

**T**he 1916 silent film *Cenere* (*Ashes*) features the great Italian actress Eleonora Duse (1858–1924) in her only cinematic role. In her meditative approach to her craft, she reprised for the screen all the “mother roles” she had created for the theater.

Marking the film’s 100th anniversary, this collection of essays brings together for the first time in English a range of scholarship. The difficulties involved in the making of the film are explored—Duse’s perfectionism was too advanced for the Italian movie industry of the 1910s. Her work is discussed within the creative, political and historical context of the silent movie industry as it developed in wartime Italy.

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Front cover: Eleonora Duse (about 1905), photograph by Mario Nunes Vais, by permission of Fondazione “Il Vittoriale degli Italiani,” Gardone Riviera



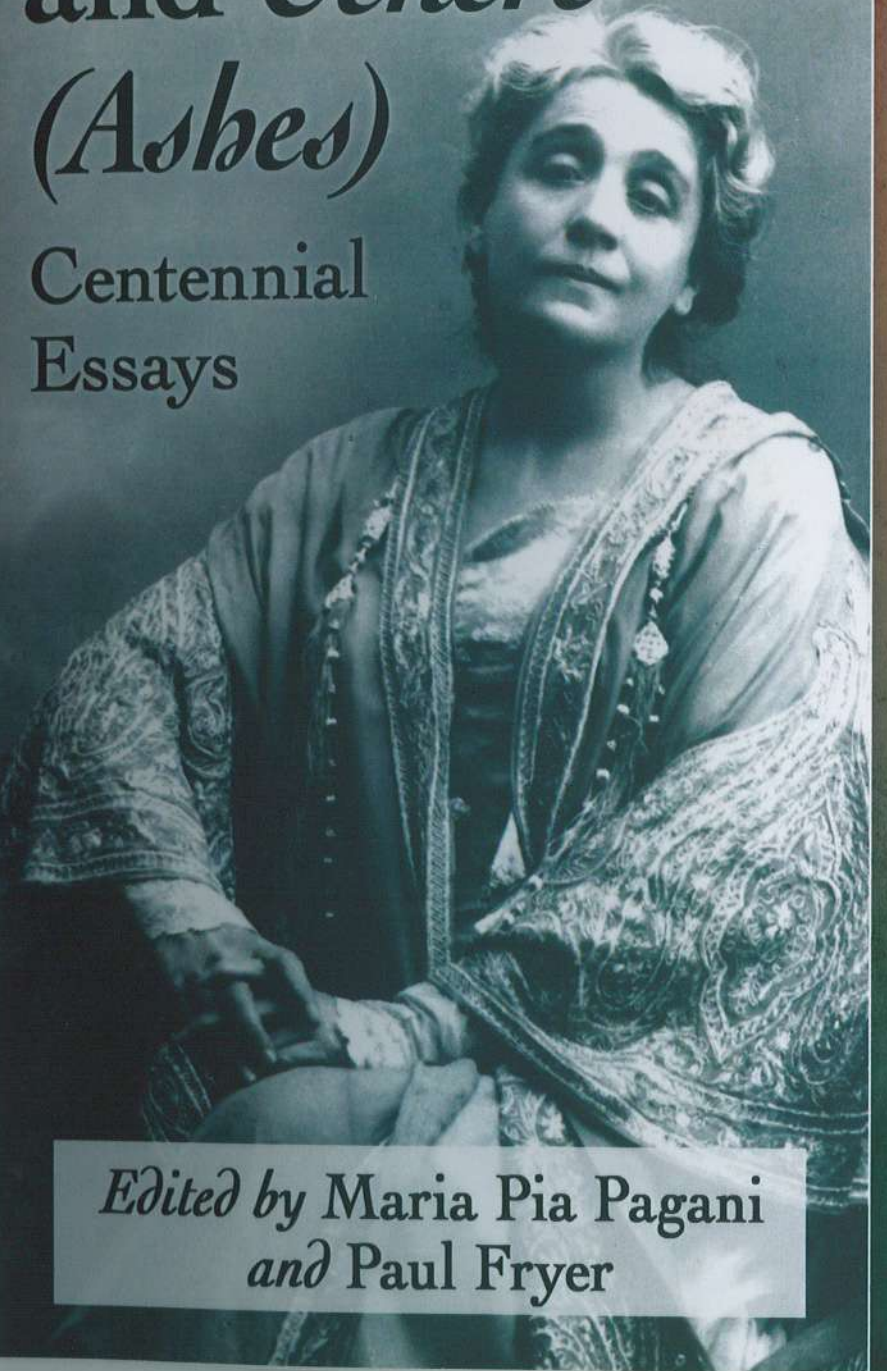
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# Eleonora Duse and *Cenere* (*Ashes*)

## Centennial Essays



*Edited by* Maria Pia Pagani  
and Paul Fryer



Eleonora Duse and *Cenere* (Ashes)

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and *Cenere (Ashes)*

*Centennial Essays*

EDITED BY MARIA PIA PAGANI  
AND PAUL FRYER



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To mark the 100th anniversary of the movie  
*Cenere* (Ashes), 1916–2016

“How long it took for the falling leaf to drop to the earth!  
All was mist; all was slow heaviness,  
desertion, waste, ashes”  
—Gabriele d’Annunzio, *Il Fuoco* (The Flame of Life)

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## Foreword

### *End Without End*

ANTONIO ATTISANI

“Eleonora Duse” (written in full) is a name that will continue to play for a long time all over the world, indicating an almost inexhaustible core of meanings projected in the light and shade of life, and therefore on the stage. “Duse” (“la Duse,” in Italian) is frequently the *tag*: biography, history, information—elements still necessary to perceive in ourselves what this actress represents. Everything depends on the attention paid, by scholars or students, to any artist, but the case of “Eleonora Duse” and “Duse” is very special—as demonstrated by the essays (or, perhaps, exercises in admiration) collected in this volume.

Here we celebrate the legacy of Eleonora Duse through essays that explore the artist’s work and, at the same time, are discreet hints of autobiographies: in fact, faced by Duse, nobody can avoid a personal discourse and a reflection on the sense of art today. *Cenere* (*Ashes*) is a fragile and monumental movie: confronted by it, the question is not whether we believe in its value, but rather our interpretation of its poetic meaning and comparison with the personal vision of the world and of the theatre. Eleonora Duse invented, we choose to receive.

The movie *Cenere* is a *sermo myticus*, and not the bearer of a philosophy or an ideology. It is not realistic in style (in this sense, it would be full of inconsistencies) or fantastic; it is not even an allegory. *Cenere* is a prophecy that is located as the opposite of the novel *Il Fuoco* (*The Flame of Life*) by Gabriele d’Annunzio, with its singular mix of the masculine and modern will of power and the artistic *noluntas*. A prophecy is understandable only if we respond as individuals and citizens.

However, it is legitimate to ask whether today, a century after the film was made, the meaning of that prophecy has become outdated. The contributors



52. Messina, Roberto. *Ritratto di Nizinskij da fauno* (Rieti: Biblioteca Paroniana, 1998).
53. Egizi, Eleonora. "La compagnia del Balletti Russi di Djagilev in Italia." *Teatro e Storia* 29 (2008): 123–148.
54. Mitry considers *Il Fauno* one of the most interesting of Mari's movies, especially for his delirium vaguely inspired by the Russian Ballet. See Roberto Lanzafame, Film card for *Il Fauno*, in *Febo Mari ed il cinema delle origini in Italia*.
55. Isgro, Giovanni. *D'Annunzio e i Balletti russi*, in *Gabriele D'Annunzio, Léon Bakst e i Balletti Russi di Sergej Djagilev*. Proceedings of the International Conference (Rome, March 4–5, 2010). Edited by Carlo Santoli and Silvana de Capua (Rome: Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, 2010), 107–114.
56. De Meyer, Adolphe. *Sur le prelude a l'après-midi d'un Faune* (Paris: Editions Paul Iribe, 1914).
57. Mari had the great sorrow of not having a higher stature (he mentions it even in his autobiography). Dino Falconi remembers his use of special shoes with inner heels.
58. Some critics underline the sexual uncertainty as a typical trait of Mari. See Ventrella, Riccardo. "Se quel guerrier io fossi ... 'Attila' di Febo Mari." *Immagine. Note di storia del cinema* 43–44 (2001): 39–41.
59. Canosa, 337.

“L’art du silence! La fièvre au  
cœur, depuis cette offre de  
Griffith, je n’ai rêvé que des films”

*Cenere through Duse’s Letters  
to Her Daughter Enrichetta*

MARIA IDA BIGGI

During the First World War, despite the atrocity of the situation, Eleonora Duse was a volcano of ideas. She made projects and worked actively for their realization: in fact, action was her antidote to the problems of the soul and the body. The depth and the creativity of her cultural interests were immediately transformed into plans, she was an artist who really wanted to produce “something” for the performing arts.

In this way, her approach to the art of cinema was made concrete by a movie: she considered all the productive and practical terms, and had a personal scheme (a sort of private, mental vision) for the images on the screen. Her first movie project was about the Sistine Chapel, but it was not realized. Then, she matured another plan for a movie based on a literary work: Grazia Deledda’s *Cenere* (Ashes).<sup>1</sup> Nowadays, we can consider Duse as a precursor of our contemporary filmmakers: she had great enthusiasm and, in her artistic research, she tried to realize her project by considering all of its complex aspects. In a word, we might say that she foresaw the role of a contemporary director.

As we can see in the essays collected in this volume, there are many documents and memories about her work in the movie industry of the 1910s. Probably, the most intimate and sincere are the many letters written to her daughter Enrichetta, who lived in Cambridge and was therefore far removed from her mother’s daily life.<sup>2</sup>



The decision of having an approach to the art of cinema was triggered by a proposal made by the American director David Wark Griffith, who invited Duse to work in the United States. This project remained unrealized, but became a kind of license to proceed for the actress: in fact, it set in motion a mechanism that was already present in her, as a sort of spring that inflamed her desire. On September 26, 2015, the actress wrote to her daughter<sup>3</sup>:

And every morning, the getting up is very heavy for me. I think that, when I did not know the futility of life, I always woke up in the morning with the emotion of doing something of useful or great. Oh, misery! And there is nothing to do. Only Time delivers us! Did I tell you yesterday an illusion of work? Uhm! Health is absolutely necessary, I have received a cable from America: 3 months in Los Angeles, California, with Griffith—a famous man for cinema. What to do?? Today with Adolfo (De Bosis)<sup>4</sup> I wrote my message, and he translated in English a cable for New York. A possibility of work, for me? Which? And, if we arrange, leaving?

P.S. I open again the letter, asking you some information on Griffith, the director for the technical aspect. The bank offering a contract for 15 weeks in Los Angeles, is "Banque Lincoln National," New York. There is something to do.

Reading the subsequent letters, we clearly understand Enrichetta's answer: she was not in favor of her mother's intention to return to work, and to travel to California. Then, we can clearly understand Duse's sadness when faced by the negative reaction of her daughter. A few days later, in her letters, the actress revealed her resentment. For example, on October 16, 1915, she wrote from Rome that the situation was uncertain, but her desire to work was strong. For Duse, working was the remedy for her inner suffering: it was the only way to make her alive and useful for life.

In a letter dated October 18–19, 1915, it is amazing to find enthusiasm in Duse's words: despite the opposition of her daughter, she was excited by a new movie project. Or better, an avant-garde project: a movie about Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel. She wanted to realize it with Griffith, at the end of the war. She also had the idea to shoot it in London, using this occasion to spend some time with her daughter.

In another letter dated November 13, 1915, after having expressed a wish to help the soldiers at the front, Duse wrote: "I'm waiting the arrival of Griffith in Europe." Their meeting would be important for the evaluation of a movie project together. But, in this period, Duse had *her* projects: one was about the Sistine Chapel in Rome, the other an adaptation of *The Countess Kathleen* by W. B. Yeats.<sup>5</sup>

Enrichetta sent the program of Griffith's movie *The Birth of a Nation* (United States 1915) to her mother. On December 1, 1915, after having received it, Duse wrote that she was still awaiting an answer about the director's possible visit to Europe. Then, for a few months, in her letters there were no references to the art of cinema.



Eleonora Duse with her daughter Enrichetta (about 1907). Photograph by Mario Nunes Vais, used by permission of Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice.

Finally, on March 30, 1916, her decision appeared in its complete form. In fact, after a moment of crisis, she understood that the active life of an actress was still necessary to her: "I felt the need to do something—in my manner—for shaking me, and I did it. I have arranged a work." In her opinion, the movie project about the Sistine Chapel would be a good opportunity to elevate the cultural level of the audience, against the stupidity of many commercial products of the film industry. Duse was absolutely conscious that it was very difficult, but this detail helps us to understand better her research into the artistic, human and cultural level of the movie.

In the same letter, Duse started to explain to her daughter the plot of *Cenere*. It is very interesting to notice her idea of a movie as a sort of living illustration of a novel, in a process from the words on paper to the images on the screen: "There is a Book<sup>6</sup> that I would like "to illustrate," a beautiful book."

A beautiful book, you will see! I will send it and you will understand. You will cry, reading, my good daughter: it is a short and eternal story of love and pain, as always in the world.... And this woman has a child, and Life separate her from him. And Life will be the key for everything, so everything will be fine. I don't want to talk



about it. Kisses, mom. I would like to write pages, telling you how the contract, the project, the research of the book is arrived, but I can't. Don't worry, I am so excited, and I will start the work for a beautiful movie, in 2 months in the Summer, in a wonderful scenery of Italy. Viva l'Italia!<sup>7</sup>

At this point, Duse's letters to her daughter narrate all the events connected to *Cenere*. Their geographical separation was filled by a lot of messages, always about the movie. On April 11, 1916, Duse admitted the impossibility of explaining in depth her movie project and her feelings by letter. It was a delicate moment, because she was living a sort of struggle faced by the possibility of working again, breaking her long artistic silence but also considering her fragile health.

A month later, there was a positive development of the situation. On May 2, 1916, Duse wrote: "Daughter, how many things in these last weeks, so many! And so various, that mom can't write them to you. I was still in bed a week, then, again better. Now, it seems that every residue of up and down has been passed. Everything has to be done!" She had considered the possibility of a trip to Sardinia for the shooting, but the dangers of the war and her health made it impossible. So, the actress decided to spend a period in Viareggio, for her physical and spiritual preparation for the work on the movie.

On May 14, 1916, Duse wrote her impression about the voracity of the people of the film industry, also considering that her contract had been redone many times. At this time, they were in search of the young actor for the role of the son. Duse had sent a copy of the novel *Cenere* to her daughter in Cambridge, and she was busy with "the work to invent, on the Book, the movie." In this letter, she emphasized the personal and intimate aspects of this choice:

The Book is: *Cenere* by Grazia Deledda.<sup>8</sup> It is a beautiful book on the island of Sardinia. I read it once, I remember, on tour. You were, Henriette, a little and young girl, and many things that seemed alive to me in the book, were part of our life. I say: the Book is based on the necessity (no matter what) of a separation between mother and son. The mother—alone—and poor, is brutalized by the death of the heart without love. But the son, by will of the mother, studies and lives a practical and poetic evolution becoming a Man. A real man, made of action, dreams, without sensual cruelty, and with a kind of pity. Something between Rolla by De Musset, René by Chateaubriand and—well understood [sic.]—something with the thirst (thirst of love and sorrow) by Nietzsche. When Life, his work, the moral development of his soul, and the love of his heart operate strongly on Him, (he loves Margherita, a young girl), that is: when action is necessary in Life, he has a so high feminine ideal that he wants above all to find his mother, who abandoned him (for his own good—said the mother, but abandoned). He wants to create between his girlfriend and his mother a form of working life ... but one was forced and the other abandoned him. The girlfriend, for the shame of sharing life with a beggar as the mother of the young man.

The Mother recognizes herself unworthy of sharing the life of her son, and for the pride of poverty. In the last pages of the book, there is a high love for life, (for life and it does not matter the provenience of this divine gift), and the mother, (it does not matter that she is the depositary), has a blind but holy vital strength.... Finally, there are pages of reality and poetry "harassing" for my heart, and imagination. I think that I will be able to make comprehensible without talking! But there are so many difficulties. We will see!

On May 18, 1916, Duse focused upon the problems with the producers for the realization of her movie project: "My film, at the moment, is waiting for a decision. So many things are complicated and, finally, it has to wait. I gave study and patience. But we must save many things, for a such work. Everything seemed affordable, but now we have to wait."

In that period, Duse was still world famous. She considered the movies as another possibility of work, and her effort to enter effectively into the Italian movie industry is evident in a letter written on June 2, 1916:

I have not thrown overboard the basic idea, it needs work as soon as possible. My strength has to be employed, not to destroy myself, but to rebuild. I have private *pourparler*, almost concluded and all positive, with three movie producers. Each is good, but I haven't signed yet, because I was sick. And because shooting a movie is a spiritual problem that cannot be decided on the spot. But, I think, I will do a nice thing. But I have to feel good. Also this year, spring has thrown me on the ground, but now, with the hot weather, I feel strength. The address in Viareggio? I don't know exactly. In any case: Via Robbia.<sup>9</sup> When I will be in Viareggio, I will orientate myself—silence! silence! Don't talk about the things of the heart, the heart hurts so bad!! Mom.

On June 10, 1916, Duse received a photo of her grandson Halley.<sup>10</sup> This gift gave her a positive impulse: "With this picture, starts again the Life of Work." She had spent many days in bed, and this vision of the child was a sort of balsam for her spirit. But the most important remedy, for Duse, was work: "Without active interest, it is impossible to resist. In the thinking of those I love, I consume all my strength and you, all of you, have your life: I am happy, but I consider necessary having one, any one, too. And the work will help... I have many ideas for the subjects, but I need a modern performance. I hope that my long letter, yesterday, has put you aware of the situation."

In this letter, Duse revealed to her daughter a detail about the international relevance of the movie producer in Turin: "Maison Ambrosio is the only one with branch offices in America, and Russia." She was satisfied with this choice, because there was the possibility of a wide international distribution of her movie. She had planned her work for *Cenere* in mid-July and August, and wanted also to use the days in Viareggio for her technical preparation for her first movie.

On June 11, 1916, just before her departure for Viareggio, Duse considered again the journey to Sardinia for the filming, even though her physical



condition was not optimal. She expressed to her daughter a very positive opinion about the producer Arturo Ambrosio: "He looks a good, simple Italian in the sense of the word." She arranged the royalties of the movie with him and, in this phase, she seemed satisfied by it.

In a letter without date, written in June 1916, Duse announced the official contract for *Cenere*. Her physical strength was not at its best again, but she was sure that working was the best solution for her. She was sure that the producer Ambrosio was the most appropriate collaborator for her debut in film:

Mom took her courage in hand, and signed a contract for a movie! A kiss to mom. I send you the news today, receiving the beautiful and dear picture of the children. Mom has signed! Daughter! As usual, I should write you some volumes, but the details are not more related. Mom has a backache. My daughter, I have signed for healing.... I consumed the strength, those that Art cannot reinvigorate. I would try to revive Art!... In the evening, going to bed, I felt that the hope for the movie had vanished. I felt a physical cold in the whole body, at night I was freezing in bed, and in the morning I had a cough. Then, I tried alone, as a wounded dog, the antidote. Since offers and proposals—in a word: the endless adventures of the movies—do not work in Southern Italy (Rome, Naples), I tried to orientate myself and went to the Mother House of all the movie producers in Italy: Ambrosio, in Turin. It is a Piemontese film industry, of an honest worker who obtained, with the job, a real treasure. I knew that Ambrosio was, and still is (even though a bit out of fashion), an honest film producer: seriousness for the choice of a movie, and financial honesty. Then, suddenly, I wired there: after a day, the director-in-chief went here. He is a good man, and intelligent, and he will do all what I want!

She appreciated the artistic sensibilities of the producer Ambrosio: one sign of this respectability was in the choice of the movie subject, never banal and vulgar. The company had a solid economic basis, huge capital, and the balance in order. Duse's contract was for only one movie, and she was engaged with all honors, becoming an associate of the company: in this way, she could have a significant economic income from *Cenere* ("50 percent of the revenue, with an advance of 40.000 francs, and 20.000 for my expenses").

After many years, with *Cenere*, Duse had the occasion to return to Turin—the town of her youth, where her daughter Enrichetta had been born on January 7th, 1882. She was glad about this, because it seemed to be a propitious link with the past. Even a sort of rejuvenation for her: "*L'art du silence! La fièvre au cœur, depuis cette offre de Griffith, je n'ai rêvé que des films.*"

Duse was aware that her film experience had to be built: it was her first movie, but she was flattered by the trust of the producer. For *Cenere*, she had all the best technical support, but was quite worried by the cameraman ("this is the most difficult man"). But, in the contract, it was written that she had "the right" to choose and—effectively—she tried to impose her point of view during the shooting.



Eleonora Duse (about 1907). Photograph by Mario Nunes Vais, used by permission of Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice.



On July 2, 1916, Duse wrote to her daughter from Viareggio and was very excited: "On 9th the work starts with Ambrosio! I think about it day and night! I have received again the books that you sent me, and the day of my entry into this room I have received from you, my daughter, the portrait of my mother. How many thoughts! Oh, Life! Everything is linked to the past, everything is blended in the future. The beautiful picture of Halley looks at my window, and the sun accompanies the lives of all of us. Thanks, Mom." Duse's excitement continued in the following days, in Turin.<sup>11</sup> On July 17, 1916, she went with Arturo Ambrosio to the studios and was amazed by this new world. She met the staff who had been employed for *Cenere*, 204 people: "The movie is 'passionate' (mother and son), and needs 204 people for living it!"

Duse was full of enthusiasm; after a long period, she felt herself alive. Thanks to Ambrosio, she had met Febo Mari<sup>12</sup> in Viareggio and studied some scenes with him: her description of this actor was "excellent."

She also visited the dark room, and was amazed by its mystery. In her position as a supreme artist, Duse was critical of her own work: it was quite natural, because it was her first movie. In her opinion, one relevant scene was set in a field: "The broad bean is high as wheat and the flower of the fruit has a silver color. Now, the result is beautiful. The head down as a gleaner, and the silver of the white hair are bright, as the silver of the flower of the broad bean." Giving her the beggar costume for the role of Rosalia, the costumier said with tears in the eyes: "Oh, how many times I have seen the radiant lady, and now!"

On August 17, 1916, Duse abandoned definitively the idea of travelling to Sardinia because of the risk of the ships being torpedoed during the war. In this way, the scenes in the little village were shot in some mountain villages in the surroundings of Turin. For *Cenere*, she wanted genuine poor places, according to the description of the miseries of life in Deledda's novel. "What a beautiful thing, and noble, working in contact with nature!"

Duse received new energy from her work, and her judgment of the movie on the screen evolved—from the point of view of the actress to that of the audience: "When in Turin, with Ambrosio, I am in the dark room to see myself, it makes a strange effect on me. I am so detached that only the character (Rosalia) speaks to me." She wanted the shooting of some scenes to be repeated, but it was impossible for the producer to do this.

After the work in Turin, Duse wanted to go to Milan to visit Arrigo Boito (in the letters, confidentially called "il Santo"<sup>13</sup>), and then return to Viareggio again. On August 21, 1916, Duse revealed the nature of her work not only as an actress, but also as a director of *Cenere*: "The movie is really good and a part has to be done again. Why? Because mommy, in a moment of tiredness, allowed the shooting of some *tableaux d'ensemble*, and this thing

in the middle of my movie. We see almost the 2 hands—I say—the 2 souls. And I want the responsibility on my movie, totally."

This brought about a change to her contract and caused a delay to the payment. Duse was worried by her financial situation, and it aggravated her in the following months. The producer Ambrosio and the lawyer Barattolo<sup>14</sup> were sure that the distribution of *Cenere* would be a success all over the world, but their plan was undermined by the atrocity of the war.

On September 2, 1916, Duse wrote from Turin: "Grazia Deledda has arrived to see her novel transformed into a movie, tomorrow we will have a private viewing." The shooting of *Cenere* was concluded, but Duse's desire to work continue to be alive. In a letter written on September 9, 1916, her judgment about the movie continued to be critical. She saw it in a small theatre and wrote: "There are a lot of faults, but the impression is beautiful." In the actress's opinion, the most innovative element for the Italian film industry was *her silence*: "In the whole movie, I never talk. The mouth is closed, yes or no with the head." Also in this occasion, her thoughts flew to Griffith: "I don't know if the great Griffith has just done it, because the Americans are very prominent with movies."

Maria Osti<sup>15</sup> was also present, and cried a lot. She remained amazed, and only said that the movie was beautiful, her emotion was so high that she could not express herself in any other way. The staff and all the women-workers asked the producer Ambrosio if they could see the movie: observing their reaction, Duse was satisfied because "the mothers have understood." She hoped that *Cenere* would be "a success of art and heart," and announced to her daughter that she was ready for the second movie: adapted from *The Lady from the Sea* by Ibsen.

On September 10, 1916 Duse admitted that she had a project for a series of movies: "The next month, I will be able to deliver the first whole movie and, in October, to shoot on the set (Adriatic coast, or Riviera) the second movie." In her artistic idea, *Cenere* was a movie full of sadness, darkness and light, while *The Lady from the Sea* would be different—full of will, endurance and desire for life.

On September 12, 1916, Duse was near to the end of her work on *Cenere*, which needed—again!—some little retouches in her absolute search for perfectionism ("for example, a window not opening in my manner, which has to open to a certain light and not the other"). She was meditating on the possibility of having another contract with the producer Ambrosio, but she had to wait for the right moment: "if the movie is not finished in any order, I cannot ask anything."

Ambrosio had the intention of creating a new arrangement with Duse, and the payment for her work for *Cenere* was imminent. This income was important for the actress, who had economic problems and wanted to resolve them with the sale of a precious pearl jewel thanks to Enrichetta.



On October 6, 1916, Duse wrote from Florence a letter which reveals other complications. She had obtained the possibility to re-shoot other scenes of *Cenere* and, thanks to Grazia Deledda, three little villages were found near Viareggio, on the Alps Apuane: the inhabitants were peasants from Sardinia (the men had emigrated to America or were fighting as soldiers during the First World War), and she thought that it could be a good sort of replacement for travelling to the island. She had quite a “philological” obsession for the setting of *Cenere* and wanted to recreate the Sardinian context in the most credible way: she was very tired by this other supplementary work, but satisfied.

In a long letter written on October 8, 1916, Duse expressed her disappointment for the producer Ambrosio: she considered him as a good worker and honest man, but discovered another side of his character—made of wiles and subtlety. They had a misunderstanding with the payment for *Cenere*, due to the real difficulties of the period: the distribution of the movie was slow and the declaration of war against Germany caused a lot of financial problems. Duse invoked the loyalty of their contract, but Ambrosio changed it, and the issue became very complicated even for the lawyers.

Meanwhile, the cameramen were ready in Alassio for the beginning of Duse’s second movie, and the actress was full of doubts about the continuation of this new project. She would work, because it was the only solution for her depression, but she wanted the right economic remuneration and did not accept a sudden change of contract even in the context of war.

In another letter written on the same day (October 8, 1916), Duse wrote that she would go to Alassio to study for the new movie, but her enthusiasm was not so high. Finally, she did not realize *The Lady from the Sea* and her career in the movie industry ended with *Cenere*.

But the ending held one surprise. Working with the producer Ambrosio, Duse realized a private movie made for her beloved daughter Enrichetta<sup>16</sup>: she wanted to send it to Cambridge, as a special gift of a mother-actress, who wanted to be near her via the medium of film. *La petite film faite pour toi... Un salut de ta maman avec film.*

Unfortunately, this is a lost memory for the screen. In the letter written on August 21, 1916, Duse described to Enrichetta this private movie in detail:

The lawyer Barattolo is the right arm for foreign affairs. Left to sell the movie, also in Russia. He will bring in the branch office in London, Maison Ambrosio, (ask for the address) a short movie of mom made for Henriette. Maison A., from London, will inform you in Cambridge. If you will go to London to their office, they will show you. Mom wears a city dress, with gloves and hat, and is greeting Henriette. Ambr., who is a refined man of the heart, having seen the message in which you were worried supposing Mom ill, wanted to do this thing to reassure you. I was very touched, we have done 2 meters of film for one-minute length, while I’m going to the door of



Eleonora Duse in Turin (1916). Used by permission of Fondazione “Il Vittoriale degli Italiani,” Gardone Riviera.

Maison Ambrosio. In the movie, I speak to you, and I say to you: “*Courage, Henriette, au revoir, maman.*”

P.S. When you have seen Mom who greets you, in the movie that Amb. himself had realized for you, I pray to write in Italian a word of thanks for him.

In her absolute modernity, in 1916 Duse shot something very similar to our contemporary video-message of the new millennium.

#### NOTES

1. Heyer-Caput, Margherita. *Grazia Deledda’s Dance of Modernity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

2. The letters of the actress to her daughter are held in Venice, Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Duse Archive). See *Ma Pupa, Henriette. Le lettere di Eleonora Duse alla figlia*, edited by Maria Ida Biggi (Venice: Marsilio, 2010).



3. The letters are written in Italian and French, in a very personal style that reveals the way to communicate between mother and daughter in a private epistolary dialogue.
4. Adolfo De Bosis (1863–1924), Italian writer and translator.
5. *The Countess Kathleen* (1891) is a play in blank verse written by William Butler Yeats (1865–1939). Based on an Irish legend, it is set during a famine: two devils disguised as merchants barter souls in exchange of bread, but the countess offers her soul for helping the starving Irish population. After the death, she is redeemed for her altruism and ascends to Heaven. This play is full of patriotic fervor, and Duse liked it very much.
6. With a lateal handwritten note, Enrichetta specified that the book for this movie project was *Cenere* by Grazia Deledda.
7. Duse wrote these words in Italian, as a typical national invocation.
8. Duse wrote the title of the book in Italian, with the aim to underline these important details with her daughter.
9. In Florence, Duse lived in via Robbia 54.
10. Halley Edward Bullough (1910–1967) was Duse's grandson; in 1937 he was ordained in the Dominican order, becoming friar Sebastian. He had a sister, Eleonora Ilaria Bullough (1912–2001); in 1932 she was ordained in the Dominican order, becoming Sister Mary of St. Mark.
11. On this occasion, Duse's address was "Anonima Ambrosio, via Catania 30, Torino."
12. Paola Bertolone, *Tournée TORNARE. Carteggi Duse/Febo Mari e Duse/Bianca di Prampero del Museo di Asolo* (Rome: UniversItalia, 2012), 9–50.
13. "Il Santo" was the nickname used by Duse for indicating Arrigo Boito (1842–1918). At this time, he had serious health problems and died in Milan on June 10, 1918.
14. Giuseppe Barattolo (1882–1949) was an Italian lawyer and film producer.
15. Maria Osti was a friend of Duse living in Tivoli, near Rome.
16. Rheinhardt, Emil Alphons. *Eleonora Duse* (Rome: Castelvecchi, 2015), 201.

## *Cenere*

### A Selected, Annotated Bibliography and Mediagraphy

NUCCIO LODATO

In the second half of the last century—save for the remarkable exceptions of some historians and the still rare academic courses of "Film Studies"—silent movies had gradually become neglected, even in the expert areas of research. This European and international indifference began to be overcome mainly through three events: the centenary of the birth of David Wark Griffith (1975), the conference in Brighton (1978), and the beginning of the Pordenone Silent Film Festival (since 1982).

Usually, in the film history books, *Cenere* (Ashes) is remembered because it is the only movie featuring the great actress, Eleonora Duse. The uniqueness of her movie experience is always emphasized, and this focuses the essence of the movie itself. Thanks to this uniqueness, the movie *now* belongs to history. Its impact in the years of the First World War, its influence on Duse's return to the theatre in 1921 and her final acting style, its relevance after her death, are elements of inquiry that this volume is investigating for the first time a century after the film appeared.

If we consider *Cenere* with the contemporary sensitivity of the second millennium, we realize that Duse had the courage to be half-invisible on the screen, especially in relation to her facial acting. In this way, the faculties of the new medium were denied and the expectations of the audience were disappointed: after a century, this reticence marks the absolute modernity of *Cenere*. In fact, for a real comprehension of the film, it has to be analyzed through the eyes of Duse's audience, with a contemporary eye upon posterity.

In the film history, generally Duse is considered as "a passing star." Thanks to this volume, we can understand her deep involvement in the project