When the movie business adopted some of the ways of other big industries in 1920s America, women—who had been essential to the industry's early development—were systematically squeezed out of key behind-the-camera roles. Yet, as female producers and directors virtually disappeared for decades, a number of female film editors remained and rose to the top of their profession, sometimes wielding great power and influence. Their example inspired a later generation of women to enter the profession at mid-century, several of whom were critical to revolutionizing filmmaking in the 1960s and 1970s with contributions to such classics as *Bonnie and Clyde, Jaws* and *Raging Bull*. Focusing on nine of these women and presenting shorter glimpses of nine others, this book tells their captivating personal stories and examines their professional achievements.

A lifelong student of films, DAVID MEUEL has also published more than 100 poems, numerous short stories, and hundreds of articles on subjects ranging from theater to U.S. national parks, to writing and speaking for business. He lives in Menlo Park, California.

Front cover: Anne Bauchens, first female film editor both to be nominated for and to win an Academy Award (Paramount Pictures); background © 2016 iStock

McFarland

MEUEL Women Film Editors

WOMEN FILM EDITORS

Unseen Artists of American Cinema

DAVID MEUEL

 by DAVID MEUEL

changed the way people approached and made films. And Fields was all of the above. In addition, she was that rarest of editors, male or female: a household name who brings attention and recognition to a profession that has always been under-appreciated—the editing "rock star." Today, the only editors who even come close in this category are Thelma Schoonmaker (mostly for her work with Martin Scorsese) and Michael Kahn (mostly for his work with Steven Spielberg).

Viewed in this light, Fields was not only the "mother cutter" to a trio of emerging film directors in the early 1970s but also a "mother cutter" to all those, male as well as female, who followed—and continue to follow—her into the editing profession. In her work with Peter Bogdanovich, George Lucas, and Steven Spielberg, she helped to forge a dominant new editing style that led to the revitalization of U.S. studio filmmaking in the 1970s and the emergence of the "New Hollywood." Her influence has been pervasive and lasting, and, while most of today's film editors might be hesitant to call Fields their "mother cutter," a bit of her professional DNA resides somewhere within each of them.

8

Making the Most of Her Moments

The Ever-Adaptable and Always Adventurous Anne V. Coates

There is a moment early on in David Lean's great film *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) that gives nearly every first-time viewer a tremendous jolt. The main character, T. E. Lawrence (Peter O'Toole), is chatting in a stately government room in Cairo with a world-weary British diplomat named Dryden (Claude Rains). Lawrence, a young British Army officer, has just been assigned to go to Arabia and make contact with an important Arab leader, Prince Faisal. He is excited and talks about the "fun" he will have on this adventure. Dryden cautions him, saying that the desert is a hostile "furnace" where only Bedouins and gods have fun and that Lawrence is neither. As they talk, Dryden selects a cigar and puts it in his mouth. Lawrence strikes a match, lights the cigar for Dryden, and then—as the picture cuts to a close shot on the match—lets it burn down a bit as he watches in fascination. After a long, curious pause, he blows it out. Then—from this intimate shot—the image suddenly (almost shockingly) cuts to another light: the sun beginning to rise amid the vast, starkly beautiful expanse of the Arabian Desert.

When seen in a theater on a 70-millimeter screen, the experience is nothing less than mesmerizing. It is one of those moments that nearly everyone, even decades after seeing the film, remembers. Steven Spielberg has said that the moment "blew me away."[1] And film writer Ian Jefferys has called it both "the most famous of edits" and "one of the most recognizable and celebrated cuts in the history of cinema."[2]

Ironically, this "most famous of edits" wasn't supposed to be a cut.

As Anne V. Coates (1925–), then a young editor working with Lean on the film, later recalled: "It was in the script as a dissolve, but we saw it cut together before we had the optical delivered. We looked at the job and said, 'My God, it worked fantastic…!' I literally took two frames off of the outgoing scene and that's the way it is today."[3]

Although Coates, with characteristic modesty, has also praised Lean's astuteness, others have given her much—if not most—of the credit for this "Eureka" moment. At the time, the traditional editing techniques to show major changes of time and place were either dissolves or fades. Since the earliest days of the movies, this was the visual grammar that audiences understood. But, starting in the late 1950s, younger filmmakers such as the French New Wave directors began to change all of this. One of their strategies was to employ new, more jolting editing techniques, which at the time seemed quite radical. And one of these techniques was to substitute strong, sudden, emphatic cuts in places where fades or dissolves would traditionally have gone. The intent was to startle audiences, put them on edge, shake them out of their complacency. By 1962, Coates, then a big fan of New Wave films, was clearly aware of the power of these techniques. Seeing the sharp, sudden cut between the extinguished match and the desert sunrise, she immediately recognized its value. In its place, a dissolve would have been slower, less emphatic, and ultimately weaker. It would still have been dramatic, but it would have lacked a cut's sharp, sudden, unexpected impact. If Steven Spielberg had seen a dissolve instead, he might have still been impressed, but the transition probably wouldn't—to paraphrase his words—have blown his mind.

Seeing and then seizing opportunities in moments such as this—opportunities others might easily overlook—has been a behavior that has served Anne Coates well throughout her long and extremely productive career as a film editor first in her native England and then in the U.S.

Throughout her work, examples abound. In addition to "the cut," *Lawrence of Arabia* alone is filled with great cinematic moments made better by Coates' excellent sense of rhythm and composition: the motorcycle ride that begins the film, the scene when Lawrence says "No prisoners" and then proceeds to slaughter a small group of opposing fighters, the attack on the city of Aqaba. The very moving 1980 drama *The Elephant Man* includes a scene when the title character goes to the theater and we see, through his eyes, a beautifully conceived, dreamlike montage of dancers. The 1993 thriller *In the Line of Fire* features a series of brilliantly crafted "cat-and-mouse" phone conversations between John Malkovich's would-be presidential assassin and Clint Eastwood's anxious Secret Service agent.

The off-beat 1998 romance/caper film *Out of Sight* shows the now-famous succession of romantic shots between George Clooney's charming thief and Jennifer Lopez' FBI agent in a hotel room as we hear snippets from a conversation they have just had in the hotel bar. And the 2002 drama *Unfaithful* includes a series of shots in which Diane Lane's adulterous wife—returning home on a subway train from an intense sexual encounter with a man she barely knows—relives the encounter (and runs the gamut of emotions) in a series of short, sharp flashbacks.

Beginning her editing career in the late 1940s as an assistant on British films, Anne V. Coates moved to Hollywood permanently in the 1980s. Over her long career in both the U.K. and the U.S., she has received five Oscar nominations, winning in 1963 for her work on director David Lean's classic film, *Lawrence of Arabia* (Photofest).

The list of such unforgettable moments in the more than 50 films Coates has edited since her first in 1952—films that also include 1964's *Becket*, 1992's *Chaplin*, and 2000's *Erin Brockovich*—is long and quite impressive. They have led to much recognition and many awards including five Academy Award nominations over 36 years, one Oscar win (for *Lawrence*), an American Cinema Editors (ACE) Lifetime Achievement Award in 1995, a Woman in Film Crystal Award in 1997, numerous editing nominations and wins from the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA), BAFTA's prestigious Academy Fellowship Award in 2007, and much more.

In addition, Coates—insistent about a film career since she was a teenager—has always found ways to make things happen in her life: getting into the film business despite family objections and lack of a union membership; being a woman in a field that by the 1950s men had come to dominate; working regularly while raising three children (all of whom would become filmmakers); leaving the U.K. to live permanently in Hollywood, where she could be more at the heart of the action; working with numerous (and increasingly younger) directors and consistently urging them to "stretch" her as an editor; and constantly adapting to, and mastering, new digital editing tools and techniques. Still active in the film

business in her 90s, she has never stopped looking toward that next horizon.

In her work, Coates prefers to call herself hands-on and intuitive rather than a theorist or an intellectual, admitting that she once tried to read a book about the rules of editing and soon realized that she regularly broke most of them. For her, what seems to matter far more is having a "feeling for a film," a phrase she frequently uses.

Personally, she has a gracious, unassuming, down-to-earth manner that is spiced with a dry, sometimes self-deprecating British wit. When asked why she moved from the U.K. to Hollywood, for example, she has often said that one of the main reasons was valet parking.[4]

Putting all this together, she has been one of the most respected film editors in the business for more than 50 years—a consummate pro who has never stopped believing that her own best can always be better and then seeking out new ways to improve in her art.

"You have to be a little pushy": A Career on Both Sides of the Atlantic

As Coates often confesses, film was not her first love. Born in Reigate, a suburb of London, on December 12, 1925, she was enthralled with horses as a young girl and had aspirations of being a racehorse trainer.

This changed, however, when she was a teen in boarding school. Teachers at the school would take students to see movies such as 1939's *Wuthering Heights*, and Coates was entranced. What particularly impressed her was how filmmakers could bring dusty old novels to such vibrant life on a theater screen. "When I saw *Wuthering Heights* I was in another world," she recalls. "I was swept away by it and Laurence Olivier. It suddenly made me realize that would be quite an interesting job to be able to take a book like *Wuthering Heights* and make it something magical on the screen. It had a profound influence on my life."[5]

From then on, Coates wanted to be a filmmaker. First, though, she needed to finish her schooling, and, with World War II raging in Europe, she then chose to serve in the war effort, working as a nurse at Sir Archibald McIndoe's pioneering plastic surgery hospital in East Grinstead in Sussex.

When the war ended, Coates' dreams of becoming a filmmaker remained as strong as ever. Her family, however, was not enthusiastic, and one of the most outspoken among her family members was her uncle—a

man who also happened to be one of the most powerful film studio owners and film distributors in England—J. Arthur Rank. A devout Methodist who taught Sunday school for years, Rank took his Christian values seriously and, even though he was involved, felt that the filmmaking was an unsavory business that was unsuitable for his impressionable young niece. In addition, the various film unions were strong and difficult to get into. Anne continued to lobby her cause, though, and Rank finally relented, getting her an entry-level job in a small non-union company he owned that specialized in religious films. There wasn't much glamor there, Rank figured, and, if glamor was what young Anne was seeking, he felt she would quickly tire of the business. At the company, Coates did sound recording, projection, and various odd jobs for a short time, and then, to her delight, the union came to the company to sign people up. She eagerly filled out the papers, and soon (as a freshly minted union member) she was applying for jobs at one of England's most prestigious film houses, Pinewood Studios. "I heard about this job at Pinewood; they were looking for a second assistant in the cutting room," she said. "I applied and got an interview. I didn't speak the exact truth because I had not worked in a cutting room." But she sought out help from some friends, quickly got up to speed, and was soon working as an assistant to the highly respected editor Reggie Mills on the 1948 Michael Powell and Emeric Pressberger film *The Red Shoes*. "There I was," Coates said, "working with one of the top editors in the world on my first picture."[6]

For the next four years, Coates assisted different editors at Pinewood. One she credits with having an enormous influence on her was John Seabourne, a veteran who had been editing British films since the 1930s. "He was very old and very experienced, and I worked closely with him," Coates recalled in the 1990s:

> He was also slightly deaf, so often he didn't hear the notes the director gave him and I would tell him what to do. He frequently went home about 4:00 to tend his gardens and he'd say, "Finish that sequence," which was a great experience. He taught me the most of anybody, I think. He taught me to be ruthless, not to fiddle around with matching and such things, but to go for the heart of the scene, for the drama, and always keep your mind on telling the story through the pictures.[7]

Then, when one editor she was assisting passed on the chance to edit a film of Charles Dickens' *The Pickwick Papers* in 1952, Coates eagerly sought the opportunity. As she recalls:

> I went off and met with the director [Noel Langley]. I didn't feel like I said anything particularly bright, but apparently I impressed him. I got the job with the proviso that if I didn't work out in the first two or three weeks they would change me or bring

in someone over me. My friends said, "You must be mad working with Noel Langley, a known misogynist." I said, "He was very nice to me." He was a very good writer but not an experienced director; he was making a lot of mistakes and it was difficult to cut. I was doing my best, but I know they were not totally happy. Then they did a courtroom sequence, which I apparently did a really good edit of, and everything went smoothly after that. They put me under contract, and I did another picture for them. You have to take the breaks when they come.[8]

During the 1950s, Coates worked as an editor on a variety of Pinewood films. Averaging about one per year, they ranged from crime thrillers to comedies. Among these, two of the best known today are the comedy *The Horse's Mouth* (1958) and the drama *Tunes of Glory* (1960), both directed by Ronald Neame and both starring Alec Guinness. The positive response to the two films helped to give Coates more visibility in the British film industry, but they could hardly have prepared her for what lay straight ahead.

As Coates tells the story, she and her husband, film director Douglas Hickox, were shopping at London's Harrods department store one Saturday morning when they bumped into an assistant director named Jerry O'Hara, who was working on pre-production for director (and former editor) David Lean's upcoming film, *Lawrence of Arabia*. O'Hara was doing a test of actor Albert Finney, then being considered for the title role, and, half-jokingly, Coates asked if they had found anyone to cut the piece. O'Hara didn't think they had, so she asked for the number of a person to call to see about it. "Luck is very often a good factor," Coates recalled. "But it's not only luck. You have to be a little pushy and follow up on things."[9] The call to a production supervisor led to the chance to cut the test, two scenes with Finney.

While Coates was thrilled with the chance to work with the highly respected David Lean, she also suddenly felt way over her head and quite nervous. She remembers being "terrified" as she brought the edited scenes into the room to screen for Lean and others involved with the film. "I was so frightened, I didn't see one cut," she said. "At the end David got up and said to the whole unit, 'That's the first piece of film I've ever seen cut exactly the way I would have done it!'"[10]

Although flattered, Coates felt that Lean and the film's producer, Sam Spiegel, would opt for another, more experienced, editor to work on the entire film. But, two days later, Spiegel invited her to come to London with him and Lean in his Rolls Royce, and she was offered the job.

Cutting *Lawrence* was a major turning point for Coates, then in her 30s. First, the experience proved that she could edit a film of its massive scale and scope. She has noted that about 31 miles of film footage was

shot, all of which had to be edited down to a running time of nearly four hours—about twice the length of a typical film. Second, it proved that she could also work very quickly. In this case, time was of the essence. Spiegel had already arranged a special screening for England's Queen Elizabeth, and this was one deadline that had to be met. "We took 13 months to shoot the film and four months to cut it!" Coates recalled. "We just cut phenomenally, when you think about it. Seven days a week until about 11:00 o'clock at night. I now look back and wish we had a little more time to finesse some of the scenes."[11]

She and Lean did eventually get that chance when they both worked on a restoration of the film in the late 1980s that added about six minutes of footage to the story. "It's a much better film now," Coates notes. "So much meaning was taken out of it. I was extremely lucky to be available to do the restoration."[12]

Despite her concerns that the film initially needed more editing "finesse," *Lawrence* was immediately hailed as classic and remains so more than a half-century after its release. In 1963, the film received 10 Academy Award nominations, winning seven, including Best Editing for Coates. It also swept the BAFTA and the Golden Globe awards that year. More recently, *Lawrence* placed seventh in the American Film Industry's 2007 list of the top 100 American films and in the top 100 in the 2012 international critics poll taken by the British Film Institute's *Sight and Sound Magazine* of the greatest films of all time.

In addition to taking her career to a new level, Coates often speaks of the experience of working with Lean on *Lawrence* as a great education. "David Lean," she once noted, "always used to say, 'Have the courage of your conviction, tell the story your way. I'll respect what you did, although in certain instances I may want things another way.' He would hold these shots of the desert, and I'd say, 'David, you can't hold them that long.' However, he said, 'Wait until the music's on, wait until the whole rhythm is together.' And he was right."[13]

Coates' success on *Lawrence* immediately led to a job on 1964's *Becket*, directed by Peter Glenville. Based on a stage play by Jean Anouilh and much more dialogue-dependent than *Lawrence*, *Becket* presented different challenges for her. Again, she faced them in her characteristically bold, forthright manner. For example, there's one scene in *Becket* when the two main characters, Thomas Becket and England's King Henry II, have been estranged and the king decides to go see Becket. Instead of dissolving, Coates made a direct cut to Becket's coming in the door. "A lovely cut, nothing very complicated," she noted. "Hal Wallis (the film's producer)

said to me, 'You can't do a direct cut. You've got to do a dissolve in there. He's 50 miles away.' I said, 'So what? It's a great cut and very dramatic, and goes right to the heart of the scene.' He never mentioned it again, and it stayed like it was.... That's what I mean by the fact that I never work with formulas or rules."[14]

Coates' instincts paid off again, and, for *Becket*, she received her second Academy Award nomination.

Soon after finishing *Becket*, Coates had the opportunity to work with another legendary director and, in characteristic form, went for it wholeheartedly. The film was *Young Cassidy*, a biographical drama based on the life of Irish playwright Sean O'Casey, and the director was John Ford. "Ford interviewed me and said, 'If she's good enough for David Lean, she's good enough for me,'" Coates recalled. "I never got to know him because I was in England, and he was shooting in Ireland."[15] Soon after starting to shoot the film, however, Ford had health problems and had to leave the film. While she enjoyed working with Ford's replacement, Jack Cardiff, Coates was also disappointed that she didn't get the chance to complete the film with Ford.

Another film Coates speaks of with great affection is David Lynch's 1980 film version of the play *The Elephant Man*, with John Hurt, Anthony Hopkins, and Anne Bancroft. As with *Becket*, some of the challenges she faced here involved adapting a stage play to the screen. One in particular was a sequence when the Elephant Man goes to a theater and sees pantomimes onstage. Originally, it had been shot as a straight sequence, but she and Lynch felt that it was "extremely flat." So, the two came up with the idea of turning the scene into a montage. "We had the music before we had the montage, so we worked from the music and made up this quite entrancing little montage where we superimposed the floor with twinkling silver over the dancing," she recalled. "You got completely what you wanted from the Elephant Man's reactions. It took on a dreamlike quality, which it wouldn't have had the other way."[16]

Her work on *The Elephant Man* led to more honors, including a third Academy Award nomination in 1981.

Receiving more and more work on American-produced films, Coates pulled up stakes in the U.K. in 1986 and moved to Los Angeles, where she felt more of the filmmaking action was. Soon afterwards, her three children—Anthony, Emma, and James—now educated, came to Southern California as well. All three, incidentally, followed in the family tradition and became filmmakers. Coates' two sons, Anthony and James, became directors, and her daughter, Emma, became an editor. (Emma has since moved back to London.)

Based mainly in Los Angeles since 1986, Coates has continued to work regularly and thrive on variety—both in terms of the projects she has worked on and the directors she has worked with. The films have ranged from thrillers to comedies, to fantasies, to serious dramas. And the directors have ranged from John Milius (1989's *Farewell to the King*) to Richard Attenborough (1992's *Chaplin*), to Wolfgang Petersen (1993's *In the Line of Fire*), to Steven Soderbergh (1998's *Out of Sight* and 2000's *Erin Brockovich*), to Adrian Lyne (2002's *Unfaithful*), to Chris Weitz (2007's *The Golden Compass*), to Tom Vaughn (2010's *Extraordinary Measures*), to Sam Taylor-Johnson (2015's *Fifty Shades of Grey*). The 2004 mystery/thriller *Taking Lives*, directed by D.J. Caruso, was a personal milestone—her fiftieth film credit as an editor. And, in addition to other honors, her work on *In the Line of Fire* and *Out of Sight* led to her fourth and fifth Academy Award nominations.

While she likes working with all kinds of directors, Coates has increasingly gravitated toward younger ones, feeling that, by working together, both she and a new generation of directors can benefit. Directors Weitz and Vaughn, for example, are both more than 40 years younger than Coates, and Caruso is 39 years younger. And she has often mentioned how she encouraged the adventurous young Steven Soderbergh to "stretch" her when they worked on *Out of Sight*. "He does a lot of flash cutting," she says. "He does a lot of nonlinear cutting, which is quite fun to do, and he kind of challenges you."[17]

Coates has noted that she also likes to work with directors who, in addition to being talented, are pleasant to work with. The script is a large factor as well. "I never cut ultra-violent films," she says.[18] She also confesses that she can't resist choosing films for the location, adding: "I love exotic places!"[19]

One additional challenge for Coates has been moving from traditional editing tools such as the Moviola (which she had been using for more than 40 years) to the newer, digital tools and techniques. The first film she and her team did digitally was the 1995 action/adventure *Congo*. "We had private teachers," she said shortly afterwards, "but we were really the blind leading the blind, and it was an extremely difficult picture. So I ran screaming and kicking into digital."[20] But, in an interview five years later, her attitude had clearly changed. "I used to think I would like to go back [to the older editing tools], but I wouldn't go back ... now," she acknowledged. "I think we've moved on. My mind's moved on."[21]

Normally, Coates doesn't make much about being in a field that for many years was a difficult place for women. "There were some wonderful

women editors who helped inspire me to go into editing in England," she has said. "I've never looked at myself as a woman in the business. I've just looked at myself as an editor. I mean, I'm sure I've been turned down because I'm a woman, but then other times I've been used because they wanted a woman editor. I just think, 'I'm an editor,' and I never expected to get paid less because I was a woman. I grew up with three brothers, and I never thought I would get paid less for anything than they did."[22]

She has, however, still been intrigued by the editing profession's gender-related evolution. "While it was just a background job, they let the women do it," she says,

> But when people realized how interesting and creative editing could be, then the men elbowed the women out of the way and kind of took over.... When I first came into the industry in England, there were quite a lot of women editors. And then slowly they fell by the wayside. They didn't seem to have the ambition, which I always thought was strange. When I left in 1986, I think there was only one other woman doing big features in England. There were quite a few doing television and commercials and things, but I can't put my finger on why that was.[23]

As of this writing, Coates, now in her 90s, continues to live in Los Angeles, work, consult on films, and speak about film editing and her career.

~

More often than she would like, Coates has been asked questions about her editing style, and, as a charming way to sidestep the subject, she sometimes answers with an anecdote. "I feel that I don't have a style of editing," she said in 2010. "I didn't think I did, but my daughter, who was studying [film] at university, asked me, 'What's your style, mum?' And I said, 'Oh, Emma, I don't have a style,' and she said, 'Oh, yes you do—we're studying it in class.' So, whatever my style was, they discussed it—but I never discussed it. I was so surprised that I had one."[24]

In an earlier interview, she told another story. A scene from one of her films was run for a production unit. After seeing it, an eager young associate producer asked her, "What was your psychology behind cutting that scene?" Coates responded, "Well, I don't really have any psychology. I just mark the film, cut it, and hope for the best." The rest of the crew, Coates recalled, "nearly died with laughter because they heard me and they knew [that] I'm more a doer than a talker."[25]

While she dislikes analyzing herself and her work, Coates has over the years revealed quite a bit about how she works and how her own personality is reflected in her work.

One very curious observation came from an extended interview she made in the 1990s. "I remember," she said, "one of the best compliments

I ever had paid to me was by the British director Carol Reed, who said, 'I've had some great editors work for me, but I've never had anyone with so much heart as you.' I've always treasured that remark."[26]

Certainly in terms of how she approaches her work, that word "heart" has a great deal to do with what she ultimately delivers. Intuitive and instinctive rather than intellectual and analytical, "feeling" strongly about a film is extremely important to her. Initially, this takes the form of a feeling for the story and its characters. She has noted time and time again that, whether serious or comic, she is most attracted to films that delve deeply into character. Then, when she is immersed in the editing process, this feeling takes the form of confidence in her work. Again, she has often noted that, when starting a new film, she usually feels lost—until at some point there is an internal "click" when something—perhaps a sense of clarity in the direction of the film and how it should be edited—takes place and she feels that she has found her way.

Over the years, this personal process has led to many different triumphs executed in both a traditional editing style and, increasingly, in a blending of both traditional and more contemporary editing styles. Just as she learned from Reggie Mills and David Lean, she has learned from David Lynch and Steven Soderbergh. A film such as *Out of Sight*, for example, is probably one of her most adventurous undertakings, mixing traditional editing techniques she has been using since the 1950s with more contemporary techniques such as freeze frames, shock cutting back and forth in time, shock cutting back and forth between dreams and reality, and overlaying dialogue from one scene onto another.

In a way, Coates is a chameleon, drawing from a full bag of editing tricks and techniques in each film she does for each director she works with both to serve the story and to reflect as fully as she can the essence of the director's intent. Her style changes from film to film and in each case is constantly calibrated to, above all else, serving and enriching meaning. What remains consistent throughout her work is her instinct for achieving this result—the abilities to cut at just the right time to just the right rhythm; to visually compose scenes so that what's being shown is always absolutely clear to the viewer; and to make edgy, highly stylized editing choices that rarely seem forced or overly self-conscious.

In Sync with Out of Sight

Most people would probably select *Lawrence of Arabia* as the supreme example of Coates' work. Virtually no one disputes that this is one of the

world's great films. But it is also a relatively early example of Coates' work—work that has continued for another five decades after *Lawrence* and reflects both her continued professional growth and the ever-changing filmmaking landscape during her long career. With this thought in mind, it might make more sense here to look at her work in a more recent film that better reflects these changes, and certainly one of the fine examples from this group is Steven Soderbergh's brilliant 1998 adaptation of writer Elmore Leonard's novel *Out of Sight*.

In the mid- and late 1990s, film adaptations of the crime novels of Elmore Leonard were all the rage. *Out of Sight* followed in a series that included *Get Shorty* (1995), *Touch* (1997), and *Jackie Brown* (1997) as well as two made-for-television movies, *Pronto* (1997) and *Gold Coast* (1997). All of these, in turn, were partially inspired by the enormous success of Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994), which was itself hugely influenced by Leonard's writing.

While *Pulp Fiction* might be the most groundbreaking and influential of all these films, *Out of Sight* might be the most thoughtfully and elegantly rendered. Without being any less hip or stylish than the rest, it steers clear of the in-jokes and other self-conscious cuteness of *Pulp Fiction*, *Get Shorty*, and *Jackie Brown*. There is plenty of humor, but the film never descends into broad farce. The characters, too, are mostly multi-faceted and nuanced. Even the supporting hoodlum roles such as Ving Rhames' Buddy, Steve Zahn's Glenn, and Don Cheadle's Snoopy—the kinds of roles that in lesser films are almost always one-dimensional—are given unusual depth and complexity. Like *Pulp Fiction*, the film's story often moves back and forth in time. But here, the time traveling seems far more natural and less forced or self-conscious. We sense that it is employed because it is simply a good way to tell this story.

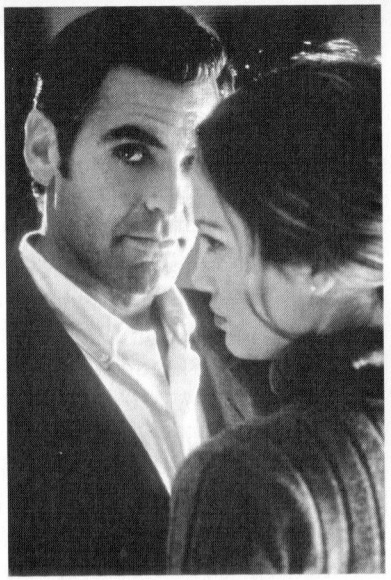
Many people made significant contributions to *Out of Sight*. The praise starts with Leonard, who wrote the quirky, consistently engaging novel, and Soderbergh, who improved upon the story in several ways (e.g. the inspired pairing of George Clooney and Jennifer Lopez in the lead roles) when translating it to the screen. Praise should also go to writer Scott Frank, whose script here is a couple of notches above his previous Leonard adaptation, *Get Shorty*, three years before, and to cinematographer Elliot Davis, who beautifully captures the "worlds" of the film from the loud, bright colors of Miami to the subdued grays of a cold winter in Detroit.

Then, of course, there is Coates' editing. Working closely with Soderbergh, she helped to give the film its unique and very stylish pace, tone,

and feel. Watching it, we sense that, while we have seen similar films, we have never experienced anything quite like this.

Among the triumphs in the storytelling are the ways Coates and Soderbergh suggest rather than show certain violent and sexual moments. Not only is their approach more artful and economical than most other approaches, but it also amplifies the humanity in each of the situations.

One excellent example takes place about halfway through the film. The evil Snoopy tells Glenn, a sensitive but not-too-bright pothead, that he wants him to prove himself by killing a double-crossing drug dealer. In the audience, we prepare for some heavy-duty violence. Then, rather than showing the bloody massacre in all its gory detail, Coates and Soderbergh simply show a 32-second wordless montage with some disturbing sounds on the track that focuses on Glenn's face as he commits the murder and his sense of shame and horror at his own actions. The final touch is an image of Snoopy covering the scene with red spray paint. It's a riveting half-minute that suggests everything we need to know, gets us into Glenn's head, and affects us far more deeply than a more conventionally filmed shoot-out would. Writing about this scene in his initial review of the film, critic Mick LaSalle said that it "almost qualifies as a miracle," adding, "The miracle is that we come away not only with the event of the massacre but with a sense of its moral horror as well."[27]



Starring George Clooney and Jennifer Lopez, the romantic caper *Out of Sight* (1998) has received wide praise for Anne V. Coates' stylish and creative editing. Not only did Coates receive her fifth Oscar nomination for her work here, but in 2012 the Editors Guild ranked the film number 53 on its list, "The 75 Best Edited Films of All Time" (Photofest).

Another example is perhaps the most frequently discussed scene (or confluence of two scenes) in the film. At this point, Karen (Jennifer Lopez) a U.S. marshal who's attracted to a handsome, charming thief, Jack Foley (George Clooney), meets up with him in a hotel bar in Detroit. Drawn to dangerous men, she fancies sleeping with him before she arrests him. Drawn to this smart, determined, and beautiful women, he fancies sleeping with

her before he pulls off a big heist and escapes. They share a drink and talk about how much they've each been thinking about the other and about how they would both like to have a "time-out" before they must again face the other realities of their situation. Then, as the gentle, flirty conversation in the bar continues, we see visuals of the two, now in her hotel room. Many of the visual images from the bar are here, too—the snow falling outside, the drinks in their hands, the way they touch each other's hands and arms. As the bar conversation continues, we next see them take off items of clothing. Now, too, there is an occasional (and very brief) freeze frame to heighten the eroticism of the moment. It is exhilarating how these two scenes—the bar and the hotel room—flow together.

In her account, Coates describes how the initial plan called for the scene to go from the bar to the bedroom with the bar conversation overlaid, but that it had seemed flat. So, she and Soderbergh got the idea to intercut. "We just tried one or two things and it started to jell," she recalled in 2004. "Flashing back. Sometimes we'd flash forward.... It was really exciting.... [The scene is] very emotional. It's very sexual, I think, without really showing much.... It's really good and very good storytelling."[28]

Equally impressed was Roger Ebert, who singled out this scene in his 1998 review of the film. "[N]othing quite matches up," he wrote, "and yet everything fits, so that the scene is like a demonstration of the whole movie's visual and time style."[29]

Sharing Ebert's enthusiasm about the scene was Mick LaSalle. "This strategy is not just economical and not just a drawn-out tease," he wrote. "It has psychological truth. As the two are talking, the sex hovers over the moment. That's what they're thinking about, and that's all the audience is thinking about, too."[30]

Another of *Out of Sight*'s triumphs (and a departure from the novel) is the way the film moves back and forth in time with such skill and grace. The purpose is always to provide backstory, and we seem to get it in the same deft way that shipping services provide just-in-time delivery. For example, the film begins with Foley robbing a bank and getting caught. We see his hands up in one of the first of the film's periodic freeze frames and then we watch the freeze dissolve into a shot of the Glades Correctional Institution in Florida, where the main action of the film begins—a jailbreak during which he will meet Karen and eventually head to Detroit to rob multi-millionaire Richard Ripley (Albert Brooks). During the story, the action occasionally flashes back to another prison in Lompoc, California, where Foley originally meets Ripley, Glenn, Snoopy, and other characters who figure prominently in upcoming events and to Ripley's office.

In these flashbacks, we learn why Foley robbed the bank in the first scene of the film, why he has a special interest in robbing Ripley at his home near Detroit, and much more. It is all marvelously done, and, while much of the credit for this must go to scriptwriter Scott Frank, Coates' skill at orchestrating all this non-linear action while keeping the pacing and the tone of the film so consistent is remarkable.

Another challenge for an editor working on a film based on an Elmore Leonard story is working with his very distinctive and carefully crafted dialogue, and Coates does a fine job here as well. Leonard's dialogue often has the rhythms of poetry in it, and in some films based on his work, such as 1997's *Touch*, the editing doesn't sync up with his language as well as it should. With her excellent sense of pacing, Coates' editing sparkles in many dialogue scenes. For example, the timing between cuts in the (mostly dialogue) scene when Foley and Karen are both locked in the automobile trunk is superb, enhancing both the instant attraction each feels for the other and their shared sense of humor about the absurd situation they find themselves in.

In addition to LaSalle and Ebert, most of the critical response to *Out of Sight*, and especially to the artful way in which it was put together by Coates and others, was quite positive. As Kenneth Turan of the *Los Angeles Times* noted, "As always with the best of Leonard, it's the journey, not the destination, that counts, and director Soderbergh has let it unfold with dry wit and great skill. Making adroit use of complex flashbacks, freeze frames, and other stylistic flourishes, he's managed to put his personal stamp on the film while staying faithful to the irreplaceable spirit of the original."[31]

Out of Sight also received recognition from the various awards bodies, including two Academy Award nominations—one for its adapted screenplay and one for Coates' editing. More recently, too, the film was ranked number 53 on the Editors Guild's 2012 list of the "75 Best Edited Films of All Time."

For the 73-year-old Coates, who had received her first Academy Award nomination more than 35 years earlier, the fifth nomination was certainly evidence of continuous professional growth as well as staying power. After a half-century in the business, she was still at the top of her game.

A Life of Living (a Little) Dangerously

Describing the experience early in her working life of applying at Pinewood Studios with only the slightest wisp of a resume, Coates once

remarked: "I've always believed you should take a risk and hope for the best."[32]

This is certainly an understandable attitude to have when one is young, has little if anything to lose, and imagines many more opportunities ahead. But one of Coates' most remarkable traits is that—despite more than 65 years in the business, editing credits on more than 50 films, numerous honors that include five Academy Award nominations, and an almost mythic status among her fellow film editors—she has never stopped taking risks in her choices of projects, the directors she works with, and the editing decisions she makes. In fact, judging from her various interviews over the years, she even seems to have a slight disdain for playing it safe and for those who do it too often. For her, risk-taking and personal/professional growth seem both intimately intertwined and key components of a fully lived life. In any case, her enthusiasm for risk-taking and growth has been indispensable to an amazing career in which she has not only survived but also consistently adapted and flourished. Along the way, she has had many moments. And she has made the most of them.

9

"The most modest of living legends"

Thelma Schoonmaker and Her Lifelong Artistic Partnership with Martin Scorsese

"It's about a sense of trust," Thelma Schoonmaker said in an interview in 2014.

> From the very first moment I worked with Marty, I think he realized I was someone who would do what was right for his films, and major egos would not be a problem.... He gradually over the years began to appreciate that and rely on that much more, and, as I became more experienced, he was able to rely on my judgment much more.... When we work together, it's just the most amazing time. We talk about *everything* in the editing room, in addition to the editing we're doing. It's a very rich collaboration. Wonderful. I'm a very lucky person.[1]

The "Marty" Schoonmaker refers to is of course Martin Scorsese, one of the most respected film directors working today. And she is of course the film editor who first teamed up with him in 1963 and, since *Raging Bull* (1980), has worked closely with him on all his projects ranging from about 20 feature films to several documentaries and even television programs. In addition to being Scorsese's trusted collaborator, Schoonmaker is one of most celebrated members of the film editing profession. With seven Academy Award nominations for Best Film Editing (that date back to her work on the 1970 documentary *Woodstock* for director Michael Wadleigh), she has tied Barbara McLean for most editing nominations by a woman. And with three editing Oscar wins, she has also tied Michael Kahn, Daniel Mandell, and Ralph Dawson for the most wins by any editor. This is in addition to more than a dozen nominations and wins for awards