

Jacob Baron

August 3, 2015

RESEARCHING “THE NOT-SO-ANONYMOUS NUTMEGGER”

I am slightly—though only slightly—embarrassed to say that it was not my original intention to write my final research paper on Tony Musante’s career and acting technique. I actually came to my Cinemas of Italy teacher, Alberto Zambenedetti (who nominated me for the Friends of the Library Excellence in Research Award), with a plan to write about Giuseppe Tornatore’s classic *Cinema Paradiso* and how it helped catalogue both the history of Italian cinema and of Italy in general. Fortunately, Alberto suggested instead that I write a piece on Mr. Musante, whose more prominent works—*The Mercenary* and *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*—had been assigned viewing for the class, and which I had watched and deeply appreciated. He pointed me in the direction of the Archives on the top floor of Mudd Library, to which Mr. Musante’s wife had donated a vast collection of his personal journals and scripts, along with cutouts of newspaper articles, interviews, and reviews of his films.

I could not simply go and research his entire life and career, however, for this would have made the paper far too dense, unfocused, and would have taken much more time to write than had been allotted. Therefore, I decided to focus on a single work in his filmography, but since we were not allowed to focus on films assigned to us in class, I also decided to base my paper on a less prominent movie which at the same time stood out in terms of Mr. Musante’s typical choice of starring vehicles. *The Anonymous Venetian* ended up being a perfect choice: a classic romance, starring a man who had been known mainly for playing dastardly bastards and menaces to society, now playing a sensitive musician and vulnerable, tender lover dying from a terminal

illness. I was shocked to see how restrained and relatable his performance was, and figured I might as well wrap my paper around how the overall public reacted themselves at the time of the movie's release, and how said reaction spoke to Mr. Musante's range as an actor.

Well, the reaction itself was easy enough to find in the thick folders of the Archives: newspaper and magazine writers at the time had the exact same startled response that I had at Mr. Musante's sudden departure from his usual "type," and gave me a great number of juicy quotes to reference in my paper, along with a few snippets of biographical information—the actor had grown up in Bridgeport, Connecticut, where I had worked throughout high school giving local children acting lessons, and thus allowing me to conduct my research with a feeling of proximity. What proved more difficult was analyzing Mr. Musante as an actor—that is to say, his process and inner workings. His personal journals and annotated scripts, in this respect, were a godsend, his notes and entries all of a deeply personal and honest nature. But what required a certain amount of intuition on my part was checking the discrepancies between Mr. Musante's journal for *The Anonymous Venetian* and the one for his much earlier and more stereotypical performance in *The Incident*. In order to truly get at how much of a departure *Venetian* was for the actor, I had to see exactly what it was he was departing *from*, and I only succeeded by analyzing differences in tone, emotional content, and approaches to character development and story beats.

So while at the end of the day "The Not-So-Anonymous Nutmegger" was, technically, a research essay, it did require some level of subjectivity on my part, so as to imbue the research with any sort of ultimate meaning. Is this to be considered cheating, or a necessary component of the essay-writing process? I pray for my own sake, as well as that of my beloved paper, that it is the latter.