



# Actresses of a Certain Character: Forty Familiar Hollywood Faces from the Thirties to the Fifties

*Axel Nissen*

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Ma Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Mammy in *Gone with the Wind*, Auntie Em in *The Wizard of Oz* --all were unforgettable characters who played an integral part in some of Hollywood's most memorable productions. For over three decades, from the 1930s to the 1950s, character actresses who brought such roles to life were one of Hollywood's great but little acknowledged assets. Often lured from Broadway yet billed fifth or sixth (if at all), these talented ladies received little acclaim for their roles in film industry productions. Still, what they lacked in promotion and perhaps adulation they made up for in longevity. While a screen star's career was generally limited by age and physical appearance, character actresses often worked well into their seventies, eighties or even nineties. Signed to contracts by major studios just like the stars they supported on screen, character actresses made hundreds of films over their careers. From the early days of sound film through the end of the studio era, this volume documents in detail the lives and careers of two score of Hollywood's most talented character actresses. It presents information regarding birth, death, film credits and prizes and analyzes each player's unique talents, signature roles and overall career development. Forty individual profiles are provided from a representative range of backgrounds, character types and career experiences. These include actresses such as Marjorie Main, Agnes Moorehead, Thelma Ritter, Fay Bainter, Beulah Bondi, Lucile Watson, Sara Allgood, Lee Patrick and Jessie Ralph, among others. A fascinating tour through Hollywood's big studio era and the lives of its characters.

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