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Hollywood on the Tiber and Italian Cinema: Practices of Transatlantic Stardom

1949-1965

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Maria Elena D'Amelio

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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My dissertation aims to contribute to the emergent scholarly conversation on transnational stardom by examining the transatlantic career of the three male stars Amedeo Nazzari, Vittorio Gassman, and Steve Reeves, as case studies to define specific transnational practices of film production, aesthetics, and reception between Italy and the United States.

While the term "transnational" in film studies is usually associated with texts that critically engage with world cinema and postcolonial studies, this project places the transatlantic cultural, political, and social exchanges between the US and Italy at its center, and explores these stars within the Hollywood on the Tiber era, characterized by the strong presence of American film productions (called runaway productions) in the Cinecittà studios in Rome.

Dedication Page

I dedicate my dissertation to my husband, Jens Benjamin Mueller, and to my son, Luca Thomas Mueller.

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CHAPTER I

Italian Stars at the Intersection of History, Politics, Art and Popular Culture: A Literature and Methodology Survey

"The Yankees have colonized our subconscious." This statement from the film *Kings of the Road* (1976),[1] by German-born director Wim Wenders, emphasizes America's mass cultural influence on postwar Western Germany and the anxiety of a consequent Americanization of German national identity (Elsaesser 39). Similarly, in postwar Italy the film *Un americano a Roma* (Steno, 1954) parodies the country's often excessive fascination with American culture through the character of Nando Moriconi - played by Alberto Sordi -, an Italian obsessively in love with everything "made in U.S.A.", from baseball caps to American-English slang and language and, of course, movies. Both Wenders' and Steno's films, although more than twenty years apart, address the issue of the American cultural hegemony in Europe at different times, with Hollywood and the popularity of its products as the main perpetrators.

The traditional debate in historical and film studies regarding the relationship between America and Europe after WWII has always underlined the irreducible oppositional positions between their two respective cinemas (Elsaesser 36). As a whole, the US views cinema as a commercial commodity, subject to free trade. In contrast, European countries generally consider film to be an art form, one to be protected as a national cultural artifact. I argue that

[1] Wim Wenders' film belongs to the *Road Movies Trilogy* that reworks the American myth of the on the road trip

this element of oppositionalism fails to take into account the complex cultural, political, economic, and social exchanges created by the presence of Hollywood productions in European countries; exchanges that do not work in opposition, but instead serve as an enriching, two-way traffic practice.

My dissertation aims to contribute to the emergent scholarly conversation on transnational stardom by examining the transatlantic career of the three male stars Amedeo Nazzari, Vittorio Gassman, and Steve Reeves, as case studies to define specific transnational practices of film production, aesthetics, and reception between Italy and the United States. While the term "transnational" in film studies is usually associated with texts that critically engage with world cinema and postcolonial studies, this project places the transatlantic cultural, political, and social exchanges between the US and Italy at its center, and explores these stars within the Hollywood on the Tiber era, characterized by the strong presence of American film productions (called runaway productions) in the Cinecittà studios in Rome.

As Richard Dyer writes in *Heavenly Bodies*, "We're fascinated by stars because they enact ways of making sense of the experience of being a person in a particular kind of social production (capitalism), with its particular organization of life into public and private spheres. Stars represent typical ways of behaving, feeling and thinking in contemporary society, ways that have been socially, culturally, historically constructed" (16). The analyses of stars in national contexts have often been tied to questions of national imaginary and to questions of political identity, value, and attitude. In the Italian case in particular, excellent work has been produced on national stars, such as Jacqueline Reich's *Beyond the Latin Lover: Marcello Mastroianni, Masculinity, and Italian Cinema* (2004); Stephen Gundle's *Bellissima: Feminine Beauty and the Idea of Italy* (2007); Mary P. Wood's article "Woman of Rome:

Anna Magnani" (2000); and Marcia Landy's exploration of Italian stars in *Stardom Italian Style* (2008). However, little has been written in relation to the transnational film culture, in which Italian stars performed, thrived, and were consumed.[2]

My project aims to address this gap by examining and understanding the specific ways in which Italian stars represent different declinations of "being male" in postwar Italy and how these representations have been socially, culturally and historically influenced by American culture. The stars I selected for my case studies have been understudied, either for bias against their work in popular genres - such as Amedeo Nazzari in melodrama and Steve Reeves in peplum – or because their national stardom obscured their work in different geographical contexts, as in the case of Vittorio Gassman's career in Hollywood. The organic intellectuals of the Left acknowledged, yet failed to understand the impact of popular genres on Italian audience, insisting on an unfair and useless comparison to Neorealism. Indeed, Amedeo Nazzari, Vittorio Gassman, and Steve Reeves became the favorite male stars of what Gramsci would call the subaltern groups (*gruppi sociali subalterni*), as they came to be identified with popular lowbrow Italian productions such as melodrama and peplum (Nazzari and Reeves respectively), and with a Hollywood-style career (Gassman). Following Gramsci's claim that cultural production is integrally linked to political and economic considerations, my project explores Nazzari, Gassman, and Reeves' stardom in the broader context of Italian popular culture, and investigates its relation to American political, economic, and cultural influence in the years comprising the reconstruction of postwar Italy (1945) and the economic boom (1963).

[2] Key works on transnational stardom that have influenced my thinking on this subject include: Bertellini (2005); Miyao (2007); Gelley (2011).

My project moves away from and beyond the constraint of stars in the paradigm of national art cinemas or as symbols of national identity. Using an interdisciplinary methodology, including archival research, stardom and celebrity studies, Marxist theory, and political economic studies, I argue instead that situating Nazzari, Gassman, and Reeves' star personae transnationally leads to a better understanding of the relationship between stardom and the production of cultural meaning regarding gender, sexuality, and race in the context of Italy's Americanization after the Second World War. Moreover, I aim to critically re-evaluate the methodological approaches to Italian cinema, shifting the emphasis from questions of artistic merit and auteurism towards socially specific contexts of production and reception of popular genres, which are often neglected in the critical scholarship devoted to national cinema.

This introductory chapter serves as a survey of the scholarship and methodologies I employed to delineate the complex relationship between Italian and American cinema, stardom, and cultural imaginary in the 1950s and 1960s. First, I review the major literature on stardom upon which I elaborated in my research, positioning it in a dialogue with issues of masculinity and male representations in film and media and with celebrity culture theories. Second, I examine the literature that confronts notions national and international in European cinema, in order to develop a transnational reading of postwar Italian cinema and stardom. My claim is that, in Italy, the strong influence of Hollywood and American culture in general played a key role in shaping Italian screen representations of masculinity through Italian popular stars. Following this assumption, I focus on the specificity of Italian-American cultural, social, economic, and political relationships during the Americanization of postwar Italy. This crucial period undergoes a historical transition from postwar settlement to the

economic miracle of the 1950s; a social transformation in family life, leisure-time activities, and consumption habits of Italians; and a cultural debate between mass and popular culture. Lastly, I define the methodological tools used in analyzing my three case studies and their transatlantic interactions with Italian and American cinema and society. Through my case studies of Amedeo Nazzari, Vittorio Gassman, and Steve Reeves' star personae, I conjecture a new terminology of *transatlantic hybrid masculinity* to understand the phenomenon of postwar Italian male stardom.

1. Stardom

As Leon Braudy argues in his pivotal *Frenzy of Renown* (1986), media fame is neither a modern phenomenon, nor do its origins reside solely in the technologies of the moving image (5). The image has been central to the idea of fame, at first through literature, theatre, public monuments, paintings, and finally photography, movies, television, and now Internet. However, star studies mainly concentrated on movie stars, and it is Hollywood that most visibly "rationalized the process of star making." (Orgeron 191). Indeed, most of the initial scholarship that theorized stardom as an academic discipline revolved around American stardom, from the first decades to the twentieth century to the golden era of Hollywood's studio system (1930s and 1940s). As Marsha Orgeron notes in 2008, "scholarly attention has only recently begun to shift beyond the Hollywood orbit," (200) and studies of the star phenomenon expanded to include examinations of Asian, European, and Latin American stars and performers.

Although theoretical fascination with the film star dates back as far as Béla Balázs' *The Visible Man* (1924), the study of stars and stardom did not become commonplace in film studies until the 1980s. The discipline first to approach the mechanics of contemporary celebrity was sociology. Barthes' essay "The Face of Garbo" in *Mythologies* (1957), Morin's *The Stars* (1960), and Alberoni's *The Powerless Elite* (1963) were among the first works to address stardom's cultural and ideological implications from, respectively, semiotic, philosophical, and sociological standpoints. These three books were all published in the late 1950s and early 1960s, a time when celebrity culture was increasingly visible.

These studies set the stage for an exploration of stardom, culture, and ideology that culminated with the publication of Richard Dyer's *Stars* (1979), which Orgeron calls "a benchmark moment in this era of the discipline's history" mostly because Dyer's work definitely established the academic legitimacy of the star studies field (194). The author introduced the idea of the "star text," a concept that stretches beyond an artist's performances in films to include fan magazine articles, advertising posters, personal biographies, and rumors about actors, all of which contribute to the experience of modern celebrity. Dyer offered "a model for mining the cultural significance of a star by examining the network of ideological discourses from which they emerged" (Holmes 8). While his analysis of stars as "texts into contexts" is fundamental for a new methodology that approaches the study of stars through film history, semiotics, cultural studies, and Marxism, in *Stars* Dyer neglected to articulate the role of the audience as a site of resistance, a concept that he reclaimed in his follow-up work *Heavenly Bodies* (1986). In *Heavenly Bodies*, Dyer analyzes stardom from two angles: the constitutive elements of stars, and their production; and the notion of personhood and social reality to which they relate (2). In particular, the analysis of Marilyn

Monroe and Paul Robeson situates them in relation to the immediate contexts of their period. Conversely, his chapter on Judy Garland looks at her stardom from the point of view of gay fandom, which developed out of her films.

As Sue Holmes writes in her article "Starring… Dyer? Revisiting Star Studies and Contemporary Celebrity Culture" (2005), in the last 10 years there has been an expansion of academic work on stardom/celebrity in film, media, and cultural studies, in which emphasis was often placed on the notion that "modern celebrity represents a qualitative break with the past" (6). There have been theoretical and critical changes in the field, for instance a move toward greater emphasis on political economy, performances studies, and on empirical audience research. Attention has also been given to the history of stardom and its relationship to technological and media contexts. However, Holmes claims that all these developments were already an integral part of Dyer's analysis. Specifically, she questions Turner's idea that celebrity as a system of representation is presented as a recent conceptual shift, pointing out how Dyer's intertextual analysis of stars already highlighted the common discursive structures through which stars are circulated (10). Rather, if a distinction has to be found between stardom studies and the most recent phenomenon of celebrity, it is in what Holmes calls "a crisis in terminology" (9). Although establishing who is a star and who is a celebrity has been the subject of recent debates, the two terms belong to what Orgeron calls a "categorical slipperiness", which exists because our conceptions of fame are "ever shifting, responding to change in the culture, in the media, and in the celebrated themselves" (Orgeron 191). Despite the frequent interchangeability of the two terms, the word "stardom" in film studies denotes a discursive interaction between on-and-off screen image, underlining the inextricable link of a performer's public role with their profession and film roles (Redmond – Holmes, 2007: 8;

Geraghty, 2007: 98). The term celebrity, on the other hand, rests predominantly on an individual's private life (Geraghty 99), implying that the way of producing meaning leads through gossip, press and television reports, magazine articles, and public relations. Holmes and Redmond, for instance, attempt to make a distinction between the terms "star" and "celebrity", employing the concept of "cultural hierarchy" to examine how a 'star' is positioned above the 'celebrity' – "with its persistent association with fame as more ubiquitous, and thus devaluated, currency" (8). Leo Braudy associates stars with "spiritual transcendence", while the celebrity is linked to "material success", suggesting that the celebrity is associated with the rapidity and ephemerality of postmodern mediation (*Frenzy of Renown* 554). However, as I attempt to demonstrate in my chapter on Vittorio Gassman, the distinction between the status of star and that of celebrity has more to do with how the performer/individual is consumed by the audience than with an arbitrary division between modern and postmodern fame.

In the post-Dyer years, a wide body of scholarship attempted to theorize and historicize the phenomena of stardom and media celebrity. Moreover, "stardom" has encompassed numerous issues in academic film studies, including the star as an historical entity; the star as a discursive formation and a cultural commodity; the role of audience and fandom in the construction of a star; and the star as the intersection of cinematic language and technique with larger historical dynamics such as gender, sexuality, youth, politics, and fashion.

Having acknowledged the interdisciplinarity of star studies, which Dyer's seminal work recognizes from the onset – Marsha Orgeron identifies three organizational umbrellas to chart the major direction that star studies has taken in the post-Dyer years: The work of stardom, which relates to issues of labor and performance; star texts, which follow Dyer's theoretical

framework in analyzing how stars are constructed, represented, and consumed; and identity politics, which engages stars with issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity (201-202).

In regard to the actor as laborer, Dana Polan examines the politics of the émigré actor at the intersection of cultural studies and political economy. In his article "Methodological Reflections on the Study of the Émigré Actor," Polan argues that we might begin to study émigré actors, and actors in general, following "that sort of existential Marxist biography envisioned by Jean Paul Sartre," in which the biographical subject is studied through two specificities: his/her own personal biography, and the ways that biography is lived out socially (181). Polan's argument, along with Dyer's analysis of Marilyn Monroe, Paul Robeson, and Judy Garland in *Heavenly Bodies*, has been particularly useful for my work on Vittorio Gassman and his troubled relationship with MGM, which involved contractual battles, labor issues, and politics of ethnic representation.

On the category of star texts and identity politics, Janet Staiger, Gaylyn Studlar, and Steven Cohan provided me with pivotal methodology. In her book *Media Reception Studies* (2005), Janet Staiger lists a four-part consideration of studying a star, based on a reworking of Christine Geraghty's, "Re-examining Stardom: Questions of Text, Bodies and Performance" (116). In her examination, the four ways to analyze a stars are: The star persona, which is the intertextually constructed notion of the star through a series of films or television programs; the star as performer, which focuses on his or her acting ability; the star as worker/laborer, which recalls Orgeron's first category (Stardom and labor); and the star in the domestic, private sphere (off-camera life). In my analysis of Amedeo Nazzari, Vittorio Gassman, and Steve Reeves, I combined all four categories to highlight the interconnectedness of their

constructed stardom to the discursive formations about masculinity, Americanization, and popular genres in the context of postwar Italian culture. Specifically, I focused more on the star as worker/laborer and the star in the private sphere in my analysis of Vittorio Gassman, while my chapters on Amedeo Nazzari and Steve Reeves examine how their stardom was constructed and deeply intertwined with two popular Italian genres - the melodrama and the peplum, respectively.

Gaylyn Studlar's impressive study *This Mad Masquerade. Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age* (1996) was a guiding example for its emphasis on historical rigor and archival research in investigating the stars of the silent era. Re-elaborating Dyer's concept of the "star text", Studlar develops the idea of the star as cultural intertext, which means the analysis of an individual star's cultural influence and historical meaning, both shaped by industry discourse and experienced by film spectators. Studlar's conceptual framework is grounded in the combined study of archival documents and gender theories to explore the relationship of stardom and the circulation of meaning around masculinity during the Jazz Age. Dyer and Studlar's methodological approaches have structured my own dissertation's methodology, along with Stephen Cohan's concept of multiple masquerades of masculinity, as theorized in his *Masked Men* (1997). Cohan places American films of the fifties in their historical context to examine "how they contributed but also resisted and problematized the postwar articulation of masculinity as a universal condition". His focus is to highlight the multiple masquerades constituting masculinity in its film representation and relationship with social discourses on gender in the 1950s. In analyzing the intertwining of stardom and masculinity in postwar Italy and the United States I was also inspired by psychoanalytic and semiotic readings of the cinematic male body in anthologies such as *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in*

the Hollywood Cinema (Cohan and Rae Hark 1993); *You Tarzan. Masculinity, Movies and Men* (Kirkham and Thumim 1993); *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema* (Tasker 1993); and Steve Neale's article "Masculinity as Spectacle" (1983).

By intertwining these various methodological approaches, my project places the study of Amedeo Nazzari, Vittorio Gassman, and Steve Reeves in the historical context of the Hollywood on the Tiber era, examining how their stardom elaborates the cultural discourses around masculinity and national identity in relation to postwar transnationalist settings between Italy, Europe, and the US. In particular, I aimed to situate my case studies of Amedeo Nazzari, Vittorio Gassman, and Steve Reeves in relation to "the specific ways of understanding and feeling" (Dyer *Heavenly Bodies* 3) – i.e., to ethnic, sexual, and national/transnational identity questions that informed the US-Italy cultural relationships in the 1950s and 1960s.

In order to do so, it is important to lay down the main theoretical approach to questions of national and transnational in film studies. While transnational cinema has been studied mainly in regards of Asian and World cinema, I focus specifically on postwar European cinema "face to face" with Hollywood, to borrow the title of Thomas Elsaesser's work (2005). I will show below that, in the age of Cold War internationalism, Italian popular genres interestingly reveal some of the peculiar characteristics of transnational cinema, such as a complex, ongoing relationship between local and global culture, the travelling of directors, actors, and technicians on both sides of the Atlantic, and the "decline of national sovereignty as a regulatory force in global coexistence" (Ezra and Rowden 1), which led to the internationalization of Italian popular cinema and its stars.

2. Question the National

"Transnational at once transcends the national and presupposes it" (Ezra and Rowden 4). One of the critical aspects of transnationalism is its dialectical engagement with ideas of the national. Transnationalism does not reject the national, yet it underlines the limits of the national as a tool used to understand and analyze cinema, considering how notions of the national can serve to "obscure awareness of the often mystified and ideologically determined dynamics of national culture and authenticity." (Ezra and Rowden 12).

An influential work contesting notions of national in European cinema is Andrew Higson's essay "The Concept of National Cinema" (1989). Higson questions the use of the term 'national' in describing and categorizing films produced within a particular nation-state, arguing that the locus of a film production is not the sole or most accurate parameter to identify a film's nationality. Instead, Higson argues, "the parameters of a national cinema should be drawn at the site of consumption as much as the site of production of films" (36). Higson's argument in contesting the use of the term 'national cinema' focuses on the fact that it implies a unique, stable identity in defining the nation, and such an identity does not exist. "The process of identification is thus invariably a hegemonizing, mythologizing process, involving both the production and assignation of a particular set of meanings, and the attempt to contain, or prevent the potential proliferation of other meanings" (37). Historically, within Western European countries, the labels of national cinema are intended for the production of an art-cinema, nationally-based, state-subsidized, but meant for international export. As Thomas Elsaesser suggests, internationally national cinemas are used for marketing purposes, to produce a particular horizon of expectation (qtd. in Higson, "The Concept of National

Cinema" 38). Indeed, the label of national cinema is often given to products of art cinema that are seen to represent the "true" national spirit of a country, which are in fact an economic means of asserting national autonomy in the face of Hollywood's international domination (37). Consequently, popular genres are seen as the Americanized "degenerate" progeny" who would corrupt both the high standard of the nation's cultural film products and the identity of the audience. In this view, according to Higson, there is a conscious attempt to prevent the recognition of popular forms as a legitimate part of national cultural life. ("The Concept of National Cinema" 37).

In the case of Italy and its film industry, the debates on a nationally produced popular and mass culture and the warnings about a much dreaded Americanization of Italian society intertwined in the postwar years. After the protectionist approach undertaken by Germany, and Italy's respectively Nazi and Fascist regimes, post-WWII film markets witnessed the emergence of Hollywood's global dominance, especially in Europe. Thus, the critical support of the Left, both parliamentary and intellectual, to the Neorealism films was a means to assert national autonomy and artistic freedom from the perceived cultural imperialism of Hollywood cinema. Hollywood's dominance of the Italian market at the level of distribution and exhibition was indeed quite aggressive in the years following WWII. As Victoria de Grazia notes, with the abolition of state-owned ENIC monopoly in distributing foreign films in Italy, and the annulment of the protectionist fascist Alfieri law in October 1945, "Italy became a wholly open market" (82). In the post-1945 reconstruction of Italy, Hollywood strongly advocated the abolition of all protectionist Fascist laws and free trade of films as commercial commodities. However, in the first years after the end of the war, Hollywood saturated Italy with American films in an effort to recuperate earnings lost during the fascist ban, and as part

of the U.S.'s government campaign to convert Europe and the world to Americanism (Forgacs and Gundle 153). Although Gian Piero Brunetta describes the initial public reaction to the American films hitting Italian screens after WWII in positive terms, he also employs a war terminology when describing the "assault" of Hollywood on the Italian market in the years 1945-50: "the Majors developed an entire operational strategy, starting out from detailed statistical and analytical knowledge of the territory to be conquered and the nature of the likely opposition;" and again "the aggressive nature of this policy, aiming at the complete destruction of the local adversary, was without precedent in the political and economic history of the film industry up to then." (*The Long March* 145). In 1946, 850 imports were released, 600 of which were American, and for a long period after the war, Italy continued to be the biggest importer of American films in Europe (de Grazia 82).

As a result, in 1949 the parties of the Left and the labor unions publicly appealed to the government to do something to defend Italian cinema, with the support of cinema directors, actors, and workers. Especially notable was the rally held in Rome's Piazza del Popolo on February 20, 1949, at which the most prominent Italian stars and directors such as Anna Magnani, Vittorio De Sica, and Gino Cervi stated their case (Forgacs and Gundle 136). During the next several years, the Italian government granted selective aid to the film industry, starting with the Law 958 of December 29, 1949, "Disposizioni per la cinematografia", popularly known as "Andreotti Law," from the name of politician Giulio Andreotti, who as the Undersecretary of State was responsible for framing it (Forgacs and Gundle 132). The law guaranteed producers protections and subsidies, while at the same time introduced no limitations on the import of American films and even favored the development of American productions in Italy. Indeed, as Brunetta points out, the decrees placing limits on

imports were never enforced by the government, despite the protests of large groups of Italian directors, actors, and film specialist, and despite the Parliamentary opposition of the Left that was characterized by "their moralistic tone, their sincere humanitarianism, and their total ignorance of the real conditions of the market." (*The Long March* 146).

Hollywood was accused not only of materially invading the Italian film market, but also of influencing Italian film production, especially the production of film genres. This emphasis on artistic productions often led to snobbery towards popular genres, which were accused by the left of focusing on escapism and superficiality, and diverting people's attention from the immediate present and from questions of social justice (Landy, *Which Way* 38). In a word, genre films were accused of Americanism.[3]

Marcia Landy in her essay "Which Way Is America?" defined two major contending positions in the analysis of the impact of Americanism on European culture: the formidable presence of American film and television products in Europe can be regarded as evidence of American economic and cultural imperialism. Alternatively, Americanism can be interpreted as selective appropriation of the foreign culture by the host culture for its own uses (40).

Lorenzo Quaglietti and Thomas Guback stress the cultural imperialism of Hollywood in Italian film productions. Guback notes that the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) along with the Motion Picture Export Association (MPEA) worked steadily to recapture overseas markets for American media after 1945, with the support of the American

[3] Although the American influence of Italian genre films was particularly evident in the postwar years, it was not a new phenomenon: During the early years of the fascist regime, Italy's commercial cinema was deeply influenced by Italy's cultural fascination with Hollywood. In 1933 journalist Luigi Freddi spent two months in Hollywood to observe the American film industry at work, and was later invited by Mussolini to re-organize the Italian film industry. Freddi's openly declared goal was to mold Italian films along the lines of Hollywood films (Reich, "Mussolini at the Movies" 17). Moreover, Mussolini's son Vittorio visited Hollywood in 1937, to "absorb secrets of America's film preeminence" (*Washington Post*, Oct 5, 1937).

government, which saw the export of American media material as essential to the government's effort in promoting the American way of life in Europe against drifting towards the left ("Hollywood's International Market" 473). As Jack Valenti, MPEA/MPAA president, remarked, "To my knowledge, the motion picture is the only U.S. enterprise that negotiates on its own with foreign governments." (qtd. in Guback, "Hollywood's International Market" 471). Lorenzo Quaglietti maintains a very critical position towards Hollywood's presence in Italy in his *Storia economico-politica del cinema italiano.* Challenging the view that Italians were enthusiastic of American films, he claims that the audience did not favor American films over Italian ones. If they actually saw more American films it was due to lack of alternatives, given the overwhelming presence of American products and the difficultly of Italian films to be produced and distributed (Forgacs and Gundle 153).

However, as Giuliana Muscio notes in her essay "Invasion and Counterattack" (2000), it is possible to interpret the history of the penetration of American cinema in Italy in a less mechanical way (116). Europe, Muscio states, is not Americanized from above, but "it receives, and either rejects or accepts, the proposed models of Americanization, often adapting them to its own needs and its own internal politics." (116). In the same line of thought as Muscio, Stephen Gundle and Thomas Elsaesser offer a negotiative interpretation in regards of the relationship between Hollywood and Cinecittà. In his essay "Hollywood Glamour and Mass Consumption in Italy", Gundle examines the transformation of Italian imagination through the concept of glamour. As Gundle demonstrates, although Italian glamour was influenced by Hollywood celebrity lifestyle, Italy did not merely absorb it in a passive way (95). Rather, Hollywood's glamour was adapted to Italian's specific cultural conditions. One example is the refashioning of postwar female stars such as Gina

Lollobrigida, Silvana Mangano, and Sophia Loren. Although they underwent a "glamourization" process influenced by Hollywood's style, Italian stars never appeared manufactured or artificial (107). Instead, they retained a kind of naturalness and earthiness associated with Italian Neorealist style and landscape and were often depicted as "beautiful bodies representing working bodies in real contexts: rice fields, lagoons, mountains" (108).

Thomas Elsaesser, in analyzing postwar German cinema, also notes that postwar German filmmakers have been in constant dialogue with Hollywood, and that "Hollywood stands at the very heart of the New German cinema becoming a national cinema" (284). One example is the American series *Holocaust* (1978), a docu-drama that had a huge impact on German viewers but was also heavily criticized by German filmmakers for its soap-opera take on Auschwitz. *Holocaust*, however, brought German filmmakers to react and produce their own film versions of the Nazi period, among which Reitz's *Heimat* (1984) is considered to be the quintessential film about Germany's national identity (288).

In the above-mentioned essay "Which Way Is America," Marcia Landy, after listing the two previously mentioned major contending positions in defining Americanism offers a third, transnational, meaning: Americanism as a multifaceted phenomenon "that had existed since the turn of the century and that has undergone various transformations as it circulates on both sides of the Atlantic" (40). In Landy's conceptualization of Americanism, thus, there is neither a hegemonic imposing of one culture over the other, nor a hierarchical classification of foreign versus host local cultures, but a mutual crossing of material and symbolic cultural artifacts that have been in constant transformation. In 1930s and 1940s Hollywood, émigré directors introduced modifications of Hollywood styles and forms (41), as much as postwar American runaway companies in Italy contributed to the productions of Italian popular genres

such as peplum and westerns. Thus, although acknowledging the postwar aggressive marketing policies of Hollywood in Europe and especially in Italy, the impact of Americanization in Europe cannot be depicted in black and white, but ought to be conceptualized in all its gray nuances, as a process of challenge and negotiation more than one of colonization.

In conclusion, it is important to underline that in an economy characterized by international ownership and circulation of images and sounds it is increasingly difficult to talk about national cinema. As Andrew Higson stated, "It is inappropriate to assume that cinema and film culture are bound by the limits of the nation-state. The complexities of the international film industry and the transnational movements of finance capital, film-makers and film should put paid to that assumption" ("The Concept of National Cinema" 23). Higson expands some of this concept in his follow-up essay "The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema". Re-working Benedict Anderson's well-known notion of "imagined communities," which "imagines the nation as limited, with finite and meaningful boundaries" (7), Higson suggests that a stable notion of the nation cannot fully account for the role played by international practices of film production and reception. Similarly, Ian Christie's 2013 article "Where Is National Cinema Today (and Do We Still Need It)?" provides an accurate historical overview of the term "national" as employed in European film history and its conceptual issues as informed by the relationship of European national cinemas to Hollywood. His work owes a great deal to Thomas Elsaesser's questioning of national cinema in his book *European cinema Face to Face with Hollywood* (2005). Here, Elsaesser compares the "invention" of national cinema with the bourgeois elites of early twentieth century's Europe inventing "national literature" to support their sense of nationhood, and argues that

how and where films are seen matters as much as their stylistic, formal, and thematic aspects (46). Building on Elsaesser and Higson's insight, Christie acknowledges films to be industrial practices that ought to take production, distribution, and exhibition into consideration, and claims that the term national can still be used, albeit not in the ideological assumption of a clash between European national elitism versus U.S. mass products. Rather, the study of national films should engage with the dynamics of local/global and reception studies to discover "how cinema has populated the 'imagined communities' of nations – not confining ourselves solely to national production, but alert to the transnational potential of film constantly being appropriated for purposes of local self-definition" (28). The study of Italian popular cinema and stars needs to re-conceptualize the category of national cinema, as we work in the interstices, frictions, and resistances of the categories of national/transnational/transatlantic.

3. From National to Transnational

"Borders are always leaky. It is in this migration, this border crossing, that the transnational emerges" (Higson, "The Limiting Imagination" 19). The concept of transnationalism has in recent years been a challenge to an essentialist concept of national cinema in the academic world. Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden definition of the term transnational encompasses "the global forces that link people or institutions across nations" (1). As they write, the term transnational then has moved beyond economic and sociopolitical origins to reveal its value as a conceptual tool within the film studies field (1). From its inception, cinema has been transnational due to the international circulation of its products

and the use of international personnel in filmmaking. As Kathleen Newman notes, "Borders are seen to have been always permeable, societies always hybrid, and international film history to have been key to the processes of globalization."(4). What is new today, Ezra and Rowden argue, are "the conditions of financing, production, distribution and reception of cinema today" (1). Transnational cinema, then, seems to be defined by an increasing permeability of national borders, decline of national sovereignty as a regulatory force in global coexistence, and increase in circulation of films enabled by new technologies, such as video, DVD, new digital media (Ezra and Rowden 1-2). However, as Stefano Baschiera and Francesco Di Chiara argue, "Italian cinema dealt with a particularly delicate relationship between local and global culture, with the permeability of national borders, and with the 'decline of national sovereignty as a regulatory force in global coexistence' (Ezra and Rowden 1), and it did so decades before the issues of globalization and transnationalism became central in cultural, social, and economical perspectives." (104).

Indeed, the transnational nature of Italian cinema has been clear since its inception. In her study of Italian serial films of the silent era, Monica Dall'Asta illustrates how Italian serial films such as the Maciste series travelled internationally, both in Europe and in America, and notes that "to approach silent serials solely in terms of national production means to ignore the fact that cinema – and serial cinema in the first place – was the most powerful vehicle in the mergence of a globalized, transnational culture" (302). After WWII, Italian cinema returned and reinvigorated its transatlantic vocation, in the context of the economic, social, and cultural internationalism produced by postwar American hegemony and Cold War policies in Europe. Italy in the 1950s and 1960s, and Rome in particular, was the center of a transnational culture that attracted well-known literary figures, artists, and filmmakers, such

as Tennessee Williams and Aldous Huxley, Henry Moore, Robert Rauschenberg and Cy Twombly, and David Lean, Orson Welles, Ingrid Bergman, William Wyler and Jean-Luc Godard, respectively. (Gardner 205). As a result, Rome became a cosmopolitan hub of creative activity, focused especially on film production that was to have a lasting effect on contemporary international film and art cultures. (Gardner 205).

One of the most interesting by-products of the Andreotti Law was the development of American runaway productions in Italy. Indeed, the only limitations imposed by the law to American film companies concerned the export of capital, which meant that 50% of the U.S. film industry's Italian earnings were to remain in blocked account for film-related use (Forgacs and Gundle 157). As a consequence, the postwar years saw a blooming presence of American filmmaking in Rome, with spectacular epics such as *Quo Vadis* (LeRoy 1951) and *Ben-Hur* (Wyler 1959), and romantic comedies such as *Roman Holiday* (Wyler 1953), and *Three Coins in the Fountain* (Negulesco 1954), in which the large use of Italy's countryside and monuments turned the country into a picturesque commodity for American tourists. This resulted in what was to become known in popular culture as "Hollywood on the Tiber", a "broader mix of major studio offices, production units, personalities and publicity" that constituted the American film colony in Rome (Gardner 210).

Hollywood runaway productions are based on a complex economic system and on the liability of laws that can be widely reinterpreted. As Barbara Corsi notes, there were no real co-production agreements between Italy and the United States. The intervention of American capital and technical personnel was done in the name of "co-participation" (*compartecipazione*), "which is an ambiguous term for any kind of artistic or financial exchange, whether legal or illegal" (69). For instance, the weight of the participation of both

partners, Italian and American, in the co-participation system was not always balanced. Since only productions whose capital was more than 50% Italian would receive government financial aids, American companies often created Italian subsidiaries entirely financed by U.S. capital to by-pass the law and get government funding. Therefore, an "Italian" film often was so only for the location and the extras, while economic investment and actors were all American. Another way to ensure the Italian nationality of a film in order to get government financial aid was to have an Italian director or an Italian director in the Italian version of the film at least. This created the figure of "straw director", a nominee credited as director in the Italian version to get government subsidies, while in the foreign markets the film is credited with the true American director (Guback, *The International Film Industry* 175).[4]

These practices have important consequences for the Italian film industry: On the one hand they emphasize the economic power of the United States over the Italian cinema, since the major's policy was aimed at both recovering blocked funds and distributing American films in the Italian market without any restriction. But on the other hand, the presence of American runaway companies filming historical epics contributed to the expansion of Cinecittà studios, produced jobs for Italian film workers, especially technicians and extras, and bolstered the production of Italian popular genres such as the peplum, horror, and spaghetti-westerns, which in turn were primarily exported to the United States. As Gian Piero Brunetta stated, with peplum and spaghetti-western films "Cinecittà not only enjoyed its first open victories, but could even begin to dream of its own conquest of the American cinema-going public." (*The Long March* 154).

[4] An example is the film *Sodom and Gomorrah* (1962), directed by Robert Aldrich. Director Sergio Leone, who was in charge of the battle scenes, is not credited as director in the American version, while he is credited as co-director in the Italian version of the film. See http://www.mymovies.it/dizionario/recensione.asp?id=23119 and http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0056504/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1

Interestingly, the migration of American productions to Italy was not only motivated by economic factors, but also by the political climate of 1950s conservative, anti-Communist America. Indeed, the beginning of co-productions in Italy chronologically coincides with the witch hunt in Hollywood, the practice of blacklisting and thus denying employment to U.S. entertainment professionals because of their suspected political affiliation with Communism (Muscio 121). American blacklisted filmmakers who made films in Italy were, among others, Jules Dassin, John Berry, and Michael Wilson. Orson Welles, although not blacklisted, came to Italy as a result of the notorious difficulties of working within the rigid parameters of Hollywood majors. In Italy, he worked as an actor in *Black Magic* (1949), and *Prince of Foxes* (1949), in the Luigi Pirandello-based film *L'uomo, la bestia e la virtu*`(1953), and in Pier Paolo Pasolini's *La ricotta* (1963), as well as in a television series for RAI, *In The Land of Don Quixot*e (1964) (Gardner 211). Swedish-born, Hollywood star Ingrid Bergman came to Italy as well, in search of artistic freedom and because of her love affair with director Roberto Rossellini. Together, they made five feature films, *Stromboli* (1950), *Europa 51* (1952), *Voyage to Italy* (1954), *Fear* (1954) and *Joan of Arc* (1954), had three children, and produced a moral and political scandal that had an enormous effect on both the 'paparazzi' culture of Cold War Italy and Italian Neo-Realist film-making. (Gardner 212).

Thus, Italy in the Cold War was situated at the center of a transnational fertile collaboration of artistic personnel that extended beyond cinema to include Italian society as a whole. American stars featured prominently in Italian film magazines such as *Hollywood* and *Film d'oggi*. Tyrone Power's wedding with Linda Christian in Rome in 1949 was "choreographed and filmed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer", and everything about it was "geared to publicity" (Gundle, *Death and La Dolce Vita* 65). Moreover, the presence of Hollywood

stars in Italy, and their frequent marriages with Italians, made the United States feel closer to home. The scandalous marriage of Hollywood star Ingrid Bergman to Roberto Rossellini, which almost destroyed Bergman's career in the States; Vittorio Gassman marrying Shelley Winters and flying to the U.S. in an attempt to pursue a Hollywood career; the love affair of Ava Gardner and Italian comedian Walter Chiari, and of Pier Angeli with James Dean, all these highly publicized relationships contributed to bring American stars and Italians together in the popular imagination. (Muscio 125). Gundle and Forgacs state that American star lifestyle's fascination had been strongly present in Italy in the 1930s, but as an external and distant influence that people experienced through the cinema as well as film and fashion magazines. In the postwar years, the relationship of the audience to the American stars became more dynamic. (163). As the 1950s progressed, America gradually turned from a distant dreamland of wealth and luxury into an increasingly real presence on Italian soil, and this distance and cultural gap was closing thanks to the transnational practices of Hollywood on the Tiber.

4. From Transnational to Transatlantic

Thus, in considering the strong American economic and cultural influence on Italian cinema and culture, I use the term transatlantic to describe the practices of production and distribution that affected and influenced both Italian and America cinema and society in the 1950s and 1960s. The term transatlantic geopolitically specifies the otherwise too broad notion of transnationalism, and it helps define the geopolitical nature of the social,

economical, and cultural relations between Italian cinema and Hollywood as well as those of Italy and the U.S.

Early cinema began as a transatlantic practice. In the first few decades of the twentieth century, for instance, world cinema was not dominated by American companies, as it would happen later, but by the French company Pathé Frerés, while the Lumière brothers competed with Edison for their respective projection systems (Doel 245). Italian films were also very successful in the American market in the 1910s, thanks to historical epics such as *The Last Days of Pompeii* (Maggi, 1908), *La caduta di Troia* (Pastrone and Borgnetto, 1911), *Quo Vadis?* (Guazzoni, 1913), and *Cabiria* (Pastrone, 1914)[5]. Cinema at the time was struggling for cultural recognition. Producers aimed to move beyond the immigrant and working class audience of the nickelodeons in order to conquer bourgeois spectators by focusing on narratives based on great historical and literary works. Film imports from Europe were marketed as cultural and literary products, and Italian epics travelled in the U.S. as cultural artifacts and were shown in universities and libraries (Bertellini, *Epica spettacolare* 231). The climax to this period occurred on June 1914, when Pastrone's *Cabiria* was shown at the White House to President Wilson (Merritt 97). However, the American film industry had already begun to fight back, and by 1911-12, the export of American films to Europe surpassed the flow of European films into America (Doel 248). The reasons encompassed several issues of cultural and economic policy. The litigious patent lawsuits instigated by Edison severed Pathé dominance in the American market, along with the shift in the association of European cinema from sophistication to moral degeneration, determined by the emphasis on the Americanization of film audiences during the immigration peak of the 1910s (Doel 247). For the immigrant, movies were becoming a relevant part of his assimilation into

[5] For more on the subject, see Bertellini 1999.

American life and producers were looking more and more for "true American subjects" such as Western and "ethical melodrama" (Doel 247; Merritt 97).

As Tino Balio notes, World War I was the turning point in the hegemony of American cinema in Europe. European film industries were forced out of business or disrupted because of the war, leaving a vacuum that American cinema filled right away, while the vertical integration of American film industry "guaranteed that the domestic market would be open only to Hollywood products" (124). However, cinema continued to be characterized by a transatlantic flow of people and industrial practices. In the interwar period, the transatlantic communications between American and European cinema increased dramatically, due to the émigré European actors and directors who fled from Europe (mostly Nazi Germany and the occupied countries) to find refuge and occupation in Hollywood. After the hiatus of World War II and the protectionist approach undertaken by German Nazi and Italian Fascist regimes, post-WWII witnessed the emergence of Hollywood's global dominance, especially in Europe (de Grazia 82).

During the postwar era, Europe became deeply intertwined with America. The relationship between America and Italy, however, was exceptional and unique for numerous political, economic and socio-cultural reasons. The peninsula's strategic position between the Mediterranean, Northern Europe, and Soviet Eastern Europe cast Italy as the focal point of the Marshall Plan and Truman's Doctrine during the Cold War (Ellwood, "L'impatto del piano Marshall" 87). Cinema played a fundamental part in this project. Both Hollywood producers and the U.S. government conceived the massive importation of American films in Italy to accomplish two goals. First, it opened a new film market for Hollywood productions, so that Italy could become their most important foreign market, along with Great Britain. Second, it

exported the American way of life to counter the perceived threat of Italy's Communist Party, the largest in all of Western Europe. Hence, in the 1950s, Hollywood filled the mind and the eyes of Italians with the "American dream" (Brunetta, "The Long March" 140). This was also the time during which media celebrity acquired a pervasive status within Italy's society. The wedding of Tyrone Power and Linda Christian in Rome "helped fuel the development of a new type of celebrity photojournalism" (Gundle, "Hollywood Glamour" 102), while the city of Rome and Via Veneto in particular became "a cosmopolitan crossroads for the international elite of the rich and famous" and the center of gossip and scandal featured in the gossip sheet *Confidential* (Gundle, "Hollywood Glamour" 113).

This pervasive celebrity culture, mostly linked to the presence of American stars in Rome, was sharply depicted in Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (1960): Paparazzo, the photo-reporter who works with journalist Marcello, has become - both in English and Italian - the common word for the professional photographers of gossip tabloids. Thanks to Fellini's films, and to stars such as Marcello Mastroianni and Sophia Loren, this era has been described by film historians as the golden age of Italian cinema, for its artistic quality and international prestige (Bondanella 142). Paradoxically, it is also the time in which Italian cinema underwent its strongest process of internationalization of production and content since its beginnings. Through the use of international casts and personnel, dubbing, and on-location shooting all over the world, the practices of Hollywood on the Tiber signaled the increased globalization of filmmaking and reassessed the international film industry, resulting in political and cultural consequences still relevant today. Indeed, according to Toby Miller, most of the practices employed by Hollywood in Cinecittà were the foundation of Hollywood's still unchallenged dominance of foreign markets (25).

5. Americanization of Italy

American commercial culture, writes Victoria de Grazia, challenged Europe in two ways: It subverted the idea of the production of culture tied to national boundaries and it questioned the distinctions between high and low, elite and popular cultures (54). De Grazia's essay focuses on how the American film market has been received in Europe since the 1920s and on Europe's various responses, from total defense to partial openings. Cinema was one of the main battlefields of the European-American war on culture. Hollywood regarded films as commodities, following the "globalizing tendencies of the capitalist marketplace, overriding the nation-state boundaries and eluding political controls" (54); in Europe, this aggressive marketing produced a reaction aimed at protecting the cultural identity of nationally-produced films, considered part of a nation's cultural heritage. In postwar Italy, mostly the Left carried out this view, while the Christian Democrats aligned themselves more with Hollywood style, which was considered compatible with their conservative ideologies. A case in point was the crucial 1948 electoral campaign, in which the Christian Democrats party claimed Hollywood stars as its allies against the Italian Communist party (de Grazia 83).

In turn, the PCI's policy toward popular culture was complex and often contradictory. In 1948, the Communist leaders raised the question of cultural colonialism in regards of American culture in Italy. The Alliance of Culture, a coordinating committee of Communists, Socialists, and independents created to defend progressive cultural currents, stressed the importance of preserving a national culture in opposition to the cultural cosmopolitanism seen as typical mark of American imperialism (Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow* 49). The cultural policy of the PCI aimed to support the indigenous folk culture, considered an

authentic and genuine form of expression of the people, as opposed to the massification of culture brought by the consumer society and the American model. However, in the name of realism and high-brow culture, the Leftist intelligentsia delegitimized the forms of popular culture that were successful among working class audience, such as melodrama or peplum films, on charges of pushing people into a world of dreams that kept the working class oblivious of its class warfare duties. Both the Christian Democrats and the PCI exhibited a paternalistic and populist attitude towards popular culture and cinema, and both Catholics and Communists reacted with a complex and often controversial attitude towards Americanization.

Giuliana Muscio defines Americanization as "the export of the American dream and of democratic values, as well as a more generalized model for modernization", which is also "a process of establishing socio-cultural hegemony that reaches different age and social groups with different and sometimes contradictory impacts." (116). She gives an example in describing the often-contradictory attitudes of both Catholics and Communists toward products of American mass culture in Italy. While the Christian Democrats were politically pro-American and anticommunist, Catholic culture, which backed up that political party, was conservative, anti-consumerist, and often critical of Hollywood cinema and its representation of loose morals. As Gundle claims, beauty contests and hyper-sexualized American stars like Rita Hayworth and Betty Grable were seen as threat to the unity of the family and the purity of a woman's spirit, values which the Catholic Church attempted to spread in the post-war years as a return to normality (Gundle, *Feminine Beauty* 371).

Conversely, many on the Left, while supporting Neorealism against the proliferation of Hollywood movies, have been fascinated with American cinema and literature since the

fascist times (Muscio 116).[6] One example is the film *Bitter Rice* (*Riso amaro,* De Santis 1949), which was Vittorio Gassman's first international success and made Silvana Mangano as the film's *femme fatale* an instant star. Silvana Mangano's character is portrayed in the negative because her fascination with American consumerism led her to betray her fellow workers for money. However, while the film's narrative criticizes the lifestyle and values spread by American mass culture, the film's style is influenced by American genres such as the gangster film, the western, and even the musical (Bondanella 2001).

In his influential essay "L'Americanizzazione del quotidiano", Gundle affirms that the rapid industrialization Italian society underwent during the 1950s made Italy the most receptive country to Americanization. He notes that "the degree to which a process of socio-cultural change can be characterized as Americanization depends on the distance that separates certain sectors of a society from a modern industrial culture. The greater the distance, the greater will be the need to make use of American models, values and ideas in order for the change to happen." (563). In order for Americanization to take root and grow in a foreign soil, Gundle lists three factors the receiving society needs to have: A rapid social change that looks to new models outside of its national tradition; an underdeveloped process of industrialization; and lack of a strong national-popular culture that works across social classes (569). In the immediate post war years, Italy had all three of these factors: Italian society underwent a rapid, accelerated process of industrialization and urbanization that profoundly unsettled the traditional rural order (Ginsborg 286); its industrializing process was

[6] The United States as a land of freedom and democracy was an important political myth for a group of anti-fascist writers like Elio Vittorini and Cesare Pavese. During the Thirties and Forties, Pavese and Vittorini translated contemporary American writers like Faulkner and Hemingway and spread their work in Italy. In the introduction to *The Selected Works of Cesare Pavese*, R.W. Flint suggests that such labor was a way to counter fascist indoctrination (vxii).

profoundly unbalanced, with some advanced sectors in the North, such as the engineering and petrochemical industries, and some regions in the South still deeply underdeveloped and based on a traditional agricultural model (Ginsborg 289): as for Italy's lack of a national-popular culture, Antonio Gramsci was the first to theorize it in his prison notebooks (1929-1935). In his entry headed "Concept of national popular" he discusses the problem of why Italian literature generally did not have a broad popular readership in Italy, unlike the serializing fiction of French authors translated into Italian. Gramsci writes:

> Neither a popular artistic literature nor a local production of 'popular' literature exists because 'writers' and 'people' do not have the same conception of the world. In other words the feeling of the people are not lived by the writers as their own, nor do the writers have a 'national educative' function: they have not and do not set themselves the problem of elaborating popular feelings after having relieved them and made them their own. (Gramsci 206-7).

Gramsci states that in the case of Italy, the concept of the national does not coincide with popular, given the intellectuals' failure to forge a national-popular alliance (Forgacs 363). This failure was caused by the lack of a national-popular literature that could appeal to the masses which preferred to read French popular literature instead. The cultural situation in which Gramsci produced these theories was one of transition to modernity in the 1930s. Nonetheless, the debate around it resurged after the publication of Gramsci's Prison Notebooks between 1948 and 1951. The PCI's leader, Palmiro Togliatti, was the mastermind behind the decision to publish Gramsci's works at the height of the Cold War. According to Stephen Gundle, this was a courageous act, which underlined Togliatti's commitment to "preserve at least the possibility of adapting communism to national conditions by reinforcing its links with an indigenous intellectual and cultural tradition" (*Between Hollywood and*

Moscow 51). In order to do so, however, Togliatti heavily edited Gramsci's notebook and provided a rigid framework for analysis of its contents (52).

One of the most controversial topics was indeed the reception and elaboration of Gramsci's concept of national-popular, especially regarding popular films,[7] which was the topic of the print debate hosted by the newspaper *L'Unità* between December 1955 and May 1956. The debate occurred over the 'impopolarità' of Neorealism compared to the popularity of Italian melodrama, in an attempt to understand the popular taste, dominated – according to *L'Unità* critics - by both American productions and lowbrow Italian films (O'Rawe 190). As I examine in my second chapter in relation to the popularity of Matarazzo's melodramas, a benign, Gramsci-based concept of popular culture thus was opposed to the negative inflection of a commercialized mass culture. "The term *cultura di massa* often assumes some kind of manipulation of those who consume it – the product of a minority or an elite for the use of the majority. *Cultura popolare*, on the other hand, points to activities which spring from the people themselves and are fashioned for their own utilization" (Barański and Lumley 10).

The use of the term *mass* has its roots in 1920s U.S. usage of the adjective to talk about the consumption of mass produced goods; conversely, the term *popolare* is based on an intellectually eclectic tradition that since the nineteenth century describes various aspects of most peninsula inhabitants' cultural life (Baranski and Lumley 10). Thus, the Italian distinction between mass and popular culture since the prewar period did assume an ideological connotation. Fascist cultural policy focused on promoting 'authentic' popular culture in the face of Hollywood imports, reinventing folkloric activities and establishing the Ministry of Popular Culture (Minculpop). In the postwar period, the parties of the Left also

[7] For more on this subject see Forgacs, "National-popular: genealogy of a concept" (1984)

sought to shape a popular culture for 'the people' in reaction to American mass culture which was perceived as imperialist cultural colonization (Balanski and Lumley 12).

David Ellwood stresses the interaction between Italy's socioeconomic changes and relationship with the United States, and the role of Hollywood cinema, as one of the most efficient channels of Americanization. In his analysis of the film *Un Americano a Roma* (Steno 1954), Ellwood pointed out how the film, albeit lacking some narrative consistency, "was a homage to the power of the Hollywood myth as much as a satire on its effects." ("Un Americano a Roma" 96). In the film, Alberto Sordi played Nando, a Roman youngster infatuated with the American "myths" and way of life that came to Italy after the war, such as the western, the police film, baseball, the musical, the pin-up, and television (96). The film makes fun of Nando's obsession while at the same time providing a social commentary of all the forms of "Americanism" that appeared in the Italian way of life, from American soldiers to jazz and Hollywood stars, to wealthy tourists in search of Italian romance.

6. Transatlantic Stardom

To approach Italian popular cinema and its stars solely in terms of national production and identity means to ignore the complex socio-cultural and political context of Cold War internationalism, embodied in the international practices of the Hollywood of the Tiber era. As Monica Dall'Asta claims in regards of Italian serials, "the issue of a national-popular culture identity is then to be approached only in relation to its counterpart, that is, in relation to what we could term an international-popular culture" (Dall'Asta 45). In my dissertation, I

argue that popular stars such as Amedeo Nazzari, Vittorio Gassman, and Steve Reeves were important vehicles in the fashioning of such a transatlantic culture. In this context, stars became new role models for a nation that, newly returned to democracy and deprived of its monarchy, was in search of a new identity, in between national traditions and the allure of American modernity.

Since the 1920s, Hollywood stars resonated outside American borders. However, in the 1950s, after the demise of the studio system, Hollywood could no longer amortize its films on the home market and concentrated on expanding its market into Europe. Due to Hollywood's stronger industrial structure and domination of the global market, European film industries modeled their star systems on Hollywood's. Nonetheless, it is fundamental to consider the national contexts of stardom, as cultural specificities complicate the simple adoption of Hollywood's system (Orgeron 200-201).

Although during the 1910s and 1920s, Italy had developed its own national star system with the phenomenon of *divismo* and starring Lyda Borrelli, Francesca Bertini, Pina Menichelli, and Eleonora Duse, the massive invasion of American cinema accompanying the Liberation and experience of Hollywood on the Tiber affected the way in which postwar Italian stardom was formed, consumed and reconfigured. In the 1930s and 1940s, Italian actors were modeled on American stars being dominant examples of the type: Maria Denis was dubbed the Italian Janet Gaynor, Assia Noris was matched with Claudette Colbert, Mino Doro with Clark Gable, and so on (Forgacs and Gundle 159). After the war and the end of the fascist embargo against foreign cultural products, the popularity of American stars increased dramatically. In their efforts to conquer foreign markets and audiences, Hollywood runaway productions would often promote films by using the stars as their main vehicle. Specifically,

Hollywood relied on the audience's attraction for the personalities and the off-screen lifestyle of the American performers. For example, in the film *Cleopatra* (Mankiewicz, 1963), the off-screen, animated love affair between Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton was intertwined with the doomed on-screen relationship between Cleopatra and Mark Antony; in *Roman Holiday* (Wyler, 1953), Hollywood star Audrey Hepburn's European origins reverberated in the character she played, a European princess who falls in love with an American journalist aided by the charm of the Eternal City. Also, as Forgacs and Gundle note, "the two biggest star cults in Italy in the postwar years were those of Rita Hayworth and of Tyrone Power" (163). In De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette* (1948) the protagonist Antonio Ricci is briefly employed putting up posters for *Gilda* (Vidor, 1946) in Rome, while Tyrone Power was the idol especially of adolescent girls (Forgacs and Gundle 163).

However, Neorealism took a critical look at the artifice associated with Hollywood stars and presented new models of stardom, deeply associated with elements of national culture (Landy, *Stardom* xvi). Thanks to Rossellini's *Rome: Open City* (1945) and Pasolini's *Mamma Roma* (1962), star Anna Magnani became the icon of a maternal, working-class, and Roman-identified femininity, in tune with the sufferings experienced by Italians during the war (Landy, *Stardom* xv). At the same time, Italian producers utilized beauty contexts to search for national models of female stars that could combine Hollywood emphasis on sex appeal with the more natural, earthy look associated with neorealist ideas of Italian-ness, and found them in the body of the *maggiorate fisiche* (physically advantaged) stars. Gina Lollobrigida, Sophia Loren, and Silvana Mangano functioned as products for both the domestic and international markets, and their prosperous bodies "were seen simultaneously as proof of the

healthy vitality of the Italian nation and as a promise of the future well-being and prosperity of the country." (Gundle, *Feminine Beauty* 378).

At the same time, male stardom underwent a complex reconfiguration process as well. Although Amedeo Nazzari's popularity continued undiminished from the 1930s to the 1950s, he did transition from embodying the heroic, fascist male in films such as *Cavalleria* (Alessandrini, 1936) and *Luciano Serra pilota* (Alessandrini, 1938), to portraying a reassuring, conservative, and stable masculinity, highlighted by his roles as the father figure in Matarazzo's melodramas, which were highly popular among working-class audiences (Günsberg 24). In the 1950s and 1960s, new male stars such as Marcello Mastroianni and Vittorio Gassman surpassed female stars in popularity and box office success and would become major national and international stars, thanks to the new genre of the *commedia all'italiana*, which satirized the Italian society of the economic boom through its new postmodern masculine types, such as the *inetto,* the seducer, and the scoundrel (Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano* 586; Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover* 1; Landy, *Stardom* vii). Popular genres such as the peplum and spaghetti-westerns signaled further transformations in conception of stardom, since their commercial success was built upon the physical prowess of a foreign performer such as American bodybuilder Steve Reeves or American actor Clint Eastwood. (Landy, *Stardom* xvi; dell'Agnese 19).

When analyzing Japanese American star Sessue Hayakawa, Daisuke Miyao states that working on transnational stardom means taking into account the different meanings the stars evoked in different national contexts, and the various social, political, and cultural discourses embodied in the construction of the star image (12-18). The three stars analyzed in my project, Amedeo Nazzari, Vittorio Gassman, and Steve Reeves, prove to be the ideal vehicles

to explore how discourses of transnationalism and international popular culture interact with Gramsci's concepts of the national and the popular. Marcia Landy notes how the male stars of the 1950s functioned "to introduce different forms of masculinity into Italian cinema" (Landy, *Stardom* xvi). My claim is that they do so because they functioned as a bridge between Hollywood's glamorized ideals of masculinity and Italy's search for new Italian male models, away from the cult of virility and exaggerated masculinity supported by fascist ideology (dell'Agnese 14). My claim is that these new forms of transatlantic hybrid masculinity negotiated Italy's sociocultural transitioning to the modernity of the economic boom, and to the new industrial society of the 1960s.

In Chapter One, I trace Nazzari's stardom from fascist to postwar cinema, examining the reasons of his career shift from embodying the war hero of fascist cinema to the father figure of postwar family melodramas. I argue that his career trajectory is framed in the broader cultural movement aimed at the reconstruction of the democratic Italian man after the fascist regime. I argue that Nazzari's roles as ideal husband and father in Matarazzo's melodramas worked against the anxieties of Italy's changing society and represented a fixed, reassuring ideal of masculinity that also functioned as the symbol of national identity against Hollywood products.

With Amedeo Nazzari and the reaffirmation of an ideal Italian masculinity in the face of social and economic changes brought by the influence of the American way of life, each successive chapter moves to a star whose work is increasingly transnational, in-between Italy and the U.S., albeit in an opposite way: Italian actor Vittorio Gassman and his Hollywood films, and American bodybuilder Steve Reeves as the main star of the Italian peplum genre.

My chapter on Vittorio Gassman interrogates celebrity and ethnicity and how they are intertwined with the failure of Gassman as a Hollywood star. Gassman's career in Hollywood has been greatly overlooked in favor of his successful career as a stage and screen actor in Italy. Through my original archival research at the New York Public Library of the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center, I analyzed photographs and gossip magazines of his rocky marriage with actress Shelley Winters, and film magazines' reviews of Gassman's work in Hollywood, and contextualized them within the discourses of masculinity and ethnicity that circulated at the time. I argue that Gassman never achieved stardom in Hollywood because he did not conform to the hegemonic idea of the 1950s male breadwinner in America, and because he actively refused to embody Hollywood's version of Italian masculinity associated with the ethnic stereotype of the Latin lover.

My last chapter is centered on actor/bodybuilder Steve Reeves. While in chapter 3 I focus on Vittorio Gassman as a vehicle for images of Italian-ness in Hollywood, in chapter 4 I look at representations of American white muscular masculinity in the peplum genre, and its significations in postwar Italy. I analyze how Steve Reeves' white masculinity engaged with issues of soft power and American cultural hegemony in postwar Italy, in the context of the cultural Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union over the control of Western Europe. I also claim that the American-looking strongman proved to be a new, hybrid model of masculinity for the Italian audience, remote enough from the fascist past while embodying the appeal of the American way of life: modernity and wealth.

By articulating the heterogeneous, yet intertwined features of Nazzari, Gassman, and Reeves's stardom, I relate them to the crucial role they performed in the negotiation of identity and otherness within the context of the transnational cinematic practices between

Italy, Europe, and the U.S. I argue that Hollywood on the Tiber and the international popularity of Nazzari, Gassman, and Reeves in several film genres on both sides of the Atlantic marked a new phase of transnational and global practices of film production and distribution.

The chapters are connected by the methodological emphasis on stars as representations of masculinity in transition. Stars served as cultural symbols that negotiated ideas of gender, values, and national identity at the crucial moment when Italy was changing from a rural country to an urbanized society (Gundle, "Stars and Stardom" 263; Muscio 120).

As I hope to demonstrate, my case studies of Amedeo Nazzari, Vittorio Gassman, and Steve Reeves are related through the overarching goal of explaining the relationship of the star phenomenon to the transatlantic cultural, economic and social practices of the Hollywood of the Tiber era, with one eye on Hollywood, and the other on Cinecittà.

CHAPTER II

"The Ideal Man": Amedeo Nazzari and National Melodramatic Masculinity.

In 1939, the film magazine *Cinema* organized a survey among its readers to establish the most popular actor in Italy. Amedeo Nazzari came in first with 19,020 votes, widely surpassing the other candidates such as Fosco Giachetti, who got 5,450 votes, and Vittorio De Sica, who received 4,209 preferences (Gubitosi 9). Nazzari, a 6 feet 3 inches tall actor born in Sardinia in 1907 had just achieved enormous success with two films directed by Goffredo Alessandrini, *Cavalleria* (1936) and *Luciano Serra pilota* (1938). With the latter, Nazzari had also won the Coppa Mussolini at the Venice Film Festival in 1938. Due to the popularity of these films in Fascist Italy, with their themes of masculine heroism and war sacrifice, the result of the 1939 survey wasn't that surprising. More surprising was a 1982 poll organized by the TV show *Flash* which asked its spectators to choose an individual from the past who would represent their "ideal man". The result was again Amedeo Nazzari, who surpassed international stars such as Tyrone Power, media icons such as John F. Kennedy, and popular historical heroes like Garibaldi (Gubitosi 10). In 1982, three years after his death, Nazzari still embodied the sum of highest Italian masculinity values for the collective imaginary. Nazzari as the "ideal Italian man" was indeed the signature of his entire career and the basis on which his stardom was constituted, both in Fascist cinema and postwar melodrama films. Nazzari, thus, is a remarkable example of Italian stardom, transitioned almost unchanged from the

Fascist era into the cinema of the 50s. However, I say "almost" because his stardom did change during the transition from Fascism to democracy, following the cultural shift that helped defining the different meanings of postwar Italy's "ideal Italian man". The longevity of Nazzari's stardom in Italian cinema serves as an exploration site for the link between stardom, politics and industry during the transition from the Fascist era to the postwar period, focusing on the cultural signification of his star persona and his work in one of the most popular genres of postwar Italy, the melodrama.

In this chapter, I explore the multiple meanings of his stardom and masculinity in the different contexts of Fascist and postwar Italy, focusing on issues of national identity, gender, and class position. First, I focus on the idea of continuity in his star persona, arguing that the different socio-political and cultural contexts and the different industrial practices in which his stardom progressed shaped the ideal man he represented. Then, I look into his postwar stardom in the light of film melodrama, analyzing his screen roles' transition from war hero to the ideal husband and father of Matarazzo's films. Finally, I contextualize his star persona within the critical debate about popular genres that took place in the left-wing newspaper *L'Unità* in 1955-56, exploring the link between popular stardom and the Gramscian idea of the *nazional-popolare* (national-popular culture). I argue that Nazzari's roles as ideal husband and father in Matarazzo's melodramas worked against the anxieties of Italy's changing society and represented a fixed, reassuring ideal of masculinity that also functioned as the symbol of national identity against Hollywood products. Nazzari's stardom, thus, representing the icon of the "Italian man", negotiated issues of gender, sexuality, class, and national identity during two fundamental transitional periods in Italian history: the passage from

Fascist dictatorship to democracy, and the cultural and social changes produced by the industrialization of the nation in the fifties.

1. Nazzari, Stardom, and The Transition From Fascist To Postwar Cinema

Amedeo Nazzari's popularity in the 30s is mostly related to a couple of his films that came to be identified with the Fascist era values: *Cavalleria* (1936) and *Luciano Serra pilota* (1938). In both films, Nazzari plays a brave man sacrificing his life for his country and in both films he is, or becomes a courageous aviator who dies on an important war mission. The glorification of the war as *igiene del mondo* (hygiene of the world), intended to strengthen the character of the Italian people, was endemic to the rhetoric of Futurism, which "was based upon the sober acceptance of the new speed of time and a love of combat and confrontation" (Mosse, *Masses and Man* 156). The aviator, especially, was seen as the symbol for the new man who, according to Mosse, "continued a stereotype that had his roots in nineteenth century nationalism, based upon an ideal of male strength and beauty, an élan vital, which we have attributed to the pilot, who dominated the skies" (*Masses and Man* 159).

Both *Cavalleria* and *Luciano Serra pilota* depicted a hero who embodied the ideal "new man" propagated by Fascist rhetoric, an often contradictory mix of traditional values such as service, honor, and sacrifice, and of an aggressive virility associated with modernity, the machine, and the aviator/soldier. As Landy writes, "the Fascist hero was a consequence of a misreading of Nietzsche's Superman, of the aesthetics of futurism, and of the mystique of nationalism" (28). Benito Mussolini was the icon of this quintessential new masculinity. His self-fashioning was calculated to represent this complex and contradictory Italian man: Virile,

sexual conqueror, war hero, but also "a frugal person who worked hard, ate little, and was unafraid of personal sacrifice" (Ben-Ghiat 341).

On-screen, the cinematic representations of men didn't reproduce Fascist ideology as mere propaganda, due to the fact that Fascism never had an all-encompassing control over the film industry. As Reich states, "the primary modus operandi of the films of this period was entertainment and enjoyment" (7), and the film industry of the *ventennio* (the roughly twenty years of Fascist regime) in general never functioned as overt propaganda.[8] Male characters in films such as *Cavalleria* and *Luciano Serra pilota* did converge with Fascist ideology at significant points, but they were also rooted in cultural myths that belong to the Romantic era, such as the gentleman and the cavalryman. These male figures refer to an idealized version of early 1900, an epoch defined by aristocratic rituals and bourgeois respectability, symbols of the old world that were swept away by WWI and the social turmoil of the Thirties. Nazzari's star persona worked in the interstice between the idealized past of pre-WWI and the new man of the Fascist regime. He was often cast as a modern romantic hero, whose virility and manliness were tempered by a melancholy attitude and sexual repression as renunciation of erotic pleasure. In *Cavalleria*, he played Captain Solaro, a cavalry officer who falls in love with a young noblewoman, Speranza. The film develops into a romantic melodrama when Speranza, in spite of her love for Solaro, decides to marry a wealthy Baron to save the family from bankruptcy. Her sacrifice deeply affects Solaro, who can't resign to lose her and tries to go after her even after she married. His obsession with passion and his transgression to the

[8] The reasons are several: first of all, the nature of the Fascist ideology was itself characterized by inconsistencies and contradictions. Italian Fascism was more a synthesis of various ideological positions than a coherent and compact political ideology. Second, Fascism lacked a defined cultural policy and a dominant artistic style, unlike National Socialism. Finally, the relationship between Fascist regime and culture was that of a constant negotiation among a variety of individual interests, such as party members, private industrialist, and intellectuals who competed to reshaping the Italian film industry during the *ventennio*. For more on this subject, see Reich 2002; Brunetta. 2009; Forgacs, and Gundle 2007.

honor of the chivalry code is punished when Solaro, dazed and confused by Speranza's return to her husband, seriously wounds his favorite horse during a competition and has to kill it.

Thereafter, Solaro resigns from cavalry and becomes an aviator. In this passage Solaro leaves the old world, symbolized by horsemen and the rigid division between aristocracy and bourgeois, and enters the new Fascist era, signaled by the modernity of the airplane, the figure of the aviator, and emphasis on war. Not only Solaro leaves the past for the present, he also converts into manhood, leaving his romantic attitude behind to embrace manliness and virility. In the romantic sequences with Speranza, Solaro is indeed depicted as a passionate young man, and his posture and attitude reflect the gentleness and kindness of his personality. But his love for Speranza emasculates him in the form of Speranza's mother who treats him with disdain and undermines his male authority in front of her daughter. To regain his manliness, Solaro has to renounce Speranza and dedicate himself to discipline and male comradeship. After becoming an aviator, Solaro is indeed depicted in a very different way: he carries his aviator uniform with stronger self confidence, he becomes a war hero, and he lives the isolated life of the flier. As Landy writes, "He is no longer passive, chained to the past and to his desire, but a liberated man of action" (Landy, *Fascism in Film* 148). Moreover, the final scene before his heroic death takes place in a bar, the quintessential male refuge, where Solaro is smoking and drinking, habits usually associated with manliness and a tough guy persona. In the same scene, Solaro talks to a former colleague from cavalry, and though admitting to still think of Speranza he states that it is time to move on and perform his duty as a soldier. In the next scene, Solaro's plane is hit and plunges to the ground. Solaro's former cavalry team carries his body away and he is buried as a hero. Solaro's sublimated eroticism is transformed into action and heroism, his death symbolizing what Landy calls "the drama of conversion"

(Landy, *The Narrative of Conversion* 121): The hero experiences different stages of disillusionment and loss in order to reconstruct a new identity, frequently associated with regeneration of the community.

As Mosse writes, "Fascism used manliness both as an ideal and in a practical manner in order to strengthen its political structure, but devotion to a higher cause was at the center of its concept of masculinity" (Mosse, *The Image of Man* 155). This higher cause was the war, as the new man was meant to fight and sacrifice his life for the fatherland. In *Luciano Serra pilota*, for instance, Amedeo Nazzari plays an aviator and veteran of WWI who during times of peace is underemployed and cannot provide for his family. The film centers on the contrast between Luciano's idea of manliness, based on independence, free will, and heroism, and his bourgeois father-in-law, who wants him to have a stable and secure job in a factory. Luciano chooses to abandon his wife and son rather than giving up his dream of being an aviator and ends up in Argentina, where he becomes a renowned pilot. But his real heyday happens when he saves his son during a war mission in Ethiopia and is consequently celebrated as a war hero.

The emphasis on the ideal man as a war-warrior had its immediate origins in the Futurists' emphasis on the "hygienic war" and in the Fascist culture of virile violence. As Ruth Ben-Ghiat has written, "in Fascism squadrism, as in war, the re-foundation of masculinity is made to coincide with the collective and erotic rite of killing and being killed" (341). The rituals of violence and masculine imaginaries influenced the whole *ventennio*, directed by Fascist ideology to create a new type of combative Italian and aimed to eradicate sentimentalism, which was considered a 'national defect' by the Duce (Ben-Ghiat 342).

However, Nazzari's star persona in Fascist films such as *Cavalleria* and *Luciano Serra pilota* was never tied to violence. When violence did happen, it was always caused by the sequence of events, such as in *Luciano Serra pilota*'s last scene, where Luciano stabs an African soldier only to protect his son, who crashed his airplane and is about to be killed. Nazzari's characters in both *Cavalleria* and *Luciano serra pilota*, although embodying some characteristics of the Fascist new man, like bravery and war heroism, retain a fundamental goodness and kindness of heart that belonged to Nazzari's star persona. As the actor once stated "I played all kinds of roles, except the villain" (Pruzzo 8). With few exceptions, Nazzari's roles both in pre- and post-war cinema, indeed, were modeled on the attributes of a traditional, timeless masculinity, such as unflinching virility, absolute dependability, and a keen sense of honor and chivalry.[9]

Right after the war, Nazzari continued to work with directors such as Alessandro Blasetti and Alberto Lattuada, who knew how to valorize his star persona, casting him in roles that reminded the public of the ideal Italian man's good qualities, such as sense of honor, loyalty and gallantry, even though the contexts changed according to the new social and historical structures. After being a captain and an aviator in the *ventennio* cinema, Nazzari was quickly cast as a partisan in *Un giorno nella vita* (Blasetti, 1946) and a veteran turned bandit in *Il bandito* (*The Bandit*, Lattuada, 1946); two roles that exemplified the new heroes of Italian postwar times. The partisan was the heroic common man who fought Fascists and Nazis and contributed to Italy's liberation. The bandit, although as an outlaw a more controversial figure, was nevertheless a mythic figure of Italian folklore, an honest man forced to turn to illegality because of economic abuse he had to endure on behalf of the ruling

[9] The exceptions were, for instance, the violent patriarch Rocco in *The lure of Sila* (Coletti, 1949), or the seducer in *A Husband for Anna* (De Santis, 1953).

class and the government.[10] Therefore, while the context in which Nazzari's stardom came to operate after the war was different, the qualities associated with Nazzari's star persona were the same, and his popularity grew even bigger.

However, after playing the rebel Pugaciov in Camerini's *La figlia del capitano* (1947), Nazzari left Italy for a year and a half to work in Spain and Argentina. The reason why Nazzari couldn't or didn't want to work in Italy during the crucial times of the *Costituente*, where Italy redefined its democratic political system and promulgated its current Constitution, were never fully explained by the actor. There are some indications, however, which relate his absence to his controversial status as star of Fascist military films. Nazzari's star persona, deeply associated with the most successful films of the Fascist *ventennio*, consequently faced difficulties when the actor attempted to adjust to a postwar cinema that was ideologically charged with a strong anti-Fascism, even though Nazzari himself never openly sided with Fascism and even refused to take the Fascist 'tessera' offered to him by Mussolini. Gubitosi claims that only a few years after 1945, Italian cinema was already ideologically biased against the roles of the "ideal Italian" played by Nazzari, rather focusing on a critique of the Italian national defects, which were clearly at odds with Nazzari's reception as the star of the Italian main virtues (91).

From 1947 to 1949, then, Nazzari left Cinecittà for Spain and Argentina and starred in two films: *Conflicto inesperado* (Gàscon, 1948) and *Don Juan de Serralonga* (Gàscon, 1949). In 1949, however, Nazzari suddenly broke his contract with an Argentinian company because he didn't want to play the part of a stereotyped evil Italian, and returned to Italy. The reasons for his return fit perfectly into the narrative of his star persona like it was constructed and publicized throughout his films, which focused on the actor as representative of the virtuous

[10] For more on this subject see Giovine.

qualities of Italian-ness. As Dyer states in his book *Stars*, "the values embodied by a star […] were harder to reject as 'impossible' or 'false', because the star's existence guarantees the existence of the values s/he embodies" (20). Indeed, an article in the magazine *Successo* that announced Nazzari's return put extreme emphasis on the Argentinian episode, underlined how Nazzari as an actor was able to defend the dignity of the Italians abroad.[11] Nazzari as an individual, is thus depicted as embodying the same qualities carried by the characters he portrayed in his films, making him a champion of Italian honor at home and abroad. The period he spent outside Italy was also instrumental for his career since, during that time, the audience began to speculate about his return and his next roles, creating a sense of expectation. The first film he worked on after his return from Argentina was *Lure of the Sila* (Coletti, 1949), where he played Rocco, a patriarch obsessively defending the honor of his family. Rocco's sister Orsola has a secret lover, Pietro. When Pietro is accused of having killed a man, Orsola wants to testify in his favor, confessing that they spent the night together. But Rocco, fearing a scandal and obsessed with his sister's honor, forbids Orsola to do so. Consequently, Pietro is arrested and then killed. Although Nazzari's character therefore is the villain of the movie, he is not evil, his actions being rather motivated by an archaic yet traditional sense of honor. However, his backwardness regarding women's rights and violent masculinity is punished in the end, where his sister kills him. Nazzari played Rocco, one of the few villains in his career, right after the war and his time abroad in Spain and Argentina. This can be read as a way of transitioning his star persona from his pre-war roles based on

[11] "L'ambiente cinematografico rivolge ad Amedeo Nazzari il suo grazie fervido e affettuoso per aver saputo difendere fieramente la dignità degli attori italiani all'estero." "Amedeo Nazzari rimpatria dall'Argentina". *Successo*, a.VI, n. 9-10, March 31 1949, p. 3

Fascist virility and masculinity to his postwar roles, where he goes on to become an idealized husband and father in Matarazzo's melodramas.

In 1949, director Raffaello Matarazzo directed *Catene*, the first of his eight melodramas produced by Titanus and starring the couple Amedeo Nazzari and Yvonne Sanson. Despite the low budget of its production, in the year of its release *Catene* became the top-grossing film in Italy.[12] Sorlin estimates that six million people went to see it (one out of eight Italians), Landy documents that *Catene* grossed 735 million lire, and Villa states that all of Matarazzo's melodramas occupied the first places of the box office list from 1949 to 1953 (Sorlin 107; Landy, *Stardom Italian Style* 132; Villa 192). *Catene* coincided with an active phase of Italian film production and distribution, which started after the war and continued until the mid-fifties, characterized by a growing expansion of theatres and the increase of filmgoers. *Catene*'s success at the box-office started a new trend in production and movie-going, where Italian domestic public was wooed away from American films due to a strategic exploitation of popular genres: first melodramas, then Neapolitan musicals, comedies, and mythological epics. (Wagstaff 76). This domestic production of films for popular entertainment was based on a multitude of small companies often specializing in one particular genre, such as Galatea for peplum movies, and Titanus for melodramas.

Catene and Matarazzo's melodramas *I figli di nessuno* (1951), *Tormento* (1950), *Torna!* (1954), and *L'angelo bianco* (1955), were also responsible for the resurgence of Nazzari's stardom after the war, turning him into "a sort of Clark Gable of the backward areas" (Castello 408) and "the special idol of the rural and provincial audiences that were encountering cinema for the first time" (Forgacs and Gundle 166). Nazzari's highly traditional

[12] An entire subplot in Giuseppe Tornatore's nostalgic 1988 *Cinema Paradiso* is devoted to the overwhelming popular impact of this tale on the audience of a small Sicilian town.

masculinity was successfully coupled with an unknown actress of Greek origins, Yvonne Sanson, who embodied a sensuous and yet maternal femininity that appealed especially to southern Italian audiences (Landy, *Stardom Italian Style* 136). The plots of Matarazzo's melodramas were easy to follow and generally involved disruptions in domesticity, injustices of social life, and menaces to the moral integrity of the family, in a "highly affective visual, verbal, and musical language highlighting the sufferings and anguish of the characters" (Landy, *Stardom Italian Style* 132). In this sense, then, Italian melodrama follows the conventions internationally correlated with the genre, as illustrated by Neale's Manichean structures, thrills and suspense (202). Furthermore, Italian melodramas, with their depiction of exaggerated, simplified characters caught in the grip of intense sensation or emotion, with a symbolic *mise en scène* that emphasized extreme or medium close-up and shot-reverse-shot, reinforced by a highly emotive soundtrack, can be included in the category of the "bodily excess genre," which involves the sensation of overwhelming pathos and evokes a physical audience response, in this case tears (Williams 604). Therefore, the genre has been called 'weepie,' tearjerker (*strappalacrime*), but also film-feuilletton, or *neorealismo d'appendice*[13].

In Matarazzo's films, Nazzari consistently portrays a husband and a father trying to overcome the obstacles and injustice that might destroy his family's happiness. Fatherhood is always the *raison d'etre* of Nazzari's characters in Matarazzo's melodramas, the status that secures them social respect and a stable identity, as "in postwar Italy fatherhood seemed to constitute the place where maleness could be reassessed" (Gennari 137). Postwar Italy was acutely aware of the necessity of manhood models that would replace the masculinities embraced by the Fascist regime, with their emphasis on war, violence, and public heroism.

[13] *Appendice* in this context means feuilleton, a newspaper supplement filled with light entertainment, talk-of-the-town gossip, and the like. See Bachman and Williams 60.

The need for new ethical codes and the urge to rebuild affective ties within families married the Vatican's exhortation to re-establish a more conventional patriarchal society based on Catholic values. Fatherhood came to signify the core of Italian manhood, and sexual procreation within the family became the proof of manliness, deeply rooted in the honor of men as a husbands and fathers.

The focus on fatherhood as expression of virility and manhood in postwar Italy is quite different from the values which Fascist masculinity was built on. Mussolini, who during Fascism came to symbolize all the virtues of true masculinity on his own, only occasionally was pictured as a family man, his public image rather centered on him doing physical exercise or engaging in productive work (Mosse, *The Image of Man* 168). As Landy states, male roles in Fascist cinema were based on an ideal masculinity, which found its true identity and purpose when it aligned itself to male heroism; this involved either renunciation or immunization of sexual and romantic love (Landy, *The Narrative of Conversion* 33). The ideal Fascist man on screen worked in the absence or through the rejection of women, such as in *Cavalleria*, where the woman was depicted preventing Nazzari's character from joining the society of males, or in *Luciano Serra pilota*, where Luciano's wife wants to prevent him from working as an aviator. However, as Mosse states, Fascism shared a tension "between a triumphant masculinity and the ideal of family life." In a contradictory attitude often being the mark of Fascist doctrine, the movement focused on an all-male society and party organization, yet also praised family life as foundation of the state (Mosse, *The Image of Man* 166). This tension could only be resolved by clearly separating the space of women and children from that of the man: Women belong to the home, while men belong to the outside and the active life.

Thus, Landy's affirmation that "Nazzari's star persona remains one of the best examples of a degree of continuity from pre-World War II cinema" (Landy, *Stardom Italian Style* 138) ought to be further problematized. Nazzari's star persona did change in postwar cinema. As we have seen in films such as *Cavalleria* and *Luciano Serra pilota*, his roles as Fascist hero were based on a masculinity that declined erotic passion and refused family life; while in his postwar melodramas Nazzari's characters center on the figure of the faithful husband and father whose manliness is based on his family's honor.

2. Nazzari, Stardom, and Melodrama

Nazzari's star persona thus transitioned from the ideal Fascist hero of propaganda-oriented war films such as *Cavalleria* and *Luciano Serra pilota* to the idealized husband and father of the Fifties' melodramas. The "new man" of Fascist propaganda therefore, is transformed into an idealized form of masculinity epitomized by the *pater familias,* the family's patriarchal head. This passage also exemplifies the transition of Italian society from Fascism to the new order of the Fifties, characterized by the Vatican's and the ruling party of the Democrazia Cristiana's (Christian Democrats) attempt to restrict femininity to the private sphere and encourage the re-integration of masculinity into a set of more traditional values, based on the Christian family as the center of Italian life (Ginsborg 235).

In Matarazzo's melodramas, the father is being portrayed as dependable and hardworking, but also as practically omnipotent in his rights over his wife and children, especially where honor is concerned (Günsberg 20). In *Catene*, Guglielmo evicts his wife Luisa from their home and forbids her to see her children after mistakenly believing she

cuckolded him. Like Guglielmo, Roberto in *Torna!* deprives his wife Susanna of their little daughter as a punishment for presumed adultery. The female characters, on the other hand, are always portrayed as fatalistic, passive, and suffering mothers, following the Roman Catholic iconography of the *Mater Dolorosa*. In Catholicism, the mother-child bond is modeled on the Virgin Mary-Jesus relationship, and thus portrayed as a source of suffering, since the mother will lose her son for a 'higher' patriarchal religious purpose (Günsberg 29). The focus on the suffering of motherhood places these films in the category of maternal melodrama of the sacrificial rather than resisting type (Kaplan 76), while the emphasis on masculinity realized through husbandry and fatherhood evoked what Cohan calls the "New American Domesticated Male" (Cohan 53), where the breadwinner came to personify the national character and democratic achievement of postwar America.

Nazzari's popularity was directly related to his being casted as a character portraying the ideal father in Matarazzo's films, and also resided in his ability to represent characters of embattled Italian masculinity who have to face and fight domestic trials and tribulations and social injustice. These characters constitute the dramatis personae of the melodrama genre. His renewed popularity as a star can't be disjointed, indeed, from the genre in which his stardom is achieved, the Italian melodramas.

Christine Gledhill explains the link between genre and stardom focusing on the way stardom combines the genre's characters, already defined by stereotypical conventions, with the star's persona. This process "forms the private life into a public and emblematic shape, drawing on general social types and film roles" (Landy, *Stardom Italian Style* 215). Nazzari's immediate identification with the melodrama genre is a direct consequence of the combination of the fictional role of the hard worker and the reliable *pater familias*

symbolizing the good qualities of an idealized man, the social and semiotic meanings being embodied by his star persona, based on his "brusque manner, taciturnity, unflinching virility, absolute dependability, and keen sense of honour" that "marked him as a personality with connotations that audiences recognized as specifically Italian" (Gundle, *Fame, Fashion, and Style* 315). This relationship between the melodrama genre and Nazzari's stardom is, therefore, a very productive one, in which the fortune of the genre is inextricably linked to the *divismo* of Nazzari and his star persona, embodying the traditional characteristics of Italian *virilità*: loyalty, fierceness, honor, and chivalry[14].

As Landy and Gledhill point out, melodrama flourishes during a moment of social transition as a form that seeks to contain, neutralize, or negotiate the conflicts presented in the films (Landy, *Stardom Italian Style* 132) (Gledhill 13). Matarazzo's family melodramas, focusing on the domestic sphere, tapped into the postwar desire for a return to stability and the fear of familial bonds being destructed as a result of the recent war and the incoming social changes of the "economic miracle" which should reshape Italian traditions and institutions. As Spinazzola points out, both the comedies of Totò and the melodramas of Nazzari are set in a Southern Italian milieu and mostly appealed to a Southern audience. Hence they ought to be seen as a reaction to both the influence of a foreign culture, such as the American one, and a changing society led by the industrialization of the North (Spinazzola, *Cinema e pubblico* 79).

With their emphasis on the roles of father- and motherhood, Matarazzo's melodramas can be categorized under what Schatz calls the "family melodrama", centered upon the nuclear unit (Schatz 226). Major representatives of this genre in Hollywood were the

[14] "Ma il successo del filone inaugurato da *Catene* non si spiega senza far entrare in gioco il filone divistico. I valori umani esaltati da Matarazzo e dai suoi emuli trovarono infatti incarnazione esemplare nel volto accigliato, gli occhi onesti, il gestire breve di un attore che ha rappresentato uno dei maggiori fenomeni divistici del nostro cinema drammatico: Amedeo Nazzari". Spinazzola, *Cinema e pubblico* 78.

melodramas of Sirk, Ray, and Minnelli, having been widely theorized since the Sixties by critics and scholars from different theoretical standpoints: film history, psychoanalysis, Neo-Marxism, and reception studies[15]. Sirk's melodramas, especially, have been the center of a 70s' neo-Marxist reappraisal which saw them as a site for symbolic resistance to dominant modes of social organization and as a masked social critique of Eisenhower's America (Gledhill; Klinger). The radical readings of Sirk's films, however, do not have any equivalent in Matarazzo's case[16]. His films were always considered conservative and certainly are, insofar as they take the side of traditional family values, Church, and social order. However, Matarazzo's conservatism is far from straightforward or without complexities. By their *mise en scène*, narrative, and display of gender relationships, his films bring to light and highlight many contradictions in the structure of Italian institutions and traditions.

As Maggie Günsberg writes Matarazzo's melodramas share a certain common patriarchal ground with many Hollywood melodramas of the 1930s and 1940s, and the 1950s revival by directors like Minnelli, Ophüls and Sirk (Günsberg 20). Their films have been analyzed especially within the context of Freudian psychology, which with its emphasis on sexual repression and patriarchal dominance was part of the dominant intellectual fashion of the postwar era. In her study on gender and Italian melodrama, Günsberg utilizes Freud's Oedipal complex and his theory of family romance to analyze Matarazzo's *Catene* and the female abjection within the family. Although psychoanalysis is a legitimate framework to analyze Matarazzo's melodramas, it fails to historicize Italian melodrama within the context of those socio-economic relations the films tried to contain and negotiate. Indeed, the

[15] For an investigation of the field, see Gledhill.
[16] However, it should be mentioned that the 1976 retrospective in Savona was dedicated to the "Matarazzo's case". The major critical interventions were collected in a volume edited by Aprà and Carabba called *Neorealismo d'appendice: per un dibattito sul cinema popolare – il caso Matarazzo* (Feuilleton Neorealism: For a Debate on Popular Cinema – The Matarazzo Case). Rimini-Firenze: Guaraldi, 1976.

historical context of Italian melodramas is very different from the Hollywood one. While "there can be little doubt that the postwar popularity of the family melodrama in Hollywood is partly connected with the fact that in those years America discovered Freud" (Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury" 58), Italian cinema in the aftermath of the war is more concerned with notions of class, realism, and the contradictory attitude of leftist intellectuals towards popular culture.

Matarazzo's melodramas were produced from 1949 to 1954, during a historical era characterized by the exclusion of Socialist and Communist parties from government, and the strong alliance between Christian Democrats (DC), the Vatican, and the United States, based on their shared anticommunism stance. The years of the cold war witnessed a substantial defeat of the Partito Comunista Italiano-PCI (Italian Communist Party) both in the political arena, with the victory of the Christian Democrats supported by the Catholic Church and the United States, and in the field of popular culture, where the PCI "failed to match the extraordinary efforts made at all levels by the Church and the DC to shape the reorganization of cultural production on modern, industrial lines and use commercially oriented entertainments to reinforce and even extend the hold they enjoyed in Italian society" (Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow* 43). The PCI's attitude towards popular culture was deeply contradictory at the time. In communist discourse, popular culture is identified primarily with autochthonous folk or class-based traditions, such as regional popular songs, games and so forth. Popular culture is then opposed to the incipient mass culture, culpable of disseminating fantasies of escapism in the working class and identifying mainly with American cultural products. However, the "authentic" forms of popular culture were constantly delegitimized in favor of the modernist, high form of culture that the people ought to reach, therefore involving

a "populist and in many ways paternalist conception of popular culture" (Forgacs, *The Italian Communist Party and Culture* 101). Matarazzo's melodramas, thanks to their huge success among the lower classes, drew the attention of film journals, leftist intellectuals, and neorealist directors, who were already engaged in a process of interrogating the currency of the popular, questioning the popular taste, while attempting to breach the gap between intellectuals and the people (O'Rawe 185). This attention showed itself, however, mostly in negative terms, by critics attacking Matarazzo's films for conservatism and representing a working class limited to the private sphere of the family.

In this context, Nazzari's stardom is particularly interesting because it exposes the ideological contradictions of the melodrama genre and contextualizes them within the cultural and political situation of postwar Italy. While analyzing the star-audience relationship, Dyer argues that the star's charisma embodies an ideological contradiction, suggesting that the rise of particular stars can be traced to their condensation of values felt to be under threat or in flux at a particular moment in time (*Stars* 30). Nazzari's star persona transitioned, as we have seen, from being a symbol of Fascist heroism to embodying the virility of the Italian breadwinner and family man. However, in the melodrama films his status as *pater familias,* and thus his virility, is constantly threatened by external forces, such as the repressive power of State and Church, and by internal conflicts, such as his wife's supposed sexual desire outside the bond of marriage. These threats symbolize the complex relation of the popular classes with the political and social changes Italy underwent after the war, and constitute a site of negotiation for new forms of Italian masculinity and gender roles of the 1950s.

Focusing on Nazzari's star persona in Matarazzo's melodramas, I investigate issues of

masculinity, fatherhood and national identity through class and gender conflicts as presented in the films *Catene*, *Tormento*, and *I figli di nessuno*.

In American melodramas, the breadwinner's functional virility is often threatened by the fear of emasculation and physical malaise, "to give form to the contradictions and anxieties of the prevailing general ideology of the 1950s" (Rodowick 278). The threat to manhood comes from inside, visually representing the Oedipal complex by the conflictual father-son relationship, which can be seen in *Home from the Hill* (Minnelli, 1960) and *Splendor in the Grass* (Kazan, 1961), or in the impossibility to reconcile law and desire that resolves itself in madness and self-destruction, as shown in *Written in the Wind* (Sirk, 1956) and *Bigger than Life* (Ray, 1956).

In Italian melodramas, on the other hand, there is a significant shift away from an internalized conflict and towards an external clash between the individual and society as a whole. The major threats to manhood indeed come from outside the family sphere, be it from an overt State dominance or the temptation of *hommes fatals,* endangering the moral virtues of the married woman.

The oppression of an individual subjectivity by an overwhelming and rigid State apparatus is a constant presence in Italian melodramas showing itself in thematic elements, narrative arcs, formal techniques, and the *mise en scène*. As Bachman and Williams point out, the formulaic plots of Matarazzo's films "constitute so many attempts to salvage and conserve a popular community torn apart not just by war but by violent contemporary political enmities", identified through State apparatuses such as the Law and the Church (63). Interestingly, the oppression of individual subjects by institutions is expressed through

gendered binary dynamics: the Law is in charge of repressing the husband/father, while the Church disciplines the life and sexual habits of the wife/mother.

In the film *Tormento*, the main character Carlo (Amedeo Nazzari) is unjustly accused of the murder of his business partner, convicted, and given a long sentence. The film doesn't show the trial but we hear the verdict though the words of Carlo's lawyer speaking to Anna (Yvonne Sanson), Carlo's fiancé, in a characteristically melodramatic narrative ellipsis. After the sentence, Anna and Carlo decide to married in prison.

A prison guard stands next to Carlo while a lawyer is at Anna's side. On the viewer's left, the barred prison windows separate the chapel from the other inmates. In this highly symbolic *mise en scène*, the Law frames the married couple, visually projecting its authority not only over their life but even their bodies.

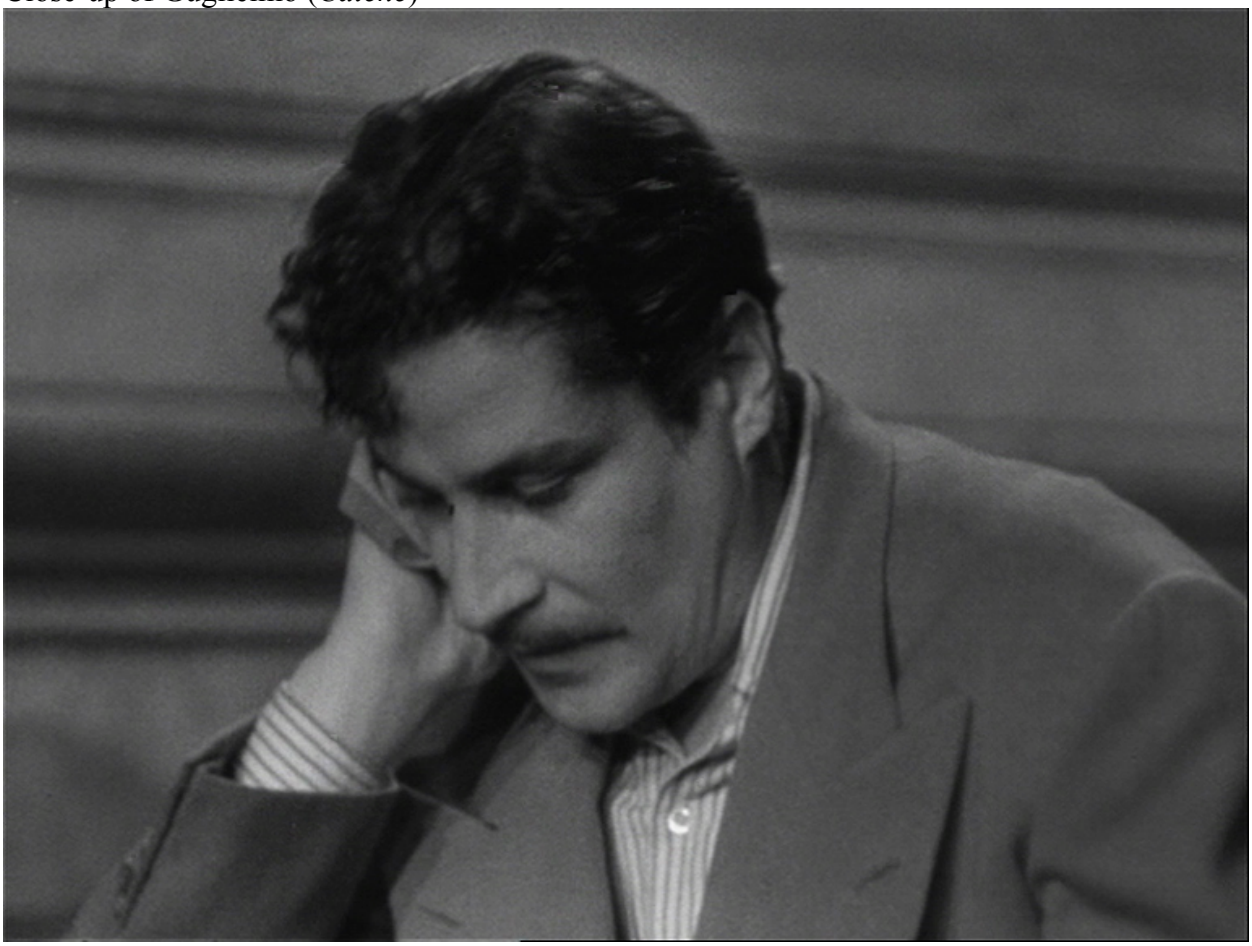
Anna's and Carlo's wedding (*Tormento*)

In the film *Catene*, Guglielmo (Amedeo Nazzari) is on trial for the murder of Emilio (also Nicodemi), a man mistakenly accused of being the lover of Guglielmo's wife Rosa. Before the trial, the lawyer convinces Rosa (Yvonne Sanson) to falsely admit to adultery in court in order to reduce Guglielmo's murder sentence to that of a crime of passion. The law on adultery in the 1950s, indeed, dated back to the Fascist Civil Code of 1942, reinforcing patriarchy by punishing female, but not male adultery[17]. During the trial, the lawyer's speech in front of the court is alternated with close-ups of Guglielmo in distress, his face covered in sweat, when listening to the defense lawyer who accuses Rosa of adultery. The close-up emphasizes the effect of the Law over the subject's body, and its power to discipline and

[17] This law would not be changed until 1968. See Günsberg 39.

punishment is extended to the subject's everyday life, which is where Foucault's effects of power are ultimately situated (*Discipline & Punish*). Similarly, in the previous scene, Rosa was verbally attacked by the defense lawyer after falsely confessing her adultery. The violence of the Law over her body is manifested not only through the close-up of her distressed face, but also by her fainting before reaching the court exit.

Close-up of Guglielmo (*Catene*)



Rosa fainting (*Catene*)

After his wife's testimony, Guglielmo is discharged and later learns the truth about Rosa's sacrifice, seeking her out just in time to prevent her for committing suicide. Guglielmo as *pater familias* is the only one entitled to resolve the happy ending of the plot, returning Rosa to the state of domestic bliss he had denied her before. However, while his masculinity and honor have been restored in his family home, both Rosa and him have been publicly questioned in court.

The public space of the State and the Law is therefore a threat to the *pater familias*' manhood, which consequently has to be reinforced within the family through the repression of the woman's sexual desire. In the film *I figli di nessuno*, the mother is punished by the death

of her son because she gave birth to him out of wedlock. In *Torna!* the father dictates the separation of the mother from her daughter because the mother is suspected of infidelity, while in *Tormento* the punitive bearer of patriarchal law is not a man but a postmenstrual older woman who represents the classic bad phallic mother-figure separating the mother from her little girl.

In regards of the male figures, the threat of imprisonment and punishment by the Law is a direct attack to their patriarchal authority and the unity of the family, while women's deviations from social norms, meant to strictly regulate their sexuality within marriage and motherhood, often result in them being incarcerated in Church-run facilities. In *Tormento*, after giving birth to their daughter, Anna is forced to support herself and her child working as a cleaning woman, but when the child becomes ill, Anna gives herself to the mercy of her evil stepmother, who accepts to save the child in exchange for Anna being sent to a Catholic reformatory (*riformatorio delle pentite*). Anna is often seen gazing powerlessly from the barred windows of the reformatory, matching her husband's imprisonment in jail. A parallel scenario is given in *Vortice*, where Elena, falsely imprisoned for murder of her husband, stares out through the bars while her child is "imprisoned" in a Church-run orphanage. Women behind barred windows and doors, prisons, reformatory, and orphanages are recurring images in Italian melodramas, identifying female figures with their trapped condition in society and their subordinate roles within the family (Landy, *Stardom Italian Style* 134).

Elena stares out through the bars (*Vortice*)

The Church and its institutions, thus, work in Matarazzo's melodramas as Ideological State Apparatuses, which "function massively and predominantly *by ideology*, but they also function secondarily by repression" (Althusser 13).

The frequency with which Church-run institutions emerge in Matarazzo's melodramas is directly connected to the situation of Italy in the aftermath of the war, where orphans, broken families, and births out of wedlock increased during the years 1944-49, mostly due to the deaths of men in the war, prison camps, and during civil war, as well as due to the occupation of Italian soil by both Allies and Nazis. A functional State being absent, the Church was the only welfare alternative for Italians, with its massive network of hospitals, nursing homes, and orphanages (Ginsborg 229). Catholic institutions were ubiquitous and

popular, numerically turning the Church into the country's largest organization (Allum 85).

By the time of the Liberation, Catholic culture had become a hegemonic mass represented in all societal strata; only the social changes brought by the economic boom of the Fifties and the Second Vatican Council reshaped its ideology and its role in the culture of Italian society (Allum 82). Parallel to welfare institutions, the Church was also running reformatories for "lost" women (*case di correzione*). The reformatories depicted in so many of Matarazzo's films perpetuated a controversial ideology: On one hand they became the only place of refuge for single mothers or women who had lost their families' support, but on the other hand, reformatories called these women *le pentite* (sinner, lost women), because they had walked away from a woman's specific role in not being a subordinate mother and husband's servant with its attendant virtues of modesty, submission and sacrifice (Allum 83).

The nuclear family's oppressive functions of surveillance and containment of female sexuality are being represented in the films by an idealized form of masculinity, epitomized by the husband-father figure as the family's patriarchal head (Günsberg 20). Outside the family, though, the melodrama's obsession with murder, false accusations, and incarceration overshadow the male characters, forming a threat to the patriarchal authority and to the unity of the family. In analyzing the domestic melodrama, Rodowick writes that its set of social determinations concern itself with representing the social relation of production in which the institutions of family and marriage are the privileged contents, and where institutional authority is depicted only to the degree that it reproduces familial politics (270). However, in Italian melodrama the relationship between private power and patriarchal right of the *pater familias* and institutional authority is often conflicted and oppositional. The overwhelming presence of Church and State in the melodrama characters' everyday life is seen as negative

force impeding the patriarchal dominance of the father. The particular aesthetic ideology of Matarazzo's melodrama therefore is contradictory insofar as it highlights what Bachmann and Williams call the "incoherent conservatism" of Matarazzo's films, since "the family may get back together in the end, but they do so despite the fact that State, Church, and the family unit itself are unfailingly responsible for having broken them up in the first place, by a dizzying array of unjust imprisonments, false accusations, and pious condemnations…" (60).

Another threat to idealized masculinity within fatherhood is being represented by the presence of another man who aims to disrupt the family harmony. Günsberg calls this character the *homme fatal*, because he is usually an ex-lover or suitor of the main character's wife, and "like the dangerously sexualized femme fatale of the film noir, the desire embodied by the *homme fatal* threatens the family unit and ultimately proves fatal to the character himself" (34). Indeed, the *homme fatal* is often associated with criminal activities such as gambling and financial fraud, and he operates, as does the *femme fatale*, on the wrong side of the law. However, unlike the *femme fatale* in the film noir, who is usually successful in seducing a flawed hero while luring him into criminality, the *homme fatal* is unable to successfully seduce the chaste, pious wife and mother of Italian melodramas, but is punished with death, such as in *Catene,* where he is shot by the husband (Nazzari), or in *Torna!* where he is killed by a fatal heart disease, or punished by the Law, such as in *I figli di nessuno*.

As Cohan writes in regards to the films of 1950s America, "fatherhood is performative, an ongoing process of acting out his masculine position as head of the family in the setting of home life, not work" (53). Although family was indeed at the center of Italian melodramas, where the masculinity of the main character became identified with the character's performance as a father, his value as head of the family was strictly linked to his hard-

working qualities, which were opposed in a Manichean dichotomy to the criminal, parasitic, and dissipated life of the *homme fatal*.

Thus, in the melodrama's aesthetic ideology the workspace and social class have prominent positions. The *homme fatal* is indeed often differentiated from the legitimate *pater familias* not only through their rivalry for the same woman, but also through their belonging to different social classes. Class is indeed a strong social determinant in Matarazzo's melodramas. The main characters of the family unit belong either to the working class, such as in *Catene*, where Guglielmo (Amedeo Nazzari) is a mechanic and Rosa a housewife, or to a lower-middle class which struggles to make ends meet, such as in *Torna!,* where Roberto (Amedeo Nazzari), despite being an engineer, struggles to support his family. On the contrary, their enemies are identified by wealth and power, although their wealth is never a product of hard work, but rather an aristocratic birthright, or a result of illicit trafficking: In *Catene*, Emilio (Aldo Nicodemi) is a man whose wealth comes from crimes; in *Tormento* the same actor plays the part of a rich philanderer who tries to rape Anna (Yvonne Sanson); in *Torna*! Giacomo (Franco Fabrizi) is an aristocratic gambler who dissipates his family's money on casinos and women.


Giacomo at the Casino (*Torna!*)

The *homme fatal*, in Matarazzo's films often played by Nicodemi, is thus the antithesis to the dependable husband- and father figure embodied by Amedeo Nazzari.[18] The two actors are often framed together to highlight their oppositional nature: In *Catene*, Nazzari is Guglielmo, a mechanic who works hard to support his wife and their two children, while Nicodemi is Emilio, the con man and ex fiancé of Guglielmo's wife Rosa, who wants to win her back. In their first scene together, Nazzari is wearing working clothes (a mechanic's

[18] One of the few exception is *I figli di nessuno*, where the role of the *homme fatal* is taken by the bad phallic mother, a Countess who pre-empts her son's cross-class marriage to a working class woman.

overall), clearly underlining his working class status, while Nicodemi wears an elegant suit and talks about money with ease.

Guglielmo and Emilio (*Catene*)

In *Tormento*, Nicodemi plays Ruffini, who owns a nightclub, is infatuated with Anna and wants to seduce her. When Anna resists him, explaining that she is married and loves her husband, Ruffini attempts to sexually assault her. In this scene, Ruffini is wearing a tuxedo, symbol of elegance, money, and wealth, while Anna is still in her working clothes, as she works as a receptionist in the nightclub Ruffini owns. The class difference between Ruffini and Anna and the fact that Anna's husband is in prison, accused of having killed a man for money, enhances the class conflicts underlined by Matarazzo's melodramas.

Anna and Ruffini (*Tormento*)

Ruffini and Emilio's financial exploitation of the honest working class is symbolized by their sexual excess, which becomes a menace to the integrity of the family and the honor of the legitimate husband. In *Torna!,* for instance, the *homme fatal* is played by Franco Fabrizi, an Italian actor best known for his performance as the lady-killer among a group of small-town youths in Federico Fellini's *I Vitelloni.* Fabrizi plays Giacomo, a gambler who dissipates his family's money and despises his cousin Roberto (Amedeo Nazzari), who works hard to save his family's business after Giacomo completely ignored it. However, Giacomo can't accept to be rejected by Susanna (Yvonne Sanson), who decides to marry the more reliable

Roberto, and tries everything to win her back, threatening to economically ruin her husband if she doesn't accept to become his mistress.

The *homme fatal*, thus, threatens the *pater familias* on both the economic and sexual level. He belongs to the upper class, has money, even though mostly from illicit sources, and is often younger and sexually aggressive, while the *pater familias* is usually older, working or middle class, and focused on family and child rearing. Even in their physical presence, the actors playing the *pater familias* and *homme fatal* are constructed in oppositional terms: Nazzari's physical presence - tall, heavy set, sturdy and reassuring -, epitomizes the dependable, protective man often associated with an older generation with strong traditional values, while Fabrizi and Nicodemi are physically slim, younger, and blond, symbolizing a new generation that rejects traditional values. As Martha Vicinus states, "melodrama sides with the powerless, while evil is associated with social power and station," focusing on the victims of an unjust economic system (130).

The Manichean dichotomy between Good, embodied by Nazzari's characters, and Bad, embodied by Nicodemi and Fabrizi, underlines the work and family ethic of Italian melodramas. However, the class conflict never turns into class warfare, and the emphasis on a quasi-religious suffering of the main characters highlights the class resignation that Matarazzo himself explains to be the basis of his dramas. In an open letter to the newspaper *L'Unità*, Matarazzo replies to his critics, saying that 37 million people watched his movies because they discuss issues that interest the masses: social injustice, cruel destinies, and inscrutable fates. He affirms that people want to see how unbearable hardship can be overcome by a twist of fate, by justice in the name of law, or by calm resignation when nothing else is possible.[19]

[19] La storia di personaggi che soffrono perché vittime di ingiustizie sociali, o perché schiacciati da un destino cieco e crudele; le vicende imperniate sulla verità della vita quotidiana, verità non cercata nei fatti esteriori, ma

As de Richard de Cordova writes regarding Freud's theory of romance, often used to analyze melodrama, class difference collapses into the machinations of a purely familial drama (257). Therefore, class conflicts are neutralized through sexual conflicts and contained within the familial, private sphere. Italian melodramas charge the idea of fatherhood, motherhood and family with a symbolic potency, where the instabilities of a changing society can be neutralized through the return and preservation of the idyllic traditional family, enforcing the false consciousness of a powerless working class and a bourgeois natural order that has to be "naturally" preserved. Thus, the contradictions of capitalism are never questioned, since the powerless father "regains moral power in its association with a family that should command protection" (Gledhill 21). The happy ending of Matarazzo's melodramas, indeed, usually involved a final scene that frames the whole family reunited, where the father embraces the mother, who holds their children to her breast, in the secure environment of the private home.

3. Nazzari, Melodrama, and the National-Popular

As Thomas Elsaesser writes in his influential work "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on The Family Melodrama," American domestic melodramas of the Fifties are characterized by a particular aesthetic mode that privileges highly saturated colors, dynamic use of spatial and musical categories, and intense emotions expressed by lighting, montage,

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nella concretezza stessa dell'esistenza di ognuno, il dissolversi improvviso, fatale, di una felicità che sembrava raggiunta e che, invece, di colpo, il fato, il caso, ci toglie da sotto gli occhi con terribile inesorabilità, non sono forse questi gli argomenti che più e veramente interessano la maggioranza? Allora, si obietterà, il pubblico ama solo la rappresentazione delle sciagure? No. Quello che ama di più è vedere come, attraverso l'opera dello stesso fato, per mezzo delle storture raddrizzate, nei limiti resi possibili dall'umanità stessa, o infine, grazie alla rassegnazione là dove inutile e vana è la lotta, si possa arrivare ad una felice conclusione, a una più umana e sopportabile condizione di vita". In Caldiron 80.

visual rhythm, décor, style of acting, and music, claiming that the domestic melodrama of the 40s and 50s is perhaps "the most highly elaborated, complex mode of cinematic signification that the American cinema has ever produced" (52). Unlike the American counterpart, Italian melodramas of the 50s are often black and white low-budget productions; therefore they miss the aesthetic significance which Elsaesser attributed to the saturated colors and the complex *mise en scène* of Sirk's films. However, melodrama as a mode of experience, as theorized by Elsaesser, and the excess that characterizes the genre in Italian melodrama are still present - by the means of music, décor, style of acting and montage.

In its dictionary sense, melodrama, which combines *melos* (Greek for music) and drama (action), is a dramatic narrative in which musical accompaniment marks the emotional effect (Elsaesser 50). The Italian word for melodrama is *melodramma*, and it usually refers to the operas of Italian librettist Metastasio and the grand opera of the Italian Risorgimento, such as the works of Verdi and Puccini and their sentimental and passionate stories, where the link of affects to music is heavily implied.[20] Until the midst of the XX century, the *melodramma* was a popular pastime for all Italians, appealing especially to the lower classes. Gramsci warned against the influence of the "operatic taste" (Forgacs, *An Antonio Gramsci Reader* 373) among the popular classes. Gramsci's reflection on *melodramma* and the operatic taste is inscribed in his broader interest in mapping the popular taste in Italy, in order to establish the terrain upon which cultural transformation might take place (Forgacs, *An Antonio Gramsci Reader* 364). Gramsci attributes the lack of an Italian national-popular culture to the detachment of Italian intellectuals from the national masses. Consequently, he was particularly interested in how, in other countries, popular forms were raised into the dominant artistic literature, especially because of its bearing on how a dominated class can become

[20] For more on the subject see Casadio.

hegemonic in its turn (Forgacs, *An Antonio Gramsci Reader* 364). He feared the artificial poses and ways of thinking that Opera brought into people's lives and condemned the fascination of escapism that the artificial passions of Opera and melodramatic serial novels could exert over common people, distracting them from their revolutionary mission (Forgacs, *An Antonio Gramsci Reader* 373). Although Gramsci wrote his notes during Fascist times and the transition to modernity, most of his thoughts can be applied to the Italian melodramas of the Fifties, considering their audience, critical reception, and relationship to music.

Music is indeed a determining element in Matarazzo's melodramas, where the "operatic conception of life" that Gramsci individuated in Opera's libretti and plots continues in the *sceneggiata napoletana* (Neapolitan song), an interwar tradition of Neapolitan music theatre and songs characterized by an excess of emotions and overwhelming pathos. In the first film of Matarazzo's melodramas, *Catene*, Neapolitan songs underline the key turning points of the plot. Rosa and Guglielmo are happily married and have two kids. But Rosa's former lover Emilio reappears to plead for her affection. In a following sequence, Emilio befriends Rosa's husband with the promise of a business deal, and is invited to the family table in an outside restaurant. Rosa is sitting next to her former lover clearly uneasily, especially since he is trying to hold her hands, while the husband, sitting close, remains unaware. Emilio asks the singer for an old Neapolitan song called *Torna!* (Come back!). Along with the notes of the song, Rosa remembers during a flashback her love story with Emilio, him leaving for the war and his subsequent disappearance. While Rosa is listening to the song that reminds her of her former lover, the repressed passion of her past and the present situation's potential threat to her happy marriage are enhanced by the emotional excess of the Neapolitan *canzone* and the close ups of Rosa's distressed face which opens and closes the flashback.

Another Neapolitan song returns in a later scene. After the murder of Emilio, whom Guglielmo mistakenly assumed to be Rosa's lover, Guglielmo is in exile in the United States. Before leaving he evicts Rosa from their home and forbids her to see their children again. On Christmas Eve, Guglielmo finds himself in a room full of Italian emigrant railroad workers in Ohio. He just received a letter from his mother, who has been looking after his children. She explains that his little daughter Angelina cannot stop asking questions about her ostracized mother, begging for her return as a Christmas gift. In a dissolve, we briefly see Guglielmo's mother and children gathered around the Nativity scene (the Italian *presepe*) set up in the house. The scene cuts back to Ohio, where a fellow worker starts strumming his guitar and singing a Neapolitan song about a daughter longing for her mother. The scene cuts to a medium close up to show Guglielmo's uneasiness and pain, until tears cover his face. Guglielmo's homesickness, guilt, and sadness about his family situation are underlined and accentuated by the Neapolitan song expressing his feelings. As Nowell-Smith claims, music and *mise en scène* in melodramas not only heighten the emotionality of an action element, but also are a substitute for it (73). The Neapolitan songs in the film function as substitute for scene dialogues in that they spell out what the characters can't express through words, being overwhelmed by their emotions; they also heighten the pathos being visually condensed in a close-up. In melodrama, though, the unspeakable and, in a Freudian sense, repressed, cannot be expressed in a discourse, is conveyed through Neapolitan song and returns converted into a bodily symptom such as the tears and the pain enhanced by the close-up.

The frequent use of the medium and extreme close-up is indeed another characteristic of Matarazzo's melodramas. In the film *Torna!* (1954), Susanna is married to Roberto and they have a young daughter, Lidia. Roberto's cousin Giacomo, who desires Susanna, persuades

Roberto that Susanna had cheated on him and that Lidia is in fact Giacomo's daughter. This false accusation drives Roberto to give the child away to a foster home in the countryside, without previously consulting Susanna. When the mother arrives to retrieve her daughter, an earthquake destroys the cottage where the girl was fostered. The next scene is a close-up of Susanna staring at the wreckage of the cottage, her face deformed by grief and pain, tears running down her cheeks, while the dramatic score enhances the scene. Later on, Lidia is found alive and brought back home by Roberto, to whom Giacomo finally confessed the truth. The final sequence is a close-up of mother and daughter, happily reunited. The scene parallels the final sequence of *Catene*, where mother and daughter are also reunited in a final close-up.

Close-up in melodrama has often been used to enhance emotionally stressful situations and register feelings that cannot be expressed by words, as Balázs states regarding Griffith's use of the close-up. Balázs calls the close-up "a new great form of art" through which the spectator is able to perceive "shades of meaning too subtle to be conveyed in words" (279). Deleuze returns to the close-up analysis in his work *Cinema 1*. Deleuze's preoccupation with affect is developed in relation to uses of the close-up through what he terms the "affection-image":

> The affect is the entity, which is Power or Quality. It is something expressed: The affect does not exist independently of something expressing it, although it is completely distinct. What expresses it is a face, or a facial equivalent (a faceified object) or… even a proposition… The affection-image, for its part, is abstracted from the spatio-temporal coordinates which would relate it to a state of things, and abstracts the face from the person to which it belongs in the state of things (11).

In Deleuze's analysis "the functions of the face presuppose the reality of a state of things where people act and perceive", but the close-up, or the affection-image as he calls it, "makes them dissolve and disappear" (97). Deleuze's analysis of the affection-image stresses

how the image ceases to be a product of its historical context and lures the spectator into a realm beyond meaning (Landy, *The Folklore of Consensus* 8). His theory echoes Gramsci's statements about the artificiality of the operatic taste, which is responsible "for a whole range of 'artificial poses in the life of people, for ways of thinking, for a 'style'" (Forgacs, *An Antonio Gramsci Reader* 373). Both the use of Neapolitan songs and close-up in Matarazzo's melodrama, thus, work to heighten stylized feelings organized in an immediately recognizable set of emotions, based on social and psychic determinations which take shape around the family.

Thus, I believe the uses of Neapolitan songs and of the close-ups can be re-conceptualized through the concept of Gramsci's folklore. According to Gramsci, folklore is "a conception of the world and life, implicit to a large extent in determinate (in space and time) strata of society and in opposition (also for the most part implicit, mechanical and objective) to 'official' conceptions of the world (or in a broader sense, the conception of the cultured parts of historically determinate societies) that have succeeded one another in the historical process" (Forgacs, *An Antonio Gramsci Reader* 360). Folklore, therefore, contains the residue of earlier cultures united with contemporary situations. For Gramsci, folklore "must not be considered an eccentricity, an oddity or a picturesque element, but as something which is very serious and is to be taken seriously" (362). Gramsci is seeking a mode to understand how popular thought is composed, how the subaltern knows the world, in order to "bring about the birth of a new culture among the broad popular masses, so that the separation between modern culture and popular culture of folklore will disappear" (362).

In her interesting conceptualization of Gramsci's folklore, Landy affirms that it is germane to what Deleuze identifies as affectivity and that "one of the basic characteristics of

folklore is its investment in the semblances of sentiment: folklore does not function consciously or rationally, but affectively" (Landy, *The Folklore of Consensus* 13). Folklore, according to Gramsci, thus is melodramatic in its preoccupation with sentimentality, romance, and jealousy and in its attempt to reduce complexity (Landy, *The Folklore of Consensus* 15).

The use of popular songs like the *canzone napoletana*, the use of the close-up, and the preoccupation with sentimentality and romance put Matarazzo's melodramas into the framework of folklore, while the emphasis on affect is the hallmark of Matarazzo's operatic taste, involving sexual tensions, a patriarchal conception of the family unit, and conflicts between social classes. The affective value of Italian melodramas, their conservative structure, and their popularity at the box office especially among the lower classes raised preoccupations among the leftist intelligentsia and brought up questions of reception and audience, problematizing the relationship of popular and mass culture with the role of intellectuals in post-war Italy.

In 1955, Matarazzo's melodramas were at the center of a debate around cinema and popular culture hosted on the page of the communist newspaper *l'Unità*. The *inchiesta* (inquiry) interrogated the currency of the popular and the relationship between neorealism and popular genres. The preoccupation of the *inchiesta* was to understand why the public would snub neorealist films and flock to see Italian melodramas and American productions. In particular, the debate was concerned with the division of critics and audience and with how to overcome it. As Catherine O'Rawe writes, the terms of the debate were based on Gramsci's notions of *nazional-popolare* (national-popular) and the role of the organic intellectuals. Gramsci, in analyzing Italian cultural society between 1929 and 1935, affirms that "nation" and "people" did not coincide in Italian history:

> One should note that in many languages, 'national' and 'popular' are either synonymous or nearly so (they are in Russian, in German, where *völkisch* has an even more intimate meaning of race, and in the Slavonic languages in general; in France the meaning of 'national' already includes a more politically elaborated notion of 'popular' because it is related to the concept of 'sovereignty': National sovereignty and popular sovereignty have, or had the same value). In Italy, the term 'national' has an ideologically very restricted meaning, and does not in any case coincide with 'popular', because in Italy the intellectuals are distant from the people, i.e. from the 'nation'. They are tied instead to a caste tradition that has never been broken by a strong popular or national political movement from below (In Forgacs, *National-Popular* 216).[21]

After the end of WWII, when published extracts of Gramsci's prison writing began circulating in Italy, the national-popular concept was re-appropriated by the Italian Communist Party (PCI). The PCI cultural elite identified the national-popular with progressive realist forms in literature, cinema, and other arts, and dismissed popular genres such as melodrama and comedies as American-style escapism for the masses.

As Stephen Gundle notes, the relationship of the party's intellectuals to popular culture was complex, and not always successful. On the one hand, the party encouraged workers to study high culture, such as literature, art, and philosophy, so that they would overcome the historic division between the culture of the elite and the common people. On the other hand, the leftist intellectuals failed to acknowledge the differences between workers and men of culture regarding the appeal of mass products, identified by Hollywood films, comics, and popular novels, which were considered by the men of culture as expressions of a "frivolous and fundamentally alienating capitalist culture" while being widely consumed by the workers (*Between Hollywood and Moscow* 39). By maintaining a paternalistic attitude over the

[21] According to Gramsci, the reasons for the lack of a 'national-popular' literature in Italy go back to the Renaissance separation of a literary and philosophical elite from the commercial and financial bourgeoisie, and to the failure of a missing common national vernacular in the peninsula. See Forgacs, "National-popular" 215.

predilection of the people for mass culture, the Left underestimated the importance of the new language of communication such as cinema and popular publishing for the process of integration of classes, tastes, and national identity. "The result was that many Communists, especially if they were intellectuals, were at best indifferent and at worst hostile to a major cultural transition that profoundly affected how consensus was formed and society integrated in postwar Italy" (Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow* 41). Most of the leftist critics of the newspaper *l'Unità* accused Matarazzo's movies of appealing not to the *popolo*, but to the *pubblico*. The meaning of *popolare* (popular) in the *L'Unità* newspaper debate is indeed opposed to *pubblico* (mass audience): *popolare* carries a positive meaning, referring to Gramsci's *popolo* of workers and peasant, while *pubblico* is connoted by the Frankfurt School's negative attitude towards mass culture audience, which consumes entertainment and is thought to be childish, passive, and feminine (O'Rawe 188). Critic Gianni Puccini makes this explicit in his final article: "the *pubblico* is made more of elderly, youth under sixteen years-old, housewives, petty bourgeoisie and lumpenproletariat, than of peasants and factory workers."[22]

The distinction between authentic forms of popular culture and a mass culture inflected and contaminated by American productions reflects what Forgacs calls the party's "populist and paternalist conception of popular culture."[23] Moreover, Puccini's reference to *casalinghe* (housewives) as the primary audience of melodramas hints at the anxiety towards a feminized nature of mass culture and helps explaining the critics' rejection of Matarazzo's films in the context of a gendered audience.[24]

[22] "il pubblico è fatto più di pensionati, ragazzi sotto i sedici anni, casalinghe, piccola borghesia e sottoproletariato che di contadini e operai". In O'Rawe 188.
[23] See Baranski and Lumley 101.
[24] On mass culture as feminized, see Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman" 44-64.

The subject of female audience and melodramas has been widely investigated in the Anglo-American scholarship on Hollywood melodramas, especially for the genre of the maternal melodrama and the Woman's Film of the 1940s. In particular, E. Anne Kaplan explores the interconnections between historical discourses around Mother and the changing representation of the Mother in films addressed to women; Jacobs investigates the fallen woman's film within the social context of the 1930s and the MPPDA censorship; LaPlace analyzes the film *Now, Voyager* (Rapper, 1942) through the discourses of consumerism, the image of the female star, and women's fiction.[25] This last essay is relevant for my analysis of Nazzari's stardom in melodramas due to its focus on intertextuality and the historical relation between melodramas, consumerist practices aimed to a female audience, and the literary genre known as "women's fiction". In the case of Italian melodramas, indeed, I argue that the female audience who constitutes the primary consumer of Matarazzo's films had been already established by another form of entertainment from which the melodrama draws its origins: the *fotoromanzo* (photo-novels). Thus, the correlation between female audience, stardom, and genre ought to be investigated through the intertextual relationship of the *fotoromanzo* and the melodrama film.

The *Fotoromanzo* was a weekly magazine that featured popular romantic themes in a graphic form. The first and most successful of the *fotoromanzi* magazines was *Grand Hotel*, whose first issue appeared in 1946. At first, the *fotoromanzo*'s tales were illustrated, and artists generally transposed the features of Hollywood stars onto the faces of their characters. Later on, the *fotoromanzo* started using photographs of actors familiar to Italian audiences, arranged like comic book panels with speech-bubbles called *nuvolette* (Bachman and Williams 59). *Grand Hotel* was an enormously successful publication which targeted a mostly

[25] See Jacobs; Kaplan 1998 and 2002; La Place.

female audience composed of office and factory workers, peasants and housewives. (Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow* 34). The *fotoromanzo* aimed to be an intertextual medium that would reach a readership fascinated by American cinema but did not necessarily have the means to go to the cinema on a regular basis. Later, however, the influence of Hollywood on the plots of the *fotoromanzi* became evident: many artists and writers of *Grand Hotel* used Anglo-Saxon pseudonyms, while their characters' physical traits were based on popular Hollywood stars such as Rita Hayworth and Cary Grant. At that point, *Grand Hotel* was perceived, especially by the leftist intelligentsia, as an Americanized form of cheap entertainment that would corrupt the working class through dreams of illusory luxury and escapism.[26]

However, the stories illustrated in the f*otoromanzi* weren't too far removed from the Italian cultural context: their melodramatic tales of separations and reunions of long-suffering couples, evil mistresses and seducers, mistaken identities, false accusations, betrayal, and restoration of the truth after many ordeals were themes the Italian audience were already familiar with, due to the circulation of popular romantic literature and feuilleton novels mostly of French origin, but also from Italian writers.[27] Women were the privileged targets, as the stories - mostly set in Italy - deal with family, female condition, masculine honor, and the contrast between passion and marriage (Spinazzola, *Da "Grand Hotel" a "Diabolik"* 313). The success of these illustrated stories prompted the film company Titanus to translate the

[26] A strong critique of *Grand Hotel* is depicted in De Santis' film *Bitter Rice (1949)*, where the *mondina* (rice field worker) Silvana is so obsessed with reading *Grand Hotel*, dreaming of a wealthier and richer life, that she betrays her own social class by helping a con-man steal the rice that her comrades worked so hard to collect.
[27] Most popular was writer Carolina Invernizio (1851-1916). Born near Pavia into a wealthy bourgeois family, she became well known writing melodramatic tales of crime and passion, many of them first serialized in newspapers, with titles such as *Il bacio di una morta* (1889) and *I drammi dell'adulterio* (1898). Her stories were addressed largely to a female readership and much denigrated by critics as frivolous *romanzi d'appendice* (Hainsworth and Robey).

format into film in order to get the f*otoromanzo*'s audience into theaters. Matarazzo's first melodrama with Titanus was indeed titled *Catene* (Chains), a direct reference to the title of the first *fotoromanzo* appeared in Grand Hotel, *Anime incatenate* (Chained souls 1946). The similitudes between the stories narrated in the *fotoromanzi* and those of Matarazzo's films are numerous: Flora in *Anime incatenate* confesses a crime she didn't commit, as does Rosa in *Catene*, and both sacrifice their reputation in order to save the person they love. In *Anime incatenate*, Flora's fiancé travels to America to forget her, as does Guglielmo in *Catene* after mistakenly assuming that his wife Rosa has an extra-marital affair. In another *fotoromanzo*'s story, *L'Ombra sul cuore*, the female main character Mariuccia enters a nunnery as a novice, after her love for Alvaro proves to be impossible. In Matarazzo's film *I figli di nessuno*, Luisa becomes a nun after losing her son and her fiancé Guido marries another woman. The functions of repetition in both *fotoromanzi* and Matarazzo's melodramas are, thus, conspicuous, bringing about lachrymose experience (*strappalacrime*) in ample display and provoking a subjective emotional reaction in the audience (Bachman and Williams 62).

However, while the *fotoromanzo*'s popular success is based on melodramatic stories interpreted by illustrated characters resembling Hollywood stars, the success of Matarazzo's melodramas is mostly due to having employed Amedeo Nazzari, the Italian actor who was "the only home-grown presence capable of filling the screen in the style of the greats of American cinema" (Gundle, *Fame, Fashion, and Style* 314). As Spinazzola writes, the traditional values magnified by Matarazzo's melodramas reverberate in Nazzari's virile star persona, who embodies a traditional masculinity based on honor, duty, and obedience to the social status quo (Spinazzola, *Cinema e pubblico* 78). The neorealist cinema had already employed him in the films *Un giorno nella vita* (Blasetti, 1946) and *Il bandito* (Lattuada,

1946), where his characters negotiated the new masculine identity of the postwar Italian male: war veteran and bandit. As Ben-Ghiat writes, the veteran and the bandit who filled the Italian screens in 1945-8 evoked particular anxieties about the legacy of defeat and the redemption of Italian men through democratic models of fatherhood and citizenship (336). As I demonstrated in analyzing the roles of Nazzari in Matarazzo's melodramas, the transition from Fascist to democratic masculinities after the war is negotiated not only through the figures of the veteran and the bandit, but also through the character of the *pater familias*. Amedeo Nazzari embodies a "father-next-door" persona that is both believable and ideal, based on a sexual and political normalcy appropriate for immediate postwar Italy, precisely because it is devoid of aggressive and seductive powers and dedicated to the preservation of the family unit.

In this respect, Villa talks about a "percorso di costruzione dell'identità italiana" elaborated by Italian melodramas and comedies in which the national identity is negotiated through the metaphor of the reconstruction: In melodramas, the reconstruction is that of the family unit, while in comedies it is the fragmented reality that is being reconstructed in a new unity based on the happy ending (199). The reconstruction of an Italian identity based on the family unit as presented in the melodrama genre is, thus, attained though Nazzari's star persona, who embodies manliness through fatherhood, sexual normalcy, and an uncomplicated, stable virility.

Moreover, Nazzari's star persona in Matarazzo's melodramas, which are set in realistic Italian milieu and based on working-class or petty bourgeoisie families, consolidates his identification with the Italian traditional masculinity, as opposed to the glamorous masculinity of Hollywood stars. In rethinking the debate on the national-popular that took place on the

pages of l'Unità in 1955 and later was resumed by Aprà and Carabba's volume *Neorealismo d'appendice* (1976), I argue that Nazzari's stardom can be read as the national-popular response to the American stars and films which filled the screens of postwar Italy.

At the beginning of 1946, the Italian market was dominated by Hollywood productions, which "flooded" Italian screens due to the Motion Picture Export Association of America's aggressive policy, preventing Italy from mandating protective laws for its domestic productions (Brunetta *Storia del cinema italiano* 6). After 1949, the Andreotti law tried to encourage domestic production with tax rebates and screen quotas, and to block American profits by currency exchange restrictions. Although neorealism was, in part, a response and reaction to Hollywood cinema, the real breakthrough for Italian productions came with domestic popular genres such as melodramas, comedies, and peplum. Melodrama in particular wooed the domestic public away from American films (Wagstaff 76). Nazzari's stardom was undoubtedly tied to the success of Matarazzo's films. Although relegated to a genre despised by critics for being lowbrow, Nazzari retained the stardom that made him a leading male star in Fascist cinema. His sole presence became synonymous with melodrama and his name was enough to inform the public about the genre of a movie (Sorlin 108).

Thus, Nazzari's stardom wasn't as unreachable and distant as that of Hollywood stars; on the contrary, his star semiosis represented a familiar universe for the spectators, a common visual language that reminded them of a traditionally virile, distinctly Italian, male image. McArthur discusses the meanings of stars as offered through "qualities that are almost entirely physical: The way the actor is built, what his face and body say about the way experience has treated him, the way he walks and talks" (142). Nazzari's physical appearance was that of an assuring, reliable, hard-working man, without the glamour that surrounded his contemporary

Hollywood stars such as Tyrone Power or Cary Grant. His body was framed in working landscapes, in domestic settings, in the interiors of the family home. But his star persona was also distant from the neurotic, psychologically twisted hero of 1950s America, such as the "psycho-stars" Marlon Brando, James Dean, and Montgomery Clift (Klinger 104).

He might be compared to the normalcy and "natural man" persona of Rock Hudson in Sirk's melodramas. As Barbara Klinger writes, in press and films of the 50s "Hudson emerged as a wholesome, conventional, ultra-American, and pristine masculine type" (104). His image was an alternative to the psychoanalytic romantic hero such as Brando and Dean and his star persona was foreign to the neuroses characterizing the screen male during the fifties. Nazzari's star persona carries a similar façade of exemplary, heterosexual manliness that Hudson represents in Sirk's films, although without the sexual display of the bared torso shots Hudson often displayed in his bachelor's series films (Cohan 290). Nazzari's sexuality is instead sublimated in his roles as a reassuring husband and father, and the danger of over-sexualizing his body is avoided by shifting the sexual danger onto the feminized body of his rival, the *homme fatal*.

Nazzari's star persona in melodramas, embodying male protagonists who were ordinary working people dedicated to family and children, emphasized a consistent persona: a physically appealing, clean-cut, and morally upright character. His extra-filmic and filmic identities overlapped and came to be associated with normalcy and a national idea of masculine ethic. Walter Benjamin, reflecting on the changing perceptions of society brought by visual technology, writes: "for the film, what matters primarily is that the actor represents himself to the public before the camera, rather than representing someone else" (229). The identification of Nazzari as an individual with the moral values of his screen characters had

been achieved since the Fascist era, but became fully established with the melodrama genre.

As Piero Pruzzo and Enrico Lancia state, Nazzari as an actor is inseparable from the "Nazzari character" having been constructed over more than two decades of films, characterized by a consistent set of moral qualities perceived as ideally Italian (7).

In 1953, *Cinespettacolo* journalist Alessandro Ferraù argued that only a few Italian actors had sufficient drawing power to affect the success of a film and could therefore be considered stars able to compete with the Hollywood charm. These were Amedeo Nazzari, Silvana Mangano, and Totò (qtd. in Forgacs and Gundle 166). Thus, Nazzari's star persona passed from being publicized as the "Italian Errol Flynn" during his early roles in Fascist cinema to being identified as one of the quintessential Italian stars of postwar Italian cinema. Director Federico Fellini acknowledged his stardom status in his film *Le notti di Cabiria* (1957) where Nazzari ironically plays himself, an Italian star who appeals mostly to the lower class, the very same class the prostitute Cabiria belongs to. The film signals Nazzari's stardom with his flashy American car, Californian villa on the Appian Way, and the almost sacral reverence showed by Cabiria. The sequence contains several allusions to Nazzari's roles in melodrama films: his character Alberto Lazzari is having relationship troubles because of his fiancée's obsessive jealousy, resulting in a breaking up and final reconciliation; also, the year on the bottle of an expensive wine Alberto opens for Cabiria states 1949, which coincides with the first release of the film *Catene*'s.

However, after the 1960s Nazzari's popularity began to fade, giving in to the pressure of new values and ways of thinking brought on by Italy's urbanization and industrialization. As Gundle notes, there was a move away from archaic ideas of honor, shame, and sin (Gundle, *Hollywood Glamour* 116). Nazzari's roles as the old-fashioned patriarchal head in the social

conservative melodramas of Matarazzo was at odds with the new Italian society, attentive to new ideas of feminine glamour and emancipation. Nazzari's pairing with actress Yvonne Sanson in postwar melodramas became a symbol of an obsolete, conservative relation between sexes, which no longer represented the unsettling sexual environment of the late Fifties new, industrialized Italian society. Cinema replaced the sacrificial maternal figure of Yvonne Sanson by the sexually assertive "unruly woman" type embodied by stars such as Sophia Loren, Silvana Pampanini, and later Monica Vitti. Nazzari's old-fashioned maleness also diverges from new figures of Italian masculinity in crisis as they came to be reflected in the Italian cinema of this period, such as the *inetto* (schlemiel) and the scoundrel, represented by Marcello Mastroianni and Vittorio Gassman respectively. As Jacqueline Reich writes, the *inetto* "dismantles the notion of traditional masculinity by highlighting its performative nature" and is the result of a crisis in the idea of a traditional, assertive masculinity brought by the social changes in postwar Italy (Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover* 48). Similarly, the character of the scoundrel belongs to the underworld of petty criminals and con men populating the films of the *commedia all'italiana*, a genre characterized by a corrosive social critique of the amorality and loss of values Italy underwent during the economic boom of the Sixties. Often played by Vittorio Gassman, the scoundrel represents the Italian anti-hero, embodying the main "defects" attributed to the Italian national character: laziness, amorality, lack of respect against the law, opportunism, and philandering. The characters played by Gassman on the silver screen are, thus, the complete antithesis of the characters identified with Nazzari's star persona, whose stardom declined at the same time Gassman's was rising.

In the next chapter, I analyze Gassman's stardom, focusing on his brief career in Hollywood, from 1952 to 1954. Gassman experienced his big break in Hollywood after his

first international success in the film *Bitter Rice* (1948). Thanks to his American wife, actress Shelley Winters, he signed a contract with MGM and took part in five of their movies between 1952 and 1954. Thereafter, Gassman practically begged his Italian producer, De Laurentiis, to help him rescind his contract and return to Italy. In his autobiography, Gassman claimed that he left Hollywood because he was only being offered stereotypical roles, such as the Latin lover or seductive scoundrel. Ultimately, Gassman did not want to end up being pegged as the "new Valentino". His protest against MGM's system was a reaction against the capitalist structure of Hollywood, and against the general discourses of ethnicity and sexuality circulating in the 1950s. My focus is on Gassman's status as celebrity in Hollywood as compared to his stardom in Italy, and I analyze his representation as the "ethnic other" in MGM films, exploring the complex relation between Hollywood and the representation of Italian ethnicity on screen. I compare Gassman's failure to be a star in Hollywood to his success in Italian cinema in order to illustrate the changes in his persona while he travelled from Italy to the US and back again.

CHAPTER III

The Unfit: Vittorio Gassman, Masculinity, and the Latin Lover Complex in Hollywood

In the final scene of Robert Altman's *A Wedding*, the dark-haired Vittorio Gassman stands in front of a blonde Lillian Gish, who is lying on her death bed. Gish portrays Nettie Sloan, matriarch of a wealthy American family, and Gassman is Luigi Corelli, an Italian who, twenty years ago, married one of Nettie's daughters. After a series of extraordinary events at the wedding of Luigi's son and Nettie's grandson Dino, Luigi comes to say goodbye to Nettie, whom he promised long ago to "behave" and stay in the United States for the sake of her family. Luigi, in the profound and ironic voice Gassman was famous for, says "it's been twenty-two years in obedient service. I think I kept my promise, our burden. Nobody here knows who I really am…. But the work is done. There is nothing left to do here. (Laughing) Nettie, I think I am going to take my leave. (In Italian) Me ne vado, Nettie! Che devo fare? Vado a casa! Vado a casa -- ciao." These words, pronounced by Gassman-Corelli in 1978, cannot help but remind us of Gassman's own life in Hollywood, several years earlier, dating back to 1954 to be precise, when after two years of marriage to American actress Shelley Winters he decided there was nothing left for him in the United States, not even his baby daughter, and left for good to go back to Italy. As this movie shows, though, Gassman never cut bridges with Hollywood and America. Years after his divorce he did return sporadically to

work in American film productions, such as Altman's *A Wedding* and *Quintet* (1979), and Barry Levinson's *Sleepers* (1996), but in Hollywood, unlike Italy, he never became a star. An investigation of the reasons for his failure in Hollywood in the Fifties is the subject of this chapter.

My method is to interpret Gassman's work in Hollywood through the concepts of masculinity, ethnicity, and sexuality circulating in the Fifties, concepts that center on two strands, one represented by reviewing the popular interest and gossip around the marriage and divorce of Vittorio Gassman and Shelley Winters, and the other by the construction of the Latin lover stereotype in Hollywood movies. I believe that the failure of Gassman's career in Hollywood is deeply intertwined with both the failure of his own marriage to Shelley Winters, as well as the problematic casting of him as a Latin lover in the MGM movies. I argue that Gassman never achieved stardom in Hollywood because he did not represent the hegemonic masculinity commonly perpetuated by films of the Fifties, symbolized by the "New American Domesticated Male" (Cohan 53), and because he actively refused to embody the Italian masculinity associated with the ethnic stereotype of the Latin lover. The period my examination mainly focuses on are the years from 1952 to 1954, which include Gassman's marriage to Winters and his contractual years at MGM. I will explore how Gassman was perceived as celebrity in Hollywood and the difference to his stardom status in Italy, as well as how the paradigms of star studies and celebrity studies apply to Vittorio Gassman's case. Further, I will consider Gassman's transnational stardom as an Italian actor working in Hollywood in the Fifties, and how the reception of his Italian-ness is contextualized within his works.

1. Gassman, Italy, and *Riso amaro*

Vittorio Gassman was born in Genoa in 1922, son of a German father and an Italian mother. His early years were spent in Genoa, but soon the family moved to Rome, when at the age of fourteen Vittorio lost his father. He attended the *liceo classico*, a classical studies-based high school, and wanted to attend law school, but his mother persuaded him to apply to the Regia Accademia d'Arte Drammatica, Rome's most prestigious acting school, in 1941. Vittorio Gassman soon discovered a strong passion for stage acting and the theatre, and began training under the supervision of Silvio d'Amico, a theatre critic and theorist who held an eminent position in theatrical study in Italy. Gassman's other passion during his youth was playing basketball, which he did at a national level, participating in the A league matches and international games.

Gassman playing basketball

His tall, dark figure, sculpted through his love of basketball, contributed to his first castings as the romantic-handsome guy in his theatre roles, where he often played the part of

the *attor giovane* (the young lover). Gassman writes in his autobiography *Un grande avvenire dietro le spalle* (A great future behind you) that he hated to be considered only a "good looking" young actor, complaining that the reviews of his shows used words such as *aitante, baldo, prestante* (handsome, hot, good-looking) to describe him, words that clearly only refer to his physical attributes (100). His first roles in cinema were in the same line, such as *Preludio d'amore* (1946) and *Daniele Cortis* (1947). However, soon the producers discovered that Gassman's persona would be a better match for the role of the villain: His first role of this character was in *La figlia del capitano* (1947), but the real breakthrough, both nationally and internationally, he achieved with his performance of Walter in *Riso amaro* (*Bitter Rice*, 1948*)*. Despite the critic Robert Hatch calling *Riso amaro* a "routine sex-and-slaughter yarn that could have been filmed as well on any studio lot" (Balio 60), the film was a huge success both in Italy and abroad, mostly due to the beauty of actress Silvana Mangano, whose bare legs and wide bosom were regarded as a fresh new type of glamour, "a mix of sex and naturalism" that was to become the export trademark of Italian postwar beauties such as Sophia Loren and Gina Lollobrigida (Balio 61).

The popular magazine *Life* dedicated its cover to *Riso amaro* and actress Silvana Mangano, and the film was shown in the main theatres all across America. The United States art houses first played it in a subtitled version, but after about a year, Lux released a dubbed version and sold it directly to national theater chains (Balio 60). The Italian magazine *Hollywood*, too, reports that *Riso amaro* was a box office hit in America in 1951 (Muscio 108).[28] Regarding the success of the film in the States, Gassman writes in the 1953 article *The Role I Liked Best*: "I'm sure *Bitter Rice* did more to make me known to American audiences

[28] Along with the news of the freshly signed agreement between Italy and the United States covering the distribution rights for Italian films in the US market.

and to get me my present contract than any other Italian film in which I've appeared" (52). And so, as the actor recalls in his memoirs, Shelley Winters when meeting him in 1952 already knew him from his role in *Riso amaro*.

In De Santis' film, Gassman plays Walter, an evil con-man who lures the *mondina* (rice-worker) played by Silvana Mangano into a life of crime. The presentation of Walter's character is that of a classical gangster in the style of American film noirs of the 40s, which filled Italian screens after the fascist embargo (1938-1943): large hat, long trench coat, cigarette and an arrogant attitude. In an article for the *Saturday Evening Post* entitled "The Role I liked Best", Gassman writes that "It's probably neither right nor fair, but being a villain in Hollywood often is more rewarding than being a hero" (52), adding that Walter was his favorite villain role.

The success of *Riso amaro* and his predilection for villainous types turned out to be more of a curse than a gift, because it endangered Gassman of becoming typecast as "a handsome and perfidious scoundrel" (Landy 150) in the Hollywood market. Indeed, his last roles in Hollywood before returning to Italy and reinventing himself as a comedian were those of a vicious con man in *Mambo* (1954), practically a clone of *Riso amaro*'s Walter, and the cynical and heartless Anatol Kuragin in *War and Peace* (1956). When Gassman arrived in the Unites States in 1952, after having divorced his first wife and hastily married Shelley Winters on the same day, in Mexico, the press saw him as a profiteer and opportunist, accusing him of being only a "handsome Italian who came to Hollywood with Shelley just to pursue a movie career" (Mosby, "Vittorio's Already a Genius, Doesn't Need Shelley to Promote Career").

This reception was a sign that - already at the early stages of his career - his star persona, identified with the perfidious scoundrel of Walter in *Riso amaro*, and his personal life had already overlapped.

2. Gassman as Celebrity

In their *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader*, Holmes and Redmond make a distinction between the terms "star" and "celebrity", arguing that "despite their blurred boundaries, there is still a hierarchy of cultural values which organizes the meanings of these terms, with the concept of the 'star' positioned above the concept of 'celebrity' – with its persistent association with fame as more ubiquitous, and thus devaluated, currency" (8). Despite the frequent interchange of the two terms, within the context of film studies the word "stardom" has been historically used to typically imply a discursive interaction between on-and-off screen image and to emphasize the contrast between performing presence and "off-stage" events (Redmond – Holmes, 2007: 8; Geraghty, 2007: 98), therefore emphasizing not only contradictory nature of identity and instability of the star image, but also the inextricable link between the public role of performers and their profession and film roles. The term celebrity, on the other hand, "indicates someone whose fame rests overwhelmingly on what happens outside the sphere of their work" (Geraghty 99), implying that the way of producing meaning leads through gossiping, press and television reports, magazine articles, and public relations.

Through my archival research I realized that the United States press news concerning Gassman focused much less on his films and profession than on his turbulent marriage and divorce from Shelley Winters. Gassman's private life with Shelley, the scandal of their

Mexican marriage, and even more their over the top fights during divorce and custody battle for their child filled the gossip magazines much more than the films Gassman made from 1952 to 1954, which where often unsuccessful at the box office. Therefore I argue that in America Gassman was always considered a celebrity, but never reached the status of a star, since "star is the usual identification of some persona that has transcended the films that he or she has performed in and created an aura" (Marshall 12). Instead, Gassman's Hollywood movies with MGM never reached the same level of public interest as his stormy marriage with Shelley Winter.

One of the definitions of being a celebrity is indeed that "their private lives will attract greater public interest than their professional lives" (Turner 3). This is exactly what happened to Gassman in America: The contrast between his public life as an actor and his private life as Winter's husband tended definitely to favoring the latter, despite the combined efforts of Shelley Winters and MGM (with which Gassman signed a seven-years contract in 1952) to build up his star persona in Hollywood.

According to both Gassman's and Winters' autobiographies (Gassman, *Un grande avvenire dietro le spalle*; Winters, *Shelley*) and to Skolsky's article "Impulsive Vittorio", Shelley and Vittorio met at the ballet in Rome, where Gassman introduced himself to Shelley with complimenting her for her performance in *A Place in the Sun*. An article provocatively entitled "Vittorio's Already a Genius, Doesn't Need Shelley to Promote Career" by the United Press Hollywood correspondent Aline Mosby reports instead that Gassman didn't know who Shelley Winters was, when they first met in Rome, saying he had never seen any of her movies. I assume Mosby's article belongs to MGM's promotional strategy aimed to

dispel the press' doubts, which had already labeled Gassman as a seducer and profiteer like Walter, the character he played in *Riso amaro*.

The defiance Gassman faced in the US following his highly publicized relationship with Shelley Winters is not only stated by the apologetic tone of Mosby's article, but also by a series of still photographs and captions depicting Gassman as Shelley Winters' new love interest. The article "Impulsive Vittorio!" depicts Vittorio Gassman as "romantic-looking fellow", and "bundle of sex appeal", placing emphasis on his attractiveness and, thus, imposing a natural Latin lover look on him. (Skolsky, "Impulsive Vittorio!"). One photograph from the Lester Sweyd Collection shows Winters and Gassman at the airport in Los Angeles in 1952, ready to fly to Mexico to get Gassman's divorce and consequently get married (even though, in Italy, the marriage was never considered legal). The caption says: "Actress Shelley Winters and Vittorio Gassman board plane in Los Angeles for Juarez, Mexico, where he is to get divorce." (Lester Sweyd Collection). The caption acknowledges Shelley Winter's status as actress, but doesn't say anything about Gassman's profession. A picture in Photo-Play in December 1952 shows Gassman and Winters holding hands, while the caption states: "Shelly and her 'Boopsy'" (Lester Sweyd Collection).

Shell and her “Boopsy”

Boopsy was how Shelley used to call Vittorio privately. By choosing to use this intimate nickname for Gassman, the caption imposes a hierarchy on the couple, depicting Gassman as female star Winters’ object of desire and thus reversing the common gender roles and power relations of the Fifties. This reversal was emphasized by Winters being a strong, independent woman, well known by Hollywood and the press for her short temper, fierce temperament, and willingness to speak her mind, be it against McCarthyism or in favor of women’s rights[29] (Martin 22). That Shelley Winters was no docile woman was even pointed out by the popular gossip journalist Louella O. Parsons in an interview with both Gassman and Winters. The conservative Parsons writes that “If Shelley doesn’t curb her tongue, her temper, and her proneness to talk out in turn, she’ll be a hindrance to a fine actor. If she tries hard to keep herself within bounds, she will be of great help.” (Parson). Parson’s comment is interesting for the way she simultaneously acknowledges the artistic merit of Gassman’s work as an actor, and his being in some way shadowed and undermined by the strong personality of

Shelley Winters. Despite Parsons' comment on Gassman's being a "fine actor", the press generally showed little interest in his proven talent as a stage actor in Italy and rather focused on his talent as a hot Italian *amante* (lover).

Shelley Winters relentlessly fed the press declaring her husband's greatness both on stage and on screen: in an interview for the *Saturday Evening Post* she told the journalist that "A studio has offered him (Gassman) so much money to sign a contract he'd be crazy to turn it down, but he keeps saying no because he prefers stage acting—in Italy he's regarded as one of the outstanding actors on that country's legitimate stage —and they keep raising their offer. Metro's after him to sign a seven-year contract. They've got two pictures they want him for" (Martin 128). When Gassman finally signed the contract with MGM in 1952, the powerful movie company began an aggressive campaign to build Gassman's star persona in Hollywood. This first strategy was to emphasize that Vittorio Gassman was already a renowned actor in Italy, who just happened to be in the United States to work. The United Press Hollywood correspondent Aline Mosby, for instance, writes that Gassman refused to sign a major Hollywood contract to be free to do theater in Italy, and that in his home country he is a "top actor in his own right", and "he specializes in Shakespeare and classical Greek drama" (Mosby). The focus on his stage career always was a trademark of Gassman's persona, as well as his snobbism toward cinema. This mention of his refusal to sign a lucrative contract and emphasis on his stage career serve to disclaim that "Italian actor Vittorio Gassman has been accused to promote his Hollywood career via his bride-to-be, Shelley Winters" (Mosby) and clearly voice Gassman's concern of not being taken seriously by Americans in his profession.

The ill fate many Italian actors and actresses seem to encounter across the Atlantic was a topic of debate in Italy as well. The Italian magazine *Hollywood*, for instance, in the article "America amara" (13/4/1950) complained about the bitter fate of Italian stars in America such as Alida Valli and Rossano Brazzi, claiming that they usually didn't achieve the success they deserved (Muscio 108). This was due partially to the differences between the American and Italian star system, the former being an organized industry where stars were manufactured and advertised according to the Hollywood canon of typecasting, the latter having a more spontaneous and less organized structure "in the absence of proper studios and of exclusive contracts" (Gundle, *Film Stars and Society in Fascist Italy* 329). Italian actors and actresses in Hollywood often lamented being compared to American stars by the Studio system (for instance, Isa Miranda as the new Marlene Dietrich, or Gina Lollobrigida as the Italian Marilyn Monroe), or being typecast as exotic foreigners (as Vittorio Gassman was), which was seen as a process undermining their uniqueness and originality, transforming them from creative individuals to manufactured "types". As Geneviève Sellier states regarding French actresses Danielle Darrieux, Michele Morgan and Micheline Presle, "The studios hired European stars on the basis of their image in their countries of origin, but did not create the right conditions for valorizing that image in Hollywood" (213).

The issue of the "image" also raised the important question of the star being a commodity for the audience's consumption within the Hollywood system's capitalist production mode. In making the European stars fit the American culture, Hollywood "has historically been unable to represent complex hybrid status, often relying instead on stereotypes of Americanness and foreignness" (Polan 186). Relying on stereotypes of Americanness and foreignness is complicated by and intertwined with issues of gender and

representation of sexuality especially in the decade after WWII, which was characterized by a conservative turn of gender roles with strong emphasis on the figure of the American breadwinner as the ideal masculine type.

3. Masculinity and Gender Roles

After the war, American men retreated into the domesticated life in order to support the expansion of the capitalistic market while the industry shifted from war production to producing everyday commodities. On screen, men weren't just heroes on the battlefront anymore, there were family heroes, good husbands and good fathers, as depicted in postwar films as *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), and *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1956). The hegemonic masculinity of the Fifties privileged white suburban males and "linked gender (manhood) and male psychology (maturity) to a heterosexual goal (mating) and economic obligation (breadwinning)" (Cohan 35). The ideal man of the Fifties, portrayed in books and movies, was thus the middle-class domesticated breadwinner, who functioned as a "mask" for other subordinated models of masculinities perceived as deviant because related to homosexuality and ethnicity (Cohan 38). However, the dominant masculinity as heterosexual and domesticated is not without conflicts, as it is linked to an emasculating process depriving men of their "natural" aggressiveness and turning them into corporate clones as depicted in popular books like *Atlas Shrugged* (1957) and the 1949 film *The Fountainhead* (Kimmel 156).

Life magazine proclaimed 1954 to be the year of "the domestication of the American man". However, the hegemonic masculinity of the white male breadwinner wasn't accepted

homogeneously, masking anxieties about the status of the American man after the war, which became threatened especially by the discourses around female sexuality that began to circulate in the Fifties with the Kinsey report. Kinsey's major accomplishment was to challenge most assumptions about sexual activity in the United States, including the supposed asexuality of women. The focus on female orgasm and female pleasure in his book *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953) was perceived as undermining male sexuality and a threat to a previous unchallenged idea of masculinity.[30] Therefore, in order to break the link between male domesticity and fear of emasculation, the breadwinner had to be turned into the new hero of Fifties' America. From there results the emphasis on the American man as the family provider and his identification with middle-class masculinity, domesticity, and white-collar employment. As sociologist Talcott Parson writes in 1959: "virtually the only way to be a real man in our society is to have an adequate job and earn a living" (Kimmel 161).

When Vittorio Gassman arrived in the United States, he didn't come as a breadwinner. He didn't have a job in Hollywood, nor a contract, and he was virtually unknown as an artist. The press was acutely aware of Gassman's status as Winters' dependent, and consequently biased against him: A still photograph from the Sweyd collection shows Shelley and Vittorio together, while the caption states: "America's land of opportunity for Vittorio since he wed Shelley" (Lester Sweyd Collection), while the already mentioned article "Impulsive Vittorio" even dared to say it was Shelley Winters who discovered Vittorio Gassman and made him a celebrity and potential star in Hollywood (Skolky). In turning Shelley Winters into the breadwinner, and Gassman into an opportunist in search of fame, the press underlined how

[30] Bullough, Vern L. "Alfred Kinsey and the Kinsey Report: Historical Overview and Lasting Contributions". *The Journal of Sex Research*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (May, 1998), pp. 127-131.

Gassman's foreign masculinity was not only different, but radically opposed to the hegemonic view of the American male as heterosexual and family provider.

As Gassman recalled in his autobiography, when he arrived in the US he followed Shelley to the set of a movie in Arizona, where he lived in her trailer for several weeks, eating, sleeping and making love to her. Because of that, he called himself a *muñeca*, a Spanish word for doll or sexually attractive woman, but it also means kept woman or concubine (86). In using the work *muñeca*, Gassman refers to himself as a "kept man" (or *mantenuto* in Italian), which also means being a sort of *gigolo* of a strong-willed woman. In his case, the strong willed woman was also a Hollywood star, much more celebrated than him. Interestingly enough, Shelley Winters would play one of her biggest film roles in the 60s as Ruby, a sexually active older woman paying gigolos for sexual pleasure in the film *Alfie* (1966). Gassman in his autobiography's chapter "America dolce-amara" (bittersweet America) several times refers to himself as *muñeca* to describe how he felt as being only the lover and, later, husband of a star, a fact that undermined not only his career but also threatened his masculinity.

Also, Gassman did not fit the role of husband and father the American society of the Fifties asked males to play. As Kimmel points out, in the Fifties the notion of family becomes the dominant ideology, in which the father holds the place of honor (161). Since non-conformist masculinities such as homosexuality and leftist political orientation were seen as negative models, the father role gave middle-class men a way to restore manhood by preventing any kind of social deviations in their sons, from juvenile delinquency to being gay or Communist.

The popularization of psychoanalysis in the 1950s and its emphasis on absent fathers and castrating mothers reinforced the discourses revolving around the role of middle-class fathers to contain the dangerous influence of mothers on their children. "Pop Freud", as Krutnik called it, had become entrenched in Hollywood's productions, especially in film noir thrillers and melodramas (46). The over-dominance of the mother in the family was once again to be blamed for the emasculation of the boys and the rise of criminal youth, as depicted in films such as *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955). Fatherhood, husbandry and manhood in the Fifties are thus associated in a complex way: fatherhood and husbandry no longer emasculate the men as long as the hierarchical family roles are respected, with the father at the top of the family pyramid. The breadwinner and the good father thus became the pillars of middle-class America and the thermometer with which American manhood was measured, preventing their children to become delinquents, gays, and mama's boys (Kimmel 162).

Regarding Vittorio Gassman, not only was his marrying Shelley Winters judged as opportunistic, but also his role as a father was questioned when, due to working in Italy, he missed his daughter's birth. Gassman's marriage to Winters was already on the rocks when she got pregnant in 1952, because Gassman was unsatisfied with his life in Hollywood and with MGM, and wanted to go back to Italy to play *Hamlet*. He was touring Italy with his theater company in February, indeed, when Shelley delivered their daughter Vittoria in California in 1953. This caused a huge scandal among the public, and the press spread rumors about their impending divorce. Gassman and Winters decided to give an interview explaining their situation to the press in *The Motion Picture Magazine* in September 1953. The article, entitled "The Shelley-Vittorio story", is a long interview by journalist Jim Henaghan with both Winters and Gassman about the reasons why Gassman was in Italy when Shelley was

delivering their baby Vittoria. The journalist bluntly said: "the word is all over town - I told Gassman – that you should have come back here a long time ago. That you could have been here when your baby was born if you'd wanted to come." (Henaghan 52). The article continues reporting Shelley Winters and Vittorio Gassman's answers, focusing on the fact that Gassman had a contract with the Italian government to play *Hamlet* in Italy and couldn't cancel the show. At the end, the journalist states the couple is still happy together and that "some people did look at crows and claim they saw eagles." (Henaghan 53). Despite the article and Shelley's defense of Gassman, the press was still very much interested in the ups and downs of their marriage and in few months it would have its satisfaction at last: Gassman's affair with 17-years-old actress Anna Maria Ferrero, who was working in Gassman's theater company as Ophelia, became widely known all over the news.

The puritanism of American society in the Fifties not only affected everyday life of the middle-class Americans with its emphasis on family, husbandry, and motherhood. It also heavily affected Hollywood stars, even though stars "always tended towards transgression" (Gundle, *Death and La Dolce Vita* 67). The Production Code Administration, also known as the Hays Code, was still in full effect during the fifties, with its obsessive censorship aimed to reassure "mainstream America of the morality of Hollywood after the scandals of the 1920s" (Gundle, *Death and La Dolce Vita* 67). Outside the screen, the the movie studio stars' private lives were strictly monitored, and any deviance or scandal could cost a career, as in the infamous case of Roberto Rossellini and Ingrid Bergman's marriage. Swedish-born actress Ingrid Bergman made her name in Hollywood as a star of purity, innocence, and goodness. Even her private life was pristine, with her happy marriage to a Swedish doctor and a little daughter, Pia. In 1949 she was one of the most popular female stars in America, but when she

flew to Italy to work in Rossellini's new movie *Stromboli* (1950), the gossip about their nascent affair began, and the scandal reached its apex when it became clear that Ingrid Bergman was pregnant with Rossellini's child. Bergman lost custody of her daughter, underwent a denunciation in the U.S. Senate, and Memphis Censor Lloyd T. Binford announced he was going to ban *Stromboli* without having seen it, along with all other Bergman pictures. "She is a disgrace . . . to American women," he fumed. "I'm glad she's a foreigner."[31] Her career in Hollywood was compromised until at least 1956, when she returned to the US to act in *Anastasia*. Her divorce and marriage to Rossellini didn't cause the same outrage in Italy as in the United States. According to Girelli it was due to the patriarchal morality of the times, when Ingrid Bergman as a woman provoked outrage by deserting husband and daughter, while Rossellini "only suffered the indignity of being confirmed as an inveterate Latin lover" (176). In the patriarchal system of the times, both in America and Italy the woman was to blame for her love affair and for having abandoned her family, while the man was forgiven, especially in Italy, due to the lenience of machismo culture towards the Italian womanizer. Also, Italy didn't have a powerful industrial system such as the Hollywood studios, which controlled their actors' every move, private lives and public image. Italian stars only had to fear one power: the Italian Catholic Church. Catholic hierarchy, however, driven by fear of an overwhelming Communist presence in Cinecittà, "kept quiet on account of Rossellini's unique position as the one prominent film director of the post-war era who proclaimed his Catholicism" (Gundle, *Death and La Dolce Vita* 69).

As for Gassman, both his divorces and stormy love life never seriously affected his status as star in Italy. The Italian press was quite amused by his last public fight with Shelley Winters, which ended up even on the main page of the popular magazine *La Domenica del*

[31] *Time*. 02/13/1950, Vol. 55 Issue 7, p88, 1p

Corriere. Shelley Winters was in Rome on the set of *Mambo* (1954), the last film she and Gassman made together, which coincided with their separation. Gassman, believing Shelley had come to terms with the upcoming divorce, took his new girlfriend Anna Maria Ferrero to the set. Shelley, in a pause from the shooting, grabbed a pair of scissors and threw herself against the young woman. The scene was captured by many paparazzi on the set and the popular newspaper *Corriere della Sera* dedicated its Sunday magazine *La Domenica del Corriere* to the feisty American actress and her violent reaction, but the tone of the article was more one of amusement than of scandal.

The American press, on the contrary, was filled with moralizing news about Winters' and Gassman's rough divorce. *The New York Post* in 1954 published an article entitled "Shelley's Sizzling as Her Roman Burns", showing a picture of Vittorio Gassman and actress Anna Maria Ferrero in stage costumes as Hamlet and Ophelia romantically looking into each other's eyes.

Vittorio Gassman and Anna Maria Ferrero as Hamlet and Ophelia

Another article in the Lester Lewyd collection, "Shelley and Vittorio Swap Bitter Words", opens with a picture of Vittorio Gassman and actress Anna Maria Ferrero sitting together in an outdoor café in Rome. The article reports Shelley's claim of Gassman's infidelity with Ferrero, an accusation Gassman denied, saying there was only a professional collaboration between them. However, the affair soon was discovered to be true, and Shelley Winters eventually flew to Rome only to be asked for a divorce by Gassman. The divorce and the battle for custody for their 11-month-old baby signaled the end of Gassman's collaboration with Hollywood and MGM.

In the construction and consumption of the star's persona, private life and screen roles often encompass each other, creating the uniqueness of the star's charisma (Dyer, *Stars* 20). In Vittorio Gassman's case, his private life and career dramatically overlapped in *Mambo* (1954). The film was his last collaboration with MGM, since he had already asked Italian producer De Laurentiis to help him get out of the contract with the powerful American company, and he had secured a role in Ponti-De Laurentiis international co-production *War and Peace* (1956), which was to be filmed at Cinecittà. But Gassman couldn't refuse to play in *Mambo*, since he had already signed his commitment to the film, along with his soon-to-be ex-wife Shelley Winters, and Italian actress Silvana Mangano, with whom Gassman already had worked in *Riso amaro*. The film *Mambo* was indeed a way to recreate the success of De Santis' film for the American public. In the opening scene, Silvana Mangano's character is dancing a mambo with a man wearing a hat and trench, clearly reminding us of the famous dance between Silvana and Walter in *Riso amaro*. As for the character, Silvana Mangano plays Giovanna, a talented yet naïve mambo dancer, who is a redeemed version of her role as the mondina Silvana, while Gassman plays Mario, a con-man and violent boyfriend of

Giovanna who is an umpteenth version of the seductive scoundrel-type like Walter. He always holds a cigarette and drink, typical objects belonging to the tough guy's screen image. He is seductive and brutal with women: In one scene, he slaps Giovanna, and in another, he severely teases Toni, Winters' character.

Silvana Mangano and Vittorio Gassman in *Mambo*

Gassman's brief parable in Hollywood opened and ended with him cast as a cynical and selfish womanizer using his Latin charm on women, which matched the image propagated by the American press at the time when he married Winters. Gassman's star persona in the United States was therefore associated with the villain tough guy, misogynist, and vicious womanizer. This type of anti-hero would definitely not fit the American audience of the Fifties, as Marcia Landy points out: "Though handsome, Gassman's persona exhibits a detachment and, perhaps even more antipathetic to a Hollywood male icon, a suggestion of cruel and immoral behavior." (151). In Vittorio Gassman's case, though, I argue that his screen persona as being immoral and cynic was complicated by his foreignness, his unfamiliar masculinity.

4. Gassman, Masculinity, and Foreignness

Recently formulated conceptualizations discuss ethnicity as invention, from James Clifford's view of ethnographies as fictions[32] to Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (2006), which reflect upon the conditions under which modern national and ethnic groups have been invented (Sollors x-xi). Conzen and Gerber thus rework the concept of invention of ethnicity by understanding ethnicity as a cultural construction accomplished over historical time. As they claim, "ethnic groups in modern settings constantly recreate themselves, and ethnicity is continuously being reinvented in response to changing realities both within the group and the host society (5)". Hollywood has always been a big player in determining the evolution of representation and perception of ethnicity in society throughout historical time, creating the illusion of ethnic "authenticity" and making it "real". However, Hollywood's representation of foreignness and ethnicity is often based on the wider sociopolitical discourses regarding race and gender in a particular historical time. In the Fifties, Vittorio Gassman's career on American screens has to be contextualized through the revival of the cinematic myth of the Latin lover of the Twenties.

In his groundbreaking works on stardom, Dyer suggests that stars are products of complex relations between the kind of individuality the star signifies and the one valued by society (Turner 7). In Gassman's brief Hollywood experience, his individuality as an Italian actor and the values the American society associated with it played an important part in the way he was cast for screen roles and in the way the public perceived his persona. The characters Gassman played in his United States movies always rely on the stereotype of either

[32] James Clifford, ed. *Writing Culture*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986.

the dark immigrant or the dangerous foreigner. Case in point, Gassman played a troubled, lower class European illegally immigrated in America in *The Glass Wall* (Shane, 1953), a fugitive of undefined ethnicity in *Cry of the Hunted* (Lewis, 1953), a Mexican aristocrat in *Sombrero* (Foster, 1953) and a European womanizer in *Rhapsody* (Vidor, 1954) and *Mambo* (Rossen, 1954). In all these films, Gassman's screen persona embodies a sense of foreignness and not belonging that shaped his masculinity.

In *Masked Men* Cohan points out that, following Judith Butler, gender is a cultural masquerade, a performance disguised as natural, and that films and stars have always been important vehicles contributing to, but also resisting and problematizing the articulation of hegemonic masculinity (xv). In the case of non-American male stars, their masculine masquerade is complicated by discourses of ethnicity and foreignness often leading to the stereotypical roles assigned to non-American performers in Hollywood. Japanese actor Sessue Hayakawa's (1886-1973) main role was that of the villain and "sinister Oriental" Hishuru Tori in *The Cheat* (1915) (Miyao 7), and his success as the sexually threatening Tori, as Daiuke Miyao states, was connected to the popular American cultural and racial imagination of Japan in the early 1900s, in between the fascination for the Japanese taste and the fear of the yellow peril (30-31). As for Europe, European actors and actresses were often typecast in roles characterizing them with dangerous, yet alluring, eroticism and exoticism, especially during the Code times, since prevailing notions in America associated Europe with loose and lascivious sexual habits.

Gassman, being foreign, dark-haired, and Italian, easily fitted the stereotype of ethnic lover and gendered Other, raising questions of foreignness and representation in Hollywood. Ruth Vasey claims that "ethnic characterization reveals, perhaps more

graphically than any other subject, the significance of Hollywood's global market as an active and systematic influence upon the treatment of motion picture material. Also, it demonstrates particularly clearly the connection between representational strategies and their wider political, diplomatic, and economic agendas" (618). During the era of the Studio system, the incorporation of recognizable foreign stars into the Hollywood stardom system was both a strategy designed to satisfy the international marketplace and aimed to gratify the American need of identity through notions of the Other. Greta Garbo was the most celebrated example.

As Vasey points out, the recruitment of the Swedish actress was a calculated overture to Scandinavian audiences, and "her films consistently depended upon the foreign market to make them profitable" (626). However, Garbo often complained about her roles when she moved to Hollywood. "The Divine" affirmed that she didn't understand what Hollywood wanted from her, and she had no idea which kind of woman they thought she could represent and symbolize. In 1926, she states: "They don't have a type like me out there, so if I can't learn to act they'll soon tire of me, I expect" (Barry 111). Hollywood's history reminds us that this was not the case and Garbo later would become The Divine, a sexual symbol embodying both eroticism and vulnerability, feminine allure and androgyny, while her stunning face in *Queen Christina* (1933) became what Barthes called the Icon (57).

Nonetheless, her frustration about not understanding the typecasting of her film roles and the kind of "new woman" she was supposed to represent echo Gassman's remarks about being cast in unfitting roles by MGM, especially that of the stereotypical Latin lover. As to this, Peter Bondanella points out: "If there is any stereotypical image of Italians that has a larger history than the gangster, it is the Latin Lover" (133). Both gangsters and Latin lovers recall the idea of Italians' hot-blooded temperament and primitive behaviors, which contrast

sharply with the restrain and self-control usually attributed to Northern European and American society.[33] When Gassman arrived in America, his only film role internationally known– as we have seen - was that of the gangster Walter in *Riso amaro*. Having already gangster on his resume, soon Gassman would discover that for an Italian in Fifties' Hollywood, there was no escape: he had to be a Latin Lover and, possibly, the new Valentino. The cultural archetype of the Latin Lover dates back to the literary, musical, and theatrical myth of Don Giovanni, the Shakespearean Romeo, and to the historical character of Giacomo Casanova (1725-1798). In popular culture, however, the Italian who "became synonymous with romance and sex appeal in the movies" (Bondanella 133) was Rodolfo Valentino.

Rodolfo Alfonzo Raffaele Pierre Filibert Guglielmi di Valentino d'Antonguolla was born in Castellaneta, Puglia, Southern Italy, and arrived in the United States in 1913. Despite his wealthy origins, he underwent a period of relative poverty in the United States, working at tango teas as a paid dance partner. The paid dancing companions were also called tango pirates and lounge lizards and stereotyped as lower-class immigrants from mostly Italian origin (Studlar 163). Thanks to his dancing abilities, Valentino achieved his first Hollywood success with the leading role in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921), an epic melodrama that became the biggest box office hit of the 1920s, exploiting the exoticism of non-Anglo ethnicity and the popularity of the tango, a new sensuous type of dancing propagated in America in the 1910s and 1920s. In his brief and striking movie career as a Latin Lover, however, Valentino played the part of an Italian only once, in the film *Cobra* (1925). In his other roles as a dark foreign characterized by an overt and wild sexuality, his onscreen ethnicity would be represented by an Arab sheik of European origin (*The Sheik*

[33] The scholarly literature about gangster and Mafia movies and the prejudice against Italians and Italian Americans is remarkable. Some of the main contributions are Bertellini 2009; Bondanella 2004; Sciorra 2010.

1921), an Argentinian (*Four Horsemen* 1921), and a "lascivious pan-European seducer" (Studlar 169) in *Eyes of Youth* (1919). Hollywood's use of foreign actors in ethnic roles has always been characterized by loose standards and approximation, as long as they fit predetermined stereotypes: The cold, Nordic vamp (Garbo, Dietrich), the sophisticated, British-like character (James Mason, Audrey Hepburn), or the dark, sexually aggressive Southern immigrant, for instance. In this regard, Gassman once commented that Hollywood made no distinctions between Latin Americans and Italians, saying that when asked where he was from, he would answer: "I'm Italian", and Americans would reply: "Oh, Italian! Buenas noches![34]" Indeed, most Latin lovers of the silver screen are from South America or Spain, such as Ramon Novarro (1899-1968), Ricardo Montalban (1920-2009), or Antonio Moreno (1887-1967) (Bondanella 133-134).

Nonetheless, Valentino was the first cinematic Latin lover to create a hysterical fan culture (Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover* 27). Valentino's star persona as a woman-made man was a studio's carefully orchestrated strategy, aimed at making the Italian-born actor a screen commodity for an almost exclusively female audience. At the same time, his talent as a dancer evoked an ambiguous, effeminate masculinity, which represented a threat for the all-American dominant masculinity based on athleticism, self-mastery, and self-restraint (Bertellini, "Divo/Duce" 693). Moreover, after Valentino married the ballet dancer Natacha Rambova, his fame as a woman-made man reached its final confirmation, since it was widely reported that Natacha wanted to control his career's choices and wielded a "mighty hand over the head of Rudy" (Studlar 188). Therefore, the Latin lover image came to represent a

[34] "Quanto spesso, e in ambienti non totalmente illetterati, mi son sentito chiedere: <where are you from? Di dove viene, lei?
<I am Italian>
<Oh Italian! Buonas noches!>". Vittorio Gassman, *Un grande avvenire dietro le spalle* 84.

woman-made man skilled in seduction but also at the woman's sexual disposal, embodying both an active and passive sexual role. As I explained in the first part of this chapter, when Vittorio Gassman arrived in the United States the gossip magazines not only described him as the strong-minded Shelley Winters' Italian stallion, but also the quintessential romantic lover, always at a woman's disposal. A still photograph from Lester Sweyd collection shows Shelley Winters lighting a cigarette to Vittorio Gassman. The caption says: "Shelley Winters cabled: 'I am lonely', and Vittorio Gassman flew from Italy to be with her, if only for a brief six days." The caption follows the stereotype of Romeo, the Italian romantic man who dedicates his life to the woman's pleasure.

Vittorio Gassman and Shelley Winters

Although Valentino's fame as Latin lover shadowed Gassman's arrival in the United States, the historical contexts in which the two actors came to operate were profoundly different. Valentino's stardom shone in an era in "which eugenics and notions of racial purity came to the foreground in American social discourse" and set in the "virulent xenophobia directed during the 1920s at immigrants from southern and eastern Europe" (Studlar 152-

153). The foreign immigrant's sex appeal and possibility of intermarriage were seen as a threat to American masculinity and the nation's idea of belonging to pure Anglo-Saxon blood. Valentino's fame in Italy was controversial as well due to his charges of sexual ambiguity. Italian masculinity at the time was shaped according to dictator Benito Mussolini, with emphasis on virility, manliness, and strong heterosexual sexuality. Therefore, Valentino's popularity as a female object of erotic desire problematized Valentino's stardom in fascist Italy, as it "was repeatedly described as emasculating him" (Bertellini, "Divo/Duce" 702). This problematic image of Valentino as an exotic sexual object also redefined the question of his ethnic identity in Italian and Italian-American communities: Both the Italian and Italian-American press, although recognizing Valentino's ethnic identity as Italian, were uneasy with his screen image as a woman-made man, and blamed the excesses of his female fandom as a quintessential American affair (Bertellini 713).

Vittorio Gassman worked in the Hollywood of the early Fifties, when a second generation of Italian Americans had already accomplished successful assimilation into mainstream American culture and society, and when Americans had began to identify Italy with its famous racing cars Ferrari, Maserati, and Alfa Romeo, fashionable clothes, and a hedonistic lifestyle. In the eyes of Americans, postwar Italy "was now exporting fashion and glamor rather than just cheap labor" (Girelli 172) and was indeed associated mainly with the glamorous worlds of the Hollywood on the Tiber and with fashion industry.

At the same time Gassman travelled to the United States, America came to Rome. American studios, lured by the high quality of Italy's equipment and availability of cheap labor, and in order to comply with the currency exchange restrictions imposed by the Italian government on American profits made from Hollywood films distributed in Italy, began

making their own films in Cinecittà. Historical epics and romantic comedies such as *Quo Vadis* (LeRoy, 1951), *Roman Holiday* (Wyler, 1953), and *The Barefoot Contessa* (Mankiewicz, 1954) were filmed in Rome. Cinecittà became known as the Hollywood on the Tiber, while Via Veneto, the most fashionable street in Rome, was a haven of Italian and American film communities and "came to symbolize the post-war economic rebound after years of struggle and reconstruction" (Reich, *Undressing the Latin Lover* 216). The glamour of Italy, which had long been associated with arts and culture, acquired a material connotation aligned to the new consumerist culture of the 1950s and 1960s, and "beauty and sexuality came to be associated with fashion and film" (Gundle, "Hollywood Glamour" 113).

The notion of glamour and fashion was central in the commodification of the Latin lover since Valentino's epoch. Valentino himself came to embody a fashionable model of masculinity based on pleasure, elegance, and recreation, and "his love for fine clothing" (Bertellini 707) was well attuned within the Twenties' hedonistic culture of commodity consumption. However, it was in the 1950s that the Latin lover as well-dressed and stylish man became seen as made in Italy, thanks to the growing vogue of Italian fashion, which played an important part in reshaping the international image of Italian masculinity. Italian fashion in the male sector came to be associated with "the new ideology of informality, leisure, and pleasure" (Reich, *Beyond The Latin Lover* 33) and was characterized by an open sensuality symbolizing an alternative masculine style compared to American and British designs. Through fashion, Italians came to be identified with "Latin good looks" and sexual charisma. Shelley recalls in her autobiography that after introducing her new husband Vittorio Gassman to her circle of friends, Iris Tree said "Shelley, at your age it's wonderful and almost necessary to have an Italian lover. Like good wine, they don't travel well" (Winters 376).

The Latin lover image associated with the Italian male was thus well established in the United States in the Fifties as a product marketed and distributed by both Hollywood and the fashion industry. Vittorio Gassman, Rossano Brazzi, and later Marcello Mastroianni were among the popular Italian actors labeled as Latin lovers by the American press, since "after Valentino, just being an Italian male was often enough to secure a future as a Latin lover for Italian star in Hollywood" (Reich, *Beyond The Latin Lover* 29).

Gassman, as an Italian actor, thus came to represent a new image of Italian-ness and Italian masculinity, positioned in-between the poor, yet good-hearted characters depicted in Neorealist films and what Tino Balio called the Second Renaissance of Italian cinema, represented by directors Federico Fellini, Luchino Visconti, and Michelangelo Antonioni (182). Gassman, then, stood for a new type of Italian man, fashionable and self-confident, "impeccably groomed" (Winters 355), even though this was in stark contrast to his own personality, he was never fashion-conscious and stated that "For me, going to the tailor was worse than going to the dentist" (Gassman, *Un grande avvenire dietro le spalle* 85).

Gassman's character in MGM film *Rhapsody* especially played off this myth of the exotic and seducing Italian male. In *Rhapsody*, Gassman worked with star Elizabeth Taylor, who plays Louise, an attractive heiress, who - according to her father - has an almost compulsory need to be loved. Two suitors are pursuing her: Paul Bronte, played by Gassman, a passionate and charming European violinist who eventually chooses his career over her, and James Guest (played by American actor John Ericson), a good and reassuring American pianist, who in reverse gives up his career just to be with Louise. The two male characters embody opposite types of masculinity - the sensual, but also foreign and dangerous Paul Bronte, and the family-oriented American James.

In the film's trailer, Vittorio Gassman is launched as the new "Latin sensation" of Hollywood, and his character in *Rhapsody* is dark-haired, tawny, and successful with women, following the conventions of the Latin lover. Through lighting and framing, the movie emphasizes the physical differences between Gassman and Ericson, especially in regards to their skin tone, where Gassman appears even darker compared to the pale American complexion and the blond hair of Ericson. The racial connotation of Gassman's dark skin and hair implies not only a Mediterranean/Latin origin, but also the moral implication of a seductive and dangerous, morally ambiguous, behavior. The tawny, tanned skin of Gassman in the movie literally underlines the dark side of Paul's character. Indeed, Paul is a heart breaker, a "sciupafemmine", as it is said in Italy, a womanizer and a seducer. In a sequence of the movie, Paul Bronte is playing a serenade to Louise in an Italian restaurant in Zurich, while an adoring crowd gradually surrounds him. The camera slowly moves away from Louise to follow Paul, who – already forgetful of his girlfriend - is now exchanging seductive looks with other women, a blonde violinist and a brunette pianist. Later in the film, Paul abandons Louise and is seen leaving town with his new blonde girlfriend. While Louise, desperate and heart-broken, attempts to commit suicide, James, the American pianist, arrives just in time to save her and nurse her back to her senses.

According to Cohan, "the hegemonic masculinity of an historical era does not define a proper male sex role for all men to follow so much as it articulates various social relations of power as an issue of gender normality" (35). James, the American suitor, refers to the hegemonic masculinity of the Fifties, to what Cohan called "The New American Domesticated Male" (53), while Gassman's role challenges such masculinity through his stereotypical character as both the Latin lover and the man who refuses domesticity and home.

Hence, Paul wants to play the violin as a soloist and is often portrayed playing alone, careless of the people surrounding him, while James is often shown as happily playing the piano for the entertainment of aristocratic crowds. In one scene, Paul left Louse waiting for hours when he is rehearsing with his violin teacher, while James is always available for comfort and talks to Louise when she feels lonely. Moreover, the drama beings when Paul, after his first success as a soloist, chose to fly to Rome without Louise. When Louise mentions marriage and family life, Paul replies that he doesn't want any family, all he wants is to become a great musician and therefore to be let free. His selfish attitude against marriage and family life is in striking contrast to James, who is ready to give up all his career's dreams just to marry Louise.

The Herald Tribune's critic Otis L. Guernsey writes: "Gassman acts the violinist as a dedicated musician with heart-break written all over him as a warning to any girl who comes close enough to read. John Ericson, on the other hand, is boyish and aggressive as the pianist waiting to catch the girl on the rebound". In *Rhapsody*, Gassman is again caught up in the role of a heartless seducer, and his character, by choosing career over marriage, seems to echo his own personal life.


Vittorio Gassman and Elizabeth Taylor in *Rhapsody*

MGM's strategy for Vittorio Gassman was indeed designed to position him as Valentino's successor, relying on his Italian nationality and his dark-haired, handsome figure. In the film *Rhapsody*'s trailer, Gassman is called a "Latin sensation", and he is often framed in tailored suits in the act of kissing or embracing Elizabeth Taylor.

The same strategy would later be applied to Italian actor Rossano Brazzi, who would play the Italian lover in films such as *Three Coins in the Fountain* (Negulesco, 1954), *The Barefoot Contessa* (Mankiewicz, 1954), and *Summertime* (Lean, 1955). While Rossano Brazzi accepted and even reinforced his label as the new Valentino (Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover* 30), Gassman was fiercely opposed to his MGM roles as Latin lover. Indeed, Rossano Brazzi only was cast as Giorgio, an Italian translator falling in love with an American secretary in *Three Coins in the Fountain*, after Vittorio Gassman refused the role and consequently left MGM.

His frustration at being simply labeled as a Latin lover emerged early on in his American career. When famous gossip columnist Hedda Hopper interviewed him, he complained that magazine photographers wanted to photograph him like Tony Curtis, with flexed muscles, to which he disdainfully walked away. Also, while the press speculated about his romantic courtship with Shelley Winters in Italy, he pointed out: "I am no Latin lover. My father was a German civil engineer" (Hopper).

According to Dyer, a star's battles against Hollywood's heavily industrialized business became "central parts of the star's image and they enact some of the ways the individual is felt to be placed in relation to business and industry in contemporary society" (Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies* 5). Relying on Marx's idea of commodity fetishism, Dyer reads stars as ideological signifiers, whose existence as individuals masks the fact that they are manufactured images and constructed personalities produced for consumption. However, the stars, as individuals, are central in the process of making themselves into commodities, either accepting, defying, or openly revolting against Hollywood's capitalistic mode of production.

In spite of MGM efforts to rely on his Italian nationality to recreate the myth of Valentino, Gassman claimed that through his entire career he had struggled against his Italian origins: "I am not Mediterranean above all and I react against the Italian psyche – it is imperative to struggle against one's own origins (Landy, *Stardom, Italian Style* 150)". His refusal to being categorized into national stereotypes regarding Italians, based on the romantic, charming type, underlined Gassman's pride in his own talent, based on a rigorous training as a stage actor and on his versatility in performing a wide range of different roles, which later would make him known in Italy as "Il Mattatore", the quintessential histrionic actor.

However, the Latin lover image goes beyond the characters the actor would portray throughout his career; it is a consumer icon, marketed to the international public's hunger for sexualized images of Italian masculinity (Reich, *Undressing the Latin Lover* 217). Gassman's battle for better and non-stereotypical roles with MGM works as an active resistance to his commodification as a Latin lover. He often complained that Hollywood offered no challenge to his abilities as an actor. In his autobiography, he describes how he tried to talk to MGM president Dore Shary about his career. He asked Shary for a private meeting, where he explained to him that he wasn't "the traditional Latin lover that MGM was obstinately trying to find in me" (107), and that he was instead a brilliant stage actor who used to play *Hamlet*, often refusing to be interviewed by gossip columnists. However, his protests to MGM didn't yield any practical result. After refusing to play another Italian lover character in *Three Coins in a Fountain*, Gassman asked producer Dino De Laurentiis to secure him a role in the film *War and Peace* (1956), an international co-production starring Audrey Hepburn and Henry Fonda, which was to be filmed at Cinecittà.

Gassman's fame on the silver screen indeed had to wait until the actor returned to Italy and met director Mario Monicelli. After leaving Hollywood in 1954, Gassman's movie career came to a huge breakthrough in Monicelli's film *I soliti ignoti* (*Big Deal on Madonna Street*, 1958), which for the very first time showed his talent as a comedian. In the film, Gassman altered the shape of his nose with cotton and spoke in a Roman dialect, contributing his own parody of the role of the Latin lover he had been associated with in the United States. An anonymous article in Vittorio Gassman's clippings file at NYPL says: "A good-looking comic is something of a rarity, but such reactions as rage, obtuseness, superciliousness seem doubly funny when reflected in those outrageously handsome features. Gassman's non-comic

appearances are obviously in some danger of being overpowered by the echoes from his Great Lover parodies" ("Makes his mistakes work").

Monicelli's bittersweet comedy had an extraordinary success in the United States and paved the road to Gassman's best roles in the *commedia all'italiana*, such as Monicelli's *La Grande Guerra* (1959), Dino Risi's *Il sorpasso* (1962) and *I mostri* (1963), and Ettore Scola's *C'eravamo tanto amati* (1974). These roles helped reshape Gassman's reputation in Hollywood as well, since the *commedia all'italiana* films did very well at the box offices of both Italy and the United States (Balio 203). As Gassman says in an interview for *Film Comment*: "I am indebted to Monicelli, because I'd made a lot of bad movies early on and he was the first to offer me a comic role in *Big Deal on Madonna Street.* He changed my whole career".

Gassman's reaction to the curse of the "Valentino complex" echoed Marcello Mastroianni's personal battle against it. But if Mastroianni undermined his Latin lover's persona playing the character of the *inetto*, "a man in conflict with an unsettled and at times unsettling political and sexual environment" (Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover* 1), Gassman's choice was to play the *Miles Gloriosus* and the *arrivista*, which means a boaster and a profiteer, a person who usually lives beyond their means and tries to take advantage of the other and the law, usually ending up in failure (Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano* 145). Gassman's roles as a boaster proletarian or an unsympathetic bourgeois became typical characters in the *commedia all'italiana,* focusing on the changes of the social structure as result of the rapid industrialization Italy underwent during the late 1950s. In the film *Il sorpasso* (*The easy life*, 1962), Gassman plays a new type of Italian masculinity, which identifies with the Economic Miracle: "The man who lives by the art of *arrangiarsi*, a kind of

improvisational way of getting by through a combination of bravado, seductiveness, and smarts" (Landy, *Stardom* 154). Gassman plays a similar type in Dino Risi's films *I mostri* and *In nome del popolo italiano* (1971), and in Mauro Morassi's *Il successo* (1963), linking his star persona in the genre of the *commedia all'italiana* to the character of a cynical and boasting bourgeois, a nonetheless likable one. Paradoxically, indeed, these characteristics both contributed to the failure of Gassman's star persona in the American market, and to his success in Italy, where Gassman's acting performance, characterized by a sense of detachment and cynicism, and his handsome looks were key factors in turning the actor into a male icon of Italian comedies in the Sixties.

When Gassman died in 2000 of a heart attack, the American press dedicated several obituaries to the Italian actor, calling him a star and one of the finest actors of his generation. *The New York Times* entitled the obituary as "Vittorio Gassman, Veteran Italian Star", and called him "a versatile film star who was also one of Italy's leading classical stage actors." (Gussow). In talking about his American period, the journalist says: "Mr. Gassman was dismissive of his work in Hollywood, regarding it as a misadventure", and reported Gassman's famous complaint that Americans "didn't understand that a European actor could be anything but a cliché Latin lover."[35] (Gussow).

Despite his versatile career in Italy, however, the label of Latin lover remained attached to Gassman's persona in the United States, not even vanishing years after his MGM movies. In the *Backstage*'s review of his American stage tour *Viva Vittorio* (1984), the critic Ronn Mullen writes: "Vittorio Gassman is not as well known in America as he is in his native Italy.

[35] Ibid. Also, *The Village Voice*, reviewing Gassman's retrospective at Lincoln Center Walter Reade theatre, states that "after a hiatus playing Eurotrash in American movies, Gassman re-established his star credentials in Mario Monicelli's classic Italian comedy *Big Deal on Madonna Street* (1958). Leslie Cahmi: "This charming man: from Eurotrash to aristocrats". *Village Voice*, feb 25 2004, p. 58

Gassman's American screen career lasted a decade (in the '50s) and his major work since then has been in the Roman stage of his company, Teatro Popolare Italiano. Displaying the classic temperament of the machismo Latin, Gassman roared his bilingual way trough an eclectic collection of vignettes, monologues and one-act plays" (Mullen). In his obituaries in American popular magazines, Vittorio Gassman is still remembered as "A leading Italian actor and a one-time Latin sex-symbol of Hollywood" (*Women's Wear Daily*, qtd. in Mullen), while the *Sunday Times* entitled Gassman's obituary "Luck eluded the silver screen's Latin lover" (Potter). In using expressions such as "machismo Latin", "Latin sex-symbol", and Latin lover, the press reduced the versatile and multiform career of Gassman to just one common stereotype, demonstrating that the Italian Latin lover myth dies hard, even after many decades.

As Turner states, "Celebrity, then, is a genre of representation and a discursive effect; it is a commodity traded by the promotions, publicity, and media industries that produce these representations and their effects; and it is a cultural formation that has a social function we can better understand" (9). Gassman's status as a celebrity in Hollywood and his struggle to achieve stardom and fight against the image of the Latin lover address specific discursive and ideological conditions in which Gassman as cultural text came to operate in the US, conditions that I hope to have stressed in this chapter. First, the way his star persona was unfit for the discourses of masculinity and gender relationships circulating in the Fifties and based on the domesticated, breadwinner male; the different ways transnational stars worked in the Hollywood system; and the promotion's strategy of MGM aimed to convert Gassman into a new Latin lover commodity.

Several years after Gassman's adventures in Hollywood, an American citizen made the reverse trip, traveling from the US to Cinecittà, Italy. Steve Reeves, an American body builder with no prior movie experience, was chosen by Italian director Pietro Francisci to play the role of Hercules in his peplum film. In the following chapter I analyze the popularity of peplum films and of Steve Reeves as Hercules both in the Italian and American markets, focusing on Steve Reeves' otherness as an American in Italy, his celebrity status as body builder, and his identification as a star with the character of Hercules in the context of Hollywood on the Tiber.

CHAPTER IV

The Hybrid Star: Steve Reeves, Hercules, and the Politics of Transnational Whiteness

In *White,* Richard Dyer writes: "Until the 1980s, it was rare to see a white man semi-naked in popular fictions. The art gallery, sports, and pornography offered socially sanctioned or cordoned-off images, but the cinema, the major visual narrative form of the twentieth century, only did so in particular cases" (146). One of the exceptions to this statement, as Dyer explained, is the adventure film in a colonial setting with a star possessing a built body (146).

This chapter focuses on a particular cycle of the adventure film in colonial setting, produced in Italy between 1957 and 1965, come to be known as the *peplum*. Peplums consisted of low-budget productions made in Italy which revolved around a Herculean-type character played by an American bodybuilder.[36] The brightest star of these 1950s mythological movies was the Montana-born, California-bred bodybuilder Steve Reeves, who, after playing Hercules in *Hercules* (Francisci, 1958) and *Hercules Unchained* (Francisci, 1959), became the highest-paid actor in Europe of his time.

Steve Reeves won the title of Mr. America in 1947, followed by Mr. World, and then, in 1948 and 1950, twice Mr. Universe. Director Cecil B. DeMille tested him for the lead in the film *Samson and Delilah* (1949), but the role eventually went to Victor Mature. However,

[36] There were two golden ages of the peplum: The first during the silent era, focusing on strongmen such as the slave Ursus in *Quo Vadis?* (Guazzoni 1913), based on the eponymous novel by Henryk Sienkiewicz, and Maciste, created by poet Gabriele Dannunzio for Pastrone's epic film *Cabiria* (1914). The second, which is the one I analyze, covered a time from the late 1950s to mid 1960s, and centered on Hercules and Maciste's feats of strength, being portrayed in more than 20 films between 1957 and 1965, at which point the genre fell out of fashion (Lagny 163).

Italian director Pietro Francisci, after seeing a photo of Reeves as Mr Universe, decided to cast him as Hercules in the eponymous movie (1958). The unexpected success of Francisci's film - which initiated the genre and at the 1957-58 Italian box-office was the highest-grossing film, making 900 million lire - convinced the Italian producers of a prospective high commercial success with low-budget mythological movies, which proved they could easily compete with Hollywood epics (Salotti 149). Thus, from 1954 to 1965, Italian film companies such as Titanus and Galatea specialized in the production of peplum films, and Steve Reeves appeared in eighteen of them. The success of the peplum genre was not only domestic, but also transatlantic, thanks to the entrepreneurship of American producer Joseph E. Levine. When Levine bought the film rights for *Hercules* and decided to release it in the United States with a soundtrack dubbed in English, it became one of the surprise hits of 1959, and also initiated a serialized production of cheaply made Italian films dubbed into English, filmed in Cinecittà and exported in the United States.

Thus, Steve Reeves solidified his emerging star image as the quintessential Herculean type not only in Italy, but also in the United States. Advertisements for the film *Hercules* appeared in the magazines *Life*, *Look*, *Parade* and *American Weekly*, while photographs of Steve Reeves in Herculean pose appeared in fan magazines like *Movie World*, *Photoplay*, and *Silver Screen* (Lucanio 13). His transatlantic star persona inhabited a liminal space, between Hollywood and Cinecittà, the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, past and future, providing an opportunity to revaluate transnational practices of cross-cultural cinematic exchanges.

The aim of this chapter is to investigate the use of Steve Reeves' star persona in the peplum cycle, focusing on the significance of white muscularity as a cultural intertext between America and Italy during the Hollywood on the Tiber era. The American-looking

strongman proved to be a new, hybrid model of masculinity for the Italian audience, remote enough from the fascist past and embodying the American way of life's appeal: modernity and wealth.

First, I frame Steve Reeves' stardom within the transatlantic productions of the Hollywood on the Tiber era in the 1950s and 1960s, focusing on the practice of recycling the set, which was both a common expedient for the peplum films in order to "pass for" an American production and to appeal to the audience's current taste for American cultural products. Then, I explore the articulation of whiteness in Reeves' muscular body as it intertwines with notions of gender performativity and racial representations. As Günsberg notes, the peplum's muscle-bound body on central display signifies historical, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts (108). Focusing on the films *Hercules* (Francisci 1958), *Hercules Unchained* (Francisci 1959), *Hercules against the Moon Men* (Gentilomo 1964), *Hercules in the Haunted World* (Bava 1961), and *Goliath and the Dragon* (Cottafavi 1961), I highlight the reasons why films construct the Herculean bodies of peplum stars as spectacle and performance, and its significations in postwar Italy. Lastly, using the films *The White Warrior* (Freda 1959) and *The Giant of Marathon* (Tourneur and Valiati 1959) as case studies, I investigate how the American muscleman embodies characteristics of whiteness and moral superiority in relation to both the Oriental Other and the childlike sidekick in the context of postwar American hegemony in Italy. In the concluding paragraph I open questions regarding the interconnectedness of Reeves' star persona and the success of the peplum genre in the American market, based on archival research of film magazines and advertisements for the release of the film *Hercules* in the United States.

1. Recycling the Set: The Italian Peplum and the Passing for an American Epic

Roy Menarini and Paolo Noto write that Italy's film industry provided different types of practices recycling content and production matters, the most common forms being recycling found footage, which is the integration of film sequences from older movies, and recycling of the *profilmic*o, which means re-usage of set, design, costumes and material of high budget movies, generally American, to create a low budget Italian movie (Menarini and Noto 20-21). Economic advantages were not the only incentive for the rise of recycling practices in Italian film industry. While recycling of set and found footage primarily aimed at cutting down the film budget, it ended up deeply affecting the identity of Italian cinema, specifically its more popular productions. Popular Italian genre movies set out to pass for high-end Hollywood productions without having to rely on a Hollywood size production apparatus and budget. They were, according to Umberto Eco's definition of *kitsch*, an aesthetic lie, insofar as they set up a world of aesthetic make-believe and self-deception (Eco 1999: 185). Indeed, most of Italian genres such as peplum, spaghetti-western, and horror, were made following respective Hollywood epics, American westerns, and British horrors (Menarini and Noto 21).[37]

The Italian film industry therefore applied the practice of recycling sets and material not only as a way to compete, but also to mimic Hollywood movies with a production of genre films that – quoting Homi Bhabha - were almost the same, but not quite (Bhabha 1984: 127). The practice of casting American actors for the main roles and the tendency of

[37] The exploitation of popular genres, such as western, horror and peplum, eventually led to a production that worked in an area "between mimicry and mockery" (Bhabha 127): Especially the late Sixties' productions showed a clear lack of concern with passing for a Hollywood movie, playing instead with parody and self-irony.

producers to anglicize the director's and cast's Italian names are examples of this mimicry intended to make the Italian audience believe they were watching a Hollywood production rather than a low budget Italian movie (Günsberg 101). This mimicry fits in the larger processes of Americanization of Italian culture and society that reached its peak in the two decades after 1945. America in Europe during the post-1945 period became, as de Grazia affirmed, an "irresistible empire" of shared commodities, which "ruled by the pressure of its markets" and "the pervasiveness of its models" (de Grazia 3). This was especially true for Italy, where Americanization was central to American-Italian political and economic relations, and the American myths and models of entertainment, goods, and consumption constituted a major modernization. (Scrivano 317; Ellwood, "Un americano a Roma" 99).

Gundle's study of the impact of American consumerist culture on postwar Italian culture underlines the interconnectedness of Americanization and industrial and social change in Italian society: "The rapid process of concentrated industrialization in a country that lacked a genuine secular culture common to all created an enormous cultural gap that only ideas, themes, products, and norms of an American origin seemed able to fill. In this sense the yearning for America so evident in the Italy of the 1950s and 1960s was an expression of a real shift in attitudes and expectations and the decline of previously accepted norms and relationships" (Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow* 75-76). The film industry, in particular, was the main instrument of diffusing the desire for the American way of life. As Gian Piero Brunetta states, "for a long period after the war Italy continued to be the biggest importer of American films in Europe", while Hollywood's projection of its power by means of publicity "had remarkable long-term effects in terms of depositing layers of icons, symbols, plots and motifs in the Italian collective consciousness" (Brunetta, "The Long March 146).

The close interaction between Hollywood and Italian film industry during the 1950s and 1960s is mostly evident in the production of film genres such as mythological, Western, and Horror, following the trend initiated by Hollywood run-away companies on Italian soil. These genres were often co-produced by American and European companies and aimed at the international market. The peplum in particular contributed significantly to film exports, making up as much as 46 per cent of exported films in the 1960s (Günsberg 100).

The internationalization of practices of film production and distribution was a common trend in postwar Italy, where America runaway companies came to reinvest their blocked funds[38]. Cinecittà, refurbished by Italian state funds and American dollars, turned Rome of the fifties and sixties into Hollywood on the Tiber, with the blessing of Giulio Andreotti, who was in charge of Italy's movie legislation while undersecretary to the president of the Council of Ministers, and the industry's major trade association, ANICA (Associazione nazionale industrie cinematografiche e affini) (de Grazia 83).[39]

Both Andreotti and ANICA welcomed the presence of American runaway productions in Rome, for different reasons: "*Meno stracci, più gambe*" (less rags, more legs) was the motto of Andreotti, whose policy "was motivated equally by distaste for the radical politics of Italian Neorealism and the desire to promote sales abroad" (de Grazia 82). As for ANICA, since it included representatives of U.S. firms from its foundation in 1945, it entertained friendly relations with the powerful Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), "a relationship which, while not guaranteeing any special economic favors, kept Italian entrepreneurs abreast of Hollywood production styles and business methods and helped attract American investment" (de Grazia 83).

[38] Here, blocked funds relates to currency exchange restrictions imposed by the 1949 Andreotti Law on American profits made from Hollywood films distributed in Italy (Quaglietti 76).
[39] For more on the subject of postwar Italy and its relations with American film industry, see Quaglietti.

The film opening the "Hollywood on the Tiber" season was *Quo Vadis?* (Sienkiewicz 1951), entirely filmed in Cinecittà, and it initiated a trend in the shooting of Hollywood historical epics in Italy. While the American occupation of Cinecittà was seen by most Italian directors and actors as flagrant example of cinematic imperialism, the expensive sets built by Hollywood studios originated a burst of inventiveness, since they were eventually utilized by low budget Italian film companies for their historical or mythological productions (Menarini and Noto 27). As Michèle Lagny noted, indeed, peplum films were "pre-prepared commodities of the 'international cuisine' type" (163), which means they were mostly co-productions aimed at an international mass audience. The film company Galatea was a key example of this internationalization of film genre production: After the success of the film *Hercules* in the United States, Galatea launched a production of low-budget mythological films made mainly for the international markets.[40] Galatea's example was soon followed by other Italian film companies such as Titanus and Achille Piazzi, which led to an exploitation of the peplum genre that saturated the markets until the mid-Sixties, when it was slowly replaced by the spaghetti-western.

Film historian Vittorio Spinazzola defined peplum films as "low-budget super-colossal" (168): cheaply made spectacular films that rely on exotic, mythic settings, baroque scenery, and hyperbolic feats of strength by muscular performers to compete with – and as I said before - "pass for" - more expensive Hollywood epics.

Mimicry of Hollywood and desire of its spectacles and stars constituted the backbone of the peplum cycle appeal in Italy and that of its main star, Steve Reeves. However, as Gundle argues regarding the diffusion of Hollywood glamour images in Italian society,

[40] *Guarda ai mercati internazionali la Galatea con i suoi film spettacolari*, in "Giornale dello Spettacolo", 1 aprile 1961, a. XVII n. 29, AGIS Milano, p.6

Italians were far more than passive consumers of American products ("Hollywood Glamour" 118). Instead, Italian films and media actively reworked, repositioned, and re-elaborated American mass culture to create diverse modes of cross-cultural transfer (Gardner 214). An emblematic example of this transatlantic reworking is the spaghetti-western. The genre flourished between 1963 and 1973, and reached its peak with Sergio Leone's trilogy: *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), *For a Few Dollars More* (1965), *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1966)[41]. While the production of western films in Hollywood had dropped from 54 in 1958 to 11 in 1962-63, it would rise back to 37 in 1967, after the international success of Leone's films (Bondanella 253). Sergio Leone's re-appropriation on the quintessential American genre departed from the classic Western formula of righteous violence as a means for moral regeneration: infusing his first Western with references to Japanese samurai cinema, Leone presents a brutal and cynical world, far removed from the moral message audiences expected from the Western formula (Bondanella 256). Leone adapted the Western to the values and sensibility of the contemporary Italian audience living in the heavily politicized Sixties, while at the same time influencing the new American cinema and its militant commitment, for instance in the Westerns of Sam Peckinpah.[42]

In the case of peplum genre, fantasy and hyperbole marked the re-elaboration of the Hollywood epic: the historical spectacles à la' Cecil B. De Mille stressed their "realistic" reconstruction of the historical past, in particular of Imperial Rome, and the seriousness of their narrative themes. Italian peplum, on the contrary, looked at the world of classical mythology for playful inspiration, without any pretense of verisimilitude (D'Amelio 2012).

[41] The literature about the spaghetti-western is remarkably large. The most recent analyses are from de Grazia, Fisher, Brizio-Skov.

[42] Not to mention director Quentin Tarantino's obsession with Leone's personal filmmaking style (extreme close-ups and zoom to details).

Peplum films reworked and repositioned classical myths in different fictional contexts and across genres, from Horror to Sci-Fi, so that Hercules could find himself not only dealing with oracles, Minotaur and Greek tyrants, but also battling aliens (*Hercules against the Moon Men*, Gentilomo 1964), or killing vampires (*Hercules in the Haunted World*, Bava 1961). Moreover, the demi-god Hercules is not the sole protagonist of the peplum saga. Another recurrent strongman hero is Maciste. Invented by D'Annunzio for the silent film *Cabiria* (Pastrone 1914), Maciste was re-launched in 1959 by Galliani's film *Maciste nella valle dei re*, starring Mark Forest. Hercules and Maciste are the two main recurring musclemen heroes in the peplum cycle. However, the Maciste films were retitled for export using more universally familiar heroic names, such as Hercules, Goliath, and Samson (Günsberg 100).

The common denominator of the genre thus neither consists in a homogeneous fictional world nor in the utilization of a common set of mythological references. Peplum's main characteristic instead centers on the constant use of a bodybuilder as main performer. Steve Reeves not only set the trend, but also was the one whose star persona became identified with that of Hercules, the fictional character he mainly played on screen.[43]

My aim is to contextualize Steve Reeves' success as Hercules through these transatlantic practices of recycling, reusing, and passing for, within the framework of the peplum genre. Steve Reeves' American physique would encase the cheaply made peplums with the nobility of a Hollywood on the Tiber epic, while his build body, carrying a wealthy, powerful, white Otherness, would remind the audience of the strength and appeal of the American dream.

[43] Thomas Guback notes that around $ 4,000,000 of the receipts for 1960 came from four peplum starring Steve Reeves (86).

2. White Muscles: Steve Reeves, Whiteness and the Cultural Cold War in Italy

As stated above, Italian peplum films were mythological epics centered on heroes drawn from classical antiquity played by American bodybuilders, performing feats of bravery and strength. Elements of a learned culture, the classical humanities, are present in the early films of the series such as *Hercules* (Francisci, 1958) *Hercules Unchained* (Francisci, 1959), and *The Giant of Marathon* (Tourneur and Valiati, 1959). However, the classical themes more often than not just serve as a pretext for the spectacle of superhuman strength of the muscleman protagonist.

The relationship between classical antiquity and modern bodybuilding - the practice of putting highly defined musculature on public display – has been a close one since the nineteenth century. Indeed, as Maria Wyke states, bodybuilding, as a product of the nineteenth century, drew its initial context and much of its validation from the ancient world (51). Eugene Shadow, one the most popular bodybuilder figures in the early 1900s, used to pose imitating classical statues, such as Farnese's *Hercules* or *Discobolos* (Wyke 54), while bodybuilder Clevio Massimo Sabbatino's autobiography was titled "The Adventures of a Modern Hercules" in an attempt to connect a contemporary bodybuilder to the heroics of ancient Rome (Reich, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" 445). Moreover, throughout the twentieth century, any hierarchical distinction between high and low culture has been challenged and "classical bodies have pervaded mass culture in circus spectacles, novels, films, cartoons, television programs, and even in consumer goods and advertising" (Wyke 52).

From its inception, cinema was characterized by its fluctuation and negotiation between high and popular culture. Its origins are rooted in circus spectacles and vaudeville houses, which largely employed the spectacle of the muscled, semi-naked male body. From the 1910s, however, Italian silent cinema's aspiration to reach a more educated, middle class audience led to the development of more elaborate, "respectable" narratives, frequently borrowed from nineteenth-century historical novels (Wyke 56).

In the first two decades of the Twentieth Century, Italy was the leading industry in producing films based on Greco-Roman antiquity, with films such as *Quo Vadis* (Guazzoni 1913), *Cabiria* (Pastrone 1914), and many others (Brunetta, *Guida alla storia* 3-10). These films were highly successful in both Italy and the United States, where the passion for classical subject and antiquity as the founding of Western civilization served as a model for Italy's nationalism and the United States' nation building respectively (Dall'Asta 40; Solomon 323).

The cinematic spectacle of a strongman flexing his muscles for an audience dates back to the Italian historical epics on the Tens and Twenties, since many of these films starred a strongman in a supportive role, usually as a humble servant of the patrician hero, such as Ursus in Guazzoni's *Quo Vadis?* (1913), and Maciste in Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1914) (Farassino and Sanguineti 29). Writer and poet Gabriele D'Annunzio created Maciste, whose name is an ancient epithet of Greek demigod Heracles (Cherchi Usai 91). Maciste and other strongmen such as Saetta were very popular in Italy during Giolitti's era. Monica Dall'Asta claims that their popularity is associated with D'Annunzio's myth of the "superuomo" in a time where Italy's growing nationalism intertwined with a renewed pride in Rome's ancient past and glory (40-46). However, Farassino claimed that the origins of the Herculean strongman ought

to be traced even before the birth of the cinema, and located in the circus spectacles. Farassino noted that several narrative patterns of the silent epics, such as gladiator battles, fights with lions and elephants, and reconstructions of biblical and historical dramatic events, originated from the Nineteenth Century's circus shows set in the Roman world. The Barnum circus' shows *Samson and the Philistines*, *Nero or the destruction of Rome*, and the arena of *Quo Vadis?* are examples of this narrative continuity between the circus and the cinema. Farassino states: "The Herculean strongman's birth and development happens in the circus and the *piazza*, before being codified by the cinema. Indeed, the *Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo* defines 'ercole' as 'a performer of exceptional physical strength who works in itinerant shows, circus, and music hall" (30).

Thus, Steve Reeves was neither the first muscleman to impersonate a classical character from mythology, nor the first to make a spectacle of his muscles on screen. However, unlike the Italian silent epics, a professional American bodybuilder almost always performs the Italian postwar peplum's main character; Steve Reeves being the best known, but also Gordon Mitchell, high school science teacher and bodybuilding enthusiast; the ex-marine Gordon Scott; Reg Park, an Englishman winning Mr. Universe in 1951, 1958, and 1965; Mark Forest, Italian-American from Brooklyn, New York; and Mickey Hargitay, mostly famous for his marriage with Jayne Mansfield - with whom he filmed *The Loves of Hercules* 1960 - than for his athletic and bodybuilding talent.

Richard Dyer notes that "the casting of US, or US-seeming, bodybuilders is crucial. It should be stressed that it is not just that these performers were presumed to be US, but that they looked it" (*White* 174).

What does it mean, considering the dynamic of the peplum genre, that it is crucial for the performers to look American? According to Dyer, the significance of the heroes' "US-ness" is that they didn't look like Italians: therefore, their physical strength is not associated with the fascist cult of the hyper masculine body supported by Mussolini's ideology, but instead with the modern, physically healthy America and the US soldiers who freed Italy from Nazi occupation and fascist regime (*White* 174).

Building on Dyer's well-documented analysis, I'd like to further explore the meaning of Steve Reeves' US-ness embodied in his muscular body within the context of postwar Italy. By doing so, I explore the articulations of whiteness in the muscular body as they intertwine with notions of gender performativity and orientalist representations. I will not venture in theorizing body building as textual discourse in and of itself, which would require a different context. What I propose here is to examine the muscularity of the Herculean characters played by Steve Reeves as twofold: firstly, I highlight the performativity of his hypermasculinity and its significations; secondly, focusing on my case studies of the films *The White Warrior (*Freda, 1959) and *The Giant of Marathon* (Tourneur and Valiati, 1959), I investigate the relation between the white hero and the Oriental Other in the context of postwar Italy as a geopolitical neuralgic site for the American Cold War against the Soviet Union.

3. The Herculean Masquerade

Steve Reeves and the other musclemen playing the muscular hero of the peplum cycle, be it Hercules, Maciste, or Goliath, almost always perform a series of feats of strength such as

uprooting trees, bending iron bars, breaking chains, wrestling lions, or lifting a heavy object. The camera often rests on a shot of the bodybuilder straining his pectoral muscles, highlighting the body of the performer more than the action sequence. In the peplum genre, the exotic settings and excessive cinematic context, characterized by feats of strength, arch-villains, and staggering obstacles, provide a setting for the display of the white male body, its martyrdom and, eventually, its revenge and victory. The Herculean bodies of the peplum stars are thus professionally constructed as performance, to be seen as spectacle (Tasker 76).

In the opening scene of *Hercules*, Hercules (Steve Reeves) uproots a tree to stop a running chariot from falling down a cliff, in order to save princess Iole. The camera rests on his muscular biceps while he is lifting the tree above his head. Later, during the same scene, Iole faints in the arms of Hercules, and we see a medium shot of Hercules' pectoral muscles carrying her body on the beach.

The opening scene of *Hercules*

In *Hercules against the Moon Men* (Gentilomo, 1964*)*, the hero is tied to a machine consisting of two metal levers with iron spikes that close in on the prisoner. While Hercules (Maciste in the original title, played by Sergio Ciani, a/k/a/ Alan Steel) is trying to push the levers away from his body, a medium shot shows his bulged and glistening pectorals and biceps, both for the pleasure of the Queen of Samar's gaze and the film's audience.

Such narrative devices are common in the peplum genre and its "collage structure", which drew upon the popular tradition of strongman acts in piazzas, circuses, and *varietà* (Dyer, *White* 166). Consequentially, the narrative is less concerned with a coherent, linear plot than with the spectacle of the bodybuilder's huge and proportioned musculature, frozen in poses simulating the practices of bodybuilding and the non-narrative forms of physique photography. In the dramatic ending of *Hercules*, when the main character pulls down the palace of the tyrant, Steve Reeves is framed within its columns flexing his lateral spread, in a pose that recalls the posing vocabulary of bodybuilding for which he won the titles of Mr. America in 1947 and Mr. Universe in 1950 (Wyke 66).

Steve Reeves in the ending of *Hercules*

However, these same poses recall the aspect of crucifixionism that characterized the white muscular body. According to Dyer, bodybuilding draws on Christian imagery with its emphasis on pain, bodily suffering, and the idea of the value of pain (*White* 150). In peplum films, the bodybuilder often undergoes a crucifixion torture which functions as a key moment to establish the moral superiority of the hero and his willingness to sacrifice for a higher purpose. The same character of Hercules, defined by superhuman strength and a harmonious muscular body, since the Middle Ages has often been associated with the figure of Christ: the pagan myth of Hercules was incorporated into Judaic-Christian imagery and transformed into an exemplum of Christian virtues.[44] As Leon Hunt suggests, the crucifixion scenes in epic movies combine "passivity offset by control, humiliation offset by nobility of sacrifice, eroticism offset by religious connotations of transcendence" (73). The eroticism of the male

[44] For more of this topic, see Blanshard, and Galinsky.

muscular body in quasi-religious pain is especially significant in the peplum genre, where it problematizes issues of gaze, fetishism, and sadomasochism.

Building on Freud's concept of fetishism, Laura Mulvey theorized the pleasure of looking at the female body on screen as fetishistic scopophilia, particularly in regards of director Sternberg's films with Marlene Dietrich.[45] In her analysis, the body of the woman "stylised and fragmented by close-ups, is the content of the film and the direct recipient of the spectator's look." (Neale 21). However, Mulvey's theory locates the gaze solely in terms of the active male as subject of the look and the passive female as the object of the gaze. In analyzing the male body in display, theorists of masculinity such as Neale and Tasker have questioned this gendered binary structure and problematized the subject of the gaze in action cinema.

In her chapter on muscle culture and the bodybuilder as star, Yvonne Tasker points out how the white muscular body on display is often constructed as spectacle, where the bodybuilder-star's body is offered as to be-looked-at, therefore being presented in a passive position traditionally associated with the female body as fetishized object. The spectacle of the muscular body in action cinema problematizes "any clear set of critical distinctions between passivity, femininity and women on the one hand, and activity, masculinity and men on the other" (77).

According to Dyer, the use of an insistent imagery stressing hardness and muscularity functions as a compensation for the feminization of the muscular body on display, and serves to calm the anxieties related to the male body as object of the gaze ("Don't Look Now" 61-

[45] In "Visual Pleasure", Mulvey addressed two modes of looking, both fundamental to the cinema: the voyeuristic looking, and the fetishizing looking (1975).

73). In the same line of thought, Neale affirms that "in a heterosexual and patriarchal society, the male body cannot be marketed explicitly as the erotic object of another male look: that look must be motivated in some other way, its erotic component repressed" (8).

Repression, disavowal and a look motivated by something else other than homoeroticism are figured crucially in the peplum, through the emphasis of sadomasochist scenarios. The muscular heroes are often shown in deadly combats, physical fights, and especially tortures, in which the hero is bound and wounded by swords, whips, and chains. The pain inflicted in the male body became pure spectacle, highlighting both the sadism inherent in voyeurism and the fetishist gaze at the fragmented body of the muscleman. At the same time, this gaze is often mediated, in peplum films, by the looks of female characters, either the love interest of the hero or the antagonistic femme fatale who usually has a lusty interest in the hero's muscular body. The return to a female look marked by heterosexual desire displaces the eroticism involved in the display of the male body, and disavows any explicit reference to homoeroticism.

A scene from *Hercules* shows semi-naked male bodies in sporting action, while princess Iole is watching them from her chariot. Hercules outdoes the other competitors in all athletic contests, while especially displaying his prowess in the discus throw, considered one of the manliest sports, since it involves the display of physical strength and muscularity. Significantly, the intra-diegetic admirers - athletes performing a contest - are all male, except for Iole on her chariot. The athletes' gaze at Hercules' body follows a close-up of Hercules' biceps. The homoerotic implications of a setting that puts together athleticism, semi-naked body on display and the male gaze are more than obvious (Hunt 71). However, as Neale states in regards of masculinity as spectacle in mainstream cinema, "the erotic elements involved in

the relations between the spectator and the male image have constantly to be repressed and disavowed," in order to avoid openly acknowledging the possibility and presence of homosexuality (15). In this case, the gaze is redirected from the male athletes back to Iole, who is looking lovingly at Hercules while overseeing his athletic performance and his victory over the other competitors. As Günsberg says, "the prolonged look of Iole at Hercules and other sporting male bodies may well function to mediate an illicit homoerotic gaze on the part of the film's male audience" (131). Thus, the manliness of the bodybuilder, endangered by the male gaze, is eventually reaffirmed and sealed by the female gaze.

Both Günsberg and Wyke point out the potential eroticism of the male gaze on the body of the bodybuilder and the mechanisms of denial of homosexuality in the peplum cycle. Günsberg related it to the emphasis on homosociality as opposed to gynosociality (119), while Wyke identifies the same conventions at work in the peplum cycle as in homoerotic representations of the classical body, for instance the consumption of "beefcake" pictures by the gay subcultures of the 1950s (60).

However, in his analysis of the peplum's sidekick, Robert A. Rushing claims that gay audiences were not the exclusive consumers of peplum films, which were instead designed to appeal primarily to heterosexual adolescent male viewers. He notes that the strongman's sidekick in the peplum films is "kind of a stand-in for these films' primary audiences, especially outside Italy: young male adolescents" (169).

While Rushing's psychoanalytic reading of the sidekick is convincing, I'd like to expand his investigation bridging the textual analysis of the peplum films with issues of cultural history, representation, and historical reception. Rushing writes that young male

adolescents were the primary audience *especially outside Italy*. A question naturally follows: What about the Italian audience?

I claim that the relation between Hercules and his sidekick shadows the complex transatlantic relationship between Italy and America and negotiates issues of Americanization in postwar Italy.

In peplum films, the sidekick is often played by young Italian actors and frequently visually marked as weaker, shorter, and more slender than the strongman hero. The young age and the androgynous physicality of the sidekick situate him in a submissive position in regards of the muscular hero. Moreover, he is often marked as not only physically, but also psychologically dependent from the main hero, whose confidence and decisiveness contrasts with the sidekick's passivity, inexperience, and irresolution.

In *Hercules in the Haunted Word* (Bava, 1961), Hercules (Reg Park) prevents Theseus (Giorgio Ardisson) from falling into boiling magma, and later advises him against his compulsory flirtations, as a father would do with an immature son; In *Goliath and the Dragon* (Cottafavi, 1960), young Illo (Sandro Moretti), the rebellious son of Hercules, first rejects his father's advice, but later acknowledges and accepts it; In *Hercules,* young Ulysses (Gabriele Antonini) idolizes Hercules and acts as his valet, while in the sequel *Hercules Unchained*, Ulysses joins Hercules and his wife Iole on their trip back home, de facto acting as their young teenage son.

The American bodybuilder plays a decisive, powerful hero who serves as a leader, role model, and father figure to the younger, weaker, and Italian-looking sidekick. Steve Reeves' muscular body symbolizes the strength and leadership associated with the cultural and economic presence of the United States in postwar Italy, while the sidekick's submissive

position echoes the complex and often problematic relation of Italy to the U.S. As Andrew Buchanan notes in his essay "'Good Morning, Pupils!' American Representations of Italianness and the Occupation of Italy, 1943-1945", the cultural representations of Italy during and after the war focused on the childish and irresponsible characters of Italians. In magazines, newspapers, and satirical cartoons, Italians were often represented as physically smaller and "literally child-sized" compared to the giant American soldier and as the "perfect subject for paternal tutelage" (Buchanan 217). Italy was seen by America as fundamentally unequipped for democratic self-government and, therefore, needing American tutelage to encourage the emergence of a wealthy economic and democratic government.

The peplum films mimic and re-enact this metaphoric father-son relationship in the figures of American-looking Hercules, muscular and assertive, and Italian-looking sidekick, younger, smaller, and in need of a strong guide.

In the first decade after the end of the Second World War, Italy underwent dramatic social and economic changes which reshaped the country, launched an unprecedented process of modernization, access to consumer goods, and paved the way to the "economic boom" of the 1960s (Ginsborg 210-253). The U.S. was responsible for a significant degree of these social and economic changes. As Paolo Scrivano states, "Americanization is usually considered the major factor in Italy's transformation after the Second World War" (317).

Italy was included in the European Recovery Program (ERP), also known as Marshall Plan, "the largest international propaganda campaign ever seen in times of peace" (Ellwood 87). The Marshall Plan helped European countries resume industrial production and reorganize their infrastructures, but it was also crucial in projecting American hegemony into Europe and for the propagation of American ideals and way of life, even though

Americanization was a multifaceted process developed in highly divergent ways (Scrivano 317).[46]

Italy was the leader in importing American films during the aftermath of the war; in the postwar period, American films were the principal means through which the American way of life could enter and penetrate the Italian imagination and dreams (Brunetta, *Storia del cinema* 9). Cinema, with its pervasive cultural appeal and ensuing mass fascination with its star system, thus was the most important cultural product to serve the purpose of Americanizing Italy (Wagnleitner 448).

Nonetheless, the cultural presence of American products on a mass level ought not to be read as only functioning in a univocal direction. Indeed, as Wagnleitner wrote, the hegemony of American popular culture in the Cold War "is a hegemony by invitation at least as much as it is one of subjugation (and self-colonization)" (450). Wagnleitner meant that Europeans altered the meanings of American culture to suit their own purposes, in a process of adaptation and cross-fertilization of popular culture (films, music, comics, and so on) (452).

In *Hercules*, Ulysses' main affective response to Hercules' athletic prowess and leadership is twofold: total admiration, and desire of identification. After he manages to approach Hercules, young Ulysses exclaims: "I wanted you to notice me; I want to be like you" (Rushing 171). Ulysses' exclamation is a reference to one of the catchphrases of the European Recovery Program (ERP): "You can be like us" (Elwood 113). "The technologically honed, scientifically fed body" of Steve Reeves carries a promise of wealth, strength and power associated with the United States as the "land of modernity" (Dyer, *White*

[46] The current literature on Americanization amounts to numerous publications. Most recent are those of Koes and Moore and Vaudagna.

174). As David Ellwood affirms, the majority of ERP documentaries portray Italy as a small and simple country, mostly agricultural and oppressed by the weight of its history. This is contrasted with America's dynamism and power to help, a notion which is predicated on the myth of ships arriving with loads of primary goods (Ellwood 100). For instance, in *Goliath and the Dragon,* Hercules returns home, where his wife and son are waiting for him. Along the way the hero visits his farm properties and is greeted by his subjects, farmers, and shepherds, who are struggling with the hard work of the fields. A few sequences show Hercules intent on helping them. In one sequence, Hercules helps some shepherds repair a beam fallen from the roof of their hut. In the next sequence, the hero uproots a tree with his bare hands that the farmers had been trying in vain to remove with oxen pulling ropes. Wherever he goes, Hercules is always greeted and acclaimed by the people who recognize him for alleviating their daily toil. Just as the Marshall Plan was presented as the only way to liberate Italy from poverty and backwardness, Hercules frees his subjects from the hardest physical labors and helps them rebuild their country.

Thus, Hercules moves away from his mythical Mediterranean origin to symbolize the new flaunted prosperity of the Marshall Plan, while the sidekick projects the promise and desire that one day, Italians will all be strong and powerful like him, like America.

4. Steve Reeves, *The White Warrior*, and Cultural Cold War

Most mythological films portray a foreign, oriental-looking, menacing kingdom standing opposed to the white hero's peaceful land. The oriental kingdom is often ruled by a

ruthless tyrant threatening to enslave the white hero's civilized free world, forcing him to eliminate the foreign enemy and free his people.

Dyer notes that Italian peplum films "have to mobilize whiteness as a balm to a damaged male class identity while also dissociating themselves from a discredited politics of whiteness" (*White* 165). Dyer alludes to the imperialistic and racist politics associated with the fascist regime, claiming that the cycle is a rejection of fascism, yet in its narrative structure also shows elements of fascism.

While Dyer's reading is perfectly tenable, I would like to further explore his concept of mobilization of whiteness in the light of the American cultural presence in postwar Italy, focusing on the semantic significations of Steve Reeves' white, muscular body in the peplum films *The White Warrior* (Freda 1959), and *The Giant of Marathon* (Tourneur and Valiati 1959). I analyze how these films resonate with problems of the Cold War era, highlighting their recourse to rhetoric of whiteness in negotiating anxieties of national identity, international politics, and cultural imperialism.

The White Warrior is a key example in this regard. Set in 1850 Russia and based on Tolstoj's short novel *Hadji Murat* (1912), the film tells the fictionalized story of a Caucasian leader, Agi Murad, based on the historical character of Hadji Murat, commander of the peoples of Dagestan and Chechnya who in 1811-1864 resisted the region's incorporation into the Russian Empire. The film draws on the image of an idealized white leader, played by Steve Reeves, whose bodily and moral superiority over both the Asian-looking tribes and the Russian Empire resonates with the political climate of late 50s Italy, characterized by the "psychological warfare" of the United States to undermine the influence of the Italian Communist Party (Brogi 156).

The peplum films' narrative is often centered on a battle for freedom between a Western democracy and an Oriental kingdom, and it always uses a white, American-looking strongman to defeat the Oriental Other. Particularly in the film *The White Warrior*, the evil kingdom is indeed Russia, albeit in the Nineteenth Century. The film opens with a massacre of women and children by the Russian Tzar's army, followed by a scene in which the Tzar - worries about the victories of the heroic resistance leader over his army and decides to send his daughter-in-law Princess Maria to negotiate.

When the Princess Maria's chariot is attacked by the rebels, who want to steal her jewelry and probably rape her, their leader Agi Murad arrives in time to stop them and lets her continue on her way. The White Warrior enters the scene from the left, towering over his men, dressed elegantly and speaking in a commanding tone. Agi Murad is thus introduced as a powerful man, yet kind and chivalric. His cultivated manners and articulate speech contrast with the roughness and primitive behavior of his men and state his bodily and moral superiority over them.

Agi Murad's whiteness is reinforced by casting, shooting and dress of the next scene, in which The White Warrior meets King Shamil and the leaders of the rebellious Caucasus tribes. The attire of Agi Murad, played by the tall, brawny Steve Reeves, contrasts with the Asian-looking appearance of the other tribes' leaders: while Steve Reeves wears a full white Western-style military uniform and a white coat and hat, the other leaders are dressed in stereotypical oriental outfits such as silk long tunics and turbans. Also, while all the men are bearded, Steve Reeves sports a short beard while the Asian leaders have long, pointy beards traditionally associated with Oriental fashion.

Steve Reeves' whiteness is reinforced not only by his American looks and the obvious signifier of his character's white uniform and coat, but also by Agi Murad's attitude and behavior, which stands in contrast to Asian leader Akmed Khan, his main rival.

In analyzing the film *The Ten Commandments* (DeMille 1956), Steve Cohan points out how the film's cold war rhetoric is condensed in the binary logic presenting the male body, "setting up a governing opposition between Moses and Ramses, between the Americanized Hebrew prophet and the demonized Egyptian dictator" (146). Moses, played by Charlton Heston, once he became God's prophet in the second half of the movie, is dressed in a plain Levite robe, while throughout the entire movie, Yul Brynner's body as Ramses is often shown covered by golden garments and sparkly jewelry. Their visual differences outline the opposite masculinities they embody: Moses the patriarchal, masculine leader of the Western world, Ramses the Oriental, feminized Other (Cohan 149-150).

A similar binary opposition frames the bodies of Agi Murad and Ahmed Khan. Played by Southern Italian-looking actor Renato Baldini, Khan's complexion and facial features are darker than Agi Murad's; his eyes are underlined with black eyeliner to look more Asian, as opposed to the blue eyes of Agi Murad; and he is wearing a long silk tunic and a pointed beard, unlike the Western attire of Steve Reeves.

Khan embodies all the stereotypical elements associated with the oriental other: He is duplicitous, lascivious, a back-stabber, and later will be revealed as traitor of his own people. Khan's characterization as a villain is based on what Edward Said calls "a latent Orientalism" (206), a stereotypical set of ideas about the Orient based on the Nineteenth Century Western racial classification dividing races "into advanced and backward, or European-Aryan and Oriental-African" (206). Said notes that Orientals were constructed as others by the Western

colonial powers, designated as backward, degenerate, uncivilized, and "linked to elements in Western society (delinquents, the insane, women, the poor) having in common an identity best described as lamentably alien" (207).

Conversely, Agi Murad's Western whiteness encases the hero as physically and morally superior, not only to his enemy Akmed Khan, but also to Agi Murad's own men. The White Warrior thus aligns himself with the white power of Princess Maria while distancing himself from his own tribe men and their primitivism, still fighting for them against the evil Tsar and his bloodthirsty son.

Referring specifically to the peplum cycle, Dyer claims that the construction of racial differences highlighted by the *mise en scène* and focused on Eurocentric discourse is a reminiscence of the colonial intervention of Italy in Africa during the fascist *ventennio* (*White* 177). Dyer thus reads the peplum as a colonial nostalgia, where "colonial ambitions and the assertion of Romanness both laid a claim for Italy to be included at the heart of whiteness" (*White* 180).

Although Dyer's reading is consistent, I aim to further problematize the binary opposition between the oriental and white hero and align it not so much with memories of colonialism, but with contemporary issues of political and cultural imperialism. As seen in *The White Warrior*, the inferior Orientals are played by Italian actors disguised as Chechen tribes, while the hero is American-looking, embodying Western ideals of democracy and justice: The White Warrior mobilizes whiteness insofar it associates whiteness with postwar America and its political, economic, and cultural influence in postwar Italy.

Emerging from World War II as the dominating country, the US assured its economic, military, and cultural hegemony in Europe through economical aids of the Marshall Plan,

military control, and mass culture. Postwar Western Europe thus tended to see America as a white nation, despite being a multiethnic society, and the preferred leader of wartime reconversion and reconstruction. Russia, on the other hand, has always been characterized by a liminal racial identity fluctuating between Europe and Asia. Due to its geopolitical position between West and East, the Soviet Union's whiteness could be easily challenged and subjected to *orientalization* in peplum films (Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano* 396).

It is also essential to consider that in the period from 1957 through 1965 (when peplum films were produced) Italy was governed by the Christian Democrats (DC), a center-right party based on Christian values, with strong opposition to the Italian Communist party (PCI). Given the economic support the peplum received from the Italian government at the time - unlike other films such as Mauro Bolognini's *La Viaccia* (1961) and Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Accattone* (1961), considered too leftist -, *Hercules* evokes a concept of "freedom" used in the ideological terms of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, for which Italy became one of the most heated battlefields.

In their battle for cultural hegemony in Italy, both Americans and Communists warned against their opponent's soft power, which is "the ability to entice and attract" (Nye 95). Soft power, thus, relies on the ability to seduce and shape the preference of others, in order to affect their behavior. It rests on three main resources: culture, political values, and foreign policies (Nye 96). America, leading the way for the new process of democratization in Europe, exercised its soft power "not only to demonstrate cultural superiority over the Soviet Union, but also to defuse widespread anti-Americanism in Western Europe" (Brogi 157). Conversely, French and Italian Communists focused on the intersection between politics and culture to manifest their opposition to America's cultural imperialism.

In the context of Cold War ideology, thus, there is no space left for any reconciliation of opposites, but only for mutual exclusion, as indicated by the many Manichean elements at work in the peplum films, which focus on the moral superiority of the American muscleman hero. "Through the traditional association of Hercules with strength and moral goodness a seemingly natural link was forged between muscularity, masculinity, justice, and the supremacy of the West" (Wyke 65).

As we have seen in *The White Warrior*, the fact that the tribal men are played by Italian actors disguised as Asians further problematizes the orientalist approach of the film. The charismatic American-looking leader seems to be indispensable for the well-being of the submissive, child-like men, who can't survive without him. This narrative recalls the description of Italians as childish people unable to govern themselves being widely circulated in the American press at the time (Buchanan, 2008 and Serra, 2009).

Indeed, as stated earlier, in the aftermath of the war, the U.S. did not trust Italy to function like a mature democracy. The American administration rather believed that spreading an American-based capitalist and consumerist culture would serve both as basis of a democratic society and, later on, best antidote to the strongly feared Italian Communist party, which since the end of the war enjoyed a growth of popularity with the Italian electorate (Brogi 8). Consequently, in the postwar years, America's main intervention in Italy was based on rigid anti-communism and focused on supporting the Italian Christian Democrats (DC), the fiercest political adversaries to the PCI.

While the Italian Communist party's well-known logo was a yellow star, hammer and sickle on a red flag, the DC's identifying color was the whiteness of its crossed shield. The opposition white-red thus came to identify the values of Christianity and Western democracy

against the "red peril" of communism in Italian society. The film *The White Warrior* centered on the whiteness, both material and metaphorical, of its main character, whose nickname in the original version is *diavolo bianco,* to be translated as "the white devil". However, the real nickname of both the historical character Hadji Murad and its fictional alter ego in Tolstoj's novel, which the film is based on, is "the red devil", due to his ferocity in battle and his habit of wearing a red garb.

The identification of the main hero with the color red would have been too evocative of communism, especially in the narrative context of a revolutionary movement against the Russian Tzar. Conversely, the association of the Western hero with the white color resonates with both the racial whiteness of American Steve Reeves and the symbolic whiteness of the Christian Democrats who were the strongest U.S. allies in their anti-communist crusade in Western Europe (Brogi 8).

A similar rhetoric of whiteness shapes the film *The Giant of Marathon,* released in 1959, the same year as *The White Warrior*. The film centers on Greek athlete Philippides and his heroic race from Marathon to Athens during the Persian wars (490 BC). The film's hero, played by Steve Reeves, is loosely based on the historical character of Phidippides (or Philippides), the dispatch-runner whose sacrifice saved Athens from the Persian attack. After a small Athenian army defeats the Persians in the city of Marathon, Phidippides runs an extenuating race from Marathon to Athens, delivers the news of the victory, warns the city about the approaching Persian ships, and then dies from exhaustion.

The film's narrative is a free interpretation of the classical story of the Marathon runner and doesn't bother with factual accuracy, since the fictional character Philippides not only survives the extenuating race, but also saves Athens from the attack of the Persian navy. Steve

Reeves once again plays a Herculean might and right hero, while the narrative, centered on the conflict between democratic Athens and Persian Empire re-enacts the anxieties of Eisenhower administration's psychological warfare against communism in Italy.

As Michèle Lagny writes, "By locating the model (and problems) of democracy in ancient Greece, it [the film] supports the idea that democracy is rooted in a European time and space" (168). The battle of Marathon is indeed considered the finest exemplum of the victory of the Western world over the East, while Athens serves as leader of the democratic world, opposed to the dictatorial nature of the Persian Empire.

As Greek historian Luciano Canfora notes, Western culture's foundations are entrenched in the Greek rhetoric of the Persian wars and the dichotomy of Western civilization opposed to the Oriental Other. He writes: "For a long time the notion of Europe coincided with the self-definition that the Greeks gave of themselves. A radical equivalence is deep-rooted in the culture of the ancient Greece's poleis: Greece = Europe = freedom and democracy; Persia = Asia = slavery."[47]

This rhetoric, which included not only Athens but also Sparta and the battle of Thermopiles, the Roman republic and Scipio's victory against Carthage, and the Jewish-Christian tradition exemplified by Moses' liberation of the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery, is inscribed in the history of Western civilization, and has often been represented in cinema, from *Cabiria* (Pastrone, 1914), to *The Ten Commandments* (DeMille, 1956), up to the recent *300* (Snyder, 2007).

The film *The Giant of Marathon* introduces Philippides (Steve Reeves) as the winner of the Olympic Games. The credit titles show him winning a swimming race, a stone-

[47] "Per molto tempo la nozione d'Europa coincise con l'autodefinizione che i Greci davano di sé stessi. Nella Grecia delle città un'equivalenza è radicata in modo profondo: Grecia=Europa=libertà e democrazia; Persia=Asia=schiavitù" (Canfora 17).

throwing competition, and a hand-to-hand combat. In one of the first scenes, he emerges from the water of a swimming pool. His muscular, naked upper-body is framed by two classical statues of white marble.

Steve Reeves as Philippides in *The Giant of Marathon*

The association of American muscleman and classical statues highlights the ideal continuity of the tradition of Western civilization and democracy to the power of America's leadership of the Western world, as opposed to the Oriental Otherness of the Soviet Union. The narration of *The Giant of Marathon* relies indeed on a clear differentiation between the Herculean Philippides, who dedicates his strength to the defense of Athens' freedom, and his

opponents, not only the Persians but also Athenian politician Theocritus, who plots against Athens' democracy on behalf of the exiled tyrant Hippias.

In both the films, *The White Warrior* and *The Giant of Marathon,* the American-looking hero's main mark is whiteness. For most of the film, Steve Reeves is wearing only a white loincloth, while full and medium shots valorize his body build; he is often shown in the open, surrounded by light and white statues or monuments. Moreover, the whiteness of the muscleman hero is reflected onto his allies: his beloved horse is white, as opposed to the black horse of his enemy Theocritus; his love interest, Andromeda, is fair-skinned, blonde, and white-dressed; finally, the brave Athenians who follow the hero in an apparently suicidal mission against the Persian naval army appear as Philippides' clones, as refracted, multiplied images of the muscleman's purity and strength.

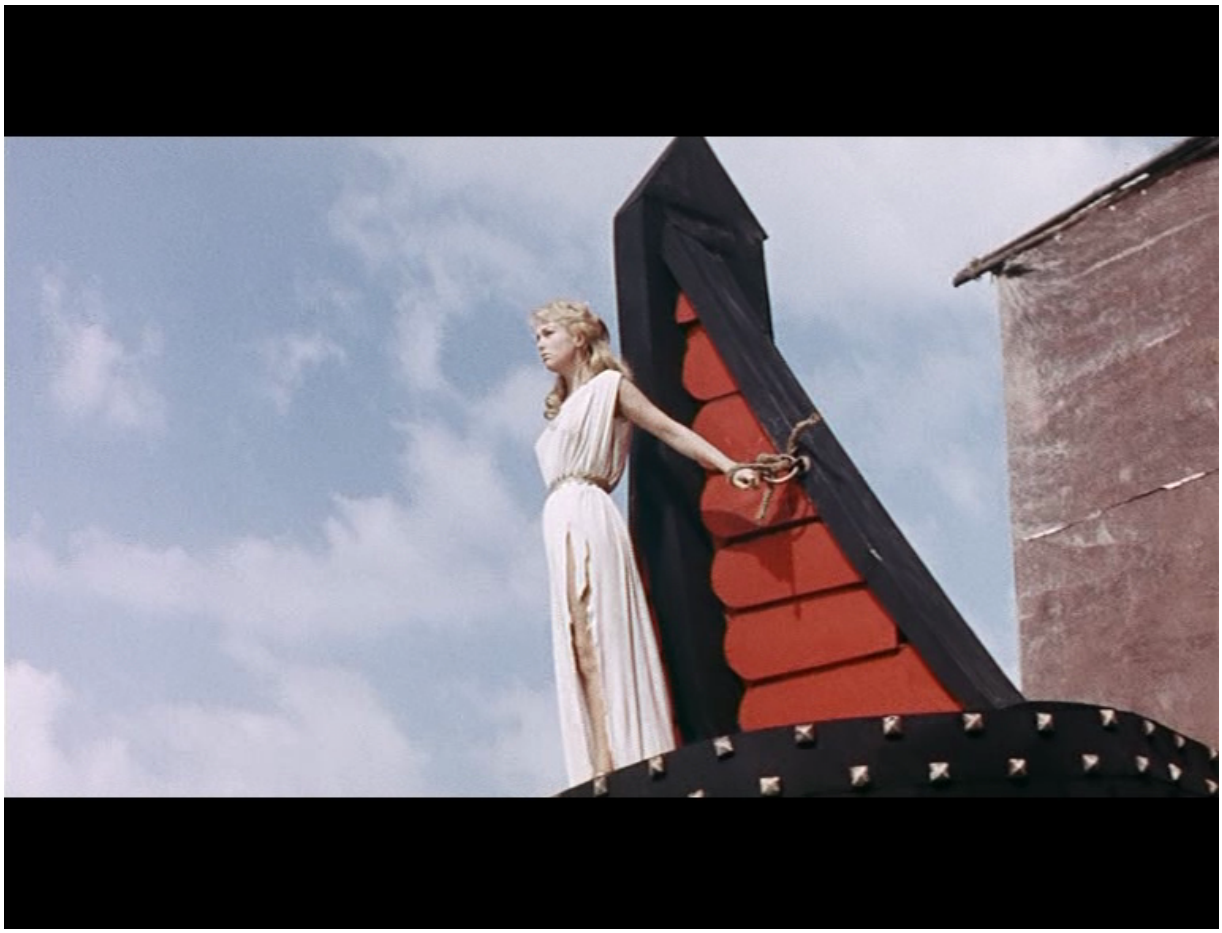
Philippides' clones

Both films share the re-appropriation and fictionalization of historical characters and events in function of a narrative privileging a Manichean battle for freedom and democracy, in which the American star symbolizes the morally and physically superior white man on the rescue. While the enemies are often orientalized, the people in need to be rescued are often represented by either a mass, or a woman.

The poor, uneducated masses in need of the American-looking strongman's guidance resonate with the image of postwar Italy in US imaginary. As Ilaria Serra writes regarding *Life* magazine's depiction of postwar Italy, Italian Communists "appear as a mass – a hysteric mass, the mass that occupies the land, the mass that discusses politics, the mass that holds manifestations in the street" (459). Communists men are also symbolically feminized, since

"homosexuality was incorporated into the demonology of the McCarthy' era by linking Communism with immoral and antimasculine behavior" (Breines 33). Moreover, according to Andreas Huyssen, the mass has feminine characteristics, connected to the fear of the unconscious and nature out of control (52). Therefore, to represent Italian Communist men as a mass reinforced the perception of Italy as a feminized, emasculated country in need of being domesticated by the masculine power of the United States.

Association of the land to the female figure is common in peplum's narrative. In both films *The White Warrior* and *The Giant of Marathon*, the hero comes to the rescue of the woman he loves, who is threatened with enslavement and death, as much as he has to defend his land from oppressors. The peplum films' imagery, thus, draws a parallel between the female body and the land, both represented in terms of a male's conquest. In *The Giant of Marathon,* Theocritus kidnaps Andromeda and ties her to the main mast of his ship, ready to attack Athens. Andromeda's long white dress recalls the white loincloth of Philippides and stands against the red and dark color of the Persian army, evoking images of purity and innocence. As Lagny wrote, "Andromeda's threatened freedom symbolizes the fragility of Athenian democracy" (168). In saving Andromeda, Philippides also saves the city and protects its freedom.



Andromeda

5. The Hybrid Star: Mediterranean and Atlantic, Past and Future.

Peplum conflates race, politics, and gender on the site of the peplum's main star Steve Reeves. His theatrical masculinity is a coalescion of a bare-chested, muscular hero's primitivism with the artificiality of a gym-built body, in a highly constructed simulation supporting the soft power policies of Americanization.

His muscular body carries a highly ideological charge as the semantic sign negotiating the contradiction between Italian national identity and desire of the Other. It relates to the

pervasiveness of American mass culture and its consumerist credo, which Italy eagerly embraced after the war and, in turn, greatly influenced cultural changes during the Italian economic boom. The American musclemen of the Italian peplum appear in an environmental context that seems to belong, by right, to Italy's cultural substratum and even to its landscape. However, the heroes are industrial products imported from a foreign and seemingly more developed civilization, beginning with their bodies, where artificiality substitutes nature. Reeves' sculpted body became a consumerist "myth", as evidenced by the propagation of body building magazines in Italy after the box office success of *Hercules.*[48] Rational muscle building, a high protein diet, and the new bodybuilding craze symbolized the prosperity imported from a society of mass culture and consumption (Salotti 151).

However, the success of Steve Reeves' *Hercules* surpassed the Italian domestic market and the American bodybuilder rose to fame in his own homeland as well, becoming – as Variety put it – "one of 1959s most popular stars, next to Sophia Loren." ("Steve Reeves"). Producer Joe Levine bought the rights of the film for $125,000 and spent $1,156,000 to launch it on the American market ("Mighty Profits of Hercules"). His advertising campaign included a gala luncheon in 1959 at the Waldorf Astoria hotel in New York City with an orchestra playing the theme from Hercules; four-color, full-page advertisements in film magazines such as *Movie World*, *Photoplay*, and *Silver Screen*; and full-page advertisements in men's magazines such as *Front Page Detective* and *Official Detective Stories* (Lucanio 13).

Levine's efforts paid off: *Hercules* played in almost 12,000 theaters and was seen by 24 million people, eventually grossing $18 million (Lucanio 1994). The marketing of *Hercules* relied not so much on the exploitation of the peplum genre's exotic appeal, such as sensual

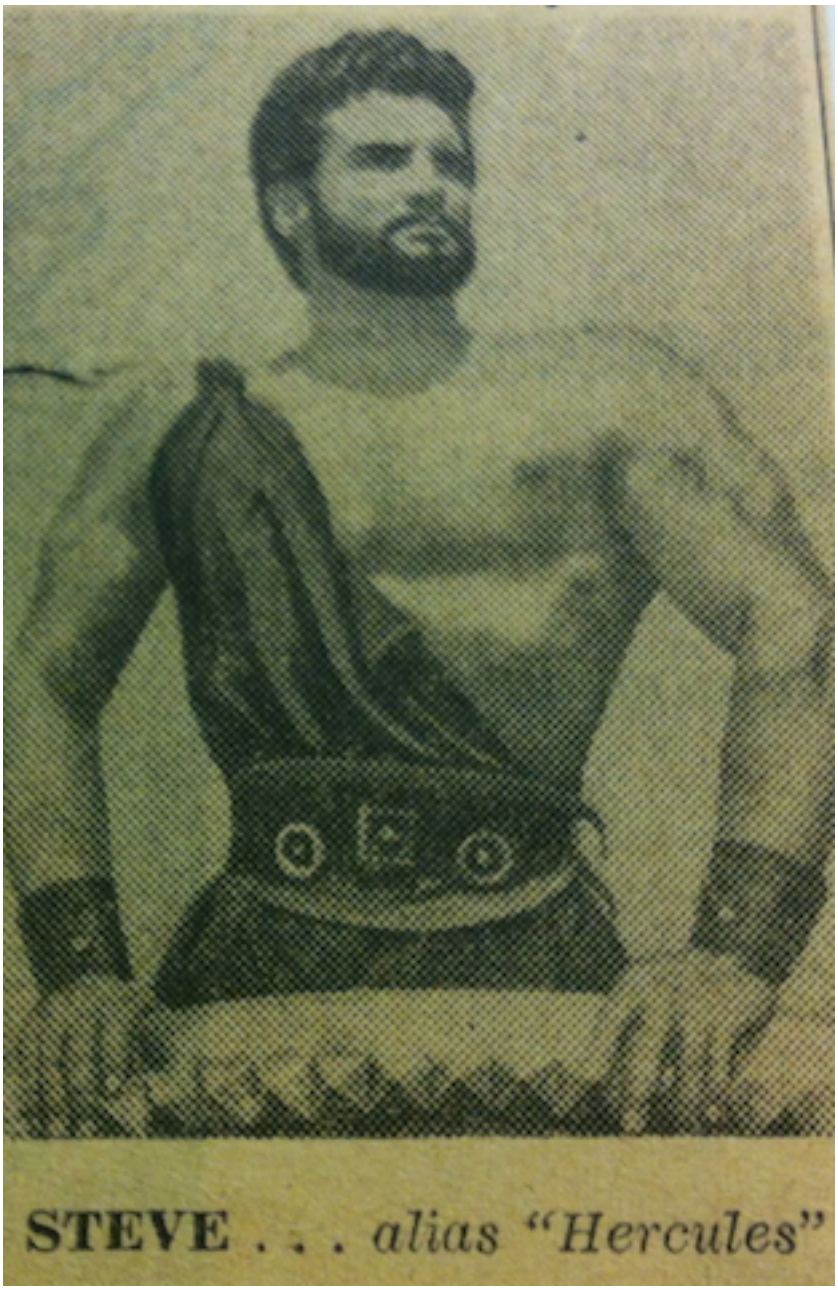
[48] There is also a Steve Reeves' fan club in Naro, a small town in Sicily. (Giordano 83).

dances, sword fights, and scantily dressed women, as on the bodybuilder performer. In fact, the most exploited promotional material was Reeves' body. Joe Levine's promotion for *Hercules* included billboards of Steve Reeves dressed in leopard skin accompanied with the words "Mighty saga of the mightiest man". Moreover, for ten days, the muscular body of Reeves as Hercules dominated television programs and magazine covers like *Life*, *Look*, and *American Parade* (Locatelli 17). After a mere six months of Levine's *Hercules* came American International Pictures' release of Carlo Campogalliani's *Goliath and the Barbarians*, also starring Steve Reeves as the muscleman Goliath. The advertising campaign of Campogalliani's film was similar to the one created by Levine, including the suggestion that local theatres and gymnasiums co-sponsor a "Mr. Hercules" and "Mr. Goliath" contest (Lucanio 14).

In her excellent analysis of the study of stars, Christine Geraghty operated a rethinking of the categories used to make sense of a star. In order to understand the relationship of a film star with other media, Geraghty compared the star's paradigm to three other categories: the celebrity, the professional, and the performer. Celebrity indicates someone "whose fame rests overwhelmingly on what happens outside the sphere of their work and who is famous for having a lifestyle" (99). Conversely, the professionals are people "whose fame rests on their work in such a way that there is very little sense of a private life and the emphasis is on the seamlessness of the public persona" (99). Usually, a professional defines an actor whose work depends on the regular appearance of recognizable fictional characters, so that "the actor is hidden behind the character" (99). Lastly, the third category is that of the performer, where "the emphasis is on the showcasing or demonstration of skills" (100). Usually, these skills are associated with acting ability and the high cultural values of theatrical performance. However,

as Tasker points out, in action films "the performer is characterized by the focus on particular skills such as martial arts which are showcased by the text" (Geraghty 100).

The analysis of the categories of the professional and the performer are of particular relevance in understanding Reeves' stardom in both Italy and the United States, which was based on Reeves' identification with the character of Hercules and his muscular physique. Film magazines and news of the period almost always used the name Hercules instead of Steve Reeves to describe his persona. In a two-page article about Steve Reeves and his work in cinema and bodybuilding, *The New York Mirror Magazine* titles "Hercules in Love – With a Horse!" (Hardy). The article barely mentions Reeves' peplum films, focusing instead on his bodybuilding training. However, the opening title refers to Reeves as Hercules, implying a complete identification of performer and character. In the same vein, captions of Steve Reeves' pictures in several film magazines quote: "Reeves alias Hercules;" "Hercules takes Bride;" and the most self-evident of all: "He's Hercules".



Steve Reeves alias “Hercules”

'HERCULES' TAKES BRIDE. Actor Steve Reeves, formerly "Mr. Universe," and Countess Lina Czartjarwicz are pictured after their wedding in Church of San Marco, Lucerne, Switzerland. Reeves, who has done 12 movies in Italy (all dubbed), soon will make his first U. S. film, a western, in his native Monta...

Hercules takes bride

HE'S HERCULES. Steve Reeves, American who went to Rome to become a top film star, was seen for the first time in the U.S. Friday at the Waldorf Astoria when scenes from his "Hercules" movie were shown to 1,500 film execs and writers by producer Joseph E. Levine. The picture premieres here shortly.

He's Hercules

Reeves' fame on the silver screen is inescapably connected to his roles as the Herculean muscleman of Italian peplum films. Before *Hercules*, the name of Steve Reeves was not known in films, but in the world of bodybuilding contests such as Mr. America and Mr. Universe. It was only with Francisci's film that Reeves' movie career took off. As gossip columnist Louella O. Parsons put it: "If it hadn't been for *Hercules* and *Goliath and the Barbarians*, we might never have heard about Steve Reeves." The common identification of actor Steve Reeves with the fictional character of Hercules in magazines and by the audience intertwined and overlapped with Steve Reeves' image as bodybuilder, and centered on his physical prowess displayed in the peplum. As *The Guardian*'s journalist John F. Lane says, "the young Reeves never aspired to become an actor; indeed, most of the Italian directors who worked with him thought he never became one. It was, of course, his muscles that made him famous." ("Steve Reeves").

In Geraghty's analysis, thus, Steve Reeves' star persona can be read as the interconnectedness of star-as-professional and star-as-performer, since Reeves' star persona was constructed through the identification with a particular genre, the Italian peplum, and with a particular skill, his muscular display of physical strength. This interconnectedness might explain how Steve Reeves was never able to move beyond this established star image and ended up with limited options in cinema after the exhaustion of the peplum genre in the mid-sixties. In her study of action heroes, Yvonne Tasker suggests that a star such as Schwarznegger introduced an element of comedy in his film characters to change his image away from bodybuilding and achieve a shift into more mainstream work (76). Conversely, Steve Reeves never managed to go beyond his identification with the herculean bodybuilder,

and eventually retired from filmmaking and settled on a ranch in California, where he bred horses.

In analyzing Steve Reeves' career in the peplum genre and his stardom trajectory, it might be useful to deploy Dyer's notion of maximization in examining the relation of the star with the film characters. In *Stars*, Dyer writes: "What is abundantly clear is that stars are supremely figures of identification, and this identification is achieved principally through the star's relation to social types." (99). Dyer continues saying that "the star's uniqueness is a guarantee of the ideological truth of the type to which s/he belongs," and that "the specific relation of a star to her/his type may be conceptualized in terms of transcendence, maximization, inflection and resistance." (99).

Maximization denotes the maximum stage of a star embodying his type's main characteristic, such as John Wayne maximizes the Westerner, or Marilyn Monroe the "dumb blonde" persona. Lawrence Alloway further specifies the notion of maximized types in his book *Violent America*, noting that the maximization of a certain type is embedded in contemporary references framing a specific society and historical period (12). According to Alloway's notion of the maximized type, Reeves' star persona "maxed out" the image of the Herculean strongman and came to symbolize the "white muscles' man" type of both 1950s and 1960s Italy and America (Dyer, *White* 145). Reeves' maximization of the white muscleman, enhanced in the peplum, embodies a particular hybrid masculinity that recalls specific cultural discourses of gender, class, and politics: The "might and right" philosophy that assumes a given correlation between physical strength and high moral values; Western civilization's superiority over the inferior oriental one that shadows the cultural Cold War in

Europe between the United States and the Soviet Union; and the embodiment of a consumerist, capitalistic way of life linked to America's hegemony in postwar Italy.

It might not be a coincidence, thus, that Steve Reeves' decline as a star coincided with the decline of the peplum genre and the rise of the spaghetti-western in the mid-Sixties. This decline coincided with a profound transformation of Western societies, due to the rise of youth culture, protests, and left wing activism. As Flavia Brizio-Skov points out, "these are the years in which Italy moves from the heavy political, ideological and cultural burden inherited from the Fascist regime into a chaotic period which will later be defined as the 'crisis of the ideologies'." (93). Hercules and his trust in the might and right power of physical prowess grew outdated in the turmoil of the 1960s, and would eventually be replaced by a new masculine type, the cynical, violent, and subversive cowboy of the spaghetti-western (Burke 47).

Ironically, Reeves came close to becoming the symbol of the spaghetti-western, too. When Mario Bonnard, director of *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1959), fell ill during its shooting, the film was finished by Sergio Leone. Watching Reeves at work as the centurion, Leone seriously thought of casting him as the Man With No Name in *A Fistful Of Dollars*. Reeves, however, turned the offer down. Recalling the episode, Reeves explains: "it seemed to me impossible that the Italians could make a western. I was wrong. And Clint Eastwood was perfect for the part." (Lane, "Steve Reeves").

Reeves' stardom, inescapably tied to the peplum genre, declined while Clint Eastwood's success as the Man with no Name began to rise. Like Reeves', Eastwood's stardom is indebted to an Italian popular genre, the spaghetti-western, which focuses on a transatlantic performer' display of masculine prowess. However, unlike Reeves, Eastwood

was able to operate beyond the spaghetti-western and in a wider field, moving smoothly between westerns, thrillers, detective films, with the occasional aside into romantic drama, while his recent turn into directing proved to be highly successful, with films such as *Mystic River* (2003), *Million Dollar Baby* (2004), and *Gran Torino* (2008). Clint Eastwood and Steve Reeves' trajectories in cinema, thus, started in a very similar way, but departed significantly after their work in the peplum and the spaghetti-western, respectively.

Steve Reeves says in an interview to Jolyon Wilde of the *National Inquirer* that he quit filmmaking because "I never planned to stay in movies all my life." However, he continues mentioning how the change in audience's taste affected his career: "I enjoyed making films, but no one can go on forever. I made a number of successful films, but it was inevitable that a new trend in public tastes would come along eventually." The "new trend" Reeves is referring to is, of course, the spaghetti-western genre and its international success. Interestingly, in the same interview Steve Reeves admits that his major regret is having turned down Sergio Leone's offer for the leading role in *For a Fistful of Dollars*. He states: "I admit I'm annoyed at what I let go when I turned down the role. I can kick myself for it."

Indeed, Reeves' judgment about Italians being incapable of making westerns couldn't have been more wrong. Not only did director Sergio Leone prove that Italians can make western films, but that they can even influence American cinema, especially the "post-westerns" of Sam Peckinpah (Brizio-Skov 96).

As Paul Smith states, Sergio Leone's trilogy of spaghetti-western – *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), *For a Few Dollars More* (1965), and *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1966) – "had a significant impact on the shape, style, and potential of American movies ever since" (1), and constitutes the beginning of Eastwood's status as a major international star (1). Leone's

westerns also continued the international practices of production and distribution that began with the peplum genre. The peplum and the spaghetti-westerns transformed Italy "from a producer of essentially 'Italian' films for an art house public to a major exporter of popular genre films for a mass audience." (Wagstaff 84). Whereas the peplum opened up an era of Italian genre products made mainly for international exports, the spaghetti-western consolidated this practice, adding a layer of complexity to the transnational relationship between Italian and American cinema in its deliberate transformation of a quintessential Hollywood genre. Indeed, as Smith states about Leone's westerns, "simply as non-American products that garner worldwide audience and make radical adjustments to a crucial American genre, they already thereby stand as a kind of challenge to the American film industry." (4).

Ironically, Reeves' last movie before leaving Italy and giving up his film career altogether was *A Long Ride From Hell* (Bazzoni, 1968), a spaghetti-western imitating the Sergio Leone epics which made Clint Eastwood a star (Lyman, "Steve Reeves"). Theorizing what could have been if Steve Reeves had accepted Leone's offer belongs to the realm of speculation; left to say is, that Steve Reeves retired from filmmaking at the peak of his career as the quintessential Hercules on screen, and this is how his star persona has been remembered since, in an almost unique, Ovid-like metamorphosis of the individual into the film character: at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, when asked to show me the clipping files of actor Steve Reeves, the librarian looked at me, smiled, and said: "Oh, yes. Hercules."

CONCLUSIONS

In his essay "Methodological reflections on the study of the Émigré actor", Dana Polan asked an illuminating question: "How, for example, does the shaping and reshaping of actors' images reflect back on the endurance of nationalist models or anticipate instead new hybrid identities in an age of multiculturalism?" (186). The same interrogation guided me through my analysis of postwar Italian cinema, a time period that witnessed historical shifts in gender representations at the beginning of a new era of internationalism in film productions.

My study has been grounded on the exploration of the relations between transnationalism, masculinity and stardom in postwar Italy and the United States. My research had put methodological emphasis on the stars as cultural texts, to highlight discourses of gender, nation, and genre. This approach made it possible to undertake a more critical analysis of the influence of Hollywood stardom on the construction of postwar Italian stars, which in turn redefined the emergence of new masculinities in the transition from fascism to democracy.

All the stars discussed in my study – Amedeo Nazzari, Vittorio Gassman, Steve Reeves – reveal significant tensions in transatlantic relations, albeit in different generic forms. Although my case studies may seem rather autonomous, a paradigm of transatlantic hybrid masculinity is the key element that links these stars together. What I hope to have demonstrated in my work is that the career trajectories of Amedeo Nazzari, Vittorio Gassman, and Steve Reeves underline the multifaceted social, cultural, economic relations between the Italian and American film industry during the internationalism of postwar years, and highlight

the centrality of the film medium in negotiating the steadfast, profound, and long-lasting social, economic, and cultural changes that Italy underwent in the 1950s and 1960s.

These influences are particularly evident in the transformation of masculine representations in popular genres, such as melodrama, comedy, and peplum. As Ruth Ben-Ghiat states, "film's centrality to the visual culture of postwar Italy made it central to the process of establishing new normative masculinities." (338). My analysis of Amedeo Nazzari, Vittorio Gassman, and Steve Reeves strengthens and expands the notion that central to this establishing of new masculinities in Italian society was the penetration of American cinema into Italy and the presence of American productions on Italian soil, which profoundly affected Italy's sense of national identity in the wake of Italian nation re-building. I place the analysis of these stars in a liminal space that encompasses the close relationship between Italian and American film industry during the Hollywood on the Tiber era, the transition from a pre-war world of nation-states to the postwar inception of internationalism, and the theoretical shift from concepts of national film to a transnational approach to film studies.

While I argued that Amedeo Nazzari, Vittorio Gassman, and Steve Reeves' star personae helped ease the transition between the representations of heroic virile manhood of fascist cinema to the multifaceted, transatlantic representations of postwar masculinity, I do not presume that the stars discussed in my work present the only possible formulations of transatlantic masculinity during the Hollywood on the Tiber era. Rossano Brazzi, Giuliano Gemma, and Clint Eastwood are some other examples of transatlantic careers rooted in postwar Italian popular genres. Indeed, with my work I have tried to suggest some of the ways we can move the study of stars beyond national frameworks, and approach the rich area of transnational stardom studies.

Moreover, my research highlights the need to further explore the interconnectedness of stardom, genre, and gender in the context of international film production and distribution. Cinema was, from the postwar years to the 1960s, a medium through which Italy's social changes brought on by modernization and Americanization were being negotiated for the Italian audience, while the Italian film industry was becoming a major exporter of popular genre films for an international mass audience. Transnational genres such as the spaghetti-western and the Italian *giallo* has been widely examined, however, more research needs to be done regarding long neglected genres such as Italian sci-fi and costume dramas productions.

Postwar Italian-American relations reveal "a rich and contradictory trajectory that never moves in only one direction – that of dominance – from the United States to Italy, but takes unexpected turns and engages in many complex interactions." (Muscio 116). I do hope that my research will open up further directions in star studies that will look at historical shifts in gender representation in genre films, through an examination of transnational and transatlantic contexts.

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