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EXETER STUDIES IN FILM HISTORY



# SCREENING EUROPE IN AUSTRALASIA

Transnational Silent Film Before  
and After the Rise of Hollywood

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JULIE K. ALLEN



# Screening Europe in Australasia

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# Screening Europe in Australasia

*Transnational Silent Film Before and  
After the Rise of Hollywood*

Julie K. Allen

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(Fotorama/The Danish Film Institute, Copenhagen; reuse not permitted)

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obscure theatre or exhibitor, and spending hundreds of hours scrolling through digitized century-old newspapers.

While this book is an entirely original work, preliminary versions of a few of the chapters have appeared in print elsewhere. Elements of Chapter 6 were published in both ‘Mapping Cinema Ghosts: Reconstructing the Circulation of Nordic Silent Film in Australia’ in Anna Westerstahl Stenport and Arne Lunde (eds), *Nordic Film Cultures: A Globalized History of Cinematic Elsewheres* (Edinburgh University Press, 2019), and ‘Selling Scandinavia at the Ends of the Earth: Nordic Silent Film in Australasia’ in *Rethinking Scandinavia*, CSS Web Quarterly 2.1 (2018). Some parts of Chapter 7 appeared as ‘To Be or Not To Be (German): Asta Nielsen and the Contested Circulation of German Silent Films in Australasia, 1910–1915’ in Andrea Bandhauer, Tristan Lay, Yixu Lü, and Peter Morgan (eds), *Die Welt auf Deutsch: Fremdenbilder und Selbstentwürfe in der deutschsprachigen Literatur und Kultur (The World Within: Self-perception and Images of the Other in German Literature and Culture)* (Röhrig Universitätsverlag, 2018), while some information that now appears in Chapters 5 and 7 was originally published as ‘Divas Down Under: The Circulation of Asta Nielsen’s and Francesca Bertini’s Films in Australian Cinemas in the 1910s’, *Studies in Australasian Cinema* 11.2 (2017). Finally, there is also some overlap between the content of Chapters 4, 5, and 7 with two articles on Asta Nielsen and early female film stardom I contributed to a special issue of *Early Popular Visual Culture* that was still forthcoming as this book went to press.

# Aotearoa New Zealand

— Railroads in 1930



Map of New Zealand, c.1930, showing towns where European silent films were frequently screened. © Julie K. Allen and ThinkSpatial, Brigham Young University



# Australia

— Railroads in 1930



Map of Australia, c.1930, showing towns where European silent films were frequently screened. © Julie K. Allen and ThinkSpatial, Brigham Young University

State Abbreviations

NSW - New South Wales

NT - Northern Territory

QLD - Queensland

SA - South Australia

TAS - Tasmania

VIC - Victoria

WA - Western Australia





# Introduction

## The Transnational Circulation of European Silent Cinema

From its earliest beginnings, cinema has been a transnational system of production, distribution, and exhibition able to bring countries and people closer than ever before possible. Even as moving picture cameras and projectors were first being developed simultaneously in France, Germany, Italy, the UK and the USA in the 1890s, the nascent film industry was already global. Unhampered by linguistic divisions, silent films moved along existing networks of trade, entertainment, migration, colonization, and communication between cities, regions, and countries; by introducing audiences to the same stories, the same stars, they created a shared cultural vernacular across vast distances. Although American films have maintained a dominant position in most national cinema markets for much of the last century, the film industry has remained intertwined with the global mobility of the people involved in making and watching films, as well as the movement of the films themselves.

In traditional film history narratives, the transnational dynamics of cinema are often overshadowed by a focus on national cinemas that privileges a history of production, producers, and authorship in a particular country. This approach is problematic at best, since film-making has always been multinational, with financing, production, acting, filming, special effects, and sound handled by people and companies from many different countries. It gets even more complicated when film distribution, exhibition, and reception are considered, for it turns out that audiences outside of the United States have always watched films from other countries. While national cinema histories are often selective accounts of the most artistically innovative or financially successful productions a country has offered the global market, what viewers actually consume generally has 'almost no relationship to the national agenda or the general quest for

a national cultural identity in the cinema'.<sup>1</sup> Particularly in the days before streaming, audience expectations and preferences were limited by what films people had access to in a particular time and place, but audiences still made their preferences known.

The New Cinema History approach to the social history of film recognizes the need to account for consumption as well as production. Studying film consumption illuminates the role of the cinema, in Richard Maltby's formulation, as a 'site of social and cultural exchange', where films contribute to cinemagoers' understanding of the world and their place in it.<sup>2</sup> Determining the nature of such exchanges requires knowing what kinds of films people were watching in each place and time. Joseph Garnarcz reminds us that every cinema audience consists not just of individual people watching a specific film in a single theatre at the same time, but also of people 'who have seen a particular film in a particular area within the same period of time, or simply those who have chosen to go the cinema, regardless of which films they have seen'.<sup>3</sup> The collective experience of watching the same films within the same general time frame provides audience members with a cultural lens through which they can evaluate their own lived experiences. Seen from this perspective, the details of a film's transnational movement matter as much as its formal qualities—knowing the kinds of audiences who might have watched it, when, where, and even why, can help us understand not just an individual film's significance and possible effect on audiences, but also its place within larger patterns of transnational communication and value formation. Instead of considering national cinema traditions as isolated phenomena, New Cinema History looks at film as a global phenomenon that connects countries and peoples in powerful, albeit often unseen, ways.

While Australasian film production has received considerable attention from film historians, film consumption in the Antipodes has been studied much less, particularly with regard to the silent period. Such a history of distribution, exhibition, and reception is necessarily very different from a history of film production in the same place, but it offers uniquely valuable insights into what people were actually watching and what kinds of cultural norms the films they watched reflect and/or challenge. Already by the turn of the twentieth century, audiences in Australia and New Zealand were avid consumers of silent films, but high consumer demand and low domestic production meant that most of these films came from overseas. In documenting and analysing the circulation of European silent films in Australia and New Zealand (for which I use the regional terms Australasia and the Antipodes interchangeably), *Screening Europe in Australasia* takes a transnational approach to film distribution, exhibition, and reception in



a region of the world where the cinema was a tremendously popular form of entertainment with far-reaching economic and social implications.

### The Circulation of Nationally Diverse Films in Australasia

The overwhelming dominance of the American film industry in production, distribution, and exhibition from the late 1910s onward has tended to obscure the fact that early cinema was highly nationally diverse, driven by innovative producers in France, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, and Britain as much as by American studios, first on the East Coast and later in Hollywood. European production houses including Pathé Frères, Gaumont, Cines, Ambrosio, Itala, PAGU, Nordisk, and Swedish Biograph assiduously cultivated foreign markets for their films. Kristin Thompson's foundational study *Exporting Entertainment* maps the networks of global distribution that the US film industry developed in the silent era, but nothing comparable exists for the major European producers,<sup>4</sup> so the scope and sociocultural impact of the international circulation of Continental European films in the silent era is largely unknown.

Although exact numbers are difficult to come by, European films appear to have made up around a quarter of all films screened in the Antipodes in the pre-World War I era, with disproportionate representation in the category of multi-reel narrative films.<sup>5</sup> Audiences in Australasia in the early 1900s and 1910s were exposed to French literary adaptations, Italian epics, Danish social dramas, Swedish historical dramas, and German cross-dressing comedies as well as British and American films. By the 1920s, the total market share of non-American films dropped to around 4%, but several dozen notable European features—primarily from Italy, Sweden, Denmark, and, in the second half of the decade, Germany—still made it to the Antipodes in the interwar period before the advent of sound film, establishing a niche market for European films perceived as artistically superior to the average American product.

Challenging the widespread but erroneous belief that Hollywood has always dominated the global film industry, *Screening Europe in Australasia* uses the cinema landscape of the Antipodes in the era of silent narrative films, c.1906–1930, to investigate the multi- and transnational politics of film circulation and reception that brought disparate cultures into contact with each other in competitive and complementary ways, with a particular focus on films from major Continental European producers from France, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, and Germany. Attributable to obstacles ranging from fragmentary records to multiple language barriers, the general lack of knowledge about the global distribution of European silent films represents a major gap in our understanding of the film industry. Nationally focused

studies such as Ivo Blom's work on the Dutch distributor Jean Desmet, Isak Thorsen's thorough analysis of the first two decades of Denmark's Nordisk Films Kompagni's involvement in the global film industry, and Richard Abel's work on French silent film in the USA have contributed to filling that gap.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, little comparative work has put such studies of individual European national cinemas in dialogue with each other, with the exception of Rudmer Canjels's *Distributing Silent Film Serials*.<sup>7</sup> Using Australasia as a case study for analysing both the representation of various European film industries and their competition with the American film industry in the silent era, this book illuminates the dynamics of the global circulation of European silent film and its economic and cultural repercussions for distributors, exhibitors, and audiences in Australia and New Zealand.

When cinema historians discuss the struggle between American and British/European companies in the silent film era for control of the global film market, Australasia is rarely mentioned. Yet focusing on film circulation in this corner of the world offers unique insights into how the competition between European and American producers played out in a neutral third space, in the era before sound film restricted the cultural adaptability and universal accessibility of films, while simultaneously demonstrating how outsize a role the Antipodes played in the market. The general trends of the global film industry's development hold true for Australasia: while rapid innovation among producers in Europe, Britain, and the USA led to robust competition on a fairly level playing field before World War I, constraints caused by the war, coupled with Hollywood's exploitation of American neutrality and its large domestic market advantage, led to American market dominance worldwide during and after the war.<sup>8</sup> A steep decline in European production and exports undermined the possibility of any real challenge to American hegemony, aside from a brief but determined attempt by Germany, with cooperation from France and Britain, to restore market balance. However, the specific conditions of cinema distribution and exhibition in the Antipodes allow us to reconstruct in vivid detail how this story played out and analyse not just the facts of the rise and fall of European film in the silent era, but also the social and cultural significance of the homogenization of the global film industry.

By treating Australia and New Zealand as a single region, the trading links that bound them together in this era become much clearer, as do the differences between their cinema markets. Tom O'Regan argues,

Australia and New Zealand are identified and brought together by the idea of the Antipodes, a term which traditionally refers to the places of the globe which are diametrically opposed to Europe. In

cultural terms being Antipodean means to be other, displaced, a reflex of European metropolitan culture and yet part of it elsewhere. The Tasman Sea, often colloquially referred to as 'The Ditch,' both links and separates Australia and Aotearoa (New Zealand). On the one hand, the two countries retain distinct political, social, economic, and cultural characteristics, which are reflected in their different positioning in the global market. But they also participate in an economic system, trading relationship, and cultural economy that is progressively more integrated and characterized by the free exchange of both capital and labour.<sup>9</sup>

Given its much larger size in terms of territory and population, Australia tended to get more films and sooner, many of which were then handed down to New Zealand, as to a younger sibling, after a few months, although in several cases, films circulated much longer or exclusively in New Zealand. Such deviations from the norm should remind us that nothing about the circulation of films was automatic or inevitable but was always the outcome of the shifting parameters of product availability, audience response, transport logistics, cost, and, after 1916/17, government censor approval.

Both Australasia and New Zealand were early adopters of cinema technology, whose exhibition sectors expanded rapidly from travelling cinemas in the mid-1890s to purpose-built picture houses in the mid-1900s to extravagant cinema palaces by 1910. By 1913, there were about 650 cinema theatres in Australia (250 of them in New South Wales, 180 in Victoria), and Australians were, according to Diane Collins, 'as regular in attending picture shows as in having breakfast', with approximately one-eighth of the population spending every Saturday night 'at the pictures'.<sup>10</sup> Despite such robust consumer demand, the early Australian film industry was not able to realize its considerable potential for domestic production on a large enough scale to meet demand, while the film industry in New Zealand started late and stayed small throughout the silent era.<sup>11</sup> This combination of low domestic production and high consumer demand made the Antipodes a lucrative market for American, British, and Continental film producers, as well as for enterprising local and regional distributors and exhibitors, especially before the centralization of distribution and exhibition under the Combine after 1913.

Since, as Graeme Turner notes, 'gaining access to the right cinemas in sufficient numbers, and at the right time—is ... the key to a film's success',<sup>12</sup> the people who decided which films to import and where to screen them played an outsize role in shaping this market. The history of the distribution and exhibition of European silent film in Australasia is a tale of such legendary showmen as Clement Mason, Cosens Spencer,

T.J. West, Henry Hayward, John Fuller, and J.D. Williams, of larger-than-life stars, and cut-throat competition on three continents and across at least nine countries, at a time when the cinema industry as we know it today was hardly a dream in the most ambitious pioneer's wildest imagination. Women played an influential role in many capacities as well, not just as actors like Lottie Lyell and directors like the McDonagh sisters, but also as distributors such as Mary Mason, exhibitors like Ettie Wilmott, and even projectionists, as Señora Spencer demonstrates.

### A Note about Methodology

Very little tangible evidence remains from the early Australasian cinema industry—precious few company records, distribution contracts, cinema logbooks, or publicity materials have survived. Cinema programming was an ephemeral thing, with individual films screened for anywhere from one night to a few weeks, then replaced by a similar product. The problem of missing circulation records is systemic; as Maltby explains, the film industry was built on a model in which 'motion pictures were understood to be consumables, viewed once, disposed of and replaced by a substitute providing a comparable experience'.<sup>13</sup> Fortunately, since newspapers offered one of the cheapest and most reliable ways for exhibitors to advertise upcoming films and report on films just screened, the open-access digitization of hundreds of Australian and New Zealand newspapers and magazines going back more than two centuries on the websites [trove.nla.gov.au](http://trove.nla.gov.au) and [paperspast.natlib.govt.nz](http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz) has made it possible to reconstruct what was going on in the Antipodean cinema landscape to an astonishing degree. Print media also played a pivotal role in fostering movie star culture, particularly from the 1920s on. These digitization projects are ongoing, so the results reported here could increase in the future, but the record is still fragmentary, with gaps, repetition, and inaccuracies, which means that some parts of the story may never be known, particularly for cinemas that did not advertise their screenings in newspapers.

Despite these limitations, Australasian print media coverage of popular entertainment venues makes it possible to establish a baseline measure of which films were imported and (sometimes) by whom, where they were shown, and for approximately how long. Based on these listings, it becomes clear that anywhere between one and seven prints—on valuable, highly flammable silver nitrate film—of hundreds of European films were shipped from Continental ports or London to Perth, Melbourne, Sydney, Auckland, or Wellington, then remained in circulation for up to several years, after which the prints were either too worn out to be screened, destroyed, or, in some cases, stolen. Most cinemas changed their

programmes once or twice a week, giving each film a run of only a few days in each city, but the sheer size of the Australasian market generated several different cinema circuits on both sides of the Tasman Sea—first in metropolitan areas, then in smaller cities, and finally in tiny rural towns—which meant that films had a potentially much longer life in Australasia than they did at home.

The major initial challenge in writing this book was figuring out which European films had even been imported and screened in Australasia. Although a few European production company archives have survived from this period, no comprehensive local, regional, or national, let alone international, registers of silent films exist—no one thought to keep records of which films were screened, nor where they came from. Since so few of the films themselves have survived, determining which film listed in an ad is which European original, particularly when many films had similar titles and the translated titles of foreign films were frequently changed (and sometimes the same film was run under different titles), has been a daunting task. Using plot summaries and cast lists included in many newspaper reviews of the time, archival records in each of the relevant countries, published registers of various companies' and countries' film output, and crowdsourced databases like the Internet Movie Database ([imdb.com](http://imdb.com)), I have been able in most cases to identify the original titles of the films that were imported, as noted in the Film List at the end of the book. Still, there will inevitably be some errors and omissions, for which I apologize.

Another major obstacle in attempting an Australasian reception history of silent films is that few if any first-hand accounts from cinemagoers in the first decades of the twentieth century have been preserved to tell us what viewers thought of the films they saw. Newspaper mentions can offer some clues to how audiences reacted to various films, though the profusion of exclamation points, all-caps declarations, and bombastic language common to many listings can make it seem like a film was a bigger success than it was. Ads and reviews in trade and popular papers illustrate not only how far and how long individual films were able to circulate within Australasia, but also how the films were marketed and what kind of information about them was conveyed (or not) to potential audiences—company names, country of origin, star names, plot summary, references to other films by the same company, particularly admirable attributes of the lead actor/actress or of the screenplay, and so on. I have paired the quantitative data from newspaper listings with qualitative analysis of the films themselves, the discourse around them, and the contexts in which they were exhibited to paint a broader picture of the cinema landscape in Australasia at the time. Including narrative data from fan magazines, correspondence, and personal memoirs transforms a potentially dry catalogue

of film titles and screening dates into a dynamic web of connections and conversations within Australasia and across the world. The circulation of European silent film in the Antipodes proves to be an intriguing part of a much larger but mostly forgotten story of cross-cultural contact, cooperation, and competition.

Finally, although British producers and distributors played an important role in the development of the Australasian cinema market, this book deals only tangentially with British films for two reasons. First, the British film industry in the silent era was itself highly dependent on imports from Continental and American producers. Ruth Megaw points out that only 15% of films released in Great Britain in 1910 were British-made, compared to 36% French, 17% Italian, and 28% American.<sup>14</sup> The same was true of Germany, where as late as 1914 only 15% of films were domestic products, but the rise of UFA revitalized the German film industry in the interwar period with large, well-equipped studios, integrated distribution networks, a large transnational Central European language market, and significant government support. Prior to World War I, London was a major hub of the global film trade, with Continental and American films on offer, but it lost that status during the war, in part because American film companies started opening their own foreign distribution offices abroad rather than trading through exchanges in London.

Second and more importantly, the circulation of British film in Australasia is entangled with cultural and political issues linked to the colonial history between Great Britain and its erstwhile colonies that complicate the circulation history of British film in unique ways.<sup>15</sup> British films were often regarded as the next closest thing to Australian-made films and subject to reduced import duties.<sup>16</sup> As the 1927 Royal Commission on the Moving Picture Industry in Australia confirmed, the cinema played an important role in promoting identification with and loyalty to the British Empire in the former colonies, though such patriotic motives were not enough to make the Commission's recommended quota of British films a successful counterweight to cheap, abundant American films. The interests of the British and European film industries do impinge on each other at various points in this period, from the central role of British film exchanges in making European films available to Australian distributors before World War I, to the devastating impact of the war on their respective film production and export capacities, the threat posed by the overwhelming Americanization of the global film market in the 1920s, and various attempts at British–European cooperation in both distribution and production. As a result, the British film industry is also an important character in this book, just not one of its central protagonists. The full story of British film circulation in the Antipodes deserves a book of its own.

Instead, this book focuses on the multi-reel European narrative features that played a major role in making the cinema a multimillion-dollar industry and shaping cinema practices that would persist for decades, from exclusive releases and double features to the star system and art-house cinemas. Many other types of European films, such as scenics, comics, and newsreels, were also well represented in Australasia, but those genres were neither as financially nor psychologically impactful on markets and viewers. Multi-reel narrative films (more than 1,500 feet) facilitated the industry's move away from what Tom Gunning has called the 'cinema of attractions', a voyeuristic cinema designed primarily to show something, towards narrative cinema that aims to tell a story and immerse the viewer in a fictional world.<sup>17</sup> The shift to longer, more expensive, complex, artistically demanding, and psychologically engaging films helped elevate moving pictures to the status of artistic productions that did more than just startle or amuse their viewers but instead helped them to identify, both emotionally and intellectually, with the characters and scenarios they saw on screen. It also gave rise to the phenomenon of the film star, both as an intermedial figure between stage and screen, like the Parisian theatrical entertainers Sarah Bernhardt, Mistinguett, and Gaby Deslys, and as purely cinematic stars, like Asta Nielsen, Francesca Bertini, and Emil Jannings. Longer films also necessitated a shift in booking practices in the late 1900s, from sales to rentals, from open-market competition to exclusive contracts in the early 1910s and then to blind- and block-booking contracts in the late 1910s and early 1920s that helped Hollywood studios retain a firm grip on the Australasian market after World War I, despite resumed production and export on the part of European producers.

### Film as a Carrier of Culture

Film functions as a type of cultural memory, preserving the technological level, tastes, and traumas of a certain era in its form, while illuminating through its movement the relationships between film-producing countries, film exporters and importers, distributors and exhibitors, and audiences and actors. Several years before the US film industry made the shift to features in any sustained way, European features became such a ubiquitous part of the Australasian cinema market in the pre-World War I era that their national origins were largely irrelevant to audiences, except as a sign of how they connected the settler-colonial populations of Australia and New Zealand to the Old World.

European silent films connected Australasian audiences to the European continent in psychologically significant ways. Unlike sound films, which segregated film markets by language, the lack of linguistic barriers rendered

the circulation of French, German, Italian, Swedish, and Danish silent films in the Antipodes in the early 1910s relatively uncomplicated. *Screening Europe in Australasia* reveals how tightly interconnected the world already was in the first three decades of the twentieth century, bound together by steamships and undersea cables and immigrants and the circulation of silent films. People living thousands of miles apart, separated by geography, politics, religion, language, and, in some cases, race, were able to catch glimpses of each other's societies on the silver screen, shaping their image of both the wider world and of themselves. In addition to featuring well-known Continental theatre actors and dancers, many European films drew on stories of Classical and European history from ancient Greece to Napoleon that Europeans and Australasians shared, as well as on their common literary-artistic heritage, encompassing works by Dante, Shakespeare, Dickens, Sherlock Holmes, Puccini, Selma Lagerlöf, and countless other novels, plays, and operas. Social melodramas, often set in opulent interiors or circus milieus and involving intrigue, infidelity, cross-dressing, murder, and suicide, rapidly became a staple of Continental films, particularly from Denmark in the early 1910s and Italy in the latter half of the decade. Many European films premiered in Australasia very soon after opening in Europe, occasionally even before, and often long before the same films reached American audiences, if they made it there at all. It was not until the 1920s, when American films dominated global and Antipodean cinema markets, that European films began to be positioned as exclusive, highbrow art films that offered a culturally significant alternative to Hollywood films. Prior to that, they were simply common fare for all to enjoy.

Yet on some level, the international diversity of the films on offer does seem to have mattered to Australasian audiences before World War I, judging by how often it is mentioned; by way of example, the exhibitor National Pictures, operating in the rural railway junction town of Narrogin, Western Australia, 124 miles south-east of Perth, which had a population of 889 (up from sixty in 1898), felt the need to reassure their patrons in July 1911 that 'this program of films, and all to follow, contain makes from all over the world'.<sup>18</sup> European silent films seem to have enjoyed a certain prestige that advertisers capitalized on. The aggressiveness with which distributors promoted 'exclusives'—such as the twenty Asta Nielsen series films that T.J. West imported between 1911 and 1913, or the extravagantly expensive *Quo Vadis?* made by Cines in 1913—and the tenacity with which exhibitors advertised those films, often in large ads on the same page of the same newspapers, suggests that there was in fact considerable variability in which films audiences chose to watch, particularly in medium-sized and large towns that had multiple cinema houses. Particularly before



World War I, Australasian audiences may not have been particularly invested in 'foreign' films (vs Australian) or 'European' films (vs American), but they were clearly interested in quality entertainment, and they seem to have associated certain brands with the likelihood of an impressive, enjoyable product.

European feature films, especially from well-known makers like Pathé, Nordisk, and later UFA, were known to be artistically innovative, frequently elaborate, and sometimes rather sensational in content, all of which made them an attractive and influential product that gave cinemagoers enjoyable access to coveted information about the larger, modern world. Australasian newspaper ads frequently mention how expensive it was to secure the exhibition rights for a particular European film, underscoring its exclusivity and sophistication. Meanwhile, the primarily female European stars of such films, including Asta Nielsen, Henny Porten, Francesca Bertini, and Karina Bell, embodied the exciting but also threatening modernity associated with European culture that was closely linked with the image of the modern girl.<sup>19</sup> Miriam Hansen argues that the 'cinema was not only part and symptom of modernity's experience and perception of crisis and upheaval; it was also, most importantly, the single most inclusive cultural horizon in which the traumatic effects of modernity were reflected, rejected or disavowed, transmuted or negotiated'.<sup>20</sup> The prominence of assertive, sexually active female protagonists in many of these films reflects the extent to which they catered to the cinema's aspiring female clientele, while the films themselves often invite viewers to engage critically with societal impediments to women's emancipation and empowerment more generally.

Any clear-cut notion of European cultural transmission through film is complicated, however, not only by the fact that Europe contains so many autonomous political entities, each with its own distinct language, history, and values, but also by the transnationalism of film production, which has always involved border-crossing artists, financing, and products. Although national affiliation often plays a significant role in logistical matters, such as determining the parameters for importing Danish and German films into British Commonwealth countries during and after World War I, it is much more difficult to define the factors that determine a film's national character. Is it dependent on the birthplace or native language of its director or the actors in it? The registration of the company that produced it? The place it was filmed? What happens when you have an American-based company making a French-language film in Paris with a mix of American and French actors—is this a French film or an American one? What about a Hollywood-made film by a German director with Swedish and Polish actors? Is this an American film? Yet even as the mobility of

directors, camera operators, actors, and screenwriters calls the possibility of nationally specific cinema traits into question, it also contributed to the increasing internationalism of Hollywood in the 1920s and beyond, when American studios deliberately recruited foreign actors, directors, and technicians in an attempt to create a universal cinematic idiom.

By virtue of its transnationalism, silent film equipped its viewers with a unique cross-cultural fluency that helped them make sense of the rapidly changing world in which they lived, where technological advances brought people together more quickly than ever before even as global conflicts pulled them apart. Film's function as a medium of cultural communication manifests itself not only in the circulation of films as physical objects, but also, perhaps especially, in the circulation of ideas contained in the films. Audiences react to the faces they see on screen, to the stories they witness, to the values those stories convey, and learn to associate certain traits and priorities with the countries that produce the films they watch. Megaw explains, 'In the absence of direct conquest of one nation by another, the picture which one people holds of another is usually derived from cultural sources. Plays, books, films, and television are just as important as news items or constitutional theses in forming the image of a society, not only because they have less conscious intention of imparting information, but also because they frequently reach a wider audience.'<sup>21</sup> John Tulloch agrees that the cinema is a powerful social institution that transcends purely economic considerations and engages in cultural and existential meaning-making, illustrated by Jeremy Tunstall's argument that Hollywood films 'have carried U.S. values (individualism, the success ethic, social and geographical mobility supposedly unaffected by class) and U.S. market orientations (directed to the migrant in urbanizing societies, to the modern urban woman with contradictory roles, to the newly affluent urban youth) into economically dependent cultures'.<sup>22</sup> By this principle, the widespread circulation of European films in the pre-war period must have also disseminated a particular set of values and ideals, such as a sense of interconnectedness between countries, the possibility of universal communication, and, as the popularity of erotic melodramas, gender-bending comedies, and diva films suggests, the empowerment of women as equal, active participants both as leading characters in films and as agents in the global film industry.

Yet this narrative of cross-cultural communication is not unproblematic in the settler-colonial context of the Antipodes, not least because film's complicity in cultural imperialism was treated so matter-of-factly. As Horace T. Clarke asserts in *Moving Picture World* in 1918, 'Western films are made from the standpoint of Western people, setting forth their religious, sociological, ethical, and political views'.<sup>23</sup> The general exclusion of

Aboriginal peoples in Australia and frequently Māori in New Zealand from not only the production but even, in some cases, the consumption of moving pictures ensured that such films, whether British, American, or European in origin, served, as Nadi Tofighian has observed, to unabashedly ‘cement the worldview of the colonizer’.<sup>24</sup> These tensions underpin the whole system of film production and circulation and deserve more attention than is possible within the scope of this book, but I will highlight them where relevant to this narrative.

### Organization of the Book

This book, divided into three parts, spans most of the silent era, tracing the emergence, diversification, and homogenization of the global film industry as it manifested itself in Australia and New Zealand. It begins with an overview of the first two decades of silent film distribution and exhibition patterns in Australasia and the transnational players who shaped them, followed by a survey of the importation and reception of films from each of the major European film-producing countries in the pre-war era, in chronological order of their entry into the Antipodean market: France, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, and Germany. Due to the fragmentary nature of the surviving documentation, this overview is doubtless incomplete, but it establishes a minimum baseline of Continental imports. With World War I marking a caesura in both trade and production, as well as the sudden and overwhelming reshuffling of the global marketplace in favour of American films, the narrative concludes by documenting how a few Australasian importers of European films tried to correct this imbalance in the 1920s, laying the foundation for the phenomenon of European art-house cinema in the process.

‘Part I: Film Distribution and Exhibition in Australasia before World War I’ introduces several of the entrepreneurs who helped establish a cinema culture in Australia and New Zealand. In documenting the evolution from travelling temporary cinemas to permanent, opulent cinema palaces it also establishes the class-, gender-, and race-based parameters of early Australasian cinema culture. Chapter 1 discusses the pioneering American showman J.C. Williamson and his British protégé Clement George Mason, who were instrumental in bringing early cinema out to many corners of Australia and in establishing European film imports as a prominent part of local cinema programmes. Chapter 2 documents the contributions of the three most powerful exhibitor-distributors in the pre-war period: Englishmen T.J. West and Cosens Spencer, the latter together with his Scottish-born wife Mary Stuart Huntly, known professionally as Señora Spencer, ‘the world’s first lady projectionist’, as well as the

American J.D. Williams. Between 1906 and 1913, these three larger-than-life characters built their own transnational cinema empires that became, in 1912/13, the core of the conjoined companies Australasian Film and Union Theatres (known as the Combine) that would dominate the Australasian cinema landscape for the remainder of the silent period. Using Tom O'Regan's notion of trans-Tasman exchange as its lens, Chapter 3 expands on the preceding one to tell the story of the three most prominent exhibitor-distributors in New Zealand in the same period—the Englishmen Henry Hayward, John Fuller and his sons, and the Australian-born MacMahon brothers—and their competition and collaboration with Australian distributors. It explores the differences between the cinema landscapes in Australia and New Zealand, as well as how these entrepreneurs shaped this market through their trans-Tasman and transoceanic connections.

The large number of important European films, more than five hundred, that circulated in Australasia before and during the war, as well as the differing trajectories and generic specializations of European national cinemas, warrants treating each country's output individually in 'Part II: European Film on Australasian Screens through 1917', which examines the circulation of French, Italian, Danish/Swedish, and German film imports, respectively. Against the backdrop erected in Part I, each chapter considers how influential brands, such as Pathé, Cines, Itala, Nordisk, Messter, and Duskes, and individual stars, from Bartolomeo Pagano to Clara Wieth, figured into the marketing of European films in particular cinemas in this period. Chapter 4 delves into the path-breaking role of French film, beginning with Pathé Frères's and Gaumont's one-reel dramas and comedies in the early 1900s, the introduction of French theatrical adaptations under the Film d'Art brand in 1909/10, and the opening of Pathé's Melbourne office in 1909, just when Pathé was losing market share in the USA and being branded there as foreign. Looking at how Pathé capitalized on existing entertainment networks to promote both crossover theatre stars and the idea of European art film, this chapter analyses representative examples of French films that were particularly successful in Australia and New Zealand as well as highlighting important locally determined aspects of the reception of Sarah Bernhardt, Mistinguett, and other French cinema stars.

Although Italian comedy shorts were also popular in the Antipodes, Chapter 5 concentrates on the extraordinary popularity of Italian historical epics and theatrical adaptations, which represented both high-quality, large-scale film production and the heroic Greco-Roman and Christian past upon which Western civilization, including the Anglo-European settler-colonial societies in the Antipodes, was built. Although no single figure like George Kleine in the USA advocated for Italian film in Australasia, many

early Italian films were imported by Pathé, Tyler, and other distributors. In addition to breaking all national records with their long runs in metropolitan cinemas, Italian films like *Quo Vadis?* (1913) and *Cabiria* (1914) were instrumental in establishing the 'one-picture' evening that would soon become the norm for cinema exhibition. Given that there was just a small Italian immigrant population in Australia and New Zealand at the time, this chapter considers the factors that can account for this phenomenon, both in terms of filmic innovations and cultural resonance.

As Chapter 6 chronicles, Denmark's Nordisk Film Kompagni became one of the most prominent European 'quality brands' in Australasia, serving as a generic identifier for films from the Nordic region for many years, including films from its Danish and Swedish competitors, such as Kinografen, Scandinavisk-Russisk Handelshus (SRH), and Svenska Bio (Swedish Biograph). This deliberate promotion of Nordisk's corporate brand came at the expense of its stars' individual brands. In addition to providing a brief history of Nordisk and analysing its approach to marketing itself in Australasia, this chapter offers a closer look at some of the most successful Nordic imports to Australasia, including erotic melodramas, crime dramas, circus films, and literary adaptations.

Chapter 7 documents how, since German film companies enjoyed minimal name recognition in Australasia in the 1910s, it was the star power of actresses like Asta Nielsen, Henny Porten, and Madame Saharet that drove the circulation of German films in pre-war Australasia, and even after the outbreak of war. The number of Asta Nielsen films imported to Australia and New Zealand, for example, is nearly twice as many as circulated in the US market in the same period, a discrepancy caused in large part by region-specific distribution methods.<sup>25</sup> This chapter analyses not only these stars' phenomenal individual stardom but also the role of geopolitics in pre-war Australasian cinema, contextualizing the reception of German films relative to the significant German immigrant populations in parts of Australia and the anti-German sentiment that flared up during World War I.

While the previous chapters focused on the circulation of films from national traditions in implicit dialogue with each other, Chapter 8 takes a more explicitly transnational approach by presenting a case study of independent distributor Clement Mason, who refused to join the Combine, and the movement of fifty-one primarily European feature films he imported to Australia and New Zealand in 1913. As 1913 seems to have been the peak year of European film importation to Australia, as well as the first year of the Combine's operation, this case study illustrates how these films' circulation reflects that popularity while negotiating the constraints imposed by centralized distribution.

'Part III: Art Cinema in Competition with Hollywood' describes the transformed distribution and exhibition market in interwar Australasia and interrogates the altered status of European film in the interwar period up to the breakthrough of sound film. The American conquest of the Australasian cinema market during World War I left little space in distributors' budgets or exhibitors' schedules for European films, which were produced in much smaller numbers than before the war and were subject to various import restrictions. This section examines the role of independent distributors such as Mason Super Films, British and Continental Feature Films, and Cinema Art Films in carving out a niche for European art films, placing this discussion into the context of political, economic, and cultural competition between the USA, the UK, and Continental Europe for access to Australasian audiences. Chapter 9 documents the novelty of European films in interwar Australasia, where Hollywood controlled most of the cinema market, and Mary Norton Mason's attempts to make Mason Super Films the standard-bearer for imported European art films in opposition to more generic American fare. In the early 1920s, this included primarily literary adaptations from Swedish Biograph (later Svensk Filmindustri), directed by Victor Sjöström or Mauritz Stiller, and Italian diva films.

Finally, Chapter 10 documents how, in the second half of the 1920s, Sydney-based distributor Cinema Art Films partnered with Universum Film AG (UFA) to promote German films as an attractive alternative to Hollywood films. As Germany became the face of Film Europe, it made common cause with the British, French, and Swedish film industries to promote European and British film abroad, as the 1927 Royal Commission reveals. This chapter also considers the cultural hybridity that Hollywood cultivated in the 1920s, particularly by poaching directors and stars from European film companies, including Ernst Lubitsch, Emil Jannings, Pola Negri, Greta Garbo, Mauritz Stiller, and Erich von Stroheim, among many others. The intercontinental careers of these individuals complicate any straightforward attribution of certain national traits or values to a particular actor or director.

By taking a transnational approach to the history of cinema consumption in Australasia, *Screening Europe in Australasia* reveals how culturally diverse and dynamic the film distribution and exhibition markets in the Antipodes were, primarily before but also during and after World War I, and how closely the cinema engaged with questions of gender, race, class, and modernity. Documenting this diversity destabilizes familiar narratives about the inherent superiority of American film and the assumed inevitability of its global dominance since the mid-silent era, while also questioning the value and validity of national cinema labels for understanding how silent films were marketed and received. It reveals how prominent and successful certain

European producer brands and individual stars were in the late 1900s and 1910s, before illuminating the ways in which the massive shifts in the global film market during and after World War I redrew the parameters of the Australasian cinema landscape in the 1920s. This had the effect of both narrowing the range of films on offer to almost exclusively American programming and creating a niche category for European art films.

In addition to recuperating this broader transnational history, this book also examines the cross-cultural connections that this intertwined history made possible. Local conditions of production and artistic innovation in various European countries affected the kinds and quantity of films available at a given time, while the specific conditions of distribution and exhibition in Australia and New Zealand determined who imported which films, who screened them, and where. The intersection of local conditions with trends in the global film industry results in a story that is highly specific to a particular time and place and yet exemplary of how the movement of capital, people, goods, and ideas around the globe informed the circulatory circuits of European films, their reception by Australasian cinemagoers, and their significance in local processes of cultural identity construction.

## Notes

- 1 Deb Verhoeven, 'Film and Video' in Stuart Cunningham and Graeme Turner (eds), *The Media & Communications in Australia* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2006), 156.
- 2 Richard Maltby, 'New Cinema Histories' in Richard Maltby, Daniel Biltereyst, and Philippe Meers (eds), *Explorations in New Cinema History* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 3.
- 3 Joseph Garncarz, *Wechselnde Vorlieben: Über die Filmpräferenzen der Europäer* (Frankfurt: Stroemfeld, 2015), 11. All translations from German and Danish are my own, unless otherwise specified.
- 4 Kristin Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market, 1907–1934* (London: British Film Institute, 1985).
- 5 Geoff Mayer and Keith Beattie (eds), *The Cinema of Australia and New Zealand* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 2.
- 6 Ivo Blom, *Jean Desmet and the Early Dutch Film Trade* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003); Isak Thorsen, *Nordisk Films Kompagni: The Rise and Fall of the Polar Bear* (East Barnet, UK: John Libbey Publishing, 2017); Richard Abel, *The Ciné Goes to Town: French Cinema 1896–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) and *The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American, 1900–1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
- 7 Rudmer Canjels, *Distributing Silent Film Serials: Local Practices, Changing Forms, Cultural Transformation* (New York: Routledge, 2011).
- 8 Jens Ulf-Møller explains, 'Ultimately the conclusion that Hollywood's film dominance has been the product of economic and political maneuvering on a Machiavellian scale is inescapable.' Jens Ulf-Møller, *Hollywood's Film Wars with*

- France: Film-Trade Diplomacy and the Emergence of the French Film Quota Policy* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2001), xiii.
- 9 Tom O'Regan, 'Crossing the Ditch: Trans-Tasman Film Expatriates' in Ben Goldsmith, Mark David Ryan, and Geoff Lealand (eds), *Directory of World Cinema: Australia and New Zealand 2* (London: Intellect, 2015), 228.
  - 10 'Picture Film Combine. Showmen Aggrieved', *Argus* (Melbourne), 17 March 1913, 5; Diane Collins, *Hollywood Down Under: Australians at the Movies, 1896 to the Present Day* (North Ryde, NSW: Angus & Robertson Publishers, 1987), 5.
  - 11 For an overview of early film production history in Australia, see Graham Shirley and Brian Adams, *Australian Cinema: The First Eighty Years* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson Publishers, 1983). For more on early New Zealand film history, see Christopher Pugsley, *The Camera in the Crowd: Filming New Zealand in Peace and War, 1895–1920* (Auckland: Oratia Books, 2017) and Diane Pivac et al., *New Zealand Film: An Illustrated History* (Wellington: Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, 2011).
  - 12 Graeme Turner, *Film as Social Practice* (London: Routledge, 2006), 17.
  - 13 Maltby, 'New Cinema Histories', 7.
  - 14 Ruth Megaw, 'American Image: Influence on Australian Cinema Management, 1896–1923', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 54.2 (1968), 199.
  - 15 Mike Walsh, 'Tackling the Big Boy of Empire: British Film in Australia, 1918–1931' in Andrew Higson (ed.), *Young and Innocent: The Cinema in Britain, 1896–1930* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002). Peter Limbrick, *Making Settler Cinemas: Film and Colonial Encounters in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) does an excellent job of dealing with the settler-colonial aspects of film production and circulation in Australasia, albeit in a somewhat later period.
  - 16 Ina Bertrand, *Film Censorship in Australia* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978), 22.
  - 17 Tom Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film, Its Spectators, and the Avant-Garde' in Wanda Strauven (ed.), *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 382.
  - 18 *Great Southern Leader* (Pingelly, WA), 7 July 1911, 2.
  - 19 Jill Julius Matthews, *Dance Hall & Picture Palace: Sydney's Romance with Modernity* (Sydney: Currency Press, 2005), 65.
  - 20 Miriam Hansen, 'The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism', *Modernism/Modernity* 6.2 (1999), 69.
  - 21 Megaw, 'American Image', 194.
  - 22 Jeremy Tunstall, *The Media Are American* (London: Arnold, 1977), 81. Qtd in John Tulloch, *Australian Cinema: Industry, Narrative and Meaning* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), 14.
  - 23 Horace T. Clarke, 'Film Trade Difficulties in the Orient: Brief Résumé of Conditions in Japan, China, Strait Settlements, India, and Dutch East Indies—Australasia Partial to American Product', *Moving Picture World*, 19 October 1918, 428.
  - 24 Nadi Tofighian, 'Distributing Scandinavia: Nordisk Film in Asia' in Nick Deocampo (ed.), *Early Cinema in Asia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 159.
  - 25 Jennifer Bean, '“Übers Meer gebracht”: In Amerika 1912–1914' in Heide Schlüppmann et al. (eds), *Unmögliche Liebe: Asta Nielsen, ihr Kino* (Vienna: Filmverlag Austria, 2009), 338; Richard Abel, 'Asta Nielsen's Flickering Stardom in the USA, 1912–1914' in Martin Loiperdinger and Uli Jung (eds), *Importing Asta Nielsen: The International Film Star in the Making 1910–1914* (New Barnet, UK: John Libbey, 2013), 285.



*Part I*

Film Distribution and Exhibition in  
Australasia before World War I



# ‘THE WINDOW OF THE WORLD’

## Distribution and Exhibition of Early Film in Settler-Colonial Australasia

In Australia and New Zealand at the turn of the twentieth century, a competitive and innovative group of film distributors and exhibitors established a vibrant cinema industry that kept cinemagoers entertained with cutting-edge, diverse cinema programmes from makers across Western Europe, Britain, and the USA. Three groups of stakeholders shaped this process: producers in different countries working within the constraints of their respective national economic, political, and cultural contexts; cinemagoers choosing between the films on offer in their local cinemas; and distributors and exhibitors responsible for deciding which films from which producers were shown (or not) in which cinemas. These distributors and exhibitors are the key to unlocking the forgotten history of foreign film exhibition in Australasia between 1896, when moving pictures were first introduced to the Antipodes, and around 1930, when the breakthrough of sound films brought the global circulation of silent films to an abrupt end.

Early film circulation built on existing theatrical networks. Veronica Kelly describes the international circulation of commercial theatre in Australasia at the turn of the century as a ‘de-centered trade ... wherein the perceived entertainment preferences and geographies of non-metropolitan centres were formative of international enterprise’.<sup>1</sup> In other words, the demands of local markets, along with the interests and abilities of local theatre impresarios, shaped the global theatrical economy.<sup>2</sup> Kelly’s observations apply equally well to the early Australasian cinema industry, before the establishment of monopolistic conglomerates and local branches of powerful Hollywood studios predetermined the films

available to exhibitors. In this early period, distributors and exhibitors were free to innovate and experiment in ways unimaginable even a few years later. The personalities and preferences of local entrepreneurs in response to the unique Antipodean market played a decisive role in the development of the cinema industry in Australia and New Zealand between 1896 and 1913. Moreover, their endeavours had a far greater impact on the global cinematic industry than has previously been understood or appreciated, boosting Continental feature films to a position of prominence and visibility vis-à-vis American film that they have never regained since.

Many of the distributors and exhibitors who sourced and screened films for Australasian audiences were themselves transnationally mobile. Of those who dominated the first two decades of Australasian cinema history, only the Tait brothers (John Henry, 1871–1955, and James Nevin, 1876–1961) and the MacMahon brothers (James, Charles, and Joseph) were Australian-born, all of them to British immigrant parents. The Australasian cinema industry was dominated by immigrants, many of whom moved freely and frequently between Australia, New Zealand, the UK, and the USA in their professional capacities, from the American showmen James Cassius (J.C.) Williamson and James Dixon (J.D.) Williams to British-born entrepreneurs Thomas James (T.J.) West, Henry John Hayward, Cosens Spencer, John Fuller, and Clement George Mason. Williams, who would go on to establish a major film-related company on three continents (Australia, the USA, and Europe), was perhaps the most dramatic example of this transnational mobility.

All these men belonged, to varying degrees, to the class of global businessmen that helped connect Australia and New Zealand to international markets. Their networks were necessarily both national and international, built on personal contacts and sheer audacity. While some—including the Tait and Spencer—were also involved in film production and others—such as West and Williams—focused primarily on their cinema chains, many of them also functioned as distributors. In this latter capacity, they set up film rental exchanges, for which they sourced films abroad, both personally and through agents in London and elsewhere, which gave them decisive influence over the films Australasian audiences got to see.

### **The Evolving Character of Australasian Cinemagoing**

Moving pictures made their debut in Australia in November 1894 with Joseph MacMahon's demonstration in Sydney and Melbourne of Edison's Kinetoscope, a peep-show device in which a fifty-foot loop of film moves horizontally, that attracted more than 25,000 viewers.<sup>3</sup> In August 1896, Harry Rickards's vaudeville show at the Melbourne Opera House featured a British film projector, most likely an R.W. Paul Theatrograph,

marketed as the ‘Greatest Wonder of the Nineteenth Century’, ‘the Rage of London’, and the ‘Photo-Electric Sensation of the World’.<sup>4</sup> On 22 August, as part of Rickards’s show, the American magician Louis Morgenstern, using the stage name Carl Hertz, offered the first public film screening in Australasia, which included a scene from George du Maurier’s 1894 novel *Trilby*. After a successful month in Melbourne, Hertz brought his cinematograph show to Sydney for a month, opening on 19 September 1896. Several temporary cinemas sprang up in Sydney in late 1896, including the Salon Lumière, the Cinématographe, and the Salon Cinématographe. Across the Tasman Sea in Auckland, self-designated ‘Professors’ Hausmann and Gow introduced moving pictures to New Zealand with a demonstration of Edison’s Vitascope projector as part of a performance of Charles Godfrey’s Vaudeville Company at the Opera House on 13 October 1896.

From these initial one-off shows, the Australasian cinema market grew rapidly and experimented with many different modes of exhibition. Moving pictures first found a niche as part of a larger entertainment business, which encompassed all manner of live performances (theatre, circus, vaudeville, musicals, burlesques, *tableaux vivants*, etc.), technological marvels, and athletic feats. Performing groups, travelling along the same routes around the trans-Tasman region as theatrical groups had been for decades, incorporated short films into their acts. Such screenings were often accompanied by a narrator-lecturer or musical interludes, but the films themselves—such as the wildly popular *Living London* series of documentary shorts that gave viewers a glimpse of the bustling streets of the UK’s capital—soon became the main attraction, not least because of their ability to bring the wider world into the colonial sphere. When Nevin Tait screened *Living London* in the Anglo-Danish settlement of Dannevirke, New Zealand in April 1906, for example, the local newspaper reported that ‘the biograph has come to the aid of those who desire to impress colonials with the greatness and glory of London. By means of the moving pictures they will be able to see everything just as it happens and will be able to easily imagine themselves in the midst of the busy throng.’<sup>5</sup>

Although vaudeville theatres continued to show films as parts of their variety programmes for decades, cinema quickly developed into an independent industry. As early as 1900 travelling showmen began screening a whole evening of short films in locations around each country, putting on a show for a few nights in one settlement’s town hall, school of arts, or mechanics’ institute hall, then moving to another town’s Masonic Hall, stadium, or even beach. Films were often screened in theatres and public halls, the latter being well suited to motion pictures because of their narrowness and unobstructed view of the stage, as well as in converted shops

and tents. In larger halls, a screen was often erected in the middle of the room, with spectator seating on both sides. Continuous shows, such as one presented at the Polytechnic Hall in Sydney in 1898,<sup>6</sup> offered an hourly programme of short films, running from 11am to 10pm.

Within a decade, makeshift theatres and travelling cinemas had given way in urban areas to a highly profitable industry with multiple cinema options at different price points, including cheap continuous shows, luxurious nightly shows, weekend matinees, seasonal open-air offerings, and special weekend events. Australian cinemas even pioneered the double-feature programme in 1911, around two decades before it became common in the USA.<sup>7</sup> Many of these picture theatres bore aspirational highbrow names with royal or classical connotations, such as King's, His Majesty's, Queen's, Princess, Theatre Royal, Palace, Empire, Lyceum, and Olympia. As Australasians tended to have fairly high wages, abundant leisure time, and a taste for theatrical entertainments, they rapidly became regular cinemagoers. *Pathé's Weekly Australasian Bulletin* reported in 1912 that while the total capacity of Melbourne's live theatres and music halls was between 12,000 and 13,000, more than 50,000 people—roughly 10% of the city's population—could be found in Melbourne's twenty-five cinemas on a crowded evening.<sup>8</sup> In March 1914, the Sydney *Sunday Times* estimated that a quarter of the nation's population 'goes to the picture show every week as regular attendants'.<sup>9</sup> The large number of new cinemas, the multi-film programmes, and the expectation of frequent (weekly or semi-weekly) programme changes meant that Australasian cinemas needed vast numbers of new films on a regular basis. Even when Australian domestic production was at its highest in the early 1910s, it produced fewer than two dozen feature films per year. All the rest of the films had to be imported from the countries producing the most films in this early period, namely the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Denmark, Germany, and the United States.

As cinema became an indispensable part of the Australasian entertainment industry, it also became a primary vector for the introduction and dissemination of information and opinions about the rest of the world to these geographically isolated settler-colonial nations. In this period, the white populations of the Antipodes defined themselves by their political, economic, and cultural connections to Europe, but physical distance was still a challenge.<sup>10</sup> One of the most attractive aspects of the new technology of moving pictures for Australasians seems to have been its ability to transport viewers to the faraway, much-imagined places of Continental Europe. As one Australian journalist in January 1897 exclaimed about the cinema's conjuring magic:

The sordid surroundings of our normal city life are just without, but suddenly the bell tinkles, and Paris, or Vienna, or Berlin, with all their

life, are before us. The merry crowd in the Boulevards, the pomp of life on Unter den Linden, the double tide of chariots rolling through the Prater Strasse, and therewith many a glimpse of such life and adventure as heretofore we could only obtain through the impassive oil color of the painter, or the dead marble of the sculptor. We see that far-famed French duel here; the tragedy is enacted before our eyes. We realise the things we have dreamed about in various ways. We transport ourselves instantly and actually, as if we were in possession of the magic carpet of the Arabian nights. The world is all before us as we take our seats, and without any cost or tedium of travel we can conjure up its most witching scenes at will.<sup>11</sup>

Thousands of miles from Europe and Britain, audiences in Australasia could close the distance to the Old World and its marvels in the cinema, in the blink of an eye, which they were clearly interested in doing. Katherine Brisbane argues, ‘While legend would have it that our colonial history was one of bush bands and itinerant balladeers, the research ... reveals a hidden Australia—an international leisure culture with international tastes ... From the start the entertainment culture was provincial yet, paradoxically, international in a real sense. In due course it matured into a cosmopolitan culture, gathering to itself the tastes and cultural traditions of many nationalities.’<sup>12</sup> Film was a crucial contributor to the cultivation of such cosmopolitan preferences.

The films Australasian audiences were able to watch in the early 1900s—initially mostly very brief non-fiction films, trick films, and comic or dramatic shorts—came almost entirely from the UK, Europe, and the USA. French-, British-, and American-made films provided the first such spectacles, but they were soon supplemented by films made in and about Australia, including footage of the 1897 Melbourne Cup recorded by Frenchman Marius Sestier for the Lumière company and the Tait brothers’ groundbreaking 1906 feature film *The Story of the Kelly Gang*. By 1911, export-oriented film companies in France, Denmark, Italy, Sweden, and Germany had begun selling their films around the world, with language barriers rendered irrelevant by easily exchangeable intertitles. Accordingly, Australasian cinema programmes in the first two decades of the twentieth century regularly featured, as Ina Bertrand and William Routt explain, French and Italian ‘chase comedies (which preceded Mack Sennett’s famous Keystone comedies), Danish “social problem” films, British crime melodramas, [and] American cowboy pictures ... all jumbled together on the same programmes, along with non-fiction “scenics” (travelogues), “industrials” (depicting industrial processes) and “gazettes” (newsreels)’.<sup>13</sup> At this point, the national origin of certain films

was occasionally mentioned, if of topical interest, but as a general rule the films were just described in terms of their genre, or, increasingly, by the name of the production company.

The inherent internationalism of the early film industry in Australasia reflected the globalized character of the entertainment business in this period, which drew on an international talent pool and facilitated the circulation of performers and attractions on a scale almost unimaginable today. Australia and New Zealand had long been regular stops on a world circuit of performers who kept their audiences in close touch with events and progress abroad, a network that soon supported the circulation of films in Australasia as well. Many of the leaders in the entertainment industry in one country were also very active in the other, which facilitated the trans-Tasman exchange of personnel and productions. Already in the mid-nineteenth century, European stage successes often reached Australasia within twelve months; by 1911, European cinema sensations reached Australasian screens within weeks of their European premieres, despite an average transit time of one month. Most of the above-mentioned distributors came to Australasia in connection with theatrical tours from the UK or the USA in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, then stayed on to build up the cinema industry, using their showmanship and expertise in the theatrical world to facilitate their entry into moving picture exhibition. Audiences were also used to admiring foreign theatrical stars, so when French actor Sarah Bernhardt's films *La dame aux camélias/Camille* and *Les amours de la reine Élisabeth/Queen Elizabeth* were screened in Australasia in the early 1910s, newspaper ads reminded viewers of her highly successful ten-week Australian tour in 1891, organized by J.C. Williamson.

The multinationalism of the cinema industry was also a reflection of the settler-colonial demographics of Australia and New Zealand after more than a century of colonization by and immigration from primarily Great Britain, as well as Germany, Scandinavia, and the United States. Initially colonized by Great Britain in 1788, the Commonwealth of Australia came into existence on 1 January 1901, formed out of six colonies that had previously functioned as rival states, with a mandate to control immigration from Asia and the Pacific. In 1901, 98% of Australia's nearly four million non-Indigenous inhabitants were of British extraction, leading the census recorder to explain, 'the Australian at present is little other than a transplanted Briton'; the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, later known as the 'White Australia Policy', was intended to ensure that British culture remained the norm. The median age was twenty-two, men outnumbered women 110 to 100, and just one in three Australians lived in an urban area.<sup>14</sup> Likewise colonized by Great Britain in 1840, New



Zealand declined to join the Australian Federation, becoming instead the autonomous Dominion of New Zealand on 26 September 1907, with a population of 948,649, 94% of whom were of European heritage and 40% of whom lived in urban centres.<sup>15</sup>

The performance circuits that carried these future cinema entrepreneurs and, later, the films they imported to Australasia followed the routes of British and, to a lesser extent, American colonialism, capitalizing on interconnected colonial empires and reinforcing the racially segregated worldview they promoted. The completion of the All-Red Line, a network of British-controlled and -operated electric submarine telegraph cables stretching around the globe, in 1902, meant that news could be transmitted across the world in a matter of hours, rather than weeks or months.<sup>16</sup> O'Regan points out the significance of this communication circuit for both political and cultural exchange:

The European invasion of Australia and New Zealand, also known as Australia's European settlement, began with the Australian first fleet in 1788 ... In establishing a beachhead in the southern part of the Australian continent it was situating itself in the middle of a most efficient and effective transportation and communication corridor—a distribution corridor if you will—that was very valuable, built as it is from the circular currents around Antarctica flowing as they do eastward ... A hundred years later the cinema would arrive in Australia, New Zealand, Latin America, Africa also by sea. It followed established trading routes including cultural flows which were also distribution routes circulating people, goods including cultural goods and services. By then the age of sail was morphing into the age of steam and the seaport had been joined with the efficient hinterland railway systems in creating continental geographies.<sup>17</sup>

Yet although Australasian cinema was anchored in global communications and trading networks that transcended national borders, it still served a predominantly Western cultural imaginary. Nadi Tofighian argues that two simultaneous tendencies characterized the entertainment industry of South East Asia and the South Pacific in the late nineteenth century: a perceived compression of time and space through technology, trade, and migration, which allowed audiences divided by thousands of miles to enjoy the same shows and admire the same performers at roughly the same time; and the separation of people, through colonialism and imperialism, into ‘different classes of people, ruler and ruled, white and non-white, creating and widening a colonial binary’.<sup>18</sup> The cinema industry developed at the intersection of these two trends.

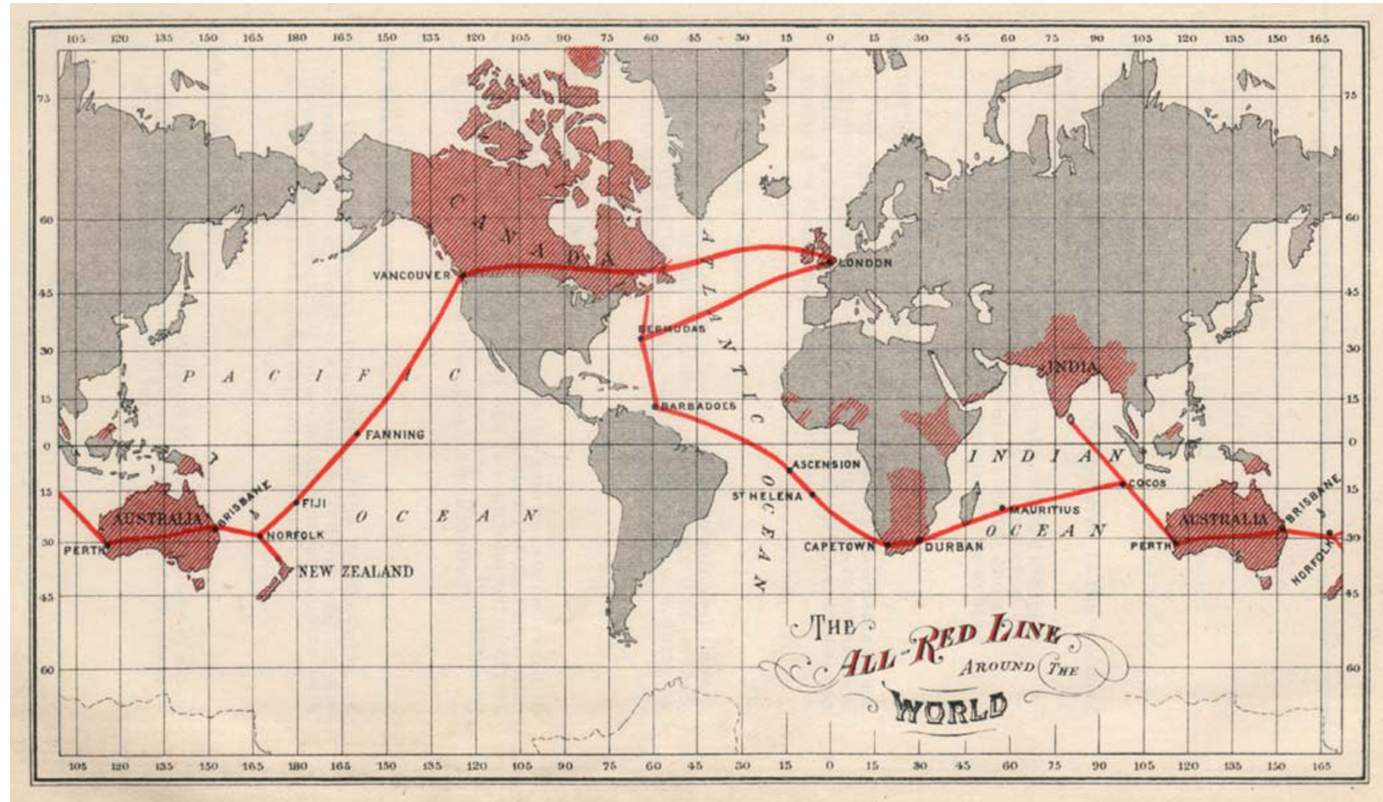


Figure 1.1 A map of the submarine telegraph cable network connecting British territories in 1902. Public domain image, from George Johnson, *The All-Red Line* (1903)

In the early twentieth century, white settler-colonists in the Antipodes were devoted, regular cinemagoers, as much for the films as for the world-view they represented and conveyed. The cinema in Australasia was a critical node for the creation and reinforcement of the European identity of the area's Anglo-European settler-colonists, a way of providing these otherwise ‘neighborless white nations’, as Arnold White described them in 1911, with an appropriate cultural community. White was a supporter of the White Australia policy, which was, in his view, simply a codification of ‘the unwritten law that white men should stand together against all combinations of coloured men’.<sup>19</sup> Indigenous peoples were not the target audience of either film producers or local exhibitor-distributors; on the contrary, fears that the cinema would corrupt the ‘susceptible minds’ of indigenous peoples were common in colonial societies.<sup>20</sup> Aboriginal people in Australia were permitted to attend the cinema, but they were generally required to enter and leave by side doors, take their seats on backless benches at the front of the cinema after the lights went down, and leave before they came back up.<sup>21</sup> Little mention is made of non-white patrons in contemporaneous records of cinema attendance, though in a rare exception, Australian film-maker William J. Lincoln (1870–1917) describes how much the Afghan camel drivers in Coolgardie (WA) in the early 1900s enjoyed a film of a Russian-American wrestling match, noting, ‘nightly their dusky faces beamed with joy at the strenuous combat waged by the athletes’.<sup>22</sup> Thus early cinema in Australasia was largely made and screened for white settler-colonists trying to determine their own cultural identity in a period of rapid technological progress, massive political upheaval, and fierce economic competition.

Though it may seem paradoxical, given the lengths to which cinemas went to keep their white and non-white patrons from interacting with each other, early cinema was also a crucial vehicle for the dissemination of information about other cultures, both in terms of documentary films about actual places and fiction films that suggested how a particular culture viewed the world. As many Australasian distributors’ and exhibitors’ slogans claimed, in various formulations, the cinema offered, as West’s Pictures touted, a ‘Window of the World’. Film companies generally downplayed national cultural referents in their films—such as names of characters, streets, or parks—in an attempt to make them relatable for audiences across the globe, but the cultural contexts of films, especially fiction films, still played a significant role in establishing audience expectations, defining genres and styles, and investing certain films with the prestige of Continental high art.

Some films, particularly early French and Italian literary, theatrical, and historical adaptations, explicitly foreground their national cultural

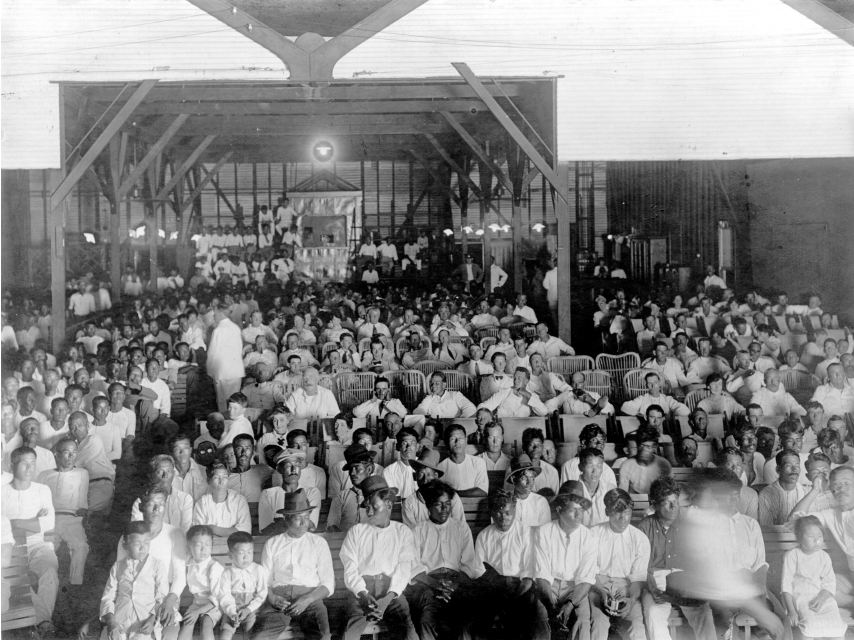


Figure 1.2 Photograph of the Sun Picture Gardens cinema audience in Broome, WA, c.1920. State Library of Western Australia, image BA2573/67

characteristics and narratives, while others simply present the norms of dress, behaviour, and interpersonal interaction that existed in their countries of origin. Bertrand and Routt note that while the

Italian epics produced by Arturo Ambrosio used national culture and settings as ways of luring audiences in New York, Paris or Perth into the cinema, ... the more common practice was for film-makers to ignore such things. Not to *efface* them, certainly, but to forget them—to make films first for a home market where audiences might recognise what was familiar, but films which were expected also to be sent abroad where national origins were usually of less importance than perceived entertainment value.<sup>23</sup>

European films were frequently either praised for their mediation of Old World art, history, literature, and theatrical prowess, or, albeit much more so in the USA than in Australasia in the early 1900s, treated with suspicion as morally dubious ‘foreign’ products.<sup>24</sup> This simultaneous foregrounding and suppression of markers of national identity in films created a curious situation, in which audiences were both indifferent to the particular national origins of the films they watched and yet

keenly aware of the prestige associated with films from certain countries and brands.

### Putting Distributors in the Spotlight

While national cinema histories rarely pay them much attention, distributors—who bought or leased films from producers for particular theatres, cities, or countries—are key to determining which films are shown where and to whom. This was particularly true in the first few decades of the cinema, before block- and blind-booking practices replaced distributors’ and exhibitors’ freedom to choose from an international buffet of films with a largely American *prix fixe* menu. The earliest cinema pioneers in Australasia, in the late 1890s and 1900s, were generally already active in the theatre and entertainment industry, while the 1910s saw the rise of cinema professionals, each of whom contributed to the development of Australasian cinema culture in different, but important ways. Just as many producers also functioned as distributors, the categories of distributor and exhibitor were also quite fluid, since many larger exhibitors sourced their own films in this period and hired them out to other exhibitors.

The film market in Australasia in the 1900s and early 1910s was, like in Britain but unlike the USA, primarily an open-market system, in which exhibitors were free to buy or rent individual film titles and exhibit them in competition with each other. This led to situations in which the same film was shown at multiple cinemas in the same city at the same time, as was the case with the Danish Nordisk film *Ved fængslets port/Temptations of a Great City*, which was offered for hire by the Greater J.D. Williams Amusements Company in the Sydney entertainment trade paper *Referee* in mid-July 1911, four months after its Danish premiere. It premiered in Australia at the Academy of Music, run by the English Amusement Co., in Launceston, Tasmania, on 29 July. Yet while the English Amusement Co. boasted of having exclusive Tasmanian exhibition rights for the film, the rights for the rest of the country were apparently non-exclusive, as the film opened at Williams’s Lyric Theatre in Sydney on 31 July, and in Melbourne on 12 August 1911 in both Williams’s New Melba Theatre and Tait’s Pictures.

As Jon Burrows has documented for the UK, the open-market system often had the effect of driving up prices for new feature-film releases and glutting the market with prints of older films, driving their price down.<sup>25</sup> The problem was not as acute in Australia, however, which did not have the same density of cinemas as the UK; instead the open-market system allowed for vigorous competition among distributors and exhibitors to bring in films of the highest artistic quality and greatest earning potential.

Audiences showed a decided preference for longer feature films and 'star pictures', which ensured a relatively high percentage of European-made films in the years preceding World War I, since American producers were slower to embrace that format. While specific preferences for one country's films above another's don't seem to have played a role in this period, contemporaneous newspaper ads that highlight the French, Italian, Danish, or Swedish origins of many featured films suggest that audiences valued seeing products from many different countries as a guarantee of variety and quality.

Despite their geographic distance from both Europe and the United States, the cinema industries in Australia and New Zealand were intimately connected to the American and European markets, both economically and discursively. Nearly all Australasian film distribution of British, Continental, and American films in the pre-war period went through London, either through British companies such as Tyler Films and Walturdaw or through Australasian-based distributors' own agents or offices in London, in addition to the distributors' frequent globe-spanning trips to buy films for importation. UK-born Australian film director Walter Franklyn Barrett (1873–1964), who worked for Pathé's Melbourne office and then West's Pictures for several years, explained in 1929,

In the pre-war days each exchange, all Australian-owned, had its buyer in London selecting only those pictures suitable for Australia and only in sufficient quantities to cover the needs of their exhibitor-customers. There was no such thing as a contract. Exhibitors booked their programmes where they liked ... After the Great War started the American houses became dissatisfied with the Australian returns and gradually established their own branches here. Equally gradually the Australian-owned exchanges were compelled to drop out.<sup>26</sup>

As Barrett notes, the rise of American-run distribution offices in Australia and New Zealand during World War I fundamentally changed distribution patterns in Australasia (see Chapter 7). Lincoln, Barrett's fellow director, concurs, but describes the state of affairs in more negative terms:

At this time the proprietors of picture houses on both sides of the river made their own arrangements for the supply of films. J.D. Williams was in touch with leading American exchanges, Mr West was buying in England, and Johnson and Gibson were importing largely. This led to what might be termed overlapping and set up a condition of affairs which had nothing to recommend it either to the showmen or the

public. It was common to see an important film showing at the same time at two or three city houses, each buyer having received a copy.<sup>27</sup>

This situation ultimately led to the establishment of consolidated film exchanges, which streamlined the process and moved the entire Australasian film industry towards a more corporatized structure, but in the first seventeen years of the industry, individual distributors played a much more visible and vital role in shaping cinemagoers’ experiences.

Focusing on the Australasian-based distributors in the pre-World War I period offers valuable insights into how silent films circulated in Australasia in this period, how they were selected and marketed, and what associations the national origins of various films came to have for Australasian audiences. The 1900s and early 1910s were a highly profitable, fiercely competitive, and rapidly changing period for Australasian film distribution and exhibition, which resulted in a colourful cast of characters vying for audience attention and market share.

### From Travelling Cinemas to Film Exchanges: J.C. Williamson and Clement Mason

Although primarily focused on live theatre, Irish-American theatre impresario and character actor James Cassius (J.C.) Williamson (1845–1913) became one of the earliest important pioneers of Australian film exhibition via an outgrowth of his theatrical endeavours. Born 26 August 1845 in Mercer, Pennsylvania to a physician’s wife, Williamson was educated in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he made his theatrical debut as a sixteen-year-old apprentice actor and stock company assistant. Working as a comic actor, he moved to Toronto, New York, and, finally, San Francisco, where he met and married the actor Maggie Moore. They toured Australia in 1874–75 and again in 1879 with the original play *Struck Oil*. In 1880 Williamson formed the Royal Comic Opera Company, which staged *The Pirates of Penzance* in Sydney in 1881, a year after its London premiere. He expanded into New Zealand, touring there with *Struck Oil*, *Pirates of Penzance*, and *HMS Pinafore*. In 1881, Williamson opened the Theatre Royal in Melbourne, then partnered with British actor Arthur Garner and the English-born, Australia-raised George Musgrove to establish J.C. Williamson Ltd, which, according to Brisbane, became the ‘largest theatrical chain in the world in the late nineteenth century ... [and] dominated Australian musical and theatrical life for a hundred years’.<sup>28</sup> In 1907, Williamson moved with his second wife, the dancer Mary Weir, and their two daughters to Europe, but remained governing director of his company, which was reorganized as J.C. Williamson Theatres Ltd in 1911 and continued to operate, under various managing directors and slightly different

names, until 1976. Williamson died in Paris on 6 July 1913, leaving an estate worth £193,010.<sup>29</sup>

Williamson used his theatrical networks to bring international celebrities to Australia, a strategy exemplified by the ten-week tour he arranged for French actor Sarah Bernhardt in 1891 (see Chapter 4), and to introduce moving pictures as part of live theatre shows. His 1896 Christmas pantomime season already featured several brief French films made by Pathé Frères.<sup>30</sup> In 1897, Williamson imported several short films that he exhibited around the country, first under the name Wonderful Williamson Biograph and later as the Anglo-American Bio-Tableau. He imported the latest model projectors from London and, along with one of them, a British electrician named Clement George Mason as projectionist, in order to ensure reliable, flicker-less screenings. On Saturday, 30 June 1900, the *Nepean Times* (Penrith, NSW) reported:

An absolutely unique entertainment will take place at the Temperance Hall, Penrith, to-night (Saturday) and Monday evening, when Mr J. C. Williamson's latest imported novelty from London will be exhibited. The Anglo-American Bio Tableau, which, during the past four weeks, has been the chief attraction at Her Majesty's Theatre in Sydney, depicts animated photographs of the British-Boer War ... The apparatus, which is the latest improvement on the cinematographe, throwing a much larger picture without any flicker, and extremely clear, has been specially imported from London by Mr J.C. Williamson, the well-known entrepreneur, and is worked by Mr Clement Mason, who came with it from London.<sup>31</sup>

Subsequent rave reviews suggest that Mason was very good at his job, which required him to travel around the country for fifteen months showing a series of realistic short films of the Boer War and Queen Victoria's funeral, among other subjects.

Newspaper reviews of these shows in Perth in November 1900 and Brisbane in May 1901 offer a snapshot of what viewers cared about in these screenings. The reviews emphasize Mason's technical skill. They do not mention who made the films or where they came from, but they do advertise the name of the distributor who imported them (Williamson), the projectionist (Mason), and whichever local musicians were accompanying the films.<sup>32</sup> Lincoln, who organized vaudeville tours for Williamson before becoming a film director himself, recalled in 1916 that 'with but a few exceptions, the original series of films remained unchanged, and a run of from six to eight weeks in the capital cities of the different States was the rule. How different are the conditions today, when two complete



changes of programme a week are deemed necessary to hold business even in outer suburban theatres.’<sup>33</sup> In this early stage, the sheer novelty of moving pictures was enough to hold audiences’ attention, but viewers would soon develop more sophisticated tastes.

Films were treated much like visiting performers, taken on tour and then replaced by the next attraction. As both Lincoln and New Zealand-based entrepreneur Henry Hayward recalled later, the initial consensus was that the public would soon tire of moving pictures, so no effort was made to follow up a successful tour with a new complement of films or to establish permanent locations for picture entertainment. When Mason imported films about the Manchurian campaign of the Russo-Japanese war in 1904–05, Williamson hired Lincoln to organize a Western Australian tour of the same vaudeville show he had just taken through Melbourne and Adelaide, now accompanied by the war films. Lincoln reports that they opened in Coolgardie (WA) on a Sunday night, travelled to various goldfield towns, including Leonora and Broad Arrow, and then continued through the eastern states for a total of eighteen months, ‘during which time only three pictures were changed, and the financial results exceeded all anticipations. The Sydney season lasted eight weeks, two shows being given daily, at prices of admission ranging from 3/ to 1/’.<sup>34</sup> After the tour, Lincoln returned to the theatre, but by 1908 he had become the manager of the Paradise of Living Pictures cinema in St Kilda and he moved into film-making by 1911. He wrote, directed, or produced twenty-three films between 1911 and 1916, but died in 1917, at the age of forty-seven, of alcoholism.

Given the profitability of film exhibition, Williamson soon had plenty of competition, which reflected rapidly growing consumer demand. In 1902, the chemists Millard Johnson and W.A. Gibson began importing films from abroad and putting on the first permanent screenings in the country, projecting the films on a screen fixed above Johnson’s shop near the Junction, St Kilda. Having established ongoing public interest in film, Johnson and Gibson opened the first film exchange in Victoria. Lincoln recalls,

Up to this time the chief makers of films had their studios in France and England, the Americans as yet having taken no really important part in the business of picture production. Johnson and Gibson made a feature of equipping suburban and touring showmen with programmes which were displayed in public halls and other buildings rented for the purpose, and in a comparatively short time the exchange would sometimes supply pictures for as many as 60 shows in the one night—Saturday, of course.<sup>35</sup>

The Taits also began exhibiting films, under the trade name Best and Baker, at the Athenaeum Hall in Melbourne, as well as in other state

capitals. Together with Johnson and Gibson, the Taites produced *The Story of the Kelly Gang* in 1906. Meanwhile, travelling showmen, including touring Salvation Army film shows under the direction of Major Joseph Perry, accompanied with a brass band, contributed to fostering widespread demand for moving pictures as a form of entertainment in smaller towns and rural areas.<sup>36</sup>

When Williamson's largely withdrew from exhibition in the mid-1900s to preserve its focus on live theatre (though it would later become an important part of the Australasian cinema industry again), Clement George Mason (1871–1917) decided to go into the cinema business for himself. Born to Thomas Jesse Mason and Kate Margaret Priest in Camberwell, London as the second of seven children, Mason had an entrepreneurial streak, having already worked his way up from electrician to projectionist. He married eighteen-year-old Beatrice Lillian Brook in 1892 but left her and their children Cecil Frank Mason (1892–1960) and Dorothy Beatrice Mason (1899–1972) behind in London when he went to Australia in 1900, though Cecil would eventually join him there. In July 1906, Mason placed an ad in the *Sydney Morning Herald* seeking a financier for the company he intended to establish, 'capital required £200'.<sup>37</sup> He doesn't seem to have found the financial backing he wanted right away, so he fell back on his reputation as 'the greatest picture expert in Australia',<sup>38</sup> which referred at the time to technical expertise rather than artistic or academic credentials. In March 1907, Mason took a job as projectionist at the Oxford Theatre in Sydney, which had just imported a new electric lighting plant, a 22hp National engine. The *Sydney Evening News* reported that 'Mr Clement Mason, who was a short time ago imported from the London Oxford by Mr J. C. Williamson for his bio-tableau, has been secured as electrical expert and operator, and the pictures, therefore, should be faultlessly exhibited.'<sup>39</sup> To bolster his technical credentials, Mason claimed ten years' experience with film exhibition, both in 'the principal music halls and theatres throughout London and England' and 'before Their Majesties the King and Queen of England'.<sup>40</sup>

From these modest beginnings, Mason went on to carve out a niche for himself in Australian exhibition and distribution, illustrating how intertwined these sectors of the industry were in Australia in this period. In August 1907, after acquiring funding from Walter Gibbons's London syndicate, Mason opened his own London Bio-Tableaux at Queen's Hall in Sydney for a twelve-month season.<sup>41</sup> Calling himself 'London's Biography Expert',<sup>42</sup> Mason touted the improvements he had made to the facilities, including installing electric lights inside and out, a specially imported silver screen 'consisting of three sheets in one adapted to a newly invented photographic process',<sup>43</sup> and special fire-safety precautions. Mason made a

point of insisting on the high status of his cinematic credentials, endeavouring to make cinema palatable to the elites of Australian society well before the advent of star pictures. He invited Sydney notables to a preview evening at the Queen’s Hall on 9 August 1907, entertaining them with light refreshments, the ‘newly-installed electric light service, and a competent orchestra to provide the incidental music’ for his London Bio-Tableaux films.<sup>44</sup> Buoyed by this auspicious launch, Mason’s London Bio-Tableaux ran for more than a year at the Queen’s Hall, to great public acclaim.

Mason was never one to rest on his laurels, however, and he seems to have pursued many different business opportunities, including authorizing franchisees, training projector operators, and undertaking mobile cinema tours of rural Australia. Acting alternately as the Clement Mason Syndicate, the Clement Mason Trading Co., and Mason’s Pictures, he secured exclusive Australasian rights to several Pathé films from Paris and Vitagraph films from New York, which he then screened in Perth, Fremantle, and various smaller towns through Western Australia, New South Wales, Queensland, and South Australia. In February 1908, he announced the reopening of the Theatre Royal in Perth, under the management of Mr William Anderson, for screenings of various ‘London Bio-Tableaux’ films for a week in March 1908.<sup>45</sup> Anderson moved on to the King’s Theatre in Fremantle on 16 March, while Mason himself started screening London Bio-Tableaux at the Theatre Royal in Perth on 22 March. Anderson then moved to Her Majesty’s Theatre in Kalgoorlie (WA) for a short season beginning on 1 April 1908, and then to Coolgardie for two nights, 14–15 April.

At the end of April 1908, Mason took out a lease on Her Majesty’s Theatre in Kalgoorlie for the winter, promising to send up the latest films from Perth. Meanwhile, he launched a mobile cinema tour, featuring the London Bio-Tableaux films and his own projector, which circulated in Western Australia from Mount Morgan on 26 May to Laverton and Leonora on 2 and 6 June, respectively, before showing in New South Wales, first in Armidale on 6 and 8 June, Oddfellows’ Hall in Guyra on 9 June, Glen Innes Town Hall on 10 and 11 June, Tenterfield School of Art on 15 and 16 June; and then to Queensland, where it was screened in Warwick on 19 and 20 June, Toowoomba from 24 to 27 June, and Gympie on 29 and 30 June. Mason then visited Federal Hall in Lismore (NSW) from 15 to 19 July before touring South Australia, moving from Moonta on 25 September to Kadina on 26 September, Wallaroo on 28 and 29 September, Port Pirie from 2 to 6 October, and Laura on 13 and 14 October, before ending up in Broken Hill (NSW) from 22 October to 6 November. Most of these shows featured the popular documentary short *The King and His Navy*, accompanied by the eight-piece Ladies’ Elite Orchestra. After this marathon tour, Mason

announced an arrangement with theatre entrepreneur A. Brandon-Cremer to show these same films, under the name Mason's London Bio-Tableaux, at the Tivoli Theatre in Adelaide, from 21 to 28 November 1908.

Whether because touring was exhausting or simply not lucrative enough, Mason began to reposition himself as a film importer and distributor, rather than an exhibitor. At the same time as he was organizing his travelling cinema shows, the Clement Mason Trading Co. in Sydney began offering 20,000 feet of new films for sale, beginning at 2d per foot.<sup>46</sup> His second wife, Mary Norton Mason, would later describe this company as Australia's first film exchange, an honour for which he must compete with Johnson and Gibson.<sup>47</sup> The demand for films in Australian cinemas continued to increase faster than the capacity of Australian film production companies to make films, so the film import business grew rapidly. By March 1909, perhaps in response to Pathé's new rental model, Mason devised a new financing scheme for film rental, which he called the 'Hire Purchase System', under which exhibitors could rent new films inexpensively and purchase prints of those films that were most successful in their areas. Mason soon extricated himself from the exhibition side of the business entirely, which allowed him to market his company as 'THE ONLY FIRM THAT HIRE AND NOT SHOW IN OPPOSITION TO YOU'.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, he assured potential customers in May 1909, 'I am not an exhibitor and do not intend to pick the plums out of all the best subjects by showing for weeks.'<sup>49</sup>

Contrary to the widespread perception that early films were essentially interchangeable, Mason made a point of underscoring the care with which the films he offered had been selected, their international origins, and how recently they had arrived on the mail boat. On 5 May 1908, the Boulder (WA) *Evening Star* emphasized the advantage of such careful film selection for viewers:

The head office in London is under the capable management of Mr Clement Mason, and as new pictures are purchased they are sent on to Australia. Mr Mason, being one of the largest purchasers in the world, always has the first chance of the buying of all new pictures taken in England, France, and America. All views are clear and distinct, and there is an entire absence of any flickering. The subjects are good and well chosen, and embrace drama, history, travels, comedy, and tragedy. The humorous collection are clever, at which the most cynical must laugh and enjoy, while the travels are interesting.<sup>50</sup>

It is striking to see, in this transitional moment, how little importance is placed on the plot, brand, or actors in the films, compared to the foregrounding of genre and, above all, technical quality.

While it is impossible to verify Mason’s claim to be one of the largest purchasers of film in the world in 1908, he clearly attributed his own success in Australia to his ability to source high-quality films from around the world. A June 1910 article in the *Evening Telegraph* boasted, ‘Mr Mason is continually hunting the world over for pictures to place before the amusement-loving public of Australia.’<sup>51</sup> A few months later, he explained how he was able to scour the world so thoroughly, asserting that the entire Mason family was ‘on the lookout for the best Films only’, and that he had placed £2,000 in a London bank at the disposal of ‘HENRY MASON & CO., LONDON (his reputed London Buyers)’. This noted firm comprised Thomas, Henry, Edgar, Herbert, and Sydney Mason, who, in addition to being ‘a noted quorum of cinematographers’, also happened to be Clement Mason’s father and four younger brothers. The ad offers some rare insight into Mason’s personal history, explaining that

Thomas Mason (the daddy of them all) is well known throughout London in the old school of the triple Lantern, he projected before the present-day experts were developed. He projected the Mason Family into the Kinematography trade. With what degree of success is best judged by the fact that Clement Mason has been twice imported from England by J.C. Williamson, Esq.; Sydney Mason twice to Africa by Dundas; Edgar Mason three times to Paris by Frank Cleary, Esq., whilst the special foreign engagements of Thomas Mason would take a page to tell.<sup>52</sup>

Though little is known about their respective careers, the Mason brothers apparently formed their own transnational network within the film industry, spanning at least three continents. Even Clement Mason’s son Cecil got into the moving picture business and worked for his uncle Henry in London before joining his father’s firm in Australia in 1913.<sup>53</sup>

The financial benefits of importing star feature films are evident from the growth of Mason’s business in the years around 1910. By 1911, there were over a hundred permanent and temporary cinemas in Sydney alone. To keep them supplied with long (30+ minute) films required greater capital outlays than the old programmes of assorted shorts, but also promised greater rewards, leading to larger, better-financed distribution companies that could afford to import large quantities of expensive feature films. In April 1910, Mason dissolved the Clement Mason Trading Company partnership with Alexander Leonard and formed a new company, the Clement Mason Cinematograph Company Ltd (hereafter Mason’s), with £8,000 capital, in cooperation with Henry Collett, on 25 February 1911. He explained this change as necessary in order to ‘keep pace with the extraordinary demands made upon the Clement Mason Trading Company’s

Film service'.<sup>54</sup> Corollary proof of this claim is evident from the fact that Melbourne businessmen Johnson and Gibson joined forces with John and Nevin Tait at this same time to create the Amalgamated Picture Company Ltd, which called itself 'the greatest picture enterprise in the Southern Hemisphere',<sup>55</sup> although their interests were initially centred more on production than distribution.

Mason doesn't appear to have followed through on his announced intentions of expanding into film production, but he did carve out a niche for himself in the distribution of 'star films', particularly from European producers. In an ad, he explained that 'picture audiences clamor for long star films',<sup>56</sup> which, if true, would suggest that the shift to longer narrative features was in fact driven by audience demand rather than producer pressure. In any case, the Australian market proved eager for features, most of which came from Europe, alongside a handful of outstanding local productions. In August 1911, Mason's advertised five 'star films' for hire, all of them at least 2,300 feet long, including the Australian productions *For the Term of His Natural Life* and *The Kelly Gang*, the latter a controversial remake of the 1906 original, as well as two Danish social dramas from Nordisk Films Co.: the above-mentioned *Temptations of a Great City* and *Den hvide slavehandels sidste offer/In the Hands of Imposters*. The latter film had already been released in Australia in May 1911 but had only been screened a few times. With Mason's backing, it achieved much wider circulation, opening at the King's Theatre in Sydney at the end of August and running for more than a year in cinemas across the country. Without Mason's connections, it didn't enjoy anywhere near the same success in New Zealand, however, where it appears to have been screened only a few times in mid-1913.

Importing high-profile films was not in itself enough to ensure financial success, for the films also had to be approved for exhibition. The rise of fiction films coincided with the imposition of various kinds of film censorship, largely on the local level at first. The erotic melodramas that were so successful in attracting the positive attention of audiences also attracted the negative attention of film censors. Mason had his first major run-in with the Sydney censor over imported European films in connection with a film of indeterminate origin called *The Passion's Slave* in September 1911. After the local police commissioner decided to ban the film, Mason invited representatives of the press to a private screening to sway public opinion in his favour. Instead, the representative of the *Sydney Morning Herald* agreed with the police commissioner.

The dialogue between Clement Mason and the newspaper offers intriguing insights into what was at stake in these early instances of censorship, particularly in terms of divergent conceptions of the role of film

as art or moral exemplar. Mason argues that such 'a work of drama of the highest class' as *The Passion's Slave* should not be held to a different, stricter pedagogical standard than live theatre, especially given that 'nine-tenths of the pictures shown in Australia, or, indeed, throughout the world, have no utility but for amusement'.<sup>57</sup> He contends that the film's depiction of the 'conflict of emotions, of heart-breaking struggle between a woman's love of child and husband and the fatal, almost hypnotic power of suggestion awaking guilty passion' taught the compelling moral lesson that 'the wages of sin is death', alongside teaching 'repentance and restoration', but the *Herald* reporter disagreed. In his view, 'the picture under notice is a degrading one, and panders to the lowest tastes', so the community would be better off without it.

Still, censorship was sporadic and inconsistent at this early stage and Mason continued his line in European features, particularly social dramas (including several of the erotic melodrama variety), detective films, historical epics, and literary adaptations. In December 1911, Mason's, which now claimed to import 'more star films than all other hiring firms put together', offered several new European films for hire, including four more Nordisk pictures: *Mormonens offer/A Victim of the Mormons*, *En lektion/The Aviator and the Journalist's Wife*, *Folkets vilje/The King's Power*, and *Dr Gar el Hamal/The Dead Man's Child*, as well as both the Italian firm Ambrosio's *Salambò*, an adaptation of Gustav Flaubert's 1862 historical novel, and its *Nozze d'oro/Fifty Years After, or The Golden Wedding*, which had recently won the 25,000 franc (approx. £2,500) first prize at the Turin Cinematograph Exposition. Nordisk had already reoriented its entire production towards high-quality, multi-reel feature films, which helps to explain why their productions are so over-represented in Mason's inventory. By February 1912, Mason's had added eight more Nordisk films to its hire list, alongside three French films, one Italian film, and two American films.

Importing European star films initially proved very profitable for Mason, earning his company a net profit of £3,292 in its first year. In March 1912, Mason's paid out a 20% dividend to shareholders, significantly higher than the 12.5% that Spencer's Pictures announced the same day.<sup>58</sup> Mason's soon increased its capital to £35,000, divided into 25,000 £1 shares and 10,000 preference shares of £1 each.<sup>59</sup> The company also moved to larger premises in Sydney and opened additional offices in Brisbane, Melbourne, and Wellington. Since Mason's did not have its own exhibition houses, it could compete aggressively on rental costs against competitors—such as Cosens Spencer, T.J. West, and J.D. Williams, discussed in Chapter 2—whose assets were tied up in bricks-and-mortar cinema palaces; on the other hand, controlling their own cinema chains meant that Mason's competitors would always be able to book the films they imported.

By 1912 Mason's faced a great deal of competition for imported star pictures that would be 'Money Spinners', which made the company's position increasingly tenuous. While West's and Spencer's had begun to pay exorbitant sums to import the latest Asta Nielsen or Cines pictures, J.D. Williams had taken control, by his own account, of 60% of the film hiring business in Australasia.<sup>60</sup> The Greater J.D. Williams Amusement Co. also publicly contested Mason's claim to be the sole Australian agents for American Biograph pictures. Meanwhile, Pathé Frères, which had been known to undercut its rivals in Europe, was able to benefit from economies of scale to offer 'Star Pictures at Ordinary Rates', primarily French and Italian features. This included many of their own films, such as the historical drama *Le Siège du Calais/The Siege of Calais* and the Series d'Art film *L'affaire du collier de la reine/The Queen's Necklace*, an adaptation of Alexandre Dumas père's novel, as well as Milano Film's spectacular literary adaptation *L'inferno/Dante's Inferno*, which had allegedly cost £20,000 to make.<sup>61</sup>

When West's, Spencer's, Amalgamated Pictures, Pathé, and eventually J.D. Williams joined forces to create the Australasian Films distribution company and its associated exhibition company Union Theatres in 1912–13 (see Chapter 2), Mason fought a losing battle to preserve his market share and to maintain his independence from what he perceived as a monopolistic cabal. In an ad in *Referee* on 20 March 1912, he declared that his company had 'no connection whatever with any combine or association. They always have been and will always remain INDEPENDENT.'<sup>62</sup> As described in Chapter 8, he worked with independent exhibitors, particularly in suburban and rural areas, and promised to ensure their continued access to a wide array of quality films, largely European features. Although he was ultimately defeated by the war and his own mortality, his widow carried on the struggle well into the 1920s (see Chapter 9).



In a matter of a dozen years, the cinema moved from the social, economic, and geographical fringes of Australasian society into its very centre. While rural areas continued to host visits from travelling cinema exhibitors and variety shows, the cinema rapidly established itself in metropolitan areas as a profitable business enterprise and an unparalleled, easily accessible source of information and ideas about faraway countries and their cultural norms. Transnational entrepreneurs like J.C. Williamson and Clement Mason brought about the cinema's transition from the fairground to the main street, bridging the gap between the young white settler-colonial societies of Australia and New Zealand, with their hunger for culture and



connections, and the Old World, with its ingrained cultural prestige and aura of modernity.

Once the cinema became a regular fixture in the lives of Australasians, they flocked to see ever longer, more artistically ambitious narrative features, which European makers like Nordisk, Pathé, and Cines were churning out. To manage that burgeoning demand, a cadre of showmen criss-crossed the Tasman Sea and the Atlantic Ocean to secure the latest and best films for Australasian cinemagoers from leading French, Danish, German, Italian, Swedish, British, and American makers. Working first individually and then together, these men would shape the Australasian cinema landscape in the pre-war era and, in so doing, influence Australasia's relationship to the world and to itself.

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## The Anglo-American Fathers of the Australian Combine

Cosens Spencer, T.J. West, and J.D. Williams

As the cinema in Australasia transitioned from travelling shows to permanent structures, film distribution became a key element in the success of emerging cinema chains, prompting many leading film exhibitors to handle their own distribution to compete effectively. Between approximately 1906 and 1913, three Anglo-American showmen emerged as the first titans of Australian film distribution and exhibition, determining almost single-handedly what kinds of films Australian audiences had the chance to see. Alongside the Australian-born brothers John and Nevin Tait, who were primarily exhibitors and producers but dabbled in distribution, and Clement Mason, who extricated himself from exhibition early on to focus on distribution, these three men—Englishmen Cosens Spencer and T.J. West, and American J.D. Williams—were instrumental in cementing the cinema as a pillar of the Australasian entertainment industry.

All three men entered the Antipodean cinema market in the mid- to late 1910s, establishing their own cinema chains and film exchanges to supply the local market with high-quality pictures, many of which were European. Although initially fierce competitors, they would eventually join forces—with each other and Amalgamated Pictures—to create the vertically integrated dual companies Australasian Films Ltd and Union Theatres Ltd (widely known as the Combine) that would be a major force in Australian film distribution and exhibition through the 1930s. By 1920, Australasian Films claimed to supply 75% of Australian exhibitors and to be the biggest independent purchaser of films in London and New York.<sup>1</sup>

The emergence of Australian film exchanges as independent businesses coincided with the global film industry's shift away from the understanding of cinema as simply one part of a show containing both live and filmed entertainment, and towards a conception of cinema as an autonomous form of entertainment, increasingly proximate in status to formal theatre. By inviting new kinds of cinema experiences, this reorientation of the cinema landscape required entrepreneurs and showmen to innovate rapidly to keep up with evolving audience demand and shifting market supply. While Spencer and West were established music-hall showmen who opted to build opulent cinema palaces with matinees and emceed evening shows, box seats, and an in-house orchestra, Williams undercut them by introducing the continuous show, running from 11am to 11pm every day except Sunday, in cheap multipurpose venues. Each type of cinema had its own clientele, with the continuous show attracting working-class urban audiences, while full-evening programmes catered to an upper-class clientele, as well as suburban and rural theatres. The fact that all three men's cinema enterprises flourished so remarkably in the late 1900s and early 1910s suggests that they were meeting the demands of disparate demographics for different ways of accessing moving picture entertainment. Still, their different styles and approaches to the problem of making cinema respectable confirm the central role of European film in the Australasian film industry before World War I.

Long before the establishment of the Combine, the rivalry between Spencer, West, and Williams was instrumental in making European films accessible to Australian cinema audiences, capitalizing on the rapidly increasing popularity of longer narrative films and artistically ambitious productions, both of which European makers produced in greater quantities than American companies in this period. Kristin Thompson identifies the three most common distribution strategies used by film producers in the silent era as: working through an agent who paid a fixed price for the film and bore all losses and gains; a profit-sharing licensing agreement between producer and distributor; and direct sales or rentals through a foreign office or subsidiary.<sup>2</sup> While the last option became increasingly common after 1908 with the founding of local offices of foreign producers, such as Pathé, Gaumont, Cines and later several American firms, and examples of the second crop up in the 1920s (see Chapter 10), the first model was the most typical arrangement in Australasia before World War I and resulted in highly nationally diverse cinema programmes. Distributors like Spencer, West, and Williams contracted with producers or middlemen, often in London, to import certain films to Australasia, paying a variable fee up front for the right (sometimes exclusive) to screen them in their own cinemas and/or hire them out to other exhibitors.

Since the entire financial risk was on their own shoulders, these showmen were highly motivated to make sure they got their money's worth by seeking out films from across Europe, the UK, and the USA that seemed most likely to attract viewers and build loyalty to their cinema brands. Each of them strove to outdo the others by offering the most exciting, enjoyable films from the most prestigious makers without, as frequently happened in London in the same period, duplicating each other's efforts and oversaturating the market.<sup>3</sup> In pursuit of this goal, West's acquired exclusive distribution rights to twenty of Asta Nielsen's films between 1911 and 1914, while Spencer's paid an unprecedented £4,000 for the rights to Cines's historical epic *Quo Vadis?* in 1913 and J.D. Williams designated his Empress theatre as the 'Home of the Nordisk feature'. As long as Spencer, West, and Williams were competing with each other, European films flourished in the Antipodes, as Part II of this book documents in detail. However, the amalgamation of their companies and the subsequent consolidation of Australasian film distribution around American producers, in conjunction with wartime constraints on the production and export of films from Continental Europe, severely limited the circulation of European films in Australasia after 1915.

### Cosens and Señora Spencer

The first member of this group of pioneering cinema showmen to set up shop in Australasia was Spencer Cosens, who went by Cosens Spencer (1874–1930). Spencer was instrumental in producing, importing, and exhibiting films throughout Australia and New Zealand between 1903 and 1919. He backed Australian actor/director Raymond Longford's early features and was a founding member of the Combine. Born in Hunston, Sussex as the third son of farmer Cornelius Cosens and his wife Ellen, Spencer emigrated to British Columbia, Canada, with his brother Arthur in 1892 to mine for gold. It's not clear when he came to Australia, but he married twenty-six-year-old Edinburgh-born Mary Stuart Huntly in Melbourne on 14 February 1903, when he was thirty. She became his business partner and chief projectionist, known professionally as Señora Spencer. Promoting her as the world's first female projectionist, Spencer claimed that her skill gave their screenings a special quality, for 'a woman cranked a projector with more sensitivity than a man'.<sup>4</sup>

Like Clement Mason, the Spencers started out doing itinerant cinema shows, but they soon established permanent theatres through Australia. In 1903, operating as American Theatrescope Company (after the name of the Edison projector they employed), they screened films for twenty-one weeks in Melbourne and Adelaide.<sup>5</sup> Crossing to New Zealand in

April 1904, they toured from Invercargill up to Hamilton, via Dunedin, Christchurch, Wellington, Auckland, and many smaller towns, until December. The Spencers then leased the Lyceum Theatre on Pitt Street in Sydney, where they opened on 1 July 1905 with a programme of Russo-Japanese war pictures, a mid-air tragedy, a cowboy and Indian film, and various other short comic and dramatic films.<sup>6</sup> Ads before the opening touted the programme's inclusion of 'absolutely the Latest Thrilling and Humorous Living Pictures from America, London, Paris, and the Far East', but it was the novelty of a female projectionist that seems to have attracted the most attention from the local press.

Despite some critics' scepticism about such a long programme comprised solely of cinematograph pictures, the two-hour show was a success from the start. During the first two weeks of the 'season', as it was called, some of the films—such as Edwin Porter's *The Great Train Robbery*—were likely already familiar to the audience, but Spencer received regular shipments of new films from his agents in London and Paris. This enabled him to change the programme every two weeks during the record-breaking eight weeks his first semi-permanent season lasted, before he took the show on tour to Perth and Western Australia. Upon their return to Sydney in December 1905, the Spencers repeated their eight-week run once more before touring South Australia, Western Australia, New South Wales, and Queensland for most of 1906. Seeing such evident demand, they decided to invest in

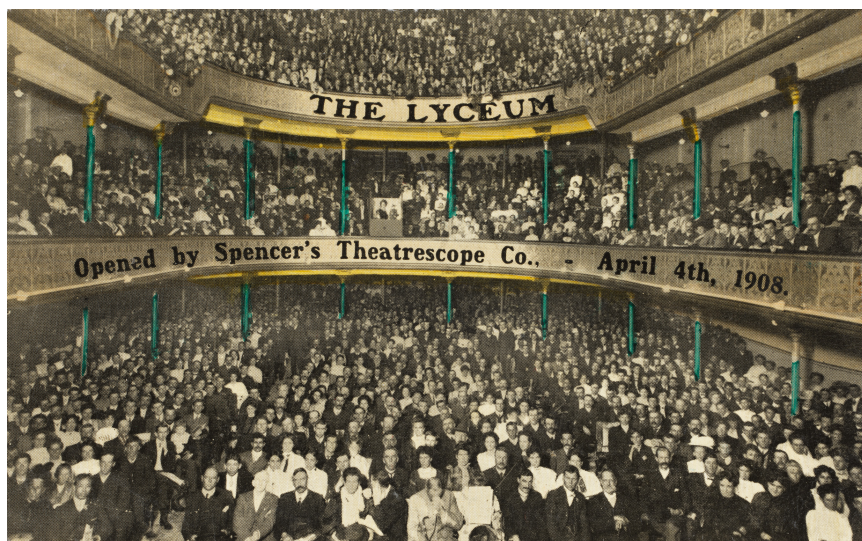


Figure 2.1 Photograph of Spencer's Theatrescope, Lyceum Theatre, Sydney, April 1908. State Library of New South Wales

long-term exhibition spaces in Australia's major cities, making six-month visits to the USA and Europe in late 1907 and mid-1910 to acquire films.

Spencer's cinemas soon became known for their elegance and high-quality programming. After opening the Lyceum in Sydney as a permanent picture theatre in April 1908, Spencer opened additional theatres in several major Australian cities, including the Olympia in the Wirth's circus building formerly occupied by West's Pictures in Melbourne in December 1909; the Royal Lyceum in Perth, supplemented by Spencer's Esplanade Gardens in December 1911; and both His Majesty's Theatre in Hobart and the Princess Theatre in Launceston. Spencer's massive cinema houses were luxuriously appointed, with thousands of comfortable seats (with backs!), red velvet drapes, a professional orchestra, and an atmosphere of excitement and novelty. Stephen Gaunson describes how Spencer's

cinema programmes became social 'must-see' events. Gleaning, borrowing and ripping off many gimmicks from his foreign exhibitor contemporaries, ... he gentrified the modern movie experience with comfort and pleasures and picture quality that none of his rivals could match—not even T.J. West, the so-called 'Napoleon' of Australian film exhibition ... As the moving pictures played, Spencer would narrate the action, in between orchestral arrangements and staff producing sound effects from behind the screen.<sup>7</sup>

By late 1909, Spencer was also exhibiting films in New Zealand on travelling circuits, but he does not seem to have established permanent cinemas there.

A central aspect of Spencer's high-class brand was his emphasis on featuring art films, many of them from Continental Europe, as the Sydney *Star* noted on 24 May 1909.<sup>8</sup> He screened, for example, the Italian Ambrosio Company's early historical epic *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei/The Last Days of Pompeii* at the Lyceum in Sydney in February 1909, two months before its US release, and Cines's medieval romance *Marco Visconti*, based on Tommaso Grossi's 1834 novel and directed by Mario Caserini, in April that same year. To supply his growing theatre chain, Spencer expanded his distribution capacity, becoming the largest importer of films to Australia by 1912. Beginning in March 1908, he also shipped many films on to New Zealand, where they were screened by the Royal Picture Syndicate on the Fullers' Pictures circuit.<sup>9</sup> Given Spencer's well-deserved reputation for being able to procure the best pictures, the Launceston *Examiner* was justified in enthusing, when his newest theatre opened there in January 1912, that



Mr Spencer ... has for years past been travelling through the Commonwealth and New Zealand as a picture showman, and always endeavored to get the best of whatever was turned out in the world's markets. Hence his phenomenal success ... It is a matter for satisfaction that Launceston and Hobart have been selected by Mr Spencer, in preference to many larger cities on the mainland, as locales for branches of his business. It is a guarantee that we shall not only have all that is latest and best in the moving picture world presented to us ... only the best, whether Australian, American, European or English.<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, having access to the best films from production houses in many different countries was a point of pride for Australian cinema audiences, as well as welcome evidence of their connection to other white Anglo-European societies. Kelly explains that 'it is typical of dispersed societies in a modernizing world of fast communications that Australian audiences, like American ones, also wanted "the best" and expected it as their prerogative, both as citizens of the British empire and as cosmopolitans'.<sup>11</sup> In the cinema, as in live theatre, settler-colonial white Australasian audiences felt entitled to see the latest and best Continental productions, as a marker of their connectedness to the wider world.

Accordingly, Spencer's ads touted his cinemas' selection of films 'from the most important makers [on] the other side of the world', which included American, British, and European films of all sorts. He was the exclusive agent for the American Thanhouser Company for several years, but he did not specialize in or limit his programmes to American films. The high-profile European features that Spencer imported in the pre-war period include Pathé's *Queen Elizabeth*, starring Sarah Bernhardt; Itala's *Padre/Father*; and Cines's *Quo Vadis?*, which caused a sensation across the country (see Chapter 3). In a 27 May 1913 ad, Spencer's boasted that its upcoming seventy-ninth complete change of pictures at the Princess Theatre in Launceston would feature 'all the leading makers', including Vitagraph, Pathé, Thanhouser, Edison, Kalem, Gaumont, Cines, American Kin, and 'other "star" subjects'.<sup>12</sup> Clearly, the diversity of films on offer was itself an attraction.

Having established his name as a valuable brand in both exhibition and distribution, Spencer also established Spencer's Pictures Ltd with a nominal capital of £150,000 in September 1911, with the intent of expanding his role in local film production. However, this move instead marked the beginning of the end of Spencer's career in the Australian film industry. Under the terms of the agreement dated 18 September 1911, Spencer 'transferred to Walter Ballard Bragg, as trustee for the plaintiff company, as

from December 4, 1911, inter alia, the full benefits and rights of, in, and to all agreements and contracts, engagements, rights, and privileges to which Cosens Spencer was at that date entitled'.<sup>13</sup> In return for this transfer of his business to the corporation and the promise not to engage in the film exhibition or distribution business on an independent basis for ten years, Spencer was paid £100,000: £45,000 in cash, and the remaining £55,000 in £1 shares in the company.<sup>14</sup> As director of Spencer's Pictures, he was able to continue supporting the production of innovative Australian feature films, including Raymond Longford's *The Fatal Wedding*, the financial success of which funded Longford's studio complex in Rushcutters Bay, Sydney. By January 1912, Spencer's company had made around twenty long features, including *The Romantic Story of Margaret Catchpole* and *Sweet Nell of Old Drury*, artistically and financially successful films that constitute an important part of Australian silent film history. Even after producing these films, Spencer's cleared a £26,000 profit in 1911.<sup>15</sup>

However, Spencer found himself largely shut out of the decision-making process when his company decided in April 1912 to join West's and Amalgamated Pictures to form the General Film Company of Australasia, and then, in January 1913, to merge with the Greater J.D. Williams Amusement Company. From the amalgamation of Australia's leading cinema chains and film exchanges came two companies: Australasian Films Ltd, which handled the importing, selling, and manufacturing of films; and Union Theatres Ltd, which took charge of exhibition. This new dual company, which was widely known as 'the Combine', will be discussed in more detail below. Spencer was made a director of both companies, but he resigned less than a year later, in January 1914, allegedly over disagreements with the company's decision to reduce its investment in film production. His wife, Mary Spencer, ran a few cinemas in Brisbane in Queensland, and Newcastle, New South Wales, until sometime in 1915.

In September 1917, Spencer's former business partners sued him for breaching his non-compete clause by allowing his wife to use the Spencer name for her theatres and helping her import American films for them. The trigger for the lawsuit seems to have been Spencer's decision, upon the expiration in February 1918 of the original ten-year lease for the Lyceum Theatre in Sydney, which he had held since 1908 and surrendered to his company in 1911, to apply to lease it in his own name. Various court cases related to these charges kept Spencer and the Combine tied up in court for almost a year, with the Combine seeking injunctions against Spencer, and Spencer denying all wrongdoing. The judges repeatedly found in his favour, allowing him to take up the lease on the Lyceum and clearing him of blame when the Combine failed to accept his offer to sublease it to them in a timely manner, at which point he offered it to their competitor, Hoyt's

Theatre Company. After Spencer and the Combine reached a settlement in July 1918, with Union Theatres taking over the lease of both his wife's theatres in Brisbane and Newcastle and his lease on the Lyceum, Hoyt's sued Spencer for breach of contract, which dragged on until November 1919, when Hoyt's appeal of Spencer's acquittal was denied.

Since the Spencers' court settlement required them to stay out of the film business in Australia for seven years, they moved back to Canada in 1918, where Spencer bought a 20,000-acre ranch in Chilcotin County, British Columbia that made him one of the largest landowners in the state.<sup>16</sup> Neither Cosens nor Mary Spencer is mentioned in Australian newspapers again until September 1930, when Spencer, aged sixty, shot off the arm of his foreman, Walter Stoddart, and killed a grocer, Edward Smith, before drowning himself in a lake. He had apparently suffered large losses in the stock market crash of 1929 and undergone a nervous breakdown but had refused to enter a sanatorium. Before Spencer's body was found, one Tasmanian newspaper speculated that 'he may have managed to make his way back to Australia', as he was 'worrying over his inability to secure money allegedly owing in Australia, and was obsessed with the false idea that neighbors were stealing his cattle'.<sup>17</sup> According to contemporary newspaper accounts, Spencer left behind an estate valued at CA\$200,000 (£60,000), including shares in the Bank of Australasia and Australian War Loan debentures, all of which he left to his widow, though Collins reports that 'his estate was sworn for probate in Canada at \$346,059; in Australia his debts exceeded his assets by £8840', and that he left the residue of his estate to the 'Orphanages of Sydney'.<sup>18</sup> British probate records only list an English estate valued at £30,577.10, but by any measure, Cosens Spencer died a wealthy man who left an important legacy in Australasian cinema exhibition.

### T.J. West

Spencer's main competitor in moving picture distribution and exhibition between 1906 and 1910 was fellow Englishman Thomas James (T.J.) West (1855–1916). When West came to Australasia in 1905 on tour with the Brescians, a theatrical group and travelling cinema show, he already owned at least one cinema in the UK, but he soon became one of the most prominent and respected figures in the Australasian cinema industry. Before their respective companies joined forces in the Combine in 1913, West and Spencer competed to build the most extensive and luxurious cinema chains in the Antipodes.

Born in Bedford, Bedfordshire, West had been involved in the entertainment industry in England and Scotland since 1873. Upon leaving

school, he got a job as a ticket seller at St James's Hall in Piccadilly, then began touring the country with Hardy Gillard's panorama of the American transcontinental railway, first as treasurer and then as manager.<sup>19</sup> Within two years, he had purchased his own panorama, which he exhibited at the Waverley Exhibition Rooms in Edinburgh, before creating a travelling magic lantern show known as 'The Heavens, the Earth, and Under the Sea', which he accompanied with lectures on astronomy and recent scientific discoveries, such as X-rays.<sup>20</sup> As soon as he experienced moving pictures in the mid-1890s, West became convinced 'that every form of picture entertainment as known at that date must give way to the kinematograph' and eagerly entered the mobile cinema business. In 1898, West was hired as a lecturer for the Modern Marvel Company, an Edinburgh-based enterprise set up the previous year to exploit scientific instruments and machines for the purposes of popular entertainment; his first shows for Modern Marvel combined a stereoscopic slide projector, a demonstration of colour photography, and a small selection of cinematograph pictures. West gradually increased his investment in Modern Marvel and, by 1903, was the company's single largest shareholder.<sup>21</sup>

West was constantly pushing the limits of film's entertainment potential. From initially screening moving pictures on a bare wall in a side room after the regular show, for sixpence extra, West moved film exhibition to the centre of his business model by 1902–03, when he screened Méliès's films of Edward VII's coronation and *Le voyage dans la lune/A Trip to the Moon* around the British Isles.<sup>22</sup> He took his show to provincial towns across England and Scotland, returning to Edinburgh each year for a Christmas show at the Queen's Hall, and to Shaftesbury Hall in Bournemouth for an extended season. At a time when most bioscope shows at fairs and variety theatres lasted fifteen to twenty minutes, West was presenting two-hour narrated film shows, featuring travel films and other actualities, twice a day. Contrary to popular wisdom that people would quickly tire of the same films, West ran shows at the Shaftesbury Hall for five to six months a year in 1904, 1905, and 1906. Burrows describes West's film shows in Bournemouth as a 'semi-permanent attraction from 1904 onwards, ... several years before the concept of the cinema as a fixed landmark of the entertainment scene is supposed to have been first established in the UK'.<sup>23</sup>

When not performing in Bournemouth or Edinburgh, West continued to work as an itinerant picture showman in partnership with travelling entertainers. His primary partner was the Brescians, an eight-person musical ensemble managed by Henry Hayward and made up principally of Hayward's family members and those of his wife, Louisa Domenica Martinengo, whose two sisters had married Hayward's two brothers. Hayward reports that he, West, and the Brescians visited more than six

hundred cities, towns and villages in Britain between 1890 and 1905, performing musical numbers and screening pictures with an Urban projector and an electric arc lamp.<sup>24</sup> However, it was difficult for the Brescians to get ahead in England, where they were 'just another company competing for business with many other equally talented touring parties', so they turned their attention to Australasia, which was not nearly as saturated with touring acts and mobile cinemas.<sup>25</sup>

In 1905, West and Hayward took the Brescians, along with about 5,000 feet of moving pictures, on tour to New Zealand, where Hayward's oldest sister Mary had immigrated. They formed a cooperative fund of £1,000 to cover their expenses—each of the members of the company took shares, based on which their tour earnings would be calculated; Hayward's share was 22.5%. While West and the Brescians sailed on the RMS *Corinthic*, presenting their 'series of Coloured Cinematograms' to their fellow passengers along the way, Hayward prepared the ground in New Zealand. He started in Dunedin on South Island, where he began advance marketing, playing on the Scottish connection between the settlers and his troupe with the slogan, 'Edinboro' of Old Scotland sends her Greatest Show, West's Pictures and the Brescians, 13,000 miles direct to Dunedin, the Edinboro' of the South Seas'.<sup>26</sup> Underscoring their cultural connection seems to have worked, for Australian film-maker William Lincoln reports, 'Mr West, who was, I believe, an Edinburgh man, received a warm welcome from the Dunedin folk, who, being largely of Scottish extraction, welcomed the visitor as a brither Scot.'<sup>27</sup>

Whether due to Scottish clannishness or simply the novelty of moving pictures that had earned Spencer such an enthusiastic response during his 1904 cinema circuit there, West and Hayward's tour of New Zealand was a resounding success. Hayward booked theatres in Dunedin, Christchurch, Wellington, and Auckland for a month in each city, even though the standard run of a visiting theatrical company was three days. They opened in Dunedin on 10 April 1905 and Hayward's confidence proved well founded, for they played to full houses every night for an unprecedented four weeks, earning more than 'one hundred pounds nightly'.<sup>28</sup> Tickets cost between one and three shillings, and the programme included scenic, narrative, musical, and comic films, including Méliès's fanciful, hand-coloured fable, *Le voyage à travers l'impossible/A Trip to the Sun*, acquired from Urban in London. West's cameraman and projectionist Edwin L. Hardy operated the latest hand-cranked Bioscope projectors, driven by a portable generator and encased in a portable, self-contained fireproof box to mitigate the flammability of the nitrate film. In Wellington, when the old Opera House proved too small, the troupe moved to the new Town Hall, while in Auckland, they extended their booking to six weeks, clearing a

profit of £3,500 there, before earning an additional £13,000 in the provinces. In total, the tour yielded £35,000 clear profit, of which Hayward's personal share was £8,000.<sup>29</sup>

Given the considerable public interest on both sides of the Tasman Sea, in their New Zealand performances Hayward and West decided to bring the tour to Australia. They toured from February 1906 to September 1908, performing in large and small towns in nearly every state (although they returned to Christchurch for the New Zealand International Exhibition from November 1906 to February 1907). West's reputation in the industry seems to have preceded him to Australia, for the Sydney *Evening News* ran an interview with him on 16 March 1906, in connection with the opening of the West's-Brescians show at the Palace Theatre the next day. Introduced as 'probably the biggest man in the cinematograph business', West muses,

I have been in touch with animated pictures ever since they were invented. I can remember the time when they were first produced in the old country—not so long ago, either. We used to take out about six films, about 50ft in length, showing a train running on a line, or something of that sort, and run the whole lot off in about six minutes. And that used to be the star feature of a night's programme. The rest of the evening would be filled with songs and lantern slides ... Now it is necessary to have 6000ft to 7000ft of films for an evening.<sup>30</sup>

The kinds of films that apparently met popular demand at this point in time ranged from documentary films ('we have a film 2600 feet in length to illustrate the construction of a British railway') to trick films ('scenes defying explanation ... produced by a skilful overlapping of negatives by processes that are known to the expert'), films 'of an educative character' ('such as nature studies—the life of the bee, the silkworm, and a lot of subjects that require microscopic adaptation to the cinematograph, in order to be visible at all', e.g. *The Empire of the Ant*), war footage (the Boer War in South Africa and the Russo-Japanese war), and fiction films ('popular plays were represented. Actors of note were engaged to perform in front of the camera, and good results obtained'), but the most profitable were current events, such as the funeral of Queen Victoria.

The success of the West's-Brescians show prompted West to invest in developing cinema circuits in Australia and New Zealand, both mobile and permanent. Trading on his now well-known name, he organized travelling cinema shows through various Australian states. In September 1907, he personally managed a 'season' in Maryborough (Qld), which earned enthusiastic advance praise from the local newspaper for his cutting-edge technology, 'optical clearness', 'absence of flicker', and, particularly, for his

extensive English and Continental film repertoire.<sup>31</sup> His most enduring contribution to early Australian film exhibition, however, took the form of luxurious, massive picture theatres in metropolitan areas. His flagship cinemas included the 4,000-seat Glaciarium on George Street in Sydney, a cavernous ice-skating rink that doubled as a cinema for seven months of the year, beginning in 1907; West's Olympia on Hindley Street in Adelaide, a former cyclorama/ice- and roller-skating rink that became Adelaide's first permanent cinema when it opened in December 1908; and West's Palace on Sturt Street and City in Melbourne, which became the first purpose-built cinema in Melbourne when it opened in 1909, replacing West's Olympia, the city's first permanent cinema, which had been housed in Wirth's circus hippodrome since 1907. In Perth, West established the first permanent picture show in Western Australia in Queen's Hall on William Street, which he operated from 1908 to 1910, before partnering with Sir Thomas Melrose Coombe to use the Melrose Theatre instead.

Despite the success of his Australasian cinemas, West had no need or intention of abandoning his British film ventures, which indicates the global interconnectedness of the film business already at this early stage. Instead, as West reported in 1906, he saw advantages in a transnational business model:

I still have several companies running in Great Britain, and for over ten years they have been the most successful cinematographic institutions in the United Kingdom. Therefore, being a big exhibitor, I am in touch with the producing markets of the world, and there is scarcely a film produced by any person interested in its sale but it is submitted to me ... It was a happy chance that led my footsteps to the colonies, for I have met with one prolonged success.<sup>32</sup>

This success lasted for a decade, with West criss-crossing the globe several times in order to keep an eye on all of his business enterprises, which, he proclaimed in 1910, 'have now stretched out like an octopus', with 'shows throughout the United Kingdom extending from Jersey, in the Channel Islands, to Edinburgh'<sup>33</sup> in addition to his Australasian cinemas.

By the time West returned to London after two years of building his business in Australasia, he had become one of the largest exhibitors in the region. West's Pictures included, as the London *Bioscope* reported in January 1909, 'eight distinct shows in Australia, as well as exhibiting in the Town Hall in Wellington, N.Z., the largest and most expensive hall in the dominion, and also at the Alhambra Theatre, Dunedin, N.Z., and the Opera House, Auckland, N.Z., whilst another engagement in the remaining large centre of the dominion—Christchurch, N.Z.—will commence

on the 8th February of the present year'.<sup>34</sup> In 1910, West maintained fourteen permanent theatres and various travelling shows on both sides of the Tasman Sea, which collectively attracted approximately 20,000 viewers per night.<sup>35</sup> By 1911, the number of West's cinemas, both fixed and mobile, had swelled to twenty-seven.

Since he lived with his family in England, West managed his trans-oceanic film empire by telegram and steamship, giving the convincing impression of being in more than one place at a time. He interacted with his theatre patrons through telegrams read aloud from the stage and letters printed in the newspaper, such as his missive 'to my Australian friends and patrons', dated 29 September 1911, which appeared in the Melbourne *Age* on 4 November. Just below an ad for *Mount Etna in Eruption*, 'the Most Wonderful Film of its Type in the Whole History of Cinematography', West reports, 'I yesterday secured exclusively such an amazing picture that I am impelled to write to you all direct through the medium of the press my opinion on this wonderful subject to be seen at my Australian establishments on arrival of the next mail, Monday, 6th November.'<sup>36</sup> Despite the now archaic phrasing, his intimate tone anticipates twenty-first-century social media communications from trusted brands to loyal customers.

West's strategy was to offer the most exclusive features in the most luxurious surroundings at a relatively high price. West's cinemas in the UK and Australasia tended to charge between sixpence and two shillings for seats, making them more expensive than their competitors, where sixpence was the usual price, but West believed that higher admission prices ensured a higher class of patron. Brisbane reports,

Seats in West's Melbourne cinema cost one to three shillings—high prices at a time when ordinary male workers earned seven shillings and sixpence to ten shillings a day, but those who could not afford them could see a film show for sixpence at the open-air Continental Living Pictures Garden in St Kilda Road [which West also owned]. West wanted high-class audiences. He boasted of vice-regal patronage and advertised his musical director, Lewis de Groen, as 'Conductor of Music to His Excellency the Governor-General.'<sup>37</sup>

The luxury and exclusivity of West's cinemas, complete with orchestral accompaniment, was as much a draw as the films themselves.

With the expansion of his theatre chain throughout Australasia, West's involvement in film distribution increased significantly, targeting a cosmopolitan, upper-middle-class consumer. In keeping with the West's Pictures motto, 'The Window of the World', West emphasized the high-culture character and Continental credentials of his cinema programmes, putting particular emphasis on the European star pictures he acquired in London





Picture Personalities : MR. T. J. WEST.

Figure 2.2 Cartoon of T.J. West in *The Bioscope* (London), 22 September 1910. Newspaper image © The British Library Board. All rights reserved. With thanks to The British Newspaper Archive ([www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk)). Reuse not permitted



Figure 2.3 Photograph of West's Queen's Hall cinema, 99 William Street, Perth, c.1910. State Library of Western Australia, image B4726/348

for the Australian market (in some cases before they premiered in the UK and/or the USA). By providing a product that he could market as exclusive and cosmopolitan, West was able to capitalize on audience aspirations of upward social mobility to achieve his own commercial success, and give Australasian audiences a sense that they were participating in the collaborative, self-reinforcing process of determining popular taste in film.

Like Cosens Spencer, West often acted as emcee during screenings, particularly prior to the breakthrough of long features. Norman Pixley recalled West, on his visits to the Centennial Hall in Brisbane in the late 1900s, as ‘an impressive figure in evening dress, sporting a splendid white mustache’, who would announce each film in the programme with the phrase, “the next ser-ies will be...”, an intriguing pronunciation which lingered in the memory of one who heard him’.<sup>38</sup> In his dress and manner, West modelled the high-class tone of his establishments, even when screening pictures in a rented hall in the backcountry. He favoured films that were both instructive and aesthetically pleasing, while taking great pains, as he explained to a reporter in 1906, to ensure that ‘there should be nothing suggestive, vulgar, or offensive in any of our exhibitions, the idea being to amuse, instruct, and entertain. My experience is that the bulk of the people desire entertainment in this high-class style’.<sup>39</sup> West also kept his cinemas closed on Sundays, in keeping with his personal religious beliefs and the social norms of the time.

Although some film historians speculate that cinema audiences in this period were indifferent to the specific films being shown, the effort West put into selecting his films suggests otherwise. Like Mason and Spencer, West did not simply buy standardized programmes of films based on length but sought out specific high-quality films that he believed would give his cinemas an edge over the competition. He was an early adopter of the idea of the ‘exclusive’, a concept he knew well from the public-hall tradition and which he applied as early as 1903 to his screenings of Urban’s *The Unseen World*, years before the promotion of feature films as ‘exclusives’ came into common use. Eager to take advantage of each innovation in cinema, West was the first to screen Pathé’s newest coloured pictures at his Olympia Theatre in Melbourne in July 1909.<sup>40</sup>

West’s reliance on exclusives and his transnational connections were unquestionably a major factor in the early prominence and popularity of European feature films in Australia. On a brief visit to Australia in February 1910, West explained to a reporter in Perth,

the selection of material is very important. Every week the best productions of the best makers are submitted to me or to my representatives in London—some of my people have been with me 12 or

18 years—and of these films the best are selected ... We must arrange for the very best work in the face of ever-increasing opposition, or, rather, competition—it is legitimate competition, and the public gets the benefit of it.<sup>41</sup>

Since the most innovative films were being made in Europe in this period, West, 'being in a position to command the first consideration from English and Continental film-makers', spent considerable time on the Continent and bought many European films.<sup>42</sup> In 1908, West bought exclusive screening privileges for the first group of Film d'Art productions, featuring distinguished Parisian stage actors, released by Pathé; and in 1911, he became the exclusive distributor in Australasia of nearly two dozen German-made Asta Nielsen films.<sup>43</sup> A 1913 report on West's film-buying practices in the Sydney-based *Theatre Magazine* notes, 'In the interests of his firm Mr West will see the Cines people at Rome, the Ambrosio people at Turin, and the Milano people at Milan. From Italy he goes direct to the firm's office in Paris, and from Paris to his headquarters—and home—in London.'<sup>44</sup> West's European connections were integral to his reputation as a leading film distributor in Australia, confirming the cachet of European films there, as well as the close trade connections between Australia and Continental Europe.

Given such good contacts with leading European production houses, West naturally showcased many European films in his cinemas, frequently as exclusives. The opening night features at West's Olympia in Adelaide on 7 December 1908, for example, included scenic footage of the gorges of Tarn and Lake Como, while the only dramatic film mentioned by name was one of Éclair's *Nick Carter* films. On opening day, the Adelaide *Advertiser* assured patrons, 'The majority of the films are exclusive, and were selected in London by Mr West, who has permanent quarters there.'<sup>45</sup> In January 1909, West's Glaciarium in Sydney screened the Pathé drama *L'empreinte ou La main rouge/The Red Hand*, which was announced as 'the second production of the new art films shown under exclusive Australasian rights'.<sup>46</sup> Two months later, in April 1909, the Sydney Glaciarium boasted 'some of the latest film-novelties from Europe, including *The Gunshot*, one of the most striking of the French tragic series prepared by Pathé Frères'.<sup>47</sup> Having such extensive, almost immediate access to the latest European productions was a remarkable privilege for Australian cinemagoers. In the *Sydney Morning Herald* report of his 1910 visit to Australia, West declared that he thought that 'the people were better catered for in Australia by picture shows than in the old country', due both to his own indefatigable efforts to sift through sixty to seventy thousand feet of film each week in order to find 'those which I thought would meet with popular favor', and

to the willingness of Australian cinema entrepreneurs to change their ideas more quickly than their counterparts in the UK.<sup>48</sup> Audiences seemed to agree; the Melbourne *Advocate* reported in September 1911, 'The attendances at West's Pictures seldom vary. During the week, the house is always three-parts full, and on Saturday nights it would require two palaces to accommodate the many intending patrons. The bill of fare is always of the best and the orchestra is undoubtedly the finest in Melbourne.'<sup>49</sup>

West's approach to film distribution and exhibition proved to be so successful that although he claimed to have retired from active management of his Australasian properties upon his return to London in 1910, leaving control in the hands of his business partners Edwin Geach, Henry Gee, and F.J. Smith, he established two new limited liability companies after his departure—West's Amalgamated Pictures, formed on 4 March 1911, which took over the exhibition interests of the Tait brothers, and West's Picture Playhouses in 1912.<sup>50</sup> Burrows reports that West was one of the three major shareholders in the latter enterprise, and that the 'largest slice of the company's nominal capital of £25,000 was invested by the managing directors of an important British film renting company (Walturdaw) and a prominent firm of film agents responsible for the sale of various continental film brands (A.E. Hubsch and Co.)'.<sup>51</sup> With such influential backers, West was in a position to supply his cinemas in the UK and Australasia with the most popular pictures very rapidly, including many from Pathé and Deutsche Bioscop.

This strong financial position and orientation towards European film may explain how West's was able, in March 1912, to buy out Pathé's Australian offices, which had been highly successful up to that point. The merger of West's, Spencer's, and Amalgamated Pictures, which was formally agreed upon the next month, may also have been a factor, though the impetus for that merger seems to have come from the Taits, who negotiated with Spencer's and West's to form the General Film Co. of Australia, which then purchased Gaumont's, Pathé's, and Harrington's distribution interests in Australia.<sup>52</sup> Under the leadership of West's deputies Geach, Gee, and Smith, West's Pictures became one of the principal founders of the Combine. Even in retirement, West served as Chairman of Directors of the General Film Agency Ltd and of the X.L. Film Co. Ltd.<sup>53</sup>

West continued to make regular visits to his Australian cinemas and to make ever greater plans for expanding his cinema interests, both of which are evident in his statement to a reporter in Perth in September 1913, near the end of 'one of his circling the globe trips', that 'he was also now connected with a producing company operating in London and Paris. He expected to be placing before Australasian audiences shortly films which had been produced by this company under his direction.'<sup>54</sup> Although it is

not clear what company he was referring to or whether the films in question were ever made, West's Ltd continued to import and exhibit important Continental films, including, among many others, SCAGL's massive *Les Misérables* in April 1913 and Pathé's film version of Zola's novel *Germinal/Master and Man* in December.

When West died at age sixty-one on 30 November 1916 in Gidea Park, Essex, England, after an operation for appendicitis, his death was reported on throughout Australia. The news was cabled to Geach on 1 December and announced in the *Sydney Morning Herald* the next day. A few days later, an obituary in the Melbourne *Argus* concluded,

By the death in London last week of Mr T.J. West the moving picture industry in Australia experienced a very serious loss, as, although of late he had not resided in the Commonwealth, he still retained an intimate connection with the Australian enterprises bearing his name. Whilst he was not the first to exploit cinematography in Australia, he was the originator of the permanent picture entertainment, and it was in a large measure due to his enterprise that it has attained the prominent position which it now holds in public esteem.<sup>55</sup>

He was survived by his second wife Emily Sarah Dunkley (b. 1864, m. 1893), their daughters Margaret Adelaide West (b. 1895) and Winnifred Beatrice West (b. 1904), his son Thomas James West (b. 1880) from his first marriage, as well as three grandsons, three sisters, and a niece, all of whom inherited shares in West's Ltd. As *Referee* reported the following year, the net value of West's New South Wales estate was 'sworn at £26,486, of which £15,392 consisted of shares in West's Ltd. and Olympia Ltd.; the gross value of the English estate was estimated at £35,787.17'.<sup>56</sup> West's Pictures remained a well-known brand in Australia into the 1930s, but the value of his contributions to making cinema a profitable, respectable, cosmopolitan enterprise in Australia was even more enduring. According to an obituary in *Bioscope* by 'one who knew him', although West 'took an honest, well-justified pride in his great achievements, success never spoiled him and he remained to the last a quiet, modest, unassuming gentleman, as courteous and fair in his business relations as he was sincere and faithful in his many friendships', despite the great wealth he accumulated.<sup>57</sup>

### J.D. Williams

The third member of the group, James Dixon (J.D.) Williams (1877–1934), was an American, who used his experiences in the cut-throat Australasian cinema industry as a springboard to his eventful later career in the American and British film industries. Jill Julius Matthews describes

him as a 'pushful' American, whose 'adventures in the film trade across three continents in the early decades of the twentieth century make him a prime subject for transnational treatment, as much for the historiographic complexities of his story as for the bravura of his performance'.<sup>58</sup> Williams was born in Ceredo, West Virginia to Harriet and O.H. Williams. Like Williamson and West, he worked first in live entertainment, selling tickets and playing the organ, before becoming a travelling picture showman between 1897 and 1908. Although he opened a few cinemas in Spokane, Seattle, and Vancouver that attracted contemporary media attention, his early career has garnered little attention from American and Canadian film historians; however, when he made the leap to Australia in 1909, he entered Australian film history, where he is variously identified as American or Canadian. Arriving in Sydney with 'a nickelodeon collection of "old films and junk pictures", a few hundred pounds capital, and "Yankee ideas of expansion"', Williams became successful very quickly. In a matter of months, he went from hawking kewpie dolls on canes at Sydney sideshows to running a team of boys in Sydney and Brisbane selling both dolls and films of Jack Johnson's prize fights.<sup>59</sup>

In early 1910, Williams, calling himself the 'American Picture King', entered the already crowded field of Australian film exhibition, converting the 600-seat Oxford Theatre on George Street in Sydney into a 1,200-seat cinema which he called the Colonial Theatre No. 1, a name then popular for cinemas in the USA.<sup>60</sup> He soon built two more theatres in Sydney—Colonial No. 2 (later the Empress), and the Lyric, directly across the street—while also expanding into Melbourne with the Melba and Britannia Theatres on Bourke Street, as well as Adelaide. In July 1911, when Williams had nine theatres in operation, with seven more planned, Australian journalist C.A. Jeffries compared Williams's 'far-ranging theatrical enterprise' to a banyan tree, with its main trunk in Sydney and branches in Melbourne, Brisbane, and four locations in New Zealand. By early 1912, Williams estimated that his theatres were serving 60,000 patrons per week.<sup>61</sup> In June 1912, he opened his second-largest and most lavish theatre, the Crystal Palace Theatre and amusement complex in Sydney (which contained a picture theatre, dance hall, winter-garden café, slot-machine arcade, novelty photography hall, gymnasium, and a childcare centre), followed by Luna Park in December 1912, both of them modelled on the Coney Island amusement park in New York City. He also had interests in motorbike and motor-car racing, as well as track-bicycle racing. In June 1912, *Footlights* magazine dubbed Williams 'the greatest showman that Australia has ever seen', the 'Napoleon of Amusements'.<sup>62</sup>

Rather than catering to upper-class patrons in capacious cinema palaces, Williams focused on providing smaller, well-appointed theatres



## Men Who Are Making Motion Picture History

By Jessie Niles Burness

**T**RANSPLANTING, it would seem, has an effect on men not unlike that which gardeners advocate for bringing plants to perfection. The uprooting and the pruning which are necessary, no less than the new environment, stimulate new and healthy growth.

This may be, at least in part, the reason why James D. Williams, general manager of Associated First National and the principal in this interview, has developed into such a power in the picture world. In the days of his youth he transplanted himself to Australia from his birthplace, Parkersburg, W. Va., and had attained success there which would have anchored an ordinary man for life, when the lure of pictures took possession of him, and he returned to America.

But his quality of genial gentleman is a contributory factor in his success, and he is likely to win what he sets out to because he is "so sort o' human" and brotherly. He is a conservationist in words, never using two when one will serve, but the right one is usually chosen. He is carefully careless in his apparel and has acquired the "habit of the smiling countenance."

And everybody throughout the great establishment calls him "J. D.," which indicates they all consider him a "regular guy."

He transplanted himself from Australia to America in 1905. Along about that time it was that feature films were gaining recognition in his vicinity, the very first feature shown having been a three-reel thriller called "The Kelly Gang." It was an Australian picture, and it was followed some months later by a Norwegian production, "The Temptations of a Great City."

"You can guess pretty nearly from their names what



JAMES D. WILLIAMS

the pictures were like," says Mr. Williams. "There was plenty of action, I can tell you. But everybody liked them, and I saw, even at that time, that the longer feature pictures were the thing, because they created so much more of a sensation and held the attention of the audience much longer than the ordinary one-reeler. People would talk about them when they came out of the theater and would tell their friends, and the feature would thus get the benefit of personal advertising, which is always of the greatest value.

"Australia had this very distinct advantage over America in the early days of the industry, that people believed in pictures. Admissions from the beginning there were about fifty cents, and we escaped the hardships that attended development here in nickelodeon days. It was a great advantage to have the backing and respect of financiers, and having this enabled Australia to keep the pace, if she did not set it for the rest of the

world, up to 1914 or 1915. Since then they haven't made much progress, due in part to the war, but also because America woke up fully to the possibilities and has outstripped all competitors, establishing a lead she will hold.

"I came to America in 1906, with my head full of the idea of opening up a feature distributing company to handle these multiple-reel pictures I was convinced would control the market. I became associated with W. W. Hodgkinson, and our faith joined to our works resulted not long after that in the formation of the Paramount Distributing Corporation.

"A man to succeed in this business has got to see a couple of years ahead. The entire outlook will change in one year more than the usual commercial enterprise will change in ten years. The time will come, and soon, when

Figure 2.4 Photograph of J.D. Williams in *Film Fun*, January 1921, p. 14

for Australian workers 'who had more money to spend on amusement than the average American, and more time to spend it in'.<sup>63</sup> Located in the middle of the city, near pedestrian traffic flows, Williams's cinemas offered a brightly lit exterior, an elegant marble foyer, upholstered seats for



all, electric lighting, continuous programmes, orchestras, and low prices, costing just threepence for adults and a penny for children to see one of the hour-long shows he presented from 11am to 11pm.<sup>64</sup> According to Jeffries, Williams's attempts at making the cinema accessible and welcoming to working people appealed to an untapped demographic:

Other photo-play enterprises had started with the idea of being as like the ordinary theatre as possible; a place where a man could take his wife and family on state occasions and, instead of watching real actors, gaze upon shadows; but it was to be the night out that a theatrical evening always means, and as everybody knows a theatrical night leaves but little change out of a sovereign. Mr Williams started with absolutely opposite ideals. His object was to establish a popular resort where people of all classes could find regular and frequent enjoyment [here] at prices that would not make their pleasure a drain on their resources. To do this he tried the experiment of giving short sittings lasting approximately an hour for sixpence and threepence, so that a couple who had an hour or so to spare could for a humble shilling sit in quiet comfort and see the life of the world unrolled before them.<sup>65</sup>

Determined to make the cinema an everyday attraction instead of an occasional luxury, Williams made it possible for shoppers and working people on their lunch hour to see a show, as well as offering special matinees for ladies and children.

Like West and Spencer, Williams got involved in distribution early on to supply his many cinemas with twice-weekly programme changes without repeats or duplication across theatres in the same towns, but here too he rapidly scaled up his business. With a supply chain stretching from London to China, Williams established film exchanges in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, and Wellington, later expanding to include offices in Townsville, Adelaide, Hobart, Grafton, and Auckland as well. In November 1910, Williams claimed to be supplying films to two-thirds of all the theatres in Sydney and its suburbs, including practically every theatre in the city except West's Glaciarium, Spencer's Lyceum, the Bijou (controlled by West's), and the King's Theatre, and to have contracts to supply more than £200 worth of film per week to Melbourne theatres as well. Once a film had made the round of Williams's own and his clients' theatres, it was sold or hired to small suburban shows, allowing films to remain in circulation for several years. In late 1912, he claimed to control 60% of the total film hiring business in Australia and New Zealand.

Williams initially showed a strong preference for shorter American films, perhaps in part because he held 'the sole agency for a large number of the best American and English film factories'.<sup>66</sup> Journalist W.H.H. Lane

praised Williams in mid-1911 for his successful efforts to increase imports of American films from Selig, Kalem, Essanay, Méliès, Lubin, AB, and AV Co. and to market them by company name.<sup>67</sup> Yet at the same time, the name of Williams's distribution company was International Pictures, reflecting his increasing focus, if only out of a desire to pick a fight with his rivals, on long European narrative films. One of his ads, titled 'A SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST', poses the belligerent question, 'Who's the Biggest, Best, and Strongest in the Australasian Film game? J.D. Williams wants to know. We are out for a fight to the finish. LET THE BEST WIN!'<sup>68</sup> In an April 1912 ad in *Photo-Play*, Williams advertised two special feature releases, both of them from Continental makers: the Éclair crime drama *Zigomar contre Nick Carter*/*Zigomar versus Nick Carter*, released in France a few weeks earlier, and Pasquali's *L'assassinio di un'anima*/*The Murder of a Soul*.<sup>69</sup> Likewise, in an ad in *Referee* in September 1912, all five of the 'special star feature film' releases on offer from International Films were Italian films, made by Cines, Ambrosio, or Milano Film.<sup>70</sup> In February 1913, shortly after he agreed to join the Combine but before the agreement was finalized, Williams screened Itala's feature *Father*, which Spencer's had imported, at the Crystal Palace.<sup>71</sup>

While West had an affinity for Pathé and Asta Nielsen pictures and Spencer favoured Italian films, Williams seems, once he decided to try to compete with West's and Spencer's for upper-class cinema audiences, to have had a particular fondness for Nordisk films from Denmark. He began cornering the market on Nordisk features as early as February 1912, when he screened two films marketed as Nordisk products—*Dødsflugten*/*The Flight to Death* and *'Twas Ever Thus* (original Danish title unknown, possibly an Essanay comedy)—in quick succession at Colonial 1. In October 1912, he launched the Nordisk military drama *Dyrekøbt venskab*/*Dearly Purchased Friendship*—just eight weeks after the film's Swedish premiere and nearly ten months before it opened in Denmark—in his lavish, air-conditioned Crystal Palace Theatre de Luxe, 'the Rendezvous of Sydney's Elite', praising it as 'one of the famous long film dramas performed by the Celebrated Nordisk Company'.<sup>72</sup> The film must have done well, for he followed up a week later with the Nordisk crime drama *Dr Gar el Hamas flugt*/*Dr Gar el Hama, Sequel to A Dead Man's Child*, and, in December, the tragedy *Klovnens hævn*/*The Clown's Revenge*. After screening two more Nordisk features at different theatres in January 1913—*Mellem storbyens artister*/*In a Den of Lions* at the Lyric and *De tre kammerater*/*The Three Comrades* at the Crystal Palace—Williams decided to make his Empress Theatre 'the Home of the Famous Nordisk Features'.<sup>73</sup> Living up to this moniker, the Empress premiered at least sixteen Nordisk features in 1913, with a few more opening at Williams's other Sydney theatres, the Lyric and

Colonial 1. However, due to the outbreak of war, the combined total of Nordisk films shown at all four of Williams's Sydney theatres dropped to nine in 1914 and two in 1915.

Williams's aggressive expansion made him a target for his competitors' animosity, but he was more than capable of fighting back. Matthews explains, 'J.D. Williams' empire was built in a world of cut-throat competition, of constant maneuvering to undermine rivals and to advance one's own position.'<sup>74</sup> In September 1910, before either West or Spencer had taken such a step, Williams consolidated his business into the J.D. Williams Amusement Co. (reorganized in February 1911 as the Greater J.D. Williams Amusement Co.), with a capital of £100,000 in £1 shares.<sup>75</sup> Williams decided to incorporate in response to the collapse of the proposed 'South Film Association', of which he had been an early proponent. His objective with the association, as he explained to the National Phonograph Company (which advised American film manufacturers) on 11 November 1910, had been 'to keep up the price of film rental, to not allow the film to get into the hands of cheaper film exchanges, to burn up the film after it was a year old, to prevent shows from charging 1d (2c) admission, and in fact to promote the business in general, in many ways'.<sup>76</sup>

However, as soon as Williams had persuaded Spencer to join the association, the latter used his influence with Gee at West's Pictures and other showmen to try to slow down the explosive growth of Williams's business. By Williams's own account,

After Johnson & Gibson found out that we were opening a film exchange in Melbourne, and Messrs. Fuller & Co. of NZ found out that we were opening in New Zealand, they were very anxious to eliminate me also. They had the audacity to ask me to only show 2,000 feet of new pictures for 3d and 6d admission, and to allow their good selves 8,000 feet for 6d and 1s admission. They also objected to me serving the Suburban Shows with good film. You can easily see the injustice of this proposition. We are getting about £500 weekly out of the Suburban Shows which we cannot afford to lose. We are also getting a net profit of at least £200 weekly with the Colonial Theatre, and as we are building another large theatre immediately opposite, you can easily see why I would not want to be handicapped by showing 2,000 feet of new pictures. We show 4,000 feet for all matinees and in all cases we never show more than 3,000 to 3,500 feet for an evening's programme.<sup>77</sup>

As a relative latecomer to the Australasian distribution and exhibition market, Williams must have seemed to pose quite a threat to West's and Spencer's, in terms of both attendance at their own cinemas and those to

which they sold or rented films, but he refused to bow under the pressure from his peers to undercut his own profits for their sake. Yet the decline in his company's dividends from 22% in 1911 to 8% in the first half of 1912, paired with a drop in the price of the company's £1 shares from thirty-five shillings in December 1910 to twenty-five in December 1911 to par (twenty) in August 1912 and then to fifteen shillings in November before returning to par in December, suggests that some of his bluster was bluff and that his finances were under strain.

The merger of West's, Spencer's, and Amalgamated Pictures in late 1912 to form the General Films Company Ltd must have seemed like another attempt to shut Williams out of the market, and he responded with open hostility. In early January 1913, Williams ran an ad in *Referee* featuring a cartoon lampooning the Combine as a leaky boat sinking in the 'Sea of Photographic Enterprise'. The text of the ad defiantly informs the reader, 'International Pictures are the originators of the idea to champion independence and for months have stood on their own and put up the battle alone. We don't intend to permit competition at this late date to imitate our methods and secure benefits not deserved.'<sup>78</sup>

[illegible]

Figure 2.5 Advertisement for Greater J.D. Williams Amusements Company,  
*Referee*, 8 January 1913, p. 16

Yet the same day as Williams's anti-Combine ad appeared, his company joined the Combine. A small notice in the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* on 8 January announced that 'one of the most important "arrangements" in Australian moving pictures has just been concluded between the principal importers of films. Under it, almost all the competition that has been going on between the various vendors of films in Sydney will give place to a solid business understanding', with the aim of producing 'a greatly-increased picture-film market'.<sup>79</sup> Within a few months, the merger was official. As the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported on 5 April, 'Union Theatres, Ltd. ... has entered into an agreement with the Greater J.D. Williams Amusement Company, Ltd., and the General Film Company of Australasia, Ltd., and will carry on the business of picture show proprietors, etc. The permanent directors are: Cosens Spencer, H.E.O. Gee, John H. Tait, Edwin Geach, H. M. Hawkins, John Williamson.'<sup>80</sup> A few days later, on 8 April, they announced that 'Australasian Films, Ltd. ... will enter into an agreement with the Greater J.D. Williams Amusement Company, Ltd., and the General Film Company of Australasia, Ltd., to carry on the business of cinematograph, theatrical, and music-hall proprietors. The permanent directors are: Messrs. Herbert M. Hawkins, Fredk. J. Smith, Cosens Spencer, H. E. O. Gee, W. A. Gibson, H.Y. Russell, and W. B. Miller.'<sup>81</sup> With this merger, nearly all of the major local film distributors in Australia (with the exception of Clement Mason) were now working together, representing a deliberate move away from the open-market system towards 'something more controlled, via the sophisticated hegemony of heavily-capitalised, locally-based companies'.<sup>82</sup> Matthews attributes the final amalgamation in 1913 to Williams's shrewd business sense, calling him the dominant partner, who did not manage the company but controlled it all the same, but no records have survived to explain Williams's sudden change of heart about the Combine, nor to account for the fact that he was not named as a director of either of the new companies.<sup>83</sup>

The effects of the Combine's centralized control on the various branches of the Australasian film industry were far-reaching, particularly in terms of starving the production sector of funding, but the intentions behind it were not malicious, merely economic. In a November 1913 interview with *Bioscope*, West objected to the derogatory use of the term 'Combine' to describe the organization:

I consider it a great misuse of the word. 'Combine', in this sense, is an American word signifying a 'trust', and our amalgamation is in no way whatsoever a trust. I found that every unit of the amalgamation was working happily with legitimate competitors, the main purpose being to reduce extravagant expenditure and unnecessary outlays for

the benefit of the shareholders in each establishment. I consider that all cinematograph shows in Australia are retaining, and even increasing, their prestige, that they are as prosperous as those of other countries, that their performances are given with great attention to detail, and that all connected with them display a worthy enthusiasm, which cannot but help forward the cinematograph business, not only in Australia, but also in other parts of the world.<sup>84</sup>

The centralization and consolidation of film distribution and exhibition in Australia under the Combine did generate profits for its members, particularly in urban areas, and, in the short term, made it possible to increase imports of big-budget European features like *Cabiria* in 1914, but these changes came at a cost, both to Australian film producers, whose budgets and output plummeted dramatically from 1912 to 1913, and to the Combine's competitors. Unaffiliated distributors such as Clement Mason had to fight to keep a share of the market for themselves and their clients; as early as March 1912, Mason defiantly declared his independence of the Combine and his determination to support rural showmen, promising to double his imports 'to KEEP THE FLAG FLYING for suburban shows'.<sup>85</sup>

As bold a move as the amalgamation was in the Australasian context, operating as part of the Combine did not seem to satisfy Williams's ambitions. Despite his own protestations that he was bound to Australia by a ten-year obligation to his business, Williams disappears from Australasian film history at this point. He left Australia in 1913 to return to the USA,<sup>86</sup> where, drawing on his Australian experience, he co-founded First National Exhibitors' Circuit Inc.—an association of independent theatre owners that became the country's largest cinema chain—in 1917, and became its general manager. In this role, he signed Charlie Chaplin and Mary Pickford, as well as importing Ernst Lubitsch's film *Madame DuBarry/Passion*, (1919) the first German film to enter the US market after the war, in December 1920. Williams became a founding member of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) in 1922 and was listed in the *Motion Picture News* the same year as one of the twelve most powerful people in the motion picture industry, but he was forced to resign from First National in late 1922 over policy differences. In mid-1923 Williams established Ritz (or Ritz-Carlton) Pictures, which planned to both produce films, featuring Rudolph Valentino at the company's main star, and offer individual films for sale to 'responsible showmen' for what [each picture is] worth, no more and for no less',<sup>87</sup> but the company never really got off the ground.

Williams then resurfaced in British film history, this time as a producer. He was associated with Stoll Picture Productions as a director from its establishment in 1920 but became Managing Director of British National

Pictures in 1925. At British National, he signed Dorothy Gish and Alfred Hitchcock, and, in 1926, began to build a British Hollywood at Elstree. Matthews argues that Williams's 'aim in these projects seems to have been the same as it had been fourteen years earlier in Australia: to foster the possibilities of film as the pre-eminent modern medium of "relaxation, and rest, and instruction, and entertainment"', but this time, he focused on production instead of exhibition. His aim was to 'make quality films that would compete with the best that Hollywood could offer in technical polish, but that also reflected "the very Soul of England"'. His plan to rationalize the fragmented British film industry resembled his strategy for the Combine, but he was once again forced out when British National became British International Pictures.

Given his early focus on American film, it is striking that Williams became an advocate for promoting a more international American film landscape in the mid-1920s. Between 1926 and 1929, Williams promoted his vision of a transnational film industry through articles and speeches, developing a scheme for multi-language film production and proposing an Academy of Motion Pictures associated with Oxford or Cambridge University. In his preface to Gerard Fort Buckle's *The Mind and the Film: A Treatise on the Psychological Factors in Film* (1926), Williams explained the power of film as a means of disseminating ideas about other countries, noting that 'never before, in the history of the world, has there existed an instrument even remotely approaching in influence the motion picture as we know it. There has never before existed any means by which the genius of a people could be expressed and presented dramatically to all other peoples.'<sup>88</sup> To this end, he founded World Wide Pictures Corporation, which he described as 'an international distribution organization which attempted to break into the parochialism of the American market, handling thirty or forty European pictures a year', to facilitate 'a film conversation between nations instead of the present Hollywood monologue'.<sup>89</sup> Despite early attempts to create multilingual films, however, the cost of sound film rendered this dream unattainable. Following a nervous breakdown, Williams died in Manhattan State Hospital in New York in 1934. His eleven-paragraph obituary in *Variety* devoted just a few lines to his seven years in Australia and five years in England, nor was his innovative vision for the global film industry mentioned, though he was recognized as 'probably the only operator to have established major companies on three continents, all of them still going concerns'.<sup>90</sup>



While the Combine and its effects on the Australian cinema landscape have preoccupied Australian film historians for decades, the men who

built the companies out of which it was formed have remained largely in the shadows. Each of them came to Australia from abroad, spent no more than fifteen years in the country, and departed again to seek their fortunes in Canada, the UK, and the USA, so it is understandable that their historical footprints are rather faint. Yet contemporary newspaper accounts provide a vivid record of their audacity in building cinema empires from nothing thousands of miles away from the lands of their birth, their energetic attempts to wrestle the cinema out of the fairgrounds and into the limelight of elegant theatres, and their tremendous success at doing so, with considerable assistance from the socially and artistically aspirational narrative feature films supplied by European producers.

Without such high-profile, big-budget, brand-name-engaging multi-reel pictures to screen, it would have been much more difficult for these three ambitious entrepreneurs to accomplish the transformation of the rough and ready Australian cinema landscape of the first years of the century into the manicured formal garden it had become, in urban areas at least, by the outbreak of World War I. At the same time, however, without such energetic promotion by gifted salesmen like these, European films may not have enjoyed nearly as much prominence in pre-war Australasia.

## Notes

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- 3 Burrows, *British Cinema Boom*, 156.
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- 7 Stephen Gaunson, 'Marvellous Melbourne: Lady Filmgoers, Spencer's Pictures and Cozens Spencer', *Early Popular Visual Culture* 12 (2014), 1, 24.
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- 12 'Amusements. Princess Theatre', *Daily Telegraph* (Launceston, Tas), 27 May 1913, 6.
- 13 'In Equity', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 February 1912, 7.
- 14 'Equity Court', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 September 1917, 4.
- 15 'Cinematography. Film-making in Australia. Spencer's Big Concern', *Examiner* (Launceston, Tas), 6 January 1912, 8.
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- 23 Jon Burrows, "'West is Best": Or What We Can Learn from Bournemouth', *Early Popular Visual Culture* 8.4 (November 2010), 355.
- 24 Henry John Hayward, *Here's to Life: The Impressions, Confessions, and Garnered Thoughts of a Free-Minded Showman* (Auckland: Oswald Sealy Ltd, 1944), 83; 'Early Experiences', *British Kinematography* 11.1 (July 1947), 12.
- 25 Pugsley, *The Camera in the Crowd*, 119.
- 26 Hayward, *Here's to Life*, 83–84.
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## Trans-Tasman Cinema Traffic

### Film Distribution and Exhibition in New Zealand

Like Australia, New Zealand was an early adopter of moving picture technology, albeit primarily consuming rather than producing films in the pre-war period. While Alfred Whitehouse demonstrated an Edison Kinetoscope—which showed short films peep-show style to one person at a time—in an Auckland photo studio in November 1895, Edison's Kinematograph projector (also known as the Vitascope) was first exhibited in New Zealand as part of the Godfrey Company's vaudeville show at the Opera House in Auckland on 13 October 1896, just ten months after the Lumière brothers' initial exhibition in Paris and two months after the demonstration of an English projector, presumably an R.W. Paul Theatrograph, in Sydney. The new technology was presented by entertainers John Gow and 'Professor Hausmann' (the stage name of Christchurch-born performer George Percy Hausmann (1869–c.1930), who also went by Percy Verto). Hausmann had written directly to Thomas Edison in June 1896 to acquire the projector.<sup>1</sup> Gow and Hausmann screened a few American films produced by Edison, including *Traffic on Broadway* and *Sandow, the Strong Man*, and some English films, possibly produced by R.W. Paul, including scenes of people swimming at Folkestone, trains entering the Bristol railway station, street scenes in Leeds and London, and other non-fiction shorts.<sup>2</sup>

This first foray into cinema exhibition in New Zealand set the tone for the enthusiastic consumption of foreign—not only American and British but also European—films throughout the silent period. In the pre-war period, the fledgling industry was shaped by a handful of innovative entrepreneurs that included Henry Hayward, John Fuller, and James, Charles, and Joseph MacMahon. This chapter will begin by discussing the

significance of the transnational character of early cinema in New Zealand, before profiling each of these exhibitor-distributors and highlighting their contributions to the circulation of European film in New Zealand in the pre-war period.

The market for moving pictures in New Zealand grew rapidly after Gow and Hausmann's initial successful demonstration. After five days in Auckland, where they gave showings every afternoon and evening, Gow and Hausmann toured the north and west coasts of North Island, including Thames, Paeroa, Gisborne, Wairarapa, Palmerston North, Manawatu, and Wellington, in October and November 1896.<sup>3</sup> On South Island, Australian cinema entrepreneur Joseph MacMahon brought the cinema to Christchurch and Dunedin with his R.W. Paul Theatrograph in November 1896. Such itinerant exhibitions, retracing the well-trodden circuits of live theatre and often combined with variety shows like the Godfrey Company's, were the norm for the next decade. Enterprising travelling showmen and their mobile cinemas, including 'Professor Hausmann's Lumigraph Company', brought moving pictures into nearly every corner of the country, transforming local halls into temporary cinemas, usually complete with a local piano accompanist. As the popularity of the cinema continued to grow in the early 1900s, mobile cinemas gave way—in larger cities, at least—to permanent cinemas: New Zealand's first permanent cinema was His Majesty's Theatre in Wellington, opened in 1908, while the King's Theatre, built in Wellington in 1910, became the country's first purpose-built cinema. In 1911, the weekly pictorial *Free Lance* enthused that picture shows were 'everywhere ... in the city and suburbs, and all of them doing big business'.<sup>4</sup> By 1916, the Dunedin *Evening Star* estimated that approximately 320,000 New Zealanders, out of a population of 1.15 million, attended the cinema weekly, for a total annual attendance of 6.4 million.<sup>5</sup>

Part of the immediate appeal of the cinema for New Zealanders, even more so than for Australians, seems to have been the way film connected these farthest-flung Anglo-European settler-colonists with the rest of the world. In moving pictures, New Zealanders could witness depictions of faraway places and see exciting new theatrical productions at practically the same time as the residents of large European and American metropolises, as well as their Australian peers. A review of a West's Pictures show in Wellington in October 1908 foregrounded the ethnographic quality of early scenic films, noting of one Alpine film that

Not many Wellingtonians have ever had the fortune to visit the Tyrolean Alps, and there are few who ever will. The Tyrol therefore came to Wellington last night, and—per medium of West's

Biograph—was shown in all its grandeur and its quaintness in the Town Hall ... The peculiar customs of the people, their quaint clothing, their picturesque dancers, their superstitions, their toy soldiery, and their impressive religious ceremonies—all these can be seen in the series of Tyrolese views forming part of West's new programme.<sup>6</sup>

As this review's description of the foreign customs, clothing, dancing, and other beliefs of the exotic Tyroleans reveals, cinema brought the world to New Zealand, both through the depiction of foreign places on screen and through stories told by representatives of different cultures, which introduced cosmopolitan views on topics from fashion to suffrage.

Since distributors and exhibitors determined which films cinema audiences in New Zealand were able to see, this chapter focuses on a few of the individuals who made those decisions in the first two decades of cinema exhibition in New Zealand, as well as the nationally diverse films they imported and screened. Many independent exhibitors, such as John Payne of Thompson-Payne Pictures, were active in various towns and cities, but the handful of exhibitors who established national networks of exhibition and distribution that contributed substantially to determining the character of New Zealand cinema will have to serve as representative examples. Prior to World War I, the films on offer in New Zealand came from many different Western countries rather than just the USA, as would become the norm in later years. In 1914, for example, only 32% of the films shown in New Zealand were American, while 43% were British, and the remaining 25% came from a variety of Continental producers, primarily from France, Germany, Denmark, and Italy.<sup>7</sup> Viewers seemed to be highly cognizant and proud of the internationalism of their cinema experience. It was common for local newspaper ads in the early 1900s and 1910s to highlight the popularity particular films had enjoyed in London, Paris, and New York, a strategy that reinforced both the cultural authority of these foreign markets for New Zealand viewers and cinema's ability to give audiences access to the same attractions. National film censorship wasn't introduced in New Zealand until 1916, so until then, decisions about the suitability of a given film, including some European films that had been banned or cut in other countries, were left up to local authorities.

It is important to remember, however, that early cinema in New Zealand was largely the domain of Anglo-European settler-colonists, including the more than 100,000 European immigrants recruited to New Zealand by Premier Julius Vogel in the 1870s, for whom these ties to Britain and Continental Europe were already meaningful.<sup>8</sup> Little direct evidence survives about the make-up of cinema audiences in

New Zealand, but they seem to have been primarily white, given the demographics of the towns in which films were regularly screened, such as Taradale, south-west of Napier, where Hayward's Picture Co. began screening movies in the town hall twice a week in mid-1912.<sup>9</sup> Settler-colonial towns like Taradale were almost exclusively white in this period, while indigenous Māori lived in separate, often impoverished, communities. For example, the 1926 census records 2,800 residents in the Taradale town district, only seventeen of whom were Māori, while the village Waiohiki pā, south of Taradale, was predominantly Māori.<sup>10</sup> No film screenings appear to have been advertised for Waiohiki in newspapers in the silent period, though it is possible the area was visited by travelling cinema shows on occasion.

Māori New Zealanders experienced varying degrees of racial discrimination in different eras and parts of the country, so it seems likely that their cinema attendance was impacted by discriminatory practices on the basis of either race or socio-economic status.<sup>11</sup> Supporting historian Caroline Daley's assertion that 'Māori and other non-white people continued to be marginalized and excluded from many leisure activities', projectionist and cinema manager Jack Valentine reports that some small-town cinemas, such as the Opera House in Hawera, required Māori patrons to use a separate entrance, while the cinema in Piopio allegedly seated Māori patrons on one side of the hall and white New Zealanders (Pahekas) on the other.<sup>12</sup> In the south Auckland town of Pukekohe, the Strand Cinema apparently enforced a policy of 'no Maoris upstairs or under the circle' from its opening in the 1920s until 1961, though its competitor, the Regent Cinema, which opened in 1958, made no distinction between patrons.<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, however, Māori attained a position closer to equality in New Zealand than other indigenous peoples in the British Empire, as evidenced by Māori representation in government from 1864 and frequent intermarriage with settler-colonists, which has given rise to a myth of idealized race relations. Based in a belief that Māori culture 'preserved an ancient Aryan heritage "in an almost inconceivable purity"', the government pursued assimilationist policies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and argued that Māori should be regarded as "white savages" or "sun-tanned Europeans" capable of embracing Christianity, commerce, and civilization'.<sup>14</sup> The nature and extent of Māori involvement in early New Zealand cinema culture reflects these tensions, with some of the earliest films made in New Zealand, such as Gaston Méliès's *Hinemoa* (1913), dealing with Māori legends, though only one of the country's early film-makers was Māori, the actor and photographer Ramai Te Miha (1916–2014), who made films together with her husband Rudall Hayward (1900–1974).

The cinema was not only the most affordable, accessible mass medium for (white) New Zealanders in the early twentieth century, but it was also a primary vehicle for the transnational cultural impulses from which New Zealand derived its blended culture. In general, New Zealand defined itself culturally, particularly after the 1880s, as an extension of Britain, albeit a 'Better Britain', as James Belich puts it.<sup>15</sup> However, as much as they may have wanted to be British, New Zealanders—even those who had emigrated from the UK—quickly developed their own, distinctive attributes, in part through the influence of other cultures. In June 1909, Sir Robert Stout suggested to a London audience that 'it was sometimes necessary to define a New Zealander ... Their ideas and principles were those of England, but now that he came to England, he discovered that the New Zealanders did not possess all the ideas and principles of the English. Influenced by our surroundings we had changed them. The future New Zealander had not yet been made.'<sup>16</sup> Miles Fairburn argues that the extreme geographic isolation and small population of New Zealand have made its inhabitants both unusually adaptive and extraordinarily receptive to outside influences, from the days of the earliest Māori settlements to the present. He suggests that the relatively late date of New Zealand's colonization was instrumental in providing both settler-colonists and Māori easy access to 'metropolitan' cultural influences, such as live theatre, musical performances, and cinema, that became the basis of the country's import-dependent culture.<sup>17</sup> Daley builds on Fairburn's thesis to show how these transnational circuits shaped local culture, explaining that 'new means of information transfer and improved transportation ... meant that people all over New Zealand had increasing access to a wide range of imported goods and services, and a desire to enjoy them'.<sup>18</sup> Daley and Fairburn agree that the most dominant cultural influences on New Zealand came, understandably, from Australia, Britain, and the USA. However, the ubiquity and prominence of European films on New Zealand's cinema screens in the 1910s, which has been overlooked by most scholars, illuminates some of the other cultural inputs also accessible to New Zealand cinemagoers.

The extensive and sustained circulation of early films, from Continental Europe as well as Britain and America, in the trans-Tasman region illuminates the scope and social stakes of New Zealand's participation in global networks, not only of trade and goods, but also of ideas, which cinema was ideally suited to disseminate. Peter Gibbons argues that the 'geography of trade is more significant than nation-state boundaries' and suggests that historical enquiries into material culture on a macro- and micro-historical level can show how objects can tie countries together: 'The world system is about production and consumption and exchange, not simply in limited economic terms, but also in social and cultural terms. It is through



trade that peoples meet, whether actually or vicariously and between and through these contacts ideas, values, and attitudes are exchanged and adjusted along with the goods.<sup>19</sup> This argument applies particularly well to the cinema, perhaps even more so in the silent era than today, given the greater national diversity of films in widespread circulation in that period. In its rapid, largely (in the pre-war era, at least) unconstrained movement across national, regional, linguistic, ethnic, and class borders, silent film facilitated connections between large and small towns across the country, as well as between New Zealand and other countries, from Australia, Britain, and the USA to France, Denmark, Sweden, Italy, and Germany.

Cinema was and continues to be a powerful force for shaping ideas of identity, as well as behaviours and beliefs. In the absence of both a state religion and a strong local live theatre community in early- and mid-twentieth-century New Zealand, picture theatres functioned as physical and imaginative gathering places, commanding 'awe and excitement' through their advertising posters and ever-changing offerings. Dubbing cinemas 'cathedrals of the movies', Wayne Brittenden speaks of cinema attendance in New Zealand in this period in religious terms, noting that 'many of the faithful came every Friday or Saturday night. Some even had permanently reserved seats—family pews—and God help anyone else who occupied them.'<sup>20</sup> In 1945, film critic and later national censor Gordon Mirams reflected on the effects of this devotion on New Zealand culture and society, connecting the enthusiasm of New Zealand cinemagoers with their adoption of certain manners, habits, and attitudes, both personal and potentially political:

We New Zealanders are a nation of film fans. Only tea-drinking is a more popular form of diversion with us than picture-going. We adopted the motion picture earlier and more enthusiastically than most other countries, and today we spend as much time and money at the pictures, per head of population, as any other people in the world, except the Americans—and even they are not very far ahead of us. It follows that our picture-going habit exerts an enormous influence upon our manners, customs, and fashions, our speech, our standards of taste, and our attitudes of mind. It may even come to affect the way we vote. If there is any such thing as a 'New Zealand culture,' it is to a large extent the creation of Hollywood.<sup>21</sup>

In acknowledging the formative power of cinema, Mirams attributes its influence primarily to Hollywood, which provided the majority of the films shown in New Zealand from World War I to the present, but neglects the keen competition between Hollywood and the British and European film industries throughout the silent era, particularly prior to World

War I. Daley likewise dismisses European films as 'experimental' products consumed primarily through film societies, which was true from the 1920s onward but not in the years preceding World War I.<sup>22</sup>

The people who pioneered the burgeoning film industry in New Zealand at the beginning of the twentieth century tended to be people either with training in a technical skill, like Clement Mason (Chapter 1), or prior experience in the entertainment industry, such as T.J. West (Chapter 2), who discovered an application for their entrepreneurial ambitions in meeting rapidly increasing customer demand for this new product. As in the theatre industry, many film distributors, exhibitors, producers, actors, and directors worked in both Australia and New Zealand, or formed collaborative partnerships—bound by common experience, friendship, or opportunism—across the Tasman Sea. The close economic ties between Britain and New Zealand in the pre-war period meant that distributors generally purchased their films for import from exchanges in London for the entire Australasian region, which facilitated trans-Tasman cooperation, though New Zealand's remoteness and smaller population meant that Australian cinemas often got prints of new films first, with New Zealand premieres following a few weeks or months later. After the establishment of powerful distribution and exhibition conglomerates in both Australia and New Zealand in 1913, independent distributors were increasingly sidelined by large American producers who promised a steady supply of inexpensive films. The economic and cultural significance of the conquest of the Australasian cinema market by Hollywood led to legislative attempts to bolster the importation of British film in the late 1920s, as discussed in Chapters 9 and 10, but although New Zealand took more concrete steps to protect British film imports than other Commonwealth countries, American domination of the global film market was too well entrenched by then to be effectively challenged.

Many of the dominant film exhibitor-distributors in Australia, including Cosens Spencer, West, and J.D. Williams, were also involved in developing the New Zealand cinema market. Spencer's and West's travelling film and variety shows played a pivotal role in establishing a cinema culture in New Zealand in 1904–08, for example, and they remained active in the New Zealand market from then on, though Williams did not branch out into New Zealand until 1910. However, since these men's enterprises were discussed in detail in Chapter 2, they will only appear peripherally in this chapter. Although addressing a much smaller market than Australia, the New Zealand cinema industry in the pre-war era was profitable and popular, with room for many cinema entrepreneurs, including Henry Hayward, John Fuller and Sons, and the MacMahon brothers, to name just the most prominent.

As in Australia, distribution and exhibition went hand in hand, with ambitious exhibitors taking charge of their own distribution networks in order to ensure the quality and timeliness of the films shown in their cinemas. These exhibitors were not simply managers running a business like any other, but were frequently showmen themselves, who were not just hawking tickets to a particular film but selling an entirely new medium and the glamorous modernity it represented. Brittenden points out that each metropolitan cinema had its own distinct personality and style, often specializing in a particular genre,<sup>23</sup> which allowed cinemagoers to choose the cinema that appealed most to their worldview and aesthetic preferences, as well as their wallet.

### New Zealand's Film Exhibition Pioneers: Henry Hayward

The interconnectedness of the theatre and cinema industries in New Zealand is evident in the career of Henry Hayward (1865–1945), who had come to New Zealand with West and the Brescians in 1905 and went on to become one of the pioneers of the early New Zealand cinema industry. Loosely affiliated with West's Pictures, he established a chain of permanent and mobile cinemas in cooperation with his brother Rudall, whose like-named son would become one of New Zealand's first film-makers, as would both of the latter Rudall's wives, Hilda Maud Moren (1898–1970) and the above-mentioned Ramai Te Miha. The Hayward family was thus intertwined with New Zealand's cinema industry for much of the twentieth century.

Like other early cinema showmen, Hayward's background in the entertainment industry led him to film. Born in Wolverhampton, England as the fourth of the seven children of violinist William Henry Hayward and his wife, Harriet Elizabeth Groutage, Henry John Hayward left school at age eleven to become a musician.<sup>24</sup> At age twenty, he founded a costume concert company called the Brescians (after the region of northern Italy where most of the performers came from), with whom he performed for more than a quarter of a century. In 1891, he married one of his fellow performers, Louisa Domenica Martinengo, at around the same time as his older brother Flavell married Louisa's sister Bettina and his younger brother Rudall married Louisa's sister Adelina.

The Brescians' joint venture with West's Modern Marvel company introduced Hayward to the cinema as a professional path, though he was initially less sanguine than West about cinema's prospects. In his memoirs, Hayward recalls walking with West up and down Pitt Street in Sydney, outside the Palace Theatre, during their Australian tour in 1906, discussing whether cinema was there to stay. Acting on the (mistaken, as it turned out)

belief that the cinema fad wouldn't last, Hayward returned to London after the Brescians' Australasian tour to book more live shows for Australasian tours in 1908. When he came back to New Zealand in November, however, with the magic show Maskelyne and Devant's Mysteries, he changed his mind about the cinema's prospects and decided to give it a chance, although he toured with the magic show until February 1909 and continued organizing other live tours alongside his cinema business.

As Hayward remembered it, he and West agreed that West would 'devote himself to the cinema in Australia and I [Hayward] should apply myself to New Zealand', but in fact they seemed to have cooperated quite closely, in the latter country, at least.<sup>25</sup> West continued to bring travelling cinema shows to New Zealand and eventually built his own permanent theatres in each of its primary cities, including the country's first purpose-built cinema, the King's Theatre on Dixon Street in Wellington, while Hayward also ventured into the Australian market on occasion.<sup>26</sup> Still, their collaboration in film distribution seems to have worked well, with West procuring films, frequently on an exclusive basis, for both of their cinema chains, and relying on Hayward's film distribution circuit within New Zealand.<sup>27</sup> Hayward and West were very different but they maintained a strong friendship and business partnership until West's death in 1916. Hayward explained, 'West was an unusual showman, clever and resourceful, a great advertiser, but in his personal character the very opposite of mine. He was a very religious man, I was a Freethinker, yet we harmonized happily together.'<sup>28</sup> While West was a churchgoing Freemason, Hayward's progressive views prompted him to become an active member of the New Zealand Labour Party and to write various articles and pamphlets in support of both the Rationalist Association and Sunday Freedom League, of which he served as president.<sup>29</sup> His support of activist causes also took more tangible form; on at least one occasion, Hayward presented the entire proceeds of one evening's screenings in one of his cinemas, £8 16s 6d in this case, to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.<sup>30</sup>

When he decided to take up the challenge of developing New Zealand's fledgling cinema exhibition industry, Hayward's years spent managing the Brescians and observing West's Kinematograph exhibitions equipped him with the necessary skills to succeed. With films supplied by West's, Hayward began operating a mobile cinema show, using whatever venue he could find that lent itself to the purpose—empty shops, old warehouses, schoolrooms, and deserted schools. His first exhibition spaces were not the luxurious cinema palaces that West was already building in major metropolises throughout the region in the same period; instead, they were makeshift affairs using whatever exhibition space was available. Hayward later recalled,

My first permanent show in Adelaide was a tent erected on a vacant section; at Wanganui, Louis Cohen, Will Jameson and I ran the first regular cinema in the auction mart; at Napier, in partnership with Messrs. Thompson and Payne, I opened the initial 'pictures' in an old garage; Fuller's first permanent movie house was a horse bazaar in Christchurch; whilst Wellington's venue was a deserted church.<sup>31</sup>

Hayward opened his first dedicated picture show, Pathé Pictures, at the Theatre Royal in Christchurch on 13 March 1909, followed shortly thereafter, on 26 April 1909, by New Zealand's first permanent picture show, an affiliate of West's Pictures, in the Royal Albert Hall on the corner of Wellesley and Albert Street in Auckland. The latter was able to advertise itself briefly as 'The Only Picture Show in Town'.<sup>32</sup> The London *Bioscope* interpreted Hayward's acquisition of the Royal Albert Hall as an expression of his belief that 'the permanent picture show has come to stay'.<sup>33</sup> At both theatres, in May and June 1909, Hayward began a tradition of hosting a photographic beauty contest in which the anonymized pictures of local beauties were shown on screen between films for the audience to vote on all week. The winner received a prize and the honour of having her picture published in illustrated newspapers in England as representative of New Zealand beauties.<sup>34</sup> Such contests were a novelty at the time but soon became ubiquitous in both New Zealand and Australia.

Hayward quickly built up a robust national network of cinemas. 'So rapidly and successfully were his operations carried out', one of Hayward's peers reported in late 1909, 'that in less than a year he became the owner of two important theatres in the Dominion, and the proprietor of twelve others', including the nightly Hayward's Pictures shows at the Theatre Royal in Nelson, which was leased by Hayward and managed by Allan Macdonald (who also managed the Druids' Hall roller-skating rink in Nelson for Hayward at the same time).<sup>35</sup> In July 1910, he established Hayward's Enterprises, with £30,000 in capital, which he later increased to £100,000 through building, leasing, and interest.<sup>36</sup> Though he continued to manage West's Pictures at the Royal Albert Hall, he soon followed West's example of building grandiose cinema palaces, opening the 1,400-seat Lyric Theatre at 160–162 Upper Symonds Street in Auckland on 6 November 1911. It was the city's most luxurious cinema, featuring a grand entrance, marble staircases, a balcony, and armchair seats, as well as accompaniment provided by the Lyric Symphony Ladies' Orchestra, conducted by Chas Parnell.<sup>37</sup> Property records indicate that the building was actually owned by George John Draghivovich, with John Dalrymple listed as tenant, but Hayward's Pictures were the building's public-facing occupants until mid-1917, when it was taken over by J.C. Williamson & Co.<sup>38</sup>

The theatre retained its elite status for many years; in 1914, the first feature film made in New Zealand, Charles Newham and George Tarr's 2,500ft film *Hinemoa*, premiered at the Lyric.

By 1912 Hayward's controlled thirty-three permanent cinema houses in New Zealand—including the Lyceum theatres in Whanganui, Whangarei, Feilding, Invercargill, and Timaru, the Academy of Music in Waihi, Zealandia Hall in Palmerston North, and Burns's Theatre in Dunedin<sup>39</sup>—as well as travelling shows in both New Zealand and Australia. In an example of the latter, Hayward took out a lease on the Academy of Music hall in Launceston, Tasmania in late 1909, hiring one Fred Dawson to manage a Tasmanian tour of Hayward's Pictures, which used Hayward's brand, although the pictures themselves were supplied by West's.<sup>40</sup> Admission to this travelling show was not cheap, with tickets costing one and two shillings, half price for children.<sup>41</sup> These prices are almost identical to what patrons had paid to see West's Pictures and the Brescians perform in Palmerston North in 1905, indicating that moving pictures enjoyed a similar perceived value as live entertainment.<sup>42</sup> By comparison, tickets to Hayward's Pictures shows at the Lyceum in December 1911 were much cheaper, costing only one shilling for seats in the stalls, and sixpence for seats in the pit or for children's tickets.<sup>43</sup> However, as Hayward's ads proclaimed, audience members at the cinema received greater value for their money than theatre patrons, since the cinema combined 'the pleasures of Travel, Comedy, Drama, Industry, and Musical Gems, all rolled into one'.<sup>44</sup>

In the years immediately preceding World War I, Hayward's Pictures operated at least six theatres in Auckland alone. These ran the gamut from a temporary cinema operating on Saturday evenings in the Foresters' Hall in the north-western Auckland suburb of Birkenhead in 1912, to the elegant 965-seat Victoria Theatre, complete with plaster ornamentation and a circle balcony, at 56 Victoria Road in the north-eastern harbourside suburb of Devonport.<sup>45</sup> Hayward purchased the Victoria Theatre in May 1914, just eighteen months after its gala opening by American exhibitor Benwell on 12 October 1912. It is still in use as New Zealand's oldest operating purpose-built cinema, after a refurbishment in 2010.<sup>46</sup> Hayward's also screened films periodically in a vaudeville hall—the Alhambra (later called the Grafton and then the Tivoli, demolished in 1980), at 9–11 (now 42) Karangahape Road in Auckland, one of the city's busiest shopping streets at the time—and operated the 1,300-seat Empire Theatre on Dominion Road, which opened on 14 December 1911.<sup>47</sup>

From 1908 to 1913, Hayward worked closely with West's Pictures to source films for his theatres and the film rental department he soon established. He shared West's apparently profitable preference for highbrow European features, which drew crowds. Hayward's motto, as reported

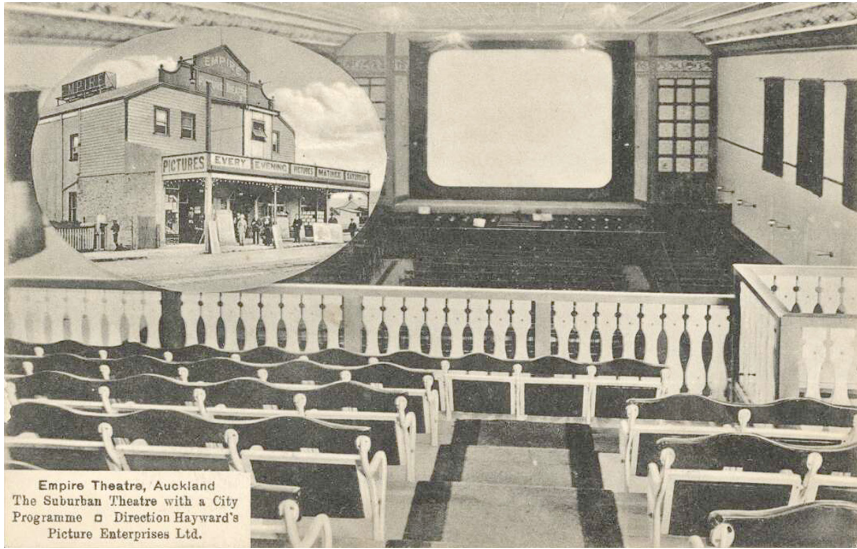


Figure 3.1 Postcard of Hayward's Empire Theatre in Auckland, c.1914.  
 Ref: Eph-A-CINEMA-1914-01, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.  
 Reuse not permitted

as notable foreign film news in the London *Bioscope* in July 1909, was 'Everything new', in the service of which he secured 'weekly batches of the freshest gems of the film manufacturer ... from Europe and America. Mr Hayward aims high, and refinement will be the keynote of his entertainment'.<sup>48</sup> Upon opening the Lyric Theatre in Auckland in November 1911, Hayward's promised its patrons 'the LATEST GEMS direct by mail from LONDON and the CONTINENT. We recognize that OUR SUCCESS depends upon WINNING POPULAR APPROVAL, and there is no surer means of doing this than by presenting ONLY THE VERY BEST, which will be our EARNEST AIM AND ENDEAVOR'.<sup>49</sup> By importing exclusive narrative films from Continental countries with established reputations for theatrical sophistication, Hayward was able to distinguish his cinemas from those of his competitors and transform cinemagoing into a prestigious social experience, even in smaller towns in rural New Zealand.

The effectiveness of West and Hayward's close collaboration is illustrated by the circulation of the two-reel (2,800ft) Pathé-branded SCAGL drama *L'assommoir/Drink*, based on a popular stage version of Émile Zola's 1877 novel about the tragic effects of alcoholism and sexual jealousy in working-class French society. Advertised as part of the 'series of "art studies" ... from Pathé Frères, the well-known Parisian manufacturers'

that West had secured for Australasia in April 1909, *Drink* premiered in Australia on 24 April 1909, at West's Glaciarium in Sydney, then in New Zealand at His Majesty's Theatre in Auckland on 14 June, the print having been delayed in Melbourne for a week longer than planned due to audience demand.<sup>50</sup> Presented under the 'preeminent and incomparable' West's brand, which was returning to Auckland 'after an absence of nearly two years',<sup>51</sup> *Drink* was so popular in Auckland as well that the management had to deviate from its policy of providing 'a complete weekly change of programme ... in deference to many requests from patrons', in order to extend the film's run for an extra three nights, until 23 June.<sup>52</sup> In response to the film's popularity, the arts column 'The Lorgnette' in the Auckland *Observer* noted that West's Pictures' 'combination of high-class pictures and low prices was proving a magnetic attraction'.<sup>53</sup> Billed as holding 'the unbeaten record of being the chief attraction for three consecutive weeks in each [Australian] centre',<sup>54</sup> *Drink* was then screened at West's Pictures in the Town Hall in Wellington, accompanied by De Groen's Viceregal Orchestra, from 3 to 9 July, followed by two more Pathé art films: *Le retour d'Ulysse/The Return of Ulysses* and *La Tosca*, ostensibly starring the legendary Sarah Bernhardt (see Chapter 4).

From Wellington, *Drink* made its way, marketed under the Pathé and Hayward's Pictures brands, to various South Island towns in the autumn of 1909. *Drink* opened with a 2:30pm matinee at His Majesty's Theatre in Christchurch on Saturday, 4 September 1909, where it was touted as 'the longest [picture] yet produced here', and praised for its thrilling realism. As the main attraction, with a thirty-minute runtime, it was preceded by several short films, including *The Thames in Winter and Summer*, *Continental Cities*, *Marvellous Ointment*, *Curing Hiccoughs*, *Up-to-Date Detective*, *Violets*, and *The Chemist's Mistake*.<sup>55</sup> The film was also used as a pedagogical tool for touting the edifying function of the cinema; a competition was held to solicit two-page-long handwritten essays from children in the audience 'on the moral and educational qualities of the pictures', with six prizes being awarded in two categories: children under twelve and those over twelve.<sup>56</sup> While Hayward initially sent his Auckland manager Geoffrey Nye to deliver the film to Christchurch in late August, Hayward personally supervised the screening at His Majesty's, which gives some indication of the event's importance to Hayward.<sup>57</sup> The film stayed in Christchurch for a week, until 10 September, after which Nye took over management of the North Island screenings, while Hayward sent J.A. MacDonald to manage the rest of the film's tour of South Island.<sup>58</sup>

Under the joint sponsorship of Hayward and Member of Parliament and temperance preacher T.E. Taylor, *Drink* appears to have been marketed as much as a morality play as an entertaining drama, but



the French credentials of the cast were still a major selling point. It was screened at the Oddfellows' Hall in Ashburton (sixty miles south of Christchurch) on 13 September, where it was advertised with the names of the cast—'which includes M. Arguilliere and M. Gretillat; also Madame Eugenie Nair and Mlle. Catherine Fontenay, the latter of whom is recognised as one of the beauties of the Parisian stage'<sup>59</sup>—and at the Municipal Opera House in Oamaru (ninety-eight miles south of Ashburton) the next day, where audiences were assured that 'the story is intensely dramatic and interpreted in so skilful a manner by high-class actors and actresses that it needs no dialogue to make its mission thoroughly understandable to all'.<sup>60</sup> One columnist asserted that the film demonstrated 'the wisdom of employing a Frenchman ... for the average Frenchman is a born pantomimist', declaring the picture 'a triumph of art, both from a dramatic and pictorial point of view'.<sup>61</sup> After a second night at the Municipal Opera House in Oamaru, *Drink* was screened at the Theatre Royal in Timaru on 16 and 17 September. Then, after an apparent detour back to North Island, it was shown at His Majesty's Theatre in Dunedin from 27 October to 2 November, and, finally, at the Municipal Theatre in Invercargill from 9 to 11 November 1909.

It seems likely that only one print of the film was in circulation in New Zealand, as no multiple screenings in different towns on the same day can be confirmed from the newspaper record. Instead, the print seems to have been shuttled back and forth between North Island and South Island to accommodate theatre availability. Just three days after the screenings in Timaru, for example, *Drink* was screened in Masterton, 514 miles (by modern highways) north of Timaru, on North Island, on 20 September 1909. Here, the film was still listed as presented by Hayward and Taylor but also by arrangement with T.J. West and under the patronage of the mayor P.L. Hollings. From Masterton, the film visited Pahiatua on 22 September, Hastings on 23 and 24 September, Napier from 25 to 28 September, the Danish settler town of Dannevirke on 29 and 30 September, and then Hawera on the west coast on 14 October, before returning (if only one print was available) to South Island to complete its run.<sup>62</sup> In Hastings, *Drink* was advertised as taking up half the programme; it was accompanied on both evenings by different sets of shorter films, including 'views from Strasburg, *Sunday Holiday*, *From Selonica to Smyrna*, *The Trooper's Bride*, *The Hypnotist*, and *The Magic Album*'.<sup>63</sup> These short films were clearly regarded as interchangeable, while the feature drew the crowds, in this case particularly because of its compelling moral message of temperance.

Despite his initial scepticism, Hayward gradually became a believer in the power of the cinema to change society. One major factor in this regard

was, in Hayward's opinion, the cinema's egalitarianism and democratic appeal. Calling the cinema 'the Cinderella of Entertainments', Hayward recalled how disdainful his peers in the theatre world were of the cinema at first, until

the love of the people themselves, bereft of the guidance of critics ... [took] our Cinema Cinderella from her lowly environment and enthroned her in the most gorgeous Palaces of Entertainment the world has ever known ... But our Cinderella of the Cinema is a Democratic Princess; she is not only to be found in her greatest theatres, [but rather ... ] steals out with her Magic Lamp to illuminate with Happiness the countless humble shows that are star-scattered in every clime and country.<sup>64</sup>

Even more importantly, however, Hayward believed the cinema's mission to be the fostering of cross-cultural understanding. In his memoirs, he explained that 'the cinema brings to the Babel of differences, which afflicts the world with its diverse illusions of religious and racial intolerances, and to its selfish disharmonies born of ignorance, distance and discordant tongues, a message of world unity and brotherhood, which nothing else can'.<sup>65</sup> He regarded cinema's unity in diversity as its greatest asset.

Hayward also played a crucial, though less visible, role in establishing New Zealand's film exhibition sector. As will be discussed below, Hayward Enterprises merged with their fiercest competitor, Fullers' Pictures, in 1913, forming New Zealand Picture Supplies (NZPS), of which Hayward served as president and managing director. The company controlled the largest chain of picture theatres in the country in the 1920s, but had much less success maintaining their distribution arm in the face of pressure from both their larger Australian competitor, Australasian Films, and the even larger Hollywood studios that came to dominate film distribution in Australasia in the interwar period and beyond. NZPS sold off its distribution interests to Australasian Films in 1925 and renamed itself the Fuller-Hayward Theatre Corporation in 1929, but the expenses of retrofitting theatres for sound film combined with the global economic depression forced the company to declare bankruptcy. Undaunted, Hayward founded the Auckland Cinema Co. together with his son Phil in 1929, which he ran until his death, at the age of eighty, in August 1945.<sup>66</sup>

### John Fuller and Sons

One of Hayward's primary competitors, and later his partner in the early New Zealand film exhibition scene, was Londoner John Fuller (1850–1923), who opened the first purpose-built cinema in Auckland: the King's

Theatre on Upper Pitt Street, in 1910. Fuller's origins were as humble as Hayward's and his ambition to climb the socio-economic ladder just as keen. He had been born in Shoreditch on 26 June 1850 to cabinetmaker Benjamin Richard Fuller and Mary Walter, and trained as a printer's compositor. However, blessed with a fine tenor voice, he abandoned his printing career in 1881 to perform with composer Harry Hunter's singing group, the Mohawk Minstrels, in music halls around the British Isles. In 1889, he accepted an invitation to tour Australia with the London Pavilion Company, arriving in Melbourne aboard the *Cuzco* on 3 August 1889, leaving behind his wife of just one year, Emily Matilda Cryer, and his five children by his deceased first wife Harriet Annie Jones. When the London Pavilion Company went bankrupt in January 1890, Fuller was stranded in Sydney. Lacking the funds to return home, he decided to stay and try his luck in the theatre business there. His wife, accompanied by their two youngest children Harriet and John Jr, joined him in Melbourne in July 1891. While Fuller supported the family with various music-hall gigs, John Jr worked as a call boy in J.C. Williamson's Royal Comic Opera Company from 1892 to 1895, a job that trained him for a life that would be spent in the Australasian entertainment business.

The Fuller family decided to settle in New Zealand after Fuller toured there with the Albu sisters in 1893. Recognizing an underexploited entertainment market, Fuller took out a short lease on the Auckland City Hall, where he began hosting 'People's Popular Concerts' together with fourteen-year-old John Jr. They toured the company throughout the main townships of New Zealand before leasing the St James Hall in Auckland to establish a more permanent show. Fuller's second-oldest son, Ben (later Sir Benjamin Fuller), came out from England to join the family in Adelaide in February 1895, where his father had been touring with the Continentals on a season break from People's Popular Concerts in Auckland. His oldest son Walter and daughter Lydia soon followed, arriving in Auckland in April 1895; all of them joined the family entertainment business, which grew to include performance venues in Dunedin and Wellington as well.

As all the Fullers seem to have been musically inclined like their father—Walter was a gifted vocalist and conductor who played several musical instruments, including the mandolin and organ, while Ben played piano and bass—the close connections between live entertainment and early cinema led them into film exhibition early on. Already in 1896, John Fuller Sr formed the Myriorama Company, a travelling magic lantern show, employing John Jr as 'electrinopticon' and Ben as comedian. According to Peter Downes, 'the program featured magic lantern pictures projected onto a large screen, accompanied by a spoken commentary and appropriate songs and instrumental items performed by Fuller and



Figure 3.2 Photograph of Ben Fuller, John Fuller Sr, and John Fuller Jr in the *Otago Witness*, 29 March 1905. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

his family, assisted by occasional guest artists. Around the end of 1898 the Myriorama was slowly replaced by a waxworks show ... [which operated] under the name John Fuller and Sons Melbourne Waxworks and Vaudeville Company.<sup>67</sup> The show was so popular that they opened four locations, in Auckland, Dunedin, Christchurch, and Wellington, gradually phasing out the waxworks in favour of an enhanced vaudeville programme. Ben and John Jr recruited variety and music-hall acts from many countries to ensure a regular circulation of new shows and international guest artists in all four theatres.

Over the course of the 1910s, the Fullers increased their involvement with cinema exhibition from including magic lantern slides in live shows to operating extensive circuits of permanent cinemas. They leased the Princess Theatre in Dunedin in 1905, where they hosted travelling moving picture shows, including Montgomery's Pictures in July 1905 and Perry's Biorama in July 1907. As was common elsewhere in the same period, these programmes were made up of numerous short films interspersed with live musical acts. For the week of 3 July 1907, for example, the programme included several one- to three-minute-long British films, from Cricks & Sharp, Warwick Trading Company, and R.W. Paul, as well as a smattering of pictures from American and Continental makers, including Edison, Méliès, and Lubin, though none of the films were advertised by company name or national origin. These early programmes did not include any star features or many fiction films at all, nor were the films particularly new, many being more than a year old. Still, they attracted steady crowds, and within a few years, the Fullers began operating their own permanent

cinema shows in the Princess Theatre. By 1908, the increasing popularity of moving pictures prompted the Fullers to convert their vaudeville theatres into cinemas, although they maintained a separate travelling vaudeville circuit.

Since the cinema business in New Zealand was highly profitable and minimally regulated for most of the pre-World War I period, competition between exhibitors was fierce, as each cinema owner tried to persuade New Zealanders where to spend their sixpence on a cinema seat. In 1909, both Wellington and Auckland had three large cinema houses each, with another fifty travelling picture shows in operation.<sup>68</sup> Prices to rent exhibition spaces could be extortionate. In August 1909, John Jr reported that West's Pictures had paid £120 to hire Fullers' Dunedin theatre in July of that year, paying £60 for the theatre itself and £60 for the Fullers to close their own cinema for the week, which included a holiday evening. Fuller pointed out that West's could have rented the Garrison Hall in Dunedin, which seated 2,000 people, for £40 a week or His Majesty's Theatre in Christchurch for £30, but he argued that they got a good deal by having access to the 'ready-made patrons of Messrs. Fuller at Dunedin'.<sup>69</sup> In Fuller's view, having several picture theatres was important to ensure that no potential revenue was lost by having to turn away patrons. West's agents in New Zealand agreed that competition between cinemas was a good thing, but noted that many existing theatres, such as the two Fuller mentioned, were unsuited to film exhibition, either due to structural features, such as protruding roof supports, or the necessity of yielding to travelling live shows—for which reason West's had decided to build their own theatres in each major city in the country, with their first theatre in Wellington scheduled to open on 20 January 1910.<sup>70</sup>

Within a few years, the Fullers had to divide responsibility for their growing cinema chain between them: John Sr managed the two Fullers' Theatres in Auckland, which included the Opera House and the King's Theatre, while Ben managed the Alhambra and Princess theatres in Dunedin, Walter took care of their theatre in the Opera House in Christchurch, and John Jr managed their Wellington theatres, including the purpose-built His Majesty's Theatre (today the St James) on Courtenay Place, designed by local architect Henry Eli White, that opened in 1912. John Sr stepped back from cinema management in 1914, making Ben and John Jr joint governing directors of NZPS, but he continued performing, often on his own stage, until his retirement in 1915. He died in Auckland on 9 May 1923, aged seventy-two, and was buried in Auckland General Cemetery in Onehunga. The Fullers eventually expanded their vaudeville circuit to Australia and moved their company headquarters to Sydney, directed first by Ben and then, after Ben volunteered for active service in

1916, by John Jr, which left only Walter to handle the family business in New Zealand.<sup>71</sup> The Fullers continued to be leaders in the Australasian entertainment industry until the 1940s.

Fullers' Pictures' slogan was 'The Warehouse of the World's Wonders', buttressed by the saying, 'The Mirror of Life, both Grave and Gay, the World at Work, and the World at Play. One-half the World knows not how the other half lives. This is true no longer. Fullers' Pictures Show You How the Whole World Lives AND MOVES AND HAS ITS BEING. THEY STAND FOR ALL THAT IS BEST In Progressive Cinematography'.<sup>72</sup> While the slogan reflects the capacity of cinema to expose its viewers to otherwise inaccessible places and experiences, the supporting poem/mantra endorses the same view of the cinema as an equalizing, democratic force that Hayward valued, while also placing a premium on showcasing the latest, best technology and artistically innovative films.

To live up to this high self-imposed standard, Fullers' theatres—like Hayward's—included many European films on their programmes from early on, no doubt in large part because of the dominance of Pathé Frères in the global film export market. Fullers' may also have reached a



Figure 3.3 Photograph of Fullers' Pictures boarding in Nelson advertising the 1910 Ambrosio film *La vergine di Babilonia/The Virgin of Babylon*. Photographer Frederick Nelson Jones, 1881–1962. Negatives of the Nelson district. Ref: 1/1–011836–G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

distribution agreement with Pathé, as reflected in their use of the business name 'Fuller's Cinema Pathé' for their shows at the Theatre Royal in Wellington. (Since Hayward also operated a Pathé Pictures in the same period, these were clearly non-exclusive arrangements.) In February 1909, for example, Fuller's Cinema Pathé offered a programme of many short fiction and non-fiction films, including *China Awakening*, *Life in a Desert*, *The Glorious Zambesi*, and so on. An article in the London *Bioscope* in early July 1909 congratulated the Fullers on 'the uniform merit of the pictures screened, not only regarding their pleasing immunity from flicker, but as regards the subjects, which are well-diversified', featuring such French scenics as *Marseilles*, *A Visit to Versailles*, and *The Carnival at Nice*.<sup>73</sup>

The percentage of European films in Fullers' Pictures' programmes continued to grow between 1907 and 1909. For the week ending 28 July 1909, for example, Fuller's Wide World Pictures at the Princess Theatre in Dunedin presented a highly varied array of films, interspersed with the occasional orchestral or vocal performance, from such Continental makers as Pathé, Gaumont, Itala, and Cines, alongside the British makers Warwick, Urban, and Wrench, with a few films from the American producers Vitagraph and Edison. By 1910, Fullers' seemed to have made a cooperative agreement with West's Pictures, as programmes for the Princess Theatre in this period list T.J. West as director, with John Fuller and Sons as proprietors, and A.M. Miller as business manager.

In the early 1910s, Fullers' screened many European feature films, particularly from Italian makers, but they seemed to be much more comfortable delegating rural screenings to smaller exhibitors than Hayward's had been in 1909. The circulation of the 1911 Cines film *Agrippina* illustrates this pattern. Although just one reel long at a time when multi-reel films were coming into vogue, *Agrippina* featured the well-known actors Amleto Novelli and Maria Caserini in the leading roles and told a gripping ancient tale of intrigue and murder that seems to have qualified it for star picture treatment. *Agrippina* premiered at Fullers' His Majesty's Theatre in Wellington on 21 February, then opened the next day at Fullers' Colosseum in Christchurch as well, which indicates that at least two prints of the film were imported. After only two nights in Auckland, one print moved on to Fullers' Opera House in Whanganui as part of a four-drama programme, accompanied by various other scenic and comic films, then arrived in Wellington, where it was screened in the King's Theatre on 27 and 28 February, while another print was screened in Auckland from 28 February to 1 March, this time at Fullers' King's Theatre on Pitt Street in the Newton neighbourhood. Meanwhile, a third print seems to have stayed in Christchurch for four nights before moving to Fullers' Princess Theatre in Dunedin, where it ran from 27 February

through 1 March, after which it was transferred to Fullers' Zealandia Hall in Invercargill for screenings on 3 and 4 March. Audiences seemed particularly impressed with the film's 'thrill and gore'.<sup>74</sup> After this very brief 'season', Fullers' passed the film on to independent exhibitors, including M'Donald's Perfect Pictures in Oamaru, Thompson-Payne Pictures in Hastings, and Price's Pictures in Feilding. The film played sporadically around the country during the middle of the year, then reappeared as a Christmas special at Fullers' Pictures in Dunedin in December.

Fullers' also jumped on the bandwagon with regard to importing multi-reel European social dramas, which they tended to exhibit exclusively in their own theatres. A prime example of this is the social drama *Balletdanserinden/The Ballet Dancer*, from the Danish Nordisk Co., which starred the up-and-coming Danish actors Asta Nielsen and Valdemar Psilander in a doomed love triangle. The Danish premiere of *The Ballet Dancer* was held on 28 October, but its first screenings in Australia (4 December) and New Zealand (9 December) followed so soon afterwards that prints must have been sent to the Antipodes immediately, although it was only the second of Nielsen's films to make it there. Clement Mason advertised the film for hire in Australia in November, most likely in an attempt to compete with West's, which had obtained exclusive rights to all of Nielsen's German-made films, so Fullers' may have acquired their print from Mason.

Fullers' received the film in time to hold a premiere only a week after the film's Australian release. By contrast, one of West's exclusive Nielsen films from Deutsche Bioscop, *In dem großen Augenblick/The Great Moment*, which premiered in Australia on 3 December 1911, did not open in New Zealand until 2 March 1912, when it opened at West's King's Theatre in Wellington. On 9 December 1911, Fullers' held the premiere of *The Ballet Dancer* in the Olympia Skating Rink in Wellington, dubbed 'Wellington's Coziest Picture House', and advertised the film as a 'Great Exclusive Production ... The Rage of London and Paris. Absolutely one of the Finest Productions ever introduced into New Zealand.'<sup>75</sup> As in Australia, Nielsen was often described (inaccurately) as a well-known French artist, which illustrates the cultural cachet that French actors continued to enjoy several years after the circulation of French art films like *Drink*. After Wellington, *The Ballet Dancer* circulated through Fullers' South Island cinemas, first in Nelson as a Christmas attraction, then at the Opera House in Christchurch from 1 to 6 January,<sup>76</sup> the King's Theatre in Dunedin from 8 to 13 January, then in Zealandia Hall in Invercargill on 15 and 16 January. From 29 January to 3 February, the film played at Fullers' Opera House in Auckland, from whence it made its way through various North Island towns, including Palmerston North (7 February) and Whanganui (8–10 February).



## The MacMahon Brothers

Even with multiple Hayward's and Fullers' cinemas, audience demand regularly outstripped supply in this period. The Auckland *Star* reported on 18 April 1910, for example, that although West's–Hayward's Pictures, in the Royal Albert Hall, had been so well attended the previous Saturday night that 'the auditorium was densely packed, and anyone arriving after the overture could not even get standing room', Fullers' Wide World Pictures in the Opera House had also been favoured by a 'huge audience', while the nearby Bijou Theatre, operated by Palace Pictures, also 'attracted large and highly pleased audiences' the same day.<sup>77</sup> Clearly, New Zealanders were eager consumers of this new media, which suggested that the industry still had room for ambitious entrepreneurs like the three MacMahon brothers—James (Jimmy, 1858–1915), Charles (1861–1917), and Joseph (1862–1918)—who had been involved in the Australian film industry before entering the New Zealand market.

Like Henry Hayward, the MacMahons, from Sandhurst, Victoria, got their professional start as theatrical managers, but they also recognized the potential of moving pictures early on. In addition to introducing the Edison Kinetoscope and running the Salon Cinématographe in Sydney in the mid-1890s, Joseph MacMahon was also one of the first people to screen moving pictures in New Zealand, demonstrating, as mentioned above, an R.W. Paul Theatrescope in Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin in late 1896 with six daily showings of twelve films lasting less than a minute each.<sup>78</sup> The MacMahons toured throughout New Zealand with travelling cinema shows sporadically from the late 1890s onward and exhibited films in the Sydney Lyceum in 1897–99. They continued to work in the theatre industry during the early 1900s, but Charles also made two silent feature films: the 5,000ft drama *Robbery Under Arms* that featured vaudeville star Jim Gerald as an Aboriginal protagonist, and the 2,000ft literary adaptation *For the Term of His Natural Life*.<sup>79</sup> While both films were very successful in Australia, the MacMahon brothers decided to get involved in film exhibition and distribution in New Zealand in mid-1911, opening the New Theatre (renamed the Princess in the 1920s and demolished in 1975) on Manners Street in Wellington.

Despite their later entry into the market than their two main competitors and the relative brevity of their involvement, the MacMahons quickly distinguished themselves with an innovative, small cinema circuit that followed the model of cheap, continuous shows pioneered in Australia by J.D. Williams. At the New Theatre, shows ran from 11am until 11pm every day except Sunday, featuring a mix of dramas, comedies, and actualities, for just sixpence for adults and threepence for children. While many of

the shorter films were American productions, from Edison and Vitagraph, among others, the features tended to be Continental. During the week beginning 9 October 1911, for example, the main attraction at the New Theatre was the Nordisk drama *Den farlige alder/The Price of Beauty*, touted as a 'Wonderful Picture Story, Wholesome, Pure, and Possessing those Attributes which will at once Command the Unstinted Appreciation and evoke the sympathies of all. THE STAGING of this Exquisite Photo-Play is really BEYOND DESCRIPTION'.<sup>80</sup> The following week, the New Theatre offered another Nordisk picture, *Temptations of a Great City*, which promised to 'create a POSITIVE SENSATION in Wellington, as it did in both Sydney and Melbourne. A VERITABLE TRIUMPH in moving pictures. Beautiful women and heroic men'.<sup>81</sup> After establishing themselves in Wellington, the MacMahons expanded their operations to Auckland, where, in November 1910, Benwell's American Pictures had opened a continuous picture show. However, its location, in the old Federal Hall on Wellesley Street West, was apparently too far from regular foot traffic to attract patrons and the business folded quickly. A year later, on 25 November 1911, the MacMahons opened their own continuous show in the new Queen's Theatre, which was much more successful.<sup>82</sup>

As the film industry in Australasia grew, it moved towards consolidation, putting pressure on individual exhibitors like the MacMahons. In December 1912, the brothers sold the leases on both of their cinemas to the newly formed Dominion Picture Theatres Co. distribution syndicate, which they had established with financier T. Mandeno Jackson, in exchange for 1,700 shares each in the company.<sup>83</sup> Dominion soon built a new, 1,400-seat dual-purpose cinema-vaudeville house in Auckland, on the site occupied by Goodson's Arcade in Queen Street, that came to be called the Princess Theatre, 'the most luxurious continuous picture theatre in the Southern Hemisphere'.<sup>84</sup> The MacMahons stayed on with Dominion as theatre managers until early 1913, when Charles left for London and James moved to Sydney to act as Dominion's agent, leaving Joseph in charge of the Queen's Theatre.

The MacMahons maintained close connections with Australasian distributors and European producers, which kept the film industry in New Zealand up to date. On 14 May 1913, *Referee* reported that Charles, described as 'one of the leading New Zealand "moving picture" men', had witnessed the release of *Quo Vadis?* while on a film-buying trip in London, five weeks before its Australian premiere on 10 May, but that he had also seen 'at several first-class picture houses many films that had been presented both by the Fullers and ourselves, in New Zealand, a year ago'.<sup>85</sup> Between buying trips, Charles returned to Auckland frequently and managed the company's arrangements with distributors, such as the Fraser Film

Supply Company with whom he entered into an agreement for a biweekly series of 'the very latest photo-plays produced by the world's picture firms' in February 1915.<sup>86</sup> However, the fact that MacMahon's New Theatre was screening Nordisk's melodrama *Temptations of a Great City*, which they had first launched in New Zealand four years before, as their star picture (albeit described as a 'reissue') at the same time as the deal was announced suggests that the company keenly needed assistance in keeping up to date.

Charles returned to Sydney from London in September 1913, bringing with him a trunk full of moving pictures 'designed for New Zealand', including the 'Miracle Play' *Das Mirakel/Sister Beatrix*, a 4,000ft spectacle made by Berlin-based Continental Kunstfilm in October 1912.<sup>87</sup> The German film version was an unauthorized adaptation of Karl Vollmöller's 1911 play *The Miracle*, which had been staged by Austrian director Max Reinhardt at London's Olympia Exhibition Hall from December 1911 to March 1912 as a massive pantomime with fifteen principal players, 1,000 minor players, a 200-piece orchestra, and a 500-person chorus. A British version of the film, *The Miracle*, directed by Michel Carré and featuring most of the principal cast, was produced in December 1912, but it had to fight several court battles against Continental Films' version, which seems to be the one that MacMahon brought back to Australia with him. Despite the published announcement that the films were intended for New Zealand, *Sister Beatrix* appears to have been screened only in Australia, opening at the Imperial Picture Theatre in Sydney on 20 December 1913 and running in Melbourne, Lithgow, and elsewhere until late January 1914. Four years later, *Sister Beatrix* was revived under the name *The Church and the Nun* by an enterprising exhibitor, David Ogilvie, of New Farm, Brisbane, in an attempt to compete with the Raymond Longford film *The Church and the Woman*, but a court injunction prevented it from being widely screened under the new title.<sup>88</sup>

Unfortunately, the MacMahons' involvement in the trans-Tasman film industry was cut short by the brothers' untimely deaths. All three brothers died within a few years of each other, in their mid-fifties. Both James and Charles died of pneumonia—James in Sydney on 29 April 1915 at age fifty-seven, Charles in Melbourne on 27 June 1917 at age fifty-six—while Joseph died from influenza in Auckland in November 1918 at age fifty-five. James MacMahon's obituary in the *Barrier Miner* noted that 'he and his two brothers at one time made big attempts to rank with the big firms of Australia but did not succeed. New Zealand was 'specially good to the M'Mahon brothers'.<sup>89</sup> Joe's obituary three and a half years later assured readers that all three brothers would be 'affectionately remembered by many friends as bright, original, and lovable men'.<sup>90</sup> All three retained the services of solicitor Richard Arnold Singer in Auckland

to distribute their assets. While Joseph left his £350 estate to his wife Violet,<sup>91</sup> Charles left his entire estate, consisting primarily of plays and a £500 life insurance policy, to his long-time partner, the actor Marie Adelaide Veronica Dietrichson, known professionally as May Grenville.<sup>92</sup>

### An Era of Consolidation

Within five years of Henry Hayward's decision to enter the cinema business in New Zealand, film had grown from a novelty to a staple of the country's entertainment industry. Seating capacity in Auckland increased by over 10,000 between 1911 and 1913, testifying to the explosive growth of consumer demand. By mid-1913, Auckland, with an urban population of approximately 120,000, had at least thirteen picture theatres—six in the city, four of which were continuous shows, and seven in the suburbs, with a total nightly seating capacity of 10,850—with three more under construction.<sup>93</sup> In July 1913, the *New Zealand Herald* reported that 'fully 5000 people attend the picture theatres in Auckland every day, or 35,000 each week, including the Saturday matinee. This represents an expenditure of over £1000 weekly on this form of amusement.'<sup>94</sup> Wellington, with about 80,000 inhabitants, also had six urban cinemas in 1913, four of which were continuous picture shows: the King's Theatre, Star Theatre, Empress Theatre, the New Theatre, Shortt's Theatre, and the People's Picture Palace.<sup>95</sup> With 130 picture theatres across the Dominion, serving 420,000 patrons per week, there was ample scope for ambitious, innovative cinema entrepreneurs and lucrative rewards for exhibitors who were able to attract the most patrons with the best films. In New Zealand in mid-1913, the standard price for a new release was fourpence per foot, bringing the cost per full-evening programme to approximately £160; the average Auckland cinema took in between £200 and £250 per week, an amount that could frequently be tripled when a star picture was on the programme.<sup>96</sup>

The large number of cinemas and limited number of top-tier films generated intense competition between exhibitors to get the most popular films to their cinemas around the country in a rapid manner. This pressure kept exhibition schedules very tight and limited a given film's profitability. Henry Hayward's nephew, the director Rudall Hayward, later recalled of this early period,

Everybody could buy the films and did so ... You knew that Fuller's had the same films as the Haywards had and so the great thing was to try and get your films through the country as quickly as possible to get ahead of the opposition. A programme of films would be made up in Auckland and immediately it finished its [weekly] season ... it

would be split up and half of it would be sent to Wanganui and half to New Plymouth or Napier and in that manner they hoped to get ahead of the Fullers.<sup>97</sup>

To eliminate duplication costs and gain more control of the distribution market, Fullers' Pictures and Hayward Enterprises joined forces in April 1913, following the example of their Australian counterparts. The exhibition arm of the business became Fuller-Hayward Theatres, with Fullers' vaudeville acts continuing on a separate circuit,<sup>98</sup> while the associated film distribution arm was called New Zealand Picture Supplies Ltd (NZPS), which would dominate film distribution in New Zealand, with near-monopoly control, for more than a decade. Since John Fuller had retired in 1911, Henry Hayward became president and managing director of the company, with Ben, John, and Walter Fuller, Percy Herman, E.J. Righton, Hector Cameron, Laurie Quinn, and Hayward's son Phil on the board of directors.

At its peak, NZPS controlled sixty-eight cinemas, employed more than 800 New Zealanders, and enjoyed a weekly attendance of more than 250,000 patrons—as the atheist Hayward noted rather smugly, 'more than that of the combined churches of all denominations of N.Z.'—and spent at least £30,000 per year on advertising alone, which the company's gross weekly turnover in excess of £10,000 rendered money well spent.<sup>99</sup> In 1925, given the dramatically increased presence of American film companies in the distribution market after World War I, Hayward relinquished the company's declining film distribution arm to Australasian Films and retained control only of Fuller-Hayward Theatres. The global financial crisis of the late 1920s took a severe toll on the entertainment industry, causing Fuller-Hayward Theatres' receipts to drop by 45%. This decline turned the company's average annual profit of 8% (roughly £50,000) into a 37%, five-figure loss; Hayward's personal savings 'vanished like mist before the morning sun' and although the company took out £100,000 in loans to try to remain solvent, it ultimately went into foreclosure.<sup>100</sup> In 1929, Hayward and his son Phil formed the cinema chain Auckland Cinemas Ltd, which he described as 'only a miniature company compared with the one we left', but which kept Hayward involved in the cinema business until his death in 1945.

In the years between the amalgamation and the end of World War I, however, Fuller-Hayward Pictures enjoyed success after success with their imported European features. In mid-1913, NZPS entered into an expensive distribution agreement with the Combine designed to ensure access to exclusive films, in particular big-budget French and Italian productions. The amalgamation deal was announced in local newspapers on 15 July 1913:

The well-known firms of 'Hayward's Picture Enterprises, Ltd.' and 'Messrs. John Fuller and Sons,' have amalgamated with the 'General Film Company of Australasia,' which comprises the following firms: 'West's Pictures, Ltd.,' 'Spencer's Ltd., Melbourne and Sydney,' 'The Greater J.D. Williams,' 'The Amalgamated Picture Co.,' 'Gaumont Co.,' 'Pathe Freres, Paris and Sydney,' and 'The Australian Film Co.' It has cost the two New Zealand firms abovementioned £35,000 to enter into a 3 years' agreement with 'The General Film Co. of Australasia' for the sole rights for New Zealand of the world's leading makers, totally apart from the large purchases of films weekly. In order to continue in the picture business, and to be in a position to present the masterpieces which will shortly be forthcoming, we have also had to enter into an agreement for 3 years for the sole and exclusive rights for Hawera of all pictures purchased and handled by the Amalgamated Companies, and it is with satisfaction and pride that shortly we shall be able to present to our patrons THE WORLD FAMOUS PICTURES, *QUO VADIS*, as recently performed before Their Majesties King George and the Queen at the Royal Albert Hall, London, and Victor Hugo's Sublime Masterpiece, *Les Misérables*, full notice of which will appear in due course.<sup>101</sup>

The expected revenues of such high-profile features justified the enormous cost of this agreement, which paid for itself amply.

As advertised, Fuller's and Hayward's theatres screened the Cines historical epic *Quo Vadis*? almost without interruption across New Zealand for eleven months—from 7 July 1913, when it started an unprecedented two-week run at the King's Theatre in Auckland, until 6 May 1914, when it ran for three nights at the Theatre Royal in Nelson, plus a few sporadic screenings in June and July 1914. The film was so popular that runs had to be extended repeatedly in various cities and revival showings organized a few months after the initial runs. In Dunedin on South Island, for example, the film was screened for two weeks in late August at Hayward's Octagon Theatre and then brought back for a week-long revival at Fullers' Princess Theatre in December 1913. Given that one-fifth of the city's population was said to attend a picture show every week, as many as three-fifths of the city's inhabitants may have seen this particular film.<sup>102</sup> Similarly, Pathé's massive, three-hour production *Les Misérables*, for which West's had acquired exclusive rights that were then shared with NZPS, circulated for an entire year to great acclaim. It was screened for the first time in New Zealand at Fullers' King's Theatre in Auckland on 14 June 1913, about two months after its Australian premiere, and for the last time at the Lyric Theatre in Nelson on 16 June 1914.

Even after the outbreak of war, European features—particularly from Italy—continued to be popular, lucrative imports in New Zealand, though with greater delays before their New Zealand release. Released in Italy and the USA in mid-1914, Itala's historical epic *Cabiria*, based on a screenplay by celebrated Italian writer Gabriele d'Annunzio, was imported to Australia in early 1915 by entrepreneur Hugh McIntosh, who leased it to NZPS for 'far and away the highest price ever given for a picture attraction' in New Zealand.<sup>103</sup> However, while *Cabiria* opened in Australia on 3 April 1915, it didn't open in New Zealand until more than a year later. Some newspapers speculated that the film had been held in 'cold storage' in order to be released in direct competition with the American film *The Birth of a Nation* by D.W. Griffith, which was being distributed in New Zealand by J.C. Williamson Ltd.<sup>104</sup> It finally opened on 17 July 1916 at West's King's Theatre in Wellington, advertised as 'the motion picture marvel of the age, the mightiest spectacle ever conceived in the brain of man'.<sup>105</sup>

*Cabiria* was popular for both its aesthetic and historical qualities. When Hayward's screened *Cabiria* in Hastings in September 1916, advertising explicitly connected the film's depiction of the Second Punic War with the carnage of World War I, in which almost 100,000 New Zealanders—almost one-tenth of the country's population—were serving overseas in uniform. Repeating twice the judgement, 'IT IS REALLY GREAT', the ad goes on to explain that, after watching *Cabiria*, 'your ideas of greatness in motion pictures will undergo a change. The height of perfection as understood by all of us now is LOW compared to what it will be after seeing *Cabiria*. In your minds is a certain standard, up to which you've been educated in KINEMATOGRAPH WORK. That standard is going to be elevated and will rise to heights hitherto undreamt of'.<sup>106</sup> *Cabiria* stayed in circulation in New Zealand for nearly a year and a half, concluding with a screening in Waipukurau, south-west of Hastings, on 28 November 1917.<sup>107</sup>



In the pre-World War I era, the cinema industries of Australia and New Zealand were closely intertwined, with distributors and exhibitors operating in both countries and cooperating across the Tasman Sea. With ever-growing consumer demand and a rich array of films on offer from countries across Europe, as well as Britain and the USA, it was an exciting and profitable time to be a cinema showman in New Zealand. The country's unique receptivity to foreign impulses seems to have made it easy for cinemagoers to embrace films from all over the world, while the way those films connected viewers to the rest of the world—both through on-screen

depictions of foreign places and by virtue of their transnational nature—contributed to shaping New Zealand’s own cultural identity.

The diversity of the Australasian cinema market in this period, before the production and import restrictions occasioned by World War I and the aggressive expansion of corporatized American producers rendered it nearly homogeneous, was closely tied to the settler-colonial demographics of the societies of Australia and New Zealand. The energetic contributions of globally connected cinema entrepreneurs like Clement Mason, Cosens Spencer, T.J. West, J.D. Williams, Henry Hayward, the Fullers, and the MacMahons fostered the development of a consistently culturally varied array of films in Australasian cinemas in the pre-war period, which gave audiences the chance to imagine and vicariously experience different ways of dressing, behaving, interacting, and living.

By offering a window onto the world far away from the Antipodes, silent film from many countries provided key cultural input into the processes of cultural identity construction that both countries underwent in the first decades of the twentieth century, as they renegotiated their political, economic, and cultural relationships with Great Britain, the United States, and Continental Europe. In the next section of this book, individual chapters will look more closely at the five European film cultures that were, thanks to the above-mentioned cinema entrepreneurs and their transnational networks, most prominently represented in Australasian cinemas prior to World War I—French, Italian, Danish/Swedish, and German—in order to better understand what kind of cultural input these films provided, and how Australasian audiences responded to the cultural narratives and values they carried with them.

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*Part II*

European Film on Australasian Screens  
through 1917



## ‘THEIR WORK STANDS SUPREME’

### Pathé Frères, Sarah Bernhardt, and French Art Films

In Australasia as elsewhere, French companies took the lead in producing both cinema technology and early films. From the brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière to Georges Méliès, Charles Pathé, and Léon Gaumont, French film pioneers were instrumental in shepherding film into the public sphere between 1895 and 1914, from providing the earliest short films shown as a technological novelty in fairgrounds and nickelodeons to spearheading the emergence of art films around 1908 and the rise of the multi-reel feature film in 1910–11. Although both short films from Gaumont, created in large part by the world’s first female film director Alice Guy, and Méliès’s whimsical fantasy (*féerie*) films were popular in Australia in the first few years of the twentieth century, the first French film company to establish itself as a major player on the Australasian market was Pathé Frères (hereafter Pathé), which dominated the global cinema market so completely in the first decade of the twentieth century that film historian Georges Sadoul has dubbed 1903–09 the ‘age of Pathé’.<sup>1</sup> In this same period, the French cinema industry underwent a fundamental transformation marked by the adoption of mass production techniques, the prioritization of fiction films over actualities, and the expansion of international markets that drove interest in Australasia. With Pathé in the lead, French film companies became major providers of narrative films to Australasian cinema programmes between 1908 and 1915, facilitating the emergence of networks of permanent cinemas in both urban and rural areas throughout Australia and New Zealand.

Through its extensive distribution networks and skilful marketing of crossover French theatrical stars, Pathé played a decisive part in securing significant Australasian market share for European silent films in the pre-World War I period. Pathé was one of the first film companies to attain brand-name recognition throughout Australia and New Zealand, with its red rooster trademark becoming a trusted mark of quality already by 1905. In an April 1910 ad, West's Pictures in Sydney declared, 'Pathe Freres are recognized the World over as the Greatest of all Cinematographic Experts. THEIR WORK STANDS SUPREME—ALONE'.<sup>2</sup> Dozens of one-reel Pathé story films played in Australasian cinemas in the first decade of the twentieth century, increasingly supplemented by multi-reel films from 1911 onward. In addition to exporting its own films, Pathé handled the Australasian distribution of films from an array of European producers, including Éclair, Éclipse, Cines, Itala, and Swedish Biograph. Cultivating an early version of the star system that would become widespread in the 1910s, Pathé built on audience enthusiasm for French theatre stars, from Sarah Bernhardt to Mistinguett and Charles Le Bargy, as a means of marketing its films and ensuring fan loyalty. Pathé's rival Gaumont, although only about one-third the size of Pathé, was also active in Australia, primarily as a retailer for projectors and cinema equipment, but also as a distributor of its own and other European films, which included several films directed by pioneering female film-maker Alice Guy for Gaumont, such as *Le piano irrésistible/The Irresistible Piano*, *Une héroïne de quatre ans/The Four-Year-Old Heroine*, and Guy's innovative hand-coloured 2,500ft *La vie du Christ/The Life of Christ*.

Pathé's direct involvement in the Australian market, and its path-breaking role as a conduit for European film travelling to Australasia, provides important context for the kinds of French films that made it to the Antipodes in this era and how they were received. As this chapter will show, French *films d'art*, from *L'assassinat du duc de Guise/The Assassination of the Duke of Guise* to *Les Misérables*, were enormously popular in Australia and New Zealand, usually playing for more than a year in urban and rural cinemas and earning the effusive praise of local critics. The outsize role that French crossover theatre stars, most notably the 'divine' Sarah Bernhardt, played in the success of French art films warrants an in-depth analysis of the reception of Bernhardt's films, which span the entire period 1908 to 1917, and encapsulate the changing parameters of European film circulation down under. Finally, the eagerness of European producers to capitalize on the turn towards multi-reel features between 1911 and 1914 gave them an initial advantage on the Australasian market, which led to fierce competition between French film companies and their Italian and Nordic rivals—as the tag-team screenings of *Les Misérables* and *Quo Vadis?* in 1913 made visible.



## Paving the Way: Pathé in Australasia

Understanding Pathé’s pivotal role in the early Australasian cinema market, particularly between 1908 and 1912, and the boost it gave European film in the region requires some basic familiarity with Pathé’s corporate history, in particular the company’s willingness and ability to innovate rapidly as the global cinema market developed. Founded in Paris in 1896 by Charles Pathé and his brother Émile to sell phonographs and kinetoscopes for amusement parks, Pathé had established itself as the undisputed leader in the global circulation of film by the beginning of the twentieth century. Pathé began mass producing films—documentaries, *actualités*, and fiction films—by 1901 and soon occupied a dominant position in the global cinema market, leading to the company’s golden age from 1903 to 1909. Pathé invented intertitles in 1902, shifted from hand-colouration of prints to mechanized stencil-colouring in 1905, and, by industrializing what had previously been a more artisanal system, produced an enormous amount of film: around 40,000 metres of positive film stock per day by 1906. Using a ‘director-unit’ system of production, each specializing in a single film subject or genre—such as trick films, realist dramas, chase films, and sentimental dramas—Pathé was able to produce films quickly and cheaply, for less than half the cost per metre of the films produced by Méliès, for example. From 1907 until World War I, Pathé was the largest film producer in the world, making itself and its investors a fortune. In December 1911, *Pathé’s Weekly* announced that Pathé was responsible for producing one-seventh of the global output of films, an aggregate of 1,040 million feet. In April 1912, it reported that Pathé’s turnover had increased that year by £240,000, from £1,680,000 to £1,920,000.<sup>3</sup>

Pathé recognized early on that distribution and foreign exports were key to profitability. Given its low expense ratio, Pathé only needed to sell twelve copies of a fiction film to break even, but due to its monopoly control of more than 90% of French fairground cinemas, actual sales were usually thirty times that number. By the early 1900s, Pathé was selling films to Denmark, Italy, the UK, and the USA in vast quantities, averaging seventy-five copies each of a dozen titles per week, making up between one-third and one-half of all films shown in the USA in 1906.<sup>4</sup> Pathé pursued a campaign of aggressive global expansion between 1904 and 1908 to capitalize on this momentum, particularly once the establishment of permanent cinema houses separated distribution from exhibition more decisively. Building on established currents of cultural circulation between Europe, the Americas, Asia, and the Pacific, Pathé opened a chain of distribution offices, first in major cities in Europe and the United States, then expanding into South America, South East Asia, Africa, and Australia in

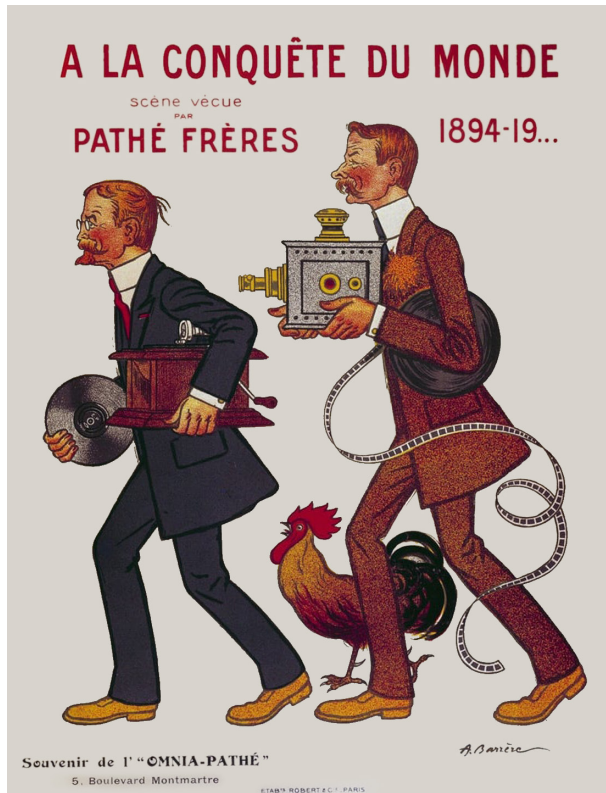


Figure 4.1 Pathé Frères publicity poster, 1898. Designer: Adrien Barrère.  
Wikimedia Commons

1907–08, operating a total of forty-one affiliates worldwide in 1914.<sup>5</sup> By 1907, Pathé films were being regularly seen by 300 million people around the world, including Australasian audiences.<sup>6</sup> Confirming Pathé’s prominence, the Melbourne *Argus* drew its readers’ attention in January 1909 to ‘the red rooster whose dumb crowing heralds the majority of the moving pictures shown in Melbourne’.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to the then-usual practice of selling films to retailers at a certain price per metre, Pathé’s shift to a rental model in mid-1907—following the example of the small German production house Duskes (see Chapter 7)—was instrumental in accelerating the global movement of films. Although Pathé’s primary aim seems to have been to eliminate independent film distribution in France by renting its films directly to exhibitors as an exclusive product, this strategy had significant impact far beyond France.<sup>8</sup> The new rental system created a highly competitive global market that allowed producers to retain more control over the exploitation

of their own products, while also enabling exhibitors to respond more quickly to audience preferences, retaining popular films for longer runs and dropping unpopular ones.

It also spurred various attempts to monopolize market control and screen access through trusts, primarily the Motion Pictures Patent Company (MPPC) in the USA, which excluded nearly all foreign makers, and a corresponding unsuccessful attempt by thirty British and European producers to establish an association to protect the interests of the European film industry. Pathé was a crucial player in both schemes—as a member of the MPPC through its American exchange, which gave it much greater access to American theatres than its European competitors enjoyed, and as one of the primary reasons the proposed European trust never came about.<sup>9</sup> Still, membership in the MPPC did not insulate Pathé from increasingly strident nativist sentiment about the unsuitability of 'foreign films' for American audiences, which disparaged Pathé's films as a dangerous, corrupting influence and advocated shrinking Pathé's once-dominant share of the US film market.<sup>10</sup>

As the lucrative American market raised barriers to foreign film imports, Australasia welcomed them with open arms, particularly the longer, more ambitious narrative films that American exhibitors scorned. A combination of high consumer demand and insufficient domestic production made the Antipodes an attractive target for British, American, and European producers and resulted in highly international cinema programmes throughout the silent era, particularly prior to World War I. While British producers such as Hepworth Picture Plays, Cricks & Martin/Cricks & Sharp, and R.W. Paul dominated the market early on, Pathé was one of the first non-British film companies to establish a strong presence in Australasia, beginning with the inclusion of Pathé films in J.C. Williamson's Christmas pantomime programme in December 1896, leading to many Pathé-branded cinemas and programmes, and giving French film a starring role in the shift from mobile cinemas to permanent cinema palaces that took place between 1906 and 1912.

Newspaper ads for Pathé phonographs began appearing in Australia in late 1904 and in New Zealand by early 1906, but since few early films were marketed as brand-name products, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly which Pathé films were featured in early mobile cinemas. Among the first films explicitly branded as Pathé products in Australia was *Épopée napoléonienne/Napoleon Bonaparte*, a 550ft (half a reel, about seven minutes long) drama produced in 1903. It was screened at the Academy of Music in Launceston, Tasmania in November 1905, where it was lauded as 'one of the most wonderful conceptions ever contrived through the medium of the biograph'.<sup>11</sup> More typically, the Pathé film *Au bagne/Scenes of Convict Life*, which is an excellent example of Pathé's meticulous sets and visual homogeneity, was screened

periodically in Australia between 1906 and 1913, but without attribution to any company.<sup>12</sup> The simple, short Pathé dramas *La gardeuse de moutons/The Shepherdess* (720ft) and *L'officier pauvre/The Poor Officer* (670ft) were both screened in cinemas, permanent and temporary, across Australia for almost a year in 1908–09, nearly always without mention of their national origin or maker. This was typical for the time across film brands—the Gaumont chase comedy *L'homme aimanté/The Magnetic Man* also featured in mixed programmes put on by independent and travelling cinemas, including the Salvation Army Bioscope and West's Brescians, between September 1907 and July 1908, but was never identified as a Gaumont production.

Pathé was well known as a film machinery brand in Australasian media at this point, but its name was primarily mentioned in connection with films as their supplier, rather than as their producer, e.g. ads touting 'all new pictures just to hand from Pathé Frères, Paris', which could include films from many different makers.<sup>13</sup> Mixed programmes were sometimes presented in Pathé-branded cinemas, such as the Pathé Bio-animatograph in Ballarat (Vic), but most often in independent theatres as one of many attractions. As the company's name recognition as a production house increased, Pathé programmes in particular and French film in general began to acquire a reputation for quality and exclusivity. In April 1907, for example, the King's Theatre in Fremantle (WA) promoted its upcoming presentation of the 'Parisian Bioscope', which had just

reached Western Australia by the R.M.S. India, and will open at the King's Theatre, Fremantle, next Saturday evening, April 20. It is claimed that the machine and pictures are of the very latest and direct from Pathé Frères, Paris. The subjects are said to be entirely new and to embrace a varied series of life-motion pictures, which will be shown for the first time in Australasia. The pictures, it is stated, were personally selected by the management, after trials at Pathé Frères' Paris studio and, it is stated, no expense was spared to get together the very best that money could procure.<sup>14</sup>

Although no individual films are named, the ad's emphasis on the careful selection of the films by the management, their cost, and their direct connection to Paris underscores how Pathé's brand evoked sophistication and style. As exhibitors like Spencer's and West's established first cinema circuits and then metropolitan cinema palaces in 1907 and 1908, they came to rely on the prestige of Pathé-made and -branded films as representative of sophisticated Continental attractions.

Pathé Frères became likely the first foreign film company to establish a distribution agency in Australasia, when it tasked Leopold Sutto with

opening an office in Melbourne in 1908, at 50 Queen Street, followed in 1910 by another in Sydney, at 73 York Street. The grand opening of the latter, at which the 650ft stencil-coloured film *Pygmalion* was screened, was attended by numerous public officials, the French consul, Members of Parliament, and the heads of Sydney's theatrical and cinema businesses, as the local French newspaper, *Le Courrier Australien*, reported with pride.<sup>15</sup> From these two offices, Pathé distributed films throughout the region, many of them marked with Pathé's rooster. Company records are sparse, but based on currently digitized newspaper ads, the number of French films released in Australasia (and publicly associated with Pathé) jumped from at least eighteen in 1908 to over fifty each in 1909 and 1910. These films included gazettes, documentaries, and short historical, dramatic, and comedic productions, including such 1909 art films as *La tour de Nesle/The Tower of Nesle* (1,246ft), based on Alexandre Dumas père's 1832 play, and *La Grande Bretèche* (950ft), based on Honoré de Balzac's 1831 story. Both films circulated under their French titles for two years in Australia, with somewhat shorter runs in New Zealand.

Neither Australasian nor French film history has paid much attention to Pathé's activities in the Antipodes, but the ubiquity of French films on Australasian screens before World War I makes it clear that Pathé was a major player in that market during a time of rapid change and experimentation to determine best practices, nearly a decade before American companies established their own Australasian offices. David Robinson points out that 'the story of Pathé's short-lived Australian empire is one of the most intriguing and least documented areas of the company's history ... Far away from the head office, from Europe and from the United States, the Antipodean branches were able to pursue policies that often appear idiosyncratic and out of line with official Paris operations.'<sup>16</sup> Pathé's successful imports proved that the Australasian cinema market was receptive to European films and established both production house brand and theatrical star promotion as markers of film quality there, several years before they became ubiquitous elsewhere. Pathé's Australian offices handled hundreds of Continental films and helped train a generation of Australasian film industry professionals, including director Franklyn Barrett (1873–1964); Stanley Crick (1888–1955), who would manage Fox Film's Australian arm from 1919 to 1938; and Leslie J. Keast (1886–1957), who got his start in Pathé's Melbourne office, then worked for J.D. Williams in Adelaide before becoming director of the Feature Film Department of Australasian Films in Victoria in early 1920 and founding his own distribution firm, Cinema Art Films, in 1926 (see Chapter 10).

The most detailed source of information on Pathé's policies and tactics in Australasia is *Pathé's Weekly, the Australasian Bulletin of Cinematography*,

which began publication in December 1910.<sup>17</sup> Printed on thin blue paper in crowded type, it includes ads, jokes, European news, fashion notes, and show-business announcements from around the region, but according to Robinson, 'the primary business of the *Australasian Bulletin of Cinematography* was of course to boost the company; and on closer analysis the contents, while convincingly purporting to be a magazine of general interest, prove to employ very modern and sophisticated techniques of image-building and rival-knocking'.<sup>18</sup> One example of this, in which Pathé disparages American films in order to promote Continental product, is an article in 1911 reporting that Australian audiences were tiring of 'the Indian and Cowboy atrocities' and preferred instead a superior class of picture such as the Pathécolor drama *The Siege of Calais*, which opened in Australia at West's in Adelaide on 18 December 1911, a few days before its Paris premiere at the Omnia Pathé on 22 December.<sup>19</sup> *Pathé's Weekly* was also outspoken in its opposition to government regulation, customs duties, and censorship. With regard to the morality of the cinema, the paper declared, 'The public is ever the best judge, and if the picture play offended, very just retribution would quickly follow', while predicting that customs duties would bring the 'picture business ... to a disastrous end'.<sup>20</sup> Until World War I, local police offices handled most film censorship issues, but, judging by public enthusiasm for most of the Continental films Pathé imported in this period, audiences were rarely offended by them, which allowed exhibitors to import them freely.

While it defended the merits of imported films, Pathé was disdainful of domestic Australian production, arguing that Australian firms could neither make the same quality of films as their international competitors nor produce them cheaply enough to be globally competitive.<sup>21</sup> Pathé produced some films of its own in Australia and New Zealand, including the documentary *Living Sydney* (1910) and a ten-minute *Pathé's Animated Gazette (Australasian Edition)* that came out each week, beginning on 28 November 1910—the same year it debuted in the UK, a year before the launch of the Pathé newsreel in the USA and nearly two years before the launch of its local competitor *Williams' Weekly News*. In the summer of 1911, Pathé also began making films in local settings, primarily bush-ranger films enacted by E.J. Cole and his Bohemian Dramatic Company. However, after making five films, Pathé ceased production in Australia, either because Cole's company had exhausted its repertoire or because of increasing political pressure to outlaw bushranger films, which led to a ban on the films by New South Wales police in 1912 that would remain in force until the 1940s. Instead, Pathé opened a manufacturing division in Adelaide and focused on newsreel production, adding *Pathé's Animated Australian News* to *Pathé's Animated Gazette (Home Edition)* from mid-1911 onward.

Pathé's Australian offices primarily rented films to local exhibitors. In 1911–12, both offices mounted a coordinated campaign to increase their distribution networks. At this point, they were releasing an average of twenty films per week, not including the *Animated News* or the *Pathé Gazette*. According to Robinson, 75% of these releases were productions of the Pathé parent company and its affiliates (SCAGL, Nizza, Comica, and American Kin), with the rest coming from American Patents companies: Lubin, Edison, and American Biograph. In January 1911 Pathé Australia held a four-week clearance sale, offering 'hundreds and thousands of feet of films at slaughtering rates', touting themselves as manufacturers rather than middlemen or showmen. They promised to deliver 'the pick of the world's markets. Every picture selected for Australians by experts who know Australia ... Absolutely the very best of the World's makers in every description of film'. The *Weekly* announced on 21 December 1911 that Pathé was now the largest film rental service in Australia and the world, 'the only complete and up to date. The one that has eclipsed all others'.<sup>22</sup>

The power of Pathé's brand and connections gave it enormous leverage with other producers, for whom it acted as an agent in the Antipodes. As of the end of February 1912, Pathé Frères had forty-one branch offices around the globe and controlled the Australasian distribution of twenty brands, enumerated in the *Weekly* as: 'Pathé Frères, Paris; Modern Pictures, Paris; Authors' Society [SCAGL], Paris; Comica, Paris and Nice; Nizza, Nice; American Kin, New York; Thanouser, USA; Geo. Méliès, 'Star Films'; Britannia Films, London; Hepwix Films, London; Italian Art Films [Film d'Arte Italiana], Rome; La Milanese Films, Milan; Russian Films, Moscow and St Petersburg; Thalie, Athens; Germanis Films, Berlin; Japanese Films, Tokio; Imperium, all over the world; Philipsen København, Copenhagen; Iberico, Barcelona; Chicago Films, Chicago'. By March 1912, that list had expanded to include 'Hollandsche, Amsterdam' and eighteen additional firms that distributed their films through Pathé, including four Italian companies (Cines, Ambrosio, Itala, and Milano), two French companies (Gaumont and Éclair), Nordisk, and Deutsche Bioscop, as well as fellow members of the Motion Picture Patents Company (Edison, Kalem, American Biograph, Vitagraph, Essanay, Selig, and Lubin) and several independent American producers (Imp, Flying A, and Lux).<sup>23</sup> In March 1912, Pathé released 131 films in Australia, totalling 86,957 feet, from twenty-nine different producers. No other distributor had the same breadth of films for hire in the region, so Pathé's clout ensured that large numbers of European films were released in Australasia.

Yet despite Pathé's apparent success and market dominance, the company closed its Australian offices in early 1912 for reasons that are still unclear but were likely connected to the company's preoccupation with the

American market and the consolidation of the Australian film distribution sector. In February 1912, Pathé's local agent Sutto was recalled to Paris, to be replaced as manager of Pathé Frères in Australia by M.H. Hérault, but only briefly, until Pathé sold its Australian distribution interests to T.J. West in March 1912. West's had been one of the earliest importers of Pathé pictures and the companies had kept up cordial relations during Pathé's six years of activity down under, to their mutual benefit. Robinson notes that *Pathé's Weekly* 'invariably gave glowing notices to everything shown at West's Glaciarium in Sydney and the Olympic in Melbourne',<sup>24</sup> while West frequently purchased exclusive rights to certain premium Pathé imports. The amalgamation of West's with Spencer's, Greater J.D. Williams, and Amalgamated Pictures of Melbourne in late 1912/early 1913 to form Australasian Films/Union Theatres (known as 'the Combine', as outlined in Chapter 2) meant that West's direct control of Pathé's network was short-lived, but ensured that Pathé films enjoyed privileged access to Union Theatres cinemas.

Although still highly profitable throughout most of the 1910s, Pathé's share of the global cinema market began to decline from around 1911 onward, as the American film industry expanded and Pathé gradually extricated itself from fiction film production. It wasn't that Pathé's enterprises weren't profitable; in 1913, Pathé posted a net profit of more than seven million francs, which allowed them to pay out a 13% dividend (down from 17.5% the previous year).<sup>25</sup> It was just that the move towards vertical integration within major American production houses drove down their costs, allowing them to export their films more cheaply than their European competitors. Pathé's share of annually released negative films in the USA plummeted to below 10% in 1913, while in France, the number of American films shown in the last three months of 1913 surpassed Pathé's domestic distribution (308 American vs 268 French).<sup>26</sup> When it tried to market its films directly to exhibitors in 1912, Pathé came into conflict with British distributors, who allegedly refused to place the ten-reel film *Les Misérables* the next year, though West's bought the Australasian distribution rights without hesitation.<sup>27</sup> Pathé's gradual withdrawal from fiction film production, in conjunction with the stress that World War I placed on the French film industry, caused the number of French feature films—from all makers—imported to Australasia to fall precipitously from at least forty-three in 1913 to less than two dozen in 1914, to as little as one or two films each year from 1915 to 1920, the year Pathé made its last feature film. By the 1920s, French fiction films were a rarity on Australasian screens, and the memory of their erstwhile market dominance and cultural status was already fading rapidly, making the heights they reached before the war even more striking.



## Launching the French Film d’Art, 1908–1909

While Pathé’s success at securing French films a prominent position on Australasian cinema programmes from at least 1908 until the mid-1910s was thus an outgrowth of its global success more generally, it was also closely connected to the increasing popularity of artistically and narratively ambitious French films in the Antipodes specifically. While many short French comic films, particularly those starring Max Linder, were also very popular and widely screened, it was largely through narrative films—primarily literature- and theatre-based features, as well as detective serials—that French imports from several makers distinguished themselves. Early French dramas exploited the established stardom of French theatre actors, particularly that of the renowned Sarah Bernhardt, but also many others whose stage credentials enhanced the status of the films they appeared in. Most of these actors, who continued working in live theatre, were hired by the day to make films, at a wage corresponding to their fame; for example, in 1910, a star like the French vaudeville actor Jeanne Bourgeois, (1873–1956), known by the stage name Mistinguett, earned sixty francs per day; leading actors such as Gabrielle Robinne, Charles Krauss, and Stacia Napierkowska earned fifty; and slightly less prominent actors like Paul Capellani and Henri Etiévant earned forty and thirty, respectively.<sup>28</sup>

The combination of big-name stars and artistically ambitious productions gave French films from Gaumont and Éclair as well as Pathé, SCAGL, and Film d’Art a distinctive profile in settler-colonial Australasia as representative of European high culture and cutting-edge film innovation, at a time when Australasian cinema audiences were developing a taste for more sophisticated films. As a February 1909 column in *Punch* (Melbourne) reported, ‘The advance in the taste of the public, as in the means of pleasing it, has been enormous since the early days of the biograph, when audiences were content with a number of comic scenes, imperfectly mounted ... What they want now is something absolute in its realism, and of a more refined character.’<sup>29</sup> Pathé was ideally situated to convey to Australasian cinemagoers that Paris was the source for such refined, realistic films. In July 1914, the Sydney *Evening News* reminisced on the beginnings of the cinema as an independent art form, a process in which French actors and dramatists played a central part:

About six years ago the moving picture play suddenly broke its cocoon. French art and dramatic genius saw the chance. Great studios were built at tremendous cost, full of elaborate appliances; scenery equal to that of the finest regular theatres was prepared, the best French actors and the foremost dramatists were drawn in; and the moving picture began to show with amazing swiftness of what it was capable. The French films drove everything else out of our market in the

higher-class theatre—only to be largely displaced themselves when American makers presently woke up to the opportunity.<sup>30</sup>

The article dates the emergence of fully fledged film from its cocoon to 1908, the same year Gaumont and Pathé launched *film d'art* as a genre, and links the two events together. Though it would only last half a dozen years, the era of French dominance of Australasian screens, at least in the finer class of cinemas, was built on the success of the French art film.

Although Pathé provided the films, it still needed exhibitors to put them in front of local audiences. Pathé's most important partner in this regard was T.J. West, who played a central role in establishing French art films as a high-value, highbrow product for middle-class audiences. As discussed in Chapter 2, the cinema palaces West opened between 1907 and 1909 tended to be large, well-appointed venues, while their programmes set themselves apart by their focus on exclusive attractions imported directly from Europe. West's close relationship with Pathé and other French makers was crucial in this endeavour. In late 1907, for example, West acquired both the 436ft Gaumont picture *The Irresistible Piano*, a comic sketch written and directed by Alice Guy that shows a crowd unable to resist a piano's infectious tunes, and Pathé's 1,150ft coloured fairy-tale adaptation *Ali Baba et les quarante voleurs/Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*. The two both opened on 21 December—*Ali Baba* at West's Glaciarium in Sydney and *The Irresistible Piano* at West's Princess Theatre in Dunedin, New Zealand. Both films arrived in the Antipodes within two months of their respective French releases and stayed in circulation for a very long time—*The Irresistible Piano* for nearly two years, until September 1909, and *Ali Baba* for possibly as long as eight years, with screenings advertised until December 1910 in Australia and October 1915 in New Zealand. Between June 1908 and December 1911, West's launched at least fifty-seven new French films (on average one per month) in its urban theatres, usually the Palace or the Glaciarium in Sydney, the Olympia in Melbourne, or Queen's Hall in Perth.

For the most part, West's French imports met with a positive reception, particularly the historical, literary, and biblical subjects. Among the most hyped French films that West imported in 1908 were the 688ft Éclair melodrama *L'honneur du corsaire/The Pirate's Honor*, directed by Victorin-Hippolyte Jasset and starring Charles Krauss, and Pathé's 1,100ft hand-coloured biblical retelling *Samson/The Story of Samson*, directed by Albert Capellani and starring Louis Ravet. Richard Abel notes that although the latter film is shot entirely in long-shot tableaux in front of painted studio sets, it includes realistic props and uses several framing changes that reflect Pathé's new system of representation.<sup>31</sup> Both films premiered at West's

Palace Theatre in Sydney on 19 July 1908, just three days after the former film's French premiere. *The Pirate's Honor*, 'the great and thrilling nautical dramatic success, at present the rage of England, the Continent, and America', was billed first, supported by *Macbeth* (Vitagraph), *Samson*, and twenty other short items, including a film of the celebration of Corpus Christi at St Patrick's Cathedral in Manly, outside Sydney. The same programme was screened at West's Olympia in Melbourne in early August and West's Pictures at Queen's Hall in Perth at the end of the month, as well as appearing in unaffiliated theatres in Brisbane, Adelaide, and a few rural towns until mid-September.

However, despite West's marketing claims to 'Continued and Increasing Success of the Unapproached and Unassailable West's Pictures', not all of the French films they imported were equally successful. Australian critics largely agreed on the merits of *Samson*, a 'glorious and awe-inspiring' film that offered, according to the Perth *Sunday Times*, 'a colossal Scriptural lesson, and a sermon many leagues ahead of the old-time droning sermon'. Of the film's theological-pedagogical value, the reviewer enthused,

It would take a lifetime of psalms, exhortations and general pulpit flap-doodle to drive home one-tenth of the truth-beauty of the lesson delivered by West's bio-motion pictures of the magnificent giant who was barbered by the wanton Delilah. The film carries the audience right out of the common, ordinary walks of life, and transports them into the very atmosphere of the time when the hairy muscular leviathan bore away the gates of Gaza.<sup>32</sup>

The same critic was not impressed with the lack of historical accuracy in *The Pirate's Honor*, however, noting

West doesn't make many bloomers in selecting his pictures, but he fell in with a dull, sickening splash of incongruity when he purchased *The Pirate's Honor*. The 'pirate' is a modern fisherman, whose girl is kissed and otherwise fondled by a dandy captain of Lord Horatio Nelson's period. The gallant bark of the said amorous captain is a modern steel sailing ship of the 1890 period, the 'piratical' craft being towed out by a screw-driven motorboat! As the boat drops downstream, on shore is seen an up-to-date city, through which are running electric tram cars, etc.<sup>33</sup>

Clearly, audiences were already attuned to noticing such anachronisms and did not hesitate to point out the flaws in the films presented to them. Exhibitors were apparently also very responsive to such criticism, as *The*

*Pirate's Honor* does not appear to have been screened any more in Australia after the appearance of this review.

West had better luck with Éclair's *Nick Carter* detective series, which was based on a long-running American dime novel character that Australasian audiences already knew and loved. Capitalizing on the popularity of the French translations that began to appear in 1907, Éclair launched a six-part series, released at biweekly intervals in late 1908, each one of which told a complete story in a single reel (up to 1,000ft). *Nick Carter, le roi des détectives/Nick Carter, Detective*, (aka *Nick Carter, King of Detectives*) the first of six episodes written by Georges Hatot and directed by Jasset in 1908, premiered at West's Glaciarium in Sydney on 17 October. This film, subtitled *Le guet-apens/The Doctor's Rescue*, introduces many of the themes and elements that recur throughout the series, such as the danger posed by 'apache' criminals in the city, the malleability of Carter's identity, and the normative position of bourgeois society. Abel points out that this template shared a 'fascination with criminal deviance as a threat to the family' with Pathé's earlier domestic melodramas, but limited its victims to childless bourgeois couples, reproducing a modern professional milieu geared towards the urban, bourgeois clientele the film industry was increasingly trying to attract and to whom West's own metropolitan cinemas catered.<sup>34</sup> Unlike his young, muscular, white American textual prototype, however, Éclair's Nick Carter had swarthy Mediterranean colouring, keen intelligence, and scrupulous integrity.

The appeal of *Nick Carter* films for Australian audiences is evidenced by their regular appearances in local cinemas, often very soon after their French releases. The second *Nick Carter* instalment, *L'affaire des bijoux/The Great Parisian Jewel Robbery*, was released in Paris on 22 September and opened at the Glaciarium on 16 November; it was replaced by the third film in the series, *Les faux monnayeurs/The False Coiners* (which had been released in France on 6 October) on 21 November. The fourth episode, *Les dévaliseurs de banque/The Great Bank Robbery*, opened in Paris on 20 October 1908 and graced the Glaciarium on 1 January 1909; the fifth, *Les empreintes/Imprints*, debuted at West's Pictures in Wirth's Olympia in Melbourne on 16 January, accompanying the headlining Pathé/SCAGL art film *L'arlésienne*, directed by Albert Capellani and starring Jeanne Grumbach of the Odéon Theatre, not quite three months after the French release of both films. The final instalment of the original series, *Les bandits en habits noirs/The Bandits in Evening Dress*, was first screened at the Glaciarium in Sydney on 23 January 1909, two months after its Parisian premiere.

The *Nick Carter* films didn't feature a known theatre star, but they established an important precedent regarding the marketability of (crime)

series featuring a familiar protagonist. They paved the way for both the next *Nick Carter* series—*Les nouveaux exploits de Nick Carter*—released later in 1909 and other, later French detective/spy series such as Éclair's *Zigomar* (1911–13), also directed by Jasset, and Gaumont's *Fantômas* (1913–14). All five instalments of the latter, directed by Louis Feuillade, were very successful down under, as was Éclair's stand-alone female spy film *Protée*, (1908) directed by Jasset. Feuillade's otherwise very successful *Les vampires* serial, made for Gaumont, does not seem to have made it to Australasia, however.

Although the above-mentioned films, including the series, were rarely marketed by company, star, or director, the launch of an art films series in late 1908 enabled Pathé to build its brand reputation in Australasia as a maker of quality films. Many of the films had been made by the Pathé subsidiaries Société cinématographique des auteurs et gens de lettres (SCAGL) and Film d'Art, but they were attributed almost without exception in Australasian newspapers simply to Pathé. These films were, by the standard of the time, generally expensive to make and buy, and, as Alan Williams notes, 'far too artisanal ... to have a regular, predictable flow of product', but they found an enthusiastic paying audience in Australasia that appreciated the films' 'restrained, efficient, and expressive acting', their high-culture aspirations, and their well-known theatrical stars.<sup>35</sup> Within a few weeks of Pathé's entry into the film d'art genre in late 1908, West's secured exclusive distribution rights for Australia and New Zealand from Pathé at a cost of £2,000;<sup>36</sup> the first of the art films to be imported were *The Assassination of the Duke of Guise*, *The Red Hand*, *L'arlésienne*, *Drink*, and *The Return of Ulysses*, all of which premiered in France between October 1908 and February 1909 and in Australia between December 1908 and April 1909. They were all marketed as Pathé films, with no distinction made between SCAGL or Film d'Art productions.

In Australasia, French art films represented the pinnacle of both cinematic art and French culture, both of which were in high demand among the Anglo-European expatriate settlers. West justified his selection of French films on the basis of their technical and artistic quality, noting that 'the art films produced by Pathé Frères represent the highest development yet reached in film manufacture'.<sup>37</sup> He interpreted the packed houses for the first film in the series, *The Assassination of the Duke of Guise*, which opened at West's Olympia in Melbourne on 7 January 1909, as supportive of his goal of 'familiarising Australians with the high art of Bernhardt, Rejane, Robinne, Coquelin, Le Bargy, Severin and Lambert', and promised that 'if the successional series maintain the same high order of merit as the initial production, patrons may look forward to an artistic and intellectual feast'.<sup>38</sup> A week later, the *Adelaide Advertiser* congratulated West for 'his enterprise' in securing the rights for this film, which was 'perfect and the acting of the

principals superb'.<sup>39</sup> So impressive were these films, in fact, that Australian audiences in mid-1909 allegedly preferred French actors to British ones on screen, as 'The Busker', an entertainment industry column in the Perth *Sunday Times*, bluntly explained: 'English bio actors can't act for nuts. A few of the films screened by West are the production of firms employing English actors, but compared with the French, they are positively dreadful in the matter of gesture. The Pathé pictures, more especially those played by the leading theatrical artists, are gems of histrionic art.'<sup>40</sup> Bolstered by well-known names from the Comédie Française and other Parisian theatres, Pathé-branded art films quickly carved out a niche for themselves in the Australasian cinema landscape as high-class but also highly profitable popular entertainment.

The reception of *The Red Hand* illustrates the positive response of Australasian audiences to the perceived sophistication and modernity of French art films. Featuring Mistinguett in her first film role, the murder mystery *The Red Hand* was first screened in Australia by West's Pictures at Queen's Hall, Perth, on 23 December 1908 (and, in New Zealand, at the Town Hall, Wellington on 12 April 1909) before going on to a remarkable three-year run in each country. As late as May 1911, when *The Red Hand* was being revived from West's extensive library to be screened alongside Itala's *La caduta di Troia/The Fall of Troy* at West's New Olympia in Brisbane, it still received top billing, a cast list, and a brief plot summary. When *The Red Hand* came to West's Glaciarium in Sydney in January 1909, the reviewer for the *Evening News* raved about the film's thirty-minute runtime, its sensational plot, its realistic depiction of Paris, and its star-studded cast:

The second production of the new art films shown under exclusive Australasian rights, ... [*The Red Hand*] is a drama in 11 tableaux, depicting modern Paris in its night aspect, the taverns and supper rooms of Montmartre, the resorts of criminals and fashionable restaurants. These are all connected with a thrilling story embracing wrongful accusation, murder, and blackmail. The drama is gorgeously mounted, and incidentally the sensational 'Danse d'Apache,' which is now the rage of Europe is introduced. The cast in this instance includes M. Severin, a world-famous actor, well-known to the English stage, M. Max Dearby [*sic*], Mdlle. Mistinguette [*sic*], and Middle. Napier Kowska [*sic*].<sup>41</sup>

The film's appeal lay in the authentic access it provided to Parisian night-life, both its upper-class dining venues and fashionable theatres and its seamier underbelly. The so-called apache dance derived its name from the Parisian street gangs of the time, the ferocity of which was considered comparable to that of Native American warriors. Like the Argentine tango, which spread from Buenos Aires to Paris to New York to Hollywood to

Sydney around the turn of the twentieth century, the apache dance would signal cosmopolitan modernity in any number of later films, but *The Red Hand* depicted it on screen for the first time, performed by Mistinguett with Max Dearly, who had been one of the dancers to invent it in 1907. Subsequent reviews of this 'famous art study' struck a similar chord, listing the four leading actors, their affiliations with the 'Folies Bergere, Odeon, and Varietes Theatres, Paris', and pronouncing the film 'Brilliantly Enacted, Magnificently Costumed, Unequalled in Stage-setting. THIS STUPENDOUS PRODUCTION is far away from the Ordinary Moving Picture, and demonstrates THE WONDERFUL ADVANCE made of late years in Kinematography.'<sup>42</sup> Anticipating twenty-first-century anxieties about the predominance of visual media over texts, one Melbourne reviewer predicted that 'if the cinematograph continues attaining this realistic perfection, the future generation will dispense with novels and dramas and enjoy pictorial interpretations in their stead'.<sup>43</sup>

What is particularly striking about the marketing of Pathé's *films d'art* in Australasia is the unusual prominence of the actors' names at a time when most producers did not disclose the names of the actors or directors of their films. Looking for a way to differentiate their product from those of their competitors, Pathé recognized that capitalizing on the established reputations of French stage actors to promote its art films would heighten their appeal to audiences attuned to the status and prestige of Continental theatre. Two months before the New Zealand release of the two-reel Pathé film *Drink*, the *Southland Times* published the entire cast list for the film, specifying which Parisian theatre each actor was connected to (the Vaudeville, the Odéon, the Gymnase, etc.), which seemed to carry more weight with audiences than the plot of the film, its brand, or any other aspect of its production.<sup>44</sup> Even Max Linder, who had failed the entrance exam for the Paris Conservatory three times, was occasionally described as affiliated with the 'Varieties Theatre, Paris', where he had in fact worked until August 1909 or, less accurately, with the 'N.Y. Theatre of Varieties'.<sup>45</sup> This practice of revealing actors' names did not become common in the global film industry until several years later, but the fact that it was frequently done for French art films already in 1909, even when no other films in the same listing received such treatment, reinforces the perception of French art films as closely akin to live theatre and therefore of higher status than other kinds of films.

### French Star Culture Down Under: The Divine Sarah on Stage and Screen

One factor giving French art films an advantage in Australasia early on was pre-existing public awareness of and interest in the lives of French

theatre stars, particularly female ones, even before they had appeared on cinema screens. Both urban and rural Australasian newspapers frequently carried gossip items about Parisian stars, about the amount various French actresses spent on their costumes, how much sleep they tended to get, their skill at billiards, and other such topics, which suggests that their readers cared about the banal details of these actors' lives. For example, Australian newspapers regularly carried news items and photos of the music-hall dancer Gaby Deslys (1881–1920) as early as 1906, when she was performing at the Gaiety Theatre in London, and later devoted extensive coverage to her romantic liaison with King Manuel II of Portugal and the revolution that deposed him in October 1910, as well as her fashion designs, transatlantic moves, and career aspirations. These thousands of mentions certainly helped promote her films, first *Her Triumph* (Famous Players, 1915), and later *Bouclette/Infatuation* (Éclipse, 1918) and *Le dieu du hasard/The God of Luck* (Éclipse, 1920) in France, all three of which were widely screened in Australia and New Zealand.

No titbit, not even silly ones, about French female stars seemed too trivial to interest Australasian readers. The Sydney *Sun* carried an ironic column on 29 April 1911 about an alleged rivalry between the music-hall stars Mistinguett, at least seven of whose films had been screened in Australia by this time, and Polaire (Émelie-Marie Bouchard, 1874–1939), 'of the fish-like profile', who had only been seen in one film down under so far, for the title of 'World's Ugliest Actress'. The article explains that

Paris, which has always adored the beautiful—at first shocked, has—tened to prostrate itself before the grotesque lack of it. Paris rewarded the ugliness of Polaire with showers of gold, applauded her and courted her ... Mistinguette [*sic*] draws crowds to the theatre where her ugliness, enhanced by all the arts of the actress, adds new thrills to the familiar Apache dance. Her google eyes, with their ragged lashes, her shapeless, thin lips parted over big teeth, her fleshless calves delight Parisians unspeakably.<sup>46</sup>

To be in on the joke, readers had to be familiar enough with both women's good looks to appreciate the implicit contrast to such parodic descriptions (accompanied by caricatures). Other articles, reporting on such novelties as the ugly monkey Mistinguett kept as a pet to make herself look more beautiful and her hollow high heels, in which she had been known to store extra cigarettes, allowed readers to feel a personal connection with her and fed into the promotion of her films, most notably *Les Misérables*, in which she played the role of Éponine Thénardier.<sup>47</sup> In the 1920s, Australian fan magazines sponsored by American film companies would facilitate similar



kinds of connections between screen stars and their fans, but the media coverage of French actresses in the first two decades of the twentieth century was ahead of its time.

The most striking example of Pathé's use of a crossover star is the celebrated Parisian actor Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923), whose popularity in both French theatre and early French film warrants a closer look at the circulation history of her films in Australia and New Zealand for insights into the currency of French film, art, and culture there, as well as the emerging culture of cinema stardom between 1908 and 1918. Born Henriette-Rosine Bernard to a Dutch Jewish courtesan in Paris, Bernhardt had a successful career at the Comédie Française and the Odéon theatres in the 1860s and 1870s, but her international stardom was closely linked to her many performance tours—to London in 1879, the United States in 1880–81, Europe, Ukraine, and Russia (1881–82), South America, the USA, and the British Isles in 1886–87, and Italy, Egypt, Turkey, Scandinavia, and Russia in 1888, among others. She undertook her most extensive world tour in 1890–91, performing across Europe, Russia, and North and South America before visiting Australia for a ten-week tour, organized by theatre impresario J.C. Williamson. Audiences there were already well acquainted with her through newspaper reports about her performances elsewhere and were thrilled at the chance to see her in person.

Bernhardt's Australian tour quickly became the stuff of legend, from her arrival in Sydney in May 1891 with forty supporting actors and more than two hundred tons of luggage, including stage costumes and sets, to her notoriously long intermissions. She had sailed from San Francisco on 2 May aboard the *Monowai*, stopping in Auckland on 22 May, where she went ashore, attended a performance at the Opera House, and bought several Māori souvenirs, accompanied by a crowd of admirers, and arrived in Sydney on 27 May.<sup>48</sup> In Melbourne, Bernhardt's company staged *La dame aux camélias*, *Fédora*, and *La Tosca*, along with several of her other well-known tragedies, at the Princess Theatre, opening on 2 June. They performed the plays in French, while audience members followed along with English translations, suggesting that the social status of French in a theatrical setting was high enough to outweigh the inconvenience. Fifteen-shilling tickets sold at auction in late May went for £2 a piece, almost three times their face value. Bernhardt played six different roles in six nights between 29 June and 4 July in Adelaide before going on to Sydney, where the stalls and the circle of the Theatre Royal were reportedly fully booked for the entire season, despite the relatively high cost of tickets (up to 12s 6d). In Sydney, Bernhardt even staged the world premiere of a new play, *Pauline Blanchard*, written for her by Albert Darmont (the leading male actor of the company). Since 'a real first night' was such a rarity in Australia, as

the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported, this decision elevated Sydney into the company of Paris, London, and New York.<sup>49</sup> However, she cancelled a one-week Brisbane engagement on grounds of fatigue and sailed from Sydney on 5 August 1891. After two years and eight months on the road, Bernhardt allegedly took home a chest containing a net profit of 3.5 million gold francs, but the Australian part of the tour was apparently not a financial success for Williamson and his partners.

Although Bernhardt undertook many more tours of the USA, Europe, and South America in the first two decades of the twentieth century, she only ever returned to Australasia on screen, often in roles that she had played on the Australian stage in 1891. At least five of her films (out of seven total) were screened down under, borne on the wings of her stardom and the competition between distributors to offer the most attractive features. In a region where few French immigrants had settled, Bernhardt and her films functioned as ambassadors of French culture and art to cinema-goers. Australasian newspapers had continued to cover Bernhardt's theatrical career in the years since her Australian tour, so fans were delighted when Henry Gee, the general manager for West's in Australia, announced West's acquisition of the Australasian rights to a Bernhardt film. At West's Pictures in Brisbane on 14 March 1909, between screenings of *The Red Hand* and *L'arlésienne*, Gee read a cable from London aloud to the audience that promised the arrival of *La Tosca*, with Bernhardt in the title role, in six weeks.<sup>50</sup>

*La Tosca* (1908), a two-reel (roughly thirty-minute) film directed by André Calmettes for Pathé/Film d'Art with Paul Mounet as the male lead, was based on the play Victorien Sardou had written specifically for Bernhardt in 1887 and Puccini had set to music in 1900. The plot is simple and dramatic: the opera singer Floria Tosca is coerced by the ruthless Baron Scarpia to become his lover in exchange for a promise of clemency for her true love, the painter and Bonapartist Mario Cavaradossi, who has been arrested on false pretences. In resisting Scarpia's advances, Tosca kills him, only to discover that he had lied about sparing Cavaradossi, which prompts her to leap to her death. Although she had performed *La Tosca* hundreds of times on stage, Bernhardt apparently hated the film once it was made and wanted it destroyed or at least shelved. Pathé immediately made another, single-reel version of *La Tosca* without her, also directed by Calmettes but starring Cécile Sorel and Charles Le Bargy, that was released in March 1909. However, although Bernhardt's version was not released in France until 1912, contemporary advertising in Australasia suggests that both versions of the film may have circulated in Australia and New Zealand in 1909–10, although it is more likely that the second version was simply marketed with Bernhardt's name.

Trading heavily on Bernhardt's reputation, which was foregrounded in the Australasian advertising, *La Tosca* enjoyed a six-month run in Australia and New Zealand in 1909–10, with sporadic revivals in subsequent years. West's premiered this 'Great Pathé Art Film' on 15 May 1909. After playing in Sydney for two weeks, *La Tosca* was screened in Adelaide from 31 May to 11 June, Melbourne from 12 to 26 June, Wellington from 10 to 21 July, Christchurch from 29 July to 4 August, Auckland and Brisbane from 7 to 13 August, and Perth from 24 August to 8 September. Several ads indicate that the decision to keep *La Tosca* on the programme in a given theatre for more than a week was made spontaneously, responding to the size of the crowds it attracted, as happened in Wellington. After making the rounds of the metropolitan areas, the film went onto the provincial and travelling circuits in rural Australia (e.g. Goulburn, Bathurst, Bendigo, Ballarat, Kalgoorlie), as well as being screened in Hobart, Tasmania for a week in April 1910, after which it remained intermittently in circulation until February 1912. In New Zealand, it also moved onto the provincial circuit in late 1909, staying in circulation until February 1910.

The film itself has been lost and the average cinemagoer's response to the film cannot be reconstructed, but it is clear from the newspaper coverage that Bernhardt, more than the film's French origins or its Pathé brand, was a major factor in its popularity in the Antipodes. *La Tosca* received top billing, even when screened alongside other Film d'Art productions, such as *The Return of Ulysses*, as it was at West's Town Hall in Wellington, in July 1909. The advertised 'appearance of Sarah Bernhardt in the part of the principal character' was considered far more noteworthy than the contributions of the playwright Sardou, director Calmettes, or Bernhardt's co-star Mounet, the latter two of whom also directed and starred, respectively, in *The Return of Ulysses*.<sup>51</sup> Although one review of the Sydney premiere in May explains that, although Bernhardt had played Tosca in Australia, Sorel and Le Bargy 'impersonated the principal parts in this film', it appears from other reviews that the Bernhardt version was in fact screened, unless some reviewers were actually unfamiliar with Bernhardt's appearance or simply didn't want to reveal their ignorance.<sup>52</sup> For example, the Wellington *Evening Post* enthused on 12 July 1909 that seeing the film was almost as good as seeing the 'divine Sarah' in person, except for missing out on her 'glorious speaking voice that has been the wonder of two generations'.<sup>53</sup>

As many ads for *La Tosca* simply advertise that the film features 'leading actors from the French stage', it is difficult to determine which version was shown in which theatre, if both were indeed in circulation. A few ads specify whether Bernhardt or Sorel, 'the coming Bernhardt', was playing the title role, but others apparently conflate the versions, listing Bernhardt and

Le Bargy as co-stars, or deliberately obfuscate by advertising 'members of Sarah Bernhardt's Parisian Company'. While many reviews praise Bernhardt's acting, at least one reviewer felt cheated when it was not Bernhardt he saw on screen. Writing in Auckland on 14 August 1909, he gave voice to audience members' annoyance at the bait and switch, describing the film as 'distinctly disappointing, chiefly by reason of the fact that although the management announced that Sarah Bernhardt would interpret the name part, the divine Sarah was conspicuous by her absence'.<sup>54</sup>

To further confuse matters, the same film(s) were also circulated under two other titles: *The Butcher and His Lover* and *The Duchess of Toscana, or Love against the World*, with Bernhardt's starring role prominently advertised in both. *The Duchess of Toscana* is explicitly described in some ads as an adaptation of *La Tosca*, while others market it as 'Bernhardt's magnificent interpretation of *The Butcher and His Lover*',<sup>55</sup> which implies that *The Butcher and His Lover* is itself a version of *La Tosca*. Since these other titles did not appear in ads until after *La Tosca* had finished its metropolitan run with West's, it is possible that Bernhardt's film was simply re-released under these new names by an enterprising exhibitor to make it seem like a novelty. W.H. Bruce's Continental Wondergraph screened *The Butcher and His Lover* in Perth from 20 to 27 November 1909 but then used all three titles interchangeably for the Bernhardt film being screened in Kalgoorlie and Boulder, WA, from 12 December through 2 January 1910. For screenings in Broken Hill, NSW on 18 and 19 April, 1910, and Petersburg, SA on 29 and 30 April, Continental Wondergraph expanded the title to *The Butcher and His Lover, or Wrongly Sentenced to Death*.<sup>56</sup> Regardless of which version of *La Tosca* that was screened, the ads' foregrounding of Bernhardt's stardom is important evidence of the drawing power of Continental actors in the Antipodes and the prevalence of star fandom for films several years before most studios began launching their leading actors as star brands.

West's repeated the tactic of securing exclusive rights and doing substantial preliminary advertising for a Bernhardt film three years later with *La dame aux camélias/Camille* (1912), Bernhardt's film version of her celebrated interpretation of Alexandre Dumas fils's novel of the same name about a Parisian courtesan, Marguerite Gautier, who sacrifices her own happiness for the sake of her bourgeois lover Armand Duval's family before dying of tuberculosis. On 20 January 1912, West's published an announcement that the management had 'received a cablegram from their London representative stating that the firm had secured the exclusive rights' to *Camille*.<sup>57</sup> Directed—like both versions of *La Tosca*—by André Calmettes for Pathé/Film d'Art and co-starring Lou Tellegen and Paul Capellani, *Camille* was approximately 2,275ft, reflecting the shift towards

longer narrative films, as well as ongoing efforts to both raise the cultural status of film and make high culture available to the masses through cheap cinema tickets. In the service of the former, West’s news blurb boasts of the film’s cost and artistry, noting that ‘very large royalties have had to be paid, and the film is said to be a triumph of moving picture skill’, while later ads foregrounded the management’s decision not to raise admission prices for this film, despite its exceptional cost. Even with those assurances of quality, however, Bernhardt’s name was the primary element of advertising prior to the film’s release, helping the film stand out from the crowd of new releases each week.

In the two months between West’s announcement and the film’s arrival in Australia, West’s drummed up audience anticipation with frequent news stories about her. Various articles recounted Bernhardt’s reluctance to perform for the camera, the £5,000 the film cost to make, and Bernhardt’s determination to conquer ‘a new world—that of the photo-play’.<sup>58</sup> West informed his Australian offices in early February that Bernhardt had retained the right to screen the film before distribution and that near the end of the film, she had wailed, ‘And do I look like that in the flesh?’, demanding to have portions of the film destroyed and re-filmed. West used the story to assure ‘the public of Australia ... that they will see the world-famed actress at her best’ in *Camille*.<sup>59</sup> Curiously, despite the frequency



Figure 4.2 Still of Sarah Bernhardt in Film d’Art’s *La dame aux camélias/Camille* (1912). Wikimedia Commons

with which *La Tosca* had been marketed with Bernhardt's name in 1909 in their own ads, West's made a point of informing viewers in 1912 that Bernhardt would be appearing for the first time on screen in *Camille*, which would seem to confirm their inaccurate marketing of *La Tosca*.

Newspaper reports kept audiences up to date when West cabled in late February 1912 to announce that Bernhardt's *Camille*, together with *Madame Sans-Gêne*, starring the comedienne Gabrielle Réjane, was on its way to Australia by steamship. Shortly afterwards, West's offered bookings of both films, along with the German-made Asta Nielsen film *Zigeunerblut/Gipsy Blood*, the Nordisk film *A Victim of the Mormons*, and fourteen other star attractions, for New Zealand cinemas. Grouping these films together reinforces the notion that star features were regarded as a primarily European product at this point. West's held a private test screening of *Camille* in Sydney on 27 March 1912, producing the published assessment, perhaps in acknowledgement of the earlier confusion surrounding *La Tosca*, that Bernhardt 'was seen early in the play and was seen to have lost none of her queenly charm, the fire of youth, or the sympathy that make for a successful actress'.<sup>60</sup> West's began promoting the opportunity, available 'only at West's Pictures', to see 'that supreme sovereign of the stage, Sarah Bernhardt. Bernhardt is to the world's stage what the sun is to the earth. There would be eternal cold without either. The Divine, Incomparable, and Unconquerable Sarah Bernhardt in *Camille* ... There is only ONE BERNHARDT, ONE CAMILLE.'<sup>61</sup>

Hyperbole aside, while it is true there was only one Bernhardt, hers was not the first film of *Camille* to play in the Antipodes. In early 1910, a 1,033ft Italian version of Dumas fil's story, produced by Pathé's affiliate Film d'Arte Italiana and starring Vittoria Lepanto, had circulated down under. In New Zealand, Lepanto's *Camille* had premiered at Fullers' Colosseum in Christchurch on 10 February 1910, but the situation in Australia was more complicated. Since West's had not secured exclusive rights to that film, it premiered simultaneously at three theatres in Melbourne—Spencer's Olympia, West's Palace, and Hoyt's Picture Palace—on 12 February 1910, with Tait's Pictures following suit a few days later. This saturation of the market cut into each exhibitor's profits and undercut the individual cinemas' attempts to profile themselves through unique film offerings. It also meant that the film had a shorter overall run and moved more quickly from the metropolitan circuit to the provincial one in Australia, while it had only a very brief run in New Zealand in 1910. After the debacle in Melbourne, West's managed to dominate screenings of Lepanto's *Camille* in the other Australian capital cities and many rural towns in 1910, but in launching Bernhardt's *Camille* two years later, West's secured sole rights to the film well in advance. Still, shortly before Bernhardt's film was due to arrive in Australia, Vic's Pictures

in Perth revived the earlier version of *Camille*, starring 'the Italian Sara [sic] Bernhardt, Vittoria Lepanto',<sup>62</sup> which circulated more widely in New Zealand in the spring of 1912 than it had in 1910, perhaps in anticipation of the New Zealand premiere of Bernhardt's version on 24 May.

Bernhardt's *Camille* seems to have distinguished itself from Lepanto's version primarily through Bernhardt's skill as an actor. Explaining that Bernhardt had been reluctant to venture into film until given the opportunity to 'appear in one of her favorite creations', West's advertised the Australian premiere of this second *Camille*, at West's Palace in Melbourne on 20 April 1912, as 'THE GREATEST PRODUCTION THE WORLD HAS EVER SEEN', featuring 'THE GODDESS OF GENIUS'.<sup>63</sup> West's praised her 'histrionic gifts', especially the 'force and reality' of her depiction of Marguerite Gautier. Bernhardt is shown throughout the film full-bodied and in full frame, as was common for diva films in this period, which allows Bernhardt to use her entire body to convey the emotional charge of each scene. Director Henri Pouctal focuses the viewer's attention on the appropriate body part for understanding each scene's emotional charge, such as Bernhardt's clenched hand that suddenly opens as she dies in her lover's arms. Tait's had explained the popularity of the earlier *Camille* with the argument that 'as long as woman is woman she will flock in numbers to see anything relative to her favorite, tearful heroine', but audiences and reviewers alike seemed particularly impressed with Bernhardt's 'dramatic skills, and the photographic quality of the picture'.<sup>64</sup>

Although Bernhardt's voice was a major part of her stage success and some French and American critics felt that the silent reproduction of a stage actor like Bernhardt was absurd, at least one Australian reviewer of *Camille* felt that 'her play-by-play is so realistic that the loss of dialogue is never noticed'.<sup>65</sup> West's explained that 'although no word is spoken, she conveys every episode of the story by her actions in a manner that carries conviction and reality in every scene'.<sup>66</sup> Victoria Duckett argues convincingly that Bernhardt's gestural acting was as important as her voice, allowing her body to express universally intelligible emotions on screen, a view that the Australian reviews support.<sup>67</sup> The view of later critics that Bernhardt's films were unsuccessful, overly stylized attempts to transfer live theatre to the screen is challenged by contemporaneous Australasian audiences' enthusiasm for the artistry of her film performances, which supported the film's run of more than a year on first the metropolitan and then the provincial circuits around the region, followed by sporadic revivals as late as 1919.

Well known to audiences in Australasia in both theatrical versions and as Verdi's opera *La Traviata*, *Camille*'s focus on a courtesan was apparently not scandalous enough to arouse comment—but what image of

French or Continental European culture might the film have conveyed to Antipodean cinemagoers, particularly with regard to the persistence of class distinctions? Marguerite's profession receives relatively little attention in the film, which focuses instead on her selflessness, loyalty, and courage. Pointing out that the film, in contrast to the play, relies heavily on intertitles to explain Marguerite's motivations and the social pressures at play in Duval Sr's plea for her to give up his son, Duckett suggests that the film presents 'a kind of guarantee for the maintenance of social order. The working classes can enjoy a product that engages them emotionally as spectators but that reinforces the separation of the classes. Reconciled with Armand (and his father) only at the moment of her death, Marguerite does not live to enjoy the social acceptance she is finally granted.'<sup>68</sup> Before classifying the film as a vehicle for reinforcing Old World class hierarchies in settler-colonial Australasia, however, it must be noted that there is no evidence that Australians and New Zealanders, with their largely egalitarian societies, registered this implicit message of social stratification; local reviews tend to stress the film's emotional impact and Bernhardt's artistry over the plot, which was already quite well known from frequent local theatrical stagings. Yet since acquiring an aura of elite social status was an integral part of *film d'art's* appeal for settler-colonial audiences, it seems plausible that the message of Marguerite's nobility of character earning her a place in high society would have resonated with Australasian viewers.

Bernhardt's persistent popularity down under heightened distributors' interest in importing her subsequent films. Six months into *Camille's* sixteen-month run in Australia, West's competitor Cosens Spencer paid £2,000 for the sole Australian rights to Bernhardt's next film, *The Loves of Queen Elizabeth*, or, as it was generally known in Australia, *Queen Bess*. This film itself reflects the transnational character of early film. Based on Émile Moreau's 1911 four-act play about the Renaissance British monarch's romantic relationship with the Earl of Essex, it starred Bernhardt and her Dutch co-star Tellegen, was co-directed by Frenchmen Louis Mercanton and Henri Desfontaines and filmed in Paris but produced by J. Frank Brockliss in London. The film was co-financed by Famous Players, recently founded by New York exhibitor Adolph Zukor, Broadway producer Daniel Frohman, and director Edwin S. Porter, which also handled the film's US distribution. *Queen Bess* premiered at Spencer's Lyceum on 12 October 1912, marketed somewhat morbidly as 'a casket which enshrines the heart of the most wonderful actress in the world'.<sup>69</sup> *Punch* modified its initial assessment that 'it is the actress more than the play that makes the film notable' to declare that 'nothing more perfect has been seen in the world up to the present time, in a cinematographic sense, than the moving picture of the great Sarah Bernhardt as Queen Bess, nor, we



should judge, is ever likely to be seen in the future. It is perfect in every detail ... Sarah Bernhardt is a name to conjure with in Australia.<sup>70</sup>

At a time when cinema programmes were typically changed once or twice a week, the sold-out two-week run of *Queen Bess* in Sydney was unusual. The immense public response to the film and its profitability silenced critics who had doubted that Spencer could recoup his costs, either by exhibiting the film in his own theatres or selling the exhibition rights for other cities. At least three prints of the film were in circulation in late 1912, with Spencer's Pictures screening it in Perth, Fremantle, Launceston, and Hobart, and West's handling Melbourne and Adelaide. Meanwhile, independent exhibitors, such as Lyceum Pictures in Newcastle and Radio Pictures in Kalgoorlie, moved the film onto the provincial circuit at the same time as second-run urban theatres, e.g. the Enmore Theatre in Sydney, extended its accessibility to metropolitan audiences. It opened at His Majesty's Theatre in Wellington on 8 January 1913. The film remained in circulation in New Zealand until August 1913 and in Australia until 25 December 1913, ending a fourteen-month run.

*Queen Bess* garnered praise for both the perfection of Bernhardt's artistry and its ability to bridge the gap between the new world of Australasia and the old world of Europe. As the Adelaide *Saturday Mail* enthused,

Let it be borne in mind that, seated in a comfortable armchair in Melbourne, Sydney, or Adelaide, one will be carried off to the Theatre Sarah Bernhardt in Paris, and that, without moving from this chair one will see the whole company of that celebrated theatre, with its world-famous tragedienne at its head, acting the same piece as is probably being acted the same night and by the same people on the boulevards. Has a greater miracle ever been performed in modern times?<sup>71</sup>

By bringing the greatest Continental artists and their performances to Australasian screens, Bernhardt's films gave Australasians access to the world in relation to which their settler-colonial societies had been constructed, thus collapsing the geographical and temporal distance between both worlds, offering immediacy and authenticity. It also collapsed the distinctions between theatre and cinema, spectacle and narrative, by telling a well-known historical tale through sumptuous period costumes and realistic stage sets, emotive physical acting, and twenty-six text-based intertitles.

The strikingly different reception of Bernhardt's next two films, *Adrienne Lecouvreur/An Actress's Romance* and *Jeanne Doré*, illustrates how dramatically the merger of Australian exhibitors in early 1913 and the outbreak of war changed the local cinema landscape for European films, even ones from leading producers in friendly

countries and featuring major stars like Bernhardt. Made by the same team as *Queen Elizabeth, An Actress's Romance* did not make it to New Zealand, but it enjoyed a ten-month run in Australia, premiering at J.D. Williams's Crystal Palace on 30 June 1913, where it stayed for a week, then making the rounds of major metropolitan cinemas, including Spencer's Olympia in Melbourne and Vic's Pictures in Queen's Hall in Perth, before touring the provincial towns of Broken Hill (NSW), Kalgoorlie (WA) and Bendigo (Vic), among many others, between July 1913 and April 1914. By August 1916, when *Jeanne Doré*, directed by Mercanton and produced by Eclipse, arrived, it was much less successful than its predecessors. Not only was the film already more than a year past its US release, but the Australian cinema market was so tightly controlled by Union Theatres, the exhibition arm of the Combine, that films not distributed by Australasian Films had difficulty finding screening venues.

Imported to Australia by the independent distributor Fraser Films, *Jeanne Doré* did not have access to the Union Theatres network. Its run consisted of just a few days on the outskirts of Melbourne, a week in Sydney, and sporadic showings in rural cinemas from Newcastle (NSW) to Mount Alexander (Vic) between September 1916 and March 1917. After the French government reissued the film in mid-1917, it was re-released with considerable hype in Western Australia in September 1917, but only for a one-month run in that state. It ran for three days at Lean's Palladium Theatre in Perth, where it apparently 'created new box office records', followed by a few days in each of the nearby towns of Fremantle, Leederville, Kalgoorlie, and Boulder.<sup>72</sup> In New Zealand, which was not as tightly controlled by the Combine, *Jeanne Doré* played in each of the major urban areas and most provincial towns on a steady circuit between August 1916 and April 1917, though not in any of Fullers' or Hayward's cinemas, which were affiliated with the Combine.

Another factor in this film's reception could also be Bernhardt herself, who had had her right leg amputated earlier in 1915 after injuring it repeatedly during performances of the death leap in *La Tosca*. Though some critics praised Bernhardt's acting in the film, others felt that it was a disappointment. One reviewer in New Zealand lamented, 'The Sarah Bernhardt in *Jeanne Doré* is not the Sarah Bernhardt we care to remember. Her appearance in the film is a tribute to her unconquerable spirit, but not to her art.'<sup>73</sup>

While stardom was apparently not enough to carry a film regardless of its quality, patriotism was. The final Bernhardt film screened in the Antipodes was the wartime propaganda film *Mères françaises/Mothers of France*, released by Éclair in January 1917. In this film, Bernhardt plays a mother who, losing her son and her husband to the war, moves from her

home into the city as an activist and then to the front as a nurse. No longer playing a role familiar from the nineteenth-century stage, Bernhardt inhabited instead the theatre of war, bringing the viewer with her into the trenches. The film was commissioned by the French Ministry of War to promote the French cause abroad, particularly in the USA. In this context, Bernhardt's long-standing public role as a representative of France took on new sociopolitical significance. As Duckett notes, 'the emotional and symbolic impact of Bernhardt now standing outside the bombed cathedral [of Reims] cogently expresses the values—cultural, human, political—that were under siege ... Bernhardt, whose appeal once lay in her capacity to bring Parisian theatre and fashion to foreign audiences, now represents a provincial, spiritual, and egalitarian France.'<sup>74</sup> Australasian audiences had a much more personal connection to the scenes on display than Americans, at least initially, since the USA only entered the war two months after Bernhardt's film was released there while ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) troops had been in combat since 1914, suffering heavy losses on the Gallipoli peninsula in Turkey. It was touted in the Australian press for nine months before opening in Australia in October 1917, and once it opened, one Sydney reviewer praised the film's ability to convey a message 'so deep, so inspiring, as to almost transfuse itself into the hearts of the women of Australia'.<sup>75</sup>

Considering Bernhardt's advanced age and the fact that her single visit to Australia lay more than a quarter-century in the past by this point, it is impressive how much weight her name still carried in the Australasian marketing of *Mothers of France*. In a Union Theatres ad, which trumpets 'The Divine SARAH BERNHARDT' in all-caps six times, the company lauded the film's ability to combine 'the art of the stage', Bernhardt's emotive acting, and 'the realism of the screen'<sup>76</sup> with live footage from the front lines. The Sydney *World News* reported that Bernhardt was actually under fire during filming,<sup>77</sup> while the Sydney *Sun* devoted a third of a page to praising her—a 'woman of such world-fame and at an age when most of us look for slippered ease'—for her courage in visiting the trenches, while assuring viewers that 'the whole production is infused [with] the wonderful dramatic art of the divine Sarah: it softens the grim story of the actualities of war the camera tells. Yet it is she who makes the most enduring appeal.'<sup>78</sup> Billed as 'Sarah Bernhardt's Greatest Screen Creation', *Mothers of France* began its Australian circulation in October 1917 with three-day runs at the Union Pictures Theatre in Newcastle, NSW and the Pavilion Theatre in Perth, prior to a two-week run at the Theatre Royal in Sydney, where 400 French soldiers on leave in Australia attended the premiere.<sup>79</sup> While it does not seem to have been screened in New Zealand, it played at theatres around Australia for more than fourteen months, concluding with

a final screening on 25 December 1918, when it played as a holiday special at the open-air Theatre Royal in Bairnsdale, Victoria.

Despite its popularity and ability to rouse patriotic fervour, however, the film's reception reflects the shift in audience preferences in the mid-1910s away from European films, due to the increasingly American complexion of Australasian cinema programmes. While noting that *Mothers of France* drew record crowds and praising the director's skill at concealing Bernhardt's inability to walk, a review in the *Mirror* (Sydney) complained that 'the characters are too French to appeal to Australian popular taste, and Sarah Bernhardt left her youth behind long ago'.<sup>80</sup> *Mothers of France* marked the end of an era in which French theatrical stars and French films were common enough on Australasian screens to be standard-setting for the industry as a whole.

### The Golden Age of French Feature Films, 1910–1914

While the number of French films screened in Australia and New Zealand in the decade following World War I almost never reached double digits in any year, more than 150 French narrative films reached Australasian cinema audiences between 1910 and 1914. As the multi-reel feature became increasingly popular with audiences and increased output from Italian and Danish makers made the market more competitive (see Chapters 5 and 6), the length of French art films also increased, with length becoming a sign of presumptive quality. While only a few of the films screened in Australasia before 1910 had broken 1,500ft—such as the Australian-made *Story of the Kelly Gang* and SCAGL's *Drink*, which had circulated for six months in 1909—that number quickly became the lower threshold for feature films, particularly from Continental Europe. In early December 1910, Pathé's Australian offices announced the imminent release of *Faust*, a tinted adaptation of Goethe's drama billed as being 'over 2000ft in length';<sup>81</sup> it opened at Tait's Glaciarium in Melbourne on 12 December 1910 and circulated for the next ten months. Seven months later, *Faust*'s length was outdone by Pathé's 2,625ft moralistic melodrama *Victimes d'alcoolisme/In the Grip of Alcohol*, which opened at West's Glaciarium in Sydney on 26 August 1911, while Éclair's 3,060ft crime drama, *Zigomar, roi des voleurs/Zigomar, King of Thieves*, opened at the King's Theatre in Sydney on 9 October.

Length was not the only factor that determined a film's popularity and staying power, of course; certain films simply resonated with some audiences more than others because of their story or theme. For example, Pathé's adaptation of Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris/The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, which reached Australia in November 1911, and its historical drama *The Siege of Calais* that followed in December, were, respectively,

2,034 and 2,326 feet long—but while the latter film only remained in circulation for about seven weeks, the former was still being screened occasionally as late as March 1918. The former's association with Hugo, whose works were widely read in the region, may help to explain the discrepancy, making up for the film's unconvincingly shallow studio sets, the comical make-up of Quasimodo (played by Henry Krauss), and the screenplay's neglect of Quasimodo's story in favour of Esmeralda's.<sup>82</sup>

Meanwhile, *In the Grip of Alcohol* was adopted by the Australian temperance movement, which gave it enhanced social significance and extended its working life far beyond other higher-profile Continental films in circulation at the same time, including the Danish company Fotorama's 4,530ft production, *Den sorte drøm/The Circus Girl*, starring Asta Nielsen, and the Italian firm Milano Film's 3,940ft *Dante's Inferno*. Although shorter than the Danish and Italian films it was playing against and lacking both a well-known actor and source text, *In the Grip of Alcohol* was declared to be

THE GREATEST DRAMA OF THE YEAR. IT IS NOT ONLY A MORAL PLAY, BUT AN HISTRIONIC MASTERPIECE, in which Pathé Frères have excelled themselves. This Picture, which is 2,625 feet long, has gained the proud distinction of being THE FINEST FILM YET ISSUED. As a Temperance Lesson it is THE GREATEST THE WORLD HAS EVER HAD, speaking in Thunderous Tones against THE WORLD'S GREATEST CURSE, DRINK. A STORY TRUE TO LIFE AND TERRIBLE IN ITS PERFECT REALISM. A PICTURE WHICH WILL MAKE BRISBANE TALK.<sup>83</sup>

The film's compelling treatment of a hot-button social issue apparently more than compensated for its lack of prestige actors or a famous source text, which serves as a reminder of contemporary debates about whether the cinema was more important as entertainment or as a pedagogical vehicle.

Taking the latter view, the *Brisbane Courier* promises that *In the Grip of Alcohol* can arouse the latent will power in those unfortunates who have become addicted to drink. It paints the terrors of the fatal downward path in a manner which no one can ignore. It shows no brutality, just the awful spectacle of the drink evil. It follows his life for eight years; eight years of slow death for him; eight years of hardship and deprivation for his little sick daughter; eight years of self-torture, loss of self-respect, the attainment of self-loathing, all because drink is what it is and because a man hadn't the backbone to say, 'NO!' This picture supplies the backbone.<sup>84</sup>

As evidence of the film's effectiveness, Reverend S.D. Yarrington claimed in March 1916 that 'upwards of 14,000 (men, chiefly) have turned over a new leaf during the last twelve months through the instrumentality of the Pathé film *In the Grip of Alcohol*'.<sup>85</sup> With such endorsements, it's easy to see how the film could still be in circulation as late as 1925, when it was screened in conjunction with a series of temperance lectures in Newcastle (NSW). Such exceptions aside, however, longer films generally provided greater scope for artistic vision and attracted enthusiastic audiences, so companies continued to push the limits, making the transition from producing two to eight or more reel films in little more than two years.

Pathé's 3,000ft (of which 2,400ft was in colour) stock-market drama *La fièvre de l'or/The Greed for Gold* illustrates not only how Pathé managed to maintain their brand prestige in this period, combining the cachet of Parisian artists with long, often coloured films, but also how great the demand for such films was in the Antipodes. While *The Greed for Gold* had been announced in the Parisian *Ciné-Journal* on 9 November, its Australian release on 16 November 1912 at West's in Melbourne took place nearly two weeks before the film's French premiere at the Odéon Pathé in Paris on 28 November.<sup>86</sup> By that date, *The Greed for Gold* had already been screened not only in Melbourne, but also at Spencer's Lyceum in Sydney (beginning 23 November) and at West's Pictures in Adelaide (beginning 27 November).

In many ways, this film exemplifies the high-status productions with which Pathé had made its name in the Antipodes a few years earlier. Directed by René Leprince, the cast includes actors from such renowned Parisian theatres as the Comédie Française, Odéon, Ambigu, Gymnase, Folies Bergère, Marigny, Athénée, and so on. Accordingly, the Sydney *Sun* praises Pathé for both the cinematography and the acting of the film, which

present[s] the story in natural colors in such a realistic manner that the characters appear to live and breathe upon the screen. The *Greed for Gold* presents yet another striking example of the rapid march of the biograph, and the ever-growing accession of the world's foremost dramatic artists to its ranks. No such cast could possibly be secured for ordinary stage representation, consisting as it does of 50 of the greatest artists on the French stage. Prominent in the cast are such celebrities as Claude Garry, Ravet, Etievant, Volny, Dorival, Wague, Mesdames Clarens, Madeleine Roch, Giorini, and Froments [*sic*]. The film deals with 'frenzied finance,' and presents a stirring story of modern times. With the death of his father-in-law a young man becomes the director of a wealthy bank, and from the outset, his lust for money

asserts itself. His wild-cat schemes for a time hold the public, but in the end disaster—and death—overtake him.<sup>87</sup>

Although the ad omits a few well-known names from the sixty people in the cast (a list of whom must have been included with the film's marketing materials), such as the dancer Stacia Napierkowska, the inclusion of so many suggests that readers and cinemagoers knew at least some of these names and valued the film the more for these actors' participation.

Yet while many French films were screened in 1912–14, no French film from this period was more spectacular or acclaimed than the Pathé/SCAGL production of *Les Misérables*, a story that audiences knew well from both Victor Hugo's 1862 novel and the three- and four-film series released by Edison and Vitagraph in 1909–10. What made this new version, considered to be the most successful French film of the decade, particularly notable was both its unprecedented length of 11,300ft and its exorbitant cost, which included a fee of 180,000 francs for adaptation rights and 50,000 francs in actors' salaries.<sup>88</sup> West's, which had secured exclusive rights to the picture and launched it in April 1913, boasted that *Les Misérables* was 'the longest film ever produced and, if stretched, would reach from Circular Quay to the Broadway, along George-street'<sup>89</sup> in Sydney, encompassing '2½ miles of star sensation'.<sup>90</sup>

Before this release, when the occasional longer film, such as Alice Guy's 2,500ft *Life of Christ*, had been shown in Australian cinemas, screenings were usually divided over multiple evenings, but the circulation history of *Les Misérables* illustrates how audience demand for longer, more immersive pictures triggered a shift to 'one-film evenings', which Harry Musgrove, the Australian manager of West's Pictures, described in December 1912 as 'the latest word in picture films'.<sup>91</sup> West's promotion of *Les Misérables* was designed to put the company ahead of the curve on this new trend by offering the longest picture ever screened in Australasia. Their advertising budget apparently didn't stretch to the two-page spreads that announced the film in various American trade papers, but it did ensure that the film, declared to be 'A BOOM', was widely screened around the country.

*Les Misérables'* unprecedented three-hour runtime presented a challenge to exhibitors, however, who had to decide whether to show the film all in one evening or divided into discrete units. In Sydney, *Les Misérables* premiered in two parts at West's two massive cinemas, the Glaciarium and the Olympia, accompanied by lectures, at Saturday matinees on 5, 12, and 19 April 1913, with additional screenings of each part during the following weeks. One of the first Sydney reviews declared that the film, 'divided into two entertainments ... is certainly one of the most remarkable productions ever introduced to the Australian public', while one of the first Melbourne

reviews, after the first screening of part one there on 19 April, protested that the division of the film left audiences sighing for more.<sup>92</sup> By 18 April, upwards of 25,000 Sydney cinemagoers had seen the first half of the film,<sup>93</sup> with 75,000 patrons reported (for both parts) by 28 April, after the originally scheduled two-week run had been extended several times.<sup>94</sup>

On 1 and 2 May, with their contract for the Glaciarium expiring at the start of the winter ice-skating season, West's attempted to meet remaining audience demand by showing the film in its entirety, 'by special and universal desire', at the Glaciarium while screening a different picture at the Olympia.<sup>95</sup> Constrained no doubt by the limited number of prints of the film available, West's screenings in Melbourne (19 April–3 May), Adelaide (30 April–16 May), and Brisbane (13 July–2 August) followed the pattern set by West's Sydney theatres, screening the first part of *Les Misérables* every night for a week, plus matinees, followed by the second part every night the week after, with a final combined screening of both parts at the end of the run when possible. While this strategy, which West's also followed for *Quo Vadis?*, still couldn't accommodate all interested viewers, those who attended required 'no opportunity of growling at the quality of the films screened', as the Brisbane *Truth* reported.<sup>96</sup>

Armed with foreknowledge of the film's strong appeal, other cinemas took the bolder route of showing the whole film in one evening. When *Les Misérables* opened at the King's Theatre in Auckland in June 1913, it was marketed as 'the First All-Night, All-One Picture Play'. The *New Zealand Herald* assured audiences sceptical of such a long film that 'this magnificent picture, although of great length, is said to contain not a dull moment, the appealing interest of the story holding the audience spell-bound'.<sup>97</sup> In September 1913, when it was screened by the English Amusements Company at the Academy of Music cinema in Launceston (Tas), which had a population of approximately 25,000 people in 1913, the film was presented as a full evening event in an unsuccessful attempt to meet enthusiastic audience demand, with the results that 'hundreds of people have been turned away each night'.<sup>98</sup> In the rural gold-mining towns of Cowra and Forbes (NSW) the film was screened in multiple parts on consecutive weeknights: in three parts at Mr Kelly's Lyceum open-air picture palace in Cowra in October, and in two parts at 'Messrs. Brook and Hassett's picture theatre' in Forbes in December.<sup>99</sup>

The film's astounding success—since audience demand remained high after its four-week run to packed houses in Sydney in April/May 1913, it returned for a revival in October that same year—was due in large part to the prestige of Hugo's name, the actors, and the artistry of the film itself. Local reviewers raved about the film's production costs (reportedly £16,000), the quality of the acting, and the realism of the staging, gushing that



'the photographic finish and the hundred and one little items that go to make up a good film can only be described as perfect'.<sup>100</sup> However, the story of an innocent man's incarceration, suffering and redemption likely also resonated strongly with Australian audiences whose collective history as a British penal colony lay less than a century behind them. West's management drew patrons' attention to the similarities between Hugo's story and Marcus Clarke's *For the Term of His Natural Life*, the classic Australian novel about the wrongly convicted Rufus Dawes, which had been adapted for the screen in 1908 by Australian director Charles MacMahon. It also built on the popularity of other Australian convict films, such as *The Romantic Story of Margaret Catchpole*, made by Raymond Longford and Lottie Lyell in 1911.

As cutting-edge as it was in length, cost, and artistic ambition, *Les Misérables* faced stiff competition from other Continental star features aiming for the same market niche. In many Australasian towns, *Les Misérables* ran immediately before or after the Italian historical epic *Quo Vadis?* from Cines, which premiered in Australia about three weeks after *Les Misérables*, and which was also widely promoted as a 'one-picture evening'. On May 8 the Sydney correspondent for *Punch* asserted that 'picture audiences love the dramatized novel', citing the monumental success of *Les Misérables* at West's cinemas during the preceding month, 'despite the fact that nearly all the picture showmen in Sydney turned it down with contempt', as evidence for the likely popularity of *Quo Vadis?*, which was due to open at Spencer's Lyceum on 10 May.<sup>101</sup> Both films were considered to be equally impressive examples of Continental cinematic innovation and both broke records for box office receipts and length of run in various cities.

Yet while both films were lengthy, expensive enactments of literary texts, *Les Misérables* distinguished itself particularly by its famous cast, while *Quo Vadis?* stood out for its scale. The Brisbane *Telegraph* praised *Les Misérables* as 'a giant among films; 11,000 feet in length; it illustrates every page of the book and is replete with tragic incident. With the cooperation of artists preeminent in the theatre world of France, a marvelous result is claimed to have been achieved'.<sup>102</sup> By seeing this film in the cinema, viewers not only got to enjoy the enactment of a familiar, beloved story, but also to bask in the company of Mistinguett, Henry Krauss, Maria Ventura, and Henri Etiévant, which gave it an edge over the competition.

In addition to filling theatres across Australia and New Zealand for more than a year and generating massive profits for Pathé, *Les Misérables* was also pivotal in reinforcing the value of Continental films as an important category of respectable middle-class entertainment. Citing *Les Misérables* as an example of high-quality art film, Musgrove predicted that it would raise the taste of audiences above the average American film: 'Some showmen

will devote themselves to scenic and classic and educational films, some to melodrama and comic pictures, some to children's shows, and so on. And as the popular taste improves, we can drop out the burglary films and the cowboy shooting pictures and such like.'<sup>103</sup> The actors who starred in *Les Misérables*, particularly Krauss and Mistinguett, enjoyed enhanced name recognition in Australasia for several years, as did some other French actors, including Gabrielle Robinne and Stacia Napierkowska, who had not been in the film but were credited for having done so anyway. For example, ads for Pathé's 8,000ft version of Zola's novel *Germinal*, released in Australia in December 1913 under the title *Germinal, or Master and Man*, reminded viewers that Krauss had played Jean Valjean, while ads for the 3,000ft Pathé film *Le roi du bagné/The Convict's Return* in October 1914 boasted that it featured 'Madame Robini [*sic*] and Napier Kowski [*sic*], of "Les Misérables" fame'.<sup>104</sup> The film also functioned as a generally accepted standard of excellence and success against which other films were measured, such as the 6,000ft Swedish Biograph film *Strejken/The Worker's Way*, which, when it was shown to 1,500 viewers in Broken Hill (NSW) in December 1914, earned the accolade 'even better than *Les Misérables*'.<sup>105</sup>

### The Beginning of the End

Yet even as *Les Misérables* enjoyed triumphal success across Australasia, the popularity of French films in the region was already waning. Not only did the number of French multi-reel features imported in 1914 drop to about half of the roughly four dozen that arrived in 1913, but critics began to label certain undesirable aspects of films as 'French' or 'Continental', consciously or unconsciously echoing a common American complaint about European films. Even as ads in late 1913 raved about *Master and Man* being a faithful reproduction of Zola's 'masterpiece', for example, they also noted that the film had been 'neatly trimmed and set to meet the exactions of English taste'.<sup>106</sup> A more explicit example is found in an April 1914 interview with Reverend Alfred Gifford, chairman of the Congregational Union in South Australia who was occupying a guest pulpit in Broken Hill, in which the local newspaper *Barrier Miner* reported that although Reverend Gifford believed the cinema to be a good influence on the population generally, particularly in terms of keeping men out of the bars and giving families a place to spend time together, he disapproved of French films for their suggestiveness and occasional nudity, with the caveat that their moral messages could redeem them in individual cases.<sup>107</sup>

The distancing effect of this kind of rhetoric is evident in a review in the same paper, a few weeks later, of a new 4,700ft Pathé film *Marie-Jeanne*

ou *La femme du peuple/A Woman of the People*. Frequently confused in Australian newspapers with Asta Nielsen's diplomatic drama *S1/A Girl's Sacrifice*, the film in question is an adaptation of an 1845 play by Adolphe d'Ennery and Julien de Mallian about 'the loves and sorrows of two young women, one a nobleman's daughter, the other a work girl'. The West's ad for the film describes it as 'the most artistically beautiful, the most pathetic, and the most highly emotional photo-play yet brought to Australia. Its intense heart-to-heart interest and the human note of appeal it strikes has earned for this film the title of the GREAT LADIES' PLAY'.<sup>108</sup> However, the local reviewer judges that 'the drama is essentially French, and introduces matters which, to the English mind, could well be left to the imagination'.<sup>109</sup> As long as many French and Continental features were being screened on Australasian screens at any given time, generalizations about their morality could be easily disproved, but as they became rarer, they also became easier to pigeonhole and condemn.

After the outbreak of World War I, French war films played in Australasian cinemas alongside Pathé newsreels, but French star pictures largely disappeared, with a few exceptions, such as the Bernhardt films discussed above. Films that were already in circulation continued to be screened for several more months, including *Germinal*, *A Woman of the People*, and the 4,000ft Belgian-made Pathé-branded romance *La fille de Delft/Tragedy in the Clouds* (aka *Loyalty*). The latter film opened at the 1,031-seat Empire Theatre in Adelaide on 4 April 1914, three days after its US premiere. It was later screened, along with 'a good programme of dramas and comics', at the canvas-roofed James Theatre in Dungog (NSW) on 14 August, where it became the longest film yet shown at that cinema as well as a rare stencil-coloured one, expected to 'please young and old', and finally, apparently for the last time in Australia, at the Tivoli Theatre in the Murray river port town of Echuca (Vic) in October 1914.<sup>110</sup> In New Zealand, it opened in September 1914, at Hayward's Lyric Theatre in Auckland, and circulated around the country until 16 February 1916, when it was featured at Palace Pictures in the Alexandra Hall in Woodville. Many of the advertisements mention the Dutch and French scenery (especially the tulips), the French actors, and the Pathé brand (though some attribute it to Gaumont instead), but the film's main attraction seems to have been its action sequences, in particular its depiction of a 'balloon ascent and a tragic fall to earth'.<sup>111</sup>

New French fiction imports were, however, the exception after 1914. The most notable of the few French features that were screened during the war included the propaganda feature *Alsace*, based on a play by Gaston Leroux and starring Gabrielle Réjane, and two films featuring Gaby Deslys: *Infatuation*, co-directed by Louis Mercanton and René Hervil for

Pathé, and *The God of Luck*, directed by Henri Pouctal for Éclipse. All three of these films, featuring well-known female French theatre stars, were imported by Australasian Films within a few months of their release in France and screened widely, primarily at Union Theatres venues, such as His Majesty's Theatre in Hobart (Tas), where both of Deslys's films premiered, in March 1919 and December 1920, respectively. Audiences must have enjoyed them, for they stayed in circulation for at least a year in both Australia and New Zealand, with *The God of Luck* persisting until June 1923, when it was screened for the last time at the open-air cinema attached to the Don Hotel in Darwin (NT). However, with only a sporadic supply of French features available and no driving force behind their distribution, French films appeared ever more rarely and after ever-greater lag. Even Abel Gance's massive Napoleonic epic, which Australian newspapers reported on as a cinema phenomenon in 1927, wasn't screened in Australia until 1929, two years after its European release, and then as an Anzac Day memorial presentation, not a regular theatrical release.

Despite the war and the production constraints it imposed, film-making—particularly of such popular serials as Feuillade's *Les vampires* and *Judex*—continued in France, albeit on a smaller scale than before, throughout the remainder of the silent era. However, few of these later French silent films appear to have made it to the Antipodes. This drastically reduced screen presence was partly a function of the reduced numbers of French fiction films available for export. Another factor was the American film industry's massive investment in feature film production in the years just before and during World War I, after years of resisting the longer format. With a huge domestic market to absorb production costs and freedom from the costs of war until 1917, the US film industry had no trouble filling the gap left by diminished French production with cheap American features, locking up foreign markets with block-booking contracts that made it difficult for other countries' films to be screened. Some of the films marketed with the Pathé brand towards the end of the war, such as the Astra Film serial *The Mystery of the Double Cross*, which was advertised as a Pathé feature at the Tivoli Theatre in Echuca (Vic) in March 1918, were American made, featuring American actors, in this case Mollie King, playing opposite the Frenchman Léon Bary.



Although French stars were soon replaced by American ones in Australasian newspapers, neither they nor Pathé were entirely forgotten by their fans in the Antipodes. A 1924 article in the Hobart *Mercury*, in a report on

Pathé's intention to increase its share capital by 50%, noted that the company 'has been associated prominently with [the] Australian moving picture business'.<sup>112</sup> The year before, newspapers and cinema audiences alike had mourned the death of Sarah Bernhardt at the age of seventy-eight, still 'in harness', as the Adelaide *Chronicle* noted in the caption of the photo of a younger, more glamorous Bernhardt they ran in commemoration.<sup>113</sup> Appropriately, the *Sydney Mail* carried an 'illustrated account of the great actress's career' a week later.<sup>114</sup> This final tribute gave Australasian fans a chance to say goodbye, both to the celebrated Frenchwoman and, though they didn't realize it at the time, to the era in which French theatrical and cinematic arts were an integral part of their entertainment landscape.

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## ‘The most important event in the annals of the biograph in Australia’

### The Triumph of Italian Historical Epics

In March 1915, the Australian arts monthly the *Lone Hand* declared that while, ‘up to the present the two greatest films screened in Australia have been “Quo Vadis” and “Cleopatra”’, those films’ accomplishments ‘pale into insignificance beside the achievements of the cinema people in *Cabiria* ... the greatest picture play ever produced’.<sup>1</sup> The magazine’s enthusiasm for big-budget, artistically ambitious, long Italian historical films, represented by such blockbusters as *Quo Vadis?*, *Marc’Antonio e Cleopatra*/*Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Cabiria*, reflects the ubiquity and prestige of Italian features on Australasian screens during much of the silent era. Although Italian film-makers were never able to dominate their own domestic market, even when, as in the pre-World War I period, both the quantity and quality of their productions were very high, Italian films circulated widely and profitably in the trans-Tasman region throughout the 1910s and into the 1920s.

During the peak years of Italian silent film production, Italian companies were eager participants in the fierce competition between European, British, and American film-makers for overseas markets. At least nine major Italian film producers were active around 1910, spread across the country from Rome to Turin, Milan to Naples. Although each company was relatively small, they were able, as a group, to conquer a significant share of the global cinema market, including in Australasia. Based on currently digitized newspaper coverage, at least 500 Italian films were screened in the Antipodes between 1908 and 1917. These included no fewer than 250 single- and multi-reel Italian narrative films and around 200 comic shorts featuring recurring characters such as Tontolini (played

by Ferdinand Guillaume for Cines), Lea (played by Armanda Carolina (Lea) Giunchi for Cines), Polidor (played by Guillaume for Pasquali), Foolshead (aka Cretinetti, played by André Deed for Itala), Tweedledum (played by Marcel Fernández Pérez for Ambrosio), and Bloomer (aka Kri Kri, played by Raymond Dandy for Cines). The narrative films were primarily from the largest Italian producers—Cines, Ambrosio, Itala, and Film d'Arte Italiana—as well as a few each from such smaller makers as Saffi-Comerio, Latium, Milano, Vesuvio, Aquila, Celio, Savoia, Caesar, Gloria, and Pasquali.

Soon after the shift to narrative film in the mid-1900s, the works of pioneering early Italian film-makers such as Luigi Maggi (1867–1946), Mario Caserini (1874–1920), Enrico Guazzoni (1876–1949), and Giovanni Pastrone (1883–1959) became popular in the Antipodes via such technically innovative, elaborate historical epics as Ambrosio's *The Last Days of Pompeii* in 1908 and *Nerone/Nero, or The Fall of Rome* in 1909 that celebrated a romanticized Greco-Roman past with a penchant for monumentality, spectacle, and elaborate historical detail. After 1914, however, despite (or perhaps in part because of) the staggering success and corresponding costs of such epics as *Quo Vadis?* and *Cabiria*, Italian film imports in Australasia increasingly featured female-centric diva films, including *L'amazzona mascherata/The Masked Amazon* (1914) and *La donna nuda/The Naked Truth* (1914), that showcased actresses such as Francesca Bertini, Lyda Borelli, and Pina Menichelli in private, domestic settings. Unlike the massive public spectacles offered by historical epics, diva films were preoccupied with gender roles and relationships, offering a more intimate, nuanced view of the transformations being brought about by the modernization of society.

Driven by the international success of such blockbusters, Italian film experienced a wave of global success in the 1910s that created what Maria Adriana Prolo describes as a 'euphoric moment, as Italian companies manage to sell their films "sight unseen." Their trademark is a guarantee: Italian films attract spectators in New York, Sydney, and Barcelona.<sup>2</sup> While the popularity of Italian films on the US market, robustly marketed by distributor George Kleine, was likely more financially significant to the producers than their success in the Antipodes, the high status and merit-based ubiquity of Italian films in Australasia had a profound cultural impact on both the cinematic expectations and historical self-consciousness of settler-colonial Australasian society. It was also an important vehicle for disseminating ideas about Italian history and culture, decades before the establishment of large Italian immigrant communities in post-World War II Australasia that would eventually support a new and discursively different kind of Italian ethnic cinema.<sup>3</sup> Gian Piero Brunetta defines Italian film as a 'privileged repository of twentieth-century historical memory—micro- and macro-history, material and lived history, the desired and

dreamed-of history of the Italian people',<sup>4</sup> which could be shared with the rest of the world on screen. Since Italian cinema in pre-war Australasia was neither limited by language nor primarily consumed by a community of heritage Italian speakers, it appealed to the cinemagoing public more generally.

Like the newly unified Italy and the young United States, where the imagined Greco-Roman past was instrumentalized to legitimize invented traditions illustrating national unity and virtue, Australia and New Zealand in the 1910s were in the throes of defining their own national identities and redefining their relationships to the British Empire, the USA, and Continental Europe, as well as to their Asian and Pacific neighbours. If, as Brunetta posits, film offered itself from the outset 'as a powerful medium for the creation of symbols and mythologies of an artificial national identity', the reception of Italian films can indicate the extent to which Australasian audiences were aware of and/or receptive to such mythologies. Maria Wyke suggests that for Italians, 'the awareness of an historical continuity ... served to enhance a sense of communal identity, legitimating the new [Italian] nation and bolstering its sovereignty in the eyes of its own and other peoples', while Americans instrumentalized a rhetoric of *romanitas* to conceptualize itself as an ideally conceived Roman republic, with Roman republican ideals of liberty, civic virtue, and mixed government.<sup>5</sup>

In the pre-World War I era, Italian cinematic celebrations of imperial glory seem to have been enthusiastically received by Antipodean audiences both as pleasurable visual spectacles and pedagogical tools for teaching history. Once the high production values and marketability of Italian films became a known quantity in Australasia, the number of Italian films imported rose from at least fifteen per year in 1909–10 to twenty-five in 1911 and several dozen per year in 1912–14, peaking at more than five dozen in 1914 alone.<sup>6</sup> The triumphal launch of *Quo Vadis?* in Australia by Spencer's in May 1913 was widely proclaimed to be 'the most important event in the annals of the biograph in Australia', due to its 'Scenes bewildering in their Sublime Grandeur and with a Realism Bordering on the Uncanny'.<sup>7</sup> Spencer's claim that *Quo Vadis?* was the 'Greatest Picture of all time', which would 'mark an epoch in the irresistible march of the silent drama', is supported by the massive profits it generated and its prolonged circulation in both New Zealand and Australia, with thousands of screenings over more than six years.

Although the importation of Italian film was not affected by trade embargoes after 1914, as German and Danish films were, wartime constraints had a severe impact on Italian film production, as they did on the French film industry as well; Italian film imports to the Antipodes appear to have fallen to barely two dozen in 1915, slightly more than a dozen

in 1916, and just a handful in 1917. American imports soon filled the cinema programmes in Italy as in Australasia, further inhibiting domestic production. After the war, the formation of L'Unione Cinematografica Italiana (UCI) out of Cines, Ambrosio, Caesar, and Tiber Film was intended to allow Italian film-makers to regain control of their own market. In the immediate post-war period, Italian films, particularly of the diva variety, were instrumental in attempts to reclaim market share for European films from American producers (see Chapter 9), but the collapse of the Italian film industry in the early 1920s, when nationwide production plummeted to just twenty films in 1923, made it impossible to regain that glorious past.

### The Breakthrough of Italian Film in the Antipodes

The Italian film industry started in 1894/5, with a kinetograph invented by Filoteo Alberini (1865–1937), a year before the Lumières' cinematographe. However, Italian companies did not begin producing large numbers of narrative films until more than a decade later, a trend launched by Alberini's pioneering 820ft historical feature *La presa di Roma/The Taking of Rome* in 1905. Unlike the domination of the early French film industry by Pathé and Gaumont, the early Italian film-making landscape was more fragmented and geographically dispersed, with high regional variation and dozens of small production companies. Alberini and Dante Santoni founded the first Italian film company in Rome in 1905, which became the Società Italiana Cines in 1906, a joint-stock holding company with such powerful men as industrialist Adolfo Pouchain Foggia, Count Francesco Salimei, and Ernesto Pacelli, director of the Banco di Roma and uncle of Pope Pius XII, among its directors. After Pouchain was discovered embezzling company funds and falsifying production information in 1908, Baron Alberto Fassini, Salimei, and Mario A. Stevani became Cines's administrators in 1910, eager to compete with Pathé and Gaumont in foreign markets. Many small companies emerged after 1906, three of which, alongside Cines, emerged from the recession of 1908 strongly positioned to export their wares to the world: Arturo Ambrosio & Co. (est. 1906) and Itala Film (created from Carlo Rossi & Co. in 1908) and Pasquali Film (est. 1909) in Turin; and Milano Films (created from Saffi-Comerio in 1909) in Milan. As the film business continued to boom, Celio Films was founded by Baron Baldassare Negrone in Rome in 1912, while Count Francesco Anamoro founded Napoli Film in Naples two years later.

Funding models for these companies varied widely, from modestly financed regional operations like Ambrosio to larger corporations like Cines backed by banks, entrepreneurs, and private financiers, which affected both the kinds of films that were produced and the production systems that

developed, giving rise to a fairly incoherent national cinematic landscape.<sup>8</sup> Since Milano Films inherited Saffi-Comerio's preoccupation with adapting Dante's *Inferno* for the screen—a massive project the company began in 1909 and completed in 1911—it produced relatively few films overall, but those films tended to be spectacular. By contrast, Ambrosio launched its first Serie d'Oro (Golden Series) with *Nero, or The Fall of Rome* and *Spergiura/The False Oath* (aka *Perjury*) in 1909, which earned the company a reputation abroad for artistically impressive films. Cines's goal of competing with French companies for international market share informed its streamlined production of historical films and aggressive distribution strategies. As early as 1909, Cines establishes branches in London, Paris, Berlin, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Warsaw, Odessa, Copenhagen, and Barcelona, and distribution agencies in New York, Buenos Aires, Caracas, Rio de Janeiro, and Sydney. Itala's production output was smaller than Cines's but still varied and ambitious, focusing on comic shorts, adventure stories, moralistic dramas, and historical epics.

In many ways, the path of Italian films into Australasia in the early silent period went through France. Beginning in 1907, Cines's publicity materials trumpeted the unique historical and cultural attributes of Italian films, but it was likely challenging for audiences to differentiate early Italian films from French ones, in terms of both style and branding.<sup>9</sup> Many of the first directors and stars at Italian production houses had been poached from the French companies founded a decade earlier. For example, director Gaston Velle (1868–1953), who worked for the Lumière brothers before joining Pathé in 1904, helped launch Cines in 1906–07, while actor André Deed (1879–1940) left Pathé for a lucrative contract with Itala in 1908, where he made and starred in dozens of films as the comic character Cretinetti (known as Foolshead in English-speaking markets) over the next two years. Other contributors were simply recruited from France, like actor/director Ferdinand Guillaume (1887–1977), often known by the stage name Polidor, who starred as the comic character Tontolini in more than a hundred short films for Cines from 1910 to 1912, before branching out to make films with Pasquali, Caesar, and his own Polidor Film company. Films produced by Pathé's Italian subsidiary Film d'Arte Italiana belonged to both the French and Italian national cinema traditions and were generally marketed in Australasia as Pathé films. Made in Italy with Italian actors by a French company, these deliberately cross-cultural adaptations of such classic historical and literary texts as Shakespeare's *Othello*, Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*, and Dante's *Françoise de Rimini* were closely aligned with the French *film d'art* productions of the same period, particularly in terms of their appeal to international audiences.

Well before the multi-reel feature became the norm in the USA, Italian films began emulating their French competitors in pushing the one-reel limit in pursuit of higher artistic quality and more complex narratives. At least three of the Italian films imported in 1909 were longer than one reel, though not by much—Cines's adaptation of Alexandre Dumas fil's novel *La signora di Monsoreau/The Lady of Monsoreau* was the longest, at 1,377ft (around twenty minutes), with *The Last Days of Pompeii* close behind at 1,246ft. The ratio was similar in 1910, with Cines's *Macbeth*, Latium's *Spartaco/Spartacus, the Last of the Gladiators*, and Film d'Arte Italiana's *Salomé* reaching 1,450ft, 1,394ft, and 1,397ft, respectively, while most of the other Italian imports ranged from 400 to 1,000ft, with the comic films tending towards the shorter end. In contrast to French *films d'art* of the same period, none of these Italian films were advertised in Australasia with the names of the actors, some of whom were quite well known in live theatre in Italy and would receive star billing in later films.

At this stage in Italian film, marketing emphasis was not placed on either the actors nor directors, but rather on the stories themselves and their universal appeal. Italian film-makers drew freely on not only Greco-Roman but also Continental European history more generally, as well as Shakespeare, Dante, and other popular European writers, to find narratives that seemed well suited to filmic adaptation and attractive to cinemagoers. Film versions of plays—such as Cines's *Macbeth* and *Phaedre*—and fairy tales, from Cinderella to Pinocchio, were popular subjects, in part because audiences were likely to have a basic familiarity with the storylines already, and in part because of how they catered to middle-class cultural aspirations. Although art films such as these made up a small component of the Italian and global film industry's total output, they represented one of the most visible markers of the industry's desire for legitimacy and improved cultural status, 'explicitly invoking "high" culture references but offering them in a "low" culture venue'.<sup>10</sup>

Literary adaptations like *The Lady of Monsoreau* were more complex than simple historical anecdotes and required more time and space to tell, thus helping to drive the transition to multi-reel films and star culture in 1910/11. The one-reel dramas from Film d'Arte Italiana imported to Australasia in 1910 included the literary adaptations *Camille*, based on Dumas fil's *La dame aux camélias*, and *Salomé*—both starring Vittoria Lepanto (1885–1965), with Francesca Bertini (1892–1985) in a minor role as a slave girl in the latter—as well as *Il trovatore/The Troubadour* (based on Antonio García Gutiérrez's 1836 play *El trovador* and Verdi's 1853 opera), in which Bertini plays the lead. The prominence of these actresses anticipates both the introduction of the star system and the later popularity of Italian diva films, but they were not yet marketed by name like their

French peers Sarah Bernhardt and Gabrielle Réjane. In many ways, these one-reel films themselves were already relics of an earlier form of cinema at the time they appeared. Marina Nicoli explains, ‘With the advent of full-length films, films themselves increasingly had the characteristics of cultural products; each film was a prototype whose life cycle played out on the screen in a different way.’<sup>11</sup>

Many of these early Italian films made it to Australasia very soon after their European releases and enjoyed sustained popularity there. By way of example, Ambrosio’s 820ft drama *The False Oath* opened at Spencer’s Lyceum in Sydney on 21 August 1909, a month after its German premiere and two months before it opened in New York, and then in New Zealand at His Majesty’s Theatre in Christchurch a month later, on 25 September, as part of a Pathé Pictures programme. The film stayed in circulation in Australia until August 1911, though only until January 1910 in New Zealand. A few months after the success launch of *The False Oath*, *Nero*, or *The Fall of Rome* premiered simultaneously at Spencer’s Lyceum in Sydney and Tait’s Glaciarium in Melbourne on 3 December 1909. Spencer’s ads described the film as ‘THE ABSOLUTE GREATEST PERFECTION. NOTHING FINER OR GRANDER EXTANT’,<sup>12</sup> while Tait’s billed it as ‘THE CINEMATOGRAPH EVENT OF THE YEAR, the most astounding historical production of modern times, intensely dramatic, thrillingly sensational, superb scenery, powerfully acted, accurate in costume, and historically correct’.<sup>13</sup> In this film, audiences were told to expect ‘magnificent spectacular events and staging never before achieved in the history of cinematography, acted by world renowned artists, costumed with minute detail, mounted on a lavish scale, [and] coupled with striking scenic and lighting effects’. In New Zealand, *Nero* was the star attraction at Fullers’ Colosseum in Christchurch on 9 December 1909, after which it circulated until March 1910, while in Australia *Nero* remained in circulation until February 1911.

Aside from Cines’s agency in Sydney, no Italian production houses appear to have established their own distribution offices for direct sales or rentals in the Antipodes, so Italian films had to make their way to Australasia by other, more indirect means. Peter Bondanella explains that Italian producers were comparatively poor businessmen who did not evolve ‘a profitable infrastructure of movie chains and rental agencies to maximize their profits and to guarantee the distribution of their products during the silent period’, but Aldo Bernardini contends that the readiness of Italian producers to export their products was perceived as threatening by French, British, and American producers already in 1907–08.<sup>14</sup> Pouchain began working with agents in major European and American cities to sell Cines films abroad as early as mid-1906 and began direct sales in key locations by



Figure 5.1 Frames from Ambrosio's *Nerone/Nero, or the Fall of Rome* (1908). EYE Filmmuseum Amsterdam. Photographs of the black-and-white and tinted nitrate film by Barbara Flueckiger. Timeline of Historical Film Colors: <https://filmcolors.org>

1909. The distribution of Italian films to British colonial markets generally went through London, where Cines opened a branch office on Charing Cross Road in 1909 and guaranteed a programme of three films per week at the end of 1910, which was soon increased to six or seven titles released twice weekly.<sup>15</sup> Other producers worked with independent companies like Tyler Film Co., with whom Itala partnered in 1910, or relied on Pathé for their global distribution. Several early Italian films, such as the Cines crime drama *La mano nera/The Black Hand* were marketed in Australasia as Pathé productions, with no indication of their actual national origins. The importation of Italian films to the American market was complicated by MPPC protectionism. Itala's partnerships with several independent American distribution companies allowed it to become the most important Italian film exporter to the USA between 1908 and 1911.<sup>16</sup> However, after Cines's director general Mario Stevani travelled to New York in 1911 and reached an exclusive agreement for US distribution with MPPC member George Kleine, Cines took Itala's place on the American market and replaced Gaumont as Kleine's most important European commercial partner.



No single Australasian distributor seems to have controlled Italian film imports, which premiered in all the major cinema chains—often Spencer's or J.D. Williams's in Sydney, West's in Perth and Adelaide, or Spencer's, Hoyt's, Tait's, or West's in Melbourne. The exception to this rule was big-budget films like Cines's massive spectacles *Gerusalemme liberata/The Crusaders* and *Quo Vadis?*, and Milano's *L'odissea/Adventures of Ulysses* (aka *Homer's Odyssey*), the exclusive Australasian rights to which Spencer's bought in London. Independent distributors also played an important role. Inspired by Spencer's successes, an Australian businessman named Archie Fraser, who had had 'extensive business relations with Italy for many years', founded the Fraser Film Release and Photographic Company in April 1913, with branches in Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Wellington, and London, for the express purpose of importing Italian films. By his own report, Fraser's initial goal was to import 'sufficient reels ... to provide one programme of 7500ft a week', but demand drove that up to 20,000ft per week within six months.<sup>17</sup> Fraser's most notable European import was Pasquali's 1913 remake of *The Last Days of Pompeii* in early 1914.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, *Cabiria* was imported to Australia by an independent distributor, entrepreneur Hugh Donald 'Huge Deal' McIntosh, the owner of Harry Rickards's Tivoli vaudeville theatre and several newspapers; he saw the film in New York in 1914 and was so sure it would be a success that he created the company Cabiria Ltd for this sole purpose, then leased the film to Australasian Films in April 1915.

As Italian production ramped up and Italian film-makers tackled increasingly ambitious projects, some Italian companies—first Itala, then Ambrosio and Cines—gradually established themselves as recognizable brands in Australasia. The one-reel historical drama *L'amanta della regina/The Queen's Lover*, which premiered at Spencer's Lyceum in Sydney in October 1908, seems to have been one of Itala's first imports to Australia (presumably via Tyler, which marketed it in London as 'a Real "Art Film"'<sup>19</sup>). Within a year Itala had attained enough prestige in the Antipodes to be listed alongside Edison, Gaumont, Hepworth, Lux, Star, Vitagraph, Warwick, Pathé Frères, Urban, Paul, Williamson, Nordisk, and Cricks & Martin in an ad for Coliseum Pictures in Ballarat (Vic), as one of the 'leading film-producing firms'.<sup>20</sup> Although the majority of the companies on this list are British, Itala has plenty of European peers, including four French producers (Gaumont, Lux, Pathé, and Georges Méliès's Star Film) and Denmark's Nordisk Films Co., as well as two American brands (Edison and Vitagraph). Itala films had an early numerical advantage in Australasia, especially around 1909, but were soon matched by comparable numbers of films from Cines and Ambrosio, with a sprinkling of films from several other Italian producers including Celio, Pasquali, Aquila, Milano, Vesuvio, Savoia, etc. Once Cines emerged

as the dominant producer in Italy after 1910, it became the source of most Italian film imports in the Antipodes, though other Italian films, particularly Ambrosio, Celio, Itala, and Pasquali, were still regularly represented.

While comic shorts were consistently popular imports in the pre-World War I period, especially Itala's *Cretinetti/Foolshead*, Cines's *Tontolini*, and Pasquali's *Polidor* films, the most prominently marketed Italian films in this period were technically sophisticated, artistically impressive literary adaptations and historical narratives. Still, many other genres—including comedies (e.g. Ambrosio's *Santarellina/Mam'selle Nitouche*), adventure stories (e.g. Ambrosio's *La nave dei leoni/The Ship of Lions*), crime dramas (e.g. Cines's *Polizia moderne/Smart Lady Detective*), and sentimental stories (e.g. Ambrosio's *Nozze d'oro/Fifty Years After, or The Golden Wedding*)—were also well represented and frequently screened. At least sixteen Italian narrative films were screened in Australasia in 1909, including seven from Itala, four from Ambrosio, and four from Cines. These one-reel dramas were predominantly historical fiction, with a particular emphasis on stories of royal courts with tragic outcomes. While Ambrosio's allegorical tale *Cuore di mamma/A Mother's Heart* stands out for its fairy-tale characteristics, most of the others are based on easily recognizable episodes from Italian, British, and French history. These historical dramas included Cines's *Marco Visconti* and *L'ultimo degli Stuardi/The Last of the Stuarts*; Itala's *Giordano Bruno* and *Il principe di Challant/The Prince of Challant*; and two ambitious Ambrosio productions directed by and starring Luigi Maggi: *Nero, or The Fall of Rome*, discussed above, and Ambrosio's first, 1,100ft adaptation of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's popular 1834 novel *The Last Days of Pompeii*. The latter was released in Italy in December 1908, in Australia and the UK in February 1909, and in the USA in April 1909. (This version of *The Last Days of Pompeii* does not appear to have been screened in New Zealand.)

Just as *Nero* was praised by Australian exhibitors for its artistry and authenticity, *The Last Days of Pompeii* also reflects the Italian film industry's move towards higher production values, innovative effects, and socially relevant narratives. The rediscovery of Pompeii in the early nineteenth century had inspired various novels and operas that reanimated the dead city; Bulwer-Lytton's novel focuses on a Greek hero and heroine (Glaucus and Ione) who escape the city before it is buried by volcanic ash. Capitalizing on the enduring popularity of the novel, *The Last Days of Pompeii* was adapted on film at least four times in the silent era: Walter Booth's very short version in Britain in 1900; Maggi's version for Ambrosio in 1908; an Ambrosio remake in 1913, directed by Eleuterio Rodolfi; and, in the same year, a Pasquali Film version, directed by Enrico Vidali, with the slightly altered title *Juno o gli ultimi giorni di Pompeii*.

Considered to be a model for cinematographic production, Maggi's version, which was also marketed in Australasia as *The Blind Girl and the Villain*, compressed the complicated narrative into a handful of scenes performed in the style of Italian opera (albeit without sound), with elaborate costumes, demonstrative acting, and elaborate staging, climaxing in spectacular and terrifyingly realistic crowd scenes of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius that set a high bar for special effects.<sup>21</sup> French director Victorin-Hippolyte Jasset described Maggi's *Last Days of Pompeii* in the Parisian *Ciné-Journal* in 1910 as 'a master work that had revolutionized the market for films by its artistic sense, its accurate mise-en-scène, the cleverness of its special effects, the grandeur of its conception and execution, and the exceptional quality of its photography'.<sup>22</sup> Maggi's *Nero* similarly distilled a long Italian dramatic tradition of depictions of Emperor Nero into a highly theatrical film, with actors gesticulating in front of papier-mâché backdrops towards an unseen audience. This version was particularly praised for its inclusion of a red-tinted sequence depicting Nero's dream of Christian suffering, the burning of Rome, and the tortured cries of the victims.

Film's ability to transport viewers to faraway locations had been a powerful attraction since the 1890s, but Italian historical epics seemed to offer a form of time travel to the distant past as well. Bringing history to life on screen, in colour, and accompanied by music gave such films both considerable cultural capital and a lasting sensory impact that lent itself to educational and devotional purposes as well as entertainment. Yet the pairing of romanticized history and modern technology could be highly problematic, as it often entailed treating the past as 'infinitely reversible and reconstructible for the present moment', as whole cloth out of which contemporary moral messages could be crafted.<sup>23</sup> The use of historical models for films designed to appeal to modern audiences required deliberate selection and presentation of material to maximize dramatic effect, while the tendency towards reusing plots, sets, costumes, and actors had the effect of collapsing the differences between eras and places, resulting in a 'singular and undifferentiated antiquity' that could underpin any number of interpretations.<sup>24</sup>

Recognizing the marketability of historical films, Italian film-makers in both Rome and Turin made them the centrepiece of their strategy to win over international audiences. Brunetta explains, 'Before Hollywood became the world's cinema capital, Italian producers of historical films and the city of Turin tasted the short-lived, alluring and inimitable sensation of dominating cinematic imperialism. The historical genre rapidly assumed a central role in production, imposing a style and a stamp of Italian identity on all the films produced'.<sup>25</sup> This focus imposed a sense of coherence and interchangeability on the products of the wide variety of Italian

film-makers, with such films as Saffi-Comerio's *Martire pompeiana/The Martyrs of Pompeii*, Latium's *Spartacus*, Itala's *Vestale/The Vestal*, and Ambrosio's *La vergine di Babilonia/The Virgin of Babylon* all appearing in Australasian cinemas in the course of 1910, often undistinguished by brand name. However, exceptions to this rule are Ambrosio's *La regina di Ninive/The Queen of Nineveh*, which was described on release in Melbourne in August 1911 as 'the best photo-play its class ever produced by Ambrosia [sic] Company', and Milano's *Adventures of Ulysses*, which Spencer's lauded as a welcome, realistic alternative to clichéd American melodramas, Westerns, and stereotyped comic films.<sup>26</sup> Of the nearly two dozen Italian features that ran on Australasian screens in 1911, three stand out for their innovative qualities and particularly enthusiastic reception: Itala's drama *The Fall of Troy*, Milano Film's adaptation of Dante's *Inferno*, and Cines's *The Crusaders*, based on Torquato Tasso's 1581 epic poem *La Gerusalemme liberata/Jerusalem Delivered*.

These three films helped confirm the multi-reel feature as the new gold standard of cinematic entertainment in Australasia and establish the pre-eminence of Italian historical epics in this new cinematic constellation. Directed by Giovanni Pastrone, *The Fall of Troy* was one of the first films to demonstrate the aesthetic possibilities of the long shot, with large crowds and magnificent open-air sets, in contrast to the one-dimensional theatrical sets that had been commonly used in earlier short historical films; it was also the first Italian narrative film to cross the 2,000ft mark in length. However, *The Crusaders*, directed by Enrico Guazzoni and starring Amleto Novelli, who would later work together on *Quo Vadis?*, was nearly twice as long, at 4,000ft, while *Dante's Inferno*, co-directed by Francesco Bertolini, Giuseppe de Liguoro, and Adolfo Padovan, was even longer, at 4,265ft. The eleventh Italian film adaptation of Dante's text since 1908, it was not only by far the longest, comprising three parts and fifty-four scenes, but also the most expensive to make, costing more than 100,000 lire (£20,000).<sup>27</sup> In comparison, *The Fall of Troy* and *The Crusaders* cost between £5,000 and £15,000 each.<sup>28</sup> Such massive capital investments in Italian film were not just a matter of economics—film was regarded as a means of enhancing Italy's prestige at home and abroad, with historical epics particularly suited to legitimizing film as an art form and confirming Italy's status as a great industrial power.

All three films were quickly picked up by leading Australian exhibitors and deployed to catch audiences' attention. *The Fall of Troy*, which arrived on the RMS *Malva* on 9 May, premiered in Perth at both West's Queen's Hall Theatre and the King's Theatre on 10 May. At least seven prints must have been imported to Australasia, for just five days later, it also opened at West's Palace and Princess theatres in Sydney and at West's in Melbourne.

At the latter, it formed part of the first known double feature programme in global film history, as the supporting film to the Australian film *The Lost Chord*.<sup>29</sup> *The Fall of Troy* also opened at J.D. Williams’s Lyric Theatre in Sydney on 15 May. Touting the film’s 800 extras and meticulous historical accuracy in his ads, Williams screened the film continuously every day from 11am to 5pm in addition to his regular cinematic programme. One week later, on 22 May, Fullers’ Pictures presented *The Fall of Troy* at His Majesty’s Theatre in Wellington. Critics were amazed at its length, marvelling that it took up a quarter of the evening’s programme, and delighted by its ability to accomplish the ‘Herculean task’ of staging the ‘story of Helen of Troy’s love for Paris and the ruin that followed in its train ... with astonishing attention to detail ... wealth of scenery, and ... army of “supers,” all well trained in their work’.<sup>30</sup> Employing 800 actors in the film was a staggering novelty, testifying to the film-maker’s desire for verisimilitude and earning the accolade of ‘one of the finest films ever screened in Wellington’.<sup>31</sup> *The Fall of Troy* was screened in Australia until June 1914 and in New Zealand until as late as Christmas 1914.

Williams purchased the exclusive Australasian distribution rights for *Dante’s Inferno*, which replaced *The Fall of Troy* at his Lyric Theatre in Sydney on 22 May 1911, the same day *The Fall of Troy* opened in Wellington. Since *Inferno* was competing that night against both Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree’s *Henry VI* at West’s Palace and Princess theatres and several live shows, Williams attempted to stimulate audience excitement by announcing the distribution of 5,000 small souvenir devils at the premiere.<sup>32</sup> Opening four months after its Italian premiere and after weeks of successful screenings in London and New York, *Dante’s Inferno* moved rather haphazardly between cinemas in rural towns, such as the Colosseum Theatre in Lithgow (NSW), where it was screened in June, and larger ones, such as Shaftesbury Gardens in Perth where it ran in July. It stayed in circulation, somewhat sporadically, until December 1916 in Australia (though it only ran from October 1911 through January 1913 in New Zealand).

Audiences appear to have been familiar enough with the contours of Dante’s story not to need the extensive plot summaries that had accompanied announcements for *The Fall of Troy*, allowing Australasian reviewers of the film to merely allude to various aspects of the tale, such as ‘the gloomy poet of Florence ... holding fast to the hand of Virgil’ in the course of showing ‘the dreadful secrets of the abyss’.<sup>33</sup> Some critics didn’t like the film’s apparently graphic depictions of infernal torment, so the reviewer for the *Riverine Grazier* in remote Hay (NSW)—almost equidistant from Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide—felt it necessary to reassure potential cinemagoers in December that although ‘the film presented numerous

gruesome views of the conditions supposed to obtain in the nether regions ... the picture as a whole was not quite so terrible as one who had read some of the criticisms of it might be led to believe'. Instead, this reviewer described the film as 'a clever sample of the ingenuity of the cinematograph artist'.<sup>34</sup>

Meanwhile, Spencer's Pictures claimed to have obtained exclusive rights to *The Crusaders*, but it opened in New Zealand as a Fullers' Pictures production at the Olympia Theatre in Timaru on 8 July 1911, two days before its Australian premiere at Spencer's Lyceum in Sydney, so it is not clear whether Fullers' leased the film from Spencer's or acquired their own rights to it from another source. Both exhibitors resorted to an excess of superlatives to market the film to potential viewers. While Fullers' praised the film as 'the Greatest, Most Original, and Most Costly Production of Modern Times',<sup>35</sup> Spencer's advertised the film as 'the greatest achievement in motion photography ... an historical subject of unusual magnitude in story, detail, and stage craft, a perfect replica of the actual event, with costumes and modes of ancient war ... It is a Lesson in Ancient History that must elevate. It is a conception and execution of the greatest merit. It is absolutely beyond description.'<sup>36</sup> Spencer's quoted the opinion of 'London and foreign advices' that the film 'was exceptionally fine and perfect in detail'.

*The Crusaders* enjoyed such success during its two-week run in Sydney that the *Sun* asked whether anyone in Sydney hadn't seen it yet and exhorted 'any such unfortunate person in or about this city of ours' to hurry to 'Mr Spencer's picture house'.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, on 15 July, it opened at Spencer's Theatrescope cinema in Wirth's Olympia in Melbourne, where it also ran for two weeks, having been extended for an additional week due to audience demand.<sup>38</sup> Since the film then opened at Spencer's Theatre Royal in Perth on 26 July, Spencer's must have imported at least three prints, which circulated in Australia until July 1913, while Fullers' print was screened in New Zealand as late as March 1917, in the Bay of Plenty region of North Island. Together with the *Fall of Troy* and *Inferno*, *The Crusaders* set a new standard for technical skill, authentic historicity, and educational value that subsequent Italian historical films such as *Quo Vadis?* and *Cabiria* went to tremendous effort and expense to surpass.

### The Apex of Italian Historical Epics in Australasia: *Quo Vadis?*

Expensive multi-reel narrative films were so popular and profitable that French, Danish, and German companies were busy cranking them out by 1911, though the longer films did not fully catch on in the USA until 1913. Most of the major Italian production companies—including

Ambrosio, Aquila, Cines, Caesar, Itala, and Pasquali—converted at least half of their output to full-length films by 1912, the year that came to mark the peak of Italian silent film production, with 569 films produced in Turin, 420 in Rome, and 120 in Milan.<sup>39</sup> The number of Italian films imported to Australasia jumped from about two dozen per year in 1910 and 1911 to more than fifty each in 1912, 1913, and 1914. Along the way, Italian film developed identifying characteristics, with some regional variations between producers. Turin-based producers tended to adapt international literary and theatrical works to the screen in order to compete with French productions and raise the cultural dignity of the cinema, while producers in Rome were more likely to set their sights on the celebration of imperial glory through classical historical films.<sup>40</sup> Films that fell outside these generic parameters, such as Ambrosio's 2,500ft social drama *La mala pianta/The Weed*, were sometimes erroneously attributed in Antipodean newspapers to the Danish company Nordisk, which had already established its reputation in Australasia as the foremost maker of social dramas.

While French, Danish, German, and American producers also made many literary adaptations in this period, Italian producers made the grandest historical spectacles. No one else had the same direct access to the actual locations of many episodes of classical history as Italian producers, who also enjoyed other perks of being locally connected. Director Enrico Guazzoni explained to Italian readers in November 1913 that *Antony and Cleopatra* had given him an 'opportunity to parade before the eyes of the spectator the most distinctive places of ancient Rome and ancient Egypt, which everyone has imprinted on their minds at their school-desks but has never seen, nor would have any way of really seeing, not even if they spent the treasures of Croesus'.<sup>41</sup> Several newspapers noted that the Italian government even permitted domestic film-makers to film on location in the Colosseum and on Palatine Hill, in order to ensure the accuracy of the settings. The columnist 'Stroller' reported from the Cines studios in Rome that the 'influence of the directors, who are connected with some of the oldest Italian families, is such that permission is easily obtained for utilizing antique backgrounds, obtaining the services of the military, borrowing animals from the noted Zoo, obtaining the loan of an airship for a week or two'.<sup>42</sup> In comparison to the miserable condition and ignominious end of the old circus lion shot by hunters in Nordisk's 1906 sensational *Løvejagten/The Lion Hunt*, Cines's unfettered access to the Roman Zoological Gardens meant that they could borrow as many healthy lions as they needed for such films as *Quo Vadis?* where Roman Christians are to be fed to a hungry pride, and *The Ship of Lions*, in which the heroine releases a cage full of lions on a burning ship to quell a mutiny.<sup>43</sup>

Such verifiable authenticity was crucial as historical epics tried to win over middle-class audiences to the new cinematic art-form by endowing it with a grandiose register and an educational justification. Wyke points out that Italian historical films ‘borrowed from the whole spectrum of nineteenth-century modes of historical representation (literary, dramatic, and pictorial) in pursuit of authenticity and authority for cinema as a mode of high culture, and to guarantee mass, international audiences through the reconstruction in moving images of familiar and accessible events of Roman history’.<sup>44</sup> Such films gave cinemagoers intimate access to a version of the past framed in terms of the concerns of the present. While many Italian film scholars have argued that the cinematic glorification of the Roman past and the Roman conquest of Carthage served to legitimize Italian colonial aspirations in the Mediterranean in the early twentieth century, the appeal of these films in Australia and New Zealand must be understood in a different context—which raises the question of why Italian historical epics appealed to settler-colonial Australians and New Zealanders, long before a substantial Italian immigrant population had settled there. To what extent did the historical message of conquest and culture-building resonate down under? Looking more closely at the circulation of two monumental films—Cines’s *Quo Vadis?* and Itala’s *Cabiria*—that represent the pinnacle of Italian historical dramas in the silent era, setting the standard for the entire industry and inspiring D.W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915, may help to answer these questions.

Directed by Guazzoni, with Amleto Novelli, Carlo Cattaneo, and Lea Giunchi in the leading roles, *Quo Vadis?* built on the reputation, scale, and extravagance of earlier Italian historical epics, but took the realistic representation of the past on screen to an astonishing new level of detail and scale. It is an adaptation of Polish Nobel Prize-winning author Henryk Sienkiewicz’s historical novel *Quo Vadis?* (1894–96), which uses the historical triumph of Christianity over Nero as a frame for a fictional love story between the pagan Roman soldier Marcus Vinicius and a Christian girl named Lygia, who is persecuted by Nero for her faith. Marcus meets the Apostle Peter and is converted to Christianity; Lygia is saved from dismemberment in the arena by her protector Ursus and the sympathy of the spectators. Through the story of Vinicius’s conversion and the skillful use of point-of-view shots, the film directs viewers’ sympathy away from the Roman imperial state and towards the persecuted Christians, most dramatically as they are herded into the arena towards the lions waiting to eat them. Wyke identifies the film’s cinematographic novelty in its ‘filmic structure that (through the use of both close-ups and long shots) alternated individual and collective experiences of imperial Rome, its naturalistic acting, its elaborate, three-dimensional set designs, and its



exploration of depth of field (especially through the movement on screen of vast crowds of extras).<sup>45</sup> Cines’s directors argued that the ‘great historical truth of *Quo Vadis?* is due to the Roman character of the play ... which can be noticed especially in the movement of the masses and the majestic posture of each individual’.<sup>46</sup> By any measure, whether of artistic innovation or symbolic meaning, *Quo Vadis?* was a cinematic spectacle greater than anything ever seen on screen in the Antipodes before.

The phenomenal success of *Quo Vadis?* cemented the elite status of Italian historical epics in Australasia. *Quo Vadis?* was both an unusually long film for its time, at 8,000ft (six reels), running for almost two hours, and one of the most profitable films ever to be shown in Australasia to that point, generating a net profit of at least £20,000.<sup>47</sup> Unlike in the USA, where *Quo Vadis?* was distributed by George Kleine under a special agreement with Cines, the film was available to the highest bidder for Australia and New Zealand, as it was in the UK. Cines’s London agent, the Italian nobleman Marchese Guido Serra di Cassano, sold the UK exhibition rights, including fifteen copies of the film, for £7,600, to Jury’s Imperial Pictures, at auction in February 1913. At the same auction, an agent for Spencer’s Pictures purchased the exclusive Australasian rights for £4,000, which, as several newspapers reported, was by far the highest price ever paid for a film in Australia at the time.<sup>48</sup> It’s not clear how many prints of the film Spencer’s received, but there were at least five in circulation in



Figure 5.2 Still from Cines’s *Quo Vadis?* (1913). Library of Congress

mid-July 1913, when it was showing simultaneously in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane, and Auckland.<sup>49</sup>

The film's popularity in Australia must have surpassed even Spencer's fondest hopes, as it attracted tens of thousands of viewers in every major city in Australia and New Zealand. It broke records for the duration of its 'seasons' and was integral to popularizing the single-picture evening, which soon replaced mixed programmes as the norm for cinema programming. Although it didn't quite match its twenty-two-week run on Broadway in New York City, *Quo Vadis?* enjoyed an unprecedented run in Australasian cinemas—ten weeks in Sydney, nine in Melbourne, five in Adelaide, three in Brisbane, Perth, and Christchurch, and two weeks each in Wellington, Auckland, and Dunedin. A Wellington reviewer pronounced it 'certainly one of the most wonderful films, if not the most wonderful, that has ever been seen in New Zealand'.<sup>50</sup> It didn't just break records for the longest run of a film, but also for the longest consecutive run of performances 'for any class of entertainment, from Shakespeare to burlesque', as the *Oamaru Mail* noted on 19 September 1913.<sup>51</sup>

Spencer's began advertising *Quo Vadis?* (and the exorbitant price they had paid for the rights to it) in February 1913, building public interest over several months. On 3 May, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that the upcoming premiere of *Quo Vadis?* was considered 'the most important event in the annals of the biograph in Australia. In presenting this 8000ft masterpiece by the Cines Company to the amusement-loving public of Australia, the directors of Spencer's Pictures, Ltd., do so with the sincere belief that they are introducing the greatest picture of all times—one that will mark an epoch in the irresistible march of the silent drama.'<sup>52</sup> The film arrived in Australia on 23 April, two days after its New York premiere, and Spencer's immediately held a test screening in Sydney's Lyceum Theatre. However, the film did not open officially in Australia until five days after King George V and his wife attended a screening at the Royal Albert Hall in London (which many Australian newspapers reported on).

When, after so much build up, *Quo Vadis?* finally opened at Spencer's Lyceum in Sydney on 10 May and at West's in Melbourne on 17 May, it drew unprecedented crowds. From its first showing, it sold out every performance, often three-quarters of an hour before showtime, amazing both cinemagoers and reporters. In its first week, 20,000 people saw the film in Sydney; Spencer's claimed that 48,000 of Sydney's citizens had attended by 31 May.<sup>53</sup> In Melbourne, West's 4,000-seat theatre sold out for six consecutive showings over the first four days of the film's run, prompting West's to trumpet the picture's remarkable success at attracting 'about 24,000 PEOPLE IN 4 DAYS', calling it 'EASILY THE GREATEST AND MOST SENSATIONAL TRIUMPH EVER ACHIEVED IN

MOVING PICTURES’.<sup>54</sup> In Adelaide, it was estimated that upwards of 70,000 people saw the film at West’s Olympia, just under half the population of Adelaide and its suburbs at the time.<sup>55</sup>

Australian cinema historian Dylan Walker argues that the screening of *Quo Vadis?* legitimized the cinema at a cultural level in Adelaide particularly. The orchestra was first conducted by Lewis De Groen, West’s chief musical director, who came out from Sydney for the occasion, and subsequently by James Wilson, leader of West’s Adelaide orchestra. The governor of South Australia, Admiral Sir Day Hort Bosanquet, attended a screening on 1 July, declaring himself ‘delighted with the picture and greatly impressed with its wonderful detail and completeness’. The film’s long run broke the three-week box office record previously held by Meynell and Clark’s ‘Arcadians’ Opera Troupe, indicating the cinema had finally achieved popularity at least equal to that of live theatre.

This overwhelming popularity caused problems in terms of timing on the secondary rental market. Spencer’s had advertised the film for hire to rural exhibitors beginning three months after its metropolitan premiere, but urban demand was so strong that the film’s run was repeatedly extended. On 13 May, a Spencer’s ad notified exhibitors that they were accepting bookings to hire the film for country and suburban screenings, with a warning that ‘dates will be allotted in the order of application’.<sup>56</sup> In Newcastle, 104 miles north of Sydney, theatre managers Dix and Baker paid £300 for the exclusive right to show the film there and in the surrounding Newark district for one week, from 26 May to 4 June, a deal that Spencer’s was apparently able to honour. However, the Lyric Theatre in Bendigo, ninety-three miles north of Melbourne, had to delay its announced week-long *Quo Vadis?* season in mid-July by nearly a week due to persistent strong demand from viewers in Melbourne. Other rural exhibitors had to find creative solutions to meet audience demand; Walker recounts the following anecdote from South Australia as an illustration of this resourcefulness:

When George Holland, a country picture showman, wanted the film for screening at his three York Peninsula venues, he was only able to hire the film for one night, as Perth was next in line for the copy. Holland screened the film at Moonta, beginning at 7 o’clock, and as soon as the first reel had been shown a car waiting outside drove that reel the eleven miles to Wallaroo. As soon as the reel had been screened at Wallaroo another car would take it a further five and a half miles to Kadina. The same procedure was applied to the other eight reels. Such was the precision of the enterprise that neither the Wallaroo nor Kadina audiences were kept waiting for the next reel.<sup>57</sup>

Likewise, while the success of a film in the eastern states was usually a brand of quality in Western Australia, there was some good-natured resentment that it took so long before the much-vaunted *Quo Vadis?* made its way to the west coast. On 11 July, the *Fremantle Herald* noted, 'we are assured that this sensational ribbon will be brought to Fremantle just so soon as it can be tugged from the tenacious grip of the people over East. They have had it for many months now, and still they won't let it go.'<sup>58</sup> As late as 2 January 1914, the *Northern Herald* speculated on how much it must have pained Spencer's to have to let the film go to fulfil rental contracts 'to their opponents', after the film had run for ten straight weeks in Sydney, attracting upwards of 200,000 visitors or approximately a quarter of the city's population. Given that the film ran in suburban and rural cinemas until November 1915, with brief revivals in December 1916 and October 1917, the rental income must have assuaged any such concerns.

Given the film's tremendous profitability, it's not surprising that some showmen tried to capitalize on it by passing off other, unrelated films as the Cines masterpiece. On 20 May, for example, just three days after the actual film opened at West's in Melbourne, Snowden Pictures in Melbourne advertised screenings of *Quo Vadis?*. Their ad includes a rather cryptic disclaimer: 'THIS COPY, secured at great cost, TO BE SEEN ONLY AT THE SNOWDEN, all the annoying, tedious details excluded from this remarkable picture. The leading incidents in this Photo Play, reproducing ancient Roman History, are revealed in all their unique magnificence by the world's finest actors.'<sup>59</sup> Apparently, their version was to be regarded as a highlights reel of the much longer Cines production. The next day, however, West's printed a special announcement contradicting the impression that the Snowden was showing the famous Cines film: 'The Management wish their patrons and the public generally to know that the Cines Co.'s Great Masterpiece, *Quo Vadis*, For which they hold the Australasian rights, cannot be seen at any other theatre or hall in the city of Melbourne.'<sup>60</sup> To cover their bases, West's also inserted the following warning in the Adelaide papers, where their theatre was due to screen Cines's film in June:

BEWARE. It has come under our notice that unscrupulous persons intend issuing a Picture of *Quo Vadis* purporting it to be the original 8,000ft. production of the Cines Company. SHOWMEN AND THE PUBLIC are WARNED that the GENUINE COPY of CINES'S MASTERPIECE can only be obtained through our Exchanges, and will be screened at WEST'S OLYMPIA, Hindley-street, at an early date. Assist us in the fight against the iniquitous system of film impersonation.<sup>61</sup>

The following day, Dix and Baker in Newcastle published a similar warning in their local paper, cautioning audiences against 'UNSCRUPULOUS PERSONS' who intended to defraud them with a different film.<sup>62</sup>

In May, the Wondergraph Company in Adelaide began advertising screenings of *Quo Vadis?* at its Adelaide theatre, more than a month before the Cines picture was due to open at West's. In response, the General Film Company sued Wondergraph. The 'imposter' film in question, which Dix and Baker described a few days later as merely 'a selection of some few scenes from the life of Nero', was, according to reports of the court proceedings, Ambrosio's 1909 film *Nero, or The Fall of Rome*, which had been widely screened in Australasia between December 1909 and October 1910. In front of the Supreme Court on 5 June 1913, the defendants, represented by Sir Josiah Symon, argued that the biblical legend underpinning the novel and film *Quo Vadis?* could not be copyrighted and claimed that Wondergraph's ads had been very clear about the differences between the two films. The plaintiffs, represented by Mr S.H. Skipper, countered that the Ambrosio film had not previously been titled *Quo Vadis?* and that Wondergraph's attempts to market it under that name violated the General Film Company's dearly purchased proprietary rights. Although the defendants refused an offer to use the English translation of the phrase, 'Whither Goest Thou?' as the title of their film, the judge lifted the temporary injunction against them advertising their own version of *Quo Vadis?* and advised the plaintiffs to file another suit later if necessary.<sup>63</sup> Wondergraph had announced in the morning papers that they were unsure whether they would be permitted to screen their abbreviated version that evening, pending the court's decision. The next day, 6 June, Wondergraph crowed, 'WE WIN!!' and announced that they would be screening the 'Ambrosio Film *Quo Vadis*' until further notice, adding that their film was 'only 2,000 feet long and does not occupy the whole evening's performance'.<sup>64</sup>

Other defendants were less successful. In June, another lawsuit was resolved in Sydney that had been brought by the General Film Company of Australasia against Mr R. Williams, proprietor of the Arcadia Theatre in Lewisham (NSW), who claimed that a three-year-old Ambrosio picture had originally been exhibited under the title *Quo Vadis?*. The judge found for the plaintiff, instructing Williams to stop advertising or exhibiting his film without including a disclaimer that 'this film is quite different from the Cines film exhibited by Spencer's, Ltd. at the Lyceum Theatre'.<sup>65</sup> In mid-August, a Mr George Sutton began advertising for *Quo Vadis?* in Gippsland (Vic), prompting a published advisory that his advertisements were deceptive, as 'the above picture is NOT A COPY of the Genuine Cines production of *Quo Vadis* as recently exhibited for 9 weeks at West's Picture Palace, Melbourne'.<sup>66</sup>

*Quo Vadis?*'s reputation bolstered the circulation of other Italian films and was frequently referenced to promote other Italian films. For example, when Cines's military drama *Scuola d'eroi/How Heroes Are Made* (aka *School for Heroes* and *For Napoleon and France*) was released in Australia in January 1915, almost a year after its Italian and US premieres, it was boosted by the reputation of not only the 'famous Cines Company of Rome ... [which] is a sufficient guarantee that it will be a first rate one [picture]', but also by the increased name recognition of the director Enrico Guazzoni and the actors 'Signor Novelli, Signora Terribilli [*sic*], Signor Vinci, Signor Cattaneo, and Signora Menichelli, all of whom had leading parts in the famous *Quo Vadis*'.<sup>67</sup> While not treated as individual movie stars in the Hollywood sense, these actors still enjoyed enhanced status as a result of their association with such an admired film.

The film also increased Australasians' familiarity with southern European language and culture, sometimes with humorous results. As much as they enjoyed the show, many Australians apparently had a hard time pronouncing the name of the film correctly, as the *Observer* (Adelaide) reported in July 1913:

A lady informed another in a car that she was going to see 'Quar Vardie.' 'Have you seen "Quee Vaddy"?' asked another young lady of a friend in a suburban train. 'This yer "Que Viddy" is a rare picture, my word!' said an old fellow in a board housing. 'You mustn't miss "Kwo Vaddy" was another remark. "'Cow Vadje" is just perfect' was a further effort. 'I almost got crushed to death when going to see "Kervadey"' was the observation of another gentleman. Other attempts were 'Kee Vardis,' 'He Vayraadis,' 'Cue-o Vadissy,' 'Keevaa,' 'Queevad,' 'Quovad,' but the most remarkable attempt of all was 'Kweeo Vaddio.' As to the correct pronunciation, well—we don't know.<sup>68</sup>

The author is clearly more amused by provincial English-speaking Australians' inability to pronounce Latin than critical of the film's foreign-language title, but the anecdote underscores both how popular the film was in Australia and, as the exception that proves the rule, how seamlessly most Italian productions blended into the Australasian cinema landscape.

### Capitalizing on Epic Success

The success of *Quo Vadis?* triggered a race among Italian makers to produce works with the same technical skill and nationalistic spirit. Many of these made it to Australasian screens in 1913/14, including Ambrosio's and Pasquali's competing remakes of *The Last Days of Pompeii*, as well as Cines's seven-reel *Antony and Cleopatra*, directed by Guazzoni. Both of

the new *Last Days of Pompeii* films, which an Italian judge ruled were sufficiently different in execution to preclude a need for legal intervention, were praised for their detailed archaeological reconstructions and lively animation of the city, not to mention being filmed during an actual eruption of Mount Vesuvius, which lent them added authenticity.<sup>69</sup> When they opened in New York City in October 1913, both films were routinely praised by American reviewers for their grand theme, scenic wonders, superb acting, educational value, and wide appeal. The *Moving Picture World's* judgement of the films as ‘typical of Italian picture-making art’ that was beyond the capacity of American film-makers<sup>70</sup> confirms the high status of Italian film-making as a result of such extravagant production, which paired technical prowess and visual appeal with compelling narratives of cultural heritage. Only the Ambrosio version appears to have been screened in Australasia, however, running between October 1913 and April 1919 in Australia, and December 1913 and April 1917 in New Zealand. Either by coincidence or in order to whet audiences’ appetites, Ambrosio’s much shorter 1908 version circulated in New Zealand, where it had not previously been released, as part of combined programmes from April through October 1913.

Of all of the pre-war Italian successors to *Quo Vadis?*, Itala’s massive *Cabiria*, directed by Giovanni Pastrone, was the only one to succeed in surpassing its predecessor’s length, cost, and extravagance, thereby crippling the production company, which dedicated its entire resources for more than a year to making this single epic. Out of 65,617ft of film shot, the theatrical cut of *Cabiria* was 13,500ft long, putting even Pathé’s eight-reel *Les Misérables* in the shade. It cost 1,000,000 lire (approximately £50,000) to make, including an honorarium of 50,000 lire to the novelist Gabriele d’Annunzio (1863–1938) for the use of his name, even though he only wrote the intertitles. Pastrone himself wrote the actual script, in which he—following the example of both *The Last Days of Pompeii* and *Quo Vadis?*—intertwines the historical rivalry between Carthage and Rome with a fictional love story between Cabiria, a girl who is sold into slavery by Phoenician pirates to be sacrificed to the Carthaginian god Moloch, and the Roman patrician Fulvio Axilla, who, with the aid of a muscular slave named Maciste, succeeds in rescuing her.<sup>71</sup> Of more lasting impact on the film industry, Pastrone is credited with inventing the dolly (*carrello*) in order to make *Cabiria*. The dolly allowed the camera to track smoothly in and out of Pastrone’s enormous sets, moving from an extremely long shot to a medium close-up or close-up to establish a sense of space and grandeur. He also paid increased attention to close-ups, in order to emphasize facial expressions and heroic gestures; employed artificial lighting, including twelve spotlights with individual reflectors; had key sequences

hand-tinted; and created impressive special effects through process shots, scale models, and superimpositions, e.g. of footage of Hannibal crossing the Alps with elephants.

Yet, in its visual depiction of Carthage as an orientalized mélange of Assyrian, Indian, and Egyptian elements devoid of Greco-Roman influence, *Cabiria* sets up a dichotomy between ‘civilized’ Rome and ‘barbaric’ Carthage that both reinforces the glory of the colonial state and amalgamates all foreignness into an undifferentiated whole. Pantelis Michelakis and Maria Wyke explain that the Carthage depicted in *Cabiria* is ‘exclusively defined by its opposition to the hyper-classical world of Rome, combining motifs and styles from various ancient cultures as well as from their modern traditions of visual representation ... in order to support a stridently colonialist narrative of rescue’.<sup>72</sup> Despite the film’s ancient context and foreign setting, having been filmed on location in North Africa and Italy, this narrative of cultural conflict and imperialist superiority may have been familiar to the settler-colonists of both Australia and New Zealand, echoing the triumphal narratives about British imperial expansion throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

When *Cabiria* was imported to Australia in early 1915 by entertainment entrepreneur Hugh D. McIntosh, Australasian viewers were apparently expected to be quite impressed by both the cost and scale of the production of *Cabiria*, which was reportedly the first film to employ full-size replica buildings in its sets.<sup>73</sup> Ads frequently mentioned impressive statistics, for example that the film ‘features 700 Players, 50 Leopards, 90 Elephants, 50 Horses, 50 Oxen, and 20 Camels’.<sup>74</sup> The Brisbane *Truth*, not incidentally owned by McIntosh, declared *Cabiria* to be ‘picturedom’s finest and most expensive production, having cost more than £100,000. With those who see it some of the types and scenes in it will live forever. *Cabiria* in short, is a picture in which the past—in all its colour, turbulency, and grandeur, again lives before one’s eyes.’<sup>75</sup> Though particularly effusive, the *Truth*’s glowing assessment matches that of many other critics.

Although the film had been released in Italy and the USA in April 1914, the delay in introducing it to Australia, paired with the outbreak of war in August 1914, worked to McIntosh’s advantage by enhancing the film’s perceived relevance, as some ads noted: ‘With war in the air, there should be an ample field for Hugh D. McIntosh’s wonderful picture play, *Cabiria* ... It deals with the first great world war in history—the dreadful struggle for supremacy between ancient Rome and ancient Carthage.’<sup>76</sup> Rather curiously, however, the exclusive Australasian rights to *Cabiria* (excluding Queensland) were offered for sale in a private auction a little more than a year after its initial Australian release, and prior to its New Zealand release, by liquidator Charles A. Lem Walker. The lot included not only



the exhibition rights to ‘this wonderful film [which] has scored a record for popularity and as a money-maker’, but also two complete prints of the film ‘in excellent condition’, in addition to ‘a quantity of scenery, a lot of highly artistic and effective printing and publicity matter’.<sup>77</sup> It’s not clear whether McIntosh ran into financial difficulties and had to divest himself of this asset or whether he simply felt that he had already maximized his profits on it. *Cabiria* (not to be confused with Federico Fellini’s 1957 *Le notti di Cabiria/Nights of Cabiria*) has remained for decades one of the most famous and enduring European silent film imports to Australasia, regularly recurring in film festivals through the 2000s.

After opening at Spencer’s Lyceum on 3 April 1915, *Cabiria* was initially screened primarily at West’s- and Spencer’s-branded cinema palaces (run by Union Theatres) in Australian metropolises, where it attracted record-breaking crowds. A total of 300,000 people reportedly saw it at twice-daily showings at Spencer’s Lyceum in Sydney between 3 April and 24 April,<sup>78</sup> plus another 75,000 in sold-out houses at West’s Palace in Melbourne from 10 April to 15 May.<sup>79</sup> Given the length of the film, prices went as high as two shillings and sixpence for dress circle and one shilling in the stalls—double the usual rates of two shillings, one shilling, or sixpence. It played in many different venues, for diverse audiences and in various formats. In Adelaide, for example, where it opened at West’s Olympia on 1 May, it played every evening as a whole-evening show from 8pm to midnight, while in towns across Western Australia, it was presented as a special educational matinee for children on Saturday afternoons in church halls and schools. By 31 May 1915, *Cabiria* had apparently ‘eclipsed all records previously established by other conceptions of motography’, ‘both financially and from a spectacular point of view’.<sup>80</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 3, it didn’t open in New Zealand until more than a year later, but it remained in circulation in both countries throughout the duration of the war, until the summer of 1919.

While local ads praised the beauty of the leading actresses Italia Manzini—who was favourably compared to English actress Lily Brayton—and Lidia Quaranta, they were wild about the supporting character Maciste, Axilla’s brawny enslaved servant, played by Bartolomeo Pagano (also known as Ernesto Pagani, 1878–1947).<sup>81</sup> Earlier Italian films, including *Quo Vadis?* and Pasquali’s *Spartacus*, had featured strongman characters as well, but Maciste paired those giants’ purely physical feats of strength—such as diving sixty-five feet into the sea and swimming in full armour in rough waves—with bravery and nobility of character, demonstrated by his rescue of the imperilled heroine in *Cabiria*. Some ads for the film in New Zealand chose to emphasize that the film featured ‘Maciste! The mightiest man before the camera’,<sup>82</sup> rather than any of its other noteworthy aspects.

In June 1916, a month before the New Zealand premiere of *Cabiria*, the Wellington *Evening Post* praised 'Ernesto Pagani, the Genoan giant who plays the part of Masciste [*sic*], the black slave in *Cabiria*' as one of the 'remarkable personalities in the screen world of today'.<sup>83</sup>

Pagano's impressive physique and heroic deeds may have called to mind the bulging muscles and superhuman feats of strength performed by German-born strongman Eugen Sandow on his tour of Australia and New Zealand in 1902–03. Sandow credited inspiration from Italian statues of David and Hercules for his own transformation from scrawny weakling into gleaming muscleman and promoted a quasi-classical system for physical enhancement.<sup>84</sup> Daley connects Antipodean enthusiasm for Sandow's embodiment of 'the modernist preoccupation with physicality' with both the increased focus on leisure and the desire for self-improvement through rational recreation in early twentieth-century Australasia, twin trends that survived the transfer from vaudeville to cinema and persisted into the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>85</sup>

Pagano, who had been a dock worker in Genoa before being hired for *Cabiria*, soon became a cinema star beloved around the world, including the Antipodes. A spin-off five-reel picture called *Maciste* (aka *Marvelous Maciste*) arrived in Australia a year after *Cabiria*, opening at West's Olympia in Sydney on 25 June 1916 and in Auckland on 27 October, playing to acclaim for more than a year. Significantly, in this eponymous film, Maciste is transformed from a black African slave in a Roman setting to a white Italian in contemporary northern Italy, which Jacqueline Reich connects to rising Italian nationalism rooted in white supremacy.<sup>86</sup> Though he actually lived for another thirty years and made at least two dozen more films in Italy and Germany, Pagano's reported death in combat during the Italian offensive on the Bainsizza Plateau in Slovenia in the autumn of 1917 was covered with solemnity by newspapers across the Antipodes and enhanced his status as an Italian hero.<sup>87</sup>

This sad, though inaccurate, news may have driven attendance at the next *Maciste* picture, *Maciste alpino/The Warrior*, which opened at West's Olympic in Adelaide on 31 December 1917. Although not a war picture per se, the film depicts 'occasional conflicts', 'in each of which Maciste becomes the warrior, hero, and conqueror'.<sup>88</sup> Reviews particularly praised the 'beautiful reproduction of the scenic Italian Alps, upon the snowclad slopes of which Maciste performs some wonderful heroic acts, and leads the soldiers in many desperate thrills, such as climbing up the sides of precipitous rocks and crossing ravines hand over hand upon a cable—a scene which is watched in breathless suspense'. Adding to its relevance, the military scenes on the Italian frontier allegedly utilized actual footage from the war, while Maciste's feats of strength included such patriotic deeds as swinging a German soldier through the air by his feet and pushing over a



Figure 5.3 Bartolomeo Pagano, publicity still for the Itala film *Cabiria* (Giovanni Pastrone, 1914). Archives of the National Museum of Cinema, Turin.  
Reuse not permitted

German soldier and his donkey.<sup>89</sup> All in all, the film was judged ‘a happy blending of beauty and power, heroic deeds constantly spiced with pleasant humor, so that the audience both applauds the deed and laughs at the

way it is performed'.<sup>90</sup> It ran until June 1919 in Australia, but does not appear to have been screened in New Zealand.

The survival of Pagano, who took his character's name as his stage name, must have been apparent and welcome to his Antipodean fans, as at least four more Maciste pictures were screened in Australasia in the 1920s, advertised with such accolades as 'Maciste, the strong and perfect man' and 'the giant of the European screen'.<sup>91</sup> Imported by Mason Super Films, Itala's *Maciste innamorato/Maciste in Love* opened in Adelaide in September 1920 and ran in Australia through March 1922, while its run in New Zealand lasted from January to December 1921. Only one film of Maciste's American-style trilogy from 1921—*Il viaggio di Maciste/Maciste's Perilous Voyage*—made it to the Antipodes, also as a Mason Super Films import, playing in Australia in 1922. It was followed several years later by two of his last films: *Maciste imperator/Maciste the Emperor*, which ran in Australia from January to July 1927, and *Il gigante della Dolomiti/The Giant of the Mountains* (aka *The Giant of the Dolomites*). The latter film reached both Australia and New Zealand at the very end of the silent era where it made a strong showing despite competition from sound film, though it was not screened in many first-run theatres in major metropolitan areas. It ran in Australia from July 1929 through January 1932 and in New Zealand, often billed as a First National release, from August 1929 through October 1930.

To a certain extent, Maciste's constancy on screen was a testament to the resilience of not just the actor himself or Italian film, despite the industry's collapse in the early 1920s, but also to European film more generally, a fact not lost on Antipodean reviewers. In connection with Maciste's last film to be released down under, *The Giant of the Mountains*, the *Manawatu Herald* reminded readers that 'Continental pictures received a big set-back with the outbreak of the last war, but *The Giant of the Mountains* shows that Europe is still capable of producing movies above the ordinary when she wishes. This film is an excellent picture and it is not unlikely that it will make American and English producers "sit up and take notice," as it were.'<sup>92</sup> Not only did *The Giant of the Mountains* remind viewers of the quality of European films, but it also demonstrated that film's ability to transport its viewers to faraway locations was still attractive. When *The Giant of the Mountains* was shown at Star Pictures in Darwin in January 1932, the ad described it simply as a 'European production. Actually filmed in the Alps.'<sup>93</sup>

As only about two dozen Italian features seem to have been imported in the 1920s, it is striking that three of them were Maciste films. Despite his lack of stage credentials, Pagano joined a few renowned male Italian crossover stage actors, notably Amleto Novelli and Ermete Zacconi, who

enjoyed considerable fame and respect in Australasia for their film work (see Chapter 8). Such male Italian film stars proved to be the exception during the next phase of Italian film-making, which replaced large-scale historical spectacles with intimate dramas unfolding around beautiful, passionate women, known as divas, a term borrowed from Italian opera to describe a new type of female cinema stardom.

### The Rise of the Diva Film

As Itala's experience making *Cabiria* illustrates, the race to create the most spectacular, longest, most expensive historical epic had limits, in terms of both the time and expense a studio could afford to invest in a single production and cinema audiences' appetite for one kind of film. Once Italian historical epic films reached their pinnacle in 1913/14, both studios and audiences seem to have rapidly lost interest in the genre and its aesthetics. In 1923, Kleine told Guido Pedrazzini of Cines that 'this kind of histrionic acting no longer attracted American audiences'.<sup>94</sup> While film aesthetics are constantly in flux, Wyke also connects this development to the evolving relationship of the individual to society in the early twentieth century, which she traces in the change from early Italian epics, 'whose protagonists merged visually in space with the community and whose heroes acted in a socially structured landscape', to the classical Hollywood style that 'placed emphasis on individual protagonists—isolated from the collective through the use of medium, close, and point-of-view shots and through their positioning in the centre of the film frame—whose psychological motivations were seen to cause historical action'.<sup>95</sup> While this turn from the collective past to an individual protagonist's struggles hurt the chances of historical epics, it helped drive other kinds of cinematic narratives.

This shift in focus emerges clearly in the diva films that began to take international cinema markets by storm in the mid-1910s. Formally defined as feature films of at least sixty minutes' duration that incorporate close-ups of the heroine and have fairly static camera usage (rather than the point-of-view and shot-reverse shots that figured prominently in classic American cinema), diva films showcase powerful female characters in dramatic, often life-threatening situations.<sup>96</sup> The director is of secondary importance, while tensions within the narrative world surrounding the diva—very often an upper-middle-class or aristocratic one defined by repressive social codes and turbulent relationships—are the main point. Pierre Sorlin explains that such films, 'by tackling problems as basic as life and death, conflict and passion, or even, more simply, food and housing', 'provide glimpses into the world in which they have been conceived ... The culture that cinema advertises creates an image for the exporting country

which redoubles export profits.<sup>97</sup> While historical epics sold a glossy version of Italy's classical past, diva films offered insights into the present and recent past, not necessarily through the realism of their cinematic depictions but through the kinds of stories that were told and the problems they illuminated. Many of Italy's early diva films were inspired by the films of the Danish actor Asta Nielsen, discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

While Italian historical epics did not generally foreground individual actors' contributions, diva films contributed directly to the rise of the star system (later known as *divismo*) in Italian film, several years after it had become common in Germany, and to the increasing name recognition of Italian actors down under, in particular Francesca Bertini (1892–1985) and Lyda Borelli (1884–1959), though many other actors, including Pina Menichelli, Leda Gys, Maria Carmi, Rina De Liguoro, Soava Gallone, Hesperia, and Italia Almirante Manzini, were also associated with the genre. Although Bertini, Menichelli, Gys, Gallone, Hesperia, and Manzini each appeared in a variety of historical and literary films screened in Australasia in 1909–13, only Bertini rose to prominence through her diva films during and after World War I. By contrast, Borelli seems to have made her first and only appearance on Australasian screens in a diva vehicle, but that single release, though highly praised, was not enough to sustain her celebrity down under.

In many ways, Italian diva films in the Antipodes built on the popularity of earlier Italian film imports and served as a bridge between the pre- and post-World War I periods for European films on Antipodean screens. This was particularly true for Bertini, who became the best known of all the Italian divas in Australasia, due both to her prolific film output and her commanding stage presence, which diva films showcased brilliantly. Born Elena Seracini Vitiello in Florence, Bertini was a self-made woman, stigmatized by her illegitimate birth, who taught herself to act. She worked her way up the professional ladder, first in sporadic appearances on stage, and then in film from 1907 onward, progressing from the *film d'art* to the diva film, through a variety of genres, from short melodramas to feature-length comedies. Bertini's acting was intuitive, realistic, and measured. In 1914, Italian film critic Cesare Naretto explained, 'Francesca Bertini does not pursue an unrealistic ideal through an artificial deployment of poses; instead she conveys reality through spontaneous facial expressions and natural gestures ... She is not a model who strikes a sculpture-like post, she is, rather, a woman of the real world.'<sup>98</sup> Although many Italian film historians see Borelli as the banner carrier for the Italian diva film, Bertini was by far the better-known star in Australasia, with the first newspaper mentions of her name in Australia appearing in September 1910, in connection with the medieval tragedy *Folchetto di Narbona*/

*Folchetto of Narbonne*, which opened at West's Pictures in Queen's Hall in Perth in late September 1910 and was pronounced 'difficult to improve upon'.<sup>99</sup>

Before the emergence of the diva film in 1914, Bertini had already appeared in more than fifty films, at least a dozen of which had been screened in Australasia. Audiences would have been familiar with her face, if not necessarily her name. Many of her early single-reel films were produced by the Pathé affiliate Film d'Arte Italiana, which had a robust distribution network in the Antipodes, and were thus often advertised as Pathé films. Her auspicious Antipodean debut in *Folchetto of Narbonne*, which was borne out by the film's nine months in circulation in Australia (though it does not appear to have been screened in New Zealand), prepared the ground for *Il trovatore*, presented by C.E. King's Pictures in the Lyceum cinema in Brisbane on 23 November 1910, three months before the film was released in the USA. Based on Antonio García Gutiérrez's 1836 Spanish play and Giuseppe Verdi's 1853 opera, the film was advertised almost exclusively in the Antipodes by its familiar Italian title.

During its six-month run in Australia and seven months in New Zealand, newspaper ads and reviews celebrated *Il trovatore* for its beautiful clarity, splendid acting, magnificent costumes, and stirring scenes. Admiring references to the film's performances by 'leading French actors' were an easy mistake to make, given the film's association with both the Film d'Art and Pathé brands, though a few ads specify that the story is 'interpreted by such world-famed artists as Senora Bertini and Signor Achille Vitte. Executed in Pathé Freres' Best Style.'<sup>100</sup> The film is also described as being of 'unusual length', given as 1,500ft. Archival records indicate it was only 951ft, but since the film is considered lost, neither measurement can be verified. Other early short Bertini films imported in this same period include *La morte civile/Dead in the Eyes of the Law*, which reached Adelaide in February 1911, and the historical melodrama *Beatrice d'Este/Beatrice d'Este*, in which she portrayed the eponymous protagonist, which opened in Melbourne in April 1912. The *Moving Picture World* praised this latter film for its use of authentic Italian palaces and gardens, opulent costumes, and coloured prints, but has little to say about the actors, none of whom are named in the advertising materials.<sup>101</sup>

In keeping with the general European shift towards multi-reel films, Bertini next appeared in Film d'Arte Italiana's two-reel (1,903ft) historical drama *La contessa di Challant e Don Pedro di Cordova/The Countess of Challant*, which opened at West's Palace in Melbourne on 5 February 1912, and the same company's three-reel (2,378ft) adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo e Giulietta/Romeo and Juliet*, which opened in Hobart in January 1912. In both films, Bertini plays opposite Gustavo Serena (1881–1970).

While the former was marketed in Australia simply as featuring 'leading Continental artists', some local ads for the latter film emulate the official Film d'Arte Italiana posters in featuring both leading actors' names, along with that of Giovanni Pezzinga as Tybalt.<sup>102</sup>

Bertini's subsequent work for other makers gave her more scope to develop her acting and resulted in such features as Cines's classical drama *La rose di Tebe/The Rose of Thebes* (aka *Ramses, King of Egypt*), imported by Clement Mason, which opened at J.D. Williams's Lyric Theatre in Sydney on 22 July 1912, and Celio's colonial fantasy *La terra promessa/The Land of Promise*, which reached Melbourne in August 1913, in which Bertini plays an unmarried bourgeois woman who loves two men. Bertini's name is not mentioned in the marketing of any of these films, though the Sydney *Sun* ran a still from *The Rose of Thebes* that depicts her character's misery at being forced to abandon her shepherd lover to marry the ruler of Egypt.<sup>103</sup> The success of *Cabiria*, in which Bertini had a minor role, may have boosted her reputation a bit, but it was primarily through the importation of at least eight of her diva films between 1914 and 1916 that Bertini became a popular enough star in the Antipodes to be able to compete against the dominance of American films in the 1920s (see Chapter 9).

The decisive role of diva films in boosting Bertini's stardom is evident by comparison with the persistent anonymity of her male co-stars, notably Serena and Emilio Ghione (1879–1930). In contrast to several hundred newspaper mentions of Bertini by name, in connection with approximately fifteen films before 1917, Serena's name only appears a handful of times in connection with *Romeo and Juliet*, although he co-starred with Bertini in several films, including Caesar Film's *La signora delle camellie/Camille* (1915), an adaptation of Alexandre Dumas fils's *Lady of the Camellias*, and also had prominent roles in the Cines dramas *Chi di spada ferisce/Justice at Last* and *Pro patria mori/Death and Glory* (both 1912), as well as a supporting role in *Quo Vadis?* Likewise, although Ghione later became famous in Europe as the Parisian gangster 'Za la Mort', he never achieved any significant stardom in Australasia. He debuted at Itala and Cines, where he appeared—briefly—in *The Fall of Troy* and played the title role in *San Francisco, Il poverello di Assisi/St Francis of Assisi*. He then moved over to Celio Films, where he co-starred with Bertini in *Land of Promise*, *La cricca dorata/The Price of Silence*, and the melodrama *The Masked Amazon*, all three of which were imported to Australasia and remained in circulation for about five years each (August 1913–December 1918; May 1913–September 1918; and August 1914–March 1919, respectively). Another of Ghione's Celio films, the crime drama *Il circolo nero/The Black Circle*, was also imported to the Antipodes in 1913 but only circulated for just under a year, as did one of the first





Figure 5.4 Francesca Bertini and Gustavo Serena in *La signora dalle camelie/Camille* (Tiber Film, 1915). Archives of the National Museum of Cinema, Turin. Reuse not permitted

films he directed, *Il club delle maschere nere/The Club of the Black Masks* (1913). Yet despite the popularity of the films themselves, Ghione's name was rarely mentioned and does not seem to have garnered any attention. Moreover, Ghione's famous *Za* serials from the war years do not seem to have been imported to Australasia at all, despite the popularity of similar crime serials and the importation of other Italian films in the same period.

By contrast, Bertini was well known by name in Australasia by 1915–16, when at least eight of her diva films were in circulation down under at the same time. In addition to *The Masked Amazon*, with its passionate kiss between Bertini's high-society character and her military attaché husband shortly before he is betrayed by a friend and court-martialled for losing top-secret documents, these dramatic films include *Camille* and the lost films *Una donna/Woman*, with its dance of death; *Nelly la gigolette/The Apache Dancer's Sacrifice*, directed by Ghione; *Histoire d'un Pierrot/Pierrot the Prodigal*, which Angela Dalle Vacche identifies as the only surviving example of a female Italian diva playing a male character, in contrast to Asta Nielsen's many cross-dressing roles;<sup>104</sup> and *The One Between* (original Italian title undetermined).

In the Australian ads for these films, Bertini is frequently described as 'Italy's leading and most highly paid actress' and 'the most beautiful actress in the world'.<sup>105</sup> When *Woman* was screened in remote Charter Towers (Qld) in February 1916, Bertini was described as 'the Dramatic Nobility of the Italian Stage', whose acting is 'so natural yet gripping that you feel you are actually living the part yourself. Every look! Every gesture! Every movement portrays [*sic*] emotion and passion!'<sup>106</sup> In June 1916, the *Daily News* in Perth declared, of Bertini's performance in *Camille*: 'Francesca Bertini fulfils all the fascination and loveliness of the original, who stands out in all spheres of life as a True Woman.'<sup>107</sup> The next day, the *Daily News* gushed that Bertini 'is as beautiful a woman as has been seen on Western Australian stages. Her acting is also a revelation.'<sup>108</sup> Amidst the bleakness of World War I, Bertini brought a welcome breath of beauty and art. At the same time, the prominence of her Italian films helped fill the European film void caused by dramatically decreased French production, irregular supply of Danish and Swedish films, and the wartime embargo on German films.

In contrast to the slow accumulation of Bertini's stardom, Lyda Borelli broke into the Australian market with a splash in a diva film but did not establish a lasting reputation there. Born in Genoa in 1884, Borelli had made her stage debut in 1902, at the age of eighteen, and her film debut in 1913, playing opposite Mario Bonnard in *Ma l'amor mio non muore/Love Everlasting*, directed by Mario Caserini for Gloria Films. She was soon regarded as a fashion icon whom Italian girls tried desperately to emulate,

while her dramatic acting style, which emulated the beloved Italian stage actor Eleonora Duse, was immortalized in the Italian words *borelleggiare* and *borellismo*. Paolo Cherchi Usai explains,

Lyda Borelli, the diva par excellence, set the standard of a style based more on the charismatic presence of the actress than on any technical or aesthetic qualities of the production. In her films the expressivity of the body was assigned a determining role. The characters ... are sensual, tormented figures, caught between frail melancholia and anxiety, expressed through mannered poses. They live in luxuriant and at time oppressively opulent surroundings, where excited glances and sharp movements mirror the excess of the costumes and scenery.<sup>109</sup>

Borelli's body, often contorted into bizarre but compelling poses, drew the camera's eye, while her wavy blonde hair and expressive face enchanted viewers.

Of the fourteen films Borelli made between 1913 and 1917, the only one that apparently reached Australasia was her third film, the melodrama *The Naked Truth*, which opened at the Crystal Palace in Sydney in early March 1915. Based on *La vierge folle* by French playwright Henry Bataille and directed by Carmine Gallone, *The Naked Truth* tells the story of a young model, Lolette, who is devoted to her artist husband but goes mad with jealousy after he falls in love with a princess. In connection with this film, Borelli was introduced to Australian audiences as 'the stage celebrity, whose name and fame are known to every European capital', 'the woman of a thousand moods', who was 'now a picture star'.<sup>110</sup> Her powerful depictions of emotion on screen were cited by Sydney film critics as evidence of her talent, while her daring costumes appeared to confirm her eroticism and sophistication:

At one moment she is gay and vivacious; a second later, roused to intense jealousy, her eyes alight with passion and her whole body radiating vengeance and hatred for her husband and the woman to whose wiles he has succumbed. Another scene shows her melancholy, hopeless, and dejected, but whatever emotion she is depicting, she is always the artiste. Her gowns alone are a revelation. Some of the creations she wears in *The Naked Truth* made even the blasé New Yorkers open their eyes when the picture was being shown in that city. All of them are daring, all of them unique, and one or two of them so startling as to suggest the much-talked-of wardrobe of Gaby Deslys.<sup>111</sup>

Despite such enthusiastic praise, the film only remained in circulation in Australia for eight months and was not screened in New Zealand. It is

not clear why her other films weren't imported, but since Borelli married and retired from film in 1918, there was no chance that she could stage a comeback on Australasian screens after the war, as Bertini did.



Based on surviving, currently digitized newspaper mentions, the number of new Italian films screened in the Antipodes fell from their peak of around fifty per year in 1912–14 to around fifteen in 1915, a baker's dozen in 1916, five in 1917, and none in 1918. Although wartime conditions impacted access to foreign markets, this decline was also tied to a global credit crisis caused by the war, which led to financial woes for Italian producers and a slowdown in production.<sup>112</sup> In 1915, production houses in Turin made 268 films, while those in Rome made 184 and those in Milan sixty-four. By contrast, in 1917, Turin's studios only produced fifty-nine films, Rome's 159, and Milan's forty. By 1923, the Italian film industry was in crisis due to competition from Hollywood and Germany, lack of innovation, and excessive taxation, so production plunged even further, with only twenty-six films produced in Turin, seventy-four in Rome, and eight in Milan that year. In Naples, the four production houses that had produced thirty films in 1912 were the only ones who held the line, producing fifty-seven films between 1923 and 1925, while just forty-seven were produced in Turin in the same period (including only four in 1925).<sup>113</sup> Looked at as a whole, the period 1920–25 saw a dramatic decline in production numbers for the whole country, from 415 films in 1920 to forty in 1925.

In an attempt to combat the national film industry's loss of prestige, eleven major Italian firms—led by Alberto Fassini, former head of Cines—consolidated to form L'Unione Cinematografica Italiana (UCI) in 1919, but the venture failed. Their films weren't particularly successful and their major financial backer declared bankruptcy in 1921. By pursuing expensive, elaborate remakes of previous successes, including a version of *Quo Vadis?* in 1924 starring the German actor Emil Jannings, and yet another version of *The Last Days of Pompeii* in 1926, UCI doubled down on outdated cinematic conservatism while privileging scenes of decadence that critics found excessive, resulting in films that were neither artistically nor commercially successful. However, the Australasia cinema market proved to be still eager for Italian films in the immediate post-war period, which gave Francesca Bertini, whose career in Italy was stagnating, another moment in the international spotlight. Although the total number of Italian imports in the 1920s was very low, compared to pre-war levels, the status of Italian films remained very high, while their significance as a European product increased the country's aura of exclusivity and artistic sophistication.

## Notes

- 1 'World's Greatest War Film: The Story of Cabiria', *Lone Hand* 3.4 (1 March 1915), 255.
- 2 Maria Adriana Prolo, *Storia del cinema muto italiano* (Milan: Poligono, 1951), 47. Translation from Peter Bondanella, *A History of Italian Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 19.
- 3 For more in-depth treatment of the role of ethnic cinema in immigrant communities in post-World War II Australia, see e.g. Peter Yiannoudes, *Greek Cinema Across Australia: Behind The Scenes* (Melbourne: Self-published, 2010); and Deb Verhoeven, 'Film Distribution in the Diaspora: Temporality, Community and National Cinema' in Richard Maltby et al. (eds), *Explorations in New Cinema History* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), 243–60.
- 4 Gian Piero Brunetta, *The History of Italian Cinema*, trans. by Jeremy Parzen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 12.
- 5 Maria Wyke, *Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema and History* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 13.
- 6 These numbers are likely significantly below the actual number of films imported, since many films were not advertised by name in the newspapers and not all newspapers for this period have been digitized.
- 7 "'Quo Vadis?' Season', *Sun* (Sydney), 3 May 1913, 3.
- 8 Kimberly Tomadjoglou, 'Rome's Premiere Film Studio: Società Italiana Cines', *Film History* 12 (2000), 263.
- 9 Tomadjoglou, 'Società Italiana Cines', 264.
- 10 William Uricchio and Roberta E. Pearson, *Reframing Culture: The Case of the Vitagraph Quality Films* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 5.
- 11 Marina Nicoli, *The Rise and Fall of the Italian Film Industry* (London: Routledge, 2018), 44.
- 12 *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 3 December 1909, 2.
- 13 *Age* (Melbourne), 3 December 1909, 12.
- 14 Bondanella, *Italian Cinema*, 18; Aldo Bernardini, 'An Industry in Recession: The Italian Film Industry 1908–1909', *Film History* 3 (1989), 341.
- 15 Cristina D'Ossvaldo, 'Cinema muto italiano e la critica inglese (1909–1914)' in Vittorio Martinelli (ed.), *Cinema Italiano in Europa* (Rome: Associazione Italiana per le ricerche di storia del cinema, 1992), 76, n. 6.
- 16 Tomadjoglou, 'Società Italiana Cines', 263; Silvio Alovisio, 'The "Pastrone System": Itala Film from the Origins to World War I', *Film History* 12 (2000), 251.
- 17 'The Lure of the Movies—A Mammoth Enterprise', *Sunday Times* (Sydney), 1 March 1914, 2.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 'News and Notes', *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly* (London), 21 January 1909. Qtd in Gerry Turvey, 'Her Lover's Honour (1909): the French film d'art and British cinema', *Early Popular Visual Culture* 16.4 (2018), 361.
- 20 'Coliseum Pictures', *Ballarat Star* (Victoria), 4 November 1909, 1.
- 21 Claudia Gianetto, 'The Great Ambrosio, or Italy's Most Prolific Silent Film Company', *Film History* 12 (2000), 242.
- 22 Wyke, *Projecting the Past*, 159.
- 23 Gian Piero Brunetta, 'No Place Like Rome: The Early Years of Italian Cinema', *Artforum International* (Summer 1990), 122.
- 24 Pantelis Michelakis and Maria Wyke, *The Ancient World in Silent Cinema* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 9.

- 25 Brunetta, *History of Italian Cinema*, 34.
- 26 'Playgoer', *Punch* (Melbourne), 10 August 1911, 40; 'Homer by Biograph', *Argus* (Melbourne), 12 March 1912, 8.
- 27 Bondanella, *Italian Cinema*, 7.
- 28 'Notes from London', *Kalgoorlie Miner* (WA), 13 April 1912, 3.
- 29 Wallechinsky, *The People's Almanac Presents the Twentieth Century*, 411.
- 30 'Entertainments', *Dominion* (Wellington), 23 May 1911, 6.
- 31 'Entertainments', *New Zealand Times* (Wellington), 23 May 1911, 6.
- 32 'Lyric and Colonial Theatres Nos. 1 and 2', *Sun* (Sydney), 18 May 1911, 3.
- 33 'Dante's Inferno', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 July 1912, 15.
- 34 *Riverine Grazier* (Hay, NSW), 1 December 1911, 2.
- 35 'Meetings and Amusements', *Timaru Herald* (NZ), 8 July 1911, 1.
- 36 'Amusements: The Lyceum', *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 1 July 1911, 2.
- 37 'Stage, Song, and Show', *Sun* (Sydney), 17 July 1911, 9.
- 38 'Amusements', *Leader* (Melbourne), 22 July 1911, 34.
- 39 Nicoli, *Rise and Fall of the Italian Film Industry*, 44.
- 40 Brunetta, *History of Italian Cinema*, 24.
- 41 Qtd in Wyke, *Projecting the Past*, 73–74.
- 42 Stroller, 'Makers of *Quo Vadis*?', *Sun* (Sydney), 6 May 1913, 2.
- 43 'The Run of the Zoo', *Sun* (Sydney), 23 June 1914, 2.
- 44 Wyke, *Projecting the Past*, 25.
- 45 Wyke, *Projecting the Past*, 120.
- 46 Letter from Società Italiana Cines to Sussfeld Lorsch & Co., 21 February 1913, Library of Congress, George Kleine Collection, Subject File Cines, Box 7, Folder 2, Kleine. Qtd in Tomadjoglou, 'Società Italiana Cines', 269.
- 47 'Mimes and Mummies', *Star* (Christchurch, NZ), 13 September 1913, 12.
- 48 '£4000 Film. "Quo Vadis" for Australia. Spencer's Establish a Record', *Sun* (Sydney), 18 February 1913, 1. Although Spencer's Film Exchange claimed to have bought the rights, they may technically have belonged to the General Film Company, as the Combine was officially known at this point, of which Spencer's was a co-founder in late 1912. As partners, West's and Spencer's may have divided the exhibition rights between them, or West's may have simply bought the rights for Melbourne and Adelaide from Spencer's.
- 49 Given that the film didn't open in Adelaide until six weeks after it opened in Sydney, it's possible that Spencer's acquired just three prints initially and then ordered additional new copies, as they reported doing in late December 1913.
- 50 Mrs Malcolm Ross, 'The Week in Wellington', *Wairarapa Daily Times* (NZ), 31 July 1913, 2.
- 51 *Oamaru Mail* (NZ), 19 September 1913, 8.
- 52 'Amusements', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 May 1913, 2.
- 53 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 May 1913, 2.
- 54 *Argus* (Melbourne), 22 May 1913, 16.
- 55 Dylan Walker, *Adelaide's Silent Nights* (Canberra: National Film and Sound Archive, 1995), 47.
- 56 'General Gossip', *Referee* (Sydney), 14 May 1914, 16.
- 57 *Australian Kinematograph Journal*, 31 July 1913, 14. Qtd in Walker, *Adelaide's Silent Nights*, 48.
- 58 'Footlight Turns', *Fremantle Herald* (WA), 11 July 1913, 5.
- 59 *Age* (Melbourne), 20 May 1913, 12.

- 60 *Argus* (Melbourne), 21 May 1913, 16.
- 61 *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 21 May 1913, 2.
- 62 *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate* (NSW), 22 May 1913, 4.
- 63 ‘Rival Films’, *Journal* (Adelaide), 5 June 1913, 1.
- 64 *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 6 June 1913, 2.
- 65 ‘In Equity’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 June 1913, 17.
- 66 *Age* (Melbourne), 16 August 1913, 20.
- 67 ‘Lyric Theatre’, *Bendigo Advertiser* (Victoria), 29 April 1915, 5.
- 68 ‘Bunbry Scintillations. Quo Vadis’, *Observer* (Adelaide), 5 July 1913, 3.
- 69 ‘“Big Films” Get Us In’, *Argus* (Melbourne), 12 March 1955, 5.
- 70 Wyke, *Projecting the Past*, 165.
- 71 Bondanella, *Italian Cinema*, 10.
- 72 Michelakis and Wyke, *The Ancient World in Silent Cinema*, 13.
- 73 The official application for international copyright was filed on 18 February 1915. ‘Proceedings under the Copyright Act 1912’, *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette* (Sydney), 24 April 1915, 721; ‘“Big” Films’, 5.
- 74 *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 24 April 1915, 2.
- 75 ‘Cabiria’, *Truth* (Brisbane), 30 May 1915, 8.
- 76 ‘Cabiria’, *Truth* (Brisbane), 6 June 1915, 6.
- 77 ‘Cabiria’, *Sun* (Sydney), 11 May 1916, 2.
- 78 ‘Amusements’, *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate* (NSW), 24 April 1915, 8.
- 79 ‘Amusements’, *Argus* (Melbourne), 15 May 1915, 22.
- 80 ‘Cabiria’, *Telegraph* (Brisbane), 31 May 1915, 8.
- 81 ‘Sydenham Pictures: People of Cabiria’, *Star* (Christchurch, NZ), 19 July 1916, 5.
- 82 *Evening Post* (Wellington, NZ), 30 June 1916, 2.
- 83 ‘The Picture World’, *Evening Post* (Wellington), 24 June 1916, 11.
- 84 Daley, *Leisure and Pleasure*, 5.
- 85 Daley, *Leisure and Pleasure*, 8.
- 86 Jacqueline Reich, ‘The Metamorphosis of Maciste in Italian Silent Cinema’, *Film History* 25.3 (2013), 33.
- 87 ‘News of the Day’, *Colonist* (Nelson, NZ), 15 December 1917, 4.
- 88 ‘At the Play’, *Critic* (Adelaide), 26 December 1917, 12.
- 89 ‘Maciste in *The Warrior*’, *Sunday Times* (Sydney), 18 November 1917, 25.
- 90 Ibid.
- 91 ‘Tonight! Pollard’s Pictures’, *Hokitika Guardian* (Hokitika, NZ), 21 September 1921, 3; ‘Entertainment’, *Manuwatu Herald* (Palmerston North, NZ), 14 October 1930, 2.
- 92 Ibid.
- 93 ‘Star Pictures’, *Northern Standard* (Darwin, NT), 5 January 1932, 5.
- 94 Gian Piero Brunetta, *Guida alla storia del cinema italiano*, 61. Qtd in Bondanella, *Italian Cinema*, 11.
- 95 Wyke, *Projecting the Past*, 26.
- 96 Angela Dalle Vacche, *Diva: Defiance and Passion in Early Italian Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 1.
- 97 Pierre Sorlin, *Italian National Cinema, 1896–1996* (London: Routledge, 1996), 4.
- 98 Cesare Naretto, ‘Francesca Bertini’, *Il magnese cinematografico* 2. 22 (30 December 1914), 10. Qtd in Francesco Pitassio, ‘Famous Actors, Famous Actresses: Notes on Acting Style in Italian Silent Films’ in Giorgio Bertellini (ed.), *Italian Silent Cinema: A Reader* (New Barnet, UK: John Libbey Publishing, 2013), 258.

- 99 Angela Dalle Vacche, 'The Diva-Film: Context, Actresses, Issues' in Bertellini (ed.), *Italian Silent Cinema*, 192; 'West's Pictures', *Southern Times* (Bunbury, WA), 8 October 1910, 5.
- 100 'The Lyceum', *Telegraph* (Brisbane), 23 November 1910, 10; 'Amusements. Theatre Royal', *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* (Tasmania), 9 December 1910, 1.
- 101 *Moving Picture World*, 14 September 1912, 1075.
- 102 'Amusements. Wondergraph Town Hall', *Register* (Adelaide), 8 April 1912, 2.
- 103 'Photo-Play Theatres', *Sun* (Sydney), 27 July 1912, 12.
- 104 Dalle Vacche, *Diva*, 164.
- 105 'Pictures', *Bathurst Times* (NSW), 15 June 1915, 2; *Brisbane Courier*, 15 March 1916, 2.
- 106 *Northern Miner* (Charter Towers, Qld), 10 February 1916, 2.
- 107 *Daily News* (Perth), 8 June 1916, 1.
- 108 Ibid.
- 109 Paolo Cherchi Usai, 'Italy: Spectacle and Melodrama' in Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (ed.), *The Oxford History of World Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 129.
- 110 'Film Fancies: The Naked Truth', *Sunday Times* (Sydney), 14 March 1915, 16.
- 111 Ibid.
- 112 As a representative example of this destabilized financial situation, Cines was sold by the Bank of Rome to French entrepreneur Alfred Bernheim in 1916.
- 113 Brunetta, *History of Italian Cinema*, 28.



## ‘Like the hallmark on silver’

### The Unquestioned Quality of Nordic Films

In early 1913, the elegant Empress Theatre in Sydney began calling itself the ‘Home of the Nordisk Feature’. Built by J.D. Williams in 1910 as a continuous picture theatre called the Colonial No. 2, it was renamed the Empress in August 1912, six months before Williams’s cinemas became part of Union Theatres, the exhibition arm of the Combine. While Williams had previously competed with West’s for access to Nordisk products, his cinemas became the default home for Nordisk pictures in the year of the merger. Between March 1913 and November 1915, the Empress hosted the Australian premiere of at least twenty-eight Nordisk features, while another nineteen opened at Williams’s other Sydney theatres, including the Crystal Palace, the Lyric, and the Colonial (No. 1), between the years 1911 and 1915.

One of the Nordisk premieres at the Empress, of the social drama *Guldmønten/Gold from the Gutter*, took place on 12 May 1913, almost a month before the film’s 2 June premiere in Denmark, despite the fact that Nordisk tried to ensure that their films premiered on the same day around the world, and at a time when a lag of six to twelve weeks between the European and Australasian premieres of a film was typical.<sup>1</sup> While no evidence survives of a formal relationship between the Combine and Nordisk Films Kompagni (hereafter Nordisk), the decision to associate one of Williams’s most profitable urban cinemas so prominently with a single Danish production house indicates just how prestigious and lucrative Nordisk films were in Australasia in this period. The Combine’s confidence in this Nordisk venture is confirmed by the Empress Theatre’s declaration in the Sydney *Sunday Times* on 1 February 1914 that the brand



Figure 6.1 Drawing of J.D. Williams's Colonial Theatre No. 2, later the Empress, Sydney, *Film Index*, 31 December 1910

'Nordisk on a film is like the hallmark on silver—it means unquestioned quality'.<sup>2</sup>

Nordisk had earned its sterling reputation through bold production and export strategies that allowed it to carve out a global market niche for its own and other films from Denmark and Sweden, despite fierce competition from French, Italian, American, British, and German

producers. Founded in Copenhagen in 1906 by entertainment entrepreneur Ole Olsen (1863–1943), Nordisk dominated the Danish film industry in the pre-war period, often competing and occasionally cooperating with smaller producers including Fotorama, Kinografen, Regia Kunstfilm, and Skandinavisk-Russisk Handelshus (Scandinavian-Russian Trading Company, hereafter SRH). As a particularly aggressive player on the global cinema market, Nordisk exported 98% of its production and achieved a position of prominence vastly disproportionate to the size of its domestic market. It was the second largest film exporter in the world in 1913, after Pathé.<sup>3</sup> Nordisk’s early, focused concentration on producing multi-reel narrative films, particularly in the social drama genre, was a critical factor in the company’s international success, while its distribution relationships with British exchanges and, initially, Pathé Frères enabled Danish films to be well represented in Australasian cinemas.

Across the Sound in Sweden, the largest film producer was Svenska Biografteatern AB (known as Svenska Bio or Swedish Biograph). It was founded in Stockholm just a year after Nordisk, in 1907, but did not begin producing fiction films until after Charles Magnusson was hired as general manager in 1908. Although it recruited strong talent, notably actor/directors Mauritz Stiller (1883–1928) and Victor Sjöström (1879–1960), who made several acclaimed films before the war, Swedish Biograph remained overshadowed by its Danish competitor until the interwar period. Swedish Biograph did export more than a dozen films to Australasia before 1915, but largely through other companies, including Pathé and Nordisk. Although relative latecomers to the international film business, Nordisk and Swedish Biograph were able to carve out a significant market share for themselves in the years prior to World War I, not only in Europe and the USA, but also in Australasia, as this chapter will demonstrate.

Unlike the crossover stage stars featured in French and Italian films, few actors in Danish films were marketed in such a way as to attain name recognition in the Antipodes. Instead, the Nordisk brand itself became the Nordic region’s most important signifier of quality films (albeit often misspelled as ‘Nordish’, ‘Wordisk’, ‘Nordick’, or ‘Nordeski’). The first Nordisk narrative film screened in Australasia seems to have been *The Lion Hunt* (aka *Lion Hunting*) in 1908, which was followed, according to contemporary Australasian newspaper ads, by a steady stream of more than 220 films between 1910 and 1918 (slightly fewer in New Zealand), including approximately forty-two feature films in 1913 alone. That number includes a dozen or so films from other Danish makers besides Nordisk, which were marketed as Nordisk pictures. Immediately prior to the war, Nordisk-branded films were ubiquitous on Australasian screens.

In addition to these Danish productions, nearly two dozen Swedish films made it to the Antipodes between 1912 and 1915. Swedish Biograph's Malmö-based competitor Frans Lundberg produced the first Swedish feature imported to Australasia, the drama *Dockan, eller Glödande kärlek/Burning Love and Flaring Hate*, featuring the Danish actor Ida Kjer Nielsen (1887–1918, no relation to Asta Nielsen, though some advertisers capitalized on the similarity). This film, which depicts a desperate woman deliberately infecting the child of her former lover with scarlet fever through a doll belonging to her own infected child, was banned by the Swedish censor in January 1912 and was restricted to adults only when it was shown in Germany in April 1912, but does not appear to have encountered any restrictions in Australia. It was distributed in the UK through the M.P. Sales Agency in London to J.D. Williams's International Pictures, which offered the 2,600ft film for hire in Australia in November 1912. The film opened first at the Snowden cinema in Melbourne on 11 November under the title *Love and Hate*, marketed with Ida Nielsen's name. A week later, on 18 November, it ran for a week at the Britannia in Bendigo (Vic) as *Burning Love and Flaring Hate*, where it was also marketed as a 'Nordisk Star Feature', with 'Miss Nielsen in the lead'.<sup>4</sup> Evidently very popular, it remained in circulation until January 1914. At least six more Swedish-made dramas starring Ida Nielsen, who is regularly praised in the Australasian press as a noted Continental actress, were imported by 1914, some produced by Lundberg and some by Nielsen's own production company.

The first instalment of roughly fourteen Swedish Biograph pictures to arrive in the Antipodes in this period (1913–17) included *De svarta maskerne/The Black Masks*, one of Mauritz Stiller's earliest directorial efforts; *I lifvets vår/Springtime of Life*, with both Stiller and Victor Sjöström in the cast; and *Trädgårdsmästeren/Broken Spring Roses* (aka *The Gardener*), written by Stiller, directed by Sjöström, and featuring Gösta Ekman (1890–1938) and Lili Bech (1885–1939; also spelled 'Beck'), all four of whom would go on to become global cinema stars. All three films opened in Australia, at Spencer's, West's, and Williams's theatres, respectively, in February 1913, but only *Springtime of Life* was also screened in New Zealand, from March to October 1913. It's not clear who distributed these films internationally. Since Pathé had opened a branch office in Stockholm in 1910 and established cooperative endeavours with local producers, including a short-lived Phoenix label for Swedish exports, some of these Swedish Biograph films may have been handled by Pathé, though the ads don't mention it. However, a breach developed between the companies in 1913/14, the primary period during which Swedish films arrived in Australia, after which Nordisk took over the foreign distribution of Swedish Biograph films from 1915 to 1917.<sup>5</sup>

After the outbreak of war, when neutral Denmark found itself torn between its two major trading partners, England and Germany, Nordisk hoped to be able to maintain or expand its market share in international markets like Australasia. The company was initially able to export films to both Entente and Central Powers countries, attempting to keep its films neutral by avoiding stories about war, espionage, and anything militaristic. In a 1916 memo, the company even advised against the use of uniforms in films because ‘it is extraordinarily difficult at present to sell films with uniforms in them ... There have been occasions in which uniforms, even when they had been diligently designed to be as neutral as possible, still caused offence in Britain for being “German” and in Germany for being “English.”’<sup>6</sup>

However, as the war progressed, Denmark found itself regarded with suspicion from both sides, while Germany’s build-up of its own production capacity led to the founding of the quasi-national Universum Film AG (UFA) and its acquisition of Nordisk’s distribution and exhibition assets in Germany. While Nordisk continued to produce films until the late 1920s, some of which made it to Australasia, the company’s production numbers and export capacity shrank dramatically, rendering it unable to recover its pre-war prominence or compete effectively with increasing American market dominance in Europe or Australasia. At the same time, the merger of several smaller Swedish film companies and Swedish Biograph in 1919 into Svensk Filmindustri (SF) positioned Swedish film to make new strides in the interwar period (see Chapter 9).

### Nordisk Bestrides the World

From its founding, Nordisk was in direct competition with larger, more established production houses from across Western Europe, Britain, and the USA as well as with local Danish rivals for a share in global cinema markets. Nordisk acted quickly and decisively to outproduce its rivals, secure distribution agreements, and establish itself as an internationally recognizable brand. In this early period, Nordisk sold its films directly to distributors, cinemas, and agents, retaining no share in box-office receipts and providing no marketing materials, which gave distributors and exhibitors a great deal of control over which films they purchased and how they were advertised. Nordisk adopted its distinctive polar bear logo in 1906, about the same time it began opening offices and hiring agents in crucial cities around Europe, including Berlin, London, Vienna, Budapest, New York, Prague, Zurich, Amsterdam, and St Petersburg.<sup>7</sup> Isak Thorsen clarifies that the only official Nordisk branches were in Berlin, London, Vienna, and New York (as Great Northern), and that the Vienna office

was short-lived, but explains that Nordisk gained access to other markets through ‘individuals or companies who obtained the exclusive rights to Nordisk’s films on one or more markets’.<sup>8</sup> Since Nordisk’s London office was generally responsible for the sale of films to (former) British colonies, including Australia and New Zealand, that is most likely where distributors such as West, Williams, and Spencer would have sourced the Nordisk films they imported between 1908 and 1913.

In vying for market share, Nordisk did not simply make films and ship them off to faraway markets in the hope that they would appeal to foreign audiences. Instead, the company initially tried to please a variety of tastes by making fairly generic films—from travelogues about Siam and Norway to documentaries about stockfish and government rations. Nordisk’s fiction films aimed for universal thematic appeal and carefully non-specific locations, with just enough interchangeable detail to seem familiar to target audiences. In the logbooks for Nordisk’s early films, each film is titled in as many as eight different languages: Danish, Swedish, French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese, along with the text for the associated inter-titles. In many cases, the film’s title is not simply translated from Danish, but is given a unique twist for each country, often using name substitution. For example, the 1910 short *Jens ser levende billeder* (which translates literally as ‘Jens sees living pictures’) kept the same title in Swedish but was retitled elsewhere as: *Willy Visits a Kinematograph Show* for English-speaking markets, *Hans im Kinematographen* for the crucial German market, *Bartolo va al cine* for Italian audiences, and *Calino au cinématographe* for French ones. Both the name of the film’s protagonist and the terminology for ‘living pictures’ were tailored to specific markets, with the French version referring to a popular comic character from a Gaumont series.

While carving out a small but profitable niche for Nordisk with such cheap one-reel films, Olsen achieved Nordisk’s international breakthrough—and attracted the attention of Australasian cinema audiences—in mid-1907, with his audacious film *The Lion Hunt*, made with two circus lions on a small island in a Danish fjord. The fact that Olsen actually had the lions killed during the filming caused a public scandal in Denmark. Olsen was arrested, fined, and stripped of his cinema licence, while the film was not allowed to be shown in Denmark for a year. Despite or perhaps because of its scandalous associations, *The Lion Hunt* was a massive financial success for Nordisk, selling approximately 259 prints worldwide, so it’s not terribly surprising that at least two prints made their way to Australasia. By December 1907, Nordisk had already established a distribution arrangement with an (unnamed) agent, who earned a 10% commission for taking a consistent quantity of Nordisk films each week for sale in Australia.<sup>9</sup>

What is notable, however, is how effectively this single film opened the door for further Nordisk imports and contributed to establishing the Nordisk brand in Australasia. The Australasian press picked up the story of the *Lion Hunt* scandal just a few weeks after it erupted in August 1907; the *Australian Star* reported on 26 September 1907 that 'an enterprising photographer at Copenhagen' had staged an actual lion hunt as 'the latest form of realism in the making of cinematographic films'. Defying police orders to desist, Olsen proceeded with making the film, which proved 'most exciting and bloodthirsty'.<sup>10</sup> Variations on this story appeared in nearly two dozen newspapers across Australia and New Zealand in the autumn of 1907, many of them noting that the Danish Minister of Justice Peter Alberti had 'prohibited the purchase of the fight films'.<sup>11</sup> The scandal seems to have whetted Australasian audiences' appetite for the film, which began showing in Australia at the Victoria Hall in Sydney at the beginning of February 1908—two months before its US premiere and ten months before it was released in Denmark—and remained in circulation until December 1909, when it was screened at Olympia Pictures in Fremantle (WA). Under the auspices of T. Shaw Valentine's mobile cinema variety show, the film opened in New Zealand in September 1908, moving from Oamaru, on South Island, up the east coast to Nelson from September 1908 and down to Hokitika by February 1909 before crossing to Wellington on North Island and showing as far north as Manuwatu in May 1909, then doing a circuit of the southern part of South Island from August to October 1909.

The success of *The Lion Hunt* seems to have alerted Australasian distributors to the marketability of Nordisk films, piquing their interest in Nordisk's follow-up big-game-hunting film *Bjørnejagt i Rusland/Bear Hunting in Russia*, which featured five brown bears being hunted down and shot (in Sweden, to avoid further legal repercussions for Olsen in Denmark).<sup>12</sup> This film opened in Australia in November 1908 at West's Olympia in Melbourne, Victoria, and, like *The Lion Hunt*, stayed in circulation for about eighteen months, until March 1910, though it does not seem to have made it to New Zealand. Many other one-reel films followed on the heels of these two hunting films, in both documentary and narrative genres. In 1909, at least fifteen one-reel Nordisk fiction films—all directed by Viggo Larsen, Nordisk's only director at the time—were screened in Australia, usually as a supporting part of a mixed programme that stayed fairly constant from place to place around the country, particularly when moving through chain theatres like West's or Spencer's.

In the absence of first-hand accounts from cinemagoers, it is nearly impossible to know what audiences thought of these films and the extent to which they noticed or cared about the films' Nordic origins. Newspaper

reports of cinema events in Australasia in this period tend to be relentlessly positive, but some details can be gleaned from them all the same. For example, Australasian audiences don't appear to have been aware of the literary basis of the coloured Nordisk film *Svend Dyrings hus/The Stepmother*, based on Danish author Henrik Hertz's 1893 novel of the same name; the *Petersburg Times* (SA) merely praised the film for its 'exciting story' and 'quaint old-world setting', both of which caused the audience to watch with 'breathless interest' and break out in loud applause at the conclusion of the film.<sup>13</sup>

The melodrama *Grevinde X/The Red Domino*, also directed by Viggo Larsen, provides a good example of the typical exhibition pattern of these early Nordisk productions. The 935ft film, about a blackmail attempt gone awry, premiered in Copenhagen on 8 October 1909 and began screening in Australia not quite two months later, with simultaneous two-week runs or 'seasons' occurring from 4 to 17 December 1909 at Spencer's Lyceum Theatre in Sydney and at Hoyt's St George Hall on Bourke Street in Melbourne. In both cases *The Red Domino* was billed as a supporting film to the star picture, Ambrosio's *Nero, or The Fall of Rome*, which had been released in Europe at approximately the same time. The two films then travelled together—along with American Biograph's *In Old Kentucky*, Gaumont's *Hats of All Ages*, Selig's *Before the Mast*, a Spanish bull-fighting documentary, another on Canadian salmon fishing, a third on glass-blowing, and an array of comic shorts—to Adelaide, Brisbane, and Perth for one week each.

Nordisk's name appears together with *The Red Domino* for the first time in an ad in the *West Australian* on Christmas Day 1909 for King's Picture Gardens, on the Esplanade in Perth, which claimed 'without the aid of suppositious superlatives ... to place the best OPEN-AIR BIOGRAPHIC DISPLAY yet seen in W.A. ALL FILMS received from the Company's Agents are TRUE to TITLE and LENGTH, and represent the BEST OUTPUT of the LEADING MANUFACTURERS of the OLD and NEW WORLD.' The ad establishes the relative status of both films, with the Italian film ranked higher: *The Red Domino* is described as 'The Nordisk's [*sic*] Co.'s Thrilling Dramatic Episode', while *Nero* is proclaimed 'the CINEMATOGRAPHIC EVENT of the YEAR', with the title listed more than a dozen times. *Nero*, 'this latest art film ... acted by world renowned artists', is praised as 'the most marvellous historical production of modern times, intensely dramatic, thrillingly sensational, superb scenery, powerfully acted, accurate in costumes and historically correct'.<sup>14</sup> While not lauded as effusively, *The Red Domino* seems to have been very well received, as it stayed in circulation in Australia until October 1910, with its last documented screening on



8 October by the Imperial Picture Company in Byron Bay (NSW), and increased Nordisk's name recognition.

Despite the commercial success of Nordisk films in 1909, however, no new Nordisk films appear to have been released in Australia or New Zealand in 1910, though many earlier imports continued to circulate. This was a side effect of the global film industry crisis caused by overproduction of films, which led to a significant drop in Nordisk's sales in late 1909. Growing pains at Nordisk also contributed to the temporary decline in productivity as the number and responsibilities of directors evolved. Between 1910 and 1911, Nordisk's staff grew exponentially, expanding from one director in 1909 to two in 1910, four in 1911, and ten in 1913. In November 1909, the company's hitherto sole director Viggo Larsen left and was replaced by Holger Rasmussen for one year. Rasmussen was replaced in turn by August Blom, who was soon joined by Robert Dinesen, Holger-Madsen, Hjalmar Davidsen, August Wilhelm Sandberg, Eduard Schnedler-Sørensen, and, somewhat later, Lau Lauritzen.

While other directors made a few films here and there, this group of seven directors made 505 of the 642 films produced at Nordisk between 1911 and 1917.<sup>15</sup> Directors were hired for just the shooting season, which ran from March to October, and were required to prepare their own scripts. They had access to sixty-five regular actors and fifty extras each day, but as budgets increased (from the original 100 kroner allotted per film) and directors began to specialize in particular genres, with Schnedler-Sørensen concentrating on crime stories, Lau Lauritzen on comedies, and Blom on social melodramas, directors developed a team of actors they worked with on a regular basis.<sup>16</sup> These teams—particularly Blom's—produced an unbroken stream of successful films in the years leading up to World War I that boosted Nordisk's bottom line and its reputation in Australasia.

### **Building the Nordisk Brand on Feature-Length Films**

Nordisk's re-entry into the Australasian market in 1911 coincided with the rise of the multi-reel feature film, an opportunity that Olsen seized eagerly. Nordisk didn't adopt the multi-reel narrative feature until 1910, but it was the first major company to align its production on long features, for which reason the company is remembered today as one of the pioneers of the feature film. Prior to 1910, Nordisk had adhered to a policy of not producing films longer than 1,000ft, which conformed to the general international industry standard for one-reel films (around fifteen minutes).<sup>17</sup> While many one-reel Nordisk films were imported to Australia prior to 1910 and generally stayed in circulation for two to six months as part of mixed programmes, they were only rarely advertised as Nordisk

products, nor did they tend to be featured as 'star' or 'exclusive' pictures, unlike many Pathé, Itala, Cines, and Ambrosio productions in this same period. Nordisk's brand recognition in the Antipodes derived from its long features, particularly the social or erotic melodramas it specialized in.

Nordisk's star rose in tandem with multi-reel feature films. Olsen converted Nordisk into a public company in 1911 to ensure sufficient capital for producing a large number of features very quickly; the company's strategies for accomplishing this task including establishing a script department, forming multiple simultaneous production teams, and adopting a highly efficient workflow that earned the company the nickname 'the film factory'.<sup>18</sup> This decisive embrace of a rather risky enterprise, which allowed Nordisk to produce a stockpile of feature films before many of their European competitors had made any at all, gave Nordisk a competitive edge that lasted into World War I. Nordisk became so closely associated in Australasia with social dramas that it was regularly credited for films made by Fotorama, SRH, and Swedish Biograph, as well as for German-made films starring the Danish actor Asta Nielsen (see Chapter 7). When asked in a 1913 interview whether other Danish film companies had a chance of matching Nordisk's global success, Olsen replied, 'If they have good managers and if they can find some empty gaps in the world market. But to find room for their films, I believe they will have to populate the South Pole.'<sup>19</sup>

Nordisk's shift into multi-reel film production was prompted by the financial success of its Danish competitor Fotorama's 2,316ft film *Den hvide slavehandel/The White Slave Trade*. Released in April 1910, the film ran to a previously unheard-of length, more than twice as long as the usual narrative film. It depicted a young girl lured from her home by the promise of employment, only to find herself tricked into a life of prostitution, from which her fiancé rescued her. The film was wildly successful, playing more than four hundred times in the Copenhagen cinema Løvebiografen, and it established a new genre of white slave trade films.<sup>20</sup> Nordisk studied Fotorama's film carefully and produced a nearly identical one, with the same name and the same leading lady, four months later. While the plagiarism led to a settlement giving Fotorama control of the distribution of Nordisk films in Scandinavia, it was also a commercial success, which inspired Nordisk to immediately re-orient its production on long narrative films. According to Thorsen, this decision ultimately saved and defined the company, so that Nordisk's manager, Wilhelm Stæhr, could declare, in early 1911, 'Long and artistic films are our future motto.'<sup>21</sup>

Oriented towards export markets, Nordisk tried to make films that would appeal to many different audiences and not offend local censors, though many of their contracts required buyers to pay for films regardless of

whether the censor approved them.<sup>22</sup> While Pathé—particularly through its affiliates Film d’Art, Film d’Arte Italiana, and SCAGL—had largely cornered the market on theatrical and operatic adaptations, and the Italians had staked out historical epics and literary adaptations, Nordisk found its niche in the social (melo)drama, which Rachael Low defines as ‘the dramatic conflict of human emotions with social conventions’.<sup>23</sup> As early as 1910, the company laid down strict guidelines for the kinds of social dramas their directors should make: depictions of contemporary upper-class people ‘that must not cater specifically to a Danish audience but must be suited to an international audience as well’, without depictions of ‘illegalities like murder, adultery, procuring and the like’.<sup>24</sup> This was partly strategic and partly a reflection of Olsen’s own aspirational tastes. In his memoirs, Olsen explained, ‘I certainly knew the taste of the people so well that I knew that they wanted to see something from lives far from their own, as life was lived in places they couldn’t go. The young people wanted to see beautiful parties with elegant dresses ... They would also like to see how a count, a baron or a king lived, and how he ate his dinner.’<sup>25</sup> The contrast between members of different social classes and their (often unsuccessful) attempts to transcend such boundaries is a recurrent theme in Nordisk social dramas of this period.

Many of Nordisk’s films feature the same actors repeatedly—which could occasionally trigger audience dissatisfaction when an actor known for playing the lover suddenly played a villain, for example<sup>26</sup>—were filmed very quickly, recycle plots, costumes, and settings, and utilize static cinematography. David Bordwell points out that while early Danish features initially relied heavily on a tableau style that allowed directors to shoot chronologically and conserve film, they became more flexible in terms of staging and settings as the films became longer, scripts more detailed, effects more realistic, and profits more substantial.<sup>27</sup> By 1913, Nordisk was making elaborate, expensive films like *Atlantis*, a 6,000ft-long adaptation of German author Gerhart Hauptmann’s novel, which involved sinking an actual ship.

To improve the exportability of its films, Nordisk tried to anticipate regional preferences, conducting informal market research through local agents. Danish identifiers in the Copenhagen-made films, such as the names of parks and the format of newspapers, were often replaced with locally appropriate ones to provide as much authenticity as possible.<sup>28</sup> Uniquely among major producers, Nordisk routinely provided alternative endings of films to accord with local expectations, particularly in terms of providing tragic endings for Russian audiences.<sup>29</sup> Nordisk’s directors self-censored their stories to avoid displeasing censors and tried to appeal particularly to female audiences, who made up the majority of cinemagoers

in many national markets. But how much did Nordisk's films, despite such conscious attempts at universalization, still reflect aspects of Nordic culture in the way they approached topics? How much did those values and expectations resonate with Antipodean audiences? The Danish cultural framework of Nordisk's films goes much deeper than superficial markers, providing the ideological underpinnings for the stories of tragic love affairs, profligate living, moral danger, and emotional torment that the films present. The relative liberality of Nordisk's approach to love triangles, infidelity, and gender roles sometimes raised eyebrows. As Marguerite Engberg points out, 'it was not only the choice of subject but also the execution that caused Danish film to be considered both *lascifs* [lascivious] and *scabreux* [lewd]' by some national censors, though they did not seem to encounter much trouble in Australasia.<sup>30</sup>

### Launching Danish Social Dramas in Australasia

The Australasian market was not initially as crucial to Nordisk's balance sheet as the German and American markets, accounting for just a handful of prints of each film out of the forty to seventy copies sold each year on average between 1907 and 1910.<sup>31</sup> However, the large number of Nordisk narrative films that circulated in the Antipodes in the early 1910s—at least 220 individual titles, often in multiple prints—suggests that Australasia became a profitable market for Nordisk and testifies to the popularity and influence of Nordisk's products there. A significant majority of these were long features, defined as longer than 1,600ft, or at least twenty-five minutes. Between 1911 and 1917, Nordisk produced 421 feature-length films, at least 146 of which were screened in Australia and/or New Zealand.<sup>32</sup> Given that numbers of Nordisk imports dropped dramatically during World War I, the statistics for individual pre-war years are even more impressive: at least twenty of the thirty-five Nordisk features produced in 1911 made it to Australasian screens; in 1912, that rose to thirty-eight of forty-seven features, and fell slightly in 1913 to thirty-four of forty-five total Nordisk features. In 1914, however, due to the outbreak of war, material shortages, and Nordisk being placed on an unofficial British blacklist due to the company's dealings with Germany, only thirty of seventy-six Nordisk features appear to have been imported to the Antipodes; in 1915, that number dropped further, to twelve of ninety-six; then ten of seventy-nine in 1916; and only one each in 1917 and 1918.<sup>33</sup>

The first of Nordisk's longer feature films to make its way to Australia seems not to have been its breakthrough 1,978ft remake of *The White Slave Trade*, marketed as *The White Slave*, which was not imported until late 1911, but rather its sequel, the 3,250ft drama *In the Hands of Imposters*,

which was often the first Danish erotic melodrama to establish the genre's popularity in foreign markets.<sup>34</sup> Starring Clara Wieth (later Pontoppidan, 1883–1975), who would appear in at least nineteen other Nordisk features in Antipodean cinemas, *In the Hands of Imposters* depicts a young, motherless middle-class woman, Edith von Felsen, who accepts a job as a maiden aunt's travelling companion. On board ship, Edith is targeted by a procurer for a sex-trafficking ring, which provides the central drama of the film, as she struggles to preserve her freedom and her virtue against two rival sex-trafficking groups. With the help of her love interest, a man she meets on board ship, Edith succeeds, and all ends well for her.

After premiering in Copenhagen in January 1911, *In the Hands of Imposters* appears to have been first screened in Australia by Tait's Pictures in the gold-rush boom town of Bendigo (Vic) for a week, beginning on 15 May 1911. The English Amusements Company then acquired it for a week-long run at the Grand Empire Theatre in Hobart in late June, but no other screenings were advertised in the first half of 1911, nor was Nordisk's name mentioned in connection with the film. After this slow start, the film's circulation gained momentum after the Clement Mason Cine Co., which occasionally picked up films that had already been released in Australia and re-released them as new exclusives, began advertising *In the Hands of Imposters* for hire in the Sydney trade journal *Referee* in late August 1911, together with another Nordisk melodrama, *Temptations of a Great City*. On its re-release, *In the Hands of Imposters* opened at King's Theatre in Sydney for a three-day run, beginning on 28 August 1911, then circulated throughout Australia until 28 December 1912, when it was shown for the last time at Taylor's Theatre Royal in Mackay (Qld). In New Zealand, the only screenings documented in currently digitized newspapers took place half a year after this last Australian screening, from 8 to 11 July 1913, at T.P. Electric Theatre in Masterton. The ads for these screenings of 'another big NORDISK HIT' make it clear that the Nordisk name enjoyed considerable prestige by this time, associated with its undisputed mastery of the social drama. One ad simply describes the film as 'another of those inexpressibly good feature dramas relating a thrilling and romantic story and a NORDISK ("Nuff sed")'.<sup>35</sup>

Even before *In the Hands of Imposters* had been re-released by Mason, two more Nordisk melodramas appeared in Australasian cinemas: *The Price of Beauty* and the above-mentioned *Temptations of a Great City*. Both films featured Nordisk's newest star, the heart-throb Valdemar Psilander (1884–1917), playing opposite Wieth. These films each enjoyed an even more impressive run than *In the Hands of Imposters*, spending years in Australian and New Zealand cinemas. *The Price of Beauty*, which premiered in Denmark on 7 April 1911, opened at J.D. Williams's Melba Theatre in

Melbourne on 20 July 1911. This 2,247ft film is adapted from Danish author Karin Michaëlis's provocative 1910 novel *The Dangerous Age*, about a woman in her forties who, instead of settling down to a placid old age as expected by society, divorces her husband and tries to rekindle an old love affair. In this film version, the first of several, the protagonist Elsie von Lindtner (played by the Danish stage actor Gerda Christophersen) is a widow who seduces her daughter Lisa's fiancé Leopold von Würzen (played by Psilander), winds up in a loveless marriage with him, and runs off with an Italian artist to Paris. The film ends tragically, with Elsie dying in a sanatorium, after reconciling with her daughter (played by Wieth), and her husband shot to death in a duel with her lover.

Nordisk's version of *The Dangerous Age* was, like *The White Slave*, a plagiarized remake of another company's film, in this case the German producer Messter Film. While the settlement with Fotorama had forced Nordisk to relinquish distribution rights in Denmark to its rival, Nordisk was allowed in this case to simply pay a 54,000 kroner settlement to Messter and release its own film.<sup>36</sup> *The Price of Beauty* earned enthusiastic accolades in Australia, where it ran until January 1914 in many competing theatre chains. After



Figure 6.2 Still of Gerda Christophersen, Valdemar Psilander, and Clara Wieth in Nordisk's *Den farlige alder/The Price of Beauty* (1911). Danish Film Institute/Nordisk Film. Reuse not permitted

opening at Williams's Melba Theatre in July, it was screened to packed houses in not only the large cities Sydney, Brisbane, and Adelaide, and smaller towns like Broken Hill (NSW) and Bendigo (Vic), but also at three more cinemas in Melbourne—Tait's Pictures in the Town Hall, the Lyric in Prahran, and Amalgamated Pictures' St Kilda Theatre—in the space of a single month. The film ran from October 1911 through November 1915 in New Zealand, where it was hailed as 'one of the best, if not the best, of the dramagraphs that have been presented in New Zealand ... It is an example of what the kinematograph can do, at its best, and so is well worth the attention of those who hitherto set little store by "pictures"'.<sup>37</sup>

While *The Price of Beauty* accrued at least 550 Australasian newspaper mentions during its thirty months in circulation, *Temptations of a Great City*, which opened just a week later and circulated in the Antipodes for thirty-seven months, aroused even more public notice, with more than 650 newspaper mentions, and was frequently described as exemplary of Nordisk's artistry. The *Barrier Miner* reported in mid-August, after the two films had played back to back at the Theatre Royal in Broken Hill, 'The Famous Nordisk film company were excellent in *The Price of Beauty*, but they have outshone all in *The Temptations of a Great City*'.<sup>38</sup> This 2,690ft film tells the story of a young man (played by Psilander, called Aage in the Danish original and Willy in the English-language release) who lives with his wealthy mother, but gets into debt by entertaining beyond his means. After borrowing money to conceal his situation from his mother, Willy falls in love with the moneylender's daughter (Anna, played by Wieth), who tries to intercede with her father on her lover's behalf when his note comes due. The famous climax shows Willy overcoming the temptation to steal from his mother to pay his debt, which leads to a happy resolution for everyone but the moneylender, who dies of a heart attack. Although released in Australia slightly later than *The Price of Beauty*, *Temptations of a Great City* was in fact Psilander's first film for Nordisk, which set the tone for the eighty-plus films he would make for them over the next five years, more than half of which made it to Australasian screens.

*Temptations of a Great City* premiered in Copenhagen on 6 March 1911 and opened in Australia four months later. It ran from 31 July 1911, when it opened at J.D. Williams's Lyric Theatre in Sydney, until 22 June 1914, closing at Souvenir Pictures in Coleraine, Victoria. Newspaper ads and reviews reveal that *Temptations of a Great City* was screened in Sydney, Hobart, Perth, Melbourne, Adelaide, and Brisbane during the summer of 1911, under the auspices of a variety of exhibitors, as had been the case with *The Price of Beauty*. In-country distribution seems to have been handled initially by the Greater J.D. Williams Amusements Co.; in *Referee* on 12 July 1911, Williams lauds the film's potential as 'an

absolute money-getter' for the suburban and rural exhibitors who could rent it from him. Since Nordisk managed to sell an impressive 246 copies of this film to exhibitors around the world, compared to just 108 prints of *The Price of Beauty*, Williams was not alone in this belief, which proved justified in the Antipodes. The ad promises that, as a 'dramatic production ... produced on a scale of magnificence never before attempted', this film would 'be the talk of Australia'.<sup>39</sup> Part of the film's appeal was its recent arrival from Continental Europe; ads boasted of it being part of 'a complete change of bill, the films having only arrived from the Old World by the last mailboat'.<sup>40</sup> No mention is made of any of the actors' or actresses' names in Williams's ads for the film, in keeping with both Nordisk's policy at the time and the general industry practice, nor is Nordisk itself mentioned until nearly a month later, in an ad for West's in the Adelaide *Daily Herald* on 7 August.

The circulation history of *Temptations of a Great City* illuminates both the highly competitive nature of the Australasian cinema market and its complexity. Ads frequently mention how expensive it was to secure the exhibition rights for a particular Nordisk film and reassure viewers (sometimes inaccurately) that a certain theatre/distributor has exclusive rights to the picture. On 7 August, for example, while Williams was still showing *Temptations of a Great City* in Sydney and the English Amusements Company was screening it in Hobart, West's Pictures began to screen it in Adelaide, marketing it as an 'exclusive attraction'. Just a few days later, on 10 August, Tait's Pictures in Melbourne began advertising the film's 'exclusive' evening premiere in that city on 12 August, but they seem to have been scooped by Williams. On 11 August, Williams's Melba Theatre added a 2:30pm matinee of *Temptations of a Great City*, noting in the *Argus* that 'we have much pleasure in submitting [it] to our patrons for the first time in Melbourne', a few hours before Tait's was poised to offer 'the first presentation [of the film] in Melbourne'. This kind of cut-throat competition was common in the open-market system, as exhibitors tried to maximize their profits on a film in the first few weeks after its release.

While still making the rounds of the major theatres in large Australian cities, including Brisbane and Perth, *Temptations of a Great City* moved on to the provincial cinema circuit in Australia. There seem to have been at least six prints in circulation in August 1911. On the same day as the film's duelling premieres in Melbourne, Tait's also screened it at the Princess Theatre in Bendigo, a showing which was, as the *Bendigo Independent* reported, 'crowded from gallery to stalls'.<sup>41</sup> Parallel ads in *Referee* on 23 August 1911 indicate that both Williams and Mason were offering the film for hire.<sup>42</sup> On 22 August 1911, the film was screened for the first time in Broken Hill, at the far western end of New South Wales, on the



border to South Australia. Since Broken Hill is more than twice as close to Adelaide (321 miles) as to Sydney (710 miles), it seems likely that the print shown there came from the Port Adelaide Empire Picture Palace, where it had run until 19 August. In Victoria, one of the prints shown in Melbourne appears to have moved on to Colac, ninety-four miles west-south-west, by 28 August, while, over on the east coast, the print shown in a two-week run at West's New Olympia in Brisbane was sent on to the brand-new custom-built Empire Theatre in Toowoomba (Qld), seventy miles west of Brisbane, to be screened beginning on 9 September.

In New Zealand, *Temptations of a Great City* opened at the MacMahons' New Theatre in Wellington on 17 October, almost three months after its Australian release, and drew throngs of cinemagoers during its week-long run. The MacMahons may have acquired their print from the Wellington office of the Greater J.D. Williams Amusement Company's distribution arm, International Pictures, which advertised *Temptations of a Great City* and *The Price of Beauty*, along with the Italian Milano Film's *Dante's Inferno*—'all of which have already been shown with remarkable success in some of the great cities of the world'<sup>43</sup>—for hire in Wellington newspapers. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the New Theatre screened *Temptations of a Great City* again nearly four years later in February 1915, which suggests that the film enjoyed enduring popularity among Wellington cinemagoers. As in Australia, the film was shown by many different exhibitors, including Hayward's Pictures, in smaller cities across North Island, from Thames to Feilding, Taranaki to Hastings, before it opened in Auckland, at the MacMahons' Queen's Theatre, in February 1912. It then circulated briefly in parts of western South Island in May but does not appear to have been screened in Christchurch or Dunedin.

More than three full years after the film's Danish premiere, *Temptations of a Great City* was still being screened in rural Australia, albeit under transient conditions. Following its run in of a variety of provincial cinemas in 1911 and 1912 under the auspices of many different exhibitors, a print of *Temptations of a Great City* was acquired by Miss Ettie Wilmott's travelling Wilmott's Electric Picture Company. Wilmott screened the film one night in Manilla (NSW) in April 1912, which must have been successful enough to justify taking it on an extensive tour in the Australian hinterlands. Between May 1913 and January 1914, she brought the film from town to town throughout rural South Australia and Victoria on a rather circuitous route, accompanying screenings with operatic songs that likely illustrated her professional nickname, 'the lady with a man's voice'.<sup>44</sup> Then, from February through May, Wilmott's toured the film around Tasmania, including some places, like Launceston and Hobart, where it had been screened three years earlier. Wilmott's last documented screening of

the film took place in Franklin (Tas) on 20 May 1914. Wilmott's then seems to have sold the print to a company called Souvenir Pictures, which screened the film for what appears to have been the last time in Australia, on 20 June 1914 as the Saturday evening picture in Coleraine (Vic), more than 212 miles west of Melbourne, a week after *Quo Vadis?* and preceding the French crime series *Fantômas*. It had had quite an impressive run, far longer and covering much more ground than it would have been able to in Denmark or Europe.

As a vehicle of cultural transmission from Europe to Australasia, *Temptations of a Great City* seems to have conveyed several different impressions of urban life, depending on what viewers focused on in the film. Though filmed in Copenhagen, the film's setting is often described as New York, but its message is pitched as universally relatable. An ad in the Broken Hill *Barrier Miner* on 24 August 1911, two days after the film opened there, describes a variety of hypothetical reactions to the film to demonstrate its appeal to different kinds of cinema patrons:

The man in the street says, 'Have you seen the great winner, THE TEMPTATIONS OF A GREAT CITY?'

The lady in her boudoir says, 'My novels are tame in plot compared to THE TEMPTATIONS OF A GREAT CITY.'

The gay old spark says, 'Well, I've had a good time in my youth, but I am beat by the doings in THE TEMPTATIONS OF A GREAT CITY.'

The lovers say, 'Oh, we are shocked! We never spoon like those in THE TEMPTATIONS OF A GREAT CITY.'

Old Cent Per Cent says, 'Mein gootness, the extravagance is awful in THE TEMPTATIONS OF A GREAT CITY.'

All the dear girls say, 'Oh, I wish George would spoon like the nice, foolish boy in THE TEMPTATIONS OF A GREAT CITY.'

And the Wowser says, 'It's dreadful but it points a great moral, and I am going again and ALL SHOULD SEE THE TEMPTATIONS OF A GREAT CITY.'

The ad makes it clear that every potential viewer should be able to find a reason to appreciate this film, from its aura of success to its extravagance and romance to its reformist message. The apparently German accent attributed to the miserly 'Old Cent Per Cent' appears to allude to the German settler population in Australia, many of whom had come to towns like Broken Hill in the mid-nineteenth century to work in the mines.

The ad conveys a sense that the film was a bit racy by the standards of the time, but its scandalousness is at once justified and legitimized, even for the self-righteous Wowser, by the film’s moral lesson about repentance and redemption. A Tait’s ad in Melbourne on 11 August offered the assurance that ‘this Great Interpretation of a Desperate Social Canker cannot possibly prove harmful to beholders. It is a true, honest representation of the terrible undertow which encompasses our young manhood in its relentless tentacles and draws them down! down! down! into the fascinating vortex of oblivion.’<sup>45</sup>

By modern standards, the film is quite tame, at least in the action it depicts. Since, according to Nordisk founder Ole Olsen, ‘a film could not be sold in England if a man walked through a bedroom, even if no one else was in the room’, most of the action in this film takes place in common spaces—Willy’s mother’s drawing room and dining room, a music hall, and Anna’s father’s office—but the main courtship scene takes place in Willy’s own room.<sup>46</sup> Presumably to satisfy the censors, there is no bed in the room, just a divan and a table, but that is enough furniture to allow considerable spooning and consumption of champagne and sweetmeats. When his mother objects to the relationship, Willy and Anna move in together, splurging on jewellery and hats, partying with friends,



Figure 6.3 Still of Clara Wieth and Valdemar Psilander in Nordisk’s *Ved fængslets port/Temptations of a Great City* (1911). Danish Film Institute/Nordisk Film. Reuse not permitted

and indulging in seductive dances and festive suppers until the money runs out and the debts come due. Yet these tantalizing glimpses of the pleasures of the 'high life' are tempered by the anguish Willy experiences at having to confess his financial incompetence and resist the temptation to rob his own mother. Taken as a whole, the film's moral message of reform seems to have made a more lasting impression on Australasian viewers than the fashions Anna models or the licentiousness of Anna and Willy's lifestyle.

A similar pedagogical rationale seems to have underpinned the importation of the Nordisk film *Opiumsdrømmen/The Opium Smoker*, which was banned by the Danish censor and never screened in its country of origin, but circulated in Australia from June 1914 through January 1915 and in New Zealand from June 1914 through August 1916. The film tells the story of a young nobleman so addled by opium and jealousy that he attempts to poison his brother to steal both his inheritance and his bride, a crime he pays for with his own life. The Sydney *Sunday Times* explained that the film's depiction of an opium addict's susceptibility to such destructive emotions conveys an invaluable lesson, while the *South Eastern Times* in Millicent (SA) deemed it 'full of thrilling situations ... even better than *The Circus Girl* or *The Pride of the Circus*, two masterpieces from the same source'.<sup>47</sup> However, the reception of this particular film illuminates differences in audience expectations between urban and rural areas and between Australia and New Zealand. When *The Opium Smoker* was screened in tiny Lawrence, NZ by the travelling cinema of Messrs Bell and Gray in August 1915, the local paper noted that this 'much lauded film failed to meet with the appreciation of the audience. Many of the scenes bordered on the gruesome and it was certainly far from edifying'.<sup>48</sup>

After *The Price of Beauty* and *Temptations of a Great City*, the average Australasian cinemagoer could have seen Psilander on screen at least once a month, in a different multi-reel feature each time, throughout most of 1911, 1912, 1913, and 1914. While Psilander's third feature to be released in Australasia, *The Circus Girl*, was not a Nordisk release, its robust circulation (see Chapter 7) built on the popularity of his preceding films. In all, seven Psilander films opened in Australia between July and December 1911, four of them also in New Zealand in the same period (the rest in early 1912). They showcase him in a variety of romantic leading roles, almost all of which involve some sort of love triangle—from the unfaithful fiancé and unhappy husband in *The Price of Beauty* to a jealous husband in *The Aviator and the Journalist's Wife* (aka *The Aviator's Generosity*) to a predatory missionary in *A Victim of the Mormons*. Thirteen more Psilander features followed in 1912, including *Den sorte kansler/The Black Chancellor*, where Psilander plays an authoritarian politician whose attempts to control a young princess's heart lead to all manner of intrigue, and *Dødsspring*

*til best fra cirkuskuplen/The Great Circus Catastrophe*, in which Psilander’s down-on-his-luck nobleman attempts a foolhardy, nearly fatal circus stunt to impress a woman.<sup>49</sup>

The year 1913 was the peak for Psilander films in Australasia, with eighteen new Psilander film releases, among them the marital intrigue *Hustruens ret/A Woman’s Right*, the romantic comedy *Vor tids dame/The Modern Girl*, and the crime drama *Hvem var forbryderen?/The Mystery of the Corner House* (aka *At the Eleventh Hour*). However, the sharp decline in Danish imports after the outbreak of war meant that only five new Psilander films opened in 1914: the business dramas *Expressens mysterium/Alone With the Devil* and *Et vanskeligt valg/The Golden Heart*, the romantic melodramas *Et skud i mørket/A Shot in the Dark* and *Lykken svunden og genvunden/A Daughter of Eve*, and the class tragedy *Fangens søn/The Convict’s Son*; two in 1915: the religious drama *Evangelieemandens liv/The Candle and the Moth* and the romance *Et læreaar/The Reformation*; and, in 1916, a single Psilander film, the historical drama *Et Revolutionsbryllup/A Revolution Marriage*, featuring Psilander playing opposite the celebrated Danish stage actor Betty Nansen. All of these films, which showcase Psilander’s versatility in dramatic roles and display his handsome appearance to advantage, circulated widely for two years each, on average, with at least a dozen of his films in circulation at any given time between 1911 and 1915. Given this high level of exposure, Psilander should have been one of the region’s most recognizable stars, yet his name is almost entirely absent from the contemporary newspaper record, due largely to Nordisk’s branding strategy in the Antipodes.

### Brand Recognition versus Film Stars

Once Nordisk multi-reel features had been successfully launched in Australasia, Nordisk’s brand recognition in the Antipodes increased dramatically. Given rapid (weekly or twice weekly in most cinemas) change of programmes, films had a relatively short commercial lifespan, so branding was crucial to securing export markets and maintaining sales. Economic historian Gerben Bakker identifies three common strategies early film producers used in building their brand: extending the brand as a trademark for a series of products, acquiring/incorporating an existing brand with high consumer resonance (famous plays, novels, theatre actors), or using the film itself as a brand to market tangible merchandise.<sup>50</sup> While Nordisk used all three strategies in different cases, the branding of Nordisk films in Australasia was largely limited to the first, with all Nordisk films marketed together under the company name as a guarantee of quality.

Since Nordisk—unlike Pathé—had no branch office in the region and does not—unlike Deutsche Bioscop—seem to have included marketing instructions with its prints, the choice of how to advertise Nordisk films was left up to local distributors and exhibitors. The lack of a coherent strategy from Nordisk left local advertisers at somewhat of a loss as to which strategy to prioritize. While the earliest ads for the films had not mentioned the company at all, later ads tended to mention Nordisk's name prominently and to use the popularity of previous Nordisk releases to build up the company's brand as evidence of quality. An advertisement for *Temptations of a Great City* in the Melbourne paper *The Age* on 10 August 1911 points out that Nordisk was the company that had previously 'presented the Famous Social Problem *In the Hands of Imposters*'.<sup>51</sup> Monikers such as 'the Famous Nordisk Company' reinforced this prominence, though the occasional reference to 'the Nordisk company of America' suggests that not all exhibitors and journalists were clear about Nordisk's Danish affiliation.<sup>52</sup> By July 1912, the *Hamilton Spectator* could assert, 'The Nordisk Company has earned a reputation in the picture world for lengthy high-class feature dramatic productions.'<sup>53</sup> Even during the war, when the Empress Theatre screened Nordisk's *Kvinden, han mødte/Satanita—The She Devil* in November 1915, three months after its premiere in Denmark, the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* simply reminded viewers that 'the fact that it is by Nordisk vouches for the quality of the production'.<sup>54</sup>

Wave after wave of successful Nordisk dramas cemented the company's reputation for 'magnificent productions' and producing 'the greatest stars', sometimes at the expense of its Continental competitors.<sup>55</sup> The flood of Nordisk films into the Australasian market made Nordisk so ubiquitous that by February 1912, Hugh Black's Entertainments in Brisbane (Qld) could screen three long Nordisk features in the same week: *Hævnens hører mig til/Mine is the Vengeance* was the star picture at the Brisbane Cricket Grounds the same night as it was shown alongside *Hendes ære/Lady Mary's Love* at Black's Spring Hill Picture Palace, which was followed three days later by *A Victim of the Mormons*. In January 1912, the Perth *Daily News* reminded audiences that the upcoming film, *The Dead Man's Child*, to be presented by Spencer's Pictures at the Theatre Royal, had been 'produced by the Nordisk Co., the makers of *The Temptations of a Great City*, *The Circus Girl*, *Fools of Society*, *A Victim of the Mormons*, and *Lady Mary's Love*, and to each and every one of these it is indeed a worthy successor'.<sup>56</sup> *The Circus Girl* had actually been produced by Nordisk's Danish rival Fotorama and *Sündige Liebe/Fools of Society* was a Deutsche Bioscop film, confirming that Nordisk had come to represent Northern European (or at least German and Scandinavian) film more generally, particularly Asta

Nielsen's German-made films. Although she had only made one film with Nordisk, Nielsen herself was often claimed to the company's credit. As late as January 1915, the Perth *Sunday Times* mused that the film *Den mystiske fremmede/A Deal with the Devil*, four prints of which were shipped to Australia, reminded viewers of the 'three-years-ago work of that powerfully artistic company. Few will forget the magnetic Asta Neilsen [*sic*] in these photo-plays, albeit a lot of her work was close to the cuticle. Whenever the name Nordisk appears on the screen the audience may make its mind up for thrill', while, a few months later, the *W.A. Sportsman* introduced an upcoming film as being from 'Nordisk, the Danish firm which gave us the incomparable Asta Nielsen photo-plays'.<sup>57</sup>

Clearly, Nordisk's long melodramas found receptive audiences in Australia, even if it is hard to pin down exactly what viewers liked about them beyond their exciting storylines and unusual length. On 17 December 1911, the theatre gossip column of the Perth *Sunday Times* offered the following assessment of Nordisk's appeal:

The Nordesk [*sic*] films, whose sign is a Polar bear mounted on a world-globe, are moving rapidly ahead in the bioline. It is a Danish firm, but though the photography is equal to the finest Pathé and the incident is replete with sensation, sudden blood and illicit smooch, the acting is a trifle wooden. Also the actors are anything but a band of male beauties, though the women are fair to look upon and nice enough to nibble.<sup>58</sup>

The implied reference to Psilander is not flattering, but the praise for Nordisk's female leads lends support to Wieth's recollection of the effusive fan mail she received: 'Oh, what I didn't get in the way of exciting letters and billet-doux with praise for my blondness and Nordic expressiveness.'<sup>59</sup> The sensationalism of Nordisk films, paired with their high technical values and attractive female stars, seems to have been a recipe for success in Australasia. However, the fame for these films was largely confined to Nordisk's brand, rather than contributing to the stardom of individual actors, unlike the prominence of crossover and cinema stars in Australasian ads for many French, German, and Italian films in the same period.

Until 1911, as a matter of policy, Nordisk did not reveal the names of its actors and had even instructed exhibitors not to use the actors' names in local advertising or in connection with a particular film.<sup>60</sup> With the rise of the feature, however, Nordisk began relentlessly marketing stars such as Psilander, who was the highest-paid actor in the company for many years in the early 1910s. He earned 10,000 Danish kroner per film in 1916, while the company's second-highest-paid actor, Olaf Fønss, earned 14,000 for the entire 1915 season.<sup>61</sup> To ensure that this investment paid

off, Nordisk provided marketing materials to many exhibitors, sending tens of thousands of Psilander postcards to their branches and offices in Russia, London, and Germany, for example.<sup>62</sup> Such efforts paid off in audience adoration in many parts of the globe. In 1914, Psilander was voted the most popular cinema actor in both Germany, in a survey of German filmgoers by the magazine *Kino-Woche*,<sup>63</sup> and Brazil, according to a survey conducted by the Rio de Janeiro newspaper *Correio da Manhã* on 19 October 1915.<sup>64</sup>

Yet—in contrast to even a small producer like the Swede Frans Lundberg—Nordisk seems not to have encouraged any targeted marketing of its stars in Australasia in the pre-war years, either by name or with photographs or keepsakes, even for Psilander, despite the tremendous success of his films in the region. Since Nordisk only kept around fifty actors on contract in this period, the same actors appeared in most of the Nordisk films that were shown in Australasia. At least forty-three of the Nordisk films imported to Australasia between 1911 and 1914 featured Psilander, while Clara Wieth appeared in nineteen (six of them as Psilander's co-star). Wieth's then-husband Carlo Wieth featured in eight, and Olaf Fønss appeared in twenty. Clara and Carlo Wieth also appeared in the Swedish Biograph picture *På livets ödesvägar/Righting the Wrong*, which opened at West's Olympia in August 1914. Following the success of *Temptations of a Great City* and *The Price of Beauty*, Psilander's films tended to stay in circulation in Australia for between two and five years, much longer than the six months that most other Nordisk films stayed on cinema programmes. However, although Psilander, Fønss, and both Wieths became world-famous for their performance in Nordisk films, receiving letters and invitations from around the globe, their names were almost unknown to Australians and New Zealanders.

Despite the popularity of Psilander's films in the period 1911–14, his name is mentioned hardly more than a dozen times in Australasian newspapers. Psilander and both Wieths are mentioned by name in West's initial ads for *A Victim of the Mormons*, the ninth Nordisk feature and the fifth featuring Psilander and Clara Wieth (and the third for Carlo Wieth) to be screened in Australasia.<sup>65</sup> The name references were carried over into many descriptions of the film by other exhibitors, but the Wieths' names are not used in connection with any of their other films until 1921. Several ads in June 1915 for one of Psilander's last few films to be screened in Australasia, *The Candle and the Moth* (judged by the Dunedin *Evening Star* to be 'THE BEST NORDISK YET'<sup>66</sup>) include Psilander's name in the cast list, but Nordisk's name is featured more prominently, and the actor himself is misidentified, with regard to both name and gender, as the 'Danish star actress Valdemer [*sic*] Psilander'.<sup>67</sup>



Perhaps due to the uncommonness of both his Danish first name and his Greek last name, his name is often reproduced incorrectly—on at least one occasion, he is called ‘Henrik’ instead of ‘Valdemar’ and ‘Pilsander’ instead of ‘Psilander’, while variations such as ‘Vladimar’, ‘Voldimar’, and ‘Valdamer’ occur fairly often.<sup>68</sup> For reasons that are unclear, most of these references occur in New Zealand newspapers in connection with the films *Livets baal/The Fire of Life* and *The Convict’s Son*, where his co-star Else Frölich is also referred to as ‘Elsie Frolick’. However, rather curiously, Psilander’s wife, the actor Edith Buemann, is identified as Edith Psilander in New Zealand ads for the film *Den røde klub/The Red Club*, even though she used her maiden name professionally. When Psilander died suddenly in 1917, at the age of thirty-two, the Danish-language newspaper *Norden*, published in Melbourne, included a notice of his death that describes the impressive trajectory of his rise to fame but does not mention the popularity of his films in Australasia.<sup>69</sup> Nordisk had a backlog of his films that they released over time in other countries, but none of those films seem to have made it to Australasia.

The lack of name recognition for Nordisk stars, especially Psilander, stands in stark contrast to the personal fame enjoyed by fellow Dane Asta Nielsen (see Chapter 7), whose Danish- and German-made films were marketed with her name as the primary brand, though some of her films were also erroneously attributed to Nordisk. If the newspaper coverage of imported films followed the lead of the producer in terms of foregrounding particular actors, that might explain why Nielsen received so much attention and her compatriots who stayed in Denmark so little, but some questions remain. First, in the two Danish-made films (one by Fotorama and one from Nordisk) that Nielsen co-starred in with Psilander in 1911, her name is prominently advertised while his is not, suggesting that exhibitors simply carried over the German manufacturer’s instructions of promoting her aggressively. Second, the fact that Nordisk did promote its stars by names in other markets, often quite aggressively, makes their disinterest in doing so in Australasia more notable.

To complicate the matter still further, Psilander’s colleague, the crossover stage actor Betty Nansen (1873–1943) did receive star treatment in Australasian media in connection with her Nordisk films. In contrast to Nielsen and Psilander, Nansen was a distinguished theatre star before making the leap to film, which seems to have given her an edge with Australasian advertisers, regardless of what Nordisk did or did not provide in the way of marketing materials. Once Nansen decided to dabble in film, while still maintaining her theatrical career, she was mentioned much more frequently than other Nordisk stars in Australasian newspapers. For example, the newspaper *Norden* noted, in connection with an illustrated

report on the first performance of a new play at the Dagmar Theatre in Copenhagen, that Nansen, who played the lead, had also begun making films for Nordisk and 'through them had already earned appreciation in Australia'.<sup>70</sup> When Nansen's first film, *Bristet lykke/A Paradise Lost*, opened at the Empress Theatre in Sydney in December 1913, the *Sun* introduced the 'famous tragedienne' who 'has never previously played to the camera' as 'the Sarah Bernhardt of the North', an epithet frequently applied to Asta Nielsen as well.<sup>71</sup>

In stark contrast to Psilander's anonymity, Nansen's name is mentioned at least twenty-five times in connection with each of her seven Nordisk films released in Australasia in 1913 and 1914, always with high praise for her acting skills.<sup>72</sup> Like her French peers, Nansen is treated like a celebrity in Australasian newspapers, with columns about her activities, still photographs, and the declaration that her name is 'closely associated with the name of Nordisk on a film'.<sup>73</sup> Announcing a screening of her fourth film, *Moderen/The Mother's Sacrifice* (aka *Storms of the Heart*), which the local exhibitor had allegedly 'booked the moment that word came it was coming to Australia', in May 1914, the *Mudgee Guardian and North-Western Representative* (NSW) praised her work and reported that the 'London, American, and Continental press say that Betty Nansen, in this her third series, has proved herself to be the greatest emotional silent actress the world has produced'.<sup>74</sup> In 1915, Nansen accepted an offer to work for Fox Films in Hollywood, where she made five additional films before returning to Denmark. Perhaps because Fox supplied films for the J.C. Williamson cinemas and marketed its stars very aggressively, Nansen's appearance in these American films generated the vast majority of the more than 1,400 newspaper mentions of her name in the Antipodes.

### New Genres and Nordic Competitors

One reason that Nordisk was able to develop its brand so quickly and effectively is that the company stuck closely to the social drama genre, which ensured a degree of predictability in its films. However, the company also recognized the need to diversify in order to remain competitive with other makers, particularly once the US film industry began to realize the advantages of longer features in 1913/14. While Nordisk continued to make erotic melodramas and white slave trade films, including *Shanghai'et/Shanghai'ed* and *Det berygtede hus/The White Slave Traffic* (aka *The House of Ill-Repute*), the company also explored other variations on the social drama, such as circus films and detective films, as well as literary adaptations, which supported film's aspirations to high culture. Nordisk had extensive experience with copyright infringement, both as perpetrator

and victim, but the adoption of new copyright laws in the early 1910s made it possible to secure legal protection against other companies pirating a particularly good adaptation idea.

Psilander's appearance in such films as *The Great Circus Catastrophe* indicates that the circus film was a popular subgenre of the erotic melodrama in the silent era, so much so that Nordisk maintained a permanent circus ring on its lot in Valby for easy access. Nordisk made many circus films in the pre-war period that were screened in Australasia, including *The Clown's Revenge*, *In a Den of Lions* (aka *Life in a Circus*), *Gøglerens datter/Behind the Scenes*, and *Manegens børn/Children of the Circus*, but some of their most famous circus-themed films, including Psilander's *Kloven/The Clown*, do not seem to have been imported. As with other Nordisk social dramas, these circus dramas often feature a love triangle and end tragically; in *The Clown's Revenge*, for example, a cyclist named Marzoni vies with a clown named Pierre for the love of the trapeze artist Baptiste, which leads to the accidental death of both Marzoni and his cycling partner Coralie.<sup>75</sup>

Other Danish production houses also exploited this popular theme, as Nielsen and Psilander's Fotorama film *The Circus Girl* illustrates. One competitor's circus film that seems to have made a deep impression on Australasian viewers in this period was *De fire djævle/The Four Daredevils*, directed for Kinografen by Alfred Lind and starring Edith Buemann Psilander and Robert Dinesen, the latter of whom would begin working for Nordisk in 1912. The film is based on the novella *Les quatre diables* (1890), by Danish author Herman Bang, about two sets of orphaned siblings—Fritz, Adolf, Aimée, and Louise—who have grown up together in a circus, but whose close relationship is destroyed by Fritz's seduction by a wealthy countess, leading to a fatal accident during a trapeze performance without a safety net. West's Pictures acquired *The Four Daredevils* as an exclusive and launched it nearly simultaneously at the company's flagship theatres in Melbourne, Sydney, and Adelaide in late January 1912. Described as 'the circus sensation of the century', it was not attributed to Kinografen or Nordisk, but merely to 'West's expert Continental artists'.<sup>76</sup> The film stayed in circulation in Australia until March 1914, but by the end of January 1912, the film rights were on offer from Harrington's Exclusive Pictures in Sydney, suggesting that West's no longer needed them. In New Zealand, where *The Four Daredevils* circulated from April 1912 to April 1915, it was enthusiastically received as 'the acme of sensationalism'.<sup>77</sup>

*The Four Daredevils* soon became the standard against which subsequent Danish circus films were judged. Within weeks of its Australian premiere, it was being used to advertise a Psilander film, *Jernbanens datter/The Little Railway Queen*, which was widely described as a sequel to Kinografen's film despite only the most superficial narrative resemblances between

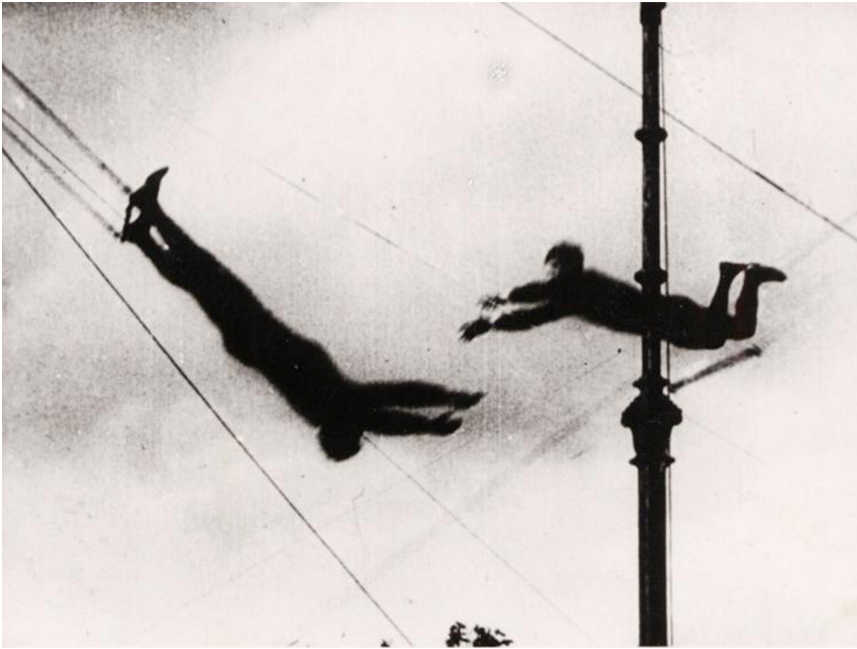


Figure 6.4 Still from Kinografen's *De fire djævle/The Four Daredevils* (1911).  
Danish Film Institute/Kinografen. Reuse not permitted

them, namely when the titular character seeks refuge in a circus from her lecherous father. By March 1912 and for years afterwards, Nordisk was frequently credited with having made *The Four Daredevils*, particularly in ads promoting the Nordisk drama, *The Flight to Death*, about a failed robbery attempt that leads to the death of both protagonists in a police chase. Kinografen soon produced its own sequel, *Efter dødspringet/The Acrobat's Daughter*, which opened at Williams's Lyric Theatre in Sydney on 17 August 1912 and the Opera House in Napier four months later, for a run of sixteen months, but the fame of their original film persisted. By June 1914, the *Dubbo Dispatch and Wellington Independent* (NSW) could declare that 'almost every picture-lover has heard of that great circus drama, *The Four Daredevils*'.<sup>78</sup> As late as 1916, *The Four Daredevils* was still being compared to circus-related films as diverse as the American Lasky Co. production *The Circus Man*; one of Alfred Lind's Italian productions, *Il jockey della morte/The Jockey of Death*, which was touted as outclassing and surpassing the director's previous effort; and the film *The Nurse's Devotion*, possibly made by the UK-based Brighton & County films in 1912, which is described as 'a sensational circus story' and attributed to 'the people who made the famous *Four Daredevils* film'.<sup>79</sup>

Other Nordic companies also made several successful circus films that found their way to the Antipodes. The most notable seems to have been the Scandinavian-Russian Trading Company's *Den flyvende cirkus/The Pride of the Circus* (aka *The Flying Circus, or the Rope-Walker's Romance*), also directed by Lind. The love triangle in this film involves a tightrope walker who abandons the snake charmer he loved, played by the Danish actor Lili Bech, for the mayor's daughter in a town the circus visits. The mayor's disapproval of the class differences between his daughter and the tightrope walker prompts the latter to attempt a death-defying feat, only to be sabotaged by his former lover's venomous snakes. Like Lind's *The Four Daredevils*, this film was also regularly attributed to Nordisk in Australasian media, cited as an example of that company's excellence in depictions of circus life and sensational acrobatics.

Swedish film-maker Frans Lundberg also contributed the circus film *Cirkusluft/Ida, Queen of the Air*, starring Ida Nielsen, which opened at the Lyric in Sydney on 27 March 1913, almost six months after its Swedish premiere, and circulated until December of the same year. This film revolves around a double love triangle, between two good friends, a wealthy young lady, a circus tightrope walker (played by Nielsen), and one of her colleagues.<sup>80</sup> There is an accident during a netless performance, but it is not fatal, in contrast to *The Four Daredevils*. Another 1913 Lundberg release, the drama *Hjältetenoren/The Fallen Star*, takes place in an opera and vaudeville milieu, while the Lundberg melodrama *Orman/The Snake Dancer* (aka *The Boa Constrictor*) involves large exotic snakes which a young woman uses to scare off a rival.<sup>81</sup> These two films opened, respectively, in August and September 1913 and circulated until January 1915 and May 1914.

In addition to circus films, character-based series detective dramas also figured prominently among Nordic productions, though none became quite as well known as Éclair's *Nick Carter* or Pathé's *Zigomar* series. Unlike serial films, these series dramas used the same story-space, but were stand-alone productions that did not rely on other instalments in a multi-episode work.<sup>82</sup> Nordisk's twelve Sherlock Holmes adaptations and five films about the master criminal Dr Gar el Hama were particularly successful in Australasia. The first Dr Gar el Hama film, *The Dead Man's Child*, opened at the Lyric in Sydney on 14 December 1911, and at Fullers' Skating Rink in Wellington two weeks later. When it arrived at the Lyceum Theatre in Brisbane for a one-week run in April 1912, the *Brisbane Courier* declared,

The Nordisk Company have been noted in the past for their magnificent productions, such as the *Temptations of a Great City*, *The Price of Beauty*, *Love and Friendship*, etc. etc. pictures, throbbing with heart interest and full of pathos from beginning to end. However,

in their latest masterpiece, *The Dead Man's Child*, they have departed from their usual theme and turned out what is without doubt the most sensational picture ever produced. The Nordisk Company, who have always been known to produce the greatest Stars, have this time excelled themselves, and for daring and sensationalism there is nothing yet offered to compare with this picture.<sup>83</sup>

The main difference between this film and Nordisk's melodramas is that most of the action focuses on the villain of the piece, with more emphasis on action than romance. Played by Aage Hertel, Dr Gar el Hama is an 'Oriental poison-mixer' who is hired by an unscrupulous man to drug a young heiress on her wedding night so that everyone will believe her dead. His efforts are thwarted by Detective Newton, who pursues Gar el Hama, his employer, and the abducted bride in his car while they attempt to escape by train. He eventually jumps onto the moving train and throws Gar el Hama to his death.

The runaway success of the first Gar el Hama film prompted Nordisk to make four sequels, relying on the conceit that Gar el Hama had not died in the fall from the train, but had merely been knocked unconscious. The second film in the series, which opened at Williams's Crystal Palace in Sydney on 27 October 1912, ten months after the first, and at Fullers' Princess Theatre in Dunedin in late February 1913, was called *Dr Gar el Hama*, widely advertised with the subtitle, '*Sequel to A Dead Man's Child*'. In this film, Gar el Hama narrowly escapes arrest by Dr Watson, then resumes his secret identity as the head of the Anti-Criminal League, only to fall into the police's hands at the end after all. By the time the third instalment—*Gar el Hama III: Slangeøen/The Abduction, or Gar el Hama's Escape from Prison*—premiered at J.D. Williams's Lyric Theatre in Sydney in April 1915 and at Everybody's Theatre in Wellington in May, the previous two films were no longer in circulation, *Dr Gar el Hama* having run until mid-1913 in Australia/September 1914 in New Zealand and *The Dead Man's Child* until April 1914. In plot, the third Gar el Hama film resembles the white slave trade films Nordisk had built its reputation on a few years earlier, with Gar el Hama kidnapping a consul's daughter who is then rescued by her valiant fiancé. It circulated in Australia for only seven months, but in New Zealand for ten. The fourth Gar el Hama picture, *Gar el Hama IV/Gar el Hama, or the Great Jewel Robbery* reached Australia in November 1916, nine months after its Danish premiere, and was in circulation in Australia for two years, until December 1918, but was not screened in New Zealand, while the fifth and final Gar el Hama film doesn't appear to have been imported to either country for reasons that likely have to do with the war.

Swedish Biograph entered the Australasian market with a detective drama of its own, *The Black Masks* (aka *Saved in Mid-Air*, perhaps to distinguish it from the Bison picture of the same name released half a year later and several earlier, similarly titled Italian dramas). The plot centres on a secret political society, a beautiful female spy named Lydia, and a love triangle between her, the male spy Lieutenant von Muehlen, and his former circus dancer lover, Lola. Mauritz Stiller's second directorial effort, *The Black Masks* stars Lili Bech and Victor Sjöström as the romantic leads. It opened at Spencer's Pictures in Perth in February 1913 and circulated in Australia for more than a year, until March 1914, but it does not seem to have been screened in New Zealand.

Stiller, Sjöström, and Bech were all involved in the creation of multiple Swedish Biograph pictures screened in Australasia before and during World War I: Bech appeared in at least six of the Swedish Biograph films screened in Australasia between 1913 and 1917, Stiller in one, and Sjöström in four, while seven of the films were directed by Stiller and five by Sjöström. However, none of their names were publicized in connection with their pre-war films, apart from Bech's in *Stormfågeln/A Daughter of Russia*, which was widely advertised in New Zealand with both Bech's name and that of Swedish Biograph. Since it was even less customary at the time to credit directors by name than actors, it is not surprising that Stiller, who directed *A Daughter of Russia*, is not credited in connection with either that film or his next import, *Madame de Thèbes* (aka *The Son of Fate*). In ads for the latter film, which opened in Australia in March 1917 and in New Zealand in June, both Swedish Biograph and the lead actress, Ragna Wettergreen (1864–1958), are often credited—in fact, the actress, whose name is often misspelled as Regina Wethergren, is described as 'the Norwegian Sarah Bernhardt', in possession of 'all the attributes for the making of a successful film actress'.<sup>84</sup> This was the fourth of five films that Wettergreen made in her movie career—two each for Nordisk in Denmark and Swedish Biograph, plus one for Christiania Film in her native Norway—but she also enjoyed a long career in live theatre in Oslo, which reinforces the trend of stage actors enjoying greater prestige and name recognition in Australasia than most of their film actor colleagues in this period. As Chapter 9 demonstrates, Stiller and Sjöström gained name recognition as directors in the interwar period, though their fame grew exponentially after both men went to work in Hollywood in the early 1920s.

Most of the other thirteen Swedish Biograph productions that followed *The Black Masks* in rapid succession to Australia (only four of which were released in New Zealand) were more ambitious in their artistic aims, particularly those based on literary texts and grappling with pressing social issues. The first of these was the erotic melodrama *Springtime*

of *Life*, directed by Pathé's Paul Garbagni, based on Swedish journalist August Blanche's 1848 novel *Första älskarinnan/First Lovers*. Marketed as a Pathé production, the 3,500ft melodrama opened at West's Olympia and Glaciarium in Sydney on 3 February 1913, almost two weeks after the Perth premiere of *The Black Masks*, and remained in circulation in Australia until January 1914. Thanks to West's trans-Tasman business interests, it opened at West's King's Theatre in Wellington in March 1913, circulating throughout New Zealand until October 1913. *Springtime of Life* stars Sjöström as the hero, Cyril Alm, who rescues a young woman—first from a life on the streets and then from death in a fire—and Stiller as Alm's womanizing rival for the young woman's heart. On 24 February, nine days after the Sydney premiere of *Springtime of Life*, a third Swedish Biograph film, *Broken Spring Roses*, premiered at the Lyric in Sydney, launching a year-long run in Australia (but it doesn't appear to have made it to New Zealand). Directed by Sjöström from a script written by Stiller, *Broken Spring Roses* features Sjöström as the disapproving father of Gösta Ekman's unsuitable love interest, played by Bech. The release of these three Swedish Biograph productions—*The Black Masks*, *Springtime of Life*, and *Broken Spring Roses*—in the same month suggests a concerted effort to promote Swedish films abroad, but it is notable that they were each handled by different members of the fledgling Combine—Spencer's, West's, and Williams's—that only one of them was released in New Zealand, and that the only company credited for any of the films is Pathé (although they are sometimes described as Danish films).

Nordisk countered this competition from Swedish Biograph with its own literary adaptations. On 6 November 1912, the sixth anniversary of its founding, Nordisk announced that it had purchased the film adaptation rights for several German-language texts, written by such literary luminaries as Gerhart Hauptmann, Arthur Schnitzler, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Felix Salten, Max Halbe, and Jakob Wassermann.<sup>85</sup> These works became the basis of several 'Autorenfilme' (author films), most notably the massive, budget-busting spectacle *Atlantis*, based on Hauptmann's 1912 novel of the same name. The book, which tells the story of an ocean liner sinking, came out at around the same time as the *Titanic* disaster, which ensured its notoriety. Nordisk sold the German rights to the film before it was even made.<sup>86</sup> Like *The Lion Hunt*, *Atlantis* garnered a great deal of Australasian media attention well before its release, primarily due to the cost of the filming, which included sinking an actual ship. *Atlantis* premiered at West's in Melbourne on 4 April 1914, about three months after its European release, and ran until 19 November 1915, but was not screened in New Zealand.

Nordisk regarded the popularity of Swedish Biograph pictures abroad as both a threat and a business opportunity. In February 1915, Olsen



attempted to buy out Swedish Biograph; when that failed, he bought a 50% share in the company instead and secured the international distribution rights for Swedish Biograph films for Nordisk, which ensured the continued importation of Swedish films to Australasia along with Nordisk ones for as long as such trade was possible.<sup>87</sup> Spanning this transition period, four more of Sjöström's directorial efforts—*Ingeborg Holm/Give Us This Day*, *The Worker's Way*, *Halvblod/Half-Breed*, and *Skepp som mötas/Ships that Meet*—were released in Australia (but not New Zealand) over the next few years.

*Give Us This Day* garnered particular acclaim, stayed in circulation far longer than any of the others, and was frequently labelled as a Swedish Biograph picture. Before the film's arrival for its premiere in an exclusive engagement at the Empire Theatre in Adelaide as the Easter attraction of 1914, the *Critic* published a lengthy description of the 'film Adelaide picture lovers have been keenly anticipating for some weeks', summarizing the five 'epochs' depicted in the 6,000ft drama and naming each character, but not the actors portraying them.<sup>88</sup> The reviewer notes that, despite the religious overtones of the film's English title, it is not a religious film but rather a 'stirring tale of life, and the hard struggle for existence the poorer classes of the Continent have to contend with', 'one of the most engrossing stories of real life ever screened'.<sup>89</sup> Exceptionally, Swedish actor Hilda Borgström is praised, by name, for her 'natural, emotional' depiction of Margaret Day, 'a devoted wife and a good woman and loving mother, who meets with one misfortune after another', until she ends in a workhouse, separated from her children, and goes temporarily insane before being redeemed by a loving son.<sup>90</sup> Thirty-eight months after its first screening in Adelaide in May 1914, *Give Us This Day* was screened for the last time in Australia on 5 July 1917 at the Don Picture Show in the Stadium theatre in Darwin (NT).

Capitalizing on the success of *Give Us This Day*, Sjöström's other films opened at regular intervals in Australia during the war. The political drama *The Worker's Way* premiered at Spencer's Majestic Theatre in Melbourne on 31 October 1914—just six weeks after its Norwegian premiere and three months before its premiere in Sweden—and circulated for just under one year. The melodrama *Half-Breed* opened simultaneously at the Lyric in Sydney and Spencer's Majestic in Melbourne on 15 March 1915 and ran until November. Both films are regularly attributed in ads to the 'famous' Swedish Biograph company. Sjöström's comic drama *Ships that Meet*, 'a stirring and sensational drama of the sea', opened at the Star Theatre in Melbourne in mid-September 1916 and circulated around the country until the end of June 1917.<sup>91</sup>

Thanks to Denmark's and Sweden's neutrality in World War I, the outbreak of war put Swedish film in an advantageous position as its French,

German, and British rivals drastically reduced feature film production. Six more films directed by Stiller arrived in the Antipodes between late 1914 and early 1917, three of which were also exhibited in New Zealand. The delay between the films' Continental premieres and their release in Australasia increased from the two to four months that had been usual in 1913 to six to twelve months, most likely due to the war's impact on shipping. Stiller's *Gränsfolken/War's Heart Blood, or The Tenth Commandment* (aka *Brother against Brother*), based on Émile Zola's 1892 novel *La Débâcle*, had the good timing of opening at J.D. Williams's Crystal Palace in Sydney on 8 August 1914, just four days after Australia entered World War I, and at the Lyric Theatre in Auckland in late October. This three-reel (3,580ft) 'sensational military drama', which ran for twelve months in Australia and thirteen in New Zealand, earned Swedish Biograph the reputation of being particularly good at war films.

Stiller's *Righting the Wrong*, starring the Danish couple Carlo and Clara Wieth, opened one week after *War's Heart Blood*, at Hoyt's St George Hall in Melbourne (on 15 August 1914) and West's Olympia in Sydney (on 17 August), and enjoyed a year's run. Laura Horak points out that this film establishes the trope of a summer romance between young people of different social classes, set in the picturesque Swedish countryside, that would become a standby of Swedish film-making, exemplified by Ingmar Bergman's *Sommaren med Monika/Summer with Monika*, which was well received when it made it to Australia in 1966.<sup>92</sup> Stiller's story of a compromised stockbroker, *För sin kärleks skull/Those That Trespass*, had a shorter run, from July 1915 to February 1916, in Australia only, and doesn't seem to have been picked up by the Combine, which limited its screenings to smaller, independent theatres.

The same seems to have been true of Stiller's melodrama *Dolken/The Gilded Wedding*, which features a female protagonist forced into marriage with her father's creditor, but it opened in Australia in September 1915, almost six months before its Danish premiere, and remained in circulation for more than three years, which suggests considerable popularity with audiences. While only one screening of Stiller's four-reel *Madame de Thèbes*, about the famous Parisian fortune teller, can be documented for Australia, at the Star Theatre in Melbourne on 5 March 1917, it seems to have circulated more widely in New Zealand, from its premiere at the Queen's Theatre in Auckland on 24 March 1917 until a final screening in tiny Te Puke in January 1918. The fact that both films are frequently described in ads as Nordisk products is likely a function of the distribution relationship between the two companies, but it also confirms how closely the Danish producer was associated with the social drama genre in Australasia.

In terms of the duration of its run and number of newspaper mentions in both countries, the most popular Swedish Biograph film in Australasia seems to have been Stiller's *A Daughter of Russia*, the story of a young Polish revolutionary, Olga (played by Bech), who loses both her lover and her life for her political convictions. While the film was interpreted by European viewers on both sides of World War I as sympathetic to their cause, Australasian viewers took a more distanced view, regarding it as ‘a story as old as Time itself’, ‘a powerful romance in a revolutionary incident in the land of the Czars’.<sup>93</sup> It opened at Hoyt's Olympia in Melbourne on 21 June 1919 and at the Grafton Theatre in Auckland on 2 August. It clearly resonated with Antipodean cinemagoers, for while it enjoyed a respectable ten-month run in New Zealand, it remained in circulation in Australia for more than four years, until September 1919, generating more than 300 newspaper mentions. The popularity of such Swedish films as these during the heyday of Continental films in Australasia laid the foundation for the high status of Swedish art films in the Antipodes in the interwar period, despite the overwhelming dominance of American films by then.



Early in the war, Nordisk was optimistic that Denmark's neutrality would allow the company to make a lot of money on the global cinema market and consolidate its hold on export markets like Australasia. As Nordisk manager Harald Frost told a regional Danish newspaper on 26 August 1914, ‘You have to take national feelings into consideration. In Germany and Austria they won't buy French and Italian films; similarly France, Russia, Britain, Belgium won't watch German films—therefore all countries will meet in neutral Denmark. And our films can be sold everywhere; to begin for now we only have American competition, but more competitors will surely emerge.’<sup>94</sup> Nordisk continued to expand during the first years of the war; production ‘peaked in 1915 with a negative film total of 116,013 metres or 174 films, of which ninety-six were multi-reel films’, roughly two per week.<sup>95</sup>

Despite the continued popularity and success of many Danish and Swedish films in Australasia, however, the war inexorably led to a decline in both the number of films produced in Scandinavia and the number exported to the Antipodes. Nordisk's business interests in Germany, in particular the German propaganda films the company's directors had made at the front, earned them the mistrust of the French and British authorities. Fearing that German films might be supplied to British cinemas via Denmark, that films shown in Britain might be copied on raw stock produced in Germany, and that Britain in this manner would indirectly

support the German industry, Britain issued a decree on 7 November 1914 requiring goods from Denmark to be supplied with a certificate of origin and a declaration from the Danish Industrial Council that they were an entirely Danish product.<sup>96</sup> Suspicion that Nordisk had tried to evade the British trade restrictions caused Britain to subject the entire Danish film industry in November and December 1915 to an export ban in Great Britain and its colonies, which affected at least one shipment of Nordisk and Swedish Biograph films going to Italy and Australia via Britain.<sup>97</sup> As early as June 1916, Nordisk was added to a confidential British blacklist with a 'P' classification, which meant that 'facilities for these firms are not, as a rule, definitely refused, but held in abeyance'.<sup>98</sup> In April 1917, Swedish Biograph took back control of its international distribution in an attempt to salvage its business from the ruin of Nordisk's once-mighty empire.

As a result of these strained relationships with Allied countries, Nordisk's exports to Britain dropped from 441 titles in 1915 to eighty-one in 1916. In November 1916, Nordisk lost contact with its agent in France, Louis Aubert, and then, in December 1917, the company was blacklisted in France.<sup>99</sup> The founding of UFA in Germany in November 1917 would prove to be the death knell for Nordisk there, where it faced accusations of using French raw stock for the films it brought into Germany. Nordisk had to shut down its New York branch in October 1916 for financial reasons, while its Zurich branch was blacklisted in France in November 1917; the Swiss press accused Nordisk of spreading propaganda for the Central Powers. Even after the war, such negative branding continued to hurt Nordisk's distribution efforts. For example, the French occupation committee in Constantinople temporarily banned Nordisk films from Turkey in June 1920 on the specious grounds that both the company and its (deceased) star Valdemar Psilander were allegedly German.<sup>100</sup>

As a result, Nordisk films slowly disappeared from Australasian screens during the war, to be replaced by American imports. At the outbreak of war, at least seventy-five Nordisk-branded films were in circulation in Australasian theatres, out of more than 170 that had been imported since 1908. Approximately forty additional films attributed to Nordisk opened in Australasian cinemas during the war—five in the last few months of 1914, fifteen in 1915, sixteen in 1916, one in 1917, and two in 1918. As Nordisk films dropped out of circulation and were not replaced, audiences missed them. In their ads for Psilander's evangelical drama *The Candle and the Moth* in June 1915, West's noted

The directors are glad to be able, after a lapse of several months, to again include films of the celebrated and popular Nordisk Co. in their programmes and to present at the Matinee this afternoon and this

evening A NEW NORDISK PRODUCTION which not only worthily sustains but enhances the great reputation this corporation has so long enjoyed among the world’s leading manufacturers.<sup>101</sup>

Similarly, in February 1916, the *National Advocate* (Bathurst, NSW), celebrated the inclusion of Nordisk’s *Satanita* on the programme, noting that, ‘at the present time, Nordisk dramas are few and far between, [so] picture patrons are sure to be anxious’.<sup>102</sup> The situation in the inter-war period did not improve appreciably, with fewer than twenty Nordisk pictures imported between 1919 and 1929, due to financial troubles that caused Nordisk to stop producing films almost entirely prior to declaring bankruptcy in 1928. For Swedish Biograph, Nordisk’s collapse meant that Hollywood became its primary competitor and obstacle to accessing international cinema markets.

Nordisk’s founder, Ole Olsen, had anticipated the American takeover of the European film industry well before it became a reality, though he had not foreseen the collapse of his own company. In a 1916 interview with a Danish film journal, he explained Nordisk’s aggressive expansion as a reaction to ‘the fear that the American system will gain power over the European market after the war’ by flooding the market with finished films at ‘prices that will exclude all European competition. This will mean the death of the European film industry, which is what we are trying to prevent.’<sup>103</sup> Despite Olsen’s best efforts to counteract this trend, it came about exactly as he had predicted, not just in Europe but also in Australia and New Zealand. By the time Olsen had to surrender control of the company he had built from the ground up, the Golden Age of Danish film was definitively over, and even the memory of its erstwhile ubiquity in the Antipodes would be quickly and utterly forgotten.

## Notes

- 1 Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 131. According to the distribution protocols for Nordisk, *Guldmønten* was officially put into circulation on 4 March 1913, with copies sent—as early as 20 February—to exhibitors in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Germany, England, Austria, Hungary, France, Spain, Italy, Russia, Holland, Belgium, the Balkans, South America, Cuba, and Egypt. This explains how the film got to Australia in advance of its Danish premiere in early June. Marguerite Engberg gives the Danish premiere date for *Guldmønten* as 15 June 1913, while the Danish Film Institute uses 2 June. Marguerite Engberg, *Registrant over danske film*, vol. 2: 1910–1912 (Copenhagen: Institut for Filmvidenskab, 1977), 468.
- 2 ‘The Stolen Child. West’s New Pathé Star’, *Sunday Times* (Sydney), 1 February 1914, 27.
- 3 Ruth Vasey, ‘The World-Wide Spread of Cinema’ in Nowell-Smith (ed.), *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, 55.

- 4 *Bendigo Advertiser* (Victoria), 18 November 1912, 1.
- 5 Marina Dahlquist, 'Global versus Local: The Case of Pathé', *Film History* 17 (2005), 31.
- 6 'Censur Cirkulære no. 7' (9 May 1916), Nordisk Film Samling (NFS) II, 56:8, Danish Film Institute (DFI), 2. Qtd in Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 111.
- 7 Ebbe Neergaard, *Historien om dansk film* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1960), 32.
- 8 Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 57.
- 9 Letter from Ole Olsen to Partsch, Berlin (2 December 1907), NFS II, 6, DFI, 401.
- 10 'Faking a Lion Hunt', *Australian Star* (Sydney), 26 September 1907, 5.
- 11 'General Gossip', *Referee* (Sydney), 20 November 1907, 12.
- 12 The French company Éclair released a documentary film called *A Russian Bear Hunt* the same month as Nordisk's fiction film, so it is possible there may have been some confusion between the versions.
- 13 'Continental Pictures', *Petersburg Times* (SA), 29 June 1909, 2.
- 14 'King's Picture Gardens', *West Australian* (Perth), 25 December 1909, 1.
- 15 Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 135.
- 16 Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 132–33.
- 17 Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 93.
- 18 Emma Gad, 'Film—Eventyret', *Politiken* (Copenhagen), 6 March 1913.
- 19 Anker, 'Men hvad siger Ole Olsen', *Politiken*, 10 April 1913. Qtd in Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 59.
- 20 Marguerite Engberg, *Dansk stumfilm* (Copenhagen: Rhodos, 1977), 220.
- 21 Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 93.
- 22 Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 99.
- 23 Rachael Low, *The History of the British Film*, vol. 2: 1906–1914 (London: Allen and Unwin, 1948), 306.
- 24 Letter from Wilhelm Stæhr to Holger Ibsen (7 November 1910), NFS II, 14, DFI, 92. Qtd in Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 106.
- 25 Ole Olsen, *Filmens eventyr og mit eget* (Copenhagen: Jespersen & Pios Forlag, 1940), 77–78.
- 26 Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 112.
- 27 David Bordwell, *Figures Traced in Light: On Cinematic Staging* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 44. See also <http://www.davidbordwell.net/essays/nordisk.php> [accessed 21 January 2021].
- 28 Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 107.
- 29 Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 113.
- 30 Engberg, *Dansk stumfilm*, 441.
- 31 Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 93.
- 32 Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 93. Several additional long films shown in Australasia in this period were attributed to Nordisk, but if I have not been able to verify the original Danish title of a given film, I have not included it in this total.
- 33 Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 174–75. Numbers of Nordisk features per year are taken from Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 94. Numbers of Nordisk features in Australasia have been collected from newspaper listings found at [trove.nla.gov.au](http://trove.nla.gov.au) and [paperspast.natlib.govt.nz](http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz). These numbers reflect only the numbers of films I have been able to confirm were made by Nordisk and were screened in either Australia or New Zealand, so these numbers are almost certainly an undercount. For the most part, the year of production is based on the Danish premiere of a given film, not the date it was released in the Antipodes.

- 34 Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 95.
- 35 'Meetings and Amusements', *Wairarapa Daily Times* (Masterton, NZ), 9 July 1913, 1.
- 36 Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 82.
- 37 'Entertainments: The Price of Beauty', *Evening Post* (Wellington), 3.
- 38 'Amusements: Theatre Royal, Sayer's Pictures', *Barrier Miner* (Broken Hill, NSW), 22 August 1911, 1.
- 39 'International Pictures', *Referee* (Sydney), 26 July 1911, 16.
- 40 'Queen's Hall. West's Pictures', *Daily News* (Perth), 7 September 1911, 6.
- 41 *Bendigo Independent* (Victoria), 12 August 1911, 4.
- 42 *Referee* (Sydney), 23 August 1911, 16.
- 43 'International Pictures', *Evening Post* (Wellington), 2 November 1911, 2.
- 44 'Temptations of a Great City', *Pinaroo Country News* (SA), 9 May 1913, 3.
- 45 *Age* (Melbourne), 10 August 1911, 12.
- 46 Olsen, *Filmens eventyr*, 105.
- 47 'The Opium Smoker', *Sunday Times* (Sydney), 14 June 1914, 6; 'The Opium Smoker', *South Eastern Times* (Millicent, SA), 16 October 1914, 2.
- 48 'Picture Entertainment', *Tuapeka Times* (Lawrence, NZ), 28 August 1915, 3.
- 49 Nordisk faced rights issues in connection with both of these films as well, as the script for *The Black Chancellor* that they had bought from an actor named Christian Schröder turned out to be based on British author William Magnay's 1901 novel *The Red Chancellor*, which their Danish competitor Kinografen had also made into a film. At the same time as Nordisk released *The Great Circus Catastrophe*, Swedish Biograph released their own circus film, *Dödsritten under cirkuspolen/The Last Performance*, which seems to rely on the same narrative premise—but since only the Nordisk film is extant, the extent of overlap is undetermined. Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 83.
- 50 Gerben Bakker, *Entertainment Industrialized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 278.
- 51 *Age* (Melbourne), 10 August 1911, 12.
- 52 'Thiele's Picture Palace, Rozelle', *Truth* (Sydney), 18 February 1912, 2.
- 53 'Nordisk Company', *Hamilton Spectator* (Victoria), 22 July 1912, 4.
- 54 *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 8 November 1915, 2.
- 55 *Brisbane Courier*, 20 April 1912, 2.
- 56 'Theatre Royal', *Daily News* (Perth), 18 January 1912, 5.
- 57 'The Busker', *Sunday Times* (Perth), 3 January 1915, 20; 'Our Doxology', *W.A. Sportsman* (Perth), 14 May 1915, 6.
- 58 'The Busker. Grease Paint Patter. Burnt Cork Chronicles', *Sunday Times* (Perth), 17 December 1911, 25.
- 59 Clara Pontoppidan, *Eet liv—mange liv* (Copenhagen: Steen Hasselbalchs Forlag, 1968), 210.
- 60 Letter from Nordisk to unknown recipient, 22 August 1908, NFS II, 7, DFI. Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 122.
- 61 Contract between Nordisk and Olaf Fønss, 10 July 1914, NFS IV, 60, DFI.
- 62 Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 123–24.
- 63 Corinna Müller, 'Der Weg zum Star. Versuch einer Rekonstruktion' in Helga Belach (ed.), *Henny Porten: Der erste deutsche Filmstar, 1890–1960* (Berlin: Haude & Spener, 1986), 32.
- 64 'Um novo concurso: Qual dos artistas dramáticos do "film" é o preferido da leitora?', *Correio da Manhã*, 19 October 1915, 4.

- 65 'The Cool, Comfortable, and Colossal Glaciarium', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 November 1911, 2.
- 66 'Amusements', *Evening Star* (Dunedin, NZ), 9 July 1915, 7.
- 67 'Princes Theatre', *Examiner* (Launceston, Tas), 30 June 1915, 6.
- 68 'Lyric Theatre', *Table Talk* (Melbourne), 12 December 1912, 16; 'West's Pictures', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 November 1911, 2.
- 69 'Danmark', *Norden* (Melbourne), 3 June 1917, 2.
- 70 'Fra første opførelsen af "Sejren" på Dagmarteatret (Kbhvn)', *Norden* (Melbourne), 7 March 1914, 17.
- 71 'Picture Shows', *Sun* (Sydney), 7 December 1913, 8. She is also described as the 'Sarah Bernhardt of the Continent', although the actual Sarah Bernhardt was very much alive in France at the time, and as the 'Danish Bernhardt'.
- 72 Nansen's other Nordisk films in Australasia were: *Prinsesse Elena/Princess Elena's Prisoner* (aka *The Princess's Dilemma*, 1913), *Under skæbnens hjul/For the Sake of a Man* (aka *The Fatal Oath*, 1914), *Moderen/The Mother's Sacrifice* (aka *Storms of the Heart*, 1914), *Af elskovs naade/Was She Justified?* (aka *Acquitted*, 1914), *Hammerslaget/Temptation's Hour* (aka *In the Hour of Temptation*, 1914), and *Et Revolutionsbryllup/A Revolution Marriage* (aka *The Heart of Lady Elaine*, 1915).
- 73 'About Favorites', *Sunday Times* (Sydney), 25 October 1914, 16.
- 74 'A Mother's Terrible Sacrifice', *Mudgee Guardian and North-Western Representative* (NSW), 25 May 1914, 2.
- 75 'St Kilda Theatre', *Prabran Telegraph* (Victoria), 28 December 1912, 5.
- 76 *Evening News* (Sydney), 20 January 1912, 2.
- 77 *Hawera & Normanby Star* (Taranaki, NZ), 2 February 1916, 7.
- 78 'Monarch Pictures', *Dubbo Dispatch and Wellington Independent* (NSW), 19 June 1914, 1.
- 79 'Remarkable Film', *Western Champion* (Parkes, NSW), 13 July 1916, 19.
- 80 Jan Olsson, *Sensationer från en Bakgård* (Stockholm/Lund: Symposion Bokförlag, 1988), 254–55.
- 81 *The Snake Dancer* was frequently misattributed, both to an unnamed German company and another presumably Danish company. In the *Age* (Melbourne) on 27 July 1912, for example, a columnist explains that 'the firm responsible' for *The Snake Dancer* 'makes a special feature of this class of work. The film introduces a complete circus company into the story and these portray their parts in the most natural manner. The success of the previous films—*The Flying Circus* and *The Four Dare Devils*—promises well for the success of the present picture' ('American Wild West Show', 14). In reality, none of the films were from the same maker. *Den flyvende cirkus/The Flying Circus* (1912) was a production of the Scandinavian-Russian Trading Company, while *De fire djævle/The Four Daredevils* (1911) had been made by Kinografen.
- 82 Andrew Shail, *The Origins of the Film Star System* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 190.
- 83 *Brisbane Courier*, 20 April 1912, 2.
- 84 'World's Pictures. "Madame de Thebes" tonight', *Hawera & Normanby Star* (NZ), 22 June 1917, 7.
- 85 Cf. Ludwig Greve, Margot Pehle, and Heidi Westhoff (eds), *Hätte ich das Kino! Die Schriftsteller und der Stummfilm* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1976), 118.
- 86 Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 130. See also Stephan Michael Schröder, *Ideale Kommunikation, reale Filmproduktion: Zur Interaktion von Kino und dänischer Literatur 1909–1918* (Berlin: Berliner Beiträge zur Skandinavistik, 2011), 419.



- 87 Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 163–64.
- 88 ‘At the Play’, *Critic* (Adelaide), 13 May 1914, 10.
- 89 Ibid.
- 90 “Give Us This Day.” Big Exclusive Rights Secured by Enterprising Empire’, *Saturday Mail* (Adelaide), 4 April 1914, 4.
- 91 ‘Cartwright’s Pictures’, *North West Post* (Formby, Tas), 7 October 1916, 2.
- 92 Laura Horak, ‘The Global Distribution of Swedish Silent Film’ in Mette Hjort and Ursula Lindqvist (eds), *A Companion to Nordic Cinema* (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 460.
- 93 *Age* (Melbourne), 19 June 1915, 16; ‘Picture Theatres’, *Port Melbourne Standard* (Victoria), 26 June 1915, 2.
- 94 ‘Filmindustrien’, *Viborg Stifts Folkeblad*, 26 August 1914. Qtd in Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 161.
- 95 Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 163.
- 96 Meis, ‘Nordisk Films Co. i Tyskland’, *Berlingske Tidende*, 13 August 1915.
- 97 Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 174.
- 98 Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 175.
- 99 Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 183.
- 100 Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 203.
- 101 ‘Everything New Tonight at West’s’, *Age* (Melbourne), 5 June 1915, 16.
- 102 ‘A “Nordisk” at the Burlo’, *National Advocate* (Bathurst, NSW), 21 February 1916, 4.
- 103 ‘Interview med Ole Olsen’, *Filmen* 3 (1916), 25–26. Qtd in Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 181.

## The Female Faces of German Film Abroad

Asta Nielsen, Henny Porten, and Madame Saharet

In May 1911, when German businessman Christoph Mülleneisen undertook a week-long train odyssey across Europe to secure the services of Danish actor Asta Nielsen for the German film industry, he could not have envisioned how pivotal she would be in popularizing German-made films worldwide, particularly in Australasia. At the time, Germany's cinema industry was small and heavily reliant on imports, primarily from France, Denmark, Italy, and the USA, with relatively little export capacity. Although Germans were avid film consumers, the country's film production sector lagged far behind that of its neighbours in the first decade of the twentieth century. The founding on 27 May 1911, as a result of Mülleneisen's efforts to bring together some of Germany's most influential producers, of the Internationale Film Vertriebs GmbH (IFVG) for the explicit purpose of marketing and distributing Asta Nielsen films launched German film's campaign to gain access to overseas markets. It would bear immediate fruit in Australasia with the popularization of several female German stars between 1911 and 1915, and ultimately culminate in the large-scale circulation of German UFA productions between 1926 and 1930 (see Chapter 10).

Between 1910 and 1925, the years when Nielsen made most of her films, the market share of German-made films (measured by title, not number of prints) in German cinemas increased from 15 to 67.6%, accompanying a corresponding increase in German films available for export.<sup>1</sup> A major factor in this exponential growth in the pre-war period was the monopoly film distribution system that German producers and distributors adopted in 1911, beginning with Nielsen's debut film *Afgrunden/The Abyss*. This model was based on selling exclusive distribution rights to a film or series

of films to individual distributors or exhibitors in a given country or city, which ensured robust distribution and generated production capital for making longer and more ambitious films. In order for those films to be widely sold, often before they had even been made, they needed to be associated with a known, marketable quantity—in short, a film star, the first of whom was Asta Nielsen. Rival companies soon promoted other female stars, including the German actor Henny Porten and the Australian-born dancer known as Madame Saharet, whose personal talents were invoked to guarantee the quality of their films. Although pre-war German films also featured male stars, such as Paul Wegener and Alfred Abel, they did not enjoy the same celebrity in the Antipodes as their female counterparts.

Despite the best efforts of several innovative German producers, German film as a national brand never attained the same kind of prestige and fame in pre-World War I Australasia as French or Italian film, nor did any German film company (prior to UFA in the 1920s) succeed in establishing itself there as a quality brand like Pathé, Cines, or Nordisk. Instead, Nielsen's, Porten's, and Saharet's personal star brands largely stood in for a German national film brand in the Antipodes in the 1910s. The Australasian newspaper record of the early 1910s confirms that these three female stars were the primary keys with which German producers unlocked the lucrative Australasian cinema market. The German films imported to Australasia in this period included, alongside a smattering of films from companies such as Continental Kunstfilm and Dekage, at least eight Messter films starring Porten, five Messter productions featuring Saharet, and eight dramas from Alfred Duskes. Yet while many of these films were popular and highly praised, the twenty-three Asta Nielsen films made by and for Deutsche Bioscop and Projektions AG Union (PAGU) imported between 1911 and 1914 were, taken together, by far the most prominent and successful German films to reach the Antipodes.

Due in part to the low prestige of film acting in the early silent period, the conviction that film did not involve the same level of artistic achievement as stage acting, and a desire to promote company brands over individual actors' reputations, production companies had been reluctant to even identify the actors in their films, but that changed with the rise of exclusive film distribution. Nielsen's targeted promotion as a film star by her German distribution company was unprecedented in the global cinema industry and played a crucial role in teaching audiences to transfer their affections from theatre to film stars. The trajectory of Nielsen's star status in Australasia illuminates this development, from initial claims of her affiliation with French theatres, to celebrity based on her previous films, to public interest in her biography and future films.

As one of the world's first purely cinematic stars (as opposed to a crossover stage star like Sarah Bernhardt) to develop a global fan base, Nielsen's reception by her Australasian fans reflects their gradual acceptance of film actors as equivalent to stage actors, the increasing status of film as an art form, and the emergence of film star fandom. Australasians had enjoyed a robust theatrical culture for nearly a century before the arrival of moving pictures and were accustomed to paying attention to details of the careers and lives of foreign theatre stars, such as the Frenchwomen Sarah Bernhardt, Gaby Deslys, and Mistinguett, even though most of these stars had never graced Australasian stages. Attempts to market French art films in Australasia between 1908 and 1910, described in Chapter 4, capitalized on this crossover appeal to promote individual art films, but had not introduced new, purely cinema-based stars like Nielsen and Porten. While Nielsen transitioned between live theatre and the screen several times during her career, Porten worked exclusively in film and was only rarely encumbered with imaginary theatrical associations, though both she and Nielsen (as well as their later rival Pola Negri) were regularly compared to Sarah Bernhardt. By contrast, Saharet was much more famous as a dancer than an actor but her live theatre fame was frequently invoked in newspaper reviews as a reason to watch her films.

### German Film and German Culture

Given the scarcity of in-depth contemporary commentary on the films, the transnational nature of these stars, and the deliberate locational ambiguity around the settings of their films, it is challenging to determine what role these early films might have played in carrying conceptions of German culture to Australasia or how such ideas might have been received there, particularly among immigrants from Germany. In the early twentieth century, German Australians were the single largest non-English-speaking population group in Australia, numbering approximately 100,000 first-, second-, and third-generation German Australians by the early 1910s—German-born Australians numbered 45,008 in the 1891 census, 38,352 in the 1901 census, and 32,990 in the 1911 census.<sup>2</sup>

However, German immigrant communities in Australia were far from culturally unified, particularly regarding the question of how and to what extent German language and cultural identity should be preserved. They were made up of Moravians, Lutherans, Jews, Catholics, missionaries, revolutionaries, farmers, craftsmen, traders, butchers, and miners, among others, from different regions of Germany and speaking different, sometimes mutually unintelligible, dialects. Many of the earliest German settlers in Australia were religious refugees from King Frederick Wilhelm III's

secularizing regime in Prussia in the 1830s. These immigrants tended to settle in rural areas, but later waves of immigration brought more Germans to urban areas, particularly as activists emigrated in the wake of the failed revolutions of 1848. While early and mid-nineteenth-century German immigration to Australia was comprised largely of family groups, growing numbers of single young men began to arrive as Germany became increasingly militarized and universal military conscription was introduced throughout the united German Empire.

By the end of the nineteenth century, German settlers had largely succeeded in 'finding a place in the colony, adopting its language and customs, marrying into its society, and achieving prominence', as Peter Monteath argues.<sup>3</sup> Yet German Australians were increasingly regarded and treated as different from and lesser than Anglo-Australians, despite their numerical significance and valuable contributions to Australian society and culture.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the German Empire's policy of pursuing an aggressive 'Deutschtumspolitik' (Germanness policy) in Australia in the early 1910s had the effect of alienating both Anglo-Australians and the many German Australians who regarded themselves as British subjects with a German cultural heritage.<sup>5</sup> All of these elements may have been contributing factors in the relative invisibility of 'German film' as such in pre-war Australasia, despite the frequency with which German-made films were imported and screened across the region in the years immediately preceding the war.

Another complicating element in attempts to characterize German film is the transnationalism of the people involved in making the films. Identification with a particular national cinema is often based on such factors as the country in which a film was produced or financed, rather than the nationality of the director or leading actors. As a result, nearly all of Asta Nielsen's films are considered part of German national cinema, despite the fact that Nielsen (and, for the record, her first husband Urban Gad (1879–1947), who wrote and directed all of her German-made films in the pre-war period) was Danish by birth, mother tongue, and citizenship. Yet although all but two of the Asta Nielsen films that made it to Australasia were made by German companies with German financing, they were not marketed there as German in any way. Nielsen herself, known for her expressive dark eyes and mane of dark hair, was frequently associated in Australasian newspapers either with French theatres or the Danish company Nordisk, both of which served to identify her films with Continental modernity and sophistication but not with Germany in particular. Some film historians insist that Porten, as a German citizen, deserves the title of the first German film star; as far as Australia and New Zealand are concerned, the fact that the Australasian publicity for at least one of her films includes frequent references to her as 'Fräulein' would support this view.<sup>6</sup> Saharet's itinerant, transnational,

intermedial career has caused her to fall through the cracks of film history altogether, belonging to neither the German nor Australasian narratives. While a few of Porten's and Saharet's films were identified by the Messter brand, most were—like Nielsen's—marketed almost exclusively under the stars' own names, as part of their star brands.

Fortunately, the films themselves offer some clues to the kind of German cultural norms they may have conveyed, not least in their overwhelming reliance on strong-willed female leads. The characters played by all three actors are usually women faced with difficult, often life-threatening choices, but their responses to these challenges frequently appeal to different social constructions of gender identity. Asta Nielsen's characters tend to be exemplary of the German modernist/feminist ideal of *'die neue Frau'* (the new woman) in terms of their sense of agency, decisiveness, and empowerment, either to fight for the people they love—as in her many tragic and comic love triangles, which frequently involved disguises and cross-dressing—or for causes close to their heart, such as Nielsen's female revolutionaries, spies, and suffragettes. Such feminist depictions may have resonated with the hardy women in Australian outback towns, for whom Victorian ideals of self-effacing debutantes had little relevance. By contrast, tall, blonde Henny Porten frequently—though by no means exclusively—portrayed a more traditional type of self-sacrificing German woman who stoically accepts her tragic fate. This stereotype may have appealed to the significant German immigrant populations in Australia and New Zealand, most of whose members had left their homeland decades before and whose self-image as Germans had little in common with modern notions of self-actualization. Chinese-Australian Saharet's films are primarily vehicles, outfitted with the barest of plots, to showcase her striking looks and dancing abilities, but they too foreground female agency and its sometimes disastrous consequences.

As political tensions between Germany and the British Commonwealth increased in the run-up to and outbreak of World War I, the import of German products, including films, ceased abruptly, but the Nielsen, Porten, and Saharet films already in circulation continued to be screened until well into the war years. Nielsen's Danish nationality may have provided political cover to continue showing her films, as did Saharet's Australian origins, but at least three of Porten's films stayed in circulation as well, even as Australians of German ancestry were treated with suspicion, required to report weekly to local police stations, and more than 4,500 of them were interned in camps. German-language schools were closed and any sign of German ethnic heritage was frowned upon. Yet the fact that these films continued to be shown, without any apparent concern, confirms that they were not widely perceived as representative

of German culture, but simply as star pictures from the Continent that were such a familiar part of cinema programmes in this era. Remarkably, at least one new German film was imported to Australia during the war—the 1913 Jules Greenbaum comedy *Die blaue Maus/The Blue Mouse*, which played in Australia from April 1916 to February 1918, advertised only by the name of its British lead actress, Madge Lessing. Even after the cessation of hostilities, ongoing trade embargoes, paired with the deportation of thousands of persons of German ancestry from Australia in 1919–20, ensured that it would be many years before German films were regularly featured on Australasian screens, causing this earlier generation of German films and the female stars they featured to be entirely forgotten.

### German Film Pioneers

Before discussing the stars and their films, it is helpful to position the German film industry in the pre-war years relative to its closest competitors, to illuminate who was behind the German films that were imported to Australasia. German film production started later and more slowly than in neighbouring France, Italy, and Denmark and was not dominated by a single company, like Pathé or Nordisk, nor regionally differentiated, as in Italy. It was centred in Berlin and driven by several important pioneers, including Max Skladanowsky (1863–1939), Oskar Messter (1866–1943), Alfred Duskes (1883–1942), Paul Davidson (1871–1927), and Jules Greenbaum (1867–1924).<sup>7</sup>

Messter has been widely credited with founding the early German cinema industry (despite a feud with Skladanowsky over this question), but the latter three men, whose names have been largely forgotten outside of film history circles, were also pivotal contributors to the emergence of a German cinema industry that, according to Christoph Wirth, ‘was intended to reach all social classes—be it through technical innovation (Alfred Duskes), affordable admission prices (Paul Davidson), magnificently appointed theatres (Paul Davidson and David Oliver), or exciting and entertainingly crafted films (Jules Greenbaum)’.<sup>8</sup> Since Davidson and Greenbaum died in the 1920s and Duskes emigrated in 1927, Messter took centre stage in writing German film history, publishing his memoirs and participating in commemorative events. Greenbaum, Davidson, and Duskes were also Jewish, which contributed to their erasure from the narrative of the early German film industry during the Nazi era. Yet although their names would have been unfamiliar to Australasian audiences, the fact that several of the films Messter, Duskes, Davidson, and, to a lesser extent, Greenbaum produced were screened

for Antipodean audiences means that they played a role in shaping the Australasian cinema landscape.

As the founder of Germany's first film production company in 1896, Messter was influential in guiding the development of German film. Like the Pathés, the Lumières, and Léon Gaumont in France, Messter was initially interested in improving and selling the technology of film recording and projection, but the success of his newsreels and documentary films of people (including the German imperial couple in Palestine) and places (such as the first bird's-eye views of Berlin from an air balloon) led him to focus increasingly on film production. He built the first artificially illuminated film studio in Germany on Friedrichstraße in Berlin in November 1896, followed by a glassed-in 'greenhouse' studio with a movable stage. His 1898 catalogue includes eighty-four non-fiction films, each between eighteen and twenty-four metres long, including several of the Kaiser and his family.

Messter continued to experiment with technical innovations, including, in 1903, sound tableaux (called '*Tonbilder*') produced by means of electronic synchronization between a film projector and a gramophone, which Messter dubbed the Biophone. Over the next five years he produced 450 *Tonbilder*, but ceased production in 1909, when it became clear that narrative films were a more profitable investment. During World War I, Messter both served in the German army and produced weekly newsreels, in addition to inventing a fully automatic film camera for aeroplanes. After the war, his company was swept up into the new German national film company, UFA, discussed in Chapter 10. According to Klaus Kreimeier, Messter 'set the standard for a modern film industry' between 1896 and 1917, but 'his life's work fell like ripe fruit into the hands of UFA's founders', for which he was paid 5.3 million gold marks.<sup>9</sup>

Preoccupied with technological advances, Messter entered the international film export business later than most of his competitors, beginning with his shift to making multi-reel feature films in 1911, with Henny Porten as their mainstay. After initial reluctance to accept the 'star film' paradigm, Messter eventually launched film series featuring both Porten, who had been making films with him since 1906, and Saharet, whom he brought to Berlin from London to make films for him in 1912. By the end of 1913, shortly before he established his own monopoly film distribution company, Messter was selling more than a hundred prints per film to distributors and exhibitors in Germany, Austria, Scandinavia, Holland and the Dutch East Indies, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Russia, South America, and Japan, among others, including fifteen prints on average to Great Britain and its colonies.<sup>10</sup> Local newspaper ads confirm that at least sixteen



Messter features were screened in Australia between May 1912 and July 1914, nine of which were also shown in New Zealand.

While Messter was an ardent patriot whose life and career were spent largely in Germany, his competitor Alfred Duskes was a much more transnational figure. Duskes was born in Germany but spent his childhood in New York City and Melbourne. He returned to Germany in his early teens and entered the cinema business in 1902, at age nineteen, using a home-made projector to show short films in Berlin bars and variety theatres across Germany and Austria-Hungary. When Duskes founded his own production company in 1904/5, he also focused initially on building and selling film projectors but soon began making films as well. He specialized in comic sketches and re-enactments of actual events, and, between 1907 and 1909, competed with Messter directly in the production of *Tonbilder*, particularly of operas and operettas.<sup>11</sup>

Duskes was one of the first film producers to rent out (rather than selling) not only his own but also other makers' films, which brought him to the attention of Pathé Frères, the world's leading film producer at the time. In August 1906, the director of Pathé's Berlin office notified Charles Pathé that Duskes was supplying between fifteen and twenty Berlin cinemas with hired films and warned that Duskes would become Pathé's most significant German competitor if they did not immediately open their own rental service.<sup>12</sup> Duskes's first studio, opened in Markgrafenstraße 94 in Berlin in 1909, suffered a devastating fire in 1912 in which many of his negatives were destroyed. He recovered rapidly from this blow, however, reorganized his company as Duskes GmbH, and entered into a joint venture with Pathé Frères called Literaria Film in December 1912, under which Pathé extended him 30,000 marks in long-term credit, which entitled them to the right of first refusal on Duskes's films, at twenty-four pfennigs per metre.<sup>13</sup> With the credit from Pathé, Duskes built a new studio in Blücherstraße 12, outfitted with the most cutting-edge technology available. Duskes GmbH seems to have produced primarily melodramas and detective films, while Literaria focused on 'Autorenfilme' (adaptations of literary works).<sup>14</sup> Perhaps a result of this cooperation with Pathé, at least eight Duskes films, albeit none from Literaria, were imported to Australia in 1912/13, all but one of which were also screened in New Zealand.

Unlike Messter and Duskes, Paul Davidson was primarily a film exhibitor and did not get involved with film distribution until 1910, with the founding of his distribution company PAGU. After seeing Asta Nielsen's debut film, *The Abyss*, he decided to get into the production side of the business as well.<sup>15</sup> Davidson was a founding member of the above-mentioned IFVG, the company formed to recruit Nielsen to make films in Germany. Davidson had a new studio built for her in Babelsberg, where

she and Gad made twenty-nine films between 1911 and 1914. Just after Davidson signed a distribution agreement with Pathé in 1914, the outbreak of World War I impeded his plans for global distribution networks. Davidson sold UFA a controlling share of PAGU in 1917 for 1.1 million marks and accepted a position as one of UFA's two general directors. Although Davidson went on to produce many important films in UFA's early years, including several directed by Ernst Lubitsch, his role in bringing Asta Nielsen's films to the world was his most significant contribution to cinema culture in the Antipodes.

Only a few of the several hundred films Greenbaum produced seem to have been screened in Australasia, but the company he established, Deutsche Bioscop, made most of Nielsen's pre-war films. Originally trained as a textile salesman, Greenbaum became a magician instead and encountered early film through the vaudeville milieu.<sup>16</sup> He established Deutsche Bioscop in 1899, but sold it in 1908 to the chemist Carl Schleussner, who later became a partner in IFVG and produced the three Asta Nielsen series. Walter Schmidthässler—who went on to found Continental Kunstfilm, produce *Sister Beatrix* (see Chapter 3), and direct two of Nielsen's wartime films—got his start as a director and actor at Greenbaum's second production company, Deutsche Vitascope, founded in 1909. When Greenbaum merged Vitascope with Davidson's PAGU in 1914, it was the best-financed film company in Germany and employed more than 800 people.<sup>17</sup> He made *The Blue Mouse* with his third company, Greenbaum Films, which he established in 1915, after the collapse of the deal between PAGU and Pathé, but was pressured into selling to UFA in 1919, which led to his financial ruin.

### Asta Nielsen: The Danish Face of Pre-World War I German Film

Although Australasian film history makes virtually no mention of her, Asta Nielsen (1881–1972) was one of the most popular film stars in the Antipodes in the early 1910s, with high name recognition and significant box office clout. Nearly two dozen of her films were shown across Australia and New Zealand in the early 1910s, prompting contemporaneous newspapers to dub her 'the most popular picture actress of the century'.<sup>18</sup> Born in Copenhagen, Nielsen got her start in acting at the Royal Danish Theatre and Dagmar Theatre in the first decade of the twentieth century, but the difficulties she faced in securing the kind of leading roles she wanted led her to make her first film in 1910, despite the medium's low status at the time. The phenomenal success of her screen debut in the three-reel Kosmorama melodrama *The Abyss* (marketed in English as *Woman Always Pays*, 2,788ft), which sold out cinemas in Denmark and

Germany for multiple weeks in late 1910, brought her to the attention of Deutsche Bioscop. Nielsen's initial engagement with Deutsche Bioscop for two films in early 1911—*Heißes Blut/Hypnotised* (aka *Burning Blood*) and *Nachtfalter/Retribution* (aka *Moths*)—confirmed her star potential and prompted Mülleneisen's above-mentioned efforts to organize a company to distribute 'Asta Nielsen' films as far and wide as possible.

Although Nielsen would make more than seventy films between 1910 and 1932, her only German films imported to Australasia were made between 1911 and 1914, while she was under contract to PAGU, with an obligation to make up to ten films per year to be sold on an exclusive-distribution basis in four Asta Nielsen series. This nascent block- and blind-booking model, which would later be fully exploited by vertically integrated Hollywood studios, required a strong link between distributor and exhibitor to ensure sufficient screenings of each film; however, the full-week rental design of the exclusive distribution system often conflicted with the standard twice-weekly programme changes that predominated before World War I, so the exclusives needed guaranteed star power to justify the longer runs. Around half of the approximately seventy copies of each of the seven films in the first Asta Nielsen series (1911/12) were expected to be distributed in the domestic markets of Germany and Austria-Hungary at one mark per metre, to recoup IFVG's investment of 700,000 marks, while the other half went into international distribution to produce a net profit equal to that investment.<sup>19</sup> Foreign distributors bought exclusive rights for a particular region or country, which they could then sell on to particular exhibitors in various compilations.

In connection with the distribution and exhibition of her film series, Nielsen became one of the most aggressively marketed and widely exported stars of German film in the pre-war era. In 1914, Davidson boasted to Spanish journalist Pablo Diaz, 'In my office, we have calculated that Asta Nielsen is shown daily to around one-and-a-half million people in ca. 600 theatres distributed around the world', including Australia and New Zealand.<sup>20</sup> The branding of Nielsen's films as exclusive, high-class products aligned with the strategy of Anglo-Australian film distributor and exhibitor T.J. West (see Chapter 2), whose luxurious, capacious cinema palaces strove to offer an elite event experience to its largely middle-class urban patrons. West's New Olympia Theatre in Sydney, for example, seated 4,000 people in relatively luxurious surroundings for one to four shillings per ticket, which was up to twelve times as much as American exhibitors charged in the same period. West himself argued that cheap admission prices suggested that the exhibitors themselves believed that 'their entertainments were of little worth'.<sup>21</sup> West had been offering 'exclusive star pictures' since as early as 1908, securing the rights to numerous French

art films and Italian historical epics in 1909 and 1910, so the monopoly distribution strategy that Nielsen's films inaugurated was familiar to him, and he seems to have entered into exclusive distribution contracts for the first three Asta Nielsen series.

As Martin Loiperdinger has argued, the innovative marketing of Nielsen as a global movie star and the practice of pre-selling her movies in series were 'crucial for Nielsen's career, the emergent star system and for the transition from short film programmes to the long feature-film format before the First World War: the three series combined the international brand marketing of the film star with the exclusive "blind" booking of long-feature film series'.<sup>22</sup> In stark contrast to the US market, where only about a dozen Nielsen films were shown sporadically in the pre-war period, all but three of the twenty-three films that make up the first three Asta Nielsen series, plus three of Nielsen's four pre-World War I stand-alone films, circulated widely in Australia, while nineteen of her pre-war films were screened in New Zealand.<sup>23</sup> Of these, seventeen premiered at West's cinemas, usually West's Princess, Glaciarium, or Olympia theatres in Sydney, West's Palace in Melbourne, West's Olympia in Brisbane, or West's Pictures in Adelaide. On average, each Asta Nielsen film was in circulation in Australasia for about two years.

Given the close ties between Australia, New Zealand, and Great Britain, it seems likely that the first Asta Nielsen films were sold to the Antipodes through London film exchanges. For the 1911/12 season, Britain's oldest film distribution company, Walturdaw, put together an 'exclusive long-feature series' of German films for its customers, combining the stand-alone Nielsen film *Retribution*, the Henny Porten feature *Das Gespenst der Vergangenheit/The Ghost of the Past*, and the Ilse Oeser drama *Fools of Society* with five films from the first official Asta Nielsen series. For the 1912/13 season, Walturdaw added the older stand-alone films *The Abyss* and *Hypnotised* to the eight films of the second Asta Nielsen series but carried only three of the seven features included in the 1913/14 Asta Nielsen series.<sup>24</sup>

However, although West generally purchased the films for his Australasian cinemas in London, where he maintained his head office, it seems unlikely that he purchased the rights to Nielsen's films solely through Walturdaw, given the differences between their marketing strategies and the much greater extent of his Asta Nielsen imports. West imported six of the eight films in the first Asta Nielsen series, plus *Retribution*, at regular intervals between September 1911 and June 1912. Of the two 1911/12 series films he did not acquire—*Die arme Jenny/Poor Jenny* and *Zu Tode gehetzt/Driven Out*—the latter turned up almost three years later at the Empire Theatre in Adelaide for a brief run in South Australia, but the

former was not screened in the Antipodes at all. West did not acquire exclusive rights for *Hypnotised* or her Nordisk-produced feature *The Ballet Dancer*, Perhaps because they were not bundled with the rest of the Asta Nielsen series. The former film may only have been screened for a week at the Shaftesbury Gardens in Perth in late August 1911. The latter, which rival distributor Clement Mason offered for hire in *Referee* in late November 1911, premiered simultaneously at two independent, continuous-run Sydney theatres—the Alhambra and the King's Theatre, on 4 December—and at Fullers' Pictures in the Wellington Skating Rink on 9 December. It went on to circulate until July 1913 in Australia and November 1914 in New Zealand.

The first Asta Nielsen film West's imported to Australasia was *The Circus Girl* (aka *The Black Dream*). Although produced by the Danish company Fotorama, *The Circus Girl* was distributed in Germany and Austria-Hungary as part of the first Asta Nielsen series, which might explain how it came to West's attention. The next step in his acquisition of the film is not clear; he may have bought the rights from Fotorama directly, through a British agent for the company, or possibly from Nordisk. In any case, *The Circus Girl* opened at West's Princess Theatre in Sydney on 27 August 1911, only eight days after its German premiere and a week before its Danish premiere on 4 September. It opened at West's King's Theatre in Wellington a few weeks later, on 21 September. It remained in circulation until November 1912, generating nearly 700 newspaper mentions in dozens of cities and towns across both countries. The film's tremendous success in the Antipodes may be due in part to West's strategy of saturating newspapers in nearly every major city with ads for weeks before the film even arrived in Australia; the first ad for *The Circus Girl* appeared in *Referee* on 9 August. Many of the ads foreground West's 'exclusive rights' to this 'latest importation', 'the great exclusive masterpiece', 'the special exclusive sensational drama', with its remarkable length of almost 4,000 feet—nearly twice that of the popular French feature *In the Grip of Alcohol*, which opened at West's Glaciarium in Sydney the day before the premiere of *The Circus Girl* at the Princess.

Since large-format producer-sponsored fan magazines didn't appear in Australia until the 1920s, Australasian dailies had the task of educating their readers about the films and stars on offer, often by reprinting cinema-related news titbits from British newspapers as well as reporting on which films had been particularly successful in other parts of the country. More than a year after *The Circus Girl's* initial screening in Sydney, a November 1912 ad for a screening at Paradise Pictures in Newcastle (NSW) assured potential cinemagoers of the film's merits, its exclusivity, and Nielsen's star quality:

The great attraction in the picture world next Thursday ... will undoubtedly be the production of *The Circus Girl* by West's. This film is claimed by the management to be one of the greatest pictorial dramatic successes ever presented to an Australian audience. So impressed was Mr West with its possibilities that he, at enormous expense, secured the sole rights of production for Australia and New Zealand ... This actress [Asta Nielsen] is described as a woman of remarkable stage presence and exceeding beauty and is quite an idol with French and German audiences. The film is considerably over 3000 feet in length.<sup>25</sup>

The ad's foregrounding of the film's cost and Nielsen's prestige among French and German audiences conveys an aura of privilege and sophistication to the 54,000 residents of this up-and-coming industrial town, 105 miles north of Sydney.

Although one of only a few Danish films featuring Nielsen, *The Circus Girl* seems to have set a precedent for identifying many of Nielsen's later German-made films in Australasia as Danish. Some local ads simply credit the film to 'a new firm', a 'Danish company with well-known Parisian artists', of which the former part is true and the latter false.<sup>26</sup> Confusing matters even more, the Melbourne newspaper *Punch* claimed that 'the makers are Norwegian and the artists are Parisian', but it compares the film, favourably, 'for perfection in staging, acting, and tout ensemble', to the 1908 Pathé drama *The Red Hand*, which West's had also imported as an exclusive three years earlier.<sup>27</sup> The frequency with which these kinds of misidentifications appeared—not only in conjunction with Nielsen's films, but with films from all sorts of European companies—suggests that Australasian reporters (and likely also their readers) at the time weren't particularly concerned about making fine distinctions between European countries. Instead they tended to view them collectively as 'Continental', representing a tradition of high-class theatre, instrumentalized here in an effort to elevate narrative cinema to the level of the stage.

It is noteworthy that West's began advertising the film with Nielsen's name at least as early as 30 August 1911, just a few days after the film's Australian premiere, which suggests that audiences wanted to know who they were seeing on screen. By comparison, Walturdaw did not mention Nielsen by name in advertisements until January 1912 and first labelled the group of films an 'Asta Nielsen series' in May 1912.<sup>28</sup> Although naming the actors in a film was generally uncommon in this period in Australasia as elsewhere, West's marketing strategy aligned with his own earlier promotion of French art films using the name of the stage actors featured in them (as described in Chapter 4). In a transparent attempt to build on

those actors' success, Nielsen is repeatedly introduced as Mademoiselle 'Asta Neilson [*sic*] of the Follies Bergeries [*sic*], Paris and other leading Continental Theatres ... one of the most fascinating ladies on the Continental stage', who has 'long been the idol of Parisian and Berlin audiences'.<sup>29</sup>

Like the earlier claims about the film's origins, the spelling of Nielsen's name and the details of her alleged biography are only partly accurate. Her name appears in many variant spellings (Asa, Aista, Astra, Astor, Esther, Neilsen, Neilson, Nielson, Nelson, etc.) nearly 2,000 times in Australasian newspapers between 1911 and 1915, in connection with twenty-seven film titles. As far as her fame goes, she had in fact performed in various European theatres before turning to film, but only in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, never Paris or Berlin, though she would later become a frequent sight on German stages. Nielsen's stardom in Australasia does not seem to have taken the tangible form it did in other parts of the world, where cinemas, haircuts, perfumes, cigarettes, and cutlets were labelled with her name, but she was undoubtedly, as the Melbourne *Herald* reported, 'probably the most popular dramatic actress appearing in picture plays screened here at that time'.<sup>30</sup>

In choosing to acquire so many films by a relatively unknown foreign company, actor, and director, West's reliable instinct for what his cinema audiences would enjoy did not fail him, as the success of *The Circus Girl* illustrates. Written and directed by Gad, *The Circus Girl* exemplifies the Danish social drama genre that was becoming very popular in Australasia at that time. It features Nielsen as the elegant circus artist Stella, who is torn between her love for Count Waldberg, an impoverished nobleman played by Valdemar Psilander, Nordisk's highest-profile male star, and her need for the financial resources of the bourgeois jeweller Hirsch, played by Gunnar Helsengreen. When the latter's vigilance foils Stella's plans to help Waldberg by stealing jewels from Hirsch, the resulting confrontation ends, like many of Nielsen's early films, with her death.

Critics and audiences alike in Australia seemed very impressed with the film, exemplified by such accolades as 'the sensation of the hour'.<sup>31</sup> It was screened continuously from the end of August through early November 1911, first more or less concurrently at West's theatres in Sydney, Adelaide, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, and Wellington, and subsequently in suburban and rural communities throughout Australia and New Zealand until November 1912, with sporadic revivals between 1913 and 1916. On 2 September 1911, after *The Circus Girl's* first week on the programme at West's Palace in Melbourne, the *Advocate* reported that *The Circus Girl* 'is remarkable for the magnificent acting of the principals engaged in its

production, whilst the staging and photographic qualities of the film are all that could be desired. It will be retained on the programme for the whole of next week so that country visitors may have an opportunity of seeing this great picture.<sup>32</sup> The Melbourne theatre management's decision to keep the film in the city longer than usual disappointed audiences in Hamilton (Vic), where the film would normally have gone after a week, but its popularity apparently justified the inconvenience.

Three months later, West's followed up on the success of *The Circus Girl* with *The Great Moment*, made in Berlin by Deutsche Bioscop for PAGU as the second film in the first Asta Nielsen series. It opened at West's Glaciarium in Sydney on 9 December, then at West's Olympia in Adelaide and West's Palace in Melbourne on 11 December 1911. In this controversial film, which was praised in many contexts for its example of selfless maternal love but banned by the Swedish censors for violence and immorality, Nielsen plays a servant girl who allows her employer to adopt her illegitimate baby, only to steal the child back, despite her poverty.<sup>33</sup> When she finds herself trapped with the child in a burning house, however, she doesn't hesitate to save the child at the cost of her own life. In Sydney, this film followed immediately after the Nordisk white slavery melodrama *A Victim of the Mormons*, starring Psilander, whom Nielsen had played opposite in *The Circus Girl*. Given Nielsen's Danish citizenship, paired with Nordisk's brand prominence in the genre of social dramas, it is not surprising that some ads attribute the film to Nordisk, with praise for the company's having 'solved the problem of silent acting in relation to cinematographic production'.<sup>34</sup> Other ads, influenced perhaps by the postulated association between Nielsen and French theatre in ads for *The Circus Girl*, described this film as a French production, made with French actors.<sup>35</sup>

Yet despite this confusion about the origin of the film and its star, this film was marketed specifically and effectively to German and Danish immigrants, in Sydney at least, as a widely reprinted news article confirms. Describing a recent Danish immigrant's reaction to seeing a German-language signboard for the film on a Sydney street, the article reports,

Mr J.K. Lund, a native of Denmark, has arrived in Sydney, and intends to take up dairy farming on the north coast ... While Australians are always ready to applaud the pluck of the Britisher, something might be said of the newcomer, who has, at the age of 45 years, determined on making a start in a new land, for he cannot speak a word of English, a severe handicap in itself. When he arrived he told, through an interpreter, how he walked along the streets looking at the signboards until he came to a boarding on which was inscribed,



‘Ein ergreifendes Lebensdrama in 3 Akten von Urban Gad. Asta Nielsen als Hauptdarstellerin.’ [A gripping three-act drama of life by Urban Gad. Asta Nielsen as leading actress.] Then his face lighted, and somehow he seemed to think he was among friends—his native tongue gave him a sign of encouragement.<sup>36</sup>

Although the article’s conflation of Danish and German as Mr Lund’s native tongue may suggest either that he was a German-speaking Dane from Schleswig-Holstein or simply indifference to the distinction, the mention of German-language signboards offers rare evidence of the ephemeral marketing materials used to promote the film to local immigrant communities.

Except for *The Circus Girl* and *The Ballet Dancer*, all of Nielsen’s films that reached Australasia in this period were made under the auspices of Deutsche Bioscop/PAGU, albeit with Nielsen and Gad in control of every aspect of each film. The films run the gamut of tragedies, comedies, and romances, with at least one film per series shot on location in an exotic locale, such as Spain or the Dardanelle mountains. Australasian audiences flocked to all of them, regardless of genre or setting, drawn by Nielsen’s masterful artistry. In January 1912, West’s screened *Gipsy Blood*, which was followed in February by *Der fremde Vogel/The Course of True Love* both *Die Verräterin/The Traitress* and *Die Macht des Goldes/The Better Way* in March, and *Retribution* in June. When West’s launched the second Asta Nielsen series in October 1912, eight of Nielsen’s nine previously released films were still in circulation in various parts of the country, so audiences, particularly in rural areas, had a good chance of being able to see several of her films in rapid succession. West’s second series began with the release of *Der Totentanz/A Fatal Dance* (aka *The Dance to Death*) on 30 October 1912 at West’s Glaciarium and Olympia in Sydney, followed by *Die Kinder des Generals/Falsely Accused, or For Her Brother’s Sake* on 7 December, and *Wenn die Maske fällt/When the Mask Falls* on 27 December (the last of which remained in sporadic circulation until March 1918!).

The high profile and popularity of Nielsen and her films likely lent considerable cultural clout to her enactment of female empowerment, which seems to have resonated with Australian audiences. Nielsen specialized in playing bold, self-confident women, from the Romani girl Zidra in *Das Mädchen ohne Vaterland/The (or A) Girl Without a Country*, who steals military plans from a fortress during the Balkan Wars by seducing an officer, to the headstrong, mischievous seventeen-year-old Jesta in *Engelien/Up to Her Tricks*, who smuggles treats and cigarettes into her boarding school and sneaks out to meet her boyfriend; these were the fourth films of the second

and third series, which reached Australasian screens in January 1913 and May 1914, respectively. She was particularly fond of so-called *Hosenrollen* ('trouser roles'), in which a woman wears men's clothing, exemplified by her role in *Jugend und Tollheit/In a Fix* (aka *Lady Madcap's Way*), the fifth film in the second Asta Nielsen series, which was often billed as *Asta Nielsen in a Fix*, conflating the actor and her character. Nielsen's assertive female characters exemplify what Dalle Vacche identifies as 'the shift from a nineteenth-century, teleological, optimistic sensibility to a twentieth-century desire for risk, accident, chance, and speed', as well as connecting to the archetype of the spunky, rebellious, courageous 'Australian Girl' that was common in Australian literature around the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>37</sup>

By means of her ubiquitous screen presence, Nielsen not only modelled modern and transgressive gender roles, but also Continental fashions to which Australasian women, particularly in rural towns, had little other access. Nielsen was personally responsible for choosing her own costumes for her films and publicity shots, and the fact that her costumes were part of the appeal of her films in Australasia is evident from ads promising that 'the costumes worn by the principal will simply charm the fair sex', as the *Brisbane Daily Standard* reported of Nielsen's outfits in *Falsely Accused*.<sup>38</sup> While those particular costumes were very proper—light-coloured slender dresses paired with decorative small hats to complement her character's long blonde braids—many of Nielsen's other costumes may well have been quite shocking to Victorian sensibilities, such as the striking black bodysuit that shows off her white neck and slender waist, which she wears in the opening sequence of *The Circus Girl*. Her preference for form-fitting stripes that work well in black-and-white is evident in many films, with, for example, the same horizontally and diagonally striped skirt featuring in both *The Girl Without a Country* and *Der Tod in Sevilla/Spanish Blood*, the fourth and eighth films in the second Asta Nielsen series.

Nielsen also favoured dramatic hats, which generally serve to extend her movements and/or enhance the scenography, reflecting the social standing of the character, her state of mind, and the situation in which she finds herself. Anke Zechner asserts that Nielsen's hats tend to be excessive—either significantly larger or smaller than those of the people surrounding her in a given scene—as a means of heightening their expressive significance, with large, 'affective' hats conveying emotional trauma, while the playful small hats indicate relaxation and emotional release.<sup>39</sup> The spectacular hats Australasian viewers saw Nielsen wear include flamboyant feathered hats in *The Circus Girl*, *The Traitor*, and *When the Mask Falls*; miniature hats in *The Course of True Love* and *Up To*



Figure 7.1 Still of Asta Nielsen in Deutsche Bioscop/PAGU's *Das Mädchen ohne Vaterland/The Girl Without a Country* (1912). Danish Film Institute. Reuse not permitted

*Her Tricks*; and a jaunty man's straw boater in her cross-dressing comedy *In a Fix*.

Nielsen's flamboyance seems to have generally entranced rather than offended her Australasian fans, as the affectionate tone of print media discussions of Nielsen's films in 1913 and 1914 reflects. An April 1913 review of *In a Fix* demonstrates deep familiarity with Nielsen's previous work, admiration for her skills, and expansive tolerance for the many different roles in which she appears, regardless of their conformity to social norms:

Asta Nielsen in a new role is funny enough to make a cat laugh. The marvelous versatility of the popular Danish actress, Miss Asta Nielsen, is strikingly shown in this latest exclusive subject. We have seen the talented lady in numerous dramatic creations that have been full of variety, from a wild Gipsy girl to a cultured lady, in all of which she has dominated the productions by her wonderful personality and undoubted histrionic ability. In this new departure she will be even more welcome than hitherto, for she displays an appreciation of real comedy that is as remarkable as it is thoroughly enjoyable. She fully

enters into the spirit of the character and gives us a finished performance equal to that of the most popular of our English actresses. It is a representation full of real rollicking humor, and cannot fail to create hearty laughter.<sup>40</sup>

Having had the chance to see more than a dozen of Nielsen's films prior to this antic, audiences merely needed to be reminded of how much they had enjoyed her varied roles in her previous films as an enticement to attend the next one. It is noteworthy that the ad both dwells on Nielsen's versatility and judges her performances, despite her foreignness, equal to the best English ones. While the latter point confirms her success at elevating film to an art form, through her expressive but restrained acting, the former explains why audiences didn't tire of seeing her on screen so frequently, even when two of her films ran back to back at the same theatre, as was the case with the sixth and seventh films in the second series—*Komödianten/The Heart of a Pierrot* (aka *Behind Comedy's Mask*) and *Die Sünden der Väter/The Temptations of Drink* (aka *The Devil's Assistant*)—which were screened in successive weeks at Spencer's Olympia in Melbourne, in July 1913.

For some reason, there was a nearly nine-month gap between the Australasian release of *Spanish Blood* in June 1913 and that of *Die Suffragette/The Suffragette* (aka *A Militant Suffragette*) in March 1914, which made audiences especially eager for her new releases. When Nielsen's film *A Girl's Sacrifice*, first screened at West's Olympia in Sydney in early May 1914, reached West's Pictures in the mining town of Broken Hill (NSW) in early June, the local newspaper lamented, 'It is some weeks since Broken Hill witnessed its last Asta Nielsen drama, but it always remembers the clever acting of that popular photoplay actress'.<sup>41</sup> Nielsen's last three films to appear in Australasia before the outbreak of war were *Das Kind ruft/The Cry of a Child*, *Das Feuer/Vengeance is Mine*—both of which opened in late July 1914—and *Driven Out*, in November 1914.

The cessation of trade between Germany and Australia in August 1914 meant that no new Asta Nielsen films made their way to Australasia, but films already there continued to circulate during the early years of the war. *The Cry of a Child* and *The Suffragette* were shown until June and October 1915, respectively, while popular older films including *The Temptations of Drink* and *The Great Moment* were screened until March and August 1917. Perhaps because they had never been marketed as German products, there is no indication that Nielsen's films were blacklisted as 'German' or associated in any way with an anti-British attitude. On the contrary, Nielsen's films were often advertised alongside war documentaries or in conjunction with reports of Anzac troops embarking for the European theatre.



Figure 7.2 Still of Asta Nielsen as Jesta Muller pretending to be the student Mr Klett, seducing her boyfriend's intended fiancée Sophia Schultz (actress unknown), in Deutsche Bioscop/PAGU's *Jugend und Tollheit/In a Fix* (1913). Danish Film Institute. Reuse not permitted

Still, Nielsen's Danish citizenship tends to feature prominently in war-time ads for her films, including one that appeared in the *Taranaki Daily News* on 8 August 1914, only four days after Britain declared war on Germany. The ad announces a 'rare exclusive' showing of *The Suffragette*—described elsewhere as 'a wonderfully human drama throbbing with the interests and ambitions of England's womanhood'—accompanied by 'special patriotic music'. Alongside Nielsen's name and the film title in all-caps twenty-five times, the ad admonishes: 'YOU MUST REMEMBER, YOU MUST REMEMBER that Miss Asta Nielsen is the famous Danish actress who pleases all who witness her splendid work in the Nordisk and Hubsch photoplays.'<sup>42</sup> The promise of 'special patriotic music' to be played acknowledges the heightened sense of nationalism that the outbreak of war had already precipitated in New Zealand, while the ad's mention of Nielsen's affiliation with Nordisk, since that relationship had been quite brief, is misleading, and the claim that she had also appeared in films produced by A.E. Hubsch and Co. Ltd, is inaccurate. Hubsch did not produce any films—it was purely a distribution agent—but since films were often marketed by the name of the distributor/renter, it is an understandable error.

Cinemagoers' concerns about Nielsen's wellbeing in war-torn Europe might explain why the *Leader*, published in tiny Orange (NSW), judged it worthwhile to report (inaccurately, as it happens) on 28 August 1914 that 'the war won't interfere with the film output of that star artiste and her co., Asta Nielsen', who had 'arranged to transport the whole of the plant, cameras, artists and scenery to England, where comparative quiet may be obtained. Denmark, where Asta and Co. operate, is now neutral, but may not be for long.'<sup>43</sup> In fact, in August 1914, Nielsen had just returned to Copenhagen with her husband, Urban Gad, from whom she was soon to separate. As far as is known, Nielsen never even explored the possibility of moving to England, but the article's assertion that she had done so colours the last sentence in the brief article, which seems to suggest that Denmark might soon be drawn into the war. Instead, Nielsen returned briefly to Berlin in 1916, where she made several films with Neutral Film, none of which were imported to Australasia due to the war.

Even as American films filled the gaps in Australasian cinema programmes and audiences found new objects for their affection, Nielsen's artistry and fame remained a standard against which other (especially dark-haired) actresses were compared. For example, the American actor Theda Bara is described in 1916 as 'in many ways an exact counterpart of the famous Asta Neilsen [*sic*], who so favourably impressed Peninsular audiences when shown by Olympic some time ago'.<sup>44</sup> Another critic gloats, 'Theda Bara, the star artiste in *The Secrets of Society*, gives Asta Nielsen, a

former Nordisk artiste premiere, a reel and romps in. Joan Petersen, the Danish star of the Nordisk, is well ahead of Asta Nielsen, the black-eyed vampire, who for so long held the star position with that celebrated Copenhagen picture firm.<sup>45</sup> A November 1918 ad for Dansk Film's *Fangen fra Erie County Tugthus/A Man's Sacrifice* notes, 'The Nordisks are Danish films and haven't been seen since the war. Who will forget the adorable Asta Neilsen [*sic*]?'<sup>46</sup>

Although none of her interwar films were screened in the Antipodes, the memory of Nielsen's fame persisted there for several years. The Melbourne *Herald* reported in April 1921 that Asta Nielsen was 'one of the stars being featured by a German producing company' in a production of *Hamlet*, as well as playing the leading role in the Maxim film *Steuermann Holk/Mate Holk*, opposite Paul Wegener.<sup>47</sup> Her name was still considered familiar to Australasian audiences and her work of interest. However, in July 1928, a Melbourne film columnist expressed amazement that the Weimar street film *Dirnentragödie/A Tragedy of the Streets*, which Nielsen carries with a consummate performance as an aging prostitute who falls in love with a younger man, had run for months at a Paris theatre. He notes offhandedly that 'the principal part was taken by Asta Nielsen, a Swedish actress, who was one of the first of moving picture stars'.<sup>48</sup> Such dismissive commentary about Nielsen's work would have been unthinkable a decade earlier.

### Messter's Stars: Henny Porten and Saharet

Messter initially resisted the trend towards foregrounding actors' names, but when he gave in, he made Henny Porten (1890–1960) his first star. Born in Magdeburg, Germany to opera baritone Franz Porten, Henny Porten received no formal theatre training but got her start in moving pictures in 1906, appearing in synchronized *Tonbilder* directed by her father and produced by Messter. She went on to act in fifty-four multi-reel narrative features produced by Messter between 1911 and 1914. Many of Porten's early films were directed by and often co-starred her first husband Curt A. Stark, who was killed on the Eastern Front in World War I. During the war Porten starred in several short propaganda films designed to boost the morale of German troops. In 1919, after Messter Film was absorbed by UFA, she founded her own production company, but also continued filming with such notable directors as Carl Froelich, Ernst Lubitsch, Leopold Jessner, Robert Wiene, and Georg Wilhelm Pabst. Although Porten successfully made the transition to talkies, her refusal to divorce her Jewish second husband, Wilhelm von Kaufmann, in conformity to Nazi race laws meant that her career came to a near standstill. From making an average of

twelve films a year before 1930, she made only ten films between 1930 and 1945. She made her last film in the German Democratic Republic in the 1950s. Over her fifty-year career, Porten appeared in at least 170 films, in addition to writing and producing several more, though only a few dozen are extant.

At least eight of Porten's films were imported to Australasia between 1912 and 1914. Founded in 1909 by German immigrant Albert Eberhardt Hübsch, London-based A.E. Hubsch & Co. Ltd acted as a sales agent for various German producers, including Messter, Deutsche Bioscop, and Deutsche Mutoskop and Biograph, and thus likely handled the sale or rental of Porten's films to the Antipodes. Although not marketed in Germany as an 'exclusive star' until August 1913, when *Der Feind im Land/Facing Eternity* was released as the first 'Henny Porten Series' picture, Porten already enjoyed robust name recognition across Europe and Australasia in early 1912. In September 1912, Ole Olsen at Nordisk signed Porten to make twenty films over two years in Denmark, but Messter made a successful counter-offer that convinced her to stay in Germany instead.<sup>49</sup> Messter had to pay Nordisk a 35,000-mark fine for breach of contract but was able to use Nordisk's interest in Porten in its advertising as proof of her stardom. Nordisk calculated their losses of projected profits on the planned films to be at least 540,000 marks.<sup>50</sup> In Australasian ads, Porten's name is often misspelled or anglicized as Helen or Henry Porter, while Messter Film is often rendered as Messiter or Mersiter Studios. A few reviews misidentify Porten as an American actress, but she is most often referred to as 'a popular Continental actress' rather than a German one.

This vagueness about Porten's nationality is striking, because one of Porten's distinguishing characteristics as an actor, at least from a German perspective, was her embodiment of Germanness and her function as a role model for traditional German femininity. In his 1920 biography of Porten, Gustaf Holberg asserts,

Henny Porten is not just a great artist, she is the prototype of a German artist. Blond, her body full of youthful beauty, quiet and emotional at once, she plays her roles enlivened by inner rhythm and filled with the striving to create artistic perfection through gestures and mimicry. Henny Porten has become a prototype today that women and girls attempt to emulate—a prototype that stands miles above the many 'stars', whose popularity rests on their pretty little faces and trim figures ... She resists the temptations of deviance and decadence, she does not use the tricks of the demonic worldly woman: Henny Porten is the heroine, the noble, good woman, who either triumphs or endures because of her goodness.<sup>51</sup>



This characterization was not externally imposed; Porten herself shared this desire to represent traditional feminine values that she associated with patriotism. In her 1919 autobiography, she explained her motivation for choosing the roles she played:

I wanted to embody the prototype of a woman in whom all admirable female traits are united. I wanted to show in my films that a woman can bring about the positive in every situation and that she alone is responsible for guiding the fates of those around her ... The woman of today must not be motivated more by anything than by duty. The fate of her fatherland rests on her today.<sup>52</sup>

Porten believed strongly in the pedagogical function of film, particularly for German films in comparison to spectacular foreign productions. 'German film, as I understand it, wants to do more,' she explained. 'In order to make an impression on the audience that offers not just aesthetic pleasure but also ethical and moral values, it depends on the individual artist's abilities.'<sup>53</sup> Over half a century, Porten devoted her considerable abilities to making films that had both aesthetic and moral appeal, which seemed to appeal to Antipodean audiences in the 1910s.

The first Porten film released in Australasia—almost a year after the release of Nielsen's *Hypnotised*—appears to have been *The Ghost of the Past*, marketed by West's in May and June 1912 as 'the first of the Great Messiter [*sic*] Films', featuring 'Miss Helen Porter [*sic*], a beautiful and accomplished Continental actress in the leading role'.<sup>54</sup> Not including the short attraction films and *Tonbilder* she had made before 1910, this was Porten's twenty-first feature film, but her name was not yet familiar to Australasian viewers, as West's anglicized version of it makes clear. The plot of this lost film is unknown, but it seems to have done well, circulating in Australia from May 1912 through June 1913 and in New Zealand from October 1912 through March 1913. By the time her next Australasian release, *Adressatin Verstorben/Addressee Dead, or A Life's Story*, opened at West's Palace, Melbourne a month later, on 29 June 1912 (immediately following Nielsen's seventh Australian release, *Retribution*, in the same theatre), Porten seems to have become a known quantity that cinemagoers apparently liked quite well.

Unusually, Porten was explicitly associated with Germany in connection with this film. In June 1912, the Sydney *Sun* ran a picture of Porten captioned, 'Fraulein [*sic*] Henny Porten, the star in a number of pictures screened by West's'.<sup>55</sup> Perhaps in a nod to the large German populations in South Australia and Queensland, West's ads for *Addressee Dead* in Adelaide and Cairns frequently refer to her as Fräulein Henny (or Helen) Porten, as do scattered ads elsewhere in Australia.<sup>56</sup> A reviewer for the Adelaide

*Saturday Mail* was so enthusiastic that he prophesied in July 1912, 'If Fräulein Helen Porter [*sic*]... were to come to Australia, she would get an engagement the moment she landed. She is positively remarkable in West's newest offering and the fine picture makes one wish to see her in other than a motion photo-play.'<sup>57</sup> Two years before the outbreak of war, there is no hint of disapproval associated with Porten's Germanness, merely an enthusiastic endorsement of Australian appreciation for her work. The fact that she does not seem to have been referred to as Fräulein after this, however, suggests that this marketing strategy, while perhaps not offensive, was not particularly effective either.

The plot of *Addressee Dead* is not recognizably German in terms of its subject matter, which was allegedly based on an autobiographical story submitted to Messter by a woman named Juliane. In the summer of 1847, Juliane had fallen in love with a young country doctor, who wrote to her father in Berlin for his permission to marry her. He agreed but mislaid the letter in a book and forgot to mail it. Both Juliane and the doctor, Marcus, were too proud to ask the other about the silence, so Juliane finally agreed to marry one of her father's colleagues instead. Upon receiving her wedding invitation, Marcus came to Berlin to find her, but arrived after the ceremony, and got swept up and killed in the March 1848 revolution. Sixty-three years later, Juliane came across her father's letter in a copy of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and realized what had happened. Messter is said to have awarded Juliane one hundred marks for her story, but when the letter arrived, Juliane had just died, so the letter was returned with the note 'addressee dead'.<sup>58</sup> The film was popular enough to run for nine months in Australia but does not seem to have been screened in New Zealand at all.

Many of Porten's films from this period are melodramas that require her character to sacrifice herself in some way for a man, either because of class differences, financial challenges, or bad luck. In February 1913, West's offered one such Porten melodrama for hire, the 2,000ft feature *Der Schatten des Meeres/The Spectre of the Sea*, alongside the 2,000ft Pathé drama *Les chemins de la destinée/The Path of Destiny*, the Cines tragedy *Cuore d'acciaio/A Heart of Stone* (aka *A Heart of Steel*), and Swedish Biograph's *Springtime of Life*. This cluster of Continental films indicates a perception of a common level of prestige among them, even though the Messter brand was much less familiar in Australasia than that of Pathé or Cines. *The Spectre of the Sea* opened at West's Palace in Melbourne on 1 February 1913 and ran until 24 January 1914 in Australia, while its run in New Zealand began at the Lyric Theatre in Auckland on 6 May 1913 and ran until 17 July 1914. Based on an East Frisian legend, the two-act film, which features Porten opposite her actor/director husband Curt Stark, depicts a young female painter, Evelyne, who comes to the sea to draw,



Figure 7.3 German publicity postcard of Henny Porten, c.1912

but is caught by rising tides. Sven Nansen, the fisherman who rescues her, falls in love with her and breaks off his engagement with a local girl named Inge, but Evelyne departs so as not to cause Inge pain. Distraught, Nansen drowns himself. When Evelyne's letter to Sven is returned marked 'addressee dead', evoking the Porten film of that name, she returns to the sea, where Sven's ghost lures her into the water to join him in death.

Six months later, another Porten melodrama, *Ihr guter Ruf/Facing the Footlights*, opened on 28 July 1913 at both Hoyt's St George Hall in Melbourne and J.D. Williams's Lyric Theatre in Sydney. The formation, in the interval between this and the previous Porten film, of the Combine that linked Williams's cinemas to West's might account for the change of venue from the usual West's cinema for the premiere, as well as the unusually aggressive competition from Hoyt's for opening-week box office. This film, which features Porten and Stark together once more, depicts the financial and psychological challenges faced by a chemist, named Helms, who accidentally blows up his own laboratory and nearly himself. While he is recovering, his wife Henny/Marjorie rebuilds his laboratory but is forced to accept work as a scantily clad model in living pictures at a local theatre to pay the household bills. Her husband is incensed when he discovers this apparent betrayal but begs her forgiveness when she makes their dire financial situation clear. Like Porten's preceding film, *Facing the Footlights* made the rounds of Australian cinemas for more than a year, until late August 1914, but was not screened in New Zealand.

Porten's next film, *Facing Eternity*—the first to be labelled by Messter as part of a 'Henny Porten Series'—opened in Australia at West's Olympia and Glaciarium in Sydney in November 1913. Two of her previous films were still in local cinemas, as were at least four other Messter films, six Duskes films, and five Asta Nielsen features, resulting in possibly the greatest density of German films on the Australian market at any point in cinema history. While Porten would later become known for her efforts to promote the German war effort through propaganda films, *Facing Eternity* destabilizes her image as the embodiment of German womanhood somewhat, as Porten plays a Frenchwoman spying on the German army during the Franco-Prussian War to avenge her husband's death at their hands. In the original version, she is executed for her crimes, despite her daughter's successful intervention with the German crown prince, but in the version that made it to Australasia, 'the final sacrifice is averted at the last moment'.<sup>59</sup> West's ads praised Porten as 'the World's Most Beautiful Picture Player ... in one of her most powerful roles', offering a 'convincing presentment of the pathetic side of "GLORIOUS WAR."<sup>60</sup> In January 1914, an Adelaide paper carried Frederick A. Talbot's essay on film heroines that highlights Porten's physically demanding performance in this

film, noting that the role required her to climb onto the roof of her home to tap the German telegraph wires. 'Unfortunately,' Talbot reports,

the roof of the extemporized building was somewhat unstably built, it giving way beneath her. Feeling the collapse, the actress threw up her hands to grab the telegraph wires. But these were 'properties' also, and unsuited to rough handling. The result was that the whole fabric came down, although the wires somewhat eased her unexpected descent. She was dug out of the ruins of the cottage, and, although it was feared that she had been grievously injured, she was found unscathed except for numerous scratches.<sup>61</sup>

While this film did not reach New Zealand theatres, it circulated actively in Australia until at least January 1915, when it was revived as a newly relevant drama of 'WAR between Germany and France'.<sup>62</sup>

As was also the case with Nielsen, having multiple Porten films in circulation at the same time gave audiences a broader perspective on her talents and versatility, as well as providing a more objective basis for her popularity than nationality alone. Three more Porten dramas were imported to Australia in 1914 before the outbreak of World War I. The first of these, *Der Weg des Lebens/The Way of the World*, opened at Spencer's open-air Esplanade Picture Gardens in Perth in February 1914 before moving on to West's Olympia and Glaciarium in Sydney on 17 March. In this film, Porten plays a young lawyer whose fiancé deserts her when her father loses the family fortune in a stock market speculation. When he asks her years later to defend him in court after having shot his unfaithful wife, she agrees and is able to secure his freedom, but she rejects his renewed romantic attentions with the declaration that 'love is vinegar to her' and her career fills all of her emotional needs.<sup>63</sup> In her next film, *Der wankende Glaube—Ein Offizierstragödie/The Colonel's Wife*, Porten again plays a professional woman, a nurse named Margaret, who is abandoned by her fiancé and marries her patient, an invalid colonel, instead. One day her stepson brings her erstwhile fiancé home with him, which leads to uncomfortable accusations from her husband. She resolves to leave him, but her stepson kills her former fiancé in a duel and restores familial harmony. On 12 August 1914, barely a week after Britain's declaration of war on Germany, an ad in the *Border Watch* newspaper in Mount Gambier (SA) asked readers, 'Do you remember that fine picture *Spectre of the Sea*? Miss Henny Porter played the leading role. Tonight she will play lead in the stirring military drama, *The Colonel's Wife*.'<sup>64</sup>

No mention is made of Porten's German nationality or the films' national origin, but it does not seem to have been considered in any way

inappropriate to show Porten's films in wartime Australasia. Still, as one British exhibitor noted, somewhat ruefully, 'it's rather difficult to know the German firms from the British', so it might have been difficult to know which films to steer clear of.<sup>65</sup> Beginning in September 1914, several Australian ads attribute Porten's films to A.E. Hubsch, which was known to be a British company but was vilified in Britain in the early days of the war as a German company, due to its founder's German citizenship, and ordered dissolved in 1917 under the Trading with the Enemy Amendment Act of 1916.<sup>66</sup> Audiences continued to enjoy Porten's films, however, particularly domestic dramas. In rural Colac (Vic) in December 1914, a local reviewer catalogued the differences between *Facing Eternity* and *The Way of the World*, in the latter of which 'the battlefield gives place to the drawing room, and the clash of arms is replaced by the conflict of personalities, in the almost equally savage if less spectacular field of romance', and commended Porten on the fact that her 'stories are sharply contrasted, and Miss Porten herself is not confined to a single class of character'.<sup>67</sup> As her films gradually dropped out of circulation, however, she was as quickly forgotten as her popularity had initially exploded. In August 1916, the Melbourne *Herald* answered a reader's question about Porten with the terse but neutral statement: 'Henny Porten appeared in *Addressee Dead*. We do not know whether any films in which she appears have been screened here lately.'<sup>68</sup>

At the opposite extreme from Porten in terms of colouring, nationality, style, and range was the Australian-born dancer Saharet (1879–1964), who was the other most prominent star of Messter films in Australia. Born Paulina Clarissa Molony in Melbourne, Saharet moved to the USA at age thirteen, where her career as a dancer began in San Francisco. She acquired her stage name and a husband/manager, Ike Rose (Isaac Rosenstamm), in New York, with whom she moved to the UK. After many years on the London stage, where she was alternately described as French, Russian, or Australian, she went to Berlin in early 1912 to perform at the Wintergarten Theatre and make several films for Messter. At least five of those films were imported to Australia, where they were advertised primarily with her name—which was well known from her famous high kicks on London stages—and, occasionally, her credentials as a native-born Australian. While her first feature *Des Lebens Würfelspiel/The Dice of Life*, produced by Messter with Henny Porten and Curt Stark in the leading roles, was offered for hire in London in May 1912 by American Film Releases and was screened at the London Hippodrome in June, it does not seem to have made it to Australia.

Instead, the first Saharet film to be screened in Australia was *Im goldenen Käfig/(In) A Golden Cage*, a three-reel Messter drama that opened at West's Palace in Melbourne on 23 November 1912. Marketed as the first

in a planned series of eight Saharet films, *In a Golden Cage* tells the story of a dancer who, after marrying a rich man, longs to reclaim her artistic freedom and is finally able to persuade her husband to release her from her vows. Saharet had little previous acting experience and German reviews were critical of how poorly her physical artistry sufficed to convey the inner emotional force that enlivens 'dead film'. In December 1912, the *Lichtbild-Theater* enthused about her physicality, noting, 'In each of her movements she reveals herself as a dancer, in her lightly rocking gait, which all too often flows into a dance step; in her gestures, which are pure line without content or expression', but concluded that 'film is not the venue for this exotic woman'. In contrast to 'a gifted actress like Asta Nielsen', who 'can move us deeply from a moving picture, take us captive', the reviewer explained, Saharet on screen offered only the pleasure of 'recognizing the familiar face and hoping to see her again soon in person in the spotlight of the variety stage'.<sup>69</sup>

In Australia, where viewers had had no opportunity to see their country's native daughter perform live, *In a Golden Cage* received much more positive marketing. In promoting the film before its arrival in Australia, West's used similar language to that used for Sarah Bernhardt, proclaiming in a front-page ad in the Sydney *Sunday Times* in December 1912, 'THERE IS ONLY ONE SAHARET. ALL SYDNEY WILL RUSH TO SEE SAHARET, THE SENSATIONAL.'<sup>70</sup> As Saharet was a child when she left Australia to pursue her career, it's not surprising that local managers had no idea who she was, but the fact that she had earned the admiration of Continental audiences was apparently reason enough to celebrate her back home in Australia. Many other ads embroider on this theme, calling her the 'rage of the Continent', the 'famous European dancer', a 'Continental Star of Magnitude', the 'world-famed Australian danseuse', and so on. In Broken Hill (NSW), the film was even renamed 'Saharet, Australia's Daughter in the Golden Cage'.<sup>71</sup>

As Saharet's fame in Australia grew, rumours swirled about her origins, with reports that although she was frequently described as French, she might in fact be 'a Hungarian of noble extraction, an escaped Princess with secrets in her keeping'.<sup>72</sup> Neither Messter nor Saharet tried to squelch the rumours, choosing instead to capitalize on 'the advertising purposes of mystery', but the Sydney *Sun* revealed that 'Saharet, the Sensational, now known as the Continental Pet', was native-born despite her international renown:

About five years ago cables informed us that 'Saharet,' an Australian girl, had created a furore at the London Alhambra. Local managers were lost in confusion as to the identity of this now famous Australian girl ... Since the first news over the wires of success this danseuse has



No. 364, APRIL 17, 1912]

THE TATLER

**BOOMING IN BERLIN**  
**A Famous Continental Dancer.**



THE DIVINE SAHARET

*Record Press* Schneider

The charming dancer who is depicted above needs no introduction to our readers for she has on more than one occasion graced the boards of the London variety theatres and there given delightful expositions of her art. Saharet is the exponent of many styles

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Figure 7.4 Photograph of Madame Saharet in *Tatler*, 17 April 1912.

© Illustrated London News Ltd/Mary Evans Picture Library.

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danced her way into the hearts of the populace of every nation on the Continent. It remains for West's Pictures to present her, at least in picture form.<sup>73</sup>

Although some articles posited that she was a Sydney girl, Saharet had actually been born in the Melbourne suburb of Richmond to Elizabeth Ah Foon and the tailor Benjamin Molony, who do not appear to have been married.<sup>74</sup> On her mother's side, Saharet had some Chinese ancestry, the legacy of a gold-miner grandfather, which may account for some of her apparent reluctance to discuss her family history, given the anti-Chinese sentiment prevalent at the time.

Several Australian newspapers covered Saharet's divorce, after a long separation, from her American manager-husband Ike Rose in October 1912. When Rose brought a set of conjoined twins on tour to Australia in early 1913, he was identified as the man who discovered Sarahet (and became notorious for eating a locally famous tightrope-walking duck by mistake while visiting Sydney). In a front-page interview with the *Adelaide Mail*, he volunteered that Saharet had been born in Ballarat, got her start as a ballet dancer in a J.C. Williamson pantomime, and earned between £750 and £1,000 each for her film roles.<sup>75</sup>

A few weeks after the release of *In a Golden Cage*, West's introduced Saharet's next film, *Unter der Maske/Behind the Mask* (aka *The Black Mask*). It opened in Melbourne and Adelaide in late December 1912, just seven weeks after its German premiere and a month before it opened in London as a Gaumont exclusive. Marketed as 'the Second Series of the Great Saharet', the film was said to offer 'a magnificent pictorial representation of real Parisian life'.<sup>76</sup> The story is a typical melodrama, in which Edgar, a young, impoverished playboy, discards his adoring, underage girlfriend Ellen in favour of her older sister, to get his hands on the latter's fortune. Devastated by his betrayal, Ellen falls back on her natural abilities as a dancer to expose Edgar's mendacity at a special engagement at the Moulin Rouge. The plot is thin, but it allows ample room for Saharet to display her considerable talents as both a dancer and an actor. As a picture of Parisian life, it offers familiar stereotypes of dance halls, self-indulgent behaviour, and financially motivated marriages that have little to do with the life of an average French citizen, but it does reinforce the image of a strong-willed woman defeating a dishonest man that made Nielsen's early films so popular.

When Saharet's next film appeared in Australasian cinemas a month later, it was not distributed by West's, but opened at Hoyt's St George Hall in Melbourne on 13 January 1913. Credited locally to 'Meister [*sic*] Films', *Hexenfeuer/Gipsy Hate* features Saharet as Mirza, 'a Gipsy maiden,

who is attracted from her wild wandering life by the glamour of the foot-lights'.<sup>77</sup> Like Nielsen, who was also cast as Romani on several occasions, Saharet's dark colouring may have influenced the ethnic identity attributed to her character. Trying to escape an arranged marriage, she runs away to the city with a music-hall manager, incurring the anger of her father and her rejected suitor, Rigo. They track her down and confront her just after her successful debut performance of a daring fire dance. As she runs away, her dress catches fire and she collapses, with just enough strength to express her love to her manager before she dies. The moral of the story seems to be that the passion that enlivened her dancing was also the cause of her death: 'Born in the heat of the South, she had enchanted everyone with her fiery temperament—and so she had to perish in flames.'<sup>78</sup> The fact that this film had the longest Australasian run—sixteen months in Australia, twelve in New Zealand—of any of Saharet's films suggests that its melodramatic tone was popular with audiences.

Offering a change of pace, the fourth Saharet film to reach Australasia (the third or fourth in Messter's Saharet series, depending on the ad), *Fürs Vaterland/For Their Country* (aka *On the Altar of Patriotism*), is a patriotic spy drama of the type in which both Nielsen and Porten also appeared. The film cannily doesn't specify its setting or who the combatants are, just the problem that an enemy fortification is being remodelled, changing the layout upon which the soldiers had based an impending raid. Lieutenant Gomez is tasked with infiltrating the fortress to acquire the new plans, which he is happy to do because of his ardent patriotism, but with regret because of his love for the beautiful, much-admired dancer Elinor. Learning of his mission, she decides to go with him; she seduces the general drawing up the new plans, giving her lover time to copy them. Although the general catches him in the act, Gomez and Elinor escape, only to be mortally wounded by enemy gunfire as they race back across the border. Their deaths, moments after handing off the copied plans, are praised as the 'first sacrifices of the gruesome war on the altar of patriotism'.<sup>79</sup>

*For Their Country* premiered at the first-run Spencer's Theatre Royal in Perth on 26 February 1913, two days before its German premiere and more than a year before it would open in the USA. It stayed in circulation until early September the same year. Unlike Saharet's earlier films, all of which recreated a theatre milieu in some way and did not require much in the way of acting, this film attempted to invest Saharet with tragic gravitas, at least at the end. A German reviewer found it implausible to require a woman 'who has conquered three continents with her legs and her smile' to die a melodramatic death.<sup>80</sup> By contrast, Australian critics paid little attention to the plot or the acting and simply expressed their pride in the 'well-known Australian and Continental danseuse', who was 'the rage of Paris'.<sup>81</sup>

Messter must not have shared the German critic's disdain for Saharet's abilities to act out dramatic death scenes, for her fifth (and apparently last) film to reach the Antipodes was *Mimosa-san/Madame Butterfly*, a story that required her to surrender her child and commit suicide after her American lover married another woman. It is an adaptation of Puccini's 1904 opera, which in turn was based on the semi-autobiographical novel *Madame Chrysanthème* from 1887 by French naval officer Louis Marie-Julien Viaud (writing as Pierre Loti). In this film, the physical traces of Saharet's Chinese ancestry may have made her casting as a Japanese geisha particularly believable, at least more so than Mary Pickford in the Famous Players version released near the end of 1915. Still, one New Zealand reviewer cautioned cinemagoers that although Saharet was 'a famous Parisian actress ... it need hardly be said that a Frenchwoman can only approximately do justice to the impersonation of a Japanese girl. Costumes and stage furniture must do the rest.'<sup>82</sup>

In the UK, *Mimosa-san* was bundled with *For Their Country* and *In a Golden Cage* (titled *In a Gilded Cage*) as a Saharet series, and offered for hire by the Award Film Service in London in August 1913. *Mimosa-san* was distributed in New Zealand by the New Zealand Picture Supplies Company, but it was not picked up by any of the major theatre chains in Australia. Instead, it seems to have circulated almost exclusively among suburban and provincial cinemas, where it was first shown at the second-run Armadale Theatre in Melbourne on 27 February 1913, the day after *For Their Country* premiered in Perth, with a second print being screened in Tamworth (NSW) on 1 March. It remained in circulation in Australia until April 1914 and until July 1914 in New Zealand, where it had premiered at the New Queen's Theatre in Dunedin in January 1914.

Given the heterogeneous settings and plots of Saharet's five films screened in the Antipodes, it's difficult to determine the extent to which her films were associated with perceptions of German identity or values. They were not consistently associated in the press with either the Messter brand or a distinct conception of German cinema. Up to just a few weeks before the outbreak of hostilities that would bring Australasian and German soldiers onto opposite sides of the same battlefields, her popularity in Germany was publicly celebrated as evidence of her talent and cited as a reason to watch her films. When *Mimosa-san* was screened by Wilson's Pictures at the Druids' Hall in Patea, New Zealand on 10 July 1914, for example, local newspaper ads noted that it featured 'the great and only Saharet, the Australian Dancer, who is now the idol of Germany'.<sup>83</sup>

Like Nielsen's films, Saharet's were primarily star vehicles for her personal brand. Illustrating this, when *Gipsy Hate* and *Mimosa-san* appeared in the *Australian Kinematograph Journal's* monthly index of film releases in

early 1913, they were not accompanied by a producer's name; instead, the parenthetical note where that information was provided for other films simply reads Saharet. Only a handful of films on this list are identified by their star or main character, primarily dramas starring Asta Nielsen and comedies featuring Max Linder and Foolshead. Such individualistic marketing ended during the war, to be replaced by corporation-controlled American stars like Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks.



Films featuring female stars were the most prominent German films on Australasian screens in the years preceding World War I and thus the easiest to find in the newspapers of the time, but that does not mean they were the only German films in circulation there, nor that their demonstrable popularity precluded negative associations with German film. While Nielsen, Porten, and Saharet enjoyed considerable personal fame in pre-war Australasia, German film as a category remained amorphous. However, a notion that German films were rather scandalous and therefore antithetical to Victorian morals seems to have developed down under. In expressing his support for national film censorship in Australia in December 1912, Harry Musgrove, the Australian manager of West's Pictures, concluded that 'the German market is the trouble. The pictures made in France, England and America are usually all right. It is the German ones that have caused the trouble. They are of a distinct "Continental" flavor at times—altogether too suggestive. We have never shown any such pictures ourselves, but they have been screened by other showmen here.'<sup>84</sup> It is not clear which problematic German films Musgrove might have been referring to in this instance, but it can hardly have included Nielsen's, Porten's, or Saharet's films, of which West's had premiered at least twelve in 1912 alone, despite their frequent depictions of infidelity, suicide, and murder.

It's possible that Musgrove was referring to the Deutsche Bioscop film *Fools of Society*, which tells the story of a young wife's affair with her husband's best friend that ends with her forced suicide. This film was singled out by film censorship advocates in the USA and the UK in late 1912 as exemplary of the 'shady exclusive', a feature film that relies on 'double entendre', 'suggestiveness, and ultra-sensationalism' to lure viewers in.<sup>85</sup> Musgrove's comments about unspecified risqué 'Continental flavor' echo these concerns, but *Fools of Society* does not seem to have been regarded as problematic by exhibitors or audiences in Australasia (nor, as Jon Burrows points out, in the UK). After its premiere at West's in Perth in October 1911, when it was judged to be 'one of the finest films ever shown in Perth',

it ran for nineteen months in Australia and two years in New Zealand (December 1911 to December 1913). It is worth noting, however, that it was not marketed as a German film in any obvious way.

This management-level denigration of German film may have been motivated in part by the climate of rising political and economic tensions between Germany and the British Empire. For most of the nineteenth century, the prestige of German cultural products in Great Britain and its dominions had been enhanced by the German connections and affinities of the British royal family. This relationship fell victim to increasing economic and political competition around the turn of the century as the newly formed German Empire struggled to acquire colonies and prove itself a world power, which necessarily provoked a hostile British reaction that spilled over into colonial politics. In November 1911, the British military strategist Arnold White explained to readers of the *Lone Hand*, 'The policy of Germany and the policy of the British Empire are antagonistic ... The rivalry of Britain and Germany is also the rivalry of Australia and Germany, whether Australians like it or not.'<sup>86</sup> This rivalry also took the form of low-grade harassment of German Australians, which intensified after the outbreak of war, to the point that German-born Australians were required to register with the state as enemy aliens, German place names were changed, and the use of the German language in schools and publications was outlawed.<sup>87</sup> An Adelaide newspaper went so far as to argue in June 1916 that Australians 'ought to feel that they cannot tolerate the sight or sound of a Teutonic flavor. A German map name has come to stand for brutality and shame and tyranny, for nearly every outrage to humanity. We want nothing in South Australia, God knows, to remind us of the Huns.'<sup>88</sup>

By June 1916, after nearly two years of a trade embargo on German products, only a handful of German films appear to have still been in circulation in Australasia, including the Duskes dramas *Die Geheimagentin/A Woman's Wit* and *Der Gott der Rache/God of Vengeance*, and at least three Asta Nielsen films—*When the Mask Falls*, *The Temptations of Drink*, and *Vengeance is Mine*. The fact that these films could remain in circulation so long, during the war, despite the virulent anti-German sentiment that pervaded Antipodean cultural politics at the time, confirms their lack of association with Germany or a perceived German film tradition. Instead, they were valued for their adventurous stories and charismatic protagonists, unburdened by any national baggage. In fact, with its depiction of a young woman's heroic counter-intelligence efforts on behalf of France, *A Woman's Wit* would have lent itself easily to supporting the wartime cause, while the South Asian religious cult depicted in *God of Vengeance* was far removed from the conflict.

The German film industry made great strides during the war, however, and by the time German films began to return to Australasian screens in the early 1920s, their national origin had become a point of pride for both distributors and exhibitors, often in explicit contrast to the American films that dominated cinema programmes around the globe. With the rise of the quasi-national German film company UFA and the consolidation of creative control in the hands of producers and directors, German films became more expensive and more experimental. Although Nielsen and Porten continued to make highly regarded films throughout the 1920s, none of them appear to have been imported to Australasia, with the result that their tremendous popularity in the pre-war period was entirely forgotten, though their legacy of using film to promote models of modernity and female empowerment remained relevant.

## Notes

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- 9 Klaus Kreimeier, *The Ufa Story: A History of Germany's Greatest Film Company, 1918–1945*, trans. by Robert and Rita Kimber (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 12; Martin Koerber, 'Oskar Messter, Film Pioneer: Early Cinema between Science, Spectacle, and Commerce' in Thomas Elsaesser and Michael Wedel (eds), *A Second Life: German Cinema's First Decades* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), 61.
- 10 Koerber, 'Messter', 58.
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- 12 Jean-Jacques Meusy, 'La stratégie des sociétés concessionnaires Pathé et la location des films en France (1907–1908)' in Michel Marie and Laurent Le Forestier (eds), *La Firme Pathé Frères, 1896–1914* (Paris: Association française de recherche sur l'histoire du cinéma, 2004), 26–29. My thanks to Christoph Wirth for bringing this connection to my attention.
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- 27 'Playgoer', *Punch* (Melbourne), 31 August 1911, 36.
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- 79 'Messter-Film, Berlin. "Fürs Vaterland"', *Der Kinematograph* (Düsseldorf) 319.5 (February 1913), 37.
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## ‘WE FEAR NO COMBINE’

### Clement Mason’s European Film Imports in 1913

The amalgamation of three of Australia’s most powerful film distribution and exhibition companies—Spencer’s Ltd, West’s Pictures, and Amalgamated Pictures—in late 1912 into the General Film Company Ltd, and then the expansion of this group with the addition of the Greater J.D. Williams Amusement Company in April 1913 into the conjoined companies Australasian Films and Union Theatres—known colloquially as the Combine—irrevocably altered the cinema landscape in Australia. When two of New Zealand’s leading exhibitors, John Fuller and Sons and Hayward’s Picture Enterprises, signed an exclusive, £35,000 three-year contract with the Combine—which now also encompassed Gaumont, Pathé Frères, and the Australian Film Co.—in July 1913, the situation of independent distributors and exhibitors across the trans-Tasman region tightened even further. Most of the market was controlled by the Combine from 1913 onward, making it increasingly difficult for distributors to rent out the films they imported and for exhibitors to hire pictures from anyone but Australasian Films, which increasingly focused on American imports.

Rather than giving in to the apparent inevitability of the Combine’s market dominance, however, distributor Clement Mason, who had been in the picture business in Australia longer than most of his competitors (see Chapter 1), decided to fight back, using European feature films as his arsenal. As early as March 1912, Mason’s ads reassured its customers, ‘WE FEAR NO COMBINE, AND SHOWMEN MAY REST CONTENT THAT WE ARE OUT TO STUDY THEIR INTERESTS;’ other ads boasted of the company’s capacity for effective resistance, declaring boldly, ‘Showmen remember! There is absolutely no other firm in Australasia that imports so

many star films' and 'we buy the pick of the world's output!'<sup>1</sup> Although Mason's struggle against the hegemony of centralized distribution was doomed to fail, as the further history of the cinema industry in Australasia testifies, his story offers an important counterpoint to the prevailing narrative about both the dominance of American films and the inevitability of the Combine's monopolistic control of Australasian film distribution. The circulation of the films Mason imported and hired out in 1912/13—the first season after the founding of the Combine—functions as a valuable case study of how films from European makers circulated outside the Union Theatres/Australasian Films network, particularly among suburban and rural exhibitors. It also illuminates the way the changing landscape of the Australian cinema industry affected that circulation, well before wartime restrictions changed the game entirely.

On 9 January 1913, Mason wrote a letter to the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* in response to an article published the preceding day about the formation of the Combine. Mason summarized the radically changed distribution situation from his perspective, stating that 'a number of big exchanges (which are incidentally Metropolitan show proprietors) have seen fit to amalgamate; their policy as is usually the case remains unproclaimed, the only declaration that we can obtain is that the object of the association is the furtherment of the picture industry and to improve the status of the picture drama in Australia'.<sup>2</sup> Mason was sceptical, not of his competitors' sincerity about wanting to boost the Australian film industry, but of the consequences he believed this amalgamation would have for smaller suburban and rural cinemas, particularly with regard to limiting their access to a wide range of films. In his letter, which does not seem to have been reprinted in the *Daily Telegraph* but survives in its typed form, Mason declares his determination—on both economic and philosophical grounds—to continue providing the best-quality films from around the world to suburban and country theatres:

Now Sir the position is this—we have a matter of £10,000 invested which sum is utilised by us in purchasing & importing Films for the Suburbs and country—are we to meekly lie down to the fact that a most determined attack has been made upon us, are we to stand still whilst a party who imagine that might is right get together and endeavor to corner all the best films to our exclusion and downfall? Hitherto they have not been successful but now the two fighting factors have kissed and become fast friends who knows what might happen. Under the circumstances there is nothing for us to do but carry the war into the enemy's camp. Our endeavors, our capital, our energy are pledged to fight any unfair combine to the bitter end, by fair means if possible we intend to see that our friends the Suburban and country showman together with their public shall have the best of film.<sup>3</sup>

Along with his letter, Mason included a list of fifty-one 'Star Films Available For Hire From Masons Ltd.', and referred to 150 more, many of which were already in circulation in Australia—where they had 'proved money getters for numerous Showmen', Mason alleges.

Although not a comprehensive catalogue of the films Mason had on offer, the list provides a unique opportunity to see how a group of films handled by an established distributor outside the Combine fared on the Australasian film market in this pivotal year. All the films are listed by title, maker, length, and price. Most are between 2,000 and 3,000 feet long, which might help to explain the overwhelming predominance of Continental features among them, since American producers had not yet fully embraced the long feature. The shortest and cheapest pictures on the list, each 1,100ft long and costing ten shillings (half a pound) to hire, are two American films—Kalem's baseball drama *Rube Marquard Wins* and Edison's military spectacle *The Charge of the Light Brigade*. The longest, at 3,400ft and 3,500ft respectively, and most expensive are Nordisk's political thriller *Nihilisternes dødsflugt/The Nihilist* (aka *Flight to Death*) and Itala's melodrama *Padre/Father* (aka *The Palace of Flames*). These two films, as well as the Duskes dramas *God of Vengeance* and *Jugendstürme/The Broken Sword*, cost three pounds each, six times what the shorter American pictures cost; all of them are more than 3,000 feet long. However, length and price didn't necessarily correlate: three other 3,000ft pictures—the Danish company Fotorama's *Mormonbyens blomst/The Flower of the Mormon City*, and the German-made Deutsche Mutoskop productions *Unerwarteter Goldregen/Greed of Gold* and *Der weiße Domino/The White Domino*—could be rented for just one pound each, but they were older films that been in Australasian circulation for over six months by this time. However, the fact that there is no price difference between *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and *Rube Marquard Wins*, although the former was released in Australia six months before the latter, suggests that popularity may have also played a role in setting prices. Most of the films cost between one and two pounds, with a handful available for fifteen shillings each.

Since the film titles are given only in English, it can be difficult to determine precisely which European films Mason was offering. His ads are frequently careless about correctly identifying producers; in one July 1912 ad in *Referee*, for example, Mason lists nine star pictures for rent but gives the wrong producer for at least half of them. Even though the list he sent to the *Daily Telegraph* provides the producers' names, those attributions appear to be incorrect in several cases (though it can be hard to be sure, as titles in translation vary from country to country and many films had similar names). However, a significant majority of the films Mason identifies by name as evidence of his ability to supply exhibitors with the

best films the world had to offer are clearly of Continental European origin. Of the fifty-one named films on Mason's list, only nine are attributed to British or American companies (one film each to Tyler, Cricks & Martin, B&B, Urban, Selig, Kalem, Bison, Imp, and Edison); the remaining forty-two are attributed to various Continental makers: Itala, Cines, Ambrosio, Film d'Art, Pathé, Éclair, Duskes, Nordisk, Kosmorama, and Deutsche Bioscop (actually Deutsche Mutoskop). After correcting for misattributions, the largest number of films from a single maker are the thirteen Danish titles (all from Nordisk except one from Fotorama that is misattributed to Kosmorama), while fourteen films are from Italian producers—eight from Cines, three from Itala, two from Ambrosio, and one from Aquila. French films make up the third most common group, with five films from Éclair, two from Pathé, and one each from Film d'Art and Gaumont. The remaining six films on the list are German, comprised of two melodramas from Duskes and four from Deutsche Mutoskop.

All the films on Mason's list are multi-reel dramas, reflecting the fact that viewers had come to expect long features as headliners, and that comedies had not yet established their viability in that capacity. Only a few of these films feature a celebrity star with high local name recognition—Ermete Zacconi in Itala's *Father* being the exception that proves the rule—though several of the Nordisk films feature actors such as Clara and Carlo Wieth, who would already have been familiar faces on local screens. Aside from Fotorama's melodrama *The Flower of the Mormon City*, which is set in the American West in the late nineteenth century, and the Cines picture *Pro patria mori/Death or Glory: A Story of Napoleon* (aka *At Napoleon's Command*), they are almost exclusively social dramas set in present-day middle-class society—albeit supplemented in several cases by lions (e.g. in Cines's *In pasto ai leoni/The Lion Tamer's Revenge* and Ambrosio's *The Ship of Lions*) and/or circus settings (e.g. Nordisk's *Manegens stjerner/The Wheels of Fate* and *Springdykkeren/All in Vain*, as well as Duskes's *The Broken Sword*).

Although Mason's had long branded itself 'The House of Stars in the Picture World' (competing with Pathé's similar motto 'The Home of Exclusive Stars'), Mason found himself in a predicament in January 1913. He had to seize whatever opportunities he could to compete within a system that was very quickly restructuring itself in favour of consolidated distribution, giving the Combine an advantage in terms of capital to acquire films and exhibition venues. Since his operation was too small to give him leverage with large American producers, Mason staked his chances on prestigious Continental offerings. The make-up of his list confirms that the lack of a dedicated local distributor of Italian films in Australasia—a role George Kleine played in the USA, for example—made them easily accessible, while the tremendous popularity of Italian

historical epics in the period 1911–13 and the fierce competition between the major Italian producers in the same period meant that large numbers of Italian features were readily available and easy to place. Likewise, the prevalence of Nordisk films is likely due both to their proven marketability as headliners and their availability outside of monopoly distribution contracts. Although J.D. Williams had been trying to corner the market on Nordisk films in Australasia (see Chapter 6), Nordisk did not generally sell exclusive rights to its films.

The preponderance of Nordisk films on the list is understandable, given Mason's long history of success with Nordisk pictures, dating to his importation of Nordisk's first erotic melodrama *The White Slave Trade* in August 1911 and Asta Nielsen's only pre-war Nordisk production *The Ballet Dancer* in November 1911. After his success with the re-release of Nordisk's second white slave trade drama *In the Hands of Imposters* in August 1911, Mason also re-released the Valdemar Psilander film *The Aviator's Generosity*—which had originally premiered in St Kilda on 27 September 1911 with the tagline 'the greatest film of the year by the famous Nordisk film company'—under the title *The Aviator and the Journalist's Wife* in January 1912 for a run that lasted until November 1914. In a 7 February 1912 ad, Mason offered seven multi-reel star films for hire, five of which were Nordisk pictures (plus a sixth from its Danish competitor Kinografen), in addition to advertising an array of coming attractions, which included one American film, three French films, one Italian film, and three from Nordisk. Two weeks later, he added three more Nordisk pictures to his inventory. In a September 1912 ad, Mason announced five new Nordisk releases, all of which appear on his January 1913 list.

In contrast, he had a harder time getting films from producers who employed local agents or had existing trade relationships in Australasia. The merger of Pathé's Australasian interests with West's in March 1912 and the opening of Gaumont film exchanges in Sydney and Melbourne may explain why Pathé and Gaumont are so under-represented on Mason's list, leaving Éclair to represent French film most prominently. The paucity of German films on the list is likely a function of that industry's relative immaturity before World War I, while West's close ties to PAGU rendered Asta Nielsen films inaccessible to Mason. However, Mason's inclusion of several pictures by Alfred Duskes and Deutsche Mutoskop is notable, since few films by these smaller German producers had previously been distributed in Australia, though additional Duskes pictures would be distributed by Pathé to the Combine later in 1913. The Combine's close ties to the American market may explain the dearth of American pictures on Mason's list, but a more decisive factor may have been the relative unsuitability of American films as programme-heading features, due to

their generally shorter lengths in this period (a situation that would soon undergo a dramatic change).

Having divested himself from exhibition several years earlier, Mason was not concerned with securing films for his own theatres, unlike his major competitors, but that also meant he had no guaranteed venues for the pictures he imported. To be able to place his films, he needed a large clientele of independent cinemas. Diverging from the Combine’s efforts to require exhibitors to hire all of their pictures from Australasian Films, Mason’s touted its willingness to allow exhibitors to make their own choices, either of individual films or entire programmes, promising, ‘Nothing is too big or too small.’<sup>4</sup> Unlike West and Spencer, Mason rarely purchased exclusive rights for the pictures he marketed, likely because it was too risky a capital investment without guaranteed access to major metropolitan cinema houses.

Instead, Mason tried to compete by offering big-name pictures on flexible terms at affordable prices, a strategy designed to appeal to independent cinemas, particularly in suburban and rural areas. He claimed to have exclusive rights to some of the films on his January 1913 list, but others were available from competing distributors at the same time, while a few were re-releases for which the rights had become available again. In June 1912, for example, both Mason and J.D. Williams’s International Pictures advertised the Cines spy thriller *Il segreto dell’inventore/The Inventor’s Secret, or The Female Spy* for hire, with ads appearing in different corners of the same page in *Referee*. The same is true of several other Italian films, including Ambrosio’s *The Ship of Lions*, and the Cines dramas *A Sicilian Tragedy* (original title undetermined) and *Justice at Last*, all of which were advertised for hire by International Pictures for weeks or months before they appeared on Mason’s list. Instead of exclusivity, which was less relevant in second-run suburban theatres or rural areas with only one or two cinemas, Mason offered exhibitors a free choice of films, primarily from Continental European producers, with a proven record of marketability.

### Distribution Outside the Combine

While the rise of the Combine posed a major threat to Mason’s business model, it also provided a unique opportunity to cement his relationships with independent exhibitors for their mutual benefit. Since the Combine controlled most major urban theatres, Mason fought for smaller, independent venues, which would otherwise be at the Combine’s mercy for access to films. In pushing back he defended ‘the smaller man’, against the American-influenced decision of the major metropolitan showmen to join forces in what Mason referred to as an ‘Amal-GRAB-ation’.<sup>5</sup> On

10 January, the day after his letter to the editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, the Clement Mason Ciné Co. issued a circular to picture showmen in Australia, in which Mason expresses his gratitude for the 'many letters, wires, and personal congratulations, together with the heartiest good wishes from a large number of picture showmen, who with one accord wish us success in our self-appointed task of fighting any combine to the bitter end'.<sup>6</sup> Invoking the motto that 'all the world loves a fighter', Mason declared his company 'stripped & eager for the fray', ready—with the support of picture showmen—to give 'any unfair combine a severe drubbing'.<sup>7</sup> As eager as Mason was to take on the Combine, he knew that he couldn't do it without the financial support of his clients, so he aimed to rally that support with this notice.

Mason followed up on the circular with an in-person strategy session. On 6 February 1913, the Sydney *Co-operator* reported on a meeting of picture showmen from around Sydney and its suburbs at Queen's Hall held the preceding day. At this meeting, exhibitors from the Greater Sydney area gathered to discuss their options in the face of the Combine's centralization of distribution. Mr Ford, owner of Star Pictures in Bondi Junction, reportedly explained,

Whilst they [the showmen] presumably had the choice of programmes in their own hands, the public who pay the piper are the people who call the tune in regard to the standard of pictures and the class of programme that will be acceptable to them. As a natural consequence of competition in every suburb the patrons of picture shows were becoming more and more exacting. If a showman meant to keep up his audience, he must screen and continue to screen bright interesting subjects, and they could only hope to do this whilst their choice of films could be made from a number of exchanges in competition. He, amongst a number of others, was vitally interested in the independence of the Clement Mason Company as providing the only alternate source of supply for films to those released by the amalgamated exchanges.<sup>8</sup>

Trapped between the Combine's centralized control and audience demands for varied programmes, one of the options these worried exhibitors wanted to explore was some sort of formal cooperation with Clement Mason's company. Together with Frank H. Joseph, manager of the Coronation Picture Theatre at Crown and Cleveland Streets in the Redfern neighbourhood of Sydney, Ford proposed that local showmen buy shares at cost in Mason's company, both to protect themselves against the Combine and to increase Mason's capitalization to 'ensure the importation of a bigger and better variety of films than they had now or had ever had before'.<sup>9</sup> No



nationalistic sentiments appear to have been expressed, either towards or against Continental or American films—this was simply a matter of maintaining a free market for distribution and exhibition.

While the financial stability of Mason's company, which had paid out a 20% dividend to shareholders in 1911 and 25% in 1912, was a powerful argument in favour of this proposal, Mason himself argued that his greatest asset was his ability 'to go to any film producer in the whole world, and for spot cash secure their best films in spite of any attempt on the part of the combine to control the supply'.<sup>10</sup> The Combine had apparently already threatened exhibitors with block-booking demands, 'that they must buy all their programme or none from the amalgamated exchanges', but Mason insisted that such a demand be treated 'with the contempt it merits. The Clement Mason Coy were prepared to fight to the last ditch for the right of independent selection and open competition'. Promising not to raise prices, Mason cited the imminent release of the first film on his list—Duskes's *God of Vengeance*—which had been 'secured by his company at a cost of £250', as an example of the kind of high-value product he could provide. Mason declared that 'his company was the one and only barrier between the octopus group and the deep sea, and as long as its position were maintained they, the showmen, could snap their fingers at the iniquitous monopoly and dare it to do the worst'.<sup>11</sup>

No records exist to confirm whether this proposal was ever actually adopted by Sydney exhibitors, nor is the circulation history of the films on Mason's list conclusive. Although many of these showmen had a track record of hiring films from Mason's and seemed eager to form a closer agreement with him, very few of the films on Mason's list appear to have been screened in their theatres in the course of 1913. The above-mentioned Frank Joseph had screened many films from Mason's list in 1912, including Cines's *The Female Spy* and Deutsche Mutoskop's *The White Domino*, both of which Mason had begun advertising for hire on 5 June 1912. In his announcement of *The White Domino* that same month, Joseph advertised it as 'one of Clement Mason's exclusives', suggesting, as other exhibitors also did, that Mason held the Australasian rights to this film.<sup>12</sup> In September 1912, Joseph also screened the Nordisk films *Montmartrepigen/The (or An) Artist's Model* (aka *Molly and Maggie*)—in which Asta Nielsen was erroneously alleged to star, according to many ads—for three nights, the tragedy *Når kærligheden dør/When Love Dies*, and the romantic comedy *Pro forma/A Situation Saved*, starring Clara Wieth, in October. In November 1912, he screened both the 3,000ft feature *The Last Will and Testament* (attributed alternately in newspaper ads to Film d'Art, Nordisk, and Solax, but most likely from the first-named), which he touted as 'a masterpiece of cinematic art!'<sup>13</sup> and Itala's 2,500ft thriller *La fossa del vivo/The Live Man's*

*Tomb*, starring Dora Baldanello, Lidia Quaranta, and Filippo Boutens, billed as 'the most startling, sensational, and hair-raising film the world has ever seen. See it and be bewildered!'<sup>14</sup> However, Joseph does not appear to have screened any of the other films on Mason's list after the meeting in February 1913, which might indicate his having contracted with the Combine for his film supplies.

Many of the other speakers in support of the project who had shorter histories with Mason are equally absent from the circulation record of the films on Mason's list in 1913, though it is of course possible that they screened other films supplied by Mason. H.A. Scot, for example, manager of the King's Theatre in Katoomba, in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney, had screened two of the films—Deutsche Mutoskop's *Greed of Gold* and Aquila's *Per il re! / For the King*—in December 1912, but does not appear to have screened any others later. Likewise, Ford had screened the Deutsche Mutoskop picture *Die Schlange am Busen / Nursing a Viper* at Star Pictures in Parramatta in August 1912, but none of the other films from the list. Given this lack of evidence, it seems unlikely that any formal partnership was established between Mason and the independent exhibitors.

By contrast, the American-born exhibitor Charles Post Doutney (1878–1918), known professionally as C. Post Mason (no relation to Clement Mason), did not speak at the meeting but proved to be a regular customer both before and after the founding of the Combine. He had worked for J.D. Williams in Sydney before taking over the management of several cinemas in Greater Sydney, where he screened several of Clement Mason's imports in October 1912, including Pathé's *Le supplice d'une mère / A Mother's Prayer* at the King's Theatre on West and Falcon Streets in North Sydney, and the Nordisk picture *Dearly Purchased Friendship* at the Queen's Theatre in Petersham. In late 1912, he took over the management of the Garden Picture Palace in Maitland (NSW), where he screened at least thirteen pictures likely hired from Mason's Cine Co. in a three-month period, including ten Continental productions: Film d'Art's *The Last Will and Testament*; Deutsche Mutoskop's *The White Domino* and *Gesprenge Fesseln / Broken Chains*; Nordisk's *When Love Dies*, *A Situation Saved*, and *A Mother's Prayer*; Éclair's *Le mirage / The Mirage*; and three Cines dramas—*Inutile delinquenza / The Incriminating Card*, *Un furto misterioso / The Mysterious Thief*, and *The Lion Tamer's Revenge*. He also screened one of Mason's American imports and two British ones: *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (Edison), *The Circus Girl's Fate* (Urban), and *The Miner's Mascot* (Cricks & Martin). In the same period, C. Post Mason also screened the Danish Kinografen/Nordisk thriller *The Acrobat's Daughter*, which does not seem to have been imported by Mason's, and Cines's *Il ricordo di un*

*amore/The Coiners*, presumably from J.D. Williams's International Pictures, which offered it for hire in *Referee* in September 1912.

Given the large number of Mason's imports screened there, Maitland offers unique insight into the conditions of the films' exhibition. Founded in 1833 on the swampy floodplain of the Hunter River, 105 miles north of Sydney, Maitland was a coal mining town, connected to Newcastle and Sydney by rail since 1857. Both East and Central Maitland boast many elegant public buildings from the turn of the twentieth century, including a Victorian Italianate railway station and post office from the 1880s; the Grand Junction Hotel in Federation Free Classical architectural style, with bay verandas, keystone arches, and pediments; and the Byzantine Bank of Australasia building, built in 1869, with a two-storey arcaded veranda. In the 1911 Australian census, Newcastle and Maitland were listed together, with a joint population of 51,942, nearly 80% of whom lived in Newcastle. Maitland's prosperity in 1913 was sufficient to support at least three cinemas: Pictoria, Garden Picture Palace, and Arcadia. All three of these fell into the category of rural independent cinemas, but they each hired different films from Mason to cater to specific audience tastes.

All three of Maitland's cinemas seem to have drawn on Mason's list to different extents. The open-air Garden Picture Palace in Central Maitland, which opened in March 1912 and closed in May 1922, billed itself as 'the only recognized house of amusements'.<sup>15</sup> The Garden Picture Palace seems to have been the most invested in screening European films, from different Continental producers. This may have been a relic of this cinema having been run by West's Pictures for part of 1912, under whose auspices several Nordisk pictures, including *The Dead Man's Child*, were shown. When C. Post Mason took over in October 1912, he continued to screen the Danish and German films detailed above in late 1912, as well as Film d'Art's *Camille*, featuring Sarah Bernhardt, in early January 1913.

Around the time Clement Mason sent out his circular in January 1913, the Garden Picture Palace, which changed its programme every day or two, was apparently a very regular customer. Between 14 and 24 January 1913, for example, the Garden showed six Continental features from Mason's list: first, the Cines historical drama *Death or Glory*, followed on the weekend by the Nordisk thriller *Lynstraalen/His (or A or The) Lost Memory* (aka *The Lightning Flash*) as the lead feature, supported by two short dramas, a comedy, and an American vaudeville act. The following Tuesday, its programme featured another of Mason's Nordisk productions, the political drama *The Nihilist*, supported by the Selig film *The House of His Master*; on Wednesday, *The Nihilist* was replaced by Nordisk's *All in Vain*, while Thursday's and Friday's programmes showcased yet another Nordisk melodrama, *Et hjerte af guld, eller Syngens hemmelighed/Faithful unto Death*,



Figure 8.1 Photograph of the audience at the Garden Picture Palace in Maitland, NSW, c.1912. Picture Maitland Collection, Maitland Libraries

starring Clara and Carlo Wieth. On Saturday, the feature was Ambrosio's *Il bivio della morte/Between Life and Death*, a crime drama described as a sequel to the popular Éclair film *Zigomar*. No record of audience reactions to these films survives, aside from the standard newspaper report that the house had been packed and that the audiences had appreciated the artistry of the productions, but the fact that so many European features were shown in such quick succession suggests that Maitland cinemagoers appreciated the quality and variety of Mason's European imports enough to want to see more of them.

One of the Garden's competitors, the Arcadia Theatre, which called itself 'the Home of Maitland's Best Pictures', positioned itself as the working man's theatre, dropping its ticket prices in December 1912 to sixpence and threepence, while still maintaining 'the best [films] the market can supply'.<sup>16</sup> It seems that its clientele had a preference for American films, some of which were also available from Mason's, but they also screened the 'thrilling and surprising' Cines drama *A Sicilian Tragedy*, which both Mason's and J.D. Williams's International Pictures offered for hire, in November 1912 to large crowds. During roughly the same period in mid-January 1913 discussed above, Arcadia screened at least seven films from Mason's list, including two American films: Bison's *Builders of the Nation*

and *Rube Marquard Wins*, alongside the Selig western *A Cowboy's Mother*. This preference for American films did not prevent Arcadia from showing several Continental films as well, including Duskes's *The Broken Sword*, Nordisk's *The Wheels of Fate*, Itala's *Il segreti dell'anima/Secrets of a Soul* and *For the King*, and Pathé's *Faust*, all of which were on Mason's list, as well as the Danish drama *Den kvindelige spion fra Balkan/A Balkan Conspiracy* from the small Danish production house Filmfabrikken Skandinavien, which does not appear to have been supplied by Mason.

The third cinema in Maitland, the Pictoria, offered a daily change of programme and generally only screened one longer picture at a time, accompanied by a full orchestra and a baritone soloist. This strategy suggests that Pictoria was aiming for a sophisticated, theatre-like ambience, to which both American and European features could easily contribute. Pictoria had screened Éclair's action film *Tom Butler* in September 1912 and the Gaumont feature *La cassette de l'emigrée/The Refugee's Casket* in October, both of which are on Mason's list. In mid-January 1913, the Pictoria screened two Continental pictures, neither of which Mason offered but which reinforced the theatre's reputation for artistically ambitious films. The Pictoria began by screening the Italian feature, Ambrosio's *Il profeta velato/The Veiled Prophet*, on Friday, 18 January (after a transport delay forced them to postpone it by one day), followed by the Thanhouser historical drama *Lucile* on Saturday, the Nordisk drama *Den stærkeste/Vanquished* (aka *Conquered*, or *The Madcap Countess*)—in which the heart-throb Valdemar Psilander performs a death-defying loop-the-loop stunt in a motor car—on Tuesday and Wednesday after being rained out on Monday, and finished the week with Thanhouser's *The Star of Bethlehem* on Thursday and Friday.

After Mason's 6 February meeting with picture showmen in the Greater Sydney area, the Maitland cinemas appear to have continued to be reliable clients of Mason's Cine Co., the Arcadia more so than the Garden. In February 1913 alone, the Arcadia screened six Continental dramas from Mason's list: Nordisk's social drama *Hjærternes kamp/A High Stake* (aka *High Stakes*), two Éclair dramas—*Larmes de sang/Tears of Blood* and *On the Threshold of Life*—Duskes's Eastern religious exposé *God of Vengeance*, Cines's *A Sicilian Tragedy*, and Deutsche Mutoskop's *Greed of Gold*. When advertising the latter two films, the Arcadia does not mention that they had already screened *A Sicilian Tragedy* five months earlier, but they do reassure patrons that *Greed of Gold* is a new Clement Mason exclusive that is 'entirely different from a film screened lately under a similar title'.<sup>17</sup> This is most likely a reference to the Pathé drama *The Greed for Gold, or Wheel of Fortune*, which the Pictoria had screened in December 1912 (see Chapter 4). In March 1913, the Garden Picture Palace screened *Her Love Against*

*the World*, a 'drama full of pathos and exciting incidents', which Mason attributes to Cines but is otherwise not identifiable.<sup>18</sup>

Of the fifty-one films on Mason's list, at least thirty-three were screened in Maitland between September 1912 and March 1913, suggesting a close relationship between Mason's distribution company and the burgeoning cinema industry of this small but aspiring provincial town. Distributed across all three cinemas, Mason's European imports seem to have appealed to a broad cross section of local cinemagoers, who were apparently comfortable with highly international programmes, with films from France, Germany, Denmark, Italy, the UK, and the USA sharing the screen on any given evening or week. Local ads for the films rarely mention the national origin of individual films, though particular makers, especially Nordisk and Pathé, are occasionally credited. Only a few films are described as exclusives, but all of them are touted as the best the international market has to offer. Maitland's relatively small population size and geographical distance from both Australian metropolises and European capitals were clearly no obstacle to the cinema's power to bring rural Australians into close contact with the bourgeois drawing rooms and political intrigues of the Old World.

### The Backbone of Mason's List: Nordisk Features

The largest group of pictures on Mason's list from a single maker were Danish films produced almost exclusively by Nordisk. As documented in Chapter 6, Nordisk features were ubiquitous on Australasian screens in this period, a phenomenon exemplified by back-to-back screenings of *Operabranden/In the Hour of Need* and *En hofintrige/A Court Intrigue* at competing theatres in Wellington in May 1913, to give one example; or simultaneous screenings in Perth on 7 October 1913 of *Den kvindelige demon/Theresa the Adventuress* at West's Shaftesbury Theatre and *Stålkongens vilje/The Steel King's Last Wish*, at Spencer's Theatre Royal. Both films had premiered at J.D. Williams's Empress Theatre in Sydney, on 3 August and 29 September, respectively.

Although Mason claimed to hold exclusive rights to some of the Nordisk films on his list, this diversity of exhibition venues suggests that the Danish company did not always sell its films to Australasia on an exclusive basis, as it did in Germany and the UK, that exclusive rights were difficult to enforce, and that the secondary hire market in Australasia was fairly relaxed in terms of maintaining those rights.<sup>19</sup> Mason clearly welcomed Nordisk's open-access policy and relied on the potential of Nordisk productions for revenue generation, since his list includes thirteen Nordisk films. All of them are at least two reels (2,000ft) long, making them well

suited for top billing as features or star pictures in comparison with the largely single-reel American imports. Although Nordisk did not generally promote its actors' names in Australia, these productions were the cream of Nordisk's crop, starring the most prominent Nordisk actors, including Psilander, Clara and Carlo Wieth, Robert Dinesen, Ebba Thomsen, Augusta Blad, Ejnar Zangenberg, Cajus Bruun, Else Frölich, and Jenny Roelsgaard, to name just a few.

The first Nordisk film on Mason's list was the 3,400ft political thriller *The Nihilist*. As was the case with at least two of his previous Nordisk releases, the film Mason advertised as *The Nihilist* was a re-release—in this case of the 1911 Nordisk drama *Dødsflugten/The Flight to Death*, directed by Eduard Schnedler-Sørensen, which had premiered at J.D. Williams's Colonial Theatre No. 1 in Sydney in February 1912 and at the Lyric Theatre in Auckland in March. It was a very successful film, with 138 prints sold worldwide, which might explain Mason's interest in it. Like many Italian films about criminal 'Black Hand' secret societies, this story about a young nobleman forced to join a nihilist group resonated with audience members' fears about the volatile political situation in Europe, while allowing them to appreciate their distance from those problems, 'congratulat[ing] ourselves upon the fact that we live under a flag which is able to strike fear into the hearts of the vagabond criminals in Europe'.<sup>20</sup>

Although the film had already been in circulation in Australia for nearly a year, Mason re-released it as *The Nihilist* at the Garden Picture Palace in Maitland on 21 January 1913, where it was attributed to the 'Scandinavian Film Company of Copenhagen'.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, it had been in circulation in New Zealand for thirteen months as *The Flight to Death* when it opened as *The Nihilist* at the People's Picture Palace on Manners Street in Wellington on 17 April, five days before the last documented screening of *The Flight to Death* 334 miles away in Gisborne.<sup>22</sup> However, it doesn't seem to have previously been screened in Wellington, for unspecified reasons. As one of seven cinemas in downtown Wellington—four of which were on Manners Street alone—the People's Picture Palace needed to play up the novelty of this film to attract viewers; they advertised it as a special production arranged with the 'Clement-Mason Film Company of Sydney, who hold the exclusive rights to this picture'.<sup>23</sup>

Without access to large cinema chains in Australia, Mason's Nordisk imports in 1913 charted very different patterns of exhibition to *Temptations of a Great City* in 1911 (see Chapter 6) or the dozens of Nordisk films imported by J.D. Williams in 1913, which tended to circulate in metropolitan cinemas for several weeks before moving on to the suburban and rural circuits. It appears that Mason's released a single print of *The*



Figure 8.2 Still from Nordisk's *Dødsflugten* (aka *Nihilisternes dødsflugt*)/*The Nihilist* (aka *The Flight to Death*) (1911). Danish Film Institute/Nordisk Film. Reuse not permitted

*Nihilist* that circulated in Australia, moving at a rather leisurely pace from town to town, primarily in a single region. After one night in Maitland in January 1913, *The Nihilist* moved on to Lytton's Pictures in Orange (NSW), also for one night, and then to Brisbane, where it was screened by Cook's Pictures for four nights. *The Nihilist* apparently attracted record crowds in Brisbane, where audiences appreciated the 'high merit' of a drama 'deal[ing] with a class of individual that strikes terror in the hearts of many Europeans',<sup>24</sup> but that was the high point of its run. After that, it seems to have had only single-night screenings in various towns around New South Wales. At the end of February, it was screened by Herbert's Pictures in Newcastle, accompanied by a lecture on Russian nihilism; then, in late March, at the Theatre Royal in Tamworth; Smythe's Pictures in Armidale in June; Oddfellows' Hall in Wilcannia in October; the Star Picture Theatre in Bega in March 1914; and Milgate's Electric Pictures in Mullumbimby in January 1915.

If these newspaper listings are complete, *The Nihilist* was screened in just nine locations in eastern Australia, covering around 3,600 miles, over the course of the two years following its re-release. Combined with the



thirteen months the film had been in circulation as *The Flight to Death*, its total run was more than three years in Australia. In New Zealand, the only listings for *The Nihilist* after its week at the People's Picture Palace in April 1913 are for a week of screenings at the King George Theatre in Auckland immediately afterwards, plus a possible single screening at Imperial Pictures in Nelson in June 1914. Since the Wellington screenings overlap with the screenings in Tamworth, there must have been a second print of the film in circulation in New Zealand, but it is unclear why it didn't circulate any further, unless the market was already saturated from the earlier circulation of *The Flight to Death*. Under both titles, the film only circulated in New Zealand for fourteen months, plus the belated screening in 1914.

Yet although individual films on Mason's list didn't always circulate very widely, the relationships between Mason's and its loyal exhibitors meant that certain theatres regularly screened Mason's European imports, a pattern that is particularly visible in New Zealand's compact market. For example, the People's Picture Palace in Wellington seems to have been a regular customer of Mason's, as it screened at least ten of the films on Mason's list between December 1912 and June 1913. These included four Nordisk dramas: the class-based tragedy *Historien om en moder/The Life of a Mother*, about a woman whose alcoholic husband sells her child to a wealthy childless couple, and the sensational circus drama *All in Vain*, described as a 'Nordisk of Nordisks' thanks to its spectacular stunt diving from a high platform, both of which ran in April 1913, immediately following *The Nihilist*; another circus drama, *The Wheels of Fate*, in June 1913; and Pathé's *A Mother's Prayer* in February 1914, albeit during 'day sessions only'.<sup>25</sup> Other Mason's-sourced pictures screened at the People's Picture Palace in this period include several German and Italian films, notably Aquila's *For the King* in December 1912, Duskes's *The Broken Sword* in April 1913, Duskes's *God of Vengeance* and the Cines drama *The Incriminating Card* in May 1913, and Cines's *Justice at Last* in June. Including *The Nihilist*, eight of those ten films were also screened at the King George Theatre in Auckland, operated by R.L. Cleland, which featured Nordisk's *His Lost Memory* in January 1913, and both the Deutsche Mutoskop drama *Nursing a Viper* and Nordisk's *Dearly Purchased Friendship* in June 1913, for a total of eleven films from Mason's list.

While many of the pictures on Mason's lists were screened at a variety of cinemas in Dunedin and Christchurch, including several at Fullers' Princess Theatre, prior to April 1913, Mason's primary exhibitor partners in the largest New Zealand cities appear to have been the MacMahon brothers, who were excluded from Fuller-Hayward's agreement with the Combine and thus free to acquire films on their own behalf. The

MacMahons showed seven of Mason's pictures at each of their two primary cinemas—the New Theatre in Wellington and the Queen's Theatre in Auckland—in 1912/13. These include the Nordisk dramas *The Artist's Model* in November 1912 and *A High Stake* in March 1913. The latter was touted as 'the Nordisk Co.'s gorgeous ladies' drama' about 'the infatuation of two brothers for a woman who is as heartless as she is beautiful'.<sup>26</sup> The MacMahons also hired three Italian films (two by Cines, one by Ambrosio), one French Pathé film (which ran at the Queen's Theatre only), and two German films by Duskes (one of which ran only at the New Theatre).

In some cases, an exhibitor's decision to hire films from Mason's was explicitly linked to a desire to resist centralized control of film selection and prices through block- and blind-booking practices. On 10 May 1913, for example, just a few weeks after Hayward's and Fuller's establishment of the New Zealand Picture Supplies company, the Queen's Theatre in Thames, New Zealand, managed by a Mr Silcocks, announced that the theatre was 'withdrawing from the film combine and will begin showing films from independents starting with the 3000ft. Nordisk masterpiece, *All in Vain*'.<sup>27</sup> The Queen's Theatre's decision to unaffiliate can be interpreted as a marketing strategy to distinguish itself from its competitors or simply as a means of ensuring its ability to offer high-quality productions at low prices. Originally a gold-mining town, Thames is located seventy miles south-east of Auckland on the southern end of the Coromandel Peninsula. Serving its population of 3,712 in 1913, Thames had four picture theatres—Hayward's Pictures in the Central Picture Palace; Robert's Pictures in the Oddfellows' Hall; King's Pictures, later managed by Robert's, in the King's Theatre, which promised 'special subjects by the world's greatest producers—Vitagraph, Edison, Lubin, Kalem, and others' (though all of the named companies are American); and the Queen's Theatre, which marketed itself as the 'People's Popular Picture Palace'.<sup>28</sup> In March 1913, King's featured two films from Mason's list—Cines's *The Lion Tamer's Revenge* and Duskes's *The Broken Sword*, while Robert's screened Nordisk's *His Lost Memory* at Oddfellows' Hall, but the Queen's Theatre does not appear to have screened any of the films on Mason's list prior to Mr Silcock's announcement in mid-May 1913.

Having Mason's as a viable alternative to the Combine seems to have empowered independent cinemas like the Queen's Theatre, lending credence to Mason's own arguments about rural and suburban exhibitors, and enhanced the national diversity of the films on offer in Thames. On 12 May 1913, when *All in Vain* opened, Queen's reminded its patrons once more of the significance of its independence from Australasian Films' centralized distribution network, declaring, 'No Trusts! No Combines! Out

on its Own! The Independent theatre. "The Cosy Theatre." Our new film supply starts tonight. Roll up and judge for yourselves. The people's verdict will satisfy us."<sup>29</sup> On subsequent days, the cinema ran 'wanted' ads in search of '500 Picture Patrons Queen's Theatre to-Night', announcing the screening of *All in Vain* and jibing that 'the film trust couldn't do it. Eh! What?'<sup>30</sup> While the Queen's Theatre had shown primarily American pictures from Bison, Essanay, and Lubin, among others, in the days preceding this announcement, its programming after May 1913 took a decidedly more European turn, screening at least seven more pictures from Mason's list over the next two years: Nordisk's *Dearly Purchased Friendship*, Deutsche Mutoskop's *Nursing a Viper*, and Cines's *The Incriminating Card* and *Justice at Last* in June 1913; Nordisk's *The Wheels of Fate* in July and *The Artist's Model* in August; and Nordisk's *The Life of a Mother* in October 1915. The Queen's Theatre also screened other Nordisk pictures not on Mason's list, including *In the Hour of Need* in late May 1913, *Flugten gennem luften/The Fugitives* in November 1913, *Eventyrersken/The Queen of Knaves* in October 1916, and Swedish Biograph's *Madame de Thèbes* (attributed to Nordisk) in April 1917, but it is entirely possible that these were also distributed by Mason's.

Promotion by an independent distributor like Mason's made it more likely that films from European makers could secure exhibition venues, even if those films had not been sourced from the Combine, while also priming the competition between cinemas. Many Nordisk films had been screened in Thames prior to the establishment of the Combine, primarily by Hayward's Pictures at Central. This situation likely reflects Hayward's affiliation with West's Pictures, which had a long-standing interest in Continental films. In 1912–13, Hayward's in Thames screened at least six Nordisk pictures: *Lady Mary's Love* (falsely advertised with Asta Nielsen's name), *The Flight to Death*, *A Victim of the Mormons*, *En stærkere magt/A Woman's Way*, *Ungdommens ret/The Rights of Youth* (aka *A Woman's Weakness*), *Indbruddet hos skuespillerinden/Those Eyes*, and *Livets løgn/A Sudden Impulse, or The Fatal Lie*. Hayward's also screened another six German-made films starring Asta Nielsen that are inaccurately attributed to Nordisk, for which West's had acquired exclusive rights for Australasia: *Gipsy Blood*, *The Course of True Love*, *The Great Moment*, *Falsely Accused*, *The Girl Without a Country*, and *Spanish Blood*. In early 1913, Hayward's had some competition for European features from Robert's Pictures, which screened a few Nordisk films in the Oddfellows' Hall, among them *The Black Chancellor* (aka *The Black Tyrant*) and *The Great Circus Catastrophe*, as well as Asta Nielsen's *The Traitor*; and later from the King's Theatre, which Robert's Pictures managed. In 1914, however, Hayward's presented only a few additional Nordisk films—*Grev Zarkas Bande/Count Zarka*,

*Midnatssolen/The Midnight Sun*, and *The Opium Smoker*—a small fraction of the forty Nordisk films imported to Australasia that year, but it is not clear what caused this decline.

The independent path that Mason's offered was not attractive to all exhibitors, who pursued different ways of securing a reliable source of high-quality product at the lowest possible prices. A meeting of picture theatre proprietors and managers was held in Wellington in the first week of July 1913 to 'review their position in light of the recent developments', or, in other words, to consider how to respond to the recent amalgamation of distribution interests in Australia. The previous situation had become untenable, the organizers noted, with 'the competition ... so warm, and the cost so heavy that the profits in some cases were reduced to a vanishing point'.<sup>31</sup> However, the benefits of bulk acquisition and centralized control for independent exhibitors was still an open question—some exhibitors faced higher rental prices, while others could not get the films they wanted in a timely manner. As Mason's New Zealand manager, C.E. Hickey, noted in a letter to the editor of the Wellington newspaper *Dominion* on 1 July, the primary arguments for amalgamation—that otherwise 'the film supply coming to this country would not be of a high standard, and that the "Amalgamation" was a benevolent institution run entirely in the interests of showmen and the public'—obscured the fact that many makers, including Nordisk, Itala, Cines, Lux, Éclair, Duskes, and some American producers, were not "tied" to any combination of hirers' and could thus negotiate with any distributor who approached them, including the Clement Mason Co.<sup>32</sup>

In contrast to the Queen's Theatre's embrace of autonomy and its attendant risks, the King's Theatre in Thames announced a few days after this conference in July 1913 that it had just signed expensive new contracts with its suppliers in order to offer the public of Thames

such a masterful series of photo-plays, that have never yet been approached by any show in this province. To offer such big productions that will be screened regularly, the management have entered into contracts, involving a large sum of money. However, realizing that 'nothing is too good for the Thames public' we have been spurred on to complete such arrangements that will make our entertainment the Best in New Zealand.<sup>33</sup>

Yet, just as with the Queen's shift to independent status, the King's Theatre's new contract (with an unspecified distributor, possibly not New Zealand Picture Supplies given Hayward's priority relationship with NZPS) affected the European content of its programming, particularly Nordisk

films. Prior to announcing its new contract, King's had screened at least two Nordisk pictures—*Den tredje magt/The Stolen Treaty* and *Karnevallets hemmelighed/The Orphan's Conquest*—in June 1913.

After the King's Theatre's announcement, its promotion of Nordisk pictures increased significantly. In July 1913, King's revived the Nordisk classic *A Victim of the Mormons* and screened at least seventeen pictures branded as Nordisk productions in the next three years. These included *Manden med kappen/The Man in the White Cloak* in October 1913; the Asta Nielsen Deutsche Bioscop/PAGU picture *The Temptations of Drink*, inaccurately attributed to Nordisk, in November 1913; *Den gamle mølle/The Last of the Old Mill* in January 1914; *Giftslangen/The Venomous Bite* in February; *Guldkalven/The Golden Calf* and *Stemmeretskvinden/Votes for Women* in November 1914; *Søvngængersken/The Mysterious Case* in December 1914; *A Deal with the Devil* and *Under søvkløngens tænder/As You Sow* in January 1915; *Tøffelhelten/His Phantom Friend* in February 1915; *Den fjerde dame/The Fourth Lady* and a revival of *A Woman's Way* in March 1915; *Detektivens barne pige/The Woman with Red Hair* in April 1915; *Under mindernes træ/The Soul's Awakening* and *The White Slave Traffic* in May 1915; *Children of the Circus* in November 1915; *Lille Teddy/The Lure of the Circus* in March 1916; and *The Candle and the Moth* in September 1916. It is possible, although the King's Theatre management doesn't say so outright, that they sourced at least some of these Nordisk pictures through Mason's, as other New Zealand cinemas credited Clement Mason Ltd for supplying *The White Slave Traffic*—such as the Empress in Whanganui, which screened it in October 1914, seven months before it reached Thames.<sup>34</sup>

### The Star Appeal of Italian Art Films: Zacconi's *Father*

While Mason's thirteen Danish features were quite popular, the fourteen Italian offerings on his list were also very successful, due more to the star power of their actors than the producers' brands, though each of the major Italian makers' names was well known in the Antipodes. Perhaps the best example of this is the two-reel (3,500ft) Itala melodrama *Father*, the second film on Mason's list. Starring the illustrious stage actor Ermete Zacconi (1857–1948) in his first film appearance, *Father* is one of the longest and most expensive films on the list. The film tells the story of a businessman named Andrew Vivante, who is wrongly convicted of burning down his own factory for the insurance payout. In fact, his rival, Evariste Marny, had hired a local vagabond to set the fire, which 'old Andrew' discovers by chance upon his escape from prison thirteen years later. When Vivante confronts Marny, he discovers that his only daughter, Lydia, not only doesn't recognize him but is in love with Marny's son, which defeats

his resolve to seek vengeance. Instead, when the vagabond sets Marny's palace on fire in revenge for losing his lucrative secret, Vivante rushes in and saves Marny's life, which brings about Vivante's reconciliation with his daughter.

*Father* was distributed in London by the British distribution company Tyler but appears to have been imported to Australasia by both Mason and his competitor Cosens Spencer, which resulted in two very different circuits of circulation. While Mason announced the film in his January 1913 letter, Spencer's advertised the film for hire in February 1913 with the tagline, 'From the company that paid £4000 for the world's greatest production *Quo Vadis?*', referring to that company's recent, widely publicized purchase of the exclusive rights to Cines's massive production that would premiere in Australia two months later. No contracts have survived to confirm which exhibitors hired the film from Spencer's and which from Mason's, but it would seem to have been a moderate success for both, as *Father* was in regular, frequent circulation from late February until early October 1913, with a few additional screenings documented in 1914 and 1916. *Father* opened at J.D. Williams's Crystal Palace in Sydney on 24 February, where the originally advertised three-night run was extended to a week due to the film's popularity. This choice of venue might have been a consequence of the impending merger of the Greater J.D. Williams Amusements Co. into Australasian Films/Union Theatres, which Spencer's cinemas had become a part of in late 1912 and which Williams had agreed to join in January 1913, effective later that year. Despite the film's apparent success in Sydney, Spencer's print of *Father* is rather difficult to track, as it does not seem to have been screened at any Union Theatres cinemas in other Australian metropolises, though it was advertised as a Spencer's Exclusive at both Crown Pictures in Wollongong, south of Sydney, on 28 March and Cairns Pictures, in Cairns (Qld) in early June.

The rather haphazard circulation of Itala's *Father* in Australasia illustrates how difficult it must have been for Mason to work around Australasian Films' centralized distribution and exhibition network. Given the ad hoc nature of his contracts with individual exhibitors, the film was sometimes screened in the same town at different theatres a few weeks or months apart. During the same week it was playing at the Crystal Palace in Sydney, for example, *Father* also ran at the independent Royal Pictures in Prahran, an inner suburb of Melbourne, under its alternative title *The Palace of Flame*, as well as at the Szarka brothers' Enmore Theatre in Sydney from 26 February to 1 March, both copies presumably hired from Mason. With at least three prints in circulation in Australia alone, offered by two different distributors, the film moved unpredictably, with little apparent rhyme or reason. From Sydney and Melbourne, the film went straight on

to suburban circuits, bypassing other metropolitan markets. Since Mason had declared his intention of concentrating on independent suburban and rural cinemas, it seems likely that he supplied many of these exhibitors.

*Father* travelled widely across the country, earning fervent acclaim. One of the prints screened in Sydney in late February 1913 appears to have been sent north to Herbert’s Pictures in Newcastle, then inland to the Arcadia Picture Palace in Maitland, and finally, in late March 1913, to the Mechanics Hall in Singleton, where it was praised to the skies:

Father! Father! Father! The Magnificent Fire Film. The Boom of All Booms, Applauded by thousands in Sydney, Newcastle and Suburbs, and Maitland. All Singleton will be at the Mechanics’ Institute to see this marvellous picture. FATHER—Itala’s Greatest Achievement; FATHER—It’s a triumph of cinematography; FATHER—A real FIRE of disastrous proportions; FATHER—See the FIREFIGHTERS at work; FATHER—See Old Andrew save his daughter; FATHER—Realism can go no farther; FATHER—There is nothing quite like it. No, nothing. You have seen *The Life of a Mother*, don’t miss seeing the Life of a Father.<sup>35</sup>

The ad’s allusion to another of Mason’s releases, Nordisk’s social drama *The Life of a Mother*, which had played at the Mechanics Hall in Singleton on 22 February 1913, confirms that the cinemagoers in Singleton were already familiar with the kind of European product Mason’s offered. Meanwhile, the Melbourne print seems to have been sent on to Broken Hill, where it was screened at the Rink on 22 March, the same night the film was being screened in Singleton, 661 miles to the east.

With most of these rural cinemas offering only a weekend programme, it took a month for *Father* to be screened in these four towns. It then resurfaced in Maitland, this time at the open-air Pictoria on 8 and 9 April; then at Empire Pictures in Darling Downs, Queensland on 29 April. In early May, about two months after the film’s initial run at Royal Pictures in Prahran, *Father* was screened at the open-air Paradise cinema on St Kilda beach, about 1.7 miles from Prahran. In June 1913, *Father* was being screened in cinemas in widely disparate parts of the country, namely Cairns (Qld), Grenfell (NSW), and Kalgoorlie (WA), thousands of miles apart. It continued to be screened at intervals for another three years, with the last listed screening taking place at the Shaftesbury in Perth (WA) on 22 June 1916.

Differing market conditions and geographic constraints resulted in a somewhat more straightforward and shorter circulation history in New Zealand. While still playing in Sydney, *Father* opened in Wellington on 1 March 1913 at West’s King’s Theatre. After one week, that print went on to Fullers’ King’s Theatre in Auckland, which proclaimed it ‘undoubtedly



Figure 8.3 Photograph of West's King's Theatre on Dixon Street in Wellington, exterior, c.1930. Ref: 1/2-139957-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington



an epoch-maker amongst Itala dramas. The fact that Zacconi, Italy's Henry Irving, who takes the leading part, was paid £700 for this single performance, is sufficiently striking'.<sup>36</sup> At least two prints of the film circulated through larger cities and towns across New Zealand, so Mason's likely supplied one or both of them. After playing at Hayward's and Fullers' cinemas in Wellington and Auckland, one print was sent south to Christchurch, where it was screened at both Fullers' Colosseum and His Majesty's Theatre for a week at the end of March. While that print moved on to Invercargill, another print was screened up north in New Plymouth. The movement of these two prints on both South and North Island creates a complex web, as the Invercargill print went to Timaru and then Oamaru on South Island, while the New Plymouth print moved on to Gisborne, Palmerston North, and Whanganui. The North Island print returned to the greater Wellington region in mid-May 1913, shown this time at the Thompson-Payne Electric Theatre in Masterton. Subsequently, the South Island print was screened in Greymouth, along the west coast of South Island, in July 1913; Lawrence, in central Otago, in August; and, finally, one of the prints was screened, for the last time, at the Town Hall in Otamatea, on the south-western coast of North Island, in late November 1913.

Given the dearth of company records for both Mason's distribution company and the cinemas he supplied, proving the assumption that later screenings may have involved a print hired from Mason's requires some deduction from small clues. A few cinemas helpfully credit the Clement Mason Cinematograph Company, e.g. McLean's Pictures in tiny Inangahua, south-west of Nelson on South Island, in connection with their screening of the Cines film *The Mysterious Thief* (aka *Stop that Mysterious Thief*) in August 1913, and Heald's Pictures in Ohakune, which simply credits Clement Mason Films for their entire programme.<sup>37</sup> In other cases, an exhibitor's history with Mason's makes further cooperation likely. The Thompson-Payne Electric Theatre in Masterton, for example, had already screened five other pictures from Mason's list (two German, two Italian, one Danish) before screening *Father* in May 1913 and would go on to screen eight more (five Italian, two French, one German) before the end of February 1914. Occasionally, an exhibitor's ads confirm their relationship with Mason's and their motivation for it. For example, the Opera House in Palmerston North announced in April 1914 the 'opening of the PERMANENT PICTURES with a new film supply from the famous firm of Clement Mason, Ltd. (the firm which fights Combines and Monopolies)'.<sup>38</sup> Praising Mason's as 'the big Independent people', the proprietors of the Opera House declared their determination 'to give the people of Palmerston nothing but the best', with Mason's help.<sup>39</sup> The unnamed proprietors seem to have run into some trouble meeting their obligations, however, as, by July 1914, Mason's was, in addition

to supplying the films, apparently managing the screenings in Palmerston North, offered every Saturday evening in the Opera House.

One of the tools Mason used to promote *Father* in so many diverse locales was Zacconi's celebrity. Many of the ads for *Father*, both those placed by Mason's and those by his competitors, highlight Zacconi's participation, dubbing him Italy's greatest tragedian and comparing him to the late, great British actor Sir Henry Irving (1838–1905). The ad for *Father's* premiere at J.D. Williams's Crystal Palace includes a large sketch of Zacconi's title character. It also makes a particular fuss about the importance of Zacconi's Italian identity and formal stage training for the artistic merits of the film:

Consider! A nation of artists, whose real appreciation can only be won by most highly developed and perfected art. Imagine, in such a nation, a prince of art—dramatic art—one who for example might rank with Sir Henry Irving as a master of thoroughly artistic interpretation. That is what Zacconi is in Italy, the home of art. And Zacconi is the master, who, in the superbly human drama *Father*, plays with the emotions of the spectators with all the certitude and splendid harmony of expression of the artist of instrumental music. To see Zacconi in this great work is to realize what great depths a real master of art may attain in that sort of emotional expression that compels the most thorough realization of the strong sentiment of the play. *Father* does not depend upon the devices of the cinema for its engrossing interest. That is furnished, with inexpressible power, by the chief actor himself. To see Zacconi is to see dramatic Italian art as its best. To see Zacconi in *Father* is a revelation in the interpretation of intense emotion.<sup>40</sup>

This awestruck coverage of Zacconi is similar to the kinds of accolades that renowned French actor Sarah Bernhardt received for her 1912 films *Camille* and *Queen Bess* (see Chapter 4), but it is unusual to see such adulation given to a male film star in this period, even one with extensive live theatre credentials.

The ad's emphasis on the idea of Italy as the home of art and Zacconi as its prince reflects the general prominence of Italian film in Australasia in this period (see Chapter 5), particularly for historical dramas, even though it would be more than three decades until significant Italian immigrant communities established themselves in Australia. The prestige of Italian film was based on its high production values and the skill of its actors. Itala is praised for its 'acknowledged success in the world of cinematography' and *Father* declared 'a veritable gem of the mimetic art, the acting of every character being of a remarkable perfect order ... There is an earnestness, an appreciation, and a grasp of each character that strikes one in every

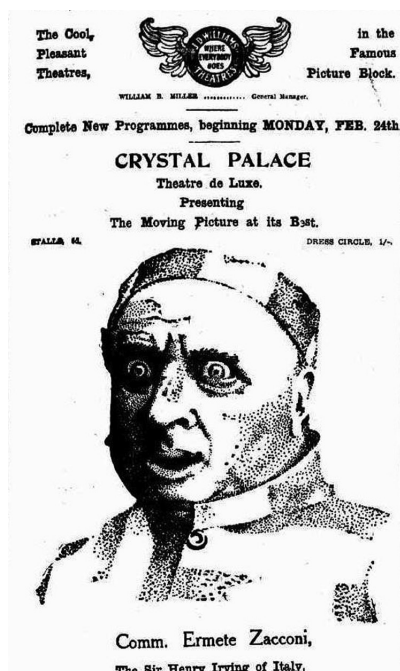


Figure 8.4 J.D. Williams Theatres newspaper ad for Ermete Zacconi in Itala's *Padre/Father* (1912) at the Crystal Theatre in Sydney

scene, and conveys the very essence of artistic delineation'.<sup>41</sup> The *Kalgoorlie Miner* declared, in advance of a screening of *Father* by WFGMU Pictures at the Boulder Town Hall on 21 June 1913, that 'the Italian companies are outstripping all competitors in the excellence and completeness with which they are mounting and producing their dramatic subjects'.<sup>42</sup> In Christchurch, where the film played in late March 1913, the *Lyttelton Times* took this attitude even further, asserting that *Father* was characteristic of its country of origin: 'It is an Italian story, worked out in Italy, by Italian actors, and bearing the stamp of the Italian people ... the leading role being played by a noted Italian actor, and he shows in every incident great power, strength and much restraint'.<sup>43</sup>

Under producer/director Giovanni Pastrone, Itala's bourgeois melodramas emphasized visual spectacles—especially buildings on fire, which figure prominently in both *Father*, as its alternative title *The Palace of Flame* indicates, and in *Tigris*, another Itala film that followed *Father* in Australasian cinemas. The *Lyttelton Times* complains, however, that 'the only point in the piece to which exception may be taken is a long-drawn out realistic conflagration. The incident is too prolonged, and would have been more effective if it had been shortened

and simplified.’<sup>44</sup> As many other reviews praised precisely the same ‘remarkable’ fire scene as one of the high points of the film, this does not seem to have been a common objection to it. More typically, in March 1913, the *Singleton Argus* dubbed *Father* ‘The Magnificent Fire Film. The Boom of All Booms.’<sup>45</sup>

None of the other Italian films on Mason’s list enjoyed quite the same level of prestige as *Father*, but they were all widely screened and frequently discussed in local newspapers. *The Lion Tamer’s Revenge* is mentioned more than 200 times and *The Ship of Lions* nearly 250, suggesting that audiences were very keen on the cinematic spectacle of wild animals dispensing karmic justice to villainous humans. Most of Mason’s Italian films only appear in currently digitized newspaper listings between 80 and 120 times, while a few—such as the unidentified film *Her Love Against the World* attributed to Cines—are rarely mentioned. Still, their popularity seems to have been enough that Mason followed up with other Italian features, particularly ones featuring large cats, such as Itala’s 4,500ft crime drama *Tigris*, starring Lidia Quaranta. Since Quaranta had not yet appeared as the title character in *Cabiria*, she enjoyed very little name recognition at this point, so advertising for *Tigris* frequently invokes Itala’s success with *Father* as a guarantee of the film’s quality. It had been originally imported by West’s in April 1913, but Mason re-released it as a Clement Mason exclusive at the King’s Theatre in Fremantle (WA) in July 1913, after which it remained in circulation until June 1915.

### A Smattering of French Films

Despite the pioneering role of French film in both the global and Australasian cinema industries, what is most striking about the nine films on Mason’s list by French makers (not including two Itala films attributed to Éclair) is their general lack of success, at least in terms of reception. Except for a re-released coloured version of Pathé’s *Faust* (which was originally produced in 1910 and is thus anachronistic in this group), none of Mason’s French productions seem to have been regarded as particularly noteworthy at the time or in subsequent film history. Mason’s inability to acquire higher-prestige French pictures is most likely related to Pathé’s and Gaumont’s direct involvement in the Australasian market, which left little product available for independent distributors. The single Gaumont film on Mason’s list, which Mason first advertised for hire in July 1912, is *The Refugee’s Casket*, a coloured print of a revolution-era drama about a faithful servant who risks her life to save her master’s hidden treasures. Only two screenings of this film are documented for Australia in digitized newspapers, and none are listed for New Zealand.

Film d’Art’s *The Last Will and Testament*, advertised as between 2,700 and 3,000 feet long, opened at Joseph’s Coronation Theatre in Sydney in November 1912 but seems to have circulated largely on rural circuits otherwise (except for a few Christmas screenings at the Crystal Palace in Brisbane in late December 1912), including one night at the Garden Picture Palace in Maitland (NSW) in mid-December 1912. A film by this name seems to have circulated for a period of more than eighteen months in Australasia (and only very briefly in New Zealand), but it is impossible to tell if it is in fact the same film in all cases. While ads in 1912/13 credit it to Film d’Art, it is attributed to former Gaumont director Alice Guy’s New Jersey-based Solax Studios during a week-long run at the Britannia Theatre in March 1914, then when screened at the Lyric Theatre in Nelson three months later, Nordisk is given credit for it.

Although Nordisk is also listed as the producer on Mason’s list for *A Mother’s Prayer*, which is frequently attributed in local ads to Film d’Art, it appears in fact to have been a Pathé production. It was screened in at least twenty-one different cinemas across Australia and New Zealand, beginning with C. Post Mason’s King’s Theatre in Sydney in October 1912. The plot of this melodramatic film is reported as follows:

Madame Saville, a widow with one son, receives a letter from him telling her that he has committed a crime, and that she must give him all she has to save him from dishonor and death. She complies with his request and sends him away under another name. Mr Lemaire, the public prosecutor, unaware of this, loves the widow, and hearing that she is ruined, buys her house, etc., and gives them back to her. After a while they marry and live happily; until one day the mother sees it in the paper that her boy is to be tried for murder, and that her husband is to prosecute him. The husband goes to the sessions, the wife not daring to tell him of the facts. Stricken down with fear for her son, she writes a letter to her husband asking him to save the boy. The husband receives the letter whilst making an earnest speech for the conviction of the boy. Placing his duty first the prisoner is found guilty. Returning home he tells his wife, who goes mad, but after a few days a letter comes from the son, who has retrieved his past and been a successful man. The condemned man had stolen his papers, hence the mistake. The son returns, and the mother recovers and all ends happily.<sup>46</sup>

Although it was screened by many of Mason’s usual customers, the circulation of *A Mother’s Prayer* is curiously stretched out, with nearly a year between its first screenings in Australia and New Zealand, which might indicate that Mason’s only released a single print into Australasian

circulation. After a two-night run in Sydney, the film moved on to Brisbane, where it ran successively in three different cinemas for one or two nights each, spent a few nights in Drayton (Qld) and was then screened at the Garden Picture Palace in Maitland (NSW) on 5 December 1912. An advertised screening in Perth on 14 December might have been difficult to manage with only one print in circulation, however, and while the remainder of advertised Australian screenings in New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland could be managed, a screening advertised in Dunedin, New Zealand in August 1913, between screenings in Armidale (NSW) and Cairns (Qld) would have been a challenge with a single print. In any case, at least one print of *A Mother's Prayer* crossed the Tasman Sea and opened at the People's Picture Palace in Wellington on 2 February 1914, after which it circulated efficiently through Palmerston North and Masterton before turning up in Christchurch and Nelson in March the same year.

The remainder of Mason's French offerings are five films from the Société Françaises des Films d'Éclair (Éclair). Founded in April 1907 by lawyer Charles Jourjon and cinema entrepreneur Ambroise Parnaland, Éclair grew rapidly to become the third most important French film producer, behind Pathé and Gaumont. Trying to enter the US market, despite the opposition of Edison's Motion Picture Producers' Association, Éclair opened a US studio and film lab in Fort Lee, New Jersey in 1911, but a devastating fire in 1913 shut down operations. Although Éclair continued to produce fiction films until 1929, a financial crisis in 1917 led to a change of leadership and corporate reorganization that dramatically reduced the company's representation on the global market.<sup>47</sup> Based on local newspaper mentions, Éclair may have exported as few as three dozen films to the Antipodes between 1908 and 1913, which would make the five films on Mason's list a substantial percentage of their total representation. While Éclair's *Nick Carter* detective serials had been quite popular in 1908–09, Éclair does not seem to have made the leap into multi-reel feature production as quickly as their French rivals. Building on the success of *Nick Carter*, the first multi-reel Éclair drama imported to Australia appears to have been the 3,067ft detective drama *Zigomar, King of Thieves* (aka *Zigomar the Elskin*), which opened at the King's Theatre in Sydney on 9 October 1911 and at the Colosseum in Christchurch on 27 October, remaining in circulation until April 1912 in Australia and July 1913 in New Zealand.

Mason's first verifiable Éclair import is the three-reel (2,313ft) melodrama *Au pays des ténèbres/The Great Mine Disaster*, which centres on a love triangle between Claire Lenoir and two coal miners that leads to a subterranean fight with fatal consequences. Mason's began offering it for hire in early February 1912. It opened at Joseph's Coronation Theatre in Sydney on 20 February, after which it was screened at more than a dozen suburban

cinemas in Australia over a ten-month period, including Imperial Pictures in Newcastle and the Arcadia in Maitland in March, Cook's Crystal Garden in Brisbane in October, the Garden Picture Palace in Maitland in November, and Herbert's Pictures in Newcastle in December 1912. After opening at the MacMahon's New Theatre in Wellington in September 1912, it circulated for a full year in New Zealand. Mason's followed up on this success a month later with Éclair's social-climbing drama *Rédemption/Redemption*, about a young girl who is first elevated by a nobleman's favour and then betrayed by various men, leading her to an asylum and then to a calling as a nurse, in which capacity she sacrifices her life fighting the plague. This film followed a similar route, opening at the Coronation Theatre in Sydney on 14 March and the New Theatre in Wellington on 17 July, and circulating in Australia for fifteen months and in New Zealand for twenty.

The other Éclair films on Mason's list generally maintained a similar pattern of circulation, albeit not always as successfully. *Le droit d'ainesse/The Brother's Barbarity*, possibly based on the 1883 operetta by Francis Chassaingne, was advertised in *Referee* in late October 1912 and opened at the Coronation Theatre on 7 November. It followed screenings of Film d'Art's *The Last Will and Testament* and Itala's *The Live Man's Tomb* during the first half of the week, competing against Asta Nielsen in *The Fatal Dance* at West's Olympia and Glaciarium. A few weeks later, C. Post Mason presented *The Brother's Barbarity* at the Garrick Cinema in Leichhardt, after which Cook's Pictures in Brisbane picked it up in December, following Nordisk's *The Artist's Model*. All in all, the film circulated in New South Wales and Queensland for fifteen months, followed by the occasional screening in South Australia (1914) and Tasmania (1917). In New Zealand, it ran for two nights at the New Theatre in Wellington on 12 and 13 September 1912, immediately following the Pathé historical drama *La comtesse noir/The Black Countess*, but it doesn't appear to have been screened anywhere else. The 2,200ft drama *The Mirage*, which depicts the 'sufferings of a girl who has been tempted by the glitter and glare of city life', opened at Cook's Pictures in Brisbane in November 1912 and closed with a final screening at Medlik's Pictures in Cairns thirteen months later in December 1913.<sup>48</sup>

By contrast, *Tears of Blood* (aka *Tears of Agony*), the story of a girl abandoned to the Parisian pleasure industry who reconciles with her neglectful father on her deathbed, only appears to have circulated in New South Wales and Queensland for six months, from December 1912 to March 1913. It didn't open in New Zealand until 21 May 1913, at the People's Picture Palace in Wellington, and ran until early July, when it was screened by Imperial Pictures in Nelson. Similarly, *On the Threshold of Life*, about a young man who (temporarily) loses his money and his hopes for the future

to a dishonest company manager and must work as a stevedore, ran in Australia from 2 January 1913, when it premiered at the Majestic Theatre in Melbourne, until mid-August of the same year. It was much more successful in New Zealand, however, running for two full years, from January 1912 until January 1914.

Mason's faced competition for Éclair imports, particularly for its popular detective films. Mason does not seem to have imported the four-reeler *Zigomar versus Nick Carter*, which opened at Spencer's Theatre Royal in Perth on 24 April 1912. The detective story *Tom Butler* (aka *The Adventures of Tom Butler*), about an escaped convict who has vowed revenge on the actress who sent him to prison, opened at the same theatre on 21 June, just two days after Mason's advertised the film for hire in *Referee*; local ads assured viewers that 'the fact that the film is from the factory of the makers of *Zigomar* and *Zigomar v. Nick Carter* should speak volumes for its all-round excellence'.<sup>49</sup> It then opened at Fullers' Skating Rink in Wellington on 5 July. Circulating among the many Combine-affiliated cinemas in both countries, *Tom Butler* remained in circulation in New Zealand for two years and in Australia for three, until August 1915. Its title character was frequently invoked, alongside *Zigomar*, as evidence of Éclair's ability to bring thrilling adventurers to life on screen. Similarly, the Éclair detective drama *Protéea*, featuring Josette Andriot as the eponymous elegant female government spy, also benefitted from the Combine's networks. It premiered at West's Glaciarium and Olympia in Sydney on 1 November 1913 and the People's Picture Palace in Wellington on 12 January 1914, after which it circulated in Australia until October 1914 and in New Zealand until September 1915.

### Mason's Dark Horse: German Melodramas

While many other distributors in Australasia imported Danish, Italian, and French films, Mason's list stands out for the inclusion of German films from lesser-known makers. As discussed in Chapter 7, German producers enjoyed little brand recognition in the pre-war era, though Messter Film is occasionally mentioned in ads, so their films' success relied heavily on the star power of lead actresses, such as Nielsen, Porten, and Saharet. However, the German films that Mason imported have neither a famous brand name nor a celebrity lead: two melodramas from the German company Duskes—*The Broken Sword* and *God of Vengeance*, both directed by Fritz Bernhardt—and four Deutsche Mutoskop films, *The White Domino*, *Nursing a Viper*, *Broken Chains*, and *Greed of Gold*.

In total, at least seven Duskes films were imported to Australasia between August 1912 and November 1913, at least four of which—*A*



*Woman's Wit*, *Der Flug ums Leben/The Parting of the Ways*, *Ein Mutterherz/His Mother's Son*, and *Schuldig/The Giant Circumstance*—were distributed by Pathé, which had established a joint venture with Duskes in 1912. Given West's control of Pathé's operations in Australia, it is unsurprising that each of these films premiered at Combine-affiliated theatres, including J.D. Williams's Lyric Theatre in Sydney, J.D. Williams's Melba and Britannia Theatres in Melbourne, and Spencer's Theatre Royal in Perth. Most of the films were advertised as Pathé productions. However, Mason appears to have negotiated with Duskes directly, as he promotes the Duskes brand in connection with his imported dramas, both of which preceded the Combine's imports via Pathé.

Judging by newspaper mentions, the more successful of Mason's Duskes films was the 3,118ft military-meets-circus-themed melodrama *The Broken Sword*. Starring Alfred Braun, Paul Moleska, and Willy Moree, *The Broken Sword* combines a military theme with a story of star-crossed lovers. When a young officer falls in love with a circus dancer, his father cuts him off, which forces him to earn his living as a trick motorcycle rider in the circus where she works. A jealous rival's sabotage endangers the male protagonist's life, but ultimately leads to his reconciliation with his father. Neither the production company Duskes nor any of the actors were familiar brand names, however, and the lack of access to major urban cinema palaces, such as West's or Spencer's, put the film at a disadvantage in Australia—even though it is just the kind of exciting, emotionally compelling Continental drama that had been so successful in Australasia since 1911.

Mason began advertising *The Broken Sword* for hire on 11 December 1912, five weeks after its German premiere on 2 November. It does not seem to have been screened in any major Australian cities, but did circulate through much of New South Wales, including Broken Hill, and a few places in Victoria. After five weeks of the film being promoted in Mason's weekly ad in *Referee*, it was picked up by one of his rural customers and screened as the main star picture (of three) at the reopening of the Arcadia Theatre in Maitland (NSW) on 11 January 1913. Echoing the themes of Mason's letter to the editor of the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* the week earlier, the Arcadia's new management promised to 'afford patrons an opportunity of witnessing the latest and best photo plays and other moving pictures that it is possible to procure'.<sup>50</sup> In Maitland, *The Broken Sword* ran against Sarah Bernhardt's *Queen Bess* at the Pictoria and *With Captain Scott to the South Pole* at the Garden Picture Palace.

Like many of Mason's other imports, *The Broken Sword* seems to have been particularly popular in New Zealand, where it remained very regularly in circulation from January 1913 until July 1914. Two days after its premiere in Maitland, *The Broken Sword* opened at the MacMahons' Queen's Theatre

in Auckland for a week-long run, followed by a week at their New Theatre in Wellington. Local ads praise it as 'a Phenomenal Dramatic Success', 'an astounding picture play', 'a sensational Continental drama', and 'a sublime love romance'.<sup>51</sup> From there, it circulated through several of Mason's other regular clients, such as the T.P. Electric Theatre in Masterton, but it also broke new ground, spending, for example, two full weeks on the programme at the Queen's Theatre in Christchurch, where 'public approval rages furiously around [it] as a drama out of the ordinary run of such works'.<sup>52</sup> The plot and the acting clearly appealed to audiences, who seemed to enjoy the forbidden romance and the stunt driving equally well.

To some extent, the novelty of it being a German film may have boosted its visibility, thanks no doubt in part to the year and a half that separated its release from the outbreak of war between Germany and the Dominion. In connection with its relatively long run at Fullers' Pictures in Palmerston North and King's Pictures in Whanganui, for example, *The Broken Sword* is regularly described approvingly as a German military drama, with director Fritz Bernhardt credited in ads, and praised for its hour-long length. Likewise, when screened at Fullers' Pictures in Timaru, the local paper noted, 'German productions are not often placed before the public here, but the new star *The Broken Sword* is made in Germany.'<sup>53</sup> It was screened widely across North and South Island throughout 1913, sometimes touted as 'Duskes New Regimental Scenaria', and sometimes attributed to Nordisk.<sup>54</sup> Its screening at the Leeston Town Hall near Southbridge, Canterbury was advertised as 'the first programme from the INDEPENDENT FILM FIENDS', a nickname for the Clement Mason company, which was now supplying films to Leeston directly from Melbourne.<sup>55</sup>

Yet while not screened as widely in Australia as in New Zealand, *The Broken Sword* did earn local acclaim in many smaller towns. For example, in April 1913, *The Broken Sword* was screened at the canvas-roofed Dungog Pictures (NSW) as part of the first week of the theatre's newly undertaken nightly screenings of star pictures, with a change of programme promised for each evening. An announcement in the *Dungog Chronicle* of upcoming features for the inaugural week of 7 April only lists titles for three films—*The Broken Sword* on Tuesday night, Nordisk's *His Lost Memory* on Thursday, and the Cines drama *Justice at Last* on Friday—while the other days are filled out with promises of 'magnificent star' pictures from 'the best Films Firms'.<sup>56</sup> The fact that all three of these films appear on Mason's list of 1913 imports suggests that Dungog Pictures, managed by C.H. Hill, was now Mason's client. An apology published by the cinema in January 1913 blames the poor quality of that week's pictures on a fire at J.D. Williams's Crystal Palace,

suggesting that Dungog Pictures had previously been getting its prints from International Films.

As in New Zealand, access to attractive films at reasonable prices in a timely manner was a matter of life or death for suburban and rural cinemas. During the first half of 1913, Dungog Pictures was competing with the Dungog Electric Lighting Co. Pictures, which screened films on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday nights, with a change of programme each night. However, Dungog Pictures' attempt, beginning in April 1913, at offering a nightly programme change seems to have proved unsustainable. Although each advertised film was only shown once that first week, the cinema repeated the same programme the following week, presumably to give people who missed any of the films the first time a second chance, but possibly also due to lack of affordable supply. The onset of colder weather in June 1913 prompted the proprietors of both cinemas to reduce the programme to Saturday nights only, which meant they only needed a single star film (or 'flicker') per week.

Although it consistently promised 'very attractive programmes' of 'first-class' films, Dungog Pictures only rarely advertised films by title and never with the name of a producer or actor. Yet that apparent indifference to the origin of its films is belied by the frequency with which European features appear on its programmes. Other Continental star pictures that Dungog Pictures most likely hired from Mason's in 1913 include the Itala film *Tigris* on 24 September, and the Nordisk romance *Faithful unto Death* on 29 October. Dungog Pictures' relationship with Mason's was not exclusive, however, as the cinema also featured several Continental pictures by special arrangement with West's, such as the 3,200ft Pathé detective mystery *Nick Winter et le vol de la Joconde/Nick Winter and the Stolen Favorite* on 21 October and Gaumont's *Les Apaches/In the Clutch[es] of the Paris Apaches* on 26 January 1914.

Mason's second Duskes picture, *The God of Vengeance*, seems to have been somewhat less successful than *The Broken Sword* in terms of the length and scope of its circulation. Most of the listings for *The God of Vengeance*, 'a strangely weird story of an Eastern sect, abounding in deeds prompted by superstition, by love, by hatred, and fanaticism', which Mason began advertising in December 1912, come from just eight cities, primarily in New Zealand, over a one-year period.<sup>57</sup> As might be expected, it played at some familiar venues, including the People's Picture Palace in Wellington, the King George Theatre in Auckland, the Queen's Theatre in Thames, and the T.P. Electric Theatre in Masterton. However, it did not receive nearly the same level of media attention as *The Broken Sword* or later Duskes dramas.

The other four German pictures on Mason's list, all of which he attributes to Deutsche Bioscop but which are actually Deutsche Mutoskop

productions, are rather obscure, but seem to have been relatively well received. Little circulation information is available for the last film on Mason's list—*The White Domino*, which was approved by the German censorship board in February 1912—beyond a few screenings in June 1912 at the Broadway and Coronation Theatres in Sydney, and a Clement Mason ad in *Referee* the same month. The film apparently centred on 'a military officer, a moneylender, and his wife and a governess'.<sup>58</sup> The second of these films, *Nursing a Viper*, was approved by the German censor on 27 March 1912. Like the Duskes drama *The Broken Sword*, *Nursing a Viper* does not appear to have been screened in Sydney, Melbourne, or Adelaide, but was screened in Brisbane, Perth, and Hobart, as well as in towns across Queensland, New South Wales, and in Port Pirie, South Australia over a period of eighteen months. It was particularly popular in New Zealand, playing for several nights each at venues including the Theatre Royal in Nelson—where it was advertised, in keeping with Mason's list, as a Deutsche Bioscop production—the Grand Theatre in Christchurch, the Opera House in Oamaru, MacMahon's New Theatre in Wellington, the King George Theatre in Auckland, the Queen's Theatre in Thames, and the T.P. Electric Theatre in Masterton.

Mason's third Deutsche Mutoskop import, *Greed of Gold*, is particularly difficult to track because of the many contemporary films and theatre productions that use versions of the same title. According to newspaper ads, the German film of this title 'deals with German life, illustrating robbery, treason, and the very latest methods used by the money getter'.<sup>59</sup> As far as the plot, 'one of the chief situations is that of a man guilty of murder being required, as foreman of the jury, to give his casting vote for or against the accused, who is innocent'.<sup>60</sup> However, mentions of the German film are hopelessly entangled with mentions of the Pathé drama *The Greed for Gold* that opened in Sydney and Wellington in November 1912, a live theatre production called *The Greed for Gold* that circulated throughout New Zealand in late 1912 and opened in Brisbane in June 1913, and three gold-prospecting dramas from Lubin, Essanay, and Kalem, respectively.

The German *Greed of Gold* was verifiably screened at the Theatre Royal in Nelson in October 1912 and MacMahon's Queen's Theatre in Auckland in November 1912, although the title is rendered incorrectly in local ads. In Nelson, the local reviewer was enthusiastic about the film's 'excellent stage appointments, and clever acting by some of the world's noted picture artists', while the Auckland reviewer praised the acting, story, and the film's extended length, but was rather critical of the quality of the cinematography:

A change of programme was made at the Queen's Theatre yesterday, and the fine series of pictures drew big houses all through the day and evening. The 'star' film is 'The Greed for Gold,' one of those lengthy stories which have lately become so popular in picture theatres. The story is highly sensational, but the acting is consistently good ... The film is produced by a German company, and the scenery and methods are very refreshing after the usual type of melodramatic film. The photography, perhaps, is not as clearly defined as in some of the American pictures, but the film is on the whole a very good one.<sup>61</sup>

One other likely screening took place at Tait's Pictures in the Royal Princess Theatre in Bendigo (Vic) in mid-November 1912, but the lack of detailed information in most newspaper listings makes it impossible to determine precisely how long or how far this film circulated in the Antipodes.

By contrast, the Deutsche Mutoskop drama *Broken Chains* is easily traceable, with its more unique name. It was very successful in both Australia and New Zealand, with a run of more than a year involving dozens of screenings, including a week at each of the MacMahons' theatres in Wellington and Auckland. The plot deals with a married doctor who falls in love with an injured dancer, abandoning his wife and child. Forced to find a means of supporting herself, the wife records a song that becomes a hit. When her husband hears it on the radio, he is struck by remorse and returns to ask his wife's forgiveness. Yet while the theme of a straying husband is a common one, reviewers felt that the resolution of this film was 'sufficiently removed from the conventional way, common to melodrama, that the situation may be justly said to be "highly dramatic"'.<sup>62</sup> After the Clement Mason Cinematograph Company advertised it in *Referee* as a 3,000ft 'Exclusive D. Vitascope' film on 26 June 1912, *Broken Chains* opened at West's Princess and Olympia cinemas in Sydney on 30 June, attracting sold-out crowds. During the thirteen months it circulated in the Antipodes, it was occasionally attributed to Nordisk and to the non-existent company 'Dutch Bioscope', but the fact that the film was provided by Clement Mason, 'a Melbourne company which deals only in the very best films', is frequently noted, particularly by rural exhibitors, such as Mr Ford of the Royal Hall in Mount Alexander, Victoria, where *Broken Chains* was screened in March 1913.<sup>63</sup>



As this survey of the films from Mason's January 1913 list illustrates, Mason's strategy of providing independent theatres with the newest European films was clearly a necessary and effective one that allowed its clients to

compete with larger chains—a challenge that became increasingly acute after the amalgamation of distribution in first Australia and then New Zealand. This freedom of choice resonated with the exhibitors who chose to have Mason's supply their films. In its May 1913 ad for *God of Vengeance*, for example, the People's Picture Palace describes itself as 'THE ONLY INDEPENDENT PICTURE SHOW IN TOWN. FOLLOW THE CROWDS!'<sup>64</sup> With Mason's help, the refusal to affiliate with the Combine does not seem to have immediately impaired this particular cinema's access to high-quality European films.

Mason's strategy of relying heavily on Continental films worked well in the pre-war years, when such films were ubiquitous in Australasia. During the same two weeks as the People's Picture Palace screened *God of Vengeance* and Nordisk's *In the Hour of Need*, two of its main Wellington competitors—Fullers' His Majesty's Theatre and West's King's Theatre—were also screening long European features. These included Éclair's crime drama *Zigomar, peau d'anguille/Zigomar's Adventures* followed by the Pathé/SCAGL literary adaptation *Le roman d'un jeune homme pauvre/Poverty's Thrall* at the former, while the latter showed the Gaumont detective film *L'évasion de forçat de Croze/The Escape of the White Glove Gang* (aka *The Escape of the Convict de Cruze*) followed the next week by the Nordisk feature *A Court Intrigue*. As the supply of Continental films dwindled over the course of the war, however, they were replaced by American pictures, which changed the cinema landscape of Australasia fundamentally, necessitating an entirely new strategy for post-war efforts to import European features to the Antipodes.

Though fighting an uphill battle against the Combine, Mason persisted well into the war years, focusing his efforts on places where the Combine was less entrenched, including Western Australia and New Zealand. As a representative example, Len Davis, lessee of the King's Theatre in Fremantle (WA) was a steady customer, screening *Father*, *Tigris*, and *Her Love Against the World* in rapid succession in March 1913 and publicly crediting Mason's for exclusive access to these pictures. After lamenting 'an absolute shortage of a good film exchange in this state', a September 1915 article in the Perth *Sunday Times* assured readers that Mason's Cinematograph Exchange, which has 'grown to a tremendous concern in the last five years', is poised to correct this deficiency.<sup>65</sup> In late 1916, Mason's also re-entered the exhibition business in Australia, taking out a long lease on the Shaftesbury Theatre in Perth.<sup>66</sup> Credited with knowing 'the Australian public's demand to a degree', Mason apparently engaged both a British buyer and a local manager to ensure that Western Australian cinemas could get the films they needed.<sup>67</sup> However, these films were now largely American, though the Perth *Sunday Times* did note, in December

1916, that 'the Clement Mason films include the Nordick [*sic*] than which there are no more realistic picture ribbons in the world of motion photography'.<sup>68</sup> By way of example, the opening night of Mason's lease at the Shaftesbury Theatre featured the American picture *The Miracle of Life*, an anti-abortion drama starring Margarita Fischer and Joseph Singleton, supported by a Swedish Biograph comedy, *Ships that Meet*, directed by Victor Sjöström and starring Lili Bech.<sup>69</sup>

In New Zealand, Mason's continued to consolidate its position as a competitor to Australasian Films, particularly after Fuller-Hayward's allied with the Combine, but was hampered by the economic instability of many of the independent exhibitors it relied upon. In August 1914, Clement Mason Cinematograph Co. Ltd purchased the assets of the Independent Film Service in New Zealand from Charles Ernest Hickey, Marshall John Donnelly, Caroline Margaret M'Grath, and George Adolphus Adams of Wellington.<sup>70</sup> While keeping the company headquarters in Sydney, Mason's also opened a new office at 12 Panama Street in Wellington in December 1914. Both Clement and his son Cecil visited New Zealand periodically to ensure the smooth operation of their business, much of which seemed to involve court cases against delinquent exhibitors. One such was the Alhambra Theatre in Auckland, which had screened Nordisk's melodrama *When Love Dies* for a week in August 1914, but still owed Mason's £70 a year later. Similarly, H. McLean (presumably of McLean's Pictures in Inangahua) was court-ordered to pay Mason's £32 12s 3d in August 1915 (an amount that was later reduced almost by half and permitted to be paid in weekly instalments of £3), while the bankruptcy of Peter Thomas Falvey, picture theatre proprietor in Nelson, saddled Mason with £94 in unsecured debt.<sup>71</sup> Given the precarity of the exhibition business, Mason was constantly looking for new partners and gauging the most sensible markets in which to invest time and energy. During a month-long stay in Wellington in April 1915, Mason sold his interests in the New Zealand market to the Co-operative Film Service, comprised of stakeholders J.H. Lawrence, C.E. Stevens, Dominion Picture Theatres, Co. Ltd, and Grand Theatre and Picture Co., and ceased operations there.<sup>72</sup>

With the dramatic decrease in films available from European producers, however, and the increasing involvement of American producers in the Australasian markets, Mason had trouble maintaining his success, despite every effort. He continued his long-held habit of shopping for films in England, returning from his last trip on 13 June 1916, and acquired new intellectual and emotional resources when, on 24 July, a little more than a month after his return, he married the British 'spinster' Mary Norton (1877–1951), who had likely worked as a clerk in his Sydney office, in



Figure 8.5 Photograph of Clement George Mason and his second wife Mary Norton, c.1916. Private collection



Holy Trinity Church in Sydney.<sup>73</sup> At the time of their wedding, Clement Mason was forty-four years old and Mary Norton's age was listed as thirty-three. As Mrs. Clement Mason, Mary would go on to make her own mark in the Australian film industry, but she was not able to save her new husband's business. After nearly twenty energetic years in the cinema industry, which had changed almost beyond recognition in that time, Mason could no longer keep up with his competitors; it was decided at an extraordinary general stockholders' meeting in late 1916 to liquidate his company.<sup>74</sup>

While the Perth newspaper *Truth* had confidence in the company's future, reporting in January 1917 that 'the Clement Mason people continue to chortle, "Are we downhearted, No!"', Clement Mason himself must have found these reverses painful.<sup>75</sup> However, he did not live to see the collapse of his life's work, as he died of hepatic cirrhosis and heart failure on 1 June 1917 at the Times Private Hospital, in Randwick, near Sydney. He died intestate, leaving an estate of just £145 10s 4d, a pitifully small amount compared to both the massive profits he was making in 1912 and the large estates (£30,000–£60,000) his competitors Cosens Spencer and T.J. West left behind at their deaths. Yet his legacy to the regional film industry far surpassed his financial assets, not least because his widow Mary and his adult son Cecil would go on to play prominent roles in the post-World War I cinema industry in Australasia. Mary in particular carried on Clement Mason's advocacy for independent film distribution and promotion of innovative, artistic European silent films in a new era of American film dominance.

## Notes

- 1 *Referee* (Sydney), 12 March 1912, 16; *Referee* (Sydney), 21 February 1912, 1; *Referee* (Sydney), 26 June 1912, 16.
- 2 Clement Mason, 'Copy of Letter Posted to Sydney *Daily Telegraph*', 9 January 1913, State Library of South Australia, 1.
- 3 Mason, 'Letter to Sydney *Daily Telegraph*', 1.
- 4 Mason, 'Letter to Sydney *Daily Telegraph*', 2.
- 5 'Circular from the Clement Mason Cine Co. Ltd. to Picture Showmen dated 10 January 1913', State Library of South Australia, 1.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 *Ibid.*, 1–2.
- 8 'The Film Amalgamation. Meeting of Picture Showmen', *Co-operator* (Sydney), 6 February 1913, 3.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 'Film Facts and Fancies', *Sun* (Sydney), 9 June 1912, 24.
- 13 *Sun* (Sydney), 3 November 1912, 3.
- 14 'Joseph's Coronation Theatre', *Sun* (Sydney), 3 November 1912, 3.

- 15 'Garden Picture Palace', *Maitland Daily Mercury* (NSW), 6 January 1913, 4.
- 16 'Amusements: Arcadia', *Maitland Daily Mercury* (NSW), 2 December 1912, 4.
- 17 'Arcadia—To-Night', *Maitland Daily Mercury* (NSW), 12 February 1913, 2.
- 18 'Garden Picture Palace', *Maitland Daily Mercury* (NSW), 29 March 1913, 2.
- 19 Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 98.
- 20 'Secret Societies and Terrorism', *Wairarapa Daily Times* (Masterton, NZ), 13 July 1911, 4.
- 21 'Garden Picture Palace', *Maitland Daily Mercury* (NSW), 23 January 1913, 4.
- 22 The People's Picture Palace vaulted into the national spotlight in July 1915, when socialist journalist Harry Holland used the cinema as the venue for an impassioned speech in defence of Alice Parkinson, who had shot and killed Bert West in Napier, after he had impregnated and abandoned her. She had been sentenced to life imprisonment and hard labour at Christchurch's Addington Prison, but Holland and the Social Democratic Party felt that her case exemplified the destructive sexual double standard for men and women. In his speech at the PPP, Holland pointed out that, while both partners in an extramarital relationship were equally to blame, 'it is always the woman who pays—who bears the full weight of the burden of shame and suffering that a mock-moral—or rather, immoral—society imposes for the "sin" of parenthood under unorthodox circumstances'. Released on parole in 1921, Parkinson later remarried and had a family. Carol Markwell, *Alice, What Have You Done!: The Case of Alice May Parkinson* (Wellington: Steele Roberts, 2014), 53.
- 23 *Evening Post* (Wellington), 19 April 1913, 6.
- 24 'Cook's Pictures', *Daily Standard* (Brisbane), 10 February 1913, 2.
- 25 *Barrier Miner* (Broken Hill, NSW), 8 May 1913, 5.
- 26 *New Zealand Times* (Wellington), 7 March 1913, 3.
- 27 'Amusements', *Thames Star* (NZ), 10 May 1913, 5.
- 28 *New Zealand Official Yearbook*, 1913, [https://www3.stats.govt.nz/New\\_Zealand\\_Official\\_Yearbooks/1913/NZOYB\\_1913.html#idsect2\\_1\\_27435](https://www3.stats.govt.nz/New_Zealand_Official_Yearbooks/1913/NZOYB_1913.html#idsect2_1_27435) [accessed 18 January 2021].
- 29 'Amusements', *Thames Star* (NZ), 12 May 1913, 1.
- 30 'Wanted Known', *Thames Star* (NZ), 14 May 1913, 1.
- 31 'Picture Business', *Dominion* (Wellington), 30 June 1913, 4.
- 32 'Letter to the Editor: Picture Business', *Dominion* (Wellington), 1 July 1913, 9.
- 33 'Amusements', *Thames Star* (NZ), 3 July 1913, 1.
- 34 'Amusements', *Wanganui Herald* (NZ), 15 October 1914, 1.
- 35 *Singleton Argus* (NSW), 22 March 1913, 5.
- 36 'Amusements', *Auckland Star*, 10 March 1913, 12.
- 37 *Rangitikei Times and Manawatu Argus* (Marton, NZ), 8 October 1914, 1.
- 38 'Opera House', *Manawatu Times* (Palmerston North, NZ), 22 April 1914, 1.
- 39 'Entertainments', *Manawatu Times* (Palmerston North, NZ), 22 April 1914, 5.
- 40 'Crystal Palace', *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 22 February 1913, 11.
- 41 'Amusements', *Darling Downs Gazette* (Qld), 30 April 1913, 7.
- 42 'Town Hall, Boulder', *Kalgoorlie Miner* (WA), 21 June 1913, 6.
- 43 'Amusements', *Lyttelton Times* (NZ), 25 March 1913, 8.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 'Singleton Pictures', *Singleton Argus* (Singleton, NSW), 22 March 1913, 5.
- 46 *Barrier Miner* (Broken Hill, NSW), 8 May 1913, 5.
- 47 'Éclair: History and Milestones', <https://eclair.digital/en/history-milestones> [accessed 22 January 2021].

- 48 'Medlik's Pictures', *Cairns Post* (Queensland), 3 December 1913, 4.
- 49 'Beyond the Footlights', *Daily News* (Perth), 21 June 1912, 4.
- 50 'Arcadia', *Maitland Daily Mercury* (NSW), 9 January 1913, 7.
- 51 See ads in the *New Zealand Herald*, *Auckland Star*, *New Zealand Times*, *Dominion*, and *Evening Post* between 13 and 22 January 1913.
- 52 *NZ Truth* (Wellington), 15 February 1913, 7.
- 53 *Timaru Herald* (NZ), 11 March 1913, 7.
- 54 *Stratford Evening Post* (NZ), 6 May 1913, 1.
- 55 *Ellesmere Guardian* (Southbridge, NZ), 23 August 1913, 2 and 27 August 1913, 3.
- 56 'Dungog Pictures', *Dungog Chronicle: Durham and Gloucester Advertiser* (NSW), 4 April 1913, 9.
- 57 *Evening Post* (Wellington), 10 May 1913, 6.
- 58 'Film Facts and Fancies', *Sun* (Sydney), 9 June 1912, 24.
- 59 'Theatre Royal Permanent Pictures', *Colonist* (Nelson, NZ), 9 October 1912, 7.
- 60 'Queen's Theatre', *New Zealand Herald* (Auckland), 8 November 1912, 5.
- 61 'Theatre Royal Permanent Pictures', *Colonist* (Nelson, NZ), 9 October 1912, 7; 'Queen's Theatre', *New Zealand Herald* (Auckland), 8 November 1912, 5.
- 62 'Entertainments. The New Theatre', *Dominion* (Wellington), 14 September 1912, 6.
- 63 'Entertainments. Royal Hall', *Mount Alexander Mail* (Victoria), 8 March 1913, 2.
- 64 *Evening Post* (Wellington), 10 May 1913, 6.
- 65 'Mason's Films', *Sunday Times* (Perth), 5 September 1915, 12.
- 66 'Entertainments', *West Australian* (Perth), 8 November 1916, 8.
- 67 'Mason's Films', *Sunday Times* (Perth), 5 September 1915, 12.
- 68 'Seen on the Screen', *Sunday Times* (Perth), 31 December 1916, 14.
- 69 'Entertainments', *West Australian* (Perth), 8 November 1916, 8.
- 70 *Evening Post* (Wellington), 31 August 1914, 1.
- 71 'Magistrate's Court', *Dominion* (Wellington), 4 August 1915, 11; 'Magistrate's Court', *New Zealand Times* (Wellington), 6 August 1915, 9; 'Grey Magistrate's Court', *Greymouth Evening Star* (NZ), 14 February 1916, 2.
- 72 'Personalia', *New Zealand Times* (Wellington), 14 April 1915, 3; 'Ships and Shipping', *New Zealand Times* (Wellington), 13 May 1915, 2; 'Private Companies', *New Zealand Times* (Wellington), 10 July 1915, 2; 'Companies-Foreign-Clement Mason Cinematography', letter dated 8 October 1915 from James McIntosh, Attorney for the Company, to the Commissioner of Stamps, informing him that Clement Mason Cinematograph Company sold out its interests to the Cooperative Film Service on 17 April 1915 and was no longer trading in NZ, Archives New Zealand, Wellington.
- 73 Clement George Mason and Mary Norton, Marriage Certificate 1939, Sydney, New South Wales, 24 July 1916.
- 74 'Law Report', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 January 1918, 4.
- 75 'The Drop-Scene', *Truth* (Perth), 6 January 1917, 3.



*Part III*

European Art Cinema in Competition with  
Hollywood



## ‘Films as Foreign Offices’

### Mason Super Films’ Promotion of Swedish and Italian Art Film in Interwar Australasia

Although only a few years separated the last European films imported during World War I and the first ones imported in the interwar period, the Australasian film industry and cinema landscape had already transformed themselves significantly. One major factor was the introduction of national censorship boards in both New Zealand (in 1916) and Australia (in 1917).<sup>1</sup> Prior to this, localized censorship had been haphazard and inconsistent, relying on the judgement of an array of people as diverse as police chiefs, the British censorship board in London (formed in 1912), and Henry Hayward’s sister Mary.<sup>2</sup>

While it systematized the process of evaluating films for the consumption of the Australasian public, the introduction of a centralized censor’s office also made it riskier for importers to bring in films that might not be approved and advantaged large American producers, thereby homogenizing film imports even further. The Cinematograph Film Censorship Act of 1916 established a Wellington-based national censor’s office in mid-September, appointing lawyer William Jolliffe as the first holder of this position—a job he held until his death in 1927.<sup>3</sup> In that almost eleven-year period, his office examined nearly 50,000,000 feet of silent film, of which 325 films were rejected outright and 1,781 were approved after excisions were made.<sup>4</sup> While Jolliffe tended to be quite broad-minded, subjecting all films to the approval of a single person could not help but affect the cinema landscape. Within a few months of Jolliffe’s appointment, the Wellington *Evening Post* reported a ‘decided change in the tone of the films being shown’, but reserved judgement on ‘whether that change is in the direction of good or otherwise’.<sup>5</sup>

Centralized film censorship aggravated members of the cinema industry for various reasons. Auckland-based distributors Dominion Picture Theatres, Fraser Film, and Universal Film Supply Co. complained about the time and expense involved in submitting films to Wellington for review, while Henry Hayward, of New Zealand Picture Supplies, was concerned about the loss of diversity in the national cinema market, which centralized censorship aggravated. He explained, in January 1917:

From Germany no pictures were coming—for obvious reasons—very few were sent from England, supplies from France and Italy were stopped, and the contribution by Denmark was much reduced ... The exchanges, then, were almost wholly dependent upon America for film supplies. They could not pick and choose. They had to take what was on the market ... It could well be understood that all the subjects available for America were not suitable for New Zealand.<sup>6</sup>

This benefitted American producers, who could ship films in bulk, but New Zealand audiences, who were, in Hayward's view, becoming 'less singular, less insular, and ... more like the Continental people in our way of looking at sex', had to settle for whatever depictions of the world American studios produced for their domestic audiences. Hayward himself looked forward to the return of international competition after the war and the diversity it would bring.

Unfortunately, that rebalancing never happened. The American film industry's embrace of multi-reel features after 1913 and preferential treatment by Australasian governments during the war ensured that American films could fill the gaps left by the reduction in British and Continental films, in addition to inhibiting a possible resurgence of the domestic Australian film industry. Weakened by material and personnel shortages, as well as physical damage to facilities, British, French, and Danish producers had fewer films to export immediately after the war, while political and economic tensions limited German film imports, despite the wartime growth of the German film industry. Even if large quantities of European films had been available, most exhibitors were bound by restrictive block-booking contracts with American producers.

Yet despite these obstacles, some European films did make their way back to Antipodean screens in the interwar period. The dramatically different market conditions meant that there could be no return to the pre-war era, when films from all over Europe, Britain, and the USA were presented cheek by jowl, with relatively little attention paid to where they came from or the significance of their national origins. Instead, the overwhelming dominance of American films created a much more homogenous cinema landscape in Australasia in the immediate post-war era than before the



war, which made European films stand out for their rarity and difference from the American norm.

Given the national polarization caused by the war, the kind of cross-cultural contact that film could facilitate was more important than ever. Walter Wanger, who would become Paramount’s general production manager within a few years, defended this view in the London *Daily Mail* in December 1921, explaining,

*Nations have never known each other as thoroughly as they are now coming to know each other by means of the moving picture ... Heretofore knowledge has been the possession of the few and the Foreign Office; but henceforth the Foreign Offices of the world will be the picture houses of the world. For they offer the best means of producing greater world knowledge, world acquaintanceship, and world peace.<sup>7</sup>*

For the cinema to facilitate world acquaintanceship, it needs access to films from many different countries. Such internationalism contributed, in Patrice Petro’s view, to forging a ‘deeply cosmopolitan cultural imaginary’ in the interwar years, which provided an opportunity for ‘thinking both within and beyond nationalism and for sustaining multiple and flexible attachments to more than one community’ that would become even more important in the Antipodes after World War II, with the flood of immigrants it occasioned.<sup>8</sup>

With the Combine and American companies dominating the Australasian cinema industry so completely, it took a particularly courageous type of person to compete with them. A few independent distributors took the risk, promoting films from Great Britain, Sweden, Denmark, and Italy, whose film industries had begun to bounce back from the war and whose products were not affected by post-war trade restrictions. Some of these distributors and the exhibitors they worked with were motivated by a desire to push back against American dominance, if only to boost the British film industry, while others sought a niche market for artistically ambitious Continental films. In the immediate post-war period, the most prominent of such intrepid entrepreneurs were Sydney-based Mason Super Films, run by Mary Norton Mason, and the Wellington-based British and Continental Feature Company (B&C). While these distributors’ economic success was limited, constrained by scarcity of product, import restrictions, and difficulty finding exhibitors, the cultural and artistic significance of these immediate post-war Continental film imports was nevertheless a crucial factor in the establishment of the association between European film and art as a counterweight to the mass-produced American cinema fare—an association that continues to inform public discourse.

## American Popular Films versus European Art Films

With its robust network of cinema houses, long-standing tradition of cinema attendance, and stable economic climate, Australasia was a particularly attractive target for American producers. As Horace T. Clarke informed American distributors in *Moving Picture World* in October 1918,

Australia holds the unique position of paying more per capita for amusement than any other country in the world, as well as paying proportionally more for her film. American pictures are very popular, and undoubtedly owe this position to the great amount of American magazines and literature read by the Australian people ... Still greater developments are to be expected in Australia, as the laboring classes receive very high wages for few hours' work, giving time, means, and inclination for amusements and sports of all kinds. In New Zealand, the business has shown a steady growth during the past year. In spite of the fact that she has contributed to the war more per capita in men and money than any other part of the British Empire she has kept abreast of the times in the cinematographic realm.<sup>9</sup>

Clarke was certainly correct in his assessment that Australasians were eager cinemagoers. In 1920, for example, average weekly cinema attendance in Australia was estimated to be slightly over one million, distributed across 808 cinemas, while those numbers jumped to 2.25 million at 1,250 cinemas by the late 1920s.<sup>10</sup> High wages, strong habits of cinema attendance, and relatively expensive admission prices meant that American companies could charge more for their films in Australia and New Zealand than in other markets, a situation made even sweeter by the lack of strong domestic competition in production.

During the war, a new generation of vertically integrated American film producers had capitalized on the absence of their European competitors and the long period of US neutrality in the war to seize control of the global cinema market, starting with Australasia. Kristin Thompson explains,

Few foreign markets succumbed so thoroughly to the American film during the Great War as did Australia and New Zealand. While the American share of the British market reached a maximum of about 90%, by the [19]20s in Australasia the estimate invariably given was 95% ... Indeed, once the War began, Australasia was one of the first markets to which American films shipped directly. Along with

South America, it was a key market for gaining and maintaining the American hegemony.<sup>11</sup>

As a result of this rapid, focused expansion of American films' market share, the proportion of imported French films in Australasian cinemas (measured by title, not number of prints) plummeted from 18% in 1913 to 1.2% in 1922, Italian films from 3% to less than 0.5%, and British films from 23.6% to 3.4%.<sup>12</sup> In 1925, 674 of the 721 films imported to Australia were American.<sup>13</sup>

Although Australasian Films, the distribution arm of the Combine, was eager to continue handling the distribution of American films, vertically integrated American production houses hoping to control rival studios' access to Antipodean cinema audiences began involving themselves directly in local markets in the mid-1910s. Paramount led the way in the American conquest of the Australasian market, as Thornton Fisher's

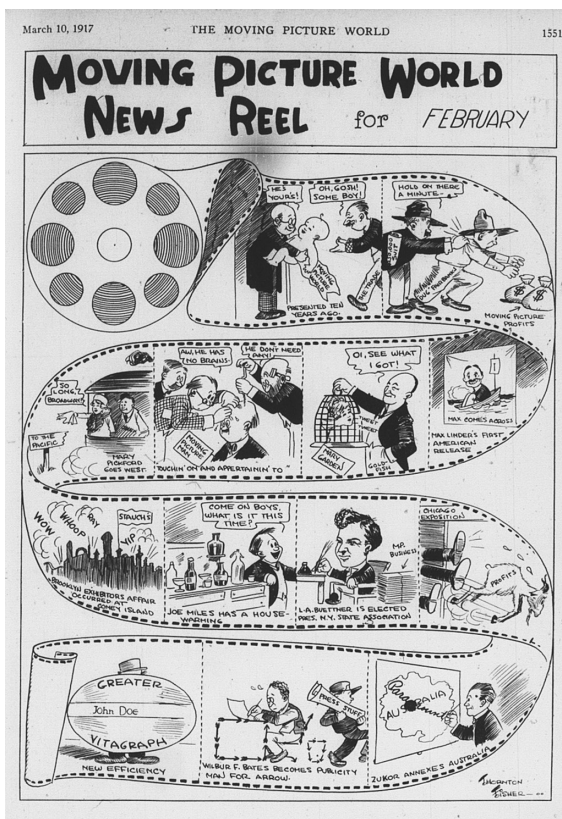


Figure 9.1 Thornton Fisher cartoon of Paramount's Zukor annexing Australia in *Moving Picture World*, 10 March 1917, p. 1551

cartoon in the 10 March 1917 issue of *Moving Picture World* illustrates, by insisting on the practice of block booking, which required exhibitors to buy an entire group of films from a single studio, with some desirable A-list films bundled with several inferior B-list ones. This practice guaranteed exhibitors a steady stream of films, but it prevented them from selecting individual films from different studios as they had before the war, generally via Australasian Films and independent distributors like Clement Mason rather than directly from producers. Block-booking contracts also often prohibited exhibitors from showing films made by other studios at all, which crippled the domestic film industry even further. When these pre-booked films were pre-sold while still in production, marketed only by title, director, star, and/or plot, it was known as blind booking. T.J. West's purchase of the planned Asta Nielsen series films in the early 1910s (see Chapter 7) was a kind of blind booking, but on a much more limited scale than was practised in the 1920s. Although block booking was outlawed in Denmark and England in the 1920s (as well as in France in 1934 and the USA in 1948), it was the norm in interwar Australasia.<sup>14</sup>

Paramount went to considerable effort to enhance its credibility as an Australian company, though it remained oriented on serving American business interests and supplying almost exclusively American films. The Paramount Service of Australia was already a known exchange when Paramount set up a new company in Sydney in 1912. It was called Australian Feature Films Ltd, but this misleading name obscured the fact that only 292 of its 10,000 shares were held in Australia.<sup>15</sup> Its focus was always on the promotion of not only American films and the norms they conveyed, but also an American way of watching films. In 1914, another Paramount company, Biblical Biograph, opened an Australian office, and most of the other 'majors', including Fox Films, First National, and Metro-Goldwyn, soon followed Paramount's example. Beginning in 1921, the Paramount offices in Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide not only sent their staff to the USA for training, but the company also began producing a house magazine, the *Exhibitor*, of the type already common in the USA, through which Paramount assiduously cultivated the popularity of particular stars. In 1926, these American companies formed the Motion Picture Distributors' Association of Australia (MPDA), which they allowed Australasian Films to join but not lead, with the result that their control of the Australian distribution and exhibition market was now almost absolute, while local productions were forced to compete on a very uneven playing field.

This fundamental (and permanent) shift in the national origins of the films shown in Australasian cinemas, from the diverse array of Australian, American, British, and Continental films available before the war to

nearly exclusively American programming, had the effect of making the national origin of any non-American film screened in the Antipodes much more significant to viewers. Rather paradoxically, the preponderance of American films made European films more visible, if only because non-American films had become such a novelty. In a reversal of the pre-war situation, the array of films available to Australasian cinemagoers was determined primarily by national origin (American) rather than on the merits of artistry or story, making for much more homogenous programming but also heightening the belief in nationally distinctive film-making. The idea of national film cultures developed in part in response to American market domination; as Victoria de Grazia explains, ‘From the 1920s, European policymakers, intellectuals, and party leaders sought to define what was “national” about popular culture and to distinguish how European cultural traditions differed from American models in terms of their relationship to the market, the political system, and the forming of social consensus.’<sup>16</sup> Amid the flood of commercially successful but often artistically generic American films, the few European films, which tended to be the most expensive and most innovative produced by their respective national industries, were perceived as artistically superior and socially elite.

While the term ‘art-house cinema’ has specific historical and cultural connotations, the idea that European films were especially artistic established itself firmly already in the silent period. Barbara Wilinsky locates the beginnings of art-house cinema in the USA to the immediate post-World War II period, when ‘the interaction of social factors such as the cold war, the growing and conflicted youth culture, and the rising popularity of television with the shifting economics of U.S. society impacted the shape and meaning of filmgoing and art film-going’, but, on a more conceptual level, she argues, ‘art cinema can be seen as an alternative [to mainstream films] that allowed art film-goers to distinguish themselves from “ordinary” filmgoers. Art houses offered an image of a more intellectual filmgoing experience. Attached to this image were notions of high culture, art, and prestige.’<sup>17</sup> Similarly, David Andrews defines ‘art house cinema’ as a ‘subcultural aggregate’, a concept that allows people to organize art cinema according to its ‘basic sociological utility, [namely] its aspirational, high-art function’.<sup>18</sup> Given the rapid increase in numbers of first-run art houses in the 1950s and 1960s, it makes sense to talk about the post-World War II period as the birth of art-house cinema as an institution in the USA, but the notion of European films as more exclusive and sophisticated than American films became a common trope in the Antipodes at least as far back as the early 1920s.

This distinction between art films and popular films and its implications for cinemagoers were very clear to contemporary film-makers and

critics. In an article in *Theatre Magazine* on 1 May 1915, the distinguished Australian author Henry Fletcher encouraged Australian film-makers to use European models to produce more high-quality, innovative Australian films to revitalize the domestic film industry. He predicted,

I say with confidence that within a short time we could produce better dramatic films here than those sent us from U.S.A. In construction these are usually wretched and depend for success on a star actor or actress and good photography. The Yank cannot write drama—only melodrama—for stage, book, or film, He is not built that way. If we are not up to the French standard, we are better in Australia—and probably more emotional and naturally artistic—than other British people.<sup>19</sup>

Fletcher's plea went unheard, however, and the Australian film industry continued to languish.

Instead, American film-makers filled the gap left by European films to meet consumer demand with vast quantities of cheap, entertaining films that intersected with audience desires. De Grazia notes,

Beyond appealing images of consumer abundance, [American films] presented novel and attractive social identities to the increasingly socially mixed publics of interwar Europe—thus the companionate couple, the tough working girl, the hero-entrepreneur. American movies also offered practical lessons about fashion, makeup, and courtship, as well as the 'art of the artistic embrace'—all useful skills in societies in which women were going out more and in which social mores were undergoing rapid change.<sup>20</sup>

Going to the movies was thus more than just entertainment—it offered an education in how people looked, dressed, and acted—in America. European films modeled different options for not just cinematography, but also fashion, behavior, gender roles, and identity constructions that many Antipodean consumers found attractive or at least intriguing.

### Tackling Goliath: Mason Super Films

The most effective promoter of Continental films in Australasia in the immediate post-war period was Mason Super Films, a distribution company run by 'Mrs Clement Mason', the widow of distributor Clement Mason, who had waged such a fierce battle against the Combine in 1913 (see Chapter 8). Husband and wife had worked together as independent distributors and as agents for the American production house Essanay during the war. Upon Clement Mason's death in June 1917, less than a year after their wedding, Mary

Norton Mason picked up the threads of the business, in the face of opposition from his estate. She would become the single most important distributor of Continental films in Australia in the immediate post-war period, making dozens of Swedish and Italian films accessible to Antipodean audiences.

Some discrepancies muddle the details of Mary's life. Born on 1 January 1877 to John Norton and Susannah Burton in Thornaby, Yorkshire, England, Mary immigrated to Queensland with her parents in February 1879, with her age at departure listed as one year. Yet, on Clement and Mary's marriage certificate in 1916, Mary's age is given as 33, which would require her birth year to be 1883, while her death certificate in 1951 identifies her as 78 years old, thus born in 1873. It is not clear where these discrepancies originated, either as bureaucratic error or a deliberate attempt on Mary's part to adjust her age of record to suit the circumstances of her wedding. Her occupation is listed on her marriage certificate as clerk and her father's as gentleman, though her death certificate lists his profession



Figure 9.2 Photograph of Mary Norton Mason in *The Lone Hand*, 1 October 1918, p. 490

as cement maker. An article in *Theatre Magazine* in April 1920 makes reference to Mrs Mason's seventeen years in the film trade, which suggests she had been involved in the cinema industry in some way since 1903, when she when she would have been either twenty, twenty-five, or thirty years old, depending on which birth year is correct,<sup>21</sup> but it is not clear what Mary's business experience prior to her marriage consisted of or for whom she had worked. It is possible that the private relationship between Mary and Clement Mason had developed out of a professional association; perhaps she had worked for the Clement Mason Cinematograph Co.

In any case, when Clement Mason died, his business was in ruins, but he left Mary a tiny cash legacy and his name. She decided to use both to start her own film distribution business, together with a Sydney plumber named Robert Arthur Haynes, to whom her husband owed £39 at the time of his death.<sup>22</sup> Mary Mason initially called her company 'Clement Mason Super Films', but this proved to be legally problematic. At extraordinary meetings of the general board in November and December 1916, the Clement Mason Cinematograph Company had voted to voluntarily liquidate the company, with the stated intent of reorganizing 'for a tougher tilt at its rivals', but Clement Mason's death altered those plans.<sup>23</sup> Throughout September and October 1917, Clement Mason Super Films gave public notice that it would be handling the Australasian distribution of all Essanay pictures, 'in addition to the best of the world's open market Super productions', as of November 1917, but within a few months, Mary Mason was served with a legal injunction to refrain from using her husband's company's name or any 'of which the words "Clement Mason" formed a part'.<sup>24</sup> Lawyers for the plaintiff argued that Clement Mason had, back in January 1911,

agreed to sell to Robert Hugh Cook [as a trustee of his newly formed company] the goodwill of the business of cinematograph film merchants and importers, which they had been carrying on in Sydney and elsewhere ... with the right to use the words 'Late Clement Mason Trading Company,' or any other words indicating that the business was being carried on in succession to the firm.

They alleged that Mary Mason's attempts to carry on 'the business of importers, vendors, and hirers of films, machines, and accessories' as 'Clement Mason Super Films' was 'calculated to deceive and induce members of the public to believe that their business was that of the plaintiffs'.<sup>25</sup> In practical terms, the main problem seems to have been that Mary Mason was receiving mail and telegrams intended for her deceased husband's company at his company's former premises on Castlereagh Street in Sydney, where her own business was housed. By dropping 'Clement' and retaining 'Mason' in



her company's name, Mary Mason seems to have found a solution acceptable to the lawyers. However, in all media mentions of her business, she is referred to exclusively as Mrs Clement Mason, never by her given name, which allowed her to retain the benefit of his name recognition.

While this legal scuffle may have caused some difficulty, Mary Mason was not deterred. Together with her twenty-five-year-old stepson Cecil Frank Mason, who had come out to Australia in 1912 to join his father's business, she established Mason Super Films in Sydney in 1918, with Cecil Mason as general manager and Harry Beacham as the company's Melbourne manager.<sup>26</sup> Already in January 1918, the company began filing customs applications required to import films according to the 1917 Cinematograph Films act, while Mary Mason travelled to the USA and UK to acquire more films to import.<sup>27</sup> Between 1918 and 1922, Mason Super Films filed applications to import at least 400 films (50 in 1918, 128 in 1919, 85 in 1920, 128 in 1921, and 23 in 1922). Many of these films were one-reel scenic and comic films, as well as a few serials, but a substantial percentage were features, both from the American company Essanay, reflecting the exclusive distribution contract she and her husband had landed during the war, and British producers such as Hepworth and Windsor, as well as several European producers, including Nordisk, Swedish Biograph, and the Italian makers UCI, Cines, Caesar, Bertini, and Itala.

In selecting films to import, Mary Mason seems to have focused on bringing over a select array of particularly distinguished British and Continental films, rather than trying to recapture the broader market for European melodramas that had existed before the war. Based on the Mason Super Films ads, these films' appeal for Australian audiences lay in their exclusivity and artistic quality, in implicit and sometimes explicit contrast to frequently formulaic American dramas. Each year, a few of the films she applied for were rejected by the censors, including Essanay's romance *The Prince of Graustark* in 1918 and Essanay's white slave drama *The Little Girl Next Door* in 1919, but most of them made it through, often with some cuts.

The interwar resurgence of the Swedish and Italian film industries worked to Mason's advantage, as did the contrast between American and European films. As the Melbourne *Herald* noted, in January 1921, 'distinct advantages have been made in filming dramatic plots [in Sweden particularly], and it is claimed that those now being turned out reveal considerable improvements in photography, staging and acting'.<sup>28</sup> An article in the 1 January 1920 issue of *Theatre Magazine* connects Mason's promotion of European films to 'the determination that now exists on the part of [British] manufacturers to vie with Americans in the production of pictures', while ads for screenings of *Sången om den eldröda blomman/The Flame of Life* at the Queen's Theatre in Auckland in April 1920 lead with the hook, 'a change from American films'.<sup>29</sup>

However, her biggest challenge was finding exhibition venues for the films Mason Super Films aimed to release, which required either buy-in from Union Theatres or agreements with competitors' chains or individual cinemas. Mary Mason persuaded Hoyt's to screen a certain number of British and Continental productions, including pictures by Nordisk, Cines, Caesar, and Hepworth, but she also supplied individual theatres, such as the Piccadilly in Sydney, the Majestic in Perth (a J.C. Williamson Theatre managed by Jack Watts), and the Theatre Royal in Broken Hill, managed by the Gardiner brothers. On the occasion of the latter cinema's reopening after renovation in July 1921, the Gardiners announced their new arrangement with Mason Super Films and the Fraser Film Company 'to supply films direct from the world's greatest photo-play producers, including Nordisk, Stolls (Famous British Players), Hepworth, Progress, U.C.I., Cines, and many other celebrated British and Continental Films'.<sup>30</sup> In August 1921, Union Theatres agreed to screen a weekly release from Mason's in each Australian state, which marked a significant step towards national circulation of Mason's imports.<sup>31</sup>

Yet these piecemeal solutions papered over the underlying problem of a disadvantageous market for British and European films. In protesting this situation, Mary Mason clearly positioned herself as both raising the standard of cinema art and promoting British and Australian interests. As she explained in a letter to the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* in 1925, signed 'M. Clement Mason', Mary Mason often had to hold on to the English and Continental films she imported, which 'our parliamentary Ministers, the Government censors, the press, and noted citizens admitted ... to be away from the beaten track and superior to American films', for six to nine months before getting a release in one of the hundreds of picture theatres in New South Wales. She blamed the contract system for the impossibility of 'getting our British films before Australians', and noted that the national origin of the films screened in the country contradicted Australians' 'boast that we are pure British—98½ per cent—and yet we allow 95 per cent of foreign films to foreignise our young Australians'.<sup>32</sup> Yet while her rhetorical strategy foregrounded British films, her inventory was heavily Continental, primarily Swedish and Italian.

Promoting a handful of European films in a sea of American ones was a constant struggle, which the decline of both the Scandinavian and Italian film industries in the early 1920s made even more difficult. Although she persisted in this effort for many more years, Mary Mason had to be resourceful in how she maintained her foothold in the cinema industry, where she was one of very few women. In 1920, her stepson Cecil left Mason Super Films, to be replaced by A.B. Helmrich as general manager, and got a job as special travelling representative of Fox Films in Australasia;

by late 1921, he was working as general manager of Selznick Pictures in Australia, and was one of the directors of Greater Australasian Films in 1929.<sup>33</sup> Rather than following his example and throwing in her lot with the mainstream distributors, Mary Mason tried to maintain her transnational contacts, frequently commuting between Australia and the UK. According to a farewell announcement in the *Australasian Picture Magazine* in May 1920, she planned to return permanently to London on the *Orsova* on 29 May to pursue her career there, though it appears she delayed this departure until July 1920 and then did not remain in England long.<sup>34</sup>

Instead, over the next decade, the endlessly resourceful Mary Mason founded several different film distribution companies. Mason Super Films continued to operate until mid-1922, after which, on 12 July of the same year, Mason (using the name Mary Clement Mason) organized Clement Mason Films (1922) Ltd in Sydney, with £10,000 in capital in £1 shares.<sup>35</sup> Her co-directors were Ludlow Richard Oswald-Sealy, director of the Elite Picture Theatre in Sydney; solicitor Arthur Vaughan Hilliard; and Arthur Joseph Matthews. This company, which had ‘power to manufacture, import and generally deal in films of every description’, imported a considerable quantity of film in 1922–23, but was voluntarily dissolved in December 1923. Its assets were transferred to a new company called Imperial Films Ltd, which had been incorporated in October 1923 for the express purpose of acquiring the assets and liabilities of Clement Mason Films (1922) Ltd.<sup>36</sup> The directors of this new company were Oswald-Sealy; William Joseph Howe, general manager of the New South Wales Olympic Theatres Ltd; Oscar Hall O’Brien; and Donald Hugh Bourke. Mary does not seem to have been involved with Imperial Films, for unspecified reasons. Instead, she established the distribution company Mason’s British Film Service (FBO), based at 143 Castlereagh Street, Sydney.<sup>37</sup> It is unclear whether this business was affiliated with Film Booking Offices (FBO), a small British distribution and production company founded in 1919 that was bought by US businessman Joseph Kennedy, father of the future US president, in 1926—but it seems likely, as Mason made a statement on behalf of FBO Films in 1925, pointing out the encouraging developments in British film production in recent years.<sup>38</sup> In March 1928, she organized yet another new distribution company in Sydney, Clement Mason’s British Films Ltd, with £35,000 in capital and William Joseph Howe and H.A. Warby as her co-directors. Just a year later, in March 1929, she invited the public to buy ten shilling shares in her most recent venture, Britannia Films Ltd, still located at 143 Castlereagh Street in Sydney, which would continue to distribute British and Continental films throughout Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific islands, and the Far East.<sup>39</sup> The announcement of this public offering notes that ‘Mrs Clement Mason, as vendor, receives

no money for the sale of her business', but would be compensated in shares (one for every six sold, up to 20,000), while the business, with £40,000 of capital, would assume up to £600 of liabilities in the form of film inventory. She was also to serve as the company's London manager, earning £20 a week, with W. Watson Duff as general manager in Australasia. Based on expected earnings of £5,000 to £12,000 per 'super feature', both silent and talking, the prospectus offered returns of 25%, but no records survive to document how the business fared.

Thanks to such constant manoeuvring, Mary Mason achieved remarkable longevity in the highly volatile cinema industry. In January 1929, the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* congratulated 'Mrs Clement Mason', 'one of the few women executives in the Australian film distributing business', on her twenty-third year in the Australian film industry, while she herself claimed to have been involved in it since 1904. Described as the manageress of the Clement Mason Trading Co., Mason is credited with having waged 'a vigorous campaign for the rehabilitation of the British and Continental film industries'.<sup>40</sup> When the Australian government convened a Royal Commission into the state of the film industry in 1927, it interviewed everyone who had a significant stake in the business; Mary Mason appeared as a representative of the Britannic Film Company of Australia.<sup>41</sup> In this capacity, she confirmed a rumour that British film companies often sold their films to American companies for distribution in Australia, due to the constraints of the block-booking system, and expressed herself in favour of a quota for British films. Mary Norton Mason disappears from the public record after 1930 and died in Sydney on 16 January 1951, leaving no heirs. Although her name has long been missing from Australasian film history, Mary Mason deserves to be remembered as one of its fiercest, most indefatigable pioneers.

### Reviving Nordic Films in Australasia

The two primary regions from which Mason Super Films sourced its European films were Scandinavia and Italy, building on the popularity of the most successful imports of its predecessor, the Clement Mason Cinematograph Co., from countries whose film industries had survived the war relatively unscathed, unlike France, and weren't compromised politically, as Germany initially was. In late 1919, Mason Super Films began importing Swedish Biograph productions, beginning with *Terje Vigen/A Man There Was* (1917), Victor Sjöström's acclaimed adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's 1862 poem, accompanied by three of Victor Bergdahl's *Capt'n Grogg* shorts. Shot on location in the Stockholm archipelago, *A Man There Was* stars Sjöström as a vengeful sailor whose family dies of starvation because of the British blockade of Norway during the Napoleonic Wars.

*A Man There Was* built on the success of earlier Swedish literary adaptations, including *Give Us This Day* and *War's Heart Blood*, both of which had circulated extensively in Australasia during the war. Its foregrounding of Sweden's pristine landscape, so different from Australia's, was doubtless a factor in its success. *A Man There Was* is often credited as having given Swedish Biograph the impetus to implement a policy of producing fewer, higher-quality films, which propelled the so-called Golden Age of Swedish cinema between 1917 and 1924, though Laura Horak awards that distinction to a slightly earlier film, *Wolo czawienko/Anjala the Dancer*, which does not seem to have been screened in the Antipodes.<sup>42</sup>

By the time *A Man There Was* reached Australia in October 1919, one of twenty-one prints of the film exported to foreign markets, more than two and a half years had passed since its Swedish premiere, so Mason Super Films wasted no time getting it into circulation. It was approved by the Australian censors on 11 October and opened at the Shell Theatre in Sydney, alongside Hepworth's *Molly Bawn*, on 5 November, more than six months before it would reach American audiences. *A Man There Was* seems to have been quite a success in Australia, staying in circulation for



Figure 9.3 Publicity photograph of the filming of *Terje Vigen/A Man There Was* (1917) © AB Svensk Filmindustri, Photographer Julius Jaenzon. Reuse not permitted

more than two years, until December 1921, but it was not screened in New Zealand, despite the strong connections that the Clement Mason Cinematograph Co. had had in that market. The same would be true of the majority of Mason Super Films' Swedish imports.

After *A Man There Was* had reintroduced Australasian viewers to Swedish films, of which only one wartime Swedish import—Mauritz Stiller's *A Daughter of Russia* (aka *A Stormy Petrel*)—appears to have still been in circulation in 1919, Mason's followed up on its success with several more Swedish Biograph pictures. In December 1919, Mason's launched another film directed by and starring Sjöström, the lyrically beautiful tragedy *Berg-Ejvind och hans hustru/Love the Only Law* (aka *The Outlaw and His Wife*), which is set in nineteenth-century Ireland but was filmed on location in northern Sweden. The male protagonist is a thief on the run who persuades a rich widow to run away with him to the mountains, where they endure tragedy after tragedy until a final fatal blizzard ends their lives. Although praised for its sophisticated cinematography, this film only remained in circulation for five months after opening at the Academy of Music in Launceston (Tas) on 4 December 1919.

Although occasionally attributed to the 'Nordisk Co. of Sweden', these new, more artistically ambitious films were closely tied to Swedish Biograph's efforts to build its own brand, in part by opening branch offices in Berlin, New York, Paris, and London in 1919, which may be where Mason Super Films acquired its prints. The *Prahran Telegraph* notes in January 1920 that Sweden had the largest and best organized film industry of any European country except Italy, despite having cut back on production 'in favour of the explosive demands of Mars' and the effect of wartime import bans, and reassures its readers, 'No sooner had the conflict ceased than picture energy began to assert itself up and down the Scandinavian peninsula.'<sup>43</sup> The article claims that *Tösen från Stormyrtorpet/The Woman He Chose* (aka *The Girl from the Marsh Croft* or *Girl from Stormy Croft*), based on a novella by the Nobel Prize-winning Swedish author Selma Lagerlöf, had been the 'first photo-play of importance to come over here', but since that film had not yet been released in Australia, the author might have been parroting an article from the USA, where the film was released in 1919. When *The Woman He Chose* opened at Hoyt's Australian in Sydney in February 1921, it proved to be a success, staying in circulation in Australia until June 1924.

In the early interwar period, Swedish Biograph campaigned for government permission to merge with its only remaining domestic rival, Skandia, in order to boost the foreign circulation of Swedish films and thereby promote awareness of Swedish culture. A promotional pamphlet from 1919 argues that 'Swedish film spreads, in the best possible way, knowledge about

our country, our culture, our people, our spirit and material resources'.<sup>44</sup> From the merger came Svensk Filmindustri (SF), which opened a new film studio in Råsunda, outside of Stockholm in 1920. Eilif Skaar, in charge of SF's exports, immediately began cultivating foreign markets, from Calcutta to China, which led to closer collaboration with Mason Super Films. Australian critics were pleased with the renewed access to Swedish productions, both because of their quality and the attractiveness of their actors. In July 1920, Mason Super Films characterized the resurgence of Scandinavian film as serious competition for American producers:

The Swedish and Norwegian group of manufacturers are making a bold bid for Continental supremacy in the output of films. Not long back the Swedish Biograph Co. increased its capital to 2 million pounds, with the result that it has in course of erection an entire film city at Rasund (Sweden). The productions of this company that have already been seen are remarkable for the sincerity of the acting and the artistic presentation of the stories.<sup>45</sup>

Mason's clearly regarded Swedish Biograph's (or SF's) potential to challenge American film dominance as a positive development that they hoped exhibitors would support. While the discourse around Swedish film as art cinema did not develop as fully in Australasia in this period as, for example, in France, Mason's marketing clearly emphasizes the distinctive qualities of Swedish films that would soon make their directors and actors such coveted acquisitions for Hollywood studios.<sup>46</sup>

Mason's next Swedish import, *The Flame of Life*, directed by Mauritz Stiller, was moderately successful in Australia, where it ran from February to August 1920. As apparently the first Swedish film to be released in New Zealand after the war, it enjoyed more than a year of screenings there. Based on a sensationalist novel by Finnish author Johannes Linnankoski, *The Flame of Life* was initially described in a December 1919 Mason Super Films ad as a 'Nordisk masterpiece' that had been enthusiastically received in London; by 1 March 1920, it was correctly labelled as a Swedish film, accompanied by the description: 'A fine film this, with a good story, beautiful old-world scenery and some clever acting by Lars Larsen [*sic*—should be Hanson], who among other things rides the rapids on a single log.'<sup>47</sup> That same month, the *NZ Truth* reported,

There was a stir at the Film House when the first purchase of a Swedish-made film arrived. It is entitled *The Flame of Life* and is an eye-opener as to the progress made this year in Continental production. Technically it is equal to the best Yankee, and, of course, as may be expected, the acting is one hundred per cent. There is a log-riding

scene in a lumber camp on the Swedish coast which, regarded purely as a 'stunt,' is close to a miracle.<sup>48</sup>

While some ads disparaged Hanson as a romantic lead, all agreed on the impressiveness of his physical accomplishments in the film.

Although *The Flame of Life* had been screened in London in August 1919, it did not premiere in Australia until 6 February 1920, nearly ten months after its release in Sweden on 14 April 1919. It was screened first at the New Lyceum Theatre in Sydney for one week before moving on to Newcastle and Lithgow (NSW) in early March for a few days in each location. In April 1920, it ran for a week at the Queen's Theatre in Auckland before being screened in Perth, from whence it travelled to Ballarat (Vic) in June, and then on to Brisbane in August for one week. This itinerary, consisting of several multi-day screenings in far-distant cities with long gaps between screenings, suggests that only a single print of this seven-reel film had been imported to Australia to be exhibited in a single theatre at a time, with a second print circulating in New Zealand for more than a year. It apparently never ran in theatres in Adelaide, Melbourne, Launceston, or Hobart, all cities that had been enthusiastic in their reception of Nordic



Figure 9.4 Still of Lars Hanson riding a log in *Sången om den eldröda blomman*/*The Flame of Life* (1919). © AB Svensk Filmindustri, Photographer Ragnar Westfelt. Reuse not permitted



films a decade earlier, nor did it feature prominently on the provincial circuit, aside from the handful of screenings in Newcastle, Lithgow, and Ballarat.

Between 1919 and 1922, Mason Super Films imported at least twenty-two Swedish Biograph/SF films, a number that includes seven *Capt'n Grogg* shorts but no non-fiction one-reelers. Nearly all fifteen multi-reel features were directed by either Mauritz Stiller or Victor Sjöström, reflecting the shift in attention towards the role of the director as auteur, but Swedish actors, such as Lars Hanson, Karin Molander, and Tora Teje, are frequently mentioned by name and praised for their skill in local ads. At least five Swedish films opened between July 1920 and March 1921: *Ingmarssönnerna/The Dawn of Love* (aka *The Sons of Ingmar*), *Klostret i Sendomir/Secret of the Monastery*, *Fiskebyn/Chains*, *The Woman He Chose*, and the tragedy *Herr Arnes pengar/Snows of Destiny*, adapted from Lagerlöf's 1904 novel *Herr Arnes penningar/Sir Arne's Treasure*.

When *Snows of Destiny* opened at the Majestic in Perth on 4 March 1921, at least six Swedish features were in circulation in Australia (only one in New Zealand), which may have primed audiences to anticipate even more artistic, literary Nordic films. The prolonged circulation of this particular film, which remained in Australia until July 1924, allowed it to be screened in nearly every Australian metropolitan area as well as in several towns on the provincial circuit. The prominence of Lagerlöf's name in reviews and ads for the film suggest that her personal prestige helped earn the film a spot in many cinema programmes. In Perth, where the Majestic regularly screened Mason's European imports, 'The Shows' column in the *Call* noted Lagerlöf's authorship of the film's story and the participation of Swedish actor Mary Johnson (born Astrid Maria Carlsson), concluding, 'the unique plot and wonderful characterizations in *Snows of Destiny* make it apparent that the Americans, English, and Italians are not alone in their conquest of screen art. The Swedish-Biograph Co., whose screen works appear exclusively at the Majestic, have given evidence in this and other pictures of their thorough grasp of the artistic, literary, and histrionic ability in photo-play making.'<sup>49</sup> Comparing the artistry of Swedish film to Italian was praise indeed, while its grouping with American and British films suggested confidence in its marketability.

Both *Snows of Destiny* and *Chains* were distributed in New Zealand by the Wellington-based British and Continental Feature Company (B&C), which had been founded in September 1920, with £10,000 in capital, out of an expressed discontentment with 'the exaggerated emotionalism of a good proportion of American films'.<sup>50</sup> In November 1920, Allen announced his company's acquisition of the New Zealand rights to films from UCI, Swedish Biograph, and Hepworth Films.<sup>51</sup> B&C began promoting their

upcoming release of ten 'All-British Masterpieces' and eleven 'Continental Specials' in December 1920.<sup>52</sup> While four of their Continental specials were Nordisk films and four were Italian, three were the Swedish Biograph films *Secret of the Monastery*, *Chains*, and *Snows of Destiny*. Of the Swedish films, only the latter two seem to have actually been released, however, and only a few screenings of each can be documented from the newspaper record. Still, B&C was successful enough to sell shares, acquire the People's Pictures cinema in Levin (95km north of Wellington), and explore opening branch offices in Sydney and Melbourne in late 1921.

Bolstered by the praise and financial success that *Snows of Destiny* and *Chains* enjoyed, Mason Super Films imported seven more Swedish films in 1921, many of which are among the most highly regarded products of Golden Age Swedish cinema. This wave began with the comedy *Bomben/Sunshine and Shadow*, directed by Rune Carlsten and starring Gösta Ekman and Karin Molander, which passed the censor in April, opened at Hoyt's Camberwell Theatre in Melbourne on 4 July, and circulated for almost three years. It was followed in August 1921 by two more adaptations of literary texts by Lagerlöf: Sjöström's technically innovative masterpiece *Körkarlen*, most commonly known in English as *The Phantom Carriage* (or *The Stroke of Midnight*) but marketed in Australia under the title *Thy Soul Shall Bear Witness*, which was praised by Australasian critics for its 'wonderful theme, fidelity to detail, mastery of action, and beauty of photography'; and the star-crossed romance *Dunungen/In Quest of Happiness* (aka *The Downy Girl*), directed by Ivan Hedqvist.<sup>53</sup>

While Swedish films were considered too heavy for some American audiences, all three films were very popular in Australia (though none reached New Zealand). *Thy Soul Shall Bear Witness* opened at the Union Theatres King's Cross cinema in Sydney on 20 August 1921 and stayed in circulation for nearly two years, with revival screenings in 1925 and 1926. One critic raved that Sjöström had turned this haunting story of a man given an unexpected chance after death to compensate for the pain he caused in life from 'a masterpiece of literature ... into a masterpiece of screen art, both by his production and the part he plays in it ... This picture is as near to perfection as the screen has yet attained.'<sup>54</sup> *In Quest of Happiness* was also picked up by Union Theatres, opening at both the Empress and Grand theatres for a week-long run in Sydney on 27 August, while *Thy Soul Shall Bear Witness* was still playing at King's Cross. Reviewers were quick to draw connections between both pictures, describing the 'quiet naturalness [that] pervades every scene of *In Quest of Happiness*' and its 'excellent rustic backgrounds—slices of Old Sweden' as a natural counterpoint to the 'visualization of her mystic soul romance' in *Thy Soul Shall Bear Witness*.<sup>55</sup> *In Quest of Happiness* remained in circulation

even longer than *Thy Soul Shall Bear Witness*: for twenty-nine months, until January 1924.

The next two SF films formed a pair of contrasts—Stiller's fast-paced, salacious comedy *Erotikon*, marketed as *Bonds that Chafe*, and Sjöström's romantic drama, *Mästerman/A Lover in Pawn*, about a merciless pawnbroker. When Mason Super Films attempted to register *Bonds that Chafe* in August 1921, the film was initially rejected by the Australian censor but passed upon a second review in September, after being cut by 249 feet. It finally opened at the Grand in Sydney two weeks after *In Quest of Happiness*, in September 1921, and ran for two years, with several revival screenings in each of the following three years. Although a Sydney reviewer dismissed Swedish films as overly preoccupied with marital troubles and criticized *Bonds that Chafe* in particular for being too inspired by American models, a reviewer in Perth enthused, of Lars Hanson and Tora Teje's performances, 'The acting of the principals in this is very high-class and compares more than favorably with American films.'<sup>56</sup> *A Lover in Pawn*, which opened in November, is described as 'rather more of a romantic phantasy than a story of human life, and perhaps for this reason will attract. As an artistic production, with a fund of pathos and gentle humor, it would be hard to find anything to better it.' The reviewer reserves his most ardent praise for director and lead actor Sjöström, using the Anglicized version of his name: 'Victor Seastrom, to whom belongs the credit of the production, and to whom also falls the lion's share of the acting, has proved that he is among the finest producers in the world.'<sup>57</sup>

After just over three years, Mason's Swedish film wave ended as suddenly as it began. SF instituted budget cuts in 1921 that reduced the number of films produced, while its shift towards a more American film-making style made Swedish films less nationally distinctive. The last SF films for which Mason Super Films applied for censor clearance in Sydney include an adaptation of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's novel *Synnøve Solbakken/A Norway Lass* (aka *Fairy of Solbakken*), which cleared the censor in November 1921, and the forbidden love story *Johan/The Rapids of Life*, adapted from the 1911 Finnish novel *Juha* by Juhani Aho. Directed by Stiller and featuring the dancer Jenny Hasselqvist, *The Rapids of Life* was approved by the censor in March 1922, as the last entry for Mason Super Films in the customs registers, but it did not appear in Australasian cinemas until more than a year later. When it opened on 5 May 1923, at the Strand DeLuxe cinema in Hobart, it was the supporting picture to the Paramount film *Making a Man*, starring Jack Holt. Like most of its predecessors, *The Rapids of Life* ran for approximately two years in Australia, proving that audiences still had an appetite for Swedish features. When a print of the film was stolen from Mary Mason's FBO Films offices in Sydney nearly three years later, in late

January 1926, its value was still given as £80.<sup>58</sup> SF company records indicate Australian orders for a few additional films, including *Karin Ingmarsdotter/God's Way* (aka *Karin, Daughter of Ingmar*), and *Eld ombord/The Hell Ship* (aka *Jealousy*), but none of these films seem to have been screened in Australasia.

One consolation for Australian audiences might have been that Victor Sjöström began working in Hollywood in 1924, joined in 1926 by his countrymen Mauritz Stiller, Lars Hanson, and Greta Garbo. Yet, although audiences now had the opportunity to see more work from the Swedish artists they admired, the nature of the work itself changed in its new cultural context. In 1925, the Brisbane *Daily Standard* used Sjöström, who now went by Seastrom, as the example of the problem that 'no sooner does a Swedish artist prove his or her ability in Swedish film work, which is noted for its high quality, than an American impresario sends over the sea for him or her to take part in American films'. The effect of this talent drain, according to the reviewer, was to impoverish both the Swedish film industry and the global film market, for 'no sooner does a Swedish artist arrive in America than he begins to lose his distinctly national characteristics; he becomes more and more American in his manners and concepts, and even his name takes on an American pronunciation and spelling'. Thus, instead of internationalizing film by incorporating aspects of many cultures, which could 'present to the world at large the best of each nation's quality ... internationalization becomes a denationalization and in this way all cultural value or historic interest is lost'.<sup>59</sup> Rather than alleviating the monotony of a diet made up almost entirely of American films, the best Swedish film-makers were simply absorbed into the Hollywood mass.

In addition to their stellar line-up of Swedish features, Mason Super Films also imported a few Nordisk pictures. Although Nordisk's production plummeted from hundreds of films per year in the 1910s to just three in 1922, four in 1923, and seven in 1924, they had a backlog of films produced but not released during the war to export.<sup>60</sup> Mason Super Films acquired the Orientalist fantasies *Maharadjaens Yndlingshustru I/Prince of Bharata* and *Maharadjaens Yndlingshustru II/Daughter of Brahma*, the space fantasy film *Himmelskibet/A Trip to Mars*, and the cautionary tale against war profiteering *Krigsmillionæren/The Parvenu*. All four films cleared the Australian censor in February 1921, followed in June by the historical drama *Kærlighedsvalsen/The House of Fatal Love*. The first two films opened three days apart in March 1921 at the Union Theatre in Newcastle, while the latter two opened at the Piccadilly in Sydney in May and June, respectively. However, *The Parvenu* didn't open until 3 February 1922, also at the Union Theatre in Newcastle, one day before the Lau Lauritzen short *Den kære Husfred/The Peacemaker* opened in Bathurst. Most of these films stayed in circulation in Australia for nine to twelve months, except *A Trip to Mars*, which lasted twenty-two.

Unlike most of the Swedish Biograph films discussed above, many of these Nordisk films were also screened in New Zealand. B&C advertised its release of *A Trip to Mars*, *Prince of Bharata*, and *Daughter of Brahma* in early 1921, *The House of Fatal Love* in September, and offered one additional Nordisk film—*Retten sejrer/Justice Victorious*—that had not been released in Australia and does not appear to have been screened in New Zealand after all either. A private press screening of *A Trip to Mars* was held at the Queen’s Theatre in Wellington on 5 February 1921, six weeks before it opened at the Opera House in Manawatu and three months before its Australian premiere at the Piccadilly in Sydney. Frequently accompanied by ads trumpeting its £20,000 production costs, *A Trip to Mars* was screened regularly in New Zealand between March 1921 and June 1924, giving it an impressive run of thirty-nine months.

Audiences needed reminding about Nordisk’s erstwhile ubiquity, however. When *Prince of Bharata* opened at the Queen’s Theatre in Wellington on 17 February 1921, ads described it as ‘produced by the world-famous Nordisk Company, being the first of their productions screened in Wellington since the beginning of the war’. This is a curiously specific



Figure 9.5 Still of Alf Blütecher as Dr. Krafft and Gunnar Tolnæs as Captain Avanti Planataros in Nordisk’s *Himmelskibet/A Trip to Mars* (1918). Danish Film Institute/Nordisk Film. Reuse not permitted

and easily disprovable claim, since many Nordisk pictures had played in Wellington during the war, most recently the drama *Flammesværdet/The Flaming Sword* at the Britannia in January 1918.<sup>61</sup> *Daughter of Brahma* followed immediately afterwards at the Queen's Theatre, on 25 February, with prominent mentions of actors Gunnar Tolnæs and Lilly Jacobson by name in local ads. These two pictures followed each other around the country for more than two years, until their final screenings at the Kosy cinema in Manawatu in April 1922.

Aside from the five above-named films, most Nordisk features (another ten or so) that reached Australasia in the early 1920s were distributed through either Howe's Film Agency or Selznick Pictures in Sydney. On 15 April 1924, Nordisk granted James Howe the sole and exclusive right to lease, let, hire, and exhibit throughout the territory of Australasia for a period of three years (1924–27) the following films: the social drama *Kan disse øjne lyve?/Mirrors of the Soul*, the shipwreck romance *Pigen fra Sydhavnsøen/The Island Virgin*, the Dickens adaptation *Store forventninger/Great Expectations*, the thriller *På Slaget 12/On the Stroke of Midnight*, and the crime comedy *Nedbrudte nerver/The Hill Park Mystery*.

Nordisk's detailed original contract with Howe has been preserved, which offers valuable insight into the rental terms. The contract specifies that Nordisk will furnish Howe with a sample copy of each 'most likely suitable film', without subtitles, for pre-screening.<sup>62</sup> If the films were rejected by the censor, Howe was obligated to return the prints to Nordisk at his own expense. If they were accepted, Howe was responsible for covering the cost of both the pre-screening and additional prints, after which each film was subject to a 50/50 profit-sharing agreement with Nordisk, minus costs for prints, posters, photographs, forwarding costs, insurance, and import duty. Nordisk assumed no liability if the films did not cover the disbursements, but 10% of Nordisk's profits were to be paid to Nordisk's local agent Henry W. Gladwin of Sydney. Howe paid a total of £180 up front for three prints of each of the first two films, at a cost of two pence per foot.<sup>63</sup>

Although no copies exist of the statements Howe was contractually obligated to supply to Nordisk each month, listing all 'bookings obtained ... titles of the pictures booked, the names of the theatres, [and] the period and amount of hire', Howe seems to have been quite successful in placing these films, which circulated in Australia for eighteen months on average. The three prints of *On the Stroke of Midnight* exported to Sydney in May and August 1924 were already in circulation by January 1925, opening at the Wondergraph in Adelaide. The following year, Nordisk reached a similar agreement with Howe for four additional films: *Kærlighedens almagt/Sealed Lips*, *Prometheus/Bonds of Hate*, *David Copperfield*, and *Min ven*

*privatdetektiven/My Friend the Detective*. In August 1924, Howe accepted all four films, paying £340 up front, though only the latter two appear to have been released in the Antipodes.<sup>64</sup> Nordisk shipped a pre-screening copy of *David Copperfield* in November 1924, followed by three more prints in early July 1925.

By that time, Howe's seems to have transferred its rights to at least some of these Nordisk films to Selznick Pictures, managed by Cecil Mason; a June 1925 contract confirms Selznick's exclusive Australasian rights to *David Copperfield* for three years, as well as Gladwin's 10% share of the profits.<sup>65</sup> The film opened as a Selznick Pictures production at the Fuller-Hayward Empress Theatre in Wellington shortly after, in late July 1925, remaining in circulation until May 1927. The Wellington *Evening Post* praised the film for capturing 'the beautiful English atmosphere ... to perfection'.<sup>66</sup> It did not open in Australia until 14 October 1925, at Hoyt's Theatre DeLuxe in Melbourne, after which it only circulated for six months in Australia. Prints of *My Friend the Detective* were shipped to Sydney in October 1924 and March 1925, but don't appear to have been released until September 1926, when the film opened at the Metropole cinema in Broken Hill (NSW).

A few other distributors also imported particularly outstanding individual Nordisk films in this period. In March 1926, Nordisk sent four prints of its Dickens adaptation *Lille Dorrit/Little Dorrit* to Australasia. They circulated from June 1926 through April 1928 in Australia, and June 1926 through November 1929 in New Zealand. While Nordisk's account books don't name the distributor who bought the prints, it may have been Nordisk's local agent Henry Gladwin, who subsequently bought a print of *Fra Piazza del Popolo/Mists of the Past* in June 1926, although that film doesn't appear to have been screened in Australasia under any of its known English titles.

Finally, in August 1927, British Dominion Films, which was the Australian distributor for Gaumont British, paid Nordisk £500 for exclusive rights for five years to the Nordisk drama *Klovnene/The Golden Clown*, a beautifully filmed remake of a 1917 Valdemar Psilander romantic tragedy about a country clown who makes it big in the city but loses his wife to another man along the way, driving him to seek revenge.<sup>67</sup> Although the original had not circulated in Australasia, this later version, starring the Swede Gösta Ekman and the Dane Karina Bell, was very successful, despite competition from talkies. Six months after *The Golden Clown* opened at Hoyt's DeLuxe in Melbourne on 12 January 1929, British Dominion Films released Nordisk's *Jokeren/The Joker*, an 'Anglo-Continental' film adaptation of a Noel Scott play, directed by Georg Jacoby and starring the British actors Henry Edwards and Miles Mander, and the German

actor Elga Brink. The Australasian rights to this film had been purchased by Cecil Cattermoule in London in February 1929 for five years for just £121 (the contract price was £350, but Cattermoule claimed £229 in currency exchange fees), so Cattermoule must have had a business relationship with British Dominion Films.<sup>68</sup> *The Joker* opened at Hoyt's DeLuxe in Melbourne on 6 July 1929, and at the Queen's Theatre in Wellington on 19 July. Both films were marketed alternately as Gaumont British or British Dominion products and screened for more than eighteen months across Australia as part of a British Film series at Hoyt's cinemas, as well as in many independent provincial theatres.

In placing their films in Australasia in the interwar period, Nordisk seems to have paid particular attention to finding products geared to Australian tastes. As the titles indicate, many of these films were adaptations of British novels, including two by Charles Dickens, and others were detective thrillers that anticipate the Nordic Noir wave of the early twenty-first century. Neither genre is particularly concerned with representing Danish culture, and even the characteristically European literary adaptations of serious texts draw on familiar British narratives, which is consistent with the universalizing strategies Nordisk had employed in the pre-war period for its export-oriented films. Later co-productions with German and British actors and producers, such as *The Joker*, attempted to increase Nordisk films' appeal across national borders, but the rise of sound film thwarted those efforts.

Despite its diminished presence in the Antipodes after 1916, Nordisk's name retained some of its brand value in the interwar period, although *A Trip to Mars* was attributed to Swedish Biograph when it played at the Majestic in Perth in December 1921, which suggests that Nordisk's brand was losing ground to its Nordic competitor. Many of the ads for these newly imported films proclaimed them 'new Nordisk features' or 'Nordisk specials', echoing the advertising language used before the war. Yet there were so few of them in circulation that they didn't achieve anywhere near the same level of market saturation, making it easy for viewers to miss the fact that they were there at all. In August 1924, the Melbourne *Table Talk* announced the release by Cooperative Films Exchange of *The Island Virgin* and *Mirrors of the Soul*, reminding readers that 'Nordisk feature pictures were formerly favorites'.<sup>69</sup> Six months later, a Port Pirie newspaper explained, '*Mirrors of the Soul* is the first of the famous Nordisk Productions to be released in Australia for some years. Before the World War, when Continental films were being imported, Nordisk, with its well-known Polar bear trade mark, was always well to the fore with attractive subjects and their new offerings promise to be just as successful.'<sup>70</sup> Similarly, in May 1925, the *Bunbury Herald and Blackwood Express* (WA)



commented, in an announcement of *On the Stroke of Midnight*, that the picture by Nordisk, 'for many years the leading European producers ... proves that but for the intervention of the World War in 1914, and the consequent cessation of producing in Denmark, the Nordisk Company to-day would be leading the world in the art of the silent drama'.<sup>71</sup>

Perhaps to compensate for Nordisk's loss of brand recognition, the names of individual Nordisk stars featured much more prominently in the 1920s, as the promotion of Gunnar Tolnæs and Lilly Jacobson in conjunction with *Daughter of Brahma* indicates, though their association with Denmark was often obscured. Nordisk's contract with Howe's gave the latter responsibility for 'all engagements assumed by the Lessors to mention—respectively not to mention—the names of actors, producers, and authors in all advertising matters emanating from them, respectively from the Lessees'.<sup>72</sup> Kate Riise, the Danish actor who starred in both *Mirrors of the Soul* and *The Island Virgin*, was frequently named in advertisements, usually described as a Norwegian with her name spelled 'Riese' or 'Reise', as a 'new and brilliant star'. Similarly, the Danish actor Karina Bell, who appeared in *David Copperfield*, *On the Stroke of Midnight*, *My Friend the Detective*, *Little Dorrit*, and *The Golden Clown*, is often introduced as a 'new film star' and said to have been born in Norway. Several newspaper accounts explained that Bell 'is a Norwegian by birth. Formerly a leading stage star in her own country, she was induced to act for the camera, and had achieved many notable successes with the Nordisk Company. Emulating her famous countrywomen Anna Q. Nilsson, Seena Owen, and Sigrid Holmquist, Karina Bell is destined to reach the top rung of the ladder of fame'.<sup>73</sup> Never mind that Nilsson and Holmquist were Swedish, while Owen was an American of Norwegian-Danish descent—all three of them had acted in American films, which had brought them to the attention of Australasian audiences.<sup>74</sup>

The increasing star power of Nordic actors sustained Nordisk's brand, even as the company was lurching towards bankruptcy, and made Nordisk films more attractive to major Australasian exhibitors. When *On the Stroke of Midnight* was screened at J.C. Williamson's Majestic Theatre in Brisbane on 27 August 1925, eight months after it had premiered at the Wondergraph Theatre in Adelaide, local papers announced that 'it will be screened for the first time in Australia to-day'. Instead of touting Nordisk's credentials, the review focuses primarily on Bell's alleged Norwegian heritage, her bloneness and apparent resemblance to Nilsson, and the picture's technical brilliance: 'The artists appear to literally step from the screen to the stage, the process by which this is done, is known at present only to the Nordisk film producing company. It makes their productions expensive, and consequently exclusive'.<sup>75</sup> This acclaim had little lasting effect,

however, as Nordisk ceased production in the mid-1920s and never recovered its dominance on the global market.

### The Revival of Italian Diva Films

Aside from Nordic films, the other primary source of European films for distributors like Mason Super Films and B&C in the early 1920s was Italy, where the film industry was trying to maintain its viability in the face of intense competition from American producers. In an attempt to regain control of the Italian market, a new company, L'Unione Cinematografica Italiana (UCI), was formed out of a merger of Cines, Ambrosio, Caesar, and Tiber Film in 1919. Funded by the Banca Italiana di Sconto (Italian Discount Bank) and the Banca Commerciale Italiana (Italian Commercial Bank), UCI united the most prestigious Italian film brands and concentrated the Italian film industry in Rome. It went bankrupt in 1927 due to bad planning and excessive expenditures for poorly conceived projects. Gian Piero Brunetta notes that UCI had 'no project other than that of producing a warehouse of titles that would prove difficult to sell and would never be seen ... Relying on films featuring Italian divas, film production [under UCI] borrowed heavily from popular literature, feuilleton, serialized stories, and theatrical repertoires.'<sup>76</sup>

Due to disorganization, unpredictability, increases in costs, the collapse of Banca Italiana di Sconto in 1921, a failure to develop new technology, the loss of foreign markets, the inability to compete with foreign production, and a lack of generational renewal, UCI was unable to reverse the industry's wartime decline. Italian film production plummeted from 516 films made across the country in 1915 to 220 in 1920, just over a hundred in 1923, and fewer than twelve in 1927–28.<sup>77</sup> By the time the first talkies appeared, the number of recently released UCI films could be counted on one hand.

Yet even as this crisis was developing in Italy, Mason Super Films was trying to capitalize on the tremendous pre-war and wartime popularity of Italian films to push back against the market dominance of American films. An August 1921 write-up of Mason's endeavour promises releases from brands including 'Masters, Swedish, Davidson Films, M.P. Sales, U.C.I., Butcher, Bertini, Caesar, Phillips, and Genina', a list that includes both producers and distributors. The author explains that 'these are all five or six-reel films, the featured artists represented by them being H. V. Esmond, Renee Bjorling, Pina Menichelli, Petrolini, Soava Gallone, Francesca Bertini, Molly Adair, Tora Teya [*sic*], Maciste, Victoria Lepanto, Lydia Qaaranto [*sic*] and Albert Pasquali'. However, he cautions, 'in some instances these over-the-sea film manufacturing corporations are disposed

to rank the value of the Australian market at too high a rate and to require bigger prices for the rent of their films than justified. After all, Australia has but a limited population and the average net profits of the business are only moderate.<sup>78</sup> The subtext of this article seems to be that some European producers had not yet come to terms with their weakened market position vis-à-vis American film and continued to expect the exorbitant rental fees they had been able to command before the war.

Despite this concern, Mason Super Films imported at least twenty-six Italian features between June 1920 and December 1921, many of which starred actors familiar to Australasian audiences, including Bartolomeo Pagano, Francesca Bertini, Pina Menichelli, and Amleto Novelli. Three of Mason's first Italian imports to clear the Australian censor focused on strongman characters, both the familiar Maciste of *Cabiria* fame, in Itala's *Maciste in Love*, and new contenders, including Sansonia, played by Luciano Albertini, in the Ambrosio production *La spirale della morte/Defying Death*, and a rare strongwoman, Astrea, in Polidor's *Justitia/Astrea the Amazing Woman*. Most of the remainder were diva films, in particular those starring Bertini, beginning with *Spiritismo/Bitter Fruits* (aka *His Friend's Wife*) in June 1920. Three more followed in September: *Il processo Clémenceau/A Case for the Defense*, based on Alexandre Dumas fils's *L'affaire Clémenceau*; *La Tosca*, based on Sardou's play; and *La contessa Sara/Countess Sara* in November. Mason's announced *Countess Sara* in a list of 'This Week's First-Release Pictures' in the Sydney *Sun* on 14 November 1920; it was still being hailed as 'the first of the great Continental pictures' when it ran in Hobart in June 1921.<sup>79</sup> In 1921, Mason's imported five additional Bertini pictures: *La serpe/The Poison Mood* in January, *The Man Who Did Not Care* (possibly *La piovra/The Octopus*) in August, *La sfinge/The Sphinx* in September, and, finally, *La ferita/Wounded Hearts* and *The Vow That Failed* (possibly *Il voto*, starring Claretta Sabatelli and Amleto Novelli) in December. Bertini's *Fedora* was also imported in 1923, but it is not clear whether Mason's imported it.

The fact that these nine Bertini films, made by Bertini Films and Caesar Films, make up a third of Mason's total Italian imports suggests something about the enduring popularity of the diva film in Australasia in the early interwar period. Other diva films Mason's imported in this period include *La storia di una donna/A Woman's Story*, *Il padrone delle ferriere/The Ironmaster*, and *La verità nuda/Women of Scandal*, all of which star Pina Menichelli (1890–1984); Maria Jacobini (1892–1944) in *La fine di un vile/The Wife He Neglected*; and Soava Gallone (1880–1957) in *Nemesis*, based on a novel by Paul Bourget, and *Amleto e il suo clown/On with the Motley*, for a total of fifteen of the twenty-six films. The enthusiastic tone of local newspaper coverage confirms audiences' particular fondness for Bertini, whom they could

already have seen in as many as fifteen earlier films and whom they knew to be famous on the Continent. Examples abound of effusive praise for her skill and elegance. For example, when *A Case for the Defense* was screened in Perth in December 1920, the *West Australian* hailed the chance to admire 'the idol of all Europe'.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, when *Fedora* was screened at the Palace Theatre in Hobart in April 1923, 'audiences rose to rapturous applause at the fine acting [of] the famous Continental beauty and tragedienne'.<sup>81</sup>

But the interwar diva film phenomenon also highlighted other Italian actresses who had not previously been famous in the Antipodes. Pina Menichelli, for example, is mentioned by name several dozen times in connection with her three films released in the interwar period, in contrast to only one mention related to the quarter of her approximately forty Cines films that had been screened in Australasia in 1913/14, among them Baldassarre Negroni's *Zuma/Zuma the Gipsy* (1913), in which she played a homewrecker, and Enrico Guazzoni's *How Heroes Are Made* (aka *School for Heroes* and *For Napoleon and France*), which brought her to the attention of Giovanni Pastrone and launched her career as a diva. In her second, interwar introduction to Australasian audiences, Menichelli was positioned much more emphatically as a famous Italian actor worth paying attention to. As the *West Australian* notes of Menichelli and her co-star Amleto Novelli, 'though famous in Rome, Naples, Venice, and the like, [they] are meaningless to us—until we see their magnificent acting, their imperious regal beauty'.<sup>82</sup>

Similarly, the Polish-born Soava Gallone had been mentioned twice in 1917 in connection with the Cines drama *Avatar/The Magician*, but it was Amleto Novelli whose name was much more prominently featured in that context. In contrast, Gallone is mentioned nearly a hundred times in connection with her two interwar diva films. She is described in one ad as 'an international beauty, whose daring dancing and dressing before the crowned heads of Europe in pre-war days was the subject of much discussion', and in another as 'the greatest screen tragedienne, known throughout Europe as the "Actress of a hundred faces." Through the mobile lines of her beautiful and marvellously expressive face, and the incomparable grace of her figure, she acts her parts dramatically and is mistress of the art of interpretation with simplicity'.<sup>83</sup> Despite her Polish heritage, Gallone became emblematic of Italian diva films in Australasia, in part because her films were made by Italian directors, including her husband Carmine Gallone, but more so because the kinds of films she made in this period, stories that revolved around her body and her emotions, so aptly represented the diva film genre.

In deciding to import Italian diva films, Mary Mason does not seem to have been consciously attempting to boost Italy's domestic film market or

strike a blow for women's emancipation. Instead, she was likely gambling on the chance that audiences would remember the Italian films they had enjoyed so much before and during the war, and be willing to make room for non-American films in the increasingly crowded Australasian cinema market. Her bet seems to have paid off in terms of the popularity of the films and their perceived artistic merit, in contrast to the American audiences to whom the Italian-style acting and stories no longer appealed, as distributor George Kleine complained in 1923.<sup>84</sup> Before *Il principe dell'impossibile/Prince of the Impossible*, directed by Augusto Genina, opened at the Palladium in Perth on 27 August 1920, for example, the *Call* commended 'Italian film manufacturers' for being so 'active in making up-to-date productions' and thanked 'the foreign buyers of the film companies of Australia, notably the Australasian Films Ltd.' for having 'secured many fine foreign productions, which are being put into shape for Australian screens'.<sup>85</sup> *Prince of the Impossible* was judged to be as thrilling a picture as *The Warrior*, featuring Maciste, which had been in circulation from late 1917 until mid-1919. However, the ad also perpetuates the stereotype of Italian names being unpronounceable, evidenced in connection with *Quo Vadis?*, with the authors declaring their inability to even spell the name of the film's star, Ruggero Ruggeri.

Francesca Bertini and her fellow divas seems to have been able to maintain their stardom in Australia in the interwar period much better than their male peers, not least because of how diva films privileged female stars. For example, Gustavo Serena, who had appeared in at least seven pre-war Italian films, often together with Bertini, co-starred with her in *A Case for the Defense*, *La Tosca*, and *Fedora*, but his name is never mentioned in Australasian advertising for any of these films. Likewise, her co-star in *Bitter Fruits* (which also circulated in Australia simultaneously as *His Friend's Wife*), Amleto Novelli (1885–1924), had been a regular on Australasian screens between 1909 and 1917, appearing in such popular epics as *The Crusaders* and *Quo Vadis?*, which earned him a modest degree of name recognition. Yet his name is rarely mentioned in Australasian newspapers in connection with his three interwar releases, which included, alongside *Bitter Fruits*, the social drama *The Ironmaster*, a story about a wealthy man who discovers his wife only married him for his money, which cleared the censor in September 1920, and *Fabiola*, a psychological reflection on the martyrdoms of Saint Agnes and Saint Sebastian, which was approved in January 1921. Novelli is only mentioned a few times alongside Bertini in ads for *His Friend's Wife*, 'a society drama of love, divorce, mystery and intrigue', and twice alongside Menichelli in ads for *The Ironmaster*.

In contrast, Bertini's name, albeit frequently misrepresented as 'Frances', 'Francisca', or 'Francesco', is mentioned more than 500 times in Antipodean

newspapers of the 1920s. Her films are frequently cited as examples of what European film art can do that American film cannot. One New Zealand review of *Countess Sara* concludes, 'After a surfeit of American features, the film comes as a breath of early spring.'<sup>86</sup> Another reviewer, with the pen name 'Deadhead', raves that Bertini 'has brought forth every possible superlative from the dictionary in the encomiums that press and public alike have lavished on her ... the greatest artiste he has ever seen in local flickerdom', with the result that 'all our much-boomed Yankee artists are as dull and lifeless as a slab of brawn after seeing this great character creator ... She is simply "It" in everything she takes up.'<sup>87</sup> She is praised as the 'Circean wonder of the Continent, dazzling, supreme'.<sup>88</sup>

The effusive Australasian reception of Bertini's version of *La Tosca*, which had caused such a stir in 1908 when Film d'Art released its two versions of it, illustrates her fame there. When *La Tosca* premiered at the Piccadilly Theatre in Sydney on 11 December 1920, the Sydney *Evening News* described Bertini as the 'acknowledged queen of Italian picture productions', saying she 'possibly has no peer on the screen'.<sup>89</sup> When the film played in Brisbane in March 1921, early in its nearly seven-year run in



Figure 9.6 British & Continental Films ad for Francesca Bertini in Bertini/Caesar Film's *La contessa Sara/Countess Sara* (1919), NZ *Truth* (Wellington), 11 December 1920

Australia that would end on 18 January 1928 in Brisbane once more, the *Daily Standard* reported,

It will surprise Australians to know that the highest paid artist on the screen today is Francesca Bertini, the wonderful Italian actress who is starring in films produced in Italy ... After the surfeit of American dope both of picture and inane artists it will be a relief to witness productions such as we had before the war gave America the opportunity to collar the world's market for films. *La Tosca* is certainly a revelation of what Italy has accomplished and proves that she has not been standing still whilst her pictures were kept out of Australia but proves that she has advanced to higher spheres in the picture game than any other country.<sup>90</sup>

While Bertini's nuanced work contrasted particularly sharply with 'American dope', the trend of comparing European films to American ones had already begun to emerge during the war, as Continental features became notable for their scarcity and non-American origins. To give just one example, a 1917 review of the Cines drama *Avatar*, starring Amleto Novelli and Soava Gallone, described it as 'a change in all respects from the ordinary American production'. After praising Novelli and Gallone, the ad mused, 'It is interesting to watch the subtle differences between their methods and those of American screen favorites.'<sup>91</sup>

What makes Italian diva films so revolutionary and compelling even today is their bold but often tortured treatment of the women who were 'both the movie's center and the movie itself'.<sup>92</sup> Diva films paid increased cinematic attention to female bodies and their sexuality, using the expressive but silent bodies of their stars, from Bertini to Borelli and Menichelli, to address societal attitudes about women, dealing with such issues as emancipation, social mobility, class divisions, and sexual exploitation. Italian diva films could be escapist adventures or melodramatic romances, but they often dealt with real problems faced by Italian women, including 'out-of-wedlock pregnancy, child custody, abandonment, shame, adultery, divorce, prostitution, and financial ruin'.<sup>93</sup> Brunetta explains that the diva 'asserted her new-found rights. She overturned centuries-old values and models. She revealed new dimensions of the human spirit. She revitalized romantic imagery, which had been put on guard by positivist culture, and she reaffirmed its relevance in an era where the great models of virility were provided by war.'<sup>94</sup>

Yet diva films rarely celebrate their empowered female characters—instead, they show the grim costs of such self-assertion. The female-dominated cinema of the diva film, a cinema of 'verbal and visual transgressions but with no change of roles', reveals women living on the margins of

society and fighting, not for political or economic emancipation as in Asta Nielsen's pre-war German films, for example, but to defend their personal virtue.<sup>95</sup> The characters played by Italian divas—the betrayed woman, or the independent woman, or the female orphan, or the naïve daughter', who are often 'mistreated, beaten, tortured, raped, humiliated, wrongly accused, abandoned together with their newborns, or forced to abandon their illegitimate children'—use their bodies as commodities as a means of emancipation, but are blamed for their own misfortunes and punished, usually with death or confinement, at the end of the films.<sup>96</sup> In their desperation, the divas often resort to murder, but are redeemed, as Dalle Vacche explains, by their beauty, which was 'a positive value in a culture sensitive to an ancient aesthetic practice at odds with the glitches and rough spots of mechanical reproduction'.<sup>97</sup> For example, in *A Woman's Story*, a melodramatic moralist tale which relies on the narrative conceit of a posthumously discovered diary, Menichelli's nameless character is an orphan girl working as a paid companion to an elderly woman whose playboy son seduces her; when she gets pregnant, she loses her job and has to deliver the baby in a convent. Alone and homeless, she is almost arrested as a prostitute, but ends up a fashionable courtesan instead, tormented by her traumatic memories. Encountering her seducer one day, she tries to avenge herself by shooting him, only to fatally shoot herself instead when he twists her arm.<sup>98</sup> Lacking a name, Menichelli's character stands in for all women victimized and brutalized by a social system that holds them to a sexual double standard and defines them by their sexual purity.

In her diva films, Bertini plays an assortment of such characters, many of whom are trapped by loveless marriages, financial precarity, and social marginality. In *A Case for the Defense*, for example, she plays Iza Dobronowska, advertised in the Australian press as 'a beautiful but unscrupulous woman', who is married to a sculptor who infantilizes and belittles her as a means of controlling her fortune, her body, and her choices.<sup>99</sup> Dalle Vacche describes Bertini's Iza as 'simultaneously frivolous, which her murderous husband accuses her of being, and thoughtful, which the emancipated new woman in the audience knows her to be', thanks to Bertini's skilful undermining of the narrated story through her facial expressions and body language.<sup>100</sup> In *The Sphinx*, Bertini plays a woman who, 'scoffing at the prospect of love in a cottage ... deserts the man who worships her and marries an elderly suitor, whose money bags compensate, in her eyes, for the absence of love or mutual interests'.<sup>101</sup> In *Countess Sara*, based on the 1887 French novel *La comtesse Sarah* by Georges Ohnet, Bertini's character Sara is a Romani woman who inherits a fortune from her adoptive mother, then spurns the young lieutenant she loves in order to marry an ageing count, only to drive herself mad with desire for the lover she discarded. Regardless of the individual



character's backstory, it is always Bertini's face and body that convey the emotional torment that her characters endure. In both *Countess Sara* and *The Poison Mood*, director Vincenzo Leone relies heavily on close-up shots to foreground the expressiveness of Bertini's highly mobile face.

As with some of the Danish and Swedish films discussed above, distribution of these Italian films in New Zealand was largely handled, to the extent it happened at all, by the British & Continental Film Company, which offered *Maciste in Love*, *Countess Sara*, *Defying Death*, *On with the Motley*, *Il leone mansueto/Might and the Mite*, *The Poison Mood*, and *Fabiola* for hire in December 1920. Both *Maciste in Love* and *Countess Sara* ran for all of 1921, while *Might and the Mite* circulated from December 1920 through July 1921. While *On with the Motley* had the shortest run, as far as currently digitized newspapers can reveal, spanning just 27 July to 19 August 1921, the most long-lasting of Italian silent films in New Zealand in this period seems to have been *Fabiola*, based on a novel by Cardinal Wiseman, which opened at the Queen's Theatre in Wellington in April 1921 and circulated in New Zealand until July 1925, when it returned to Wellington, at the Tivoli. At the end of the decade, one more *Maciste* film—*The Giant of the Mountains*—enjoyed a fourteen-month run in the Dominion.

However, few other Italian films seem to have circulated in New Zealand, at least not very widely. Of thirty Italian features imported to Australia in the 1920s, only these six can be documented to have been screened in the Dominion. It is unclear whether the dearth of Italian pictures on New Zealand screens was due to their rejection by the censor, whose records are not publicly accessible, or to distributors' failure to secure exhibition venues. Additionally, B&C proved to be short-lived. It reorganized itself in August 1921 as the British and Continental Film Co., with a greatly increased capital of £50,000 raised through the public sale of £1 shares, but that company failed to defend itself against a civil suit brought by A. Money; the default judgement for the plaintiff cost them £31 8s 1d.<sup>102</sup> Gaumont British announced the release of Bertini's *La Tosca* in New Zealand in August 1923, but does not seem to have followed through on that promise.

Still, although none of Pina Menichelli's pictures had been released in New Zealand, the *Auckland Star* ran a profile in October 1921 of 'the famous Italian beauty ... the idol of picturegoers in Southern and Eastern Europe, where she occupies a position comparable only to that of Mary Pickford in Western hearts. Fair, girlish, and graceful, she possesses a beauty that does not seem to belong too closely to any national type.'<sup>103</sup> This claim echoes one made about Bertini in the *New Zealand Herald* in May 1920, which, in conjunction with the information that Bertini 'receives a

salary of approximately £100,000 on the Continent', also offers the assessment that 'she is as popular [there] as Mary Pickford is in America'.<sup>104</sup> Where once the brightest cinema stars were compared to Sarah Bernhardt or Eleonora Duse, the stardom of Italian divas in the interwar period was measured in terms of American film standards.



While the number of European and British films screened in Australia and New Zealand before World War I had made up around 50% of all cinema programming, their combined market share fell to around 6% in the early 1920s, even as the number of cinema admissions in the Antipodes climbed to sixty-eight million per year. In comparison, combined annual admissions for the second and third most popular forms of entertainment in the region—live theatre and horse racing—were around sixteen million.<sup>105</sup> Although their efforts to bring international diversity to the Australasian cinema industry involved a tiny fraction of the films screened each year—in 1925, only twenty-one of 1,763 films imported to Australia were European in origin, rising to twenty-seven out of 1,960 in 1926<sup>106</sup>—independent distributors such as Mason Super Films and B&C nevertheless enjoyed considerable support in their endeavour, both rhetorical and financial, from local film reviewers and enthusiastic audiences. This support enabled them to pose a meaningful challenge to American cinematic hegemony by presenting a product that came to be perceived as aesthetically superior to the average American picture.

The difficulties associated with importing European productions necessarily meant that the few films that seemed likely to make the effort worth it, in financial terms, were the cream of the crop, the most critically acclaimed and aesthetically innovative films, in contrast to the fire-hose stream of American films of varying degrees of sophistication. As a result, these artistically impressive Continental films contributed to an emerging discourse about the differences between mainstream, popular American films and highbrow European art films. Reviving and repurposing the characterization of European features as art films—the same branding used to promote the salon-worthiness of early French and Italian features in 1908–11—enabled distributors and exhibitors to market European pictures as offering access to a more rarefied cultural experience than mainstream American fare. This option of an alternative kind of cinemagoing experience set the stage for the revival of German film imports in the second half of the 1920s, as will be discussed in Chapter 10, and the rise of dedicated art-house cinemas after World War II.

On a more practical level, Hollywood's domination of the Australasian cinema landscape forced British and Continental film-makers and

distributors to make common cause, supporting rather than competing with each other. In February 1922, B&C's managing director C. D'Arcy Allen published an article in the Australian trade magazine *Everyone's*, titled, 'In Support of the All-British Films', in which he articulates the nature of the opposition to American cinematic hegemony:

The picture field in Australia is well represented by the principal producers of the world—and when we say the world, as applied to the industry, it pretty well means America ... But strong opposition is now rising—very gradual, to be sure, till it promises to be formidable, whether English or Continental. All this is evidenced in some of the recent releases from countries other than America, and, if these subjects have not yet attained the heights reached by the best American productions, they have certainly created a very favorable impression.<sup>107</sup>

It is striking how Allen, despite his article's nationalistic title, treats British and Continental films as essentially interchangeable, which both reflects their common endangerment by the dominance of American studios and anticipates British/Continental co-productions later in the decade.

One such co-production, the Itala-Windsor drama *The Wages of Sin*, exemplifies this sense of solidarity between British and Continental producers in response to the threat posed by Hollywood. Imported by Mason Super Films in October 1919, *The Wages of Sin* was directed by Arrigo Bocchi on the basis of the 1891 British novel by Mary St Leger Kingsley Harrison (published under the pseudonym Lucas Malet) and filmed with an all-British cast. This film stood out to Australian critics for the opportunity it provided for 'comparison between British and European photo-plays and the American releases, [which] is not often afforded Australian patrons, who have become so accustomed to American players and their work that a film plot from another country almost ranks as a novelty'.<sup>108</sup> In response to the success of this film, the Melbourne *Herald* predicted, inaccurately, that 'in the near future film importations into the Commonwealth will include a much higher percentage of British, French, and Italian screen drama than has been the case since 1914'.<sup>109</sup>

This need for solidarity against Hollywood helped to heal the political rifts between Germany and Britain and led to the Film Europe movement, which tried to improve the bargaining position of British and Continental film-makers. Low identifies *The Uninvited Guest* as one of the first British-German collaborative productions, made in Germany with British capital in 1923.<sup>110</sup> This project opened the door to many more exchanges of actors, directors, and technicians between Britain and Europe, including such luminaries as E.A. Dupont, Georg Jacoby, Alexander Korda, Mady Christians, Lars Hanson, Dorothy Gish, Lilian Harvey, Lya de Putti,

and many others. This co-operative tendency increased in the second half of the 1920s, with the formation of British and Foreign Films in 1928, which produced films made by Germans like Hans Steinhoff that featured such transnational stars as Warwick Ward and Lillian Hall-Davis—for instance *Three Kings*, a circus melodrama from 1929.<sup>111</sup> The final battle with Hollywood for silent access to the hearts and minds of Australasian cinemagoers would be fought out in the last years of the decade, with British and Continental makers on the same side.

## Notes

- 1 Some states—Western Australia, Queensland, and Tasmania—did not delegate their state censorship powers to the Commonwealth Film Censorship Board until 1947. Bertrand, *Film Censorship in Australia*, 10–11.
- 2 A report from the Wellington Police District in 1915 included a statement from New Zealand Picture Supply that ‘all films imported from England by this firm had to be shown before the National Board of Censors in London, and all American films also had to pass the censors in London before they were sent to New Zealand. Before they were exhibited in this country they were further censored by Miss Hayward (Henry Hayward’s sister), who cut out anything objectionable. All films imported by three other companies which supplied Wellington theatres also were censored by the National Board of Censorship in London.’ Robin Kay and Dallas Moore (eds), ‘Cinematograph Films—History of Film Censorship 1911–1968’ (A&R Branch 1968–69), 4, Archives New Zealand, Wellington.
- 3 The 1916 legislation set a fee schedule of five shillings for the first 1,000 feet and two shillings and sixpence for every subsequent 500 feet or part thereof; on appeals, ten shillings for every 1,000 feet of film or part thereof, with a minimum of thirty shillings for any one film; and five shillings for preparing and affixing a photographic reproduction of the censor’s certificate. Kay and Moore, ‘Cinematograph Films’, 19.
- 4 Kay and Moore, ‘Cinematograph Films’, 23. These numbers come from the Annual Reports of the Department of Internal Affairs, 1917–1927.
- 5 ‘Cinema Pictures and Public Morals’, *Evening Post* (Wellington), 27 January 1917, 6.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Walter Wanger, ‘Films as Foreign Offices’, *Daily Mail* (London), 10 December 1921, 6. Italics in the original. Qtd in Desley Deacon, ‘“Films as Foreign Offices”: Transnationalism at Paramount in the Twenties and Early Thirties’ in Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake (eds), *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2005), 140.
- 8 Patrice Petro, ‘In the Wings’ in Patrice Petro (ed.), *Idols of Modernity: Movie Stars of the 1920s* (Princeton, NJ: Rutgers, 2010), 282.
- 9 Clarke, ‘Film Trade Difficulties’, 428.
- 10 Megaw, ‘American Image’, 200.
- 11 Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment*, 42–43.
- 12 Megaw, ‘American Image’, 198.
- 13 Sally Stockbridge, ‘Monopoly Capitalism—The Case of the Australian Film Industry’, *Australian Journal of Screen Theory* 5.6 (1978), 19.
- 14 Gaunson, ‘American Cartel’, 214.

- 15 Gaunson, 'American Cartel', 212.
- 16 Victoria de Grazia, 'Mass Culture and Sovereignty: The American Challenge to European Cinemas, 1920–1960', *Journal of Modern History* 61.1 (1989), 56.
- 17 Barbara Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 3.
- 18 David Andrews, *Theorizing Art House Cinemas: Foreign, Cult, Avant-Garde, and Beyond* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), 11.
- 19 Henry Fletcher, *Theatre Magazine* (Sydney) 13.3 (1 May 1915), 7.
- 20 De Grazia, 'Mass Culture', 60.
- 21 'Leaving for London by the Orsova on 29th May', *Picture Magazine* (Sydney), 1 May 1920, 27.
- 22 'Clement Mason, Will, 1917', ANZ\_BMD\_NSW WILLS, 81660.
- 23 'Law Report', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 January 1918, 4; 'Seen on the Screen', *Sunday Times* (Perth), 14 January 1917, 6.
- 24 *Sunday Times* (Sydney), 30 September 1917, 27; 'The Courts. Civil. An Interim Injunction', *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 4 January 1918, 6.
- 25 'The Courts. Civil. An Interim Injunction', *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 4 January 1918', 6.
- 26 'Life's Phases on the Film', *Herald* (Melbourne), 26 January 1918, 5. Beacham was replaced in January 1920 by W.W. Duff, who had managed Clement Mason's West Australian business interests before the war, in which he served in the Australian armed forces. 'Life's Phases on the Film', *Herald* (Melbourne), 10 January 1910, 13.
- 27 'Leading Men of the Film World: Mr Cecil Mason', 490.
- 28 'Life's Phases on the Film', *Herald* (Melbourne), 1 January 1921, 5.
- 29 *Theatre Magazine* (Sydney) 18.1 (1 January 1920), n.p.; 'Amusements', *Auckland Star*, 5 April 1920, 6.
- 30 *Barrier Miner* (Broken Hill, NSW), 9 July 1921, 2.
- 31 'Mason Super Films', *Everyone's* (Sydney), 10 August 1921, 10.
- 32 'English Films', *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 31 July 1925, 6.
- 33 'Film Flickers and Fancies', *Table Talk* (Melbourne), 14 February 1924, 42; 'New Companies', *Daily Commercial News and Shipping List* (Sydney), 27 March 1929, 4.
- 34 'Leaving for London by the Orsova on 29th May', *Picture Magazine* (Sydney), 1 May 1920.
- 35 'Registered Companies', *Daily Commercial News and Shipping List* (Sydney), 2 August 1922, 5.
- 36 'Clement Mason Films (1922) Ltd.', *Government Gazette of the State of New South Wales* (Sydney), 18 January 1924, 348; 'Index', *Government Gazette of the State of New South Wales* (Sydney), 31 March 1924, vi; 'Companies Registered', *Daily Commercial News and Shipping List* (Sydney), 31 October 1923, 5.
- 37 'Company News', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 March 1928, 17.
- 38 'Film Industry. Position in England', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 March 1925, 5.
- 39 'Britannia Films Limited', *Truth* (Sydney), 16 June 1929, 12. Despite the similarities in their names, Mason's company does not appear to have any connection to Dinah Shurey's Britannia Films production company, founded in 1924.
- 40 'Woman Film Executive for 23 Years. Mrs Clement Mason Celebrates Anniversary', *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 25 January 1929, 18.
- 41 'British Films Sold to America for Australian Market', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 October 1927, 16.
- 42 Horak, 'Global Distribution', 465.

- 43 'Swedish Films', *Prahran Telegraph* (Victoria), 24 January 1920, 8.
- 44 'Svensk film i utlandet', 1919. Qtd in Horak, 'Global Distribution', 467.
- 45 *Theatre Magazine* (Sydney) 18.7 (1 July 1920), 26.
- 46 Annie Fee, 'Paris Looks to the North: Swedish Silent Film and the Emergence of Cinephilia' in Anna Westerstahl Stenport and Arne Lunde (eds), *Nordic Film Cultures and Cinemas of Elsewhere* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 212.
- 47 *Theatre Magazine* (Sydney) 18.3 (1 March 1920), n.p.
- 48 'The Deadhead's Diary', *NZ Truth* (Wellington), 6 March 1920, 2.
- 49 'The Shows', *Call* (Perth), 4 March 1921, 4.
- 50 'Something Bigger and Better. British and Continental Pictures', *Manawatu Times* (NZ), 9 February 1921, 5.
- 51 *New Zealand Times* (Wellington), 30 November 1920, 3.
- 52 *New Zealand Truth* (Wellington), 24 December 1920, 2.
- 53 'Thy Soul Shall Bear Witness', *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 22 September 1921, 10.
- 54 'Thy Soul Shall Bear Witness', *Critic* (Hobart, Tas), 2 September 1921, 2.
- 55 'In Quest of Happiness', *Sunday Times* (Sydney), 28 August 1921, 25.
- 56 'Bonds that Chafe', *Sunday Times* (Sydney), 18 September 1921, 9; 'Life's Phases on the Film', *Herald* (Melbourne), 7 May 1921, 15; 'The Shows', *Call* (Perth), 16 December 1921, 4.
- 57 'Majestic. Perth', *Daily News* (Perth), 28 February 1922, 5.
- 58 'Rapids of Life', *Evening News* (Sydney), 29 January 1926, 9.
- 59 'Films in Sweden', *Daily Standard* (Brisbane), 15 August 1925, 2.
- 60 Thorsen, *Nordisk Films*, 195.
- 61 *Evening Post* (Wellington), 17 February 1921, 2.
- 62 NFS XII, 46:11, Danish Film Institute, Copenhagen, Denmark.
- 63 This cost only applied to the first print with intertitles, after which the price fell to 1.5d per foot, equivalent to half a Danish crown. By comparison, C. Boisen in Harbin, China, only had to pay half a Danish crown per metre in April 1925, but with a more unequal profit-sharing agreement with Nordisk (66.66% of profits to Nordisk, 33.33% to Boisen). NFS XII, 46:27, Danish Film Institute, Copenhagen.
- 64 NFS XII, 46:11, Danish Film Institute, Copenhagen.
- 65 NFS XII, 46:2, Danish Film Institute, Copenhagen.
- 66 'Empress Theatre', *Evening Post* (Wellington), 30 July 1925, 10.
- 67 NFS XII, 46:69, Danish Film Institute, Copenhagen.
- 68 NFS XII, 46:87, Danish Film Institute, Copenhagen.
- 69 'Film Flickers & Fancies', 14 February 1924, 49.
- 70 'New Alhambra Theatre', *Recorder* (Port Pirie, SA), 9 January 1925, 4.
- 71 'Wednesday', *Bunbury Herald and Blackwood Express* (WA), 19 May 1925, 1.
- 72 NFS XII: 11, Danish Film Institute, Copenhagen.
- 73 Gadabout, 'Town Tattle', *National Advocate* (Bathurst, NSW), 18 April 1925, 8.
- 74 Cf. Hans J. Wollstein, *Strangers in Hollywood: A History of Scandinavian Actors in American Films from 1910 to World War II* (Methuen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1994).
- 75 'Amusements', *Daily Standard* (Brisbane), 27 August 1925, 2.
- 76 Brunetta, *History of Italian Cinema*, 57.
- 77 Brunetta, *History of Italian Cinema*, 28; Bondanella, *Italian Cinema*, 19.
- 78 'Film Flickers & Fancies', *Table Talk* (Melbourne), 25 August 1921, 40.
- 79 'Right off the Reel', *Sun* (Sydney), 14 November 1920, 20; *Mercury* (Hobart, Tas), 2 June 1921, 6.

- 80 'Amusements', *West Australian* (Perth), 8 December 1920, 2.
- 81 'Entertainments', *World* (Hobart, Tas), 27 April 1923, 7.
- 82 *West Australian* (Perth), 20 November 1920, 2.
- 83 'Whisper Market', *Sun* (Sydney), 27 March 1921, 20; *Mercury* (Hobart, Tas), 23 May 1921, 6.
- 84 George Kleine, 'Memorandum for Dr Pedrazzini', 12 November 1923, in the Kleine Papers, Motion Picture Division, Library of Congress, Washington DC. Qtd in Brunetta, *History of Italian Cinema*, 58.
- 85 'Palladium', *Call* (Perth), 20 August 1920, 4.
- 86 'Movie Stars, Films, and Features', *Sun* (Christchurch, NZ), 11 December 1920, 12.
- 87 Deadhead, 'Wonderful Picture and Actress', *NZ Truth* (Wellington), 11 December 1920, 2.
- 88 *NZ Truth* (Wellington), 11 December 1920, 2.
- 89 'Bertini in "La Tosca"', *Evening News* (Sydney), 11 December 1920, 3.
- 90 'Amusements', *Daily Standard* (Brisbane), 26 February 1921, 9.
- 91 'Hoyt's Theatre DeLuxe and Olympia', *Table Talk* (Melbourne), 29 March 1917, 25.
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## The Rise of UFA, Cinema Art Films, and Anglo-German Solidarity Against Hollywood

Unlike in the USA, where German films experienced a brief boom in 1920–22, very few German films reached Australasia immediately after World War I, since German products were not permitted to be directly imported to Great Britain or its former colonies for several years. However, the rise of an invigorated, expanding German film industry was pivotal to the circulation of European film in Australasia in the second half of the 1920s, into the earliest years of the ‘talkies’.

The German film industry attracted considerable attention in British and Australasian newspapers from the early 1920s onward, preparing viewers to respond enthusiastically to German films in the second half of the decade. For example, the London *Times*’ Berlin correspondent reported in a widely reprinted December 1919 letter how the war had boosted the German film industry and alerted readers to the emergence of new German film companies including UFA, Decla, and Bioscop, which allegedly had an ambitious agenda to ‘conquer the (cinema) world’, fearing ‘no foe but America’ in this endeavour.<sup>1</sup> As the battle lines were drawn between Hollywood and the film industries of Great Britain and Western Europe in the interwar era, Berlin emerged as the most viable contender against Hollywood’s global dominance, a cause that the UK and Australasia had political, economic, and cultural grounds to support. In the waning years of the silent era, German film played a significant role in Australasia (as elsewhere) in countering American film dominance, albeit more in cultural than economic terms.

Despite the thoroughly transnational nature of film production in this era, assumptions about the national character of films from a given country



still pervaded public discourse in Australasia, with regard to both American and German film. The former was perceived as generic, light-hearted, intellectually undemanding entertainment, while the latter was initially regarded with suspicion and skepticism. Thomas Valois, manager of the Auckland branch of the New Zealand Exhibitors' Alliance, explained in January 1927 that the cinema 'has, mainly through the strict commercialism of the American viewpoint, become as standardised as the American motor-car. This has been aggravated too, through the profound belief of the average American picture producer in the low mentality of the average picture audience.'<sup>2</sup> Conversely, after the British Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association decided in early 1922 to lift the five-year ban it had imposed on German imports in 1918 (a reversal that did not take effect in New Zealand until August 1923), some doubted whether German films would be palatable to Australasian audiences. While German cinema's advances in the early 1920s had brought many films into American circulation, the Launceston *Examiner* expressed the opinion that these films were 'marred only by the strong Teutonic flavour which pervades their production, a flavour which prejudices foreigners against their pictures'.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately for historians, no attempt was made to specify the nature of this 'Teutonic flavour', nor to describe how it manifested itself. However, aside from a few costume dramas that were denigrated as 'anti-British propaganda' with the explanation that 'a square head can be fairly effectively concealed beneath a flowing wig', German films soon came to be perceived as more artistically innovative and less formulaic than American productions.<sup>4</sup>

Even before the import ban was lifted, a handful of German films circulated in the Antipodes in the early 1920s via the American studios Paramount, First National, and related entities. *Table Talk* announced in 1922 that 'big German pictures by contract with the Hamilton Theatrical Corporation, an American concern, will be released in Great Britain, its colonies and dependencies by that company while Famous Players-Lasky Corporation will release them in the United States. Among the foreign stars and directors who figure in the contract are Pola Negri, Ernest [*sic*] Lubitsch, Max Reinhardt, Joe May, Emily [*sic*] Jennings and Paul Wegener.'<sup>5</sup> The misspelling of some of the actors' names confirms their relative unfamiliarity to Antipodean audiences, but that would soon change. Paramount released three German-made films starring the Polish actor Pola Negri (1897–1987)—*Die Augen der Mumie Ma/The Eyes of the Mummy* and *Arme Violetta/The Red Peacock* in late 1922, followed by *Das Karussell des Lebens/The Last Payment* in early 1923—but being marketed as Paramount products obscured their association with Europe, Germany, and UFA. Negri's name was prominently advertised in connection with these films as a Paramount star, with whom she had recently signed a contract that would launch her

US career. When Negri went to Hollywood to work for Paramount in 1922 after five years in Berlin, she became one of the first of many artists in the German film industry poached by Hollywood studios.

By the late 1920s, however, artistically ambitious German films had become palatable, relatively profitable, and politically significant down under, even though the distribution and exhibition markets were controlled almost entirely by Australasian Films and the Australian branches of American studios. The importation of Continental (primarily German) films in this period seems to have been handled almost single-handedly by Cinema Art Films, an Australian distribution agency founded in 1926 to promote European films as an alternative to the Hollywood films that had become the norm. Its goal, as perceived by Australian critics at the time, was the hope of improving

an industry whose product had become rather mediocre, due, no doubt, to the monopoly held by one country, but now this Continental company [UFA] have challenged this country [the USA], which, by way of the Press, have admitted the equality, and in most cases the superiority, of their product—praise from competitors is praise indeed. Long may these pictures continue to confound the critics with their ever-increasing excellence! Cinema Art Films are to be congratulated.<sup>6</sup>

While its artistry was certainly important, the fact that German film offered an attractive alternative to American film had both aesthetic and geopolitical appeal. In addition to enhancing the entertainment value of local cinema programmes, the pre-war strategy of importing and promoting the best European films, which Cinema Art Films revived (and a few competitors such as Continental Film Classics Ltd, founded in Christchurch in 1928, emulated) was now intertwined with new economic and cultural-political concerns, including the dwindling influence of British media in Britain's former colonies.

While British literature and customs retained a strong position in the settler-colonial societies in the Antipodes in the interwar period, British film never dominated the Australasian cinema market, although its 26.3% share of that market in 1913 was higher than the 15% of the domestic British market it made up in the same period.<sup>7</sup> In 1925, only 3% of the films shown in Australia were British.<sup>8</sup> The fluctuating fortunes of British film in Australasia were tied to the development of the British film industry, shifts in the Australasian cinema market, the dominance of American distributors after World War I, and former colonies' changing and contested relationship to Britain, British culture, and the British economy.<sup>9</sup> Although Britain tried to hedge against the erosion

of its position in Australia and New Zealand by relying on a rhetoric of Empire, it simply did not produce enough feature films to compete against American imports, for which reason it made common cause with German and other Continental film industries in the 1920s and early 1930s.

Concerns about an American film monopoly in Australia had been raised in the Australian parliament and press as early as 1920 and persisted throughout much of the decade, developing into a discussion of the need for a quota to protect British films. An early attempt by the Board of Trade to mandate an increasing proportion of British films, 'beginning with 1ft of British film to 9ft of foreign film in 1926 and ending with 1ft of British film to 3ft of foreign film after June, 1929', was rejected by the Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association, prompting the *Launceston Examiner* to praise Germany for having implemented such a rule, which required one domestic film to be shown for every foreign import.<sup>10</sup> A Royal Commission into the Australian Motion Picture Industry was convened from June 1927 to February 1928 to explore and address concerns about the overwhelming dominance of American films over British (and Continental) productions. Although the commission ultimately found that the contracts between American producers and Australian companies were configured to make the Australian companies merely distributors rather than equal partners and that most profits were remitted to the USA, they did not find evidence of an actual monopoly.

Instead, to increase the percentage of 'Empire films' (referring to British films rather than domestic Australian or New Zealand productions), the commission recommended that British companies imitate American companies in establishing local agencies. In the interim, they proposed a temporary, voluntary quota for British films. As *Film Weekly* reported, the British Films Act that became law in January 1928 had the goal of promoting 'the production of film within the British Empire and by British capital and subjects', with a target of releasing sixty British films in Australia per year by 1929.<sup>11</sup> Since a 'British picture is one that is produced under the control of a British subject or a British company', the nationality assigned to a film was determined by the company being registered under the laws of any part of the British Empire, with majority British subjects as directors and 75% of salaries in production paid to British subjects or persons domiciled in the British Empire. Under these terms, both Australian and New Zealand productions would count as British films, but domestic film production was not explicitly advantaged by this act, nor was any provision made to bolster Continental films. The commission's quota recommendations were both insufficient to change the trend of American dominance and unsustainable, to the extent they were

implemented at all, but the process reflects the perception that British and Continental film-makers were on the same side against Hollywood.

Cinema Art Films' endeavours to import German films to Australasia in the late 1920s thus supported a more general strategy of using the cinematic output of Britain's recent opponent in the war to contest the dominance of one of its former colonies. This chapter traces the contours of these geopolitical and cultural negotiations over the distribution and exhibition of German films in Australasia in the late 1920s, in order to illuminate the complexities and paradoxes of cinema's role in shaping cultural identity in the final years of the silent period.

### The Rise of UFA and German Art Film

German films from various makers had enjoyed considerable success in Australasia prior to World War I as part of nationally and generically diverse cinema programmes (see Chapter 7), but when German films returned to Australasian cinemas in the 1920s, their cultural significance was perceived as much greater than before, while their economic position was much weaker. Both aspects of this realignment are evident from correspondence between Allan Macdonald, general manager of Famous Lasky Film Service (NZ) Ltd, and the New Zealand comptroller of customs in November 1923. In a letter to the customs inspector, Macdonald enquired whether the embargo on the importation of German films had been lifted yet and what it would cost to release the six German films his company had already tried to import—among others, Negri's *The Red Peacock* and the historical drama *Das Weib des Pharao/The Loves of Pharaoh* (aka *Pharaoh's Wife*)—that had been held in bond for several months because they were considered to be more than 5% of German origin. The comptroller forwarded this letter to a Mr Tanner with the handwritten query, 'Will the importation of German films interfere with a British industry?', which suggests that the restrictions on importing German films were largely an economic matter, from the perspective of the customs office at least.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast, the response to Macdonald's enquiry from examining officer J.H. Quinn (who may also have been the proprietor of the Capitol Picture Theatre on Dominion Road in Mt. Eden, Auckland) focuses on the question of the artistic value of the films and the benefit New Zealand filmgoers might receive from exposure to such products. Quinn reports that German films posed little economic threat, particularly since American production companies had little incentive to import very many of them as competition for their own products. However, he believed that excluding German films would be detrimental to local audiences' cultural education.

Referring to Mr Scott, general manager of NZ Picture Supplies Ltd, and Macdonald, Quinn explains,

They regard the picture industry as the expression of an art, and that it has so come to be regarded by the picture going public. They also point out that it does not pay to import poor quality productions but that to attain success the quality must be good. Therefore the only German pictures imported would have to be of good quality. It has also to be remembered that if German films were kept out of New Zealand it would be no great hardship on picture importers, who can get all they require from the United States, but would rather penalize the New Zealand public who would be debarred from becoming acquainted with German art as expressed by their picture productions.<sup>13</sup>

According to Quinn, the possibility of economic competition from German films for the British film industry was minimal, considering American dominance (which was, in fact, a much greater threat to British film). Instead, it was a question of art, at which German films were believed to excel, and film's role in conveying cultural knowledge. In this exchange, the significance of German films as artistic products and vehicles of cultural exchange appears to far outweigh their minor economic impact.

The German film industry itself had changed radically during and immediately after the war, which shifted the parameters for the films it produced and exported. German films featured different actors, directors, and were made by different companies than in the pre-war period. Directors such as Ernst Lubitsch (1892–1947), who made large-format spectacles like *The Eyes of the Mummy*, and Joe May (born Joseph Mandl, 1880–1954), whose four-part serial *Die Herrin der Welt/The Mistress of the World* was announced in Australia as a Paramount release in late 1922 but does not seem to have been released there after all, enjoyed increasing prominence. At the same time, however, individual actors lost much of the autonomy and creative control they had exercised in the early 1910s and were subordinate to the demands of producers and directors. Although pioneering early stars like Asta Nielsen and Henny Porten continued to make highly regarded films in the 1920s, both with their own companies and with major German studios, none of those later films appear to have been imported to Australasia. Instead, a new generation of female stars took centre stage, including Negri, Lil Dagover (1887–1980), and Camilla Horn (1903–1996), as well as male stars such as Emil Jannings (1884–1950), Conrad Veidt (1893–1943), and the Swede Gösta Ekman (1890–1938).

Of greater significance for distribution networks, however, was the absorption of the many small production companies that characterized pre-war German production into Germany's quasi-national film company Universum Film AG (UFA). Founded in 1917 as a state propaganda organ with funding from the Deutsche Bank, UFA was initially created through a coerced merger of three major players in the pre-war German film industry—Messter Film, Paul Davidson's PAGU, and Nordisk's German assets—but it soon acquired Decla-Bioscop as well (in November 1921), and attracted a host of small studios that essentially functioned as appendages, including Greenbaum, Zelnik, and Gloria Film. UFA centralized and accelerated German film production to unprecedented levels, with global repercussions. Rampant post-war inflation made it prohibitive to import US films but cheap to produce big-budget pictures in Germany. The strong dollar made German films inexpensive to import to the USA, giving UFA increasingly valuable foreign currency to recover its production costs. By way of example, Lubitsch's historical epic *Anna Boleyn/Deception* cost eight million German marks to produce in 1920 and was sold to the USA for \$200,000 (equivalent to fourteen million marks).<sup>14</sup>

The wave of inexpensive but elaborate German films supplied by UFA caused consternation in the USA in the early 1920s, for both cultural and economic reasons. Some US newspapers framed the attempts of German film-makers to appeal to international audiences through historical films as an attempt to discredit France (*Madame Du Barry/Passion*) and England (*Deception*), and proposed a tariff on European-made pictures to prevent 'foreign screen dramas crowd[ing] the home product into a tight corner'.<sup>15</sup> In Los Angeles, film industry workers protested the premiere of *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari/The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* in the summer of 1921 and forced German films off the screen, while Adolph Zukor of Famous Players-Paramount took a subtler route to try to pre-empt the competition.<sup>16</sup> He allegedly tried to buy a controlling share in UFA in 1921, but UFA declined the offer.<sup>17</sup> Paramount then supported Davidson, after an unsuccessful attempt to repurchase his PAGU shares, in founding the European Film Alliance (EFA), but it made just a handful of films with some of UFA's biggest stars before going under, leaving UFA largely alone on the field. UFA continued to make horrendously expensive films to compete with Hollywood, but soon found themselves in financial difficulty. In a bid to stave off bankruptcy and ensure access to US markets, UFA joined with Paramount and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in 1925 to form a distribution company called Parufamet. This agreement provided UFA with seventeen million dollars in operating capital in exchange for reserving 75% of screening slots in their cinemas for Parufamet films. UFA films

were also to be distributed in the USA, but since very few actually were, the Parufamet scheme merely aggravated UFA's financial distress.

In Australasia, however, conditions for the importation and circulation of UFA films were very different. Not only was there no significant domestic film production to contend with, but the German film industry's ability to compete with Hollywood buttressed British attempts to reclaim market share for non-American productions. In January 1925, Sir Oswald Stoll, of Stoll Pictures, praised the Film Europe movement, which touted a 'new method of European co-operation designed to prevent the American film from driving the British film off a not too patriotic market'.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, in 1926, Sir Robert Donald praised German producers for their 'indomitable courage, their artistry, their foresight, their technique, and their attention to detail', suggesting that 'in the motion picture industry of the Fatherland, there lay a lesson that the Motherland might take to heart advantageously'.<sup>19</sup> Bringing UFA films to Australasia thus became an act of solidarity with British film, bolstering the ideal of a common European culture in opposition to American aggression. From 1927 to 1930, UFA was the most significant European producer on the Antipodean cinema market, supplying many big-budget, artistically ambitious productions that played in Australasia to great acclaim.

As it turned out, Hollywood's most effective strategy for hamstringing German film production was hiring away its most celebrated stars and directors, which reflects the high status of German film in this period. So many actors, directors, and producers in this period were border-crossers making films on both sides of the Atlantic and in various European countries that one can hardly describe any film tradition as nationally autonomous. This was already true in the 1910s, with Danish actors like Asta Nielsen and Olaf Fønss and the Australian dancer Madame Saharet making films in Germany, but the pace and volume of such exchanges increased between the wars. By the late 1920s, the long list of European film-makers and stars working for Hollywood studios included, among many others, Lubitsch, Jannings, Negri, Veidt, Greta Garbo, Mauritz Stiller, Erich Pommer, and Erich von Stroheim.

These talented individuals naturally contributed a great deal to the development of Hollywood film in the late silent period and beyond, but it can be difficult to determine the exact nature of their contributions, particularly within the rigid studio system. One New Zealand reviewer judged that while Hollywood excelled at comedy and action films, it

fails only in tragic drama and in an appeal to the emotional intensities. These money cannot buy, or it can buy them only in the sense that it can buy foreign directors with foreign minds and foreign

traditions behind them. Von Stroheim is a foreigner; Von Sternberg, Buchowetski, Murnau, Stiller, Seastrom, Christianson—all the American employed directors who mean anything in tragic drama—are foreigners ... All the 'movies' that approach the first class in adult emotional appeal were produced by foreigners.<sup>20</sup>

Other actors and directors moved in other directions, however, with British actors including Lillian Hall-Davis and Warwick Ward and the American actor Anna May Wong making films in Germany, while the German director E.A. Dupont became director in chief of British National Pictures in early 1927 and made several films in the UK.

Anglo-German, Anglo-French, French-German, and other transnational co-productions were also common until the early 1930s, blurring the lines of national film production even further. The transnational circulation of silent films, albeit constrained by the political and economic competition between countries, introduced ordinary settler-colonial Australasians, far from the American, British, and Continental capitals where the films they watched had been made, to a cosmopolitan cultural imaginary. Brisbane notes that

the dominant influence of the United States of America upon [Australia] is as much a matter of acquired popular taste as it is of international politics ... If the mark of a cosmopolitan culture is not that it provides 'world standard' performance but that it creates something uniquely its own, then ... Australian culture is at every level not only an international culture but a cosmopolitan one.<sup>21</sup>

All of this cross-pollination complicates any straightforward attribution of certain national traits or values to any film based on its actors or director, as well as complicating the definition of national film entirely.

Still, many Australasian critics made a point of identifying and underscoring differences between American and British/Continental films, presenting the latter as a refreshing, sophisticated alternative to the cloying homogeneity of the former. Already in November 1921, the *Australian* identified three major German films that had recently done well in the US market (but don't seem to have made it to Australasia)—*Passion*, *Carmen/Gipsy Blood*, and *Der Golem/The Golem*, the first two directed by Lubitsch and starring Negri—and concluded, 'One great fault with American productions up to the present seems to have been that every feature picture appears to be modelled on the same plan ... The recent German and British productions, however, have not been afraid to try something new.'<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Valois explained in early 1928 that



the Continental productions ... are largely costume and historical plays, the idea being that national concealed propaganda is hard to keep out of many modern subjects and is obnoxious in any art or entertainment. The cinema, like music, should be without nationality. It would be impossible, after seeing a good German or French moving picture, to assign it to a country of origin. It is sadly easy to affix the source of production of the average Hollywood movie.<sup>23</sup>

In contrast to the prevalence of social dramas among European films on Australasian screens in the pre-war period, those Continental pictures in the 1920s that positioned themselves as transnational and universal seem to have had cultural and commercial appeal in the Antipodes. Abstract experimental films, such as *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, which passed the Australian censor in October 1928, do not appear to have been widely screened, while gritty Weimar street films like *Die freudlose Gasse/The Joyless Street* were simply not imported.

Local critics agreed that greater national differentiation in the film market would translate into more diverse attractions for Antipodean cinemagoers. A *Sydney Morning Herald* review of films released in Australia in 1927, for example, singles out the UFA features *Variété/Variety* (aka *Vaudeville*) and *Der letzte Mann/The Last Laugh* as particularly noteworthy, not least because of their technical innovations, as well as the UFA *Kulturfilme* (educational documentaries) *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit/The Golden Road (to Strength and Beauty)* and *Falscher Scham/False Shame*.<sup>24</sup> In announcing the arrival of new British and German films in 1928 that 'are so full of good things and promise of more good things in the future that they demand discussion', a reviewer for the *Australasian* predicts that 'if the UFA film, *The Spy*, and the British International productions, *Moulin Rouge* and *Tommy Atkins*, are representative samples of what British and German studios are making to-day, picture-goers who are weary of comic Irishmen, moral lessons, and "smart alecks" can take heart'.<sup>25</sup> Even this distinction between British and German films is artificial, however. As the reviewer goes on to note, *Moulin Rouge*, although produced by BIP, is 'legally, but not spiritually, a British film. Its producer and photographer were German; its leading players Russian (apparently), French, and Australian'.<sup>26</sup> In their need to compete with Hollywood, British and European film-makers achieved as high a level of international cooperation as in the pre-war period.

Yet although Hollywood's own internationalization made it difficult for the average cinemagoer to differentiate between German and American films, especially when the same actors and directors featured in productions from different national industries, the idea that European film represented a higher level of artistic accomplishment than American film

and a bulwark against American dominance seems to have been widespread. The Australian press frequently identified German films as representative of Continental innovation, while some members of the German press regarded their country's films as cultural ambassadors, 'agents of Germanness amongst foreigners'.<sup>27</sup> Film's role as an entertainment commodity was thus intertwined with its economic and political significance, making the question of which films to import a much more consequential one than simply a matter of what audiences were perceived to want or what would make the most money.

### Cultivating a Niche Market: Cinema Art Films

Against this backdrop, the decision by Cinema Art Films (CAF) to focus on importing British and Continental productions in the late 1920s stands out as not only an economic gamble, but also a delicate sociopolitical negotiation. As in the pre-war period, Continental films enjoyed a reputation as high-class, exclusive luxury items that connected the Antipodes back to the Old World in a highly visible way, but this reputation for modern sophistication was now intertwined with the challenge Continental films posed to American film. As the *Collie Mail* noted in 1927, CAF's releases 'are the last word in up-to-date Continental film fare, comprising, as they do, the cream of European productions, and are without doubt the only serious rival of the American film corporations'.<sup>28</sup> Cinema Art Films' strategy of importing European films and convincing local exhibitors to screen them relied on amplifying audience demand for something other, better, than standard American cinema fare. For example, a January 1928 review in the Sydney *Sun* of the Greenbaum/Parufamet film *Die Flucht in den Zirkus/The Circus of Life*, directed by Mario Bonnard, pointed out that 'picturegoers have come to expect something different from Cinema Art Films', in this case 'the manner of presentation, the unusual photography, the masterly manner in which the imagination of the audience is played upon, that gives this film its claim to artistic achievement'.<sup>29</sup> While *The Circus of Life* had passed the Australian censor in February 1927, it wasn't screened until January 1928 in Australia and May 1928 in New Zealand; once it was in cinemas, however, it remained in circulation until 1930 in New Zealand and 1932 in Australia.

Cinema Art Films' name presupposes the same highbrow reputation of European films that Mason Films played on in its marketing of Swedish and Italian films immediately after the war (see Chapter 9), but the company focused particularly on German films from UFA. In fact, a Perth newspaper reported in June 1927 that the 'young and progressive company' had been formed specifically to handle UFA films in Australia.<sup>30</sup> The company's

first director was Leslie John Keast (1886–1957), a Port Adelaide native educated at Friends' High School in Hobart, who had started his career working for Pathé in Melbourne and Adelaide, then for J.D. Williams in Adelaide and Spencer's in Sydney, before becoming director of the Feature Film Department of Australasian Films in Victoria in early 1920 and then moving to Fox Films.<sup>31</sup> As a consummate Australian film industry insider, Keast was in a strong position to negotiate favourable exhibition contracts for his new company's imports. His co-directors and financiers were Leslie Portray Hoskins (1884–1956), one of the proprietors of the Lithgow ironworks in New South Wales, and his brother Edgar James Hoskins (1894–1969). To launch the company, Les Hoskins and Keast made a four-month-long film-buying trip to Europe and the USA in mid-1926 that included stops in London and Berlin. Hoskins and Keast's return to Sydney in November 1926 was widely covered in local papers, along with the information that they had brought back several films with them 'from the big German combine UFA, whose headquarters are at Berlin'.<sup>32</sup>

On this initial trip to Berlin, Keast and Hoskins negotiated a contract with UFA, signed on 28 September 1926, through which they acquired for CAF the sole and exclusive distribution and exhibition rights, for a period of five years beginning 1 January 1927, to sixteen films in Australia, Tasmania, New Zealand, and islands under the protectorate of the Commonwealth government. This initial list included such blockbusters as *Variety* and *Metropolis*, in addition to several lesser-known films, such as *Der Farmer aus Texas/Somebody's Son* (aka *The Farmer from Texas*) and *Die drei Kuckucksuhren/Adventure Mad*. Four of the films featured Emil Jannings, while Lya de Putti, Lil Dagover, and Lillian Hall-Davis starred in three each. The deal cost Keast and Hoskins \$100 (USD; equivalent to £20) up front, for the assurance that UFA would provide them with positive prints on AGFA stock, 'not later than one calendar month after receipt of the notice in writing therefore upon payment of the market price prevailing in Berlin ... for printing', packing, and shipping the films.<sup>33</sup> The positive prints themselves remained the property of UFA and were to be returned to UFA at the end of the contract. CAF was expressly prohibited from copying the negatives, except by prior arrangement with UFA in case of a print being rendered useless by fire.

Since centralized national film censorship was well established in both Australia and New Zealand by this point, the contract provides for sending an advance copy of each film to Australia to be reviewed by the censor. If a film were to be rejected, it was to be returned to UFA for a refund, minus half the return freight and insurance costs, and replaced by a different film of the same quality and length. CAF was given permission to edit the films as necessary for the Australasian market with regard to

intertitles, tinting, and excising questionable material, but not to the extent that the story or plot was thereby altered, 'nor to make such alterations that will discredit the name of UFA or the country of origin'. All advertising was to display the name UFA Productions, the UFA trademark, and the directors' names alongside the title of the film, 'also if desired by UFA the names of the chief artists'. This provision makes it very clear to whom credit for the film was chiefly to be given—first and foremost to UFA, then the director(s), and finally—optionally—the leading actors.

As a new company, not yet even officially incorporated in September 1926, Cinema Art Films apparently didn't have the means to buy UFA films outright, so the contract establishes a profit-sharing lease agreement. Distribution/exhibition revenue for each of the films was to be divided 50/50 between CAF and UFA, with a guaranteed minimum of £10,000 for UFA—except in the case of *Metropolis*, on which UFA was to receive 52% of the gross receipts—minus the costs of the prints, freight, insurance, import and censor fees.<sup>34</sup> By 31 October 1926, Cinema Art Films was to pay £1,000 on account, with an additional £3,980 due upon receipt of the first shipment of films, and £5,000 more due by 1 July 1927. After the contract had been signed, a flurry of letters between UFA's foreign office and the Cinema Art Films directors' Berlin hotel address a complication that seems to have arisen at the last moment. Australasian Films had apparently offered to buy outright the rights for Australia and New Zealand to twelve UFA films for £25,000, which may have been a much more attractive offer for UFA than the profit-sharing agreement with CAF, which only guaranteed them £10,000. Writing from the Hotel Adlon in the evening of 28 September, Hoskins and Keast asked for notification by 6pm on 30 September whether the deal was off, in which case they would return the contract as well as all publicity materials received.<sup>35</sup> However, no surviving evidence indicates that UFA accepted this alternative offer, so the contract with CAF must have remained in force. The fact that CAF applied for Australian censor approval for twenty-one German features in the first six months of 1927 also testifies to the validity of the contract.

The brief history of CAF is tumultuous, due to rapid growth and frequent reshuffling of leadership. Immediately upon Keast and Hoskins's return to Sydney in late November 1926, they officially registered Cinema Art Films in New South Wales, with £60,000 of capital in £1 shares.<sup>36</sup> CAF soon opened a branch office in Melbourne headed by Walter J. Nicholls, who opened a Perth office for the company, before becoming the manager of the Majestic Theatre, and subsequently exploitation manager for Hoyt's Theatres in Western Australia.<sup>37</sup> UFA's interest in ensuring the success of this venture is confirmed by the visit of UFA representative Kurt Hubert to Sydney in June 1927 and that of his colleague Baron

Gronicka to Hamilton, New Zealand in November 1927. With an eye to ensuring the exhibition of its imports across the trans-Tasman region and solidifying its control over the distribution of UFA products, Cinema Art Films announced a merger with Exhibitors' Alliance Films (New Zealand) and UFA in July 1927, promising to ensure that 'selected English and Continental films will occupy a larger portion of Australian and New Zealand picture theatre programmes', in part by negotiating for exhibition rights for the entire Australasian region.<sup>38</sup>

When it was registered in March 1928, the new company used the name Cinema Art Films (Australia & New Zealand) Ltd and boasted an increased capital of £100,000 in £1 shares. At this point, L.J. Keast no longer appears as a director.<sup>39</sup> Instead, UFA's Gronicka joined the two Hoskins brothers; W.F. Gale, formerly manager of the Government Savings Bank of New South Wales; A.J. Clegg, formerly director of Exhibitors' Alliance Films (NZ); solicitor Arthur Charles Davis, formerly managing director of Exhibitors' Alliance Films; and solicitor John Williams Maund. It's not clear why Keast left the company, particularly since he and his wife Evlyn (Eveleana) both appear as subscribers on the listing for CAF's incorporation in Queensland in August 1928, along with George Herbert Hoskins,



**INTERESTED IN ALIEN IMMIGRATION.**—Left to right: Captain Tadsen (president of the German Club, Sydney), Mr. K. Hubert (representing U.F.A. Cinema Art Films, Ltd.), who arrived by the Aorangi yesterday, and Mr. L. G. Brundahl, of the Alien Immigration Welfare Society, Sydney.

Figure 10.1 Newspaper coverage of UFA representative Kurt Hubert's arrival in Australia, *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 25 June 1927

T.B. Watt, and the other previously named directors.<sup>40</sup> G. Ward, who had written for the theatrical journal *Everyone's*, was hired on as a publicity expert, with the particular task of helping market *Metropolis* in Melbourne for Hoyt's Theatres, after which he became the manager of Hoyt's Theatres in Adelaide.<sup>41</sup> Stan Perry ran the company's film exchange in 1927–28, while Ron Shafto was hired as publicity director and assistant general manager in 1928, but he resigned after less than six months to become general manager for British Dominion Films.<sup>42</sup> In New Zealand, Arthur Davis handled the company's legal affairs, while Valois, of the New Zealand Exhibitors' Association, was appointed in August 1929 to be the company's public officer in New Zealand.<sup>43</sup>

CAF did not control any cinemas of its own but had to find exhibitor partners to work with to get their imported films into circulation. In March 1928, CAF announced its partnership with Hoyt's brand-new, opulent, 2,297-seat Regent Theatre on George Street in Sydney, which had agreed to screen many of CAF's German imports, including both *Faust* and *Metropolis*. An ad in the *Evening News* congratulates Hoyt's on 'their far-sighted and courageous policy as exemplified by the dedication of the mighty "REGENT" Theatre to all that is good and uplifting in Motion Picture Art'.<sup>44</sup> While the Regent does not seem to have screened *Faust*, it did screen *Metropolis* in April/May 1928, paired with Chaplin's *The Circus*, for more than five weeks, accompanied by 'startling back-stage sound effects and weird futurist music, specially composed for this film by the German musician [Gottfried] Huppertz'.<sup>45</sup> Buoyed by this extended urban season, *Metropolis* immediately moved onto the provincial circuit, opening at the Dungog Picture Theatre, 138 miles north, on 26 May.

In addition to endorsing Hoyt's good taste, CAF also used the above-mentioned ad to reflect on the role of film in national development and international cooperation, a cause that it believed itself to be serving with its Continental imports. The ad declares:

A Nation must progress or stagnate, and side by side with progress in Commerce must come the artistic development of all forms of Amusement enjoyed by the people. PALATIAL THEATRES DEMAND SUPERLATIVE PICTURES. The atmosphere created by Theatres such as the 'REGENT' does not admit of anything mean or petty. Just as the policy of the Directors in opening such a Theatre calls for broadmindedness of vision, cleanliness of thought and general uplift, so do the minds of those who create the Pictures for exhibition in that Theatre become elevated toward the ultimate in Art. NO ONE CAN PROGRESS ALONE. The mighty 'REGENT'

calls for World-wide co-operation so that its Screen may reflect the talent of the World in brains, beauty and Art.<sup>46</sup>

German film is thus positioned as an important element of national progress and international cooperation to achieve great art, a position that CAF had defended from its inception.

Testifying before the Royal Commission in July 1927, Keast expressed his conviction that there was a niche market in Australia for high-quality European productions, although strict Australian censorship, particularly of European films, made it difficult to convey their full appeal.<sup>47</sup> He explained that although he opposed the quota system, CAF aimed to 'further Empire films' by striving to ensure that 50% of its releases were British, with German films making up most of the remainder, for 'German pictures ... are of a more artistic nature than American films. Continental films are the greatest competitors of American films.'<sup>48</sup> A few months later, in December 1927, CAF ran an ad campaign promoting its ability to provide access to 'the drama, art, and culture of the four corners of the earth', from the 'emotional depth of the Teutons—the racing freshness of the Briton—the spicy gaiety of the French—the languorous romance of the desert nomads and the red-blooded adventure of the New World'.<sup>49</sup>

Among the 'superlative' German productions that Cinema Art Films announced as possible future releases at the Regent was the Leni Riefenstahl film *Der heilige Berg/The Wrath of the Gods*, which had premiered in London in late 1927. After passing the censor on 13 April 1928, it was released in Australia in June as *Peaks of Destiny*. Although reviews faulted the film as 'overburdened with far-fetched symbolism', they also praised its magnificent scenery, photography of mountain climbing, and exciting ski racing.<sup>50</sup> This film did not open at the Regent Theatre, but rather at the Piccadilly, alongside Chaplin's *The Circus*, on 28 June 1928. It stayed in circulation in Australia until August 1930, and until February 1931 in New Zealand, where it had premiered at the Grand Theatre in Christchurch in October 1928.

Cinema Art Films worked hard to convince exhibitors to book European films. When Les Hoskins returned in August 1928 from another five-month-long world film-buying tour, he held a luncheon for major exhibitors in Western Australia at the Savoy Hotel to promote some of the films he'd just acquired, which included twenty British films, twenty Continental specials, and a dozen American films. Among the UFA productions in this batch were the Fritz Lang drama *Spione/The Spy*, the adventure romance *Die Todesschleife/Looping the Loop*, the French-German co-production *Geheimnisse des Orients/Secrets of the Orient* (aka *Secrets of the East*), the Joe May war drama *Heimkehr/Homecoming* (aka *Coming Home*), starring



Figure 10.2 Cinema Art Films poster for UFA's *Der heilige Berg/Peaks of Destiny* (1928). National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra. Reuse not permitted

the Swedish actor Lars Hanson, and, rather belatedly, *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*.<sup>51</sup> Attendees included the managers of the Union Theatres, Hoyt's Regent in Perth, the Grand Theatre, the Majestic, the Pavilion, the Princess Theatre in Fremantle, the New Oxford Theatre in Leederville, and many others. As flattering as such personal outreach may have been, the economic clout of consolidated imports was hard to fight against. Around the same time as the luncheon, independent suburban exhibitors in Melbourne signed an agreement with Hoyt's to hire films only from Hoyt's buying pool, which had closed contracts with First National, Fox, MGM, Universal, and British Dominion, leaving Paramount and Australasian Films/Union Theatres standing alone. CAF was reportedly 'unaccounted for' in this struggle, while United Artists continued to sell to all sides.<sup>52</sup>

CAF made regular, effective use of popular and trade newspapers to promote its films. One primary marketing strategy was an UFA News column published in *Film Weekly*, in which CAF provided not only news of



UFA films being screened in Australia but also gave updates on other new UFA films premiering elsewhere, either as a means of stimulating interest in importing these films or simply helping tradesmen keep up with the latest news. For example, the 19 January 1928 UFA column announced the company's intention of noting city releases regularly of films expected to cater to 'captive critics and very discerning patrons' due to their 'new faces and fresh environment'.<sup>53</sup> An accompanying ad promoted four UFA films, all of which had cleared the Australian censor in early 1927: *Ein Walzertraum/A* (or *The Waltz Dream*, *Somebody's Son*, the bucolic Zelnik feature *Die Forsterchristel/Flower of the Forest* (aka *The Bohemian Dancer*), starring Lya Mara, and Greenbaum's *The Circus of Life*, starring Marcella Albani. A review in the same issue of *Film Weekly* emphasizes the latter film's scope for 'plenty of play for the Continental actors' emotions' and notes that the film was 'particularly interesting owing to difference of locales, actors, method of presentation, and peculiar attention to details, differing so greatly from the usually accepted style of British and American productions'.<sup>54</sup> Despite praise for Albani, 'an actress of ability and a European beauty of the Madonna type', however, the film was only rated 'Good', exactly the same as not only *Flower of the Forest*, but also the other eight American films reviewed in the column.

Between 1927 and 1930, Cinema Art Films imported at least fifty UFA-branded films (which included several films licensed from other makers, such as Greenbaum, Sascha, and Eichberg Films), as well as several British pictures (primarily from Stoll and British International Pictures) and a few American films (some of which are erroneously attributed to UFA in ads). CAF hired these films out to exhibitors across Australia and New Zealand. Most films appear to have been screened in both countries, but a few, including *Der Tänzer meiner Frau/Her Dancing Partner* (aka *Dance Fever*) were only screened in New Zealand (in this case because the film was rejected by the Australian censor in January 1928), while a bigger percentage circulated only in Australia, due to the larger market's greater capacity to accommodate films.

In the absence of virtually all documentation of CAF's agreements with exhibitors, there does not seem to be much rhyme or reason as to where UFA films were screened. In 1927, several of Cinema Art Films' highest-profile UFA imports—including *Variety* and *The Last Laugh*—seem to have been rented to Australasian Films, under whose auspices they opened at Union Theatres' Piccadilly cinema on Pitt Street in Sydney. In 1928, the independent Rialto Theatre in Sydney, located midway along the southern side of the Corso in the beachside suburb of Manly, seems to have been the most common metropolitan venue, hosting the premieres of such lower-budget films as *Der Wilderer/The Poacher*, *Manon Lescaut*, *Flower of the*

*Forest*, *Die Finanzen des Großherzogs/The Grand Duke's Finances*, *Adventure Mad*, the Ossi Oswalda comedy *Blitzzug der Liebe/Cupid's Express* (aka *Love's Express*), the Greenbaum production *Der Meister der Welt/Master of the World*, and *Die Czardasfürstin/The Gypsy Princess*. Built in 1923 and operated by the Smythe family, the modern, elegant Rialto seated 1,240 people on a single floor, with boxes along the side walls and a sliding roof for warm nights.<sup>55</sup> Many other UFA films premiered at various theatres in Melbourne, Perth, Canberra, and an array of smaller cities across Australia. The Princess Theatre in Bunbury (WA), for example, was proud to announce in November 1927 its contract with CAF to show sixteen 'super productions ... under the UFA banner' in the 1927/28 season (a total that included two British films), beginning with *Variety*.<sup>56</sup>

In addition to distributing UFA fiction features, Cinema Art Films also distributed the UFA 'enlightenment' films *The Golden Road to Strength and Beauty*, starring Leni Riefenstahl, and *False Shame*. As a non-theatrical release, *The Golden Road* circulated on a smaller circuit but was shown for much longer in individual venues than the average feature film. From early May until mid-August 1927, *The Golden Road* played at Adyar Hall in Sydney, under the auspices of the Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society, founded in 1891, which built the hall on Bligh Street in 1925. The society used the lodge to host all manner of classes, concerts, and public lectures, as well as one of Sydney's only vegetarian cafés at the time.<sup>57</sup> Screening films designed to educate viewers about the human body seems to have been very much in keeping with the society's goals, but in the 1930s and early 1940s, Adyar Hall would go on to host meetings of groups as diametrically opposed as anti-war activists, many of whom advocated alliance with the Soviet Union, and the nationalist Australia First Movement, which sympathized with Nazi Germany.<sup>58</sup>

Despite the extensive nudity shown in the film, *The Golden Road* does not appear to have incurred either official or public disapproval; instead it earned praise for its beauty and the variety of material it drew on to underscore the 'importance of having a strong and healthy body'.<sup>59</sup> In New Zealand, where the film was not released, newspapers marvelled at its popularity among Sydney audiences during its seventeen-week run, despite the fact that it featured neither a popular star nor a story, and assured readers that 'although it frankly presents nude figures, so artistically is the picture produced, not one foot of it is considered objectionable'.<sup>60</sup> After leaving Sydney, *The Golden Road* was screened at the Melbourne Playhouse and the Theatre Royal in Brisbane, while also making the rounds of provincial theatres, such as Mechanics Pictures in Melton, Victoria, where it was screened during the Christmas season in 1927. Ads in Melton introduced it as 'the Most Beautiful Motion Picture Ever Made. A Famous U.F.A.

Production, Showing a Brilliant Assemblage of the Youth and Beauty of Every Country. All Nations Pass in Review. A Tribute to Health.'<sup>61</sup> It stayed in sporadic circulation in Australia until August 1930.

*False Shame*, based on the 'diary of a doctor and showing the dangers and temptations of sex and the evils of venereal disease', proved to be nearly as popular with Australian viewers. It cleared the Australian censor in May 1927 after cuts of 192 feet, after which it was exhibited at Adyar Hall from 26 September 1927 to 16 March 1928, with multiple screenings per day, restricted to patrons over age sixteen.<sup>62</sup> After this long run, R. Baker, representing Adyar Hall, took the film north to Brisbane, where, beginning on 2 April 1928, it was screened in the Theatre Royal, with screenings segregated by gender by order of the Commonwealth censor. Baker promoted the film as a 'definite attempt in motion pictures to destroy sham[e] and hypocrisy and fight a social evil with gloves off', citing France's problems with sexually transmitted diseases and the global fight to eradicate 'White Slavery' (e.g. sex trafficking) as evidence of the importance of the cause.<sup>63</sup> From Brisbane, Baker toured the film throughout New South Wales until at least October 1929. New Zealand viewers had to be content with reports of the film from across the Tasman Sea, despite various attempts to import it to the Dominion for educational purposes.<sup>64</sup>

Despite the apparent success of its imports, however, Cinema Art Films struggled to stay solvent and ultimately ceased operations in late 1930, about the time that sound film—with its higher production costs and language-limited distribution potential—had become the norm in Australasia. Another contributing factor may have been a fire in Sydney on 12 June 1929, which destroyed millions of feet of film, worth more than £60,000, affecting Cinema Art Films and several other distributors.<sup>65</sup> In October 1929, the company took out a £11,000 loan from Interstate Investments Ltd, signed for by solicitors J.W. Maund and Paul Frederick Dawson in their capacity as company directors. As of December 1929, the shareholders of the company appear (in order of number of shares held) as Exhibitors' Alliance Films (NZ) Ltd (18,000 shares), Les Hoskins (13,373 shares), UFA (10,000 shares), British International Pictures (5,000 shares), and 18,627 shares divided between various other company directors, managers, solicitors, Hoskins family members, and the company's creditor Interstate Investments, for a total of 65,000 shares total, down 35,000 from their initial offering.<sup>66</sup> By March 1930, Interstate Investments had apparently lost confidence in the company leadership and filed a legal motion to appoint solicitors Arthur C. Davis and Paul Dawson as company director and manager, respectively.<sup>67</sup>

As late as May 1930, CAF seemed to be functioning normally, releasing films and answering fan questions about UFA actors in the 'Who's

Who in the Movies' column of the Melbourne arts paper *Table Talk*. Readers interested in obtaining photographs of Willy Fritsch, Dita Parlo, and Lil Dagover—the stars of *Ungarische Rhapsodie/Hungarian Rhapsody*, which had been released in March 1930—were instructed to write either to the CAF office on the corner of Swanston and Little Bourke Streets in Melbourne, or directly to UFA, address given as Berlin, Germany.<sup>68</sup> Although its imports continued to be branded as Cinema Art Films releases well into 1931, the company went into liquidation in New Zealand in June 1930, with Australia & New Zealand Pictures Ltd acting as its successor.<sup>69</sup> In Australia, an extraordinary general meeting of the shareholders voted likewise in November 1930 to dissolve the company 'by reason of its liabilities',<sup>70</sup> which was duly accomplished by 4 August 1931.<sup>71</sup>

### The Exhibition of UFA Films in New Zealand and Australia

According to its September 1926 contract, Cinema Art Films' first shipment of UFA films was supposed to arrive in Australia 'as near as possible on January the 1st 1927', containing one copy of *Variety* and one of *Manon Lescaut*. Four weeks later, the second shipment would bring *Eifersucht/Jealousy* and *A Waltz Dream*, with *Herr Tartüffe/Tartuffe* and *The Poacher* following at the beginning of March. The fourth shipment, scheduled for 1 April, would contain *Die keusche Susanne/The Girl in the Taxi* (aka *Virtuous Suzanne*) and *Somebody's Son*, with further shipments to be determined after Keast and Hoskins's return to Australia. While *Variety* cleared the Australian censor on 11 January 1927 (minus 32 feet), *Manon Lescaut* was not approved until 2 March, after being reconstructed with cuts of 397 feet. *A Waltz Dream* and two Greenbaum films not on the list (*The Circus of Life* and *Flower of the Forest*) were cleared in February, while the remainder were approved on 9 May, except for *The Girl in the Taxi*, which was rejected by the censor. The contract with UFA required CAF to 'furnish to UFA detailed statements showing where the film or films have been exhibited in the said week, including the name of the theatre, the date when exhibited, and the gross-receipts arising from such distribution and shall at the same time pay over to UFA their share of the amount so received'. If such reports were ever submitted, they do not appear to have survived in either Berlin or Sydney, which leaves only the Australian censor's log to document the company's applications for permission to screen individual films and the newspaper trail to determine how successful the various films were in the Antipodes. With the exception of *Tartuffe*, which passed the censor with cuts of 40 feet but does not appear in any newspaper listings, all of the above-mentioned films appear to have been screened in Australasia, but

at widely dispersed intervals, with premieres ranging from February 1927 (*Variety*) to December 1928 (*A Waltz Dream*).<sup>72</sup>

Whether deliberately or by happenstance, New Zealand led the way in the exhibition of UFA films. In January 1927, Hoskins announced that a series of UFA films would be screened at 'a palatial Queen Street theatre' in Auckland, beginning with *Variety*, 'acclaimed throughout Europe and America to be the finest photoplay ever made'. Hoskins had stopped in New Zealand on his way home from Europe, where he had contracted with New Zealand's Exhibitors' Alliance to sell them 'the parcel of German pictures and arrange for the sole distribution in the Dominion of the output of the UFA studios'.<sup>73</sup> His timing was excellent, for UFA films had just begun to get a foothold in New Zealand in 1925/26. It's not clear who imported it, but *Her Dancing Partner* was screened at the King's Theatre in Wellington in August 1926, albeit without any mention of its German origin. It was marketed as a 'Scintillating, Saucy, and Supremely Sensational Super Success' which 'takes one into the exclusive social circles of Paris and the Continent', featuring Maria Corda, Willy Fritsch, and Livio Pavanelli, who, 'although practically unknown in New Zealand, are as famous internationally as the leading screen artists in America'.<sup>74</sup> Corda, a Hungarian actor, was directed in this film by her husband Alexander Korda. By the time this film was released in Australia, the couple had been hired by First National in Hollywood, which might explain why one of Maria Corda's earlier films, the elaborate biblical dramatization *Die Sklavenkönigin/Moon of Israel*, made by Sascha Film in 1924, was released in Australasia in January 1927 as a Paramount picture. It opened at the Haymarket Theatre in Sydney on 22 January and at the De Luxe Theatre in Wellington on 29 January.

One possibility for who might have orchestrated the pre-1927 UFA releases in New Zealand is Julius A. Lutz, who had registered a company called Ufa Films Ltd in Wellington in March 1926, with £3,000 operating capital in £1 shares. While the timing suggests an interest in capitalizing on UFA's sudden prominence in the English-speaking world, the stated aim of this company, whose subscribers were primarily in Wellington, with a few in Palmerston North and Auckland, was simply to 'undertake and carry on the business of cinematograph, theatrical, and music-hall proprietors'.<sup>75</sup> Lutz clearly had some connection with UFA beyond the name he chose for his company, however, for when *Her Dancing Partner* was rejected by the Australian censor, W.A. Osborne, in July 1928, UFA asked Lutz, as the agent for Walter F. Probst & Co. (Basel), to supply Cinema Art Films instead with a print of the film *Der Mann im Feuer/When Duty Calls*, directed by Erich Waschneck and starring Olga Tschechowa, Helga Thomas, and Henry Stuart.<sup>76</sup> As compensation for this print, for which he

had paid £875, Lutz was to receive UFA's share of the film's earnings in Australia, up to £656, while CAF agreed to distribute a comparable UFA picture on his behalf.<sup>77</sup> As part of the terms of this exchange, however, CAF was instructed to withhold any royalty payments to Lutz until Lutz's Ufa Films Ltd had been verifiably removed from the register of New Zealand businesses. Lutz's company had been fined £3 in May 1928 for failure to renew its licence to carry on business as a limited company, but it appears that Lutz may have resolved his company's official status only to attract negative attention from UFA when his Ufa Films Ltd began screening *Variety* at the Tauranga Town Hall on 19 June 1928.<sup>78</sup>

In any case, the carefully non-specific marketing of *Her Dancing Partner* in Wellington in August 1926 functioned as a successful trial balloon for German films in New Zealand. It was followed the next month by the 1921 Decla-Bioscop film *Der müde Tod/Destiny*, one of Fritz Lang's earliest and most haunting expressionist films (which is said to have inspired Ingmar Bergman's *Det sjunde inseglet/The Seventh Seal* thirty-five years later). Written by Lang and his wife Thea von Harbou, the film depicts a young woman negotiating with Death for the life of her newly-wed husband, roles played by Lil Dagover, Bernhard Goetzke, and Walter Janssen. Death grants her three chances to cheat him out of a human life, transporting her to Persia, Venice, and China, but in vain. Although no mention is made of its specific origin, ads for *Destiny* in the *Auckland Star* in September 1926 praise the film's philosophical depth and artistic qualities, explaining that it is 'not an American movie made to sell tickets—it is a film poem of splendid endeavor, a masterpiece of artistry and beauty, with an uplifting theme which presents reincarnation and its philosophy as a healer of worldly separation and despair'.<sup>79</sup> By offering an intellectually and emotionally satisfying alternative to American products, *Destiny* set itself apart from the norm, helping establish the distinction between art films for the discerning and mass-produced commercial drivel.

Cinema Art Films' large-scale import of UFA films aimed to satisfy this nascent demand for more complex art films, despite lingering local antipathy towards German-made products. In conjunction with Hoskins's announcement in January 1927 about the upcoming UFA productions to be screened in Auckland, the *New Zealand Herald* felt compelled to explain why it had been unusual to screen German films up to this point and what had since changed. As an editorial explains,

The public presentation in New Zealand of German films may be said to be a new departure in exhibiting policy, for although good pictures have been made in Germany for the past five years, nobody has had the temerity to import them in face of an unfavourable public opinion.

Last year, however, it was felt that the decline of the anti-German sentiment warranted the importation of a few trial films, with the result that two German pictures were shown at Auckland theatres during September. They were *Destiny* and *Her Dancing Partner*, two average films, whose country of origin was camouflaged somewhat transparently under the label 'Continental.' Subsequent events have encouraged a bolder policy.<sup>80</sup>

The experiment seems to have assuaged fears that viewers wouldn't attend screenings of German films, and whetted audiences' appetites. By the time *Destiny* was re-released in Christchurch in March 1928 by Continental Film Classics for a three-month run, German films were a well-known and desirable quantity. UFA's name features prominently in local ads, along with reminders to potential cinemagoers that UFA had also produced *Variety* and *A Waltz Dream*, both of which had previously been screened there. Billed as 'the first Phantasy film to be screened in New Zealand', *Destiny* was shown together with another UFA production, *Tatjana*, starring the Russian émigré actor Olga Tschechowa, that was understandably but erroneously described as 'the first Russian film to be screened in New Zealand'.<sup>81</sup> Although all three of the main actors in *Destiny* were German, Dagover is described as a Polish actress, Janssen as Swedish, and only Goetzke as German (but his name is misspelled as 'Gertzke').

Hoskin had announced that half a dozen UFA films would be released each year in New Zealand, which would allow CAF to stretch their original quotient of films over three years. J.C. Williamson Films purchased the exhibition rights for New Zealand to Cinema Art Films' 1927 UFA series, comprised of *Variety*, *A Waltz Dream*, *Faust*, *Manon Lescaut*, *Jealousy*, and *Liebe macht blind/Love is Blind*, for exhibition at the New Regent Theatre in Auckland. E.R. Greenfield, manager of the Regent, expected 'no prejudice against the showing of German films ... [for] if international prejudices obtain to any serious extent in peace time, they have no damaging influence on the universal popularity of the art of the screen'. On the contrary, he expected these 'phenomenal films, representing the greatest advance in motion picture technique', to break box-office records.<sup>82</sup> By the time *Variety* opened at the New Regent on 11 February 1927 for a week's season, it had already completed a twelve-week run in New York and had been shown in forty-three London theatres simultaneously, earning back its record-setting £40,000 rental price. It continued to be screened in Auckland at Everybody's Theatre while also opening at the Grand Theatre in Lyttelton.

New Zealand reviews of *Variety* initially quoted the glowing praise of British newspapers, but soon pronounced their own favourable judgements.

The Lyttelton *Press* describes the film as 'the picture which has demonstrated the possibilities of the camera as no other film has done; the picture which breathes, in every scene, the highest conception of art and beauty, and those little, well-connected gestures which make for true greatness in anything'.<sup>83</sup> More than just technically brilliant, however, with its pioneering camera angles, the film's Germanness is considered to be one of its most powerful features, binding it together with Britishness by the 'same grandeur, the same truth, the same fearlessness as any British writer might envisage, with the addition of peculiarly German quietness and alternate passion'. In the reviewer's opinion, the film is 'typically Teutonic in its unadorned fatalism; the suggestion "what will be, will be," runs through the entire piece, without in any way placing the plot and the development in jeopardy thereby ... There is something of their [the Germans'] melodious music, something of their sterling and phlegmatic philosophy, something of their creative bent in this exquisite effort from Berlin.'<sup>84</sup> With such praise to bolster its circulation, it is in no way surprising that *Variety* stayed in circulation in New Zealand for approximately three and a half years, until October 1930.

In contrast to the rapid launch of its UFA imports in New Zealand, CAF took several months to get UFA films on screens in Australia. *Variety* didn't open in Australia until 30 June 1927, six months after its Auckland premiere. Rather than framing this decision in terms of scarcity, however, CAF explained this measured release schedule in terms of discernment and exclusivity, explaining, 'the entire Ufa product is NOT TO BE DUMPED on the Australian market but only those especially applicable to Australian tastes will be screened'.<sup>85</sup> Aside from the selection process underlying UFA's initial list and the necessity of passing the censor, the truth of this alleged selectivity is hard to discern in terms of which films were released in what order and where. The metropolitan premiere of the guaranteed blockbuster *Variety* was preceded by both the educational film *The Golden Road*, which opened in Sydney in May 1927, and the drama *Love is Blind*, starring Lil Dagover, Conrad Veidt, Lillian Hall-Davis, and Emil Jannings, which opened in tiny Orange (NSW) in early June. *Variety* was followed by *The Girl in the Taxi*, which premiered in Perth in July; *Somebody's Son* opened at the Burlington Theatre in rural Bathurst (NSW) in October; and *The Last Laugh* at the Piccadilly in Sydney in November, around the same time as *An der schönen blauen Donau/The Blue Danube*, starring Lya Mara and Harry Liedtke, opened at Hoyt's Regent Theatre in Perth.

Most of the films on Cinema Art Films' initial hire list from UFA boast at least one well-known name, such as Lillian Hall-Davis, Lya de Putti, Willy Fritsch, or Harry Liedtke. *Love is Blind*, *Variety*, and *The Last Laugh*



all feature Emil Jannings (born Theodor Friedrich Emil Janenz), who was one of the most popular male stars of the 1920s and whose reception in Australasia is exemplary for German film culture of the era. Like Asta Nielsen a decade earlier, Jannings's appearance in a film, regardless of its national origin, was generally enough to ensure its success at the box office. He is first mentioned in Australian newspapers in 1921, before any of his films had been screened in the Antipodes, in connection with the filming of *The Loves of Pharaoh*. Although several of Jannings's popular costume dramas—including Lubitsch's *Passion* and *Deception*—do not seem to have been imported to Australasia, several of his other early films were, including the PAGU production *The Eyes of the Mummy* (in Australian circulation from November 1922 to April 1923), *The Loves of Pharaoh* (released in July 1924, in a shortened US version with a happy ending, in circulation for two years), the EFA production *Peter der Große/Peter the Great* (released in November 1924 as a Paramount picture, in circulation for three years), the Wörner/UFA productions *Othello* (released in June 1925, in circulation for three years) and *Danton/All For a Woman* (in circulation from May 1926 to June 1927), and the Italian remake of the 1913 blockbuster *Quo Vadis?* (released in July 1925 as a First National picture, in circulation for five years). Of these, only *The Loves of Pharaoh*, *Peter the Great*, and *Quo Vadis?* were also released in New Zealand, where they each stayed in circulation for at least a year (with *Quo Vadis?* staying two and a half). Because of these successful films, three of which were still in circulation when CAF was formed, Jannings already enjoyed a robust reputation in the Antipodes. Called 'the World's Greatest Shakespeare Actor' by Australasian papers in connection with his depiction of Othello, Jannings was also praised as 'Europe's wonder actor' and declared 'the most human star of all time'.<sup>86</sup>

Given Jannings's name recognition, Cinema Art Films' decision to start off their UFA series with three Jannings pictures in 1927, followed quickly by a fourth, *Faust*, in 1928, was strategic. Of the three, *Variety* proved to be the most successful, staying in circulation in Australia for nearly four years, from July 1927 until June 1931. Featuring Jannings as Boss, an ageing circus actor who abandons his long-suffering wife for a sexy young performer (Lya de Putti) only to be betrayed by her in turn, the film 'stirred the audience to such a high pitch of enthusiasm' as had never been witnessed before in Sydney, according to the *Sunday Times* on the day after the film's Australian premiere.<sup>87</sup> In addition to praising the actors, many reviews also draw attention to director E.A. Dupont, who is described as 'the most gifted of German directors';<sup>88</sup> some papers even featured an article by Dupont, who expressed humility at being 'perhaps the first foreign motion picture director asked to write an article for a newspaper', and

trepidation, since 'the place for a cinema producer should be in the studio', before claiming full credit for writing and making *Variety*, in regard to which he was particularly proud of the believable mob scenes.<sup>89</sup>

Popular admiration for *Variety* and its participants in the Antipodes proved to be enduring, for when *Variety* was screened in Port Pirie (SA) in January 1929, eighteen months after its Australian premiere, the local newspaper dedicated an entire column to it. The reviewer asserts,

*Variety* well justifies its description as one of the wonder films of the age. Its direction is inspired, and the work of the principals, Emil Jannings, Lya de Putti and Warwick Ward has seldom been equaled on the screen. It is staggering and prodigious and its tense action, assisted by very few titles, marks an entirely new school of endeavor in the motion picture production field. 'Variety' is Germany's latest contribution to the world's cinema mart and has been received with enthusiasm in all cities. Metropolitan critics, in whatever country 'Variety' has been shown have greeted it with superlatives. Lya de Putti, who plays the part of enticingly beautiful Bertha Marie in the big Ufa production, 'Variety,' is one of the most successful screen artists of Germany.<sup>90</sup>

Although the film was now three and a half years old, having first reached Australasian cinemas eighteen months after its German release and a year after its triumphant twelve-week run in New York City, it was still treated as the latest novelty wherever it was screened in the Antipodes, even until a few years after the transition to sound. The emphasis on *Variety*'s international success reminded rural Australian viewers that film was the medium that connected them to the wider world.

The next Jannings film after *Variety* to reach Australasia, although it had premiered in Germany in December 1924, almost a year before *Variety*, was *The Last Laugh*, a naturalistic drama directed by F.W. Murnau (1888–1931), based on a script by Carl Mayer. Master Pictures proclaimed the imminent release of *The Last Laugh* repeatedly throughout 1926 but does not seem to have followed through. Instead, it was exhibited first by Universal in New Zealand, premiering at the Strand and Frankton theatres in Hamilton on 30 March 1927, and then by Australasian Films (presumably hired from CAF) in Australia, opening at the Piccadilly Theatre in Sydney on 12 November 1927, as a supporting picture to the Fox comedy *The Cradle Snatchers*.<sup>91</sup> As with *Variety*, the lag time between the film's original German release and its arrival in Australasia is far greater than had been usual before the war, when European films were screened within a few weeks of their Continental premieres; moreover, the fact that both films opened in New Zealand so much earlier than in Australia hints at

the difficulty Cinema Art Films faced in finding exhibitors in the constricted Australian market.

Technically impressive, in sharp contrast to the pre-war German films that were often cranked out within a week with only a minimal script and a lot of improvised technology, *The Last Laugh* took 180 days to shoot and is considered one of Murnau and Jannings's best films. Sidney Gottlieb attributes this to Murnau's 'formal and technical brilliance ... integrated into a thoughtful analysis and deeply moving view of a representative purpose, family and society; of individual aging and social and economic deficiency and decay; and of our dream of being fully human and happy—unattainable goals through a combination of individual and institutional inadequacies'.<sup>92</sup> The director's innovative use of the '*entfesselte Kamera*' (unhinged camera) echoes the frightening and exhilarating instability of contemporary society, giving the film an expressionist flair, while Jannings's performance as a pompous doorman who, after he loses his position and its associated social status, devolves into a timid shadow of his former self, is haunting (completely aside from his nightmarish encounters with witches and monsters). In the turmoil of interwar German society, where political and economic instability were the order of the day, the desperate self-identification of Jannings's character with his doorman uniform long after his demotion to washroom attendant parallels Germany's struggles to define itself in a world changed beyond recognition.

Long before it was screened in local theatres, *The Last Laugh* impressed Australasian critics as a welcome change from banal American fare and a challenge to American film-making style. As early as June 1925, the *Nelson Evening Mail* reported that the film 'breaks almost every rule of American picture making ... There are no subtitles: no villain: no hero or heroine: no love story. Its interest lies in the fascinating study of a stout old doorman at a hotel, the role played by that consummate actor, Emil Jannings'.<sup>93</sup> When *The Last Laugh* finally opened in Sydney in November 1927, the *Sydney Morning Herald* suggested that 'to compare this German film with the average American production would be like comparing Tolstoi with Peter B. Kyne, so remote is its somber and strenuous delving into psychology from the customary inanities of the beauty actor, and jokes about divorce'.<sup>94</sup> However, some Australian critics felt that the film blew a simple story all out of proportion, resulting in some long 'infertile' and 'arid' passages, although they were grateful for the narratively artificial happy ending in which Jannings's character is redeemed from his social misery by an improbable inheritance. While there was universal praise for Jannings's work, without whom 'the picture would be a hollow, worthless shell', the film was criticized as lacking emotional force, judged by the fact that 'it never carries the spectator away'.<sup>95</sup>

One major difference between the German version of the film and that screened in Australasia, which may account for this ambivalent reaction and perhaps also the film's delayed release, is the addition of intertitles, which Murnau had all but omitted from the original film, relying entirely on the action to tell the story. That kind of unprecedented innovation seemed like a risky proposition to Australasian Films, so they hired a man named Jim Donald to add titles to the Australian release version. Although that titled version has not survived, its apparently terrible titles (superfluous explanations like 'he breaks into a little run' and 'kindly hands support him as he sways' were derided by reviewers as representative examples) gave the film a certain amount of notoriety.

Shortly after its Australian premiere, the *Sydney Morning Herald* concluded that the 'film has by no means been spoilt by them, but it has been weakened', and advised film booking offices to remove the 'puerile' titles immediately. Not only are the titles redundant and laden with American puns, the author explains, the 'superficial American moral comment are so hopelessly out of key with the tragic intensity of the action that they are grotesque'.<sup>96</sup> A few months later, a cinemagoer named 'Frederico' was more outspoken in a letter to *Film Weekly*, complaining that the titles were so incomprehensible that they 'spoil what is really a first-class picture. I was given to understand that a boxing journalist was given the job. Well, no fighter ever made a bigger hack of an opponent than did this writer to those titles! His work was really an insult to the intelligence of Australian picturegoers'.<sup>97</sup> Fortunately for Jannings, viewers did not hold him accountable for the bad intertitles, choosing to praise his performance and Murnau's inspired direction and innovative camerawork instead.

In *Faust*, the final film Jannings made in Germany before heading to Hollywood and the last of his UFA films to be screened in Australasia, Jannings's gleeful, lecherous Mephisto steals the show from his co-stars Gösta Ekman and Camilla Horn. Directed by Murnau, *Faust* carries the cultural weight of not only Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's 1808 canonical retelling of a German folktale about a medieval scholar who makes a deal with the devil to satisfy his desire for youth, strength, and knowledge, but also Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (1604), Charles Gounod's 1859 opera, and many other versions that Australasian audiences would have been familiar with. An announcement of the film's arrival in Rockhampton (Qld) invokes the film's antecedents, from Gounod to Goethe, before describing the film as 'a magnificent UFA production ... powerful in its sweep, splendid in its depiction of human souls, masterly directed and brought to the screen by the genius of F.W. Murnau'.<sup>98</sup> Intertitles for the Australian prints were written by the British

novelist and playwright Arnold Bennett and many screenings included vocal performances of numbers from Gounod's opera.

Although reviewed positively as early as July 1927 in the Perth *Sunday Times*, *Faust* didn't open in Auckland until November 1927, at J.C. Williamson's New Regent Theatre, and in both Perth and Adelaide nine months later, on 11 August 1928, at the Prince of Wales Theatre and West's, respectively. Even in advance of its Antipodean release, *Faust* earned reviewers' praise for everything from Jannings's acting to the cinematography to the skilful use of lighting and shadow throughout the film.<sup>99</sup> In connection with its New Zealand premiere, the *Auckland Star* advised prospective cinemagoers to appreciate the film's attention to detail:

Acclaimed as a masterpiece, Goethe's 'Faust' should be just as enjoyable as a photoplay as it was a drama. It has been made the subject of a picture by U.F.A. and has Emil Jannings in the role of Mephisto, Prince of Evil. As in 'Variety,' Jannings is excellent. In 'Faust,' he has a different type of part, but again he meets the bill and again offers a faultless characterisation. Again the wonderful photography which marks all U.F.A. productions is an outstanding feature. Many of the settings can be described only as realistic in the extreme. Each shot has obviously been made with the careful attention of the director to even the smallest detail. Then, too, the costuming is very beautiful, and the make-up of many of the players a revelation indeed. Lon Chaney has been called 'the man of a thousand faces,' but by the different appearances he presents in 'Faust,' Jannings looks as though he should be soon recognised as a master in this important art. Among the featured players of the cast are several well-known Continental artists, the title role being filled by Gosta Ekman, and other parts by Camilla Horn, Wilhelm Dieterle, and Frieda Richards.<sup>100</sup>

Reviewers were particularly impressed by the film's special effects, which include Mephisto looming over the city in his first appearance and 'the taking of Faust by Mephistopheles on a magic carpet to view the pleasures of the world'.<sup>101</sup> Jannings's ability to render Satan entirely human is frequently noted, as is Murnau's genius. One American review reprinted in the Sydney *Sunday Times* explains this in terms of the scope of the German film industry, noting 'we do not believe that it is possible for such a picture to have been made anywhere save in Germany and by Germans. Perhaps it is true that America only gets their best pictures, but their best is the best in the world!'<sup>102</sup> As UFA's carefully curated list for CAF reveals, the dramatic reduction in film exports from Europe ensured that only the highest-budget, most promising films made it to Australasia.

In contrast to the relatively unknown male stars of pre-war German film, Jannings was lavished with attention by the Australasian press. This trend intensified after Jannings was recruited to work in Hollywood in 1927, which suggests that Paramount was already giving him the same kind of promotional treatment as their other stars. Declaring that 'no name has of late risen to such heights as that of Emil Jannings', Australian and New Zealand newspapers ran biographical sketches about his alleged youthful exploits, his determination to join the theatre, his initial disdain for moving pictures, and his single-minded method-acting intensity.<sup>103</sup> While several articles claimed the Swiss-born Jannings had in fact been born in New York, one went so far as to explain that 'Jannings, though originally supposed to be a European, is an American, who did not achieve success until he appeared in German films, where he was instantly recognised as a character actor of remarkable knowledge and sympathy.'<sup>104</sup> It is striking that the article both attempts to identify Jannings as an American, perhaps to fit him into the prevailing narrative of American film dominance, and acknowledges that the German film industry was able to recognize his talent, which the American industry presumably had not (though of course Jannings was on his way to Hollywood by this time anyhow). His director and co-stars in *Faust*, Murnau, Horn, and Wilhelm Dieterle, as well as Lya de Putti, whom he played opposite in *Variety*, also immigrated to Hollywood at about this time, joining the large community of German and Scandinavian actors and directors there.

As a result of his move to Hollywood and the delay in importing German films to Australasia, many of Jannings's German-made films ran alongside the six films he made for Paramount in Australasian cinemas. This juxtaposition raises the interesting but ultimately unanswerable question of whether fans perceived his American films as related to his German ones in any meaningful way, or whether they believed the inaccurate (but possibly deliberately planted by Paramount) claim of his hitherto concealed American origins. Antipodean reviewers seem to take for granted that the logical consequence of success in the German film industry must be 'importation to America ... of practically all the more talented of the directors and players associated with them', and the negative consequences of this talent drain. One article notes that the 'enticement of intellect to America' meant that 'it will be some time at least before Germany produces films equal in originality and power to those of the days of *Variety*'.<sup>105</sup>

Several ads for *Faust* remind readers of Jannings's roles in *Variety*, *The Last Laugh*, and *The Way of All Flesh*, his first American-made picture. The latter is one of the two Paramount pictures for which Jannings won the first-ever Academy Award for Best Actor in 1929, confirming that his talent transcended national borders. Although he was the only German

actor ever to be so distinguished, Jannings's strong German accent made him unsuited for English-language sound films. He returned to Germany in 1929, where he went on to make sixteen more films, including the iconic satire *Der blaue Engel/The Blue Angel* opposite Marlene Dietrich, before his death in Austria in 1950.

Aside from the star power of actors, the increasing prominence of film directors was another decisive factor in the success of UFA films abroad. While film directors were rarely credited in pre-war European cinema, with the company brand or the individual star occupying most of the publicity spotlight, the frequent mentions of Dupont and Murnau in connection with the films starring Jannings illustrates this shifting focus. Fritz Lang's futuristic epic *Metropolis* is perhaps the most prominent example in Australasia of a UFA film being carried by its director's star power. Although *Metropolis* has become in many ways the poster child of 1920s German cinema, it only ranked fourth in Germany's box office for 1927/28 and was not an international success at the time of its original release, although it was the most expensive and elaborate film made in Germany to that point.<sup>106</sup> The international release version was shorter than the German original, but it seems to have been in great demand in Australasia. A publicity reel cleared the censor in May 1927, followed in November by the eleven-reel film itself, which had been cut by fifty-three feet. It was released in Wellington at the De Luxe Theatre in December 1927 and at the Auditorium in Melbourne in April 1928. Its anticipated popularity is evident in the fact that CAF's solicitor Davis had to track down a pirated print said to be circulating in New Zealand in February 1928 before applying for his own local copyright for the film.<sup>107</sup>

Like the Murnau films that preceded it, the technical and aesthetic advances of *Metropolis* appeared to local critics to be decisive for the global film industry. A December 1927 review in the *New Zealand Herald* by D. Winter Hall foregrounds the importance of diverse national film cultures for advancing film technique, by providing necessary competition-driven innovation. He explains,

German ideas, German camera tricks, and German effects are exercising a pronounced effect on American films. Many ordinary pictures, which otherwise would go unembellished, include futuristic or, perhaps, impressionistic camera angles at the vital points of their stories. Had it not been for the two or three Teutonic films which the American public is allowed to see every year, none of these forms would show themselves.<sup>108</sup>

Hall judged *Metropolis* to be the best of the 'five great German films' of the past year, alongside *Deception*, *The Last Laugh*, *Variety*, and *Faust*. He

reserves particular praise for director Fritz Lang, but predicts (accurately) that Lang, 'in all probability ... will very soon be imported to the land of mass production. It is a debatable question whether he will go the way of other German directors and produce merely mediocre pictures, or continue with the creative work started in *Metropolis*.'<sup>109</sup> Cinema Art Films immediately cited this review as proof that *Metropolis* 'appeals to Australasian taste to an equal extent to that of Europe and America'.<sup>110</sup> The following year, a Melbourne reviewer argued that *Metropolis* illustrates that 'British and German films are usually interesting because of their novel treatment of story and character ... [In addition] the photography and decoration are at least equal and often superior to that achieved in American films of the better kind.'<sup>111</sup> In short, being able to see European films seemed to be beneficial for both audiences and film-makers alike.

Australasian critics praised *Metropolis* for its photography, its acting, and its prescient political message. The narrative's allegorical structure posed no difficulty for Australasian reviewers. In September 1928, the Dunedin *Evening Star* reported:

The story itself is melodramatically moral ... The story points out the fact that efficiency without soul leads to revolution and destruction. It is a prophetic warning to this age that is living in a world of material achievement. Writers all over Europe are now predicting a general decline, so it is not to be wondered at, that this picture, made in Berlin, carries the same pessimistic trend of thought.<sup>112</sup>

This assessment aligns with author Thea von Harbou's declaration, in the epigram to the novel version of her screenplay, that the story is intended 'as a figural commentary on the present ... It tells of no place.' While the doomsday message of *Metropolis* seemed to confirm European prescience about the human cost of mechanization, it also represented a celebration of modernity. Hall describes it as 'a vision of the final development of such cities as New York ... Everything is down to a system, and the separation of the classes complete. This idea forms the basis of the picture and through it the small figures of the main actors move, their actions really dwarfed by the gigantic bedlam around them.'<sup>113</sup> On screen, one could be transported not just to other places in the world, but apparently also to dystopian versions of the future.

### The End of an Era

Two of Cinema Art Films' final European imports were the German-Swedish co-production *Hans engelska fru/Matrimony* (aka *Discord* and *The Question of Marriage*), featuring the familiar faces of Gösta Ekman and Lil



Dagover under the direction of Gustaf Molander for Svensk Filmindustri, and UFA's *Die weiße Hölle vom Piz Palü/The White Hell of Pitz Palu* (aka *Prisoners of the Mountain*), produced by Sokal and directed by Arnold Fanck and G.W. Pabst. Set partly in London high society and partly in rural northern Sweden, *Matrimony* attempts to combine the rustic appeal of earlier Swedish hits like *The Flame of Life* with the glamour of urban sophistication. This daring but somewhat strained balancing act between such diametrically opposite settings, combined with the film's reliance on well-known stars like Dagover as a glamorous widow, Ekman as one of her London admirers, and Finnish actor Urho Somersalmi as the heroic Swedish lumberjack who literally sweeps her off her feet, illustrates the challenges European producers faced in trying to make films that could succeed in a global market characterized not just by competition between the USA and European makers, but also rapid technological innovations. Lauded for launching Swedish film in a promising new direction, it was



Figure 10.3 Cinema Art Films poster for SF's German-Swedish co-production *Hans engelska fru/Matrimony* (1927). National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra. Reuse not permitted

relatively successful in Australia and New Zealand, staying in circulation for eighteen months, but has been overlooked by film history, in part because of the timing of its release.<sup>114</sup>

By contrast, *The White Hell of Pitz Palu* foregrounds the technological transitions of the era. The silent original premiered in Vienna on 11 October 1929, while a synchronized version premiered in London on 10 June 1930.<sup>115</sup> It's not entirely clear which version made it to Australia in September 1930, when *The White Hell of Pitz Palu*, distributed by Universal, opened at Roxy Pictures in the Theatre Royal in Sydney, and later, in January 1931, at the DeLuxe Theatre in Wellington. One of the most popular pictures in Germany in the 1929/30 season, this mountain-climbing thriller starring Leni Riefenstahl, Gustav Diessl, and Ernst Petersen was a great success in Australia, where it ran for two years, though it only stayed in circulation in New Zealand for eight months. This Australian reception may have been in part a relic of the popularity of Riefenstahl's earlier mountaineering film *Peaks of Destiny*, which had run in Australia from June 1928 until August 1930.

At 11,000ft (127 minutes), *The White Hell of Pitz Palu* was longer than most films of the time, since the pre-war trend towards ever-increasing film length had reversed itself in the 1920s. The film needs the length to develop its complex narrative structure, however, which is built up around a tragic prologue, in which the wife of Dr Johannes Krafft plunges to her death in the mountains as a result of his arrogance and carelessness; a love triangle between Riefenstahl's character Maria, her fiancé Hans (played by Petersen), and Krafft; competition with a crew of young Swiss mountain climbers to reach the peak of Piz Palü; and the desperate ordeal all of the climbers endure on the mountain, which only Hans and Maria survive. The emotional trajectory of the plot, which starts with a tragedy, returns to a state of idyllic happiness, then builds towards a melodramatic climax, is said to represent 'the symbolic trajectory of mankind's innocence to its inevitable fall', occasioned by human pride, with the ominous mountains playing the role of judge and executioner.<sup>116</sup>

The cinematography of the film's on-location shots of the dramatic peaks of the Bernina Range in south-eastern Switzerland is unparalleled for the time, reflecting Fanck's expertise as a geologist and nature documentary film-maker, with breathtaking images of ice crystals, glacial crevasses, and swirling blizzards. The novelty of the frozen Alpine landscapes alone may have appealed to Australian viewers in the heat of their summer of 1930, while Fanck's pioneering use of aerial photography shot by former fighter pilot Ernst Udet was also stunning and symbolically important in depicting man's triumph over nature with the help of technology. Riefenstahl's athleticism in performing not only the mountain climbing

and skiing but also her own stunts, impressed audiences and experts alike. Riefenstahl's subsequent association with Nazi film-making later tainted the mountain film genre: German film historian Siegfried Kracauer argued that mountain films expressed 'a typically German yearning for a time before modernity and as a symptom of the collective German soul caught between tyranny and chaos', but it is unlikely that Australasian audiences would have shared either politicized view.<sup>117</sup> The moralizing message of nature triumphing over human arrogance was a common theme in novels and films of the time.

As successful as the approximately sixty German films that circulated in the Antipodes in the second half of the 1920s were, the breakthrough of sound films in 1928/29 changed the cinema landscape irrevocably, however much producers, distributors, exhibitors, and audiences tried to fight against it. Many previously imported films stayed in circulation for several more years—for example, the Conrad Veidt comedy *Der Geiger von Florenz/Impetuous Youth* (aka *The Violinist of Florence*), which had opened at the New Paramount Theatre in Nelson in June 1928, was still being featured as a headlining attraction in Auckland cinemas in late 1932. Other UFA silent films—many of which Hoskins had purchased in late 1928—continued to be released in 1929, but they lost ground to talkies as cinemas across the region converted to sound film exhibition. As late as 23 November 1929, two of Cinema Art Film's UFA films—*The Spy* and *Secrets of the East*—opened at the Paramount Theatre in Melbourne, while *Looping the Loop* was relegated to the Queen's Theatre in the Sydney suburb of Hurstville. As one reviewer noted, these films 'earn the gratitude of those who still retain some affection for silent films', but that affection was apparently not widespread enough to justify importing additional UFA silents, not even the Joe May films *Homecoming* and *Asphalt*, which Erich Pommer produced after his return from Hollywood.<sup>118</sup>

Still, UFA and Cinema Art Films tried to adapt to maintain their already meagre market share, attempting dual silent/sound versions of some films and bilingual versions of others. *Hungarian Rhapsody*, for example, seems to have been screened as a 'lookie', silent but with a synchronized orchestral accompaniment, in Canberra in April 1929. *Der weiße Teufel/The White Devil*, featuring Lil Dagover, was produced in both silent and sound versions in English and German in 1930, with the English-language version premiering in the Wintergarden Theatre in Brisbane in May 1931 and the Theatre Royal in Christchurch three months later.<sup>119</sup> German directors Dupont and Richard Eichberg made several dual-language British-German films for UFA/BIP that made it to the Antipodes. These included Dupont's shipwreck drama *Atlantik/Atlantic* (1929, filmed in English, German, and French versions), his

Australasian lighthouse thriller *Menschen im Käfig/Cape Forlorn* (aka *The Love Storm*), and his family drama *Zwei Welten/Two Worlds*, as well as Eichberg's *Schmutziges Geld/Song* (aka *Show Life*), featuring the Asian American actor Anna May Wong opposite the German actor Heinrich George, and *Großstadtschmetterling/The Pavement Butterfly*, where Wong plays opposite the Galizian (now Ukrainian) actor Alexander Granach. In all, at least nine dual- or triple-language British-German(-French) films were imported between 1929 and 1932, some of which had different casts for each language, as was the case with *Two Worlds*, while others used some of the same actors in multiple versions, as did *Die singende Stadt/The City of Song* (aka *Farewell to Love*), which featured the Polish singer Jan Kiepura opposite Brigitte Helm in the German version and Betty Stockfeld in the English.<sup>120</sup>

Several English-language UFA films were imported in the early 1930s, including the war film *Die letzte Kompagnie/The Last Company*, the farcical operetta *Der Kongress tanzt/Old Vienna* (aka *The Congress Dances*), and *F.P.1 antwortet nicht/F.P.1* (which was filmed in German, English, and French versions with different actors in the main role in each version). Not coincidentally, all of these films featured Conrad Veidt (1893–1943), whose years in Hollywood in the mid-1920s had equipped him with sufficient—albeit accented—English skills to succeed in sound film. *F.P.1* was Veidt's last German production, as he and his Jewish wife went into British exile in 1933, which makes his final screen appearance as the Nazi Major General Strasser in *Casablanca* in 1942 both poignant and ironic.

The cost of preparing multiple versions of films in different languages proved prohibitive for all but the largest studios, however. American companies soon took the lead on making dual-language and foreign-language films, producing at least thirty German-language films in the first few years after the shift to sound, using many of the actors and directors hired away from UFA in preceding years, including Horn and Dieterle. In Paris, Paramount facilitated co-productions with French and German film-makers, including German-language versions of French films, but to the extent that the English-language versions of these pictures reached Australasia, they would have been marketed and received as productions by American studios, with the same weak association with Continental film-makers as other American films featuring Continental artists. Such efforts did not last more than a few years, and the number of foreign-language films on the Australasian market continued to dwindle, particularly after the rise of the Third Reich in Germany—although a few landmark films including *The Blue Angel*, featuring both Emil Jannings and Marlene Dietrich, and the pioneering lesbian-themed *Mädchen in*

*Uniform*, were imported, albeit considerably shortened by the censor, after successful runs in London.



Already in the early 1930s, Australasian audiences began to notice and mourn the rarity of foreign films in mainstream cinemas and the resulting impoverishment of cinema offerings in cultural and artistic terms. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported in September 1930 that 'few foreign films, other than American, are screened in Sydney. In London, the Film Society keeps its patrons up to date with screenings of the latest Russian and other European productions. Here for some time picture-goers have had no opportunity to see anything but English and American dramas.'<sup>121</sup> Similarly, a leading Perth cinema executive expressed regret that cinemagoers in his city 'had little opportunity of seeing the cream of European productions', in contrast to London, which had two cinemas (the Cambridge and the Academy) dedicated to French, German, and Russian talkies.<sup>122</sup> The Brisbane *Telegraph* noted in 1932 that the absence of Continental pictures had had a detrimental effect on the level of innovation in the cinema, since 'Hollywood always aims at the safely commercial rather than the unusual, and British studios are inclined to copy Hollywood.'<sup>123</sup>

The intentionally homogenizing effect of the American screen monopoly is evident from a statement in *Film Weekly* on 5 April 1928, by David Lake, special representative for Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer in Australia and New Zealand, about the company's efforts to internationalize motion pictures by making only 'subjects which would offend no nation or individual, and, at the same time, possess all the essentials of generous and general entertainment'.<sup>124</sup> Churning out bland, inoffensive comedies may have been a recipe for international financial success for MGM, but it could not possibly convey the same level of cultural complexity and artistic innovation that films from a variety of countries could. It would take decades before state support for local film industries in countries from Denmark to Australia would start to rectify this situation in any substantial way and begin to regain the international diversity of the silent period. This book's attempt to document and celebrate that diversity, as well as illuminating its cultural significance for Antipodean societies, is one further step along that road.

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# European Film List

This list is not a comprehensive record of the hundreds of European films screened in Australia and New Zealand between 1896 and 1932. It merely organizes the titles of those Continental productions mentioned in this book according to their original release title, producer, release year, and the English-language titles they were screened under. In a few cases, it was not possible to determine the original language title. Many of the Danish films and a few of Asta Nielsen's German films are available for free streaming on [stumfilm.dk](http://stumfilm.dk).

## Danish Films (from Nordisk unless otherwise noted)

### ***Original Title, Producer, Year***

*Løvejagten* (1907)

*Bjørnejagt i Rusland* (1908)

*Grevinde X* (1909)

*Svend Dyrings hus* (1909)

*Afgrunden* (Kosmorama, 1910)

*Den hvide slævehandel*

(Fotorama/Nordisk, 1910)

*Balletdanserinden* (1911)

*De fire djævole* (Kinografen, 1911)

*Den farlige alder* (1911)

*Den hvide slævehandels sidste offer* (1911)

*Den sorte drøm* (Fotorama, 1911)

*Dødsflugten* (1911)

alt. title: *Nihilisternes dødsflugt*

*Dr Gar el Hama* (1911)

*En lektion* (1911)

alt. title: *Aviatikeren og Journalistens*

*Hustru*

*Hendes ære* (1911)

*Hævnen hører mig til* (1911)

### ***English-Language Title(s)***

*The Lion Hunt*

alternate title: *Lion Hunting*

*Bear Hunting in Russia*

*The Red Domino*

*The Stepmother*

*The Abyss*

alt. title: *Woman Always Pays*

*The White Slave Trade*

alt. title: *The White Slave*

*The Ballet Dancer*

*The Four Daredevils*

alt. title: *The Four Devils*

*The Price of Beauty*

*In the Hands of Imposters*

*The Circus Girl*

alt. title: *The Black Dream*

*The Flight to Death*

alt. title: *The Nihilist*

*The Dead Man's Child*

*The Aviator's Generosity*

alt. title: *The Aviator and the*

*Journalist's Wife*

*Lady Mary's Love*

*Mine is the Vengeance*

<i>Mormonens offer</i> (1911)	<i>A Victim of the Mormons</i>
<i>Ungdommens ret</i> (1911)	<i>The Rights of Youth</i>
	alt. title: <i>A Woman's Weakness</i>
<i>Ved fængslets port</i> (1911)	<i>Temptations of a Great City</i>
<i>De tre kammerater</i> (1912)	<i>The Three Comrades</i>
<i>Den flyvende circus</i> (SRH, 1912)	<i>The Pride of the Circus</i>
	alt. title: <i>The Flying Circus, or the</i>
	<i>Rope-Walker's Romance</i>
<i>Den kvindelige spion fra Balkan</i> (SRH, 1912)	<i>A Balkan Conspiracy</i>
<i>Den sorte kansler</i> (1912)	<i>The Black Chancellor</i>
<i>Den stærkeste</i> (1912)	<i>Vanquished</i>
	alt. title: <i>Conquered,</i>
	<i>or The Madcap Countess</i>
<i>Det berygtede hus</i> (1912)	<i>The White Slave Traffic</i>
	alt. title: <i>The House of Ill-Repute</i>
<i>Dødspring til brest fra cirkuskuplen</i> (1912)	<i>The Great Circus Catastrophe</i>
<i>Dr Gar el Hamas flugt</i> (1912)	<i>Dr Gar el Hama, Sequel to A</i>
	<i>Dead Man's Child</i>
<i>Dyrekøbt venskab</i> (1912)	<i>Dearly Purchased Friendship</i>
<i>Efter dødspringet</i> (Kinografen, 1912)	<i>The Acrobat's Daughter</i>
<i>Et hjerte af guld, eller Sypigens</i> <i>hemmelighed</i> (1912)	<i>Faithful unto Death</i>
<i>Folkets vilje</i> (1912)	<i>The King's Power</i>
<i>Historien om en moder</i> (1912)	<i>The Life of a Mother</i>
<i>Hjerternes kamp</i> (1912)	<i>A High Stake</i>
	alt. title: <i>High Stakes</i>
<i>Indbruddet hos skuespillerinden</i> (1912)	<i>Those Eyes</i>
<i>Jernbanens datter</i> (1912)	<i>The Little Railway Queen</i>
<i>Klovnens hævn</i> (1912)	<i>The Clown's Revenge</i>
<i>Livets baal</i> (1912)	<i>The Fire of Life</i>
<i>Livets løgn</i> (1912)	<i>A Sudden Impulse, or The</i>
	<i>Fatal Lie</i>
<i>Lynstraalen</i> (1912)	<i>His (or A or The) Lost Memory</i>
	alt. title: <i>The Lightning Flash</i>
<i>Manegens stjerne, eller skolerytterskens</i> <i>kærlighed</i> (1912)	<i>The Wheels of Fate</i>
<i>Mellem storbyens artister</i> (1912)	<i>In a Den of Lions</i>
	alt. title: <i>Life in a Circus</i>
<i>Montmartrepigen</i> (1912)	<i>The (or An) Artist's Model</i>
	alt. title: <i>Molly and Maggie</i>
<i>Mormonbyens blomst</i> (Fotorama, 1912)	<i>The Flower of the Mormon City</i>
<i>Når kærligheden dør</i> (1912)	<i>When Love Dies</i>
<i>Operabranden</i> (1912)	<i>In the Hour of Need</i>
<i>Pro forma</i> (1912)	<i>A Situation Saved</i>
<i>Shanghai'et</i> (1912)	<i>Shanghai'ed</i>
<i>Springdykkeren</i> (1912)	<i>All in Vain</i>
<i>Atlantis</i> (1913)	<i>Atlantis</i>
<i>Bristet lykke</i> (1913)	<i>A Paradise Lost</i>



# EUROPEAN FILM LIST

<i>Den gamle mølle</i> (1913)	<i>The Last of the Old Mill</i>
<i>Den kvindelige dæmon</i> (1913)	<i>Theresa the Adventuress</i>
<i>Den tredje magt</i> (1913)	<i>The Stolen Treaty</i>
<i>En hofintrige</i> (1913)	<i>A Court Intrigue</i>
<i>Et skud i mørket</i> (1913)	<i>A Shot in the Dark</i>
<i>Flugten gennem luften</i> (1913)	<i>The Fugitives</i>
<i>Giftslangen</i> (1913)	<i>The Venomous Bite</i>
<i>Gøglerens datter</i> (1913)	<i>Behind the Scenes</i>
<i>Guldmønten</i> (1913)	<i>Gold from the Gutter</i>
<i>Hustruens ret</i> (1913)	<i>A Woman's Right</i>
<i>Hvem var forbryderen?</i> (1913)	<i>The Mystery of the Corner House</i> alt. title: <i>At the Eleventh Hour</i>
<i>Karnevallets hemmelighed</i> (1913)	<i>The Orphan's Conquest</i>
<i>Manden med kappen</i> (1913)	<i>The Man in the White Cloak</i>
<i>Prinsesse Elena</i> (1913)	<i>Princess Elena's Prisoner</i> alt. title: <i>The Princess's Dilemma</i>
<i>Stålkongens vilje</i> (1913)	<i>The Steel King's Last Wish</i>
<i>Under mindernes træ</i> (1913)	<i>The Soul's Awakening</i>
<i>Under søvklings tænder</i> (1913)	<i>As You Sow</i>
<i>Vor tids dame</i> (1913)	<i>The Modern Girl</i>
<i>Af elskerens naade</i> (1914)	<i>Was She Justified?</i> alt. title: <i>Acquitted</i>
<i>Den fjerde dame</i> (1914)	<i>The Fourth Lady</i>
<i>Den mystiske fremmede</i> (1914)	<i>A Deal with the Devil</i>
<i>Den røde klub</i> (1914)	<i>The Red Club</i>
<i>Detektivens barnepige</i> (1914)	<i>The Woman with Red Hair</i>
<i>Expressens Mysterium</i>	<i>Alone with the Devil</i>
<i>Eksprestogets Mysterium</i>	
<i>En stærkere magt</i> (1914)	<i>A Woman's Way</i>
<i>Et vanskeligt valg</i> (1914)	<i>The Golden Heart</i> alt. title: <i>A Difficult Choice</i>
<i>Eventyrskenen</i> (1914)	<i>The Queen of Knaves</i>
<i>Fangens søn</i> (1914)	<i>The Convict's Son</i>
<i>Gar el Hama III: Slangen</i> (1914)	<i>The Abduction, or Gar el Hama's</i> <i>Escape from Prison</i>
<i>Grev Zarkas Bande</i> (1914)	<i>Count Zarka</i>
<i>Guldkalven</i> (1914)	<i>The Golden Calf</i>
<i>Hammerslaget</i> (1914)	<i>Temptation's Hour</i> alt. title: <i>In the Hour of Temptation</i>
<i>Lykken svunden og genvunden</i> (1914)	<i>A Daughter of Eve</i>
<i>Midnatssolen</i> (1914)	<i>The Midnight Sun</i>
<i>Moderen</i> (1914)	<i>The Mother's Sacrifice</i> alt. title: <i>Storms of the Heart</i>
<i>Opiumsdrømmen</i> (1914)	<i>The Opium Smoker</i>
<i>Søvnøggersken</i> (1914)	<i>The Mysterious Case</i>
<i>Stemmeretskvinden</i> (1914)	<i>Votes for Women</i>
<i>Tøffelhelten</i> (1914)	<i>His Phantom Friend</i>
<i>Under skæbnens hjul</i> (1914)	<i>For the Sake of a Man</i> alt. title: <i>The Fatal Oath</i>

*Et Revolutionsbryllup* (1915)  
*Evangeliemandens liv* (1915)

*Kvinden, han mødte* (1915)  
*Lille Teddy* (1915)  
*Manegens børn* (1915)  
*Flammesværdet* (1916)  
*Gar el Hama IV* (1916)  
*Klovnene* (1916)  
*Maharadjaens Yndlingshustru I* (1917)  
*Fangen fra Erie County Tugthus*  
 (Dansk Film, 1918)  
*Himmelskibet* (1918)  
*Retten sejrer* (1918)  
*Krigsmillionæren* (1919)  
*Kærlighedens almagt* (1919)  
*Maharadjaens Yndlingshustru II* (1919)  
*Den kære Husfred* (1920)  
*Kærlighedsvalsen* (1920)  
*Kan disse øjne lyve?* (1921)  
*Prometheus* (1921)  
*David Copperfield* (1922)  
*Pigen fra Sydhavnsøen* (1922)  
*Store forventninger* (1922)  
*Nedbrudte nerver* (1923)  
*På Slaget 12* (1923)  
*Lille Dorrit* (1924)  
*Min ven privatdetektiven* (1924)  
*Fra Piazza del Popolo* (1925)  
*Klovnene* (1926)  
*Jokeren* (1928)

*A Revolution Marriage*  
*The Candle and the Moth*  
 alt. title: *John Redmond, the*  
*Evangelist*  
*Satanita—The She Devil*  
*The Lure of the Circus*  
*Children of the Circus*  
*The Flaming Sword*  
*Gar el Hama, or the Great Jewel Robbery*  
*The Clown*  
*Prince of Bharata*  
*A Man's Sacrifice*  
  
*A Trip to Mars*  
*Justice Victorious*  
*The Parvenu*  
*Sealed Lips*  
*Daughter of Brahma*  
*The Peacemaker*  
*The House of Fatal Love*  
*Mirrors of the Soul*  
*Bonds of Hate*  
*David Copperfield*  
*The Island Virgin*  
*Great Expectations*  
*The Hill Park Mystery*  
*On the Stroke of Midnight*  
*Little Dorrit*  
*My Friend the Detective*  
*Mists of the Past*  
*The Golden Clown*  
*The Joker*

## French Films

**Original Title, Producer, Year**  
*Le voyage dans la lune* (Méliès, 1902)  
*Épopée napoléonienne* (Pathé, 1903)  
*Le voyage à travers l'impossible*  
 (Méliès, 1904)  
*Au bagne* (Pathé, 1905)  
*La vie du Christ* (Gaumont, 1906)  
 Alt. title: *La vie et la passion de N.S. Jesus Christ*  
*Ali Baba et les quarante voleurs*  
 (Pathé, 1907)  
*Le piano irrésistible* (Gaumont, 1907)  
*L'homme aimanté* (Gaumont, 1907)  
*Une héroïne de quatre ans*  
 (Gaumont, 1907)

**English-Language Title(s)**  
*A Trip to the Moon*  
*Napoleon Bonaparte*  
*A Trip to the Sun*  
  
*Scenes of Convict Life*  
*The Life of Christ*  
  
*Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*  
  
*The Irresistible Piano*  
*The Magnetic Man*  
*The Four-Year-Old Heroine*

# EUROPEAN FILM LIST

<i>L'affaire des bijoux</i> (Éclair, 1908)	<i>The Great Parisian Jewel Robbery</i>
<i>La gardeuse de moutons</i> (Pathé, 1908)	<i>The Shepherdess</i>
<i>L'arlésienne</i> (SCAGL, 1908)	<i>L'arlésienne</i>
<i>L'assassinat du duc de Guise</i> (Film d'Art, 1908)	<i>The Assassination of the Duke of Guise</i>
<i>L'assommoir</i> (SCAGL, 1908)	<i>Drink</i>
<i>L'empreinte ou La main rouge</i> (Pathé, 1908)	<i>The Red Hand</i>
<i>Les bandits en habits noirs</i> (Éclair, 1908)	alt. title: <i>Incriminating Evidence</i>
	<i>Nick Carter: Bandits in Evening Dress</i>
<i>Les dévaliseurs de banque</i> (Éclair, 1908)	<i>Nick Carter: The Great Bank Robbery</i>
	alt. title: <i>Nick Carter, the Banker</i>
<i>Les empreintes</i> (Éclair, 1908)	<i>Nick Carter: Imprints</i>
<i>Les faux monnayeurs</i> (Éclair, 1908)	<i>The False Coiners</i>
<i>L'honneur du corsaire</i> (Éclair, 1908)	<i>The Pirate's Honor</i>
<i>L'officier pauvre</i> (Pathé, 1908)	<i>The Poor Officer</i>
<i>Nick Carter, le roi des détectives</i> (Éclair, 1908)	<i>Nick Carter, Detective</i>
	alt. title: <i>Nick Carter, King of Detectives</i>
<i>Samson</i> (Pathé, 1908)	<i>The Story of Samson</i>
<i>La Grande Bretèche</i> (Pathé, 1909)	<i>La Grande Breteche</i>
<i>La Tosca</i> (Film d'Art, 1909)	<i>La Tosca</i>
<i>La tour de Nesle</i> (Film d'Art, 1909)	<i>The Tower of Nesle</i>
<i>Le coup de fusil</i> (SCAGL, 1909)	<i>The Gunshot</i>
<i>Le retour d'Ulysse</i> (Pathé, 1909)	<i>The Return of Ulysses</i>
<i>Faust</i> (Pathé, 1910)	<i>Faust</i>
<i>Pygmalion</i> (Pathé, 1910)	<i>Pygmalion</i>
<i>Le Siège du Calais</i> (Pathé, 1911)	<i>The Siege of Calais</i>
<i>Nick Winter et le vol de la Joconde</i> (Pathé, 1911)	<i>Nick Winter and the Stolen Favorite</i>
<i>Notre-Dame de Paris</i> (Pathé, 1911)	<i>The Hunchback of Notre Dame</i>
<i>Victimes d'alcoolisme</i> (Pathé, 1911)	<i>In the Grip of Alcohol</i>
<i>Zigomar, roi des voleurs</i> (Éclair, 1911)	<i>Zigomar, King of Thieves</i>
	alt. title: <i>Zigomar the Eelskin</i>
<i>Au pays des ténèbres</i> (Éclair, 1912)	<i>The Great Mine Disaster</i>
<i>La cassette de l'emigrée</i> (Gaumont, 1912)	<i>The Refugee's Casket</i>
<i>La dame aux camélias</i> (Film d'Art, 1912)	<i>Camille</i>
<i>L'affaire du collier de la reine</i> (Film d'Art, 1912)	<i>The Queen's Necklace</i>
<i>La fièvre de l'or</i> (Pathé, 1912)	<i>The Greed for Gold, or Wheel of Fortune</i>
<i>Larmes de sange</i> (Éclair, 1912)	<i>Tears of Blood</i>
	alt. title: <i>Tears of Agony</i>
<i>Le droit d'aïnesse</i> (Éclair, 1912)	<i>The Brother's Barbarity</i>
<i>Le mirage</i> (Éclair, 1912)	<i>The Mirage</i>
<i>Le supplice d'une mere</i> (Pathé, 1912)	<i>A Mother's Prayer</i>
<i>Les amours de la reine Élisabeth</i> (Pathé, 1912)	<i>(The Loves of) Queen Elizabeth</i>
	alt. title: <i>Queen Bess</i>

## SCREENING EUROPE IN AUSTRALASIA

<i>Les chemins de la destinée</i> (Pathé, 1912)	<i>The Path of Destiny</i>
<i>Madame Sans-Gêne</i> (Film d'Art, 1912)	<i>Madame Sans-Gêne</i>
<i>On the Threshold of Life</i> (original title undetermined) (Éclair, 1912)	<i>Redemption</i>
<i>Rédemption</i> (Éclair, 1912)	<i>Tom Butler</i>
<i>Tom Butler</i> (Éclair, 1912)	alt. title: <i>The Adventures of Tom Butler</i>
<i>Zigomar contre Nick Carter</i> (Éclair, 1912)	<i>Zigomar versus Nick Carter</i>
<i>Adrienne Lecouvreur</i> (Pathé, 1913)	<i>An Actress's Romance</i>
<i>L'Aiglon, ou Napoleon II</i> (Éclair, 1913)	<i>The Eaglet</i>
<i>Fantômas</i> (Gaumont, 1913-14)	<i>Fantômas</i>
<i>Germinal</i> (Pathé, 1913)	<i>Master and Man</i>
<i>La comtesse noir</i> (Pathé, 1913)	<i>The Black Countess</i>
<i>Le roman d'un jeune homme pauvre</i> (SCAGL, 1913)	<i>Poverty's Thrall</i>
<i>Les Apaches</i> (Gaumont, 1913)	<i>In the Clutch[es] of the Paris Apaches</i>
<i>Les Misérables</i> (SCAGL, 1913)	<i>Les Misérables</i>
<i>L'évasion de forçat de Croze</i> (Gaumont, 1913)	<i>The Escape of the White Glove Gang</i>
	alt. title: <i>The Escape of the Convict de Cruze</i>
<i>Protéa</i> (Éclair, 1913)	<i>Protéa</i>
<i>The Last Will and Testament</i> (original title undetermined) (Film d'Art, 1913)	
<i>Zigomar, peau d'anguille</i> (Éclair, 1913)	<i>Zigomar's Adventures</i>
	alt. title: <i>Zigomar, the Black Scourge</i>
<i>La fille de Delft</i> (Pathé, 1914)	<i>Tragedy in the Clouds</i>
	alt. title: <i>Loyalty</i>
<i>Le roi du bagne</i> (Pathé, 1914)	<i>The Convict's Return</i>
<i>Marie-Jeanne ou La femme du peuple</i> (Pathé, 1914)	<i>A Woman of the People</i>
<i>Jeanne Doré</i> (Éclipse, 1915)	<i>Jeanne Doré</i>
<i>Les vampires</i> (Gaumont, 1915)	<i>Les vampires</i>
<i>Alsace</i> (Pathé, 1916)	<i>Alsace</i>
<i>Judex</i> (Gaumont, 1916)	<i>Judex</i>
<i>Mères françaises</i> (Éclair, 1917)	<i>Mothers of France</i>
<i>Bouclette</i> (Pathé, 1918)	<i>Infatuation</i>
<i>Le dieu du hasard</i> (Éclipse, 1920)	<i>The God of Luck</i>

### German Films

<b>Original Title, Producer, Year</b>	<b>English-Language Title(s)</b>
<i>Sündige Liebe</i> (Deutsche Bioscop (DB), 1911)	<i>Fools of Society</i>
<i>Heißes Blut</i> (DB, 1911)	<i>Hypnotised</i>
	alt. title: <i>Burning Blood</i>
<i>In dem großen Augenblick</i> (DB/PAGU, 1911)	<i>The Great Moment</i>
<i>Nachtfalter</i> (DB, 1911)	<i>Retribution</i>
	alt. title: <i>Moths</i>

EUROPEAN FILM LIST

<i>Zigeunerblut</i> (DB/PAGU, 1911)	<i>Gipsy Blood</i>
<i>Adressatin Verstorben</i> (Messter, 1912)	<i>Addressee Dead, or A Life's Story</i>
<i>Das Gespenst der Vergangenheit</i> (Messter, 1912)	<i>The Ghost of the Past</i>
<i>Das Mädchen ohne Vaterland</i> (DB/PAGU, 1912)	<i>The (or A) Girl Without a Country</i>
<i>Das Mirakel</i> (Continental Kunstfilm, 1912)	<i>Sister Beatrix</i>
<i>Der fremde Vogel</i> (DB/PAGU, 1912)	<i>The Course of True Love</i>
<i>Der Gott der Rache</i> (Duskes, 1912)	<i>God of Vengeance</i>
<i>Der Schatten des Meeres</i> (Messter, 1912)	<i>The Spectre of the Sea</i>
<i>Der Totentanz</i> (DB/PAGU, 1912)	<i>A Fatal Dance</i>
	alt. title: <i>The Dance to Death</i>
<i>Der weiße Domino</i> (Deutsche Mutoskop, 1912)	<i>The White Domino</i>
<i>Des Lebens Würfelspiel</i> (Messter, 1912)	<i>The Dice of Life</i>
<i>Die arme Jenny</i> (DB/PAGU, 1912)	<i>Poor Jenny</i>
<i>Die Kinder des Generals</i> (DB/PAGU, 1912)	<i>Falsely Accused, or For Her Brother's Sake</i>
<i>Die Macht des Goldes</i> (DB/PAGU, 1912)	<i>The Better Way</i>
<i>Die Schlange am Busen</i> (Deutsche Mutoskop, 1912)	<i>Nursing a Viper</i>
<i>Die Verräterin</i> (DB/PAGU, 1912)	<i>The Traitress</i>
<i>Gesprenzte Fesseln</i> (Deutsche Mutoskop, 1912)	<i>Broken Chains</i>
<i>Hexenfeuer</i> (Messter, 1912)	<i>Gipsy Hate</i>
<i>Im goldenen Käfig</i> (Messter, 1912)	<i>(In) A Golden Cage</i>
<i>Jugendstürme</i> (Duskes, 1912)	<i>The Broken Sword</i>
<i>Unerwarteter Goldregen</i> (Deutsche Mutoskop, 1912)	<i>Greed of Gold</i>
<i>Unter der Maske</i> (Messter, 1912)	<i>Behind the Mask</i>
	alt. title: <i>The Black Mask</i>
<i>Wenn die Maske fällt</i> (DB/PAGU, 1912)	<i>When the Mask Falls</i>
<i>Zu Tode gehetzt</i> (DB/PAGU, 1912)	<i>Driven Out</i>
<i>Der Feind im Land</i> (Messter, 1913)	<i>Facing Eternity</i>
	alt. title: <i>Faithful unto Death</i>
<i>Der Flug ums Leben</i> (Duskes, 1913)	<i>The Parting of the Ways</i>
<i>Der Tod in Sevilla</i> (DB/PAGU, 1913)	<i>Spanish Blood</i>
<i>Der wankende Glaube</i> (Messter, 1913)	<i>The Colonel's Wife</i>
<i>Der Weg des Lebens</i> (Messter, 1913)	<i>The Way of the World</i>
<i>Die blaue Maus</i> (Greenbaum, 1913)	<i>The Blue Mouse</i>
<i>Die Geheimagentin</i> (Duskes, 1913)	<i>A Woman's Wit</i>
<i>Die Suffragette</i> (PAGU, 1913)	<i>The Suffragette</i>
	alt. title: <i>A Militant Suffragette</i>
<i>Die Sünden der Väter</i> (DB/PAGU, 1913)	<i>The Temptations of Drink</i>
	alt. title: <i>The Devil's Assistant</i>
<i>Ein Mutterherz</i> (Duskes, 1913)	<i>His Mother's Son</i>
<i>Fürs Vaterland</i> (Messter, 1913)	<i>For Their Country</i>
	alt. title: <i>On the Altar of Patriotism</i>

*Ihr guter Ruf* (Messter, 1913)  
*Jugend und Tollheit* (DB/PAGU, 1913)

*Komödianten* (DB/PAGU, 1913)

*Mimosa-san* (Messter, 1913)  
*Schuldig* (Duskes, 1913)  
*Das Feuer* (PAGU, 1914)  
*Das Kind ruft* (PAGU, 1914)  
*Engelien* (PAGU, 1914)  
*S1* (PAGU, 1914)

*Carmen* (PAGU, 1918)  
*Die Augen der Mumie Ma* (PAGU, 1918)  
*Das Karussell des Lebens* (UFA, 1919)  
*Madame Du Barry* (PAGU, 1919)  
*Anna Boleyn* (Messter/PAGU, 1920)  
*Arme Violetta* (PAGU, 1920)  
*Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari*  
 (Decla-Bioscop, 1920)  
*Der Golem* (PAGU, 1920)  
*Steuermann Holk* (Maxim, 1920)  
*Danton* (Wörner/UFA, 1921)  
*Hamlet* (Art Film, 1921)  
*Das Weib des Pharao* (EFA, 1922)

*Der müde Tod* (Decla-Bioscop, 1922)  
*Die Herrin der Welt* (May Film, 1922)  
*Othello* (Wörner, 1922)  
*Peter der Große* (EFA, 1922)  
*Tatjana* (Messter/UFA, 1923)  
*Der letzte Mann* (UFA, 1924)  
*Die Finanzen des Großherzogs*  
 (UFA, 1924)  
*Die Sklavenkönigin* (Sascha/UFA, 1924)  
*Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* (UFA, 1924)

*Blitzzug der Liebe* (UFA, 1925)

*Der Farmer aus Texas* (UFA, 1925)

*Die freudlose Gasse* (Sofar, 1925)  
*Eifersucht* (UFA, 1925)  
*Ein Walzertraum* (UFA, 1925)  
*Falscher Scham* (UFA, 1925)  
*Liebe macht blind* (UFA, 1925)  
*Variété* (UFA, 1925)

*An der schönen blauen Donau*  
 (Zelnik/Mara, 1926)

*Facing the Footlights*  
*(Asta Nielsen) In a Fix*  
 alt. title: *Lady Madcap's Way*  
*The Heart of a Pierrot*  
 alt. title: *Behind Comedy's Mask*  
*Madame Butterfly*  
*The Giant Circumstance*  
*Vengeance is Mine*  
*The Cry of a Child*  
*Up to Her Tricks*  
*A Girl's Sacrifice*

alt. title: *A Woman of the People*  
*Gipsy Blood*  
*The Eyes of the Mummy*  
*The Last Payment*  
*Passion*  
*Deception*  
*The Red Peacock*  
*The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*

*The Golem*  
*Mate Holk*  
*All For a Woman*  
*Hamlet*  
*The Loves of Pharaoh*  
 alt. title: *Pharaoh's Wife*  
*Destiny*  
*The Mistress of the World*  
*Othello*  
*Peter the Great*  
*Tatjana*  
*The Last Laugh*  
*The Grand Duke's Finances*

*Moon of Israel*  
*The Golden Road (to Strength and Beauty)*  
*Cupid's Express*  
 alt. title: *Love's Express*  
*Somebody's Son*  
 alt. title: *The Farmer from Texas*  
*The Joyless Street*  
*Jealousy*  
*A (or The) Waltz Dream*  
*False Shame*  
*Love is Blind*  
*Variety*  
 alt. title: *Vaudeville*  
*The Blue Danube*

EUROPEAN FILM LIST

*Der Geiger von Florenz* (UFA, 1926)

*Der Mann im Feuer* (UFA, 1926)

*Der Tänzer meiner Frau*

(Fellner and Somio/UFA, 1926)

*Der Wilderer* (UFA, 1926)

*Die drei Kuckucksuhren* (UFA, 1926)

*Die Flucht in den Zirkus*

(Greenbaum/Parufamet, 1926)

*Die Forsterchristel* (Zelnik, 1926)

*Die keusche Susanne*

(Eichberg/UFA, 1926)

*Faust* (UFA, 1926)

*Herr Tartüffe* (UFA, 1926)

*Manon Lescaut* (UFA, 1926)

*Dirnentragödie* (Pantomim Film, 1927)

*Metropolis* (UFA, 1927)

*Der heilige Berg* (UFA/Berg Film, 1928)

*Der Meister der Welt* (Greenbaum, 1928)

*Die Czardasfürstin* (UFA, 1928)

*Die Todesschleife* (UFA, 1928)

*Geheimnisse des Orients* (UFA/ACE, 1928)

*Heimkehr* (UFA, 1928)

*Schmutziges Geld* (Eichberg/BIP, 1928)

*Spione* (UFA, 1928)

*Ungarische Rhapsodie* (UFA, 1928)

*Asphalt* (UFA, 1929)

*Atlantik* (BIP, 1929)

*Die weiße Hölle vom Piz Palü*

(Sokal/UFA, 1929)

*Großstadtschmetterling*

(Eichberg/BIP, 1929)

*Der blaue Engel* (UFA, 1930)

*Der Greifer* (Eichberg/BIP, 1930)

*Die letzte Kompanie* (UFA, 1930)

*Die singende Stadt* (UFA, 1930)

*Dreyfus* (Richard Oswald Productions,  
1930)

*Menschen im Käfig* (BIP, 1930)

*Impetuous Youth*

alt. title: *The Violinist of Florence*

*When Duty Calls*

alt. title: *The Man in the Fire*

alt. title: *The Fireman*

*Her Dancing Partner*

alt. title: *Dance Fever*

*The Poacher*

*Adventure Mad*

alt. title: *The Three Cuckoo Clocks*

*The Circus of Life*

*Flower of the Forest*

alt. title: *The Bohemian Dancer*

*The Girl in the Taxi*

alt. title: *Virtuous Suzanne*

*Faust*

*Tartuffe*

*Manon Lescaut*

*A Tragedy of the Streets*

*Metropolis*

*Peaks of Destiny*

alt. title: *The Wrath of the Gods*

*Master of the World*

*The Gypsy Princess*

*Looping the Loop*

*Secrets of the Orient*

alt. title: *Secrets of the East*

*Homecoming*

alt. title: *Coming Home*

*Song*

alt. title: *Show Life*

*The Spy*

*Hungarian Rhapsody*

*Asphalt*

*Atlantic*

*The White Hell of Pitz Palu*

alt. title: *Prisoners of the Mountain*

*The Pavement Butterfly*

*The Blue Angel*

*Night Birds*

*The Last Company*

*The City of Song*

alt. title: *Farewell to Love*

*The Dreyfus Case* (BIP, 1931)

*Cape Forlorn*

alt. title: *The Love Storm*

*Zwei Welten* (BIP/Greenbaum, 1930)  
*Der Kongress tanzt* (UFA, 1931)

*Die Bräutigamswitwe* (Eichberg/BIP, 1931)  
*Mädchen in Uniform*  
 (Deutsche Film-Gemeinschaft, 1931)  
*F.P.1 antwortet nicht* (UFA, 1932)

*Two Worlds*  
*Old Vienna*  
 alt. title: *The Congress Dances*  
*Let's Love and Laugh*  
*Mädchen in Uniform*  
*F.P.1*

## Italian Films

### **Original Title, Producer, Year**

*La presa di Roma* (Alberini and Santoni, 1905)  
*Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (Ambrosio, 1908)  
*L'amante della regina* (Itala, 1908)  
*Marco Visconti* (Cines, 1908)  
*Nerone* (Ambrosio, 1908)  
*Cuore di mamma* (Ambrosio, 1909)  
*Giordano Bruno* (Itala, 1909)  
*Il principe di Challant* (Itala, 1909)  
*La mano nera* (Cines, 1909)  
*La signora di Monsoreau* (Cines, 1909)  
*L'ultimo degli Stuardi* (Cines, 1909)  
*Macbeth* (Cines, 1909)  
*Martire pompeiana* (Saffi-Comerio, 1909)  
*Othello* (Film d'Arte Italiana, 1909)  
*Phaedre* (Cines, 1909)  
*Spartaco* (Latium, 1909)  
*Spergiura!* (Ambrosio, 1909)  
*Camille* (Film d'Arte Italiana, 1910)  
*Folchetto di Narbona* (Film d'Arte Italiana, 1910)  
*Françoise de Rimini* (Film d'Arte Italiana, 1910)  
*Il trovatore* (Film d'Arte Italiana, 1910)  
*La morte civile* (Film d'Arte Italiana, 1910)  
*La vergine di Babilonia* (Ambrosio, 1910)  
*Salomé* (Film d'Arte Italiana, 1910)  
*Vestale* (Itala, 1910)  
*Agrippina* (Cines, 1911)  
*Gerusalemme liberata* (Cines, 1911)  
*La caduta di Troia* (Itala, 1911)  
*La regina di Ninive* (Ambrosio, 1911)  
*L'inferno* (Milano, 1911)  
*L'odissea* (Milano, 1911)

### **English-Language Title(s)**

*The Taking of Rome*  
*The Last Days of Pompeii*  
 alt. title: *The Blind Girl and the Villain*  
*The Queen's Lover*  
*Marco Visconti*  
*Nero, or The Fall of Rome*  
*A Mother's Heart*  
*Giordano Bruno*  
*The Prince of Challant*  
*The Black Hand*  
*The Lady of Monsoreau*  
*The Last of the Stuarts*  
*Macbeth*  
*The Martyrs of Pompeii*  
*Othello*  
*Phaedre*  
*Spartacus, the Last of the Gladiators*  
*The False Oath*  
*Camille*  
*Folchetto of Narbonne*  
*Françoise de Rimini*  
*Il trovatore*  
 alt. title: *The Troubadour*  
*Dead in the Eyes of the Law*  
*The Virgin of Babylon*  
*Salomé*  
*The Vestal*  
*Agrippina*  
*The Crusaders*  
*The Fall of Troy*  
*The Queen of Nineveh*  
*Dante's Inferno*  
*Adventures of Ulysses*  
 alt. title: *Homer's Odyssey*



EUROPEAN FILM LIST

<i>Nozze d'oro</i> (Ambrosio, 1911)	<i>Fifty Years After, or The Golden Wedding</i>
<i>Salambò</i> (Ambrosio, 1911)	<i>Salambo</i>
<i>San Francisco, Il poverello di Assisi</i> (Cines, 1911)	<i>St Francis of Assisi</i>
<i>A Sicilian Tragedy</i> (original title undetermined) (Cines, 1912)	
<i>Beatrice d'Este</i> (Film d'Arte Italiana, 1912)	<i>Beatrice d'Este</i>
<i>Chi di spada ferisce</i> (Cines, 1912)	<i>Justice at Last</i>
<i>Il profeta velato</i> (Ambrosio, 1912)	<i>The Veiled Prophet</i>
<i>Il ricordo di un amore</i> (Cines, 1912)	<i>The Coiners</i>
<i>In pasto ai leoni</i> (Cines, 1912)	<i>The Lion Tamer's Revenge</i>
<i>Inutile delinquenza</i> (Cines, 1912)	<i>The Incriminating Card</i>
<i>La contessa di Challant e</i> <i>Don Pedro di Cordova</i> (Film d'Arte Italiana, 1912)	<i>The Countess of Challant</i>
<i>La fossa del vivo</i> (Itala, 1912)	<i>The Live Man's Tomb</i> alt. title: <i>A Living Tomb</i>
<i>La mala pianta</i> (Ambrosio, 1912)	<i>The Weed</i>
<i>La nave dei leoni</i> (Ambrosio, 1912)	<i>The Ship of Lions</i>
<i>L'assassinio di un'anima</i> (Pasquali, 1912)	<i>The Murder of a Soul</i>
<i>Padre</i> (Itala, 1912)	<i>Father</i> alt. title: <i>The Palace of Flames</i>
<i>Polizia moderne</i> (Cines, 1912)	<i>Smart Lady Detective</i>
<i>Per il re!</i> (Aquila, 1912)	<i>For the King</i>
<i>Pro patria mori</i> (Cines, 1912)	<i>Death or Glory: A Story of Napoleon</i> alt. title: <i>At Napoleon's Command</i>
<i>Romeo e Giulietta</i> (Film d'Arte Italiana, 1912)	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
<i>Santarellina</i> (Ambrosio, 1912)	<i>Mam'selle Nitouche</i>
<i>Un furto misterioso</i> (Cines, 1912)	<i>The Mysterious Thief</i> alt. title: <i>Stop that Mysterious Thief</i>
<i>Cuore d'acciaio</i> (Cines, 1913)	<i>A Heart of Stone</i> alt. title: <i>A Heart of Steel</i>
<i>Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei</i> (Pasquali, 1913)	<i>The Last Days of Pompeii</i>
<i>Her Love Against the World</i> (original title undetermined) (Cines, 1913)	
<i>Il bivio della morte</i> (Ambrosio, 1913)	<i>Between Life and Death</i>
<i>Il circolo nero</i> (Celio, 1913)	<i>The Black Circle</i>
<i>Il club delle maschere nere</i> (Cines, 1913)	<i>The Club of the Black Masks</i>
<i>Il segreti dell'anima</i> (Itala, 1912)	<i>Secrets of a Soul</i>
<i>Il segreto dell'inventore</i> (Cines, 1912)	<i>The Inventor's Secret, or The Female Spy</i>
<i>La cricca dorata</i> (Celio, 1913)	<i>The Price of Silence</i>
<i>La rose di Tebe</i> (Cines, 1912)	<i>The Rose of Thebes</i> alt. title: <i>Ramses, King of Egypt</i>
<i>La terra promessa</i> (Celio, 1913)	<i>The Land of Promise</i>
<i>Ma l'amor mio non muore</i> (Gloria, 1913)	<i>Love Everlasting</i>
<i>Marc'Antonio e Cleopatra</i> (Cines, 1913)	<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>

<i>Quo Vadis?</i> (Cines, 1913)	<i>Quo Vadis?</i>
<i>Spartaco</i> (Pasquali, 1913)	<i>Spartacus</i>
<i>Tigris</i> (Itala, 1913)	<i>Tigris</i>
<i>Zuma</i> (Cines, 1913)	<i>Zuma the Gipsy</i>
<i>Cabiria</i> (Itala, 1914)	<i>Cabiria</i>
<i>Histoire d'un Pierrot</i> (Celio, 1914)	<i>Pierrot the Prodigal</i>
<i>L'amazzona mascherata</i> (Celio, 1914)	<i>The Masked Amazon</i>
<i>Una donna</i> (Celio, 1914)	<i>Woman</i>
<i>Il jockey della morte</i> (Vay, 1915)	<i>The Jockey of Death</i>
<i>La donna nuda</i> (Cines, 1915)	<i>The Naked Truth</i>
<i>La signore delle camelie</i> (Caesar, 1915)	<i>Camille</i>
<i>Scuola d'eroi</i> (Cines, 1915)	<i>How Heroes Are Made</i>
	alt. title: <i>For Napoleon and France</i>
<i>The One Between</i> (original Italian title undetermined) (Celio, 1915)	
<i>Maciste</i> (Itala, 1916)	<i>Maciste</i>
	alt. title: <i>Marvelous Maciste</i>
<i>Maciste alpino</i> (Itala, 1916)	<i>Maciste, The Warrior</i>
<i>Nelly la gigolette</i> (Caesar, 1916)	<i>The Apache Dancer's Sacrifice</i>
<i>Avatar</i> (Cines, 1917)	<i>The Magician</i>
<i>Fabiola</i> (Palatino/UCI, 1917)	<i>Fabiola</i>
<i>Il processo Clémenceau</i> (Caesar, 1917)	<i>A Case for the Defense</i>
<i>La fine di un vile</i> (Itala, 1918)	<i>The Wife He Neglected</i>
<i>La Tosca</i> (Caesar, 1918)	<i>La Tosca</i>
<i>The Wages of Sin</i> (no Italian title found) (Windsor/Itala, 1918)	
<i>Il leone mansueto</i> (Cines/UCI, 1919)	<i>Might and the Mite</i>
<i>Il principe dell'impossibile</i> (Itala, 1919)	<i>Prince of the Impossible</i>
<i>La contessa Sara</i> (Bertini/Caesar/Aquila, 1919)	<i>Countess Sara</i>
<i>Maciste innamorato</i> (Itala, 1919)	<i>Maciste in Love</i>
<i>Amleto e il suo clown</i> (D'Ambra/UCI, 1920)	<i>On with the Motley</i>
<i>Il padrone delle ferriere</i> (1920)	<i>The Ironmaster</i>
<i>Justitia</i> (Polidor, 1920)	<i>Astrea the Amazing Woman</i>
<i>La serpe</i> (Bertini/Caesar, 1920)	<i>The Poison Mood</i>
<i>La sfinge</i> (Bertini/Caesar, 1920)	<i>The Sphinx</i>
<i>La spirale della morte</i> (Ambrosio, 1920)	<i>Defying Death</i>
<i>La storia di una donna</i> (Rinascimento, 1920)	<i>A Woman's Story</i>
<i>Nemesis</i> (D'Ambra/UCI, 1920)	<i>Nemesis</i>
<i>Spiritismo</i> (Caesar, 1920)	<i>Bitter Fruits</i>
	alt. title: <i>His Friend's Wife</i>
<i>Il viaggio di Maciste</i> (Itala, 1921)	<i>Maciste's Perilous Voyage</i>
<i>Il voto</i> (Bertini/Caesar, 1921)	<i>The Vow That Failed</i>
<i>La ferita</i> (Caesar, 1921)	<i>Wounded Hearts</i>
<i>La piovra</i> (Bertini/Caesar, 1921)	<i>The Man Who Did Not Care</i>
	alt. title: <i>The Octopus</i>
<i>La verità nuda</i> (Rinascimento, 1921)	<i>Women of Scandal</i>
<i>Fedora</i> (Bertini/Caesar, 1923)	<i>Fedora</i>
<i>Maciste imperator</i> (FERT, 1924)	<i>Maciste the Emperor</i>

EUROPEAN FILM LIST

*Quo Vadis?* (UCI, 1924)  
*Il gigante della Dolomiti* (FERT, 1926)  
*Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (UCI, 1926)  
*Le notti di Cabiria* (Federico Fellini, 1957)

*Quo Vadis?*  
*The Giant of the Mountains*  
 alt. title: *The Giant of the Dolomites*  
*The Last Days of Pompeii*  
*Nights of Cabiria*

**Swedish Films** (from Svenska Bio/Svensk Filmindustri unless otherwise noted)

***Original Title, Producer, Year***  
*De svarta maskerne* (1912)

*Dockan, eller Glödande kärlek*  
 (Lundberg, 1912)  
*Dödsritten under cirkuspolen* (1912)  
*I lifvets vår* (1912)  
*Trädgårdsmästeren* (1912)

*Cirkusluft* (Lundberg, 1913)

*Gränsfolken* (1913)

*Hjältetenoren* (Lundberg, 1913)  
*Ingeborg Holm* (1913)  
*Orman* (Lundberg, 1913)

*På livets ödesvägar* (1913)  
*För sin kärleks skull* (1914)  
*Halvblod* (1914)  
*Stormfågeln* (1914)

*Strejken* (1914)  
*Dolken* (1915)  
*Madame de Thèbes* (1915)

*Skepp som mötas* (1916)  
*Wolo czarwienko* (1916)  
*Terje Vigen* (1917)  
*Berg-Ejvind och hans hustru* (1918)

*Dunungen* (1919)

*Ingmarssönnerna* (1919)

*Sången om den eldröda blomman* (1919)  
*Synnøve Solbakken* (1919)

***English-Language Title(s)***

*The Black Masks*  
 alt. title: *Saved in Mid-Air*  
*Burning Love and Flaring Hate*  
 alt. title: *Love and Hate*  
*The Last Performance*  
*Springtime of Life*  
*Broken Spring Roses*  
 alt. title: *The Gardener*  
*Ida, Queen of the Air*  
 alt. title: *Circus Queen*  
*War's Heart Blood, or The Tenth*  
*Commandment*  
 alt. title: *Brother against Brother*  
*The Fallen Star*  
*Give Us This Day*  
*The Snake Dancer*  
 alt. title: *The Boa Constrictor*  
*Righting the Wrong*  
*Those That Trespass*  
*Half-Breed*  
*A Daughter of Russia*  
 alt. title: *A Stormy Petrel*  
*The Worker's Way*  
*The Gilded Wedding*  
*Madame de Thèbes*  
 alt. title: *The Son of Fate*  
*Ships that Meet*  
*Anjala the Dancer*  
*A Man There Was*  
*Love the Only Law*  
 alt. title: *The Outlaw and His Wife*  
*In Quest of Happiness*  
 alt. title: *The Downy Girl*  
*The Dawn of Love*  
 alt. title: *The Sons of Ingmar*  
*The Flame of Life*  
*A Norway Lass*  
 alt. title: *Fairy of Solbakken*

# SCREENING EUROPE IN AUSTRALASIA

*Bomben* (1920)  
*Erotikon* (1920)

*Fiskebyn* (1920)  
*Herr Arnes pengar* (1920)  
*Karin Ingmarsdotter* (1920)

*Klostret i Sandomir* (1920)  
*Mästern* (1920)  
*Johan* (1921)  
*Körkarlen* (1921)

*Tösen från Stormyrtorpet* (1921)

*Eld ombord* (1923)

*Hans engelska fru* (1927)

*Sommaren med Monika* (1953)  
*Det sjunde inseglet* (1956)

*Sunshine and Shadow*  
*Bonds that Chafe*  
alt. title: *Seduction*  
alt. title: *When We are Married*  
*Chains*  
*Snows of Destiny*  
*God's Way*  
alt. title: *Karin, Daughter of Ingmar*  
*Secret of the Monastery*  
*A Lover in Pawn*  
*The Rapids of Life*  
*Thy Soul Shall Bear Witness*  
alt. title: *The Phantom Carriage*  
alt. title: *The Stroke of Midnight*  
*The Woman He Chose*  
alt. title: *The Girl from the Marsh*  
*Croft*  
alt. title: *Girl from Stormy Croft*  
*The Hell Ship*  
alt. title: *Jealousy*  
*Matrimony*  
alt. title: *Discord*  
alt. title: *The Question of Marriage*  
*Summer with Monika*  
*The Seventh Seal*

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**Julie K. Allen** is Professor of Comparative Arts and Letters at Brigham Young University. She is the author of *Icons of Danish Modernity: Georg Brandes & Asta Nielsen* (2012) and *Danish but Not Lutheran: The Impact of Mormonism on Danish Cultural Identity, 1850–1920* (2017), as well as numerous articles about European silent film, fairy tales, migration, and the construction of cultural identity.

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