

“Piccola Italia: The Italians at the Companhia Cinematográfica Vera Cruz”

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Do planalto abençoado para as telas do Mundo was the slogan of the movie studio Companhia Cinematográfica Vera Cruz (1949 – 1954), and it encapsulates very clearly the ambitions of its main investors, Franco Zampari (Naples, 1898 – São Paulo, 1966) and the Brazilian Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho – commonly known as Ciccillo – (São Paulo, 1898 – 1977): to produce export-grade movies at the company’s studios in São Paulo that could go on to win audiences abroad. Suffice it to say the Italian presence was there from the very outset, seeing as Ciccillo was of Italian descent and Zampari was an Italian, born and bred. (Fig. 1)¹

The Companhia Cinematográfica Vera Cruz – located in São Bernardo do Campo (SP, Brasil) – was purpose-built to produce movies on an industrial scale. Circulating among its five studios, dressing rooms and canteens were directors, actors, actresses and technicians eager to develop a Brazilian industrial cinema like nothing that had gone before. As was widely publicized, the studios were installed on a former grange belonging to the prosperous entrepreneur Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho.

Such a daring, pioneering endeavor begs a certain question: after all, what made these businessmen decide to venture into the film industry? The spur of the success of the Teatro Brasileiro de Comédia - TBC [Brazilian Comedy Theater], perhaps? Ciccillo was chairman of the theater, and Zampari its director, and it proved such a hit that they wanted to repeat their stage success on the silver screen. However, some suggest the idea came from a test filming of the play *Arsenic and Old Lace*, by Joseph Kesselring, directed at the TBC by Adolfo Celi, and described later by Kemeny². In his version of the genesis of Vera Cruz, the playwright and director Abílio Pereira de Almeida declared that “it was all just a game from the very beginning, a fun pastime for the moneyed gentry”.³ At Zampari’s house one Sunday in 1949, Aldo Calvo and Adolfo Celi took out an eight-millimeter camera (at Franco Zampari’s home) and started filming an

1 Acknowledgments: Caco Souza, Lina Maciel P. de Souza, Daniel Maciel P.de Souza, Fabio Carpi and Ana Magalhães.

2 GALVÃO, M. *Burguesia e Cinema: o caso Vera Cruz*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1981, p.87.

3 Ibid, p.89.

improvised story called *O roubo do brilhante* (The Brilliant Heist. 10mins)⁴, starring Zampari and his wife, Débora. In fact, Débora Zampari gives yet another version for the creation of Vera Cruz, saying that Franco's brother, Carlo, was so impressed by the success of the Rio-made *chanchadas* (musical romps) that he suggested that Franco start using the TBC's cast, crew and repertoire to produce movies⁵. So, as we can see, there was no shortage of possible motives for the creation of Vera Cruz, depending on who one asks, but the fact is that Zampari and Ciccillo decided to "live the dream" of creating a Brazilian film industry to rival that of the North-American studios.

In pursuit of that goal, Vera Cruz found itself having to contend with two initial challenges: a lack of raw material and shortage of qualified labor. The studio depended entirely on imported equipment (and film), and to ensure a qualitative edge over the domestic competition, the company opted to import foreign professionals en masse.

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(Fig. 02)

As is well known, from the late 1940s on, Ciccillo was involved in a number of cultural undertakings that would shape the cultural life of São Paulo. A childhood friend of Ciccillo, with whom he had studied in Naples, Zampari moved to Brazil in 1922 to take up a job at Metal Graphica Aliberti, which belonged to the Matarazzo family. Thus began a flourishing partnership that expanded into the theater and film industries.

To achieve their aim of quality film production, they hired the director and producer Alberto Cavalcanti (Rio de Janeiro, 1897 – Paris, 1982), a Brazilian based in Europe who was back in the country in July 1949 to deliver a series of lectures on the fledgling Centro de Estudos Cinematográficos at MASP. The Center, set up to train cinema professionals, was directed by Paolo Giolli (another Italian), and it administered theoretical and practical classes, and held seminars and film screenings. The Center's archives — now hosted by the MASP Library — contain a note introducing Cavalcanti:

*On the invitation of the Centro de Estudos Cinematográficos and Museum of Art's, we are pleased to announce a visit, in the coming month of December, from the famous Brazilian filmmaker Alberto Cavalcanti, resident in Europe for the last thirty years, where he has achieved worldwide acclaim as the producer and director of documentary and fiction films. (...) This fellow countryman, still largely unknown to the wider Brazilian public, is today one of the most renowned, respected and often cited names in European cinema, not just for the scope of his work, but for its quality*⁶

4 An original copy of the film *O Roubo do Brilhante* can be found at the Cinemateca Brasileira; by Adolfo Celi, director and screenwriter; director of photography Aldo Calvo.

5 Ibid, p.91.

6 MASP, Library. 1949 CAIXA 3 PASTA 14: "Virá a São Paulo o cineasta patricio Alberto Cavalcanti".

(Fig. 03)

The Film professor Maximo Barro, a former student at the Center, told me in an interview (recorded in 2006) that Pietro Maria Bardi had asked the students to choose a *renowned* director they would like to see giving classes on film-making and the first name presented was that of Vittorio De Sica. According to Barro, when informed of the students' choice, Bardi suggested that they select a Brazilian filmmaker, which caused widespread embarrassment, as they didn't know any. Bardi then put forward the name of Alberto Cavalcanti, leaving the students with the distinct impression that the "vote" had merely been a pretext for a premeditated recommendation⁷.

During Cavalcanti's stay in São Paulo, where he gave the course Cinema as an Art Form, Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho introduced him to Franco Zampari, Adolfo Celi and Ruggiero Jacobbi, who were directly involved in the creation of Vera Cruz. Cavalcanti had this to say about the job offer:

Mister Franco Zampari invited me to direct a film in Brazil, on condition that, prior to filming, I give some orientation to Mister Adolfo Celi, who, it had been agreed, would direct the company's maiden film (...). So, the suggestion was that I come to Brazil for a period of four years as general producer for the Company⁸.

When Cavalcanti arrived in São Paulo, now in the employ of Vera Cruz, Pietro Maria Bardi made no attempt to conceal his disgruntlement, as we can see from the letter below:

My dear Cavalcanti:

It was with great surprise that I learned from the newspapers of your arrival in our city. On behalf of the and Museum of Art and Centro de Estudos Cinematográficos, I would like to extend the warmest of welcomes, like the one you received at Congonhas [airport]. However, as neither the Museum nor the Center was invited, we felt it would have been improper of us to turn up and discomfit those who, acting upon a certain provincial spirit, seem incapable of displaying even the most rudimentary good manners and recognition (...)

Cordially,

Pietro Maria Bardi (director)⁹.

One can infer that the "provincial spirit" to which Bardi referred was the "spirit" of Vera Cruz. At a time when cosmopolitanism was the buzzword, there could be no worse insult than to be called provincial.

7 Máximo Barro, in conversation with the author, on November 16, 2006.

8 CAVALCANTI, Alberto. In: VALENTINETTI, C.; PELLIZZARI, L. *Alberto Cavalcanti*. São Paulo: Instituto Lina Bo e P. M. Bardi, 1996, p.159.

9 MASP, Library. Sent Letters. São Paulo, January 5, 1950.

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One of the biggest challenges facing the nascent Brazilian film industry, with its intended overhaul of the local cinema, was the lack of qualified labor. In response to this shortage, Cavalcanti decided to round up a “multi-national” team of professionals, because, he would later say, he did “not want an English or French or Italian majority that might nudge the meaning of the films this way or that”.¹⁰

This international contingent, commonly referred to as the group “Cavalcanti”, joined the “Italian” team, in which Adolfo Celi played a fundamental role, at both the TBC and Vera Cruz. Celi, who was trained as a director at the Accademia Romana di Silvio D’Amico, was away in Argentina—working on the film *Emigrantes* (FABRIZI, 1948)—when the set designer Aldo Calvo recommended him to Zampari, who then hired him as art director for the TBC. Celi was one of the main vectors for the Italian presence at the head of both the TBC and Vera Cruz, as he invited some former Accademia Romana colleagues to work with him in Brazil. The first of these was Lucio Salce, followed by Flaminio Bollini Cerri, and then the screenwriter Fabio Carpi.

(Fig. 04)

For years I tried in vain to interview some surviving member of this Italian group, until I finally managed to do so in 2012, during a visit to Europe, when Fabio Carpi agreed to meet me, and we have maintained a fertile dialogue ever since. On his move to Vera Cruz, he said that, given the scarcity of local Brazilian screenwriters, his good friend Flaminio Bollini suggested that he try his luck on the other side of the Atlantic. He was working as a film critic for the Milanese newspaper *L’Unità* and as a collaborator with the director Dino Risi (1916-2008). Carpi was the first of the Italians to return to Italy, where he went on to enjoy a prosperous career as a director, author and screenwriter.

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Getting back to Vera Cruz, within the context of the “founding” of a home-grown industrial cinema in the molds of the USA studio system, Italian films were considered an artistic inspiration. In an interview with the *O Estado de São Paulo* newspaper in 1949, Alberto Cavalcanti remarked that Italian cinema was “one of the best in the world”, and he mentioned De Sica —especially the film *Ladri di biciclette*—, Lattuada and Blasetti as his main influences¹¹. Eliane Lage, the star actress in the Vera Cruz stable, once said that it was post-war Italian cinema that drove Zampari and Ciccillo to found the studios in São Bernardo¹².

Adding further weight to this dialogue between Italian and Brazilian film, when Companhia Cinematográfica Vera Cruz’ first feature, *Caiçara* (CELI, 1950), was

10 CAVALCANTI, A. *Filme e Realidade*. Rio de Janeiro: Artenova/Embrafilme, 1977, p. 250.

11 *O Estado de São Paulo*, October first, 1949.

12 In an interview with the author.

screened at Cannes in 1951, it attracted comparisons with Rossellini's *Stromboli*, while the local São Paulo press likened Eliane Lage to Ingrid Bergman. Writing about the association being drawn between the two films, the film critic and *O Estado de São Paulo* correspondent Novais Teixeira, said that he felt the comparison had dampened *Caiçara*'s impact at Cannes. He wrote: "On the matter of plot, everyone here, without exception, noted the similarity between the settings of Vulcão¹³ and *Stromboli* (...) Hence the refusal to recognize its originality"¹⁴.

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(Fig. 05)

In April 1951, the Roman magazine *Cinema* ran a report by Francesco Biagi highlighting the pivotal role being played by Italian professionals in Brazilian cinema: "In 1950, roughly 20 films were produced in Brazil: a truly notable number for a country that only started operating in the vast and difficult field of movie production a few years ago".

Biagi describes these productions as "Italo-Brazilian combinations", underscoring the involvement of "numerous Italian technicians, directors and producers". The film *Caiçara* (Celi) was mentioned as being "the first Brazilian feature to step outside the national bounds", though this did not prevent it from being merely a "pretext for showcasing Brazil" in all its folkloric elements, resulting in a "touristy" movie "with no consistency".

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Back in Brazil, if we look at the press coverage during the Vera Cruz years, we can see that this Italian presence caused a good deal of controversy and intrigue, largely fuelled by Alberto Cavalcanti's resignation from the studio in 1951. One of the reasons for this rupture was a clash with the Company directors, the "Italians" Franco and Carlo Zampari.

At this point it is perhaps important to note that this relationship – made possible by Vera Cruz – had always been fraught, to the point that the Italians are sometimes considered the cause of frustration of the industrialization of Brazilian cinema. In the latter half of the 1950s, the press was discernibly defensive of Cavalcanti and attack of the Company, and therefore, by association, of the nationality of its board of directors. An article published in *Anhembi* magazine in March 1951 admitted as much:

(...) that São Paulo-based company has just lost a great Brazilian filmmaker – Alberto Cavalcanti. What hidden reasons, what mysterious events, what unknown circumstances led, on one hand, "Vera Cruz" to dispense with its producer, a figure

¹³ "Volcano" (DIETERLE, 1950)

¹⁴ *O Estado de São Paulo*, May 5, 1951.

of the highest possible value at this time of revival in Brazilian cinema (...)

If the reasons behind the split were not duly mentioned, the “grave errors” were certainly enumerated. According to the abovementioned article, the Studio had been put together rushy, with:

*mediocre, incompetent and sometimes intellectually dishonest people utterly ignorant of cinematic craft, who were, nonetheless, allowed to work on a movie like “Caiçara”, particularly on its intellectual structuring*¹⁵.

It is important to note that the “intellectual” team behind *Caiçara* was full of Italians, from the director, Adolfo Celi, and production director, Carlo Zampari, to the screenwriter, Ruggero Jacobbi, and the set designer, Aldo Calvo.

Two years after leaving the Company, Cavalcanti made direct reference to the predominant nationality at Vera Cruz in an article suggestively entitled “Italianos no cinema brasileiro” (also published in *Anhembi*), in which he expressed his opinion—not always positive—about the work this group had done at Vera Cruz:

When I was invited by some Italians, directors at Companhia Cinematográfica Vera Cruz, to work as the firm’s general producer, I carefully chose specialists from different nationalities so that a Brazilian style could evolve freely, unburdened by the influence of a majority.

Though he recognized that “minor technicians” and “specialist operators”, mostly Italians, helped “train Brazilian crew” and maintain a spirit of professionalism and discipline on-set, he attacked the “directorial ineptness” and “lack of any serious production control”.

As, by this stage, the Italian presence in the Brazilian film “industry” had spread beyond Vera Cruz into other fledgling studios, Cavalcanti widened the aim of his attacks to include another operation altogether:

One of the more unusual figures among the Italians in the film industry in São Paulo is a “former driver” or chauffeur from the Cinecittà studios in Rome, who turned up in Brazil and presented himself as a producer and ex-assistant of Rossellini, and managed to secure funding from one of the city’s richest families to build a studio and start producing films.

He does not name this “figure”, but he was quite possibly referring to Mario Civelli, who, alongside Marinho Audrá, founded the Companhia Cinematográfica Maristela in São Paulo. Resuming his attacks on Vera Cruz, Cavalcanti says:

At Vera Cruz, thanks to one authoritarian businessman, five or six young Italians, with extremely vague credentials on the peninsula and not a single directorial credit to their name, managed to secure the task of directing films, and the results, it must be said, have hardly been encouraging so far.

15 *Anhembi*, Vol.I, p. 573, n.4, Mar, 1951.

Adding further fuel to the controversy, the critic Benedito J. Duarte commented on Cavalcanti's absence from the screenwriters competition (part of the festivities for the 4th Centenary of São Paulo City) by alluding to rumors apparently circulating about the former studio producer: "There were the now-customary snide remarks from the Italo-Brazilian circles at 'Nick Bar' (...)"¹⁶.

In her autobiography *Tudo em cor de rosa*, published in the 1970s, Yolanda Penteadó mentions the "conspiratorial" atmosphere between the Italian and Brazilian cliques. She was divorced from Ciccillo by this stage, and had maintained a strong bond of friendship with Cavalcanti:

*When I saw that things were looking pretty bleak for Alberto at Vera Cruz, and that the Italians, the money-men, had hired one of the biggest lawyers in Brazil, if not the biggest, it was clear my good friend Alberto didn't stand a chance. What's more, they waged a massive, orchestrated campaign against him; they were a genuine clan*¹⁷.

For us today, it is hard to read between the lines and grasp what Yolanda meant by this, especially because the "Italians" weren't the capital behind the venture. It is also interesting to note that Ciccillo's involvement with Vera Cruz is barely mentioned. For Yolanda, it had been naive of Cavalcanti to take the job in the first place.

*The Italians made all sorts of promises, and he agreed to come over out of his love for Brazil, a desire to do cinema here, because, at the end of the day, however ingenious he may be, Alberto is still a child. He is too trusting, and you just can't be like that.*¹⁸

In an interview published in the French magazine *Écran* (1974), Cavalcanti stated that the "Italian majority" had finished off the balance he'd hoped to achieve¹⁹.

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The decade after the founding of Vera Cruz, in 1963 to be precise, Glauber Rocha, a filmmaker icon of the Brazilian Cinema Novo, published the book *Revisão Crítica do Cinema Brasileiro*, in which he took a revisionist look that effectively erased the Company's legacy. He added to the chorus of criticisms of the Italians, who, he said, "turned up in droves, touted as assistants to Rossellini"²⁰: "What prevailed at Vera Cruz was stupidity, self-sufficiency and amateurism. It was a sin to speak of Brazil; the Italian directors shot whatever

16 DUARTE, B.J. "Cavalcanti em São Bernardo", Tribute to Alberto Cavalcanti, Filmoteca do MAM, SP. April/May, 1956, s.p.

17 PENTEADO, Y. *Tudo em Cor de Rosa*. São Paulo: Ed. da Autora, 1977, p.251.

18 Ibid, p.253.

19 CAVALCANTI, A. op. cit., p. 250.

20 ROCHA, Glauber. *Revisão Crítica do Cinema Brasileiro*. São Paulo: Cosac & Naify, 2003, p. 71.

an Italian author, Fabio Carpi, wrote (...)”²¹.

For Glauber, Franco Zampari was simply an “Italian that protected other Italians”²², while the screenwriter Fabio Carpi was “an Italian writer who barely knew any Portuguese”²³:

*It wasn't racism, but the opportunities went to Adolfo Celi, Ugo Lombardi, Alberto Pieralisi, Luciano Salce, Gianni Pons, Ruggero Jacobbi, Fabio Carpi, Tom Payne, Flaminio Bollini Cerri – these were the movie directors at Vera Cruz, where the only Brazilians allowed to direct there were people like Lima Barreto, Abílio Pereira de Almeida and Carlos Thiré*²⁴.

For Glauber, these foreigners were given breaks that should have gone to Brazilian filmmakers, who, he says, “would have made better, more popular and more Brazilian films than the anti-commercial, pretentious melodramas”²⁵ turned out by the Companhia Cinematográfica Vera Cruz.

According to Glauber, Cavalcanti should have set the condition that only Brazilian directors would be used, because that would have “made Vera Cruz work”. On the fate of the Studio’s Italians, Glauber says:

*Salce and Carpi were saddled with debts and beat it; Bollini Cerri, who'd been doing an imitation of American crime shows in Na senda do Crime, did a little theater, then disappeared; Pieralisi stuck around, doing second-rate comedies. Ugo Lombardi went to work as lighting handyman (...)*²⁶.

Glauber’s youth and desire to instill a new cinematographic language explains his implacability toward this group of foreigners, who he saw as having squandered an opportunity to produce film in Brazil under unprecedented conditions.

In an interview with *Anhembi* magazine (previously cited), Alberto Calvalcanti admitted that the opportunity offered to these “young foreigners” caused a certain resentment among “their Brazilian film-industry counterparts”. Ending on a prophetic note, he said: “in the end, the only ones who will actually make it will be those who really deserve it, whether Brazilian or not”²⁷.

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With these considerations in mind, we can identify a certain tendency among the critics to lump these “foreigners”, unfamiliar as they were with Brazilian

21 Ibid, pp. 71 & 72.

22 Ibid, p. 77.

23 Ibid, p.80.

24 Ibid, p.77.

25 Ibid, p.77.

26 Ibid, p.82.

27 *Anhembi*, n. 35, Oct 1953, p.400..

culture, with most of the blame for the Company's failure. It is a value judgment that has abided for decades and constituted something of a bias in the way the cinema produced at Vera Cruz is analyzed.

In the 1970s, the literary critic Antonio Candido de Mello e Souza contested this position during a thesis defense by the historian Maria Rita Galvão at the University of São Paulo²⁸:

*Reading your work, I was shocked by the wholly unjustified accusation of "foreign protectionism" leveled against these films. The technicians were Italian, the editors were English, but the films are very Brazilian indeed. I consider mere prejudice this idea that something is more or less Brazilian depending on which part of the country it was produced in, or because the guy's name was Zampari rather than Silva. (...) In your thesis, I feel you should have examined whether or not they reached the point at which those values achieved a certain universality beyond the question of class*²⁹.

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Antonio Candido put a name to that veiled aspect behind the critical bias against the Italians (or foreigners in general) in Brazilian film: "prejudice". Six decades on, now that the ill-feeling has had time to subside, we can reflect more clearly on the Companhia Cinematográfica Vera Cruz's legacy, above and beyond any dichotomies: we might now exonerate the Italians and ask ourselves why—in the early years of the 21st Century—we still don't have a national film industry.

28 GALVÃO, M. *Companhia Cinematográfica Vera Cruz*. thesis defended at the FFLCH USP, in 1975.

29 SOUZA, A. "A Vera Cruz, a Fábrica de Sonhos". Published in *Tendências e Cultura*, "Opinião", on September 17, 197... (year illegible). Gathered by Luiz Renato Martins.



Fig. 1 Companhia Cinematográfica Vera Cruz facade/© Unknown author, c. 1952/Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo/ Fundação Bienal São Paulo.



Fig. 2 Photo of Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho/© Unknown author, c. 1950/Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo/ Fundação Bienal São Paulo.



Fig. 3 Photo of Alberto Cavalcanti/© Unknown author/Flyer of the Museu de Arte de São Paulo/ São Paulo, Oct 9th 1952/ Acervo Biblioteca do MASP.

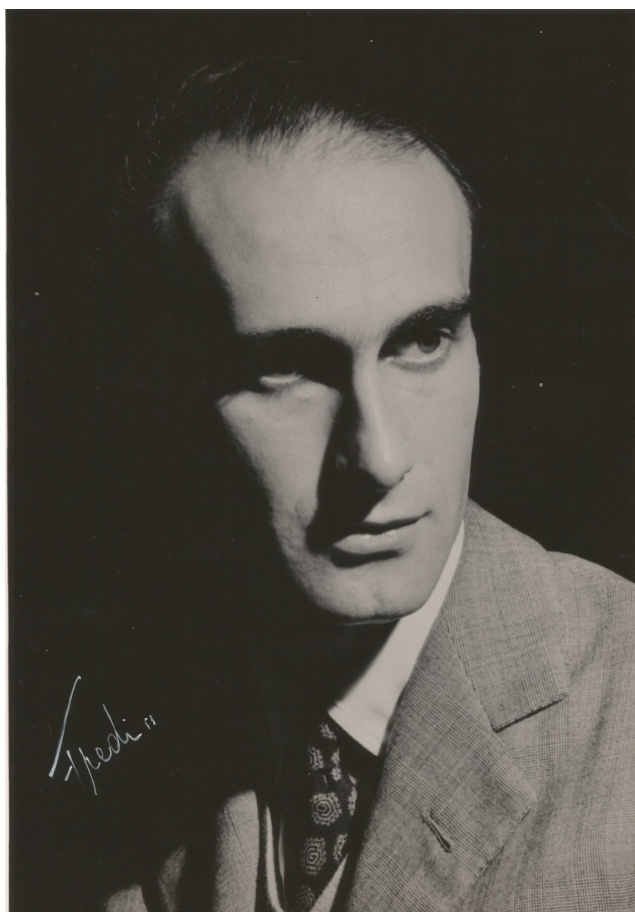


Fig. 4 Photo of Fábio Carpi/Photographer: Fredi Kleemann, 1951, São Paulo/ Author's private collection.

LETTERA DAL BRASILE

BOCCIATO A PUNTA DEL ESTE
CAIÇARA VA A CANNES

progetto di ridurre per lo schermo il libro di Desmond Young *The Desert Fox* («La volpe del deserto»), basato sulla vita del generale nazista Rommel. Johnson è accusato di voler procedere a una esaltazione del maresciallo tedesco; a sua discolpa, egli cita una dichiarazione fatta nel 1942 dal "premier" inglese Churchill: «Abbiamo in Rommel un audace ed esperto avversario, e mi sia concesso dirlo pur attraverso il turbine della guerra». Johnson afferma inoltre che, pur non essendo un genio intellettuale (sic), Rommel partecipò all'attentato contro Hitler e venne "fatto fuori" dalla Gestapo. Ma il produttore sembra dimenticare che Rommel fu uno dei più accaniti fautori dell'imperialismo militarista prussiano, e che la sua opposizione al regime non fu certo dettata da amore per la libertà, ma proprio dalla sua mentalità imperialista, prussianistica e tipicamente "junker". La RKO ha intanto presentato *Payment on Demand* di Curtis Bernhardt, in cui il tema del divorzio è trattato con scarsa sincerità. Il film riconferma peraltro le qualità di Bette Davis, la quale, dopo la parentesi notevolissima di *All About Eve* («Eva contro Eva») sembra essere tornata ai ruoli di "donna da odiare". Assai più importante appare *Fourteen Hours* di Henry Hathaway, basato su una vicenda di suicidio realmente avvenuta alcuni anni orsono. Hathaway è ritornato alla maniera che aveva adottato in precedenti opere a carattere "cronachistico". Bosley Crowther del *New York Times*, ravvede in *Fourteen Hours* l'influenza dei film italiani, da *Pausa a Ladri di biciclette*. Un altro film, pure della Fox, mi sembra degno di menzione. Si tratta di *The 13th Letter*, diretto dal viennese Otto Preminger, interpretato da Charles Boyer (particolarmente efficace) e da Linda Darnell, e ricavato dal celebre film di Clouzot *Il Corvo*. La Warner Bros ha proiettato *Storm Warning*, diretto da Stuart Heisler. La vicenda espone, con effetti drammatici sapientemente congegnati, alcuni particolari della sordida attività del Ku Klux Klan.

John Huston e Sam Spiegel, soci della nuova casa di produzione Horizon, hanno interpellato Laurence Olivier e Vivien Leigh in merito a una trilogia che Huston intende realizzare, per la regia di Garson Kanin, Billy Wilder e sua, su brani della antologia *Presenting Moonshine*. Pare che le trattative siano a buon punto: Olivier e la Leigh saranno associati alla produzione quali attori, mentre i tre film della trilogia saranno diretti rispettivamente da Huston, Kanin e Wilder. Frattanto sono partiti, alla volta dell'Irlanda, John Wayne e il presidente della Republic Pictures Herbert J. Yates. In Irlanda, l'attore interpreterà un film di John Ford, intitolato (almeno per ora) *The Quiet Man*. E' la prima volta, dai tempi di *The Informer* («Il traditore») che Ford ritorna a girare nel suo paese d'origine. A Roma, invece, si recherà fra poco l'ex-regista della Garbo, Clarence Brown, per dirigerla *When in Rome* (MGM). Speriamo che la "città eterna" sia trattata con il dovuto rispetto.

GIORGIO N. FENIX

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NEL 1950 sono stati prodotti in Brasile circa venti film: una cifra davvero ragguardevole per un paese che soltanto da pochi anni ha iniziato una attività propria nel vasto e difficile campo della produzione cinematografica. Nascono case di produzione, combinazioni italo-brasiliane (a Rio de Janeiro e a San Paolo si trovano molti tecnici, registi e produttori italiani) ma, alla resa dei conti, non è ancora uscita un'opera tale da imporsi all'attenzione internazionale. Abbiamo visto recentemente, a Rio, il film *Caiçara* (1950) e un vecchio film *Itacema*. Entrambi hanno avuto un largo apporto italiano.

Caiçara rappresenterà il Brasile al Festival di Cannes. E' la prima pellicola brasiliana che esce dai confini nazionali per andare ad una grande competizione europea. Organizzato su serie basi industriali, senza economia (riportiamo a puro titolo di cronaca questa voce ufficiale: il film sembra sia costato sessanta "coritos", equivalente a quasi 125 milioni di lire; di solito tutti gli altri film vengono realizzati con 1000 "coritos" e cioè con poco più di 20 milioni), prodotto e supervisionato da Alberto Cavalcanti, scritto e diretto da Adolfo Celli, il film racconta una storia piuttosto trita. Una povera e bella ragazza, figlia di lebbrosi, sposa, per uscire da un orfanotrofio, il ricco proprietario d'un cantiere di barche, violento e brutale. L'azione si svolge su una isoletta del litorale paulista; in un mondo primitivo con sentimenti primitivi, lontano dalla città; in questa isoletta la giovane sposa non trova l'agognata libertà, ma una seconda prigione. Attorno a lei ruotano diversi uomini: uno dei quali lascia affogare, in un giorno di tempesta, il marito della protagonista che alla fine trova l'amore in un giovane marinaio. La storia è un pretesto per "farci vedere" molto Brasile; il film è pieno di elementi folcloristici: dalle

danze locali (macumbé e congá) alle preghiere esotiche. Pertanto il dramma della donna risulta sopraffatto dalle eccessive annotazioni "turistiche": solo a brevi intervalli affiora e prende una certa consistenza. I personaggi sono appena disegnati, le azioni mancano di una logica giustificazione e rimangono perciò avulse dal resto del film.

L'influenza della scuola francese è evidente in tutto il film: la recitazione di Carlos Vergueiro ricorda quella di molti altri attori. Eliana Lage ha un volto intelligente ed è quasi sempre brava (se si toglie qualche incertezza nella recitazione all'inizio del film), discreto Pereira de Almeida è un tantino gignone. Carlos Vergueiro, la fotografia di Chic Poule è, nel complesso, assai bella. *Caiçara* è, a tutt'oggi, il migliore film brasiliano.

Itacema di Vittorio Cardinale è censurato, dalla critica locale, un buon film in verità non lo è, e ricorda i tempi dei muti. Gli attori sono Ilha Soares e Mario Brum.

E adesso qualche notizia sulle ultime novità del cinema brasiliano. A San Paolo è sorta una nuova grande società, la "Luz Stella", che sotto la direzione artistica di Ruggero Jacobbi (la produzione è affidata a Mario Ciccioli), ha terminato *Proscritto*. Anita, desunto dall'omonimo romanzo di Mario Donato, che ha ottenuto un buon successo librario nel 1949 in Brasile. Sempre a San Paolo, sono finite le riprese di *Terra e sempre terra*, per la regia di Tom Payne, con Marisa Prado e Mario Sérgio, il marinaio di *Caiçara*. Continua la lavorazione del primo film brasiliano a disegni animati ed a lungo metraggio *Sinfonia Amazonica*. A Rio la "Nova Terra" ha portato a termine Meu dia chegou, una commedia brillante per la regia di G. Talamo.

FRANCESCO RINALDI

Eliana Lage e De Almeida in *Caiçara*: film diretto da Adolfo Celli con la supervisione di Cavalcanti. Già proiettato a Punta del Este, questo film rappresenterà il Brasile a Cannes.

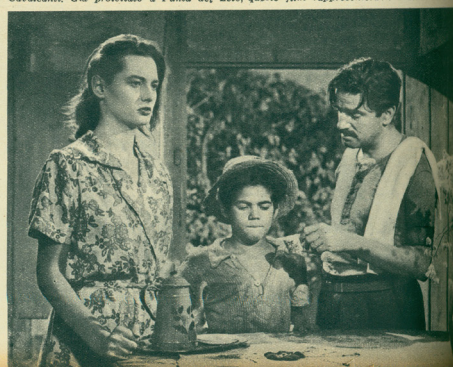


Fig. 5 Reproduction of Cinema Magazine, Rome, n.59, 1 April 1951/Acervo Biblioteca Jenny Klabin Segall.