

Italian Silent Cinema: A Reader

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Courtesy of Museo Nazionale del Cinema (Turin).

Credits

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Chapter 15/All the Same or Strategies of Difference: Early Italian Comedy in International Perspective

Ivo Blom

Introduction

Since the 1985 Pordenone retrospective, Italian comedy has gained great international interest, particularly in its early format – the comedy short film or *comica*. Until the mid-1980s, the European film collections that held Italy's best comedy short films, such as the Desmet and the Joye Collection, were not open to researchers. Since then, things have changed. In this essay I will mainly discuss comedy short films and for purposes of brevity I shall refer to them as comedies. The reader should be aware that, with their emphasis on physical humor, comedy short films, or *comiche*, were in many ways different from the later, often longer, and subtler comedic narratives known in Italy as *commedie*, and represented for instance by the work of Eleuterio Rodolfi, Camillo De Riso, and Lucio D'Ambra.¹

Over the past few decades, archives have preserved comedy short films and made them available for research. In addition, information on early Italian comedy has enormously increased through the publication of a multi-volume filmography entitled *Il cinema muto italiano (FCMI)*, edited by Aldo Bernardini and Vittorio Martinelli.² One result of this increased availability of films and reviews has been that while in the past scholars focused on the genre's national differences, for instance by *comparing* French and Italian comedies,³ more recently they have begun to pay attention to diversification *within* the comedic genre itself. The reason for this shift is due to the recognition of various factors: differences in actors' professional background, differences between situation (or, situational, as we shall see below) and action driven comedy, and watershed developments such as the international rise of the feature

film. How, then, do Italian comical types, which also encompassed foreign comedians working in Italy, relate to their foreign counterparts? Was the Italian distinction between action driven and situation comedies common elsewhere? Comparisons with contemporary comedy across national borders will show many common characteristics. For a reevaluation of Italian early comedy as part of an international style and film culture, the adoption of an international perspective is a promising starting point.⁴

A comparison of national cinemas in the early 1910s is challenging, because, in contrast to the cinema of the 1920s, the concept of "national" was more of a construction than a reality. By replacing foreign intertitles, every film could be adjusted to and even "localized" within different markets. For pre-1914 European distribution and exhibition, nationality was not such a big issue, especially for short films. Also, since one can certainly speak of an international style, as David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson have shown, the identification of national traits for pre-1914 comedies is often difficult.⁵

This approach, however, deliberately neglects the diversification within early comedy. For example, we can now identify individual companies' distinct approach to film comedy, thereby distinguishing a typical Ambrosio style from a Cines one. When from 1909–1910 Itala Film, Ambrosio and Cines introduced identifiable comical types, such as Cretinetti (André Deed), Robinet (Marcel Fabre) and Tontolini (Ferdinando Guillaume), the notion of a singular international comical style became even more ambiguous. Such singularity did not work at either the national or company level. Robinet is a totally different



Fig. 1. *Polidor al club della morte* [UK: Polidor, a Member of the Death, Pasquali e C., 1912], lithograph (Litografia A. Cotta, Turin; design: Giovanni Grande). [Courtesy of EYE Filmmuseum (Amsterdam).]

character from *Gigetta* or *Rodolfi*, although all three worked for Ambrosio. Likewise the comedies of Léonce Perret are completely different from those of Onésime, even if both were produced by the French production company Gaumont.

In the past, scholars discussed comedians as if they were all the same. But every comedian represents his/her own type. Differences not only in physical appearance and performance but also in content, style, and professional background can be traced as much between Cretinetti and Polidor as between Kri Kri and Robinet. Furthermore, a clear difference exists between the comedies performed by the aforementioned comedians and those of *Gigetta*, *Rodolfi*, *Vaser* and *Pilotti*. The latter ones are more *boulevardier*-like, "with their stories of dreadful wives, nasty mother-in-laws and depressed husbands", as Vittorio Martinelli has remarked.⁶

Martinelli has argued that in early Italian cinema there are two kinds of comedies, divided by a phenomenon that can also be traced in other national cinemas: the development of comedy from vaudeville and the circus, and the development of comedy from the legitimate theatre. We could dub

this distinction as the opposition between the more action driven comedy or *comiche* and the situation comedy, or *comédie*, often centered on a domestic theme. Comedies tied to vaudeville and the circus diminished drastically in European cinema after the early teens, while the latter type continued as a quantitatively minor, but no less interesting, genre. With the arrival of the sound film, comedies linked to legitimate theatre became an important genre in both Europe and the United States.⁷

Vaudeville- and circus-based comedy

Before dealing with theatrical comedy, we should investigate the more well-known vaudeville- and circus-based *comiche* that emerged earlier. By focusing on four major characters of early Italian *comiche*, we can see how it developed in the early teens.

Polidor, the circus master

The circus clown-turned-film comedian was typical of the early film comedy. In 1910 Ferdinando Guillaume (1887–1977) and his well-bred European circus family found employment at Cines. He soon became famous in Italy with the character of Tontolini, which was known as Jenkins in Britain and in the U.S. Beginning as an actor, Guillaume later became a director, rivaling Itala Film's best card, André Deed, known on the screen as Cretinetti. Guillaume contributed to Italian comedy film's international reputation. In the autumn of 1911, he moved from Rome to the Pasquali Company of Turin; since Cines owned the name of the character of Tontolini, Guillaume created a new one, Polidor, and continued his double profession of leading actor and *metteur-en-scène*. After Deed returned to France, Guillaume's more mature and complex style developed and earned him more popularity and esteem. During the years 1912–1913 his output amounted to four films a month. From 1914 on, however, the production of his *comiche* diminished considerably, despite the fact that he was the only comic actor to pursue a career in Italian cinema after the early teens.⁸ The popularity of feature-length productions was making the genre of short comedy films appear obsolete while Guillaume's comedic register remained the same. From the pied piper who makes everyone and everything dance in *Il clarino di Tontolini* [UK: Tontolini's Clarinet, Cines 1911] to even the famous balloon act in Fellini's *La dolce vita* (1960), in fact, Guillaume's circus background remained consistent.

Guillaume's roots in the circus are most obvi-



Fig. 2. Cretinetti (André Deed), postcard (Edition Pathé Frères), 1910s. [Courtesy of Ivo Blom Collection.]

steak in *Polidor mangia del toro* [Polidor Eats Bull Meat, Pasquali e C., 1913]. The latter film's plot restaged an established and fairly stereotypical narrative of many early comedies, particularly in France, that played with the imaginative effects of eating certain animals.⁹ Consider *Un monsieur qui a mangé du taureau* [A Man Who Ate Bull Meat, Gaumont 1909] or the similarities between *Cretinetti ha ingoiato un gambero* [UK: Foolshead Swallows a Crab, Itala Film, 1909] and *Patouillard mange du homard* (Bill Buys a Lobster, Lux, 1911), which operate on the premise that eating a lobster causes one to walk backwards.¹⁰

Cretinetti, speed and/of destruction

If Polidor films focused on the grotesque, the ones featuring Cretinetti, played by André Deed, emphasized extraordinary speed. Cretinetti's quickness in chases, destruction, and transformations recalled the Boireau-comedies that Deed himself had made for Pathé before coming to Italy. They were also similar to the surreal comedies of Onésime, including *Onésime horloger* (Gaumont, 1911) where the main character speeds up time in order to get an inheritance. The unrestricted violence and anti-establishment attitude of the Cretinetti films is not unlike that of certain French comedies starring Calino or early American comedies. Cretinetti's action-driven films were not the result of a circus background, but stemmed from his familiarity with French *variétés* and cinema.

ous in a film like *Polidor e i gatti* [UK: Polidor and the Lions, Pasquali e C., 1913], in which his character is a servant who substitutes his masters' runaway cats with a pair of young lion pups. Lions were often used in Italian films, although more frequently in drama than in comedy. Consider for instance *In pasto ai leoni* (The Lion Tamer's Revenge, Cines, 1912) and *Nelly, la domatrice* (Love Amongst the Lions, Ambrosio, 1912), both featuring actor Alfred Schneider and his lions performing sensational scenes with both male and female lion tamers. Comedies that featured lions as a regular component were typical of French cinema, especially the Gavroche film comedies, including *Gavroche veut faire une riche marriage* (A Marriage of Convenience, Éclair 1912). Played by Paul Bertho, the character of Gavroche resembled Polidor, with his small stature, his continuous grimaces towards the camera and his clown-like checkered plaid coat and bowler hat.

Guillaume had Polidor interacting with all kinds of animals in his films. In addition to the real lions seen in *Polidor e i gatti*, he worked with an elephant in *Polidor e l'elefante* [Polidor and the Elephant, Pasquali e C., 1913], where Polidor wins the friendship of the large animal by extracting a splinter from one of its feet. Similarly, Polidor becomes hysterical when he thinks he has eaten an infected rabbit in *Polidor mangia il coniglio* [Polidor Eats Rabbit, Pasquali e C., 1913] or becomes strong and aggressive as a bull after eating a bull

André Deed was born André Chapais in Le Havre, France, in 1879. Before starting as a film actor, he worked in different capacities – as an actor for a dialect-spoken theatre company, in café-concerts, and at the Folies-Bergères and the Chatélet. He first worked in films with Georges Méliès and subsequently with Pathé, where he starred in his own series as the character Boireau. Deed also scripted and directed his own films. At the end of 1908, Itala Film lured him to Turin with an attractive contract. Deed's Cretinetti films were extremely popular domestically and worldwide. Abroad he was known as Gribouille (France, Holland), Foolshead (Britain, USA) and Müller (Germany). Several renowned Itala Film actors worked with him, including Valentina Frascaroli and Emilio Ghione. When Deed returned to Pathé in 1912, followed by Frascaroli, he rejuvenated his character Boireau in *Gribouille redevient Boireau* [Gribouille Becomes Boireau Again], thereby continuing the French character's earlier success. In later years, Deed returned several times to Italy to perform in two-reelers and feature films. Most



Fig. 3. *Robinet chauffeur miope* [UK: Tweedledum, A Short-Sighted Chauffeur, Ambrosio, 1914], lithograph (Atelier Butteri, Turin). [Courtesy of EYE Filmmuseum (Amsterdam).]

notable were the films *La paura degli aeromobili nemici* [Fear of Enemy Planes, Itala Film, 1915] about Zeppelin attacks, and *L'uomo meccanico* [The Mechanical Man, Milano Films, 1921], where Deed created a fierce, remote-controlled robot character.¹¹

Deed has often been praised for one film: *Cretinetti e le donne* (1909), also known as *Cretinetti che bello!* (Too Much Beauty, Itala 1909), in which Cretinetti is torn to pieces by his female admirers.¹² After they leave him, Cretinetti magically reassembles his body. In his enormous shoes underlining his small stature, he reminds us of the even smaller stage character Little Tich, played by English music hall comedian Harry Relph (1867–1928), who in turn-of-the-century vaudeville circuits was famous for wearing 28-inch boots, commonly called “slapshoes”. The bodily disintegration and reintegration in *Cretinetti che bello!*, however, appeared often in early comedy, especially in the very first years. Suffice it to mention Georges Méliès’ *Tom Tight et Dum Dum* (Jack Hags and Dum Dum, 1903) and *Une indigestion* (Up-to-Date Surgery, 1902), the latter being a par-

ody of the medical films by Dr. Eugène-Louis Doyen. Deed performed in several of Méliès’s films, including *Dislocation mystérieuse* (An Extraordinarily Dislocation, 1901), in which he detaches and re-attaches his limbs.¹³ In the teens, decapitation as a trick film technique was also evident in *Kri Kri senza testa* [UK: Headless Bloomer, Cines, 1913] and in the French comedy, *Polycarpe veut faire un carton* [Polycarpe Wants to Shoot Targets, Eclipse 1912] in which Polycarpe is so fond of firing a gun that, after shooting a waiter’s head off, he replaces it with a pig’s head.

Robinet: seducer on the run

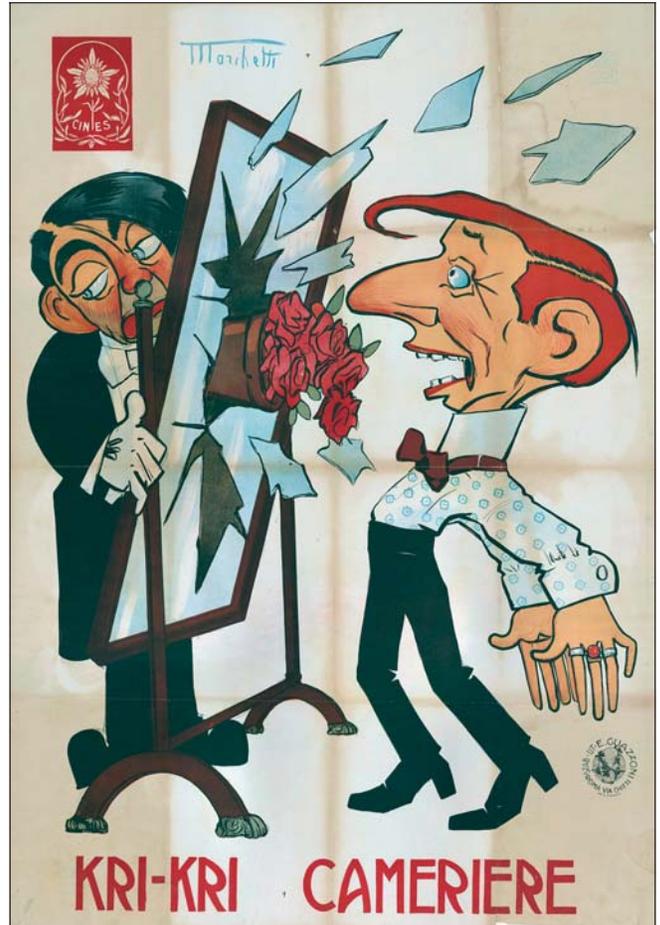
Another early Italian comic character known for his destructive talent was Ambrosio’s Robinet. Differently from the minute Cretinetti, Robinet was a tall type, not as socially and culturally incendiary in his performances as Cretinetti, but still quite clumsy and provocative. A few films also featured Robinet as a shameless libertine in a unique combination of action-driven and situation comedy that made his work not so distant from the Feydeau’s comedy style, filled with their misunderstandings, illicit meetings and triangular relationships.

Marcel Fabre, a pseudonym of Marcel Fernández Peréz, was born in Spain and originally worked as a circus clown. His film career began in France with short comic films made for Éclair and Pathé. In early 1910 Ambrosio was looking for a comedian capable of competing with Tontolini of Cines and Cretinetti of Itala. Eventually, the Turinese firm hired Fabre in March of that year. He later became a director as well. Fabre acquired international notoriety under different names. He was Robinet (France, Spain, Holland), Nauke (Germany, Holland), and Tweedledum (UK and U.S.). His screen companion, played by Nilde Baracchi, was known as Robinette. In addition to directing his own films, Fabre also directed a few Fricot comedies in 1913. In 1914, he directed something quite unique, the grotesque feature film *Le avventure straordinarissime di Saturnino Farandola* [The Extraordinary Adventures of Saturnino Farandola, Ambrosio, 1914], an adaptation of the eponymous science fiction novel by Ferdinand Robida.¹⁴

If his common role was that of a fanatic and shameless Casanova, Robinet, like other comedians, was often involved in chases. The chase was one of the most frequent and defining elements in the short comedy film in Italy and abroad. It was regularly adopted as a mere pretext to have characters running, causing the destruction of objects and property, and involving innocent bystanders. Usually an ever-growing group of enraged indi-

viduals joins the pursuit. These are not individualized characters, but stock types, and include police officers, grocery vendors, waiters and nannies. They stereotypically epitomize a rigid bourgeois society ruled by law and order, business and social hierarchy. The genre was known in France as the *course poursuite*.

Robinet's chase films are often triggered by an improper use of a modern mean of transportation. In *Robinet aviatore* (Tweedledum, Aviator, Ambrosio, 1911) his newly designed airplane destroys a rooftop, a car and a chimney, before crashing through five stores and ending up in a police station. The amount of destruction is not unlike the French comedies starring Onésime, including *Onésime et son collègue* [Onésime and His Colleague, Gaumont, 1913]. In *Robinet chauffeur miope* [Robinet, Short-sighted Chauffeur, Ambrosio, 1914], a short-sighted Robinet runs over everything with his car, while in *La prima bicicletta di Robinet* (Tweedledum on His First Bicycle, Ambrosio, 1910) he causes chaos when riding his first bike. Plots of this kind were also typical of earlier French short comedies, including car chases in *Les débuts d'un chauffeur* (The Inexperienced Chauffeur, Pathé, 1906) and bike chases in *La première sortie d'un cycliste* [A Cyclist's The First Ride, Pathé, 1907], and undoubtedly influenced Italian comiche. Another typical situation of early Italian and French comedy short films featured a



female character chased down by her admirers. In *Signorina Robinet* [UK: Miss Tweedledum, Ambrosio, 1913], Robinet's usual Casanova persona is turned upside down. He has to dress up like a woman to escape his beloved's angry husband who, unable to figure out Robinet's disguise, fancies him and starts following him in the company of a growing crowd of admirers. Police officers have to make sure the "lady" returns home safely.¹⁵

Fig. 4. *Kri Kri s'improvvisa cameriere* [UK: Bloomer Valet, Cines 1914]. Lithograph (Litografia E. Guazzoni, Rome; design: Marchetti). [Courtesy of EYE Filmmuseum (Amsterdam).]

Kri Kri: innovation and special effects

Until recently the character of Kri Kri, played by Raymond Frau, was a rather undervalued one. Born in Senegal in 1887, Frau began his career as a circus clown and acrobat in France where he performed in vaudeville circuits and café-chantants. In 1912 he started his film career as comic actor at the Cines studios, establishing the internationally popular character of Kri Kri and working with other Cines players, including Lea (Lea Giunchi Guillaume), Checco (Giuseppe Gambardella), and Cinessino (Eraldo Giunchi).¹⁶ The

Fig. 5. Lea Giunchi, postcard (Caesar Film), ca.1915. [Courtesy of Joseph A. North Collection.]

character of Kri Kri was exported to various countries bearing different names, such as Bloomer (Britain), Patachon (France, Holland), and Mucki/Krikri (Germany).¹⁷

The Kri Kri films often contain scenes that nowadays we would describe as surreal and that may remind us of the poetic affinity between surrealism and silent film comedy. At a time when the artistic avant-garde was only slightly involved in filmmaking and Italian cinema was mainly a bourgeois enterprise, it is quite surprising to note Kri Kri's need and ability to make use of special effects to create unusual worlds where individuals decapitate themselves, gravitational laws are challenged, and mirror images pester their "original subjects". For example, in *Kri Kri senza testa* [UK: Headless Bloomer, Cines, 1913] Kri Kri wins a marriage competition by separating his head from his body. The film clearly is a variation on the French comedy *Gavroche veut faire une riche mariage*, in which the suitor Gavroche wins a rich American lady's heart and preference by bringing along two real lions.

In *Kri Kri fuma l'oppio* [Kri Kri Smokes Opium, Cines, 1913] the comedian smokes opium cigarettes and begins to hallucinate. First he meets his cheeky valet, also played by Frau, and then a host – a third Frau. Through refined and almost invisible trickery, the three characters occupy separate sections of the same shot. Later, Kri Kri continues to hallucinate in front of his mirror. His reflection starts to pester him and finally crosses the mirror – similar to later surreal renderings in Jean Cocteau's *Orphée* (Orpheus, 1950) and Leo McCarey's *Duck Soup* (1933). Kri Kri and his double begin a fight until the double disappears. As Kri Kri cools down he finally realizes that he has been smoking opium cigarettes. Ever since Lotte Eisner, the theme of the evil double has been attached to the German Autoren-film *Der Student von Prag* (The Student of Prague, 1913), but apparently the theme was in the air in 1913.¹⁸ In addition, the open display of drug use in this era strikes us as remarkable, though one encounters it as well in other Italian films, including the short drama *Amore tragico* [Tragic Love, Cines, 1912], in which a doctor regularly injects his wife with morphine to calm her nerves, until she commits suicide by taking an overdose.

Nothing remains safe in place in the Kri Kri films. The world can be turned upside down and humans lose control over gravity. In *Kri Kri e i voli Pegoud* also known as *Kri Kri imita Pegoud* [Kri Kri Imitates Pégoud, Cines, 1914], Kri Kri attempts to emulate the famous French pioneer aviator Adolphe Pégoud by standing on his head and sleeping upside down. When he finally happens to fly an actual plane, he falls out of his seat because

he forgets to fasten his seatbelt. In *Kri Kri e il tango* [UK: Bloomer and the Tango, Cines, 1913], Kri Kri dances the tangos with his partner Lea Giunchi in spite of being tackled by a nasty rival. The ensuing commotion causes the concert podium to collapse, they do a leap backwards over a sofa, jump into and back out the water (through reverse motion), and return exhausted into the ballroom. When Lea dances with the rival, Kri Kri takes revenge by tying the couple up and unrolling the rope with such ardor that they start to pirouette at enormous speed. What is unusual for this period is that the camera, positioned together with actors on a rotating platform, shows the dancing couple's twirling point of view leading to a striking merry-go-round effect.¹⁹ *Kri Kri balla* [Kri Kri Dances, Cines, 1915] features again the trick of linking the unrolling of a rope with a gyrating platform. Kri Kri watches two dancers doing pirouettes on a stage. That night he dreams of himself as a perfect dancer, but falls out of bed. The next day he practices with his maid, but ends up hitting her and giving her a black eye. The twirling Kri Kri however is contagious. Everywhere he passes, people and objects begin to pirouette too: first the furniture in his house, then visitors at his front door, then the world outside. Even the spectators in a movie theater start pirouetting right as the screened film shows the blurred point of view of both "pirouettes" and on-lookers. One is reminded of the dance frenzy of the aforementioned *Il clarino di Tontolini* and Max Linder's *Entente cordiale* [Pact of Hearts, Pathé, 1912].

As Yuri Tsivian points out, the tango was at its zenith around 1913, providing the subject for comedies all around Europe, including *Max, professeur de tango* [Max, Tango Instructor, Pathé, 1914] with Max Linder, *Tango in Russia*, also known as *Il tango russo* [Tango in Russia, Cines, 1914] with Checco, and *Die Tango-Königin* [The Tango Queen, Vitascopie, 1913] with Hanni Weisse.²⁰ Comparing the frenzy of Cines's *Kri Kri e il tango* with the much more subdued version of Vitagraph's *Tangled Tangoists* (1914), which also dealt with the tango craze, one notes a totally different approach. John Bunny and Flora Finch meet at a soirée and fall in love. Since they are both unable to dance the tango, they decide separately to take lessons. They are both quite clumsy and torture their teachers but by chance they do so in the same dance school, in two adjacent rooms. Flora spies on John through a keyhole; and John does the same to her through a door crack. At the next soirée their tango dancing is much improved and everybody praises them. On the way back home, the coach shakes so much that to the couple's delight it too appears to have learned the dance. Unable

to remain still, the couple marries while dancing (more like wobbling) imitated by all their guests. Eventually, even their newly born babies require their parents to dance the tango before being able to sleep. Humorous and fast-paced, *Tangled Tangoists* does not however feature the same sense of frenzy and voyeurism that pervaded *Kri Kri e il tango*.

Theatrical comedy

Tangled Tangoists is representative of a different kind of comedy that had its counterparts in Italy. Along with short comedy narratives that constantly converged on a central popular figure, Italy also produced theatrical comedies that involved love triangles and adultery. By creating a mood suited more for a chuckle and a smile than for peals of laughter, these films used a more restrained kind of humor, comparable to the Gaumont comedies directed by Léonce Perret. Often there is an element of voyeuristic complicity shared with the spectator, who is turned into an accomplice.²¹ Action is less important than the situation, which relies on misunderstandings and identity changes. As a result, the comic film resembles the dramatic features of the 1910s that Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs described as “situational”.²² The rise of situational comedy went hand in hand with the gentrification of the film medium, the rise of the feature film, and the social diversification of movie theatres. Both in Europe and in the U.S., production companies began to make feature length comedies that resembled theatrical comedies more than action-driven vaudeville acts. This variety of style and mode of address within the comic genre is exactly what makes this transitional period in film history so interesting.

Ambrosio produced quite a few of these situational comedies, often starring Gidgetta Morano, Eleuterio Rodolfi, and Camillo De Riso. Their films were often based on Italian and French *fin-de-siècle pochades* and grew in length over the years. Gidgetta Morano (1886–1986) trained in Turinese amateur theatre before starting at Ambrosio, where she appeared in various genres including drama, comedy, and romance. She achieved great success with her role as Mam’zelle Nitouche in *Santarellina* (Mam’selle Nitouche, Ambrosio, 1912) and became one of Italian cinema’s leading ladies. From 1913, she performed regularly as Gidgetta in the eponymous Ambrosio comedies, in which she often played against the character of Rodolfi, impersonated by Eleuterio Rodolfi.²³ Rodolfi (1876–1935) trained as a theatre actor before starting in comedies, where he played a witty and



sometimes unlucky gentleman. From late 1913, Rodolfi also began a directing career, mostly with comedies.²⁴ Camillo De Riso (1854–1924) had a theatre background before starting in film, just like Morano and Rodolfi. A son of stage actors, he started a family of film actors. With his rotund face and generous look of bourgeois *bonhomme*, De Riso formed a successful trio at Ambrosio in 1912 with Morano and Rodolfi. In late 1913 he moved to the Gloria Film company where he created the epicure and shameless libertine character of Camillo.²⁵

One typical example of the Morano-Rodolfi comedies featuring complex relationships among at least three characters is *Vendetta d'amico* [UK: Friendly Vengeance, Ambrosio, 1911], in which two friends fight over the same woman. One ends up marrying her, but discovers that she is a spendthrift. After he leaves a suicide note, she marries his friend, who soon discovers her wasteful conduct. Husband Number One reappears laughing. In *Un successo diplomatico* [UK: A Diplomatic Success, Ambrosio, 1913], Morano is an ambassador's daughter who travels to Berlin as she suspects her

Fig. 6. Eleuterio Rodolfi in *Un successo diplomatico* [UK: A Diplomatic Success, Ambrosio, 1913], lithograph (Silvestrelli & Cappelletto, Turin; design: Paolo Parodi). [Courtesy of EYE Filmmuseum (Amsterdam).]



Fig. 7. Gigetta Morano in *L'acqua miracolosa* [Miraculous Water, Ambrosio, 1914], lithograph (Atelier Butteri, Turin). [Courtesy of EYE Filmmuseum (Amsterdam).]

husband of infidelity and plans to divorce him. Her father (Camillo De Riso), travels to find her, and discovers that a diplomat (Rodolfi) is courting her. The father prevents his daughter from making two mistakes, divorce and adultery, and deters the suitor by informing him that she is a dangerous terrorist. Finally in *L'acqua miracolosa* [Miraculous Water, Ambrosio, 1914], a daring comedy for those years, Morano is married to a childless man who dreams of a swarm of children. Their doctor (Rodolfi) suggests that the wife goes to the miraculous wells. There she meets no other than... the doctor. Shortly after her husband becomes a father. In the end, the father holds a baby in his hands, while his wife lifts a jug in which the film's spectator can recognize, thanks to special effects, a little doctor. Just as in such comedies as *Una tragedia al cinematografo* [UK: Cinema Tragedy at Carnival Time, Cines, 1913], adultery is explicitly displayed and sanctioned.²⁶

This film resembles the French comedy *Une perle* [A Pearl, Gaumont, 1912], in which a son of

a well-bred family smuggles his beloved piano-teacher into his house by pretending that she is the new maid. She serves the parents extremely well and although the fraud is eventually discovered, the parents accept her. The closing scene of the film is witty: a first intertitle reads "And they got many children", followed by an image of the parents with seven grandchildren in the foreground, the young couple in the background singing and playing the piano, and a final intertitle that reads "And all of them musicians" before a series of intercut shots of family happiness close the film.

Images of children as the product of the film's plot occur more often in bourgeois comedies, including the above-mentioned *L'acqua miracolosa*, than in action-driven comedies. Instead of marriage and procreation, the result in action-driven comedies might be separation and loneliness, as in *Cretinetti fra due fuochi* (Foolshead Between Two Fires, Itala Film, 1910), where two women duel with swords and guns over Cretinetti, resulting in physical harm to the poor man. When he falls into the water, two men save him, after which the women fall in love with the saviors and abandon Cretinetti. Injured, and with his clothes torn to pieces, he gestures as if to say: "one moment you have two, the next you have none" before walking away from the camera.

A recurrent visual trope of the bourgeois comedy is the keyhole, which both represents and signifies early film audience's complicity and voyeurism.²⁷ Comedies by Ambrosio, but also those by Vitagraph and Gaumont, regularly make use of keyhole shots. In *Vendetta d'amico*, one of the suitors looks through the keyhole of Gigetta's house and, to his dismay, sees her in the arms of his rival. In *Robinet in vacanza* [UK: Tweedledum Takes His Holidays, Ambrosio, 1912], Robinet spies on a girl in a dressing cubicle. In *Robinet innamorato di una chanteuse* (Tweedledum In Love With a Singer, Ambrosio 1911), Robinet runs after a singer he has fallen in love with (Morano) and peeks through her door's keyhole seeing her putting on a nightgown. While in the film's diegesis she pretends not to know about being seen in her underwear, she laughs at the camera teasingly – at both Robinet and the film's spectators.

Keyhole scenes were not restricted to Italian bourgeois comedy, but were common in American and French bourgeois comedy as well. We have already mentioned the scene in *A Vitagraph Romance* in which Flora Finch spies upon Bunny practicing the tango. What is remarkable here is both the subjective shot, resulting from Finch peeking through a keyhole, but also a close up from the other side revealing Finch's eye, bulging almost



like the shot in the classic British film *Grandma's Reading Glass* (1900).²⁸ A Gaumont example of a keyhole scene is in *Vengeance du sergent de ville* [The Policeman's Vengeance, Gaumont, 1913]. Here a police officer terrorizes his neighbors by playing his bugle. While the neighbors are plotting against him, he drills a hole in a wall and watches their actions.²⁹

Marketing and self-referentiality

An important aspect of early Italian comedy is its flair for marketing and self-referentiality.³⁰ Looking at the films, it often becomes clear how strong the production companies' hold was on their "golden geese" and how they skillfully used comedies for promoting themselves, their comedians, and their film series. Regularly visible on intertitles and film leaders, companies' names and logos were also printed on the publicity materials that accompanied the continuous output of comic films with their recognizable and ever returning heroes. In some cases, comedies would also include companies' names within their narratives, mostly at the conclusion.

One of the first Italian examples of this use was *Cretinetti ha rubato un tappeto* [Foolshead Stole a Carpet, Itala Film, 1909]. After stealing a carpet, Cretinetti is chased up on a roof. As he rolls himself up in the carpet to make his chasers fall down, the carpet opens up to a text that reads: "Itala Film". In *Cocciutelli affissatore* [Kelly, Billposter, Milano Films, 1911], poor Cocciutelli tries to affix his posters but is chased everywhere. He ends up in jail where he can finally attach his poster on the wall. Of course it is a poster for... the Milano Films company. At the end of *Attenti alla vernice!* [Fresh Paint!, Itala Film, 1913] our hero (Ernesto Vaser) has the springs of a chair glued to his bottom. Like a kangaroo he escapes a frantic mob by jumping up a wall and through an open window. Once inside, the closing shutters reveal a poster of the Itala Film company. Finally, there is the example of the aforementioned *Il clarino di Tontolini*, in which even the Cines logo, made of a drawing of the Capitoline lioness with Romulus and Remus, starts moving as if dancing to the tune of Tontolini's clarinet. A variation on this method, one that promotes more a character than a production company, is *Cretinetti nella gabbia dei leoni* (Foolshead

Fig. 8. *L'acqua miracolosa* [Miraculous Water, Ambrosio, 1914], frame enlargement. [Courtesy of EYE Filmmuseum (Amsterdam).]

Fig. 9.
Self-referentiality
at work: Bruto
Castellani in *Una
tragedia al
cinematografo*
[UK: Cinema
Tragedy at
Carnival Time,
Cines, 1913],
frame
enlargement.
[Courtesy of EYE
Filmmuseum
(Amsterdam).]



in the Lion's Cage, Itala Film, 1910). Cretinetti quarrels with a tamer who puts him in the lion cage. He escapes but is haunted by the lions, first at his house and then in a movie theater that is projecting a Cretinetti film. There the lions sit still and watch Cretinetti on the screen, as the real Cretinetti sits next to a lion and salutes the audience.

Establishing a name: Pathé and competition

This kind of playful self-promotion can also be seen in French comedies – much less in American ones. Pathé was the most active in promoting its brand name (and logo), going further than just having a cardboard rooster hanging on film sets to prevent copyright infringement. During the period of traveling movie theatres, Pathé films constituted the larger part of film programs, but were presented without the company logo. The only identifying marks were the Pathé posters. After 1907 the company's strategy changed. Pathé became synonym with prestige. For instance, in 1907 Pathé organized a large promotional tour in the Netherlands that featured programs consisting exclusively of its films.³¹ Exhibitors eagerly aided Pathé's self-promotion in order to associate themselves with the company.

Beginning in 1908, other production companies, including Gaumont, Vitagraph, Ambrosio, Cines and Itala Film achieved notoriety and suc-

cess in the European film markets thereby establishing their names. These companies' marketing campaigns relied on a notion of brand consistency in terms of steady output, which was most visible in comedy short films, and comedic characters that audiences could easily identify with their respective production companies. In the late 1900s exhibitors began advertising new films by mentioning not their title but their manufacturers as a way to guarantee product quality and recognizability. This practice would change with the post-1910 rise of the feature film, which prompted the advertisement of individual titles. As for comedy short films, characters' names remained the most reliable vehicle to market their films and for distributors and exhibitors alike to book the works of Kri Kri, Cretinetti and Robinet sight unseen.

A nice French example of the brand marketing is *Les Incohérences de Boireau* (Pathé, 1913). Here Boireau (André Deed, before his move to Italy) engages in a series of senseless acts: to get down from his hammock he shoots the ropes with a revolver; he borrows clothes from the portrait of a forefather; and just by putting on an armor he reroutes a squadron. In the end, through an hilarious visual metaphor, he attaches a duck to the door of his house: the French word *canard* meaning not only "duck" but also "out of tune" and "stupid". Further, by replacing the iconic rooster near the inscription "Pathé-Frères", once more the duck emphasizes Boireau's utter lunacy.³²

Films on filmmaking and film publicity

When comic characters visited movie theatres, the film being projected there usually belonged to the comedy's manufacturing company. This kind of self-referentiality applied to either comedy or drama and was common in both European and American cinema.

Italian comedies showcased both a range of Italian films and a number of new film professions, including film operators, as in *Robinet operatore* [UK: Tweedledum as A Cinematograph Operator, Ambrosio, 1912], and scenario writers, as in *Tontolini scrittore di soggetti cinematografici* [UK: Tontolini Writes for the Cinema, Cines, 1911]. Apart from casually showing posters for blockbuster films such as in *Una tragedia al cinematografo*, a few comedies associated their central characters either to famous films or famous characters, as in *Kri Kri e il Quo vadis?* [Kri Kri and Quo Vadis?, Cines, 1912], which was a response to the most spectacular 1913 epic, *Kri Kri Giulio Cesare* [Kri Kri as Cajus Julius Caesar, Cines, 1915], which capitalized on the success of the 1914 Cines epic, and *Polidor Za-la-Mort* [Polidor as Za la Mort, Tiber-Film, 1917], which engaged with the master criminal Za la Mort, played by Emilio Ghione, who was the Italian answer to Zigomar and Fantômas. Comedy short films thus both sanctioned and commented on, even through irony, the prestige of Italian feature films and serials.

Another kind of self-referentiality was the display outside a movie theater of posters advertising a company's name and films – a long-running tradition that existed years before the first Italian comedies. Already before 1900, this was the strategy deployed in *The American Biograph in the Palace or It's Unlucky to Pass Under a Ladder* (British Mutoscope & Biograph Co., 1899). In this film the protagonist is posting announcements on a wall of a few of the company's titles. This practice continued well into the 1910s. Consider *The Right Girl?* (Vitagraph, 1915), in which the film's characters meet outside a movie theatre near a billboard that prominently publicizes a Vitagraph film.

In the Cines comedy short film *Una tragedia al cinematografo* (1913), starring a still unknown Pina Menichelli, we have an interesting variation on the theme of comedies and publicity. A jealous man pursues his attractive and fashionable wife (Menichelli), and discovers her chatting with a male friend in front of a movie theatre which is plastered, inside and outside, with posters of the 1913 Cines blockbuster *Quo Vadis?* Unable to get into the crowded theatre, but convinced that she is in there

with her presumed lover, the husband lets the manager of the film theatre know that he will shoot his unfaithful wife on her way out. The manager stops the projection – the film being screened tells the story of an adulterous woman reading a secret letter from her lover – and warns the audience, made mostly of adulterous couples, about the jealous husband's threatening intentions. The hilarious result is that, when the projection resumes, all the film spectators secretly flee from the theatre: when the lights go up, everybody is gone. The film capitalizes on the notion of movie theatres as ideal locations for illicit rendezvous, but also on the Chinese box-effect of spectators watching a film that shows other spectators watching a film. The latter reference was used in other Italian films, including *Al cinematografo, guardate ma non toccate* (UK: At the Cinema Show, Itala Film, 1912) and *Maciste* (Itala Film, 1915), which operated on a heightened sense of film voyeurism. The same voyeurism was even more in play in *Una tragedia al cinematografo* because of the way the audience shared in the secret of the characters' adultery. These examples appear to walk a fine line between Tom Gunning's concept of cinema of attractions and Christian Metz's notion of voyeurism in classical narrative cinema.³³ In the 1910s, film voyeurism was apparently acknowledged and quite explicit in contrast to its later disavowal in classical cinema.

Self-referentiality in international perspective: comedies on studios

Another way films promoted companies' names and reputations was by showcasing their film studios. A good example of a comedy is *Come Vardannes entrò alla "Milano Films"* [UK: Kelly's Home-coming, Milano Films, 1912], in which Vardannes returns to the Milano Films studio after a holiday in Britain and a visit to a British film set. In *Mariute* (Caesar Film//Bertini Film, 1918), a production that stood between a comedy and a drama, Francesca Bertini appears at home and at work at the Caesar Film studio, first parodying herself with all of her star caprice, then establishing herself as dramatic actress in a wartime drama to raise war bonds. The film's message here is that both Bertini and the Caesar Film studio do their bit for the war cause. In general, several Italian films dealt with representations of film studios as addressing problems felt by ordinary citizens.³⁴

American cinema did not generally show the same playful self-promotion strategy exhibited by Italian and French companies possibly because of their business relationships. Production companies were either linked to the Motion Picture Patents

Company (1912) or affiliated with the independent conglomerate of Universal. Focusing attention on individual companies could therefore distract attention from the trusts and joint companies. In Europe things were different. Even if some American companies relied heavily on European distribution companies, they still managed to promote themselves individually.³⁵ Vitagraph was probably the best one to market itself in Europe and became a brand name that stood for quality in drama and comedy, the moderate alternative for Northern Europeans annoyed at the all too hectic pace of Italian and French productions.³⁶ With its name conspicuously visible on publicity materials and intertitles, Vitagraph overcame the challenge that most American companies faced in distributing their products in countries with strong production activities, including Italy and France. Vitagraph posters, manufactured in its Paris-based laboratory and designed by French artist Harry Bedos, carried titles in two or three main European languages.³⁷ The historical hypothesis that there was some form of exchange between American comedy and Italian comedy on Italian soil needs further research and ought to start with Vitagraph.

Conclusion

We need to rethink our conceptualization of early Italian comedy. It was strongly rooted in French comedy, not only because of the presence of comedians such as Deed or Raymond Frau who came from France or its colonies, respectively. Many Italian comedies had plots or themes that had been used earlier in France and in the United States. On the whole this should not be surprising, as French comedies, especially those by Pathé, were popular everywhere, including in Italy before the 1905 inception of fiction film production.³⁸ An American influence seems more problematic, since American films were not widely distributed in Italy during the early 1910s. However, research on a broader scale could confirm or challenge this hypothesis: perhaps the relationships of influence have to be read the other way around. Close re-

search on similarities between the Cretinetti films and the previous and subsequent ones starring Boireau could be a starting point, particularly with regards to the common and recurrent trope of self-referentiality.

Certainly, American slapstick comedies, for instance those produced and directed by Mack Sennett, are full of excess, destruction, and speed. It would certainly be beneficial to compare them with Max Linder films, the Gaumont action comedies starring Onésime and Calino, and Cretinetti and Robinet films. I would argue that it is not at all clear whether American slapstick developed entirely on its own. On the other hand, the more restrained domestic comedies of Gaumont and Ambrosio alert us that these production companies did not just make action films, but diversified their genre production into both action driven comedies and situational comedies. In their subdued style, the comedies by Gaumont and Ambrosio are not stylistically that different from American comedies from the same period, particularly those produced by Edison and Vitagraph. The goals of these films are quite comparable: Léonce aimed at smiles, Onésime provoked roars, the Italians aimed at peals of laughter with their Cretinetti and Robinet farces, or set their sights on sniggering and stealthy looks with the Morano-Rodolfi comedies.³⁹

Early Italian comedy targeted Italian bourgeois society with its class distinctions, its rites and its trappings. When taking a closer look, we can see a continuously mocking engagement with modernity, fueled by an urge to create innovative and sometimes radical gags that expressed the doubts and the struggles of a society in transition.

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Notes

1. Paolo Cherchi Usai and Livio Jacob, eds., "I comici del muto italiano", special issue, *Griffithiana*, nos. 24–25 (October 1985). Informative and inspiring was Aldo Bernardini's contribution therein included, "Appunti sul cinema comico muto italiano", 21–35. For early Italian and early European comedy in general, see also Paolo Cherchi Usai, "Acrobaten, clowns en helden in de komische films", in *Hartstocht en heldendom: de vroege Italiaanse speelfilm 1905–1945*, ed. Ivo Blom and Nelly Voorhuis (Amsterdam: Stichting Mecano, 1988), 43–53; Thomas Brandmeier, "Fin de siècle Comedy Culture", in *Slapstick & Co. Frühe Filmkomödien/ Early Comedies*, ed. Helga Belach and Wolfgang Jacobsen (Berlin: Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek/Argon, 1995), 17–71. For more recent articles, see Giacomo Manzoli, "Maschere in serie. Ipotesi per un passaggio dall'anatomia alla fisiologia del corpus. Forme della serialità nel cinema comico muto italiano", and Frank Kessler's cross-national analysis, "Mésaventures en série. La circulation des motifs dans le cinéma comique des premiers temps", in *Il film e i suoi multipli/ Film and Its Multiples*, ed. Anna Antonini,

- Leonardo Quaresima and Laura Vichi (Udine: Forum, 2003), 459–464 and 451–458. Moreover, see Silvio Alovio, “Attrazioni, fughe e farse: Appunti sul cinema comico a Torino nei primi anni Dieci”, in *Insegnare storia con il cinema muto. Torino. Cinema, moda e costume nel primo Novecento*, ed. Maria Vasallo (Faenza: Associazione Clío 92, 2006), 95–130.
2. See the section on Reference Books at the end of the volume.
 3. Gian Piero Brunetta, “Il clown cinematografico tra salotto liberty e frontiera del West”, in “I comici del muto italiano”, ed. Paolo Cherchi Usai and Livio Jacob, special issue, *Griffithiana*, nos. 24–25 (October 1985): 11–20.
 4. Kristin Thompson, “The International Exploration of Cinematic Expressivity”, in *Film and the First World War*, ed. Karel Dibbets and Bert Hogenkamp (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), 65–85. See also Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
 5. Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995), 48 and 48n3.
 6. Author’s conversation with Vittorio Martinelli, 7 July 1999.
 7. In the twenties theatrical comedy emerged in the United States through the work of Cecil B. DeMille, particularly his social comedies. Its European counterparts were the French comedies by Albatros and the Italian comedies based on French boulevard theatre. These included Mario Almirante’s *Il controllore dei vagoni-letto* [The Controller of the Wagons-Lits, Alba Film, 1922], based on a play by Alexandre Bisson, and *La Dame de chez Maxim’s* [The Lady from Maxim’s, Rinascimento Film, 1923] and *Occupati d’Amelia* [Take Care of Amelia, Rinascimento Film, 1925], both Feydeau-adaptations starring the French comedian Marcel Levesque and the Italian diva Pina Menichelli. In 1925 two more Italian comedies, directed by Mario Bonnard and starring Marcel Levesque, followed: *Il tacchino* [The Turkey, Bonnard Films] and *Teodoro e socio* [Theodore and Partner, Bonnard Film], adapted after Feydeau’s *Le Dindon* and Robert Armont and Nicholas Nancey’s *Théodore et Cie*. Theatrical comedy during the thirties is to be associated with directors René Clair in France, Mario Camerini in Italy, and Howard Hawks and Preston Sturges in the United States.
 8. In 1915 Guillaume began his own production company, Polidor-Film. In 1916 he worked for Caesar Film and in 1917 and 1918 for Tiber Film. In 1921 and 1922 his last films were two feature comedies or commedie, released by his own company, Polidor Film. The company’s merger with the UCI trust did not turn out as expected: the trust’s 1922 collapse dragged into its grave a wide number of Italian companies from the previous period. I draw most biographical information on the various characters of early Italian comedy from *Griffithiana*’s aforementioned special issue.
 9. With regard to the practice of employing animals on the set, Polidor’s French counterpart was Gaumont comic character Onésime.
 10. Giulio Marlia, “Ferdinando Guillaume, in arte Polidor”, in “I comici del muto italiano”, ed. Paolo Cherchi Usai and Livio Jacob, special issue, *Griffithiana*, nos. 24–25 (October 1985): 45–61.
 11. For *L’uomo meccanico*, see Michele Canosa, “Il crepuscolo dei divi (muti e italiani)”, *Cinegrafie* 2, no. 4 (1991): 123–124.
 12. Bernardini lists the film as *Cretinetti che bello!* (Too Much Beauty, Itala 1909). Cf. *FCMI 1905–1909*, 263.
 13. For Deed and Méliès, see Paolo Cherchi Usai, *Giovanni Pastrone* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1985), 22–23. See also Cherchi Usai, “André Deed, più del solito”, in “I comici del muto italiano”, ed. Paolo Cherchi Usai and Livio Jacob, special issue, *Griffithiana*, nos. 24–25 (October 1985): 37–43.
 14. Shortly before Italy joined the Allied Forces in the First World War, Fabre emigrated to the United States. There he tried in vain to break through with his Jester Comedies. In the 1920s, he worked for smaller companies, including Pasha, Sanford, and Arrow. His leg was amputated after a work accident and some years later, in 1929 he died, forgotten.
 15. The chase trope was important to other Italian characters too, including Butalin (Cesare Gravina). Gravina moved to Hollywood in 1915, where he was cast in a number of notable films, including Eric von Stroheim’s *Foolish Wives* (1922) and *The Wedding March* (1928). In the thirties he returned to Naples.
 16. Lea Giunchi Guillaume was Natale Guillaume’s wife, Ferdinando Guillaume’s sister-in-law, and Eraldo Giunchi’s mother.
 17. He remained in Italy until his return to France in early 1916, where he created a character named “Dandy” and performed in various Éclair shorts.
 18. Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, [1969] 2008).
 19. The unstable image was not new, if one thinks such precedents as *The Fatal Sneeze* (Hepworth, 1907) and *The Dream of a Rarebit Fiend* (Edison, 1906). In *Kri Kri e il tango*, however, the unstable image reveals a subjective perspective that shakes the spectator’s own perspective.
 20. Yuri Tsivian, “Russia 1913. Cinema in the Cultural Landscape”, *Griffithiana*, no. 50 (May 1994): 135–139. Tango was also often included in drama as in Éclair’s *Le tango de la mort* (1914) and the Italian diva-films *La donna nuda* (The Naked Truth, Cines, 1914) and *Sangue bleu* [Blue Blood, Celio, 1914]. Representation of the period in later films was often linked to the tango, one of the most famous examples being Valentino’s tango in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (Metro, 1921).
 21. For the Morano-Rodolfi comedies and other Ambrosio films, see Blom, “Un tesoro nascosto. I film Ambrosio nella collezione Desmet”, in *Cabiria e il suo tempo*, ed. Paolo Bertetto and Gianni Rondolino (Turin: MNC; Milan: Il Castoro, 1998), 117–125. For Perret’s comedies, see Richard Abel, *The Ciné Goes to Town. French Cinema 1896–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 417–424.
 22. Cf. Brewster and Jacobs, *Theatre to Cinema*, 12 passim.
 23. Morano stayed at Ambrosio until 1917 and performed in a few films in the twenties. Just like Guillaume, Gigetta Morano also performed with Fellini, specifically in *I vitelloni* (1953) and *Otto e mezzo* (1963). For a profile, see Claudia Gianetto’s excellent article, “Gigetta Morano, una forza irresistibile”, in *Non solo dive. Pioniere del cinema italiano*, ed. Monica Dall’Asta (Bologna: Cineteca di Bologna, 2008), 291–296.
 24. In the mid-teens, Rodolfi expanded his directing repertoires to historical dramas and theatrical adaptations, enlisting various *monstres sacrés* of

the Italian theater. In 1917 he began his own company and in the twenties he returned to the stage. In the late 1920s he retired and in 1933 he committed suicide.

25. De Riso also performed in feature films at Film Artistica "Gloria", including *Ma l'amor mio non muore* (Love Everlasting, 1913), starring Lyda Borelli in her first feature film. There he played the joyful little impresario who brings Borelli's character onto the stage. In the second half of the 1910s, he directed films with such major actresses as Leda Gys and Francesca Bertini. De Riso continued working in the light comedy genre into the early twenties, but then the genre faded and his career was over.
26. Unfortunately, only a handful of the Morano-Rodolfi-comedies survived.
27. The voyeurism of gazing through keyholes has a long history in film history, going from such early examples as *The Inquisitive Boots* (Hepworth, 1905) and *Un coup d'oeil par étage* (Pathé, 1904) to Lubitsch' *Die Austernprinzessin* (My Lady Margarine, PAGU, 1919).
28. On the identity of the film's producer, whether it was by G.A. Smith film or Arthur Melbourne Cooper, see the discussions included in *KINtop* no. 3 (1994), no. 4 (1995), and no. 5 (1996), and more recently Frank Gray, "Smith versus Melbourne-Cooper: History and Counter-History", *Film History* 11, no. 3 (1999): 246–261.
29. Keyhole shots were also essential to detective stories like Perret's *L'Enfant de Paris* (In the Clutch of the Paris Apaches, Gaumont, 1913) and Benjamin Christensen's *Det hemmelighedsfulde X* (The Mysterious X, Dansk Biograf, 1913).
30. On self-referentiality in early cinema, including Italian films, see Sabine Lenk, "A la rencontre du spectateur d'avant la Guerre de 14", *Archives*, nos. 61–62 (April–May 1995): 1–11.
31. Ivo Blom, "De eerste filmgigant in Nederland. De snelle verovering van Nederland door Pathé" (The First Film Giant in the Netherlands. The Fast Conquest of the Netherlands by Pathé), in "Honderd jaar film in Nederland: het begin" (One Hundred Years of Cinema in the Netherlands: The Beginning), ed. Karel Dibbets *et al.*, special issue, *Jaarboek Mediageschiedenis* 8 (Amsterdam: Stichting Mediageschiedenis/Stichting Beheer IISG, 1997), 129–152.
32. Michelle Aubert (Centre National de la Cinématographie) to the author, 8 December 1999. Pathé also used non-fiction films to promote itself.
33. Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avantgarde", *Wide Angle* 8, nos. 3–4 (Fall 1986): 63–70. Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982)
34. A striking example is *Maciste* (Itala Film, 1915), an action film filled with comic moments. A young woman is threatened by her uncle who intends to eliminate her and her mother in order to get an inheritance. The girl flies into a movie theatre, which is showing the epic *Cabiria* (Itala Film, 1914). Impressed by Maciste's force and courage she writes him for help. The film shows images of the Itala Film studios bustling with activity. At the conclusion of the film, her savior, Maciste that is, tells her that if she were ever to need him again his address is "Maciste, Itala Studio", in a promoting move that identified not just the character, but also the studio as the rescuer of the oppressed.
35. Kristin Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment. America in the World Film Market, 1907–1934* (London: BFI, 1985). See also Ivo Blom, *Jean Desmet and the Early Dutch Film Trade* (Amsterdam University Press, 2003). Ben Brewster to the author, 21 December 1999.
36. Ansje van Beusekom, *Film als kunst. Reacties op een nieuw medium in Nederland, 1895–1940* (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit, 1998).
37. Many of these posters are included in the Desmet-Collection (Amsterdam).
38. I leave out here the turn-of-the-century films starring the Italian vaudeville artist Leopoldo Fregoli, as it is debatable whether they were Lumière films or independent productions.
39. If comedians like Guillaume and Frau clearly showed their roots in circus and vaudeville, Morano, De Riso and Rodolfi showed their roots in regional and dialectical theater. The different backgrounds of the various comedians diminish the surprise of the later Italian Feydeau adaptations and show the path all the way to the *telefoni bianchi* (white telephones) genre from the 1930s, and the *commedia all'italiana* in the post-war period.