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Research, Rhetoric, and the Cinematic Events of Cecil B. DeMille

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Satisfaction of the Requirement for the Degree

of Doctor in Philosophy

In Film and Television

by

Philip Joseph Wagner

2016

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Research, Rhetoric, and the Cinematic Events of Cecil B. DeMille

By

Philip Joseph Wagner

Doctor of Philosophy in Film and Television

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016

Professor Chon A. Noriega, Chair

This dissertation looks to the career of epic cinema pioneer Cecil B. DeMille in order to grasp the role of the research department in the Hollywood studio system. Situated at the intersections of three areas of study—scholarship on the form and social function of popular historical representation; theorizing on the archive as a site of knowledge production; and studies on film authorship that attend to the historical underpinnings of aesthetic choices—the dissertation explores the following questions in particular: What were the industrial standards on which studio researchers based the success and authenticity of their work? And what can we know about the research process as it relates to the production and reception of DeMille’s brand of spectacular cinema?

I offer this study as an intervention into previous scholarship on research practice in Hollywood, which too often stresses cinema's divergence from the factual record and draws a rigid binary between academia's histories and the "unprofessional" ones derived from research departments. This study takes a different approach by examining a wider range of archival materials, including studio library circulation records, scaled prop sketches based on photographs and artifacts, and researcher correspondence with historical consultants and museum curators. By expanding our archival horizons, I argue, we can think about studio research more productively (and more accurately) as a distinct production culture operating in varied and often unpredictable relations to academic historiography. In doing so, we can appreciate DeMille's cinema not as something to be judged against the implicitly accurate products of the academy but on its own terms, as an institution that exerted continual influence on mass-historical perceptions. I have found that although DeMille did indeed publicize his academically-inspired standards of contemporaneity and breadth, his use of research must be examined along more media-specific lines, which has not been done before. Without recourse to the historian's footnote in order to establish an indexical relationship to the past, DeMille used historical research in order to create an immersive, detail-rich brand of spectacle that brought audiences a sense of authentic experience.

This dissertation of Philip Joseph Wagner is approved.

John T. Caldwell

Rob King

Kathleen A. McHugh

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University of California, Los Angeles

2016

DEDICATION PAGE

For Bob and Les, epic teachers.

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- “Sound Ideas: Fanchon & Marco, Inc., in the World of Talking Pictures,” presented at the Conference for the Society of Cinema and Media Studies, March 17, 2010, Los Angeles, California
- “These Songs of Freedom: *Land of Liberty* (1939), Hollywood’s Redemption Song,” presented at the Conference for the American Historical Association, Chicago, IL, January, 2012
- “What Invisible Power? Cecil B. DeMille’s *Samson and Delilah* and the Paradoxes of Spiritual Vision,” presented at the Conference for the Society of Cinema and Media Studies, 2014, Seattle, Washington

## Introduction: A Method, an Institution

*I have pursued verity from the Museum at Cairo to the smoking tepees of the Cheyenne at Lame Deer Montana, and a costly pursuit it has been. The charges of research alone on a major historical film are sixty thousand dollars.<sup>1</sup>*

When Martin Scorsese received the honorary Cecil B. DeMille Award at the 2010 Golden Globes, Betsy Sharkey, reporting for the *Los Angeles Times*, wrote that “you could feel the spirit of DeMille, the quintessential showman, hovering over the ceremony.”<sup>2</sup> This “showman’s” film career began in 1914, when DeMille, alongside former Edison employee Oscar Apfel, co-directed one of Hollywood’s earliest features, *The Squaw Man*, produced by Edison’s pioneering rival the Lasky Feature Play Company, where DeMille worked as a co-founder. In the mid-twenties, the Lasky Company was consolidated under Paramount, the distributor-turned-vertically-integrated studio that kept Lasky productions in theaters throughout the late-teens. Aside from an unsuccessful attempt at running his own studio in the late-twenties, followed by a brief stint at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, DeMille directed at Paramount until 1956, when he released an ambitious, updated version of his 1923 *The Ten Commandments* (DeMille died of heart failure in 1959, while overseeing production on *The Buccaneer*, also a remake, of the 1938 pirate epic with same title).

DeMille’s crucial place in Paramount’s brand legacy was indicated at a 2010 celebration of the 1956 *Ten Commandments*, held on the Paramount lot paces away from the now-gone DeMille Unit bungalows, where a current executive introduced the event

by observing how the profits of DeMille's Cold-War biblical spectacular outweigh those of any other Paramount property if adjusted for inflation. It follows, then, that DeMille, the "quintessential showman," is not simply the ghostly inspiration for industry extravaganzas: he "hovers" over Paramount through the wealth he continues to bring the studio he helped build about a century ago. Yet DeMille—whose career as producer and director of celebrated historical epics and modern-day "social problem" films stretches the rise and fall of the Classical studio era—is remembered too simplistically as the personification of Hollywood extravagance. To return to Sharkey's coverage, DeMille's spectral presence was perceptible at the Golden Globes only in the red carpet pomp, after party bacchanalia, and in the populist grandeur of James Cameron's *Avatar*, a sci-fi blockbuster that profited enormously from what was said to be a "DeMille model" of spectacular escapism.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, in his DeMille Award acceptance speech Scorsese prefaced the tenor of Sharkey's reportage, praising DeMille as the man whose name is "synonymous with the big show" and whose "easily understood" films "represent the shared landscape of our childhood."<sup>4</sup>

I stress this cliché—DeMille, the showman, whose spectacular epics oversimplified history for uncritical mass consumption—because it has worked itself into contemporary film scholarship, where, with rare exceptions, DeMille appears to be the Hollywood icon that everybody "knows" so well that studying his films in depth seems redundant or unnecessary.<sup>5</sup> Robert Rosenstone, consistent academic spokesman for the reflective value of historical representation in film, excludes DeMille from his mini-pantheon of "major directors [who] have devoted major parts of their careers to history," and Marcia Landy echoes Rosenstone in her important *Cinematic Uses of the Past*, where

DeMille appears as a mere catchphrase for a lower-status brand of historical spectacle: the campy Italian sword and sandal films from the fifties and sixties, for Landy, remain a tawdry extension of “Hollywood-type Cecil B. DeMille epics.”<sup>6</sup> I want to open up this discussion by suggesting that Rosenstone’s and Landy’s forgetting of DeMille and the design-intensive style he has come to personify reflects a disciplinary hangover from an elite-specific auteurism, which sets aside the discursive machinery behind “simple,” high-profile spectacles that still shape historical memory.<sup>7</sup> Thus I interrogate how a lasting consensus on the apparent obviousness of DeMille’s films has deterred scholars from analyzing the cultural functions and strategic formal strategies of *the DeMille cinematic event*, defined here as a research-based mode of discourse comprised of spectacular, design-intensive mise-en-scène, persuasive identification with representative characters, and captivating public spectacle tied to marketing, including oratorical addresses on liberty and faith, costumed reenactments in theater courtyards, or the publicized testimony from eyewitness consultants. Over years of research on DeMille’s career, it’s become clear that a study on the historical *functions* of DeMille’s work should consider how filmic rhetoric and promotional spectacle worked dynamically to provoke collective impressions of historical continuity, social responsibility, and authentic engagement with past and present worlds in periods of crisis. To illustrate this, I have positioned DeMille’s extensive use of research as my project’s conceptual axis. By using pre-production research as an investigative through line, I’ve endeavored to show that historical epics like *Samson and Delilah* (1949) as well as DeMille’s less remembered contemporary “social problem” films like *The Godless Girl* (1929) affirm the research department’s place within a broader spectacularization of bureaucratized empiricism,



organized discursively around an apparent expansion of access to once-exclusive realms of historical contact.

In film studies, the studio research department is generally framed as a specious marketing tool or as a springboard for inaccurate historiography. The limited archival scope of two major studies that discuss studio research departments—George Custen’s *Bio/Pics* and Mike Chopra-Gant’s *Cinema and History*—helps explain why the dynamic interrelationships between the pre-production research process and the aesthetic design of a finished historical film remains largely obscure and underappreciated. For instance, Custen, whose classic *Bio/Pics* remains the most historically detailed treatment of research under the studios, focuses on a minimal set of correspondences wherein researchers protest the distortions of their solid information. From this, Custen concludes that the Hollywood researcher’s greater purpose rested in marketing campaigns in which “a film could be exploited for its ‘spectacular research,’”<sup>8</sup> and Chopra-Gant follows this line of argument, claiming that research departments “enable movies to preserve the appearance of historicity while discarding all of the rigour of the academic historian.”<sup>9</sup> The mutual sense is that research labor is affirmed in marketing because it’s not done so all that evidently on-screen. As Custen writes: “Extravagant research efforts became . . . *a way of reassuring* consumers that every effort had been expended to bring them true history in the guise of spectacle,” concluding that research was ultimately a way for studios to differentiate historical films from the other genres that lacked the capacity to exploit alluring truth claims.<sup>10</sup> If Chopra-Gant suggests that the preservation of “the appearance of historicity” does not deserve the same kind of analytical attention as the

filmmaker who displays “the rigour of the academic historian,” I propose that we consider this “apparent historicity” more carefully, as a complex institutional phenomenon that reveals culturally determined perceptions of authenticity. Indeed, both Custen and Chopra-Gant underestimate the inherent limitation of the historical project per se, how the historian engages his object of inquiry through unstable processes of rhetorical configuration. In doing so, these authors insinuate an essentialized binarism between unprofessional histories derived from research departments and more dignified historical narratives from the academy, underplaying what, years ago, Frank Kermode referred to as the “regulative fiction” that bears down on both forms.<sup>11</sup>

This dissertation reevaluates the role of research in filmic representation by examining a range of archival materials stemming from DeMille's career, including bibliographies, fact guides, and research correspondences with art directors, writers, and other above-and-below-the-line talent. By expanding our archival gaze we can appreciate research under the studios more productively as a distinct professional practice that operated alongside of or in some relation to academic standards for historical research, wherein the histories generated by each, to evoke Michel De Certeau, is the disciplinary “product of a *place*.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, I shed light on the institutionalized methods of research and re-construction through which DeMille achieved his durable ethos as public historian, a perception that doesn't mesh with recent characterizations. We should see research performed under DeMille not as something to be judged against the implicitly accurate products of the academy, but on its terms: as an enduring professional culture within the studio system that popularly impacted impressions of causality, authenticity, and

historical identification.<sup>13</sup> And although DeMille did indeed publicize his academically-inspired standards of contemporaneity and breadth, his *activation* of research must be examined along more media-specific lines, which film scholars have not yet done. Thus I not only consider DeMille's promotional use of research but scrutinize markers of research *within the frame*, arguing that DeMille's costly reconstructions—routinely based in extensive bibliography, eyewitness testimony, and analysis of artifacts and rare documents—could inspire a sense of being both authentic and rigorous without publicity's more explicit affirmations. As his career evolved, DeMille's form aspired to the evidentiary status of museological exhibition, becoming a veritable cinema of curatorial attractions, a self-contained affirmation of the director's studious *mise-en-scene*.<sup>14</sup> With help from Philip Rosen's argument for historical film's Barthesian "reality effect," I argue that DeMille's screen denotation of archival detail had a profound "performative" function.<sup>15</sup> This performative function of research, as outlined by Rosen, involves spectatorial awe before a proliferation of historical detail, calling tacit attention to the research and production labor that brought the display into being. In this light, DeMille's spectacle solidifies the bond between a film's historical referent and the signifiers on-screen (from costume to dialogue to set decoration) and thus heightens the perceived "documentary" value of a filmic reconstruction. It is telling, therefore, that in a 1934 installation of Paramount News DeMille referred to his latest epic, *Cleopatra*, as an impossible "newsreel" of Ancient Egypt.<sup>16</sup>

Scholars forget that historical films—time-based and self-contained—are denied literary historiography's convenient apparatus of the footnote.<sup>17</sup> The fact of research, as a condition of possibility, resides not necessarily in public citational asides but in the

curatorial richness of period details, functioning as “invisible footnotes,” to quote Stephen Bann’s study of monumental history painting, a form which, like DeMille’s cinema, emerges from research but remains trapped inside a visual system that prohibits divergent truth claims. Absent this declaration of indexicality, DeMille used the machinery of publicity as a *substitutive footnote*, providing what Anthony Grafton has so compellingly outlined as historiography’s “secondary story” of citation, that delineation of “thought and research that underpin[s] narrative” and garners trust and assent.<sup>18</sup>

This study does not offer a chronological overview of DeMille’s career. What I present are case studies organized around genre-affiliated themes—autobiography, Americana epic, social problem film, and the “late style” text—as a way of exploring the creative nexus between research and filmic style alongside the cultural allure of the authentic and the real that compelled studios to establish research departments in the first place. These specific inquiries place production and reception histories in close dialogue with formal analysis in order to show how a persuasive, complexly engineered historiographic voice lent institutional order to DeMille’s popular and “easily understood” cinema.<sup>19</sup>

Some crucial methodological questions for this dissertation are as follows: What can we know about the research process as it relates to DeMille’s cinematic discourse? To what extent were DeMille’s cinematic events intended to shape or influence the outcome of political events? What new film historical knowledge can we acquire about forgotten DeMille collaborators through archival inquiry into relationships between research and form? What were the practical, industrial standards on which studio

researchers based the success of their work? What were the hiring criteria for studio researchers? What kind of research questions were mobilized during pre-production? And, finally, how did results of research translate into audiovisual impressions of historical believability?

I want to underscore how this study is not concerned with DeMille's fidelity to a traditionally historicist conception of the factual past nor am I interested in launching DeMille into some "yet-incomplete" authorial pantheon. Rather, I have investigated studio research files and films themselves in order to gain a sense of what studio researchers actually did on DeMille's watch and how their labor encouraged conceptions about what the past was like. DeMille—not unlike the historiographic literature he drew inspiration from—remained goaded by a larger ambition of eliding the gap between modern history and its imagined referent.

Literature on historical representation in film has productively evolved over the past two decades as scholars have turned away from controversies surrounding fidelity to historical events in order to grasp the aesthetic codes by which film has provoked reflection on an engagement with the past. I have found a number of recent theoretical formulations on the aesthetic politics of historical films illuminating for this analysis of DeMille's research-derived spectacular discourse. Marcia Landy's observations on affect's role in a hegemonic identification with the past can be productively applied to DeMille, whose spectacularly rendered arguments for national momentum evidence Landy's claim that "investment in the past is melodramatic."<sup>20</sup> Also instructive for an historical understanding of DeMille's didactic uses of an "exemplary" past is Maria

Wyke's observations on how the historical epic film, as "a selectively represented past," allegorizes cultural anxieties and political aspirations of the contemporary period in which an epic was produced.<sup>21</sup> Wyke's insight into the presentist address of modern portrayals of antiquity, however, does not offer an analytical frame for DeMille's curatorial attention to period detail. Natalie Zemon Davis's writings on cinema's historiographic advantage for concretely showcasing history's material otherness, on the other hand, can be productively applied to what I'll speak of as DeMille's "museal" mise-en-scene.<sup>22</sup> In the end, however, Zemon Davis's archaeological appreciation for historical representation (i.e. let the past be the past) fails to consider the industrial pressures that encourage filmmakers to draw salable and heartening analogies between the heroic past and the present-day. As Robert Burgoyne points out, popular historical film discourse is characterized persistently by "slippages between authenticity and invention." These cultural products, as Burgoyne's ongoing investment in the genre makes clear, blend studied denotation of historical research with anxious, analogical projections.<sup>23</sup> Thus, in line with Burgoyne's practical, text-based approach, I argue that we can obtain a rich understanding of DeMille's cinematic rhetoric through a hybridized methodology, one sensitive to film's allegorical concessions to the present-day but also to its ethical stakes in alienating the past, in affirming its existential Otherness.<sup>24</sup> I want to expose a fundamentally irreconcilable tension in DeMille arising from this desire to denote the past as a dead, artifactual spectacle (an impulse that Georg Lukács celebrated in the thick historical descriptions of Balzac and Walter Scott) and the presentist urge to interpret history against modern, politicized codes of morality and justice.<sup>25</sup> Memory is used, in other words, and so, as Matt Matsuda's proposed, a "truly historical project must

be attentive to the ways in which ‘memory’ is not a generic term of analysis, but itself an object appropriated and politicized.”<sup>26</sup>

Matsuda’s call for “memory history” has constructive resonance with Jacques Derrida’s theorizing on archives. No mere site for inert preservation, the archive, as Derrida frames it, is the site of “commencement,” where memory finds narrative shape and politicized purpose through the figure of the “archon,” the culturally empowered guardian and interpreter of documents.<sup>27</sup> DeMille, to apply Derrida’s vocabulary, performed as a modern version of the “archon,” promoting his access to rare materials discovered in production research. These spectacles of access and erudition not only affirmed DeMille’s status as a reliable source for knowledge about the past but gesture towards the paradoxical vitality of researcher subjectivity in the public assessment of historically objective truth.



1.1 – DeMille/Archon

The inquiry begins at the end, as it were, with *Chapter 1* excavating the archive left from the ghostwriting of *The Autobiography of Cecil B. DeMille*, posthumously

published but started six years before DeMille's death in 1959. By reverse engineering this literary confidence game, I explore a nagging concern for DeMille that touches upon greater disciplinary strictures: how can authority and accuracy be assured in a representational form that carries strict citational prohibitions? I argue that *The Autobiography* met this challenge with telling subterfuge, becoming an archive in motion but in the performative, genre-acceptable guise of first-person reflection.

*Chapter 2*, a production archaeology of DeMille's late-thirties epics *The Buccaneer* (1938) and *Union Pacific* (1939), the final installments of the director's New Deal "American Trilogy," elaborates key issues of scale addressed in the previous chapter. Here, I aim to clarify the encyclopedic logic of the DeMille event, shedding light on a defining tension in DeMille's work between classical narrative and the cataloguing impulses of encyclopedism. Encyclopedic breath, to be sure, inspired DeMille's cross-promotional museum exhibition, which encouraged a social perception of democratized access to rare objects but also to Hollywood's mystified labors of authentic reconstruction. This sense of historical access, explicit in the museum setting, also inflected DeMille's filmic style, evident in the dominant framing and excessive duration that approximated the discrete ocular stagecraft of the museum.<sup>28</sup>

*Chapter 3* extends the discussion of DeMille's formal style, arguing for the affinities between the director's aesthetic politics and nineteenth-century romantic historical tradition. By turning to the American Trilogy's first installment—western-epic *The Plainsman* (1936)—I delineate the key features of DeMille's romantic historiographic vision: the narrative and philosophical centrality of representative heroes; a painterly attention to period detail; a spectacle-driven incitement of an illusory



historical participation; and the authentication of represented worlds through both extra-textual citation and an excessive denotation of historical materiality that reflexively calls attention to the research process. By doing so, I expose the DeMille event as a “regenerative text” whose affecting arguments for national momentum and continuity were performatively enacted in various forms of pageantry, including boy scout parades and costumed battle reenactments. Staged by DeMille’s publicity team, such spectacle exploited a timely yet deep-rooted social desire to reenact the past, to performatively locate oneself within an exemplary historical timeline.

*Chapter 4* leaves the expansionist past and moves on to DeMille’s muckraking investigations into reform school mismanagement. Performed for the late-silent social problem film *The Godless Girl* (1929), DeMille’s researchers’ shocking discoveries at reformatories, alluded to in public as part of a Progressivist campaign to ameliorate horrific conditions, were never calibrated to effect real change but to spectacularize the director’s privileged access to forbidden knowledge. If DeMille’s vain, encyclopedic marshalling of “dirt” on reformatories for *The Godless Girl* signaled an anachronistic projection of historiographic method onto a real modern-day problem, *Chapter 5* demonstrates how anachronism acquired new and profound meaning for DeMille as he ended his career in the post-Decree ruins of Hollywood, where his late, staunchly “old-fashion” style took on the luster of reflexive eulogization.

## Chapter 1

### The Whispering Chorus: the Corporate Archive and *The Autobiography of Cecil B. DeMille*

*With or without spectral aid, the writing of a book demands an arduous regimen.*<sup>29</sup>

*When did he have time to work on that?*<sup>30</sup>

The allure and peculiar authority of autobiography is bound in the labors of memory. These books, ideally, delineate a precise writing act, preserving the time in which a writer adapts memories into marketable shape.<sup>31</sup> By and large undocumented, autobiographies delight by recording lived remembrance, not historical actuality; the effect readers seek is genuine contact with interesting people, not fidelity to the documented past. As George Gusdorf observes in his classic “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography,” this enduring form does not profit from “a simple recapitulation of the past,” but attracts with “the drama of a man struggling to reassemble himself in his own likeness at a certain moment of his history.”<sup>32</sup> A self-portrait in words, the autobiography disarms the empiricist with calculated modesty: seek the facts elsewhere if you please, dear reader, for these pages contain merely what *I* can remember. Distortion is the welcome price of a form that does not command evidence but arrests reflective consciousness.

This tendency to shun documentation is a consequence of autobiography’s constructed literary “voice,” the sense of a personality inflecting a text.<sup>33</sup> William Howarth, for instance, has linked autobiographers’ resistance to citation to the effort of creating “a colloquial, conversational, and apparently spontaneous mind.”<sup>34</sup> Readers, we

might add, excuse autobiographers' uncorroborated reflections because citation disrupts and depersonalizes a text, whereas an artfully off the cuff voice implies that some person sat, thought back, and then organically represented what he or she could remember. The autobiographer's personalized voice, unbroken by outside sources, indexes a trawl through late-year remembrance, not a trip to the library.

A consistent voice from an identifiable personality is a key generic feature also because it shrouds a dreaded fact of the form: ghostwriting. A literary impersonation, ghostwriting calls for careful scrutiny of an employer-subject's vocal quirks. Part actor and part biographer, the ghostwriter must reproduce a familiar voice by consulting an archive of emblematic speech acts. It's tricky work, since paying readers have a good idea of how an autobiography should "sound."<sup>35</sup> David Ritz, ghostwriter for Ray Charles, BB King, and other popular musicians, defines his craft as convincing impersonation: he begins by researching and taping his famous employers, "but once I get their rhythms down, I throw away the transcripts and start writing in their voices."<sup>36</sup> The result is artifice, Ritz concedes, and his work routinely strays from historical record, but he maintains that his studied miming can still "*feel genuine*."<sup>37</sup> Ghosted authenticity is won with cadence, diction, and measure, not historical method.

Decades before Ritz's initial ghostings, the *New York Times Book Review* published an essay on the "remarkable rise" of autobiographical books, three-quarters of which, the *Times* discovered, were completed with un-credited "outside help."<sup>38</sup> Raymond Walters, assistant editor of the *Review* and author of the piece, examined works attributed to various high-profile types, including military leaders, athletes, esteemed writers "with flamboyant private lives," and Hollywood legends including Cecil B.

DeMille, whose posthumously published—and ghostwritten— autobiography was selling well at the time. Consumers of autobiography, Walters learned, are a forgiving bunch, letting “untruths” pass as the “inevitable consequence of the fact that autobiographers are human [and thus] portray themselves as they would like to appear in the world.”<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, Walters’s study affirms Ritz’s methodological premise: autobiography’s “truth” is secured through the construction of familiar voices, not through mounting evidence.<sup>40</sup>

Casual falsehoods, the pact implies, only confirm a book’s profitable legitimacy as spontaneous remembrance spilled onto the page. We all forget, don’t we?<sup>41</sup>

Autobiography, then, whether ghosted or not, is made to be read as “memory carried out for itself,” leisurely writing that affirms an authentic act of self presentation.<sup>42</sup>

Documented sources throw a wrench in this arrangement: they imply that research into oneself displaced the spontaneous narration of the self that readers seem to want. Popular autobiography, privileging the harmony of voice over the credibility of statements, is thus inherently vulnerable to the archive: through its generically pressured confinement to self-reference, it forfeits dependability as a source and becomes a grotesque foil to authoritative historiography.

This chapter explores how the autobiography’s exclusion of sources created an imbroglio for a posterity-obsessed celebrity like Cecil B. DeMille, eager to fix his image but trapped in a provisional genre.<sup>43</sup> Howard L. Goodkind, editor-in-chief at Prentice-Hall, put his finger on the conundrum in a letter to DeMille’s ghostwriter, Donald Hayne, who was vexed by the challenge of integrating research into a form afraid of footnotes. “I think your job is a tough one,” Goodkind observed, “because you are faced with the

dilemma of producing a historical document without letting anyone realize that it is one.”<sup>44</sup>

In July 1953, while DeMille and Prentice-Hall worked out a contract for *The Autobiography*, Donald Hayne wrote a lengthy memorandum that laid out his method and concerns as DeMille’s spectral biographer. Hayne’s memo, revealingly titled “A Preliminary Essay on the *Biography*,” suggests that DeMille never intended to write out his own life story, which was eventually published after DeMille’s fatal heart attack in 1959 (Hayne was credited as “editor”). A resigned clergyman and former itinerant lecturer who taught religious history at the State University of Iowa before landing a job as a DeMille assistant in 1945, Hayne characterized his latest undertaking as an ambitious research endeavor. Ignoring the book market fetish for “pure” recollection, Hayne insisted that DeMille’s memories, which he planned to gather in frequent interviews, should provide the mere jumping off point for more thorough investigations. He repeatedly asserted the importance of checking “the data of memory with the findings of solid research.” The “blank spaces” of DeMille’s fading memory, Hayne maintained, should be supplemented “by patient digging in newspaper files... federal records... old attics.”<sup>45</sup> Hayne understood that the book must “avoid frightening away the average reader with a formidable array of scholarly apparatus,”<sup>46</sup> but he was determined nonetheless to write “a work of history” in which “facts control,”<sup>47</sup> even if they couldn’t be flaunted as such in notes.

Once Prentice reached an agreement with the DeMille Trust, the charity foundation handling the *Autobiography*’s profits, Hayne wrote his editors about the

daunting task he faced in “making the book at once popular and, as far as it goes, definitive.”<sup>48</sup> Definitiveness, sought by historians through vast documentation, appears counterintuitive to the autobiographer, who is expected to hew to a “sprightly and undocumented course,” as Hayne pointed out to his editor.<sup>49</sup> Because of such evidentiary restrictions—“*naturally*, footnotes and numbered references are out,” Prentice casually instructed—autobiographies must carry modest expectations for how they will be read in the future.<sup>50</sup> This detail flummoxed DeMille’s once-academic ghostwriter, who saw immense value in research. “Patient digging,” Hayne believed, would help distinguish *The Autobiography* from apocryphal “vanity publications” that dominated the market, but more importantly such rigor would ensure the book’s legitimate use-value for “historians of the events of which Mr. DeMille has been a part.”<sup>51</sup> Last but not least, however, archaeology into DeMille’s storied past would affirm Hayne’s aptitude in an industry that commodified the physical “recovery of reality” through research labor.<sup>52</sup>

### **Patient Digging and the (E)strange(d) Place of the Second Writer**

Ghostwriters, like good assassins, cover their tracks. The capable assassin erases all traces of the grisly deed, while the dependable ghostwriter, paid to “be” a book’s subject, commits authorial suicide. The successfully ghosted work, according to one practitioner, “requires an imaginary plunge into the depths of a human soul, so deep as to threaten the ‘ghost’ with extinction.”<sup>53</sup> Like the genre’s constitutive act of solitary reflection, however, the ghostwriter’s total erasure is an *ideal* that the creative requirements of research, voice simulation, and intertextual synthesis render problematic. As Erica L. Johnson has shown, the ghostwritten autobiography is an unruly analytical

object, “shaped by [the] competing voices” of an anonymous writer, a powerful figure with final say, and various oral and written sources that round out the tale (but are generally tucked away). This enunciative hybridity not only betrays interiority as a ghostwritten charade but, as Johnson points out, reflects “a power struggle in which both subject and [actual] writer compete to find a voice.”<sup>54</sup> DeMille’s *Autobiography*, like Johnson’s helpful case study, accentuates the genre’s veiled but inevitable reliance on outside sources, signaling as well the awkward standing of citation in other popular genres of historical representation (biographies, epic cinema) where the complete, transparent documentation of research enters only at the chagrin of an audience content with a “sense of the past” through evocative, seamless narration.<sup>55</sup>

These narrative and enunciative constraints of first-person voice gnawed at Hayne from the book’s inception. In his “Preliminary Essay on the Biography,” for instance, Hayne emphasized the importance of placing DeMille’s “honors, decorations, and awards” in their proper historical context, but he realized to do so “autobiographically” would betray the work as yet another “vanity publication.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, Hayne suggested integrating other “voices” into the text as a means of holding onto flattering biographical background. He first proposed integrating chapters “by other hands” that would cover DeMille’s civic distinctions and film-historical achievements.<sup>57</sup> Yet Hayne realized that to authorize praise was far from humble, so he advised making additional room for hostile critics to assess DeMille’s craft and for “liberal commentators” to question DeMille’s conservative beliefs.

This multi-speaker approach yielded structural complications, however. Most explicitly, a diplomatic inclusion of unsympathetic commentary, which Hayne saw as

“more interpretive [in nature] than biographical,” would derail the “thread and flow” of the narrative. This was a frightful prospect because, as Prentice-Hall stressed, “the person who reads this book wants to read along like he reads a story.”<sup>58</sup> So Hayne proposed having DeMille “incorporate and tailor” private and published sources as a strategy for addressing what the autobiographer “cannot [talk about] in the first person,” like admirable feats and, of course, events preceding DeMille’s birth. Neither seamless nor ideally self-referential, Hayne concluded that gracious references to others’ praise were more advisable than disfiguring text with contributions from “outside hands.”

Though this second approach reflects the book’s finished form, Hayne’s final solution sheds greater light on what I’m pushing at here: the ghostwriter’s resistance to self-abnegation. The plan was to juxtapose DeMille’s first-person text with elucidating commentary by a “second writer”—Donald Hayne, incidentally. Doing so meant giving Hayne two decisive roles, as the veiled author of autobiographical chapters and as an exegetical authority on autobiographical content. Though Hayne conceded that running commentary would delay the narrative, he fought hard to redeem the method that would win him co-author credit.<sup>59</sup> First, he maintained that readers would easily “catch onto” the “dialogue” between the two “voices,” conveniently forgetting how the narrative would be endlessly suspended if the autobiographer truly did go back and respond to interpolated commentary. Hayne stressed that the second writer would provide a sense of privileged eavesdropping; as depicted in the “Preliminary Essay,” the “dialogue” will hook the reader like a song. A “mélange of speakers popping in from time to time,” on the other hand, would leave readers disoriented and tired. These “speakers” resemble



town criers best avoided, shouting “isolated pieces” apropos of god knows what. Avoid eye contact and cross the street.

The second writer’s source laundering, on the other hand, would minimize textual dissonance and warrant in-text substantiation of DeMille’s reflections. Hayne emphasized how he would “be free to comment on anything in the deMille text” and reference sources wherever necessary. By doing so, DeMille’s chapters could stick to personal reminiscence, as readers of an autobiography would anticipate. But moreover, for Hayne the second writer approach made historical definitiveness *and* due credit both seem attainable. By using “the deMille first-person text as [a] springboard,” Hayne, as co-author, could smuggle in sources to elaborate, clarify, and corroborate DeMille’s apparently subjective recollections.

Though unimplemented, Hayne’s advocacy for the second writer is worth detailing for two main reasons: it reaffirms how DeMille’s *Autobiography* was conceived initially as authoritative historiography built from sources and, second, it points to Hayne’s uneasiness with evacuating his ghosted work. I stress this latter point not as an attempt to recuperate the repressed agency of DeMille’s assistant but to demonstrate how DeMille’s “last monument to himself,” as one reviewer tagged it, animates the challenges of parleying an archive of innumerable voices into harmonious and persuasive autobiographical narrative.<sup>60</sup> I want to suggest that even after the second writer idea was rejected, Hayne still managed to professionally assert his “voice”, making his mark through rigorous source evaluation and in-depth research, consistently prioritized over DeMille’s “unreliable” memories. Hayne’s confessed obsession with “absolute accuracy,” as he himself phrased it, did eventually stall the process, but it also

assured *The Autobiography*'s monumental form and curious appeal as a print showcase of archival treasures decades before DeMille's papers were made publically accessible.<sup>61</sup>

### **Prove the Legend**

Time and again, Hayne's inter-office communications trumpeted a neutrally positivist approach in which "the material controls the writer." It becomes increasingly clear, however, that his research discoveries could only say so much, as the narrative and thematic scope of DeMille's *Autobiography* were both clarified at the start. Hayne was aware of the book's conceptual limitations: aside from researching and ghostwriting, he authored immodest press releases like "Why the DeMille Biography Will Be the Most Important Book Ever to Come Out of Hollywood," which posited the exemplary weight of DeMille's socially-upward biography. "More than anyone," wrote Hayne, DeMille "has continuously affected and molded Hollywood's course from its birth to the present day." Thus, the release went on, it's clear that "when Mr. deMille writes his biography he is really writing the biography of the motion picture industry...from a penny peep show to a great art...a particularly American story."<sup>62</sup> DeMille's tireless industry beyond motion pictures as "a pioneer of commercial aviation...an oilman...a breeder of blooded stock race horses,"<sup>63</sup> among other things, and his unflagging commitment to "personal liberty," cited in DeMille's Right to Work advocacy after resigning from Lux Radio Theater in protest to a union-levied political fee, became what Gusdorf called additional "leitmotifs of the total experience,"<sup>64</sup> the autobiographical touchstones that would foil a "material-controlled" method like Hayne's.

DeMille's persona, in other words, was patterned well before *The Autobiography's* planning stages. Syndicated career profiles with declarative subheadings—Civic Praise, Urges Bible Study, a Man of Many firsts, and so on—were tied into DeMille's publicity since the early twenties. These mini-bios, abundant in Hayne's research files, offered a pre-fabricated, institutional template for a bulkier text.<sup>65</sup>

Curiously, this conceptual leveling of DeMille's character did not stymie Hayne's research. In fact, Hayne worked hard to verify or debunk much of what DeMille recounted. Investigations commenced with focus and zeal, especially when facts in question lent substance to important themes.<sup>66</sup> Hayne's researches were abundant, but in this section I want to isolate and reconstruct two particular ones for their robust methodological implications.

The first research, an optimistic attempt to produce evidence for a cherished DeMille family legend dating back to the eleventh century, reveals Hayne's familiarity with the art of "heuristic," determining the likelihood and whereabouts of documents related to a given historical question. The energy Hayne expelled on heuristic activity, exalted as "the first and most important part of the historian's craft" in Charles Langois and Charles Seignobos's widely read primer on method, reaffirms how available documentation significantly delimited the *Autobiography's* content. The second inquiry concerned a surprising entry in the diary of DeMille's father, Henry Churchill DeMille, at the time a candidate for the Episcopal Priesthood who one day made note of his plan to attend Good Friday mass at a local Catholic church. Whereas the first investigation, a dream of corroborative documentation, accentuates Hayne's mismatched criteria for autobiographical authenticity, the second reveals Hayne's cultivated indulgence in the

ways of “internal criticism,” the hermeneutic extraction of personal motives from archival traces. Both efforts, in the end, point to an academic presupposition that made *The Autobiography* a wearisome task (and still makes it an odd read): wait in silence until documents are possessed.<sup>67</sup>

*The Autobiography* opens in the BC era – Before Cecil. DeMille plays family biographer before assuming a discourse of recounted experience, linking his personal quest for liberty and spiritual enlightenment to an exemplary lineage of “ambitious, sometimes pugnacious, and usually religious” relatives.<sup>68</sup> The continuity of character across the DeMille line is a key thematic premise, illustrated early with bits of family history embedded in “relics and mementos” (7). Monarchal records, for instance, document the incarceration of Anthony deMil [sic], a Dutch baker who refused to sign a loyalty oath after England seized New Amsterdam in the 1670s. Such documentation, retrieved from a distantly related family genealogist still residing in Amsterdam, affirms a long-dead DeMille’s staunch “belief in freedom” (6), thematically reinforced in the *Autobiography* by a reference to DeMille’s Foundation for Political Freedom, a Right to Work lobby whose ostensible goal was to “oppose political coercion in any form.”<sup>69</sup> Anthony’s persecution “has a curiously modest ring,” our narrator muses, “The first American deMil left a good example for one of his descendants” (7). Anthony’s son, Peter, a devout Episcopalian miller who settled in Connecticut, left behind “another assertion of a DeMill’s belief in freedom” when he petitioned against a state tax intended for a Congregational Church that he did not attend (7). Such casual allusion to historically loaded objects creates the impression of DeMille writing away in an artifact-rich workspace. As DeMille confesses later in the text, “I cite so often” only because

such things are “near at hand” (212). Impersonal research, in other words, is not why these materials are “here” and are being discussed: they are not dusty sources for the specialist’s assurance but regularly consulted possessions that form DeMille’s existential DNA.<sup>70</sup>

Sources are thus mobilized and reflexively indicated to reverse-engineer DeMille’s persona and produce a work of integrity and heft in the absence of linear testimony. This *realia* of diaries and manuscripts are mobilized to make ancestors’ uses persuasively resonate for modern-day readers (8). By pinpointing sources like these early on and *within* the narrative body, Hayne maintains the spontaneity so vital to the genre’s pact of singular authorship and frees the text of cumbersome citation. But he also makes artifactual evidence seem natural and necessary to DeMille’s self-representation, while reinforcing Hayne’s empiricist predisposition of “no sources, no history.”

Yet Hayne’s vestigial academic principles are indicated as well by research left *out* of *The Autobiography* because of perceived inauthenticity.<sup>71</sup> For instance, during his second year of research Hayne was determined to produce ancient documentation to confirm a family motto, “Lux tua via mia,” or, “thy light is my way.” This saying, which DeMille recited proudly through life, was assumed to trace back to the Battle of Hastings of 1066, where Sir William Blount, a distant relative who allegedly served as William the Conqueror’s Naval Commander, was wounded and hidden among his fallen comrades before a sunbeam miraculously struck his shield and attracted help.<sup>72</sup> The story, which established blood continuity to a valorous ancestor apparently protected by God, appealed to DeMille for obvious reasons. DeMille, in fact, channeled Sir William’s rescue when he reflected back on the production of the first *Ten Commandments* (1923) during *The*

*Autobiography's* preparation. In a note to Hayne, DeMille recalled a day on set that gave him “gooseflesh from the sights.”<sup>73</sup> It was an entirely cloudy afternoon, DeMille remembered, but that changed when Moses (played by Theodore Roberts) descended a stand-in Mount Sinai and apparently caused the “the sun [to break] through the clouds” and beam down on the set. This light from the heavens, interpreted as divine approval of DeMille’s biblical recreation, conspicuously evokes Sir William’s battlefield salvation. Yet despite the anecdote’s resonance with the “Lux Tua Via Mia” legend, Hayne resisted including it in the absence of stronger evidence, which he tracked down determinedly.

Hayne found living Blount relatives to see if they had any documentation confirming Sir William’s employ in the Conqueror’s ranks. At first, he was willing to accept the legend’s authenticity if he could place Sir William at the Battle of Hastings. Figuring that a British relative would be inclined to safeguard materials validating a Blount’s role in this nation-forming campaign, Hayne contacted Sir Walter Aston Blount, a baron from Cleobury, England. His letter summarized the family legend and the research problem at hand: Hayne’s best source for Blount data was a patchy genealogy, which did not substantiate the Blounts’s descent from the Conqueror’s naval commander. As a storyteller, Hayne *wants* to affirm the legend, but the nagging requirements of historical method—the discovery, authentication, and synthetic recombination of *reliable* source materials—prevented this academy-bred researcher from acknowledging William’s story as anything but fanciful “legend,” without the “cold test” of authentic documents. Well-read in heuristics of the ancient world, DeMille’s ghostwriter dreamt of material like battlefield morning lists or immediately rendered chronicles, but he was doubtful such things could be unearthed under deadline, if at all.

Allen Johnson, the Yale historian and influential methodologist, once pointed out how the urge to corroborate is continually frustrated by documentary famine, especially when a pressing research question predates modernity's "documentary revolution."<sup>74</sup> Whether acknowledging it or not, the source-starved historian must cope with modifiable criteria for "credibility," which early-twentieth century methodologists pin to two key variables: the scarcity of evidence and the historian's assessment of how important an un-verified source is to a concrete narrative goal. Hayne, driven by certainty but still under-the-gun, similarly adjusted his standards so an unproven but thematically pivotal occurrence could be "thinkable" within a "proper" historical discourse. Hayne, aware of this probably unverifiable legend's appeal, thus conceived of an alternate way of keeping "Lux Tua Via" in the mix. It's probable, Hayne reasoned, that if William's miraculous rescue was recounted similarly across the Atlantic then there is a good chance the story is based in actuality. "Would you (or your secretary or some member of your family) be kind enough to let me know if the same tradition is extant in your family?" Hayne inquired in closing to Walter Blount. "If it is, I should be willing to accept it even in the absence of documentary confirmation." Hayne's apologetic tone – he's just "willing," not "pleased" or even "ready" to admit the story's credence – suggests that the loosening of empirical standards has brought something of a heavy conscience to the academic ghostwriter. The legend's likely appeal, however, overwhelms the pang of regret Hayne indicated as he prepared to concede veracity with wobbly criteria.

Walter Blount didn't write back. But still, Hayne, who appeared uncomfortable compromising his source evaluation, could have taken Blount's silence as a blessing and moved on to thicker papertrails. Lured, however, by the endzone of ratiocination,

defined by Edgar Allen Poe as the analytical compulsion to “disentangle,” Hayne was resolute in turning this legend into “credible” knowledge.<sup>75</sup> Perhaps ashamed of his lapsed rigor, Hayne refortified his methodology, a move suggested by a letter to a different relative, George of Michigan, written a few months after Hayne’s orphaned epistle went out to Walter Blount. This time, however, the “cold hard test of official records” would again bear down again and hopefully turn reminiscence into “source.”<sup>76</sup> And this Blount, a hobbyist family historian, replied promptly with a thoughtful deduction that opened the sound possibility for Sir William’s involvement at Hastings.

George’s Blount’s records showed that a certain William *Broke*, the son of a Guisnes councilman who was recorded to take “Le Blount” as an alias, was in fact a foot soldier on the Conqueror’s fateful campaign; Broke’s brother, Robert, performed as Commander of Ships. This made George confident that the motto derived from the Hastings battle. But the relationship between the historical, soldiering Broke brothers and DeMille’s Blount relatives remained too obscure, Hayne felt: somebody could have simply poached a noble family tale, which was not uncommon. Thus, George Blount’s letter does bolster the context of the beloved phrase, but it doesn’t clarify DeMille’s blood continuity. Even with George’s letter, DeMille would have had to conduct gymnastic plotting in *The Autobiography* to plausibly draw the link. And the letter didn’t annotate sources. So the legend remained legend, and it stayed out of the book.

These dead-end leads are worth tracing in this kind of detail because they touch on a structuring tension between research and narrative representation in the heavily-documented productions under DeMille’s banner. Hayne, to a degree, snubbed *institutional* protocol with his insistently *evidentiary* method, where sources underpin



inferences on how events transpired in time. This ambition to wrest actuality from the “remains of human activity,” as Allen Johnson summed up the evidentiary method, conspicuously ran counter to the apparently method-less, antiquarian gathering that later chapters will illuminate as DeMille unit protocol.<sup>77</sup> In the case of “Lux Tua Via Mia,” Hayne’s refusal of sources as credible evidence marks a rare triumph of method over narrative: the good story lost out. The legend’s silence in omission thus affirmed Hayne’s professional “voice” as he labored in the shadows on DeMille’s book. As appraiser of documents, Hayne began to demarcate the thinkable for DeMille’s story at its first drafting stage.

The fact that DeMille, as casual narrator, *could have* recounted the battle legend without drawing suspicion or protest from readers makes Hayne’s methodology all the more noteworthy for its *self*-endorsing implications. Autobiographies, welcomed broadly as undocumented and off-the-cuff, are thought to enjoy what Alessandro Portelli calls the “different credibility” of oral history, whose value lies “not in its adherence to fact, but rather its departure from it, as imagination, symbolism, and desire.”<sup>78</sup> Along these lines, the generational repetition of the Hastings legend, whether apocryphal or not, has great importance since it underscores DeMille’s emulatory regard for a swashbuckling ancestor and highlights the director’s perceived intimacy with the divine. Luis Gottschalk, in his popular manual *Understanding History*, encourages historians not to throw the baby out with the bathwater when sources fail methodical tests of verification. Repeated legends or even obvious lies, as Gottschalk instructs, can richly indicate “mental process and personal attitudes” and lend psychological depth to historical characterizations.<sup>79</sup> Oxford historian of Revolutionary France Sir Charles Oman

concluded, finding that military autobiographies, even once proven “full of slips,” can give sound historical evidence “for realizing a man’s estimate of himself.”<sup>80</sup> Or, to quote early academic oral history advocate Allan Nevins, legend grows from a “granite of hard facts.”<sup>81</sup>

Despite such concessions to legend’s evidentiary potential, early twentieth century historiography remained lured by what Portelli calls the “awe” of the *written* source, irregardless of the essential “orality” of the eyewitness records historians hold dear.<sup>82</sup> Following this line of reasoning, the authentic autobiography, one man’s testimony on various experiences, fulfills a necessary condition of primacy through its constitutive presence of a reflecting witness: I saw, now I tell. But autobiographies are *belated* testimonies, and, as Langois and Seignobos portentously warned, “Above all, we must ask when he *wrote down* what he saw or heard...the only exact observation is the one which is recorded immediately after it is made.... [A]n impression committed to writing later is...liable to be confused in the memory with other recollections.”<sup>83</sup>

The negating charge of archival testimony and its evidentiary power to debunk autobiography thus springs from its *temporal* distinction as a source. The methodological polarization of these testimonial genres– the distantly recalled autobiographical moment vs. the immediately rendered observation – derives not only from a primary source’s representational proximity to an event but from an academicized equation that emboldens a particular breed of statements: simply less factors (memory, self-interest, resentment, whatever) interfere in the accuracy of primary sources, whose textual citation lends auratic expertise and rhetorical permanence to historical literature.

Hayne's suppression of legend reflects this disciplinary suspicion of the orality that haunts official documents. The archive, as Hayne characterized it in a research assistant job description, provided a necessary "adjunct to DeMille's memory," which Hayne's training taught him to assess as faulty and filled with gaps.<sup>84</sup> Hayne's investigations asserted, in a continually perverse way, research's place in the construction of *The Autobiography*, registered ideally as spontaneous remembrance. For example, any mention of DeMille's baptism was omitted because Hayne could not produce a record for the occasion, event after soliciting historic churches in Pompton Lakes, New Jersey, where Cecil spent a portion of his youth, and lower Manhattan, where the DeMille family moved once Cecil's father left the ministry for dramatic theater.<sup>85</sup> DeMille would casually recall that his baptism was held in Pompton Lakes, at Christ Church, in 1893, but he had nothing to back this up aside from "tradition," Hayne's euphemism for undocumented, word-of-mouth transmission. Hayne also learned that Christ Church's records were ruined by a flood just years after DeMille's birth, so he could have reasonably concluded that there was simply no evidence for the baptism, and then gone on to record the director's inherited version of the event.<sup>86</sup> Yet Hayne was encouraged by the surrounding "documentary revolution" of increasingly transparent catalogues and accommodating curators, so he continued to hunt but to no avail. Eventually the baptism was also branded "legend" and cut, lest its cancerous uncertainty plague the text as a whole.

If Hayne's heuristic method was upheld to skeptically affirm or to refuse content of orally preserved "legend," then his analytic unpacking of documents, or "internal criticism," was geared more towards understanding *why* certain events really took

place.<sup>87</sup> However, whereas Hayne's corroborative heuristic assumed a certain methodological autonomy from DeMille's Unit and affirmed his relative power to appraise content in light of his personal guidelines for credibility, his "internal" detection of motives was strictly patterned by DeMille's institutional mythos. Extant documents became, in other words, semantically overdetermined. Hayne's search for *missing* evidence betrayed an out-of-place academic's attempt to legitimize autobiographical anti-history, but his reading of *available* documentation buoyed up institutional lore.

### **A Grand Old Priest and the Exhaustion of Accuracy**

Two essential factors underpin a statement's ontological transition from archive noise to historical fact: 1) the suggestiveness of supporting documentation and 2) a statement-in-question's capacity to serve a particular argument or historical chronology. A deliberate "postulating of meaning," as Gusdorf writes, "dictates the *choice* of facts to be retained" by the historian.<sup>88</sup> In the erotic economy of historical construction, facts are dumped, stood up, if their attraction wanes in eye of the researcher, whose first step is to decide what type of document "does it" for him or her. Research, in the Classical situation, paves the rose path to a nuptial bed of conclusions, a rule that distinguishes the "pottering" antiquarian from the knowledge-making historiographer.<sup>89</sup>

In the end, Donald Hayne's "material-controlled" method represses this underlying eros of historical endeavor—the *purposeful* search for traces from a past that's always Other—and thus stands out more as a performance of erudition than as a practical summary of Hayne's labor. Conceptual blinders and projected conclusions, as Hayne's contemporaries instructed, are in fact *needed* to bring historical contours of meaning and

motive into persuasive relief. Hayne's research files are revealing in this regard, for they indicate how his "internal" discernment of motives was consciously geared towards parrying DeMille's reputation as a cavalier Cold Warrior, a damaging perception as HUAC's intimidation tactics were deemed unconstitutional and as the Blacklist became an institutional black eye. Indeed, 1959, the year *The Autobiography* hit shelves, was the year the Blacklist crumbled after Otto Preminger openly hired Hollywood Ten screenwriter Dalton Trumbo to pen his Zionist epic, *Exodus* (1960).

The defeat of Proposition 12 in 1944, a Right to Work Amendment that DeMille ardently backed after being dropped from Lux Radio Theater in violation of union bylaws, was the first in a series of well-publicized political disappointments for the storied filmmaker. After voters rejected the "open shop" measure, DeMille took his fight to the courts, but his appeals were brushed off at both the state and federal levels, where it was decided that DeMille's constitutional rights were *not* compromised since the meager fee did not stop him from voting in *favor* of Proposition 12. Unperturbed, DeMille formed his Foundation for Political Freedom, comprised of right-wing studio brass, including DeMille's boss at Paramount Y. Frank Freeman, and influential, labor-bashing tycoons like Union Pacific president William Jeffers, who twenty years earlier unlocked his company's archives so DeMille could reenact post-bellum expansion for his epic *Union Pacific* (1939). Ostensibly committed to foiling politically coercive employment contracts, DeMille's post-war political forays were motivated chiefly by the supposed "red infiltration" of Hollywood labor. Convinced he was a political target for character assassination, DeMille cozied to Hoover's Bureau, tagging investigators to confirm suspicions of leftist conspiracies. DeMille's moles found no communist plots at

either AFRA or at Paramount but the director remained “morbidly certain that certain communist influences were against him,” as Unit assistant Phil Koury recalled in a memoir that DeMille unsuccessfully fought to suppress.<sup>90</sup>

Then a senior board member at the Screen Directors Guild, DeMille decided that a mandatory loyalty oath would be an efficient mechanism for politically “cleansing” the American film industry. His hope was that Hollywood’s other top guilds – the Actors’ and the Writers’ – would admit to the “purifying” effects of such an oath and mandate similar statements rejecting Communism. A resentful faction of left-leaning members committed to stymieing DeMille’s efforts, however, rallied round Guild president Joseph Manciewicz, a centrist Republican who opposed the idea of an oath and who would soon switch party affiliation out of spite for McCarthyist scare tactics. DeMille answered back by corralling conservatives willing to brand Manciewicz a “turncoat” and depose him of his presidency and, if all went according to DeMille’s plan, banish him from American movies. Appalled by the power play, the Maciewicz faction, boasting influential directors like John Huston and William Wyler, successfully petitioned for a general meeting with the intent of thwarting DeMille’s campaign and keeping Manciewicz in power. Held at the Beverly Hills Hotel into the early morning hours of October 23, 1950, the meeting transpired badly for DeMille, who was ousted from the Board after lobbing savaging accusations at members in attendance. “Disgraceful” was how Delmer Daves, himself a republican, summarized DeMille’s spurious charges of guilt by association, targeted, witnesses say, at émigré Jew colleagues, including Wyler and Rouben Mamoulian.<sup>91</sup> The Guild meeting, as DeMille biographer Scott Eiman points out, marked an unfortunate shift in the storied director’s perception amongst his colleagues and public

admirers: “Before . . . DeMille was regarded as a principled conservative; afterward he was regarded as an anti-democratic ideologue and quite possibly a bigot . . . The destructive echoes of the October 22 meeting echoed down into the succeeding century, damaging DeMille’s reputation.”<sup>92</sup>

*The Autobiography*’s omission of the Guild ordeal affirms the humiliating repercussions of DeMille’s failed overthrow of Hollywood labor. However, as I’d like to argue, DeMille’s Cold War misfires remained essential to *The Autobiography*’s design, functioning as a salient absence that oriented Hayne’s empiricization of DeMille as broad-minded and tolerant.

Hayne's attraction to archival documentation betrays a similar presumption of moral inheritance that kept him stuck on Sir William's battlefield adventures. His sleuthing into eleventh century military history, as we saw, failed to produce sound evidence for the miraculous rescue at Hastings, a story we know inspired DeMille. Hayne did succeed, however, in locating “proof” for DeMille's absorption of commendable qualities embodied by his father, Henry. In the winter of 1954, while scouring Henry’s diary, a critical source for family data before Cecil's birth, Hayne hit upon a puzzling but potentially revealing entry concerning DeMille’s father’s religious education. Writing Father John J. Quinn of New York’s Church of the Nativity, Hayne pointed to an “undated notation” in which Henry mentions a Good Friday sermon to be delivered by a certain “Father Everett Ch of Nativity.”<sup>93</sup> The notation leaped out because, as Hayne pointed out, “Henry DeMille was at the time a candidate for Holy Orders in the Episcopal Church,” arousing curiosity as to why Father Everett won “the attention of a young and ardent Episcopalian.”<sup>94</sup> Hayne offers hypotheses—“A convert?”

“An authority on the Holy Land?” “An outstanding preacher?”—and indicates willingness to look further in church Society archives if the Nativity holdings prove lacking. This will to dig deeper intimates Everett’s *presupposed* relevance to DeMille’s narrative. The answer, Hayne hoped, would affirm a characteristic that could be woven into *The Autobiography*’s outline of impressive blood lineage.

Father Quinn replied with alacrity, excerpting parish documents confirming Everett’s Nativity Church tenure at the time Henry DeMille was studying to be a minister. Not only did dates align, but it was made clear that Henry admired an exemplary man, “the most outstanding priest in the history of Nativity Church,” a popular and erudite preacher as well a former Episcopalian, as Hayne had speculated.<sup>95</sup> Henry’s fondness for Everett, a socially aware and “decidedly spiritual” priest whose “interests were in souls, not in material progress,” became a valuable character reflection for DeMille’s thinly documented father.<sup>96</sup> In his grateful response, Hayne deduced how

The young Henry DeMille’s interest in Father Everett seems to me to indicate a wholesome breadth of mind in a student for the Episcopal Ministry at that period. Henry DeMille remained a devout Episcopalian all his life—but you will be interested to know that, when he conducted services as a lay-reader and read the sermons of Charles Kingsley to his congregation he carefully crossed out some of Kingsley’s more violent anti-Catholic expressions. Perhaps his early contact with Father Everett, however impersonal and fleeting, had a life-long influence.<sup>97</sup>

A fair conclusion, but in actuality it was Everett’s *posthumous* influence that interested Hayne, whose research program made DeMille’s inheritance of ancestral features a structural given. In other words, Henry’s admirable “wholesome breadth of



mind” became a *proxy* trait that DeMille could claim in order to combat memories of his misguided red-baiting and implicit anti-Semitism. A similar thematic reasoning compels references to Henry's recorded abhorrence for "Prejudice! Prejudice!" (14) and to his unwavering faith in an "*all* merciful" God, presented as "the strongest single motive of [Henry DeMille's] whole life" (11). DeMille's achievements and finest qualities thus cohere in book form as the completion of a good-will endeavor instinctually advanced over time by his ancestry. Dead ancestors' very best, from the innate liberty of the Dutch pilgrims to the religious tolerance of Cecil's father, "lived on" in the great filmmaker, the alleged telos of a virtuous line.

Quinn's deferential, solidly documented portrait of Father Everett encouraged Hayne to push ahead with his cross-generational schema for inherited virtue. Thus, at first glance, Everett's absence from the finished book is surprising, but it's likely Hayne reasoned that Henry's "wholesome breath of mind" was sufficiently clear from the diary's endorsements of religious tolerance, which required no digression into esoterica on Everett, however relevant. Yet Hayne's follow up letter to Nativity suggests that structural simplification was not the key factor behind Hayne's exclusion of this "Grand Old Priest" who taught Henry and his adoring son such valuable lessons.<sup>98</sup> Everett was dumped because church records proved out-of-synch with Hayne's factual ideal: the burrowing ghostwriter hoped to confirm not only Everett's good nature but also his affiliation with liberal Jesuit clergy, whom DeMille targeted as perfidious "communist sympathizers" in his widely-syndicated column, "Cecil B. DeMille Speaking."<sup>99</sup>

Eloquent rejoinders from prominent Jesuits like San Diego Bishop Charles Buddy cast

public doubt on DeMille's indictments, which for activist clergy and withhunt victims across industry sectors reflected a dire need for "Republican soul-searching."<sup>100</sup>

Since Hayne's research presupposed moral continuity in the DeMille line, Henry's openness to Jesuit wisdom could be parlayed as *Cecil's* instilled respect for a group he disparaged ineffectually. *The Autobiography* wastes no time before explicating this burnishing pattern of moral inheritance. In the opening pages, DeMille muses over insomniac nights when "instead of counting sheep" he "travels back" in time counting generational "links" that define him (3). "If [my ancestors] had not been what they were," DeMille concludes, "I would not be what I am . . . I am one of the effects" (3). Such an assertion of morally coherent lineage sheds light on why Father Everett's potential Jesuit membership became an absorbing research hypothesis.<sup>101</sup> The Jesuit connection's character-boosting, like-father-like-son design is reaffirmed by Hayne's gradual openness to falsehood as the hunt persisted. Research files indicate how wishful facticity began to seduce DeMille's ghostwriter from soundly skeptical verification. Correspondence insinuates a voluntary lapse of rigor, mirroring Hayne's near admittance of Sir William's legendary trials at Hastings. "You modestly do not mention whether or not Father Everett was a Jesuit," wrote Hayne in closing to Nativity's Father Quinn, "I *assume* that he was and have so designated him in my notes."<sup>102</sup>

Narrative, again, declaws method: Hayne confesses to fatefully inscribing Everett's *potential* Jesuit affiliation in his research notes, the supposedly factual ballast for DeMille's history, and later he even discourages Quinn from writing back with an answer: "If I do not hear from you I shall assume that [my notes] are correct. You have been so generous in copying the excerpt from your Parish Archives that I do not want to

trouble you with any unnecessary letter writing.”<sup>103</sup> Hayne’s solicitations of cross-checking aid, courted steadily over the project’s first two years, render the courtesy suspicious—and all the more telling for that. Hayne portrays himself as a nag and excuses Quinn from further correspondence so he can forget strictures of method and roll with a narrative hunch (“I assume that he was and have so designated him...”).

Though Father Quinn’s reply foiled Hayne’s gambit, Hayne’s shiftiness warrants emphasis because it points to a growing workplace realization that document fetishism was holding DeMille’s book hostage. The lacking dividends of Hayne’s sleuthing became increasingly apparent, even as DeMille worked tirelessly on preparing his most monumental undertaking, the second *Ten Commandments*. Hayne’s commitment to “absolute accuracy” could no longer obscure the farce in searching endlessly for dramatic anecdotes and sidelights that may or may not suit DeMille’s autobiographical blueprint. Compulsive gathering, as James D’Arc has suggested, may have protectively diverted Hayne from the “tremendous pressure” of capturing DeMille’s famous voice in prose.<sup>104</sup> But whether or not ghostwriter’s block was what compelled Hayne’s dilatory research, it’s clear that the book was becoming “an endless work in progress.” Narrative synthesis and voice construction needed to supplant rabid gathering and strict appraisal.<sup>105</sup> A new friendly ghost needed summoning.

### **Meet the Chief of Files**

Roland Barthes once argued for the paralyzing effect of rigid methodologies. Attachment to method’s purity, Barthes maintains, crimps the writer, whose imposed criteria for sound evidence thwarts productive thought. If the method-affixed writer does

eventually produce, Barthes continues, his writing amounts to a “sterile” endorsement of an *a priori* rhetorical value. Privileged as “law” in such a way, method holds the writer hostage: it demands hymns in its name, frustrating the “dispersion of desire” and discovery that Barthes sees as writing’s true purpose. “At a certain moment,” therefore, it is “necessary to turn against Method,” to refuse its “founding privilege” in textual creation. Donald Hayne acknowledged as much, ducking contrary evidence so he could—at last—write. But the project had lagged long enough, and Hayne’s magpie pursuits were causing as many archival complications as they were anxious letters from Prentice-Hall.

DeMille’s production unit at Paramount offered a promising solution in Art Arthur, public relations director for the remarkably ambitious global campaign for *The Ten Commandments* remake. Arthur, unlike Hayne, was an established Hollywood insider before signing on with DeMille. He was “Broadway’s youngest columnist” before arriving in Hollywood in the mid-thirties, and he excelled in an impressive assortment of production roles by the age of forty. As a screenwriter, Arthur contributed to the Charlie Chan franchise, Marx Brothers farces, and Sonia Henie ice-skating spectacles, and during World War II he wrote and co-produced the Oscar-winning documentary *Seeds of War* (1946), a harrowing record of orphaned children from liberated territories that stimulated a successful relief effort through the UN.<sup>106</sup> But it was Arthur’s research and administrative achievements as Executive Secretary of the Motion Picture Industry Council (MPIC) that urged DeMille to call on him for *The Autobiography*’s swift completion.

The MPIC was formed in 1949 as public relations bureau designed to assure Americans of Hollywood's sound moral and political standing. Founded by Roy Brewer, anti-communist president of the International Association of Theater and Stage Employees (IATSE), and boasting representatives from across the hierarchy of studio labor, the MPIC orchestrated a "comprehensive, continuous public relations program" that counteracted various forms of negative press on Hollywood, from rumors of casting couch tomfoolery to the alleged communist infiltration of the studios.<sup>107</sup> As Executive Secretary, Arthur's mission was to cherry-pick and publically disseminate reliable information that would foil harmful accusations against the industry. Though smutty exposés on things like the "unwritten lily-white body clause" that helped win SAG cards would at times consume Arthur's attention, he was dedicated primarily to rehabilitating the careers of contrite or hastily branded Hollywood subversives. Arthur played career angel to politically wayward as well "graylisted" talent, the term for industry workers who were neither admitted nor proven communists but who stopped getting hired because of rumored subversive activity. Indeed, capricious "witchhunt indexing" made the workaday climate in Hollywood eerily Kafkaesque, as fateful filing decisions spawned errant, career-killing avatars. "The great frustration of the graylist," as Leclair and England observe in their illuminating study on blacklist Hollywood, "was that it seemed to many sufferers to be an ailment which had no origin, diagnosis, or treatment. One simply stopped hearing the telephone ring. No one was secure from reckless accusation or mistaken identity."<sup>108</sup> Arthur, in an interview taken near the end of his tenure at the MPIC, reaffirmed this trepidatious atmosphere of Cold War Hollywood and clarified his own role as a redemptive arbiter of information: "Suppose someone came to me and

said, ‘Look, I was up for a TV program. There was a lot of interest and suddenly there is no interest at all. The only thing I can thing [sic] of is that I may have been accused of being a Communist. What can be done about it?’ We’re simply a channel where a person can go to give information.’<sup>109</sup>

Thus Arthur was a behind-the-scenes, bureaucratic intelligence supplying documentary ammunition for the industry’s “bitter but highly successful fight to shatter Commie hopes for power in Hollywood,” a fight publicized by Brewer and his equally-outspoken successor, Cecil B. DeMille.<sup>110</sup> In the words of Herb Stein, sleeves-rolled reporter for *Daily Racing Form*: “You can put it in your little bonnet...that although Art Arthur’s name isn’t on any of [Hollywood’s] illuminating signs...he’s in there supplying much of the juice!”<sup>111</sup> And the “juice” found its punch in files, for the war against “irresponsible charges of redism in the film colony” was a war waged with files. Arthur’s adeptness in arranging the *right kind* of information for immediate retrieval proved vital in tagging the suspected and absolving the brashly accused.<sup>112</sup> Processing paper for “finger-tip availability,” as Arthur would later describe his own reorganization of Hayne’s swelling research on DeMille, was essential to the Council’s race to diffuse potentially injurious attacks on Hollywood personnel.

Arthur’s “Report on the Series of Five Articles in the *Los Angeles Mirror* Entitled ‘Hollywood Fame or Shame’” illustrates how Arthur’s studied source appraisal laid waste to “malodorous” press on alleged transgression in Hollywood.<sup>113</sup> Filed exhaustively in the MPIC’s “developing Library of Information,” Arthur’s curated repository for useable data related to American movies, the *Mirror* controversy illustrates the Council’s preemptive, source-based method of media counteraction. As Herb Stein’s

profile made clear, Arthur was an “excellent authority” on “almost any subject,” laboring “neck deep in clippings” to “quietly ste[p] in on situations in time to keep them from becoming lurid.”<sup>114</sup> The *Mirror*’s “smear parade,” which painted Hollywood as a “moral quagmire” haunted by “night shapes” of junky peddlers and hopeful-actresses-turned-harlots, was one such instance when Arthur’s damage control was needed. And fast.<sup>115</sup>

Penned by Omar Garrison, the *Mirror*’s “religion editor” keen on Hollywood licentiousness for probably all the wrong reasons, the “Fame or Shame” series stemmed from a Grand Jury investigation into corruption and moral misconduct at LAPD Vice, a scandal fueled by an indictment from Brenda Allen, the headline-grabbing “red-haired proprietress” of an elite bordello high up in the Hollywood Hills.<sup>116</sup> Eyecatching coverage on Allen, a “shapely,” spotlight savvy “vice queen” who sashayed to the witness stand in “imported gabardine” that exhaled the “scent of Arabian Night perfume,” alarmed the MPIC because it placed “men from the studios” alongside off-duty cops at Allen’s “call house,” where, as Allen related in court, “the girls and the men can do anything they want to... You pay your money and you take your choice.”<sup>117</sup> The *Mirror*, therefore, riding the frenzy of the Vice scandal, agitated the MPIC by insinuating that prostitution was not merely an elite diversion at aeries of pleasure like Allen’s. “Playing bean bag,” as Garrison concluded, was “for the young girls” an almost necessary move to make it in “the film Babylon.”<sup>118</sup> An anonymous source who refused to “submit to the casting couch” casually affirmed Garrison’s premise: “Of course, I didn’t get the screen test, job, or guild card.”<sup>119</sup>

Arthur parried the *Mirror*’s “irresponsible smear attack” first by impugning the story’s authenticity, underscoring how the “principle sources” Garrison used to “defame

an entire industry” are all “unnamed.” But moreover, Arthur continued, all these anonymous sources “talk remarkably like the same person,” discoursing on “tricky Vickies,” “Breezy-Wheezy,” and other similarly rhymed underworld types. Boasting a near-encyclopedic memory of Hollywood content after using a customized “IBM Machine” to classify films with “educational angles” for the MPIC Library, Arthur argued that Garrison’s “free play of imagination” is betrayed further by the reporter’s likely borrowing from *The Lost Weekend* (Billy Wilder, 1945): he noticed how a call-girl lush who claimed patronage from some “big producers” suspiciously experienced the same alcohol withdrawal symptoms as Ray Milland’s fiending drunk, hallucinating “terrible shapes emerging from musical instruments.”<sup>120</sup> Lastly, in a concluding section entitled “Could Have Been Constructive,” Arthur rebuked the *Mirror* for sensationalizing dubious and “highly discolored” testimony instead of proposing remedies to an urgent social problem, which, Arthur’s careful to note, can “be found in any large-size American city.”<sup>121</sup>

Affirmed by the Council and officialized as a “stiff letter of protest by some of the industry’s most respected figures,” Arthur’s “sound and exhaustive” rebuttal still failed to provoke *The Mirror*’s retraction or apology.<sup>122</sup> So his next move was to “counter-attack publically,” drafting press releases on the industry’s continual efforts to keep “young and impressionable” newcomers from those “predacious elements” of Hollywood’s “scum fringe.”<sup>123</sup> Yet Arthur’s efforts to “line up some dope” confirming the industry’s *past* efforts to “discourage stray girls” from Hollywood and its attempt to inoculate more wholesome ones from the “blandishments” of stardom came up short.<sup>124</sup>



If an industry-coordinated endeavor to bare down on the comportment of Hollywood's tyro class couldn't be grounded *historically*, however, it could be staged as an earnest priority of the day. Unable to document a standard industry practice for bracing neophytes from tinseltown seductions, Arthur *extemporized* the evidentiary process, staging a performance of industry-led outreach for the public record, as the following Press Release demonstrated:

Orientation courses for young and impressionable newcomers to Hollywood have been recommended by the Motion Picture Industry Council as a helpful service in protecting aspiring movie hopefuls from errors in personal and professional conduct...orientation will include straight-from-the shoulder talks by seasoned individuals...who can detail past experiences.<sup>125</sup>

This mise-en-scene of Hollywood behavioral reform—inspired by documentary lack—was choreographed ultimately for purposes of future historicization. The *immediate* function of the MPIC's sexual orientation stunt was, as Arthur framed it for one colleague, "to take an active part in protecting the film capital's reputation by locking the stable door before the horse escapes," but the deeper meaning of such behavioral reform rested in its potential as an event that could be cited down the line as moral defense. As Charlotte Linde has demonstrated, healthy institutions require "retold tales," hand-me-down narratives that build team spirit and sustain institutional self-images.<sup>126</sup> Arthur's media charade of uplift and temperance, a calculated riposte to Allen's besmirching testimony, was both a practical attempt to "head things off before they happen" as well as a proleptic rigging of institutional memory.<sup>127</sup> This attempt to parry charges of rampant perversion in the film capital—titled in the major dailies "Hollywood Acts with Industry

Sponsored Clean Up Drive”—put certain members of the viewing public at ease. But Arthur’s rejoinder, now public record, also filled what the prudent Executive Secretary saw as a vexing gap in the greater institutional archive. Arthur did posterity a favor, in other words, elaborating nearsighted publicity of yore with readily useable data. This gumshoe-journalist-turned-secretary understood how record keeping is a technology of memory *and* action. Filed properly, an institution’s self-registration becomes a handy, rhetorically charged resource for “active remembering.”<sup>128</sup>

But to *use* one must be able to *find*, and thus Arthur’s first priority after signing on to DeMille’s *Autobiography* was to make Donald Hayne’s erratically stored files more user-friendly. In his old age Arthur recalled his “utter astonishment” at Hayne’s “apparen[t] filing system,” comprised of index cards with “cryptic” references to documents that were placed haphazardly in a “three-foot long file box.”<sup>129</sup> Arthur saw that in order to “organize and put rails under the project” he needed to systematically generate themes from Hayne’s documentary thicket and then take charge in figuring out how to store and standardize pertinent material. Bruno Latour has described functional bureaucracy as a “process of punctualization,” an effort to glean a limited set of “indicators out of many traces.”<sup>130</sup> Here, I want to suggest that Arthur’s targeted mapping and precise description of DeMille’s corporate archive lends archaeological concreteness to Latour’s thoughts on bureaucratized “mechanisms to explain,” a push for order hinging on schemes that turn cascading paper collections “into *less* paper.”<sup>131</sup> Arthur’s synthetic, institutionally-confined method for detecting and charting biographical patterns spelled the end of Hayne’s archival dillydallying. It was Arthur’s aim to *automate* the process by affirming the file as a constitutive intelligence, a

technology that would turn writing into *programming*. Arthur's method radically contrasted Hayne's romantic historicism, stemming from the slow-burn rituals of nineteenth century historiography, symbolized by the lone, erudite researcher whose intent archival consultation brought séance-like proximity to the historical past. Hayne, as we saw, clung to the "patient digging" and hermeneutic footwork that made his inherited tradition a near-sacred science of an elite society of men tuned into the right "signals."<sup>132</sup> Arthur's bureaucratized alternative exchanged time-consuming intellectual labor for a systematized method of document retrieval, the surest way of telling DeMille's life story—in the absence of DeMille.

Whereas Hayne isolated themes and persistently tracked documents to animate them, Arthur branded himself "Chief of Files" and dove into *already*-archived material, hoping to process Hayne's documentary wilderness into "a high road which any writer can...follow with ease."<sup>133</sup> Geographic metaphors, frequent in Arthur's memos, reaffirm the chaos of Hayne's improvised method and point to Arthur's confidence in his alternative filing system, carried over from the MPIC and then developed further while planning the source-heavy publicity campaign for the *Ten Commandments* remake.<sup>134</sup> Indeed, tracing Arthur's paper-shuffling tactics up through his proud days as DeMille's Chief of Files reveals a sharply increased complexity in organizational structure. His PR grab-bag that became the MPIC Library of Information encompassed a practical series of general groupings, including his file for "Constructive Influence of Motion Picture Content," which united a swath of titles that vaguely signified "public service."<sup>135</sup> The subject divisions for *Ten Commandments* campaign, nested of precise subthemes like

“Sinai Granite” and “DeMille’s Authentic Biblical Pilgrimage,” reveals an enhanced administrative sophistication that allowed for the global circulation of resonant publicity angles, what Arthur called the “‘what do we say’ of our operation.” Yet the great reach of the campaign, with “fieldmen” deployed from Dallas to Calcutta, opened the possibility of fugitive messages in the “dissemination phase,” a risk warded off with a strict filing system, “charted in detail and coded with key numbers . . . so that all files . . . are standard whether in Hollywood, New York, or in the offices of the fieldmen,” wherever they may lie.<sup>136</sup>

Arthur’s system was designed to minimize analytical sense-making within an extravagant network of publicity grunts. It aggressively affirmed the dominion of the file, programming “fieldpeople” in a precise pitch. In effect, Arthur had reinvigorated his secretarial system for the MPIC, where his files helped curb accusations of radicalism but also prompted remorseful subversives during publicized mea culpas and “naming” hearings that “outed” former comrades. There was undoubtedly more at stake for Arthur’s contrite or simply job-hungry clients who reached out to the MPIC for name-clearing support. Yet Arthur’s calibration of promotional activity for what would be DeMille’s last film still marked a greater career milestone for our secretary-cum-publicity virtuoso, who divined “every conceivable form of disseminating ‘Themes and Material’ on the widest possible scale,” delimiting content for academics, Hedda Hopper columns, traveling Ambassadors, regional television stations, “the Negro,” and myriad other outlets and demographic groups.<sup>137</sup> Thus, I stress Arthur’s *Ten Commandment’s* promotional system not only because it won him the job as *The Autobiography’s* Chief of Files and as its second ghostwriter: his purposeful delineation of where and why

promotional materials should move anticipates the methodological reasoning behind Arthur's schematized re-ordering of Hayne's research, which by 1957 had sprouted into an unwieldy meta-archive at the DeMille Unit bungalow, a wild assemblage of interview transcripts, family curiosities, and production file residuum pulled from storage for often impenetrable reasons.

Since recurring, publicity-gearred spotlights made turning points of DeMille's life story generally familiar to those who already cared, Arthur realized that he had to re-frame the expected biographical beats through DeMille's *likely* perspective. The narrative architecture was set, in other words, but the tone of preliminary drafts was too impersonal. Seeing this, Arthur devised a way to add the essential feature of "voice" to this autobiographical work. "It is agreed by all concerned that what a man thinks can be as important as what a man does," Arthur observed in an early "structural breakdown" for the book entitled "CB—Views On," which, like his marketing scheme for the *Ten Commandments*, was putatively exhaustive in breadth and derived largely from the corporate archive at hand.<sup>138</sup> This early structuration plan marked a pivotal step in semantically wrangling Hayne's immense research. It became, as Arthur would later phrase it for DeMille, "one of the technical devices for assembling and filing the material that in some way provides road maps through the enormous accumulation of notes, etc."<sup>139</sup>

At the project's outset, Donald Hayne proposed incorporating his own exegetical interludes into DeMille's ghosted account, but this tactic was dismissed for being, intrusive, diverting, too redolent of footnotes. Arthur's "Views On" breakdown provided a generically sound alternative, promising historical breadth, narrative flow, and the

subjective verisimilitude autobiographies are pressured to convey. Essentially, Arthur's "Views On" delineated topics that tied-in logically to important people and to pivotal events, while suggesting ways to capture DeMille's voice in prose. Hayne conveniently neglected this burden of impersonating his boss, devoting his days instead to dilatory sleuthing; Arthur, conversely, affirmed the vitality of DeMille's voice—the feature that will "make people sit up and pay attention"—and he saw better filing as the best way to capture and re-create this voice.<sup>140</sup>

DeMille, as Arthur pointed out, was "one of America's most sought speakers," so there was abundant recorded and transcribed material against which to measure written impersonation, including wax cylinders documenting his nearly ten years as host of Lux Radio Theater.<sup>141</sup> But DeMille's prominence as a public speaker was a mixed blessing. The filmmaker's celebrity meant that his vocal character would be tough to cheat in book form: certain oratorical quirks—the measured cadence, nasally timbre, narrative crescendos and punchline reveals—were too well known for perfunctory imitation. It's clear Arthur realized that autobiography's "authenticity" is actualized through tone, through tactful details and gestures that affirm a writer's embodied attachment to the "I" of the narrative. He realized that Hayne's "patient digging" for the purest truths was a fool's errand in a genre in which "the truth of facts is subordinate to the truth of the man."<sup>142</sup> And the "truth of the man," as Arthur saw as well, was in essence a mirage, an effect of archival artifice. Jean Starobinski has suggested that "The autobiographical form," particularly as it relates to tone and the persuasive stacking of historical detail, "can cloak the freest fictive invention."<sup>143</sup> Arthur seems sensitive to this, employing the archive to *performative* rather than empirical ends, as the key to authentic voice

construction. This re-prioritization meant that Hayne, still employed but now in the hot seat, was forced to abandon cross-checking rituals and start studying documented vocal acts.

But although Arthur's files for "all past speeches and writings" helped clarify how DeMille should "sound" on the page, they weren't entirely sufficient in animating all the views and events Arthur deemed essential to DeMille's character. Arthur needed DeMille to chime in on various subjects and he managed to persuade his elderly boss to break from production and sit down for a series of interviews. "I knew he was a master story teller," Arthur recalled in an oral history moderated by the curator of DeMille's now-public archive at Brigham Young University, James D'Arc, but "there simply did not exist a DeMille version of DeMille stories."<sup>144</sup> D'Arc, drawing from his sit-down with Arthur, emphasizes the supposedly "informal" nature of DeMille's taped interviews, portraying them as candid conversations pick up by a hidden recording system at the DeMille Unit. Arthur's reminiscence insinuates a fly-on-the-wall set-up, with Arthur activating the concealed recorder only when DeMille "strayed into" casual conversation, yielding "priceless anecdotes for the autobiography."<sup>145</sup>

Interview transcripts imply a more controlled and rhetorically-leading situation, however. Far from a hushed interlocutor whose friendly, unobtrusive presence made DeMille "[un]conscious of being recorded," these interview transcripts show Arthur returning to his journalist roots, interjecting with follow-ups and leading questions designed to confirm hunches and develop themes on the structural grid.<sup>146</sup> DeMille was present as a speaker, of course, as a witness to his own past, but transcripts make clear that it was really *Arthur* writing DeMille, delimiting the content of recollections and

cherry-picking details that reflected his annotation scheme. In one interview exploring early Lasky Co. productions, Arthur intrudes to observe how *The Cheat*, the 1915 orientalist melodrama that made DeMille a global brand, “had critics doing nip-ups...[for] its tremendous artistic accomplishments.”<sup>147</sup> The fact reappears in the finished *Autobiography*, but, tellingly, not in the words DeMille used in the interview to affirm *The Cheat*’s success overseas: there, DeMille referenced grosses (“\$41,000 foreign”), while the book underscores “film historians”’ enduring “regard [for] *The Cheat* as a landmark in the development of the cinema” (150). The emendation’s telling, for it substitutes DeMille’s words for a ghostwritten remark that elaborates a planned motif for the published narrative: *sometimes* critics “got it right,” but usually they did not.<sup>148</sup> Arthur, in Derridean terms, “pre-archived a lexicon” in sight of “a corpus” that will “articulate the unity of an ideal configuration.”<sup>149</sup> The transcription indicates how DeMille’s spoken memories, *even once archived*, are subordinated to Arthur’s annotative commentary, which mirrors the file-specific categories he conceived for “Views On” but also reflect *The Autobiography*’s strange ontology as an archive in motion, “a historical document” that, as we’ll recall, was not to behave as such.

This authoring command of Arthur’s file-coordinated theme menu, actively suppressed in published form, is clarified further in a second interview on the silent era. Seeking information related to what’s described in the *Autobiography* as “my quest for authenticity in films,” Arthur references an “incident” that occurred while shooting *The Warrens of Virginia* (1915), an adaptation of a David Belasco production of a play by Cecil’s brother William and loosely based on DeMille’s grandfather’s trials as a Commissary for the Southern Confederacy. The scene in question, “one of your first



efforts at authenticity and interesting in view of your insistence on research and so on,” as Arthur prefaces it in the interview, showed a confederate brigade retreating after a bloody skirmish and closed with a shot of a battlefield strewn with military paraphernalia, including a field telegraph tripod, which, in the finished film, stands prominently center-frame. A period-specific artifact, the telegraph instrument was nevertheless mistaken by audiences as a foolish oversight. To quote *The Autobiography*: “disgusted letters began to come in: how could we be so careless as to leave one of our *camera* tripods standing right there in the middle of the scene?” (115 emphasis added) This incident’s worth stressing because it sheds light on DeMille’s equivocal status as a “speaker” within his own *Autobiography*, even after his statements were recorded and incorporated into Arthur’s system. The message DeMille takes away from the anecdote as an old man is not the same message he imparts to readers: for DeMille-the-interview-subject, the scene points to a then-lacking appreciation for how *mise-en-scene* could be bracketed to clarify an image. If he could re-shoot the scene, DeMille adds matter-of-factly, he would do so “close-up...to show the telegraph instrument on [the tripod].” In the *book*, DeMille gestures to the “maturing” tastes of the “movie audience,” a shift that compelled hostile letters to a director whose fast-and-loose ways made for embarrassing anachronism.

But this isn’t the story’s greater lesson in the *Autobiography*. In the interview, DeMille looks back on the misunderstanding as an amateur screw-up, “the fault of the director,” and then even confesses that he forgets shooting the scene. DeMille’s autobiographical persona, however, remembers the scene rather well, and he elaborates its import in the book as Arthur records it in the transcript margins: “RESEARCH.” DeMille’s point in the interview on coherent scene construction fades so the telegraph

tripod can stand in the public memory as a naive inauguration of a commitment to authenticity: “The compilation of research done for my latest picture, *The Ten Commandments*, was honored by being published in book form by the University of California under the title *Moses and Egypt*. That academic recognition is a deserved tribute to the scholarship, labor and, I may add, patience of my present research consultant, Henry Noerdlinger. It is also, in its way, a memorial to...a lonely, misunderstood tripod on a deserted battlefield” (116).

The *Warrens*’ tripod incident became one of many topical “cues” that could be “tied in with” other documents in which Arthur saw harmonious thematic dividends for *The Autobiography*.<sup>150</sup> The interview’s re-purposed significance in the book suggests that Arthur’s system recuperated itself even after DeMille offered his own words. Thus I’ve explored at length the poetics of Arthur’s system—its structural form and empirical functions—in order to illuminate the generative, indeed writerly impact that Arthur’s system had. But moreover, I’ve dug into Arthur’s administration in order to show how prosthetic archival memory held enunciative sway over DeMille’s lived recollection. Arthur’s fixed set of annotative terms functioned as a both a tonal register and bulwark against archival non-sense; it was used to say “this, too, *fits* there,” refracting the “proper place” for disparate materials. Groupings proliferated, meanings reverberated, and events, people, and places, grew thick with redundant signification.<sup>151</sup>

For Arthur, therefore, filing’s aim was clear and simple: make more mean less. The “Views On” breakdown was decisive in this attempt at repelling thematic contingency and delimiting the meaning of DeMille’s corporate archive and of his current reflections captured on tape. Early on and unapologetically, Arthur’s system aimed for

an “impoverishment of explanation,” a phrase one information design theorist has used to insinuate the likelihood of “premature closure” in data synthesis.<sup>152</sup> It placed the surviving traces of DeMille’s life-work in a semantic stranglehold through its acronymic, file-correlative subject menu broken down into “voluminous subgroupings,” which, in Arthur’s appraisal, lent “shape and form and compass points” to DeMille’s tortuous papertrail.<sup>153</sup> Arthur’s meta re-framing of DeMille’s documented past was *not* an act of organizational quality control; DeMille’s archive already had what Schellenberg influentially codified as “organic character,” a durable provenance in workaday protocol that Arthur’s training taught him to respect and keep intact.<sup>154</sup> So what Arthur did was make copies, lots and lots of them, which he re-filed and then filtered through a synthetic grid that ultimately ghosted the ghostwriter.

The clerical staff at DeMille Productions worked in general accord with the “provenance principle,” classifying and storing documents in order to “reflect the processes by which they came into existence.”<sup>155</sup> Arthur’s system, by contrast—an interpretive punctualization of an “official” archive—was *writing* itself, a structurally-defining compartmentalization of traces, a narrative syntax in skeletal form.<sup>156</sup> Though Arthur’s patterning of DeMille’s archive foiled Haynes’s staunch efforts to discover and corroborate stories, both approaches were compelled by an economy of semiotic exchange in which, to return to Barthes, a “piece of research” rode the currents of a textual ideal. For, as Barthes explains, “from the moment a piece of research concerns the text . . . the research itself becomes text, production.”<sup>157</sup>

DeMille’s biographical mythos, a focused archival extraction spanning many decades, thus asserted itself as a centripetal force that either galvanized or repelled

research finds. It pre-determined where research materials truly belonged. Arthur's meta-archival arrangement, drawn from these avatarial manifestations of DeMille's public self, maintained its force as an authoritative "voice," as an enunciative intelligence that paradoxically affirmed the insignificance of DeMille the living person. True, Arthur sensibly prioritized recording and studying DeMille's voice to construct an authentic persona, but he also quickly betrayed indifference towards DeMille as a flesh-and-blood subject: spoken memories, if used at all, were modified and recycled in published form as intermittent soundbites. Arthur's endorsement of his archival system as "a high road which *any* writer [not Hayne exclusively] can follow with ease" thus warrants reemphasis since it infers Arthur's confidence in his filing system's ability to tell the "whole story," making prose adaptation a mere coupe-de-gras, an act of data-plugging that any clerical functionary should be able to manage.

Broadly, then, Arthur's system offered an effective way to draw a manageable set of biographical themes from an otherwise biographically evidence pool. Despite Hayne's early attempt to "speak" through exegetical interruptions and lengthy research trials, Arthur made sure it was DeMille's staff-curated archive that enjoyed "final say" in the director's farewell to his public. "Grist [that] may suit your mill" was a phrase Hayne used to describe his hard-won research awaiting Arthur's distillation, and the metaphor's apt: it indicates how Arthur's system established the expressive parameters for DeMille's archival record. Put differently, it "pre-archived" a vocabulary that "laid down the law" for a life.<sup>158</sup> But although Arthur's schemata expedited the process and answered some of the challenges inherent to making source-based narrative read off-the-cuff, it never clarified an exact procedure for integrating sources, an early point of trepidation for both

Prentice-Hall and Donald Hayne, the original ghostwriter who now faced the task of translating Arthur's "digest" into a first-person re-telling.

### **The Man Who Wasn't There?**

In "The Memo and Modernity," John Guillory demonstrates how memory's displacement from "individual minds to documents" became a defining feature of modern bureaucracy as it grew more complex and multi-tiered under corporate consolidation.<sup>159</sup> Guillory's essay traces a necessary shift from the verbose "business letter" to the concise, command-dealing memo, the efficient mode for storing ideas and for communicating protocol to a large clerical network. "As long as business was confined to relatively small labor forces dominated by single owner-entrepreneurs," Guillory writes, "the business letter sufficed for most contexts of written communication. But with the growth of large-scale corporate enterprises, such as the railroad and chemical companies of the later nineteenth century, the need for internal communication across distances and between levels of management increased exponentially."<sup>160</sup> Building on the work of business historian Joanne Yates, Guillory brings to light a fateful un-burdening of remembrance for modern management personnel, a *necessary* amnesia for tycoons like DeMille, whose clerical staff became prosthetic memory regimes prodded by things the boss might forget—names, birthdays, seeming epiphanies, you name it. DeMille's utterances were, to lift a field expression of today, "born archival."

The following note from a DeMille Unit secretary clarifies how corporate archival expansion was bound up causally with restorative memory cleansing: "DeMille noticed Doris Beyer, a hairdresser, this morning – thought her very attractive. He mentioned she

would look very well in a Persian costume. . . This is *just in case* he asks you her name.”<sup>161</sup> While gesturing towards the erotic power politics of the soundstage, the notation points to the aleatory undercurrents of DeMille’s archive, registered by a fear of oblivion that weighed down especially hard on clerical workers: censure or termination is a likely consequence if Doris’ face returns in a flash and the secretary fails to produce DeMille’s “note to self.”<sup>162</sup> The secretary’s vital “supplemental position in the office, as Leah Price and Pamela Thursch point out, “reveals the inability of the boss’ name to signify an authentically occupied identity.”<sup>163</sup> Such gendered demarcation between mental and manual labor and the idealization of the “secretary as the woman who ‘knows not to know’” has been explored in light of the “control revolution” of modern bureaucracy, and I stress it here because it occasioned the tireless scribal indexing of DeMille’s production operation, which became a sprawling, elliptical record of existence that the ghostwriters sought to reshape into spontaneous remembrance.<sup>164</sup> Indeed, Hayne saw that his only hope in finishing *The Autobiography*, already a year behind deadline when Arthur returned to his producer’s post at Ivan Tors studios in December 1957, rested in a transparent concession to source material. The decision made sense: there was too much to tell without the teller and too much alluring archive at hand not to flaunt.

Hayne, as it turned out, legitimized counter-generic citation by adopting a stance of the *authorially* genuine but historically inaccurate autobiographer: forgetful old age. The admittedly bad memory of DeMille’s autobiographical persona, alluded to in self-deprecating jest throughout the book, did not result in the casual, publically accepted distortions of classical autobiography, however. It did the just opposite; it warranted source use in a way that would not annoy general readers but lend the book evidentiary

weight without the dreaded “array of scholarly apparatus.”<sup>165</sup> Rather than hide the archive and make it appear as if the book materialized from a prodigious memory, Hayne projected DeMille *inside* his archive, pen in steady motion, reciting his days with the assistance of documents made available by a solicitous clerical staff, “a cloister of individuals as dedicated to their boss as any Trappist to his order,” as one trade magazine described DeMille’s secretaries.<sup>166</sup>

Paid to safeguard the dross of daily operations, the secretary subsumed herself to the memory demands of the institution that DeMille personified publically. The office credo might have read: turn off your minds, ladies, and record, so DeMille can remember *and* be remembered. Hayne and Arthur resurrected this dense corporate record as running a diary of sorts, an eye-witness account of operations that DeMille, as an old man, could *reclaim* autobiographically. A legacy was thus sustained by a tacit emptying-out, a secretarial dissolution into surplus data. DeMille makes so much clear in *The Autobiography* in describing a prized secretary: “She *is* my memory” (373).

If spontaneity is a pantomime in source-based ghostwriting it is also the animating feature of DeMille’s secretarial record. DeMille secretaries, hyper-vigilant documenters “with an endurance no less remarkable than [their] efficiency,” were a relentless relevance production machine, armed with data which outsized any human capacity to remember. “Attentive and alert...the field secretary is there to see and hear everything,” DeMille observes in *The Autobiography* before conveying the eclectic breadth of what his secretaries were compelled to record:

On the set, I may give an order for something to be done tomorrow, which I will forget unless it is noted down; in the studio restaurant, I may meet an exhibitor

from the Philippines or a missionary from the Sudan or a congressman concerned with legislation affecting some cause in which I am interested, whose words I may need to refer to a year from now; I may be trudging over the Sinai desert and suddenly see something or think of some incident from years ago that I want to put in [my autobiography]. The field secretary is there to see and hear everything [I cannot].<sup>167</sup>

By insinuating the secretary's prosthetic nature—as literally adjunctive eyes and ears—DeMille personalizes what they produce. The greater secretarial registry, once cast in this light, finds aura by way of an impossibility: DeMille got around, definitely, but he was not as ubiquitous as he would have liked to have been.<sup>168</sup> His secretaries were necessary extensions of managerial presence, weaving a documentary mosaic for an institutional historiography. They indexed the present in remarkable excess, aiming for a totality that similarly inspired research for historical film efforts.

For decades, promotional tradition worked to establish DeMille's credibility as a source for historical knowledge. Over time, he had paratextually affirmed his research-won authority, embracing the role of "archon," a document guardian whose access to precious research materials was justified by publically-acknowledged erudition.<sup>169</sup> Publicity, to this end, functioned as a substitutive footnote, providing what Anthony Grafton has called historiography's "secondary story," a reflexive delineation of the "thought and research that underpin [historical] narrative."<sup>170</sup> Careful research was showcased to similar ends in film trailers where DeMille lectures from an artifact-dense office, while ethos-building declarations from collaborators, like this one from Hedy Lamarr, reaffirmed DeMille's antiquarian diligence: "I was won over to appearing in the



picture [*Samson and Delila* (1949)] from the moment I entered his office and saw the extent of the research that he had done... You have no idea how thorough and comprehensive that research is. He has documents and evidence to support everything that he does.”<sup>171</sup> It’s telling how Lamarr’s statement portrays DeMille’s office as the evidentiary basis for the director’s entire output. By doing so, she affirms the “secondary story” of collection and verification behind DeMille’s historical visions, a convenient standard for DeMille’s ghostwriters, who, in spite of Prentice-Hall’s early hostility to citation, saw how they would be remiss in excising evidence from the book. DeMille was too well known as a man who dealt in evidence, a *public* impression that *The Autobiography* theatricalizes through its many descriptive references to documents, artifacts, and other precious materials that the reading public had no way of knowing about otherwise.

Staging the narration as a race to rediscover a past sidestepped the alienating effects of source documentation that Anthony Grafton has traced so compellingly. Sources, levers to memory’s floodgates as used in DeMille’s book, did not necessarily betray the ghostwriter’s hand or work to de-personalize the reader’s experience, both nagging concerns as the book was being drafted. Deprived a remembering subject, sources were not only necessary for the book’s completion but their museological framing encouraged readers’ sense of a writerly presence. Content had to come from somewhere, and this exigency was spun into curatorial attraction, which is illustrated early in the book when DeMille discusses his “the accident film,” a compilation reel held “in my vault” showing “scenes of untoward events” that occurred while shooting various films, including a botched take for *The Virginian* (1914), when the genteel female love

interest pratfalls into a river “head over crinolines” (102). Though DeMille holds to his promise to “all concerned” that this reel of embarrassments “will never be released” commercially, he is more than comfortable sharing such bloopers with his dedicated readers (103). Such generosity spans the text, producing what Calum Storrie would call a “delirious” museological display, an idiosyncratic accretion of objects whose meanings either hide or proliferate in the absence of an explanatory discourse: unabridged telegrams and letters that “read something like an old-fashioned cliff-hanging serial” about the Lasky Company’s tempestuous merger with Adolph Zukor’s Famous Players (155); “color sheets” delineating the die-transfer tinting and toning process used on silent epics like *The Woman God Forgot* (1917); “shooting scripts” for early synchronized sounds films such as *Dynamite* (1929), with “dialogue, typed in red...as if we were dinning into the audience what good playwrights we were” (292); summer 1914 issues from DeMille’s “prized” and “complete set” of the *Illustrated London News*, where British sailors’ burials could be witnessed in “full, punctilious” circumstance after maritime skirmishes with Germany that portended a war that “still seemed remote from us” (123-124); plans for a transportable “dynamo” projection apparatus that would power a “portable motion picture circuit” across the Western Front and allow allied troops to enjoy “all the Famous Players-Lasky pictures” for morale’s sake (206-207); the “painful documentation” of the “organized opposition of certain Jewish groups” to DeMille’s *The King of Kings* (1927), which are strategically counterpointed by the exculpatory praise from Rabbi Alexander Lyons of Brooklyn, who reportedly hailed DeMille’s Christ film as “reverent, inspiring [and cause to] make the Jew more nobly and proudly Jewish, the Christian more emulous of the character of Jesus” (282); the hefty research notebook

taken in preparation for DeMille's ambitious, late tribute to the circus, *The Greatest Show on Earth* (1953), compiled while in tow with the Ringling Brother's troupe "through heat and rain across...the middle West" (404); and rare curios drawn from DeMille's personal "collection of antiquities," including an ancient tax receipt that DeMille brought with him to the White House premiere of *The Story of Dr. Wassell* (1944), a film that was inspired by FDR's fireside chat tribute to the eponymous naval physician who led a sick and wounded squadron through the choking rainforests of Java while Japanese belligerents descended upon the island.

The book reads like an urgent reunion with a past that DeMille, a forgetful old man who "will soon be joining" his exemplary ancestors (7), can access only through fragments. Evidence is not funneled into *The Autobiography* as an academic assurance of accuracy, therefore, but as the portal to a history that DeMille can now "revisit" one last time. He moves through the text as the docent of his own commemorative gallery, describing artifacts in vivid detail and elaborating their film-historical relevance. For example, in an early chapter exploring DeMille's momentous 1913 move out West "to a quiet village of orange groves and pepper trees" known as Hollywood, DeMille unveils "a small red leather-covered notebook" in which he recorded production costs for *The Squaw Man*, the inaugural production of the Jesse Lasky Feature Play Company that DeMille co-directed with former Edison cameraman, Oscar Apfel. This notebook's archival preciousness is implied by emphasizing its decay: it consists of "ruled pages . . . now gray with age and frayed at the corners" and is covered with pencil notations "so faint and smudged that they can hardly be read" (81).

By accentuating the notebook's fragility along with the near-inscrutability of its content, DeMille insinuates the historical urgency and epistemic particularity of his written show-and-tell act. Perhaps illegible and probably non-sensical to unfamiliar eyes, these "names and notes that loom out of the past" are given meaning and context thanks to DeMille's archival performance. We're not merely "witnessing" a discrete artifact; we're allowed to see DeMille's sentimental reunion with it. Hayne is careful to encourage the reader's illusion of peering over the shoulder as DeMille gazes at the notebook's inscriptions, a "secret map of a soon-to-be conquered territory," as Paolo Cherchi Usai and Lorenzo Codelli have described the notebook.<sup>172</sup> We learn, for instance, how "On one page can be made out the name of an eager young extra, with the notation, '\$5—O.K.,' meaning that we paid him \$5 a day and that he was worth it" (81). This turn from description to arcana-explained affirms the singular presence of DeMille, ghostwritten as the ideal interpreter of an archive that the director rarely consulted in his day but that nevertheless authored his industrial persona and his twilight statement to the world.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter attempted to shed archaeological light on how DeMille's *Autobiography*—a book whose evidentiary foundations were deliberately silenced for the market—remained haunted by measures of historiographic authority. By reverse engineering this literary curio of late-fifties Hollywood, I have tried to demonstrate how DeMille's ghostwriters, forced to research intensely because of their boss' absence (too busy when writing began, dead when it wrapped) managed to institute a *surreptitious*

citation apparatus that lent substance and credibility to their phantom subject, and without alienating a popular readership.<sup>173</sup> This song of self came to be through the backstage recital of an archival chorus; its ideal harmony is tripped up by the dissonance of archives in general, however, even those structured around a single persona. `

DeMille's spoken recollections, as we saw, proved marginal to *The Autobiography's* production, and they were often contradicted by the "harder" proof that the reformed theologian Donald Hayne saw as more suitable to historical narrative. But the once-academic Hayne's empirical pursuits were impractical and expensive, and so Art Arthur was brought into the fold. Schooled in source evaluation, too, but more usefully qualified in modern filing, Arthur was vital in bringing the book shape, coherence, and a likelihood of getting done. If Hayne personified archive fever, that sick search for impossible origins, then Arthur's cure was the coldness of meaning, extractable only through bureaucratic artifice.

Completed, *The Autobiography* returns us to what I identified earlier as the structuring tension between narrative elegance and avid compilation, common to DeMille's cinema, certainly, but accented especially through *The Autobiography*, "a historical document" that did its best to hide the fact "that it is one." The charade was successful for a stretch: the book "sounded enough" like DeMille and DeMille-the-narrator's docent-like descriptions of historical objects were familiar enough from preview trailers that showed the director's hands-on familiarity with period-specific objects. But the ghostwriters' exposure was fated: their tracks weren't covered; they were filed away. "No doubt...many valuable sections will be trimmed out," Art Arthur wrote to DeMille two years before joining the effort, and "I hope some way will be found

to make them permanently available for study in some other fashion—together with extensive papers, etc., which no doubt will be pulled together during your research.”<sup>174</sup>

My unveiling of this archive—one that shouldn’t exist, really, since the ghostwriter’s exit should mean archival erasure—is an unveiling with intriguing repercussions. First, it repositions DeMille *authorially* in a work he had little to do with creatively. *The Autobiography*’s archival trail foils any claims to classical autobiographical historicity. There’s not the “truth of the man,” to return to Gusdorf, but a narrative assimilation of an archived past for the delight of the non-critical reader. But although DeMille’s archive undermines the existential truth of his own *Autobiography*, the “faith,” as one critic has put it, “that we are in the presence of a writer, working under his or her own name and in his or her own voice, as something profound is explored,” it signals other truths that encourage us to reconsider autobiographical authenticity beyond the romantic pact of singular authorship.<sup>175</sup>

When Donald Hayne told Hedda Hopper about DeMille’s near-completion of his autobiography, she responded incredulously: “When did he have time to work on *that*?” Hopper’s skeptical surprise adds an additional layer of paradox to this fraught literary endeavor. DeMille publicized his relentless industry as a defining trait, as Hopper, an old publicity ally, knew very well. “I hope to die working, and on something better than I have ever done before,” (148) asserts DeMille in the *Autobiography*, and in a later section expounds on his “horror” as an older man “of ever letting myself be made a coddled invalid” (365). Indeed, DeMille’s stubborn perseverance is a prominent autobiographical motif, made particularly dramatic when recalling how, after “some major surgery,” he refused doctor’s orders by returning to the set of *Union Pacific* (1939), where “I had my

stretcher fixed to the camera boom and for ten days swung with it up in the air and down again, for whatever camera angles were required” (364-365).

The public perception was that DeMille’s office time was used strictly for preparatory immersion in artifacts, sketches, and source texts. The serene candlelit event associated with autobiographical writing was anathema to this perception; taking significant leisure time to write a life story, as Hopper insinuated, seemed decidedly *un-DeMillean*. It’s the predicament that compels the defensive tone of Hayne’s “Editor’s Preface” (opening line: “This is Cecil B. deMille’s book”). But it also encourages us to reconsider DeMille’s authorship in light of the auto-generative procedures of his production Unit and not reduce authorship to the aura of a creator’s hand. DeMille’s *Autobiography* is disembodied, avatarial; it’s not memory spilled but archival memory made sensible and readable through intensive bureaucracy.<sup>176</sup> Yet it still allegorizes and commemorates a vital institutional order that kept an *authorial* legacy in motion. *The Autobiography*’s buried archive reminds us of the parameters of historical understanding in general but also of the daily, cultural ghostwriting that gives form to the shadow region we call “the self.”

## Chapter 2

Time's Bayou: Compositing the American Past in *The Buccaneer* and *Union Pacific*

*Here in Denver you have your world famous mines. My gold mine is the archives of American history.*<sup>177</sup>

*When the public realizes the meticulous care that is used to make an historical picture authentic, they will probably be less prone to criticize this particular branch of picture making.*<sup>178</sup>

Paramount Studios librarian Peggy Schwartz wasn't pleased. Less than two weeks after the premiere of *The Plainsman* (1936), a historical production that borrowed and renewed, repeatedly, "just about everything" there was on the West in Schwartz's stacks, DeMille fell deep into research on his next subject, Jean Lafitte, the expert privateer of the Louisiana bayou who led America to victory in the Battle of New Orleans, effectively ending the War of 1812 against the British. Titled *The Buccaneer* and publicized as the next installment in what would be "a series of pictures" commemorating "unsung" national heroes, to Schwartz the Lafitte epic meant more overly-liberal borrowing by DeMille's staff and a subsequent flood of unsatisfiable loan requests from researchers on other films. And it didn't help that Paramount had just declared a renewed commitment to lavish historical epics, designed to signal Hollywood's emergence from debt and timid aesthetics as the late-thirties "national economic recovery" continued to gain steam.<sup>179</sup> Indeed, Paramount Chairman Adolph Zukor drew special attention in the press to "big pictures" set in the American past as evidence for his studio's "revitalized schedule of picture making,"<sup>180</sup> all while poor



Peggy Schwartz implored DeMille to return her books on time so other history-set productions could use them. You “put us in rather a bad spot,” Schwartz reminded one DeMille secretary charged with bibliographic duties, “How about buying” more books.<sup>181</sup> Exasperated, Schwartz lobbed an unlikely solution: “if we would only do some that were not period pictures we would not be in this jam.”<sup>182</sup>

DeMille’s research staff began its “expedition” for *The Buccaneer* with predictable rigor, scouring studio shelves before scurrying off to “private collections...antique shops and old book stores” for additional answers on “Lafitte, the War of 1812, pirates, etc.”<sup>183</sup> The handsome funds allowing for such diligence and the in-studio jousting for library books that Schwartz pointed out affirms how Hollywood used history to position itself within a New Deal discourse of cultural rehabilitation. Poised to put money back on the screen, the studios, and DeMille in particular, mobilized spectacle based in research to announce Hollywood’s endurance through the Great Depression. Costly forays into the heroic past, a perennial signifier of studio vigor and craft expertise, assured the public of the sound future of America’s preferred medium, movies.<sup>184</sup> It also guaranteed late nights for wearied librarian Peggy Schwartz, forced to corral sources from different productions hunting similar details under strict deadlines.

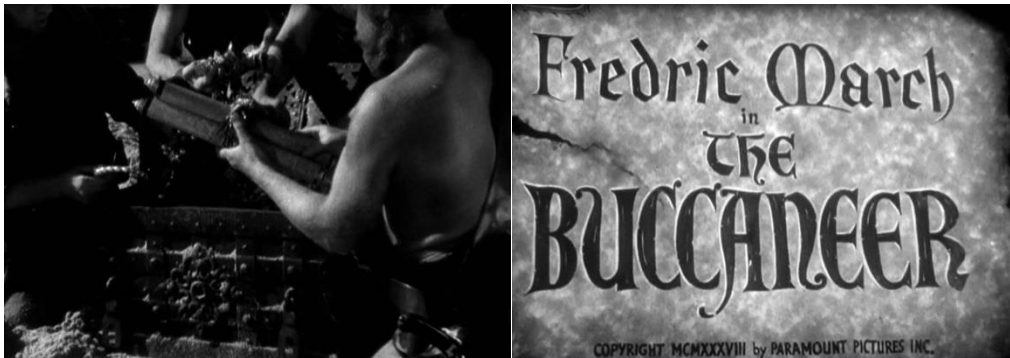
Scholarship on filmic history has acknowledged this fact of pre-production research, but the consensus remains that research departments were either simple marketing tools or breeding grounds for inaccurate retellings. Researcher efforts, the literature goes, were by and large a charade, a marketable distraction from a finished film’s chronological distortions and factual errors. George Custen, for example, in his

classic *Bio/Pics*, still the most focused consideration of research under the Classical system, argues that factually-minded researchers were a quixotic breed, naively hoping their data would be incorporated soundly into a product structured by a procrustean template for success and class mobility. Custen concedes that historical data was consulted attentively by art directors and costume designers alike to “create a factual mise-en-scene,” but he concludes by locating the value of research in its brute marketing potential: “the very fact of extensive research was itself a selling point, as historicity via extravagant research efforts became, along with the presence of a well-known star or a famous director, a quality to exploit.”<sup>185</sup> Custen is right to stress the prevalence and commercial impact of publicized research, how marketing a film’s evidence “was key in differentiating the biopic genre from other studio fare,” but his emphasis on how credible data was manipulated irresponsibly by producers leaves us with too reductive a binarism between the “unprofessional” histories based in research departments and the academy’s implicitly authentic narratives.<sup>186</sup> The polarization misses how publicity’s spectacularization was a practical, extra-textual result of *citational aphasia*, of an epic’s inability to declare its research foundations on-screen. Indeed, of an inability to display the academic’s print affirmations of rigor and representational legitimacy.

### **Finding the Site: Credits, Time, Discourse**

Five men descend a tiered sea crag. Waves crash at their feet as they funnel down the rocky incline. The crew, led by a bearded, barrel-chested man with a cutlass jutting from his belt, makes its way to the shore, and we begin to decipher accoutrements of the pirate trade on all the men: breeches, bandanas, striped and puff-sleeved shirts, flintlock

pistols. Next we see the quintet on land, still moving in single-file, with the apparent purpose of a game hunt. Cut again and the bearded leader is shown crouching to his knees, marking a point in the sand with his firearm. His mates watch his calibrated movements eagerly. The scene cuts again, showing the crew dig. A treasure chest is extracted from the ground and is presented in tight close-up. The pirates remove beaded pearls and miscellaneous jewels from the chest. A screen credit—“A Cecil B. DeMille Production”—is then read over dangling treasure before the scene cuts to an extreme close-up of a parchment scroll, which is unfurled for the camera. The scroll’s blotched, tattered appearance suggests authenticity and significant age but its contents do just the opposite: instead of revealing an ancient treasure map or some errant message of maritime history, the open scroll reminds of what we’re *about* to see: “Frederick March in *The Buccaneer*.”



2.1 – Opening credits, *The Buccaneer*

This trope of the “found” document would have looked familiar to readers of DeMille’s nineteenth century novelistic predecessors, writers like Walter Scott and William Thackeray, who often framed their historical narratives as the chance resurrection

of a lost document. Such a framing device, as Stephen Bann has argued in his great study of nineteenth century historical representation, grew out of an intensifying cultural fixation with historicity, of grasping the temporal essence of something that's endured physically through time. These historical novelizations were of course not authentic documents themselves, but they encouraged an impression of standing witness to rare discovery, approximating a freshly museum-minded West's investment in auratic things.

The "found" novel found success within this climate of historical mindedness precisely for of its artifactual pretense. The story this type of novel recounts, as Baan observes, is not merely "based on" sources, "as a historical work is based upon documents...it *is* the source which has been brought to light."<sup>187</sup> This rhetorical elision of source and fictional narrative was a shrewd maneuver. It made the *consumption* of these novels feel like inspired historiographic work, like a serendipitous encounter with some primary source. Indeed, Thackary, as Bann's careful to note, used archaic typography to heighten this salable, readerly illusion of possessing an authentic remain. *The Buccaneer's* credits aim for a similar verisimilitude, but DeMille's cinematic assimilation of the found framing trope ultimately short-circuits and leaves us in a dizzying loop. The found novel sets up a logical parallelism between the supposed source and the book product: we read in the present what's been found and reproduced in the past. In this ludic situation, the reader becomes the imaginary beneficiary of the document-finder, whose explanatory jottings on the found source frames the narrative. DeMille's opening credits lack such conceptual tidiness. It would make allegorical sense to double the film's spectator with a *contemporary* treasure seeker, who we would see dig up an account of Lafitte's life before flashing back in lap dissolve. What the film opens

on, however, is an alienating meta-diegesis: the five treasure seekers do not reappear in the narrative as characters at all; they exist in a purely Other sphere for the abstract purpose of generic and temporal enunciation: swashbuckling adventure, circa nineteenth century. Thus we momentarily have continuity of a historic milieu, surviving even the presentist intrusion of DeMille's own production credit, juxtaposed with jewelry to suggest his prestige brand of spectacle. But precise contours of time and place erode completely with the antique scroll's impossible exposure of credits for the film's actors and for DeMille's crew and later even for the Louisiana State Museum for its hand in research: nothing a pirate is likely to find.

So where does DeMille situate his film in relation to its historic referents of nineteenth century privateering and west-of-the-Mississippi expansion? The best answer is: at least a couple places. Though DeMille legibly denotes a world and a trade through costume and action, the film soon buckles under its archaeological aims by alluding to its modern-day production conditions. As spectators we ricochet from near-immersion in a defined historical milieu to an illusion-breaking awareness of a filmmaking institution, one known for its "luxury of spectacle so far unequaled" but also for its habit of spending "weeks and months delving into historical data."<sup>188</sup> And it's precisely this research tradition that makes us rethink the pirates' introduction in a presentist sense, since it reflexively gestures towards a very present-day activity: the research "dig" conducted for *The Buccaneer*. And as with our pirates, the earth was no obstacle here: before arriving in New Orleans on his research expedition, DeMille arranged a meeting with local tinkerer and Lafitte enthusiast George Osmand Moher, the self-described "first person to perfect a machine working on the radio principle to be used to aid in locating treasure," a

device that had located a bounty of "interesting things . . . relative to Lafitte," including jewelry, outdated coins, flint lock pistols, and canon barrels—all, eventually, period props in *The Buccaneer*.<sup>189</sup> The press took notice of these authenticity hunts, including New Orleans' very own *Times Picayune*, which commended "DeMille and his aides" for their weeks spent "prowling the bayous Lafitte haunted, searching libraries and museum, and inspecting and photographing the *treasures* of the Cabildo."<sup>190</sup>

But on top of alluding to this publically acknowledged rigor and allegorizing it through a decorative denotation of place, I would add that *The Buccaneer* insinuates an additional, loftier position, one placed neither "back in time" nor in the "now" but well into the future, figuring the film's wished-for monumental status. Indeed, the anachronistic blending of Hollywood talent with graphic signifiers of pastness on parchment scroll gives the contemporary cast a historical valence, announcing something that DeMille's use of promotional museum exhibition made more directly: *The Buccaneer* is not simply history reenacted but is a production *to be remembered*, an artifact out-of-the-gate, a born-historical film.<sup>191</sup>



I've stressed these intertwining axes of historical positionality—archaeological denotation (past), authorial reflexivity (present), and museal divination (future)—not to presume any intrinsic flaws in *The Buccaneer's* structure but to highlight what Bann calls the “intertextual fact of monstrosity” that haunts historiography in general and pulses at the atomic level of DeMille's filmic rhetoric, aspirationally authentic and premised time and again on a surplus of data that could not be affirmed through literary means such as footnotes. According to Bann, the monstrous nature of historical writing is betrayed in its “desire to repress” [its] rhetorical status,” a tendency apparent since at least Ranke's discipline-defining, near-transcendental estimation of the archive as the site where historical signals could be re-transmitted “as they were” with uncontested certainty: “The historian's business is . . . to aspire . . . to recovering the mythic wholeness of the historical *disjecta membra*.”<sup>192</sup> Discourse, Foucault might add, is essentially a bulwark against monstrosity, an arbitrary yet consensual set of principles that freezes a whirl of stimuli into a legibly rational order. *The Buccaneer's* opening credits, in this sense, show us *anti*-discourse, what Foucault described in a different context as “an atlas of impossibility,” a dispersement of signifiers on undefined semantic ground.<sup>193</sup> A *site*—the “mute ground upon which it is possible for entities to be juxtaposed” and for rational thought to impose order upon them—appears to have been elided, and absurdity is the after effect. Yet deeper archaeological scrutiny reveals this charge to be overly superficial, sourced in a rule book blind to the institutional reasoning behind *The Buccaneer's* patchy temporal aggregations, a conscious *aesthetic of compositry* registered by the twin goals of affirming research textually and bolstering a public-historical ethos.

## **Projecting a Region: DeMille's 2<sup>nd</sup> Unit**

Rear projection process photography—pre-recorded footage projected on-set behind a scene's performers—is a form of compositry that fabricates scenic totalities within the convenient setting of the studio soundstage. Called either “plates” or “transparencies,” rear projection sequences were generally photographed by 2<sup>nd</sup> Unit teams in places too remote for stars to travel if a production was to wrap on time and within budget. Rear projection's technical rationale was efficiency and world-realization, but its aesthetic aim, as Julie Turnock has shown through her recent, illuminating research on the device, was photo-realistic seamlessness. As Turnock points out, however, this aspiration to seamlessness was never realized fully in Classical studio practice. However, it is precisely rear projection's continual awkwardness, Turnock argues, its literal misfit nature, that makes the technique an instructive point of aesthetic and archival inquiry, one that reveals “cracks in the [Classical] system,” for a “conscious . . . controversial choice was made to pursue a production technique that favored industrial efficiency standards over aesthetic ideals” of transparent illusion.<sup>194</sup>

Not long before Turnock's study, Laura Mulvey published a brief reflection on rear projection in which she celebrated the accidental artifice of the process, a confused jumble of temporalities that carries the force of a “clumsy sublime.”<sup>195</sup> For Mulvey, part of this “sublime” aura comes from rear projection's uncanny distortion of the Classical narrative cinema's “three time levels”: the present time of reception, the past moment of indexical registration, and the inferred chronology of a film's plot. With rear projection, as Mulvey points out, this scenario is upended by the inclusion of an additional moment



of cinematic registration, one that occurred *before* the physical, set-based coordination of mise-en-scene:

Rear projection introduces a . . . dual temporality: two diverse registration times are “montaged” into a single image. While this is true of any photographic superimposition, the dramatic contrast between the ‘document’-like nature of the projected images and the artificiality of the studio scene heightens the sense of temporal dislocation.<sup>196</sup>

The scenario gains increased structural complexity in the event of historical representation, an effort that strives for a certain documentary credibility, "an impression of witness," to quote Philip Rosen, "to the details of a past age."<sup>197</sup> The researched-based historical film, as Rosen maintains, is "an image that represents not one but two past times," of the indexical inscription of mise-en-scene (present-day, performative) and of the referential world of the historical narrative (past-tense, premised on sources). Thus, in Rosen's assessment, the "document-ness" of the historical film remains a structuring *aspiration*, "a kind of residue, as if the diegeticized film attempts to retain something of the factual convincingness of the document" by marshalling a wealth of historical detail.<sup>198</sup> But what happens when a *literal* document's thrown into the equation, when a rear-projected place-in-itself flickers behind a record of studied reenactment, behind the wishfully documentary mise-en-scene that interests Rosen?

Such a situation, I would argue, does not unsettle Rosen's hypothesis on the defining liminality of historical film—hovering inexactly between document and diegesis—but gives it concrete, aesthetic concentration. Such a film, to quote a tellingly vague line from DeMille's *Buccaneer* lecture tour, is "as nearly historically correct as the

cameras could make it."<sup>199</sup> Publicity, however, where labors of authenticity can be recounted in lieu of exiled citation, can add to this appearance of "correctness" and even lend artifactual aura to the not-quite-seamless rear-projection captured by DeMille's 2nd Unit.

The DeMille 2<sup>nd</sup> Unit was a disciplined group of actuality gatherers whose movements were tracked with interest by the regional press. "The newspapers will undoubtedly mention the arrival of the deMille unit," a publicist promised one New Orleansean who was eager to share her command of the Creole patois with DeMille's team. Directed by Arthur Rosson, an established DeMille associate who would go on to direct dozens of studio westerns, the 2nd Unit also included a Unit Manager, an assistant director, first and second cameraman, a production assistant who doubled as researcher, a still photographer, a field secretary and well-over one hundred locally-cropped extras. The unit's initial task was to scout potential sites for effective "action backgrounds", which would be photographed, scaled and expressed back to Hollywood for DeMille's go-ahead. Once approved, Rosson would coordinate the location sets and film their most "pictorial spots," a process that was often made open to both the press and the public.

The natural footage captured during what was generally about a two-week expedition was then raced back to Hollywood, where, as one New Orleans paper outlined, it will "be blended into action scenes by technicians."<sup>200</sup> All in all, pretty routine. Yet the journey had dramatic publicity potential, depicted in the press as a crash course acquaintanceship with unforgiving bayou land, a historic landscape whose essence of changelessness gave Rosson's process photography rich, artifactual appeal. "Much of

the location work was done in our own Barataria seciton," reported Charles P. Jones of the *Times Picayune*, and "the spirit . . . has been caught with fidelity."<sup>201</sup>



### 2.3 – Projecting the bayou

2<sup>nd</sup> Unit publicity materials illuminate how this production stage discovered rhetorical use-value beyond its primary, aesthetic mission of world-realization. The New Orleans press, as I've indicated, applauded DeMille's team's rigor with the local archives, but they also amplified its resilience amongst the Delta's demanding elements, anticipating what John Caldwell has called the authenticating "war story mythos" of below-the-line technicians.<sup>202</sup> DeMille's men "are suffering from chiggers," observed *The New Orleans Tribune* before it noted the uncanny versimilitude of the "large cast of Cajuns" standing in as patriot pirates: "even Lafitte would be envious of such an able looking crew of cutthroats."<sup>203</sup> After conceding the authenticity of the Unit's extras, the article then points to the military-like efficiency of the greater unit operation, explaining how the "way the moviemen go about the job of filming the pirates in action . . . on location on the bayous. . . is akin to the efficiency of the Army...Barges float equipment and personnel down stream behind motor-driven boats....men in pirogues shoot past the

camera operated by Chief Cameraman Dewey Wrigley, time and again."<sup>204</sup> "Aspirin Tells of the Headaches Met in Filming *The Buccaneer*," read the title of another New Orleans publication. Apparently all the effort paid off: "Better than the original," quipped another newspaper, while another linked the film's aesthetic merit directly to its investigative undercurrents: "Out of the welter of detail . . . a moving and virile manuscript story was achieved."<sup>205</sup>

It's crucial to acknowledge the institutional mediation of this praise, how such public affirmation was encouraged and pre-framed by DeMille Unit explanatory discourse. The 2nd Unit's job was not to simply make *mise-en-scene* out of real environments; Rosen and his crew, photographed in balooney waders and bell-rimmed safari hats as they labored away under the gaze of local spectators, performed in a separate, institutionally-embellishing *mise-en-scene*, an evidentiary staging for the DeMille Unit's considerable investment in authentic re-creation. The work of the Unit still photographer, a precious resource today for under-historicized second unit activities, was intended chiefly for promotional circulation, "for Newspaper and Magazine Reproduction," as the copyright line went.

Typed verso descriptions helped make sure the public read these images "correctly." One affirmed the 2nd Unit's skillful endurance through the region's environmental displeasures: "Hollywood's ace cameramen go through the hardship of bugs, and swamps, and mosquitoes to film scenes in the Louisiana delta country for Cecil B. DeMille's *The Buccaneer*.'" Another assured readers of DeMille's ceaseless authorial command, despite his 2nd Unit's elite skillset and DeMille's physical absence from the New Orleans shoot: "no camera set-up on *The Buccaneer*,' or any other Cecil B.

DeMille film, is complete until the producer-director himself has . . . seen that he is getting exactly what he wants." An additional photograph, this one featuring DeMille as he conducts "a mighty battle scene by short wave radio," shows that what *this* director wants is period specificity, serious physical encumbrance notwithstanding: "On one side of [DeMille] is a seven-acre settlement constructed at Catalina Island, and on the other are three squarerigged warships and three gunboats of the period of 1814. He is recreating for 'The Buccaneer' . . . the siege of Barataria. . . It took DeMille two weeks to get the scene, with 700 people and 18 bargeloads of equipment on the island."<sup>206</sup>

I emphasize this descriptive ephemera because it points to an extra-textual knowledge fund that encourages us to re-think *The Buccaneer's* rear-projection outside the putative teleology of "transparent immediacy," when an aesthetic work succeeds in erasing its representational back story.<sup>207</sup> *The Buccaneer's* rear-projections were indeed expertly crafted, made with a cutting-edge, contrast reducing "triple-head projection" system designed by Paramount's lead transparency artist Farciot Edouart, and much of Rosson's composited footage of drooping swampland moss and coruscating moonglow are impressively stunning.<sup>208</sup> Yet despite their beauty and savvy construction, such composited moments still confirm Turnock's thesis on the essentially *aspirational* status of rear projection, its technologically frustrated reach for a "fully convincing illusion of the whole."<sup>209</sup>

But the conversation needn't end here, at an impasse of aesthetic impoverishment. These rear-projected sequences are hard-won documents, and that's how many people knew about them thanks to the precisely annotated publicization of 2<sup>nd</sup> Unit labor. So why try to parley compositry on-screen as "something else," as an extension of studio-

built recreation, when the technological deck was pretty well stacked? I'm not trying to suggest a deliberate enhancement of rear-projected artifice as a means of enunciating authorial presence, as Lesley Brill has done in relation to Hitchcock.<sup>210</sup> Nor am I positing a perfunctory "surrender" to rear-projection's imperfection. What I would like to suggest is that DeMille found rhetorical opportunity in rear projection's stark photo-realistic shortcomings, in a visual dissonance that reflected back on the Unit's ambitious documentary efforts. Spectatorially, therefore, these imperfect composites stand as documentary reminders of the research, travel, and toil through which DeMille acquired a sensitivity to the historic pulse of New Orleans along with a perceived right "to imprison Mr. Lafitte and his country in film," as one Paramount publicist boasted from the studio's Manhattan high-rise.<sup>211</sup>

### **The Miniature, the Library, and the Expert**

It's been said that DeMille made his films mostly at his desk, and there's no question that DeMille's preparatory office work was a publicity motif. It was DeMille's pre-production *modus operandi* to immerse himself in the material culture of a film's historical era, as Jesse Lasky Jr. makes clear in his recollection of a DeMille office visit while the *Buccaneer* was being drafted. "[A]-clutter with model sets, pistols, cutlasses" and crowded with the researched-based, impressionist sketches of Dan Sayre Groesbeck, the DeMille office was a robust apparatus of *pre-visualization*, a curated space where DeMille would "saturate his eyes" and become enriched by a historical world's external facts.<sup>212</sup> Before he reconstructed history on the epic scale expected of him, DeMille built it in miniature form in the archontic laboratory of his office.

If art direction is driven by an economy of fragmentation in the service of diegetic coherence and if rear projection aimed for plausible enlargement of studio-based mise-en-scene, then miniaturization, at least in DeMille's application, offered a fantastic sense of historical presence and possessibility by way of precise physical downscaling. A burden of visual seamlessness bore down on both rear projection and miniature construction, to be sure, but here I am less interested in the verisimilitude of filmed miniatures than in how miniaturization was used to publically evidence DeMille's "right" to historicize Lafitte.<sup>213</sup>

The evidential integrity of a miniaturized object is based in its in abidance with the laws of perspective and scale. Indeed, perspectival scaling allows for objects, structures, and entire scenic locations to "travel" without really having to go anywhere, a principle of representational fidelity that Bruno Latour has dubbed the "immutability of the displaced object." Perspective was thus a decisive tool in the modern production of knowledge: it encouraged and accelerated the global consolidation of epistemological consent by providing ever larger audiences with a "new type of image designed to transport the objects of the world" without destroying their internal proportions. This, to paraphrase Latour, made interesting yet absent things uncannily "present" as evidence for this or that.<sup>214</sup>

Though Latour's focus is on the representational trafficking of actuality across *space* for the sake of winning allies in evidentiary disciplines, his inquiries are instructive with regard to DeMille's effort to transport objects through *time* by reconstituting research cinematically. Reviewing miniature models for both characters and sets, built from research under art director supervision, gave DeMille a chance to pre-visualize his

epic production and catch slips in accuracy before they showed up on film. "These figures," as a publicity still showing DeMille intently examine tiny statuettes of Jean Lafitte in various modes of dress, "help the producer-director to check his costumes for authenticity and pick his players."<sup>215</sup> What's striking about such an image is how it insinuates knowledge imbalance within the DeMille Unit, with the director admitting or rejecting his staff's recreations. Indeed, DeMille is framed as a discerning, eagle-eye expert, cross-checking his team's models with what the viewer's to accept is the director's incontrovertible mental conception. History, such promotional mise-en-scene implies, not only "lives" in DeMille's consciousness but, thanks to the edifying influence of the director's office collection, it resides there in vetted and authentic form.<sup>216</sup>

Miniaturization as a craft sustains historiographic allure because, as Didier Maleuvre writes, "it shines with the promise of an entirely comprehensible experience."<sup>217</sup> Its evidential value, then, is inextricable from the desiring gaze that greets it. Often discussed in light of nostalgia and its economy of impossible repossession,<sup>218</sup> miniaturization provided DeMille with a powerful imaginary waystation to historical presence and clarity. Indeed, the publicization of DeMille's Lilliputian office clutter insinuated the director's fitness to depict historical events. To cite Maleuvre again: the miniature "carries in its appearance the external vantage point from which it is observed: the detached gaze is literally inscribed in the miniature's form. It is an overbearing eye seeking epistemological mastery over its environment."<sup>219</sup> The formulation's telling not only because it describes DeMille's staged interfacing with scaled models; it locates DeMille's microcosmic office space within an institutional imaginary of totalization, a wishful epistemology that roots itself *methodologically* in apparently excessive labors of



authenticity, from the precise preparatory scaling of historical structures to the exhaustive bibliographic habits that, as we saw earlier, literally exhausted Paramount's library.

Thus it should be noted how DeMille counteracted Paramount's limited monographic resources by installing his own research library within the DeMille Unit.<sup>220</sup> Research accounted for about a tenth of DeMille's overall production expenses (half independently raised, half dispensed by Paramount) and a healthy portion of the research budget went to acquiring books for "the DeMille Library," which was available exclusively to Unit employees. The library stood as a staunch institutional symbol of research diligence, an in-studio reminder of DeMille's insistence on looking beyond the stacks that Peggy Schwartz monitored. And it had obvious practical advantages: its books were never recalled and they could travel outside Paramount's gates for sustained inquiry, paid overtime labor often performed at DeMille's Paradise Ranch, a cloistered retreat in the recesses of Little Tujunga Canyon, where the director maintained a voluminous "literary workshop" for his writers and research staff.<sup>221</sup>

Though not as publicized as DeMille's vetting of miniatures or as the second unit's documentary excursions, the director's coordination of readerly activity affirms the *performative* thrust of DeMille Unit research. The media spectralization of research, as Philip Rosen points out, worked to convince moviegoers of a film's "baseline of historical authenticity," its acceptable "fund," in other words, "of researched knowledge."<sup>222</sup> DeMille's research efforts and their routine media spotlighting illustrate this pressure to publically confirm a film's evidentiary scaffolding through surrogate citation methods. Yet the *archival* registration of this research, continual done in excess of "baseline" knowledge, suggests that the DeMille Unit was equally concerned with

reminding *itself* of its rigor and its right to portray weighty historical topics. Thus, all this actuality was only *apparent* excess, a surplus data fund that managed to find *both* institutional and aesthetic use-value. What may initially seem like compulsive hoarding or a sleight of hand showcase of scale was in fact a functional intensification of the academic's source-based ethos construction. DeMille's encyclopedic impulse not only reflexively elevated the labor of "the DeMille researchists" to the status of "scholarship" but it offered a plenum of indexical detail to translate visually onto film.<sup>223</sup>

The "Books Used for Research" on *The Buccaneer* lists 182 sources, 74 of which came from the DeMille Library. The record suggests an indiscriminate method of bibliographic trawling, an eclectic conjoining of sources with varying degrees of research integrity: dense studies like H.L. Menken's *The American Language* sit beside Marquis James's *Andrew Jackson: Border Captain*, a pop hagiography that neighbors *The Black Cruiser* by Mat Mizen, which is flagged in parentheses as an "Old dime novel" and precedes handsomely illustrated fashion references like *The British Military* and *Dame Fashion*.<sup>224</sup> Though a premiere program's claim to consulting "several hundred books" is an exaggeration, the Books Used list still confirms *The Buccaneer*'s encyclopedic aim to "uncover every vestige of data" related to Lafitte's world.<sup>225</sup> But the list is striking not only for its breadth: indeed, one wonders about the practical logic behind the list's striking sprawl, for, as *The Buccaneer*'s opening credits state, DeMille's film was an adaptation of a *single* text, *Lafitte the Pirate*, the 1930 episodic biography by Louisiana man of letters, Lyle Saxon. The Unit's vast "survey of Lafitte literature," according to the premiere program, proved Saxon's *Lafitte* to be "the best book on the 'last of the buccaneers' for DeMille's purposes." But what exactly were these "purposes"?

Narrative blueprinting? Basic cross-promotion? And if Saxon's book was truly the film's chief "source," then what structural and/or evidentiary role did all of those other peripheral texts finally take on, apart from a self-affirming show of erudition?

Saxon's *Lafitte* was purchased for \$1,250, which gave DeMille's production the right to the "name of the book as well as author as source material." No small sum, especially considering DeMille's significant outlay on other research materials and that Saxon's additional "services as a consultant" were not folded into the book option.<sup>226</sup> Yet attaching Saxon to the film was seen as sure way of rooting it in a reliable voice, one with a deep insider appreciation for the cultural history of Saxon's native Louisiana. By the time of *Lafitte*'s 1930 publication, Saxon had published three hefty, popular volumes on the region: *Father Mississippi* (1927), *Fabulous New Orleans* (1928), and *Old Louisiana* (1929). These broad, colorfully written chronicles were preceded by years of output for the *Times-Picayune*, where Saxon began in the mid-1920s writing short fiction and book reviews and where he stayed on as a features contributor until the 1940s. A fixture of the New Orleans literati, Saxon also hosted a salon in his French quarter flat at 612 Royal Street, a "showplace and guesthouse of visiting dignitaries," including Saxon's critic-friend Edmund Wilson and the local "literary lioness" Grace King, whose classic study *New Orleans: The Place and the People* provides rich historical details throughout *Lafitte the Pirate*.<sup>227</sup> This prestigious standing led to what was perhaps Saxon's most prominent and lasting contribution, his tenure as the State Director for Louisiana's Federal Writers Project through the Works Progress Administration (WPA), where he edited and helped assemble regional guidebooks including the bestselling *New Orleans*

*City Guide*, a perennial “tourist’s delight” through the mid-century published the same *The Buccaneer* hit screens.<sup>228</sup>

Thus, aside from providing a marketable insider’s blessing, Saxon offered guidance as an experienced hand in the pertinent local archives and collections. Indeed, Saxon’s *Lafitte* often reads like narrativized bibliography, replete with unexpurgated document transcriptions and lengthy meta-critical passages that distinguish sound documentation from dubious legend. This commitment to locate, appraise, and share the best available evidence on Lafitte is announced in Saxon’s Forward, and it finds echoes in *The Buccaneer*’s many publicized claims to painstaking detection:

For the greater part my information is taken from contemporary documents and letters, and from the crumbling files of century-old newspapers. The mass of legendary material is so great, and so disguised as history, that the task of sifting truth from legend has proved a long and difficult one. It was rather like trying to put together a jig-saw puzzle, a portrait of a man which had been cut into a thousand fragments, and further complicated because upon the reverse side of the portrait was another picture similar in coloring; the second picture was that of a mythical pirate.<sup>229</sup>

From the opening chapter, which summarizes the earliest extant “real picture of Lafitte,” gleaned from an 1809 letter home written by the teenage son of a slave trader named Glasscock, we see Saxon’s attempt to “let the sources speak for themselves.” Thus it’s through the recorded impressions of the traveling Glasscock boy where we first meet the “strapping” Lafitte brothers (Jean’s elder sibling, Pierre, was his dearest accomplice) and get a sense of the “richness and extravagance” of New Orleans society, with its “walled

gardens,” “houses of foreign appearance,” and sultry “quadroon [mixed race courtesan] women,” who stunned Lafitte’s guests with their “liquid black eyes.”<sup>230</sup>

At times, however, Saxon abstracts his sources, supplying his reader with a mosaic of detail that we can only trust derives from his expansive bibliography, attached in lieu of diverting footnotes. Barrataria, for example, Lafitte’s marshland colony where smugglers “from God-knows-where” found asylum and wealth, is portrayed with the help of “[s]trange bits of description” that “have come down to us” over time:

Sunlight, white and blistering hot, streaming mercilessly upon those palmetto-thatched huts, sunlight which shone in long streaks between the openings in rough boards on the walls. . . sunlight which slanted, too, upon furtive women who crouched beside the sleeping men, women who preened themselves before bits of broken mirrors, as they forced their sweating bodies into gay dresses of damask and brocade, dresses sometimes stained with blood. . .for these were a part of the loot which the sailors had taken from the captured ships of Spain.<sup>231</sup>

And this “loot” had so permeated New Orleans commerce that Lafitte’s rival, William C. Claiborne, the state’s first non-colonial Governor after the 1803 US Purchase of Louisiana, had declared the “leader of the privateering gentry” an uncouth enemy of civil society and a toxic threat to the state’s tax-based prosperity.<sup>232</sup> But unlike the “vivid fragments” provided by “the descendents of Lafitte’s corsairs,” Saxon has Claiborne’s official words, and he shares them, without interruption.<sup>233</sup> At the end of the day, such magnanimous and clear-eyed disclosure made Saxon a dependable ally in evidence, recording his deductions on documentary credibility and soundly deducing the motives

behind Lafitte's risky decision to collaborate with an army that was not only outnumbered but that fought for a country that branded him a pariah:

Some of those who have written of Lafitte think that he hesitated [to lead Jackson's army through the labyrinthine bayous surrounding New Orleans], and considered the British offer [to join the British forces in exchange for \$30,000, a naval decoration, and a free pardon]. I can find nothing in all the mass of fragmentary material examined which points to that. Nor do I doubt that his final conclusion could have been other than it was. He was, first, a Lousianian; second, a Frenchman. His friends, his interests, his aims, all centered in the State. To a great number of men in the vicinity, he was a popular hero, a Robin Hood of the sea; and he was well aware of his popular following. He had no love for the English, nor for Spain; nor, for that matter, any great love for the United States laws, as typified by Governor Claiborne. Nevertheless, America was his country, and many of his followers were Americans. . . . [Plus,] Lafitte's men were largely American in their sympathies; England was their enemy. They had scuttled English ships, and they had fear, but no love for that country. Nor would they have believed the English promises. . . . [Moreover,] [t]he extremely doubtful thirty thousand dollars, which the British had offered, meant little to Lafitte. He had plenty of money; the merchandise alone that was stored in the warehouses at Grande Terre was worth more than five hundred thousand dollars. . . . More, he realized that his position was dramatic, heroic. And he determined to make the most of it. . . . [for] he could make no

more help making a play to the gallery than he could help breathing; or perhaps it is better to say that this type of heroics was the breath of life to him.<sup>234</sup>

Though biographer James W. Thomas suggests that Saxon, a prolific but slow writer with a taste for the bottle, piled on quotes to economize his work, it's important to note how Saxon's recap of sources gave *Lafitte the Pirate* a sense of the "found" tradition that DeMille adapted for the opening credits. Indeed, both Saxon and DeMille appear to strive for the found novel's *virtual* access to historical materials. But whereas Saxon sets his reader "beside him" in the archive by using frequent and unabridged transcription, DeMille does so by *scenically* accentuating object and document simulations.

The "spectacle-within-the-spectacle" is a common DeMilleian devise, where relays of point-of-view reflexively affirm the visual pleasures of mise-en-scene. *The Buccaneer* repeats this editing pattern, but lends it a historiographic charge concretely linked to research. The first scene, tellingly, sparks gratitude for a special document's survival (Dolly Madison flees the presidential palace clenching the Declaration of Independence while British belligerents advance on the building) and other sequences provoke spectator appreciation for the chance to "encounter" documents that affected Lafitte's surroundings and are now on "display" thanks to DeMille. Indeed, the articulation of point-of-view repeatedly makes us "over-the-shoulder" readers of historical agents, possessing fateful (and faithfully reconstructed) messages, including the \$5,000 reward for Lafitte's capture, advertisements for the Baratarian thieves market, and the British military's epistolary plea for Lafitte's aid.<sup>235</sup>



#### 2.4 – Re-witnessing the record in *The Buccaneer*

This on-screen bracketing of research points to the performative ripples of DeMille's encyclopedism, affirmed not simply in the press' concessions to the director's "constant historical research" but through subjective relays of artifacts and imitations that stand in excess of narrative clarity.<sup>236</sup> Yet while this excess speaks to archival pre-production other moments speak to still-lacking evidence on Lafitte, particularly as it relates to his activities after the Battle of New Orleans, after which, as Saxon writes, Lafitte faded "out of life, into dim legend."<sup>237</sup> Thomas argues that DeMille violates Saxon's attempt to "de-mythologize" Lafitte, though closer analysis of *The Buccaneer's* ending proves this conclusion too simplistic. DeMille does indeed distort chronology to expedite Lafitte's "flagless" return to the open seas (the film offers the fictitious scenario of General Andrew Jackson giving Lafitte a "one hour start" before he's pursued in punishment for a renegade attack of an American cruiser) but DeMille's parting shot *impressionistically* affirms Lafitte's dissolution into mythic opacity, reinforcing Saxon's insights on Lafitte' un-documented "dark ages."

We see Lafitte at sea, enlarged by a dramatic low angle and dressed in the wingéd, long-tailed frock coat he wore to the victory ball where his men's murderous



treachery was exposed (“Not you, Jean!” / “What difference does it make, I was their boss”). A sheet of clouds is softly illuminated overhead and Lafitte leans with exhausted dignity against his escape vessel’s mast, staring pensively towards nothing in particular. Gretchen, the hopelessly infatuated Dutchgirl who joined Lafitte’s effort but expedited his downfall by unknowingly sporting a contraband gown that belonged to the slain sister of a victory ball guest (also a DeMille invention), nestles beside him. The morose castaways stand still as Lafitte responds to his second shipmate, the Napoleonic canonner-turned-loyal-Lafitte-accomplice Dominic You (he was real), who inquires as to “What flag we should break out, boss?” The liminal hero observes, matter-of-factly, “We have no flag . . . This deck under our feet is our only country.” Gretchen holds her gaze on Lafitte, who bows his head and assumes a corpse-like pose. Key and fill lights dim but the camera stays fixed, leaving our castaways silhouetted against the sky. *The End.*



2.5 – “Into dim legend...”

Saxon’s notes on Lafitte’s fragmentary record finds striking conceptual resonance with this parting sequence. “They seemed suspended in space between black water and

black sky,” writes Saxon of Lafitte and his expelled bootleggers, “the sails gleamed ruddily against the dark [and] one by one, they faded and were gone . . . into a dark sea.”<sup>238</sup> Again, though DeMille’s plot does indeed distort chronology (records show that Lafitte’s last escape was made from his failed Galveston compound) the director is careful to *aesthetically* register Saxon’s appraisal of Lafitte’s historical memory, consumed eventually by the “darkness” of hearsay and misremembrance. DeMille’s tactful lightplay, his in-camera modulation from light to shadow, evokes this thesis. In the end, therefore, the director does not join the chorus of “wild” and “romanticized” tales that Saxon picks apart, as Thomas suggests, but gives us a visual precis on the undocumented, mythic fate of our “patriot-pirate.” It spells a legend-to-be, a prolepsis of mythic survival.

If Saxon provided the narrative backdrop and epistemic parameters for DeMille’s representation then what became of all the other relevant sources? The best way to describe these “secondary” works is “supplementary,” as details that *could have* fit comfortably within Saxon’s well-researched account but happened to end up in other books. DeMille once described his filmmaking as belated newsreels, and his Unit’s “rationalization of detail,” to borrow Philip Rosen’s evocative phrase, reflects this ambition to play impossible witness to past events.<sup>239</sup> We’re fortunate to have many of DeMille’s researchers’ transcriptions and notes, which point collectively to what Maleuvre calls the “realist belief that reality is entered by way of its smallest door” in order to provide the “illusion of an almost palpable contract with matter . . . [with] the object as such undigested.”<sup>240</sup>

DeMille's prioritization of the eye-witness accounts of participants affirms this institutional aim to "documentize" a diegesis. Indeed, the indexical validity of thick, realist description, as Foucault would point out, is clenched by a discourse-affirming faith in the interchangeability of "things and language."<sup>241</sup> To descriptively recall the past with the "joy of epistemological clear-sightedness"<sup>242</sup> depends on a specific type of wishfulness, one that Clifford Geertz has identified as constitutive to firsthand accounts. In the fevered act of description, as Geertz elaborates, we let ourselves forget that "what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions," allowing the mimetic density and seeming neutrality of descriptive language become an evidentiary place-taker for some thing or event.<sup>243</sup> The DeMilleian epic, buoyed continually by descriptive artifacts, colludes with this deep-seeded cultural desire "to perceive the In-Itself as such" in pseudo forms, including DeMille's own aesthetic synthesization of both eyewitness testimony and scaled miniatures—"constructions of other people's constructions."

Like the miniature-builder, the description-taker employs an economy of precision in order to uproot an object or a place and carry it with him. Both practices are propelled by a self-assuring sense of mimetic fidelity, a representational capacity to "stand in" for an actuality that rests either in the past or somewhere in fixed space. *The Buccaneer* was built upon a *Wunderkammer* of colorful, ethnographic details that showed the aesthetic use-value of what one reviewer saw as the "wealth of detail too lavish for . . . comment."<sup>244</sup> Titled "Description Of..." in the production files, these pointed research transcriptions reveal the practical nexus between descriptive detail and filmic re-construction. Particularly useful were recorded first-hand accounts from British

officers, accented by the verbose, imperialist curiosity one might expect from cavaliering military journals of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>245</sup> Not only do these transcribed documents insinuate a DeMilleian fetishization of source primacy but they show how much energy could be spent on creating “a factual mise-en-scene,” regardless of a script’s alignment with “hard facts.”<sup>246</sup>

DeMille’s researchers, the transcriptions suggest, kept an eye out for vivid renderings of initial contacts, where phenomenological denotation takes precedence over explanation or analysis. The excerpt below from British Artillery Officer Benson Earle Hill is exemplary in this light, for its prosodic momentum reflects the inquisitive travel of the eye, telescoping alien details that eventually strain the Officer’s descriptive vocabulary:

On its quarter deck I saw, *for the first time*, the Indian chiefs, who we were led to believe would prove valuable allies to us . . . These savages belonged to the Creek and Choctaw tribes . . . They were fantastically attired; two of the principals had on large ill-made coats of scarlet serge, with a profusion of marine buttons, tinsel epaulettes, and small stars on their breasts. This attempt at European costume scarcely covered their filthy check-shirts and deer skin leggings . . . all of them exhibited the peculiarity of having the external cartilage of the ear out, and hanging down on the shoulder in unseemly flesh, resembling the cadaverous appendage to the neck of a turkey-cock . . . Their ensemble was unlike the fanciful arraignment of feathers, seen in pictures or on the stage, in Mexican or Indian costume.<sup>247</sup>

DeMille left out the Indian involvement in the Battle of New Orleans, but he did stress the last minute participation of Jackson's ragtag Kentucky Militiamen, who made an equally strong impression on our British officer. DeMille's researcher once again zeroes in on a first-time contact, an experience which eventually leaves our foreign witness awkwardly groping for familiar analogies.

Returning from the river side, I perceived tall figure approaching me, whose appearance I think *worthy of description*. He was a young man, of about two or three-and-twenty, good-looking, but pale from a recent wound, indicated by his arm being tied up in a pocket-handkerchief, somewhat the worse for use; his hair was dark, and long enough to reach his shoulders; he wore a conically-shaped hat, which, from its hapless state, had, perhaps, been handed down in his family from the days of the arch-hypocrite Oliver [Cromwell], and worn now as an appropriate covering, for one who would have been, 'When that old hat was new,' a fitting representative in the Rump parliament. His dress consisted of a coarse reddish-brown cloth coat, with huge metal buttons, a waistcoat of deer skin, and trowsers of thick dreadnought.<sup>248</sup>

A secretarial memo links this form of telescoped data complement to DeMille's own preparatory ritual of filing away details worthy of re-creation. For example, while paging through Grace King's *New Orleans: The Place and the People*, a favorite source of Saxon's, DeMille was struck by "a good turban on a mulatto's woman's head that . . . might be very good for a pirate."<sup>249</sup> What's noteworthy here is how the physical facts of Lafitte's environment are being recycled with the effect of an erasure, as the authentic costume item (the mulatto's turban) is being transferred to the less "problematic"

character type of the pirate (per Production Code guidelines, any suggestion of the casual “miscegenation” that took place at Lafitte’s camp would have been forbidden). Yet while the above dictation suggests a redirection of period detail to suit public mores, other queries indicate how DeMille’s compulsion for particularity compelled his researchers to become a collective Answer Man. The specificity of their fact searches is telling, signaling DeMille’s push for a mise-en-scene of *tacit* truth-value, or what a Toledo reviewer saw as *The Buccaneer*’s impressive “ring of authenticity” in the absence of source annotation.<sup>250</sup> Whereas DeMille’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Unit was deployed to document evocative local scenery for composite integration, DeMille’s fact hunters were sent on spontaneous searches for whatever happened to be puzzling their boss.

Much of this labor was left to long-time DeMille staffer (and one-time son in law) Frank Calvin, nicknamed the Unit’s “Walking Encyclopedia”, who, in the words of a Paramount Press Release, handled “the job of looking up obscure data [and] answering miscellaneous queries [often] having nothing to do” with the film being made.<sup>251</sup> The *Buccaneer*’s research files richly illustrate the breadth and seeming triviality of Calvin’s erudite pursuits. Through July 1937, at DeMille’s command, Calvin sought answers related to British military facial grooming customs, the banter of Louisiana newsboys, period “cuss words,” absinthe bottles, anchor chains, and the etymology of the word “brig” (this, just a sample). Such magpie accumulation of artifacts or of just plain facts does, as I’ve suggested, find concrete use-value in set design; but the peculiar publicization of what was once shadow labor affirms the rhetorical currency of Calvin’s “encyclopedic” efforts. One publicity release is especially telling in this regard. Calvin, “eyesore and weary,” is portrayed as a long-suffering martyr of authenticity, sacrificing

health and social existence for DeMille's off-the-cuff curiosity. Indeed, "[a]ll is not glamour in Hollywood"; just look at Frank Calvin:

From where he sits . . . the place looks about as inviting as the back room of a museum, where scholars commune grimly with the past. Hollywood, to him, is a room full of old bones, musty volumes, and perplexing question marks. Mr. Calvin, who might as well be holed up in the Smithsonian Institution, is research director for Cecil B. DeMille . . . [H]e has been the unsung hero responsible for all the vaunted historical accuracy of the DeMille pictures [and] that means a whole lot of history. Interesting work, if you like that sort of thing, but Mr. Calvin doesn't. He is no scholar by natural bent, nor even by formal education. No, he is just a normal human being, unfortunately, with the ordinary college education and all the healthy appetites of the male animal. That's the tragedy. He sort of fell into this job of his, made good at it, and now he's stuck.<sup>252</sup>

He might not have had to "suffer from chiggers" like Arthur Rosson and his New Orleans brigade, but Calvin's labor generated its own type of "war story mythos," one which affirms DeMille's institutional reach for epistemic totality. This Unit fixture, who you'll find either "locked in his office or burrowing in libraries" and whose hopes for "a nice, quiet vacation" are continually frustrated by "the next picture" or by vague plans for some public "DeMille exhibit," becomes the sacrificial embodiment of DeMille's excessive data reach. The public pleasure of "accessing" authentic research in cinematic form is thus premised on the painful toil of Frank Calvin, DeMille's "hired headache."<sup>253</sup>

Calvin's inventories were meant to imbue profilmic space with secure, historical referentiality. Audiences, of course, were deprived of these bureaucratic delineations,

sprawling lists of cross-checked minutiae that could be funneled into mise-en-scene, from the period's authentic method of dairy delivery ("in two wheeled carts in jars") to precisely how many bales of cocoa the US Army confiscated at Baratavia on September 16, 1814 (seventy).<sup>254</sup> Extra-textual substantiation was thus needed to authorize such on-screen detail, and here, too, Calvin was pivotal, as made clear by the following press release, where Calvin expounds upon labors of authenticity "of which the public has little knowledge."

When Mr. deMille decided to make a picture based on Jean Lafitte's contribution to American history, our research workers knew little about him, and not much more about the period in which he lived. The first thing was the sending of a research expedition to Louisiana. Lafitte's known haunts were visited, hundreds of photographs were taken, private collections were studied, many people interviewed, hours were spent in antique shops and old book stores. Over two hundred books, manuscripts, old newspapers and magazines were combed over from cover to cover. Any reference to Lafitte, the War of 1812, Jackson, pirates, etc. were carefully read and notations made of any material that might prove of use to Mr. deMille and the authors. Months were spent gathering words and phrases of the period that would lend authenticity and 'flavor' to the dialogue. Costume designers were put to work at once going through endless volumes to find costumes of the period that would be suitable for the picture. Set designers started on plans for buildings, both interior and exterior. A man was assigned to the study of flintlock muskets, cannons, swords, and other war materials.<sup>255</sup>



The affirmation of diligence was not simply an off-screen affair. Two sequences in particular illustrate how pre-production research could formally accent DeMille's final representational product. Earlier I argued that DeMille prioritized authentic documentation through a near-museal, temporally excessive form of display that grants the spectator an approximate "over-the-shoulder" vantage point on the historical milieu. The two sequences I would like to highlight here (both showcasing weaponry) illustrate how historical props were bracketed to enjoy a similar scopic dominance. In such moments, the film's internal narrational voice becomes a docent of sorts, insisting upon the on-screen object's artifactual interest. Consider the first sequence, in which we see Dominique You on lookout aboard Lafitte's private vessel, where he spies a distant ship ablaze. It was common privateer practice to leave a plundered vessel in conflagration, but Dominique catches an alarming detail through his looking glass: *this* ship bears an American flag, and its Lafitte's sworn credo to not harm American ships, lest he violates his privateer oath to confiscate only the goods of declared enemies. So Dominique anxiously reports the sighting to his boss, who springs from his seat and removes a double-barrel flintlock pistol from a holster on the wall. The camera holds while Lafitte's face and upper body are concealed by a large hanging lampshade, which consumes the near-entirety of the right frame. The decision here to *not* re-frame the shot (custom continuity would move in close to highlight Lafitte's agitation) is key, as it makes the antique gun the scenic dominant. This transfer of attention, from Frederic March-as-Lafitte to flintlock pistol-as-itself, gives the sequence a pronounced museological charge, approximating the gallery's insistent mode of "eye-management."<sup>256</sup> The sequence exaggerates what I argued was the effect of protracted

point-of-view relays of documents, deferring narrative legibility to draw out the historicity of what's being shown. Such moments, rare in the Classical narrator system but essential to DeMille's historiographic program, reflexively announce *The Buccaneer's* integrity as a site of *access*, as a museal constellation of antiques and honest re-constructions.

Though implicit in the *mise-en-scene*, DeMille was still careful to *extra-textually* affirm the artefactual aura of the flintlock sequence. One notice is especially revealing in this light, for it points directly at the flintlock's explicit visual prominence and speaks to the object's approximate status as a museal attraction soliciting "directed vision."<sup>257</sup> This antique pistol, the reporter observes, is one of many "priceless collector's item[s] that will make *its screen debut* in the private film," a phrase, of course, generally reserved for human performers but suitable here given the flintlock's generous screen time and brief overshadowing of Frederick March. And many of these precious, prominent, and never-before-seen pistols weren't simply drawn from just any repository but from the "extensive arms collection of producer-director" DeMille, whose personal arsenal helped make up for what proved to be a "limited supply in Hollywood" of flintlocks [from] the early Nineteenth Century."<sup>258</sup> This effort to attach *mise-en-scene* to the director's antiquarian depth and goodwill is striking, and it elaborates key rhetorical cornerstones of DeMille's encyclopedism: the personal arsenal, like the exclusive DeMille Library at Paramount, reasserts the director's institutionalized effort to go beyond studio access tradition in the name of richer authenticity, affirming *The Buccaneer's* pleasures as a virtual access forum where yet-unseen objects could be experienced publically in seemingly haptic form.<sup>259</sup>

If the flintlock's museal address rests in duration and restrictive framing, the artifactual interest of the next weapon-prop I've chosen to isolate is announced less subtly: through spoken, diegetic commentary directed at the object itself, the British Congreve Rocket, a devastating contraption used to great effect in the Napoleonic Wars and brought as well to the skirmish at New Orleans. After a sequence where General Jackson and Lafitte ready their company for the British attack, we cut to the Red Coat encampment, where soldiers stand erect between a row of lengthy, tube-like cannon barrels propped up and pointed towards the American base. The scene then cuts in to a medium two-shot and an older officer turns to a gunner manning one of the (still unnamed) long-range weapons. "I'll wager those Yankees have never seen a *Congreve rocket*," the officer submits, before glancing down at his time piece and commanding "Fie-uh!" A montage then follows, showing rocket activation and the ensuing wreckage at the Americans' improvised garrison made from cotton bales and wood scraps.

The insistent angles of the rocket and of its destructive capability in battle elaborate the didactic thrust of the sequence, implied by the doubling of "those Yankees" with the film's present-day audience, both presumably unfamiliar with this military relic. Descriptive commentary, in effect, functions as museum wall label, introducing the Congreve rocket as a synecdochic emblem of what Frank Calvin spoke of as "the tremendous amount of work and patience" that went into re-creating this historical event. To explain each and every authentic set piece on-screen would be narratively inconceivable, so the Congreve rocket sequence was positioned cinematically as an

efficient concentration of DeMille's process as a whole. It indexes a rigor mutely embedded in the other details.<sup>260</sup>



2.6 – Museal mise-en-scene

Structured to educate and rouse by bringing relics “back to life,” the sequence, though sourced in documentation from London’s Woolwich Museum (today, The Royal Artillery Museum), betrays an ambition to one-up the museum interface, to transcend its originary fragmentation. *The Buccaneer*’s encyclopedic basis for mise-en-scene, those pulsing details that make Lafitte’s world “live again,” stand as an attempted *rectification* of what Heidegger deemed the museum’s violently constitutive “world-withdrawal,” a mourning of authentic context that often characterized early-modern critiques of museum culture.<sup>261</sup> One of DeMille’s over-arching aesthetic aims, then, with the American Trilogy and even more so with later Ancient-world epics, is a *reanimation of provenance*, an aesthetic and evidentiary transcendence of discrete, language-bound indications of the past available at the museum.<sup>262</sup>

But though the DeMilleian epic marked an ideal, world-*restoring* alternative to the museum’s foundational world-*removal*, DeMille still used the aura of museum space to

embellish his institutional brand. Well before *The Buccaneer*'s theatrical release, DeMille Unit publicity maestro Bill Pine had contacted James J. A. Fortier, chief curator at the Louisiana State Museum, for assistance in “exploiting the picture through museums and historic centers of the country.”<sup>263</sup> The eventual strategy—to exhibit miniature models used in the construction of historical sets, many built from the Fortier’s archives—was sensible in terms of space but peculiar in light of museological standards for artefactual authenticity. Museum holdings are, in an *a priori* sense, objects of *historical* knowledge; whether prized aesthetic creations or curious fragments preserved over time, museum objects are perceived to reflect back on a specific origin of historical interest. This origin, by institutional standards, exists at an appreciable temporal distance from the act of gallery display. Framed in this exhibition context, the DeMille set model is conspicuously aberrant (these miniature structures were less than a year old). So how did this contemporary production matter qualify as “museal,” and what did DeMille hope to gain from locating traditionally “ephemeral” models into a climate of embedded historicity, a world of time-saturated things?

In a revealing trade article by Hans Dreier, a supervising art director at Paramount and regular DeMille collaborator, the *planned* obsolescence of art department materials is submitted as institutional protocol. Dreier, who designed the sets for DeMille’s flamboyant pre-Code epic *The Sign of the Cross* (1932), echoes DeMille on points related to period accuracy—“the pressing search for correct answers,” Dreier insists, consumes much of the art department’s “money and labor”—but his historical disregard for production design materials couldn’t be less DeMilleian.<sup>264</sup> “The very foundation of the industry,” Dreier submits axiomatically, is efficiency and “novelty of entertainment; the

system, thus, “acts against anything too permanent.” The great art director does observe how “major companies” maintain “a large stock of furniture of all periods and styles,” but, as Dreier maintains, historical preservation is *not* the purpose here. According to Dreier, “characteristic pieces cannot be seen too often without being recognized,” and thus generically suggestive items must be recycled architecturally to mask their former screen identities.<sup>265</sup> In short, the property department item is an object in steady flux; segregated from a filmable totality, its provenance marks a void, a hurried adaptation for the next shoot or an unceremonious march to the studio incinerator.

DeMille’s push for museum visibility marks a radical departure from this consensus on the fleeting worth of a film’s physical substratum. Towards the beginning of this discussion, I suggested that the antique typography of *The Buccaneer*’s credits insinuated its “born historical” status as a commemorative film that will only gain importance over time. Museum exhibition advanced this auto-monumentalization effort. It’s telling that what DeMille chose to donate was not a set piece that ended up on film; what the Louisiana State Museum got was, as the local press reported, something “used in *planning* the filming of ‘The Buccaneer,’” a detailed maquette of Lafitte’s “stronghold at Barataria.”<sup>266</sup> The model’s appeal does not derive from any time spent on DeMille’s exclusive set, from any baptism of celluloid; this mini-Barataria, as Stephen Greenblatt might point out, commands museological attention strictly because of its “resonance,” its framed potential “to evoke . . . the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged and for which it may be taken by the viewer to stand.”<sup>267</sup> If the Congreve rocket sequence emblemized an institutional credo of painstaking re-creation, the model Barataria symbolically encapsulated a process as well, one which, as DeMille insisted in

public, brought about the “best collection of material on [Lafitte] probably every assembled,” an unprecedented consolidation leading to an allegedly “perfect preservation of the times.”<sup>268</sup>

The State Museum, though foiled publically by DeMille’s better-resourced antiquarianism, keenly endorsed DeMille’s method and vision. James Fortier, curator and spokesman for the Museum, greeted DeMille warmly upon arriving at New Orleans, speaking effusively of the filmmaker’s rigor. “I never saw a man take more pains, more effort, in learning the true facts about the Battles of New Orleans,” declared Fortier to the local press, “he became saturated with it. He understood that a great event had taken place in New Orleans which was not understood generally, throughout the nation and the world.”<sup>269</sup> The curator’s statement presaged similar outpours in the name of DeMille, whose stay in New Orleans amounted to a serialized procession of civic adulation. The most remarkable display came from then-Louisiana Governor Richard W. Leche, the corrupt successor to slain populist Huey Long who would serve ten hard years for graft, extortion, and (honoring Lafitte?) racketeering. To recognize DeMille’s New Orleans premiere, Long authored an official Proclamation declaring January 8, 1938 “a legal holiday” for the observance of the British retreat at New Orleans on that same day 123 years ago. The victory, in Leche’s words, would be celebrated properly if “all citizens of Louisiana, as a tribute to the gallant men who defended the city 123 years ago, attend the showing of the ‘Buccaneer’ to gain therefrom a new conception of the patriotism demonstrated by our forefathers and a new appreciation of the beauty of our state.”<sup>270</sup>

So DeMille event turned national duty, a unifying gesture of belonging and grateful citizenship. The Proclamation’s deeper and more threatening implication,

however, was that to miss DeMille's maximally-publicized epic, an educational "re-construction" that now boasted "the Great Seal of the State of Louisiana," was to *actively* forget "the romance, history, and beauty" of Louisiana, whose defense was so essential to America's preservation and growth. These cinema truants, as DeMille's address at the historic victory site made explicit, were an insidious shadow breed, perhaps puppet agents under Communism. The Battle of New Orleans may have been the last gasp of British conquest in the Americas, the director rhapsodized, but it did not mark the end of the threat of "foreignism." This, DeMille continued, was a threat "far more dangerous and crafty" in modern times, as "it starts attacking our children, sometimes in our schools and colleges, pecking and sneering at the principals that made us the greatest nation on earth, coming from foreign lands, not to settle and build like those heroic settlers from foreign lands that fought on this field, but to undermine and destroy those American institutions and ideas from which have arisen this powerful and magnificent union."<sup>271</sup>

The speech ends on a chilling, eschatological note, anticipating in tone and target the DeMille's Witchhunt rhetoric of the 1950s. "Today, if we are to survive," DeMille concludes, "we must face the enemy with a similarly united front. We must join hands in warding off communism, agitation of all kinds . . . The battle for a peaceful, harmonious existence, and a truly United States is never won. It is a series of engagements progressing through history."<sup>272</sup> Hence the gambit: rekindle a memory cinematically so that its DeMilleian commemoration finds historical value that the initial event appears to have lost. Animating this meta-monumental strategy, as I've tried to show, was a practical politics of scale, an aesthetic industrialization of research that gave both



DeMille and his audience an assured sense of historical purpose, presence and ownership.<sup>273</sup>

Though DeMille's public strong arming did not win him the sweeping national devotion he hoped for (*The Buccaneer's* returns fell far short of its \$1.4 million budget) he was not about to temper his rhetoric or his method. Through his voluminous, aggressively publicized research, DeMille found credibility in the eyes of the right institutions, including the Works Progress Administration's Survey of Federal Archives, which thanked DeMille as their ally in "furthering American scholarship" by making primary materials on US history publically accessible.<sup>274</sup> Enjoying as well a liberal, five picture contract signed after *The Plainsman's* profitable run, DeMille was encouraged to make the last installment of the American Trilogy, *Union Pacific* (released 1939), his most ambitious research effort to date. Indeed, *Union Pacific's* research files speak of a method proudly emboldened, an additional step closer to the "perfect," archive-drawn picture attempted with *The Buccaneer*.

### **Research on the Rails**

*Union Pacific* functionally intensified *The Buccaneer's* authenticity program. Familiar methodological touchstones—spontaneous fact searches, sprawling bibliography, curatorial and academic consultation, second unit scenery capture, and regionally-staged pageantry—are all evidenced alongside noteworthy variations. These changes, as this closing section will suggest, stem from *Union Pacific's* specific period setting, registered by an evidentiary ecology distinct from *The Buccaneer's* pre-photographic one. Scaffolded by a bigger, more durably indexical field of data, *Union*

*Pacific* fortified DeMille's interpretive license while flattering the director's self-fashioned status as an impossible historical witness, as the newsreel photographer of yesteryear he fancied himself to be.<sup>275</sup>

The Union Pacific was the westward half of the First Trans-Continental Railroad. Its construction began in 1863 in Omaha, Nebraska, as a continuation of an already robust eastern rail system. Its final spike was laid in 1869, at Promontory Point, Utah, where it met the Sacramento-based Central Pacific in a celebratory conjoining of the US coasts. Though paid for eventually with federal land grants and bonds, initial trans-continental construction required private investment from emergent tycoons, like the wholesaler and future governor Leland Stanford, whose cash was vital to the Central Pacific's success, and the speculating physician Thomas C. Durant, whose scandal-plagued Credit Mobilier of America made the Union Pacific viable.

Postbellum America was a period of "intense outdoor photographic endeavor," as itinerant photographers saw great opportunity in railway expansion.<sup>276</sup> Those expert enough in the cumbersome wet-plate process took their practice beyond studio portrait rooms and followed the rail, capturing pictorial vistas and curious native rituals for newspapers and stereoscope parlors. The competing rail lines took notice of this demand and called on these photographers to publicize their respective progress and stir curiosity about the virgin West. To DeMille's delight, the Union Pacific archive held on to much of this material, and the company's solicitous research aid was a contractual precondition before starting the film. The agreement's demands, all satisfied, warrant repetition:

We would also require your cooperation in the matter of the extensive research we will undertake for the purpose of depicting, as authentically as the

dramatic presentation of the development of your railroad in a motion picture would permit, the actual incidents and facts which occurred in the development of the road. We would need your assistance in securing perhaps four or five locomotives used by your railroad during that period, if they are available, some unused track, some advice and help in the fine art of laying track, and the right to use in the production of the photoplay and in the advertising and exploitation, photographs, charts, and pictures and other material which have been used by you for the purpose of advertising your railroad and its early development.”

In late March 1938, six months before cameras rolled, the two-man reconnaissance team of Jack Cunningham, a veteran Paramount screenwriter praised for his portrait of frontier existence in James Cruze’s *Covered Wagon* (1923), and Frank Calvin, that ever-dependable “hired headache,” trekked out to the Union Pacific archives in Omaha, Nebraska. “Splendid reminders,” as Cunningham put it, leaped out right away. DeMille read of these “reminders” back in Hollywood, while recovering from emergency pancreatic surgery: “We arrived this morning at 4:20 . . . Many authentic relics; hundreds of good action photographs actually taken on the spot at various stages of the construction of the road, and innumerable maps, documents, etc.” Though pension records helped Calvin and Cunningham track down “old timers” who witnessed the rail’s construction, the immediacy of archival photo-documentation made hazy memories seem almost quaint, useful for “sidelights,” if at all, as Cunningham stressed in his field reports.<sup>277</sup>

Documentary lack compels the historian to over-value distant reminiscence, as I suggested in chapter one in relation to DeMille’s ghostwriter’s adaptable standards for

evidence. It's the same principal of credibility that bolstered the confused, first-hand sightings by British soldiers during the Battle of New Orleans. But it took on a less pivotal role in *Union Pacific*, for the later film enjoyed what the Allan Sekula has called the "aggressive empiricism" of the photographic archive, where the researcher can forget the quirky, limited scope of first-hand observation and take in the putative "appearance of history itself."<sup>278</sup> A boon to DeMille's "perfect" conception of the past, photography enhanced the "silent authority of the archive," of its capacity to connect "incontestable documents in a seamless account."<sup>279</sup> Photography, then, was welcomed as structural mitigation of what George Kubler spoke of as the "deforming pressure" an event undergoes as its mediated in time.<sup>280</sup>

Medium-based limitations, however, began to present themselves almost immediately. Cunningham wasn't exaggerating when he reported finding "hundreds" of construction-period photographs, but his labeling them "action" shots needed a caveat, as Frank Calvin's subsequent appraisal of the archival holdings made clear. Exposure time was tediously long in the wet-plate process, meaning that spontaneously captured action came out a ghostly blur. Thus, as Calvin pointed out, "[t]here were no action pictures in those days, everything had to be posed."<sup>281</sup> Posing, of course, implies a disruption of process, of an unnatural re-direction of attention—away from the task at hand, towards the lens. In testimony, the "big picture" can grow obscure because of the periphery's pull on the observer but with this slow, pre-candid photography, actuality is placed on hold so self-aware memorialization can occur. This, as Calvin concluded, can lead to significant documentary distortions of how actions were actually carried out. "For instance," reported Calvin, "[one photo] on track laying shows three men holding front end of rail

[sic]. According to old timers, etc. only two men held it, as a rule—the third guy probably saw a chance to get his picture taken.”<sup>282</sup>

Thus, while the Union Pacific’s photographic archive enhanced the mimetic fidelity of DeMille’s mise-en-scene it also introduced fresh evidentiary problems that could only be solved by using descriptive artifacts. DeMille’s researchers saw that these photo-documents, though certainly instructive for costume and set design purposes, needed to be fleshed out with descriptive evidence.

This evidentiary recuperation of language was affirmed dramatically by the *Research Notes for Cecil B. DeMille’s Production of Union Pacific*, a hefty, indexed compilation delineating facts, processes, and historical personages with varying relevance to rail expansion. A massive administrative undertaking, the *Research Notes* only increased the “pains” of Frank Calvin, who was tasked with organizing and excerpting all the pertinent data. A bound concentration of 393 sources, the *Research Notes* stood institutionally as a bureaucratized augmentation of *The Buccaneer*’s vast but inefficiently segregated fact pool. It simultaneously reaffirmed the symbolic and structural currency of intensive research scale. Armed with this improved, user-friendly bulwark against anachronism, Calvin’s presence on-set was an insurance in accuracy, emboldening DeMille’s fantasy pitch for reconstructive identity.

Pages back, I suggested that *The Buccaneer*’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Unit photography enjoyed autonomous documentary force in its rear-projected state, imperfect compositry that reflected back on a taxing hunt for evocative location scenery. Natural locales “beyond time” were caught as well by *Union Pacific*’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Unit (especially for “motion transparencies” that indicated train movement), but they didn’t consume as much energy

as they did on the previous, extra-studio jaunt. This time, the foremost task was the *reenactment of process*, an informed animation of photographically embalmed labor activity.

Static visual documentation and written primary sources joined in producing a “conditional perfect” mode of address: *if* the tedious wet-plate cameras *could have* registered motion, in other words, we’d *already* have something like DeMille’s portrayal. This research-based supplementation of the photographic record is best illustrated near *Union Pacific*’s half-way point, when a gang of rail workers lay new track at the foot of the Wasatch Mountains. As in *The Buccaneer*’s meta-diegetical credit sequence, the human figures here are anonymous, strategically abstracted to draw attention to the reenacted labor and to the density of researched detail. We’re first presented with a ground-level wide-shot as a row of workers move in-tandem down the line, sharing the burden of long, rectangular wood carve outs. These “skilled workmen,” the *Research Notes* tell us, were the “tie placers,” the first division of track laying’s “three part” process whose ties provided ballast for the greater track. This step was followed by “track laying proper” and, finally, by “bolting and spiking.” Enactments of these last two activities follow, scripted as before by Calvin’s notes: “stalwart fellows” with the help of a horse drawn “open car” leave rails against ties, readying them for the attack of “spikers” and their “tremendous sledge hammers.” The complete process, relayed through a mix of close-ups and absorbing long takes from moving rail cars, is shown again from different angles, revealing previously eclipsed visual information. The repetition’s motivated by the stacking of detail, in self-congratulatory excess of the construction’s initial, cemented-down photographing. The point is that periphery matters

*epistemically*, as a visual knowledge-swell that only expands with DeMille's addition of a meticulous aerial wide-shot that connects track laying to an ensemble of mini-events including tie-stacking, foreman signaling, bucket construction, and the livestock grazing the helps sustains all this activity.



2.7 – Reenacting expansion

An earlier scene demonstrates how this indexical performativity was not restricted to 2<sup>nd</sup> Unit interludes. An establishing shot places us in Cheyenne, a bustling “end of track” town where honest wages go fast at places like Sid Campeau (Brian Donlevey)’s “Big Tent” casino, where painted ladies and sleight-of-hand dealers “fleece the poor lads” of the rail, as the Union Pacific’s stalwart Irish post-mistress Molly Monahan (Barbara Stanwyk) laments. The scene’s point-of-entry is a laborer named Paddy O’Rourke (Regis Toomey), who’s compelled to try his luck at poker after finding a shamrock in a prayer book mailed by his wife. Sure of his odds, Paddy disappears into Cheyenne’s thoroughfare, where we hear Campeau’s front-door barker inducing passerby to “Step right in my friends! If you don’t feel like taking a chance, there’s plenty of dancing!” The scene then loses Paddy, focusing instead on a nameless passerby making

his way into the Big Tent. The camera holds from behind as the man pushes through swinging doors, but it loses him too as he moves deeper into the crowd. The *absent* reverse-angle that would have distinguished this patron obscures character individuality to enhance our participatory immersion in the space: we are being “invited” into this re-made hall of vice, whose environmental detail is catalogued by an elegant tracking shot that brings Calvin’s research notes “to life.” Indeed, the scene’s welcoming address to the spectator—its visualized invitation to “step right in!”—seems carried over from Calvin’s research notes on the historical Big Tent: “let us spend an evening in the Big Tent and see how men amuse their leisure where home life and society are lacking,” muses Calvin’s first-hand source, whose tour-guide tenor is matched by DeMille’s inquisitive interior tracking shots:

As we enter we note that the right side is lined with a splendid bar supplied with every variety of liquors and cigars, with cut glass and glass goblets, ice pitchers, splendid mirror [sic] and pictures rivalling those of our Eastern cities. At the back end a space large enough for one cotillion is left open for dancing . . . the rest of the room is filled with tables devoted to monte, faro, rondo coolo, fortune wheels and every other species of gambling known. During the day the Big Tent is rather quiet but at night after a few inspiring tunes at the door by the band, the long hall is soon crowded with a motley throng of three or four hundred men and women.<sup>283</sup>





2.8 – The Big Tent, “Step right in!”

Reading this sequence in light of its descriptive basis reveals how the “performativity” of profilmic detail, to quote Philip Rosen’s inspiring analysis of DeMille’s *Cleopatra* (1934), became an enduring methodological stake in DeMille’s formal system. These exhibitions of researched moments in which the “excessive detail [appears to have] no diegetic addressee” but rather puts on “a show . . . for the spectator alone,” bring out the structuring tension between historical narrative and spectacle, the latter more decisive in declaring an epic’s research foundations.<sup>284</sup> Indeed, these scenes evoke what Stephen Bann has identified as the “invisible footnotes” of nineteenth-century history paintings, closed yet elaborate renderings with truth-telling aims. In both history painting and filmic history, as Bann would add, we are not only compelled but “willing to accept that these [works] are veracious, partly because we *feel* that . . . research has been painstaking, and partly because the very minuteness of the execution seems, by a kind of metonymic sliding, to vouch for their authenticity.”<sup>285</sup>

As suggested by DeMille’s routine, research-affirming appearances connected to premieres, substitutive citation worked in collusion with on-screen authenticity. While preparing for *Union Pacific*’s premiere run, planned in conjunction with the “Golden

Spike” commemoration of the rail’s completion (“the most colorful and varied ever staged,” boasted Omaha’s Chamber of Commerce) DeMille dictated how a “good subject for a talk” might be “the importance of a director working out little background business in scenes.”<sup>286</sup> The reasoning behind such a “talk” evidences confidence in the reality-affirming capacity of perceptual indecision, of spectatorial drift encouraged by proliferating detail. If “the eyes of anyone in the audience stray from the main characters,” as DeMille’s points out, “the action of the unimportant players *lends to the realness* of the scene. One person might see and like some bit of incidental business which another person might not even see.”<sup>287</sup> Painstaking detail will get lost in the mosaic, in other words, but the fugitive details will still trigger intuitive appreciation for research efforts. We have, in the end, a formal-historiographic approach compelled by a modern relationship to attention, which, as Jonathan Crary’s demonstrated, is defined by a “mobile system of deflections” that disturbs optical stability.<sup>288</sup> DeMille constructs a “mobile spectator” in a double sense, pleasing the restless modern gaze while eliciting an imaginary return to how “it was in the past.”

## Chapter 3

### Staging the Event: *The Plainsman* and New Deal America

*[T]he American cinema had the means to save its dream by passing through nightmares.*<sup>289</sup>

*You'll find 'THE PLAINSMAN' the grandest picture that ever stirred the heart of a boy—in size, action, breathless thrills and daring deeds of heroes.*<sup>290</sup>

This chapter illuminates the ways in which the DeMilleian epic event situates itself within American culture as an authentic, monumental form that nourished collective senses of belonging, personal responsibility, and “spiritual” affinity with venerated historical beings. I begin by arguing that *The Plainsman* (1936), the first installment of DeMille’s Depression-era “American Trilogy,” is not only instructive of how the director’s epics *cinematically* convey poignant themes of historical continuity through visual metaphors of regeneration along with immersive, research-derived spectacle that provokes empathy for historical characters. I will also show how the “historical eventfulness” of the DeMille epic, those features of the experience that transcend “already excessive screen boundaries,”<sup>291</sup> provided audiences with uplifting opportunities to socially perform continuity with the past, as indicated by the Wild West fashion tie-ups and schoolhouse reenactments that accompanied *The Plainsman*’s theatrical run and the eager participation in the film’s production of historical bona fides and modern-day servicemen. Indeed, *The Plainsman* is emblematic of how epic film discourse—as a historiographic mode of expression that implies an existential bond between present-day spectators and re-presented pasts—both nurtures and restores what Gilles Deleuze has identified as the reigning “consensus which allows [America] to develop illusions about

itself, about its motives, its desires . . . values and its ideals.” (148). As Jani Scandura reminds us, “the Depression shattered a national imaginary—perpetuated by big industry—that was grounded in progressive narratives of history and culture.”<sup>292</sup> The *Plainsman* labored to resuscitate this dream as it imbued DeMille’s coordinated event activity with the weight of patriotic obligation.

### **“No Cracked Earth...”—*The Plainsman* and Presentist Address**

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, in his Fireside Chat of September 6, 1936, recalled a haunting journey through America’s Dustbowl. “I saw draught devastation in nine states,” the President told his listeners, and then, in solemn, near-biblical language proceeded to evoke the vast “fields of wheat so blasted by heat that they cannot be harvested,” the “brown pastures which would not keep a cow on fifty acres,” and the “families who had lost their . . . water in their well, lost their garden.” But for FDR this scorched earth was not entirely fruitless. Roosevelt’s affecting depiction of agrarian struggle not only provoked state sympathy for intensified work relief but offered a fertile symbol of American perseverance. The nation’s wasteland became a canvas upon which Roosevelt projected an encouraging vision of human endurance. “I would not have you think for a single minute that there is permanent disaster in these drought regions,” the President declared, “No cracked earth, no blistering sun, no burning wind . . . are a permanent match for the indomitable American farmers and stockmen and their wives and children who have carried on through desperate days, and inspire us with their self-reliance, their tenacity and their courage.”<sup>293</sup>

The emotional tenor of the Roosevelt's oratory—unflagging determination in the face of extraordinary disaster—informed the historical mythos of the Hollywood epic in New Deal America. Paramount screenwriter Jesse Lasky, Jr. recalled how 1930s American “audiences were ripe for sweeping vistas of continent-taming tribulations . . . We needed to regain a sense of purpose in the long hangover from Prohibition and the materialistic disestablishment of the Depression.”<sup>294</sup> DeMille's tremendously successful western epic, *The Plainsman*, vividly demonstrates Lasky's observations on the contemporary cultural value of heroic tales of nation building.<sup>295</sup> Consider the film's opening credit sequence, which begins as the Paramount logo dissolves to a shot of migrants' horses hauling a covered wagon towards a distant horizon. Composer George Antheil's orchestral march transforms this somber scene of cultural dislocation into a commemorative image of national endurance. A second dissolve then leads to a static vista shot of an arid plain. The shot holds and performers' credits—which are not presented in a conventional top-to-bottom scroll but emerge from the frame's foreground and travel towards deep space—dissolve into the rolling hills which line the background of the shot. The opening credits come to a close and the gleeful score is quickly replaced by a cacophony of foreboding horns and vertiginous strings. This orchestral digression reaches its climax and a third dissolve segues to a murky image of tumbleweeds traveling through a dense cloud of dust. A wailing flute appears on the soundtrack, accentuating the violence of the storm.

The wasteland imagery must have had a familiar ring to present-day audiences, especially those of the Plains States, where DeMille premiered his film and where the public suffered the most from the agricultural catastrophe. Piers Brendon observes how

“The Dust Bowl provided contemporaries with a potent symbol for the Depression decade . . . a metaphor of brave new world into wasteland, the turning of American dream into nightmare.”<sup>296</sup> Michael Denning notes that “the desiccated plains and violent dust storms of the Dust Bowl became the foremost natural analogue of the depression[.]”<sup>297</sup> But DeMille, like Roosevelt in his moving address on the great draught, puts a positive spin on Dust Bowl imagery. As the opening sequence progresses, the dust cloud dissipates and the sequence dissolves to a vista shot of the plains on a fair day, over which the initial jubilation of the score has been restored and in front of which an epigraph introduces the film’s leading characters: “Among the men who thrust forward America’s frontier were Wild Bill Hickok and Buffalo Bill Cody. The story that follows compresses many years, many lives and widely separated events into one narrative—in an attempt to do justice to the courage of the plainsman of our west.” It is particularly telling that the dust storm—a metaphor for the nation’s ecological disaster and economic turmoil—clears once the film’s historical protagonists are introduced. Here, DeMille situates the film’s predominant message: the resilience and determination of America’s frontiersmen, spiritually preserved in the present body politic, will steer the nation through the turbulence of the Depression.

### **“Kindred Fires”—The DeMille Epic as Romantic Historiography**

Popular American storytelling of the 1930s was characterized, in large part, by a return of the repressed. Denning, for instance, has observed how a “gallery of allegorical icons of victimization, innocence, and resilience, ranging from Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s ‘forgotten man’ to Steinbeck’s *Ma Joad*, from Dorothea Lange’s *Migrant*

Mother to Frank Capra's Mr. Smith" came to the surface alongside Depression-bred sentiments like vulnerability, rootlessness, and abandonment.<sup>298</sup> This representational tradition, defined by a taxing discovery of place and belonging, was a reflection of the "mainstream populism" of a New Deal state, geared towards bolstering faith in national endurance rather than stimulating desire for radical social change. "Simply in being remembered the Forgotten Man seemed rescued," Scandura observes.<sup>299</sup>

Newfound, political interest in the forgotten and the ordinary not only affected Hollywood's construction of fictional heroes but guided its selection of historical topics and characters as well. Indeed, this mass-mediated revision of collective memory significantly inflected the DeMilleian epic of the New Deal era. DeMille, on his popular *Lux Radio Theater* broadcast, described *The Plainsman* as the "first in the series of pictures based on the magnificent pageant of American history and its *unsung* heroes."<sup>300</sup> Months before, DeMille, also in reference to *The Plainsman*, noted how "It is the *unrecorded* episodes between events of history—the story between the lines—which have always fascinated me."<sup>301</sup> Around the same time, the director told the *New York Times* that *The Plainsman* is the first installment to "a series of American sketches ... [on] some of the *obscurer*, less academic figures of history."<sup>302</sup> DeMille's film, heralded as a commemorative portrait of the nation's pioneers and as a tribute to the enduring frontier ethos in contemporary America, was, on the surface, an exciting yarn set after the Civil War about frontier compatriots Buffalo Bill Cody, Calamity Jane Canary, and Wild Bill Hickok and their valiant attempt to keep vengeful Indians from buying repeating rifles from venal government men. "Not a plainsman in the group," observed Frank S.

Nugent of the *New York Times*.<sup>303</sup> But Nugent overlooked the representative capacity of the film's heroes, a quality that resonated for Depression-era audiences.

In his classic *History as Romantic Art*, David Levin writes how "In order to understand the romantic historians' heroes . . . one must begin with what the heroes embodied . . . the People."<sup>304</sup> Here, Levin refers to the romantic historiography practiced by 19<sup>th</sup> Century American writers like Francis Parkman and William H. Prescott who were influenced, first and foremost, by the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott. Despite Levin's period-specific frame of reference, his study sheds light on both DeMille's epic discourse and the general popular fiction of the New Deal state. Levin observes how the romantic historian views History as

the unfolding of a vast Providential plan . . . all along the way, whether they knew it or not, the people had carried with them a new principle: Christianity in the 'German woods,' nationality in the Iberian peninsula, the Reformation in the Netherlands and England, Democracy (or Liberty) in the American colonies . . . The historian studied the age, looked for the banner of progress in any conflict, and supported the side fighting under it.<sup>305</sup>

Similarly, Gilles Deleuze illustrates how the American epic film "favors the analogies or parallels between the one civilization and another: great moments of humanity, however distant they are, are supposed to communicate via the peaks, and form a 'collection of effects in themselves' which can be more easily compared and act all the more strongly on the mind of the modern spectator."<sup>306</sup> *The Plainsman*, as a romantic historical text, brings into focus both a chief artistic goal of the New Deal state and a fundamental ambition of epic film discourse: the convincing and heartening communication of



spiritual continuity between history's great men and present-day laypeople. This recurring theme of "the forgotten," which DeMille so visibly advocated in the late-1930s, calcified this emotional connection between the intrahistorical present and the collectively celebrated past. DeMille's epics of the Old West, in the end, exemplify romantic history's governing belief as conveyed by one of its most passionate spokesmen, William Godwin: "It is the contemplation of illustrious men . . . that kindles into flame the hidden fire within us. . . . While we admire the poet and the hero, and sympathize with his generous ambition or his ardent expressions, we insensibly imbibe the same spirit, and burn with kindred fires."<sup>307</sup> DeMille's romantic historiography (characterized by a dramatic reliance on representative characters and an outspoken faith in both the affective power and didactic virtue of spectacle) reinforced the rhetorical platforms of the New Deal (the inevitably progressive flow of Western history, the everyman's ability to prevail through hard times) while it gave vivid expression to the epic cinema's bedrock theme of national continuity.

**"Take Plenty of Explosives to the Location"—DeMille, Frederic Remington,  
Historical Participation**

On November 1, 1935, Jeff Lazarus, a production supervisor at Paramount, contacted DeMille with concerns regarding *Buffalo Bill*, the director's western in its early developmental stages that would soon become *The Plainsman*. Lazarus feared that *Annie Oakley* (1935), an RKO production opening later that month which depicted the sharpshooter's days on tour with the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show, might present legal hurdles before the DeMille project. DeMille assured the anxious Lazarus that there

would be no creative conflict since “Buffalo Bill is a secondary character in *Annie Oakley*, and the entire picture deals with the show life of Annie Oakley,” while our picture “is laid between the years 1865 and 1878, prior to the start of the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show.” DeMille was not interested in the “the ridiculous theatric adventures attributed to [Buffalo Bill] by so many authors,” and recycled by RKO.<sup>308</sup> The director, who would repeatedly cite country-western stage shows, generic cowboy pictures, and apocryphal dime novels as artistic foils to his “super western,” evoked a more dignified creative influence when discussing his film: “[*The Plainsman*] is a story of the West . . . a story of American character . . . pictured as Frederick Remington might have drawn it.”<sup>309</sup> DeMille was so confident in the comparison that a “traveling collection of Frederick Remington’s paintings . . . in theater lobbies in connection with premieres of the picture” was planned so his public could directly observe the estimable aesthetic kinship.<sup>310</sup>

Both DeMille and Remington were native easterners with boyish wonder for the American West. Though DeMille did not share Remington’s elegiac outlook on the frontier’s demise, he did share the painter’s admiration for its stirring drama and sublime landscapes. DeMille’s allusions to Remington implicitly guaranteed awe-inspiring spectacle and gripping action. But they also suggested meticulous attention to authentic details. It was well-known that Remington frequently shadowed the nation’s Cavalry in order to witness firsthand the fading culture of the western frontier. The painter would sketch and photograph the behavior, customs, and dress of frontier life and, back in his studio in upstate New York, artistically render his observations. DeMille, on the other hand, found authentic inspiration in storied landscapes and primary documents.<sup>311</sup> “I

have pursued verity from the Museum at Cairo to the smoking tepees of the Cheyenne at Lame Deer, Montana,” DeMille once reminisced, “and a costly pursuit it has been. The charges of research alone on a major historical film are sixty thousand dollars.”<sup>312</sup>

Ultimately, however, in a DeMilleian epic primary materials and authentic locations did not acquire their greatest interest through an academic capacity to disprove or corroborate but through their capacity to stimulate a sense of “historical mobility,” the thrilling sensation of “sitting invisible” at the table of the past.<sup>313</sup>

For DeMille, archival documents served as blueprints for morally-instructive, filmic scenarios in which authentic props enjoy museological prominence. Like Theodore Roosevelt, the 20<sup>th</sup> Century’s most vociferous advocate for the enduring social value of romantic history, DeMille believed that the “very accurate, very real and vivid presentation of the past can come only from one in whom the imaginative gift is strong.” Both men acknowledged that the “historian must of necessity be a master of the science of history, a man who has at his finger-tips all the accumulated facts from the treasure-houses of the dead past.” But unless the historian possesses the “[imaginative] power to marshal what is dead so that before our eyes it lives again,” the accumulated facts fail to contribute to “the sum of man’s wisdom, enjoyment and inspiration.”<sup>314</sup> Unless animated rhetorically by the historian, accrued data remains, as Godwin warned, “the mere chronicle of facts, places and dates” from which the “muscles, the articulations, everything in which the life emphatically resides, is absent.”<sup>315</sup>

Remington—who illustrated Roosevelt’s meditations on the beauty and hardships of the Plains, *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail*, and later illustrated the Rough Riders’ exploits in the Spanish-American War—served as DeMille’s exemplar for the

emotionally bracing and morally inspiring re-creation of the past.<sup>316</sup> Though Remington's oeuvre is far from homogenous in topic, genre, or tone, he is mostly remembered—and emulated—for his dramatized renderings of frontier rituals and warfare. David McCullough's description of *A Dash for the Timber*, Remington's vision of survival in the wilderness as personified by cowboys escaping rifle-wielding Apaches, captures this popularly remembered side of the artist:

The excitement is terrific. The missed riders charge pell-mell, nearly head on at the viewer. The horses are flying—hardly a hoof touches the ground—and the dead weight of one Indian soldier who has been hit makes the action of the other, and of the pursuing Indians, all the more alive. The dust flies . . . the guns blaze away, the wind whips the big hat brims . . . It is big action in big space.<sup>317</sup>

DeMille hoped to achieve this panoramic sense of peril in a scene in which a band of Cheyenne ambush Buffalo Bill and a brigade of cavalrymen. Though the scene was staged by second-unit director Arthur Rosson, DeMille managed to leave his authorial stamp on the footage. In fact, the scene is particularly noteworthy since it forced the director to communicate to his auxiliary team his ideal vision of cinematic battle.

DeMille's daily correspondences to his second-unit illuminate the filmmaker's preference for sensorally combative techniques that elicit the impression of audience participation.

With DeMille's orders to "Take plenty of explosives to the location," the second-unit ventured out into the snowcapped mountains of Birney, Montana.<sup>318</sup> DeMille was displeased with Rosson's early footage, mostly for its failure to leave a kinetic impression on the spectator. On June 20, 1936, an frustrated DeMille wired Rosson, exclaiming how

It is impossible to get a thrill from a charge coming directly at camera... We could not see any movement of either horse or man... The effect of this scene must be fast speed and thundering horses not little toy puppets two or three miles away... This must be the climax of an exciting sequence photographed as such.<sup>319</sup>

A later correspondence underscores the director's stake in providing spectators with a fully immersive sense of combat:

The Indians should come from the second or lower platform ... They should start to fire immediately... Foreground should always be full of Indians... It is of the utmost importance that the audience sees firing at soldiers on island from all around... Be certain that men are firing constantly from the trees in background of this shot and from other directions as well... Any of your available help can do some of the firing... You can even use explosive bullets... Puffs of smoke must be seen from trees all around especially trees in immediate background.<sup>320</sup>

The shots of the Indian war raid were to be returned to Hollywood and processed as “transparencies”—background scenes projected onto a screen in front of which performers move.<sup>321</sup> The audience's sustained awareness of the Cheyenne war party, waiting in the background for the ideal moment to attack, was achieved by unceasing artillery fire. The puffs of smoke that span the frame and the relentless gunfire ricocheting on the soundtrack heighten this absorbing sense of battle sought by DeMille. The director's eye-level close-ups of Hickok and Buffalo Bill taking cover as bullets whiz by and over the shoulder shots of the cavalry picking off Cheyenne in the distance further enhance the spectator's illusion of partaking in combat.<sup>322</sup> As Paul Ricoeur has suggested, the experience of an historical work is itself a form of “reenactment,” for

audiences imaginatively “enter” a reconstructed past world as an attempt to grasp the feelings and decisions that instigated events.<sup>323</sup>

DeMille was inspired by Remington’s 1897 painting, *Through the Smoke Sprang the Daring Soldier*, a stirring vision of military sacrifice that anticipated these compositional arrangements geared towards intimate viewer involvement.<sup>324</sup> Art historian Doreen Bolger Burke has noted how “In works like *Through the Smoke Sprang the Daring Soldier* . . . the viewer seems to participate in the battle: standing with the soldiers, who occupy the foreground, he faces an unseen enemy.”<sup>325</sup> *The Plainsman*’s ambush also resonates with Alison Griffith’s observations on nineteenth-century historical panoramas and how viewers of these colossal spectacles vicariously played the role of “historical witness or war reporter” and were thus able “to re-experience an event of enormous national significance [and] step inside history.”<sup>326</sup> A Chicago exhibitor was similarly engrossed in *The Plainsman*: “The Indians were great. You have a feeling you’re in the picture yourself.”<sup>327</sup> DeMille’s frontier epic thus affirms how the cinema amplifies this art-historical tradition of imaginary involvement in a re-presented past. Nineteenth-century media like historical panoramas and Remington paintings not only “created expectations of verisimilitude and spectacle” for contemporary historical films, as Robert Burgoyne points out, but highlight the symbiosis between the public’s desire to viscerally experience the past and the success of DeMille’s immersive approach to depicting battle.<sup>328</sup>

This sense of participation, so integral to the epic film experience, is firmly rooted in the romantic historical tradition. This is worth stressing because DeMille, like his romantic predecessors, believed that the human circumstances and moral lessons of the

past are most affecting if presented with dramatic immediacy. Levin, for example, notes how Francis Parkman's picaresque renderings of exploration in the Americas aim "to put the reader on the scene—inside a small stockade attacked by Iroquois, bivouacking with a French and India war party, trying to sleep in a reeking Indian hut."<sup>329</sup> Incidentally, Remington, who shared Parkman's penchant for the direct presentation of tense moments, was commissioned to illustrate the fourth edition of Parkman's *The Oregon Trail*, much to the author's delight.<sup>330</sup> And like Parkman, Prescott, and Remington, DeMille repeatedly orchestrates narrative moments of crisis in order to furnish the illusion of participation and to direct his audience's sympathies. In *Conquest of Mexico*, Prescott's dehumanized vision of the Aztecs, relayed from "the Spanish point of view, from which they appear as a wild mass"<sup>331</sup> structurally anticipates the grotesque close-ups and abstracted long shots of *The Plainsman*'s savages.

Yet in the romantic historical epic it is not only crucial to "put the reader on the scene" of battle through verisimilar spectacle but to convey as well the inner feelings of fighting men, the flesh and blood vessels of the work's moral principles. In *The Plainsman*, for instance, DeMille juxtaposes crowded wide shots of firing lines fending off Cheyenne with intimate close-ups of individual cavalymen. The director repeatedly turns away from the battle at large and zeros in on, for example, a humorous exchange between fellow soldiers or a moving display of individual valor, like when an elderly soldier, blinded by shrapnel, struggles to load muskets for his able-bodied comrades. Here, DeMille successfully conveys the destructive scale of battle and the humanity caught in its grips. The sequences above, to be sure, mirror Godwin's choreographic preferences: "A scene incessantly floating cannot instruct us. . . . I would stop the flying

figures, that I may mark them more clearly. There must be an exchange of real sentiments . . . There is a magnetical [sic] virtue in man, but there must be friction and heat before the virtue will operate.”<sup>332</sup> DeMille’s decoupage (isolating objects for their dramatic poignancy) not only enhances the audience’s sense of danger but deepens its compassion for the imperiled soldiers. Empathy for these characters, in turn, engenders sympathy for the timely values which they embody—camaraderie, patriotism, and the good-natured perseverance through overwhelming odds.

### **The Labors of Authenticity, or: “Who Cares About Historical Correctness?”**

As well as shedding light on the epic cinema’s affective rhetoric and historical presentism, *The Plainsman* offers instructive examples of how DeMille’s epics work to authenticate themselves in order to acquire the aura and persuasive power of historical documentation. The film’s production history reveals an impressive assortment of tactics by which DeMille and his research department sought the cultural cachet of literary History.

The well-publicized involvement of eye-witnesses in the technical process, for example, gave *The Plainsman* an appealing truth value. During pre-production DeMille advised Bill Pine, an associate producer involved in research, to “get a great many old scouts, historians and old Westerners and everybody else to make statements that are to be published prior to the opening of [*The Plainsman*] relative to the historical accuracy of the picture.”<sup>333</sup> DeMille’s research team was later instructed to “to dig up outstanding people . . . and well-knowns of the Buffalo Bill days for a series of articles.”<sup>334</sup> DeMille’s researchers discovered Jim Moore, a veteran of Wounded Knee and the last surviving



witness of Wild Bill's murder in Deadwood, South Dakota. Moore was summoned to *The Plainsman* set in order "to aid DeMille and see to it that the Bella Union saloon [where Wild Bill was slain] was reconstructed properly."<sup>335</sup> The participation of this elderly westerner was one step taken in DeMille's endeavor to silence critics who repeatedly questioned the veracity of his work. *The Oakland Tribune*, reporting from the set on the day of Moore's visit, emphasized the director's "perennial war with the critics on the matter of authenticity in his historical sequences," adding that Captain Moor's guidance would help guarantee that the reenactment of Wild Bill's death would be portrayed "with unimpeachable accuracy."<sup>336</sup> The *Los Angeles Times*, also on-set that day, noted how the former Indian fighter helped Gary Cooper refine his authentic behavior by "teaching [him] all about six shooters."<sup>337</sup> DeMille hoped his epic would soak up the aura associated with Moor's lived experience.

In addition to showcasing Moor's authentic input, Paramount publicized DeMille's restaging of Custer's Last Stand "on the actual site of the original battle."<sup>338</sup> The authentic historical scenery heightened the documentary value—the perceived referential bond between filmic representation and original historic event—of the action on-screen. The authenticity of the filmed battle was accented as well by DeMille's recruitment of the National Guard Cavalry of Wyoming, which happily volunteered its entire regiment for the three-day shoot, and the director's casting of "real Indians" from nearby reservations.<sup>339</sup> In fact, DeMille was fortunate enough to find two elder Cheyenne who participated in the *real* Custer Massacre.<sup>340</sup> Cheyennes Louis Dog and Stump Horn, the *Los Angeles Times* reported, "were used as actors and technical advisers for the Custer scene and the other Indian sequences in 'The Plainsman.'"<sup>341</sup> These impressively

authentic ingredients helped elicit the sense that DeMille and company were not simply performing history, but, as the studio proudly advertised, were actually “*re-fighting* the Custer Massacre.”<sup>342</sup> *New York Times* critic Frank S. Nugent, generally dubious of DeMille’s reconstructions, praised the film as “a picture in which small details are faithfully reproduced and established historical facts scrupulously rewritten.”<sup>343</sup> Indeed, DeMille spoke of his epic as “an authentic record” of the opening of the frontier.<sup>344</sup> Welford Beaton of *The Hollywood Spectator* agreed, concluding that *The Plainsman* “is a valuable historical document to make future generations of Americans realize what they owe to a past generation of brave men and loyal women.”<sup>345</sup>

DeMille was undoubtedly delighted when he read affirmations of the film’s authenticity from people like H. L. Hallett, a native plainsman in his late-eighties. “I’ve seen everything you put in that picture,” Hallett proclaimed, “It’s a true life of the plains.” Judge Dunker, a resident of the Black Hills since the early 1880s, echoed Hallet: “[The] picture is true to life.”<sup>346</sup> Previewing the film in “towns and cities intimately associated”<sup>347</sup> with the film’s milieu was an effective publicity maneuver, as acclaim from *actual* plainsmen further embellished the film’s historical value. On December 1, 1936, DeMille left Hollywood for a “transcontinental preview tour” that targeted states connected to the film’s historical background.<sup>348</sup> DeMille prefaced each screening with laudatory words on the nation’s pioneers—some of whom were sitting in the audience. Preview cards were distributed so audience members could voice their opinions. Many trumpeted the praise DeMille wanted to hear—and publicize. O. L. Mills of Dallas wrote that *The Plainsman* was the “Finest picture I have witnessed depicting the Frontier.” Anonymous of Omaha who “has served many years on these same plains . . . thought it

[was] the best portrayed of the customs of the ancient west we have ever seen.” Others admired the film’s educational merits. The nation “needs more historical pictures like this one,” a Dallas spectator proclaimed. Mrs. J. J. McCarthur, also from Dallas, observed how “The historical background [was] quite correct,” adding that the film “should go down in history as valuable educationally and in a class with [the great silent western] Covered Wagon.” Mrs. Grace Butler, a schoolteacher from Houston, saw the film as “a marvelous history lesson[,] even for elementary children.”<sup>349</sup>



3.1 – *The Plainsman*, “valuable educationally”

Not all plains dwellers were so approving, however. Susan of Houston was unconvinced that DeMille significantly elevated the western genre: “Same Old Stuff Cecile Old Boy—Indians Vs. Cowboys + A Little Lovin.” Others weren’t persuaded by the film’s claims to authenticity. “As a biographical sketch it is rather faulty,” wrote C. R. Lister of Dallas. John Conway, a gun enthusiast from Omaha, noted how the real “Wild Bill used [a] swivel holster, one only, not a 2-gun” like Cooper wears in the picture. Others would have preferred a less sanitized picture of the Old West. A Denver audience member felt that Jimmie Ellison, who played Buffalo Bill, showed “good acting

[skill], but his face was too clean.” Mrs. M. J. Kahn of Denver also would have liked a less beautified Buffalo Bill: “the boy who played Bill Cody was . . . too feminine and weak.” Others objected to the glamour of Calamity Jane. Texan J. W. Buckett remarked how “Jean Arthur would be much more convincing as Calamity Jane if her hair were tousled some and if her face did not usually look like she had just left a beauty parlor.” Barney Oldfield of Nebraska’s *Lincoln Sunday Journal and Star* wondered “how on earth any actress, especially one of Jean Arthur’s smooth sophistication and unusual soft tongue, could re-enact with any faith the heavy holstered hoyden who chased Hickok wherever he went.”<sup>350</sup> For Houston’s F.G. Shoemaker, Jean Arthur’s charm diluted the film’s historical authenticity: “Calamity Jane was a trifle too nice to be historically correct.” Although the film’s protagonists were said to personify “the strength, virtues and character”<sup>351</sup> of both the nation’s pioneers and present-day inhabitants of the Plains, for many they remained all-too beautiful creatures of Tinseltown.

Authenticity, it should be said, had its obvious and necessary limits. Smaller town audiences of the Depression-era not only enjoyed the gratifying sense of historical continuity between legendary figures but also sought distraction from the general ugliness of 1930s America. For many, escapist urges outweighed appreciation for historical accuracy. Such an attitude was most pronounced in response to the film’s tragic ending, when Wild Bill is shot in the back, as in history, by the craven glory seeker Jack McCall. Ms. Alfred Jacoby of New Orleans pointed out how “the ending does not appeal to us *in these days and times* when there exists so much unhappiness and distress.” A Denver audience member opined, “I think it would be better to disregard History and make a happy ending.” A second Denver viewer rhetorically asked, “Why let the hero

die? Who cares about historical correctness?” Such sentiments spread throughout the New Orleans preview crowd, too. “A magnificent picture,” admitted the Crescent City’s Leo Hawks, “but I heard ladies all around . . . complain of the unhappy ending; they all think Gary [Cooper] should have lived for Calamity’s sake.”

Ultimately, *The Plainsman* was a financial achievement precisely for its multifaceted appeal.<sup>352</sup> It provided the luring aura of historical authenticity and the soothing refuge of historical make-believe, qualities that continue to define epic film spectatorship. In the end, DeMille said it best: “The picture will be history to those who look for that . . . and a Western to those who don’t.”<sup>353</sup>

The Hollywood epic, seen by many to reflect America’s material decadence and amnesia over its genocidal past, was framed and perceived rather contrarily in the late-1930s, as an artistic reflection of core New Deal principles like optimism, endurance, and public good will. Yet cultural friction between Hollywood and New Deal America remained evident. For one, DeMille touted the populist messages of *The Plainsman* while he scoffed at the prosaic traditions of the generic western, a beloved form of entertainment in the provincial regions the director was seemingly trying to win over. DeMille rejected an early draft of the script because it was merely “a straight Western.”<sup>354</sup> He later assured the cultured readers of *Stage* that they should not hesitate to see *The Plainsman* because it starkly “differs from any Western we have ever seen,” and then mockingly listed the generic trappings he made sure to avoid: “There is no half-breed . . . There is no snatching of the heroine off a runaway horse . . . There is no shooting out of the lights in the saloon . . . There isn’t a single sheriff with a star badge.”<sup>355</sup> DeMille’s genteel airs clashed with the ostensibly populist character of his

epic. Moreover, *The Plainsman*'s status as tribute to the stoic residents of the devastated Plains was weakened by the rise in admission fees that accompanied the film's "special release" in Omaha. The increased prices were met with anger and resistance and were quickly abandoned by the studio.<sup>356</sup> Apparently, Hammond Dale of the Omaha summarized the frustrations of many when he commented, "it cost too damn much to get into your 'theetah.'"<sup>357</sup> But nevertheless, Paramount's framing of the New Deal Hollywood epic as an encouraging symbol of American perseverance (predicated, of course, on big spending) reveals how epic form, by virtue of its grand spectacle and patriotic zeal, can simultaneously represent studio prestige and social awareness.<sup>358</sup>

#### **"Into the Depths of Futurity"—Allegory, Regeneration, Pedagogy**

In *Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema, and History*, Maria Wyke demonstrates how the epic film, as "a selectively represented past," provides a revealing window into cultural anxieties and political aspirations that exist at the time of an epic's production. Through this presentist critical perspective, as Burgoyne points out, "the past in historical films becomes an allegory of the present; the milieu in which the film was produced stamps every frame."<sup>359</sup> *The Plainsman*, a film in concrete dialogue with the New Deal era, is especially revealing of how the epic genre lends historical expression to contemporary cultural energies.

In a letter addressed to DeMille dated January 27, 1937, N. A. Hickok, a distant relative of Wild Bill, explained to the director how he is offended by the media's consistent portrayal of his deceased ancestor "as a Desperado, stage robber, cutthroat and bad man in general."<sup>360</sup> DeMille responded quickly, assuring Hickok that Wild Bill will

be depicted in *his* production as “a man of great patriotic fervor and not as a desperado,” and then added how in the character of Wild Bill “I have attempted to summarize the strength and character of all the great scouts.”<sup>361</sup> DeMille, of course, was making sure to preclude negative publicity that might arise from disgruntled relatives’ protests against his film. But his reply has important structural implications that should not be overlooked. It is particularly telling that DeMille emphasizes in the letter the emblematic nature of Wild Bill’s character. This self-consciously representative quality of Wild Bill (and the film’s other principal characters) guaranteed greater use-value for DeMille’s epic as national tribute. In a letter to a New Mexico exhibitor, for instance, DeMille characterized *The Plainsman* as his personal contribution “to the commemorative program honoring the pioneers Deming and Luna County.”<sup>362</sup> Likewise, in a correspondence to Buffalo Bill’s nephew, Ernest W. Cody, DeMille expressed how he is “trying to make *The Plainsman* in which Colonel Cody is one of the central characters an everlasting tribute to him *and* other great plainsman of his time.”<sup>363</sup>

This representative nature of *The Plainsman*’s protagonists—their metonymic relationship to a larger group—not only mitigated the creative burdens of biographical specificity but also facilitated the characters’ allegorical significance for the present-day. *The Plainsman* sheds considerable light on what might be seen as *the underlying politics of representativity in epic film discourse*: how remarkable feats of historical figures become both saleable spectacle and tacit celebrations of a contemporary people. Such allegorical implications are textually inscribed into *The Plainsman*’s structure, perhaps most notably in the film’s closing minutes, after Wild Bill is murdered.

In an intimate two-shot, Calamity Jane embraces the still body of Wild Bill and places a tender kiss on the dead man's lips. Jane, crying, lays her head down on her slain love's face. A slow dissolve then leads to a shot of an empty wheat field. The close-up of the sad embrace is briefly superimposed over the swaying stalks before the couple disappears into the harvest. Through Bill and Jane's "absorption" into the fertile land, the sequence metaphorically conveys the natural regeneration of the frontier spirit in American society. This intimation becomes explicit with film's the closing titles—"It shall be as it was in the past / Not with dreams, but with strength and courage / Shall a nation be molded to last"—which rest over a ghostly image of General Custer and Wild Bill on horseback, resolutely galloping towards the film's audience. The fallen characters' passage through this transcendental realm marks their triumphant emergence "into the depths of futurity."<sup>364</sup> *The Plainsman's* slain heroes, in the end, become heartening symbols of collective renewal for American audiences of the Great Depression.



### 3.2 – Tragic Romance/Regeneration



The *Plainsman*'s allegorical implications—how the pioneer spirit can be channeled by the present for the sake of a brighter future—were crystallized by the film's role in the classroom. Paramount distributed a truncated 16mm version of *The Plainsman*—renamed *The Valor of the Plains*—for exhibition in public schools nationwide. The didactic value of the scholastic adaptation—“the first educational film to be produced by a major studio for distribution to schools exclusively”<sup>365</sup>—was explicit. Ralph Jester, the Paramount Art Director who conceptualized and compiled the classroom version, told the *Los Angeles Times* how he “tried to show that courage is just as important today in battling floods, dust storms, and earthquakes as it was to pioneers 100 years ago.” An illustrated study guide was prepared as well so teachers could highlight the film's timely messages.<sup>366</sup>

Such didactic objectives were anticipated by the First Annual Buffalo Bill Essay Contest, sponsored by the Cody Club of Wyoming, an organization managed by Buffalo Bill's ancestors. The Essay Contest was part of the national commemoration of Buffalo Bill's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, which took place just months before *The Plainsman*'s premiere. Schoolchildren throughout the United States were invited to partake in the contest, and were instructed to write a brief essay honoring the life and achievements of the legendary westerner. The young author who could best articulate the good deeds and moral lessons available in Buffalo Bill's mythologized life would receive a \$25.00 reward from the Cody Club. The winning essay became property of the Cody Club and re-circulated in a “nation-wide entertainment and publicity” campaign dedicated to sparking interest in Buffalo Bill, “one of the most colorful figures in the history of the West.”<sup>367</sup>

DeMille attributed to his protagonists a similarly didactic “idealization of American motives.”<sup>368</sup> For DeMille, pedagogic virtue justified factual distortion. DeMille, in a letter to a relative of Wild Bill Hickok, explained how “While Hickok actually lost his life in a casual poker game . . . I have found it necessary to imbue that poker game with a patriotic motive.” (In the film, Hickok is shot in the back while detaining gun smugglers). DeMille then admitted that he has

always found it necessary in picturizing [sic] the life of any actual character to make the motivations of their various acts a little more noble than they sometimes were . . . William Cody and Wild Bill Hickok are both heroes in the minds of the American people, and I believe it of importance to build this heroism to a point beyond which it actually ran as an example for the youth of the country today.<sup>369</sup>

Feeding idealized perceptions of historical figures meant preserving their mythic signification—which, in the case of *The Plainsman*, meant upholding faith in American manifest destiny. Ultimately, DeMille’s didacticism worked to combat what Scandura calls the “depressive modernity” of the New Deal era, “an affective component of Americanism that exposes itself at those moments when the axioms of American culture and progressive modernity itself” are cast in doubt.<sup>370</sup> *The Plainsman* remains a striking example of how the DeMilleian epic, by way of its monumental visions of national growth and its assertive claims to historical accuracy, regional authenticity, and moral righteousness, could position itself within a particular moment in American history as a persuasive and inspiring didactic text.

## **Conclusion: The Plainsman and the Performance of Historical Continuity**

Yet *The Plainsman*'s youth objectives did not simply point to the inculcation of patriotic values. They also revealed how the epic cinema provokes the deeply-rooted social desire to reenact the past.<sup>371</sup> Under Paramount's instruction, for instance, young Native Americans from nearby reservations were invited to act with schoolchildren of Western states in historical episodes adapted from *The Plainsman*.<sup>372</sup> Such schoolhouse spectacle presented children with the exciting opportunity to imitate their ancestors as well as their idols from the movie; for the adults in the audience, the youthful reenactment of Western expansion gestured reassuringly towards the preservation of the pioneer spirit in New Deal America.<sup>373</sup> The public urge to perform history was demonstrated as well through Paramount's exploitation tie-up with the Boy Scouts of America—"the biggest tie-up ever effected on any picture!" Paramount encouraged Scouts to hold pageants and parades near theaters screening *The Plainsman*, and "to scour surrounding territory for old relics having any relation to the picture" for use in theater lobbies displays.<sup>374</sup> Paramount was convinced that *The Plainsman*'s historical subject matter would appeal to the theatrical antimodernism of the Boys Scouts of America. The Boy Scout tradition—with its weekend escapades of adventure and self-reliance and ceremonial powwows in affiliate programs like the Order of the Arrow—can indeed be seen as an ongoing reenactment of an idealized, pre-industrial yesteryear. Street parades and artifact hunts gave Scouts the opportunity to experience the past in a tangible, performative fashion. Although such tie-ups were motivated first and foremost by studio profit maximization (Scouts volunteer labor mitigated publicity costs and eye-catching ads in *Boys Life*, America's largest youth publication, significantly enhanced the film's



Sumiko Higashi has demonstrated how DeMille's historical imagery was a garish reflection of American consumerism of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Writing on the similarities between civic pageantry of the early 1900s and DeMille's silent historical spectacles, Higashi observes how the "selective and pragmatic approach to history in terms of its present usefulness had implications not only for an agenda of democratic reform but also for the commodification of the past as a form of commercial amusement."<sup>376</sup> DeMille—Hollywood's "architect of modern consumption"—proved that "even religious or spiritual uplift was subject to commodification" with his Orientalist biblical allegory, *The Ten Commandments* (1923).<sup>377</sup> The filmmaker's extravagant endorsement of material consumption persisted into the sound era, where DeMille "continued to reinforce consumer values by representing history ... as a magnificent spectacle for visual appropriation" that was ripe for intriguing marketing tie-ups.<sup>378</sup> *The Plainsman* was no exception. For instance, the buckskin jacket worn by Jean Arthur in the film was entered into a fashion show at the Waldorf Astoria.<sup>379</sup> Photographs showing Arthur in that same costume were used at women's stores to promote the season's line of leather jackets. Paramount also planned a glove tie-up in which "any of the stills of Jean Arthur in which her gauntlets are prominently shown" were to be hung in department stores. The studio devised male-targeted tie-ups as well. Stills of Gary Cooper seated in an antique barber's chair adorned the windows of local barbershops and pictures of James Ellison as Buffalo Bill standing beside vintage suitcases decorated the walls of luggage vendors.<sup>380</sup>

Rather than see these marketing stunts as merely indicative of a culture's acquiescence to corporate pseudo-needs I would like to conclude by observing the social

impulses that compelled Americans of the thirties to, quite literally, step inside history's clothes. Like the Wyoming Cavalry's enthusiastic participation in DeMille's restaging of the Custer Massacre or the youthful pageantry in honor of *The Plainsman*, the social exhibition of frontier garb became a self-defining act that put on display one's perceived likeness to admirable historical figures. And like DeMille's western epic, this historical self-fashioning became a statement on the presence of the frontier ethos in present-day America.<sup>381</sup> Commercialized period dress provided the means to a far more powerful commodity: a tangible sense of historical groundedness. As John Don Passos wrote, looking back on the 1930s: "a sense of continuity with generations before can stretch like a lifeline across the scary present."<sup>382</sup>

Vivian Sobchack has argued memorably for how the epic film, through its reflexive assertions of authority and significance by way of omniscient voice-overs and excessive duration and space, "opens up a temporal field that creates the general possibility for re-cognizing oneself as a historical subject of a particular kind."<sup>383</sup> Indeed, the forms public reenactment that accompanied *The Plainsman's* release are social expressions of historical being, which can either been realized through or reaffirmed by the epic film experience. What begins as an affective response to the genre's artistic conventions—a spectator's perceived affinities with estimable representative figures; the illusion of participation elicited by immersive spectacle; the impression of here-and-nowness achieved through authentic locations and performances—becomes an existential reminder of one's place in historical time. The phenomenological plurality of DeMille's frontier epic event—its ability to simultaneously stand as a hymn to the nation's pioneers, as an allegorical portrait of American resilience, and as a commemoration of Paramount's

industrial fortitude, which, in turn, signified the perseverance American capitalism—provided welcome diversion from the bleak realities of the Great Depression. *The Plainsman*'s overarching narratives of national commemoration, triumph over adversity, US industrial endurance reflexively pointed to the downcast yet ultimately hopeful culture of New Deal America. History, as William Godwin wrote, “takes away the cause of our depression,” a statement affirmed by the monumental fantasy of national regeneration that rests at the heart of DeMille's American Trilogy.<sup>384</sup>

## Chapter 4

### Traces of Torture: *The Godless Girl* and the Spectacle of Exposure

*There remains . . . a trace of  
'torture' in the modern mechanisms of  
criminal justice—a trace that has not been  
overcome, but which is enveloped, increasingly, by  
the non-corporal nature of the penal system.*<sup>385</sup>

*Stung, absolutely STUNG, is what I felt after seeing  
'The Godless Girl'*<sup>386</sup>

In late July of 1928, county prisoner Charles White wrote Cecil B. DeMille from his jail cell. White, a repeat offender from Iowa serving an unspecified sentence, had just read about DeMille's latest production, *The Godless Girl*, in a prison library copy of *Picture Play* magazine, and he was moved by the summary. Scheduled to premiere the next month, *Godless* was, as White recapped, a badly needed exposé of harsh conditions in “the reformatorys [sic] in this country of ours.” It was a topic White was all too familiar with, “having served a little better than three years in one . . . a place where Mr. A. Lincoln would roll over in his grave if he knew some of the treatment received by the inmates . . . after he worked so hard to do away with slavery.” White's gratitude for DeMille's undertaking was matched by his hope that the director had portrayed these institutions unflinchingly, “as life really is in the schools,” and that the film's terrible realism would inspire significant change.<sup>387</sup>

The inquiry found its way to DeMille's secretary, Gladys Rossen, who assured White that *Godless* was indeed “an earnest effort to improve conditions” in state reformatories, an effort that White could help by preparing “an affidavit outlining the conditions you met during the time you were in the reformatory.”<sup>388</sup> The film was



finished, but White's sworn statement could still have value in DeMille's evidentiary arsenal, a testimonial record of abuses suffered by juveniles in detention. Though allegedly marshaled to discourage severe methods in specific institutions, these oaths were ultimately denied concrete scandal-rousing potential as reenacted in DeMille's spectacle of disciplinary cruelty. The methodological model was Progressivist muckraking, but the end result, as this archival exposé will demonstrate, was a reflexively *sentimental* agitation, a public aim for the heart while the social problem in question was sure to hold ground.

### **DeMille and the Muckrake**

In 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt made his famous "The Man with the Muck Rake" speech, in which he assailed journalists keen on rousing scandal with questionable evidence. This breed of journalist, like the character from *Pilgrim's Progress* after whom Roosevelt named his speech, had made a perverse obsession of dirt-gazing, a soul-eroding commitment to looking downward at all "which is vile and debasing." Though careful to insist that his speech's purpose was not to lobby for an end to "relentless exposure of and attack upon every evil man," what Roosevelt was after remained clear: across-the-board besmirchment of the media's "wild preachers of unrest and discontent . . . the most dangerous opponents of real reform." Indeed, an "epidemic of indiscriminate assault upon character," Roosevelt concluded, had spread in the press to the point of "public calamity," desensitizing readers with excessive luridness and scaring "able men of normal sensitiveness" from "entering the public service" and thus from mitigating social problems "mud-slingers" appeared to care about.<sup>389</sup>

Roosevelt's ostensible plea for the American "soul" (really a preemptive debunking in "a period of great unrest" of news that might obstruct massive infrastructural growth) speaks to key issues related to the ethics and utility of social exposé, the representational tradition in which *Godless* would be framed upon release. Muckraking, of course, survived Roosevelt's attack, and the term itself was eventually embraced by reform-minded journalists to describe a proud, socially vital tradition. As the twentieth-century moved along, the practice distinguished itself against the "morbid and vicious" reportage that Roosevelt villainized, identifying with urgent Progressivist causes and insisting upon specified targets for public denigration as a methodological premise. Real, measurable change became the operative idea, and muckraking, as Louis Filler writes in his tome on subject, asserted itself culturally as a "potent matter of human anguish capable of mitigation."<sup>390</sup>

Agenda-building in the press, however, was pointless without legal or reformist allies carrying substantial clout. The goal, then, was to attract sympathy from parties powerful enough to rectify or reverse exposed wrongdoings in places like fetid slaughter houses or abusive asylums. The job was to make an injustice or atrocity not simply a matter of public knowledge but of public *blame*, so that if a problem endured it was clear who to picket, boycott, or indict in court. Muckraking would never fully elude the trappings of paternalism and exploitive sensationalism, but the important point here is that it became *codified* under a burden of measurable change, as the first "spark of outrage" in a program seeking social justice.<sup>391</sup>

The juvenile reform system was a frequent target of reformist ire during the “progressive flowering” of the early twentieth century. As the twenties dawned, reformers, compelled by figures like Thomas Mott Osborne, who exposed the rampant brutality within New York’s penitentiary system, pushed for a disciplinary overhaul in state reformatories, one sympathetic to “the psychology of crime,” to quote the preface of Sir Cyril Burt’s multi-volume study, *The Young Delinquent*.<sup>392</sup> The old system did little to distinguish young wrongdoers from adult offenders, punishing crimes brutally and with a lacking appreciation of circumstance, thus sowing the bitter seeds of recidivism. Progressive reform, by contrast, sought to understand delinquency’s social as well as domestic undercurrents as a means to refashioning young wrongdoers into productive citizens. The modern reform system would succeed only after a dramatic transference of rights, Progressivists argued, from “the right of society to protect itself from the disorderly and anti-social person [to] the right of the disorderly and anti-social person to be made orderly and socially valuable.”<sup>393</sup>

This transfer of rights insinuated a shift in blame as well: from the problem child to problematic environments. The analytical focus became the complex social engineering of the delinquent, and the routine finding was that modernity was letting young people down. The child, as Dr. William A. White concluded, “picks up the emotional flavor of the environment as effectively as a glass of milk in the ice-chest acquires the flavor of the onions that might be laying nearby.”<sup>394</sup> And by the twenties, the onion miasma had spread nation-wide. So the home, the school, and the delinquent reformatory—presumed bulwarks against juvenile rottenness but now targeted as

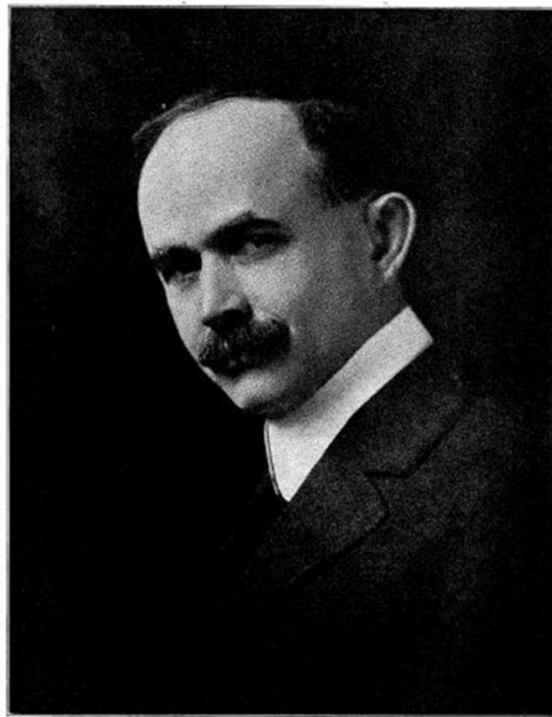
causes—met the interrogatory gaze of Progressivism’s fresh “criminological” methods against anachronistic cruelty.<sup>395</sup>

Toxic social influence became a defining motif of Progressivist literature on juvenile reform, and its most impactful elaboration was perhaps Judge Ben B. Lindsey’s *The Revolt of Modern Youth*, published in 1925. Here, Lindsey, the chief architect of the first US juvenile system, casts a jaundiced eye at the repressive mindset of America’s educational and reformist institutions. The book’s central grievance rested in the “systematized hypocrisy and cant” of adults, manifest in a prevailing unwillingness to engage frankly in discussions on “uncomfortable” but urgent topics that affected modern-day youth, like illegal boozing and “heavy petting.”<sup>396</sup> A “conspiracy of silence” had become the authoritative status-quo, Lindsay concluded, and it had made “unmitigated fear and distrust” the main culprit in the *reactively* delinquent behavior that Lindsey handled so frequently in court.<sup>397</sup> Lindsey upped the ante with his personal variation on the Progressive social thesis, framing bashful, puritanical authority as the source of a collective madness that will prove irreversible if left unrooted:

A child may be likened, indeed, to a naturally sane person set down in a lunatic asylum run by adults for adults. From infancy he gets educated in the prevailing, age-old insanities; and he is counted worthy of stripes if he put them to the test of his naturally excellent reasoning powers. . . . The effect [is] a fiery and ill-considered rebellion against every rule of the place, the good rules and bad rules together. And in such revolt many court their destruction.<sup>398</sup>

Lindsey’s *Revolt*, which saw twelve reprintings and was endorsed by prominent public figures as an urgent “dose of truth” for “every parent,” epitomized the

Progressivist tactic of agitational visibility.<sup>399</sup> Though not muckraking per se, Lindsey's anecdotal polemic, marshalled over Lindsey's twelve years as court referee, evoked muckraking's exposé tenor by commanding readers' attention through first-hand revelations calibrated to shock. And because of his role in the system, Lindsey was a figure with sufficient power to push causes beyond the well-intended echo chamber of middle class gentility. "Progressive flowering," as Filler reminds us, "could not have occurred had there not been a meeting of minds and energies that reached from the bottom of the social order to the top . . . it needed its articulators, its evangelical figures, its interpreters. It needed also people who could cut out its programs and predictions, inspiring others into emulation."<sup>400</sup>



**JUDGE BEN B. LINDSEY**  
Lectures — Joint Debates

4.1 – Progressive reformer

DeMille asserted himself as one such “articulator,” a self-fashioned arbiter of change who could use his research acumen and celebrity brand to help fix reform schools. That, at least, was the pitch to reformers, including, in fact, the honorable Judge Lindsey, whom DeMille courted for dirt on violent youth groups at *Godless*’ outset. The pitch was made as well to the public, for whom DeMille posed as a Dickensian unveiler of reform school terror.<sup>401</sup> “DeMille Stands in the Boots of Dickens,” the *Portland Journal* announced, placing *Godless* within a Progressive exposé lineage through its revelation of “appalling facts” discovered over a “six month investigation of reformatories in over 20 states.” The reader, the article continued, might be surprised to learn that DeMille’s discoveries were not left in the “gruesome history of the dark ages,” atrocities of a decidedly “medieval” nature, including the “stringing up of thumbs, piercing under the finger nails, knockdowns with bare fists” and not to mention “the shackle, the water-cure, the ice-packed blanket, together with semi-starvation.”<sup>402</sup>

Other press statements highlighted the reformist agenda behind DeMille’s investigative tenacity, carried out with the hope of actually “Influencing [the] Reform System,” as one article insisted in light of DeMille’s partnership with a Governor-appointed “commission” designed to improve young inmates’ surroundings throughout California. Inspired allegedly by DeMille’s “remarkable fund of information gathered . . . in a sweeping investigation of reformatories throughout the country,” this governmental alliance made the “actual observations” of DeMille’s “own investigators” seem like part of a concretely reformist program.<sup>403</sup> Yet certain details on the commission vitiated *Godless*’ oft-repeated stance as a legally-gearred “indictment” of cruelties against youngsters.<sup>404</sup> For one, the commission’s reported intent was to “*establish* a model

institution,” meaning, of course, that such an institution did not yet exist and was therefore free from damning exposure. This plan for much needed improvement—which materialized well before *Godless*’ conception—implied a persistence of injustices in other reformatories, therefore, in spite of DeMille’s files of “definite proof” that could be used to combat them.<sup>405</sup>

So what was the *practical* objective behind these thorough investigations into reformatory misconduct, if not to advance its Progressivist amelioration in a measurable way? Again, the muckraking DeMille evoked publically sought to topple *specified* targets with besmirching disclosures; *Godless*, constructed upon observations “so revolting they will probably never be printed,” as Dorothy Donnell of *Motion Picture* magazine remarked after a privileged glimpse at the production’s “two immense books” of affidavits and reportage, boasted the proof but refused to finger point.

The remainder of this chapter is an attempt to grasp the ethos-building, institutional logic behind *Godless*’ surplus of evidence on the atrocious misdeeds of reform school authorities. The aim is not to retroactively scandalize DeMille for his Progressivist sleight-of-hand, encouraged, ironically, by abundant and compelling data that any change-driven muckraker would have drooled over. Rather, what I want to elucidate is the peculiar, epistemological conundrum that DeMille’s supposed exposé imposed onto his public: on the one hand, there was salable comfort in believing that the visibility DeMille brought to juvenile mistreatment will pressure reformatories to change their ways; this trusting view, however, was countered by a sense that reform school abuses exist ubiquitously but are vexingly beyond any public capacity to end or even locate them. What this spectacle of exposure symbolized, then, was *DeMille*’s accrued

institutional power to penetrate and visualize exclusive penal zones. *The Godless Girl* remains an odd yet revealing artifact of carceral visibility, textually abstracted from concrete historical geography but grounded empirically in DeMille's power to see and to let see.

### **On the Beat for DeMille**

*Godless* opens at an indistinct city high school, where the student body has been bitterly divided amongst pious Christians and rebellious atheists. The atheist sect, known as the "Godless Society" and run by a charismatic flapper named Judy (Lina Basquette), has gained considerable numbers through its efficient print propaganda campaign, which we see permeate the school as the film opens. Meanwhile, the Christian sect, led by a minister's son named Bob (George Duryea), grows determined to stymie the Atheist group's progress, but after their attempt to bust up a Godless Society meeting leads to the accidental death of a student, Bob and Judy are sent off to the reformatory. While detained, they undergo a litany of abuses, including strangulation, electrocution, and shackled solitary confinement, all carried out at the hands of a monstrous guard known as The Brute (Noah Beery). In a turn of events, however, both Bob and Judy are pardoned and released after risking their lives while extricating the Brute from a deadly situation during a reformatory fire.

*Godless* was far from DeMille's first venture into social problem film territory, and, to be sure, it wasn't even the first time he sent creative personnel to investigate life behind bars. In 1922, in preparation for *Manslaughter*, a morality tale about a speed-crazy socialite (played by Leatrice Joy) who's sent to prison after a fatal hit and run,



DeMille asked scenarist Jeanie Macpherson to find some “authentic prison atmosphere” for the film’s second half. How they achieved this is recalled in DeMille’s *Autobiography*: “Macpherson went to Detroit, stole a fur piece by prearrangement from a friend of hers, was arrested with the goods on her, and sent to jail.” MacPherson lasted only “three days in the Detroit lockup,” but that was apparently enough time to help make her protagonist’s stay in prison look plausible on film.<sup>406</sup>

Macpherson’s undercover lock-up is difficult to confirm, yet the integrity of her investigation is not what’s of interest here. What matters for this discussion is DeMille’s evolving, authorial inclination to connect a modern cinematic storyworld to the candid observations of a research team. Though DeMille began incorporating elements of both human interest news and social photography since directing 1915’s *The Kindred*, a tenement-set melodrama inspired by sentimental reportage on New York slums along with the stark photographic realism of Jacob Riis, *Godless* accomplished what McPherson’s panic had cut short while working on *Manslaughter*: an *exclusive*, institutional archive of investigative research to adapt for the screen.

McPherson would be hired as main writer on *Godless*, though, this time, she would not be forced to handle the dual tasks of investigative research and scenario drafting. This would have pushed the production well past what turned out to be its over-budget, year-plus schedule, especially considering that *Godless* was DeMille’s original “personal interest” project to be built from “as much data as possible . . . on boy’s and girl’s reformatories.”<sup>407</sup> And not just any data, but raw, inflammatory disclosures, “facts from boys and girls recently released whose confidence you may be able to obtain and whom you may be able to get to talk to you.”<sup>408</sup> Exposure before story, in other words:

narrative would have to graft its way onto the often-ghastly facts that crowded the screenwriter's desk as *Godless*' six month research effort unraveled.

Publicity indicated DeMille's stunned surprise at the brutalities his research envoys reported back with.<sup>409</sup> Yet production documents show that DeMille was not only well aware of rampant reformatory abuse but that he carried a wishlist of atrocities for his investigators to confirm. One dictation, for example, records DeMille's "urgent desire" to find an "institution which has a charged electric fence," a set piece that would be used to sadistic effect in the finished film. This corroborative urge is indicated as well by a memo entitled "Affidavits Which *Will Be* Obtained," a future-perfect mapping of tortuous reenactment, including: "Whipping," "Starvation discipline," and "'Guards menacing girls.'"<sup>410</sup>

Much of this corroborative labor was performed by a mysterious figure named Charles Myers, a reported private eye whose film credits appear to begin and end with *Godless*. Called "Mr. S" in publicity write-ups, "to protect him from the indignation of those who played host to him in his visits to the different reform schools of the country," Myers made a worthy DeMilleian gumshoe, describing abject conditions vividly and surreptitiously winning the confidence of locked up youths in order to extract the most "shocking bits" of information he could.<sup>411</sup> His investigations warrant thematized reconstruction, as they affirm the reflexively performed diligence of DeMille research labor in general, in spite of its extemporized pooling from diverse professions (theology, screenwriting, academia, and so on). Introducing himself to reformatory personnel as part of DeMille's "intelligence bureau," Myers embodied the remote, curiosity-driven

observation that enhanced the director's imaginary omniscience as he waded through data back in Hollywood.

Myers took an intensely literal approach to muckraking. Filth is almost everywhere in his reports, and its persistence registers twin structuring objectives. Muck's descriptive recurrence, for one, lent documentary force to the squalor DeMille wished to show on film. Second, and more subtly, unrelenting emphasis on muck betrays the investigator's conscious *narrativization of field space*, insistently bracketing observations with potential, cinematic resonance as symbol or spectacle.

To illustrate, let's join Myers at the Boys' Industrial School of Topeka, Kansas, a wretched institution that Myers recorded with the type of near-photographic precision that thrilled DeMille and his art department. We begin at the school house, where "13 or 14" boys have been "unloaded" after a grueling, eight-hour boiler room shift. Dog-tired, the boys funnel into class "with their hands and faces very dirty and hair unkempt" and assume their "old fashioned desks." Class begins, and the room is "locked from the outside with heavy Yale locks." Class is dismissed, and it's off to the Dining Room, a grimy mess hall that would test the appetite of the most insatiable eater:

The dining room and kitchen is in a very unsanitary condition . . . Each table has a white, dirty table cloth which looks as though it had not been changed for months. The dishes are dirty aluminum dishes and cups, very cheap silverware . . . boys who were waiting on tables had dirty overalls on, black shoes covered with manure and mud and in most cases no shoe strings . . . hands and faces dirty and hair not combed. Dirty blue shirts open at the neck . . . shirts looked as

though they had not been washed for weeks. Boys are on silence while eating.<sup>412</sup>

Next, in a Griffithian gesture of loaded contrast, we cut to the “separate dining room” of the guards, where dinner’s enjoyed on “neat clean table clothes [with] flowers on each” and is followed with “pies and other pastry.” The spatial shift makes Myers’s reportage profoundly cinematic, as situations are indexed descriptively to elaborate a film-specific argument against the reformatory’s inequity and thorough abjectness, deterrents, of course, to positive juvenile reform.

Myers’s observations represent an excessive salesmanship of misery, a disciplinarized execution of DeMillean exhaustiveness. DeMille’s power as both coordinator and editor of this research gets reaffirmed through his investigator deployments, therefore. As Foucault’s observed, power exerts itself most proficiently once it can back off a little, when its procedures and aims are carried out with machinic predictability, instilled thanks to a constant sense of power-based scrutiny.<sup>413</sup> Myers’s situation as looker-on implies similar scrutiny at a dual level: detail-targeted reconnaissance under the pressure of DeMille’s proxy gaze. Such programmatization of research made DeMille’s *physical* absence from the investigation scene no real impediment to an epistemology of inmate life, attained through “a single gaze able to see everything constantly.”<sup>414</sup>

Yet the wishful corroboration and tacit pre-scripting that *methodologically* dictated research deployments compelled DeMille to allege strategies of observational detachment. As *Godless*’ premiere drew close, for example, DeMille “leaked” news of his “secret investigations” of reformatories, performed, as the press reported, by a team of

“young men” dressed undercover “as inmates.”<sup>415</sup> There’s nothing in the research files to suggest that undercover work actually took place; what’s important, however, is the fantasy of spontaneous exposure implicit in this dream of invisible data gathering. Basing *Godless* in this imagined system of surveillance gave it an aura of appalling referentiality: behind each reenacted atrocity emerged the specter of solid facticity. This affirmed DeMille’s diligence with the muck rake, certainly, but doing so also left audiences vexing over the purpose in exposing atrocity without naming perpetrators. To this point, one preview audience member spoke volumes: “Agonizing on the screen is of no practical effect on the spectators.”<sup>416</sup>

Earlier, I referred to DeMille’s investigative goal of attaining affidavits for specified cruel acts. Myers, with fellow research staffer Emily McGaffey, a scenarist on loan from Metropolitan Studios who, back in 1916, helped DeMille establish the Famous Players-Lasky research department, satisfied these requests by tracking down reform school “graduates” residing in and around Los Angeles. The affidavits, in most cases, were simply sworn confirmations of what inmates had already recollected and what Myers and McGaffey had already seen “on the inside.” They rarely yielded fresh information, in other words, but reflected what Carlo Ginzburg, following Bakhtin, described as the *monologic*, power-validating repetition of legal inquisition, where “answers are quite often just an echo of the inquisitor’s questions.”<sup>417</sup> Yet the marshalling of affidavits is still worth pausing on for two major reasons. They episodically inflected the finished film, as a later section will illustrate, and they acquired audacious symbolism as “legally-binding” documents in an extra-legal, institutional context.

Voluntary statements of fact based on personal knowledge and given under oath to an authorized public official, affidavits can serve as evidence in a variety of legal contexts, from credit clearance to criminal prosecutions. Since an “affiant,” however, is not cross-examined while giving her statement, an affidavit carries less intrinsic evidential weight in criminal proceedings than do trial witness statements. This contingent nature of an affidavit, however—“restricted to times when no better evidence can be offered”—does not excuse the affiant from perjury if her statement is found to be willfully untrue. The oath, therefore, is key to the affidavit’s legitimacy, for it consciously brings penalty into the testimonial equation: perjury for the strictly secular or, for the devout, perjury coupled with the burden of penance.

This is the legal framework that DeMille casually hijacked. Given DeMille’s early insistence on legal neutrality, the appropriation should not be taken too seriously on legal grounds.<sup>418</sup> He may have dreamt about it, but DeMille could neither punish the perjurer in any real way nor could he smite the lying sinner from above. Not to mention, the affidavits were pre-scripted to substantiate cruelties that McGaffey and Myers had learned about already, recording them as report headings--in bold red ink--so DeMille could locate them immediately.<sup>419</sup> Thus any active dis-crediting of statements would have foiled DeMille’s exposure ideals. It also would have been a cold and possibly injurious public relations move to make against informants whose experiences should have been taken to heart given the commonality of reform school abuse.

So what to make of this legal posturing, of DeMille’s social installment of a parallel yet fictitious legal apparatus? It was a charade, undoubtedly, though one that

says much about DeMille's cultural performance as a bearer of both justice and shocking yet socially necessary spectacle. I want to argue that DeMille's mobilization of the affidavit process betrays the vital *corroborative stagecraft* of the DeMilleian event, which, in the case of *Godless*, was geared towards not only audiences seeking truth in spectacle but towards concerned Progressivists as well, supposed allies in the cause whom DeMille dismissed behind scenes as petty "complaining agencies."<sup>420</sup>

Alarmed by *Godless*' press campaign, a collective of east coast reformatory administrators known as the Welfare Council issued a joint statement of protest that accused DeMille of slander, falsification and "unjustly and improperly influenc[ing] the public mind."<sup>421</sup> DeMille, upon receiving the complaint, had a retort drafted for the review of industry press relations coordinator and MPPDA president, Will Hays, a letter which denied any intent to defame the reformatory system as a whole. The aim, as DeMille summarized it, was to call attention to only those "several institutions . . . throughout the country . . . which are far from progressive and in which the old corrective and abusive methods are still employed," adding, not surprisingly: "I have one or more affidavits substantiating every instance of such abusive methods as I show in the picture."<sup>422</sup>

After highlighting his "legal" evidence, DeMille pointed to the reform-oriented reasoning in recreating cruelties on-screen. The target, DeMille maintained, was not backwards institutions but *well-meaning* reform school authorities who've perhaps grown blind to misdeeds happening on their watch. "My purpose in making the picture," DeMille explained,

was to bring to the attention of those individuals and organizations *in authority*, who may be lax in their inspection, the true conditions of the institutions in their charge. . . . It was not, and is, not my desire or intention to inflame the citizenry of the country against such institutions or to ridicule such institutions in the eyes of the public.<sup>423</sup>

It's an odd appeasement, a rhetorical maneuver that suggests *conscious* perversion of exposé methodology. Traditionally, a mishandling of power is exposed soundly and forcefully so that the offending power can be removed by an agent of change; here, by sharp contrast, bad power is left to stand, barely with a slap on the wrist: we know what you're up to, DeMille appears to be saying, so maybe you should cut it out before anything serious happens to you. And, in fact, DeMille added that he could have made the offending institutions look a lot worse, as "Discretion was used in the incidents selected for filming. . . For example, the [concluding] incident of the young woman handcuffed to a bed while the reformatory burned was taken from an incident which occurred in a reformatory fire . . . and, according to the affidavit of his mother, the boy who was handcuffed to his bed during the reformatory fire was actually burned to death, [while we let our character live]." Finally, DeMille writes in closing, if you are one of the "many" institutions doing progressive, "splendid work," you should be grateful to us, for our disclosures of such horror only burnish your noble ways: "the film definitely states that [abuses] are not general, and I believe upon further consideration the Council will realize that showing the evils of certain institutions merely augments the progress and humanity of the others."<sup>424</sup>



The rejoinder indicates how a *provisional* Progressivism became a means to shocking, data-sourced spectacle, enduring atrocity notwithstanding. Indeed, internal communication makes clear that “protecting the picture from attack” by the “complaining agencies” would be DeMille’s only cause for “placing this information before any of the big newspaper syndicates.” Thus, while the press reported DeMille’s urgently-felt responsibility to expose the “alarming, and in some cases, appalling conditions” captured by the “investigations made by DeMille’s agents into the juvenile reform institutions,” production records index a staunch commitment to avoiding any leaks that “might create a scandal.”<sup>425</sup> Damning proof was held as mere collateral, therefore, and with counter-intuitive courtesy towards “those institutions that were guilty of misconduct,” who, DeMille reasoned, “should be given a chance to clean house themselves before having it all hashed over in the newspapers.”<sup>426</sup>

It’s an alarming dodge, one that betrays DeMille’s nominal exposé-ism and affirms his aggrandized imagining as a judicial authority. While mobilizing legal process to bolster his act of “indictment,” DeMille paradoxically implied that the law is all but irrelevant thanks to his personal intervention into reformatory cleanup. By sitting on evidence and shunning legal finger pointing, DeMille placed himself at the communicative terminal point of a Progressivist campaign, aping while artfully sidestepping practical jurisprudence. Evidence needn’t travel any further, the assumption went; the “spark of outrage” courtesy of DeMille will surge and billow into actual reform.

In social terms, the “*result* of research by DeMille agents in widely distributed sections of the country in actual reformatories” became an obscure, self-congratulatory

exposure, a catch-and-release muck raking.<sup>427</sup> Evidence, vast and amply provocative for widespread social consternation, stood detached from the guilty parties that produced it. Interestingly, DeMille seemed to anticipate blowback in alienating his proof this way, so he pushed for an alternative, *externalized* route to justice and improvement. The righteous indignation of the public (sparked, of course, only by attending *The Godless Girl*) would have to meet DeMille's production half-way, for the "evils [of the reformatory] are long entrenched" but beyond DeMille's "legal province." They "will not be done away with save by a hard fight by an indignant public."<sup>428</sup>

This burden of justice-realization is displaced more explicitly in *Godless' Motion Picture* magazine spotlight, where it's implied that DeMille will effectively hold his evidence hostage until public outcry is heard nationwide: "Facts, dates, names, and addresses will some day be given to the authorities if 'The Godless Girl' . . . should arouse the indignation of the country. . . . If [it] does not arouse the public it is *not the fault of the choice collection of facts*."<sup>429</sup> Thus DeMille not only unburdens himself from blaming mishandled institutions he's built cases solid against; he places blame on the public if reformatory terror carries on.

It's a peculiar concession to institutional powerlessness, considering DeMille's refrains of concern and rigor that encouraged him to construct a film upon "the most amazing collection of data concerning those institutions which are being mismanaged in a most deplorable manner."<sup>430</sup> I stress these deferrals not simply to impugn the ethics of *Godless*, a half-way exposé built on incriminating yet buried evidence, but because they gesture towards deeper paradoxes that research-based filmmakers and their audiences contend with. Indeed, confusion about the utility of DeMille's disclosures—divorced

from an authentic legal apparatus and left out as “footnotes” to plot-descriptive intertitles—is evident in *Godless*’ reception. An anonymous preview audience member, for example, was incredulous about DeMille’s reformist posture: “don’t try to delude people into believing that you intend to help right a moral wrong by basing your picture upon a vital topic, then proceed to lead them through a lot of mud just to make a picture.” Rose Stern of Pasadena felt duped, on top of being purposely subjected to on-screen horror: “[the film] holds interest only because it seems so terrible,” she opined, adding that it’s “almost a crime to show so much of the horrible, such as the electric fence,” without announcing their exact whereabouts. This charge of criminality, though hyperbolic, is revealingly ironic, since it paints DeMille’s *legal* intervention into reformatory’ *criminal* mismanagement as *criminally* misleading. Our reception record suggests that audiences indeed grew aware of *Godless*’ spectacular in-itselfness. Useful, agitational research retired as de-fanged entertainment, and people felt bated and conned.

This sentiment is expounded on with insight in Welford Beaton’s review for the middlebrow monthly, *Film Spectator*. It’s a loaded critique, revealing not only because it echoes preview audience skepticism towards DeMille’s reformist goals but also since it addresses ethical issues related to violent, agitational spectacle. *Godless*’ status as a half-way exposé—built on sound evidence but projecting phantom villains—goads Beaton. It’s not the fact that DeMille has “worked us up to a state of indignation over the evils he exposes” that offends Beaton; what piques him, rather, is how “C.B. was not brave enough to follow through to the end.” *Godless*, Beaton concludes, is “afraid of its own shadow.”<sup>431</sup>

I'm not sure exactly what Beaton meant by this, but the metaphor inspires constructive disentanglement. To be afraid of one's shadow: a cliché which figures irrational fright, an infantile lapse that makes one's outline something dreadfully Other, a life-force lurking in spite of all evasion maneuvers. So what is *Godless*' "shadow," then, and why has it provoked fear in its source, Cecil B. DeMille? Beaton offers a hint: "As long as I thought the exhibitions of cruelty were the children of DeMille's brain I was intrigued by them as examples of creative thinking, but when it was explained in a title that everything was true, which meant that the picture merely was copying old stuff, I lost interest in the scenes and resented being preached at."<sup>432</sup> Thus, an ethical distinction is drawn between fancy ("the children of DeMille's brain") and fact ("true, old stuff") as progenitors of screen imagery. The fanciful, more innocent projection, it's implied, indexes an aesthetic realm; its characters and situations, its terrible "shadows," are merely "examples of creative thinking" and therefore do not leave spectators agonizing over any factual reform school counterparts. This isn't the case with *Godless*, and, for Beaton, the vexing "fact that incidents are true . . . robs them of value as screen material."<sup>433</sup>

It's a sweeping claim, yet one that touches upon pertinent aesthetic-ethical issues. A few lines later, Beaton implies that DeMille's archive-spawned "shadow play" grew monstrous beyond DeMille's capacity to see it for the actuality it abstracted, to recognize it as anything but spectacle *despite* its rigorous underpinnings. Thus, Beaton concluded, "There is nothing constructive in the picture." DeMille's shadow phobia—evident in his refusal to confront his film's tragic origins—meant that his public carried a dreadful *near-knowledge* of reformatory abuse. Beaton lamented: "if we become excited

sufficiently to do battle for the cause, we are not told how to go about it.”<sup>434</sup> Caring, in other words, became shadowboxing.

### **“Too Bad to Look At...”**

Before the completion of *Godless*' script, DeMille held an “Expository and Descriptive Reading” for an audience of crew members and familiar colleagues, which he preceded by listing concerns related to the film's awful realism. “The story is very different from any story that we have ever told,” the director begins, “It savors a little of Dickens – possibly dangerously so.”<sup>435</sup> The Dickens allusion reaffirms DeMille's self-projected lineage of progressive exposure, yet it also reveals awareness of both the structural and ethical risks posed by *Godless*' shocking discoveries. Is the film “a diary” or “a drama”? DeMille asks his audience, with “diary” implying an episodic disjointedness resulting from the script's “amalgamation of incidents taken from thirty or forty reformatories.”<sup>436</sup> Cecil's brother William, a writer and director in Hollywood since the early teens who co-founded the University of Southern California's film school the year *Godless* hit screens, was the most vocal attendee when it came to structural complications attached to research. In particular, William noted how the plot seemed awkwardly subordinated to documented atrocities, or, in William's words, “the detail of your propaganda.” We “get the effect of the horror,” William conceded, but “the story doesn't progress [in] the reform school part.” And he adds how this delineation of horrors could become an ethical can of worms. By “showing the amount of horror that you do” in the absence of story logic, William submits, “you punish your audience pretty severely.”<sup>437</sup>

The use of “punish” is revealing, for it implies negligence in DeMille’s power to access and to expose. Cinematic “punishment” is warranted, William argues, when the payoff is clear, when “the amount of horror that you get them [the audience] to look at would make them arrive in a frame of mind . . . so that it would make the audience want to see it.”<sup>438</sup> It’s a telling (admittedly convoluted) point that makes the arrival at an enlightened “frame of mind” the payoff in subjecting oneself to on-screen horror. William was suspicious that this was the case, however, since each successive atrocity, as DeMille presented them, merely reduplicated a single message: “that a reform school is a brutal school.” Such ideological redundancy, in the end, compelled William to brand *Godless* “propaganda.” And even if well-intended, William remained unconvinced that such repeated, propagandistic exposure was well-suited for the screen. The medium’s graphic indexicality could make the experience overwhelming, which, as we saw, it proved to be for a number of spectators. “In other words,” William concluded, “people like to read about those things in the newspaper but they do not like to actually see them, look at them. In your very strenuous effort to try to do good in the way of propaganda you may find that you will be making your picture too ‘bad’ too look at.”<sup>439</sup>

Whereas William DeMille challenged his brother to reflect on his audience’s tolerance for cruel, episodically distributed spectacle, other participants puzzled over the film’s social utility. Robert Edeson, a favorite DeMille character actor since the early teens, raised the question of the intended “mass effect” behind all “the brutality.”<sup>440</sup> DeMille answered defensively, predicting that his exposures will provoke righteous anger in audiences. “After seeing [*Godless Girl*],” DeMille assured his guests, audiences “will want to kick over the institution itself.” Joseph Schildkraut, also a frequent DeMille

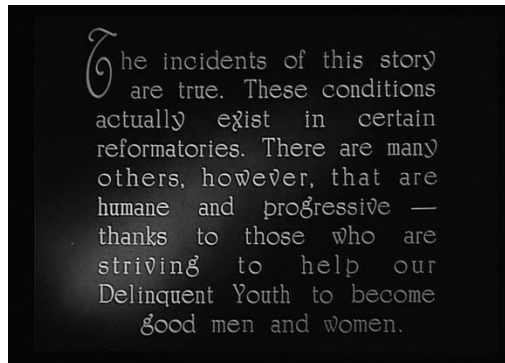
actor, disputed this assumption of fevered mobilization. “I do not think it was made quite clear,” Schildkraut observes, if “your intention is to “portray these institutions as they exist in the United States of America” or if the brutality is there “only to give the picture color.” If “your intention by publishing these things” is indeed polemical against “the way these institutions are run,” then “I do not think you can show enough of these atrocities.” But if the intent is to “only give the picture color,” Schildkraut concludes, “I think they should be left out.”<sup>441</sup> Alvin Wyckoff, a pioneering cinematographer long associated with DeMille, concurred in a near-distillation of Schildkraut’s critique: “I think you have to choose between propaganda and entertainment. If it was designed as entertainment, it struck me that there was quite a few details and brutalities that could be eliminated.”<sup>442</sup> Stalwart character actor and one-time reform schooler Charley West, however, submitted a defense of “the brutality shown,” reasoning that by helping “parents see how children are treated in those institutions” they might find ways to deal with missteps at home before sending them away.<sup>443</sup> Bertram Milhauser, a journeyman scenarist who’d go on to write installments for *Sherlock Holmes* at Universal in the 1940s, offered a more sanguine defense, arguing for the cathartic, empathy-building value of melodramatic violence:

as soon as you inform people of the situation, how bad a menace these brutal methods in the reformatory constitute, you will have so much sympathy from your audience that they will want to do away with that great menace, and after you have shown it to them as cruelly and violently as possible, your audience wants to see all kinds of death, disease and disaster visited upon those

responsible for it in that reformatory. . .that is your plot; that is your interest, and that all makes mighty good melodrama.<sup>444</sup>

The evocation of melodrama, jarring at first blush, provides a helpful historical framework for considering *Godless*' unevenness as a work of film and as a supposed indictment. Sue Harper has pointed out how "Melodrama, like all genres, is historically specific. Stylistic flamboyance and emotional 'excess' may be its recurring features, but these will be structured in relation to . . . production conditions . . . and the precise historical period."<sup>445</sup> *Godless* boldly illustrates this historicity, providing an instructive case for how melodrama circulated in silent-era trade-speak to make sense of *extra-domestic* storyworlds in which the subjectivity of victimhood occasioned mercurial structure. Indeed, by mobilizing the trope of melodrama I'd like to clarify what I referred to earlier as *Godless*' politics of sentimental agitation, its quasi reform agenda rooted in sensational affect. DeMille's intervention, as it transpired *filmically*, did not stimulate the espoused cause but spectacularized its horrific preconditions, abstracting the problem of juvenile abuse in ways that induced coercive guilt and impotent dread in moviegoers who were unsure how to effect change. The film *stylistically* allegorizes the tension between affirmation and disavowal that was apparent in DeMille's research program, which was authentic as could be but was adapted cinematically into context-less spectacle. As one concerned pastor reflected: "The picture made me wonder . . . how many reform schools and penal institutions are like what you present, how many Christian people know about it, and what they are going to do about it."<sup>446</sup>





#### 4.2 – Disclaimer/Citation/Intertitle

##### “Not a religious film”?

The *Godless Girl*, it’s crucial to note, begins not as an “indictment” of reformatory mismanagement but of the “unlawful propaganda” that “School-corrupting atheists” distribute to their peers, as DeMille summarized the theme for one publication. The opening title card spells out the threat explicitly: “It is not generally known that there are Atheist Societies using the schools of the country as their battle-ground— attacking, through the Youth of the Nation, the beliefs that are sacred to most of the people.” The wording is telling in a few ways. First, it introduces *Godless* as a public exposure of this “not generally known” phenomenon of teen “Atheist Societies.” Tropes of warfare then appear to imply the severity of this threat along with atheism’s insidious capacity to spread itself through the innocent “Youth of the Nation,” leaving “sacred beliefs” in its destructive wake. Atheism’s shadowy machinery is then indicated as the film opens on a shot of an anonymous man’s hand removing bulletins from a printing press. A cut to a close-up brings the printed material into view—“Join the Godless Society—Kill the Bible”—before the sequence dissolves to a petite, feminine hand removing pamphlets from a tennis racket case and sending them through locker slits. A

full shot follows, and we see a girl of maybe thirteen dressed plainly in pinafore, distributing the recruitment literature with surreptitious caution. An off-screen glance suggests student traffic, and the girl hurriedly buttons her racket case and feigns absorption in a book. Students, meanwhile, open their lockers and discover what the young courier's left behind to read.

The sequence is built to make two key points. The graphic match of the anonymous printmaker's hand with that of the atheist bulletin girl *causally* unites the separate actions to suggest a diffuse, well-coordinated atheist program, the same one that presumably won over the young girl. Once an unwitting target of atheist propaganda, the girl is now its propagator. The girl, an active conspirator in the very machinery that "corrupted" her, becomes an emblem of tainted innocence, therefore, an idea advanced by the girl's modest attire and tennis racket, once used for innocent sport, we assume, not blasphemous solicitation.

After establishing the collaborative efficiency of the atheist network, we meet the agent behind it, Judy, the eponymous character who we first see outside school furtively rallying classmates for a "Godless Society" meeting to be held that night. Some of Judy's pamphlets, however, have been turned over to the school principle, who's assured by the student body president, Bob the minister's son, that he will put an end to the Godless Society.

We arrive at the Society's meeting, where Judy rails against creationism before a rapt assembly that includes the pamphleteer girl and, with the help of a nimble-fingered monkey named Koko ("your cousin!" Judy quips), distributes literature endorsing a Godless "the Scientific Age." Meanwhile, Bob and his gang of atheist-busters, whom far

outnumber Judy's congregation of "little rebels," descend upon the meeting and command it to disperse. The Society doesn't budge and a riotous melee spills out into the stairwell. A virtuosic crane shot captures the brawl swelling upward four flights with flailing bodies crashing against the rails. Pressed against a rail near collapse, the pamphleteer girl's singled out amongst the fray. We watch the rail give in to body weight and the girl plummets to the floor.



#### 4.3 – Inciting incident: The Godless Society

If melodrama is distinguished by conspicuously stylized punctuation, then the pamphlet girl's fatal fall is especially noteworthy.<sup>447</sup> Retrospectively, the fall lends motivation to DeMille's crane shot flourish, applied, we realize, not to only clarify the brawl's size but the height of the girl's descent, rendered kinetically through a camera freefall that gives an embodied sense of the plunge. Matched eyelines and POVs abound in *Godless*, but here we're witnessing something quite different and less continuity-driven. The death drop—*Godless*' only mobile subjective shot—announces itself as something to be remembered for the duration of the film; it argues, stylistically, for the

posthumous story weight that this marginal character will acquire, not simply as the incident behind Bob and Judy's lockup but as the haunting presence that will compel Judy to open herself up to faith.

The cinematographic treatment of the girl's death is crucial as well for its conspicuous stylization. As the girl takes her dying breaths, she begs Judy, her atheist mentor, to "tell me you're wrong—I don't want this to be the end! . . . I'm scared!" Judy, despite her affection, cannot bring herself to forswear atheism. She shakes her head with regret, mouthing the words "There's nothing, nothing." A riot cop, meanwhile, catches sight of the display and crouches down, taking the dying girl's her hand and tenderly assuring her that she "has no call to be scared . . . He's waiting there to take you into His arms!" The scene then cuts to a ground-level shot of Judy and the cop huddling over the girl. We begin to notice a shift in the girl's expression, her eyes changing from dreadful terror to something like ecstatic rapture. A decorative title card with words layered over a celestial ray of light is cued ("Judy—He's right—There is something more—I see it—I see...") and we cut back to the previous three-shot of the huddle, this time with the girl's arm growing lifeless down the officer's sleeve. Finally, an aerial close-up of the girl's face shows her eyes set tranquilly heavenward, and, as the girl's eyes close and her body grows still, the shot's image quality turns from high key and sharply defined to abstractly out-of-focus.

The idea behind the abstraction is plain to see: the girl has "transitioned" to the beyond. The graphic figuration of what's to be taken as a spiritual passage, however, has deeper implications if read in light of DeMille's enunciative presence within the film's textual system, announced stylistically for what I'll suggest are thematically disparate

ends. The assertion of diegetic control is especially apparent in moments of often-excessive bracketing of researched detail, moments where the plot slows down so a prop can shine. When Judy receives her new inmate threads, for example, she's framed in close-up as she turns her shoe over and puzzles over a diamond-shape divot etched into her sole. A dialogue intertitle explains that "If you try a getaway—those cuts will leave tracks a blind man could see," relaying what DeMille discovered through research on escape restrictions but also establishing the systematic harshness of reformatory life.



4.4 – Clarifying the evidence

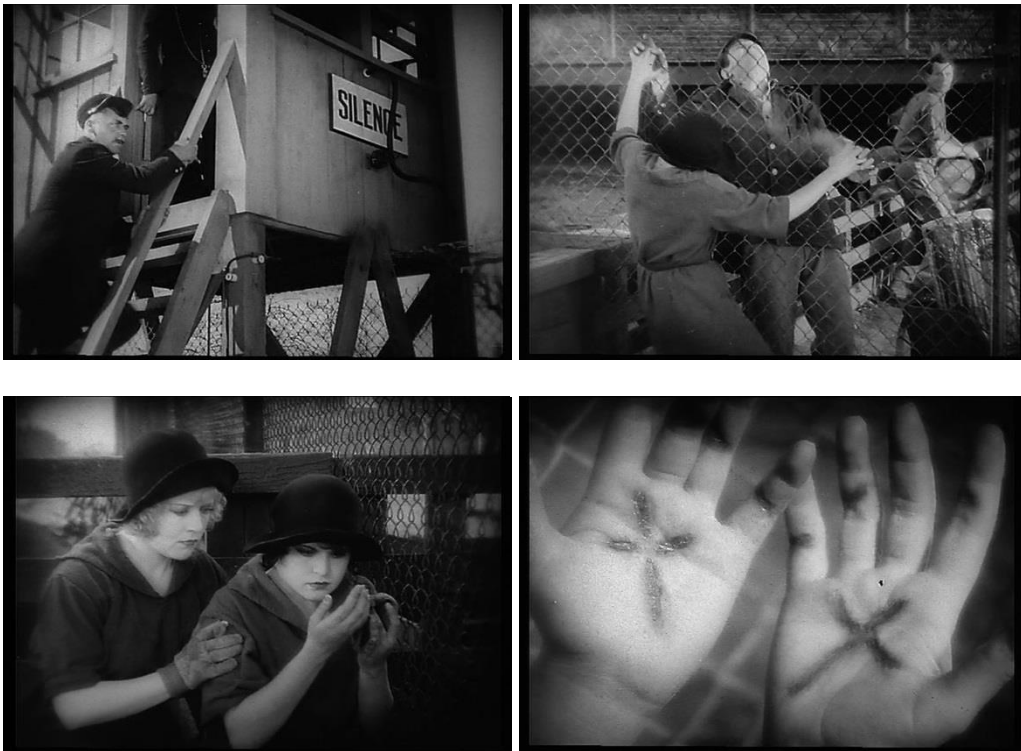
Judy and Bob's cluelessness makes them perfect entryways into the reformatory. Indeed, they're positioned as the spectator's proxy tourist, expressing stunned disbelief at watchtower rifles bearing down menacingly and towards odd and brutal punishments like the "Mud Horse," pre-scripted in Charles Myers's field notes as "an absurdly purposeless exercise wherein boys are forced to carry large stones back and forth from both ends of a stockade, without rest." If they drop, "fists and blackjacks preferred over whips."

While DeMille seeks to narrativize reality-drawn methods of punishment he also enunciates his ability to affirm the spiritual forces behind *Godless*' storyworld, explicit in

the pamphlet girl's final moments. Minutes before the girl's "transition," we shared a moment of visceral identification with her as she plummeted, the camera tracing the descent. The succeeding death scene presents a notably different identificatory structure, however. We're encouraged of course to feel for the girl as she dies on the floor, but we're not "placed in her shoes" as she expires physically. We don't experience the girl's near-death revelation through her embodied point-of-view but through an *external* figuration of divinity by the *film's* creator, DeMille, manipulating focus to evoke transcendental-ness. *Godless'* form suggests that DeMille has chosen to share not only his archive of reformatory abuse with his public but also his insight into the divine, his projected conviction that, as Judy as declares after escaping with Bob to an idyll in the woods, "*Someone* is running these things" [aside from crooked wardens and bullish guards, that is].<sup>448</sup>

The transcendental is most explicitly projected into document-drawn terror when the Brute, the maniacal guard alluded to earlier, electrocutes Bob and Judy as the unlikely couple clenches hands through an electrically charged fence. The scene begins with Bob and Judy spotting one another through the fence while pushing rubbish barrels over to a pig sty. Bob, wearing work gloves, notices Judy's bare hands and gallantly lobs his gloves over so Judy can protect her skin as she works. The Brute spies the toss, and continues watches suspiciously while the former adversaries meet face-to-face. Judy, trying to spare Bob punishment for losing his work attire, returns the gloves through the chain link. Bob stops her, however, and clasps her hand affectionately through the narrow opening. As the Brute sees this, his face grows sadistically inspired. A cut to a hanging sign—"Hands off Charged Fence"—clarifies his violent intentions. The editing

accelerates, cutting between Bob and Judy's obstructed embrace and the Brute, who races up to the watchtower where the fence's activation lever is found. Arriving before Bob and Judy release hands, the Brute gives the lever a forceful push. The current sends Bob and Judy writhing in pain, smoke wafting from clenched fingers. The Brute holds the lever in place, and we witness the electrocution from each side of the fence. Finally, after about twenty excruciating seconds, the Brute de-activates the fence. Bob and Judy collapse in a state of shock. The Brute detains Bob, cuffs him, and hauls him off to solitary confinement. While Bob's taken away, Judy looks at her injured hands and expresses puzzled astonishment. A point-of-view close-up reveals the source of Judy's response: cross-shaped stigmata seared onto each palm.



#### 4.5 – Divine intervention?

Though it narratively propels Judy's conversion, the divine branding seems weirdly cruel, even in *Godless*'s sadistic storyworld. It can (and was, as I'll show) be read as further cause to refuse God. Though hinting at the divine, the electrocution's imprint suggests a wrathful God, who discovers revelational opportunity in what DeMille spoke of as the Brute's perverse "punishing complex."<sup>449</sup> The stigmata are bully intervention, aggressive self-exposure that turns God and the Brute into unexpected allies. In the Expository and Descriptive Summary, DeMille motivates the Brute's behavior as resulting from misguided piety: "he believes that those boys were ordained to be punished, and, by God, he is going to punish them!" But the electrocution makes story sense only as religious conversion through punishment, in spite of the fact that it was *Bob*'s bible thumpers that sparked the melee that killed the pamphlet girl. The Brute, therefore, in spite of his demonic antics, becomes an ally in Judy's redemptive journey, the plot trajectory that dislodges the alleged indictment. Disbelief, not the appalling reformatory, becomes the target.

Structural contradictions and narrative deviations were both highlighted anxiously while *Godless* was being prepared. Virginia Bradford, a contracted star at DeMille Pictures invited to DeMille's Reading, questioned the plausibility of Judy's conversion inside these hellish surroundings. "Seems to me that there's nothing that happens there that would want to make people pray to God," Bradford opines, repeating in befuddlement, "I don't see how they would find God there."<sup>450</sup> Field researcher Emily McGaffey, who witnessed up close the abuses DeMille acted out during the Reading, warned her boss that by having Judy convert "We have gotten away from our big theme completely."<sup>451</sup> And such digression, McGaffey noted, weakens the value of the



researched violence. Assistant producer William Siström echoed McGaffey, arguing that the narrative inelegantly juxtaposes separate indictments:

The opening of the picture seems quite an elaborate frame-work for an attack on Atheism as it exists in high schools, then it seems to go abruptly right into the immediate discussion of the situation in connection with the reform schools, without much connection with what has gone before – Atheism in the high schools . . . I suppose you will take care of it . . . But personally I do not know where you feel that you will connect it up, or expect to climb back to it.<sup>452</sup>

DeMille, despite his repeated insistence that “I do not want to make a religious story,” can respond to Siström only by re-framing his narrative as a pious morality tale: “The only way we can tie it back . . . is to show that there is machinery for atheism being taught; then you show that Atheism will really not hold water, that it is no comfort in the terrific stress of life.”<sup>453</sup> Finally, and perhaps encouraged by Bertram Milhauser’s asides on melodrama’s emotionally productive irrationality (“the march of your melodramatic events is much more important than any theme,” he insists in DeMille’s defense) DeMille gives up on storyworld logic altogether and concludes: “I am afraid of boring my audience if I try too much to go into motive.”<sup>454</sup> But if Judy’s redemptive conversion was unquestioningly accepted by audiences, as DeMille hoped it would be, then it still betrayed holes in the apparent argument against reformatory violence. A Story Department analysis lays out the risk:

We started with the very the excellent hypothesis that reformatories in general are little less than institutions for encouraging crime and tending, through violence, towards the destruction of the good in youth. And yet we propose to

show a godless and lawless girl entering a reformatory, encountering all phases of its hideous violence, and yet coming out a redeemed and reformed young woman, who has found GOD. Our boy, Bob, enters the institution a fine, upstanding young fellow and, after running the gamut of reformatory tortures, he comes out just as fine and as upstanding as ever. In short, we seem to prove, contrary to our hypothesis, that reformatories, through the practice of violence and punishment, bring out the finer qualities of human beings. Hence, we are for them and for the advocacy of suffering as a means to regeneration.<sup>455</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The textual assimilation of these contradictions warrants detailed emphasis because it affirms the archive's supremacy in DeMille's filmic style. Atheism, to be sure, brought its own archive to the production effort, mainly to lend authenticity to *Godless* Society propagandista, which was re-created from DeMille's "copious library" acquired from actual "School-corrupting atheists."<sup>456</sup> But ultimately the atheist angle was, as Robert Birchard's suggested, a serendipitously topical way to shift from the high school to the reformatory setting, a move that lent melodramatic weight to Judy and Bob's lockup, framed perversely, in the end, as a redemptive crucible.<sup>457</sup> Thus it's important to keep in mind that *Godless* was conceived and executed as a *performative* exposé, a heuristic attempt at projecting DeMille's trademark, historical encyclopedism onto the modern-day backdrop of social problem film. DeMille, however, as I've tried to illustrate, methodologically distanced himself from the result-driven context-enlargement

that distinguished Progressivist writing on juvenile reform, abstracting his melodrama from what the Juvenile Judge Ben Lindsey spoke of as the larger “conditions which mold some lives to an evil conformation.”<sup>458</sup> Indeed, *Godless*, a production based in raw observation of institutional atrocity, would nevertheless have its audience forget, against Judge Lindsey’s advice, that “It is not merely brutalized wardens and keepers with low foreheads, fat jowls, and walrus moustaches that are responsible” for the reformatory’s abjectness. “These [guards] are responsible,” Judge Lindsey adds, “only to the extent that they are the kind of men willing to be employed to destroy and degrade . . . while men of fine feeling and judgement in other matters approve of such methods.”<sup>459</sup> And though one DeMille associate observed that by suggesting that “brutality comes from one individual” you obscure the systemic nature of reformatory injustice, DeMille shirked the structural connections that would have aligned his film more soundly with the muckraking tradition he referenced publically.<sup>460</sup>

*Godless* becomes defined by its melodramatic hermeticism in both process and style, “a thrilling combination,” as DeMille compatriot Louella Parsons called it, one sealed off from Progressivist commitment to reverse-engineering social problems with the hope of rectification.<sup>461</sup> And while, behind-the-scenes, DeMille distanced himself from the Progressivists he claimed inspiration from, he inadvertently allegorizes himself on-screen through the figure of the Brute, whose motiveless malignance *occasions* the cinematic implementation of horrifying evidence. Indeed, divorced from the novel contextualism that distinguished modern Progressivism, the Brute’s terror is reduced to a sadistic game, an enigmatic monster show. Ultimately, and because of this perverse ludicity, we discover alarmingly reflexive implications behind the Brute’s acts, based in a

documentary arsenal that worked to sustain a modern horror show, a spectacular symbol of DeMille's exclusive, institutional access to data of whatever form.



4.6 – The Brute

In closing, we should remember how the Classical Hollywood cinema, in accordance with the 1915 *Ohio v. Mutual* Supreme Court decision, was pressured to function as a strict purveyor of “harmless entertainment,” meaning that it was legally discouraged from substantial “engagement with the public sphere of political debate or cultural negation.”<sup>462</sup> This, as Lee Grieveson has made clear, deeply inflected how Hollywood could address current social problems in publicity settings and in the movies themselves. The Classical mode of production would have to operate at peace with being restricted discursively to “fictional goals and non-practical ends,” with restrictions of course loosened in times of war, when the government needed Hollywood’s skills and screens.<sup>463</sup> It could not, in other words, claim the freedom or the utility of the press. The credibility of Hollywood’s social address, research department toil notwithstanding, was preemptively weakened by the Court’s insistence on “a split between the referential and the pleasurable or entertaining functions of the cinema.”<sup>464</sup> DeMille’s *The Godless Girl*,

read along these strict legal parameters, remains a fascinating, frustrating, and self-consciously aberrant studio artifact, a means to authorial brand distinction that hinged upon archival access and a uniquely spectacularized capacity to propagate in the name of reform. *Godless* occupies an instructive place in DeMille's career for its attempt to parlay the encyclopedist method as committed muckraking, a *historiographic* projection that blurred out the stakes of genuine exposé work. But if *Godless* betrays anachronism in its melodramatic defanging of "indicting" evidence it also allegorizes the contingent melodrama that *is* the archive, whose sound and fury pulses expressionistically under the Classical style's detainment.

## Chapter 5

### Anachronism, Self-Inscription, the Pangs of Late Style: *Samson and Delilah* and *The Greatest Show on Earth*

*incredibly old-fashioned . . . in the dramatic and artistic sense. . . spectacle in the old silent-screen tradition of historical pageantry.*<sup>465</sup>

*all of us and all the things we wear make and build and write, our rituals and styles and folkways, are condemned to anachronism insofar as we and they endure into an estranging future.*<sup>466</sup>

In a 2008 episode of his weekly television cable broadcast, Texan evangelist Joel Osteen related a story of righteous violence that his mega-church congregation visibly relished. During a lecture on religious belief, a “progressive” teacher from a local high school challenged God, if he exists, to strike him dead right there in the classroom. The skeptical teacher stood silent for a moment, waiting in vain for the deadly blow from the heavens. But right before the teacher continued with his controversial lesson, a tremendous force sent him crashing to the floor. A defensive tackle from the football squad, apparently a soldier of faith on *and* off the field, objected to the theosophical implications of that day’s lesson and sprung from his desk, pummeling the doubting teacher like a quarterback abandoned by his offensive guards. The pious jock, staring down at his humiliated instructor, explained the lord’s inaction in the face of the teacher’s defiance: “*God was busy.*”

Osteen’s anecdote is noteworthy since it gestures towards a trepidatious faith in secular society and the powerful and necessary affective role spectacle continues to play in modern religion, whether it be in mega-church pyrotechnics or the cinema’s arsenal of

special effects and computer-generated imagery. It might be said that the heroic response of the Christian athlete to the philistine teacher reenacts the divinely inspired violence of the biblical hero Samson, the Hebrew strongman from the Book of Judges who toppled the towering Philistine temple of Dagon with his bare hands. The uproarious applause that the tale of the adolescent quasi-Samson received in Osteen's mega-church points to some of the pleasures—the visual allure and perverse catharsis of holy violence—and paradoxes—the perceived need to spectacularize the transcendental—that both energize and confuse Hollywood biblical epics, and, in particular, Cecil B. DeMille's 1949 release, *Samson and Delilah*.

DeMille's *Samson and Delilah* is the story of Samson (Victor Mature), a man who comes from a shepherding village under Philistine rule and has been blessed with superhuman strength, and Delilah (Hedy Lamarr), a ravishing Philistine beauty from the city of Timnah. Early in the film's narrative, Samson flouts Philistine law and decides to court Semadar (Angela Lansbury), the daughter of a Philistine nobleman named Tubal (William Farnum). Semedar's stunning and willful younger sister, Delilah, falls madly in love with Samson as she watches him court her older sister and kill a lion with his bare hands. Delilah professes her love but swears vengeance on Samson after he rejects her and burns down her village in Philistia, an act of revenge committed after Semedar is killed by a Philistine arrow intended for Samson at the couple's wedding feast. The spurred Delilah becomes courtesan of the sybaritic Saran of Gaza, who not only gives Delilah gifts of exotic fabrics and precious jewels but also control over the Philistine military strategy to capture Samson after she convinces the Saran that she is capable of extracting the secret behind Samson's inhuman physical strength. Delilah lures Samson,

who has been living as a bandit in the mountains ever since he escaped a brief imprisonment by the Philistine army, into her luxurious caravan and seduces the strongman into disclosing how his unshorn hair is the strength of his extraordinary power. Delilah then shears Samson's hair after he drinks a cup of drugged wine that she has set before him. Samson awakes disempowered in Philistine captivity and the sadistic general Ahtur (Henry Wilcoxon) has Samson's eyes removed with a fiery blade. The blind and weak Samson is then placed on public display in a Philistine granary where he is whipped into submission and forced to turn the millstone. Delilah, however, now tortured by guilt for her complicity in Samson's blindness, helps Samson escape and leads him to the Temple of Dagon, where crowds have gathered for a spectacle. Discovered, the sightless Hebrew is cruelly paraded before a Philistine audience, but Samson, once again inspired by God, destroys the temple with a great push of the columns, killing himself, Delilah, the Saran, and the Philistine spectators.

In his autobiography, Cecil B. DeMille responds to critics who have attacked him for “gingering up the Bible with large and lavish infusions of sex and violence,” defending himself by reminding his reader that his films are instructive morality tales and thus temptation should look—tempting.<sup>467</sup> The director maintains that we must “remember that Samson was swept by a surge of sexual passion but redeemed the breaking of his vows when, being blinded, at last he saw,” cautioning his readers against interpreting the Bible through an anachronistically purified lens, “that stained glass telescope which centuries of tradition and form have put between us and the men and women of flesh and blood who lived and wrote the bible.”<sup>468</sup> DeMille's self-defense is crucial for it points not only to an enduring critical denigration of “the large and lavish”



spectacle but also to the historical problem of *the visible* in religious cinema, this problem amplified by Paul Schrader's incredibly influential codification of what he termed a "transcendental film style."<sup>469</sup> Indeed, the central characteristics of such transcendental style avoid the lavish and spectacular in favor of a sparse mise-en-scene that indicates the spiritual protagonists' inability to find solace in the material realities of the everyday; scenic austerity that foregrounds spiritual mystery; and creative resistance to the visibly literal rendering of the miraculous. Embracing these characteristics, modern Western critics have either overlooked or denigrated as anachronistic films that present what theologian Gwenfair Adams calls the "multilayered" world of pre-modernity in which "visions," "direct encounters with or communications from the supernatural," are, indeed, a perceived reality.<sup>470</sup> Schrader's formal system was, by contrast, influenced by a theosophical modernism that stressed absurdity as an existential state and advocated for an irrational leap of faith as the only true means to God; it hinges on the *invisible* and on welcome alienation from the material world. Characters in the transcendental style "are condemned to estrangement: nothing on earth will placate their inner passion, because their passion does not come from earth."<sup>471</sup> Yet this "modern" theological mode of representation draws attention away from what has been the continuing cultural and phenomenological resonance that miraculous and spectacular religious "visions" and the perceived inspiration from above enjoy in the secular world. As Tom Gunning writes, modern media are perpetually torn between "archaic and progressive energies,"<sup>472</sup> a tension apparent in the ways in which an exemplary form of modern mass communication—the cinema—gravitates towards untimely and pre-modern modes of thought and perception.

This chapter continues by teasing out this conflict, starting with a discussion of the modern-spectacular forces that structurally and ideologically overpower *Samson and Delilah*'s historical moral argument for religious asceticism. These forces that disrupt the narrative's ingrained spiritual lessons on the dangerous seductions of material reality are represented by the triangulation of the most prominent figures in *Samson and Delilah*'s storyworld, all of whom reflect, in varying ways, what Georg Lukacs wrote of as historical representation's anachronistic "necessity" to provide insight into concepts and casual relationships that were likely obscure for historical participants.<sup>473</sup> Character one in this triangulation of disruptive, incongruous forces is Delilah, the seductive and devilish incarnation of fleshly desires with whom the spectator ultimately identifies and empathizes—despite the narrative's attempts at demonizing her and the materialism she represents. Next is the Saran of Gaza, who presents himself in DeMille's film as the compelling voice of modern absurdism. The Saran dryly undermines the narrative's transcendental lessons on the spiritual rewards of austerity and martyrdom, not only through his own consumption of the dramatic spectacle in which the film's audience also finds pleasure but also through his sage and ironic musings on life's ultimate meaninglessness.<sup>474</sup> Finally, there is Samson, the creator, whose ostensibly anti-modern discourse on faith and displays of miraculous and spectacular heroism become a reflexive hymn to both the Godlike powers of the film director and the spectacular visual pleasures of modern cinema. DeMille's biblical re-creation thus sermonizes against the temptations of material possessions and human flesh while it spectacularly celebrates the hedonistic materialism of both Delilah's flesh and of Philistine culture. As *New York Times* critic Bosley Crowther observed: "All of this . . . is quite in keeping with the

dictates of current imagery. . . . Mr. DeMille, the image-maker, has not let his modern public down.”<sup>475</sup> In sum, *Samson and Delilah*, a film explicitly about vision, brings into sharp relief the vexed relationship between spectacular historical imagery and cinematic discourse on the transcendental.

### **Sweeter than Honey/Stronger than a Lion**

“The name Delilah will be an everlasting curse on the lips of men.” These words, spoken by Samson after he has been disempowered and turned over to the Philistine army, are meant to reaffirm Delilah’s place in the cultural imaginary as the Old Testament’s most ruthless temptress. Indeed, as the Saran of Gaza observes, Hedy Lamarr’s personification of fleshly passion and selfish rage, prowling DeMille’s sets in revealing gowns of gold lamé, “could teach the devil new tricks.”<sup>476</sup> The wicked and materialistic Delilah is an explicit character foil to the righteous Hebrew Danites whose austerity and piety are meant to provide moral instruction for the modern-day viewer. Despite this thematic opposition between the devilish flesh and the heavenly spirit, however, *Samson and Delilah*’s spectacular visual discourse directs the spectator’s interest and identification away from the film’s religious moral exemplars. A later sequence in which Delilah, unaware of Samson’s blindness, teases the anguished prisoner at the mill stone with alluring poses, reaffirms the immense pleasures of sight and *not* those of the narrative’s anti-materialistic spiritual message—that after “being blinded, at last [Samson] saw.”<sup>477</sup> The identificatory rift between the spectator (who *can* admire Delilah’s spectacular form and costumes) and Samson (who sees only darkness) thus undermines the narrative’s attempt to follow the lead of the historic Danites and denigrate

vision and earthly beauty. Throughout DeMille's film not only are we compelled to relish Delilah's spectacular beauty but we are encouraged to identify with her desires because of the structural prominence of her gaze.

Delilah's entry into and ultimate dominance over the film's storyworld should be read alongside salient metaphors of vision, lust, and spirit that are introduced before the temptress appears in the film. It is productive, therefore, to explore the scene that directly precedes Delilah's introduction because it incorporates two metaphorically resonant symbols—the heart and the lion—that shed light on film's conflicted historical discourse on the transcendental. In this scene, Samson scales the walls of the garden in which Semadar is practicing her spear throwing. DeMille cuts from a point-of-view shot of Samson as he hoists himself up on the ridge of the stone complex to a medium shot of Semadar as she sends a spear flying off-screen. The sequence does not, as one might expect, reveal where the spear lands but instead cuts to a shot of Samson eyeing his athletic love interest from high above. The sound of the spear's landing (“thwp”) is heard over the image of the smitten strongman. This cut-away is narratologically revealing: DeMille, by substituting a shot of the spear's point of contact with the image of the charmed Samson, draws a metaphorical connection between Samson, the lion slayer, and the lion as hunter's prey—a figurative link strengthened by the joining of Samson's stare with the sound of the spear penetrating its target (as we quickly learn, a lion's skin stretched out across a surface of woven bark). “That's a good throw, but the lion's heart is on the other end,” Samson observes after Semadar throws a second spear, which, this time, we see hit the rear-end of the lion skin.

The above sequence not only establishes Samson's diegetic function as a source of scopophilic pleasure—his partially naked, muscled body is the visual target for men and women throughout the film—but also portends his bleak fate as the blind captive of the Saran of Gaza, chained to a rotating millstone in a sadistic spectacle for Philistine on-lookers. Earlier, the Danite Samson, guiltless over his romantic feelings for the Philistine Samedar, declares to his distraught mother that “A man must marry where his *heart* leads him,” to which the pious elder woman responds: “A man's heart can be *blind*, son.” Samson's mother's warning figuratively presents Samson's “lion's” heart—a metonym for lustful desire—as the cause of his misguided passion for the tawdry “woman at Timnah, a woman in silks and jewels.” Samson's physical attraction points to the spiritual “blindness” of the rebellious Danite hero. Thus it is telling how Samson's saccharine talk of his bleeding heart is often answered by statements pointing to his sensorial deprivation. For instance, after Samson announces his intentions to ask the Saran of Gaza for permission to marry Samedar, Samedar responds, “You have lost your senses.” “And my heart,” adds Samson, as he draws in for a kiss. Because of our extra-textual knowledge of Samson's imminent blindness, these connections between the heart and sensorial perception remind us of Samson's impending physical submission by the Philistine army and his symbolic castration (the Oedipal displacement of phallic dismemberment through the violent penetration of the eye sockets). Indeed, Samson clearly sees the “blindness of his heart”—this right before he is literally blinded by the Philistines: “Oh lord, my eyes did turn away from you to look upon the fleshpots of my enemies. Now you take away my sight that I may see more clearly.” The heart

represents a yearning for flesh and thus stands in thematic opposition to a spiritually enlightened, transcendental vision that is indifferent to a fleeting material reality.

Delilah's spectacular bodily presence and intense visual engagement with material reality derails the narrative's didactic objectives, however. Delilah's scopophilia, so prominent in the film's visual structure, overwhelms the narrative's alleged moral goal of highlighting the spiritual bankruptcy of fleshly desire. Delilah asserts herself into the narrative by flicking a plum pit at Samson as he courts Samedar in Tubal's garden. The symbolic differences between the objects sent airborne by the Philistine sisters (i.e. Samedar's spear and Delilah's plum pit) is telling with regard to the film's power-based structures of looking. Samedar's target practice suggest her *present* entitlement over Samson's affections and augurs the phallic penetration of his eye sockets by a sharp object; the purposeful flight of Delilah's plum pit—a yonic symbol of Delilah's sexual assertiveness—establishes the increasing scopic centrality of Delilah's desiring gaze as well as the gradual abatement of the historically spiritual lesson. The underlying erotics of DeMille's decoupage (dominated by reaction shots and eyeline glances) draws attention away from the transcendental and towards the sight of human flesh—both Delilah's and Samson's. Delilah occupies an elevated spot on the courtyard's wall, as did Samson earlier in the scene. The positioning of Delilah in the spatial region from which Samson has taken leave, indicates a transference of specular identification—from Samson to Delilah. Although earlier, the spectator joins Samson in his pursuit of the coquettish Samedar, the subjective energies that manage the viewer's attention, however, are usurped by Delilah upon her introduction into the story world. The spectator is sutured firmly into this empowered characters's point-of-view. As we

watch Delilah watch Samson we are complicit in her attempt to possess him. And so is DeMille, who seems perpetually torn between voyeuristic indulgence in the erotic profilmic space he's constructed and the pious morals ingrained into his source. Indeed, Samson's diegetic function as a spectacular creature to behold is highlighted in the early sequence in which Samson bends with ease a golden javelin that the Philistine General Ahtur has given Semadar. Ahtur indicates wonder and disbelief as Samson reshapes the intractable weapon, while Delilah relishes the muscular feat with sped-up breath and lust in her eyes.

The centrality of Delilah's diegetic spectatorship—which points to both Delilah's increasing control over the dramatic action and the de-centering of the moral argument against the flesh—is highlighted further in DeMille's revision of Samson's legendary brawl with a ferocious lion. In the Bible, Samson is alone when he discovers his preternatural strength after bare-handedly slaying a lion in the vineyards of Timnath. The skirmish is related in a single line—"he rent [the lion] as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand" (Judges 14:6)—and *nobody* watches. In DeMille's adaptation, Delilah stages the scuffle—and what a spectacle it is!<sup>478</sup> The sequence begins as Delilah promises to show Samson a shortcut to the lion's den only if he takes her along for the hunt. After the two characters find the lion in a mountainous shelter in the desert, Delilah takes a ringside seat atop of a fallen boulder. Samson discards the spear that Delilah offers him and walks towards the beast who—like the onlooker Delilah—is situated above him on a rocky incline. As Samson draws closer to the beast, the lion leaps down and sends the strongman falling. Man and beast tussle and Delilah scopes the action with a mixture of fright, concern, and erotic yearning. The modulating affect indicated by

Delilah's shifting facial expressions renders the emotional impulses motivating her viewing rather enigmatic. Is this simply love and desire, or are more menacing wishes being projected here? Indeed, DeMille's staging seems to affirm the latter, as Delilah's looking at Samson's male prowess seems as predatory as the lion's and her pose is catlike as she watches the fight from on high. This is prescient staging, for, as we learn, Delilah's thirst for pleasurable spectacle has tragic consequences for the Hebrew strongman. "Anything, only *let me watch*," says the spurred and vengeful Delilah later in the narrative when the Saran of Gaza asks if she has a preferred mode of public torture for the captive Samson.



#### 5.1 – Delilah, spectator/director

Delilah becomes a directorial force behind key story events, and shot transitions insinuate this causal sway. Take, for example, the sequence where a red hot blade nears Samson's eyes before it cuts to a close-up of Delilah's golden sandal resting on a table, a visual metonym for Samson's submission under Delilah. Or consider the sequence where we see the newly married Samson and Semadar join lips before a dissolve reveals a close-up of Delilah staring deviously into the distance. The dissolve lingers hauntingly over the doomed couple, reaffirming Delilah's structural configuration as cruel



puppeteer. Abstracted from any specific diegetic space, Delilah becomes an omniscient force, hovering ominously over the future recipients of her wrath.

Ultimately, Delilah's exceptional power over the storyworld is conflated with DeMille's authorial control over his filmic material. But DeMille not only "shows his hand" through Delilah's plotting but draws an intriguing parallel between Delilah—the woman who "could teach the devil new tricks"—and the "invisible God" whom Samson and the oppressed Danites worship. In a sequence right before Samson divulges the secret of his strength to Delilah, the two characters sit beneath the stars as Samson muses over God's Creation. "My power comes from Him," Samson remarks. "Is he here with you now?" asks Delilah, the skeptical materialist. "He's everywhere, in the wind, the sea, and the fire," responds Samson as he scans the night sky. By now, we are well aware of Samson's miraculous strength because of his slaying of the lion and his destruction of Delilah's village in Timnah. But Samson's influence on his environment is constrained by the burden of fixed spatial presence. Delilah's presence, on the other hand, has been figuratively staged as *Godlike* through the rhymed edits that indicate the forward motion of her revenge scheme as well as through strategic superimpositions that render Delilah an abstract force that haunts Samson. Moreover, not only do the film's surfaces celebrate the Philistine sensualism that Delilah embodies—and that the story condemns—but Delilah's "transcendental" ubiquity—her felt "presence" at times when she's absent—narratively overpowers the invisible God whose *direct* influence over events is embodied in Samson's *physicality*. Delilah, incarnation of flesh, lust, and decadence, is thus also a transcendent power in DeMille's film, with influence unbounded by time and space. But although we vicariously participate in Delilah's off-screen as well as on-

screen omnipresence, her character also bring us down to earth. Because DeMille's camera is so invested in her allure, when Delilah scolds the plain and virtuous Miriam (Olive Deering) for loving Samson as an idealized symbol, an empty vessel through which "a higher voice speaks" and not as the "man of flesh and blood" that Delilah sees, we're induced to sympathize with Delilah's unapologetically physical attraction. Through Delilah we find both transcendence and immanence—although, perhaps, not quite the sort that the narrative's moralism would warrant.

### **The Wisdom of Ants**

Whereas Delilah's passions and fleshly presence offer transgressive points of identification and pleasure in an ostensible morality tale, the Saran of Gaza—who is not present in the Bible—introduces an alternate, absurdist interpretation of a story that for centuries had taught asceticism and spiritual martyrdom. The Saran's flamboyant wardrobe (in public he sports gem-studded breastplates and ornate military helmets; in private, plush velvet robes with golden embroidery) places him comfortably inside his baroque Philistine kingdom; yet his detached and cynical attitude towards the narrative's action places him figuratively outside of the debauched world of Gaza. Whereas the decadence of the Gazan population is unreflective, the Saran's the accumulation of pleasurable moments is a conscious philosophical statement on the absurdity of seeking greater meaning in worldly events.<sup>479</sup> Indeed, the Saran is perpetually amused by other humans' desperate attachment to "greater purposes," such as the mad devotion that, at the end, forces Delilah to stand by Samson in the crumbling temple or the Danite people's enduring faith in their "leader" Samson, who has abandoned them.

The Saran of Gaza is introduced into DeMille's film as a man who has just missed a great show. Accompanied by black slaves, leashed hounds, and an assembly of noblemen in burnished armor, the Saran arrives just after Samson's battle with the unfortunate lion. The Saran, standing pompously on his golden chariot harnessed to three white steeds, flashes an annoyed look at the man responsible for ruining the Philistine's outdoor sporting plans for the day. Skeptical towards Delilah's account of Samson's feat—"Samson killed the lion with his bare hands! Never has there been such power in any man! Only a god could do what he did!"—the Saran commands his men to "examine the beast and find the mark of the javelin." The underlings examine the lion's corpse and confirm Delilah's story. The Saran stands contemplative, eventually realizing that, since hunting is no longer an option, an exhibition of Samson's strength might provide satisfactory diversion for the afternoon: "*I should like to see this strength.*" The Saran summons a beast of a man named Garmiskar (former pro wrestler William "Wee Willie" Davis), conveniently along for the day's hunt, to "break this boaster's bones." The two square off, and Samson effortlessly lifts the apish creature high above his head, spins him around, and throws him to the ground. The Saran is impressed and rewards the Danite with a prize of his choice. Samson asks for Semadar, amusing the Saran but inciting Delilah's fury.

The Saran's introduction to Samson has rich significance beyond its function as a plot catalyst (the granting of Semadar's hand to Samson being the initial provocation of Delilah's wrath). Indeed, the Saran functions as the archetypal agent of doubt in a film purportedly about faith, a character whose existence in the plot facilitates one of the biblical genre's definitive narrative trajectories. As Pamela Grace writes:

One typical narrative element of [the religious film] involves skeptics, doubters, or cynical characters, who make snide comments about religious belief near the beginning of the film, only to be proved wrong at the end. These characters, who are often witty, attractive, and worldly, are stand-ins for the modern viewer; they make it easier to accept ideas such as miracles and heaven at the conclusion of the film.<sup>480</sup>

However, although the Saran is indeed such a “witty, attractive, and worldly” skeptic, he never undergoes the epiphanic moment of contrition and spiritual clarity that the cynic in biblical film generally experiences. When the Saran figures out Samson and Delilah’s conspiracy to topple the temple of Dagon, he makes no attempt to stop the treacherous woman as she leads the blind and shackled man towards the temple’s columns. Instead, beneath the panicked din of the doomed crowd, the Saran fatalistically notes to himself, “She’s mocking us, not Samson.” Indeed, the Saran’s acknowledgement of his kingdom’s grim fate is met neither with dread nor with pathetic pleas for mercy but with a concise summary of the cataclysmic event’s causality: “The weak always band together to defeat the strong.” The Saran is also not an audience surrogate whose ultimate conversion makes fantastic imagery more palatable for sophisticated modern viewers; he’s a detached, endlessly amused spectator of man’s folly, an anachronistic but astute commentator on this turbulent storyworld.



## 5.2 – The Saran of Gaza

Unlike Delilah, whose volatile passions and fleshy desires we cannot help but identify with, we are affectively distanced from the Saran through his aloof and observational attitude towards diegetic events. In his autobiography, *Samson and Delilah* screenwriter Jesse Lasky, Jr. reminisced as to how “George Sanders, as the Saran of Gaza . . . had just the right touch of nonchalance to lift a cup in toast to Delilah—while Samson pulled the temple down on his head.”<sup>481</sup> The Saran stands before the spectacular materiality of Gaza (whether it be an available Delilah in a revealing silver dress or the collapse of the monumental statue of Dagon) with a studied insouciance. However, though we are not sutured to the Saran’s point-of-view (as we are to Delilah’s) we are nonetheless intrigued and likely persuaded by the haughty ruler’s distance and pragmatic insight into this world of gold and miracles.

Consider the scene in which the Saran, after a year’s search for the marauding Samson, advises his top general Ahtur to rethink his tactics through studying the behavior of ants. Ahtur, who has “flogged Danites, hung ‘em in chains, burned them,” has uncovered nothing but “lies and rumors” as to Samson’s whereabouts. When the general proclaims that a massive troop escalation is the best way to extract the Samson’s

whereabouts from the Danite populace, the Saran sighs imperiously and observes, “Like all soldiers, when you fail by the sword you ask for more swords,” adding: “You should study the ant.” Saran directs the hot-headed Ahtur’s eyes towards an ant farm modeled after a Gazan thoroughfare that stands between the two characters in the frame. “See how these master ants collect food from their slaves,” observes the Saran, “you might call them tax collectors.” The Saran, a student of behavior in all its incarnations, sees in the ants an intelligence his military lacks. Although the ruler of a great civilization, the Saran refuses to exalt the human species. Indeed, the tax hikes inspired by the master ants are levied against the Danites until they eventually direct the Philistine army to Samson. For the Saran, the rich discoveries of entomology only reaffirm the underlying emptiness of human existence. So let the temple fall.



### 5.3 – Farewell

#### **The Medium is the Message**

I have tried to demonstrate how Delilah serves as a magnetic point of entry into DeMille’s reconstruction and how she deflects attention from righteous, flat characters and from biblical instruction. I have also suggested how the Saran similarly thwarts the basic didacticism, articulating a compelling, near-nihilistic counter-reading of his world.

I would like to end by showing how *DeMille* uses Samson as an embodied analogue for the cinematic medium's spectacular appeal and Godlike formal abilities. The pre-modern cosmology of *Samson and Delilah*—a “multi-layered” universe in which the transcendental permeates the mundane—paradoxically justifies a spectacle of modern film technique that structurally competes with spiritual lessons and exemplifies the “temporal disjunction” that defines anachronistic discourse.<sup>482</sup>

According to Bosley Crowther, DeMille reached a hyper-stylistic apotheosis with his latest choice in historical subject matter:

[DeMille] has led his carpenters and actors and costumers and camera crews into the vast manufacture of a spectacle that out-Babels anything he's done. . . . At least that's the sizable impression which Mr. DeMille has achieved by bringing together the Old Testament and Technicolor for the first time. . . . In the dazzling displays of splendid costumes, of sumptuous settings and softly tinted flesh which Mr. DeMille's color cameras have brilliantly pageanted [sic] resides the theatrical pre-eminence of this more than two-hour-long film. . . . Eyes that have envisioned the Bible from stereopticon slides and from Sunday-school-lesson illustrations will see something new added here.<sup>483</sup>

It is revealing how Crowther's review places DeMille's biblical film at the end of a progressive genealogy (after illustrations and slides) of mediated transcendental vision. Indeed, the notion of “medium” acquires rich significance in *Samson and Delilah*. First, and most explicitly, Samson is a literal medium for God's will and divine action on earth. Second, Samson, whose extraordinary violence is visualized through cinematic trickery,

is a “medium” through which DeMille expresses the spectacular power of cinema, making God serve spectacle.

In this light, DeMille’s reenactment of Samson’s slaughter of Philistine soldiers with the jawbone of an ass involves a telling, reflexive analogy between director and God. In the valley in Lehi, a captive Samson, bound by rope, sends a plea to the sky above: “Let them see thy power, oh God!” The heavens respond with a terrifying lightning storm and Samson, inspired by Godly strength, tears apart the rope that connects him to General Ahtur’s chariot. DeMille then cuts in to separate close-ups of Samson’s hands and chest as he breaks apart his shackles. DeMille, by answering Samson’s plea to God (“Let me see thy power!”) and then asserting of control over plot detail through privileged cut-ins, reflexively portrays *himself* as enjoying near-divine power.

Such a reflexive gesture of Godlike control over a cinematic world lends novel meaning to an earlier question voiced by Ahtur right after Samson destroys the banquet hall in which Semadar has been struck dead by a Philistine arrow. The stunned Ahtur, half-conscious in the wreckage of the hall, asks himself, “What invisible power strikes through his arm?” Narratively speaking, it is, of course, the Judeo-Christian deity that is “speaking” through Samson’s violence. But it also through Samson’s grand heroics that *DeMille*, the creator, finds the expressive means for the enunciation of a monumental, artistic vision. The real question is, however, does DeMille’s voice drown out God’s in this apparent hymn to religious martyrdom?

DeMille’s *literal* voice—heard in an authoritative introductory voice-over—substitutes for what has been interpreted as the moment of “divine paternity” that begins



the biblical narrative of Samson. Samson's mother, simply called the Wife of Manoah in the Bible, is visited in a field by an angel of God who informs her that she will give birth to a son in spite of her barrenness.<sup>484</sup> Instead of beginning his film with the mysterious angel's visit that results in Samson's birth, however, DeMille opens his film by invisibly (transcendentally?) speaking over a miniature globe turning slowly on its axis inside a foggy, celestial space lit in patches of fluorescent blue and pink. Over this hallucinatory Technicolor image, DeMille relates a universal history of man, placing Samson within a lasting struggle against "forces that sought to enslave" the human race, like "fear-bred superstition . . . devil gods . . . the order of idolatry." As DeMille speaks, we see a museal presentation of pagan statues, which dissolves to a ground-level close-up of soldiers' silver boots marching in formation: "And tyranny rose," DeMille goes on, "grinding the human spirit beneath the conquer's heel." The voice-over not only points to what Gilles Deleuze has argued is "the deeply analogical or parallelist character of" the Hollywood epic, in which the struggles of Christianity against the "sick" and "decadent" societies of Babylon and Rome allegorize the founding of America, the "healthy nation-civilization."<sup>485</sup> It also emphatically demonstrates what Vivian Sobchack has described as the transcendental quality of the introductory voice-over in the Hollywood epic:

The narrators entailed by the genre to establish, repeat, and elaborate upon the dramatic representation call particular attention to their own personal (if cinematically) derived authority as a means of further authorizing and "authenticating" the dramatic material. Their offscreen voices are especially male, highly sonorous, and distinctively recognizable, marking these narrators of

History as literally transcendental—significant stars of such “celestial” stature that they, like the face of God, must not be seen.<sup>486</sup>

Thus DeMille’s introductory voice-over—which structurally replaces God’s role in Samson’s inception—reflexively situates the director in the film as the primary creative force from which life is given. This enunciative tug-of-war between the biblical instruction of Judeo-Christian morals and a spectacular discourse on materiality and sensation—so grippingly played out in the film through Delilah’s subjective dominance over the film’s scopic economy, the Saran of Gaza’s absurdist reading of his biblical surroundings, and DeMille-the-director’s figurations of divine creative power—is never fully reconciled. Indeed, DeMille seems to punish both his spectator and himself for finding this sort of sensual gratification through a transcendental lesson-narrative. This ambivalence is expressed most memorably in Samson’s blinding scene, where DeMille inserts the assaultive point-of-view angle showing the Philistine general’s fiery blade approach Samson’s eyes. The quality of the image grows increasingly blurry as the blade draws closer and closer to Samson (and to us). And while the camera explicitly situates the spectator within Samson’s terrible position it also situates DeMille, if we recall the director’s consistently enunciated control over the apparatus. When placed alongside the film’s captivatingly sensual imagery that provokes our admiration and pleasure, this shocking image of punishment reminds us of the irreconcilable energies—excess/austerity, absurdity/meaning, pleasure/shame—that pulse beneath DeMille’s classic, necessarily anachronistic expression of transcendental vision.



#### 5.4 – The cost of looking

##### **DeMille Joins the Circus: A Pathetic Survival Tale**

Whereas *Samson and Delilah* leaves us with an often-ironic, historically irreconcilable view of its spiritual storyworld, the anachronistic subtext of DeMille's next and second-to-last film, the circus docu-fiction *The Greatest Show on Earth* (1952), arises less from playful infelicity than from a conflicted relationship to the inexorability of time. An ode to the mobile circus of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey combine, *Greatest Show* was filmed just four years before sharp spikes in rail fees and, more expeditiously, television ratings forced America's last traveling "big top" to fold its tent for good. Even by 1949, when DeMille convinced Paramount to purchase the rights to use the Ringling's iconic "Greatest Show" handle for his own production title, the circus was seeming more and more like a quaint artifact. Despite forays into deco aesthetics, futuristic pageantry, and cross-promotional spectacle with General Motors, this national pastime was becoming, as circus historian Ernest Albrecht writes, "inherently old-fashioned, the wonder of a far less sophisticated age. It was a dinosaur . . . slowly starving to death."<sup>487</sup> While the natural scale and dazzle of the circus made Hollywood's "old sachem of sensation" feel "finally and completely at home," as an

important reviewer pointed out, I would add that DeMille felt “at home” there because of a shared sense of estrangement, reflected in an anachronistic “late style” that foretells the leave-taking of both the circus and the veteran filmmaker.

In a classic essay, Thomas Greene poses a constructive question for scholars of anachronism, which, for Greene, suggests a textualized “clash of period styles or mentalities.”<sup>488</sup> Works betray anachronism, as Greene argues, not simply through untimely malapropism or inaccurate period detail but in reflexive gestures towards a work’s own “datedness” at the time of production. Rather than reduce the sign of anachronism to an embarrassing blemish, therefore, scholars might assess it as a logical creative reflex triggered by an alienating moment in time. In doing so, the methodological question becomes *not* how well a text reconstructs an era’s documented culture but in what formal ways “a text deals with its own datedness, the pathos of its future estrangement?”<sup>489</sup> And, as Greene encourages, it’s through this “superannuated character” of specific works—relics-in-waiting in existential conflict with an alienating now—where anachronism becomes a productive trope for grasping “late style” works characterized by melancholy, narrative irresolution, and a nostalgic luxuriation in old-fashioned forms.

Following Greene, I want to close this dissertation by arguing that DeMille’s late-career, actuality-based circus film marked a highpoint in the director’s ongoing reach for documentary authority. The documentary integrity of *Greatest Show*, however, aside from being a teleological aesthetic realization, became a defining source of thematic tension. The film’s preservational urgency, as I’ll show, reflected a twin case of

imminent cultural extinction. Indeed, this constitutive tension—between endurance and obsolescence, survival and death—is thematized through the varied patterns of movement, stasis, and scale that allegorically structure DeMille’s wishfully vital portrait of circus life in the 1950s.

The *Greatest Show* opens with DeMille introducing us to the circus in his patented omniscient voice-over, “the pied piper whose magic tune leads children of all ages.” Mobile camera work, from the film’s opening minutes, affirms the director’s wish to convey not only the expansiveness of the Ringling Bros’ operation but the visceral energy of circus spectacle. As DeMille familiarizes us with the show, we see static aerial views of the bustling outdoor midway before a drooping crane shot transports us inside the circus tent and situates a montage of “whirling thrills of rhythm, excitement, grace, of daring and blaring and dance!” The tonal message, right away, becomes rhythm and vitality as DeMille’s sprightly cataloguing of circus activity proceeds in harmony with the director’s bouncy cadence.

The specter of death, however, is soon projected onto this scene of gaiety and life, captured observationally at the Ringlings’ Sarasota headquarters. Though we’re told that this “mechanized army on wheels” can “roll over any obstacle in its path,” we’re informed as well how “death is constantly watching” over high-flying feats. Only “one frail rope,” we learn, or “one weak link” can harbor deadly consequences. DeMille manages to regain his upbeat, sing-songy tenor when he insists upon the circus’ determination to “smash relentlessly” forward in spite of all obstacles, but we’re compelled, however, to remember this darker concession to death’s presence, its

perpetual haunting of performance and travel. Indeed, the figuration of death as a *spectator*—as a force that that is “constantly watching”—is telling in this regard, especially given the film’s excessive incorporation of crowd reaction shots, included, as I’ll elaborate later, to prompt and mirror spectatorial excitation. And if death as a performance *possibility* haunts the circus tour it also haunts these reaction shots, tableaux of cross-generational delight that carry a valence of morbid anticipation.

In short: we meet a showbusiness world defined along opposing currents of agency and fate, endurance and the end. Indeed, DeMille’s introduction frames death as a ubiquitous cosmic threat, and an early scene hints at the circus’ cultural vulnerability in fifties America, when it became impractical to keep booking small provincial areas where there wasn’t the population to justify a long and expensive voyage. In this scene we see the indefatigable circus “boss man” Brad Braiden (Charlton Heston) being diverted from his tour preparations when summoned by the company “big brass,” who are pushing for a half season because of sinking profits. The shareholders at the meeting insist that small towns must be struck from the route if the show’s to stay “in the black,” for “times have changed! . . . The world’s upside down!” How exactly times have changed is left out of the plot, but we do learn that cancelling small towns means perverting the circus’ cultural symbolism as an equitable provider of novelty across the nation. As Brad argues, “If you play only the big cities, you’ll cut the heart right out of this show,” winning the sympathy of circus president Johnny Ringling-North (playing himself), who asks his colleagues to not “forget what circus day means for a small town” with limited access to quality live spectacle.

Though this is the last verbal indication of the circus' very real mid-century struggles, the film advances this issue at the stylistic level. Detectable already in DeMille's opening voice-over (and very much like in *Samson and Delilah*) DeMille's circus tribute is split between conflicting, *diegeticized* readings of itself. For one, the film's storybook hermeticism helps both audience and filmmaker forget about the real life context reflected in the stakeholders' concerns, and, in doing so, accept melodramatic salvation in the form of "The Great Sebastian" (Cornel Wilde), a womanizing trapeze celebrity contracted to save the tour. "A devil on the ground" but a "God in the air," this unlikely savior remains, like the touring circus, taunted by obsolescence: miraculously healed after a reckless stunt, Sebastian will be rehabilitated into an irrevocably changed society, where his professional "death-defiance" is in its cultural death throes.



5.5 – The Great Sebastian falls

This suppression of historical context allows for an idealized, anachronistic mapping of the future, in which the circus abides as a staunch national diversion. This fantasy, however, is tempered in the narrative figuration of sickness and infirmity as a motif suggesting mortal vulnerability. As Brad prepares for spring tour, for example, he

makes a stop at the circus menagerie, where he learns that his prized giraffe is fighting strep throat (“all of it?”), that Myrtle the elephant has a stomach ache (“gin and ginger,” Brad tells the handler, “just be sure Myrtle gets all the gin!”), and that his couplet of baby gorillas have been exposed to the mumps (“plenty of spinach” and “an immune shot”).

The scene, varying between over-the-shoulder crane shots that affirm Brad’s command over the busy space and intimate close-ups that show his paternal concern for his animal performers, helps initiate the film’s charged pattern of motion vs. stasis. And doing so here, to be sure, gestures at a recent, documented misfortune with Ringling circus gorillas. DeMille’s film is replete with honest-to-god members of the circus, and in this scene we have two, Christy and Gorilla, “adopted” babies of the deceased Gargantua the Great, the wildly popular primate who helped the Ringlings survive the Depression. Publicized in garish bill posters as “the largest and fiercest creature ever brought before the eyes of civilized man,” Gargantua’s colossal size and disfigured upper lip, scowling perpetually thanks to a sadistic, acid-bearing deckhand who boarded the soon-legendary gorilla’s vessel out of Africa, made him an irreplaceable draw.<sup>490</sup> From “whistle stop to Broadway,” as the *New York Times* declared, “Gargantua has created more talk than all the phonograph needles manufactured since 1936.”<sup>491</sup> His death, which happened just months after DeMille began researching the circus, was felt profoundly by fans and employees alike. As Albrecht’s suggested, “the purchase and exploitation of Gargantua have to be regarded as the high point of [president] Johnny [Ringling-North’s] professional life.”<sup>492</sup> The baby gorillas seem to re-affirm the perseverant spirit of DeMille’s opening voice-over, but they take on sadder, fatalistic significance once contextualized historically. Introduced in the midst of hardship, these



baby primates become vane insurance, *a priori* relics. Not unlike the Great Sebastian after he completes his prescribed “psycho-somatic therapy,” the young duo of Christy and Gorilla—far from being either grown or grotesque—embody a destined belatedness, an anachronistic cultural projection of value and fame.



5.6 – Children of Gargantua

Gargantua represented more than big money at the Ringling and Barnum and Bailey combine. He signified an early twentieth-century tradition of discrete exhibitionist novelty, a geographical mobilization of curiosity that DeMille related to fondly as a veteran manufacturer of exotic spectacle. This epitomizing push of novelty, however, placed the circus in an increasingly daunting bind: by accelerating demand for all that was outlandish and “never before seen,” the last traveling circus became, to an extent, its own worst enemy.<sup>493</sup> How long could this circus afford to out due itself, especially as highway-braving, network-hooked Americans grew less eager each year for the Big Tent’s return?<sup>494</sup> Gargantua’s an emblem of an end, in other words, of an era of attractions in fearful twilight, and the late gorilla’s *diegetic* inclusion in *Greatest Show* speaks to this allegorical subtext.

Gargantua hasn't been "brought back to life," as a cynical shareholder asks when Brad insists that there's a sure way to complete the tour and still make a profit; but we do see Gargantua, curled upper lip and all, immortalized in portraiture on Mr. Ringling's wall. The sequence, with the camera panning away from the doubting shareholder before pausing on the Gargantua's portraited face, is revealing in light of the gorilla's epochal departure. The shareholder, though cast unsympathetically, makes a culturally pertinent point, one which the narrative equivocates: this circus' salvation demands a miracle, which we get, but in the dubious shape of Great Sebastian, the improbable savior who's left with a dead "claw hand" when the film comes to an end.<sup>495</sup> And this sense of finality and of impossible return embeds itself in the close-up of Gargantua, protracted leisurely so audiences could bid adieu to this beast of the center ring, who died before the culture could leave him for dead.



5.7 – Gargantua, in memoriam

Though depicting and documenting the circus in its present-day, DeMille took liberties with temporality that lends *Greatest Show* a feeling of being *already*-historical.

Given its present-day setting, the film of course does not qualify generically as a historical epic. But it does boast a “temporal magnitude” that Vivian Sobchack has identified as being essential to the “experiential field” of epic cinema. This experience, as Sobchack’s influentially argued, acquires a weight of historical “eventness” because of its painstaking organization of materiality, of narratively excessive detail and of the spectator’s relationship to time. The epic’s routinely “excessive duration,” Sobchack argues, “far longer than the Hollywood norm,” lends weight and authority to the genre while tacitly connecting the experience to a welcome exchange of not just money but of considerable mortality. Epics take a bit of time to watch, in other words, and we keep doing so, as Sobchack suggests, not merely for their visual “splendor” but because they affirm us within a pattern of historical continuity: “The importance of the [epic] genre is not that it narrates and dramatizes historical events accurately according to the detailed stories of academic historians but rather that it opens a temporal field that creates the *general* possibility for re-cognizing oneself as a *historical subject* of a particular kind.”<sup>496</sup> *Greatest Show*—two-and-a-half hours, plotted on a zephyr, and liberally inclusive of excessive interludes of circus virtuosity—offers an intriguing variation on the epic’s figuration of a historically meaningful present: rather than linking a present state of a “being in time” in far-reaching causal terms *Greatest Show* uses excessive temporality as a long *goodbye*, calcifying its aura of belatedness. Epic time is genealogical, with history “communicating via the peaks” across the ages, as Gilles Deleuze writes; circus time, in DeMille’s twilight ode, becomes *archaeological*, marking a rupture in culture in the form of a film.<sup>497</sup>

The funereal implications behind *Greatest Show*'s length reverberate in the drawn-out performance segments that intersperse the narrative. The film's peculiar hybridity arises largely from the plot's structural alignment with the actual show. DeMille frequently blends his stars in with the displays of the great Ringling designer John Murray Anderson. At one point, characters played by Gloria Graham and Dorothy Lamour don rococo gowns and join the "regal cavalcade of Marie Antoinette and her gay court," a procession that typified the classy extravagance for which Murray Anderson was celebrated. Other scenes blur the line between star and troupe member, like when Holly the trapezist (Betty Hutton) lands a spinning dismount in an uninterrupted shot, evidencing Hutton's training in an indexical way that Bazin would cheer. Other segments simply bide the time, pronounced early when the camera follows the Ringmaster's enumeration of animal novelties ("Sophisticated sea lions!" "Brainy bruins!") and when the narrative steps aside for the "world's smallest bareback rider," a little girl on horseback who after six long minutes we learn is a jockey in drag. Narrative contrivances keep presenting themselves (a living "Disney album" is notably interrupted when Buttons [Jimmy Stewart], a fugitive clown wanted for murder, spots his worried mother in the audience) but the predominant mode of address remains attraction-forward excess. These luxurious segments, though delightful, betray a preservational agenda compelled by a sense of the imminent. Epic temporality, transposed into circus spectacle at this moment in history, intimates a death mask, a commemorative embalming act.<sup>498</sup>

Allegory's push for transparent meaning clarifies the allegorical impulse to *textually* demonstrate ideal readings of storyworlds. "Every allegory," as Tom Gunning

observes, “and certainly every modern allegory, foregrounds the act of reading and even offers a lesson in how it should be read.”<sup>499</sup> Thus, Gunning continues, film can operate rhetorically as a “tutor text,” as a “visual parable” for ideal comprehension. DeMille’s excessive incorporation of reaction shots is telling in this allegorical light, prompting, through mimetic, “tutor”-like address, collective awe in the face of documented spectacle. Earlier I suggested how reaction shots worked to figure death-defiance as a performative stake that gave the circus “authenticity,” but I think the reaction shots carry an additional layer, one suggestive of the circus’ deadly imminence. The conspicuous age span of these singled-out spectators not only confirm the show’s mass and family-friendly appeal but speak to an impossible return, basing the show’s allure in a nostalgic re-activation of astonishment. The regressive ecstasy in these reaction shots (“Look! Mickey Mouse!” cries a plump old man between licks from an ice cream cone) animates the circus’ essential, performative concession to the inner-child, a salable “realignment of time and space,” as cultural historian Doug Mishler frames the tradition:

The circus was a canvas time machine, transporting many customers back to their childhoods and rejuvenating them. . . . Under the circus’ unique spell, adults became children, once more carrying water to elephants or peeking under the sidewalk. Even a man expected to ‘act his age’ could not when it came to the circus.<sup>500</sup>

It’s an important point, one that elucidates the circus’ peculiar economy of nostalgia, not necessarily for old and familiar spectacle but for an old and familiar *feeling*, oftentimes provoked by novel sights. The excessive repetition of DeMille’s reaction shots, however, casts a patina of desperation over this unreserved and child-like fun. As with the

durational extension I outlined above, the regularity and insistence of these “instructional” reaction shots betray unspoken awareness of a world on its way out, preserving not just the Ringlings’ attractions but the transportive ecstasy they provoke.



5.8 – “Children of all ages...”

This sense of finality that these diegetized “reading lessons” suggest lends cultural and authorial sense to DeMille’s late documentation of circus life. After all, for the children in these mirror-like, emulative crowd shots, the circus will exist down the road only as a hazy memory. But not necessarily, now that DeMille has preserved its pleasures on film. Indeed, DeMille’s film, in spite of its sanguine outlook on and earnest affection for the Ringling organization, probably hurt the already-struggling show that was documented. “Although it filled the show’s coffers with royalty payments,” as Albrecht points out, *Greatest Show* “ultimately . . . didn’t do the show much good. The 1952 tour seemed to follow the film around the country and everywhere it was the same result—a decline in attendance.” The public, Albrecht adds, “must have felt sated by the film, for 1952 only accelerated the box office’s downward slide alarmingly.”<sup>501</sup>

DeMille’s cinematic ode became a competitive substitution.

Throughout this dissertation, I've argued that DeMille's aesthetic politics are energized by an aspirational reach for documentary authority, a mounting of indexical detail for the sake of reducing distance between historical document and diegetic construction.<sup>502</sup> The *Greatest Show* offers an intriguing, late-career variation on this theme, indexically capturing authentic circus moments but also infusing them with artificial situations and performers that would not have been there in DeMille's absence. Thus, while these documentations certainly aren't innocent of diegetic invention, they are grounded *fundamentally* in an indifferent universe, one which would exist in time regardless of DeMille's involvement. "The old master," in the words of that routinely insightful DeMille critic Bosley Crowther, "has invaded an appropriate reality."<sup>503</sup> Here we might recall DeMille's figuration of his own work as the missing "newsreel" record of the past, a self-imagining that makes a second observation of Crowther's profound in its equation of late-style success with enhanced documentary authority. "Indeed, looking back on his career," reflects Crowther, "this film glorification of the circus would appear that one, far-off divine event to which the whole creation of CB DeMille moved."<sup>504</sup> Crowther adds that the *Greatest Show*'s largely pre-existent mise-en-scene potentially undermines DeMille's authorship, observing how "the bright magic that is in [the film] flows from the circus as it was photographed for real. One of them must have done the honors. We honestly can't tell you which." I would argue that the director's late-style achievement arises *from* this very tension of agency, from the present-absence that DeMille attained incrementally through his dense, cinematographic coordination of encyclopedic detail.

DeMille's authorial positionality, therefore, his enunciative self-inscription, becomes a structurally defining source of irresolution, a telling instance of what Edward Said's called the "unsynthesized fragmentariness" of late style creations.<sup>505</sup> It's an irresolution that Greene sees as well and locates similarly in a reflexive, late impulse: "anachronistic pathos . . . cannot help being self-referential, since the text must situate itself in relation to that past represented as outmoded."<sup>506</sup> And though DeMille's film comes short of what Greene calls the anachronistic "recognition scene," where an authorial proxy of some sort "registers clearly the degree of his exclusion and his obsolescence" (*Greatest Show*, I'd argue, is one sprawling *disavowal* scene, textually repressing the cultural truths indicated early by the shareholders) it does leave traces of its confrontation with "pathetic survival" in a changing world.<sup>507</sup> And in this conflict's textual manifestation we see the "divided awareness" of pathetic anachronism, a begrudging acknowledgment of "becoming vestigial" that leads to bold, reflexive assertions of aesthetic agency as a way of coping with time's indifference.<sup>508</sup>

The personification of the circus in DeMille's voice-overs speaks to this ambivalence that inflects anachronistic positionality. This personification is most explicit in the film's third narrated vignette, a documentation of the traveling "roustabout" laborers who place the "restless giant" that is the Big Ten squarely on its feet. The figure of the giant, an ostensible trope of might and dominance, carries, at a deeper level, a vulnerability inextricable from its enormity. As the worker army "the audience never sees" (until now!) prepares the massive, sheltering "fireproof canvas, 58,000 pounds of it," we begin to appreciate the unviable scale of the traveling show, requiring not only ample clear lots but hundreds and hundreds of wage laborers. Susan Stewart, in an



evocative study, observes how “description of the miniature approaches an infinity of relevant detail, [whereas] description of the gigantic frequently focuses on movement and its attendant consequences.”<sup>509</sup> And, on giant’s feet, the consequence of movement is entropy. Indeed, in myth and in science, the giant is an imposing but terribly fragile creature, cursed with biology ill-equipped for the torments of daily activity.

This essential vulnerability leaves poignant subtext to the big tent’s gigantic personification. In the voice over, the tent’s assembly is described as a disciplinized re-animation. After “unlimbering its muscles after the long night ride. . . [the canvas is] hauled out, unwrapped, stretched, laid on the ground, where it lies like the skin of a mighty, dismantled giant, waiting for some magician to bring it together and give it life.” Then, “one-by-one, the giant’s ribs rise into place and are firmly fastened to the earth. . . The giant comes to life!” But it’s a hard life, up against changing mass tastes and dependent upon a massive army of roustabout “magicians,” uniting skillfully to fortify the Ringling “giant” against nature’s aggression. For, as DeMille muses omnisciently, the “searching fingers of the wind” may discover the slightest tear “and rip [the circus] into disaster.”

Which does strike late in the film, but not in the form of wind. After robbing the company payroll on a night voyage to Cedar City, the lovelorn, sadistic elephant trainer Klaus (played by the great villain of B-Westerns, Lyle Bettiger) has second thoughts when he realizes that the passenger train carrying his beloved pachyderm rider, Angel (Gloria Graham), will collide with the vacated payroll car that Klaus and his accomplice Harry (John Kellogg), a carnival swindler sacked from the show, left sitting on the tracks. In his desperate, last minute attempt to warn the conductor of the impending crash, Klaus

drives his convertible head-on at the train, arms flailing in mad panic. The conductor spots Klaus' headlights and slams his breaks, but it's too late. Klaus is bulldozed and the sprawling, multi-car train is derailed and left a heap of splintered metal.

DeMille's late impulse to remake his early work deserves its own book, but in these concluding thoughts I want to pause on the similarity between *Greatest Show's* climax and DeMille's "metaphysical" melodrama of 1926, *The Road to Yesterday*, an improbable tale of reincarnated lovers that, it was said, "boasted the greatest train wreck scene ever shot."<sup>510</sup> *Road to Yesterday* is set at the Grand Canyon, where newlyweds Kenneth (Joseph Schildkraut) and Malena (Jetta Goudal) have arrived for their honeymoon. The couple's nuptial bed remains cold, however, as Malena cannot get over a mysterious fear she has towards Kenneth, who thinks that Malena is repelled by a lame arm he carries. Malena, however, thinks that her frigidity comes from a haunting sense that Kenneth has harmed her in a previous life. The history behind this suspicion is revealed when, after a colossal train collision, our protagonists are transported back to their previous lives in 17th Century England, where we see Malena, as a persecuted gypsy, place an eternal curse on Kenneth, a wicked Duke who condemns Malena to death.

*Road to Yesterday's* train wreck becomes a literal portal to the past, enlarging the film's chronology to unlock the mysteries of a troubled present. It's a privileged opening-up, lending melodramatic closure to the narrative while affirming DeMille's penchant for historically mobile filmic discourse.<sup>511</sup> *Greatest Show* uses the train wreck to similar causal ends: the troupe's fortitude passes its ultimate test when it manages to "roll the show" using elephant-drawn wagons for transport to Cedar City, all while

Buttons-the-Fugitive-Doctor blows his cover when he sutures a fatal wound under the investigative eye of Detective Gregory (DeMille favorite, Henry Wilcoxon). Although here, unlike *Road to Yesterday*, we remain diegetically grounded in the present after the crash, I want to suggest that the *Greatest Show's* ending entails a world-transition, but at the subliminal level. Throughout this analysis, I've tried to bring out the ghostly nature of DeMille's late-circus homage, populated with culturally moribund types who endure *aesthetically* as if inoculated from time. Cast in Freudian terms, this perseverance narrative represents a melancholic denial, a "medium of a wishful psychosis" impossibly "clinging to [an] object" that the tests of reality prove not to exist (again, it's useful to recall the shareholders' trepidations, overblown in *Greatest Show's* storyworld but historically quite on point).<sup>512</sup> The film remains allegorically elegiac at a culturally-sensible level, insinuating the circus' near-obsolescence with anachronistic implications of corporate optimism and continued dominance.



#### 5.9 – Resurrection

If we can, after Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, admit that happy endings are largely "over-determined" in Classical Hollywood cinema, we should, as a

historiographic stance, aim to decipher markings of textual denial, of aberrant truths and story possibilities that prove irreconcilable with the Classical model. Doing so helps us make cultural sense of *Greatest Show* as a “screen memory,” a nostalgic commemoration serving the purposes *not* of history but “of the *repression* and replacement of objectionable or disagreeable impressions.”<sup>513</sup> If the film’s narrative as a whole expresses a wishful, continued state of cultural supremacy it is both tempting and reasonable to see the circus’ ascendance from the train debris and the company’s subsequent parade into Cedar City as a final passage from history to a realm of aesthetic timelessness. If faithful to its wishful projection of endurance, the film has no choice but to transcend historical time and build a heaven of high fliers and still-devoted masses. At the shareholders’ meeting we were told that “it’s *suicide* to play the whole tour this year.” But as it turns out, *DeMille*’s the one who euthanizes the circus, shielding it from time and enshrining its mythic form, which we see on display one last time in the oneiric dirt lot performance that follows the train crash. In *DeMille*’s phantastic rendering, the “Greatest Show on Earth” can survive only after *leaving* earth for an atemporal paradise of sheer artificiality.

### **The Academy Awards on TV: a Dirge**

In 1953, *The Greatest Show on Earth* won the Oscar for Best Picture at the 25<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards, the first televised broadcast of the ceremony. Though it was the first *DeMille* production to win Best Picture after a long and exceptional career, many were surprised by the victory of this “spectacular but old fashioned film.”<sup>514</sup> The Fred Zinnemann western *High Noon*, tense, brooding, and edited with angularly modernist

force, was the critical favorite expected to take home the prize. In hindsight, the choice makes sense, however, given the heuristic, transitional state of the “new,” post-Consent Decree Hollywood, which saw the Majors bereft of theater chains and prohibited from the coercive block-booking that won big returns for cash cow “programmers.” As television galvanized the masses, the studios fought to stay solvent and dramatically downscaled operations. Backlot land was sold and expensive talent was let go, leaving a power vacuum for talent agencies and ambitious actors-turned-producers who saw the future in discrete, “package unit” productions, which could be realized outside of studio factories but could also take advantage of distribution networks that the Majors still controlled.<sup>515</sup>



5.10 – Oscar, at last

If *Greatest Show* found coded ways to say “goodbye” to the circus and to the live mass spectacle of yore it epitomized then this inaugural telecast bids adieu to “CB” DeMille and to the Old Hollywood he personified. The broadcast’s funeral concessions are hardly subtle. It begins with a noirish, truck-mounted shot along a dark and desolate Hollywood Boulevard, where, as our announcer tells us, “population changes have run the motion picture industry away,” leaving the bustle and magic of “this historic street” a “a little bit of memory and nostalgia.” As the ceremony begins, the old age of movie icons becomes a running gag in Bob Hope’s emcee spiel: in his opening monologue, for instance, Hope promises TV viewers that they will meet “new faces” tonight—and then, smirking, lists stars from the silent era in attendance, “Mary Pickford, Janet Gaynor, and Ronald Coleman.” Even Oscar is said to be showing his age: if the veterans listed make it to next year’s event, they’ll find that the statuette will need to “be wearing glasses” too.

DeMille has some fun with this line of jest, reminiscing with Mary Pickford, his award’s presenter, about when they appeared on-stage together in “[David] Belasco’s *Warrens of Virginia*, just about the time Noah started that craft.” But the director’s tone turns somber when he starts speaking “on behalf of the thousands it took to make *The Greatest Show on Earth*,” dedicating the award to his massive team of collaborators, a reflection of those factory “colonies” whose domain it was to bring movies into being. At one point Hope makes fun of TV as the place “where movies go when they die,” and he makes a good, if inadvertent, point. Though gesturing at the tawdry eternity of syndication—bringing “fame and fortune to Hopalong Cassidy and perpetual youth to the Bowery Boys”—Hope points to the fact that beneath this historic “wedding of two

great entertainment mediums” rests a of casket of coaxial cable awaiting DeMille, who eulogizes himself as the late acclaim pours down.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Cecil B. DeMille, “No Fight on the Edge of a Cliff,” *Stage* 14 (1936) : 59.

<sup>2</sup> Betsy Sharkey. “DeMille’s Landscape,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 January 2010, D1+.

<sup>3</sup> Sharkey, “DeMille’s Landscape.”

<sup>4</sup> Scorsese quoted in Sharkey, “DeMille’s Landscape.”

<sup>5</sup> An important exception is Paolo Cherchi Usai and Lorenzo Codelli’s anthology *The DeMille Legacy* (Pordenone: Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, 1991), prepared for the 1991 Pordenone Silent Film Festival.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to our Idea of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995) , 66. Rosenstone’s pantheon includes Roberto Rossellini, Akira Kurosawa, Masahiro Shinoda, Carlos Diegues, Ousmane Sembene, and Oliver Stone. Marcia Landy, *The Cinematic Uses of the Past* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996) , 81.

<sup>7</sup> Scott Eyeman offers a conspicuously snappy summary of “the DeMille style” in his nearly 600-page biography of the director: “thin characters set against titanic productions with an overlay of narrative didacticism.” This dissertation suggests that there’s more to aesthetic. See *Empire of Dreams: The Epic Life of Cecil B. DeMille* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010) , 324.

<sup>8</sup> George Custen, *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992) , 38.

<sup>9</sup> Mike Chopra-Gant, *Cinema and History: The Telling of Stories* (London: Wallflower, 2008) , 86.

<sup>10</sup> Custen, 34-35.



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<sup>11</sup> Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968) , 37. An important elaboration is, of course, Hayden White's *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975).

<sup>12</sup> Michel De Certeau. *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 64 (emphasis added).

<sup>13</sup> The research that undergirded DeMille's cinema can be seen to have taken place inside what John Caldwell has described to be a "production culture," a community of media practitioners whose shared theoretical principles inform aesthetic practice. See *John Caldwell, Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> The allusion, of course, is to Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions," reprinted in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker (London: BFI Publishing, 1990) , 59. I'd like to suggest that the discrete, exhibitionist draw of DeMille's authentic screen objects affirms Gunning's case for the "primal power of the attraction running beneath the armature of narrative regulation" in Classical Hollywood (61).

<sup>15</sup> Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2001) , 170-171.

<sup>16</sup> [DeMille Visits Boston for Cleopatra opening] (Paramount News, 1934). UCLA Film & Television Archive.

<sup>17</sup> In the silent era, intertitles did occasionally "cite" a scene's basis in the historical record, but this approach, as one might expect was jettisoned with the standardization of

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synchronized sound. For more on the intertitle as citation, see Lucy Fisher, “The Silent Screen, 1895-1927,” in *Art Direction & Production Design*, ed. Lucy Fisher (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press) , 30-33.

<sup>18</sup> Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997) , 22.

<sup>19</sup> This study, then, works along the lines of David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson’s instructive model for a “historical poetics,” which demonstrates how an “excessively obvious cinema” can indeed serve as a revealing historical index for the Classical system’s aesthetic-industrial strategies. In doing so, I offer this work as an experiment in “historical formalism,” a term that broadly implies a contextualized examination of aesthetic strategies. For an impactful call for historical formalism in film studies see Dana Polan, “A Brechtian Cinema? Towards a Politics of Self-Reflexive Film,” in *Movies and Methods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) , 2: 661-672. A recent and helpful elaboration of historical formalism can be found in Stephen Cohen’s edited volume, *Shakespeare and Historical Formalism* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), where Cohen introduces historical formalism as a methodology that “neither imposes nor assumes any single understanding of form, history, or the relationship between them, but instead explores the complexity of their mutual implication . . . in order to illuminate at once text, form, and history” (3). Indeed, throughout this study I maintain that a similar methodological union of primary research and aesthetic formalism sheds constructive light on how DeMille’s filmic rhetoric—the persuasive manipulation of audience affect and interpretation through stylistic devices—and cultural history significantly illuminate one another.

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<sup>20</sup> Marcia Landy, "Introduction," in *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media*, ed. Marcia Landy (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000) , 4.

<sup>21</sup> Maria Wyke, *Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema and History* (New York: Routledge, 1997) , 13.

<sup>22</sup> Natalie Zemon-Davis, *Slaves on Screen: Film and Historical Vision* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>23</sup> Robert Burgoyne, "Introduction," *The Epic Film in World Culture*, ed. Robert Burgoyne (New York: Routledge, 2011) , 11.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Burgoyne, *The Hollywood Historical Film* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008) , 11: "The historical film, like the mythic figure of Janus, looks both to the past and the present. On the one hand, Hollywood historical films carefully and insistently cultivate a sense of documentary images of the actual occurrences and figures . . . On the other hand, every historical film constructs the past in a way that is shaped and informed by its own context, its own way of imagining the past."

<sup>25</sup> Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press) , 30-62.

<sup>26</sup> Matt K. Matsuda, *The Memory of the Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) , 6.

<sup>27</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996) , 1-2.

<sup>28</sup> For more on the museology of perceptual organization, see Stephen Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," in *Exhibiting Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Kar and Steven D. Lavine (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991);

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Michael Baxandall, "Exhibiting Intention: Some Preconditions of the Visual Display of Culturally Purposeful Objects," in *Exhibiting Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Kar and Steven D. Lavine (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991); Donald Preziosi, "Art History and Museology: Rendering the Visible Legible," in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

## CHAPTER 1

<sup>29</sup> Raymond Walters Jr., "The Confessions of Practically Everybody," *New York Times* 11 September 1960 : 54.

<sup>30</sup> Hedda Hopper quoted by Donald Hayne in a letter to Cecilia DeMille [nd]. The Cecil B. DeMille Archives, L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (hereafter DMA), Box 9, Folder 7.

<sup>31</sup> See Elizabeth Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) , esp. Chapter 1, "Memory in the Contemporary World."

<sup>32</sup> Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," (1956) reprinted in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, trans. and ed. James Olney (Princeton: New Jersey, 1980) , 43.

<sup>33</sup> For an influential discussion of "voice" as a literary device, see Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961). Booth helpfully distinguishes voice from tone, which does not imply a readerly sense of a personality

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rendered on the page but describes an author's apparent attitude towards a work's subject matter.

<sup>34</sup> William L. Howarth, "Some Principles of Autobiography," *New Literary History* 5 (1974): 363-381. Reprinted in Olney (1980), 100.

<sup>35</sup> In a suggestive article on autobiographical chicanery, cultural critic Joe Queenan points out how the ghostwriter's foremost ambition is the production of a book "that sounds like something the author could conceivably have written if he'd only had the time." See Queenan, "Ghosts in the Machine," *New York Times Book Review* 20 March 2005 : 7.

<sup>36</sup> Patrick Goldstein, "Ghostwriter David Ritz Works to Give His Writing Real Voices," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 June 2012.

<sup>37</sup> Patrick Goldstein, "Ghostwriter David Ritz Works to Give His Writing Real Voices," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 June 2012.

<sup>38</sup> Raymond Walters Jr., "The Confessions of Practically Everybody," *New York Times*, 11 September 1960 : 54.

<sup>39</sup> Walters, 54.

<sup>40</sup> Such a conclusion, Walters adds, "is a conclusion that any historian who has had occasion to check an autobiography against documentary and other source material can easily corroborate" (65). The genre's effort to authentically depict a familiar voice is affirmed as well by the blurbs that adorn Errol Flynn's outrageous, ghostwritten autobiography, published the same year as DeMille's. The *Saturday Review*, for example, applauded how Flynn's book conveyed "the same roguish charm that endeared his celluloid incarnation," while the *Clifton Record* found the star's autobiography "reminiscent of someone writing in a journal, sometimes as though he is talking to a

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friend.” The *New York Times* agreed: “Flynn writes cleverly, as he talked. He has left us a good book.”

<sup>41</sup> Along these lines, the reverie-gripped autobiographer has a kindred spirit in Sir Philip Sidney’s model poet, who “though he recount things not true...because he telleth them not for true, he lieth not” (947-948).

<sup>42</sup> Gurdord, 37: “The act of memory is carried out for itself, and recalling of the past satisfies a more or less anguished disquiet of the mind anxious to recover and redeem lost time in fixing it forever.”

<sup>43</sup> It’s telling that “authorized biographers” are often encouraged by publishers to revise their subject-approved books into ghosted autobiographies, which sell better than biographies written in the third-person. As Margot Strickland, a historian with ghostwriting experience, observes, “any self-respecting author would prefer to write a biography for which he is properly cited...Market forces, however, militate against this.” It’s not a stretch, then, to see ghostwritten autobiographies as “authorized biographies” in a mendacious first person. See Strickland, “Ghosting an Autobiography,” *Biography* 18.1 (1995) : 65-68.

<sup>44</sup> Howard L. Goodkind to Donald Hayne, Sept. 22, 1953, Box 9, Folder 1, DMA.

<sup>45</sup> Donald Hayne, “A Preliminary Essay on the Biography,” Box 9, Folder 1, DMA.

<sup>46</sup> Donald Hayne to Howard L. Goodkind, 18 September 1953, Box 9, Folder 1, DMA.

<sup>47</sup> Hayne, “A Preliminary Essay,” Box 9, Folder 1, DMA.

<sup>48</sup> Hayne to Goodkind, 18 September 1953, Box 9, Folder 1, DMA.

<sup>49</sup> Hayne to Goodkind, 18 September 1953, Box 9, Folder 1, DMA.

<sup>50</sup> Howard L. Goodkind to Donald Hayne, 22 September 1953, Box9, Folder 1, DMA.

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<sup>51</sup> Hayne to Goodkind, 18 September 1953, Box 9, Folder 1, DMA.

<sup>52</sup> This definition of research, from former Archivist of the United States Frank G. Burke, is found in *Research and the Manuscript Tradition* (Scarecrow Press, 1997) , 17.

Hayne's self-branding as a credible historian paid off. He was kept on the payroll as pre-production "assistant" for DeMille's *Ten Commandments* remake (1956) and when Otto Preminger needed "technical advising" on matters of church history for *The Cardinal* (1963), he turned to Hayne, "a very charming and knowledgeable man who had left the priesthood." Preminger: *An Autobiography* (New York: Doubleday) , 178.

<sup>53</sup> Strickland, "Ghosting an Autobiography." Erica L. Johnson makes a similar point in a brilliant essay about the fraught construction of Jean Rhys's ghostwritten autobiography, *Smile, Please*: "The ghostwriter's function is to be absent from the text." See Johnson, "Auto-Ghostwriting *Smile, Please: An Unfinished Autobiography*," *Biography* vol. 29 no. 4 (2006) : 566. In recent years, however, as Joe Queenan points out, readers have seen "greater transparency about the collaborative process," often signaled by the word "with," printed in very small font down low on a book's cover. Such confession to collaboration, a boon to previously uncredited writers, also confuses readers, since the practical nature of the process – who wrote what? – is never completely clear. The confusion reached a farcical peak when retired NBA power forward Charles Barkley complained that his credited help misquoted him in his own autobiography! See Queenan, "Ghosts in the Machine" : 7.

<sup>54</sup> Johnson, 563.

<sup>55</sup> Irritation towards the footnote's implicitly "excessive display of learning" and "sterility", as Anthony Grafton has shown, has been a common response to erudite

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histories for centuries. See Grafton, esp. Chapter 1, “Footnotes: The Origin of a Species.”

<sup>56</sup> Hayne, “A Preliminary Essay on the Biography.” Box 9, Folder 1, DMA.

<sup>57</sup> DeMille’s impressive array of distinctions can be found in “Some of the DeMille Awards and Honors,” Box 8, Folder 6, DMA. These distinctions range from a Doctor of Letters from Pennsylvania Military College in 1932; the 1949 Motion Picture Pioneer of the Year Award (from the Motion Picture Pioneer, Inc.); a 1951 Certificate from President of Tuberculosis Foundation of Sao Paulo, Brazil; and the 1956 Grandfather of the Year Award, “For dedication to the benefit and inspiration of all mankind.”

<sup>58</sup> Conversation between Mr. Richard Ettinger, Chairman of the Board of Prentiss-Hall and Mr. Myron L. Boardman, Vice-President of Prentice-all, Mr. deMille and Art Arthur and Donald Hayne in Mr. deMille’s Office,” 23 April 1957, Box 10, Folder 2A, DMA.

<sup>59</sup> At first, Hayne is coy about delegating himself as a credited commentator, but it becomes clear that he has himself in mind when he writes how the running commentary solution was anticipated by “the proposed forward I drafted some months ago.” Hayne, “A Preliminary Essay on the Biography,” 15.

<sup>60</sup> David Robinson, (review) [*The Autobiography of Cecil B. DeMille*], *Film Bulletin* Autumn 1960: 203.

<sup>61</sup> Donald Hayne to Cecil B. DeMille, 25 February 1955, DMA, quoted in James Vincent D’Arc ““So Let it Be Written: The Creation of Cecil B. DeMille’s Autobiography” (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1986) , 80.

<sup>62</sup> “Why the DeMille Biography will be the most important book ever to come out of Hollywood,” [nd], Box 9, Folder 1, DMA.



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<sup>63</sup> “Why the DeMille Biography will be.”

<sup>64</sup> The DeMille Case, undated [probably 1953]. At the top of page 1 DeMille has made the note: “good.”

<sup>65</sup> These repetitive mini-biographies, ranging from the early thirties to fifties, can be found Box 8, Folder 10, DMA.

<sup>66</sup> The autobiographer, Gusdorf instructively points out, “commences, in a manner of speaking, with the problem already solved. Moreover, the illusion begins from the moment that the narrative confers a meaning which, when it actually occurred, no doubt had several meanings or perhaps none. This postulating of a meaning dictates *the choice* of the facts to be retained and of the details to bring out or to dismiss according to the demands of the preconceived intelligibility” (42, emphasis added).

<sup>67</sup> Following Michel de Certeau, we can interpret Hayne’s protocols for DeMille’s legacy construction as the practical “product of a place,” reflecting traces of “former structuring” within a positivistic discourse of twentieth-century academia. See *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 36. Indeed, the problematic evidentiary nature of autobiographical writing is a common discussion point in early twentieth-century historiography. Langois and Seignobos look askance at the form because it lacks the primacy of legally sound evidence: “Above all, we must ask when he *wrote down* what he saw or heard. This is the most important point: the only exact observation is the one which is recorded immediately...an impression committed to writing later is only a recollection, liable to be confused in the memory with other recollections. *Memoirs* written several years after the facts, often at the very end of the author’s career, have introduced innumerable errors into history. It must be made a

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rule to treat *memoirs* with special distrust, as second-hand documents, in spite of their appearance of being contemporary testimony” (175, emphasis in original). In his 1926 primer, Allen Johnson stresses the inherent self-interest of the form, advising novices to skeptically assess the autobiographer’s “gamut of motives” before the autobiographer’s memory is cited “as a source.” See Johnson, *The Historian and Historical Evidence* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1926) , 85. “This sort of work,” Oxford historian Charles Oman adds, “needs more careful inspection by the historian than almost any other class of evidence, being often written with complete insincerity, and sometimes with a failing memory, even when deliberate misrepresentation is not intended. . . They can never be trusted as evidence, though their authors actually existed, and (no doubt) saw some queer things.” See Oman, *On the Writing of History* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company Inc., 1939) , 56-57.

<sup>68</sup> Cecil B. DeMille, *The Autobiography of Cecil B. DeMille* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1959), 4. All future citations from *The Autobiography* will be parenthetically indicated within the body text.

<sup>69</sup> Articles of Incorporation of DeMille Foundation for Political Freedom, Box 9, Folder 10, DMA: “No employer, organization or labor union shall deprive any person of the right to earn a living because said person agrees to or refuses to pay money, in the form of dues, assessments or otherwise, to support or oppose any political party.”

<sup>70</sup> Other referenced artifacts are DeMille’s father’s “manuscript [recounting] the way a boy grew up in the ante-bellum South,” (8) which our narrator looks to for lessons in self-reliance while staying at his bucolic Paradise Ranch, where the tombstone of Joseph DeMill, dead in 1800, was relocated for the sake of stirring reflection on “mortality and

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immortality . . . [and other] wholesome thoughts for a man who will soon be joining Joseph . . . and, he hopes, the Other also” (7). Pages later, sources related to *The Great Line*, a realist drama directed by David Belasco and co-authored by DeMille’s father, genealogically trace DeMille’s pursuit of filmic authenticity back to this Victorian play’s “realistic railroad effects,” which “represented in many ways a revolutionary advance in realism” that cinema would soon elaborate: “Beyond Belasco’s realism the stage could hardly go. There the camera was needed” (19).

<sup>71</sup> Hayne’s evidentiary and rhetorical procedures thus offer an instructive case for what John Caldwell sees as the “theorization in practice” in apparently “intuitive” below-the-line crafts. See Caldwell, *Production Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), esp. the Introduction, “Industrial Reflexivity and Common Sense.”

<sup>72</sup> Blount was the last name of DeMille’s grandmother on his father’s side and is also DeMille’s middle name.

<sup>73</sup> Joan [?] to Donald Hayne, “Aboard SS Constitution,” [nd, probably 1954], Box 9, Folder 3, DMA.

<sup>74</sup> Allen Jonshon, *The Historian and Historical Evidence*, 10-30.

<sup>75</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” in *The Short Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe: An Annotated Edition*, eds. Stuart Levine and Susan Levine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) , 175-196.

<sup>76</sup> Sir Charles Oman, *On the Writing of History* (New York: EP Dutton and Company Inc., 1939) , 63.

<sup>77</sup> Allen Jonshon, *The Historian and Historical Evidence*, 3.

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- <sup>78</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991) , 51. See esp. Chapter 3, “What Makes Oral History Different.”
- <sup>79</sup> Louis Gottschalk, *Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf) , 151.
- <sup>80</sup> Oman, *On the Writing of History*, 69.
- <sup>81</sup> Allan Nevins, *The Gateway to History* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1938) , 64.
- <sup>82</sup> Portelli, 46.
- <sup>83</sup> Langois and Seignobos, 174. Thus, our methodologists conclude, “It must be made a rule to treat memoirs with special distrust” (175).
- <sup>84</sup> Donald Hayne to Joseph W. Harper, Trustee, Cecil B. DeMille Trust, June 4, 1956, Box 8, Folder 15, DMA.
- <sup>85</sup> Donald Hayne to Rev. A.F. Chilsson, Christ Church, Ramapo and Passaic Avenue, Pompton Lakes, New Jersey, Box 8, Folder 12, DMA.
- <sup>86</sup> A.F. Chillson to Donald Hayne, Feb 11, 1954, Box 8, Folder 12, DMA.
- <sup>87</sup> Langois and Seignobos, 20.
- <sup>88</sup> Gusdorf, 43 (emphasis added).
- <sup>89</sup> For more on the methodological discrepancies between antiquarians and historiographers, see Oman, 208.
- <sup>90</sup> Phil A. Koury, *Yes, Mr. DeMille* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1959) , 247.
- <sup>91</sup> Quoted in Scott Eiman, *Empire of Dreams: The Epic Life of Cecil B. DeMille* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010) , 407.
- <sup>92</sup> Eiman, 404.

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- <sup>93</sup> Hayne to John J. Quin, 5 January 1954, Box 9, Folder 3, DMA.
- <sup>94</sup> Hayne to Quin, 5 January 1954.
- <sup>95</sup> John J. Quinn to Donald Hayne, 8 January 1954, Box 9, Folder 3, DMA.
- <sup>96</sup> Quinn to Hayne, 8 January 1954.
- <sup>97</sup> Donald Hayne to John J. Quinn, 12 January 1954, Box 9, Folder 3, DMA.
- <sup>98</sup> Quinn to Hayne 8 January 1954. This was the name Father Everett “was tenderly called in his later life.”
- <sup>99</sup> DeMille quoted in Phil A. Koury, *Yes, Mr. DeMille* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1959) , 298.
- <sup>100</sup> See “Republican Soul-Searching,” *America* 5 April 1947 , 6-7.
- <sup>101</sup> “I wish we could claim [Everett] as a fellow Jesuit. He was, however, a member of the secular clergy” (Rev John J. Quinn to Hayne 19 January 1955, Box 9, Folder 3, DMA).
- <sup>102</sup> Hayne to Rev. John J. Quinn 12 January 1954, Box 9, Folder 3, DMA.
- <sup>103</sup> Hayne to Quinn, 12 January 1954.
- <sup>104</sup> D’Arc, ““So Let it Be Written,”” 79-80.
- <sup>105</sup> D’Arc, 80-81.
- <sup>106</sup> “Who’s Who in Hollywood” (column), *Film Daily*, June 19, 1953 (Herrick clipping).
- <sup>107</sup> Larry Leplair and Stephen England, *Inquisition Hollywood* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003) , 359.
- <sup>108</sup> Leplair and England, 388-389. The authors relate the sad quandary of screenwriter Louis Pollock, who was casually ignored by the studios once an American Legion bureaucrat confused him with Louis Pollack, a leftist garment worker who took the fifth

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against HUAC and was found in contempt of court. In an interview, Pollock recalled his dismay and befuddlement when he abruptly “stopped selling.” “All I could do was keep writing,” Pollock added, and “try not to believe that in some mysterious way my work had slumped...I broke down to the point where I became panicky and was plagued day and night by the fear of complete destitution.”

<sup>109</sup> Telephone Interview with Art Arthur, Nov 18, 1953, Elizabeth Poe Kerby Papers, Box 3, Folder 41, Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (hereafter AMPAS).

<sup>110</sup> Art Arthur to Arne Nord, May 21, 1949, Motion Picture Industry Council Papers, Box 35, Folder 348, AMPAS.

<sup>111</sup> Herb Stein, “Inside Hollywood,” Jan 28, 1952, Art Arthur, Biographical Clipping File, AMPAS.

<sup>112</sup> Leez Zhito, “MPIC Backs Kramer vs. Smearing Pickets,” *Billboard*, January 1, 1952, 2.

<sup>113</sup> Art Arthur, “The Motion Picture Industry Council Report on Series of Five Articles in the Los Angeles Mirror Entitled ‘Hollywood Fame or Shame’ by Omar Garrison, from Monday July 11, 1949 to Friday, July 15, 1949, MPIC Papers, Box 28, Folder 281, AMPAS.

<sup>114</sup> Herb Stein, “Inside Hollywood,” Jan 28, 1952. AMPAS. Art Arthur. Biographical Clipping File.

<sup>115</sup> Arthur, “The Motion Picture Industry Council Report.”

<sup>116</sup> “Revels Told Grand Jury by Brenda,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 8, 1949: 1.

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<sup>117</sup> “Lewd Shows Free to Police, ‘Queen Says’,” *Washington Post*, Aug 9, 1949: 6; “Job Offer to Audre Davis Denied by Allen,” *Los Angeles Times*, Nov 1, 1949: 2.

<sup>118</sup> Garrison quoted in Arthur, “The Motion Picture Industry Council Report.”

<sup>119</sup> Anonymous quoted in Arthur, “The Motion Picture Industry Council Report.”

<sup>120</sup> Arthur, “Report on a Series of Five Articles.”

<sup>121</sup> Motion Picture Industry Council to Virgil Pinkley, Publisher, *LA Mirror*, July 22, 1949, MPIC Papers. Box 28, Folder 281, AMPAS.

<sup>122</sup> Arthur to Kenneth Clarke, 19 July 1949; Arch Reeve, Inter-Office Memo, Association of Motion Picture Producers, Inc., 17 August 1949, MPIC Papers, Box 28, Folder 281, AMPAS.

<sup>123</sup> J. D. Spiro, “Hollywood Acts—Industry Sponsored Clean-Up Drive Aims to Avert Bad Publicity,” *New York Times*, 23 Oct 1949 : X5.

<sup>124</sup> Art Arthur to Arch Reeve, n.d. MPIC Papers, Box 28, Folder 281, AMPAS.

<sup>125</sup> Art Arthur, Press Release, 14 October 1949, MPIC Papers, Box 35, Folder 348, AMPAS.

<sup>126</sup> See esp. Chapter 3 in Linde, *Institutional Memory*, where she defines “retold tales” as “narratives told by a speaker who was not a participant or witness to the events narrated but heard them from somebody else...Such retold narratives have a special status within institutions because. . .they form an important part of the way that institutions remember their past and use that remembering to create current identities for both the institution and its members” (73).

<sup>127</sup> Art Arthur to Ken Clark, 14 Oct 1949, Box 35, Folder 348, DMA.

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<sup>128</sup> Linde, 12. Arthur, unlike Hayne, heeded pressures to systemize records for ready availability, a mantra in secretarial primers of the day, including Laura H. Cadwallader and S. Ada Rice continually repressed *Principles of Indexing and Filing* (San Francisco: The H. M Rowe Company, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1951), 4: The modern push for “system and orderliness,” paradoxically, enhances the agency of the quill-driving bureaucrat, charged with fresh burdens of curatorial sense-making: “Filing is very much more than storing papers; it is storing them in the proper place” (4). See also Leslie H. Matthies, *Records: The Systems Memory of Action* (Colorado Springs, CO: Systemation, Inc., 1966). “The true record has just one job to do in the system...to *remember*” (emphasis in original 6).

<sup>129</sup> Arthur quoted in D’Arc, 81.

<sup>130</sup> Bruno Latour, “Visualization and Cognition: Thinking with Eyes and Hands,” *Knowledge and Society* vol. 6, 1986 : 29.

<sup>131</sup> Latour, 23.

<sup>132</sup> As Grafton observes, “The library and archive transform themselves through Ranke’s glamorous metaphors into a gallery of three-dimensional antiquities...the astute and critical historian performs magic: he reassembles the dusty thrift shop of the past into a modern museum” (39).

<sup>133</sup> Arthur to DeMille, 21 November 1957, Box 8, Folder 1, DMA.

<sup>134</sup> In an earlier memo to DeMille, Arthur explains how his recommended “technical devices for assembling and filing” materials provide “road maps” and “compass points” that will enable the ghostwriter to navigate with ease “the enormous accumulation of notes, etc.” See Arthur to DeMille, June 25, 1957. Box 7, Folder 29, DMA.



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<sup>135</sup> Art Arthur to Virginia Kellog, May 31, 1950, Box 1, Folder 8, DMA: “In the old days this kind of first-hand expose was dubbed ‘muck-raking’ but did a great job of speeding numerous badly needed reforms. The industry took quite a beating in connection with ‘White Heat’ due to criticism about brutality, etc. Perhaps there will be an entirely different kind of reaction to [your] expose . . . ‘Caged.’ I would be very much interested in having copies of letters etc. which might reflect the public service of contribution rendered by a picture like ‘Caged,’ in terms of correcting the evils it portrays.”

<sup>136</sup> “Basic Structure,” 3, Box 9, Folder 12, DMA. “These [themes] should be outlined in the greatest possible detail . . . and identified in a fashion which will make master filing simple and easy so that the fieldman . . . can lay his fingers on just the right themes with which to impress the Chief of Police just as readily as the right themes for the man who is interested only in action pictures, etc”.

<sup>137</sup> “Basic Structure,” 3-5.

<sup>138</sup> Art Arthur, “CB--Views On,” 24 June 1957, Box 7, Folder 29, DMA.

<sup>139</sup> Arthur to DeMille, June 26, 1957, Box 7, Folder 29, DMA.

<sup>140</sup> Recall that Hayne’s early methodological justification was titled “A Preliminary Essay on the *Biography*,” a *wishful* inaccuracy.

<sup>141</sup> Arthur, “CB—Views On,” 1, Box 7, Folder 29, DMA: Arthur’s “Views On” breakdown made clear that studying DeMille’s speaking appearances would now be essential to the effort: “all past speeches and writings should be reviewed for guidance.” DeMille’s radio popularity in the thirties rivaled Roosevelt’s Fireside Chats in ratings and his expository voice-overs situated his epics since 1940s *Northwest Mounted Police*.

<sup>142</sup> Gusdorf, 41.

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<sup>143</sup> Starobinski, “The Style of Autobiography,” trans. Seymour Chatman, in *Literary Style: A Symposium*, ed. Seymour Chatman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971). Reprinted in reprinted in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 75.

<sup>144</sup> D’Arc, 81.

<sup>145</sup> D’Arc, 82.

<sup>146</sup> D’Arc, 83.

<sup>147</sup> Arthur interview with DeMille, 23 July 1957, Box 7, Folder 29, DMA.

<sup>148</sup> Arthur, Views On, 1.

<sup>149</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) , 3.

<sup>150</sup> Arthur, Views On.

<sup>151</sup> Strained transitional phrasing often insinuates the *Autobiography*’s structural reliance on Arthur’s filing divisions. “I have to do here what is necessary to do in a motion picture sometimes: telescope history a little, to show connections of events perhaps widely separated in time” (*Autobiography* 333); “From Mount Sinai to *Madam Satan* may seem a long leap; but, in a way, the second picture I directed for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer illustrates some of the points I have been making” (300).

<sup>152</sup> Edward Tufte, *Beautiful Evidence* (Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press, 2006) , 67; 45. Tufte’s book is geared primarily towards helping readers detect specious and rhetorically-leading “explanatory imagery,” to see how “confirming alignments will pleasingly lock into place if the desired answer is already known” (17).

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<sup>153</sup> Arthur to DeMille, June 25, 1957, Box 7, Folder 29, DMA. Arthur also draws attention to his synthetic key chart for “major facets of the DeMille story.”

<sup>154</sup> T. R. Schellenberg, *The Management of Archives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 97. Manipulating the corporate archive itself would be a violation of provenance, the cornerstone of archival management that establishes the identity of records “in relation to activities of a particular office” (97).

<sup>155</sup> Waldo G. Leland, “American Archival Problems,” (American Historical Association presentation 1909) quoted in Schellenberg, 179.

<sup>156</sup> “Skeleton digests,” it should be pointed out, was a term used for one of Arthur’s breakdowns.

<sup>157</sup> Barthes, “Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers,” *Image Music Text*, 198.

<sup>158</sup> Derrida, 7.

<sup>159</sup> John Guillory, “The Memo and Modernity,” *Critical Inquiry* 31 (2004): 115.

<sup>160</sup> Guillory, 115-116.

<sup>161</sup> Vivienne [?] to Flossie [?], Inter-Office Communication, 23 February 1939. See also Frank Calvin to deMille, 4 Sept 1936, Box 259, Folder 6, DMA: “You wanted to remember the man on the set that you called ‘Missouri’. He talks with a slow drawl. His name is Marty Joyce.”

<sup>162</sup> It’s worth stressing that this enduring office cliché insinuates the composite and indeed ghostwritten nature of corporate authority in general.

<sup>163</sup> Leah Price and Pamela Thurschwell, *Literary Secretaries/Secretarial Culture* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 6.

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<sup>164</sup> The “secretary’s mind,” write Price and Thurschwell, is “pictured as disposable, a machine for mechanical reproduction...The ideal worker bec[ame] a non-reading writer” (5-6).

<sup>165</sup> Donald Hayne to Howard L. Goodkind, 18 September 1953, Box 9, Folder 1, DMA.

<sup>166</sup> *Jones’s Magazine* (winter, 1938), Box 334, Folder 8, DMA.

<sup>167</sup> *Autobiography*, 373-374.

<sup>168</sup> “We put up new buildings at the DeMille studio. We even put in a radio station so that I could keep in touch with the studio when I was sailing the coastal waters in [my yacht] the Seaward” (273).

<sup>169</sup> Derrida, 2-3.

<sup>170</sup> Grafton, 22.

<sup>171</sup> “Hedy May Play Wire Walker; All’s Well with C. B. DeMille” *Los Angeles Times* 22 Jan 1950 : 7.

<sup>172</sup> Paolo Cherchi Usai and Lorenzo Codelli, “The DeMille Legacy: An Introduction,” in *The DeMille Legacy*, eds. Usai and Codelli (Pordenone: Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, 1991), 16.

<sup>173</sup> As Louis Gottschalk once cautioned: “few things will so thoroughly interfere with book sales as footnotes” (19). *Understanding History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950), 19.

<sup>174</sup> Art Arthur to DeMille, 10 Sept 1953, Box 7, Folder 29. DMA. DeMille wrote back the next day: “It is good to know you think my decision to write my autobiography is not a sign of dotage. I particularly appreciate your suggestion that the research papers, etc., and any parts that have to be left out of the book for want of space should be kept

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together and made available for possible future researchers. I will do that.” DeMille to Artur, Box 7, Folder 29. DMA.

<sup>175</sup> David Ulin, “Searching Big Picture for Answers,” *Los Angeles Times*, Oct 29 2012 : D3.

<sup>176</sup> Donald Hayne, “You Don’t Know Mr. DeMille,” Box 9, Folder 17, DMA.

## CHAPTER 2

<sup>177</sup> Cecil B. DeMille, “Notes for Denver—Dinner at Silver Glad Room at Cosmopolitan Hotel [*Union Pacific* Preview Tour],” 15 April 1939, Box 549, Folder 7, DMA.

<sup>178</sup> Frank Calvin, “Research on ‘The Buccaneer’ [Press Release],” 8 Dec 1937, Box 529, Folder 5, DMA.

<sup>179</sup> “US Film Industry Sees 1937 Greatest Year,” *Film Daily*, 23 December 1936.

<sup>180</sup> “Hollywood Confidence and Enthusiasm Highest in Years, Says Zukor,” *Film Daily*, 5 September 1936. The “big pictures either projected or in the making” that Zukor references are all set in the American past, *Maid of Salem*, *Go West*, *Young Man*, and DeMille’s *The Plainsman*.

<sup>181</sup> Peggy Schwartz to Emily Barrye [DeMille secretary], 8 April 1936, Box 323, Folder 3, DMA.

<sup>182</sup> Schwartz to Barrye, 22 Apr, 1936, Box 323, Folder 3, DMA.

<sup>183</sup> Frank Calvin, Research on “The Buccaneer,” 8 December 1937, Box 529, Folder 5, DMA.

<sup>184</sup> As Jesse Lasky Jr., a DeMille unit screenwriter in the late-thirties, recalled, “[DeMille] felt audiences were ripe for sweeping vistas of continent-taming tribulations.

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. . . We needed to regain a sense of purpose in the long hangover from Prohibition and the materialistic dis-establishment of the Depression. . . . Ripe time to produce chauvinistic fairy tales—thundering with rescuing cavalry, Old Glory cracking above the horse soldiers bugling into the wind, racing to save the settlers from the savages.” Jesse Lasky Jr., *What Ever Happened to Hollywood?* (New York: Funk & Wagnall) , 150. See also Cecil B. DeMille to N. Helacky [Editor, *The Cinema*, London], 16 Dec 1937, Box 332, Folder 11, DMA: “The best thing that can happen for the trade is a concentration by each studio on two or three subjects of world-wide importance and historic significance which will give theater business a much needed impetus and the studios needed revenue. England in the past few years have [sic] proved the wisdom of concentrating on a few fine pieces of work [including period productions *Henry the Eighth* and *Scarlet Pimpernel*]”.

<sup>185</sup> George Custen, *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992) , 112.

<sup>186</sup> Custen, 41.

<sup>187</sup> Stephen Bann, *The Clothing of Clio: A Study of the Representation of History in Ninetennth-Century Britain and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) , 145.

<sup>188</sup> Rob Reel, “‘Buccaneer’ Page in Real Life, Reel History,” *Chicago American*, 22 January 22, 1938 [n.p] *Buccaneer* clippings binder, DMA; “‘The Buccaneer’, DeMille’s Latest, is a Gripping Photoplay,” *Kansas City Star*, 6 February 1938 [n.p], *Buccaneer* clippings binder, DMA.

<sup>189</sup>George Osmand Moher to De Mille, Dec 22, 1936. Box 529, Folder 12.

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<sup>190</sup> “World Premiere of Buccaneer Billed,” *Times Picayune*, 2 Jan 1938 [n.p], *Buccaneer* clippings binder, DMA, MSS 1400, Series 18, Vol 129.

<sup>191</sup> Fortier to Calvin [Cecil B. DeMille Productions, Inc.], 15 May 1937. Box 530, Folder 14: “We would appreciate if you would put us on your follow-up list at the time you will be actually filming, as Mr. DeMille thought there might be some sets that might be useful for the benefit of the public at our Museum.” On 24 May 1937 Calvin responded: “we will see what we have in the way of props that might be interesting for the museum to have.” See also Emma Quigley [Vice President, Special Libraries Association, Los Angeles] to DeMille, 14 July 1939, Box 537, Folder 19, DMA: “We sincerely appreciate all the material sent to us for our Exhibit, but particularly the books with your personal book plates. Due to your long and outstanding association with the industry any volumes from your library would be of special interest. It was our hope to bring to the attention of the public the great importance of authentic research as it affects all phases of a picture, instead of the emphasis usually placed on star names and personalities.”

<sup>192</sup> Stephen Bann, *The Clothing of Clio: A Study of the Representation of History in Nineteenth-Century Britain and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 23.

<sup>193</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994 [edition]), xvi.

<sup>194</sup> Julie Turnock, “The Screen on the Set: The Problem of Classical-Studio Rear Projection,” *Cinema Journal* 51, no. 4 (2012) : 160.

<sup>195</sup> Laura Mulvey, “A Clumsy Sublime,” *Film Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2007) : 3.

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<sup>196</sup> Mulvey, 3.

<sup>197</sup> Rosen, 161.

<sup>198</sup> Rosen, 182.

<sup>199</sup> “Bill Pine Here,” *Item*, 27 Dec. 1937, *Buccaneer* clippings binder, DMA.

<sup>200</sup> “Film Official Looking Overs Scenes for Lafitte Picture,” *The States* [New Orleans], 12 July 1937, *Buccaneer* clippings file, DMA.

<sup>201</sup> *The Buccaneer*'s source text, *Lafitte the Pirate* by Lyle Saxon, underscores this sense of ecological continuity: “So it was in Lafitte’s time, and so, in a sense, it remains today...there remains a vast realm of sea-marsh given over to gulls and terns and pelicans, and those other wild creatures which have lived and mated there from time immemorial.” Saxon, *Lafitte the Pirate* (New York: The Century Company, 1930) , 39. A preview tour address from DeMille affirmed his local extras’ blood continuity with Lafitte’s historic mates: “For the scenes showing the pirates in their adopted homes and hiding in the bayous I sent a camera unit into the depths of the Louisiana swamps to photograph 700 descendants of those pirates who live there today as they did when Lafitte was their ‘boss’ and commander” (emphasis in original). Suggestion for Speech in the Theaters at Preview Showings, Box 536, Folder 2, DMA.

<sup>202</sup> Caldwell, 40.

<sup>203</sup> “Back from New Iberia,” *Tribune* July 23, 1937. The *Buccaneer*'s deluxe preview program depicted the insect annoyance in more ghastly detail: “Though inoculated against malaria and other swamp ills before leaving Hollywood, the film crew was severely plagued by red bugs, or chiggers. For the first day of their two-months’ stay they were on dry land—the rest they spent in slimy Mississippi backwash virtually alive



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with water moccasins and crocodiles. But it was the first day on dry land that did the harm. The chiggers, a microscopic form of parasite, dug into their flesh in tender parts and laid eggs which raised hundreds of itching welts on the flesh and hatched into additional chiggers.” Cecil B. DeMille’s 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Production: *The Buccaneer*, a Paramount Picture (premiere program), 23, Box 536, Folder 5, DMA.

<sup>204</sup> “Back from New Iberia.”

<sup>205</sup> Ralph Holmes, “ ‘Buccaneer’, DeMille Historical Masterpiece,” *Detroit Times*, 4 Feb 1938; “ ‘The Buccaneer’, DeMille’s Latest, is a Gripping Photoplay,” *Kansas City, MO, Star*, Feb 6, 1938. *Buccaneer* clippings binder, DMA. According to a Press Release, DeMille was inspired to move forward on a Lafitte picture two years before cameras rolled, while “tarpon fishing near the Island of Barataria, where Lafitte made his headquarters.” Bill Herbert, Press Release, n.d. [probably December 1936], Box 325, Folder 10, DMA.

<sup>206</sup> *The Buccaneer*, off-camera stills. Core Production Files, AMPAS.

<sup>207</sup> The dream of "transparent immediacy" is foiled by the tradition of "hypermediacy," when "the viewer is ... constantly reminded of the materials, the surface, and the mediated character" of an artwork. Classic rear-projection, along these lines, exemplifies an accidental hypermediacy. See Bolter and Grusin. *Re-Mediation*, 38.

<sup>208</sup> For a helpful, technical breakdown of rear-projection’s development in the Classical era, see Farcio Edouart, “The Evolution of Transparency Process Photography,” *American Cinematographer*, October 1943, reprinted in *The ASC Treasury of Visual Effects*, ed. Linwood G. Dunn (Hollywood, CA: American Society of Cinematographers, 1983) : 107-116.

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<sup>209</sup> Turnock, 161.

<sup>210</sup> "[C]omplaints of implausibility have been a general motif in Hitchcock criticism for half a century. The obvious rear projection in *Marnie* and *Spellbound*, the painted backdrops and artificial sets of *Under Capricorn*, the train wheels that whisper 'save Ashenden' in *Secret Agent*, the comically speeded-up fireworks of *To Catch a Thief* . . . [T]hese and similar moments in Hitchcock's work could be (and many have been) criticized as gross disruptions of the realistic illusions of the films in which they appear. The description is accurate, the complaint unjust. Though their importance varies from movie to movie, antirepresentational techniques in Hitchcock's films express the basic assumptions of much of his work. They signal a romanticism, a self-conscious sense of the fiction as a story of a certain kind, that is the dominant mode of many Hitchcock films and an important element in almost all of them" (5). Lesley Brill, *The Hitchcock Romance: Love and Irony in Hitchcock's Films* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

<sup>211</sup> Bob Gillham [New York office, Publicity] to Bill Pine [publicity, Paramount, West Coast], 24 Dec 1936, Box 325, Folder 6, DMA.

<sup>212</sup> Lasky Jr, 136.

<sup>213</sup> For an industry practitioner's take on how this essential "illusion of reality" is achieved through miniaturization, see Don Jahrous, "Building Miniatures," *American Cinematographer*, November 1931 reprinted in *ASC Special Effects*, ed. Linwood G. Dunn: "[The miniature artist] must be sufficiently an artist to make his miniatures harmonize with the full-scale settings of the picture. . . . In the execution of the design, exactness of detail is of vital importance, especially in the foreground, or in prominent

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elements of the setting elsewhere. This unusual detail is required in order to avoid grossness, which destroys the illusion of reality that is the distinctive difference between a good miniature prop and commonplace models and toys...[I]f it is missing, the audience speedily becomes conscious of it, and resentful of the fact that it is looking at a miniature” (99-100). My discussion of miniaturization is indebted to Bruno Latour’s outline for a “more parsimonious” historiography of the sciences, premised ideally on empirical scrutiny of “the precise practice and craftsmanship of knowing.” See Latour, “Visualizaiton and Cognition,” 3.

<sup>214</sup> Bruno Latour, “Visualization and Cognition: Thinking with Eyes and Hands,” *Knowledge and Society* vol. 6, 1986 : 7.

<sup>215</sup> Buccaneer Off-Camera Still, P102-289, AMPAS.

<sup>216</sup> “A prelude to activity on a larger scale,” is how the premiere program describes the art department’s miniature-scapes, “brought to DeMille for approval or changes.” Cecil B. DeMille’s 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Production: *The Buccaneer*, a Paramount Picture (premiere program), 23, Box 536, Folder 5, DMA.

<sup>217</sup> Dieder Maleuvre, *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999) , 133.

<sup>218</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

<sup>219</sup> Maleuvre, 134. The *Boston Globe* observed as well DeMille’s preparatory tendency to spatially concentrate the past, reporting that the director “has a whole room full of American histories back in Hollywood” (emphasis added).

<sup>220</sup> Frank Calvin to DeMille, Oct 9 1936, Box 323, Folder 9, DMA.

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<sup>221</sup> William Herbert to Weldon Reynolds [*Freehold Magazine*], 15 October 1937, Box 332, Folder 11, DMA. “Many of his pictures have been written there,” the publicist observes, “and he has entertained many of the greatest personalities in the realm of the screen, finance, and politics.” The twelve hundred acre ranch, cloistered in the oak recesses of Little Tujunga Canyon, also accommodated a game shelter, demonstrating that DeMille’s preservation imperatives went beyond the documentation of human history.

<sup>222</sup> Rosen, *Change Mummified*, 160.

<sup>223</sup> Cecil B. DeMille’s 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Production: *The Buccaneer*, a Paramount Picture (premiere program), 23, Box 536, Folder 5, DMA. The modification of “researcher” to the more dignified and artisanal-sounding “researchist” speaks to this push for academic credibility.

<sup>224</sup> *The Buccaneer: Books Used for Research*, Box 529, Folder, DMA.

<sup>225</sup> Cecil B. DeMille’s 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Production: *The Buccaneer*, a Paramount Picture (premiere program), Box 536, Folder 5, DMA. This ambition is amplified in DeMille’s mailed response to a hobbyist historian who claimed to possess authentic corroboration for Lafitte’s marriage, an ongoing controversy in Lafitte literature and lore: “One of our greatest difficulties in making a picture of this kind is to separate legend from fact for many families have had legendary stories handed down to them for several generations and have come to regard them as fact. They are generally very much annoyed when interlopers from Hollywood attempt to correct them on their local history . . . I believe [however] that I have photostatic copies of every known document in which Lafitte figures, including the messages of three Presidents regarding him, but I can find no trace

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or suggestion of a marriage except an unsubstantiated allusion to his widow, the Senora Del Norte, written by a traveler from Yucatan about 1825 or 26. Historians generally believe this to be a purely imaginative tale for this same document is the only evidence to in any way substantiate Lafitte's death upon the shores of Yucutan [sic]. Of course, legend has killed him many times in many places." DeMille to James J. McLoughlin, March 3, 1937, Box 529, Folder 12, DMA.

<sup>226</sup> For rights fees agreement see Bill Pine to Jeff Lazarus, 7 May 1937, Box 335, Folder 6, DMA. For Saxon's involvement as historical consultant see Bill Pine, Feb 22 1937, Box 530, F15, DMA.

<sup>227</sup> James W. Thomas, *Lyle Saxon: A Critical Biography* (Birmingham, AL: Summa Publications, 1991) , 31.

<sup>228</sup> Thomas, *Lyle Saxon*, 157.

<sup>229</sup> Lyle Saxon, *Lafitte the Pirate* (New York: The Century Company, 1930) , ix.

<sup>230</sup> Glasscock quoted in Saxon 7, 11.

<sup>231</sup> Saxon, 42. Lafitte's acquisition of "Letters of Marque" from the province of Colombia, which had seceded from Spain, made the seizure of Spanish goods a matter of legal "privateering" as opposed to "piracy." According to the laws of the sea, Letters of Marque granted "privateers" the right to sack the ships of declared enemies; pirates, on the other hand, boasted no such legitimating documentation. Thus Lafitte, the self-fashioned "leader of [a] privateering gentry" (62), took umbrage at the denigrated label of "pirate." For more on pirating as distinguished from privateering see Saxon 27-33.

<sup>232</sup> Saxon, 62.

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<sup>233</sup> Saxon transcribes Claiborne's 1813 "Proclamation" in full: "Whereas I have received information that upon or near the shores of Lake Barrataria, within the limits and jurisdiction of this State, a considerable Banditti composed of Individuals of different nations, have armed and equipped several Vessels for the avowed purpose of cruising on the high Seas, and committing depredations and piracies on the Vessels of Nations at peace of the United States, and to the great injury of the fair trade of the Public Revenue... I have thought proper to issue this my Proclamation hereby Commanding the persons engaged as aforesaid, in such unlawful acts to cease therefrom and forthwith to disperse and separate;--And I do charge and require all officers civil and Military in this State, each within his respective District, to be Individual engaged as aforesaid in the violation of the Laws;--And I do caution the people of this State, against holding any kind of intercourse, or being in any manner concerned with such high offenders;--And I do also earnestly exhort each and every good Citizen to afford help, protection and support to the officers in suppressing a combination so destructive to the Interests of the United States and of the State in particular, and to rescue Louisiana from the foul reproach which would attach to its characters should her shores afford an asylum or her Citizens countenance, to an association of Individuals, whose practices are so subversive of all Laws human and divine, and whose ill begotten treasure, no Man can partake, without being forever dishonored, and exposing himself to the severest punishment."

<sup>234</sup> Saxon 136-147. Saxon's ability to outline and disentangle a research problem was echoed in his correspondence as historical consultant. The following, a response to DeMille Unit researcher Frank Calvin, is therefore exemplary:

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You ask about the gown and jewels belonging to a Creole lady which were discovered in the warehouse at Baratavia when it was capture by the Americans. This is an historical fact. It is mentioned by Charles Gayarre, the Louisiana historian, and again in the chapter on Baratavia in Miss Grace King's "New Orleans, the Place and the People." It is also mentioned by Dr. Stanley Fay of the University of Chicago in a thesis which he prepared in 1929 but which has never been published insofar as I know. I also found references to this matter in the papers in the Rosenberg Library at Galveston, Texas. When I did my research on Lafitte in 1930, I made notes from some old records concerning this. It was, as I recall, an inventory in which jewels and linens belonging to the lady were identified. The lines were marked with initials or perhaps a crest – I have forgotten but I can dig up the notes, which are at my study in the country" (Lyle Saxon to Frank Calvin, 26 May 1937, Box 530, Folder 15, DMA).

<sup>235</sup> DeMille and his staff would often counter mailed disputes on *The Buccaneer's* accuracy by highlighting their possession of "photo-static copies of every known document in which Lafitte figures," as we saw in DeMille to James J. McLoughlin, 3 March 1937. Box 529, Folder 12, DMA.

<sup>236</sup> "Inside Story of The Buccanner," *The States*, 4 Jan 1938 (clipping, n.p.).

<sup>237</sup> Saxon, 256. The last three chapters of Saxon's *Lafitte* provide a helpful survey of the patchy documentation for Lafitte's later years. We know, for instance, thanks to "proof . . . in the archives of Spain," that Lafitte moved to Galveston, Texas, where he became a spy for Spanish Royalist forces in exchange for governmental representation. His attempts to re-create his smugglers paradise in Galveston, however, proved unsuccessful,

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thanks to Indian raids, a devastating hurricane in 1818, and roguish attacks on American vessels by his once-obedient privateers. Eventually, in 1821, some brazen piratical activity carried out by rogue breakaways of Lafitte colony forced the US Navy to deploy a brig-of-war and expel Lafitte and his men from Galveston. And here, as Saxon deduces, “the *history* of Lafitte comes to an end. Beyond that there are only fragments, brief notices in the newspapers of the period—and a mass of contradictory and improbably legends.”

<sup>238</sup> Saxon, 256.

<sup>239</sup> Rosen, 161.

<sup>240</sup> Maleuvre, 130-131.

<sup>241</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994 [edition]), 132.

<sup>242</sup> Maleuvre, 138.

<sup>243</sup> Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in *The Interpretations of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 9.

<sup>244</sup> Rob Reel, “‘Buccaneer’ Page in Real Life, Reel History,” *Chicago American*, 22 Jan 1938 (clipping, n.p.).

<sup>245</sup> See for example *The British Military Library: A Complete Body of Military Knowledge and Consisting of Original Communications with Selections from the Most Approved and Respectable Military Publications* (London: J. Carpenter and Co. Booksellers, 1804). See also DeMille to M. L. Clark, 4 March 1938, Box 536, Folder 10, DMA: “In order to have the British side of the story authentic, we used autobiographies



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of British officers that were present at the burning of Washington, as well as present at the Battle of New Orleans. Our research workers in England studied the British documents that pertained to this expedition.”

<sup>246</sup> Custen, *Bio/Pics*, 38.

<sup>247</sup> Description of Creek & Choctaw Indians—Recollections of an Artillery Officer, Benson Earle Hill, Vol. I. n.d. Box 529, Folder 1, DMA.

<sup>248</sup> Description of a Kentuckian, March 10, 1937, Box 529, Folder 1, DMA.

<sup>249</sup> Office of C.B. deMille to Joe Caplan, 27 July 1937, Box 259, Folder 6, DMA.

<sup>250</sup> “Buccaneer Wins Plaudits as an Engrossing Spectacle,” *Toledo Times*, 2 Feb 1938. Buccaneer clippings binder, DMA.

<sup>251</sup> “If you ask Frank Calvin.” Paramount Press Statement. October 23 1940. Frank Calvin, Core Biographical Collection, AMPAS.

<sup>252</sup> “All is not glamour in Hollywood.” Paramount Press Statement. Jun 12 1940. Frank Calvin, AMPAS.

<sup>253</sup> “All is not glamour in Hollywood.” Paramount Press Statement. Jun 12 1940. Frank Calvin, AMPAS.

<sup>254</sup> Frank Calvin, Props and Dressing of Extras and Sets, 3 Feb 1937, Box 530, Folder 15, DMA.

<sup>255</sup> Frank Calvin, Research on “The Buccaneer”, 8 Dec 1937, Box 529, Folder 5, DMA.

<sup>256</sup> For a compelling discussion on the ideological implications behind the museum’s “insistent” management of the eye see Tony Bennett, “Civic Seeing: Museums and the Organization of Vision,” in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006) , 270.

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<sup>257</sup> Bennet, 268.

<sup>258</sup> “Cecil B. DeMille to Use Ancient Guns for Film,” (clipping, n.d.), Box 529, Folder 7, DMA.

<sup>259</sup> Mieke Bal has addressed the self-interest frequently behind gestures of public access in “Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting,” in *Cultures of Collecting*, eds. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion, 1997). “Deceptively,” writes Bal, “collections, especially when publicly accessible, appear to ‘reach out’, but through this complex and half-hidden aspect they in fact ‘reach in’, helping the collector—and, a certain extent, the viewer—to develop their sense of self while providing them with an ethical or educational alibi” (105).

<sup>260</sup> In his press release titled “Research on ‘The Buccaneer’” (8 Dec 1937) Frank Calvin walks the reader through the painstaking work that went into this brief sequence, framing it as typical of the research adaptation process: “We first heard of the rockets from the line in the ‘Star Spangled Banner’ . . . Then later, in a book written by an English officer who was present at the Battle of New Orleans, we read a reference to the ‘firing of ever fatal rocket’, which was the signal for the British advance. The next step was to go to the Public Library and obtain books on old weapons and artillery. In these we found mention of the Congreve rocket and of the Woolwich Museum in England. We then wrote to our London representatives, who went to the Woolwich Museum, photographed in detail the rockets and rocket carriers, and forwarded the pictures to us. These in turn were carefully studied and duplicates of the actual rockets made at the studio. Thus, after months of painstaking study and research, we were able to show a short flash on the screen of the firing of the ever fatal rocket that changed the destiny of our nation. When the public

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realizes the meticulous care that is used to make an historical picture authentic, they will probably be less prone to criticize this particular branch of picture making.”

<sup>261</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Work of Art,” 40, quoted in Dieder Maleuvre, *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 18.

<sup>262</sup> See Wm. Herbert [DeMille speech writer], Speech for Universities, n.d. Box 536, Folder 4, DMA: “the sense of antiquity, of the period and of the people, a vivid and lasting impression . . . which I could never give . . . with mere words.”

<sup>263</sup> Bill Pine to James J. A. Fortier, Sept 22, 1937, Box 530, Folder 14, DMA.

<sup>264</sup> Hans Dreier, “Designing the Sets,” in *We Make the Movies*, ed. Nancy Naumberg (New York: WW Norton, 1937), 80.

<sup>265</sup> Dreier, “Designing the Sets,” 85.

<sup>266</sup> “Cabildo Gets Model,” *The Tribune*, Nov. 26, 1937. *Buccaneer* clippings binder, DMA.

<sup>267</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder,” in *Exhibiting Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Kar and Steven D. Lavine (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 42. *The Buccaneer*’s script was an additional “resonant” donation to the State Museum, gifted to Fortier before a crowd at Jackson Square in the historic French Quarter. Described by DeMille as an exemplary artifact, a symbol of a “new literature of celluloid,” the script was framed explicitly as both archival and forward-looking, an object that “may stimulate the study of the art of motion pictures, an art little understood by the layman [so it may] be used as a model to . . . students, interested in the study of the

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construction of motion picture stories.” Make Speech at Jackson Square, Jan 9 1938, Box 533, Folder 10, DMA.

<sup>268</sup> Wm. Herbert, Columbia University. Box 536, Folder 9, DMA. Hollywood’s ability to outspend academic institutions on historical research is a motif in DeMille’s American Trilogy oratory. The implication is that research gathered in DeMillean mass scale becomes an act of public good will, one potentially leading to archival breakthroughs: “All this data . . . in one way or another, either in the picture itself or in the printed material we distribute to schools, finds its way into educational channels. I consider that the money the studios invest in research is an investment in education. Education profits immeasurably from every sincere and authentic historical film that is made. Only a few years ago research workers from one studio made discoveries about Mesopotamia and the Mayan Empire which might not have come to light for centuries if the studios did not have the money and the enterprise to go into their research as energetically as they do.” Speech for Universities, Box 536, Folder 4, DMA.

<sup>269</sup> James J. A. Fortier [Curator, Louisiana State Museum], Report of Address before the Lions Club of New Orleans, 15 February 1938, Box 530, Folder 1, DMA.

<sup>270</sup> Governor Richard W. Leche, Proclamation, 30 December 1937, Box 535, Folder 12, DMA.

<sup>271</sup> DeMille Hits ‘Foreignism’ in Address at Chalmette Battle Anniversary Fete,” Jan 10, 1938, Buccaneer clippings binder, DMA.

<sup>272</sup> Speech at Chalmette Battlefield [nd], Box 536, Folder 9, DMA.

<sup>273</sup> In his Speech at Chalmette, DeMille suggests that his immersive research has brought hallucinatory presentness to Louisiana history: “My work in re-creating the lives of

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Lafitte and Jackson [for] ‘The Buccaneer’ . . . has engraved the details of this battle on my mind as an unforgettable and intense human drama. I can see the British troops . . . advancing to the ramparts in the merciless, deadly fire of Jackson’s men—the rockets overhead bursting with the thunderous red glare commemorated in ‘The Star Spangled Banner’. I can hear the band behind Jackson’s line play martial music . . . hear the orders of Jackson’s deep throat . . . The entire campaign from Villere’s Plantation to the final withdrawal of British troops under Lambert and the retreat from the Mississippi lies before me as if it were happening now.”

<sup>274</sup> Stanley C. Arthur [Regional Director, Survery of Federal Archives] to DeMille, 16 April 1937, Box 532, Folder 5, DMA.

<sup>275</sup> [DeMille Visits Boston for Cleopatra opening] (Paramount News, 1934). UCLA Film & Television Archive: “Speaking of Cleopatra, what a wonderful thing it would be if she had had newsreel cameras then; it would have eased my work very much. If Cleopatra could have been photographed drifting down the river . . . with Mark Anthony [or] if we had a newsreel weekly of Caesar’s triumphal entry into Rome . . . If they had newsreels then, we’d have a history such as, such as we will have in the future.”

<sup>276</sup> Bradley W. Richards, *The Savage View: Charles Savage, Pioneer Mormon Photographer* (Nevada City, CA: Carl Mautz Publishing, 1995) , xvi.

<sup>277</sup> Cunningham’s correspondence speaks to the often-obscure narrative purpose of a DeMille Unit archive hunt. “I do not know as yet whether these records are of any value,” Cunningham confessed in his first day summary for DeMille. His confusion was no less pronounced after two weeks of accumulation: “In the first place, the mass of material is beyond all expectations. . . Another thing, we hardly expected . . . to find

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anyone alive who participated in the construction of the Union Pacific Railroad. Since then we have been told about so many ‘sole survivors’ that I begin to feel like the registrar in a home for the aged. However, here is how my problem is complicated. In nearly every instance when I have interviewed or read material, I have picked up some incident, a bit of characterization or other point of value which can be used in writing the story. Yet none of these fragments has provided the inspiration for the key situation about which Mr. DeMille is worried. There is no telling . . . when one such piece of data or anecdote will do so.” Jack Cunningham to DeMille, 26 March 1938; Cunningham to DeMille, April 6, 1938. Both letters are from Jack Cunningham papers, Billy Rose Theatre Division, the New York Public Library. T-MSS 1942-003.

<sup>278</sup> Allan Sekula, “Reading an Archive: Photography between Labour and Capital,” in *The Photography Reader*, ed. Liz Wells (New York: Routledge, 2002) , 447.

<sup>279</sup> Sekula, 447.

<sup>280</sup> George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* ( New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962) , 9-10.

<sup>281</sup> Calvin to Bill Pine, 9 April 1938, Box 546, Folder 11, DMA.

<sup>282</sup> Calvin to Bill Pine, 9 April 1938, Box 546, Folder 11, DMA.

<sup>283</sup> Calvin, *Research Notes for Cecil B. DeMille’s Production of Union Pacific*.

<sup>284</sup> Rosen, 189.

<sup>285</sup> Bann, 74 (emphasis added).

<sup>286</sup> Omaha Chamber of Commerce, What the Mammoth Gala ‘Golden Spike Days’ Will Mean to You and to Omaha Business, 26 April 1939. Box 548, Folder 16, BYU;

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DeMille, Inter-Office Communication Memo, Re: Subject for Talks, 2 April 1939, Box 549, Folder 7, DMA.

<sup>287</sup> The “incidental business” of the Big Tent is noted as an ideal illustration.

<sup>288</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000) , 120.

#### **CHAPTER 4**

<sup>289</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) , 145.

<sup>290</sup> Advertisement, *Boy's Life*, December (1936) : 41.

<sup>291</sup> Vivian Sobchack, “Surge and Splendor: A Phenomenology of the Hollywood Historical Epic,” *Representations* 29 (1990) : 9.

<sup>292</sup> Jani Scandura, *Down in the Dumps: Place, Modernity, American Depression* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008) , 17.

<sup>293</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, Fireside Chat of 6 September 1936. Transcripts of Roosevelt’s fireside chats can be found at: <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/fireside.php>>

<sup>294</sup> Jesse Lasky, Jr. *What Ever Happened to Hollywood* (New York: Funk & Wagnell, 1975) , 150.

<sup>295</sup> Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White provide an instructive definition of this hybrid genre: “the western epic concentrates on action and movement, developing a heroic character whose quests and battles serve to define the nation and its origins.” *The Film Experience*, (New York: Macmillan, 2004) , 303.

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- <sup>296</sup> Piers Brendon, *The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002) , 277.
- <sup>297</sup> Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1996) , 265.
- <sup>298</sup> Denning, 126.
- <sup>299</sup> Scandura, 17.
- <sup>300</sup> *Lux Radio Theater*, 31 May 1937. Complete broadcast available at: <<http://www.archive.org/details/Lux02>> [emphasis added].
- <sup>301</sup> Cecil B. DeMille, Galley Proof for January *Stage* article, 7 December 1936, Box 528, Folder 5, DMA (emphasis added). DeMille's article was published in the first 1937 issue of *Stage*.
- <sup>302</sup> B. R. Chrisler, "Gossip of the Films," *New York Times*, 6 December 1936, X8 [emphasis added].
- <sup>303</sup> Frank S. Nugent, "The Screen," *New York Times*, 14 January 1937, 16.
- <sup>304</sup> David Levin, *History as Romantic Art: Bancroft, Prescott, Motley, and Parkman* (New York: Harbinger, 1959) , 49.
- <sup>305</sup> Levin, 26, 27, 29.
- <sup>306</sup> Deleuze, 149.
- <sup>307</sup> William Godwin, "Of History and Romance," appendix IV in *Caleb Williams*, ed. Maurice Hindle (New York: Penguin, 1988) , 362.
- <sup>308</sup> Cecil B. DeMille to Mrs. Mary Jester Allen, Director, Buffalo Bill Museum, 14 November 1935, Box 521, Folder 14, DMA. See also Mary Jester Allen to Cecil B. DeMille, undated correspondence, Box 521, Folder 14, DMA. Allen lets DeMille know



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that the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association would appreciate “a very careful, historically correct motion picture of Buffalo Bill . . . Something as colorful as the last of the great scouts . . . With a real background of real pioneering America.”

<sup>309</sup> DeMille to Jeff Lazarus, 1 November 1935, Box 526, Folder 16, DMA.

<sup>310</sup> “Publicity-Advertising-Exploittion on ‘The Plainsman,’” Box 528, Folder 5, DMA.

DeMille’s self-comparisons to Remington not only illuminate his affinities with romantic historiography but also indicate the director’s tendency of enhancing his films’ prestige through intertextual associations with the “finer” arts. For valuable discussions of DeMille and intertextuality, see See Sumiko Higashi, *Cecil B. DeMille and American Culture: The Silent Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) , 20-25, and Lea Jacobs, “Belasco, DeMille and the Development of Lasky Lighting,” *Film History*, 5, no. 5 (1993) : 405-418. See also Cecil B. DeMille, *The Autobiography of Cecil B. DeMille* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1959) , 115 : DeMille recalls how after Lasky Co. producer Sam Goldfish (later Goldwyn) screened *The Warrens of Virginia* (1915), a civil war drama in which DeMille experimented with theatrical low-key lighting effects, “a very disturbed Goldfish wired back to ask what we were doing. Didn’t we know that if we showed only half an actor’s face, the exhibitors would want to pay only half the usual price for the picture? Jesse [Lasky] and I wired back to Sam that if the exhibitors did not know Rembrandt lighting when they saw it, so much the worse for them. Sam’s reply was jubilant with relief: for *Rembrandt lighting* the exhibitors would pay double!”

<sup>311</sup> For a telling example of DeMille’s research departments hunt for minor historical detail, see “Uniforms and Equipments for Seventh Cavalry,” Box 21, Folder 10, DMA.

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The document gives detailed descriptions of each piece of the Cavalry uniform, from socks (“regulation issue was of gray wool or cotton”), to spurs (“the regulation was the brass, slightly curved one with small rowel”), to gauntlets “(the Officers wore what they pleased . . . the Men wore gauntlets of buff with about six inch cuff”), and so on.

<sup>312</sup> Cecil B. DeMille, Galley Proof for *Stage* article, 7 December 1936, Box 528, Folder 5, DMA.

<sup>313</sup> As Levin points out, the sense of “historical mobility” was a major factor in the public appeal of romantic history. See Levin, 22-23: “Motley adds interest to his history [*Rise of the Dutch Republic*] by reminding that he is reading the ‘secret never published correspondence of royalty; Parkman insists repeatedly that he has actually studied the historic scenes, that he has painted his picture of Indians ‘from life’; Prescott defends Ferdinand and Isabella as ‘an honest record, from rare and authentic sources, of a period, rich in circumstance, of personages most remarkable in their character.’”

<sup>314</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *History as Literature and Other Essays* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913) , 8-10.

<sup>315</sup> Godwin, “Of History and Romance,” 367.

<sup>316</sup> James K. Ballinger, *Frederic Remington* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1989) , 37, 85-88.

<sup>317</sup> David McCullough, “The Man,” in *Frederick Remington: The Masterworks* (New York: Henry N. Adams, Inc., 1988) , 20.

<sup>318</sup> DeMille to Arthur Rosson and Gene Hornbustle, 18 June 1936, Box 527, Folder 15, DMA.

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<sup>319</sup> DeMille, telegraph to Arthur Rosson, 20 June 1936, Box 527, Folder 15, DMA. See also, Robert S. Birchard, *Cecil B. DeMille's Hollywood* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004) , 286-287. In his brief production history of *The Plainsman*, Birchard cites DeMille's telegram as indicative of the "direct and specific instructions the filmmaker would offer to those who worked with him."

<sup>320</sup> Bill Pine, telegraph to Arthur Rosson, 29 June 1936, Box 527, Folder 15, DMA. Pine, DeMille's associate producer, was most likely passing on DeMille's directions.

<sup>321</sup> "Transparency," or "plates," was the industry's term for what is more commonly referred to as "rear projection" (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of *The Buccaneer's* use of rear projection photography). Farciot Edouart, a longtime collaborator of DeMille, was the transparency artist on *The Plainsman*. Edouart was also responsible for the stunning rear projection in *The Ten Commandments* (1956) and his technical skills enhanced the brilliant artifice of Hitchcock, too, most notably in *To Catch a Thief* (1955) and *Vertigo* (1958). For more on *The Plainsman's* rear projection, see Birchard, 297, and DeMille *Autobiography*, 350.

<sup>322</sup> DeMille's penchant for massive assemblies of extras also added to the sensorally immersive viewing experience. See Arthur Rosson, Description of Second Unit Shoot with Wyoming Mounted Militia, 23 June 1936, Box 527, Folder 15, DMA: "The second unit will shoot . . . First: Custer's ride to the rescue of Beecher's Island . . . ONE HUNDRED FULL COSTUMES SHOULD COVER THE FOREGROUND."

<sup>323</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Reality of the Historical Past* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1984) , 5-14.

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- <sup>324</sup> See “‘The Plainsman’—List of Books Used in Research,” Box 521, Folder 10, DMA, which includes Remington’s *Crooked Trails* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1898), in which an illustration of *Through the Smoke Sprang the Daring Soldier* appears on page 46.
- <sup>325</sup> Bolger Burke, 50-52.
- <sup>326</sup> Alison Griffiths, “‘Shivers Down Your Spine’: Panoramas and the Origins of the Cinematic Reenactment,” *Screen* 44, no. 1 (2003) : 11.
- <sup>327</sup> Gladys Rosson, Comments re: Plainsman preview tour from theater Managers and exhibitors, 7 December 1936, Box 528, Folder 9, DMA.
- <sup>328</sup> Robert Burgoyne, *The Hollywood Historical Film* (Malden: Blackwell, 2008) , 57.
- <sup>329</sup> Levin, 18.
- <sup>330</sup> James K. Ballinger, *Frederic Remington* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1989) , 62. Parkman, after discovering that Remington had been commissioned to illustrate his volume, informed the painter that “I am very glad that you are to illustrate the ‘Oregon Trail . . . [for] I have long admired your rendering of Western life, as superior to that of any other artist.’”
- <sup>331</sup> Levin, 168.
- <sup>332</sup> Godwin, 363.
- <sup>333</sup> Office of Cecil B. DeMille, memo to Bill Pine Box, 3 March 1936, Box 527, Folder 6, DMA.
- <sup>334</sup> “Publicity-Advertising-Exploitation on ‘The Plainsman,’” Box 528, Folder 5, DMA.
- <sup>335</sup> The Knave, “Wild Bill in Film,” *Oakland Tribune*, 1 November 1936 (clipping, n.p). Box 527, Folder 22, DMA.

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<sup>336</sup> The Knave, “Wild Bill in Film.”

<sup>337</sup> “Learning How,” 15 August 1936 *Los Angeles Times* : 7.

<sup>338</sup> “Paramount’s Advertising Approach: The Plainsman,” Box 528, Folder 5, DMA.

The art department built “studio replicas of Hays City, Dodge City and St. Louis[.]” In addition, “A full-sized Mississippi river boat was constructed, manned by a full crew and jammed with passengers.”

<sup>339</sup> Gene Hornbostel to Mr. DeMille, 22 June 1936, Box 527, Folder 15, DMA. The guardsmen’s desire to participate in the reenactment outweighed the demand for extras. Competitive drills were held in order to single out “the pick of the regiment.”

<sup>340</sup> “Indians Who Fought Custer Appear in Film,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 January 1937 : 8. “The last two surviving Cheyenne who took part with the Sioux redskins in Custer’s massacre in 1876, were hired by Cecil B. DeMille during the filming of ‘The Plainsman’[.] . . . The two braves are Louis Dog, who claims to be 101 years old, and Stump Horn, a mere youngster of 87 years.”

<sup>341</sup> “Indians Who Fought Custer Appear in Film.”

<sup>342</sup> “Paramount’s Advertising Approach: The Plainsman,” Box 528, Folder 5, DMA [emphasis added].

<sup>343</sup> Frank S. Nugent, “The Screen,” *New York Times*, 14 January 1937, 16.

<sup>344</sup> Cecil B. DeMille, telegraph to Mayor W. J. Evans, Deming, New Mexico, 27 April 1937, Box 528, Folder 5, DMA.

<sup>345</sup> Welford Beaton, “DeMille on a Broad Canvas,” *The Hollywood Spectator*, 5 December 1936, 10 [emphasis added].

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<sup>346</sup> Gladys Rosson, re. *The Plainsman*, Misc. comments made in lobbies after showing of the picture, 7 December 1936, Box 528, Folder 9, DMA.

<sup>347</sup> “Publicity-Advertising-Exploitation on ‘The Plainsman,’” Box 528, Folder 5, DMA.

<sup>348</sup> “Coming and Going,” *Film Daily*, 3 December 1936, 4: “Cecil B. DeMille left here yesterday for Chicago, Omaha, Denver [and then will return to] Hollywood.” See also “Coming and Going,” *Film Daily* 8 December 1936, 2: “Cecil B. DeMille today returns to Hollywood from the transcontinental preview tour with ‘The Plainsman.’” Though DeMille made live appearances only in the cities listed above, preview screenings were also held in Houston, New Orleans, and Dallas. For DeMille’s travel itinerary, see “Plaisman Tour—December 1936” Box 528, Folder 10, DMA.

<sup>349</sup> Preview Cards for Dallas, Omaha, Houston, and New Orleans are found in Box 528, Folder 7, DMA.

<sup>350</sup> Barney Oldfield, “Producer DeMille Shows ‘The Plainsman’ Depicting Cody, Hickok, To Nebraskans,” *Lincoln Sunday Journal and Star*, 6 December 1936, 3.

<sup>351</sup> DeMille to Mrs. Agnes Robinson, 18 November 1936, Box 521, Folder 13, DMA.

<sup>352</sup> Birchard, 293. *The Plainsman* grossed \$2,278,533.33, more than twice its production cost (\$974,084.85), and returned DeMille to Paramount’s good graces after losing money on his medieval epic, *The Crusades* (1936). See also, “Plainsman Will Hold Second Week,” *Los Angeles Times*, 21 January 1937, A19, in which it’s reported how *The Plainsman* is “Continuing its assault on Paramount box office records.”

<sup>353</sup> Edwal Jones, “Mr. DeMille Returns to the Plains,” *New York Times*, 10 January 1937, X4.

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<sup>354</sup> Virginia Van Upp, script draft for “Buffalo Bill,” 4 March 1936, DMA, BYU.

DeMille’s comments are written in pencil in the document’s margins.

<sup>355</sup> Cecil B. DeMille, Galley Proof for *Stage* article, 7 December 1936, Box 528, Folder 5, DMA.

<sup>356</sup> “Omaha Experiment with Higher Admish is Flop,” *Film Daily*, 7 December 1936, 10.

<sup>357</sup> Omaha Preview Cards, in Box 528, Folder 7, DMA.

<sup>358</sup> The Depression-era Hollywood epic not only allegorized the nation’s prized values but also became in itself a sign of American economic recuperation. See “News of the Screen,” *New York Times*, 15 February 1937, p. 12, in which it is related how *The Plainsman*’s enormous success had encouraged Paramount to prepare more large-scale historical pictures, including Frank Lloyd’s recreation of the Salem witch trials *The Maid of Salem* and the slave trade drama *Souls at Sea*. See also Harold Hefferman, “Hollywood Digs More Gold,” *New York Times*, 24 October 1937, p. X5, in which it is reported that “the greatest picture-spending orgy Hollywood has ever known rolls on unabated.” For more on Hollywood’s late-Depression discursive climate of industrial resilience, see “Para. Adds 12 Films to Zukor Jubilee Drive Schedule,” *Film Daily*, 21 November 1936, pp. 1, 7; “Hollywood Confidence and Enthusiasm Highest in Years, Says Zukor,” *Film Daily*, 5 September 1936; “New Season to Set Record in Outstanding Films, Says Will Hays,” *Film Daily*, 21 August 1936, pp. 1, 13; and Jack Alicoate, “US Film Industry Sees 1937 Greatest Year,” *Film Daily*, 23 December 1936, pp. 1, 8.

<sup>359</sup> Burgoyne, 10.

<sup>360</sup> N. A. Hickok to DeMille, 27 January 1937, Box 521, Folder 13, DMA.

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<sup>361</sup> DeMille to N. A. Hickok, 4 February 1937, Box 521, Folder 13, DMA. See also DeMille to Mrs. Agnes Robinson [Granddaughter of Hickok's widow], 18 November 1936, Box 521, Folder 13, DMA, and DeMille to Ernest W. Cody, 3 August 1936, Box 521, Folder 14, DMA.

<sup>362</sup> Cecil B. DeMille, telegraph to Mayor W. J. Evans, Deming, New Mexico, 27 April 1937, Box 528, Folder 5, DMA.

<sup>363</sup> Cecil B. DeMille, telegraph to Ernest W. Cody, 3 August 1936, Box 521, Folder 14, DMA.

<sup>364</sup> Here, William Godwin refers to the ability of historical characters to both inspire and represent future generations. This scene thematically anticipates the ending of a much later epic film, Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000), which, like *The Plainsman*, helped revitalize what seemed at the time to be a culturally outmoded form. Robert Burgoyne's analysis of *Gladiator*'s conclusion brings the similarities between the two films into sharp focus: "After Maximus has been killed, Juba [the African gladiator whom Maximus has befriended] is viewed alone in the Colosseum. Here he buries Maximus' figurines of his family and ancestors in the dirt of the Colosseum floor . . . The planting of the figurines by the black gladiator, with its clear suggestion of an appeal to the future, can be read as a symbol of the planting of the seeds of a new nation, a new civilization" (Burgoyne, 97).

<sup>365</sup> "News of the Screen," *New York Times*, 25 November 1936, L19.

<sup>366</sup> Andy Hamilton, "The Camera Moves into the Classroom," *Los Angeles Times Sunday Magazine*, 14. It should also be noted that the Schools Motion Picture Committee, "a voluntary organization composed of parents and teachers," included *The Plainsman* on



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their list of films “For Young Audiences.” See “Films of Week-End For Young Audiences,” *New York Times*, 25 February 1937, L19.

<sup>367</sup> “First Annual Buffalo Bill Essay Contest,” Box 521, Folder 14, DMA. Unfortunately, the winning essay can not be found in the DeMille Archives at BYU.

<sup>368</sup> Levin, 53.

<sup>369</sup> DeMille to Mrs. Agnes Robinson, 18 November 1936, Box 521, Folder 13, DMA.

<sup>370</sup> Scandura, 5.

<sup>371</sup> For a discussion of reenactment as applied to cinematic historical representation, see Burgoyne, *The Hollywood Historical Film*, 6-9: “the concept of reenactment [is an] act of imaginative re-creation that allows the spectator to imagine they are ‘witnessing again’ the events of the past . . . The historical film conveys its message about the world by reenacting the past (7-8).”

<sup>372</sup> Publicity Campaign Manual for *The Plainsman*, pages 13-14, Box 528, Folder 5, DMA.

<sup>373</sup> I am indebted to David Glassberg’s extraordinary *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), which has influenced my thought on the public spectacle that surrounded *The Plainsman*: “Public historical imagery is an essential element of our culture, contributing to how we define our sense of identity and direction. It locates us in time, as we learn about our place in succession of past and future generations, as well as in space, as we learn the story of our locale . . . Ultimately, historical imagery supplies orientation towards our future action” (1).

<sup>374</sup> Exhibitors Booklet regarding *Plainsman*-Boy Scout tie-up, Box 528, Folder 1, DMA.

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<sup>375</sup> Bill Pine to DeMille, “Re tie-up with the Boy Scout Organization for THE PLAINSMAN,” 7 October 1936, Box 538, Folder 1, DMA.

<sup>376</sup> Higashi, 120.

<sup>377</sup> Higashi, 4-6.

<sup>378</sup> Higashi, 201-203.

<sup>379</sup> C. J. Dunphy, to Bill Pine, 27 August 1936, Box 22, Folder 8, DMA.

<sup>380</sup> Publicity Campaign Manual for *The Plainsman*, pages 12, 16, 17, 10, Box 528, Folder 5, DMA.

<sup>381</sup> “Against its detractors,” writes Theodore Adorno, “fashion’s most powerful response is that it participates in the individual impulse, which is saturated with history.” See Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) , 316.

<sup>382</sup> John Dos Passos, *The Ground We Stand On* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1941) quoted in Robert McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941* (New York: Random House, 1984) , 221. The need to situate oneself within a progressive historical genealogy is reflected as well by peoples’ alleged personal ties to *The Plainsman*’s characters. DeMille, in a response to an alleged acquaintance to a friend of Buffalo Bill, gives a comical impression of the enormity of this public desire to be intimately connected to historical figures: “My desk is piled so high with letters from and about men who nursed Buffalo Bill in the cradle, carried him across the plains, rode in the Show with him, divorced him, shot him, etc. etc. etc., that I have come to the conclusion that more people were Buffalo Bill’s pals than went on the crusades.” See DeMille, letter to Mr. Milton E. Hoffman, 18 November 1935, Box 521, Folder 12, DMA.

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<sup>383</sup> Sobchack, 29.

<sup>384</sup> Godwin, 362.

### CHAPTER 3

<sup>385</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan  
16.

<sup>386</sup> Oliver Olson [preview audience member] to DeMille, Aug 27, 1928, Box 293, Folder  
10, DMA.

<sup>387</sup> Charles White to DeMille, July 20, 1928, Box 291, Folder 17, DMA.

<sup>388</sup> Gladys Rosson to Charles White, July 27, 1928, Box 291, Folder 17, DMA.

<sup>389</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, "The Man with the Muck Rake," 14 April 1906.

*AmericanRhetoric.com*. (19 Jan 2016).

<sup>390</sup> Filler, Louis, *Appointment at Armageddon: Muckraking and Progressivism in the  
American Tradition* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976) , 22.

<sup>391</sup> Judith and William Serrin, eds. *Muckraking! The Journalism that Changed America*  
(New York: The New Press, 2002) , xxii.

<sup>392</sup> Cyril Burt, *The Young Delinquent* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1925) ,  
viii. For an impactful account of Thomas Mott Osborne's muckraking observations  
drawn from "personal experience during a week of voluntary confinement in the state  
prison," see *Within Prison Walls* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1917).

<sup>393</sup> Miriam Van Waters, *Youth in Conflict* (New York : Republic Publishing Company,  
1925) , v.

<sup>394</sup> quoted in Van Waters, *Youth in Conflict*, ix.

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<sup>395</sup> “Scientific synthesis of psychology, psychiatry, medical opinion and social science, speaking through court clinics and nursery school and bureaus of child guidance, now places the burden where it fundamentally belongs.” Van Waters, *Youth in Conflict* , vi.

<sup>396</sup> Ben B. Lindsey, *The Revolt of Modern Youth* (New York: Garden City Publications, 1925) , 95. The topical reach and melodramatic flare of Lindsay’s chapter sub-sections warrant recapitulation, as they betray tonal resonance between journalistic muckraking and more “sober” book-length accounts like *Revolt*. Here’s a sample: “How many really go wrong? . . . What happened after church? . . . The hip flask, one key to Folly Lane . . . The Flapper that Petted that She Might Dance . . . Enter the Abortionists . . . The Younger Generation not a Wormy Apple . . . The Sophisticated and Rightly Educated Girl Establishes Her own Sex Restraints . . . Freedom a Less Perilous Thing than Too Much Law.”

<sup>397</sup> Lindsey, *Revolt* , 27.

<sup>398</sup> Lindsey, *Revolt* , 312.

<sup>399</sup> See publisher’s brochure *Judge Ben B. Lindsey—A Blazer of New Trails*, available through the University of Iowa <<http://sdrc.lib.uiowa.edu/traveling-culture/chau1/pdf/lindsey/4/brochure.pdf>> (19 Jan 2016). Thomas Edison, Havelock Ellis, and George Bernard Shaw, among others, contributed endorsements for Lindsey’s *Revolt*.

<sup>400</sup> Filler, *Appointment*, 158.

<sup>401</sup> Ben Lindsey to Neil S. McCarthy, Jan 12, 1928, Box 291, Folder 16, DMA.

<sup>402</sup> “DeMille Stands in Boots of Dickens,” *Portland Journal*, Feb 28, 1928, *Godless Girl* scrapbook, DMA.

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<sup>403</sup> “The Godless Girl—Influencing the Reform System,” 21 June 1928 *Kinematograph Weekly* (London), *Godless Girl* scrapbook, DMA. The note on DeMille’s use of “actual observations” is from a separate article entitled “The Godless Girl—DeMille’s Super Previewed at Hollywood,” which was published in London as well but circulated as boilerplate globally. *Daily Film Renter* (London), 11 June 1928, *Godless Girl* scrapbook, DMA.

<sup>404</sup> See, for instance, “State Reformatories Indicted for Cruelty by the ‘Godless Girl,’ Film,” *The Record*, 18 August 1928, *Godless Girl* scrapbook, DMA.

<sup>405</sup> “Appalling Cruelty to Children—DeMille Film Exposures,” *London Bioscope*, June 6, 1928, *Godless Girl* scrapbook, DMA. See “Women Visit Hub City Studio,” *Venice Vanguard* (California), 14 February 1928, *Godless Girl* scrapbook, DMA, which clarifies how DeMille had targeted a commission with existing plans for a humane institution to insinuate his film into a pre-existent reform effort: “At the present, the committee is planning to erect a new women’s prison in California and informed Mr. DeMille that all the things being fearlessly exposed in ‘The Godless Girl’ will be eliminated from the routine and system of the new institution such as corporal punishment, brutal treatment of the inmates, and other inhumane practices of different penal institutions throughout the country.”

<sup>406</sup> DeMille, *Autobiography*, 247-248.

<sup>407</sup> Charles Beahan to DeMille, n.d., Box 292, Folder 6, DMA.

<sup>408</sup> DeMille to Charles Beahan, May 27, 1927, quoted in Robert Birchard, *Cecil B. DeMille’s Hollywood* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2004), 229.

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<sup>409</sup> “‘Godless Girl’ Spotliht on Reformatory Schools,” *The Houston Chronicle*, 12 Feb 1928. “DeMille, at heart a crusader, is intensely interested in his subject.”

<sup>410</sup> George Ellis to Emily McGaffey, 3 Jan 1928, Box 292, Folder 2; Affidavits Which Will Be Obtained, Jan 17, 1928, Box 292, Folder 6, DMA.

<sup>411</sup> Dorothy Donnell, “DeMille Indicts the Reform Schools,” *Motion Picture*, May 1928, 83; Chas T. Myers, Re: State Reformatory, Buena Vista, Colorado, Nov. 25 1927, Box 291, Folder 17, DMA.

<sup>412</sup> Regarding the Boys’ Industrial School, Topeka, Kansas, n.d., Box 291, Folder 17, DMA.

<sup>413</sup> See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 195-228. “Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce . . . a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary” (201).

<sup>414</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 173.

<sup>415</sup> Jail Expose in ‘Godless Girl,’” *NY Telegraph* 20 Jan 1929, *Godless Girl* scrapbook, DMA; “‘Godless Girl’ Promises Thrills,” *NY Telegraph*, 28 Nov 1928, *Godless Girl* scrapbook, DMA. These “facts,” the latter article stresses, “together with data secured by special employees who have served varying periods of time in a number of the nation’s reformatories *with their true identity concealed* will provide a dramatic ‘bombshell’ (emphasis added).

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<sup>416</sup> Preview Card by R. S. L, Box 293, Folder 6, DMA. An anonymous audience member echoed this apparent befuddlement over DeMille's greater reform objectives: "The effect of the brutality, even though real, is not pleasing"

<sup>417</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 160.

<sup>418</sup> DeMille [Now at MGM, but operating within "Cecil B. DeMille Productions, Inc."] to Hays, May 6, 1929, Box 292, Folder 13, DMA.

<sup>419</sup> See, for example, McGaffey's report, "Girls Tied and Whipped--Solitary Confinement in Straight Jacket. Statement of Elmira Coffee, Regarding State School for Girls, Grand Mound, Washington," Apr 6, 1928, Box 291, Folder 17, DMA.

<sup>420</sup> DeMille to Will Hays, May 11, 1929, Box 292, Folder 13, DMA.

<sup>421</sup> Dr. Raymond F.C. Kies to DeMille, May 3, 1929, Box 292, Folder 13, DMA.

<sup>422</sup> DeMille to Will Hays, May 6, 1929, Box 292, Folder 13, DMA.

<sup>423</sup> DeMille to Will Hays, May 6, 1929, Box 292, Folder 13, DMA.

<sup>424</sup> DeMille to Will Hays, May 6, 1929, Box 292, Folder 13, DMA.

<sup>425</sup> "Mr. DeMille's New Film," *New York Times*, 19 Feb 1928 : 115; DeMille to Hays, May 11, 1929, Box 292, Folder 13, DMA.

<sup>426</sup> DeMille to Hays, May 11, 1929, Box 292, Folder 13, DMA.

<sup>427</sup> Rosalind Shaffer, "'Godless Girl' Spotlight on Reform School," *Houston Chronicle*, 12 Feb 1928, *Godless Girl* scrapbook, DMA.

<sup>428</sup> "DeMille Stands in the Boots of Dickens," *Portland Journal*, 28 Feb 1928, *Godless Girl* scrapbook, DMA.

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<sup>429</sup> Dorothy Donnell, “DeMille Indicts the Reform Schools,” *Motion Picture*, May 1928, 83 (italics added).

<sup>430</sup> DeMille to Carline deFord Penniman [Superintendent of Connecticut State School for Delinquent Girls], March 28, 1928, Box 291, Folder 18, DMA.

<sup>431</sup> Welford Beaton, “Cheap Mentally and Afraid of its Own Shadow,” *The Film Spectator*, 15 September 1928, 7.

<sup>432</sup> Beaton, 8.

<sup>433</sup> Beaton, 8.

<sup>434</sup> Beaton, 7.

<sup>435</sup> Verbatims Transcript of Expository and Descriptive ‘Reading’ by Mr. Cecil B. DeMille, Thursay, Dec. 29, 1927, DeMille Studios, Culver City, California, Reported by Paul Lehnhardt, Jr : 1, Box 293, Folder 6, DMA.

<sup>436</sup> Expository and Descriptive ‘Reading’ : 1.

<sup>437</sup> Expository and Descriptive ‘Reading’: 62.

<sup>438</sup> Expository and Descriptive ‘Reading’: 62.

<sup>439</sup> Expository and Descriptive ‘Reading’: 74.

<sup>440</sup> Expository and Descriptive ‘Reading’: 73.

<sup>441</sup> Expository and Descriptive ‘Reading’: 74.

<sup>442</sup> Expository and Descriptive ‘Reading’: 76.

<sup>443</sup> Expository and Descriptive ‘Reading’: 76.

<sup>444</sup> Expository and Descriptive ‘Reading’: 65-66.



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<sup>445</sup> Sue Harper, “Historical Pleasures: Gainsborough Costume Melodrama,” in *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media*, ed. Marcia Landy (London: The Athlone Press, 2001) , 98.

<sup>446</sup> George W. Thomas, Pastor, Grandview Community Presbyterian Church, Glendale, CA, to DeMille, Sept 21, 1928, Box 293, Folder 10, DMA.

<sup>447</sup> Thomas Elsaesser, in his classic genre sketch, points out that film melodrama’s “most useful definition” should remain in tune with its theatrical origins in live musical accompaniment. This, Elsaesser suggests, “allows melodramatic elements to be seen as constituents of a system of punctuation, giving expressive color and chromatic contrast to the storyline, by orchestrating the emotional ups and downs of the intrigue. The advantage of this approach is that it formulates the problems of melodrama as problems of style and articulation.” See Thomas Elsaesser, “Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama,” in *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*, ed. Marcia Landy (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991) , 74.

<sup>448</sup> An instructive text related explicitly to questions of cinematic form and the transcendental is Vivienne Sobchack, “Embodying Transcendence: On the Literal, the Material, and the Cinematic Sublime,” *Material Religion* 4, no. 2 (2008): 194-203: “[T]his strategy depends upon making the *content* of transcendence and the transcendental intelligible by making it *literally* visible . . . [A]s visible, this content must be abstracted from the visible immanence of its cinematic world by metaphorical forms” (199).

<sup>449</sup> Expository and Descriptive ‘Reading’: 24

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<sup>450</sup> Expository and Descriptive ‘Reading’: 72.

<sup>451</sup> Elizabeth McGaffey to DeMille, Apr 16, 1928. Box 293, Folder 10. DMA.

<sup>452</sup> Expository and Descriptive ‘Reading’: 79-80.

<sup>453</sup> Expository and Descriptive ‘Reading’: 80.

<sup>454</sup> Expository and Descriptive ‘Reading’: 89.

<sup>455</sup> Ernest Pascal, General Analysis of Story, Sept 7, 1927, Box 293, Folder 5, DMA.

<sup>456</sup> Henry MacMahon [DeMille Studio], “Devil’s Angels RE “Godless Girl,” Box 293, Folder 3, DMA.

<sup>457</sup> Robert Birchard, *Cecil B. DeMille’s Hollywood* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2004) , 230. For background on Judy’s real-life inspiration, the atheist teen orator with the memorable birth name of Queen Silver, see Emily McGaffey to Jeanie Macpherson, Re: Queen Silver, June 24, 1927, Box 292, Folder 1, DMA. From McGaffey’s report: “This girl has been mentioned to me by several persons and is a most interesting character. . . Her mother is a Jewess and trained her from early childhood to speak from soap boxes. She is an atheist and a radical and has a wonderful flow of language. Her mother is now married to a man named Henry Roser, a red hot radical. Queenie is now about 19 and was married recently. I will find out more about this woman.” For more on Queen Silver’s fascinating story as a philosophical agitator, labor activist, and feminist see Wendy McElroy, *Queen Silver: The Godless Girl* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Book, 2000).

<sup>458</sup> Lindsey, *Revolt*, 354.

<sup>459</sup> Lindsey, *Revolt*, 353. Researcher Emily McGaffey seemed to endorse a deeper contextual explanation for the Brute’s violent nature, referring to the abusive guards she

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came across in her investigations as part of an unfortunate “class of ignorant, brutal, ill-paid men,” implying that if guards were better trained and paid they would be less likely to unload their hostilities on young inmates.

<sup>460</sup> Charlie West, *Expository and Descriptive Reading*, 90.

<sup>461</sup> Louella O. Parsons, “Uplift Now is Motive for DeMille Pictures,” *El Paso Times*, 5 Feb 1928, *Godless Girl* scrapbook, DMA.

<sup>462</sup> Lee Grieveson, “Not Harmless Entertainment: State Censorship and Cinema in the Transitional Era,” in *American Cinema’s Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices*, eds . Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) , 274. The decision wasn’t reversed until the “Miracle Decision” of 1952, which transferred first amendment rights over to Hollywood filmmaking.

<sup>463</sup> Grieveson, 276.

<sup>464</sup> Grieveson, 276.

## CHAPTER 5

<sup>465</sup> Bosley Crowther, “Pair of Spectacles—Samson and Delilah and Prince of Foxes,” *New York Times*, 8 Jan 1950 : 81.

<sup>466</sup> Thomas M. Greene, “History and Anachronism,” from *Literature and History: Theoretical Problems and Russian Case Studies*, edited by Gary Saul Morson (Stanford: Stanford UP 1986) , 209.

<sup>467</sup> Cecil B. DeMille, *The Autobiography of Cecil B. DeMille* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1959) , 399.

<sup>468</sup> DeMille, 399.

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<sup>469</sup> Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (Berkeley: Da Capo Press, 1972). A more recent example of this critical preference for the implicit presentation of the transcendental, see the essays in Mary Lea Bandy and Antonia Monda, eds., *The Hidden God: Film and Faith* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2003).

<sup>470</sup> Gwenfair Walters Adams, *Visions in Late Medieval England: Lay Spirituality and Sacred Glimpses of the Hidden Worlds of Faith* (Boston: Brill, 2007) , 2.

<sup>471</sup> Schrader, 76.

<sup>472</sup> Tom Gunning, “To Scan a Ghost: An Ontology of Mediated Vision,” *Grey Room* 26 (2007) : 102.

<sup>473</sup> Georg Lukacs, *The Historical Novel* trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), esp. Chapter 1, The Classical Form of the Historical Novel. According to Lukacs, the enduring social value of the historical novel rests largely in its elucidating “expression of thought and feeling [that] outstrips the consciousness of the age” (63).

<sup>474</sup> Thus, the *Saran* becomes an embodiment of what Joseph Luzzi has illuminated as anachronistic rhetoric’s “idealizing subjectivity,” its provocative introduction of a “register of meaning beyond the reach of historical objectivity.” See Joseph Luzzi, “The Rhetoric of Anachronism,” *Comparative Literature* 61.1 (2009) : 75.

<sup>475</sup> Bosley Crowther, “The Screen: Lavish DeMille Film Arrives,” *New York Times*, 22 December 1949, 29. Crowther’s point lends historical precedent for Luzzi’s inspiring argument for the “aesthetically productive temporal fissures that anachronism produces” (70).

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<sup>476</sup> See Anton Karl Kozlovic, “Making a ‘Bad’ Woman Wicked: The Devilish Construction of Delilah within Cecil B. DeMille’s *Samson and Delilah* (1949),” *Journal of Theology and Ministry* 7 (2006) : 70-102.

<sup>477</sup> DeMille, 399.

<sup>478</sup> In “Pair of Spectacles,” *New York Times*, 8 June 1950, X1, Bosley Crowther points out DeMille’s spectacular enhancement of this famous moment in the Bible: “[Samson’s] bare-handed slaying of a lion, which the Bible rather tightly tosses off, becomes in this awesome contemplation, a titanic episode.”

<sup>479</sup> Thus we’re reminded of Lukacs endorsement of “necessary anachronism” through the Saran’s trenchant and recurring diegetic commentary.

<sup>480</sup> Pamela Grace, *The Religious Film: Christianity and the Hagiopic* (Malden: Blackwell, 2009) , 13.

<sup>481</sup> Jesse Lasky, Jr., *Whatever Happened to Hollywood?* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1975) , 260.

<sup>482</sup> Since the silent era, DeMille had drawn reflexive analogies between the miracles in the Bible and the “miracles” of the cinema. For example, after the resurrection of Christ in *King of Kings* (1927), the film’s dreary black and white palette changes to vibrant two-strip Technicolor, a spectacular novelty of the 1920s. Higashi observes how DeMille’s 1923 *The Ten Commandments* “signifies a return to the antimodernist tradition of civic pageantry in its representation of a macrocosm and its nostalgia for the moral certitude and sense of community associated with small-town life [while at the same time] the director’s technical achievement with respect to use of color processes, special effects,

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and colossal set design attests to the reification of religious uplift as spectacle in a modern consumer culture” (179).

<sup>483</sup> Crowther, “Pair of Spectacles.”

<sup>484</sup> Gregory Mobley, *Samson and the Liminal Hero in the Ancient Near East* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2006) , 41.

<sup>485</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) , 148.

<sup>486</sup> Vivian Sobchack, “‘Surge and Splendor’: A Phenomenology of the Hollywood Historical Epic,” *Representations* 29 (1990) : 34.

<sup>487</sup> Ernest J. Albrecht, *A Ringling by Any Other Name: The Story of John Ringling and His Circus* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1989) , 172.

<sup>488</sup> Thomas M. Greene, “History and Anachronism,” from *Literature and History: Theoretical Problems and Russian Case Studies*, edited by Gary Saul Morson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986) , 205.

<sup>489</sup> Greene, 210.

<sup>490</sup> For photos of and background on Gargantua, see  
<<http://www.gargantuaphotos.com/historyofgargantua.html>>

<sup>491</sup> Fred Allen quoted in Albrecht, *A Ringling*, 57.

<sup>492</sup> Albrecht, *A Ringling by Any Other Name*, 59.

<sup>493</sup> For more on the circus and spectacular novelty, see Doug A. Mishler, “‘It Was Everything Else We Knew Wasn’t’: The Circus and American Culture,” in *The Cultures of Celebrations*, eds. Ray B. Browne and Michael T. Marsden (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Press, 1994) : “Public interest so obligated circuses to exhibit

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exotics that if genuine ‘strange’ people could not be obtained, no self-respecting show owner would think twice before fabricating them” (135).

<sup>494</sup> For more on the “inescapable facts of mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century life” that compelled the demise of the Ringling’s “tented city,” see Albrecht, *A Ringling*, esp. 226-254.

<sup>495</sup> And though Sebastian’s chance for recovery is medically confirmed, history, as I’ve suggested, is working against him as a virtuoso in an outmoded field.

<sup>496</sup> Vivian Sobchack, “‘Surge and Splendor’: A Phenomenology of the Hollywood Historical Epic,” *Representations* 29 (1990) : 29 (italics in original).

<sup>497</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) , 149.

<sup>498</sup> Bosely Crowther, “Pair of Spectacles.”

<sup>499</sup> Tom Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity* (London: British Film Institute, 2000) , 56.

<sup>500</sup> Mishler, “‘It Was Everything Else We Knew Wasn’t,’” 137.

<sup>501</sup> Albrecht, *A Ringling*, 195.

<sup>502</sup> Here, I refer back to Philip Rosen’s argument for how film diegesis seeks to minimize its ontological distance from “legitimate” documentation. See Rosen, *Change Mummified*, esp. chapter 4, “Detail, Document, and Diegesis in Mainstream Film.”

<sup>503</sup> Bosley Crowther, “The Screen in Review,” *New York Times*, 11 Jan 1952 : 17.

<sup>504</sup> Bosely Crowther, “Just Like the Circus,” *New York Times*, 20 Jan 1952 : X1.

<sup>505</sup> Edward Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (New York: Vintage, 2007) , 12. For a recent, compelling exploration of textualized “self-inscription,” see Cecilia Sayad, *Performing Authorship: Self-Inscription and*

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*Corporeality in the Cinema* (New York: IB Tauris, 2013), esp. Chapter 1, “Performance, Corporeality, and the Borders of the Film.”

<sup>506</sup> Greene, 213.

<sup>507</sup> Greene, 210.

<sup>508</sup> Greene, 210-211.

<sup>509</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 86.

<sup>510</sup> “Reviews.” *Variety*, 2 December, 1926.

<sup>511</sup> Along these lines, DeMille’s cinematic discourse continually reflects Rosen’s observation on the historical film’s “construction of film spectatorship as a transhistorical viewpoint on the historical past” (84). Indeed, DeMille’s “flashback films” of the silent era repeatedly allowed for economical glimpses of past worlds by taking us back in time through what appears to an extemporized miscellany of devices, including sequestered prologues (*The Ten Commandments*, 1923), phantasies stirred by Neanderthal hieroglyphs (*Adam’s Rib*, 1923), and mystical objects discovered in the modern-day (*The Devil Stone*, 1917), to name just a few situations. For an insightful analysis on DeMille’s silent-era flashback films, see David Blanke, “Experiments in Time: The Silent Films of Cecil B. DeMille,” in *Time Travel in Popular Media: Essays on Film, Television, Literature and Video Games*, eds. Matthew Jones and Joan Ormrod (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2015), 92-105.

<sup>512</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. trans. James Strachey, vol. 14 (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 244.



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<sup>513</sup> Freud, “Screen Memories,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. trans. James Strachey, vol. 3 (London: Hogarth Press, 1953) , 322.

<sup>514</sup> Bosley Crowther, “The ‘Oscar’ Awards: Showmanship Rather than Artistry Reigned at the Academy Affair,” *New York Times*, 29 March 1953 : X1. See also, “Circus Film, Gary Cooper, Shirly Booth, Win Oscars,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* 20 March 20, 1953 : 1 : “The selection of Cecil B. DeMille’s ‘The Greatest Show on Earth’ as the best picture was the sole surprise of the evening. Most predictors had picked ‘High Noon.’”

<sup>515</sup> For an illuminating overview of this industrial sea change see Denise Mann, *Hollywood Independents: The Postwar Talent Takeover* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), esp. Chapter 1, “Charting a Path of Independence in a Corporate Wilderness.”