This is the case of one writer, working in a field less familiar to us. The paradigm of practice was different in the British film of the 1920s, and it was changing, which presented problems for a screenwriter who had opinions about good screenwriting. Intellectual debate over film principles led to strong views, but tensions in practice had particular consequences.

In the early 1920s, Cecil Hepworth’s company were working with an ‘alternative representational system to that of classical American cinema’ (Higson 1995, 48), which Christine Gledhill calls a ‘pictorial-theatrical-narrative’ paradigm (2003, 3). Gledhill’s account then describes the development of ‘pictorialism modernised’ into a richer, more mosaic-like sense of impressions, and a type of montage she calls ‘flicker-book’ montage. We might also consider the shot-based montage approach, as exemplified by Anthony Asquith’s work, and the very different scene-based approach of early sound films (as in Atlantic, 1928), presaging the arrival of Hollywood practices (see also Bordwell 1985, 178–93). All of these paradigms looked different on screen, which has implications for their construction, and for the work of the individual screenwriter.

**Eliot Stannard (1888–1944)**

Eliot Stannard was Alfred Hitchcock’s first major screenwriter, and was probably the most prolific, perhaps most successful British screenwriter in the silent era. His career closely follows the ‘second wave’ of screenwriting practice during the 1910s and 1920s, lasting through the industry slump of 1924 into the ‘third wave’, when his association with Hitch ended, abruptly and mysteriously. He wrote at least 167 films (including series episodes) between 1914 and 1933, all but four of them silent films; at least 85% of them were adaptations.¹

Stannard was brought up in a family where writing and drama, hard work, liberal social values and self-belief were valued. That Stannard was later attracted to writing photoplays is not surprising, and neither was it strange

---

that he turned out so many, so fast. His mother Henrietta was a novelist who had written since the age of 14 and, under the pseudonym of John Strange Winter, wrote over 100 popular novels until her death in 1911. She married Arthur Stannard, a civil engineer who had worked on railway-building projects, in 1883; and in 1885 her novel ‘Bootles Baby: a story of the Scarlet Lancers’ first appeared in The Graphic. Two million copies were sold within ten years of its first publication; it was filmed as a short in the US in 1910 and in the UK in 1914. Henrietta was both successful and hard-working. The first woman novelist to be elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, and the first President of the Writers Club (1892), and of the Society of Women Journalists (1901–03), Henrietta took up causes such as anti-vivisection and the Anti-Crinoline League; held charity soirees at which she sang; helped her husband set up one of the first golf courses in France in 1897; and invented prize-winning toiletries (a hobby which became a necessary source of income for the family in the 1900s, after the publishers of her periodical Winter's Weekly went bankrupt).

Eliot, known as ‘Bootles’ to his family, grew up in London and in Dieppe, where the family lived from 1896 to 1901, initially for reasons of Arthur Stannard’s health. He claimed later to have been a journalist and fiction writer before joining the film industry, and to have worked as ‘actor, stage-manager [i.e. director], art-expert, film cutter and producer’ before acquiring ‘a complete mastery of screen-technic [sic] and then [devoting] himself exclusively to writing scenarios’ (1920, 3) from 1914.

Stannard’s first films were a series of shorts at British and Colonial for director Maurice Elvey, and for Elvey’s regular actors Elisabeth Risdon and A. V. Bramble. Stannard also wrote feature-length adaptations of plays by Charles Darrell: The Idol of Paris (1914) and Her Luck in London (1914). His mother’s stories came in useful for the shorts Beautiful Jim (1914) and Grip (1915), and the features Jimmy (1916) and Goodbye (1918). By 1917, Stannard was working not just for B&C but for Ideal as well as Butchers. By the early 1920s, he was very much in demand, and he responded with energy. In 1923 alone, he wrote nine feature-length films and three series of half-hour two-reelers totalling 24 episodes – 33 titles released in one year – for Stoll, Welsh-Pearson, Graham-Wilcox, Granger-Binger and Anglia as well as B&C and Ideal. If this seems near-impossible, Ideal Films’ Harry Rowson later recalled that in 1915 Stannard had read a biography of Florence Nightingale and prepared ‘a lay-out for a scenario which, to me, seemed to cover every worth-while cinematic incident’, in about six hours from around 5 pm to ‘after the theatre’ the same evening (1951, 61). Stannard both responded to, and suggested, ideas for new films; producer-director George Pearson recalls he suggested the character of ‘Squibs’ for Pearson’s newest actor, Betty Balfour.

Stannard worked with over 40 directors in his career, most on just one occasion. A freelance, probably from at least 1917, he also had regular