

# CINECENSURA

## FILM CENSORSHIP IN 1943-1946

by Roberto Guli

In the historical era in Italy between 1943 and the immediate post-war period, the so-called temporary constitutional period, the Second World War was proceeding towards its dramatic conclusion, generating upheavals and clamorous coalition changes. The intensifying war on Italian territory had, of course, repercussions on the cinema industry: films were increasingly difficult to distribute, and cinema revision proceeded at a slow pace. Following the Allies' offensive, Italy was broken in two: the South went to the Anglo-Americans, who dictated their propaganda, while Fascist censorship was restored in the Republic of Salò. Even before the end of the war, the movie revision system in Italy gradually got back into the swing of operations, but it had to face a past which was still too close for comfort, as troublesome as it was difficult to cleanse.

### The PWB

The positive outcome of the "Italy campaign", started by the Allies with the landing in Sicily on 10 July 1943 (preceded by operations in the Pelagie Isles and in Pantelleria in June), couldn't depend entirely on military action, which however led to a fast death for the already moribund Mussolini government on 25 July 1943. For the Anglo-Americans' ambition of a progressive "defascistisation" of Italy (and of the whole Europe) to be realised, war using arms had to be flanked by ideas, a so-called "psychological war". And in order to implement effective war propaganda, the Allies had to take control of the Italian media. Even before the start of military operations, the Anglo-American government created for this purpose the Psychological Warfare Branch (PWB), that was aimed to manage the Italian media. As the Allied forces penetrated Southern Italy, the PWB took control of the Italian press, radio and cinema. Just after the liberation of Rome (5 June 1944), the PWB moved its headquarters into the former Ministero della Cultura Popolare (Ministry of Popular Culture). The majority of Italian newspapers were closed, to reopen soon after, many changing their editorial staff and name. At the same time, the PWB's "film department", headed by Captain Pilade Levi, decided to make a clean break with the past.

All of the Italian movies, from the Fascist propaganda ones to entertainment movies, were confiscated and their distribution stopped. Both movies that had already been distributed, like *Noi vivi/Addio Kira* (We, the Living, 1942) by Goffredo Alessandrini, or *Silenzio...si gira!* (1943) by Carlo Campogalliani, and movies waiting for clearance, like Alessandro Blasetti's *Nessuno torna indietro* (Responsability Comes Back), that was shot in 1943 but still not distributed before the PWB's embargo, suffered the same destiny. The ban on distribution to Italian film theatres was also imposed on films from other Axis nations, which had previously been rife on Italian screens, partly due to Italy boycotting Hollywood. This affected many films, especially German and Hungarian ones, like the Italian-German co-production *Casa lontana...* (1939), the Hungarian *A harmincadik* (1941), the Czechoslovakian *Turbina* (1941) but even the French *L'étrange Monsieur Victor* (Strange M. Victor, 1938). After the Armistice of 8 September 1943, the boycott affected almost all films produced, or at least distributed, in the Republic of Salò (for example *Lacrime di sangue*, (Tears of Blood, 1944), by Guido Brignone, or *Vietato ai minorenni* (1945) by Domenico Gambino.

Only towards the end of 1944, with film revision (again in the hands of the Italian authorities) beginning to function normally again, did the massive backlog of films begin to be screened.

At the same time, the aim of the Allies was to promote American and British fiction films and documentaries. At first, old films were used. Subsequently, a propaganda organisation of the American government, the OWI (Office of War Information), expressly selected and sent films to Italy: for instance, the first films from the US arrived in Sicily in October 1943. The PWS's propaganda would continue until the end of 1945. It distributed newsreels, war documentaries – like the series *Why We Fight* (1943-1945) directed by Frank Capra and Anatole Litvak – and feature films, especially those produced by the American majors once the embargo against Italy was abolished. To resolve the latter issue, of vital importance for the US industry, the PWB's mandate in the film field was extended beyond the initial deadline of 15 July 1945, as by that date the decree abolishing the notorious "Fascist laws" on cinema had not yet been approved. The PWB officially closed on 1 January 1946, when the government in Rome regained full sovereignty.

### Film censorship in the Italian Social Republic (aka Salò)

While in June 1944, the PWB occupied, even symbolically, the former Ministero della Cultura Popolare in Rome, for around nine months, the "new" MinCulPop had been formed in Salò on 23 September 1943. December 1943 is the date for which there are records of the first clearances given for films by them in Venice. Fascist censorship was once again in action, as a sign of the announced continuity with the recent past, which was not strictly institutional.

There was, however, one significant difference: the authority of the new Ministero della Cultura Popolare (and of the entire government of Salò) was considerably limited by the submission to Nazi Germany, the true decision maker. As a consequence, the choices of film censorship had to receive the approval of the Germans. In spite of the innate weakness and instability of a country that had its territory gradually taken over by the Allies, the Italian Social Republic tried to implement strict cultural policy. The minister Ferdinando Mezzasoma, who was in office throughout the short life of the RSI, aimed at maintaining the same totalitarian control over culture and the media that had Fascism tried to implement with Luigi Freddi and the ex-minister Alessandro Pavolini (who in the meantime became the secretary of the new Republican Fascist Party). In November 1943, the Direzione Generale dello Spettacolo (Directorate General of Entertainment) was created for this purpose and it was then given to Giorgio Venturini to run. By ruling cinema and theatre together, he aimed at creating standards throughout the home-grown industry. Mezzasoma is also one of the main figures in the what became known as Cinevillaggio, the surrogate of Cinecittà, founded in Venice in February 1944 (with additional studios in Turin and Montecatini Terme). The eventual goal was to transfer Italian film production to the north of Italy after the abandonment of Cinecittà during the war. The Cinevillaggio was feasible thanks to the decisive contribution of Freddi himself; he was able to save part of the Cinecittà machinery from the Germans (who planned to send it to Germany), dispatching it to Venice.

In perfect continuity with the final years of the Fascist era, from October 1943 to April 1945, there were many Italian and German films distributed in Salò, as well as Hungarian, French, Swedish and some Czechoslovakian, Austrian and Argentinian ones.

Amongst the most important films were *La tendre ennemie* (The Tender Enemy, 1936) by Max Ophüls, *Le capitaine Fracasse* (Captain Fracasse, 1943) by Abel Gance and *Münchhausen* (The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen, 1943) by Josef von Bány. Seeing as regime censorship was applied in Salò, eventual

modifications were probably agreed upon even before the films were put to the revision boards, so there are only rare cases of any censorial documentation: one that does exist regards cuts in the war film *Squadriglia bianca* (1944) by Jon Sava, an Italian-Romanian co-production. However, the severity of the Republic of Salò's censorship lay in the tendency to revise previously-approved films. This was the case of Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* (Obsession, 1943), which was revised again in April 1944, just as the director was arrested and held prisoner for a few days in Rome, occupied by the Germans. The film was exhibited in Venice with its revised, considerably-reduced version (2575 meters compared to the 3817 meters of the original version). It gained clearance again, but it had to eliminate the names Luchino Visconti and Maestro Previtoli from the opening credits and cut the scene containing the Italian flag with the Savoy's coat of arms. Therefore, the "Communist" name Visconti and the image of the despised House of Savoy were blacked out in one fell swoop. *Ossessione* was censored following the protests of the magistrates, the clergymen and the citizens, who were outraged after the film was screened in some Northern cities, including Bologna and Milan. This climate of moral intransigence was nurtured partly by the Church, and its Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, which had for years been complaining about the permissiveness of the censors towards licentious Italian films, including *La cena delle beffe* (1942) by Alessandro Blasetti, *La statua vivente* (Scorned Flesh, 1943) by Camillo Mastrocinque and *Sorelle Materassi* (1943) by Ferdinando Maria Poggioli. Another censorship method rife during the Republic of Salò was to ban certain films from the top-end cinemas, allowing them only to be screening in suburban theatres, considered to be less worthy. This was the case for *Apparizione* (Apparition, 1943) by Jean de Limour, revised in February 1944, and approved for screening only in second-rate cinemas due to its "artistic deficiency".

### Post-Fascist Censorship

The liberation of Rome by the Allies opened the doors to the regular functioning of the revision boards in Italy and the gradual distancing of the "tutelage" of the Anglo-Americans in censorship matters. With the Ministero della Cultura Popolare (and therefore also the Direzione Generale per la Cinematografia) officially disbanded on 3 July 1944, film revision continued to be undertaken for several months by the PWB until, in October of the same year, it returned fully into the hands of the Italian authorities. The Council of Ministers assumed legislative control, initially entrusted to the Sottosegretariato per la Stampa e le Informazioni - Ufficio dello Spettacolo (Undersecretary for Press and Public Information - Department of Entertainment, then renamed as Secretary-General for Press, Entertainment and Tourism), and at a later stage, after the abolition of the Undersecretary in July 1945, to a dedicated Central Bureau for Cinematography. An initial step towards re-establishing censorship commissions was made in April 1946, during the first De Gasperi government: when both the Home and Justice Ministries showed some concern about the revision of the movie *Sciuscià* (Shoeshine), the bureau officials were given a Ministero dell'Interno representative to work alongside them. The ultimate goal was to implement a law on filmmaking, which was reached on 16 May 1947. Law no. 379, drawn up by the Assemblea Costituente, institutionalised the revision commissions: the first degree was made up of functionaries from the Ufficio Centrale per la Cinematografia, a magistrate and a representative of the Ministero degli Interni, while the appeal commission was chaired by the undersecretary for the Council of Ministers (or delegated to the head of the same Office). As is known, the undersecretary for Entertainment was, as of 1 June 1947, Giulio Andreotti.

The only new norm with regards to revision in 1945 was the cancellation of preventive controls on scripts. But the criteria for obtaining clearance had remained unchanged since the 1923 laws, still in act. For example,

images of suicide continued to be censored: in 1946, the Swedish film *Ett Brot* (1940) by Anders Henrikson was approved as long as the final suicide scene was cut. The same fate awaited *Germania anno zero* (Germany Year Zero, 1948) by Roberto Rossellini, whose clearance was refused in the first instance due to the suicide of the young star. The explicit dictates of the 1923 law became almost a pretext to hit films which represented the poetry of post-war Neorealism. In addition, many officers operating during the Fascist era were able to “recycle” themselves during the new deal. This shows how the fall of the regime did not cause instant renewal nor a loosening of censorship. Proof is in the attempt to create self-regulation, a code drawn up by Italian film producers in 1945 in order to protect themselves from censorship as well as to ingratiate themselves with the commission. This new code took inspiration from the American Hays code. However, the project was unsuccessful. In 1947, Vincenzo Calvino, chief of the Ufficio Centrale per la Cinematografia, complained that the code died on the drawing board while, in his opinion, censorship had always adopted a broad-minded attitude, especially towards the new artistic direction Italian cinema was taking at the time.

### The Purging Issue

The first mission of the post-Fascist censors was to “unblock” the films that had been banned by the PWB, and to allow films to be freely distributed, as requested by the industry. In general, all films, both Italian and foreign, approved after June 1944 (before the liberation of Rome) had to undergo further revision before being released on the big screen. This posed a serious problem to the censorship commissions: that of purging. How should they react to films which, although not explicitly propaganda material, were made by actors, and technical staff who were notorious supporters of the Fascist regime? Should they give clearance to German films, perhaps innocuous in content, but still a product of Nazi Germany? From a judicial point of view, purging, which had been practised by the Allies, was legalised in 1944: in June, a High Commission was set up to take disciplinary action against Fascism, and this included a purging commission. On 31 July, the film department of the commission was established, to decide on the purging of directors, assistant directors and writers: the board included Umberto Barbaro and the directors Mario Camerini, Mario Soldati and Luchino Visconti. The commission decided to send to trial all those who had collaborated with the Salò regime after the armistice, as well as the major directors of Fascist propaganda, names like

Goffredo Alessandrini, Carmine Gallone, Augusto Genina, Romolo Marcellini but also Roberto Rossellini.

But in the end, the sentence damaged only Alessandrini, Gallone and Genina, banned from working for six months, during a period of employment difficulties for everybody. The motto of the purge, “up with merciless severity, down with indulgence and absolution”, also affected the cinema, as those primarily responsible for the cultural policy of the Fascist regime didn’t have a lucky escape: the former ministers Pavolini and Mezzasoma got arrested and executed by partisans in Dongo on 28 April 1945, the same day on which Mussolini was executed. Luigi Freddi was arrested, taken to trial and imprisoned, first in Como, then in Rome and afterwards released by the Sezione Speciale of the Corte di Assise (High Court) in May 1946, the same month he had been relieved from his post with the loss of the right to retirement pension. The Alto Commissariato was abolished during the time of De Gasperi’s government, when the minister of Justice Palmiro Togliatti granted a general amnesty for political crimes which were committed after 8 September. Purging was put out of practice in 1948.

For the censorship officials, the issue of purging was not also merely a question of morality and public order, but also – especially – a financial one. One of the first cases subjected to purging was *Resurrezione* by Flavio Calzavara, as the star was the regime diva Doris Duranti, who had a well-publicised affair with Alessandro

Pavolini. In November 1944, the Head of the Entertainment office for the government wrote about the film (which had already been released in May 1944) to the Undersecretary at the Ministry for Press and Information: "Political motivations would advise against giving clearance for the film; however, we must bear in mind that it would cause serious damage to the production company and, given the fact that various films are in the same situation, the damage would have repercussions on the whole film industry." So authorization was given to *Resurrezione*, with just one seduction scene cut and a ban for under-16s.

With Italian cinema under duress in wartime, for purely financial reasons it was not opportune to ban films "branded" by the presence of people accused of collaboration with the regimes. Almost all of them were therefore authorised, except some propaganda movies whose ban, imposed by the PWB, was confirmed. An example is Alessandrini's *Abuna Messias* (Cardinal Messias, 1939), banned in 1945, but eventually cleared two years later with some cuts, including the one to an "anti-parliamentary line". In compensation, though, two kinds of restrictions were imposed on the movies "sullied" with Fascism: the limitation of distribution in some areas of Italy, often including the big cities, and, above all, the removal from credits and advertisements of names belonging to celebrities associated with the regime, such as Osvaldo Valenti and Luisa Ferida (just as had happened to Visconti in *Salò*) and of all the other "collaborationists". Famous movies of Fascist cinematography, from *La cena delle beffe* to Gallone's *Knock out (Harlem, 1943)*, as well as Gianni Franciolini's *Fari nella nebbia* (1942), were allowed to be shown only in central and southern Italy, except Rome, Naples and Florence, and with the elimination of Valenti and Ferida's names. The two actors were also eliminated from the films *Fatto di cronaca* (1944) by Piero Ballerini, *La locandiera* (1944) by Luigi Chiarini (ex-director of the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia), which was only screened in Sicily and Sardinia, *Tristi amori* (1943) by Gallone and *Enrico IV (Henry IV, 1943)* by Giorgio Pastina. Other names erased from credits include the screenwriter and director Alessandro De Stefani, the "collaborationist director" Ferruccio Cerio and the actor Mino Doro, "guilty of having collaborated with the Germans". As for films produced in Germany, they were given clearance, but the even more drastic condition was to eliminate from the credits and advertising material any indication relating to the production company, the director or the actors. Even songs in German were erased from the soundtrack.

These restrictions were maintained for several years. Only in 1949 did the political motives behind them begin to wane. So times had changed, even if, in the 1950s, two "champions" of Fascist propaganda *Scipione l'Africano* (Scipio the African, 1937) by Gallone and *L'assedio dell'Alcazar* (The Siege of the Alcazar, 1940) by Genina were refused clearance as they were held to be a threat to public order. Times had changed, but not enough to heal old wounds.

The "removal" of Nazi Fascism in the censorship of the post-war period

The purge of the collaborationist personalities from the Italian screens was just the most visible method the censors chose to adopt to deal with the troublesome Fascist past. All the films, and above all the ones dated prior 1944, were carefully examined to verify if there were political elements that required censorship. Any kind of reference to Nazi Fascism and its allies, any war actions under Fascism or similar, was systematically removed or modified so that the content of the scenes became more generic. *Il treno crociato* (1943) by Carlo Campogalliani, for instance, saw its sequences and references to the Russian frontline eliminated, in order to make it "unspecified and generic"; the same was done to the scene representing the Fascist ritual of writing "Present" on the tombstones of the fallen. The propaganda film *Il cavaliere di Kruja* (The Knight of Kruja, 1940), by the same director, in 1948 had scenes about the armed attack carried out by Italy in Albania eliminated. In

1947, on the other hand, the setting during the Greek campaign cost Rossellini the ban of his film *Un pilota torna* (A Pilot Returns, 1942). All elements such as mottos, Fascist salutes, uniforms and medals, but also monarchic symbols such as the cry, "Long live the King!" or the Savoy flag were removed from films, including *Cavalleria* (1936) by Alessandrini, *La nave bianca* (The White Ship, 1941) by Rossellini and *Alfa Tau!* (1942) by Francesco De Robertis. A mere portrait of Mussolini on a wall could cause the scene to be eliminated, as was the case in 1946 for two films by De Robertis, *Uomini e cieli* and *Marinai senza stelle*. There were frequent modifications to dialogue too: in 1945, *Nessuno torna indietro* (Responsibility Comes Back, 1944) by Blasetti had some lines altered that put the war in Spain and General Franco in a positive light; *L'Onorevole Angelina* (Angelina, 1947) by Luigi Zampa had a line expressing nostalgia for Fascism cut. A curious forerunner to this kind of censorship was seen in August 1943, when Mario Mattoli's film *L'ultima carrozzella* (The Last Wagon) was required to cut the word "camerata", used by Fascists to greet each other.

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