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An early presence of Italians in the Australian film industry: The Pugliese family

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to trace the rise and fall of the Pugliese family which represents, perhaps, the earliest involvement of Italians in the Australian film business. An immigrant from Southern Italy, Antonio Pugliese arrived in New South Wales in 1881 and by the early 1900s had become a successful film exhibitor, owning and managing three cinemas in Sydney. Following his death, his family expanded its activities into film production, financing, among other things, one of Raymond Longford's early triumphs. The move, originally crowned with success, ultimately proved to be ill-fated and the family eventually withdrew from the film business altogether.

Italians in Australian Film Culture

After long being excluded from most canonical histories of Australian cinema, Sicilian-born Giorgio Mangiamiele has in more recent years come to be acknowledged rightfully as one of the pioneers in the revival of filmmaking in Australia in the post-war period.¹ Such a welcome rehabilitation, however, might lead one to wonder about the possibility of any earlier presence of Italians in the Australian film industry. A closer investigation of the historical record with this question in mind would indeed seem to confirm a significant, if perhaps sporadic, involvement of Italians – or, at least, of Italian Australians – in Australian

¹ The beginning of this acknowledgement can probably be dated to Mangiamiele's inclusion in *The Oxford Companion to Australian Film*, edited by Brian McFarlane, Geoff Mayer and Ina Bertrand (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 282. A more comprehensive study of his films was subsequently provided in Gaetano Rando and Gino Moliterno, *Celluloid Immigrant: Italian Australian Filmmaker Giorgio Mangiamiele* (Melbourne: ATOM, 2011) and Raffaele Lampugnani, *Giorgio Mangiamiele: Cinematographer of the Italian Migrant Experience* (Ballan, Victoria: Connor Court Publishing, 2012). See also Silvana Tuccio's unpublished PhD thesis, "Who is behind the camera: Giorgio Mangiamiele" (University of Melbourne, 2009). Undoubtedly crucial in this rehabilitation of Mangiamiele's reputation has been the restoration of a number of his films carried out by the National Film and Sound Archive and their subsequent release in the multiple DVD set, *The Giorgio Mangiamiele Collection* (Ronin Films and the National Film and Sound Archive, 2011).

film culture from its earliest days, the most notable case being that of the Sydney-based Pugliese family.

Pioneering Exhibitors

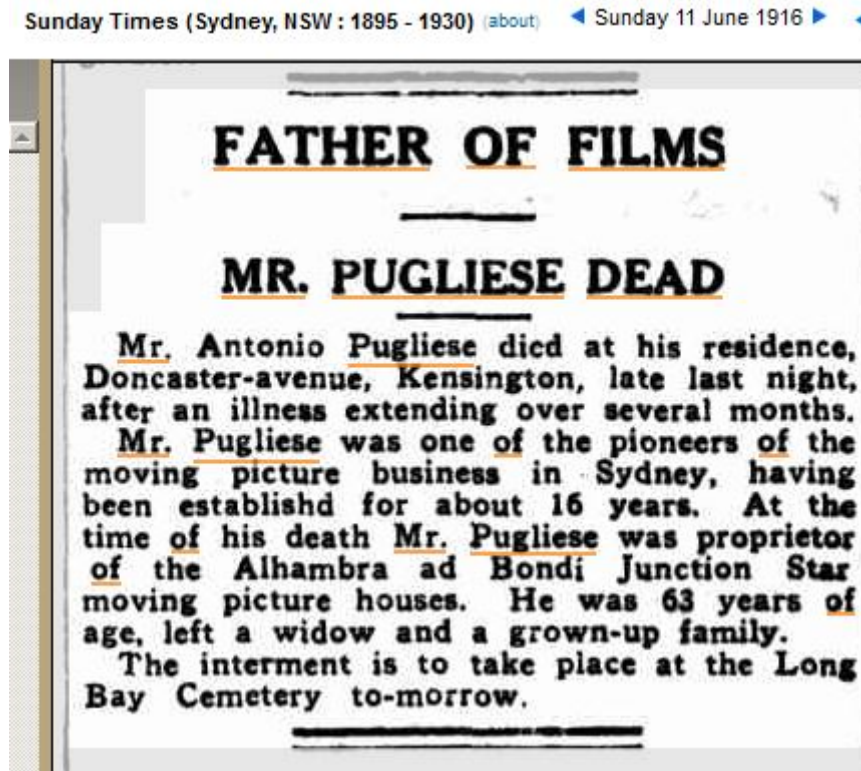
Mentioned only, if at all, in passing in most histories of Australian cinema, Umberto (or Humbert) Pugliese and his mother, Caroline Frances Pugliese, nevertheless now have their own dedicated entries in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (ADB).² Both are identified as cinema owners and exhibitors but also, significantly, as film producers. One of their most noteworthy achievements in both entries is indicated as their involvement in the production of three Australian films during the silent period, the most significant of which was *The Church and the Woman*. Released in October 1917, this was, at the time, an early popular success of the Raymond Longford/Lottie Lyell team but is now mostly remembered for the legal wrangles in which it came to be embroiled, all of them with Humbert, as the producer of the film, at their centre. We will return to *The Church and the Woman* and its legal vicissitudes presently but for the moment we should turn our attention to the patriarch of the family, Antonio Pugliese.

Antonio does not get his own entry in the ADB but is mentioned in both Humbert's and Caroline's entries as a "labourer" from Viggiano (a town near Potenza in the Basilicata region) who arrived in NSW in 1881. Two years later he married Caroline Frances Donaldson with whom he had seven children, Humbert being the first-born.³ There is mention in both entries of Antonio practising as a watchmaker before, eventually, becoming involved, with his family, in film exhibition in the very early 1900s. Closer examination of his documented presence in the running of the three cinemas that came to be managed by the family – the *Alhambra* in George Street, *The Star* in Bondi and the *Britannia* (sometimes given as the *Broadway*) in Leichhardt – suggests that, after some active involvement during an initial period, he reduced his own participation to the role of general supervision and left much of the day-to-day running of the cinemas, and of "Pugliese Enterprises", largely in the hands of Humbert – who, at least at first, was also able to enlist some of his younger siblings – and his mother, Caroline. It is significant, however, that obituaries at the time of his death in 1916, when he had also apparently become a racehorse owner and trainer, should characterise him as the "Father of Films" and as one of the pioneers of the moving picture business in Australia.⁴

² Both entries written by Bill Crowley and available online at <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/pugliese-humbert-james-13280> and <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/pugliese-caroline-frances-13160> (last accessed 18/07/2015). My thanks to Margaret Avard, Archivist at the Noel Butlin Archive, for having kindly allowed me to consult very useful background material relating to these two entries held at the Archive's Centre at the ANU.

³ *Ibid.* Both entries also state that Antonio "had two children by an earlier marriage" although this is not corroborated by any other source and would seem to be disproved by the fact that no mention is made of any previous marriage or children in any other account outside the ADB entries.

⁴ "Father of Films: Mr. Pugliese Dead", *Sunday Times* (Sydney), 11 June 1916, p. 2. The notice of his death in the trade paper, *Australian Variety and Show World* (14 June 1916), also characterises him as "one of the pioneers of the moving-picture business (...) connected with the picture business for the past sixteen years (...)" (p. 16). The report of his death in *The Theatre Magazine* (August 1916) credits him with having been "the first to establish a permanent picture show in Sydney. This was in George-street, the building afterwards being secured from Mr. Pugliese by J. D. Williams, and converted into what has since become known as the Colonial Theatre. It was here that Mr. Williams, in turn, started the first continuous picture show – not only in Sydney – but in Australia" (p. 37).



One hears the familiar ring of a migrant's rags-to-riches story here but the question immediately arises: just how did this presumably poorly-educated immigrant from one of the most impoverished regions of Southern Italy, arriving in Australia at a time when Italians were not particularly welcome, manage to make his way from a lowly "labourer" to a film entrepreneur? Clearly he *had* somehow up-skilled from labourer to watchmaker to cinema owner, although a closer examination of the available evidence suggests something of a staggered trajectory.

Just how he made the first transition from labourer to watchmaker (not to mention acquire the good command of English which he appears to have had from his earliest days in Australia) remains obscure but he was clearly already practising as a watchmaker and jeweller in partnership with a certain William Fontani in December 1884 when their shopwindow in Park St, Sydney, was "maliciously broken", as the report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* put it, by two middle-aged men, James Knox and Francis Lynch, who also physically assaulted both jewellers and were consequently tried and heavily fined for both offences.⁵ Fourteen months later, however, in a most decidedly odd turn of events, Antonio was himself arrested and tried for a jewel robbery. The report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* is worth quoting in full:

The police yesterday arrested a man named Antonio Pugliese who, according to the police, was formerly in business in George street, Sydney, as a watchmaker. Latterly, however, he appears to have adopted the profession of a wine merchant, and at the time of his arrest was carrying on business in that capacity in Goulbourn street. Towards the end of last week a resident in Glenmore road, Paddington (...) reported to the police the theft from his house of a quantity of jewellery (...). Suspicion having rested on Pugliese, a search warrant was

⁵ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 December 1884, p. 5.

obtained and when the police entered his premises they found nearly the whole of the missing property, which was identified by the owner. On searching the residence of the prisoner, detectives were surprised to find secreted under a staircase, no fewer than 100 gold and silver watches, watch chains, bracelets, rings, and in fact every description of jewellery, which, it is assumed, had been stolen at various times by the accused, and police are desirous of finding the owners of this property. The prisoner will be brought before the Water Police Court this morning.⁶

Pugliese's subsequent appearance in court is also worth noting in full. Under the headline "The Extraordinary Discovery of Jewellery" the *Sydney Globe* reported:

At the Water Police Court, Antonio Pugliese, an Italian of striking appearance, attired in a brown velvet coat and fashionably cut trousers and gaiters, was charged with stealing jewellery to the value of £200, property of Mr. Leo Trichen Von Kammeritz, of Hopewell-street, Glenmore road, Paddington, on the 13th of this month. A remand was asked for by the police for the purpose of making further investigations and Mr. Marsh granted one until Friday, refusing to allow bail. Considerable interest was manifested in the case by the Italian community, and there was quite a little crowd of swarthy loiterers in and about the precincts of the police court.

It went on:

The circumstances in connection with this startling discovery are certainly very remarkable. It appears that "from information received" Constables Sawtell, Burnsey, Gorman and Brown proceeded to the prisoner's house, a wine-shop in Goulbourn street, and armed with a search warrant, made a thorough examination of the premises, with the result that in nearly every corner, from the cellar to the garret, the[y] found valuable parcels of jewellery secreted[,] more than 100 watches and about 50 chains, a large number of brooches and earrings and a quantity of gold and silver trinkets were among the articles seized, together with some valuable precious stones. A large quantity of watch works, the cases having evidently been disposed of, were also found, and some almost new sets of harness, saddles, bridles &c. At present the articles are all mixed up, and are awaiting identification at No. 3 Police Station. (...) The police are making active inquiries as to the existence and whereabouts of Pugliese's accomplices, and hope by next Friday to have a fresh load of facts to disclose.⁷

On the following Friday, a certain Walter Lynch and Ernest Beck appeared in court alongside Pugliese, who was charged with both stealing a number of items from various locations

⁶ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 February 1886, p. 14. In its report of the incident the *Goulbourn Herald* of 23 February 1886, also characterised Pugliese as now "the keeper of a wine shop in Goulbourn-street" although it pointed out that "it is stated that about three years ago Pugliese carried on the business of a jeweller in Park-street, and while there he himself was robbed of £200 (or £900?) worth of jewellery" (p. 2).

⁷ *Globe*, 20 February 1886, p. 5

himself, and with receiving stolen property at the hands of his two accomplices.⁸ After a number of further court appearances, during which almost a dozen other charges of robbery were laid against him, Pugliese was granted bail but eventually, as the *Sydney Freeman's Journal* reported on 24th April, 1886:

At the Sydney Quarter Sessions, Antonio Pugliese was sentenced to five years' penal servitude for receiving a quantity of stolen jewellery at his house in Goulbourn street.⁹

Remarkably, and in spite of the conviction and sentence being confirmed on appeal by the Supreme Court on the 30th of April,¹⁰ there appears to be no evidence of Pugliese actually serving the jail sentence and, oddly enough, his name only resurfaces five years later in a newspaper report regarding a robbery of two watches from *his* own jewellery shop (now in Engine Street, Sydney) by a certain Thomas Barry, who was subsequently apprehended, tried and sentenced for the crime.¹¹

Just how, in the next fifteen years, Pugliese was able to effect a transition from (convicted?) watchmaker/wineshop owner to showman and entrepreneur – and to take the family with him – has proven difficult to trace in any detail. In 1917, having achieved both financial success and peer recognition as “one of Sydney's live-wire showmen”, his son Humbert recounted youthful memories of side-shows in showgrounds, shops in George Street with snakes, performing monkeys, waxworks and trapeze artists, and country tours with shows that featured wax-works, vaudeville and the cinematograph.¹² A potted history of the family in *The Theatre Magazine* of June, 1916, largely founded on Humbert's own declarations but clearly endorsed by the trade paper itself and based on its own historical knowledge, seems to confirm that the family had indeed begun screening films in the evening as part of running a waxworks exhibition in what had been known as the Sydney Music Hall in the lower George Street/Haymarket area, probably as early as 1903.¹³ It also appears to confirm that at least some members of the family had subsequently toured the countryside with a waxworks display and a number of films although, apparently, without much financial success. Coming back to the city, they returned to the Haymarket area and had eventually taken possession of the old Alhambra Music Hall where they had begun running vaudeville shows and screening moving pictures.¹⁴

It is perhaps ironic, especially in view of the legal problems he would later have with *The Church and the Woman*, that Humbert's activity as a theatrical manager and film

⁸ *The (Sydney) Evening News*, 27 February 1886, p. 6.

⁹ *Freeman's Journal* (Sydney), 24 April 1886, p. 9.

¹⁰ Reported in the *Evening News*, 30 April 1886, p. 5.

¹¹ *Evening News*, 2 June 1891, p. 6.

¹² “Chats with our Foremost Showmen”, Humbert Pugliese interviewed in *The Green Room*, 1 November 1917, p. 20.

¹³ The account, clearly occasioned by the fact that Antonio was terminally ill at this stage and the writer's desire to offer support to what it called a “Successful Picture Family” appears in *The Theatre Magazine*, 1 June 1916, pp. 48-49. The account is rather light on precise dates but the fact that the Waxworks in George Street had begun the novelty showing of films in the evening is confirmed by an advertisement in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 September, 1903, p. 12, which, however, makes no mention of the Pugliese family.

¹⁴ *The Theatre Magazine*, 1 June 1916, p. 49.

exhibitor should first receive documentary confirmation in reports of a court case. In September 1907, Humbert was charged with a number of breaches of the Lord's Day Observance Act, a law that had been passed under George III in 1781. The breaches dated back to November of the previous year (1906) when it was alleged by the authorities that he had opened the Alhambra Hall on a Sunday for entertainments which "mainly consisted of biographic pictures and music", illegally charging the price of a silver coin for admission.¹⁵ The case was widely reported both in Sydney and as far afield as Adelaide and Tasmania, occasioned by what the papers bemusedly called its "novelty" or "unusualness".¹⁶ Fortunately, in spite of the strong case mounted by the prosecution which could have resulted in a massive fine of £950, the jury voted in Pugliese's favour and the charges were dismissed.¹⁷ Less than a year later, however, Pugliese was back in court, charged with "unlawfully caus[ing] a public entertainment of the stage, including an exhibition of moving pictures, stage dancing and comic songs, in the Alhambra Hall in George-street, a place not authorised or licensed under the Public Entertainments Act, 1897."¹⁸ This time the magistrate found against him and he was fined £5 and 7 shillings costs.

In spite of such minor setbacks – and presumably after Humbert had obtained the necessary license – the Alhambra, and the Pugliese family with it, continued to flourish. The old building itself was extensively renovated and enlarged in 1910, prompting the trade journal, *The Theatre*, to write that: "To-day the building is capable of holding 1000 people, and in prettiness and comfort is not surpassed by any theatre in Sydney." Furthermore, it suggested, "Together with what is really a first-class vaudeville program, some fine films are screened, with the result that if the audience have any complaint at all, it is that Mr. Pugliese really gives them too much for their money."¹⁹ *The Argus* was similarly generous with praise:

Business is always going on ahead merrily at this place of entertainment and frequenters of the tastefully fitted up and furnished house down at the Haymarket can depend on a programme effervescing with brightness. The dual features – vaudeville and moving pictures – are happily combined. There is no staleness about the show, it is always full of interest; and Mr. Pugliese brings his great experience to bear in providing entertainment which is marked by excellence in its various branches.²⁰

¹⁵ First reported, under the rubric "The Sabbath Day. Pictures and Music. Morals of the Public. An Unusual Action" in the *Evening News*, 18 September 1907, p. 6.

¹⁶ "Sunday Observance Act. A Novel Procedure. Action by the Attorney-General. An Old Statute", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 Sept 1907, p. 5; "A Novel Prosecution", *Sunday Times* (Sydney), 22 September 1907, p. 12, but also "Sabbath Amusement. Action against Concert Manager", *The Register* (Adelaide), 18 September 1907, p. 7; "Verdict for Defendant", *The Register* (Adelaide), 19 September 1907, p. 5; "An Interesting Prosecution", *The North Western Advocate* and the *Emu Bay Times* (Tasmania), 19 September 1907, p. 3; *Newcastle Morning Herald & Miners Advocate*, 19 September, 1907, p. 4. Under the title "Legislation and Sympathy" the *Sunday Times* of 6 October 1907 also printed a long letter to the editor by a D. N. Mayman who seized on Pugliese's prosecution under such an old statute to exemplify what he saw as "the trend of legislation and administration in this State" which he deemed "destructive of liberty and fraught with peril to the freedom secured to us during the last century" (p. 12).

¹⁷ Reported in a number of the above.

¹⁸ As reported in the *Evening News*, 3 July 1908, p. 7.

¹⁹ *The Theatre*, July 1910, p. 21.

²⁰ *The Argus* 30 July, 1910, p. 6.

But perhaps the most unabashed praise came from the columnist of the short-lived *The Newsletter* (Sydney) who reported that “Jack Russell and Olive St. John, his wife, have become quite established favourites at the Alhambra. By the way, Humbert Pugliese is putting on a show which the office boy describes as ‘boshter’.”²¹

The family had, by this time, moved out to the Eastern suburbs and the great success of the moving pictures at the Alhambra – not to mention the ever-increasing popularity of cinema-going generally – had led to the establishment of the Star cinema in Bondi Junction. It seems that there, as much as the films, it was the Pugliese family itself that was a star attraction. In his detailed study of the Star Theatre, Waverley historian, Jack Atkins, reports that the theatre had been built with two private boxes and “[t]wice weekly all members of the Pugliese family from Mama to grandchildren attended the movies, occupying a reserved section.”²² A local woman, interviewed in 1972, could still distinctly remember how the dark and handsome Humbert would float down the aisle, politely showing people to their seats. “This way madam, careful madam. (...) What a charmer!” she sighed.²³

From Exhibition to Production

Atkins suggests that the same films were probably shown at both the Alhambra and the Star, with Humbert ferrying the films from one cinema to another as in Giuseppe Tornatore’s *Cinema Paradiso* (1988).²⁴ This undoubtedly would have been logical and made perfect financial sense but it in fact appears, with only a small number of exceptions, not to have been the case. Humbert himself later stressed that his cinemas catered for different audiences – the suburban Bondi spectators were more partial to American films while the Alhambra could offer a more varied fare.²⁵ In any case, even as the cartel formed by Australasian Films and Union Theatres – the so-called “Combine” – began to impose its strictures and control over the industry, the Pugliese family appear to have remained resolutely independent and sourced their films from a variety of exchanges. Courageously, in June 1914, Humbert elected to screen Longford’s *The Silence of Dean Maitland* (1914) at the Bondi cinema, a film which – according to Longford himself – the Combine had done its best to have excluded from Australian screens.²⁶ Less than two years later, in January 1916, he again openly defied the Combine by premiering Longford’s *A Maori Maid’s Love* (1916) at the

²¹ *The Newsletter: An Australian Paper for an Australian People*, 3 December 1910, p. 2.

²² Jack Atkins, *The Pugliese family: Star Picture Theatre, Bondi Junction* (Historical Waverley, vol. 7) (Bondi Junction, N.S.W.: Waverley Historical Society, 1983), p. 14.

²³ Reported in *ibid.*, p. 15.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁵ “A showman must consider his audience first of all. I find my Bondi audience like such pictures as ‘The Little American’ [Cecil B. De Mille, for the Mary Pickford Company, 1917] while my Leichhardt audience prefer something else, and the Alhambra audience have a different taste altogether.” “Leading Men of the Film World: 2 – Humbert Pugliese”, *The Lone Hand*, 1 July 1918, p. 352.

²⁶ See Longford’s comments in “The ‘combine’ shows its strength: the Longford-Gee case (1914)” in Ina Bertrand (ed.) *Cinema in Australia: a documentary history* (Kensington, N.S.W.: New South Wales University Press), pp. 79-94. Interestingly, this was one film that was shown both at the Bondi Star and at the Alhambra, although not concurrently. The film was shown at Bondi on 30 June (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 June 1914, p. 2) but only appeared at the Alhambra on 13 July, at a time when the Star had passed on to screening the 3-reel American Bison company thriller, *Raid of the Human Tigers*; see advertisement for both in the *Sunday Times*, 12 July 1914, p. 3.

Alhambra and in September of that year his *The Mutiny at the Bounty* (1916) at the Star.²⁷ One can only imagine that it must have been this strong expression of support for the local film industry that prompted Longford to approach Pugliese early in 1917 (Antonio had died a year earlier) in order to ask him to finance his next film, *The Church and the Woman*.

A myth has been propagated in a number of sources, including the ADB entries, that the screenplay for the film was written by Caroline Pugliese but this is, in fact, patently untrue.²⁸ As later emerged in the court case and was reported in the *Theatre Magazine*, Longford had gone to Humbert with a treatment for the film which he claimed to have written himself (possibly with some input from Lottie Lyell, who was to play the heroine). When asked about copyright by Pugliese's lawyer, Longford admitted to not having yet applied but he undertook to do so forthwith. Pugliese consequently provided the money and shooting on the film began in March 1917.²⁹

An obstacle arose in July of that year when, alerted by the pre-publicity for the film, theatrical entrepreneur, George Marlow, who owned the rights to a popular play called *The Monk and the Woman* and who was in the process of producing a film of it, threatened Pugliese with legal action for marketing a film whose title could be confused with his own property. Pugliese replied, rejecting the idea that the two titles could cause confusion in the public's mind and offering to contest the matter in court. In the meantime he continued to market the film with full-page ads in the trade magazines and even preparing something like a trailer for the distributors, a stratagem he appears to have been one of the first producers in Australia to adopt.³⁰ Just before the film was due to open, however, Marlow finally made good his threat, taking out an injunction against the film's release on the grounds that its title would cause confusion with his own film and possibly damage him financially. As a result, the two producers ended up in the Equity Court one day before the film was due to open. The matter was, however, successfully resolved when Pugliese offered, and Marlow accepted, that all subsequent advertisements for *The Church and the Woman* would display the

²⁷ See advertisement in the *Sunday Times*, 9 January 1916, p. 16, and the "With the Movies" rubric in *Australian Variety and Show World*, 13 September 1916.

²⁸ Both the Humbert and the Caroline Pugliese entries in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* assert that "Caroline was the driving force behind, and wrote the script for, *The Church and the Woman* (...)". Clearly based on the ADB entries, the attribution is repeated in both the Pugliese entries in the usually-dependable online *Australian Variety Theatre Archive: Popular Culture and Entertainment 1850-1930*, (<http://ozvta.com/entrepreneurs-m-r/>), and the entry on Caroline Pugliese in the online AUSTLIT, (<http://www.austlit.edu.au/rp.nla.gov.au/austlit/page/A114634>). The origin of this web of misattributions is in all likelihood Jack Atkins' bald assertion that "Caroline Frances Pugliese wrote the script, and as company treasurer and holder of the family purse strings, supplied the finance [for *The Church and the Woman*]", *The Pugliese family*, *op. cit.*, p. 20. This may itself have been founded on nothing more than the remark of a relative who had told Atkins that "Caroline was a remarkable woman, the driving force behind them all" (p. 7) since the account of the genesis of the film published in *The Theatre Magazine*, 1 Aug 1918, made it plain that Raymond Longford had written the screenplay with possible input from Lottie Lyell (pp. 32-34). For a comprehensive discussion of the film in these terms see Mervyn J. Wasson, "The Church, the Woman and the Law", in *Photo Play Artiste: Miss Lottie Lyell 1890 – 1925*, compiled and written by Marilyn Dooley (Canberra: ScreenSound Australia, 2000), pp. 66-74.

²⁹ See the full account provided in *The Theatre Magazine*, 1 August 1918, pp. 32-34.

³⁰ An announcement regarding the availability of the one-reel trailer to exhibitors appeared in *The Theatre Magazine*, 1 November 1917, p. 40.

disclaimer, “This picture must not be confused with the picture or play *The Monk and the Woman*”.³¹

The film was thus premiered under the J. C. Williamson banner at the Sydney Theatre Royal on 13 October 1917 and became an immediate and spectacular success. In the months that followed, the film did what the papers called “phenomenal business” everywhere and Humbert himself became somewhat of a celebrity. Extended interviews with him were published in the leading newspapers and trade journals which consistently characterised him as one of Australia’s leading showmen and film producers. In many of these interviews Humbert now explicitly voiced what had always been his implicit support for Australian-made films and a strong local film industry in which, it seemed, he was now intending to play a major role. “Given expert direction and a sufficient amount of financial backing”, he told *Australian Variety and Show World*, “there seems to be no reason, so far as I can see, why Australian films should not rival in excellence the best which we have received from other countries.”³² After reporting similar statements under the rubric “Australian Films – Successful Local Production – Plenty of Talent Available”, *The Mirror* suggested to its readers that “Mr. Pugliese (...) undoubtedly deserves the support of the community generally for the part he is taking in building up what may prove to be a very considerable industry.”³³ However, in March 1918, even as the film continued to do “roaring business” as it spread out across the country and Pugliese had already committed to producing two further films, he was served with a legal injunction against any further exploitation of the film lodged by a journalist and writer named Edmund Finn who claimed that *The Church and the Woman* was an unauthorised adaptation of a novel he had published in Victoria in 1888 called *The Priest’s Secret*.³⁴ In the protracted legal proceedings that ensued and which were all directed at Pugliese who, as producer, had legal responsibility for the film, Finn was able to successfully prove that the treatment that Longford had copyrighted under the title of “The Church and the Woman” had indeed been closely based on Finn’s forgotten novel, with the result that Pugliese was ordered by the court to surrender all copies of the film to Finn, as *his* legal property.³⁵ Whether and to what extent Pugliese complied with the order remains unclear but by the end of 1918 the film, which had been hailed with such superlatives and broken all sorts of box-office records, disappeared from Australian screens and was only briefly shown again in Melbourne in 1921 before becoming one of the myriad lost Australian films of the silent period.³⁶ In the meantime Longford, unaffected by any of the legal proceedings, appears to have gone to South Australia where he produced his next film, A

³¹ The court case reported in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 October 1917, p. 9, and the entire saga was recounted in detail in *The Theatre Magazine*, 1 November 1917, p. 37.

³² *Australian Variety and Show World*, 21 December 1917, p. 103.

³³ *The Mirror*, 27 October 1917, p. 8.

³⁴ Reported in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 March 1918, p. 4.

³⁵ Judgement reported in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 July 1918, p. 4.

³⁶ Its return Melbourne screening was advertised in *The Argus*, 29 August 1921. Oddly enough, before disappearing completely, the film appears to have been shown at the Superlative Cinema of Charters Towers (Queensland) in August 1926, where it was paired with an earlier film titled *The Unpardonable Sin* in what appears to have been a religious pedagogical exercise. See the article in *The Northern Miner*, 9 August 1926, p. 2, which reports the film’s having received a special showing “before a large body of the clergy” in order to determine whether it was morally objectionable but the verdict had apparently been a very positive one and so the film could now be screened for the general public. The article makes no mention of the film’s previous legal wrangles nor of who supplied the copy.

Woman Suffers (1918), before embarking on what would be the stellar triumph of *The Sentimental Bloke* (1919).³⁷

In October 1919, just as *Struck Oil*, the third film financed by the Pugliese family and directed by Franklyn Barrett, was being released, *Australian Variety and Show World* was still singing Humbert Pugliese's praises, writing:

One of the reasons of C.F. [sic] Pugliese's unflinching success as a motion picture producer is his knack of picking "winners". This refers not only to his choice of stories to be filmed but also to his judgment in selecting his personal staff. Mr. Pugliese it was who launched upon the Australian market such tremendously successful productions as "The Church and the Woman", "The Waybacks," etc. His latest venture is an elaborate production of "Struck Oil", featuring Maggie Moore in her world-famous interpretation of Lizzie Stofel. "Struck Oil" is successful because it has been properly done. Mr. Pugliese is strong on efficiency. He is one of the coming men in the film-world today. He is going to go a long way as a producer.³⁸

And yet, looking back on it now, it seems clear that the Pugliese comet was by this time already sinking (tellingly the Pugliese name appears nowhere on the posters for either *The Waybacks* or *Struck Oil*). By the end of that year "Pugliese Enterprises" had relinquished the leasehold of the Bondi Star to Olympic Theatres and, by 1921, the family had severed all its connections with the theatre that had practically been their home for the previous decade. Caroline – it would seem on her own – continued to run the Alhambra, presenting a mixture of vaudeville and films there until 1922 when it, too, was sold. Renamed the Melba, it continued offering vaudeville shows together with films for a year or so before it was rather ignominiously raided by bailiffs in the middle of a film screening and closed down completely.³⁹

It is difficult to know exactly how and why the family's involvement in the film business declined so quickly and so permanently. The adverse ruling over *The Church and the Woman* must undoubtedly have significantly wounded "Pugliese Enterprises" financially but to the point of convincing the family to abandon the business completely? In any case, the crippling financial blow of the court ruling was undoubtedly augmented by a number of personal problems. By this time Humbert's marriage to Elsie Harvey, a singer working at the Bondi Star in the family's early days in exhibition, was patently in crisis. In 1920 Humbert felt obliged to petition the Supreme Court for restitution of his conjugal rights from his wife

³⁷ Mervyn J. Wasson, in his discussion of the court case (*op. cit.*), argues that the conduct of the case, and especially the fact that Pugliese's legal team never called Longford to the stand as a witness, suggests that Pugliese had in fact agreed to finance Longford's film, well-knowing that the script had been plagiarised. Since Longford never testified, and Pugliese appears to have never changed his story, this will remain impossible to know. Interestingly, in Anthony Buckley's account of the long conversations he managed to have with Longford before his death, Longford mentions the litigation regarding copyright that enveloped the film but is very careful to neither affirm nor deny Pugliese's culpability in the matter. See Anthony Buckley, "The Man who met Raymond Longford", *Inaugural Longford Lyell Lecture* (Canberra: ScreenSound Australia Monographs, 2001), n.p.

³⁸ *Australian Variety and Show World*, 9 Oct 1919, p. 9.

³⁹ The report of the closure in the (Lismore) *Northern Star* ran: "Bailiffs raided the Melba Theatre, Haymarket last night during the filming of "The Soul of a Woman," turned off the electric light supply and ejected the audience. They then cleared out the place, taking the seats, cinema, and even the electric fittings. It was in every sense a real movie sensation." *Northern Star*, 13 December 1913, p. 5.

who apparently was refusing to live with him because he was so dominated by his mother.⁴⁰ Three years later the couple were again in court, this time with the wife seeking a decree for restitution of conjugal rights against the husband.⁴¹ Then, in 1925, Elsie, who appears to have been sick for some time, died.⁴² In this period, according to the electoral rolls, Humbert Pugliese, the former up-and-coming Australian film producer, was, between 1925 and 1927, declaring his profession to be that of a “mechanic”. In 1932 Humbert married Margaret (Mabs) McGuirk and from then on worked first as a salesman, then as a manager and finally as CEO in her family’s extremely successful shoe-retailing business until his death in 1955.⁴³ Ironically, even during this period Humbert continued to be pursued by legal litigation. In 1944, having moved residence to Port Hacking, Humbert and his now-wife, Mabs, were prosecuted over some construction work being done, it seems illegally, on their property by a firm of Italian cementers. After a hearing in a special Federal Court the couple were fined £3/10 each.⁴⁴

The couple eventually returned to Sydney to live at Vaucluse. By that time – indeed, even as Giorgio Mangiamele had arrived and begun making films in Australia – the Pugliese family’s connection with Australian cinema had been completely forgotten. However it seems appropriate that at least one obituary at the time of Humbert’s death, while blithely omitting all reference to his, and his family’s, involvement in the film industry, at least elevated him to the ranks of Italian nobility.⁴⁵

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⁴⁰ “Humbert James Pugliese”, *Australian Dictionary of Biography* entry, *art. cit.*

⁴¹ See the “In Divorce” notices, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 September 1923, p. 10.

⁴² See death notice, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 December 1925, p. 10.

⁴³ “Humbert James Pugliese”, *Australian Dictionary of Biography* entry, *art. cit.*

⁴⁴ See *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 January 1944, p. 11. For some reason the case was reported as far away as Canberra (see *The Canberra Times*, 8 January 1944, p. 4), Adelaide (*News*, 8 January 1944, p. 4) and even Broken Hill (*Barrier Miner*, 10 January 1944, p. 1). Interestingly the *Singleton Argus*, in its report of the case (10 Jan 1944), had quoted the defence lawyer who had argued that “there had been no defiance of the regulations. There had been newspaper sensationalism, and an attempt to make out the Puglieses [sic] were foreigners” (p. 1). Humbert and his wife seemed to have got off lightly since the *Singleton Argus* later reported (19 January 1944, p. 2) that the Italian construction firm that had done the work, Terrazzo and Co. Pty Ltd, and its manager, Remo Guigni, had been fined £230 over the breach.

⁴⁵ Under the rubric, “Homeless Family loses adopting Father”, *The Canberra Times* (30 May 1955) reported Humbert’s death as that of a “wealthy Sydney businessman who had ‘adopted’ six homeless children from Bigga”, and stated unequivocally that “The man, Mr. Humbert James Pugliese, 72, was a member of the Italian nobility” (p. 3).

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