



Lillian Ducey

Lived:

November 26, 1878 - December 9, 1952

Worked as:

director, screenwriter, title writer, writer

Worked In:

United States

by **Daniela Bajar, Livia Bloom**

“The skeptical may not believe it... Hundreds of directors may scoff—But—There is one director who is efficient—and without the aid of puttees. Introducing Lillian Ducey, directing *Youth Triumphant* for the newly formed Fisher Productions. Efficiency plus is said to be Miss Ducey’s middle name,” heralded the *Los Angeles Times* in reference to Ducey’s first job as a motion picture director in 1923 (III34). With silent star Anna Q. Nilsson in the lead role, *Youth Triumphant*, alternately titled *Enemies of Children*, was a melodrama about “a street waif of questionable parentage [who] is taken into a wealthy home,” according to *Variety*’s summary (26). Distributed by Mammoth Pictures and released on December 13, 1923, the black-and-white six-reeler was based on the 1921 novel by George Gibbs. The film was expected to be the first of many, and as the *Los Angeles Times* announced a few months later: “Mrs. Ducey’s next production will be an original story of her own” (II10). Yet despite these announcements of her directorial debut and the possibility of other films, Lillian Ducey’s only association with directing is a single feature. In this, she can be compared to other writers like [Frances Marion](#) and [Eugenie Magnus Ingleton](#) who had one opportunity to direct. However, unlike Marion and Ingleton, Ducey’s credit has not been verified. In the American Film Institute Catalog, Ducey is not even credited as the sole author of *Youth Triumphant*; John M. Voshell receives equal billing for both direction and adaptation. Ducey’s accomplishments as a women’s magazine writer, however, were remarkable by

any standards. She wrote for numerous publications and her work was everywhere on newsstands. According to *The Writer*, in one month, June of 1914, her stories appeared in six magazines: *Harper's Bazar* [sic], *Red Book*, *To-Day's Magazine*, *McCall's Magazine*, *Woman's Magazine*, and *Ladies' World* (104). Born in New York City in 1878, Ducey had no formal training as either writer or director. She began her career in 1910, at the age of thirty-two, when she entered seven pieces in a short-story contest held by the *New York Evening Telegram*. All of her entries were accepted, and despite her modesty when describing her work to the press, calling her stories "near-stories" and herself a "near-writer," Ducey quickly began to publish an impressive average of six stories and articles every month. Her byline appeared in national and local publications with stories like "Courting Millicent" (*The Cavalier*, 1911), "The Proposal" (*Young's Magazine*, 1912), "No Sentiment" (*National Magazine*, 1913), "Their Tongues" (*National Magazine*, 1914), "The God in the Box-Office" (*Romance*, 1915), "The Love Game" (*To-Day's Magazine*, 1917), and "The Worth of a Woman" (*Breezy Stories*, 1918). "For a year now her average receipts have been between \$300 and \$500 a month for her writing," gushed *The Writer* in 1914 (104).

Ducey wrote the story for her first film, *His Enemy, the Law*, in 1918. Her work was then singled out by Peter Milne in his *Motion Picture News* review of the film: "Lillian Ducey has provided a very human set of characters in her story and, being human in character and in deeds, they are always the center of attention" (3949). Ducey went on to write the Selznick productions *The Spite Bride* (1919) and *Upstairs and Down* (1919) for the celebrated silent actress Olive Thomas. She then worked with legendary director Eric von Stroheim, writing the titles for his directorial debut, *Blind Husbands* (1919). The film was hailed as a masterpiece. "Virtually a new angle on cinematic productions is provided by *Blind Husbands*," said Edwin Shallert in *The Los Angeles Times* (II 12). Von Stroheim himself agreed. As the *Atlanta Constitution* quoted him: "I am Stroheim. They call me the Satan of the screen ... I am the author and director and leading man in a photodrama which many people believe to be one of the best pictures of the year [and] the first picture I ever directed" (D6).

Ducey went on to collaborate with another renowned director-producer; her work for Allan Dwan included his films *The Scoffer* (1920) and *A Broken Doll* (1921). She also wrote Dwan's *In the Heart of a Fool* (1920), which starred Anna Q. Nilsson and presumably led to the actress's subsequent starring role in the single film Ducey directed, *Youth Triumphant*, in 1923. Deferential, Ducey would credit von Stroheim, Dwan, and director Maurice Touneur with her success (III34).

The sources of inspiration for Ducey's scripts were varied, and their influence was often seen as socially profound, as with *Lullaby* (1924), which the *Los Angeles Times* in a 1936 article reported came from a three-line newspaper story that described how the State of New York would take over the care of a baby after the execution of its mother for murder. After this case, the article went on, other states arranged to take over the foster care responsibilities for other children who were orphaned in this way (C1). Ducey frequently explored themes of questionable parentage and adoption, for instance, in *In the Heart of a Fool* (1920), *The Lullaby* (1924), and *Enemies of Children* (1923); battered or crippled children in *The Scoffer* (1920) and *A Broken Doll* (1921); and broken or conflicted families in *The Captain of His Soul* (1918) and *His Enemy, The Law* (1918).

A group of melodramas brought Ducey's career in screenwriting to a close, corresponding with the end of the silent era: *The Warning* (1927), *Behind Closed Doors* (1929), *The Devil's Apple Tree* (1929), and *The Climax* (1930). The last, a tale of romance and opera in which the heroine's voice is first lost and then regained, was the only film that she wrote to have been released in a sound as well as a silent version. She is not known to have been credited on films after 1930, and her literary star seems to have faded as well. Neither did she fulfill the *Los Angeles Times*'s expectations of a longer run as the "Efficiency Plus" female film director (III34).

Bibliography

Ducey, Lillian. "Their Tongues." *National Magazine* vol. 40 (1914): 417-421.

"Enemies of Children." Rev. *Variety* (20 Dec. 1923): 26.

"Fisher Plans Expansion." *Los Angeles Times* (19 June 1923): II10.

Kingsley, Grace. "Plots Inspired in Odd Surroundings." *Los Angeles Times* (13 Sept. 1936): C1, C3.

Milne, Peter. "His Enemy, the Law." Rev. *Motion Picture News* (20 June 1918): 3949.

Schallert, Edwin. "Drama: 'Blind Husbands.'" *Los Angeles Times* (22 Dec. 1919): II12.

"Stars and Stories of the Film World: Stroheim, 'Satan of Screen,' Comes to Tudor This Week, Stars in 'Blind Husbands.'" *The Atlanta Constitution* (23 Nov. 1919): D6.

"Woman Director Efficiency Plus." *Los Angeles Times* (29 April 1923): III34.

"Writers of the Day." *The Writer: A Monthly Magazine for Literary Workers* Vol. XXVI. (January/December 1914): 104.

Filmography

A. Archival Filmography: Extant Film Titles:

1. Lillian Ducey as Screenwriter

Blind Husbands. Dir.: Erich von Stroheim, sc.: Erich von Stroheim, ttl: Lillian Ducey (Universal Film Manufacturing Company US 1919) cas.: Sam de Grasse, Francelia Billington, Erich von Stroheim si, b&w. Archive: [Cineteca Nazionale \[ITN\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [Österreichisches Filmmuseum \[ATM\]](#), [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#), [Cinémathèque Québécoise \[CAQ\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [Filmoteca Española \[ESM\]](#), [Library and Archives Canada \[CAO\]](#), [Museo Nazionale del Cinema \[ITT\]](#), [National Film and Sound Archive of Australia \[AUC\]](#).

The Spite Bride. Dir.: Charles Giblyn, sc.: Lillian Ducey (Selznick Pictures Corp. US 1919) cas.: Olive Thomas, Robert Ellis, Jack Mulhall si, b&w. Archive: [Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée \[FRB\]](#).

In the Heart of a Fool. Dir.: Allan Dwan, sc.: Lillian Ducey (Mayflower Photoplay Corp. US 1920) cas.: James Kirkwood, Anna Q. Nilsson, Mary Thurman, Philo McCullough si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

A Broken Doll. Dir.: Allan Dwan, sc.: Allan Dwan, adaptation: Lillian Ducey (Allan Dwan Productions US 1921) cas.: Monte Blue, Mary Thurman, Mary Jane Irving, Les Bates si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

B. Filmography: Non-Extant Film Titles:

1. Lillian Ducey as Director

Youth Triumphant/Enemies of Children, 1923.

2. Lillian Ducey as Screenwriter

Captain of His Soul, 1918; *His Enemy, the Law*, 1918; *Upstairs and Down*, 1919; *The Scoffer*, 1920; *The Lullaby*, 1924; *The Warning*, 1927; *Behind Closed Doors*, 1929; *The Devil's Apple Tree*, 1929; *The Climax*, 1930 (silent and sound versions).

D. Streamed Media:

[Blind Husbands](#) (1919) is streaming online via Kanopy

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Libraries, 2013. <<https://wfpp-test.cul.columbia.edu/pioneer/ccp-lillian-ducey/>>