

Milestone Film & Video and the British Film Institute present



1929 Austrian Poster

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PICCADILLY

Directed by Ewald André Dupont
Original Screenplay by Arnold Bennett

1929. B&W. Silent. 1:1.33. 108 minutes.

Cast

Gilda Gray.....	Mabel Greenfield
Anna May Wong.....	Shosho
Jameson Thomas.....	Valentine Wilmot
King Ho-Chang.....	Jim
Cyril Ritchard.....	Victor Smiles
Charles Laughton.....	Greedy nightclub diner
Hannah Jones.....	Bessie
Ellen Pollock.....	Vamp
Harry Terry.....	Publican
Gordon Begg.....	Coroner
Charles Paton.....	Doorman
Ray Milland.....	Extra in Nightclub Scene
Jack Raine.....	Extra in Nightclub Scene
Debroy Somers and his Band	

Crew

Produced and Directed by.....	Ewald André Dupont
Original Screenplay by.....	Arnold Bennett
Assistant Director.....	Ronald Goetz
Cinematography.....	Werner Brandes
Film Editor.....	J.W. McConaughty
Art Direction.....	Alfred Junge
Released by.....	British International Pictures
Filmed at.....	Elstree Studios

London Premiere: January 31, 1929.

A sound version with effects and a synchronized score was subsequently released later that year. It featured a short prologue (494 feet, 5 1/2 minutes) set in a country pub, featuring Jameson Thomas with John Longeden as “the Man from China” and several scenes were censored. Running time: 92 minutes. Shown in New York City at the Little Carnegie Playhouse the week of July 13, 1929.

Restoration by the British Film Institute’s National Film and Television Archive.

Original Score by Neil Brand.

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BFI acknowledges the generous support of Simon Hessel in the restoration of *Piccadilly*.

The Restoration

When the British Film Institute's National Film and Television Archive team started work on the restoration of *Piccadilly*, they discovered that the original silent version negative was too decayed to be completely usable. Consequently, damaged sections had to be replaced with material from a number of different sources, including sections from an American sound version. Because of the variety of source material, and the fact that some of the titles had been rewritten for the sound version, a complete set of new titles was produced. Some frames have been slightly masked to disguise the fact that the source material for them was cropped. The amber and blue tinting is copied from an original 1929 silent release print of *Piccadilly* which has survived and is now in the National collection.

Synopsis

Valentine Wilmot (Jameson Thomas) is the owner of The Piccadilly Club, one of the hottest nightclubs in London. His love, Mabel (Gilda Gray), was once the rage of Piccadilly but at age 28, she is considered too "old" to be a dancer, and her young partner Victor (Cyril Richard) is now the main attraction. The customers know, however, that the "Club" is not what it used to be...

One night, during Mabel and Victor's act, a customer (played by Charles Laughton) starts a loud commotion. His plate is dirty. This is not the first time this has happened. Valentine approaches the manager of the nightclub who tells him that this is the responsibility of the kitchen. The busy head of the kitchen tells him that this is the domain of the scullery. When Valentine goes to talk to Bessie, the head of the scullery, he discovers the cause of all the commotion. A beautiful young Chinese scullery maid in ragged clothes is entertaining the entranced dishwashers with an impromptu dance on top of a table. The girl, Shosho (Anna May Wong), is immediately fired.

That same evening Victor goes to Mabel's dressing room. He tells her that he is madly in love with her. He is going to America and wants her to join him. She tells him that she can't leave Valentine. When Victor goes to quit, he discovers that Valentine not only knows about the dancer's unwanted advances to Mabel, but the nightclub owner has already written him a notice of termination.

Mabel starts to entertain at the Club as a solo act, but the audience is clearly bored. Something must be done.

Valentine goes to Bessie and asks her to find Shosho. When the former scullery maid comes to his office with her friend Jim, Valentine offers her a chance to dance at the Club. She confidently tells him that she is not afraid of appearing on stage. She once performed in Limehouse (the dangerous Chinese district of London where she lives) but had to stop when two customers fought over her. Valentine tells her to meet him at his costumer's shop to pick out a dress. Shosho insists that she will only dance in something authentic, and tells him to meet her at a shop in the back alleys near her home.

Mabel enters the office and upon seeing Shosho, mistakenly thinks that her lover is hiring Shosho back as a scullery maid and thanks Valentine for swallowing his pride. Valentine and Shosho say nothing.

Valentine goes to the shop in Limehouse and is shown a beautiful dress. He tries to take command of the situation by insisting that he won't buy it until he sees it on. Shosho turns to Jim and tells him that if this is the case, he will try it on for them. Jim does. Valentine tries to bargain the owner down from his price of eighty pounds. The shopkeeper refuses to negotiate. Valentine turns to leave, but

Shosho haughtily announces that without the dress she won't perform. Unhappily, Valentine pays the full price. Shosho then tells him she has decided that Jim will play the music for her routine.

Mabel hears that Shosho will be a featured performer at the Club and is taken aback. She tells Valentine that she is worried that the customers will laugh at poor Shosho. But in her eyes, she knows her age is catching up with her, and there might be more to all this than Valentine will say.

That night, Mabel performs a new dance to lukewarm applause. Valentine goes to her dressing room to profess his admiration and congratulations. Mabel tells him to visit her in her apartment after the nightclub closes, but now he should go back and see his new performer. Framed in a single spotlight, Shosho begins her dance. It is unlike anything the audience has ever seen. Slowly, hypnotically, Shosho weaves a dance of seduction. At the end, the audience explodes and wildly applauds. The applause is so loud that Mabel hears it in her dressing room, and faints.

Later that night, Shosho sees Valentine. She is with Jim, but tells Valentine that she needs a ride home. Leaving the musician behind, Valentine takes her in his chauffeured-driven car to Limehouse, hoping that his growing obsession with the girl will be sated. At the outskirts of Limehouse, Shosho tells Valentine to stop the car. She frustrates him by saying that she can't be seen by her neighbors driving in such a fancy vehicle.

When Valentine arrives at Mabel's apartment, she is already upset that Valentine is late. She becomes angry and jealous when Valentine tells her that he had to drive Shosho home. Valentine protests his innocence.

Shosho is soon the hottest act in London. The reviews and articles are all raves. Soon, the Club is once again the place to go for the rich and famous.

One night, Shosho tells Valentine to come to her apartment. Jim answers her door but Shosho tells the musician to leave. It is now, and only on her terms, that Shosho consents to Valentine's desire.

After Valentine leaves, there is a knock on Shosho's door. It is Mabel and she begs Shosho to give her back Valentine — he is too old for her. Shosho exclaims that it's not true, that Mabel is too old for him! Mabel opens her purse, and Shosho sees a gun in there. She pulls a ceremonial Chinese dagger off her wall. Threatened, Mabel holds out the gun. The screen cuts to black.

The next day, the headlines scream out that Shosho is dead, killed by a bullet. Jim, who found the body the next morning, tells the police that the last person to see her alive was Valentine. The trial becomes the biggest event in London, but there are a few twists before the truth is revealed...

Contemporary reviews for *PICCADILLY*

“Wonder of wonders — a truly fine British picture! Gilda Gray is starred, but Anna May Wong brings home the bacon.” — *Photoplay*, October 1929

“A good picture that in the silent days could have made the deluxe first runs over here with its Gilda Gray name. It is virtually silent despite a useless prologue. It may have been added and contains its only dialog, badly done. In present silent houses *Piccadilly* is okay for a week or a day, this due to Miss Gray's name, the story and Anna May Wong, who outshines the star.” — *Variety*, July 1929

“Miss Gray seems to have been rediscovered as an actress. For a long time she has been docketed as an exponent of ‘shimmy,’ but in *Piccadilly* she appears to show that acting is not above her.” — *New York Times*, July 14, 1929

Notes for PICCADILLY

“Apart from [Alfred] Hitchcock, [Victor] Saville, [Anthony] Asquith and [Graham] Cutts, the number of truly creative directors working in the British silent cinema was regrettably small. But one must not forget the all-pervasive German influence at the time, which is clearly evident in Dupont’s two late British silents, *Moulin Rouge* and *Piccadilly*. The latter is a major discovery from this period, although it looks more German than British. Dupont has taken [Arnold] Bennett’s rather novelettish story of a Chinese girl-turned-dancer who finds herself caught in a fatal entanglement with a nightclub owner and turned it into an exotic, nightmarish affair whose visual panache places it squarely in the Sternberg/Pabst bracket.

“Utilizing a probing mobile camera (as in *Variété*) allied to Werner Brandes’ chiaroscuro lighting and Junge’s marvelously detailed, angular sets, Dupont evokes a studio-built London Chinatown which looks, at times, like an extension of the Jack the Ripper sequences from *Pandora’s Box*. Anna May Wong gives a steely inward-looking performance as the girl caught between East and West and the main nightclub set is a wonder to behold. All the luminous qualities of Dupont’s *mise-en-scene* are clearly detailed in this 35mm print.”

— John Gillett, British film critic

“From its opening shots, *Piccadilly* shows his [Dupont’s] excellent visual sense — his use of camera movement, skill in intercutting and predilection for mirrors and shadows, glass and glossy surfaces. The result is an extreme opulence and filmic dynamism. The plot is simple but with customary Dupont overtones: a nightclub owner, aware that his mistress is losing her drawing power as a dancer, gambles on the attraction of a young Chinese girl he discovers washing dishes in the scullery of his own restaurant. The girl quickly ensnares him, and when she is found dead both he and his mistress are under suspicion...

“In *Piccadilly*, Dupont shows himself to be fascinated by the Chinese *femme fatale* portrayed by Anna May Wong, whom he surrounds with decadent glamour. The differing atmospheres of nightclub dance floor and backroom scullery are neatly captured, the drunk-filled bars of *Piccadilly* have a real sleazy corruption, and the hero discovers a disconcerting world of oriental mystery when he ventures into Limehouse. Dupont’s cinema is marked by his mastery of light and surface texture — the beauty of women’s faces and bodies, the effect of smoke or shadow — all captured with an admirably fluid camera.”

— Roy Armes, British film author and critic

The Production of PICCADILLY

By 1928 British film production costs had risen fairly dramatically over the past few years, though still microscopic by Hollywood standards. While many in the industry said that any film costing more the £10,000 would never break even, film budgets were now often in the £30,000 to £50,000 range. E. A. Dupont’s artistic reputation and his temperament, along with his love for his “production touches,” cost British International Pictures’ John Maxwell a great deal of his own money. Maxwell was not inexperienced in film matters as he produced or invested in a remarkable twenty-four features from 1927 to the advent of talkies. He continued as a major producer in England for the next forty years. However, there was much consternation during the production of *Piccadilly* because the German director’s habit of starting work around brunch time and working until well after midnight caused considerable overtime pay. The year before, Dupont’s *Moulin Rouge* had exceeded its already astronomical budget of £80,000 and *Piccadilly* probably went far beyond that.

Along with the enormous budget came the advent of sound, which created even more anxiety for Maxwell. After *Piccadilly's* initial release, a five-minute sound prologue was quickly filmed with Jameson Thomas and John Longeden as the Man from China, along with the addition of a far-from-satisfactory score for the film. In Shosho's first big dance number, the music was "borrowed" from Tschaikevsky's *Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairies* — hardly a suitable arrangement for this exotic and sultry dance! This truncated sound re-edit of *Piccadilly* was the version that premiered in America.

Anna May Wong and the Making of *Piccadilly*.

Adapted from a chapter in Graham Gao Russell Hodges' *Anna May Wong: From Laundryman's Daughter to Hollywood Legend* (Palgrave/MacMillan, January 3, 2004) All rights reserved.

Cinema critics and fans in Europe hailed Anna May Wong's arrival in Germany in April 1928 as proof that the continent's film industry had attracted a genuine star who could help mount successful competition with the Hollywood behemoth. Anna May's first duty was learning German, a feat she accomplished by nonstop eight-hour-a-day lessons. By May, she filmed *Song*, her first film with the UFA, the major German Studio. Directed by Richard Eichberg, who is now forgotten but was then Germany's most popular filmmaker, *Song* was a tour de force for Anna May and received accolades from critics across Europe. Anna May's extraordinary presence dominates *Song*, a film which also deserves a major revival.

Anna May spent the early summer of 1928 strolling through Berlin's nightclubs, coffeehouses and causing a sensation wherever she went. On one occasion, she thrilled Walter Benjamin, who wrote a worshipful article for *Literararische Welt*. Her beauty dazzled the philosopher, who searched the boundaries of his poetic imagination to describe her. Benjamin characterized her name as "like the specks in a bowl of tea that unfold into blossoms replete with moon and devoid of scent."

Benjamin's reaction typified critical commentary on Anna May across Europe. After a brief, but sensational sojourn in Paris, Anna May moved to London in July 1928. There she began shooting *Piccadilly*, directed by E. A. Dupont. She was an immediate sensation in London. Anna May and her sister Lulu, who accompanied her to Europe rented an apartment in the Park Lane Hotel in the Mayfair District. Their rooms overlooked Hyde Park. The sisters received guests in the hotel there with an American enthusiasm. They made trips down the Thames to Maidenhead and visited Limehouse, where London's Chinese population resided. She told reporters she liked London enormously because everyone was friendly to her. Her impact on the public was immediate. People mobbed her everywhere she went, making her forays into the city difficult. English girls tinted their faces ivory with ochre color to get the "Wong complexion." They cut their hair with bangs in the front to achieve the "Wong haircut." Gorgeously embroidered coolie coats blossomed among the theater crowds in Piccadilly Circus. Anna May began to make the rounds of London theaters, seeing Fritz Kortner, a German actor she had befriended in Hollywood in one performance, and Tilly Losch, the Viennese sensation, in another.

Lulu left for America in late July, so Anna May was on her own. Soon after, journalist Annesley de Silva interviewed Anna May in her London residence at the elegant Park Lane Hotel. His account is useful for understanding Anna May's life on the road and for understanding how she appeared through the Orientalized vision of a western journalist. A "spectacular Chinese servant" ushered the writer into Anna May's sitting room. Expecting to find the "opulence of the East," he was mildly disappointed at the simplicity of the room, although he noted books, pictures, Chinese vases, and easy chairs near the fire. More catching to the eye were "cushions of daring colors leap[ing] over one another. A heavily embroidered Chinese shawl was spread across to its full length and breadth and caught the most careless gaze." Anna May entered the room "softly, silently and greeted me with a melodious 'good morning.'" She put him at ease with the "winsome smile of the pretty little dancing

girl of the pictures— the smile that thrilled a hundred thousand hearts.” Anna May offered him a Players cigarette, which he found ordinary “from a hand which should have held a gold case inlaid with jade.” Anna May then related to him over the next half an hour her standard autobiography — which differed little from similar narration given over the years to myriad numbers of journalists. Yet, even in the written edition, her verve and lovely personality lifted the timeworn tales of the tortured girl, paternal disapproval of her career, and constant rehearsals before the mirror at home. The journalist discerned two women before him. One was the international star, the other a “simple Chinese girl, unmoved by the honors that have fallen thick upon her.” He left enchanted, as so many other journalists before had done and after would do.

Journalists were not the only ones enamored of Anna May. Londoners flocked to see Anna May.. Despite its far-flung empire and imperialist intrusions into China, Britain had few Chinese residents. Virtually all of the Shandong Province laborers who toiled in British ports during World War I had been repatriated. In 1930, census counters found only 1,934 Chinese in England and Wales. About half of them were either seamen or laundry workers. Despite their small numbers, the Chinese loomed large in the English imagination. Labor unions were vigilant against Chinese competition, especially on the waterfront; eugenicists warned against dilution of English blood through intermarriage with Chinese; and the popular press stoked feverish anxieties about racial purity, drug abuse, and potential Chinese political power. Two results occurred. Like those in the United States, British laws restricted Chinese immigration and forced out Chinese residents. The second effect sustained a xenophobic popular imagination that identified the Limehouse district as the locus of the “intrinsic evil of sexual contact.” As in the United States, the racist impulse behind these forces produced the roles Anna May labored under in her movies.

Anna May’s celebrity lifted her above such racial animosity and did her best to charm reporters. Stanley Fitzmaurice of the French film magazine, *Pour Vous*, visited her on the set of *Piccadilly*. He found her charming, not capricious like other stars. Anna May, he wrote, was “a real woman,” who hummed the ditty composed for her by Hollywood friends: “Anna May Wong, From old Hong Kong, She can’t be wrong.” Anna May told him of her childhood, her discovery, and showed off baby pictures of her youngest brother, Richard. She avowed that she liked Europeans because they accepted people of color. Then, to the writer’s sorrow, Dupont called her back to the stage. Fitzmaurice concluded his article by recognizing her for what “she is — a great actress. Not only is she talented, but she is friendly and simple, and she has this independence of mind that only real artists have and that those stars are lacking.”

Her European isolation from Hollywood made Anna May ponder her career. She wrote articles for the French magazines about life in Tinseltown. For the March 7 issue of *Pour Vous*, she wrote a lengthy letter from London in which she told readers about the real Hollywood. It was a place where many dreams met with a harsh reality. Although the town was based upon entertainment, there was, she opined, perhaps no other place with less “amusement” in the conventional sense of the word. For many aspirants, the great chance never arrived. Young girls worked in restaurants and stores for years and years, longing for the parts they never would play. Yet Hollywood was not always grim, but a place for idealists who earned their way up to a good position thanks to hard work and intelligence. She claimed that everybody in Hollywood understood the necessity of such trials and encouraged struggling actors. She told of a beautiful young woman who had worked for ten years in a Hollywood restaurant; Anna May believed she would soon be famous.

Anna May understood the fragility of fame. She told one French interviewer that “success is not a jewel that you can purchase and keep for your entire life. On the contrary, the brightest star can fall down at any time for short-lived reasons and can miserably fade away into the dust. The audience is an implacable judge.” It is to that public judgment that the actress must appeal: “She has to please millions of people with her personality and her success depends only on the changing tastes of the

audience.” Anna May also understood how fleeting was her youth. Accordingly, she dropped two years from her age. She apparently even changed her birthday. One German magazine listed it as September 21, 1908, shaving off nearly three years. Her actions initiated misconceptions about the year of her birth that last to the present day.

Anna May explained to her readers the fates of the idealists who made up Hollywood society. In order to remain close to the action, older actors became managers of apartment buildings, tearooms, beauty salons, flower shops, and garages. In general, they lived regular lives. The last place to look for famous actors was in the nightclubs, where tourists wound up staring at other tourists. In fact, she wrote, famous stars relished steady lives with their families, or had hobbies such as Noah Beery’s farm or Douglas Fairbanks’s creation of a Spanish village. It was a remarkable description, which revealed Anna May’s own hopes for a full family life and her recognition that someday she would have to stop chasing her film dreams and find alternative work. As she toiled in films thousands of miles away from home, Anna May doubtless realized that her destiny was Hollywood.

Despite its intentions, the European community had its own limitations. Like their counterparts in the United States, European filmmakers commonly used “yellow faces” to act in Asian roles. Charles Boyer, the veteran French actor, recalled how making his eyes slanted and adjusting the curve of his cheeks gave his eyes an impassive look “that our western faces do not have.” At the same time, Europeans were deeply aware of the need to appear “white.” An article on women’s hands that appeared in *Pour Vous* declared that “whiteness [was] one of the most essential qualities that the standard beauty code requires of women’s hands.” To satisfy this need, perfume makers created ointments and expensive lotions to make hands whiter. The color of nail polish had to accommodate this need for whiteness. Nail polish had to match the lipstick, and red, a favorite color of Anna May’s, was particularly hard to combine. Other women had to be content with pastel colors to distract attention from the ordinary qualities of their hands. They could, however, paint their toenails red, when walking through the rain or mud, as it makes a woman happy to know that she has “carmine nails shining like sultans’ nails of ‘The Arabian Nights,’ inside your shoes and your stockings.” Anna May, whose hands were considered the most beautiful in Hollywood, enhanced a rose-hued skin with a stunning sense of fashion. Anna May had, in French eyes, achieved a kind of whiteness. The French were astonished at her beauty, intelligence, grace and success. At a time when other Chinese were barely marginal characters in European society, Anna May was extraordinary and gave through her public persona a positive glow to her ethnicity. It is not enough to say that she was a product of colonialism. Her public stature in France transcended that.

Writers in Europe enhanced Anna May’s reputation in the East by dispatching articles about her. Magazines in the Far East dutifully recorded her travels to Europe. *Screen and Stage* of Tokyo depicted Eichberg and Wong talking pleasantly. In another, she posed for a painting by a Professor Michallow in Berlin, an event recorded in Shanghai film magazines. Anna May helped the cause by writing personal letters to magazine editors about her travels. Writing from Paris, she told Wu Liande, the editor of the pioneering Chinese magazine *Xingyingxing* (*Silverland*) about her career and her life in Hollywood. Other Chinese magazines gave her mixed coverage. The popular *Pei-Yang Pictorial* from Tianjin put her on the cover in August 1929 and featured her in other issues after denouncing her risqué dancing the previous year. When nude photos of Anna May circulated from Germany, the *Pei-Yang Pictorial* promptly published them, along with snide references to her as “Huang A-Mei,” a term that Chinese readers denoted as prostitute.

As soon as *Piccadilly* became the most talked about film in late 1928, prestigious and popular magazines on the continent vied to include images of her in their publications. In England, *Film Weekly* put her on its front cover. *Das Magazin*, one of the Germany’s most sophisticated and stylish journals, featured her on its cover. The Swedish magazine *Filmjournalen* devoted four pages of stills to *Piccadilly*. *Cinemonde* and *Cine-Miroir*, two prestigious French magazines, featured her twice on

their covers. An Austrian critic hailed her as “*The Wong*,” an accolade reserved for the highest rank stars and one that suggested that she had become an institution. American studios, sensing Anna May’s high popularity in Europe, re-released a number of her silent films from the mid 1920s, hoping to cash in on her fame. In November 1929 alone, *Old San Francisco*, *The Devil Dancer*, and the English talkie *Elstree Calling* hit the screens in Portugal, Germany and Austria.

Posters for *Piccadilly* emphasized Anna May’s exotic beauty. The most extravagant of all was a fifteen-foot high poster by George Pollak for Austrian cinemas. The poster, which borrowed an image of her from *Across to Singapore*, featured Anna May in a topless gypsy outfit with large bangles. Her limbs and breasts have a yellow hue and her legs and posterior are larger than her real body. Behind Anna May the artist drew an expressionist vision of Piccadilly circus replete with cinemas, dance halls, restaurants, and theaters, while cars and cabs circled the streets. Portraying Anna May topless was not scandalous in Vienna, but it would have rocked her audiences in America and in the East. The poster suggested a measure of the personal freedom she enjoyed in Europe.

As the opening night of *Piccadilly* loomed in London, Anna May traveled to England and luxuriated in the comfortable rooms of the Claridge Hotel. Her English fans were numerous and vocal in their approval of Anna May. Her arrival was hailed as proof that the nation’s studios were attracting international talent. For some reason, the release of *Piccadilly* was delayed in London until February 1929. The leading film journals called Anna May’s acting “brilliant,” though the intellectual review, *Close Up* magazine, was harshly critical of the film. *Picture Show*, however, put her on its cover twice within one year. It also gave ample coverage to the shooting of *The Road to Dishonor* and gushed Anna May had “applied herself assiduously to the study of English elocution and the miraculous change she has effected in three months is the marvel of all her friends.” The magazine touted her singing voice as well. Another magazine spoke of her hard work learning French. In short, English magazines notified readers that Anna May Wong was prepared to survive the “talkie” revolution. The same seems to be true for French film critics. *Hebdo-Cinema*, one of the most nationalist journals, honored her with a front cover and gave the film extensive coverage.

Piccadilly, considered among the best of films from the silent era in England, was a marvelous credit for Wong. The locale was the Piccadilly Club, one of the most elegant nightspots at the famous London crossroads. From the outset of the film, the club was a favored hangout for London’s elite because of the modern dancing of Vic and Mabel, played by Anna May’s old friend, Gilda Grey, who performs “The Piccadilly Shiver.” (Grey also claimed to have invented the Charleston and the Black Bottom.) In the film, Vic tries to change the professional relationship with Mabel to a personal one, much to the anger and jealousy of the owner, Wilmot, expertly performed by the veteran English actor Jameson Thomas. Wilmot confronts the dancer and fires him. Unfortunately, Mabel can’t carry the show by herself and customers quickly move to other locales. One night as he surveys the emptiness of the once-crowded tables, Wilmot has to put up with the drunken antics of a customer, played by Charles Laughton in his film debut, who complains loudly about dirty dishes. Wilmot then marches into the kitchen for answers, only to be ushered down to the scullery. There he finds all the dishwashers entranced by the erotic dancing of a young Chinese girl, Shosho, played by Anna May. Shosho’s hairstyle signifies the innocent virgin; her pigtail wrapped around the back of her head in the style of a country laboring girl. Her face is filled with innocence. Shosho’s dance, in which she places one hand below her hips and the other arm cocked before her made up forehead, recalls a Tang Dynasty dance, *Si Lu Hua Yu*, about the Silk Road that connected China to western culture. Her dress, on the other hand, combines a working class skirt with a chic, broad striped sweater. Wilmot orders the dishwashers to get back to work. As business worsens, his thoughts return to Shosho and her slow gyrating hips. After “interviewing” her in his office, Wilmot decides to put her on stage. During this scene, the talented Thomas actually sketches Anna May. His decision to replace Mabel with Shosho signified a sexual victory for the former scullery maid over the

vaunted inventor of the Shimmy and implies an English preference for authenticity. Gray, a talented, gracious actress, played the part of the abandoned woman expertly.

To convince Shosho to perform, Wilmot has to accede to two significant demands, presented by her with hands defiantly on hips. First, Wilmot has to purchase an elaborate costume from a shop of her choice down in the Limehouse district.. Second, he had to employ Shosho's dour friend, Jim, played by King-Ho Chang, in real life one of London's most famous Chinese restaurant owners, to play the Chinese erhu for background music. Throughout this scene, Anna May uses a masculine style, even crossing her face with splayed fingers, a Chinese man's mark of negotiation. During this episode, her hair is tied loosely on her nape, but allowed to fall freely down her back. One disconcerting note is the constant emasculation of Jim throughout the episode. Much taller than her partner, Shosho dominates and diminishes him. Anna May's influence on the script is overt. While in Hollywood, Anna May's demands were often discreet; in this film, her influence was written into the story line.

Shosho's dance is a mixture of traditional Chinese and Anna May's own ultra modernism. Her use of fluttering hands and slow swaying of the upper body combines Mongolian traditional and palace dances. Her thighs are not part of her dance and show Anna May's willingness to expose her body to gain further notice. Her costume is that of a warrior. In the movie, Shosho's dancing rapidly captivated the fancy crowd, who were in fact played by Anna May's friends among the English royalty. Although Mabel soon makes her unhappiness known to Wilmot, he is now in love with Shosho. Anna May plays this part in a manly style, particularly during contract negotiations when she stands over both Wilmot and Jim, to whom she closes the door while jousting with the nightclub owner.

One night Wilmot takes Shosho, now wrapped in furs and with a distinctly modern hairstyle to a jazz club where they watch interracial carousers. A tight hat covers her hair, with curls slipping down by her ears. After they go nightclubbing, she invites him back to her rooms, which are filled with Chinese antiques. It was the first of many times in which the sets of Anna May's movies were filled with priceless antiquities. At home, Shosho changes into a seductive gown, lies on a couch, and obscures her face with an arm adorned with silk veils. Her hair is slicked back against her head. In one of the most erotic scenes from the silent era, Shosho entices the aroused Wilmot to come closer and gradually lets her veil drop from her pliant face. Although the censors cut the ensuing kiss, their sexual embrace was inescapable. This scene was the closest Anna May had come to an on-screen kiss since similar embraces with Ramon Navarro in *Across to Singapore*. Thomas later contended that Anna May and he agreed the scene should be cut because although the English were more tolerant than Americans about interracial kissing, "we were very careful to handle such scenes tactfully." Should there be any doubt of their intention, the photoplay book, penned by Arnold Bennett, included a still photograph from the scene with a caption in which Shosho tells Wilmot, "Kiss me ... I like you." Despite the overt fantasies English writers and actors had about Anna May, she sadly accepted that they lacked sufficient courage to embrace her fully. Later in life, a friend suggested that they go to a screening of *Piccadilly* in Los Angeles. She refused, stating that she was in a terrible emotional state when the film was made and did not want to be reminded of her suffering. The episode with Thomas convinced Anna May that despite London's seeming liberality, its codes matched American injunctions against mixed race kissing on screen. There were a few dissenters. *Social Magazine*, a prominent arts journal from Havana, printed a lovely picture of Anna May sometime after and declared that many believed the ban on kissing her should be lifted.

After that erotic scene, the plot takes a violent turn. After Wilmot leaves, Mabel enters the apartment to beg Shosho to let her man alone. Shosho retorts that she is unwilling to give back what Mabel was unable to keep. Humiliated, Mabel pulls out a gun out of her purse and threatens Shosho, who takes a dagger from the wall. During the scramble it appears that Shosho is killed and later police find her body. Because Wilmot refuses to admit where he was on the night of the murder, he becomes the

principal suspect, based partly on the testimony of Jim. At the inquest, Mabel testifies for Wilmot, making the case more complex. When the judge demands that Jim return to the witness stand, he is found mortally wounded in a nearby toilet. As he dies, Jim admits that he was Shosho's husband and was furiously jealous at Wilmot's dalliance with her. Because Shosho had made him suffer so much, "I took my revenge." The film's trite conclusion does not undermine Anna May's achievement. Unlike American films in which her sexuality was suppressed, here she openly vamped Wilmot. No viewer could deny her extraordinary sensuality. Despite fine performances from Thomas and Gray, Anna May carried the film and established herself as a leading lady. The picture also gave her the chance to showcase her fusion of European and Asian fashion.

After *Piccadilly*, Anna May Wong went on to star with a young Laurence Olivier in *The Circle of Chalk*, the most talked about play in London's West End theaters in the 1929 season. Following that triumph, she returned to the Continent to make more film, star in an Viennese opera and enchant theatergoers and cosmopolitans around Europe until her return to the United States in October 1930. She came back to Hollywood with a reputation greatly enhanced by the success of *Piccadilly* and by her personal triumphs around Europe. Within a year, she crossed the Atlantic again. Between 1928 and the end of 1935, Anna May Wong worked and lived in Europe far more than she did in Hollywood. The restoration of *Piccadilly* is testament to the transnational importance of this neglected legend. Forty years after her death in 1961, Anna May seems on the verge of a major revival.

For more info on Graham Gao Russell Hodges' *Anna May Wong: From Laundryman's Daughter to Hollywood Legend* contact Felicia Sinusas, Publicist. St. Martin's Press, Tel: 212-674-5151 x 540 Fax: 212-674-6132.

Perpetually Cool: An Appreciation of Anna May Wong

Adapted from Anthony B. Chan's *Perpetually Cool: The Many Lives of Anna May Wong* (Scarecrow Press, November 2003) All rights reserved.

"Lotus Flower," "China Doll," and "Dragon Lady" are just a few of the stereotypical appellations attached to Anna May Wong by European American and European producers, directors, critics, and journalists. As the first and most famous Chinese American movie star in the history of cinema, she was more than the images she portrayed in her films, stage productions, vaudeville acts, and radio and television shows over forty-two years.

Wong was the first internationally acclaimed Asian American female film star. She mesmerized audiences from Hollywood and London to Berlin, Paris, and Vienna with more than sixty films. Her stage career took her to Australia, Austria, Denmark, Italy, Scotland, Sweden, and Switzerland. Even more remarkable, she sometimes performed in the languages of the countries in which she worked. Her spoken German was legendary. Her cinematic demeanor was detached, cool, and hip. The woman had style!

Anna May Wong's portrayal of Shosho in *Piccadilly* was pure eroticism. Gilda Gray, born Marianna Michalsha (1901–1959) in Krakow, Poland, was cast as the lead in this British-financed film directed by Evard Andre Dupont (1891–1956). But Wong's star presence relegated the "shimmy girl" to a distant second in persona, acting, charm, charisma, sexuality, and of course, exoticism. Even though Shosho would die in the end at the hands of Jim, her jealous Chinese suitor, portrayed by King Ho-Chang — while Mabel Greenfield, played by Gray, eventually recovered her wayward mate, Valentine Wilmot, played by Jameson Thomas (1888–1939)—*Piccadilly* is quintessentially Anna May Wong. The story of jealousy, treachery, and death was secondary to the fiery and potent performance of Wong, whose various talents were now on display for a wider and more circumspect

British audience, accustomed to quality stage acting in its long tradition of theater.

As Wong's last silent film, *Piccadilly* is also a smoking crescendo in the first part of her long career that would eventually take her to more legitimate stage work and then to an eleven-part television series entitled *The Gallery of Mme. Liu Tsong* in 1951. Of all her silent films, this British International production is Wong in her most erotic and exotic role. It is obvious that the camera loves her. It is almost as if this is her final audition as a smothering femme fatale who would later reveal herself as the complete Asian woman of agency and power, especially in her acts of selflessness, courage, humor, and heroism in the role of Hui Fei in *Shanghai Express* (1932)....

Even the way Shosho answers Wilmot reveals an eroticism that moves from willingness and deference to fearlessness and power. She is a woman of substance and strength, unlike Mabel Greenfield, who seems to pander to Wilmot. This undisguised courage becomes even more apparent when Shosho volunteers, "I did dance once in public in Limehouse. I live down there." But the coup de grace in this conversational eroticism is the overt air of imminent peril. Shosho closes the dialogue with Wilmot by revealing that, "They wouldn't let me dance again, sir—there was trouble between two men along of me—knives—policemen." Thus, Shosho as *Piccadilly*'s newest dancing sensation evokes not only a certain sexual passion but also a raw eroticism tinged with a threatening climax.

Like Marlon Brando (1924–) as Johnny Stabler in *The Wild One* (1954), Wong as Shosho exudes a sexuality that evokes an unbridled danger, a precarious life on the edge, a potential flirtation with violent death, and an invitation to enter the closed world of the radical chic. Both Brando as the alien rebel and Wong as the alien outcast in these films play illegitimate characters beyond the pale of conservative, respectable bourgeois society. Yet the people they encounter in *The Wild One* and *Piccadilly* simply want an intimate piece of their persona. They desire to be just as hip and cool as Marlon Brando and Anna May Wong. The Western audiences were just as enamored.

Like Brando, Wong was young, vibrant, beautiful, licentious, and dangerous. She pushed the boundaries of the erotic as heroic as she sought to navigate around a class system personified by Valentine Wilmot and his elegant nightclub patrons. As a heroine, Shosho is an obvious working-class woman of a certain ethnic origin attempting to survive in an increasingly hostile bourgeois environment, with the upper class and the court system weighted decidedly against her....

After acting in more than thirty films since her days as an extra, Wong was finally to actually have her first on-screen kiss. However, as Shosho and Wilmot move in for the inevitable wet embrace, the moment of intimate touching ends on the editor's cutting room floor. This aborted kissing scene was a hot topic in the film, with Jameson Thomas remarking that "in England, we have less prejudice against scenes of interracial romance than in America. In France, there is still less, and in Germany, there is none at all. But we are careful to handle such scenes tactfully." Apparently even Wong agreed to cut the scene.

The nature of the racial divide in Britain and the United States meant that the on-screen liaison between a yellow Shosho and a white Wilmott could never be consummated because of antimiscegenation laws prohibiting "inferior" yellows from mating legitimately with "superior" whites. But flouting these laws makes this biracial mating even more inviting. It was almost as if with Shosho as an illegitimate sexual possibility, Wong was the fulfillment of every European male's wet dream....

The death scene was classic Anna May Wong; she often complained that she "died a thousand deaths." She was, in fact, one of the best Hollywood actresses at dying a convincing death, which was no easy feat. In an interview with London reporter Vivien North of *Picturegoer Weekly*, Wong's classic humor was revealed when she talked about her many "screen deaths": Because on the screen,

it's very necessary to do something conclusive with any personality that's at all glamorous or exotic. One cannot leave them just floating around. They are *too* definite.

In *Piccadilly*, Wong's character is indeed not left "just floating around." Immediately before she expires, Shosho has a look of profound horror when Jim picks up the gun from the floor and shoots. She expresses obvious pain as the bullet enters her body and then keels over. Years as a successful silent film actress perfected her expressions, body language, and gestures so that she could "counterfeit various emotions" not her own.

Anna May Wong as Shosho, the dancer and femme fatale, outplays both Gilda Gray and Jameson Thomas. While Gray's Mabel Greenfield is weak, chubby, reactive, and prone to fainting when events prove too much for her, Wong's Shosho is always strong, attractively slender, proactive, assertive, rational, virile, and all business. The camera loves Wong, and it shows in her performance....

Although reviewers continued to portray Wong as a siren or femme fatale, the fact that she was able to capture such an enriched role as Shosho in *Piccadilly* provided her with the opportunity to develop her persona as one of the world's foremost female film stars. With this leading role and other major performances in film and theater behind her, the European producers, directors, and audiences raised Wong to the status of an icon who understood the bottom line and worked toward achieving profitability for her backers. Europeans recognized that her exoticism and eroticism sold tickets. Wong knew that sexuality and being Chinese "could be used to ensure continued interest in her career, and that continued interest could in turn be leveraged against studio politics regarding the development of worthwhile projects for the actor."

With the release of *Piccadilly* in 1929, Anna May Wong was ready to fulfill the rest of her five-picture contract with Richard Eichberg... Following the completion of the Eichberg trilogy of *The Flame of Love* in 1930, she returned to the United States to perform in *On the Spot*. In the following year she portrayed Ling Moy, daughter of Fu Manchu, played by Swedish actor Warner Oland (1879–1938) in the *Daughter of the Dragon*, which was the first of the Fu Manchu series. In 1932 she would work again with Oland in one of Hollywood's all-time blockbusters. This time Oland would die at the hands of Anna May Wong's character, Hui Fei. That film was *Shanghai Express*.

For more info on Anthony Chan's *Perpetually Cool: The Many Lives of Anna May Wong*
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Ewald André Dupont

(December 25, 1891– December 12, 1956)



Nearly forgotten today, Ewald André Dupont was a giant of silent cinema and in four short years, the director of three of the most important silent films of European cinema.

Dupont was born in Zeitz, Germany. In 1893, his family moved to Berlin where he later attended high school. In 1911, Dupont became a film critic, writing for the *Berliner Morgenpost* and *Berliner Allgemeinen Zeitung*. There, he developed his ideas about the cinema and tried to create a clear division between real criticism and puffery that had not existed in film journalism before that time. He liked films that appealed to the masses through popular genres — such as detective stories and adventure — but he also wanted a sense of realism. Dupont believed that film shouldn't be too close to literature or drama in the classic sense. He also wrote about the visual strength of cinema in comparison to other art forms.

Encouraged by his experience as a critic, Dupont started writing scripts in 1916 with the film *Mein ist die Rache*, directed by Rudolf Meinert. By the next year, eleven of his scripts were filmed by such directors as Joe May and Richard Oswald. His rise in the young movie industry was meteoric. In 1918 he was hired by Stern-Film-GmbH to write and direct a 12-part detective serial with actor Max Landa. Up to then, he had never been inside a film studio! Through the next year, he directed a dozen films with the company, but then moved to Gloria-Film-GmbH where he achieved his first big success with *Die Geier-Wally* (1921). With *Die grüne Manuela* (1923), he created a more experimental film in which he cast relatively unknown actors. It was not well received. He returned to using stars in *Das alte Gesetz* (*The Ancient Law*, 1923) with Henny Porton and Ernst Deutsch and it proved to be his greatest success to date. The film told the story of a Jewish boy who escapes from his family's Orthodox traditions to find fame in the Austrian theater. Several critics have considered the film one of the finest to deal with that bygone world and its rituals. In 1924, Dupont ran a cabaret in Mannheim that featured variety acts. Though it was artistically acclaimed, it failed financially. However, Dupont took this experience and his long-held passion for these shows and in 1925, directed his first masterpiece, *Variété* (*Variety*), starring the legendary Emil Jannings. For this film, the influential American magazine, *Film Daily*, chose Dupont as one of the ten best directors in cinema.

It was a golden age in Hollywood for foreign-born directors such as Ernst Lubitsch, Paul Leni and F.W. Murnau. On the strength of *Variété*, Universal Studios signed Dupont to a three-year contract.

Dupont's first film for Universal, *Love Me and the World is Mine*, was troubled due to the large canvas he wanted to portray while working with the American studio system's short production schedule. The film proved a failure and Dupont soon returned to Germany. Shortly thereafter, he found himself in England where he felt much more at ease with the working conditions of the British film industry. He directed five films there including the remarkable *Moulin Rouge* and *Piccadilly*. For the latter, he hired set designer Alfred Junge. In a 1928 interview with the *New York Times* about the coming of sound (as he was working, ironically, on the silent *Piccadilly* with the noted author Arnold Bennett), Dupont said:

You can never make a good film by putting the camera at an angle nobody has ever thought of before or by introducing new incidental noises. The weakness of motion pictures has nothing to do with cameras or new inventions. That the film speaks a universal language is its weakness as much as its strength. It means that film producers scarcely ever dare break away from one or two themes and the most timid variations on those themes. They have to consider the susceptibilities of the Chinese as well as the Londoners; they have to think of the censor in London and the censor in Sweden and the censors in America. In the result the weakness of the film is in no sense a matter of technique; the fault lies in its stories. When logic and courage are forbidden and the most interesting themes are barred, when the few really good film actors are compelled to repeat time after time almost the same part in almost the same story (only the costumes and the name being changed), what gain is there in improved incidental noise?" (Interview with John MacCormac, *New York Times*, June 24, 1928)

In 1929, Dupont was back in Germany, where he met with directors Carl Froelich and G.W. Pabst. They were all fascinated with the future of sound films and made a bet on who would direct the first German talkie. The bet was never really won, as Dupont came in first with *Atlantic*, a retelling of the Titanic tragedy starring Willy Forst — but it wasn't a truly German sound film since it was a co-production with England and shot in London. With this and his next two films, Dupont pioneered the use of multi-language sound films —creating English, French and German versions at the same time. In 1930, he returned to Germany to work at Emelka. That didn't last as the studio quickly found itself in financial difficulty and had to let him go. Dupont's last films in Germany included *Salto Mortale* (1931, starring Reinhold Bernt, Kurt Gerron, Anna Sten, along with a very young Anton Walbrook, appearing in only his second film) and *Der Läufer von Marathon* (1932/33) with a script by Thea von Harbou.

Dupont returned to America in 1933 where his first two films flopped and he gained the reputation of being difficult and expensive. He never really recovered, going from Universal to MGM to Paramount and finally Warner Brothers. His work consisted mainly of a number of undistinguished "B" pictures. Unable to work in Hollywood after being fired from *Hell's Kitchen* (1939) for slapping one of the Dead End Kids who made fun of his accent, he returned to journalism as the publisher of the *Hollywood Tribune*, an independent magazine with anti-fascist leanings. In his column, Dupont ranted against big industry — so much so that the *Tribune's* advertisers dropped out and the paper failed after twenty-one issues. Next, he became a press agent for Columbia Publishing Corporation, but again, soon found himself out of a job. Dupont worked for several years in many fields, while always trying to get back into filmmaking.

He returned to directing in 1949, with *The Scarf*, from a novel by Robert Bloch, starring John Ireland and Mercedes McCambridge, and produced by Gloria Productions (run by Ms. Swanson herself for United Artists). It was not released until 1951. Because of its failure, Dupont was reduced to writing and directing for *Big Town*, a television crime drama. His nadir came with *The Neanderthal Man* in 1953 ("What primitive passions ... what mad desires drove him on... He held

them all in the grip of deadly terror ... nothing could keep him from the woman he claimed as his own!”). His last out really came in 1954, when he was replaced during the shooting of *Miss Robin Crusoe* because of drunkenness. Dupont helped write a script on the life of Richard Wagner for William Dieterle called *Magic Fire*, but it was mutilated by the distributor. Dupont died of cancer in Los Angeles in 1956. After his death, his belongings were sold at a garage sale.

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Anna May Wong (*Shosho*)

(January 3, 1905–February 3, 1961)



Anna May Wong was born Wong Liu Tsong (Frosted Yellow Willows) on January 3, 1905 in Los Angeles, California, where her parents ran a laundry. Wong was fascinated with the movie industry at a young age and thrilled when films were shot on location in her neighborhood. Film historian Kevin Brownlow writes that she frequently played truant to watch them work and became known as the Curious Chinese Child by the film people. Anna became a photographer's model while she was still attending Hollywood High School.

At the age of fourteen she was hired for her first film role by an Englishman born in China, Tom Gubbins. On moving to Los Angeles as an adult, Gubbins found himself at home in the Chinatown section, where he helped organize a strike of local actors protesting the lurid screen portrayals of Chinese. James Wang, an agent and one of the technical advisors on her first film, *The Red Lantern*, introduced Anna to Gubbins. Wang also helped her get a role in the next year's film *Dinty*, directed by Marshall Neilan.

Wong's first starring role was in the two-color Technicolor feature *Toll of the Sea* (1922). Although the film was only a modest success, Wong's performance caught the eye of one of the great stars of her time.

Douglas Fairbanks was all set to make *The Thief Of Bagdad* (1924) and hired Wong for the small role of the Mongol Slave, handmaiden to the Princess. But dangerous, alluring, and vivacious in her slave outfit, Wong's few minutes onscreen were electric. She soon became the first Chinese-American movie star in Hollywood, appearing in many films with Asian themes — though usually in fairly stereotypical roles. *A Trip to Chinatown* (1926), *The Devil Dancer* (1927) and *Across to Singapore* (1928) helped keep her name in the spotlight. In 1927 she appeared in *Mr. Wu*, starring Lon Chaney and Rene Adoree as fellow Asians, and *Old San Francisco* as “A Flower of the Orient” alongside Dolores Costello, Warner Oland, and the 1906 earthquake.

After another supporting role in *The Crimson City* the following year (Myrna Loy played a Chinese girl about to be sold into slavery and John Miljanas the English aristocrat that Loy secretly loves), Wong saw the writing on the Hollywood wall. There were no parts in Hollywood that reflected her range and talent.

So, like that other brilliantly radiant and talented actress with the short black hair and bangs, Louise Brooks, Wong decided to go to Europe. After going to Germany for two films directed by Richard Eichberg in 1928 (*Schmutziges Geld*, aka *Song* or *Show Life* and *Grosstadtschmetterling*, aka *Pavement Butterfly*), Wong was hired by E.A. Dupont, fresh from both enormous success with *Variété* and then stunning failure in America. In surprisingly parallel roles, Louise Brooks portrayed Lulu in G.W. Pabst's *Pandora's Box* and Wong incarnated Shosho in E.A. Dupont's *Piccadilly*. These actresses created a new kind of “vamp” — a beautiful flame that destroys the men who are drawn to them like moths. Although *Piccadilly* was supposedly Gilda Gray's film, the 24-year-old Wong, finally given the chance for a multi-dimensional performance, stole the film.

Pabst's “discovery” of Brooks' amazing allure and Dupont's fondness for extreme close-ups of Wong showed the world what many famous photographers had known for years — the stunning, sexually provocative, classical beauty of the two actresses. Sadly, in another parallel, these were to be Brooks' and Wong's greatest roles — but the films were quickly forgotten in the onrushing change to sound. In Brooks' case, *Pandora's Box* and *Diary of a Lost Girl* were re-released in the 1980s and she has now become an icon of cinema. It is only now, with the restoration of *Piccadilly* by the British Film Institute, that Wong's star can too begin to shine.

Shortly after *Piccadilly*, Wong performed in her first play, written for her by Basil Dean. Appearing with her was the young Laurence Olivier. She returned to the US in 1931, where she starred in *Daughter of the Dragon* with Warner Oland and Sessue Hayakawa, and the next year, in *Shanghai Express* with Marlene Dietrich. In 1934, she returned to England to appear in one of England's more charming musicals, Walter Forde's *Chu Chin Chow*.

By the end of the 1930s, Anna's career had become a steady stream of stereotypical Asian roles in standard melodramas. With America's entry into WWII, the chance for positive roles was made even more difficult, although she played a Chinese girl risking her life to spy on the Japanese in the 1942 film, *Bombs Over Burma*. After the same year's *Lady from Chungking*, Wong stayed in semi-retirement until 1949's *Impact*. In the 1950s, she briefly found work as host of a TV series, *The Gallery of Madame Liu-Tsong*. She worked fairly steadily in the new medium over the decade, but during that period, Wong learned she was suffering from heart problems coupled with cirrhosis. Her last film appearance was in the 1960 *Portrait in Black* with Lana Turner and Anthony Quinn. In February 1961, Wong died of a heart attack in Santa Monica, California. She was 56 and had never married. Her star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame is located at 1700 Vine Street.

Anna May Wong Bibliography

Though for years there was almost nothing written about Anna May Wong, there are now at least three books coming out on her in the next few months along with two documentaries.

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Graham Gao Russell Hodges. *Anna May Wong: A Biography*. Palgrave MacMillan; January 2004.

Philip Leibfried and Chei Mi Lane. *Anna May Wong: A Complete Guide to Her Film, Stage, Radio and Television Work*. McFarland & Company; October 2003.

And in the fashion world:

Maggie Norris, the premier haute couture fashion designer in America, will debut her Spring 2004 Collection at a runway fashion show and cocktail reception at the exclusive Asia Society in New York on October 27, 2003. For her Spring Collection, Maggie Norris has found her muse in the 1930s film star, Anna May Wong. The runway presentation will be a dramatic and alluring celebration of the silver screen era and the aura and style of Anna May Wong's film persona.

See also:

Kevin Brownlow. *Behind the Mask of Innocence*. Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1990.

Conrad J. Doerr. "Anna May Wong." *Films in Review*, December 1968. Pages 660-662.

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Yunah Hong. *Dangerous to Know: Anna May Wong*.

Elaine Mae Woo. *Anna May Wong: Frosted Yellow Willows: Her Life, Times and Legend*.

Gilda Gray (*Mabel Greenfield*)

(October 24, 1901– December 22, 1959)



Born Marianna Michalska in Krakow, Poland, Gray and her family fled to the United States when she was eight. Living first in Bayonne, New Jersey, they found their way to a suburb of Milwaukee where her father worked in a meatpacking plant. As a fourteen- or fifteen-year-old teenager, she met John Gorecki, the son of a local saloon keeper and, after giving birth to their son Martin, she began singing in her father-in-law's saloon. In 1916, legend has it that she invented a kind of dance she called "shimmying" (her accented corruption of her dress straps of "chemise") by accident while she was shaking from nerves during the singing of the "Star Spangled Banner." Although there were other claimants to the dance's origin, including Mae West and Ethel Waters (with the song *Shim-*

Me-Sha-Wabble), Gray's dancing created a sensation, and she soon left her family for Chicago, changing her name to Mary Gray. She then went East to New York City where she met Frank Westphal, the husband of the magnificent Sophie Tucker. Tucker convinced her to change her name to Gilda and helped her gain a starring role in J.J. Shubert's *The Gaieties of 1919*. Gray eventually made it to stardom with The Ziegfeld Follies.

Divorcing her first husband, Gray married nightclub owner Gallaird T. "Gil" Boag. They went on tour in vaudeville where their act supposedly earned them \$47,000 a week. When they arrived on the West Coast, she was signed by Paramount's Jesse Lasky. In 1923 she starred in *Aloma of the South Seas*, which became a huge success. In 1924, she was credited with co-writing, with Harold Dixon and Nat M. Binns, the song "Hawaiian Dream Girl." Much like in the film, her appearance in *Piccadilly* was one of the last highlights of her career, as her marriage and finances came crashing down in 1929, followed by a heart attack in 1931. Recovered, she had a small role in the 1936 film *Rose Marie* and was to make a big comeback in *The Great Ziegfeld*, but her scenes were cut out of the final film. By the 1940s, she made a living appearing in New York with her famed shimmy, and in 1946, unsuccessfully sued Columbia claiming that the film *Gilda* was based on her life. In 1956, she had one last hurrah, appearing in Ralph Edwards' *This is Your Life*. She died three years later from a second heart attack. The Motion Picture Relief Fund paid for her funeral.

Jameson Thomas (*Valentine Vilmot*)

(March 27, 1889 – January 10, 1939)

Born in London, Jameson Thomas began his stage career in the early 1900s as a young boy in *The Squaw Man*. Thomas made his film debut in 1923's *Chu Chin Chow* directed by Herbert Wilcox. Thomas starred in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Farmer's Wife* (1928) as the ironically named Samuel Sweetland, a cantankerous widowed farmer who decides to take a new wife but can't find a woman to live up to his impossible standards — until he discovers his own charming housekeeper. Unhappy with his film career ("If one wants to live by playing in British films, it is better to be miscast than never to be cast at all.") he left for America, where he made his first American film in *Body and Soul* (1931). His career in Hollywood was confined mostly to bit roles, though in many fine movies such as *Scarlet Empress* (1934), *It Happened One Night* (1934), *The Lives of the Bengal Lancer* (1935) and *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936). Thomas died on January 10, 1939 from tuberculosis.

Charles Laughton (*Greedy nightclub diner*)

(July 1, 1899 – December 15, 1962)

Whilst performing in the 1927 Arnold Bennett play, "Mr. Prohack" in London, Laughton met his future wife, Elsa Lanchester. After appearing in his first feature film, *Piccadilly*, rumor has it that Laughton went onto a fairly suitable career (highlighted by similar gluttonous eating scenes), including such roles as King Henry VIII in *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933), Capt. Bligh in *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935), and Quasimodo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1939). He also directed the film, *The Night of the Hunter*.

Arnold Bennett, screenplay

(May 27, 1867 – March 27, 1931)



“The price of justice is eternal publicity.”

“It is well, when judging a friend, to remember that he is judging you with the same godlike and superior impartiality.”

Arnold Bennett wrote almost three thousand articles and essays and more than 70 books in a career spanning almost forty years.

Enoch Arnold Bennett was born in North Staffordshire England near Hanley, in the area known as the Potteries, home to such famous potters as Sir Henry Doulton, Josiah Spode and Josiah Wedgwood. Bennett was brought up in modest surroundings. His education ended with his graduation from the Newcastle Middle School. His father had qualified as a solicitor in 1876 and had an office in Piccadilly Street, Hanley. At 21, Arnold, who worked as a rent collector, left his father’s practice and went to London as a solicitor’s clerk. He had already begun to write reports for the Staffordshire newspapers and continued to write at night in his London room. Bennett won a literary competition in *Tit Bits* magazine in 1889 and was encouraged to take up journalism full time. In 1894 he became assistant editor of the periodical *Woman*. He noticed that the material offered by a syndicate to the magazine was not very good, so he wrote a serial, which was bought by the syndicate for 75 pounds. He then wrote another. This became *The Grand Babylon Hotel*. Just over four years later his first novel *A Man from the North* (1898) was published to critical acclaim and he became editor-in-chief of the magazine.

In 1899, Bennett recorded his literary output for the year in his diary:

“This year I have written 335,340 words, grand total: 224 articles and stories, and four installments of a serial called *The Gates of Wrath* have actually been published and also my book of plays, *Polite Farces*. My work also includes six or eight short stories not yet published, also the greater part of a 55,000 word serial *Love and Life*, for Tilliotsons, and the whole draft, 80,000 words of my Staffordshire novel *Anna Tellwright* [later published as *Anna of the Five Towns*].”

In 1900 he gave up his editorial job and devoted himself full time to writing, including serious criticism and theatre journalism, one of his special interests. In 1902 *Anna of the Five Towns*, the first of a succession of stories that detailed life in the Potteries appeared.

In 1903, Bennett moved to Paris, where other great artists from around the world had converged on Montmartre and Montparnasse. Bennett spent the next eight years writing novels and plays. In 1908 *The Old Wives' Tale* was published and was an immediate success throughout the English-speaking world. As a novelist, Bennett was enamored of and influenced by such great French writers as Stendahl, Flaubert, Rimbaud, Huysmans and Gide. He was also a great fan of the works of Chekov, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and Hardy.

After a visit to America in 1911 where he had been publicized and acclaimed as no other visiting writer since Charles Dickens, he returned to England where *The Old Wives' Tale* was reappraised and hailed as a masterpiece. In 1912 he married the gifted French actress Marguerite Hebrard. During the war Bennett became Director of Propaganda at the War Ministry. In 1926 at the suggestion of Lord Beaverbrook, he began writing an influential weekly article on books for the *London Evening Standard* newspaper.

Bennett separated from his wife in 1922, and then fell in love with actress Dorothy Cheston, with whom he remained until his death in 1931 from typhoid. His ashes are buried in Burslem cemetery. His daughter Virginia Eldin lives in France and is president of the Arnold Bennett Society. His most famous works are the Clayhanger trilogy and *The Old Wives' Tale*, which in 2001 was named as one of the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century by the editorial board of the American Modern Library.

In 1927, in an essay about the movies, he wrote: "All the new stories, contributed *ad hoc*, are conventional, grossly sentimental, clumsy, and fatally impaired by poverty of invention. The screen has laid hands on some of the greatest stories in the world, and has cheapened, soiled, ravaged, and poisoned them by crudest fatuities." *Piccadilly* was Bennett's first and only work written expressly as a screenplay. In 1928, he came out with an illustrated photoplay novelization for the Readers Library Publishing Company.

Werner Brandes, cinematographer

(July 10, 1889 – September 30, 1968)

Born in Braunschweig, Germany, Brandes became a cinematographer in 1914 when he photographed a German version of Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* for director Rudolf Meinert. He joined director Joe May in 1919, working with him on *Die Herrin der Welt* and *Das Indische Grabmal* (*The Indian Tomb*). He started collaborating with E. A. Dupont on *Die grüne Manuela* (1923), and continued working with him on *Der Demütige und die Sängerin* (1925), *Moulin Rouge* (1928), *Piccadilly* (1929) and *Two Worlds* (1930). Brandes also photographed Gerhard Lamprecht's *Emil und die Detektive* (1931, with a script by Billy Wilder) and remained active in Germany before moving to Switzerland during World War II.

Alfred Junge, set designer

(January 29, 1886 – 1964)

Born in Görlitz, Saxony, Germany, Junge studied art in Germany and Italy before becoming a scenic artist at the Berlin State Opera and State Theatre Studios. Starting his work in cinema in 1920 at UFA, he first worked with Dupont on *Das alte Gesetz*. His production design for *Moulin Rouge* and *Piccadilly* were two of the most elaborate in English cinema up to that time and launched Junge on one of the most illustrious careers in cinema. Michael Balcon hired him to join the new Gaumont-British studio where he worked as art director with Alfred Hitchcock on *Waltzes from Vienna*, *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934 version), and *Young and Innocent*. But it was in 1940 that he started his most famous collaboration with the team of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger on *Contraband*. (He had previously worked with Powell on three of his "quota quickies" in the 1930s.)

He was an invaluable addition to The Archers' classic films such as *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, *I Know Where I'm Going*, *A Matter of Life and Death* and *Black Narcissus*, for which he won the Academy Award®. Some of his other great films include *Evergreen*, *The Citadel*, *Goodbye Mr. Chips*, *Ivanhoe*, *Mogambo* and his last film, completed in 1957, *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*.

Websites for Further Research

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The British Film Institute

The **British Film Institute** (*bfi*) was established in 1933 to promote greater understanding, appreciation and access to both film and television culture. Its activities include film preservation and conservation; running the National Film Theatre; the *bfi* London Imax Cinema; the London Film Festival and the *bfi* National Library. It also re-releases classic films in cinemas and on VHS/DVD and publishes a wide range of books and educational resources, including *Sight & Sound* Magazine.

The *bfi*'s **National Film and Television Archive** (NFTVA), with sites in London and at the J.Paul Getty Jr. Conservation Centre in Berkhamsted, is responsible for acquiring, documenting, preserving, conserving and ensuring long-term accessibility of the national collection of film and television for the United Kingdom. Find out more at: www.bfi.org.uk

Milestone Film & Video

“Since its birth the Milestone Film & Video Co. has steadily become the industry’s foremost boutique distributor of classic and art films — and probably the only distributor in America whose name is actually a guarantee of some quality.”

— William Arnold, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

Milestone is a boutique distribution company with more than 13 years experience in art-house film distribution. The company has earned an unparalleled reputation for releasing classic cinema masterpieces, new foreign films, groundbreaking documentaries and American independent features. Thanks to Milestone’s rediscovery, restoration and release of such important discoveries as Mikhail Kalatozov’s award-winning *I am Cuba*, Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Mamma Roma*, and Alfred Hitchcock’s *Bon Voyage* and *Aventure Malgache*, the company now occupies an honored position as one of the most influential independent distributors in the American film industry. In 1999, the *L.A. Weekly* chose Milestone as “Indie Distributor of the Year.”

Amy Heller and Dennis Doros started Milestone in 1990 to bring out the best films of yesterday and today. The company has released such remarkable new films as Manoel de Oliveira's *I'm Going Home*, Bae Yong-kyun's *Why Has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?*, Hirokazu Kore-eda's *Maborosi*, and Takeshi Kitano's *Fireworks (Hana-Bi)*.

Milestone's re-releases have included restored versions of Luchino Visconti's *Rocco and His Brothers*, F.W. Murnau's *Tabu*, Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack's *Grass and Chang*, Henri-Georges Clouzot's *The Mystery of Picasso*, Marcel Ophüls' *The Sorrow and the Pity* (a Woody Allen presentation) and Hiroshi Teshigahara's *Woman in the Dunes* and *Antonio Gaudí*. Milestone is also working with the Mary Pickford Foundation on a long-term project to preserve, re-score and release the best films of the legendary silent screen star. In recent years, Milestone has re-released beautifully restored versions of Frank Hurley's *South: Ernest Shackleton and the Endurance Expedition*, Kevin Brownlow's *It Happened Here* and *Winstanley*, Lotte Reiniger's animation masterpiece, *The Adventures of Prince Achmed*, Michael Powell's *The Edge of the World* (a Martin Scorsese presentation), Jane Campion's *Two Friends*, Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Wide Blue Road* (a Jonathan Demme and Dustin Hoffman presentation), Conrad Rooks' *Siddhartha* and Rolando Klein's Mexican classic, *Chac*.

Since its beginning, Milestone has had a fruitful collaboration with some of the world's major archives including the British Film Institute, UCLA Film & Television Archive, George Eastman House, Museum of Modern Art, Library of Congress, Nederlands Filmmuseum and the Norsk Filminstitutt. In August 2000 the Film Society of Lincoln Center in New York premiered Milestone's 10th Anniversary Retrospective. During the New York run and the nationwide tour that followed, all revenues from retrospective screenings were donated to four major archives in the United States and England to help restore films that might otherwise be lost.

In 2003–2004, Milestone will be releasing an important series of great silent films restored by the world's foremost film historians and preservationists, Photoplay Productions. These stunning versions, never before available in the United States, include the horror classic *The Phantom of the Opera*; André Antoine's early neorealist adaptation of Emile Zola's *La Terre*; and an astonishing historical epic of Polish independence by Raymond Bernard, *The Chess Player*. Video highlights for this year also include a special DVD series of incredible animation including *Cut-Up: The Films of Grant Munro*; *Norman McLaren: The Collector's Edition*; and *Winsor McCay: The Master Edition*.

In theaters, Milestone will be releasing Tareque Masud's remarkable *The Clay Bird* from Bangladesh and *The Big Animal*, directed by and starring Jerzy Stuhr, from a script by Krzysztof Kieslowski.

Milestone received a Special Archival Award in 1995 from the National Society of Film Critics for its restoration and release of *I am Cuba*. Eight of the company's films — Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep*, F.W. Murnau's *Tabu*, Edward S. Curtis' *In the Land of the War Canoes*, Mary Pickford's *Poor Little Rich Girl*, Lon Chaney's *The Phantom of the Opera*, Clara Bow's *It*, Winsor McCay's *Gertie the Dinosaur*, and Merian C. Cooper, Ernest B. Schoedsack and Marguerite Harrison's *Grass* — are listed on the Library of Congress' National Film Registry.

Cindi Rowell, director of acquisitions, has been with Milestone since 1999. In 2003 Nadja Tennstedt joined the company as director of international sales.

"Milestone Film & Video is an art-film distributor that has released some of the most distinguished new movies (along with seldom-seen vintage movie classics) of the past decade"
— Stephen Holden, *New York Times*

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In Memoriam: Phil Serling, Syracuse, New York