



RESEARCHING WOMEN IN SILENT CINEMA

NEW FINDINGS AND PERSPECTIVES

EDITED BY MONICA DALL'ASTA, VICTORIA DUCKETT, LUCIA TRALLI

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ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
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Researching Women in Silent Cinema: New Findings and Perspectives

Edited by: Monica Dall'Asta, Victoria Duckett, Lucia Tralli

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Researching Women in Silent Cinema: New Findings and Perspectives

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This publication has been edited through a blind peer review process. Papers from the Sixth Women and the Silent Screen Conference (University of Bologna, 2010), a biennial event sponsored by Women and Film History International, were read by the editors and then submitted to at least one anonymous reviewer. When the opinion of the first reader was entirely negative or asked for substantial revision, the essay was submitted to a second anonymous reviewer. In case of a second negative opinion the essay was rejected. When further changes were deemed necessary for publication, the editors worked extensively with the authors to meet the requests advanced by the reviewers.

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Luca Mazzei

The Passionate Eye of Angelina Buracci, Pedagogue

ABSTRACT: This paper examines the contribution of Angelina Buracci, a young feminist and pacifist pedagogue, to the early discourse on film in Italy. Published in 1916, her book *Cinematografo educativo* [educational cinema] is a brilliant counter to the contemporary representation of women filmgoers in the writings of several Italian male modernist intellectuals. Their construction, between 1908 and 1930, of a new canon of spectatorship centered on the figure of the male cinephile and bears traces of a gendered discourse. In the minds of these intellectuals, the “new spectator” was evoked as an alternative to an earlier, female model of spectatorship. Yet, despite their dismissal of women’s significant presence in the early discursive field, a few women writers had already begun carving out their own space in reflections on cinema. Buracci’s essay is an exemplary document in this respect. Not only does it demonstrate the author’s familiarity with the experience of cinema, but it also reveals an extraordinary independence of thought.

Prologue: When was Cinephilia Born in Italy?

The word cinephilia is literally defined as a “love for the cinema,” a kind of passionate relationship with the screen and the experiences it generates. It can also be defined as a ritual practice of spectatorship whose privileged form of expression is writing. Its beginnings are usually associated with the emergence of the film-club phenomenon in the 1950s (Hagener 11; De Baecque 8–16). However, recent literature has debated the question of its origins, tracing its appearance back (at least in France) to as early as the 1930s (Jullier and Leveratto), 1922 (Gauthier 236–255), 1911 (Gili 397–416) and even 1895 (Elsaesser 28). If the cinephile is essentially a writing spectator, it seems logical that an historical canon of cinephilia would consist in a listing of the most significant articles and essays written to praise the cinema for its aesthetic, moral or social values. Therefore, to look for historical documentation of this peculiar form of expressive spectatorship means in large part to research the field of the history of the discourse on film.

As in France, a primitive form of cinephilia emerged quite early in Italy. An important occurrence appears as early as 1908, in the December 25 issue of the Florentine paper *Il Nuovo giornale* [the new journal]. It was on that date that Ricciotto Canudo, later known for his enthusiastic support of the French avant-garde, published his first article on film. Entitled “Trionfo del cinematografo,” [the triumph of the cinematograph] the piece welcomed the cinema as a foundational phenomenon in the building of a new modern, secular and progressive society. Canudo describes the act of participating in a movie screening as a collective experience of social regeneration; cinema is seen as a substitute for churches with their religious rituals. *Il Nuovo giornale* had long been following a laical and anticlerical political

line, and perhaps the publication date of Canudo's article was not haphazard¹: the article extended an invitation to a secular Christmas, spent in the urban habit of reading papers and the public ritual of watching a movie.

Apart from Canudo, a chronology of early cinephilia in Italy would include at least the following items:

1) "Max Linder muore alla Guerra" [Max Linder dies at war], published in October 1914 by Lucio D'Ambra. The article is an emotional portrait of Max Linder, the acclaimed French comedian believed to have been fatally wounded on the frontline. For D'Ambra, the indestructible power of Linder's cinematographic work could break down national barriers even in war times, uniting people from both the Austrian-German and the French-Italian side around the shared film.

2) *Cineamore* [cinelove], 1914, a Futurist graphic and visual poem by Carlo Carrà. The composition equated the pleasure of spectatorship to that of an orgiastic ritual: subjective identities and objective impressions (the film) merged into a new visual and tactile experience, the audience itself became a single organic entity that "lived" the film.

3) "Buio e intelligenza" [darkness and intelligence], 1916, by Emmanuele Toddi. In this article, the Roman columnist returns to the traditional distinction between crowd and audience, adapting it to the content of the movie theater: he differentiates between an *indistinct* audience (one that is oblivious to its spectatorial condition) and an *intelligent* audience (one that is instead aware).

4) "L'arte delle immagini" [the art of images], an essay written by Floriano Del Secolo in 1916.² This writer was a journalist influenced by Benedetto Croce's school of thought. In the final part of this article, Del Secolo interprets the experience of spectatorship in terms of a conscious and blissful surrender to the logic of dreams.

5) The articles written from October 1923 to June 1924 by Alberto Savinio for the daily newspaper *Corriere Italiano* and its weekly magazine *Galleria*. Savinio defines cinema as a "mythology in progress," comparing the film audience to the crowds of the Late Roman Empire and the film theatres to the temples dedicated to the worship of the god Mithras.

6) *La donna di ieri* [yesterday's woman] by Corrado d'Errico, and *Avventura cinematografica* [movie adventure] by Mariani dell'Anguillara. In these two short stories published in 1926, the world of cinema merges with daily reality, replacing it entirely.

7) "Iniziazione alle delizie del cinematografo" [invitation to the delights of the cinema], by Antonello Gerbi, 1926. Here spectatorship is presented as a device to discipline passions and is linked to the theme of sexuality.

8) In the second half of the 1920s (between 1926 and 1929), the creation of the first film

¹ Because of an editorial mistake made in 1973, when Canudo's writing was first historiographically referenced (Mossetto 358–365), "Trionfo del cinematografo" has been long reported to have been published on November 25, instead of December 25, 1908. The article was the fifth installment in the series of *Lettere di vita* [letters about life] and *Lettere d'arte* [letters about art] he had submitted to this newspaper in Florence.

² The same article was curiously republished three years later in another journal, *L'arte muta* [the silent art], with a different title and under the name of a different author, Angelo Piccioli.

clubs in Italy takes place in parallel with the creation of a “national” film canon. For some scholars, this corresponds to the beginnings of Italian cinephilia (Tosi 15–17).

9) *Il cinema e le arti meccaniche* [film and the mechanical arts], a book by Eugenio Giovannetti, published in 1930. This is the first Italian book based entirely on viewing records, which, in turn, were destined to generate further annotations pertaining to aesthetic and economic topics.

10) The behind-the-camera debut of Alessandro Blasetti and other people revolving around him. These new entries marked the arrival of a new generation of filmmakers that had formed themselves by watching and discussing movies from inside a movie theatre, rather than practising on sets (Gili 398–399).

Is Cinephilia a Male-Only Passion?

As the above points illustrate, only male names are mentioned in the canonical reconstruction of the origins of cinephilia in Italy. In fact, the one thing that the earlier generation of *cinematophiles* (Gili 398–399) seem to share with the cinephiles of the 1950s and 1960s is that they are all men.³ The need for a “defeminization” process of the Italian film audience was in fact theorized in several texts of the 1910s and 1920s, including some of the titles cited above. While the emerging attitude of cinephilia was represented by a small number of young male intellectuals, the general, non-writing audience that crowded the early film theaters was perceived as an anonymous mass of uncultured working-class women and children. Reconsidering the history of film theories in Italy from this perspective shows that the definition and fine-tuning of the medium according to gender characteristics did not come as a bolt out of the blue. On the contrary, the bias towards the male spectator and male cinephilia appears to have been accurately shaped within the scope of a theoretical reflection.

A good representative of this line of thought is Eugenio Giovannetti in his book of 1930, *Il cinema e le arti meccaniche* [cinema and mechanical arts], which promotes the ideal of a cultivated and rather intellectual film audience that in his view would have to be constituted mainly by men. The formation of a prevalently male audience is welcomed by Giovannetti as a sign of a rebirth, of or at least as a chance for a kind of cinema Renaissance on both the aesthetic and the socio-cultural level.

Consider, for instance, this passage:

The history of feminine aesthetics is, therefore, in the shadows, monotonous and unmentionable; the masculine theory of aesthetics, on the other hand, is the dominant model, with a rich history full of splendors. Men are the only ones who have been able to speak of

³ This is clear when one looks at the list of the women working in the field of cultural film programming in the 1950s and 1960s, recorded by Virgilio Tosi in his volume on the history of film clubs in Italy, *Quando il cinema era un circolo* [when cinema was a club]. As important as they certainly are, the names of these women can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

male beauty in a worthy manner, because only men have been capable of recognizing it and loving it throughout time. No woman would ever be able to write about masculine beauty like in the notorious page in which Winckelmann describes the Vatican's torso. And no woman would ever be able to speak of a man's charm with the enthusiastic simplicity that, according to Gorky, was typical of Leo Tolstoy, the most sound and unsuspected author among the great modern ones. Gorky writes that Tolstoy said he preferred one of his friends for his masculine beauty: 'because seeing a handsome man is always an exquisite pleasure.' For thousands of years, men have been the only creators and the sole judges in terms of beauty. Nowadays, we can therefore consider with calm impartiality the cinematographer's uprisings against the dominant masculine aesthetics; these rebellions are becoming increasingly daring, since filmmakers have a powerful and extremely original autonomy, and therefore an enormous direct influence on tastes and culture. (Giovannetti 106–107)

According to Giovannetti, then, the masculinization of the viewing experience and the emergence of a male-gendered type of visual pleasure are both key elements in the aesthetic improvement of film production. Moreover, such aesthetic improvement would represent a modern resurgence of a classical standard of beauty, historically established by male consensus.

As several other male writers explain, the woman who loves going to the movies, entering a dark theater to share an experience of exuberant emotionality with other spectators and spectatrices, is unable to appreciate a film in terms of its aesthetic values.⁴ In Giovannetti's text, this figure is evoked in opposition to the new spectatorial model represented by the male *cinéphile*, a cultivated middle-class man who takes cinema as a serious aesthetic affair, whose emotions never supersede his rationality, but are instead shaped by it. I will call this figure the "early female film buff" and I will try to track her traces throughout the silent period, 1898-1930.

The gendering of spectatorship as an innovation within the boundaries of an entirely male cultural perspective first became a matter of public debate on 18 May 1907, when *La Stampa* (a daily paper) published an essay entitled *La filosofia del cinematografo* [the philosophy of the motion pictures]. Its author was the renowned intellectual, Giovanni Papini, who wrote:

Although the philosopher is by nature a person who lives a secluded life, generally opposed to noise and fuss, it would be a mistake on his part to ignore these new leisure establishments, leaving them for the curiosity of the young, the ladies, and the common man. (Papini 1-2)

The logic behind statement is clear: women and children are too prone to emotions, so

⁴ Other authors expressed similar concepts during those years. See in particular Gerbi, D'Errico, and Mariani Dell'Anguillara. But the list also includes less obvious names, like that of Luciano Doria, the author of a disturbing short story on the fascination of cinema based on a sexist theme, *Io, Riri e l'amore in pantofole* [me, Riri, and love in slippers].

they lack the ability to appreciate the film according to its true aesthetic values. To accept that the film going audience be mostly made of women and children, would mean to accept the impossibility of any sort of reflection on the phenomenon of cinema. Consequently, it was important to introduce into the audience a great deal of adult, and preferably intellectual, men.

A History to be Rewritten

This sexist view was incorrect, even back in 1907. We know today that a number of remarkable articles and fictional stories on cinema were written by women authors such as Anna Gentile Vertua (1898), Luigia Cortesi (1905), Matilde Serao (1916)⁵, Annie Vivanti (1917), and Ada Negri (1928). These were all respectable writers, but no doubt they were as many passionate moviegoers too (Ada Negri most certainly was).

In 1916, Angelina Buracci wrote a remarkable essay entitled *Cinematografo educativo* [educational cinema]. In many ways, this long-forgotten piece of writing challenged the snobbish certainties of contemporary male discourses on the cinema.

Though the existence of this sixty-page booklet was not unknown (Raffaelli, “Il cinema per la scuola dei primordi” [cinema for primary school]; Raffaelli, “Sul primo scaffale del cinema italiano” [on the first shelf of Italian cinema]; Spinosa), the essay itself has never the subject of a study. And yet it holds many surprises. In my view, it should be returned to the place it deserves in the international debate. This is a place that it has so far been denied, perhaps also because of the serious difficulties one has to face in finding copies of the volume. In what follows, I will compare Angelina Buracci’s reflections on the cinema with the basic assumptions underlying the Italian male discourse on film and film spectatorship between 1907 and 1930.

Aside from the considerable length of her study (sixty pages) and the wide range of topics examined, the most interesting feature of *Cinematografo educativo* is the significant number of the films reviewed by Buracci. She considers about fourteen titles.⁶ They span from the classic *Il fuoco* (the fire, Giovanni Pastrone, 1915), to an obscure western entitled *Il testamento del cercatore d'oro* (the gold-digger’s last will, 1915), to action thrillers like *Marvelous Maciste* (*Maciste*, Luigi Romano Borgnetto, Vincenzo Denizot, 1915), to slapstick comedies, not to

⁵ On Matilde Serao’s complicated relationship with cinema and cinema going, see Annunziata.

⁶ This is the list of titles ordered by citation: *L'ebreo errante* (the wandering jew, 1916) by Umberto Paradisi; *The Wedding March* (*Marcia nuziale*, 1915) by Carmine Gallone; *Marvelous Maciste* (*Maciste*, 1915) by Vincenzo Denizot and Luigi Romano Borgnetto; *Passano gli Unni* (the huns pass through, 1916) by Mario Caserini; *Il mio diario di guerra* (my war diary, 1915) by Riccardo Tolentino; *Alla bajonetta!* (to the bayonet!, 1915) by Edoardo Bencivenga; *Giardino zoologico di Roma* (Rome zoological garden, 1910) by Cines productions; *Il testamento del cercatore d'oro* (the gold-digger’s last will, 1915) by Savoia productions; *Il Fuoco* (the fire, 1915) by Giovanni Pastrone; *Falena* (the moth, 1916) by Carmine Gallone; *La Gorgona* (the gorgon, 1915) by Mario Caserini; *Cuore di De Amicis—Dagli Appennini alle Ande*, (heart by De Amicis—from the Apennines to the Andes, 1916) by Umberto Paradisi; and finally the films played by the child star Cinessino (1913-1916), and certainly among them *Cinessino is Lucky* (*Cinessino ha fortuna*, 1914) and *Bloomer and Cinessino’s Easter* (*La Pasqua di Cinessino*, 1914).

forget the *dal vero* genre (non fiction films). In writing about these films, Buracci always gives the impression of having seen them all firsthand; the titles are never mentioned as echoes of banal hearsay or through word of mouth. Moreover, several of the films in the book are the object of specific analysis and in-depth study. Some reviews may be shorter than others, but they are generally quite sharp. Such an analytic approach was truly groundbreaking at the time for a country like Italy, where theory was largely based on abstract and often obtruse concepts.

Another surprising aspect of Buracci's work is the careful description of the theatres in which the films discussed in the book were screened. In the opening, Buracci dares to express something that no other intellectual mentioned until the 1930s: that she had been going to the movies regularly since she was a young girl, ever since she first saw a motion picture show put on by an itinerant company (most likely that of the Roatto's Brothers) in Venice in 1904 (Buracci, *Cinematografo educativo* 11). Therefore, Buracci was not only a female film buff, but also a long-standing witness of the emergence of the motion pictures and its audience in Italy.

Additionally, all of Buracci's observations are accurate and precise. They range, for instance, from the gender of the worker assigned to sell admission tickets (a job performed only by men in the beginning), to the type of seats (both in the hall and in the stalls), to the furnishings of hygiene-related innovations that were introduced in the theatres during the period (ventilators and disinfectant sprays vaporized in the air). Buracci also writes lengthy descriptions of the audience (commenting on its variety, its social composition and modes of expression), the wall decorations (which she often admires for their modernist style), and the musical repertoire that was played in the hall (which, she notes, never included classical music) (Buracci, *Cinematografo educativo* 11–15).

Unlike most of the other commentators on cinema, Buracci never indulged in futile observations, especially when she wrote about audiences. Her descriptions are concise and precise, and always functional to the development of her argument. While she was a regular filmgoer, her observational method was, first and foremost, that of a woman of science.

Cinematografo educativo was not aimed to either present or praise the virtues of modern movie theatres. Instead, its purpose was to make an accurate analysis of the socio-psychological dynamics at work in these places (9), with particular regard to the role played by women spectatrices within the realm of what we would today call the "cinematic device" (on this topic, see also Lant and Perez; Alovio).

The Role of Women in the Critical and Theoretical Debate

One major aspect of Buracci's interest in film theatres is the bond between women and the cinema. Not only does she acknowledge that women and children constitute the majority of the audience, but she also provides a useful sociological framework to explain this evidence.

She writes:

Why do people bring children to the movies indifferently, without getting any prior information on the shows being screened? Why, on certain days, do we see in the movie theatres such a great number of fidgety little heads, exasperating their mothers and nannies, but then also giving the environment a cheerful tone with their laughter? The answer is that mothers want to enjoy themselves, but they don't know who to leave their children with; so they drag them along, since they know the kids will enjoy themselves too, and, even if there are some *risqué* scenes, they won't understand anything anyway. This is why you often see women barge into movie theatres followed by a swarm of lively, rowdy children. (Buracci, *Cinematografo educativo* 27)

These sociological considerations can best be understood by keeping in mind the book's opening sentence:

The antiquated idea that movie theatres are a pastime for children and for the mediocre and below-average minds . . . has now faded. (Buracci, *Cinematografo educativo* 11)

Countering Papini's misogynist view of the film theatres as leisure places for an uncultured, mostly female audience, which the male intellectual would have to ennoble, Buracci welcomed the composite structure of the film audience as a sign of modernity, making the film theater a place where "a businessman, a blue-collar worker, or a lady can go . . . in their spare time from work" (Buracci, *Cinematografo educativo* 6).

A talented pedagogue, Buracci was also a supporter of the women's movement. She explicitly acknowledges her position as a moderate feminist in a 1913 booklet, *Il pensiero educativo di Caterina Franceschi Ferrucci e la moderna cultura femminile* [the educational thinking of Caterina Franceschi Ferrucci and modern women culture], dedicated to Caterina Franceschi Ferrucci, a nineteenth century writer who was also a patriot and an educator. Ferrucci had fiercely advocated in defence of the right of teenage girls and women to attend live performances, regardless of whether they were plays or vaudeville (Buracci, *Il pensiero educativo* [the educational thinking] 30–34; 51–53). There was no reason, then, why the same principles should not be applied to cinema, Buracci maintained. Her feminist and, perhaps, academic formation saw her contest the alleged mediocrity attributed to the average filmgoer because they were (for the most part) women.

Buracci also paid careful attention to the contemporary debate on film spectatorship. Some brief but relevant reflections reveal a possible knowledge of some important articles and essays that were published in this period. In *Cinematografo educativo* (50) a clear reference can be found to the work of Emilia Santamaria, a feminist and a pedagogue (Formiggini Santamaria 253). Moreover, one passage of the book shows emotional analogies with Gozzano's article *Il nastro di celluloido e i serpi di Laocoonte* [the celluloid strip and Laocoon's

snakes], a beautiful essay published in May 1916 in *La Donna* [the woman], a moderately feminist magazine that was issued for a brief period during the war. These analogies emerge particularly with reference to Gozzano's interpretation of the cinema as a show that allows its bourgeois viewers to free themselves from the formality of social conventions. He states:

There are some empty evenings, when you look through the list of theatres in vain: there isn't anything worth watching for three consecutive hours, because otherwise you would be watching the same production for the umpteenth time. In those evenings, your tired brain cannot pay attention to anything; it refuses to watch either a good comedy or a good actor, just as it refuses to read a book. These evenings are denied to both the brain and the arts. So you try to come up with something else to do: something light, not tiresome; something that isn't as heavy as a play; but something that is more stimulating than just going to a café or to the club, with its magazines and your bored friends, or the pitifully fowl vernacular of the music halls. Movie theatres offer such an entertainment option. (Gozzano 10)

Likewise, Angelina Buracci states:

Movie theatres are a convenient creation indeed. They provide a form of entertainment that doesn't last too long, doesn't tire you out, and it isn't boring; it welcomes spectators at any time of day, without etiquette and without making them feel uncomfortable. A businessman, a blue-collar worker, or a lady can go to the movies between business deals, between assemblies, between sessions, or in spare time from work; or, surprised by a sudden downpour, they can find shelter in a movie theatre and wait for the rain to desist.

People go to the movies because, when they pass by one, they always see a program they find interesting. There is no need to change shirts or to wear white gloves; and, mostly importantly, this form of entertainment is relatively inexpensive.

Why not take advantage of it? (Buracci, *Cinematografo educativo* 10)

One year after the publication of Buracci's book, her considerations resonate in an article by another gifted writer of this time, Annie Vivanti. Vivanti's single, witty description of the experience of film viewing appeared in April 1917, again in *La Donna*:

Examine your conscience, oh gentle readers. When you attend an elegant dinner, or a classical music concert, or an exhibition of ancient paintings, or the somber conference of a speaker in vogue; as you wear your Semenza-Sorelle coat with its collar reaching up to your nose, as you nervously fasten the delicate buttons of your pearl-colored gloves, and as you head tip-toeing (as your dainty shoes impose) toward that magnificent and majestic duty. In those moments, look deep inside your hearts and tell me: wouldn't you rather be going to a movie?

Some might ask: why specifically the movies? Why not the theatre or some other place? The reasons are many.

First and foremost, because movie theatres represent a source of ineffable joy for us women. We are slaves to fixed duties at fixed times: pre-arranged amusements in places booked in advance, visiting certain people and having conversations on the same compulsory topics. Hence, amid all of this, thinking: ‘We can go to any movie theatre, at any time, and see any show’ is of great source of delight.

What a relief for our nerves this impartial decision left to chance, such soothing . . .

Sitting in the movies, you find complete intellectual repose.

At the theatre (during the intervals) or at concerts (during the most important pieces of music), as women we are morally obliged to make clever and lighthearted conversation. We have to give our opinion on the value of the performance that was played in front of us, to demolish its author, to draw comparisons, and to unveil plagiarism. And finally, because of the loud unflattering lights of the interval, as ladies, we also have to worry about the details of our hairdo.

There is none of this at the movie theatre.

You can just sit there in peace and quiet sunken into your seat, under the comforting shadow of your cloche hat, without having to talk or dazzle: there’s no need to be funny or caustic, witty or sharp. No. At most you become part of the whispering chorus of people watching the film, as you read the intertitles preceding each frame,

‘... and Duke Gustavo realized that Elena had become indispensable to his happiness...’ (Vivanti 24)

Children are Intelligent Spectators as Well

Buracci’s principal interest, however, concerned the process of visual comprehension and awareness in growing children. She argued that teenagers and children were not to be treated like little creatures devoid of intellect; on the contrary, they deserved to be considered as subjects capable of “making associations, remembering, summarizing, analyzing, imagining, judging, and reasoning” (Buracci, *Cinematografo educativo* 28). Therefore, they were also to be deemed able to attend film screenings in a discerning way.

In terms of spectatorship, the differences between adults and children were described by the author in relation to 1) timing, and 2) different phases of understanding and reaction to the visual stimuli on screen. Children, Buracci argued, display the same phases of understanding a film as adults, only with a slower timing. As a result, rather than explaining the lack of narrative connections with magic (as they were generally believed to do), children seemed to enjoy the possibility offered by their perception of disconnected stimula to produce personal articulations of the images and events they perceived on screen, creating unexpected mental collages. According to Buracci, this was particularly the case for the youngest filmgoers.

She continued to explain that younger boys and girls deploy an emotional strategy that consists in the “theft” of other people’s feelings. Because of this particularly strong relationship to the screen, children can experience true pain when put in front of images of suffering and sorrow. Buracci writes that this process of identity development puts children

in a delicate condition. She argues that the huge emotional power of the filmic experience can open a dangerous passageway into their evolving personalities, easily overwhelming internal emotional processes (*Cinematografo educativo* 28–29).

In what appears to be an anticipation of the debate on the psychological implications of the star, Buracci argues that the film hero plays an important role in the creation of a positive relationship between the child and the screen (on the same topic, see also the coeval essay by Bellonci). Buracci explains that because of the limitations of the younger mind in seizing all the details in a film, the figure of the hero stands out and, when recalled, tends to become larger than life. She states:

Oh! The heroes from the movies outshine Hercules and Samson. Children dream of their adventures at night, they light up with enthusiasm and wonder. In their fantasies, Maciste becomes their friend, their savior. He rescues them when the monster is about to eat them; he saves them from the fury of the waves; and he catches them as they are about to fall from a cliff. And, little by little, Maciste becomes bigger and bigger, until he becomes a giant that could fill an entire room. (Buracci, *Cinematografo educativo* 21)

Buracci's attention to the representation of the hero also surfaces in her discussion of war films. She complains about the way national heroicism was portrayed in contemporary productions, where isolated and harmless Austrian soldiers were attacked and humiliated because they were labeled enemies (*Cinematografo educativo* 59). Buracci believed that this kind of representation was grotesque and would have terrible repercussions in the years to come.

In *Cinematografo educativo* Buracci also briefly describes one of the first reported educational experiments with war films. She addresses the reactions of some children who were exposed to footage shot in Lybia during the Italian-Turkish war in 1911-1912. The topic had already been touched on by Gisella Chelini, another pedagogue, in 1915. But unlike Chelini's celebrative attitude—particularly with regard to the reactions of a group of elementary students in Florence to the screening of *La gloriosa Battaglia delle Due Palme. Bengasi 12 marzo* (the glorious battle of the two palms. Bengasi 12 march 1912) by Luca Comerio (Chelini 5-6). Buracci reveals an awareness that even when the war ends, the memory of the films remain: the hero's attitudes persist in the children's imagination outside their original context, out of place, like an image of violence in times of peace. Buracci explains:

Our children will be tomorrow's generation. They have to learn that you cannot extinguish hate with hate; you cannot wash blood away by shedding more blood. War is a necessity of people still affected by primeval barbarism; it shouldn't extinguish our compassion and mercy. I am aware that, nowadays, my words may sound dissonant given the current political context: but I treat the topic from the perspective of a professional educator, and as such I have to dissociate any notion that does not comply with the purest and highest forms of morality. (Buracci, *Cinematografo educativo* 49–50)

Buracci's ostinate will to preserve an accurate, professional approach as a scientist—even in a confused context as was then the Italian culturale debate, particularly during the war years—is perhaps her most important legacy to the cultural history of Italian cinema. She was a pedagogue and a feminist, a scientist and a spectatrix who, countering the rethoric of so many male authors, attempted to resist the impetus of male passions simply by means of her intellect.

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