CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	Researching Janet Dean: Perspectives on female collaboration in television production
Authors	Lane, Christina
Publication date	2021
Original Citation	Lane, C. (2021) 'Researching Janet Dean: Perspectives on female collaboration in television production', Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media, 20, pp. 205-212. https://doi.org/10.33178/alpha.20.15
Type of publication	Article (non peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	http://www.alphavillejournal.com/Issue20/HTML/DossierLane.html - https://doi.org/10.33178/alpha.20.15
Rights	© 2021, the Author(s). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. - https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/
Download date	2024-04-25 21:06:31
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/10990

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media
no. 20, 2020, pp. 205–212
DOI: https://doi.org/10.33178/alpha.20.15

Researching *Janet Dean*: Perspectives on Female Collaboration in Television Production

Christina Lane

Abstract: *The 1954 American television series* Janet Dean, Registered Nurse *(1954–1955) capitalised on the star power of its lead Ella Raines, business heft of CBS executive William Dozier, and cache of film producer Joan Harrison. Though a brainchild of Raines', the series relied heavily on Harrison's decades of nuts-and-bolts experience producing Hollywood films. It became a vehicle for both women to pool their creative talents, advance a growing medium, and comment on contemporary social issues. This contribution to the dossier considers the methodological challenges posed by analysing this instance of female collaboration in 1950s television production. It represents an effort to excavate undocumented production practices and women's creativity, while decentring prevailing historical narratives surrounding the "great genius" male executive.*

Janet Dean, Registered Nurse (1954–1955) aired in February 1954 as a first-run syndicated series in individual markets across America, distributed by Motion Pictures for Television (MPTV). The thirty-minute drama returned 1940s film star Ella Raines to the public eye following the end of her Universal contract and a European hiatus. Assuming the role of a private nurse adept at handling psychological and somatic troubles, Raines, who developed the show, told trade press that she hoped to promote the nursing profession and explore contemporary social problems.

Janet Dean was the first television series to feature a nurse as the central character and one of the first to put a female protagonist in a professional role. While *Boss Lady*'s (1952) construction-firm executive Gwen F. Allen and *Adventures of Superman*'s (1952–1958) Lois Lane had appeared by this time, women were more typically teachers, secretaries, or in the case of *Beulah* (1950–1953), domestic workers.[1] What further distinguished the series was the fact that two women held creative control. Joining Raines (who held the title of president of *Janet Dean*'s production company, Cornwall Productions) was long-time friend and colleague Joan Harrison, a Hollywood producer known for noir films (including two Raines vehicles) and her work with Alfred Hitchcock in the late 1930s and early 1940s. *Janet Dean* is an uncommon example of female collaboration in early 1950s television production. The series provided a vehicle for Raines and Harrison to pool their talents, advance a growing medium, and comment on relevant and often controversial social issues.

It should be noted that the series was facilitated by a network of male relationships and support. Initial financing came from Laurence Rockefeller, who was a family friend of Raines and her husband, Second World War pilot Robin Olds. (Rockefeller loaned Cornwall $30,000 and stipulated an additional $130,000 in available funds). Long-time Harrison friend and associate

© Christina Lane
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

William Dozier served as executive vice president of Cornwall, lending authority and crucial executive expertise to the production company.[2] Dozier, who had spent many years in upper-level management at RKO, was now head of CBS Television, while serving as executive producer on shows such as *Janet Dean* on the side. The distributor, MPTV's Matthew "Matty" Fox, was also a key player. Known to take marketplace risks, he was aiming to challenge the networks (ABC, NBC, CBS, and DuMont) by combining his film libraries with new syndicated series. Matty Fox saw the Ella Raines vehicle as a potential money-maker and met the financing gap left by Rockefeller (Hoyt 142).

The collaboration between Raines and Harrison holds numerous possibilities for feminist research. The women's work together provokes questions of why and how *Janet Dean, Registered Nurse* was conceived, how the day-to-day workflow occurred and how the professional relationship between Raines and Harrison was structured. Answering these questions is hindered by the significant gaps in institutional histories. There is a stark contrast between the scant degree of archival materials on these women and the available files on the men and companies they worked for. For example, consider the William Dozier papers, the CBS collection at UCLA, and the studio files on the films made by Alfred Hitchcock, not to mention various holdings of the director's personal and professional papers, and so on. These gaps are compounded by the fact that only a handful of *Janet Dean* episodes are known to exist; while four are held in archives, two episodes are in the hands of private collectors and thus are nearly impossible to view.[3]

To let such missing pieces hold us back only adds to the erasure of Raines, Harrison and their work. What happens, though, when the research question shifts from "What can we tell about these women's collaborative work by looking at the television series?" to "What does the search for answers tell us about how their work was viewed, valued, and preserved?"

Michele Leigh, in her essay "Reading Between the Lines: History and the Studio Owner's Wife", likens feminist historiographic research to that of a crime scene investigator (conjuring the television series *CSI*), a comparison I suspect Joan Harrison might have appreciated. The major difference for Leigh is that a crime investigator seeks out "a logical connection between the clues that will result in *the* answer as to who committed the crime. The historian, on the other hand, realizes that sometimes the puzzle is not solved, that the stories created while meaningful, cannot be complete" (43). In essence, what meanings can we make out of Raines and Harrison's collaborative work in television and where do we find them?

First, it is not productive to search for *Janet Dean* in any Ella Raines files housed at archives across the United States; such materials are generally limited to her film career. Likewise, archival materials related to Harrison are scattered across various collections in the US and UK, tied to parent studios Universal and RKO or major figures such as Hitchcock or David O. Selznick. The primary archive for source material on *Janet Dean* is the collection of William Dozier papers held at the American Heritage Center. Documents related to the show are dispersed throughout eight of the forty-nine boxes in the Dozier papers. These include contracts, budgets, production schedules, correspondence, clippings, and several scripts. While the contents are well-organised, the *Janet Dean* documents are relatively scant in comparison to Dozier's more popular shows *Perry Mason* (1957–1966), *Batman* (1966–1968), and *The Green Hornet* (1966–1967), or his work on the Board of Governors of the Academy of Motion Pictures of Arts and Sciences.

As a consequence, the feminist problem—the *methods challenge*, if you will—is to pursue strategies that resist framing *Janet Dean*'s production history through the Dozier prism (and the corresponding Hitchcock lens that inflects historical research on Harrison). Noteworthy documents in Dozier's papers include the original Raines, Dozier, and Fox contracts, budgets for five episodes, and clippings that trace the announcement of the series and its debut. However, these materials do not provide insight into creative decisions such as story topics or which salient news events were deemed to make for good subjects. Nor do they shed light on editorial choices such as scene revisions, endings (resolutions of conflicts), or fine dialogue edits.

The script files contain no storylines whatsoever, and script drafts for only three episodes: "The Kennedy Case" (pilot), "The Burlingame Case" (episode 28), and "The Benton Case" (episode 31). All versions appear to be either Dozier's or Matty Fox's personal copies. Annotations are scant, consisting of minor word changes or dialogue trims. Perhaps the fundamental value of the Dozier papers is demonstrating the central role Raines and Harrison played in production; *Janet Dean* was no vanity project. The clippings files contain excerpted trade articles that elucidate how the show was positioned. According to the Cornwall Productions publicity files, Dozier came up with the idea of a series centred around a nurse. But apparently it was Raines who nurtured the concept. She wanted to develop a character focused less on medical concerns than interpersonal relationships and psychological problems. Inspired by episodes she had witnessed in her global travels as a military wife, Raines envisioned a semi-documentary style with stories that drew on real life and current events (Foster 7; Lester 18).

The trades and newspaper coverage recited the publicity put out by Cornwall while also rejuvenating dimensions of Raines' Hollywood star persona from a decade earlier. She was portrayed as a Renaissance woman who not only painted, wrote, and had studied psychology, but also was a savvy businesswoman. This reinforced the implication that *Janet Dean* would transcend existing television genres. She told interviewers that it would be "unlike anything that has gone before it" and not "just another soap opera" (Lester 18; "Ella"). *Janet Dean* was advertised in *Broadcasting/Telecasting* as a "suspenseful, unusual TV film show based on a nurse's exciting adventures among the rich and poor . . . in big cities and small towns . . . in peace and war . . . at home and abroad" ("Advertisement").

The extant episodes indicate that the series indeed blended pseudo-documentary style with numerous genres including action, suspense, horror, romance, and melodrama. A sociological dimension is stressed through the use of newsreels and actual locations. For example, the pilot episode "The Kennedy Case" opens with stock footage of military conflict meant to represent protagonist Steve's (Charles Nolte) Korean War flashbacks before they dissolve into nightmares. Later, nurse Janet takes Steve's fiancée Claire (Stella Andrew) to Brooklyn's Veterans Administration Hospital to test whether she is emotionally mature enough to accept and provide care for a mentally distressed Steve. Taking place on-site at the Brooklyn VAH's physical therapy ward, the scene introduces approximately one dozen actual veterans as though they are Janet's long-time pals and, hence, normalises their disabilities. While the overall point of "The Kennedy Case" is to bring attention to difficulties faced by veterans and their families, the episode demonises Steven's mother in the process (espousing 1950s momism) and ultimately reinforces the notion that Steven's long-term psychiatric and psychological troubles can be healed with one

kiss. This is where the feminist, social realist impulses of the series come into conflict with its conservative, liberal-humanist narrative conventions.

With respect to Joan Harrison's contribution to the series, the Dozier papers have little to say. In fact, data contained in the New York–based television index *Ross Reports* proves to be much more valuable than archival holdings in accounting for her creative work. Given how little probing there had been into *Janet Dean* prior to my research for *Phantom Lady: Hollywood Producer Joan Harrison, The Forgotten Woman Behind Hitchcock*, these reports (which are publicly available through *WorldRadioHistory.Com*) yield significant results.[4] I will admit that discovering the weekly *Ross Reports* for *Janet Dean* was an "aha moment", akin to tilting a prism in a new direction. Compiling a more thorough credits list sheds light on the kind of team Harrison assembled to write, direct, photograph, and edit the series. Harrison and her Cornwall collaborators sought out progressives already well versed in such social problems as anti-Semitism, class bias, sexism, and racism (then more commonly referred to in the press as "bigotry" and "prejudice"). For example, Victor Wolfson, who wrote five episodes, had organised acting classes for striking coal miners in West Virginia as a young man before joining the first class of the University of Wisconsin Experimental College, where he helped found the Experimental College Players.[5] Sarett Rudley, who likewise wrote five episodes, was seen as a fresh voice who took on controversial issues, having cowritten the New York City play *How Long Till Summer* (1949), which dramatised the experience of racism from a young boy's perspective ("How").

For "The Randall Case" (episode 17), Harrison recruited veteran writer Lenore Coffee. With over three decades of experience writing Hollywood screenplays (including *Suzy* [1934], *Four Daughters* [1938], and *The Great Lie* [1941]), Coffee was known for bringing added dimensions to her female characters. In the case of Gore Vidal, Harrison also nurtured new talent. Already a celebrated novelist, Vidal wrote "The Jinx Nurse" episode under the pen name William Cameron Kay, which led to an assignment with the anthology series *Studio One*. He later credited Harrison with versing him in the television form and Raines (to whom he was related by marriage) with convincing him to try his hand at *Janet Dean* (Kaplan 372).

It was Harrison who gave Hollywood veteran art director Robert Boyle his shot at television directing. Harrison signed Boyle, who had previously worked on Harrison's films *Nocturne* (1946) and *They Won't Believe Me* (1947) and served as associate art designer on Hitchcock's *Saboteur* (1942) and *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), to direct over a dozen *Janet Dean* episodes. Though he appreciated her invitation, Boyle described the two-day production scheduling as gruelling and bowed out in the middle of the series. Robert Aldrich, who at the time was respected as a television director on the brink of Hollywood fame, was also set to direct, but for unknown reasons—perhaps because the opportunity to lens the western *Apache* (1954) arose—never did. One notable addition to the *Janet Dean* team that did work out was director of photography J. Burger Contner, who had shot the Yiddish-language movies and race films of Edgar J. Ulmer in the 1930s.

Though it is not clear whether Harrison or Dozier (through his CBS ties) brought in Lora Hays to edit *Janet Dean*, Hays's creative contribution was surely influential. The eldest daughter of Arthur Garfield Hays, one of the founders and first counsel of the American Civil Liberties Union, Hays "epitomized the Greenwich Village lifestyle […] mobilizing those around her to act, speak up, and make a difference" (Dowell). After working as a filmmaker for the government

during the Second World War, she became a freelance documentary editor. By the time she was contracted to edit *Janet Dean*, she had worked on *You Are There* (1953–1957), hosted by Walter Cronkite, and *Mama* (1949–1957).[6]

Filling in the *Janet Dean*'s credits not only brings us closer to understanding the important contributions that Harrison and Raines made through the series' production, it reveals the way that they participated—and helped cultivate—an influential female network in early television that included Hays and such writers as Coffee and Rudley. The production histories generated by such female networks may be more difficult to piece together, due to the gendered process of archiving and preservation. Still, as this paper shows, an unexpected and inconspicuous publicly available, open-source database can advance our knowledge of women's work and collaboration if the pieces are pulled together through a feminist methodological lens.

Notes

[1] Lynn Bari played construction-firm executive Gwen F. Allen in *Boss Lady*, which ran in summer of 1952 as a replacement for *Fireside Theatre*. In *The Adventures of Superman*, producers made efforts to focus equal attention on reporter Lois Lane. Also consider *Our Miss Brooks* (1952–1956), *Private Secretary* (1953–1957), *Wire Service* (1956–1957), *Decoy Police Woman* (1957–1958), *Willy* (1954-1955), and *Meet Millie* (1952–1956).

[2] Robin Olds is listed as vice president of Cornwall Productions in the contract.

[3] The 1954 episodes "The Kennedy Case" (Episode 1), "The Garcia Case" (Episode 9), and "The Applegate Case" (Episode 25) float on the Internet, but are not distributed through reliable sites.

[4] Formerly *AmericanRadioHistory.Com*, *WorldRadioHistory.Com* is a non-profit educational and historical resource that contains scans from countless broadcasting periodicals. I accessed the *Ross Report* through this site, which is maintained by David Gleason.

[5] No explicit reason for the producers' tendency to hire progressive writers is offered by the production company; it is a pattern that emerges through a study of the credits. One possibility is that they were consciously using the production as a pipeline to usher blacklisted talent back into the industry, something Harrison later did while making *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*.

[6] Hays's editing credits include *King: A Filmed Record . . . Montgomery to Memphis* (1970), *Harlan County U.S.A.* (1976), and *Sembène: The Making of African Cinema* (1994).

References

Adventures of Superman. Created by Robert J. Maxwell and Whitney Ellsworth, Motion Pictures for Television/National Comics Publications, 1952–1958.

"Advertisement for Janet Dean." *Broadcasting/Telecasting*, 30 Nov. 1953, p. 55, in Janet Dean, Registered Nurse clippings files, William Dozier Papers, Box 5, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

Alfred Hitchcock Presents. Created by Alfred Hitchcock, Revue Studios/Universal Television, 1955–1960.

Apache. Directed by Robert Aldrich, United Artists, 1954.

"The Applegate Case." *Janet Dean, Registered Nurse*, Episode 25, created by William Dozier and Ella Raines, written by Franz Spencer, Cornwall Productions, 2 Nov. 1954.

Batman. Created by William Dozier, Greenway Productions, 1966–1968.

"The Benton Case". *Janet Dean, Registered Nurse*, Episode 27, created by William Dozier and Ella Raines, written by Victor Wolfson, Cornwall Productions, 7 Dec. 1954.

Beulah. Created by Roland Reed, Roland Reed Productions, 1950–1953.

Boss Lady. Created by Robert Mann and Jack Wrather, Wrather Television Productions, 1952.

"The Burlingame Case". *Janet Dean, Registered Nurse*, Episode 26, created by William Dozier and Ella Raines, written by James Neilson, Cornwall Productions, 23 Nov. 1954.

Cornwall Productions legal files Box 11, Folder 6851, William Dozier Papers, Collection 06851, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

Decoy Police Woman. Created by Everett Rosenthal, Peter Rodgers Organization, 1957–1958.

Dowell, Chelsea. "Village People: Arthur Garfield Hays." *The Blog of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation*, 15 Dec. 2016, gvshp.org/blog/2016/12/15/village-people-arthur-garfield-hays.

"Ella Raines's Rx for TV." *TV Guide*, no. 15, in Janet Dean, Registered Nurse clippings files Box 5, Folder 6851, Dozier Papers, Collection 06851, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

Foster, Bob. "Ella Raines Finds Gold Mine in TV." *San Mateo Times*, 31 July 1954, p. 7.

Four Daughters. Directed by Michael Curtiz, Warner Bros., 1938.

The Great Lie. Directed by Edmund Goulding, Warner Bros., 1941.

The Green Hornet. Created by William Dozier, Greenway Productions/Twentieth Century Fox Television, 1966–1967.

Harlan County U.S.A. Directed by Barbara Kopple, Cabin Creek, 1976.

"How Long till Summer." Playhouse Theatre, produced by Leon J. Bronesky and Edward M. Gilbert, 27–31 Dec. 1949.

"How Long till Summer." *Theatre Arts*, March 1950, p. 11.

Hoyt, Eric. *Hollywood Vault: Film Libraries Before Home Video*. U of California P, 2014.

Janet Dean, Registered Nurse. Created by William Dozier and Ella Raines, Cornwall Productions, 1954–1955.

"The Jinx Nurse." *Janet Dean, Registered Nurse*, Episode 13, created by William Dozier and Ella Raines, Cornwall Productions, 27 July 1954.

"The Kennedy Case" *Janet Dean, Registered Nurse*, Episode 1, created by William Dozier and Ella Raines, written by Franz Spencer, Cornwall Productions, 15 Mar. 1954.

Kaplan, Fred. *Gore Vidal: A Biography*. Open Road Media, 2013.

King: A Filmed Record . . . Montgomery to Memphis. Directed by Sidney Lumet, Commonwealth United Entertainment, 1970.

Lane, Christina. *Phantom Lady: Hollywood Producer Joan Harrison, The Forgotten Woman Behind Hitchcock*. Chicago Review P, 2020.

Leigh, Michele. "Reading Between the Lines: History and the Studio Owner's Wife." *Doing Women's Film History: Reframing Cinemas Past and Future*, edited by Christine Gledhill and Julia Knight, U of Illinois P, 2015, pp. 42–52.

Lester, John. "Ella Raines to Star as Nurse in Janet Deane [*sic*]." *Long Island Star-Journal*, 23 Feb. 1954, p. 18.

Mama. Created by Ralph Nelson, CBS, 1949–1957.

Meet Millie. Created by Frank Galen, CBS, 1952–1956.

Nocturne. Directed by Edwin L. Marin, RKO, 1946.

Our Miss Brooks. Created by Al Lewis, CBS, 1952–1956.

Perry Mason. Created by Erie Stanley Gardner, Paisano Productions, 1957–1966.

Private Secretary. Created by Jack Chertok, Jack Chertok Productions, CBS, 1953–1957.

"The Randall Case." *Janet Dean, Registered Nurse*, Episode 16, created by William Dozier and Ella Raines, Cornwall Productions, 7 Sept. 1954.

Ross, Wallace A. *Ross Reports*. New York City, Television Index, Inc., 1949–1979.

Saboteur. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock, Universal Pictures, 1941.

Sembène: The Making of African Cinema. Directed by Manthia Diawara and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Channel 4 Television, Third World Newsreel Film Collective, 1994.

Shadow of a Doubt. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock, Universal Pictures, 1943.

Suzy. Directed by George Fitzmaurice, MGM, 1936.

They Won't Believe Me. Directed by Irving Pichel, RKO, 1947.

"Victor Wolfson Dead; Wrote Broadway Plays", *New York Times*, 30 May 1990, p. B20.

Willy. Created by Louis Pelletier and William Spier, Desilu Productions/CBS, 1954–1955.

Wire Service. Created by Warren Lewis and Don Sharpe, Desilu Productions/ABC, 1956–1957.

You Are There. Created by Goodman Ace, CBS News, 1953–1957.

Suggested Citation

Lane, Christina. "Researching Janet Dean: Perspectives on Female Collaboration in Television Production." *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, Archival Opportunities and Absences in Women's Film and Television Histories Dossier, no. 20, 2020, pp. 205–212, DOI: https://doi.org/10.33178/alpha.20.14.

Christina Lane is Chair and Associate Professor of the Department of Cinematic Arts at the University of Miami. She is the author of *Phantom Lady: Hollywood Producer Joan Harrison, The Forgotten Woman Behind Hitchcock* (Chicago Review Press, 2020), *Magnolia* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), and *Feminist Hollywood: From Born in Flames to Point Break* (Wayne State UP, 2000). Her work has been published in *Cinema Journal*, *Feminist Media Histories*, the *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, *Mississippi Quarterly*, and *Cine-Files*. A member of the Women Film Critics Circle, she has provided commentary to such outlets as NPR, Air Mail, and the Daily Mail.