

A PORTFOLIO PRODUCER: MICHAEL BALCON'S MANAGEMENT OF FILM
PRODUCTION AT THE GAUMONT-BRITISH PICTURE CORPORATION

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by

Andrew Thomas Croft
Department of History of Art and Film
University of Leicester

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Statement of authorship

This thesis, submitted for assessment, is my own and is expressed in my own words. I have used no part of this work for any other qualification.

Any uses made within it of the works of other authors in any form are properly acknowledged at the point of their use.

A full list of the references employed has been included.

Abstract

Michael Balcon has been acknowledged for his work at Ealing Studios from 1939, and particularly for a portfolio of films produced in the decade 1942-1952. Charles Barr's 1977 history of Ealing Studios¹ and John Ellis' 1975 article on Ealing² explore Balcon's 'agency' - the ways in which he exercised authority, and the decisions and deals he committed to, in order to achieve success - in the production of films such as *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (1949) and *Passport to Pimlico* (1949). Yet, despite the fact that Balcon produced 152 films between 1924 and 1936, of which 133 are features³ - and despite the fact that Balcon produced across many genres during that period, facilitating the use of many different technical and aesthetic approaches to cinema, Balcon has not been fully acknowledged in the initial, interwar years of his career in film production. His role in the formation and development of Gainsborough Pictures has been assessed in Pam Cook's edited history of the firm.⁴ However, Balcon's contribution to British film industry development at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation (GBPC) - during a key period from 1931 to 1936, when he was responsible for a significant proportion of British films viewed in British cinemas - has not been subjected to a dedicated and comprehensive appraisal. This thesis represents research into the relationship between industrial and commercial development, governmental intervention, and that which is known of Balcon's policies and practices; the choice of films produced, the film production techniques adopted and encouraged - and the technicians and artists he managed and worked with.

¹ Barr, Charles. *Ealing Studios* (London: David & Charles, 1977)

² Ellis, John. 'Made in Ealing', in *Screen*, Vol.16, No.1 (1975) pp.78-127

³ See Appendices 2 and 3

⁴ Cook, Pam (Ed.). *Gainsborough Pictures* (London: Cassell, 1997)

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Introduction

This thesis comprises a historical and critical assessment of Michael Balcon's tenure as director of productions at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation between 1931 and 1936.⁵ It is an attempt to demonstrate Balcon's significance to the development of the film industry during this period, from a hitherto relatively unexplored position: Michael Balcon is assessed in this thesis as an interwar producer of multiple film genres, motivated to produce several different types of feature film in order to develop and capitalise the commercial and technical potential of British cinema. It is argued herein that Michael Balcon also sought to produce a diverse portfolio of genre films, in order to represent a variety of cultural and political influences.

During the 1930s, Michael Balcon was amongst the most important figures in British film industry. He produced commercially successful films. He sought to develop defined roles and careers for talented film industry personnel. His significance is associated, also, with the prominence of GBPC itself during the 1930s. The Gaumont-British Picture Corporation was one of two vertically integrated film corporations in the 1930s - alongside British International Pictures (BIP) - which dominated domestic production, distribution and exhibition during the decade, both as BIP and as Associated British Picture Corporation.⁶ In the early and mid-1930s GBPC was the largest film industry operation in the United Kingdom in the 1930s. Its assets included "two studios, over 300 cinemas, film printing works with a capacity of about a million feet a week and over 14,000 employees"⁷, as well as a number of subsidiary companies.

⁵ 'Who's What in the Industry', in *The Kinematograph Year Book 1947* (London: Kinematograph Publications Ltd) p.58

⁶ British International Pictures became the Associated British Picture Corporation in 1933. See Ryall, Tom. 'A British Studio System: The Associated British Picture Corporation and the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation in the 1930s', in Murphy, Robert (Ed.). *The British Cinema Book* (London: BFI Publishing, 1997) pp.35-41

⁷ Low, Rachael. *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985) p.135

A recent trend of British cinema histories has been the increasing attention given to the role of the producer. Vincent Porter acknowledges this trend towards establishing the role of the producer, and what the role entails. Porter suggests that analysis should be focused on the interrelationship between four key factors: the producer's estimation of public taste, the ability to obtain adequate production finance, the capacity to employ suitable people in key creative roles on favourable terms, and the effectiveness of the overall control of the production process.⁸

Linda Wood explains the challenges in defining the role of the film producer, arguing that "it is difficult to specify precisely where his influence operates and how it takes effect, given the absence of any direct input into the film"⁹. However, Wood offers a clarification in her appraisal of Julius Hagen's work at Twickenham Studios. She writes "It is fairly easy to connect other contributors to particular facets of a film: the cameraman and the art director are responsible for the look, the writer provides the story, the editor controls a film's pace. For most people, 'the unifying intelligence' is provided by the director. Yet without the producer the film would not be made, for it is he who provides and sustains the environment necessary for making the product. He raises the finance, chooses the directors, finds and approves projects. He oversees those non-film activities associated with businesses in general, such as marketing and administration. He also acts as a link between the film studio and those other industry branches - distribution and exhibition – responsible for getting the completed film to its audience."¹⁰

In a paper on misperceptions of the role of the producer, Andrew Spicer attempts to define the role of the producer with regard to "both the tangible and intangible elements in film production:

⁸ Porter, Vincent. 'The Context of Creativity: Ealing Studios and Hammer Films', in Curran, James; Porter, Vincent (Eds.). *British Cinema History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1983) pp.179-80

⁹ Wood, Linda. 'Julius Hagen and Twickenham Film Studios', in Richards, Jeffery (Ed.). *The Unknown 1930s: an Alternative History of the British Cinema, 1929-1939* (London: I B Tauris & Co, 1998) p.37

¹⁰ *ibid*

attempting to control properties (studios, sets, and equipment), finance and diverse, often volatile, artistic temperaments”¹¹ Spicer regards Michael Balcon as an example of such a producer. He observes, “Balcon stresses the need to combine commerce and art, a ‘dual capacity’ that can understand and appreciate both.”¹²

In Spicer’s view, producers such as Balcon demonstrated “creative insight” and “business acumen”. They are or were as adept at managing “script, casting, design” as at handling “logistics, scheduling, marketing, and costs”. Spicer uses *The Field of Cultural Production* by Pierre Bourdieu to support the argument that the producer acts as an intermediary, “mediating between the creative world of writers, directors, stars and cinematographers and the world of finance and business deals”¹³.

Of Michael Balcon’s interwar contemporaries, Alexander Korda is most notable for managing creative input and commercial sensibilities. Both Korda and Balcon were engaged, in the 1930s, of making big-budget films in order to appeal to audiences and generate revenues in the USA. Both men used successful literary material as the basis for film productions. Both Balcon and Korda produced films that promoted the hegemonic cultural values of the British Empire.¹⁴

Working with Victor Saville, Michael Balcon wedded the techniques and stylistic devices utilised by UFA’s operatives in Germany to a penchant for “story-telling, wit and melodrama”¹⁵.

As Sue Harper observes, Korda combined an appeal to audiences’ cultural cognisance with an

¹¹ Spicer, Andrew. ‘Why Study Producers?’ (Paper presented at the Dept. of Theatre, Film and Television Studies, University of Aberystwyth, 2 November 2011)

¹² *ibid*

¹³ *ibid*

¹⁴ Of Korda’s productions, Empire is promoted explicitly in *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1934), *Sanders of the River* (1935), *Fire Over England* (1937), *The Drum* (1938) and *The Four Feathers* (1939); Balcon’s most overt promotions of Empire ideology include *Rhodes of Africa* (1936) and *King Solomon’s Mines* (1937)

¹⁵ Scott, Ian. *From Pinewood to Hollywood: British Filmmakers in American Cinema, 1910-1969* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010) p.64

emphasis on creative story-telling and artistic values, alternately encapsulating “a radical conservative view of history” and deploying “aristocratic motifs”.¹⁶

Other contemporaries of Balcon, operating at smaller studios, were less concerned with artistry, culture or ideological concerns. Resources were insufficient for sophisticated production values, and the need to complete production quickly, in order to generate revenues was too acute for artistic considerations. For example, none of the films produced by Julius Hagen at Twickenham Studios represented current debates about societal issues. Even Hagen’s principal attempt at attracting American audiences, *This Week of Grace* (1933), bore few of “the dialectic and idiomatic features”¹⁷ typical of Gracie Field’s previous work.

The challenges facing British film producers during the 1920s and 1930s included critical disapproval of British film production and distribution, and an increasingly dismissive response to the cultural and artistic qualities of British cinema, based on a view that British film producing companies were failing to achieve unrealistic and often contradictory standards. Published in 1925, Pearkes Withers’ account of ‘Why British Films Fail’ begins with the observation, “I am far from convinced that those of us who patronize the cinema are to any great extent influenced by the pictures we see on the screen”¹⁸ before proceeding to consider the cultural reasons for the proliferation of American films. By 1930, Paul Rotha’s work, *The Film Till Now*, encapsulated the tone of interwar critical response to British film: Rotha writes, “I am unable to discern a realistic, expressionistic, naturalistic, decorative, or any other phase in the development of the

¹⁶ Harper, Sue. *Women in British Cinema: Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know* (London and New York: Continuum, 2000) p.11

¹⁷ *Motion Picture Herald* (28 October 1933)

¹⁸ Withers, Pearkes. ‘Why British Films Fail’, in *Quiver* 61 (November 1925) p.79

British cinema. Added to which, there are no tendencies to be traced, for British films do not have tendencies, unless allusion is made to the prevalence of cabaret scenes and war themes.”¹⁹

Lawrence Napper’s analysis of contemporary critical responses to interwar British cinema highlights the difficulties faced by producers such as Michael Balcon in trying to achieve cultural and commercial success in British cinema during this period, and particularly during the 1930s. Napper writes that the British industry was “criticised for being too parochial and too internationalist; for its primitive style and its ‘slavish imitation’ of Hollywood; for being too reliant on stage and literary adaptation, and for its inability to draw on the richness of British literature and history; for being too slow and picturesque, and for failing to use the setting provided by the British landscape; for being too reliant on foreign stars and technicians, and for the poverty of its native talent.”²⁰

Balcon’s efforts towards creating a broad portfolio of films may be considered in response to these criticism of British cinema. His interest in developing the skills and careers of talented individuals hence appear both to have been motivated by two needs. The first was the commercial necessity to generate revenues and profitability. The second was a desire to support efforts towards improving the artistry and technical quality of film production in Britain. Hence, this thesis represents an attempt to answer questions pertaining to the commercial viability and quality of production at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, which formed the locus of Michael Balcon’s interwar production efforts:

¹⁹ Rotha, Paul. *The Film Till Now: A Survey of the Cinema* (New York: Jonathan Cape & Harrison Smith Inc, 1930) p.230

²⁰ Napper, Lawrence. ‘A Despicable Tradition? Quota Quickies in the 1930s’, in Murphy, Robert (Ed.). *The British Cinema Book* (London: BFI Publishing, 2001) pp.46-47

- First, what was the nature and true extent of Michael Balcon's impact on the commercial viability of British film production during the 1930s?
- Second, how did Michael Balcon influence the style and content of films produced at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation?

Answering these questions requires identification of Michael Balcon's engagement with production trends, cycles, and genres, in order to characterise Balcon's agency. It requires, also, close assessment of industry structure and development during the 1930s, and in the preceding and succeeding decades - including analyses of industrial and legislative events. By concentrating on the structure and development of interwar British film industry, one can chart the operation of vertically integrated firms such as GBPC and the influence of industry figures such as Balcon. The exploration of Michael Balcon's role as a 'portfolio' or genre producer comprises contextual and textual analyses of 18 films²¹ across seven genres²², with reference to developments in the British film industry, in order to highlight Balcon's significance as an interwar film producer - and also to highlight both the opportunities for further research of individual films produced by Balcon, and a wider exploration of genre production by Balcon.

Literature on interwar film industry, and on Michael Balcon

The production history of interwar British film industry has been extensively mapped by the academic community. There are texts that serve researchers seeking to identify production activity during the period, as a basis for exploration of issues associated with the culture and

²¹ *Jack's the Boy, Foreign Affairs, The Good Companions, Evergreen, First a Girl, It's Love Again, A Gentleman of Paris, Rome Express, The Man Who Knew Too Much, The 39 Steps, Secret Agent, The Ghoul, The Man Who Changed His Mind, The Passing of the Third Floor Back, Rhodes of Africa, Jew Süss, The Iron Duke, and Man of Aran*

²² Comedy; musical; melodrama; crime; historical; horror; documentary

commercial condition of British cinema. Dennis Gifford's *The British Film Catalogue*²³ comprises the basic text for such a task, with entries from 1895 to 1985 - including credits, generic categories and synopses. Gifford sorted films by month and year of release, enabling and supporting an understanding of production trends with respect to genres, actors, directors, producers, companies and other aspects of the industry. One may refer, also, to David Quinlan's *British Sound Films; the Studio Years 1928-59*²⁴ and Linda Wood's *British Films 1927-1939*²⁵. Furthermore, *British Cinema History*²⁶, edited by James Curran and Vincent Porter, contains a considerable bibliography categorised by subjects including 'The Industry', and 'Films and their Audiences' - including a highly useful index of government reports and statutes pertaining to film industry development. Research into British film industry of the period may be assisted, also, in any of a number of wide-ranging guides, encyclopaedias and dictionaries. Roger Manvell's *The International Encyclopedia of Film*²⁷, and Liz-Anne Bawden's *The Oxford Companion to Film*²⁸ represent ample filmographic research resources. Applicable popular histories of British film industry and cinema include historical surveys such as Paul Rotha's *The Film Till Now: A Survey of The Cinema*²⁹ and Ernest Betts' *The Film Business*³⁰. Researchers may consider, also, how George Perry's *The Great British Picture Show*³¹ serves as a comprehensive guide to British film industry trends, with acknowledgement not only of directors and actors but also categorisation by genre references to structural developments - progressive

²³ Gifford, Dennis. *The British Film Catalogue 1895-1985* (Newton Abbot: First Impressions, 1986)

²⁴ Quinlan, David. *British Sound Films: the Studio Years 1928-1959* (London: Batsford, 1984)

²⁵ Wood, Linda. *British Films 1927-1939* (London: British Film Institute, 1986)

²⁶ Curran, James; Porter, Vincent (Eds.). *British Cinema History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1983)

²⁷ Manvell, Roger (Ed.). *The International Encyclopedia of Film* (London: Michael Joseph, 1972)

²⁸ Bawden, Liz-Anne. *The Oxford Companion to Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976)

²⁹ Rotha, Paul. *The Film Till Now: A Survey of the Cinema* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930)

³⁰ Betts, Ernest. *The Film Business* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973)

³¹ Perry, George. *The Great British Picture Show* (London: Pavilion Books, 1985)

and regressive - affecting the industry over time. More incisive is Roy Armes' *A Critical History of British Cinema*³², which combines observations on key film industry figures - including Alfred Hitchcock, John Grierson, Alexander Korda, and Michael Balcon - with references to interrelations of industry, society, culture and politics.

However, whilst Armes' work does support the development of a critical understanding of film industry and film culture in Britain, a more sophisticated resource is offered in the detailed accounts of British film history written by Rachael Low - whose documenting of British film industry began when she worked in support of Roger Manvell, a research officer at the British Film Institute during and after the Second World War, and an influential figure in the study of film culture. Manvell co-opted Low to conduct the research that would become a series of books - definitive volumes of British film history, beginning with a publication devoted to the first ten years of cinema, from 1896 to 1906³³. Low continued to research independently of Manvell - leading to the publication of another four volumes that address, decade by the decade, British film history from 1906 to 1939³⁴. These are seminal histories of British film production, distribution, exhibition and reception, in which Low demonstrates that researching histories of film industry and film culture need not and should not be limited to the study of the film industry and/or film texts themselves, but should concentrate upon the history of the experience of cinema-going, as well as film industry, and also of social and economic factors that may affect the production of film and the viewing of film. As their titles indicate, *The History of the British*

³² Armes, Roy. *A Critical History of British Cinema* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1978)

³³ Low, Rachael; Manvell, Roger. *The History of the British Film, 1896-1906* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1948)

³⁴ Low, Rachael. *The History of the British Film, 1906-1914* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1949); Low, Rachael. *The History of the British Film, 1914-1918* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1950); Low, Rachael. *The History of the British Film, 1918-1929* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971); Low, Rachael. *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985)

Film, 1918-1929 and *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939* bear particular significance in the canon of critical and historical literature on interwar British film industry and culture. Low is not, however, the sole contributor to the understanding of the period in film.

General histories of interwar British cinema include, also, *The Unknown 1930s: an Alternative History of the British Cinema*³⁵, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain, 1930-1939*³⁶, and *Films and British National Identity*³⁷ - each of which is edited or written by Jeffrey Richards. However, these texts have little specific to say about Michael Balcon and the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation other than to offer contextualised appraisals of Balcon's attributes as producer alongside contemporaries such as Basil Dean and Herbert Wilcox.

With respect to interwar film industry and cinema culture, Rachael Low and Jeffrey Richards are not alone in supplying a survey of British film industry development over the decade. Andrew Higson's article on national cinema in *Screen*³⁸ offers a general discussion of film industry and film culture, which includes but is not dominated by reference to Britain's relationship with America. And, in *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain*³⁹, Higson argues that national cinema and a nation's sense of identity should be considered in terms of processes; that is, that a nation's cinema, and its appeal to a nation, may be understood with reference to relevance to the following processual factors: that nation's industrial and commercial development; the impact of national film industry on national culture;

³⁵ Richards, Jeffery (Ed.). *The Unknown 1930s: an Alternative History of the British Cinema, 1929-1939* (London: I B Tauris & Co, 1998)

³⁶ Richards, Jeffery. *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain, 1930-1939* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984)

³⁷ Richards, Jeffery. *Films and British National Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997)

³⁸ Higson, Andrew. 'The Concept of National Cinema', in *Screen* Vol.30 No.4 (1989) pp.36-46

³⁹ Higson, Andrew. *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995)

the criteria by which film industry products are critiqued within a culture; the criteria determining how a nation's film industry may be subjected to legislative or regulatory frameworks; and finally, the degree to which national representation is supported or is undermined. This last determination, of cinematic representation of national conditions, is associated by Higson with genre studies. Furthermore, Higson is concerned less with modes of production than with the modes of consumption; his issue is not the ways in which films may be produced to serve a nation, but rather the ways in which audiences construct cultural identities in relation to screened films.

As an early form of industrialised mass entertainment, film was a pervasive influence on British society and economy in the early decades of the twentieth century. Falling working hours, rising disposable income, increasing urbanisation, expanding transport infrastructure and strong population growth since the late nineteenth century contributed to an increase in demand for entertainment. Innovations in production processes and the introduction of industrial practices, as entrepreneurs developed film production and screening equipment, pushed live entertainment to the margins of society and economy - with established entertainment companies investing in cinema technology to offset decreasing returns from traditional entertainment businesses.

Although interwar Britain was amongst the world's largest markets for film exhibition, its film production sector was relatively weak. American firms sought to counter that competition from British film production companies by undermining British attempts at gaining, and regaining, domestic market share. The British government sought to redress the declining interwar British film industry, which had prospered before the First World War, through legislative measures.

So, American influence must not be ignored. Interwar British film industry, cinema culture, and the legislature were all influenced and impacted by American film production and

export - and by the anticipation and actuality of American action. Margaret Dickinson and Sarah Street offer a highly empirical approach, which has included the close examination of American materials. Dickinson and Street offer, in their account of legislative measures and their consequences, in *Cinema and State: The Film Industry and the British Government 1927-84*⁴⁰, a pertinent historical account of relations between American and British film industries - and also a methodological example for the completion of this thesis, in the development of an explanatory framework from the examination of interwar materials, including the aforementioned documentation produced by institutional organs such as the Board of Trade, articles written by journalists and published in journals such as *Kinematograph Weekly* and newspapers including *The Guardian*, and personal papers such as those maintained by Michael Balcon and Ivor Montagu.

As John Hill argues in *Cultural Trends* that governmental policy in the United Kingdom, with respect to film industry, bears a pre-eminently 'protectionist' position, "concerned with the preservation and support of commercial film making"⁴¹ in the face of American competition - so one may take from Dickinson and Street the understanding that the early types of state aid in the 1920s, which took the forms of a quota system and cultural subsidies, were in reaction to the fear of American economic and cultural domination of the British film industry, and take on board an understanding of the consequences of such state intervention.

Dickinson and Street support accounts of failure of governmental policy, as the quota system is acknowledged to have engendered a trend towards American financing and screening of 'quota quickies' - low quality, cheaply produced British films. It is important to note, however,

⁴⁰ Dickinson, Margaret; Street, Sarah. *Cinema and State: The Film Industry and the British Government 1927-84* (London: BFI, 1985)

⁴¹ Hill, John. 'UK Film Policy, Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion', in *Cultural Trends* Vol.13 No.2 (2004) p.32

that American sponsorship of quota quickie production did entail employment British technicians. Moreover, as Professor Steve Chibnall's work on interwar British cinema indicates, although quota quickies were produced merely to satisfy legislative requirements, some of them were popular with provincial cinemagoers.⁴²

The requirement of the Cinematograph Films Act (1927) for renters and exhibitors to obtain and exhibit a quantity of British films amounting to a prescribed percentage of their annual acquisitions and screenings⁴³ was intended to create a climate conducive to the emergence of support for a hitherto struggling British film industry - not to position that industry in low-grade subservience to American interests.

Dickinson and Street offer opportunities for exploration because they interrogate the impact of public sector policy-making on British film production and distribution, and explore the relationship between government and industry with financial stringency. The process by which American interests achieve pre-eminence in British cinema is charted comprehensively in *Cinema and State: The Film Industry and the British Government 1927-84*, through the presentation of a compendium of statistics and facts detailing the impact of British film legislation. Street extends her work with Dickinson in *Transatlantic Crossings: British Feature Films in the USA*⁴⁴, by exploring underlying issues that caused or contributed to financial crisis and overextension during the 1930s - a period of radical change in British film industry structure and practice, and of commercial and critical successes at home and abroad.

⁴² Chibnall, Steve. *Quota Quickies: The Birth of the British 'B' Film* (London: British Film Institute, 2007)

⁴³ Dickinson, Margaret; Street, Sarah. *Cinema and State: The Film Industry and the British Government 1927-84* (London: BFI, 1985) pp.1-2

⁴⁴ Street, Sarah. *Transatlantic Crossings: British Feature Films in the USA* (London: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2002)

Street's research and the products of her collaborative efforts with Dickinson bear significance, also, on considerations pertaining to the role of the state in constructing a "collective consciousness about nationhood"⁴⁵. Considering legislature, and associating governmental policy with national culture, one may refer, then, to Hill - whose edited volumes inform exploration of the notion that there may be no such thing as a 'national culture', and that interwar proponents of a 'national cinema', which would be capable of representing the complexities of British national life, to domestic and international audiences, could not be realised as long as the absence of "political and cultural support for film"⁴⁶ persisted.

Dickinson and Street do make especial use of Board of Trade papers pertaining to internal film industry and cinema culture. Such empiricist usage of government documents offers a model for research that was extended for the purposes of this thesis. Their use shows how to acknowledge Balcon's significance as an interwar film producer by contextualising the papers with reference to him and to the companies he served during the period. That is an approach adopted and modified in research for this thesis, in the sense that Board of Trade and Cabinet Office documents have been assessed in order to contextualise Balcon's career. Of particular relevance to this thesis are the Board of Trade documents held in The National Archives - principally in the records filed as BT 64 (which include the papers of the Cinematograph Films Committee established to oversee the operation of the 1927 Act) - and those catalogued as BT 55 and CAB/24 (which hold, respectively, files associated with the work of the Moyne Committee established by the Board of Trade in 1935, and Cabinet Memoranda reviewing the operation of the 1927 Act).

⁴⁵ Street, Sarah. *British National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1997) p.1

⁴⁶ Hill, John. 'British Film Policy', in Moran, Albert (Ed.). *Film Policy: International, National and Regional Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1996) p.112

For further exploration of issues associated with interwar film policy, film industry and cinema culture, reference to Margaret Dickinson, Sarah Street and John Hill may be complemented by reading the work of Lawrence Napper. *In British Cinema and Middlebrow Culture in the Interwar Years*, Napper argues that British filmmaking sensitivities were, in fact, predominantly influenced by a growing British middle class, such that the nation's film industry sought to deliver a combination of commercial appeal and high production values, whilst retaining a cultural resonance. Arguably, British cinema of this sort has failed, ultimately, to deliver. Napper maintains that the British film industry's expression of the nation's identity could not be achieved effectively "within the industrial context of the commercial sector"⁴⁷. Napper's book is a valuable resource, because it contextualises British film industry operations with assessment of other modes of cultural production and reception, locating interwar film in relation to radio, music recording, publishing, television, and other forms of entertainment.

There is, then, a considerable corpus of broad referential literature supporting analyses of interwar British film culture, industry and commerce. There are, also, publications addressing the roles and significance of Michael Balcon's contemporaries within interwar British film industry, offering assessments of contributions to the popularity of British films, to improvements in production practices, and to marketability of the British product at home and abroad. Interwar British film industry figures accorded academic appraisals, republication or revisionism include the producers Sydney Box⁴⁸, John Grierson⁴⁹, and Alexander Korda⁵⁰. By contrast, as has been mentioned, Michael Balcon's work during the 1930s has been relatively poorly explored. Pam

⁴⁷ Napper, Lawrence. *British Cinema and Middlebrow Culture in the Interwar Years* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2009) p.90

⁴⁸ Spicer, Andrew. *Sydney Box* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006)

⁴⁹ Ellis, Jack C. *John Grierson: Life, Contributions, Influence* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000)

⁵⁰ Kulik, Karol. *Alexander Korda: The Man Who Could Work Miracles* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1975); Drazin, Charles. *Korda: Britain's Movie Mogul* (New York: I B Tauris, 2011)

Cook's *Gainsborough Pictures* - the most purposeful work with respect to research into Michael Balcon's career during this period - offers accounts of and insights into Michael Balcon's approach to commercially viable film production, and to his relationship with British and European film technicians, artists, cineastes, and production companies. It is concentrated, as its title suggests, on the Gainsborough Pictures subsidiary operation - but it bears insights that apply to production management and strategic concerns at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation. Philip Kemp's text⁵¹ explores evidence of Balcon's early international ambitions and schemes, prior to the formation of Gainsborough Pictures, and extends this account into analysis of the technical and artistic benefits to Gainsborough Pictures from Balcon's co-production arrangements with Ufa in Berlin, from Balcon's membership of the Film Society in London, and from Balcon's attempt to develop 'reciprocal' production and distribution arrangements with American film enterprises including Lee-Bradford. Tim Bergfelder's contextual analysis of the aesthetics of Gainsborough Pictures' interwar productions⁵² examines how Balcon's films were impacted, thematically and technically, by the relationship between British and European producers. Charles Barr's assessment of Victor Saville's working relationship with Balcon⁵³, and the critical role played by Saville in the development of Gainsborough Pictures and of British film industry, particularly during the early years of commercial sound film production. There is, too, the chapter by Andrew Higson assessing the relationship between Gainsborough Pictures, the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, and companies operating within continental European

⁵¹ Kemp, Philip. 'Not for Peckham: Michael Balcon and Gainsborough's International Trajectory in the 1920s', in Cook, Pam (Ed.). *Gainsborough Pictures* (London: Cassell, 1997) pp.13-30

⁵² Bergfelder, Tim. 'Surface and Distraction: Style and Genre at Gainsborough in the Late 1920s and 1930s', in Cook, Pam (Ed.). *Gainsborough Pictures* (London: Cassell, 1997) pp.31-46

⁵³ Barr, Charles. 'Desperate Yearnings: Victor Saville and Gainsborough', in Cook, Pam (Ed.). *Gainsborough Pictures* (London: Cassell, 1997) pp.47-59

film industries⁵⁴ - with regard to the relative capabilities and profitability of European film concerns and their American counterparts. Alongside Higson's chapter, Sue Harper's appraisal⁵⁵ of comedies produced by Balcon and featuring Jack Hulbert and Will Hay examines the social relevance and popularity of these films and their stars, domestically and internationally. Following Harper, Geoffrey Macnab's analysis of Balcon's use of celebrity to gain revenue⁵⁶ offers accounts of Balcon's casting decisions from the production of *Woman to Woman* (1923), and how the talent, artistry and reputations of the actors recruited by Balcon contributed to commercial success. Lastly, in Cook's publication on Gainsborough Pictures, Duncan Petrie examines the contribution of cinematographers to Balcon's interwar successes on screen⁵⁷, again with reference to international influences on Gainsborough Pictures productions - for example, through Michael Balcon's exposure of Alfred Hitchcock to German technicians and techniques in the mid-1920s.

Sue Harper offers, also, an example of a methodological approach to the study of cinema and film production. In *Picturing the Past: the Rise and Fall of the British Costume Film*⁵⁸, Harper uses a combination of primary resource research and textual analysis to show that the costume films produced by Michael Balcon at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation demonstrated a consistent view of history in terms of patterns of social and gender politics - patterns which, due to the different writers and directors involved, may be attributed to the

⁵⁴ Higson, Andrew. "A Film League of Nations": Gainsborough, Gaumont-British, and "Film Europe", in Cook, Pam (Ed.). *Gainsborough Pictures* (London: Cassell, 1997) pp.60-79

⁵⁵ Harper, Sue. 'Nothing to Beat the Hay Diet: Comedy at Gaumont and Gainsborough', in Cook, Pam (Ed.). *Gainsborough Pictures* (London: Cassell, 1997) pp.80-98

⁵⁶ Macnab, Geoffrey. 'Looking for Lustre: Stars at Gainsborough', in Cook, Pam (Ed.). *Gainsborough Pictures* (London: Cassell, 1997) pp.99-117

⁵⁷ Petrie, Duncan. 'Innovation and Economy: The Contribution of the Gainsborough Cinematographer', in Cook, Pam (Ed.). *Gainsborough Pictures* (London: Cassell, 1997) pp.118-136

⁵⁸ Harper, Sue. *Picturing the Past: The Rise and Fall of the British Costume Film* (London: BFI, 1994)

agency of Balcon as producer. Moreover, the ways in which interwar industry and commerce are associated with visual culture are underlined and assessed by Harper both in 'Historical Pleasures: Gainsborough Costume Melodrama'⁵⁹, and in 'Studying Popular Taste; British historical films in the 1930s'⁶⁰.

Harper has been instrumental, also, in refining approaches to research - as one of a corps of British and American film historians who have developed a catholic methodological movement termed 'the New Film History', an approach to study that combines contextual and textual analyses in order to understand how film production processes, and the decisions taken during the production process, may impact film form, shaping or determining the substance and style of the picture produced.⁶¹

Harper's *Picturing the Past: the Rise and Fall of the British Costume Film*⁶² may be taken as an example of a sophisticated methodology that links production context to film text by analysis of production history - and, in fact, this book has served as a model for this thesis, in its reading of Michael Balcon's deliberations, decisions, associations and productions. In *Picturing the Past*, Harper considers how interwar film industry personnel were engaged in a debate centred on issues associated with association and production. Such assessment is echoed by contemporary film historians such as Martin Stollery. In 'Technicians of the unknown cinema: British critical discourse and the analysis of collaboration in film production'⁶³, Stollery offers a

⁵⁹ Harper, Sue. 'Historical Pleasures: Gainsborough Costume Melodrama', in Gledhill, Christine (Ed.). *Home is Where the Heart is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: BFI, 1987) pp.167-196

⁶⁰ Harper, Sue. 'Studying Popular Taste; British historical films in the 1930s', in Dyer, Richard. Vincendeau, Ginette (Eds.). *Popular European Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1992) pp.101-111

⁶¹ See Chapman, James; Glancy, Mark; Harper, Sue (Eds.). *The New Film History: Sources, Methods, Approaches* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)

⁶² Harper, Sue. *Picturing the Past: The Rise and Fall of the British Costume Film* (London: BFI, 1994)

⁶³ Stollery, Martin. 'Technicians of the unknown cinema: British critical discourse and the analysis of collaboration in film production', in *Film History* Vol.21, No.4 (2009) pp.373-393

case study of the Gaumont-British production of *Little Friend* (1934)- which was produced by Michael Balcon, directed by Berthold Viertel, with significant input from Adrian Brunel, Ivor Montagu and Ian Dalrymple amongst others - to represent interwar British film industry in the context of an expanding production base, increased investment flows, legislative or regulatory interventions such as the Cinematograph Films Act (1927), the introduction of technology such as sound on film, and interplay between the British film industry and its counterparts in America and Europe. In Stollery, as in Harper, there is a model to observe of textual and contextual observations allied to empiricism. In keeping with Harper, Stollery and their contemporaries, the methodology represented in this thesis privileges primary sources through archival research, but also offers an interdisciplinary openness. Films do not exist in isolation, but may be viewed with regard to a wider cultural context. An understanding of the relations between film art and film industry, production and reception, are viewed here with respect to changing historical conditions.

Furthermore, critical attention paid to Gainsborough Pictures' productions, and those of the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, are associated in this thesis with the position of British cinema as a cultural institution perennially and increasingly affected by a dominant American industry that was, in the 1920s and 1930s, progressively colonising national cinemas around the world. Pam Cook assesses the nature and the definition of British cinema in *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema*⁶⁴, as does film historian John Hill in 'The Issue of National Cinema and British Film Production', published in *New Questions of British Cinema*⁶⁵ - and,

⁶⁴ Cook, Pam. *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005)

⁶⁵ Hill, John. 'The Issue of National Cinema and British Film Production', in Petrie, Duncan (Ed.). *New Questions of British Cinema* (London: BFI, 1992) pp.10-21

particularly, Andrew Higson in *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain*⁶⁶, and in 'The Instability of the National', published in *British Cinema, Past and Present*.⁶⁷

Both Hill and Higson suggest that the nostalgic, heritage orientated caricatures of English national life depicted in many British productions may be considered as problematic as they have appealed to, and represented, only particular parties within British society, whilst ignoring the actuality of others. Certainly, it is possible to consider interwar British cinema as an institution predominantly centred on particular forms of national representation. However, there is also a significant body of work addressing interwar British film production, distribution and exhibition as a fluidly cosmopolitan and internationalist industrial domain. For example, Tim Bergfelder and Christian Cargnelli indicate in *Destination London: German-Speaking Émigrés and British Cinema, 1925-1950* that, in the 1920s and 1930s, British film industrialists and technicians were "looking across the English channel for artistic inspiration and technological training, and across the Atlantic for economic success and potential distribution markets"⁶⁸ - with the consequence that the British film industry, and the culture of British cinema, was constructed of "a busy transnational traffic of production strategies, generic formulae and personnel"⁶⁹.

Indeed, many of the articles edited and offered by Bergfelder and Cargnelli assess the contribution of the generation of émigrés employed by film production companies in Britain. The book, which is the product of a three-year research project at the University of Southampton in the United Kingdom, comprises 18 contributions on the subject of transnational cultural transfers

⁶⁶ Higson, Andrew. *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995)

⁶⁷ Higson, Andrew. 'The Instability of the National', in Ashby, Justine; Higson, Andrew (Eds.). *British Cinema, Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 2000) pp.35-48

⁶⁸ Bergfelder, Tim; Cargnelli, Christian (Eds.). *Destination London: German-Speaking Émigrés and British Cinema, 1925-1950* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008) p.3

⁶⁹ Bergfelder, Tim; Cargnelli, Christian (Eds.). *Destination London: German-Speaking Émigrés and British Cinema, 1925-1950* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008) p.3

from German-speaking film markets to British film production between the 1920s and the 1940s. Included in *Destination London* is analysis of Conrad Veidt's British films by Gerd Germünden - with the principal film cited being *The Passing of the Third Floor Back* (1935)⁷⁰.

Cinematography under Balcon is addressed in this book by Michael Omasta, who writes of the British career of Günther Krampf - with particular reference, amongst numerous films, to *Rome Express* (1932), the first of six films Krampf worked on for Balcon at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation between 1932 and 1936.⁷¹ Further analysis of the émigré experience in interwar British film industry is provided by Sue Harper in "Thinking Forward and Up": The British Films of Conrad Veidt' - in *The Unknown 1930s: an Alternative History of the British Cinema 1929-1939*⁷². In discussing Veidt's British work, Harper assesses the various attempts by Balcon at exploiting Veidt's charismatic, romantic, erotic screen presence in the 1930s. One learns from Harper, also, that Balcon encountered significant problems in realising Veidt on screen as he wished - and it may be understood from Harper's research that this affected both Veidt's marketability and Balcon's ability to make good returns on his investment in the German actor.

There is further relevance to research undertaken for the completion of this thesis, and with respect to Balcon's relationship with film industry émigrés, in assessments of British film production published by Geoff Brown, an independent film historian who has studied several British producers including Michael Balcon. Brown offers analysis of the Gaumont-British

⁷⁰ Germünden, Gerd. 'Allegories of Displacement: Conrad Veidt's British Films', in Bergfelder, Tim; Cargnelli, Christian (Eds.). *Destination London: German-Speaking Émigrés and British Cinema, 1925-1950* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008) pp.142-154

⁷¹ Omasta, Michael. 'Famously Unknown: Günther Krampf's Work as Cinematographer in British Films', in Bergfelder, Tim; Cargnelli, Christian (Eds.). *Destination London: German-Speaking Émigrés and British Cinema, 1925-1950* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008) pp.78-88

⁷² Harper, Sue. 'Thinking Forward and Up', in Richards, Jeffery (Ed.). *The Unknown 1930s: an Alternative History of the British Cinema, 1929-1939* (London: I B Tauris & Co, 1998) pp.121-137

Picture Corporation's engagement with German film producing companies, businesspersons and technicians - with specific references to a number of films and film industry developments affecting the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation in the early 1930s - further to linkage to Michael Balcon's experiences of Germany's film industry of the late 1920s whilst running Gainsborough Pictures.⁷³ Of more significance is Geoff Brown's collaboration with Laurence Kardish for the publication of *Michael Balcon: The Pursuit of British Cinema* by New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in 1984⁷⁴ - a book produced to accompany a retrospective of British film presented by the Department of Film at Museum of Modern Art, in collaboration with the National Film Archive at the British Film Institute. In a chapter titled 'A Knight and his Castle', Geoff Brown offers a contextual, almost entirely linear account of Balcon's career - from Michael Balcon, Victor Saville and Jack Freedman's tenancy at the Islington facilities of Famous Players-Lasky's British subsidiary, through to the formation of Gainsborough Pictures and subsequent subsumption into the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation - and Balcon's life up to and work following his resignation from GBPC in 1936. With respect to the production of films and context of production at Gainsborough Pictures and at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, Brown offers references to the films produced in association with commentary on the possible rationales for decisions over casting and contracting and choice of film, the key events and competition that influenced Balcon's thoughts and actions, the promotion of pictures and corporate policies and production processes.⁷⁵ Succeeding Brown's chapter on Balcon's activities in development of British cinema, a chapter by Kardish titled 'Michael Balcon and the

⁷³ Brown, Geoff. 'Happy Ever After? The German Adventures of Gaumont-British in 1932', in *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, Volume 7 (December 2010) pp.378-400

⁷⁴ Brown, Geoff; Kardish, Laurence. *Michael Balcon: The Pursuit of British Cinema* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984)

⁷⁵ Brown, Geoff. 'A Knight and his Castle', in Brown, Geoff; Kardish, Laurence (Eds.). *Michael Balcon: The Pursuit of British Cinema* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984) pp.17-41

Idea of a National Cinema' offers a thematic exploration of British film culture as Balcon engaged with it - tracing Balcon's career back further than Brown, to his work as a British distributor of American films in his native Midlands, and associates these beginnings with an interest in the development of a national cinema, in part to counter the social and economic influence of American industry. Kardish maintains that the promotion of British film production and film culture informed much of Michael Balcon's approach to his trade, from the recruitment of American actors such as Betty Compson in the 1920s to Balcon's stateside excursions in search of North American distribution and exhibition in the 1930s.⁷⁶

This thesis incorporates research into the theory and practice of film adaptation of literary source materials, and attempts application of this research to the work of Michael Balcon at Gainsborough Pictures and at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation. Brian McFarlane's methodology for studying the process of transposition from book to screen, in *Novel to Film*⁷⁷, is relevant, because it addresses both theoretical works for consideration and historical records. Empiricist approaches to film adaptation of literary sources are presented in *Film and Literature* by Morris Beja⁷⁸, in James Griffith's *Adaptations as Imitations*⁷⁹ - and articles such as 'Adaptation' by Dudley Andrew, included in James Naremore's *Film Adaptation*.⁸⁰ However, amongst the most influential accounts of the relationship between film and literature is George Bluestone's purposeful *Novels into Film*⁸¹, which offers a categorical treatment of the relations between screen adaptations and the books on which such films are based.

⁷⁶ Kardish, Laurence. 'Michael Balcon and the Idea of a National Cinema', in Brown, Geoff; Kardish, Laurence (Eds.). *Michael Balcon: The Pursuit of British Cinema* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984) pp.43-73

⁷⁷ McFarlane, Brian. *Novel to Film* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996)

⁷⁸ Beja, Morris. *Film and Literature* (New York: Longman, 1979)

⁷⁹ Griffith, James. *Adaptations as Imitations* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997)

⁸⁰ Andrew, Dudley. 'Adaptation', in Naremore, James (Ed.). *Film Adaptation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2000) pp.28-37

⁸¹ Bluestone, George. *Novels into Film* (University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1957)

Charles Barr offers specific insights into film adaptation by Michael Balcon, in the analysis of the sound film *The Good Companions* (1933) published in *The Cinema of Britain and Ireland*⁸². This volume, edited by Brian McFarlane, merits additional consideration because Charles Barr's writing on *The Good Companions* is followed by an appraisal by Martin McLoone of the 1934 production by Michael Balcon of *Man of Aran*⁸³. The production of *The Good Companions* is also assessed by Lawrence Napper in *British Cinema and the Middlebrow in the Interwar Years*.⁸⁴ Napper's contextual analysis of *The Good Companions* is informed by Michael Thornton's observations on Jessie Matthews' career, in *Jessie Matthews: A Biography*⁸⁵ - which presents a sympathetic but nonetheless frank account of her life. Napper is also informed by Rachael Low's account of film production in the 1930s,⁸⁶ with respect to the depiction of local and national cultural paradigms and transitions in the decade before the Second World War. Analyses of the relationship between the British film industry and other cultural industries. For example, Napper argues that British filmmaking sensitivities were predominantly influenced by the expansion of the British lower middle class, translating into a film industry that sought to deliver a combination of commercial appeal and high production values, whilst retaining a cultural resonance - amounting to a new generation of British film producers, technicians and artists who were set to compete with Hollywood. It is arguable that British cinema of this sort ultimately failed to deliver, because it failed in competition with the Hollywood product. Napper offers a reminder that film critics and intellectuals of all generations have argued that the British

⁸² Barr, Charles. 'The Good Companions', in McFarlane, Brian (Ed.). *The Cinema of Britain and Ireland* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005) pp.31-40

⁸³ McLoone, Martin. 'Man of Aran', in McFarlane, Brian (Ed.). *The Cinema of Britain and Ireland* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005) pp.41-52

⁸⁴ Napper, Lawrence. *British Cinema and the Middlebrow in the Interwar Years* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2009) pp.81-130

⁸⁵ Thornton, Michael. *Jessie Matthews: A Biography* (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1974)

⁸⁶ Low, Rachael. *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985)

film industry's expression of a national identity could not be achieved effectively "within the industrial context of the commercial sector"⁸⁷. Hence, British representation of the 'state-of-the-nation' was successfully executed in films such as *The Good Companions*. Napper suggests that one of the strengths of this film, and the novel on which it is based, is its adherence to the middlebrow interpretation of the nation as a society in flux, in a time of social and cultural transitions.

Literature specifically addressing productions by Michael Balcon during this period, and hence of importance to the completion of this thesis, also includes Donald Spoto's analyses of three thrillers produced by Michael Balcon and directed by Alfred Hitchcock, in successive chapters of *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock: Fifty Years of His Films* - the production of *The 39 Steps* (1935)⁸⁸, and the filming of *Secret Agent* (1936)⁸⁹ and *Sabotage* (1936)⁹⁰. Examination of *The 39 Steps* is supported, also, by the publication of Mark Glancy's examination of the context of production of the film.⁹¹ Glancy joins James Chapman and Sue Harper in developing the New Film History approach to research, and hence his appraisal of *The 39 Steps* combines contextual and textual analyses with deep explorations of applicable film production processes. Comparative academic assessment of *The 39 Steps* and its 1934 predecessor *The Man Who Knew Too Much* is supported by William Rothman's *Hitchcock - The Murderous Gaze*⁹², which contains a comprehensive reading of both films. Analysis of adaptation by Balcon includes, also, Susan Tegel's observations on the production of *Jew Süss* (1934) - an adaptation of a novel by

⁸⁷ Napper, Lawrence. *British Cinema and the Middlebrow in the Interwar Years* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2009) p.90

⁸⁸ Spoto, Donald. *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock: Fifty Years of His Films* (London: Fourth Estate, 1992) pp.40-46

⁸⁹ *ibid* pp.47-53

⁹⁰ *ibid* pp.54-62

⁹¹ Glancy, Mark. *The 39 Steps: A British Film Guide* (London: I B Tauris, 2003)

⁹² Rothman, William. *Hitchcock The Murderous Gaze* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982)

Lion Feuchtwanger, first published in England in 1926⁹³ - in *Jew Süß: Life, Legend, Fiction, Film*⁹⁴, and in an article penned for the *Historical Journal of Film Radio and Television*⁹⁵.

Archival sources for British film history research

Like Harper, Richards, Chapman, Glancy, and Dickinson and Street, Napper shows that the most productive approach to film history is through archive-based analysis of institutional, industrial, cultural and socio-economic contexts. This thesis represents engagement with the nature and scope of primary source materials held in The National Archives, which holds records of governmental deliberations and actions with respect to interwar film industry - including the papers of the Board of Trade and the Cabinet. However, the major source of research material on the British film industry is the British Film Institute (BFI). The BFI's departments include the National Film Archive and the BFI National Library. The NFA holds prints of films from all stages of the history of British film industry. The library's collections of film industry documentation includes books, journals, trade papers, scripts and other materials such as the articles of the British Board of Film Censors and papers donated by key figures including Michael Balcon and Ivor Montagu. The papers contained within the Aileen and Michael Balcon Special Collection contribute to understanding of the concerns amongst Balcon's contemporaries around the transition from silent film production to sound cinema, or the conditions affecting the film production process in the early 1930s, or the relations between Balcon and fellow producers and technicians. The Ivor Montagu Special Collection offers a vastly different perspective on

⁹³ Feuchtwanger, Lion. *Jew Süß* (London: Martin Secker Ltd, 1926)

⁹⁴ Tegel, Susan. *Jew Süß: Life, Legend, Fiction, Film* (London: Continuum, 2011)

⁹⁵ Tegel, Susan. 'The politics of censorship: Britain's 'Jew Süß' (1934) in London, New York and Vienna', in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* Vol.15 No.2 (1995) pp.219-244

British film industry and culture. Montagu's papers comprise articles of association for the Film Society, commentary and correspondence pertaining to films on which Montagu worked - and articles and reports on films and film industry developments for trade journals, newspapers and film producers.⁹⁶

Film trade journals and newspapers are important sources of material, as records of contemporary events and opinions - yet trade periodicals and newspapers differ in content and so in purpose. Articles and notices on film and cinema in newspapers (and consumer magazines) served principally as a guide to film-going, but with some acknowledgement of film industry development and issues associated with film culture. Film trade journals, however, are an invaluable source of information on the film studios, legislative and regulatory issues, technological developments, exhibitors' concerns and the production and distribution of individual films.

A significant challenge to the researcher of interwar British film history, however, is the lack of corporate records detailing production matters, and operational and financial issues, which might have supported analyses of decisions affecting film production during the period. Films produced from the late 1920s onwards are better documented because - following introduction of the Cinematograph Films Act (1927) - producers were required to register film titles and footage with the Board of Trade. Furthermore, the first attempts at providing a systematic record of films produced were undertaken from 1934 when the British Film Institute began publication of *Monthly Film Bulletin* - though this journal is focused more on "educational

⁹⁶ Select indices of papers studied for this thesis, held in the Aileen and Michael Balcon Special Collection and in the Ivor Montagu Special Collection, are included in Appendix 1

and documentary films”⁹⁷ than on feature films. More useful are the *Kinematograph Year Books*, which list films that were trade shown as well as films that were registered under the 1927 Act.

Critically, there is no archive of corporate papers for the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation to serve research into Michael Balcon's interwar career. There is the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation archive, owned by Granada International - but this maintains features produced by GBPC, rather than records of operational matters. Few of the records that were kept have survived, except in particular references held in repositories such as the BFI Special Collections of personal papers originally maintained by key interwar industry figures including Michael Balcon and Ivor Montagu. The documentation available in the Aileen and Michael Balcon Special Collection, for example, includes observations on the transition from silent film to sound cinema, on interwar film production processes, and on the negotiations and conditions applicable to co-production arrangements in Europe, and scripts of films such as *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934) and *The Camels are Coming* (1934). There are letters and cables, also, detailing studio management and plans for development, the financial and critical performance of Balcon's productions, and the state of the British Film Industry.

⁹⁷ 'Foreword', in *Monthly Film Bulletin* (February 1934)

Chapter 1: Michael Balcon's career before the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation

1.1 Introduction

This chapter indicates how, before becoming director of productions at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, Michael Balcon demonstrated business acumen, acquired a technically-superior facility and equipment, endeavoured to develop the capabilities of the artists and technicians under his management, and sought to establish associations with individuals and corporate entities in Europe and in America to improve commercial, creative and technical potential. The aims and practices demonstrated by Balcon at Gainsborough Pictures in the 1920s, prior to the firm's subsumption into the GBPC combine in 1928, set the basis for strategies adopted by Balcon at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation in the 1930s.

Michael Balcon endeavoured to exercise authority as producer during the 1920s, to ensure the quality and commercial appeal of films produced. In this regard, Balcon both anticipated and supported the core aims of the British government in implementing the Cinematograph Films Act (1927), to empower the British film industry to produce commercially viable films, which were also identifiable with contemporary aesthetic, artistic and generic trends. Prior to the Act's introduction, British film production companies lacked technical capability, organisational capacity and access to financial resources. The Act enabled the creation of an environment that was conducive to investment, and to the development of standardised production regimes and a national cinema increasingly based around genre production. Balcon's early career in film production is characterised by his commitment to investment in a viable British film industry, which could achieve replicable commercial and critical successes through superior film production facilities and practices.

1.2 Balcon at Islington

Michael Balcon's first permanent base for film production was at a facility in Poole Street, Hoxton, in the London borough of Hackney. The site was addressed as Islington Film Studios, despite its actual location across the municipal border - possibly to avert negative references to the site of production in reviews.⁹⁸ The Islington facility had two stages totalling some 6,250 square feet. Its sole exterior lot was a flat roof. The studio was equipped "with the best American lighting, cameras, and workshops"⁹⁹. In order to deal with the air pollution of North London, which "would have made photography very second-rate"¹⁰⁰, it was fitted, also, "with an air-washing and filter plant, something quite unique in a factory in the twenties"¹⁰¹. Its construction was a direct consequence of a strategic decision at Paramount to charge the foreign department of Famous Players-Lasky Corporation with supporting the distribution of Paramount-Artcraft productions outside the United States of America. The corporation established Famous Players-Lasky British Producers, Ltd, a US\$3,000,000 corporation established to produce films in European locations, after "prominent English financiers became interested in the possibilities for the production of Paramount-Artcraft pictures in the beautiful lake and mountain regions of England"¹⁰².

⁹⁸ Hackney has, historically, suffered in terms of public regard, as compared with its neighbouring, more affluent borough. Jibes at film production in poverty-stricken Hackney in critical reviews would have been unwelcome. Association with the more affluent, less criminalised Islington may, hence, have been a deliberate decision, an attempt at gaining a more prestigious bearing for the firm and its films.

⁹⁹ Moseley, Roy (Ed.). *Evergreen: Victor Saville in His Own Words* (Carbondale, Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000) p.25

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*

¹⁰¹ *ibid*

¹⁰² Paramount-Artcraft Motion Pictures. *The Story of the Famous Players-Lasky Corporation* (New York, 1919) p.47

This was a short-lived policy, however, as Famous-Players Lasky “failed to reach a quality comparable to those made in the States”¹⁰³ at Islington. A decision was taken to cease production by Famous-Players Lasky in the United Kingdom in 1922, and the Islington site was rented out to independent producers throughout the following year. Michael Balcon, Victor Saville and Jack Freedman leased space at Islington to produce *Woman to Woman*, after forming a film production partnership - the evolution of which was recalled by Saville for *Film Pictorial* in September 1933.

Saville writes, "This partnership existed for quite a few years. It started by importing films and renting them through various agents; then it started to manufacture advertising films. Eventually, it became a full-fledged production company, producing the first version of *Woman to Woman*, with Clive Brook and Betty Compson in the lead rôles."¹⁰⁴

The Islington site was rented out on an ad hoc basis, as Balcon recalls in his autobiography. “Our normal procedure was to rent the studio for a month with an option to continue for another two weeks if necessary.”¹⁰⁵ Islington was taken over by Balcon in 1924 - following the production of *Woman to Woman* and *The White Shadow* (1924) and after he had formed Gainsborough Pictures.

The studio became, then, Gainsborough’s permanent production base. Balcon had realised that, with ownership of Islington, he and his Gainsborough associates “would have a better chance of getting a steady flow of production going”¹⁰⁶.

¹⁰³ *The Bioscope* (7 February 1924) p.29

¹⁰⁴ Saville, Victor. ‘Victor Saville by Victor Saville’, in *Film Pictorial* (30 September 1933) p.31

¹⁰⁵ Balcon, Michael. *Michael Balcon Presents...A Lifetime of Films* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1969) p.18

¹⁰⁶ *ibid* p.20

1.2.1 *Woman to Woman*, and *The White Shadow*

There is a reason why Gainsborough Pictures was “a wholeheartedly commercial operation, churning out product designed to be popular - and therefore profitable - at the British box office”¹⁰⁷ from the outset. Michael Balcon learned from the markedly different experiences associated with the early production of films at Islington, as a tenant producer. The successful reception of *Woman to Woman* and the relative failure of *The White Shadow* were instructive, and may be understood to have strengthened Balcon’s resolve to produce commercially viable films of superior quality throughout the early development of Gainsborough Pictures and in his subsequent management of production at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation.

Woman to Woman is an adaptation of a romantic play about an amnesiac officer in the British army, who learns in conversation with his aristocratic wife that he has led a sordid life before his marriage to her. In the film, as in the play, the amnesia is a consequence of severe head wounds suffered in action. The sordid matter is the soldier’s affair with a Frenchwoman in 1914, whom he falls in love with and promises to marry, but abandons when he is called to the front line - forgetting her and marrying an upper class Englishwoman after the war has ended. The French woman has borne his child, however, and has become a famous international dancer since their affair. She travels to England to dance at a soirée - and encounters her former lover and his English wife there. A confrontation between the two women ensues, and the French woman loses her life. Balcon sought to attract audiences both in the United Kingdom and in the United States of America by casting an American actress in the lead female role. Victor Saville travelled to America to find a star. Balcon wanted an American after Herbert Wilcox had achieved “success

¹⁰⁷ Petrie, Duncan. ‘Innovation and Economy: The Contribution of the Gainsborough Cinematographer’, in Cook, Pam (Ed.). *Gainsborough Pictures* (London: Cassell, 1997) pp.118-119

in importing an American name”¹⁰⁸ - that ‘American name’ being Mae Marsh, cast by Wilcox in *Flames of Passion* (1922). As Balcon recalls, “He got one all right - Betty Compson, a big name - but he contracted us to pay her £1,000 a week.”¹⁰⁹

This was expensive, but Compson was a popular screen actress in America and in the United Kingdom, and the investment appears to have been rewarded with significant returns from both domestic English cinemas and American picture houses. It gained a measure of critical acclaim, too - even though, as Balcon acknowledged, the story is “both naïve and melodramatic”¹¹⁰.

The success of *Woman to Woman* was noted by Balcon’s contemporaries, and encouraged industry and critics to pursue a policy of recruiting Americans to attract British audiences. For example, Cedric Belfrage observed, three years on from the release of *Woman to Woman*, “It is now a recognised fact that the only really effective way by which British pictures can be given a universal appeal is to employ well-known Hollywood stars and directors until we can create big names in England. In the past, several American players of genuine box-office value have been induced to come over, and in many cases their names proved a tremendous commercial asset to the pictures in which they appeared.”¹¹¹

Belfrage cited Compson in *Woman to Woman* as “the classic example”¹¹² of an American actress who had justified her engagement by a British producer. However, it was not the success of *Woman to Woman* that encouraged Balcon and his partners to produce its successor feature -

¹⁰⁸ Moseley, Roy (Ed.). *Evergreen: Victor Saville in His Own Words* (Carbondale, Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000) p.22

¹⁰⁹ Balcon, Michael. *Michael Balcon Presents...A Lifetime of Films* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1969) p.15

¹¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹¹ Belfrage, Cedric. ‘American Stars and British Producers’, in *Kinematograph Weekly* (12 August 1926) p.46

¹¹² *ibid*

The White Shadow - without delay. Balcon's eagerness to begin another production was motivated more by contractual concerns.

In *The White Shadow*, Betty Compson plays the lead female role once more - but she had to. Betty Compson was contracted for two pictures - and the contract committed her producer to start the second film within two weeks of completion of the first. Arguably, the commercial failure of *The White Shadow* was a consequence of a production that was rushed; a key failing on the part of the production team is that it "had made no preparations for the second"¹¹³ - even though it was contractually committed to produce a second film immediately following production of the first.

The White Shadow is notable because its production was poorly managed. It is more notable that the productions of both *The White Shadow* and *Woman to Woman* offered Balcon and his partners the experience of massive success and massive failure in short order. However, these films are most notable because they offer early indications of Balcon's management style throughout and beyond his tenure at Gainsborough Pictures and at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation. *The White Shadow* was advertised as featuring the same star actress, and as having been produced by the same team - that is, producer, writer, and staff - that were responsible for the success of *Woman to Woman*. Balcon believed in retaining, maintaining and developing teams of production personnel from film to film. Those whom Balcon employed and retained at Islington, for example, continuing to work with Balcon into the 1930s, include Harold Boxall, C Wilfred Arnold and George Gunn. Harold Boxall was employed by Famous Players-Lasky as storekeeper, and worked as Michael Balcon's general manager at Gainsborough Pictures and at GBPC. C Wilfred Arnold, a draughtsman at Islington before Balcon arrived, served as art

¹¹³ Balcon, Michael. *Michael Balcon Presents...A Lifetime of Films* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1969) p.16

director in the 1920s and 1930s for Gainsborough Pictures and the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation. George Gunn was an electrician at Famous Players-Lasky who emerged under Balcon as an expert in photography, specialising in colour photography, and became chief executive of Technicolor. However, it is perhaps most significant in terms of British and American film industry development that Michael Balcon retained a general assistant, employed by Famous Players-Lasky at Islington, named Alfred Hitchcock.

Balcon recalls in his autobiography that Hitchcock attracted his attention “because of his passion for films and his eagerness to learn”¹¹⁴. To Balcon, it seemed that Hitchcock’s commitment to the film industry was such that he was ready to do anything asked of him. Balcon writes, “I’m sure if he never actually swept the floor at Islington he would have been ready and willing to do so.”¹¹⁵

Alfred Hitchcock graduated, under Michael Balcon, to direct features at Gainsborough Pictures in the 1920s and at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation in the 1930s. His directorial career began, formally, with the co-production of *The Pleasure Garden* (*Irrgarten der Leidenschaft*, 1925) and *The Mountain Eagle* (1926) - both of which were made in Germany, and which offer early indicators of Balcon's interest in internationalism, the use of international, frequently pan-European, and often specifically German, associations to support development of his own career and that of the companies he worked for.

The Pleasure Garden was filmed principally at Münchner Lichtspielkunst AG (MLK) in Munich, in Germany. MLK was and is better known as ‘Emelka’, after the German phonetics for the studio’s initials. Additional footage was shot in Italy. Though Hitchcock directed *The*

¹¹⁴ Balcon, Michael. *Michael Balcon Presents...A Lifetime of Films* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1969) p.19

¹¹⁵ *ibid*

Pleasure Garden at Emelka, he had been interned by Balcon at the Ufa studios in Neubabelsberg, east of Berlin. Though it was the largest production company in the world outside Hollywood, producing around 50 films a year in 1924, Ufa was experiencing pecuniary problems as Hitchcock worked. As they had in Britain, American film enterprises had achieved a significant presence in the production, distribution and exhibition of films in mainland Europe. Even the giant Ufa succumbed to the financial pre-eminence of the Americans. Paramount and MGM secured guarantees over the certification, distribution and exhibition of its films in Germany, in return for bolstering Ufa with a US\$4mn loan after it encountered financial difficulties in 1924-5; at the same time, Ufa agreed to distribute Universal's films in return for a loan of US\$275,000¹¹⁶.

Hitchcock was heavily influenced by his observations of the techniques of production of German films, and of the Expressionist aesthetics expressed in German cinema of the 1920s. He observed Friedrich Murnau at work on the production of *Der letzte Mann* (1924) in Neubabelsberg, - and watched "Karl Freund's famous 'entfesselte Kamera' (unchained camera), gliding and swooping and soaring around Robert Herlth and Walter Röhrig's intricate sets"¹¹⁷.

Hitchcock's later deployment of "witty angles and camera movements"¹¹⁸ for *The Pleasure Garden* may be attributed to the opportunity afforded by Balcon to witness these and other skilled German technicians. And, although *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog* (1926), which Hitchcock directed in Islington, "seems relatively static by comparison"¹¹⁹ with *The Pleasure Garden*, innovations introduced by Hitchcock on this film, learnt on secondment to

¹¹⁶ Dickinson, Margaret; Street, Sarah. *Cinema and State: The Film Industry and the British Government 1927-84* (London: BFI, 1985) p.25.

¹¹⁷ Kemp, Philip. 'Not for Peckham: Michael Balcon and Gainsborough's International Trajectory in the 1920s', in Cook, Pam (Ed.). *Gainsborough Pictures*. (London: Cassell, 1997) p.17

¹¹⁸ *ibid*

¹¹⁹ *ibid*

Germany, lent a particular credibility to Gainsborough Pictures. *The Lodger* was considered on release to be “finely acted, imaginatively produced and magnificently photographed”¹²⁰, and possibly “the finest British production ever made”¹²¹ - and remains notable to this day for its sophisticated use of lighting, set design and camerawork. Moreover, the influence of contemporary German cinema on Hitchcock is evident in *The Lodger*, by Hitchcock’s association of violence, murder and sexuality with “a conventional thriller plot and gothic characterizations to a shadowy mise-en-scène with strong Germanic overtones”¹²².

Arrangements agreed upon by Michael Balcon’s English distributor and financier - Woolf & Freedman Film Service, Ltd (W & F), formed by Charles Woolf and John Freedman - actually empowered Alfred Hitchcock to experiment. The production of *The Pleasure Garden* and *The Mountain Eagle* at the MLK studios at Munich Geiseltal followed a co-production agreement reached between Emelka and W & F.¹²³ W & F co-financed and distributed films for Gainsborough Pictures, before W & F was subsumed within the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation in 1926. The first fruit of this agreement was *The Blackguard* (*Die Prinzessin und der Geiger*, 1925), made at Neubabelsberg during the winter of 1924/5. In March 1925, before the production of *The Pleasure Garden*, the agreement between W&F and Emelka was “expanded to an extensive contract, the purpose of which is not only to co-produce films on the greatest scale and with stars of international acclaim, but also to organise the international distribution of the total production by both partners”¹²⁴.

¹²⁰ ‘The Lodger’, in *Kinematograph Weekly* (16 September 1926) p.57

¹²¹ ‘The Lodger’, in *The Bioscope* (16 September 1926) p.39

¹²² Sterritt, David. *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) p.4

¹²³ In concert with the agreement reached between Emelka and W & F, Emelka opened a London office in 1925, following the production of a first film under the agreement, *Hidden Fires* (*Verborgene Gluten*, 1924) - see Holloway, Ronald (Ed.). *Kino, Issues 9-16* (Berlin: Dorothea Holloway, 1983) p.22

¹²⁴ Gottlieb, Sidney. ‘Early Hitchcock: The German Influence’, in Gottlieb, Sidney; Brookhouse, Christopher (Eds.). *Framing Hitchcock: Selected Essays from the Hitchcock Annual* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002) p.62

The terms of the agreement between W & F and Emelka placed responsibility for the production of international films with W & F, but required production to be undertaken in Munich. Ultimate control of production appears to have been placed away from Gainsborough Pictures - operationally, the production company. However, Gainsborough shared with W & F the financial and contractual responsibility for distribution of the films produced. With Michael Balcon in London, Hitchcock “was responsible for a production that was not directly controlled by a producer on the set”¹²⁵ A subsequent deal was struck between Ufa and Gaumont-British in December 1927, principally to secure reciprocal distribution, but with some measure of knowledge-sharing.¹²⁶ An agreement was reached between Gaumont-British Picture Corporation and Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft in December 1927 to enable further reciprocal distribution, and also to facilitate deeper knowledge-sharing by personnel from both German and British production teams. Conferences in London and Berlin, attended by representatives of the Ufa and GBPC, concluded with an arrangement whereby GBPC would distribute Ufa films in the United Kingdom and Ufa would acquire productions by GBPC or its affiliate enterprises, for distribution in Germany.

The arrangement entailed provisions for advance payments and cash guarantees, and the right to reject films considered unsuitable for either British or German audiences. Collaboration was planned for distribution in Central European markets, where British films had not been successful. The agreement allowed GBPC “to have a voice in the activities of the German

¹²⁵ Gottlieb, Sidney. ‘Early Hitchcock: The German Influence’, in Gottlieb, Sidney; Brookhouse, Christopher (Eds.). *Framing Hitchcock: Selected Essays from the Hitchcock Annual* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002) p.67

¹²⁶ Garnearz, Joseph. ‘German Hitchcock’, in Gottlieb, Sidney; Brookhouse, Christopher (Eds.). *Framing Hitchcock: Selected Essays from the Hitchcock Annual* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002) pp.61-63. Note, also, that the background to Germany’s European alliances in the 1920s is explored in Higson, Andrew; Maltby, Richard (Eds.). *‘Film Europe’ and ‘Film America’: Cinema, Commerce, and Cultural Exchange 1920-1939* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999)

company and to be present in the studios during productions”¹²⁷. Ufa was empowered, also, to advise on GBPC’s studio and technical matters as required. Moreover, the two firms committed to plans “to exchange artists, so that British artists may learn the German technique and vice versa”¹²⁸.

In terms of film form and content in Germany, Expressionism was already becoming outmoded by the mid-1920s, with alternative approaches to filmic representation emerging. Kammerspielfilm was one such alternative. Kammerspielfilm productions are typically set in lower class milieu, have few characters - typically, focusing mostly on one character - with relatively simple plots, played at a relatively slow tempo. They offer, arguably, realistic representations. They were grounded on overt displays of emotion and psychology at the expense of complex narrative. There were few intertitles, and few settings. The principal objective of Kammerspielfilm production was to represent a greater interest in the everyday and the normative than Expressionism allows - with objects on screen commanding greater importance and plots typically reflecting the realities of life in the German middle-class, or *Mittelstand*. Seçil Deren argues that “the whole realistic cinema which grew out of Kammerspielfilm can be seen as both an extension of and a reaction against the Expressionist cinema, in that it retained the unhealthy psychological themes of the earlier films but presented them in realistic form”¹²⁹.

Filmed on location in the Austrian Tyrol, *The Mountain Eagle* appears to have offered an appreciation of the production of the Kammerspielfilm. The contemporary critic Hans Spielhofer

¹²⁷ ‘Anglo-German Film Agreement’, in *The Times* No.44762 (12 December 1927) p.19

¹²⁸ ‘ibid

¹²⁹ Deren, Seçil. *Cinema and Film Industry in Weimar Republic, 1918-1933*. PhD dissertation (Ankara: Graduate School of Social Sciences of the Middle East Technical University, 1997) p.13

suggests that Hitchcock “acquired the Kammerspiel-technique energetically, at least in its crude form”¹³⁰.

A combination of intimate interaction, symbolism and mobile camerawork typify Kammerspielfilm production. A typical feature, also, of the Kammerspiel film is the use of studio recreations of prosaic environments. The influence of Kammerspielfilm aesthetics and techniques on Alfred Hitchcock is evident in *The Lodger*, which is characterised by “intimacy, careful exploration of domestic interiors, use of highly charged objects, and mobile camera work”¹³¹ - and close-ups of architectural attributes including “the bottom part of an opening door, a hand on a doorhandle, a foot on a step of a stairs, a cuckoo clock, a mysteriously dimming wall lamp”¹³² and more, to support an intention to stress the significance of the domestic environment to the filmed narrative.

1.2.2 Michael Balcon and the Film Society

Throughout the 1920s, Michael Balcon formed and nurtured associations with key international firms and figures. However, Balcon also developed working relations with intellectual cineastes and key film industry figures and organisations at work in the United Kingdom. Adrian Brunel and Ivor Montagu contributed knowledge of cinematic trends and film production techniques gained by association with the London Film Society and by editing foreign films for British distribution. Angus MacPhail and Ian Dalrymple, alumni of Cambridge University, contributed to writing and editing at Balcon's firm. The principle objective of the London Film Society, since its inception in 1925, was “to show a group of films which are in

¹³⁰ Spielhofer, Hans. ‘Die Munchener Herbstproduktion’, in *Süddeutsche Filmzeitung* 36 (3 September 1926) p.3

¹³¹ Jacobs, Steven. *The Wrong House: the Architecture of Alfred Hitchcock* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2007) p.17

¹³² *ibid* p.69

some degree interesting and which represent the work which has been done, or is being done experimentally in various parts of the world”¹³³. Financed by member subscription, the Society comprised individuals engaged in film culture at differing levels - involving intellectuals and critics as well as visual artists and wordsmiths. In interview with Peter Wollen, Alan Lovell, and Sam Rhodie for *Screen* on 24 May 1972, Montagu recalled, “We could draw into film, artists, sculptors, writers, who up to then disdained films. Films were in general disdained. It was supposed to be low taste. Intellectual snobs would have nothing to do with film but of course when it was organized on the lines of the Film Society, they poured in.”¹³⁴

Unsurprisingly, this disparate group had ambitious, diverse and competing agendas. It sought, at once, to make films more fashionable, to tackle censorship, to encourage intellectual appraisal of films, and to stimulate the British film industry to make and to market better quality films. Its purview was sweeping, mediating between highbrow, middlebrow, lowbrow, and avant-garde productions. The society’s programmes indicate a catholic range of interests, including: archived newsreels, scientific shorts, non-contemporary American features, high-concept foreign productions, farces, parodies, and experimental films. Screenings by the society were reviewed in *Close Up*, *Kinematograph Weekly*, *London Mercury*, *Vogue* and other publications aimed at an array of audiences in the arts, society and trade. The Film Society’s “admirable Sunday afternoon performances”¹³⁵, which screened highly influential works such as *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, *Entr’acte* (1924), *Ballet mécanique* (1924), and the *Secrets of Nature* (1922-1933) series of shorts depicting countryside scenes, contributed to an enabling of access to film culture that

¹³³ Amberg, George. *The Film Society Programmes: 1925-1939* (New York: Arno Press, 1972) p.4

¹³⁴ Montagu, Ivor. ‘Interview: Ivor Montagu’, in *Screen* Vol.13 No.3 (Autumn 1972) p.72

¹³⁵ H D. ‘The Cinema and the Classics; I Beauty’, in Donald, James; Friedberg, Anne, Marcus, Laura (Eds.). *Close Up 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism* (London: Cassell, 1998) p.106

could not gain representation in commercially-run cinemas. The Society was regarded, indeed, as “as a veritable St. Bartholomew of the cultured”¹³⁶.

Amongst its principal members, Ivor Montagu sought to develop the society into an instrument of intervention in the development of British film production and film culture, through the introduction and promotion of concepts and techniques from without the British Isles, by the British exhibition of sophisticated films produced abroad. Moreover, Montagu's principle concern appears to have been the promotion of artistic and intellectual sensibilities over commercial agendas. Some five decades on from the society's formation - in an interview with Peter Wollen, Alan Lovell and Sam Rohdie - Montagu recalled, “We thought there are such a lot of films that we are interested in that are being made abroad, that we would like to fertilise British film ideas by seeing some of them.”¹³⁷ However, the society's diverse membership included key figures with commercial interests - including the influential exhibitor and financier Sidney Bernstein, whose backing was of critical importance to the society's establishment and continued ability to address intellectual and commercial issues. Bernstein's accommodation of film as art form and film as commercial product was made possible by his understanding that the primary function of cinema should be as a provider of entertainment - in his words, “allowing to the word “entertainment” the most catholic significance, to include the provision of aesthetic enjoyment”¹³⁸.

Balcon and Bernstein knew each other from the outset of each other's careers. Before working in feature film production, Balcon and Victor Saville set up a business to produce

¹³⁶ Dobrée, Bonamy. ‘Seen on the Stage’, in *Vogue* (Late January 1926) p.59

¹³⁷ Montagu, Ivor. ‘Interview: Ivor Montagu’, in *Screen* Vol.13 No.3 (Autumn 1972) p.72

¹³⁸ Bernstein, Sidney. ‘Walk Up! Walk Up! - Please’, in Davy, Charles (Ed.). *Footnotes to the Film* (London: Readers' Union Ltd, 1938) pp.221-237

advertising films for exhibition in cinemas. Their first opportunity in this field was established through contact arranged by Bernstein, who ran an office in Cecil Court, London - near their own rented office in Cranbourn Street. Bernstein's father owned cinemas in London. Bernstein suggested that he and Saville bid for work with the Anglo-American Oil Company (AAOC). Representatives of AAOC had sought Bernstein's advice on the production of an industrial film. Balcon and Saville won the contract - their first after moving from Birmingham to London. They had a joint capital of just £200 when they arrived in the capital¹³⁹ - but, as Balcon recalls, the remuneration from the deal with AAOC "not only provided for the production of the film but also for payments to be made to cinemas to induce them to show the film as part of their programme"¹⁴⁰. While Balcon and Saville worked on the AAOC project, Graham Cutts walked into their office, looking for a backer. He had an option on the film rights to *Woman to Woman* - which, as has been noted, he eventually directed for Balcon and Saville at Islington.

1.2.3 Balcon, Cutts and Hitchcock

John Henry Graham Cutts entered the film trade in 1909 after training to be an engineer. In 1909 Cutts became the owner of a cinema in Newcastle. He became involved in film production in 1921.¹⁴¹ Cutts directed *The Wonderful Story* (1922), *Flames of Passion* and *Paddy the Next Best Thing* (1923) for Graham-Wilcox. Balcon's relationship with Cutts may be seen as instrumental in the formative development of Balcon's career in the British film industry. It was Cutts who had advised Balcon and Saville to forego the making of advertising pictures and

¹³⁹ Balcon, Michael. *Michael Balcon Presents...A Lifetime of Films* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1969) p.11

¹⁴⁰ *ibid* p.14

¹⁴¹ Winchester, Clarence (Ed.). *The World Film Encyclopedia* (London: The Amalgamated Press Ltd, 1933) p.187

become involved in feature film production.¹⁴² When Balcon incorporated Gainsborough Pictures Limited, solely as a production company, in 1924, Cutts was his co-director, while Victor Saville took charge of Crane Paget & Co, which was an advertising business.¹⁴³ It was Balcon and Cutts together, following the formation of Gainsborough Pictures, who sold their services to Colonel A C Bromhead and R C Bromhead at the Gaumont Company. Within four years of its inception by Balcon and Cutts, after the subsumption of Gainsborough Pictures into the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation in 1928, and following the reorganisation of GBPC into a fully integrated company in 1927, Balcon gained responsibility for production at both Gainsborough Pictures and GBPC.¹⁴⁴

Michael Balcon offered the example of *Woman to Woman* to support a plea to the British film industry, to produce films for both domestic and international cinemagoers, to attract investment and maintain or raise standards of production. His argument, published in *The Film Renter and Moving Picture News* in January 1925, was that British producers would achieve commercial success by complying with agreed standards of film production. Balcon called for the British film industry to be "educated to the necessity of producing not only for this country, but for the world"¹⁴⁵, in order to avoid "the further discouragement of British capital and a lamentable levelling down of the standards of production"¹⁴⁶.

¹⁴² Danischewsky, Monja. 'Profile', in Danischewsky Monja (Ed.). *Michael Balcon's 25 Years in Films* (London: World Film Publications Ltd, 1947) pp.8-9

¹⁴³ Moseley, Roy (Ed.). *Evergreen: Victor Saville in His Own Words* (Carbondale, Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000) p.27

¹⁴⁴ Danischewsky, Monja. 'Profile', in Danischewsky Monja (Ed.). *Michael Balcon's 25 Years in Films* (London: World Film Publications Ltd, 1947) pp.9-10

¹⁴⁵ Balcon, Michael. 'British Film Production: Is the general conception too narrow? A plea for wider vision', in *The Film Renter and Moving Picture News* (3 January 1925) np

¹⁴⁶ *ibid*

In features following the 1923 production of *Woman to Woman*, Graham Cutts almost upheld Michael Balcon's conviction that standards of British production, and so prospects of commercial viability for British producers, could be improved. He did not, however, fully realise Balcon's vision of the globally competitive product.

The Passionate Adventure (1924) was noted for several excellent individual scenes, but also for being "very uneven in its technical qualities"¹⁴⁷. There were well-directed sequences, including "the one in which the hero interviews a ruffian who has sworn to kill him"¹⁴⁸ - and the climax, in which the "ruffian" is stabbed by a girl. It is arguable that Cutts' efforts were undermined by poor choice of source material, a story that is "basically weak and full of inconsistencies"¹⁴⁹.

Cutts' treatment of the source text was regarded as "quite good in sequence", with "more moments of suspense and dramatic force than in most British pictures"¹⁵⁰ - though it was considered that the film would have benefited from rigorous cutting of the opening scenes, in which "much too much footage is expended on showing the passionless relationship of husband and wife"¹⁵¹.

Moreover, Balcon's association with German studios and technicians paid clear dividends, with critical recognition of the producer's emphasis on superior production values and technical innovations.

¹⁴⁷ Collier, Lionel. 'Screen Values', in *Kinematograph Weekly* (21 August 1924) p.42

¹⁴⁸ *ibid*

¹⁴⁹ *ibid*

¹⁵⁰ *ibid*

¹⁵¹ *ibid*

Contemporary reviewers could discern, in the film, the influence of German technique on Cutts, and welcomed this - with the qualification that it was better to see than any American influences on the film's production.

The Passionate Adventure's "lavish production, superb photographic quality, and many phases in clever treatment in direction"¹⁵² were considered as good as that of any British film produced up to 1924. The sets were regarded as magnificent, with a superior portrayal of "slum corners, war silhouettes and Waterloo Station by night"¹⁵³ amongst the finer technical efforts.

Ultimately, although the film's set pieces were regarded as well-assembled, they were let down by artificial action and development. Cutts might have been culpable for such deficiency in direction, but the poverty of source material was acknowledged on the film's initial release, with *Kinematograph Weekly*'s review concluding, "What strength the early reels possess is wasted by the inconclusive and inconsistent anti-climaxes. It would be unfair, perhaps, to blame the adaptation for not succeeding in making the original story completely feasible; but some of the snags could have been smoothed out. Sub-titles are often stilted, and in the last reel leave one in much doubt regarding what has been said by their over-economy."¹⁵⁴

Graham Cutts and Michael Balcon achieved greater success - critically, commercially, and technically - when working with Ivor Novello on *The Rat* trilogy: *The Rat* (1925), and *The Triumph of the Rat* (1926), and *The Return of the Rat* (1929). During the twenties, particularly, Novello was noted as much for his looks as for his compositions, or his appearances on stage and screen. The pages of film magazines and books appraised his appeal. *The Picture Show Annual* of 1929, for example, included a graphic three-page feature on 'Ivor Novello and his Leading

¹⁵² 'Reviews of the Week', in *Kinematograph Weekly* (21 August 1924) p.44

¹⁵³ *ibid*

¹⁵⁴ *ibid*

Ladies', with pictures from films such as *The Call of the Blood* (*L'appel du sang*, 1921), *The Rat*, *Downhill* (1927), *The Lodger*, *The Triumph of the Rat*, *The Vortex* (1928) and *The Constant Nymph* (1928).¹⁵⁵ Fred G Stowe, for example, describes Novello as "a tense, hard, enthusiastic worker, seeking ever something better than the last triumph accomplished"¹⁵⁶.

Interestingly, association by Balcon, Cutts and Novello - and so commercial success for Gainsborough Pictures with *The Rat* and its successors - might not have happened. Ivor Novello offered *The Rat* to Adrian Brunel in 1922 "on a percentage, with his services at a quarter of his then market value"¹⁵⁷. Brunel could not raise the funds, however; he tried to sublet it the Gaumont Company, but neither that company nor any other was interested in adapting the story for the cinema. Without the immediate prospect of a film adaptation, Ivor Novello wrote a play of the story with Constance Collier. The play was successful; in fact, Brunel writes that the stage success of *The Rat* enabled Novello to sell the film rights to the story to Gaumont for several thousand pounds, and to sell his services to the company at about ten times the rate that

Brunel had considered paying him.¹⁵⁸

Graham Cutts began work on *The Rat*, on the European mainland, in May 1925, with exterior scenes filmed in Paris. The interiors were photographed in London.¹⁵⁹ It was shown to trade on 6 September 1925¹⁶⁰ and privately screened two days later¹⁶¹ - both at London's Alhambra Theatre. The acting, the photography and Cutts' treatment of the story were praised by the press. In particular, scenes in the White Coffin, the Parisian café that serves as a locus for

¹⁵⁵ 'Ivor Novello and his Leading Ladies', in *The Picture Show Annual 1929* pp.28-30

¹⁵⁶ Stowe, Fred G. 'Ivor Novello - Composer - Film and Stage Star', in *The Picture Show Annual 1926* p.94

¹⁵⁷ Brunel, Adrian. *Nice Work; Thirty Years in British Films* (London: Forbes Robertson Ltd.1949) p.102

¹⁵⁸ *ibid*

¹⁵⁹ 'The Film World' in *The Times* No.43953 (5 May 1925) p.14

¹⁶⁰ 'The Rat', in *Kinematograph Weekly* (20 August 1925) p.14

¹⁶¹ 'The Film World', in *The Times* No.44061 (8 September 1925) p.10

much of the film's action, were considered to "reflect in the producer a sound faculty for the handling of crowds and working-up of background"¹⁶².

Cutts worked extensively for Michael Balcon in the 1920s, directing *The Passionate Adventure*, *The Blackguard* and *The Prude's Fall* (1925) before undertaking *The Rat*. Before his association with Balcon - when working for Herbert Wilcox in the early 1920s - Cutts made stylish, sumptuous romantic dramas of a certain narrative fluidity, drawing subtly emotional performances from the actors he directed - including Mae Marsh in *Paddy the Next Best Thing*. Tom Ryall argues that the early successes of Gainsborough Pictures may be credited to the "directorial prowess"¹⁶³ of Graham Cutts, noting also that Cutts' contribution to Balcon's new production company was rewarded with the offer of a long-term contract in 1926. Certainly, Graham Cutts was considered to be the figure most likely to improve the British film industry's prospects in the early and mid-1920s. His capabilities as director continued to be exercised and recognised with the 1923 production of *Woman to Woman*, with Michael Morton - author of the play from which the film was adapted - observing, "The emotion projected from the screen amazed me. America has her Griffith; we have our Graham Cutts."¹⁶⁴

The Rat is notable for its frequent, audacious tracking shots and dramatic camera angles, with cinematographer Hal Young making full use of N G Arnold's complex 'White Coffin' set. At Cutts' direction, Young's camerawork contributes to characterisation and depth of story. In one sequence, for example, Pierre sees Odille as a reflection on returning to the couple's apartment, and the camera tracks in on this reflection before cutting to the actual couple. In another sequence, as Odille is threatened by Herman, there is another reflection shot - effecting the

¹⁶² *ibid*

¹⁶³ Ryall, Tom. *Alfred Hitchcock and the British Cinema* (London: The Athlone Press Ltd, 1996) p.86

¹⁶⁴ 'Woman to Woman', in *The Bioscope* (1 November 1923) p.72

appearance of Herman as a vampire, akin to that seen in *Nosferatu*. One sees, furthermore, in addition to innovative camera movements, the Germanic influence of the craft of chiaroscuro lighting in this film.

During the latter half of the 1920s, Cutts became increasingly capable. Following the production of *The Triumph of the Rat*, Cutts returned to Germany to make the visually dynamic adaptation of *The Queen was in the Parlour* (1927) for Gainsborough Pictures and Ufa, and directed the maritime melodrama *The Rolling Road* (1927). The following two years were spent with First National Pictures, for whom Cutts directed *Confetti* (1927) at Islington, *God's Clay* (1928) and then *Glorious Youth* (1928) at Elstree. Each film may be regarded as technically superior, comparative to contemporary British productions. By the time Cutts re-joined Balcon in 1929 to direct *The Return of the Rat*, he was more adept than ever at visual art. However, *The Return of the Rat* was released as the switch to sound cinema was underway in Britain - and Graham Cutts himself continued to decline personally and professionally throughout the following decade.¹⁶⁵

Graham Cutts' capabilities as a film director were not the only contributing factors to Gainsborough Pictures' early achievements. *The Rat* and its sequels, which featured Ivor Novello as an apache, a criminal operating in the Parisian underworld subculture of the 1920s, capitalised on a vogue for translating a French literary and dance phenomenon to the British screen. The Parisian apache was a particularly popular character in French literature and the arts at the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁶⁶ By the time Ivor Novello was screened first as the Rat in

¹⁶⁵ There is no definitive appraisal of Graham Cutts life and career; however, one can gain an understanding of his career in film by reading Gledhill, Christine. 'Cutts, Graham (1885-1958)', in Murphy, Robert (Ed.). *Directors in British and Irish Cinema: A Reference Companion* (London: BFI, 2006) pp.130-131

¹⁶⁶ For a comprehensive appreciation of the Parisian Apache subculture and its representation in art, see Matthies, Rich John. *Fort Apache: The Literary Lives of the Parisian Banlieue Savage (France)*. PhD dissertation (Washington: University of Washington, 2005)

1925, 'apache' characters had already featured often in British cinemas. As Lawrence Napper and Michael Williams observe, "Even as early as 1922 there were enough 'Apache' films (in the wake of the craze for Apache dancing in the London clubs of the 1920s) to allow *Picture Show* [11 February 1922: 14] to carry a photo-feature on 'The Apache Dance of the Screen', which portrayed the motley denizens of the silver screen underworld, all wearing the same trademark cap and scarf later adopted by Novello"¹⁶⁷. Moreover, the Apache dance, as depicted in *The Rat*, featured frequently in the 1910s and 1920s in films such as the French series of productions based on *Les Vampires* (1915).

Like Graham Cutts, Ivor Novello was a vital ingredient in the success of Gainsborough Pictures' productions in the 1920s. Whilst *The Rat* was successful enough to warrant the production of two sequels, Novello also contributed to the success of Gainsborough Pictures through his co-authorship of, presence in and performance for *The Lodger*.

1.3 Summary

During the early period of Michael Balcon's career, his early forays into film production, first as a tenant producer and then as owner-operator, Balcon utilised Famous Players-Lasky's resources at the Islington film facility to achieve high technical and artistic standards. However, his motivation was aesthetic or technical. Balcon sought profitability, and sustainable commercial operation, and he believed that quality of production and a coherent production environment would appeal to audiences and generate revenues. He sought, also, to achieve audience appeal by recruiting established players for his films. It is reasonable to state that

¹⁶⁷ Napper, Lawrence; Williams, Michael. 'The Curious Appeal of Ivor Novello', in Babington, Bruce (Ed.). *British Stars and Stardom: from Alma Taylor to Sean Connery* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001) p.48

Balcon made mistakes - repeating many production factors in the success of *Woman to Woman* did not result in success with *The White Shadow*. However, as this thesis demonstrates in following chapters, Balcon persisted with a business model which prioritised quality of production and star appeal in order to achieve commercial success.

Another key indicator in Balcon's early career in the film industry is his propensity for networking, for establishing and nurturing working relationships, at personal and corporate levels. As this chapter indicates, Michael Balcon maintained a broad spectrum of associations with key film industry figures and corporate entities at work in the United Kingdom, in Europe, and in America, in the 1920s - and these associations influenced the production and distribution of Gainsborough Pictures' films in the 1920s, and of the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation in the 1930s.

Chapter 2: Michael Balcon and the British film industry of the 1930s

2.1 Introduction

This chapter locates Michael Balcon position in the interwar British film industry, with respect to the industry's structure and development during the period. It incorporates a broad assessment of the key influences affecting industry prospects - including, most notably, the cultural appeal and market dominance of American pictures and enterprises - and also the key commercial and economic factors motivating the British political class to seek action in support of the protection and development of the nation's film industry. This chapter also offers analysis of GBPC's position in the interwar industry landscape, focusing on Michael Balcon's contribution to film production management and corporate strategy at the corporation.

2.2 British film industry and economic protectionism

Increasingly, in the decade following the First World War, the British government and film industry had considered the USA's near-monopolistic domination of the international film trade as a threat to the British economy, and also as a threat to British societal norms or values. Films from America were regarded as a means by which American values and products could be promoted - and the prevalence of American pictures engendered the possibility that American exports and ideals might displace their British equivalents around the world. This issue was debated at the 1926 Imperial Conference in the following terms: "It is a matter of most serious

concern that the films shown in the various parts of the Empire should be to such an overwhelming extent the product of foreign countries.”¹⁶⁸

The threat to British trade and cultural norms began during the 1910s. As John Sedgwick observes, during the First World War American film producers, led principally by Essanay, used the popularity of films such as the Chaplin productions to secure exclusive distribution contracts with individual British exhibitors.¹⁶⁹ British cinema was transformed from a relatively flexible, open market to one that was largely tied to American production, with limited access to exhibition for non-American film production companies. By the mid-1920s, American firms had overwhelmed the British market for film exhibition and were undermining the prospects for British film production, with the American share of the British market rising from approximately 75 per cent during the First World War to almost 90 per cent during the 1920s.¹⁷⁰ By 1926 British production output had been reduced to 37 films for the year, competing for domestic market share against more than 500 American productions.¹⁷¹ Britain's film industry leaders and the nation's politicians shared concerns in the 1920s, over both the “monopolising aggression”¹⁷² of the American film industry and the means by which British film production interests could be fostered and strengthened in the face of such aggression.

As in mainland Europe, the American film industry had gained a dominant position in the UK, following the First World War, "by dumping hundreds of films - whose production costs had

¹⁶⁸ Imperial Economic Conference, General Economic Sub-Committee (18 November 1926) The National Archives, File CAB 32/59

¹⁶⁹ Sedgwick, John. *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain: A Choice of Pleasures* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000) p.48

¹⁷⁰ *ibid*

¹⁷¹ Murphy, Robert. 'Under the Shadow of Hollywood', in Barr, Charles (Ed.). *All Our Yesterdays* (London: British Film Institute, 1986) p.47

¹⁷² Lapworth, Charles. 'Production - and the exhibitor', in *Kinematograph Weekly* (6 August 1925) p.26

already been recouped in the US - at very low prices into the market"¹⁷³. Britain's film industry became the focus of political debate, with respect to the protection of British economic interests domestically and internationally. It was concern over the viability of the nation's economic performance that led Parliament to introduce legislation in 1927; to introduce quota legislation to protect the interests of the British film industry - and to recognise the economic significance of the film industry by placing responsibility for its development with the Board of Trade.

There were discussions of a fiscal response to American predominance in British cinemas from December 1926, beginning with a letter from the newspaper proprietor Baron Riddell of Walton Heath to the then Chancellor of the Exchequer Winston Churchill, proposing the taxation of imported American films.¹⁷⁴ However, Churchill regarded the proposal as “detestable”¹⁷⁵, and stated so in a memorandum to Sir Richard Hopkins, Chairman of the Board of the Inland Revenue, and Sir Horace Hamilton, a civil servant.

The McKenna duties, introduced in September 1915 to raise money on imports of luxury goods, and repealed in August 1924, had been reintroduced in July 1925, and operated on film stock.¹⁷⁶ However, these levies were adjudged to have been ineffective in addressing either American competition. As *The Saturday Review* maintained, “The moment the British producer individually or collectively makes a serious endeavour to push his wares, the American competitor lowers prices temporarily, sometimes going so far as to offer not only his own film

¹⁷³ Ulf-Møller, Jens. *Hollywood's film wars with France: film-trade diplomacy and the emergence of the French film quota policy* (Rochester: Boydell & Brewer, 2001) p.xv

¹⁷⁴ The National Archives, File PRO: IR 40/4110

¹⁷⁵ *ibid*

¹⁷⁶ By 1927 the McKenna duties included a tariff of one-third of a penny per foot for raw film stock, one penny for positives (developed or undeveloped) and five pence for negatives (developed or undeveloped)

for next to nothing but a contribution towards losses resulting from the exclusion of the British film which is thus squeezed out.”¹⁷⁷

Discussions around the issue of taxation abated until January 1931, when Assistant Secretary to the Board of Trade Percy Ashley informed Principal Private Secretary to the Chancellor Sir James Grigg that he had discussed an ad valorem tax with the film producer John Maxwell.¹⁷⁸ However, in the late -1920s there remained the pressing prospect of the ruination British film industry. The ultimate Governmental response, in the form the Cinematograph Films Act (1927), was intended to assist in "building up the film production industry in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in the Empire and it carried out this purpose by placing an obligation on renters in the United Kingdom to acquire, and on exhibitors to show, a proportion of British films”¹⁷⁹ It imposed on renters and exhibitors the requirement that a minimum number of indigenously produced British films should be screened in the nation's cinemas. The quotas stipulated were 7.5 per cent for distribution and 5 per cent for exhibition. A British film was defined as a film produced by a British subject or a company with a majority British shareholding, for which the majority of filming had taken place within the British Empire, and on which not less than 75 per cent of labour costs incurred - not including payments for copyright, and payment made to a foreign actor, actress or director - were paid to British subjects, or to persons resident in the British Empire.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ ‘The “Pictures” and the People’, in *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 139:3,628 (May 1925) p.480

¹⁷⁸ The National Archives, File PRO: IR 40/3914A

¹⁷⁹ Film Quota Legislation: Memorandum by the President of the Board of Trade (15 April 1937). The National Archives, File CAB/24/269 p.1

¹⁸⁰ A further stipulation was that the film's scenario had to be written by a British author. Additionally, the 1927 Act illegitimated blind and block booking.

President of the Board of Trade Sir Phillip Cunliffe-Lister had delivered a memorandum to the Cabinet in January 1927, detailing his interest in producing a draft bill on cinema legislation, in which he stressed that the British film industry had failed to take advantage of the “full opportunity of securing an increased exhibition of British films by a voluntary effort”¹⁸¹, that no voluntary American support for British film could be expected voluntarily, and that therefore legislative measures would need to be introduced to ensure American collaboration with British producers. At this point, he also offered a first definition of the British film, as a production “by British nationals or by companies registered in the British Empire and British controlled, and the scenario at least should be the work of a British author”¹⁸².

Cabinet approved of the proposals set out by Cunliffe-Lister in February 1927 included an agreement to prohibit blind booking and to introduce limitations on block booking. More significant was Cabinet approval of the minimum quota of British product imposed on renters, a quota on exhibitors, and the definition of ‘Britishness’ as any film made by British nationals or by British controlled companies registered in the British Empire, where those employed in the film’s production were predominantly British.¹⁸³

There was some resistance to the Act, following its implementation in April 1928, with the quota system a particular point of concern. For example, *The Film Daily* reported that “certain British studios have closed down because the quota of British films had not been enforced by theatre owners”¹⁸⁴, leading to William Graham, then the President of the Board of Trade, issuing a warning to exhibitors to obey the law or face direct intervention by the

¹⁸¹ The National Archives, File CAB 24/184

¹⁸² *ibid*

¹⁸³ The National Archives, File PRO: CO 323/974/1

¹⁸⁴ ‘Claims British Quota Act not upheld by exhibitors’ in *The Film Daily* (12 January 1930) p.11

Government. Dissent was not confined to exhibitors. Sir Gordon Craig proposed that the quota should be raised to 25 per cent - and protested that the requirement for three-quarters of personnel on a British production to be 'British' prevented "the hiring of foreign talent which the British industry so badly needs"¹⁸⁵.

However, British film production companies were, eventually, compliant with the 1927 Act, with nine producers prepared to enter into contracts for quota production, and GBPC offering space occasionally for additional production work on such films.¹⁸⁶ And records indicate that British film companies more than honoured the quota requirements. In 1929, the excess of British 'long' films registered was 230 per cent. It declined markedly in 1930, but it was still 70 per cent over in that year, and through to 1932 it never went lower than 44 per cent.¹⁸⁷ The key factor was the fact that the films were distributed by British companies – for example, GBPC registered 206 feet of film in 1933-34, although its quota requirement was 44 feet.¹⁸⁸

However, the nature of the test applied before a British film could qualify for renter's quota became a point of contention between the film trade and the Government during the 1930s. In fact, concerns over the quality of quota film production were widely held even before the introduction of the 1927 Act, with the government urged by the film industry to consider not only how the implementation of a quota would affect the quantity of films produced, but also what effect there would be on the quality of films produced.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ 'British Industry Calls for Change in Films Act', in *The Film Daily* (26 January 1930) p.7

¹⁸⁶ 'British Filmcraft, British Instructional Films, British International Pictures, British Lon Film Corp, British Screen Productions, London Screen Plays, New Era Production, Stoll Picture Productions, and Twickenham Film Studios' ('British film studios open for quota films', in *The Film Daily* (9 February 1930))

¹⁸⁷ Rowson, Simon. 'A Statistical Survey of the Cinema Industry in Great Britain in 1934', in *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 99 (1936) pp.67-129

¹⁸⁸ Wood, Linda. *British Films 1927-1939* (London: British Film Institute, 1986) p. 119

¹⁸⁹ 'A British Film Industry', in *The Times* No.44491 (28 January 1927) p.15

2.3 The implementation of the Cinematograph Films Act (1927)

British subsidiary renting firms, owned by American production companies, secured predominance of British cinema screening schedules during the 1920s, by insisting that cinema owners could only book popular films as part of a package, or 'block', of films. Many of the films were booked either unseen by the cinema owners or unmade at the time of the booking. Although the quota stipulations set out in the 1927 Act were intended to limit this abuse of the market, whilst bolstering British production, block booking was not made unlawful, and British productions could be booked as part of a block. Hence, the predominance of American subsidiary renters was not addressed, and American productions continued to dominate cinema screen schedules whilst much of the British film production industry was concerned with making low-budget 'make-weights', films made solely to comply with quota obligations.

By March 1938 there was recognition in government that American-owned companies had gained dominance in film finance as well as film production in the United Kingdom. Debating the 1927 Act and its 1938 successor in Committee at Westminster, Lord Strabolgi observed that funds for investment in film industry were only available to American renters, which were making significant sums of money in Britain. He stated, moreover, "The ordinary channels of finance for British production have dried up. It is no use blinking our eyes to the fact. The ordinary sources of finance have dried up, and the industry is looking for its main sources of finance to these very renters because they have the money."¹⁹⁰

On reviewing the 1927 Act in July 1937, newly-installed President of the Board of Trade Oliver Stanley noted that the lack of a test of quality meant that foreign-owned renters, who controlled more than 50 per cent of imported films, had been able to meet their quota

¹⁹⁰ House of Commons Hansard Debates (HL Deb) Vol 108 (14 March 1938) cc.52-102

requirements “by the acquisition of British films made as cheaply as possible”¹⁹¹. In July 1937 Stanley observed that these “quota quickies” discredited British industry so severely that by 1937 there was a distinct need to use new legislative powers to prevent their production. Renters and most producers agreed that there should be a minimum cost for quota films of £15,000, with half of the cost accounting for labour costs.¹⁹²

As suggested earlier in this chapter, governmental support for British cinematic success could not only have been motivated by a need or desire to wrest market share and box office revenues from American firms. Indeed, “the immense influence which the cinematograph exercises upon the social, political and economic ideals of nations”¹⁹³ was acknowledged by William Graham at the Imperial Conference of 1930. Politicians appreciated the relevance to economic strength of industrial activity that follows commercial success. The 1927 Act was an essential instrument not only in the defence of the film industry but also in support of economic growth. An oft-repeated interwar slogan, 'trade follows the film', betrayed an understanding of the potential of cinema to influence audiences in their consumer choices.¹⁹⁴ Hence, also, the measures considered and effected to improve the condition of Britain's film industry and economy were intended to address issues associated with culture as well as finance.

The implementation of the 1927 Act did translate into an increase in the number of British films produced from the late 1920s to the mid-1930s. By 1937, the total annual value of

¹⁹¹ Film Quota Legislation: Memorandum by the President of the Board of Trade (July 1937). The National Archives, File CAB/24/270 p.2

¹⁹² *ibid*

¹⁹³ Imperial Trade Policy and Imperial Economic Machinery: Note by the President of the Board of Trade (11 September 1930) The National Archives, File CAB/24/215 p.31

¹⁹⁴ This phrase was, in fact, understood to have been said first by the Prince of Wales in 1923. See Swann, Paul. *The British Documentary Film Movement, 1926–1946* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) p.10

British film production had risen to over £7 million, up from £500,000 in 1928.¹⁹⁵ However, there were issues with the structure of the British market and the condition of British industry that would ensure American pre-eminence during the 1930s and through the decades beyond.

Volumes were high in the 1930s. Simon Rowson's 1934 calculations indicate a total of 4,305 cinemas and 3,872,000 seats in the United Kingdom¹⁹⁶. Rowson estimated, also, that there were just short of a billion visits to the cinema each year in the United Kingdom¹⁹⁷ - though the Board of Trade statisticians H E Browning and A A Sorrell revised this down to 910 million¹⁹⁸. The 1927 Act helped to create a production environment that could serve this demand. However, at least in terms of its capacity to support sustainable growth of domestic industry, the Act was flawed. There was no inclusion of a minimum cost criteria; no provision in the 1927 Act was made to influence the actual amounts invested per film. As Rachel Low indicates, failure to include a minimum cost criteria in the 1927 Act meant that American production firms could meet the quota - and meet demand - by producing cheap films in Britain, usually through subsidiaries set up specifically for quota quickie production firms with little prospects of making money by box office returns, whilst investing fully in domestic American production for export to Britain.¹⁹⁹

The 1927 Act was successful in creating the conditions for the transformation of British film production from a moribund sector to a thriving industry, however. Annually, distributor and exhibitor quotas were exceeded - offering evidence "that the Act had achieved its purpose of

¹⁹⁵ Klingender, Francis Donald. *Money Behind the Screen: A Report Prepared on Behalf of the Film Council* (London: Laurence & Wishart, 1937) p.29

¹⁹⁶ Rowson, Simon. 'A Statistical Survey of the Cinema Industry in Great Britain in 1934', in *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 99 (1936) p.76

¹⁹⁷ *ibid* p.71

¹⁹⁸ Browning, H E; Sorrell, A A. 'Cinema and Cinema-Going in Great Britain', in *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* Vol.117, No.2 (1954) p.134

¹⁹⁹ Low, Rachael. *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985) pp.xiv, 33

establishing an industry which might have never come into existence without the protective aid of this legislation"²⁰⁰.

Arguably, the most significant attribute of the 1927 Act is its acknowledgement of “the interdependency of production, distribution, and exhibition”.²⁰¹ Regardless of concerns over quality, or the failure to address industrial structure, indigenous film production was protected and boosted. There was an increase in British-based production of 66 per cent in 1928, and further rises in the early 1930s.²⁰² However, American production continued to dominate the British cinematic landscape, with 75 per cent of cinema screen time allocated to American films in 1930.²⁰³

2.4 The structure and financing of GBPC

In the decade from the introduction of the Cinematograph Films Act (1927) to the introduction of the Cinematograph Films Act (1938), the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation was one of only two British film industry enterprises, which could be considered serious rivals to American corporate interests in British film renting and film production. The other company representing significant competition to American interests was the Associated British Picture Corporation (ABPC), which was the parent company of British International Pictures (BIP). Both GBPC and ABPC achieved market share by utilising vertical structures based on the control

²⁰⁰ Rowson, Simon. 'A Statistical Survey of the Cinema Industry in Great Britain in 1934', in *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 99 (1936) p.108

²⁰¹ U.K. *British Film and Television Industries - Decline or Opportunity? First Report of Session 2009-10 Volume 1: Report: House of Lords Paper 37 - i Session 2009-10* (London: The Stationary Office, U.K., 2010) p.12

²⁰² Dyja, Eddie (Ed.). *BFI Film and Television Handbook 2002* (London: BFI, 2001) p.30

²⁰³ Segrave, Kerry. *American Films abroad: Hollywood's Domination of the World's Movie Screens from the 1890s to the Present* (Jefferson: McFarland, 1997) pp.284-285

of extensive cinema circuits.²⁰⁴ The formation of GBPC brought together three core elements of the British film industry: production, distribution and exhibition through a vertically-organised film combine, with the two production companies Gaumont-British and Gainsborough Pictures supported by the two distribution agencies Ideal and W & F Film Service, and exhibition interests served through the Biocolour circuit and, eventually, the 96 cinemas of Provincial Cinematograph Theatres.²⁰⁵

Perhaps one of the most interesting figures involved in GBPC's formation and management is Charles Moss Woolf, who had achieved success with W & F Film Service by distributing American, French and German films. Woolf established W & F in 1919 and it was incorporated into GBPC in 1927. Woolf became joint managing director in 1929.

Michael Balcon regarded Woolf as "without doubt the finest and shrewdest film salesman of his time"²⁰⁶ - though Balcon also observed that Woolf was not a film-maker "in any sense of the word"²⁰⁷. As Balcon recalled, Woolf did not visit any of the corporation's studio facilities, but he encouraged producers by supporting them financially and with distribution. Balcon benefitted from Woolf's patronage. Woolf supported, also, Herbert Wilcox. Wilcox regarded Woolf as a "champion of British films when so many of his contemporaries "didn't want to know""²⁰⁸.

²⁰⁴ BIP would achieve additional market influence through the acquisition of a block of GBPC shares in the mid-1930s, including what it claimed was an option on the controlling block of shares held by Isidore, Mark and Maurice Ostrer - merchant bankers who had financed the 1927 merger of British subsidiary assets of the Gaumont Company, Ideal Films, the W & F Film Service, and a number of cinema circuits. See Klingender, Francis Donald. *Money Behind the Screen: A Report Prepared on Behalf of the Film Council* (London: Laurence & Wishart, 1937) p.18

²⁰⁵ Eyles, Allen. *Gaumont British Cinemas* (London: Cinema Theatre Association/BFI Publishing, 1996) pp.22-29

²⁰⁶ Balcon, Michael. *Michael Balcon Presents...A Lifetime of Films* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1969) p.30

²⁰⁷ *ibid*

²⁰⁸ Wilcox, Herbert. *Twenty-Five Thousand Sunsets* (London: Bodley Head, 1967) p.74

Balcon and Wilcox were both commercially-astute film producers, who employed talented technicians and artists with audience appeal or star potential, with the objective of managing profitable film operations. As Christine Gledhill observes, Balcon and Wilcox represented, in the 1920s, “a new entrepreneurial generation who grasped both the workings of an internationally based film economics and the new ethos of mass culture - including, crucially, a modernising sexualisation of popular culture, with its concomitant class, gender and racial implications - to which large-scale filmmaking was now directed”²⁰⁹.

The Ostrer brothers had executed the formation of GBPC in partnership with Colonel A C Bromhead, formerly chairman and managing director at the Gaumont Company. Bromhead had set up the firm as the British subsidiary of the French Gaumont Company in 1898 with Leon Gaumont, to sell “photographic materials and topical films”²¹⁰, and managed the buy-out of Leon Gaumont’s shares by a trust in 1922. He resigned from the position of chairman of GBPC in 1929 - from which point Mark Ostrer was chairman as well as managing director, alongside Isidore Ostrer as president and Maurice Ostrer as assistant managing director.²¹¹ Control of the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation was invested in a private firm, the Metropolis and Bradford Trust Company, which was owned by Ostrer Brothers and by Twentieth Century-Fox Corporation. The controlling interest was retained by the Ostrers from the late 1920s, and for most of the 1930s. However, several financial, insurance and holding or nominee companies held substantial shares in GBPC - including the Pearl Assurance Company, the Prudential Assurance

²⁰⁹ Gledhill, Christine. ‘Play as experiment in 1920s British cinema’, in *Film History* Vol.20 Issue 1 (2008) p16

²¹⁰ ‘Gaumont’s Twenty-nine Years’, in *Kinematograph Weekly* (24 June 1926) p.59

²¹¹ Klingender, Francis Donald. *Money Behind the Screen: A Report Prepared on Behalf of the Film Council* (London: Laurence & Wishart, 1937) pp.23, 24

Company, and the Refuge Assurance Company, insurance firms which would be held responsible for capital flight from the British film industry in 1937.

There was concern that American interests were controlling the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, but this was effectively dismissed within governmental debate. In Parliament, in April 1931. The Conservative politician John Rumney Remer declared that the American Telegraph and Telephone Company and the Western Electric Group had obtained control of GBPC through subsidiary companies. President of the Board of Trade William Graham responded by circulating a statement detailing GBPC share ownership, revealing that of the 10,000 shares entitling voting rights, 5,050 were owned by British nationals.²¹²

So, in the decade following the introduction of the Cinematograph Films Act (1927), the British film industry evolved into a tripartite structure addressing modes of renting, production and exhibition, with indigenous British interests principally represented by the two British majors - GBPC and BIP - which were formed as investors sought to capitalise on post-Act industry prospects.²¹³

American companies dominated renting, still, distributing more than 60 per cent of all films marketed in Britain. Nonetheless, GBPC became a serious enterprise, and a credible competitor in domestic British cinema. It was the largest British concern of the early and mid-1930s, with ownership of studios at Shepherds Bush in London, control of Gainsborough Pictures Ltd and its facilities in London at Islington, the newsreel producer Gaumont-British News, and subsidiaries including the equipment firms British Acoustic Films, International

²¹² House of Commons Hansard Debates (HC Deb) Vol 251 (21 April 1931) cc.785-7

²¹³ Sharpe, Dennis. *The Picture Palace and Other Buildings for the Movies* (New York: Praeger, 1969) pp.36-37

Acoustic Films - and GB Equipments, which comprised the subsidiary educational production unit, Gaumont-British Instructional Films.

GBPC and BIP undertook the majority of film production in the United Kingdom during this period. Most of the rest of British-based industry was managed by two production subsidiaries of American renting companies “and a large and fluctuating number of independent English producers renting through the two major independent English renters and/or producing films for the Americans”²¹⁴. Further production interests were held by GBPC in the Baird Television Company, Bus Radio, C & M Productions, New Standard Film Company, and Standard Film Company.²¹⁵ With respect to exhibition, as Klingender notes, “two main circuits were affiliated to the two main English renters”²¹⁶ - Gaumont-British Distribution (which controlled over 300 halls, in the forms of theatres and cafés), and Wardour Films & Pathé Pictures (which controlled about 290 halls). There were, furthermore, many independent circuits in operation - including one controlled by an American renting company - but, in fact, the majority of British exhibition took place in single halls, independently-owned and run.

In the 1930s, as director of productions at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, Michael Balcon oversaw the development of a production operation replete with talented scenarists, cameramen, musicians, studio technicians and editors.²¹⁷ A key motivation for Balcon was the perceived potential for success in America to guarantee the continued commercial viability of the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation and to support development of the British film production. This core concern was affirmed by Balcon to the head of GBPC’s distribution

²¹⁴ Klingender, Francis Donald. *Money Behind the Screen: A Report Prepared on Behalf of the Film Council* (London: Laurence & Wishart, 1937) p.15

²¹⁵ *ibid* p.23

²¹⁶ *ibid* p.15

²¹⁷ The key personnel within Michael Balcon’s production staff at GBPC are listed by Rachael Low - see Low, Rachael. *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985) pp.131-132

operation, Jeffrey Bernard, on 8 January 1934. Balcon reported that he believed “that success for the output stands or falls by its success in that market”²¹⁸. An equally important motivation for Balcon was a need to raise the quality of production in order to achieve success abroad. This is evident in a report submitted to the managing directors at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation in December 1934, in which Balcon states, “It is necessary to bear in mind that in order to obtain a firm grip on the American market our pictures must bear comparison, not only with the average Hollywood product, but with the outstanding American films; this is our problem in a nutshell and it cannot be resolved without spending money. Personally, I would prefer not to attempt it under an average of from £55,000 to £60,000 per picture, and even then it would be a contest of David and Goliath.”²¹⁹

Undertaking a prolific, if expensive, regime at GBPC, Balcon led a series of serious efforts aimed at producing films - such as *The Passing of the Third Floor Back* - which would be attractive to American audiences.²²⁰ Balcon sought, also, within the same production schedule, to produce films - including *The Good Companions* - that would project a quintessential Britishness. Furthermore, Balcon’s productions in the 1930s are notable for the wide range of genres covered - thrillers including *Rome Express*, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *The 39 Steps* and *Sabotage*; musicals such as *Evergreen* (1934) and *First a Girl* (1935); horror in *The Ghoul* (1933) and *The Man Who Changed His Mind* (1936); science-fiction in *The Tunnel* (1935); war represented in *I was a Spy* (1933); documentary in *Man of Aran*; and historical costume dramas such as *Jew Süss* and *Tudor Rose* (1936).

²¹⁸ Letter from Michael Balcon to Jeffrey Bernard - Head of G-B's distribution wing (8 January 1934), in Aileen and Michael Balcon Special Collection, File C/55

²¹⁹ Report to Joint Managing Directors on the 1935 Programme (13 December 1934), in Aileen and Michael Balcon Special Collection, File 27b

²²⁰ See Street, Sarah. *Transatlantic Crossings: British Feature Films in the USA* (London: The Continuum International Publishing Group., 2002) ch.2-3

Notably, Michael Balcon employed numerous European émigrés, many of whom had worked in the Expressionist German cinema of the 1920s - including the art director Alfred Junge, the cameraman Günther Krampf, the directors Berthold Viertel and Lothar Mendes, the actor Conrad Veidt and other expatriate technicians. The impact of employment of these individuals, with reference to Michael Balcon's record of production at GBPC and with reference to the development and standing of British film production, is explored in later chapters of this thesis. *Rome Express*, for example, may be considered amongst the indigenous British cinema output of the early 1930s for which "[m]any of the best ideas of German studios"²²¹ were adopted - and this thesis assesses the ways in which Balcon's production of *Rome Express* was impacted by the introduction of production technicians trained in the German film industry. There is examination, too, of how another Balcon production, *Jew Süss*, benefited from the recruitment of German technicians and actors such as Mendes, Junge, and Veidt. Analysis of *Jew Süss* also extends understanding of Balcon's use of his association with the German film industry to submit a sympathetic position with respect to the treatment of the Jewish community in Germany in the 1930s.

The early and mid-1930s are marked by financial buoyancy and a production boom - and the endeavours of producers like Michael Balcon, seeking to develop a viable film industry and a national film culture. This examination of Michael Balcon's career in the film industry, and influence on film industry development, during the period of his tenure as director of productions at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation - from 1931 to 1936 - offers consideration of differentiations between GBPC and BIP. There were many notable differences between these firms, in terms of management of film production, but also with respect to associated activities

²²¹ Krampf, Günther. 'The Curse of Dialogue', in *World Film News* No.11 (February 1937) p.4

such as corporate and personal affiliations and contracts, or marketing and distribution arrangements. For example, a key policy instrument at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation in the 1930s was that described by Balcon as "internationalism" - which entailed a promotion by GBPC of its productions internationally, and which was based on the belief that industry development in commercial terms could be achieved best by adopting "a production policy ever less and less parochial and more and more international in appeal"²²². To Balcon, indeed, "internationalism" was not merely an instrument of policy; it "sums up G.B. policy"²²³ under his watch. Installed at GBPC, Balcon maintained a belief that British films could succeed abroad - including in the United States of America. Whether or not Balcon's expansionist, export-led agenda was more aspirational than it was a realistic attempt at achieving commercial success, the policy clearly distinguished GBPC from BIP. Experience of the commercial failure of several high budget productions at BIP informed its executives to maintain a risk-averse policy of low budget production, whereby profitability from domestic returns would be more likely.²²⁴

Michael Balcon's commitment to achieving commercial success at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation through distribution and exhibition in foreign markets mirrors a policy of engagement with the German film industry in the 1920s, which was motivated also by a commitment to reducing production costs. Balcon gained boardroom support in seeking to develop an agenda based on a policy of internationalism. GBPC managing director Isidore Ostrer followed a much more flamboyant and expansionist policy than John Maxwell as managing director at BIP and its successor entity, the Associated British Picture Corporation. However,

²²² Balcon, Michael. 'G.B. Goes International', in *World Film News* Vol.1, No.3 (June 1936) p.6

²²³ *ibid*

²²⁴ For further detail on GBPC's production policy under Michael Balcon, see Chapman, James. *Past and Present: National Identity and the British Historical Film* (London: I B Tauris & Co Ltd, 2005) pp.45-47

Ostrer's international interests took him east, to Germany - where he initiated an arrangement for co-productions of multiple-language version (MLV) films that undermined, categorically, Balcon's authority amongst GBPC artists and technicians and also impacted on plans to achieve success in America with films representing key determinants of and contributors to British national identity, featuring British actors recruited and developed by Balcon and nurtured to perform as Balcon considered best. In 1932 Ostrer and GBPC's chairman and joint managing director Charles Moss ('C M') Woolf contracted to a co-production alliance with Erich Pommer, head of production at Ufa, following encouraging correspondence with the producer Hermann Fellner in 1931.²²⁵ Pommer was regarded as "probably the most note-worthy of all producers the world over"²²⁶. Furthermore, Ostrer and Woolf made arrangements for distribution with Fellner and Joseph Somlo - acting as Fellner and Somlo GmbH - the details of which were confirmed in a letter to Fellner, dated 27 October 1931. GBPC committed to pay Fellner and Somlo 25 per cent of its net profits from any foreign versions of Gainsborough Pictures productions - not including German distribution, an option on which was extended to Fellner and Somlo, to handle themselves on a percentage basis. By return, Fellner and Somlo were required to make available the artistes under contract to them - including Wilhelm Thiele and Renate Mueller - to work for Gainsborough Pictures as required and as available.²²⁷

The arrangement is comparable with the collaboration undertaken by Michael Balcon at Gainsborough Pictures in the 1920s, before Gainsborough Pictures was subsumed within the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, but its intended scale was much larger. The motives for the

²²⁵ Correspondence between Hermann Fellner and Isidore Ostrer (13 May 1931), in Aileen and Michael Balcon Special Collection, File A/44

²²⁶ Collier, Lionel. 'Trade Shows Surveyed', in *Kinematograph Weekly* (27 June 1929) p.38.

²²⁷ Letter to Hermann Fellner, from Gaumont-British Picture Corporation Limited (27 October 1931), in Aileen and Michael Balcon Special Collection, File A/45

deal struck between Ostrer and Pommer were effectively the same as that underpinning British and continental European operations in the 1920s; the defence of domestic industry from the market dominance of imported American productions, and the opportunity to reduce costs. Following the First World War, industrial imperatives added a particular agency to cross-cultural transactions between European film production industries. An economic drive within Europe towards co-production and international distribution may be acknowledged in relation to American aspirations - with respect to the American film industry's relatively unchallenged position of dominance in European markets for film exhibition - which incorporated various attempts to create a pan-European film market. The interwar 'Film Europe' project, for example, ventured not beyond an idealistic rhetoric of unified European film industry, of the sort proffered by critic and filmmaker Louis Delluc in 1922 - two years before the birth of the 'Film Europe' movement - in observing, "Film is an international product. Its traffic is international, but it is the production which should be international. In place of competition, there should be association. In place of this interminable fight between merchants or diplomats, we deserve a sort of world communism of the screen."²²⁸

Pommer was, also, a strong advocate of internationalism - and he offered American success as an example of the way forward for European producers. Pommer understood that American international success during the silent era rested not solely on "the unlimited financial resources at the disposal of the American producers, who are clever enough to make the best and most rational use of them"²²⁹ - but that international success was a consequence of producing pictures with narratives simple enough to generate universal appeal. Michael Balcon and the

²²⁸ Delluc, Louis. 'Les Cineastes', in *Le Monde Nouveau* (15 Aug-1 Sep 1922) p.44

²²⁹ Pommer, Erich. 'The International Picture: A Lesson on Simplicity', in *Kinematograph Weekly* (8 November 1928) p.41

Gaumont-British Picture Corporation sought also to generate universal appeal, including attempts to match the success of American products - but his approach differed from Pommer's espousal of 'success through simplicity'. Rather, Balcon's approach to the matter of commercial viability at the start of the 1930s was more aligned to Cedric Belfrage's view, published in *Kinematograph Weekly* in August 1926, that "the only really effective way by which British pictures can be given a universal appeal is to employ well-known Hollywood stars and directors"²³⁰.

2.5 The transition from silent cinema to sound film production

Interests in the development of an 'international' film industry underwent a revision with the transition from silent cinema screening to the exhibition of sound on film - with the shift, towards the end of the 1920s, in the creative function and commercial potential of film engendered by the rise of sound technology. As *The Film Daily* reported on 6 January 1930, "British exhibitors and producers lost no time to take advantage of the new development and place their orders for both recording and reproducing equipment for immediate installation"²³¹. At Gainsborough Pictures, Michael Balcon had spent £70,000 fitting the Islington studios with equipment for sound film production during the summer of 1929 - including the construction of false wooden walls inside brick walls to guarantee sound insulation.²³² He had travelled to the USA earlier that year with the electrician George Gunn, to study sound techniques.²³³ The transition was swift. It was estimated that approximately 2,000 cinemas - half the total number in

²³⁰ Belfrage, Cedric. 'American Stars and British Producers', in *Kinematograph Weekly* (12 August 1926) p.46

²³¹ 'Europe is going slow on talkers, Joe Brand Says', in *The Film Daily* (6 January 1930) p.8

²³² Low, Rachael. *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985) p.128

²³³ *ibid* p.127

the United Kingdom - had been wired for sound by the end of 1930.²³⁴ At this point in the commercial development of national film industries, linguistic difference bound film tightly to distribution in national markets. The emergence of sound as a commercially viable feature of the film product disrupted the strategies of internationally-minded producers - some of whom responded in innovative ways.²³⁵ The multiple-language version film, for example, was an attempt to overcome the barrier to international trade represented by the introduction of sound cinema.²³⁶

The introduction of sound to the commercial film industry also affected the economics of production. The additional cost of producing sound films ensured the end of many small, often under-capitalised, film producing companies - both in the UK and across mainland Europe. By making production costs prohibitively expensive for the private individual, sound added an imperative element to the movement towards a corporate film industry. And the introduction of sound added urgency to the question of what constituted a product of national culture - already a subject of debate in the wake of quota legislation and international co-productions of the mid- and late-1920s. Furthermore, legislative interpretations of the 'national' cultural product were undermined by commercial realities. In Britain, the architects of the Cinematograph Films Act (1927) were required to consider the Britishness of a film not on the basis of cultural factors, but on the proportion of production expenditure allotted to the employment of British nationals - and

²³⁴ Faulkner, W G. 'The Cinema To-Day', in *Daily Mail Yearbook 1931* (London: Associated Newspapers, 1930) p.248

²³⁵ For a discussion of the impact of sound cinema on commercial film production and exhibition, with particular reference to co-productions involving French, German and British firms, see Higson, Andrew; Maltby, Richard (Eds.). *'Film Europe' and 'Film America': Cinema, Commerce, and Cultural Exchange 1920-1939* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999). For an understanding of Michael Balcon's involvement in European attempts at multinational film industry, read Higson, Andrew. "'A Film League of Nations': Gainsborough, Gaumont-British, and 'Film Europe'", in Cook, Pam (Ed.). *Gainsborough Pictures* (London: Cassell, 1997) pp.60-79

²³⁶ Some contextual data indicating the scale of production multiple-language films during the early years of sound cinema may be ascertained by reading O'Brien, Charles. 'Multiple Language Versions and National Films, 1930-1933. Statistical Analysis', in *Cinema & Cie* No.6 (Spring 2005) pp.55-61

even attempts such as this, aimed at supporting British or other European cultural identity in film markets, was undermined by American investment in 'quota quickies' and multiple-language versions. In fact, across Europe, governmental attempts at protecting markets with contingency mechanisms or quota legislation were circumvented by such films, financed by American companies to meet European governmental requirements that a certain percentage of film products be produced locally. Invariably, these quota quickies were deliberately shoddy so that they offered no competition to American productions; a strategy that served to reinforce perceptions of difference between the glamour and high production values of American imports, and the inadequacy of local products. It is arguable, further to this, that interwar action towards economic protectionism was complemented by actions or expressions towards artistic and social independence from American culture - particularly, in response to American dominance of markets for film exhibition. It is also arguable that these anti-American sympathies were accentuated by the advent of the sound feature, with the consequence of an intensification of efforts to protect local industries, distinguish national and local qualities in cinema art, and to support the marketability of indigenous cinema domestically and abroad.²³⁷

2.6 Balcon's interwar employment of émigrés

From the late 1920s, as it became more technically proficient and aesthetically refined, Britain's film industry attracted the attention and critical engagement of the cultural elite. It had become clear to a body of 'highbrow' critics that films were more than a form of idle amusement for the masses. Film began to be regarded as a genuine art form. When the Film Society was

²³⁷ For an exemplary discussion on the definition of 'national' cinema, read Rosen, Philip. 'History, Textuality, Nation: Kracauer, Burch and Some Problems in the Study of National Cinema', in *Iris* 2 (1984) pp.69-84

formed in London in 1925, its members included H G Wells, George Bernard Shaw and Ivor Montagu, amongst other notable highbrow intellectuals.²³⁸ Serious studies dealing with the history of the film industry and cinema were published; books such as Terry Ramsaye's *A Million and One Nights*.²³⁹

Much interwar British technical development was due, in fact, to the employment of German-speaking émigrés to the British film industry, which influenced film production and film culture from the late 1920s, through to the end of the Second World War, by introducing aesthetic considerations and production techniques acquired in continental Europe. Cheryl Buckley and Tobias Hochscherf note the wide range of cultural influences that émigrés brought to interwar British film production, thus: “It was not unusual for émigrés from political persecution in Europe in the 1930s to have already moved several times in Europe prior to crossing the Channel or the Atlantic and, as a consequence, their engagement and understanding of visual culture was multiple, nuanced and interconnected.”²⁴⁰

There are many examples of émigrés contributing to Britain's interwar film industry in differing ways. Tobias Hochscherf presents analysis in his text on German-speaking émigrés working in British cinema between 1927 and 1945²⁴¹, indicating that film technicians from Berlin, Munich and Vienna extensively influenced the British film industry with respect to aesthetics, themes and narratives, technical innovations and work organisation during the 1930s. Film industry figures such as Ewald André Dupont, Alfred Junge, Oscar Werndorff, Mutz

²³⁸ See Samson, Jen. ‘The Film Society, 1925-1939’, in Barr, Charles (Ed.). *All Our Yesterdays* (London: British Film Institute, 1986) pp.306-313

²³⁹ Ramsaye, Terry. *A Million and One Nights: A History of the Motion Picture* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1926)

²⁴⁰ Buckley, Cheryl; Hochscherf, Tobias. ‘From German “Invasion” to Transnationalism: Continental European Emigres and Visual Culture in Britain, 1933-56’, in *Visual Culture in Britain*, 13: 2 (2012) p.161

²⁴¹ Hochscherf, Tobias. *The Continental Connection: German-speaking émigrés and British cinema, 1927-1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011)

Greenbaum and Werner Brandes were central to production practices at British-based companies including London Film Productions and the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation. Several of Michael Balcon's productions are characterised by émigré involvement. For example, when Alfred Junge began working in Britain, he presented an extensive list of props and technical terms he had used in Germany, enabling émigré technicians to transfer skills to British production environments and introducing new ideas and opportunities to British film personnel and companies.²⁴² Junge had collaborated with E A Dupont in the mid-1920s for British International Pictures, and he was employed by the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation from 1932 to 1937. Junge introduced innovative technologies and practices to British film production, including the use of scaffolding and cranes to enable camera mobility.²⁴³ Junge was a critical figure in the development of the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation in the mid-1930s, during which period GBPC became Britain's most productive, most diverse and most technically proficient film company. However, Junge's employment formed part of an ambitious strategy adopted by Michael Balcon, one in which Shepherd's Bush and Islington became the hubs of an international community of artists and technicians.

Michael Balcon employed émigré technicians, and artists, for their technical expertise and acting ability. Balcon sought, also, to integrate European aesthetic sensibilities and political concerns into the GBPC production portfolio. Fritz Kortner starred in *Chu Chin Chow* (1934), which was photographed by Mutz Greenbaum, with sets designed according to the "painterly

²⁴² 'English-German translations from Film Department' (nd), in Alfred Junge Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre, University of Texas, Austin, Film Drawer 1, box 2

²⁴³ Bergfelder, Tim. 'The Production Designer and the Gesamtkunstwerk: German Film Technicians in the British Film Industry of the 1930s', in Higson, Andrew (Ed.). *Dissolving Views: Key Writings in British Cinema* (London: Cassell, 1996) p.25

tradition”²⁴⁴ observed by Ernö Metzner. Directed by Berthold Viertel, who sought to exploit the script’s “lyrical” and “psychological”²⁴⁵ potential, *Little Friend* also starred Fritz Kortner, playing against sets designed by Alfred Junge and photographed by Günther Krampf. Alfred Junge designed the sets for *Jew Süss*, a big budget production directed by Lothar Mendes, for which Michael Balcon contracted Conrad Veidt, already a star actor renowned for his ability to modulate his voice, augment his body language, and achieve a variety of facial expressions.²⁴⁶ Ernö Metzner designed the sets for *The Tunnel*, based on the German thriller *Der Tunnel* (1933), which the director Günther Krampf transformed into a melodramatic representation of bravery and determination, and included an Anglo-American alliance in subversion of the Nazi sympathies of the original film.

There are, in fact, clear cultural implications to the émigré experience of British film industry and culture, which have been explored by Tim Bergfelder and Christian Cargnelli in *Destination London: German-Speaking Emigrés and British Cinema, 1925-1950* - in particular, with respect to how their integration into British society and film industry impacted “wider patterns of a national film culture”²⁴⁷ in British cinema. Bergfelder extends this emphasis in his assessment of genre production at Gainsborough Pictures, in Pam Cook’s study of the company. Specifically, émigrés influenced British film culture by introducing a more holistic approach to production, to change the aesthetics and ontological values expressed in British films. Émigré

²⁴⁴ Bergfelder, Tim; Harris, Sue; Street, Sarah. *Film Architecture and the Transnational Imagination: Set Design in 1930s European Cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007) p55

²⁴⁵ Witt, Peter. ‘Lothar Mendes and Berthold Viertel talk about their latest films’, in *Picturegoer* (7 April 1934) p.15

²⁴⁶ See Jeffrey Richards’ appraisal of Veidt’s acting in *The Wandering Jew* (Richards, Jeffrey (Ed.). *The Unknown 1930s: an Alternative History of the British Cinema 1929-1939* (London: I B Tauris & Co, 1998) p.44)

²⁴⁷ Bergfelder, Tim; Cargnelli, Christian (Eds.). *Destination London: German-Speaking Emigrés and British Cinema, 1925-1950* (Oxon: Berghahn Books, 2008) p.7

artists and technicians “reorganised the concept of mise-en-scène in the British film industry”²⁴⁸ by pre-planning films more comprehensively before filming began. As has been noted, Alfred Junge was a principal proponent of more coherent production practices, and a greater emphasis on film aesthetics, involving writers, directors, actors and technicians including cinematographers and set designers in more collaborative forms of pre-production planning.

Cheryl Buckley and Tobias Hochscherf note, also, the wide range of cultural influences that émigrés brought to the British film industry. According to Buckley and Hochscherf, “It was not unusual for émigrés from political persecution in Europe in the 1930s to have already moved several times in Europe prior to crossing the Channel or the Atlantic and, as a consequence, their engagement and understanding of visual culture was multiple, nuanced and interconnected.”²⁴⁹

Andrew Higson has explored the ‘transnational’ aspects of British cinema with respect to “subtler means of describing cultural and economic formations that are rarely contained by national boundaries”²⁵⁰. Higson observes that “film-making and film exhibition have been transnational since the first public film shows in the 1890s...as film entrepreneurs like the Lumières shot films around the world and arranged for them to be shown equally widely”²⁵¹.

2.7 Michael Balcon’s interwar international and domestic ambitions

It should be noted that, whilst Balcon’s ‘international community’ did include émigrés, Balcon also promoted the talents of indigenous British personnel. The films themselves centred

²⁴⁸ Bergfelder, Tim. ‘Surface and Distraction: Style and Genre at Gainsborough in the Late 1920s and 1930s’, in Cook, Pam (Ed.). *Gainsborough Pictures* (London: Cassell, 1997) p.36

²⁴⁹ Buckley, Cheryl; Hochscherf, Tobias. ‘From German “Invasion” to Transnationalism: Continental European Emigrés and Visual Culture in Britain, 1933-56’, in *Visual Culture in Britain* 13: 2 (2012) p. 161

²⁵⁰ Higson, Andrew. ‘The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema’, in Hjort, Mette; Mackenzie, John (Eds.). *Cinema and Nation* (London: Routledge, 2000) p.64

²⁵¹ *ibid* p.66

on popular British players, on genres with mass appeal, and on the subject matter most likely to appeal to the majority of filmgoers. Hence, Balcon produced musicals featuring Jessie Matthews, and comedies starring Jack Hulbert. Michael Balcon combined internationalism with domestic British talent in another sense. His strategy for commercial success at GBPC included, also, ambitious attempts at distribution and exhibition in the United States of America. Balcon recognised that film production for America would require production values matching those of films produced in Hollywood, the casting of artists who were popular internationally as well as in Britain, and also the filming of subject matter that could appeal to American audiences as well as British filmgoers.²⁵²

Indeed, Michael Balcon regarded international success as the principal part of his production strategy - and set success in America as his prime goal. He was actively involved in GBPC's concerted attempt to gain market share in the United States of America - producing 32 films released to the American market between 1934 and 1936²⁵³ and overseeing a distributing organisation in the USA.²⁵⁴ There were successes in North America. *Sunshine Susie* (1931), released in North America as *The Office Girl*, received critical praise, including the observation in *The New York Times* that the film has “a sparkle in every foot”²⁵⁵. In December 1934 Mark Ostrer was able to secure contracts for the exhibition of the corporation's films at the Roxy and

²⁵² For a detailed account of Michael Balcon's attempts at success in the USA, see Sedgwick, John. *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain: A Choice of Pleasures* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000) pp.211-29

²⁵³ Sedgwick, John. *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain: A Choice of Pleasures* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000) p.223

²⁵⁴ Klingender, Francis Donald. *Money Behind the Screen: A Report Prepared on Behalf of the Film Council* (London: Laurence & Wishart, 1937) p.18

²⁵⁵ *New York Times* (27 June 1932) p.20. Cited in Street, Sarah. *Transatlantic Crossings: British Feature Films in the USA* (London: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2002) p.66.

Radio City Music Hall in New York - both 6,000-seat venues - following “the success of *Chu Chin Chow* and *Little Friend* at the former and *Jew Süß* at the latter”²⁵⁶.

However, the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation was not structured to achieve success in the USA. Although the corporation employed many talented film technicians and artists, the films produced were neither cheap nor grand; GBPC did not produce any of Britain’s quota quickies, but neither did it produce films comparable to the more extravagant American features. Even with the increased financial resources available for film production in the 1930s, GBPC had not the money available to compete effectively in America, with respect to the quality of its films. A number of Balcon’s projects were allocated relatively high budgets in an attempt to recreate American production values. *Jew Süß*, *The Iron Duke*, *Rhodes of Africa*, *King Solomon’s Mines* and *The Tunnel* “had budgets of £100,000 or more”²⁵⁷. However, whilst these were large budgets for British films, they were “not much more expensive than the routine standard-budgeted A-features of the big American studios, and much cheaper than the top-budget (\$1 million and more) American films”²⁵⁸ that they were seen to be competing with.

Balcon noted that features such as *Jack’s the Boy*, *Sunshine Susie* and *The Ghost Train* cost half as much to make as typical American features - but he believed that these films were equal in quality to their American counterpart productions. The difference between costs of American and British productions was less a matter of quality, in Balcon’s view, and more “a question of the enormous expenditure that goes on in the Hollywood studios; the extravagant

²⁵⁶ Sedgwick, John. 'The British film industry's production sector difficulties in the late 1930s', in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 17:1 (1997) p.53

²⁵⁷ Ryall, Tom. 'A British Studio System: The Associated British Picture Corporation and the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation in the 1930s', in Murphy, Robert (Ed.). *The British Cinema Book* (London. BFI Publishing, 1997) p.39

²⁵⁸ *ibid*

salaries paid to stars and directors, and the immense sums paid to authors for story rights”²⁵⁹.

Nonetheless, Balcon believed that a lack of access to capital was the principal reason that a number of British films that could have been expected to have a global appeal were not produced. By 1933, he had concluded, "The industry could not afford to tie up large sums for purposes of production, and the return in profit from their pictures was little more than sufficient to keep the industry alive in its limited sphere."²⁶⁰

There was another challenge to Michael Balcon's policy of internationalism. Success abroad necessitated high budgets, by British standards, but it also required that subject matter appealed to audiences outside Britain as well as domestically. This represented a significant challenge to Balcon, and he responded to it by producing films that conveyed an idealistic portrayal of Britain and Britishness (or, more specifically, England and Englishness). In this way, Balcon could produce films with domestic and international appeal.

When Balcon was appointed director of productions at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, the corporation was already structured to make films that capitalised on the domestic popularity of British stars and generic preferences. This becomes evident in Jessie Matthews' musicals and Jack Hulbert's comedies, for example, which "represented home-grown entertainment that was consistently popular with British audiences"²⁶¹. Soon after his appointment, Michael Balcon published what amounts to a statement of intent in *The Era*, to the effect that he would concentrate on the production of films with overtly English themes and representation. It was November 1931, and Balcon believed that the time had come to

²⁵⁹ G.W.B. 'Pictures - British and American', in *The Observer* (3 July 1932) p.13

²⁶⁰ Balcon, Michael. 'The Film Industry', in Schonfield, H J (Ed.). *The Book of British Industries* (Edinburgh: Dennis Archer, 1933) p.153

²⁶¹ Glancy, Mark. *The 39 Steps: A British Film Guide* (London: I B Tauris, 2003) p. 20

"concentrate on the fashioning of the essential 'English picture'"²⁶², "to make films which express England"²⁶³. In Balcon's view, expressed in 1931, the essential picture of the nation could be defined by a depiction of "native simplicity and sincerity"²⁶⁴. At that time, the newly-established presence of sound on film was also a consideration for Balcon, in defining the English film. His call for films that express England included an appeal for actors who spoke "a suitable standard of English"²⁶⁵. Balcon's understanding of the market appeal of British productions continued through the 1930s. In January 1935, in the *Daily Film Renter*, Balcon expressed the belief that the prospects remained good for the international success of a British film industry focused on representation of the British nation. Balcon reckoned at this time that Americans had "a warm and somewhat sentimental feeling towards Britain"²⁶⁶, that the Americans were fascinated by scenes of British cities and the British countryside, and that Americans were pleased by British accents.

The ideal of producing a film that represents the nation was held by Balcon, still, in 1936 - but Balcon had acknowledged, by then, that there were difficulties in achieving critical and commercial success, internationally, with such a production. In an article published in the *London Evening News* in October 1936, Balcon called for a more realistic representation of Britain in cinemas - but he implied, also, that the British film industry needed to produce patriotic films about Britain and the British Empire.²⁶⁷

²⁶² Balcon, Michael. 'Sincerity Will Make the Film English', in *The Era* (11 November 1931) p.10

²⁶³ *ibid*

²⁶⁴ *ibid*

²⁶⁵ *ibid*

²⁶⁶ Balcon, Michael. 'Putting the New British Talkie on the Map in the States' in *Daily Film Renter* (1 January 1935) p.8

²⁶⁷ Balcon, Michael. 'Putting the Real Britain on the Screen', in *London Evening News* (1 October 1936) p. 11

2.8 Summary

British industrial and political responses to American film industry expansionism, principally in the form of the Cinematograph Films Act (1927) and associated corporate restructuring and investment in domestic production, failed to address American dominance of the British market. American film industry production costs, recouped entirely from American cinema screenings, were so unaffected by British legislation and regulation that the requirement for American firms to invest in British film industry was met with ease, by minimal funding in British projects - thereby unwittingly creating an industry sub-sector based on quota film production, which reduced further British ability to respond to competition from abroad.

However, the improvements to British film production following the 1927 Act - in terms of working conditions, technical capabilities and capacity - enabled the industry to avert the complete collapse that seemed likely in the early and mid-1920s, when production was at its lowest, and to begin the evolution of legislative support for the development of an industry which could be considered conducive to investment.

Legislation enabled film industry survival and growth, by creating the conditions for demand for British production resources, and for films made in Britain. However, producers and investors misunderstood the dynamics of the newly legislated market. The most significant returns available to British producers comprised the broad spread of revenues which could be gained from domestic exhibition of a portfolio of diverse yet modestly budgeted productions. Contemporary exhibitors understood that revenue maximisation might have been achieved by a broad appeal to audience tastes. The few individual films that generated high returns - particularly, those that were successful abroad - did not represent the best strategy for success for British producers; yet, many British film producers felt compelled to challenge comparatively

resource-rich American counterparts by committing large budgets to fewer films. The consequence of higher quality, yet narrower, production portfolio was the potential for reliance on higher returns from a tranche-of cinema-goers rather than the general cinema-going population. To conduct such a strategy domestically would have been challenging enough, as BIP discovered. However, Michael Balcon complicated GBPC's position by adopting or retaining a broad portfolio approach to British cinematic exhibition, whilst indulging in a highly-targeted, high-finance model to support an attempt at international expansion. The following chapters examine, by genre, this portfolio approach to film production, both with reference to improvements in British technical capacity and film aesthetics, and with reference to the attributes and failings of Balcon's strategy of internationalism.

Chapter 3: Comedies and musicals produced by Michael Balcon in the 1930s

3.1 Introduction

In the mid-1930s Michael Balcon oversaw an international community of film artists and technicians, many originating from Central and Eastern Europe. Principally, Balcon recruited and managed actors, directors and designers with the calibre and experience required to execute a transformation of British film industry and British cinema, embodied in higher quality film production and an increasingly diverse product portfolio. The majority of Balcon's films during this period were modestly budgeted, but they represented significant technical achievements and an overtly commercial response to audience preferences for particular subject matter, star performers and successful genres. This chapter comprises assessments of the musicals of Jessie Matthews and comedies featuring Jack Hulbert, as well as the production of the Aldwych farces. As this chapter demonstrates, these comedies and musicals represented a collective of indigenous and consistently popular British entertainment, but were also instruments intended to serve Balcon's ambition to achieve commercial success abroad.

3.2 British comedy on screen in the 1930s

Comedy on British screens in the 1930s was dominated by alumni of the British stage. The point was emphasised by Edith Nepean in *Picture Show* in September 1933, thus: "Is any country in the world so rich in comedian as we are? And the humour of our comedian is so natural that never for an instant is the pace forced. Some of these fine artistes made names for

themselves, and won the affection and laughter of hundreds of theatre-goers, before they were even seen on the screen."²⁶⁸

As this chapter indicates, Michael Balcon recruited comedic performers from theatrical backgrounds. However, as Sue Harper observes, Michael Balcon was the only producer operating in Britain to have applied high production values to comedy, and the only British producer to employ superior technicians to produce comedy during the decade. Balcon's comedic ventures, produced in the main for Gainsborough Pictures, "were sophisticated, verbally adept and culturally up-market"²⁶⁹. Harper classifies, also, the comedies produced by Balcon in the early 1930s - the period of his tenure as director of productions at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation - into two types: "the 'Jack' comedies, starring Jack Hulbert, and the film versions of the Aldwych stage farces, featuring Ralph Lynn"²⁷⁰. These films were made during the peak period of production by Balcon at GBPC; Hulbert's comedies were produced between 1932 and 1935, and Lynn's farces were made between 1933 and 1935. This chapter comprises analyses of two comedies produced by Balcon for GBPC, roughly corresponding to the beginning and end of this period of comedic film production, to achieve an understanding of his influence on the genre during the decade: *Jack's the Boy* (1932), and *Foreign Affairs* (1935).

Balcon's production of comedy films offers indications of differing degrees of influence over production processes at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation. Making the 'Jack' films, Balcon worked with staff and resources autonomously. Acting as producer of the Aldwych farces, Balcon was bound to instruction by his superior at GBPC, CM Woolf - but, worse, he was

²⁶⁸ Nepean, Edith. 'Round the British Studios', in *Picture Show* (2 September 1933) p.21

²⁶⁹ Harper, Sue. 'Nothing to Beat the Hay Diet: Comedy at Gaumont and Gainsborough', in Cook, Pam (Ed.). *Gainsborough Pictures* (London: Cassell, 1997) p.81

²⁷⁰ *ibid*

bound also by the decisions of his director and members of the production team he was compelled to work with.

This chapter also presents musical genre film production by Balcon, through analyses of the productions of *The Good Companions* in 1933, *Evergreen* in 1934, *First a Girl* in 1935, and *It's Love Again* in 1936 - described by Jeffrey Richards as "Art Deco fantasies, taking place in a highly stylized, high contrast, hermetically sealed black and white world of ritzy nightclubs, luxury hotels, ocean liners, newspaper offices, radio studios, theatres and mansions, where vast floorspaces were polished to a preternatural brightness, chrome gleamed and angular metallic accoutrements spoke of the influence of modernism"²⁷¹.

3.3 Jack Hulbert's films for Michael Balcon

Michael Balcon employed Jack Hulbert frequently, casting him in several films including *Jack's the Boy*, *Jack Ahoy!* (1934) and *Bulldog Jack* (1935). The films featuring Hulbert vary in technical quality, in pace and style, and this may be due to the different locations used for production and the different production teams assembled for each. For example, *Jack's the Boy* was made at Gainsborough Pictures' Islington Film Studios, whereas *Jack Ahoy!* was produced at the Shepherd's Bush facility run by Gainsborough Pictures' parent company, the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation. However, there is a common thematic factor in Hulbert's comedies: as Harper observes, "the Hulbert comedies demonstrated the ease with which ordinary people might transform themselves into their social betters"²⁷².

²⁷¹ Richards, Jeffrey. *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain, 1930-1939* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984) p.209

²⁷² Harper, Sue. 'Nothing to Beat the Hay Diet: Comedy at Gaumont and Gainsborough', in Cook, Pam (Ed.). *Gainsborough Pictures* (London: Cassell, 1997) p.82

Jack's the Boy was regarded by Balcon as "one of the best of the Jack Hulbert-Cicely Courtneidge comedies"²⁷³. Balcon attributed the success of *Jack's the Boy*, however, to the director rather than to the stars of the film. He regarded Walter Forde as "a versatile as well as reliable director"²⁷⁴, who was at the peak of powers. In Balcon's view, Forde made his best film, *Rome Express*, in the same year that he directed *Jack's the Boy*.²⁷⁵ However, the film's principal players must be acknowledged also for the film's success - at least, domestically. The husband and wife team of Jack Hulbert and Cicely Courtneidge had achieved and established success on stage before their partnership was adapted for the screen by Michael Balcon, performing in light comedies and musicals for two decades prior to their work at GBPC - including *The Pearl Girl* (1913) and *By the Way* (1927). Hulbert and Courtneidge had already proved a hit and, in this regard, the 'Jack' comedies mirror the Novello films of the 1920s. Balcon had recruited Novello to work at Gainsborough Pictures after Novello had become a stage matinee idol, so enhancing prospects of commercial success with an audience already familiar with the principal actor. The success of *Sunshine Susie* had indicated, too, that "the introduction of singing and dancing was inevitable"²⁷⁶, if comedy was to become more appealing to audiences.

Jack's the Boy is a performance-based comedy with singing and dancing - rather than an escapist musical comedy along the lines of *Sunshine Susie*, Gainsborough's remake of the musical *Die Privatsekretärin*. At £18,214, *Jack's the Boy* cost almost £1,500 more to make than the superior *Rome Express*, which Forde directed a few months later - but this appears to have been principally due to the amount of film stock used for shooting. There was in fact a lower cost

²⁷³ Balcon, Michael. *Michael Balcon Presents...A Lifetime of Films* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1969) p.63

²⁷⁴ *ibid*

²⁷⁵ *ibid*

²⁷⁶ Hulbert, Jack. *The Little Woman's Always Right* (London: W H Allen, 1975) p.181

per 100 feet for *Jack's the Boy*, at £227, than for *Rome Express*, at £266 - *Jack's the Boy* was registered on completion at 8,004 feet, and *Rome Express* was logged with the Board of Trade at 6,389 feet.²⁷⁷

The film features Hulbert as a character called Jack Brown, who becomes a policeman against his father's wishes - although his father is a senior police officer. Jack attempts to catch the criminals responsible for a jewellery heist to show his father that he is good enough for the police force. The casting of Hulbert for the lead in *Jack's the Boy* is odd in a sense that he was too old for the role - but Hulbert built his screen reputation on playing characters like Jack Brown; having "to prove his worthiness to join the place in family/society that already awaits him, conditional on the rite of passage he undertakes from 'Boy'-hood to man-hood"²⁷⁸. Hulbert was 40 at the time of production, and yet the part of Jack Brown - and the principal comedic theme - is that of an irresponsible young man trying to start a sensible career as a detective. Moreover, the character of Jack Brown is that of a rich, posh, immaculately-tailored individual, existing in an elegant art deco environment - but outgoing and sociable; Hulbert's protagonist drinks and sings songs with friends. The film is, then, an unbalanced composite of class clichés and improbable casting. It is, however, a vehicle for Hulbert and Courtneidge to perform comedy sketches, to sing and to dance - to appeal directly to their prime sources of revenue, working-class audiences.

Aside from the lively music penned by composer Vivian Ellis, and the choreography of Hulbert himself, there are solo numbers and ensemble performances in *Jack's the Boy*, each of

²⁷⁷ Particulars of British Films Acquired by Renters during Quota Year 1923-33. The National Archives, File BT 64/97

²⁷⁸ Sutton, David R. *A Chorus of Raspberries: British Film Comedy 1929-1939* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000) p.175

which is the product of plot contrivances, rather than integrated narrative components. The film is interspersed with music hall gags, too - including a set-up in which a builders' ladder disrupts traffic duty. Its musicality and comedy appealed to audiences. *Jack's the Boy* was a major success - which Rachael Low contends was less a matter of the film's narrative or directorial treatment, more a consequence of Hulbert's amiability in performance, "and his ability to toss off a pleasing song and a casual-seeming dance"²⁷⁹.

Although Balcon valued the contribution of the director Forde more than that of the actor Hulbert, the actor was a prized asset. Music hall performers were often successful in middle-budget British productions in the 1930s - and Hulbert, in particular, had become a top star, a guarantor of box office success in Britain. For example, *Jack's the Boy* was the biggest box-office success in UK cinemas in 1932.²⁸⁰ It was also placed fourth in Film Weekly's survey of the best British films of 1932²⁸¹ - with Hulbert rated for the fourth best performance in a British film that year, in *Jack's the Boy*²⁸².

By the end of 1932, as *Love on Wheels* was released to British cinemas, Lionel Collier was describing Jack Hulbert as possibly "the brightest comedy star on British screens"²⁸³.

According to Cicely Courtneidge, Selfridges in West London allowed space for filming *Love on Wheels* every weekend for six weeks. The shots in Selfridges, in Courtneidge's view, "gave reality to the picture"²⁸⁴. Arguably, however, the most realistic representations in this musical comedy are of public transport infrastructure. The 'wheels' to which the title refers

²⁷⁹ Low, Rachael. *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985) p.132

²⁸⁰ See the POPSTAT tables devised by John Sedgwick (Sedgwick, John. *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain: A Choice of Pleasures* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000) p.262

²⁸¹ *Film Weekly* (26 May 1933) p.7

²⁸² *ibid*

²⁸³ Collier, Lionel. 'On the Screens Now', in *The Picturegoer* (19 November 1932) p.22

²⁸⁴ Hulbert, Jack. *The Little Woman's Always Right* (London: W H Allen, 1975) p.192

belong to the Green Line coach that Hulbert's protagonist, Fred Hopkins, works on with co-star Jane Russell, as Leonora Corbett. The film's opening sequence comprises a montage of various forms of commuter transport. There is, also, a brief glimpse of a fictional underground station, 'Duchess Street', mocked up in an architectural style similar to stations designed by the architect Charles Henry Holden for the extension to the City and South London Railway. The stations were relatively new at the time of the film's production.²⁸⁵

Around the time of the film's production, modernist representations of infrastructure were in vogue in the United Kingdom. From the late 1920s through to the mid-1930s, the British modernist movement was stimulated by European émigrés - in particular, those fleeing Nazi subjugation. Away from cinema, on the Underground itself, the designer Hans Schlegel was commissioned to produce the memorable 1935 depiction of a refugee in a poster entitled 'Thanks to the Underground'.²⁸⁶

Love on Wheels does feature real-life in the form of location shooting, as Green Line buses are driven through the London-suburbs, and with Selfridges the set for a fictional department store. However, despite its modernist references, and allusions to realism, *Love on Wheels* may not be taken too seriously. The film is a modest attempt at musical comedy, akin to many such genre films produced during the 1930s. It offers no pretensions, either to dancing of the calibre of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rodgers, or to music of the quality of compositions by George Gershwin or Irving Berlin. The director, Victor Saville, could make no claim to have

²⁸⁵ The seven new City and South London Railway stations, designed by Charles Holden in 1924 for the Underground Electric Railways Company of London (UERL), today form part of the Northern line, which is operated by Transport for London (TfL); Duchess Street appears in a later scene in the film, when the conductor Briggs, played by Gordon Harker, is conversing with Leonora as they walk from the ticket hall.

²⁸⁶ Keith Holz's study of modern German artists in the 1930s, working in Paris, Prague and London, explores the experience and art of émigrés during the decade (Holz, Keith. *Modern German Art for Thirties Paris, Prague, and London: Resistance and Acquiescence in a Democratic Public Sphere, Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004)

completed a film as sophisticated as any by Busby Berkeley. This is an exercise in endearing inanity, in a kind of vacuousness expertly practiced by Hulbert, and ably supported in this film by the *ingénue* Leonora Corbett and the foil Gordon Harker. However, Hulbert's popularity continued through the early 1930s, and by 1934 *The Camels Are Coming* was described in terms of "Hulbertian adventures" and "the usual Hulbertian lightness"²⁸⁷.

Michael Balcon regarded Jack Hulbert and Cicely Courtneidge as "two of the most popular stars"²⁸⁸ he managed at GBPC. He employed Hulbert, despite initial resistance from CM Woolf and Jeffery Bernard, who objected to Hulbert's screen presence on the basis that "nobody in his right mind could contemplate casting a man with such an enormous chin"²⁸⁹, because he considered Hulbert to be a "lovable"²⁹⁰ presence on screen. Indeed, Balcon regarded Hulbert and Courtneidge so highly that films featuring the couple were considered important assets in the Gaumont-Gainsborough production portfolio managed by Balcon - which Balcon describes in his autobiography as comprising Hitchcock films, Jessie Matthews musicals, Anglo-German films, comedies ("particularly those of Jack Hulbert and Cicely Courtneidge, and Tom Walls"²⁹¹), George Arliss films and "'epics' made with an eye on the American market"²⁹².

3.4 GBPC and the Aldwych farces

The other key comedic player in Michael Balcon's staff, Tom Walls, acted in the Aldwych farces, which were produced by Herbert Wilcox and distributed by GBPC until 1933.

²⁸⁷ 'Entertainment Films Section', in *Monthly Film Bulletin* (October 1934) p.79

²⁸⁸ Balcon, Michael. *Michael Balcon Presents...A Lifetime of Films* (London: Hutchinson, 1969) p.51

²⁸⁹ *ibid* p.52

²⁹⁰ *ibid* p.55

²⁹¹ *ibid* p.62

²⁹² *ibid* p.63

The key point of interest of these films is not, however, Walls' participation in their production. Rather, the production history of these films suggests a loss of autonomy for Balcon.

When Herbert Wilcox left the United Kingdom to work for United Artists in the United States of America, GBPC managing director C M Woolf decided that GBPC should undertake to continue their production. They had been highly profitable for GBPC, with Wilcox operating on modest budgets and with revenues many multiples over the production costs incurred.²⁹³ Like Jack Hulbert's comedies, Ralph Lynn's Aldwych farces were produced both at Islington and at Shepherd's Bush, with different production teams for each film. Like Hulbert's films, the popularity of the Aldwych farces rested on audience familiarity with format and with characters - like the majority of the stage productions, most of the film narratives were based on "an inexorable Walls, and a plausible but no less ruinous Lynn, to be fleeced of his fair repute, of his cash, and of his trousers"²⁹⁴. Like Hulbert's films, there is thematic linkage across the Aldwych series - though, unlike the aspirational ethic of Hulbert's comedies, the films featuring Lynn "exhibit a swingeing cynicism about human nature, which is conveyed by the acting style of the stars as well as by the scripts"²⁹⁵. Unlike Hulbert's films, GBPC's Aldwych productions were all made with the same director - Tom Walls. Another key difference is the degree to which Balcon maintained control over production - and it is notable that Walls and Lynn were not recruited by Balcon, but were imposed by Woolf as part of the arrangement securing the continued production of these films by GBPC. Balcon was categorically instructed by Woolf "to concentrate on persuading the stars associated with Wilcox - Jack Buchanan, Tom Walls and Ralph Lynn - and

²⁹³ *Rookery Nook* (1930), for example, was produced by Wilcox for £14,000, and generated £150,000 in the year following its initial release (Wilcox, Herbert. *Twenty-Five Thousand Sunsets* (London: Bodley Head, 1967)) p.89

²⁹⁴ Travers, Ben. *A-Sitting on a Gate: Autobiography* (London: W H Allen, 1978) p.97

²⁹⁵ Harper, Sue. 'Nothing to Beat the Hay Diet: Comedy at Gaumont and Gainsborough', in Cook, Pam (Ed.). *Gainsborough Pictures* (London: Cassell, 1997) p.83

even the writer Douglas Furber, who worked closely with Jack Buchanan - to transfer their allegiance from Wilcox"²⁹⁶. Once Balcon had secured the services of the Aldwych production team, he endured what he considered to be particularly problematic working relations with Walls - particularly, with regard to casting. In Balcon's view, Walls casting decisions "were not always made on acting ability"²⁹⁷.

As Janet Moat observes, Walls "insisted not only on directing the films himself but also on having the choice and approval of both story and cast"²⁹⁸. Walls' disputes with Balcon were not only a consequence of his need to control such production decisions, however, but also because "Walls was a poor film director"²⁹⁹ who made "little attempt to make the films much more than photographed stage plays"³⁰⁰. Balcon's lack of influence over the casting for *Foreign Affaires* may be taken with other incidents to indicate a loss of autonomy and frustration during this period. For example, when the film's screenwriter Ben Travers sought to gain an acting part on *Foreign Affaires* for a repertory actor called Mervyn Johns, he consulted the director Walls - not the producer Balcon³⁰¹. The presence of Johns in the supporting cast implies that, as Balcon suggested, control over casting was exercised by Walls.

3.5 *The Good Companions*

Michael Balcon's authority as producer was, however, not in question during this period, with regard to his involvement in the production of musical comedies starring Jessie Matthews.

²⁹⁶ Balcon, Michael. *Michael Balcon Presents...A Lifetime of Films* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1969) p.91

²⁹⁷ *ibid*

²⁹⁸ Moat, Janet. 'Cuckoo in the Nest (1933)', in *screenonline*. Accessed at <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/439660> on 16 August 2012

²⁹⁹ *ibid*

³⁰⁰ *ibid*

³⁰¹ Travers, Ben. *A-Sitting on a Gate: Autobiography* (London: W H Allen, 1978) p.122

The production contexts of the Matthews films offers insights into the scope of influence he exercised over operations elsewhere at GBPC, and in doing so indicate his preferred mode of cinema, which the contemporary critic C A Lejeune identified in her review of *The Good Companions* as “to copy the film manner of Hollywood”, but which could be identified with “a national manner in film-making - an English manner, with the characteristic slow, packed development of the best English art - a picaresque manner, which has always been, in writing, painting, drama, and music, the English heritage”³⁰².

Balcon produced *The Good Companions* in partnership with T A Welsh and George Pearson.³⁰³ Arguably, Welsh would have been highly sympathetic to Balcon’s interests in the development of British film production, and to the internationalisation of the British film industry. At the Glasgow conference of the Cinematograph Exhibitors Association (CEA) in 1925, Welsh proposed “a scheme to provide studios and production facilities in England equal to the best to be found in America, backed by an International Sales Organisation for the exploitation of British films all over the world”³⁰⁴.

When *The Good Companions* was distributed in the USA by Fox, however, concerns were expressed that its Britishness would not be well-received by American audiences. *Variety*’s review of the film describes the film as a slow-paced and overly long film with limited prospects “because of its foreign nature, notably its very English accent, characteristics, etc”³⁰⁵. *Variety*

³⁰² Lejeune, Anthony (Ed.). *The C.A. Lejeune Film Reader* (Manchester: Carcanet Press Ltd, 1991) p.87

³⁰³ The film’s opening credits do, indeed, claim the film as a Gaumont-British/Welsh-Pearson production - though producer credit for *The Good Companions* has been variously given as Michael Balcon, as T A Welsh, and as George Pearson - and one print apparently gives no producer credit at all, but does retain the list of Louis Levy, George Pearson, Angus MacPhail, and George Gunn as production personnel

³⁰⁴ ‘Who’s What in the Industry’, in *The Kinematograph Year Book 1942* (London: Kinematograph Publications Ltd) p.269

³⁰⁵ ‘Film Reviews’ in *Variety* (17 October 1933) p.19

noted, also, the film's "unfamiliar locale and inept construction"³⁰⁶, at once denigrating its cultural origins and the national film industry that produced it.

The Good Companions is based on a novel authored by John Boynton Priestley and published first in 1928 - and the play derived from the novel by Priestley and Edward Knoblock, which debuted at His Majesty's Theatre in London in 1931. Priestley's book was a critical success as well as commercially successful. It sold in thousands in its first year of publication - despite costing "10s. 6d., a stiff price for a novel in 1929"³⁰⁷. Furthermore, it earned Priestley the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1929, an award offered in recognition of excellence in fiction.³⁰⁸ The literary appeal of *The Good Companions* is a matter of contemporary cultural resonance. Concert parties and Pierrot troupes, of the kind described by J B Priestley, worked the variety halls and end-of-the-pier theatres of Britain in the 1920s and 1930s. Moreover, the book is set after the beginning of broadcasting and during a period of economic depression, so it is reasonable to assume that J B Priestley intended readers in the late 1920s to regard it as a contemporary story. One can appreciate that the success of the book was due to the contemporary resonance - with real-life experience of popular culture, society and economy - of the lives of the three principal characters and their nomadic hosts. Priestley's characterisation is sympathetic and comprehensive; with many qualities and foibles presented as the protagonists traverse a nation in economic depression, witnessing the gamut of English society - and, as Lawrence Napper observes, Priestley was one of a number of authors (including, also, Margaret Kennedy, author of

³⁰⁶ 'The Woman's Angle', in *Variety* (17 October 1933) p.19

³⁰⁷ Priestley, J B. *Margin Released: A Writer's Reminiscences and Reflections* (London: Heinemann, 1962) p.193

³⁰⁸ 'James Tait Black Prize Winners'. Accessed at <http://www.ed.ac.uk/about/people/tait-black/fiction> on 4 November 2010

The Constant Nymph) specifically sought by producers in the 1930s because they provided “realist narratives of family and community life”³⁰⁹.

In print and on screen, *The Good Companions* represents an idealised notion of a commonality amongst British people, an inclusive society, which might be produced from the socio-economic transition resulting from economic depression. Described in the 1 April 1936 issue of *The Times Literary Supplement* as evidence of Priestley’s ability to compose “descriptive reports, genial and satirical of the daily round of wage earners of both sexes”³¹⁰, Priestley's novel presents this ideal England through a tale of journeys undertaken, and symbolic or metaphorical excursions.

In the film of *The Good Companions*, the director Victor Saville establishes the nomadic narrative immediately, in a voice-over introduction to subject, character and setting - playing against a still shot of a map of England, with the counties of origin of the three main characters shaded - and the fourth county, shaded darker, described as “the middle of England”, in which theatre troupe the Dinky-Doos are travelling and performing. Saville establishes at the outset, also, the key relationships that define the viewing experience - and these relationships are not those in the filmed story. There are differing levels of narration in this film, serving to relate the filmed story from different, yet complementary, perspectives. The voice-over narrates the story in the third-person, and introduces the three protagonists to establish these three as narrators who are also characters within the story, or first-person narrators. The direct addressing of the camera and so the audience, secures identification of the audience as spectator. Saville's decision to define, immediately, the relationship of the audience to the principal characters and narrators in

³⁰⁹ Napper, Lawrence. *British Cinema and Middlebrow Culture in the Interwar Years* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2009) p.118

³¹⁰ Cook, Judith. *Priestley* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1997) p.150

The Good Companions bears a critical effect. As mentioned, *The Good Companions* offers cultural resonance in the real world. The narrators enable the audience to perceive the film as a work that bears a direct relationship to real-world experience. The first-person narrators bring greater focus on the feelings, opinions, and perceptions of the story's characters, and on how the characters perceive the world and other characters. The third-person narrator helps the audience to understand the world the characters inhabit, and gain insights into the characters' background motivations. What Saville does, then, is make the film openly accessible to its audience, so that its audience can openly engage with the similitudes and verisimilitudes of real-world experiences on offer.³¹¹

So, at the outset, the audience learns that they are watching a film of “the roads and wandering players of modern England, the story of how Jess Oakroyd left his home in Bruddersford and took to the road, and how Inigo Jollifant marched out of his school at Washbury Manor, and how Elizabeth, daughter of old Colonel Trant, suddenly went off into the blue, and how chance brought these three to one small town in the Midlands, together with a broken-down troupe of entertainers, the Dinky-Doos”. Cinematographer Bernard Knowles uses a cross dissolve, then, to transport the audience from Oakroyd's county on the map to the back of Oakroyd's head. Oakroyd turns around, having been called by the narrator, to face the camera, and address the audience. The narrator continues, and Knowles repeats the dissolve from map to head for the introductions of Inigo Jollifant and Elizabeth Trant.

Victor Saville remains faithful to the plot and characterisation of J B Priestley's work, and retains also the book's cultural sensibilities. In this regard, C A Lejeune's description of the

³¹¹ For more on narrative modes, see Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980) and Stanzel, Franz Karl. *A Theory of Narrative* (Cambridge: CUP, 1984)

film as thematically ‘picaresque’ is entirely valid not in the sense that she delivers it - as a “slow, packed development of the best English art”³¹² - but, rather, in the sense that the term denotes “an episodic style of fiction dealing with the adventures of a rough and dishonest but appealing hero”³¹³, and also on the understanding that the term may lend itself to the description of novels in which much of the action takes place ‘on the road’. The carpenter Oakroyd, the seemingly wealthy Trant and the former schoolteacher Jollifant encounter the Dinky-Doos - and the troupe's star performer, Susie Dean. As they traverse the England of the Great Depression, the troupe's constituents run the gamut of English society, comparable to the social observations expressed objectively in print by Priestley. Saville manages to convey a sense of the nation as it was in 1933, through a combination of nationally representative images, drama, comedy, and music, and capitalises “on the novel's complexity of plots and the centrality of its depiction of the changing landscape of England in the 1920s and 1930s”³¹⁴.

The Good Companions is at once an intensely English film, and a film in which people from diverse backgrounds come together to serve a common cause. It is film projection of an inclusive nation. Representatives of the industrial North, the educated East, and the bucolic West - each come to the Central and Southern hub of the land, to join and be joined in progress. The episodic first forty minutes presents the audience with a patchwork of a nation - images of different forms of economic, social and cultural activity that, as Charles Barr puts it, “are like compressed versions of three kinds of film that would already have been familiar to many

³¹² Lejeune, Anthony (Ed.). *The C. A. Lejeune Film Reader* (Manchester: Carcanet Press Ltd, 1991) p.87

³¹³ *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary (COED11)* [CD-ROM]

³¹⁴ Gale, Maggie Barbara. *J. B. Priestley* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008) p.134

audiences”³¹⁵ - the urban and rural documentaries of John Grierson at the Empire Marketing Board (EMB)³¹⁶ and iconographic fictions centred on upper class characters.³¹⁷

For the first forty minutes, the film offers episodic sequences of the lives of the individuals and the troupe presented at the outset - each offering a picture of England, each accounting for the manner in which they have left their circumstances and ended up in a new county, meeting on the road and convening in a café. Fade dissolve is deployed again, but occasionally - separating strands, transitioning between episodes - and without the voice-over establishing the film’s credentials at the beginning. The point at which all parties convene is prefaced by a repeat screening of the map of the county in which they meet, and determine to improve their lots collectively.

In the Midlands’ café, The Dinky Doos submit to a partnership with the three absconders from England’s regions, and a freelancer performer called Mitcham, and the group renames itself The Good Companions. Trant becomes financier and manager. Mitcham and Jollifant become fellow performers. Oakroyd serves the group as its handyman. This cross-section of people proceed, then, to build or rebuild a business - depending on their prior circumstances - and the film becomes “a fresh narrative of striving, obstacles and fulfilment”³¹⁸. Success is met, for example, with enmity and sabotage. A rival disrupts Dean’s benefit performance by planting hostiles in the audience - hecklers who provoke disorder, leading to the show being closed by the police. However, all ends well for two reasons. First, the cast and the audience rally together to restore the performance, despite the riot’s ruining of the stage. Second, an audience member

³¹⁵ Barr, Charles. ‘The Good Companions’, in McFarlane, Brian (Ed.). *The Cinema of Britain and Ireland* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005) pp.33-34

³¹⁶ Films including *Industrial Britain* (1933) and *O’er Hill and Dale* (1932)

³¹⁷ Features such as *Downhill* (1927)

³¹⁸ Barr, Charles. ‘The Good Companions’, in McFarlane, Brian (Ed.). *The Cinema of Britain and Ireland* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005) p.35

reveals himself as an impresario from London, and signs Dean and Jollifant to contracts. Dean's performance with the troupe transposes into Dean performing in London - for Dean is to be a star in the capital city, as Jollifant is to pursue a new career in music. Third, *The Good Companions* - minus Dean and Jollifant - find continued success in touring, and are shown in Bournemouth at the film's end, on stage and successful. Lastly, Oakroyd - long-since alienated from his wife and son - is seen boarding a liner for Canada. Oakroyd's daughter, married and living in Montreal, remains on good terms with him.

Despite praise for the use of English locations, Michael Balcon's treatment of *The Good Companions* failed, actually, to impress American critics. The production was criticised, in particular, for poor sound quality, slow pace, and various technical faults. In *The Sun*, a New York newspaper, in October 1933, John S Cohen Jnr stated, "One continuously wishes that the production had been smoother, that the continuity and plot lines had pursued a steadier course. What it needs, furthermore is 'visual flow' - begging your pardon for bringing up that old descriptive phrase which Hollywood proficiency has almost made it possible to throw into the discard. In other words, it doesn't steadily create an illusion from just these faults."³¹⁹ Balcon's principal saving grace, with respect to American critical reception, was the casting of Jessie Matthews, whom Mordaunt Hall among others regarded as "charming"³²⁰ in a disappointing adaptation that offered only "a rather fleeting conception of the book"³²¹.

In England, Jessie Matthews had already impressed on screen, prior to the release of *The Good Companions*. She was regarded by Lionel Collier, reviewing the Gainsborough Pictures comedy *There Goes the Bride* for *The Picturegoer*, as "a revelation" who "carries off the acting

³¹⁹ *The Sun* (New York (11 Oct 1933))

³²⁰ Hall, Mordaunt. 'The Good Companions (1933)' in *New York Times* (10 October 1933)

³²¹ *ibid*

honours on her very capable shoulders"³²². Reviews of Jessie Matthews' performance in *The Good Companions* emphasise her continued appeal. C A Lejeune's account in *The Observer*, for example, suggests the film is "a tremendous personal triumph"³²³ for Matthews. However, the attraction of *The Good Companions* for cinema audiences rested, also, on a narrative that addresses social and economic migration, and the leaving behind of an old, staid, regionalised England in favour of a new, dynamic, centralised land - a country bound less by the constraints of tradition, gender conventions and class immobility; a country enveloped anew in the appearance of opportunity, the value of performance, and an associated inauthenticity of existence. In this new mode of living, Jessie Matthews delivers a symbolic performance as Susie Dean, a coquettish performer who may be defined by an ability and a desire to play-act, to parody, to imitate, and ultimately to mock. For example, Dean dresses up in Jollifant's teaching cap and gown in one scene, caricaturing his intellectual pretensions. In another scene, Dean affects a cut-glass, upper class accent as she rejects Jollifant's proposal of marriage, affecting a parody of social or cultural elites. What is genuine about Dean is the desire for stardom, the ambition to escape the lacklustre life of a touring performer - allied to the dream of a new England, a land of new possibilities, characterised by a democratisation of culture, with a wider range of opportunities and modes of living, which might bring Dean the social mobility denied to her parents' generation.

The characterisation of Susie Dean in *The Good Companions* is paralleled, in fact, by Matthews' own life experience - related by Matthews herself and by the biographer Michael

³²² Collier, Lionel. 'On the Screens Now', in *The Picturegoer* (14 January 1933) p.19

³²³ Lejeune, C A. "'The Good Companions' Britain Sells British", in *The Observer* (26 February 1933) p.12

Thornton in separate accounts, both of which were published in 1974.³²⁴ Matthews was born into poverty in Soho, London - the seventh of eleven children fathered by a market trader. Matthews made her first professional stage appearance at age 10, in 1907, working in the chorus lines of London musicals and taking roles in low budget silent films. She achieved stardom in musical revues in the early 1920s, "earning an enviable reputation on the musical comedy stage of London previous to her elevation to film stardom"³²⁵.

Jessie Matthews' screen stardom following *The Good Companions* was founded primarily on audience appreciation of her singing and dancing.³²⁶ However, Matthews' appeal rested, also, on her ability to adapt to different film genres and acting styles. GBPC recruited Matthews, initially, to perform in 'straight' roles. Michael Balcon recalls, in fact, that although he and his contemporary producers were looking for good female singers and dancers, Matthews was not considered for roles requiring "a singing and dancing artiste"³²⁷. It was the success of *The Good Companions* that changed Matthews' status at GBPC, with Balcon realising then that she was better suited to musical performances than to straight acting parts - and, furthermore, that the company should "build stories around her"³²⁸.

Over time, Matthews' appeal to audiences was also based on her physical appearance and personal style. She endorsed beauty products - recommending, for example, Potter & Moore's Powder-Cream in numerous advertisements as "invaluable for keeping a nice complexion"³²⁹

³²⁴ Matthews' biographer, a journalist called Michael Thornton, published his biography of Matthews in 1974 (Thornton, Michael. *Jessie Matthews: A Biography* (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1974) - the same year that Matthews published her autobiography. (Matthews, Jessie. *Over My Shoulder: an Autobiography by Jessie Matthews* (W H Allen, 1974)

³²⁵ 'British Star of Evergreen is Film Find', in *Torrance Herald* (21 February 1935) p.4

³²⁶ See Jeffrey Richards and Dorothy Sheridan on contemporary audience research - including reception of Jessie Matthews' films (Richards, Jeffrey; Sheridan, Dorothy (Eds.) *Mass-Observation at the Movies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987) p.107

³²⁷ Balcon, Michael. Essay on Jessie Matthews (26 February 1937), in Aileen and Michael Balcon Special Collection

³²⁸ *ibid*

³²⁹ 'Jessie Matthews' Beauty Secret', in *Film Pictorial* (21 April 1934) p.25

when she had been engaged in "long days and long nights rehearsing"³³⁰. Her appearance and performances, and the aesthetics of her films, became more refined from *Evergreen* onwards. *The Good Companions* was an expensive film, at £32,406.³³¹ As director of productions at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, Balcon oversaw substantial investment in the star characterisation and visual cues first adopted for Matthews in the film, for the role of Susie Dean - reprising with each subsequent feature the escapism that Dean represents. In a sense, *The Good Companions* engenders the Matthews star vehicles that follow it, by creating a star of Jessie Matthews as her character Susie Dean becomes a star in the film's narrative. Dean is propelled to stardom, at the film's climax, as she sings of happiness and success - propelling Matthews towards success and a star persona built around personal happiness in a new projection of an England of individuality and enterprise. This interpretation may seem distinct from Charles Barr's observation that *The Good Companions* represents the achievement of success and happiness as "reward for the individual's commitment to the communal enterprise of the Companions"³³² - which is represented, in the film, by a montage of personal and shared resolutions that ends with Oakroyd's departure for Canada to be reunited with his daughter. However, both Barr's appreciation of the film's communal, consensual values, and the understanding that the film embodies the ethics of success through individualism, are compatible with the film's representation of an England in cultural transition - as both consensus and singularity may be appreciated through the migration, endeavours and achievements of the protagonists and supporting characters on screen.

³³⁰ 'An Inspiration says Jessie Matthews', in *Film Pictorial* (30 September 1933) p.40

³³¹ Particulars of British Films Acquired by Renters during Quota Year 1923-33. The National Archives, File BT 64/97

³³² Barr, Charles. 'Desperate Yearnings: Victor Saville and Gainsborough', in Cook, Pam (Ed.). *Gainsborough Pictures* (London: Cassell, 1997) p.58

The production of *The Good Companions* is illustrative of the efforts undertaken to transform source material into film product. The first significant decision, the choice of story, was taken by Michael Balcon and the executives at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation. It was, then, the responsibility of Balcon and the board at GBPC to choose a director. Having been placed to direct a screen adaptation of *The Good Companions*, Victor Saville's first task was preparation - a process that, according to Saville, entails deliberations on the kind of adaptation the film should be, followed by "discussions and the actual drafting of the first treatment"³³³ in collaboration with the scenario writer. Saville regarded his scenario writer for the production of *The Good Companions*, W P Lipscomb, as amongst the best available to him.³³⁴ An actor turned writer, W P Lipscomb had worked for Basil Dean in the early thirties³³⁵ - but, more importantly, Lipscomb was one of a number of established dramatists and composers recruited by Michael Balcon in the 1930s, alongside key film industry staff including Sidney Gilliat and Robert Stevenson, working under Angus MacPhail's supervision in GBPC's scenario department. A point of interest that may be raised here is the degree to which Balcon seems to have allowed senior staff such as MacPhail to act without question or interference - and what the implications may have been with respect to the production of films such as *The Good Companions*. Ivor Montagu recalls, when working with MacPhail at story conferences for Hitchcock's films, that Balcon did not ever interfere at that stage. Balcon "simply created the conditions and confidence"³³⁶ that enabled the writers to do their job. If Montagu's recollection applies to Balcon's management of production generally, and if it refers to the production of *The Good*

³³³ Saville, Victor. 'Making a Film', in *The Picturegoer's Who's Who and Encyclopaedia of the Screen To-day* (London: Odhams Press Limited, 1933) p.495

³³⁴ *ibid*

³³⁵ For example, on *The Sign of Four* (1932) and *Loyalties* (1933)

³³⁶ Montagu, Ivor. 'Working with Hitchcock', in *Sight & Sound* (Summer 1980) p.192

Companions, then one may question the extent to which Balcon was actively involved in production after choosing a director, if the director and other production staff were delegated with responsibility for the execution of their roles and the completion of production - and what the implications of delegation were with respect to faithfulness of adaptation or other aspects of the filmed storyline. Could one credit Balcon with a significant measure of 'agency' - as ultimate authority on set, as arbiter of action in production - if Balcon's staff emerge as the key decision makers in the production process?

Victor Saville's account of the production of *The Good Companions* suggests that Balcon's active participation in production did not extend much beyond choosing the director and arranging and allocating finance. Arbitrage from thence onwards - essentially, before pre-production was completed and certainly before studio or location work began - seemed to have rested with the director. Once the director had determined the general approach to the source material, the studio executives could set a budget for the production. The preparation process affected budgetary considerations, insomuch as the director and the production staff then calculated the film stock required for the film. *The Good Companions* was a complicated production in this regard; the film comprised three subsidiary stories in one feature, meaning the director and his team had to work out "what percentage of total footage each individual story should take and at what point in the film all parties concerned should be brought together."³³⁷

Preparation for *The Good Companions* took nine weeks by which time enough material had been prepared by the scenario department for actual production to begin.³³⁸ Casting lasted four weeks - during which time, and for which purpose, Saville "shot some 30,000 feet of

³³⁷ Saville, Victor. 'Making a Film', in *The Picturegoer's Who's Who and Encyclopaedia of the Screen To-day* (London: Odhams Press Limited, 1933) p.495

³³⁸ *ibid* p.496

negative on artists' tests alone"³³⁹ at a cost of around £2,000. With casting completed, Saville managed the planning of "48 major sets, including a railway station and a theatre"³⁴⁰, in consultation with the art director and the cameraman. Detailed discussions of each set were followed by set design, according to Saville's requirements, with the designs being "photographed for distribution to all departments"³⁴¹, once approved.

Set design was followed by exteriors, the choosing of locations. Saville was concerned that the exteriors chosen for *The Good Companions* should evoke, as accurately as possible, the source text. At this point, it is clear that responsibility for faithfulness to the original adaptation had been assumed by the director - even if the producer's concerns on this matter had been clear when negotiating for the rights to film the story. On the subject of exteriors, Saville writes, "These had to be truly representative of the various parts indicated by Mr. Priestley in his book, and had to cover a good area, so my location man was instructed to go out by road with a camera and choose the different locations according to the sun at that time of year (to ensure the right light for good photography) and also for the picturesqueness and correctness of the various places."³⁴²

Michael Balcon's own recollection of the production of *The Good Companions* would support the perception that he preferred and was prepared to delegate responsibility for production decisions after initial conception, commissioning, and contractual arrangements were completed. In his autobiography, Balcon writes of selecting Priestley's book as subject for adaptation and of casting Jessie Matthews, John Gielgud and Henry Ainley (though Ainley, well-

³³⁹ *ibid*

³⁴⁰ *ibid*

³⁴¹ *ibid*

³⁴² *ibid*

known in theatrical circles for his alcoholism, was dropped from the production and replaced by Edmund Gwenn).³⁴³ There is nothing in Balcon's autobiography to contradict Saville's recollection that - with script, cast, scenes and exteriors decided upon - it remained for the director to manage the production as well as direct the film. This delegated management detail included, for example, working with his designer on dresses, and on a dress chart for every scene, and employing a composer to prepare songs and routines in collaboration with Saville and his lyric writer for the film - Douglas Furber was lyric writer for *The Good Companions*; Saville's composer of choice, for the film, was George Posford. Saville's recollection corresponds with Balcon's. Saville recalls, "With all the main information and detail decided upon, the script, designs, dresses, scenes, fixed locations, etc., were handed down to the various departments for them to begin on the detail [sic] work of building, making and arranging", and the film went into production. Saville's task, then, was to execute "the translation on to the screen of the story"³⁴⁴ as planned, with dialogue being finalised as the production progresses, in rehearsals before shooting.

3.6 *Evergreen*

Balcon's key decision following the success of *The Good Companions* was to find a vehicle to capitalise on Jessie Matthews' talent for musical performance and her steadily increasing star status - "to give full play to her singing and dancing and to star her in a large-scale musical"³⁴⁵.

³⁴³ Balcon, Michael. *Michael Balcon Presents...A Lifetime of Films* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1969) p.65

³⁴⁴ Saville, Victor. 'Making a Film', in *The Picturegoer's Who's Who and Encyclopaedia of the Screen To-day* (London: Odhams Press Limited, 1933) p.496

³⁴⁵ Balcon, Michael. *Michael Balcon Presents...A Lifetime of Films* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1969) p.86

In choosing *Evergreen* to follow *The Good Companions*, Balcon committed Matthews again to a film that looks to the past and to the future. However, unlike *The Good Companions*, which symbolises a nation in transition, *Evergreen* represents the tradition of music hall and the avant-garde of Art Deco.

The cultural influences of music hall extended beyond its interwar decline into literature, theatre, and cinema. In the 1920s and 1930s, the music hall was evoked in films, plays, and books. The 1930 stage musical *Ever Green*, for example - the source text for Michael Balcon's 1934 production of *Evergreen* - takes its cue from the life of the music hall performer Marie Lloyd.³⁴⁶ The theatrical production of *Ever Green* debuted at the Royal Adelphi Theatre on 3 December 1930 - the first production performed at the Royal Adelphi Theatre following its renovation. It was Jessie Matthews' fourth stage success with her husband Sonnie Hale - who would eventually direct his wife for the first time for the screen in *Head Over Heels* (1937), shortly after Balcon's resignation from GBPC, to lukewarm reception.³⁴⁷ *Ever Green* was noted for its lavish production values - incorporating a rotating stage and a set designed as an upside-down ceiling, complete with chandelier, both of which were novelties to London theatre audiences. On stage, Matthews played a young woman who seeks to further her career as a music hall performer by employing the ruse of claiming to be a 60-year-old woman whose youthful appearance is the result of cosmetology. The ruse fails, and she admits to the deception. Nevertheless, she wins the love of her leading man and the admiration of the music hall

³⁴⁶ Marie Lloyd's career and personal life are addressed, if without serious analysis either of her celebrity status and cultural significance, in *Marie Lloyd: the One and Only* (Gillies, Midge. *Marie Lloyd: the One and Only* (London: Gollancz, 2001)

³⁴⁷ Lionel Collier's review of *Head Over Heels* for *The Picturegoer* is critical of the film's "distinctly synthetic" atmosphere, and because "rather more broad humour was not introduced to bolster up the plot which is not remarkably strong" (Collier, Lionel. 'Reviews', in *The Picturegoer* (13 March 1937) p.32)

audiences. She and the cast performed five compositions on stage - in the last of three musicals penned by Rodgers and Hart in London.³⁴⁸

Balcon's film is a music hall revue - but one with a connecting narrative. It features 15 songs³⁴⁹ in a storyline altered from the stage production on which it is based. In Balcon's film, Matthews plays a popular Edwardian music hall performer called Harriet Green. There is a scandalous detail in Green's life, however, in the form of a daughter born out of wedlock. To avert public disgrace, Green retires from her musical career and settles in South Africa, where she raises her daughter peaceably.

Matthews also plays Green's daughter, Harriet Hawkes, who returns to London some years on from her mother's retirement, with ambitions to succeed in show business. She meets Tommy Thompson, a publicity man who sees in Hawkes a strong resemblance to Green. Thompson convinces a theatre producer to cast Harriet Hawkes in a revue - but under the pretence that she is the original Harriet Green, inexplicably untouched by ageing. The ruse succeeds, so well that audiences believe Harriet Hawkes really is a well-preserved Harriet Green, and that Tommy Thompson is her son. Hawkes is offered engagements not only domestically, but also in France and Spain. The problem with the success of the deception is that Hawkes and Thompson have fallen in love, and so it would appear to the deceived public that mother and son have an incestuous relationship. Eventually, however, Hawkes admits to the ruse - but she is forgiven by her public and marries Thompson.

³⁴⁸ The stage musical *Ever Green* featured: *Dear, Dear*; *No Place but Home*; *In the Cool of the Evening*; *Dancing on the Ceiling*; and *If I Give in to You*

³⁴⁹ The film musical *Evergreen* includes: *Harlemania*; *Doing a Little Clog Dance*; *Dear, Dear*; *Nobody Looks at the Man*; *Waiting for the Leaves to Fall*; *No Place but Home*; *The Lion King*; *Quand Notre Vieux Monde Etait Tout Neuf*; *La Femme a Toujours Vingt Ans!*; *The Colour of Her Eyes*; *In the Cool of the Evening*; *Dancing on the Ceiling*; *Je M'en Fiche du Sex Appeal!*; *Hot Blues*; and *If I Give in to You*

Evergreen is, as Jeffrey Richards observes, the first of Matthews' films to have been "specifically tailored for her, highlighting her singing, dancing and comedy talents and projecting her as a brisk, resourceful, thoroughly modern miss"³⁵⁰. *Evergreen* is also the first of Matthews' films to have been made with "all the gloss, polish and sophistication of their American counterparts"³⁵¹, in order to obtain significant revenues from the United States of America. *Evergreen* was one of 14 GBPC productions planned for simultaneous presentation in New York as well as in London, at the Radio City Music Hall and Roxy Theatre, during the 1934-35 season.³⁵² Andrew Higson's comparative assessment of *Evergreen* and *Sing As We Go* (1934) describes how the Balcon production incorporates American cinematic conventions to appeal to the American market.³⁵³

In the USA, in the late 1920s and the early 1930s, Art Deco aesthetics permeated film melodrama and film musical. Associations between Art Deco iconography and the musical film are particularly strong, with fixations on the female form, elaborate costuming and various forms of dance common to both.³⁵⁴ Part of *Evergreen*'s appeal to American audiences was the utilisation by the film's art director, Alfred Junge, of Art Deco mises en scène, and of modernist aesthetics. All of which, arguably, interwar American audiences could associate as easily with their nation's successful adoption of European cultural attributes as with economic, industrial and commercial expansiveness. As conveyed to Maurice Ostrer in 1935, from 1932 onwards Junge had sought to "build up an Art Department which would at least equal the American

³⁵⁰ Richards, Jeffrey. *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain, 1930-1939* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984) p.215

³⁵¹ *ibid*

³⁵² 'U.S. Distribution Plans Completed', in *Kinematograph Weekly* (13 September 1934) p.5

³⁵³ Higson, Andrew. *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995)

³⁵⁴ Connections between interwar musical films and Art Deco aesthetics are explored in Fischer, Lucy. *Designing Women: Cinema, Art Deco, and the Female Form* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) pp.123-150

standard and which would be conducted on a sound economical basis”³⁵⁵. Moreover, Junge had been concerned not merely with aesthetics, but also with reducing the costs of sets and so with maintaining adequate storage space to ensure that sets were not broken up at the end of a project, but could be used for a number of films.

One can see how such modernist opulence would have borne an international appeal; *Evergreen* is a fantasy that could and did attract audiences bound both by consumerist aspirations and post-1929 fiscal stringency. Jessie Matthews’ performances in the film are situated in and highlighted by Art Deco sensibilities, with modernist environments and ostentatious dress - perhaps most notably in the white-room set for the performance of *Dancing on the Ceiling*.

Alfred Junge was one of several talented European émigrés to have influenced the aesthetics of British film design during the 1930s.³⁵⁶ Jessie Matthews’ svelte figure and gracious dancing style complimented Junge’s penchant for set design that represented a convergence of urbane, feminine movements and modernist, technological milieus. As Sarah Street observes, Matthews is dressed in *Evergreen* to support an alliance of a modernist aesthetic and a “proclivity for curvaceous, free-flowing female expression”³⁵⁷. A further consideration - with respect to the stylistic gestures that enhanced *Evergreen*’s appeal to American audiences - is a robotic, Art Deco-style dance sequence that echoes well the avant-garde, frenzied simultaneity and rapid juxtapositions performed in Fernand Léger’s avant-garde film *Ballet mécanique* - the intended soundtrack for which was described by its composer, George Antheil, as a

³⁵⁵ Letter from Alfred Junge to Maurice Ostrer (15 May 1935) in Alfred Junge Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre, University of Texas, Austin File 1; Junge Correspondence and Notes.

³⁵⁶ Alfred Junge’s contemporaries in film design included Oscar Werndorff, Vincent Korda, Erno Metzner, Andre Andrejew and Lazare Meerson

³⁵⁷ Street, Sarah. ‘Extending Frames and Exploring Spaces: Alfred Junge, Set Design and Genre in British Cinema’, in Bergfelder, Tim; Cargnelli, Christian (Eds.). *Destination London: German-Speaking Emigrés and British Cinema, 1925-1950* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008) p.105

representation of “the rhythm of machinery, presented as beautifully as any artist knows how”³⁵⁸. The soundtrack to *Ballet mécanique* - or *Ballet for Mechanical Percussion Instruments* - which was not, in fact, released with Léger’s film, due to synchronisation difficulties, was an impractical work for an orchestra of three xylophones, four bass drums, two pianists, a tam-tam, a set of electric bells, a siren, and three airplane propellers, as well as 16 synchronised player pianos.³⁵⁹ Moreover, the composer and producer, Antheil and Léger, did not work together - and the musical composition turned out to be twice as long as the film production.³⁶⁰ The soundtrack was performed in Paris in 1926 and in New York in 1927;³⁶¹ in fact, the score’s première in Paris (without the film) was performed in the same week that the film debuted première (without the music) in Vienna.³⁶² However, although it is feasible that the avant-garde dance of Léger’s film influenced, directly or indirectly, the choice of dance for at least one particular sequence in *Evergreen*, the association may not be taken too far. *Ballet mécanique* is an abstract production in which disconnected objects and scenes, loops and optical effects create an approximation of a Dadaist fantasy.³⁶³ The political overtones, and the rejection of war and of dominant culture that defined the Dada artists in the 1910s and 1920s, do not figure in *Evergreen* or any other film featuring Matthews.³⁶⁴ *Evergreen*, despite its avant-garde symbolism, is a film designed to appeal to the centre, the mainstream, and to an aesthetic of craft and chic.

³⁵⁸ Oja, Carol J. *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) p.64

³⁵⁹ Lehrman, Paul D; Singer, Eric. ‘Doing Good by the “Bad Boy”’: Performing George Antheil’s *Ballet mécanique* with Robots’ (Paper presented at the 121st Convention of the Audio Engineering Society, 5-8 October 2006) p.2

³⁶⁰ Whitesitt, Linda. *The Life and Music of George Antheil, 1900-1959* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983) p.106

³⁶¹ Hill, Brad. *Classical* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2005) p.16

³⁶² Peress, Maurice. Programme Notes to *George Antheil’s Ballet* CD 01612-67094-2 (1992) p.16

³⁶³ Many consider, like Thomas Elsaesser, that Léger’s film is more than an approximation - that “*Ballet mécanique* is 100% Dada” (Elsaesser, Thomas. ‘Dada/Cinema?’, in Kuenzl, Rudolf E (Ed.). *Dada and Surrealist Film* (New York: Willis Locker & Owens, 1987) p.14)

³⁶⁴ As Neil Coombs explains, the Dada artists rejected craft skills and middle class values in favour of radical political ideas. (Coombs, Neil. *Studying Surrealist and Fantasy Cinema* (Leighton Buzzard: Auteur Publishing, 2008) p.15)

With *Evergreen*'s modernist stylistic cues, intended to appeal to audiences outside the United Kingdom as much as at home, the distinct transatlantic tone of the production offers a substantial departure from the picaresque Englishness of *The Good Companions*. Both *The Good Companions* and *Evergreen* were commercially popular films - but the success of each was due to different approaches. *The Good Companions* represents the indigenous popular traditions associated with musical performance to make a product aimed primarily at the domestic market. *Evergreen* simulates American production values to infiltrate foreign markets - in particular, to challenge American products in America. *Evergreen* was produced to compete directly with Hollywood. *The Good Companions* offered a vicarious experience of a virtuous community. Furthermore, with *The Good Companions*, Michael Balcon also traded on the cultural status of J B Priestley - whereas, with *Evergreen*, Balcon sought to sell against the achievement of the high professional and technical standards of American cinema. The film is, indeed, a relatively lavish, ostentatious production.

Evergreen was widely distributed in America, and was regarded well, with The Educational Screen's judging panel describing it as a "delightful" film, and as "deft, intelligent fun"³⁶⁵ - but it did not generate the revenues Balcon was aiming to achieve. Balcon placed himself and GBPC at a distinct strategic disadvantage, by default. For Balcon's strategy of achieving international distribution to succeed, his productions required stars recognisable to audiences abroad. However, although *The Good Companions* created a star of Matthews, and so created a domestic selling point for future GBPC productions, *Evergreen* failed to offer star value to American audiences, as neither Jessie Matthews nor any of the rest of the cast were known to Americans. The year following *Evergreen*'s production and exhibition, Balcon acknowledged

³⁶⁵ 'The Film Estimates', in *The Educational Screen* (May 1935) p.129

that the lack of *Evergreen* international star quality had limited the film's international appeal, writing, "It is obvious to us that *Evergreen*, although a great professional success with fine notices, failed to do the business expected of it owing to the lack of known star value."³⁶⁶

Evergreen was the first of six films featuring Jessie Matthews, which were made to appeal primarily to American audiences by matching American production values and commercial appeal.³⁶⁷ The first three of these films were directed by Victor Saville, and the last three by Sonnie Hale. Each of the six were, thematically, inspired by a vogue for the Art Deco design style, comprising "hymns of praise to elegance, luxury, glitter and glamour"³⁶⁸ - comprising, in a broader sense, paeans to the aesthetic modernism - the expression of industrial development through artistic movement and artefacts, and the rejection of 'traditional' forms of art, economy, industry, and societal and political structures - represented in the works of contemporary artists such as Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse,³⁶⁹ and the dramatist Berthold Brecht.³⁷⁰ In this regard, the contribution of the émigré set designer Alfred Junge was critical to the realisation, in Matthews' musicals, of a cinematographic visual style associated with modernity and contemporary design trends. Junge exerted considerable influence over the production process at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, as studio-based design had become key to prevalent modes of production, both in Europe and in America, by the 1930s - and had become associated with lavish productions, and craftsmanship, with artisanal approaches to the creation of filmic space. Furthermore, good designers such as Junge were engaged in

³⁶⁶ Letter to Arthur Lee (28 June 1935), in Aileen and Michael Balcon Special Collection, File C/48

³⁶⁷ *Evergreen* (1934); *It's Love Again* (1936); *Gangway* (1937); *Head Over Heels* (1937); *Sailing Along* (1938); and *Climbing High* (1938)

³⁶⁸ Everson, William K. 'Jessie Matthews', in *Films in Review* 26 No.10 (December 1975) p.581

³⁶⁹ Picasso and Matisse fostered a rejection of traditional perspective as a means of structuring paintings

³⁷⁰ Aside from his plays and poems, Brecht was an influential scenario writer for German film productions including the slapstick *Mysteries of a Barbershop* (1923) and scriptwriter for films including the semi-documentary *Kuhle Wampe* (1932)

multiple functions and diverse work environments, entailing an extension of influence across studio facilities, and throughout production processes. Set design had been a task-driven role, until the 1920s, with carpenters and painters and other craftsmen providing a director with scenery and sets - but, by the 1930s, the role of the set designer had become a position requiring expertise and managerial skills, as the stylistic development of films, and changes in the structure of film production companies, required more streamlined modes of operation and greater creative contribution from design personnel.³⁷¹

Émigré cinematographers and art directors such as Günther Krampf and Oscar Werndorff influenced the British industry in terms of technique, style and studio organisation in the 1930s. However, Junge contributed, particularly, to the improvement in working conditions for art directors during the decade - with Denham and Pinewood studios building dedicated design spaces into their facilities following Alfred Junge's work at Gainsborough Pictures' Islington facilities and at the GBPC Lime Grove Studios in Shepherd's Bush, London. Junge worked on more British films than any other designer during this period, surpassing the productivity of contemporary designers such as Alexander Vetchinsky, Vincent Korda, and Ernő Metzner.

Junge's contribution to films pushed the boundaries of studio organisation, integrating the concept of set design with the practice of cinematography, through the use of preparatory drawings to ensure cinematographic continuity - enabling the production of films that were "designed and composed"³⁷² and offering the cinematographer a prepared context to work with.

³⁷¹ For comparisons of working practices and methods in mainland Europe, with reference to set design, see Bock, Hans-Michael. 'Berliner Ateliers', in Berg-Ganschow, Uta; Jacobsen, Wolfgang (Eds.). *Film...Stadt...Kino...Berlin* (Berlin: Argon, 1987) pp.177-202. For contextual assessment of the transformation of British set design in the 1930s, see Carrick, Edward. *Designing for Moving Pictures* (London/New York: The Studio Publications, 1941) and Carrick, Edward. *Art and Design in the British Film: A Pictorial Directory of British Art Directors and their Work* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1948)

³⁷² Manvell, Roger. 'Introduction', in Carrick, Edward. *Art and Design in the British Film: a Pictorial Directory of British Art Directors and their Work* (London: Dennis Dobson Limited, 1948) p.10

Junge continued to introduce innovative techniques to Britain throughout the 1930s - including the use of scaffolding and cranes to enable camera and set mobility.³⁷³

The Jessie Matthews musicals, from *Evergreen* onwards, were not only star vehicles for Matthews. They were also opportunities for Junge to design sets that framed Matthews' performances in modern contexts.³⁷⁴ In *Evergreen*, for example, a sequence in which Matthews' character must share a house with her manager, who is pretending to be her son, was an opportunity for Junge to introduce Art Deco aesthetics. The house, which has been bought by the 'son', is an Art Deco affair, the full geography of which is revealed before a dance by Matthews. The camera explores its Art Deco interior, as the pair chase through the house, at all times in different spaces. The audience sees that the house is built on two levels, and with two staircases of different designs. Once together, a long-shot reveals an immense, minimalist living room. During the end-of-sequence dance, Matthews moves through the various spaces of the house, which comprises a mixture of curved and vertical structures, and Deco furniture and fittings. Sat at a piano, Matthews's diaphanous, elegant dress offers an example of Deco style - in the sense of the representation of a voluptuous, free-flowing female mien. The representation is continued as Matthews conducts a balletic dance, a series of smooth movements, of glides that may be seen as typically Deco. It becomes apparent that the designer Junge and the director Saville have constructed a scene that 'frames' the audience within a modernist fantasy. However, the fantasy is not one that is necessarily technological. The fantasy is primarily visual and sensual, and

³⁷³ Bergfelder, Tim. 'The Production Designer and the Gesamtkunstwerk: German Film Technicians in the British Film Industry of the 1930s', in Higson, Andrew (Ed.). *Dissolving Views: Key Writings in British Cinema* (London: Cassell, 1996) p.25

³⁷⁴ Alfred Junge had previously worked with Jessie Matthews on *The Good Companions* - for which, for example, he designed the village theatre set, complete with a modest arch, unclean windows and worn noticeboards

indulgent of shape and structure. The same emphasis on form is embodied in a statue on set, on a balcony.

The minimalist design lends itself towards an emphasis of space. The dance, the free-flowing figure movement through this space, suggests an extension of the structure and the performance beyond the frame of the filmed set - an 'openness' suggested, in Matthews' dance, by her extension of arms and legs 'outwards', to the possibility of a world beyond, perhaps of escape from the present to a modernist future.

3.7 *First a Girl*

First a Girl continues the inclusion of modernist styles in films featuring Jessie Matthews, notably in the sequence set in the Casino de Folies. Although Junge did not work on *First a Girl*, Modernist aesthetics are referenced in the film's presentation of Matthews as a representative of modern femininity akin to that seen in German cinema of the early 1930s. In this regard, Matthews's performances on screen may be associated with Art Deco's European heritage - and thence, also, with Balcon's internationalist ambitions for Matthews' films. Like *Evergreen*, *First a Girl* potentially addresses European cinemagoers and American cinephiles alike with its Art Deco emphases. And yet, like *Evergreen*, *First a Girl* bears a distinct domestic resonance, an appeal to British audiences, in Matthews' unchanging screen persona. Whether Harriet in *Evergreen*, or Elizabeth in *First a Girl* - or, indeed, Susie in *The Good Companions* - Matthews's voice and manners are distinctly English. *First a Girl* is, indeed, a clear example of Matthews playing an English character against a European and American vogue. However, the European artistry and American pretensions of Matthews's films could not promote these productions sufficiently from domestic successes to international hits.

There is no word from Balcon on the possibility that mainstream American audiences might not actually respond to the film's adherence to modernist aesthetics. Rather, he persisted with a perception of Matthews' screen performance and box office potential as a key component of GBPC's attempt to achieve significant distribution, exhibition and revenues abroad - deciding that Matthews' profile in America, and the potential for her films to make money, would be improved "if she is allowed to make one picture in America"³⁷⁵. Quite what reasoning underpins this conclusion is unclear. However, Balcon does persist with Matthews, and there are elements of *Evergreen* - not including Art Deco style - repeated in subsequent features. For example, in both *Evergreen* and in *First a Girl*, a masquerade is central to narrative progress. In *Evergreen*, Matthews plays a mother to the man with whom she falls in love. In *First a Girl*, Matthews masks her gender, acting the role of a woman acting the part of a man acting as a woman.

Initially, *First a Girl* is an English comedy. Matthews plays Elizabeth, a seamstress at a fashion house who harbours a desire to be in show business. Her chance comes when she meets Victor, a female impersonator who aspires to Shakespearean acting. As Elizabeth shelters from a rainstorm in Victor's room, Victor discovers that he has lost his voice, and cannot perform that evening. He persuades Elizabeth to play his part for him. Elisabeth agrees, and takes to the stage in Victor's stead, as 'Victoria', becoming hence a woman impersonating a man impersonating a woman. She removes a blonde wig at the end of her performance, revealing her short-cropped dark hair to her audience - who believe, consequently, that there she really is a man. Elizabeth's performance is so well-received that she is awarded a tour of Europe - and she and Victor perform together throughout the continent. The act is popular, with no-one suspecting that Elisabeth might not be a man. However, the deceit is uncovered after Victor and Elisabeth

³⁷⁵ Letter to Arthur Lee (28 June 1935), in Aileen and Michael Balcon Special Collection, File C/48

become friends with a couple, a princess and her fiancé, and the princess begins to suspect that Victor's partner is actually female. In time, her true gender is revealed. The farce is ended.

Elizabeth hands over her tour to Victor.

Throughout the film, the narrative is interspersed with extravagant musical performances, showcasing Matthews' capabilities and beauty. Furthermore, the farce has been accentuated at points by knowingly unconvincing routines involving Matthews' attempting male behavioural traits - such as a drinking and smoking session involving Matthews drinking whisky and brandy and smoking cigars, indulging in 'man talk' with the princess' fiancé and becoming inebriated.

That the substance of the farce is based on transgression of masculine and feminine identities positions the narrative and Matthews' Englishness against establishment, and so aligned with modernist art aesthetics such as the Art Deco predilection for "openness and general optimism about the post-First World War world"³⁷⁶ - which was expressed in itself through consumerism and fashion. *First a Girl* achieves such expression through the narrative device of a clothing industry worker showcasing fashionable clothes on stage, whilst maintaining an androgynous appearance akin to that of 1920s Art Deco artistes such as Greta Garbo - a sophisticated European actor of androgynous, modernist style, who achieved success in American cinema. The film's sophistication, relative to contemporary English musical comedies such as *Chu Chin Chow* (1934) and *Jack's the Boy*, owes much to cultural developments in continental Europe, also. *First a Girl* is set in Paris and Vienna - both centres of interwar cultural elitism over the half century before the film was made. Art Nouveau and the eclectic dances of

³⁷⁶ Street, Sarah. "Got to Dance my Way to Heaven": Jessie Matthews, art deco and the British musical of the 1930s', in *Studies in European Cinema* Vol.2 No.1 (2005) p.22

the Folies Bergère emerged during the Parisian Belle Époque of 1871 to 1914,³⁷⁷ whereas Vienna became a centre of new forms of artistic expression - ranging from Schoenberg's conceptual music for the Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen to the dance styles of internationally-respected institutions such as the Hellerau-Laxenburg School - following the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.³⁷⁸

Furthermore, the plot's relative refinement and audience appeal owes much to clever adaptation of continental European source material, *First a Girl* is a remake of *Viktor und Viktoria* (1933). Arguably, what the screenwriter for *First a Girl*, Marjorie Gaffney, did well was to remove the characters and the dialogue of the original to suit the star and supporting players of the remake. For example, in producing the remake for the English public, the derivatives had to go. In *Viktor und Viktoria*, much of the dialogue between the protagonists, played by Hermann Thimig and Renate Muller, comprises rhyming couplets set to music. This operatic device is viable in the German original because, frankly, Thimig is an outrageous ham. Playing against Jessie Matthews, Connie Hale is much more restrained in *First a Girl*, and so the comic effect of the rhyming couplets would be much reduced. Gaffney does well, also, to retain the comic devices and sequences in the original that would translate best into the English remake. The best example of this is the dressing room scene, copied almost exactly from the original - including minutiae such as the trainer removing his hairpiece and the strongman pursing his lips as the scene cuts to a clown playing a tuba.

³⁷⁷ See McAuliffe, Mary. *Dawn of the Belle Epoque: The Paris of Monet, Zola, Bernhardt, Eiffel, Debussy, Clemenceau, and Their Friends* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2011); and Wires, Richard. 'Paris: La Belle Époque', in *Conspectus of History* 1.4 (1977) pp.60–72

³⁷⁸ See Holmes, Deborah; Silverman, Lisa (Eds.). *Interwar Vienna: Culture Between Tradition and Modernity* (Rochester, Woodbridge: Camden House, 2009)

The plot of *First a Girl* is, otherwise, broadly similar in outline but considerably differing in detail from *Viktor und Viktoria*. Whilst both films offer a montage showing success after success on tour, scenes from the original such as the barbershop visit have been dropped in favour of episodes that audiences with English sensibilities might find more comedic. Furthermore, the choreographer Ralph Reader did not attempt to replicate the dance sequences of the German original, but enabled Matthews to showcase her superior skills in song and dance to the score written specifically for the remake - and to suit the relatively limited space available at Shepherd's Bush. One notes, also, that Victor Saville directs the camera with less fluidity than Reinhold Schunzel directed *Viktor und Viktoria* - and this was regarded as the poorest of the three 'Art Deco' musicals directed by Saville and starring Matthews. Saville was regarded to have returned to form with *It's Love Again*. This viewpoint was expressed best, perhaps, in December 1972, when Cyril B Rollins and Robert J Wareing contributed the following text to a monograph published to mark a National Film Theatre retrospective of Saville's films:

"*First a Girl* did well at the box-office, because of the singing and dancing of Miss Matthews, but the useful songs and clever dance routines could not hide the fact that the story was trite, unconvincing and, worse still, in poor taste. However, Saville recovered his laurels with *It's Love Again*."³⁷⁹

3.8 *It's Love Again*

Despite being well-received in the USA, *It's Love Again* marked the end of Michael Balcon's attempt to gain American market share for GBPC pictures. Its production was

³⁷⁹ Rollins, Cyril B; Wareing, Robert J. 'Victor Saville', in *Victor Saville: National Film Archive* (London: BFI, 1972) p.6

undertaken as economic circumstances were deteriorating in Britain, and in the British film industry. The Gaumont-British Picture Corporation came under severe financial pressure as financial institutions withdrew from investment commitments - and, moreover, Michael Balcon's productions had not returned the profits required to sustain an internationalist strategy based on competition with American productions in the USA. For Balcon's strategy to be successful, GBPC's films needed both star value and high production values - and, hence, sizeable budgets. They needed, also, an effective distribution network in the USA. However, GBPC's New York-based distribution agency could not compete with the vertically-integrated major production enterprises in Hollywood.³⁸⁰

There was an attempt to introduce American star value with *It's Love Again* - in the form of Robert Young, a contract player loaned from MGM to GBPC for two pictures, the first of which was *Secret Agent*. In *It's Love Again*, Young plays a newspaper journalist called Peter - for whom disgraced journalist Freddie, played by Sonnie Hale, is ghost-writing articles. Freddie and Peter need an 'angle', to gain a competitive advantage over a rival newspaper. They decide to invent a celebrity - a Mrs Smythe-Smythe, the highly talented consort of the similarly fictitious Maharajah of Myrashar. The plan becomes complicated when an aspiring singer and dancer called Elaine, played by Jessie Matthews, decides to adopt the persona of Mrs Smythe-Smythe in order to further her career. Peter acquiesces to the deception, however, because it is mutually beneficial, and also because Peter and Elaine are becoming increasingly attracted to each other.

³⁸⁰ For performance data on GBPC films in the USA, see Sedgwick, John. 'Michael Balcon's Close Encounter with the American Market, 1934-1936', in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* Vol.36 No.3 (1996) pp.333-48; and Sedgwick, John. *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain: A Choice of Pleasures* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000) pp.211-29

There are plenty of songs and dances, created as before to appeal to American tastes, and Matthews is imaginatively dressed throughout - though the sequences are somewhat imbalanced. For example, a number at a party with an 'Indian' theme includes Matthews in exotic costume, performing an approximation of an ethnic dance, accompanied by Indian musicians - but the ethnic dance and music mutates into swing orchestration and conventional tap dance. In another sequence, Peter and Freddie arrange for a local impresario called Raymond to watch Elaine perform in a local park. Matthews delivers ballet, soft-shoe shuffle and tap within a single rendition of *Dance My Way to Heaven* - a song which betrays its title by reflecting less on the idea of achieving stardom by dancing, and more on the film's central theme of deception and impersonation. Raymond is impressed, and declares his interest in making a star of 'Mrs Smythe-Smythe'. The masquerade continues with performances on a sizeable, complex stage - until Elaine is blackmailed by another journalist, and walks out of a performance, and out of the show, telling Peter that she cannot spend the rest of her life "at a fancy-dress party". There is, then, a performance in an empty auditorium of *I Nearly Let Love Slip Through My Fingers* - and a reprise of *Dance My Way to Heaven*, with superimpositions of routines performed during the film. Both performances have been witnessed by Raymond, and he asks Elaine to return to show business under her real name - Elaine Bradford. The final twist is delivered when Peter tells Raymond to spell her surname, Bradford, as 'Carlton'. This is Peter's surname, and Elaine's future married name.

The Jessie Matthews' musicals are, as William K Everson describes them, "hymns of praise to elegance, luxury, glitter and glamour"³⁸¹. Junge's sets comprise rectilinear and curvilinear forms and white walls. Junge's optimal Deco style is evident in *It's Love Again*, with

³⁸¹ Everson, William K. 'Jessie Matthews', in *Films in Review* 26 No.10 (December 1975) p.581

the modernist flat of Peter Carlton, the geometric clock tower giving way to a sprawling antechamber, and the glass and metal staircase therein. These modernist stylistic cues co-opted for *It's Love Again* may be traced to the avant-garde aesthetics designed into the sets of *Evergreen*. One may, also, link a preoccupation with success in the world of entertainment in *Evergreen*, *First a Girl* and *It's Love Again* with a similar preoccupation in American musical films of the period. All three films were associated with American cinema by emulating the songs, orchestrations and choreography of American musical productions. Moreover, *It's Love Again* retains the English tone of the two precedent films - principally, because all three feature Matthews, whose singing style and diction are unchanging from picture to picture, but also because many of the performances are on British theatrical stages. In this sense, whilst *Evergreen*, *First a Girl* and *It's Love Again* are not typical British musical productions - offering modernist styles and high production values - they do retain and represent elements of the English musical tradition and the picaresque, episodic narrative structure of *The Good Companions*.

3.9 Summary

Balcon's production of comedies and musicals offers indications of differing degrees of influence over production processes at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation. Making the 'Jack' films, Balcon worked with staff and resources autonomously. Acting as producer of the Aldwych farces, Balcon was bound to instruction by his superior at GBPC, CM Woolf - but, worse, he was bound also by the decisions of his director and members of the production team he was compelled to work with.

The Jessie Matthews' musicals, however, offer not only evidence of how films and film-making were influenced by Balcon when he was able to manage production without political interference or significant budgetary constraints, and with staff of his own choosing. The Matthews' films also indicate how Michael Balcon's use of source material with cultural resonance and actors with popular appeal could result in commercially successful film production in the United Kingdom and in the USA. More so in musicals than in comedies, in fact, Balcon is shown to have been an extremely adept producer. Though he did face criticism over technical issues, in films such as *The Good Companions*, working within the single genre of the musical film, working with the same core technicians and artists, Balcon produced films that appealed to audiences with domestic and foreign tastes. Balcon progressed through musical productions from an episodic representation of a common Englishness to the realisation on screen of an avant-garde transatlantic aesthetic. Consensual values are substituted for individuality, and the mundane experiences of working people are replaced by opulence and celebrity. In this thematic progression, from the ordinariness of community to the affluence of the elite, realism is discarded and fantasy is brought to the foreground.

The transitions between Balcon's musicals also correspond to the transition of the British film industry, towards a greater emphasis on operational and technical sophistication, and increasingly refined presentation - not least because of Balcon's continued employment and retention of adept technicians and talented artists. However, these musicals also offer an insight into a cause for failure. Higher production values and the employment of superior technicians, even without the consideration of transatlantic distribution, logically impact upon corporate finances. The more Balcon spent on his musical productions, the greater the pressure to succeed commercially. In the 1930s, during which time the United Kingdom experienced economic

decline, the need for commercial success abroad would have been particularly acute. The failure to gain the returns required to justify investment and generate profitability could only kill Balcon's strategy for international success through investment in high quality, high culture cinema.

Chapter 4: Interwar melodrama and crime by Michael Balcon

4.1 Introduction

As the Jessie Matthews musicals produced by Michael Balcon derived from the cultural appeal of the music hall and emulated the refinement of American musical revue - so the producers of British crime films in the 1930s sought to draw upon the cultural and literary appeal of detective fictions, whilst also incorporating the core appeal of American crime pictures. Furthermore, in the decade before the Second World War, crime in British cinema became more imaginative; narratives and cinematography became more subjective, and characterisation became more complex, than had been the case in the 1920s and earlier.

One factor in the improved quality of the crime film is the emergence of longer feature films in the 1930s, replacing of the shorter 'series' productions typically seen in the 1920s - allowing for deeper characterisation and more complex plots. Where, for example, Ellie Norwood tackled cases as Sherlock Holmes in 47 short films, typically at 35 minutes length, between 1921 and 1923,³⁸² so Arthur Wontner played Sherlock Holmes in five feature-length productions produced between 1931 and 1937.³⁸³ British film producers readily adapted the works of writers such as Arthur Conan Doyle as they sought to complement and cash in on the appeal of American films such as *Paying the Penalty* (1927), *The Doorway to Hell* (1930) and *Enemies of the Public* (1931) - although Conan Doyle's work was also adapted, for example, by Fox in 1933, in an adaptation that featured not only Holmes and "the super-criminal, Professor

³⁸² It should be noted that the series of shorts starring Ellie Norwood as Sherlock Holmes was inspired by the success of a feature-length version of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1921), directed by Maurice Elvey

³⁸³ Arthur Wontner starred as Sherlock Holmes in *The Sleeping Cardinal* (1931), *The Missing Rembrandt* (1932), *The Sign of Four* (1932), *The Triumph of Sherlock Holmes* (1935) and *Silver Blaze* (1937)

Moriarty", but also "gangsters such as Conan Doyle would have delighted to meet"³⁸⁴. Michael Balcon completed a version of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in 1932 on the basis of a competition in *Film Weekly*, to choose the subject for a film to be produced by Gainsborough Pictures.³⁸⁵

One may argue, as John Betjeman did, that although interwar British crime films - such as *Down River* (1931) - offer vibrant backdrops to routine narratives, the majority of British crime films produced during this period lack authenticity.³⁸⁶ Nonetheless, there is sympathy between the 1930s crime film and modernist stylistic concerns, characterised in a European context by James Naremore as a fusion of melodrama and existentialism³⁸⁷ - and represented in GBPC productions directed by Walter Forde and Alfred Hitchcock. And, in fact, with respect to Michael Balcon's work as producer at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, crime is principally represented in the thriller sub-genre - with which Hitchcock, particularly, may be associated.³⁸⁸ Crime films are melodramatic narratives based on the enactment of a specific crime or set of crimes, with little violence but more drama - whereas crime-thrillers incorporate espionage, violence and/or murder, frequently featuring more realistic scenarios and deeper characterisation. This chapter, hence, focuses on work undertaken for several crime-thrillers - the

³⁸⁴ 'Sherlock Holmes', in *The Picturegoer* (14 January 1933) p.16

³⁸⁵ Balcon detailed the production of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in a draft of an article proposed for *Film Weekly* in 1931. See Balcon, M E B. 'The Diary of a Talkie' - introduction to a proposed column in 'Film Weekly' describing the film production process (1931), in Aileen and Michael Balcon Special Collection, File A/56.

³⁸⁶ According to Betjeman, "Most British crime films (and this applies to American films of British crime) regard the setting as of minor importance" (Betjeman, John. 'Settings, Costumes, Backgrounds', in Davy, Charles (Ed.). *Footnotes to the Film* (London: Readers' Union Ltd, 1938) p.94)

³⁸⁷ Naremore, James. *More than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) pp.64-81

³⁸⁸ As Thomas Leitch observes, when considering thrillers directed by Hitchcock throughout his career, from the 1920s onwards, "Hitchcock's thrillers, indeed thrillers generally, are essentially crime films that focus on the victims of crimes, or of the criminal-justice system." (Leitch, Thomas. *Crime Films* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) p.17)

1932 production of *Rome Express*, the 1934 filming of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, the 1935 production of *The 39 Steps*, and the filming in 1936 of *Secret Agent* and *Sabotage*.

Of these productions, *The Man Who Knew Too Much* and *The 39 Steps* are notable as the first films produced by Michael Balcon, which were directed by Alfred Hitchcock after Hitchcock had signed a contract at the end of 1933 to work for Balcon at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation.

The case studies presented here achieve an understanding of interwar British crime cinema through analyses of the production of crime-thrillers produced by Michael Balcon and directed by Walter Forde and Alfred Hitchcock. Furthermore, this chapter includes an account of Michael Balcon's response to change, which was two-fold. Balcon returned to the superior standards of German film technicians, to realise as fully as possible the potential for superior film production following investment in the British film industry. Balcon returned, also, to the superior standards of one particular film technician, the director Alfred Hitchcock, whose apprenticeship in German film production techniques of the 1920s had been fostered by Balcon. Under Balcon at GBPC, "Hitchcock's imaginative co-ordination of sound and visual effects established his reputation as the foremost British director"³⁸⁹ of the 1930s.

4.2 *A Gentleman of Paris*

In fact, Michael Balcon produced numerous crime melodramas throughout the 1930s, and worked with several directors. One such picture was *A Gentleman of Paris* (1931), which was the product of collaboration between GBPC and Stoll. Sinclair Hill directed the film.

³⁸⁹ Stanbrook, Alan. 'The Lady Vanishes', in *films and filming* (July 1963) p.44

An adaptation by Sewell Collins and Sidney Gilliat of the book *His Honour, the Judge* by Niranjan Pal, *A Gentleman of Paris* is a sound film, which is both a crime melodrama and a courtroom drama. The film features Sybil Thorndike as a murderess. Arthur Wontner, who was better known for his portrayal of Sherlock Holmes, was cast in the principal part of a judge who witnesses a murder whilst with his mistress, played by Phyllis Konstam, and then has to oversee the trial of his mistress for the crime. The case is further complicated by the fact that the accused woman's husband, played by Hugh Williams, is also her prosecutor.

The judge knows that this woman is not the killer, but he risks ruining his marriage and his career if he bears witness to her innocence. He chooses not to intervene, and the trial proceeds. He refuses, moreover, to allow the mistress to defend herself by revealing her relationship with him. He believes that he can influence the jury to find her innocent, so saving her and his own career. However, the jury convicts her, leaving the judge with a moral quandary.

Before she is sentenced, he resolves to confess to his affair with her, and attests to her innocence. His intervention saves the life of the innocent woman, but it results also in the loss of his judicial career.

The story may be contrived, but that is not the worst of this film's flaws. The acting is stagey, theatrical. The players are generally impassive, with the exception of Williams, who exaggerates his character's traits. The film is technically imperfect, too. There is poor cinematography - notably, in a reaction shot for the film's climax. The sound editor did not appear to have covered the splices properly, so there is constant clicking on the soundtrack. Furthermore, the sound of the camera can be heard clearly as the mistress presents her evidence during the trial.

Despite the lack of a wholly credible plot, Sinclair Hill endeavoured to make the settings as realistic as possible, and he also filmed some scenes on location in Paris. Critics reflected both the poverty of subject matter and the director's attempts at raising production values. *The Bioscope*'s reviewer observes, "The long arm of coincidence stretches through the story, which is perhaps more convincing when one remembers that "truth is often stranger than fiction." But in spite of a heavily drawn theme, plausibility is preserved and poignancy at times is powerful enough to test the strongest apathy to render sentiments."³⁹⁰

Was *A Gentleman of Paris* regarded as a disappointment by Michael Balcon and the Board at GBPC? Possibly, for Sinclair Hill directed no other crime melodramas for Michael Balcon. However, Hill did work on other genre pictures at GBPC - including the musical comedy *Britannia of Billingsgate* (1933), the romantic comedy *The Man from Toronto* (1933), and the war drama *My Old Dutch* (1934). However, the production of *A Gentleman of Paris* did benefit GBPC and the British film industry by enabling a young screenwriter to gain an initial screenplay credit. Sidney Gilliat began his career as a screenwriter in 1928, with Frank Launder. However, he had been uncredited before this film. Launder and Gilliat wrote for numerous production companies and catered to several genres during the 1930s. Under Balcon at GBPC they wrote additional material for the musical comedies *Lord Babs* (1932) and *Jack's the Boy* (1932) before writing the scenario and additional dialogue for *Rome Express*.

4.3 *Rome Express*

At the time of its production and initial release, *Rome Express* was the most significant film Gilliat had worked on. It was the first internationally-successful British sound production,

³⁹⁰ *The Bioscope* (8 December 1931)

despite its modest budget; *Rome Express*' statutory costs (at £16,796) were half those of *The Good Companions* (£32,406).³⁹¹ *Rome Express* was also the first production to benefit directly from investment in the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation's production operations at Lime Grove, in Shepherds Bush.

Rome Express is notable, too, because it represents not the domestic British societal condition, but rather explores international geopolitical issues through a tale of transnational travel. Passengers of different nationalities occupy a train passing through several European countries. This premise distinguishes *Rome Express*, particularly, because it "is a good example of the sort of cosmopolitan production designed to secure access to international markets"³⁹², with numerous characters of different nationalities.

At least in part, *Rome Express* is a crime-thriller. The film concerns the theft of a valuable painting. However, it is principally a film of travel and of cultural difference, in which the stories of a number of characters are interwoven, within a common setting. Aside from the opening and closing sequences, the film is set on a train - the Rome Express, operated by the Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits - travelling from Paris to Rome. The characters filmed are a jaded American film actor, a golfer, an adulterous couple, a French policeman, and a millionaire. Although the audience only knows the prime motive for action about a third of the way into the film - when it is treated to the report of a theft, prior to the filmed journey, of a painting by Van Dyck from an art gallery in Paris - this adaptation of a novel by Ruth Alexander and Clifford Grey³⁹³ conveys pace and suspense through quality of performance, of camerawork, and of

³⁹¹ Particulars of British Films Acquired by Renters during Quota Year 1923-33. The National Archives, File BT 64/97

³⁹² Higson, Andrew. "A Film League of Nations"; Gainsborough, Gaumont-British and "Film Europe", in Cook, Pam (Ed.). *Gainsborough Pictures* (London: Cassell, 1997) p.77

³⁹³ Alexander, Ruth; Grey, Clifford. *The Rome Express* (London: The Readers Library Publishing Co Ltd, 1926)

editing. Conrad Veidt's character - called Zurta - has boarded the train with an accomplice called Tony, played by Hugh Williams, to search for the painting, which he believes is being held by an English passenger called Poole. Zurta encounters a number of characters of differing nationalities and backgrounds on board the train, as he searches for Poole and the painting. The painting is discovered, but not by Zurta. It is passed between passengers on the train. Zurta kills Poole, but also dies when he tries to escape a police inspector. The camerawork in Poole's killing is notable for its delivery of tension. It is a claustrophobic scene, set in a compartment, with Conrad Veidt's Zurta confronting Donald Calthrop's Poole - with the camera close-up tightly framing Veidt, making him appear both immense and genuinely threatening. There is additional innovation in this film in the form of a wide variety of camera angles, and constant cross-cutting - to support the pace of action and to add [to] suspense by showing significant simultaneity; events of consequence take place at the same time in different parts of the train.

It is possible to consider a thematic linkage between *Rome Express* and other Balcon productions of the period. "The theme of travel, the movement through different geopolitical spaces and the mapping of a transnational landscape"³⁹⁴ also, figure, for example, in *The Tunnel* - a remake of a German film, which was also remade in France, about a multi-national team trying to build a trans-Atlantic underpass. Directed by Maurice Elvey for the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, *The Tunnel* expresses opulence and speculates on the prospect of an advanced, affluent society emerging from scientific development. It is set in an imagined, unspecified near future. Its elaborate opening sequence presents the audience with a musical soirée hosted by a wealthy industrialist, in his home, where a group of other wealthy industrialists are introduced to

³⁹⁴ Higson, Andrew. 'The Instability of the National', in Ashby, Justine; Higson, Andrew (Eds.). *British Cinema, Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 2000) p.42-43

the engineer who is going to manage the construction of a tunnel to connect the USA and the UK. The engineer explains that construction has been made possible through the use of a new material called Allanite steel, and a new technology called a radium drill. The material has been developed by the engineer. The technology has been developed by a friend of the engineer. The group is initially sceptical, but is persuaded to buy shares in the project. Construction commences, and continues for three years before a crisis of confidence emerges amongst the project's backers. There is, also, a romantic sub-plot, involving the engineer's failing relationship with his wife, and the affections the industrialist's daughter nurtures for the engineer. There is opportunity for pathos, as the engineer's wife, working on the tunnel project as a nurse, is blinded by gas, and frets that her husband no longer loves her. Further to this, she reasons somehow that he should not stay with her out of pity, and that it is better to leave him. This she does, taking their son with her. The engineer reacts to his wife's unexplained departure by throwing himself into the project. Years later, the tunnel nears completion - though the cost, in terms of lives and money, continues to mount. Both the British Prime Minister and the American President anticipate the tunnel's completion, and the improved political relations its completion promise. The engineer's wife has settled in the countryside with her son, who is now a young man. Near to completion, however, the tunnel workers encounter a submarine volcano, necessitating further investment to build a detour. Access to additional funding is blocked by two investors who have manipulated the stock market to become the company's controlling shareholders. There is some speculation that these two shareholders intend to use the delay to engineer a depression in stock prices, in order to gain complete ownership of the tunnel, but funding is gained and the additional work on the tunnel commences. However, tragedy ensues before progress can be made. There are deaths. Samples indicate that the volcano may be too large to circumnavigate.

Then, the drill breaks through to volcanic gases, and hundreds of workers perish - including the engineer's son, who had lobbied for a job on the project. The engineer's wife reappears, and it is she who discovers her son dead. However, her reappearance revitalises the engineer and the project, and the final push needed to complete the tunnel is achieved.

So, political and social internationalism were represented both in *The Tunnel* and in *Rome Express* through narrative and characterisation. However, the transnational focus of *Rome Express* was expressed also through sound. The use of speech as an additional sound effect was realised as Walter Forde directed porters and railway staff of different nationalities speak only in their own languages. Forde wanted, in fact, to indulge in sound much more, “with each character speaking his own language, and with subtitles”³⁹⁵ - but it is understood that he met with opposition from his producer. Michael Balcon’s reluctance to experiment more fully with sound may seem surprising, if one considers the support extended to Alfred Hitchcock for the Germanic experimentation of *The Lodger*. However, Balcon may have been subject to the influence of corporate disharmony; the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation may be regarded as “a ramshackle empire heavily dependent on its monopoly position - the booking power of a circuit of 300 cinemas - for its profitability”³⁹⁶, without the capabilities “to integrate the diverse and sometimes conflicting interests gathered together under the Gaumont-British banner”³⁹⁷. The possibility that corporate inertia may have dictated Balcon’s stewardship of production may find support in Isidore Ostrer’s own inability to develop sound film production at GBPC. It may be true that “Isidore Ostrer was far-sighted enough to buy up companies involved in sound

³⁹⁵ Slide, Anthony. *Fifty Classic British Films, 1932-1982: a Pictorial Record* (London: Constable & Co, Ltd, 1985) p.1

³⁹⁶ Murphy, Robert. ‘Fantasy Worlds - British Cinema Between the Wars’, in *Screen* Vol.26 No.1 (Jan/Feb 1985) p.13

³⁹⁷ *ibid*

equipment, radio, and television, but he rapidly lost interest and did little to develop their potential". However, it may also be true that he could not have progressed the matter further. Did Balcon stand in the way of developing sound film production? Was Ostrer, therefore, unable to make any further progress due to Balcon's reluctance to utilise the new technology. What is known is that Michael Balcon was slow to integrate sound film production at GBPC, "and made several late silent features which had to be revamped later with synchronised soundtracks"³⁹⁸. In fact, one of the last silent films to be produced in Britain in the 1920s - *The Wrecker* (1928) - was also one of Balcon's last silent productions.

Star values continued to apply to commercial consideration, through the transition from silent to sound cinema. Michael Balcon appears to have been conscious that to succeed commercially, domestically and internationally, with the production of *Rome Express*, it would have been most important to secure the services of an actor of Conrad Veidt's ability. Indeed, his stated opinion at the time was that "no time should be lost for Veidt...irrespective of who directs"³⁹⁹. Charm and villainy seem to have been unaffectedly natural qualities in Veidt - who had played, in 1919, the first homosexual role on German cinema in *Anders als die Andern*, and the somnambulist Cesare in *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*. *Rome Express* was also a first for Veidt - his first British film, playing a criminal seeking to catch and kill a fellow thief, some fifteen years on from his acting break in his native Germany, in the 1917 production of *Der Spion*. Veidt's inclusion as villain in the cast may be seen to ensure that *Rome Express* is more than a film of a train journey across France and Italy, and of various ethnicities. Appearing with Conrad Veidt in *Rome Express* is the established American actor Esther Ralston - star of

³⁹⁸ Low, Rachael. *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985) p.126

³⁹⁹ Richards, Jeffery (Ed.). *The Unknown 1930s: an Alternative History of the British Cinema, 1929-1939* (London: I B Tauris & Co, 1998) p.251

Fashions for Women and *Ten Modern Commandments*, both released in 1927. Furthermore, the quality of the production team assembled by Balcon for the production of *Rome Express* ensured that the film could be judged, according to C A Lejeune, writing in *The Observer* in November 1932, “by international and not by British standards”⁴⁰⁰ - notably, by the standards of German film production of the 1920s. Michael Balcon acknowledged openly the capabilities of foreign film technicians - particularly, those who had worked at Ufa’s studios. By November 1932 Balcon was openly expressing his determination to create a Gaumont-British art department “on modern German lines”⁴⁰¹.

The promotion of the film played on the desire amongst cinephiles and industrialists for investment in a technically superior British film with serious commercial potential, highlighting the financial commitment undertaken to produce a film of its quality. The press book of the film bears the declaration, “Only unlimited expenditure could produce such an epic of cinematic art.”⁴⁰²

This was a declaration underlined by action. *Rome Express* inaugurated an expanded production schedule at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation’s new facilities in Lime Grove⁴⁰³, the installation of which was initiated and overseen by Michael Balcon.

The corporation’s managing director, W J Gell, affirmed in the trade press, including *Kinematograph Weekly*, that the newly reinvigorated facility as the base for the corporation’s involvement in and contribution to a new era of higher production values and a superior form of

⁴⁰⁰ Higson, Andrew. “‘A Film League of Nations’”; Gainsborough, Gaumont-British and “Film Europe”, in Cook, Pam (Ed.). *Gainsborough Pictures* (London: Cassell, 1997) p.77

⁴⁰¹ Ede, Laurie N. ‘Lost in Siberia: Ernö Metzner in Britain’, in Bergfelder, Tim; Cargnelli, Christian (Eds.). *Destination London: German-speaking Émigrés and British Cinema, 1925-1950* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008) p.113

⁴⁰² Press Book of *Rome Express* (1932) np

⁴⁰³ Wood, Linda. *British Films 1927-1939* (London: British Film Institute, 1986) p.20

sound cinema.⁴⁰⁴ The new Lime Grove facilities were “monuments in steel and stone to the progress made by film production in Britain”⁴⁰⁵— centred around three sound stages. One sound stage had been built in 1913, as part of the original Lime Grove facilities; the 1913 building bore historic significance, as “the very first structure to be designed and erected in this country for the express purpose of making films”.⁴⁰⁶ Two additional sound stages were constructed in 1927. By 1931 the company’s on-going production plans included the construction of more new stages at Lime Grove, with new dressing rooms in an extension that would, when built, “represent the latest developments in regard to personal comfort and convenience”⁴⁰⁷, with a new restaurant and kitchens.

Industry observers were optimistic that GBPC would produce more commercially viable films, and to a higher standard of manufacture. Basil Wright offered a particularly positive assessment late in 1932 - remarking that, if *Rome Express* typified the kind of production to be expected from the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, then filmgoers and industry observers alike could “look happily forward to a new era of technical brilliance, clever observation, and good entertainment”⁴⁰⁸. Opened on 28 June 1932 by Isidore Ostrer, the GBPC facilities at Shepherd’s Bush, which formed “an extension to the original glass studio erected in 1914”⁴⁰⁹, were estimated to cost up to half a million pounds upon completion, and were regarded as amongst the most advanced in Europe, with laboratories “bigger than all other European laboratories combined”⁴¹⁰ that could process at least two million feet of film each week.

⁴⁰⁴ ‘Steel and Stone’, in *Kinematograph Weekly* (2 April 1931) p.61

⁴⁰⁵ *ibid*

⁴⁰⁶ *ibid*

⁴⁰⁷ *ibid*

⁴⁰⁸ Wright, Basil. ‘Rome Express’, in *Cinema Quarterly* Vol.1 No.2 (Winter 1932) p.113

⁴⁰⁹ G W B. ‘The Most Up to Date in Europe’, in *The Observer* (5 June 1932) p.10

⁴¹⁰ *ibid*

Moreover, the impact on Michael Balcon's ability to execute his role as director of productions was thought to be wholly positive - with *The Observer*'s correspondent writing, "The Gaumont-British Picture Corporation is now in a position to carry out its million pound programme of thirty to forty pictures each year. This will be undertaken in conjunction with the subsidiary company, the Gainsborough, at Islington. There will be a unification of control, the resources of the two studios are to be pooled, and Mr. Michael Balcon will be in charge."⁴¹¹

4.4 *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, and *The 39 Steps*

Although new facilities equipped Michael Balcon with the most advanced equipment for film-making available to any producer operating in Britain, arguably his most instrumental decision did not initially rest on the use of equipment. Rather, it was his recruitment of key personnel, and the freedom he allowed them to act creatively, that engendered greater commercial successes at the corporation. With respect to Alfred Hitchcock's success at GBPC, Michael Balcon's key decision was to grant the director considerable freedom and support to choose subject matter or source material without objection, and to direct films without intervention. At Hitchcock's request, Balcon acquired the rights to a story based on the *Bulldog Drummond* series of novels penned by H C McNeile - 'Bulldog Drummond's Baby'. Hitchcock had sought unsuccessfully to bring it to production at British International Pictures in the early 1930s. Balcon also hired Charles Bennett, too, to help develop a scenario based on the story. The scenario was developed into *The Man Who Knew Too Much*.⁴¹² Balcon's choice of Bennett to

⁴¹¹ G W B. 'The Most Up to Date in Europe', in *The Observer* (5 June 1932) p.10

⁴¹² See Glancy, Mark. 'The Man Who Knew Too Much (1934); Alfred Hitchcock, John Buchan, and the Thrill of the Chase', in Barton Palmer, R; Boyd, David (Eds.). *Hitchcock at the Source: the Auteur as Adapter* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011) pp.79-80

help Hitchcock develop the scenario was progressive, constructive and informed. Bennett had authored *Blackmail*, the play adapted by Hitchcock for the 1929 film of the same name. Furthermore, Bennett had served the British intelligence services during the First World War, and was able to bring this experience of espionage to bear on Hitchcock's treatment of several films in the 1930s. In addition to providing the original idea for *The Man Who Knew Too Much* - in the form of a McNeile's story⁴¹³ - Bennett was scriptwriter for *The 39 Steps*, *Secret Agent*, and *Sabotage*. Bennett also contributed to the script of *Young and Innocent* (1937), before gaining work as a scriptwriter at Universal Studios in Hollywood.

Alfred Hitchcock had been consistently developing his techniques for sound film production in the years preceding the filming of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. In the formative years of commercial sound cinema in Britain, only *Blackmail* had represented, as Charles Barr suggests, "bold experimentation with sound, which helped to reconcile critics to the new synchronised medium"⁴¹⁴. Hitchcock's directorship of *Blackmail* was critically acclaimed and commercially successful, and indicated clearly, as Tom Ryall observes, "that the future lay in sound pictures"⁴¹⁵. British film industry commitment to sound was affirmed in 1930 by Arthur Dent, director of British International Pictures, who affirmed the belief that sound film production would boost domestic industry prospects by generating employment "for hundreds of skilled technicians and studio personnel" and offering opportunities "for directors and assistant directors, and artists, too"⁴¹⁶.

⁴¹³ McGilligan, Patrick. 'Charles Bennett: First-Class Constructionist', in McGilligan, Patrick (Ed.). *Backstory 1: Interviews with Screenwriters of Hollywood's Golden Age* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986) p.25

⁴¹⁴ Barr, Charles. *English Hitchcock* (Moffat: Cameron and Hollis, 1999) p.78

⁴¹⁵ Ryall, Tom. 'A British Studio System: The Associated British Picture Corporation and the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation in the 1930s', in Murphy, Robert (Ed.). *The British Cinema Book*, Second Edition (London: BFI Publishing, 2001) p.37

⁴¹⁶ 'British Industry Favours U. S. Filming Britain', in *The Film Daily* (1 June 1930) p.8

The story of a young woman who kills a man in self-defence and is blackmailed by a man who knows of her guilt, *Blackmail* features a 'sound-bridge' between Alice, the female protagonist, screaming at the sight of a vagrant's outstretched hand and a landlady discovering a body. It features, also, the use of distorted sound in the 'knife' sequence. Hitchcock used the RCA Photophone sound-on-disc system for the sound production of *Blackmail*. Although, for *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, Hitchcock utilised the inferior British Acoustic sound-recording and reproduction system developed by the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation and installed at the corporation's Lime Grove studios,⁴¹⁷ there are similar examples of experimentation with sound, in *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, in a shot of fingers pointing at a bullet hole in the window through which the French agent Louis Bernard is shot - and in the screaming of Annabella Smith as a train whistle screeches in *The 39 Steps*. Furthermore, Hitchcock's experimentation with sound incorporates the intelligent use of silence to heighten tension - as in the scene, in *The 39 Steps*, in which the crofter believes his wife and Hannay are planning a tryst; as he watches them converse, but does not hear what they say.

Hitchcock made and re-made *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. He succeeded his 1934 British production with a Hollywood remake in 1956. In the first version of the film, a terrorist group, led by a man called Abbott, kills a French secret agent in Switzerland, in front of a man and his wife, Bob and Jill Lawrence. Mr and Mrs Lawrence were told by the spy that the terrorists were planning to assassinate a foreign diplomat in London. After killing the spy, the terrorists realize that the couple were told of the plot. They kidnap the couple's daughter, Betty,

⁴¹⁷ British Acoustic equipment was installed at Lime Grove in June 1929 - see Low, Rachael. *The History of the British Film, 1918-1929* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971) p.174. At Islington, RCA equipment was initially installed in 1930, but was replaced with the British Acoustic system in June 1933 - see Wood, Linda. *British Films 1927-1939* (London: British Film Institute, 1986) p.24

to keep them quiet. The couple decide not to tell the police about the kidnapping. They decide, instead, to find her themselves. Time is pressing, however. The diplomat might be killed, because they have not told the police. If the diplomat is killed, World War might result.

Amongst the more memorable scenes in the film, perhaps most notable is a concert sequence, in the Albert Hall, with a slowly revolving camera as Jill Lawrence looks around her for the assassin. The concerto for this sequence was composed specifically for the film, by Arthur Benjamin, and Hitchcock used the same composition again in the fifties remake.

Of particular interest, also, is the siege at the end of the film, in which the police become involved in a gun battle with the terrorists. This sequence is based on the 'Siege of Sidney Street', a real life event. The 'Siege of Sidney Street' followed an incident in December 1910, when several Russian aliens burgled a shop in Houndsditch, London, killing three constables as they made their escape from the shop. Part of the proceeds of their robberies were intended for or used to help fund anti-Tsarist activities in Russia. The Russians were tracked down to a house elsewhere in the East End of London, on Sidney Street, from which they fired at police. The Home Secretary, Winston Churchill, sent troops, sharp shooters, and artillery to the street. On 3 January 1911, a cannon was used to set fire to the house, and the Russians were found dead inside it.⁴¹⁸

There are traces of Hitchcock's development as a director of films in *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, with respect to his schooling in silent film and European film culture. Balcon interned Hitchcock at Ufa, whilst Hitchcock was employed at Gainsborough Pictures in the mid-1920s. The first film directed to completion by Hitchcock, *The Pleasure Garden* was filmed principally

⁴¹⁸ For a detailed study of this event, see Rumbelow, Donald. *The Houndsditch Murders and the Siege of Sidney Street* (London: Virgin Books, 1973) and Rogers, Colin. *The Battle of Stepney. The Sidney Street Siege: Its Causes and Consequences* (London: Hale, 1981)

in Germany, at the Emelka facilities in Munich, in 1925⁴¹⁹. The expressionistic influences represented in *The Pleasure Garden* may be considered a consequence not only of the location of the film's production, but also the result of Hitchcock's ability to learn by observation, repetition and refinement of the techniques and stylistic partialities of German doyens including Fritz Lang, Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, E A Dupont, Walther Ruttmann, and other German filmmakers whose influence is evident in Hitchcock's work of the 1920s and later.⁴²⁰ The film is notable for innovative cinematography and lighting - including elevated and angled shots, and use of contrast for artistic emphasis. There are close-ups, point-of-view shots and, for the Albert Hall sequence, a revolving camera. There are pan shots, such as one can see in the work of Hitchcock's continental European contemporaries - in sequences directed by Carl-Theodor Dreyer, a Danish contemporary film-maker, for example.⁴²¹ There is a quick cutaway shot of Abbott, with eyes downcast. And the frame compositions are effective, as audiences for *The Man Who Knew Too Much* look over a shoulder, through a gate, at formations of people, and towards a silhouetted father who looks out of a window, with his daughter, at his wife. These were the technical actions of good silent era cinematographers and directors, who became adept at telling stories through images alone.

The Man Who Knew Too Much is notable as an example of a film for which the choice of subject matter and narrative treatment and performances on screen were influenced by the director to such an extent that the director was as prominent to audiences as star actors. A letter to *Film Weekly* in January 1937 indicates the level of regard for Hitchcock amongst British cinemagoers. The correspondent - A Mair from Liverpool - notes that some held the view that

⁴¹⁹ Hitchcock directed certain scenes for *Irrgarten der Leidenschaft* in Italy, also.

⁴²⁰ 'Emelka und England: Ein brauchbares Abkommen', in *Süddeutsche Filmzeitung* 14-15 (1925) p.8

⁴²¹ Consider the arc-and-pan movements in *Vampyr (The Dream of Allan Gray)* (1932)

Hitchcock preferred to make films to suit his own ambitions, "rather than one which emphasises the importance of some star"⁴²². The correspondent counters this view by declaring that Hitchcock "did more for Peter Lorre, in *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, than any other director"⁴²³. Mair observes, then, "England has yet to produce a better director than Hitchcock. His British backgrounds are more British than those of any other director; and he is a master of the art of story telling."⁴²⁴ Lastly, the correspondent states, "His name spells vital story interest, clever camera work, convincing character-acting and polished distinction."⁴²⁵

On seeing the film, R H Billings wrote to Michael Balcon, "The climax of this film is good, not because it brings the rather dull and protracted proceedings to an end, but because it provides thrilling spectacle, a grand finale, which, however fantastic it may appear on paper, is firmly based on actual fact - the Sidney Street siege."⁴²⁶ Although Alfred Hitchcock was inspired to direct *The Man Who Knew Too Much* - at least, in part - by the real-life event of the Siege of Sydney Street of 1911, the source material for *The 39 Steps* was more conventional. The film of *The 39 Steps* is a relatively loose adaptation of the novel of the same name, written by John Buchan and published in 1914.⁴²⁷ It shares with *The Man Who Knew Too Much* the theme of the man who is framed by circumstantial evidence, and forced into unusual or extraordinary situations. Both films are relatively light treatments of tales involving murder and intrigue. Like *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, the opening sequences of *The 39 Steps* include the murder of an agent. In *The 39 Steps*, the agent is a woman called Annabella Smith, who has accompanied the

⁴²² 'Where British Films Beat the World', in *Film Weekly* (16 January 1937) p.12

⁴²³ *ibid*

⁴²⁴ *ibid*

⁴²⁵ *ibid*

⁴²⁶ Report on "The Man Who Knew Too Much". Letter to Michael Balcon from R H Billings (16 June 1934), in Aileen and Michael Balcon Special Collection, File C/12b

⁴²⁷ Buchan, John. *The Thirty-nine Steps* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1915)

film's protagonist, Richard Hannay, to his apartment after a music hall performance by a 'memory man'. It is in Hannay's apartment that the murder is committed, but not before the agent reveals herself and her secret to him. She is being hunted by a group of secret agents.

Hannay is the chief suspect. He goes on the run, to Scotland, to where Annabella Smith told him the spies are based. On the train to Scotland, and on the run from the police, he encounters a teacher called Pamela, and shares a series of misadventures with her before returning to London to uncover the truth about the spies and the plot - and, in the process, to clear his name of the murder of Annabella Smith. Audiences learn, by the film's end, that The Thirty-Nine Steps is the name of the group of spies that had been hunting Annabella Smith, and that they are planning to steal classified technical plans, which have been memorised unwittingly by the same 'Mr Memory' seen performing in the music hall sequence at the start of the film.

In fact, whilst never delivering a documentarian approach to cinema, Hitchcock has drawn on actual incidents in his films. When talking to François Truffaut about *The 39 Steps*, Alfred Hitchcock disclosed that the character of Mr Memory is based on a real-life music hall performer called Datas, of whom audiences would ask questions about major events, such as 'When did the Titanic sink?'. Hitchcock recalls that Datas was presented with trick questions, also, but gave answers to these questions as correctly as he did to others. Hitchcock recalls that Datas was asked when Good Friday fell on Tuesday, and that Datas responded that Good Friday was a horse that started but fell at the first hurdle in a race at a Wolverhampton race track in 1864. Hitchcock says of Mr Memory, his film imitation of Datas, "The whole idea is that the

man is doomed by his sense of duty”⁴²⁸, that he knows what The Thirty-Nine Steps are, and that “he is compelled to give the answer”⁴²⁹ when questioned about The Thirty-Nine Steps.

The device Hitchcock deployed in his productions, the MacGuffin or “the pretext for the plot”⁴³⁰ in a film, is the tangible or intangible object on which the filmed story is based. In *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, the MacGuffin is the information - “the mechanical formula for the construction of an airplane engine”⁴³¹ - held by Mr Memory. The identity of The Thirty-Nine Steps is the MacGuffin in *The 39 Steps*.

As Angela Devas observes, *The 39 Steps* adopts a modernist sensibility - locating Richard Hannay in the modernist interior of a flat in Portland Place as Annabella Smith partially discloses the spy plot before she is assassinated.⁴³² However, there is more to this film than modernism, as the film offers a broad social and geographical picture of the United Kingdom. Hitchcock offers modernist chic in Hannay’s London flat - but one sees in *The 39 Steps* a predilection for a variety of settings in which to find misdeeds committed.⁴³³ *The 39 Steps* features the seedy London music hall from which Smith escapes and outside which she encounters Hannay, and the station at Kings Cross from which Hannay travels to Scotland. He films the Highland cottage where Hannay and Pamela are betrayed by a crofter. He presents the Scottish police station in which Hannay and Pamela are arrested and from which they escape, and the Highland bridge where the spies’ car is blocked by sheep. Finally, Hitchcock films Hannay in the London Palladium, where

⁴²⁸ Truffaut, François. *Hitchcock* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1985) p.98

⁴²⁹ Ibid p.98

⁴³⁰ Ibid p.138

⁴³¹ Ibid p.138

⁴³² Devas, Angela. ‘How to be a Hero: Space, Place and Masculinity in *The 39 Steps* (Hitchcock, UK, 1935)’, in *Journal of Gender Studies* 14:1 (March 2005) pp.45-54

⁴³³ Hitchcock is reported as saying that he chose to direct films with several locations because he liked to travel - “The Man Who Knew Too Much originated simply from a desire on his part to do a picture that would take him from St. Moritz to an East End dentist’s office to a London mission to a vaudeville house.” (Hellman, Geoffrey T. ‘Alfred Hitchcock; England’s Best and Biggest Director Goes to Hollywood’, in *Life* (20 November 1939) p.36))

the original music hall act Mr Memory is revealed as a key figure in the conspiracy at the heart of the film.⁴³⁴

The music hall is a key construct in this production. In the opening sequences, there is horizontal camera movement, panning, along an electric sign, flashing the words 'Music Hall' against a black background. As the audience within is entertained, the audience for the film is introduced to Richard Hannay - first from the back, and then framed frontally and centrally. From this moment until the film's end - with occasional breaks - Hannay is at the centre of the film's narrative. Principally, *The 39 Steps* is a film of the adventures and misadventures of this single character. The film's audience is directed to follow Hannay, and to identify with him as an audience member in another theatre. The film's audience is positioned, then, to learn what Hannay is and has been, and what is happening to him, from this point in the film onwards. Furthermore, the film's audience may imagine themselves in Hannay's place in the film - an audience member distinct from others. Hannay's arrival at his theatre seat seems to be a cue for the orchestra to begin, and the rest of the music hall audience to applaud. In the filmed story, this is coincidence. In terms of Hitchcock's direction of the film, this is to signify Hannay's status and to confirm that the narrative has begun in earnest.

What occurs, then, is at once a reprisal of the community of the music hall, seen in earlier films such as *The Good Companions* - and an additional affirmation of Hannay's singular status in *The 39 Steps*. Hannay stands up and is distinct from the music hall audience. He asks Mr Memory, the performer who begins and ends the film, for the distance from Winnipeg to

⁴³⁴ Interestingly, the climactic musical performance appears to have been sequenced not only because it corresponds to the ending of the novel on which the film is based, but also because Hitchcock wanted the film to end in a music hall - because Hitchcock considered the music hall "a pleasantly gay setting for a murder." (Hellman, Geoffrey T. 'Alfred Hitchcock; England's Best and Biggest Director Goes to Hollywood', in *Life* (20 November 1939) p.41)

Montreal. Mr Memory acknowledges Hannay as a “gentleman”, setting him apart from the rest of the audience. He answers correctly, and Hannay declares Mr Memory is “quite right!” - and encourages the music hall audience to applaud, so inducing them to express approval of the performance as a community of spectators. The genuine sense of community in this early sequence is short-lived, as heckling and fighting break out. However, a false sense of community returns at the film’s denouement, as an upper-class gathering proceeds pleasantly whilst murder is committed, as a musical performance becomes a cover for political violence.

As early as November 1934, during scripting for the film, Michael Balcon believed *The 39 Steps* to be “an obvious international proposition”, although he was concerned that some of the dialogue, and certain costumes and settings might seem “very foreign to an American audience”⁴³⁵. *The 39 Steps* was, in fact, a comparative failure when it was screened in the USA - and, as Mark Glancy indicates⁴³⁶ - Balcon was right to be concerned that American filmgoers might have been less interested in depictions of British cultural heritage and scenarios, than in the more materialistic, stylistic and fantastic depictions of Britain to be found in contemporary Hollywood films and also in Balcon’s relatively successful (in transatlantic terms) avant-garde musical productions featuring Jessie Matthews.⁴³⁷

Problems with the reception of *The 39 Steps* were not confined merely to the form of British culture depicted. The multiple plot twists in *The 39 Steps*, the complexity of the film’s narrative, also alienated critics. Alistair Cooke, for example, writing in *Sight & Sound* in 1935,

⁴³⁵ 'Mr. Balcon's notes on *The 39 Steps*'. (26 November 1935), in Aileen and Michael Balcon Special Collection, File C/2

⁴³⁶ Glancy, H Mark. *When Hollywood Loved Britain: The Hollywood 'British' Film 1939-45* (London: Manchester University Press, 1999)

⁴³⁷ *First a Girl*, for example, was praised in the American press for its style and star quality, and was acknowledged as a superior British production. See Philip K Scheuer’s *Los Angeles Times* review (Scheuer, Philip K. ‘Jessie Matthews Shines as Star of ‘First a Girl’’, in *Los Angeles Times* (11 Jan 1936) p.7

declared the film to be confused. He believed Hitchcock was “always distracted to decide the mood of any scene”, and that “the attempt at odd, Capra-like pieces of inconsequent characterisation (the commercial travellers in the train, the milkman) are unobservant and academic”.⁴³⁸

However, Hitchcock’s Capraesque direction also attracted critics who regarded Hitchcock’s direction as thematically sophisticated. Positive American reception includes the post-war appraisal of the Committee on Exceptional Photoplays, assembled in the country’s National Board of Review in 1947, which observed that *The 39 Steps* “falls a little more directly into the line of the Capra and Van Dyke pictures”⁴³⁹.

The 39 Steps marks the first pairing of Alfred Hitchcock with *cinematographer Bernard Knowles*, who also acted as director of photography for *Secret Agent* and *Sabotage*. In Britain, critical reception to the work of Hitchcock and Knowles was positive, with the *Monthly Film Bulletin* in particular observing, “The photography throughout is excellent and there are some beautiful scenes in Scotland which greatly contribute to the film”.⁴⁴⁰ Michael Balcon retained Bernard Knowles to work on several Hitchcock films before GBPC’s collapse and Hitchcock’s emigration to the USA. Knowles also worked with Hitchcock at Mayflower for the cinematography of *Jamaica Inn* (1939). Post-Balcon, post-Hitchcock, Knowles worked at Gainsborough Pictures in the 1940s, by which time he had graduated from cinematography to become a film director in his own right.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁸ Cooke, Alistair. ‘Films of the Quarter’, in *Sight & Sound* (Summer 1935) p.72

⁴³⁹ Committee on Exceptional Photoplays, National Board of Review. ‘1935’, in *National Board of Review Magazine* (January 1936) pp.8-11 p.10

⁴⁴⁰ ‘39 Steps, The (1935)’, in *Monthly Film Bulletin* (June 1935) p.72

⁴⁴¹ ‘British Production’, in *The Kinematograph Year Book* (1947) p.155

A key point to make about the quality of the partnership of Hitchcock and Knowles is the way in which the pair use cinematographic techniques to support episodes of tension and humour. In *The 39 Steps*, Hitchcock and Knowles have sought to entreat the audience to take Hannay's situation seriously, but also to leaven an otherwise sombre story. For example, there is a sequence in which Hannay has escaped the police and is hiding from them by sneaking into an assembly hall where a political meeting is going on. Up to this point, there has been tension as Hannay has confessed everything to the police officer in the station - and it becomes clear that the officer, whilst appearing to believe what Hannay is telling him, was playing along with him until support could arrive. Hitchcock and Knowles increase the tension of the scene with a quick pan from the supporting police officers, once they have arrived, to a close-up of Hannay's face - he is incredulous, as he realises his predicament has become increasingly desperate. The pace of the panning shot gives the scene a sense of urgency, emphasising the sense that there is no time to waste. As the shot focuses in on Hannay's face, the audience gains a visual expression of his feelings of bewilderment and betrayal - and is able to connect with him emotionally. The cinematographer zooms out, then, to a medium-long/long shot, to show Hannay's clenched fists and angry stance, further engendering sympathy with his misfortune. Then, there is a long shot of the outside of the building, showing Hannay breaking out of a window and running away. The long shot allows the audience to see the chaos that ensues after Hannay's escape - including the pedestrians and the policemen that give chase. Following this, after about three-quarters of an hour of tension and drama, Hitchcock offers relief from the suspense. He inserts a scene in which Hannay is mistaken for a political speaker, therefore providing an opportunity for comedy. Knowles uses the camera to increase appreciation of the irony of the situation. As Hannay is introduced as the speaker, Knowles deploys a point-of-view (POV) shot from Hannay's

perspective - showing people staring expectantly at him. The deep space and the identical postures of the people in the frame emphasise the absurdity of the situation that Hannay finds himself in. A close-up is shown, then, of Hannay's face. The viewer sees that Hannay is anxious, furtively looking from side to side, and can empathise with the perception that this situation is irregular.

4.5 *Secret Agent* and *Sabotage*

To locate the significance of *Secret Agent* in British interwar film history, one must appreciate that the film which preceded it was *The 39 Steps* - an outstanding production in many respects, for which its director Alfred Hitchcock was able to merge multiple aspects of cinema (including casting, editing, and cinematography) into a tense crime-thriller. *Secret Agent* is less complex, at least in the sense in which the central action or crucial events of the plot take place not across multiple geographies and social situations, but on a train. Complexity in *Secret Agent* is embodied in characterisation and - particularly in the moral and ethical positions of the protagonists - the degrees to which the two spies conform, and fail to conform, to ideals of human conduct, and the extent of their commitment to their assignments. The complexity of *Secret Agent*, in characterisation and in narrative was indeed noted in the *Kinematograph Weekly* published 14 May 1936, in a review that cited an unorthodox approach to espionage drama, in which "the producer reflects the story in the psychological reactions of the leading characters"⁴⁴²

Edgar Brodie is not a spy as *Secret Agent* begins. He is a novelist. He is proclaimed dead in order to be sent out and undertake espionage for British intelligence. Brodie is reluctant to take the job, but he does. He adopts a new identity, becoming Richard Ashenden. He is good

⁴⁴² Ryall, Tom. *Alfred Hitchcock and the British Cinema* (London: The Athlone Press Ltd, 1996) p.107

looking and, albeit unwittingly, carelessly brings attention to himself. There is a scene in which Ashenden loudly talks about his instructions in front of a porter in a Swiss hotel. There is another scene, in a crowded casino, in which Ashenden openly handles a clue to a murder. Ashenden differs from Robert Marvin - his counterpart. Marvin is suited to espionage. He is discreet. Marvin is present throughout the film - yet, it is not apparent, until near the end of the film, that he is the spy Ashenden is looking for. Marvin is not revealed as a spy by any error of his own, however. Ashenden discovers Marvin's identity when he decodes information acquired from a contact inside a chocolate factory.

Ashenden and Marvin seem different, in terms of their approaches to their roles. Ashenden is a reluctant spy. He resents the job, which he feels he has had no option but to take on, and he resents the new identity he must adopt - and he acts churlishly towards the woman, Elsa Carrington, who is assigned to be his 'wife'. Marvin, however, serves out of a sense of duty. He is a patriot, prepared to be underhand to achieve his aims. Marvin is prepared, for example, to manipulate others - including Elsa, whom he deceives into believing that he has fallen in love with her, in order to get to Ashenden.

Although each character is unique, in terms of their personality and their thoughts on their careers in espionage, there are moments in the film where the characters appear to be very similar. Marvin is better than Ashenden at being a spy. However, Marvin and Ashenden act similarly at times, and for similar reasons. For example, both use Elsa as cover for the machinations. They both enjoy, in one scene, each other's company at a casino - and together they defend a man called Mr Caypor, as Caypor is being scolded by the casino manager for allowing his dog to enter the casino. As one, Ashenden and Marvin intervene, protesting Caypor's innocence - on the premise that, since the casino manager did not have the house rules

with him, he could not say whether it was illegal for Caypor to bring his dog. In this sequence, Hitchcock's manipulation of characterisation and mise-en-scène are evident. Hitchcock places Ashenden and Marvin together, side by side. Both are dressed in tuxedos. The hairstyle of each man is neat and tidy. Both affect a similar grin, as they argue against the casino manager. The characters even speak in unison. These men, in this scene, can be seen as one and the same type. Ashenden and Marvin may be distinctly different characters - but there are similarities, which Hitchcock emphasises by making them seem to be a reflection of each other. Ashenden may be disillusioned, but he does have outlandish traits - and the same applies to Marvin. The casino scene presents their unity of purpose - even though, for most of the film, their differences are marked - as everything from their clothes to their manner of speaking is harmonised.

The complexity of *Secret Agent* extends from the protagonists' moral and ethical positions to mise en scène - the cinematography, lighting, set design, and use of sound. Working with the cinematographer Bernard Knowles and the set designer Albert Jullion, Hitchcock articulates the cinematic space in *Secret Agent* to suggest that nothing is quite what it seems. A number of scenes may be cited, in this regard.

The first, the opening scene, includes a funeral, at which attendees proceed past a closed coffin. The appearance of a one-armed man adds to a sense of irregularity. At the end of the funeral, visual discord is intensified. The coffin is empty; the deceased is actually alive.

Death is instrumental in two further sequences. There is the death of an organist, associated with a sound innovation - a long, continuous organ note, foreshadowing the discovery of the organist's body, slumped on the organ, which has been partially hidden by a pillar. And, there is the most intensively-worked scene in the film, with respect to filming, editing and

direction - a set piece involving a murder at a cliff, which is seen at a distance, through a telescope.

Also, key plot points are prompted by objects. Twice, a message hidden in a chocolate box is the device to change direction, or reveal a secret. The first instance offers a plot point; the second occasion reverses the meaning of the first, and endangers the lives of Ashenden and Elsa. Another key narrative device is a button, held in a deceased hand, which is ultimately used as evidence by Ashenden to trail Marvin. The button is claimed by a man playing at table in the casino, and Ashenden and 'the general' - the double agent assigned to work with Ashenden - suspect erroneously that the man is the spy that must be identified and intercepted.

Of the characterisation in *Sabotage*, Rachael Low writes, "The motives and characters had a social significance and an emotional depth unusual in thrillers and the fine acting of the two leads, as well as the sombre story, make this more moving than Hitchcock's other films."⁴⁴³

A key point to consider, with respect to the characterisation in *Secret Agent*, is the treatment of character in relation to narrative. Narrative, in this film, is extra-cinematic - in the sense that it concerns other forms of art, such as literature and theatre. Many systems of narration have been developed outside cinema, and precede cinema. This distinction indicates how characterisation and events can be explained with critical tools of literature established by theorists such as Vladimir Propp (in 1928)⁴⁴⁴ and Algirdas Julien Greimas (in 1966)⁴⁴⁵. The narrative treatment of *Sabotage* draws on *The Secret Agent*, Joseph Conrad's novel of agents provocateurs operating in Tsarist Russia.⁴⁴⁶ However, with regard to characterisation, Hitchcock

⁴⁴³ Low, Rachael. *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985) p.140

⁴⁴⁴ Propp, Vladimir. *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin: University of Texas, 1968)

⁴⁴⁵ Greimas, Algirdas Julien. *Sémantique structurale* (Paris: Larousse, 1966)

⁴⁴⁶ Conrad, Joseph. *The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale* (London: Methuen & Co, 1907)

offers key distinctions from the novel. Political anarchists and socialists are transformed into apolitical foreign agents. Conrad's investigating policeman is, on screen, an undercover officer called Ted Spenser - posing, in *Sabotage*, as a greengrocer. And the change of the protagonist's name and business interests - from Adolf Verloc as a shopkeeper to Karl Verloc a cinema owner - enables Hitchcock to avert one issue and explore another. Firstly, the change of name to Karl Verloc averts unintended, unwanted associations with Adolf Hitler's newly-installed regime. Although the Verlocs are immigrants from America, Karl Verloc's accent is Germanic, and so the unnamed hostile power behind the bombings may be assumed to be Nazi Germany. Secondly, Hitchcock averted censor objections to Conrad's characterisation of Verloc as a pornographic bookseller by turning him into a cinema owner. Thirdly, the use of Verloc's Bijou cinema as location enabled Hitchcock to introduce a series of intra-cinematic references, of allusions to contemporary cinema, and to audience fascination with murder and mystery - including film tins supposedly containing reels of a film called *Bartholomew the Strangler*, and the screening in Verloc's cinema of the Walt Disney Silly Symphony *Who Killed Cock Robin?* (1935). Furthermore, Stevie - Mrs Verloc's brother - is characterised in the film as an ordinary schoolboy, with few of the idealistic qualities of his literary counterpart. Stevie's death, in the film, represents a key narrative juncture - connoting a perspective on how the innocent suffer through random acts of violence. Stevie's death may be regarded as brutal and unnecessary, in terms of the screen adaptation of Conrad's literary narrative. However, Hitchcock was faithful to the novel, at least in the inclusion of the explosion - which, in the film, also serves as justification for Mrs Verloc killing her husband, in revenge for Stevie's death, and getting away with it.

Alfred Hitchcock acknowledges the importance of adroit editing to the production of an effective crime-thriller - of understanding what is "permissible for a film to be horrific, but not

horrible”⁴⁴⁷, and of allowing the viewer to collaborate in crime, to experience, vicariously, “with ecstatic excitement...the cinematic blade approach the cinematic neck...without having to pay the price”⁴⁴⁸. This vicarious experience could not be sustained without the use of two narrative devices, both of which are evident in British crime-thrillers directed by Hitchcock: comic relief, and the chase. *Sabotage* is notable for both - but, particularly, it is distinguished by the ‘double-chase’, during which a character (the ‘hero’) is pursued by others (‘authority figures’), whilst pursuing another character (the ‘anti-hero’).⁴⁴⁹

Moreover, Michael Balcon intended *Sabotage* to represent Britain. Ahead of its release, he announced that *Sabotage* would “feature more of the real London than any film yet made”⁴⁵⁰. There are, certainly, plenty of shots featuring well-known London locations and landmarks such as Oxford Street, the Houses of Parliament and Trafalgar Square. Indeed, *Sabotage* opens with such landmarks affected by a blackout after a saboteur has disabled Battersea Power Station.

Early in the film, Mrs Verloc and Karl Verloc are introduced; they work at a cinema, they have no children, and Mrs Verloc is very close to her younger brother Stevie. The grocer, Ted, becomes friendly with Mrs Verloc and Stevie - but Karl suspects him of ulterior motives. Characters and possible motives continue to be introduced and explored, in order to set up the film’s two critical sequences - the first of which is the bomb on the bus, carried by an innocent character; the second being the climactic killing of a protagonist. Hence, *Sabotage* may be

⁴⁴⁷ Gottlieb, Sidney (Ed.). *Hitchcock on Hitchcock: Selected Writings and Interviews* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995) p.111

⁴⁴⁸ *ibid* p.117

⁴⁴⁹ For further references to Hitchcock’s use of ‘double-chase’ sequences, see Wood, Robin. ‘Norm and Variations: *The 39 Steps* and *Young and Innocent*’, in Wood, Robin. *Hitchcock’s Films Revisited* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989) pp.275-283

⁴⁵⁰ Krohn, Bil. *Hitchcock at Work* (London: Phaidon Press, 2003) p.14

regarded as an exercise in construction, in staging, with actors secondary to both *mise en scène* and to narrative devices.

With respect to the filmed narrative, the representation of characters succumbing to violent, destructive impulses in *Sabotage* is associated with the desire to be free of oppression - but the point-of-view cinematography ensures the audience is also directly associated with the scheming of the duplicitous Verloc. The audience is encouraged through POV editing, furthermore, to take a sympathetic stance towards a woman getting away with the killing of her husband, as Mrs Verloc makes her way through a crowd - distraught both at the crime she has committed and at the revelation preceding it, that her husband is responsible for the death of her brother - and as a second explosion, in the cinema, offers freedom from the consequences of murder.

Sabotage is a tense, compact, moral crime-thriller. As in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* and *The 39 Steps*, little regard is paid to the intentions of the spies, to which international situation prevails, or to who is employing whom. *Sabotage* is concerned more with base characteristics of human nature, with the pervasiveness of immorality, and with the suffering of innocent individuals that follows acts of political terrorism. Karl Verloc's American wife and her brother are both ignorant of Verloc's intentions, associations and activities.

The structure of *Sabotage* is carefully arranged, with the filmed narrative covering four days. On the first day, Wednesday, an audience is sent away from the Verloc's cinema following the blackout, which is itself caused by Verloc's sabotaging of Battersea power station. However, the effect of the blackout on the public disappoints Verloc and his conspirators - a coven of spies who have paid Verloc to engineer a disaster. It seems that, across London's affected areas, there is community spirit and laughter in the face of adversity. In the Verloc home, then, situated to the

rear of the cinema, Stevie is introduced comically; clearly, he is prone to distraction, to accident, and to damage. As he tries to help prepare supper, his head is wrapped inappropriately in a towel, he tears an apron accidentally, he smashes a plate, and he pops a boiling potato in his mouth.

Following the appearance of the detective-turned-grocer Ted Spenser, Hitchcock offers an opening reference to contemporary cinema.

“I thought someone was committing murder!” Spenser says when a window creaks open and there is a sound resembling a woman’s scream.

“Someone probably is, on the screen there,” Verloc says, and nods to a wall adjacent to the cinema.

The second day, Thursday, comprises an explicit representation of the questionable morality of observing crime as it occurs, without sympathetic reaction towards the victims of crime - echoing Ashenden's remote observation, in *Secret Agent*, of the murder of Caypor. During a meeting at the London Aquarium, Verloc is instructed to plant a bomb in Piccadilly Circus on Saturday, when the Lord Mayor’s Show is taking place. The meeting ends, and Verloc remains at the aquarium, to consider the mission whilst looking at fish. A POV shot offers the audience Verloc’s view of the swimming fish, before a screen dissolve to Verloc’s imagination, comprising the collapse of buildings in Piccadilly Circus as a consequence of a massive explosion. A redissolve, then, back to the fish swimming. Verloc leaves the aquarium - but not before being caught, comically, in a revolving door. Does the director intend the audience to laugh at Verloc’s predicament? Is this a crime-thriller or black comedy? Note, the films exhibited at Verloc’s cinema depict violence - and, yet, in his cinema, audiences laugh at the films screened.

On Thursday, also, there is the introduction of the association of birds with evil deeds, and with those affected by evil - a narrative device that figures in many films directed by Hitchcock in the decades following the production of *Sabotage* - up to and including *Psycho* (1960) and *The Birds* (1963). Stevie is in Trafalgar Square, feeding and befriending birds. Subsequently, Verloc gifts birds to Stevie. Stevie has become associated with “the birds that will sing on Saturday” - the phrase that the spies’ use to refer to the forthcoming bombing of Piccadilly Circus. Looking ahead to Saturday, Stevie is told by Verloc to “kill two birds with one stone” by delivering the film tins containing explosives, which Verloc collected earlier from an accomplice who runs a bird shop. Hence, the director of this film, Hitchcock, achieves linkage with Verloc, the Bijou cinema owned and run by Verloc, and the realisation of death and destruction. Hence, the significance of the murderous bird, and of an audience laughing at the killing of a bird, in *Sabotage*, in the diegetic screening of *Who Killed Cock Robin?*

The third day, Friday, offers melodrama in place of crime-thriller, as the role of the detective-grocer’s own moral dilemma becomes explicit. Spenser has become attracted to Verloc’s wife, and it becomes clear that he is prepared even to place the prospect of romance above a commitment to duty. Spenser becomes, in fact, a saboteur of public order - undermining the rule of law.

The fourth and final day offers a concluding synthesis of symbolism and morality. Birds sing at 1:45, as the planned explosion kills Stevie and other passengers on a bus. Audiences for *Sabotage* see, then, Spenser and the Verlocs laughing - but they do not see what is being laughed at. There follows a sequence in which Mrs Verloc prepares dinner, with Mr Verloc sat waiting to be served. During preparation, as a carving knife escapes her hands, her thoughts turn to avenging Stevie’s death. She considers the knife, retrieves it, and considers her husband. Mr

Verloc rises from his chair, conscious of Mrs Verloc's distress, and seems to walk into the knife, to kill himself.

And so to the screening of *Who Killed Cock Robin?* as Mrs Verloc stumbles from the Verloc home to the Verloc cinema, and an audience laughs at a crime committed, as the audience for *Sabotage* watch a movie within a movie, a film screened within a film screened. These few seconds of this Disney cartoon, and the audience reaction to the cartoon, serve as précis of the entire narrative of *Sabotage* - a film of moral complexity, of innocence and guilt, and of questionable judgement, a film that explores both the appeal of crime and the development of cinema.

4.6 Summary

Like the filming of *Rome Express* and *The Tunnel*, Balcon's productions of *The 39 Steps*, of *Secret Agent*, of *Sabotage* may be regarded as representative of technical and aesthetic achievements as well as commercial successes - whether domestically alone or also internationally. Balcon invested in advanced equipment prior to these productions and recruited talented and experienced personnel. In particular, Balcon granted Hitchcock considerable freedom with respect to treatment of subject matter, and of source material, without intervention. Such investment in the judgement of talented personnel is evidenced, also, in Balcon's decision to allow Hitchcock to develop the scenario for *The Man Who Knew Too Much* with Charles Bennett. Moreover, Balcon's recruitment and continued employment of talented technical staff such as the cinematographers Günther Krampf and Bernard Knowles indicates an emphasis on quality of production in pursuit of commercially viable cinema.

Chapter 5: Historical cinema produced by Michael Balcon in the 1930s

5.1 Introduction

In the decade following the introduction of the Cinematograph Films Act (1927), the nation's film industry attracted an exceptional amount of capital investment and developed the studio system that became the basis for its economic infrastructure in the decades following. In the main, this was a period of significant progress, characterised not only by advances in studio organisation but also by the employment of talented émigrés from continental Europe. British cinema during this period was characterised, also, by the variety of genres available to producers, who often opted to adhere to a portfolio strategy of production, in order to appeal to as many cinemagoers as possible. This chapter offers a focus on the impact of film industry investment on one genre, the historical film, which became associated with large budgets and extravagant production values - and of the contribution of émigré film technicians and artists to the sophistication of mise-en-scène. In particular, this chapter offers an exploration of how historical film production provided art directors with opportunities to develop sets that served varying approaches to historical representation. The films explored here are the productions by Michael Balcon of *Journey's End*, *I Was a Spy*, *Jew Süss*, *Rhodes of Africa* and *The Iron Duke*.

Sue Harper argues that Balcon's historical films differed from contemporary producers such as Alexander Korda, particularly with respect to visual style. The historical film genre was distinguished by approaches to set design and cinematography that presented 'the past', whether they were realist or spectacular, in different ways, as the examples cited in Harper's survey of popular historical and costume films indicates.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁵¹ Harper, Sue. *Picturing the Past: The Rise and Fall of the British Costume Film* (London: BFI, 1994)

Whether realist or not, films that were produced to depict past events and figures presented unique challenges to art directors and their staff - resulting from “a constant tension between display and effacement”⁴⁵². Often, accurate historical representation was sacrificed for verisimilitude, which offered greater potential for audience appeal through visual splendour; that is to say, producers sought to address popular views and expectations of historical films rather than attempt strict historical authenticity.

The ambition of the largest British film production companies to gain audience share in the American market had implications for set design, and for film finance. British firms attracted investment on the potential returns from successful American exhibition. With increased available funds, producers escalated budgets. Much of the investment finance was allocated for aesthetics, as the international marketability was judged on spectacle as well as narrative. With increased funding, British producers were able to attract superior technicians and artists from mainland Europe - particularly, those who had worked in the German film industry in the 1920s. The combined influence of continental European aesthetics and British film industry finance entailed, hence, the radical development of British film industry practices, style and structure.

Michael Balcon had maintained associations with European and American production companies and figures from the establishment of Gainsborough Pictures in 1924 onwards, with a corresponding focus on foreign distribution. However, it was the international appeal of an historical film produced by one of Balcon's contemporaries in 1933, Alexander Korda, founder of London Films Productions, which proved most successful and most influential with respect to the transatlantic ambitions of British film producers. The success of *The Private Life of Henry*

⁴⁵² Tashiro, C S. *Pretty Pictures: Production Design and the History Film* (Austin, Texas: University of Austin, 1998) p.94

VIII provoked Balcon to write of the prospects for a new era of British cinema, one in which British film production would be “ever less and less parochial and more and more international in appeal”⁴⁵³. In common with other historical films produced in the 1930s, *The Private Life of Henry VIII* “promoted a strong sense of a British heritage, while also suggesting more subliminally the superiority of British culture and its role in world affairs”⁴⁵⁴. Balcon aligned with Korda, though his ambitions for foreign distribution promoting Britain’s heritage and culture preceded Korda.⁴⁵⁵

Many films produced by the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation in the 1930s appear to serve 'Empire' sensibilities - promoting British heritage, British culture and Britain’s role in world affairs. Michael Balcon and his contemporaries may have been interested in such promotion of Britain, in cinemas at home and abroad, in the 1920s. Discussions undertaken by the Economic Sub-Committee of the 1926 Imperial Conference, which were to affect film production for more than a decade, reached consensus on the type of films that had the potential to revive the British film industry, and film production throughout the British Empire. The encouragement of governments throughout the Empire to collaborate on the production and exhibition of ‘instructional films’ indicates a recognition of the educational and cultural significance not only of documentaries, but also of biographical pictures (biopics) and historical films. Stress was placed, also, on ensuring that films exhibited did not "give the native races very unfavourable impressions as to the characteristics and habits of the white races"⁴⁵⁶ and did not

⁴⁵³ Balcon, Michael. ‘G.B. Goes International’, in *World film News*, Vol.1, No.5 (June 1936) p.6

⁴⁵⁴ Walker, Greg. *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (London: I B Tauris, 2003) p.33.

⁴⁵⁵ Alexander Korda founded London Films Productions in 1932

⁴⁵⁶ Memorandum of the Economic Sub-Committee of the 1926 Imperial Conference. The National Archives, File PRO: CO 323/974/1

offer negative impressions of the armed forces.⁴⁵⁷ The need to work with government to ensure social order through positive cinematic representation of the instruments of state and through positive racial profiling would impact production throughout the 1930s - and might help to explain, to an extent, why producers covered historical subjects inaccurately - including, for example, the "classic case of cinematic whitewashing"⁴⁵⁸ of the life of Cecil John Rhodes in *Rhodes of Africa*, a decade on from the conference.

5.2 *Journey's End*

The decision to adapt *Journey's End* for the screen was taken at a time of uncertainty in British cinema, produced by technological transition. The introduction of sound technology to film production was met with "fear that sound would ruin the poetic art of cinema developed in the silent era - reducing all film to banal talking heads or ringing phones"⁴⁵⁹. However, sound was also regarded as a clear opportunity - improving further the prospects of potentially successful pictures, transforming the commercial viability of otherwise unpromising productions. As Warren Low observed in *The Cinematograph Exhibitors' Diary* of 1928, "The finest film may be greatly enhanced if accompanied by the right and appropriate sound; the poorest film may also be saved from failure by the same means"⁴⁶⁰.

Towards the end of 1931, Michael Balcon was concerned that standards of production achieved in silent cinema should be maintained in the sound era, to ensure the cultural resonance of film products. Balcon considered, also, that sound cinema should bear a particular

⁴⁵⁷ Memorandum of the Economic Sub-Committee of the 1926 Imperial Conference. 'Annex III - Films Calculated to Bring His Majesty's Uniform and the Army into Contempt'. The National Archives, File PRO: CO 323/974/1

⁴⁵⁸ Richards, Jeffrey. *Visions of Yesterday* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973) p.140

⁴⁵⁹ Fischer, Lucy. 'Film Editing', in Miller, Toby; Stam, Robert (Eds.). *A Companion to Film Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004) p.78

⁴⁶⁰ Low, Warren (Ed.). *The Cinematograph Exhibitors' Diary: 1928* (London, 1928) p.69

interpretation of reality, an ideal representation of 'Britishness' in film, which demonstrated British national themes. However, as Balcon reflected decades later, the majority of British films produced in the 1930s lack any true representation of British society - and even films he produced during this decade fail to reflect "the despair of the times in which we were living"⁴⁶¹. There was one exception, in Balcon's view. Only *Journey's End* (1930), Balcon believed, "had something to say at that particular time"⁴⁶².

Like its key contemporary production, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), *Journey's End* is notable for the use of technology. It was the first American-British co-production of the sound era. The coming of sound had proved problematic for British film technicians, but Balcon surmounted numerous obstacles to produce *Journey's End* - involving technical collaboration in America. By April 1929 Gainsborough Pictures had developed plans to produce only "synchronised sound and talking pictures"⁴⁶³. Its studios were at that time "being converted to meet these requirements"⁴⁶⁴. The company was also in negotiations to send a team to the United States of America, "to make an all-talking picture over there"⁴⁶⁵, and had completed plans for sound production in Germany.⁴⁶⁶ In May 1929, as Gainsborough Pictures prepared to equip a sound studio in Islington, it prepared also to collaborate with Welsh-Pearson-Elder Films, Ltd, on the production of *Journey's End*, to which Welsh-Pearson-Elder had acquired global silent and talking film rights.⁴⁶⁷ It was, in fact, produced not only by Gainsborough Pictures in partnership

⁴⁶¹ Balcon, Michael. *Michael Balcon Presents...A Lifetime of Films* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1969) p.41

⁴⁶² *ibid* p.41

⁴⁶³ "'Talkies Only'", in *The Guardian* (4 April 1929) p.18

⁴⁶⁴ *ibid*

⁴⁶⁵ *ibid*

⁴⁶⁶ The first Anglo-German co-production with sound, for Michael Balcon, titled *Bride Number 68* (1929), was made with the collaboration of Hermann Fellner and Josef Somló - with a cast including Conrad Veidt, Elga Brink, and Clifford MacLaglen, directed by Carmine Gallen. ("Talkies Only", in *The Guardian* (4 April 1929) p.18)

⁴⁶⁷ "'Journey's End" as "Talkie"', in *The Guardian* (11 May 1929) p.9

with Welsh-Pearson, but also with Tiffany-Stahl. Filmed in the United States of America at the Tiffany Studios in Hollywood, *Journey's End* was distributed both by Tiffany Pictures and by Woolf & Freedman Film Service.

Journey's End indicates “many of the qualities which were to mark the director James Whale’s later work: close attention to acting and dialogue, a striving for authenticity in settings, and a thoughtful use of camera”⁴⁶⁸. However, at this juncture, and for the purposes of this thesis, the principal consideration is the context of production, and issues associated with distribution and reception.

Michael Balcon’s 1930 adaptation of R C Sherriff's *Journey's End* may be regarded as a key anti-war text. However, it should be noted - particularly, with reference to research conducted by Rosa Maria Bracco⁴⁶⁹ - that Sherriff's intention, when the play made its debut in 1928, and for the duration of Sherriff's life, was that the text should be regarded as a neutral representation of soldier’s experiences, with no moral position. The origins of this ambivalence appear to be the contrasting outlooks of Sherriff and the play’s first theatrical producer, Maurice Browne. Sherriff's career had been transformed for the better when he was commissioned into the 9th Battalion of the East Surrey Regiment and saw active service in France. Browne, however, was a pacifist and a conscientious objector who had remained in America throughout the First World War. Set in the trenches at Saint-Quentin, Aisne, in 1918 towards the end of the First World War, Sherriff uses *Journey's End* to offer insights into the experiences of the officers of a British Army infantry company in World War I. The entire story plays out in the officers'

⁴⁶⁸ Slide, Anthony. *Fifty Classic British Films, 1932-1982: a Pictorial Record* (London: Constable & Co, Ltd, 1985) p.1075

⁴⁶⁹ Bracco, Rosa Maria. *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1939* (Oxford: Berg, 1993)

dugout over four days - from 18 March 1918 to 21 March 1918. The play and Balcon's film adaptation are of an eighteen-year-old 2nd lieutenant, a new arrival at a company of troops commanded by the lieutenant's former friend at school, now a captain. There are three years between them, but a lifetime of experience is understood to distinguish the two. The younger man's Peter Pan-style enthusiasm for war as a big adventure is contrasted by the captain's world-weary bitterness and dependency on whiskey to get him through the horror.

James Whale directed *Journey's End* on stage, in London's West End, before Balcon tasked him with filming it. Balcon's film was, also, the first of many adaptations of *Journey's End* - including a German remake, *Die andere Seite*, in 1931 - and a BBC broadcast on 11 November 1937, in commemoration of Armistice Day. In Sherriff's terms, *Journey's End* may be viewed as a film with neither an anti-war nor a patriotic agenda. In such mode of reference, Whale's film is a powerful representation of the experience of war. The final moments of the production, both pointed and yet understated, are particularly effective in conveying intense empathy.

Sherriff's realistic portrayal of the trenches and the relationships between the principal male protagonists are retained in Balcon's adaptation of the play. The misinterpretation of intent as an anti-war text is understandable, given that the film juxtaposes emotion, friendship, horror and brutality very effectively, with the bleak depiction of the environment of the Western Front, and of the conditions of soldiers in the trench system. The 'journey' on which the soldiers embark upon in literature and in film is fuelled by two human attributes - emotional attachment, and the power of perseverance. Neither play nor film need to depict in graphic detail the events that follow the men's run 'over the top', as the representation of passionate friendships move and endear reader and viewer alike. For example, the anger of the older friend, the captain, is fully

communicated to the audience, following the loss of a comrade - and then with the loss of his school friend, newly arrived amongst the troops. And, perhaps, the most sombre moment comes when the captain is paralysed and killed as shrapnel breaks his spine.

Arguably, Sherriff sought a portrayal devoid of anger or confusion. It is arguable, also, that the intimation of the horrific truth of war-time conflict inevitably requires that *Journey's End*, on screen, in print and on stage, be regarded as an anti-war work. Although Whale, who was himself a British officer and a German prisoner of war, has brought his own understanding of the relationships inherent in men living in the confines of the trenches to the screen, *Journey's End* has not received the accolades of the aforementioned contemporary production of *All Quiet on the Western Front*. However, its impact may be appreciated as being equally potent and its performances more realistically intuitive.

All Quiet on the Western Front represents technological advancements in the film industry, with sound and special effects enabling filmmakers to visualise and personalise warfare as no war film before had. Indeed, Andrew Kelly discusses such significance, citing *All Quiet on the Western Front* as a forerunner of the modern war film through this technology. He writes, "All Quiet on the Western Front was a leap forward for cinema in critically addressing war and peace issues. Here, the Great War is seen as it was: a brutal waste. No film up to then had shown this - indeed, had been able to show this as the time was not right and the camera was incapable, in the early sound era, of recreating the reality of trench combat."⁴⁷⁰ However, *Journey's End* is also notable for the use of technology in production as well as in the filmed story. This was the first film to be produced by the utilisation of new equipment at Gainsborough Pictures' Islington

⁴⁷⁰ Kelly, Andrew. 'The Greatness and Continuing Significance of All Quiet on the Western Front', in Eberwein, Robert (Ed.). *The War Film* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2005) pp.23-29 p.23

facility. Balcon had invested £70,000 fitting the Islington studios with equipment for sound film production during the summer of 1929 - including the construction of false wooden walls inside brick walls to guarantee sound insulation.⁴⁷¹

5.3 *I Was a Spy*

I Was a Spy is a complex and realistic film about the harsh experiences of the First World War. It is an adaptation of the autobiography of Marthe Cnokaert McKenna.⁴⁷² However, the book begins in the McKenna farmhouse in Westroosebeke on 2 August 1914, and with Marthe's father announcing to the family that the German army had invaded Belgium, whereas the film begins in a hospital, after the German invasion.⁴⁷³

Madeleine Carroll plays Martha Cnockhaert, a Belgian nurse working in a military hospital in Belgium during the First World War. She is inspired by her aunt, played by Martita Hunt, to aid the Allied cause by carrying messages. Soon, she graduates to espionage. Herbert Marshall plays the part of a fellow spy, working in the same hospital as an orderly. Carroll's nurse exhibits courage and compassion, helping the wounded regardless of nationality, spying despite her fears and in spite of the fact that it is punishable by death, and agreeing to undertake increasingly dangerous missions. Both Carroll and Marshall were acknowledged in *Picturegoer* for their performances,⁴⁷⁴ and Carroll and Conrad Veidt were similarly acknowledged in *Film Weekly*.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷¹ Low, Rachael. *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985) p.128

⁴⁷² McKenna, Marthe Cnokaert. *I Was a Spy!* (London: Jarrolds, 1933)

⁴⁷³ *ibid* p.15

⁴⁷⁴ *Picturegoer* (28 April 1934)

⁴⁷⁵ *Film Weekly* (9 May 1934)

This is early sound cinema, but many of the film's most interesting sequences are essentially silent. There is, for example, a scene in which Martha anxiously attends a church service for the German army in a field, knowing the Allies are set to attack because of information she has conveyed. Another scene, in which Martha must meet the man she loves after spending a night with a German officer, again features no dialogue, but is acted out through a series of simple gestures. It is tempting to regard this film as representative of the concerns around the transition from silent cinema to sound film production, associated earlier in this chapter with Balcon's production of *Journey's End*.

I Was a Spy was regarded as "technically one of the best pictures made" in the United Kingdom at the time of its release. It was also well-received in the United States of America, where it was released by Fox in December 1933.⁴⁷⁶ Of the principal protagonist, the American critic Mordaunt Hall wrote, "Miss Carroll is both beautiful and convincing in her acting. She looks like a Belgian girl and she arouses no little sympathy, particularly in a closing scene when she gazes upon the Highland soldiers as they march past to the welcome skirl of the pipers."⁴⁷⁷

Michael Balcon's casting of Conrad Veidt in *I Was a Spy* proved to be problematic, though the difficulties GBPC encountered in dealing with the German government were not insurmountable. As Balcon recalls, in his autobiography, Veidt was offered a term contract by GBPC following the success of *I Was a Spy*. However, he was committed to a role in a film to be produced in Germany before making his next production for GBPC. Whilst in Germany, Veidt intimated in correspondence with Balcon that he was facing unspecified difficulties. Veidt did not, then, return to London to report back to GBPC on the contract start date, ahead of the

⁴⁷⁶ *Variety* (24 October 1933) p.16

⁴⁷⁷ Hall, Mordaunt. 'I Was a Spy (1934)', in *New York Times* (15 January 1934)

production of *Jew Süss*, which was to be the first of Veidt's films under the new contract. Rather, as Balcon puts it "there followed a curiously formal letter from him, enclosing a doctor's certificate that he was not well enough to work"⁴⁷⁸. Balcon understood, following further correspondence, that Veidt was being pressurised avoid contributing to the production of *Jew Süss*. Leon Feuchtwanger, the author of the novel on which the film was to be based, had been critical of Nazism, and the German government disfavoured both the book and the prospect of the film adaptation.

Balcon's lawyer introduced him to a doctor in London who was prepared to travel to Germany to examine Conrad Veidt. Although this was arranged with great difficulty, Balcon writes, "The doctor declared that Conrad Veidt was fit to work and the German authorities, apparently unwilling to create a minor incident, allowed him to travel to England."⁴⁷⁹

5.4 *Jew Süss*

As Balcon recalls in his autobiography, an "important consequence of *I Was a Spy*"⁴⁸⁰ was the decision by the Board at GBPC to offer Conrad Veidt a long-term contract. In Balcon's view, the decision was vindicated in successive performances, and most notably in the principal part in *Jew Süss*. Veidt performed expressively to deliver a rather sour portrayal of Joseph Süß Oppenheimer, complementing well Frank Vosper's nuanced portrayal of the Duke of Württemberg, as a man at the mercy of his emotional impulses. Writing for *Film Weekly* in 1934, Balcon commented, "There was no doubt in our minds as to who was the right man to play the

⁴⁷⁸ Balcon, Michael. *Michael Balcon Presents...A Lifetime of Films* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1969) p.76

⁴⁷⁹ *ibid* p.76

⁴⁸⁰ *ibid* p.75

title role - Conrad Veidt. No other man could possibly have been considered - unless Veidt had never existed at all!”⁴⁸¹

Balcon's 1934 production is an adaptation of the novel *Jud Süß*, written by Lion Feuchtwanger, which was published in German in 1925 and in English the following year. It tells the story of an eighteenth century ghetto businessman who thought he was a Jew, who discovers - when he is arrested and sentenced to be hanged under anti-Jewish laws - that he is not, in fact, Jewish. He has the option of declaring his ‘Aryan’ status, but refuses to do so, because that would mean rejecting the community in which he had grown up - even though the consequence of this choice is his execution. To an extent, Michael Balcon's production may be considered a faithful philo-Semitic adaptation of Feuchtwanger's novel - but that is not to say that the novel is necessarily a positive portrayal of Jewish people. A key distinction between novel and film is that the film's main Jewish characters are essentially benign in behaviour, and well-kept - whereas many Jewish characters in Feuchtwanger's novel are fairly unappealing, physically and socially. It might be even be judged that, in the novel, disagreeable stereotypes of Jews are narrated with some relish. In both novel and film, however, Joseph Süß Oppenheimer is ultimately a disagreeable character - at once, arrogant and sycophantic. In fact, though he elects to remain faithful to his 'false' identity as a Jew, he is indifferent to the plight and sensibilities of his fellow Jews in the Württemberg ghetto - yet, he is servile towards the Duke of Württemberg to such an extent that he bears insults directed by the duke without retaliation. The duke kills Süß's daughter whilst trying to rape her - and, still, Süß assists the duke in effecting the corrupt practices that bring wealth and power to each.

⁴⁸¹ ‘Jew Süß, 1934. Article on the film's production by MEB for Film Weekly. The Story of Jew Suss’, in Aileen and Michael Balcon Special Collection, File C/39

One finds that Süß is a rather unpleasant individual. At best, on screen and in print he is a man born with a particular talent for business and finance, trying and succeeding in subversion of a hostile legal framework, but ultimately subordinate to it. At worst, his obnoxiousness delivers him as an unintended gift to those with prejudices against Jews. This interpretation accords with comparative analysis presented in an essay on Balcon's 1934 production and the 1940 treatment sponsored by the Nazi government⁴⁸²; that the intended philo-Semitism of the Balcon production is obfuscated by the portrayal of Süß as a thoroughly ill-mannered and disagreeable individual. Michael Balcon hoped that *Jew Süß* would draw attention to Nazi outrages taking place before and during the film's production - that the story of a Jewish businessman who gains affluence and power in the mid-18th century, despite anti-Jewish legislation and anti-Semitism in government and society, would resonate with audiences of the 1930s, witnessing or learning of similar developments in Germany. However, the treatment of the story, in leaving undiluted the book's negative stereotyping of Jews, lends the film to anti-Semitic interpretations of the mind actively sought by the Nazi adaptation that followed it.

Despite Michael Balcon's claim to have sought, with the making of *Jew Süß*, "to prove that a British product...would serve our one and only purpose - to furnish universally acceptable screen entertainment"⁴⁸³, contemporary critical reception was less than warm. The sentiment of the film was appreciated, but the film was regarded as technically dated - and Balcon was cited for failing to invest in "the fullest use of the technical resources of modern cinema"⁴⁸⁴. Possibly,

⁴⁸² A Nazi adaptation of *Jud Süß*, with an anti-Semitic bias, was produced under the direction of Veit Harlan in 1940

⁴⁸³ 'Jew Süß, 1934. Article on the film's production by MEB for Film Weekly. The Story of Jew Süß', in Aileen and Michael Balcon Special Collection, File C/39

⁴⁸⁴ 'Jew Süß (1934)'. *Monthly Film Bulletin* (October 1934) p.8

this response would have been unexpected by those involved in the production, including Balcon, for a few reasons - not least of which was money spent on the production.

Jew Süss cost around £100,000 to make - more than had been spent on a British production up to that point. In fact, Balcon considered that the story could not be properly filmed for less than £120,000.⁴⁸⁵ Furthermore, the photography is actually quite efficient; in comparison with contemporary productions, the visual proficiency might have offered audiences some respite from rather stiff dialogue.

5.5 Rhodes of Africa

Balcon's production of *Jew Süss* is a straightforward political text, indicating an awareness of the role British film industry might play with respect to British and European political issues in the 1930s, through the effective representation of contemporary social and cultural concerns on screen. Another historical production by Balcon during the 1930s, *Rhodes of Africa* (1936), also represents and reinforces government policy around the time of its production and initial distribution. However, like *Jew Süss*, it also betrays Balcon's personal interest in partisan representations of historical events, themes and figures. In the case of *Rhodes of Africa*, Balcon's personal interest arises from his father's business connections in South Africa, and his father's personal acquaintance with Cecil Rhodes and President Kruger.⁴⁸⁶

There are precedents and contemporary productions to consider in relation to Michael Balcon's production of *Rhodes of Africa*. *Disraeli* (1929), and *The Private Life of Henry VIII* figure in a canon of several biopics produced and popularly received in the 1930s. Pertinent

⁴⁸⁵ 'Jew Süss, 1934. Article on the film's production by MEB for Film Weekly. The Story of Jew Süss', in Aileen and Michael Balcon Special Collection, File C/39

⁴⁸⁶ Balcon, Michael. *Michael Balcon Presents...A Lifetime of Films* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1969) p.3

cinematic precedents are to be found, also, in the making and screening of imperial epics including *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (1935) and *Sanders of the River* (1935). Moreover, Balcon was not alone in choosing Rhodes as the subject for a biographical feature. By 1934 GBPC was one of four companies that developed a plan to produce a biopic of Rhodes.⁴⁸⁷

Rhodes of Africa is an adaptation of *Rhodes*, a biography penned by South African novelist Sarah Gertrude Millin and published in 1933. Millin presents Rhodes as a political visionary, who speculated on the prospect of a global federation of states led by a British governing authority. Her work on Rhodes was popularly received, and was regarded on its initial publication as an interesting and well-written account of Rhodes' life.⁴⁸⁸ However, it is not at all definitive. Not enough attention is paid to Rhodes' early years in Africa, to his political career, or to his role in the Anglo-Boer War, which was fought between Afrikaners and English Colonialists in South Africa in 1899. Rather, Millin's biography of Rhodes is centred on the Jameson Raid - an episode which Rhodes, a man with acquisitive instincts, instigated and then monitored from the side-lines. Motivated by mineral discovery and territorial expansionism, the Jameson Raid was an attempt, initiated by Rhodes, at overthrowing the Boer government in the Orange Free State. Discoveries of significant deposits of diamonds and gold along the Witwatersrand reef, in the Transvaal near Johannesburg, established South Africa as a prime location for acquisition and investment, with serious interest from British mining firms in controlling and gaining from South African mineral extraction.⁴⁸⁹ Rhodes was motivated, also, by the broader agenda of developing plans for a trans-African railway stretching from South Africa to Egypt, so creating a direct trade

⁴⁸⁷ For production details of the Rhodes films not produced by Balcon, see Gutsche, Thelma. *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa, 1895–1940* (Cape Town: Timmons, 1972) pp.338–339

⁴⁸⁸ Roland, Charles. 'A Magnificent Pirate', in Canby, Henry Seidel (Ed.). *The Saturday Review of Literature*, Vol.X (9 September 1933) pp.89-91

⁴⁸⁹ Thompson, Leonard. *A History of South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) pp.115-132

route to Europe and ultimately to Britain. The Jameson Raid was, however, an expensive failure. Rhodes conspired with Johannesburg's political establishment to invade the Transvaal and establish a provisional British governing authority. The army assigned to carry out the invasion was detained en route, along with its leader - an associate of Rhodes - Dr Leander Starr Jameson.

Rhodes of Africa was completed three years on from Balcon's preparatory work and choice of text for adaptation. Afrikaner politicians in office in the 1930s expressed concerns about the misrepresentation of history by the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation. In July 1934 South African Prime Minister General Hertzog wrote to GBPC to ask for caution, to ensure that no part of the filming could "excite racial prejudice". Discussions followed between GBPC representatives and Boer General Jan Christian Smuts that concluded with the South African government retracting its concerns about the film.⁴⁹⁰ GBPC engaged, also, in correspondence with the government of Southern Rhodesia in 1934, to assure its officials that the film would be sympathetic to their concerns, and to offer access to and influence over the film's production. GBPC assured Southern Rhodesia that it would submit its production staff to guidance by its officials - that it would allow Southern Rhodesia limited control over production, and that the company would employ consultants who could help ensure that the GBPC production was accurate and sympathetic - including people who had been associated with Rhodes.⁴⁹¹

Rhodes of Africa represents the Jameson Raid. It depicts, also, Rhodes' personal battles with Boer President Paul Kruger, Rhodes' role in the Jameson Raid - and events surrounding the onset of the Anglo-Boer War at the end of the 19th century, which obviated Rhodes' plans for the

⁴⁹⁰ Gutsche, Thelma. *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa, 1895–1940* (Cape Town: Timmons, 1972) pp.338–39

⁴⁹¹ Correspondence between GBPC and the government of Southern Rhodesia, with reference to the production of *Rhodes of Africa*, is held in the National Archives of Zimbabwe (ZNA), at File ZNA S482/240/39 ('Films of Rhodesian Interest')

continent. It may be regarded as a somewhat simplistic celebration of British imperialism. It may, indeed, act as a “cinematic whitewashing”⁴⁹². It may be considered, less damningly, as a meditation on the idealism of its principal character. What is seen in *Rhodes of Africa* is the successful subjugation of the people of Rhodesia, but presented as a patriarchal, beneficial act intended to create a civilised society in the land. What is seen is conflict between Cecil John Rhodes and his associates and footmen, and the obdurate Afrikaner President Paul Kruger of the South African Republic and the similarly intransigent Afrikaner population. What are viewed, ultimately, are scenes of meetings between Rhodes and Kruger - one in which the two men argue over their respective dealings with a Matabele king, and one in which Rhodes pleads with Kruger for Jameson’s life, following the raid. The impression conveyed by Balcon’s production is that Kruger is a man of honourable intentions - but that he is culpable, ultimately, for the conflict between the Afrikaners and the English. Kruger is portrayed negatively not because his actions were dishonourable, but because he is framed in opposition to Rhodes, who is presented as an agent of progressive change.

Although it represents the life of a key figure, *Rhodes of Africa* takes historical liberties and omits key periods. The fabrications include the depiction of a meeting between Rhodes and the Matabele leader, Chief Lobengula - and the scene in which Rhodes bargains with Kruger for Jameson’s life. Part of the portraying of Rhodes as a positive influence misunderstood and mistreated by locals and other foreigners is the film’s exculpation of Rhodes from responsibility for the Jameson Raid on the Transvaal. No representation of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899 is made. Indeed, the film ends by skipping forward in time, past that conflict, to a title confirming that the creation of a South Africa united under British governance - one of Rhodes’ ambitions -

⁴⁹² Richards, Jeffrey. *Visions of Yesterday* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973) p.140

was achieved in 1910. However, it is reasonable to suggest that Balcon was also motivated not by a need to present an accurate picture of an historical figure. In Balcon's case, the prime motivation for production appears not to be commercial, but to redress possibly unpalatable historical facts of imperialist England through the partisan portrayal of a key figure on film.

One interesting aspect of Balcon's production regime was the nurturing of talent, the support he extended to talented technicians to improve their skills. The production of *Rhodes of Africa*, in particular, is notable for Balcon's intervention in the interest of developing individual capabilities. As Harper reports, Balcon was quoted in the *Sunday Dispatch* published 6 January 1936, apropos the production of *Rhodes of Africa*, thus: "We find, develop, and train young men capable of taking complete charge of a film unit."⁴⁹³ The retaining of experienced staff across a number of films is also a factor. The director Berthold Viertel, art designer Oscar Werndorff and editor Derek Twist had worked together previously on *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*. In particular, Viertel was a veteran of European film production by this time - working on productions from the adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's *Nora* (1923) and the episodic *Die Abenteuer Eines Zehnmarkscheines* (1926), through to the subtle study of a child witnessing the disintegration of a marriage in *Little Friend*.

5.6 The Iron Duke

Whilst the productions of both *Rhodes of Africa* and *Jew Süss* were personal projects for Balcon - notable, for example, for the extent to which he was involved in the choice and treatment of subject matter, the casting and budgetary considerations - another of GBPC's portfolio of historical films is characterised by a loss of control over production matters.

⁴⁹³ Harper, Sue. *Picturing the Past: The Rise and Fall of the British Costume Film* (London: BFI, 1994) p.30

The production of historical films in the 1930s was problematic, with respect to the definitive representation of subject matter. In the case of *Rhodes*, Balcon and his production team simply did not or were not able to deliver wholly accurate representation, at least in part because the text chosen for literary adaptation was not a comprehensive report of Rhodes' life and career - but also because accurate representation of Rhodes, as an ambitious colonialist, would not serve Balcon's aim of promoting a positive picture of British heritage and culture. Balcon's cinematic response to anti-Semitic tendencies in Europe, in the form of *Jew Süss*, is also an adaptation of a literary work. It is arguable that Balcon sought also, a more positive portrayal of the subject matter because - as with *Rhodes* - there was an ideological need to present a positive perspective. Balcon's philo-Semitic adaptation, in which the film's main Jewish characters are depicted as benign and well-kept, contrasts Feuchtwanger's depiction of Jewish characters - and the non-Jewish protagonist - as physically and socially unappealing. Another issue with Balcon's adaptation of Feuchtwanger's novel is that the production was unambitious, lacking the technical dynamism of GBPC's best productions of the period, despite the massive investment in the project - which implies a lack of budgetary control and/or a failure to allocate resources effectively at the time of production. Was Balcon overstretched? Was Balcon overusing GBPC's assets, to the detriment of production values?

It is arguable that, by the mid-1930s, when *Rhodes of Africa*, *Jew Süss* and *The Iron Duke* were produced, GBPC's directors were no longer willing or able to support Balcon's ambitions for superior quality film production and profitable international distribution. The decision, taken by the Board at GBPC, to allow George Arliss to exercise influence over the production of *The Iron Duke*, reducing Balcon's role in the process, indicates a possible lack of faith in Balcon's ability to continue to produce commercially viable films. Indeed, GBPC's Board members could

have regarded their decision to extend influence over production to Arliss as vindicated, as *The Iron Duke* earned revenues in the United States of America.

Balcon's objections to Arliss could represent the culmination of a personal journey for the producer, in which he fundamentally revised his opinion of the value of American participation in the British film industry. However, it is possible to interpret the rejection of Arliss as a rejection of interference in his work at GBPC, at a time when his commercial judgment was being called into question.

During the 1920s, Balcon had supported the use of American actors to generate audience appeal in the UK and in the USA. By the time of Arliss' arrival at GBPC's Shepherd's Bush facilities, Balcon appears to have changed his mind about the value of Americans to British film producers. In the 1920s and 1930s British producers allocated significant shares of their budgets to the importation of American actors, on the understanding that an American name would bolster commercial prospects. Balcon adopted the practice in 1923 with the recruitment of Betty Compson to star in *Woman to Woman*. However, by the 1930s it was becoming apparent that the casting of expensive American actors did not necessarily lead to greater revenues from the circuits - and that the Americans cast by British producers often had not been very successful in the home country, or were experiencing declining popularity. Anna May Wong, for example, had achieved international stardom by 1924 but had become stifled by stereotypical roles both before and after her career in England from the late 1920s onwards.⁴⁹⁴ Gloria Swanson's personal issues contributed to her decline in popularity before coming to England to produce and take the lead in *Perfect Understanding* (1933). By the 1930s the British film industry had become, as *The*

⁴⁹⁴ See Bergfelder, Tim. 'Negotiating Exoticism: Hollywood, Film Europe and the cultural reception of Anna May Wong' in Fischer, Lucy; Landy, Marcia (Eds.). *Stars: The Film Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004) pp.59-76

Picturegoer put it in its 6 May 1933 issue, a refuge for “America’s Throw-Outs, Has-Beens and Never Wasers”⁴⁹⁵. In his autobiography, Michael Balcon indicates that he regretted the decision to recruit American actors to enhance the commercial potential of his films in the 1930s. In his view, many of his American actors did not contribute to the commercial potential of the films he produced. He writes, "I supported the mistaken policy of importing stars from Hollywood in order to make our product more saleable in the Americas"⁴⁹⁶. However, Balcon held the Board of Directors at GBPC responsible for the recruitment of George Arliss - for the productions of *The Iron Duke* (1934), *The Guv'nor* (1935), and *East Meets West* (1936). In Balcon’s view, this was the most significant error in American casting by GBPC during the decade. However, this view must be informed by Balcon’s personal loss of control over the film’s production at Arliss’ instigation, rather than commercial considerations. The fact is that the star appeal of Arliss did generate more money than the production values espoused by Balcon and his team. As Saville confirms, *The Iron Duke* alone brought more revenue from American exhibition - despite Arliss’ waning popularity in the USA - “than infinitely superior pictures, such as *I Was a Spy* or *Evergreen*”⁴⁹⁷ - despite recognition that *I Was a Spy*, in particular, was regarded as "Saville's best work"⁴⁹⁸.

Arliss was British-born, but had achieved screen success in the USA. After making a successful film debut in *Disraeli*, and starring in *The Man Who Played God* (1932), *The House of Rothschild* (1934) and several other features, Arliss decided to return to the United Kingdom, to work. According to Balcon, Arliss sent his manager, Rufus Le Maire, to the UK to secure work

⁴⁹⁵ Macnab, Geoffrey. *Searching for Stars: Stardom and Screen Acting in British Cinema* (London: Cassell, 2000) p.63)

⁴⁹⁶ Balcon, Michael. *Michael Balcon Presents...A Lifetime of Films* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1969) p.88

⁴⁹⁷ Moseley, Roy (Ed.). *Evergreen: Victor Saville in His Own Words* (Carbondale, Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000) p.83

⁴⁹⁸ Collier, Lionel. 'On the Screens Now', in *The Picturegoer* (18 November 1933) p.26

in advance of his return. Le Maire finalised a contract with GBPC's directors, which gave Arliss rights of approval over story, casting, choice of director, and working hours. The contract between GBPC and Arliss took from Balcon "virtually all the prerogatives that must be exercised by a producer if he is to do his job properly"⁴⁹⁹. Balcon seems to have resented the loss of creative control over the production of *The Iron Duke*, and consequently to have viewed Arliss with disdain. Balcon prefaces, in his autobiography, his opinion that Arliss' films at GBPC were poor films with a note on the balance of power with the "pompous" Arliss. Balcon writes, "I am afraid to say the films we made with him (which were, in fact, the films *he* made with us) - *The Iron Duke* (in which he made the Duke of Wellington look and talk like George Arliss rather than the other way round), *The Guv'nor* and *East Meets West*, were not very distinguished works"⁵⁰⁰.

The film's director, Victor Saville, was similarly unimpressed with George Arliss. Saville recalled that Arliss, who was in his seventies when *The Iron Duke* was made, "was long in the tooth to play Wellington"⁵⁰¹ at the age depicted in the film. He remembered, also, that Arliss maintained an entourage and conditions of employment, which were less than conducive to film-making. For example, production was stopped daily at four in the afternoon, so that Arliss could be served tea by his valet, "a Jeeves that even outdid P. G. Wodehouse's creation"⁵⁰².

Furthermore, there were unexpected cost issues and operational problems arising from George Arliss' presence on set. A memorandum from Harold Boxall to C M Woolf cites, as an example of cost overruns at the corporation, the example of the employment of "an entire night staff"

⁴⁹⁹ Balcon, Michael. *Michael Balcon Presents...A Lifetime of Films* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1969) p.88

⁵⁰⁰ *ibid* p.89

⁵⁰¹ Moseley, Roy (Ed.). *Evergreen: Victor Saville in His Own Words* (Carbondale, Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000) p.82

⁵⁰² *ibid*

during the production of *The Iron Duke*, in order to avoid any delay in shooting, which would add to the already high daily costs of working with Arliss.⁵⁰³

Furthermore, it was a problem that the insurance company did not cover actors over seventy, including Arliss - but an additional issue was presented when it emerged that Arliss' aide-de-camp, A E Matthews, was a year older than Arliss. Saville recalled that he had to hoist both actors on to their horses to reproduce the meeting between the duke and Marshall Blücher after the Battle of Waterloo.⁵⁰⁴ Arliss seems to have been uncomfortable at GBPC, in any case. Although he considered that Victor Saville had "made a good job"⁵⁰⁵ of directing *The Iron Duke*, he was not complementary of GBPC's production environment - noting also that *The Iron Duke* "was not the easiest picture in the world to make in the studios at Shepherd's Bush"⁵⁰⁶.

The Iron Duke is a select biographical narrative, based on events in the life of the first Duke of Wellington following the defeat of Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo - though the character of Napoleon actually is not represented at all in the film. Most of the filmed story is viewed through the eyes of the duke, and from the duke's standpoint - including the Battle of Waterloo sequence, which is a central, but not climactic, scene and is shown solely from Wellington's perspective. The film begins with Napoleon in exile, and with Wellington persuaded by Lord Castelreagh (played by Gerald Lawrence) to represent the United Kingdom at the Congress of Vienna. At the congress, during an evening ball, there is interplay between Wellington, the Duchess of Richmond (played by Norma Varden) and Lady Frances Webster - during which it is apparent that Lady Webster admires the duke. Before the interplay between

⁵⁰³ Memoranda between Harold Boxall and C M Woolf (9 October 1934; 12 October 1934), in Aileen and Michael Balcon Special Collection, File C/14

⁵⁰⁴ Moseley, Roy (Ed.). *Evergreen: Victor Saville in His Own Words* (Carbondale, Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000) pp.82-3

⁵⁰⁵ Arliss, George. *My Ten Years in the Studios* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1940) p.250

⁵⁰⁶ *ibid*

these three can develop, however, Wellington learns that Napoleon has escaped and has reached France.

King Louis XVIII (Allan Aynesworth) and his adviser the Duchess d'Angoulême (Gladys Cooper), are untroubled by Napoleon's return to France. However, Marshal Ney (Edmund Willard), decides to act, setting out with 4,000 men to capture Napoleon - before joining Napoleon. Ney was a Napoleonic marshal before Napoleon's defeat.

Napoleon regains control of France, and various armies are reassembled. Napoleon forces the Prussians under Marshal Blücher (Franklin Dyll) to retreat, before engaging Wellington and the British troops at Waterloo. At the critical point in the battle, Blücher and his forces arrive to support Wellington, and Napoleon is defeated.

France is returned to allied control, and the leaders meet in Paris to divvy the spoils of war. Again, Wellington is sent by Castlereagh to try to ensure that the settlement is not too punitive on the French State, and that the conditions for a sustainable peace are established. However, Wellington's involvement is complicated by the actions of the Duchess d'Angoulême, who suspects the British duke of harbouring an ambition to rule France. Wellington attempts to explain to Louis XVIII that the duchess' wish to have Ney executed for treason would risk another revolution, because Ney remains popular with the French people. The duchess organises Wellington's recall to London, however, on the basis of a false newspaper story about an affair between Wellington and Lady Webster.

Whilst Wellington is distracted disproving the story, Ney is convicted and executed by firing squad, enraging the French people. When he returns to Paris, Wellington is able to force the King to dismiss his advisers, including the duchess - but he then has to return to London to explain his decision to take no reparations for Britain.

In terms of the quality of its production and with regard to the accuracy of its representation of subject, it proved a disappointment to contemporary critics. *Newsweek*'s review concludes that the film is poor, for example, because Arliss was approximately twenty years too old to play the Wellington at Waterloo, and because Arliss offered none of the robustness for which the duke was renowned.⁵⁰⁷

There is some merit in the view that *The Iron Duke* lacks the production values of the better productions by GBPC during the 1930s. There is none of the inventive camerawork or editing in Victor Saville's other films for Balcon, such as the 1931 remake of *Hindle Wakes*.⁵⁰⁸ There are no close-ups, for example. Rather, the narrative is delivered through a series of static, but expansive, sets prepared by Alfred Junge and photographed by Curt Courant. With respect to the cast, George Arliss characterises the duke with slow, but measured, delivery. A few of the other actors complement Arliss well - for example, Allan Aynesworth as the indecisive King Louis XVIII, and Lesley Wareing as the impetuous yet empty-headed Lady Frances Webster - but most of the cast are effectively subordinate on screen to Arliss' protagonist, lacking distinctive mannerisms or speech.

5.7 Summary

The production of historical films in the 1930s was problematic, with respect to definitive representation of subject matter. In the case of *Rhodes of Africa*, it is arguable that Balcon failed to produce either an accurate representation of Rhodes' life and career either because an accurate

⁵⁰⁷ 'The Iron Duke, Arliss Does Not Fall Off His Horse', in *Newsweek* (2 February 1935) p.32

⁵⁰⁸ *Hindle Wakes* was originally produced by Victor Saville and Maurice Elvey, with Elvey directing, for Gaumont-British in 1927

portrayal would not serve Balcon's aim of promoting a positive picture of British heritage and culture, or because of technical limitations at the time of production.

Jew Süss and *Rhodes* share an ideological perspective, revealing Balcon's inclination towards propagandist cinema. These films also cement an understanding of Balcon as a technically proficient producer of quality films, but the context of production suggests that Balcon was either overreaching or being overstretched during the mid-1930s. Is a lack of effective control during the production of *Jew Süss* to be considered a factor in the decision by the Board at GBPC to allow George Arliss to exercise influence over the production of *The Iron Duke*?

The production of *Journey's End* is more indicative of Balcon's capacity for collaboration, his ability to manage relations with staff and with external organisations, and organise resources to overcome technical challenges, to produce a commercially viable feature film. Like the productions of *The Iron Duke* and *Rhodes of Africa*, *Journey's End* stands for Balcon's interest in projecting British history and imperial interests positively. Similarly, *I Was a Spy* serves as propagandist celluloid, though its production values, which were well-regarded by contemporary critics and well-received in cinemas, mean that the production reflects well Balcon's capabilities as a coherent force in production teams, when working without interference, managing assorted talents to achieve a commercially-successful production.

Chapter 6: Michael Balcon's 1930s horror films

6.1 Introduction

Analyses of two films in this chapter serve to highlight influences on producer of horror genre feature films in the 1930s - in particular, the critical importance of literary sources for film adaptation, thematic references within films to earlier productions, and both the use of new technologies to produce the films, and the representation of new technologies within the films produced. Additionally, the influence both of the American and German film industries is a significant factor, as British producers including Michael Balcon sought to emulate the filmic elements contributing to the commercial of American horror genre cinema.

6.2 *The Ghoul* and its stereotypes

Despite a rich tradition of horror in British literature - including influential novels such as *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*⁵⁰⁹, *Frankenstein*⁵¹⁰, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*⁵¹¹ and *Dracula*⁵¹² - analysis of the horror genre in film has been problematic for scholars of interwar British cinema. Achieving an understanding of horror film production in the 1920s, prior to the mass commercialisation of sound on film, is particularly hampered by a lack of critical examination. For example, L S Smith's filmography in *British Horror Cinema* lists sound horror films only⁵¹³ - and Dennis Gifford identifies only a couple of silent films as horror

⁵⁰⁹ Radcliff, Anne. *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (London: Hookham and Carpenter, 1793)

⁵¹⁰ Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* (London: Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor, & Jones, 1818)

⁵¹¹ Stevenson, Robert Louis. *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1886)

⁵¹² Stoker, Bram. *Dracula* (London: Archibald Constable & Company, 1897)

⁵¹³ Smith, L S. 'Filmography of British Horror Films of the Sound Era', in Chibnall, Steve; Petley, Julian (Eds.). *British Horror Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2002) pp.196-238

films.⁵¹⁴ Phil Hardy lists only *The Basilisk* in the silent section of his horror encyclopaedia.⁵¹⁵

Nevertheless, early British film adaptation of literary sources did include adaptation of Gothic novels, and these have been mapped by one researcher, Jonathan Rigby, who has produced the only substantial list of British silent horror films based upon their relation to Gothic literature.⁵¹⁶

Part of the difficulty in locating early horror films lies in attributing films to the horror genre before it existed. Siegfried Kracauer for example, argues that the First World War gave rise to a horror tradition in German cinema - but that German films were not conceived by their makers as part of a horror film genre, since horror was not established as a genre until the 1930s. With respect to British cinema, horror was recognised formally by a development in British regulation - the introduction (in 1933) and application (until 1951) of the 'H' certificate by British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) - which initially caused British producers to obviate overt associations with horror, in order to ensure audience appeal was not limited. However, perceived demand for horror in film was such that films featuring horror elements were produced - but were marketed as melodramas, thrillers or comedies.⁵¹⁷

The first British production to be assigned H certification by the BBFC, *The Ghoul* depicts characters apparently returning from the dead, borrowing only the outline of a 1928 novel written by Frank King, which subsequently became a play penned by King and Leonard J Hines. In King's novel, a criminal popularly referred to as 'The Ghoul' is responsible for a series of crimes committed in London. Also, a woman called Betty inherits an estate on the Yorkshire

⁵¹⁴ Gifford, Dennis. *The British Film Catalogue Volume 1: Fiction Film 1895-1994* 3rd Edition (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001)

⁵¹⁵ Hardy, Phil (Ed.). *The Aurum Film Encyclopaedia: Horror* (London: Aurum Press, 1985) p.18

⁵¹⁶ Rigby, Jonathan. *English Gothic: A Century of Horror Cinema* (London, Reynolds and Hearn, 2000) pp.10-15

⁵¹⁷ Ian Conrich analyses the impact of censorship on British horror film production. See Conrich, Ian. 'Horrific Films and 1930s British Cinema', in Chibnall, Steve; Petley, Julian (Eds.) *British Horror Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2002) pp.58-70

moors. Betty's benefactor is Edward Morlant, who had had a relationship with Betty's mother. Morlant's will requires Betty to take up residence in the house on the estate. Betty moves to the house, in which Morlant's corpse appears, and tells Betty that he is an immortal. He is seeking, also, the return of a secret diary. Following this, an assortment of characters converge on the house. Morlant reappears, but is killed, stabbed through the heart - but then he is wandering the house again. Additionally, dead people are appearing at or in the house.

This whole situation is revealed, ultimately, to be less than a supernatural phenomenon, however - as 'The Ghoul' (and the constantly reappearing 'corpse' of Edward Morlant) is revealed to be Edward Morlant's twin brother, James. The tale ends with James setting fire to the house.

The film of the book blends elements of King's narrative with the mysticism of *The Mummy* (1932) and the ambiance of *The Old Dark House* (1932) - both of which had featured Boris Karloff, the lead player in *The Ghoul*. In the film, Morlant is a professor, and an Egyptologist. Morlant believes that, if he is buried with a jewel called 'The Eternal Light' in a mock Egyptian tomb he has constructed at his house on a country estate, Anubis will appear before him, accept his gift of the jewel, and grant him eternal life.⁵¹⁸ When Morlant appears to die, however, the jewel is snatched by his butler, Laing, before the burial. As Morlant's heirs arrive for the reading of the will, Morlant rises from his tomb, realises that the jewel has been taken, and seeks revenge. Various characters handle the jewel - it is passed from the servant to a lawyer, to a niece, to an Egyptianophile, to a spinster, to a man posing as a vicar - before it is again in Morlant's hands. Morlant offers a blood sacrifice to Anubis before dying - and it

⁵¹⁸ The film betrays, here, a lack of research in preparation. Morlant is characterised as an Egyptologist in the film, but 'Anubis' is actually the Greek name for the god known in Egyptian mythology - and associated with mummification and afterlife - as Ienpw

emerges that he had not died before; that he been buried alive after suffering a seizure. Late into the film, the fake vicar is revealed to be the criminal, who - having taken *The Eternal Light* - sets fire to Morlant's tomb, and so to the house. As an adjunct, Betty escapes the burning property with her life and her lover.

The Ghoul's characters are a collection of simplistic stereotypes - basic archetypes of the horror genre - but there is good interaction within a complicated, atmospheric treatment. The cast tends to overact, but Boris Karloff and Cedric Hardwicke perform well as counterparts - and Ernest Thesiger, Ralph Richardson, Dorothy Hyson and Anthony Bushell offer effective support. The key problem with characterisation in this film is that the parts are underwritten, and the plot develops relatively slowly - even by contemporary standards - although the assault scene in the bedroom and the final fist fight in the tomb are convincing and well-choreographed.

T Hayes Hunter's experience of directing silent films served this production well - with evident deployment of a perpetually moving camera resulting in little wastage of screen time. *The Ghoul* is an exercise in succinct, economic film production - extending a theatrical tradition of supernatural mysteries with a rational explanation.

The Ghoul is a good example of the Anglo-European style adopted by Balcon at GBPC during the 1930s. With respect to photography and mis-en-scène, *The Ghoul* could be regarded as a caricature of German horror films of the 1920s. Cinematographer Günther Krampf immerses the entire film in a complex arrangement of shadows and candlelight. Alfred Junge's art direction is a surreal concoction of Gothic design, Orientalist ornamentation, and elaborate set structures.

In the decade preceding his employment by Michael Balcon for *The Ghoul*, Günther Krampf had achieved recognition as one of “Germany’s most important cameramen”⁵¹⁹, alongside technicians including Theodor Sparkuhl and Karl Puth. Krampf’s record included *Orlacs Hände* (1924)⁵²⁰ and *Der Student von Prague* (*The Student of Prague*, 1926)⁵²¹. A year before to his employment by Balcon, Krampf had also directed two quota quickies in the United Kingdom - *The Outsider* (1931), and *The Bells* (1931). In almost every film on which he worked, Krampf in a 'naturalist' mode of photography, in which the audience is treated to "an exaggerated, but nevertheless realist vision of the world"⁵²². *The Ghoul* is an exception, in that Krampf delivered an Expressionistic treatment - which is concerned more with utilisation of space, lighting and décor to present an abstract or theatrical reality rather than a natural or plausible reality.

6.3 Boris Karloff and *The Man Who Changed His Mind*

Boris Karloff returned to work for Michael Balcon in 1936, for the Gainsborough Pictures production of *The Man Who Changed His Mind*. Karloff plays a scientist with the ability to transpose the mind of one person to the brain of another. The scientist, Dr Laurience, lives in a manor on the outskirts of London, with a companion called Clayton, played by Donald Calthrop. Clayton is paralysed, and has a fatal brain disease - and Dr Laurience is keeping him alive.

⁵¹⁹ Robinson, Kelly. ‘Flamboyant Realism: Werner Brandes and British International Pictures in the Late 1920s’, in Bergfelder, Tim; Cargnelli Christian. *Destination London: German-speaking Emigrés and British Cinema, 1925-1950* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008) p.65

⁵²⁰ Günther Krampf collaborated on *Orlacs Hände* with fellow cinematographer Hans Androschin

⁵²¹ The cinematography for *Der Student von Prague* was handled Günther Krampf and Ernst Nitzschmann

⁵²² Omasta, Michael. ‘Famously Unknown: Günther Krampf’s Work as Cinematographer in British Films’, in Bergfelder, Tim; Cargnelli Christian. *Destination London: German-speaking Emigrés and British Cinema, 1925-1950* (Oxon: Berghahn Books, 2008) p.82

Another character, a publisher called Lord Haslewood, played by Frank Cellier, funds experiments conducted by Dr Laurience at Haslewood's institute in London.

When Dr Laurience is ridiculed following a presentation to the Medical Society, Lord Haslewood withdraws financial support for his experiments. Laurience becomes crazed by rejection and the withdrawal of patronage. He straps Lord Haslewood into a chair, and transfers Haslewood's mind into Clayton's body, which then expires from heart failure. Clayton demands that his new mind be transferred into the body of Lord Haslewood's son, Dick. Laurience rejects this, and strangles Clayton. Furthermore, Laurience has determined to share his secret of eternal youth with his assistant, Dr Clare Wyatt, played by Anna Lee. Laurience's plan is to live eternally with Clare, by repeatedly transferring their minds to younger bodies. Clare is engaged to marry Dick Haslewood - but Laurience is resolved to murder Dick, and transfer his mind into Dick's body in order to secure Clare's love and his place at the Haslewood Institute.

As observed in *Monthly Film Bulletin* in September 1936, the film is constructed and directed to provide "plenty of macabre thrills without descending to horrific sensationalism"⁵²³. The director Robert Stevenson created a visually arresting, Expressionistic mis-en-scene, which cinematographer Jack Cox exploited with a combination of innovative photographic techniques, allying a number of POV shots with dolly and tracking camerawork and a number of montage sequences.

Early in the film the young couple, Clare and Dick, discuss Clare's imminent departure to work with the renowned but reclusive Laurience. The position appears to represent a great career opportunity for Clare, but Dick has reservations based on information gained whilst working in Fleet Street - Dick is a reporter, working on his father's newspaper. He is anxious, and his

⁵²³ 'Man Who Changed His Mind, The', in *Monthly Film Bulletin* (September 1936) p.148

anxiety manifests itself in a proposal of marriage. His reservations cause him, also, to follow Clare to her new place of work, the small village where Laurience lives and works, on the basis that she needs to be protected and the pretence that he may be able to write a story. He does, indeed, write a story, to which his father responds by offering Laurience access to the equipment and resources of the Haslewood Institute in return for exclusive rights to publish the results of the Laurience's experiments. The ridicule Laurience experiences at the scientific conference Lord Haslewood has arranged to hear the doctor's theories is not what unhinges the doctor. After Laurience is mocked, after he loses financial and technical support, Lord Haslewood claims all Laurience's work as his property, to use as he pleases, based on the contracts signed. This is what unhinges Laurience, who then resolves to use his technology and theories for personal gain rather than for the betterment of humanity.

Thematically, *The Man Who Changed His Mind* borrows from *Frankenstein* the concept of the scientist striving for immortality and rejuvenation, focusing on the growing obsessiveness and psychological dislocation of Dr Laurience, and the murderous and abusive actions leading to the investigation of his affairs. The catastrophic denouement seems a fitting resolution both to the filmed story and its treatment, which benefits not only from the proficiencies of many of best technicians available to British film industry, employed by Balcon at Gainsborough Pictures studios in Islington, but also a scripting that offers a combination of the gravitas of John L Balderston⁵²⁴ and the wit of Sidney Gilliat.⁵²⁵

⁵²⁴ Balderston's writing work in the early 1930s included scripting for Tod Browning and Carl Laemmle, Jr for *Dracula* (1931), and for Laemmle, Jr for *Frankenstein* (1931) and *The Mummy* (1932)

⁵²⁵ Gilliat had written, prior to *The Man Who Changed His Mind*, for Michael Balcon's productions of *The Ringer* (1931) and *Rome Express*

6.4 *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*

The director of *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*, Berthold Viertel begins by borrowing a theme from *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog*. A foreign gentleman - the Stranger - arrives at a boarding house - the Hotel Belle Vue - in Bloomsbury, London. He is an enigmatic figure, played by Conrad Veidt with a slight sinisterness and an air of austerity. His first appearance, in the hotel doorway, echoes that of Ivor Novello in *The Lodger*. The comparable entrances of the protagonists in the two films may not be coincidental, since Alma Reville wrote for both films. Reville's work on both films might explain, also, the possible uses of both films as religious allegories. The BBFC demanded that a number of purifications be incorporated into the script,⁵²⁶ but the presence of religion is stronger in Reville's and Michael Hogan's adaptation for the screen than in the source novel by Jerome K Jerome. For example, there is a church set behind Veidt as he crosses the threshold of the hotel for the first time, from which a cruciform shadow falls across his chest. This corresponds to the cruciform imagery of *The Lodger* - both in the window shadows behind Annie Ondra creating an approximation of a crucifix shape, and in the mock-crucifixion of Novello's character towards the end of the film.

Edith Nepean reported for *Picture Show* that Conrad Veidt was uncertain that he could portray the protagonist character effectively *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*. However, his personal qualities and approach to acting were recognised as most appropriate to play the Christ-like figure motivating the narrative. Nepean observed of Veidt, on set, "He is a keen student of psychology; he strives to show the complex workings of the human mind, the subtleties of cause and effect. He wears the mantle of his character, it clothes him with meekness or devotion. It

⁵²⁶ Harper, Sue. 'Thinking Forward and Up', in Richards, Jeffery (Ed.). *The Unknown 1930s: an Alternative History of the British Cinema, 1929-1939* (London: I B Tauris & Co, 1998) p.131

becomes part and parcel of himself. He bathes himself in a sort of subtle emotionalism, which creates the very essence of that which he would depict."⁵²⁷

In *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*, Frank Cellier plays "the Satan to Conrad Veidt's tender characterisation"⁵²⁸. Religious and moralistic themes persist in *The Passing of the Third Floor Back* - described accurately by John J Soister as "a working class fantasy of Good versus Evil"⁵²⁹. The hotel has become a microcosmic hell. Its residents represent assorted depravity and victimhood. Stasia, a kitchen maid (played by René Ray) from a reform school background, resists advances from the lecherous property developer Mr Wright (Frank Cellier). At the same time, Major Tomkin (John Turnbull) and his wife are considering giving their daughter, Vivian (Anna Lee), in marriage to Mr Wright. Vivian is resigned to acquiescing to her parent's wishes, even though she is in love with an architect who also lives in the house. There are gossips in the forms of the cynical Miss Kite, the snobbish Mrs de Hooley and a musician called Mr Larkcom. The hotel landlady, Mrs Sharpe, runs the establishment with indifference towards the guests' predicaments and activities.

Most of these characters behave abhorrently, making the job of delivering redemption challenging for the protagonist, the Stranger, who has taken a room on the third floor back in the building. However, the Stranger tries to transform the other residents into better versions of themselves. He encourages the other residents to behave in more civilised fashion, to respect each other better and to try to realise their goals rather than fret about their social positions. Some, but not all, of the house's residents are persuaded to change. Veidt then offers to treat the residents and the servants - including Stasia - to a Bank Holiday boat trip to Margate. The trip

⁵²⁷ Nepean, Edith. 'My friends in British Studios', in *Picture Show* (8 June 1935) p.8

⁵²⁸ *ibid*

⁵²⁹ Soister, John T. *Conrad Veidt on Screen* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2002) p.270

begins well, but Stasia falls in the Thames. However, a woman jumps in and saves Stasia's life, and she is looked after by the Tomkins as if she were their daughter. The Tomkins then experience regret over their pressuring Vivian into a marriage with Wright. Meanwhile, various residents on the trip begin to enjoy the trip and begin also to treat each other respectfully.

Only Wright rejects the positive changes amongst the group. Until the boat trip, he has been a domineering, evil force in the house, commanding respect through fear. He sets out to disrupt the Stranger's efforts to reform the residents, successfully returning them to bickering and misery by corrupting them with money. Wright rejects the repeated entreaties by the Stranger to try live a better life - but Wright rejects the suggestion. Thus, a moral battle ensues, with the Stranger's positivity set against Wright's evil intent, with the quality of the residents' lives at stake - until Wright's accidental death, following which the residents come to terms with each other once more and the Stranger departs as suddenly - and as enigmatically - as he arrived.

The production of *The Passing of the Third Floor Back* was hampered by financial constraints. By 1935, GBPC was generally unprofitable, and Balcon was charged with cutting costs. The original production schedule of six weeks and four days was cut by a week, and the director Berthold Viertel was asked to limit the number of shots taken. Ivor Montagu, Balcon's associate producer on this film, objected strongly but in vain to the cuts, in communication with GBPC production manager S C Balcon.⁵³⁰ Montagu complained that he was being placed at odds with Viertel - "as one who in servile enthusiasm to reduce the company's expenses, urges him to impossible feats"⁵³¹. Viertel, for his part, complicated matters by ignoring Montagu's instructions and seeking assurances from Montagu's superiors. Viertel gained assurances from Maurice

⁵³⁰ 'Who's What in the Industry', in *The Kinematograph Year Book 1942* (London: Kinematograph Publications Ltd) p.243

⁵³¹ Letter from Montagu to S. Chandos Balcon, 5 April 1935, in the Ivor Montagu Special Collection (MONT/40)

Ostrer that he could direct without the hindrance of what both he and Montagu believed was an impracticably-reduced shooting schedule.

There were fewer sets for *The Passing of the Third Floor Back* than for any production Viertel had worked on to that point, and only one location - Margate. Viertel studied another film in which the majority of the action takes place in and around a house in London, *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* (1934), to understand how to utilise equipment and sets most effectively within confined working conditions. Viertel determined that he would have to integrate camerawork more fully into the production, and therefore to work closely with the cinematographer Curt Courant. After watching *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*, writing in *Film Weekly*'s 3 May 1935 issue, Viertel noted, "By following the movements of the various players, the camera virtually 'acted' a part in the film. It created the correct atmosphere, and laid symbolic emphasis on the right people at the right time. In *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*, we shall use our camera in the same way."⁵³²

6.5 Summary

Interwar British horror film production may be understood as a cinema based on adaptation of literary sources, with the prominence of Gothic literature key consideration in locating the horror genre in the British cannon. Cinema and horror did gain formal recognition through regulation - by the British Board of Film Censors - but this impacted categorisation of horror productions. Michael Balcon's interest in profiting from high quality productions applies to interwar horror cinema, and there are strategic options exercised for horror as for other genres.

⁵³² Gough-Yates, Kevin. 'Berthold Viertel at Gaumont-British', in Richards, Jeffery (Ed.). *The Unknown 1930s: an Alternative History of the British Cinema, 1929-1939* (London: I B Tauris & Co, 1998) p.210

Balcon sought to appeal to mass audiences in two ways. He employed skilled, and established, technicians to ensure the quality of production. He cast well-known artists and chose popular literary sources for adaptation in order to achieve cultural resonance. The employment of skilled technicians meant, also, that when funding was restricted, as for the production of *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*, innovations (for example, in camerawork and the utilisation of sets) could ensure that a reduction in quality was averted.

Chapter 7: Michael Balcon's interwar attempt at documentary film production

7.1 Introduction

John Grierson coined the term 'documentary' in 1926, when reviewing *Moana* (1926) in the *New York Sun*.⁵³³ He is credited, also, with establishing the first principles of documentary cinema in the 1920s and 1930s - perhaps, most notably in a series of essays in the mid-1930s.⁵³⁴ At the Empire Marketing Board (EMB) between 1930 and 1933, and at the Government Post Office (GPO) from 1933 on, John Grierson established and developed a British institutional base for documentary film-makers, cultivating a community of practitioners, championing conventions of film practice, and defining audience expectations for documentary films. Documentaries produced in Britain between 1929 and 1939, by the practitioners of the 'British Documentary Movement', present "a cross-section of society, thus building up a unique record of British life, its health, education and social services, its industries and even communications"⁵³⁵.

This chapter is concerned with the context of the production of *Man of Aran*, a film loosely based on reality but more concerned with mythic and thematic interpretation, and visual poetry. Arguably, one may take the view that *Man of Aran* is a documentary, located in "the gap between life as lived and life as narrativized"⁵³⁶ identified by Bill Nichols. However, in another sense, this is a film which represents elements of the documentary genre but which fails

⁵³³ 'The Moviegoer' (pen name of John Grierson). 'Moana' in *New York Sun* (8 February 1926). For the text, and context, of Grierson's review of *Moana*, see also Rotha, Paul. *Robert J. Flaherty* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983) pp.78-9

⁵³⁴ Grierson, John. 'First Principles of Documentary (1932-1934)', in Barsam, Richard Meran (Ed.). *NonFiction Film Theory and Criticism* (New York: Dutton, 1976) pp.19-30

⁵³⁵ Cumberlege, G (Ed.). *The Factual Film: A Survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947) p.12

⁵³⁶ Nichols, Bill. 'Questions of Magnitude', in Corner, John (Ed.). *Documentary and Mass Media* (London: Arnold, 1986) p.114

ultimately to meet the requirements for documentary film production and content, as set out by the Documentary Film Movement.

7.2 Michael Balcon and Robert Flaherty

Michael Balcon was a commercially-minded producer, who had attracted audiences and revenues in the 1920s and 1930s through the recruitment and promotion of foreign and domestic actors such as Betty Compson and Ivor Novello, and the nurturing of talented film technicians such as Alfred Hitchcock, in order to produce film of quality and commercial appeal. Moreover, Balcon had bolstered development of the British film industry by forging close working arrangements with continental European production houses and leading film industry figures - to learn from and adopt innovative film practices, to gain access to advanced facilities and equipment, and to exploit foreign distribution networks. Notably, Balcon had established links in Germany, where Hitchcock and others benefitted from the utilisation of advanced facilities and from the observation and deployment of innovative film practices.

Robert Flaherty, on the other hand, was a maverick, and ignorant of the requirement for film producers to maintain control over production teams, to operate within defined budgets and film production schedules. The result was an expensive drama-documentary, with little evidence of Balcon's influence over the film-making undertaken by Flaherty. In the trade, *Man of Aran* became known as 'Balcon's folly'. It was an exercise in folly, or foolishness if you will, that he would never repeat.

Flaherty made his first full feature documentary film, *Nanook of the North* (1922), when he was thirty-six years old. Before committing himself to a career in film, Flaherty had been a prospector, a surveyor, and an explorer, making four expeditions between 1910 and 1916 to the

sub-Arctic regions of the Hudson Bay. Flaherty had filmed locations on two of these expeditions, to Baffin Land in 1913-1914, and to the Belcher Islands in 1915, as a side-line to help defray the costs of the expeditions. The 30,000 feet of film he took to Toronto to edit was lost in a fire. Nonetheless, the experience of film photography inspired Flaherty to become seriously involved in film-making - and in June 1920 Flaherty travelled to Hudson Bay with 75,000 feet of film stock, a Haulberg electric light plant and projector, two Akeley cameras, and a printing machine to make prints of exposed film on location. It was whilst filming in Hudson Bay that Flaherty met an Eskimo called Nanook.

Flaherty's adventures before his career in film appear to have profoundly influenced his development as a filmmaker. The expeditions that brought Flaherty into contact with the Eskimo culture enhanced his appreciation of the human condition in a natural setting, and enabled him to develop a talent for 'in situ' observation and photography.

Flaherty appears to have turned to filmmaking to communicate to the outside world his impressions of Eskimo culture. He appears to have held a deep respect for the Eskimos, for their inherently physical struggle to survive in challenging environments. Flaherty sought to portray their existence in a manner that would illustrate the purity and nobility of their lives, a purpose underlying each of his films.

Flaherty developed a method of working that was fairly consistent from film to film. His filmed depictions of the people of the Aran Islands, as with his films of the peoples of Hudson Bay, Samoa, and the Louisiana Bayou, demonstrate a more or less constant concern with people who live in natural settings, representative of societies on the verge of change.

Another consistent factor in Flaherty's work is the selection of a 'cast'. He may have pioneered the use of real people to re-enact their own everyday lives before a camera, but he

appears to have chosen ideal types on the basis of physical appearance, and to have created artificial families to act before the camera.

Typically, Flaherty encouraged improvisation, working without a plot or script. Flaherty's method required total immersion in a culture in order to discover the basic patterns of life. However, Flaherty's working methods left Balcon and Gainsborough with little control over the production. Shooting on location, off the west coast of Ireland, not only was Flaherty literally remote and beyond contact, but was also to finish production over-schedule and over-budget. The cost of production was never recovered by revenues from screening.

Amongst contemporaries in the 1920s, Flaherty's uncompromising interest in producing naturalistic films had impressed Fred Zinnemann - who met Flaherty in 1926 whilst working on *Menschen am Sonntag*. In an ultimately unpublished manuscript about Flaherty, Zinnemann writes that Flaherty "was preoccupied in showing the spirit of man" - and recalls that he learned from Flaherty "that if you want to make a picture, you should try to tell the truth as you see it, and try not to compromise nor deviate from what you are trying to say".⁵³⁷

John Grierson held a particular interest in the naturalistic form of film-making promoted by Flaherty, as is indicated in a memorandum authored by Grierson for the Industries & Manufactures Department of the Board of Trade, which was circulated to the Film Committee of the Empire Marketing Board on 5 May 1927. After opening the memorandum with a claim of "popular demand for a worthy use of the medium", Grierson suggests that film production is best developed by exploiting "its own inherent nature and more obvious powers" - these powers comprising "a pre-occupation with movement which ensures a drama of action, an elasticity

⁵³⁷ Zinnemann, Fred. 'Reminiscences of Flaherty', in Bachmann, Gideon (Ed.). *Bob or Speaking of Robert Flaherty* (Unpublished Manuscript, ND)

which permits of great variety in scene and setting, a detachment which allows for idealisation, a command over the natural which allows for the more objective forms of poetry, an essentially visual appeal which makes it difficult to impose on it all matters syllogistic”⁵³⁸.

7.3 *Man of Aran*

Man of Aran is a naturalistic documentary film, a film that sets out to imitate real life or natural environments, but through a fictional narrative. This is a simple story of “hardy fisherfolk and peasants”⁵³⁹ off the west coast of Ireland. It is a representation of life on the three Aran islands off the western coast of Ireland. It is a portrayal of hardship, an audio-visual record of the daily routines of islanders. Aran island activities in the thirties, as depicted in Flaherty's film, consisted of crop farming on relatively barren ground, line fishing from a tall cliff, harpooning a basking shark from a boat, cooking shark liver and decanting shark liver oil. Flaherty depicts, also, the sea's destruction of the boat used to hunt the shark.

Flaherty was invited to Britain by the Empire Marketing Board Film Unit - which supported educational and propaganda services provided by EMB. Flaherty had no significant background in commercial cinema before working on *Man of Aran*. He had not been involved in cinema since working with F W Murnau on *Tabu: A Story of the South Seas* (1931), described by Grierson as "a film which was financed and made outside of the commercial circle"⁵⁴⁰. Flaherty was introduced to the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation by Cedric Belfrage and Angus MacPhail. Grierson recalls that Flaherty was given carte blanche by GBPC, with respect to his

⁵³⁸ Forwarding copy of a paper circulated to the Film Committee of the Empire Marketing Board (5 May 1927). The National Archives, File BT 64/86

⁵³⁹ ‘New Films in London’, in *The Times* No.46735 (23 April 1934) p.12

⁵⁴⁰ *ibid* p.59

work on the Aran islands. A 'carte blanche' arrangement, Grierson writes, "was altogether a freak happening in commercial cinema and entirely due to the supporting courage of Michael Balcon and MacPhail"⁵⁴¹.

Flaherty and his wife moved to the largest of the three Aran Islands, Inishmore, in 1931, and built a studio. He prepared a laboratory, a screening room, and an editing suite.⁵⁴² Flaherty built several facilities on Inishmore. The Irish researcher Lance Pettitt criticises Flaherty for his impact on the island environment.⁵⁴³ As an example of the detrimental effects of Flaherty's impact on the island, of the kind that Pettitt criticises, we can take the disappointment of David Noble, a photographer, who captured views of the island without knowing that the cottage that Flaherty had built for the production was not the traditional building he believed it to be.⁵⁴⁴ Given that the cottage photographed by Noble was made by traditional methods,⁵⁴⁵ we may consider that Flaherty's intent may have been to construct a form of documentary film by associating a reconstructed or purported reality and a filmed reality. This view may be aligned with Walter Benjamin's contention, first published in 1936, that reality is reproduced or reconstructed in order to bring the contemporary masses closer to spatial, 'human' experience.⁵⁴⁶ However, Flaherty's construction fictionalises the island environment, and possibly contravenes the understanding of the documentary as a form of art, which positions the viewer in a world of things as they are.

Kevin Rockett denounces the negative effect of Flaherty's work on the Aran islands, for helping to impoverish the representations of the Irish landscape almost immediately. The

⁵⁴¹ Hardy, Forsythe (Ed.). *Grierson on Documentary* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1966) p.59

⁵⁴² Comolli, Jean-Louis. *Voir et pouvoir* (Lagrasse: Éditions Verdier, 2004) p.223

⁵⁴³ Pettitt, Lance. *Screening Ireland* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2000) p.77

⁵⁴⁴ *Hindesight* (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 1993) p.38

⁵⁴⁵ Pettitt, Lance. *Screening Ireland* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2000) p.78

⁵⁴⁶ Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (London: Penguin Books, 2008)

reception of *Man of Aran*, its promotion and acceptance as documentary, led cinematic images of Ireland to acquire a generic and false value within Ireland as well as globally. As Rockett writes, “Following the international success of *Man of Aran* (1934) it was hardly surprising that O’Cahill’s choice of location, if not theme, was similar to Robert Flaherty. *The Islandman* (which is also known as *West of Kerry*) promoted a similar set of values...”⁵⁴⁷ Arguably, the success of Flaherty’s work legitimised a stereotypical impression of Ireland, with *Man of Aran* and successive productions. As Rockett observes, “Irish documentary production did not follow the British route in the 1930s. There, an active group of film-makers presented an oppositional cinema through documentary production with their focus on the working class and social problems. Irish film-makers made little or no attempts to explore such a reality in the 1930s and chose to reproduce in the main both the a-historical ethnicity represented in *Man of Aran* and its economic off-shoots, the tourist-landscape film.”⁵⁴⁸

Paul Rotha, who was a British documentary film-maker and a contemporary of Flaherty, opposed the stylised form of documentary represented by Flaherty’s work. In Rotha’s view, Flaherty represents ideas rather than facts and discards or rejects analysis of social context.⁵⁴⁹

Flaherty used a mobile camera and long lenses, reducing distances and depth of field. The use of a mobile camera was not unusual, but Flaherty’s management of photography was innovative. Flaherty used a Newman-Sinclair 35mm wind-up camera. According to Richard Griffith, Flaherty "was the first Director to understand that the eye of the camera doesn't behave

⁵⁴⁷ Rockett, Kevin; Gibbons, Luke; Hill, John. *Cinema and Ireland* (London and New York: Routledge, 1987) p.67

⁵⁴⁸ *ibid* p.72

⁵⁴⁹ Rotha, Paul. *Documentary Film* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952)

in the same way as the human eye that selects from a field of vision the only things that interest him”⁵⁵⁰.

Flaherty’s innovation was to prioritise visual aesthetics over visual record; he is less interested in documentary than in artful representation. Lance Pettitt suggests that, typically, Flaherty preferred photogenic subjects in his films. He comments, “Flaherty’s desire for photogenic faces arose from a mix of racial attitudes and commercial savvy. He knew what would look good cinematically and how his central theme of man versus sea needed to be realized in the scenarios that the archetypal Aran family and curragh (canoe) crew performed for the camera.”⁵⁵¹ Martin McLoone adds to this notion of photogenic subjects the consideration that Flaherty purposely chose to misrepresent island life, and to construct a reality that incorporates the notion of the ‘noble savage’, which was represented most recently by Carmel Schrire.⁵⁵² McLoone writes, “To achieve his epic vision of the ‘noble savage’, Flaherty took considerable liberties with the objective reality of life on Aran as he found it.”⁵⁵³ Rockett notes, also, that film should not be considered as documentary. He writes, “In this respect, contemporary critiques of the film which charged that ‘romanticism...and “the noble savage” pervades the whole’ would appear to be nearer the mark than those reviews which praised it on account of its fidelity to the ‘stern and brutal realities’ of social conditions on the islands.”⁵⁵⁴

Lance Pettitt writes, “Flaherty was an Irish-American adventurer, a self-styled cinematic poet, who unconsciously deployed a colonial discourse in representing native Irish people,

⁵⁵⁰ Griffith, Richard. *The World of Robert Flaherty* (London: Gollancz, 1953) pp.164-165

⁵⁵¹ Pettitt, Lance. *Screening Ireland* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2000) p.78

⁵⁵² Schrire, Carmel (Ed.). *Past and Present in Hunter Gatherer Societies* (Orlando: Academic Press, 1984)

⁵⁵³ McLoone, Martin. *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 2000) p.40

⁵⁵⁴ Rockett, Kevin; Gibbons, Luke; Hill, John. *Cinema and Ireland* (London and New York: Routledge, 1987) p.201

undifferentiated from Inuits and Polynesians.”⁵⁵⁵ Flaherty’s *vision* counters the harsh reality of life on the Aran Islands and in Ireland generally. Hence, *Man of Aran* was, in fact, rejected within the Irish cultural milieu. Bill Nichols points out how the discursive value of the documentary may be associated with the socio-political context of its production. He writes, “Documentary film has a kinship with those other nonfictional systems that together make up what we may call the discourses of sobriety. Science, economics, politics, foreign policy, education, religion, welfare- these systems assume they have instrumental power.”⁵⁵⁶

In Balcon's view, *Man of Aran* could not have been made without the participation of Pat Mullen, who published an account of the making of the film in 1935.⁵⁵⁷ In his appraisal of the life of Robert J Flaherty, based on research conducted by Paul Rotha and Basil Wright, Arthur Calder-Marshall writes about the shooting of *Man of Aran*, and of Pat Mullen's contribution to the film. Calder-Marshall writes that Mullen engaged the labour on the islands, to support the film's production, and drove Flaherty and his wife, Frances, around the islands, as they sought "possible film types and incidents which might be built into a film"⁵⁵⁸. Mullen’s role in recruiting locals for Flaherty may have been crucial to the film’s completion. The first few months following Flaherty’s arrival on the Aran islands were spent “making friends and persuading the fisherfolk, much against their will, to help him with his film”⁵⁵⁹. Before making the film, Flaherty took those whom he had chosen to be his principal actors in *Man of Aran* to Galway, 30 miles from the islands, “to see what a film and a cinema were like”⁵⁶⁰. The Aran film goes

⁵⁵⁵ Pettitt, Lance. *Screening Ireland* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2000) p.80

⁵⁵⁶ Nichols, Bill. *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) p.3

⁵⁵⁷ Mullen, Pat. *Man of Aran* (New York: E P Dutton, 1935)

⁵⁵⁸ Calder-Marshall, Arthur. *The Innocent Eye* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966) p.145

⁵⁵⁹ ‘New Films in London’, in *The Times* No.46735 (23 April 1934) p.12

⁵⁶⁰ *ibid*

would have included Mullen, who acted in the film as a shark hunter as well as acting as a contact man for Flaherty.

Taking our cue from Paul Falzone's writing on ethnographic research, it might be of interest to consider that Pat Mullen's publication on the making of *Man of Aran* identifies him as the subject of a major ethnographic film who has subsequently written about his experience as a subject, and has reflected on the ethnographer's work.⁵⁶¹ However, Mullen had not spent his life on the island. He had returned from America seven or eight years before the making of *Man of Aran*, and was regarded somewhat distinctly by the islanders, for his socialist views.⁵⁶² Whatever the ethnographic value in Mullen's writing, it is possible to gain some understanding of Mullen's contribution to the production of the film. In *Man of Aran*, Mullen describes his provision of local transport, in the form of his own jaunting cart, but also the building of the "film" house, the makeshift studio that served as Flaherty's base whilst making the film.⁵⁶³ In praising Flaherty's work, Balcon recalls that he was introduced to Flaherty by John Grierson, "some time in 1931...in one or other of the pubs where film men used to forgather to talk about films"⁵⁶⁴. Balcon writes that he learned that Murnau and Flaherty had parted company before the completion of *Tabu: A Story of the South Seas*, because the two men could not reconcile differences. Incidentally, Murnau had been killed in a car crash in 1931, just before *Tabu: A Story of the South Seas* was released and exhibited for the first time. Flaherty convinced Balcon to produce *Man of Aran* in the course of this first meeting, in this pub, with Grierson present, by describing to Balcon the barren, treeless, infertile land of the Aran islands, and by talking of the

⁵⁶¹ Falzone, Paul. 'Transcendent ethnography', in *Action Research* 2 (3) p.336

⁵⁶² Calder-Marshall, Arthur. *The Innocent Eye* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966) p.144

⁵⁶³ Rotha, Paul. *Robert J. Flaherty: A Biography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983) p.111

⁵⁶⁴ Balcon, Michael. *Michael Balcon Presents...A Lifetime of Films* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1969) p.69

people and the challenges they faced to feed themselves. In fact, Flaherty had never been to the islands; he was relaying that which a friend of his had told him. Balcon recalls that Flaherty's description of the islands and islanders was enough to persuade him to produce the film; he did not require a written story from Flaherty, or anything else to convince him to proceed. Balcon decided, "almost immediately"⁵⁶⁵, to make a film about the islanders' struggle for existence.

It may be significant, in terms of an understanding of Michael Balcon's attitude to the production of *Man of Aran*, to convey his recollection that he had agreed to provide a small budget for the film's production. Balcon committed to outlay £10,000, which "was exhausted long before the film was complete"⁵⁶⁶. In notes submitted to Paul Rotha on 16 July 1959, Michael Balcon writes, "Flaherty merely told me that he wanted to deal with a community who kept alive on minimum standards, even to the point of reclaiming tile soil for their barren rocky island. The fishing and hence the shark sequences...were never mentioned in our original discussions...Flaherty undertook that the film would not cost more than 10,000 pounds."⁵⁶⁷ In fact, the budgetary constraints imposed by Balcon "meant the film was shot as a silent and the sound track was laid on afterwards"⁵⁶⁸. There were, moreover, criticisms of the film with respect to ways in which "the experimental nature of the recording"⁵⁶⁹ detracted from the film's realism.

Grierson affirmed *Man of Aran* as "a silent film to which a background ribbon of sound has added nothing but atmosphere"⁵⁷⁰. The sound does not detract from an essentially visual mode of storytelling - achieved, Grierson observed, using "the tempo'd technique built up by the

⁵⁶⁵ Balcon, Michael. *Michael Balcon Presents...A Lifetime of Films* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1969) p.70

⁵⁶⁶ *ibid*

⁵⁶⁷ Rotha, Paul. *Robert J. Flaherty: A Biography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983) p.108

⁵⁶⁸ Alexander, Lou. *Man of Aran (1934)*. screenonline. Accessed at <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/480287/index.html> on 14 March, 2009

⁵⁶⁹ *ibid*

⁵⁷⁰ Hardy, Forsythe (Ed.). *Grierson on Documentary* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1966) p.61

Russian silent films"⁵⁷¹. Robert J Flaherty may be regarded as an unconventional film maker, in the sense that his working practice involved shooting vast quantities of film for each of the film's segments. This practice may be seen as one cause of the film's protracted production schedule; it took almost two years to shoot. Arthur Calder-Marshall, who had access to research conducted by Paul Rotha and Basil Wright, reports that Flaherty shot over 200,000 feet of film in total, in an exercise in "wild over-shooting"⁵⁷². Mullen affirms Flaherty's enthusiasm for filming in a 1953 issue of *Film News*. On Aran, Flaherty would decide to put up his camera at a distant spot. Once he had decided where to shoot, he would be determined to get to the location, to place the camera. Mullen writes, "Well, nothing could stop him getting there. He made a direct line and he'd bolt through a field of briars, you know, that would hold a bull - that sort of way. He had that fire in him."⁵⁷³

Whatever the precise quantity of film shot by Flaherty, Balcon's active involvement in the production of *Man of Aran* extended, also, to handling the raw footage. Balcon recalls that all the exposed film, amounting to thousands of feet, was sent to him in London for processing and inspection. He writes, "The flow was such that the time involved in seeing these rushes was so great that I used to spend all my Saturday afternoons (no longer going to football matches, by the way) in my small private theatre at the studio."⁵⁷⁴ Balcon recalls that he used several hours of this uncut footage to assuage the concerns of Isidore Ostrer, chairman of the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, who had become concerned about Flaherty's ability to complete the film within schedule and within budget. Balcon recalls that Ostrer and his wife viewed the rushes, and

⁵⁷¹ Hardy, Forsythe (Ed.). *Grierson on Documentary* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1966) p.61

⁵⁷² Calder-Marshall, Arthur. *The Innocent Eye* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966) p.151

⁵⁷³ *Film News* Vol.13, No.3 (1953), cited in Calder-Marshall, Arthur. *The Innocent Eye* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966) p.153

⁵⁷⁴ Balcon, Michael. *Michael Balcon Presents...A Lifetime of Films* (London: Hutchinson, 1969) p.70

were "absolutely enthralled by the uncut scenes of seascape and the wonderful performances of the cast"⁵⁷⁵. Indeed, on its release, *Monthly Film Bulletin* praised the film for the "grand photography of sea, rock, sky and simple human life" - encouraging the audience "to share toil and hardship with these folk, even to feel the tremendous power of the elements around as, with fish, sea-weed, a few handfuls of earth and their native wit, they extract meat, oil and potatoes for sustenance"⁵⁷⁶.

Flaherty seems to have been seeking to depict a particular significance in the portrayal of hard work, and of stormy conditions. However, and despite its somewhat artificial representation of Aran islanders' lives, *Man of Aran* was well-regarded at the time of its release and in the years and decades following its initial exhibition in 1934. Decades on from its production, writing in the early fifties on cinema and exploration for *France-Observateur*, André Bazin describes *Man of Aran* as an example of the "photographic splendour of the films of Flaherty"⁵⁷⁷. A contemporary of Balcon and Flaherty, John Betjeman offered *Man of Aran* as an example of imaginative and knowledgeable production, and experimentation in the use of setting and characterisation. Betjeman did not name Balcon and Flaherty specifically but, in so far as Balcon was producer and Flaherty the director and cinematographer, the credit accorded by Betjeman should be clear. In an article published in 1938, Betjeman cites *Man of Aran* in relation to a perceived prevalence of ignorant producers, unimaginative presentation of scenes, and timidity in experiment, in American and British film production of the thirties. Betjeman writes that a knowledgeable producer such as Michael Balcon or Michael Powell would represent English country life through photography of "the unexplored beauties of Northants, which rival the

⁵⁷⁵ Balcon, Michael. *Michael Balcon Presents...A Lifetime of Films* (London: Hutchinson, 1969) pp.70-71

⁵⁷⁶ 'Man of Aran (1934)', in *Monthly Film Bulletin* (May 1934) p.30

⁵⁷⁷ Bazin, André. *What is Cinema? Vol. I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) p.162

Cotswolds"⁵⁷⁸. A filmgoer or critic could expect an imaginative producer to make a film of English country life by depiction of rolling downs, or forests wherein deer leap glades, or "a genuine cottage not inhabited by weekenders"⁵⁷⁹. The same imaginative, knowledgeable producer might make a film of Parisian life that would complement the work of the director and screenwriter René Clair, or a filmed depiction of London folk that focuses not on St. Paul's Cathedral or Westminster Abbey, but instead displays "Kilburn High Road, and a street running like corrugated iron, bow front and beastly front door, in strips over hill-sides of New Cross"⁵⁸⁰. Balcon may not have succeeded in producing a film that told a story of the struggle for existence on the Aran islands, but he did succeed in making a picture that offered filmgoers a faithful representation of the challenging environment that islanders had to deal with in order to live. *Man of Aran* was released in the United Kingdom on Wednesday, 25 April 1934.⁵⁸¹

Four days later, on Sunday, 29 April 1934, C A Lejeune published an appraisal of the film in *The Observer*, describing *Man of Aran* as beautifully-photographed, and as produced from a total of "six thousand feet of such fine and purposeful pictorial composition have seldom been set out upon the screen"⁵⁸². However, the film was not regarded as great, "in the sense that Nanook was great"⁵⁸³, as Flaherty fails to convey the islanders' struggle for existence "to an audience who are, after all, strangers to this sea-folk, and unversed in the difference between the incidents and accidents of their lives"⁵⁸⁴. This might be considered a fundamental failing for

⁵⁷⁸ Betjeman, John. 'Settings, Costumes, Backgrounds', in Davy, Charles. (Ed.). *Footnotes to the Film* (London: Readers' Union Limited, 1938) p.98

⁵⁷⁹ *ibid*

⁵⁸⁰ *ibid*

⁵⁸¹ 'New Films in London', in *The Times* No.46735 (23 April 1934) p.12

⁵⁸² Lejeune, C A. 'The Thirties', in Lejeune, C A (Ed.). *The C. A. Lejeune Film Reader* (Manchester: Carcanet Press Ltd, 1991) p.93

⁵⁸³ *ibid*

⁵⁸⁴ *ibid*

Flaherty, who was regarded as a film maker in the naturalist tradition, seeking primarily "to record the conflict of man and nature using real subjects"⁵⁸⁵. Reviews of the film include that which was written by Irene Nicholson and published in the summer 1934 issue of *Film Art*. Nicholson's assertion in this review is that *Man of Aran* is flawed. It is visually attractive, but it is not an accurate and true representation. Nicholson writes, "Picturesqueness rather than realism is in documentary a serious fault, and one which Flaherty's peasant idealism can hardly avoid."⁵⁸⁶

Although Flaherty has been commended for photography, he has directed a film in which incidents develop slowly, and wherein there is little cohesion between the events filmed. Furthermore, Flaherty's idealistic depiction of the islands and people is such that, as Nicholson puts it, "everything is beautiful in Aran, hardships are bravely endured and invariably overcome, the peasants are noble and rear model children"⁵⁸⁷. The dubbing is regarded by Nicholson as almost ruining "the natural movements of natural actors"⁵⁸⁸ – although the dubbing is considered by Grierson as not detracting from the film's "essentially visual mode of storytelling"⁵⁸⁹. Criticism of this film with respect to verisimilitude, or truthful and accurate representation, includes Graham Greene's observation, published in 1938, that *Man of Aran* does not truthfully represent life on the Aran islands - that, for example, the Aran islanders "had to be taught shark-hunting in order to supply Mr Flaherty with a dramatic sequence"⁵⁹⁰. This is echoed approximately 70 years later by Lou Alexander. Writing for the British Film Institute, Alexander observes that *Man of Aran* has been criticised for a lack of realism, and for being composed of a

⁵⁸⁵ Alexander, Lou. *Man of Aran* (1934). Screenonline. Accessed at <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/480287/index.html> on 14 March, 2009

⁵⁸⁶ Nicholson, Irene. 'man of aran', in *film art* (Summer 1934) p.66

⁵⁸⁷ *ibid*

⁵⁸⁸ *ibid*

⁵⁸⁹ Hardy, Forsythe (Ed.). *Grierson on Documentary* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1966) p.61

⁵⁹⁰ Greene, Graham. 'Subjects and Stories', in Davy, Charles (Ed.). *Footnotes to the Film* (London: Readers' Union Limited, 1938) p.62

narratory structure imposed on the project by Flaherty, that did not reflect the real lives of the Aran islanders at the time of the film's production. Alexander suggests, moreover, that life on the Aran islands had not been lived as Flaherty depicted for some centuries - and that Flaherty chose to engineer sequences to deliver an essentially false representation of Aran island life to cinema audiences.

"For example, shark hunts had not been carried out in the way that the film suggested for several generations, as hadn't the potato planting, but Flaherty felt the romantic nature of his study, and his desire for the audience to understand the harshness of the Islanders lives, would be enhanced by recreating the old ways."⁵⁹¹ The artifice of the shark hunt is affirmed in Balcon's recollection of the production. Balcon recalls that Robert and Frances Flaherty discovered the basking sharks off the Aran islands on their first reconnaissance trip, and learned that previous generations of Aran islanders had hunted the sharks. They learned also that the sharks had returned to the islands only a few years previously, presumably because the hunting of sharks was no longer practiced by the islanders. Balcon recalls, then, Pat Mullen was told how to hunt basking sharks by one of the eldest islanders, and Flaherty taught Mullen how to use a harpoon gun. Writes Balcon, "The sharks and the storm scenes, which were not even mentioned in our original discussions, became the climactic scenes of the film."⁵⁹² According to Alexander, Paul Rotha and others wrote of "Flaherty's lack of reference to the social and political situation on Aran and generally in Ireland in that period"⁵⁹³. For comparison with the perceived failure of Flaherty to create a faithful representation of island life, one might gain an appreciation of the

⁵⁹¹ Alexander, Lou. *Man of Aran (1934)*. Screenonline. Accessed at <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/480287/index.html> on 14 March, 2009

⁵⁹² Balcon, Michael. *Michael Balcon Presents...A Lifetime of Films* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1969) p.70

⁵⁹³ Alexander, Lou. *Man of Aran (1934)*. Screenonline. Accessed at <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/480287/index.html> on 14 March, 2009

actual lifestyle of Aran islanders by viewing a film produced two years before *Man of Aran*. *Aran of the Saints* (1932) was made by The London Catholic Society to relate a history of the Catholic religion on the Aran islands. Whilst telling the history of the islanders' faith, the film also includes footage of contemporary island life. In an article published in the November 1937 issue of *World Film News*, John Grierson compared *Man of Aran* to *The Life of Emile Zola* (1937) and *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), in terms of the finesse of its manufacture, and the quality of the viewing experience.⁵⁹⁴ Some 14 years later, on 16 October 1951, *The Reporter* published an article in which Grierson reported Flaherty's bitter reaction to criticism of *Man of Aran*, to suggestions that Flaherty "had idealized this tough world of tough men and lost the reality of a landlord-ridden poverty to decorative horizons and artificial issues with basking - and very harmless - sharks"⁵⁹⁵. A reason for Flaherty's choice to shoot an artificial representation of Aran island life may be found in Grierson's observation that Flaherty "hated the grotesque and deformed"⁵⁹⁶, and could not understand why critics preferred to see shabbiness and poverty.

Months on from its release in the UK, the Film and Photo League, an American film movement, published a review in the first issue of *Film front*, which is less than sympathetic toward Flaherty's portrayal of the Aran islanders. In particular, the film is criticised for oversimplification of the islanders' situation. The unnamed *Filmfront* reviewer writes, "We are asked to believe throughout that these islanders' only concern is the sea, their only means of livelihood fishing. By now we are all aware that these people are very much affected with the laws and prices prevailing on the mainland."⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹⁴ Hardy, Forsythe (Ed.). *Grierson on the Movies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981) p.103

⁵⁹⁵ *ibid* p.177

⁵⁹⁶ *ibid* p.177

⁵⁹⁷ 'The Films Look at the Worker', in *Filmfront, One* (1934) p.6

Of Flaherty's approach to film making, Grierson writes, "He sought beauty as passionately as any, but it was not of his origin, his nature, or his habit to find it in the gutter."⁵⁹⁸ *Filmfront's* reviewer appears exercised by the lack of reference, in *Man of Aran*, to external influences upon island life. The presentation, in *Man of Aran*, of an apparently self-sufficient island people, which could be interpreted as having rejected the relative stability and civilisation of the nation they belong to, prompts the reviewer to ask, "Why not show us what has caused these people to cut themselves off from the world? Why do these people choose to lead their lives so harshly?"⁵⁹⁹

In *Filmfront's* review, *Man of Aran* is described as a "rotogravure account of a few people who live around rocks and the sea, particularly the sea"⁶⁰⁰. The use of the word 'rotogravure' to describe *Man of Aran* is intriguing. A rotogravure is a printing system, which uses a rotary press with intaglio cylinders. The use of 'rotogravure' could be a reference to Flaherty's comprehensive use of an automatic camera throughout his stay on the Aran islands, as confirmed by *Sight & Sound*.⁶⁰¹ Whatever the appreciation of the film's technical qualities - for example, what might have been meant by the comparison of the production of *Man of Aran* to the product of a sheet printing press - the film may be regarded as a fundamentally false representation of island life, at the time of the film's release it was praised by the same realist critics who acclaimed *Drifters* (1929) and *Song of Ceylon* (1934). Realist critics included not only John Grierson, but also Basil Wright, Edgar Anstey, and Paul Rotha. It is interesting to note that, in *The Film Till Now*, which was published in 1930, Rotha writes that his contemporaries in British film-making lacked a

⁵⁹⁸ Hardy, Forsythe (Ed.). *Grierson on the Movies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981) p.177

⁵⁹⁹ 'The Films Look at the Worker', in *Filmfront, One* (1934) p.6

⁶⁰⁰ *ibid*

⁶⁰¹ Pocknall, George. 'The Film in the Making - V. Automatic Cameras', in *Sight & Sound* (1934) p.43

sense of nationality, a vision of Britishness. He considered that British film makers chose not to represent British life in film; they chose, rather, to emulate American film makers or the stylistic approach of the German school. In *The Film Till Now*, Rotha writes, "Our railways, our industries, our towns, and our countryside are waiting for incorporation into narrative films."⁶⁰²

Those who campaigned for stronger representation of real life in British films were supported, in print, by Michael Balcon. In October 1936, near the end of his tenure as director of productions at the Gaumont-British/Gainsborough combine, Balcon writes, "We see the dramatic entertainment in the life of the farmer on the fells of the North, of the industrial worker in the Midlands, of the factory girls of London's new industrial areas, of the quiet shepherds of Sussex. I believe that the sweep of the Sussex Downs against the sky makes as fine a background to a film as the hills of California; that Kentish and Worcestershire orchards and farms are as picturesque as the farmlands of Virginia; that the slow talk of labourers round an English village pub fire makes as good dialogue as the wise-cracks of 'City Slickers' in New York."⁶⁰³

Balcon's support for realist film production, however, is not borne out by his production record at Gainsborough Pictures and the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation. *Man of Aran* may be regarded as the only Balcon production in the realist style advocated by critics such as Grierson. One can imagine that Balcon's lack of further involvement in realist cinema at Gainsborough Pictures and the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, following the production of *Man of Aran*, might have disappointed film makers such as Grierson and critics such as Nicholson. Grierson, as already mentioned in this chapter, acclaimed the production and the quality of the viewing experience, associated with *Man of Aran*. Nicholson's review of *Man of*

⁶⁰² Rotha, Paul. *The Film Till Now: A Survey of the Cinema* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930) p.315

⁶⁰³ Balcon, Michael. 'Putting the Real Britain on the Screen', in *London Evening News* (1 October 1936) p.11

Aran, in the summer 1934 issue of *film art*, concludes with a note on its significance, relative to other productions of 1934. "In spite of its obvious faults, the film is of importance in the year's events because it is free of the studios, concedes nothing to convention, and breaks new geographic ground"⁶⁰⁴. The significance of the film was acknowledged with the award of the prize for Best Foreign Film at the Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica di Venezia - the Venice Film Festival - in 1934. However, its achievement at Venice, in winning the award, was seen as controversial at the time. *Man of Aran* was awarded at Venice by the fascist dictator Benito Mussolini - not because of its photography or any aspect of Flaherty's direction and Balcon's production, but because the film was misread as a perpetuation of the fascist paradigm of the 'noble savage'. References to this fascistic interpretation of Flaherty's work on the Aran islands, and Mussolini's subsequent acknowledgement of the film at Venice, may be found in the various biographical accounts of Robert J Flaherty written by William T Murphy,⁶⁰⁵ and Paul Rotha.⁶⁰⁶

There is an understanding that Michael Balcon had agreed to the production of *Man of Aran* to fulfil a perceived requirement for a documentary strand to GBPC's production portfolio.

The production of *Man of Aran* may be regarded as a means to defend the GBPC/Gainsborough combine from increasing criticism that its films, and those of other British studios, failed to represent real life. Such criticism would seem consistent with advice submitted to Michael Balcon by Angus MacPhail in 1930, on the various options for viable film production at Gainsborough Pictures. MacPhail's memorandum considers the possibility, and commercial

⁶⁰⁴ Nicholson, Irene. 'man of aran', in *film art* (Summer 1934) p.66

⁶⁰⁵ Murphy, William T. *Robert Flaherty: A Guide to References and Resources* (Boston: G K Hall & Co, 1978) pp.70-75

⁶⁰⁶ Rotha, Paul. *Robert J. Flaherty: A Biography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983) pp.139-60

viability, of producing: westerns; crook and underworld dramas; murder and court-room stories; spectacular dramas; college stories; backstage musical stories; musical shows and operettas; and drama.⁶⁰⁷ Though MacPhail offers Balcon, in his 1930 memorandum, no overt reference to the viable production of documentary or realist pictures, the GBPC programme of nine films for 1932 included, in addition to five comedies, two melodramas, and an unspecified genre, “one real-life drama” in the form of *Man of Aran*.⁶⁰⁸

Whilst Michael Balcon committed only a hundredth of his 1932 production budget of a million pounds to the making of *Man of Aran*,⁶⁰⁹ Balcon did deploy numerous publicity ploys to attract cinemagoers to see *Man of Aran*. Arthur Calder-Marshall's work on the life of Robert J Flaherty, and Grierson's own 1935 text on documentary film production, detail the promotion of *Man of Aran*. For example, Maggie Dirrane, an Aran Islander cast as a central figure in *Man of Aran*, was presented at Selfridges, the London department store, by the *Daily Express* - where she was asked her opinion of silk stockings. Furthermore, a stuffed basking shark was crammed into a window display at the GBPC offices in London's Wardour Street.⁶¹⁰

Although Balcon considered a documentary approach to film production following the making of *Man of Aran*,⁶¹¹ he did not follow up his work with Flaherty with more realist film production. However, Flaherty completed additional footage for the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation in relation to his work on the Aran islands. In addition to directing *Man of Aran*, Flaherty also made *Oidhche Sheanchais/Oiche Sheanchaide (A Night of Storytelling/The*

⁶⁰⁷ MacPhail, Angus (7 May 1930), *Memorandum on types of production*, Aileen and Michael Balcon Collection, File A/59

⁶⁰⁸ Rotha, Paul. *Robert J. Flaherty: A Biography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983) p.108

⁶⁰⁹ *ibid* p.107

⁶¹⁰ Calder-Marshall, Arthur. *The Innocent Eye* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966) p.164; Hardy, Forsythe (Ed.). *Grierson on Documentary* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1966) p.110

⁶¹¹ Balcon, Michael. *Michael Balcon Presents...A Lifetime of Films* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1969) p.130

Storyteller) (1935), for the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation. He left, then, for the USA, to direct documentaries including the *Louisiana Story* (1948) for Standard Oil, in which the Louisiana bayou is depicted through the eyes of a Cajun boy who befriends the oil company's crew after they contain a blow-out that threatened the bayou environment.

7.4 Summary

Criticisms of *Man of Aran*'s misrepresentation of its subject may be well-founded. The Aran community is not depicted with verisimilitude. However, Flaherty appears to have intended not to make a documentary - but to have sought to celebrate the values associated with island life through dramatised re-enactments of historical practices, rather than to impart evidence or knowledge of the actualities of Aran life. The reason that Flaherty's objectives and achievements in making *Man of Aran* should be considered at all is because of the lack of involvement by Balcon in the film's production, once underway. On another production for GBPC, *The Iron Duke*, Michael Balcon's role as producer was undermined by George Arliss' contractual arrangements. For the production of *Man of Aran*, the lack of authority exercised by Balcon may be understood as a consequence of insufficient engagement with the director during production.

Conclusion: Michael Balcon, British film industry and 1930s genre film production

Michael Balcon's significance as a British interwar film producer rests on two characteristics of his role as director of productions at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation - a dedication to the refinement of technique, and an interest in meaningful content. Much of Balcon's tenure, between 1931 and 1936, is marked by Balcon's concentration on developing the commercial viability of the corporation by insisting on high production values, on high standards of technical practices and relatively sophisticated aesthetic qualities. Balcon was concerned, also, with the cultural impact of film, the degree to which the audience could be influenced by the content of a production; for Balcon, this meant consideration with respect to the audience appeal of the actors, the sets, the script, and anything else that was represented on the cinema screen.

Balcon's means for ensuring commercially viable and culturally impactful film production was to create a diverse body of work, a portfolio of genre films, to appeal to the preferences of as many cinemagoers as possible. Managing a diverse production portfolio necessitated the adoption of an array of techniques and aesthetic approaches to film-making, which could have arguably underscored the development of the British film industry both during the 1930s and for decades following. One possible area for further research would entail the study of the longer-term impact of Balcon's portfolio approach to film production, in terms of the technical and aesthetic quality of later projects⁶¹².

The original motivation for adopting and developing a portfolio approach to film production management can be identified in examination of the early period of Michael Balcon's career, in the 1920s, as a tenant producer and then as owner-operator of a film production facility

⁶¹² Thomson, David. *The New Biographical Dictionary of Film* Fifth edition (London: Hachette Digital, 2010) np

in North London. Balcon began the business that would become Gainsborough Pictures with a modicum of capital and an acute need to generate a sustainable revenue stream. He understood that audience appeal He sought, also, to achieve audience appeal could be achieved by casting known, popular players in key roles, and marketing his films around their presence as well as any plot devices. He learned, also, with the commercial failure of *The White Shadow*, that audiences sought quality of production as well as the familiarity of famous or highly-regarded actors.

A key contextual point, explored in this thesis, is the response of British industrialists and legislators, in the 1920s, to the increasingly dire condition of the British film industry and British cinema following the First World War. Michael Balcon's initial successes (and failures) in cinema shortly precede the introduction of the Cinematograph Films Act (1927), and the merger of Gainsborough Pictures, the firm he founded, into the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation is completed as the Act was being implemented. Corporate restructuring and investment in domestic production during this period may have failed to address American dominance of British cinema, but there was scope for pioneering producers such as Balcon to tap into investment flows to improve the conditions, technical capabilities and artistry of the British film industry, thus arguably averting a decimation of British film production in the face of strong American competition.

Of the genre pictures produced by Michael Balcon in the 1930s, Balcon's comedies and musicals offer perhaps the best examples of his influence over industrial development through the adoption of superior production processes, technical standards and aesthetic principles. The art deco chic of the Jessie Matthews' films offers, in particular, evidence of how the technical and artistic qualities of British films and film-making were influenced by Balcon, through his continued recruitment and empowerment of talented film industry technicians. Thrillers and

melodramas such as *Rome Express* and *The 39 Steps* also indicate a willingness to use techniques and artistry in pursuit of commercial success, but these films also show that Balcon was prepared to invest in advanced equipment and facilities to enable staff such as Alfred Hitchcock and Günther Krampf to innovate on set and so improve domestic production the appeal of mainstream British cinema.

As his musicals and comedies demonstrate, Michael Balcon sought cinematic success through cultural resonance - portraying aspects of Englishness, for example, in *The Good Companions*. However, Balcon sought also to influence culture through propagandistic productions intended to instil particular ideological positions in audiences. The clearest indications of Balcon's promotion of ideological positions are found in his historical productions. *Rhodes of Africa*, arguably, served Balcon's aim of promoting a positive picture of British heritage and culture. *Jew Süss* must be regarded as Balcon's cinematic response to anti-Semitic tendencies in mainland Europe. *Journey's End* represents Balcon's interest in projecting British history and imperial interests positively. *I Was a Spy* is propagandist material akin to *Journey's End*.

Michael Balcon's interwar British horror film production is based primarily on British and European literary culture, on the adaptation of literary sources. The association of the British cinema with Gothic literature, in particular, was a key consideration for Balcon, as for other British film producers who adapted literature for horror cinema. However, Balcon's primary interest in generating revenue from high quality productions applies to interwar horror cinema, and this is evident in his continued and consistent recruitment of skilled technicians and well-known artists as well as the adaptation of popular literary sources.

The one exception to the notion that Michael Balcon was driven first and foremost by profitability is countered in history of the production of *Man of Aran*. Cultural values dominate this documentarist endeavour. However, the conditions of its production are the least conventional of his career; Balcon did employ a talented technician, Robert Flaherty, and aimed for a production of high quality. However, whilst this film's production reveals and reinforces the notion of Balcon's detachment from operational matters as a trait which evident throughout his career, it was not possible for Balcon to delegate operational responsibility for the production itself and retain control over the film's profitability. Typically, Balcon set film projects in motion, arranging financing and distribution, but delegated production management either to an associate producer or the director. This empowered skilled technicians such as Alfred Hitchcock, who sought to innovate cinema with advanced techniques and high cultural or aesthetic values. However, once empowered to proceed with the production of *Man of Aran* in isolation, remote and removed from his studio superiors, Robert Flaherty indulged in a celebration of non-existent cultural values and societal practices, an aversion to evidential cinema, to filming the realities of island life.

There is further work to be done to explore more fully Balcon's commercial, industrial, and ideological motivations – not only to understand better such anomalies as the production of *Man of Aran*, but also to enhance appreciation of the portfolio approach to interwar film production that Balcon, which was a prime exponent of. Such additional study could bring in further evidence of the careers of contemporaries such as Alexander Korda. Moreover, there is now an opportunity to extend the research represented in this thesis, on Michael Balcon's interwar film production, to inform the study of Michael Balcon's wartime and post-war career, particularly at Ealing. Balcon's broad policy and operation of the Ealing enterprise, over two

decades and one hundred features from 1938, was centred around continuity in several senses. Just as Balcon formed and nurtured a core of technicians and artists through the interwar years, serving on productions at Gainsborough Pictures and at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, so his staff remained substantially the same for most of the Ealing period. As Charles Barr observes of Balcon at Ealing, “The film-making team was built up in the early stages of the war, and many of its members stayed on with the company until it ceased operation.”⁶¹³

Hence, this thesis opens up several areas for further exploration of Michael Balcon’s career as an interwar, wartime and post-war producer of genre films. Each chapter on genre, in this thesis, requires deeper consideration of primary source documentation and further analysis of secondary sources. His relationships with key personnel within the industry and within the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation also require further assessment, through broader and deeper research into collections such as the National Archives, the British Library Newspaper Library and the British Film Institute Special Collections. Further to the bibliography, the appendices to this thesis include select cataloguing of sources and documents, which may require further examination.

⁶¹³ Barr, Charles. *Ealing Studios* 3rd Edition (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1998) p.7

Appendices

Appendix 1: Select indices of papers held in the Aileen and Michael Balcon Special Collection and in the Ivor Montagu Special Collection

Appendix 1a: The Aileen and Michael Balcon Special Collection

A The Gainsborough Period 1929-1931

A/13 Gainsborough. Report to the directors of Gainsborough Pictures, dated 14.3.1929, on changeover to sound.

A/45 Fellner & Somlo, 1931. Correspondence regarding possible Anglo-German co-productions, and possibility of Herman Fellner working on Gainsborough productions in England, July-Dec 1931.

A/56 Balcon, M. E. B. 'The Diary of a Talkie' - introduction to a proposed column in 'Film Weekly' describing the film production process. 1931.

B Gaumont-British at Lime Grove Studios, Shepherd's Bush + Balcon's continuing involvement at Gainsborough 1932-1936

B/39 Gainsborough, 1932. General correspondence relating to both Gainsborough, & Balcon's role at Gaumont-British.

B/70 Granville, Edgar. Correspondence, 1933, concerning parliamentary matter, including the composition of the Board of Governors for the embryonic British Film Institute.

Hansard, July 20th, 1933

An interview with Michael Balcon, the General Manager of Gaumont-British Productions by Edgar Granville M.P.

C Gaumont-British and Gainsborough 1934-35

C/12 Billings, R. H. Correspondence 1933-34 with freelance film reviews, including several of his reports on G/B scripts set for his comments: *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *Oh daddy!*, *Little Friend*, *Man Save the Queen* (*Lady in Danger*), *Even Song*, *Road House*, *The Camels are Coming*, *My Old Dutch*.

C/12a Letter. To Michael Balcon. From R. H. Billings. 210434.

C/12b Letter. To Michael Balcon. From R. H. Billings. 160634.

Letter. To Michael Balcon. From R. H. Billings. 140734.

Letter. To Michael Balcon. From R. H. Billings. 020734.

Letter. To Michael Balcon. From R. H. Billings. 280634.

C/14 Woolf, C. M. Correspondence, 1933-34, mainly with H. G. Boxall. Includes documentation on delays in schedule on *Evergreen* and *Jew Süss*.

C/39 *Jew Süss*, 1934. Article on the film's production by MEB for *Film Weekly*.

D 1936 MEB leaves Gaumont-British, joins MGM

D/13 and D/13(a) Bernerd, Jeffrey. Letters and cables, 1936, from New York and Hollywood.

Includes article on British Film Industry, by Adela Rogers St Johns (*Liberty*, 11/7/36)

D/24 Warner, Jack. Correspondence, 1936, concerning studio layout.

D/35 Press cuttings, general, 1936.

E MGM Independent Ealing 1937/38/39

E/5 Paper on the structure of the British film industry up to 1939.

Appendix 1b: The Ivor Montagu Special Collection

The Film Society

1. Memorandum & Articles of Association of The Film Society Ltd. Incorporated 22 June 1925.
2. Annual Reports & A/Cs. 1926-1939 (incomplete).
3. Claim in King's Bench Division and others (The Film Society) against The Sunday Pictorial. Dated 30 April 1929.
4. Programme notes - surplus items. (A complete unbound set lodged in Library). Text of address by PUDOVKIN on "Montage" to Film Society.
5. Booklet - History of The Film Society 1925-1938.
6. Sundry Film Society leaflets.
7. General correspondence relating to The Film Society 1927-1948.
- 7a. Correspondence ie showing of Russian films 1926/7.
8. Correspondence 1970-78 about pirated reprints of The Film Society Programme Notes.
9. Council Minutes 1938-39.
10. Bulletins and other papers.
11. Notes from the FS to the Home Office on licensing and censorship.
12. The federation of Film Societies - Conference 1932 and first AGM 1937. Correspondence 1945.

- 12a. Film Societies. Items on various societies, English and foreign.
- 13. 50th Anniversary Article by IM in Sight and Sound - drafts and correspondence.
- 14. 50th Anniversary General Correspondence.
- 15. 50th Anniversary Federation of Film Societies correspondence and publications.
- 16. 50th Anniversary Correspondence with Lord Bernstein (including transcript of discussion between B & IM).
- 17. 50th Anniversary IM's mss notes, lists etc.
- 17a. Correspondence (1950) on proposals to re-form The Film Society

Early Film Career.

- 18. THE LODGER. (Hitchcock) 1926. Revised title lists. IM credits "Editing and titling".
See p350 "The Youngest Son"
- 19. Ein WALTZERTRAU (a Waltz Dream) 1926. English titles.
- 20. BLIGHTY (Brunel) 1927. Original story by IM. Treatment. Also correspondence re "book of the film" & script notes.
- 21. DOWNHILL (Hitchcock) 1927. IM's comments on original play and suggested film treatment.
- 22. MANON LESCAUT (Robison) 1926. German and English title list (IM Credits Editing).
- 23. DAUGHTER OF ISRAEL 1926/27 (Jose) title list. IMs involvement not known. 23a.
THE ROLLING ROAD 1927 (Gainsborough) title list.
- 24. Correspondence with ANGLE PICTURES on making and distribution of 3 HG Wells comedies BLUEBOTTLES, DAYDREAMS and THE TONIC 1928/32. Also, musical suggestions for all three.

- 25. Book of clippings on The Three Wells comedies 1929.
- 25a. Draft screenplay for The War of the Worlds, possibly written by I.M. See docs with item.
- 26. [Subsequent correspondence on distribution and rights in 3 Wells comedies]. 26a.
International Motion Picture Conference Paris 1926 Programme.
- 27. CUP-TIE SPECIAL. Several copies of a scenario for a 1 reeler with explanatory notes
1931. Presumably never made.
- 28. BIP (British International Pictures Ltd) Prospectus of Share Offer 1927.
- 28a. Travel documents 1930. Visit to the US and Stamboul.
- 29. Correspondence with BIP 1929/1932. Includes handwritten letter from Hitchcock dated
25.6.1929.
- 30. International Congress of Independent Cinemas at La Sarraz Switzerland. 1929 (Where
IM met Eisenstein and the other Russians).
- 31. [Symposium organised by FIAF in 1979 to celebrate 50th anniversary of La Sarraz
congress on Independent Cinema] see above.
- 32. Article by IM c. 1930 Outline of Sound Film by Proposed New Method - typescript.
- 33. Article by IM on Sound Studio for Independents c 1930 typescript.
- 34. Pencil mss of long article (booklet?) by IM on the future of the sound film c. 1930.
- 35. Notes and ideas by IM for making film portraits, tests etc c. 1930. List of IM's editing
credits.
- 36. Proposed Canadian film - correspondence 1929/30.
- 37. TABLE TENNIS TODAY Registration Form (1928) (Evidence of British Nature), copy
of title list and promotional sheet.

38. Research notes and treatment for a proposed film on polar flight - NORTHBOUND c. 1930s.
39. Montagu's film reviews from W/E Review & New Statesman 1932-1934.
40. Film correspondence 1920s/1930s Letters A-B
- 40a. Film correspondence 1920s/1930s Adrian Brunel
41. Film correspondence 1920s/1930s Letters C-D
42. Film correspondence 1920s/1930s Letters E-F
43. Film correspondence 1920s/1930s Letters G
- 43a. Film correspondence 1920s/1930s Gainsborough
44. Film correspondence 1920s/1930s Letters H
45. Film correspondence 1920s/1930s Letters I, J, K
46. Film correspondence 1920s/1930s Letters L
47. Film correspondence 1920s/1930s Letters M-N
48. Film correspondence 1920s/1930s Letters O-R
49. Film correspondence 1920s/1930s Letters S
- 49a. Film correspondence 1920s/1930s Letters John Nind Smith
- 49b. Film correspondence 1920s/1930s Letters T-Z
- 49c. Correspondence - Charles Weinberg
50. Typescript review by IM of 2 Soviet films AEROGRAD and the ACCORDION. c. 1935.
51. Typescript article on Moyne Committee Report on film quotas etc.
52. Typescript article c. 1936 Latest Film Development in Britain.
53. Typescript article The Trade Paper Racket by S F Van Buren. Undated but c. 1936.
54. Typescript article by IM c. 1936 Lament of a Diehard on inadequacies of the "talkies".

- 55. Typescript article by IM undated A Soviet Hollywood giving pros and cons of a Russian "film capital", also 3 other articles on Soviet cinema.
- 56. Pencil MSS by IM The Decline of the German Film Trade under National Socialism undated.
- 57. Two typescript versions of note on modifications made to adaptation of THE SECRET AGENT (1936) [See also Item 60 Letter May 1936]
- 58. Typescript dated 4.2.37 - Very rough translation of dialogue of WE FROM KRONSTADT.
- 59. Early correspondence with Michael Balcon 1929/32.
- 60. Copy memos 1935/36 between Ass. Prods. At Gaumont British Including some memos to and from Balcon; Colour Ctte notes - 8.8.36; Len Lye idea of a live dancer incorporated with a cartoon film 15.6.36.
- 61. IM's file copies of cables between M Balcon in Hollywood and Ostrer in London mainly on casting 1935.
- 62. PASSING OF THE THIRD FLOOR BACK (1935) Typescript of 2nd draft script.

Personalities - files on, correspondence with (Selected Index entries)

310. BALCON, Michael. Correspondence and memos 1939/77 (see also Item 59).

Film Festivals (Selected Index entries)

417. Handwritten notes and documentation for talk by IM on "Vintage Hitchcock" at the NFT 24.1.60.

422. Typescript of article on "British Film, Past and Present" (1962) by Judith Todd (? Published).

- 426. Angus MacPhail Letters 1950s/60s (see 404).
- 426a. Angus MacPhail Correspondence 1926/7.
- 430. Special issues "The Times" March 19 1929 on cinema.
- 431. Special issue, "The Times" 2 Nov 1929 50 years of the BBC.

Appendix 2: Quota obligations, registrations, and screenings

The table below offers a record of the extent to which the Quota requirements - under the operation of the Cinematograph Films Act (1927) - were exceeded by British renters and exhibitors:

Distributor and exhibitor quotas, 1928-1936				
Quota year	Renters obligation	Quota actually registered	Exhibitors obligation	Quota actually screened
1928-29	7.5	19.9		
1929-30	10	14.5		
1930-31	10	15.0		
1931-32	12.5	19.6	10	21.6
1932-33	15	20.3	12.5	23.7
1933-34	17.5	24.1	15	26.1
1934-35	17.5	23.8	15	25.5
1935-36	20	26.6	20	27.4

Source: Low, Rachael. *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985) Appendix, Tables 5 and 6

Appendix 3: Interwar Production by Michael Balcon, at Gainsborough Pictures and at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, by type and year of production

Between 1924 and 1936, at Gainsborough Pictures and at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, Michael Balcon produced or co-produced 133 features. Contemporaneously, Balcon produced several series of shorts. Michael Balcon's projects at Gainsborough Pictures, and the products of his work at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, represent distinct periods in his career. However, there is some continuity between them. Balcon founded Gainsborough Pictures Ltd in 1924, and managed the transition to Gainsborough Pictures (1928) Ltd. When he assumed overall responsibility for production at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation in 1931, Balcon retained his post as production manager at Gainsborough Pictures.

Michael Balcon controlled production at both companies from 1931 until 1936, when he joined MGM-British. This was, also, Balcon's peak period of interwar production activity. There were 18 feature films produced in 1931, 11 in 1932, 18 in 1933, 18 in 1934, 17 in 1935 and 20 in 1936. The three tables below list the films produced at Gainsborough Pictures, and at the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, by type (produced feature, co-produced feature, short), and by year of production.

Table 1: Feature films produced by Michael Balcon, 1924-1936 (133)

1924 (two productions) *The Passionate Adventure*; *The Prude's Fall*

1925 (two productions) *The Blackguard*; *The Pleasure Garden*

1926 (five productions): *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog*; *The Mountain Eagle*; *The Rat*; *The Sea Urchin*; *The Triumph of the Rat*

1927 (six productions): *Blighty*; *Downhill*; *Easy Virtue*; *One of the Best*; *The Rolling Road*; *The Vortex*

1928 (four productions): *The First Born*; *A Light Woman*; *A South Sea Bubble*; *The Wrecker*

1929 (five productions): *Armistice*; *City of Play*; *The Return of the Rat*; *Taxi for Two*; *Woman to Woman*

1930 (seven productions): *Balaclava*; *The Crooked Billet*; *Journey's End*; *Just for a Song*; *Symphony in Two Flats*; *Ashes*; *A Warm Corner*

1931 (18 productions): *Aroma of the South Seas*; *Bull Rushes*; *The Calender*; *The Ghost Train*; *Hindle Wakes*; *Hot Heir*; *The Lady of the Lake*; *The Man They Could Not Arrest*; *Michael and Mary*; *My Old China*; *A Night in Montmartre*; *P. C. Josser*; *The Ringer*; *The Sport of Kings*; *The Stronger Sex*; *Sunshine Susie*; *Third Time Lucky*; *Who Killed Doc Robin?*

1932 (11 productions): *After the Ball*; *The Faithful Heart*; *The Frightened Lady*; *Jack's the Boy*; *Lord Babs*; *Love on Wheels*; *Marry Me*; *The Midshipman*; *Rome Express*; *There Goes the Bride*; *White Face*

1933 (18 productions): *Aunt Sally*; *Britannia of Billingsgate*; *The Constant Nymph*; *Falling for You*; *The Fire Raisers*; *Friday the Thirteenth*; *The Good Companions*; *The Ghoul*; *It's a Boy*; *I Was a Spy*; *Just Smith*; *King of the Ritz*; *The Lucky Number*; *The Man from Toronto*; *Orders Is Orders*; *Sleeping Car*; *Soldiers of the King*; *Turkey Time*

1934 (18 productions): *The Camels Are Coming*; *Chu Chin Chow*; *A Cup of Kindness*; *Dirty Work*; *Evensong*; *Evergreen*; *Jack Ahoy!*; *Jew Süß*; *Lady in Danger*; *Little Friend*; *Man of Aran*; *The Man Who Knew Too Much*; *My Old Dutch*; *Prince Charming*; *Road House*; *Temptation*; *Wild Boy*; *Wings over Everest*

1935 (17 productions): *Boys Will Be Boys*; *Bulldog Jack*; *Car of Dreams*; *The Clairvoyant*; *Fighting Stock*; *First a Girl*; *Foreign Affaires*; *Forever England*; *The Guv'nor*; *The Iron Duke*; *Me and Marlborough*; *Oh, Daddy!*; *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*; *Stormy Weather*; *The 39 Steps*; *Things Are Looking Up*; *The Tunnel*

1936 (20 productions): *All In*; *East Meets West*; *Everybody Dance*; *Everything is Thunder*; *First Offence*; *The Flying Doctor*; *His Lordship*; *It's Love Again*; *Jack of All Trades*; *King of the Damned*; *The Man Who Changed His Mind*; *Pot Luck*; *Rhodes of Africa*; *Sabotage*; *The Secret Agent*; *Seven Sinners*; *Strangers on Honeymoon*; *Tudor Rose*; *Where There's A Will*; *Windbag the Sailor*

Table 2: Short films produced by Michael Balcon, 1924-1936

1925: Gainsborough Burlesque Films (Series of five productions: *Battling Bruisers*; *The Blunderland of Big Game*; *Cut It Out*; *So This is Jollygood*; *A Typical Budget*)

1926: The Steve Donoghue Series (Series of four productions: *Beating the Book*; *Riding for a King*; *The Golden Spurs*; *The Stolen Favourite*)

1929: *In a Monastery Garden*

1930: Sugar and Spice Series; Gainsborough Gems Series

1931: Harry Lauder Songs Series (Series of seven productions: *Roamin' in the Gloamin'*; *I Love to be a Sailor* and *The Wee Hoose Amang the Heather*; *Nanny*; *The Safest o' the Family*; *Somebody's Waiting for Me*; *Tobermory*; *I Love a Lassie* and *The Old Scotch Songs*)

Appendix 4: All films produced by Michael Balcon between 1924 and 1936 (Numbers of films produced each year in brackets)

1924 (3): *The Passionate Adventure*; *The Prude's Fall*; *The White Shadow*

1925 (7): *Battling Bruisers*; *The Blackguard*; *The Blunderland of Big Game*; *Cut It Out*; *The Pleasure Garden*; *So This Is Jollygood*; *A Typical Budget*

1926 (5): *The Lodger*; *The Mountain Eagle*; *The Rat*; *The Sea Urchin*; *The Triumph of the Rat*

1927 (5): *Blighty*; *Downhill*; *Ghost Train*; *One of the Best*; *The Queen Was in the Parlour*

1928 (8): *Balaclava*; *The Constant Nymph*; *Easy Virtue*; *The First Born*; *The Lady of the Lake*; *A Light Woman*; *The Rolling Road*; *The Vortex*

1929 (5): *City of Play*; *The Crooked Billet*; *The Return of the Rat*; *Taxi for Two*; *Woman to Woman*

1930 (25): *Al Fresco*; *Ashes*; *Billie Barnes*; *Black and White*; *The Blue Boys No. 1*; *The Blue Boys No. 2*; *Classic v Jazz*; *Dick Henderson*; *Dusky Melodies*; *Elsie Percival and Ray Raymond*; *Ena Reiss*; *George Mozart in Domestic Troubles*; *Gypsy Land*; *Hal Swain and His Sax-O-Five*; *Just for a Song*; *Lewis Hardcastle's Dusky Syncopaters*; *Martini and His Band No. 1*; *Martini and His Band No. 2*; *Pete Mandell and His Rhythm Masters No. 1*; *Pete Mandell and His Rhythm Masters No. 2*; *Symphony in Two Flats*; *Toyland*; *The Volga Singers*; *The Walsh Brothers*; *A Warm Corner*

1931 (25): *Aroma of the South Seas*; *Bull Rushes*; *The Calendar*; *Dr. Jossier, K.C.*; *A Gentleman of Paris*; *The Ghost Train*; *Hindle Wakes*; *Hot Heir*; *I Love a Lassie*; *I Love to Be a Sailor*; *The Man They Couldn't Arrest*; *Michael and Mary*; *Nanny*; *Night in Montmartre*; *The Ringer*; *Roamin' in the Gloamin'*; *The Safest of the Family*; *She Is Ma Daisy*; *Somebody's Waiting for*

Me; The Stronger Sex; Sunshine Susie; Third Time Lucky; Tobermory; Wee Hoose Among the Heather; Who Killed Doc Robin?

1932 (12): *After the Ball; The Faithful Heart; The Frightened Lady; The Hound of the Baskervilles; Jack's the Boy; Lord Babs; Love on Wheels; Marry Me; The Midshipmaid; Rome Express; There Goes the Bride; White Face*

1933 (11): *Britannia of Billingsgate; The Constant Nymph; The Ghoul; The Good Companions; I Was a Spy; It's a Boy; Just Smith; The Man from Toronto; Sleeping Car; Soldiers of the King; Turkey Time*

1934 (18): *Aunt Sally; The Camels Are Coming; Chu Chin Chow; A Cup of Kindness; Evergreen; The Iron Duke; Jack Ahoy; Jew Süß; Lady in Danger; Man of Aran; The Man Who Knew Too Much; Mon coeur t'appelle; My Song for You; Orders Is Orders; Princess Charming; Red Ensign; Road House; Wild Boy*

1935 (16): *Brown on Resolution; Bulldog Jack; Car of Dreams; The Clairvoyant; First a Girl; Foreign Affaires; The Guv'nor; King of the Damned; Me and Marlborough; Oh, Daddy!; The Passing of the Third Floor Back; The Phantom Light; Stormy Weather; Things Are Looking Up; The 39 Steps; The Tunnel*

1936 (12): *All In; Everybody Dance; The First Offence; Jack of All Trades; Sabotage; The Man Who Changed His Mind; Pot Luck; Rhythm in the Air; Secret Agent; Tudor Rose; Where There's a Will; Windbag the Sailor*

All films produced = 152 (1924 (3); 1925 (7); 1926 (5); 1927 (5); 1928 (8); 1929 (5); 1930 (25); 1931 (25); 1932 (12); 1933 (11); 1934 (18); 1935 (16); 1936 (12))

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Select Filmography of Interwar Film Production by Michael Balcon

Evergreen (1934)

Company: Gaumont-British Picture Corporation

Producer: Michael Balcon

Director: Victor Saville

Writing: Emlyn Williams; Marjorie Gaffney

Cinematography: Glen MacWilliams

Art Director: Alfred Junge

Editor: Ian Dalrymple

Cast: Jessie Matthews; Sonnie Hale; Betty Balfour; Barry MacKay

Première: April 1934

First a Girl (1935)

Company: Gaumont-British Picture Corporation

Producer: Michael Balcon

Director: Victor Saville

Writing: Marjorie Gaffney

Cinematography: Glen MacWilliams

Art Director: Oscar Friedrich Werndorff

Editor: Al Barnes

Cast: Jessie Matthews; Sonnie Hale; Anna Lee

Première: December 1935

Foreign Affairs (1935)

Company: Gaumont-British Picture Corporation

Producer: Michael Balcon

Director: Tom Walls

Writing: Ben Travers

Cinematography: Ray Kellino

Art Director: Alex Vetchinsky

Editor: Alfred Roome

Cast: Tom Walls; Ralph Lynn; Robertson Hare; Norma Varden

Première: November 1935

A Gentleman of Paris (1931)

Company: Gaumont-British Picture Corporation

Producer: Michael Balcon

Director: Sinclair Hill

Writing: Sewell Collins; Sidney Gilliat; Niranjan Pal

Cinematography: Mutz Greenbaum

Cast: Arthur Wontner; Vanda Gréville; Hugh Williams; Phyllis Konstam; Sybil Thorndike

Première: December 1931

The Ghoul (1933)

Company: Gaumont-British Picture Corporation

Producer: Michael Balcon

Director: Thomas Hayes Hunter

Writing: Rupert Downing

Cinematography: Günther Krampf

Art Director: Alfred Junge

Editors: Ian Dalrymple; Ralph Kemplen

Cast: Boris Karloff; Cedric Hardwicke; Ernest Thesiger; Dorothy Hyson

Première: August 1933

The Good Companions (1933)

Companies: Gaumont-British Picture Corporation; Welsh-Pearson

Producers: Michael Balcon; T A Welsh

Director: Victor Saville

Writing: Ian Dalrymple; William Percy Lipscomb; Angus MacPhail

Cinematography: Bernard Knowles

Art Director: Alfred Junge

Editor: Frederick Y Smith

Cast: Jessie Matthews; Edmund Gwenn; John Gielgud; Mary Glynne

Première: February 1933

The Iron Duke (1934)

Company: Gainsborough Pictures

Producer: Michael Balcon

Director: Victor Saville

Writing: H M Harwood; Bess Meredyth

Cinematography: Curt Courant

Editor: Ian Dalrymple

Cast: George Arliss; Ellaline Terriss; Gladys Cooper

Première: November 1934

It's Love Again (1936)

Company: Gaumont-British Picture Corporation

Producer: Michael Balcon

Director: Victor Saville

Writing: Marion Dix

Cinematography: Glen MacWilliams

Art Director: Alfred Junge

Editor: Al Barnes

Cast: Jessie Matthews; Robert Young; Sonnie Hale

Première: May 1936

Jack's the Boy (1932)

Company: Gaumont-British Picture Corporation

Producer: Michael Balcon

Director: Walter Forde

Writing: Douglas Furber; Sidney Gilliat; Jack Hulbert; W P Lipscomb

Cinematography: Leslie Rowson

Art Director: Alex Vetchinsky

Editors: Ian Dalrymple; John Monck

Cast: Jack Hulbert; Cicely Courtneidge; Winifred Shotter; Francis Lister

Première: October 1932

Jew Süss (1934)

Company: Gaumont-British Picture Corporation

Producer: Michael Balcon

Director: Lothar Mendes

Writing: Arthur Richard Rawlinson; Dorothy Farnum

Cinematography: Roy Kellino

Art Director: Alfred Junge

Editor: Otto Ludwig

Cast: Conrad Veidt; Benita Hume; Frank Vosper; Cedric Hardwicke

Première: October 1934

Man of Aran (1934)

Company: Gainsborough Pictures

Producer: Michael Balcon

Director: Robert J Flaherty

Writing: Robert J Flaherty

Cinematography: Robert J Flaherty

Editor: John Monck (credited as John Goldman)

Music: John Greenwood

Sound: Harry Hand

Cast: Colman 'Tiger' King; Maggie Dirrane; Michael Dirrane; Pat Mullin

Première: April 1934

The Man Who Changed His Mind (1936)

Company: Gainsborough Pictures

Producer: Michael Balcon

Director: Robert Stevenson

Writing: L du Garde Peach; Sidney Gilliat; John L Balderston

Cinematography: Jack E Cox

Art Director: Alex Vetchinsky

Editor: R E Dearing; Alfred Roome; Ben Hipkins

Cast: Boris Karloff; John Loder; Anna Lee; Frank Cellier

Première: September 1936

The Man Who Knew Too Much (1934)

Company: Gaumont British Picture Corporation

Producer: Michael Balcon

Director: Alfred Hitchcock

Writing: Edwin Greenwood; A R Rawlinson; Emlyn Williams

Cinematography: Curt Courant

Art Director: Alfred Junge

Editor: Hugh Stewart

Cast: Leslie Banks; Edna Best; Peter Lorre; Frank Vosper; Hugh Wakefield; Nova Pilbeam

Première: December 1934

The Passing of the Third Floor Back (1935)

Company: Gaumont-British Picture Corporation

Producer: Michael Balcon

Director: Berthold Viertel

Writing: Michael Hogan; Alma Reville

Cinematography: Curt Courant

Art Director: Oscar Friedrich Werndorff

Editor: Derek N Twist

Cast: Conrad Veidt; René Ray; Frank Cellier; Anna Lee

Première: September 1935

Rhodes of Africa (1936)

Company: Gaumont-British Picture Corporation

Producer: Michael Balcon

Director: Berthold Viertel

Writing: Leslie Arliss; Michael Barringer; Miles Malleson

Cinematography: S R Bonnett; Bernard Knowles

Art Director: Oscar Friedrich Werndorff

Editor: Derek N Twist

Cast: Walter Huston; Oskar Homolka; Basil Sydney; Frank Cellier; Peggy Ashcroft

Première: March 1936

Rome Express (1932)

Company: Gaumont-British Picture Corporation

Producer: Michael Balcon

Director: Walter Forde

Writing: Sidney Gilliat; Clifford Grey; Ralph Stock; Frank Vosper

Cinematography: Günther Krampf

Art Director: Andrew Mazzei

Editor: Frederick Y Smith; Ian Dalrymple

Cast: Muriel Aked; Joan Barry; Donald Calthrop

Première: November 1932

Sabotage (1936)

Company: Gaumont-British Picture Corporation

Producer: Michael Balcon

Director: Alfred Hitchcock

Writing: Charles Bennett; Ian Hay; Helen Simpson; Alma Reville; E V H Emmett

Cinematography: Bernard Knowles

Art Director: Oscar Friedrich Werndorff; Albert Jullion

Editor: Charles Frend

Cast: Sylvia Sidney; Oskar Homolka; Desmond Tester

Première: December 1936

Secret Agent (1936)

Company: Gaumont-British Picture Corporation

Producer: Michael Balcon

Director: Alfred Hitchcock

Writing: Charles Bennett; Ian Hay; Alma Reville; Jesse Lasky Jr

Cinematography: Bernard Knowles

Art Director: Oscar Friedrich Werndorff

Editor: Charles Frend

Cast: John Gielgud; Peter Lorre; Madeleine Carroll

Première: May 1936

The 39 Steps (1935)

Company: Gaumont-British Picture Corporation

Producer: Michael Balcon

Director: Alfred Hitchcock

Writing: Charles Bennett; Ian Hay

Cinematography: Bernard Knowles

Art Director: Oscar Friedrich Werndorff; Albert Jullion

Editor: Derek N Twist

Cast: Robert Donat; Madeleine Carroll; Lucie Mannheim; Godfrey Tearle; Peggy Ashcroft

Première: June 1935

The Tunnel (1935)

Company: Gaumont-British Picture Corporation

Producer: Michael Balcon

Director: Maurice Elvey

Writing: Clemence Dane; L du Garde Peach; Curt Siodmak

Cinematography: Günther Krampf

Art Director: Ernö Metzner

Editor: Charles Frend

Cast: Richard Dix; Leslie Banks; Madge Evans; Helen Vinson; C Aubrey Smith

Première: November 1935