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University of the Incarnate Word, cmgonza4@uiwtx.edu

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SECOND-BILLED BUT NOT SECOND-RATE: A REAPPRAISAL OF THREE  
CHARACTER ACTORS FROM HOLLYWOOD'S GOLDEN AGE

by

Candace M. Graham

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the University of the Incarnate Word  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

University of the Incarnate Word

December 2015

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by  
Candace M. Graham

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To my husband...I will now cook again. And to my mother: we will continue our evening calls on classic film. To my father in heaven: thank you for shining your light on me.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to:  
my husband, Bruce Graham, and to  
the character actors of Hollywood's Golden Age.

## SECOND-BILLED BUT NOT SECOND-RATE: A REAPPRAISAL OF THREE CHARACTER ACTORS OF HOLLYWOOD'S GOLDEN AGE

Candace M. Graham, MA

University of the Incarnate Word, 2015

Seventy-six years ago Hollywood experienced something never before nor since seen. The year, 1939, was Hollywood's "Dream Year" for production of some of the most memorable films of all time. Today, the term used to describe films of this success level is blockbuster. Film scholars and fans call them classics. It was the culmination of films of Hollywood's Golden Age starring every one of Hollywood's A-Listers of this Golden Age of film, from Don Ameche to Loretta Young. However, lost in this maze of the top-billed or leading actors were the character actors who were also known as supporting cast members or B-stars. What the performances of these character actors communicate to the world is the focus of this thesis. First, a reappraisal of three character actors, Eve Arden, Charles Coburn, and Thomas Mitchell was conducted through research of existing literature. Second, interviews were conducted with classic film experts, publicists, and those possessing unique knowledge and/or experience on the topic, to establish grounded theory. Analysis and findings of these interview responses provided insight into the contributions of classic film character actors – these three and at-large – as second-billed but not second-rate. Finally, findings supported the hypothesis of the deficiency in scholarly literature on this research topic and how character actors contributed to the overall and lasting success of their films.

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## DEFINITION OF TERMS

A-Lister – A list or group of people who are very well-known or respected (Merriam-Webster.com).

B-Movie – A movie that costs little money to make and that is usually not considered to be very good (Merriam-Webster.com).

Character actor – People who play roles in a movie who specialize in the portrayal of particular types or who are capable of playing a wide range of roles (*The Film Encyclopedia – The Most Comprehensive Encyclopedia of World Cinema in a Single Volume*).

Classic film – Film acts as a historical agent. Classic film represents the historical agent of films made during Hollywood's Golden Age of 1929-1945 (*Cinema and History*).

Film studios – Properties including sets and stages, often utilizing and transforming minimal spaces and previously used props to create recognizable and identifiable landscapes of movie culture (*M-G-M – Hollywood's Greatest Backlot*).

Hollywood's Golden Age - This era of cinema is defined as the films made in Hollywood between 1929-1945 (Quarterly Review of Film & Video Journal, p4).

Hollywood's Golden Age – Defined as 1930-1959 (HollywoodsGoldenAge.com)

Second-Billed – The place an actor is identified in screen and/or film credits. Everything from cast order to font size both on screen and all promotional materials are worked out in fine detail usually by the actor's agent during contract negotiations with the studio/production with input from the actor and/or actor's manager. Factors such as screen time and the role title (leading or supporting) are considered in the negotiations. How badly the actor wants the role compared with how badly the studio wants the actor in the film is a determining factor on how much bargaining power the agent will have in negotiating the terms (Quora.com – 'How does the order of billing of cast members work?').

Second-Rate – Not very good: Of ordinary or inferior quality (Merriam-Webster.com).

Silver Screen – Refers to the film industry, as the stars of the silver screen (Dictionary.Cambridge.org).

Studio/Publicity Machines – In the film industry, the departments within film studios responsible for arranging the greatest exposure for the company's films and stars (*The Film Encyclopedia – The Most Comprehensive Encyclopedia of World Cinema in a Single Volume*).

Studio Mogul – An important or powerful person, especially in the film or media industry (Oxforddictionaries.com).

Supporting Actor/Role – Actors who do not have majority time on the movie screen (Internationalbusinesstimes.com).

Top-Billing – A position at the top of a theatrical bill usually featuring the star's name (Merriam-Webster.com)

Triple Crown – A set of three major awards, wins, or achievements in a particular field (Merriam-Webster.com).

Turner Classic Movies (TCM) – The official site [television network] with thousands of classic movies available (TCM.com).

Yester-year – Time gone by (Merriam-Webster.com).

## Chapter I: Introduction

The sense of belonging to another time, another place, crosses the mind of some people. For example, a person may say, “I should have been born in 1927,” and the person was born in 1967. Others may share “I wish I could have lived in the time of...,” filling in the blank with whatever era in which they refer. The person born in 1967 wishing to have been born in 1927 is this researcher. The sense of belonging to this time gone by burns brightly in the mind’s eye. Looking into every aspect of the films of this era represents the better part of three decades. What began as simple interest eventually turned into the desire to study film in the more formal setting of a college classroom. Now, scholarly research and writing on the movies of Hollywood’s Golden Age, specifically the character actors, best define the reasons for this paper and deep passion, which fuels all measures of work. It was for these reasons I argue my hypothesis of the absence in scholarly literature on this topic.

### Background—American Cinema

The classic period of American Cinema, defined as 1929 - 1945, produced not only some of the most entertaining, but also the most-well-crafted movies in cinematic history (*Quarterly Review of Film and Video Journal*, 4). This period, also identified as Hollywood’s Golden Age, defined from 1930-1959, represents the characterization of films on what was referred to as the silver screen. The importance of cinema provides foundation for background. The book, *Movies: From the Silent Classics of the Silver Screen to the Digital and 3-D Era*, edited by Philip Kemp, highlights the following on its interior dust jacket:

The phenomenon of cinema has gained an important and much-loved place in society in the course of its dynamic development over the past hundred years. Wanting to make a record of one’s own time, to learn about the lives of others, and to escape from the realities of life are natural human instincts.

## Background—Character Actors

In an interview with writer, Dwight Kemper, he stated: “Most character actors came from the stage or vaudeville (interview, 24 Oct. 2015).” In understanding the term, character actor/role, Ephraim Katz defines it in his book, *The Film Encyclopedia – The Most Comprehensive Encyclopedia of World Cinema in a Single Volume*, as: “Roles that are performed by stars, especially as they get older, but they are usually played by actors or actresses who specialize in the portrayal of particular types who are capable of playing a wide range of roles (228).” Perhaps the most applicable and important definition of character actor can be taken from *USA Today’s* Cinematic Arts section May 2013 article, “What a Character.” It stated that the character actor “Is that performer who is an indispensable satellite figure to the story or lead character.”

Author, Jordan Young, wrote in the preface of his book, *Reel Characters – Iris Adrian:*

The producers of the movies’ golden age didn’t need multi-million dollar budgets for CGI [Computer Generated Images]. They had their own ingenious special effects. They were called character actors – highly skilled performers who peopled the backgrounds of movies like foot soldiers in a revolution.

## Background—Directors

According to Mr. Young, who also wrote *John Ford’s The Quiet Man: The Making of a Cult Classic*, and *Burt Mustin: The Reel Characters Series*, and several others: “Directors would’ve been SOL [shit out of luck] without them [character actors]. The films wouldn’t be what they are. They wouldn’t have the staying power (interview, 24 Oct. 2015).” Directors such as John Ford had what were referred to as stock companies. These were groups of select, hand-picked, character actors who regularly appeared in films made by that particular director. Ford’s included character actors Harry Carry, Jr., Victor McLaglen, Ward Bond, and Ben Johnson. Actor and director, Orson Welles, also utilized a stock company of supporting character actors

for his films of Mercury Theatre to include Agnes Moorehead, Ray Collins, Norman Lloyd, and Paul Stewart.

In character actor, Eve Arden's, autobiography, *Three Phases of Eve*, Ms. Arden wrote of her experience of casting selection by director, Gregory La Cava, for his 1937 film, *Stage Door*. She stated La Cava told her: "...I can't offer you a specific part, but I like certain qualities I see in you and want very much to use you in the picture (41)." Classic film directors knew a good thing when they saw it. It was no different when directors and music score composers worked together to achieve harmony in their films.

### **Background—Music Composer**

In her thesis, "American Tradition Music in Max Steiner's Score for *Gone With the Wind*," Heather Grace Fisher addressed several important characteristics of this famous music score and what Steiner accomplished in writing it. She stated that: "Steiner created leitmotives [motifs or themes associated throughout a music drama with a particular person, situation or idea] for the characters central to the plot as well as a few of the relationships between the characters (2)." Character actor, Hattie McDaniel, portrayed Mammy, the caretaker of the lead actress role of Scarlett O'Hara. The relationship between them was critical due to the accountability Mammy held Scarlett to for her mischief and wrongdoings. In analyzing the movie several times over, the researcher observed the music and the chemistry between these two actors greatly contributed to the relationship between the two characters – not forgetting McDaniel won an Academy Award for Best Actress in a Supporting Role for this performance and was the first African-American to receive an Oscar.

## **Background—Film Studios and Studio Publicity Machines**

Film studios of yester-year were, in effect, the heartbeat of movie making during this time period.

Self-sufficient, these studios were each their own little world and were often referred to as well-oiled machines. Much like assembly lines, each person, each department, had their specific functions. Names like Paramount, Warner Bros., Selznick, and Samuel Goldwyn, represent some of the larger and more well-known studios. According to *M-G-M: Hollywood's Greatest Backlot*, by Steven Bingen, Stephen X. Sylvester, and Michael Troyan:

It is estimated that a fifth of all films made in the United States prior to the 1970s were shot at MGM [Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer] studios, meaning that the gigantic property was responsible for hundreds of iconic sets and stages, often utilizing and transforming minimal spaces and previously used props to create some of the most recognizable and identifiable landscapes of modern movie culture (13).

Directors and producers – the likes of David O'Selznick, Louis B. Mayer, and many others – were those who fronted the money to make movies and also ran these studios. They had the final say in nearly all aspects of filmmaking. One of the most important departments within these studios were the publicity departments or publicity machines. As per Ephraim Katz's previously mentioned encyclopedia on film, it was the job of this department and the people in it to: "Generally seek the greatest exposure for his company's films and stars (936)." Oftentimes, concocted stories were released as press releases, highlighting off-screen, steamy romances resembling those the leading stars portrayed in their films portrayed. True or not, these publicity machines stopped at little to nothing to achieve maximum exposure.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The idea and practice of identifying a person's work – as a matter of placement and form – subjects the person to a wide range of either accolades and/or criticism; this gives



cause to revisit and reappraise their work in a different context. In defining overall success, the problem lies in assuming this success is restricted to the measure of proceeds earned at the box office. Film earnings are recorded, but the true measurement of character actors' impact on the overall and enduring success has never been studied as it pertains to the continued popularity of classic films. There's no arguing certain films have stood the test of time – their sustained popularity and critical acclaim make it easy to identify the “classic films.” What has not been proven is to what degree character actors contributed to the overall and lasting success of their films – and as second-billed but not second-rate.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research is to reappraise the work, the careers, of three character actors of this period: Eve Arden, Charles Coburn, and Thomas Mitchell. They fall into a much larger group represented by hundreds. Further, this research fills the gap in scholarly literature as it pertains to the classification of character actors as second-billed but not second-rate – all this in relation to the contributions of their work to the overall and lasting success of their films. Many of their movies were identified by film-recognizing authorities such as the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Science (the Oscar™), the Broadway Emmy™, and television's Golden Globe™. In choosing which character actors to research and write about, these three stood out. The researcher believes, after watching most of their films repeatedly and researching literature, enough has been observed in what they accomplished in their performances to take this second look.

## Eve Arden

Eve Arden once said: “I looked at all the women that I worked with – so many of them had such tragic lives and unhappy lives and divorced lives, and I thought, I don’t want to be a star. There’s too much concentration on self (*Women’s Wear Daily*, 1983).” Eve Arden’s ability to create character distinguished her in a way no other character actor could match. In author, Stephen M. Silverman’s, book, *Funny Ladies*, Ms. Arden’s peer and actress, Kaye Ballard, said of Ms. Arden: “She had an air of sophistication, class, and wit. She was ladylike even doing a pratfall (76).” After only her third film, she was cast in a small role in director, George La Cava’s, 1937 production of *Stage Door*. Impressing the director – in part to her improvisational talent – her part was beefed up to a strong partnering lead to the lead actress in the film, Katherine Hepburn. Ms. Arden was also recognized with an Academy Award nomination for Best Actress in a Supporting Role for her work in the 1945 film, *Mildred Pierce*, directed by Michael Curtiz.

In her dissertation, “Routine Adjustments: Re-viewing Women’s TV Comedy Genres, 1950-1969,” Heather Kathryn Osbome-Thompson addressed what she called “An impending revolution in women’s television comedy,” and discussed Eve Arden’s successful television series, “Our Miss Brooks (26).” She acknowledged Arden as a “Featured comedic star who was well known in vaudeville and film (27).” Contributing her wit, sense of timing, care, concern, compassion, and countless other attributes, she was unlike any other actress.

## Charles Coburn

In 1905, Charles Coburn founded his own troupe, The Coburn Shakespearean Players. He began his film career many years later at the age of 60. In the article “Courtly Charles Coburn a Character Actor,” he was described as someone who “Always looked the parts he was playing

and that his soft, sanded-down voice meshed perfectly with his Old School demeanor (2015).” Fellow actor and childhood larger-than-life star, Shirley Temple, stated in an article in the June 9, 1945 issue of “The Saturday Evening Post” that her “Favorite scene in *The More the Merrier* is a sequence involving Charles Coburn.” It was for his performance in this 1944 film Coburn won the Best Actor in a Supporting Role Award. He was nominated for three such awards throughout his film career. On Turner Classic Movies’ website of TCM Archive Material, contributor, Roger Fristoe, wrote of Coburn: “He was as well recognized as the stars whom he supported, and from whom he often stole the show.” For his final performance in a stage production of “You Can’t Take it With You,” he was described as “A devoted thespian to the end (Smumcounty.com, 2013).”

### **Thomas Mitchell**

Thomas Mitchell began his acting career on the stage. After some years, he joined Charles Coburn’s Shakespearean troupe. Mitchell also co-authored plays. *USA Today* paid tribute to Thomas Mitchell and “named him the best character actor of all time (70).” In Hollywood’s “Dream year” of 1939, Thomas Mitchell starred in five of the top films released that year: *Only Angels Have Wings*, *Gone With the Wind* – which was the first film to win ten Academy Awards including Best Picture – *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and *Stagecoach* for which he won the Best Actor in a Supporting Role award. “It should be noted that very few actors in the Academy’s history have won the Oscar™ for a role in a Western, an always popular but not prestigious genre (Emanuellevy.com).”

Mitchell was the first triple-crown winner of acting awards: the Oscar™ as previously mentioned, an Emmy™ for his 1953 lead actor role in *The Doctor*, and a Tony™ for his performance in the 1953 stage musical, *Hazel Flagg*. He provided audiences with craft and talent

extensive in a variety of film genres worthy of revisiting and analysis. As noted by moviefanfare.com, Mitchell's career is "An impressive body of work that most actors would love to have on their resume." His career spanned more than sixty years. In one sentence: "Thomas Mitchell was a renaissance man, a good friend, and a great actor. One of the best, in fact (Once Upon a Screen: Thomas Mitchell defines WHAT A CHARACTER! 2014)." Journalist Jay J. wrote about Thomas Mitchell, utilizing his article title as the means in which to identify Mr. Mitchell as: "The character actor's character actor (2007)." In *Forgotten Hollywood, Forgotten History*, author, Manny Pacheco, refers to Mitchell in the chapter six title as: "1939...Hollywood's Crown Jewel: Thomas Mitchell." The following figures, illustrated through photos, represent the five films of Hollywood's "Dream Year," 1939, that Mitchell was in. The researcher included what billing placement Mitchell received.



Fig. 1. *Only Angels Have Wings*, Third-Billed.

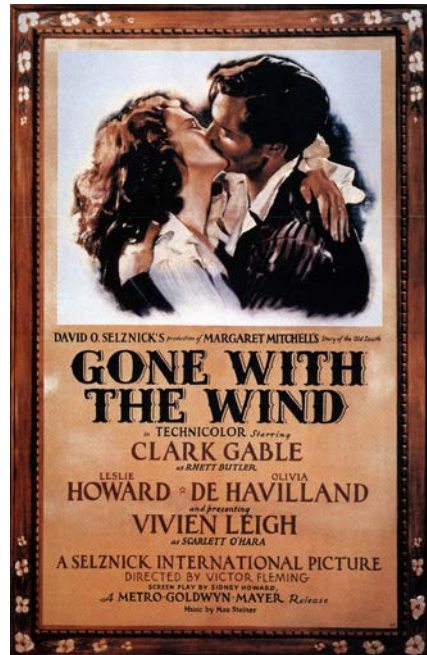


Fig. 2. *Gone With the Wind*, Sixth-Billed.



Fig. 3. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, Sixth-Billed.



Fig. 4. *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, Third-Billed.



Fig. 5. *Stagecoach*, Fifth-Billed.

## Summary

The work and careers of these actors all warrant reappraisal. According to Internet Movie Data Base (IMDB.com), an on-line database considered to be an authoritative source for movies, Eve Arden had 100 films to her credit, Charles Coburn had 99, and Thomas Mitchell had 106. This research on their contributions to the films in which they starred to the overall and lasting success of their films sought to fill this gap in scholarly literature. Bringing this to light provides venue for topical discussion and continued discovery. In researching the work of these three particular characters, little to no scholarly research exists. As noted on Turner Classic Movie's 2015 Film Festival website, their film festival discussion, "Character Actors 101," led by the Repertory of New York's, Bruce Goldstein, pays "Tribute – jam-packed with great film clips – to the real stars of Classic Hollywood."

## Research Question

The research questions explored were: (a) What do the character actors of this era contribute to the story telling in their particular films, (b) How was the overall success of some of the most popular and greatest films of all time ever considered without analyzing the value and influence of these character actors. Here, it is important to note of the American Film Institute's tenth anniversary of its "100 Greatest American Movies of All Time," Thomas Mitchell starred in four of them: *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *Gone With the Wind*, which won the Best Picture Oscar™ in 1939, *Stagecoach*, and *It's a Wonderful Life* (afi.com/100 years). And (c) How do classic film experts and scholars, publicists, and those possessing unique knowledge and/or experience define the overall success of these films as it pertains to the character actors' contributions.

## **Limitations of Study**

Due to the era of film studied in this research, the greatest limitation is the large majority of people who fulfilled the character actor roles are deceased and therefore unavailable to interview. Additionally, the lack of necessary resources for travel to institutions such as the Louis B. Mayer Library at the American Film Institute in California, the Museum of the Moving Image in New York, and the University of Athens Georgia to which Charles Coburn donated his Papers to conduct research, also caused limitation. Film director, Francis Ford Coppola stated in James Thompson Stern's book, *the FILM-MAKER says – Quotes, Quips, and Words of Wisdom*, that "One of the most important tools that a filmmaker has are his/her note (12)." Not having access during the time of this research to any director's notes also posed limits to this study.



## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

This study explored aspects of what character actors contribute to the success of their films, how the overall success of films is defined, the importance, which should be placed on character actors in scholarly literature, and the classification of these actors as second-billed but not second-rate. For a clearer understanding of this, it is first necessary to identify previous literary works on the topic, offering insight into what is – and is not – present in existing literature. Separated by source types, consistent themes ring true.

Survey of literature stops shy of addressing the contributions of characters to the success of their films. Literature does not exist on these contributions, especially in relation to the character actors as second-billed but not second-rate. The majority focus of character actors of this period is on their filmographies. Or, articles such as “Greatest Character Actors of Our Time” lean toward addressing the question: “aren’t all actors playing characters (McArdle)?” In both, essence of classic character actors in film is minimized. McArdle’s same thirty-three page article defined character actors as “those who didn’t have matinee idol looks.” Writer, Vincent Scarpa’s article, “Second billed, but first-rate: TV’s best supporting characters,” only identifies various actors in TV shows. “It’s important to give these talented actresses their due,” Scarpa writes, “because sometimes it’s a thankless job to be second best.” While helpful for television supporting or character actors, this article – and others like it – make no mention of character actors of Hollywood Golden Age.

### **Scholarly Articles**

In 1969, Author, Richard H. Palmer, wrote an article titled: “The Professional Actor’s Early Search for College Audience: Sir Philip Ben Greet and Charles Coburn,” for the

*Educational Theatre Journal*. The article's premise addressed the pioneering efforts of these two actors in the search and acquisition of college audiences for their touring plays. Palmer stated that: "Through their persistence and the quality of their productions, these two men constructed loosely formed circuits of college sponsors and opened the way for the scores of traveling companies which came in the subsequent half century to bring professionally acted plays to college audiences (52)." Further, "Charles Coburn, more than any other individual, succeeded in the attempt to develop a circuit of college engagements (56)." Coburn's touring success on the college circuit eventually led him to Broadway and Hollywood.

Later in a 1990 *Film in Review* article titled "The character player," writer, Anthony Slide, wrote about a 1938 survey *Daily Variety* conducted among Hollywood's top casting directors to "Name the eight 'featured players' who make the greatest contributions toward the artistic success of their films." He further stated "Such a contest perhaps proves that character players were not so much the mortar between the bricks as the foundation upon which the edifice of the motion picture stood secure." Here, the contributions of character actors are restricted to the artistry of their films.

*Film Criticism* journal article, "The Production of Character in *It's a Wonderful Life*," by Brenda Wineapple, validated the development and importance of character in this 1946 Frank Capra classic. It "Defines character and the importance of narrative and its contribution to character (4)." The article emphasized narrative's contribution to the character; not the contribution of character actor(s) to the narrative or film, let alone its success. Given the film's long-lasting achievement as one of the most favored Christmas classic movies of all time, this research point warrants exploration.

Still, other scholarly work addresses the importance of character actors, but only on the level of belonging to stock companies of the major film moguls of the time, including those assembled by John Ford, Preston Sturges, and Frank Capra. This is the focus in the *Films in Review* article, “The Character Players” (I. 4). While each of these directors recognized the value and importance of the character actors, they were often stereotyped in the same role, film after film. Once again, there is no mention of their contribution to the enduring success of the films they starred in.

*Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* journal article, “Small Screen, Smaller Pictures: Television Broadcasting and B-Movies in the Early 1950s,” illustrated the blatant and obvious lack of attention given to B-movies, which primarily starred these particular actors. The author supported that most things character-actor related receive little of the scholarly and popular attention they deserve: “B-movies received relatively little scholarly attention in general as compared with their A-picture counterparts (219).” The American Library Association provided insight into character actor, Lee J. Cobb’s importance in particular films, but stopped there, only “calling for use of imagination of these films without Cobb’s performance (3).” Again, no validation of Cobb’s own imprint on his films.

*Literature Resource Center*, Susan Ohmer’s article, “Female Spectatorship and Women’s Magazines: Hollywood, *Good Housekeeping*, and World War II,” addressed publicity and promotional efforts of Hollywood’s studios and *Good Housekeeping* during part of Hollywood’s Golden Age by virtue of World War II occurring during this time period. To attract women to the theatre, the “Promotional devices addressed audiences on the basis of gender...they channeled women’s interests and desires in a specific direction, toward romance and preoccupation with personal relationship.” Herein lies another example in the gap in scholarly literature in addition

to identifying what studios and other sources used to attract audiences. Missing, are the contributions of character actors.

Finally, from Carolyn A. Kelley's dissertation: "Rejected Women in Film Noir," she analyzed what she called the "Female character frequently pictured, but rarely discussed." These "Rejected women characters include: the faithful and taken-for-granted 'girl Friday,' the 'B' girl (Noir code for fallen woman)...and the lonely spinster [the 'B' girl was often the supporting actress]." Citing several examples, Kelly made a strong point for actress, Claire Trevor's, character in *Key Largo*. She referred to the character as "invisible," and described this is how the other characters treated Trevor's character. As such, the character was able to accomplish certain things because no one was watching. While this analysis is spot-on, it would have completed the argument by addressing how Ms. Trevor's performance contributed to this movie's success.

## **Books**

A look at *Movies: From the Silent Classics of the Silver Screen to the Digital and 3 – D Era*, edited by Philip Kemp, highlighted the dynamics in John Huston's *The Maltese Falcon*, released in 1941. While this film solidified A-Lister, Humphrey Bogart's, screen power on many levels, it also "boasted a rich gallery of villains: Mary Astor, Sydney Greenstreet, Elisha Cook, Jr. [the perennial fall guy], and Peter Lorre (172)." Again, four of the best character actors in the business in sub-roles greatly contributed to a film whose last line is one of the most remembered in film history: 'It's the stuff dreams are made of.'

In Hortense Powdermaker's book, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory an Anthropologist Looks at the Movie Makers*, the role of the publicity department of the large film studios and its emphasis is described as a department "whose function is to continuously publicize the stars and

build up those whom the studio is planning to make into stars. The department pays relatively little attention to character actors and supporting players (238).”

James Thomson Stern’s book, *the FILM-MAKER says-Quotes, Quips, and Words of Wisdom*, “Holds forth on such topics as auteur theory, the importance of audience, the creative process, the value of a good story, and the business of show. Directors, screenwriters, producers, cinematographers, studio heads, actors and critics all get to have their say here (4).” Further, Stern wrote: “Believe me, there’s no shortage of material. There is much brilliant commentary out there that *didn’t* find its way into these pages, and I urge you to continue the search. You’ll probably also be inspired, as I was, to watch – or re-watch - a lot of old movies (5).” With no mention of contribution of character actors, who is to say whether any information is contained in the commentary that didn’t make its way into this book.

Some may characterize this next absence in recognition of contribution as one of the most blatant with regard to Eve Arden. In author, Daniel Eagan’s, *America’s Film Legacy: The Authoritative Guide to The Landmark Movies in the The National Film Registry*, for each film, Eagan broke down what he referred to as “the pertinent information about how and when it was made (xiii).” He included aspects such as the film’s title, the distributor, release dates, and most pertinent to this research, awards and cast. For Warner Bros. studio 1945 film, *Mildred Pierce*, Eagan provided lengthy history on the film’s star, Joan Crawford. “She won the Academy Award for Best Actress, legitimizing her move to Warners and cementing her new screen persona (386).” While Eve Arden was listed as a cast member, Eagan made no mention of the fact she was nominated for the Best Supporting Actress Academy Award for her role in the picture.

In *From Scarface to Scarlett – American Films in the 1930s*, Roger Dooley wrote: “May this history of the total Hollywood product of the 1930s provide the same kind of background against which the greatest achievements stand out all the more clearly (xxiv).” Providing a chronology of 1930s, Dooley provided information on the making of the films, the stories, and particulars on the actors. In his discussion on RKO Radio Pictures 1937 production of *Stage Door*, he wrote that “Eve Arden clearly revealed the talents that were to make her a star (502).”

Manny Pacheco’s book, *Forgotten Hollywood, Forgotten History*, contains thirteen chapters, each focuses an individual character actor. Chapter six is on Thomas Mitchell. This book highlights points on character actors in relation to America’s history at the time, and how the films of these actors portrayed that history.

Alfred E. Twomey and Arthur F. McClure’s book, *The Versatiles: A Study of Supporting Character Actors and Actresses in the American Motion Picture, 1930-1955*, is a reference book for little known and some familiar character actors. It lists hundreds of photos of character actors and some biographical information. Filmographies are also included. This was one of two books identified by the researcher to contain information specific to the contributions of character actors. Its opening statement of the prefaces reads: “One of the most important aspects of the history of the American motion picture has been the contribution of the character actor. The character actor has had a great influence on the enjoyment provided by movies (7).” In it, a quote by film actor, Dana Andrew reads: “The real acting parts go to the character actors (8).”

As identified on his website, [blogs.indiewire.com/leonardmaltin/](http://blogs.indiewire.com/leonardmaltin/), “Leonard Maltin is one of the most recognized and respected film critics of our time.” In his 1979 book, *The Real Stars*, Maltin states:

One of the curiosities of the Hollywood system was that many of these character people would appear in movies unheralded, their names omitted from the cast listings. But

Hollywood's mistake has become the film aficionado's playground, with true buffs trying to outdo each other in noticing and naming these unsung heroes as they parade by the camera (11).

This researcher's book, *I Only Quote From the Best – Revisiting Hollywood's Golden Age*, provided support on this point regarding Eve Arden: "I'm of the scholarly opinion it was Ms. Arden's performance and talent, which were the reasons for some these successful gems. She was charming and likeable, even when she tried not to be. That's talent (28)."

To this research, the most important of all findings is contained in the forward of *The Versatiles*, provided by classic film A-list actress, Irene Dunne. Nowhere else is an evidence statement made on this point. After listing several characters in a number of films, Dunne wrote: "I firmly believe [listing the names here as they appear in Table 1] were as responsible for the success of these films as the stars and directors (13)." Further, she wrote: "I maintain character actors are perennial students, constantly aware of their fellowmen, and it is the awareness of these fine actors that gives fullness to their performances, a depth that makes all the difference (16)."

## **Magazines**

Further study uncovered an article focusing on a particular close-up of character actor, Glen Anders, in Orson Welles' production of *The Lady from Shanghai*, starring A-Listers, Orson Welles and Rita Hayworth. *Film Comment* article, "A Little Target Practice *Lady from Shanghai* Supporting Player, Glen Anders, Hits One Perfect Mark," highlighted Anders' life, but made no mention about the impact, the contributions, his performance had on this film. It stopped at the significance of only one close-up shot of him. And, although, as this article points out, "Welles created this role specifically with Anders in mind," the writer of this article, Chuck Stevens,

missed the opportunity to delve deeper into Anders' performance and its influence on the success this film continues to enjoy to this day (18).

Turner Classic Movies (TCM), the television network, which shows, discusses, highlights and promotes classic films on a 24/7 schedule, publishes a monthly magazine called *Now Playing*. The magazine consists of articles, viewing schedules, events, and more. Every August, TCM hosts a festival, "Summer Under the Stars," in which a single movie star is highlighted each day. In addition, primetime TCM host, Robert Osborne, writes an article of the same festival name in every August magazine issue. In it, he features the movies to be shown that month.

In the August 2015 issue, Osborne's article stated: "This year we'll be covering all bases: films with such iconic legends as Fred Astaire, Greta Garbo, Katherine Hepburn, Joan Crawford, John Wayne, Vivien Leigh, Marlene Dietrich, Gary Cooper and Robert Mitchum." He named 21 other stars making up the 31 for the month. While the article – like the majority of articles in the TCM magazine – educates and draws attention to the classic film era, not one character actor is part of this "Summer Under the Stars" salute. The clear absence may speak to the neglect of focus on character actors, specifically Eve Arden, Charles Coburn and Thomas Mitchell, and their contributions.

TCM does periodically promote character actors in a series called "What a Character" on its network. Usually highlighting their most famous roles and/or movies, there is usually mention of personal attributes. Narrated by current-day actors and well-known personalities, they also make mention of how the particular actor may have influenced the narrators' own careers. Here too there is no mention of their contributions to the overall and lasting success of their films.



## Newspaper

The original March 3, 1939 *New York Times* review of John's Ford's film, *Stage Coach*, by Frank S. Nugent, stated on Mitchell's performance: "Thomas Mitchell won an Oscar for what could have been just another comic relief role." This is great mention of Mitchell winning the award, but no actual statement is made as to his contributions.

Actor, writer, producer, director, film historian, and book reviewer, Peter Bogdanovich, published a book review, "Playing John Wayne," in the *New York Times* March 2014 issue, on author, Scott Eyman's *John Wayne: The Life and Legend*. In addition to praising this book on many levels, Bogdanovich addressed points of relation to Wayne such as the importance of directors, Howard Hawks and John Ford, on Wayne's career. Highlighting the gap in literature and, in the opinion of this writer, missing the mark, Eyman wrote:

Of course, those times are gone forever. Currently, there are many film stars but virtually none with the iconic status of Cary Grant or John Wayne. Or James Cagney, for that matter, or Jimmy Stewart, or Katherine Hepburn, or Bette Davis, or Humphrey Bogart. These were more than simply good or great actors playing roles, they were brand names you could happily invest in, and rarely be disappointed.

## Online

The American Film Institute (AFI) is self-defined as: "America's promise to preserve the heritage of the motion picture, to honor the artists and their work and to educate the next generation of storytellers ([www.afi.com](http://www.afi.com))."

AFI's site contains information on many levels related to film. One of its lists, "America's Greatest Legends," includes an "A compendium of the 500 stars nominated for top 50

"Greatest Screen Legends" status. Citing 250 males and 250 females, Eve Arden, Charles Coburn, and Thomas Mitchell all appeared on these lists. On this same website, tributes are paid to those who worked in the industry. In a tribute to one of Hollywood's Golden Age directors,

“Frank Capra in the 1930s,” the article highlighted some of his films. For *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, it reads that “Claude Rains, Edward Arnold, and Thomas Mitchell all shine in supporting roles.” Here, once again, there is no mention of Mitchell’s contribution other than to say he “shined.”

On-line journal, *Live Journal*, is an internet site devoted to movie fans. A December, 2007 post titled “Classic Character Actors” reads: “Character actors are the unsung heroes of the cinema. They do all of the work that the big stars do but get none of the notoriety (or at least a tiny fraction of what the Gables and Garlands get) and substantially less pay.” Charles Coburn, Thomas Mitchell, and Eve Arden all appear with pictures (Figures 6, 7, and 8 illustrates photos as they appear on this site) and brief filmographies.



Fig. 6. Charles Coburn.



Fig. 7. Thomas Mitchell.



Fig. 8. Eve Arden.

Youtube™ is an internet site that hosts videos. On June 23, 2009, a video titled “Thomas Mitchell Tribute” was uploaded to Youtube™. The video is a collage of Mitchell’s photos representative of his career. The video is played to the main theme of Mitchell’s film, *Gone With the Wind*. On this same date, a similar tribute video titled “Charles Coburn Tribute” was also posted. On October 29, 2012, an individual named Chris Johnson posted a video called “Eve Arden a Tribute.” Once again, this was a photo collage set to music.

## **Conclusion**

On May 16, 1929, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences held its first Academy Awards Ceremony, recognizing various achievements in film making of the previous year. The most coveted awards were for Best Picture, Best Actress, and Best Actor. It wasn’t until 1936 that the Academy first offered Best Actor and Actress in Supporting Roles categories. Like many other categories later added, for all intent and purposes regarding this research, these two categories appear as an after-thought. As the most recognized body awarding actors for their achievements, it is critical not to undermine this lag in recognition from the start of the awards.

First, in all but two of the sources aforementioned, the most prevalent theme is the absence of the heart of this research: the contributions of character actors Eve Arden, Charles Coburn, and Thomas Mitchell – among countless others – to the overall and lasting success of their films. The second most common theme is the attention given to the A-listers. Third, many sources that offer information on characters actors only reference them.

Further, as second-billed but not second-rate performers, this too is missing in the literature reviewed. In addition to these sources, movie trailers were perhaps the studios’ most effective tool in promoting their films. Usually highlighting the stars of the film, they offered a brief synopsis of the story line, were filled with music reflecting the film’s theme, and they were

narrated, which provided insight into the films. Occasionally, supporting actors were mentioned, but never were their contributions to the success of their films mentioned. As an example, in *Gone With the Wind's* two-minute, twenty-five second promotional trailer, the only actors highlighted are Clark Gable, Vivian Leigh, Leslie Howard, and Olivia de Havilland – the actors in the four leading roles. Thomas Mitchell appeared nowhere, not by name, credit, or billing, at all in this movie trailer. Mitchell, the actor who appeared in five films in Hollywood's "Dream Year," received fifth billing in this 1939 Best Picture film (*Gone With the Wind* credits).

### **Chapter III: Methodology**

#### **Methodology and World View**

Qualitative research methods and grounded theory were applied to address the research questions. Interviews with classic film scholars and/or experts, publicists, and/or individuals possessing unique knowledge and/or experience were conducted. For purposes of this research, the writer took the transformative philosophical world view for the following reasons: (1) With a basis of grounded theory, there exists the call for people to change how they view character actors' success, (2) there is a call for people to change how they define overall film success, and (3) there is a call for people to change how they view the impact of character actors on some of the greatest and most memorable films from Hollywood's Golden Age. With this world view, there comes an agenda to educate through scholarly research on classic film and change what has been the norm in categorizing the "success" of a given classic film. Ultimately, there will be a transformation of thought from character actors as supporting players to solid contributors, second-billed but not second-rate, to the overall and lasting success of their films.

#### **Interviewees**

In identifying appropriate interview participants, diversity in their perspective areas of expertise, experience, and/or knowledge were considered. People of varied backgrounds can and do possess information worth contribution to this research. To better understand these individuals, specific information regarding each of them is offered. They are listed in the order in which the researcher conducted their interviews.

*Harry Flynn*

Mr. Flynn has served as a publicist since the 1950s to some of Hollywood's most recognized names including Bob Hope, Ernest Borgnine, Michael Landon, Carrol O'Connor, Bob Newhart, John Conboy and Glen Campbell. He is also an author.

*Casey LaLonde*

Mr. LaLonde is the grandson of classic film actress, Joan Crawford. His work includes appearances to promote the work of Ms. Crawford during Hollywood's Golden Age, while sharing insight into her private life. Mr. LaLonde's work includes participation on the Turner Classic Movies themed cruises.

*Gary Roen*

Mr. Roen is a syndicated book critic and has served as a literary agent. He has reviewed several books on varying topics including classic film.

*Valerie Greenberg, Ph.D.*

Dr. Greenberg is an associate professor at the University of the Incarnate Word. She teaches classes including American Cinema, Aesthetics of Visual Perception/Film, Media Ethics, and Seminar in Women's Studies. She also conducts independent study work with students and has presented at conferences.

*Leslie Halpern*

Ms. Halpern is an author of several books including *Dreams on Film*. In addition, she is a book reviewer, movie reviewer and entertainment journalist. She also holds several professional memberships.

*Frank Thompson*

Mr. Thompson is a filmmaker, film historian, and author of forty books. He wrote hundreds of introductory scripts for the network, American Movie Classics, during the time it showed only classic films. He has written for several newspapers and also hosts The Commentary Track, in which he holds podcast interviews with filmmakers, film historians, authors, actors and archivists. He is currently working on another book on classic film director, William Wellman.

*Jordan Young*

Mr. Young is a freelance writer and author of thirty-five books, including *John Ford's The Quiet Man: The Making of a Cult Classic*, and his series called *The Reel Characters*. His books were supported by numerous interviews with his subjects.

*Polly McCord*

Ms. McCord serves as Graduate Research Librarian at the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, TX.

*Dwight Kemper*

Mr. Kemper is an author whose area of expertise is horror. His books include subjects from classic film and his interviews include work with Sarah Karloff, daughter of classic horror film character actor, Boris Karloff. Mr. Kemper possesses immense knowledge on Mr. Karloff and the making of classic films. He is a stage character actor, serves as a guest film critic for *Videoscope Magazine*, and is host of Murder Mystery Theatre on-line.

*Eric Hoffman*

Mr. Hoffman possesses unique knowledge on this research topic based on his personal conversations with many classic film stars and his own research initiatives.



*Dora Fitzgerald, Ph.D.*

Dr. Fitzgerald is an Assistant Professor at the University of the Incarnate Word. She studied film at Columbia University and teaches coursework in Media Ethics and Writing for the Media, Video Production, Producing, and Directing; Video Production II; and Script Writing. She also teaches a graduate studies course on classic film director, Alfred Hitchcock.

*Douglas Brooks West*

Mr. West is the youngest son of Eve Arden and her husband, actor, Brooks West. He worked as a writer, producer and director.

### **Procedure**

Individual qualitative interviews asking eleven open-ended questions were conducted with each participant. In some instances, “snowball” questioning occurred to gather additional information, based on some of the interviewees’ responses. The order the interviews were conducted was based on the participants agreeing to do the interview and their availability. As stated in John W. Creswell’s *Research Design – Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, “Open-ended questions are intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants (190).” Further, the value of utilizing open-ended questions is well-defined in an article published by Oxford University Press in the Journal, “International Journal for Quality in Health Care,” This article, “The value of open-ended questions in surveys on patient experiences: number of comments and perceived usefulness from a hospital perspective,” stated that: “Open-ended questions have been shown to elucidate critical comments that cannot be obtained using purely quantitative surveys (2012).”

All interviews were conducted via telephone with the exception of Ms. Halpern’s, which was via e-mail, at her request due to her travel schedule, and Dr. Greenberg, which was

conducted in person. The interviews ranged in time length of thirty minutes to two hours. After all interviews were conducted, the researcher compared the responses and analyzed them for findings, themes, and significance to the research.

### **Instrument**

Participants were each asked the same eleven open-ended questions. The questions were designed to uncover the participants' thoughts and knowledge about the contributions of character actors Eve Arden, Charles Coburn, Thomas Mitchell, and character actors in general. In addition, questions to reveal what the participants know and think about the character actors in reference to my thesis topic, "second-billed but not second-rate" were solicited. Where this topic fits in scholarly literature was also investigated. This all was in an effort to answer the research questions.

The following represent the eleven questions the interviewees were asked:

1. What part/role did or do you play in the making or promoting of classic films of Hollywood's Golden Age?
2. What did the character actors of this period contribute to the storytelling in their particular films?
3. Regarding the performance of character actors of this period, what do you think should be considered when taking into account the overall and lasting success of their films?
4. How do you define the overall success of these films as it pertains to the performances of these character actors?
5. What importance should be placed on character actors in classic film scholarly literature?
6. What is missing about character actors of Hollywood's Golden Age in scholarly literature?

7. What do you know to be true regarding any particular character actor, their experience, and/or publicity on their classification as second-billed but not second-rate?
8. What can you share about this second-billed but not second-rate classification in relation to the contributions of their performances to the overall success of their films?
9. Why do you believe it is important for there to be scholarly literature where character actors are concerned?
10. What do you know about character actor information in any scholarly literature?
11. Why do believe there exists a gap in this literature?

### **Interviewees Responses**

In this qualitative analysis, taking a holistic account served as guiding parameters for subjective interpretation of the data for each question. With this approach, in combination with knowledge of existing literature and observation, significance and themes in the participants' responses were identified. All responses by the interviewees, with some additional information collected as a result of "snowballing" subsequent to certain interviewee responses, were considered.

#### *The role played in the making and/or promoting of classic film of Hollywood's Golden Age*

Eleven of the twelve participants acknowledged playing a role in this category. Mr. Flynn, as a publicist, promoted – and continues to promote – actors and their work. Mr. LaLonde's work in promoting the classic films of his grandmother, Joan Crawford, draws attention to the era. Working with Turner Classic Movies, the most recognized network devoted to classic film, gives credence to this work. Mr. Gary Roen, book critic, stated he "promotes books like mine [this researcher's book, *I Only Quote From the Best – Revisiting Hollywood's*

*Golden Age*] and Suzanna Leigh's book [actress and God daughter of film star, Vivian Leigh]."

In addition, he speaks at conferences at which he promotes books on classic film.

Dr. Greenberg promotes classic film through lectures, mostly in her American Cinema class, where she uses older films, such as *Casablanca* and *Stagecoach*. She incorporates the aesthetic values and addresses what happened during American history at the time of the film. Author, Leslie Halpern, indicated she did not feel qualified to address this interview question. Mr. Frank Thompson has written many books on the subject and has made documentaries on the subject. He also performs this function through audio commentary and his own continued research.

Mr. Young's response to this question was that he hoped, "His books had a hand in promoting [classic film]." He also stated it was his idea to have a Turner Classic Movies "What a Character" segment on character actor, Beulah Bondi. Graduate Research Librarian, Polly McCord, first stated she plays no role in this. She then stated she does have film displays in the library (although she has never had a request for displays on classic film).

Dwight Kemper acknowledged his primary role in this is that he uses setting and the making of classic films as the backdrop of his murder mysteries. Mr. Hoffman stated he: "assisted in finding reference material for some shows and wrote for *Monsters of Film Land* magazine and also worked on promoting *San Antonio Rose* with Eve Arden." Dr. Fitzgerald offered the following explanation into the definition of promotion of film as it relates to the difference from the promotion of knowledge of film: "promotion for film is commercial promotion. It is educational promotion of knowledge on film I do in teaching specific decades of film."

Mr. West, Arden's son, offered that: "I'm just starting to do that. It wasn't possible to do until five years ago because of my own career. I want to promote my mother. That's how you [the researcher] found me. A woman started the Eve Arden page [Facebook page] and she made me co-administrator to post pictures. Eventually, she gave it up to me. I want to do much more."

*What the character actors of this period contribute to the storytelling in their particular films*

A look into how storytelling is defined first provided a context for the interviewees' responses. P. Neuhauser, in *Corporate Legends & Lore: The Power of Storytelling as a Management Tool*, stated that, "in addition to being entertaining or conveying information, stories are a method by which important values and traditions are conveyed to others, including the next generation."

Eleven of the twelve participants contributed to answering this question; Leslie Halpern did not. Although not all eleven provided responses specific to Eve Arden, Charles Coburn and Thomas Mitchell, some responses are generalized to classic film character actors at-large. Mr. Flynn responded by stating "It took very special people to interpret lines of the great writing that captured humanity." Mr. Flynn did offer a response specific to Thomas Mitchell by stating "He's so real. Everything he ever did on screen, he brought the character to life. You're looking at him and you buy what he's playing." "It's very difficult to separate him from who he really was," said Flynn. "When you see somebody saying what he believes, you're seeing somebody who believes what he's saying."

Mr. LaLonde replied: "Character actors provided background to the story and key elements to fully flush out the story and how it's told. They provided colorful characterizations outside of the lead actors." Specific to Eve Arden, he stated that she "Had some of the snappiest dialogue in the film [*Mildred Pierce*] and acted as a counterbalance to Mildred's scheming

daughter, Veda, and the rogue Monte Beragon.” Book critic, Gary Roen, acknowledged the character actors’ contributions by stating, “What they brought to it were the mannerisms of the character.” Further, Roen remarked, “Actors of today, compared to Eve Arden, who wasn’t afraid, also always gave credit to the writers who created the roles.”

Thematic to Mr. LaLonde’s response, Dr. Greenberg also offered, “They gave background. They added dimension.” “Otherwise, leading actors couldn’t carry the films alone,” Greenberg said. She identify contributions of each of the three actors specific herein. On Eve Arden, “She could hold her own. She gave real characterizations and she was likeable.” About Charles Coburn, Greenberg observed that, in her opinion, “He was stereotyped, but had a marvelous range of characterization. He was rich in the way he portrayed them and he gave his audience a good sense of them.” On Thomas Mitchell, Greenberg referenced his work in *Stagecoach* – the performance for which he was awarded the Academy of Motion Picture’s Oscar for Best Actor in a Supporting Role in Hollywood’s “Dream Year” of 1939. “As the doctor in *Stagecoach*, he was part of an ensemble piece, but there were only two main stars; he was one of them. He contributed something to human nature,” remarked Greenberg.

Mr. Thompson opened his thoughts on this by saying “I love the character actors.” Of Arden, Coburn and Mitchell, Thompson said, “They were supporting players. They were important during the studio era. What they brought was incredibly important in getting the idea across and character actors were the living epitome of that,” Thompson added. Young answered with a question of his own: “What didn’t they contribute? They had the best lines. Directors relied on them, they highly praised these actors, and had them flush the background.” He went on to say, “Gable [actor, Clark Gable] sold the tickets, but the character actors make the films and they hold up because of their contributions.”

Ms. McCord offered a different take on the question of importance of character actors. Of character actor, Thelma Ritter, McCord stated that she “Showed a generation of women they could be out there in the world and didn’t have to be somebody’s wife.” On Eve Arden, McCord said, “She was so smart and she represented the kind of woman you didn’t see much on screen.” “She’s essential to her films, like in *Mildred Pierce*, McCord offered. “If Eve Arden wasn’t in it, Crawford [actress Joan Crawford] wouldn’t have had the best friend telling her ‘You could do this!.’” Once again, like Mr. LaLonde, McCord’s mention of Arden’s contribution in the film, *Mildred Pierce*, presents itself.

Dwight Kemper offered his opinion on another untapped mode of contributions by character actors. On the *Son of Frankenstein* set, Kemper stated that “a lot of the movie was adlibbed. There was a script, but the director held meetings with the actors to ask where it should go.” Further, Kemper added, “They contributed a lot to the making of the film. Bela Lugosi [character actor] did his own make-up.” “Most character actors came from stage or vaudeville,” Kemper said. “They had a certain sense of how audiences reacted to what they were doing and this transcended on screen.” Most important, Kemper noted, “A lot of their contributions came from their knowledge of audiences.” Additionally, “They took very positive roles in the making of their characters. For them, it wasn’t about ego; they worked.”

On this point, Mr. Hoffman commented, “Character actors of that period had something a lot of something performers of today don’t have: training.” “They gave solid support to the production, even in B-movies,” Hoffman replied. Arden, Coburn and Mitchell had it. These people learned their craft and they were necessarily versatile. You were seeing people who know exactly what they were doing.” Hoffman went on to reference more specifics related to each actor: “In Eve Arden, you knew you would get a wise-cracking lady. She had wonderful

sarcastic delivery in her films. Coburn is a mastermind . Mitchell gave Ford [John Ford, director] something new on the set of *Stage Coach*. They gave us solid performances.”

Dr. Fitzgerald responded with, “They contributed from the wall paper – the background of narrative. Character actors added flavor, added ethnicity.” “They could do things the main characters couldn’t do,” Fitzgerald said. “Thomas Mitchell: I didn’t know his name until you described him as Scarlet O’Hara’s father, then I could see and hear him.” Further, on Mitchell, Fitzgerald stated that “He had everything, everything, in that film [*Gone With the Wind*]. He brought that ‘O my darling’ like Maureen O’Hara [A-list actress] did. You cannot underestimate these contributions of character actors, for many, many, reasons.”

Mr. West’s reply to this question was that “An enormous amount [should be considered]. I was a film student and the heroes in these tales were larger than life,” said West. “The people who were the same in life were the character actors. People going to see the films related to the character actors,” West commented. “They really wanted to be like Eve Arden.”

*What should be considered in overall and lasting success of their films regarding the character actors’ performances*

Here again, all save Ms. Halpern responded. Mr. Flynn remarked, “If a picture really works even after twenty years, you consider how it still affects you.” “How much of it do you remember after you’ve seen it,” Flynn said. Mr. LaLonde responded by acknowledging that “Given they’re supporting actors, [they] take their roles as part of the overall cast and look at the overall film.” Again, on Ms. Arden, LaLonde said “Pull her out to examine her role,” then went on to suggest that viewers look at “How they supported the stars of the films and whether their character really propels the story or film.” Mr. Roen had this to say: “Looking at the ones you’re mentioning [Arden, Coburn, and Mitchell], they weren’t type cast. They could play anybody.



Clark Gable was Clark Gable. You didn't look at Eve Arden. You looked at the character."

Roen's response is in sync with LaLonde's on looking at Arden's character.

Dr. Greenberg, while stating, "Their performance added such richness to their films," focused again on Mitchell in *Stagecoach*. She said of his character, "Doc in it is a drunk, but he cared. His performance gave a lot of opportunity to the other characters to react to him – giving them room to act more deeply." Mr. Thompson's initial response to this question was: "That's a hard one." He followed it by observing, "They were all incredibly talented people who found a particular focus. They helped populate film with vivid characterizations."

Young provided the most insight into all three actors on this point. He said, "If you took these characters out of the film, you'd have no film." On Coburn, he contributed this statement: "*In The Lady Eve*, he brought so much to that film as Stanwyck's [actress Barbara Stanwyck] partner-in-crime. In *The More the Merrier*, he steals the film." On Mitchell in *Stagecoach*, "He is the rock *Stagecoach* stands on. Where would you be without Thomas Mitchell in this picture?" Finally, regarding Eve Arden on this

point, Young offered, "In *Stage Door*, her delivery, very few were on her level that had that delivery. She may have only had five lines, but she made them jump."

Ms. McCord's response was that "They show us who we were – hold up a mirror to American Society at that time: American greed, or how women were treated in society, and the relationships between men and women," drawing on actors, Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn.

With multiple focuses, Dwight Kemper offered significant insight into this point. Beginning with an example of Bela Lugosi as a method actor, Kemper shared, "Lugosi stood in front of a mirror and rehearsed his lines." In deep reflection into Boris Karloff's *Frankenstein's*

monster, unobvious – and perhaps not much considered – contrasts were offered. Kemper said of the monster: “He’s scary, but he’s the victim; he didn’t ask to be created; he’s treated badly by the people.” “He didn’t know he was created and when he finally saw his own self, he was afraid too,” added Kemper. He went on to say, “Unlike actors of today, these actors, there was a certain pathos. They really got into their parts.”

Noting a different contribution all together, Kemper then shared Karloff was a founding member of the Screen Actors Guild. He followed this up by adding, “The Screen Actors Guild was one of the better and most important contributions to the industry.” Although this researcher did not consider this point, it validates the contributions of characters on an entirely different level. Mr. Hoffman related that: “In *The More the Merrier*, Charles Coburn reflected the housing shortage of the time.”

Dr. Fitzgerald answered:

They added narrative richness and depth. There is, no doubt, the comical characters gave something to the audiences who can’t withstand too much seriousness. They added to the success of these dramas. They had untold ways of making these movies successful. You remember the characters, or series of characters, they played. You have a beautiful actress whose best friend is homely and this character actor makes that main character look more beautiful. The character actor was used as binary to make more attributes for the main characters. There’s absolutely no doubt they added to the success of these films. The directors know they [character actors] are going to add to the films. Producers knew they needed to bring this person in because they did it in previous films. The sky is the limit on character actors.

Mr. West remarked, “I hold in high regard the character actors of the films. They are real people. The ones people relate to. They propel the story.” “They help the hero and they hinder the hero. Their success enabled the story to move forward,” said West.

*Regarding the performances of these character actors, how the overall success of these films is defined*

Here too all participants except Ms. Halpern answered this question. According to Mr. Flynn, “Character actors made the story real.” Mr. Lalonde focused on the separate entities: “Without something like TCM and how veracious the fans are, without repertory houses or film houses, these major supporters keep classic film at the forefront.” Mr. Roen responded by providing an example: “Borgnine was Marty [the title character in the film by the same name]. No one else could play that. He ‘was’ the role.” “It takes an actor with life experiences to make that happen. You’re looking at him as Marty.” “That’s why character actors work,” Roen added.

Dr. Greenberg offered the observation that “They support main characters. In *Casablanca*, S.Z. ‘Cuddles’ Sakall, Rick [Humphrey Bogart’s lead character] was kind to Sakall’s character. In this way, the look of kindness provided a way for Bogie [Bogart’s nickname] to develop.” “Claude Rains [character actor also in *Casablanca*] was fabulous for this [enabling lead actors to develop],” Greenberg added. While making this picture, Greenberg said the script was written as the filming went along. The actors didn’t know the ending until it was shot. According to Dr. Greenberg, “These circumstances enriched the film and it showed what the actors could do.” Mention of this film is significant because *Casablanca* is listed as the American Film Institute’s second greatest American movie of all time and contains a host of well-known character actors ([afi.com/100 years](http://afi.com/100%20years)).

Filmmaker and historian, Frank Thompson began his responses with the statement that “There isn’t anything these films have in common in terms of success. But, over a 30-year period of film, they’re [character actors] in all of them. In *Gone With the Wind*.” “They had a sheen of quality about them,” Thompson said. Thompson then referenced films of the 1930s by remarking, “Clark Gable [A-list actor] was the reason films were successful. All these other people made it good.”

As previously mentioned in the Introduction section of this paper, under the Directors section, Young was quoted as saying that “The Director would’ve been SOL without them. The films wouldn’t be what they are. They wouldn’t have the staying power.” Once again referencing *Gone With the Wind*, Young added, “People didn’t know they got their money’s worth when they paid to see *Gone With the Wind*. Without the character actors, what would they have?” Similar to Mr. Young’s take, but specific to Eve Arden – Ms. McCord replied, “There has to be something in the performance that was real. And of films during that time, Eve Arden’s performance was so much more real. I’m not sure Joan Crawford could be in a film today. These character actors held up these performers and the films.”

Perhaps Mr. Kemper best validated this point in offering, “Sometimes actors’ contributions was giving scenes to fellow actors because it would work better. They were selfless. There was a lot of give and take you don’t see now.” “Once they found something that worked, they didn’t change it. Scripts were sometimes crazy and the actors brought it to make sense,” Kemper added. Mr. Hoffman responded with, “It was the work of these character actors the audience reacted to.” Dr. Fitzgerald offered that “The success of these actors – they helped to create the world in which the main characters spin. They’re very successful at it and it wouldn’t be the same without them.” “So many of the films of this era, each studio had its own stable of character actors they would go to,” Fitzgerald added. Mr. West referenced his response to the previous question: “Their success enabled the story to move forward.”

*The importance that should be placed on character actors in classic film scholarly literature*

According to Mr. Flynn, “You trust them. You know they’re real. The story is everything and the characters make it believable.” Mr. LaLonde offered this breakdown: “They should be looked at case by case, based on each body of work, based on other connections, and how they

fit in.” Describing it as a “Family tree of sorts, look at how they interrelate in films. Are they inter-connected,” LaLonde asked.

Mr. Roen, stated, “The Golden Age had more character actors who had more to contribute. Without character actors, you wouldn’t have a good film.” Citing lead actor, Marlon Brando, Roen asked: “Can you see anyone else playing the Godfather? Unlike James Bond – everyone can play it.” According to Dr. Greenberg, a great deal of importance should be placed on character actors in scholarly literature. “A lot,” she said. “Much. Their work influenced the stars’ work. It timbered their performances and all those things that make it a really great film,” Greenberg said. Ms. Halpern provided no response to this question.

Mr. Thompson offered a lengthy response to this question: “No more or less than any other aspect of filmmaking of the time. It’s still probably the job of film historians to work on the bigger names, for example, not the editor.” “I would love to see more attention be given to character actors because it’s still a misunderstood part of the process,” Thompson offered. “I’m always drawn to aspects of film history that there hasn’t been much attention to.” Finally, Thompson put this question in perspective in relation to timing: “I’d love to see something written on Grady Sutton [character actor], but I think the time’s past because of the nature of audience. We’re in the last days of this sort of thing. It is important and wonderful to give these people their due.”

Once again, Jordan Young answered a question with a question: “How many books can you write about Spencer Tracy [A-list actor]? There are too many books on Clark Gable, Greta Garbo [A-List actress]. Only a handful of books have been written on these character actors.” In closing, Young said,

“They are under-valued, under-recorded, and more should be written.” Ms. McCord had this to offer: “Without character actors, all you have is someone pretty with no one to talk to. Character actors added realism to the seen. The importance of character actors in scholarship needs to be looked at and recognized.”

Dwight Kemper replied with citations of several films and the character actors in them: “If you didn’t have character actors, you wouldn’t have interesting movies. They are the flavor of the films. Romantic leads are boring.” In examples, Kemper offered, “If you didn’t have character actors like the witch [played by character actress Margaret Hamilton] in *The Wizard of Oz*, you wouldn’t have pathos.” This is Kemper’s second reference to pathos in this research. An additional example offered included the character actors in *The Magnificent Ambersons*, “They give the flavor,” Kemper said. “Name any classic film, the character actors are the flavor. They create a sense of time, place, and person that the leads just can’t do.” “The style of character actors changes and they achieved a different level of success.”

To the importance that should be placed on character actors in classic film scholarly literature, Mr. Hoffman replied, “A great deal of importance [should be placed on character actors]. It’s the talent of the actor. It’s the character.” “The character actor is very important and they gave solid support,” Hoffman added. Dr. Fitzgerald offered that: “We need more writing about it [character actors in scholarly literature].” “The film is discussed. The main actor is discussed,” said Fitzgerald. “There’s some on character actors, but don’t have a tremendous amount on the character actors up front and what they added. The portrayals deserve an upfront look.” Fitzgerald then stated, “There’s not enough and there’s room for a lot of this.”

Mr. West’s response to what importance should be placed on character actors in scholarly literature was that, “Whatever importance you find in the film [should be placed on character

actors].” Regarding West’s mother, he commented, “Eve Arden in *Mildred Pierce* contributed comedy relief and humor is an enormous part of life. Ida, her character, she levied it with a laugh and many of the lines she came up with on the spot,” West added. “In that regard, really my mom contributed. There’s enormous believability.”

*To what is missing about character actors of Hollywood’s Golden Age in scholarly literature*

“I admire you about digging into this, Candace,” Flynn told this interviewer. Citing Marilyn Monroe [A-list actress], Flynn stated “She was very undependable so you put people around her who could handle it and make it believable. The character actors, they shone on screen and it’s something special. Again, you trust them.”

Mr. LaLonde approached this from the perspective of people’s understanding on character actors: “Other than people who really enjoy classic film, there’s a lack of understanding in their contributions to classic films, their ensembles.” “This isn’t examined. Nor examined is how there’s no understanding of how many character actors over the years came up from vaudeville and silent movies,” LaLonde added. “So much time is taken looking at A-listers. To have Robert Osborne [primetime host of Turner Classic Movies] only focus on the character actors, Clark Gable being the afterthought.” Once again, here is reference to Clark Gable.

Mr. Roen offered the following to this question:

There is nothing, nothing that I know of that approaches the subject in mainstream or scholarly. There’s no scholarly dissertations on character actors. There is on film, contributions of film, movies like *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone With the Wind*. You don’t see any on character actors and what they contribute to classic film.

Dr. Greenberg offered her opinion that “An intense study of what they added to films is missing. Most literature takes focus on the film itself, what it does in regard to culture, and it highlights the stars.” Again, Ms. Halpern abstained from responding to this point. Mr. Thompson’s comments were as pointed

as those of Roen:

Everything [is missing]. There's very little that's been devoted specifically to them in history of film. Jordan's [Young] work is all I know of. In the general history, you're writing history about Warner Bros. [film studio], you're writing about Davis [A-list actress Betty Davis] and Cagney [A-list actor James Cagney], not the characters. Not much of a force in literature now. When I'm writing, there's a limited amount of space. You list the character actors in filmography, but not much else. It's a subject that deserves its own book.

"I don't know that I've read a massive amount on classic film scholarly literature,"

Young said. "In terms of scholarly literature, I haven't read anything," Young said. According to Ms. McCord, "Some pieces have been written about some of them. The vast number of them have been overlooked." "Ernest Borgnine was one who was able to move past that," referencing *Marty* [Borgnine's film in which he played the lead and won the Best Actor Oscar™]. McCord concluded by saying that, "The ones who get more lines get more attention."

Mr. Kemper, once again, referenced pathos in this response here:

The heart of being a character actor is missing. A lot of fans of these films write books – they are fans. The fervent love a fan has is missing because academia is dry and numbers. You can't put numbers on this. It has more to do with heart and communicating with the audience. Most academics probably haven't performed on stage so they don't understand the anxiety and discipline it takes, the work it takes, to make it look effortless. Most academics aren't necessarily fans so it's dry.

According to Mr. Hoffman, "The books on film history focus on the stars; you don't talk about the character actors." "Only in the last forty years or so, is it that people started coming up with articles," Hoffman added. They've been horribly overlooked, but the average reader is only interested in the stars. There is something missing, that's all," Hoffman concluded. Dr. Fitzgerald responded with: "More scholarly literature on specifics bringing these portrayals upfront [is needed]." Mr. West offered, "I don't read much on scholarly literature. I couldn't answer that,." "It is wonderful that we perpetuate American culture in film," said West.



*To what is known regarding character actors, their experience, and/or the publicity on their classification as second-billed but not second-rate*

Based on Mr. Flynn's decades-long work and friendship with actor, Ernest Borgnine, Flynn stated: "That's tough. Ernie was always a character. He never thought of himself as a star or leading man." Mr. LaLonde provided this insight: "Publicity machines were for A-Listers; you can discern what was happening. They're not in fan magazines. During the studio system, it was different." According to LaLonde, "All character actors: not a one is second rate." Mr. LaLonde asked for additional time to further consider this question. He followed the phone interview with an email containing this additional information in response to this question:

Character actors, always second-billed but never second rate, finally received their due when, in 1937, the Academy Awards created the Best Supporting Actor and Actress awards. Many highly regarded character actors were awarded an Oscar from 1937 forward including Walter Brennan, Charles Coburn, Thomas Mitchell, Alice Brady, Fay Bainter, and Hattie McDaniel. The vast experience and credentials of those Oscar Best Supporting Actress and Actor winners and nominees were finally celebrated by the broader Hollywood artistic community.

Mr. Roen's reply focused primarily on three actors who had film careers, but later had successful television shows. Citing DeForest Kelly, Ernest Borgnine, and Frances Bavier, Roen stated: "They were humble, they were second-billed, but not second-rate. They may have played second-fiddle, but were not second-rate." To this question, Dr. Greenberg replied: "The proof is in the pudding." In referencing actor, Claude Rains, Greenberg added, "He moved his way up [from second-billed to first-billed], enriching the films." Ms. Halpern did not respond to this question.

Frank Thompson remarked, "Very rare that any character actor would've been second-billed and second-rate. If someone does a spectacular scene, someone else [character actor] will come in and steal the scene." For movie lovers and scholars, they're happy when Pat O'Brien

walks in.” “When you go through the “B” movies, that’s the only time they opened themselves to reviews because they carried the film,” Thompson added.

Jordan Young had this to offer: “In most cases, you see them only for a few minutes. A rare number were allowed to take the character further. You never saw their width or breadth.” Ms. McCord’s response was specific to Eve Arden: “There were character actors like Eve Arden – when her name was on a poster, when people passed by and saw her name they said ‘I like her.’”

“The second-billed people can make or break your show,” Kemper said. “They are important. What elevates them is they connect with an audience, not designed by script, but by performance.” “There is really no second banana if someone can really elevate the part,” Kemper said. Dr. Fitzgerald’s response reflected, “Many critics will say the performances of the main character actors were outstanding, but so-and-so steals the show, like in high level magazines and the *New York Times*.”

Mr. West commented that, “I met many of them. Often, the character actors were leading ladies and leading men and they were the stars; the roles stopped coming.” “You have to play something very different from yourself,” West added. “In *Anatomy of a Murder* she was a secretary. She [Arden] had roles like this where she had to stretch. She didn’t work in an office. That’s where she made up.”

*On what relates in performance to the overall success of their films in their classification as second-billed but not second-rate*

The majority of the interviewees referenced their responses to the previous question to answer this question. “They are professional, very good actors.” “No correlation between

second-rate and second-billed,” LaLonde stated. Mr. Roen made this statement two times: “They made it work.” “They contributed that they were minor characters,” he stated.

Ms. Halpern chose to answer only two questions, she offered the following here:

Every aspect of a film factors into its success including the acting, direction, screenwriting, cinematography, costumes, set design, and music. Any weak link causes the other parts of the project to suffer. Second bill actors were (and still are) working actors who accept one quirky sidekick or best friend role after another to make a living. In relation to the lead actors, people such as Eve Arden, Charles Coburn, and Thomas Mitchell received fewer scripts coming their way, were offered lower salaries, and got less glamorous parts. However, the quality of their work was an essential part of the whole in determining a film’s success. While they may not have had the ability to pick and choose their roles as carefully as the stars did in order to craft their Hollywood image, these working actors had steady roles, long lists of movie credits, and received awards and professional recognition for their first-rate performances as second-billed actors.

On Eve Arden, Ms. McCord stated: “She added a level of realism; people could relate to what she was, to who she was. I’m not sure I believe the Lana Turner’s [A-list actress] characters were real people.” Additionally, McCord said of Arden, “She was pretty. She could have carried films as a star, but her best work was a character actor. She like to invest herself in the business of being real. And, she had a real reason to be in the room.” “That is so consistent, it had to come from her and not the many directors of her films,” McCord added. Mr. Kemper said, “The second banana [billed] people can make or break your show. They are important. What elevates them is they connect with an audience not designed by script, but by performance.”

Mr. Hoffman offered his opinion that, “The publicity department can be a nightmare. Rock Hudson, heartthrob, was in a situation of less tolerance as being gay. The magazine, *Confidential*, got ahold of a ‘rumor’ on Hudson and George Nader [actor] who was thrown to the wolves as a way of protecting Hudson’s career.” Rock Hudson was an A-List actor. “The gossip columnists, Hopper [Hedda Hopper] and Parsons [Loella Parsons] were very competitive and

‘power corrupt.’ Today, you have columnists, but no one with that kind of power,” Hoffman added.

According to Mr. West, “They were young ingénues. As they aged, they got more and more parts. Often, the character actors in the piece are actually better actors than the leading lady.” “I know my mother got an awful lot of attention in *Mildred Pierce*,” West added. To his point on Arden, he commented that, “She was cast in *Grease* [1978]. She wasn’t beautiful. She was good. They needed a principal that could really stand out against the young actors, John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John” “It became a classic and had Eve Arden, Sid Caesar, Dotti Goodman, and Joan Blondell [all character actors during Hollywood’s Golden Age],” West said.

*On the belief of importance of character actors in scholarly literature*

The researcher intentionally saved the topic of scholarly literature on character actors for the last three interview questions to close the interviews with the subject at the heart of this work: the importance of and leading to the perceived deficiency of this research topic in scholarly literature. Mr. Flynn’s response to this question was, “If there isn’t, nobody will write about them. Everybody assumes they’ve been around forever. The staples they are, you trust them not to be wrong. They fit into it because of the well-trained developed people the character actors play,” West said.

Mr. LaLonde offered the observation that “Very little scholars look at character actors. Any research at all is good for classic film. Given amount of screen time, a closer look at them is long overdue.” In a “snowball” question, LaLonde was asked what he would include and he replied: “1). On an individual basis per actor, work history before they came to the studios, 2). Examination of their roles, 3). How they were given roles within the studios, 4). A correlation between key directors and who they chose to play.”

Mr. Roen's response was "To keep the films alive. To let the people know they exist – keep people talking about them." "If we don't acknowledge the contributions, if we don't study the contributions, then they are just films. Character actors should be studied to keep the movie community alive," Roen said. Dr. Greenberg referenced her response to the previous question. Mr. Thompson began his response with his personal feeling on this question: "I'm appalled at the stuff I hear. It never addresses what film history is all about." "It's important for any unexplored part of film to be given light, like character actors. I'm in favor of any literature to help inform people on what these actors are about and what they contributed, including character actors," Thompson added.

Before responding to this question, Mr. Young stated that he always includes visits to the New York Library when conducting his own research in the lives and influences of character actors. "Their contributions should be remembered," Young said. "They are in danger of being ignored. People should recognize their contributions."

"I think that twenty years ago, there were more film schools in New York and LA [Los Angeles], but not schools like UIW [University of the Incarnate Word] – need for a deeper look and deeper research for filmmaking and the Golden Age," McCord said. "Without research, that history is going to fall away."

Mr. Kemper offered the following response to the question: "It is important for people to study and understand the purpose of character actors, whether you're acting, writing a script. It's important to know a character actor is the foundation you build your world around." A character actor himself, Kemper said, "There's a foundation to create identifiable reality that you want only your character actors to and can do." Mr. Hoffman's comment to this question was that: "So they won't be lost in the information. So people know who they are. People know the faces, not

the names.” “These major supporting players will get lost in the sands, in the midst of time,” Hoffman offered. “It is important they receive their due. Without their support, who would the lead character have to play off of?”

Mr. Hoffman then remarked that, “If you don’t have scholarly references, people are not going to know who they are or know their contributions.”

According to Dr. Fitzgerald, “I think that those films from that period are heavily indebted to the character actors because of what they contributed to the narrative.” “We’re remiss in not paying more attention on what they provided,” Fitzgerald commented. “History is a big part of my life. History is the story of the human race and one of the biggest parts of modern culture is film,” West replied to the question. “Scholarly study is really important. Actors and artists of today read on the shoulders of the actors whose shoulders they stand on,” West said.

*What is known about character actor information in any scholarly literature*

Most important to this research, are the interviewees’ responses to this particular question. Mr. Flynn replied that: “Two hundred pictures – he [actor, Ernest Borgnine, starred in] as a character actor, even after *Marty* [the 1955 film for which Borgnine won the Best Actor award].” “Walter Brennan loved everything he did. You bought him one thousand percent. Nobody concentrates on them.” “It’s so needed,” Flynn said.

Mr. LaLonde said to this question: “There’s very little [character information] except in references of biographies of A-Listers or their autobiographies. There’s so few of their own.” “They are reference at best,” LaLonde added. “There are books about them, but not scholarly as you’re [the researcher] planning to do,” Roen said. Roen then referenced a character actor Mr. Flynn previously mentioned: “Walter Brennan – he was in everything. I don’t know of any study, and scholarly study, of them.” Dr. Greenberg’s response to the question was that, “There’s not a

lot. I haven't seen anything." "All I've read about them are short synopses of what they did, not what they contributed." "The general public doesn't get it like students do," said Greenberg.

"They are not as interested." Mrs. Halpern did not respond to this question.

Frank Thompson shared that Charles Coburn donated his papers to the University of Athens. To the question, Thompson said, "I don't know of anything. I've never seen a scholarly book on anything." "Jordan Young is the person I know who has done genuine research. He talked to these people, he knew them, and he would read studio memos," Thompson said. "These actors worked within a lifetime ago so it is doable."

Mr. Young commented that, "There is not much; off the top of my head, I can't think of a good example to give people." "I haven't read anything on classic film in scholarly research," Young added. Ms. McCord's response reflected Mr. Young's by stating that, "Nothing off the top of my head." "There are a lot of good books written by people interested in character actors, but they aren't academic papers," Kemper said. "First-hand information is the hardest to obtain. There should be more interviews with people who were there, but this is difficult because many of them are dying."

As per Mr. Hoffman, "When I read a book and spot references, there are some mentions of character actors." "Coburn in *The Lady Eve* is a likable villain and he's versatile and needs to be in literature," Hoffman offered. "I've never really studied this," Fitzgerald added. "I'd be looking up every single role." "For the importance of character actors of that time, I would look up 1). What they added then hone in on certain films, then 2). Look specifically for staying power," Fitzgerald offered. Mr. West's comment to the question of what is known about character information in scholarly literature was, "What I've read. You [the researcher] will do your thesis then write a book and I'm a huge supporter," added West. "I've worked in the

industry all of my life. My mother would be very surprised that anyone would be writing, doing scholarly work, on her career,” West said.

*As to why this gap in literature exists*

Mr. Flynn answered this question in one word: “Merchandising.” He stated that, “Most people want to read about the Clark Gables and Cary Grants [A-List actor] who people identify with.” “You want to sell fantasies that are the leading man,” Flynn said. Mr. LaLonde’s response referenced the general population by replying that, “Outside of hardcore fans, most [of the] general population focuses on A-Listers.” “People don’t think of the character actors,” Roen said. “They don’t think they contribute anything scholarly. You’ll not find anything on them.” Dr. Greenberg shared, “It wouldn’t be as well read as flashy autobiographies of Lauren Bacall [A-List actor]; there’s not the drama and pizzazz,” Greenberg added. “The reader would be disappointed if the character actor didn’t talk about the stars rather than their own experiences.” Ms. Halpern did not answer this question. Mr. Thompson commented that, “It’s more than a gap. There’s no literature there. There’s a void.”

“People are focused on the stars, the directors, the films themselves, kicking away who it really belongs to: the screenwriters,” said Jordan Young. To Young’s point, in this researcher’s book, *I Only Quote From the Best-Revisting Hollywood’s Golden Age*, credit is given to the screenwriters as it pertains to the contributions to the lines in the films: “The doers of tinsel town worked their magic. These movie lines, brought to us through the imagination, creativity and talent, and collaborative efforts of the script and screenwriters foremost...remain the best ever delivered, and by those who fade not from our memory (3).” Young added, “People don’t necessarily think of these people in the Lincoln Center Library, like Sam Jaffe [character actor].”



Ms. McCord's replied, "The emphasis is on other things. People are interested in the directors, the big stars, the studios, and how people got chosen." Ms. McCord referenced this researcher's earlier point related to how the general public got their information: "Studios had a relationship with gossip columnists. What people learned, they're interested in how Clark Gable was owned by the studio and could be lent out, and he had no say in it." "There's the romance of Hollywood: Lana Turner [A-Lister] sitting at Schwab's and she becomes a movie star. That means anyone can sit at Schwab's and become a star," McCord added. Perhaps McCord's most disturbing response to this question – but also maybe the most significant – was that her father, who worked in movies in the 1950s, would go to places and meet character actors like Ward Bond who would tell stories. She stated: "But no one recorded those stories."

Mr. Kemper replied:

There are two reasons for it: 1). The way the studios worked back then and they had big publicity departments whose job it was to create bullshit. To create ballyhoo. They created stories and sent them to the newspapers; they were written to promote. This is where a lot of today's information came from. 2). There are little things that, unless you go to these sources, you'll never know these things.

Mr. Hoffman offered, "It's because the big stars sell the books. You have to have what publishers are willing to take a chance on." "Unless the character is really ultra-known, the average reader only wonders what this is about. It's what sells? What is promoted? What makes the money?," Hoffman added. "It's the lead parts that are written about," Dr. Fitzgerald said. "Most of the criticism is on main actors. It's almost logical we pay attention to what's up front, but that doesn't mean the peripheral actors shouldn't be looked at," added Fitzgerald.

Mr. West provided this last response to the last question of this study: "It's so hard to do, as you [the researcher] well know. It's hard to dig into their private lives. I know these people's

lives well. I know Lucy [Actress Lucille Ball] and Desi [Actor and band leader Desi Arnez] as human beings.”

## **Chapter IV: Findings**

In consideration of what questions to ask the interviewees, the researcher first identified the importance of learning their specific backgrounds in relation to what role they played in either the making and/or promotion of classic films of Hollywood's Golden Age. Then, the contributions of the character actors in relation to their performances on different levels were assessed. Finally, identifying how the interviewees each define the overall success of films as per the character actors' performances was ascertained.

The next section of interview questions focused on scholarly literature: what the interviewees pinpointed on the importance of character actor information in literature; what they knew to be missing on Hollywood's Golden Age in scholarly literature; why it's important for this information to exist; and lastly, considered why they believed there exists this gap on this research topic in scholarly literature. All of this was looked at in relation to the character actors classified as second-billed but not second-rate.

In searching for people to interview, the researcher began with the personal contacts of Harry Flynn, Casey LaLonde, Gary Roen, Valerie Greenberg, Polly McCord, and Dora Fitzgerald. Interviewees, Dwight Kemper and Leslie Halpern, were referred by Gary Roen. Interviewee, Eric Hoffman, was referred by Dwight Kemper. The researcher sought additional people whose backgrounds and/or experience reflected the desired criteria for participants to possess. As such, the researcher identified Jordan Young who referred Frank Thompson. Douglas Brooks West, while known to the researcher as Eve Arden's son, was the last to be contacted. These people made up the twelve interviewees. An additional nine people were identified and asked throughout the researcher's search, but the researcher received no response from them.

Of the twelve, eleven of them answered all eleven questions and one answered only two questions. They were interviewed in the order in which they agreed to participate. Ten interviews were conducted by phone, one by e-mail, and one in person. Phone interviews were the most practical means, as interviewees' locals included California (4), Florida (2), Pennsylvania (1), New York (1), Virginia(1), and Texas(3) and the researcher resides in Texas. The average length of time for the interviews was 45 minutes.

The researcher's application of interpretation of the interviewees responses in this qualitative research answered the research questions of (a) What do the character actors of this era contribute to the story telling in their particular films, (b) How was the overall success of some of the most popular and greatest films of all time ever considered without analyzing the value and influence of these character actors, and (c) How do classic film experts and scholars, publicists, and those possessing unique knowledge and/or experience define the overall success of these films as it pertains to the character actors' contributions. Through their individual responses of the instrument questions, the interviewees addressed the most important areas of consideration to answer the research questions, as defined by the researcher. The findings revealed and provided legitimate material in laying this foundation of grounded theory.

*What Role They Play in the Making or Promotion of Classic Film of Hollywood's Golden Age*

The interviewees collectively provided a breadth of experience on this point. As a publicist in the business of promoting actors of Hollywood for fifty years, Harry Flynn worked with A-List actors including Bob Hope, Michael Landon and Ernest Borgnine. Developing a close friendship with Landon, Flynn wrote a book about him. As Borgnine's long-time publicist and close friend, Flynn shared a variety of experiences in publicizing Borgnine's work and

career, from accompanying him on movie sets – which provided him with opportunity to meet many actors – to influencing Borgnine to write his autobiography.

This researcher's personal interview experience with Flynn on two separate occasions – one was prior to the start of this research so no information was included herein – to his interview specifically for this paper, Flynn spoke about Borgnine both on and off the set, as an actor and as a person. In his reference to Borgnine's work, Flynn stated, "He watched other actors because he cared about his craft." Having observed many actors – both A-Listers and character actors – while accompanying Borgnine as his publicist, Flynn stated, "Great writing captured great humanity. It took very special people to interpret the lines." The researcher's selection of Flynn as a research contributor was validated by his shared knowledge, professional and personal experiences.

As the grandson of Joan Crawford, acting legend of Hollywood's Golden Age, Casey LaLonde shared he was the only member of Crawford's family who applied efforts to promote her movies and personal life. Legitimizing Crawford's place in film history, LaLonde's participation as a presenter on Turner Classic Movies' second Classic Cruise afforded him the opportunity to share rarely seen home footage of his grandmother. He shared that some of Crawford's best character actor friends were Butterfly McQueen, and Hattie McDaniel, and she shared very specific memories of them. LaLonde also added Eve Arden was one of Crawford's closest friends and their relationship on screen in *Mildred Pierce* provided insight into what could have been the real-life relationship between them. Finally, LaLonde shared he participates in discussions and film festivals promoting Crawford's work. His personal relationship to Joan Crawford and his promotional experience justified his participation in this research.

Syndicated book critic, Gary Roen, regularly receives books for review on varying topics, including classic film. His reviews promote these works on the research topic. One of the author's whose book he reviewed was character actor, Suzanna Leigh, who is also the God daughter of Hollywood A-Lister, Vivien Leigh – the lead actress in *Gone With the Wind*. He also served as a literary agent for writers whose books cover this topic. Roen grew up with a father who worked in the film industry in a talent agency. As such, he met many actors. Lastly, Roen presents at various conferences, some related to television and film stars. His personal experience with his father and his professional experience provide valid reason for his inclusion as an interviewee.

Dr. Greenberg's academic role as a professor of American Cinema afforded her a hands-on participatory role in a professional video shoot. As an educator in the Communication Arts department at the University of the Incarnate Word for the last twenty years, she has promoted many films and their value in America's culture.

Frank Thompson's professional roles as a director, film historian, and author include works on numerous levels related to film. With years of research and revisiting topics to include William Wellman, director from this research film era, Thompson's interest in and dedication to the topic presents value worthy of his inclusion herein.

Author, Jordan Young, has contributed to the preservation of classic film history to the degree he has authored several books on character actors. His years of interviewing these actors and his familiarity with their work provided grounds to interview him for this research.

Polly McCord's role as Graduate Research Librarian at the University of Incarnate Word placed her in the position to assist individuals in locating information on their research topics. For this researcher, McCord provided additional sources to explore for my research. In her

position, she is apprised of trends in what is displayed regarding film and/or what research on classic film individuals seek.

Dwight Kemper's multi-faceted career placed him in the position of interacting with others in the industry, including individuals with direct knowledge on certain films from this time period. As an author on specific subject matter on this topic, his own interactions and interviews provided him with first-hand information.

Eric Hoffman's extensive film collection, personal film study and research provided him with knowledge worthy to include in this research.

Dr. Fitzgerald's graduate studies in film and her profession in academia, which includes the promotion of film knowledge identified her as a person whose knowledge would contribute to this researcher's exploration.

As Eve Arden's son, Douglas Brooks West is a person whose unique knowledge and familiarity with Ms. Arden, alone, validated this investigator's choice to include him herein.

#### *What the Character Actors of the Period Contributed to the Storytelling of Their Films*

Mr. Flynn's characterization of these actors as "special people" first acknowledges they are worthy of attention. In identifying Thomas Mitchell as an actor who was "so real and brought the character to life," Flynn validated Mitchell's contribution to the storytelling because the viewer suspends their disbelief to buy into and believe the story.

Mr. LaLonde stated that "Character actors provided background to the story and key elements to fully flush out the story." This response fully answered this research question. In the article, "Formal Elements of Film: The Big Four," which appeared in "Film Analysis: Formal Elements," the Mise-en-scene is, "The aspect of film that includes everything that appears before the camera within a shot [including] the actors themselves (Rieder)."

Dr. Greenberg responded that “They gave background.” In identifying that “Arden gave real characterizations, Coburn gave his audience a good sense of his characters, and that Mitchell contributed something to human nature,” Greenberg also corroborated their contributions to the storytelling of their films.

Frank Thompson also substantiated the investigator’s point of this question in offering, “Directors relied on them to flush out the background and the character actors make the film and they hold up because of their contributions.” Speaking to background once again, Thompson contributes to validating this point.

Polly McCord’s specific response to Eve Arden highlighted her contribution in *Mildred Pierce*, by stating that “If Eve Arden wasn’t in it, Crawford wouldn’t have had the best friend telling her ‘You can do this!’. She was essential to her films.” McCord spoke directly to Arden’s contribution to storytelling by referencing her delivery of dialogue. It is mentioned in the online journal, *Film Reference*, that “Dialogue also serves important functions within a film's story. Those who seek to minimize the value of dialogue have underestimated how much it contributes to every aspect of narrative film.”

To the storytelling of their films, Dwight Kemper stated that character actors “Contributed a lot, from adlibbing their lines, even though there was a script,” like on the set of *Son of Frankenstein*, to Bela Lugosi doing his own make-up.” On this point, “Lugosi created an utterly fascinating character that is as sympathetic as he is repulsive. Lugosi musters every iota of his towering talent to craft an unforgettable performance full of villainy and pathos.” As noted in the online source, Dailykos.com, by C.M. Colin. The article, “Persuasive power: The Importance of Ethos, Pathos and Logos,” reveals that “Pathos is the ability to tap into audience’s emotions that can evoke feelings of connectedness (Communication Assessment & Learning



Lab, ASU).” Kemper brought to surface how storytelling has different components and they all are important.

Eric Hoffman additionally confirmed the point of this question; on these actors’ contributions to the topic in offering, “They gave solid support to the production. In Eve Arden, you knew you would get a wise-cracking lady. She had wonderful sarcastic delivery in her films.” This speaks to McCord’s remarks on dialogue delivery. In regard to production, as it relates to film, it is defined as “The phase of movie during which principal photography occurs or the entire movie project (Internetmoviedatabase.com).”

“They contributed from the wall paper, the background of narrative,” Dr. Fitzgerald stated. “Character actors added flavor, added ethnicity,” she added. Supporting the previous point made in relation to background and Mise-en-scene, Fitzgerald too confirms their contribution to storytelling.

To this question, Mr. West asserted that “People going to see these films related to the character actors.” By definition, Barry McWilliams is a storyteller who educates people on the art of storytelling. In *Effective Storytelling A manual for beginners*, McWilliams wrote that “The audience has a very important role in storytelling - for their minds are the canvas on which the teller paints his tale (28).”

*What Should be Considered in the Overall and Lasting Success of Their Films Regarding the Character Actors’ Performances*

Mr. Flynn answered this question in the context of how a film still affects the viewer even after twenty years.

Mr. LaLonde called for the viewer to remove Arden from a given role and then examine the role. In stating, "...whether their character propels the story or film," LaLonde challenges the viewer to consider a film's success based on what the character did for the story.

Mr. Roen responded that, "Looking at Arden, Coburn, and Mitchell, they weren't type cast. You didn't look at Arden. You looked at the character." Similar to LaLonde's call to remove the actress from the role to determine the character and their role, you should consider this when evaluating a film's overall success.

As Dr. Greenberg referred to Thomas Mitchell's performance in *Stagecoach*, she said that "His performance gave a lot of opportunity to the other characters to react to him – giving them room to act more deeply." Consider the following facts on the film, *Stagecoach*: It is ranked number 63 on the American Film Institute's "100 Greatest Movies list;" It received nominations for Best Picture and Best Actor in a Supporting Role; It is the movie, which shot newcomer-turned-A-Lister, John Wayne, to stardom – practically overnight. At the Directors Guild of America 2011 awards ceremony, director Paul Schrader, introduced the film, *Stagecoach*, and explained "Aspects of that film made it a real game changer."

Mr. Thompson offered that "They helped populate film with vivid characterizations." As previously addressed, this speaks to the characters connecting to the audience in a way of providing viewers with real interpretation of the story. In the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, characterization is defined as "the artistic representation of human character or motives." For a film to be believable, human elements must exist. What these character actors provided was this very thing and to the level that, to Mr. Flynn's point, it continues to impact a person even twenty years later.

In talking on this point, Mr. Young provided feedback for each of the three topical actors. On Coburn in *The Lady Eve*, Young stated “He steals the film.” On Mitchell in *Stagecoach*, “He’s the rock *Stagecoach* stands on.” “In *Stage Door*, very few were on her [Arden] level that had that delivery,” Young added. These are very strong statements, all of which support the premise to this particular research question.

Ms. McCord’s response was that “They show us who were – hold up a mirror to American society at that time.” The investigator believes this too speaks to a previous point and the importance of connection with the audience. This example puts it into a context on a more personal level as individuals.

Mr. Kemper acknowledged the pathos these actors had. Once again, herein lies a connection to the audience; evoking emotion draws a viewer deeper into a film.

In his response, Mr. Hoffman referenced Coburn’s role in *The More the Merrier*, citing how, in this film, the true housing shortage of the time was reflected. Closely resembling McCord’s answer to this research question, sensitivity to a mirror image for people is critical when considering a film’s overall success.

After citing several examples of character actors’ contributions to the success of films, “They added narrative richness and depth; they added to the success of dramas; they had untold ways of making these movies successful,” Dr. Fitzgerald said. “There’s absolutely no doubt they added to the success of these films and the sky is the limit on character actors,” she added. These are definitive statements strongly supporting this research question’s premise.

Mr. West spoke to the fact, “These actors are real people. The ones people relate to. They propel the story. Their success enabled the story to move forward.” The resonating theme of relation to the audience once again surfaced here.

*Regarding the performances of these character actors, how the overall success of these films is defined*

Mr. Flynn stated that “Character actors made the story real.”

Mr. LaLonde focused on current-day supporters of classic film such as Turner Classic Movies, repertory and film houses who “keep classic film alive.”

In citing an example using actor Ernest Borgnine, in his Oscar™-winning role in *Marty*, Mr. Roen remarked, “No one else could play that. He WAS Marty. That’s why character actors worked.” Flynn and Roen’s responses closely resemble each other in how the character actors provided realness.

Dr. Greenberg cited examples of circumstances character actors experienced in the making of the film and/or in the film itself that, according to Greenberg, “Enriched the film and showed what the actors could do.” Once again, this is a powerful statement to this point in question.

Mr. Thompson’s answer best speaks to a continuum in the lasting success of these particular films: “There isn’t anything these films have in common in terms of success. But, over a 30-year period of film, they’re [the character actors] in all of them.”

Mr. Young clearly answered the questioned and in doing so, validated this research question in offering, “The films wouldn’t be what they are. They wouldn’t have the staying power.”

Ms. McCord, again, spoke to the “realness” in Arden’s performances. Further, McCord added that “These character actors held up these performers [A-Listers] and the films,” directly implicating their contribution to the films’ success.

Mr. Kemper described these character actors as “selfless,” by stating, “There was a lot of give and take you don’t see now, including sometimes giving scenes to fellow actors because it worked better.” This is another identifier to the lengths these actors went to for the overall success of their films.

Mr. Hoffman reappraised a consistent theme on this point in declaring that “It was the work of these character actors the audiences reacted to.”

“They helped to create the world in which the main characters spin,” Dr. Fitzgerald remarked. In this ‘world,’ one can translate this to mean the *mise-en-scene* of the pictures – referring back to previous validation on this argument. In referencing his answer to the previous question, Mr. West said, “Their success enabling the story to move forward – another thematic message contained in this investigation.

*The importance that should be placed on character actors in classic film scholarly literature*

Mr. Flynn’s response, “You trust them. You know they’re real,” is interpreted by the researcher to mean the believability they contribute and the importance of an audience’s trust in them speaks to a level of importance for consideration of them in scholarly literature.

Mr. LaLonde offered specific factors for considered on this point in identifying that “They [character actors] should be looked at case by case, based on each body of work, based on other connections, and how they fit in.” These are just a few of the many details that should be considered on this question.

“The Golden Age had more character actors who had more to contribute. Without character actors, you wouldn’t have a good film,” said Mr. Roen. From the investigator’s perspective on this response, if they contributed more and made films good, don’t they warrant placement in scholarly literature?

Dr. Greenberg stated, “A lot of importance should be placed on character actors in scholarly literature. Their work influenced the stars’ work and it timbered their performances and all those things that make it a really great film.” Greenberg’s response pointedly addressed this research question and validated its premise.

Mr. Thompson’s reply, from a film historian’s perspective, offered unique insight while validating the premise. In his answer to the importance that should be placed on this topic, “No more or less than any other aspect of filmmaking of the time,” Thompson said. The true validation came with Thompson’s follow up to this: “I would love to see more attention be given to character actors because it’s still a misunderstood part of the process.” And, as a film historian, Thompson is, “Always drawn to aspects of film history that there hasn’t been much attention to.” Further, Thompson said he “Would love to see something written on Grady Sutton [character actor]...it is important and wonderful to give these people their due.” These are statements, which speak directly to the researcher’s hypothesis on the importance of character actors in scholarly literature.

In Jordan Young’s response to this question, the investigator’s point was again validated. Young stated: “There are too many books on Clark Gable, Greta Garbo [both A-List actors. Only a handful of books have been written on these character actors.” “They are undervalued, under-recorded, and more should be written,” Young added. As recent as August 27, 2012, articles, such as “From Fran Langella to Hope Davis, the Most Undervalued Actors in Movies” appearing in *The Atlantic*, call attention to the very point of this research question. Even though the article speaks to current-day supporting actors.

Ms. McCord’s last remark to this question most directly corroborates the researcher’s theory: “The importance of character actors in scholarship needs to be looked at and

recognized.” To be looked at isn’t enough. From the investigator’s standpoint, if the look – the research – isn’t also recognized, the mark is missed.

Mr. Kemper’s citations of several examples, as outlined in Table 2., were his responses to this question; these examples reflected the their importance to their perspective films. In stating that “They create a sense of time, place, and person that the leads just can’t do,” the researcher drew a connection between Kemper’s response here, and Jordan Young’s previous statement of: “How many books can you write about Spencer Tracy [A-Lister]?”

Mr. Hoffman also supported the investigator’s argument by offering that “A great deal [of importance should be placed on character actors].”

“We need more writing about it [this research question]. The film is discussed. The main actor is discussed. The portrayals deserve an upfront look,” said Dr. Fitzgerald. “There’s not enough [scholarly literature] and there’s room for a lot of this,” Fitzgerald declared. In giving these character actors an “upfront look,” means that, in research, they are not in the reference section only, but comprise the main body in the literature.

Mr. West’s answer was definitive in supporting this question: “Whatever importance you find in the film [should be placed on character actors].” To Fitzgerald’s point, the films are discussed in scholarly literature; so said, character actors should be too.

#### *What is missing about character actors of Hollywood’s Golden Age in scholarly literature*

Mr. Flynn referenced a consistent theme contained in several of the interviewees’ responses to some of this investigator’s inquiry. In citing A-List actress, Marilyn Monroe, Flynn remarked that “She was very undependable so you put people around her who could handle it make it believable. Again, you trust them.” This element of trust speaks to credence of their

performances. The researcher took this to mean the trust put in these actors to carry films, to make them real, is missing in scholarly literature.

Mr. LaLonde was very specific on this point. Identifying that “Other than people who really enjoy classic film, there’s a lack of understanding in their contributions to classic films.” “This isn’t examined nor examined is how there’s no understanding of how many character actors over the years came up from vaudeville and silent movies,” LaLonde added. Referencing Turner Classic Movies and its primetime host, Robert Osborne, is acknowledging what’s currently at the forefront of classic film promotion. How would it be if TCM did as LaLonde suggests and “Only focuses on the character actors and Clark Gable being an afterthought?”

Mr. Roen stated that “There is nothing, nothing that I know of that approaches the subject in main-stream or scholarly. There’s no scholarly dissertations on character actors.” “There is on film, movies like *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone With the Wind*, said roen.” Continuing one of the response themes, the films are looked at, but not the character actors for scholarly works.

“An intense study of what they added to films is missing,” Dr. Greenberg commented. Most literature takes focus on the film itself and it highlights the stars.” Again, the theme herein resurfaces.

Mr. Thompson’s reply further supported the same theme. He first stated that “Everything [is missing]. There’s very little that’s been devoted specifically to them in history of film.” “...you’re writing about Davis [A-List actor Betty Davis] and Cagney [A-list actor James Cagney], not the characters,” Thompson added. It’s not much of a force in literature now and it’s a subject that deserves its own book.”

Mr. Young replied “In terms of scholarly literature, I haven’t read anything.” This clearly supports the research question premise.



“Some pieces have been written about some of them,” Ms. McCord stated. “The vast number of them have been overlooked. The ones who get more lines get more attention,” McCord concluded. This implies the previous point made several times over that the A-Listers, the ones who get the most attention, are the ones focused on in scholarly literature.

Mr. Kemper spoke to a point, which, in the investigator’s scholarly opinion, is crucial to this research. What Kemper stated is missing is, “The heart of being a character. The fervent love a fan has a lot of fans of these films write books – is missing because academia is dry and numbers. You can’t put numbers to this.” “It has more to do with the heart and communicating with the audience,” Kemper added. Here too, previously-made points are further validated in addition to bringing to the forefront the unexplored aspect of the heart of being a character actor.

“The books on film history focus on the stars; you don’t talk about the character actors. They’ve been horribly overlooked. There’s something missing. That’s all,” said Mr. Hoffman.

To this point made several times over, especially in reference to Clark Gable, the researcher looked up and found the following books about Gable to further support the hypothesis. The list of book titles and authors was taken from Amazon.com, but may not represent a comprehensive list. Table 1 outlines the books by title and author.

Table 1

## Books about A-Lister Clark Gable

Book Title	Author
<i>Clark Gable: A Biography</i>	Warren G. Harris
<i>The King: A Biography of Clark Gable</i>	Charles Samuels
<i>Clark Gable: A Personal Portrait</i>	Kathleen Williams Gable
<i>Clark Gable: Tormented Star</i>	David Bret
<i>Clark Gable and Carol Lombard: The Golden Era of Hollywood's Star-Crossed Couple</i>	Charles Rivers Editors
<i>Films of Clark Gable</i>	Gabe Essoe
<i>Long Live the King: A Biography of Clark Gable</i>	Lyn Tornabene
<i>Clark Gable, in Pictures: Candid Images of the Actor's Life</i>	Chrystopher J. Spicer
<i>Clark Gable in His Own Words</i>	Neil Grant
<i>Clark Gable: Biography, Filmography, Bibliography</i>	Chrystopher J. Spicer
<i>Clark Gable: Portrait of a Misfit</i>	Jane Ellen Wayne
<i>Clark Gable: Quotes &amp; Facts</i>	Blago Kirov
<i>American Legends: The Life of Clark Gable</i>	Charles River Editors
<i>Gable: A pictorial biography</i>	Jean Garceau
<i>Gable &amp; Lombard</i>	Warren Harris
<i>Gable &amp; Lombard &amp; Powell &amp; Harlow</i>	Joe Morella & Edward Z. Epstein
<i>Clark Gable: A Hollywood Portrait</i>	Marie Cahill
<i>Gable (The Hollywood Legends Book 4)</i>	Michael B. Druxman
<i>Gable</i>	Chester Williams
<i>The Life and Loves of Gable</i>	Jack Scagnetti
<i>Dear Mr. G: The Biography of Clark Gable</i>	Jean Garceau & Clark Gable
<i>Clark Gable Unauthorized and Uncensored</i>	R.B. Grimm
<i>Clark Gable (The Pictorial Treasury of Film Star series)</i>	Rene Jordan
<i>The Clark Gable and Carole Lombard Murder Case</i>	George Baxt
<i>Clark Gable: The Life Story of the King of All Movies</i>	George Carpozi, Jr.
<i>Gable's Women</i>	Jane Ellen Wayne
<i>Clark Gable and History of the Liberty Ship Carole Lombard</i>	Daniel Pierrejean & Martin Hamm
<i>Film Actors Vol.2: Clark Gable</i>	Iacob Adrian
<i>Rhett and Scarlett: The Lives and Legacies of Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh</i>	Charles River Editors
<i>Looking for Clark Gable and Other 20<sup>th</sup> Century Pursuits: Collected Writings</i>	Virginia Van der Veer Hamilton
<i>The King of Hollywood: The Story of Clark Gable</i>	Charles Samuels
<i>Vintage Movie Stars #1: Clark Gable (Volume 1)</i>	Dirk Stursberg
<i>Complete Films of Clark Gable</i>	Gabe Essoe
<i>Clark Gable – The FBI Files</i>	The FBI
<i>Clark Gable an American in War</i>	Daniel Pierrejean
<i>The Clark Gable Handbook – Everything You Need to Know About Clark Gable</i>	Tebbo Publishers

Resuming the interviewees' responses to the question of what is missing about character actors of Hollywood's Golden Age in scholarly literature, Dr. Fitzgerald stated, "More scholarly literature on specifics bringing these portrayals upfront."

Mr. West offered that he "Doesn't read much on scholarly literature." Here again, the point is well-validated.

*What is known to be true regarding character actors, their experience, and/or their publicity on their classification as second-billed but not second-rate*

Mr. Flynn's answer to this question was specific to actor Ernest Borgnine, citing that "Ernie was always a character. He never thought of himself as a star or leading man." Based on Flynn's decades' long work with Borgnine, he knew this to be true.

Mr. LaLonde brought up the point the researcher highlighted in the Literature Review portion of this research, acknowledging the role the publicity and studio machines played in the lives of the actors. LaLonde offered that "Publicity machines were for A-Listers; you can discern what was happening. They're [character actors] not in fan magazines." "All character actors: not a one is second-rate," LaLonde added. He then referenced when character actors received their due in recognition by the Academy Awards when, in 1937, the first Oscars were given to actors in supporting roles. He also stated that "Character actors are always second-billed, but never second-rate." LaLonde also spoke to these actors' experiences in submitting "The vast experience and credentials of those Oscar Best Supporting Actress and Actor winners and nominees were finally celebrated, including Charles Coburn and Thomas Mitchell, by the broader Hollywood artistic community." With his respond, LaLonde validated the question's purpose.

Mr. Roen provided insight by focusing on three people who were character actors in movies, but whose film careers gave way to them having more prominent roles in television shows, citing DeForest Kelly, Ernest Borgnine, and Frances Bavier. “They were humble, they were second-billed, but not second rate,” Roen added.

Dr. Greenberg’s reply was that “The proof is in the pudding. Like Claude Rains, he moved his way up [in billing], enriching the films.”

Mr. Thompson clearly stated that “It is very rare that any character actor would’ve been second-billed and second-rate. If someone does a spectacular scene, someone else [a character actor] will come in and steal the scene.” “When you go through the “B” movies, that’s the only time they [character actors] opened themselves to reviews because they carried the film,” Thompson added. This response support the previously made point that publicity machines weren’t focused on character actors when they acted in supporting roles.

“In most cases, you see them only for a few minutes. A rare number were allowed to take the character further,” said Mr. Young. “You never saw their width or breadth,” Young added. This may speak to the point that had more of these character actors had more opportunity to prove their onscreen abilities, how would this have affected their status as second-billed? Could some of these character actors have become A-Listers? While this may present a point of contention for some, others would possibly argue they were best where they were in supporting roles. Again, this does not minimize their importance.

Ms. McCord spoke to this point referencing Eve Arden. Her response also validated the point of second-billed but not second-rate in terms of Arden’s appeal to viewers. “There were character actors like Eve Arden – when her name was on a poster, when people passed by and saw her name, they said ‘I like her,’” McCord stated.

Mr. Hoffman opened up by stating, “The publicity department, the publicity, can be a nightmare. Also, the gossip columnists, Hopper [Hedda Hopper] and Parsons [Louella Parsons], were very competitive.” “Power corrupt,” Hoffman added. This too speaks directly to the point of how publicity impacted these actors’ experiences.

“Many critics will say the performances of the main actors were outstanding but so-and-so [character actor(s)] steals the show, like in high level magazines and the *New York Times*,” Dr. Fitzgerald remarked. To illustrate this point, the 1942 *New York Times* review, written by Bosley Crowther, of the film, *Casablanca*, “*Casablanca*, 1942 with Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman,” reads that “Mr. Wilson’s [pianist, Dooley Wilson] performance as Rick’s [Bogart’s character] devoted friend, though rather brief, is filled with a sweetness and compassion which lend a helpful mood to the whole film.” To Mr. Jordan’s point, some weren’t on the screen that long, but they could certainly impact – and contribute to – the whole film.

Mr. West’s reply was that he “Met many of them. Often, the character actors were leading ladies and leading men and they were stars [even back to their days in vaudeville or in silent pictures].” “The roles stopped coming,” West added. In lead roles, these character actors would not have been second-billed.

*What relates in performance to the overall success of their films in their classification as second-billed but not second-rate*

As mentioned in the previous section of the Interviewees Responses, the majority of the interviewees referenced their answers to the previous question. As such, the researcher’s findings herein are specific to those who provided additional commentary to this specific question.

Mr. LaLonde stated that “There is no correlation between second-rate and second-billed.” This statement is clear to the point.

Mr. Roen remarked: “They made it work. They contributed that they were minor characters.” In relation to the question of what these actors contributed, Roen’s response relates directly to the topic.

In Ms. Halpern’s response, she stated several points. Most clearly validating this question’s premise was that “People such as Even Arden, Charles Coburn, and Thomas Mitchell received fewer scripts coming their way, were offered lower salaries, and got less glamorous parts.” “However, the quality of their work was an essential part of the whole in determining a film’s success,” Halpern added. Further “...these working actors had steady roles, long lists of movie credits, and received awards and professional recognition for their first-rate performances as second-billed actors.” This definitively supported the researcher’s identification of the importance to get answers to this question and, more important, validity of the hypothesis.

Ms. McCord’s response was directed to Eve Arden. Bringing back a familiar theme in this research, McCord spoke the point of realism. On Arden, “She added a level of realism; people could relate to what she was, to who she was.” “She was pretty. She could have carried films as a star, but her best work was a character actor,” McCord added. This statement is in direct connection to the researcher’s hypothesis of whether or not character actors were better to remain character actors.

With Kemper commenting that “The second banana [billed] people can make or break your show,” this strongly supports the point that their performances were in relation to the success of their films, as second-billed.

While Mr. Hoffman referenced his response to the previous question, he added that “Today, you have columnists, but no one with that kind of power.” In relation to this question, the researcher drew on Mr. Hoffman’s response to the previous question. It is interpreted to

mean that while the publicity machines and gossip columnists had power, their influence could have impacted how the general public viewed a performance, but did not do it in relation to the actors as second-billed or second-rate. Since this did not appear to be the case, the researcher further believes since the second-billed but not second-rate factor was not addressed, this was not taken into account in relation to the overall success of their films – from the columnists' viewpoints.

Mr. West directly supported the theory on this point in remarking that “Often, the character actors in the piece [film] are actually better actors than the leading lady.” “I know my mother got an awful lot of attention in *Mildred Pierce*,” West added. To better illustrate this point, West referenced Ms. Arden’s experience with the film, *Grease*. In this 1978 Paramount Pictures musical, Arden was cast as the high school principal. West had this to say: “She wasn’t beautiful. She was good. They needed a principal that could really stand out against the young actors, John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John.” “It became a classic and had Even Arden, Sid Caesar, Dotti Goodman, and Joan Blondell [all character actors during Hollywood’s Golden Age],” West said. According to imdb.com, “Grease was the highest grossing movie of 1978.” *Why they believe it is important for there to be scholarly literature where character actors are concerned*

Mr. Flynn opened by noting: “If there isn’t [any scholarly literature on character actors], nobody will write about them.” “They fit into it because of the well-trained developed people the character actors play,” Flynn added. This response clearly answered the question.

Beginning with “Very little scholars look at character actors,” LaLonde went on to say that “Any research at all is good for classic film.” “Given amount of screen time, a closer look at

them is long overdue,” LaLonde added. Here to, the question is directly answered, adding to proof of the researches premise on this point.

Mr. Roen’s answer added even more support to the premise of why this is important: “To keep the films alive. To let people know they [the character actors] they exist and to keep people talking about them.” “If we don’t acknowledge the contributions, if we don’t study the contributions, then they are just films.” This speaks straight the investigator’s previously stated remark that it’s not enough to acknowledge the contributions; they need to be studied.

To this question, Mr. Thompson replied: “I’m appalled at the stuff I hear. It never addresses what film history is all about.” “It’s important for any unexplored part of film to be given light, like character actors,” Thompson added. Further, he went on to offer that “I’m in favor of any literature to help inform people on what these actors are about and what they contributed, including the character actors.” To the argument this topic warrants exploration and why this important, Thompson absolutely validated each.

“Their contributions should be remembered,” Mr. Young answered. “They are in danger of being ignored and people should recognize their contributions.” Young remarked. To be written about – including in scholarly literature – is to be remembered.

Ms. McCord submitted that “There is a need for a deeper look and deeper research for filmmaking and the Golden Age.” “Without research, that history is going to fall away,” McCord said. Coming from a graduate research librarian’s perspective, the researcher’s own fear of this becoming reality was brought to the forefront.

Mr. Kemper’s response included that “It is important for people to study and understand the purpose of character actors. It is important to know a character actor is the foundation you build your world around.” Kemper too spoke directly to this question’s purpose.



Contributing to the theme of importance of people knowing who these people, who these characters are, Mr. Hoffman answered with, “So they won’t be lost in the information. So people know why they are.” “These major supporting players will get lost in the sands, in the midst of time,” Hoffman added. He concluded his remarks by saying, “If you don’t have scholarly references, people are not going to know who they are or know their contributions.” Here exists additional support for the researcher’s overall theme of this research.

Dr. Fitzgerald replied, “I think that those films from that period are heavily indebted to the character actors because of what they contributed to the narrative.” “We’re remiss in not paying more attention on what they provided,” Fitzgerald said. Her remarks here speak to this investigator’s call to bring more attention to this overall topic with the very nature of this research.

“Scholarly study is really important,” said Mr. West. “Actors and artists of today read on the shoulders of the actors whose shoulders they stand on,” West contributed. This response correlates to Mr. Kemper’s notion on character actors as a foundation. West also put this in the perspective as its importance applies to today’s actors. This is a direct connection to Mr. Flynn’s earlier stance on the fact that today’s actors don’t get the training the actors of Hollywood’s Golden Age did.

*What is known about character actor information in any scholarly literature*

Very important to this research are the interviewees’ responses to this particular question. They speak directly to the identified method of the deficiency model premise for this research.

Mr. Flynn referenced the many acting credits Ernest Borgnine had to his career and stated that “Walter Brennan [character actor who, according to imdb.com, has 243 acting credits to his

name] loved everything he did and you bought him 1,000 percent.” Flynn’s mention of them speaks to his point that “Nobody concentrates on them.” “It’s so needed,” Flynn added.

Mr. LaLonde comments provided that “There’s very little except in references of biographies of A-Lister or their autobiographies. There’s so few of their own.” “They are reference at best,” LaLonde said – speaking directly to and validating the research points once again.

“There are books about them, but not scholarly as you are [the researcher] planning and doing,” Mr. Roen said, also speaking to the point.

Dr. Greenberg also reference Walter Brennan as Mr. Flynn did, in remarking, “Walter Brennan was in everything.” “I don’t know of any study, and scholarly study, of them [character actors],” Greenberg stated. Further, Greenberg offered, “There’s not a lot. I haven’t seen anything. All I’ve read about them are short synopses of what they did, not what they contributed.” In clearly identifying the absence of material on this topic in scholarly literature, Dr. Greenberg’s observations speak to the researcher’s method of deficiency model.

Speaking to the same method, Mr. Thompson commented that “I don’t know anything. I’ve never seen a scholarly book on anything.” Thompson spoke the point that Jordan Young has conducted genuine research, that “He talked to these people, he knew them, and he would read studio memos.”

Mr. Young answered the question with “There is not much off the top of my head. I can’t think of a good example to give people.” “I haven’t read anything on classic film in scholarly research,” Young added. The consistent theme here is the clear absence of this topic in scholarly literature.

Ms. McCord used nearly the exact same verbiage as Mr. Young in her response to this question: “Nothing off the top of my head.” This is a direct statement also supporting the research hypothesis.

“There are a lot of good books written by people interested in character actor actors, but they aren’t academic papers,” Mr. Kemper said. “There should be more interviews with people who were there, but this is difficult because many of them are dying,” Kemper added. This answer specifically addressed one of the limitations the investigator identified of this research.

Charles Coburn was addressed in Mr. Hoffman’s response to this question. He first said that “When I read a book and spot references, there are some mentions of character actors.” On Coburn, Hoffman stated, “Coburn in *The Lady Eve* is a likeable villain and he’s versatile and needs to be in literature,” thus validating the main idea.

While Dr. Fitzgerald offer that she’s “Never really studied this,” she made several suggestions on what to study, including their “staying power.” In identifying that she hasn’t studied this, she didn’t speak directly to knowing anything about character actor information in literature.

Mr. West replied to the question: “What I’ve read.” He further stated that his mother “Would be very surprised that anyone would be writing, doing scholarly work, on her career.” West did not offer specifics to what he knows to exist in literature on the topic.

#### *Why this gap in literature exists*

Mr. Flynn’s answers to this question was “Merchandising. Most people want to read about the Clark Gables and Cary Grants [A-List actor] who people identify with.” “You want to sell fantasies that are the leading man,” Flynn added. While Flynn’s reference to the A-Listers as those actors who people identify with contradicts several interviewee’s responses, he is on point

that it is the fantasy component that appeals to people. Mark Chadbourn wrote in a 2008 article in *The Telegraph*, “The Fantastic Appeal of Fantasy,” that “The more irrational the world gets, the more we demand irrational in our fiction.” Further, Chadbourn wrote that “The one defining characteristic [of fantasy] is irrationality.” It is irrational for the majority of people to think they could be involved with the likes of the Clark Gables and Cary Grants, thus the fantasy.

Mr. LaLonde stated that “Outside of hardcore fans, most [of the] general population focuses on A-Lister,” a point made several times over throughout this research.

“People don’t think of the character actors,” Mr. Roen said. This speaks to the out-of-sight out-of-mind context of this research.

Dr. Greenberg commented by saying, “They [the general public] don’t think they contributed anything scholarly. You’ll not find anything on them.” “What the general public doesn’t know is what this researcher sought to find with this scholarly work – at least, to pave the way,” Greenberg said. Greenberg further remarked, “The reader would be disappointment if the character actor didn’t talk about the stars rather than their own experiences.” This speaks to the researcher taking the Transformative World View to call for change in how this topic is viewed.

Mr. Thompson also validated this question’s idea in responding, “It’s more than a gap. There’s no literature there. There’s a void.” This is the very premise of the Deficiency Model used here.

“People are focused on the stars, the directors, the films themselves, kicking away who it really belongs to: the screenwriters,” said Mr. Young. This is further commentary supportive of the premise.

Ms. McCord's response also resembled a thematic message here: "The emphasis is on other things. People are interested in the directors, the big stars, the studios, and how people got chosen [for particular roles]." Adding that her father worked in movies during the 1950s and that he met and character actors like Ward Bond [who, according to [imdb.com](http://imdb.com), has 273 acting credits], who would tell stories, but, McCord said: "No one recorded those stories." This piece of research blatantly speaks to one reason why this gap exists.

Mr. Kemper stated two reasons for this gap existing: "The way the studios worked back then, they had big publicity departments whose job it was to create bullshit. To create ballyhoo. They were written to promote." The second reason Kemper offered was: "There are little things that, unless you go to these sources, you'll never know these things." Referencing the publicity departments and the importance of going to the sources, Kemper corroborates the researcher's stance.

"It's because the big stars sell the books," Mr. Hoffman replied to the question. "Unless the character actor is really ultra-known, the average reader only wonders what this is about," Hoffman added. This too references the Transformative World View approach identified by the investigator.

Confirming what's been addressed several times over herein, Dr. Fitzgerald replied with, "It's the lead parts that are written about." "Most of the criticism is on main actors. It's almost logical we pay attention to what's up front, but that doesn't mean the peripheral actors shouldn't be looked at," she added. Once again, further evidence supports the research theory and prospective change in world view on the subject.

“It’s so hard to do, as you [the researcher] well know. It’s hard to dig into their private lives,” said Mr. West. “I know these people’s lives well.” West’s response here mirror’s Kemper’s earlier mention of the difficulty presented with researching this topic.

The following tables provide examples, calling for consideration of what the A-List actors, films, and/or the directors would have been without the specific character actor in their perspective motion pictures. Table 2 cites examples offered by the interviewees and are listed in the order of their interviews. Table 3 cites examples by A-List actor, Irene Dunne, of specific character actors who, according to Dunne, were “As responsible for the success of these films as the stars and directors (Twoman, McClure, 13).”

## **Analysis**

The importance of this research speaks to fulfilling a need – a need to establish the ground work for research on this topic. Through my own analysis of these findings, the arguments presented are best defined. Question by question, answer by answer, I discovered validity and echoes of what my own experience, studies, and knowledge on this topic reveal.

In storytelling, characters, plot and a storyline represent a complete work. Through many of the interviewees’ responses, they conveyed the fact character actors propel the storytelling in their films. As I too have observed and studied in reviewing dozens of films, and most many times over, the character actors advance storytelling by moving the narrative along. Through their performances, they transport audiences from one part of a picture – of a story – to the next. Through their banter, their gazes, their sighs, their gestures, they shift what’s happening on screen. In how they say what they say, they add to the collective efforts to move stories along.

Table 2

A-List actors, films and/or directors without character actors

Interviewee	A-List Actor/Film/Director	Without Character Actor
Casey LaLonde	<i>A Woman's Face</i>	Donald Meek, Marjorie Main
	<i>Mildred Pierce</i>	<b>Eve Arden</b>
Gary Roen	Howard Hawks (Dir).	Walter Brennan
	<i>Rio Bravo</i>	Jack Elam
	<i>Shane</i>	Jack Palance
Valerie Greenberg	<i>Stagecoach</i>	<b>Thomas Mitchell</b>
	<i>Bridge on the River Kwai</i>	Sessue Hayakawa
	<i>Casablanca</i>	S.Z. 'Cuddles' Sakall
Jordan Young	<i>The Lady Eve</i>	<b>Charles Coburn</b>
	<i>The More the Merrier</i>	<b>Charles Coburn</b>
	<i>Gone With the Wind</i>	<b>Thomas Mitchell</b>
	<i>Stagecoach</i>	<b>Thomas Mitchell</b>
	<i>Stage Door</i>	<b>Eve Arden</b>
Polly McCord	<i>Mildred Pierce</i>	<b>Eve Arden</b>
	<i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>	The entire supporting cast
Dwight Kemper	<i>The Wizard of Oz</i>	Margaret Hamilton
	<i>Bride of Frankenstein</i>	Dwight Frye
	<i>The Maltese Falcon</i>	Peter Lorre
	<i>The Maltese Falcon</i>	Sydney Greenstreet
	<i>Champagne for Caesar</i>	Vincent Price
Earl L. Hoffman	<i>Cover Girl</i>	<b>Eve Arden</b>
	<i>The Long Wait</i>	<b>Charles Coburn</b>
	<i>Lured</i>	Lucille Ball
		<b>Charles Coburn</b>
		Boris Karloff
		George Sanders
	John Ford (Dir.)	<b>Thomas Mitchell</b>
	<i>The More the Merrier</i>	<b>Charles Coburn</b>
	Errol Flynn	Basil Rathbone
	Betty Davis/ <i>Now Voyager</i>	Gladys Cooper
	<i>The Lady Eve</i>	<b>Charles Coburn</b>
Dora Fitzgerald	<i>Gone With the Wind</i>	Hattie McDaniel
Douglas Brooks West	<i>Mildred Pierce</i>	<b>Eve Arden</b>

Table 3

Character actors and the films to which they contributed to the films' success

Irene Dunne	Character Actor	Film
	Bobby Watson	<i>The Awful Truth</i>
	Granville Bates	<i>My Favorite Wife</i>
	Ellen Corby	<i>I Remember Mama</i>
	Marie Ouspenskaya	<i>Love Affair</i>
	Ward Bond	<i>A Guy Named Joe</i>
	Charles Winniger	<i>Show Boat</i>
	Edgar Buchanan	<i>Penny Serenade</i>
	Gladys Cooper	<i>The White Cliffs of Dover</i>

As several interviewees pointed out, these particular actors largely contributed to the background in their films. For some movies, there may have only been two or three character actors in a given scene. For others, there were dozens in any given frame. And, as often referenced herein, with their stage experience, they knew how to connect with audiences and transmit this on screen. This enabled moviegoers to suspend their disbelief and buy into the story. It is true: if the character actors weren't part of the films, who would the lead actors have played off of? Who would have held the leads accountable? As the supporting actors they were, they often carried the films; meaning, they oftentimes carried the story lines.

The strongest case to make in support of this argument is to offer this particular look into *Gone With the Wind*. The most important part of this film's storyline isn't the love the heroine, Scarlett, has for Ashley; nor is it the quest Rhett Butler is on to make Scarlett his ever-loving wife. The story is about Tara, the plantation, and its importance to Scarlett's family. In what I believe to be the most important scene in this four-hour film is Scarlett's father, portrayed by Thomas Mitchell, teaching Scarlett about the importance of this land – what it means, what it stands for. And it is on this premise, the importance of Tara, Scarlett fights – tooth and nail – to



eventually return to, to rebuild, to sustain, and to preserve Tara. This is the heart of the storyline. And it Thomas Mitchell who plants this seed to move the story along.

As Mr. Flynn noted, in considering the overall and lasting success of films, one may consider how many times over he or she watches a film. And, after twenty years, whether or not a film still impacts the viewer? It isn't necessarily any film in entirety, which may have a lasting impact; it is the performances of the actors. Were they believable? Would the film be the same without this particular actor? As many interviewees pointed out, some of the lead actors always played the same part – the audience knew what they were getting. But in regard to the character actors, would *Stagecoach* have been the same without Mitchell's performance as Doc? I think not. He did provide a level of humanity among this group of very different characters that no other one actor in the film portrayed.

The word, real, was used several times over in describing Eve Arden. Would *Mildred Pierce* continue to enjoy the attention it receives had it not been for Ms. Arden's sardonic delivery in this film? Again, I argue it wouldn't. While Joan Crawford led the actors, Ms. Arden moved every other character's parts surrounding Crawford. With her no-nonsense approach, she was not only real, but believable on every level. After seeing this films many times, I continue to be amazed at the fact I enjoy it so much because of Ms. Arden. Her performance earned her an Academy Award nomination. As this elevated her status as an actress, I believe it was her ability to remain true to her audiences that many of her films continue to enjoy notoriety.

I well agree with Mr. Young's statement that Charles Coburn did steal the film, *The Lady Eve*, with his performance. While Barbara Stanwyck and Henry Fonda provided the love interest, it was Coburn portraying the gentleman's card sharpie that makes viewers want to see this picture time and time again. His delivery of the line, "Let us be crooked, but never common,"

conveys his commitment to fulfilling the two roles he's playing: the English gent and the lad who is out to take any one's money who dares to play cards with him. In considering the lasting success of this film, Coburn significantly adds to its credibility and entertaining luster.

With the added insight and observations of the interviewees, it is my scholarly opinion that how the overall success of films is defined takes on a new meaning. From the box office dollars, it is now the performances of these character actors that should be considered in defining the success of their films. As some interviewees offered, these people should be given their due. It does go deeper than this. It is not merely recognition, but also in this study, exactly how the acknowledgement of what they contributed matters. A bold statement it was that Mr. Young made, "The directors would've been SOL without them," but I concur as someone who continues to analyze these performances at every opportunity. Again, many of the top directors had their own stock companies of their go-to character or supporting actors. They went to these same people because they could be relied upon; their work stood out; what they contributed to the stories convinced the directors they belonged in the films. Again: they were real.

After reconsidering how the success of these films is defined, now based upon the performances of these character actors, it follows that their importance in scholarly literature warranted consideration. Here too, in analyzing what the interviewees offered, the validity of this surfaced. To say, as Mr. LaLonde said, they should be looked at case by case, confirms this introductory phase my thesis serves as the grounded theory this work is laid upon. It's never been done before. Looking at some of the films of Arden, Coburn and Mitchell lays the groundwork for not only their contributions to their films, but for the hundreds of other character actors for their deserved place in scholarly literature. Mr. West pointed out how film is part of –

and reflects – America culture, as did Ms. McCord. To not study it, is to ignore it. To ignore it, is to erase some of history because it won't be there for others to learn.

Is it really necessary to write any more books about Cary Grant? Or, is it high time to investigate and discover information, important information, then write about it on the many other people who surrounded the Gables so successfully? By successfully, with pathos, as Mr. Kemper repetitiously offered. With humanness. With realism and believability? Researching and writing about this fills the gap in this literature; it fills the deficiency, as the interviewees all pointed out. To know that only two of the many sources researched – in the literature review phase of this work – referenced the contributions of these actors to the success of their films speaks to the fact this subject has been ignored. And the fact that one of these two sources was my own recently published book only validates the gap even more.

There are many connections to look for and many other sources to draw from to further this study and fill this deficiency. In acknowledging this topic's importance in scholarly work, the interviewee's corroborated my hypothesis on this deficiency and that it has a place in the academic world. As Mr. Roen said: "Everything is missing on this."

I have long maintained these character actors were second-billed but never second-rate. Nor did they give second-rate performances. While the publicity machines and big studios had their work to do in promoting the A-Listers, they clearly missed the mark – and opportunity to do so much more. Yes, it's been established the big names, the Gables, sold the tickets, but they weren't the people on screen that the people on the streets related to. In acknowledging my own desire to have lived during this era, is to say I relate to the character actors of these films. I wrote in my book, *I Only Quote from the Best –Revisiting Hollywood's Golden Age* – "I've always thought of character actor, Keenan Wynn, as an imaginary uncle who would buy me all the ice

cream I could eat (120),” Human connection is everything in perception between people. The furthest thing from second-rate are the Ardens, the Coburns, and the Mitchells of the silver screen. Arden really was wise-cracking. Coburn with his monocle was just that: Coburn with his monocle. And Thomas Mitchell was first-rate in every scene, in every film – from *Stagecoach* to his last film appearance in director Frank Capra’s, *Pocketful of Miracles*. It’s true: they don’t make them like this anymore.

As reference material in the A-Listers’ biographies, these particular actors provide subtext, at best. Like LaLonde said: what if it were the character actors upfront, getting the attention? The articles? The publicity? As it was established by many of the interviewees, a lot of importance should be placed on this topic in scholarly literature, these character actors and their contributions to their films, should be well-defined in academic writing. With so little – to nothing – found for this paper, this gives way to looking for more. And it certainly gives way to writing more. In Ms. Arden’s autobiography, she wrote: “Everything in this book is true. Not everything true is in this book! Not enough room!” Ms. Arden said it one way and Dr. Fitzgerald said it another by stating: “There’s a lot of room for this.” Its level of importance has been raised so it’s time to take up more room on the subject. Most certainly, as the person who, almost single-handedly, was responsible for getting live theatre into colleges, Charles Coburn well-deserves to take up some of this room. As does the first triple-crown winner of awards, Thomas Mitchell. Mr. Thompson said it was only one generation ago that these people lived and that this is doable. As both the researcher and a person most passionate about this subject, I believe it is long overdue.

Will the interest be there? Will there be readers, both academics and non-academics, who seek out more scholarly information on these contributors of storytelling? In turning the tide, I

would argue the more that is written, the more interest it will gain; the more people will see beyond the handsome Clark Gables and mesmerizing Elizabeth Taylors. Mr. Flynn mentioned it is because of merchandising that the gap in this literature exists. Ms. McCord stated, according to her father, no one recorded the stories of these character actors. While the tide cannot be reversed on the seventy-six years passed of merchandizing on the films of these actors, certainly the tide can be pushed in the direction of recording their stories. Mr. West was right: it is hard to dig into people's private lives. It is hard, but I don't believe it to be impossible. After all, I did interview Joan Crawford's grandson and Mr. West himself...the son of one my three research subjects.

My overall summation of these findings is first, that the interviewees' backgrounds lent themselves by experience, expertise, and/or having unique knowledge to participate in the research. Second, with their responses, the interviewees validated these character actors contributed on some level to the success of their films. By the majority of answers, the interviewees also supported the premise that these actors were second-billed but not second-rate. With the many references to additional character actors, especially in regard to what their leading co-stars, their films, and/or their directors would be without them, the research infers the same research premise could be applied to the many other character actors not found in scholarly literature. Third, the research premise of the existence of a gap in scholarly literature on this topic does exist. The interviewees' validation of this came in the form of identifying – by the large majority – that they know of no literature on this topic, on these character actors, except, perhaps, in reference form.

Further, I deduced consistent themes in many of the interviewees' responses: The character actors and their performances are defined as real; the majority of existing literature focuses on the films themselves and/or the A-Listers; the character actors perpetuated the stories

of their films; and the character actors were trusted. Another theme revealed is that Clark Gable is the reason many are interested the films in which he (and so many of the character actors) starred. Additionally, the publicity machines played a role what information was presented to the public. Finally, these character actors and their performances warrant scholarly literature and a place in academic study.

The three research questions of a) What do the character actor of this era contribute to the storytelling on their particular films, b) How was the overall success of some of the most popular and greatest films of all time ever considered without analyzing the value and influence of these character actors, and c) How do class film experts and scholars, publicists, and those possessing unique knowledge and/or expertise define overall success of these films as it pertains to the character actors' contributions, were all answered by the interviewees to the degree that I believe my point was argued successfully and my hypothesis was proven.

## Chapter V: Significance

*Life in the USA* is noted as “a complete guide to American Life for immigrants and Americans (lifeintheusa.com).” In its section, “Life in the USA-American Culture Hollywood,” it reads: “Before the age of television, going to the movies in the United States was a major social ritual. The American movie theater of the pre-television age was often a palace, an elaborate cathedral of family entertainment.”

Film director, Steven Spielberg, is described as: “Undoubtedly one of the most influential film personalities in the history of film, and is perhaps Hollywood's best known director and one of the wealthiest filmmakers in the world (internetmoviedatabase.com).” He has won 168 major film awards and been nominated an additional 150 times (internetmoviedatatbase.com). In a Youtube™ posted video clip by the American Film Institute titled “Steven Spielberg on the Importance of Studying Classic Films,” Spielberg stated that:

I come into contact with a lot of young people and I found that a lot know my films, really, even better than I do...but they don't know much beyond that. When I say what are your favorite films from the old days, from the black and white days, the 30s and 40s, I don't get a lot of answers that give me comfort. All of the movie masters learn from the 40s and 50s and 30s, and those from the 50s and 40s learned from the silent masters. So we are all handing influences down, and inspiring from generation to generation (2011).

Classic film study exists because film is part of America's culture. This research revealed it is valued, decade after decade, and film study research and analysis contributes to a greater understanding of eras, talent, and the dynamics of various time periods. This specific research was both necessary and significant to the validation of the contributions of character actors on the overall and lasting success in these films of Hollywood's Golden Age and identifying the need for it in scholarly literature. Perhaps it is best summed up in Robert Beverley Ray's book, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*:

The historical nature of American Cinema has made it uniquely vulnerable to influence. Innumerable other know figures (aside from the foreign A-Listers who were first to arrive in America) - character actors, cameramen, lighting technicians – arrived during the 1930s, bringing with them a montage and making the America style the closest thing to a truly international cinema (27).

In his autobiography, *Ernest Borgnine, My Autobiography*, Borgnine addressed what he believes an actor is supposed to do: “I believe showing emotions, showing that you have a heart. When you can make your audience – which includes your director – feel it too, you’re doing what an actor is supposed to do. What a person should do (151).” The significance this reflects as it pertains to this research is, as a character actor himself at one point in his career, Borgnine provided insight into the importance of emotional conveyance. As mentioned in some interviewees’ responses, these character actors achieved this. And, as Mr. Kemper stated, the heart of these actors is what’s missing in scholarly literature. Mr. Borgnine also wrote in his book that “They don’t make stars like that anymore (128).”

Some of the interviewees’ responses highlighted the significance of this topic in the context of this subject as untapped or unexplored. These statements were directly to the point of this research. Table 4. offers the participants’ names and the statement made reflecting this.

As many of the interviewees noted, the ‘world’ of the main actors would not have existed were it not for the character actors. Research and literature on these particular actors, Eve Arden, Charles Coburn, and Thomas Mitchell – and all the other characters actors mentioned and the many who were not – provide sources of information for others to study. It is more than acknowledgement. It is more than recognition of their presence in films of Hollywood’s Golden Age. The significance of this investigator’s research was to identify what these character actors contributed – that they contributed – to the overall and lasting success of their films as second-billed but not second-rate.



Table 4

## Interviewees' statements

Interviewee	Statement
Harry Flynn	"I think you're embarking on a cruise like Columbus [Christopher Columbus]."
Valerie Greenberg	"You're a pioneer."
Frank Thompson	"The subject is underserved."
Dora Fitzgerald	"I think that you're on to something."
Douglas Brooks West	"It's so important for scholars like you to research this. My mother would be very surprised that anyone would be writing, doing scholarly work, on her career."

Having the most intimate insight into any of the three character actors researched herein,

Mr. West, as Ms. Arden's daughter, best summed up the significance of this research. He stated:

I hope what you do preserves. Keep it up. Write hundreds of books about these people. I think it's a great thing. A hundred years from now, this will be the classic Greek literature. American film is at the heart of American culture and these people are the characters in *Oedipus*.

## Chapter VI: Conclusions and Recommendations

### Conclusions

After three-plus decades of watching and study classic film, this opportunity to research and write on the character actors of these films presented with it an obligation to remain as unbiased as possible. Marrying passion and academic writing presented a challenge, which was met with the desire to serve these people well. Passion fueled this research. This topic is important because of what classic films contribute to America's culture as a whole. Though this research is limited, it represents the start of placement of these character actors and their contributions in scholarly literature – and on a respectable level. By this, they are not merely reference material any longer.

This paper laid the ground work. Offering some background information on the era, on different components comprising the time of these films, provided a starting point. From character actors and the role of directors, to how music mattered and to what degree the studio publicity machines influenced lives, both on and off the screen, this peek into this time gone by of the big studio systems provided some perspective on how different it was then – and why these character actors didn't get the attention they deserved.

The purpose of this study was to learn what already existed in scholarly literature on the topic and what was missing. Being pretty certain little would be identified through research, a wide variety of informational sources were reviewed. In acknowledging the problem that the success of films was largely measured by box office earnings, this gave way to take a look into how else the success of these films could or should be defined, in relation to the performances of the character actors. As an example, the website, [boxofficemojo.com](http://boxofficemojo.com), offers dollar earning for films, both adjusted and unadjusted. For the 1939 film, *Gone With the Wind*, it shows an adjusted

gross of \$1,685,052,200.00 and an unadjusted gross of \$198,676,459.00 (2015). These numbers cannot speak to the identifiable patterns, attributions, or contributions of these actors' performances and their influence on the success of these classic films, nor as it relates to them as second-billed but not second-rate.

With 315 combined acting credits to their names combined, Eve Arden, Charles Coburn and Thomas Mitchell all gave audiences very real, very human, experiences because this is what they were both on and off screen. Through their brilliant performances, they helped audiences achieve what everyone in the movie business hopes for audiences: That viewers suspend their disbelief so they believe what they are seeing and hearing on screen. These three actors – and the hundreds of other character actors – greatly contributed to their films and on many levels.

To truly do this subject – and these actors – justice, the limitations of most of them being deceased hindered the prospect of gaining first-hand insight. In addition, the inability at the time of this study to access specific research sites and materials also placed limitations.

In the many resources reviewed, only two sources were identified, which validated the research point that these character actors contributed to the success of their films. These character actors were referenced at best and, in most cases, not mentioned at all. From this absence, I identified the deficiency or gap in scholarly literature on this topic and therefore sought to establish grounded theory with my research.

Interviewing twelve people with varied backgrounds, experience, expertise, and/or unique knowledge proved most valuable in this research. Gaining perspectives through interpretation of their responses provided for the analysis of this data, determination of findings, and ultimately validity for this research. Overall, the large majority agreed with the research

points: these actors did contribute to the success of their films, there exists a gap in the literature, and that these actors were second-billed, but not second-rate.

While 1939 was Hollywood's "Dream Year," so much more can be researched as to contributing factors that continue to make generation after generation clamor for more screenings of these films. With so much emphasis placed on the A-Listers, lost were the contributions of the great character actors of the era. With various sources naming this character actor and that character actor as the best in the business, they stop short of delving further into overall influence on the timelessness of their films.

In the blog devoted to classic film, [aurorasginjoint.com](http://aurorasginjoint.com), it is written, "The response we've gotten to the "What a Character!" Blog-a-thon for which this post is intended, shows how much the classic supporting actors are loved and admired. The fact is that without them, classic films would not be as great and memorable." With the Transformative World View, there comes an agenda to educate with this scholarly study on classic film, and to now change what has been the norm in categorizing – in defining – the "success" of any given classic film. It is the researcher's hope – and through continued efforts by the researcher – there will now be a transformation of thought from the character actors as supporting players to solid contributors, second-billed but not second-rate, to the overall and lasting success of their films

## **Recommendations**

With this research comes the provision of the significance and importance on the research topic. While the investigator focused on three particular character actors, many others were identified as contributors as well - as outlined in two of the Tables. On the whole, there are hundreds of others classic Hollywood character actors whose work and careers also warrant scholarly study, original research, and identifiable means for their contributions. Having

identified in the Limitations section of this paper the researcher's inability to research this topic at the Louis B. Mayer Library and the Museum of the Moving Image, the first recommendation is to continue research at these institutions. In addition, the New York Library was cited by Mr. Young as a source of good and valuable information on the topic.

Additionally, the researcher recommends scholarly study on this topic at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the UT Austin Archives, and a visit to the *Gone With the Wind Museum* located in Georgia. As Mr. Thompson suggested that Charles Coburn donated his Papers to the University of Athens, this is another prospective site at which to conduct scholarship. The investigator also suggests outreach to the film studios that existed during Hollywood's Golden Age which still exist today, for possible access to movie scripts, director's notes, inner-office communications, and other forms, which may provide evidence on this subject.

For other research, identifying retirement centers and or nursing homes that some of these actors may have resided in – or may still live in – could potentially prove valuable. Reviewing interviews and documentaries of these people may as well prove valuable to further study. Identifying and interviewing any living actors and/or family members – or people who worked with or for them in some capacity – from that era would provide a great deal of insight and information to add to scholarly literature on this topic. For this research, the investigator attempted to secure interviews with Turner Classic Movie hosts, Robert Osborne and Ben Mankiewicz, to no avail. The researcher recommends additional efforts to secure this. Ben Mankiewicz is also the grandson of screenwriter, Herman Mankiewicz, and the great nephew of director, Joseph L. Mankiewicz, both of Hollywood's Age of film. The researcher also asked

actress, Erica Slezak, daughter of Golden Age character actor, Walter Slezak, but received no reply. Continued attempts should be made to interview her.

The investigator also recommends the conduct of research at the Library of Congress and further pursuit of information in additional periodicals and collections as identified. Finally, a visit to the new Academy Museum located in Los Angeles may prove most critical to furthering this research. It contains an Academy Film Archive and the Margaret Herrick Library.

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## Appendices

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