The Jew as dangerous other in early Italian cinema, 1910-1914

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The Jew as Dangerous Other in Early Italian Cinema, 1910-1914

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Abstract

My thesis examines imagery of the Jew in four Italian silent films: *Il mercante di Venezia* (Gerolamo Lo Savio, 1910), *L'Inferno* (Francesco Bertolini, Adolfo Padovan, Giuseppe de Liguoro, 1911), *Quo Vadis?* (Enrico Guazzoni, 1913), and *Cabiria* (Giovanni Pastrone, 1914). The thesis deconstructs this filmic imagery and traces its history back to medieval and Renaissance representations of the Jew. This process reveals connections between traditional anti-Jewish ideologies and the moving images of early Italian cinema. In so doing, my thesis demonstrates that there is a powerful relationship between the socio-political and religious discourses that were in circulation before the First World War in Italy and the presence of anti-Semitic stereotyping in these films. It also argues that the image of the Jew in all of these filmic case studies functions as a representation of the radical dangerous Other that threatens the unity of the citizenry of the nation-state of the Kingdom of Italy and the cohesion of Liberal Italian society at a key time of new nation-building.

Contents

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Introduction

'We have made Italy; now we must make Italians.'

Massimo d'Azeglio (1860)

This thesis argues that the image of the Jew in early Italian cinema (1910-1914) was a particular media construct that contributed to the process of forming Italian identity in terms of representing its binary opposite. This cinematically fabricated Jew did not represent the Italian; it was the Italian Other and a dangerous Other at that. The nature of this radical Otherness and the possible ideological and socio-political factors that may have motivated such a construction during this period in Italy's history is the principal concern of this thesis. To explore these aspects in detail, four filmic case studies have been chosen: *Il mercante di Venezia* (Gerolamo Lo Savio, 1910), *L'Inferno* (Francesco Bertolini, Adolfo Padovan, Giuseppe de Liguoro, 1911), *Quo Vadis?* (Enrico Guazzoni, 1913), and *Cabiria* (Giovanni Pastrone, 1914).[1]

To go back to the beginning of cinema in Italy and to look at silent films in particular was a deliberate choice. Although much has been written about Holocaust imagery in Italian post-war film,[2] Italian Jewish film scholarship has given scant attention to Jewish imagery in films with a different subject matter and in films of other periods.[3] That said, the Centro Primo Levi is doing much to promote the study and discussion of Jews in Italian cinema and television and has compiled a valuable filmography, which starts in 1940 and ends with a list of films and documentaries made in the late 2000s.[4] However, the silent period is conspicuous by its absence with no film productions from before the Second World War listed.

Similarly, apart from discussions that focus on the Holocaust and/or Second World War imagery, Italian film history has largely ignored the subject of Jews in Italian cinema. In general, important studies contain very little information. For example, R.T. Witcombe's book, *The New*

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[1] With the exception of *Quo Vadis?,* these films are available on DVD. The British Film Institute holds a copy of *Quo Vadis?* (with French subtitles). There is also a version available on videocassette, the Classic Video Cinema Collector's Club edition, released in 1984.

[2] Recent important studies on Holocaust and/Second-World-War Jewish imagery include Claudio Gaetani's *Il cinema e la shoah* (Recco: Le mani, 2006), Millicent Marcus's *Italian Film in the Shadow of Auschwitz* (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 2007), and Giacomo Lichtner's *Film and the Shoah in France and Italy* (London and Portland OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008).

[3] One of the few studies to do this is Virginia Picchietti's 'A Semiotics of Judaism: Representations of Judaism and the Jewish Experience in Italian Cinema, 1992-2004', *Italica* 83:3-4 (2006), 563-82.

[4] See 'Jews in Italian Cinema', http://www.primolevicenter.org/Film.html.

Italian Cinema: Studies in Dance and Despair (1982), refers briefly to scenes that contain important Jewish references, mentioning Jewish food symbolisms and Jewish religious iconography but does not discuss these aspects in any detail.[5] Robin Buss's book *Italian Films* (1989) makes only brief references to Jews when discussing two narratives set during the Second World War, *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* (Vittorio De Sica, 1971) and *La Storia* (Luigi Comencini, 1986), a television mini-series.[6] Peter Bondanella's *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present* (1994) is a widely-acknowledged comprehensive guide to Italian cinema; however, it contains no references to Jews or Judaism in its subject index. The word 'Holocaust' does not appear either. In Marcia Landy's book, *Italian Film* (2000), the words 'Jew', 'Judaism' and/or 'Jews' do not appear in the index although it does contain references to the Holocaust, which refers the reader to the section dealing with Roberto Benigni's film, *La vita è bella* (1997).[7] In other words, for Jews: see Holocaust.

In the work of scholars who have concentrated on early Italian cinema, very little attention if any has been devoted to the discussion of Jewish representation. In discussing the subject of race in *Cabiria*, for example, Antonia Lant's article 'Spazio per la razza in *Cabiria* [space for race in *Cabiria*]', does not reserve any space to mention the possible Jewish ethnicity of one of the film's key characters.[8] Asher Salah is the only scholar to have commented on *Cabiria*'s director, Giovanni Pastrone, resorting to the use of Jewish imagery and contemporary anti-Semitic stereotypes in the characterisation of one particular figure (the final chapter of this thesis is a close examination of this specific anti-Semitic characterisation).[9] In examining *Quo Vadis?*, Ruth Scodel and Anja Bettenworth refer to the possibility of reading Chilo Chilonides as a Jewish character, saying that he looks like a Fagin or Shylock type but no further explanation or justification is given for this reading.[10] Indeed, when it comes to the subject of Jews, the corpus of literature that specialises in early Italian cinema is, for the most part, silent.[11] By drawing attention to the representation of

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[5] R. T. Witcombe, *The New Italian Cinema: Studies in Dance and Despair* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1982), 35, 73, 74, 167, 226.
[6] Robin Buss, *Italian Films* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1989), 121, 123, 126.
[7] Marcia Landy, *Italian Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 118-19.
[8] Antonia Lant, 'Spazio per la razza in Cabiria', Cabiria e il suo tempo, ed. Paolo Bertetto and Gianni Rondolini (Turin: Il Castoro, 1998), 212-222.
[9] Asher Salah, 'Maschere Giudaiche: gli ebrei al cinema italiano', in *Italia Ebraica: oltre duemila anni di incontro tra la cultura italiana e l'ebraismo,* ed. Natalia Berger and Daniela Di Castro (Turin: Allemandi, 2007), 224.
[10] Ruth Scodel and Anja Bettenworth, *Whither Quo Vadis?* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 182.
[11] There are no discussions on the subject of Jewish imagery or characters in important studies such as Gian Piero Brunetta's *Cent'anni di cinema italiano: 1. Dalle origini alla seconda Guerra mondiale* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 1991 edition), *Guida alla storia del cinema italiano, 1905-2003* (Turin: Einaudi, 2003), Riccardo Redi's *Cinema muto italiano, 1896-1930* (Rome: Marsilio, 1999), Aldo Bernardini's *Cinema muto italiano: arte, divismo e mercato, 1910-1914* (Bari: Laterza, 1982), and Roberto Paolella's *Storia del cinema muto* (Naples: Giannini, 1956) to name but a few key examples.

Jewishness contained in these four filmic case studies, this thesis attempts to break that silence and to fill a glaring gap in Italian and Jewish film scholarship. At the time of writing, no other study as far as I am aware, has been devoted to examining the figure of the Jew in early Italian cinema.

Unfortunately, the study of this topic is somewhat hindered by the lack of archival materials relating to those companies that made the four films which this thesis considers. In the absence of specific archives that belong or belonged to the production houses that made the four films under consideration, the digital archives of the *Museo Nazionale del Cinema* in Turin proved to be a valuable resource in terms of providing information regarding production history, promotional material, studio and film set photographs, and reviews from contemporary Italian language film journals.[12] Many contemporary American reviews were also sourced by means of the Internet Archive.org website.[13] In the case of *Il mercante di Venezia*, the British Film Institute's Reuben Library provided information concerning the film's reception in Britain.[14]

Visits to the archives of the *Biblioteca nazionale centrale* in Rome were essential so as to read newspaper and/or film journal reviews that were not available in the *Museo Nazionale del Cinema* in Turin. Any referenced contemporary newspaper articles and/or editorials that discussed the Jewish question and any anti-Jewish polemics found in the Catholic press are the results of extensive research undertaken in this archive.[15] In addition, time spent in the Roman Jewish archives held at the *Unione delle communità ebraiche italiane* proved invaluable in understanding the reaction of the Jewish community to the numerous negative discussions about Jews that were in circulation in the popular press during this period.[16] The motivation behind this specific archival research was the desire to ground the film analysis contained in this thesis in the socio-political and religious discourses of the day as enunciated in these contemporary writings and to see whether there were any connections between the representation of Jews in the four filmic case studies and the figure of the Jew that was being represented in the media during this time.

Much of the critical approach to the film analysis in this dissertation is informed by various studies on semiology/semiotics.[17] In deconstructing a scene from these films, a governing principal was to examine individual elements of the *mise-en-scène* for any possible connotative meanings.

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[12] See the Museo Nazionale del Cinema's website: http://www.museocinema.it/.

[13] See the Internet Archive's website: http://archive.org/index.php.

[14] See the website: http://www.bfi.org.uk/education-research/bfi-reuben-library.

[15] See the National Library's website: http://www.bncrm.librari.beniculturali.it/.

[16] See the centre's website for more information: http://www.ucei.it/.

[17] For example, Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Vintage Books, 2009 edition), Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (London: Marion Boyars, 1978), Theo van Leeuwen, *Introducing Social Semiotics* (London: Routledge, 2005), David Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2007), Gunther Kress, *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication* (London: Routledge, 2010), Nathan Abrams, *The New Jew in Film: Exploring Jewishness and Judaism in Contemporary Cinema* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012).

To ascertain whether or not these possible meanings encoded within the filmic text could have been understood as probable significations by contemporary audiences, these decoded, deconstructed meanings were set against or compared with the language used and the ideologies espoused in Liberal Italian political and religious discourses. Thus far, no review from the period in which these films were made has been found that makes mention of any Jewish imagery or Jewish characters in these films. Therefore, seeing how any potential meanings that flow from the process of textual deconstruction fit into wider Liberal Italian discussions on issues such as identity, race, nationhood, and belonging is a methodology that helps to ascertain the value of such meanings and the validity of readings based upon them.

In other words, the semiotic analysis carried out in this thesis is underpinned by a form of discourse analysis, that is, a consideration of the social, political, and religious institutions dominant at the time these films were originally shown. Combined with this approach was a determination to examine specific sets of imagery in terms of shared iconography. Jewish iconography in these films was compared with Jewish iconographies in other visual texts such as Renaissance paintings and *fin-de-siècle* caricatures. In this way, the history of the anti-Jewish images present in a Liberal Italian film can be traced back to older representations or compared with other types of contemporary visualisations. Any patterns of representation that emerge from these texts can, by means of this contextualisation process, be compared and their trajectory examined. Apart from their cultural impact and popularity, these four films were chosen because a pattern, a model, or a paradigm of anti-Jewish representation emerges from these texts that is very similar in each case. This thesis will unpick this specific pattern of anti-Jewish representation and demonstrate that it has a very long history.

Each of these four films were produced in the Kingdom of Italy (1861-1946) and when they were shown for the first time in Italian theatres, Italy, as a unified modern nation-state, was created only fifty or so years previously in 1861.[18] Before then, 'Italy' in the strictest sense did not exist and the peninsula could be described as 'a patchwork of states, each with its own history and traditions'.[19] Forging a geographical political entity called Italy was one thing but forging Italians who would be loyal to that newly established homeland would be a completely different matter. Loyalties to previous states, to previous systems of governance, to previous cultural traditions, and to previous regional dialects would all have to give way to a new loyalty: loyalty to The Kingdom of Italy, which was now the new territorial national-political homeland or *patria*.

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[18] Christopher Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), xiii.
[19] Ibid. See also pages 135-142. Venice and the Veneto region did not become part of Italy until 1866 following the Third War of Independence and Rome did not become Italy's capital until it was captured in 1870.

According to Eric Hobsbawm, the period between 1870 and 1914 saw relatively few 'new states' being formed and most European states by this time had already 'acquired the basic official institutions, symbols and practices', which were regarded as necessary for creating nations and citizens. Italy was one of those new states created during this period and it had to build for itself unifying structures of nationhood that other nation-states had already established. As far as the project of creating citizens was concerned, Italy was lagging behind its more established European neighbours. Hobsbawm points out: 'Among the major states only Italy had to start from scratch in solving the problem summarized by d'Azeglio in the phrase: "We have made Italy; now we must make Italians"'.[20]

Italy, just like the other state powers of Europe, had to construct the imagery, the symbolisms, the customs, and the traditions that defined it as a nation-state. The bonds of loyalty between Italy and Italian would be made strong by means of such innovations as a national anthem, a flag, nationwide political movements, public ceremonies, monuments and statues, military uniforms and regalia. Italy was no different to other nation-states as it attempted to give its identity a legitimacy by grounding the new political entity of the Kingdom of Italy in the glories of the peninsula's recent and distant past. The nation-state did this by drawing upon a 'multiplicity of reference, ranging from mythology and folklore…through the shorthand cartoon stereotypes to definition of the nation in terms of its enemies'.[21]

Hobsbawm argues that this project of European nation-state self-definition was at its most intense during the 'thirty or forty years before the First World War' and this process is termed by him as 'the creation of traditions' and this period as one marked by the 'mass-generation of traditions'.[22] Benedict Anderson says that 'in the minds of each [citizen] lives the image of their communion', a bringing together of people by means of *imagining* the nation that symbolises their unity.[23] The mobilisation of the masses behind the idea of nation, the mass-generation of traditions and myth that tell the story of that nation as one cultural continuum were all facilitated by the apparatus of mass media. Of course, at the beginning of this period of identity formation, cinema was still unborn. However, with the birth of cinema during the turn of the century, it did not take long for this medium, which was soon to become a global mass-medium, to play its part in the creation or invention of tradition. Nation building involves enunciating a clear sense of identity and citizenship

[20] Eric Hobsbawm, 'Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-14', *The Invention of Tradition*, eds Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 266, 267.
[21] Ibid., 278.
[22] Ibid., 263.
[23] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991 revised edition), 6.

and film, like all media, plays its part in this project either by being shaped by the dominant socio-political discourses of the day or by being actively involved in shaping those discourses. This thesis will demonstrate that the discourse flowing through the four chosen films simultaneously speaks for and as the patriotic voice of the period in which these films were produced both reflecting and reinforcing the nationalistic ideologies of the day.[24]

If the Risorgimento, the movement responsible for uniting the country, revolutionised what would become the new nation state of Italy, it would also revolutionise the small world of Italian Jewry. It is worth stating that many Jews from across Italy played an active role in this nineteenth century socio-political movement that would eventually form a new nation-state out of the peninsula's disparate city-states and ancient feudal kingdoms. Italian Jews, therefore, participated in the movement that would lead to a period of unprecedented freedom and equality (1815-1938) for all Jews living in Italy.[25] Under Pope Pius IX (1846-78), for example, Jews were no longer required to attend conversionist sermons. In 1848, 'he ordered that the gates and walls of the ghettos should be demolished in Rome and in other towns of the Papal States'.[26] During the same year, the house of Savoy 'established equal civil and political rights for citizens, without religious distinction'.[27] This emancipation was extended as the house of Savoy extended its dominion over new areas to encompass what would, in 1861, become the Kingdom of Italy.

As the gates of the ghettos were pulled down, Italian Jewish life and Italian life intermingled. Nineteenth-century emancipation meant that Jews, upon leaving the ghetto, no longer had to wear the mandatory and stigmatising red or yellow badges of identification.[28] Jews became soldiers in the Italian army; they became doctors, teachers, civil servants, and diplomats. Occupations that were once prohibited were now open to Jews and they could embrace fully all aspects of Italian life. Being on equal terms with Italian non-Jews and being able to associate unrestrictedly with their non-Jewish neighbours led to a minimising of differences between the two communities. This emancipation ultimately led to a process of assimilation. The freedom to be Jews gave Jews the freedom to be what they wanted to be in Italian society and to adopt the identity of their choosing. Perhaps this explains why some Jews chose to hide away their Jewish heritage and to conceal their identities at a time when Jews were lawfully free to be Jews without fear of

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[24] Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2000), 87.

[25] *Encyclopaedia Judaica Jerusalem,* 1127-1128.

[26] Ibid., 1127-1128.

[27] Ibid., 1127-1128.

[28] Augusto Segre, *Memories of Jewish Life: From Italy to Jerusalem, 1918-1960*, trans. Steve Siporin (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), xviii.

persecution.

These developments, however, created a new problem for Italy's Judeophobes. Pre-Emancipation Jews were easily identified either by their distinctive clothing, their Jew badges, or by where they lived. In the past, Jews were segregated and were forbidden to intermarry.[29] Now that these barriers had been removed, how was it possible to recognise the Jew when he looked, dressed, and spoke like non-Jews living in the Kingdom of Italy? This thesis will argue that this is a question that is being asked in each one of the four filmic case studies and will offer possible reasons as to why such a question was being asked in the first place.

Italians on the whole, —perhaps in an attempt to distance themselves from the political and religious ideologies of the past— embraced this notion of equal civil rights for all in society. According to Cecil Roth, this is how Italians viewed their Jewish neighbours:

> Jews were accepted freely, naturally and spontaneously as members of the Italian people, on a perfect footing of equality with their neighbours…There was in the Italian Jew no element of the foreigner. Established in the country already for two thousand years, he was as much a native as any other component of the Italian people.[30]

From the Italian non-Jewish point of view, juridical emancipation, it seemed, led to assimilation and secularisation where 'the profession of Judaism was regarded as an amiable eccentricity rather than a social mistake'.[31]

Attitudes on both sides were changing. If Jews were now 'accepted' by Italy and Italians then this feeling of 'acceptance' was reciprocated: Jews living during this period accepted, or were beginning to at least, the notion of Italy as homeland. One only has to look at the rolls of honour in many synagogues throughout Italy to see that many Jews fought and died for *la patria* or the fatherland during the First World War.[32] To many Jews, Italy had become a homeland worth fighting for and worth even dying for. If, as Roth notes, 'their [non-Jewish] neighbours were prepared to forget, the Jews were more than ready to forgive'. Finally, the Jews were now 'sons of free Italy'.[33] This was a period of 'unmistakable Jewish revival' with many, especially the young and members of the intelligentsia, embracing 'Jewish enthusiasms' without fear or prejudice.[34] Looking back on this period, this is how Chaim Weizmann (1874-1952), the Zionist leader,

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[29] Riccardo Calimani, *Storia degli ebrei italiani: Dalle origini al XV secolo, Volume primo* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 2013), 172-175.
[30] Roth, *Jews in Italy.*, 474-5.
[31] Ibid.*,* 475.
[32] Ibid., 5.
[33] Roth, *Jews in Italy*, 489.
[34] Ibid., 508.

described the contribution made to Italian society by Italian Jews:

> The community was a small one, but its members took an active part in Italian life –
> political, economic, artistic, scientific – and were to all intents and purposes
> indistinguishable from their fellow-citizens, except that they went to synagogue instead of to
> Mass…They had given so much to Italy and so much to their own people.[35]

Indeed, being Jewish did not hold back the career of Luigi Luzzatti (1841-1927), who became Prime Minister of Italy in 1910.[36] He was born in Venice on 1 March, 1841 to a family of wool merchants in the city.[37] Elizabeth Shächter says that Luzzatti, 'Italy's first and only Jewish prime minister, represents arguably the most famous and 'classic' case of assimilation'.[38] He had, by the age of sixteen, distanced himself from Judaism and, according to Simona Bianconi, the assimilated Luzzatti adhered 'ad una fede di tipo deista [to a type of deist faith].'[39] Shächter explains that his religious views brought criticism from the Jewish community in Italy, which felt hurt by his abandonment of the Jewish faith and accused him of being afraid to call himself a Jew.[40] Annibale Zambarbieri writes about how certain clerics were scornful of Luzzatti's deist views and believed that his ideas concerning religious freedom and diversity undermined the authority of the Church.[41] Luzzatti was seen by Jews and non-Jews as belonging to a growing 'modernismo ebraico [Jewish modernism]', a movement that was feared by traditionalists – both Jewish and non-Jewish – for its radical views on such matters as faith and politics.[42]

Although Luzzatti no longer professed the Jewish faith, he chose to reassert his Jewish identity when facing anti-Semitic attacks.[43] Following Luzzatti's appointment as finance minister in 1896, Luzzatti was subjected to one such attack when *Il cittadino di Mantova* accused him of having links to 'la massoneria [freemasonry]' and, under the heading, 'L'ebreo Luzzatti e gli operai [Luzzatti the Jew and the workers]', the newspaper urged the citizens of Mantua to ask themselves a

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[35] Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and Error: The Autobiography of Chaim Weizmann* (London: Harper, 1949), 356-7.

[36] Meir Michaelis*, Mussolini and the Jews: German-Italian Relations and the Jewish Question in Italy, 1922-1945* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1978), 5.

[37] Franco Catalano, *Luigi Luzzatti: La vita e l'opera* (Milan: Banca Popolare di Milano, 1965), 141. Catalano's book was published in 1965 to commemorate 100 years since Luzzatti played an important role in establishing the *Banca Popolare di Milano*. Catalano makes no mention at all of Luzzatti's Jewish ethnicity. The only clue is the name of the Venetian primary school that he attended: *la scuola israelitica*. See page 141.

[38] Elizabeth Schächter, *The Jews of Italy, 1848-1915: Between Tradition and Transformation* (London and Portland, OR: Valentine Mitchell, 2011), 27.

[39] Simona Bianconi, L'Autobiografia italo-ebraica tra il 1848 e il 1922: memoria di sé, identità, coscienza nazionale (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2009), 331.

[40] Schächter, *The Jews of Italy*, 28.

[41] Annibale Zambarbieri, 'Luigi Luzzatti e la crisi modernista', *Luigi Luzzatti e il suo tempo: Atti del convegno internazionale di studio – Venezia, 7-9 Novembre, 1991*, ed. Pier Luigi Ballini and Paolo Pecorari (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze Lettere ed Arti, 1994), 503.

[42] Ibid., 502.

[43] Schächter, *The Jews of Italy*, 27, 28.

question: what has 'il nostro massonico guidaico Governo [our Masonic, Jewish Government]' ever done for the working classes?[44] The piece makes a direct appeal to workers, reminding them that freemasonry pulls them away from their God, their Church, and their traditions and serves only to prepare them for the 'camino trionfale degli ebrei [the triumphant march of the Jews]' who are intent on 'sradicare dalla terra il popolo Cristiano [eradicating the Christian people from the earth]'.[45] The article finishes by exhorting Christian workers to be on guard against the enemies of Christianity: 'gli ebrei ed i massoni loro servi [the Jews and their masonic servants]' and to do that by remaining united with those who share the same blood and the same religion.[46]

Whilst in charge of the Treasury, Luzzatti was satirised as 'il gran lesinatore d'Italia [the great penny-pincher of Italy]' and depicted as holding a 'lèsina in mano [a type of dowel in his hand i.e. a tool used by a cobbler to make eyelets and popularly used as a symbol of extreme parsimony]'.[47] Thus Luzzatti is associated with a traditional Jewish occupation and a traditional anti-Jewish trait through the powerful use of stereotype. Moreover, as Rhonda Lieberman explains, 'the myth of the Wandering Jew, dating back to the Middle Ages, is in fact a shoe story', stating that the story begins with a Jewish cobbler who is 'forced to roam the earth shoeless', embodying the Jewish experience of having to live as constant exiles in the Diaspora.[48] Luzzatti the Jew becomes Luzzatti the accursed stingy Jewish shoemaker who, by his presence in the cabinet, transforms the entire government into the Jewish government. *The 'ebreo Luzzatti'* becomes *the 'guidaico Governo'* according to the *Cittadino di Mantova* with its subtle but powerful use of the definite article.[49]

Luzzatti, whose experience fluctuates between belonging and non-belonging, seems to epitomise the liminal space of Jewish presence in Liberal Italy. The ambivalence surrounding Jewish identity and the anxieties that this phenomenon caused is a common thread that runs through each one of the filmic case studies. Luzzatti became Prime Minister of Italy in 1910, the same year *Il mercante di Venezia* was released. *L'ebreo* Luzzatti was now in charge of the entire country. This thesis argues that the anti-Jewish imagery and iconography inherent in these four films reflect fears about Jewish presence that was, at one time, clearly demarcated. Emancipation and its resultant process of assimilation had blurred these lines of distinction, a factor that had raised concerns in the imagination of those who saw the figure of the Jew as a symbol of danger. To the Judeophobic

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[44] 'L'ebreo Luzzatti e gli operai', *Il cittadino di Mantova* 1:72 (9-10 September, 1896), 3.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Catalano, *Luigi Luzzatti*, 157.
[48] Rhonda Lieberman, 'The Wandering Shoe', Bookforum, http://www.bookforum.com/inprint/015_05/3275. Accessed 1 August, 2013).
[49] 'L'ebreo Luzzatti e gli operai', 3.

mind, the Jew cannot readily be seen in a liminal space. Neither collective nor individual anti-Jewish antagonisms can be projected onto the Jew if he cannot be seen. These chosen films, either with saliency or subtlety, (re)visualise the Jew by pulling him away from the problematic and anxiety inducing spaces of liminality, where mimicry, passing, ambiguity, hybridity, and other impurities reside – concepts out of which Italians could never be made.

The relationship between Jews and Gentiles living in post-Risorgimento Italy is summed up by William Nicholls and is worth citing in full:

> With the Risorgimento and the spreading rule of the Sardinian royal family, better conditions for Jews were extended over widening areas of Italy. In 1870, the temporal power of the pope was abolished and his rule confined to Vatican City. Rome was declared the capital of a united Italy. Henceforward, there was to be somewhat greater toleration for Jews in Italy than elsewhere in Europe. In spite of Fascist efforts, destructive antisemitism never took root among the Italian populace, and many remained friendly to their Jewish neighbors. However, the role of Italy in the international politics of the late twentieth century does not suggest that antisemitism had by any means been uprooted from the Italian mind.[50]

Emancipation brought new freedoms and opportunities to Italian Jewry but even if Roth was correct in stating that Jews had been accepted as sons of Italy by the majority of their non-Jewish neighbours, new laws could not eradicate old hatreds and negative sentiments towards Italian Jews were still simmering away and, every now and again, as the aforementioned anti-Semitic attack on Luzzatti shows, they would boil over quite vociferously. Shächter does not accept that this was a period punctuated by the occasional and unfortunate anti-Semitic episode. In a chapter called 'The Longest Hatred', this is her evaluation of the Jewish Italian experience during the first decades of Emancipation:

> Despite separation of Church and State, Catholic anti-Semitism through education, sermons and publications continued to have an impact on daily life at all levels, from the Cabinet office to the classroom; assimilatory pressure and aspiration to adhere to the majority, to identify with an as yet fragile notion of *italianità* was felt by many Jews; the stigma of otherness was experienced, hence the attitude of not wishing to be noticed, to remain in the shadow.[51]

The premise of this thesis is that the image of the Jew present in these four examples of early Italian cinema, of Liberal Italian, pre-Fascist cinema, is an image of the stigmatised Other and a filmic

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[50] William Nicholls, *Christian Antisemitism: A History of Hate* (Northvale, New Jersey and London: Jason Aronson Inc., 1993), 311.

[51] Schächter, *The Jews of Italy*, 116.

enunciation of Shächter's abovementioned evaluation.

The 'longest hatred' of Judeophobia was still rooted in Italian emancipated society. The Mortara case of 1858 is just one example and shows that Jews and the Jewish religion were treated with contempt by the papal authorities whose anti-Jewish views in this particular affair were widely condemned as medieval and backward in nature.[52] A six-year old Jewish child, Edgardo Mortara, was forcibly taken from his parents and his home in Bologna by papal guards because he had been secretly baptized by the family servant because she feared he may die as a result of a serious illness. The girl confessed to a priest that she had baptized the child in secret and he, in turn, reported the matter to the Church authorities in Rome. The Congregation of the Inquisition decreed that the child's baptism, although conducted in secret, was sacrosanct and 'made the recipient *ipso facto* a member of the Christian communion'.[53] The little boy was never returned to his family and Mortara was educated in a convent, entered the priesthood, and 'was often paraded in the ghetto for the purpose of annoying the Jews'.[54] This affair took place in the Kingdom of Sardinia a little over a decade before Italian unification and only forty or so years before the films on which this thesis is focused were exhibited. The principal aim of this discussion is to see whether or not there is a connection between the Jewish imagery present in the filmic case studies and the anti-Jewish attitudes that led to the abduction of a little Jewish boy and the cruel breakup of an Italian Jewish family at the behest of the papal authorities in Rome.

The first chapter deconstructs the representation of Shylock the Jew in Gerolamo Lo Savio's *Il mercante di Venezia* (1910), a silent cinematic adaptation of Shakespeare's play. The didactic aspects of the film will be discussed, arguing that the Jewish imagery deployed assumes an air of authority and speaks with a certain cultural 'truth' because of its privileged association with one of the most important cultural figures in history. Venetian connections with the flesh-bond story, medieval attitudes towards Jews and usury, Christendom's views on circumcision, the Jew-as-Christian-devourer, the Jew-as-bloodsucking-monster, and the Jew-as-circumcised/castrated-weak-male are all notions that are distilled in this cinematic portrayal of Shylock the Jew, creating a grotesque anti-Jewish filmic metonym. Shylock, with his abnormal Jewish gait, is the very embodiment of the perpetual outsider and as such is constructed as a 'bad' citizen.

The second chapter will be devoted to the film *L'Inferno* (Francesco Bertolini, Adolfo

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[52] 'Mortara Case', *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1906), http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11028-mortara-case. Accessed February 28, 2012. See also David I Kertzer, *The Popes Against the Jews: The Vatican's Role in the Rise of Modern Anti-Semitism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 118-119 along with Kertzer's book *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.

Padovan, Giuseppe de Liguoro, 1911) along with certain scenes from a fourteen-minute short, also entitled *L'Inferno,* which was made in the same year and directed by Giuseppe Beradi and Arturo Busnego. A close analysis of the images contained in these two films will show how age-old prejudices against the Jewish religion, were ideologically useful in the domain of Italian identity politics. An examination of these films will demonstrate that new suspicions regarding the negative influence of the Jewish race on Liberal Italian society were reinforced by their amalgamation to older suspicions regarding Jewish ritual, religion, and culture. The main argument is that the differential symbolism of Othering the Jews in these films is rooted in a very specific anti-Judaic stereotype: the Jew as Devil. The figure of the satanized, demonized Jew – often conflated with the image of the Jew as moneylender – will be studied closely, looking at the way this Jew-Devil character was utilised by the Catholic Church to maintain hierarchical order in society. This chapter will show how the figure of the Jew was often representative of sin, apostasy, and the Antichrist. The Devil in *L'Inferno* can be read as an early cinematic manifestation of the Jew-Devil motif, serving to perpetuate the anti-Semitic notion that the Jews were Satan's mediators on earth and inherently disloyal to the nation-state.

The third chapter argues that a form of anti-Semitism based on traditional anti-Jewish stereotypical ideology and imagery runs through Enrico Guazzoni's *Quo Vadis?* (1913), which was the first film adaptation of Henryk Sienkiewicz's famous novel of the same name (1895). The principal idea put forward is that this anti-Semitism was deployed for a specific political purpose: identity, the construction of a Catholic Italian identity, which defined the Jew as the negative Other that would stand in opposition to the Italian nation-state's definition of itself and its citizens. To substantiate this argument, this study will examine closely the film's Jewish references and ground that textual analysis in the anti-Jewish rhetoric that was prevalent during the time *Quo Vadis?* was produced and exhibited. In addition, the film's reception will be explored in order to ascertain the film's cultural impact. The chapter will discuss in detail the close connection between Italian silent cinema, politics, and religion, using *Quo Vadis?* as a barometer to measure the Kingdom of Italy's socio-political atmosphere at this time.

The fourth and final chapter will examine how the silent epic *Cabiria* (Giovanni Pastrone, 1914) played a part in shaping or in reshaping Italian identity at a time when the Kingdom of Italy was about to enter the First World War. A close study of the film's *mise-en-scène* will reveal the presence of Jewish imagery, which functions within the text as a marker of Italian alterity. This chapter will argue that the film's representation of the Jew served as an oppositional device in the mapping out of Italian identity. In 1914, the year *Cabiria* was released, the Jewish question was at

the heart of the Italian question: what does it mean to be a citizen of the Kingdom of Italy? The construction of a positive citizen was a process of identity formation that required a negative type: the non-citizen. This analysis will also show how *Cabiria*'s narrative, which is set during the Second Punic War between Carthage and Rome and inspired by Italy's military victories in Libya (1911), can be read as a commentary on 1914 Italy with its competing political entities, cultures, and ethnicities. The image of the Jew as the same/Other in Liberal Italy's identity politics will also be explored, based on a discussion concerning Italian eugenicist ideas and pseudo-scientific racial theoretics. Anti-Jewish imagery in *Cabiria* taps into these discourses and constructs an image of the Jew that is the very epitome of a racially inferior Semitic, hostile, and perfidious neighbour; a radical Other that cannot be assimilated.

To what extent does the Jew-as-parasite, the Jew-as-hidden-threat, the Jew-as-Devil, the Jew-as-scapegoat, the Jew-as-cruel-moneylender, the Jew-as-dangerous-Other appear in these films? Also, why was this negative portrayal deployed in the first place? The discussion that follows will answer these questions.

Chapter One:

Il mercante di Venezia: An Italian habitation and an Italian name

> **Theseus**: [A]s imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name.
>
> (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 5.1.14-7)

This chapter deconstructs the representation of Shylock the Jew in Gerolamo Lo Savio's *Il mercante di Venezia*, a silent cinematic adaptation of Shakespeare's play. The didactic aspects of the film will be discussed, arguing that the Jewish imagery deployed assumes an air of authority and speaks with a certain cultural 'truth' because of its privileged association with an important historical cultural construction. This 'truth' will be examined in relation to the Kingdom of Italy's colonial ambitions and evaluated in light of the knowledge that the country was preparing for war in Africa. In September 1911, the year after Lo Savio's film was made, Italy fought against the Ottoman Empire in a military campaign to conquer new territories in Libya and this historical contextualisation will shed further light on the episteme of Italian identity that manifests itself in this filmic text.

Framing the film within this colonialist national agenda provides important clues as to the possible if not the probable motivating factors behind the cultural differentiation that operates within the film text. The film's portrayal of Shylock the Jew is a cinematic enunciation of cultural difference, an example of what Michel Foucault describes as a referential in discourses that are concerned with the (re)affirmation of authority. This referential:

> Forms the place, the condition, the field of emergence, the authority to differentiate between individuals or objects, states of things and relations that are brought into play by the statement itself; it defines the possibilities of appearance and delimitation.[1]

As will be discussed, Lo Savio's Shylock helps to form that figurative place or site highlighted by Foucault from which ideas concerning belonging and non-belonging emerge. He is a character that also embodies many anti-Jewish stereotypes, which make verbal and non-verbal statements, that bring into play notions of positives and negatives that helped define the appearance of Italianness and became a cinematic mode of identity-delimitation during this period. Shylock's filmic

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[1]   Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1972), 91.

representation helped define 'the possibilities of appearance and delimitation' as Foucault puts it but in an Italian context of course. The words of certain intertitles, the physiognomy and appearance of certain characters, along with *mise-en-scène* symbolisms, will all be examined to show how age-old anti-Jewish stereotypes helped to differentiate between the Italian citizen and the Italian Other. Unpacking the film's iconography and narrative in this way will show how a Shakespearean story about a sixteenth-century Jewish moneylender in Venice contributed to the Kingdom of Italy's identity politics in the twentieth century, doing so at a foundational level, where matters concerning belonging and non-belonging are argued out. Engaging with the film's text in this way will help map out some of the important binary polarisations that emerge from this time in Italy's history: civility/savageness, Occident/Orient, citizen/alien, Christian/Pagan, to name just a few.

The principal argument will be that Shylock functions as an anti-Jewish metonym within the filmic text and that his representation stems from what Homi K. Bhabha describes as the 'psychosis of patriotic fervour', a national psychosis, which is rooted in the ideology of building a racially pure national identity and a homogeneous national culture.[2] Analysing the semiotics of Shylock's onscreen construction will bring into focus that 'ahistorical nineteenth-century [and in this instance, early twentieth-century] polarity of Orient and Occident which, in the name of progress, unleashed the exclusionary imperialist ideologies of self and other'.[3] On *Il mercante di Venezia*'s 'surfaces of cinematic signification',[4] stereotypes speak of such polarity and reinforce the idea that the figure of the Jew represents a danger – often a hidden danger – to the dominant major group. Looking specifically at Shylock's function within the text will help to understand better the hegemonic structures of the day and how iteration – the repeating of negative antagonisms in discursive articulation to reinforce essentialist ideologies – and alterity are the foundation stones of such structures.[5] Shylock, as a mediator of Otherness, exemplifies how this phenomenon played out in film during this time of nation-state building in Italy's history.

With the above points in mind, specific attention will be given to the connection between Venice and the flesh-bond story and the subsequent dramatizing of the Jew's unnatural and evil behaviour. Medieval attitudes towards Jews and usury will be discussed so as to understand more clearly the various aspects of this myth of the moneylender, which often links this Jewish business practice with Christian heresy and the innate wickedness of Jews. The next section deals with aspects of performance, studying the way Shylock looks, moves, and behaves onscreen, a factor

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[2] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, Routledge Classics edition, 2004), 7.
[3] Ibid., 29.
[4] Ibid., 29.
[5] Ibid., 43.

that provides the audience with important clues regarding the dark side of Shylock's character. A close examination of the *mise-en-scène* will demonstrate how Shylock's evil inner self is foregrounded in the film's iconography, which in turn reveals much about turn-of-the-century attitudes towards the Jewish religious practice of circumcision. The final sections will highlight how Shylock's portrayal can be read as a distillation of many traditional anti-Jewish tropes such as the Jew-as-Christian-devourer, the Jew-as-bloodsucking-monster, and the Jew-as-circumcised/castrated-weak-male.

Before considering the above points, however, the next section will briefly look at the phenomenon of silent Shakespearean film in general, setting out possible reasons for the plundering of Shakespeare by Italian film production companies. Understanding the cultural significance of Shakespeare in film can then open up a discussion concerning the specific nature of Shakespearean stereotypes in relation to the figure of Shylock.

Silent Shakespeare Speaks

Il mercante di Venezia was produced by Film d'Arte Italiana, which was founded in Rome in 1909, by Charles Pathé and his Société Pathé Frères.[6] The objective was to create an Italian equivalent of Pathé's French film production company: Le Film D'art.[7] Pathé was the company's president and Lo Savio, as well as directing films, was the company's managing director. Lo Savio worked for the company from 1909 to 1914 and he worked, along with his colleague Ugo Falena, on many ambitious projects involving literary adaptations. As the company's principal talent scout, he was also responsible for making a significant contribution 'to the career of actors both young and established'.[8] Before turning his attention to *Il mercante di Venezia*, Lo Savio had already directed a Shakespeare film in 1909, adapting the play *Othello* and turning it into *Otello* the one-reeler. In addition to these two films, the company went on to produce two further Shakespeare films: *Re Lear* (1910), which was also directed by Lo Savio, and *Giulietta e Romeo* (1911), directed by Falena, the company's artistic director.

Il mercante di Venezia was one of almost 300 Shakespearean adaptations filmed between 1899 and 1927 in the UK, the United States, Germany, Denmark, France, and Italy. Today,

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[6] Giorgio Bertellini, *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Richard Abel (London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2005), 238.
[7] Ibid., 238.
[8] Ibid., 392.

however, only forty or so remain extant.[9] Moreover, this body of silent cinematic Shakespeare has received very little attention from film scholars compared to their sound equivalents. Judith Buchanan offers a suggestion as to why this may be the case, explaining that the idea of a film version of one of Shakespeare's plays, which does not allow the audience to hear Shakespeare's actual *words*, was considered to be nonsensical and the films therefore unworthy of critical analysis.[10] In the late sixties, however, scholars such as Robert Hamilton Ball did much to change this perception, producing an informative survey of these largely ignored films and Buchanan's recent work continues to build on the foundation of Ball's legacy. This filmic analysis endeavours to make a further contribution to the knowledge base of this understudied corpus of films by introducing the subject of Jewish representation.

Shakespeare without words could be described as an antithetical association and silent Shakespeare, therefore, must be a contradiction in terms, an oxymoronic notion. Shakespeareans that hold this view are concerned that silent cinematic adaptations of Shakespeare's plays could only ever serve to dilute the potency of his dramatic poetic words. To put it another way, watching these filmic texts is a constant reminder of what is missing, of what is lacking: audible words. For many interested in studying the impact of the Shakespearian drama, silent Shakespeare films were nothing more than oddities, absurdities, and curiosities. This rather dismissive attitude towards pre-sound Shakespeare films is summed up by what Laurence Kitchin wrote in 1966: 'There was little point in tackling Shakespeare seriously until the movies could speak'.[11] Writing in 1977, Jack Jorgens is not only disparaging but actually celebrates the fact that the majority of silent Shakespeare films have been destroyed and that these 'dumb-shows' have, 'mercifully', been lost forever.[12] Although dumb-show is a technical term for pantomimic wordless staged action, it is difficult not to feel the force of the pejorative meaning that can be attributed to the word 'dumb' by the tone employed by Jorgens.

The other antagonistic extreme in this critical debate on the validity of Shakespeare on film is encapsulated in the position taken by the Soviet filmmaker Lev Kuleshov who, writing in 1918, called on cinephiles to reject the idea that cinema had to rely on the literary and the theatrical in order to 'speak', insisting that the language of film is cinematographic in nature and that filmmakers should not attempt to make film 'literary' and more poetically dramatic in style but,

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[9] Judith Buchanan, *Shakespeare on Silent Film: An Excellent Dumb Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1.
[10] Ibid., xviii.
[11] Laurence Kitchin, *Drama in the Sixties: Form and Interpretation* (London: Faber, 1966), 142.
[12] Quoted in Buchanan, *Shakespeare on Silent Film*, 6.

rather, allow the filmic image to speak for itself by using its own unique language.[13] Film must free itself from any theatrical constraints in order to fulfil its true potential as a medium in its own right. The conventions of the written word and the spoken word on a theatre's stage are not ones to which cinema must adhere. For the filmic image to truly speak creatively, it must free itself from any literary or theatrical inhibitions. Both viewpoints, however, position silent Shakespeare films in a liminal artistic space, 'caught between a Shakespearean world and a filmic one and apparently well placed to disappoint both'.[14]

It's also important to remember that Lo Savio's silent Shakespeare film speaks with a didactic voice because the production of *Il mercante di Venezia* was driven by certain cultural and commercial imperatives. Film d'Arte Italiana's Shakespeare films owe their existence to a specific set of artistic ambitions, which were set in motion by the realisation that the works of Shakespeare contained important 'cultural capital'. According to Buchanan, the Italian company's aspirations were to 'nurture a literary and theatrical cinema as a prestigious alternative to a more populist agenda'.[15] Film d'Arte Italiana was intent on promoting the view that film was a respectable, cultural art form. The use of the word *arte* in the company's name was, undoubtedly, a carefully chosen marketing ploy in order to persuade audiences that the cinema, a film theatre, functioned in the same way as the traditional theatre in that they were both auditoria for the performing *arts*. At a time when film, as a medium and as an industry, was still in its infancy, the message sent out from those involved with Film d'Arte was meant to be as unambiguous as possible: the film or the stage play may be different media forms; but they were both *art* forms nonetheless. The use of the word *arte*, in a subtle but powerful way, lends an air of sophistication and refinement to the company's productions. The review of the film in *The Bioscope* would no doubt have pleased the company directors when it said that the adaptation had 'been carried out in a very artistic and faithful manner'.[16] This air of artistic sophistication raises even the crude exaggerations of spectacle, including reductive stereotyping, to the level of art, inflecting such imagery with a tone of respectability. Shylock's representation was intended to be *art* of the highest order.

Film d'Arte Italiana embraced Shakespeare for more than simply artistic inspiration for its films. Form, style, and story-telling techniques may have been important artistic concerns but commercial concerns were equally as important if not more so. The company was competing in the Italian market against other ambitious film production houses that were also actively engaged in

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[13] David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 27.
[14] Buchanan, *Shakespeare on Silent Film*, 7.
[15] Buchanan, *Silent Shakespeare* (British Film Institute DVD, 2004), filmed introduction.
[16] *The Bioscope* (London), 23 February 1910 (reproduced in Aldo Bernardini and Vittorio Martinelli, *Bianco e Nero: Il cinema muto italiano, i film dei primi anni, 1910* ((Turin and Rome: Nuova ERI, CSC, 1994), 256.

making highbrow films, producers and distributors such as Società Italiana Cines, another Rome-based company established in 1906,[17] and Milano Films, which was set up in 1909.[18] However, the cultural capital that has always been associated with Shakespeare was crucial to Film d'Arte Italiana's market positioning in the film industry's economic sector, both at home in Italy and abroad via its international distribution operations. Exploiting the cultural clout of Shakespeare allowed the company to promote its upmarket credentials, creating a prestigious brand name and a deliberately highbrow commercial image. Buchanan explains the strategy:

> The plundering of works by classical authors was, as ever, a useful tool in fulfilling Film d'Arte Italiana's charter to distance itself from more down-market moving picture entertainments. In its early years of production, FAI even made films of some Verdi operas (including a 1909 *Il Trovatore* and a 1911 *Aida*). But it was Shakespeare who featured most frequently in Film d'Arte Italiana's campaign to produce a cinematic record of weighty cultural landmarks.[19]

The film industry wanted to distance itself from the titillating fairground spectacles that had become associated with the world of film. This attitude was also prevalent in Italy where there were serious concerns regarding the 'dangers' of cinema. In light of this, Shakespeare allowed filmmakers to proclaim that the medium of film was worthy of respect and that the industry itself was reputable and serious minded. Gian Piero Brunetta speaks of how, in 1908, Italian filmmakers deliberately sought to win over the bourgeoisie by repudiating the 'infantile' productions of the magic lantern and fairground spectacles, which they now considered as culturally subaltern.[20] Shakespearean film adaptations helped Italian cinema to shake off the stigma of 'seediness' – by means of a 'vocazione pedagogico-didattica',[21] a notion adopted by certain influential film producers and, most certainly by Film d'Arte Italiana – as well as allowing the industry to participate in a programme of restructuring popular culture. Shakespeare was important because it provided Italian film production companies with an opportunity to 'ennoble' both the medium and the industry in which that medium was artistically created.[22]

Moreover, in restructuring popular Italian culture, these pedagogical and didactically driven filmic narratives participated in the (re)structuring of the Italian national story/*storia*. This is Shakespeare seen through an Italian lens. This is Shylock seen through an Italian lens. This is an

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[17] 'Cines: About Us'. http://www.cinesfilm.com/english/About_us.htm. Accessed February 28, 2012.
[18] Raffaele De Berti, Milano Films: The Exemplary History of a Film Company of the 1910s', *Film History,* 12 (2000), 276-287.
[19] Buchanan, *Shakespeare on Silent Film*, 89.
[20] Ibid., 143.
[21] Ibid., 153.
[22] Ibid., 152.

Italian appropriation of Shakespeare with its truly *local* habitation and its Italian name: *Il mercante di Venezia*. Film d'Arte Italiana was the first Italian production company to utilise locations in Italy for its Shakespeare films. In contrast to the inauthentic studio sets of American companies such as Vitagraph, which had to make use of painted backdrops in an attempt to evoke the Venice of *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice* and the Verona of *Romeo and Juliet*, Film d'Arte Italiana stole a march on its competitors and shot these Italian Shakespearean stories on location in what the company described as their 'proper environment'.[23] Other Italian film companies were soon to follow suit and shoot the exteriors of their Shakespearean Italian stories in the Italian cities where the dramatic action of the story world takes place; a powerful marketing tool that would help promote the 'authenticity' of their films to a worldwide audience. Venice and Verona were key players in these filmic Shakespearean dramas.

Figure 1

In the original play, references to the Rialto, gondolas, and *traghetti* [boats that ferry people across the canals for a small charge] are ingredients that provide the audience with local flavour and colour. Shakespeare's play certainly added to the myth of Venice, which was already well established by the latter part of the sixteenth century due to mercantile links between the republic and her trading partners. A body of writings belonging to this period extolled the city's virtues and

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[23] Buchanan, *Shakespeare on Silent Film*, 90.

set out a vision of Venice as a seductive, exotic, and opulent place. There is some speculation that Shakespeare had visited Venice before writing the play when the theatres of London were closed down because of a plague between the years 1592 and 1594.[24] However, he did not have to visit the city to write so evocatively about it. Shakespeare might have spoken to Venetian traders living in London or read the travel books of those who had visited the city or, perhaps, he might even have seen pictures of the place in guidebooks.[25]

The power of films such as *Il mercante* is to turn the mythological cityscape of Shakespeare's imagination into a new form of 'reality'. The audience *sees* the canals, the bridges, and the gondolas in all their exotic, exciting glory, sweeping away the constraints of theatrical productions with the new technologies of cinema (See fig. 1). The film's Venice is not merely suggested or evoked by means of painted wooden props but it is actually seen thus becoming a new type of Shakespeare's Venice, contributing to and perpetuating the myth surrounding the city. Shylock is part of that myth and there is an authenticity at work in seeing the character inhabit this real Venetian space and this somehow does not simply enrich the imagery but serves to empower it. Silent Shakespearean cinema does speak and it speaks with gravitas. Rather than be dismissed as absurdities for the audible words they lack; the visual language of these films should be studied closely to unlock any probable meanings that can help explain more fully any contemporary socio-political discourses.

Also, the potency of stereotype in Lo Savio's film is not muted. Its visual nature onscreen, silent and without words, makes no difference to the stereotype's ability to communicate its message. In terms of Shylock, the language of film, the medium's own unique language that Kuleshov was intent on nurturing, speaks powerfully and convincingly about the nature of the Jew. There is nothing 'dumb' about the way that Shylock is artistically constructed in *Il mercante*. Shakespeare's words feed into Lo Savio's visual representation of Shylock and Lo Savio's moving images of Shylock reinforce the words. Richard S. Levy describes the relationship in this way:

> Existing alongside the literary tradition of antisemitism and contributing to its durability stands a tradition almost as old and complex: the visual stereotype of the Jew. Over the centuries and into modern times, the graphic and plastic arts have been employed to create images of the Jew as a physically repulsive, ridiculous, but nonetheless menacing figure.[26]

The lack of audible words does not mute the negative message inherent in this particular silent

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[24] M. M. Mahood, 'Introduction', in *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. M.M. Mahood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 12.

[25] Ibid., 12.

[26] Richard S. Levy, *Antisemitism in the Modern World: An Anthology of Texts* (Chicago: D.C. Heath and Company, 1991), 135.

cinematic representation of the Jew. Shylock's presentation in Film d'Arte's production exemplifies what Walter Lippmann calls 'widely shared and simplified evaluative images'.[27] As will be explored in the sections that follow, Shylock's stereotypical imagery is a powerful distillation of pre-existing anti-Jewish feelings, creating essentialist moving pictures of the Jew that 'govern deeply the whole process of perception'.[28] In this regard, it is not what the spectator sees but what he/she, through the language of film, is 'told' to see concerning the Jew.

The way stereotypes operate in *Il mercante* is summed up in this recent study on the use of Jewish images in the media:

> When stereotypes are applied to members of a social group – and, actually, they are mainly generalizations about groups – simplification and overemphasis of certain aspects may lead them to becoming derogatory and hostile, especially when social tensions arise (or are fuelled) between groups. In this case, stereotypes function as central elements of prejudice which often translates into discrimination, into aggression, and ultimately, as history has shown, into dehumanization of an 'outgroup'.[29]

This dissection into the nature of stereotype is important to keep in mind as the specificities of Shylock's representation are picked apart during the analysis section. Much if not all of what Shylock's construction says about Jews is based on oversimplification, exaggeration, and the sweeping visual statement. In many ways, this is how the spectacle of silent cinema does its speaking and how its communication of narrative and emotion is done. The peculiar language of silent cinema lends itself naturally to the construction of reductive imagery, intensifying the positivity or the negativity of what is signified.

Roland Barthes talks about the 'function of grandiloquence' in the world of wrestling that is similar to the language of ancient theatre and that forms the basis of an 'exaggeratedly visible explanation of a Necessity'.[30] In such spectacles, there is what Barthes calls the 'perfection of an iconography' in which costumes, masks, props, grand gestures, body movements, and facial expressions, to name but a few, all come together to communicate that necessity or truth.[31] Moreover, this 'rhetorical amplification' fulfils expectations as the spectator gains pleasure in seeing the 'gradual construction of a highly moral image: that of the perfect 'bastard''.[32]

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[27] Walter Lippmann, quoted in Martin Liepach, Gabriele Melischek, and Josef Seethaler, 'Introduction', *Jewish Images in the Media*, eds Martin Liepach, Gabriele Melischek, and Josef Seethaler (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2007), 7.
[28] Ibid., 8.
[29] Ibid., 8.
[30] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Vintage Books, 2009 edition), 4.
[31] Ibid., 9.
[32] Ibid., 12.

Witnessing the spectacular downfall or degradation of these stock villainous characters provides the audience with a sense of closure. Shylock, 'the perfect bastard', gets his comeuppance and all is well with the Venetian/contemporary Italian world. The spectacle, in this grandiloquent way, speaks with authority about the difference between good and bad. Speaking of authority, Shakespeare is important in the context of this study because it ennobles, either intentionally or unintentionally, the negative representation of Shylock the Jew. The image of Shylock in Lo Savio's film is imbued with a certain power because it operates under the auspices of a cultural phenomenon that represented/represents one of the highest artistic forms of making sense of the world through narrative.[33]

Whilst keeping in mind these possible motivating factors behind the cinematic exploitation of Shakespeare's cultural capital and the possible didactic and ideological elements that are tied in with the figure of Shylock the Jew, the next sections will look at the way his representation in *Il mercante* fits into a wider agenda of nation building that was designed to map out clearly the Kingdom of Italy's insiders and outsiders.

Venetian Connections to the Flesh-Bond Story

Shakespeare's play is, perhaps, an original Italian story seen through the lens of an Elizabethan English playwright. Source analysis may explain why Shakespeare's play was set in Venice. *The Merchant of Venice* was written between 1596 and 1598 but its inspiration might have come from an earlier Italian work.[34] According to John K. Hale, Shakespeare's play adheres closely to its main source, which is the story of Giannetto from *Il Pecorone*.[35] Mahone agrees, adding that most commentators have 'noted the remarkable resemblances between *The Merchant of Venice* and a late-fourteenth-century collection of tales (first published in 1558 and available only in Italian) by a Ser Giovanni of Florence, *Il Pecorone* ("the big sheep", or simpleton or dunce)'.[36] A pound of flesh is pledged to a Jewish moneylender in return for a loan in this Venetian story. Just like Shylock, the Jew in *Il Pecorone* has 'murderous intentions' and his wicked deeds are only thwarted because of the law forbidding the shedding of Christian blood and, just like Shylock, he fails in securing his

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[33] Sonia Masai, 'Defining local Shakespeares', *World-wide Shakespeares: Local appropriations in Film and Performance*, ed. Sonia Massai (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 4.

[34] Ibid., 1.

[35] John K. Hale, 'Does Source Criticism Illuminate the Problems of Interpreting The Merchant as a Soured Comedy?', *World-wide Shakespeares.*, 187.

[36] John W Mahon, *The Merchant of Venice: New Critical Essays*, ed. John W Mahon and Ellen Macleod (New York: Routledge, 2002), 7.

original loan.[37] However, the 'flesh-bond' that must be both 'exact and bloodless' is an idea that does not originate with either Shakespeare or Ser Giovanni but, rather, as M. M. Mahood explains, it is a topos, which has a 'long ancestry as a folk tale'.[38]

In a critical analysis of *The Merchant of Venice*'s court scene, William Chester Jordan traces the history of the bond story, explaining how it first appears in the literature of Western Europe during 'the late twelfth-or early thirteenth-century Latin poem, the *Dolopathos*'.[39] This topos would also work its way into other popular collections of tales, such as *Cursor Mundi* (thirteenth-century English tales) and *Il Pecorone*, which is mentioned above as one of the possible sources from which Shakespeare may have drawn upon in writing *The Merchant of Venice*.[40] In all of these stories, common themes emerge: the bond is a flesh-bond, the borrower cannot pay back what is owed and is taken to court by the lender who demands his portion of flesh as a penalty. Recognising the legal validity of the lender's claim, the court allows the lender to cut out the portion of flesh; however, it must be exact: not a fraction more and not a fraction less and, moreover, there must be no bone, no sinew, no muscle and no blood. If the lender was to carry out his request for justice, failure to cut out his portion of flesh *exactly* would cost him his life and, for this reason, the lender acquiesces, humiliated by the court.[41] It must be pointed out that the lender in these tales is not always a Jew. However, 'these flourishes seem usually to have been added for a more enthusiastic telling of the tale' and, when the lender is a Jew, the tale ends with a 'moral vignette': the conversion of the Jew to Christianity.[42]

The importance of Jordan's article is its introduction of another dynamic into critical discussions concerning the court scene. He argues against the idea, which has been espoused by many Shakespearean scholars such as Mark Andrews, Maxine MacKay, Alfred Harbage, Ruth M. Levitsky, and John S. Coolidge, that the court scene allows Shakespeare to enact a symbolic drama between the rule of law on the one hand and the principle of mercy on the other hand. This critical approach, despite conceding that it could be read as a reflection on the theological dispute between the 'harsh' laws of the Old Testament and the more 'merciful' Christianity of the New Testament, tended to dismiss the view that Shakespeare was utilising the court scene in order to portray Jews as

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[37] Mahood, 'Introduction', 3.
[38] Ibid., 5.
[39] William Chester Jordan, 'Approaches to the Court Scene in 'The Bond Story: Equity and Mercy or Reason and Nature', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 33:1 (Spring, 1982), 50. Jordan rejects the classic notion that the bond story is Indic in origin, 'owing to the lateness of the manuscripts in which the tale is found'.
[40] Ibid., 50.
[41] Ibid., 50.
[42] Ibid., 50.

a nasty and depraved people.[43] Jordan is not convinced by this approach because, on the whole, it does not take into account the dynamics surrounding earlier folkloric renditions of the bond story.

As Jordan explains, in extant versions of the bond story, the lender is *never* won over by an appeal to 'Christian' mercy, not even once. In the bond stories, the lender's behaviour is motivated by a deep-seated, unremitting greed, which does not yield to reasonableness and the lender is often portrayed as 'avaricious by nature or by profession and as uncommonly vicious'.[44] All passionate pleas for mercy fall on deaf ears not because the lender is concerned with the principle of equity but because he is 'uncommonly vicious'. Jordan views the dynamic in this way:

> We must accept that for dramatic intensity the general desire for a 'merciful' outcome is
> heightened by an insistence in all the versions of the story that the debtor is an (holy)
> innocent and the lender just plain nasty. A naked Christian stands before the vengeful Jew in
> the *Cursor Mundi*, Antonio is a 'tainted wether of the flock,/ Meetest for death' in the
> Merchant of Venice (IV. i. 114-15); and the flesh desired of the debtor in the ballad,
> *Gernutus*, *The Jew of Venice*, comes 'from under his right side' in allusion to Christ's
> passion.[45]

The binary that Jordan sees predominately at work in *The Merchant of Venice*'s court scene is not the conflict between the rule of law and the principle of mercy but, rather, between reason and nature. The nature of the lender makes him impervious to reason. He is controlled by his nature rather than by his powers of reason. In the *Orator*, which is a sixteenth-century version of the bond story and principally used to train students who had ambitions to serve in a public capacity, a Christian debtor and a Jewish lender argue vociferously in court regarding the rightfulness and fairness of demanding a flesh-bond.[46] The main thrust of the Christian's argument is that it cannot be natural to demand a portion of human flesh as a penalty for non-payment of a debt and, as a result of this cruel and unnatural insistence, the Jewish lender must be abnormal. The Christian demonizes the Jew by calling him a 'divell in the shape of a man' and dehumanizes him by saying that he has a 'monster's crueltie'.[47] This desire for human flesh on the part of the Jew is not only strange but evil. Being so Satanic in nature would make it easy for the Jewish usurer to force the Christian debtor to agree to the flesh-bond by means of magic, a factor that would 'constitute duress (*exceptio de duritia*)' in a court of law.[48] The Christian may have behaved foolishly only because

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43 Ibid., 49.
44 Ibid., 53.
45 Ibid., 53.
46 Ibid., 54.
47 Ibid., 55.
48 Ibid., 55.

he was subjected to Jewish dark arts. His unnatural nature is impenetrable by the power of reason. The Christian debtor's anti-Jewish diatribe continues:

> Such people…have always been unnatural and unreasonable, making rebellion against God, against their priests, judges, and leaders, selling their own brothers into slavery (Joseph into Egypt), persecuting fathers (Absalom and David), lacking a homeland.[49]

Jordan believes that 'reason' and 'nature' were two important concepts in medieval thought and ought to be considered when discussing potential symbolic meanings in *The Merchant of Venice*'s court scene. Not only do these concepts form a binary within the scene's dynamic but they are also useful in understanding age-old anti-Jewish antagonisms more clearly and how they operated in Italian society. In other words, with a Jewish character as the lender syntagm in the flesh-bond paradigm, the Jew's abnormal and unnatural 'nature' is dramatically emphasised. Attributing such unspeakable cruelty to Jews, who were in turn presented as unswerving in their unreasonableness, tapped into ancient anti-Jewish religious discourses that had taken a millennium and a half to crystalize in the form of Shylock.

The figure of Shylock is a distillation of such hatreds that could easily have stemmed from anti-Judaic propaganda, which, over the centuries, had been deployed in a war waged upon the Jewish religion by Christianity. This process of Christianity's affirmation may provide the 'reason' behind the representation of the Jewish lender in bond stories as inhumane and depraved. People who behave with such despicable depravity surely cannot hold the theological high ground. The reference to the desired portion of flesh coming from the right side in one of the surviving bond stories – which, as Jordan explains above, calls to mind the passion of Christ – is further evidence that hatreds towards Jews during the Elizabethan age, primarily associated with the role of Jew as usurer, had their roots in older religious anti-Judaic hatreds.

Medieval Moneylending: A Dangerous Game

Possible prevailing attitudes towards Jews in Shakespeare's day are discussed by Warren D. Smith as he examines the image of Shylock. Anti-Judaic sentiments would not have been alien concepts to the Elizabethan audience. Smith states that from the period following the expulsion of Jews from England in 1290 up to and including Shakespeare's day, writings condemning Jews for their crime of killing Christ were widely read. In addition to literary anti-Jewish invectives, medieval dramas, passion plays, and artworks that depicted Jews as devilish villains were popular and widespread; all

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[49] Ibid., 55.

of which meant that 'the Jew could be forgotten in post-expulsion England as an undesirable neighbour but never as the slayer of Jesus Christ.'[50] That said, however, Smith is quick to add that members of the Elizabethan audience watching the machinations of Shylock would have been antipathetic because he was a usurer first and foremost. That he was a Jew and a besmirched Christ killer would have mattered less. It was the money that mattered. The audience's antipathy was roused because Shylock had become wealthy by means of usury, a business practice that was not only frowned upon during Shakespeare's day but also was 'condemned by the Middle Ages and the Renaissance as both unnatural and irreligious'.[51] Even though lending money for interest would be made legal in England during the middle part of the sixteenth century, the prevailing attitude towards moneylending of this kind was one of negativity, with the practice being viewed as a crime worse than stealing or even murder.[52] This medieval concept of usury was an amalgamation of Old Testament thought, the views of Aristotle, and Church doctrine. As Carl F. Taeusch shows, it was the expectation of earning a rate of return over a fixed period of time that defined the medieval concept of usury because the interest charged was based on time.[53] A lender was allowed to share in the profits if his loaned monies funded a profitable business venture and, likewise, he had to suffer financial loss if that business venture proved to be unsuccessful. However, what was deemed wrong was the notion that money lent out could continually be working, that is earning rates of interest over time. Money in this way could still be working/earning even during the Sabbath, a notion that the Medieval Church found wholly unacceptable. According to Taeusch:

> This is the view presented in *The Merchant of Venice*: Shylock's behaviour was reprehensible, not merely because the 'bond' he demanded was a pound of flesh, but also because it was forfeit at a certain time regardless of the fact that Antonio's vessels lay 'wracked on the narrow seas'.[54]

To the medieval mind, it was as if the usurer – Shylock in this case – was selling time itself and this idea was completely objectionable.

By the same token, the stereotyped image of Jew as moneylender does not originate with Shakespeare's Shylock the Jew or with Christopher Marlowe's Barabas the Jew.[55] According to Smith, this association can be traced back to the early part of the Middle Ages and 'little wonder

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[50] Warren D. Smith, 'Shakespeare's Shylock', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15:3 (Summer, 1964), 194.
[51] Ibid., 194, 195.
[52] Ibid., 195.
[53] Carl F. Taeusch, 'The Concept of "Usury": The History of an Idea', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 3:3 (1942),
[54] Ibid., 297, 298.
[55] Christopher Marlowe's play *The Jew of Malta* was written in 1589. John W. Mahon, *Merchant of Venice.*, 8.

since usury for Jews was encouraged by both the Church and the State'.[56] Joshua Trachtenberg states that 'in the twelfth century the words Jew and usurer had become almost synonymous'.[57] Credit was essential to fund business ventures and to fight wars and aristocrats across Medieval Europe turned to moneylenders to fund their business and military ambitions. These moneylenders were a 'necessary evil' as the economy grew across Europe as a result of the First Crusade and because wars created business opportunities and credit was required to exploit those opportunities, the usurer was tolerated by the state and acknowledged by the Church.[58]

During this period, Jews became moneylenders because they could not become farmers, artisans, lawyers or any other type of noble profession. Across Europe, laws prohibited Jews from entering such professions. Jews had traded successfully with the Orient but the First Crusade brought an end to that economic relationship.[59] Jews were now merchants of money because trading in money was one of the only viable economic activities in which they could lawfully participate. If Jews as merchants of money continued to provide the state with readily available sources of profit, they were, to some degree, offered protection. Pawnbroking or usury was forbidden in Venice from 1254 and, therefore, Venetian gentry turned to the Jews of Mestre for their capital funding needs. During the fourteenth century, the war between Venice and Genova resulted in financial instability and a distinct lack of credit in the city. As a result, the Venetian authorities encouraged Jewish moneylenders to move to the city where their lending 'at usury' would be tolerated.[60] This was a precarious position because protection was afforded to Jewish usurers as long as they could provide the state in which they were living with credit. When the credit dried up, so did state protection.

Often, nobles resorted to *force majeure* so as to not pay back what was owed and the Church confiscated money from Jewish moneylenders because it was attained by 'unchristian' means. Trachtenberg describes this state-sponsored Jewish system of usury as a 'vicious circle from which there was no escape for the Jew'.[61] A Jewish moneylender was often used, abused, and then expelled when he could not be repaid or could no longer provide credit. As Herbert Bronstein notes, because the gentry 'feared the loss of their pawned lands',[62] they would deflect the wrath of

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[56] Smith, 'Shakespeare's Shylock', 195.

[57] Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and its Relation to Modern Antisemitism* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983), 190.

[58] Ibid., 188.

[59] Ibid., 188.

[60] Reinhold C. Mueller, 'The Procuratori Di San Marco and the Venetian Credit Market: A Study of the Development of Credit and Banking in the Trecento', *The Journal of Economic History* 30:1 (1970), 242.

[61] Trachtenberg, *Devil and the Jews*, 189.

[62] Herbert Bronstein, 'Shakespeare, the Jews, and *The Merchant of Venice*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 20:1 (Winter, 1969), 6.

the common people by projecting it onto the Jewish moneylenders. The negative anti-Jewish stereotype, which was so prevalent in European literature, ballads, and plays was 'used both as a justification of the terrible treatment of the Jews and as encouragement to the masses to attack the Jews'.[63]

Across Europe, moneylending was a dangerous game. This is not to say that Christian moneylenders were not despised as well. Trachtenberg talks about how the Church wanted to stamp out the heresy of Christian usury but too many Christians participated in this wicked business practice. Nevertheless, usury, during the middle ages and the Renaissance, was always synonymous with the Jew:

> Thus the Jew was obliged to bear the brunt of popular feeling against the moneylender from the outset, and long after his short-lived prominence in the field had been preempted by others, he still remained *the* usurer in the mass memory and had to suffer for the sins of his successors.[64]

In his seminal study on the figure of Shylock, John Gross discusses how Jewish moneylenders were perceived as the real villains in Medieval society and, to their Christian equivalents, there was no greater insult than to be described as being as bad as or worse than a Jew. Even in countries where Jews had been expelled for generations, 'the Jewish moneylender remained a constant point of reference'.[65]

It must have been the point of reference for Shakespeare too as he created the character of Shylock because his personal experience of Jews must have been limited given that they had been expelled from England over three centuries previously.[66] He may also have made his merchant of Venice a Jew because the moneylender was Jewish in one of the sources that inspired the play. If being a Jew was synonymous with being a wicked usurer and being a usurer was synonymous with being a heretic, by creating Shylock, Shakespeare was creating an arch villain, the very epitome of all things hateful: a usurer and an unbeliever combined. His Shylock the Jew, either wittingly or unwittingly, drew from age old anti-Jewish stereotypes thus imbuing his very own anti-Jewish stereotype with an appeal that had already withstood the test of time. Shylock was a stereotype that resonated with prejudices that still permeated the society of his day, prejudices that may have had their roots in religious hatreds but had become mixed with or transformed into hatreds regarding money. The bond story or 'the pound of flesh episode is merely a demonstration of the innate evil

63 Ibid., 6.
64 Trachtenberg, *Devil and the Jews,* 190.
65 John Gross, *Shylock: Four Hundred Years in the Life of a Legend* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992), 43.
66 Bronstein, 'Shakespeare, the Jews, and *The Merchant of Venice*', 5.

in the man'.[67] Trachtenberg states that the moneylender that demands a pound of flesh first appears as a Jew in *Il Pecorone* but 'thereafter he remained a Jew in the succeeding accounts – and thus Shakespeare found and immortalised him'.[68]

Lo Savio's Shylock

Lo Savio's *Il mercante di Venezia* communicates the conflict between Italianness and Other, between Christianity and Judaism, between good and evil, between cruelty and compassion, between naturalness and unnaturalness, between acceptance and rejection, all in the space of less than ten onscreen minutes. It is true, as Margaret Farrand Thorp points out, that 'there is no reason why a Shakespearian film should not reproduce a Shakespearian plot in its entirety'[69] but Lo Savio could not do so because he was operating in an industry where films were predominately ten-minute one-reelers, or twenty-minute two-reelers. Thorp is rather dismissive of silent Shakespearean films, calling them disrespectful and lacking in 'serious piety' because of their cutting and slashing of both the plots and the poetic language.[70] This type of criticism concentrates on what these films lack rather than on what they contain. Lo Savio's craft of storytelling is clear from what he chooses to put in the film and what he must, due to the practical constraints of filmmaking, leave out. Every second of a one-reeler must count if it is to tell a story that is both coherent and engaging. Lo Savio's film succeeds on both counts because it focuses on the elements that provide the play with its dramatic narrative force: the flesh-bond story and the court scene. This less-than-ten-minute film is more a distillation than an adaptation of Shakespeare's original play, successfully capturing the essence of Shylock the Jew. Shylock is rarely offscreen and, arguably, the film's masterfulness is that it manages to say everything that Shakespeare wanted to say about this Jewish Venetian merchant in such a condensed dramatic timeline (otherwise known as foreshortening) and, perhaps even more remarkably, the film achieves this without being able to use Shakespeare's actual words. The avaricious usury, the unchristian behaviour, the innate wickedness, the obduracy are all character traits that are manifested in Lo Savio's Shylock.

In the film, Shylock is played by Ermete Novelli who was an 'eminent star of the Italian classical stage'.[71] Novelli was the kind of prestigious name that Film d'Arte Italiana wanted in order to demonstrate the company's cultural pedigree because he came from the respectable world

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[67] Smith, 'Shakespeare's Shylock', 195.
[68] Trachtenberg, *Devil and the Jews*, 106.
[69] Margaret Farrand Thorp, 'Shakespeare and the Movies', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 9:3 (Summer, 1958), 358.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Buchanan, *Silent Shakespeare*.

of the theatre. His performance in the film testifies to his ability to hold the stage as he powerfully commands the screen. He is, as Buchanan describes, 'marvellously expressive' but, at times, his 'grand pantomimic gestures' are too exaggerated with no need in cinema to have to communicate to those audience members sitting in the back rows of the theatre's auditorium.[72]

Figure 2

This exaggerated theatricality in Novelli's performance, seems to fix Shylock's Jewishness, creating a negative, almost essentialist, representation that tends to nullify any nuances and subtleties in the character's Jewish identity. There is only one way for Shylock to be Jewish in Lo Savio's film and that is as a misanthropic usurer and every gesture or facial expression caricatures him as such.

The spectator learns much about Shylock during the scene in which he first appears. In the play, the first words that Shylock speaks are 'three thousand ducats'. Gross sums up the significance of these telling three words:

> The phrase can be spoken drily or slyly or thoughtfully; it can be savoured or rasped out.
> But however it is delivered, it identifies Shylock from the outset with the spirit of
> calculation – and money.[73]

This naked desire for money and this spirit of calculation is signalled to the audience as Shylock

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[72] Ibid.
[73] John Gross, *Shylock,* 35.

raises his hand and shows three fingers: one finger for each one of the thousand ducats. An intertitle has already indicated Antonio and Bassanio's intentions and the audience knows that the nature of their visit is solicitous rather than social. Now, in this scene (see fig. 2), the audience sees Shylock's reaction to their request for credit. His smile is simultaneously sycophantic, sly, obsequious, and calculating. Right from the outset, Shylock is defined by the exploitative nature of his opprobrious profession. It is a scene that establishes Shylock's power over money, symbolised by a large set of keys that are carefully secured to his waist. These keys may be attached to his belt for safekeeping, but they are also placed in a prominent position and visible to others, which insinuate that Shylock wants those around him to know that he is wealthy and to know that he is powerful.

Figure 3

However, this scene provides valuable visual signs that point to where the real power over the Jewish purse lies. Behind the characters we see windows criss-crossed with strong iron bars, which are a reminder of the fact that Shylock the Jew is forced by the Venetian authorities to live in the *ghetto*.[74] Prominently placed in the *mise-en-scène* is the symbol of the city's power: the lion.

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[74] Robert Bonfil describes the Venetian ghetto in this way: 'Venice offers perhaps the most articulate example from premodern times of a Jewish cultural space that was clearly separate from a non-Jewish one. Venice indeed retains the 'copyright' for the semantically innovative term *ghetto*, as defining the locus of settlement of the Jews in the city almost from the beginning'. Robert Bonfil, 'A Cultural Profile (of the Jews in early modern Venice)', *Cultural*

This ghetto and the Jews living within its walls belong to Venice. Shylock may deal in the commodity of money but he too is commodified and, as a valuable asset, is locked away for safe keeping behind the closed gates and high walls of Venice's ghetto.[75] Venice holds the literal keys that lock Shylock away at sundown and Venice holds the symbolic keys of power. He may think that he is in control but Shylock's histrionic airs of authority are tragicomic reminders of his self-delusion. As the story unfolds, it soon becomes apparent that the 'real' power of the purse belongs to Venice.

The scene finishes with a daring shot that breaks the imaginary fourth wall between spectator and the diegetic space (see fig. 3). Shylock offers 'a surreptitious incensed look straight to camera', which is a form of 'conspiratorial intimacy with the audience'.[76] This look, however fleeting, tells the audience how Shylock really feels about his guests: publicly he is ingratiating but privately he is seething with anger at their patronising arrogance. A soliloquy would not work in silent cinema but this straight-to-camera shot demonstrates an innovative way of attempting to communicate the inner feelings and emotions of the characters as well as attempting to pull the viewer into the process of textual interpretation.

Shylock's Secret Self

The next scene, utilising a studio-based set, takes the audience into the interior world of Shylock's home and reveals more about Shylock's personality. Aspects of the *mise-en-scène* along with Rossi's portent-laden score all seem to conspire against Shylock, contributing to his demonization and 'exposing the dramatic contrast between his private and public selves'.[77] The dark side of his private self is foregrounded by the scene's iconography, which contains sharp killing weapons such as swords and spears (see fig. 4). As Antonio is signing the flesh bond, the eye is drawn to a knife positioned on the table in such a way that its menacing blade is clearly visible. Antonio smiles as he signs, suggesting that either he does not see the danger or is unperturbed by the horrific imagery conjured up by seeing the knife. Perhaps he feels his status will always come to his rescue in the event of any future financial disaster and this self-assuredness is reflected in his onscreen position,

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Change Among the Jews of Early Modern Italy, ed. Robert Bonfil (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010), 169.

[75] Benjamin Ravid has traced the history of this trading in money and holds the view that the Jewish presence in Venice was not significant until the last two decades of the fourteenth century 'when Jewish moneylenders were first authorized to settle' in the city. Benjamin Ravid, 'The Legal Status of the Jews in Venice to 1509', *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, vol. 54 (1987), 171.

[76] Buchanan, *Silent Shakespeare*, extra commentary.

[77] Ibid.

which is, hierarchically, higher than Shylock. The ruthless Jewish moneylender is placed in an abased position, as he is during the film's final court scene, a blocking within the set that reinforces the idea that this man is unscrupulous and unchristian in his behaviour.

Figure 4

Figure 5

The mercenary private self, which Shylock is at pains to hide from Antonio and Bassanio,

manifests itself as soon as they exit the scene. Shylock is now alone and he can be himself, his true self. Flushed with the excitement of successfully closing a business deal and, feeling secure in the knowledge that no one is watching him, he clenches his fist triumphantly. There is a grotesque look of delight on his face that conveys the perverted pleasure that Shylock derives from reading the bond, which stipulates his right to a pound of Antonio's flesh if the loaned money is not repaid (see fig. 5). This is avarice of an altogether more sinister kind. Novelli's amplified performance coupled with the threatening presence of sharp weapons in the *mise-en-scène* all strengthen the idea that Shylock would actually prefer it if Antonio and Bassanio did not pay back what was owed. Novelli, 'with his face like that of an enormous chimpanzee',[78] portrays Shylock's psychopathic behaviour in a way that is both comical and unnerving at the same time. Here is a man that is delighted at the prospect of what his revenge may entail.

Portraying Shylock in this caricatured way is nothing new. Novelli had already played Shylock on the Italian stage and, according to Jose Ortega y Gasset, his performance was 'grotesque', thinking that it trivialised the play's anti-Semitism, a phenomenon that he described, writing in 1910, 'as a disease that was still running its course in the real world'.[79] What Ortega perhaps did not appreciate was that Novelli was drawing on a stage history of grotesquely stereotyped Shylocks. Audience expectations demanded a certain Shylock that looked a certain way and moved on stage in a certain way. For example, German scientist Georg Christopher Lichtenberg went to see the play performed in 1775 on a visit to London where Shylock was played by the celebrated actor Charles Macklin. Lichtenberg recalled:

> Picture to yourself a rather stout man with a coarse sallow face, a nose by no means lacking in any one of the three dimensions, a long double chin; as for his mouth, Nature's knife seems to have slipped when she carved it and slit him open on one side all the way up to the ear. He wears a long black gown, long wide trousers, and a red three-cornered hat.[80]

Later, in the early nineteenth century, William Hazlitt summed up the kind of Shylock that audiences expected to see on stage:

> A decrepit old man, bent with age and ugly with mental deformity, grinning with deadly malice, with the venom of his heart congealed in the expression of his countenance, sullen, morose, gloomy, inflexible, brooding over one idea, that of his hatred, and fixed on one unalterable purpose, that of his revenge.[81]

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[78] John Gross, *Shylock,* 228. For a further discussion on the association of Jews and monkeys in the plastic arts, see the section 'Simian Symbolisms' in chapter four of this thesis, '*Cabiria*: Silently Shaping Italian Identity'.

[79] Ibid., 228, 229.

[80] Ibid., 97.

[81] Ibid., 107.

Novelli, in less than ten onscreen minutes, manages to express many of the negative characteristics listed above, which suggests that he may have been influenced by traditional stage conventions regarding the performing of Shylock. Elmer Edgar Stoll, an academic commentator who wrote about Shakespeare before the First World War, spoke about how the character of Shylock should make the audience both laugh in derision and shudder in fear at the same time because that is how the Elizabethan audience would have reacted and, in one of his essays, 'he felt compelled to acknowledge, if only in passing, that *The Merchant of Venice* touched on prejudices that were still current'.[82] In Novelli's Shylock, the comic grotesque of the Elizabethan stage is seen on the Italian screen. He is a complex and contradictory composite figure, eliciting conflicting responses such as laughter and revulsion, frivolity and hideousness. The effect defamiliarises Shylock, adding to the sense of his unnaturalness or even his freakishness. His behaviour is strange, which strengthens the idea that he is a stranger in Venice.

The Horror of Circumcision

Furthermore, the use of swords and knives in the set intensifies Shylock's difference. By means of these prominently placed props, a subtle connection is made with the Jewish practice of circumcision, which indelibly marks the Jewish male as different. Sander L. Gilman explains that '*the brit milah* [Hebrew: circumcision, lit. "covenant of the word"], the practice of infant male circumcision, became, for thinkers of the late nineteenth century, the major sign of Jewish difference'.[83] The deliberate inclusion of so many sharp blades in the *mise-en-scène* could be read as signs of a fear of a Jewish religious practice, a fear that was still in circulation during the time the film was made. Gilman quotes the British explorer Richard Francis Burton (1821-90) who says that 'Christendom practically holds circumcision in horror'.[84] Indeed, there is a sense of uneasiness about Shylock's home, a sense of foreboding and, perhaps, even a sense of horror. To be delighted at the thought of carving out a pound of human flesh with a knife can easily be described as horrific.

Gilman talks about how, during the nineteenth century, Jewish males were considered to be uncanny, 'in that they superficially appear to be males but are not because of the altered form of the genitalia'.[85] Lo Savio's film draws attention to Shylock's uncanny difference. It is as if his hidden

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[82] Ibid., 162.
[83] Sander L. Gilman, *Freud, Race, and Gender* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 51.
[84] Ibid., 49.
[85] Ibid., 49.

indelible sign of difference – his circumcision – must be revealed by means of symbolic allusions to it. What cannot be shown in the film, Shylock's naked circumcised male body, must be depicted in a figurative way. By subtly linking Shylock's vile business practices to the 'vile' Jewish practice of circumcision, his real Jewish secret self is revealed. In writing about the fetishistic tradition within Christendom of claiming to possess the treasure of Christ's holy foreskin in relic form, Marc Shell talks about this specific conflation of Jewish business malpractice with the Jewish religious and/or cultural practice of male child circumcision:

> The view that coin clipping and penis snipping amount to the same thing (at least for Jews) is the basis for the anti-Semitic mockery in 'The Circumcision', which appeared in an Austrian periodical just before the First World War [see fig. 6]. This cartoon's assertion, that Jews practice circumcision because it is lucrative in much the same way that people snip ducats because it is profitable, suggests more about Christians than about Semites. For 'The Circumcision' projects onto the Jewish practice the characteristic foreskin adoration that modern Christians repress, or fear to recognise, in Christianity itself.[86]

As Shell demonstrates, Christian Europe's fear of Jewish circumcision was expressed through negative images of cruel mockery.

Western Europe has ascribed many meanings to the act of circumcision. Gilman outlines them in this way:

> Circumcision has been read as a sign of everything from sexual hygiene, to cosmetic appearance, to tribal identity or a mark of adulthood, to diminishment or enhancement of sexual desire, to increased or decreased fertility, to patriarchal subjugation, to enhanced purity, to the improvement of sexual endurance, to a form of attenuated castration, to menstrual envy, to a substitute for human sacrifice.[87]

Despite these many differing viewpoints on the 'meaning' of circumcision, Gilman goes on to explain that four views emerged to form the dominant or 'traditional' understanding of Jewish circumcision: first, the Church's view, based on its understanding of the apostle Paul's writings, which saw it as a symbolic act seeing that Judaism had been 'superseded' by Christianity. This theological stance was adopted by the patristic fathers and continued through the Renaissance and through the period of the Reformation. Second, the view that circumcision was more politically motivated and that it was a sign of group identity. This view was particularly popular during the

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[86] Marc Shell, 'The Holy Foreskin; or, Money, Relics, and Judeo-Christianity', *Jews and Other Differences: The New Jewish Cultural Studies*, eds Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 351, 354.

[87] Gilman, *Freud*, 57.

late nineteenth century and, in general, was couched in anti-Semitic rhetoric. Third, the idea that circumcision is a primitive act with its roots in idol worship and is what remains of Jewish phallus worship. Fourth, the medical view that circumcision acted as a prophylaxis against disease. This rationale was espoused during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but its roots can be traced to the writings of Philo.[88]

Figure 6

When Jews became acculturated in countries across Europe, predominately during the nineteenth century, the view that circumcision was a sign of political, religious, cultural, and racial difference, which is the second 'traditional' view listed by Gilman, dominated the debate regarding Jewish identity, a debate that continued to rage well into the twentieth century. In the middle part of the nineteenth century, German Jews were asking questions about whether or not circumcision was 'a prerequisite of their Jewish identity' and non-Jews were debating the abolition of infant male

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[88] Ibid., 59.

circumcision, basing their protests on a wide variety of medical, hygienic, and theological issues.[89] In Italy, possible meaning attributed to circumcision may have been influenced by the writings of the Italian physician Paolo Mantegazza (1831-1901). At the turn of the century, he was considered to be an ethnological authority on the subject of human sexuality and one of the most widely read 'experts' in the field.[90]

His views on Jewish circumcision were hostile, viewing the act as barbaric and a savage mutilation of the male's genitals that was completely unnatural if not perverse. He denied being an anti-Semite, saying that he held 'the Israelites' in high regard but he could not condone an act that he saw as shameful. 'Cease mutilating yourselves', he urges, 'cease imprinting upon your flesh an odious brand to distinguish you from other men; until you do this, you cannot pretend to be our equal'.[91] Moreover, Mantegazza calls circumcision 'a sanguinary protest against universal brotherhood' and sees it as a mark of racial difference that impedes the Jews from belonging to the human family of peoples or, as Gilman puts it, 'Mantegazza's rhetoric sets the Jew apart and makes out of his body a sign that he is a pariah'.[92] His rhetoric also conflates circumcision with castration, stating that these genital mutilations have profoundly modified the Jewish character with 'the outstanding traits among them being selfishness, craftiness, hypocrisy, and a thirst for gold'.[93]

The scene in Shylock's home with its evocation of barbaric unchristian circumcision and its fusion of that idea with Jewish usury and the flesh bond narrative opens up the possibility to read Shylock's murderous intentions as bound up with his altered bodily state. The inference here is that he is what he is *because* of his circumcision. His circumcision is the mark of his unnaturalness. His indelibly altered physical state is the mark of his liminality and of his undesirable alterity. What must not be forgotten is that Shylock's house, however ostentatious it appears in Lo Savio's film, is inside the ghetto, the place in Venice where the undesirable Jew-as-other was locked away.

Daniel Itzkovitz believes that Jews occupy 'a position of fundamental instability' in debates regarding identity, race, nationhood, belonging, culture, along with many other socio-political issues and 'this instability, which hid inside the seeming stability of the Jew's proximate whiteness, fed fantasies of dangerous secrets behind the eyes of the suspect Jew'.[94] Through the stigmatisation of ghetto identification, Shylock cannot escape from his state-sponsored categorisation as Jew. He is not the 'suspect Jew' but, as the film's intertitles constantly state, *the* Jew, 'substantially a

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[89] Ibid., 59, 60.
[90] Ibid., 57.
[91] Ibid., 57.
[92] Ibid., 58,
[93] Quoted in Jay Geller, *The Other Jewish Question: Identifying the Jew and Making Sense of Modernity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 230.
[94] Daniel Itzkovitz, 'Secret Temples', *Jews and Other Differences*, 185.

foreigner'.[95] Within the prison walls of the ghetto, Shylock is denied the possibility of denying the circumcised body that betrays him as a Jewish male. If, as Jean-Paul Sartre asserts, certain Jews resort to this self-denial as a form of self-protection in the face of anti-Semitic hatred, Shylock the ghettoised, stigmatised, and identified Jew is prevented from resorting to such strategies of self-preservation.[96]

In Lo Savio's film, Shylock's inherent Jewish instability is laid bare. He is denuded by his private display of bloodthirsty glee and his soliloquy-replacing angry looks to the camera. The audience sees the 'real' Shylock in a way that is not permitted to the other characters in the film's diegesis. What is established in this sequence is that Shylock not only looks differently to the other Venetian merchants but that he *is* different – different on the inside. This idea was certainly in keeping with *fin de siècle* pseudo-scientific and pseudo-medical thinking, which attempted to locate Jewish difference within the special nature of the Jewish body. Gilman says that the governing principle of the day was that 'the male Jew's psyche was as clearly distinct from that of the Aryan as was his body'.[97] Geller says that the European processes of identification during this period 'pinned the identity of the other to the tell-tale truth of the body' and that these 'specific corporeal ascriptions' rendered the Other 'visible for supervision and discipline'.[98] In fact:

> Within Europe, the circumcision of the (male) Jew could alone function as an indubitable
> and indelible diacritical; this Jewish difference was singular in the European cultural
> imaginary of the time.[99]

This cinematic circumcised Shylock could be read as an example of what Geller refers to as the 'fetishized Jew', fixated upon by a modern European imagination that was obsessed about a body part and the ritual practices inflicted on that body part.[100] Circumcision suggested 'something perverse in their essential being' and was 'an index of their true nature'.[101] This is why identification was important because it protected the homogeneity of the modern nation-state as it engaged in its colonialist project and came into contact with different cultures and peoples, an interaction that 'might undermine the narcissistic phantasy of European wholeness.[102]

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[95] Ibid.*,* 185.
[96] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, translated by George J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), 119.
[97] Gilman, *Freud*, 92.
[98] Geller, *The Other Jewish Question*, 7.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid., 13.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.

Shylock's Crab-like Shuffling and Bad Citizenship

Before moving on to discuss the court scene, it is important to understand another aspect that marks Shylock's difference in the film: his onscreen movement. Shylock's gait is markedly dissimilar to the way the other characters walk in the film. He seems to shuffle abnormally across the screen and in the DVD's added commentary, Buchanan makes mention of his 'crab-like' movement. In his book, *The Jew's Body*, Gilman dedicates an entire chapter to the phenomenon known as 'The Jewish Foot' and explains how the construction of the Jewish body/nose/voice/foot had its roots in the strategic process by which the Christian Church deliberately differentiated itself from the Judaic Synagogue. In terms of this film, Shylock operates as a signifier of religious difference and, as has been pointed out already, he embodies many age-old anti-Judaic prejudices but he also works as a signifier of biological difference.

This form of identification based on race was becoming more and more prevalent during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and, as the structure of the European nation state's modern body politic began to establish itself, the differentiation between Christian and Jew was giving way to a more racially-based differentiation between German/French/Italian and Jew.[103] Of course, religious differentiation was still important and was often deployed to augment racial processes of Othering (for a fuller discussion on the combined effect of secular and religious discourses on the representation of the Jew in Italy, see chapter three on the film *Quo Vadis?*).

As racial science grew in influence to assume hegemonic status within European culture, much of the anti-Semitic (a formulation which itself grew out of this thinking) rhetoric, which was intent on denying Jews their rights as citizens of Europe's nation-states, was permeated with pseudo-scientific empirical evidence of the alleged physical and psychological differences between Jews and non-Jewish citizens of Europe.

It is conceivable that these turn-of-the-century ideas concerning the meaning of the Jewish foot stemmed from negative anti-Jewish stereotypes that were much older in origin. Gilman says:

> The idea that the Jew's foot is unique has analogies with the hidden sign of difference attributed to the cloven-footed devil of the middle ages. That the shape of the foot, hidden within the shoe (a sign of the primitive and corrupt masked by the cloak of civilisation and higher culture) could reveal the difference of the devil, was assumed in early modern European culture.[104]

In time, the association between the Jewish foot and the Devil was replaced by a more secularised

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103 Sander L. Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), 38.
104 Ibid., 39.

and 'scientific' association between the Jewish foot and infirmity. If, during the eighteenth century onwards, notions of citizenship were bound up with notions of military service, a degenerate, diseased, infirm foot would preclude an individual from becoming a *foot*-soldier thus constructing him as a 'bad' citizen.[105] The political significance of this anti-Semitic idea meant that Jews were deemed unfit to serve in the military. In Austria during the early part of the nineteenth century, for example, Jewish men who were drafted into the army were later discharged because of their inherently 'weak feet'. Later, in 1867, the right of a Jewish man to enter the armed forces was written into Austria's statute books but, due to sustained anti-Semitic rhetoric denouncing his inherent physical weaknesses and his inability to fight as a soldier, it would have been very difficult for a Jew to gain promotion as an officer.[106]

In post-Risorgimento Italy, the process of emancipation meant that Italian Jews could become soldiers in the Italian army.[107] However, the Austrian example above shows that legislation, despite its significance, could not protect individual Jews from the negative effects of institutional anti-Semitism. Richard Bosworth states that the presence of Jews in the Officer Corps of the Italian Army along with a past record of humiliating defeats on the battlefield 'made it hard for Italian officers to hold up their heads at international gatherings'.[108] To the Italian officers who hoped that 'their Army could one day be like that of Germany', Jewish officers were a source of embarrassment on a par with ignominious military defeat.[109]

Despite the best efforts of the secular governing classes to legislate against anti-Semitic treatment within Italy, Michele Sarfatti reveals how the Catholic Church, during the late nineteenth century, adopted a 'new political anti-Judaic stance' around which 'other currents and trends hostile to Jews' coalesced.[110] Gene Bernardini discusses how this Catholic anti-Semitism was 'given added impetus by the forces of late-nineteenth-century ultranationalism'.[111] Influenced by the violent rhetoric of Futurism and D'Annnuzianism, ultranationalism viewed Jews as cowardly, unwilling and/or incapable of fighting to protect the Italian fatherland.[112] A coward who walks with a limp and whose money-grubbing greed quashes any sense of loyal patriotism, cannot and will not fight

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[105] Ibid., 39.
[106] Ibid., 42.
[107] Roth, *Jews in Italy*, 467.
[108] Richard Bosworth, *Italy and the Approach of the First World War* (London: The Macmillan Press Limited, 1983), 43. What was more embarrassing, according to Bosworth, was that one of those Jewish officers, Ottolenghi, became the Minister of War from 1902 to 1903.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Michele Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini's Italy: From Equality to Persecution* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 9.
[111] Gene Bernardini, 'The Origins and Development of Racial Anti-Semitism in Fascist Italy', *The Journal of Modern History* 49:3 (1977), 432.
[112] Ibid., 436.

and will not, if necessary, die to protect the nation-state. In this regard, the Jewish question revolved around citizenship. Even if the law stated that Jews were equal citizens with equal rights; the anti-Semitic discourses of the period worked against such progressive emancipatory political developments. This is how Bernardini describes the situation in Italy towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century:

> Because Jews were scattered throughout the world and supposedly gave primary allegiance to their religion which transcended individual nation-states, they could never be considered loyal citizens of a single state. They remained disparate individuals, living among other peoples but without roots of their own.[113]

Shylock, with his abnormal and Jewish gait, is the very embodiment of this 'perpetual outsider' and as such is a 'bad' citizen.

Shylock Goes Red in Court

Shylock's difference is further emphasised during the court scene, which brings the film to its conclusion. Antonio's ships have been wrecked and, as the film's intertitle states, he is ruined and unable to pay back the loaned three thousand ducats. He is arrested and taken before the court of Justice. When Portia learns about his arrest, she disguises herself as a lawyer and is determined to save Antonio by releasing him from his bond. The court scene underscores Shylock's thirst for Christian blood as well as his strangeness. Upon entering the court he sits down at the feet of the Doge, takes off his shoe and uses it to sharpen his knife, an act that conveys his blood-lust in dramatic fashion. Sitting down on the floor not only orientalises Shylock but connects him with the dirty ground, filth, which connotes him as 'dirty', 'uncouth' and 'uncivilised'. As he does this, the other characters look on in a mixture of disbelief and disgust.

Portia ensures that Shylock loses the case by reminding the court that Shylock the Jew could not be permitted by Venetian law to shed the blood of a Christian. He is, as the film's intertitle clearly iterates, an 'alien' (see fig. 7). Shylock is not a Venetian citizen. He is a complete outsider, a notion that is buttressed by Shylock's appearance, in particular his clothing, which sets him apart from the other Venetian merchants. Cecil Roth describes how Jews living in the Venetian ghetto, which was established in 1515, had to wear yellow or red badges of stigmatisation and/or red pieces of clothing so that they could easily be distinguished.[114] The tradition of visually stigmatising Jews

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[113] Ibid.

[114] Roth, *Jews of Italy*, 295, 360, 361. It tended to be a yellow hat in the Papal States and red in Venice and Florence.

can be traced back to the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, which was assembled by the authority of Pope Innocent III and sought to 'have Jews placed in position of perpetual serfdom'.[115] During this council, a regulation was introduced 'compelling Jews to wear a distinguishing badge on their garments'.[116] Riccardo Calimani writes that the Lateran Council's 'segno di riconoscimento [sign of recognition]' that Jews of twelve years old and over had to wear on their person was not simply introduced to help non-Jews recognise their Jewish neighbours with greater ease but it served to help Christians avoid 'il rischio di rapporti sessuali per errore e, soprattutto, possibili matrimoni [the risk of sexual relations by mistake and, above all, possible marriages]' with Jews living in their communities.[117]
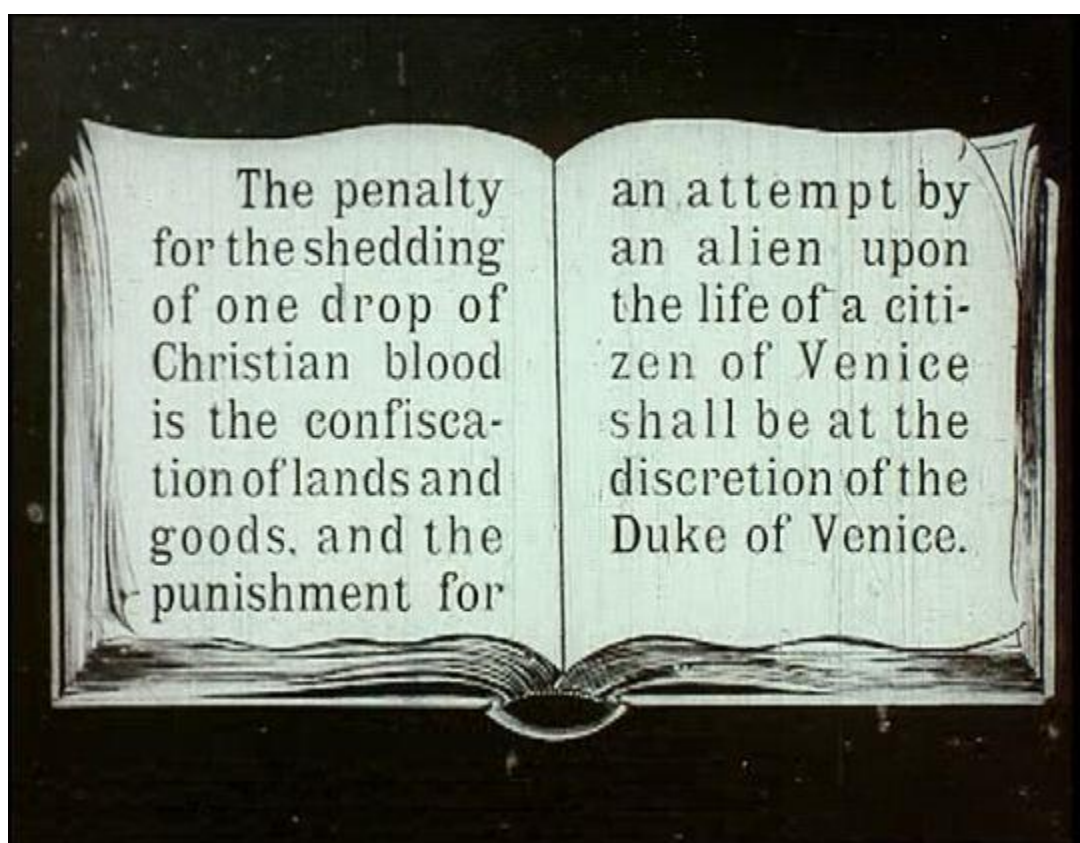

Figure 7

The Holy Roman Emperor and King of Sicily and Apulia, Frederick II (1194-1250), was keen to enforce these treaties and demanded that all Jews living under his authority wear a 'badge

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In the region of Piedmont it was a piece of yellow cloth sewn onto the right shoulder.

[115] *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 1119-1120.

[116] Ibid., 1119-1120.

[117] Riccardo Calimani, *Storia degli ebrei italiani: Dalle origini al XV secolo, volume primo* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore S.p.A., 2013), 174. Calimani says that the Church justified this imposition on Jews living in all Christian lands by stating that the Mosaic Law commanded the Israelites to wear specific types of ornamentation on their garments to distinguish themselves from other nations.

of bluish color in the shape of the Greek letter T (tau)' as well as having to 'grow beards in order to be even more easily distinguishable from non-Jews'.[118] According to Roth, this badge, which differed in colour depending on the region, 'placed the Jew on the same level as a leper, and his womenfolk on that of prostitutes'.[119] Shylock is wearing a red cloak and a red-topped turban-like headdress, which orientalises him yet further. According to John Block Friedman, the headdress, including the exotic turban, has long been used by dominant groups to describe weaker groups in what he describes as 'systems of identity formation'.[120] Shylock's turban is thus a symbol of his foreignness, his otherness.

Colour as a generator of potential meanings within the film's text must not be ignored. This silent film was not seen by contemporary audiences in black and white. *Il mercante di Venezia* is an example of a film that has been colour stencilled, using a palette of four colours. The dyes used were very mutable, which explains why over time the colours become more muted. When Lo Savio's film was first shown, the colours were more vivid and the colour red was easily distinguishable from the colour purple. The film's colours have sadly faded with time and this distinction between red and purple is not always apparent to the modern audience.[121] The red of Shylock's clothing and headdress with all its sanguinary connotations functions as a signifier of his non-Christian Jewishness and separates him from the other characters, many of whom are dressed in purple. The colour purple has traditionally been utilised as a signifier of regal power and Church authority.[122] Shylock's position in the frame, seated on the floor, places him under the authority of the Doge and his 'Christian' rule of law (see fig. 8). This is a dramatic clash of colours.

To ignore the colour symbolism present in this scene and the resultant clash between the figurative meanings generated by that symbolism, is, as Joshua Yumibe describes, choosing to ignore the long tradition of the symbolic use of colour in the plastic arts. This is the main thrust of his argument:

> It is nonetheless essential to recognise that many colour productions both in film and other media historically have been created under the influence of symbolic paradigms of universal meaning, and to dismiss such approaches entirely ignores an important aspect of the history

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[118] Roth, *Jews of Italy.*, 98.

[119] Ibid., 139.

[120] John Block Friedman, 'The Art of the Exotic: Robinet Testard's Turbans and Turban-like Coiffure', *Medieval Clothing and Textiles*, ed. Robin Netherton and Gale R. Owen-Crocker (New York: Boydell Press, 2005), 174.

[121] Buchanan, *Silent Shakespeare*, extra commentary.

[122] T. E. Bridgett, 'Symbolic Colours', *The Irish Monthly* 11:124 (1883), 539. In Canterbury during the thirteenth century, the tradition on Good Friday was for the celebrants to wear red but the ministers to wear purple. On Palm Sunday, 'when all wore red, there was one black cope, to call to mind the part of Caiphas[sic]'. In Catholic celebrations, red is associated with the blood of Christ and the blood of Christian martyrs. The use and therefore the symbolism of specific colours changed according to the religious and dramatic context.

of colour.[123]

Recognising the possibility that colours can operate as signifiers of culture, class, religion and identity opens up the film's *mise-en-scène* to an array of new interpretations. The association of Shylock with the colour red evokes the idea of Jew-as-Christ-killer, the Jewish rejection of Christ's redeeming sacrificial blood, the blood libel, the sanguinary ritual of male circumcision, the Jew-as-sexual-predator, the Jew-as-Christian-devourer, the Jew-as-Devil, the Jew-as-bloodsucking-monster, Jew-as-blood-libel-perpetrator; and so on. In the history of colour, red often symbolises danger and Jews, even in periods of emancipation, have been equated with either obvious or hidden danger. A single colour in a specific context can imbue negative stereotypes with great communicative power. In this court scene, all that is negative about Shylock the Jew is intensified by the red that stigmatises him as an alien resident and a non-citizen of Venice.

Figure 8

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[123] Joshua Yumibe, 'Harmonious Senstations of Sound by means of Colour: Vernacular Colour Abstractions in Silent Cinema', *Film History* 21:2 (2009), 174.

Shylock as Shochet: A Masquerade Unmasked

The presence of the knife in the scene with its upwardly curved blade of Arabic or middle-eastern design also serves to orientalise Shylock (see fig. 8). The type of knife used in the film may also be an articulation of contemporary fears concerning specific Jewish religious practices. Kenneth Collins has written about how the practice of *shechita*, 'the Jewish method of killing poultry and cattle for food' was receiving negative attention in many European countries at the turn of the century.[124] This antagonism, according to Collins, was an indication of xenophobic attitudes towards Jews that was multi-layered:

> Anti-Jewish myths were also invoked in the campaigns against *shechita* even linking it with the mediaeval ritual murder myth and the alleged Jewish bloodthirstiness. Jewish butchers and *shochtim* [Hebrew: pl. 'butchers'] were even arrested on murder charges on the grounds that they knew how to kill cattle.[125]

Collins's research shows how these debates were part of a wider discussion of the civility of European societies where the humane Christian method of slaughtering animals for food was contrasted with the alien ritualistic and religious methods of the Jews. These *shochtim*, these 'ritual murderers', symbolised the inhumane, the uncivilised nature of Judaism.[126] Collins's understanding of these food/ritual/religious/Christian/Jewish discourses can help make sense of certain aspects of Lo Savio's *mise-en-scène* and the following points are worth mentioning in full:

> Contemporary fantasies about Jews and ritual murder were linked to the meanings associated with the reality of ritual slaughter at the turn of the century. The late nineteenth century was not just a period of awakening interest in *shechita* but a time when there was a resurgence of the medieval blood libel accusation that Jews required Christian blood for *matzot* for Pesach. The language used for both ritual murder and ritual slaughter has uncomfortable associations. A Swiss cartoon from 1893 in the periodical *Der Nebelspalter* shows a Yiddish accented David slaughtering Goliath with a knife which is not the *chalef* [an extremely sharp blade] of the *shochet* but the curved and pointed dagger used in ritual murder depictions of the Middle Ages.[127]

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[124] Kenneth Collins, 'A Community on Trial: The Aberdeen Shechita Case, 1893', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 30:2 (2010), 77. Collins explains how this Jewish method of slaughtering animals was banned in Switzerland in 1893 and how debates surrounding Jewish kosher butchering methods intensified in Europe during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. These anti-*shechita* campaigns were popular leading up to the First World War.

[125] Ibid., 81. A *shochet* is a trained kosher butcher appointed to carry out the practice of *shechita* according to *halacha* (Jewish religious law).

[126] Ibid., 83.

[127] Ibid., 83, 84.

Shylock's upwardly curved and pointed knife connects him with the mythological *Shochtim* or ritual murderers of the anti-Jewish medieval imagination. Shylock's knife could also be read as a metaphor of his cruelty and his bloodthirstiness. The meat in this unholy Jewish Venetian form of *shechita* is Bassanio's Christian flesh, conflating his exploitative usury with his vile religious ritualistic abominations. There is nothing humane or civilised about Shylock the *shochet* and he easily works as a symbol of the worst kind of evil that lurks inside a community, constantly threatening its wellbeing if not its very existence.

However, other significance can be ascribed to this knife. A knife is used to circumcise and a knife can be used to kill, allowing it to be read as symbolising two distinct anti-Semitic stereotypes, which are, according to Matthew Biberman, ultimately related: the Jew-Devil and the Jew-Sissy. The Jew-Devil has often been used to represent the monstrously insatiable sexual appetite of the Jewish male whereas the Jew-Sissy pictures the effeminate, domesticated, delicate, and weak Jewish male.[128] Biberman reads Shylock as 'impersonating "the castrated Jew-Sissy" in his reliance upon the Law, in his being "content to play within the rules"'.[129] The crucial word here is 'impersonating'. The knife may signify Shylock's 'castration' or his impotence as a weak, womanly, circumcised Jew, fighting for justice in a Christian court of law or it may signify latent evil intent, a calculating intent that is definitely present in Novelli's Shylock as he calmly sharpens his knife. What is not communicated by Shylock's story is that this type of intentional maximising of injury was forbidden by Jewish law. The Torah expressly forbids the bearing of grudges (Lev. 19:17-18) and rabbinic tradition 'has strict covenants to minimize injury and reduce embarrassment to the offender, strictly forbidding "a twist to the knife so as to cause pain"'.[130] Shylock the bad Jew wants to twist the knife.

What makes the Jew-Devil especially dangerous is his ability to hide. Biberman – who sees works such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) as articulating nineteenth-century anxieties in England as a result of seeing so many Eastern European Jews moving to live and work in the country – sees Shylock as an example of the Jew-Devil masquerading as Jew-Sissy.[131] Sarah Libby Robinson also sees the vampire as a metaphor for Jews as evil bloodsuckers within the community, arguing that 'Count Dracula is a faithful embodiment of the caricature of the Jews as greedy and parasitic,

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[128] Thomas Moisan, a review of Matthew Biberman's Masculinity, *Anti-Semitism and Early Modern English Literature: From the Satanic to the Effeminate Jew* in *Renaissance Quarterly* 58:4 (Winter, 2005), 1433.

[129] Ibid., 1434.

[130] Leslie Kane, *Weasels and Wisemen: Ethics and Ethnicity in the Work of David Mamet* (New York: Palgrave, 1999), 217.

[131] Ibid., 1434.

placing money above all else'.[132] Despite the fact that Dracula has wicked supernatural powers he is, ostensibly, a 'commercial character' intent on accumulating great wealth and 'like the modern Jewish financier, Dracula does business and reaps profit from all over the world'.[133] Novelli's Shylock too is an embodiment of similar fears, which were present in Italian society at the time the film was made. Bernardini, in tracing the history of Fascist ideologies, speaks of how Italy's ultranationalists at the turn of the century raged against the economic internationalism of the Jews.[134]

Judith Halberstam is convinced that 'the nineteenth-century discourse of anti-Semitism and the myth of the vampire share a kind of Gothic economy in their ability to condense many monstrous traits into one body'.[135] Much of what Halberstam sees at work in the character of Dracula can also be seen in Shylock:

> He is monster and man, feminine and powerful, parasitical and wealthy; he is repulsive and fascinating, he exerts the consummate gaze but is scrutinized in all things, he lives forever but can be killed. Dracula is not simply a monster, but a technology of monstrosity.[136]

Shylock too is a technology of monstrosity, containing many of the above contradistinctions in one body. Unlike Dracula, Shylock's monstrosity is marked out as explicitly Jewish. Interestingly, Halberstam states that 'technologies of monstrosity are always also technologies of sex'.[137] It is worth noting that the shape of Shylock's blade is curved upwards (see fig. 8), suggesting arousal, which invokes the notion of the Jew as a hypersexual predator who is clearly deriving erotic pleasure from his imminent penetration of male flesh. Shylock's bad blood, his perversions, his parasitic vampirism, his degeneracy, all constellate around a figure that unites 'blood and gold in what is feared to be a conspiracy against nationhood'.[138] What is being penetrated here is the homogenous purity of the nation-state – Shylock the *Shochet*, if not identified, could ritually murder the Italian race. Shylock's knife could be seen as articulating contemporary concerns regarding exogamy, symbolising 'a phallus that literally and figuratively penetrates'.[139] It is through the use of this knife that Shylock can make up for the lack in him, transforming his emasculation – as symbolised by his circumcision – into potency as the knife is 'used in an attempt to restore phallic

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[132] Sarah Libby Robinson, 'Blood Will Tell: Anti-Semitism and Vampires in British Popular Culture, 1875-1914', *Golem: Journal of Religion and Monsters* 3:1 (2009), 21.

[133] Ibid., 21.

[134] Bernardini, 'The Origins and Development of Racial Anti-Semitism in Fascist Italy', 436.

[135] Judith Halberstam, 'Technologies of Monstrosity: Bram Stoker's *Dracula*', *Victorian Studies* 36:3 (Spring, 1993), 334.

[136] Ibid.

[137] Ibid.

[138] Ibid., 348.

[139] Linda Dorff quoted by Thomas P. Adler in 'More Uses of the Knife as Signifier', *The Art of Crime: The Plays and Films of Harold Pinter and David Mamet*, ed. Leslie Kane (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 191.

power and strength, exercised through both word and act'.[140] Paradoxically, that which makes him weak, his circumcision/castration, makes him strong as he is constantly compensating for his lack. This compensation manifests itself in the desire for violence. It is the presence of the knife, with its multiple significations, that make this reading possible. It invites the spectator to focus on Shylock's predatory nature. Shylock's revenge is pleasurable because it is allows him to act violently by means of the knife. This is why he is so dangerous; he is not a Jew-sissy at all. Lo Savio's cinematic text has transformed the figure of the Jew 'into one image, one body, one monster, a totality of horror' that is none other than Shylock *the* Jew.[141]

The Jew-as-unscrupulous-usurer, the Jew-as-Devil, the Jew-as-circumcised/castrated-weak-male, the Jew-as-bloodsucking-vampire, the Jew-as-Christ-killer all form part of a tropology that creates a perfect scapegoat. Trachtenberg says that 'so firmly persuaded was Christendom of their [the Jews] sanguinary habits that almost any mysterious homicide was laid at their door as a matter of course'.[142] Many of these negative tropes originate in the anti-Jewish folklore of medieval blood libel or ritual murder accusations; the earliest written account of such charges dates back to 1096.[143] The thirteenth century is replete with stories from across Europe about Jews killing Christians, abducting and killing Christian children and using their blood for magical and demonic rituals. Diane Owen Hughes refers to a fifteenth-century example from Italy, in which Fortunato Coppoli of Peruggia, a Franciscan friar, describes Jews as 'truly wild and thirsty dogs that have sucked and go on sucking our blood, who devour Christians as rust devours iron'.[144]

Brenda Gardenour believes that this mythical bloodsucking vampire Jew was constructed out of a combination of Aristotelian, medical, and theological discourses during the late twelfth century and early part of the thirteenth century, which created 'the paradigmatic Christian and male body, which was pure and perfect'.[145] An opposite to this idealisation was also created, an impure and imperfect female Other that was not Christian and placed into this unholy category was the male Jew, fabricated as 'cold and feminine, evil and calculating, sexually rapacious and starving for warm, moist blood'.[146] Thirteenth-century clerics utilised these Aristotelian ideas about dichotomies and categorical inversion as a 'powerful mechanism to define what the true Christian

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[140] Thomas P. Adler, ibid., 191.

[141] Halberstam, 'Technologies of Monstrosity: Bram Stoker's *Dracula*', 349. According to Halberstam, resonances between Dracula and Shylock should not be surprising given that Bram Stoker worked for Henry Irving as a stage manager and watched him perform Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* on 250 occasions.

[142] Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jews and the Devil*, 129.

[143] Ibid., 129.

[144] Diane Owen Hughes, 'Distinguishing Signs: Ear-rings, Jews and Franciscan Rhetoric in the Italian Renaissance', *Past and Present* 112 (1986), 28.

[145] Brenda Gardenour, 'The Biology of Blood-Lust: Medieval Medicine, Theology, and the Vampire Jew', *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 41:2 (2011), 51, 52.

[146] Ibid., 52.

body was – and was not'.[147] Gardenour posits that these theologically motivated discourses contributed greatly to an anti-Jewish folklore that would stand the test of time:

> It is here that we see the languages of medicine and natural philosophy in service of the theologically constructed Blood Libel, which claimed that Jews not only required Christian blood for healing charms, amulets, and religious rituals, but also consumed Christian blood mixed with Passover matzo or in the filling of the Purim Hamantaschen. Jews, it would seem, were biologically driven to consume blood – ironic, of course, because according to Levitical Law, the consumption of blood in any form is forbidden.[148]

Understanding this discursive background helps to understand the complexities of Shylock's nature. He is one other imagined Jewish male body, impure, imperfect, ungodly, and unchristian, in a long line of Jewish vampires that have menaced Christian societies for centuries.

Leading up to the turn of the century, the Catholic press in Italy continued this long tradition of scapegoating Jews with ritual murder accusations. In 1890, the *Osservatore Cattolico* contained an article accusing the Jews of Damascus of assassinating a Christian child for the purposes of their own blood rituals, describing Jews as 'vampiri succhiatori cosmopolitici del sangue materiale e del sangue della proprietà e industria sociale [vampires, cosmopolitan suckers of real blood and of the blood of property and industry in society]'.[149] In the following edition, the paper praised itself as a leading European voice, guarding the Italian people against 'le malefatte degli ebrei, assassini moralmente della società, e positivamente e ritualmente dei cristiani [the evil deeds of the Jews, assassinating society morally, and Christians in a positively ritual way]', which ought not be surprising, says the article, given that their forefathers perpetrated the same evil deed on Jesus Christ.[150]

The following year, 1891, the Jews of Corfu were accused of ritual killings and, as a result, were persecuted and subjected to violent attacks by the local population. The newspaper *L'Osservatore Cattolico* covers the story with the most extraordinary heading: 'Pietà…per gli ebrei! [Mercy…for the Jews!]' (see fig. 9).[151] The headline is an attempt to distance the newspaper from the acts of violence carried out against the island's Jewish community but the article, whilst not condoning physical attacks against Jews, says that it understands the motivations behind such anti-Jewish hatreds. Listed, as a matter of historical fact, are other infamous episodes where Jews across

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[147] Ibid., 55.

[148] Ibid., 60.

[149] 'Il rito di sangue ebreo. Assassinio d'un fanciullo Cristiano a Damasco', *L'Osservatore Cattolico*, 14-15 May (1890), 2.

[150] 'Ancora il rito di sangue ebraico', *L'Osservatore Cattolico*, 17-18 May (1890), 2.

[151] 'Pietà…per gli ebrei', *L'Osservatore Cattolico*, 14-15 May (1891), 1.

Europe have engaged in ritual murder during the celebration of the Passover, 'per cui il Talmud prescrive il sangue critiano [for which the Talmud prescribes Christian blood]'.[152] Is it any wonder that Jews are treated in such ways when they always manage to 'corrompere la giustizia, a comprare i governi [corrupt justice, and buy governments]'?[153]

The idea is that Jews subjected to humiliation and/or violence can only blame themselves for their suffering because of their evil deeds. *L'Osservatore Cattolico* is intent on monitoring very closely the Jewish community so as to limit their influence on Italian society. Cesare Lombroso, the famous Italian criminal anthropologist, said that 'il vero Shylock, il vero antico Ebreo, deplora i suoi vecchi Ghetto in cui accumulava immense ricchezze [the true Shylock, the true ancient Hebrew, deplores his old ghettos in which he has accumulated immense riches]'.[154] Lombroso claims that the true nature of Shylock the *fictitious* Jew is the true nature of all living Jews who adhere to their ancient laws and traditions. This true Shylock deplores the ghetto because it stigmatises him, limits his movements and preserves his status as outsider. His wealth does not and cannot buy him citizenship. Lombroso's tone is one of longing for a period in Italy's not too distant past when this true Shylock was still locked away in the ghetto where he could be monitored, controlled, and exploited. (For more on Lombroso's views on the Jewish question, see chapter three '*Quo Vadis?* – Where Will You Go Italian Jew?') Emancipation, however, released this true Shylock and his knife into Italian society at large.

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[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Cesare Lombroso, 'Ancora sull'antisemitismo', *La Nuova Rassegna*, 10 September (1893), 324.

OFFERTE AL S. PADRE

SOCCORRETE LE POVERE MONACHE

NOTIZIE DEL VATICANO

Sacra Congregazione dei Riti.

Onorificenze pontificie.

Il Giubileo Episcopale di Leone XIII

E IL VESCOVO DI TORTONA

La santa visita Pastorale

LETTERA DI MONS. VESCOVO DI GUASTALLA

IL P. GIUSEPPE BRUNENGO, D. C. D. G.

GIUSTIZIA E DIRITTO

LETTERE BERLINESI

Berlino, 12 maggio 1891.

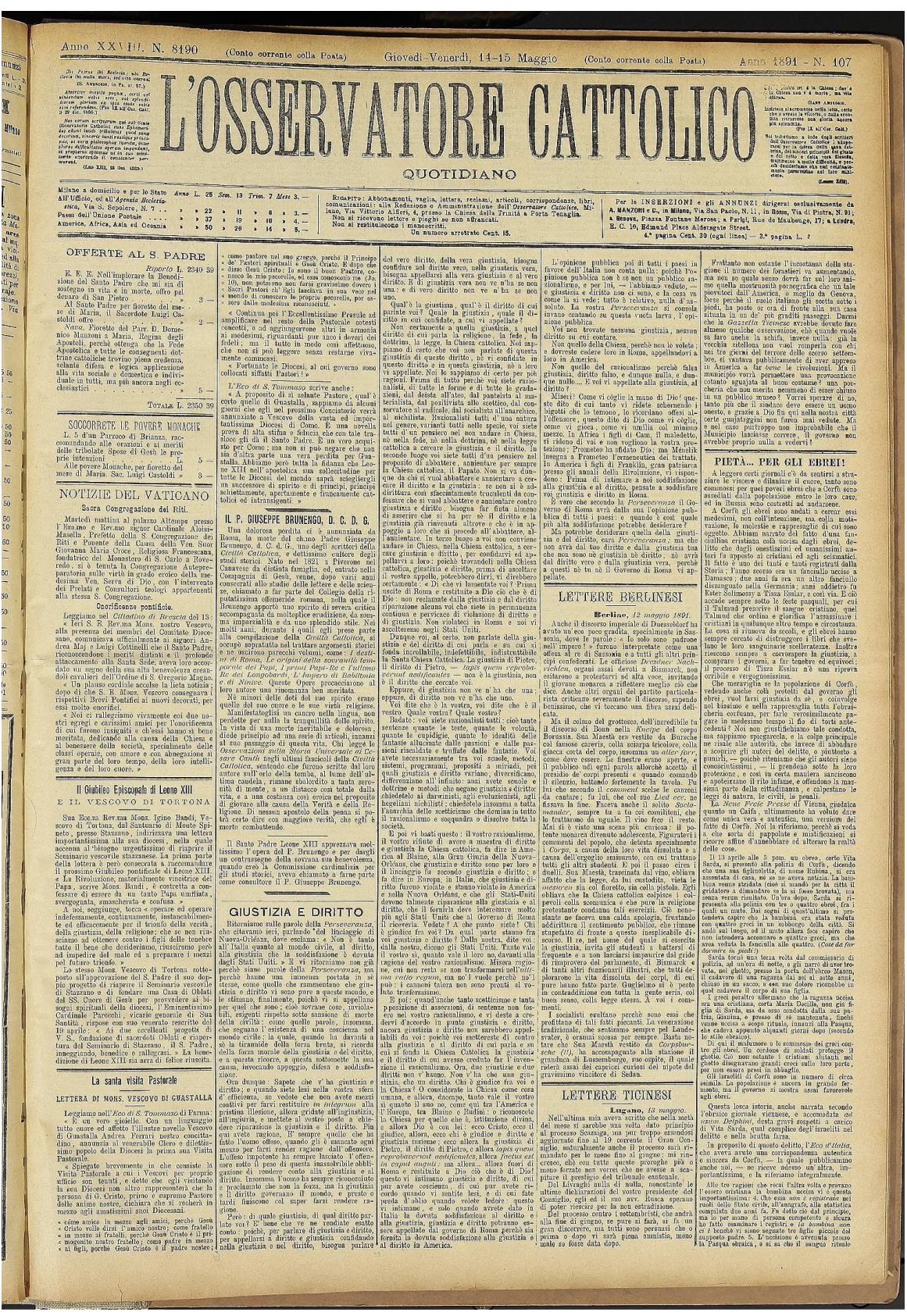### LETTERE TICINESI

Lugano, 13 maggio.

PIETÀ... PER GLI EBREI!

Conclusion

Il mercante di Venezia is a film that gives Shakespeare an Italian habitation and an Italian name. It belongs to a long tradition of Italian Shakespearean appropriations. As a filmic artefact, it is valuable because of its rarity. Of the many silent Shakespeare films made, it is one of very few that has survived. It also represents a concerted effort on the part of Italian filmmakers to establish film as a legitimate art form. At times, its scenes resemble the acts of a theatrical stage play with the camera positioned in the centre of the action with characters entering and exiting as they would on a stage but, at other times, the film shows off its new cinematic powers with the camera filming the action from a moving gondola. This, along with Shylock's straight-to-camera look, was innovative filmmaking. Film d'Arte's decision to shoot the film on location in Venice stole a march on its Italian and American competitors. The film speaks in a language unique to its day but it is a legitimate language nonetheless; a language form that the audience of the silent period would have understood. Audiences watching the film on its release would not have thought that the idea of Shakespeare on film was absurd. Then, that was how all stories were told on film: a combination of projected moving images, live music or sound effects, and words written on intertitle slides. When *Il mercante di Venezia* was first shown to Italian audiences, it would not have been shown in silence. The film was a colour film from the outset and its colours, all hand-stencilled, would have been fresh and vivid during its first exhibitions.

Recent and/or current negative attitudes towards silent cinema and silent Shakespeare films in particular should not detract from the positive reception given to these films during the time of their initial release. Standard critical response was also, on the whole, enthusiastic and positive with most reviews acknowledging the 'problems' of screening Shakespeare but, at the same time, praising the adaptations for their ability to convey new interpretations on Shakespeare's oeuvre along with the films' appeal to both the eye and the mind.[155] Early twentieth-century audiences, it would seem, were willing to engage with silent Shakespeare films and enjoy them for what they were able to contribute to their cultural experience rather than criticise the films for their lack of audible words.

The stereotype of Shylock the Jew is a media construct, which has its roots in anti-Jewish folklore that is far older than Shakespeare's play. In many ways, Novelli's Shylock conforms to the tradition of grotesquely performed onstage Shylocks but, in other ways, the film's representation of Shylock is unique because of what it can reveal about the attitudes towards Jews that were prevalent

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[155] Buchanan, *Shakespeare on Silent Film*, 9, 10.

in Italy at the time the film was made, especially attitudes concerning identity and nationhood. Shortly after this film was produced, the Kingdom of Italy was going to fight a war against the Ottoman Empire in order to gain the territory of Libya. This was Italy's 'scramble for Africa'. This 1910 portrayal of Shylock is an embodiment of the fears and concerns that were in circulation during this period. These were the anxieties of a relatively new nation-state – barely fifty years old – wanting to assert its authority by defining what it means to be one of its citizens. What *Il mercante di Venezia*'s figure of Shylock does is define clearly what being an Italian citizen is not and this at a time when a recently united Italy had to be united in her sense of Italian identity. This kind of debate always has insiders and outsiders, those who belong and those who do not and Shylock the Jew is the outsider and does not belong – he is a 'bad' citizen. He is an anti-Jewish filmic metonym.

Chapter Two explores two Italian silent films based on Dante's *Inferno*, which will examine another key feature of anti-Jewish stereotyping: the demonization of the Jew. This anti-Judaic association of the Jew and the Devil has a long history and when it was combined at the turn of the century with modern ideas of Jewish racial inferiority, the Jewish Other becomes even more hellish.

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Chapter Two:

   The Infernal Jew in *L'Inferno*

As has been discussed in the previous chapter, the ideological distortion of the figure of the Jew that is inherent in Shylock created a representation of bad citizenship that was primarily – although not exclusively of course – based on physiognomic and phenotypical differences, that is, racial differences. The focus in this chapter will shift slightly as it concentrates on the Italian silent film *L'Inferno* (Adolofo Padovan, Francesco Bertolini, and Giuseppe De Liguoro, 1911), a loose adaptation of Dante's work. The aim is to explore the film's construction of religious difference between Jews and non-Jews, a difference that is crucial to the negative ideological conceptualisation of citizenship in the Kingdom of Italy. In this film, the racially anti-Semitic and the religiously anti-Judaic combine to produce anti-Jewish imagery that powerfully creates a binary opposite subordinate to Italian identity. This negative anti-Jewish archetype is bad, malevolent, and unholy because it is associated with God's archenemy the Devil, the very epitome of all things evil. Casting the Jew as Satan the Devil reinforces the myth that the Jew is God's enemy, standing in opposition to the Christian church. The Jewish imagery of Padovan and Bertolini's film is powered by this myth and a close examination of the film's *mise-en-scène* will demonstrate how anti-Jewish iconography is deployed to demonize the Jews.

      This examination will also trace the history of such anti-Jewish imagery to a Christian anti-Judaic discourse, which is the precursor to secular racialised anti-Semitism. In its portrayal of the Jewish High Priest, Caiaphas, the film revisits the site of age-old anti-Jewish theological polemics, a subject matter that reveals much about attitudes towards emancipated Jews living in a modern Italian nation-state. It is as if the racially driven nineteenth-century secular anti-Semitic rhetoric – with its roots in the Enlightenment and its notion that there was something inherently wrong with Jews[1] – needed the added impetus of differential religious prejudices so as to make the Othering of Jews in Italian society complete. Alternatively, the old order may have been too strong to be replaced completely and, therefore, the newer secular anti-Semitism was allied to the older religious Judeophobia in a very potent concoction. To consider these aspects fully, in addition to Padovan and Bertolini's film, a scene from another cinematic adaptation of Dante's story will also be analysed for Othering devices. This is a fourteen-minute short, which is also called *L'Inferno*, and

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[1] William Nicholls, *Christian Antisemitism: A History of Hate* (Northvale, New Jersey and London: Jason Aronson Inc., 1993), xxi.

was a rival version made by Helios, a company located just outside Rome. The film was made in 1911 and was directed by Giuseppe Beradi and Arturo Busnego.[2]

This chapter will also examine to what extent the imagery of Jews in the films reflect negative attitudes towards Italian Jewry, especially by the Roman Catholic Church. An exploration of Church attitudes towards the Jews and of whether these attitudes manifest themselves in Italian film is important because Church interference is described by the cultural historian, Manlio Graziano, as one of the dynamic constants of post-unitary Italian history and that these constants 'reflect realities rooted deeply in the social life of the country' as well as showing how long-entrenched prejudices die hard.[3] A close analysis of *L'Inferno* will reveal that the anti-Judaic was still ideologically useful in the domain of Italian identity politics. William Nicholls describes how, during the nineteenth century, the 'old theological put-downs' were being replaced by specific references to the 'Jewish problem';[4] among the intellectual elites, *les philosophes*, racial differences was superseding religious differences. While it is true that the nation-state's nationalistic tendencies 'provided people with new reasons for being suspicious of an old enemy',[5] the old reasons behind the stereotyping of Jews, many of which were based on medieval theological disagreements, still proved to be useful and hard to discard in the national project of defining and constructing Italian identity. An examination of these films will demonstrate that new suspicions regarding the negative influence of what was now being referred to as 'the Jewish race' on society were reinforced by their amalgamation to older suspicions regarding Jewish 'ritual', religion, and culture.

This specific analysis of *L'Inferno* will explore the connection between medieval anti-Jewish conceptions of the Jew and modern anti-Semitic notions of the Jew as an evil presence in post-Risorgimento Italian society. These discourses were Catholic theological critiques of the Jewish religion that sought to confirm the validity and rightfulness of Christianity by condemning Judaism. These anti-Judaic sentiments are at play in *L'Inferno* and function to stress Jewish religious difference while, at the same time, consolidating a racialised Italian identity.

What will be argued throughout this discussion is that the differential symbolism of Othering the Jews in *L'Inferno* is rooted in a very specific anti-Judaic stereotype: the Jew as Devil. According to Joel Carmichael, this negative stereotype is extremely potent because it links Jews to a concept that goes beyond the hatreds of prejudice and xenophobia and lends what he calls a 'mystical dimension' to these animosities. This mystical anti-Semitism 'identifies Jews with a

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[2] Bryony Dixon, *100 Silent Films – BFI Screen Guides* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 107.
[3] Manlio Graziano, *The Failure of Italian Nationhood: The Geopolitics of a Troubled Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 28.
[4] Ibid., xxi.
[5] Ibid., xxi.

concept beyond themselves' and 'has lent a special tincture to the fate of the Jews'.[6] An important aim in this regard is to discuss the singularity of this mystical stereotyping and attempt to unpack the figure of the demonized Jew in the film *L'Inferno* and scrutinise how its function within the filmic text relates to identity politics in the period when The Kingdom of Italy was fighting colonial wars in Africa and preparing itself and its people for battle in a conflict that would become known as *La Grande Guerra* or The Great War.

The purpose of such satanizing or demonizing of Jews in modes of cultural production will be reviewed by looking at the power of stereotypes and the dialectical relationship that can exist between visualisations of hatred by means of demonizing strategies and actual violence towards Italian Jewry. An examination will then follow of the role that the Jew-Devil character has played in the cosmic drama of Good and Evil, looking at how this figure was used by the Church and state to maintain hierarchical order. The Wandering Jew trope will be discussed to see how it contributed to racial anti-Semitic discourse and to see whether or not elements of its iconography manifested itself in the film *L'Inferno*. Gustave Doré's 1861 illustrations for Dante's Comedy[7] were used as a basis for the film's compositions and connections between the film's *mise-en-scène* and Doré's visualisations of Dante's narrative including some of his other works will be explored.[8] The next section will be devoted to the ambivalent status of Jews within an emancipated Italy and how ultranationalist rhetoric was fusing anti-Judaic ideas with modern pseudoscience, giving voice to a national paranoia stemming from a national sense of insecurity regarding Italian identity. The filmic analysis will focus on the image of Dante's Devil as treacherous Jew. Connections will be made between Lucifer's hellish appearance in both *L'Inferno* films and Christian anti-Judaic representations of Jews, either visually or in narrative form, as arch betrayers in the mould of Judas Iscariot or as murderous Cain-prototypes. This section will argue that the Devil in *L'Inferno* can be read as an early cinematic manifestation of the Jew-Devil motif, serving to perpetuate the anti-Judaic notion that the Jews were Satan's mediators on earth and the anti-Semitic notion that Jews were inherently disloyal to the nation-state. In the final section, the image of Caiaphas will be discussed to show how the question of money was closely linked to the Jewish question in the early part of the twentieth century in Italy and how the image of the Jew-as-Devil was often conflated with the figure of the Jewish moneylender.

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[6] Joel Carmichael, *The Satanizing of the Jews: Origin and Development of Mystical Anti-Semitism* (New York: Fromm International Corporation, 1992), vii.

[7] Doré was born in Strasbourg in 1832. He began working on illustrating the *Inferno* in 1857 and published the work at his own expense in 1861. He died in Paris in 1883. See 'Publisher's Note', in *The Doré Illustrations for Dante's Divine Comedy* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1976), v.

[8] David Shipman, *The Story of Cinema: Volume 1* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980), 31.

Discursive Repetition for Emphasis

As we saw in the previous chapter, the figure of Shylock in *Il mercante di Venezia* functioned as an anti-Semitic metonym, which can be read as an expression of the Kingdom of Italy's imperialistic desire to conceptualise the image of the orientalised Other with the express purpose of controlling its identity. By controlling the identity of the Other, it can thus be defined, constructed, packaged, and disseminated in the form of stereotypes that are bound up with the cultural and ideological norms of society.[9] These stereotypes reinforce entrenched ideas concerning identity and citizenship. As has been shown in the previous chapter, filmic anti-Semitic stereotypes were employed specifically as binary subordinate opposites in the epistemological project of identity-building in Liberal Italy. The ideological state apparatuses of the day were intent on creating good citizens, which would support Italy's expansionist policies as well as defend its territorial borders.[10]

The ideology of anti-Jewishness was enunciated across a plurality of apparatuses, not only making its voice heard even louder but also lending that voice authority.[11] A singular ideology, in this case a merged Judeophobia and anti-Semitism, expressed across a range of outlets, reproduces its message over and over again thus reinforcing the 'obvious' truth of that message in society. Whether Louis Althusser was correct or not in stating that ideology itself was a 'non-historical reality', unchangeable in its form and function throughout history, an 'omni-historical reality' as he puts it, its communications must surely garner truth and authority if repeated *over time*. In other words, if what is said ideologically about Jews is said by different voices, in different ways and in different times, then, according to Althusser, what is said must be true? The 'imaginary distortion of the ideological representation of the real world' is continually strengthened as it is repeated for emphasis by various 'agents of production'.[12]

As will be discussed in this chapter, the ideological imaginary distortion of the Jew has certain characteristics that have not changed in centuries. Specific visual examples will be studied to demonstrate how the ideologically constructed Jew of Italian early twentieth-century cinema has certain characteristics that can be traced back to Renaissance and Medieval art. The repetition of these negative characteristics or these stereotypical features of the Jew create the illusion, at least, of an immutable ahistorical image of the Jew that, in turn, reifies such negativities. Althusser suggests that this ideological effect imposes an 'obviousness' that the subject 'cannot fail to

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[9] Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick, 'Race/Racism', in Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick (eds), *Cultural Theory: The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), 278.

[10] Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1971), 138.

[11] Ibid., 137.

[12] Ibid., 154, 155.

recognize' and that 'at work in this reaction is the ideological *recognition* function'.[13] It is obvious that Jews have a certain look and behave in a certain way because that is how they often – if not always – appear in an ideologically constructed form. What follows is an analysis of what happens at that intersection when the Catholic religion and film come together – Althusser refers to them both as examples of ideological state apparatuses – and what that coming together reveals in terms of the relationship between Jews and non-Jews in Liberal Italy.[14]

Dante, Didactics, Cinema and Identity Politics

The images of early Italian cinema had a tremendous didactic power. Due to the poor state of the Italian education system, illiteracy persisted into the twentieth century. In 1911, 37.9 per cent of the Kingdom of Italy's population was illiterate. In certain regions of the south, illiteracy levels were as high as almost 70 per cent.[15] Illiteracy, however, did not prevent a spectator learning from the images he or she would see whilst attending a film exhibition in 1911 Italy. This point was not lost on an American reviewer of the Milano-Films version who lavished praise on the filmmakers for educating people about Dante through the medium of film in a country whose masses are challenged by illiteracy especially, as he states, 'in the southern portions of the Kingdom'.[16] Any images of Jews seen on the big screen would have shaped a spectator's understanding of Jewry especially if the individual had had no personal contact with Jews. Illiteracy cannot prevent anti-Jewish stereotypes from speaking through the visual language of film; it cannot reduce their visual impact and communicative power.

Padovan and Bertolini's *L'Inferno* was distributed at home, and abroad for that matter, with enormous success.[17] In March 1911, when the film was released by Milano-Films, Nick Havely describes how it 'became one of the most successful and influential products of the "golden age" of Italian silent movies', making an impact in countries such as France, Germany, Denmark, Britain, and the United States.[18] Aldo Bernardini says this of the film's significance:

Inferno è in assoluto il primo film a lungometraggio realizzato in Italia, con un dispendio di mezzi economici e tecnici quale non si era mai verificato in precedenza. È stato anche il

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[13] Ibid., 160, 161.

[14] Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy,* 136, 137.

[15] Martin Clark, *Modern Italy 1871-1995* (London and New York: Longman, second edition, 1996), 36.

[16] W. Stephen Bush, *The Moving Pictures World* 8:27 (July, 1911), 1572, 1573. He states that illiteracy could be as high as 80 percent in southern Italy.

[17] Giorgio Bertellini, 'Milano Films', *Encyclopaedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Richard Abel (London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2005), 436.

[18] Nick Havely, 'Epilogue: Dante and Early Italian Cinema: The 1911 Milano-Films Inferno and Italian Nationalism', in *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century: Nationality, Identity, and Appropriation*, ed. Aida Audeh and Nick Havely (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 353.

primo film a godere di un apposito lancio pubblicatario orchestrato con metodi moderni, a venire proiettato a pubblici selezionati degni di una importante 'prima' teatrale e a essere accolto e recensito sulla stampa nazionale con un rilievo mai prima accordato a un film.[19] [*Inferno* is absolutely the first full-length film produced in Italy with an economical expenditure and technical extravagance that had never been seen before. It was also the first film to enjoy an orchestrated public release managed with modern methods, theatrical premieres before selected VIPs, plaudits and reviews in the national press with a significance never before accorded to a film.]

This promotional campaign was managed by a Neapolitan businessman who had secured the rights to distribute the film globally. His name was Gustavo Lombardo (1885-1951) and he used the film magazine *Lux: rivista settimanale di Cinematografia, Fotografia e Fonografia*, which he set up in 1908, to advertise the film before its release. From the autumn of 1910 through to the 1911 spring release of *L'Inferno*, Lombardo's *Lux* succeeded in building a sense of anticipation by using full-page advertisements on a weekly basis (see fig.10).[20] In addition, *Lux* would publish brief articles outlining the contents of the film, providing useful insights into the film's narrative and valuable information regarding some of the main characters, engaging with the spectator months before the film's release and adding to the excitement (see fig. 11).[21]

The Milano-Films production of *L'Inferno* was finally premiered on 1 March 1911 to great fanfare, all of which was organised 'sotto gli auspici della Società nazionale Dante Alighieri [under the auspices of the National Society of Dante Alighieri]'.[22] Screenings took place in the following theatres: the *Mercadante di Napoli*, the *Sala Roma*, the *Filodramatici di Milano*, and the *Vittorio Emanuele di Torino* and present were the great and the good of Italian society: 'artisti, parlamentari e, naturalmente, nobiluomini [artists, members of parliament and, naturally, noblemen]'.[23] Vittorio Emanuele di Savoia, a member of Italy's royal family, praised the film after a private viewing.[24]

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[19] Aldo Bernardini, '*L'Inferno* della Milano-Films', *Bianco e Nero* 46 (1986), 91. According to Bernardini, the Milano-Films adaptation was divided into three parts and included 54 individual scenes and was 1400 metres long, which is equivalent to a viewing time of approximately seventy minutes, 93.

[20] Havely, 'Epilogue: Dante and Early Italian Cinema: The 1911 Milano-Films Inferno and Italian Nationalism', 359, 360. Figure 10 is reproduced by Aldo Bernardini and Vittorio Martinelli in a special edition of *Bianco e Nero: Il cinema muto italiano 1911, prima parte* (Turin and Rome: Nuova ERI, CSC, 1995), 242.

[21] Figure 11 taken from *Lux: rivista settimanale di Cinematografia, Fotografia e Fonografia* 55 (1910), 3.

[22] Bernardini, '*L'Inferno* della Milano-Films', 104.

[23] Ibid., 105. On 16 March 1911, the film premiered in Paris in front of select audience and Lombardo organised a conference, held a few days after the screening, in which the Italian critic Ricciotto Canudo extolled the virtues of the film.

[24] Ibid., 102.

Figure 10

LUX

3° Combattere energicamente tutti i soprusi e i facili favoritismi, escludendo dagli Aderenti chiunque per un motivo qualsiasi non ottemperi agli obblighi contratti come socio; e favorire invece gli interessi economici, difendendo costantemente la causa morale.

4° Affidare il compito di ordinamento e di controllo a persone di provata esperienza e capacità, non esclusa quella commerciale.

5° Diffondere le proprie idee a mezzo della stampa e promuovere congressi ed adunanze pubbliche.

6° Favorire i meno abbienti, sia associandoli alle nostre imprese, sia contribuendo al loro sviluppo con esortazione e consigli e sussidi in denaro.

7° Istituire una scuola di operatori.

8° Istituire una scuola di artisti drammatici.

9° Proteggere la produzione italiana senza dare per questo l'ostracismo alla produzione estera.

10° Esaminare ogni fin di mese l'andamento del mercato e predisporre il terreno di produzione pei mesi avvenire.

11° Intensificare l'esportazione, rendendo più vivi e frequenti i nostri rapporti con le Case estere.

12° Avanzare una petizione alla Camera allo scopo di unificare la tariffa di trasporto delle films.

13° Cooperare, infine, perché la produzione abbia maggiore sviluppo e si perfezioni, ammaestrando gli operai e approfondendo gli studi.

Questo programma, pur non essendo privo di difficoltà, è, come ognuno può vedere, eminentemente pratico; onde sarebbe il caso, parmi, di tracciare in base ad esso le linee generali del Congresso, il quale, a sua volta, potrebbe gradatamente prepararsi attraverso le discussioni.

Ecco ciò che dovrebbero aver di mira oggi i Cinematografisti, ed ecco ciò che è assolutamente necessario di fare. Il momento mi pare il più favorevole.

SIMON MAGO

La "DIVINA COMEDIA" della "MILANO-FILMS"

Il contenuto e lo svolgimento della film

La film dantesca, di cui largamente ora si occupa il mondo cinematografico e sulla quale la stampa anonimamente pubblica lusinghieri giudizi, riprodurrà, com'è noto, l'immaginario viaggio di Dante Alighieri attraverso l'Inferno, secondo il racconto che il divino poeta fa nella prima cantica del suo poema immortale. E la riproduzione non sarà soltanto tecnicamente perfetta, ma soprattutto fedele e minuziosa.

La film non sarà una rapida esposizione di quadri, nè una vasta successione di figure e di luoghi, di tormenti e di tormentati; sarà, invece, la espressione forse più suggestiva del fato tragico che pesò su uomini ed eventi di cui rimase orma profonda nella storia. E le dolorose vicende di molte anime, gli oscuri presagi di Ciacco e di Farinata degli Uberti, l'atroce martirio del Conte Ugolino e 'l fatale amore di Paolo e Francesca non avranno più l'espressione sonora e lirica del verso dantesco, bensì un'altra, che più s'avvicina alla realtà e c'offre la più forte illusione.

Noi vedremo svolgersi sullo schermo cinematografico, per intero, gli episodi culminanti della vita di quelle anime; onde la nostra commozione sarà quale può suscitare il fatto, nel suo compiuto svolgimento, e non il racconto che di esso in varia modo possa farsi.

La film si presenta, infatti, in principio, Dante, che tenta di ascendere il colle della salvezza. Il poeta è respinto e minacciato da tre fiere; ma Beatrice discende nel Limbo e prega Virgilio perchè accorra in aiuto di Dante.

« Io son Beatrice, che ti faccio andare;
Vegno di loco, ove tornar disio;
Amor mi mosse, che mi fa parlare. »

Così ella dice; e Virgilio libera Dante delle tre fiere e muove in sua compagnia verso l'Inferno.

I poeti percorrono nell'antinferno, ove sono puniti i poltroni, ignudi, stimolati da mosconi e da vespe; e, giunti al fiume Acheronte, sono traghettati da Caron dimando all'altra riva. Quivi è il Limbo, ove sono puniti color che non ebber battesimo che senza speme vissero in disio. Omero, Orazio, Ovidio e Lucano onorano Virgilio, e fanno Dante della loro schiera. Giungono, quindi, i poeti, a piè del nobile castello, ove sono gli spiriti dei grandi, e poi discendono nel secondo cerchio.

Sull'ingresso di questo cerchio sta Minosse, che giudica le anime e assegna loro la pena.

Dal ripiano, si vedono i lussuriosi.

« La bufera infernal, che mai non resta,
Mena gli spirti con la sua rapina,
Voltando, e percotendo li molesta. »

Fra costoro sono Semiramide, Didone, Cleopatra, Elena, Achille, Paride, Tristano e Paolo e Francesca.

« . . . che insieme vanno,
E paion sì al vento esser leggieri. »

A questi due Dante grida:

« O anime affannate,
Venite a noi parlar, s'altri nol niega. »

Ed ecco:

« Quali colombe dal disio chiamate,
Con l'ali aperte e ferme, al dolce nido
Volan per l'aer dal voler portate; »

Figure 11

The day after the premiere, the Neapolitan newspaper, *Il Giorno*, lauded the film's achievements, admitting that it had been wrong about cinema's artistic capabilities:

> Nulla vedemmo di più nobile, di più bello, come nei quadri, ove le visioni più salienti dell'inferno vi appariscono in tutta la loro grandezza e la loro possanza. Noi che, spesso, abbiamo detestato il cinematografo, per la banalità e la scempiaggine dei suoi spettacoli, noi, ieri sera, abbiamo fatto ammenda onorevole, noi ci siamo interessati come al più imponente spettacolo e il nostro animo ne è stato scosso e contiamo di ritonarci.[25]
>
> [We have seen nothing more noble, more beautiful, as in the paintings, than the most salient visions of the inferno as they appear here in all their grandeur and might. We have often detested cinema, for its banality and the silliness of its spectacle, but we, yesterday evening, had to make honourable amends, we are now interested in its imposing spectacle and our hearts and minds have been moved with excitement and we intend to go back to the cinema.]

According to a review in a Neapolitan film magazine, the Milano-Films production was 'una fra le più nobili esspressioni dell'arte italiana [among the noblest expressions of Italian art]'.[26] In the words of a Turin-based film reviewing periodical: 'È l'illustrazione fedelissima della Divina Commedia, di quella poesia, cioè, che fu ed è germe di purezza nella vita civile [It is the most faithful rendition of the Divine Comedy, of its poetry, that was and is the seeds of purity in civil life]'.[27] W. Stephen Bush, writing in the American film journal *The Moving Picture World*, complimented the filmmakers for having 'made Dante intelligible to the masses'.[28] The poet's 'immortal work' was 'until now accessible only to a small band of scholars, has now after more than six centuries become the property of mankind'.[29]

Despite being up against the prestigious Milano-Films and Lombardo's powerful marketing machine, the Helios production also made a significant impact. This small company, based in Velletri, succeeded in putting out a rival short film in just three weeks that cost a mere fraction of the Milanese film studio's budget at 8000 lire.[30] Two months before the Milano-Films version was premiered, Helios released its film and by the time the Milano-Films version had been shown in Italian theatres for the first time, the Velletri studio had already managed to distribute its film across

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[25] *Il Giorno* (Naples), 2 March, 1911.
[26] *La Cine-Fono e la Rivista Fono-Cinematografica* 151 (April, 1911).
[27] *La Vita Cinematografica* 6 (April, 1911).
[28] W. Stephen Bush, *The Moving Pictures World* 3 (July, 1911), 188.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Bernardini, '*L'Inferno* della Milano-Films', 103.

Europe and as far away as the United States.[31] These were two competing Dante films, both films receiving attention at home and abroad and both films containing widely-distributed signifiers of Jewishness worthy of close scrutiny.

Before moving on, it is worth considering briefly the political use of Dante during this period so as to understand better the way these two Dante films fit into a long tradition of specific media appropriation. As Aida Audeh and Nick Navely explain, 'the figure of Dante loomed large in the visual media and the public places' of the long nineteenth century (1789-1914), figuring in 'many types of discourse – political, religious, social, cultural' – during this period, which in turn all fed into a wider hegemonic discourse that was 'crucial to successful nation-building'.[32] Putting Dante on the nineteenth-century stage was, in Richard Cooper's opinion, 'inherently a political act, for Dante was reinterpreted as a forerunner and hero of the unification of Italy'.[33] Certainly 'Dante lent himself to the cause of nationalism in Italy', and this might explain the popularity of staging Dante during this period of fervent patriotism in a newly unified nation-state.[34] Cooper states that 'between 1750 and 1910, 60 or more plays put Dante on stage' in Italy.[35]

However, it was not all about nationalism. Antonella Braida explains how, as Dante moves from the stage to the film set in the 1900s, there is a shift from the politicisation of the poet to an appreciation of his didactic and artistic value and 'moving away from the political Dante cherished by the Risorgimento, the early twentieth-century Dante inspires new poetic and aesthetic experimentation in poetry, drama and film'.[36] Dante might still have been 'a symbol of national unity' but, during the twentieth century's first decade, he 'was deployed to lend both credibility and vitality to cinema as an art'.[37]

Giuseppe De Liguoro, who collaborated with Francesco Bertolini and Adolfo Padovan in directing *L'Inferno*,[38] was an aristocrat who believed in the didactic power of cinema and backed his mission to teach Italian values through film with his own personal wealth.[39] De Liguoro and his fellow industrial bourgeoisie investors and owners of Milano Films 'shared a common didactic aspiration to establish a national cultural hegemony and foster a sense of national identity'.[40] As a

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[31] Aldo Bernardini and Vittorio Martinelli, *Bianco e Nero: Il cinema muto italiano 1911, prima parte* (Turin and Rome: Nuova ERI, CSC, 1995), 250.

[32] Aida Audeh and Nick Navely, *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century,* 1, 2.

[33] Richard Cooper, 'Dante on the Nineteenth-century Stage', *Dante on View: The Reception of Dante in the Visual and Performing Arts*, ed. Antonella Braida and Luisa Calè (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 24.

[34] Ibid., 27.

[35] Ibid., 26.

[36] Antonella Braida, 'Dante's Inferno in the 1900s: From Drama to Film', in *Dante on View*, 40.

[37] Ibid., 40, 41.

[38] *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 125.

[39] Shipman, *Story of Cinema*, 31.

[40] Bertellini, 'Milano Films', 435.

former teacher, these didactic values might also have governed Padovan's artistic sensibilities.[41] Davide Gherardi and Giovanni Lasi say that Padovan was considered to be an eminent scholar of Dante in his own right.[42] These pioneers in early Italian cinema saw profits to be made in filmmaking but De Liguoro and his fellow film entrepreneurs saw another potential in the medium of film:

> They also brought a certain instinct for patronage and philanthropy, insisting on the potential of the moving image as an instrument for the moral and cultural education of a nation, which was still in large part illiterate.[43]

Dante was an integral part of fulfilling this vision and from 1908 to 1912 there were ten films made that were loosely based on his work.[44] Lasi states that the aristocratic backers of Milano-Films were, right from the outset, intent on 'fondare una casa di produzione esclusivamente dedicate ai "film d'arte" [establishing a production house exclusively dedicated to film art]'.[45] Films such as *L'Inferno* functioned 'come un strumento di diletto, ma anche di educazione; un divertimento sano istruttivo [as an instrument of pleasure, but also of education; a wholesome form of enjoyment and instruction]'.[46] The long tradition of staging Dante was being augmented by a new phenomenon of viewing Dante onscreen.

However, Braida believes that a return to a more politicised Dante took place before the First World War as the cult of Dante was appropriated by the *interventisti* and the irredentists.[47] Once again the poet became a symbol of national identity and patriotism at a time of war. This time, Italy was not fighting a war of unification but was on the brink of fighting a war against Austria over unredeemed territories. And there is a link between one of those unredeemed lands and the Milano-Films version of *L'Inferno*. The final scene of the film is of the statue of Dante built in Trento in 1865, a city that belonged to Austria-Hungary until its annexation in 1919 by Italy. In 1914, when Italy was still neutral, the scene was cut from the film by the censor because of its overtly political message.[48]

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[41] *Braida*, 'Dante's Inferno in the 1900s: From Drama to Film', 47. Bertolini was an accountant who worked for Saffi-Comerio before it became Milano-Films, contributing commercial nous to Padovan's didacticism and De Liguorio's noble ambitions to 'elevate the art' of cinema.

[42] Davide Gherardi and Giovanni Lasi, 'L'Inferno: Grandioso Film d'Arte della Milano Films', *Cinegrafia* 20 (2007), 389.

[43] Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *History of World Cinema*, 125.

[44] Braida, 'Dante's Inferno in the 1900s: From Drama to Film', 47.

[45] Lasi, Giovanni, *La produzione cinematografica nel sistema economico-industriale italiano tra il 1908 e il 1914 – Il caso della Milano-Films*, (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Bologna, 2012), 308.

[46] Ibid., 309.

[47] Braida, 'Dante's Inferno in the 1900s: From Drama to Film', 43. Italy declared war on Austria in May 1915.

[48] Bernardini, '*L'Inferno* della Milano-Films', 108. The copy of the film in the *Cineteca nazionale* does not contain this final scene whereas the copy of the film in British Film Institute does.

De Liguoro saw *L'Inferno* as 'un' opera di apostolato culturale [a work of apostolate culture]'.[49] The film had a message to preach, apostolate in nature. The following sections will try to decode that message and see what it has to say about the figure of the Jew and *Italianità*.

The Awesome Power of Stereotypes, Hatred, and Violence

Elaine Pagels argues that the idea of Satan as fallen angel is 'virtually absent'[50] from the Hebrew Bible, the TaNaCh,[51] and that it took until the first century C.E. for the figure of Satan, Belial, or Beelzebub, to become more and more prominent in Jewish thought but, by the time the Gospels were written, the Devil and his demons had entered centre stage.[52] According to Pagels, this period marked the beginning of a certain narrative, a struggle between the forces of Christian good and Satanic evil and that this cosmic drama would significantly influence the Christian imagination. During this early period of Christian struggle for affirmation, the figure of the Devil also played a part in religious identity formation:

> Such visions [of the demonic being] have been incorporated into Christian tradition and
> have served, among other things, to confirm for Christians their own identification with God
> and to demonize their opponents – first other Jews, then pagans, and later dissident
> Christians called heretics.[53]

Pagels makes a connection between the processes of Othering and the strategy of demonizing the enemy and explains how the figure of Satan, in this sense, works 'as a reflection of how we perceive ourselves and those we call "others"'.[54]

This combination does not just create 'them' and 'us' scenarios but helps define these identity formations in terms of 'good' and 'bad'. The role that this type of strategy plays in turning the Other into an enemy must not be underestimated. Politicized religious and/or national identity formations cannot be built on ambiguous foundations; there has to be clear-cut boundaries that separate and differentiate. When such national identities are constructed on the theological premises of the specific religion privileged by the nation-state, that is Roman Catholicism in the

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[49] Gian Piero Brunetta, *Cent'anni di cinema italiano: 1. Dalle origini alla seconda guerra mondiale* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 1998), 30.

[50] Elaine Pagels, *Origin of Satan: How Christians Demonized Jews, Pagans, and Heretics* (New York: Vingage Books: A Division of Random House Inc., 1996), xvi.

[51] The TaNaCh comprises the Torah, the *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and the *Cetuvim* (Writings).

[52] Ibid., xvii. Pagels makes reference to the Essenes, a Jewish first-century group, which claimed to have had allied itself with angels in the struggle between the sons of Light and the sons of Darkness.

[53] Ibid., xvii.

[54] Ibid., xviii.

case of the Kingdom of Italy, the 'us' becomes a people with God on their side. In other words, 'we are God's people and they are God's enemies'.[55] This demonizing or Satanizing of the Other has, in Pagels' opinion, led not only to the justification of hatred towards the Other in society but even to the killing of the Other.[56]

Robert Wistrich also argues that the demonizing of the Other made it easy to rationalize the slaughtering of the Other. He believes that there is a real link between what he terms the 'awesome power of stereotypes' and genocide.[57] He discusses how an unrestrained hatred of the other was often crucial in defining the national self, a blind irrational hatred that would always make the other the perpetrator of crimes and the national self the blameless victim. He argues:

> Almost invariably, the possibility of massacres ensues once the enemy has been
> metaphorically dehumanized and made to appear beyond the pale of civilization. The more
> monstrous the image of physical deformity, moral depravity, and general backwardness, the
> easier it becomes to rationalize killing.[58]

Cruel stereotypes that linked the Other to the Devil or that created images of anthropomorphised demons were the ultimate stigmatisations because in these portrayals, the Other is invariably dehumanised. Nationalistic discourses that deploy negative stereotypical imagery to serve their own ideological needs can turn ethnocentric tendencies into what Wistrich describes as 'ethnic paranoia'.[59] This in turn can lead to large-scale violence towards the Other or, as Steven T. Katz puts it, a deliberate distancing process in which 'the victimizer stigmatizes and stereotypes the victim in various ways in order to legitimate the violence that is then unleashed'.[60]

Violence towards Jews living in Italy can be traced back to end of the thirteenth century when the Jewish communities of Southern Italy, which had been present in the region since the first century, were persecuted by being forced to relinquish their Jewish faith and convert to Christianity or face being killed.[61] During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Observant Franciscan monks preached anti-Jewish sermons throughout the country, publicly condemning Jewish usurers as demonic bloodsuckers since, in the words of Bernardino da Siena, 'all Jews, especially those who

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[55] Ibid., xix.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Robert S. Wistrich, 'Introduction: The Devil, The Jews, and Hatred of the "Other"', in *Demonizing the Other: Antisemitism, Racism, and Xenophobia*, ed. Robert S. Wistrich (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999), 9.
[58] Ibid., 8, 9.
[59] Ibid., 8.
[60] Steven T. Katz, 'Mass Death under Communist Rule and the Limits of "Otherness"', *Demonizing the Other: Antisemitism, Racism, and Xenophobia*, ed. Robert S. Wistrich (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999), 267.
[61] Dana E. Katz, *The Jew in the Art of the Italian Renaissance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 8.

are moneylenders, are the chief enemies of all Christians'.[62] One of the most well-known episodes of Renaissance mass-violence against Jews living in Italy took place in the northern city of Trento in 1475. The local Jewish community was accused of abducting and killing a two-and-a-half-year-old little boy in order to use his fresh Christian blood for their own demonic ritualistic practices.[63] Blood acquired through the ritual murder of Christian children was said to be used by Jews to conjure the Devil.[64] As Dana E. Katz recounts, the Jews found the body of Simon Unferdorben in Simon Ebreo's water well, believing that his body had been planted there by the murderer. They reported the discovery to the authorities only to be tried and found guilty of the infanticide. Thirteen Jewish men were burned at the stake and two other Jewish men who converted to Christianity were decapitated and their bodies burned at the stake. During the months to come, more Jewish men were burned to death and the Jewish women and children were only spared if they converted to the Christian faith. Simon was beatified and his martyrdom at the hands of the Jews was venerated.[65]

What Katz does is demonstrate that anti-Jewish visual stereotypes, many of whom associated Jews living in Italy during the Renaissance period with the Devil, were present in religious art and functioned as *symbolic* acts of violence towards Jews, contributing to what she terms as 'Italian toleration policies'.[66] Renaissance paintings that adorned Church altarpieces, sanctuaries, and walls depicted Jews as dangerous outsiders who were in league with the Devil. These pictorial deprecating images served as a constant reminder of the religious differences between Jews and non-Jews as well the fact that any 'tolerance' of Jews living and working in Renaissance Italy was tenuous at best. Katz explains: 'Only so long as the presence of Jewish merchants and moneylenders proved economically necessary for the community was the tolerance of Jews communally feasible.'[67] Jews could be exploited for Christian gain but anti-Jewish ecclesiastical and/or monastic works of art reminded the viewer of the Jew's status within Renaissance society. These images that depicted Jews as child murderers, host desecrators, Catholic image profaners, and corrupt usurers all emphasised, to a lesser or greater degree, the nefarious relationship between Jews and the Devil. The prevalence of such imagery cannot be underestimated and they 'became a prominent part of the sociocultural topography of Renaissance

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[62] Ibid., 9.

[63] Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Concept of the Jew and its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, second paperback edition, 1983), 137.

[64] Ibid., 136.

[65] Dana E. Katz, *Art of the Italian Renaissance*, 120, 121.

[66] Ibid., 11.

[67] Ibid., 4, 5.

Europe and had a marked presence in the visual arts'.[68] From the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries, this imagery swept across Europe and, according to Katz, 'delineated communal boundaries' by creating a 'unified Christian social body' that stands in opposition to the demonized Jew. The Jew, after all, is a Christian's enemy so a relationship based on opposition is not only inevitable but essential if differences between the two groups are going to be maintained for theological and political reasons.[69]

Katz does not say that there is a direct link between these cruel images of stereotyped Jews and the violent crimes committed against the Jewish communities of Renaissance Italy and that symbolic violence in the form of pictorial representations was responsible for the literal violence unleashed on the Jewish communities. Her work, however, does provide valuable insights into the way Jewish imagery in Renaissance artworks reflected the religious polemics of the day as well as shedding light on notions of civic identity. Katz's principal argument is that this anti-Jewish visual language was a form of symbolic violence and, situated within the context of Renaissance policies of tolerance, that this symbolic anti-Jewishness both protected Jews from literal violence as it projected violence from the real onto the symbolic and, at the same time, perpetuated ideas that corporeal violence towards Jews was justified.[70] This approach contributes to an understanding of attitudes towards Jews without having to figure out which came first: the violent anti-Jewish images or the violent anti-Jewish acts? Katz's contention is that this process was dialectical in nature. The symbolic and the literal anti-Jewishness were both present at the same time.

The Jew's Eternal Role in the Cosmic Drama of Good and Evil

This theoretical approach to the relationship between visual images and socio-political discourses demonstrates that the process of Othering is essential and continual if identities are in need of being constructed and fixed. Henri Zukier speaks about how the demonized other has always been an essential presence and a valuable contrivance in times of need for the majority culture, a constant outsider that represents non-indigenous values, a projection of all the fears, anxieties, and repressions of the host society.[71] Zukier goes further by suggesting that the image of the Jew as

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[68] Ibid., 7.
[69] Ibid., 7.
[70] Ibid., 8.
[71] Henri Zukier, 'The Transformation of Hatred: Antisemitism as a Struggle for Group Identity', in Wistrich (ed.), *Demonizing the Other*, 120, 121.

demonized Other 'has become the privileged and essential "Other" in the Western mind'.[72]

Zukier believes that the figure of Jew as essential Other owes its endurance to the West's obsession with categorization, boundaries, classification, group membership, hierarchical organisations but also to 'the particular historical encounter of the Jew with medieval Christianity'.[73] This is when the figure of the Jew-as-Devil became a leading character in the cosmic drama of Good and Evil, the conflict between the Church and the Synagogue. Zukior explains that Jewish non-affiliation was seen as a rejection of the Christian credo and a threat to Church authority. The response was decisive:

> In response, the Church contrived a positive exclusion and a new ontological status for the Jews, decisively removing them from the group of potential or necessary members. The move was amplified by the popular imagination, which assigned Jews to a 'counter group' of the Devil or the Antichrist. The Jew became the prototype of a perversion of the mind, best exemplified by his inhuman blindness to the manifest Christian truth.[74]

This strategy of positive exclusion on the part of the Church set up boundaries in order to protect Good from Evil. Once established, diligence was required to police these boundaries to stop the forces of evil from encroaching onto Church territory, the space inhabited by the Christian Good. Harumi Befu argues that one of the functions of demonizing the Other was to create a spatial structural boundary between good and bad because liminal spaces, in which both ontological states could coexist or be combined, had to be avoided completely.[75]

Liminal spaces were dangerous because they allowed space for the Devil and his demons to make inroads into the territory of the Roman Catholic Church, undermining its notions of truth.[76] It is in these spaces that Good must engage in hand-to-hand combat with Evil, fight it, push it back, claim back its space or, even better, to expand its own space, conquering more territory. This is a constant battle between two foes. However, 'the two adversaries are not equal', the forces of Good are superior to those belonging to Evil even though 'the latter constitute an opposition that may sometimes sway people to its side'.[77] Despite never being powerful enough to conquer the Supreme Good, the demon is dangerous because it can infiltrate into the liminal space, corrupt, erode, attack, harm, tempt, seduce, possess, influence, poison, and even kill.

The popular image of the Jew during the middle ages embodied this dangerous liminality.

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[72] Ibid., 121.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid., 126.
[75] Harumi Befu, 'Demonizing the "Other"', in Wistrich (ed.), *Demonizing the Other,* 20, 21.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid., 22.

According to Zukier, the hybridity of the Jew was highly problematic and a key motivating factor in the process of demonizing the Jew:

> The imaginary Jew obsesses society as one who crosses boundaries, combines contradictory features, breaches the barriers of the natural species and otherwise violates the order of nature. He is 'other' because he is a hybrid, transitional figure who exposes society's vulnerabilities and the precariousness of its boundaries, introducing chaos in the structure of the universe.[78]

Zukier goes onto discuss how Jews were often portrayed in the Middle Ages as possessing animal features that connected them to the popular figure of the Devil, for example, Goat's beard, horns, cloven feet, and a long tail all of which were powerful images that dominated the iconography of Medieval Christianity and the folk mythologies of Europe. In cultural texts, the image of the Devil and the image of the Jew were often conflated with both figures being stereotyped in much the same way. Wistrich shows how the Devil in Christian works of art, especially from the twelfth century onwards, 'is an undeniably repulsive figure with an oversized head, bulging eyes, horns, and long, flamelike hair (symbolizing the fires of hell)' and 'these frightening and grotesque images also frequently appeared as symbols of Jews and Judaism'.[79] The Devil and the Jew, the Devil as Jew, and the Jew as Devil created powerful, enduring, and negative stereotypes that helped preserve and perpetuate notions of religious and socio-political order. This was especially true during times of crises when the order of stable systems of beliefs or governance was thrown into chaos or when carefully constructed hierarchical structures within society were threatened.

The above description of the medieval Jew-Devil motif helps us to deconstruct the iconography of Gustave Doré's 1852 depiction, *The Wandering Jew* (see fig. 12). The woodcut could easily have been titled, *The Wandering Devil*, seeing that the image of the Jew could be read as the image of the Devil and vice versa. This illustration is useful because it provides information about the attitudes of the artist who went on to create the illustrations for Dante's *Divine Comedy* in 1861, upon which *L'Inferno*'s *mise-en-scène* is based, but also because it helps explain some of the reasons why the image of the Jew undermined the careful ordered structure of society.

It is very probable that the legend of the Wandering Jew, according to G.K. Anderson, has its origins in Italy and, around the time of the later Crusades or the middle part of the thirteenth century, began to take shape as a distinctive narrative: a Jew who taunted Christ, who may have even struck him, on Via Crucis, and is punished by being forced to wander eternally.[80] This legend

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[78] Zukier, 'The Transformation of Hatred: Antisemitism as a Struggle for Group Identity', 126.
[79] Wistrich, 'Introduction: The Devil, The Jews, and Hatred of the "Other"', 4.
[80] G.K. Anderson, 'Popular Survivals of the Wandering Jew in England', *The Wandering Jew: Essays in the*

was crystallised further as it appeared in a pamphlet printed in Danzig, in 1602, by the prominent printer Jakob Rhode. The author of the pamphlet is unknown, however, it may have been written by Giovanni Bernardini Bonifacio, the Marquis d'Oria (1517-1597), a political refugee who had fled Italy for Danzig.[81] From this point onwards, the narrative establishes 'the Jew as a contrite sinner, with patriarchal appearance, ragged and unkempt, super-solemn, with a distinctive name not previously known'.[82]

Figure 12

The name given to this wandering Jew was Ahasuerus. This is the name of the Persian King in the Biblical narrative of Esther.[83] It is not a Jewish name but rather a highly unusual exotic sounding name, which acts as an orientalising device in itself. Also, in not giving him a Biblical name, this peripatetic Jew becomes an alienated character, forcibly taken out of the Judeo-Christian tradition, named instead after a monarch who, in the Book of Esther, was willing to oversee the

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Interpretation of a Christian Legend, eds Galit Hasan-Rokem and Alan Dundes (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 77.

[81] Ibid., 77. The pamphlet is called, *Kurtze Beschreibung und Erzehlung von einem Juden mit Namen Ahasverus* (A Brief Description and Tale of a Jew by name Ahasuerus).

[82] Ibid., 77.

[83] Aaron Shaffer, 'The Ahasver-Volksbuch of 1602', *The Wandering Jew*, 34, 35.

mass killing of all Jews in his domain.[84] It is an aspect of anti-Jewish stereotypes that belongs in the same category of naming Jews after objects that cause them distress or that, for cultural and/or religious reasons, invoke in them feelings of disgust, for example, the *Judensau* motif that associates Jews with swine, a particularly cruel hate sign because it uses a non-kosher animal to signify Jews.[85] Anderson argues that in the narrative and symbolisms of this early seventeenth-century pamphlet are the origins of modern anti-Semitic ideas that portray 'the Jew as a representative of sin, omniscience, political liberty, social unconventionality, and Jewish nationalism'.[86] These are the negative ideas that coalesce around later manifestations of the legend of the Wandering Jew. These are the elements that have bled into Doré's *The Wandering Jew*, an illustration that certainly resonated with the Nazi authorities that included a coloured version of the artist's work in its Eternal Jew Exhibition, which was held at Munich's Library of the German Museum in 1937.[87]

Doré illustrated the entire wandering Jew narrative in a series of ten woodcuts,[88] which project the idea of a historical figure who witnessed the Crucifixion, doomed to wander until Judgement Day for his sin of rejecting Christ and who, on that day, receives his Saviour's forgiveness and love at last (see fig. 13). However, the image of the Jew in his 1852 depiction projects the idea of a symbolic or mythical figure that functions as an anti-Semitic metonym, 'standing for the Jewish people in secularized terms'.[89] Galit Hasan-Rokem and Alan Dundes, in their examination of the narrative, quote Arthur Schopenhauer who stated that 'Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew, is nothing but the personification of the whole Jewish race'.[90] The nature of the stereotype is different in Doré's secularized depiction. In contrast to the figure of the Wandering Jew in his set of ten woodcuts, gone is the old Jewish man with his patriarchal look and his flowing white hair and beard, contrite and wiser now after an eternity of traversing the weary way of ceaseless toil and deathless life. He is no longer 'wandering' but striding purposefully, driven by sense of mission and putting his right foot forward on the path towards salvation. (The significance of right and left as physiognomic signifiers of Jewishness will be discussed in the following

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[84] Ibid., 32.

[85] For more on the history of this stereotype, see Ruth Mellinkoff, *Antisemitic Hate Signs in Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts from Medieval Germany* (Jerusalem: Hamakor Press, 1993).

[86] Anderson, 'Popular Survivals of the Wandering Jew in England', 78.

[87] 'Der ewige Jude: The "Eternal Jew" or the "Wandering Jew"', Holocaust Education & Archive Research Team: http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/holoprelude/derewigejude.html (Accessed 17/05/12).

[88] Galit Hasan-Rokem and Alan Dundes, *The Wandering Jew*, 261 (Appendix: Gustave Doré's Depictions of the Wandering Jew).

[89] Ibid., 227.

[90] Ibid. The editors were quoting from Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays, Vol. II* (Oxford, 1974), 261.

chapter.) Although the subject matter of these ten illustrations is rooted in anti-Jewish polemics, emblematic of Christian wish-fulfilment, and patronising in their tone, Doré does not dehumanize the image of the Wandering Jew by making him look like a demon or the Devil personified. That motif is set aside for his standalone 1852 woodcut, which is a more secularized visual representation of the image.
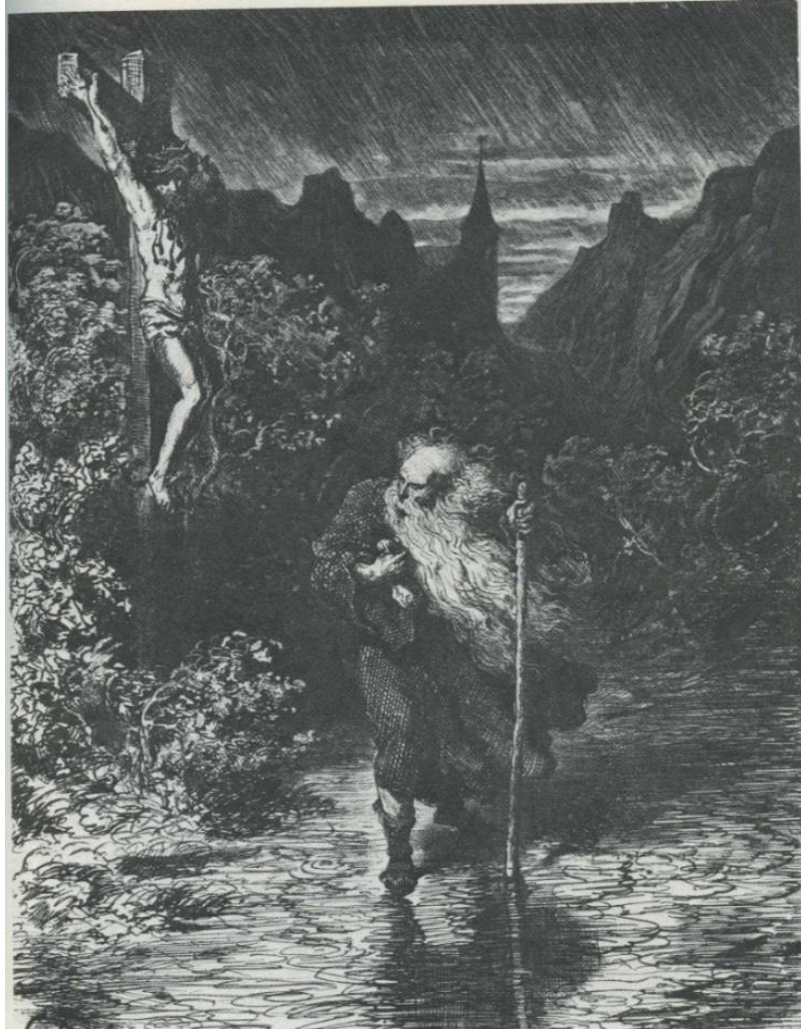
Figure 13

  The introduction of the Devil into the imagery characterises the shift from legend to myth, creating a version of the tale that strips the Wandering Jew of any redeeming qualities. The difference between Doré's two distinct and separate portrayals is that the Wandering Jew-Devil, in its cruel exaggerated satirical form, creates a certain type of Jew that is beyond redemption. The majority culture decides how the narrative plays out. Whether or not Jews actually desired redemption is irrelevant because, in this discourse, they do not get to decide. In this instance, the stereotype is constructed by the majority culture and its message is enunciated through a certain mode of cultural communication in order to say what it wants to say about that which is

stereotyped. Doré's woodcuts may say different things about the Wandering Jew, each individual illustration revealing another layer of meaning to the story, but all his representations are negative; they are all rooted in Catholic anti-Jewish notions about punishing the anti-Christian Jew. However, his representation of 1852 in which the Wandering Jew is demonized and dehumanized is far more damning because the figure of the Jew-Devil cannot be saved from the flames of hell.

In the German language, the legend or myth of the Wandering Jew was referred to as the Eternal Jew (*Der Ewige Jude*). This particular concept of the Jew as a constantly roving presence in society is explained by Adolf L. Leschnitzer:

> Normally – and this is the underlying idea – a people is born, lives, achieves, and dies. Jewry, on the other hand, is something abnormal, as if it were a living corpse, a spectre. It has survived the great peoples of ancient history and reaches into our time, a mystery, an enigma. Jewry lives on and on, although it has lived up to its destiny, has accomplished its task. For what purpose, one must ask, does it still live?[91]

In the Christian drama, the role of the Jew was to take the blame for killing Christ. However, as this drama became more and more secularised, the Jew became a symbol of society's perennial ills and the legend of the Wandering Jew 'was given a hostile connotation: it meant that the Jew was an eternal plague'.[92] The narrative has always emphasised the unwillingness of Jews to embrace their assigned role in the Christian mythical play but as anti-Semitic ideologies imbue the legend, the Wandering Jew is associated 'with the medieval picture of the Jew as a ghoulish, demonic figure abducting Christian children, mutilating the Host or poisoning wells'.[93] The secular age, the age of enlightened thought and reason, the age of science was to reimagine the Jew as a demon, a ghoul, a spectre, a walking corpse, a zombie. The Jew was becoming the infernal/eternal other.

As Trachtenberg points out, anti-Jewish prejudices pre-dated Christendom and that 'it would be absurd to attribute its every manifestation to doctrinaire Christian hatred of the "Christ killers"' but a close examination of the demonological nature of anti-Jewish stereotyping reveals its medieval origins, 'born of a combination of cultural and historical factors peculiar to Christian Europe in the later Middle Ages'.[94] These medieval concepts of Jews, founded in Catholic theological polemics, mythologized the idea that the Jew was the Devil incarnate, allowing the Church to root out its enemies from within and without. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these anti-Jewish mythologies became anti-Semitic mythologies, allowing nation-states

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[91] Adolf L. Leschnitzer, 'The Wandering Jew: The Alienation of the Jewish Image in Christian Consciousness', *The Wandering Jew*, 229.
[92] Hyam Maccoby, 'The Wandering Jew as Sacred Executioner', *The Wandering Jew*, 253.
[93] Ibid., 253.
[94] Trachtenberg, *Devil and the Jews,* 6.

across Europe, including the Kingdom of Italy, to root out its enemies from within and without. Whilst the medieval anti-Jewish mythologies were motivated by religious ideologies, modern anti-Semitism drew on what Carmichael terms as the 'mock-science' of nineteenth-century racial ideologies.[95]

This transformation from the anti-Judaic to the anti-Semitic had an effect on the stereotype of Jew as infernal other:

> Thus, the word 'anti-Semitism', polite and socially acceptable, was also in harmony with the scientific temper of the age. It sounded rather scientific, as though it were part of the vocabulary of the newest biological science, or of the race theories now beginning to proliferate. The suffix '-ism' played a role: it gave the vulgar aversion to Jews a lofty cachet among those whose faith had shrivelled but in whose unconscious the deposit of hatred left by the debris of theology had calcified the infernal conception of Jewry.[96]

This 'calcification' of the Jew as infernal other by means of pseudo-scientific anti-Semitic theories categorised Jews as unredeemable, biologically unchangeable, inalterable, and fixed. The old anti-Judaic religious hatreds and prejudices, however virulent, did not preclude the possibility of individual Jews being saved by converting to Christianity. Modern anti-Semitism, beginning with the 'mock-scientific' racism of the 1840s, stigmatized the Jew eternally. Even if Jews chose to change their religion, they could not change who they were. This is what modern anti-Semitism created: the eternal infernal Jew. As Carmichael points out, even if the figure of Satan was being rendered more and more irrelevant by 'the cooling of faith and atheistic indifference, the Jews became *pure* Evil'.[97] The theology of reconciling Jews to Christ was becoming weaker and weaker as a belief system, which meant that Jews in the racist mind had lost their rationale for existence and were the cause of evil in the world. In this way, the Satan symbolisms remained as the racists 'retained the concept of the special maleficence of the Jews'.[98] To the racist minds of nineteenth and twentieth-century Europe, as perpetrators of pure evil, Jews still possessed devilish powers, they were still the personification of all things wicked. The two greatest enemies of Christ, the Jew and the Devil, were transformed by racist discourses into the evil other of the burgeoning European nation-state. In such societies, if the function of the Jew in any given cultural text is to symbolise the evil in society then the Devil is still very much in the detail.

Othering the Jew through demonizing or satanizing stereotypes, of which Doré's Wandering

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[95] Joel Carmichael, *The Satanizing of the Jews: Origin and Development of Mystical Anti-Semitism* (New York: Fromm International Publishing Corporation, 1192), 124.
[96] Ibid., 129.
[97] Ibid., 132, 133.
[98] Ibid., 134.

Jew-Devil is just one example, constructed an image of the Jew that was figurative of an eternal protagonist in the ongoing drama of good and evil, 'an unregenerate character, with evil magic powers derived from his long experience of life and his association with the Devil'.[99] The continual presence of this invented attachment between the Jew and the Devil reveals an underlying paranoia at the heart of European nation-state identity formations. A rootless cosmopolitan who has no real homeland, devoid of any connection with the land of the host nation was seen and projected as a threat to the nation's unity 'in the sense that he had no attachment to any human group, but was the common enemy and scourge of mankind in all his settled habitations'.[100] The tradition of demonizing the Jew, with layer upon layer of negative connotative meaning built up from the medieval period onwards, had created a 'fiend in barely human shape'.[101] Hyam Maccoby holds the view that nineteenth-century racialist anti-Semitism, although equally as negative as Christian anti-Semitism, operated without any of its restraints:

> From Christianity it derived the picture of the Jews as the people of the Devil; but it jettisoned the Christian idea that the Devil too has his place in the scheme of things. Thus, dangerous as Christianity was to Jews, the move from Christian to post-Christian society was even more dangerous.[102]

Maccoby is arguing that the secular society of nineteenth and twentieth-century Europe still held onto the most irrational prejudices concerning the Jewish communities living within its geopolitical boundaries. Secularism attacked all forms of mythmaking and belief systems, Christian or otherwise, that were based on superstition, irrationality and yet, in the case of Jews, it still believed in the supernatural forces of evil. When it came to imagining or reimagining Jews, the secularist philosophers, poets, novelists, physicians, and scientists all still believed in monsters. The typological descriptions used to label Jews come straight from the invented world of medieval folkloric tales in which a singular community lives in fear of ghouls, spectres, demons, bogeymen, and vampires. In the secular anti-Semitic imagination, the Devil was still very much alive and the Jew was regarded 'as a necessary evil, like the Devil himself, in the sense that evil in this world is inevitable'.[103]

When these anti-Jewish types appear in art, the mythologies or folk tales that coalesce around these representations are transformed into enduring realities. These new discursive realities have a certain power. Referring to the modes of artistic production in Renaissance Italy, Katz says

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[99] Maccoby, 'The Wandering Jew as Sacred Executioner', 252.
[100] Ibid., 255.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid., 226.
[103] Ibid., 258.

that 'painting possesses the power to impose a reality on its subjects and to ensure the continual efficacy of that reality'. The same could be argued about film. If the stereotypical images of Jews in Renaissance paintings could impose a certain reality on its subjects then it could be argued that the films of Liberal Italy can do the same. The medium of film can historicise the image of the Jew in the Kingdom of Italy in much the same manner that paintings did so for the image of the Renaissance Italian Jew. This chapter will now trace the connections between these pictorial representations from different eras along with their various iconographies and discuss how these images contributed to national ideological projects concerning the creating of Italians by constructing their Other.

The Emancipated Jew is Still the Devil

The nineteenth century, with its Risorgimento ideals of tolerance and emancipation, brought legal equality to Italian Jews. As has already been explained, post-unification Italy was far more tolerant of Jews than any other country in Europe and, in general terms, favourable relations existed between Italian Jews and their non-Jewish neighbours. [104] But this did not mean that anti-Semitism was absent in Liberal Italian society. Emancipation 'did not bring real and universal social acceptance to' Italian Jews.[105] Nicholls argues that anti-Semitism in the Kingdom of Italy may have been a reaction to the constitutional freedoms given to Italian Jews. It was as if emancipation, which led to integration and assimilation had diminished the differences between the Jew and the non-Jew living in Italy. As markers of Jewish difference were fading, anxieties regarding hybridity and the dilution of the Italian 'race' were deepening in ultranationalist circles. Across *fin-de-siècle* Europe, a radicalisation of Enlightenment ideas was taking place, which led to a new type of nationalism based on what Nicholas Doumanis describes as 'ethnic chauvinism, war and dictatorship'.[106] These new nationalists of the new Right were 'characteristically xenophobic, hostile towards immigrants, established minorities – especially Jews – and most foreign nations'.[107] The new nationalists' greatest concern was protecting the nation-state from hostile foreign forces. The foreign was seen as a dangerous threat to national cohesion. The principal way of identifying the foreign element in society was to focus on race. As Doumanis explains:

> They were convinced of the innate superiority of their own national community, which they

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[104] Nicholls, *Christian Antisemitism*, 311.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Nicholas Doumanis, *Inventing the Nation: Italy* (London: Arnold Publishers, 2001), 121.
[107] Ibid.

often perceived as a distinctive 'race', and had a paranoid conviction that enemies were
lurking both within and beyond the nation. For these radical nationalists, the 'Fatherland'
was in constant mortal danger.[108]

For the new nationalists of Italy, race was an important tool in fabricating the Self, the Collective
Self, the Other, and the Collective Other. Constructing racial differences that were based on binary
opposites invented Italy by inventing the other. This form of identity invention required the
'awesome power of stereotypes' with their reductive simplicity. Their caricaturing exaggeration
was essential in communicating the nationalists' message: this is Italy, these are the Italians and we
all need to be protected against them. A certain image of the Jew entered into these racialist
discourses that deliberately emphasised Jewish racial, ethnic, and physiognomic differences. When
Jewish cultural, ritual, and religious differences were added to the identity mix, the image of the
Jew functioned as a potent representation of the foreign 'them'. This fabricated image, a fusion of
folkloric, Christian and modern anti-Semitic mythology, however, was altogether more menacing
and threatening. The Jewish 'them' signified not just difference but danger. Jews were hated
because they were poor, uneducated, uncivilized, uncouth, and because they were rich, clever,
entrepreneurial, successful, and cosmopolitan. This new Jew, an amalgamation of old and new
stereotypes, embodied all that was bad about Jews, the ultimate villainous Other. This is a history
of hate, hatred towards Jews for simply being Jews and for possessing a character, a look, a culture,
a diet, a language, a religion that was the perfect representation of the evil Other.

According to Nicholls, during the nineteenth century across Europe, especially from the
mid-1850s onwards, the anti-Jewish myths of old were being secularised. This may have been the
period of Jewish emancipation but it was a period in European history marked by reactionary
politics. Equal rights to Jews were granted as European governments granted their peoples with
new constitutions. However, changing laws does not equate to a change in social attitudes. When
the ghetto gates were pulled down in Rome, the Jews who were forced to live within its walls were
now permitted to live anywhere in the city; 'when they emerged, however, they were met with
violence'.[109]

This is the period in history out of which the new, unified nation of Italy would be born. But
the historian Doumanis describes the Risorgimento as a stillbirth and the Kingdom of Italy as a
'stillborn nation'.[110] Despite espousing political ideals of progress, the newly born Italy was going
backwards. Poverty, crime, and other serious social problems were increasing. Millions of newly-

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[108] Ibid.
[109] Nicholls, *Christian Antisemitism*, 310.
[110] Doumanis, *Inventing the Nation*, 107.

made Italians were leaving their new nation-state, deciding, instead, to search for prosperity in other northern European countries and in the Americas.[111] Class divisions were rife. Italy may have been politically unified but on a socio-political level, the nation was far from being united. Italian Jewry, although constitutionally emancipated, suffered as a result of such upheaval. The fears and concerns of a society in turmoil were projected onto its ethnic minority groups; Jews included. Emancipation did not stop Italian Jews from being persecuted and, it could be argued, that the ideological process of demonization Italian Jewry intensified. In terms of relations between Jews and non-Jews living in Italy, this is how Nicholls describes the situation in Italy at the turn of the century:

> Jews were never felt by their fellow citizens to be so alien as when they mixed freely with others and had abandoned most of what had hitherto been distinctive in their way of life. Old hatreds persisted, and new rationalisations were devised for them. Both the Left and the Right continued to be hostile to Jews, and in due course the new racist antisemitism was combined in many Christian circles with the old theological hatreds. The readiness with which the new antisemitism could be integrated into the old theological anti-Judaism is perhaps the strongest evidence that they were not essentially different. The new was the deadly offspring of the old.[112]

The concept of the Jew as alien in Italian society in this new turn-of-the-century 'deadly' form of anti-Jewish ideology became critical in the construction of the Jew as dangerous internal other at a time in history when Italy was building a set of geographical knowledges based on the creating, the fixing, and the policing of its national boundaries as well as the expansion of those borders through colonial geopolitical desires. In demonizing Italian Jewry, nationalist and/or colonialist rhetoric was serving an imperialist purpose at home:

> Naturalizing and legitimizing the racial difference that underpinned colonialism, providing spatial theories to support expansionism, or persuading Italians to conceptualise themselves as an 'imperial people'.[113]

As Italy moved into the twentieth century, spatial expansion was concurrent with spatial containment. The geopolitics of both initiatives was interconnected if not interdependent. The external colonial other was mirrored at home by the internal other, a parallel Othering project that was driven by spatial theories that revolved around the belief in segregation. Segregation and clear

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[111] Doumanis notes: 'During the first half-century of Italy's existence, 16.6 million departures were recorded, with approximately 10 million Italians applying to migrate between 1896 and 1915', *Inventing the Nation,* 108.

[112] Nicholls, *Christian Antisemitism*, 311.

[113] David Atkinson, 'Constructing Italian Africa: Geography and Geopolitics', *Italian Colonialism*, ed. Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 24.

lines of demarcation between Italians and Others both at home and abroad would help protect these contested spaces of identity from such problematic and anxiety-inducing ideas as hybridity. Acculturated or assimilated Italian Jews blurred these lines, entering into the liminal spaces of Italian identity and moving into figurative segregated zones undetected. Conceptualised in this way, Jews were alien 'space invaders', circumscribed as trespassers. The early part of the twentieth century in Italy's history, the period in which the film *L'Inferno* was made, was a period of identity paranoia where 'the Italian race' was deemed to be under threat due to 'its unfortunate proximity to Jews in Italy and to Africans in the colonies'.[114] (For more on this identity paranoia during the time of Italy's colonial projects, see the final chapter on the film *Cabiria*.)

Ruth Ben-Ghiat believes that this paranoia stems from Italy's insecurities as a result of the nation's 'ambivalent identity position generally perceived as located between Mediterraneanness and Europeanness'.[115] According to Vetri Nathan, Italy has a history of being categorised as Europe's internal other, which 'has led to chronic ambivalence over its status as a European nation'.[116] The late formation of Italy as a nation-state in the nineteenth century and the complicated nature of uniting a country that was fragmented culturally and linguistically are factors that, according to Nathan: 'Capture the relative otherness of Italy in relation to Europe, consistently perceived from within and without as a nation resigned to only partially assume all the requirements of a "Western-European-style democratic" nation.'[117] The effect of this chronic ambivalence, as Nathan calls it, on Italian identity formation politics was to fetishize the objects essential to the building of nation-states and nationhood: boundaries, governance, law, language, cuisine, culture, identity, belonging, territory and race. When these building blocks are clearly recognisable, containing readily identifiable concepts, notions of nation can put down roots in a clearly demarcated cultural space. The conceptual space of Italy and all the cultural objects fetishized within that location must be seen as clearly as the Kingdom of Italy's geopolitical outline on a map.

In-between spaces, interstices where the Italian self and the Italian other are fused together to become a new entity were highly problematic to the nation-state's sense of identity. There was no place in the ultranationalist agenda of Liberal Italy for such ideas. The self and the other had be kept apart, the colonizer and the colonized, on home soil or on settlements abroad, had to be segregated in case they were to occupy and cohabit what Homi Bhabha would go on to describe as

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[114] Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, 'Introduction: Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Culture', *National Belongings: Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Cultures*, ed. Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Bern: Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers, 2010), 9.
[115] Ibid., 4
[116] Vetri Nathan, 'Mimic-nation, Mimic-men: Contextualising Italy's Migration Culture through Bhabha', *National Belongings*, 48.
[117] Ibid., 50.

the 'third' space: the territory of hybridity, the location of 'classificatory confusion'.[118]

In a newly formed nation of previously fragmented territories and peoples that was fixated on the idea of becoming a great colonial power in its own right, ideas concerning hybridity caused anxiety. Some of the peninsula's pre-risgorgimento states had been colonised by other nations in the past, therefore, any image of the new unified country painted by nationalist discourses had to project homogeneity in terms of race, language, and culture. The nation and all concepts relating to the national ideal had to be a singular, distinct entity. Anything that fractured that unity was considered a threat by the body politic or by Catholic hegemony. In ultranationalist ideologies, the pairing of Italian and non-Italian had to be maintained. This was the ordered symmetry of Othering at work. As far as Nathan is concerned, any disquiet or anxiety concerning the threat of hybridity to concepts of Italian identity was exposed by the presence of stereotypes in the cultural production of the nation.[119] The Jewish diabolical Other is a symbol of difference but when aspects of difference are visualised, Bhabha insists that the stereotype is assigned with a certain authority because the visual is, in general terms, mimetic of the natural.[120] When this anti-Jewish/antisemitic stereotype is visualised, the unnatural and the natural world is conflated. The natural and the supernatural are melded into a new type of reality: an object of disquieting dread infiltrating society and the perfect symbol of the eternal, infernal non-Italian Other. The next section will discuss the presence of demonising anti-Jewish stereotypes in the film *L'Inferno*.

L'Inferno's Money Shot: The Devil as Jewish Traitor

Bryony Dixon, in writing about *L'Inferno*, says that 'no one ever lost money with tales of the Devil'.[121] Representations of the Devil offer the viewer the pleasure of being fearful and yet curiously fascinated at the same time. Despite the fear factor, the irresistible pull of the image makes looking away extremely difficult. These depictions of the diabolic can be read as an expression of society's fears and concerns during times of heightened anxieties. The turn of the century saw socio-political changes that caused both excitement and fear in Italian society. Doumanis highlights the principal mechanisms driving forward these changes:

> Unprecedented technological progress, rapid industrialization, urbanization, mass
> immigration, mass culture, and other developments that commonly come under the rubric of

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[118] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 130.
[119] Nathan, *National Belongings*, 53.
[120] Bhabha, *Location*, 113, 114.
[121] Bryony Dixon, *Silent Films,* 107.

'modernization', had produced extraordinary cultural side-effects. Modernity made many nervous. The appearance of motor cars, aeroplanes and moving pictures might confirm that civilization was moving forward, but falling birth-rates and a decline in church attendance and other traditional practices were seen by many as signs that it was heading towards a precipice.[122]

This section will argue that upheavals in 1911 Italy bleed into the horrifying images of Padovan and Bertolini's film and find their ultimate expression in the film's dramatic concluding shots of Lucifer.
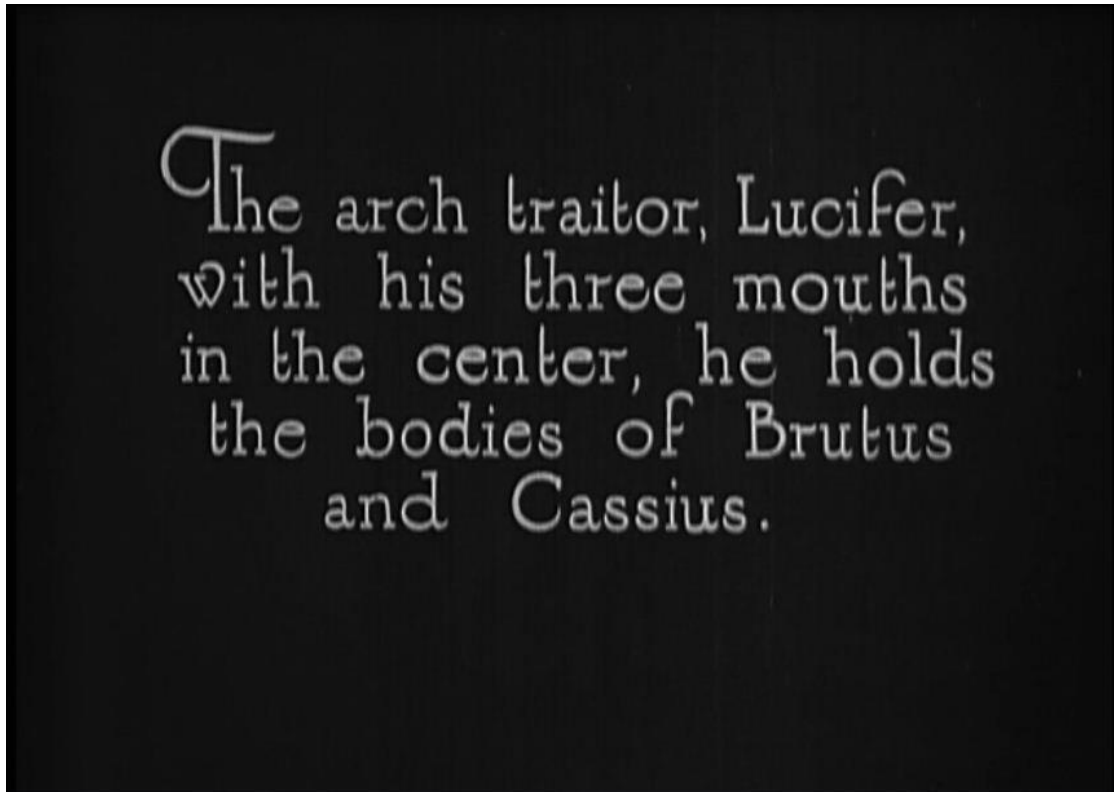
Figure 14

Dante finally enters the ninth circle of Hell, which symbolises Treachery, the ultimate sin, and finds four further zones or rounds, each one, in order of seriousness, containing traitors who have betrayed friends, families, guests, and lords. These rounds are bookended by the names of two infamous characters in the cosmic drama of good and evil. Round One is called Caïna. The traitor here, of course, is Cain who murdered his own brother and who became for anti-Jewish Christians the symbol of Judaism, rejected for its treachery. Catherine S. Cox makes a connection between Cain and the figure of the Wandering Jew and, in particular, between the Jew badge, and the marking of Cain. The thirteenth-century Jew badge of Pope Innocent III was a visual marker of difference, making the invisible visible. There had to be a clear distinction between Christianity

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[122] Doumanis, *Inventing the Nation*, 122.

and Judaism. Adherents to these faiths had to be seen as different otherwise a fusion of identities could lead to a confusion of faiths. These visual markers of difference did not separate two equal entities; Innocent's Jew badge stigmatised the Jew's identity and religion. During this period in the middle ages, the Jew had to be seen not only as different to the Christian but as subordinate.[123] Innocent's anti-Jewish position had been shaped by Augustine-influenced ideas, which were in turn influenced by a misreading of the account in Genesis regarding the marking of Cain. Innocent's interdict stated:

> The Lord indicated that Cain be made a wanderer and a fugitive over the earth…Thus the Jews, against whom the blood of Jesus Christ calls out, ought not be killed, lest the Christian people forget the divine law.[124]

This mark was invested with iconic status. Doré's secularised version of The Wandering Jew has the mark of Cain on his forehead in the form of a crucifix. He is the embodiment of the 'doctrine of witness', preserving the Jew's status as a necessary but simultaneously unwanted component within Christianity. For the Christian drama to reach its teleological conclusion, the Jews had to be included as signifiers of the old and rejected. The reason for that rejection was simple: treachery. Cain betrayed his brother and killed him; the Jews betrayed their brother and killed him. The divine law led to Christ and the infernal Jew, Cain's descendent, served as a constant reminder of Christian superiority for having accepted the Messiah. Without the Jew, Christian orthodox eschatology would not make sense. This is why he was shaped by Christian anti-Jewish mythology into an eternal character but infernally so. One important way in which this is accomplished is through the deployment of demonizing anti-Jewish/antisemitic stereotypes. The name chosen for this innermost region of hell by Dante is further of evidence of the Judaic Other at work in a Christian allegory.

The name chosen for the deepest part of hell, Round Four, is Judecca or Judas's circle, named after Judas Iscariot and Doré's drawing of Satan trapped, waist high, in the frozen lake called Cocytus uses this title. In Judecca, the figure of Satan and of Judas Iscariot is conflated, a common depiction in the middle ages as Cox explains: 'In medieval culture, representations of Judas are so frequently conflated with demonic and diabolical figures as to be ordinary, and, in conjunction with these sets of associations, he is a figure of Jews and Judaism as well.'[125] Despite the presence of Hebrew-scripture characters such as Moses, Sarah, and Rachel in the circles of Paradiso, Dante chooses the New Testament Judas Iscariot as Judaism's main representative. He is 'the Christian

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[123] Catherine S. Cox, *The Judaic Other in Dante, the Gawain Poet, and Chaucer* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 23.
[124] Ibid., 24.
[125] Ibid., 28.

exemplar of demonic Jewry'.[126] In Padovan and Bertolini's film, this connection between Judas and the Devil is hinted at rather than expressly stated. Although the word Judecca does not appear in the film, the intertitle that introduces the audience to the film's climactic scene refers to Lucifer as the arch traitor (see fig 14.). In the Christian tradition, the word traitor is synonymous with the gospel betrayer of Jesus and so the wording of the intertitle subtly conflates the treachery of Judas Iscariot with demonic behaviour and situates him within the parameters of Lucifer's control. This is a dramatic filmic example of 'the patristic hermeneutic Jew trope'.[127] The narrative function of this Judas-Lucifer figure is to elucidate all that is evil about treachery, the worst fear of a nation-state that harbours colonial ambitions and an indicator of societal anxiety as the Great War looms on the horizon. The popular medieval melding of Cain, Judas, and the Antichrist comes to life on the big screen, perpetuating age-old anti-Judaic stereotypes and reinforcing the more modern anti-Semitic stereotypes, which were obsessed with projecting images of the other based, primarily, on racial difference.

Figure 15

The intertitle prepares the audience for a shocking image. Lucifer with his three mouths is eating the enemies of the state: Brutus and Cassius, the conspirators and assassinators of Julius

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[126] Ibid., 36.
[127] Ibid., 71.

Caesar. In Dante's mind these traitors, along with Judas Iscariot, were worthy of eternal punishment by being chewed in one of Lucifer's three mouths. These images represent what Dante saw as Treachery against their Masters, and their filmic representation located within a cultural text that was produced in the historical context of Liberal Italy, could be read as a symbolic image of treachery against the nation-state. Lucifer's three mouths (see fig. 15) is a dramatic visualisation of a certain type of trinity that was formed during the Middle Ages. This was an unholy trinity to symbolise the spiritually dead world of Judaism. This is a Catholic hermeneutic device, described by Moshe Lazar as the 'Luciferian Trinity (Devil-Antichrist-Jew)'.[128] This new trinity of the profane served to bolster an antagonistic dualism: Christ versus the Devil. 'The Church is defined as godly, the Synagogue as satanic' says Lazar, and Jews 'described as descendants of Cain and identified with the Devil, the Jews are given all the possible attributes and qualifications, all the images and symbols that pertain to the prince of the netherworld'.[129]
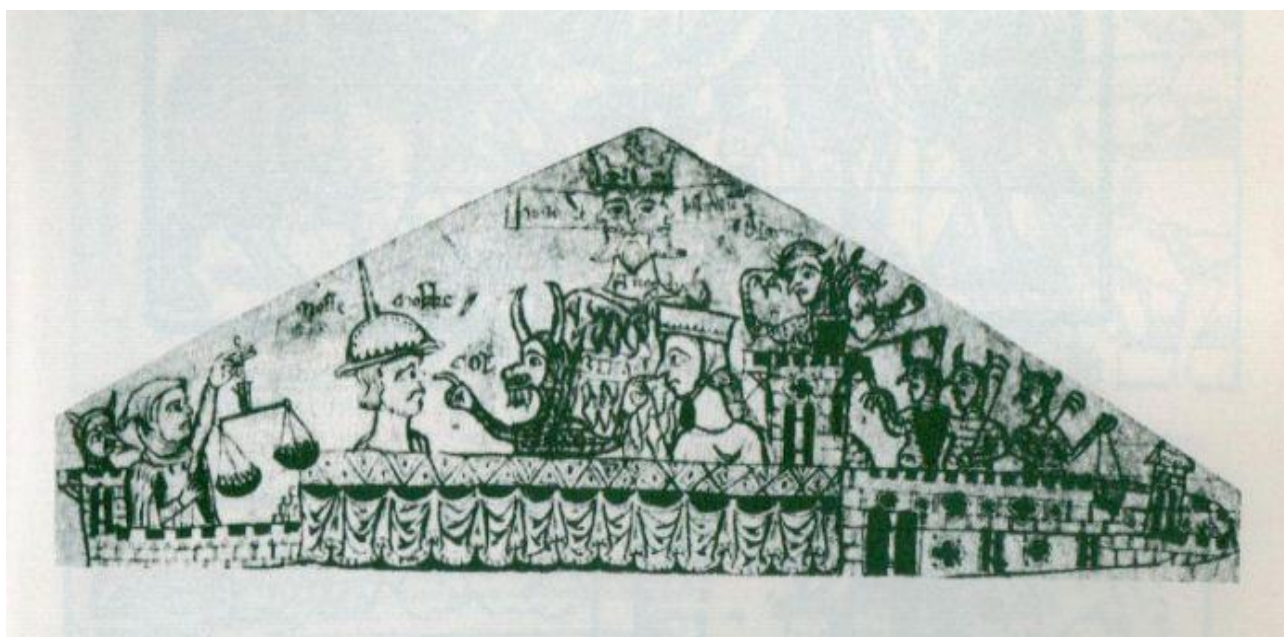

Figure 16

Modern turn-of-the-century anti-Semitic propaganda, in which the Jews become the Devil's mediators on earth, can be traced back to the anti-Judaic stereotypes of the High Middle Ages. In the depiction below (see fig 16.), which is taken from an English manuscript dated 1233, this unholy trinity is personified in the figure of the wealthy Jew, Isaac of Norwich. He is pictured right at the top of the scene with his strange three-in-one face and three devilish goatee beards,

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[128] Moshe Lazar, 'The Lamb and the Scapegoat: The Dehumanization of the Jews in Medieval Propaganda Imagery', *Anti-Semitism in Times of Crisis*, ed. Sander L. Gilman and Steven Katz (New York and London: New York University Press, 1991), 38.
[129] Ibid., 40.

resembling the very embodiment of the Luciferian trinity. He is a commanding all-surveying figure and is seen to be wearing the crown of King Henry III, an apt symbol of his power. However, this most definitely is not regal power, neither in origin nor in nature. In the bottom left-hand corner of the illustration, there is a pair of usurer's scales that reveals the real reason behind Isaac's ill-gotten gains: moneylending. This Jew is prosperous only because he has exploited the prosperity of others. In addition, Isaac of Norwich does not command ordinary soldiers but demons, suggesting that he is protecting his fortress by supernatural means. In fact, standing beneath Isaac and, therefore, under his control, is a horned devil-like creature who signals with gesticulating authority that the other Jewish characters in the scene belong to him. The devil does this by pointing to their prominent Jewish noses thus attributing demonic significance to a caricatured Jewish physiognomy.

Notions of rebellion, disloyalty, and heresy were reified in the visual image of Jews as devils. The constant use of this motif objectified Jews as a real and present diabolical danger within society. As Robert Bonfil explains, Jews were seen as posing a constant threat to not only to the secular structure of society but also to God's Church on earth, undermining the faith of Christian believers by sowing seeds of doubt. The Devil tempts believers to stray from the path of truth and, the Jews, his earthly agents, are his accomplices in this trickery of Christians.[130] He stands in opposition to Christ and so do they. Bonfil asserts:

> Stated simply, the Jews, who lived among the Christians as a distinct religious community, were perceived as embodying the will of Satan. With their demonic poison they endangered the very well-being of Christianity. The challenge which Judaism represented for Christianity was nothing less than the challenge of the Devil.[131]

Church art fulfilled an important function in this regard because it could reach the illiterate masses through the use of pictures. The location of these works of art must not be underestimated. The churches of Christendom were believed to be God's houses on earth. Any pictorial representations contained within their walls or hanging from their walls were attributed with theocratic authority. The Church promoted the idea that God was speaking to believers through these representations. The Jews in Christian art and folklore, especially during the medieval period, were often portrayed with goatee beards and as having demonic tails. Their bulging black eyes signified menace and, occasionally, horns appeared on the top of their heads signifying their evil relationship with the Devil.

This imagery is replicated in Padovan and Bertolini's film at a time when the Catholic

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[130] Robert Bonfil, 'The Devil and the Jews in the Christian Consciousness of the Middle Ages', *Antisemitism through the Ages*, ed. Shmuel Almog (Oxford and New York: Pergamon Press, 1988), 91.
[131] Ibid., 97.

Church was competing for power in a post-Risorgimento nation-state that was 'determined to disregard the one factor that nearly all Italians had in common: Roman Catholicism'.[132] Recording Dante's Christian allegory on celluloid and projecting it onto Italy's big screens reveals that Catholic imagery with its fear-inducing iconography still had the power to fascinate. The choice of subject matter could also mean that religion, despite the anticlericalism of secular Italian nationalists, was still seen as a powerful marker of ethnic identity. Any image that conflated Jews with the Devil underpinned the Othering of Jews during a time when the Catholic Church still commanded a moral authority and, despite falling church attendances, was still capable of 'rallying the great mass of the population'.[133]

It could be argued that the secular nationalist racial stereotyping of Jews turned to past religious demonizing iconography so as to construct an image of the Italian other that deliberately tapped into Catholic credos that still held sway over the populace at large. On the other hand, these devil images in Doré's Dante-inspired illustrations and in the Milano-Films Doré-Dante inspired film were rooted in medieval Catholic visualisations of the Jew-as-Devil/Devil-as-Jew trope and could testify to the continual presence of religious animosity towards Jews living in an emancipated Liberal Italy. The battle for Christian self-affirmation was far from over for the Catholic Church; in fact it intensified as Italy's secularists were challenging its authority. However, when the Church was finally accepted by the political classes and integrated into the national political system almost fifty years after the seizure of Rome, it participated in the process of creating Italians.[134] Catholic ideologies infused the Othering process and brought religion back into identity politics at a time when it was being dominated by issues concerning race. The presence of the Jew-Devil image in 1911 Italy shows that its potency is still useful in both religious and secular identity politics in creating a modern archetype that captures all that is in direct opposition to the idealised Italian citizen, 'a semisatanic figure, cursed by God, and marked off by the state'.[135]

The appearance of Padovan and Bertolini's Lucifer can be read as a signifier of demonic Jewishness. As Ziva Amishai-Maisels elucidates, the Devil and/or demons were portrayed in much the same way as Jews in the visual arts. In the visual language of religious art, Jews and the Devil were synonymous with each other. The iconography is shared between them: horns, tails, claws, fiery breath, unkempt hair and beard, thick lips, large mouths and tongues, and long or hooked noses.[136] Together these characteristics make up the demonic face (see fig. 17). The unkempt hair

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[132] Doumanis, *Inventing the Nation*, 110.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid., 112.
[135] Lazar, *Anti-Semitism*, 47.
[136] Ziva Amishai-Maisels, 'The Demonization of the "Other" in the Visual Arts', *Demonizing the Other,* 50.

was a sign of sorcery, the large mouths and tongues symbolised heresy and blasphemy.[137] Amishai-Maisels discusses how, starting in the ninth century, Christian art began to demonize the Jewish enemy resulting in an imagery that 'has both *sub-* and *super*-human overtones, and elicits fear as well as contempt'.[138]

Figure 17

The hooked nose is a signifier of the demonic and is seen in Milano-Films Lucifer especially in the profile of the left-hand face of the unholy trinity of faces. Amishai-Maisels explains its meaning:

> This originally demonic feature became specifically associated with Jews by the thirteenth century, and has remained an accepted stereotype to this day. Thus many depictions of Christ's Passion and other scenes of his life display hooked-nose Jews, and the demonic meaning thus given the Jew is indicated by the thirteenth century drawing in the Forest Roll of Essex of hooked-nose Jew labelled 'Aaron fil diaboli'.[139]

Beradi and Busnego's Lucifer has three hooked-noses. The ones belonging to the side faces are grotesquely exaggerated in the manner of Punch and Judy noses, invoking feeling of ridicule and

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[137] Ibid., 50.
[138] Ibid., 51.
[139] Ibid., 53.

disgust at the same time (see fig. 18). According to Ruth Mellinkoff, the Jewish hooked-nose 'was portrayed as a derogatory attribute in Christian art on figures considered evil'. [140]

Figure 18

Many anti-Jewish images represent Jews as having birds' heads with long beaks or as having human heads but with long beak-like noses.[141] Mellinkoff is certain that these images are a variation on the stereotype of the 'Jewish nose' and that they have negative connotations and 'deprecatory implications'.[142] These images have 'magnified the concept of the hooked nose, cartooning it into a bird's beak'. [143] Sometimes, these beak-like noses are not highly stylised and not greatly exaggerated but their negativity makes their anti-Semitism unambiguous. Other non-Jewish figures in Christian art are never represented as having birds' heads with hooked, beak-like noses, a factor that amplifies the negativity surrounding these images. These disparaging distortions found their way into the performing arts or, as Heinrich Strauss believes, actually originated in the medieval world of theatre, spectacle and performance and that these caricatured images of Jews, these 'visual

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[140] Ruth Mellinkoff, *Antisemitic Hate Signs in Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts from Medieval Germany* (Jerusalem: Hamakor Press, 1993), 23.
[141] Ibid., 25.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.

concepts stemmed from stage masks used in the medieval Christian drama to portray Jewish stereotypes'.[144] Seeing a character wearing a bird-like mask with a long protruding beak-like nose provided the audience with an instantly recognisable archetype – an archetype of badness.

In the Milano-Films version, another aspect of Lucifer's demonic face that demands further examination is his stare. Daniel Pick reveals how, during the Middle Ages, Jews were seen as magicians, illusionists, and practitioners of the dark arts that could, by means of uncanny powers, mesmerise Gentiles and, ultimately, seduce them. Jewish eyes were dangerous:

> The Jew's very glance was said by some to be so piercing and intense that it could unsettle gentiles with or without their consciously knowing it. Underhand powers of fascination as well as conquest were thought to be the very trademarks of the Jews.[145]

Many of these trademark features were fleshed out by using sinister fictional characters. Pick provides one example: a character called Svengali in George Du Maurier's novel *Trilby* (1894) and a brief consideration of this character's appearance sheds light on some of the *fin-de-siècle* notions concerning the Jewish evil eye and how some of these attitudes may have manifested themselves in Padovan and Bertolini's twentieth-century representation of Lucifer.

Du Maurier's protagonist is a new variation on the Jew-Devil stereotype: the Jew as an evil hypnotist. When Edgar Rosenberg reads in the novel about 'Svengali walking up and down the earth seeking whom he might cheat, betray, exploit' he sees the figure of Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew.[146] Svengali plays not only on the anti-Jewish fear of the Jew as a peripatetic thief or pickpocket but also on older fears of the Jew being in league with the Devil. Sara Libby Robinson discusses an original illustration from Du Maurier's novel (see fig. 19), which shows Svengali staring up at Trilby, enabling her to sing beautifully on stage by means of his uncanny powers. Robinson sees Trilby as a Christ-like figure in complete servitude to the evil powers of Svengali and Trilby's pose in the drawing as suggestive of torture or crucifixion.[147]

Robinson says that Du Maurier's contemporaries were aware of Svengali's medieval demonic connections and that the actor Max Beerbohm based his stage performances of 'du Maurier's villain on old representations of the devil'.[148] The theatre critic William Archer said that

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[144] Ibid., 11.

[145] Daniel Pick, 'Powers of Suggestion: Svengali and the *Fin-de-siècle*', *Modernity, Culture and 'the Jew'*, ed. Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 106.

[146] Edgar Rosenberg, *From Shylock to Svengali: Jewish Stereotypes in English Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), 242.

[147] Sara Libby Robinson, 'Blood Will Tell: Anti-Semitism and Vampires in British Popular Culture, 1875-1914', *Golem: Journal of Religion and Monsters* (3:1, 2009), 18.

[148] Ibid.

Svengali was 'lineally descended from the Devil of the Miracle Plays'.[149] Brenda Gardenour points out that this demonic stare is also part of the Jew-as-vampire stereotype and that in two filmic depictions of the vampire Nosferatu, the lighting was configured in a specific way so as to draw attention to the actors' 'piercing eyes, which stare deep into those of their victims, mesmerising them with their vampiric *pneuma*, the toxic spirit-breath of their being'.[150]

Figure 19

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[149] Daniel Pick, *Svengali's Web: The Alien Enchanter in Modern Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 12.

[150] Brenda Gardenour, 'The Biology of Blood-Lust: Medieval Medicine, Theology, and the Vampire Jew', *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 41:2 (Fall, 2011), 59. The specific films were *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* (F.W. Murnau, 1922) and *Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht* (Werner Herzog, 1979) and the actors were Max Schreck and Klaus Kinski respectively. For more on Gardenour's research and the connection between the Jew and the vampire narrative, see Chapter 1: *Il mercante di Venezia*: An Italian Habitation and an Italian Name.

As the Milano-Films Lucifer stares directly at the spectator with his bulging eyes and piercing gaze, there is something of Svengali at work. It is not inconceivable that elements of this turn-of-century conflation of medieval Jew-as-Devil and Jew-as-hypnotist could have become assimilated into this specific cinematic image of Lucifer. The demonic gaze could be read as a signifier of Jewish mischief making and the fear of Jewish penetration into Italian society. The Svengali-type Jew is a money-grubbing thief but he is capable of stealing far more than money. Those piercing hypnotic eyes are full of demonic menace and unholy intention. As Pick says: 'Svengali gave expression to fears of psychological invasion, showing the Jews' capacity to get inside – and even replace – the mental functioning of the gentile through mesmerism.'[151] It could be argued that the representation of the Devil in *L'Inferno*, with the physical characteristics that have, over the centuries, been traditionally attributed to Jews, was an early twentieth century cinematic manifestation of the irrational fear present in Italian society concerning the infiltration of the non-Italian alien. This image represents the outsider who tries to trespass onto Italian territory and pass as Italian, cheating, lying, exploiting, and seducing in the process. Through his mesmerism, Italian identity could be possessed by a sinister entity.

Lucifer's appearance acts as a warning sign. His face is not blackened completely so as to intimate black skin; it is merely black with dirt. Lucifer's appearance is that of a dishevelled, grotesquely hirsute man and the grime on his white skin prevents him from passing off as white. The devil cannot be white but this filmic devil is slightly ambivalent in nature: not totally black and not quite white. The black dirt on his skin is a visible maker of difference that can be read as metaphor of racial difference but which may go undetected. The dishevelled appearance is a salient feature of the Othering process. This is certainly true of the Svengali stereotype, as Pick explains:

> In *Trilby*, as well as in the plays and poems which followed, Svengali is represented as dirty, ill-mannered and gross; moreover, these attributes are seen as linked to - representative of – his Jewishness. Filthy Svengali is contrasted with the clean Englishmen.[152]

For Italian men, read Englishmen. The stereotype is the same, it is transcultural and transnational. The insiders are clean, white, and pure whereas the outsiders are dirty, black/blackened, and impure. Lucifer in this film is an image that could easily function as a representation of the dirty, degenerate, and foreign Other. There is nothing normative about the way he looks and there is nothing exotically attractive about this symbol of Italian Otherness. His presence in society threatens all that is quintessential about the majority group's identity.

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[151] Pick, 'Powers of Suggestion: Svengali and the *Fin-de-siècle*', 107.
[152] Ibid., 106.

The Money-Motivated Archetype

Figure 20

Judas Iscariot's treachery was motivated by money and Jews' attachment to money is often describes as dirty and grubby. In the hands of demonic Jewish moneylenders, money really does become filthy lucre. The image of Jew-as-Devil is often fused with the image of the Jewish usurer. There is a striking similarity between the image of Padovan's Lucifer and Isaac, the son of a Jewish moneylender, Daniele ebreo da Norsa, as depicted in a fifteenth-century Mantuan altarpiece, which Katz describes as 'a quiet and insidious form of violence' (see fig. 20).[153] This seemingly realistic portrayal of a Jewish family does not contain any demons as signifiers of Jewishness or other traditional emblems that connote Jewishness and embed it in the text, such as the use of scorpions in Paolo Uccello's 1468 *Profanation of the Host* to symbolize Jewish perfidy.[154] However, the devil is still lurking in the Mantuan painting of c.1499.

The whole family is relegated to the bottom of the painting, 'separated from the Madonna and the Child by an architectonic throne' and are 'portrayed as enemies of the faith, whose perfidy

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[153] Katz, *Art,* 45.
[154] Ibid., 56.

has not gone unpunished'.[155] The Christians are dominant but the Jews are dominated. Daniele, 'probably the central male figure with grey beard, dark eyes, and hooked nose, appears weathered and defeated'.[156] The Jewish women gaze downwards, unable or unwilling to look at the light of Christian truth. Daniele and Isaac both gaze slightly outwardly, catching the eye of the viewer, in either defiance or contrition; it is hard to tell. In Katz's commentary on the altarpiece, the following description is given:

> The Norsa…represent the perfidious Other and wear the indelible mark of the Jewish badge blazoned on their chests to denote their nonnegotiable visual identity. Three Gonzaga proclamations (*gride*) made the Jewish badge compulsory in Mantua in 1496, as Jews were to be 'distinct and diversified from Christians in dress as they are in faith'.[157]

This seemingly naturalistic portrait of the Jewish perfidious other, especially in the case of Isaac, who is pictured to the left of the scene, is a depiction of a certain Semitic look: a figure that is dark in countenance, dress and grooming, with large black eyes and a piercing stare, a large protruding hooked-nose, long black hair and a long black beard.
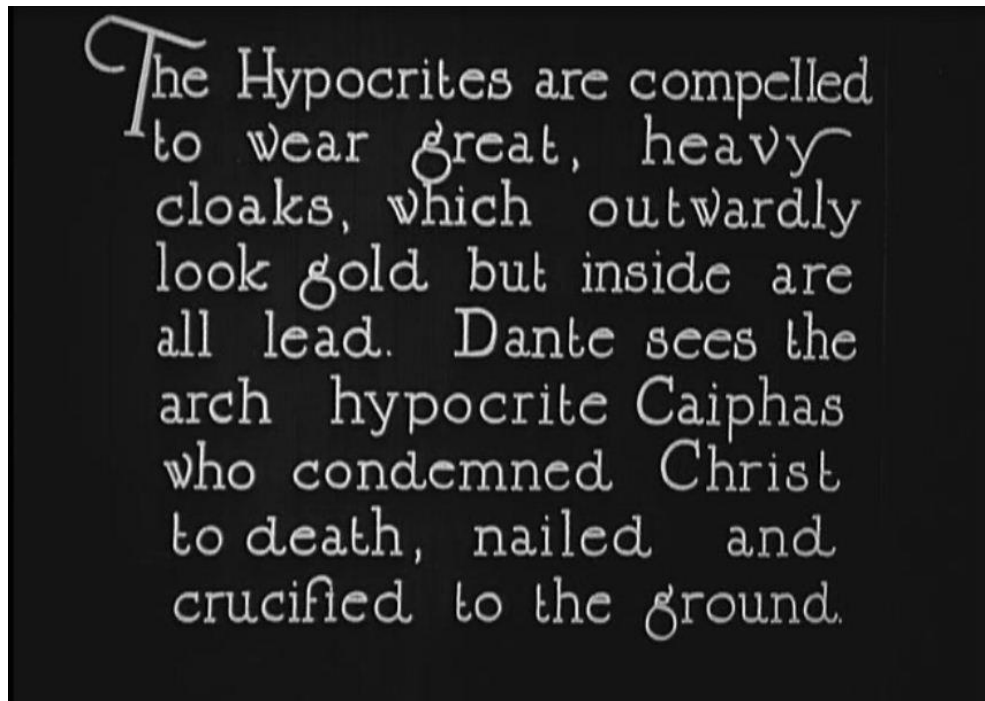
Figure 21

Padovan and Bertolini's Lucifer has this constructed Semitic look. Isaac and Lucifer are one and the same. It could be argued that in this 1911 filmic adaptation of Dante's *Inferno*, Satan, either

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[155] Ibid., 63.
[156] Ibid., 57.
[157] Ibid., 60.

consciously or unconsciously, was given a Semitic face. Likewise, the Jewish moneylenders Isaac of Norwich and Isaac da Norsa were Satanized.

The conflation of demonic evil with Jewish religious, ritual, and business practices produce what Maud Ellmann calls the 'hated double'. Through the 'mirror of identification', the majority group's 'own darkness' can be projected upon the Jews.[158] Money is often the root of all irrational hatreds towards Jews. In the process of unpicking many anti-Jewish stereotypes or narratives, very often the motivating factor behind Jewish misdemeanours is money. Judas Iscariot, an archetype of treachery in the Christian imagination, betrayed his master for money. However, if Judas was bought by money, it stands to reason that someone or some group did the buying. The scene that immediately precedes Dante's entry into the Judecca reveals all. Dante does not merely see any hypocrite but the arch hypocrite Caiaphas. The negative trait of hypocrisy is reified in the figure of the Jewish High Priest who, in the words of the intertitle, 'condemned Christ to death'.

Caiaphas's piousness as a religious leader could not hide his true nature as a power-hungry murderer. If the Jewish High Priest is the arch hypocrite, the entire Jewish faith is deemed suspect and untrustworthy. The placement of the definite article and the use of the word 'arch' transform Caiaphas into an anti-Judaic metonym (see fig. 21). The inference here is that Caiaphas, at base, is a temporal rather than spiritual figure, driven by ambition. In his position of authority and power as High Priest, he uses the religious funds at his disposal for the procurement of information that, ultimately, leads to the killing of Christ. Just like Cain, he harbours cruel murderous intentions and the criminal abuse of money for wicked ends reveals his true nature.

The heavy cloaks that the hypocrites are forced to wear in this circle of hell look like gold on the outside but, on the inside, are made of lead. Judaism, as represented by the High Priest Caiaphas, may appear to be Christianity's brother but, in reality, it is its enemy. The crime of condemning Christ to death did not go unpunished. He is crucified on the ground and, as the scene in the film plays out, all the hypocrites, weighed down by their heavy cloaks of lead, walk slowly over him, trampling him underfoot (see fig. 22).

Interestingly, out of the 54 scenes contained in the film, this scene of Caiaphas's torture and humiliation was one of those deployed to promote the film within the trade in the United States, seeking 'responsible movie picture men' to bid for the rights to exhibit the film in their individual state. The advertisement says that Dante's Inferno is 'a big money film and will be exploited on a big scale'.[159] Consciously or not, this promotional literature with its blood-red image of the arch-hypocrite Caiaphas receiving his punishment exploits anti-Judaic prejudices that go back many

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[158] Maud Ellmann, quoted in Cox, *Judaic Other in Dante.*, 151.
[159] *The Moving Pictures World* 9:3 (July, 1911), 224, 225.

centuries (see fig. 23). The same company, Monopol Film Co., proudly presents the film as 'the successor to the Passion Play' (see fig. 24).[160]

Figure 22

Figure 23

Figure 24

Lazar explains that the process of vilifying the Jews socially and religiously was dramatized during performances of medieval Christian plays in which 'the devils and the Jews…play the roles of the hideous villains and antagonists both for a didactic purpose and for comic relief'.[161] The Jews were the stage devils, the villains of medieval theatre, always seen to be 'gesticulating, shouting, ranting, and raving like mad dogs, cursing and blaspheming the holy beliefs and rituals of the Church'.[162] During Passion Plays, medieval religious plays performed across Europe during Easter to commemorate the suffering, the death, and the resurrection of Christ, Jews were emphasised as aliens in a homogenised Christian society through brutal caricature 'in which the actors portraying Jews would stammer incoherent Hebrew or even nonsense syllables', to symbolise their demonic possession.[163] If this film is a successor to the passion play, the demonic vilification of the Jew in the form of the Jew-Devil motif lives on in this widely distributed early cinematic Italian text.

Conclusion

The religious imagery of Christian medieval art played a pivotal role in teaching a primarily illiterate spectator. Catholic artworks were didactic in nature and any negative pictorial depictions of Jews located in Christendom's places of worship would reinforce the Church's anti-Judaic message. The Catholic Church constructed a Jewish other so as to show its superiority as the keepers of divine truth on earth. Christian anti-Judaic polemics portrayed the Jew as the eternal villain for the crime of killing Christ. In the cosmic drama between Good and Evil, the Jew was transformed into the infernal other by being constantly associated with the Devil and/or his demons. This conflation makes the words 'Devil' and 'Jew' synonyms. In the visual language of art, images of one can signify the other, they were interchangeable. When these religiously motivated anti-Jewish ideas were melded to the mock scientific anti-Semitic racism of nineteenth and twentieth-century Europe, the stereotype of the Jew-as-evil-other was made even more sinister.

The Milano Films production, with its release in Italy carefully choreographed by the Dante Alighieri Society, did have a message to proclaim, it did have an apostolate to preach: *Italianità*. Gherardi and Lasi claim that it was not an accident that members of the Milanese aristocracy were employed as board members of Milano Films. Rather, it was a clear indication of the 'artistic course

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[161] Lazar, *Anti-Semitism*, 50.
[162] Ibid., 54.
[163] Bonfil, *Antisemitism*, 93.

the Milan-based film production company had set itself'.[164] Through Dante, *italianità* could be promoted internationally to enhance the image of the country abroad and confirm its status as a major force of cultural production in the world. Through Dante, *italianità* could be seen by the masses on the Italian silver screen, engendering feelings of national pride not only for Italy's burgeoning film industry and its technological advancements but for *la patria* herself. John P. Welle believes that Padovan and Bertolini's film 'helped to kick off the boom era of the Italian silent cinema and allowed film to compete favourably with the theatre for the first time' as well as making Italy's intellectual classes take note of cinema and recognise the 'potential of the new medium to contribute to Italian cultural unification'.[165]

This nation-state, born out of the Risorgimento and symbolised by Dante, was competing against other powerful nations and 'the defence of the unitary state' was paramount.[166] Moreover, *italianità* belonged to those who lived in the unredeemed territories and the last scene, which showed the statue of Dante standing defiantly in Trento – a city in one of those unredeemed areas –, highlights the period's irredentist political ambitions. Italy would soon fight to redeem these lands and expand its geo-political boundaries.

Italianità had its opposite enunciated in both of these Dante films. The sinners, the immoral, the lustful, the avaricious, the envious, and the prideful of Dante's inferno were all signifiers of the non-Italian. Soon after seeing the Milano-Films production in 1911, Bush wrote that the film would appeal to members of the Roman Catholic clergy because Dante's poem is based 'strictly on the orthodox Catholic philosophy'.[167] Any manifestations of Catholic orthodoxy present in these filmic case studies would have flowed into contemporary discourses on the nature of *italianità* and vice versa, contributing by means of a dialectical process to the construction of national identity and playing a role in its dissemination. Right at the centre of Dante's inferno, lies Lucifer, the opposite of all things Christian, of all things godly, of all things good; the epitome of evil. The former Dante-scholar-turned-filmmaker for Milano-Films, Adolfo Padovan, wrote about Dante's Devil seven years before his film was released: 'il Lucifero dantesco, grottesca mostruosità mediovale [Dante's Lucifer, a grotesque medieval monstrosity]'.[168] Padovan believed that Dante gave the Devil a gigantic quasi-human form for a specific didactic purpose: 'per mettere in vista la Potenza e

[164] Gherardi and Lasi, *Cinegrafia.*, 389.
[165] John P. Welle, 'Early Cinema, Dante's Inferno of 1911, and the Origins of Italian Film Culture', *Dante, Cinema, and Television*, ed. Amilcare A. Iannucci (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 36, 38.
[166] Ibid., 395.
[167] Bush, *The Moving Picture World,* 189.
[168] Adolfo Padovan, *L'Uomo di genio come poeta* (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli, 1904), 100.

la forza di un essere ribelle [to highlight the power and the force of a rebellious being]'.[169]

This chapter has shown, if only briefly, that the figure of the Jew has been traditionally fabricated in the plastic arts to represent rebelliousness. By transforming the Jew into the Jew-Devil, the Jew becomes not only a rebel but an arch rebel. This motif has endured and continues to circulate in Italian forms of communication. Modern Italian Sign Language, for example, uses signs for the Devil, the evil eye, temptation, inferno, yellow (a colour traditionally associated with Jews), Saturday (the Jewish Sabbath), and the Jew that are, ostensibly, based on the same base sign: the Devil's horns (See fig. 25).[170] To sign the Jew, '*l'ebreo*', the right hand forms the Devil's horns and then points towards the left shoulder in a gesture that evokes the red or yellow badges of stigmatisation worn by Jews living in Italian ghettos (See fig. 26).[171]

Whether the Jew-Devil trope appears in a Renaissance painting or poem, in a film or in language, it is the myth of the Jew at work in the text, as Barthes says, 'a type of speech', and a 'system of communication'.[172] The sinful, ungodly, unrepentant, treacherous, and rebellious Jew and the Devil go together, forming 'a progressive solidification of signs' capable of communicating with 'perfect intelligibility'.[173] The message of the myth? The Jew as Infernal Other.

The next chapter will focus on *Quo Vadis?* (Enrico Guazzoni, 1913) so as to continue this discussion on how the anti-Judaic and the anti-Semitic come together to fabricate a negative mythological figure of the Jew.

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[169] Ibid., 98.
[170] Elena Radutzky, *Dizionario bilingue elementare della lingua italiana dei segni*: *Oltre 2.500 significati* (Rome: Edizioni Kappa, 2001), 389.
[171] Ibid., 391.
[172] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Vintage Books, 2009 edition), 131.
[173] Ibid., 14.

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CORNA pl. f.
"Le corna del cervo sono diverse da quelle del daino."

389.1

Cat. Gramm.: sost.

Sinonimi:

-

Varianti:

. .

DIAVOLO
"Il diavolo viene spesso raffigurato con le corna e i piedi caprini."

389.2

Cat. Gramm.: sost.

Sinonimi:

-

Varianti:

-

GIALLO (PG)
"I bambini per disegnare usano molto il giallo, forse perché è il colore del sole."
Vedi il primo sinonimo a pag.192.2, il secondo, usato a Genova, a pag.207.1 ed il terzo, usato a Torino, a pag.205.1.

389.3

Cat. Gramm.: agg.

Sinonimi:

$G_{\perp\wedge*}\Delta^{\vee\omega}$, (GE) $G_{<\wedge*}\Pi^>$, (TO) $G_{\vee<}\cup^{>*>}$

Varianti:

-

Figure 25

EBREO, EBRAICO
"Il popolo ebraico ha origini antichissime.
Il Capodanno degli ebrei si festeggia in autunno."
Il sinonimo è un segno usato a Genova, vedi pag.397.3.

391.3

Cat. Gramm.: agg., sost.

Sinonimi:

(GE)$I_{<\wedge}$ $\times\cup$ $^{\omega}$..

Varianti:

-

Figure 26

Chapter Three:

Quo Vadis? - Where Will You Go Italian Jew?

'Antisemitism was a consistently exploited organizing principle, a pillar of Protestant and Catholic identity.'

James Carroll[1]

Enrico Guazzoni's silent epic, *Quo Vadis?* (1913), was the first film adaptation of Henryk Sienkiewicz's famous novel, which was published in Polish in 1895.[2] The narrative tells the story of love between a Roman nobleman, Vinicius (Amleto Novelli), and a Christian girl called Lygia (Lea Giunchi) during the reign of Emperor Nero (64 C.E.), a period of Christian persecution and martyrdom in the city of Rome. According to the classicist Simon Goldhill, there was an 'easy anti-Semitism' running through the narrative of Sienkiewicz's original source text, which tells the story of Emperor Nero's vehement persecution of Rome's early Christians.[3] In choosing the adjective 'easy' to describe anti-Semitism, Goldhill may be referring to the uncomplicated nature of the prejudice, an easy, matter-of-fact, unquestioning acceptance of such negative sentiments towards Jews, which stems from a long tradition of Catholic and Protestant anti-Judaic polemics. This chapter will argue that an 'easy anti-Semitism', a form of anti-Semitism based on age-old anti-Jewish stereotypical ideology and imagery, also runs through Guazzoni's filmic text.

The principal idea put forward will be that this 'easy anti-Semitism' was deployed for a specific political purpose: identity, the construction of a Catholic Italian identity, which defined the Jew as the negative Other, which would stand in opposition to the Italian nation-state's definition of itself and its citizens. To substantiate this argument, this study will examine closely the film's Jewish references and ground that textual analysis in the anti-Jewish rhetoric that was prevalent in the popular press during the time *Quo Vadis?* was produced and exhibited. All of these discussions will be organized around one key character in the film: Chilo Chilonides (Augusto Mastripietri, see fig. 27), a charlatan, a soothsayer, a liar, and a double-crossing first-century private detective who treacherously hunts down Christians for money. In her book *Italian Film*, Marcia Landy says that Chilo reminds her of the 'Monkey' character in Giovanni Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1914).[4] Landy does

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[1] James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews - A History* (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 478.

[2] Simon Goldhill, 'Bryn Mawr Classical Review 2009.03.60 – Review: Ruth Scodel, Anja Bettenworth, Whither Quo Vadis?: Sienkiewicz's Novel in Film and Television'. http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2009/2009-03-60.html. Accessed: 01 February, 2012.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Marcia Landy, *Italian Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 30.

not explain the similarities between these two characters and neither does she comment on the significance of the comparison. This analysis will explain clearly the nature of that comparison as well as its significance. This 'Monkey' character is none other than Bodastoret, the innkeeper of the striped monkey; hotelier turned moneylender. The final chapter, 'Cabiria: Silently Shaping Italian Identity', reveals that Bodastoret was a Carthaginian Jew and that his possible function within the filmic text was to symbolize the dangerous Jewish Other that cannot be assimilated into the national whole.

Figure 27[5]

This chapter will look at the close connection between Italian silent cinema, politics, and religion, using *Quo Vadis?* as a barometer to measure the socio-political atmosphere before the Kingdom of Italy's entry into the First World War in 1915. This film, along with other historical silent epics of the day, reveal much about the political, religious, social, and cultural climate of the period in which these films were produced. The representation of history in *Quo Vadis?* matters because it opens a window on a specific time period in the Kingdom of Italy's existence. A period of time that was not that far removed from the Risorgimento, a time period that overlapped two centuries, a time period that existed before the first ever world war and that led, only a decade

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[5] Promotional photograph of Augusto Mastripietro who plays Chilo, in *La Cine-Fono e la Rivista Fono-Cinematografica* 248 (August, 1913), 3.

afterwards, into one of Italy's darkest moments in history: Mussolini, totalitarianism, Fascism, and, ultimately, to the breakup of Italy's Kingdom following the country's defeat in the Second World War. *Quo Vadis?* is a cultural artefact that lies at the heart of this period. It sits roughly at the halfway point between the War of Unification and the onset of World War II.

Quo Vadis? is not just about Rome and Christian identity in the first century; it is about Italian and Catholic Christian identity in the early part of the twentieth century and the interplay between those two identities in a relatively new nation-state. The authenticity of the film's portrayal of the classical Roman world and the question of whether Guazzoni faithfully adheres to Sienkiewicz's source novel are not the primary concerns of this chapter - as interesting as those matters may be to other film scholars. Rather, the focus will be on the way history is used in the film and in trying to see what Guazzoni saw in the original text that inspired the making of the movie.

In examining the idea of an Italian national cinema, Pierre Sorlin says that 'images of the past, of a common, shared past, as they appear in history-books or films, are central to the basic, most common concept of a nation'.[6] The images of the past contained in *Quo Vadis?* are rooted in the country's political drive towards militant nationalism and aggressive imperialistic ideals. The negative image of Chilo, the money-grabbing betrayer of Christians, is rooted in Catholic anti-Judaic hatreds. His Jewishness is not as explicit as that of *Cabiria*'s Bodastoret (see the final chapter) but, as this chapter will demonstrate, it is a negatively constructed Jewishness that comes from the same mould. There are enough Jewish signifiers to corroborate the reading of Chilo as a Roman Jew and these will be deconstructed during the filmic analysis. Politics, pseudoscience, religion, and history all come into play in the process of Othering, which is an essential part of identity formation.

Film scholar, Steven Ricci, talks about what he calls the Romanizing of the Italian experience by means of the silent historical epic. Many Italian nationalists, according to Ricci, deliberately evoked ancient Rome to gain support for their political ideologies. To simply concentrate on the film's story, the subject matter of Emperor Nero and ancient Rome, would miss a crucial point regarding the film's relevance to the Italy of 1913:

> The rhetorical re-evocation of Rome was supported by its fictive construction in the films.
> That is, at the same time the nationalist speeches referred to an ideal of the Roman past as a

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[6] Pierre Sorlin, *Italian National Cinema: 1886-1996* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 16.

legitimation of their political agenda, a large set of films circulated images of Roman antiquity to larger, popular audiences.[7]

This dialectical relationship between nationalist political and ideological discourses and the medium of film will be discussed in detail in the final chapter on *Cabiria*. This chapter will contribute to that discussion by focusing on the religious aspects of identity formation and on how pro-Catholic, anti-Judaic discourses, which were in circulation in Italian society at the turn of the century, manifest themselves in the figure of Chilo. If *Cabiria*'s Bodastoret (see final chapter) embodied the era's eugenicist, racist and anti-Semitic ideas concerning the Jew's perceived innate inability to become a proper citizen of the Kingdom of Italy, Chilo embodies much of the same fears and anxieties about the presence of the Jew in society but with the added emphasis on the character's hostility towards Christians and Christianity. Chilo's hatred, betrayal, and murder of Christians will be analysed in the light of the relationship between the Catholic Church and Jews around about the time *Quo Vadis?* was produced.

These historical silent epics allowed audiences to travel back in time and to connect with what was being presented as *their* past. These films functioned as an imaginative retrospective use of history, a treatment of the past that offered many possibilities in terms of constructing national identity and cultural sensibilities.[8] They also underscore what Giorgio Bertellini describes as the 'dynamic relationships between Italian cinema and political culture'.[9] In examining the socio-historical context of *Quo Vadis?*, which 'was the most expensive and most successful of its age',[10] this discussion can look at how the film works as an example of retrospectively using history for political purposes. According to Robin Buss, turning to ancient Rome for inspiration was not only about the desire for spectacle:

> The lure of this history is not only in its potential as spectacle. It is also the site of political possibilities, the background to successive experiments in the organization of society. Italian cinema, which in less than a century has witnessed revolutions, experiments and wars, could hardly approach this history in an apolitical way.[11]

The importance of *Quo Vadis?* is not only its politicised use of history but its politicised use of religion within that retelling of the Roman past. As a filmic text, it operates as a site where the

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[7] Steven Ricci, *Cinema and Fascism: Italian Film and Society, 1922-1943* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2008), 18.

[8] Marcia Landy, *Italian*, xiv.

[9] Giorgio Bertellini, *24 Frames: The Cinema of Italy*, ed. Giorgio Bertellini (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2004), 1.

[10] Robin Buss, *Italian Films* (London: B.T. Basford, 1989), 103.

[11] Ibid., 47.

political and the religious come together. The source novel's pro-Catholic agenda is also present in the film and, as this discussion will highlight, this overtly Christian message is woven into a classical narrative of Roman antiquity for the purpose of identity construction. A close study of the imagery in *Quo Vadis?* will disclose such Liberal Italian ideological interests as anti-Semitism, imperialism, colonialism, and Catholicism. The classicism of Guazzoni's film was a vehicle for such interests. How these interests, in particular religious and theological concerns, all worked together to fabricate a non-Catholic, non-Christian Jewish Other is the principal focus of this chapter. The next section will move on to discuss the allure for a relatively new nation-state like Italy to make films that project the classical past.

Cines and the Cinematic Appeal of Ancient Rome

Cines, the production company responsible for Guazzoni's Quo Vadis? wanted to make a film that would help showcase Italian cinema on the international stage and, for this reason, the film was always destined to be exported globally.[12] Gian Piero Brunetta highlights this commercial ambition by quoting a letter that was sent by one of Cines's directors, Fassini, to an American film distributor called Kleine. In the letter, Fassini mentions that he will soon start working on *Quo Vadis?*, providing Kleine with the opportunity to purchase the original negative of the film for eighty thousand lire. To show how committed he was to making the film a success and to demonstrate his ambition in creating a veritable *spettacolo*, Fassini says that he is holding twenty lions in his studio for the next four weeks. The lions that would soon tear the Christians apart in the arena must have made a favourable impression on the Chicago-based film distributor because six weeks later he writes back stating that he wants to be a partner in the venture.[13] This demonstrates 'the power of attraction exercised by Italian cinema outside Italy in the years leading up to 1914'.[14]

Film historian Roberto Paolella says that the popularity of Cines's historical epics played a pivotal role in attracting attention to Italian cinema from countries all over the world.[15] *Quo Vadis?* proved to be an enormous success for Cines, helping to take Italian cinematic production to the next

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[12] Antonio Costa, 'Uso e riuso dei classici: *La Gerusalemme liberata* dal muto al sonoro', Working Papers, Università Iuav di Venezia, Dipartimento delle Arti e del Disegno Industriale, settembre 2007, 8. Società Italiana Cines was founded in 1906; see Riccardo Redi, *La Cines: Storia di una casa di produzione italiana* (Bologna: Paolo Emilio Persiani, 2009), 7.

[13] Gian Piero Brunetta, *Cent'anni di cinema italiano: 1. Dalle origini alla seconda guerra mondiale* (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, seconda edizione 1998), 62. This correspondence is kept in the Kleine Archive, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[14] *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 125.

[15] Roberto Paolella, *Storia del cinema muto* (Naples: Giannini, 1956), 156. According to a Neapolitan film magazine, *Quo vadis?* was distributed and screened in countries as far away as Japan. See *Cinema* 60 (September, 1913), 103.

level and expose its films to millions of spectators worldwide.[16] As Brunetta points out, all of this was part of a national strategy, which was linked to identity:

> Il cinema, nella logica dei produttori italiani, deve diventare mezzo di allargamento degli orizzonti culturali del destinatario e strumento privilegiato di trasmissione di simboli di itentità nazionale. Mediante l'occhio della macchina da presa si tenta di trovare un punto d'incontro tra i ritmi di un'industria proiettata in avanti e un passato glorioso che si considera reversibile e ricostruibile in ogni momento.[17]
>
> [Italian film producers reasoned that cinema must become the means to expand the cultural horizons of consumers and an instrument privileged with transmitting symbols of national identity. Through the eye of the camera, an attempt can be made to find an intersection that exists between the rhythms of an industry projecting itself forward and a glorious past that is considered reversible and reconstructable in every moment.]

Quo Vadis? with its narrative, its imagery, its spectacle, its iconography, its characters, its messages is found at that intersection, that point of convergence where the filmic retelling of history, current technological innovations, the impact of the story world's past on the present, politics, ideology, religion, nationhood, heroism, Church, Catholicism, State, identity all come together.

Brunetta is clear that these historical epics created and projected an ideal space in which the grand narratives of ancient Rome can participate in the identifying of an important set of symbols that were essential in creating a national identity that had to be built, more or less, from anew.[18] *Quo Vadis?* did become an instrument that broadened the Italian horizons of its international spectator base, making an impact, in the United States at least, on 'a more prosperous and sophisticated audience' due to the film being shown almost exclusively in legitimate theatres rather than nickelodeons.[19] Cines was managed by a formidable board of directors that 'included the cream of Roman nobility', which had established subsidiaries in 'Paris, London, Barcelona, Moscow, and Berlin, and offices in New York, Buenos Aires, Sydney, Yokohama, and Hong Kong' two years before *Quo Vadis?* was produced.[20] This distribution set up for the film was already in place and global in its reach.

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[16] Brunetta, *Cent'anni*, 62.
[17] Ibid., 62, 64.
[18] Ibid., 64.
[19] David A. Cook, *A History of Narrative Film* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2004), 34.
[20] Gino Moliterno, *Historical Dictionary of Italian Cinema* (Lanham, Maryland, Toronto, and Plymouth, UK: The Scarecrow Press, 2008), 83.

The film was well-received at home and abroad.[21] Ange J. Locadier described *Quo vadis?* as a 'capolavoro (masterpiece)' after seeing it for the first time at Milan's Dal Verme theatre (see fig. 28).[22] Locadier finishes his review by saying that the artistic director rightfully deserves all the plaudits and has proven himself to be an 'artista eletto, conoscitore profondo della linea e del colore, meravigliosa evocatore di un'era lontana piena di magnificenza e di fascino [a distinguished artist, a profound connoisseur of line and colour, capable of marvellously evoking a long-lost past that is full of magnificence and fascination]'.[23] In Britain, the film was premiered in April, 1913, at the Royal Albert Hall to an audience that included King George V.[24] In the United States, F. H. Richardson wrote that 'for the first time in all my connection with the moving picture business I have been able to sit through a lengthy moving picture production without finding anything to criticise'.[25] The film was promoted aggressively in the United States by Kleine (see fig. 29) and reviews of the film were very positive.

James S. McQuade wrote about how the film generated an atmosphere that had the subtle power of 'translating the beholder into the midst of old Rome when the early Christians were mocked upon as members of a pernicious secret society' and that this atmosphere was 'accompanied by fine dramatic construction and treatment'.[26] In summarising the film's reception, the Italian film historians Aldo Bernardini and Vittorio Martinelli state that 'il film fu senza dubbio il più importante e prestigioso realizzato e distribuito in tutto il mondo nel 1913 [the film was without doubt the most important and prestigious and the most distributed production in all the world in 1913]'.[27]

The next part of the discussion will look at the pedagogical appeal of using ancient Rome to construct narratives and characters that had an ideological bearing on pre-First-World-War Italy.

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[21] The Italian premiere of the film took place in the Teatro Costanzo di Roma on 7 March 1913. See Redi, *La Cines*, 47.

[22] Ange J. Locadier, 'Il trionfo del Quo Vadis?', *Il maggese cinematografio* 3 (May, 1913), 14.

[23] Ibid.

[24] David Robinson 'I film italiani in Gran Bretagna, 1909-1914', *Cabiria e il suo tempo*, eds Paolo Bertetto and Gianni Rondolino (Turin: Il Castoro, 1998), 87. Cines, accoding to Robinson, had opened an office in London in January, 1909, at Dacre House, Arundel Street but soon had to move location twice as the business expanded.

[25] F. H. Richardson, *The Moving Picture World* 10 (June, 1913), 1029.

[26] James S. McQuade, '*Quo Vadis?*', *The Moving Picture World* 7 (May, 1913), 681.

[27] Aldo Bernardini and Vittorio Martinelli, *Bianco e Nero: Il cinema muto italiano 1913, seconda parte* (Turin and Rome: Nuova ERI, CSC, 1994), 182.

La serata Cinematografica al Regio.

Torino, 11 Maggio 1913.

Organizzata come annunciammo nello scorso numero, da un Comitato di cui facevano parte i migliori nomi della nobiltà ed aristocrazia Torinese sotto gli auspici della Principessa Laetitia, ebbe luogo sabato 10 corr., al Regio, la serata di Beneficenza a favore dell'Opera Pia Bonomelli.

Il concorso di favorevoli fattori di riuscita, quali l'instancabile attività dei promotori, la novità ed originalità dello spettacolo, e lo scopo benefico, attrassero al "Regio", un pubblico enorme, e spiccatamente aristocratico. Non valsero a frenare lo Edlu degli intervenuti, i prezzi elevatissimi e diremmo insoliti persino alla "première", d'Opera, la platea a L. 5, le poltrone a L. 20 ed i palchi a L. 100.

Piazza Castello e un gran tratto di via Po, erano quella sera occupate in modo assolutamente insolito da qualche centinaio di carrozze ed automobili che dopo aver portati gli spettatori, disposte in multiple file attendevano la fine dello spettacolo.

Una previsione per quanto ottimistica, non poteva essere che molto e molto inferiore alla realtà: platea, palchi e gallerie erano affollatissimi, gremiti diremmo quasi, da un pubblico straordinariamente elegante ed insolitamente interessato, che dava al massimo teatro cittadino un magnifico colpo d'occhio.

L'introito [L. 12.000] che fu degno della serata, costituì certo, se non un massimo d'incassi al nostro "Regio", un "record" d'incassi per una rappresentazione Cinematografica.

Le films proiettate sullo schermo verso cui erano rivolti gli sguardi attenti dei molti spettatori sono: Scambio di Cappotto e Sciocco Matto, due brillanti e piacevoli commedie.

L'esecuzione artistica e tecnica accuratissime al ottimamente riuscite, per l'abilità degli attori improvvisati, e per la nota perizia del cav. Ambrosio che tutto diresse, però malauguratamente molto mal resa da una imperfetta e troppo affrettata installazione dell'apparecchio di proiezione.

Ci auguriamo quindi che il pubblico Torinese possa nuovamente e più convenientemente ammirare le due films in qualche Cinematografo cittadino.

Noi pure potremo allora dare un giudizio più preciso e particolareggiato quale ora non ci azzardiamo ad esprimere.

Concorsero all'esito della serata, che fu felicissimo nonostante l'accennato incidente, il cav. G. B. De Negri, la Baronessa De-Negri Scotti ed il Cav. Nicoletti Kormann, con perfetta interpretazione di alcuni brani d'opera, ed il M.º A. C. Gallá quale accompagnatore dei nominati Signori e quale Direttore dell'orchestra.

P. B.

DALLA CAPITALE MORALE.
Il trionfo del "Quo Vadis?"
al Dal Verme di Milano

Milano, 11 maggio.

Ringrazio sentitamente del cortese invito del Maggese Cinematografico, e inizio la mia collaborazione da Milano registrando con vivo compiacimento una vera e grande vittoria dell'arte cinematografica, affermazione definitiva e indiscutibile di questa nuovissima manifestazione artistica: lo spettacolo cinema-teatrale del grandioso Quo Vadis? al "Dal Verme", di Milano.

E mi piace parlarne nelle colonne di una Rivista che bene interpreta gli scopi e le aspirazioni della nuova sorella che entra gloriosamente nel novero delle arti umane, poiché se il cinematografo fu considerato libera un'arte negletta e asservita all'industria, col capolavoro della valorosa Casa romana, s'innalza e assurge alle sublimi attitudini dove spaziano le vere creazioni generate dal genio umano.

Il Quo Vadis? ha rivendicato i diritti sacri del cinematografo, ha forzato la barriera di scetticismo che avvolgeva e teneva schiavo il muto schermo bianco si espressivo ed ha fatto parlare di sé con entusiasmo i quotidiani locali.

Infatti, mai prima del Quo Vadis? i critici teatrali dei giornali s'erano degnati di volgere lo sguardo verso il cinematografo. Il cinematografo? — dicevano — spettacolo istrionico, degno solamente dei baracconi da fiera! Ora invece, il giornalissimo Corriere della Sera, rompe il suo mutismo per dire che "parecchi quadri apparvero invero come classiche e magnifiche visioni dell'epoca romana. Lo svolgersi dello spettacolo fu accompagnato dall'orchestra e interrotto dai frequenti applausi del pubblico ,, Il Secolo aggiunge "che un bellissimo e numeroso pubblico ha applaudito con fervore la magnifica film d'arte che rievoca in una lucida sintesi rappresentativa la vicenda nota del Quo Vadis? La proiezione costituisce veramente un sinistro sforzo di ricostruzione: tutti pagani, suavità cristiane, abbagli di luce e fascino di romanzo passarono in una visione fantasmagorica. E la folla, che si assiepava in ogni parte del teatro, decretò il successo indiscutibile ,, Il Sole constata

"che infatti trattasi di un'artistica e copiosa (?) film che riproduce assai da vicino gli episodi maggiori e minori del popolare romanzo di Sienkiewicz, distribuito in quadri disposti con buon gusto pittorico, con ricchezza e fedeltà di costumi e con grandioso concorso di comparse, compresa la troupe leonina del Circo Massimo ,, Anche la Perseveranza; La Lombardia, l'Avanti, L'Italia, parlarono diffusamente e con calore della bella première al "Dal Verme ,, solamente il minimo La Sera non ne fece cenno nella sua rubrica teatrale. La cosa può esser chiara per chi è dentro il mondo cinematografico. È certo però che il mutismo della Sera non mutarsi per nulla il grandioso successo di Quo Vadis?

Per la cronaca della serata, dirò che difficilmente al "Dal Verme ,, s'ebbe un pienone simile, sebbene i prezzi fossero si elevati da parreggiare quasi quelli delle serate popolari della "Scala ,, I palchi valevano fino a 25 lire, le poltrone 5; i posti numerati 3, l'ingresso alla platea 1,50 e al loggione 1. Il pubblico che affollava la sala era composto di quanto di più eletto conti la città: notai numero infinito di personalità, di autorità e di belle e gentili dame dell'aristocrazia e della borghesia. L'orchestra seppe accompagnare egregiamente la meravigliosa evocazione storica, commentandola quadro per quadro con un pout-pourri composto appositamente.

Parlare della cinematografia, credo sia superfluo, dopo quanto ne hanno detto le riviste tecniche e artistiche, accennerò quindi alle scene maggiori, alle quali il pubblico si scatì strappare l'applauso sincero ed entusiastico.

Il quadro dell'orgiastico banchetto neroniano, l'incendio di Roma, il Circo Massimo, le torce umane nei giardini incultani sono scene di una tale potenza rappresentativa che fanno passare a traverso gli spettatori un brivido d'angoscia, di ribrezzo e di raccapriccio.

Ma quale poesia, quale reconditá forza dolcissima non racchiudono le rievocazioni delle catacombe ove S. Pietro predica ai fedeli, le scene intime fra Petronio e la sua schiava innamorata, fra Licia e Vinicio, e la visione sublime del tramonto sulla via Appia quando Gesù appare all'apostolo Pietro per imporgli di ritornare a Roma!

Il Quo Vadis? è un capolavoro, indiscutibilmente, ma quale opera d'arte anche sublime è veramente perfetta? Alcuna. La perfezione non è umana, anche se è emanazione viva dell'ingegno. Così, nel Quo Vadis? ho notato qualche mancherolezza, la quale non toglie nulla alla grandiosa magnificenza dell'opera cinematografica, ma pur tuttavia risalta all'occhio dell'osservatore acuto ed esperto. La ricostruzione della Trireme imperiale lascia trasparire troppo il suo carattere teatrale, manca insomma dell'inluoscura fastosa dell'epoca della Roma imperiale. Anche nel finale fu notata una brusca interruzione. Quanto sarebbe stato migliore se, dopo tutte le atrocità del Nero imperatore, fosse apparso sullo schermo una scena di catenara tutta soffusa di dolce sentimentalità, una scena della vita di pace e d'amore che Licia e Vinicio conducono lontano dalla città eterna, nell'isola di Trinacria! L'apparizione del Cristo contornato dai fedeli che inneano verso di Lui le braccia in un gesto sublime di invocazione, avviene troppo vicina alle scene cruente e tenebrose degli ultimi barbagli d'imperio nefasto dell'aborrito despota. Il passaggio è troppo reciso, e quella visione, poiché non è quadro, ma una pura visione bianca su fondo scuro, non riuscir l'animo oppresso dello spettatore, non fa sparire la cupa impressione del sangue veduto, delle atrocità poco prima vedute.

In ogni modo, ripeto, queste mie osservazioni puramente personali, non hanno nessuna mira di diminuire il valore del capolavoro cinematografico, che nel suo complesso è cosa meravigliosa per interpretazione, per distribuzione e per allestimento scenico, il quale, principalmente, è degno di vero e incondizionato encomio. L'accuratezza nei dettagli più minimi, i vestiari, i mobili, le decorazioni, gli accessori come vasi, coppe, anfore, tazze, danno l'idea precisa e concreta della vita dell'antica Urbe, col suo fatto, la sua magnificenza e il suo pervertimento.

L'interpretazione individuale che risalti, si stacchi e emerga dalla massa degli attori non l'ho riscontrata. Sembra gl'interpreti si siano passata parola di non sopraffarsi l'un l'altro, per non richiamare l'attenzione dello spettatore su un dato personaggio: hanno collaborato di conserve per la grandiosità dell'opera in modo egregio e basta. Forse è meglio così.

Vero plauso di lode va al direttore artistico, che con Quo Vadis? s'è affermato artista eletto, conoscitore profondo della linea e del colore, meraviglioso evocatore di un'era lontana piena di magnificenza e di fascino.

E finisco questa mia rapida rassegna, ripetendomi la domanda di Pietro l'Apostolo: "Quo vadis, Domine? ,, e, sinceramente, con il completo convincimento, rispondo: "Verso la Gloria!"

Ange J. Loeadier.
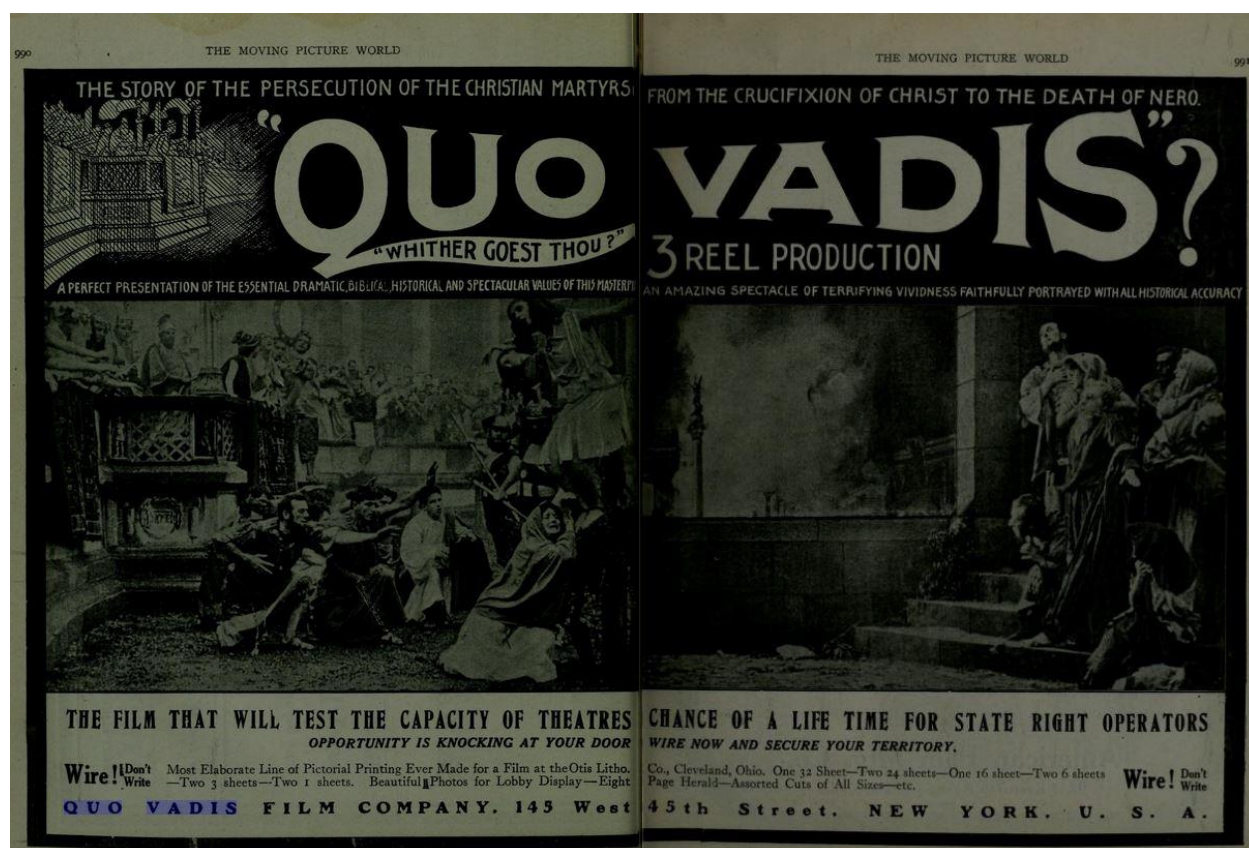
Figure 28

Figure 29[28]

The Mark of Cain

Maria Wyke speaks of how historical films were seen by their producers and consumers as 'true histories'.[29] However, these 'constant claims to truth, accuracy, and pedagogic value' were nothing more than a 'masquerade'.[30] The attention to historical detail in regards to costume design, set construction, and props would often disguise the masquerade of such films. This was true history in the form of spectacle, made all the more immediate and exciting by its swordplay, veiled eroticism, and romance. In addition, the Christian message of *Quo Vadis?* provided the cinematic spectacle with a religious dimension, which could offer the audience a sense of righteousness and self-satisfaction. In analysing these various religious aspects, possible motivating factors behind the film's use of history will become clearer and the masquerade revealed: *Quo Vadis?*, like any other

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[28] *The Moving Picture World* 10 (June, 1913), 990, 991.
[29] Maria Wyke, *Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 9.
[30] Ibid., 10.

historical film, cannot escape 'the obligation of a narration'.[31] Wyke insists that 'all history involves storytelling and a plot, troping and figurality' and that the telling of a tale about Romans and Christians in *Quo Vadis?* is a fiction that uses a well-defined time period so as to call up 'a constellation of specific meanings for its mass audiences'.[32]

By studying closely the figurality, the troping, and the function of the character Chilo in *Quo Vadis?*, a constellation of specific anti-Jewish meanings shines through. The politico-religious aspects of the film are a useful device in trying to understand the relationship between politics and religion in Liberal Italy, between the nation-state and the Catholic Church, and how both elements contributed to identity formation and the process of Othering. The type of Other that emerges from a close reading of Chilo is still very much a dangerous Other in the mould of Bodastoret: a double-crossing, money-obsessed, and untrustworthy character. The difference is the emphasis on Chilo's non-Christianity, which manifests itself in the character's fear and loathing of Christians. This hatred is not passive; he participates in the betrayal, the persecution, and the killing of Christians. His racial differences are still amplified - and these physiognomic aspects will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter - but, in this instance, it is the character's antipathy towards Christians and the Christian faith that marks him out as a dangerous internal Other.

The role of religion and its relationship with the state was a constantly debated subject in post-Risorgimento Italy. What is interesting to note is that these politico-religious discourses would often make reference to the Jewish question. The film *Quo Vadis?* stems from such discourses and can provide useful insights into this nexus of Italian identity negotiation and renegotiation. Religion or a form of patriotic, uniting religion was seen as essential in the process of making Italians. Emilio Gentile speaks of a growing demand in monarchical Italy for a type of civil religion that would 'create a collective, unitary consciousness'.[33] The hope of intellectuals such as Francesco De Sanctis was that this civil religion would operate as a moral compass for the population, creating Italians that had a sense of obligation and duty to the nation-state and that were prepared to live a life of self-sacrifice on behalf of the state, protecting the populace from 'paganism and hypocrisy'.[34]

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[31] Ibid., 10.

[32] Ibid., 12, 13.

[33] Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 1996), 6.

[34] Francesco De Sanctis, writing in 1874 and quoted by Gentile, *Sacralization of Politics*, 6.

Quite what De Sanctis meant by paganism and hypocrisy in terms of his civil religious ideas is difficult to surmise. However, some interesting clues can be gleaned from what he wrote in 1869:

> This Italian race of ours is not yet recovered from that form of moral weakness; it has not yet lost that Mark of Cain put on his brow by double-dealing and pretence. The Guicciardi man *vivit, imo in Senatum venit*; you find him everywhere. It is this fatal figure who blocks our way: unless we can bring ourselves to kill him in our souls.[35]

Even in an ideology of civil religion, seemingly devoid of any Catholic dogmatism, the Old Testament figure of Cain becomes the metaphor for difference. This omnipresent bad citizen, an ever-present threat to the national idea and dubbed as the Guicciardi man by De Sanctis, is the very epitome of individualism and selfishness; a symbolic everywhere man who has no roots in the ground of the nation-state, which has been sacralized by nationalistic politico-religious rhetoric. No roots means no loyalty and what could be more powerful as a symbol of disloyalty than duplicity and treachery? Cain who betrayed his own flesh and blood by murdering his brother, accursed and forced to wander the earth as a fugitive, serves as a receptacle for fears and concerns about the fragility of a relatively newly constructed Italian identity. Italians cannot fulfil their true potential as a morally strong, self-sacrificing, and progressive race of people without first ridding themselves of the Cain within.

The bad citizen symbolised by Cain, not only lurks within Italian society, threatening the cohesion of the collective national body, but also within the body and soul of individual Italians, operating as an impediment to spiritual growth and development. De Sanctis was in no doubt as to what was to be done: this 'fatal figure' had to be killed. The mark of Cain, often depicted as a cross on the forehead of the Wandering Jew figure, stemmed from a Catholic anti-Jewish notion that the Jew and his religion was to be continually punished for the treacherous act of killing Christ.[36] A patriotic religion, a civil or secular religion where the fatherland is the object of adoration could still potentially utilise the mark of Cain to stigmatise treachery. It is conceivable that in such a context of anti-Jewish mythmaking, the figure of Cain and the bad Jew became one. The turn-of-the-century intelligentsia that longed for a civic religion to replace Catholicism would often exploit religious metaphors to make political points. This was certainly true of the nationalist writer Gabriele D'Annunzio who, during the period leading up to the First World War, 'had assumed the

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[35] Ibid.

[36] For more information on the connection between the mark of Cain and the Wandering Jew, see the chapter 'The Infernal Jew in *L'Inferno*'.

mantle of prophet, bard, and high priest of a renewed patriotic religion'.[37] Writing in 1929, historian Benedetto Croce describes the patriotic religion that D'Annunzio and other nationalists were trying to introduce into Italy as 'a religion of the State' and 'a religion of the race'.[38] If the sacralization of the Italian state was often enunciated using the imagery of Christianity and that this discourse was also infused with turn-of-the-century racial theoretics, it should not be surprising to see anti-Jewish/anti-Semitic imagery such as the cross-marked-Cain-as-Wandering-Jew emerging from the political rhetoric of the day.

The reason for this, as has been argued in previous chapters of this thesis, is that there is a long tradition of Judeophobia in Christian iconography. Christian Judeophobia can be useful in communicating a secularist fear of all things Jewish. Christian Judeophobia has a track record of success in stereotyping and in this, for the promulgators of anti-Semitic discourse, lies its obvious appeal. Whether the formation of identity is based on secular or religious ideologies and whether the citizen is guided morally and/or spiritually by a form of religion based on civic virtues or by a traditional Church-organized way of worship, there is, more often than not, an Other that emerges from these discursive systems of communication. At this crucial moment in Liberal Italy's history, as the country was fighting colonial wars in Africa and soon to be fighting the Austrian-Hungarian Empire in the First World War, the Othering that takes place in *Quo Vadis?* reveals, once again, an obsession with the image of the Jew and its deployment as symbol of bad citizenry.

Discourses shaped by the 'religion' of the Italian state or of the Italian race had a direct impact on the Kingdom of Italy's Jewish community. In the year 1900, the Italian Jewish journal, *Il Corriere Israelitico*, had a leading article entitled 'Gabriele D'Annunzio antisemita'. Under the title was a quotation by D'Annunzio taken from the *Giorno* newspaper and from an article called 'La Coscienza nazionale' (dated 21 May 1900). Here are the thoughts of the high priest of Italy's patriotic religion on the subject of Jewish control in Italy:

> Ahimé, temo che per ora ella (l'Italia) sia destinata a cader nelle mani d'un giudeo dalla fronte bassa, ghiotto delle sue unghie e del suo cerume, a cui un soldato balbettante - che non ha d'italiano neppure il nome - la cederà come taluno cede una scarpa vecchia a un rigattiere nel Ghetto.[39]
>
> [Alas, I fear that in this moment Italy is destined to fall into the hands of a low-browed Jew whose is greedy from his fingernails to the wax in his ears, to whom a stuttering soldier -

[37] Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics*, 17.
[38] Benedetto Croce, *A History of Italy* (New York: Russell and Russell Inc., 1963, although first published in 1929.), 249.
[39] *Il Corriere Israelitico*, 'Gabriele D'Annunzio antisemita' 1 (31 May 1900), 10.

who is not Italian not even by name - would give up Italy like someone who would casually hand over an old shoe to the Ghetto's scrap merchant.]

The editorial explains that this is a 'vulgar antisemitic attack' on Sidney Sonnino.[40] D'Annunzio's fear was that Italy could soon be controlled by an uncivilised, greedy, and uncouth Jew. Sonnino may have had a Jewish surname but his family had converted to Protestantism before emigrating to Italy from Britain.[41] According to the editor of *Il Corriere Israelitico*, Sonnino was never considered to be an Italian Jew except in the imagination of D'Annunzio whose anti-Semitic insults bear all the hallmarks of a tangible hatred towards Jews. The writer of the editorial is convinced that it would not take much for the followers of D'Annunzio to gather in the piazzas of the country and shout: 'Morte agli Ebrei! [Death to the Jews!]'.[42] According to Feinstein, D'Annunzio had 'a clear sense of traditional Roman ghetto stereotypes'.[43] He also had a clear sense of how to use them for his own political ends. Much of what D'Annunzio feared about Sonnino's Jewish character is definitely present in Guazzoni's portrayal of the greedy soothsayer, Chilo. The scene analysis section of this chapter will show how the character of Chilo Chilonides is a cinematic example of these traditional Roman ghetto stereotypes at work and present specific arguments regarding their possible function within the film's narrative.

In the next issue of the journal, Professor Guglielmo Lattes is uncertain about denouncing D'Annunzio as an anti-Semite and places a question mark at the end of the previous editorial statement: 'D'Annunzio antisemita?' He makes excuses for D'Annunzio, comparing his antipathy of the Jews to the instinctive aversion of Christians inherent in Gaius Petronius, a character in the novel *Quo Vadis?*: a form of aesthetic or epicurean disdain and nothing more.[44] The editorial reply is unwavering: 'D'Annunzio sente verso di noi antipatia, dunque D'Annunzio è antisemita [D'Annunzio feels towards us an antipathy, therefore D'Annunzio is an anti-Semite]'.[45] Whatever the motive for anti-Semitism may be -- ignorance, stupidity, political opportunism, aesthetic reasons -- anti-Semitism is still anti-Semitism. Lattes replies by saying that calling D'Annunzio an anti-Semite was an exaggeration and that he stands firm in his belief that Italy, 'bella e gentile [beautiful and genteel]', will not allow the plant of anti-Semitism to put down roots in its soil.[46] The editor's final reply does not share Lattes's optimism, suggesting that the professor is deluded in his refusal

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[40] Ibid., 10.

[41] Wiley Feinstein, *The Civilization of the Holocaust in Italy: Poets, Artists, Saints, Anti-Semites* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 2003), 168.

[42] *Il Corriere Israelitico*, 'Gabriele D'Annunzio antisemita', 10.

[43] Wiley Feinstein, *Civilization*, 168.

[44] *Il Corriere Israelitico*, 'Gabriele D'Annunzio antisemita?' 2 (30 June, 1900), 35.

[45] Ibid., 37.

[46] *Il Corriere Israelitico*, 'Gabriele D'Annunzio antisemita'' 3 (31 July, 1900), 51.

to accept that the seeds of anti-Semitism have already germinated and spread in Italy.[47] Thirteen years after this debate, Chilo appears on the big screen, a representation of Jewishness rooted in the cultural soil of 'beautiful and genteel Italy'. The following sections will explore whether this is an unambiguous cinematic statement of anti-Semitic intent or whether its anti-Semitism is less explicit with a question mark placed at the end.

Anti-Semitic Catholic Anti-Judaism

Before Zionism was to become a topic of political debate during the early years of the twentieth century in Italy, Liberal anticlerical ideas were not necessarily anti-Catholic or devoid of anti-Jewish sentiments. The Jews of Italy were a problem even for those who adhered to post-Risorgimento anticlerical ideals. Even for the non-religiously motivated, the religion of the Jews was considered a stumbling block to acceptance and belonging. Although anti-Semitism was shifting the discourse from religion and theology to race, the Jewish religion was still muddying the waters of Italian citizenship and problematizing the unity of the nation-state (see the section 'The Horror of Circumcision' in Chapter One for a specific example of how pseudoscience during this period saw Jewish religious practices and rituals as a manifestation of their racial inferiority).

Wiley Feinstein draws attention to the anti-Jewish rhetoric in post-Risorgimento anticlericalism by highlighting the Pasqualigo case of 1874. Francesco Pasqualigo, a member of the Italian parliament from Vicenza in northern Italy and an anticleric, sent a letter to the King of Italy urging him not to sanction the appointment of Isacco Pesaro Maurogonato as minister of the treasury.[48] He argued that Jews and money were a dangerous combination and 'as long as Jews maintain their religion they could not be accepted into a European nation and putting the Italian people's money in the hands of a Jew is a bad idea'.[49] Maurogonato was a Jew whose different religion marked him out, in the eyes of Pasqualigo, as a foreigner and one that could not be trusted to hold the nation's purse strings. Pasqualigo was quite open about his prejudices, writing a letter to the Jews of Italy in which he explained his concerns, stating categorically: 'You are not yet truly natural members of the Italian nation; you are legally citizens of the state as in any other, but you are not Italians in fact'.[50] Pasqualigo was willing to change his mind and accept that Jews could

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[47] Ibid., 52.
[48] Feinstein, *Civilization*, 150.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.

become Italians but only if they converted to the Catholic faith. Pasqualigo was anticlerical but not anti-Catholic yet most definitely anti-Jewish.

This period of increasing anticlericalism in Italy has been described by historians as a time of great spiritual upheaval if not one of spiritual crisis. From 1849 onwards, the Papal States were locked in a battle with the new nation-state but the fall of Rome in 1871 was a major defeat for the Pope. The Church had been hostile to unification seeing it as a political movement that seriously undermined its powerbase. Christopher Duggan explains that after 1860, 'the Papal States (for centuries seen by the popes as vital to their independence and security) were reduced to the city of Rome and a small area of surrounding territory'.[51] However, it would be too simplistic to argue that that capturing Rome led to a defeat of Catholicism itself. The anticlerical ideas that were common during this period in the latter half of the nineteenth century - espoused by many who fought for the Risorgimento - did not loosen Catholicism's grip on the popular imagination. Feinstein explains the social dynamic:

> For another thirty years after 1871 the Church stays out of Italian politics and remains a bitter opponent of the governing forces of the new nation. Avowedly Catholic political forces would not begin to emerge until the formation of the Partito Popolare in the next century. But even as anticlerical forces continue to play an active role in the newly formed nation, Italy is not transformed in any sort of revolutionary way and traditional cultural forces continue to exercise considerable power, especially the Catholic Church's continuing dominant influence in the education of political and cultural leaders.[52]

The points that Feinstein makes help to explain the socio-political context in which a Catholic anti-Jewishness persisted in Italy even though the Pope could no longer use his personal power to impact negatively on the lives of Italian Jews living in his territories and beyond. Despite the anticlerical aspirations of many of those who had participated in the project of 'making' Italy and the secular cultural drive of the period, a Catholic anti-Jewish spirit grew more and more strongly during the later Risorgimento period and, as Italy moved into the twentieth century, this spirit of antagonism towards the Jewish faith would be combined with anti-Semitic racism, the hatred of an emerging Zionism, conspiracy theories about evil Jewish global monetary control as well as the scapegoating of Jews for all the sins of the modern world. This tradition of hating Jews for everything and everything was, according to Feinstein, based on the solid foundation of Catholic anti-Jewishness, a tradition upon which 'the civilization of the Holocaust in Italy would be built'.[53]

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[51] Christopher Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 138.
[52] Feinstein, *Civilization*, 146.
[53] Ibid.

David I Kertzer seeks to quash the widely-held belief that the Church promoted only negative *religious* attitudes towards Jews. He describes the Church as a major player in the modern anti-Semitic movement, which was growing steadily towards the end of the nineteenth century. This movement portrayed Jews as conspiratorial enemies of the state, unpatriotic and foreign, a deadly group intent on corrupting society and stealing its financial assets for its own evil ends. What Kertzer endeavours to show is that it would be a mistake to assume that such a movement was motivated by politics and pseudo-science alone because 'every single one of these elements of modern anti-Semitism was not only embraced by the Church but actively promulgated by official and unofficial Church organs.'[54]

Moreover, Kertzer argues that the distinction between anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism blurs if not completely disappears when articles, which appeared in the Catholic press during this post-Risorgimento period, denounce Jews for not only being enemies of the Christian religion but for being enemies of all Christian people. The 'uncomfortable truth' that emerges from Kertzer's research is that Jews living in the Papal States of Italy were still being evicted from towns and cities as late as the 1850s and were still being prosecuted for not wearing the yellow Jew badge of stigmatisation prominently on their clothes.[55] This is what happened at a time when popes could do what they wanted to the Jews living in territories under their direct temporal control. The trajectory that stemmed from such Catholic-constructed anti-Jewish attitudes culminates, in Kertzer's opinion, in Mussolini's Racial Laws of 1938, which served to stigmatise Italian Jews at every level of their daily lives. Papal stigmatisation led directly to Fascist stigmatisation despite the period in between being marked by emancipation.

In the path of that trajectory lies Sienkiewicz's novel *Quo Vadis?* and Guazzoni's film adaptation of that novel. When the novel was translated into Italian in 1899, the Church of Rome organized a conference in Genoa to discuss the novel's message and ascertain whether or not Sienkiewicz's text could be described as a Christian apology.[56] At a time when the Church of Rome and of modern Italy was anxious about losing its influence and power, the ancient Church of Rome through its portrayal by Sienkiewicz, Guazzoni and other artists was being transformed into a powerful symbol of Roman Catholic triumph over the evils of tyranny. In the literature and cinema

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[54] David I. Kertzer, *The Popes Against the Jews: The Vatican's Role in the Rise of Modern Anti-Semitism* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2001), 7.

[55] Ibid., 9.

[56] Maria Wyke, *Projecting the Past*, 116.

of popular culture, Rome was 'becoming the city of Christ, the capital which will rule over both the souls and bodies of men'.[57]

Despite the anticlerical and more secular aspirations of many in the political and cultural elite, this period in Italy, from the publication of Sienkiewicz's novel up to the release of Guazzoni's film, was marked by a renewed interest in religion especially in Rome. The popularity of the novel's Christian subject matter coincided with an interest in certain archaeological digs that were taking place in Rome. These excavations were conducted on a large scale throughout the city and the work of Catholic archaeologists such as Giovanni Battista de Rossi and Rodolfo Lanciani 'stimulated extensive interest in their attempts to support the theological doctrine that both Peter and Paul had been martyred at Rome at some point during Nero's reign'.[58] In turn, this interest in Rome's Christian past 'inspired a widespread religious fervour' with people flocking to masses conducted in the catacombs and basilicas that had just been discovered by archaeologists.[59] Because it reinforced the foundation upon which Italian identity was being built, it was becoming important to prove that the Petrine tradition was not a myth but a historical fact: the apostles Peter and Paul had not only preached in Rome but had been executed as a result of their Christian faith in the city.

These developments lent a weight of authority to the apocryphal story of Peter seeing the Lord Jesus on the Appian Way and asking him: 'Quo vadis, Domine?' ('Whither goest Thou, Lord?'). Christ replied by saying: 'Now thou art abandoning my people, I am going to Rome - there to be crucified a second time'. Rome's Christian heritage and the city's links with two of Christ's apostles gave Italian identity an enviable lineage despite being formed only a few decades previously. When Guazzoni's film was released in 1913 and 'achieving vast international acclaim', the historian George Edmundson said in one of a series of lectures on the Church in Rome that the martyrdom of Peter and Paul during the time of Nero was an incontrovertible truth and that current academic research along with recent archaeological evidence all testified to the tradition's 'historical reality'.[60] Christ did not have to return to Rome to be crucified a second time because Peter turned back, he did not abandon the Christians of Rome, becoming instead the foundation stone upon which the Church was built - or so the story went. Peter gave up his life for his Christian faith but his martyrdom was not in vain because the Church lived on. Rome was not just

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[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

[60] George Edmundson, *The Church in Rome in the First Century* (London: Longmans, Green & Company, 1913), http://www.ccel.org/ccel/edmundson/church.pdf (Accessed 14 March, 2013), 46.

the eternal city but the eternal Christian city. Nero persecuted and killed Christians but he could not kill the Christian faith, which lived on through the congregation inspired by the faith, and through the martyrdom of the apostles.

If modern Italian identity, which was barely half a century old, could be connected with a Roman Christian identity going back to the first century, it becomes transformed, despite its relative newness, into an idea that has pedigree. In this context, making Italians becomes a process of capturing the essence of what it meant to be Italian in the past. The fact that the definition of precisely what was meant by that nebulous notion of historical Italianness was a concept constructed in the present did not matter. What mattered was the appropriation of history for political and/or religious reasons. This appropriation, and constant discursive re-enactments of a modern-day constructed vision of the past, made it possible to believe on a national level that the process of making of Italians started with the Christians of Rome. The Roman citizen, a symbol of imperious fortitude, would become the Christian Roman citizen and be made even stronger by his Christian faith.

Such an idea may not necessarily have been problematic for those intellectuals who espoused a more civic type of national religion because it helped create citizens that were loyal to the state. Dismantling the power of the Catholic Church did not mean a total rejection of its imagery and rituals especially when such symbolisms could galvanise national identity. At a time when Italy was facing change at an unprecedented rate of acceleration, the link with Rome provided stability and any religious fervour may have been a manifestation of a real sense of pride that the worldwide Christian Church is, in essence, Italian. The Holy See of Rome anchored the Kingdom of Italy in a glorified, idealistically imagined past where the civility of ancient Rome was refined and perfected by Christianity.

It is possible that Guazzoni's *Quo vadis?* tapped into a national desire for stability at a time of unparalleled societal turmoil, an equilibrium that the traditions and belief systems of a Church built on the solid rock of Saint Peter could provide. This may explain the phenomenon of religious ardour that was growing in Italy around the time the film was made and that may have been an inspiration for the film in the first instance. As a text, the film reveals important clues as to current anxieties concerning upheaval, turmoil, change, and instability. *Quo vadis?*, both the novel and the film, was born during a period of spiritual and 'intellectual crisis'.[61] Historian Stanley G. Payne describes the fin de siècle as 'a time of radical innovations in thought' where the dominant trends of liberalism and materialism were being challenged and even replaced 'with a new orientation toward

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[61] Zeev Sternhall refers to the worldwide 'intellectual crisis of the 1890s'. Quoted in Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism: 1914-1945* (London: UCL Press Limited, 1997), 24.

subjectivism, emotionalism, nonrationalism, and vitalism'.[62] This movement away from positivist and rationalist thought was very popular in Italy, as Payne explains:

> The revolt against positivism was clearly marked in Italy, where the leader of neoidealist philosophy was Benedetto Croce. Croce rejected mere rationalism and required that truth to some extent be grounded in faith, since one could not know ahead of time how history would develop. Neoidealism required more than a little subjectivism as well as a marked voluntarist orientation.[63]

Out of this battleground of conflicting ideas, it is possible to see how religious, philosophical, and political discourses engaged dialectically and how this space of cultural conflict created an environment where ideas from competing discourses seeped into each other - either wittingly or unwittingly.

The nineteenth century was not just the century of materialism, secularism, and nationalism with its emphasis on the enlightenment and the civil society. The nineteenth century also saw an upsurge in religious interest and a renaissance in Christianity, a factor that, according to theological scholar Olaf Blaschke, has been overlooked due to overly focusing on the secularisation of the period. In Blaschke's opinion, 'the master narrative of secularization seems still to be very strong. But secularization and sacralization are not mutually exclusive. Both are dialectically related to each other'.[64] The 'but' in Blaschke's above statement is important to remember so as to understand better the cultural environment out of which the film *Quo vadis?* grew and to evaluate the impact Guazzoni's film may have had on Italy's cultural landscape. During this period of change, from one century to the next, from one dominant set of ideas to a multiplicity of competing ideas, it is not difficult to see how a cultural text produced during this time of extreme transition could contain strands from various discourses. Guazzoni's *Quo vadis?* worked as a transmedia enactment of this specific discourse chain in Italy's history, a powerful interconnective, which was constantly getting longer and stronger in its attempt to tie down the idea of Italian identity. Discourse upon discourse upon discourse and the incremental effect of such discourse building was, in turn, the laying of a firm foundation upon which Italianness could be built. Of course, it was not just Italianness that was built upon that foundation but its constructed oppositeness.

[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid., 25.
[64] Olaf Blaschke, *Offenders or Victims? German Jews and the Causes of Modern Catholic Antisemitism* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 42.

Nero the Antichrist and Chilo the ambiguous/ambivalent Jew

Another significant incremental effect of discourse is a phenomenon that often generates binary opposites. In the film *Quo vadis?*, the Roman Christian characters provided contemporary Italian spectators with a figurative pattern of living, demonstrating qualities deemed essential for good citizenship such as selflessness, self-sacrifice, courage in the face of adversity, moral rectitude, and a willingness even to die for one's faith. If such traits could be fostered in Italy's new Italians and this love for God combined with love for country, there would be no conflict of interest between the religion of Roman Catholic Christianity and the religion of the nation-state. Such a citizen would die not only for his religious faith but also for his country. What is at work here is a sense of patriotism that was bolstered by religious faith, which, in turn, has been validated by Rome's Christian heritage. These Roman Christian characters, although fictitious, represented a bond between the Italian people and Christ's apostles.

The Christian Other in the film is without question the emperor Nero. Early Christian writers such as Commodianus and Victorinus of Petau identified Nero with the Antichrist.[65] Wyke explains that this identification had more or less petered out by the early part of the sixth century but it was resurrected by the French humanist Ernest Renan towards the end of the nineteenth century by incorporating 'the emperor into the apocalyptic drama of *Revelation*'.[66] The anticlerical Renan's reading of John's book of Revelation placed Nero at the heart of the cosmic battle between good and evil. Nero's battle with the apostles and his downfall prefigured Christ's final victory over the Antichrist. It was also a reading that influenced Henryk Sienkiewicz's 'satanic depiction of Nero'.[67] Guazzoni's cinematographic adaptation fortified that depiction by means of the visual pleasure that cinema's new technical innovations could generate and the battle between Christ and the Antichrist 'seemed to come alive on the screen and vividly engage the off-screen spectator', all of which 'helped to authenticate a spectacular history of Nero'.[68]

Nero's persecution of the early Christians, Peter and Paul's martyrdom, and the establishment of the Church in Rome were all teleologically inevitable because they formed a part of God's purpose. In their examination of Sienkiewicz's novel and its many filmic adaptations, Ruth Scodel and Anja Bettenworth explain how a predominantly Catholic audience watching Guazzoni's historical epic in 1913 would never doubt the inevitable triumph of the Christians and their faith. The reason given for this acceptance of the film's telling of events was because a

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[65] Maria Wyke, *Projecting the Past*, 113.
[66] Ibid., 113, 114.
[67] Ibid., 114.
[68] Ibid., 124.

'Christian audience believes that a divine plan lies behind the success of Christianity' and that such an audience 'is not likely to resist the invitation to see the story's historical outline as inevitable'.[69] Nero and his empire failed because he was in conflict with Christ. This was a battle that he and his cohorts could not win. Nero was doomed from the start because his path crossed with that of Christ's apostles. Nero was the enemy of Christ; he could not and would not succeed and the audiences of 1913 Italy knew it.

Doomed too were those characters who did Nero's bidding, especially those who helped the emperor in his persecution of the Christians. One such character is Chilo Chilonides who is employed by Nero to infiltrate the Christian community and act as his informer. Nero has been persuaded to blame the Christians for setting fire to Rome and Chilo's machinations leads to their deliberate scapegoating and mass murder. It is not merely Chilo's association with Nero, the Antichrist, that makes him an antichristian figure but his actions. He is a mercenary betrayer of Christians, a spy, an infiltrator who is especially dangerous because he seemingly poses no threat. In the novel, Chilo is introduced to Nero by two rabbis who persuade the emperor of his dependability by saying that his mother is Jewish.[70] Scodel and Bettenworth believe that Sienkiewicz took this notion from Renan's *L'Antechrist*, 'who speculates that the Jews of Rome could have been responsible for accusing the Christians of starting the fire' that destroys the city.[71]

The first time the reader is introduced to Chilo in the novel, he is described as a 'physician, a sage, a soothsayer, who knows how to read people's fate and predict the future'.[72] The Roman nobleman Petronius and a member of Nero's court has heard of Chilo's unique expertise and wants his help in finding a missing girl called Lygia, a maiden with whom his nephew Vinicius has fallen in love. She was initially taken to Nero's court but has subsequently been kidnapped by the Christians. Desperate to find her, Petronius summons Chilo to his house for a private meeting. When the two men set eyes on Chilo for the first time, his appearance is described in great detail:

> The man who was standing before him [Petronius] could not be any one's lover. In that marvellous figure there was something both foul and ridiculous. He was not old; in his dirty beard and curly locks a grey hair shone here and there. He had a lank stomach and stooping shoulders, so that at the first cast of the eye he appeared to be hunchbacked; above that hump rose a large head, with the face of a monkey and also a fox; the eye was penetrating. His yellowish complexion was varied with pimples; and his nose, covered with them

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[69] Ruth Scodel and Anja Bettenworth, *Whither Quo Vadis?* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 7.
[70] Ibid., 19.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Henryk Sienkiewicz, *Quo Vadis: A Narrative of the Time of Nero*. Kindle Edition.

completely, might indicate too great love for the bottle. His neglected apparel, composed of a dark tunic of goat's wool and a mantle of similar material with holes in it, showed real or simulated poverty. At the sight of him, Homer's Thersites came to the mind of Petronius.[73]

The conflation of the figure of Chilo with that of Thersites is highly significant. In Homer's *Iliad*, Thersites represents internal dissension in the figure of the useless bow-legged soldier who creates havoc in the Greek ranks through disorder and disobedience. Despite the fact that he only appears briefly in the *Iliad*, 'his deformed appearance and rude behaviour were sufficiently vivid for him to be given a secure place in Latin rhetoric books as an example of the railing detractor'.[74] In Shakespeare's loose adaptation of the Trojan War, *Troilus and Cressida*, Robert Kimbrough argues that the character of Thersites personifies the fact that the Greeks did not 'solve their problem of internal disorder even in victory'.[75] This physically deformed character has a sharp tongue, which he uses as a sword to attack his enemies in the most vulgar, crude, coarse, and venomous way possible. He is a liar who is so cunning that his lies appear as truths. In an old English play of 1562, Thersites's rhetorical function is to rail against the natural order of things, against motherhood and Christianity. He is, according to W.G. Thalmann, the very antithesis of the Homeric hero, brave and handsome. This is not an exaggeration because he is described in the *Iliad* as 'the ugliest man who came beneath Ilium'.[76] His ugliness may categorise him as a comical figure but it also makes him grotesque thus facilitating the process of scapegoating, which is what the character of Thersites, according to many Homeric scholars, represents within the text.

Just as Chilo's physical appearance was described in careful terms by Sienkiewicz, no other character's physiognomy receives as much attention in the whole of the *Iliad* as Thersites.[77] It is as if his grotesque physical appearance reflected the character's inner ugliness, an ideological assumption that makes it possible to believe that there is a 'biological basis' for cultural normativeness.[78] Thersites is ugly and his behaviour is ugly. Chilo is ugly and his behaviour is ugly. Both characters' moral worth - or lack of - correlates to their aesthetic beauty - or lack of, a textual (re)enactment of a 'social attitude that makes appearance an index of quality'.[79]

Such an index of quality is useful as a self-defense mechanism. A Thersites/Chilo type may be highly intelligent, quick witted, clever with words, and a real fast talker. One of Thersites's key traits is his ability to use language in a deceitful way and his 'skill at imitation and parody (in his

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[73] Ibid.
[74] Robert Kimbrough, 'The Problem of Thersites', *Modern Language Review* 59:2 (April, 1964), 173.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid., 15.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.

speech he appropriates the language of aristocrats)'.[80] His extreme ugliness marks him out as potentially dangerous, an outwardly visual sign of his inner malice. He may fool you with his words, he may sound noble and worthy but his looks tell the truth about him. His overall performance in the poem, the novel, the play, or the film is to capture and contain the tension within society that builds up as a result of trying to figure out who is in and who is out, who belongs and who does not. Thalmann describes how negative 'emotion and potential violence' can be 'unloaded onto him', him being Thersites, the '*pharmakos* or ritual scapegoat' of society in general.[81] This 'unloading' takes place at the site of interaction between text and reader or between the filmic text and spectator in the case of Chilo-as-Thersites in *Quo Vadis?*. As Thalmann points out, the Greek epic was performed publicly, an audience would have been able to see Thersites in all his glorious ugliness with the *Iliad* itself becoming a complex site of engagement and 'a part of complicated social transactions in a period of crisis'.[82]

Sienkiewicz's description of Chilo is one long list of traditional anti-Jewish and/or anti-Semitic stereotypes: his yellow complexion of stigmatisation, his dishevelled curly hair and dirty beard, his monkey features and his fox-like face, his evil-eye stare, his pimply bulbous nose, his hunchbacked deformity, his scruffy goat's wool - not lamb's wool, notice - tunic, which allows him deceitfully to plead poverty.[83] When Chilo's Jewishness is revealed later on in the novel's narrative, it is not surprising. The label merely confirms what is already instinctively known. The only missing element in Sienkiewicz's initial description of Chilo is the mention of money. It soon follows, however. When Vinicius asks him about what means he has at his disposal for the task of finding Lygia, 'Chilo smiled cunningly' and said '"Thou hast the means, lord; I have the wit only"'.[84]

Combining the deformity and disorderliness of Thersites with a Jewish obsession for money is not unique to Sienkiewicz. In James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), there is a nameless narrator in the twelfth or 'Cyclops' episode, which many critics refer to as Thersites, a debt collector who works for the lender Moses Herzog.[85] Joyce once remarked that the anonymous narrator was modelled on Shakespeare's Thersites in *Troilus and Cressida,* because he wanted him to be a clever and cunning

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[80] Ibid., 16.
[81] Ibid., 21.
[82] Ibid., 28.
[83] On the connection between the colour yellow and Italian Jewry and the notion of a deformed Jewish foot, see Chapter One '*Il mercante di Venezia*: An Italian Habitation and an Italian Name'. For a discussion on the association of Jews with monkeys and/or other animals, see Chapter Four '*Cabiria* - Silently Shaping Italian Identity'. Chapter Two 'The Infernal Jew in *L'Inferno*' goes into detail about the demonisation of Jewish physiognomy.
[84] Henryk Sienkiewicz, *Quo Vadis* (Kindle edition).
[85] Eshiro Ito, 'The Nameless Narrator and Nationalism: A Study of the "Cyclops" Episode in Ulysses', *The Harp: Journal of Irish Studies* 12 (1997), 103.

talker.[86] An ugly character bent with deformity, seeking to go about his business anonymously, highly intelligent, sharp witted and even sharper tongued, driven continually by money, and plagued constantly by his insatiable desires. Whether this figure is called Shylock, Bodastoret, Chilo, or Thersites, he seems to encapsulate all that was deemed negative about the Jew. He is a media construct that exploits the incremental effect of stereotype with each link in the stereotype chain ever strengthening the negative connotations.

Chilo is such a construct, purpose-built during a time of crisis to allow the world to be viewed in a particular way, reducing complex matters to easily understood realities: ugly/beautiful, good/bad, moral/immoral, Christian/Pagan, clean/dirty, citizen/foreigner, Christ/Antichrist. All that was bad could be loaded upon his crooked shoulders and banished into the desert. As Blaschke puts it, 'the Jew serves the antisemite as pretext'.[87] Pretexting is an essential part of contructivism, helping it to create its own preferred version of reality. As Blaschke explains: 'What we think we see is not always what is really out there. Antisemites construct their own image of the perceived out-group'.[88] The next section will look in depth at Guazzoni's onscreen construction of Chilo Chilonides to see whether the portrayal contributes to the idea that the Jew belongs to an out-group and as such is conducive to scapegoating.

Dirty Work for Dirty Money

During the first scene of the film, the audience learns that Vinicius is in love with the Christian girl Lygia. Nero agrees to help Vinicius and orders that the girl is taken from her home by Imperial guards and brought to the Emperor's household. Knowing this, Vinicius, with Nero's blessing, has ordered his slaves to fetch Lygia from the emperor's garden. Lygia thus far has resisted Vinicius's advances and, during Nero's orgy, had to be rescued from his inappropriate behaviour by the strongman Ursus (Bruto Castellani). Christianity is introduced to the film's narrative for the first time through this character when he is seen kneeling and praying in a traditional Christian pose, vowing to defend his mistress Lygia who is becoming drawn to his faith. Ursus and his fellow Christians ambush Lygia's litter and rescue her. Vinicius is enraged and turns to Petronius (Gustavo Serena) for help. The next intertitle states: 'If he is paid for his efforts, Chilon offers to find Lygia'. In the novel, the mention of money comes after the character's introduction but here, in the film, the character's obsession with money is mentioned before the audience even sees the

[86] W. B. Stanford, 'Ulyssean Qualities in Joyce's Leopold Bloom', *Comparative Literature* 5:2 (Spring, 1953), 134.
[87] Olaf Blaschke, *Offenders or Victims*, 25.
[88] Ibid., 26.

character. This reference to the character's miserliness creates a sense of dreadful anticipation, preparing the audience in advance for the shock of seeing Chilo's grotesque appearance for the first time.

Figure 30

Figure 31

He is severely bow-legged, which means that he cannot walk properly at all and is forced to shuffle, crab-like, from side to side (see Chapter One, which discusses how Shylock walks in the same manner). When the Roman noblemen enter the room, Chilo turns around and salutes them using his left hand. The look of disgust on their faces is hard to disguise and Chilo's comical salute is not reciprocated. They simply stand there for a moment, towering over this pathetic looking figure whose crippled frame forces him to be constantly looking up at the Romans even when they are sitting down (see fig. 30). It soon becomes apparent that Chilo's right hand is badly withered, which means that he always has to use his left hand for everything, which often looks claw-like. In profile, his scraggly beard and long nose stand out prominently and when he turns towards the direction of the camera, his inane grinning and wide-eyed stare make him laughable and disconcerting at the same time.

It does not take long for Chilo to mention money. The audience is made aware of this when it sees Chilo rubbing the thumb and fingers of his left hand together, a gesture that immediately signals money. Vinicius becomes visibly angry, thrusts out his arm and points it like a sword towards Chilo's face and he is forced to back away (see fig. 31). Despite this aggression, Chilo is not put off, refusing to help find Lygia for nothing. This is not charity; this is a business transaction. Vinicius knows this, of course, but could not resist in rebuking Chilo for his greed, which suggest that Chilo's love of money was common knowledge and resented. Vinicius steps back, which creates an angle within the static framing, and looking down on Chilo he takes a bag of coins from inside his tunic and throws it aggressively at Chilo as if he were throwing food at an animal. Chilo grabs the money pouch with his crippled hand in one foul swoop and quickly places it within the folds of his inner garment for safe keeping, close to his heart. It is an instinctive animalistic movement as if a primal thirst or hunger had to be assuaged. Chilo's delight borders on an addict's delirium. Chilo has a habit to feed.

The next intertitle informs the audience that Vinicius remembers seeing Lygia draw a picture of a fish, a Christian symbol, in the sand. Chilo must act quickly because Nero has cursed Lygia and the Christians for the sudden death of his daughter. However, although Chilo now knows that Lygia is hiding with Christians, he is thwarted in his attempts to discover her whereabouts by the leader of the Roman Christians Glaueus. He returns to Vinicius, demanding that Glaueus be put to death and demanding more money, making begging gestures with his right hand, which he is hardly able to use. Vinicius loses his temper, thrusts out his hand, his fist clenched but his index and second finger pointed directly towards Chilo's face. He then grabs the soothsayer and pushes him to the floor. Chilo is undeterred and, using his robe to remove the dirt

from his eyes, quickly gets up and continues to remonstrate with the Roman tribune. This time, however, he is sent on his way without being given a pouch of coins.

This episode reveals Chilo's deep-seated hatred for the Christians. It is not enough for him to find Lygia, the task with which he has been entrusted; he wants to see to it that the leader of the Christians is killed. He may greedily demand money and more money but he also is not scared of calling for blood. This introductory sequence also reveals the complex nature of the relationship between the Romans and Chilo. They exploit his services and yet despise him. His dirty work is useful but they hate the fact that they have to resort to using him. His dirty physical appearance reflects his unscrupulous nature, his torn garments and his black cloak contrasting sharply with Vinicius's pristine white tunic. Vinicius's body language communicates real discomfort and, quite clearly, he does not want to be in the same room as Chilo (see fig 32).

Figure 32

Although Vinicius may have the power of life and death over Chilo, he does not underestimate Chilo and he is wary, if not scared, of the soothsayer's uncanny powers. Chilo's dominant left arm and hand can be read as a subtle sign of his sinister powers. Sinister is Latin for left but the English language word is loaded with connotations of all things evil and occultish. Chilo's sinister left hand may also reveal superstitions concerning such matters that were still in circulation during the time the film was made. George H. Bohigian traces these superstitions back to Greek and Roman times to suggest that they may be connected to ancient worship rituals where

the priest or diviner would face the north star with his right hand facing the direction of the rising sun to the east and his left hand facing the setting sun to the west. The right hand side, from where the sun would rise up into the sky symbolised life and goodness whereas the left hand side, where the sun disappeared into darkness and death, was a symbol of badness.[89]

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, racial pseudo-science promoted the idea that disease was an outward sign of degeneracy, criminality, and often of inferior racial characteristics. A deformed, withered hand was a symptom of deeper psychological or pathological problems. In 1888, Professor of Anatomy, Frank Baker, wrote a scientific paper called 'Anthropological Notes on the Human Hand' in which he tries to explain the reasons behind certain popular superstitions regarding the human hand. He describes the hand as the executor of the brain's behests due to their intimate connection.[90] The power of the hand to heal and the power of the hand to curse means that the hand has become fetishised in some cultures.

According to Baker, 'Magic and the healing art have always been more or less allied in the popular mind' and, to many, the hand 'must be an epitome of the man'.[91] Although Baker tries to distance himself from pseudoscientists, he believes that it is 'unquestionable' that the hand is shaped by the tasks that it carries out and that much can be learned about 'the tendencies of a man' by a close examination of his hand.[92] Baker was convinced that an 'inherited cast of mind' manifests itself in 'a definite form of hand'.[93] Studying the physiognomy of the hand in a rational way can help explain the pathological disturbances inherent in an individual. Tremors, tics, irregular movements of the hand are sure signs of 'pathological conditions of the nervous system' and 'in cases of progressive muscular atrophy, the human characteristics gradually disappearing and the hand assuming more and more the attitude and shape of an ape's paw'.[94] Baker moves on to argue in the final part of his paper that negative forms of the hand are typically seen in what he calls 'reversive characters', demonstrating 'features common to forms which lie lower in the biological scale'.

Roughly during the same period, Italian science was also intent on locating criminality in the body. The left hand for Cesare Lombroso, the Italian scientist, and inventor of criminology, was a symbol of inherent weakness. Professor Lombroso argued that it was universally accepted that left-

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[89] George H. Bohigian, 'The History of the Evil Eye and its Influence on Ophthalmology, Medicine, and Social Customs', *Documenta Ophthalmologica* 94 (Printed in the Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997), 92.
[90] Frank Baker, 'Anthropological Notes on the Human Hand', *American Anthropologist* 1 (January, 1888), 52.
[91] Ibid., 54, 62.
[92] Ibid., 62.
[93] Ibid., 63.
[94] Ibid., 69.

handers are usually women, children or savages.[95] Left-handedness was prominent in criminals and especially so in the case of swindlers. Left-sidedness, that is a natural sensitivity to the left side of the body, which includes all the senses, was typical of lunatics. In addition, the visual sharpness of the left eye was greater in dishonest individuals.[96] For Lombroso, physically misshapen individuals were asymmetrical and asymmetry was linked with animals and animalistic behaviour. In proof of this statement, he says that the left shoulder was found to be heavier than the right shoulder in twenty three anthropomorphous monkeys.[97]

In a similar manner to Baker, the paper ends on the subject of race. Lombroso's thesis is that 'as man advances in civilization and culture, he shows an always greater right-sidedness as compared to savages'.[98] He stops short of saying that all left-handed individuals are evil but he is unequivocal about it being a physiognomic feature that could 'form one of the worst characters among the human species'.[99] He concludes by saying that what science is only now discovering is something that has long been known in Italy where referring to someone as left-handed expresses 'the idea that a person is untrustworthy'.[100]

Chilo fits Lombroso's profile perfectly: he is left-handed and left-sided, he is asymmetrical. His trembling right hand is so badly atrophied that it looks like an ape's paw. His deformity animalises him. Even if he wanted to do what was right, he could not because he cannot. He is instinctively savage. If he is put to use, then it is his left-handedness, his left-sidedness that is exploited. The fact that he is a criminal and a swindler is communicated from the very first moment he is seen onscreen. His inherent dishonesty is marked by his ugliness. His malevolence is located in his body. Vinicius knows this only too well. He is always standing in Chilo's presence, facing him authoritatively, never turning his back, never letting his guard down not even for a moment. His outstretched arm, his clenched fist with two fingers pointing sharply towards Chilo may not simply be a sign of aggressive annoyance. Vinicius was wary. This gesture, phallic in nature, was a way of warding off the uncanny powers of the evil eye - the *oculus sinister*, the left eye. In Italy, the use of the phallic to guard against the evil eye was a superstition that still prevailed in parts of Italy during the time Guazzoni's film was made.[101] Certain superstitions that were common in Italy

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[95] Cesare Lombroso, 'Left-handedness and Left-sidedness', *The North American Review* 177:562 (September, 1903), 440.
[96] Ibid., 440, 441.
[97] Ibid., 441.
[98] Ibid., 442.
[99] Ibid., 444.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Frank Baker, 'Anthropological Notes', 72.

during the early part of the twentieth century demonstrates that a popular fear of the sinister left did not die out with the pagans of ancient Rome.[102]

Chilo was an embodiment of such fears: the sinister Other, a throwback to a primal form of evil. Chilo can be read as a media-constructed representation of the Lombrosian savage, a wild and more primitive species: *Homo delinquens*.[103] In his book *Anti-Semitismo e le Scienze Moderne* (1894), Lombroso castigates the Jews for their primitiveness in ritual, custom, language, mind, and body. Much of what he says about the Jew is precisely what he says about Criminal Man. They are both neurotic, cunning, lecherous, deceitful, and ambitious. Their physical profile matches too: small in stature, weak, and wretched. Their 'meager muscular energy' or atrophy is due to their involvement in the physically passive world of commerce, an activity that also explains their 'insatiable spirit of greed'.[104] The Jew and the Criminal Man are easily conflated. One could easily be confused for the other. Chilo, the Jew, the Criminal Man, they could all pass for each other. His deviancy is made visible by his physical asymmetry. His ugliness, both external and internal, allows him to be identified, categorised, and socially managed and/or controlled.

The 'Founding Father of Criminology' Lombroso, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, 'popularized the body-centred social-scientific study of aberrant behaviour – criminality, pathology, madness, and violence'.[105] Renzo Villa believes that Lombroso's influence grew as a result of 'his appearances as an expert in some of the most notorious local and national trials; relived and celebrated in the news for weeks on end' and 'due to the *Gazzetta piemontese* and *La Stampa* newspapers, and to the illustrated crime literature, his name became extremely popular'.[106] His ideas were popular too in the United States and, on the whole, 'Americans were enthusiastic about him and his science'.[107] However, Patrizia Guarnieri is keen to emphasise that Lombroso was not free from criticism both at home in Italy and abroad especially within the scientific community and that his reputation, especially in the United States was beginning to wane by the early part of the twentieth century.[108]

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[102] See Anthony Rini, 'Popular Superstitions in Petronius and Italian Superstitions of To-day', *The Classical Weekly* 22:11 (7 January, 1929), 83-86.

[103] Gabriel Cavaglion, 'Was Cesare Lombroso Antisemitic?', *Journal for the Study of Antisemitism* 3:2 (November, 2011), 301.

[104] Ibid., 310, 311.

[105] Paul Knepper and P. J. Ystehede, 'Introduction', *The Cesare Lombroso Handbook*, ed. Paul Knepper and P. J. Ystehede (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 4.

[106] Renzo Villa, 'Lombroso and his School: From Anthropology to Medicine and Law', in Knepper and Ystehede, *Lombroso Handbook*, 12,

[107] Patrizia Guarnieri, 'Caesar or Cesare? American and Italian Images of Lombroso', in Knepper and Ystehede, *Lombroso Handbook*, 117.

[108] Ibid.

As Paul Knepper points out, Lombroso, although born into a Jewish family from Verona, did not associate himself Italian Jewry and 'was committed to assimilation'; an 'anti-Zionist' who believed strongly that Jews should look to Europe and North America to fulfil their aspirations rather than look to the past by emigrating to Palestine.[109] Even in defending Jews from scientific anti-Semitism, Lombroso seems to blame Jews for their own problems by stating that in-breeding has created a community of neurotics, inveterate liars, crafty criminals, weaklings, and morally dubious characters.[110] Lombroso believed that adhering fanatically to Jewish customs and rituals was a serious impediment to Jewish integration and that only through complete assimilation could Jews free themselves from the evils of usury and the greedy excesses of capitalism.[111] It is understandable to see historians such as Nancy Harrowitz contend that Lombroso's views on Jews betrayed a Jewish self-hatred and that the criminologist, despite attacking anti-Semitism, had 'adopted the equally racist logic of the erasure of difference'.[112]

Guazzoni's portrayal of Chilo works as a filmic visualisation of the Lombrosian degenerate. His portrayal also invites the spectator to read him as Jewish. In referring to two silent film adaptations of the novel, one of which is Guazzoni's 1913 version, Scodel and Bettenworth say that 'Chilo's appearance implicitly codes him as Jewish; he could be Shylock or Fagin'.[113] He could be the Devil in *L'Inferno* and Bodastoret in *Cabiria* too (this character will be discussed in the next and final chapter).

A Middle Man in Murder - Lethal Infiltration

To find Lygia, Chilo must somehow enter the Christian community in a way that does not arouse suspicion. Thus far, Chilo's covert attempts at locating her whereabouts have been in vain. The Christian leader Glaucus has frustrated his plans and Chilo wants him murdered. Following his rough treatment by Vinicius, the next intertitle says that 'Chilo visits Ursus and pretends to him that Glaucus is a traitor'. Ursus is turning an enormous millstone in a scene that may have inspired the later film *Cabiria* in which Maciste, the strongman is chained to a millstone and taunted by the

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[109] Paul Knepper, 'Lombroso and Jewish Social Science', in Knepper and Ystehede, *Lombroso Handbook*, 182, 183.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Nancy Harrowitz, quoted in Paul Knepper, 'Lombroso and Jewish Social Science', 183. Historian Michael Berkowitz takes a different view and says that too much emphasis is placed on Lombroso's seeming Jewish self-hatred and not enough attention is given to his influence on criminology in general (see Michael Berkovitz, 'A Hidden Them of Jewish Self-Love? Eric Hobsbawm, Karl Marx, and Cesare Lombroso on "Jewish criminality"', in Knepper and Ystehede, *Lombroso Handbook*, 260.
[113] Scodel and Bettenworth, *Whither*, 182.

Jewish Bodastoret. Unlike Maciste, Ursus is not chained as a captive but, in the absence of panoramic shots of the city, the *mise-en-scène* operates as an important indicator of the character's status throughout the film and, in this instance, it conveys his enslavement to the difficult working conditions of the lower classes (see fig. 33). In the novel, the Jews and the Christians live in the districts of Trastevere and Subura, which corresponds to historical reality.[114] In contrast to the Palatine district of Roman nobility, the Subura was a business district, 'a shabby yet busy neighbourhood inhabited by small businessmen and dubious persons from the lower layers of society', a place that was located geographically in between the noble Palatine and the insalubrious Trastevere.[115] The novel makes it clear that this interstitial space, which was not predominantly Christian or Jewish, was where Chilo lived.

Figure 33

In Guazzoni's version, these geographical boundaries between the Christians/Jews and Roman aristocracy are not conveyed by the static camera work. The *mise-en-scène* is a useful provider of clues in this regard in which clothes, physical appearance, interior decor, exterior facades etc. become the signifiers of social status and location and of any mobility across this terrain. Ursus is strong but the millstone keeps him in his place. In contrast, Chilo seems to float freely across these literal and figurative spaces of difference. He is a businessman who has to deal with Romans and Christians, which means that he has to inhabit their spaces, moving from one

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[114] Scodel and Bettenworth, *Whither*, 43.
[115] Ibid., 44.

territory to the next to fulfil his business obligations. The pagan aristocratic world and the Christian world come together through him and yet he belongs to neither world. His world is the grey zone of the Subura: the intersection of difference. The dichotomy between these two worlds, which is clearly expressed in the novel, is dramatised in the film by means of Chilo himself, his presence and movement serving as plot device to highlight difference and tension. Although classed as a minor character, Chilo is somehow ever present and some of the film's major moments revolve around him.

In the dark alleys and narrow streets of the shabby district is where he truly belongs and here is where he is at his strongest. When he meets Ursus, he does not appear to be intimidated by his enormous strength whatsoever; he is confident and forthright despite his deformities. There is no shaking, trembling, and kowtowing. This is his territory. Ursus is taken in by Chilo's lies and is distraught at the thought of his leader's treachery. After soliciting the required information, there is a brief but telling moment in the scene when Chilo turns away from Ursus and smiles in a conniving way to himself. The grotesque glee on his face, the rubbing of his hands together in vengeful anticipation, appears demonic and is similar to the look on Shylock's face when he envisaged the thrill of cutting a pound of Antonio's flesh from his body. Chilo does not look directly at the camera but the audience sees what Ursus does not: bloodlust (See figure 33).

Figure 34

Chilo goes immediately to see Vinicius and asks him for the assistance of the gladiator
Croton to help kill Glaucus. When the gladiator enters the room, Chilo shuffles between the two
men with the whites of his bulging eyes especially prominent. Croton gestures to demonstrate how
he will kill Glaucus and Chilo can hardly contain his excitement. Once again, there is what appears
to be a furtive glance in the direction of the camera and, therefore, towards the audience. The
audience sees a perverted look of anticipatory pleasure on Chilo's face as he imagines the death of
the Christians' leader. His blocking in the *mise-en-scène* is important; it places him right in the
middle of the shot, right in the middle between Vinicius, a figure of pagan authority, and Croton,
the hired killer. All three form an unholy alliance against Rome's Christians. The man in the
middle is Chilo (see fig. 34).

On the Wrong Side of the Apostle

In the hunt for Lygia and Glaucus, Chilo takes Vinicius and the gladiator Croton with him to
Rome's eastern wall to where the Christians are known to gather for prayer. The Christians, most
of whom are dressed in white robes, walk up a hill as Chilo, Vinicius, and Croton follow slowly
from behind, dressed in black and with hoods covering their heads. On the summit of the hill, the
Christians enter a building and descend into an underground vaulted room.

Figure 35

Suddenly, there is enormous excitement as the apostle Peter (Giovanni Gizzi) walks in, holding a staff and hailing his fellow Christians. The whole group follow the apostle into a smaller ancillary room to listen to him preach. The intertitle states that 'the preaching of Peter has a mysterious effect on Vinicius'. The tribune has been leaning against the arch on the right of the frame, listening intently and is visibly moved by what he hears. Despite deliberately standing on the periphery so as to remain inconspicuous, he cannot help but be fascinated and drawn in by the spectacle of Christian worship. This is the beginning of his journey towards Christian conversion and baptism. He may be searching for Lygia but he also finds a new faith. The Pagan Roman will soon become a Roman Christian.

Figure 36

Chilo too stands at the back. He may remain inconspicuous to the Christians, who perhaps think that he is one of them, but to the spectator his positioning right in the centre of the frame draws attention to his every movement. One of Christ's apostles may be preaching but the character blocking means that it is Chilo who takes centre stage (see figure 35). The spectator is forced to focus on Chilo and his reaction to Peter's sermon. Chilo is constantly shuffling awkwardly in the foreground and he cannot bring himself to look directly at the apostle. Like a Jewish moneylender in a Renaissance painting, he looks downwards, he looks away from the light of Christianity (see the section 'The Money-Motivated Archetype' in chapter two and fig. 20, which shows the Jewish moneylender Daniele ebreo da norsa being depicted in this way). When the

crowd responds enthusiastically to something Peter says, he turns around and looks at what is happening only to see the Christians praying. He quickly looks away in abhorrence.

When the sermon is finished, the Christians file out slowly, making the sign of the cross by crossing their arms over their chests.   Chilo turns his back on them and makes no eye contact. Although he has managed to infiltrate the group, their acts of Christian worship disturb him. Chilo's aversion to Christianity is made explicit in this scene. Perhaps this hatred for their form of worship, which is made obvious by his body language, is a motivating factor in him wanting to kill their leader Glaucus.

Chilo's behaviour and mannerisms during this scene are very similar to how he behaves under a similar set of circumstances later on in the film's narrative. Chilo has finally located Lygia and takes Vinicius to the Catacombs where he can be reunited with the Christians in the hope that they will take him to see his beloved. Once again, Peter is preaching but this time he is located more in the foreground of the shot and, as a result, his actions and expressions are much more visible to the spectator. He is raised higher than his audience and, despite being underground, is bathed in light. The impression given is that the source of the light is divine in nature, a powerful visible sign of God's approval on Peter's Christian mission in Rome. The light creates a contrast between Peter and Chilo who is lurking in the bottom left hand corner of the scene (See figure 36). The backlighting effect creates a fiendish silhouette of Chilo's head. Whereas Vinicius and the Christians are looking at Peter and listening intently to his preaching, the light of Christian truth occasionally falling upon their faces; Chilo is always looking in the opposite direction, staring into total darkness. Vinicius leaves the shadows, approaches Peter and kneels before him. Peter lays his hand upon the tribune's head and blesses him. Chilo does not want Peter's blessing, preferring instead to stay in the shadows.

When the worshiping has finished, Peter steps out of the Catacombs with Vinicius walking closely beside him on his right hand side. Peter approves of Vinicius and Vinicius places his arm around the apostle's shoulder as a sign of his affection. Chilo limps along comically on Peter's left but, unlike Vinicius, he does not stand too closely to the apostle. He keeps his distance. In one long shot (See figure 37), it is clear that the right side of Chilo's entire body seems deformed and this ugliness is an outward marker of his inner demons, of his pathological motivating factors. Sander Gilman speaks about how lameness and limping 'mark the hysterical Jew as diseased'.[116]

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[116] Sander Gilman, *Freud, Race, and Gender* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 117.

Figure 37

Gilman points to the late nineteenth-century work of Jean-Martin Charcot as an example, which contained drawings of the Hungarian Jew Klein whose right hand side was clearly marked as diseased, including a close-up drawing of a withered right hand. These were physical symptoms of hysteria, a mental illness that was promoted as being a Jewish disease. Chilo's neurotic ticks, his hysterical facial expressions, his lameness are inscribed on his body as a sign of his inherent diseased state. Chilo is ill on the inside too. General paralysis and other such like corporeal deficiencies were all seen as evidence of the Jew's inability to cope with the pressures of modern life. Jewish hysteria was 'a sign of their being out of their correct space'.[117] Chilo's physical and mental problems could be read as signifiers of his non-belonging. In the context of these particular scenes where he is exposed to Christian worship, his non-belonging is religious in nature. He appears to be repulsed by scenes of Christian adoration. His left-sidedness reveals his fear and disdain of Christianity. It is not made plain in the film if Chilo adheres to a religious faith but what is unambiguous is his revulsion for the Christian faith.

A constant feature of anti-Jewish diatribes, medieval and modern, is that Jews are full of hate towards their Christian neighbours, promoting the idea that whilst Christians pray for the Jews,

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[117] Ibid.,120.

the Jews curse Christians and their faith.[118] It is not that Jews do not want to be Christians, although that in itself was considered a terrible insult to many involved with the Church, it is that they secretly conspire against the Christian faith. In this story, Chilo's body operates as a theological construct, a visual teaching tool that symbolises all that was bad about the non-Christian.

In theological discourses, the differences between the body and the 'soul' are still important even if in scientific circles such 'distinctions' were increasingly being examined by psychoanalysts and psychologists and, from a philosophical standpoint, were phenomena that belonged to the world of metaphysics.[119] But not examining the role of religion in shaping the body because other more secular influences became popular from the Enlightenment onwards, would be to ignore one of the key forces that shaped the body during the pre-modern period, thus making it more difficult to deconstruct the way the body was formed during later periods.[120] It would also ignore the contribution of religion in shaping the body during the modern period, a period in which religion would fight for its voice to be heard and taken seriously as a relevant force in people's everyday lives. Often what was said by both religion and science was the same: disease on the outside meant disease on the inside. The Jewish body served as an emblem for both camps. What the anti-Jewish-Christian-constructed Jewish body also conveyed was that this inherent disease, the disease of the body and of the soul was the direct consequence of sin. Chilo's ugly twisted body was a sinful body.

Mary Douglas argues that the body 'is always treated as an image of society'.[121] It could be argued that Chilo's body should be treated as an image of Liberal and/or Catholic Italian society. This concept of corporeality and its reflective qualities goes back to medieval interpretations of Greek philosophical traditions where the body 'is not an isolated entity' but 'reflects and contains on a micro level the whole cosmos, from divine to material'.[122] In the Judeo-Christian tradition, 'the body speaks by identifiable and decipherable corporeal semiotic system. The internal virtues, the intention, and the emotions of others are exposed by their deportment'.[123] The same tradition saw the body's shape as a metaphor for the inner person, symbolising either good or bad

[118] Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1943), 181.
[119] Maria Diemling and Giuseppe Veltri, 'Introduction', *The Jewish Body: Corporeality, Society, and Identity in the Renaissance and Early Modern Period*, ed. Maria Diemling and Giuseppe Veltri (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 1.
[120] Ibid., 2.
[121] Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (London: Barrie & Rockliff, The Cresset Press, 1970), 70.
[122] Roni Weinstein, 'The Rise of the Body in Early Modern Jewish Society', *The Jewish Body*, 30. Weinstein explains that this was the dominant view taken by Italian Jewry, certainly up to the middle of the sixteenth century so it should not be understood as merely a Christian or Catholic concept.
[123] Ibid., 35, 36.

characteristics. A sick body and a sick mind was a direct consequence of sinful behaviour. Sin defiled the body and brought it into contact with demonic forces.[124]

The shape of a character's body could provide important semiotic clues as to their roles in the cosmic drama between good and evil. The antimony between Christianity and Judaism is dramatised in these scenes where the Apostle Peter's authority is contrasted by Chilo's awkward body language. Peter's hagiographic portrayal, bathed in the light of Christian truth, is in stark contrast to Chilo's representation as a semi-satanic figure, hiding in the darkness of apostate lies all of which evokes the medieval artistic tradition of embodying Judaism in the figure of the Synagoga. The battle of these two theologies was played out in the paintings, the sculptures, and the stained-glass windows of Europe's cathedrals. Christianity and Judaism were allegorised in the figures of two women: Ecclesia and Synagoga. The depictions of Synagoga left no doubt in the minds of visitors to Christendom's grand churches as to which woman was victorious and which woman was defeated: Church triumphant and Synagogue vanquished. Robert Bonfil explains:

> The Devil would be depicted both in painting and sculpture as riding on the back of a Jew or the back of Synagoga, the maiden whose blindfolded eyes are incapable of perceiving the true light of Christianity. In Christian thought and folklore, in sermons and in art, the Devil's new attributes would be assigned to the 'Church of Satan', that is the Jews.[125]

The apostle Peter is Jesus Christ's representative on earth. The Gospels describe how Peter was given the keys to Christ's Kingdom with the responsibility of opening up Messianic truth to the gentiles. In Guazzoni's film, Peter's encounter with Vinicius calls to mind the New Testament account in which Peter visits the Roman centurion Cornelius who wants to know the truth about Christ (Acts 10). Peter would have been reluctant to visit a gentile home. However, in a vision, he sees a cloth descending from heaven holding animals that the Mosaic Law covenant prohibited Jews from eating. He is told to eat these animals but Peter refused, unable to go against his Jewish conscience and eat anything impure or unclean. God commands him to eat with the following rebuke: 'Do not call anything impure what God has made clean' (Acts 10:15).[126] The inference is clear: Christianity was open to all who chose to listen to its message. The closed faith of Judaism belonged to the past. Peter, himself a Jew, would fail to carry out his commission to preach the Christian message if he stubbornly clung to a law covenant that Christians had been released from

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[124] Ibid., 40.

[125] Robert Bonfil, 'The Devil and the Jews in the Christian Consciousness of the Middle Ages', *Antisemitism through the Ages*, ed. Shmuel Almog (Oxford and New York: Pergamon Press ,1988), 94.

[126] Unless otherwise stated, all Bible references come from the *New International Version*.

by means of Christ's death. He was now a disciple of Christ, and Judaism should no longer govern his life.

Moreover, the Catholic Christian tradition holds that the Church of God was built on Peter and if the apostle's body was the figurative foundation stone of the Church then Chilo's body, and the positioning of his body in relation to Peter's within the filmic frame, works as a visual oppositional device. Just like Christendom's Synagoga, Chilo too is blind to Messianic truth. But it is a wilful blindness; he does not want to look at Peter because he cannot accept Peter's divinely appointed authority. Synagoga, as Bonfil outlines above, was portrayed as Satan's representative on earth and Chilo does the work of the anti-Christian Nero. His association with Nero, the story's allegorical Antichrist, marks Chilo out as satanic. His left-sidedness powerfully reinforces this connection to the uncanny and evil supernatural forces.

In the Bible, the Messiah does not sit on God's left hand (Psalms 110:1; Matthew 26:64), the Lord is not at the Psalmist's left hand (Psalms 110:5), swearing an oath was never done by lifting up the left hand (Genesis 14:22; Psalms 106:26; Isaiah 62:8), approval was never shown by placing the left hand on an individual's head (Genesis 48:13-15), in the parable of the sheep and goats, the Son of Man does not place the sheep on his left because those on the left will depart into the fire prepared for the Devil and his demons (Matthew 25:33). Chilo's left-sidedness - his movements, his behaviour, his character, his actions - precludes him from walking on Peter's right and places him on the apostle's wrong side, the left side of disapproval where the goats, the demons, and the Devil reside in eternal damnation.

Revenge, Contrition and (Forced?) Conversion

Vinicius wants to share the same faith as his beloved Lygia. After gaining Peter's approval, the tribune is taken to the home of Glaucus, the stonecutter, where Lygia has been hiding. During the fire of Rome, Glaucus's protection ensured Lygia's survival. Vinicius has embraced Lygia's faith and all the Christians present are delighted to see the couple reunited. By listening to the preaching of Peter, Vinicius has gained sufficient knowledge of Christian teaching and insists on getting baptised. The subsequent scene is well-known for making an association between the Christian ritual of baptism and the political symbol of the hammer and sickle, which is clearly seen on the wall of Glaucus's house (See figure 38).

According to Scodel and Bettenworth, this carefully choreographed scene alludes to the film's political subtext: the punitive suppression of socialist and workers' rights by a tyrannical

state. They explain that Guazzoni's film was made five years before the revolution in Russia and that the director could not have known that the hammer/axe and sickle would become emblems of communist regimes. However, tools arranged in this manner were already utilised by socialist organizations as political symbols by the time the 1913 film was made.[127] Nero opposes the Christians and the workers and the scene's iconography conflates Socialism with Christianity, which opens up the possibility of reading the scene's political message as a commentary on the various tensions brewing in 1913 Italy. During the turn of the century, the Liberal Italian government 'banned a number of Catholic and socialist organizations as subversive and arrested activists'.[128]

Figure 38

Catholic movements were frustrated at the loss of the Church's political influence in a nation-state that was becoming increasingly secularised and, as a result, were intent on reaffirming Church authority in the minds and hearts of the public. Socialism, on the other hand, was emerging as a powerful force in nation-states across Europe and 'posed a different threat to the liberal government' of Italy.[129] By transforming different groups that had different agendas into one common enemy and victim of Nero's tyranny, Scodel and Bettenworth argue that Guazzoni's film invites the spectator to associate Nero's persecution of the Christians/Socialists/Workers with

[127] Scodel and Bettenworth, *Whither*, 91.
[128] Ibid., 92.
[129] Ibid.

contemporary Liberal Italy's treatment of groups that it considered subversive. Also, this incongruous juxtaposition of Catholic and Socialist imagery 'could be read as a provocative appeal to Christians to consider the radical workers as allies rather than enemies'.[130]

Chilo is everyone's enemy. His association with Nero, the Antichrist, sets him against the Christians and his tyrannical regime sets him against the workers of Rome. His business agreement with Vinicius was concluded successfully but Chilo was treated badly by the tribune and, on one occasion, he was physically beaten on the Roman's orders. Chilo vows that he will avenge his humiliation. He cannot forget what was done to him despite the change in Vinicius's personality when he becomes a Christian. For example, immediately after getting baptised, Vinicius celebrates by releasing all his slaves; a gesture of repentance, perhaps, for past sinful behaviour. Chilo cannot forgive Vinicius and plans to hurt him by hurting the wider Christian community. When Nero is seeking a scapegoat to appease the people after the fire, the intertitles state that Chilo tells the emperor that the Christians, Vinicius, Lygia, and Glaucus were to blame for starting the fire that destroyed Rome. Nero arrests the Christians including Glaucus, Ursus, and Lygia.

Figure 39

The next intertitle says that Chilo has been 'rewarded for his infamy by a promotion'. There has been a complete turnaround in his fortunes. He is no longer a scruffy and dirty looking character and Vinicius, who has escaped arrest and is trying to rescue Lygia, cannot believe his eyes

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[130] Ibid.

when he sees Chilo carried in a litter upon the shoulders of six men. He is dressed elegantly and treated as if he were a Roman nobleman (See fig. 39). The tables have been turned. Vinicius is forced to look up to Chilo who gloats over the fact that the tribune has to turn to him for help. Despite his new attire, Chilo's withered hand still trembles. His deformities cannot be completely covered over by his apparel. He knows that Nero has arrested and imprisoned the Christians and that they will soon be fed to lions in the arena. He knows Lygia's fate and takes delight in seeing the despairing Vinicius having to approach him for help.

Figure 40

The following sequence reinforces Chilo's promotion. Nero (Carlo Cattaneo) invites him to the Colosseum to watch as wild beasts tear the Christians to shreds. "Come, philosopher, admire your work' says Petronius to Chilo. Up to that point, Chilo has been talking to Nero's guests but is now forced to come and witness the graphic violence of what is happening in the arena. His new clothes do not help him to blend in with the other privileged guests; his constant shuffling and awkward bearing make him stand out as different. His failure to fit in is as comical as it is painful to watch. For those who already belong to the status group to which Chilo has been promoted, he is a figure of fun. They are not fooled by this change of clothes and his crippled walk is a reminder to them of who he really is: a soothsayer from the Subura who betrays for money. No one else looks like Chilo in this imperial milieu. Chilo does not wear the white toga of the Romans around him because, quite simply, he is not Roman. Even in his elegance and newly promoted status, Chilo

becomes an object of contemptuous curiosity. He is no one's friend, certainly not Nero's. Being useful does not make Chilo liked. Petronius grabs Chilo by the arm quite forcefully and drags him to where Nero is sitting so that he can admire the horrific mass killing of Christians that he himself had instigated (See fig. 40). Chilo's greed was exploited by Nero but Petronius's treatment of him is, perhaps, an expression of the deep seated hatred that he feels towards a traitor, an infiltrator, a betrayer. When Chilo sees the horror befalling the Christians, he faints and has to be carried away, much to the delight of Nero's guests who cannot stop laughing.

Chilo's reaction to the violence reveals, perhaps, a change of heart and the beginning of contrition. It could also be a filmic re-enactment of popular beliefs concerning the feebleness of Jews. Joel Carmichael explains:

> In the popular imagination, the virility ascribed to the Devil turned the Jews, his
> counterparts on earth, into sexual athletes as well as redoubtable magicians, who were
> nevertheless - through the combination of contrasts associated with dynamic pathologies -
> also feeble and sickly.[131]

Chilo embodies this 'combination of contrasts'. He is a Satanic 'redoubtable magician', cunning, resourceful, determined, and yet, at the same time, feeble and sickly. Fainting also marks him out as womanly, suggesting that he is weak and unable to cope with much. Reading Chilo as Jewish provides the possibility of seeing him as constituting 'a special, uncanny kind of minority' within the film's narrative, a role often ascribed to Jews in Christian tradition.[132] This special kind of minority was a fusion of various age-old negative stereotypes. The fact that this composite image contained conflicting and contradictory ideas about Jews did not matter because what was important was to construct an Other and to leave no one in any doubt that this Other was dangerous. Carmichael makes the following point:

> Christians could, after all, move about and change their status while remaining members of
> society, but Jews could change only through conversion. As long as they did not convert,
> they remained different in *kind*.[133]

Chilo could move about from milieu to milieu but he could not change his status. His promotion was illusory. Nero's reward meant that Chilo appeared to the subaltern groups of Rome as if he were now an aristocrat but, in the eyes of the privileged few, Chilo had only been given temporary

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[131] Joel Carmichael, *The Satanizing of the Jews: Origin and Development of Mystical Anti-Semitism* (New York: Fromm International Publishing Corporation, 1192), 72.

[132] Ibid., 74.

[133] Ibid., 74, 75.

access into their group. No amount of Nero's money could possibly change Chilo's status. Chilo did Nero's dirty work, an uncanny accomplice in evildoing but always an outsider.

However, Chilo does change. He becomes a Christian. His status changes through conversion. Nero's persecution of the Christians continues and he orders that the Christians be burned alive and used as human torches. Chilo recognises Glaucus as one who has been martyred in this way and immediately begs for forgiveness: "Glaucus, Glaucus! In the name of Christ, forgive me". Horrified by what he sees, he turns to those around him and cries out: "Romans, I swear that those who are being killed are innocent!". If Chilon were a Roman himself, it is unlikely that he would have used such a form of address. The distancing process in which Chilo is attempting to extrapolate himself from any association with Nero's regime has already begun in his mind. The next intertitle says that Chilo 'is rescued by Paul of Tarsus' and that he 'asks for baptism'. It is interesting to note that it is Paul rather than Peter that conducts Chilo's baptism. Paul, who, before his conversion on the road to Damascus, was Saul of Tarsus, the infamous persecutor and killer of Christians. Saul the Jew became Paul the Christian through conversion and baptism. Chilo's repentance can only be truly complete if he does the same (see fig. 41).

However, there is something unsettling about Chilo's baptism. Unlike the baptism of Vinicius, which was celebrated as a joyous occasion in the story, Chilo is arrested immediately after his baptism, dragged away by Nero's soldiers to a prison cell where he soon dies. The whole episode calls to mind a period when Jews living in Rome felt under pressure to convert or even certain cases where Jews were actually forced to convert. Official Church doctrine stipulated that salvation was still open to Jews through baptism and that 'any theory that the nature of Jews was fixed at birth went against what the Church taught about regeneration in Christ through baptism'.[134] Kertzer describes how the conversion of Jews 'held a special meaning for the Church'.[135] Some of Rome's Jews would come freely - perhaps feeling that the only way to escape the poverty of ghetto life was to convert[136] - but others were forcibly taken from the ghetto and taken to a prison-like building called the House of Catechumens. Alongside the ghetto, this house had a specific function:

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[134] David I. Kertzer, *The Popes Against the Jews*, 205.
[135] Ibid., 38.
[136] Robert Bonfil, *Cultural Change Among the Jews of Early Modern Italy* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010), I 82, II 33. Bonfil explains how in the later sixteenth century, conversion of Jews became a core policy in the Church's dealings with Italian Jewry and talks of the 'pervading conversionary obsession' of the period. Kertzer in his chapter on 'Forced Conversions', in *The Popes Against the Jews*, 38-59, talks of how this obsession was still prevalent during the middle part of the nineteenth century in Rome. Undermining Jewish theology and ideology was central to these policies.

The ghetto and the House of Catechumens were the two cornerstones of the Church's Jewish policy. The ghetto embodied all the restrictions that the popes believed had to be placed on the Jews, while the Catechumens was the place designed to save them, the portal through which Jews could escape the ghetto and enter into normal, Christian society.[137]

One of the ideas underpinning the work that was carried out at the House of the Catechumens in Rome was that each Jewish convert proved the supremacy of Christianity and its authority over Judaism. Baptisms of Jews formed a central part of many of the Church's holiest celebrations, providing crucial reminders within the Church's own ceremonial rituals of its supersession over the old Jewish faith. Given their importance to the process by which Catholic Christianity defined itself, the popes themselves would often oversee these occasions.[138] A German historian, Ferdinand Gregorovius, visited Rome in 1853 and witnessed one these sacred Catholic rites. He describes a 'daughter of Judah' standing in front of the font awaiting baptism dressed in a white veil, which could not hide her 'exquisite ugliness' and that the miracle of Catholic baptism had transformed her from being a demon-possessed Jewess to a child clothed 'in the pure light of God'.[139] Chilo too was exquisitely ugly and he too, in the end, found the light and became transformed.

Figure 41

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[137] David I. Kertzer, *The Popes Against the Jews,* 41.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid., 42.

However, Chilo's sudden disdain for violence, which is in stark contrast to his behaviour earlier on in the film when he quite obviously delighted in plotting violence against the Christians, is somehow unconvincing. There is nothing glorious, celebratory, or joyous in Chilo's salvation and it seemed appropriate that such an odious character died at the end of the film. Despite his baptism, there is a sense that Chilo gets his comeuppance.

The ambivalence surrounding the representation of Chilo's conversion in the film may, perhaps, stem from conflicting ideas concerning the converting and baptising of Jews within Catholicism. Kertzer argues strongly that despite the official teachings of the Church, during the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century the idea that the Jew was not only religiously different but biologically different was common among Church followers.[140] In Kertzer's opinion, the reason for this is because the Church itself was actively involved in promoting such anti-Jewish ideas and that it had a long history of stressing the biological and physiognomic differences of Jews. Common among Catholics was the belief that Jewish people were considered to be 'the bearers of negative physical or spiritual traits' and because of their sin in murdering Christ, all Jewish blood was polluted, a taint that was passed on to future generations of Jews from Christ's day onwards.[141] The influence of racial anti-Semitic theoretics on Church thinking during this period made it difficult to maintain the official Church position that individual Jews could be saved and their racial impurity made miraculously pure by means of water baptism. How could someone so evil suddenly become good especially seeing that the physical differences of that individual remained unchanged? Chilo's baptism did not cure him of his physical left-sidedness; he was still a cripple, he still had a withered right hand, he was still exquisitely ugly. The physical ugliness made it difficult to see Chilo's inner beauty despite his Christian transformation and regeneration. It was as if Chilo's figurative death and rebirth, symbolised by his water baptism, was not enough; in his case, his ugly, deformed, and impure physical body had to die too.

Conclusion

Unlike the source novel, Chilo's Jewishness is not explicitly rendered. That said, reading him as a Jewish character is possible because he embodies so many anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic stereotypes. His body encapsulates too the many discourses of the day, simultaneously competing and complementary, where Catholic anti-Jewishness, pseudoscientific racism, and nationalistic

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[140] Ibid., 206.
[141] Ibid., 206, 207.

xenophobia all coalesce to construct a powerful figure of Italian Otherness. What is more, many of these negative anti-Jewish attitudes that manifest themselves in Chilo are very old indeed and can be traced back to the middle ages and even earlier. Although Guazzoni did not openly profess any political affiliations himself, 'he nevertheless made various films with strong ideological messages' and 'slightly more than a decade after the production of *Quo Vadis?*, he was engaged in productions which spread fascist and racist views'.[142] Reading Chilo as conceptually or implicitly Jewish sheds further light on the film's possible strong ideological messages regarding the issue of race, religion, and national identity that permeate the film's narrative and character representation.

Chilo could also be read as an early cinematic example of what cultural critic Fredric Jameson terms the 'inevitability of stereotypes in cross-ethnic representation'.[143] In other words, out of the battle between Christianity and Judaism, between insider and outsider, between citizen and non-citizen framed within the wider theological struggle for superiority, it is inevitable that a Chilo/Shylock/Bodastoret type would be created to function as an Othering device within any given cultural text. This is what the clash, the conflict, the violence, and the friction that is generated between two groups in opposition to each other can often create - *inevitably* create if Fredric Jameson is to be believed. Whether inevitable or not, stereotypes are often the by-product of such antagonistic coming together. The centrality of stereotyping to the process of Othering is explained by Paul Bowman:

> When a community, under leadership of a government, decides to draw a boundary between itself and what it is not itself, racial stereotypes are typically deployed as a way to project onto an other all the things that are supposedly alien. In the light of an idealized group identity to be guarded in its purity, such stereotypes (of unwelcome others) are, indeed, demons - bad figures to be exorcised.[144]

Alongside Nero, the Antichrist, Chilo is a demonic, unwelcome, bad figure in Guazzoni's *Quo Vadis?* and he too must be exorcised. Chilo's exorcism was only made possible through a Catholic Christian conversion and baptism. Forced or not, this was the only way. Reading Chilo as Jewish invites the question: where will you go emancipated Italian Jew? Will you move towards the light of Catholic Christian truth or will you remain in the shadows of eternal damnation? This was not only a question of individual identity but of national identity. Soon after *Quo Vadis?* was made, a time would come when this Liberal Italian question would not be posed at all. In the not too distant

[142] Scodel and Bettenworth, *Whither*, 93.
[143] Ray Chow, *The Rey Chow Reader*, edited by Paul Bowman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 49.
[144] Ibid., 53.

future, Italian Jews would be told where to go instead. In that place, not even Christian conversion or baptism could save them.

The next chapter will focus on the film *Cabiria* (Giovanni Pastrone, 1914) and will shed further light on the way Jewish imagery in film was used to define the dangers of 'bad' citizenship. The chapter will examine whether or not the way Jews are represented in *Cabiria* was shaped by the Italo-Turkish war (1911-12) and the socio-political rhetoric of the period. As the discussion will reveal, something of the Jew as infernal usurer will endure.

Chapter Four:

Cabiria: Silently Shaping Italian Identity

This chapter will examine how the silent epic *Cabiria* (Giovanni Pastrone, 1914) played a part in shaping or in reshaping Italian identity at a time when the Kingdom of Italy was about to enter the First World War. The process of creating Italians, to paraphrase Massimo d'Azeglio famous exhortation, was still on-going in 1914 when *Cabiria* was released. This construction of Italian identity was critical to notions of unity and patriotism at a time when this *new* country's *new* citizens would soon be persuaded to fight not for Lombardy, not for the Veneto, not for Tuscany or Sicily but for Italy: a united, unified, integrated, uniformed, and homogeneous Italy – a new country of Italy, an idealised Italy, forged in the heat of the Risorgimento. It will put forward the argument that *Cabiria* contributed to this process of 'making Italians' as it silently mapped out this uncharted territory of Italian identity and citizenship. The film does this 'silently' in the sense that it covers the territory of *italianità* or the landscape of Italian identity with subtlety, utilising a narrative that gave the audiences of 1914 Italy the possibility of engaging with the symbolisms of the peninsula's ancient past, many of which revolve around notions of nationhood. For those contemporary spectators who recognised that the symbolisms inherent in the film could be used to make sense of Italy in 1914, the film took on greater significance and to discover the impact of *Cabiria* on Italy's cinema-going audiences, the film's reception will be discussed more fully in the first section, which will outline briefly the film's production history as well as examine the way that historical film with its images of a glorious past can make a significant contribution to the process of (re)imagining the contemporary nation. The key point made here is that *Cabiria* with its depictions of ancient Roman magnificence did not merely create an entertaining spectacle on the big screen but that the film's retelling of history had a didactic mission.

Following a brief summary of the type of Jewish representation at work in the film, the discussion will look at Liberal Italy's colonial ambitions and the country's military exploits in Ethiopia and Libya during the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century. The focus here is on understanding better the connection between a contemporary filmic depiction of an ancient war between Rome and Carthage and the modern wars between the Kingdom of Italy and Africa and to see to what extent this connection contributed to debates on identity.

Building on these points will be a section devoted to the phenomenon of Othering in Italian

identity politics and the often ambivalent nature of the Jew in this (inter)national debate on who precisely ought to be classed as rightful citizens of a sovereign country. Nation-building during this time of war in Italy – a period that had seen the recent fighting of colonial wars in Africa and was seeing the shadow of the Great War loom large on the horizon – was intent on fabricating not just any Italian but an Italian citizen that would and could fight for Italy as a proper soldier, capable of defending and/or even extending its territory boundaries. Citizenship in this context of soldiering and military prowess often revolved around ethnicity and race and a shared heritage of descent. As will be shown, the figure of the Jew was highly problematic in this regard. Anthony D. Smith explains that this was a period when the concept of the *patria* was based on an ethnic model with

BODASTORET
Gabriele d'Annunzio „CABIRIA" „Itala Film" Torino

Figure 42

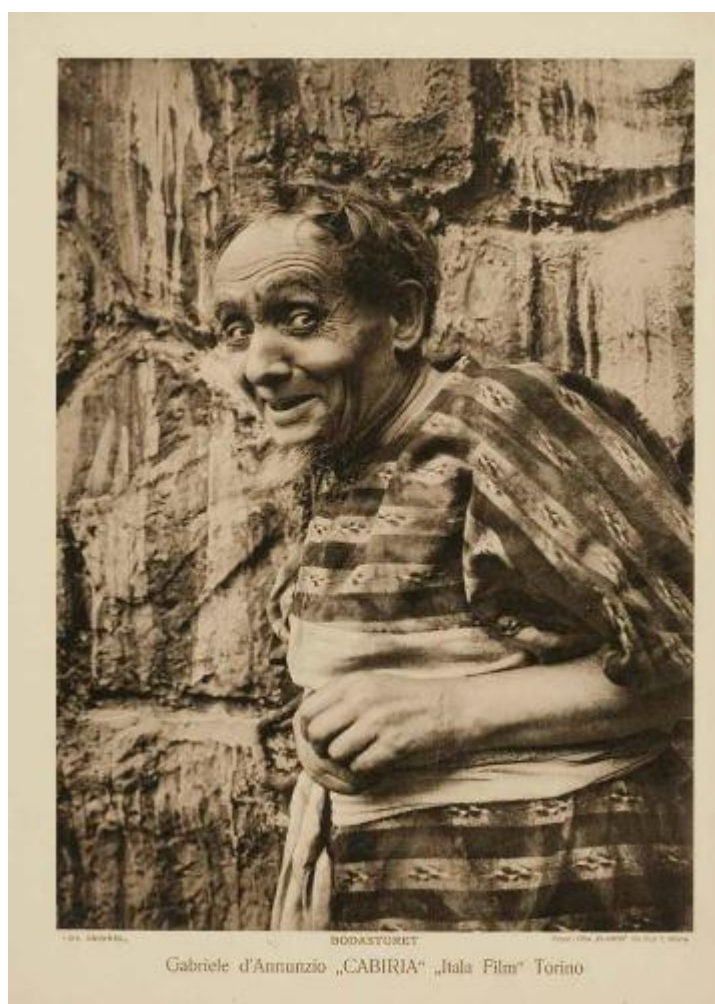'the stress on descent – or rather, presumed descent' and a period in history when the nation saw itself as a 'super-family', proud of its pedigree and boastful of its traced genealogies.[1] A close study of the representation of Jewishness in *Cabiria* will provide important clues as to whether Jews were

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[1] Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 1991), 12.

considered to be part of that 'super-family' of Italian citizens or whether that belonging was problematized by racist ideologies.

The scene-analysis sections that follow will concentrate on the character of Bodastoret (Raffaele Di Napoli) and argue that this character's Jewishness becomes more and more explicit as the film's story is told (see fig 42).[2] His physiognomy and appearance is scrutinised, his association with monkeys is explored in detail by looking at traditional depictions of monkeys and apes in medieval art along with considering the significance of their symbolic meanings in relation to the construction of Jewishness based on the racist ideologies of the day. The conflation of Bodastoret's narrative with that of Judas Iscariot and the transformation of Bodastoret from a lowly innkeeper to a wealthy moneylender are all aspects that will be considered carefully.

The Making of Jews

A close examination of the film's *mise-en-scène* reveals the presence of Jewish imagery in *Cabiria*'s symbolism, and that this imagery functions within the text as markers of Italian alterity. This chapter will continue to argue that depictions of Jews in Italian silent cinematic productions, whether they are explicit or implicit, symbolic or literal, are a construct that has been utilised as an oppositional device in the mapping out of Italian identity. Thus, in the process of making Italians, the film also makes Jews and vice versa. Certain scenes in *Cabiria* will be analysed closely to examine the extent to which these socio-political questions concerning race, ethnicity, and identity have seeped into the film's story world. Doing this will also explain how concepts of Jewishness were employed in the film to define concepts of Italian-ness and how one constructed abstracted image of identity was used to construct another by standing in opposition to it. What unites these two sets of constructed identities is their reductive quality and their conceptual nature.

Also, it is important to note at the outset that the representation of Jewishness in *Cabiria* is ambivalent. In reading a particular character in *Cabiria* as symbolically Jewish, it is important to accept that this form of textual reading can never truly be complete. There will always be gaps in the reading, spaces unmarked by any Jewish signposts. Accepting that this approach to reading a text has its uncertainties does not, however, undermine the symbolic readings it is capable of producing. If the sum total of the paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations inherent in the filmic sign evokes a mental representation of a Jewish character in the narrative that is, to some degree,

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[2] Photograph of cast member Bodastoret, printed by Brunner, Como, Milan (1914), F10742/089, Archive of the *Museo Nazionale del Cinema* in Turin.

credible, coherent and convincing then the reading remains valid, so long as it is anchored in the filmic text.[3] The picture paradigm may also have been drawn from a shared iconography of stereotypical imagery, thus contributing to its multi-accentuality or its multiplicity of meaning as conflicting groups of cinema-goers 'strive to appropriate it and imbue it with their own meanings'.[4]

Jon Stratton speaks about how a certain character in a film 'offers the viewer the possibility of reading him as a Jew – looks, behaviour, name – but no certainty'.[5] Following Stratton, the principal argument presented in this chapter is that there are characters in *Cabiria* that offer the viewer the possibility of reading them as Jews in the text but with no certainty. This is what Stratton terms as 'an ambivalence of representation'.[6] The connotative readings that this type of engagement with the text produces – especially in regard to deconstructing the iconography present in a film's *mise-en-scène* – are as equally valid as the more first-order or denotative readings. As far as *Cabiria* is concerned, studying the text in this way opens up the film to new interpretations, which aid the contextualisation of those images, as well as shedding light on the possible ideological function of this historical film.

The first section will now discuss the background to the film's production, looking also at the way the film was critically received at home and abroad.

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[3]   Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne, and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics: Structuralism, Post-structuralism and Beyond* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 9.
[4]   Ibid., 13.
[5]   Jon Stratton, *Coming Out Jewish: Constructing Ambivalent Identities* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 5.
[6]   Ibid.

A Brief History of a Historical Film
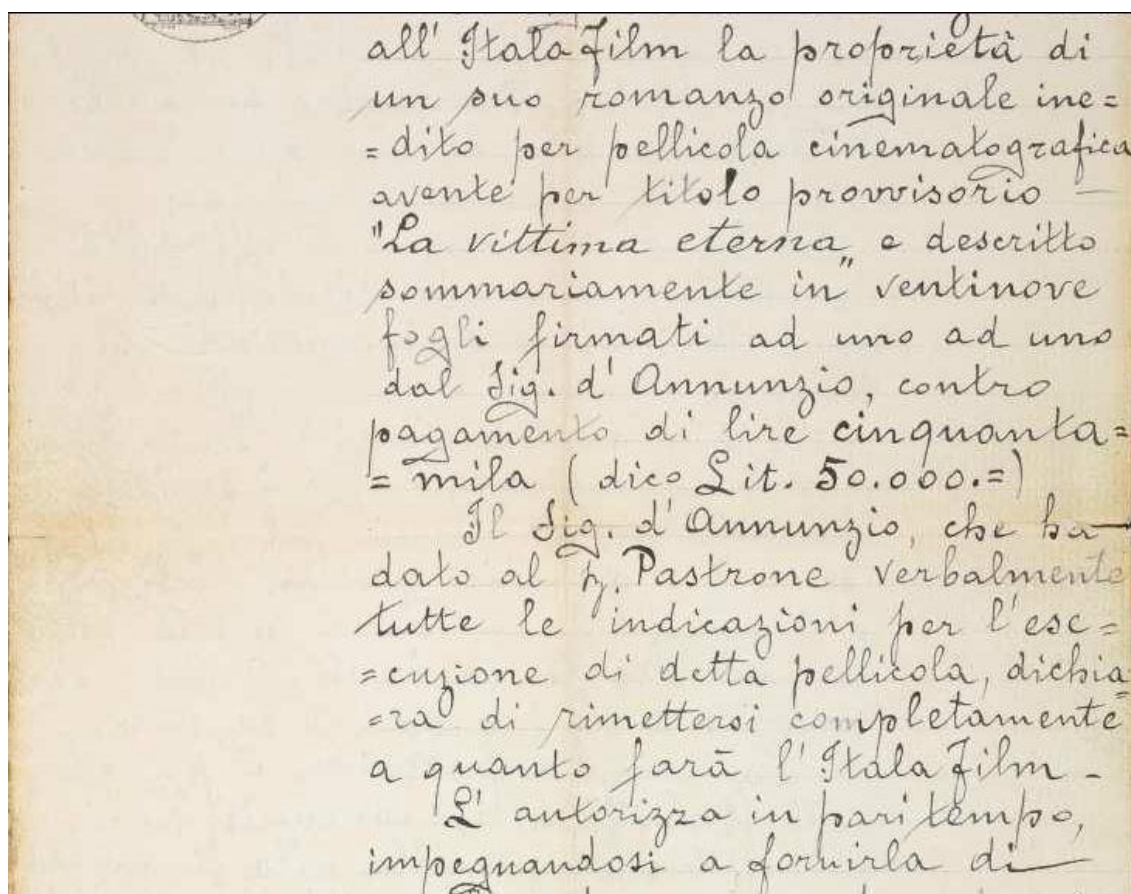

Figure 43[7]

The film *Cabiria* was inspired by the novel *Cartagine in Fiamme* (1908) or *Carthage in Flames* by the writer of popular adventure stories Emilio Salgari (1862-1911), although his name does not appear on the film's credits.[8] The film tells the story of the Second Punic War and the fighting between Rome and Carthage (218-201 C.E.). During the chaos that follows the eruption of Mount Etna, a little girl called Cabiria (Carolina Catena played the little girl and Lydia Quaranta played the older Cabiria) becomes separated from her parents and is stolen by pirates and taken to Carthage as a slave, destined to be sacrificed to Moloch. She is eventually saved from this fate by the Roman Fulvio Axilla (Umberto Mozzato) and his trusted slave Maciste (Bartolomeo Pagano). The film introduces the audience to the great Roman Consul Scipio (Didaco Chellini) and the enemies of Rome, Hannibal (Emilio Vardannes), King Massinissa (Vitale De Stefano) and the beautiful

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[7] Poster titled *Sacrificio di Baal*, designed by Luigi Enrico Caldanzano for Off. G. Ricordi & C. Milan (1914), P00004, Archive of the *Museo Nazionale del Cinema* in Turin.

[8] 'Cabiria', *The Oxford Companion to Film*, ed. Liz-Anne Bawden (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 102.

princess Sofonisba (Italia Almirante Manzini).

Figure 44[9]

The name that did appear on the credits, however, as well as appearing on all the official promotional material was that of the poet and novelist Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863-1938), 'whose name had been bought for prestige reasons' (see fig 43).[10] D'Annunzio's contribution, for which he was paid a substantial fee, was to write the film's intertitles and choose the characters' names (see fig. 44).[11] D'Annunzio was an ultranationalist and a vociferous advocate of Italy's entry into the First World War and, along with other leading interventionists such as Benito Mussolini, he took a great deal of credit for Italy's eventual participation in the war on the side of France and Britain in May, 1915.[12] To gain 'the collaboration and support of the most famous intellectual figure of the era' was a major achievement for the production company.[13] In reality, it was the film's director,

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[9] Original contract between Itala Film and Gabriele D'Annunzio, which states that the poet would be paid 50,000 Lire for his work in adapting an unedited novel into a film entitled provisionally *La Vittima Eterna* and signed by both parties on 30 June, 1913. GP1-A896, Archive of the *Museo Nazionale del Cinema* in Turin.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Christopher Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 190.

[13] Paolo Cherchi Usai, 'Italy: Spectacle and Melodrama', in *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, ed. Geoffrey

Giovanni Pastrone (1882-1959, see fig. 45), who was primarily responsible for writing *Cabiria* and it took until 1931, when the sound version of the film was released, for his contribution to be finally acknowledged and his name placed on the list of credits.[14]

Figure 45[15]

Associating the film with D'Annunzio was, of course, a deliberate marketing strategy on the part of Itala Film, the company that produced *Cabiria*. Given that Itala Film, which was founded in Turin in 1907, had come under the managerial control of Pastrone and his colleague Carlo Sciamengo in 1908, it may have been the case that the producer-turned-director did not mind that his name as the film's principal creator was replaced on the credits by D'Annunzio's.[16] If this were the case, it goes to show that Pastrone did not allow the creative side of his directorial duties to cloud his commercial judgements as the film's producer. Pastrone was an ambitious filmmaker and his business acumen soon turned Itala Film into 'the third most important film company of Italian early cinema' (see fig. 46).[17] Pastrone had been a 'gifted child with a talent for both music and

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Nowell-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 125.

[14] 'Cabiria', *The Oxford Companion to Film*, 102.

[15] Photograph of Giovanni Pastrone by L. Fioro. F40866/003, Archive of the *Museo Nazionale del Cinema* in Turin.

[16] Ivo Blom, 'Itala', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Richard Abel (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 333.

[17] Ibid.

production'.[22] Upon its release, *Cabiria* received instant success not just in Italy but internationally. This is how Bryony Dixon describes the film's impact:

> In *Cabiria*, the sets were huge, the story huge in scope and included an equally huge individual, Maciste, whose character became so popular it spawned a franchise. It was, in effect, an epic and though not unique, the substantial marketing campaign that accompanied its release in 1914 made it uniquely influential. It directly influenced D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916) and in the longer term, of course, the epic film would go on to become a whole genre of its own.[23]

Pastrone's ability to mix business sense with artistic vision ensured that *Cabiria* enjoyed both critical and financial success. As was argued in the previous chapter on the appropriation of Shakespeare by Film D'Arte, this combination of commercial and cultural capital imbued the work and its images with a sense of authority including, of course, any literal or symbolic images of Jews. Prestige commands respect and a work of art that is produced by respected artists speaks with a greater authority and its didactic voice is heard more loudly and clearly within the public sphere.

In an article on Italy's silent cinema, the subtitle used by Paolo Cherchi Usai to describe the period in which *Cabiria* was made is 'The Power and the Glory'. And for good reason because the epic historical films, which characterised this most successful period in the history of Italian silent cinema, spoke of power and glory. In the case of *Cabiria*, the power and glory of ancient Rome is a didactic tool, which can be used to construct the power and glory of a newly formed Italy. This is the politics of identity at work in the apparatus of Italian early cinema. The existence of this dynamic of politics, ideologies, and difference was there in the filmic text at that crucial time in the history of film when normative ideas were beginning to coalesce around what a 'mainstream' film ought to be and how film ought to communicate with audiences.

What is more, an intrinsic part of this process of institutionalising the modes of representation in film is the politics of identity, gender, race, ethnicity, and class. These elements came together in cinema at the same time. A close analysis of the images contained in *Cabiria* will show that hegemonic notions of identity are operating also within this filmic text. This analysis will also show how images of Jews played a key role in cinematic modes of representation during the time in cinema's history when these modes of representation were being institutionalised. The process of Othering is fundamental to the politics and ideologies of identity and, right at the outset, at the intersection where these types of ideas came head to head with the classical film narrative, the

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[22] Usai, 'Italy: Spectacle and Melodrama', 125.
[23] Bryony Dixon, *100 Silent Films: BFI Screen Guides* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 44, 45.

image of the Jew as perennial Other was present. William Scott Green says this about the process of constructing the Other in society: 'A society does not simply discover its others; it fabricates them, by selecting, isolating, and emphasising an aspect of another people's life, and making it symbolize their difference.'[24] The institutionalisation of this process served to typecast the image of the Jew in this negative role. As will be revealed in this chapter, the use of filmic negative anti-Semitic imagery in for the sake of majority culture affirmation goes back to the early days of the power and glory of Italian cinema and, therefore, to the very beginnings of narrative cinema itself.

During this period of development and transition in the history of cinema, film was becoming an 'event' with audiences being 'socialised into a particular cinema practice' of sitting together in an auditorium to watch moving pictures being projected onto a silver screen.[25] In addition to the standardisation of film language, those individuals and companies involved in making films began to realise during the latter part of the first decade of the twentieth century that film was a powerful tool of communication that could speak to audiences on many different levels: intellectually, emotionally, ideologically, aesthetically, and politically. Moreover, if a film appealed to the mainstream, it could generate large sums of revenue. Usai's subtitle, 'The Power and the Glory' may nod to the glorious pasts resurrected in these historical film epics but it is, primarily, a description of Italy's film industry during the 1910s. The power and the glory was no longer the preserve of novelists, poets, and dramatists but of filmmakers. Italian filmmakers understood that film mattered and, just like their counterparts in Hollywood and other film-producing places, they understood the political significance of a medium that had enormous cultural and social reach. What Patrick Phillips says of *The Birth of the Nation* is also true of *Cabiria*:

> *The Birth of a Nation* established that cinema matters. It demonstrated that some films at
> least enter into the public sphere, are experienced by audiences coming to the event with
> their different personal and community formations in ways that tell us not just about the
> movies but about the force-fields at work within society.[26]

Cabiria established that cinema mattered in Italy too and it demonstrated that Italian filmmakers were cognizant of the 'increasing cultural (and political) significance of cinema within a developing industrial-commercial public sphere'.[27] Taking over from the early pioneers of Italian cinema were a new generation of investors, many of whom were bourgeoisie *cinéastes* or high finance

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[24] William Scott Green, 'Otherness Within: Towards a Theory of Difference in Rabbinic Judaism', *To See Ourselves As Others See Us*, ed. Jacob Neusner and Ernest S Frerichs (Chicago and California: Scholars Press, 1985), 46.
[25] Ibid., 152.
[26] Ibid., 155.
[27] Ibid., 153.

entrepreneurs who were keen to turn Italy into a powerhouse of film production.[28] *Cabiria* represented a major investment for Itala Film with its seven-month production costs of one million lira, which was a significant sum of money at the time.[29]

However, filmmaking was not purely a source of income for these new types of backers. As Usai explains:

> Their contribution was not solely economic in nature. They also brought a certain instinct for patronage and philanthropy, insisting on the potential of the moving image as an instrument for the moral and cultural education of a nation which was still in large part illiterate.[30]

These early entrepreneurs, who invested their resources into making such films as *Cabiria,* synthesised their commercial concerns with a didactic mission. Out of this didacticism grew the Italian full-length historical feature film, a new form of film narrative that was popular with audiences from Italy's working classes and the middle classes alike. This is what Giulio Cesare Castello calls Italy's 'golden age of historical film',[31] which realised the financial and artistic ambitions of the film companies, ensuring that Italian cinema was 'both profitable at home and prestigious abroad'.[32]

The historical epic, as Peter Bondanella asserts, did not, by no means, completely dominate Italian cinematic output at this time but it was, by far, the most profitable and the most popular genre of film.[33] As well as being popular and profitable, these films also fulfilled a purpose that went beyond mere entertainment as these grand productions 'aimed to develop what were held to be the highest of ideals, such as the promotion of the nationalist spirit or of religious values'.[34] Quite how these ideals manifest themselves in *Cabiria*, especially in relation to the representation of Jews, will be the main point of discussion during the upcoming section on scene analysis.

The many reviews of *Cabiria* testify to the film's enormous success and popularity with thousands upon thousands flocking to cinemas all over Italy to see the spectacle that many of the country's leading critics described as a masterful work of art.[35] In summarising the film's reception, the magazine *La cine-fono & La rivista fono-cinematografica* carried the headline: 'La stampa

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[28] Usai, 'Italy: Spectacle and Melodrama', 125.

[29] Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 3.

[30] Usai, 'Italy: Spectacle and Melodrama', 125.

[31] Giulio Cesare Castello, 'Italian Silent Cinema', in *Cinema: A Critical Dictionary, Volume One*, ed. Richard Roud (Norwich: Fletcher & Son Ltd., 1980), 526.

[32] Ibid., 527.

[33] Bondanella, *Italian Cinema*, 2.

[34] Usai, 'Italy: Spectacle and Melodrama', 127.

[35] 'Le grandi manifestazioni d'arte – Cabiria ha trionfato a Torino, Milano e Roma', *La cine-fono & La rivista fono-cinematografica* 8:279 (April 25, 1914), 41.

italiana si fa eco dell'entusiasmo del pubblico [the Italian press echoes the public's enthusiastic response]' (see fig. 47).[36] The film's first viewing in Venice proved to be an enormous success. The Goldoni theatre was packed out with an audience of aristocrats, intellectuals and press reviewers. Locals who were queuing outside were told to leave if they did not have a pre-purchased ticket. The reviewer himself only just got to the theatre in time to see what he described as 'this precious gem of cinematic art'.[37] The critic who saw the premiere of the film in the *Teatro Lirico* in Milan said that 'il nome dell'autore basta per dare affidamento, e Cabiria è un'opera degna di Gabriele D'Annunzio [the name of the author was enough to provide trust, and *Cabiria* is a work worthy of Gabriele D'Annunzio]'.[38] He concludes his review by stating proudly that only Italian art could produce such an exceptional cinematic spectacle.[39] Edgardo Ciappa who saw the film at the Mercadante theatre in Naples said that anyone who believed that film was 'una profanzione dell'arte [a profaning of art]' had to admit that they were wrong.[40] In Verona, the film was shown repeatedly to much critical acclaim and was received enthusiastically by local audiences so much so that the owner of the cinema, Domeneghini, sent a telegram to Paris for the attention of D'Annunzio, congratulating him on the revocation of Roman glory and Latin greatness.[41]

Il Giornale d'Italia describes the premier as a 'colossal success', adding that during the screening people would often applaud key scenes.[42] *Il mattino* talks about how hundreds of people had to be turned away from the premier because all the tickets had been sold and how many made up for their disappointment by immediately buying tickets for the repeat screenings. The same newspaper uses the following headline to describe the situation in Torino: 'Un delirio – la folla acclama D'Annunzio [Delirium – the crowd hails D'Annunzio]', adding that members of the audience were seen standing on their feet, shouting enthusiastically at the screen because of the way D'Annunzio had recreated the power and glory of ancient Rome.[43] The reviewer is convinced that *Cabiria* will stand the test of time:

> *Cabiria* è una di quelle cose che rimarrà. Rimarrà perchè a quel punto cessa la volgare arte del cinematografico e subentra la storia, la storia vera, la storia vissuta e vista attraverso i meravigliosi occhi d'un grandissimo poeta che nella storia scruta e trova l'anima dei popoli

[36] Ibid.

[37] Rino, 'Cronaca veneziana: La prima della *Cabiria* al Goldoni', *La cine-fono & La rivista fono-cinematografica* 8:284 (13 June, 1914), 52.

[38] Hover, 'La premièr di Cabiria al Teatro di Lirico di Milano', *Il maggese cinematografico* 2:8 (25 April, 1914), 32, 33.

[39] Ibid., 33.

[40] Edgardo Ciappa, 'Corriere Napoletano', *La vita cinematografica* 5:17 (7 May, 1914), 78.

[41] A. Scartozzoni, 'Verona', *La cinematografia italiana ed estera* 8:179/180 (November, 1914), 102.

[42] Reproduced in 'Le grandi manifestazioni d'arte – Cabiria ha trionfato a Torino, Milano e Roma', 41.

[43] Ibid., 42.

passati e morti, sepolti sotto le tragiche rovine delle città superbe.[44]

[*Cabiria* is one of those things that will remain. It will remain because, at this juncture, the vulgar art of cinema ceases and is replaced by history, true history, lived history and history seen through the marvelous eyes of a truly great poet who, by scrutinising history, has discovered the soul of people in the past and of the dead, buried under tragic ruins of superb cities.]

D'Annunzio's cinematic vision of history, which the reviewer calls *la storia vera* (true history), was seen as an art form that was capable of not only reimagining past Roman glories but of recapturing the very soul of ancient Roman heroes. In this sense, the historical film resurrects the past as dead heroes live again onscreen. This true history of Roman glory was also hugely popular in the United States. The Itala Film production, 'exhibited to capacity audiences at the Knickerbocker Theatre, New York, has proven to be a spectacle of unusual proportions, and of great interest to the theatre-going public' (See fig. 48).[45] A performance of *Cabiria* was even given to the President and his family, the first time in history for a film to be projected outside on the grounds of the White House.[46] All of this demonstrates that *Cabira* was made by filmmakers who wanted to push the artistic boundaries of the art form and create a new type of visual experience that would startle audiences. Indeed, many of the effects such as the superimpositions in the Sofonisba dream sequence, the fire and smoke of Mount Etna's eruption, the elephants and soldiers of Hannibal crossing the snowbound Alps, the imperial Roman fleet in flames at the siege of Syracuse, are all set pieces that stand up today.

Pastrone was a meticulous researcher and, before filming, he spent time in the Louvre looking into historical architectural and costume design. The look of the film had to produce a sense of the past that was authentic. However, this attention to detail did not mean that Pastrone was, in the words of François Truffaut, a mere *metteur-en-scène* (scene-setter)*,* intent on using the film's *mise-en-scène* to illustrate as perfectly as possible the screenplay or the novel upon which the film was based.[47] As important as the literary figures of D'Annunzio and Salgari were to the making and promotion of *Cabiria*, Pastrone certainly did not feel bound by any literary criteria. He was a filmmaker, interested in the art of making new realities through the medium of film. In discussing *Cabiria*, Bondanella says that the epic battle between Rome and Carthage was being recreated onscreen for the first time. This was not the literary histories of Livy or even the faithful

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[44] Ibid., 43.
[45] *The Moving Picture World* 21 (July-September, 1914), 86.
[46] Ibid., 461, 462.
[47] Chris Darke, 'The French New Wave', in Nelmes, *Introduction*, 403.

filmic representation of those histories but a newer type of history where the ancient clashes between two civilisations were being historicised in a new exciting visual way. Bondanella explains how Pastrone sought to captivate the audience intellectually and emotionally:

> Vast historical themes often fail to achieve an emotional impact upon an audience unless this historical atmosphere is filtered through the lives of more mundane characters, and so Pastrone focused the plot of *Cabiria* around not Livian figures but, instead, purely fictitious characters of his own invention: Cabiria, a girl from Catania captured by pirates and sold into Carthaginian slavery; Fulvius Axilla, a Roman spy who falls in love with Cabiria and eventually marries her; and his slave, Maciste, played by a non-professional actor named Bartolomeo (Pagano) whose muscular exploits turned him overnight from a Genoa dock worker into a star.[48]

Some of these fictitious characters of Pastrone's own invention can be read as signifiers of Jewishness in *Cabiria*. Moreover, this imagery was coupled with innovative developments in film language, adding to the film's ability to communicate on multiple levels and achieve that 'emotional impact' that Bondanella speaks about. In this regard, *Cabiria* is described by Bondanella as a 'masterpiece', which 'embodies a number of artistic and technical innovations', exemplifying a level of craftsmanship that few works of the silent era could surpass'.[49] An important innovation was the use of tracking shots, which contributed to the way the film told its story. A complex system of tracks was built so as to allow the camera to move ingeniously throughout the film's enormous sets. This non-static approach to camera work allowed Pastrone to pull the spectator into the film world as he incorporated extreme long shots, medium close-ups, and close-ups. According to Bondanella, the *carello* or dolly, which transported the camera along the track system, was Pastrone's invention, although his cinematographer Segundo de Chomón, one of 'the greatest filmmakers of the early silent period',[50] may also have contributed to this innovation.[51] It is important to keep in mind these points regarding the film's pioneering artistry and aesthetic innovations as subsequent sections endeavour to discover how these developments generate meaning within the film's narrative as well as seeking to deconstruct some of the film's connotative agents of Jewishness in order to see what myth-making function those characters could have had in 1914 Italy.

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[48] Bondanella, *Italian Cinema*, 5, 6.
[49] Ibid., 3.
[50] Joan M. Minguet, 'Segundo de Chomón', in Abel, *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, 116.
[51] Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema,* 4. In '*Cabiria*', *The Oxford Companion to Film*, ed. Liz-Anne Bawden (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 102, it is suggested that both Pastrone and Chomón came up with the idea of moving the camera on a dolly and on a rudimentary type of crane.

Cabiria was released just after a war and just before a war. The significance of this socio-political context is what will be discussed next especially in terms of the film's Jewish imagery.

LA CINE-FONO

Le grandi manifestazioni d'arte

"CABIRIA,,

ha trionfato a Torino - Milano e Roma

La stampa italiana si fa eco dell'entusiasmo del pubblico

Il Giornale d'Italia

La prima di "Cabiria,, a Milano

Milano, 19 aprile

Ieri sera è stata proiettata al Teatro Lirico la *Cabiria* di Gabriele d'Annunzio, visione storica del terzo secolo avanti Cristo.

Il teatro era tutto esaurito e, diciamolo subito, questa *première* ha ottenuto un colossale successo.

Fin dal primo episodio il pubblico distintissimo, per quanto preparato a veder *mirabilia*, è rimasto gradevolmente sorpreso dalla vastità della tela del dramma, dalla scrupolosa cura dei particolari archeologici e storici, dalla elegante armonia degli aggruppamenti e dei movimenti dei varii personaggi. L'eruzione dell'Etna e le devastatrici scosse di terremoto stupirono per la loro tragica realtà.

Nel secondo episodio fu applauditissima la *Sinfonia del fuoco* appositamente scritta dal maestro Ildebrando da Parma e cantata dal baritono Viadana. Il tempio di Moloch diede a tutti gli spettatori un'impressione di straordinaria grandiosità.

Ammirata nel terzo episodio la calata di Annibale dalle Alpi nevose, mentre si trovava vieppiù interessante « la finzione avventurosa » — come la chiama il Poeta — che collega le grandi composizioni storiche. Piena di suggestione parve la scena sentimentale negli orti di Asdrubale, alla quale fa orribile contrasto l'atroce supplizio del fedele Maciste.

Magnifica nel quarto episodio la ricostruzione di una delle più caratteristiche pagine della scienza e insieme della storia: l'incendio della flotta romana, compiuto da Archimede con gli specchi ustorii; e pietosissima la scena in cui Fulvio Axilla rivela a Batto, padre desolato, che Cabiria, diletta sua figliuola, vive ancora.

Il quinto episodio — non esagero — incantò addirittura il pubblico perchè sembrò compendiare tutte le virtù trasfigurative del cinematografo. Il deserto, la mischia, il singolar modo con cui Fulvio Axilla riesce a penetrare in Cartagine, la liberazione di Maciste incatenato alla mola, l'incendio del campo di battaglia, l'inseguimento del nemico tra le dune sabbiose, il patetico ricordo della notte lunare, la tragicomica vendetta di Maciste contro il pontefice di Moloch, l'acciecamento di Cabiria, la fermezza di Scipione l'africano contro la figlia di Asdrubale e il re dei Numidi,

il suicidio di Sofonisba, il ritorno a Roma del patrizio Fulvio e di Cabiria salvata, furono giudicati tutti quadri meravigliosi di bellezza e di verità.

Parecchie volte durante lo spettacolo il pubblico proruppe in calorosi applausi.

La musica adattata dal maestro Mazza è stata eseguita da settantacinque professori d'orchestra diretti dal maestro Seveso. Anch'essa piacque per la precisa sincronia del ritmo musicale con lo svolgimento della pellicola cinematografica.

Vennero pure applauditi i cori cantati da ottanta coristi d'ambo i sessi.

Il *Corriere della Sera* dice: La fusione degli elementi cinematografici, musicali e vocali è riuscita veramente perfetta e lo spettacolo della grande visione storica di d'Annunzio, che costituisce il più grande tentativo d'arte del genere fin qui compiuto è veramente magnifico. Il nobile sforzo dell'*Itala films* di Torino, che per allestire *Cabiria* ha profuso un milione, è stato coronato da un successo degno dell'avvenimento d'arte ».

Il *Secolo* dice che ebbe tutto il valore e il significato di una *première* « la presentazione di questa grande eccezionale cinematografia, che ha voluto fare assurgere la *film* non solo ad opera d'arte, ma altresì a perfetta ricostruzione storica.

Finito il magnifico spettacolo s'accesero e s'accalorarono le discussioni sul trionfale ingresso di Gabriele D'Annunzio tra coloro i quali non sdegnano di far servire l'Arte alla Cinematografia.

Costituisce questo fatto una diminuzione della personalità artistica di Gabriele D'Annunzio? O non piuttosto egli ha dato alla Cinematografia una patente di nobiltà elevandola agli occhi del pubblico?

Naturalmente i giudizi non erano concordi. Voi ricordate quel che si diceva dei sapienti di Salamanca; essi erano innegabilmente degli studiosi di buona volontà; ma solo quando si assise tra di loro il venerando don Ignazio divennero per l'universo « i dotti di Salamanca ». Ora alcuni non perdonano al D'Annunzio di aver fatto penetrare, con la sua persona, la grande austera Arte nel tempio della Cinematografia; mentre altri lo lodano del coraggio che ha mostrato consentendo alla Cinematografia di fissare la sua visione poetica in un ricordo incancellabile.

« In verità — scrive a questo proposito l'*Illustrazione Italiana* — non dobbiamo che rallegrarci che D'Annunzio abbia scritto per il Cinematografo. Per quel suo consueto e bello entusiasmo che lo spinge a ren-

Figure 47

Figure 48[52]

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[52] Photograph of the Knickerbocker Theatre in New York (1914) whilst showing *Cabiria*. F11908/001 (Archive of the *Museo Nazionale del Cinema* in Turin).

Ancient Wars in Africa and Modern Identity Conflicts in Italy

Cabiria is a film about a war in the third century B.C.E. between Carthage and Rome and inspired, perhaps, by a twentieth-century war between Libya and Italy. To ignore this historical context would undermine any inquiry into the inclusion and function of certain scenes in *Cabiria*. Understanding the history of the relationship between Italy and Africa is crucial to the understanding of Jewish imagery in *Cabiria*. A synchronic approach to critiquing *Cabiria*, anchoring the critical analysis in the events of that particular timeframe, will help explain the reasons why the film was made when it was made and why Jewish imagery was employed in certain scenes in certain ways.

In September, 1911, the then Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Italy, Giovanni Giolitti, ordered a military attack on Libya.[53] Within three weeks, Libya's principal cities and major ports were in Italian hands. Despite on-going opposition from Libyan guerrilla groups, the invasion was deemed a success. A little more than a year later, in October 1912, the Turkish authorities formally relinquished control of their former colony, thus completing a major military and political victory for Giolitti and his Liberal government.[54] Fifty years after the Risorgimento, Italy's first military victory on African soil demonstrated that the country had embraced militaristic modernity with its nation-state power politics. The forces of Liberalism that had kept Italy united for half a century with their ideals of progress, industrialisation, enlightenment, respect for social order, and patriotic citizenship were the self-same forces that unleashed a militaristic spirit of imperialism. Italy had captured her 'fourth shore'. Richard Bosworth explains more:

> Italy would no longer be curtailed by the Mediterranean. Instead it would be Italy which, from her 'four shores', embraced the Mediterranean, the sea which politicians, learned in the classics, already liked to call 'mare nostrum'. In attacking Libya, Italy had crossed the Rubicon on an Italian road to imperialism.[55]

Bosworth is of the opinion that Italy's imperialist war on Libya was waged primarily for 'psychological reasons'.[56] He is persuaded by political scientist Roberto Michels' view that Italy went to war because the Liberal ruling elites wanted the Kingdom of Italy to be respected in the world as a Great Power and that this desire for respect was at the heart of Giolittian colonial

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[53] Mark Robson, *Italy: Liberalism and Fascism, 1870-1945* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2000), 32.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Richard Bosworth, *Italy and the Approach of the First World War*, (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1983), 1.
[56] Ibid., 76.

aspirations.[57]

These 'psychological reasons' are called 'sentimental reasons'[58] by the historian Benedetto Croce. Italy, he says, could not stand seeing the British, the French, and the Spaniards placing their respective national flags on African soil, claiming new territorial resources, which Italy ought to be claiming for itself. Italy was in danger of missing out on the 'scramble for Africa'. The African Mediterranean coast especially was meant to be Italy's 'fourth shore', a fertile land of promise for Italian emigrants who would be welcomed enthusiastically by the indigenous north Africans. No longer did Italian emigrants have to leave for the colonies of other nations, they could now help populate Italian colonies and participate in the aggrandisement of Italy. If the Kingdom of Italy was to be taken seriously as a great European power, it had to plant its flag, the crowned *tricolore*, in Africa.[59] Italy had to become a coloniser to become a great power.

But the war in Libya tells only half the story. Before the Great War, the history of Liberal Italy was a tale of two African wars. Before the victory in Libya there was a defeat in Ethiopia. In 1890, the Prime Minister, Francesco Crispi, established an Italian colony in Eritrea with the port of Massawa as its strategic centre. This was the first step towards forming an Italian Somaliland.[60] Italy's position – or lack of position – in Europe was extremely important to Crispi and he believed that Italy 'was a great power by natural right', which 'had been made by awakening the Italian people – or the politically conscious among them – to their destiny as the heirs of ancient Rome'.[61] When Crispi demanded further colonial expansion by ordering Italian soldiers into the Ethiopian province of Tigre, Ethiopian forces resisted and, under the leadership of Emperor Menelik, defeated the Italian army during the battle of Adowa, which began on 28th February and ended on 1st March 1895.[62] Those Italian troops who fought at Adowa were 'the first European forces to be defeated by an African state in modern times', and 5,000 of them were slain on the battlefield.[63]

This humiliating defeat was, perhaps, the real psychological reason behind Italy's decision to participate once again in the struggle for African colonies in 1911. A victory in Libya would help heal the scar on Italy's national consciousness, which was so badly wounded at Adowa. The image that Italy wanted to project to the world had to be rebuilt and re-projected. That image-building process was still driven by the politics of identity, of national identity and belonging. Italy felt

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[57]   Ibid., 75, 76.
[58]   Benedetto Croce, *A History of Italy: 1871-1915* (New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1963), 261.
[59] Ibid., 260, 261.
[60] Robson, *Italy: Liberalism and Fascism*, 26.
[61] C. J. Lowe and F. Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy, 1870-1940* (London and Boston: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1975), 48.
[62] Ibid., 67.
[63] Robson, *Italy: Liberalism and Fascism*, 26.

aggrieved that it did not sit at Europe's top table of powerful nation-states. The shame of losing at Adowa was exacerbated by the shame of having to watch other European nations continue to carve up Africa between them. These sentiments were summed up by a question asked in *La Perseveranza:* 'Why should the shame of being excluded [from Africa] be reserved for Italy?'[64] This was a newspaper that had opposed the colonial policies of Crispi but was now positioning itself firmly in the nationalist camp. The socialists and the anti-expansionists were losing the battle of public opinion. With their evocations of past Roman glories, the nationalists were winning the battle for the hearts and minds of those Italians who were engaged in the political process. Invading Libya had nothing or very little to do with material gain. The invasion was not motivated by an Italian greed for oil, the true significance of which was, to all intents and purposes, unknown at the time – even to the nationalists.[65] C. J. Lowe and F. Marzari say of this period:

> The motivation behind the public demand for the Tripoli venture was more psychological than material: the need for some outlet for a demonstration of Italy's status as a great power of more critical importance than the province itself.[66]

The motivation for war in Africa was ideological and psychological in nature. It was all to do with image: the image of Italy at home and abroad.

Pastrone's *Cabiria* was a projection of that image, the *bella figura* of a nation that was once again victorious in Africa with *Roma capitale* once again prominent in power and glory. *Mare nostrum* indeed. *Cabiria* functioned as an ideological apparatus both projecting and reflecting the identity politics of the day. As Steven Ricci highlights, since its inception, Italian cinema 'specifically inscribed itself into what can be termed a cultural search for national identity'.[67] The dialectic at the heart of this search for a national Italian identity was the on-going negotiation between the idea of the national as espoused by those involved in political life and the reality of regional linguistic and cultural differences. Any concepts of a unifying Italian identity in circulation at the time *Cabiria* was made had their roots in this dialectical struggle between the local and the national. Ricci suggests that Italian cinema enjoyed a privileged position within the public sphere right from the industry's beginnings. He says:

> Not only did its films explicitly address national political issues, the cinematic institution also attempted to assert its role as an agency that could recruit, codify, and circulate the

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64 Lowe and Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy*, 114.
65 Richard Bosworth, *Italy and the Approach of the First World War*, 17. The existence of oil in Libya was known to a handful of Italian experts but in over thirty years of an Italian presence in Libya, Italy did not exploit this resource.
66 Lowe and Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy*, 115.
67 Steven Ricci, *Cinema and Fascism: Italian Film and Society, 1922-1943* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2008), 36.

cultural terms for a modern national identity.[68]

But once these terms of national identity had been forged out of the politics of difference between the local and the national, these new terms and conditions of identity were deployed in another dialectical debate; this time, between the national and the foreign. If a hegemonic consensus was beginning to crystallise around these relatively new concepts of Italy, Italians, and Italianness, it was essential that these concepts were protected. The institution of film helped to protect them. In watching *Cabiria*, *il pubblico,* in both senses of the Italian word: the audience and the public, was Roman, Italian. Regional boundaries dissolved as audiences across Italy were being 'presented a fictive view of themselves *in the past'*, a past that invited the audience to identify with fictional representations of Roman protagonists who were protecting Roman ideals in the face of a foreign threat.[69]

The nationalistic imperative demanded that national identity had to be protected by creating a set of binary oppositions: Italy versus other country, Italian versus Other, and Italianness versus Otherness. The new nexus was between Italy and the foreign and *Cabiria*, like many other silent historical epics belonging to this period, played out this drama of difference onscreen. D'Annunzio, the writer of *Cabiria*'s intertitles, was often engaged in atavistic rhetoric, promoting military might as the way not only to protect Italy but as the primary means of achieving glory, power, pride, and beauty. Ricci provides further insights to relationship between cinema and the political rhetoric of the day:

> In this context, the rhetorical reevocation of Rome was supported by its fictive reconstruction in the films. That is, at the same time that nationalist speeches referred to an ideal of the Roman past as a legitimation of their political agenda, a large set of films circulated images of Roman antiquity to larger, popular audiences.[70]

Audiences were being presented with a 'common' history in order to ensure a 'common' present and future. Ancient Rome was the primary inspiration. Aldo Bernardini also agrees that the power of cinema helped forge a composite national Italian identity, which was primarily carried out by focusing on memories of glorious Roman pasts. This was the nationalists' strategy:

> The ideology and, above all, the mentality of nationalism was taking shape and gaining strength in Italy. It depended on traditions, on patriotic memories, on historical and cultural heredity, in order to reinforce that unity and of our people which, after forty years, was still

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[68] Ibid., 38.
[69] Ibid., 46.
[70] Ibid., 45, 46.

quite far from being a reality.[71]

Cabiria was a patriotic memory, re-envisioned, re-imagined, and re-projected as a 'common', 'national' and 'Italian' memory. The representation of a collective memory, enunciated through film language, functions as a building block in the construction of a nation's identity.

Cabiria, just like the war in Libya that inspired the film, was also a part of the country's collective psychological reaction. At the turn of the century, Italy's image abroad was less than favourable. In a chapter titled 'Liberal Italy: Myths and Realities', Bosworth discusses the contemporary attitudes of writers, historians, and politicians towards the Kingdom of Italy. Most of the comments reveal an anti-Italian racism and a deep mistrust of a country, which stood for everything northern European civilisation was not: lazy, imprudent, feudal, primitive, violent, vulgar, poor, sensual, sexual, comical, disorganised, cowardly, and so the list goes on. Even in the writings of Italophiles – such as the historian G. M. Trevelyan, who wrote his *Garibaldi and the Making of Italy* in 1911 – many remarks ridicule and patronise.[72] This inevitably produced a desire to retaliate and hit back at the critics. Italy had to fight back and reclaim the image of ancient Rome to repudiate the negative image ascribed to the country by other nation-states. The prejudices and racial theoretics to which Italy had been subjected were now being employed to define the non-Italian. Those self-same northern European anxieties about southern Italy manifested themselves in Italian anxieties about the Other. The ruling elite that had helped create the Italian Liberal Monarchy were desperate to protect it and 'their aim was to consolidate the unification, and thus to make the new regime safe not only from hostile foreign powers, but also from its internal enemies'.[73]

Jew as the Same and/or the Other in Liberal Italy's Identity Politics

Beginning in the late eighteenth century and continuing well into the twentieth century, the discussion about race was central to the idea of nation-state building, of making citizens that belong to a specific geopolitical entity, and of constructing a single culture as a form of national expression. The nation-state builders were concerned with homogeneity and 'discourses of race was the most important method by which the homogeneous population was produced'.[74] People of the same race belonged and were accepted into the homogeneous whole but people of a different race did not

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[71] Aldo Bernardini, 'Industrializzazione e classi sociali nel primo cinema italiano', *Risorgimento*, 2:3 (1981), 160.
[72] Bosworth, *Italy*, 2-7.
[73] Robson, *Italy: Liberalism and Fascism,* 15.
[74] Stratton, *Coming Out Jewish*, 53.

belong and were excluded from the national group. Throughout this period of more than a hundred years, which saw the nation-state evolve and become Europe's principal expression of political power and will, Jews in Italy and in other countries were sometimes considered to be citizens of the nation-state and sometimes not. Stratton describes their position as one of ambiguity and ambivalence and this position of almost constant vacillation between citizenship and non-citizenship rendered the European debate on national identity as highly problematic.[75] Jews with their ambiguously constructed identity could be seen as being both the same and the Other simultaneously. In tracing the history of this ambivalent construction of Jewish identity in the European context, Stratton explains how the Jew as harmless Other, whose differences were negligible and considered to pose no threat to national unity, was a type of Other that could be assimilated into the dominant group. In this scenario, 'them' can be turned into 'us', making every citizen the same. The Jew as radical Other, however, was an altogether more dangerous type of Other and stood for ineradicable difference; a Difference with a capital D and this type of Other was not assimilable.[76] During the period in which *Cabiria* was made, race was still considered to be the key factor in establishing radical alterity and the main determinant of Difference and perhaps this, coupled with anxieties surrounding hybridity and its seeming detrimental effect on the purity of the national whole, contributed to the process of demonizing the Other during this period, seeing it as radical and dangerous rather than harmless and assimilable. As will be discussed later, what adds to the sense of danger surrounding the figure of the Jew is his ability to ape and mimic the traits of a real Italian and hence to pass as an Italian citizen.

The racialization of European Jews meant that they could be categorised and, as a result, more easily identifiable. The pseudo-scientific racial theoretics, which were in circulation during the turn of the century, proved to be a method by which the ambivalence surrounding Jewish identity was erased. Race was used to 'establish the Jews as un-ambivalently Other to the west'.[77] The anthropologist Giuseppe Sergi, a founder member of the *Comitato Italiano di Studi Eugenici* (Italian Committee of Eugenic Studies), which was established in 1913, believed that a prosperous future for humankind could only be accomplished by a competition between the races.[78] Despite not wanting this racial competition to take place on the battlefield, his anti-militarism did not hold him back from devising a form of 'sociological environmentalism' that functioned as a

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[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid., 57.
[78] Luca Tedesco, 'For a healthy, peace-loving and hardworking race': anthropology and eugenics in the writings of Giuseppe Sergi', *Modern Italy*, 16:1 (2011), 52.

'complement to negative eugenics'.[79] In 1914, he wrote:

> It is not enough to eliminate the human elements that carry hereditary pathological and
> degenerative defects in whichever way such elimination will be carried out; it is necessary
> first of all to take care of the healthy elements of the race.[80]

Educating those in society who were classed as degenerates was deemed by Sergi to be a pointless
exercise: The danger is not imaginary; because deficients contain the seeds from which criminals,
prostitutes, the mentally unbalanced, madmen, vagabonds and beggars grow.[81] This kind of rhetoric
is reminiscent of the aforementioned discourse of European nation-state self-definition that,
according to Hobsbawm, created internal enemies so as to clearly delineate an idealised type of
national identity, choosing, more often than not, the Jew to function as that enemy.[82]

Another Italian eugenicist, Paolo Mantegazza, was extremely hostile towards Jews despite
accusing Sergi of being cruel in making such extreme statements as those above. Mantegazza
insisted that the 'razza giudaica' was different because those who belonged to it were usurers,
neurotic hypochondriacs, and obscene degenerates. These were differences that had to be made
visible in order to allay the fears of those who were distressed by what Mario Toscano describes as
the 'presenza dell'invisibile diversità dell'ebreo emancipato [the presence of the invisible diversity
of the emancipated Jew]'.[83] Writing towards the end of the nineteenth century, this is how
Mantegazza describes Jewish difference:

> Essi non son membra del nostro corpo europeo; ma son nodi, escrescenze, tumori sparsi qua
> e là ad intoppare la libera circolazione dei nostri umori e delle nostre forze. Sono in una
> parola i parassiti grassi e molesti della vita europea.[84]
>
> [They are not members of our European body; they are tangled growths and tumours spread
> here and everywhere to obstruct the free circulation of our spirit and strengths. They are in a
> word the disturbing fat parasites of European life.]

If Jews were ambivalently Othered, they could be considered as being both racially 'white' and
'non-white', allowing them the possibility of growing and spreading insidiously throughout the
European body and, ultimately, harming it. What un-ambivalent Othering succeeds in doing is to
establish without doubt the 'non-whiteness' or the 'blackness' of Jews within the dominant group's

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[79] Francesco Cassata, *Building the New Man: Eugenics, Racial Science and Genetics in Twentieth-Century Italy* (Budapest and New York: Central European Press, 2011), 18.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Eric Hobsbawm, 'Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-14', *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 279.
[83] Mario Toscano, *Ebraismo e antisemitismo in Italia, dal 1848 alla guerra dei sei giorni* (Milan: F. Angeli, 2003), 31.
[84] Paolo Mantegazza, 'La questione antisemitica', *Fanfulla della Domenica*, 20 September, 1885.

identity formulations. If Jews were thought of as 'black' in 1914 Italy, they were clearly, un-ambivalently, and unambiguously non-Italian and, as such, were so fundamentally different in racial terms that they could not be assimilated into the mainstream.[85] If Jews were thought of as almost the same, almost white, and almost Italian in 1914 Italy, their construction as such would not make it impossible for them to become assimilated. Moreover, these decisions regarding the assimilation or the non-assimilation of certain groups were taken by those privileged with power within the dominant society. On this specific exercise of power, Stratton says:

> The crucial point is that who is allowed to assimilate is determined by the national group itself, and by the government. Likewise, tolerance is a function of power. Those with power can decide whom they tolerate and the limits of their tolerance, and can change their opinion. The possibility of assimilation, whether a person or group finds himself or herself able to assimilate is another matter.[86]

Representation is one way of communicating such political ideologies. Identity can be represented on film, providing powerful visual clues regarding that which is assimilable and that which is not.

Media representation functioned as an expression of the nation-state's ideologically self-defined identity. The representation of the Jew as Other in *Cabiria* reveals the desire within Italy's structures of power to redefine the image of the Jew and throw it into sharp relief. Film as a mode of representation is an expression of a nation-state's desire to be 'perfectly representable to itself'.[87] The modern nation-state constructed a view of itself that was easily recognised by its members, a view of itself that its members could identify with and towards which could feel an emotional attachment. Films such as *Cabiria* helped to create the Kingdom of Italy's view of itself. The representation of Rome and the Romans in the film's narrative functioned as a visual metaphor for the way in which Italy and Italians wanted to view themselves in the modern world: a unified homogeneous group of people characterised by economic wealth and military successes. This was the idealised view of itself and of its citizens and this particularistic view did not include the image of the Jew because the image of the Jew functioned as its direct opposite.

Jewish emancipation had, for the most part, led to a process of Jewish assimilation into the Italian whole. The state that had liberated the Jewish communities had become *their* state and, as a

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[85] In the book *Are Italians White?: How Race is Made in America*, ed. Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno (New York: Routledge, 2003), Guglielmo outlines in her introduction how the post-risorgimento ruling classes of northern Italy, driven on by the racial theoretics of Italian positivist eugenicists, racialized Arabs, Jews, Africans, and Southern Italians as the internal and external enemies of a united Italy (see page 9). In his chapter 'No Color Barrier: Italians, Race, and Power in the United States', Thomas S. Guglielmo describes how the northern Italian ruling elite considered itself to be racially superior and of white Aryan stock, intent on civilising through colonising (see page 33).

[86] Stratton, *Coming Out Jewish*, 57.

[87] Ibid., 120.

result, Jews had fought for an independent, united, Italy. During post-Unification, 'the Jews of Italy contributed to the foundation myths of their national identity and the shaping of Italian identity'.[88] The Italian Jews who had participated in the Risorgimento and who were steeped in its ideals were fiercely patriotic and considered themselves Italians first and foremost. Many Italian Jews were staunch monarchists, and this is reflected in so many Jewish children being given Royal names during the latter part of the nineteenth century.[89] During the same period it became common to combine a Jewish name with a non-Jewish name and, towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, Jewish names were being replaced by 'ones that embodied *italianità* such as Dante, Regina, Garibaldi, Italo and, to reflect the first emancipation, Napoleone'.[90] Emancipation allowed Italian Jews to participate in the process of making Italians. The naming of children is closely connected to identity and giving Italian Jewish children Italian names reveals a desire to assimilate and acculturate on the part of Italian Jews.

This reformulation of Jewish identity in post-Unification Italy sees the emergence of an emancipated, liberal Jew who was becoming less and less tied to Jewish traditions and more and more affiliated with the sensibilities and mores of Italian society. This reshaping of Italian Jewish identity is described as a shift 'from Italian Jews to Jewish Italians'.[91] It is important to remember that this shift did not take place immediately but gradually with identity changes taking place over several generations from the first emancipation (1848) onwards. Moreover, Jews living in Italy reacted to the idea of assimilation in different ways. From embracing the idea to outright rejection of it, there would have been a range of positions in between. During this period of Italian emancipation, some Jews were rejecting their Jewishness and embracing their Italianness but others were rejecting their Italianness and embracing their Jewishness. This was a period of flux in Jewish Italian identity in which Jews were reshaping their identities and creating new multi-layered identities, a fusion of identities that resisted the traditional dichotomous battle between two seemingly mutually exclusive ethnic identities: Jewishness and Italianness. Jews living in Italy from the middle part of the nineteenth century onwards would, no doubt, have done all of the above.[92]

But, as Stratton points out, during this period of nation-state building, it is not what the minority group wanted that mattered but what the majority group wanted. Stuart Hall puts it

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[88] Elizabeth Shächter, *The Jews of Italy, 1848-1915: Between Tradition and Transformation* (London and Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2011), 18.
[89] Ibid., 20.
[90] Ibid., 19, 20.
[91] Ibid., 24.
[92] Ibid.

another way: 'In certain historical moments, some people had more power to speak about some subjects than others'.[93] Even if individual Jews believed in assimilation and wanted to unambiguously become Italian in identity, this choice did not belong to them. The decision was not theirs to take. The nation-state of the Kingdom of Italy decided on such important matters as identity and citizenship and its discursive formations communicated its decisions. This episteme served to fix the idea of Italian citizenship so as to identify who ought to be considered Italian. The boundaries of identity were set. The following section, using key scenes from *Cabiria*, will seek to locate the position of the Jew on the spectrum of Italian identity during the period in which the film was made. The figure of Bodastoret will reveal much about whether the Kingdom of Italy had decided to make Italians out of Jews.

Simian Symbolisms

Figure 49

During the film's second episode, an intertitle introduces the audience to 'the Innkeeper Bodastoret'.

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[93]   Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 42.

This is Carthage in northern Africa and the Romans, Fulvius Axilla and his strongman servant Maciste, are operating as spies in enemy territory or in what an intertitle describes as 'a rival republic'. The Roman spies need food and shelter and, as they approach the 'Inn of the Striped Monkey', Bodastoret turns his head to see who is coming. This startling profile shot begins the first of six sequences in which the actions of this particular character plays a key role in the outworking of the film's plot. His features, his protruding goatee beard and nose, are thrown into sharp relief by the way in which he is framed within the *mise-en-scène* by the large black door (see fig. 49). This rather menacing profile gives Bodastoret an air of malevolence from the very first instance he is seen onscreen. His appearance mirrors that of the monkey whose relief is carved into the inn's stonewall frontage. This is a 'striped monkey'. Bodastoret too is striped, his clothing equating him with the monkey. Even his dishevelled bushy hair is reflected in the tufts of hair that are sticking up on the striped monkey's head. It is a powerful juxtaposition of imagery that serves to animalise Bodastoret. The background too is striped with the inn painted in black and white. Striped objects are ambiguous and liminal in nature, being neither one thing nor the other, neither black nor white. Moreover, seeing that they incorporate both, it could be argued that they *are* both at the same time. Here, though, the profiles of both innkeeper and monkey are placed unambiguously in the black of the film's *mise-en-scène*.

Figure 50

Bodastoret is a dark and complex character who possesses few, if any, redeeming qualities. Ultimately, his function is to epitomise duplicitous and treacherous behaviour. His striped garment aptly symbolises Bodastoret's contrasting traits: he is hospitable and opportunistic, courageous and cowardly, stupid and clever, harmless and harmful. As he turns round, Bodastoret is startled as if by the presence of the camera. He walks slowly towards the camera, looking straight to camera and, breaking the imaginary fourth wall, seeks to curry favour with the spectator (see fig. 50). But his extreme obsequiousness works against him and his constant bowing and ingratiating smiles serves only to arouse suspicion. Despite his welcoming open arms, his bulging eyes and strange grin makes him look rather strange.

Bodastoret's striped garment is torn and dirty, which is in stark contrast to the clean white toga worn by Maciste. The strongman may have been travelling incognito but this garment marks him out as a Roman citizen; a garment of such status that servants or foreigners were prohibited from wearing it. But Bodastoret's dirty and torn striped garment conveys more than his non-Romanness. This Carthaginian is the innkeeper of the striped *monkey*. He wears the same monkey stripes, engages in monkey business, which is more than simply mischievous, and moves like a monkey onscreen. The meaning disguised in the simian symbolisms surrounding Bodastoret is far more damning than simply contrasting his uncouth, uncivilised Carthaginianness with Fulvius Axilla and Maciste's refined and civilised Romanness. Bodastoret's monkeyness dehumanises him and contrasts him with the humanity of the Roman citizens. The Carthaginian is a beast and the Romans are human.

On the symbolisms of monkeys and apes within the visual tradition, Lucy Cutler says that they 'became emblematic of man's baser nature dependent on or trapped by sensory pleasure'.[94] In Paolo Veronese's *Feast in the House of Levi* (1573), Cutler argues that the image of the monkey works not only as a signifier of all things oriental and exotic but also 'embodies surrender to animal appetites'.[95] The monkey, often seen fettered and holding an apple, was a common motif in Medieval and Renaissance art, representing man in his fallen or sinful state.[96] Kenneth Gouwens writes about how Christian theologians of the Renaissance period 'referred to sinners as apes and to Satan as God's ape'.[97] Gouwens says that interpretations of monkey images varied greatly from the comical and mischievous to the licentious and sinful as well as the diabolical. This range of

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[94] Lucy Cutler, 'The Monkey in Art, http://www.artandarchitecture.org.uk/stories/cutler_monkey.html (Accessed 24/10/2011).
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Kenneth Gouwens, 'Human Exceptionalism', *The Renaissance World*, ed. John Jeffries Martin (New York and London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2007), 416.

interpretive meaning can also apply to the character of Bodastoret whose function as an antisemitic metonym only becomes apparent when his story within the film is told in its entirety. As the story unfolds, Bodastoret becomes increasingly nastier in character. He may have started out as a comical innkeeper but he ends up as a conniving moneylender. His story is one of treachery, greed and deserved comeuppance.

Before moving on to discuss Bodastoret's storyline trajectory, however, one or two further points need to be made regarding the way the film links him with the image of the monkey. According to Gouwens, Renaissance Europeans utilised simian symbolisms to underscore the superiority of humans over animals. To the humanistic mind in sixteenth-century Europe, the boundary between humans and animals was defined 'with unprecedented clarity and precision'.[98] However, comparing humans with apes or monkeys blurred this boundary due to the similarities between human and simian behaviour. Gouwens quotes Cicero to convey the disquieting nature of these comparisons when he said: 'Simia quam similis turpissima bestia nobis [How similar is the ape, a most-foul beast, to us]'.[99] Gouwens goes on to say that:

> Psychological experiments have documented apes engaged in a variety of behaviours that uncannily resemble 'human' ethical lapses, such as compulsive gambling, exchanging sex for money, and deceiving 'friends' for personal advantage (a trait that has been termed 'Machiavellian Intelligence').[100]

This Machiavellian Intelligence allows a most-foul beast to imitate or 'ape' the behaviour of a human being. This aping or impersonation was despised by many Renaissance writers or artists because it was seen as form of deception. Because simians appeared to be more like human beings than other animals they were seen as arch deceivers and any human deliberately playing the ape was nothing more than a trickster and eventually his deception would become apparent. The 'superficially humanoid' ape or monkey 'does badly what humans do well'. It tries to pass as a human but a monkey will always be a monkey. In reiterating a Greek axiom, Martin Luther said that 'even if a monkey wore royal apparel, it would still remain a monkey'.[101]

Bodastoret's monkey-like Machiavellian form of intelligence allows him to pass in society as a hospitable innkeeper and even though he manages to better himself in relation to wealth and status, his new found prosperity is founded on scheming and deception. He is not what he appears to be; he is a striped monkey trying to imitate all that is bad about human behaviour. This is not

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[98] Ibid., 417.
[99] Ibid., 416.
[100] Ibid., 428.
[101] Ibid., 421.

merely a power struggle between different types of ethnicities – the Carthaginian versus the Roman – but a struggle between the human and the non-human, between Bodastoret the anthropoid and Fulvius Axilla the human being and, as will be expanded upon during the next few sections, this particular figure draws upon age-old anti-Jewish dehumanising stereotypes that 'are not derived from the object of prejudice but are the product and the projection of the majority's prejudice against the Other'.[102] The majority in this case being the nation-state of Italy. If the Other is dehumanised, he cannot become a citizen of a nation. Once animalised, the Other cannot even be classed as a bad citizen but only as a non-citizen. He is non-human and, therefore, a non-citizen. As the nature of anti-Jewish rhetoric changed when society became less religious and more secularised, Leslie Kane argues that, although the way Jews were portrayed in the plastic arts changed, the actual perception of the Jew as a negative figure in society did not. Everything bad that was said about Jews remained; it was just said in a different way. Something else remained too. Kane explains that 'although rhetoric changes from religious to secular, the Jew is a threat to the body politic whether as usurer, thief, trickster, con artist, kidnapper, criminal, or alien'.[103] The idea that the Jew is a threat to society at large is the motivating factor behind the construction and deployment of anti-Jewish stereotypes in the first place. Bodastoret represents the Jew as radical Other rather than harmless Other and his aping cannot conceal the threat he poses to Roman characters in the film. As soon as Fulvius Axilla and Maciste enter into the inn of the striped monkey, the spectator senses that not all is as it seems. Despite being offered food, drink and shelter, there is a growing awareness that the Romans are being plotted against.

The figure of Bodastoret encapsulates many of the negative tropes, which have been drawn upon to stereotype Jewish religious and cultural behaviour across the centuries as Jews were mythologised, demonized, and dehumanised. These portraits included dirty weasels, gesticulating and gibbering ranters, and greedy, hard-necked money-obsessed characters.[104] Bodastoret is all of these negative qualities and, in him and Pastrone's portrayal of him, the nefarious stage Jew becomes the villainous onscreen Jew. It is true that there is nothing in the storyline or the *mise-en-scène* that explicitly marks him out as Jewish. After all, these are the Punic Wars and Bodastoret is a Carthaginian, living in Carthage. At this stage in the narrative, Bodastoret can be read as a symbolic Jew in the filmic text but with no certainty. Any possible anti-Jewish meanings that can be attributed to Bodastoret are disguised in the film's symbolisms. However, as the film's narrative

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[102] Leslie Kane, *Weasels and Wisemen: Ethics and Ethnicity in the Work of David Mamet* (New York: Palgrave, 1999), 8.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.

moves forward, this chapter will argue that Bodastoret's 'Jewishness' becomes more and more explicit. At time when the Kingdom of Italy was busy in the process of making Italians, Bodastoret's representation is important because it stands for the radical Other that is not assimilable. 'He' cannot ever become 'us'. Even if he wanted to change, he cannot. Italy cannot make an Italian out of Bodastoret, it is impossible.

The Carthaginian Judas

When her home was destroyed by the volcanic eruption of Mount Etna, the little girl Cabiria was separated from her parents in the ensuing confusion, captured by a group of pirates and taken to Carthage as a captive. She has been bought by wicked priests and is now going to be offered up in the Temple of Moloch as a child sacrifice.[105] What follows is one of the film's most memorable scenes as the crowd, in a state of delirium, bay for the blood of children. As the statue of Moloch opens his mouth, a child is thrown into the fiery furnace. As the mouth shuts tight, the god's eyes light up with the flames caused by the child's burning.[106] The content of the intertitles adds to the sense of horror: 'Accept the hundred innocent children' is the invocation. 'Swallow! Devour! Accept the purest flesh! Accept the sweetest blood! Carthage gives you its flower.' Fulvius Axilla and Maciste or 'the bold heroes', as the intertitle describes them, enter the temple and courageously rescue Cabiria and steal her away.

This scene is viewed by Brien K. Garnand as an example of the way ancient cultures such as the Carthaginian or Phoenician culture has been exotically reconstructed in fictive novels and films. These re-imaginings, of which Gustave Flaubert's novel *Salammbô* (1862) is an example, were hugely popular and influential. The focus is always on the depravity of a culture that would willingly sacrifice its own children. European writers, artists, filmmakers, and scholars held onto this view and perpetuated these depictions well into the twentieth century. In these popular texts, the Punic civilisation was stripped of its successes with little or no attention being given to extraordinary Carthaginian achievements such as seamanship, business acumen, and military might. Its major cultural contribution of inventing the alphabetic script was completely ignored. Drawing

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[105] The visualisation of Moloch evokes the TaNuCh with its mention of Moloch, a god associated with the Ammonites (see 1 Kings 11: 5, 7, 33). Israelites along with anyone else who lived among them would be put to death if they were found guilty of sacrificing children to Moloch (see Leviticus 20: 2-5). The New Testament also makes mention of Moloch (different spelling but possibly the same deity or title for a group of pagan gods) as a reminder that God will not tolerate false gods and demands exclusive devotion (see Acts 7:43). In the Judeo-Christian imagination, Moloch/Molech is a symbol of baseness and depravity.

[106] Such an image was later used by Fritz Lang in his *Metropolis* (1927) to symbolize the sacrifice of the workers to the Moloch of capitalism/industry.

heavily on classical sources, these exotic reconstructions concentrate on the Carthaginians' purported reputation for sacrificial infanticide, piracy, ritual prostitution, and deceit. Garnand argues that these fictional representations solved the paradox of the Carthaginian or Phoenician as depraved civiliser or civilised depraver by simply 'erasing the civiliser', thus 'leaving only the depraved and exotic Other'.[107]

Cabiria, formed during an era of European colonial expansion and racist ideologies, was part of the discourse of Orientalism, demonstrating that Italy participated in the systematic and disciplined European cultural project, as Edward Said describes it, by which nation-states were able 'to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period'.[108] *Cabiria* exemplifies how a European culture attempted to manage and produce the construction of the Orient so as to manage and produce the construction of its own self. If the superiority of the Roman/Italian culture is set off against the inferiority of the Carthaginian/Other culture, it becomes easier to see. The making of Italians could not happen if it were a cultural project clouded in ambiguity. The representation of the Other could not contain any paradoxes or else it risked the communication of possible positive meanings, which could potentially muddy the ideological waters. Italians had to see clearly what they were not so as to see clearly what they were supposed to be. *Salammbô* was produced at a time when France was constructing national identities following Napoleon's victories over the Arabs in Egypt. *Cabiria* was produced at a time when Italy was constructing national identities following victories over the Turks and Arabs in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica (modern-day Libya). *Cabiria* is a form of Orientalism that 'determines what can be said about the Orient'[109] so as to determine what can be said about Italy, Italianness, and Italians. This was the overarching discourse of the day.

Returning to the film's plot will help develop these points further. The deceitful Bodastoret will soon become the arch-depraver when he behaves in a way that is reminiscent of Judas Iscariot. The next few sequences of the film call to mind the treachery of Judas and function almost as a parallel account to the Greek Testament source. What this does is fix Bodastoret's Otherness with a distinctive Jewish colour. This form of Orientalism is an essentialism, which uses negative traits that are traditionally associated with anti-Jewish stereotypes. Betrayal in the manner of Judas is one such negative trait. It is a form of essentialist imagery and narrative structure, which can turn *all*

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[107] Brien K. Garnand, 'From Infant Sacrifice to the ABCs: Ancient Phoenicians and Modern Identities', *Stanford Journal of Archaeology* 1 (2002) 3.
[108] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 3.
[109] Ibid.

Jews into Bodastoret or Judas figures. The power of this overriding Orientalist attitude is described in this way by Said:

> It shares with magic and with mythology the self-containing, self-reinforcing character of a closed system, in which objects are what they are *because* they are what they are, for once, for all time, for ontological reasons that no empirical material can either dislodge or alter.[110]

Not only does Bodastoret operate as a Judas-type figure capable of stereotyping all Jews as betrayers, it can fix the idea that this is how all Jews behave because this is how they have always behaved in the past and this is how they are bound to behave in the future. Their Jewish behaviour is what it is because of who they are and they cannot change who they are. A Jew cannot change his treacherous behaviour no more than a striped monkey can get rid of his stripes. The figure of Bodastoret as radical Italian Other seems to capture Orientalist, racist, colonialist, essentialist, as well as anti-Semitic, ideologies. Bodastoret reinvigorates and reinforces such ideologies.

Figure 51

To go back to the film's storyline, the two Roman spies and the rescued little girl Cabiria all flee to Bodastoret's Inn of the Striped Monkey. An angry mob is chasing after them. Upon

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[110] Ibid., 70.

reaching the inn, Fulvius Axilla bangs on the door but there is no reply. In the end, Maciste uses his strength to break down the door. Bodastoret is hiding inside and, on this occasion, there is no warm welcome or open-armed embrace to greet his visitors. 'Maciste convinces the bewildered innkeeper' to allow them to stay but the words of the intertitle are clearly ironic as Maciste grabs Bodastoret, holds him upside down, and carries him upstairs. Outside the inn a crowd gathers, searching for Cabiria and her Roman protectors. Bodastoret opens the upstairs window and shouts down to the crowd, 'By Baal-Peor, you must believe me, I have seen no one!' All the while, Maciste is holding onto to him forcefully, warning the innkeeper not to betray them. The crowd leaves, satisfied that Bodastoret is telling the truth. 'Fulvius Axilla and Maciste hide at the Inn of the Striped Monkey. They are protected by the cautious silence of the fearful Bodastoret' says the next intertitle. Unbeknown to the Roman spies, however, that protection is only mere pretence. When Fulvius Axilla and Maciste hear of Hannibal's exploits in crossing the Alps and of the dangers facing Rome, they decide to escape that very night. However, that very night, Bodastoret will betray them. The Romans will be ambushed and captured. Fulvius Axilla will manage to escape but tragic consequences await Cabiria and Maciste.

The next scene featuring Bodastoret is highly motivated and this is not just regarding the film's historical reconstructions, which lends the diegesis a verisimilitude but in the character of Bodastoret as a source of intertextual motivation.[111] Just like Judas in the New Testament accounts, Bodastoret visits surreptitiously the chief priests to betray the Roman rescuers along with Cabiria in exchange for money. When nightfall comes, Bodastoret enters the temple cautiously, continually glancing around him to see whether or not he has been followed. Even though the characters' facial expressions cannot be seen as they meet in the dark shadows of the temple's enormous columns, their silhouettes, caused by the backlighting, serve to dramatise one of Bodastoret's gestures, a single gesture that says so much about the motivating factor in this character's makeup. He raises his hand so that the Carthaginian chief priest can see it and rubs his fingers and thumb together (see fig. 51). This sign can only mean one thing: money.

In the gospel account of Matthew, it was not the chief priest Caiaphas that went to seek out Judas but the other way round. 'What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you' are the first words uttered by Judas when he comes face to face with Caiaphas.[112] The chief priests offer him thirty pieces of silver for information concerning Jesus and Judas accepts without any further negotiation. In this scene, however, Bodastoret's greed is not readily assuaged. As the two

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[111] Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2000)*,* 242.

[112] Matthew 26: 14, 15.

characters walk slowly out of the shadows and into the lighted foreground, their facial expressions are now clearly visible and it soon becomes apparent that the chief priest is angry with the innkeeper. The priest is handed a bag of coins and he gives Bodastoret a few of them. Despite his constant cowering and nervous shuffling, the innkeeper rejects the offer and demands more money. The chief priest threatens to strike Bodastoret but decides against it and throws the entire bag of money at the innkeeper. It is clear that the chief priest detests Bodastoret but he is forced to deal with him if he is to find out the whereabouts of Cabiria's Roman saviours. Finally, Bodastoret informs the chief priest of the Romans' plan to escape at moonrise and tells him where to lay an ambush. The chief priest with his long sidelocks (suggestive of the *payot harosh* or sidelocks worn by male members of the Jewish *haredi* community), his penetrating stare, his prominent nose, and devilish facial hair is a character that sends out dangerous signals. He too is greedy and ruthless, greedy for power, control, and human blood. If she had not been rescued, Cabiria, an innocent blond-haired Roman girl, would have been burned alive on the authority of this man.

As for Bodastoret, he returns to his inn and sends the Romans on their way. Once again he looks straight towards the camera and reveals his true self by rubbing his hands in glee at the prospect of the Romans being captured. His 'cautious' approach – as it is described by the English-language intertitles – has proved to be successful. In the original Italian intertitles written by D'Annunzio, the word used is *prudente* or prudent. These words could be seen as euphemisms for underhanded behaviour for there is a fine line between prudence, cautiousness, shrewdness and cunning, slyness, or craftiness. Depending on the chosen translation, the snake or the serpent is described in Genesis 3:1 as being 'subtil', 'subtle', 'shrewd', 'cautious', 'prudent', 'crafty' and 'cunning'. This is the serpent that 'beguiled Eve with his subtilty'[113] or cunning, depending on the translation. These positive qualities have a very negative flip side, which reference the machinations of the Devil himself in his role as the serpent-like arch deceiver. In the Christian imagination, negative meanings generated by simian symbolisms may not readily be decoded but meanings generated by serpentine symbolisms can function as powerful evocations of the Devil and/or concepts of demonic evil in any given cultural text. Linking Bodastoret to monkeys draws attention to his beastly attributes; linking Bodastoret to Judas-like behaviour Jewifies him in the most damning of ways, and linking him to the 'cautious' behaviour of a serpent, however tenuous or subtle the link, is to condemn him as incorrigibly evil.

At a time when the Kingdom of Italy had recently fought and conquered the 'Carthaginians' in Africa and was now about to enter into the Great War to prove its military might as a nation-state

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[113] 2 Corinthians 11:3.

against the Austrian-Hungarian empire, bad citizenship could not be tolerated. Any monkey-like Italians who mimicked being Italians constituted a substantive problem. Judas-like citizens, who resembled upstanding Italians, could betray the nation-state during a time of war and thus posed a threat to national security. Any devil-like citizens threatened to unravel the very fabric of Italian Catholic society. Italians could never be made out of such bad citizens. The Carthaginian Judas, Bodastoret, represented all that was dangerous about the non-Italian Other during this critical period in Italy's history. The Jew is a part of this dangerous Other. Emancipated Italian Jews had become invisible and Bodastoret represents a conscious or subconscious need in Italy to make him visible once again. The circulating theoretics of the day insisted that the Jew be stigmatised as racially different and, therefore, inferior. He had to be 'seen' as different and 'labelled' as different.[114] The Italian ethnographer Paolo Mantegazza (1831-1901) was 'one of the accessible, "popular" sources for "scientific" knowledge (and misinformation) to the educated public at the turn of the century'.[115] He was also a virulent anti-Semite who was obsessed with the 'seeing' of racial difference and behaviour. If Paolo Mantegazza would have lived long enough to see *Cabiria*, he would no doubt have recognised the figure of the Jew in Pastrone's portrayal of Bodastoret who walked like monkey and behaved like Judas Iscariot. As soon as Bodastoret walked out of the shadows and demanded a bag of coins, the audience 'saw' who he really was. This single avaricious and treacherous act confirmed their suspicions: Bodastoret behaves like a Jew; he may even *be* a Jew. The next sequence reveals that he actually *is* a Jew.

The (Hebrew) Writing is on the Wall

Up until this stage in the film, it has been argued that the representation of Bodastoret in particular has provided the audience with many possibilities of reading him as Jewish: in behaviour, in physiognomy, in expression. The presumptions surrounding his portrayal draw from a tradition of anti-Jewish representations all of which conspire to construct him as Jewish but still with no certainty. Now, however, Bodastoret's symbolic Jewishness becomes literal. This is accomplished by exploiting an age-old anti-Jewish stereotype: Jew as moneylender. The scruffy, sly old proprietor of the Inn of the Striped Monkey has now become a prosperous and well-dressed moneylender.

Before Bodastoret's improved status is revealed in the storyline, there is one scene that

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[114] Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York & London: Routledge, 1991), 96. 97.
[115] Ibid., 90.

underscores his mean spirit. Following the ambush, Cabiria is hidden by Maciste in the royal gardens but is soon discovered by queen Sophonisba and taken in to live as a member of the household. Her identity is concealed and she is no longer known as Cabiria but as Elissa, queen Sophonisba's favourite slave girl. Unfortunately for Maciste, his fate is far crueler. The intertitle says that 'the innkeeper takes his revenge for the fear he experienced'. Maciste had threatened Bodastoret whilst hiding in the inn from the angry mob and the innkeeper was not going to forget this mistreatment. Upon capture, the Roman strongman is chained mercilessly to a millstone, which he is forced to turn constantly, resting only to sleep. Wearing a conical-looking 'Jewish' hat, Bodastoret is seen dancing demonically behind him, taunting him and whipping him relentlessly (see fig. 52). It is obvious that Bodastoret is taking delight in torturing the enslaved Roman. As he inflicts pain, his constant grinning is rather disturbing, belying his deviant nature. This traitor is also a vengeful, spiteful, sadist. In a previous chapter, we saw how Shylock in *Il mercante di Venezia* took a perverse pleasure at the very thought of what his revenge might entail. Unlike Shylock, however, Bodastoret is un-thwarted and not only does he think about revenge but also he actually takes his revenge.

Figure 52

The next intertitle signals an ellipsis in the narrative. Fulvius Axilla who managed to escape Carthage and return to Rome 'remembers Maciste and Cabiria, who have been in the enemy city for more than ten years'. For an entire decade, Maciste has been chained to the same millstone but, in sharp contrast to the imprisoned Roman's misfortune, 'the innkeeper's fortunes have improved'. Fulvius goes back to Carthage as a spy to try and rescue Maciste and Cabiria.

He tries to find the Inn of the Striped Monkey so as to interrogate Bodastoret but on approaching the place that he assumes to be the correct location, Fulvius is confused: something has changed. It is no longer a scruffy inn but a handsome looking property. The façade has been completely transformed with the entrance being far grander than it once was, well appointed with dressed stone posts, architrave, and steps. It is little wonder that Fulvius is unsure about being in the right place. There is no monkey engraved on the wall, no cuneiform-style writing scratched crudely on the frontage. In their place there is a stone plaque, a proper sign. Fulvius takes one look at this sign and he knows he is in the right place. The sign is written using Hebrew letters (see fig. 53) and is a sign of Bodastoret's Jewishness, which is no longer suggested, implied, or symbolic, but explicitly signified.

Figure 53

Bodastoret was Jewish all along. Any doubts concerning his real identity have been dissipated. This elegant stone plaque means that Bodastoret has come out as Jewish, to appropriate Stratton's phraseology. It is his sign, his announcement, his proclamation, his inscription. Benjamin Orlove speaks about the peculiar manner by which identity can surface, constantly turning and changing in appearance and form as it swims into view.[116] These *surfacings* can appear quickly or slowly, they can leave many ripples or just a few. Surfaced identity may stay surfaced or may sink out of sight once again. Orlove devised this analogy because, in his mind, it helps convey the dynamic and flexible aspects of identity, whereas expressions such as 'fragmented identity' reinforces the idea that identity is rigid or static and, even it could be glued back together again it would be 'a somewhat weakened and cracked version of a former whole'.[117] This is the moment in *Cabiria* when Jewishness surfaces, Bodastoret's Jewishness.

This opens up one or two possibilities regarding the character's function within the text. Bodastoret's Jewishness could work as a device to symbolise the Jewishness of all African Carthaginians, a metonym for the entire pagan, primitive, uncivilised, treacherous and evil nation. In this scenario, Carthage is figurative of a Jewish nation in opposition to a Western civilisation. The real enemy here is the Jew and the Hebrew writing on the erstwhile innkeeper's wall is a warning that the Jew as Other is no longer hiding behind the Oriental Other but has surfaced in the shape and form of Bodastoret the Jew. This is not the Oriental Other with certain exotic Jewish characteristics but this is the Jew as Other. In his *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), Freud referred to Hannibal the African as the 'Semitic commander' and a favourite of all his childhood heroes.[118] Freud's sympathies lay not with Rome but with Carthage. 'In my youthful eyes', Freud recounts, 'Hannibal and Rome symbolized the struggle between the tenacity of the Jews and the organization of the Catholic church.'[119] If the Carthaginians and Phoenicians were Semites, then they were Jews, representing a Jewish people standing in opposition to the anti-Semitic West as represented by Rome. What Freud saw as Jewish tenacity is pictured in *Cabiria* as Jewish recalcitrance. The Carthaginians resist, fight back, win key battles but, ultimately, Carthage is destroyed and conquered by Rome. If Rome was capable of defeating the Semites of ancient Carthage then the surely the Kingdom of Italy could defeat the Semitic Africans and/or Jews of its day. Enemies abroad that stood in the way of Italian colonial gains and enemies at home that stood

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[116] Benjamin Orlove, 'Surfacings: Thoughts on Memory and the Ethnographer's Self', *Jews and Other Differences: The New Jewish Cultural Studies*, ed. Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 20, 21.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretations of Dreams,* trans. A. A. Brill (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1951 edition), 195.
[119] Ibid.

in the way of a homogenised Italian society had to be defeated. Bodastoret stood for both type of enemy.

   Fulvius thinks about knocking on the door but decides instead to climb up the outside of the house and break in via the upstairs window. There is a cut to the interior of the upstairs room. Bodastoret is no longer the dirty, unkempt, shabbily dressed innkeeper. His scraggly hair is neatly cut. Unlike before, his garment does not contain any holes or tears. Bodastoret is busy weighing coins on a pair of 'Judas scales' (see fig. 54). Still unsure of the coin's metallurgic consistency and, therefore, its worth or value, he taps the coin on the stone surface to test it further and only then is he satisfied, placing the coin carefully inside an earthenware jar for safekeeping. Bodastoret is no longer a poor innkeeper but a rich moneylender, becoming prosperous on the back of blood money. His treachery has made him wealthy. He is, after all Jewish, and this is how Jews within any given society become rich. Bodastoret loves counting his money and the look of delight on his face reveals much about his obsessive greed. Positioned next to the earthenware vessel in the *mise-en-scène* is what appears to be a small statue of a god. This juxtaposition amplifies the idea of Bodastoret's avarice, linking money to worship. For Bodastoret the Jew, money is an object of veneration, the prime motivating factor in his life. Even when he was poor, he wanted desperately to be rich and it was this incorrigible love of money that led him to betray others so as to realise his ruthless ambitions. As far as money is concerned, Bodastoret has no conscience.

Figure 54

Another curiously placed object in the *mise-en-scène* is a bunch of garlic, hanging prominently from a column right in the centre of the frame. As Maria Diemling points out, Jews have traditionally been associated with garlic in Christian consciousness and that mocking Jews for their strange culinary taste is part of a broader tendency in society of mocking peoples from other cultures, nationalities, and ethnic groups for their distinctive eating habits. This mocking of what one group of people chooses to eat by another group who finds such foods inedible or even disgusting, demonstrates how images of food and drink play a part in identity formations and are a common feature, just like images of the body, in political and power relations.[120] The seemingly innocent garlic bulb became a signifier of Jewish religious difference as far back as the fourth century when the Church gained political power and when 'sharing meals with Jews became a standard prohibition'.[121] After all, the Jewish dietary laws, which provided strict guidelines on the preparation of food and on certain forbidden foods, were regulations that made the sharing of meals with Gentiles extremely difficult and served to keep Jews separate from the other surrounding nations. The Church, taking umbrage, responded in kind by discouraging the sharing of food and drink with Jews.[122]

Jews, especially eastern European Ashkenazi Jews, were described as 'garlic eaters'. The Talmud encourages the eating of garlic on Fridays and encourages sexual relations on Friday night, emphasising 'the aphrodisiac quality of garlic'.[123] Concerning the eating of garlic, the Talmud also says that it 'satisfies, it warms, it brightens the face, it increases virility' as well as being a remedy for great many ills.[124] In the context of Italian Jewry, the Jewish-Italian poet Immanuel of Rome (1260-c. 1328 CE) praises garlic in the first ever sonnet to be written in Hebrew.[125] In the Christian imagination, Jews and garlic go together and, despite being an ingredient in Christian dishes from the medieval period onwards, garlic functioned primarily as a coded expression for Jew or Jewishness. Despite being eaten by many different groups, garlic became, primarily, a signifier of the Other, the foreigner, which was especially the case from the sixteenth century onwards when food prejudices were deployed to caricature the enemy and their disgusting habits during times of war. It was during this period when garlic's popularity as an ingredient began to wane and 'that it and the distinctive odour it leaves on those who eat it became a pungent topic in Christian-Jewish

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[120] Maria Diemling, '"As the Jews Like to Eat Garlick": Garlic in Christian-Jewishness Polemical Discourses in Early Modern Germany', in *Food and Judaism: A Special Issue of Studies in Jewish Civilisation, Volume 15*, ed. Leonard J. Greenspoon, Ronald A. Simkins, and Gerald Shapiro (Omaha: Creighton University Press, 2005), 215, 216.
[121] Ibid., 216.
[122] Ibid., 217.
[123] Ibid., 218.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.

polemical discourse.'[126]

As Jay Geller notes, the notion that Jews exude a particular odour specific to them goes back to the time of the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius in the second century CE.[127] Geller describes how the notion of an innate Jewish odour, smell, or stench captured the imagination of post-Emancipation Europeans. This is the *foetor Judaicus*, the stench that so disgusted the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, a distinctive Jewish stink that motivated biochemists such as Gustav Jaeger (1884), psychologists such as Edgar Berillon (1908-9), anthropologists such as Hans Günther, and ethnographers such as Richard Andree to link this repugnant odour to the unique racial essence of Jewishness.[128] If assimilation and integration had rendered Jews troublingly invisible, a Jewish-specific odour, 'a real, kosher Jewish smell',[129] could prove to be useful in detecting their presence. The pungency of garlic pointed towards dangerous Jewish practices, as Diemling explains:

> To represent the food eaten by another group as a dangerous act of religious and political antagonism is quite a different matter. When writers did so, they must have been fully aware of the consequences such statements could have for the Jewish community. Such an interpretation invested even the most mundane matter of Jewish daily life, food and holidays, with a hidden – and thus potentially dangerous – meaning, hinting at dark secrets carefully hidden from the scrutinising Christian eye.[130]

Bodastoret may look like a respectable, well-to-do business man but it is all mimicry. Inside the privacy of his home, he is up to no good, obsessing over money. His affluence cannot hide the fact that he still smells. No amount of money, of clean and smart garments, of clean and smart surroundings, can disguise the stench of garlic or, more to the point, Bodastoret's *foetor Judaicus*.

The moneylender soon cuts a pathetic figure, shaking uncontrollably, bending over his jar of money in a desperate attempt to protect his hoard despite the fact that Fulvius is standing over him, thrusting a knife towards his face. He is allowed to keep the money once again in exchange for information. Fulvius wants to find out Maciste's whereabouts and Bodastoret takes him to the place where the strongman has been chained to the millstone for a period of ten whole years. Fulvius returns that night and manages to free the strongman from his enslavement and they both go back to Bodastoret's house. The moneylender is still sleeping but when he awakes to see Maciste standing

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[126] Ibid., 220.
[127] Jay Geller, 'The Aromatics of Jewish Difference; or Benjamin's Allegory of Aura', in *Jews and Other Differences: The New Jewish Cultural Studies*, ed. Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 222.
[128] Ibid., 222, 223.
[129] Diemling, '"As the Jews Like to Eat Garlick": Garlic in Christian-Jewishness Polemical Discourses in Early Modern Germany', 228.
[130] Ibid., 229.

in his house, he falls to the ground in fright. He is dumped unceremoniously on his bed and Maciste goes to fetch a drink of water to revive him but it is too late, Bodastoret is dead. 'Fear has cut off his breath forever', says the intertitle. As Fulvius walks away, he looks back at the body of Bodastoret lying on the bed and sighs, as if to suggest that the innkeeper-turned-moneylender was responsible for his own downfall. In the end, he simply got what he deserved.

Conclusion

In her study on the history of Italian Jewry from the period of emancipation in the late nineteenth century to the Racial Legislation Laws of 1938, Cristina M. Bettin argues that the memoirs and writings of individual Jews living in Italy do not in themselves suggest the presence of rampant anti-Semitism in the country during this period and that the adoption of the Racial Laws by the Fascist authorities was an event that took the majority of Italian Jews by surprise.[131] As a result of accessing primary sources such as biographies and conducting interviews with Jews who lived through this period in Italy's history, this is how Bettin summarises the prevailing attitude towards Jews:

> The Jewish question did not exist in Italy at the time, at least from the standpoint of regarding Jews as a foreign body within the Italian nation. Neither was their presence seen as a burden on the economy. There was no Jewish monopoly of any type proportionate to their limited numbers. The situation in Italy was always different than that of Jews in other countries. This fact explains why many Eastern European Jews immigrated to Italy during the nineteenth century, even before the Nazi period.[132]

She concedes, however, that the image of the Jew as portrayed in the period's popular culture was most definitely negative in nature. Bettin refers to Lynn M. Gunzberg's book, *Strangers at Home* (1992), which provides ample evidence of Italian popular literature constructing negative images of Jews that were based on age-old anti-Jewish stereotypes: Jews as usurers, dangerous plutocrats, foreigners, outsiders, and aliens who had the unshakeable 'stench of the ghetto' and who lived separated from Italians 'like oil in water'.[133]

If, according to Bettin, bourgeois Jews and their Italian Gentile counterparts lived, essentially, the same way of life and that there was no 'perceived difference between Jew and non-

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[131] Cristina M. Bettin, *Italian Jews from Emancipation to the Racial Laws* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 55.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid., 182. Bettin referes to Lynn M. Gunzberg's book *Strangers at home: Jews in the Italian Literary Imagination* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 280-82

Jew'[134] and if, according to Gunzberg, the image of Jews in popular Italian culture did not reflect that lack of difference then, perhaps, the experience of Jews living in Italy and the experience of Jews by their non-Jewish neighbours fluctuated between these two positions. These seemingly contesting discourses on the acceptance and/or non-acceptance of Jews living in the Kingdom of Italy emphasise Stratton's assertion that, ultimately, assimilation is not a choice that belongs to members of the minority group. If, as Massimo d'Azeglio famously said, Italy had to create Italians, assimilation, its processes and parameters, had to be under the control of the majority group's ruling classes. Controlling assimilation controls the process by which Italians are made. Even if individuals belonging to a minority group desire assimilation or feel that they have already been assimilated into the dominant group, powerful discourses that have agency over the mainstream's modes of cultural production will eventually seep into such productions, helping to define who is in and who is out.

The writings by Jews living in Italy during this period before Fascism and its anti-Semitic Racial Laws were, for the most part, the reminiscences of assimilated bourgeois Jews, living comfortable lives, working in respectable jobs, enjoying the latest fashions and leisure activities and who were calling themselves Italians first and foremost. Assimilated or acculturated Jews had decided to embrace their Italianness, often with a fervent patriotism. The Jewish problem could not exist in their world of freedom where laws were passed to protect their status within society as equal citizens. This was a protected world of Jewish privilege.[135] If, as Gunzberg states, the antisemitic legislation took many of the Jews living in Italy by surprise, the phenomenon was either underestimated, deliberately avoided, rejected as an uncomfortable truth, or simply ignored as an increasing irrelevance in a country that was built on the ideals of emancipation – the very ideals of the Risorgimento.

These Jewish voices were the voices of members belonging to an ethnic minority who were proclaiming loudly and clearly that they were Italians or that they wanted to be made into Italians. On the other hand, discourses are voices too, the voices of the dominant, the arbiters of Italian identity and such voices, which shout out *Italianità* in novels, plays, books, school textbooks, political speeches, and, yes, in films such as *Cabiria*, are voices that can drown out the shouts of subaltern groups. And if such voices proclaim that race is a key identifying mark of being a true citizen of the Kingdom of Italy then Jews who want to be Italians, who have always thought of themselves as Italians, are subjected to the complicated task of passing as Italians. In such circumstances, Jews can only ape or mimic Italianness. Geller explains how this attempt at aping

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[134] Ibid., 56, 57.
[135] Ibid., 58, 59.

the majority culture was troublesome to the anti-Semites who felt that emancipation had allowed Jews to infiltrate society and blend in without a trace.[136] Adherents of anti-Semitic thought were convinced that 'these Jewish attempts to ape European culture – their mimicry of language, dress, manners – would always fail' and that eventually 'the true Jewish nature would necessarily break through the mask, disrupt the illusion, and produce a hybrid monster'.[137] Bodastoret is such a hybrid monster, a Jew that attempted by means of animalistic mimicry to secrete his presence in society.

It could be argued quite strongly that these dominant voices of discourse, present in films like *Cabiria*, helped revoke laws that gave emancipation, equality, and citizenship to all and contributed, over time, to the formulation and ratifying of laws that discriminate on the basis of racial difference. These popular modes of representation, of representing perfect Italians and perfect non-Italians, played an active role in the identity politics of the Kingdom of Italy at a time when the country was fighting, figuratively and literally, on all fronts to build a powerful nation-state. The recent victory in Libya, which inspired *Cabiria*, would surely inspire more victories in the Great War against the Austro-Hungarian armies, further enhancing the country's reputation as a military might in the world.

In Pastrone's *Cabiria*, Romans and Italians, the past and the present all become one. Carthaginians, Phoenicians, Arabs, Black Africans, and Jews all become one. What did not become one, however, was the 'them' and 'us'. The line between Roman and Carthaginian, between the Italian and the Italian Other, is never blurred. *Cabiria* is a Eurocentric, Italocentric text, which deploys such dichotomies to espouse the superiority of an ancient Western civilisation to symbolise the on-going superiority of a modern Western/Christian civilisation over an Oriental world that includes Arabs, Africans, and Jews. As Bernal explains, the Punic War narrative is often retold for very specific reasons:

> It is not without reason that the recollection of the Punic War has remained so popular and vivid in the recollection of men. That struggle was not merely to decide the fate of two cities or two empires; the matter at hand was to determine to which of the two races, Indo-Germanic or Shemetic [sic], should belong the dominion of the world. It must be remembered that the first of these two families of nations comprehends, besides the Indians and Persians, the Greeks, the Romans and the Germans; in the other are included the Jews and the Arabs, the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians. On one side the heroic genius, that of

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[136] Jay Geller, *The Other Jewish Question: Identifying the Jew and Making Sense of Modernity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 266.
[137] Ibid.

art and legislation; on the other, the spirit of industry, navigation, and commerce. These two hostile races have everywhere attacked each other . . . the heroes incessantly oppose their industrious and perfidious neighbours.[138]

Bodastoret, as has been argued in this chapter, is the very epitome of the racially inferior Semitic, hostile, and perfidious neighbour. This is his primary function within the filmic text. If there is any blurriness or ambiguity in the film, it is found in the character of Bodastoret, in his primitive aping and mimicry. This is what makes him so dangerous. This is the savage in him finally coming to the fore. The accepted anti-Semitic wisdom of the day is summed up by Richard Andree:

Even when he [the Jew] adopts the language, dress, habits, and customs of the people among whom he lives, he still remains everywhere the same. All he adopts is but a cloak, under which the eternal Hebrew survives; he is the same in his facial features, in the structure of his body, his temperament, his character.[139]

Bodastoret symbolises the 'eternal Hebrew' who hides under the cloak of nation-state homogeneity. Bodastoret represents more than the notion of Jew as bad citizen, he represents a concept that is far more damning: the Jew as non-citizen. It is impossible to make a citizen out of a non-citizen. It is impossible to make a citizen out of Bodastoret.

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[138] M. Bernal, 'The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, 1785-1985', *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, Volume I* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 341, 342.
[139] Gilman, *The Jew's Body*, 76.

Conclusion

Shylock, the alien blood-thirsty usurer in *Il mercante di Venezia*, the Cain-Judas-Lucifer figure in *L'Inferno*, Chilo Chilonides the physiognomically-challenged enemy of Christians in *Quo Vadis?*, and Bodastoret the garlic-eating, money-hoarding traitor in *Cabiria* can all function as anti-Semitic filmic metonyms in each of the above cinematic texts. The cinematic representation of these characters, their clothing, their appearance, their mannerisms, their blocking within the frame, their contribution to and their interaction with the *mise-en-scène*, their words or words said about them by means of the films' intertitles, their specific role in the story, is a filmic example of Derrida's notion of the *pharmakos* or scapegoat: the badness within that feeds parasitically off society and, as such, is a danger that must be recognised and removed. The *pharmakos*, especially in times of crisis, embodies all the ills of the society in which it has been dwelling. The *pharmakos* is very much a dangerous Other.[1]

As a figure, he is ambivalent: capable of living, working, and contributing to a society but also a hidden danger that can turn on the community that houses him. The *pharmakos* is both poison and remedy but when it does harm, it must become a scapegoat, carry off the sins of the community and be banished from its protective boundaries. Derrida says that the *pharmakos* contains two key elements: 'the evil and the outside, the expulsion of the evil, its exclusion out of the body (and out) of the city' and was a 'representative of an external threat or aggression'.[2] However, this evil is not always found on the outside:

> That representative represents the otherness of evil that comes to affect or infect the inside by unpredictably breaking into it. Yet the representative of the outside is nonetheless constituted, regularly granted its place by the community, chosen, kept, fed, etc., in the very heart of the inside. These parasites were as a matter of course domesticated by the living organism that housed them at its expense.[3]

During times of plague, catastrophe, calamity, famine, and drought, the Greeks would decree that these parasites were outcasts that had to be sacrificed as scapegoats. Order on the inside could be restored by removing the representative of evil and harm and placing it outside. What Derrida finds interesting, however, is the dual nature of this *pharmakos*. It can function as a cure, a remedy, which allows him to be housed and protected as well as a poison that harms and embodies all that is fearful, which means that it must be treated with caution. For Derrida, the *pharmakos* is

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[1] Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 130.
[2] Ibid., 130.
[3] Ibid., 133.

simultaneously 'alarming and calming' and both 'sacred and accursed' and the ritual or ceremony involved with its identification and expulsion is performed along 'the boundary line between inside and outside'.[4]

Derrida's concept of the *pharmakos* can be applied to the constructed anti-Jewish figure of the Jew in Liberal Italy. He is the representative of the outside that lives inside the body of the nation-state. His emancipated and assimilated state renders him problematically liminal. The *pharmakos*-Jew is betwixt and between, both same and other. In times of trouble, he is cast as an outsider and must perform the role of scapegoat with the ills of society projected onto his mythologically created image. The parasitical hidden danger within the body politic is at once identified, stigmatised, and expelled. The boundary lines are retraced and redrawn once again.

In these four films, the *pharmakos* is either explicitly or implicitly Jewish. As has been shown in this thesis, the figure of the Jew has often been constructed by myth, folklore, and religious polemics to function as society's scapegoat in perilous times. The ambiguity and ambivalence of representation in regards to these chosen characters aptly reflects the liminal nature of the emancipated Jew in Liberal Italy. It is a representation that tapped into anxieties concerning a Jewish presence within Italy's borders that was perceived as a hidden danger. In the anti-Jewish imagination, this small minority group signified the evil lurking within. The tiny population of Italian Jewry, the 'piccolo mondo ebraico', was, in the irrational anti-Semitic mind, becoming the *pharmakos* in Liberal Italian society during a time of nation-state building, a time of colonial expansionism, of military campaigns, of identity formation, and of citizen construction.[5]

A troublesome aspect of the Derridian scapegoat the *pharmakos* is that its threatening nature grows out of the ambiguity and ambivalence inherent in the closely related Platonic word *pharmakon* (drug). Of this word and its meaning, Derrida says the 'essence of the *pharmakon* lies in the way in which, having no stable essence, no "proper" characteristics, it is not, in any sense, … a substance'.[6] Its instability is the basis of its ambivalence and 'if the *pharmakon* is ambivalent, it is because it constitutes the medium in which opposites are opposed'.[7] In other words, 'the

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[4] Ibid.

[5] Lynn M. Gunzberg says that the already small Jewish population in Italy dwindled yet further during emancipation with a notable demographic shift from the lesser municipal areas into the bigger cities. Gunzberg refers to the census of 1938, undertaken by the Fascist authorities, which states that the population of Italian Jews was 41,224, coupled with a further 7,767 Jews from other countries lived in Italy's cities and only 4,137 Italian Jews and 1,975 foreign Jews lived in outside the major urban areas. See p. 220, Lynn M. Gunzberg, *Strangers at Home: Jews in the Italian Literary Imagination* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1992). According to historian Christopher Duggan, the population of Italy following the acquisition of the Veneto region and the capture of Rome in 1870 was almost 27 million. See p. 146, Christopher Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

[6] Derrida, *Dissemination*, 126.

[7] Ibid., 127.

pharmakon is the movement, the locus, and the play: (the production of) difference.'[8] This can be applied to the figure of the emancipated Jew and to the Jew in these four films because the assimilated Jew disrupts the binary divide between Jew and Italian.

These opposites were opposed by a challenging figure of difference: the Jew-Italian, a figure that constituted both the same and the other in one. The difference produced here is one of movement, fusion, amalgamation, and hybridity rather than the traditional markers of difference such as race, religion, language, and nation, which categorise clearly, separate and keep separate, demarcate, and protect. The type of difference expressed by the *pharmakon* disrupts the established order and convention of belonging and non-belonging. The nation-state dictated the terms of difference and fluidity, especially in terms of identity, could not be tolerated in the process of making citizens; identity had to be fixed in this ideologically driven context. It had to be either one or the other; it could not be unstable. Resolving this problem of a floating identity meant splitting the Jew-Italian in half and returning the separate parts to the conventional categories of them and us. Only by doing this could the *pharmakon* be turned into the *pharmakos*, the scapegoat, and ostracised if needs be. Shylock, Chilo, Caiaphas, Judas-Lucifer, and Bodastoret all exemplify in filmic terms this process of identity fixing, of pulling the Jew out of any liminal space and placing him categorically on the outside.

Lynn M. Gunzberg, in looking at the way Jews were portrayed in the popular fiction of post-Risorgimento Italy, found that 'anti-Semitism was very much alive'.[9] Common notions about Jews in Liberal Italian culture is described in the following way:

> In much popular literature, some of it directly inspired by the Church, to mention a Jew was to conjure up an image of a moneylender, rapacious and never satisfied, in whose life love of money had replaced human affection and greed had banished morality. Usurers prayed on non-Jews, for so they were commanded by the Talmud. They isolated themselves from Christians, for so it befitted the "chosen people" to live. They were more content to dwell apart, for given their laws and customs, they envisioned different concerns and different goals for their people. They lived in the heart of every city and yet did not participate in city life, as if a nation within a nation.[10]

This sums up the specific representation examined in this thesis. Even if these characters were not explicitly marked out as Jewish in the four filmic case studies – as is the case with Chilo Chilonides for example – so much of what these films say about each examined character could also be said

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Gunzberg, *Strangers at Home*, 56.

[10] Ibid., 22.

about the image of the Jew in Liberal Italy and vice versa. This is an image that stemmed from anti-Jewish notions that were, according to Gunzberg, 'so ingrained as to have become part of the culture'.[11]

It is as if the films' stereotypical devices slowly but surely reveal or unmask the Jew lurking in the text – Bodastoret the Jew is very much a slow reveal. In the case of Shylock, his Jewishness is clearly signposted, he is after all Shylock *the* Jew. However, in his case, the compounding power of stereotype slowly reveals his true nature, what the Jew is *really* like. Anti-Semitic rhetoric that shouts about the inferiority and degenerate nature of the Jewish race and the barbarity of its ancient rituals, the anti-Judaic rants that turn all Jews into satanized Christ-killers, the newspaper articles that warn its readers about the masonic Jewish government finance minister who is intent on enslaving the country's workers, stories about using the blood of murdered Christian children for the Jewish Passover are all discourses that were in circulation at the time each of these four films were made and would have reinforced any anti-Jewish meanings generated by the iconography at work in each cinematic production. The popularity of these films, at home and abroad, would have further contributed to the disseminating of anti-Jewish stereotypes and the visual replication of negative ideas that have consistently been associated with Jews over the centuries.

In these four films, the filmic language describes an outsider, a bad citizen if not a non-citizen. All of which is highly ironic given that Jews have lived in Italy since 168 BCE. The Jewish community in Italy is older than Italy's most venerable institutions.[12] The visual language of these cinematic stereotypes do not speak of such belonging, preferring instead to formulate, either consciously or unconsciously, explicitly or implicitly, a stereotyped image of the Jew, which functions as a symbol of enduring Otherness. Only a few decades previously, Italy had recently been 'made' and now it had to 'make' Italians; but not out of the types represented by the dangerous Jewish Other in these films.

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Cecil Roth, *The History of the Jews in Italy* (Philedelphia: Press of the Jewish Publication Society of America, 1946), 1.

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