



Georgette Méliès

Also Known As:

Mademoiselle Méliès, Madame Méliès-Fix, Georgette Fontaine

Lived:

March 22, 1888 - August 29, 1930

Worked as:

camera operator, film actress, projectionist, theatre manager

Worked In:

France

by Jacques Malthête

Georgette Méliès may be considered to be one of the first film pioneers, since she started acting in her father's films in 1896 and also became a projectionist and a camera operator, or *opératrice de prise de vues*, very early. Georgette Eugénie Jeanne Méliès was born on March 22, 1888 in Paris. Her father, Georges Méliès, had married Eugénie Génin three years before in June 1885 and Georgette was their first child. Thirteen years later, her brother, André, was born.

Only three years after Georgette's birth, her father bought the Théâtre Robert-Houdin, which he attended quite frequently. This famous theater of magic on the boulevard des Italiens in Paris was then going through difficult times. Méliès renovated it and created the first grand illusions that brought him fame. On December 27, 1895, the day before the first public screening of the Cinématographe, Antoine Lumière invited a few theater owners to discover the first animated images projected by the machine invented by his two sons. Méliès was among the guests and he was immediately charmed by the extraordinary magic lantern, whose possibilities appealed to him right away.

In May 1896, when Méliès made his first film, *Une partie de cartes*, in the yard of his family's estate in Montreuil-sous-Bois, Georgette, who was then eight years old, made her first appearance in this one-minute scene that was already carefully staged. One year later, she acted in another film, *Entre Calais et Douvres* (1897). In fact, these are the two films in which she can be seen among the 213 extant titles out of the 520 made by her father between 1896 and 1913. However, it is quite certain that she acted in at least two other films made on the coast of Normandy during the yearly closure of the Théâtre Robert-Houdin in the second half of July 1896: *Un petit diable* and *Bébé et Fillettes* (Noverre 1929, 76; G. Méliès 1961, 190; G. Méliès 2012, 68). Unfortunately,

too little information remains to be able to say more concerning her career as a child. Around 1900, Méliès made around twenty short films advertising combs, mustard, whiskey, beer, liquor, shoeshine, baby bottles, insecticide, corsets, hair lotion, hats, and chocolate, and according to his recollections in the 1930s, Georgette was then in charge of projecting these on the opaque window looking out on the boulevard des Italiens at the entresol of the Théâtre Robert-Houdin (Noverre 76; G. Méliès 1961, 190; G. Méliès 2012, 67-68; A. Méliès 1991, 41).

After the duping of *Voyage dans la Lune* (1902) in the United States in the fall of 1902, Méliès sent his brother Gaston to New York to open a new branch in March 1903. At the end of 1902, however, Georges started to shoot with two negative films and two cameras simultaneously, which were then put together mechanically and activated by one operator. The first two cameras required two operators, one of whom was Georgette Méliès, who first worked with Lucien Tainguy, followed by Lucien Bardou after Tainguy left for the United States. Of the two negative prints, one was subsequently sent to the American market, while the other was used to print copies for Europe. This system allowed the company to pay less custom taxes when entering the United States, since the positive prints were produced in New York, while also enabling them to deposit each new film at the Library of Congress in Washington and thus protect Méliès's rights (Noverre 71-72; G. Méliès 1961, 177, 210; G. Méliès 2012, 40, 96; A. Méliès 1990, 20-21).

Nevertheless, this period still remains quite obscure. Théophile Michault, who was operating the unique camera in Montreuil, continued to do so even when the films were shot simultaneously with two cameras. Lucien Tainguy then replaced him in 1904. However, the remaining documents do not mention Georgette Méliès as a camera operator before Tainguy (Noverre 76; G. Méliès 1961, 190; G. Méliès 2012, 68). In other words, it remains unclear who was working alongside Michault and operating the second camera between the end of 1902 and 1904, when the two cameras were replaced by the double camera, which only required one operator. Furthermore, it is difficult to determine whether Georgette worked in the second studio built in the winter of 1908, after the first studio was created in the spring of 1897 at the estate in Montreuil. Just as it is hazardous to enumerate the exact number of titles in which she acted, it is impossible to give a more accurate estimation of the number of films for which she operated the camera.

Eventually, her brother recalls that Georgette operated one of the two Pathé cameras, most likely when Méliès shot the last six films financed by Pathé in 1911-1913: *Les Hallucinations du baron de Münchhausen* (1911), *Le Vitrail diabolique* (1911), *À la conquête du Pôle* (1911-12), *Cendrillon ou la Pantoufle merveilleuse* (1912), *Le Chevalier des Neiges* (1912), and *Le Voyage de la famille Bourrichon* (1912-13) (A. Méliès 1990, 21). Upon the death of her mother, Eugénie Génin, who had conducted many of her husband's affairs, in 1913, Georgette took over the management of the Théâtre Robert-Houdin. Before the Great War, Méliès transformed his second studio into a local cinema-theater and then, in October 1917, after a few additions, the "Salle Méliès" became the théâtre des Variétés artistiques. Until the beginning of the 1920s, the Méliès family organized operettas, comic operas, dramas, and comedies there. Georgette then displayed her skills as a manager, piano player, and especially as a soprano singer, while she also organized shows at the

military hospital “number six” where she volunteered as a nurse. For her extreme devotion, she received six distinctions, such as the medal for Reconnaissance nationale. After the estate in Montreuil and the théâtre des Variétés artistiques were sold in 1922, Georgette pursued her career as an artist with her husband, Amand Fontaine, also known as Pierre Armand Fix, who was a baritone singer. During their tour in Algeria, Georgette became ill and upon her return to France, she died at the hospital of Coubevoie on August 29, 1930, at the age of forty-two. Her daughter, Madeleine, was then seven years old.

Translated by Aurore Spiers

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Noverre, Maurice. “L'œuvre de Georges Méliès.” *Le Nouvel Art cinématographique* 2:4 (October 1929): 56-76.

Archival Paper Collections:

Fonds Georges Méliès. [Bibliothèque du Film, Cinémathèque Française](#).

Fonds Merritt Crawford. [Museum of Modern Art, Film Study Center](#).

Fonds Méliès (includes programs and posters from the théâtre des Variétés artistiques). [Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée](#).

Filmography

A. Archival Filmography: Extant Film Titles:

1. Georgette Méliès as Actress

Une partie de cartes/Playing Cards. Dir./prod.: Georges Méliès (Star Film Paris 1896) cas.: Georges Méliès, Georgette Méliès, 35mm, 65.6 ft. Archive: [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#), [Academy Film Archive \[USF\]](#), [Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée \[FRB\]](#).

Entre Calais et Douvres/Between Dover and Calais. Dir./prod.: Georges Méliès (Star Film Paris 1897) cas.: Georges Méliès, Georgette Méliès, si, b&w, 35mm, 65.6 ft. Archive: [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#), [Academy Film Archive \[USF\]](#).

2. Georgette Méliès as Camera Operator [unconfirmed]

Les Hallucinations du baron de Münchhausen/Baron Munchausen's Dream. Dir.: Georges Méliès (Star Film/Pathé Paris 1911) si, b&w, 35mm, 16mm, 771 ft. Archive: [Cinemateca Romana \[ROB\]](#), [Deutsches Filminstitut \[DEW\]](#), [Cinemateca de Cuba \[CUH\]](#), [Cinemateca do Museu de Arte Moderna \[BRR\]](#), [Svenska Filminstitutet \[SES\]](#), [Cineteca del Friuli \[ITG\]](#), [Hungarian National Film Archive \[HUB\]](#), [Gaumont Pathé Archives \[FRS\]](#), [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#), [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#), [Deutsche Kinemathek \[DEK\]](#), [Cinémathèque Québécoise \[CAQ\]](#), [Lobster Films \[FRL\]](#), [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [National Film and Sound Archive of Australia \[AUC\]](#), [Museo Nazionale del Cinema \[ITT\]](#), [Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée \[FRB\]](#), [Fundación Cinemateca Argentina \[ARF\]](#).

Le Vitrail diabolique. Dir.: Georges Méliès (Star Film/Pathé Paris 1911) cas.: Georges Méliès, si, b&w, 35mm, 640 ft. Archive: [Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée \[FRB\]](#), [Academy Film Archive \[USF\]](#).

À la conquête du Pôle/Conquest of the Pole. Dir.: Georges Méliès (Star Film/Pathé Paris 1911-12) cas.: Georges Méliès, André Méliès, 16mm, 35mm, 2132.5 ft. Archive: [Cinémathèque Française \[FRC\]](#), [Cinemateca de Cuba \[CUH\]](#), [Cinemateca do Museu de Arte Moderna \[BRR\]](#), [Cineteca del Friuli \[ITG\]](#), [Münchner Stadtmuseum \[DEI\]](#), [Filmoteca Española \[ESM\]](#), [Fundación Cinemateca Argentina \[ARF\]](#), [Hungarian National Film Archive \[HUB\]](#), [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#), [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#), [Norwegian Film Institute \[NOO\]](#), [Österreichisches Filmmuseum \[ATM\]](#), [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#), [Cineteca Nazionale \[ITN\]](#), [Filmarchiv Austria \[ATF\]](#), [The New Zealand](#)

[Archive of Film \[NZW\]](#), [Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée \[FRB\]](#), [Deutsches Filminstitut \[DEW\]](#), [Harvard Film Archive \[USI\]](#), [UC Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive \[USB\]](#), [Academy Film Archive \[USF\]](#), [National Film and Sound Archive of Australia \[AUC\]](#), [Cinémathèque Québécoise \[CAQ\]](#), [Jugoslovenska Kinoteka \[YUB\]](#), [Lobster Films \[FRL\]](#), [Fondazione Cineteca Italiana \[ITC\]](#).

Cendrillon ou la pantoufle merveilleuse/Cinderella. Dir.: Georges Méliès (Star Film/Pathé Paris 1912) cas.: Marthe Lagrange, Louise Lagrange. si, b&w, 35mm, 16mm, 2017.7 ft.

Archive: [Cinemateca do Museu de Arte Moderna \[BRR\]](#), [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#), [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#), [Library and Archives Canada \[CAO\]](#), [Svenska Filminstitutet \[SES\]](#), [Academy Film Archive \[USF\]](#).

Le Chevalier des Neiges. Dir.: Georges Méliès (Star Film/Pathé Paris 1912) cas.: Georges Méliès, si, b&w, 16mm, 1312.3 ft. Archive: [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#).

Le Voyage de la famille Bourrichon. Dir.: Georges Méliès et "Manuel" (Star Film/Pathé Paris 1912-13) si, b&w, 1328.7 ft. Archive: [Lobster Films \[FRL\]](#), [Academy Film Archive \[USF\]](#).

B. Filmography: Non-Extant Film Titles:

1. Georgette Méliès as Actress

Un petit diable/A Little Rascal, 1896; *Bébé et Fillettes/Young Girls*, 1896.

C. DVD Sources:

Georges Méliès. DVD. (Fechner Production, StudioCanal Paris, 2007) - includes *Une partie de cartes*, *À la conquête du Pôle*, and *Cendrillon ou la pantoufle merveilleuse*

Georges Méliès. *À la conquête du cinématographe*. DVD. (Fechner Productions, La Cinémathèque française, StudioCanal, Paris, 2011)- includes *Une partie de cartes*, *À la conquête du Pôle*, and *Cendrillon ou la pantoufle merveilleuse*

Georges Méliès, *First Wizard of Cinema (1896-1913)*. DVD. (Flicker Alley, US, 2008) - includes *Une partie de cartes*, *Entre Calais et Douvres*, *Les Hallucinations du baron de Münchhausen*, *À la conquête du Pôle*, *Cendrillon ou la pantoufle merveilleuse*, *Le Chevalier des Neiges*, and *Le Voyage de la famille Bourrichon*

Georges Méliès. *Encore (1896- 1911)*. DVD. (Flicker Alley, US, 2010) - includes *Le Vitrail diabolique*

D. Streamed Media:

Les Hallucinations du baron de Münchhausen/Baron Munchausen's Dream (1911)

Le Vitrail diabolique (1911)

Clip from *À la conquête du Pôle* (1911-12)

Clip from *Le Chevalier des Neiges* (1912)

Clip from *Cendrillon ou la pantoufle merveilleuse* (1912)

Credit Report

Georgette Méliès is also credited as Mademoiselle Méliès and Madame Méliès-Fix (after she married Amand Fontaine in February 1922) in the programs and posters of the théâtre des Variétés artistiques preserved in the Fonds Méliès of the Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée.

Citation

Malthête, Jacques. "Georgette Méliès." In Jane Gaines, Radha Vatsal, and Monica Dall'Asta, eds. *Women Film Pioneers Project*. New York, NY: Columbia University Libraries, 2016. <<https://wfpp-test.cul.columbia.edu/pioneer/georgette-melies/>>