Shoot! – Book III

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In Italiano – Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio, operatore

Translated from the Italian by C. K. Scott Moncrieff
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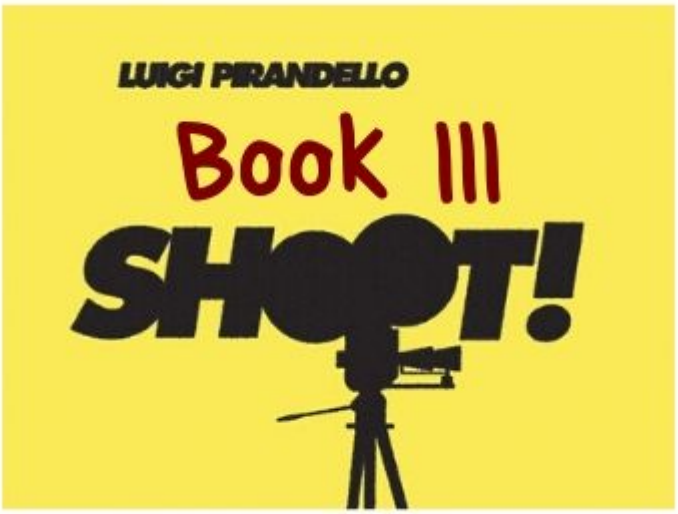

Shoot! – Book III

1.

A slight swerve. There is a one-horse carriage in front.
"_Peu, pepeeeu, peeeu_."
What? The horn of the motor-car is pulling it back? Why, yes! It does really seem to be making it run backwards, with the most comic effect.
The three ladies in the motor-car laugh, turn round, wave their arms in greeting with great vivacity, amid a gay, confused flutter of many-coloured veils; and the poor little carriage, hidden in an arid, sickening cloud of smoke and dust, however hard the cadaverous little horse may try to pull

it along with his weary trot, continues to fall behind, far behind, with the houses, the trees, the occasional pedestrians, until it vanishes down the long straight vista of the suburban avenue. Vanishes? Not at all! The motor-car has vanished. The carriage, meanwhile, is still here, still slowly advancing, at the weary, level trot of its cadaverous horse. And the whole of the avenue seems to come forward again, slowly, with it.

You have invented machines, have you? And now you enjoy these and similar sensations of stylish pace.

The three ladies in the motor-car are three actresses from the Kosmograph, and have greeted with such vivacity the carriage flung into the background by their mechanical progress not because there is anyone in the carriage particularly dear to them; but because the motor-car, the machinery intoxicates them and excites this uncontrollable vivacity in them. They have it at their disposal; free of charge; the Kosmograph pays. In the carriage there is myself.

They have seen me disappear in an instant, dropping ludicrously behind, down the receding vista of the avenue; they have laughed at me; by this time they have already arrived. But here am I creeping forward again, my dear ladies. Ever so slowly, yes; but what have you seen? A carriage drop behind, as though pulled by a string, and the whole avenue rush past you in a long, confused, violent, dizzy streak. I, on the other hand, am still here; I can console myself for my slow progress by admiring one by one, at my leisure, these great green plane trees by the roadside, not uprooted by the hurricane of your passage, but firmly planted in the ground, which turn towards me at every breath of wind in the gold of the sunlight between their dark boughs a cool patch of violet shadow: giants of the road, halted in ile, ever so many of them, they open and uplift on muscular arms their huge palpitating wreaths of foliage to the sky.

Drive on, yes, but not too fast, my coachman! He is so tired, your old cadaverous horse. Everything passes him by: motor-

cars, bicycles, electric trams; and the frenzy of all that motion along the road urges him on as well, unconsciously and involuntarily, gives an irresistible impetus to his poor stiff legs, weary with conveying, from end to end of the great city, so many people afflicted, oppressed, excited, by necessities, hardships, engagements, aspirations which he is incapable of understanding! And perhaps none of them makes him so tired as the few who get into the carriage with the object of amusing themselves, and do not know where or how. Poor little horse, his head droops gradually lower, and he never raises it again, not even if you flay him with your whip, coachman!

“Here, on the right… turn to the right!”

The Kosmograph is here, on this remote side road, outside the city gate.

2.

Freshly dug, dusty, barely traced in outline, it has the air and the ungraciousness of a person who, expecting to be left in peace, finds that, on the contrary, he is continually being disturbed.

But if the right to a few fresh tufts of grass, to all those fine, wandering threads of sound, with which the silence weaves a cloak of peace in solitary places, to the croak of an occasional frog when it rains and the pools of rain-water mirror back the stars when the sky is clear again; in short, to all the delights of nature in the open and unpeopled country: if this right be not enjoyed by a country road some miles outside the gate of the city, then indeed I do not know who does enjoy it.

Instead of this: motor-cars, carriages, carts, bicycles, and all day long an uninterrupted coming and going of actors, operators, mechanics, labourers, messengers, and a din of hammers, saws, planes, and clouds of dust and the stench of petrol.

The buildings, high and low, of the great cinematograph

company rise at the far end of the road, on either side; a few more stand up farther off, scattered in confusion, within the vast enclosure, which extends far over the Campagna: one of them, higher than all the rest, is capped with a sort of glazed tower, with opaque windows, which glitter in the sunlight; and on the wall that is visible from both avenue and side road, on the dazzling whitewashed surface, in black letters a foot high, is painted:

THE KOSMOGRAPH

The entrance is to the left, through a little door by the side of the gate, which is rarely opened. Opposite is a wayside tavern, pompously surnamed _Trattoria della Kosmograph_, with a fine trellised pergola which encloses the whole of the so-called garden and creates a patch of green within. Five or six rustic tables, inside, none too steady on their legs, and chairs and benches. A number of actors, made up and dressed in strange costumes, are seated there and engaged in an animated discussion; one of them shouts louder than the rest, bringing his hand down furiously upon his thigh:
“I tell you, you’ve got to hit her here, here, here!”
And the bang of his hand on his leather breeches sounds like so many rifle shots.
They are speaking, of course, of the tigress, bought a short time ago by the Kosmograph; of the way in which she is to be killed; of the
exact spot in which the bullet must hit her. It has become an obsession with them. To hear them talk, you would think that they were all professional hunters of wild beasts.
Crowding round the entrance, stand listening to them with grinning faces the chauffeurs of the dusty, dilapidated motor-cars; the drivers of the carriages that stand waiting, there in the background, where the side road is barred by a fence of stakes and iron spikes; and ever so many other people, the most wretched that I know, albeit they are dressed with a certain gentility. They are (I apologise, but everything here

has a French or an English name) the casual _cachets_, that is to say the people who come to offer their services, should the need arise, as _supers_. Their petulance is insufferable, worse than that of beggars, because they come here to display a penury which asks not for the charity of a copper, but for five lire, in reward for dressing themselves up, often grotesquely. You ought to see the rush, on some days, to the dressing-room to snatch and put on at once a heap of gaudy rags, and the airs with which they strut up and down on the stage and in the open, knowing full well that, if they succeed in _dressing_, even if they do not _come on_, they draw half-salary.

Two or three actors come out of the tavern, making their way through the crowd. They are dressed in saffron-coloured vests, their faces and arms plastered a dirty yellow, and with a sort of crest of coloured feathers on their heads. Indians. They greet me:
“Hallo, Gubbio.”
“Hallo, _Shoot_!…”
Shoot, you understand, is my nickname. The difficulties of life!
You have lost an eye in it, and your case has been serious. But we are all of us more or less marked, and we never notice it. Life marks us; and fastens a beauty-spot on one, a grimace on another.
No? But excuse me, you, yes, you who said no just now… there now, _absolutely_… do you not continually load all your conversation with that adverb in _-ly_?
“I went absolutely to the place they told me: I saw him, and said to him absolutely: What, you, absolutely…”
Have patience! Nobody yet calls you _Mr. Absolutely_… Serafino Gubbio (_Shoot_!) has been less fortunate. Without my noticing it, I may have happened once or twice, or several times in succession, to repeat, after the producer, the sacramental word: “_Shoot_!” I must have repeated it with my face composed in that expression which is proper to me, of

professional impassivity, and this was enough to make everyone here, at Fantappiè's suggestion, address me now as _Shoot_.

Every town in Italy knows Fantappiè, the comedian of the Kosmograph,who has specialised in travesties of military life: _Fantappiè, C. B_. and _Fantappiè on the range; Fantappiè on manoeuvres_ and _Fantappiè steers the airship_; _Fantappiè on guard_ and _Fantappiè in the Colonies_.
[Footnote: Fantappiè, or fante a piede, is equivalent to the English footslogger. C. K. S. M.]

He stuck it on himself, this nickname; a nickname that goes well with his special form of art. In private life he is called Roberto Chismicò.
"You aren't angry with me, laddie, for calling you _Shoot_?" he asked me, some time ago.
"No, my dear fellow," I answered him with a smile. "You have stamped me."
"I've stamped myself too, if it comes to that!"
All of us stamped, yes. And most, of all, those of us who are least aware of it, my dear Fantappiè.

3.

I go in through the entrance hall on the left, and come out upon thegravelled path from the gate, shut in by the buildings of the second department, the _Photographic_ or _Positive_.
In my capacity as operator I have the privilege of keeping one foot in this, and the other in the _Art_, or _Negative Department_. And all the marvels of the industrial and so-called artistic maze are familiar to me.
Here the work of the machines is mysteriously completed.
All the life that the machines have devoured with the voracity of animals gnawed by a tapeworm, is turned out here, in the large underground rooms, their darkness barely broken by dim red lamps, which strike a sinister blood-red gleam from the enormous dishes prepared for the developing bath.

The life swallowed by the machines is there, in those tapeworms, I mean in the films, now coiled on their reels.
We have to fix this life, which has ceased to be life, so that another machine may restore to it the movement here suspended in a series of instantaneous sections.
We are as it were in a womb, in which is developing and taking shape a monstrous mechanical birth.
And how many hands are at work there in the dark! There is a whole army of men and women employed here: operators, technicians, watchmen, men employed on the dynamos and on the other machinery, drying, soaking, winding, colouring, perforating the films and joining up the pieces.
I have only to enter here, in this darkness foul with the breath of the machines, with the exhalations of chemical substances, for all my _superfluity_ to evaporate.

Hands, I see nothing but hands, in these dark rooms; hands busily hovering over the dishes; hands to which the murky light of the redlamps gives a spectral appearance. I reflect that these hands belongto men who are men no longer; who are condemned here to be hands only:these hands, instruments. Have they a heart? Of what use is it? It is of no use here. Only as an instrument, it too, of a machine, to serve, to move these hands. And so with the head: only to think of what these hands may need. And gradually I am filled with all the horror of the necessity that impels me to become a hand myself also, and nothing more.
I go to the store-keeper to provide myself with a stock of fresh film, and I prepare my machine for its meal.
I at once assume, with it in my hand, my mask of impassivity. Or rather I cease to exist. It walks, now, upon my legs. From head to
foot, I belong to it: I form part of its equipment. My head is here, inside the machine, and I carry it in my hand.
Outside, in the daylight, throughout the vast enclosure, is the gay animation of an undertaking that prospers and pays punctually and handsomely for every service rendered, that

easy run of work in the confidence that there will be no complications, and that every difficulty, with the abundance of means at our disposal, will be neatly overcome; indeed a feverish desire to introduce, as though by way of challenge, the strangest and most unusual difficulties, without a thought of the cost, with the certainty that the money, spent now without reckoning, will before long return multiplied an hundredfold.

Scenario writers, stage hands, scene painters, carpenters, builders and plasterers, electricians, tailors and dressmakers, milliners, florists, countless other workers employed as shoemakers, hatters, armourers, in the store-rooms of antique and modern furniture, in the wardrobe, are all kept busy, but are not seriously busy, nor are they playing a game. Only children have the divine gift of taking their play seriously. The wonder is in themselves; they impart it to the things with which they are playing, and let themselves be deceived by them. It is no longer a game; it is a wonderful reality.
Here it is just the opposite.
We do not play at our work, for no one has any desire to play. But how are we to take seriously a work that has no other object than to deceive, not ourselves, but other people? And to deceive them by putting together the most idiotic fictions, to which the machine is responsible for giving a wonderful reality!
There results from this, of necessity, and with no possibility of deception, a hybrid game. Hybrid, because in it the stupidity of the fiction is all the more revealed and obvious inasmuch as one sees it to be placed on record by the method that least lends itself to deception: namely, Photography. It ought to be understood that the fantastic cannot acquire reality except by means of art, and that the reality which a machine is capable of giving it kills it, for the very reason that it is given it by a machine, that is to say by a method which discovers and exposes the fiction, simply by giving it

and presenting it as real. If it is mechanical, how can it be life, how can it be art? It is almost like entering one of those galleries of living statuary, waxworks, clothed and tinted. We feel nothing but surprise (which may even amount to disgust) at their movements, in which there is no possible illusion of a material reality.
And no one seriously believes that he can create this illusion. At the most, he tries to provide _something to take_ for the machine, here in the workshops, there in the four studios or on the stage. The public, like the machine, takes it all. They make stacks of money, and can cheerfully spend thousands and thousands of lire on the construction of a scene which on the screen will not last for more than a couple of minutes.
Scene painters, stage hands, actors all give themselves the air of deceiving the machine, which will give an appearance of reality to all their fictions.
“What am I to them, I who with the utmost seriousness stand by impassive, turning the handle, at that stupid game of theirs!”

4.

Excuse me for a moment. I am going to pay a visit to the tiger. I shall talk, I shall go on talking, I shall pick up the thread of my discourse later on, never fear. At present, I must go and see the tiger.
Ever since they bought her, I have gone every day to pay her a visit, before starting my work. On two days only have I not been able to go, because they did not give me time.
We have had other animals here that were wild, although greatly subdued by melancholy: a couple of polar bears which used to spend the whole day standing on their hind legs beating their breasts, like Trinitarians doing penance: three shivering lion cubs, always huddled in a corner of the cage, one on top of another; other animals as well, that were not exactly wild: a poor ostrich, terrified at every sound, like a

chicken, and always uncertain where to set its feet: a number of mischievous monkeys. The Kosmograph is provided with everything, including a menagerie, albeit its inmates remain there but a short time.
No animal has ever _talked to me_, like this tiger.
When we first secured her, she had but recently arrived, a gift from some illustrious foreign personage, at the Zoological Gardens in Rome. At the Zoological Gardens they were unable to keep her, because she was absolutely incapable of learning, I do not say to blow her nose with a handkerchief, but even to respect the most elementary rules of social intercourse. Three or four times she threatened to jump the ditch, or rather attempted to jump it, to hurl herself upon the visitors to the gardens who stood quietly gazing at her from a distance.

But what other thought could arise more spontaneously in the mind of a tiger (if you object to the word _mind_, let us say the paws) than that the ditch in question was put there on purpose so that she might try to jump it, and that those ladies and gentlemen stopped there in front of her in order that she might devour them if she succeeded in jumping it?
It is certainly an advantage to be able to stand a joke; but we know that not everyone possesses this advantage. Many people cannot even endure the thought that some one else thinks he is at liberty to joke at their expense. I speak of men, who, nevertheless, in the abstract, are all capable of realising that at times a joke is permissible.
The tiger, you say, is not placed on show in a zoological garden for a joke. I agree. But does it not seem a joke to you to think that she can suppose that you keep her there on show to give the public a “living idea” of natural history!
Here we are back at our starting-point. This, inasmuch as we are not tigers, but men, is rhetoric.
We may feel compassion for a man who is unable to stand a joke; we ought not to feel any for a beast; especially if the joke for which we have placed it on show, I mean the “living

idea," may have fatal consequences: that is to say, for the visitors to the Zoological Gardens, a too practical illustration of its ferocity.
This tiger was, therefore, wisely condemned to death. The Kosmograph Company managed to hear of it in time, and bought her. Now she is here, in a cage in our menagerie. Since she has been here, her behaviour has been exemplary. How are we to explain this? Our treatment, no doubt, seems to her far more logical. Here she is not at liberty to attempt to jump any ditch, has no illusion of _local colour_, as in the Zoological Gardens. Here she has in front of her the bars of her cage, which say to her continually: "You cannot escape; you are a prisoner"; and she lies on the ground there almost all day long, resigned to her fate, gazing out through the bars, quietly, wonderingly waiting.

Alas, poor beast, she does not know that here there is something far more serious in store for her, than that joke of the "living idea"!
The scenario is already completed, an Indian subject, in which she is destined to represent one of the principal parts. A spectacular scenario, upon which several hundred thousand lire will be spent; but the stupidest and most vulgar that could be imagined. I need only give the title: _The Lady and the Tiger_. The usual lady, more tigerish than the tiger. I seem to have heard that she is to be an English _Miss_ travelling in the Indies with a train of admirers.
India will be a sham, the jungle will be a sham, the travels will be a sham, with a sham _Miss_ and sham admirers: only the death of this poor beast will not be a sham. Do you follow me? And does it not make you writhe in anger?
To kill her in self-defence, or to save the life of another person, well and good. Albeit not of her own accord, for her own pleasure, has
the beast come here to place herself on show among a lot of men, but men themselves, for their pleasure, have gone out to hunt her, to drag her from her savage lair. But to kill her

like this, in a sham forest, in a sham hunt, for a stupid make-believe, is a real iniquity and is going too far. One of the admirers, at a certain stage, will fire point-blank at a rival. You will see this rival fall to the ground, dead. Yes, my friends. But when the scene is finished, there he is getting up again, brushing the dust of the stage off his clothes. But this poor beast will never get up again, after they have shot her. The scene shifters will carry off the sham forest, and at the same time clear the stage of her carcase. In the midst of a universal sham, her death alone will be genuine.
And if it were only a sham that could by its beauty and nobility compensate in a measure for the sacrifice of this beast. But no. It is utterly stupid. The actor who is to kill her will not even know, perhaps, why he has killed her. The scene will last for a minute or two at most, when projected upon the screen, and will pass without leaving any permanent impression in the minds of the spectators, who will come away from the theatre yawning:
“Oh Lord, what rubbish!”

This, you beautiful wild creature, is what awaits you. You do not know it, and gaze through the bars of your cage with those terror-stricken eyes in which the slit pupils contract and dilate by turns. I see your wild nature as it were steaming from your whole body, like the vapour of a blazing coal; I see marked on the black stripes of your coat the elastic force of your irrepressible spring. Whoever studies you closely is glad of the cage that imprisons you and checks in him also the savage instinct which the sight of you stirs irresistibly in his blood.
You cannot remain here on any other terms. Either you must be imprisoned like this, or you must be killed; because your ferocity—we quite understand—is innocent; nature has implanted it in you, and you, in employing it, are obeying nature and cannot feel any remorse.
We cannot endure that you, after a gory feast, should be able

to sleep calmly. Your very innocence makes us innocent of your death, when we inflict it in self-defence. We can kill you, and then, like you, sleep calmly. But out there, in the savage lands, where you do not allow any stranger to pass; not here, not here, where you have not come of your own accord, for your own pleasure. The beautiful, ingenuous innocence of your ferocity makes the iniquity of ours seem disgusting here. We seek to defend ourselves against you, after bringing you here, for our pleasure, and we keep you in prison: this is no longer your kind of ferocity; it is a treacherous ferocity! But we know, you may be sure, we know how to go even farther, to do better still: we shall kill you for amusement, stupidly. A sham hunter, in a sham forest, among sham trees…. We shall be worthy in every respect, truly, of the concocted plot. Tigers, more tigerish than a tiger. And to think that the sentiment which this film, now in preparation, is intended to arouse in the spectators is contempt for human ferocity! It will be part of o'ur day's work, this ferocity practised for amusement, and we count moreover upon making a handsome profit out of it, should the film prove successful.

You stare. At what do you stare, you beautiful, innocent creature!
That is just how things stand. You are here for no other purpose. And I who love and admire you, when they kill you, shall be _impassively_ turning the handle of this pretty machine here, do you see? They have invented it. It has to act; it has to eat. It eats everything, whatever stupidity they may set before it. It will eat you too; it eats everything, I tell you! And I am its servant. I shall come and plant it closer to you, when you, mortally wounded, are writhing in your last agony. Ah, do not fear, it will extract the utmost penny of profit from your death! It does not have the luck to taste such a dinner every day. You can have that consolation. And, if you like, another as well.
There comes every day, like myself, in front of your cage here, a lady intent on studying how you move, how you turn

your head, how you look out of your eyes. The Nestoroff. Is that nothing to you? She has chosen you to be her teacher. Luck such as this does not come the way of every tiger.

As usual, she is taking her part seriously. But I have heard it said that the part of the _Miss_, “more tigerish than the tiger,” will not
be assigned to her. Perhaps she does not yet know this; she thinks that the part is hers; and she comes here to study.
People have told me this, and laughed at it. But I myself, the other day, took her by surprise, on one of her visits here, and remained talking to her for some time.

5.

It is no mere waste of time, you will understand, to spend half an hour in watching and considering a tiger, seeing in it a manifestation of Earth, guileless, beyond good and evil, incomparably beautiful and innocent in its savage power.
Before we can come down from this “aboriginality” and reach the stage of being able to see before us a man or woman of our own time, and to recognise and consider him or her as an inhabitant of the same earth, we require—I do, at least; I cannot answer for you—a wide stretch of imagination.
And so I remained for a while looking at Signora Nestoroff before I was able to understand what she was saying to me.
But the fault, as a matter of fact, was not only mine and the tiger’s. The fact of her addressing me at all was unusual; and it is quite
natural, when anyone addresses us suddenly with whom we have not been on speaking terms, that we should find it hard at first to take in the meaning, sometimes even the sound of the most ordinary words, and should ask:
“Excuse me, what was it you said?”
In a little more than eight months, since I came here, between her and myself, apart from formal greetings, barely a score of words have passed.

Then she—yes, this happened too—coming up to me, began to speak to me with great volubility, as we do when we wish to distract the attention of some one who has caught us in some action or thought which we are anxious to keep secret. (The Nestoroff speaks our language with marvellous ease and with a perfect accent, as though she had lived for many years in Italy: but she at once breaks into Frenchwhenever, if only for a moment, she changes her tone or grows excited.) She wished to find out from me whether I believed that the actor's profession was such that any animal whatsoever (not necessarily in a metaphorical sense) could regard itself as qualified, without preliminary training, to practise it.

"Where?" I asked her.
She did not understand my question.
"Well," I explained to her; "if you mean, practise it here, where there is no need of speech, perhaps even an animal—why not!—may be capable of succeeding."
I saw her face cloud over.
"That will be it," she said mysteriously.
I seemed at first to divine that she (like all the professional actors who are employed here) speaking out of contempt for certain others who, without actually needing, but at the same time not despising an easy source of revenue, either from vanity or from predilection, or for some other reason, had managed to have their services accepted by the firm and to take their place among the actors, with no great difficulty, that supreme difficulty being eliminated which it would have been most arduous for them and perhaps impossible to overcome without a long training and a genuine aptitude, I mean the difficulty of speaking in public. We have a number of them at the Kosmograph who are real gentlemen, young fellows between twenty and thirty, either friends of some big shareholder on the Board, or shareholders themselves, who make a hobby of playing some part or other that has taken their fancy in a film, solely for their own amusement; and play their parts in the most gentlemanly fashion, some of them even

with a grace that a real actor might envy.
But, reflecting afterwards on the mysterious tone in which she, her face suddenly clouding over, had uttered the words: “That will be it,” the suspicion occurred to me that perhaps she had heard the news that Aldo Nuti, I do not yet know from what part of the horizon, was trying to find an opening here.
This suspicion disturbed me not a little.
Why did she come to ask me, of all people, with Aldo Nuti in her mind, whether I believed that the actor’s profession was such that any animal might consider itself qualified, without preliminary training, to practise it? Did she then know of my friendship with Giorgio Mirelli?

I had not then, nor have I now any reason to think so. At least the questions with which I have adroitly plied her in the hope of enlightenment have brought me no certainty.

I do not know why, but I should dislike intensely her knowing that I was a friend of Giorgio Mirelli, in his boyhood, and a familiar inmate of the villa by Sorrento into which she brought confusion and death.

“I do not know why,” I have said: but it is not true; I do know why, and I have already given a hint of the reason. I feel no love, I repeat again, nor could I feel any, for this woman; hatred, if anything. Everyone hates her here; and that by itself would be an overwhelming reason for me not to hate her. Always, in judging other people, I have endeavoured to break the circle of my own affections, to gather from the clamour of life, composed more of tears than of laughter, as many notes as I could outside the chord of my own feelings. I knew Giorgio Mirelli; but how, in what capacity? Such as he was in his relations with me. He was the sort of person that I liked. But who, and what was he in his relations with this woman? The sort that she could like? I do not know. Certainly he was not, he could not be one and the same person to her and to myself. And how then am I to judge this woman by him? We have all of us a false conception of an individual whole.

Every whole consists in the mutual relations of its constituent elements; which means that, by altering those relations however slightly, we are bound to alter the whole. This explains how some one who is reasonably loved by me can reasonably be hated by a third person. I who love and the other who
hates are two: not only that, but the one whom I love, and the one whom the third person hates, are by no means identical; they are one and one: therefore they are two also. And we ourselves can never know what reality is accorded to us by other people; who we are to this person and to that.

Now, if the Nesteroff came to hear that I had been a great friend of Giorgio Mirelli, she would perhaps suspect me of a hatred for herself which I do not feel: and this suspicion would be enough to make her at once become another person to me, I myself remaining meanwhile in the same attitude towards her; she would assume in my eyes an aspect that would hide all the rest; and I should no longer be able to study her, as I am now studying her, as a whole.
I spoke to her of the tiger, of the feelings which its presence in this place and the fate in store for it aroused in me; but I at once became aware that she was not in a position to understand me, not perhaps because she was incapable of doing so, but because the
relations that have grown up between her and the animal do not allow her to feel either pity for it or anger at the deed that is to be
done.
Her answer was shrewd:
“A sham, yes; stupid too, if you like; but when the door of the cage is opened and the animal is driven into the other, bigger cage representing a glade in a forest, with the bars hidden by branches, the hunter, even if he is a sham like the forest, will still be entitled to defend himself against it, simply because it, as you say, is not a sham animal but a real one.”

“But that is just where the harm lies,” I exclaimed: “in using a real animal where everything else is a sham.”
“Where do you get that?” she promptly rejoined. “The part of the hunter will be a sham; but when he is face to face with this _real_ animal he will be a _real_ man! And I can assure you that if he does not kill it with his first shot, or does not wound it so as to bring it down, it will not stop to think that the hunter is a sham and the hunt a sham, but will spring upon him and _really_ tear a _real_ man to pieces.”
I smiled at the acuteness of her logic and said:
“But who will have wished such a thing. Look at her as she lies there. She knows nothing, the beautiful creature, she is not to blame for her ferocity.”

There was a strange look in her eyes, as though she suspected that I was trying to make fun of her; then she smiled as well, shrugged her shoulders slightly and went on:
“Do you feel is to deeply! Tame her! Make her a stage tiger, trained to sham death at a sham bullet from a sham hunter, and then all will be right.”
We should never have come to an under-standing; because if my sympathies were with the tiger, hers were with the hunter.
In fact, the hunter appointed to kill the animal is Carlo Ferro. The Nestoroff must be greatly upset by this; and perhaps she comes here not, as her enemies assert, to study her part, but to estimate the risk which her lover will be running.
He too, for all that he shews a scornful indifference, must, in his heart of hearts, feel apprehensive. I know that, in conversation with the General Manager, Commendator Borgalli, and also upstairs in the office, he has put forward a number of claims: the insurance of his life for at least one hundred thousand lire, to be paid to his parents in Sicily, in the event of his death, which heaven forbid; another insurance, for a more modest sum, in the event of his being incapacitated for work by any serious injury, which heaven forbid also; a handsome bonus, if everything, as is to be hoped, turns out

well, and lastly—a curious claim, and one that was certainly not suggested, like the rest, by a lawyer—the skin of the dead tiger.

The tigerskin is presumably for the Nestoroff; for her little feet; a costly rug. Oh, she must certainly have warned her lover, with prayers and entreaties, against undertaking so dangerous a part; but then, seeing him determined and bound by contract, she must, she and no one else, have suggested to Ferro that he should claim _at least_ the skin of the tiger. "At least?" you say. Why, yes! That she used the words "at least" seems to me beyond question. _At least_, that is to say in compensation for the tense anxiety that she must feel for the risk to which he will be exposing himself. It is not possible that the idea can have originated with him, Carlo Ferro, of having the skin of the dead animal to spread under the little feet of his mistress. Carlo Ferro is incapable of such an idea. You have only to look at him to be convinced of it; look at that great black hairy arrogant goat's head on his shoulders.

He appeared, the other day, and interrupted my conversation with the Nestoroff in front of the cage. He did not even trouble to inquire what we were discussing, as though a conversation with myself could not be of the slightest importance to him. He barely glanced at me, barely raised Ms bamboo cane to the brim of Ms hat in sign of greeting, looked with Ms usual contemptuous indifference at the tiger in the cage, saying to his mistress:

"Come along: Polacco is ready; he is waiting for us."

And he turned his back, confident of being followed by the Nestoroff, as a tyrant by Ms slave.

No one feels or shews so much as he that instinctive antipathy, which as I have said is shared by almost all the actors for myself, and which is to be explained, or so at least I explain it, as an effect, which they themselves do not see clearly, of my profession.

Carlo Ferro feels it more strongly than any of them, because,

among all his other advantages, he has that of seriously believing himself to be a great actor.

6.

It is not so much for me, Gubbio, this antipathy, as for my machine. It recoils upon me, because I am the man who turns the handle.

They do not realise it clearly, but I, with the handle in my hand, am to them in reality a sort of executioner.

Each of them—I refer, of course, to the real actors, to those, that is to say, who really love their art, whatever their merits may be—is here against his will, is here because he is better paid, and for work which, even if it requires some exertion, does not call for any intellectual effort. Often, as I have said before, they do not even know what part they are playing.

The machine, with the enormous profits that it produces, if it engages them, can reward them far better than any manager or proprietor of a dramatic company. Not only that; but it, with its mechanical reproduction, being able to offer at a low price to the general public a spectacle that is always new, fills the cinematograph halls and empties the theatres, so that all, or nearly all the dramatic companies are now doing wretched business; and the actors, if they are not to starve, see themselves compelled to knock at the doors of the cinematograph companies. But they do not hate the machine merely for the degradation of the stupid and silent work to which it condemns them; they hate it, first and foremost, because they see themselves withdrawn, feel themselves torn from that direct communion with the public from which in the past they derived their richest reward, their greatest satisfaction: that of seeing, of hearing from the stage, in a theatre, an eager, anxious multitude follow their _live_ action, stirred with emotion, tremble, laugh, become excited,

break out in applause.

Here they feel as though they were in exile. In exile, not only from the stage, but also in a sense from themselves. Because their action, the _live_ action of their _live_ bodies, there, on the screen of the cinematograph, no longer exists: it is _their image_ alone, caught in a moment, in a gesture, an expression, that flickers and disappears.
They are confusedly aware, with a maddening, indefinable sense of emptiness, that their bodies are so to speak subtracted, suppressed, deprived of their reality, of breath, of voice, of the sound that they make in moving about, to become only a dumb image which quivers for a moment on the screen and disappears, in silence, in an instant, like an unsubstantial phantom, the play of illusion upon a dingy sheet of cloth.
They feel that they too are slaves to this strident machine, which suggests on its knock-kneed tripod a huge spider watching for its prey, a spider that sucks in and absorbs their live reality to render it up an evanescent, momentary appearance, the play of a mechanical illusion in the eyes of the public. And the man who strips them of their reality and offers it as food to the machine; who reduces their bodies to phantoms, who is he? It is I, Gubbio.
They remain here, as on a daylight stage, when they rehearse. The first night, for them, never arrives. The public they never see again. The machine is responsible for the performance before the public, with their phantoms; and they have to be content with performing only before it. When they have performed their parts, their performance is film.

Can they feel any affection for me?
A certain comfort they have for their degradation in seeing not themselves only subjugated to the service of this machine, which moves, stirs, attracts ever so many people round it. Eminent authors, dramatists, poets, novelists, come here, all of them regularly and solemnly proposing the “artistic regeneration” of the industry. And to all of them Commendator

Borgalli speaks in one tone, and Cocò Polacco in another: the former, with the gloved hands of a General Manager; the other, openly, as a stage manager. He listens patiently, does Cocò Polacco, to all their suggestions of plots; but at a certain stage in the discussion he raises his hand, saying:
“Oh no, that is a trifle crude. We must always keep an eye on the English, my dear Sir!”
A most brilliant discovery, this of the English. Indeed the majority of the films produced by the Kosmograph go to England. We must therefore, in selecting our plots, adapt ourselves to English taste. And is there any limit to the things that the English will not have in a film, according to Cocò Polacco?

“English prudery, you understand! They have only to say’shocking,’ and there’s an end of the matter!”
If the films went straight before the judgment of the public, then, perhaps, many things might pass; but no: for the importation of films into England there are the agents, there is the reef, the pitfall of the agents. They decide, the agents, and there is no appeal. And for every film that will not _go_, there are hundreds of thousands of lire wasted or not forthcoming.
Or else Cocò Polacco exclaims:
“Excellent! But that, my dear fellow, is a play, a perfect play! A certain success! Do you want to make a film of it? I won’t hear of it!As a film it won’t go: I tell you, my dear fellow, it’s too subtle, too subtle. That is not the sort of thing we want here! You are too clever, and you know it.”
In short, Cocò Polacco, if he refuses their plots, pays them a compliment: he tells them that they are not stupid enough to write for the cinematograph. From one point of view, therefore, they would like to understand, would resign themselves to understanding; but, from another, they would like also to have their plots accepted. A hundred, two hundred and fifty, three hundred lire, at certain moments….
The suspicion that this praise of their intelligence and

depreciation of the cinematograph as a form of art have been advanced as a polite way of refusing their plots flashes across the minds of some of them; but their dignity is saved and they can go away with their heads erect. As they pass, the actors salute them as companions in misfortune.

“Everyone has to pass through here!” they think to themselves with malicious joy. “Even crowned heads! All of them in here, printed for a moment on a sheet!”
A few days ago, I was with Fantappie in the courtyard on which the rehearsal theatre and the office of the Art Department open, when we noticed an old man with long hair, in a tall hat, with a huge nose and eyes that peered through his gold-rimmed spectacles, and a straggling beard, who seemed to be shrinking into himself with fear at the big coloured posters pasted on the wall, red, yellow, blue, glaring, terrible, of the films that have brought most honour to the firm.
“Illustrious Senator,” Fantappie exclaimed with a bound, springing towards him and then bringing himself to attention, his hand comically raised in the military salute. “Have you come for the rehearsal?”
“Why… yes… they told me ten o’clock,” replied the illustrious Senator, endeavouring to make out whom he was addressing.
“Ten o’clock? Who told you that! The Pole?”
“I don’t understand…”
“The Pole, the producer!”
“No, an Italian… one they call the engineer. …”
“Ah! Now I know: Bertini! He told you ten o’clock? That’s all right.
It is half past ten now. He’s sure to be here by eleven.”
It was the venerable Professor Zeme, the eminent astronomer, head of the Observatory and a Member of the Senate, an Academician of the Lincei, covered with ever so many Italian and foreign decorations, invited to all the Court banquets.
“Excuse me, though, Senator,” went on that buffoon Fantappiè. “May I ask one favour: couldn’t you make me go to the Moon?”
“I? To the Moon?”

“Yes, I mean cinematographically, you know … _Fantappiè in the Moon_: it would be lovely! Scouting, with a patrol of eight men. Think it over, Senator. I would arrange the business. … No? You say no?”

Senator Zeme said no, with a wave of the hand, if not contemptuously, certainly with great austerity. A scientist of his standing could not allow himself to place his science at the service of a clown. He has allowed himself, it is true, to be taken in every conceivable attitude in his Observatory; he has even asked to have projected on the screen a page containing the signatures of the most illustrious visitors to the Observatory, so that the public may read there the signatures of T.M. the King and Queen and of T. E. H. the Crown Prince and the Princesses and of H. M. the King of Spain and of other Kings and Cabinet Ministers and Ambassadors; but all this to the greater glory of his science and to give the public some sort of idea of the _Marvels of the Heavens_ (the title of the film) and of the formidable greatness in the midst of which he, Senator Zeme, insignificant little creature as he is, lives and labours.

“_Martuf_!” muttered Fantappiè, like a good Piedmontese, with one of his characteristic grimaces, as he strolled away with me.

But we turned back, a moment later, at the sound of a great clamour of voices which had arisen in the courtyard.

Actors, actresses, operators, producers, stage hands had come pouring out from the dressing-rooms and rehearsal theatre and were gathered round Senator Zeme at loggerheads with Simone Pau, who is in the habit of coming to see me now and again at the Kosmograph.

“Educating the people, indeed!” shouted Simone Pau. “Do me a favour! Send Fantappiè to the Moon! Make him play skittles with the stars! Or perhaps you think that they belong to you, the stars? Hand them over here to the divine Folly of man, which has every right to appropriate them and to play skittles with them! Besides… excuse me, but what do you do? What do you

suppose you are? You see nothing but the object! You have no consciousness of anything but the object! And so, a religion. And your God is your telescope! You imagine that it is your instrument? Not a bit of it! It is your God, and you worship it! You are like Gubbio here, with his machine! The servant. … I don't wish to hurt your feelings, let me say the priest, the supreme pontiff (does that satisfy you?) of this God of yours, and you swear by the dogma of its infallibility. Where is Gubbio? Three cheers for Gubbio!

Wait, don't go away, Senator! I came here this morning, to comfort an unhappy man. I made an appointment with him here: he ought to be here by now. An unhappy man, my fellow-lodger in the Falcon Hostelry….

There is no better way of comforting an unhappy man, than by proving to him by actual contact that he is not alone. So I—have invited him here, among these good artist friends. He is an artist too! Here he comes!"

And the man with the violin, long and lanky, bowed and sombre, whom I first saw more than a year ago in the Casual Shelter, came forward, apparently absorbed as before in gazing at the hairs that drooped from his bushy, frowning brows.

The crowd made way for him. In the silence that had fallen, a titter of merriment sounded here and there. But stupefaction and a certain sense of revulsion held most of us spellbound as we watched this man come towards us with bent head, his eyes fastened like that on the hairs of his eyebrows, as though he refused to look at his red, fleshy nose, the enormous burden and punishment of his intemperance. More than ever, now, as he advanced, he seemed to be saying:

"Silence! Make way! You see what life can bring a man's nose to?"

Simone Pau introduced him to Senator Zeme, who made off, indignant; everyone laughed, but Simone Pau, quite serious, went on introducing him to the actresses, the actors, the producers, relating to one and another of them in snatches the story of his friend's life, and how and why, after that last

famous rebuff, he had never played again.
Finally, thoroughly aroused, he shouted:
“But he will play to-day, ladies and gentlemen! He will play! He will break the evil spell! He has promised me that he will play! But not to you, ladies and gentlemen! You will keep in the background. He has promised me that he will play to the tiger. Yes, yes, to the tiger! To the tiger! We must respect his wishes. He is certain to have excellent reasons for them! Come along, come along now all of you…. We must keep in the background…. He shall go in, by himself, in front of the cage, and play!”
Amid shouts, laughter, applause, impelled, all of us, by the keenest curiosity as to this strange adventure, we followed Simone Pau, who had taken his man by the arm and was urging him on, following the instructions shouted at him from behind, telling him the way to the menagerie. On coming in sight of the cages he stopped us all, bidding us be silent, and sent on ahead, by himself, the man with the violin.
At the sound of our coming, from shops and stores, workmen, stage hands, scene painters came running out in full force to watch the scene over our shoulders: there was quite a crowd.

The animal had withdrawn with a bound to the back of its cage; and crouched there with arched back, lowered head, snarling teeth, bared claws, ready to spring: terrible!
The man stood gazing at it, speechless; then turned in bewilderment and let his eyes range over us in search of Simone Pau.
“Play!” Simone shouted at him. “Don’t be afraid! Play! She will understand you!”
Whereupon the man, as though freeing himself by a tremendous effort from an obsession, at length raised his head, shook it, flung his shapeless hat on the ground, passed a hand over his long, unkempt locks, took the violin from its old green baize cover, and threw the cover’down also, on top of his hat.
A catcall or two came from the workmen who had crowded in behind us, followed by laughter and comments, while he tuned

his violin; but a great silence fell as soon as he began to play, at first a little uncertainly, hesitating, as though he felt hurt by the sound of his instrument which he had not heard for so long; then, all of a sudden, overcoming his uncertainty, and perhaps his painful tremors with a few vigorous strokes. These strokes were followed by a sort of groan of anguish, that grew steadily louder, more insistent, strange notes, harsh and toneless, a tight coil, from which every now and then a single note emerged to prolong itself, like a person trying to breathe a sigh amid sobs. Finally this note spread, developed, let itself go, freed from its suffocation, in a phrase melodious, limpid, honey-sweet, intense, throbbing with infinite pain: and then a profound emotion swept over us all, which in Simone Pau took the form of tears. Raising his arms he signalled to us to keep quiet, not to betray our admiration in any way, so that in the silence this queer, marvellous wastrel might listen to the voice of his soul.

It did not last long. He let his hands fall, as though exhausted, with the violin and bow, and turned to us with a face transfigured, bathed in tears, saying:
“There…”
The applause was deafening. He was seized, carried off in triumph. Then, taken to the neighbouring tavern, notwithstanding the prayers and threats of Simone Pau, he drank and lost his senses. Polacco was kicking himself with rage, at not having thought of sending me off at once to fetch my machine to place on record this scene of serenading the tiger.
How perfectly he understands everything, always, Cocò Polacco! I was not able to answer him because I was thinking of the eyes of Signora Nestoroff, who had looked on at the scene, as though in an ecstasy instinct with terror.

1915/1925 — Shoot!
(The Notebooks of Serafino Gubbio, Cinematograph Operator)

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In Italiano – Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio, operatore

««« Pirandello in English

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