Speech at the People’s Theatre

Vittorio Emanuele Orlando

If Mr. Ludovico Ariosto could come back to see things down here on earth, even for just a little while, Oh! How his keen eyes would be filled with wonder! Because those fanciful imaginings of his—which Cardinal Este originally called ‘foolish nonsense’ and later came to describe with greater respect as ‘lovely fantasies’—those fanciful imaginings, those dreams, are now reality. The monstrous and gigantic Orc, who swiftly dives to the depths of the sea, swallowing up knights and ladies in the ample recesses of his belly, has now become the submarine, this new and terrifying mechanical sea creature that itself contains men of great daring who are ready to kill or to be killed. And that enchanted Brigliadoro—the steed who breathed flames from his nostrils and who, in running, competed with the winds—what is to become of him when faced with the 120-horsepower engine of an automobile hurling through space like a flash of lightning? And Ruggero and Astolfo, who flew through the sky on the back of the hippogriff—that large and bizarre bird—how confused and surprised would they be to find themselves surrounded on all sides—near and far, above and below—by monoplanes and biplanes of every make, every kind, every size? And when the good fairy Melissa, in the chamber where the spirit and the bones of Merlin the Magician were resting, made an endless series of shadows and shapes parade past the astonished stares of Bradamante at the command of her magical incantation, was the good fairy not perhaps making some timid experiments in cinema for the distant future?

Truly, this epoch of ours is the epoch of wonders: wonders that are accomplished not through mysterious enchantments or through supernatural or occult powers, but through natural forces developed, regulated, and governed by the human genius. And every day, they follow one right after the other, they press on, they crowd in all around us in such a way that our wonder remains subdued in a certain sense: nothing seems wondrous to us anymore because we have seen too many wonders, and we live in them, and we are used to them. As a result, for our generation, which has seen men fly, underwater navigation, the turbine engine, the type-setting machine, the telephone and the phonograph, the spreading of ideas across the continents and the oceans by means of electrical waves, I mean, for our generation, the cinema—this new miracle which seems to stem from the mysterious craft of a necromancer—has come harmonically, almost spontaneously, to
take its place among the totality of the triumphs that contemporary human genius has raised up to its own glory throughout the ages.

But, nonetheless, the cinema perhaps holds a special kind of record over other similar inventions: that of quickness. It has been quick not only in its development and improvements, but also, and above all, in its diffusion. Printing had to struggle for nearly a century to attain primacy over copying by hand. It took nearly a half century for the steam engine to overtake the sail. In about fifteen years, though, the cinema has come into use everywhere—widely, triumphantly, and definitively. And it could well proclaim, with pride, to have conquered the world; seeing as how it has on its own so much power of propaganda, so much power of expansion, that it doesn’t just give life to hundreds of spectacles every day in large cities, but it has succeeded in penetrating into countries that are the most obstinate and most closed off from our civilization (like China) and into the most removed and remote villages, where not even the most feral pack of canines has ever dared to push itself into barking out Il trovatore (The Troubadour), nor has even the most ravenous herd of amateur actors to dared to burst out I due sergenti (The Two Sergeants).

I will not elaborate on statistics regarding the movement of capital—which the cinema companies have calculated and is numbered in the billions of lire—nor those regarding the collaboration of work, for which film productions require thousands of minds and tens of thousands of hands. I don’t even want to highlight or celebrate the new triumph of public finance in this theatre of the poor, which, although it only requires a few dozen cents, can nevertheless compete in its salaries with the most aristocratic [opera houses, such as] La Scala, the Opéra de Paris, and the Metropolitan—and can even beat them if it is true that a lucky mortal, an artist for the motion pictures, can have a guaranteed check for a half a million each year. But another phenomenon does merit particular discussion here, a phenomenon which, of those previously discussed, is less reducible to statistics, but which will nevertheless make a rather deeper impression: I’m referring to the impact that the invention—though still very recent—has already exercised on manners; I’m referring to the transformations through which it has shown itself capable of dominating the social psyche (in such a tremendous way).

Without a doubt, all great inventions—even when they seem to circumscribe their own effects within the realm of economics—nonetheless have effects and repercussions in the areas of psychology and morality. But naturally, this last action will be just as much, if not more immediate, wide, and profound as the new findings of human genius more directly seek out
a spirit of collectivity and use that to put themselves in communion with one another. When looking at this aspect, the analogies and connections between motion pictures and print are as deep as they are obvious; both constitute a means of stirring up feelings of every intensity and spreading knowledge of all kinds to countless multitudes. Moreover, we could add that the force that cinema exerts on the intelligence and conscience can, at least in a certain sense, be even greater than that of the book or printed materials more generally. This is equally true in regard to quantity or diffusion as quality or intensity. By extension, because not everyone knows how to read, and because not everyone who knows how to read can read all the books and all the newspapers. The cinema, however, speaks directly to everyone, and about everything. As The Poet would say, it passes through the eyes to the heart. And here is the second aspect—the second element of its strength which we said prevailed over the written word: since a suggestive power that is more rapid, penetrating, and driving emanates from the image rather than the concept expressed in the symbols of alphabetic writing. In the former, the image appears decomposed, dissected, dead. And the mind must laboriously recompose it and make it come back to life. In the latter, however, it sparkles and leaps intact, real, full of life. This is a truth fully known to all those experts in that other contemporary science and art: advertising. Keen and sharp psychologists, advertisers rely more on images than on letters—even if the characters were printed a half a metre tall—to give credence to their products. And look—a foot reaches out, shod in a miraculously shiny shoe, proclaiming the virtues of a shoe-polish; a lovely, feminine mouth, which is giving you the most loving of smiles, reveals the benefits of a tooth-powder; and a shapely woman who, like Mary Magdalene, unfurling her blond or brown tresses to gloriously billow in the wind, exalts the miracles of a hair tonic. And the advertisement will be all the more effective and majestic if from time to time those images, with the help of electric lights or the cinema, sparkle in the darkness of the night from the grand terraces or the roofs of houses like silent, luminous sentinels, or like bizarre genies guarding over the city.

It is still necessary to say something more. The efficacy of the cinema is not just greater—still in certain ways—than the efficacy of press, but also the theatre. Here is why: even when, through the power of interpretation, the dramatic action takes on a tone, a colour, a suggestion of truth, it nevertheless always remains imaginary or outside of reality, since the theatre necessarily brings with it so many conventions that cannot be reconciled with reality. However, film action, unless it purposely, and I would add, foolishly, chooses an implausible and fantastic subject, always
has in its favour the presumption of truth and of reality: it is a fragment of the world; it is a piece of lived life that happens in front of us—quick and urgent, but sure of itself, certain, inescapable.

I do not claim to delve deeply into the question of cinema’s influence on the public’s character, which is of such high ethical and social significance, or more specifically, [its influence] on the developing conscience of children, adolescents, and young people. But at the same time, the corresponding analogies with print and theatre have other consequences, which confirm those same analogies in a way that is extremely interesting for a sociologist: I’m referring to the rapid mobilization of distrust and the reaction which is already taking place against the feared harmful effects of the cinema on the soul of the people. Out of this comes the search for ways of curing these ills through prevention and repression. This happens in no greater or lesser measure than it did with regard to printing and to the theatre. Worried by the depravities and aberrations, which unfortunately are not infrequent in films, Morality and Art are already demanding that State action intervene. And not only in singular and authoritative protests of distinguished philanthropists and educators, but also in the acts of public authorities, since interventions and limitations are being worked out that will give content and form to those Institutes of policing and censorship that already exist for the press. There is an ordinance dating from 1920 by Berlin’s Chief of Police which prohibits children under the age of fourteen from entering the cinema, even if they are accompanied by an adult. I read in the newspaper that similar orders were recently adopted in Norway and Manchester. The Italian commission charged with studying the frightening increase in juvenile delinquency and with concretizing their findings into law, has already spoke out against and dedicated special directives to the dangers posed by the cinema.

The remarks that we have just made regarding the suggestive power of cinematic representation already make it clear that we are perfectly aware of the concerns that have prompted the mobilization [against cinema]. Indeed, for the purpose of our conference, it is useful to insist on that argument, starting with an anecdote so that, in illustrating our idea—and even we are doing so in a cinematic manner—real facts, images from lived life, which are more conclusive and more suggestive than any abstract reasoning, will be helpful to us.

So, Bruno Franchi recalls the case of two boys, students in a Roman school, who sneak into the house of one of their classmates by climbing through a window and steal some of his pen nibs. Caught and under questioning, they candidly admitted that they had only intended to reproduce a scene that they had seen at the cinema: only, the film dealt with grown men.
And even more recently, the press in New York was abuzz with the following story. Three boys (it would seem, my fellow Italians, that this means that the Italian is not more prone to delinquency, but is only more impressionable) had witnessed a scene of cannibalism in a film at the cinema. Upon leaving the theatre, they lie in wait at 104th Street, waiting at a passageway for some kid to come by who they will make play the part of the Catholic missionary destined to be killed, roasted, and eaten. In the meantime, they set up and light a small blaze. To his misfortune, a nine-year-old boy, Joseph Jaeger, happens to walk past. They attack him, knock him out with a stick, and drag him to the fire. Fortunately, some women came rushing over, and that sent the three little cannibals running. The unlucky victim muddles through, but is left fearful and with some burns, which are by no means slight.

And moving from this anecdote to a more general observation, one cannot deny that a simple reading of the titles of old, crummy plays of the arena (which come one after the other on the cinema advertisement posters that cover the walls of large cities) reveals to us the existence, if not even the prevalence, of repertoire about which one can't decide whether to complain more about its immorality or its bad taste. The representation of lewd and immoral scenes, of the bold and successful acts of thievery, of cruel and horrific crimes, makes us wonder rather often if the cinemas aren't schools of vice and of immorality, that is, when they don't seem to be actual public universities for delinquents. And we feel offended no less in the name of morality than good taste or the sense of art, which has been trampled and violated, too. Because those representations, even when they aren't disgusting and depraved, are quite often ineffective, absurd, clumsy, and grotesque. The same comedy, when forced to repeat itself, demonstrates a distressing emptiness: it is always the same robber, followed by the same ridiculous cops, who knock over the fruit vendor's cart, the same painter's ladder, the same basket or the same laundry of the same girl or the same washerwoman, in such a way that the fruit vendor, and the painter, and the girl, and the washerwoman are added to the useless and laughable chase [...]. And please forgive the abrupt switch from the aesthetic sensibility when I say that I rebel against the depravation of good taste even more than against the spread of immorality: a healthy conscience can react, spontaneously, against this latter violence; but against that other violence, which operates with obscenities that are supposed to make people laugh, but which are instead puerile and foolish, what defences, what protections can the innocent mind of the public—which is certainly not strengthened and trained to acquire an exquisite artistic sensibility—put in place?
So you see, gentlemen, how I understand and respect the feelings of those who seek repressive interventions against evil; but even if the consensus is full and fervent in this premise, some not-so-minor doubts grip me and leave me disconcerted when it comes to accepting those consequences. What do you want? To resort to police methods, with the proud aim of regulating the multiform manifestations of the human spirit, instinctively disgusts my liberal conscience. And let the memory of the censorship of books speak for censorship of all kinds. This censorship suppressed no idea, did not appear to effectively stand in the way of any idea, and did not achieve any other concrete result except to miserably and eternally mire itself in endless ridicule. In the world of ideas and thought, just as repression does not stifle the good, nor does it destroy the bad. The good, even when it is constricted, burns like an unquenchable flame; the bad, even when it is chained up, wriggles out of its bonds, like a slimy snake, to unwind in its coils the souls of the depraved, the weak, the inexperienced. In any case, I prefer whichever remedy is the more liberal, and therefore, more human and more worthy, means of confronting the spread of wickedness with goodness, fighting in an open war, in equal combat, with the same weapons. Let us oppose the bad book with a good book and the bad movie with a good movie.

And there she is, coming down onto the battlefield—on our side—shaking her bright shield and bouncing her formidable lance: Minerva, the young and victorious daughter of omnipotent Jupiter. Snowy Olympus, having been abandoned, is now deserted. She wants to be here among us, to show herself a worthy sister of those generous and brilliant initiatives that are radiating forth from the meritorious Unione Italiana dell’Educazione Popolare (Italian League for the Education of the Working Classes). She wants to take a conspicuous place among them, to fight a good and vigorous battle. And, to leave behind the metaphor, the institution we have founded proposes that the cinema—this wonderful daughter of the light—truly make use of the light, that is, of the good: so that for the People, for whom this institution came about and for whom it lives, it may depict great, useful, and beautiful things; so that it might elevate the soul of the People, comfort their spirit, guide their taste; in other words, so that it can be for the people the most prized and effective teacher of morality and art.

In this way, as I have said, the cinema will do good works: I will even add that it will, wherever and as much as it is possible, also do works of justice and social equality, by removing that odious privilege through which aesthetic pleasure has become for the most part a class-based pleasure. How many people attended a conference that I gave in Milan on ‘The Word and Writing’, they will perhaps remember the complaint that we raised at
the time, accusing civilization—from which, although, so much light of wisdom and of knowledge radiates—of having distanced art too much from the people, of essentially having violently broken that living and original foundational bond, which linked the people to all manifestations of beauty, the shining patrimony of not one or a few classes, but of all of humanity. And let us add that the generous efforts of those who want to lift up the lowest classes must strive precisely towards this goal: to make it so that the humble can participate in aesthetic emotions. It is from here, standing before the beauty of nature and art, that the spirit re-creates itself, individual energies are restored, and the solidarity of human sentiments is reaffirmed. Now, motion pictures make it possible for an Alpine man, who has never and probably will never leave his mountain home, to witness the grandiose spectacle of the ocean roiled by a storm, and for the fisherman—who is only slightly less attached to his shores than the oyster is to his rock—to feel for himself that overwhelming fascination which comes down from the snowy peaks of the Alps, spreads throughout the earth, and calls the determination and hearts of men back up towards the heavens. Up until now, only millionaires could grant themselves the luxury and experience the pleasure of seeing the Aurora Borealis, or the sunset on the sands of the desert, or gothic cathedrals, or Moorish palaces, cities buried in the shroud of history, and cities shaking and pulsing with the most fast-paced rhythm of modern life; well now, even the lowly worker, the son of the poor man, can at least have an idea of these phenomena and of these fantastic spectacles as they are, thanks to the little white screen. It will even give them the most genuine documentation of the visible world and of reality. Separated in this way from all of its impurities, or whatever it might have in it that is harmful or unhealthy, the cinema will be able and will know how to be a powerful mechanism—perhaps stronger than any other—in the socialization of aesthetic sensibilities: no other means, working like this one in such an immediate and communicative manner on the soul of the masses, will be able to awaken the most noble enthusiasms in them—whether it inspires admiration for the spectacles of divine nature, or glorifies the works of human genius. [The] Minerva [Institute] sees this path unfolding before it; and on this path, she wants to move forward with determined strides and persevere with every bit of her strength.

But within this complicated goal, which our Minerva [Institute] is proposing, we want to very briefly sketch out a more particular aspect, one which in an even more direct way has to do with the progress, diffusion, and purposes of education. And that allows me to pick up again, though under a different guise, that theme already mentioned before with respect
to the analogies that can be made between the cinema and specific forms of representation and the expression of ideas and deeds, like those that exist in writing and in the printing press. Everyone knows that there was a period in the history of civilization (a period which persists among some peoples), when the visual representation of thought happened not through letters that expressed sounds, but rather through images that recalled the thing or the concept that was being referred to. But perhaps not everyone knows about the proposal of a contemporary writer who is lobbying for the return to ideographic writing, which he claims has great advantages over phonetic writing: this proposal constitutes, certainly, a paradox; but, like all paradoxes, it still contains a grain of truth. And the grain of truth, in fact, lies in the greater suggestive power, that, as we have said, the image has compared to the signs of writing; in the ease with which it is immediately understood, independent of knowing how to read and being able to understand what one reads, independent even of the knowledge of the language spoken by the person who drew the images. Why then couldn’t we have, for the purpose of instruction, alongside phonetic writing, the assistance of ideographic writing in motion, which is a way that the motion pictures could be described?

In truth, the notion and the awareness of the wondrous pedagogical benefits that can be drawn from images is anything but new: books are frequently, and usefully, illustrated to one degree or another. In school, the teacher, in order to make his teaching more effective and clear, colours—in a manner of speaking—his words with diagrams, drawings, paintings on the walls. But think what sharper stimuli, what more energetic impressions cinematographic representations would have on the students, who are themselves so desirous of novelty, so eager for living and real spectacles! And with regard to this, permit me to share a brief personal memory. Dozens of times, I heard my geography teachers explain glaciers and other things that I had continued to learn about by reading this or that book. And yet, I admit that I did not have a clear and accurate idea of what a glacier was until, unfortunately at an advanced age, I was finally able to see a glacier up close with my own eyes, thanks to the Swiss organizations that allow you to arrive there comfortably on a train. If instead of hearing all of those verbal explanations I had happened to see a movie about them, I would have had an accurate, certain, and definitive idea of what a glacier was from that point onwards.

What I have said for me about glaciers, I think can and should be said for everyone and about everything. In school, in order to explain, to excite, to animate, words are not enough: you need images. And the image isn't
even enough anymore; you need the moving image. Why have so many bits of knowledge fallen out of our minds, almost like yellowed leaves that the wind has stripped off, and in blowing them all about, has carried them far away and left them scattered? Because there lacked a penetrating and clear perception; there lacked a clearly delineated image: with both of them being weak, they wavered, weakened, vanished. If you want to give a faithful and indelible description of countries and places, phenomena and events, locations and processes, and demonstrations of every branch of the arts and of the sciences; if you want all the disciplines studied in our schools, but particularly, geography, physics, natural history, agronomics, mechanics and so on, to create results that are rather more concrete and fruitful, it is necessary to resort to the live and direct reproduction of the thing and the process. It is only in this way that pieces of knowledge are transmitted more vividly to the intellect and solidly imprinted there. And can we wish that for school—or is the wish too haughty? Or is that day in a too distant future? Can we wish that, just as today each subject matter has its own textbook or textbooks, they will have one or more series of their own ‘text-films’?

For a long time, and from all over, people have been clamouring that we have to put schools in contact with life, in direct communion with reality. And from time to time, we change the rules, or more simply and comfortably adjust programs/plans when we do not prefer to nominate a...commission. And in this way, we believe and we show that we believe we have reached that goal, or at very least, that we have taken another big step towards it.

Alas! We remain in the same place as before, exactly because in spite of all the aspirations and theoretical affirmations, our schools continue to lack the means, the instruments, the vehicles that must lead it towards real, actual life. Even without continuing to the point of exaggeration or paradox, who does not see something to deplore in the excessive use of the mnemonic device, which is still favoured among the pedagogical methods of us Latins, which to this day looms over schools and their students like a dark, grey, wintry sky over a flock of sparrows who are longing for blue skies and the sun? We torture our young people with an education based on theories, maxims, definitions, and formulas that is as difficult as it is fruitless. All of the teaching is entrusted to the word and to writing: and as a consequence to memory. And yet—as Montaigne was already saying over three centuries ago—memorizing does not mean knowing.

It is not necessary to delve into the arduous and intricate paths of pedagogical metaphysics in order to perceive the full validity of the maxim that the first and mightiest impetus towards knowledge is curiosity. In the child who has been put into contact with life, this curiosity develops the spirit of
observation and reflection, intellectual qualities that are much more im-
portant than memory. And while the Anglo-Saxons owe all their wondrous
effectiveness to their educational methods and to having had understood
this truth and put it into effect, our educational methods and systems
seem more suited to hog-tying and suppressing, rather than promoting,
that initial impetus towards education that nature generously provides.

And be aware: this contrast—actually, I'll say it more precisely—this
triumph of theoretical teaching over practical teaching, of mnemonic teach-
ing over experiential teaching, has consequences that are far more grave and
pernicious for the education of the working-classes than for institutions of
classical education. For the latter, once the humanistic learning has been
acknowledged, when it is recognized that it is desirable and useful to write
verses in Latin, I even understand myself how resorting to experimental
methods or practices could be rather less ideal and how, instead, one needs
to train oneself with the versions of Horace and of Virgil and to master the
rules of syntax and of prosody. Nor do I see the use of cinema as easy for
explaining Platonic philosophy. But it is not this way—I was about to say
'fortunately'—for public culture.

This is our ministry, this is our faith—we very much want people who
have the mallet and the shovel waiting for them to raise up their spirit,
to cultivate their intellect, and to refine their artistic sensibilities so that
tomorrow they can enter the grand struggle of economic production, the
enormous conflict of social interests, ready to bring a more intelligent
and personal contribution to the work they must tend to, ready to react
against the depressing nature of their surroundings with a more clear and
fervent sense of human nobility and human dignity. But, to accomplish this
very important dual goal, they have neither the time nor the capability for
laborious mnemonic training exercises. From that stems the need for visions
as beautiful and noble as what nature and art can boast, and the for notions
more wondrous and at the same time more practical than what the sciences
have produced, which can be acquired equally for the people with the most
direct and immediate means—with lesser effort and greater returns.

And there you have it, the other goal toward which our Minerva [In-
stitute] is striving: to introduce, to diffuse as widely as possible, to make
as welcome and useful as it can, the use of projections and of films in
school, especially—naturally—in the public elementary schools and in
the supplementary institutions that the League, to which we are connected,
operates and promotes. In this way, with neither vanity nor arrogance, we
can nevertheless affirm that this our modest initiative contains seeds that
could beneficially and radically renew and transform institutes, systems,
and methods of our culture. Seeds that would operate in such a way that, freed from shackles old and new, freed from everything inside that is superfluous, cumbersome, or obsolete, school will joyously come closer to life, as though it were coming to a pure spring of fresh and ceaseless energies. May propitious fates and the young Goddess of Wisdom smile on this promise of intellectual flourishing of our people!

Gentlemen, at this point, however, I want to curb the lyrical fervour of our sincere enthusiasm in order to prevent two misconceptions may easily take root in people's minds. The first, for goodness sake, is that there will be as many good educational spectacles amusing all of Italy as there are flowers popping up in the springtime, penetrating all the miserable and squalid slums, where unfortunately, a great number of our schools are located. The other is that with the definitive triumph of good cinema guaranteed, the tree of knowledge and good will, of course, lift itself up to heaven and cover men with her immense crown of leaves, just like in the Earthly Paradise, before the original sin. The men who will have the honour and the burden of running the new institute, are too much aware of reality to engaged in any delusions. And they have too active a sense of probity and responsibility to delude others. We are aware of and we have taken account of all the difficulties of similar endeavours up until now, especially at their beginnings: we know that there is a battle being waged, and that, as in all battles, there are risks, dangers, and failures awaiting us. Spurred forward by strong faith, we happily face such a battle; and in the meantime, with our best wishes, we want our Minerva [Institute], whose Baptism we recently celebrated in Rome, to receive her Confirmation in Milan. In this generous and strong Milan, where the tree has dense and expansive roots and perennially springs up all the most brilliant and progressive initiatives, which will raise up the spirits of our workers towards superior forms of life. And this your 'Theatre of the People' is a symbol and evidence of this edification. It is within such a brief time that you have learned and have been able to demonstrate that the soul of the people, through education itself, is capable of understanding great Art and that Art is truly great when it knows how to seek out and move the soul of the people.

Now, among the many manifestations of artistic Beauty, please welcome with hospitable grace the serene and shining cinema, which we intend to present to you. Although it does not claim, as I have said, to suddenly transform hearts and intellects and establish on the earth the kingdom of knowledge and goodness, it will certainly be useful in developing and in making the desire to know oneself, others, and the world more acute. Remember that generous invocation:
‘Considerate la vostra semenza: | Fatti non foste a viver come bruti | Ma per seguir virtute e conoscenza.’ (‘Bethink you of the seed whence ye have sprung; | for ye were not created to lead the life of stupid animals, | but manliness and knowledge to pursue.’)⁹

And let Democracy herself speak to the innumerable multitudes in the same words Dante’s Ulysses spoke to himself; on his path, which only has Love and Light as its borders; may they pass eternally, not as herds of beasts, but as enormous phalanxes of knowledgeable and virtuous men.


Notes

1. [Editors’ note. ‘Speech to the People’s Theatre’ was an editorial title proposed by the editors for this volume. The text and the transcription of the speech made by Orlando in the spring of 1913 at the Teatro del Popolo di Milano (The People’s Theatre of Milan) to celebrate the inauguration of the Milanese headquarters of the Istituto Nazionale Minerva (The Minerva National Institute), a society organized for the promotion of educational cinema. In the original text, the text had the following title: A Milano—Teatro del Popolo. Discorso dell’On. Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, Ex Ministro della Pubblica Istruzione e della Grazia e Giustizia (‘Milan—The People’s Theater—A Speech by Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, Former Minister of Public Education and Grace and Justice’).]

2. [Translator’s note. In the original Italian, cetaceo or any of the various aquatic, chiefly marine mammals of the order Cetacea, including the whales, dolphins, and porpoises.]

3. [Editors’ note. Brigliadoro and the other names mentioned by the author in the opening paragraph, such as Ruggero, Astolfo, Melissa, Merlino, Bradamante, are characters from the 1532 poem, Orlando furioso (The Frenzy of Orlando) by Ludovico Ariosto.]

4. [Editors’ note. Il trovatore is an 1853 opera by Giuseppe Verdi; I due sergenti is an 1823 drama by Jean-Marie-Théodore Baudouin under the pen name d’Aubigny.]

5. [Editors’ note. The idea of passing through the eyes to the heart is common in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italian love poetry. Dante’s ‘Tanto gentile’ (‘So Kind’) also refers to this idea: ‘[…] che dà per li occhi una dolcezza al core’ (‘and through her eyes a sweetness touches the heart’).]

6. [Translator’s note. The original used the term arena to refer to low-brow entertainment.]
7. [Editors’ note. The mythical image of Minerva, goddess of virtue and wisdom, metaphorically evokes the Istituto Nazionale ‘Minerva’ (Minerva National Institute).]

8. [Editors’ note. L’Unione Italiana dell’Educazione Popolare (Italian League for the Education of the Working Classes) was an association started in 1908 in Milan for the promotion of books, and then later—with the support of the Istituto Nazionale Minerva—also cinema for the popular classes.]

9. [Translator’s note. From the famous verse from the twenty-sixth canto of the Dante’s Inferno. The poet recites this verse to Ulysees, the principle protagonist of the canto. The translation is from Langdon (trans.), The Divine Comedy.]