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### Mother Confessor

Emma Quirk-Durben

*Washington University in St. Louis*

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# MOTHER CONFESSOR

*Emma Quirk-Durben*

*Mentor: Richard Chapman*

For my thesis project, I wrote a screenplay about an early female pioneer in journalism and the film industry, Adela Rogers St. Johns. Much of the screenplay is inspired by material from St. Johns' autobiographies. The screenplay also tells the story of trailblazing female comedian Mabel Normand, who directed many of her own films during the silent period and was a lifelong friend of St. Johns. The film takes place in the beginning of the twentieth century, which led me to research the early days of Los Angeles and the film industry for my story's backdrop. My screenplay also features the beginnings of the gossip industry, as well as William Randolph Hearst's sensationalizing mode of journalism. St. Johns worked in both of these industries and was known for being what was then called a "sob sister," indicating a highly emotive style of writing associated with women. I explored how this sob sister style of writing paved the way for New Journalism of the 1970s and the author-centered style of journalism that is now commonplace. My screenplay highlights St. Johns' varied work as a journalist, a gossip columnist, a screenwriter, and a short story writer. Ultimately, my screenplay positions St. Johns as a vital figure in the history of Hollywood as the creator of a sustaining Hollywood myth. St. Johns wrote the original story that, through many versions, is now well known as *A Star is Born*. St. Johns' story of the tragic consequences of a young female star's rise to fame has become one of the quintessential and enduring Hollywood archetypes.