

Fascism and pornography: the cultural 'message' of the Venice Film Festival

by Filippo Ciccanti

To the general public, Cannes and Hollywood spell show, spectacle, big bucks, the movie-star system, and all the rest. But it is Venice where the "cultural lines" are laid down, to be spread and imposed on the public through motion pictures. The Venice Film Festival (*Mostra del Cinema*) was founded in 1932 by Mussolini's controller, Count Volpi di Misurata, and has been the most important Italian film festival ever since. This year the Festival, also known as the *Biennale* of Venice, celebrated its 41st year. And the message expressed by "Venezia 41" is only one thing: *fascism*, or Nazi-communism, to be more precise.

The Cini Foundation, the Société Européenne de Culture, and the Benedictine monks on the Island of St. George in Venice have decided that the "cultural" message to be conveyed this year through the cinema should be fascism. A look at the films presented in Venice this year gives a chilling glimpse into the future that the oligarchy has in store for the rest of us.

The movies presented were all composed of essentially the same elements, varying only with regard to the degree of pornography, violence, and terror. The common scenario was the Second World War and immediate postwar period; terror, hunger, misery, cruelty, death, hate, desperation, and violence reign supreme.

The film that won the Golden Lion award was *The Year of the Quiet Sun*, by the Polish director K. Zanussi. Here death triumphs absolutely: An old mother and her daughter let themselves die after having survived the second World War, rejecting the possibility of going to the United States for a new and better life.

Then there was *Maria's Lovers*, which looks at veterans of World War II coming back home to a small Pennsylvania town. This is the only "American" film presented at "Venezia 41"—but its director is none other than the Russian Andrei Mikhalkov Konchalovskii, son of Sergei Konchalovskii, the president of the Writers' Union of the U.S.S.R. and a big boss of the Moscow Communist Party.

Son Andrei is no "dissident," but a top Soviet "Daddy's boy," who travels frequently to the West. And like Mikhalkov is Yevgenii Yevtushenko, the drunken Soviet poet, who presented in Venice his first movie—*Kindergarten*—a semi-autobiographical film about the war period in the Soviet Union, the suffering of Mother Russia, her hungry children leaving Moscow, encircled by the Germans, for Siberia. Yevtushenko declared that he defines himself as a progressive D'Annunzio, referring to the most flamboyant of all the Italian fascist poets. His movie is a "pacifist" one, Yevtushenko declared, reminding his audience that the U.S.S.R. lost 20 million people during the war—but neglecting to credit Stalin and his pact with Hitler for those deaths.

The Nazis and Mussolini

Worst of all was Edgar Reitz's *Heimat* (*Homeland*), a 16-hour extravaganza which has been broadcast as a serial on German television. The film was "accepted" in Venice following an appeal by the principal German film directors: "*Heimat* represents all of us, it is the real meaning of our fatherland." *Heimat* begins in 1919, telling the story of a veteran of the first World War and his peasant family, as they live through the Nazi regime, World War II and the postwar period. Pornography is a central feature of this huge "pizza."

That this film should purport to represent the history of the Germans is a pure fraud: German history is not a Berlin brothel or a particular flower along the Rhine. It was certainly no coincidence that *Heimat* was shown almost alongside the monstrous *Wundkanal: execution in four voices*, by the German director Thomas Harlan. This cinematographic perversion brings us directly to the point: fascism.

The film portrays the interrogation of a banker (Hans Martin Schleyer) by "revolutionaries" (the Red Army Fraction, or Baader-Meinhof Gang) in an underground prison. The role of the banker is played by an authentic, confessed war criminal, Alfred F., who was responsible for several thousand executions of Jews in Poland and Lithuania in 1941,

remained underground until 1950, then became director of a bank, was arrested and condemned to life imprisonment in 1959, and finally freed in 1977 for "health reasons." In the film, the old Nazi undergoes a wild interrogation by Harlan personally, who forces him to watch parts of the movie *Immensee*, directed by his father, with the main role played by his mother-in-law, Kristina Soderbaum. This movie was presented at the Venice Mostra in 1942, but Alfred F. had seen it previously, in exactly the place where he was carrying out mass executions. The film builds into a crescendo of sadistic, Nazi cinematographic torture.

One disgusted critic was moved to write: "That man [Alfred F.] is a criminal, but the worst Nazi is the film director." How true! Thomas Harlan is the son of the famous Veit Harlan, the number-one film director of the Nazi period, who died in 1964 in Capri, the author of films like *Der Herrscher* and *Suss der Jude*. Thomas Harlan's former wife and co-producer of this film, Luisa Orioli, recalled: "Goebbels wanted toy shops to open in the middle of the night to give Thomas a small train as a present. He was the lucky son of the Nazi power."

Alongside the ultra-Nazi *Wundkanal*, the Venice festival featured the Italian fascist movie *Claretta*, by Squitieri, about Mussolini's famous lover. Publicity for this squalid production was provided by "antifascist" members of the jury, like Yevtushenko, Günther Grass, R. Alberti and Josepphson, who handed down the verdict: "This movie is fascist." The preprogrammed counterreaction came from the authors, who began to scream about "Stalinist censorship," and said that the real fascists were those self-proclaimed antifascist members of the jury. The mutual accusations went on for several days, dominating the front pages of Europe's press, and reopening a "debate" about fascism, the Italians' ability to discuss it civilly after 40 years, and so on.

The result is that now Italians are flocking to the theaters where *Claretta* is being shown, while the Communist administration of Rome has dressed up the Colosseum like a *Balilla*, with a show on the "fascist economy" of the 1930s. Film director Squitieri declared to the press: "Claretta represents the consensus view of the Italians toward Mussolini, which must be discussed. . . ."

To hammer home the fascist message, another Italian movie was presented, *Uno scandalo perbene*, a film with the same story line and the same title as a movie done in 1940 about a scandal that broke out during the fascist period; only the new version has a lot more pornography.

The Italian Communist Party, like Mussolini, knows very well how to use the cinema to control and brainwash the masses: A movie made by 39 communist directors, was presented about the Communist Party's March on Rome of last March 24. At the "post-modern" festival of the communist paper *Unità* in Rome about the same time, a necrophiliac movie was shown about the death and funeral of party chief Enrico Berlinguer.

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