

# Silent Magic

Trick Films and Special Effects

1895 – 1912

Sunday, October 20, 2013

Alamo Drafthouse Ritz

The Sprocket Society  
Austin, TX

## *The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots*

1895 (Edison Manufacturing Company)

Directed by Alfred Clark. Photographed by William Heise. With Robert Thomae as Mary.

“Representing the beheading of Mary, Queen of Scots. A realistic reproduction of an historic scene.” – Maguire & Baucus catalog, 1895

One of the very first films to use any kind of special effect and lasting only a few seconds, it must have been quite shocking to those who saw it through the Kinetoscope’s peep hole 118 years ago.

Director Alfred Clark (1873-1950) came from a prosperous middle class New York family. In 1889, at age 16, he went to work for the North American Phonograph Company, which leased the devices as office dictating machines. After the company collapsed in 1894, Clark was hired by Edison’s Kinetoscope business to make films and assist with sales. As a producer/director, he specialized in historical tableaux often with sensational content, including *The Burning of Joan of Arc*, *Indian Scalping Scene*, *A Frontier Scene* (which depicted a lynching) and tonight’s film, which is the only one of these known to survive. All were shot outdoors at Edison’s West Orange laboratory, and several (like this one) used stop-action substitution to swap out a live actor for a dummy which then suffered the promised mayhem.

Clark’s career as a filmmaker lasted less than a year. In 1896 he joined Emile Berliner’s Gramophone Company as a sales manager. Three years later, he emigrated to France as an agent for Edison and Berliner, and soon after formed the French branch of The Gramophone Company, eventually becoming the managing director in 1909 and later the company’s chairman. In Britain in 1931, Clark became the founding chairman of EMI, the legendary recording label and electronics manufacturer. There he helped shepherd early experiments in television and radar, among other innovations. Clark retired in 1946.

Robert Thomae, who plays the doomed Mary in our film, was at the time the secretary and treasurer of the Kinetoscope Company, a consortium of entrepreneurs that was among the very first companies created to exploit the brand new novelty of moving pictures.

## *L’Illusioniste fin-de-siècle*

(aka *L’Impressionniste fin-de-siècle*; aka *The Conjurer*)

## *La Danse du feu*

(aka *La Colonne de feu*; aka *Pillar of Fire*)

1899 (Star Films, France)

Directed by Georges Méliès

Two very early, very short films by Méliès that typify not only his work at the time but, in their way, much of his later shorter works. *L’Illusioniste fin-de-siècle* is essentially a remake of his 1896 film, *Escamotage d’une dame chez Robert-Houdin (The Vanishing Lady)* – little more than a representation of a trick from his stage act enhanced with carefully executed stop-action photography. In the early years, he made dozens of such films. The pure spectacle of *La Danse du feu* is evidence of both his growing success and what laid ahead for him. While also little more than an elaborate stage presentation with a little stop-action, the tinting and hand-coloring make it an eye-popping feast.

Georges Méliès (1861-1938) was the youngest of three sons in a family with a prosperous shoe manufacturing business. Sent to London for a year as a young man, he discovered the Egyptian Hall and the magic shows of the legendary conjurer John Nevil Maskelyne, whose innovation was to

perform his tricks amidst a continuous dramatic sketch. There Méliès found his life's passion. Upon returning to Paris, he took magic lessons from Émile Voisin and soon was performing at the Grévin wax museum's Cabinet Fantastique. In 1888, his father retired and gave the family business over to his sons. Georges sold his shares to his brothers and used the money to buy the famous (but now threadbare) Théâtre Robert-Houdin. He revitalized the theater, and soon achieved prominence in the thriving Parisian theater community by combining stage magic with phantasmagorical theatrical sketches laced with absurd humor, *a la* Maskelyne.

His life took another pivotal turn in 1894-95. In rooms rented directly above the Théâtre Robert-Houdin, Auguste and Louis Lumière were working on a new invention. In December 1895, Méliès was among the just 30 people who attended the public debut of their new *cinématographe*, a wondrous device that could actually project motion pictures onto a screen, and also be used as a camera. He immediately tried to buy one, but was rebuffed by the Lumières. Shortly after, he learned of the Briton Robert W. Paul's own new projector. He traveled to London and paid 1,000 francs for one. Back in Paris, in the workshop of the Robert-Houdin, he and Lucien Korsten reverse-engineered Paul's apparatus to jerry-rig a camera.

By the spring of 1896, Méliès was making and showing films as additions to the shows at the Robert-Houdin. Initially making actualities and street views, he quickly discovered the concept of stop-action, where the camera is stopped and people or objects rearranged to seemingly magical effect. (Legend has it he made the discovery thanks to a camera malfunction while filming on the Paris streets, but it is certainly not impossible that he may have seen Edison's *The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots*.)

This changed everything for Méliès, who plunged whole-heartedly into making dozens of films exploiting the idea within the first few months. He continued to experiment and in a very short span either invented or perfected nearly every special effects technique used for the next 100 years. Meanwhile, he also branched out with pioneering historical dramas, reenactments and proto-docudramas of major current events, including a multi-part series about the notorious Dreyfus case. He built a glass-house studio in the garden of his home at Montreuil, the first of its kind in the world. As his profits increased, his productions became ever more spectacular and complex. His 1902 epic *La Voyage dans la Lune* established him as one of the preeminent filmmakers in the world. By the time he ceased making films in 1913, he had produced more than 525 titles and forever changed the conception of what cinema could do.

## *La Voyage dans la Lune*

(aka *A Trip to the Moon*)

1902 (Star Films, France)

Directed by Georges Méliès

*Music:* Pink Floyd, "Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun," *Live at Pompeii* (1972)

The grand-daddy of all special effects extravaganzas, this was the first true international hit of the cinema, often playing for weeks at a time when most films were shown for a day or two and then forgotten. Released more than a year before the Wright brothers flew at Kitty Hawk, Méliès' most famous film is not only the first science fiction epic it is a landmark in the development of cinema; indeed, it was the first movie to be designated a UNESCO World Heritage cultural artifact. Yet later in life, Méliès said this was not his personal favorite. "In brief, it was considered my masterpiece – I don't agree with that," he wrote.

Produced over four months for the then-staggering sum of 10,000 francs, no one before had achieved such a scale or used so many new, inventive tricks to create a cinematic world. Besides Méliès himself, the cast was recruited from the dancers, acrobats, and music hall performers active in

the thriving Paris theater community. Méliès did all of the designs (examples of which still survive), built the models and many of the sets, and sculpted the master elements for the Selenite costumes, which were then fabricated from cardboard by a local mask-making company.

The story – told over an unprecedented 30 scenes – borrows liberally from several sources. Most famous of these is Jules Verne’s 1865 novel, *From the Earth to the Moon*, as well H.G. Wells’ *The First Men on the Moon*, first serialized in 1900-1901. Another influence was an 1876 opéra bouffe of the same title by Jacques (*Tales of Hoffmann*) Offenbach which had very successful premiere at Théâtre de la Gaîté in Paris and was revived in later years both in Paris and New York City. Recent scholarship indicates another important influence, though more by reputation, was a spectacular theatrical “cyclorama” that debuted at the 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, NY. Called “A Trip to the Moon” and bearing a number of striking similarities to Méliès’ film, it was the sensation of the fair. In the summer of 1902, it was remounted at Steeplechase Park where some 850,000 paid to experience it. Finally, in 1903 it was moved to Coney Island, giving birth to the legendary Luna Park.

Hundreds of copies of *La Voyage dans la Lune* were sold worldwide, but in America most were bootleg dupes made by Siegmund Lubin, Edison, and others – an enormous financial loss for Méliès. This prompted him to send his older brother Gaston to the US, where a company branch was founded to defend the Star Films copyrights and do their own distribution. For decades, most of the only Méliès films known to survive were those submitted as paper prints to the US copyright office.

## *Jack and the Beanstalk*

1902 (Edison Manufacturing Company, USA)

Directed by Edwin S. Porter, assisted by Arthur S. White. Scenic design by George S. Fleming. With Thomas White as Jack.

*Music:* Various selections by John Phillip Sousa, conducted by the composer

*From the Edison Films catalog, Sept. 1902:* A grand spectacular performance in nine scenes and one tableau, illustrating the most popular fairy story ever written.... From this very simple and popular fairy tale we have produced a most pleasing, interesting and mirth producing play in motion pictures, introducing therein many surprising new tricks and dissolving effects. The subject was carefully studied, and every scene posed with a view to following as closely as possible the accepted version of Jack and the Beanstalk. We have, for the purpose of producing comedy (which in reality is the life of any animated picture play), in some instances departed slightly from the story, in that we have burlesqued a few of the features; as, for instance, where the butcher trades the hatful of beans with Jack for his mother’s cow, we have introduced a burlesque animal made up of two men covered over with the head, horns and hide of a cow. This animal goes through many ludicrous antics....Note – In this beautiful production, in changing from one scene to the other, transformations are made by beautiful dissolving and fading effects. There are no sudden jumps whatever, and the entire effect is at once pleasing, gratifying and comprehensive, and the audience finds itself following with ease the thread of this most wonderful of all fairy tales.

“From laboratory examination of some of the story films of the French pioneer director, Melies – trick pictures like *A Trip to the Moon* – I came to the conclusion that a picture telling a story might draw the customers back to the theatres, and set to work in this direction.”

– Edwin S. Porter, quoted in Ezra Goodman, “Turn Back the Clock: Reminiscences of Edwin S. Porter, or the History of the Motion Picture,” *New York Times*, Jan. 2, 1940.

While all too easily dismissed as a trifling Méliès knock-off, *Jack and the Beanstalk* was a minor landmark in American film production. It achieves a grandeur and narrative editing complexity little

known in this country at the time, and puts Porter on the path to his landmark achievement, *The Great Train Robbery* (1903).

Filmed over six weeks at a princely cost of \$1,000, it ran twice as long as any other US film of the time. Porter later recalled that “It was a matter of great difficulty, and required great artistic skill to arrange all the different scenes, pose the various subjects and take the views successfully.” In addition to some rather impressive sets and stagecraft, camera effects like superimposition and stop-action are used to a degree Porter rarely if ever repeated. Edison positioned the film as a major release, offering tinted copies for a premium, and encouraging exhibitors to use the catalog’s detailed scene-by-scene description as the basis for live narration.

*Jack and the Beanstalk*, with its nearly unprecedented budget, was also at the center of Edison’s ongoing battles with plagiarism by pirates, like Siegmund Lubin in Philadelphia, who plied a considerable trade selling low-quality bootleg dupes that undercut Edison’s rates. Although orders for the film poured in, delivery was postponed while Edison’s lawyers sought an injunction against Lubin. However, copyright protection for motion pictures in the US was still murky at best, and the judge declined. *Jack* finally shipped in mid-July and, indeed, it was pirated.

Edwin S. Porter (1870-1941) started in the film business at the dawn of cinema, working as a projectionist as early as 1896 both as a touring exhibitor and at the famous Eden Musée theater. In 1900 he went to work for Edison where, working with George S. Fleming and others, he advanced from cameraman to become one of the key directors of the era. He left Edison in 1909 to start his own production company, later merging with Adolph Zukor’s Famous Players in 1912. Seeing lackluster success, just three years later he sold his shares and abandoned directing, investing in the Precision Machine Corporation, producers of the Simplex projector, eventually becoming its president. After losing his fortune in the great crash of 1929, he lived out the rest of his life in largely forgotten.

## *Aladin ou la lampe merveilleuse*

(aka *Aladdin and his Magic Lamp*; aka *Aladdin and His Wonder Lamp*)

1906 (Pathé Frères, France)

Directed by Albert Capellani. Photographed by Segundo de Chomón. Production design by Hugues

Laurent. Produced by Ferdinand Zecca. With Georges Vinter as Aladdin.

*Music:* Excerpts from Taqsim and Makam compositions by Dimitrie Cantemir

The tale of Aladdin presented in classic *féerie* style, with lavish sets and costumes, and a cast of dozens.

Albert Capellani (1874-1931) was a major director for Pathé, which was the largest film company of its day, pioneering the industrialization of cinema around the world. He studied drama at the Paris Conservatory and began his career in the city’s legendary theaters, first as an actor then as a stage manager and administrator. In 1905 he was hired on at Pathé by Ferdinand Zecca. There Capellani directed almost everything imaginable: literary adaptations, historical and biblical films, melodramas, comedies, and occasional fairy tales like this one. His films epitomized the world-famous Pathé style and high production values, with a particular adeptness at staging in depth (as opposed to the flat proscenium compositions common at the time) and a variety of editing techniques. In 1908 Charles Pathé appointed him artistic director of a new subsidiary company, where he supervised numerous prominent directors, advised on scripts, and recruited theater stars to act in their films. Significant films made during this period include *Les Misérable* (1912), a nearly three-hour epic that received worldwide acclaim. When French film production came to a halt due to World War I, Capellani came to America where he worked as a director and artistic among a small community of French filmmakers and, later, with a variety of companies. He returned to France in 1923, continuing to work despite failing health until his death in 1931.

## *Les Quatre cents farces du Diable*

(*The Merry Frolics of Satan*)

1906 (Star Films, France) Tinted

Directed by Georges Méliès

*Music:* Hal Russell NRG Ensemble, “Hal on Earth” and “Calling All Mothers,” *Hal on Earth* (self-released cassette, 1989; Abduction CD, 1995)

The engineer William Crackford and his assistant visit the wondrous laboratory of a mysterious Alchemist. The Alchemist prepares for them magic “bombs” that instantly create whatever the thrower wants. They offer to pay the Wizard cash, but he waves it away. Instead he has them sign a contract, and off they go with their new toys. But alas — the Alchemist is actually Satan in disguise! The Evil One conjures malevolent imps and all Hell breaks loose as they pursue the hapless fools and drag them to their inevitable (and eternal) doom.

In 1905, the Châtelet theater in Paris commissioned Méliès to film the flying demon-horse sequence for use in their new stage production, *The Merry Deeds of Satan* by Victor Darlay and Victor de Cottens, itself a reworking of the old 1839 favorite, *The Devil’s Pills*. When the show closed in 1906, Méliès shot new scenes to fill out the story, diverging from the Châtelet version but preserving key elements from the older one, and released this riotous masterpiece.

Méliès was extraordinarily prolific between 1904 and 1906, producing literally hundreds of films. These ranged from one-joke skits lasting a minute or two, to 20 minute epics like *The Palace of the Arabian Nights* (*Le Palais des Mille et une Nuits*, 1905). This incredible body of work allowed Méliès to hone his craft, and the result is readily evident here.

## *Le Spectre Rouge*

(aka *El Espectro Rojo*; aka *The Red Spectre*)

1907 (Pathé Frères, France) Tinted

Directed by Segundo de Chomón. Produced by Ferdinand Zecca.

*Music:* added electronic soundtrack by artist unknown

In a hellish cavern, a devilish sorcerer performs amazing acts of magic.

To the extent he is remembered at all, Segundo de Chomón (1879-1946) is usually pigeon-holed as “the Spanish Méliès.” But not only were his trick films sometimes more advanced (and certainly less stage-bound) than the French master’s, he also made important early actualities and dramas, and is deserving of a full revival and greater scholarly attention, particularly in English.

Chomón entered the film business in Barcelona in 1901, working for Spanish film pioneer Albert Marro. Between 1902 and 1905 he ran a Spanish branch of Pathé Frères, distributing their films, doing tinting and hand-coloring, and also producing actualities, fiction films, and his first trick films. Chomón and his family moved to Paris in 1905, where Pathé put him in charge of trick films and special effects, producing some of the best such work of the time including *The Electric Hotel* (1908), *Bob’s Electric Hotel* (1909), *Voyage to Jupiter* (1909). He left Pathé in 1910, returning to Spain to start a short-lived (but prolific) production company and perfect an advanced coloring system. He then moved to Turin, Italy in 1912, working as director of photography and effects artist on such notable films as *Cabiria* (1914). He continued to work along these lines for the rest of his life. One of the last productions he worked on was Abel Gance’s masterpiece, *Napoleon* (1927).

## *Princess Nicotine; or, The Smoke Fairy*

1909 (Vitagraph Company, USA)

Directed by J. Stuart Blackton. Photographed by Tony Gaudio. With Paul Panzer and Gladys Hulette.

*Music:* Tex Williams, "Smoke! Smoke! Smoke!" (1947) and Billy Briggs, "Chew Tobacco Rag" (1951)

A delightful comic fantasy in which a man dreams of a pair of fairies playing pranks with his tobacco stash. Trick effects include stop-motion animation, mattes and superimposition, and the clever use of oversized sets.

James Stuart Blackton (1875-1941) is best remembered for his pioneering animated and trick films, but he was a seminal figure in the American film industry and his legacy was more wide-ranging. He was born in England and immigrated to the US with his family as a child. In 1894, at age 19, he met fellow British expats Albert E. Smith and Ronald Reader and formed a magic act. Blackton's specialty was chalk talks and lightning sketches, a skill he used to get occasional assignments from the *New York Evening World*. In 1896, the paper assigned him to interview and draw sketches of Thomas Edison and his new movie projector, the Vitascope. Edison was impressed enough with his drawing skills that he shot and released a film of him doing "lightning sketches." Blackton bought a projector, Smith reverse engineered a camera, and the pair founded the American Vitagraph Company that same year. Their film business took off, and the magic act was set aside.

As Vitagraph's primary director, Blackton made all kinds of films – actualities, westerns, comedy series, and numerous stage adaptations. His 1906 *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces* is generally considered to be the first animated film ever made. He made more of these plus a number of notable trick films, including *The Haunted Hotel* (1907). *Princess Nicotine* was the last trick film he made. In 1911, he co-founded and edited the first movie fan magazine, *Motion Picture Story Magazine*. Blackton left Vitagraph in 1917 to be an independent producer. Among his productions was the first British color feature, *The Glorious Adventure* (1922). He briefly returned to Vitagraph until it was acquired by Warner Brothers. Like so many, he lost his fortune in the 1929 stock market crash, but continued to make occasional films until his death.

## *The Airship Destroyer*

(aka *Battle in the Clouds*; aka *The Aerial Torpedo*; aka *Possibilities of War in the Air*)

1909 (Charles Urban Trading Company, Britain)

Directed by Walter R. Booth. Photographed by F. Harold Bastick.

*Music:* Richard Wagner, "The Ride of the Valkyries" and "Magic Fire Music" from *Die Walkure*

A fleet of airships armed with devices for dropping bombs is launched and attacks an unsuspecting London. As the aerial invaders wreak terrible havoc on the innocent citizens, defenders fight back with special armored cars and biplanes, to no effect. An inventor saves the day with an experimental radio-controlled missile, but the city is devastated.

Inspired by H.G. Wells' prophetic novel *The War in the Air* (first serialized the year before), *The Airship Destroyer* was among the very first films to depict aircraft as a weapon of war, and even imagined a primitive type of drone. Using an impressive array of effects, staging, editing techniques and realistic scenes of destruction, this early science fiction thriller was successful enough to inspire several "sequels." In 1910 Booth made *The Aerial Submarine*, in which stateless pirates use a combination airship-submarine to sink and then loot ships carrying gold bullion. Booth's third and final film along these lines, *The Aerial Anarchists* (1911), recycled the same idea only with crazed

radicals laying waste to military targets, railroads, and St. Paul's Cathedral. There were imitations by others as well, including *The Pirates of 1920* (1911) released by Lion's Head Films in Britain, and D.W. Griffith's *The Flying Torpedo* (1913) in the USA.

*The Airship Destroyer* was rereleased in January 1915 as *The Aerial Torpedo*, amidst growing fears of aerial attacks by German Zeppelins. (The fears were borne out: that same month two towns suffered that very fate, and by May London itself was the target of airborne bombing raids.) Also rereleased that year was *The Aerial Submarine*.

Walter Booth was a magician working for John Maskelyne and David Devant's company at the Egyptian Hall in London, where he first saw films made by British pioneer Robert W. Paul. By the end of the 1800s, Booth was working for Paul designing and directing countless magic and trick films. More famous examples include *The Human Flies* (1899), which used an upside-down camera to make its performers look like they were dancing on the ceiling; *Hindoo Jugglers* and *Chinese Magic* (both 1900), which were based on stage conjuring tricks; and early experiments in animation like *The Devil in the Studio* (1901) and *Political Favourites* (1903). Probably his most famous film for Paul was *The 'P' Motorist* (1906), in which an exceptionally reckless automobile driver manages to wind up in outer space, driving on the rings of Saturn.

In 1906 Booth was hired away by Charles Urban. Almost immediately he made what is considered the first animated cartoon in Britain, *The Hand of the Artist* (1906). He also built an outdoor studio in the back garden of London's Neville Lodge, and there he made some 15 films a year until 1915, when he left Urban to make advertising films.

Producer Charles Urban was a German-American raised in Cincinnati, Ohio who moved to London where he became the most significant figure in the early British film industry. By 1897 he was manager of the London office of Maguire and Baucus, which distributed films by Edison and the Lumière brothers. The following year, Urban renamed the business the Warwick Trading Company (after the street it was on) and within a few years built it into one of the top distributors in the country, with licenses for films by Méliès, G.A. Smith, James Williamson, Edison, and others. In 1903, Urban broke away and started the Charles Urban Trading Company, where he maintained his reputation for quality, an emphasis on scientific and current events documentaries, and the use of new technologies like Kinemacolor, the most successful color process of the time. He remained an important figure through World War I, after which he sought to reestablish himself in America by starting a new company there. By the early 1920s his business empire had collapsed.

## *À la conquête du pôle*

(*Conquest of the Pole*)

1912 (Pathé Frères, France)

Produced and directed by Georges Méliès

*Music:* Excerpts from *The Residents, Eskimo* (1979), special remix by Scott Colburn

The greatest scholars of the world meet at Le Club Aeronautique to discuss how they might reach the North Pole. Professor Maboul ("Crazy") presents a solution: his griffin-headed "Aero-bus." Various competitors attempt to get there first, but their inferior machines all meet an ignominious end. Despite their own close calls, Maboul and his colleagues successfully reach the Pole, only to encounter the ferocious, man-eating Giant of the Snows (a full-sized mechanical wonder that required a crew of 12 to operate). Defeating the beast, they meet their match with the very magnetic pole itself. Thankfully, an airship happens along to rescue the explorers, who return to a hero's welcome.



One of the very last films Méliès made (only four more followed), and in many ways the epitome of his great adventure epics, it also heralded the end of the classic trick film era. Originally 20 minutes long, a shorter version is presented here.

As usual, Méliès drew inspiration from various places. The polar explorations of Peary, Amundsen, and Scott were in the news; and aspects of Jules Verne's *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras* (1897) are also apparent. A more direct inspiration was probably a 1903 film by Robert Paul, *Voyage to the Arctic*, which even featured a giant living at the Pole.

In late 1911, his fortunes failing, Méliès had made a distribution deal with Pathé. But declining sales and, especially, heavy interference and drastic edits of his work by the studio finally led Georges to retire from filmmaking in 1913. Pathé began foreclosure proceedings. He continued to show his films at the Robert-Houdin until the outbreak of WWI in 1914; later the French military seized most of his prints, which were melted down for their silver content. Following the war, the long-delayed foreclosure was completed, the Robert-Houdin was demolished to make way for a new street, and his beloved second wife died. In despair, he burned the few remaining prints he had, and resigned himself to a life of impoverished obscurity as proprietor of a small shop in the Paris train station. Late in his life, Méliès and his films were rediscovered and hailed by a new generation. He was given a special pension, enabling him to end his days in relative comfort.

## Sources and Suggested Reading

Erik Barnouw, *The Magician and the Cinema* (Oxford University Press, 1981) – A slim but important volume exploring the role of stage magicians as crucial pioneers in the early evolution of cinema. The author was then the chief film archivist for the Library of Congress. Profusely illustrated, with bibliography.

Jack Zipes, *The Enchanted Screen: The Unknown History of Fairy-Tale Films* (Routledge, 2010) – A wide ranging book, covering early cinema through the present day, with background about the oral and literary origins of the fairy tale. The author is a respected authority on children's literature.

Frederick A. Talbot, *Moving Pictures: How They Are Made and Worked* (J.B. Lippincott Co, 1912) – This very early book on film production history and techniques includes several chapters devoted to trick films and the special effects techniques used to create them. Available for free online in various formats at <http://archive.org/details/cu31924030699445>

Matthew Solomon ed., *Fantastic Voyages of the Cinematic Imagination: Georges Méliès's Trip to the Moon* (SUNY Press, 2011) with DVD – Excellent anthology of leading scholars providing a detailed examination of the landmark film by Méliès, its roots in theater, and the impact it had on cinema. The DVD includes two versions of the film (plus commentary), one accompanied by a new recording of an original 1903 score (which we believe to be otherwise unavailable).

John Frazer, *Artificially Arranged Scenes* (G.K. Hall & Co., 1979) – Invaluable. Hands-down the best English-language book about Méliès and his films. Sadly, it's also quite rare. Includes extensive biographical information, a history of Star Films, and an exhaustive filmography with detailed descriptions and production notes about all Méliès films known to survive at the time of publication. Illustrated throughout.

David Robinson, *Georges Méliès: Father of Film Fantasy* (BFI/Museum of the Moving Image, 1993) – An extremely thin but well written and researched book published as a companion to a Méliès retrospective by the British Film Institute.

Paul Hammond, *Marvelous Méliès* (St. Martin's Press, 1975) – Thin but very worthwhile, albeit organized in rather scattershot fashion. Profusely illustrated throughout, and includes a non-annotated filmography with survival status (ca. 1975). A fine though now-dated book.

- Maurice Bessy and Lo Duca, *Georges Méliès, Mage* (Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1961; orig. Prisma Editions, 1945 in an edition of 2,000) – Alas, only ever published en Français and also fairly rare, but the first extensive biography and a true treasure trove of rare illustrations, including original production sketches. Also includes extensive excerpts from *Mes Memoires* by Méliès.
- John Brosnan, *Movie Magic: The Story of Special Effects in the Cinema* (Plume: rev. pb. ed. 1977, orig. 1974) – A fine introduction to and survey of the lost era of “analog” special effects, from the silent era through *Star Wars*.
- Richard Abel, *The Ciné Goes to Town: French Cinema 1896-1914* (Univ. of California Press, rev. pb. ed. 1998; orig. 1994) – An essential and richly detailed history by a top film historian, based on original archival research, covering the entire scope of French cinema during the period.
- Richard Abel ed., *Encyclopedia of Early Film* (Routledge, 2005 & 2010) – An outstanding and seemingly inexhaustible resource covering people, companies, technologies, genres, and more up through the mid-1910s.
- Stephen Herbert & Luke McKernan eds., *Who's Who of Victorian Cinema* (British Film Institute, 1996) – A slim but essential volume covering the period up to 1901, with excellent scholarship and only partly supplanted by the above *Encyclopedia*. Now out of print and quite rare, its contents can be found for free online at <http://www.victorian-cinema.net/>

## Home Video

- A Trip to the Moon* (Flicker Alley, 2011) Blu-Ray/DVD dual-pack, with booklet – Beautiful restoration of the only surviving hand-colored print of the film, plus a restored B/W version, two additional moon-related shorts, and a new feature-length Méliès documentary produced by Lobster Films.
- Georges Méliès: First Wizard of Cinema (1896–1913)* (Flicker Alley, 2008) 5-DVD box set, with booklet – The gold standard home video collection of Méliès, with 173 films (most of the ones known to survive, including his very first) on five discs, plus an illustrated booklet with excellent notes by John Frazer.
- Georges Méliès Encore: New Discoveries 1896-1911* (Flicker Alley, 2010) – An additional 26 films found and/or made available since the release of the 5-disc set above. Also includes two films by Segundo de Chomón which had commonly been misidentified as being made by Méliès.
- Segundo de Chomón 1903-1912: El Cine de la Fantasía* (Cameo Media / Filmoteca de Catalunya, 2010) Region 2/PAL DVD with multilingual booklet – The only DVD anthology of de Chomón's films not only requires an all-region player but is increasingly hard to find. But it gathers 31 rare titles including trick films, actualities, and dramas. The booklet's English translation is poor but serviceable enough, and remains one of the few detailed profiles of Chomón available in English.
- R.W. Paul: The Collected Films 1895-1908* (BFI, 2006) Region 2/PAL DVD with booklet – Excellent collection of 62 pioneering short films, including several co-produced with W.R. Booth.
- Emile Cohl*, DVD 1 of *Gaumont Treasures Vol. 2* (Kino, 2011) part of a 3-DVD set – Very good selection of short films made 1908-1910 by the early master of animation and trick films. If you can find it, a much more extensive 2-disc collection was released in France by Gaumont in 2008, *Emile Cohl: L'Agitateur aux mille images*.
- The Cameraman's Revenge and Other Fantastic Tales* (Image Entertainment, 2005) DVD – Collection of essential films by the great stop-motion animation pioneer, Ladislav Starewicz.