PETER CARIN

LE

CINÉMATOGRAPHE

Monologue Comique

DIT PAR

M. RAMBERT, du Théâtre du Vaudeville

PRIX : 1 FRANC

PARIS
LIBRAIRIE G. BARANGER FILS
5, RUE DES SAINTS-PÈRES, 5

1897

The title page of Peter Carin's monologue, »Le Cinématographe«, originally performed in 1896, which cautions against the risks of being revealed in *flagrant délit* by the eponymous device

STEPHEN BOTTOMORE

»Devant le cinématographe« The Cinema in French Fiction (1896-1914)

Introduction – the international context

Most film historical writing is about what really happened in the history of the cinema: about actual films that were made or real people who took part in the film industry or who viewed films at the time. But along with these accounts of real events and the contemporary discussion and debates about them, there is another discourse about cinema – in the form of fictional accounts of the medium. These fictions include such forms as novels, short stories, songs, plays, poems (and even films).[1]

Among the more famous of these fictions about cinema are novels such as Budd Schulberg's *What Makes Sammy Run* (1941) or Nathaniel West's *Day of the Locust* (1951) and films such as SINGING IN THE RAIN (1952).[2] But as well as these examples from the ›classical‹ era of cinema, there were also many from much earlier. In fact fiction about the cinema was being written from almost as soon as moving images captured the world's attention in 1896 (and there was even a short story published about the cinema's predecessor, the Kinetoscope[3]). In the twenty years from the mid 1890s to the First World War, scores of stories, plays and poems were published on the cinema theme.

As we shall see below, in the first decade after the cinema's arrival many of these literary works were on one recurring theme: the power of the new medium to witness and record. In this first batch of fictions the story is often about a film camera capturing visual evidence – of a crime or of a lover's infidelity or other misbehaviour. This is true, for instance, of an early British short story about the cinema, »An Idyll of the Cinematographe« of 1898 – the plot concerns a woman who discovers the bad behaviour of her faraway fiancé by having him filmed. An American example of two years later from *Harper's Weekly*, »The Cardinal's Rose«, begins as the protagonist sees an actuality film in which a theft is committed, and the rest of the story is about the tracing of the criminals who perpetrated the crime.[4]

But other themes emerged as the years passed. After the cinema became increasingly institutionalised in its second decade, the fiction associated with it also became more concerned with film as an established medium rather than as a novel and potentially dangerous means of surveillance and disco-

very. For example, there are stories about the lives of film actors and technicians, and about the infatuation of cinemagoers with early films and film stars. Longer works of fiction also started to appear, such as Giulio Piccini's book of short stories about the film industry, *Le Novelle del Cinematografo* (1910), which dealt with several themes: one tale is about a cinema pianist while another is about a group of cameramen who go off to film in Africa.[5]

Most of these early fictions about cinema were by obscure or forgotten writers (in most cases deservedly so!). But occasionally a famous author such as Maxim Gorky contributed to the ›genre‹.[6] In Britain Rudyard Kipling was among the most eminent, with his haunting short story »Mrs Bathurst« of 1904, long believed, falsely, to be the first story ever written about cinema.[7] As we shall see, well-known French authors Guillaume Apollinaire and Jean Giraudoux were also to write early film-related stories.

By the early teens a large number of short stories about films and filmmakers were being published in magazines, and there were also numerous songs about cinema (eg. »At the Picture Show« by E. Ray Goetz and Irving Berlin from 1913), as well as many poems and even a couple of operettas, including the 1913 success, »The Girl on the Film«.[8] These fictions appeared in countries around the world: in the Americas, in several European countries, and even further afield. Pilar Marino's »Parellismo«, for example, was published in the Philippines in mid 1913 and is concerned with one spectator's state of mind while viewing a movie – seeing parallels with real life in the melodramatic story.[9]

Bearing in mind the large amount of fiction being published about cinema through the early era, it is worth asking if these many works are of any use or significance for film historians, beyond their entertainment value. Historians, after all, should be wary of their sources, and these works of imaginative literature – by definition fictional sources – would seem to be ruled ›out of court‹ as offering no solid facts for serious historical research. However, I think there is a sense in which they *are* of some historical and evidential value.

Fiction as history?

In writing fiction, authors tend to distil the mood of a time; the themes that they address are likely to draw on the prevailing mood and ›Zeitgeist‹. Indeed, an author's work of fiction may in some respects be a more rounded picture than that offered in certain factual sources, which are inevitably partial and incomplete. Many factual historical documents have been destroyed or lost, and in any case those documents which survive only cover very specific facts and events, rather than offering an overview or generalisation. Writers of fiction, on the other hand, who were on the scene as history unfolded,

are likely to have absorbed the prevailing ›mood‹, and so their fictional writing may offer us a useful impression of contemporary mood and opinion. Such historical ›commentary‹ (one can't really call it ›evidence‹) needs, of course, to be treated carefully, and is of more value when several such works of fiction are taken together. What one is trying to do in this analysis is to identify common and repeated themes, because if several writers used a similar theme or ›trope‹ in their fiction, it suggests that this theme was indeed preoccupying the ›public mind‹ at the time.

The value of fictional sources for purposes of ›theme analysis‹ first occurred to me when I was researching a book of satirical cartoons about early cinema.[10] As I leafed through the illustrated and comical press of the period from the 1890s to the First World War, I discovered recurring themes in cartoons about the early movies.[11] Some very specific subjects and ›angles‹ about the new medium emerged from my perusal of numerous cartoon magazines from diverse countries (with the help of several other researchers, I should add). In terms of film exhibition the subjects of cartoons included: the transformation of neighbourhoods by picture palaces, with their garish posters and uniformed commissionaires; problems of women's hats blocking the views of other spectators in cinemas; the sexual opportunities for couples in darkened picture palaces; and the competition traditional theatres faced from film. Themes about film production included: the ubiquity of the western film genre; the faking of war films; the new phenomenon of performers acting in real locations (rather than merely in theatres as hitherto); and actors having to do physically demanding, stunt-type roles.

Some of these themes and issues had scarcely been thought worth mentioning by conventional film historians, but clearly the press cartoonists of the time considered that they were of interest. It is worth adding that the themes about cinema which I found in these printed cartoons must have been well known to the public at the time, because cartoonish satire is based on what is publicly recognized and discussed: if an issue is not well known it cannot be effectively satirised.

As with cartoons, so with other forms of fiction: it seems to me that the themes found repeatedly in early stories and other fictions about cinema may indicate to us something of what people of the time were feeling about the new medium. Such theme analysis can be a useful tool of diagnosis: a way of, as it were, putting one's thermometer under the collective tongue of the historical public. This is not to say that we should not take other forms of evidence (factual evidence) into account as well, nor that a theme found in one single story should be considered indicative – that would be anecdotal rather than properly critical history. But if themes are found in several different fictions at about the same time, as well as in other sources, it does suggest that this theme was ›in the air‹ at the time, and was of some significance to the people and society who were living through the first years of the cinema.

I should add that some other historians have also been examining this body of fiction about early cinema. Several authors have looked at the spate of novels about filmmaking which started appearing in the United States before the First World War. This phenomenon had begun tentatively in 1912 with the publication of *Tom Swift and His Wizard Camera,* a novel by »Victor Appleton« – pseudonym of the writing factory, the Stratemeyer Syndicate.[12] It was followed the next year by the start of two series of juvenile novels, also by »Victor Appleton«: *The Moving Picture Boys* series and the *Motion Picture Chums* series; and in 1914 a similar series for young female readers began with the *Moving Picture Girls* novels. As some of the historians who have examined the subject have noted, these novels offer revealing descriptions of attitudes and practices in the US film industry at the time.[13] Similarly, Frank Kessler in one of his articles uses a 1911 poem by the expressionist poet Jakob van Hoddis, as a guide to examining issues of segmentation and integration in early cinema. Van Hoddis' poem is entitled »Schluss: Kinematograph«, and is concerned with the confusion in the minds of some early cinema-goers as they viewed a programme of different films – an issue which is confirmed as being very prevalent by my and Yuri Tsivian's researches into other sources.[14]

In the remainder of this essay I will analyse in more detail some of the common and repeated themes which I have found in early cinema fiction. Rather than try to cover all the material here – an impossible task in the space available – I will concentrate on what I have found for one country, France. I make no claims for comprehensiveness, and my francophone colleagues who research the French press in detail will, no doubt, be able to amplify and correct my account.[15]

Le Cinématographe

> Et tout-à-coup! c'est là où l'on commence à se moquer de nous! – l'image se met à danser, à sauter, à trépigner, à se trémousser. C'est une véritable sarabande sur l'écran!

This is a description of a man's first visit to the Lumière *cinématographe* – and the disturbing flicker and shake that he witnesses on the screen. It is part of a »monologue comique« by Peter Carin, entitled *Le Cinématographe*, which was copyrighted in 1896 and apparently performed in the same year by a certain Rambert of the Théâtre du Vaudeville.[16] The monologue continues in a critical vein:

> Tous ces gens qui grouillent pour gagner de l'argent!... Et c'est ça que l'on vous montre au Cinématographe!...

La mer avec les vagues! peuh! Il y a cinquante ans peut-être ç'aurait été curieux! Mais aujourd'hui tout le monde va aux bains de mer!...
On vous montre aussi des blagues, de petites blagues! Un arroseur qui se laisse berner par un gamin; et le gamin qui s'amuse à arroser l'arroseur.
(D'un air navré.) Hein! Vous trouvez ça drôle! Moi pas. J'aime mieux les dessins de Caran d'Ache.

This critical and contemptuous attitude towards the trivial content of the first films, coming so soon after these films were made, is unusual, especially given that most of the initial reaction to the cinema was adulatory. But the main reason for his disliking the *cinématographe* is soon revealed, for it seems that our monologuist had an unfortunate personal experience involving the cinema. A month earlier he had been engaged to an attractive young woman, whose additional attraction was that she would likely soon inherit from rich and aged parents. One evening he and his prospective in-laws all went to the *cinématographe*. Inside the hall the master of ceremonies, »le barnum«, announced the next film: »Les Acacias, au Bois de Boulogne«. But:

Tout-à-coup – oh stupeur! – toute ma future famille s'évanouit! Je regarde la toile! Mes cheveux se troublent et mes yeux se hérissent! Je m'aperçois défilant lentement dans une superbe victoria et à mes côtés – oh pudeur! – deux tapageuses horizontales entre lesquelles je faisais le joli cœur!!
Sans me demander d'autres explications, mon beau-père a rompu le mariage.
J'étais pincé en flagrant délit avant la lettre... de faire part!
Et vous voulez qu'après ça j'aime le Cinématographe! Oh, non!

The *cinématographe*, in other words, has revealed to the world his indiscretions with the two loose women. This theme of ›ciné révélateur‹ or ›ciné témoin‹ is, as I have pointed out elsewhere, the most common theme to be found in early fiction about the cinema.[17] But since my original research I have found many other early fictional texts about film, and have discovered that various other themes emerge later in the period.

Devant le Cinématographe

When any major new technology is introduced there is often a period when it evokes anxiety among those who experience it or are affected by it. This has been especially true with regard to visual and media technologies, because of their apparent potential to reveal to the world what was once private. Such concerns have greeted (press) photography, the telephone, cinema, and radio, and these anxieties were sometimes expressed in the form of fictional accounts.[18] As far as cinema-related fiction goes, Carin's piece was one of the first of a number of stories, plays, poems, etc. which dealt with the cinema's

apparent power to reveal the hidden.[19] At about the same time that Carin's popular monologue was being performed, a rather more refined and ›theoretical‹ treatment of this issue also appeared.

»Devant le Cinématographe« by Gabriel Aubray was published in the literary journal, *La Quinzaine*, on 15th January, 1897, as the eighth installment of her fictional diary, »Lettres à ma cousine«.[20] Aubray begins by reminding us that the *cinématographe* was born from photography, which medium has the ability to fix images forever, as in a »miroir magique«. Thus:

> [...] les riens fugitifs que sont une attitude, un geste, un jeu ténu de physionomie, ont maintenant l'univers et les siècles pour témoins.

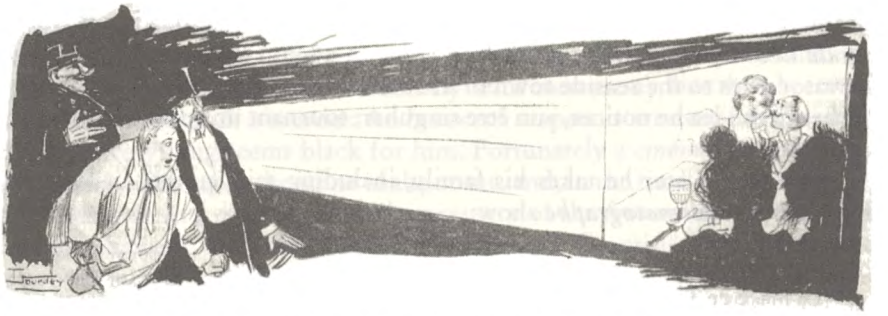
Aubray argues that photography and X-rays demonstrate:

> [...] la poignante mais salutaire idée du retentissement indéfini de nos moindres actes [...] tout ce qui est doit être vu [...] rien ne tombe au néant: de nous tout ce qui est est éternellement.

And now, with the invention of the *cinématographe* there is a means to record a more detailed memoir of our lives – and sins – even than with photography:

> Le cinématographe, fixant pour l'éternité ce qui passe, et le fixant dans la vie, ne symbolise-t-il pas bien, ma cousine, l'immortalité à laquelle, êtres d'un jour, nous sommes voués?... Il faut se raffermir en songeant qu'au jeu de la vie rien n'est perdu, tout compte, et, qu'à cause de l'enjeu l'on doit, par suite, faire sérieusement sa partie, tout en riant du jeu lui-même et de ses surprises... Et tant pis pour les joueurs que le cinématographe a pris dans une posture grotesque ou fâcheuse!
> Cette chronique de fin d'année, ma cousine, ne sera pas autre chose qu'à l'écran du cinématographe le défilé des ombres humaines qui ont joué un moment, le mois passé, dans le rayon de lumière de l'actualité, et qu'a saisies au jour le jour mon objectif en se promenant dans Paris.

Aubray's little-known piece is a philosophical and religious meditation which takes the cinema as a metaphor for the all seeing eye of God. It is a remarkable first example of the cinema's conjunction with religious philosophy. But most writers of short stories and other fictions were much more interested in using the cinema as a practical plot device, often as a way of revealing the secret behaviour of another character. Plots using cinema in this way appear to fall into three categories: 1. a film reveals an indiscretion, especially marital infidelity; 2. a crime is revealed, 3. a long-lost loved one is recognised on screen.



An illustration by Lourdney for Miguel Zamacoïs' 1897 tale in which, using a »cinématographe perfectionné«, the fat man and the police commissioner discover that their wives are deceiving them

Indiscretions displayed

The first category is the one most open to a comical treatment, which we saw in the Carin monologue which I quoted earlier, and very soon this same plot was repeated – with a twist. »Flagrant délit« by Miguel Zamacoïs appeared in *Journal Amusant* in July 1897, charmingly illustrated by the artist Lourdey.[21] Set in 1925, the story concerns »un gros monsieur« who believes his wife is deceiving him, and he pays a visit to the *commissaire de police* to have the matter investigated. The *commissaire* accompanies the *monsieur*, and to record the erring wife he brings his »appareils à flagrants delits«. One of these devices is a »cinématographe perfectionné« which »projette sur le mur d'en face tout ce qui se passe dans la pièce«.

The pair visit a hotel which the *monsieur*'s wife is suspected to use for her adultery, and sure enough, thanks to the *cinématographe* device placed at the keyhole, the wife is revealed *en flagrant délit* with her lover. But the image of another man and woman in the room can also be made out: this second woman cannot at first be recognised, but suddenly she moves into the light. The story ends:

> Bon Dieu de bois! dit le commissaire, mais c'est ma femme!!
> Et il constata deux adultères au lieu d'un. Alors, fraternellement, les deux victimes des erreurs du mariage entrèrent dans le café voisin pour se remettre un peu, ou ils absorbèrent chacun un verre de coca et deux cornes de deux sous.

As well as marital infidelity, the cinema could record a mere indiscretion or embarassing moment – a »posture grotesque ou fâcheuse«, in Gabriel Aubray's words – and this might then be replayed on the screen as public amusement. A poem entitled »Le Cinématographe: monologue dédié à MM.

Lumière« was written by the Comte d'Osseville, and published in the *Bulletin de la Société caennaise de Photographie* in 1899.[22] It concerns a visit the narrator pays to the seaside town of Trouville with his mother-in-law: as she bathes in the sea he notices, »un être singulier; tournant un appareil assez particulier«.

Six months later he takes his family, including said mother-in-law to a Paris *charité cinématographe* show:

La lumière s'éteint. Que va-t-il arriver?
«La plage de Trouville!» entendons-nous hurler.
A l'instant, je repense au cinématographe.
A la scène du bain, au maudit photographe.
Quelle angoisse cruelle! ah! j'avais bien raison.
D'abord, ma belle-mère est prise de frisson,
Puis, d'attaque de nerfs, en voyant son image...
C'est que l'écran lui donne un drôle de visage.
Pour éviter la vague, elle veut se courber,
Mais la force du choc... pile la fait tomber,
Et, l'indiscret monsieur, à ce moment critique,
Dévide son rouleau, tourne sa mécanique.
Grand succès dans la salle, ou l'on applaudit fort.
Moi, je feins la tristesse, et je fais un effort
Pour fuir les complaisants, et faire cesser vite

Ce petit incident... dont je craignais la suite.

Rushing his embarrassed mother-in-law out of the hall and to the safety of home, Osseville concludes: »Jamais de belle-mère!! ... Evitons le scandale«.

A variation on this theme can be found in tales set in the future in which a ›television‹ system allows one to monitor other peoples' activities. The theme appears as early as 1883 in Robida's *Le Vingtième siècle*, but in our period crops up in a story by Marigny, »L'Œil électrique ou la vision à distance«, published in *Excelsior* in 1910.[23] This tale is set in 1950, and describes a man, »X.233«, who uses a television device to check up on his family and associates, and sure enough finds them wanting: on the screen he sees his employees idling, his children misbehaving, and his wife entertaining visitors he dislikes. But then the machine stops working, and he decides it is better that way; to remain in blissful ignorance. The tale ends: »X.233 est heureux.«

Crime revealed

It seems that the first play about the cinema to be performed in France was ›L'Auvergnate‹. Written by Fernand Meynet and Marie Geffroy, it premiered at the Théâtre de la République in Paris on 29th September, 1899.[24] It was a five

act piece, and, though I have been unable to locate a surviving copy in any library, I have worked out the plot from other sources. The play told the story of a *femme fatale* who at first merely leads men astray, but then becomes so bold as to commit a murder. An innocent suspect is arrested for this murder and everything seems black for him. Fortunately a *cinématographe* happened to be filming at the scene of the crime, and, in the final act the resultant film is shown in a courtroom in the presence of the *femme fatale*, the judge and the innocent, the latter thus being exonerated. The critical response to the play was mixed. *Le Monde Illustré* praised it as an:

> [...] application très ingénieuse du cinématographe. Voilà qui est vraiment nouveau et tout Paris sans doute voudra voir le curieux effet de ce truc encore inédit de la dramaturgie moderne.[25]

But another critic was less kind, noting that: »Malheureusement, avec l'›Auvergnate‹, qui a succédé à ›Roulebosse‹, nous retombons dans le mélo de facture, avec les ordinaires banalités.«[26] The Paris critic of a British Sunday newspaper was generally favourable:

> It is hardly worth asking how it came about that a cinematograph was in the middle of a park when the murder was committed where it could have only been engaged in taking still life. The effect was remarkably dramatic, and, had a skilled playwright led up to this dénouement, ›L'Auvergnate‹ would have had a big run before it. Even as it is, the main idea is a vast improvement on old traditions.[27]

There is one other interesting aspect of »L'Auvergnate«: Georges Monca, later an important director for Pathé, recalled that it was this play which first brought him into the world of film production:

> En septembre 1899 [...] j'étais acteur au Théâtre de la République, depuis baptisé l'Alhambra. Un auteur de la maison, Fernand Meynet, nous apporta une pièce ou le cinéma jouait un rôle. Au premier acte, à l'insu de tous, un opérateur filmait une scène de famille qui dégénérait en meurtre, et la bande ainsi obtenue servait à dévoiler le vrai coupable au dénouement. J'étais, en même temps qu'acteur, metteur en scène, et c'est moi qui eus à m'occuper de tourner le film nécessaire.[28]

The cinema as a means to reveal crime was again used some years later in a piece of French fiction. This was in a pulp novel by Paul d'Ivoi (the pseudonym of Charles de Leutre), *La Justice du cinématographe*.[29] Set in Australia, the plot has a criminal disguise himself as a police chief and so get away with serious crimes. But, as in ›L'Auvergnate‹, the truth is established in a final courtroom scene (before a judge glorying in the name of Lord Strawberry!) again through tell-tale filmed images. These images were taken with a *cinématographe* with some kind of sound recording capability, and they establish the guilt of the accused.

The most interesting, and certainly the best known, of the early stories on this crime theme is Guillaume Apollinaire's »Un beau film«, which was originally published in *Messidor*, 23.12.1907, one of six tales in his series *L'Amphion faux-messie ou histoires et aventures du Baron d'Ormesan*.[30] The story is about a film company which has been established with the aim of filming extraordinary events, such as the activities of famous people and real births taking place. The company manages successfully to secure films of such events, and soon they lack only a film of a crime. To fill this gap, the film company kidnaps a young couple and an elderly gentleman, forcing the latter to murder the couple – all of which is filmed. The resulting film is very successful and is shown to great acclaim. Later an innocent man is arrested for the murder and he is executed, the cinema company filming this too!

Such a brief summary cannot do justice to the delightful style of Apollinaire's sarcastically gruesome tale, but it is sufficiently well known and available that there is no need to quote from it. It is probable that Apollinaire was influenced in his choice of plot by real films of gruesome events, bull-fights and the like, which had been widely shown by this time. There had even been reports of hangings filmed in the USA.[31] It is worth adding that films themselves took up this crime theme: for example, in FALSELY ACCUSED (AM&BC, 1908) a film is developed and proves that a dead man was murdered.

Recognition of loved ones

A long-lost relative, spouse or friend being recognised on the cinema screen is a common theme in anecdotal news reports in the cinema trade press before the First World War. It is also to be found as a theme in fiction about the cinema. The first example I have seen is Maurice LeNormand's »Devant le cinématographe«, which appeared in the famous illustrated journal, *L'Illustration*, in February 1900.[32] Set during the Boer War, it concerns an Irish girl, Delia Flaherty, and her lover, Jerry, who is in the British Army in South Africa. He writes to her that a film has been taken of his unit, and she goes and sees this in a music-hall. But another film is also shown in which Jerry is apparently depicted being killed by the Boers. Though the music-hall manager claims this is genuine, she is told by another spectator that it is a fake, filmed at the Buttes-Chaumont area of open ground on the outskirts of Paris. The latter seems to be the case, for the following day Delia is relieved to receive a letter from Jerry – to say that he's been retired from the front on sick leave. The reference to Buttes-Chaumont is not haphazard, for fake films had been shot at this location, according to press reports.

Strangely enough, the next French story I have found on the theme of ›cinema-recognition‹ is also set during the Boer War, but this one has a sinister twist to it. »Le Cinématographe« by François de Nion, appeared in the

Petit Journal in January 1903.[33] A Frenchman, Paul, who had been fighting on the Boer side in South Africa, goes missing. Back in Europe his sister Marie meets John Shermont, an Englishman who fought on the British side in the war. They marry, and one day they go into a cinema, where Boer War films are showing. John says that his unit in South Africa had been filmed by an American, a very brave camera-man it seems:

> Il prenait ses clichés successifs au milieu de la fusillade, comme s'il avait été dans son atelier. Il a dû obtenir des séries bien intéressantes. Si c'étaient les siennes, ce serait curieux.

These are indeed the films being shown, and Marie is shocked to see the British soldiers maltreating Boer prisoners, including women. (British prison camps in South Africa had been a real concern in the year before this story was written, 1902). Then a group of prisoners appear on screen, among them one who is known to Marie – her brother. She exclaims:

> Mais c'est Paul! Oui, c'est Paul, je le reconnais; c'est le second, a droite.
> M. Shermont, blomi, se dressait à moitié, saisissant la main de sa femme.
> Mais il apparaissait, lui-même, dans le cadre, il y vivait, il y commandait. Il tira son sabre et l'éleva pour un ordre: les fusils des soldats s'abattirent...
> Marie se dressait, hurlait, jetait les bras vers la vision implacable:
> – Arrêtez, arrêtez! Ne tirez pas, John; c'est Paul!
> Tout s'effaça, comme une craie qu'un linge essuie et l'on n'entendit plus qu'un doux air de valse à l'orchestre.
> Mme Shermont gisait évanouie sur le tapis de la loge.

The story doesn't say what happened next, but one doubts that the marriage could survive when the husband has killed the brother. Clearly the emotional impact of war, combined with a plot device of cinema-recognition was an attractive one for the story writers. This combination of themes crops up again in a story of 1906 (also called »Le cinématographe«), about a Russian soldier who witnesses a Chinese man being bayoneted during the Russo-Japanese war, and is then haunted by apparently seeing images of him in news films of the war – this rewitnessing of a traumatic event from his past eventually sends him mad.[34]

Interestingly, the cinema-recognition theme is also used in a story by a later celebrated writer, Jean Giraudoux: his »Au cinema« appeared in *Le Matin* in 1908.[35] The main character is one Marguerite, whose lover, Jacques, is an eccentric cyclist with the Cirque Manhattan in America. One day she visits a Paris cinema and in a film of a Red-Indian show she recognises Jacques. But as he performs his act, suddenly he takes a bad fall. Thinking him dead or badly injured Marguerite goes to the manager of the cinema to find any news he might have. Unexpectedly he asks her: »Vous appelez-vous Marguerite

Rocher?« Yes, she replies, and he hands over a letter addressed to her which was enclosed with the film. It reads:

> Ma chère Marguerite,
> Je viens de gagner un pari de cinq mille francs. Il s'agissait, en bouclant la boucle, de se laisser tomber sur un tapis de caoutchouc de la maison Williams and Co. Nous voici riches! Dans une semaine, je serai au Havre. Mais, si tu es libre un de ces soirs, va donc passer une heure – tu comprendras pourquoi après – au cinématographe.

A somewhat implausible plot, it is true, the American locale of which was probably determined by the fact that Giraudoux had spent a period in the USA in the summer of 1908. A plot about a film from America also figures in the last story of this type that I will mention. Written by Charles Dornier, and again titled »Le cinématographe«, this appeared in the journal, *Le Penseur*, in February 1910.[36] A travelling film show, »Le Cinématographe universel«, visits a village whose inhabitants have never seen a cinema show before, and don't even know what it is (»C'est un cornet acoustique«, says one girl). A big crowd turns up that evening, including an old woman, »la vieille Magui«, whose son deserted and went to America to make his fortune: he hasn't been heard from for nearly two years. The films are shown, the last one being set in the American west, depicting a man stealing a bag of gold, who is then chased and hanged. The screen protagonist is recognised by the villagers as the long-lost son. But is this a documentary or an acted film in which he features? Is this really how the son has ended his days – as thief – or has he become a film-actor? Either way the shock has taken its toll: the lights go up and the old and frail Magui is found to have died during the screening. Dornier's story concludes:

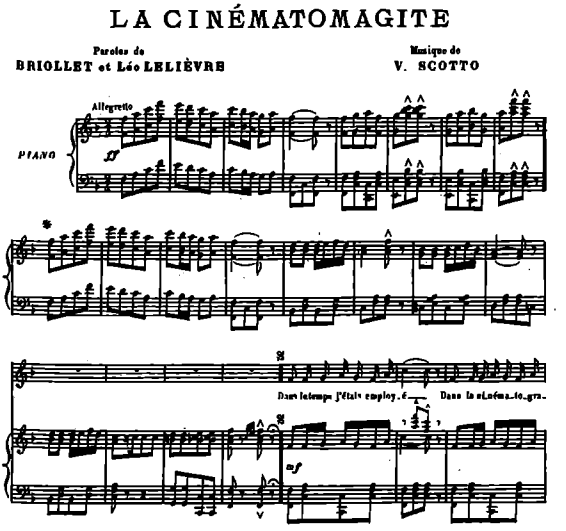
> Et c'est ainsi qu'un cinématographe, un soir, au fond d'un village perdu de Franche-Comté, apprit à tous en même temps qu'à la mère, ce qu'était devenu là-bas, en Amérique, Martin, le déserteur.[37]

Other themes

The themes that I have covered so far would all come under the broad heading of ›witnessing‹, or ›témoinage‹ as I called it in my 1985 essay: the cinematic apparatus revealing something that a character in the story otherwise wouldn't know. This evidencial role for cinema is the main subject of cinema fiction in the early part of the period we are examining (to about 1907), both in France and elsewhere, but a variety of other themes appear in fictional plots about cinema toward the middle and end of the early era (approximately 1908 to 1914). Often these later fictional accounts are not concerned with

film as evidence but with film as *a medium*, i.e. about the film industry itself and aspects of its production and exhibition.

In the French context, such themes can be found in certain songs and stage shows. For example, a poem about how the cinema was leading to the decline of the acting profession appeared in the 1908 revue, »Tu l'as l'allure!«[38] Another revue, »Au Bout du Film«, presumably about the process of making a film, was performed at the Paris theatre, l'Omnia-Pathé, Boulevard Montmartre in 1913.[39] But perhaps the most bizarre piece of fiction of all that I have found is a lewd chanson of 1907, entitled »La Cinématomagite«, with music by Vincent Scotto and slangy lyrics by Briollet and Lelièvre, and based on the theme of film flicker, which the writer links metaphorically with sexual feelings or vibrations.[40] The first verse and refrain give a flavour:



»La Cinématomagite«, a lewd chanson of 1907, amusingly conflates the vibrations of early flickering film shows, with sexual feelings or sensations

Dans le temps j'étais employé
Dans la cinématographie,
Mais j'y ai bientôt attrapé
Un drol' de maladie.
A force de voir trépider
Les vu's que l'on donne en séance,
J'peux pas m'empêcher d'remuer
J'ai tout l'temps quelque chos' qui danse!

REFRAIN
J'ai d'la ci-ci-ci-ci-ci,
D'la cinématomagite,
D'la tête au croupion,
Je sens des vibrations.
J'ai d'la ci-ci-ci-ci-ci,
D'la cinématomagite,
Quand je m'balad' dans la rue,
Qu'un mollet s'montre à ma vue,
Ne pouvant me mettre au r'pos,
Ma cann' se dress' de bas en haut.
etc...

The cinema continued to be the subject of short stories and to be mentioned in longer works too. A film-related sub-plot occurs in the novel, *Juve contre Fantômas* of 1911.[41] Juve comes across an armed bandit in the street and shoots him, but it turns out that the wounded man is an innocent actor whom the arch-criminal Fantomas had forced to pose for a supposed film. Says Juve in his own defence: »[...] je ne me pardonnerai jamais l'accident que je viens de causer. Mais je ne pouvais savoir que c'était du cinéma.« This theme of confusing a scene being filmed with the real thing occurs in several other stories (in non-French sources) and in many caricatures and films about film from the period.[42]

As well as appearing in general interest periodicals, stories about the cinema were also published in the early film trade press with great frequency. For example, in *L'Echo du Cinéma* within the space of a mere three months, from April to June 1912, we find three stories with film-associated plots. These concern: a man working in the film-industry who later becomes a king; a couple who find new romance in their relationship through going to the cinema; and a story entitled »Le Passé«, about being reminded of loved ones through seeing a film.[43] The last mentioned suggests that the earlier-dominant theme of ›recognition‹ hadn't entirely gone away, though this is now merely one among several film-related themes, rather than being a dominant note. After the early era, the subjects found in cinema-related fiction tend to centre round issues to do with the film industry itself: in Louis Delluc's *La Jungle du Cinéma* of 1921, for example.[44]

Conclusion

There are a variety of themes which recur in the fiction of early cinema, but one of them, that of recognition or evidence, dominates in the earliest years. In the latter half of our period, other topics, often concerned with the film industry itself and the ›picturegoing habit‹, become more prominent. Thus, to some extent fiction mirrors the evolution of early cinema, from a period of wonder to one in which an industry of production and exhibition has become an established fact.

While I have taken all my case studies in this essay from one country, France, it is noticeable that the themes seem to be more or less the same in different countries' fiction. In this sense the present essay could be said to represent the more general, global situation. However, some national differences remain, and there is no better example of this than the French »Le Cinématogite«, whose Gallic satire and *risqué* humour has no equivalent in the literature of any other country. The French, as ever, remain wonderfully unique.[45]

Post Scriptum

After I submitted this article, Don Crafton sent me a short story which I hadn't previously knon: Adrien Vély, »Le Cinématographe«, *Le Sourire*, 8 February 1908. Richly illustrated by P. Destez, this story concerns two men and a pretty girl who go to a cinématograph show late one evening. As the films are screened (and, interestingly, there are many news items), one of the men sneaks his around the girl, only to find another man's arm around her already. Later he accuses his friend of being the rival, but the latter denies it, leaving open the possibility of a third man! The story is clearly not based on the ›recognition‹ theme of the early years of cinema tales, though the element of sexual intrigue was a common aspect of some of the other stories I have covered. This example is an early reflection of a growing public perception: that the dimly-lit cinémaographe hall was a perfect place for romantic dalliance.

Notes

1 On films on film in early cinema see Sabine Lenk, »A la rencontre du spectateur d'avant la Guerre de 14«, *Archives*, no. 61/62, 1995, pp. 1-11, and Sabine Lenk, »Filmverrückt oder Wie es wirklich im Kino zugeht. Kurzfilmographie zum Thema ›Das Kino auf der Stummfilmleinwand‹«, *KINtop*, no. 5, 1996, pp. 161-168.

2 A large collection of such film-related novels and other forms of fiction about cinema is held in the Bill Douglas Collection at the University of Exeter. It was co-assembled by Peter Jewell who is one of the leading authorities on this form of ›meta literature‹ of the cinema.

3 James Brander Matthews, »The Kinetoscope of Time«, in: J. B. Matthews (ed.), *Tales of Fantasy and Fact*, Harper Bros., New York 1896, reproduced in George C. Pratt (ed.), *Spellbound in Darkness : A History of the Silent Film*, University of Rochester, Rochester 1966.

4 Mrs. Henry Mansergh, »An Idyll of the Cinematographe«, *Windsor Magazine*, vol. 7, Feb 1898, p. 363-368; Sutphen Van Tassell, »The Cardinal's Rose«, *Harper's Weekly*, 22. 9. 1900.

5 Giulio Piccini, *Le Novelle del Cinematografo*, R. Bemporad & Figlio Editori, Firenze 1910.

6 Gorky famously wrote about the *Cinématographe Lumière* at the Nizhni-Novgorod Fair in 1896 using the noms-de-plume I. M. Pacatus and A. Peshkov. An English translation of the article signed Pacatus was published in Jay Leyda, *Kino. A History of the Russian and Soviet Film*, George Allen & Unwin, London 1983 (3rd edition), pp. 407-409. For a German translation of the two articles and a short story about a prostitute being emotionally touched by the Lumière film DÉJEUNER DE BÉBÉ see »Maksim Gor'kij über den Cinématographe Lumière (1896)«, *KINtop*, no. 4, 1995, pp. 11-25.

7 See the reprint of »Mrs Bathurst« in *Aura*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1996, pp. 68, 69-78, including Jan Olsson's introduction to the story.

8 Walter Kollo et al, *The Girl on the Film: A New Musical Play in Three Acts*, Chappell, London 1913.

9 Pilar E. Marino, »Parellismo«, *Renacimiento Filipinos*, 14.6.1913, pp. 1604-1605,

translated as 'Parellism' in *Philippine Short Stories in Spanish*, University of the Philippines, Manila 1989.

10 Stephen Bottomore, *I Want to See This Annie Mattygraph: A Cartoon History of the Coming of the Movies*, Le Giornate del Cinema Muto / Indiana University Press, Gemona, Bloomington 1995.

11 Themes of this kind had been noted before the appearance of my book by cultural historian Yuri Tsivian. See Tsivian's book, *Early Cinema in Russia and Its Cultural Reception*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1998.

12 Victor Appleton, *Tom Swift and His Wizard Camera; or, Thrilling Adventures While Taking Moving Pictures*, Grosset and Dunlap, New York 1912. This was number 14 in the *Tom Swift* series, and its real author was Howard R. Garis.

13 See the following references: Peter A. Soderbergh, »Birth of a Notion: Edward Stratemeyer and the Movies«, *Midwest Quarterly* 14, no. 1, October 1972, pp. 81-94; Sherrie A. Inness, »The Feminine En-Gendering of Film Consumption and Film Technology in Popular Girls' Serial Novels, 1914-1931«, *Journal of Popular Culture* 29, no. 3, Winter 1995, pp. 169-182; Anne Morey, »Acting Naturally: Juvenile Series Fiction About Moviemaking«, *Aura*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2000, pp. 90-112; Margaret Compton, »The Orphan as Filmmaker: Juvenile Series Fiction, 1912-1935«, a curated exhibition of books at the »Orphans of the Storm« conference, 1999.

14 See Frank Kessler, »Le Cinéma des Premiers Temps: Problèmes de Segmentation«, in: Jürgen E. Müller (ed.), *Towards a Pragmatics of the Audiovisual*, vol. 2, Nodus, Münster 1995, pp. 195-205. Kessler uses the story as, in his words, a »fil conducteur« for his analysis.

15 An earlier version of the following section of this essay appeared as Stephen Bottomore, »Reflet du cinéma dans la fiction littéraire française«, *Archives*, no. 61/62, Avril/Mai 1995, pp. 12-20. For more on early cinema fiction see Jan Olsson's 1,000 word entry on moving picture fiction in: Richard Abel (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, Routledge, London, forthcoming; Micheline Tremblay, »L'image du cinéma dans les romans Canadiens-Français de 1896 à 1930«, *Cinémas*, vol. 6, no. 1, Fall 1995, pp. 133-148.

16 Peter Carin, *Le Cinématographe*, Librairie G. Baranger fils, Paris 1897. Consisting of 10 pages, it is held in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF), which also preserves 5 other monologues and short stage works by Carin, all from 1897. The Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal preserves various works by him from 1897 to 1910. Carin's real name was A. Carpentier.

17 Stephen Bottomore, »Le thème du témoinage dans le cinéma primitif«, in: Pierre Guibbert (ed.), *Les Premiers Ans du Cinéma Français*, Institut Jean Vigo, Perpignan 1985, pp. 155-161.

18 For example see Nicholas Hiley, »The candid camera of the Edwardian tabloids«, *History Today*, August 1993, pp. 16-22; Susan Briggs, *Those Radio Times*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1981; Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1988.

19 One rare French book from this period uses the term ›cinématographe‹ in a metaphorical sense, rather than being about the cinema as such: Jean Joseph-Renaud, *Le Cinématographe du Mariage*, Ernest Flammarion, Paris 1897. Copies are held in the BNF and in my collection.

20 The series had started in *La Quinzaine* in November 1896, and was reprinted as a single volume later in 1897.

21 *Journal Amusant*, no. 2132, 10. 7. 1897.

22 *Bulletin de la Société caennaise de Photographie*, vol. 8, 1899, pp. 119-120: this journal survives in the collections of the Royal Photographic Society, now held by the National Museum of Photography Film and Television. A revised version of the poem appeared in Osseville's *Passe Temps Poétique Normand* (1904).

23 *Excelsior*, 19.12.1910.

24 Charles Beaumont Wicks, *The Parisian Stage: Alphabetical Indexes of Plays and*

Authors, vol. 5, University of Alabama Press, University, Ala. 1979. Meynet and Geffroy also wrote »Maman Gâteau« which, like »L'Auvergnate«, featured at the Théâtre de la République in 1896. Theatrical pieces by Meynet as sole author appeared in 1911 and 1913 (copies are held at the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal), as well as his earlier »Les Volontaires de la Loire«, 1890. Incidentally, the first ever play about the cinema was Oskar Blumenthal and Gustav Kadelberg's »Hans Huckebein« (1897), which was on the theme of marital infidelity revealed through film. It was translated and performed in several different countries, though not in France to my knowledge.

25 *Le Monde Illustré*, no. 2219, 7. 10. 1899, p. 297, which also explains that ›the Auvergnate‹ (country bumpkin) of the title is a rather minor character – it is not clear if this was the innocent victim or not.

26 *Le Théâtre*, no. 22, October 1899, p. 2.

27 Quoted in *British Journal of Photography*, 13. 10. 1899, p. 649.

28 »Les souvenirs de Georges Monca«, *L'Image*, no. 9, 1932. This article also appears, translated but with no source given, in Riccardo Redi (ed.), *Pathé: Verso Il Centenario*, Di Giacomo, Pesaro 1988, p. 101. See also René Jeanne, *Cinema 1900*, Flammarion, Paris 1965, pp. 72-74, who calls Meynet »Frédéric« instead of »Fernand«.

29 Paul d'Ivoi, *La Justice du cinématographe*, G. Fayard, Paris n. d. The novel is undated, but appeared as number 18 in the series *Les Lavarède* which began in 1903. I own a copy. For more on this intriguing novel, see the informative note in Claude Beylie, »Curiosa Cinematografica«, *1895*, no. 13, December 1993, pp. 83-84. Incidentally, a Nick Carter story, »The Man in the Biograph«, is mentioned in the same issue of *1895*, and I can add that this appeared in the *New Nick Carter Weekly* (New York) no. 631, 30. 1. 1909; interestingly, another film-related story appeared in the same journal (no. 633) only 2 weeks later, »The Moving Picture Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Blindest Trial«. As for Paul d'Ivoi, I can add that he broached the subject of the cinematograph again in his *Le Corsaire Triplex* series, part II, chapter 11.

30 Reprinted in *Œuvres Complètes de Guillaume Apollinaire* (Balland, Paris 1966), and translated into English in Roger Shattuck (ed.), *Selected writings of Guillaume Apollinaire*, Havill Press, London 1950, and in *Sight and Sound*, July/October 1952. Incidentally, the last story in the series, »Le toucher à distance« concerns a false messiah, whose image appears around the world thanks to a television device. For more on Apollinaire and the cinema see also Francis Ramirez, Christian Rolot, »Guillaume Apolinnaire et le désir de cinéma«, *Cinémathèque*, no. 7, 1995, pp. 50-60.

31 For example, »Exploiting a hanging«, *Daily Mail*, 20. 12. 1897, p. 5.

32 *L'Illustration*, no. 2974, 24. 2. 1900, pp. 122-123; this was also published in a German translation in *Frankfurter Zeitung und Handelsblatt*, no. 186, 8. 7. 1900, pp. 1-3. For more on this story, see: Roland Cosandey, »Delia im Kinematographen und der Burenkrieg – ein Text zur Wahrnehmung des Films um 1900«, *KINtop*, no. 6, 1997, pp. 11-27.

33 *Petit Journal*, supplément illustré, no. 635, 18. 1. 1903, p. 18.

34 Ivan Strannik, »Le cinématographe«, *Le Figaro*, reproduced in *Phono-Ciné-Gazette*, 1. 1. 1906, pp. 173-174.

35 Jean Giraudoux, »Au cinema«, *Le Matin*, 14. 12. 1908, p. 4, under a pseudonym; reprinted in *Les Contes d'un Matin*, Gallimard, Paris 1952. Giraudoux (1882-1944), French novelist and dramatist, combined his literary work with a long diplomatic career. His early novels include *Les Provinciales* (1909) and *Amica America* (1919), which relates a stay in the United States, a country with which he had a long relationship.

36 Charles Dornier, »Le cinématographe«, *Le Penseur*, vol. 10, no. 2, February 1910, pp. 56-60. Cited in Franz-Josef Albersmeier, *Die Herausforderung des Films an die französische Literatur*, Reihe Siegen Bd. 49,

Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, Heidelberg 1985.

37 This story has something in common with an American example that I have found, which also concerns a parent seeing his son in a film, and dying with shock after this rediscovery: Herman Babson, »Jim«, *The Pilgrim*, January 1903, pp. 13-14.

38 *Argus Phono Cinéma*, 7.3.1908, p. 6.

39 *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly*, 26. 6. 1913, p. 1008, which article noted that »[...] it sparkles with witty dialogue and has many ingenious situations.«

40 *La Cinématomagite*, Aux succès du XXe siecle, Paris 1907, held in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département de Musique.

41 Pierre Souvestre, Marcel Allain, *Juve contre Fantômas* (Fayard, Paris 1911); reprinted: Livre de Poche, Paris 1967, chapter 25, pp. 281-285. I thank Michel de Moura for this reference and publication date.

42 For example, see the short story by H. S. Hall, »When the Indians came«, *Saint Nicholas*, vol. 41, April 1914, pp. 494-496.

43 *L'Echo du Cinéma*, issues of 26. 4., 10. 5. and 7. 6. 1912.

44 Louis Delluc, *La Jungle du Cinéma*, Impr. Ducros, Lefebvre et Colas, Paris 1921.

45 There is a non-French song about flikker, though without the sexual component: »The cinematograph«, published in New York in 1909, with lyrics by Joseph W. Herbert. It begins:

A melancholy gentleman desirous of a laugh
Took in the funny pictures on the cinematograph
His doctor recommended it to cure him of the dumps,
It cured him in a measure but it gave the man the jumps. (etc.)