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'Taken by my wife' – Challenging the Amateur/Professional Binary in Wessex Film and Sound Archive's (WFSA) Early Films (1895–1922)

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Gaines' phrase, 'Women were both 'there' and 'not there'' (2018: 4), captures the paradoxical presence of women in early film history, central to this study on women amateur filmmakers in the Wessex Film and Sound Archive (WFSA) up to 1950. Using an intermedial approach, this article seeks to expand the recognition of filmmakers by re-examining clearly attributed records and questioning those around which there is ambiguity. Louisa Gauvain (1880–1945) is a key figure in this discussion, whose 1913 work challenges traditional definitions of amateurism. This article argues for a movement beyond the amateur/professional binary to appreciate the diverse contributors to regional film collections, including women and film exhibitors. By analysing Gauvain's medical film *Plaster of Paris* (1913), the paper highlights women's engagement in filmmaking, expressions of gendered labour, and their evolving roles in quasi-professional contexts. The article argues that the film serves as an analogy for the broader treatment of amateur women filmmakers, whose contributions have been largely overlooked. The term 'non-professional' is proposed to elevate these filmmakers' status, integrating their work into a broader media history and beginning the reclamation of women's contributions to early cinema.

'Women were both 'there' and 'not there'' (Gaines 2018: 4) is a phrase coined by Gaines in her discussion of women's work in early film history and is of particular relevance to the discovery of women amateur filmmakers in regional archives in the UK. Gaines' expression offers tacit acknowledgement of women's historical presence while reflecting on a landscape of entrenched patriarchal practices, which are prejudicial to women and impact their visibility. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, I seek to expand awareness of the filmmakers whose work is present in WFSA, by considering those records with clear attributions but also by asking questions of other records where attribution could be drawn into question. One example of ambiguous attribution is the case of Louisa Laura (née Butler) Gauvain (Lulie) (1880–1945),[1] whose work in the early period of amateurism (here taken as before 1922) draws into question how we define the amateur. Through this case study I argue that a move away from the amateur/professional binary of pre-1922 films is needed to fully appreciate the breadth of contributors to historic film collections. These collections might include women and film exhibitors, and producers of medical, educational, or industrial films whose work is subject to elision because of a relational positioning to the commercial film industry. I consider the case of filmmaker Gauvain as a means of highlighting female engagement with filmmaking, expressions of gendered labour and the changing role of women in quasi-professional contexts.

I argue that Gauvain's film *Plaster of Paris* (1913) is analogous to the treatment of amateur women filmmakers more widely, whose work in such contexts has largely been overlooked. I suggest that the power relations crystallised in *Plaster of Paris* serve to demonstrate how patriarchal society permitted the creative freedom of women amateur filmmakers within a culturally defined suite of pre-sets and how the resultant creative products have been subsequently suppressed by the same masculine system. Simply put, the power relations demonstrated in this film are widely applicable to how women amateur filmmakers and their work have been treated by patriarchal practices. Through the application of the term 'non-professional', the work of such individuals will be elevated out of the confusion that their not-quite-professional status carries, resituating them within a wider chronology of media technologies.

[1] There is variance in how her name is recorded in archival documents. Birth, marriage and census records up to 1913 indicate forenames of 'Louisa Laura' (London, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813–1923; 1881,1891,1901 censuses; Westminster, London Church of England Marriage and Banns 1754–1935). Notations in the 1939 register and her probate entry however, record 'Louise L' (1939 Register) and 'Louise Laura' (England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations, 1858–1995). Subsequently, other secondary sources have adopted the latter form of her name. This article will employ the earlier form of her name.

The struggle of defining amateurism

Definitions of amateur cinema are plentiful within the discipline, with numerous scholars venturing to pin down the term with apparent retrospective ease. Zimmermann, whose seminal work *Reel Families* is the cornerstone of scholarly discussion on the discourse of amateur film, notes in her opening pages how 'amateur filmmaking is always defined as a hobby rather than as job' (1995: x). Film practice of this sort could be characterised by an uneasy mobility between the public and private spheres (Zimmermann 1995: 2), a feature that troubled both contemporary users but that has also given historians considerable cause for discussion. Chalfen's work on still photography excludes from the realm of the amateur those who have 'professional identities' and those who have had relevant 'extensive training', and takes steps to suggest that there are degrees of amateur ranging from those who are active in clubs and enter competitions to those making purely domestic content for private consumption (1987: 12). Stebbins' view aligns with this analysis, proposing levels of seriousness within amateurism (1979: 260–261), a concept which has been further developed by Craven (2009: 7–9). Despite what appears as a distinctive shift in practice following the introduction of reversal safety film after 1922, few scholars in the field have little more than acknowledged the variance within the production environments before and after 1922 that might have had a material impact on our understanding of their practice.

Both Zimmermann and Tepperman concede that over time amateur cinema has been 'defined in technological terms' (Ishizuka, K; Zimmermann 2007: 279; Tepperman 2014: 117). If we are to subscribe to technological determinism within this period, we might seek out all pre-1922 films on narrow gauge film stock. However, it is likely that the problem of discussing early amateurism (and the resultant dearth of scholarship in this area) is hampered by a lack of extant film material and an overlap with professional conventions, which makes it difficult to distinguish from one another. Further complicating this discussion is the fact that female work suffers a double elision because of its existence outside of the industry and by having been produced by women (Hill & Johnston 2020: 2). Drawing on definitions of the amateur that insist upon a singular, binary interpretation that is applied indiscriminately across a broad timeframe risks obfuscation of filmmakers operating on the margins. At particular risk are practitioners active before 1922, whose work might uncomfortably reside outside clearly demarcated professional settings and those whose work outside of their filmmaking might be considered professionals in other ways.

A cinema with uses

In this vein it is of note that medical films and other forms of 'useful cinema' (Acland & Waisson 2011) can be subject to elision, falling neither under the category of amateur film nor being produced within the 'commercial tradition' (1920, *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly*, 29 January: xix–xxi). Educational (Ordero, Odero & Streible 2011), industrial, advertising, adult and medical films conceived in diverse contexts contribute to the 'formation and reformation of cinema' (Acland & Waisson 2011: 2) and have attracted growing scholarly attention. Most recently Bell considers women's labour in this context (2018). The role of medical film has been explored usefully by Curtis (2015), whose analyses of forms of medical cinema explore the various applications of film in medicine and helpfully recognise one of the functions of film in this setting as an 'object lesson' (2015: 108).

Women filmmakers

Gender theory in early film has been widely discussed, with Gaines' work having relevance to the process of archival recovery and restoration of early women filmmakers (Gaines 2004: 115; Callahan 2010: 2). Historical excavations of women's work often reveal filmmaker narratives that are fragmented. These sometimes unconventional and frequently fractured histories result in inevitably incomplete feminist readings. This is as a result of historiographical practices that are prejudicial to women, which continue to proliferate a gender knowledge gap. However, significant progress is being made through projects such as the Women Film Pioneers Project (WFPP) (Gaines, Vatsal & Dall'Asta 2013). WFPP collates plentiful evidence of women working in this early period, providing a backdrop against which we might consider Gauvain's work. Constance Bromley, for instance, like Gauvain, made her first foray into film in 1913 (McKernan 2024) and Madeline Brandeis, though ambitious in the commercial scope of her work, was open about her views on what she considered to be a leisurely pursuit and made her first feature in 1918 (Vatsal 2013). Jenny Gilbertson's career demonstrates how amateurism might offer a conduit into industry (Evans 2012) and Margaret Hepworth's profile demonstrates how women's interactions with filmmaking might be facilitated through a spouse (Fletcher 2013). In their consideration of data-led methodologies, Wreyford and Cobb consider the incompleteness of feminist readings (Wreyford and Cobb 2017: 2) when calling upon scholars to adopt a self-reflexive approach (Wreyford and Cobb 2017: 3). Fragmentation, loss and issues of context are similarly explored by Ross, Moseley and Wheatley, and Motrescu-Mayes and Norris Nicholson (Ross 2004: 31; Moseley & Wheatley 2008: 153; Motrescu-Mayes & Norris Nicholson 2018: 50).

For many years, gender and cine amateurism received little academic attention with only minor mentions of women filmmakers appearing in the works of key scholars (Zimmermann 1996: 96). Marion Norris Gleason received scholarly attention in 2003 (Swanson 2003) and Buckingham, Pini and Willett touched on issues of gender in 2007. However, the most significant tranche of scholarship on female amateurs in the UK began to develop after 2012 with Motrescu-Mayes (2012, 2013) and Norris Nicholson (2012) laying substantial groundwork on gendered practice in this context. Around this time there was a groundswell of activity that homed in on gendered filmmaking including the *Cataloguing of the Institute of Amateur Cinematographers Women Filmmakers' Films* (WAF), and later the *Invisible Innovators* (II) project (Clayton, Johnston and Williams 2020: 3).

In a subsequent publication, largely drawing on the findings of the latter project, Hill and Johnston reflected on the 'range of female authorship' (2020: 5) and observed 'the marginalisation of women filmmakers within authorship discourse' (2020: 6). They also responded to Gaines' call for 'archival excavation' in the study of women's filmmaking labour (2020: 2) and argued for a review of archival praxis around digitisation priorities (2020: 3). The WAF and II projects provided promising results for further in-depth research and in 2023 the *Women in Focus* (WinF) project published its Toolkit for Archiving Women's Amateur Film (Arnold et al. 2023).

A Regional Collection in Context

There are 28 collections (containing 67 items) in WFSA that hold pre-1922 material. Of these, there are no more than 19 collections that can be defined as falling within the commercial tradition. To apply the professional/amateur binary oversimplifies a complex configuration of production origins and suggests a division of 38%/62% in favour of professional film in the collection. Of the nine collections within the early timeframe that sit outside of formal professional structures, there is little characterising them as purely 'amateur' film as they bear no evidence of an 'amateur aesthetic' (Frith and Johnston 2020: 131) and yet they speak to the wider development of amateurism as new technologies began to emerge in the teens and early 1920s.

Towards a consideration of the non-professional

The work of Gauvain features in the WFSA collection and that of Hampshire Archives (HA) even though she is not expressly named in the records for these items. The case of Gauvain justifies the necessity for a move away from the amateur/professional binary while also highlighting some of the challenges that scholars and archivists face when working with film collections where incorrect or misleading attributions obfuscate

female involvement in film production. The question of whether to consider Gauvain and the other early filmmakers represented in the WFSA collection as amateurs draws into focus a range of elements that scholars in the field have debated on various grounds: Should the amateur be defined by the technology they use? Or their intended audience? Or by their pecuniary motivations? Or simply in a relational way to the professional?

With the monopolisation of film production promoting 35mm as the 'standard' film gauge, the categorising of every other gauge as 'substandard' naturally followed. As the collections of WFSA evidence, not all non-professional filmmakers of this period adopted narrower gauges yet by popular application, their work might still be considered to fall within the category of 'amateur'. The evolution of terminology that equates non-standard technologies with inferiority positions amateur film in opposition 'to more dominant technological standards' (Zimmermann 1995: 12) and complicates our understanding of those using 35mm in contexts outside of the professional film industry.

Gauvain is an example of one of these hard-to-pin-down filmmakers, functioning as an opposition to this relational model; she was working outside of the mainstream yet using accessible 35 mm stock. Gauvain's work and that of a small number of others represented in the WFSA collection does not provide enough evidence of amateurs during this early period (1895 to 1922) to suggest a flourishing new pastime in the region; a collection survey of WFSA identified 22 extant items that might be broadly considered as amateur (compared with 41 professional). There are many explanations for this, the simplest being that films simply did not survive. Despite the lack of extant films, there are indications of a fledgling non-professional market that pepper the wider cinematic press of the time (1907, *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly,* 24 October: 415).

No amateurs, only non-professionals?

As far as is known, all the early film items within WFSA are 35mm and if these works were to be defined on their technical specification, then it would be the natural conclusion that they *are* professional works, produced by professional filmmakers. Before 1922, there were few cameras available that used substandard film (Kattelle 1986: 47). Therefore, if we are to apply a technological definition of the amateur, we would seek to categorise 35mm as professional and narrower gauges as amateur. However, none of these substandard gauges are present in the WFSA collection. Arguably, the early film collection of WFSA holds no true amateur films or filmmakers, only the work of non-professionals using 35mm film in varying contexts.

Gauvain was a non-professional filmmaker working in a medically professional context. She held medical qualifications yet only deployed her photographic skills to assist the progressive work of her husband. At the time that *Plaster of Paris* was produced, she and her husband were members of a wealthy professional class with the necessary funds to access industry-standard filmmaking equipment. Positioned as they were within an upper-class milieu they, much like wealthy American filmmaker Madeline Brandeis, had access to disposable income to fund their film endeavours (Vatsal 2013). As might be expected given her financial position, Gauvain's film does not evidence a frugal use of expensive film stock, instead indicating that the accurate recording of the application of the treatment was the primary aim. The film served to both demonstrate the procedure but also to educate and disseminate the pioneering technique. As the primary filmmaker, Gauvain demonstrates a high level of technical proficiency in her deployment of the cine camera, the staging of the diegesis, editing and titling.

Very few of WFSA's early films are attributed to a named individual, with the dearth of person-centred attributions contributing to the uncertainty around how to categorise such films. Of these, there are a number which are suggestively tied to exhibitor-filmmakers rather than professional filmmakers *per se*. This other group of not-quite-professional filmmakers increase notably in number after 1913 following both the introduction of non-flam film in 1912 (Kattelle 1986: 47) and the International Kinematograph Exhibition at Olympia in 1913 (held 22 to 29 March 1913) (1913, *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly*, 27 March: 2153). From this date cameras marketed to the amateur began to appear with an advertising focus that sought to appeal to exhibitors by calling on them to 'Provide your local topicals' (1914, *Kinematograph Weekly*, 4 June: 42). Such equipment claimed to bring 'moving pictures within the reach of the amateur photographer…' (1914, *Kinematograph Weekly*, 4 June: 42). However, widespread uptake did not take place until after 1922 when greater accessibility was achieved through portable equipment and narrower reversal film stock. Such sources suggest that contemporary thought might place the exhibitor-filmmaker firmly in the realm of the amateur, yet this problematises our own modern definition and conflates issues of professionalism and commercialism. One such WFSA example is *Mayoral procession to Romsey Abbey* (1913), where evidence suggests production by the Elite cinema tied in with the filming and subsequent screening of the event (Gazzard 2021). The film was photographed by cinema staff with a view to being screened at the venue, with Romsonians providing a captive audience as they sought to catch glimpses of themselves on screen. *Southampton – Hampshire Boy Scouts Rally* (1912) was similarly produced by Southampton Picture Palaces and *Gosport War Memorial Hospital, Laying*

the Foundation Stone (1921) was most likely produced by the Criterion Theatre. As with *Plaster of Paris*, these films bear no characteristics that suggest a distinctly amateur origin. Instead, they appear to have been produced with the aim of generating income, something that *Plaster of Paris* did not intend to do. Both types of film had a niche audience that inhibited widespread distribution (Cranston 2016: 55), with *Plaster of Paris* holding value for the medical field and the local topicals to their communities as both a form of entertainment, news dissemination and economic development. While commercial intent is a key factor in differentiating these films from one another, I argue that it need not be the deciding factor in categorising them as professional.

The first female amateurs

Gauvain's involvement in cinematography stemmed from a prior interest in still photography, a familiar conduit into the craft for many amateur filmmakers. Entrenched in marketing rhetoric from the very earliest advertisements for the 'Kodak no 1' still camera, the simplicity that new amateur technology presented in the late 1880s played on the notion of gendered inferiority as *even* a woman could use the Kodak no 1 (Motrescu-Mayes and Norris Nicholson 2018: 1). Gauvain, as an educated middle-class woman with disposable income, was Kodak's target consumer and tracing the genesis of her cine skills in photography requires little detective work. With a dearth of films attributable to women amateurs in the pre-1920 period comes a reliance on attributions tied to the technological developments later made by Kodak (and then Pathé whose Baby Cine Camera arrived shortly after the Cine Kodak Model B 16mm camera) in the early 1920s; with Marion Norris Gleason oft cited as the first female amateur filmmaker (Swanson 2003: 127; Motrescu-Mayes and Norris Nicholson 2018: 3). Gauvain's work therefore predates Gleason by eight years – tentatively placing her as one of the first female amateurs. It is not suggested that Gauvain was a trailblazer or pioneer, but rather her existence and proven involvement in the production of amateur film as early as 1913 signifies that women *could* function in an amateur context before 1921. There are likely to be many reasons why only one film produced by Gauvain is extant, it could be one film amongst many that she produced, or it could be the only venture she made into Cine.

Mapping a web of probable happenings

The biographical approach deployed here feeds into the interpretation of the films, their positioning within collections and subsequent archival narrative. This process has many challenges, not least when we consider the additional problems that gender infers on the evidence and its very discovery. In many senses, how records are

represented in the archive is part of an 'ongoing collaborative process' (Caswell 2016: 10). Traces of an individual's life can be challenging to locate even when we begin with a seemingly solid piece of evidence, such as a name. This task becomes significantly more challenging when we consider that a person might have more than one name during their lifetime or that, because of their gender, their name is not always recorded in full or accurately. The challenges that discriminatory recording practices present when tracing a woman's life in the archive result in biographies that are necessarily imperfect, the result of 'archival practices [that] privilege state-driven modes of history-making' (Gloyn *et al.* 2018: 158). Only when tentatively drawing together multiple disparate sources do women's chronologies solidify into a tangible web of probable happenings. Gauvain's occupation is corroborated by her family history in the profession, by the 1901 census, and by her filmmaking practice, yet the 1911 census and her 1913 marriage certificate fail to provide evidence for this aspect of her life.

Introducing Louisa Gauvain

Census and birth index registers indicate that Gauvain was born to financially stable, supportive parents and that her father and grandfather before him, had realised successful careers in the medical profession (Census 1891; GUP 1913, *Homeward Mail from India*). Her choice of schooling was influenced by two generations of high-achieving surgeons and enabled her to leave the family home and take up employment and private lodgings. It is likely that Gauvain moved out of her parents' home sometime between 1897 and 1901. As a middle-class, unmarried young woman there were limited options available to her for respectable employment outside the bounds of marriage and the home (Jefferson, Bloor & Maynard 2015: 6). The Women's Movement was directly instrumental in enacting the change that would enable women to take up formalised roles in medicine, through their work in supporting women into work as dispensers of medicines in hospitals (Jordan 2002: 431) but also for advocating for women be admitted to University (Jefferson, Bloor and Maynard 2015: 6). Between 1880 and 1901 there was an increase in both female entrants into dispensary roles and in the professionalisation of the occupation that had hitherto been unregulated (Jordan 2002: 430). This influx of women into a recognised para-profession is significant here as in the 1901 census Gauvain gave her occupation as 'dispenses sub med'; a term used to denote an individual who worked in a hospital or surgery dispensing medicines, essentially providing primary medical care to those unable to afford the services of a qualified (male) doctor. The notation in Gauvain's entry functions on several levels. Firstly, it indicates that Gauvain was primarily working outside of the home in a role that occupied most of her time; it

was regular employment, not occasional or seasonal (Hatton & Bailey 2001: 90–1; You 2020: 109). Secondly, it indicates that she had undergone at least three years of vocational training and attended lectures at Bloomsbury Square (Jordan 2002: 450), a short walk from her home. She was likely a student at Bedford College for Women or Royal Holloway, institutions among the first to offer training to women. Her training across the three years would have amounted to £220 in fees, a considerable outlay on a modest income of £40 per annum (Jordan 2002: 445), and it seems reasonable to assume her family assisted with these expenses.

Gauvain's profession before marriage is of note for several reasons that are relevant here: as a middle-class unmarried woman she is representative of the second wave of women to publicly enter the medical workforce in a professionalised way. Her status and occupation led to her marriage within the field but also to her involvement in filmmaking. Additionally, she provides evidence for the early adoption of picture-making technologies outside of the commercial tradition by those working in roles with technical elements. As a dispenser, she had access to the necessary chemicals required for image processing and was sufficiently skilled in handling them; a formal part of Louisa's training was laboratory based, at a time when it was standard practice for photographers to develop their own images at home. Before making moving images Gauvain became proficient in still photography, with a body of work held at HA being attributed to her (47M94/F1/21); an album entitled 'Photographs and skingrams taken by my wife to illustrate thesis 'The Conservative treatment of Tuberculosis Diseases of the Spine''.

A marriage that *worked*

At the time of her marriage in 1913 to Dr Henry Gauvain (hereafter Henry or Dr Gauvain), Louisa Gauvain is noted as being a 'spinster' with no profession and her age is given as 'full', indicating her unmarried status and fullness of age but also serving to elide her professional status. The dearth of documentary evidence to support knowledge of Gauvain between 1901 and 1913 speaks of historiographic practices that are automatically prejudicial to women (Gloyn *et al.* 2018: 158). Gauvain's husband was as deeply involved in the medical profession as both her father and grandfather had been. From 1913 onwards, records evidence a productive professional and personal partnership between the couple, with Gauvain's photography skills being used to further the progressive work undertaken by Dr Gauvain, who was 'first medical superintendent of Lord Mayor Treloar's Cripples Hospital and College' at Alton, Hampshire (RCS, 2021). The couple spent their time between the Harley Street practice

and Treloar's and welcomed a daughter a year after their marriage who was to become similarly entrenched in hospital life, later going on to enter the medical profession herself (Who's Who 2007).[2]

AV90/6 *Plaster of Paris* (1913)

Much of the extant work thought to be attributable to Gauvain was produced between 1913 and 1920, with *Plaster of Paris* and at least one album of photographs dating from this period surviving (47M94/F1/21), both of which have a clinical focus. The attribution in the WFSA catalogue for AV90/6 reads 'Medical film probably made by the wife of Sir HENRY GAUVAIN in about 1913.'[3] The original film can attribution correlates with a body of work held by HA that elides full credit 'Photographs and skingrams taken by my wife …'(47M94/F1/21). Both entries are notable for their failure to attribute a name to Henry Gauvain's wife. The notation on the photograph album by Dr Gauvain cements his wife's role in his medical endeavours and recognises the importance he placed on ensuring credit was given where it was due. He did not commission a photographer to take such exacting images but relied upon the expertise of his medically qualified photographer wife.

Structural features

Plaster of Paris was shot on 35mm nitrate film and depicts an unnamed female child patient at the Treloar Hospital having a full body plaster cast applied by Dr Gauvain. The film contains a title card (**Figure 1**) and six subtitles, each describing the procedure to be displayed in the following scene. The lettering of the titles and subtitles appears to have been completed by hand. It is incredibly neat though nuances in uniformity hint at its labour-intensive composition. The film is composed of a total of four shots – two taken at medium close-ups and two at a slightly greater distance in what is a well-lit clinical room. Although no source of artificial light is obvious, curtains are present on one side of the room, possibly indicating that it was shot in a conservatory or other hospital room with a glass ceiling. The duration of the film is 00:05:59 and it is approximately 540 feet long.[4]

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[2] The couple had a daughter Catharine Joan Suzette (née Gauvain) Murray (1914–1980) who also went into medicine, as a Consultant of Occupational Medicine. The ODNB states the couple had one son, but no birth or death records have been identified to corroborate this.

[3] It is relevant to note here that the BFI now holds the nitrate negatives, as well as later positive prints of this film made in 1920, (*C-619472*).

[4] The film can be viewed online Application of plaster of Paris to patient suffering from cervical caries. | Wellcome Collection.

The film demonstrates an innovative method of treatment for cervical caries (Shetty, Viswanathan & Rajasekaran 2021), pioneered by Dr Gauvain at a time when existing treatments were highly invasive and largely ineffectual (Bishop, 2004). In the centre of the shot is a large white rectangular frame, with a rope and pulley arrangement eerily like the gallows. The frame has a hoist mechanism and positioned at its foot is a sheet-covered stool. To the right of the frame is a circular basin held in a raised stand and further right again are boxes, which appear to be full of dry strips of bandage. To the left of the frame is a single chair. The room appears to be half-panelled, with dark-coloured wainscotting giving way to curtains suspended against the walls with pegs. The basin at times appears to emit steam and possibly plaster dust, indicating that that plaster was mixed with warm water to facilitate a quicker setting time.

To apply a feminist analysis of this film, it is useful to consider the role of the gaze and identification of the 'three looks' (Mulvey 1975: 17; Kaplan 1983: 15) but also to consider Berger's discussion of *Ways of Seeing* (Berger 1972). A synthesis of these approaches allows for a deconstruction of both the filmic and pro-filmic space considering those featured on screen, the audience, and the camera/person filming. Berger points out that photographs (and by extension, film) can 'become a record of how X had seen Y' (Berger 1972: 10) and, as a result, the extant film text can provide evidence for non-diegetic spectatorship that is invested with agency. Where looking 'is an act of choice' (Berger 1972: 9), the on and off-screen participants can be said to be engaged in a reciprocal exchange of looks (Berger 1972: 9).

Plaster of Paris disrupts Mulvey's tripartite male gaze (Mulvey 1975), providing examples of both the male and female gaze. In the profilmic space, Henry Gauvain fulfils the role of the male protagonist; as an established professional and a man, society has permitted him to attend university and pioneer new treatments (RCS 2021). At the time of filming, he is the Superintendent of the hospital at which he works, the patriarch. In the context of *Plaster of Paris*, he embodies the 'promise of [clinical] power' which Berger describes, with his screen presence 'large and credible' (Berger 1972: 45). He orchestrates the application of treatment on a female patient, aged approximately seven. His presence and actions evidence his ability to 'do to you or for you', discernibly exercising the power he has over others (Berger 1972: 46). His physical actions enacted on the child's body supplement the possessiveness of his gaze, which Kaplan writes 'carries with it the power of action and of possession' (Kaplan 1983: 31). Henry Gauvain's eyes do not meet the camera, instead his focus is task orientated. This is not to understate his spectatorship; he does not simply passively observe the female patient. In his role on-screen, he objectifies the patient as an item of study; his

back is ostensibly placed toward the camera and the oncoming female gaze of his wife while he undertakes the medical intervention. Berger's discussion of the nude in art is commensurate with the patient's objectification in this film (Berger 1972: 54). The partially clothed unidentified child is separated from 'herself', as she might perceive herself (with a name and unique biography) and thus, her body must be seen as an object, to become (or be viewed as) a patient.

The female patient, identified as such through the brief exposure of her genitals in the opening shot and the presence of long hair worn with a ribbon, is without physical agency in this sequence above the emphatic application of her gaze. Through the consentient deployment of her look, those around her are 'brought within [her] reach', though frustratingly outside the range of her physical grasp (Berger 1972: 8). She is carried into the frame by Dr Gauvain, her body rigid, and placed on a stool in the centre of the structure. As the child is placed gently on her feet on the stool, a female nurse positioned at the child's back supports her under her arms. The patient wears sleeves, a vest, and leg coverings; her genitals remain exposed until the cast is applied. The child meets the gaze of the camera as she is placed on the stool, then her attention is drawn by the second female nurse as she places bandages in the plaster basin. Dr Gauvain begins the child's restraint, attaching fabric supports to the vest that reaches up to her face. Dr Gauvain forms a fabric noose, which he uses to encircle the child's head. He reaches it under her chin and attaches it to a hoist arm that hangs down from the framework. He then pulls a rope that elevates the hoist arm, whereby the child is raised to tiptoes, and the first nurse fixes the frame in position by tightening a knob on the side of the frame.

Berger notes how our 'vision is continually moving, continually holding things in a circle around' ourselves (Berger 1972: 9). This movement is demonstrated by the patient, who looks repeatedly around herself within the narrow scope available; as the procedure begins her head is mobile and allows for a turning of the head, but as the application of the plaster cast progresses to cover her neck and head her gaze is increasingly fixed beyond her control. She looks initially, when her head is free to move, at those applying the treatment: the first nurse, Henry Gauvain, and at the camera, exemplifying the female ability to 'receive and return a gaze but [not to] act upon it' (Kaplan 1983: 31). As mobility in her neck and head are restricted, her gaze is exclusively cast forwards toward Dr Gauvain and the camera, though she makes attempts to search out the nurse in her periphery vision.

The vest's neck is pulled up and over the panicked child's head, a hole is cut in it for her face, and the application of the strips of bandages begins. The swathes are applied around the child's body, reaching from her hips, and encasing her head almost fully. Dr Gauvain lifts bandages from the basin, which is then replenished by the second nurse.

As the procedure progresses, an edit allows time to elapse, and the plaster jacket is clearly now hardening. The patient, now completely restrained and unable to move without the assistance of Dr Gauvain's mechanical frame, becomes more frantic in seeking reassurance through her gaze, searching for verbal or physical reassurance that does not appear to be offered by those on screen. To compound the possessiveness of Dr Gauvain's gaze, and the power he exerts in the pro-filmic space, the two female nurses subvert their gazes obsequiously. Neither nurse raises her eyes to the camera or to meet Dr Gauvain's look; they exist purely to facilitate the objectification of the female patient.

Berger asserts that 'Every image embodies a way of seeing' (Berger 1972: 10) and thus, every frame captured in *Plaster of Paris* is imbued with the specificity of Louisa Gauvain's own way of seeing. An erosion of this gendered look is enacted through Dr Gauvain's physical restraint of the female patient and his all-pervading gaze that serves to debase the position of the (female) camera. While the camera can be said to occupy a female standpoint in the hands of Gauvain, engaged in the reciprocal acting of looking with the patient, extra-filmic knowledge positions her gaze within a wider cultural hierarchy of patriarchal power, wherein she is the less qualified un-professionalised wife of the doctor on screen.

The reciprocity at play between Gauvain's camera and the female patient evidences a conflicting duality: the patient whose eyes entreat action and yet go unanswered demonstrating an inevitable impotency, while Gauvain's unfaltering gaze serves to liberate the patient by capturing her outward look and lifting her outside of the frame in a way that might not have been possible had the film been produced by a male. On the one hand, Gauvain's camera offers a female filming a female and, on the other, highlights the futility of the position that has been carved out for her by patriarchy. The space that Gauvain's camera occupies exists only because of a series of societal pre-sets: her marriage to Henry, her forfeit of her own career for marriage, and her role in the hospital hierarchy. Any potential power allowed to Gauvain in the creation of this film is arrested in the ensuing historiographical process; only by a process of reclamation can this power be reinstated (Callahan 2010: 5).

Finally, there is the gaze of the spectator who is, inevitably, male. As an educational medical film designed to disseminate a pioneering treatment of cervical caries, the intended audience would have been those working in the medical profession and seeking to expand their knowledge. At this time there were only around 1000 women working in qualified medical roles (Elston 1986: 165), very few of which would have formed the intended audience for this film. Taken as an educational medical film and outside of the commercial tradition, the spectator has a highly clinical focus and

therefore the scopophilia that might be imagined to be activated during the course of viewing is less about sexual desire than it is about narcissistic repositioning, which places the male spectator in the role of the on-screen doctor (McGowan 2003: 28).

An analogous restraint

Drawing on both a textual analysis of the film and a deconstruction of the film object's past allows for a fuller reclamation of women filmmaker's work, but also facilitates a re-evaluation of the amateur/professional binary. Despite the necessary predominant female presence in this film, the gaze positions it firmly within the patriarchal tradition. The historising of the film relegates the position of female involvement to a linguistic nuance, which has been conveyed and proliferated through its subsequent archival narrative. The film can on accession bearing the handwritten epithet 'made by the wife of Sir HENRY GAUVAIN', reduces the female filmmaker's involvement to a genitive pronoun, defined singularly in relation to the male whose name is provided with full honorific. The term 'wife' is a noun, yet in the context of the archive it is applied (or could be interpreted) as a pronoun, as no other identifying language is applied to the filmmaker. Thus, female involvement is obscured through the application of legacy terminology, applied through necessity and matter of process. The failure to attribute gender traits to any others featuring in the film further compounds the precedence given to Henry Gauvain.

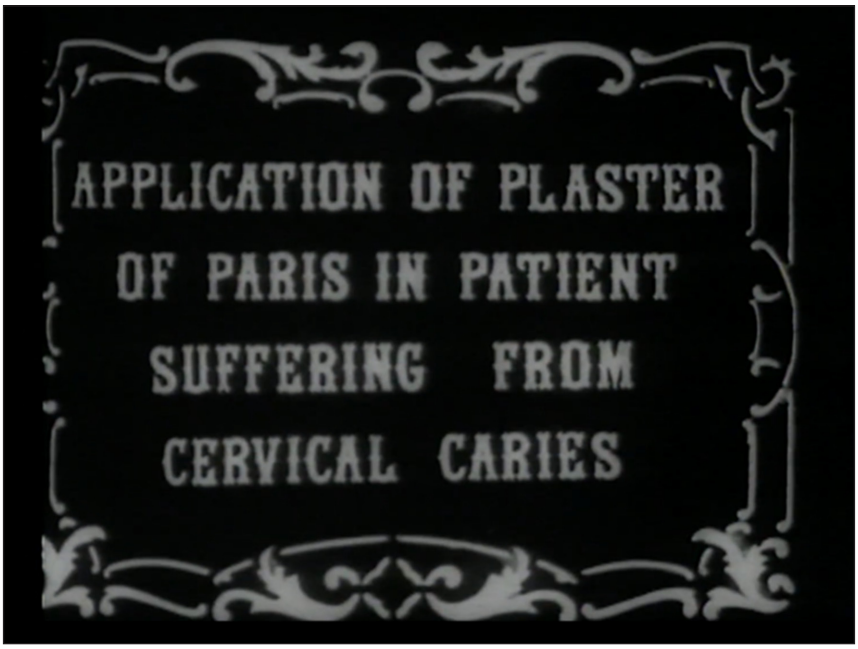

Figure 1: Title card (AV90/6 Plaster of Paris). Courtesy of WFSA.

Just as the film *Plaster of Paris* seeks to restrain its female participants, so too it subverts Gauvain's female camera for patriarchal ends. The female gaze is eliminated from the discourse, obscured by a genitive pronoun. The film itself and its object/biography is analogous to the treatment of amateur women filmmakers more widely, who were allowed freedoms to create within a patriarchally defined set of pre-sets. The creative product is then subsequently suppressed by the same masculine system that allowed this feminine exception to occur, thus the work of other such women is subjugated by patriarchal norms.

The Professional/Amateur Binary

Reflecting on my earlier discussion of the struggles of defining amateurism during this period, the case of Gauvain evidences the increased mobility of women within the labour market and provides a justification for a move away from the binary classification of such filmmakers. Gauvain's status as a single professional working woman was not completely forfeit at marriage. She may no longer have been practising as a dispenser of medicines, but she was able to 'reclaim [some] personal autonomy' through her filmmaking in the context of her husband's work (Motrescu-Mayes & Norris Nicholson 2018: 229). Other early film pioneers, including Margaret Hepworth, were similarly introduced to filmmaking through connections with their husbands' professions (Fletcher 2013). As a woman filmmaker active before the widespread introduction of narrow gauge film and as a female using 35 mm outside of an industry context, Gauvain and her work sit at odds with the technolgical determinism discussed in amateur discourse by Zimmermann and Tepperman. *Plaster of Paris* sits on the periphery of mainstream cinema as it was not intended for wide distribution, nor was it produced for commercial reasons. It is a medical film and as such has been long since 'buried within the narrative' of the wider history of both the Treloar Hospital, but also within the annals of WFSA as an ungendered example of early film (Clark quoted in Motrescu-Mayes & Norris Nicholson 2018: 203). Motrescu-Mayes and Norris Nicholson point out that women working in the early part of the twentieth century represent a 'corpus of visually mediated historical experience often against, or within, male-dominated master narratives' (Motrescu-Mayes & Norris Nicholson 2018: 228). Gauvain's work can certainly be said to have been absorbed up to this point in the master narrative of her husband and that of the medical establishment and partly as a result of technological determinism, and has been overlooked by amateur discourse. It is only through a process of reclamation and re-evaluation of material aspects that non-professional women filmmakers such as Gauvain can be introduced to disrupt and 'displace homogenous, linear histories' (Callahan 2010: 5) that patriarchal norms

have given rise to. Linearity is the institutional preference, yet women's histories are so often punctuated by fractures that render this optimum standard extraneous. Rather than presenting a 'perfect' biographical account of Gauvain, this history is offered as a web of probable happenings that at the very least provides evidence for the existence of non-professional women filmmakers working in the pre-1922 period.

Gauvain's medical film and the exhibitor-filmmaker topicals within WFSA seek to ape professional conventions, yet not unlike other forms of useful cinema they sit notably outside of the formal system and of the Institutional Mode of Representation (Burch and Lane 1973). In that regard they form a nucleus of a new amateur movement; part of a raft of users outside of the formal commercial system that sought to apply film technology in alternative ways (Acland & Waisson 2011) and which, as I have argued, can challenge the rhetoric within scholarship that technology alone defined a filmmaker's practice. That is not to say that this group of film pioneers were the *first* amateurs, they were not; the photographic press had been discussing the appearance of the kinematograph amateur as early as 1899 (1898, *The British Journal of Photography*, 30 December: 845; Chalke 2007: 223). Rather, the filmmakers represented in the WFSA collection could be said to form part of a little acknowledged wave of amateurism that gathered swell from 1912. 1912 to 1922 was a period when technology became more accessible for certain groups of people and the WFSA collection provides evidence for increased access amongst film exhibitors, the professional classes, and the military,[5] all of which were encouraged by the introduction of non-flam film, which is not commonly recognised in amateur film discourse. It is significant that camera manufacturers sought to drive business in these areas during this period and this is reflected in the WFSA collection.

Reappraising early film items within regional collections with the refinements discussed can allow for the presentation of a much more nuanced understanding of those working outside of professional contexts (see **Figure 2** for a recalculation of WFSA's early film following this reappraisal), demonstrating that the blanket application of the term 'amateur' is far from accurate in categorising work produced outside of the professional sphere. Considering the challenges that the binary model presents to regional collections, I propose the adoption of the term 'non-professional' for films produced before 1922 that sit outside of the formal commercial system. However, such a categorisation should not be applied without caution when its definition is founded upon a relational position to the professional. With no fixed criteria that can be usefully applied diachronically between 1895 to 1922 to determine a film's status

[5] Collections produced by the King's Royal Rifle Corps (AV335).

as ‘professional’, films should be considered on a case-by-case basis. This should take into consideration as much extra-filmic knowledge as possible including, where present, the fragmented narratives of women participants.

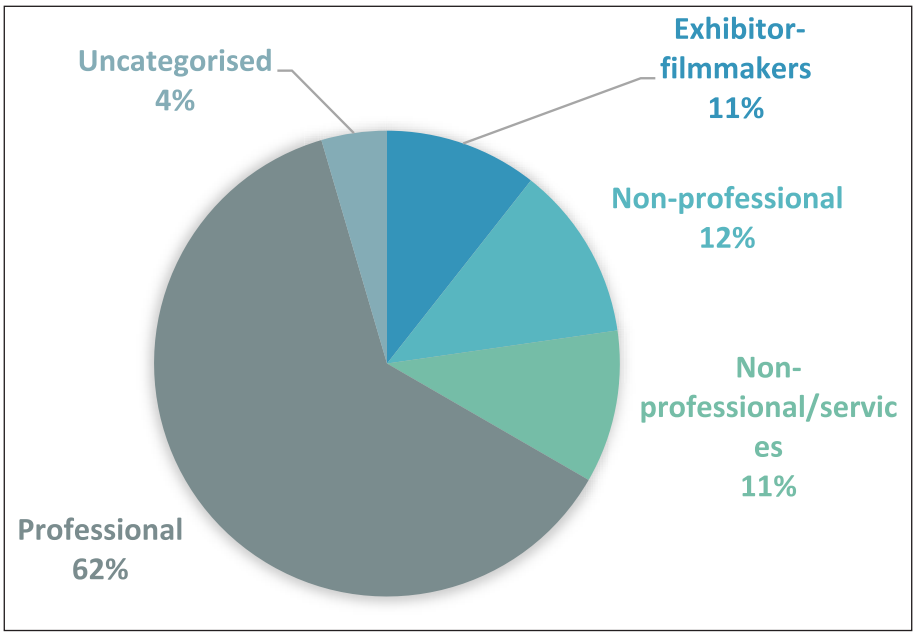

Figure 2: Early film items within WFSA by origin (1895–1922).

Conclusion

This article aimed to challenge the categorisation of films within regional collections in the pre-1922 period according to an established amateur/professional binary, using the case study of WFSA. I have highlighted how problematic it is to apply a simple binary model to pre-1922 films where production contexts may be fluid or challenging to categorise. Through this case study I have demonstrated the potential benefits of revising our approach and indicated where possible elisions may occur. By combining empirical data, gleaned from a collection wide survey, with textual analysis and archival research, I have been able to more fully understand how the archive has categorised works within this period and the challenges inherent in this. Through the compilation of an outline biography and a deconstruction of the film text, I have focused on the case of Gauvain and her film *Plaster of Paris*, which had been ostensibly attributed to her husband.

This example has highlighted the problematic ways in which films are historised according to entrenched patriarchal practices of history writing. Gauvain’s *Plaster of Paris* demonstrates how such practices can lead to ambiguous attributions; she was

given indirect credit for her work yet failed to be acknowledged by name because her husband was the revered professional. Importantly, it is apparent that the language we use (or fail to use) causes problems for how certain practitioners are made visible, particularly women and those working in contexts peripheral to the film industry proper. In this case, the term 'wife' served to obfuscate Gauvain's authorship and assigned a value judgement that situated her work outside of the 'professional'. With archival metadata fields often reliant on industry defined terminology (Arnold et al. 2023:4), those practitioners active in peripheral screen industries are at risk of being mis-categorised and as a result, overlooked. Furthermore, this example alludes to the negative value judgements that can occur because of a relational positioning to the commercial film industry, where a lower value is often attributed to works produced outside of commercial production environments. However, as knowledge of these peripheral screen industries grows, their value as significant sociocultural practices become more apparent.

I posit that Gauvain's film *Plaster of Paris* is analogous to the treatment of amateur women filmmakers more widely, whose work in such contexts has largely been overlooked. Gauvain's practice evolved at a time when marketing rhetoric encouraged women to partake in still photography and then cine photography, yet the systems in which they were operating meant that they could only do so in ways defined for them by the patriarchy. In cine clubs, they were largely restricted to background or supporting roles and their work is often misattributed in collections with credit more typically falling to leading male participants. Gauvain's involvement in cine stemmed from an earlier interest in photography, but her filmmaking was facilitated through her husband's work. Within this remit she was enabled to create film, yet her authorship was unrecognised; her name was buried within her husband's professional legacy. The example of Gauvain and the exhibitor filmmakers in WFSA builds a case for a more widely sustained adoption of the term 'non-professional' as a marked shift away from 'amateur' for those functioning outside of the formal industry context. Through such revaluations we may begin to readdress historic value judgements that give precedence to certain types of film over others and consider how relational positioning has hitherto impeded the visibility of practitioners functioning in marginalised screen industries.

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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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