

Kino International Corp.
presents

EDISON

THE INVENTION
OF THE MOVIES

Film Notes by
Charles Musser

DISC FOUR:

At Bear Track Gulch

Directed by Harold M. Shaw. Scenario by R. P. Janette. Cast: William West (Old Pete Griffin), Herbert Prior (Big Slim), George Lessey (Jack Turner), Bigelow Cooper (The stage driver), Edna Flugarth (Alice Lorraine), John Sturgeon (Her father). © 27 December 1912; released January 14, 1913. Print: MoMA.

This western, with its simple story set in a gold mining camp, recycles many of the elements found in David Belasco's influential play *The Girl of the Golden West* (1904).

The Ambassador's Daughter

Directed by Charles J. Brabin. Scenario by Bannister Merwin. Cast: Miriam Nesbitt (Helen, the ambassador's daughter), George Lessey (Richard Farnsworth, an attaché at the embassy), Robert Brower (The ambassador), Marc MacDermott (Charles Dumont, a clerk at the embassy), Bigelow Cooper (Thomas Crompton), Charles Ogle and Mary Fuller (Foreign Conspirators). © 10 January 1913; released 21 January 1913. Print: MoMA.

The innocent attaché, who loves the ambassador's daughter, is framed for espionage, but she successfully exposes the real spy. Although the *New York Dramatic Mirror* criticized the picture for its "visibly forced or overdrawn situations," it was felt to have strong appeal, "for it has been well directed, staged, and photographed."

A Serenade by Proxy

Directed by C. Jay Williams. Scenario by A. H. Giebler. Cast: Frank A. Lyon (William Jackson), Mrs. Wallace Erskine (Mrs. Jackson), Gertrude McCoy (Muriel, their daughter), Augustus Phillips (Thomas Perkins), Alice Washburn (Romantic Molly, the cook), William Wadsworth (Zeb Hawkins), Edward O'Connor (Mike, the hostler), Bigelow Cooper (The minister). © 16 January 1913; Released 29 January 1913. Print: MoMA.

A quiet celebration of small town America. In this sentimental comedy, there are two parallel romances—one upstairs and one downstairs—and various moments

of mis-recognition that complicate the plot. Each couple encounters difficulties, but all ends happily in a double elopement. A critic for the *New York Dramatic Mirror* raved, "One would not, on witnessing this farcical comedy have to refer to the Edison announcements to discover the Director. To one who is familiar with these comedies of the past the hand of C. Jay Williams is apparent in almost every clever turn in the business or twist of the action. As demonstrated in this and other comedies, the players are as capable and funny, without being cheap or trashy, as any to be found in the motion picture field. The subject matter here is of minor consequence; the treatment is everything."

All on Account of a Transfer

Directed by C. Jay Williams. Scenario by Henry W. Otto. Cast: Frank A. Lyon (Herr Müller), William Bechtel (A German Passer-by), Mrs. C.J. Williams (the woman), Edward O'Connor (the conductor). © 14 February 1913; released 26 February 1913. Print: MoMA.

Life can get complicated when you don't know English, as a German visitor to New York City discovers in this film. One critic declared, "Here we have a little comedy that is out of the ordinary, that is original in its idea and that is wholesomely funny, even though it is barely half a reel." Another C. Jay Williams comedy that is "delightfully acted and as well staged." The director's wife plays the female lead.

One Touch of Nature

Directed by Ashley Miller. Scenario by Courtney Ryley Cooper. Cast: John Sturgeon (Mr. Bradley), Elizabeth Miller (Mrs. Bradley), T. Tamamoto (The butler), Alan Croluis (The chauffeur), Andrew J. Clark (Freckles), Edna Hammel. © 18 July 1914; released 8 August 1914. Print: MoMA.

The film's title comes from Shakespeare: "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin." This is just one of many stories from the period that illustrate this dictum. A well-to-do, middle-aged man with a foul temper regains his humor when he spends some time in the woods with a young boy. Scenarist Courtney Ryley Cooper (1886-1940) was a prolific writer of adventure stories and is today most famous for ghostwriting numerous articles for FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover.

The Adventure of the Hasty Elopement

Directed by Charles M. Seay. A story of Octavius—Amateur Detective by Frederick Arnold Kummer –Courtesy of Pictorial Review for October 1914. Cast: Barry O'Moore (Octavius), Julian Reed (The butler), Viola Dana (Ruth), Yale Benner (The lover), Harry Linson (The minister), Frank A. Lyon (Ruth's father), Mrs. William Bechtel (Her mother). © 4 September 1914; Released 21 September 1914. Print: MoMA.

The ninth installment in the “Octavius Amateur Detective” series (12 episodes total). Octavius is a bumbler who “never fails” to solve the crime due to an endless array of good luck and coincidence. He goes in search of local car thieves, only to have his own auto carjacked. To pursue the thief, he steals a car in turn. This vehicle eventually turns out to belong to the thieves he is seeking. A film made with a certain slap dash quality, it is still, as one contemporary critic characterized it, “an amusing film.”

1915-1918:

Edison's motion picture business was besieged by multiple difficulties in its final four years. Sales of its projector fell off rapidly after 1912 and this once profitable part of Edison's business soon disappeared. Although Edison moved into feature film production with some seriousness, it was never very profitable. Many features actually lost money. The war adversely affected Edison's European markets, which were crucial to its profitability. Domestically, its efforts to find effective distribution were scattered and increasingly ineffectual. Meanwhile, its films continued to appeal to a genteel, moralistic sensibility that was out of touch with changing audiences. Throughout the final three years of its existence, the Edison Company ceased to make money. In March 1918, the business was sold at fire sale prices.

The Wonders of Magnetism

Filmmaker(s) unknown. © 6 January 1915; released 20 January 1915 on the same reel with the comedy *A Weighty Matter for a Detective*. Print: MoMA.

A science film meant for educational use. These carefully staged and often elaborate classroom demonstrations subtly remind us of Edison's own technological achievements. As *Moving Picture World* remarked, “An educational which is full of interest, illustrating the two kinds of magnets in common use, the electro and the steel magnet and their uses, as an aid to science and industry.” The electromagnet is shown to be far more powerful, and the principles of electromagnetic iron ore separation are demonstrated. In fact, Edison had lost much of his fortune through disastrous investments in his large-

scale iron ore works. (W.K.L. Dickson had worked alternately on iron-ore separation and the development of Edison's motion picture system in the early 1890s.)

Black Eyes

Direct by Will Louis. Scenario by Lee Arthur. Cast: Raymond McKee (Frank Willard) Jean Dumar (Mrs. Willard), Guido Colucci (Mr. Willard's Law partner-Mr. Foster), Yale Benner (Henry Rossiter), Julian Reed (Prof Scarab), T. Tamamoto (His Assistant). © 17 September 1915; released 6 October 1915. Print: MoMA.

As the feature film was becoming dominant over the course of 1915, Edison (like other American producers) had clearly mastered the one reel format—as *Black Eyes* demonstrates. This is an enjoyable domestic comedy about marital discord and reconciliation. Nothing is allowed to get too serious, and all ends happily. The story is structured around parallels and coincidence, as Mr. and Mrs. Willard each seek their own entertainments on the sly but fail miserably in their deceptions. The actors are adept and keep the situations light and charming.

The Lone Game

Directed by Edward C. Taylor. Scenario by Mary Rider. A Red Cross Seal Drama, Produced in cooperation with the National Association for the Study and Prevention of Tuberculosis. Cast: Bessie Learn (Grace Proctor), Robert Walker (Dean Anderson), Wilfred Young (Phil Proctor). © 4 December 1915; released 11 December 1915. Print: MoMA.

The lone game is the battle against consumption. The film's three principal characters all contract tuberculosis and each struggles to overcome it in different ways. One of them makes the wrong choices and dies, while the other two recover. The Edison studio sought to inform and instruct its audiences by combining critical medical information with a conventional romantic story, resulting in an unconventional, if ultimately instructive subject.

The Unbeliever

Directed by Alan Crosland. Based on the novelette *The Three Things* (1915) by Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews. Camera: Philip Tannura. Produced with the cooperation of the United States Marine Corps. Cast: Marguerite Courtot (Virginie Harbrok), Raymond McKee (Philip Landicutt), Kate Lester (Margaret

Landicutt), Frank de Vernon ("Uncle Jemmy" Landicutt), Lew Hart (Hoffman, the German gardener), Darwin Karr ("Lefty"), Sgt. Moss Gill, U.S.M.C. (Albert Mullins), Lieutenant Thomas G. Sterritt, U.S.M.C. (commanding officer), Mortimer Martini (Eugene Harbrok, a Belgium scout), Blanche Davenport (Madam Harbrok), Harold Hallacher (Pierre Harbrok, their son), Erich von Stroheim (Herr Lieutenant Kurt von Schnieditz), Earl Schenck (Emanuel Müller), Major Thos. Holcomb, U.S.M.C. (commanding officer of the Marine Sector), Gertrude Norman (Marianne Marnholm), Lieutenant J. F. Rorke, U.S.M.C. (Lieut. Terence O'Shaughnessey), and the men of the Third Battalion, Sixth Regiment, United States Marine Corps. ©15 February 1918; released February 1918. Print: LoC.

This was perhaps the last Edison film ever to be released, and features Erich von Stroheim as a German army officer who enjoys killing old women and children. He would reprise and modify this role in Jean Renoir's *Grand Illusion* (1936). Besides the wartime propagandistic clichés, the film offers a set of moralizing beliefs. As the story begins, Philip Lundicutt forcefully expresses his lack of belief in God, as well as his disdain for those of the lower classes. He is the "Unbeliever" of the title. On the battlefields of Europe, however, he finds God and learns to respect his social "inferiors." This well-made film offers the homilies of a genteel culture that is about to fall apart. It was part of a popular genre of propagandistic fiction films that included D. W. Griffith's *Hearts and the World* (1918), William Nigh's *My Four Years in Germany* (1918), and Allen Holubar's *The Heart of Humanity* (1919). Its battle scenes, shot at Camp Quantico, Virginia, were often praised. One critic remarked that, "It is the best of its kind that the present writer has seen, principally because, among the reasons too numerous to mention, it is realistic: the story is reasonable, and the main issue is never lost, there are no cheap heroics, and last but by no means least, it stirs up a healthy patriotism." Its director, Alan Crosland, would later direct *The Jazz Singer* (1927).