

## 'A kind of recreative school for the whole family': making cinema respectable, 1907–09

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The New York Board of Censorship was set up in New York City in early 1909 in the midst of a series of intense debates about the social function of cinema. It met for the first time in March of that year, and amongst the films reviewed was *A Drunkard's Reformation* (Biograph, 1909), which tells the story of the reformation of a male 'drunkard' brought about by attending a temperance drama at the theatre.<sup>1</sup> *The New York Herald* commented:

Until the noble young man with the high forehead and the bow tie resolved that rum should never be his master and began life anew in a beautiful apartment papered with wandering rose bushes it seemed that the new Board of Censorship for Moving Picture films, in session at 80 5 Avenue yesterday, would have reason to object to the first films which were spread before them. But the reformation in the case of the young man, whose life was depicted by the screen, was so sudden and so complete that Professor Charles Sprague Smith . . . and the other censors gathered in the offices of the Motion Pictures Patents Company found no fault with the first sad, sweet story of the young man's life. The film which showed the transition from wickedness to goodness was one of the 28 which were inspected yesterday at the first session of the censors. . . . *The Drunkard's Reformation* took the lead early in the session and held it to the close. It seemed a pity that such a nice young man as he whose history was the subject of the picture

<sup>2</sup> *New York Herald*, 26 March 1909, p. 4. Charles Sprague Smith was the founder and managing director of New York City's People's Institute, a progressive reform organization which aimed to encourage civic activism, participatory democracy and cultural pluralism. The Institute was instrumental in establishing the New York Board of Censorship.

<sup>3</sup> Untitled, unpaginated newspaper article in Box 116, National Board of Review of Motion Pictures Collection, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library (hereafter NBR).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* For more recent readings of this film see Tom Gunning, *D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: the Early Years at Biograph* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991), pp. 162–71; Roberta Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures: the Transformation of Performance Style in the Griffith Biograph Films* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), in particular pp. 140–43.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Butsch, 'Bowery b'hoys and matinee ladies: the re-gendering of nineteenth-century American theater audiences', *American Quarterly*, vol. 46, no. 3 (1994), p. 375.

<sup>6</sup> Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: the Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790–1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Stuart Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1770–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>7</sup> Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, p. 15. See also Richard Ohman, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (London: Verso, 1996), p. 221.

should have ever yielded to the insidious highball and the brain stealing rickey. Still, he found no happiness till he threw away his pint flask and took a new hold on life and its possibilities.<sup>2</sup>

The film might have been criticized, one of the censors told another reporter, 'had it not pointed out a *moral lesson*, and concluded with a *happy ending*'.<sup>3</sup> This 'happy ending' was the family, which had been threatened by the effects of alcohol on the father, reunited. 'Reform came about in this way', the censor continued. 'The man was prevailed upon to accompany the little child to the theatre and there he saw enacted on the stage the story of his own life. When the curtain fell on the last act, he was a *reformed man*' (emphasis mine). The closing image made this process of reformation clear: 'Last scene: Good husband, seated at home, smiling wife at his side, and girl on his knee'.<sup>4</sup>

The conjunction of censorship, moral education and images of reformed men and happy domesticity is the focus of this essay, which is premised on a rather simple question: how did the film industry make cinema respectable? Scholars have previously sought to answer this question by focusing principally on class, suggesting that the cinema was made respectable through an appeal to middle-class audiences based on a turn to the forms and names of bourgeois culture in order to uplift cinema's cultural status (and to make more money). Such efforts were reflected in the location of nickelodeons and in the emergence of new textual forms (principally a new configuration of narrative discourse). Though this focus on class is certainly important, its exclusivity has led scholars to ignore both the gendered nature of this process of making cinema respectable and the complex imbrication of class and gender in the self-definition of the middle class. 'Respectability', Richard Butsch has argued, 'was at its core a gendered concept,' and thus entertainment spaces such as theatre in the mid nineteenth century and vaudeville in the late nineteenth century became respectable (and increasingly profitable) through a process of 're-gendering' – a conscious effort to attract middle-class women who, 'particularly as wives and mothers, carried designations of respectability'.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, social historians have shown how the self-definition of the middle class in the USA throughout the nineteenth century was predicated on notions of domesticity and gentility which were closely aligned with idealized notions of femininity as moral guardianship.<sup>6</sup> '[T]he American middle class', Mary Ryan observes, 'molded its distinctive identity around domestic values and family practices', a process that scholars have traced through the proliferation of domestic advice books, improving tracts, magazines such as *Ladies Home Journal*, and sentimental fiction.<sup>7</sup>

Conceptions and practices of femininity as moral guardianship shifted in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century from the private

<sup>1</sup> *A Drunkard's Reformation*, released 1 April 1909. The film was loosely based on Emile Zola's *L'Assommoir*, which had itself been turned into a temperance play by Charles Reade, in the 1880s, entitled *Drink*. See Frank Rahrill, *The World of Melodrama* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967), p. 243.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Empire, and Reform in the Nineteenth-Century Middle-Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>9</sup> Details from the 'Policy and Standards of the National Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures, 1915', in Robert Fisher, *Film Censorship and Progressive Reform: The National Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures, 1909-1927* (Journal of Popular Film, vol. 4, no. 2 (1975), p. 154, n. 8. Lay May notes a slightly different number, suggesting that the actual viewing of films was undertaken by 113 female volunteers and that 'women were the moral guardians who enforced' censorship rules. Lay May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 54-5. By my reckoning, by 1912, fifty-seven out of seventy-five censors were women.

<sup>10</sup> See Charles Matthew Feldman, *The National Board of Censorship: Review of Motion Pictures, 1909-1927* (New York: Arno Press, 1977), pp. 25-32.

<sup>11</sup> *The New York Times*, 24 December 1908, p. 3.

to the public sphere, initiating what feminist historians have labelled a 'politics of domesticity' as a critical component of Progressive reform movements – central, for example, to the creation of welfare programmes – and effectively redefining the public sphere.<sup>8</sup> This is the context in which the process by which cinema was made respectable might profitably be re-examined. I contend that in the critical years between 1907 and 1909 this was linked to a 'feminization' or 'domestication' of cinema space and textuality in line with both the moral discourses associated with women reformers and the commercial imperative of the film industry to cater to a family audience. In this conjuncture, the representation of the reformation of deviant masculinity and the happy ending of domesticity could be positioned by the industry as analogous to the reformation of cinema itself. In turn, this reformation was validated by a newly formed regulatory body that was staffed predominantly by women reformers: by 1915, one hundred out of 115 censors were women.<sup>9</sup>

A precise confluence of historical currents, regulatory concerns and commercial imperatives led, then, to a 'domestication' of cinema, simultaneously figured through discursive, institutional and textual formations. This was linked to a concerted effort to differentiate cinema from the homosocial (and classed) space of the saloon, to a reformation of theatre space, and to the production of texts which insistently focused on the reformation of masculinity and the celebration of domesticity. What follows seeks to describe and explain this process and to trace its historical consequences. The first section outlines discursive attempts to make cinema distinct from the saloon and the effects of this on cinemas' material space. The second section shifts focus to film texts, concentrating on a cycle of temperance dramas produced between 1908 and 1910.

### Siting cinema

One of the most highly charged moments in the contestation over cinema in the pre-classical period took place in New York City in late 1908, when Mayor McClellan called a public meeting to debate the safety and morality of nickelodeons (the meeting set in motion a series of events that would lead to the formation of the New York Board of Censorship three months later).<sup>10</sup> At the McClellan meeting members of the clergy and of certain reform groups 'condemned the nickel theatre as a moral sinkhole and a physical deathtrap', suggesting that cinema led to 'the corruption of the minds of children', to 'degeneracy and in some instances actual crime', and was thus a threat to religious, familial and moral order.<sup>11</sup> Those 'interested in the business' countered by suggesting that individual films could fulfil an educative cultural function and that the

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nickelodeon was a safe, respectable family space. In particular, they argued that the cinema was distinct from the saloon. Gustavus Rogers, lawyer for the film interests at the hearing, defended the industry by claiming that on Sundays 'many a former drunkard now spent that day in such shows with his family', and R.S. Symonds, supervisor of the Juvenile League, reiterated this by suggesting that 'Years ago, the man was in the rum shop on Sunday night. Where do you find him now? Side by side with his children witnessing a moving picture show.'<sup>12</sup> For the film industry and sympathetic reformers, public anxiety about cinema could be assuaged by aligning cinema with domestic space as against the homosocial space of the saloon (and, implicitly, of other male entertainment such as cheap variety, concert saloons, gambling halls, peep shows and brothels).

This stance can be identified from mid 1908 onwards, and it became a central trope in the film industry's efforts to present itself as respectable. The journal *The Moving Picture World*, for example, noted in mid 1908 that 'moving picture shows are doing temperance work quietly' and, furthermore, 'Men who formerly were rarely seen on the streets in company with their wives and children have come to the practice of taking their family for an hour almost nightly to the five cent shows'.<sup>13</sup> Such rhetoric was widespread, and was articulated by exhibitors, producers, reformers and, at times, even by those involved in the regulation of cinema. For example, in late 1909 the head of the Police Censorship Board in Chicago stated:

I consider the moving picture theatre properly conducted a boon to any community. It affords entertainment for young and old and my observation has been that it has had a tendency to bring together parents and children who spend the evening in the neighbourhood picture house; there the father can not only entertain himself and his family with the price of a few drinks, which might otherwise be spent in the saloon, but he has the double enjoyment of being with his family.<sup>14</sup>

Other examples are easy to find. An anonymous poem entitled 'A Newsboy's Point of View', written around 1910, described how a newsboy witnessed the father of his girlfriend giving up drink after seeing a film about the evils of alcohol, confessing 'I never knewed just what a bum I'd gone an' got to be/until those movin' pictures went an' showed myself to me'.<sup>15</sup> Frederick Howe – Chairman of the National Board of Censorship – asserted in 1914 that 'men now take their women and families for an evening at the movies where formerly they went alone to the nearby saloon', and William Fox similarly suggested that instead of getting drunk the working man could take his family to the nickel theatre and discover that 'he was getting a much bigger kick holding his kid's hand or the hands of his wife, than he would be from getting his drink at the bar'.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Gustavus Rogers quoted in *New York Herald*, 24 December 1908, p. 7. R.S. Symonds quoted in Daniel Culom, *The politics of performance: from theatre licensing to movie censorship in turn-of-the-century New York*, in Francis G. Cozzano (ed.), *Movie Censorship and American Culture* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), pp. 32-3. *The New York Times* further noted that the show owners claimed that 'working men patronized them, while a few years ago they patronized the saloons'. *The New York Times*, 24 December 1908, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> *The Moving Picture World*, 4 July 1908, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Sergeant O'Donnell, quoted in *The Moving Picture World*, 9 October 1909, p. 407.

<sup>15</sup> 'A newsboy's point of view', in Herbert A. Jump, *The Religious Possibilities of the Motion Picture*, c. 1910, quoted in Daniel Culom, *Media and the American Mind: from Moore to McLuhan* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), p. 50.

<sup>16</sup> Frederick C. Howe, 'What to do with the motion-picture show: shall it be censored?', *Outlook*, no. 107, 20 June 1914, p. 413; William Fox, in the *New York Evening World*, 30 November 1912, quoted in Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), p. 66.

17 Orrin Cocks, 'A saloon substitute and drink preventive: the moving picture show', *Pacific Christian Advocate*, 17 January 1915, n.p.

18 The Board conducted a questionnaire as early as 1912 to ascertain whether saloons were closing down because of nickelodeons. Box 147, NBR. In 1916, a letter from the Board was sent out to police chiefs: 'We are making an inquiry concerning the reduction in the number of saloon licenses reported in several states and are particularly interested in the truth of the assertion that saloons are lessening in number because of the motion picture'.

Letter from the National Board of Censorship, 25 May 1916, Box 23, NBR.

19 Special Bulletin, February 1917, Box 23, NBR.

20 Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Motion Picture* (New York: Liveright, 1970), p. 235.

21 On general campaigns for temperance and their focus on the Catholic working classes, see Joseph Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1963); Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

22 See, in particular, Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity*.

23 Epstein argues that the WCTU was proto-feminist in its concerns, and Paula Baker likewise sees the women-led campaign for temperance as an important moment in the politicization of women, noting that it was linked closely to the campaign for suffrage. 'While taking traditional domestic concerns seriously', Baker argues, 'the WCTU taught women how to expand them into wider social concern and political activism'. Paula Baker, 'The domestication of politics: women and American political society, 1780-1920', *American Historical Review*, vol. 88, no. 3 (1984), p. 638. Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity*.

Where the 'saloon is anti-social in its effects on the family', said Orrin Cocks, the Advisory Secretary to the National Board of Censorship, moving pictures 'hold together the whole family'.<sup>17</sup> The National Board of Censorship actually conducted investigations in the early 1910s to try to prove that saloons were closing down because of nickel theatres,<sup>18</sup> and took action to stop the film representation of drunkenness, producing a Special Bulletin in 1915 which declared that 'In view of the growing sentiment throughout the country opposing the theme of drunkenness in slapstick comedies, the Board is placed in a position where it must take action . . . THE BOARD WILL NOT PASS "DRUNK" COMEDIES'.<sup>19</sup>

The rhetorical positioning of cinema as what Vachel Lindsay in 1915 termed a 'substitute for the saloon' clearly drew on the broader cultural struggle over drink which had been reanimated in the late nineteenth century by the contests over cultural authority that accompanied industrialization.<sup>20</sup> Concerns about saloons emerged from both Protestant elites and female evangelist traditions, focused respectively on the cultural practices and 'styles of living' of the increasingly Catholic working classes and, in the feminist campaign for temperance, on practices of masculinity (and their effect on domesticity).<sup>21</sup> As a number of historians of women have suggested, traditions of female evangelism were transformed in the late nineteenth century into a broader social morality centred on the defence of 'home values'. Thus organizations such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) became focused on reshaping masculinity in line with the 'feminization' of middle-class culture (the suppression of roughness, increased restraint, emotional self-control and so on).<sup>22</sup> No doubt this was in part based on a nineteenth-century ideology of separate spheres and the 'cult of domesticity', but female evangelism went beyond these ideological formations by enlarging what was considered the 'women's sphere' and, indeed, the boundaries of the 'public'. Groups of women began to use the language of motherhood and domesticity to include in political discourse areas of social and family life that until then had been considered the domain of voluntary work.<sup>23</sup> The WCTU's 'politics of domesticity', in particular, led to campaigns against the saloon as a working-class and immigrant space that was effectively closed to women.<sup>24</sup> The aim was to 'curb the self-assertive, boisterous masculinity of the saloon, to support and protect the family, and to return the husband - the immigrant working man in particular - to the home'.<sup>25</sup>

In its attempts to counter the condemnation of cinema as a 'moral sinkhole' the film industry drew on these arguments. This was an important moment in the siting of cinema in 'regulatory space', the broader process of deciding how cinema should be aligned with pre-existing recreational activities such as the theatre and made subject to public decisions and governmental intervention.<sup>26</sup> In the struggle to

24 On the exclusion of women from saloons, see Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, pp. 16-21.

25 Norman H. Clark, *Deliver Us From Evil: an Interpretation of American Prohibition* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976), p. 13.

26 For the concept of 'regulatory space', see Lee Grieveson, 'Fighting films: race, morality, and the governing of cinema, 1912-1915', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 38, no. 1 (1998).

27 See William Uricchio and Roberta Pearson, 'Constructing the audience: competing discourses of morality and rationalization during the nickelodeon period', *Iris*, no. 17 (Autumn 1994).

28 On anti-suffrage films, see Shelley Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), in particular pp. 156-68.

29 Lucy France Pierce, *World Today*, October 1908, p. 1052.

30 *Views and Films Index*, 11 May 1907, quoted in Richard Abel, *The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American, 1900-1910* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), p. 67; *The Moving Picture World*, 13 April 1907, p. 89; *The Nickelodeon* (February 1909), p. 34.

31 For a review of recreation surveys in the 1910s, see Alan Havig, 'The commercial amusement audience in early twentieth-century American cities', *Journal of American Culture*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1982).

32 See, for example, Kathryn H. Fuller, *At the Picture Show: Small Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), in particular pp. 133-68.

33 *Universal Weekly*, 6 September 1913, quoted in Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*, p. 12.

34 See Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Constance Balides, 'Scenarios of exposure in the practice of everyday life: women in the cinema of attractions',

align cinema with the home as opposed to the saloon, defenders of the industry drew on feminist discourses associated with the campaign for temperance because they could thus bypass the clergy's general condemnation of the emergent heterosocial leisure world.<sup>27</sup> Such an affiliation with feminist discourse would, of course, only go so far - later there would be a slew of antisuffrage films<sup>28</sup> - but the attempt to present cinema as respectable was coded clearly in terms of gender. Simply put, the industry presented cinema as aligned with what had historically been constructed as a feminized space, and capable of functioning as what one commentator described as 'a kind of recreative school for the whole family'.<sup>29</sup>

This strategy was further informed by the film industry's growing realization of the importance of women spectators and the family audience. As early as May 1907, the trade journal *Views and Films Index* had attributed the boom in moving pictures principally to 'the patronage [of] women and children'; *The Moving Picture World* similarly noted that 'mothers . . . take the children and spend many restful hours there at small expense', and *The Nickelodeon* flatly asserted that 'Most of the nickels are feminine'.<sup>30</sup> Journalistic accounts and recreation surveys in the 1910s suggest that women formed a significant component of the motion-picture audience, in certain weeks comprising the majority of box-office admissions.<sup>31</sup> Scholars have also recently shown how fan culture increasingly catered to young women in the 1910s.<sup>32</sup> Reform strategies for 'domesticating' cinema thus meshed fortuitously with the commercial interest in catering to female audiences as central players in the new culture of consumption. There is evidence to suggest that theatre managers not only understood, but also exploited, the fact that women took a prominent role in family decision-making. The managers of one theatre confessed to women: 'We want and need your patronage, for where you attend, so will follow the husbands and sons'.<sup>33</sup> It is also the case that the female cinema audience was viewed with considerable unease by those elite reform groups steeped in an ideology of separate spheres, which is to suggest that women cinema-goers were, indeed, increasingly important for the industry.<sup>34</sup> Press reports from newly opened nickel theatres and moving-picture palaces between 1907 and 1910 announced intentions to 'cater especially to the patronage of women and children', 'to families, especially ladies and children', and promise to be 'ladies and children's resort[s] in earnest'.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, exhibitors such as Eugene Cline were asserting that 'better business in the long run' would come to theatres patronized by 'ladies and children'.<sup>36</sup> The proprietors of the Swann Theater in Chicago in 1908 went so far as to assert that 'The policy of the house recognizes the eternal feminine as the great factor in determining the nature of any amusement enterprise', further promising that 'the pictures shown are always carefully selected with the view of pleasing the ladies'.<sup>37</sup>

Screen, vol. 34, no. 1 (1993); Janet Staiger, *Bad Women: Regulating Sexuality in Early American Cinema* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Lauren Rabinowitz, *For the Love of Pleasure: Women, Movies, and Culture in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*.

- 35 Clippings Book, Providence, RI, Nickel Theatre and Bijou Theater, 1906, Volume I, quoted in David Nasaw, *Going Out: the Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 163; press release from Worcester Nickel Theatre, quoted in Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will*, p. 198; *Des Moines Register and Leader*, 23 July 1907, quoted in Abel, *The Red Rooster Scare*, p. 67.
- 36 Eugene Cline, quoted in Abel, *The Red Rooster Scare*, p. 67.
- 37 Charles F. Morris, 'A beautiful picture theater', *The Nickelodeon*, 1 March 1909, p. 66.
- 38 See Eileen Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 45-6.

39 On the morality of lighted theatres, see, for example, *The Moving Picture World*, 5 March 1910, p. 331; on the introduction of restrooms and nurseries, see Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema*, p. 39.

40 On the relationship between movie-theatre design and department-store interiors, see Charlotte Herzog, 'The movie palace and the theatrical sources of its architectural style', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 20, no. 2 (1981), and 'The archaeology of cinema architecture: the origins of the movie theater', *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* (Winter 1984).

41 See Russell Merritt, 'Nickelodeon theatres, 1905-1914: building an audience for the movies', in Tino Balio (ed.), *The American Film Industry*, second edition (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 96; Douglas Gomery, *Shared*

Female theatre-owners were also frequently singled out for praise by the trade press for the air of respectability they brought to the business.<sup>38</sup>

The discursive production and promotion of cinema as a safe heterosocial space had a series of material effects, including the innovation of lighted theatres (to counter the possibility of immoral behaviour and, in particular, harassment by men) and the introduction of restrooms and nurseries.<sup>39</sup> This latter development, along with improved ventilation, perfumed deodorizers, mirrored common areas, luxurious decoration and uniformed attendants, was borrowed from department store interiors, themselves carefully designed to appeal to female consumers.<sup>40</sup> Exhibitors initiated matinee showings to attract female audiences (often half-priced), competitions such as baby photograph contests, free gifts of teddy-bears and perfume, space for baby carriages and, more generally, made a conscious effort to transform the rowdy space of nickelodeons to polite standards of decorum.<sup>41</sup> Such changes signalled a clear attempt to cater to women as decision-makers in the new culture of consumption, while simultaneously assuaging reform and governmental anxiety about cinema by creating a public space that was homely, blurring the boundaries between public and private space and reconciling the seemingly contradictory cultural formations of respectability and consumption. Given this context, we might profitably re-examine the location of nickelodeons. Were theatres located (like department stores) along what historian Stuart Blumin calls an 'axis of respectability', in thoroughfares, for example, that were well lit?<sup>42</sup>

### Tempering movies

Theatrical temperance dramas proliferated in the mid nineteenth century in conjunction with a reformation of the cultural status of theatre that was, historians Richard Butsch and Bruce McConachie suggest, aligned with ideals of education and with appeals to women and family audiences as signifiers of respectability.<sup>43</sup> The creation of museum theatres in the 1840s was an important development within this reformation process. Such theatres featured lectures on a variety of educational and moral topics but could also be used for the presentation of 'moral dramas', beginning significantly with the temperance drama *The Drunkard; Or the Fallen Saved* (1843), which was described at the time as a 'moral domestic drama'.<sup>44</sup> The play ran for more than one hundred performances at a time when theatres typically changed their bills every night, and was chosen by P.T. Barnum to open the American Museum in New York in 1848. Museum theatres and moral dramas cut across class formations by fusing ideals of entertainment and 'instruction', and set in process the acceptance of theatre as a source of education and morality and,

*Pleasures: a History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), p. 31; Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*, p. 23; Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, p. 432; Douglas Gomery, 'Saxe amusement enterprises: the movies come to Milwaukee', *Milwaukee History*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Spring 1979), p. 23; Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will*, pp. 204-15; Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, pp. 76-89.

- 42 Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class*, p. 238.
- 43 Butsch, 'Bovary b'hoys and matinee ladies'.
- 44 Quoted in Rahill, *The World of Melodrama*, p. 242.
- 45 On this, see Parker R. Zellers, 'The cradle of variety: the concert saloon', *Educational Theatre Journal*, vol. 20 (December 1968).
- 46 There were films with drunkenness and temperance as themes prior to 1908, such as *The Drunken Acrobat* (Biograph, 1896), *Carrie Nation Smashing a Saloon* (Biograph, 1901), *Drunkard and Statue* (Pathe, 1904), and *The Moon Lover* (Pathe, 1906), but these were principally comic. The transformation of the theme of drunkenness from comedy to melodrama speaks to a larger transformation from a risqué and potentially immoral cinema to a cinema closely intricated with moral discourse. See Tom Gunning, 'From the opium den to the theatre of morality: moral discourse and the film process in early American cinema', *Art and Text*, no. 30 (September-November 1988).

47 *Effecting a Cure*, for example, was advertised as 'A Lesson to the Wives of Recreant Hubbies', and the bulletin accompanying it noted 'This Biograph subject will afford many a wife an opportunity to profit by its lesson'. See Bowser (ed.), *Biograph Bulletins*, p. 252. *The Moving Picture World*, 24 December 1910, p. 1476. Selig advertised *The Drunkard's Fate* as a 'temperance masterpiece' that 'teaches a great temperance lesson' (and *Variety* observed that the film ended with 'a good

in turn, the differentiation of respectable theatre from the variety theatre still closely linked to concert saloons.<sup>45</sup>

There are obvious differences between the mid nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and between the cultures of the theatre and cinema, but the context sketched so far does suggest that the reformation of the cultural status of cinema also centred on efforts to promulgate ideals of instruction alongside an engendering of the space of cinema as distinct from the homosocial space of the saloon. This is borne out not only by the insistent appeals to female spectators in the trade press already cited, but also by the proliferation of filmed temperance dramas from 1908 onwards,<sup>46</sup> some of which had direct theatrical intertexts, for example, *Ten Nights in a Bar-room* (Essanay, 1909), *A Drunkard's Reformation* (Biograph, 1909), which featured a theatrical production of *Drink*, and *Drink* (Pathe, 1909) itself. Other films drew on this discursive tradition and on the thematic repertoire of theatrical dramas, for example, *Father and Drunkard* (Pathe, 1908), *The Broken Locket* (Biograph, 1909), *The Drunkard's Fate* (Selig, 1909), *The New Minister; or, the Drunkard's Daughter* (Kalem, 1909), *What Drink Did* (Biograph, 1909), *The Expiation* (Biograph, 1909), *The Honor of the Slums* (Vitagraph, 1909), *A Change of Heart* (Biograph, 1909), *A Slave to Drink* (Kalem, 1910), and *Effecting a Cure* (Biograph, 1910). These films were closely linked to industry rhetoric about family values and the distinctions between nickel theatres and saloons. They could be seen as self-consciously attempting to appeal to female audiences (at least, to what the industry assumed women wanted to watch), and to a 'respectable' audience more generally, both through a validation of the educative cultural function of cinema – these films were often advertised as 'lessons' or 'sermons'<sup>47</sup> – and through their representation of the dangerous effects of male drinking on the family. They clearly and overtly intervened in the moral debate about the cinema, internalizing external debates through a thematic emphasis on the reformation of masculinity as metonymic for the reformation of cinema itself.

The reformation of masculinity in the temperance film came principally through the actions or sacrifice of a child. For example, the film *Father and Drunkard* tells the story of a sailor returning home to his wife and young son but then neglecting them because of his drunken gambling.<sup>48</sup> The son is sent to bring the father back from the saloon, but is thrown roughly aside. He runs to get his mother but on their return he falls into a river. The father sees his son battling for life, 'the man in him plays strongly' and he saves the child. 'The last scene shows the little family and the witnesses of the near tragedy gathered round a table, where the now sober father smashes the liquor bottle and earnestly vows never more to drink'.<sup>49</sup> The family is reconstituted through the father's reformation – from drunkard to father, as it were – initiated by the child. The last scene

temperance lesson which some patrons of picture houses may profit by'. See Kay Sloan, *The Loud Silents: Origins of the Social Problem Film* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1968), p. 97; *The Moving Picture World*, 9 October 1909, p. 505; *Variety*, 9 October 1909, np. *What Drink Did* was described as 'a powerful moral lesson' and *A Drunkard's Reformation* as 'the most powerful temperance lesson ever propounded' and 'a masterful powerful sermon on the evils of the drink habit'. *The Moving Picture World*, 29 May 1909, p. 703; Bowser (ed.), *Biograph Bulletins: The Moving Picture World*, 31 July 1909, p. 165.

48 See the review in *The Moving Picture World*, 11 January 1908, p. 28.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

50 See Gunning, D.W. *Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film*, p. 142; and, for a list of films, p. 149, n. 25.

51 This concept of 'allegiance' draws on the work of Murray Smith. See Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), in particular pp. 186–227.

52 *Biograph* bulletin for *What Drink Did*, in Bowser (ed.), *Biograph Bulletins*, p. 94; *The Moving Picture World*, 29 May 1909, p. 722.

53 *The Moving Picture World*, 5 June 1909, p. 753.

54 On the play see the details in Rahill, *The World of Melodrama*, pp. 244–6. On the film see the review in *Variety*, 19 June 1909, np.

55 I have come across just one film in which the drunkard was a woman. *Converted*, distributed by Kleine Optical Company, was released in January 1909. The film was reviewed in *The Moving Picture World*, 9 January 1909, p. 43, and 13 March 1909, p. 302.

56 See the reviews in *The Moving Picture World*, 20 February 1909, p. 212, and 6 March 1909, p. 268.

exemplifies the new emphasis on narrative closure that was emerging in US cinema from 1908: the reunited family embraces, seemingly seeking to initiate a similar reconciliation in the space of the auditorium.<sup>50</sup>

*What Drink Did* tells a similar story. The film opens with a happy family seated around the breakfast table. The father plays with his two daughters and, when leaving for work, hugs both them and his wife. At work kettles of beer are brought in at lunchtime and he is coaxed into taking a drink. After work he is pressured to go for a drink by his colleagues and, though reluctant, joins them. Scenes of him drinking are intercut with scenes of his wife and children at home, with the wife clearly becoming increasingly concerned. This contrast edit intervenes to comment on events, making clear to the audience the effects of drinking on the family and setting in place a structure of 'allegiance' with the moral position of the mother.<sup>51</sup> The contrast attendant upon the man's drinking becomes clearer after the father returns home, when the family rush to greet him but are brushed aside, and further the following morning when the father ignores his daughters in a clear contrast with the opening of the film. 'The blight of rum', the bulletin notes, 'changes the stamp of nature, turning the heretofore good-tempered man into a veritable demon'.<sup>52</sup> Following work the next day he initiates the drinking, and one of the daughters is sent to look for him. The father brushes her away twice and when she returns again pushes her over. At this, the barman gets angry and in a scuffle is hit by the father; the barman gets a gun and shoots but accidentally kills the daughter. The father, at the front of the frame, cradles her in his arms; in his distress he attacks his friends. The close of the film moves forward in time. The man leaves work and is asked if he will go for a drink. He declines and arrives home, where the wife and remaining child are now dressed in grey – in contrast to the white at the opening of the film – and the family hug one another. The man kneels, cries and holds his child. This sombre conclusion, carried through the *mise-en-scène* and in the contrast with the opening of the film, makes plain the dangerous effects of drinking and, in turn, 'how men should be'. *The Moving Picture World* review noted that 'A moral lesson is taught in this excellent *Biograph* film', and, further, that 'The film could be used to advantage by religious and temperance organisations'.<sup>53</sup>

The Essanay version of the classic temperance drama, *Ten Nights in a Bar-room*, tells a similar story, with the drunkard's child fatally hit by a missile thrown at the drunkard, who subsequently reforms.<sup>54</sup> The reformation scene was critical to most of these films, which suggested that a certain type of masculinity was problematic and needed to be brought into line through the dictates of domestic ideology.<sup>55</sup> *The New Minister; or, the Drunkard's Daughter* ends with the drunkard 'now a reformed man', restored to his estranged daughter.<sup>56</sup> In *The Honor of the Slums*, the 'hero' spends his time at

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57 *The Moving Picture World* noted that the film was 'unusually strong from a religious standpoint' and 'could well be used by religious organisations in illustrating the saving grace of what they preach'. *The Moving Picture World*, 20 February 1909, p. 203.

58 *Biograph Bulletin for A Change of Heart*, in Bowser (ed.), *Biograph Bulletins*, p. 133.

59 *Biograph Bulletin for A Drunkard's Reformation*, in Bowser (ed.), *Biograph Bulletins*, p. 77.

60 Gunning, D.W. *Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film*, pp. 162–71; Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures*, pp. 140–43.

the saloon while his wife joins the Salvation Army to ensure other families do not end up like hers. After a bar-room fight, the hero reforms and also joins the Salvation Army.<sup>57</sup> *A Change of Heart* tells the story of a son of 'indulgent parents' getting mixed up with the wrong crowd. 'Drinking is always the feature of such parties', the bulletin intones, 'and the head and heart benumbed by the fumes of alcohol are never normal and the being is morally weakened, oftentimes falling into a morass of irreparable ruin'.<sup>58</sup> The son dupes a country girl into going through a pretend marriage ceremony, but after speaking to his mother he realizes the error of his ways and persuades the girl to marry him for real.

*A Drunkard's Reformation* is in many ways the most self-conscious of these films in respect of the broader regulatory and commercial context. The film opens with the wife and daughter at home and contrasts this with a shot of the father at the saloon. The two spaces are contrasted through parallel editing, which suggests a temporal simultaneity but spatial differentiation, and sets up a structure of allegiance with the moral position of the suffering mother. The father returns home and disrupts the domestic space, frightening the wife and daughter with his drunken violence. He is, however, persuaded to take his daughter to the theatre to see a temperance drama, repents and returns home, in the words of the *Biograph Bulletin*, 'a changed man' as a result of 'the psychological influence' of the play on the audience.<sup>59</sup> The film's final shot shows the family together, bathed in the light from the hearth. The space of the saloon and the theatre thus pivot around the domestic space, with the saloon threatening it and the theatre upholding it. The theatrical space is one where fathers and children can be together safely. This is a moment when cinema was clearly drawing on an association with theatre and its shift into the realms of respectability.

This representation of the positive 'psychological influence' of drama responds to criticism of the social and psychic functioning of moving pictures, utilising filmic discourse – parallel editing, implied point of view, shot/reverse-shot, lighting – for the presentation of film as an educational and moral medium. For Tom Gunning and Roberta Pearson, both of whom offer insightful readings of *A Drunkard's Reformation*, this is linked to the presentation of character and to the use of structures of 'identification' such that audiences are effectively aligned with some characters and sorts of behaviour as opposed to others.<sup>60</sup> *A Drunkard's Reformation* shows this in process, with the drunkard literally miming the process of alignment at the theatre in an extended twenty-shot sequence cutting between the play and the drunkard's reaction to it, forming a proto-point-of-view/reaction-shot pattern and a perceptual position that allows a form of access to the character's emotions. This is further enabled by an acting style that leans towards the psychological delineation of character. The film is, then, as Gunning asserts, not

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simply a film with a moral lesson, 'but a film one of whose lessons is that *film can be moral*; that watching an edifying drama can have a transforming effect on the spectator'.<sup>61</sup>

In addition, given the context outlined here, I would argue that we can be more precise about the rhetorical parameters of this transformative effect: it is a male spectator who is represented as being reformed by edifying drama – becoming, commentators noted, a 'changed man', a 'reformed man'; because it is, insistently, the male drunkard in these temperance dramas who must be reformed.<sup>62</sup> Masculinity is the problem and the 'moral orientation' of the text positions the spectator in a structure of allegiance with the suffering women and children. Male spectatorship in *A Drunkard's Reformation*, we may say, involves the man opening himself to the instruction of women (and children) and this mirrors the position of the industry itself at this moment in cinema history.

The more general historical emergence of a moral structure in the narrative process is central to Gunning's influential reading of the emergence around 1908 to 1909 of what he terms the 'narrator system', for Gunning a critical precursor to the slightly later emergence of classical narrative conventions.<sup>63</sup> Gunning argues that the transformation of American cinema from a 'cinema of attractions' to a cinema of 'narrative integration' involved a 'conscious movement into a realm of moral discourse'.<sup>64</sup> The particular narrative configuration of American cinema emerged in close conjunction with issues of morality and respectability linked by Gunning to the (here rather amorphous) middle class, and this was reinforced with the emergence of censorship institutions (principally from 1909) which channelled film 'towards an imbrication of narrative development and moral discourse', standardizing formulas of acceptable content and narrative development.<sup>65</sup> For Gunning, the interweaving of formal and institutional factors at this moment set in play the conditions which led to classical Hollywood cinema.

If the above outline of the importance of gender to conceptions of respectability is factored into this argument, we can understand the importance of gendered discourses to the moral discourse of the cinema of narrative integration. In the examples above, narrative discourse is tied up with reform discourse which, in turn, is linked to the ideological goals of women reformers and their emergent roles as 'civic housekeepers'. Cinema's move into the realm of moral discourse was, then, perhaps more closely aligned to early feminist discourse than has hitherto been realized. If this is the case it may in turn suggest a revised genealogy of classicism. No doubt further systematic work needs to be undertaken in terms of narrative and thematic analysis of films from this period and into the 1910s, and, in particular, into the complexities of structures of alignment and allegiance, but the above analysis may suggest that what emerges at the stuttering outset of classicism is a narrative system that is

<sup>61</sup> Gunning, 'From the opium den to the theatre of morality', p. 37.

<sup>62</sup> Biograph Bulletin for *A Drunkard's Reformation*, in Bowser (ed.), *Biograph Bulletins*, p. 77, untitled, unpaginated newspaper article, Box 116, NBR.

<sup>63</sup> Gunning, *D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film*.

<sup>64</sup> Gunning, 'From the opium den to the theatre of morality', p. 31.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>56</sup> For an early formulation of what such a project might look like, focusing closely on *The Drive for a Life* (Biograph, 1909), see Lee Grieveson, 'Knowable man: drive for life', in Tim Armstrong (ed.), *American Bodies: Cultural Histories of the Physique* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

<sup>57</sup> Nick Browne, 'Griffith's family discourse: Griffith and Freud', in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), p. 224. See also Michael Allen, *Family Secrets: The Feature Films of D.W. Griffith* (London: British Film Institute, 1999).

<sup>58</sup> Lauren Rabinowitz, 'Temptations of pleasure: nickelodeons, amusement parks and the sights of female sexuality', *Camera Obscura*, no. 23 (1991), p. 85.

<sup>59</sup> Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*, in particular pp. 24–101.

<sup>70</sup> See Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), in particular pp. 44–64; Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977).

principally centred on the threat to, and recuperation of, domestic order.<sup>56</sup> Frequently in films of this period the family is initially separated only to be brought back together by the agency of narrative. Future work may well need to pay more attention to Nick Browne's suggestive observation that the 'development of the cinematic language was, from the very start, linked to a particular subject matter . . . the family'.<sup>57</sup>

Thus far this essay has suggested that part of the strategy of presenting cinema as respectable was to differentiate cinema from the saloon, drawing on early feminist discourses to suggest that cinema was a space where families could be together and in which men could be reformed. This meant the reformation of both cinema space and cinema texts, exemplified here by a cycle of temperance dramas but suggesting more generally that cinematic narrative codes emerged in the context of gendered norms of respectability. This process was no doubt also mandated by the film industry's growing recognition of the importance of women audiences, not just as signifiers of respectability but also as paying customers. Once underway, the process was less about respectability and more about commercial imperatives, and it is worth noting that the importance of female audiences underscored a series of developments in the following years: the serial-queen cycle of the 1910s, the growth of fan magazines directed at female readers, the emergence of powerful female stars such as Mary Pickford, the increasing presence of women scriptwriters from 1913 onwards, and the proliferation of women-aimed discourses surrounding film stars through the 1920s.

There is no doubt that this appeal to women spectators constructed and shaped the encounter of women with cinema in various ways and drew on deeply rooted and essentialist conceptions of gender roles (as, of course, did notions of women's innate morality). Women were addressed as consumers in ways that played on entrenched cultural constructions of gender. If amusements such as the cinema solicited the female gaze, they also confirmed woman's status as object of the gaze, both on and off screen, in what Lauren Rabinowitz describes as a 'double-edged process of subjectification and objectification'.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, Shelley Stamp's recent book, *Movie-Struck Girls*, insightfully details the concerns articulated in the 1910s about both women's presence at the cinema and the implications of female spectatorship, drawing attention also to the contradictions between the idealization of the moral female spectator and the actual interest of women in stories with subject matter like sexuality, action-adventure, and feminist agitation.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, scholars have noted how critics of mass culture in the early years of the twentieth century used femininity to symbolize precisely its supposed effects of cultural passivity and decay.<sup>70</sup> American modernist writers launched

71 Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1985), p. 246.

72 See T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981); Kibler, *Rank Ladies*, p. 205; Abel, *The Red Rooster Scare*, pp. 151-74.

73 See Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Regulating Early American Cinema* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, forthcoming).

'an explosive protest against maternal suffocation and infantilization';<sup>71</sup> there was a backlash against women authors and the female patrons of the theatre and a corresponding 'remasculinization' of various cultural practices, including the cinema in Richard Abel's account.<sup>72</sup>

Clearly, the process described in this article is but one element of the more complex and shifting trends that saw the production of cinema as respectable and profitable, and we need to think further about the shifting positions of class, gender and the economy and, in particular, about the friction between *laissez faire* capitalism and patriarchal ideology. It may also be necessary to pay more attention to the broader reform context for understandings of masculinity in this period and to examine discourses about not only temperance but also sexuality. On the evidence so far I would argue that it was the regulation of masculinities even more than femininities that shaped cinema's move to classicism.<sup>73</sup>

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## If looks could kill: image wars in *María Candelaria*

ANDREA NOBLE

In his wittily titled essay 'All the people came and did not fit onto the screen', Mexican cultural critic Carlos Monsiváis outlines the impact that the cinema had upon Mexican society. In particular, Monsiváis is concerned with cinema's role in the modernizing processes at work in the first half of the twentieth century, as the State sought to redefine national identity and make the transition from a predominantly rural to urban, Catholic to secular, and pre-modern to modern cultural/political entity. In the face of the uneven social, cultural and economic effects of these processes, the role of cinema was crucial: 'With hindsight, we can see the basic function of the electronic media at their first important moment of power: they mediate between the shock of industrialization and the rural and urban experience which has not been prepared in any way for this giant change, a process that from the 1940s modifies the idea of the nation'.<sup>1</sup> The suggestive title of Monsiváis's essay obliquely signals the importance of the cinema's role as cultural mediator: one that was, moreover, predicated on a screen-spectator relationship. 'All the people came and did not fit onto the screen' indicates a screen-spectator relationship that promoted spectatorial identification with a repertoire of new and traditional images associated with 'Mexicanness' (*lo mexicano*) that were played out onscreen. Given that spectatorship is clearly a key issue for an understanding of the intersection between the reconfiguration of Mexican national identity in the twentieth century and the parallel development of the Mexican cinematic industry, how might we offer an account of the specificities of Mexican spectatorship?

1 Carlos Monsiváis, 'All the people came and did not fit onto the screen: notes on the cinema audience in Mexico', in Paulo Antonio Paranaguá (ed.), *Mexican Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), p. 151.

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