



Advisory Board Members

Joanne Fraser

Famous Players

Kathryn Lynch

National Film Board Canada,
Pacific Region

K.T. McFadden

Rainmaker Digital Pictures

Shelley Nowazek

Telefilm Canada

Lisa Purdy

CBC British Columbia

Rohays Reid

Royal Bank

Tom Rowe

Pacific Motion Pictures
Corporation

Liz Shorten

British Columbia Film

Portrayal of Women in Film Product of Male Domination



As a guest on the John Pifer radio show in support of Shoot Out, I was asked by our host (a woman filling in for John) to comment on the portrayal of women in film, in particular the older man/younger woman romantic pairing that's been the focus of much feminist criticism. Unfortunately I wasn't

prepared for the question and so my answer was limited. Luckily I have this space to elaborate.

While shopping around for an agent, I had a revealing conversation about potential casting for my script, *A Plurality of Loyalties*. The agent (a male) noted the actor playing the midwife would have to be "voluptuous, with big breasts" because that's how she's described in the script. I pointed out that, in fact, this wasn't in the script and laughingly told him he was just being a guy. Somewhat embarrassed, he defended his preference by pointing out that she was certainly portrayed as a very vivacious, sexual woman. "Now that's true," I replied. "But you're projecting onto the material your idea of what a vivacious, sexual woman looks like."

This is usually the point in the story where women begin to cluck in that knowing, somewhat condescending manner at the obvious sexism in Hollywood. But I must dissent, for it is the nature of

every reader—male or female—to interpret literary material through the filter of their own experience. There's even a term for it: hermeneutics.

Case in point: my best friend, Maggie, has decided Russell Crowe should play the part of Sir Reginald, described in my script as "tall and well-built, with dark hair, piercing green eyes, and full lips set in a goatee beard." Now, I didn't see Russell Crowe when I was writing, so I asked why him. After the usual defense of fine actor, able to meet the emotional demands of the character, blah blah, she summed up her choice with "Oh, and I want to meet him."

In other words, women are no different from men in allowing our desires to color our creative choices. The portrayal of women on screen is a function of men dominating creative decisions, not some patriarchal conspiracy to limit our options—even though the subconscious motives behind men's choices are often of valid concern to us. And so though I may be annoyed by the narrow choices men usually make regarding female roles, I'm not convinced there's always malice attached. As women gain more control over what's on the screen, our fantasies and preferences will also find their way into film—but they too will still be fantasies and preferences, not necessarily a mirror to reality.

Michelle Demers