

# Faith and Spirituality in Masters of World Cinema, Volume III

Edited by

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## FOREWORD

### MATT ZOLLER SEITZ

Devoted—or devout—moviegoers often describe the experience of seeing a film in a theater, with its communal response to an artist’s themes, images and “message,” as a quasi-religious experience. This is common even among viewers who have no experience with, or interest in, the traditions or the texts of organized religion, much less a belief in any particular god or gods. I suspect *devoted* is one way of describing the sort of contributor that *Faith and Spirituality in Masters of World Cinema*, now in this its third volume, attracts. For me—a critic who was raised among Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses, but whose own religious leanings tend more toward the agnostic or atheist end of the spectrum—cinema’s quasi-religious potency evokes feelings of awe, or reverence, for the mysteries of human experience that I’ve rarely felt in houses of worship.

One filmmaker in particular has captured—even sharpened—my attention in this way for years.

*Some people make films. Terrence Malick builds cathedrals.*

Instinctively, I wrote that in my 2005 *New York Press* review of Malick’s *The New World*, not realizing all the ways in which it was true. What I was trying to get at was the sense of wonder that the Oklahoma-born, Austin-raised filmmaker evokes. Malick awakens this response quite strongly among those who respond to his work, and in my own admittedly anecdotal experience, I’ve found little difference in response between those who consider themselves specifically religious, generally “spiritual,” agnostic, or atheist. There’s something about the way Malick shoots, cuts and scores action—the things he chooses to show us or not show us; the things he considers significant—that evokes these feelings.

The biographical facts give us some insight, even if these alone don’t illuminate his artistry. We know that his parents were Assyrian Christian immigrants, that his name is one of the Names of God in the Qur'an—one that means The King, or the Lord of Worlds, or King of Kings. We know that he grew up in former Confederate states where derivations of Christianity dominate and the landscape is dotted with as many crosses as you’d find in Brazil. I’ve been told by people who know and work with

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## CHAPTER THREE

### BUSTER KEATON AND THE PUZZLE OF LOVE

TIMOTHY YENTER

Buster Keaton is one of the great film comedians, masterfully weaving sight gags, shocking stunts, and innovative film techniques into some of the greatest two-reel and feature-length films ever seen. While many critics have noted Keaton's stoic persona in the face of ridiculous circumstances and what vision of the world this suggests, I will focus on what we can learn about love in the modern world. Despite the notable lack of Chaplinesque romantic flourishes, Keaton has a sophisticated approach to romantic love in his films. In Keaton's films, love is a mutual recognition and admiration for the physical and mental competence necessary to deal with an absurd, cruel, or indifferent social and physical environment and an agreement to face the world together.

There are two ways in which this claim might seem surprising to someone familiar with Keaton's films. Keaton's famously stoic persona seems to be at odds with the very idea that there is an expression of romantic love in the films. How could someone so unexpressive express romantic love? There is simply not enough there for interpretation. Additionally, the topic of love seems to be the wrong approach to take toward Keaton, the master of the gag. His films are original and interesting and funny because of their visual wit, not because of their thematic value. Watching his films for themes is to miss what is valuable about them.

In answering these objections, I will set the stage for my argument that Keaton's narratives assume the viewer recognizes the Buster character is in love while withholding many of the traditional emotional signifiers of that love. The narrative cannot proceed without this assumption and many of the gags don't work without recognizing Buster's motivation. Through careful attention to the resolution of the stories within the films, we can begin to recognize the surprising, sophisticated approach to romantic love that the films contain.

A few clarifying remarks before we begin. First, in my discussion of “Keaton’s films” I will focus exclusively on Keaton’s short films from 1920-1923 and the feature length films that continued through 1928. These are the films Keaton made after acting in Roscoe Arbuckle’s shorts, after serving in WWI, and after co-starring in 1920’s *The Saphead*. He wrote or co-wrote, directed or co-directed, edited, and (functionally) produced 19 shorts between 1920 and 1923 and 10 feature films between 1923 and 1928.<sup>1</sup> Prior to 1920’s *One Week* and after 1928’s *Steamboat Bill Jr.*, Keaton had significantly less control over the finished projects (but he never had complete control, even in the creative period under discussion). Second, although there can be significant variations between films, there is a notable overlap between the characteristics of the characters that Keaton plays.<sup>2</sup> I will call this ur-character “Buster,” which is frequently the name given Keaton’s character in the short films.<sup>3</sup> So “Keaton” refers to the filmmaker, and “Buster” to the core character that Keaton builds on in most films.

### Love and the Threat of Paradox

Keaton’s characters are almost always motivated by love. This is true of all but one of the features and numerous shorts. In a typical story, Buster’s sweetheart declines to be with him or he decides he cannot yet be with her until he has proven himself in some way. The bulk of the film is then an attempt for Buster to earn the love of the woman or prove himself worthy of a woman who might not reappear until the finale. Everything Buster does he does for love.

However, there is potentially a deep problem at the core of these stories. Keaton’s famously affectless persona removes nearly all the emotive facial expressions associated with romantic love. He may bring flowers or perform some other act expected of someone who is in love, but we are never (as with Chaplin or Lloyd) invited by Keaton’s performance style to feel the love that he must have to motivate the action. Given how the object of his affection often drops away and is sometimes absent for all or most of the film, we might begin to wonder just what sort of romantic love this is, or if it is love at all. I will return to the question of what sort of love this might be, but for now let’s consider what would happen if we were to claim that Buster is not actually in love: a deep paradox would arise.

The standard narrative recipe is altered in nearly every picture, but is often recognizably so: (1) an opening scene establishes that Buster and the love interest cannot be together, either because she refuses Buster’s

advances, or because he considers himself unworthy of her, or because of some external obstacles (such as the objection of her father); (2) he works to earn her respect or love or otherwise show himself able to provide for her financially; (3) he fails badly at doing so; (4) when things are at their worst, he proves himself worthy; and (5) Buster and the woman are romantically united. We can only understand the narrative of a Keaton film if we understand Buster’s motivations, and this motivation is clearly love in almost every case. However, if we also deny, on the basis that there is little in Buster’s facial expressions to indicate passion or desire or joy, that Keaton is in love, the paradox arises: we both must believe and cannot believe that Buster is in love. If possible, such an interpretation should be avoided. However, there is something very right about this charge that I hope to capture in my account. The love that Keaton portrays does not produce positive emotional states like joy. Keaton’s famously stoic countenance is at odds with what we expect of a person who is in love. The goal is to capture this observation without falling into the paradox expressed above.

I address the potential paradox from two angles. First, I consider various theories of love, looking to see if any matches well with Keaton’s peculiar combination of narrative engine and unshakeable deadpan expressions. Second, the key to understanding what Keaton shows about love emerges through a careful look at the resolution of his narratives. Then I consider the tension between narrative and gags in Keaton’s films because there is a long-standing dispute in discussions of Keaton’s films, and if it turns out that gags are primary over narrative in Keaton, then the approach I take, which is partly motivated by narrative considerations, is misguided.

### Is this Love?

Philosophical discussions of love typically take the ancient Greek linguistic division as a starting point. *Eros* is romantic love or sexual attraction. *Philia* is affection, admiration, loyalty, or “brotherly” love. *Agape*, at least beginning with the early Christians, is unconditional love, such as that of God for creation. Romantic love (*eros*) is our concern here. In nearly all accounts of romantic love, either emotion plays a constitutive or importantly expressive role.

In considering love, conceptual complexities abound. Perhaps love is a bestowing of value on the thing loved. “In loving another, in attending to and delighting in that person, we *make* him or her valuable in a way that would not otherwise exist” (Singer 2). Alternatively, love might not be a

bestowing but a *desiring*. Desire could be the desire for sex with that person or, more abstractly, a “desire to form a *we* with that other person” and a “desire for the *we* to continue” (Nozick 84–85). Desire, at least since the speech by Aristophanes in Plato’s *The Symposium*, has often been thought to involve a lacking or need. I desire what I do not have. In desiring it, I recognize that I don’t have it (my need or lack) and express the inclination to satiate that need. In the most extreme version, love is said to be a desire to be united to the beloved as a single thing. So some theorists say love is a *uniting*, without the emphasis on desire.<sup>4</sup> In an influential passage, Paul, citing Genesis, claims that love in marriage is a kind of uniting (“the two will become one flesh”) and this same love as uniting is between Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:31–32). Others argue that love is a kind of *emotion* or perhaps a complex of emotional, affective, and attitudinal states (Rorty 75). Finally, some offer a *reductive* account of love, for example, love is a fundamental drive to bring another person into existence (Schopenhauer).

None of these seem particularly well suited for making sense of what we see in Keaton’s Buster character. There is no moment in most of the films when the viewer comes to appreciate more fully the love interest based on how Buster views her. By contrast, this does happen frequently in Chaplin’s films of the same period. If Buster desires the woman or union with her or is acting based on biological imperative, there is very little in his countenance to show for it. Individual films might lean one way rather than another. For instance, the structure of *Three Ages* might suggest that it is biological instinct that pushes Buster toward the woman. The tenacity with which he pursues his goals might lead one to conclude that Buster is acting based on whatever theory of love one thinks provides the strongest motivation. But again, the motivation seems vastly underdetermined.

Can affectless Keaton love? Perhaps he only reproduces the outward signifiers of love without any of the inward feeling. We might then conclude that his films represent a dark turn in our modern age, in which we can find no help from a cruel universe (a common theme in Keaton’s films) and we simply reproduce thoughtlessly the customs of courtly love that belong to a different era.

This is all too quick, however. Kant famously—or perhaps infamously—declares that true love does not include any emotional, physical, or psychological (“pathological”) element:

It is in this way, without doubt, that those passages in scripture are to be understood in which it is commanded to love our neighbor and even our enemy. For love as inclination cannot be commanded; but beneficence or solely from duty, even when no inclination at all drives us to it, or

even when natural and invincible disinclination resists, is practical and not pathological love, which lies in the will and not in the propensity of feeling, in the principles of action and not in melting sympathy; but the former alone can be commanded. (15)

Roughly, because Christians are commanded in Scripture to love and we cannot be commanded to have a feeling, love cannot be or include a feeling. So argues Kant, or at least he appears to argue this way in the *Groundwork*. The view that Kant cleaved love from emotion (or any contingent affective state) is a standard reading of the *Groundwork*, but Allen Wood (16–20) has persuasively argued that this is a misreading that is clarified in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. However, the interpretation that Kant denies that love (in its most important sense) cannot include emotion, inclination, or feeling is common enough that I’ll call this view “Kantian.”

Is Keaton a demonstration of the Kantian approach to love: love as an emotionless recognition of one’s duty? This seems unlikely for other reasons. The defining characteristic of every character in a Keaton film (not just those portrayed by him) is a monomaniacal pursuit of some particular end, which is typically trivial. The fantastic chases that define many of Keaton’s greatest works are typically expanded by triggering more and more people who are pursuing Keaton with utter disregard for all other responsibilities as he single-mindedly pursues his goal (usually, the unseen woman). This absolute concern with a merely hypothetical end is decidedly un-Kantian, as his disregard for the humanity of the persons who stand in the way.

I think, then, that we must say that the love expressed by Keaton’s characters neither includes the common assumption that it must involve affection nor does it include the emotionless Kantian conception. We are left with the deeply troubling tension that love is both required to make sense of Keaton’s protagonists yet they also seem to be missing the core element that would mark their actions as recognizably for love.

In addition to the Kantian tradition, there is a second tradition that de-emphasizes or elides the emotional aspects of the experience of love. The relevant sort of love, *eros*, is frequently associated with sexual union. However, an important tradition going back to Plato argues that true *eros* is a recognition and valuing of the beauty in the person’s soul, not their physical body, which leads us towards knowledge of true beauty. Contemporary Platonists, like Robert M. Adams, emphasize the ways in which love features in relationships that are non-sexual and importantly involve valuing of the relationship as a relationship. The Platonic view is that love is a valuing (admiring, liking, appreciating) of a quality in the beloved or in the relationship with the beloved. Because this valuing is a

judgment, it need not involve any emotion. One can see the etymology of the English “platonic” relationship; what is desired is not sexual union; rather the relationship is valued for other reasons. However, the Platonic view can include sexual relationships. What the tradition emphasizes is the valuation of the best qualities of the beloved.

Could love in Keaton’s films be this Platonistic valuing? A significant problem for this approach to love in Keaton’s films is that in order for a film to present such a view of love, it must demonstrate the best qualities of the beloved or of the relationship with the beloved, so that we can recognize what the lovers love in each other. Unlike many romantic comedies, we are not really expected to fall in love with the love interest in a Keaton film. We are not given her specific features that Buster originally comes around to love. As Gabriella Oldham puts it, “As typical Keaton leading ladies, they are stepping-stones, not distinct personalities ...” (Oldham 136). The lack of specificity is in fact a key reason why Keaton’s films are not easily classified as romantic comedies. There are generic elements that create expectations about what is particular and alluring about a character, that can be specified by costuming, non-diegetic music, editing (especially insertion of close-ups), and more, but Keaton’s films rarely have these. Other than perhaps physical attractiveness and wealth, the woman is typically generic. She’s completely general, but love thrives in specificity. It is the beloved’s specific qualities (or, on some accounts, specific history with the lover) that the lover loves.

### Resolution

How do we resolve the puzzle of love in Keaton? We must begin by noting how love is typically different at the beginning and end of the film. The bookends of a Keaton film are romantic love, but the nature and value of that love is different at the beginning and the end. At the beginning of the film, love sets the wheels of the plot in motion, but there is often no clear reason for this. Sometimes it seems to be no more than social expectation or Buster’s confused expectation of being a man. We aren’t presented enough specifics about the woman for us to see what Buster sees in her. The love story seems merely perfunctory.

Over the course of the film, one or both of the main characters will undergo changes that lead to their final uniting. Most readings of Keaton’s films emphasize the changes that Buster undergoes. The expectation of a typical story is that Buster starts as incompetent (physically, socially, and/or in business sense) but, when called upon to save or win the woman, he displays the physical and intellectual mastery needed. It would be a

mistake to overemphasize the ordering and thus the narrative direction of the incompetence and competence. If a gag requires, as the coffee pouring in *The Love Nest* does, mechanical intelligence to be followed immediately by klutziness, Keaton does it. However, there is a general tendency in Keaton’s films for the Buster character to perform remarkable feats of physical acuity near the end of the film, when the story demands it, despite having repeatedly demonstrated his physical incompetence up to that point.

What does this tell us about love? Cynically, some of the films suggest that love is a ruse or a rigged game that our hero can’t win. After fighting to prove himself, he either fails and is rebuffed (*Daydreams*) or succeeds in doing something, if not exactly what he intended, and is rebuffed (*Cops*). The cynical resolution can work in the other direction, too. In *The Blacksmith*, Buster tricks the haughty, rude, but attractive woman into marrying him when she bumps her head; in her confusion (perhaps amnesia), he proposes and they elope. Other stories don’t require quite the same sort of resolution. For instance, in *One Week*, *The Boat*, and *Frozen North*, Buster begins the film already married, and in *My Wife’s Relations* a mix-up leads to an unintended early wedding and then an ugly marriage. Eleven of the nineteen shorts end with Buster and the Girl united, but of these only *The Scarecrow*, *Neighbors*, and *The Balloonatic* could be said to be motivated by love. This is a notable contrast from the features, where fully nine out of ten are clearly motivated by love and end with the couple united. The exception is *Go West*, which is a love story of Buster and a cow rather than Buster and the Girl.<sup>5</sup> The features, which are the films where Keaton prioritized narrative, overwhelmingly begin with love and end with love.

Yet the sort of love that motivates Buster is often unclear. In most cases, it could as easily be the biological imperative for sex as social pressure as puppy love as mere whim. By the end, however, we are given a clearer sense of why Buster and the Girl are united. Having overcome or persevered or simply survived everything thrown at him or her or them, Buster or the Girl or both have shown themselves to be capable of facing a cruel or indifferent world. Either the Girl recognizes this in Buster, or he in her, or both in each other. In other words, whatever motivated Buster at the beginning, by the end of the films, we see a particularly interesting and robust form of romantic love: the mutual recognition of and admiration for the physical and mental competence necessary to deal with an absurd, cruel, or indifferent social and physical environment and an agreement to face the world together. Buster and the love interest are shown to be an appropriate couple because one or both have demonstrated their ineptness

and then overcome this ineptness with a competent response to an absurd situation.<sup>6</sup>

Keaton often reinforces this idea by showing the couple isolated from society. Social forces, especially class difference, often oppose the initial inclination and prevent the couple from being together, who often must leave cities, towns, or the United States altogether. As Brad Stevens has noted, "Taken together, *The Paleface*, *Cops* and *My Wife's Relations* suggest that heterosexual desire can only be sustained outside the institution of marriage (and, indeed, outside the 'civilised' society)" (Coursodon, Salitt, and Stevens 114). As he says earlier, "Keaton's work, taken as a whole, suggests that the institution of marriage is inimical to the happiness of the couple" (Coursodon, Salitt, and Stevens 73). This might be a slight overstatement, as numerous Keaton films suggest happiness outside of the confines of the wealthy and working class white American society. In *The Paleface*, Buster joins a Native American tribe and takes a squaw as his wife. In *Hard Luck*, Buster returns years after falling into a pit with a Chinese wife and children. In *The Navigator* and many other films, it is by leaving towns and their trappings behind that the couple can be united. In *One Week*, they leave behind the destroyed symbol of married life, the house. In these and other cases, the love story is only completed outside of traditional expectations of middle- and upper-class white American society in the early twentieth century.

Thus, there is a way out of the initial puzzle of romantic love that began this essay. Buster's actions are perhaps unmotivated because he is performing a role expected of him or that is an unconscious biological imperative. Buster doesn't seem to be in love because he performs the expected motions without joy. And without joy, we don't believe it is love but some sort of obligation or pressure causing him to act. When he realizes his own competence, or the competence of the love interest, or both, we can recognize their mutual admiration or at least the removal of a significant obstacle. The hero's transformation is that he learns how to survive (physically and socially) in a cruel, indifferent, or absurd world. As Barbara Savedoff argues, this is at least sometimes the heroine's journey as well and contributes to her convincing argument that Keaton's heroines are not incompetent fools but are often Buster's equals in both their competencies and ineptitudes and in both where they begin and where they end (Savedoff 87–88). Often by leaving domesticity, urban life, or organized society behind, they can face the world together, secure in their recognition of each other's willingness and ability to face an indifferent world.

## Narrative and Gags

Both the puzzle of love in Keaton's films and my suggested solution rely heavily on analyzing narrative features of the films. This forces me to weigh in on a long-standing point of dispute regarding Keaton's films (and, to a lesser extent, early Hollywood comedies generally): whether the films fit a standard model of classical storytelling or whether the gags are paramount, rupturing the narrative. Henry Jenkins cleverly poses the debate as one between an older and younger scholar; the older scholar takes *The General* as his model, because its narrative symmetry and integration of the gags into the story fits the classical model, while the younger builds his argument on *Sherlock Jr.*, with its embedded dream structure mostly used to make a series of vaudevillian and filmic gags (Jenkins 29–31). Some, like Robert Knopf, attempt to meld the two approaches: "Keaton's films generally follow the classical Hollywood model in fusing romantic action with the pursuit of another goal," which David Bordwell has argued was central to the storytelling approach, but Knopf departs from Bordwell in thinking that the gags can play a larger disruptive role than Bordwell allows (Knopf 83–85). Knopf argues that Keaton's films are united sometimes by classical Hollywood narrative structure but also by vaudeville structure, and this can be shown by the symmetry of gags (representing a vaudeville aesthetic) and the symmetry of narrative (representing a classical Hollywood aesthetic) (110–111). Instead of Hollywood/vaudeville, one could see the divide as romantic comedy/anarchistic comedy. Andrew Horton argues that Keaton's films "straddle both" ("Introduction" 12). In form, for example, *Sherlock Jr.* is a romantic comedy, "for the whole narrative is structured around the boy's efforts to gain the affection of his girl" (Horton 13). Yet nearly all the scenes, and especially the dominant dream sequence, are anarchistic.

We thus feel that Keaton stands at a unique crossroads in American film comedy, with a nod toward romantic comedy, but marked by an irony that denies sentimentality, and more than a nod toward 'gag' comedy. The combination of these two, plus Keaton's unusual face and gaze, which seem to be ... beyond any of the action taking place, is part of what makes Keaton so memorable. (Horton 13)

Perhaps, though, there can be no fusing of the two. Donald Crafton, for instance, claims "that it was never the aim of comic filmmakers to 'integrate' the gag elements of their movies. I also doubt that viewers subordinated gags to narrative" (Crafton 107).

This dispute has bearing on my argument because I rely on narrative elements to establish that there is the problem of love that I have identified. For those who believe that the narrative matters less than the gags, my approach might appear either undermotivated or irresolvable. Noël Carroll does something very much like this in *Comedy Incarnate*, a 2007 monograph based on his 1976 dissertation. Carroll is decidedly against interpreting *The General* through narrative analysis generally and the theme of love specifically. (Carroll focuses on *The General* but some of his claims are clearly to be taken as about all of Keaton's films.) He argues that "the physical intelligibility of his fictional world" is Keaton's original and most interesting contribution to the experience of his films (Carroll 10), while the romantic conflict is thematically insignificant (19). Carroll raises four reasons against reading Keaton through the lens of romantic love. I will respond to each, typically by showing that my approach does not have the problems that concern Carroll because I am not attempting a reductive literary analysis of the sort he opposes.

First, Carroll charges that reading "the transformation of love" as the thematic key to Keaton is too general. Carroll is particularly concerned to separate himself from the approaches to narrative that predominated in the 1970s. He wants to avoid allegorical reductionism masquerading as insightful analysis. Instead, he argues that Keaton's films work because they oscillate between Keaton's physical intelligence, which is high, and the physical intelligence character he plays, which is low (at least until the late transformation that provides the climax). The same claim about "the transformation of love" works for Chaplin and Lloyd, for instance, despite some pointed differences between the three's films. I am not claiming that "the transformation of love" is the key to Keaton's films, nor do I think allegorical reductiveness is a productive interpretive tool, nor does my argument assume either of these points. I am interested neither in allegory nor in reductions.

Second, on the "transformation of love" reading, Keaton is not original, because he is simply repeating an ages-old story. This is the closest Carroll comes to offering a straw man. Love could be an important element of Keaton's films and still be unoriginal. Carroll assumes that any reading that posits originality to Keaton is to be preferred to one that does not, but this assumes a specialness to Keaton that has not yet been supported by argument.

Third, Keaton in at least one interview seems dismissive of the importance of the love interest. The value of importing interviews, marketing, and other extra-textual elements is fraught, but we should at least be wary of putting too much weight on these claims. Leaving this

worry aside, the Keaton quote admits the very point that I need for my argument: the protagonist's attempts to woo the girl are what motivates the action in Keaton's shorts. (Carroll concedes that this continues in the features.) Keaton returned to this point in other interviews. Of he and his collaborators, "We were very conscious of our stories." Gags that worked in two-reelers wouldn't necessarily work in a feature. "So story construction became a very strong point with us" (Sweeney 222).

Finally, a thematic emphasis on love should be apparent in the visuals, which it is not. "In order to include such emphasis, Keaton would undoubtedly have employed more close-ups of the romantic couple and would have edited close-ups of the boy's gaze with point-of-view shots of erotic desire"—the sort of techniques we find in Chaplin (21). I won't quibble with how often images and edits conveying romantic love are present in Keaton. Shots of heightened *pathos* are rare, but other visions of love might be present. While Chaplin goes for such "erotic longing," Keaton does not. And this is, precisely, my starting point. How does Keaton motivate the plot of the films without this erotic longing? How do we square the apparently passion-less Buster character with the perfectly predictable attempts to secure the beloved that follow?

I want to preserve the observation by Carroll and others that what Keaton is primarily interested in the gags. However, some of the gags can only be appreciated by recognizing the narrative elements, and the motivation of love in particular. There's no clean cleaving of narrative and gags in Keaton's films. To appreciate Keaton's accomplishments, we must understand what he says about love. We should agree with Carroll (23) that "Keaton uses the lovemaking motif to invent yet another situation where concrete problem-solving is called for," but this is not just *physical* problem-solving, as Carroll sees it, but *relational* problem-solving. This can help establish (not oppose) Carroll's claim that the conclusion of *The General*, to take the film he focuses on, presents love in "rather realistic than sentimental flavor" (24).

The confusion of love with sentiment is potentially pernicious and has led many of Keaton's most astute viewers to mistake his lack of affection with a lack of love. When we watch a Keaton film, especially a feature, we see him and his collaborators masterfully interweaving gags and narrative, using each to enrich the other. Throughout, we often see both Buster and the heroine reach a point where they have not only overcome one or more formidable obstacles but recognized that the other is capable of this, too. This is the story of love to which Keaton frequently returns, and it is a love of mutual admiration and recognition that they can face life together.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "I was practically my own producer on all those silent pictures. I used a co-director on some of them, but the majority I did alone. And I cut them all myself: I cut all my own pictures" (Sweeney 221).

<sup>2</sup> Compare to Gabriella Oldham's claim: "While Keaton may have made these films with little intention of linking them thematically, nonetheless his style and outlook have aligned the films in a continuum that nurtures a uniquely dimensional comic persona" (Oldham 333).

<sup>3</sup> As Oldham notes, "Most of Keaton's feature characters possess real names (John McKay, Rollo Treadway, Alfred Butler, Johnnie Gray, Ronald, Willie)," but the shorts are often just "The Little Guy" or "Our Hero" (Oldham 360). As with everything, Keaton gets a gag out of the naming when in *The Love Nest*, the nineteenth and final short, his name ("Buster") is added to a list of crew members lost at sea and his is the only one without a surname.

<sup>4</sup> For an overview of the accounts of love that emphasize union, see (Johnson 60–99).

<sup>5</sup> *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* is a borderline case. Kittie King appears to be just a friend, although Janice Agnello claims that she is the college sweetheart of Keaton's Luke Shannon (Agnello, Crabtree, and Foote).

<sup>6</sup> Although I have focused on the ways in which this point is reached through a narrative arc to which Keaton frequently returns (boy sets out to earn girl's love), it appears in other stories as well. For instance, in *One Week* the hero and heroine begin married, but despite the complete failure of their first home in every conceivable way, they walk off together, knowing that they if they can face what they have, they can face anything else.

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