A Tribute to Anita Loos, a month-long retrospective of 50 films authored or adapted by the famous first lady of screen writers, will be presented from June 14 to July 13 by the Department of Film of The Museum of Modern Art. The tribute to Miss Loos will focus attention on the contribution of the screen writer to the development of the motion picture medium.

One of the most prolific of screen writers, Anita Loos started her career with D.W. Griffith in his Biograph Studio days. She later wrote original scenarios for stars of the dimension of Douglas Fairbanks in the 20's and Jean Harlow in the 30's. She also worked with the highest ranking directors — Edmund Goulding, Sam Wood, William Wellman, George Cukor, Clarence Brown, Mervyn LeRoy and Howard Hawks. Her most popular work "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," written in 1925 in her celebrated youth, was remade as a Broadway musical a quarter of a century later.

Miss Loos, a life-time non-conformist, came to fame in the 20's, a period not unlike the 60's in respect to the revolutionary changes of style and mores. Born in the Far West, she was a symbol of the flapper age, and knew Hollywood in its halcyon days. She then became an intimate of the international set of Gertrude Stein as well as the American literati, H.L. Mencken, Aldous Huxley, Sherwood Anderson, and Alexander Woolcott. She nevertheless retained her own blend of humor and sense of the ridiculous as expressed in her work on the screen, which provides the occasion for this tribute to her as a screen writer and to the craft of screen writing.

In her autobiography, "A Girl Like I," Miss Loos tells of her precocious years as a child actress, after which in her teens she became a scenarist. She sold her first script, "The New York Hat," for fifteen dollars to D.W. Griffith, who filmed it with (more)
Mary Pickford and Lionel Barrymore. "The New York Hat" will be shown with other Biograph films she wrote in the first program of the Loos retrospective.

Gary Carey, Assistant Curator, Department of Film, has assembled an array of films illustrating Miss Loos's wide range of accomplishments. Included in the selection is D.W. Griffith's three-hour epic, "Intolerance," for which Miss Loos wrote the titles. Title writing was then a succinct, expressive form conveying the gestures and reactions of the silent performers. It led to Miss Loos creating numerous original screen plays, many of them directed by John Emerson, her husband, who was sometimes her co-author. Together they wrote the script for one of the last D.W. Griffith films, "The Struggle," a part of this series.

When "talkies" arrived Miss Loos wrote the dialogue for Marion Davies in "Blondie of the Follies." She continued to devise original scenarios, but was also a recognized novelist, who was in demand to adapt stage plays to the screen. She adapted Clare Booth Luce's "The Women," several Rachel Crothers plays, including "Susan and God," and S.N. Behrman's "Biography," which became "Biography of a Bachelor Girl." The girl in this Irving Thalberg production was Ann Harding.

In a star-studded age Miss Loos wrote lines delivered by the most celebrated names in screen history: Clark Gable in "Hold Your Man," Spencer Tracy in "Riff-Raff," both Tracy and Gable together in "San Francisco," Joan Crawford in "Susan and God," Greer Garson in "Blossoms in the Dust," and others.

At that time only the stars counted; today the directors are practically "starred;" but the screen writer, then as now, has been traditionally neglected, according to Mr. Carey. The Loos retrospective, in fact, is designed as one of a series planned by the Museum to emphasize the work of individual scenarists because "in this day and age of director-oriented movie-goers and film critics the screen writer has been belittled when not ignored."

According to Mr. Carey the touch of individuality that is often the work of the writer is sometimes erroneously attributed to what he calls "directorial omnipotence."
He points to the fact that three Hitchcock films of the mid-fifties have a texture that set them apart from the rest of the director's work. They were written by John Michael Hayes. Mr. Carey also notes that a certain femme fatale element in the films of Josef von Sternberg was also to be found in some of Howard Hawks's films. The scenarist for Sternberg, Jules Furthman, had also written for Hawks.

A further instance cited by Mr. Carey is "Citizen Kane," of which Herman Mankiewicz was co-author with Orson Welles. Many aspects of the power-driven anti-hero, as well as the structure of the film, had previously appeared in "The Power and the Glory," written by Mankiewicz, although most of the credit for this picture was given to the director.

The screen writer merits more careful study, it was stated by Mr. Carey, despite the collaborative nature of film writing, "to permit certain characteristics to emerge" so the public will be able to discern and evaluate the writer's personal touch.

Anita Loos is typical of a writer whose personality pervades her screen work. Her last film was an adaptation of the Broadway musical, "I Married an Angel," produced in 1942. Since then she has continued to write novels and plays, providing Helen Hayes with "Happy Birthday," and Carol Channing with the musical book of "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," and introducing Audrey Hepburn to America with the stage adaptation of Colette's novel "Gigi." On the London stage last year Glynis Johns starred in "The King's Mare," a Loos play about Henry IV and Anne of Cleves.

Commenting on Miss Loos's ability to work in other media than film, Mr. Carey points to her skill in handling "potentially melodramatic material and turning it upside down through her peculiarly comic vision of the world. Her humor acts as a deflation of human foibles and hypocrisy, social fads and frivolities." It applies even to herself, for she admits, "I whacked out the first recorded boyish bob of the twentieth century" -- this at a time when long hair was considered de rigeur.

The Loos program follows:

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SHOWINGS ARE SCHEDULED AT 2:00 P.M. AND 5:30 P.M., WITH AN EXTRA SHOWING THURSDAY EVENING AT 8:00 P.M., AND SATURDAY SHOWINGS AT 3:00 AND 5:30 P.M.

June 14

June 15
"Intolerance" (1916). Directed by D.W. Griffith. Titles by Anita Loos. With Mae Marsh, Robert Harron, Lillian Gish, Constance Talmadge. 191 min. 2:00 P.M. showing only.

June 16
"The Social Secretary" (1916). Directed by John Emerson. Written by Anita Loos. With Norma Talmadge, Erich Von Stroheim. 60 min.

June 19

June 20

June 21
"In Again, Out Again" (1917). Directed by John Emerson. Written by Anita Loos. With John Fairbanks, Arline Pretty, and Bull Montana. 85 min.

June 22

June 23

June 24

June 26

June 27

June 28

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"Hold Your Man" (1933). Produced for M.G.M. Directed by Sam Wood. Story by Anita Loos. Adapted by Anita Loos and Howard Emmett Rogers. With Jean Harlow, Clark Gable, Stuart Erwin, Dorothy Burgess, Muriel Kirland, Garry Owen, Barbara Barondess, Paul Hurst, Elizabeth Patterson, Theresa Harris, Blanche Friderici, George Reed. 85 min.


*The Museum regrets the silent film version of "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" appears to be lost, a search of film vaults has revealed.

and stills

Additional information/available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, and Lillian Gerard, Film Coordinator, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. 956-7501, 7296.