

# THE SCRIPT IN ITALIAN SILENT CINEMA OF THE TEENS: THE CASE OF TURIN

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The goal of this research is an examination of the birth and development of the script in the Italian silent cinema of the 1910s with a specific focus on Turin production. The corpus of research documents includes over a hundred scripts from Turin's Museo Nazionale del Cinema, as well as thirty other published scenarios. As the most considerable collection from the silent era in Italian cinema, these scripts document the entire decade of film production in Turin during the 1910s. This study is completed by an analysis of the surrounding production, exhibition, and marketing ephemera from the decade: advertisements, magazines, film literature, contracts, notices, script manuals, set photos, and film stills.

Between 1909 and the early 1920s, Italian screenwriters began to achieve notoriety as the script itself took on a more crucial role in the actual production process. During this period, the identity of the screenwriter was balanced between that of a literary-minded *auteur* and an innovator in mass cultural production. In Turin, the screenwriter's double identity represents a connection between the intellectual sources that contributed to the evolving importance of the screenwriter, and the available financial capital in the mass media marketplace, the continuously expanding avenues for public consumption, the developing technological know-how, and, finally, growth in local business participation and investment.

In this context, we should understand the screenplay as:

1. The result of the employment of intellectual workers in a new cultural industry.
2. A document of growing importance emerging organization system for the actual production process.
3. A controlled film document, or the result of a combination between intellectual work and economic and industrial powers, which will not be the case in the next decade.

In order to explore the role and contribution of the screenwriter in the renewal of the media landscape that took place with the transition from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this study is divided into three chapters. Each chapter strives to integrate an economic analysis with an aesthetic evaluation of the film production process.

Chapter one establishes a model that describes the relationship between intellectual work and the cinema industry of the 1910s. On the one hand, the screenwriter appears as a traditional writer whose interest lies in remaining on the outside of the production process, choosing instead, key moments in which he will collaborate through selective employment. On the other hand, we see a new kind of writer emerge as one completely absorbed in the production dynamics, a "specialist" whose work includes writing a number of scripts for the same film. For example, Arrigo Frusta and Renzo Chiosso, two

screenwriters from Turin, exemplify the second category of the “specialized” writer. A discussion of their professional activities and career paths is a central aspect of this chapter.

The second chapter examines the script’s and the screenwriter’s role in the various production modes of the Italian silent cinema of the 1910s. Here, the study investigates: the organization of labor (the birth of the story department, the controversies concerning copyrights, and script revision process); the attempts to promote standardized production (manuals, schools, competitions, etc.); the relationship between and responsibility of writers and *metteurs en scènes*; the script writers’ attempt to create a trust; and, finally, the emergence of precautionary censorship of the scenario.

The last chapter is dedicated to a detailed analysis of the scripts themselves. I contend that with a study of the script, we in turn gain valuable information about the *mise-en-scène* and frame composition. Screenwriters, such as Frusta, would often provide answers for questions concerning the entire realization process by planning not only the story but the entire *mise-en-scène* through storyboards, or by developing cross-cutting strategies. The work of the scriptwriter therefore underscores the importance of certain facts about the Italian silent film industry: the birth of a specialized vocabulary; the emergence of writing techniques for the modern script; the apparently paradoxical relationship between the writer as an abstract and literal figure; the changing nature of the intertitle (long considered the only creative aspect of script writing); and finally, a theory of *mise-en-scène* that develops from a study of the codification of style in lighting and depth of staging. Naturally, my study takes up a comparison between the filmic and the non-filmic sources. With this methodology, my study interrogates Pasolini’s concept of the *volontà della forma* of the *mise-en-scène* that emerges, he suggests, by comparing the film frame and its scenario, as well as the set photos and the surviving film.

Indeed, my research and analysis will contribute fundamental information concerning the way in which the Italian cinema of the 1910s improved, and as it began to reach a balance in its standardization of *mise-en-scène*. Above all, my project demonstrates the existence of an intense planning network underlying the models of *mise-en-scène* themselves.