



Ouida Bergère

Also Known As:

Eulalia Bergère, Ida Bergère, Mrs. George Fitzmaurice, Mrs. Basil Rathbone

Lived:

December 14, 1885 - November 29, 1974

Worked as:

adapter, film actress, scenario editor, screenwriter

Worked In:

United States

by Laura Jacquelyn Simmons

Ouida Bergère was perhaps best known in the film industry as Mrs. Basil Rathbone and party hostess extraordinaire. However, before her marriage, to Rathbone, Bergère was a prominent and top paid scenario writer. Bergère was born in Spain, but moved to the US at the age of six. Her father was French-Spanish and her mother, British (Lowrey 1920, 22). There is some conflicting information regarding her birth name; most sources claim she was born Ida Bergère, others Eulalia Bergère. Regardless, upon entering the film industry, she changed her name to Ouida.

Bergère began her film career by serving as scenario editor and actress for Pathé Freres, eventually writing her own scripts and branching out to other companies, including Vitagraph and Famous Players-Lasky, according to the *New York Dramatic Mirror* in 1915 (24). Much of Bergère's screenwriting career coincides with the career of her second husband, George Fitzmaurice, to whom she was married before Rathbone. She met Fitzmaurice after she started her screenwriting career, and after their marriage, he directed almost all of the films she wrote. As is the case with the many Hollywood marriages, Bergère's relationship to Fitzmaurice must be considered when discussing her career, and, typically, because her career was so closely linked to that of Fitzmaurice, there is confusion about their credits. She very well might have had her hand in directing some of the films that have been credited to him, as was the case with other couples such as actress [Alice Terry](#) and director Rex Ingram. Conversely, Ouida Bergère is assumed to have been the screenwriter, simply because Fitzmaurice directed, as in *Cytherea* (1924), which is credited to her in her *New York Times* obituary although not elsewhere (83). The exact dynamics of husband-wife teams working in the industry are now difficult to assess, but we now look to clues such as the article on the production of *The Cheat* (1923)—a remake of DeMille's 1915 film—in the *Morning Telegraph* where it is mentioned that, as always, Bergère would be present during

shooting (5). In another *Morning Telegraph* article, Bergère claims to have directed several scenes, explaining to the reporter that “Once when Mr. Fitzmaurice, my husband, was ill, I directed ever so many scenes in a picture on which he was working” (2).

We receive some insight into Bergère’s idea of scenario writing in Dorothy Day’s 1924 article, strangely titled “Ouida Bergère Wants to be Barriesque,” perhaps a reference to British writer J. M. Barrie, author of “Peter Pan.” By “Barriesque” is meant working with the director to develop “a simple and life-like story” (2). Bergère’s desire to move in a new direction may reflect the lukewarm reviews that the popular and trade press gave of her stories. Most of her scenarios were adaptations from stage or novel and were generally accepted as standard, but not exceptional film fare. The films for which she wrote story and scenario, such as *The Hillcrest Mystery* (1918) and *The Profiteers* (1919), were criticized as unoriginal. By 1924, near the end of a productive career, Bergère was best known for her flamboyant style and exotic stories, as Day argues, rather than for simple stories. Critically, Bergère’s stories succeeded the most when the extravagance of the narrative matched that of the production values for which George Fitzmaurice was known, as in *Arms and the Woman* (1916), which was referred to as “uncommonly interesting” and a “smashing dramatic” by *Variety* (29). She wrote mostly dramas, with just two known comedies, *More Trouble* (1918) and *Three Live Ghosts* (1922). Her dramas tended to be high in action, centering on war, crime, drugs, and social issues, typically with a romantic subplot. One of her best-known films is a remake of Cecil B. DeMille’s 1915 film *The Cheat* (1923), starring Pola Negri in one of her first roles. Some of her extant crime dramas are *Idols of Clay* (1920), *Kick In* (1923), and *The Man From Home* (1922), all collaborations with George Fitzmaurice. The fact that they were all distributed by Famous Players-Lasky–Paramount Pictures, the biggest of the US production-distribution companies in those years, may explain their survival.

Despite her status in the field and the top salary she was receiving as a scenarist, Bergère gave up most of her career ambitions after she divorced Fitzmaurice and, at forty-one, married Rathbone in 1926. An article in the *New York Post* in 1964, titled “At Home with Mrs. Basil Rathbone,” reports that she stayed “at home” so that she could guide his career as well as raise their family.

See also: [Alice Terry](#).

Bibliography

“Arms and the Woman.” Rev. *Variety* (10 Nov. 1916): 29.

“The Cheat.” Rev. *The New York Times* (27 Aug. 1923): 14.

Day, Dorothy. “Ouida Bergère Wants to be Barriesque.” *Morning Telegraph* (13 July 1924): 2.

“Fitzmaurice to Direct ‘The Cheat.’” *Morning Telegraph* (24 Dec. 1922): 5.

“George Fitzmaurice-Ouida Bergère Join in New Deal with Famous Players-Lasky.” *Moving Picture World* (28 Feb. 1920): 1490.

Murphy, Agnes. "At Home With Mrs. Basil Rathbone." *The New York Post* (17 May 1964): 45.

"Ouida Bergere Rathbone Dies; Dramatist Was Actor's Widow." Obit. *The New York Times* (1 Dec. 1974): 83.

"Woman Heads Company. Ouida Bergere, Former Pathé Scenario Editor, to Manage Film Company." *The New York Dramatic Mirror* (17 Feb. 1915): 24.

"Work on Elsie Ferguson Photoplays Establishes Ouida Bergère as One of Foremost Scenario Writers." *Moving Picture World* (13 Sept. 1919): 1652.

Archival Paper Collections:

Gloria Swanson papers. [University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ransom Center](#).

Ouida Bergère clippings file. [Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Margaret Herrick Library](#).

Ouida Bergère clippings file. [New York Public Library, Billy Rose Theatre Division](#).

Reminiscences of Basil Rathbone. February, 1959. [Columbia University, Rare Book and Manuscript Library](#).

Filmography

A. Archival Filmography: Extant Film Titles:

1. Ouida Bergère as Screenwriter

Via Wireless. Dir.: George Fitzmaurice, sc.: Ouida Bergère (Pathé Exchange, Inc. US 1915) cas.: Gail Kane, Bruce McRae, si, b&w, 5 reels. Archive: [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#).

The On-the-Square-Girl (Fifth Avenue). Dir.: George Fitzmaurice, sc.: Ouida Bergère (Astra Film Corp. US 1917) cas.: Mollie King, L. Rogers Lytton, si, b&w, 5 reels. Archive: [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

The Witness for the Defense. Dir.: George Fitzmaurice, sc.: Ouida Bergère (Famous Players-Lasky, Corp. US 1919) cas.: Elsie Ferguson, si, b&w, 5 reels. Archive: [Gosfilmfond of Russia \[RUR\]](#).

Idols of Clay. Dir.: George Fitzmaurice, sc./st.: Ouida Bergère (Famous Players-Lasky Corp. US 1920) cas.: Mae Murray, David Powell, si, b&w, 7 reels; 7,230 ft. Archive: [Gosfilmfond of Russia \[RUR\]](#).

Right to Love. Dir.: George Fitzmaurice, sc.: Ouida Bergère (Famous Players-Lasky Corp. US 1920) cas.: Mae Murray, Holmes Herbert, si, b&w, 7 reels; 6,661 ft. Archive: [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#).

Kick In. Dir.: George Fitzmaurice, sc./adp.: Ouida Bergère (Famous Players-Lasky US 1923) cas.: Betty Compson, Bert Lytell, si, b&w, 7 reels; 7,074 ft. Archive: [Gosfilmofond of Russia \[RUR\]](#).

The Man From Home. Dir.: George Fitzmaurice, sc.: Ouida Bergère (Famous Players-Lasky US 1922) cas.: James Kirkwood, Anna Q. Nilsson, si, b&w, 7 reels; 6,895 ft. Archive: [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#).

Three Live Ghosts. Dir.: George Fitzmaurice, sc.: Ouida Bergère (Famous Players-Lasky US 1922) cas.: Anna Q. Nilsson, Norman Kerry, si, b&w, 6 reels; 5,784 ft. Archive: [Gosfilmofond of Russia \[RUR\]](#).

Bella Donna. Dir.: George Fitzmaurice, sc.: Ouida Bergère (Famous Players-Lasky Corp. US 1923) cas.: Pola Negri, si, b&w, 8 reels; 7,895-7,903 ft. Archive: [Gosfilmofond of Russia \[RUR\]](#), [Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique \[BEB\]](#).

Six Days. Dir.: Charles Brabin, aut. Elinor Glyn, adp.: Ouida Bergère (Goldwyn Pictures US 1923) cas.: Corinne Griffith, Frank Mayo, Myrtle Stedman, si, b&w, 9 reels, 8,010 ft. Archive: [Lobster Films \[FRL\]](#).

The Love of Sunya. Dir.: Albert Parker, sc.: Ouida Bergère, Earle Browne (Swanson Producing Corp. US 1927) cas.: Gloria Swanson, John Boles, si, b&w, 8 reels; 7,311ft. Archive: [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#), [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

B. Filmography: Non-Extant Film Titles:

1. Ouida Bergère as Screenwriter

At Bay, 1915; *Esterbrook Case*, 1915; *Wasted Lives*, 1915; *Arms and the Woman*, 1916; *Big Jim Garrity*, 1916; *New York*, 1916; *The Romantic Journey*, 1916; *Virtue Triumphant*, 1916; *The Iron Heart*, 1917; *Kick In*, 1917; *The Hillcrest Mystery*, 1918; *Innocent*, 1918; *A Japanese Nightingale*, 1918; *More Trouble*, 1918; *The Narrow Path*, 1918; *The Avalanche*, 1919; *The Broken Melody*, 1919; *Common Clay*, 1919; *Counterfeit*, 1919; *The Country Cousin*, 1919; 1919; *Cry of the Weak*, 1919; *Our Better Selves*, 1919; *The Profiteers*, 1919; *The Root of Evil*, 1919 ; *A Society Exile*, 1919; *His Wife's Money*, 1920; *On with the Dance*, 1920; *Forever*, 1921; *Paying the Piper*, 1921; *Peacock Alley*, 1922; *To Have and to Hold*, 1922; *The Cheat*, 1923; *The Rustle of Silk*, 1923; *Eternal City*, 1924.

2. Ouida Bergère as Actress

Getting Even, 1912; *Mates and Mis-mates*, 1912.

Credit Report

While credits were collected using AFI, FIAF, Spehr and Braff's *Short Films Working Papers* and *Universal Silents*, some inconsistencies remain. Braff lists Ouida Bergère as an actress in *Getting Even* and *Mates and Mismates* (both 1912), though Spehr does not. AFI lists Bergère as scenario writer and casting director on *At Bay* (1915), however, Spehr does not list her as working on the film. AFI only gives [Frances Marion](#) an adaptation credit for *Cytherea*, however, other sources, such as Sharon Smith's *Women Who Make Movies*, gives scenario credit to Bergère. The author of this article claims Bergère helped with writing *The Loves of Sunya*, however, no source (including [Gloria Swanson](#)'s autobiography) can confirm this claim.

Citation

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