THE NEEDLE AND THE DAMAGE DONE

Circle of friends: Tracy Tynan with her father, the playwright and theatre critic Kenneth, who had a few cinematic heavyweights in his glittering crowd

WEAR AND TEAR

The Threads of My Life

By Tracy Tynan, Duckworth Overlook, 320pp, ISBN 9780715651506

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

"Costume design enabled me to combine many of my interests: I was part artist, part historian, part shrink, part nanny, and part accountant." Tracy Tynan's description of her Hollywood career may seem disappointingly pragmatic, but the daughter of writers Kenneth Tynan and Elaine Dundy has no illusions about the glamour of showbiz. As this engrossing memoir reveals, her parents were as self-destructive and neglectful as they were well-connected and wealthy. After an unhappy youth in London and New York in the company of artists and intellectuals, Tynan was unlikely to have her head turned by celebrity, or the prestige of a Hollywood set, as an adult. Being the child of addicts and adulterers was detrimental enough to Tynan's well-being, but in her teens she was also condemned to a special kind of discomfort once her father was known to all her peers, and boarding-school teachers, as the first person to say 'fuck' on TV.

A theatre critic and playwright, Kenneth Tynan also had some cinematic heavyweights in his glittering circle. He became friendly with Roman Polanski, for example, after working on the screenplay of his *Macbeth* (1971). One grim anecdote has Polanski, between camera setups during the production of *What?* (1972) on the Amalfi Coast, insisting that the 19-year-old Tracy Tynan clamber on his shoulders while he went waterskiing. Two years later, as a favour to her father, screenwriter George Axelrod and his wife Joan arranged a spectacularly misjudged 21st-birthday treat for Tynan: a private screening of their friend Sammy Davis Jr's personal print of *Deep Throat* (1972). In both cases, Tynan's mortification is palpable, and has barely abated with time: all such tales are related in unflinching detail, but without recriminations.

This autobiography covers many chaotic and emotionally devastating scenes (she describes her parents' marriage as "a horror movie, scary but riveting"), but is narrated in a rational, candid tone, and organised, almost compartmentalised, into chapters devoted to memorable garments: from her Las Vegas wedding dress to her film costumes and a pink woollen hat worn by her daughter after a premature birth. Film may be second to fashion in Tynan's list of passions but she is certainly a cinephile, who counts Bernardo Bertolucci as a friend and bonded with boyfriends over a mutual love of not just John Ford and Howard Hawks, but Andrew Sarris's *The American Cinema*, the volume that enshrined them as film deities. Her interest was practical too: after ditching an early ambition to become a ceramicist, Tynan took a filmmaking class at UCLA overseen by her aunt Shirley Clarke, the director of *Portrait of Jason* (1967). It can't be denied, however, that it was Tynan's eye for fashion that led to her sole directorial credit, *A Great Bunch of Girls* (1979). Captivated by the blue-and-white uniforms of the Dallas Cowboys cheerleaders, she made a documentary about the squad's audition process – it is disappointing that the production is mentioned here only fleetingly.

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It was after she married the film director Jim McBride that Tynan made her first foray into costume design and her film career began in earnest. Having witnessed the casting process for *Breathless*, McBride's 1983 update of *A bout de souffle* (she favoured Isabelle Huppert for the female lead: the part went to Valérie Kaprisky), Tynan was drafted in to assist costume designer Allen Highfill, who was having difficulties with the director's 'good bad taste' aesthetic. Tynan's role was to mediate between Highfill and McBride, and – what would become a crucial skill for her – to provide workable solutions to the problems arising from impossible demands and a small budget.

Tynan describes her experience on *Breathless* as "a crash course in film costume design", and the most valuable sections of *Wear and Tear* comprise the lessons she continued to learn about her trade. Tynan explains the need to make several copies of each garment, either because the original is a vintage piece, or because funds won't stretch to multiple purchases. She explains how wardrobe must contribute to the director's overall aesthetic, and express both the character's personality and likely shopping budget – but it must also complement set design in the most basic ways (she uses the example of an actor wearing blue and sitting on a blue sofa: Tynan suggests offering the production designer a throw rug). Some colours simply don't work well on camera – hence, white Betsey Johnson slip dresses were dyed pink for *Breathless*, with variable results. Occasionally stars would refuse their costumes and cause a backstage meltdown, incurring further costs, but others could be more accommodating. Divine ("the sweetest, funniest person"), happily wore his own bespoke suits on *Trouble in Mind* (1985). Dressing a low-budget period film such as the 50s-set *Strangers Kiss* (1983) offered its own challenges, but Tynan obviously relishes hunting down a vintage bargain or a one-off boutique piece, such as the crepe-de-chine wedding dress worn by Ellen Barkin in *The Big Easy* (1986).

Towards the end of *Wear and Tear*, Tynan is frank about the Hollywood ageism that nudged her out of the profession, and enthuses about the work she now does for the non-profit organisation The Glamour Project, which provides makeover treats for women in difficult circumstances. She reveals that her favourite everyday fashion choices are camouflage, hoodies and a utilitarian cross-body bag, though she buys the latter from Coach, the brand co-founded by Hollywood costumier Bonnie Cashin, who dressed Gene Tierney in *Laura* (1944).

Touchingly, Tynan can be susceptible to a glimmer of Hollywood starshine on occasion. After wrapping *Breathless*, she kept one of Richard Gere's reproduction 1950s 'shirt-jacs' as a souvenir. "It looks just like a regular vintage shirt," she writes, "but I know it's a fake and has lived many lifetimes, and that a movie star wore it on a movie directed by my husband."

WILLIAM FAULKNER AT TWENTIETH CENTURY-FOX

The Annotated Screenplays

Edited by Sarah Gleeson-White, Oxford University Press, 968pp, ISBN 9780190274184

Reviewed by Jonathan Rosenbaum

We know that Faulkner was no cinephile, but it's less known that he referenced Sergei Eisenstein in his 1939 novel *The Wild Palms* (aka *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*) and cited *Citizen Kane* (1941) and *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) as two of his favourite films (along with *High Noon*, 1952) in a 1958 interview. One also can't read the present-tense opening of *Light in August* without noting its cinematic immediacy, which suggests that consciously or not, Faulkner learned a lot from the movies.

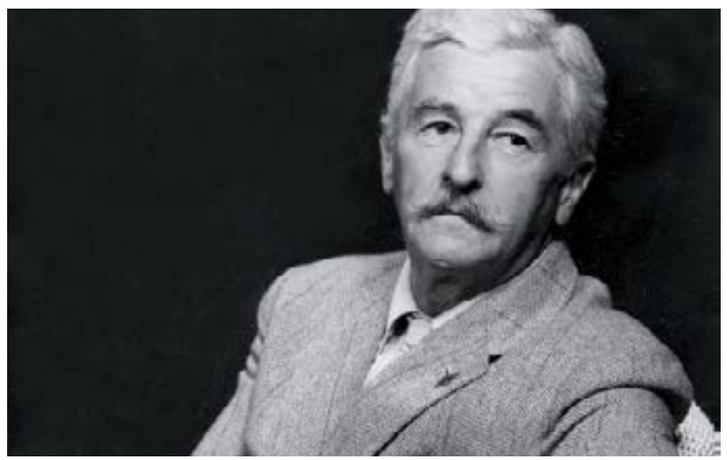
Yet when it comes to his screenwriting, it's closer to alienated assembly-line labour than any significant form of self-expression. Editor Sarah Gleeson-White, a Sydney-based literary scholar, is well aware of this problem, beginning her introduction with contradictory statements from Faulkner about how seriously he took this work (both of which, unsurprisingly, sound perfectly sincere) while noting that he wrote around 50 Hollywood screenplays between 1932 and 1954. That Faulkner was fully capable of working simultaneously on both his novel *Absalom, Absalom!* and Howard Hawks's *The Road to Glory* (1936) is also duly noted. But Gleeson-White's ambivalence about what actually constitutes screen authorship is reflected in the fact that several photographs in her commentaries are devoted to Faulkner's Fox collaborators and none at all to Faulkner himself. And most of these commentaries are devoted to distinctions between successive script drafts, fewer comparing the drafts with the finished films.

Both William Faulkner and Howard Hawks were doom-ridden romantic fatalists deeply marked by World War I

Even in Faulkner's work for Hawks and John Ford – including four of the six scripts gathered here, all co-written by others, only one of which (*The Road to Glory*) assigned Faulkner a screen credit – one feels that the most relevant auteur often turns out to be Fox studio head Darryl F. Zanuck. This is clearly true of *The Road to Glory*, where the assignment was to find ways to incorporate stock battle footage from Raymond Bernard's *Wooden Crosses* (1932) while further developing a love triangle that was added to the plot at Zanuck's request well before Joel Sayre and then Faulkner were brought on to the project. (The other Hawks script here, *The Left Hand of God*, was eventually directed by Edward Dmytryk and credited to Alfred Hayes.)

Hawks was a good friend, responsible for first bringing Faulkner to Hollywood, having been a fan of his work ever since his first novel, and using him initially as a World War I specialist. (Both men were doom-ridden romantic fatalists deeply marked by that war, even though neither saw overseas combat.) By contrast, as Gleeson-White points out, there is reason to doubt whether Faulkner ever met Ford, for whom he co-scripted the potboiler *Submarine Patrol* (1938) as well as Ford's first Technicolor feature, *Drums Along the Mohawk* (1939). (As with *The Road to Glory*, there are some thematic parallels in the latter film with Faulkner's fiction, but not especially illuminating ones.)

The other screenplays here are for John Cromwell's *Banjo on My Knee* (1936) and Tay Garnett's *Slave Ship* (1937). All six scripts, annotations and all, are useful to have, even if they aren't much fun to read and ultimately teach us more about Hollywood than about Faulkner. What he contributed to them was probably helpful, but other hacks could have done the same.



Hack work: William Faulkner wrote around 50 Hollywood screenplays between 1932 and 1954