

Arthur Melbourne-Cooper: Discussion Continued

Following Tjitte de Vries's article on the British film pioneer Arthur Melbourne-Cooper in *KINtop* 3 and the contributions by John Barnes and Tony Fletcher in *KINtop* 4, we have received new comments by Frank Gray, Geoffrey Donaldson and Anthony Slide. We publish these together with Tjitte de Vries's reply to Frank Gray.

When we invited Tjitte de Vries to write on Arthur Melbourne-Cooper we wanted to create a forum for a debate. We are very thankful to all the renowned scholars who have taken the trouble to participate in this discussion. As the contributions show, the difficulty of attributing a film from the early period to a specific director raises many questions the scope of which goes far beyond the initial problem. However, as far as *KINtop* is concerned, we should like to end the debate here – without wishing to close it. We very much endorse Anthony Slide's suggestion that all parties involved get together in order to examine all the evidence and arguments under scholarly supervision. Even then the question will probably not be definitively resolved - but hardly known material, interesting discussions and challenging new riddles would certainly make such a meeting a most stimulating experience for everybody.

The Editors

Films by George Albert Smith

I would like to confirm and expand on John Barnes' criticism of the Tjitte de Vries campaign to cast Arthur Melbourne-Cooper as the author of a number of films by G. Albert Smith.

The evidence to support my believe that Smith is either the producer or director of the films known as *GRANDMA'S READING GLASS* (1900), *THE OLD MAID'S VALENTINE* (1900), *AS SEEN THROUGH A TELESCOPE* (1900), *THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT* (1900) and *THE SICK KITTEN* (1903) comes from a close analysis of the films themselves. (*THE SICK KITTEN* is the second version of his *THE LITTLE DOCTOR* (1901).) This work was conducted by studying the prints held by the National Film and Television Archive (NFTVA). As Curator of the South East Film and Video Archive (England) and as an early film historian, I am very confident with these attributions.

There are a number of recurring characteristics which are found in Smith's films from 1897-1903. The essential link is the use of the same ›cast‹. In the period in question, he frequently employs the actors Tom Green, Laura Bayley, Eva Bayley, and the same boy, girl and tabby cat. The accompanying ›Identification Chart‹ links known films by Smith to the ›disputed‹ films by Smith and acts as a summary of my findings.

Tom Green, the Sussex comic, is Smith's leading actor in this period. He is found in *HANGING OUT THE CLOTHES; or, MASTER, MISTRESS AND MAID* (1897), *COMIC FACES - OLD MAN DRINKING A GLASS OF BEER* (1898), *GRANDMA THREADING HER NEEDLE* (1900), *LET ME DREAM AGAIN* (1900), *A QUICK SHAVE AND BRUSH-UP* (1900) and *THE TWO OLD SPORTS* (1900). It is very likely that he plays the ›Professor‹ in *AS SEEN THROUGH A TELESCOPE* and I also believe that he provides the face viewed in close-up in *GRANDMA'S READING GLASS*.

Laura Eugenia Bayley married G. Albert Smith in Ramsgate in 1888. She features in many films made by her husband. These include *HANGING OUT THE CLOTHES; or, MASTER, MISTRESS AND MAID* (1897), *SANTA CLAUS* (1898), *AS SEEN THROUGH A TELESCOPE*, *LET ME DREAM AGAIN*, *WEDDING CEREMONY IN A CHURCH* (c. 1900) and *MARY JANE'S MISHAP; or, DON'T PLAY WITH THE PARAFFIN* (1903). They would appear together in *THE KISS IN THE TUNNEL* (1899) and he is probably her partner in *AS SEEN THROUGH A TELESCOPE*.

The actress named as Eva Bayley appears in *THE OLD MAID'S VALENTINE*, *SCANDAL OVER THE TEACUPS* (1900) and *WEDDING CEREMONY IN A CHURCH*. The family resemblance to Laura Bayley is indisputable. They were probably sisters and appear together in *WEDDING CEREMONY IN A CHURCH*.

The little boy in *SANTA CLAUS*, with his distinctive high forehead, appears in *GRANDMA'S READING GLASS* and *THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT*. The little girl in *SANTA CLAUS* reappears in *THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT*, and, I believe, in *THE SICK KITTEN*. The same mature tabby cat, wearing a ribbon collar, features in *GRANDMA'S READING GLASS*, *THE OLD MAID'S VALENTINE*, *GRANDMA THREADING HER NEEDLE* and *THE SICK KITTEN*.

John Barnes has also found that the placing and size of the circular matte is the same in *GRANDMA'S READING GLASS* and *AS SEEN THROUGH A TELESCOPE*. This is also the case in Smith's film *SPIDERS ON A WEB* (1900). He has also identified correctly the location of *AS SEEN THROUGH A TELESCOPE* as that of Furze Hill in Hove.

The NFTVA's print of *GRANDMA'S READING GLASS* must be by G. A. Smith. The presence of the boy, the cat and probably Tom Green and the use of the distinctive matte provides the conclusive evidence. Close examination of the film reveals that Smith's 'Grandma' is a composite figure. Study of the facial features shows that two different individuals were filmed. The medium shot presents a woman, perhaps in her thirties, appearing in profile wearing a bonnet, wig and spectacles. She has some of the qualities of the wife in *LET ME DREAM AGAIN*. She could also be Laura Bayley. Proper identification is hampered by the fact that the position of the figure does not provide a clear view of her face. But she is too mature to be the twelve-year-old Bertha Cooper, as identified by Audrey Wadowska. The close-up is of a face, covered in make-up, which possesses the recognisable features of Tom Green. This is clear when the film is compared with *LET ME DREAM AGAIN*. It is possible that Smith chose to mask the identity of the woman in the master medium shot so that he could make dramatic use of the plastic and magnetic features of Tom Green. The innovatory use of point-of-view in *GRANDMA'S READING GLASS* is also consistent with its deployment in his *AS SEEN THROUGH A TELESCOPE*. Both works are excellent examples of Smith's development of the art of film editing in 1900.

Melbourne-Cooper may have made his own versions of the 'contested' films and I suggest that this should now be explored. But it is time that Mr. de Vries began to celebrate the uncontroversial achievements of Arthur Melbourne-Cooper and stopped this crude and unscholarly attempt to rewrite history. Proper study of the films *GRANDMA'S READING GLASS*, *THE OLD MAID'S VALENTINE*, *AS SEEN THROUGH A TELESCOPE*, *THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT* and *THE SICK KITTEN*, all held by the NFTVA, confirms the veracity of the NFTVA's identification of G.A. Smith as the author of this work.

Can I also add that in his unpublished letter to *The Times*, 7 October, 1993, de Vries states that *STOP THIEF!* (1901) is by Melbourne-Cooper and not by James Williamson (*Alpha Tidings*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1993, p. 3). This is impossible because its second shot features Williamson's two sons - Stuart and Tom - and it uses the same row of terraced cottages found in Williamson's *THE SOLDIER RETURNS* (1902).

Films by G. A. Smith: Identification Chart

titles with asterisk = named as work by A. Melbourne-Cooper

| Titles | Characteristics |
|--|--|
| HANGING OUT THE CLOTHES; or, MASTER, MISTRESS AND MAID (1897) | Tom Green, Laura Bayley |
| SANTA CLAUS (1898) | Laura Bayley, the Boy, the Girl |
| COMIC FACES – OLD MAN DRINKING A GLASS OF BEER (1898) | Tom Green |
| THE KISS IN THE TUNNEL (1899) | Laura Bayley |
| * GRANDMA'S READING GLASS (1900) | Tom Green, the Boy, the Cat, the Circular Matte |
| * THE OLD MAID'S VALENTINE (1900) | Eva Bayley, the Cat |
| * AS SEEN THROUGH A TELESCOPE (1900) | Tom Green, Laura Bayley, the Circular Matte |
| * THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT (1900) | the Boy, the Girl |
| * THE SICK KITTEN (1901/03) | the Girl, the Cat |
| GRANDMA THREADING HER NEEDLE (1900) | Tom Green, the Cat |
| LET ME DREAM AGAIN (1900) | Tom Green, Laura Bayley |
| A QUICK SHAVE AND BRUSH-UP (1900) | Tom Green |
| THE TWO OLD SPORTS (1900) | Tom Green |
| SCANDAL OVER THE TEACUPS (1900) | Eva Bayley |
| SPIDERS ON A WEB (1900) | the Circular Matte |
| WEDDING CEREMONY IN A CHURCH (c.1900) | Laura Bayley, Eva Bayley |

House Of Cards

I expected much when the editors of *KINtop* sent me Mr. Frank Gray's article, asking me to comment on it. Finally, from someone of the same place where G. A. Smith lived and worked, a serious analysis of my Arthur Melbourne-Cooper article, showing me the flaws and mistakes, which everyone can make, such as that of Bertha Cooper's age which should be 23 instead of 12 years¹.

Mr. Gray presents an impressive construction of comparisons of persons acting in the GRANDMA'S READING GLASS group of films with other films, credited to Smith. Going through his list, the only key between the two groups² can be found in SANTA CLAUS. We all agree that this was made by Smith. In *Pioneers of the British Film*, John Barnes gives four pages of frame illustrations from SANTA CLAUS. However, the children are filmed in a long shot so that they are only very small figures. Is the boy really the same as Bert Massey in GRANDMA'S READING GLASS? If we take Mr. Gray's word for it that the »distinctive high forehead« belongs to one and the same boy, his construction becomes an interesting outline for further studies, but if we look at all the material collected by Melbourne-Cooper's daughter Audrey Wadowska, then Mr. Gray's scheme becomes a house of cards.

1. Melbourne-Cooper himself remembered the story outline of GRANDMA'S READING GLASS and this even more completely than that of the copy discovered later in Denmark.
2. John Grisdale,³ in his manuscript »Portrait in Celluloid«, describes the film and qualifies it as »unique in the sense that it introduced a new technique of filming«.
3. In a letter, Mrs. Ursula Messenger, younger daughter of A. M.-C., clearly remembers her father regularly talking about this film as an achievement.
4. A recorded interview with Arthur Massey confirms that his brother Ralph and sister Mary played in the GRANDMA'S READING GLASS group of films.
5. Mr. Gordon Fisher identified for Mrs Audrey Wadowska the children in these films and presented her with photographs of Bert Massey.
6. Bert Massey's friend Reginald Shirtcliffe identified the Massey children on the film stills.
7. When Sadoul and Rachael Low visited Smith, he did not recall a thing about GRANDMA'S READING GLASS.
8. Brighton film-collector Graham Head presented to me four frames from Smith's negative of GRANDMA'S READING GLASS, but the eye in Smith's close-up has nothing to do with the original film.

9. GRANDMA'S READING GLASS cannot be found in Smith's cash-book, which – I completely agree with John Barnes – gives a wealth of information about his activities.
10. A family photograph of the Barnes children shows toddler George Barnes as the spitting image of the boy in THE LITTLE DOCTOR.
11. Research based on population census returns by local St. Albans historian Christopher Wilkinson confirms the ages of several children, who were next-door neighbours, in the films.
12. GRANDMA'S READING GLASS appears first in Warwick catalogues, but only since 1903 in the G.A.S. lists in the Urban Trading Company catalogues. Georges Sadoul's mistake in crediting this group of films is so obvious.

Audrey Wadowska was so convinced that her father made GRANDMA'S READING GLASS that, since 1956, she never stopped reminding BFI- and NFA-officials. However, are we talking about the same film? In 1991, an exhibition in Hove was dedicated to »Early Film Makers of the South Coast« for which a booklet was published. In it we find a still said to be from GRANDMA'S READING GLASS, but this photograph is from a completely different film. My copy of the booklet contains an inserted »Erratum« that acknowledgement is due to the National Film Archive, British Film Institute for the supply of stills and films. No erratum about this film still, which is obviously from GRANDMA THREADING HER NEEDLE.

I hoped to learn from Mr. Gray more about Smith, who as far as my files show was either commissioned or employed by Charles Urban. Smith, involved in film making from 1897, actually did not make many more films after 1899, as his cash-book shows. Graham Head confirmed this to me in one of his letters. Is it very likely that someone like Melbourne-Cooper, involved in film making since 1892, independently since 1896 with his own companies, would clone films from Smith? In interviews at the time, Smith declares that the actual taking of films is not very special. To Melbourne-Cooper, however, it was very important, so much so that he was one of the first in the world to specialize in it.

I would have liked to see frame blow-ups of the two children in SANTA CLAUS and original photographs of them. The same goes for Tom Green. Green, »the Sussex comic, is Smith's leading actor in this period«, writes Mr. Gray, but after 1898 one cannot find listing of any more payment to Tom Green for film making in Smith's cash-book. Is Tom Green the same as in GRANDMA THREADING HER NEEDLE? But the rather bulging eye of this female impersonator does not look at all like the wrinkled eye in the close-up of GRANDMA'S READING GLASS, which is the eye of AMC's mother. I would like to see a photograph of Tom Green as a professional comedy actor⁴. Mr. Gray's construction, I am afraid, is based on too much conjecture and not enough facts. Even these facts summon more questions than answers.

From the beginning, the moving pictures, like any other branch of entertainment, were subject to mythology (in order to enhance patronage). I think it would do film history no harm if it were rewritten when new facts and insights come to light. I would really appreciate discussing this with Mr. Gray, with John Barnes (whom I admire very much for the enormous wealth of information in his books, though I completely disagree with his supposition of the *Paul-Acres camera*) or with anybody else.

Notes

1 Population census of 1891 shows her age as 14.

2 I set aside *AS SEEN THROUGH THE TELESCOPE*, which is definitely another film than Cooper's *WHAT THE FARMER SAW*, as John Barnes convincingly demonstrated.

3 Because of my misunderstanding of the pronunciation of this name I wrote »Grisedale« before. The correct spelling is without the »e«.

4 Smith's cash-book presents even more confusion with an entry on August 22 (1900): »Fee Eva Bayley »Valentine« £ 1/1/-«. Dennis

Gifford, however, in his second edition of »The British Film Catalogue 1895-1985« credits »THE OLD MAID'S VALENTINE also THE VALENTINE« to Smith and the part to »Tom Green...Spinster«. Is this really the same Tom Green as in *GRANDMA THREADING HER NEEDLE*? (Green is not mentioned in these films in the first edition of Gifford's book.) Nevertheless, I am certain that Melbourne-Cooper made his own VALENTINE version, which is confirmed by the use of the same back drop as in *GRANDMA'S READING GLASS*.

GEOFFREY N. DONALDSON

Response to Tjitte de Vries' Article on Arthur Melbourne-Cooper

In *KINtop* No. 3, I read with pleasure the article »Arthur Melbourne-Cooper, Film Pioneer Wronged by Film History« written by Tjitte de Vries, and, in *KINtop* No. 4, Tjitte's response to a somewhat petulant letter from John Barnes and an encouraging, sympathetic letter from Tony Fletcher. If, as I hope, the discussion concerning the activities of Arthur Melbourne-Cooper is still open (and not, according to the BFI, »closed«), I should like to participate in it for personal reasons and also in my capacity as a Dutch film historian.

My personal reasons are that:

- way back in 1972 I met Audrey Wadowska and thereafter visited her a number of times in London and St. Albans, and even had the pleasure of receiving her in my flat in Rotterdam; and that

- it was I who introduced my good friend Tjitte de Vries to Audrey.

First of all, let me state that I do not know (nor do I really care) who made *GRANDMA'S READING GLASS*. There are so many other films made in the earliest days, here, there and everywhere, of which the paternity is unknown and probably never will be known. However, I feel that Audrey Wadowska's claim that the film was made by her father deserves serious consideration.

One thing is certain. It is thanks to Audrey's research that the making of this controversial film can be accurately dated to shortly after July 4th, 1900, because Audrey managed to locate in a London newspaper of that date, *Daily Express*, the advertisement for Bovril that the film's little boy looks at through grandmother's reading glass. No-one at the BFI had discovered or even looked for this – but it seems that the employees of the BFI are always willing to let the donkey's work be done by outsiders.

Audrey was an adorable lady. Nevertheless, she had the knack of treading on people's toes, particularly the tender toes of some of the BFI's authorities. The BFI brushed aside what the people there called »unsubstantiated claims«. As far as I can recall, Audrey never made any unsubstantiated claims. When reading synopses in old catalogues she would now and then say: »This sounds as if it could be one of the films my father has told me about.« Thereafter she would try to find out if it had been made in the neighbourhood of St. Albans. If illustrations were available she would go in search of the exact locations and attempt to trace the whereabouts of people who may have worked in or on that film. It was only after she had found some documentary proof that she would say: »Yes, I am convinced that this film was made by my father.«

Coming back to the question of the paternity of *GRANDMA'S READING GLASS*, I know that, in support of her and her father's claim that the film was made by Melbourne-Cooper, Audrey Wadowska brought forward a great deal of documentation and evidence ... completely ignored by the BFI people. Now I should like to hear from the BFI what documentation and evidence has been presented by the BFI – other than the completely unsubstantiated statement by the, not always completely reliable, French film historian Georges Sadoul – that *GRANDMA'S READING GLASS* must have been made by George Albert Smith.

I have seen a photocopy of a letter signed in April 1995 by two employees of the BFI, Jane Hockings and Luke McKernan, wherein Arthur Melbourne-Cooper is described as »a jobbing cameraman« and wherein it is grudgingly admitted that he made at least seven films between 1899 and 1912 (films now held by the NFTVA). During the recent *Giornate del Cinema Muto* in Pordenone, one of those films was shown, on Tuesday, 17th october, as part of the non-fiction programme, namely *AN EMPIRE'S MONEY MAKER*. The six-line programme note, which it took no less than three employees of the BFI, Elaine Barrows, Luke McKernan and James Patterson, to compose, reads as follows:

«Making coins at the Royal Mint. Arthur Melbourne-Cooper began his career in films working for Birt Acres about 1900. He later founded the Alpha Trading Company, where he first specialized in model animation but by 1910 was mostly filming industrials.»

If, as the BFI people concede, Arthur Melbourne-Cooper had his own production company from approximately 1904 up to about 1910, it seems to me that, as film-making was Melbourne-Cooper's way of earning a living for himself and his family, in those seven years he must have made far more than the seven for which the BFI gives him credit. I can bring forward documentary proof concerning at least one other film produced by Melbourne-Cooper.

But now, let me go back to 1972 and my very first contact with his daughter, Audrey Wadowska.

Audrey had sent to the Nederlands Filmmuseum in Amsterdam some material relating to a Dutchman who for some years had worked as cameraman and occasional actor for Melbourne-Cooper in St. Albans, and had asked for some information. From the NFM – as was usual at that time – Audrey received no reply. I was then corresponding regularly with the young Anthony Slide – now in the U.S.A. and the author of many valuable reference books. As Tony was a good friend of Audrey, he suggested that I should get in touch with her.

During our first meeting, Audrey asked me if I would be willing to write a booklet about her father's pioneering work. I replied that I was too busy with my own research concerning Dutch silent films, but I added that I knew someone in Holland who possibly could help her, namely Tjitte de Vries.

The Dutchman who worked for Arthur Melbourne-Cooper from about 1904 to 1908 was Franz Anton Nöggerath jr (1880-1947). His father, Franz Anton Nöggerath sr, although born in Germany, was a pioneer of film exhibition, distribution and production in the Netherlands. He was the owner of the music-hall ›Flora‹ in Amsterdam, in which from 1896 onwards films were an integral part of the program. A year or two later he started producing films, mostly non-fiction but also, in a tiny studio built on the roof of ›Flora‹, some fiction items, including a faked film about the Boer War. In some of his fiction films the players were German actors and actresses who were appearing on the stage of ›Flora‹. One of them was Gerhard Dammann. ›Flora‹ was destroyed by a fire in 1902, but re-built and re-opened the following year.

Father Nöggerath decided that his eldest son should go to England in order to learn how to make films. In December 1897 the young man was sent to London as an apprentice to the McGuire & Baucus Company, then managed by Charles Urban, who, in 1898, reorganized this firm and renamed it the Warwick Trading Company. The apprenticeship was easily arranged because Nöggerath sr was the Dutch agent for that company's films.

According to autobiographical notes published by Franz Anton Nöggerath jr in 1918, his mentors were Cecil Hepworth and, especially, the camera-

man Joe Rosenthal. He asserted that his very first work as cameraman was for some (discarded) filmed scenes to be inserted in the stage play ›Hearts Are Trumps‹ that was presented at the Drury Lane Theatre in September 1899.

In 1900 he married an English girl, Eleanor Fox, who, as actress, used the professional name ›Nellie Hope‹. All five of their children were born in England. The fourth, a daughter called Amanda, was born in St. Albans.

I do not know how or exactly when Franz Anton Nöggerath met Arthur Melbourne-Cooper, but I do know that Nöggerath acted in the Alpha production *THE MOTOR VALET* (1905) and that little Amanda – born in 1906 – appeared in *NOAH'S ARK* (1909).

In 1906, Melbourne-Cooper sent Nöggerath to Norway to film the festivities in connection with the coronation of King Haakon. An advertisement, placed by the Alpha Trading Company in the German magazine *Der Artist* on 24th June 1906 offered this documentary film to German exhibitors.

During his trip to Scandinavia, Nöggerath photographed at least two more documentaries for Alpha, namely *A TRIP FROM MOLDE TO RAMSDALSHORN* and *A PANORAMA OF KRISTIANSUND*.

In my archive I have photographic reproductions of a number of postcards sent by Nöggerath to the Melbourne-Cooper family from Norway, Denmark and Germany, made for me by Audrey Wadowska's husband, Jan.

To round off my story of Nöggerath's connection with Melbourne-Cooper, I add that, when his father died in 1908, the son returned to Holland in order to help his step-mother run ›Flora‹. In 1911 he opened a small film studio in Sloten, on the outskirts of Amsterdam, where, between that year and 1913, he produced a number of fiction films, all of which must now – alas – be considered as ›missing, believed lost‹.

I hope that some of my information will go towards giving Arthur Melbourne-Cooper more of the credit due to him than the BFI, for some inexplicable reason, has never been willing to give him. I hope, too, that my letter will be considered as a tribute to Audrey Wadowska and as support to Tjitte de Vries, who, in Audrey's footsteps, has done and is still doing his best to rehabilitate Arthur Melbourne-Cooper and give him his justly deserved place in the history of film-making in England, small though it may be, but still something more than just a footnote in one of Rachel Low's books.

Response to Tjitte de Vries' Article
on Arthur Melbourne-Cooper

I loath to enter the debate with regard to the work of Arthur Melbourne-Cooper in that I will doubtless be accused of bias. I make no apology for my high regard for Melbourne-Cooper's daughter, Audrey Wadowska, and, as a consequence, my support of Tjitte de Vries in his efforts to continue her research and achieve publication of full-scale study of the life and career of Arthur Melbourne-Cooper. When I first came to London as a young man in the 1960s, Audrey Wadowska and her husband became my closest friends, and Audrey was very much a surrogate mother to me. I am, therefore, deeply offended by the manner in which her devotion to her father and her efforts to document his career have been greeted with ridicule by self-appointed film historians and film scholars who refuse to endorse any form of revisionist history of the motion picture.

Virtually all the ›name‹ film historians of the past received no formal training in the field, but that in no way denigrates the accomplishments of Eileen Bowser, Kevin Brownlow, William K. Everson, and even John Barnes. A cursory examination of the writings on motion picture history by trained academic, non-film historians reveals a considerable lack of knowledge and expertise. Unlike any other discipline, film history requires a unique and open approach from its ›scholars‹. Least of all, no-one should deny the importance of an individual's research because he, like Tjitte de Vries, happens to be a journalist. A major portion of film history is based on the writings of journalists in the pages of early trade publications, and just as the veracity of this reporting can be confirmed and denied through its study in relationship to other primary sources of the period, so should the work of Tjitte de Vries be considered *vis-à-vis* the documentation that he presents to support his claims on behalf of Arthur Melbourne-Cooper.

Tjitte de Vries notes that Audrey Wadowska collected together two cases full of evidential material on GRANDMA'S READING GLASS. The time is long overdue for all interested parties, including John Barnes and de Vries, to examine these items under academic supervision. While it might be argued a questionable use of public money, I would like to see the British Film Institute and the National Film and Television Archive sponsor such a symposium. Each ›side‹ should be required to lay all its evidence on the table and argue its positions.

John Barnes maintains that ›family reminiscences [...] are of little value.‹ Let members of the academic community – film and non-film – consider this point of view. To what extent should and do historians rely on oral histories? Certainly, Kevin Brownlow's work, which I do not recall has been subject to

major negative criticism, is based in large part on oral documentation. Are we now to dismiss *The Parade's Gone By* as an irrelevant contribution to film history? If a contemporary photograph exists which seems to prove the claim of an individual that it is he or she in a certain frame of film, do we disregard the evidence of that photograph simply because there is no written documentation to back up the claim?

Most film historians are not film technicians. Are we qualified to make rational judgements in terms of frame lines, splices and mattes without a thorough grounding in laboratory technique? When we look at a modern copy of a piece of film from 1900 does it provide the same evidence as an original print made in 1900? In his argument in favor of George Albert Smith as the maker of *GRANDMA'S READING GLASS*, John Barnes states that the same mask (or matte) was used in both the latter film and *AS SEEN THROUGH A TELESCOPE*, and, therefore, both films were shot with the same camera. I showed the frame enlargements from these two films, as reproduced in *KINtop* to a well-known film preservationist, familiar with laboratory work and camera technique, past and present. While he was unwilling to make a definite statement without examining the film itself, it was his opinion that the circular mattes in the two films were not identical.

No matter how qualified the historian, no matter his academic background or credentials, does he know more than the film technician? Obviously not. In trying to determine a definitive answer to the question, who made *GRANDMA'S READING GLASS*, it is equally necessary for the technical establishment to be represented, and to have access to whatever original film elements have survived.

The *auteur* theory has yet to be discussed in terms of *GRANDMA'S READING GLASS*, but it also has a place in the debate. I was recently shown a commentary on Arthur Melbourne-Cooper by a National Film and Television Archive staff person, Luke McKernan, who has compiled a *Who's Who of Victorian Cinema*. He describes, or rather dismisses, Melbourne-Cooper as »a jobbing camera-man«, and questions whether he should rightfully be described as the author of films that he shot while in the employ of others. I do not question McKernan's statement that »Authorship for this period is a very grey area«, but I do dispute his notion that cinematographers in the early years of the motion picture should not be credited as the authors or *auteurs* of the films. If we accept McKernan's argument that jobbing cameramen are not worthy of consideration as major contributors of the craft of filmmaking, then we must take away Edwin S. Porter's credits for the films he made for the Edison Company and, instead, identify those films either as the work of Thomas Alva Edison or, more appropriately, give the credit to Edison's head of the Kinetograph Department, James Henry White. Luke McKernan would have us travel down a very dangerous road, which would, for example, take away Alice Guy-Blaché's credits for several hundred films and hand them to her employer, Leon Gaumont.

But then, of course, Alice Guy-Blaché, like Audrey Wadowska, was a woman. And both, I believe, have suffered because of their sex and a male establishment. It is worthy of note that just as George Albert Smith's credit for *GRANDMA'S READING GLASS* is based on an original interpretation by Georges Sadoul, so was it Sadoul who credited many of Alice Guy-Blaché's films to others. Similarly, it is the same British film historians, who ignore the contribution of Arthur Melbourne-Cooper to film history, and continue to find Alice Guy-Blaché and other female filmmakers of the silent era undeserving of recognition.

Ultimately, it is personalities and egos that dominate in the discussion of the authorship of *GRANDMA'S READING GLASS*. No-one is willing to admit he or she might be wrong, and no-one wants to meet face to face with the 'other side' and quietly argue the issue. So much of what is published in the arguments of both John Barnes and Tjitte de Vries is irrelevant. The latter is still upset over the snubbing of Audrey Wadowska at a 1978 FIAF Congress. That was almost twenty years ago. The world has moved on, many of the individuals at that meeting are retired or dead, and de Vries should channel his unbounded energy to persuading a new generation of film historians and film archivists of the veracity of his and Audrey Wadowska's claims. John Barnes is equally at fault in bringing up the claim that Tjitte de Vries' papers on Melbourne-Cooper and Birt Acres were rejected by Domitor because they were unworthy of presentation. One of the organizers of the Domitor conference tells me that the only reason for the rejection was that de Vries had nothing new to state. Further, Domitor may be, as Barnes writes, »the prestigious association of film historians«, but it is also an organization open to anyone willing to pay an entrance fee. I, like some other film historians that I know, choose not to join any institution, no matter how commendable. (Indeed, I am reminded of the Groucho Marx remark that I would not want to belong to any group willing to have me as a member.)

In conclusion, I would question the statement by Tjitte de Vries that film history is like any other science. Therein lies the problem. Film history is not like any other science. It is imprecise, based on primary sources that are always subject to question and to doubt. In no other medium, can one find publicists paid not to publicize the happenings on a film or the behavior of a celebrity, but, deliberately, to obscure what actually took place. Primary sources, such as trade papers, are based on press releases carefully sanitized for public consumption. Films themselves are such fragile objects, open to all manner of abuse. The truth at 24 frames per second is beyond our grasp, the truth relating to silent films at 16 frames per second or thereabout is perhaps intangible.