

CINECENSURA

FILM POSTER CENSORSHIP

by *Maurizio Cesare Graziosi*

The first decade of the twentieth century was the golden age of Italian cinema: more than 500 cinema theatres in the country, with revenues of 18 million lire. However, the nascent Italian “seventh art” had to immediately contend with morality, which protested against the “obsolete vulgarity of the cinema”. Thus, in 1913 the Giolitti government set up the Ufficio della Revisione Cinematografica (Film Revision Office).

Censorship rhymes with dictatorship. However, during the twenty years of Italian Fascism, censorship was not particularly vigorous. Not out of any indulgence on the part of the black-shirted regime, but more because self-censorship is much more powerful than censorship. Therefore, in addition to the existing legislation, the Testo Unico delle Leggi di Pubblica Sicurezza (Consolidation Act on Public Safety Laws - R.D. 18 June 1931, n° 773) was sufficient.

And so, as far as film poster censorship is concerned, the first record dates from the period immediately after the Second World War, in spring 1946, due to the censors’ intervention in posters for the re-release of *La cena delle beffe* (1942) by Alessandro Blasetti, and *Harlem* (1943) by Carmine Gallone. In both cases, it was ordered that the name of actor Osvaldo Valenti be removed, and for *La cena delle beffe*, the name of actress Luisa Ferida too. Osvaldo Valenti had taken part in the Social Republic of Salò and, along with Luisa Ferida, he was sentenced to death and executed on 30 April 1945. This, then, was a case which could be defined as a “censorship of purgation”.

In the same spring of 1946, R.D. Lgs. (royal charter) N° 561 was issued, regarding newspapers and publications; this was followed in autumn of the next year by D. Lgs. CPS n° 1382 (Law Decree of the Provisional Head of State, “*Autorizzazione di pubblica sicurezza per l’esposizione dei manifesti ed avvisi al pubblico*” – Public security authorisation for the display of posters and public notices).

On the whole, however, little changed compared to the Fascist legislation.

For around fifteen years after the end of the war, censorship mainly focused on the concerns of a prudish, watchful society, which was allergic to suspender belts and suspicious of cleavage. A white square was placed over “provocative” images; in the industry, this strategy was known as “putting knickers on posters”, a direct descendent of the “drawers” painted in the

16th century by Daniele da Volterra, who was commissioned by the Church to censor the “scandalous” nudes in Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment*. It should be pointed out that this article on film poster censorship refers, by way of example, to just some of the posters held by the Direzione Generale Cinema (Directorate General for Cinema). It lays no claim to being an exhaustive study of censorship in Italy of all film posters.

It is also worth focusing briefly on a description of various forms of film promotional material, taking a small step backwards and bearing in mind that the earliest film posters modelled themselves on theatre, circus or commercial advertisements. In these early examples, great importance was placed on the location in which the film would be shown, and there was much more emphasis on text than on imagery. Even as far back as the 1900s, various posters were conceived specifically for cinema facades; in general they covered 4 sheets of paper and reached dimensions of up to 340 x 240 cm. Publicity poster art developed as a profession, and thanks to the work of some of its leading lights, such as Leonetto Cappiello, Adolf Hohenstein, Giovanni Maria Mataloni, Leopoldo Metlicovitz and Marcello Dudovich, it became an art form in its own right.

Until the Second World War, the poster was one of the main vehicles for film publicity. Posters were displayed for between seven and thirty days to coincide with a film’s release, and of course outside cinemas, as well as in various locations around the city set aside for advertising (streets, shop windows, building facades), and even on the side of public transport.

From just after WWII, as the cinema audience increased in Italy, so did the production of images on printed paper. In addition to billboard posters, one-sheet posters and mini-poster packs to display inside cinemas also became increasingly popular. A film’s publicity material was therefore made up of: brochures (various sizes); stereotypes (in various sizes, for newspapers); one-sheets (in 33x70cm format, landscape or portrait, generally repeating the design of the main poster); mini-poster packs (various formats, landscape or portrait, generally 33x50 cm, then from the mid-1950s 50x70cm, containing 8-10-12-16-18 stills from the film, known as “*soggetti*”) plus a *soggettone* (1 sheet, measuring 70x50cm or even 70x100cm, portrait, containing double the “*soggetti*”). The large posters fell into six different-sized categories: covering 2 sheets (100x140cm), 4 sheets (140x200cm), 6 sheets (140x300cm), 8 sheets (200x280cm), 12 sheets (200x420cm), 24 sheets (280x600cm). The 2-4-6 sheet posters were landscape or portrait format, while the 8-12-24 sheet posters were always landscape, observing a standardisation introduced by the American movie industry back in the early twentieth century. The largest formats, such as those printed on 24 sheets, were used for certain film launches and posted on their own specific hoardings, or on the facades of buildings undergoing restoration. The press office directors of the distribution companies chose a film’s poster artist based on his particular style, depending on the genre of film and visual content featured in it. Indeed, a talented movie poster artist had to be able to bridge the gap between the demands of the producers and distributors on one hand, and the audience’s language on the other. The artist would put forward a series of sketches, three

or four for each poster; once the final choice had been made, the final mock-up for printing was prepared in two to three days. Even international distributors, seeking to diversify the style and type of image used in publicity materials for different countries, would use Italian poster artists for Italy.

Posters for an American film and an Italian film were the first two cases of censorship (and not purgation censorship) in the post-war period. In February 1948 a vibrant protest was held by the Centro Italiano Femminile (Italian Women's Centre) of Palermo, against the poster for the film *Dove sta Zazà* (1947) directed by Giorgio C. Simonelli, which "depicts an almost-naked dancer on every street corner" (this was actress Isa Barzizza, depicted by Averardo Ciriello). Then in 1949, the poster for the American film *52nd Street* (1937) by Harold Young was not granted authorisation for display, and nor was a photographic series of 16 stills from the Italian film *Totò cerca casa* (*Totò Looks for an Apartment*, 1949) by Steno and Mario Monicelli. Yes indeed, even innocuous Totò got the censors' hackles up.

Another example of the "censorship of purgation" dates from 1950: the manager of the "La Vittoria" cinema in Sanremo took censorship into his own hands, and for the re-release of Luigi Zampa's film *Signorinette* (1943), he covered over the Fascist badge (a fabric shield placed over the heart) worn by the four young Italian women in the film's mini-poster pack. In the same year, Gino Boccasile's billboard for the innocent film *L'inafferrabile 12* (1950), by Mario Mattoli, was rejected, while the one-sheet poster was approved, on condition that the bare breast was blurred. The ingenuous sketch for the Giorgio C. Simonelli's film *La bisarca* (1950) was returned to sender, so that "the figure of a semi-naked woman on the one-sheet be covered with a strip of thick paper". Authorisation was not granted to the billboard for an American film, David Miller's *Our Very Own* (1950) until certain changes were made.

In 1951 the poster for another American movie, *Tea for Two* (David Butler, 1950) was approved, on condition that the woman's dress be extended to cover her cleavage. In the mini-poster pack for Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia's 1951 film *Una bruna indiolata!*, the body of the female figure (Silvana Pampanini) had to be covered up. Gina Lollobrigida was also castigated in Enrico De Seta's poster for the Giorgio Bianchi film *Amor non ho!... però, però... (Love I Haven't... But... But*, 1951). The poster for the American film *Bahama Passage* (1941) by Edward H. Griffith was also rejected, while the "Morality Office" in Foligno presented a complaint to the Public Prosecutor's Office of Perugia with request for the immediate seizure of the publicity material for Aldo Fabrizi's film *La famiglia Passaguai* (*The Passaguai Family*, 1951): "A photographic frame depicts a scantily clad character in a disgusting state holding a bottle, in a very provocative position wearing a swimming costume" (the photo showed the face of a drunken-looking Aldo Fabrizi, superimposed on a drawing of a woman in a bikini).

The importance of the film poster has also been explored in two short films: the first from 1952, *Affissioni* by Luigi Bazzoni and Mario Fenelli, which narrates the effects that billboards on the city streets have on passers-by, and the second, Mario

Nazzaro's 1953 film *Nascita di un manifesto*, which illustrates the various developments in the birth of the film poster, as its name suggests.

In 1953, self-censorship on the part of the producers and of director Fellini resulted in Enrico De Seta's first sketch for *Vitelloni* (1953) being rejected. It showed a half-naked woman in the foreground, with the layabouts on an autumnal beach in the background. The fear was that the poster would be seized due to contempt for public decency. De Seta thus designed a blander alternative: the group of idle youngsters is shown sitting at a café, with a woman walking along the pavement in the background. The same year, the censors demanded that in the poster for the French film *La Danseuse nue*, (Pierre Louis, 1952) "the word NUDE must be well covered up with a strip of paper bearing the words FORBIDDEN TO CHILDREN BELOW THE AGE OF 16".

The posters for another French film, *En Effeuillant la marguerite*, (*Plucking the Daisy*, 1956) by Marc Allégret, for the British film *Zarak*, (Terence Young, 1956), and the Italian film *Poveri ma belli* by Dino Risi (*Poor But Beautiful*, 1956), particularly the first two, were deplored by Pope Pius XII on 5 March 1957 during his Lenten speech. The Pope stated his indignation at the fact that the walls of Rome were lined with large billboards showing immodest figures, and he underlined Rome's status as a sacred city, as established by the Concordat. And so prudishness won out, in the form of an enormous white hand, added to cover a young Brigitte Bardot in *Plucking the Daisy*; the confiscation of the posters depicting Anita Ekberg as an odalisque in *Zarak*; and the confiscation of a poster for *Poor But Beautiful* "representing a scene in which a man and a woman are shown scantily clad and in poses that offend modesty" (namely, Ettore Manni and Marisa Allasio in their swimming costumes, embracing aboard a barge on the Tiber).

The following year, for the film poster for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958) by Richard Brooks, the MGM distributor asked Silvano Campeggi, known as Nano, to make the glass disappear from Paul Newman's hand, and make it look as though Liz Taylor were wearing a petticoat.

In 1960, in the original sketch by Mauro Innocenti (aka Maro) for Luchino Visconti's *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (*Rocco and His Brothers*), the knife used by Renato Salvatori to kill Annie Girardot is covered in blood, whereas in the final print of the poster, the red blood has disappeared.

On 12 December 1960, law n° 1591 was issued: "Provisions concerning the billposting and public display of posters, images, objects contrary to modesty and decency". In just two sections, it stated that responsibility for film posters now fell to the performing arts offices of Police headquarters.

As a result, the first sketch by Nano (Silvano Campeggi) for Daniel Mann's 1960 film *Butterfield 8*, showing Elizabeth Taylor, was seized and destroyed because it was deemed too racy. More serious problems were in store for Giuliano Nistri, who

received a court summons for the poster of a British-Italian produced film, *Five Golden Hours*, by Mario Zampi (1961): the female lead, Cyd Charisse, shown sitting on a pile of coins held by a hand, was considered sinful.

Another work by Nano (Silvano Campeggi) was seized for obscenity: the one-sheet poster for the Japanese-Italian co-production *Il paradiso dell'uomo (Man's Paradise, 1962)* by Giuliano Tomei and Susumi Hani. The reason was that "behind the fan, the woman might be naked". Also sent for pulping was a poster for a French-Italian co-production, *La frusta e il corpo (The Whip and The Body, 1963)* by Mario Bava, showing Daliah Lavi's back streaked with whip marks.

The following year, Enrico De Seta's poster for Marco Vicario's film *Le ore nude (The Naked Hours, 1964)*, showing Rossana Podestà and Keir Dullea in an embrace, was seized due to obscenity. To get past the censors, in 1965 De Seta had to use an airbrush to retouch the one-sheet poster for the film *Le Bambole (Four Kinds of Love, 1965)* by Mauro Bolognini, Luigi Comencini, Dino Risi and Franco Rossi, duly concealing Gina Lollobrigida's noble loins.

In 1966 *La battaglia di Algeri (The Battle of Algiers, 1966)* by Gillo Pontecorvo, an Italian-Algerian co-production, paved the way for "political" censorship: the poster, designed by Sandro Simeoni, was initially seized because it offended the French flag, and was later altered so that the *tricolore* would no longer be recognisable. While, in the following year, the usual reasons of immorality led to the seizure of Simeoni's poster for Elio Petri's film *A ciascuno il suo (We Still Kill the Old Way, 1967)*, which showed Gian Maria Volontè and Irene Papas in a passionate clinch, lying on the ground; the artist was put on trial at the Court of Rome, and ordered to pay a fine of 150,000 lire.

Despite the revolution of 1968, it was prudent to proceed with modesty. The Titanus distribution company asked Manfredo Acerbo to put clothes on the two bodies he had depicted naked (Lino Capolicchio and Marilia Branco) for the film poster of *Vergogna schifosi (Dirty Angels, 1969)* by Mauro Severino.

From 1969 until the mid-Seventies, in parallel to the police headquarters a preventative committee was set up, comprising ANICA (*Associazione Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche Audiovisive* – National Association for Film and Audio-visual Industries) and AGIS (*Associazione Generale Italiana Spettacolo* – Italian General Association for the Performing Arts), with the intention of self-regulation. For some, this was a case of self-censorship by producers, distributors and cinema owners. Indeed, the latter were able to safeguard themselves by strategically placing phrases such as "COMING SOON" or "ONE NIGHT ONLY" on the right stops of billboards and posters. For his part, in 1972 Sandro Simeoni ran into a problem similar to *The Battle of Algiers*: for the poster for the American film *Joe Hill (1971)*, by Bo Widerberg, Simeoni was summoned by the American Embassy in Rome, and held for almost 24 hours ("it is not possible for a US citizen to be forced to kiss the American flag on his knees"). Meanwhile, it was not for political reasons, but due to female nudes, that Simeoni was forced to retouch the censored poster for Pier Paolo Pasolini's *I racconti di Canterbury (The Canterbury Tales, 1972)*. However, nobody noticed that, despite having

been altered, the poster still contained, albeit dissimulated, explicit sexual acts (one woman is masturbating a man, while another is being penetrated from behind). The poster for the Italian-French co-production *Ultimo tango a Parigi* (Last Tango in Paris, Bernardo Bertolucci, 1971) was given a red “patch” to cover the sex act between Marlon Brando and Maria Schneider. Yet again, Sandro Simeoni was forced to change another censored poster, for reasons of modesty and decency; this time it was in 1973, for a French-Italian co-production, *La grande bouffe* (The Big Feast, 1973) directed by Marco Ferreri. However, in the same year, Averardo Ciriello designed the poster for *Paolo il caldo* (The Sensuous Sicilian, 1973) by Marco Vicario: it showed a head, its profile recognisable as the film’s star Giancarlo Giannini, with the back of the neck formed by two buttocks! The poster got past the censors, and perhaps this marked a turning point, because from that point on, many more posters began getting approved. After all, these were the years in which Italian porn films flourished.

For “religious” reasons, however, the next year Simeoni’s poster for the film *L’Anticristo* (*The Antichrist*, 1974) by Alberto De Martino, was censored; it contained the first T in the title in the form of a cross, while the second T was an upside-down cross. Also in 1974, the poster for Salvatore Samperi’s film *Peccato veniale* (*Lovers and Other Relatives*, 1973) was seized; and four years later, Sandro Simeoni’s poster for the Luigi Rosso movie *Porca società* (1978) provoked outcry.

The years went by, and everything seemed to be (more) permitted than before. However, permissiveness has its limits and its regurgitations. And so, on the cusp of the third millennium, came the cry of sacrilege for the poster of the American film *The People vs. Larry Flynt*, (Milos Forman, 1996): the lead character, played by Woody Harrelson, is wearing the American flag as a pair of underpants, and seems crucified between two women’s thighs, at groin height. This was, moreover, the cover picture for the American porn magazine *Hustler*. The poster was censored. The approved version shows a close up of Woody Harrelson, his mouth gagged with the stars and stripes.

What strikes one, however, is another aspect which fully emerged due to the film poster for *The People vs. Larry Flynt*. Over the years, the techniques used to make film posters have changed greatly. Before, an artist’s painting would have been used, whereas later, computer-processed photographs began to take over. This process began slowly in the 1960s, with the development of television, and was completed by the mid-Eighties. Over time, film producers and distributors increasingly began launching films through TV trailers, and interviews with actors on talk shows and so on, simultaneously cutting various budget items. Including that for film posters. It could even be said that in the end, ironically, film poster censorship was financial more than anything else.

However, censorship of so-called “misleading titles” was another story altogether. This refers to attempts to commercially exploit films which have already been distributed, re-releasing them years later with different titles, thus making them look like new films – hence the term misleading titles.

In 1947, for the American film *Intermezzo. A Love Story*, (Gregory Ratoff, 1939), authorisation was exceptionally granted for existing printed publicity materials to be distributed bearing the unauthorised title *Addio per sempre*; however, in the Sixties and Seventies, there were various cases of “misleading title” censorship. In 1962 the Prefecture of Palermo issued a contravention report to the rental company ECI Film of Palermo, and the manager of the city’s “Trionfale” cinema, for having screened the film *Processo alla città* (*The City Stands Trial*, Luigi Zampa, 1952) under the unauthorised title *Processo alla camorra*. On 13 December 1966, the Ministero dello Spettacolo (Ministry for the Performing Arts) suspended its authorisation for the poster of the American film *Elephant Walk*, (William Dieterle, 1954), originally translated as *La pista degli elefanti*, as it bore the unauthorised title *La venere di Ceylon*. For the record, the film’s Italian distributor, Fida Cinematografica in Rome, added back the original title with a “patch”. On 16 December six years later, the SIAE of Vigevano reported that the American film *Drum Beat* (Italian title *Rullo di tamburi*, Delmer Daves, 1954) had been re-released under the unauthorised title *Captain Jack*, while on 20 April 1973 it was found that the Italian-French co-production *Gli amori di Ercole* (*The Loves of Hercules*, 1960) directed by Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia, was being touted as a new release under the unauthorised name of *Le 4 fatiche di Ercole*. Likewise, the Ministero dello Spettacolo suspended its authorisation for the poster of the American film *His Majesty O’Keefe*, (Byron Haskin, 1954): originally translated as *Il trono nero*, it was now circulating under the unauthorised title *Il selvaggio*. These are just a few examples of misleading titles. In any case, it is universally acknowledged that a film is a commercial product, and as such, why not seek to get the greatest productive yield from it?

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