**Title: Writing in the Silent Era**

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**Course Title and Level: Gender and Film, 3rd year (taught as Women in Screenwriting History)**

**Description: Students are asked to do primary and secondary research about scenario writing and scenario departments in the silent period. The students will produce a section of a scenario or other creative portion of a film (Intertitles, continuity, etc) and a report that details the research and why they made certain creative choices.**

**Learning goals: Familiarity with digital archival material of film history beyond the film text itself. Understanding of the film industry and different creative roles during the silent period. And a deeper understanding of screenwriting in the studio era.**

**The assignment:**

There were many different roles in (and names for) writing departments in early Hollywood Studios. You might have a job as a story editor, a continuity writer, a title writer, a scenario writer, an original story writer, a freelance writer, etc. The purpose of this assignment is two-fold: first, choose, research, and describe a role that you envision yourself doing in an early studio. Second, do the job. In other words, if you envision yourself as a “film doctor” (see Lenore Coffee’s memoir, for example, on her work as a “film doctor”) you can take a pre-existing silent film and re-write the story by changing the intertitles and re-editing the scenes/shots. Alternatively, perhaps you would like to be a continuity writer. You can find a pre-existing silent film and write a continuity for the film (or part of the film, depending on the length). If you would like to write an original film (or part of a film), research the style of a film scenario and the tips for writers. Write in the style and conventions of the era, based on your research. For any of these jobs, you do not have to write or re-work a full length film. In consultation with the instructor, choose a manageable size for the creative portion of this assignment.

Students are required to do primary and secondary research. Primary research might include early screenwriting manuals, memoirs, or vocational guides, whereas secondary research would include essays or books about screenwriting history.

The assignment will consist of two parts.

**Part One: A four-five page written report and bibliography** describing the role you have chosen and what it entailed during the silent period, and how your research helped you to develop your creative component. This report will demonstrate the research that you did about careers and work in the silent period: what did the writers do? How were scenarios written? What different phases of writing were there? What period are you working within? Scenario writing practices changed rapidly throughout the 1910s and 1920s, so specify the year and what the practices were at that time.

**Part Two: The Creative Component:** possibly screen-grabs and new titles of a film you “re-edited,” or a continuity you composed, or an original story synopsis [keeping in mind the style and filmic capabilities of the era], etc. Here you can be creative while being mindful to keep within the historical parameters. You must first research story departments and writing in the silent period to decide what you can write.

You must consult at least one primary source and one secondary source for your report.

The creative component will vary in length depending on what type of role you choose. Therefore, you do not need to write an entire continuity, for example. Aim for 3-5 pages of creative work.

Example options (you must read the manuals and do some research in order to perform any of these tasks according to the practices of the time):

* Take a pre-existing silent film and write the continuity for a partial section.
* Take screen grabs from a silent film and “rework” the narrative by changing intertitles and rearranging the order
* Writing the original story (remember to read the scenario writing manuals and think in terms of action, not dialogue. Write for a silent movie. Your written report will describe the research and how it informed your story.)
* Writing titles (some movies could just use better intertitles or different timing. Using screengrabs, you can rewrite the titles but keep the story the same)

Additional research suggestions:

*Opportunities in the Motion Picture Business* (1922): <https://archive.org/stream/opportunitiesinm02photiala#page/n7/mode/1u>

*Scenario Writing Today* (1921): <https://archive.org/details/scenariowriting00lyttgoog>

*Careers for Women* (1920): <https://archive.org/details/careersforwomen00filegoog>

*The Photoplaywright* (1912): <http://archive.org/stream/photoplaywright01phot#page/n7/mode/2up>

*The Photoplay Author* (1914): <http://archive.org/stream/photoplayauthor45esen#page/n7/mode/2up>

*Writing the Photoplay* (1913, 1919): <https://ia600301.us.archive.org/1/items/writingthephotop17903gut/17903-h/17903-h.htm>

*Photoplay Writing* (1922):

<https://archive.org/stream/photoplaywriting00wriguoft#page/n3/mode/2up>

*The Photoplay Writer* (1912): <https://archive.org/stream/photoplaywriter00radn#page/n7/mode/2up>

Price, Steven**.** *The History of the Screenplay*. Palgrave, 2013.

MacCreadie, Marsha. *The Women Who Write the Movies*. Birch Lane Press, 1994.