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*Film Theory/Film History*

*In Memory of Miriam Hansen*

Giaime Alonge and Giulia Carluccio, eds.



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The Reconfigurations of the Young Gary Cooper*

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To write the international history of classical American cinema... is a matter of tracing not just its mechanisms of standardization and hegemony but the diversity of ways in which this cinema was translated and reconfigured in local and translocal contexts of reception.<sup>1</sup>

What Miriam Bratu Hansen proposed in “The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism” is true and fruitful more than ever. If we bear in mind the vast spread of that cinema and the wide span of time involved, we can realize that the grounds for analysis are extremely broad and varied. Hence we should identify some focused local contexts in order to follow Hansen’s advice, even in relation to what she points out further:

As systematic as the effort to conquer foreign markets undoubtedly was, the actual reception of Hollywood films was likely a much more haphazard and eclectic process, depending on a variety of factors. How were the films programmed in the context of local film cultures, in particular conventions of exhibition and reception? Which genres were preferred in which places..., and how were American genres dissolved and assimilated into different generic traditions, different concepts of genre? And how did American imports figure within the public horizon of reception which might have included both indigenous products and films from other foreign countries?<sup>2</sup>

Although Hansen does not say it directly here, what is true without a doubt is that stars play a leading role in the reception of classical Hollywood cinema. The photos of the stars are the photos on the passports of the major studios that began to “invade” the international markets from the time of the First World War on.<sup>3</sup> As we know, the

<sup>1</sup> Miriam Bratu Hansen, “The Mass Production of The Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism,” in Christine Gledhill, Linda Williams, eds., *Reinventing Film Studies* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), 341.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> See Christine Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment. America in the World Film Market 1907-34* (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 1985); Victoria De Grazia, “Mass Culture and Sovereignty: The American Challenge to European Cinemas, 1920-1960,” *Journal of Modern*

beginning of the crisis in Italian film coincides with the World War I years and the 1920s are marked by the inexorable advance of American cinema, the rise of their stars and the almost complete dismissal of Italian stars.<sup>4</sup> Although looked at with distrust, Hollywood is “a vision that enchants,” as declared in the title of a book by Umberto Colombini that was published in 1929.<sup>5</sup> This essay concentrates on the context of Italy and on the reception of one star in particular – Gary Cooper. One of the many possible fields of research that follow the suggestion of Miriam Hansen is that of the career of Gary Cooper from 1927 to 1932 – i.e. from the release of his first films in Italy to his first trip to Italy. If we go through some of the popular periodicals and film magazines of those years,<sup>6</sup> we can reconstruct a career that very well exemplifies two phenomena. Firstly, the processes underlying the spread of Hollywood cinema are haphazard and eclectic. Secondly, the two cultural contexts – American and Italian – entered into a relationship with each other and, in fact, negotiated a star identity for Gary Cooper.<sup>7</sup> As we can see, the Italian press acknowledged the figure of the young Paramount star. To a certain degree, the press did this passively. To another, it remodeled the figure of the emerging star in order to construct a figure that would respond to the socio-cultural context of the early years of the 20-year Fascist rule, to the needs of the market, and to the public of that era.<sup>8</sup> These years right before the introduction of sound were marked by the economic crisis, by the debate over the so-called “Renaissance,” and by the gradual working out of the Fascist regime’s policy on cinema.

During these years, the young Cooper was one of the new American stars who was able to arrive in Italy successfully and enchant our audiences through the merits of a promotional strategy that was not aggressive but effective. The blue-eyed kid with the

*History*, 61, March 1989, 53-87; Lorenzo Quaglietti, *Ecco i nostri. L'invasione del cinema americano in Italia*, (Roma: Eri Edizioni Rai – Biblioteca di Bianco e Nero, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> See Gian Piero Brunetta, *Cinema italiano fra le due guerre. Fascismo e politica cinematografica* (Milano: Mursia, 1975), 19. For the myth of America in Fascist Italy, see Vito Zagarrìo, *Cinema e Fascismo. Film, modelli, immaginari* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Umberto Colombini, *Hollywood, visione che incanta* (Torino: S. Lattes & C. Editori, 1929). See also his *Il mito di Hollywood* (Milano: La Prora, 1931).

<sup>6</sup> This research was done by examining the periodicals housed at the *Bibliomediateca Mario Gromo del Museo Nazionale del Cinema*. The review of a portion of the periodicals was conducted in collaboration with Roberta Picco, student at the *Dams* degree program at the *Università di Torino*, whom I would like to thank.

<sup>7</sup> For an analysis of the relationship between the star system and Italian society in the Fascist period, see Gundle, “Film Stars and Society in Fascist Italy,” Jacqueline Reich & Piero Garofalo, eds., *Re-viewing Fascism: Italian Cinema 1922-1943* (Bloomington-Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 315-339.

<sup>8</sup> Raffaele De Berti dedicated many studies on film paratexts and Italian magazines in relation to the role played by periodicals in the spread of American cinema in Italy. He underlined how the periodicals played a role “that was not passive at all and was not just that of publicity vehicles. They played active roles in the effort to adjust American cultural models and make them acceptable inside Italian tradition.” Raffaele De Berti, *Dallo Schermo alla carta. Romanzi, fotoromanzi, rotocalchi cinematografici: il film e i suoi paratesti* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2000), 3.

thin frame did embody an “American type,” but as long as his identity was still a bit hazy, somewhat uncertain, his American nature was put forward in a way that would not be an open threat to the stalwart defenders of the Italian nature of our cinema.

### *1. A Name without a Face*

The name of Gary Cooper began to appear in Italian magazines in the second half of 1927. His was one of the names of artists at *Films Paramount, Società Anonima Italiana*, whose announcements and publicity pages promoted the “grandiose productions of the up-coming season.” His name began to be mentioned in little articles as part of a cast made up of actors already known to the Italian public. His name was often mentioned in connection with Lido Manetti, an Italian actor who had immigrated to Hollywood and signed a contract with Paramount. In that year Manetti took part in the shooting of John Waters’s *Beau Sabreur*, which was to be released in Italy with the title, *Lo sciabolatore del Sahara* in 1928.<sup>9</sup> The first film of Gary Cooper to be released in Italy was *The Winning of Barbara Worth / La vittoria di Barbara Worth* in 1927 directed by Henry King and produced by Sam Goldwyn and featuring the leading actors, Vilma Banky and Ronald Colman. In the United States, where the film was released in October 1926, the appearance of Cooper attracted a great deal of attention<sup>10</sup> and managed to get Paramount to offer him a contract. The critics and the public in Italy were not particularly struck by the young actor, who seemed to pass by unobserved.

The most significant event of 1927 was the clamor raised by the shooting of William A. Wellman’s *Wings*, featuring Clara Bow, Richard Arlen and Charles Rogers, with Cooper playing only small role. The film, which was publicized as “a marvel of cinema” with its spectacular aerial photography, was launched with high-sounding tones in Italy.<sup>11</sup> *Wings* found a context that was particularly receptive and friendly in the Italy of Mussolini. In fact, “aviation represents a new topic,” and the film “is the most glorious re-evocation of aviation glories, which consecrates mechanical greatness.”<sup>12</sup> Cooper plays a cameo role as the cadet White who dies during an exercise, appearing on the screen for less than three minutes. Even so, he was able to reap the benefit of Paramount’s great promotional bandwagon, which contributed to making his name resound around magazine pages much before *Wings* was released. The Italian press,

<sup>9</sup> See Lido Manetti alla “Paramount”, *Al cinema*, 49, December 4, 1927, 4.

<sup>10</sup> See my *Gary Cooper. Il cinema dei divi, l’America degli eroi* (Recco: Le Mani, 2011), 40ff.

<sup>11</sup> See *Il cinema italiano*, 12, June 15, 1927, 3 and *Cinema Star* (*Kines* supplement), 19, July 24, 1927, 6: “The film looks like it will be formidable. It is the reconstruction of the implacable air war fought on the French front. It was as demanding and costly as any film that could be undertaken on the topic of war, and needed the ponderous organization of Paramount to make it.”

<sup>12</sup> Film advertisement, in *Cinematografo*, II, 22, November 4, 1928. Italo Balbo and other high-ranking Air Force officials attended a private screening of the movie at the Littorio airport in October 1928.

in fact, limited themselves to publishing what came to them directly from the offices of Paramount Italy. Even doing so, they made it so that the name of Cooper, from the first time it appeared, was solidly anchored to the Paramount brand and appeared next to already renowned names such as Adolphe Menjou, Harold Lloyd, Eddie Cantor, Emil Jannings, and Wallace Beery. The Italian public of 1927 had probably memorized the name of Gary Cooper, but did not yet know anything about the young actor. Moviegoers had to wait until 1928 to see *Wings* in their theaters as well as the other films exported by Paramount. Not only this, they had to wait to find out some details about his life and career. Thanks to the photos that portray him (on-set shots and promotional portraits), which began to be published on those pages, it became possible to associate Gary Cooper with a face and a body.

## 2. *Without the West*

The choice of films and the order in which they are released in Italy is one of the primary factors to take into consideration in relation to the reception of the actor. In 1927 Cooper was involved in three westerns – *Arizona Bound*, *The Last Outlaw* and *Nevada*. Even so, none of these were distributed in Italy the following season. Although the young actor had signed a contract with Paramount in the summer of 1926,<sup>13</sup> the studio had not yet worked out a strategy on how he would be used. The Italian public saw a Cooper on the screen in 1928-29, one who was somewhat halved in relation to the one seen by the American public in his debut. The American public began to get to know him dressed as a cowboy, taking advantage of his Montana origins his experience as a boy on a ranch. In fact, the western was first identified as “Gary Cooper’s new Paramount vehicle.”<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, the Italian public first saw him stripped of his hat, gun belt, lasso, and boots. In 1928 he made a total of six films, but only two of the three that he starred in with Clara Bow were released – Frank Lloyd’s *Children of Divorce* and Clarence Badger’s *It*.

At the beginning of 1929 Paramount officially launched the actor in Italy not only through *Wings*, but mainly through William A. Wellman’s *Legion of the Condemned* and *Beau Sabreur*. Cooper played the leading roles as a flyer “in a film of intense emotions and of the most vibrant passion”<sup>15</sup> and as a French foreign legionnaire “who shines in his courage and incredible bravura in swordplay.”<sup>16</sup> There was a great impression on the press and a

<sup>13</sup> See my “What is a Gary Cooper? La Paramount e le incertezze nella costruzione di una star”, *Agalma*, 22, October 2011, 82-90.

<sup>14</sup> See *The Last Outlaw* Press Sheet, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

<sup>15</sup> Film advertisement, in *Cinematografo*, III, 3, February 3, 1929.

<sup>16</sup> Paramount advertisement, in *La rivista cinematografica*, IX, 12, June 30, 1928. For the emphatic and sensationalistic nature of film publicity, see Elena Mosconi & Roberto Della Torre, “Consumo cinematografico e funzioni sociali del cinema: critica, dati di consumo e mani-



great audience success, an impression that contributed greatly to defining the shape the rising star was to take. In the eyes of the public, his character was that of a man in uniform, of the fearless hero who discovers love in the end. The Italian promotion of Cooper could not help but stride side by side with the releases of the films. At first, it deprived Cooper of a basic component of his *star persona* – his being an authentic son of the west, naïve and sometimes carefree, someone who can handle horses and guns. Without the westerns, Cooper is “simply” a young and promising American actor with a “masculine physique” who is involved adventurous and romantic enterprises. Thus when the Paramount promotional strategy presented the biography of the actor, it went so far as to give another definition to the features his American nature. Bereft of what could have appeared too foreign (the Wild West, in this case) in the figure of Cooper, the strategy brought other elements to the fore, elements that could more easily be understood, elements that were universal, as it were – first of all, his youth, then his talent for drawing,<sup>17</sup> and then his rapid rise into the empyrean of the stars.

One of the first articles dedicated to the actor and his partner Fay Wray appeared in 1928 entitled “The Lightning-like Career of two Actors”:

the artistic career of Gary Cooper, in turn, has been no less fortunate and less rapid. Caricaturist and artist of unusual ability, he happened one day to go up to the stage manager B. P. Schulberg, who was looking for a leading man for his grandiose Paramount film, *Beau Sabreur*. Impressed by the masculine physique and expressive face of Cooper, he did not hesitate one instant and offered him the role of leading actor.... Today Gary Cooper, along with Fay Wray, by now are confirmed artists over whom fame has already held sway. They make up a couple of the most original and most interesting actors both because of their physical and artistic qualities and because of their lightning-like ascent into the firmament of Hollywood, which has something wonderful about it.<sup>18</sup>

The article is an interesting mix of confirmed facts and promotional emphasis, where what counts consists in presenting the new stars and giving the public some

festi”, Mariagrazia Fanchi & Elena Mosconi, eds., *Spettatori. Forma di consumo e pubblico del cinema in Italia 1930-1960* (Roma: Biblioteca di Bianco & Nero, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> “There are very few people among the innumerable admirers of the “stars” and, generally, of the artifices of cinema, who know that many of them owe their fortune to another artistic manifestation... Even Gary Cooper owes his entrance to the family of stars to drawing. He was an artist for periodicals in a little city in the ‘Middle-west’ when it came into his mind that he could use his talent at a movie studio for comical cartoons. He was hired by Paramount and one day he was called to substitute an actor who was sick and they noticed the he had the talents of an actor.” E. Mc Farrel, “La cinematografia ed il disegno”, *Cine Mondo*, III, 36, March 20, 1929, 20.

<sup>18</sup> *La rivista cinematografica*, IX, 6, March 30, 1928, 11 [The same article appears in *Al cinema* (14, April 1, 1928) and in *Cine Mondo* (13, April 5, 1928)].

evidence of a certain idea of how the overseas magic movie machine works. This reinforces the rhetoric typical of those years about the mirage of Hollywood – “the fabled land towards which the desire and yearning of multitudes point, dazzled by the mirage of fabulous earnings, quick celebrity, and sumptuous life,” as Arnaldo Fraccaroli described it.<sup>19</sup> Thus the parabola of Cooper becomes something marvelous and exemplary. He is young. (In reality, he is 27.) He has talent, not only for the cinema, but he is also lucky, with that luck that only Hollywood knows how to second with extraordinary speed. In fact, it is mainly the “rapid rise” of Cooper that is the promotional leitmotif in Italian magazines in 1928. For example, *Cine Mondo* describes Gary Cooper as “the very young Paramount actor who has learnt how to win over the favor of the public all over the world in a very short time.”<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, *Cinematografo* printed a photo of Cooper with the caption, “the latest revelation of Hollywood, the actor who has quickly won himself celebrity because of his ability but above all because of his very sweet look.”<sup>21</sup> Here we see again his quick success as well as his “very sweet look,” which would go on to define his Italian image clearly in the following years.

### 3. *The Good Kid Overcome by Love*

In the 1929-30 season more and more Gary Cooper films were being distributed in Italy. Likewise, his name appeared more and more in magazines, but the tone and the type of the articles varied, even markedly so, with repercussions on the then sketchy image of the new American star. The actor began to raise the interest of the Italian women moviegoers, who revealed their interest in the letters to the newspapers when they kept on asking for information about his private life and career.<sup>22</sup> These letters were followed by short articles that brought rather imaginary news about filmmaking that fed into the stereotype of Hollywood as a grandiose, exotic, and bizarre dream machine. Besides these short film stories,<sup>23</sup> which were often accompanied by several on-set photos, his films were reviewed, often more than once in the same newspaper according to the city where they were being screened, as if they were dealing with repeated performances of the same stage play. Critics showed a special good will towards the young actor, with whom they associated adjectives like effective,” “very good,” “worthy of the highest praise,” and “outstanding.”

<sup>19</sup> Arnaldo Fraccaroli, *Hollywood paese d'avventura* (Milano: F.lli Treves Editori, 1929), 3.

<sup>20</sup> “L'attività di Gary Cooper”, *Cine Mondo*, II, 23, September 20, 1928, p. 38.

<sup>21</sup> *Cinematografo*, II, 24, December 2, 1928, 15.

<sup>22</sup> “Your sister is mad about GARY COOPER?... And you are not trying to bring her to her wits, and, that is, tell her simply to have a more reasonable admiration,” Mino del Sorriso, in the column, “Tra di noi. Si risponde ai lettori,” in *Cine Sorriso Illustrato*, VI, 19, May 11, 1930, 13.

<sup>23</sup> On film stories, see Raffaele De Berti, “I film appassionanti. Breve storia dei cineracconti”, Emiliano Morreale, ed., *Gianni Amelio presenta: Lo schermo di carta. Storia e storie dei cineromanzi* (Torino-Milano: Museo Nazionale del Cinema-Il Castoro, 2007).

On their own part, the Paramount people were encouraged by the success of *The Legion of the Condemned* and *Beau Sabreur*, and so decided to offer John Waters's *Arizona Bound*, the first Western Cooper had starred in in 1927. This was right in the middle of the sound-film revolution. Thus, while Paramount was waiting for the Italian market to catch up and discover some solution for the problem of the foreign language, it decided to rehabilitate some of the films that they had initially excluded. Richard Wallace's *The Shopworn Angel* was released – in fact, the first sound film Cooper made. It became a “silenced film” in the wake of the censorship rule that mandated “to remove every scene dialogued or in any way spoken in a foreign language.”<sup>24</sup> There then followed the release of three films – George Fitzmaurice's *Lilac Time*, produced by First National, where Cooper stars alongside Colleen Moore; *Betrayal* by Lewis Milestone, a drama where he competes for the love against Emil Jannings; and Gregory La Cava's *Half a Bride*, a romantic story with a happy ending.

Obviously, Cooper's massive presence on Italian screens made it hard for Paramount get across a unified image and a precise typology for his personality and role.<sup>25</sup> In fact, he starred or co-starred in films with very different settings. He played a pilot, a yacht captain, an artist, and even a cowboy. Although his image as a man in uniform seemed to have faded partly, there was another image that served to create continuity and define his identity in a more clear-cut manner – the image that was being formed from the news about his private life that was reaching Italy. The Italian public was finding out that Gary Cooper, in private, was a reserved young man with sound principles bound to family values and living with his parents. He was a young man who also had a steady relationship with his fiancée Lupe Velez:

The three Coopers are now living in Hollywood in an old house, romantic as in days gone by, where Gary's mamma reigns sovereign, keeping everything in order even without the help of her parents. Gary has remained a big shy kid who cannot stand parties and too much noise, he stays home at night with his parents and there are always some guests... Gary is engaged to Lupe Velez, a beautiful Mexican woman... However, both he and his fiancée rightly believe that that their marriage is incompatible with their careers, and so they are waiting to get married the day that they have decided to retire from the studio for good. Then, as Gary plans, he will retire to his father's ranch and do everything he can so that his wife... will give him the gift of many little children.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> See Mario Quagnolo, *La parola ripudiata. L'incredibile storia dei film stranieri in Italia nei primi anni del sonoro* (Gemona: La Cineteca del Friuli, 1986). On foreign film censorship in the Fascist era, see Jean A. Gili, *Stato fascista e cinematografia* (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 1981).

<sup>25</sup> See Danae Clark, *Negotiating Hollywood: The Cultural Politics of Actors' Labor* (Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

<sup>26</sup> Jean Bart, “Gary Cooper,” *Cine Sorriso Illustrato*, VI, 17, April 27, 1930, 10. The article draws liberally from the information contained in an article entitled *After a Year of Fame* by Patsy

What solidifies Cooper's image as a young fiancé is the Italian release of *The Wolf Song*, a sentimental melodrama featuring several songs, in which Lupe Velez is Lola, a young woman from a good family who is head over heels in love with him. Meanwhile, Cooper is Sam, an adventurer, a hard unemotional guy. The film was promoted as "a song of love and loneliness." In an October 1929 review entitled significantly *Giovinazza* ["youth" and the title of a Fascist hymn], Umberto Masetti wrote:

The basic sensation that comes out of *The Wolf Song* is that of youth that bursts forth, rejuvenated in its power by the primitiveness of its protagonist. The spirit of youth – dreamy, restless, loving poetry and nature, and rebellious of the ties that life fatally imposes on all men – is incarnated in the character that Gary Cooper gives life to with a singular power of expression.... In the *clear eyes* of this magnificent actor we can see the reflections of the bright sky that challenges the highest mountaintops and kisses the illusionary borders of the borderless prairies. We can see his *characteristically masculine face*, one like few others, still gentle in its *roughness*, on which there are the *marks of the struggle he is waging to overcome the irresistible power of love*.<sup>27</sup>

In the end, as we can read in the emphatic tones of the film novel published in *Al cinemà*: "A look is enough to bring the two lovers together. Sam is dying and his eyes say the great sublime truth: he is conquered and he loves her."<sup>28</sup> His "very sweet look" has thus become the look of someone in love not only on the screen but in life.

#### 4. *The Torment of Gary Cooper*

"The face that Copper wears is strangely photogenic, tormented, and brightened by uneasy pupils,"<sup>29</sup> Raul Quattrocchi commented in his positive review of *The Legion of the Condemned* in *Kines*. The steady stream of gossip about his relationship with Lupe Velez give body and "real" connections to the statements about the torment that was beginning to mark the actor's face. Gary Cooper has by now definitely left behind his image, one that was very little individualized, of the handsome, lucky, young American. The "very sweet look" has turned into the "uneasy pupils" because of the restless spirit of a

DuBuis, which appeared in *Picture Play* September 1929. In addition, *Cine Sorriso Illustrato*, which paid a lot of attention to the sentimental relations between the two actors, had previously published the (false) news of their wedding (35, September 1, 1929).

<sup>27</sup> Umberto Masetti, "Giovinazza", *Cinematografo*, III, 20, October 13, 1929, 5. My italics.

<sup>28</sup> "La canzone dei lupi", *Al cinemà*, VIII, 24, April 6, 1930, 9. On the characteristics of the popular Turin periodical, see Antonella Angelini, "Alle origini del cineromanzo: note su 'Al cinema,'" Silvio Alovio, ed., *Cineromanzi. La collezione del Museo Nazionale del Cinema*, (Torino: Museo Nazionale del Cinema, 2007), 49-55.

<sup>29</sup> *Kines*, IX, 14, April 14, 1929, 4.

young man in love who is suffering is hiding behind the beauty of his “clear eyes.” The cause of his torment and his restlessness consists in the continuous stream of vexations that he subjected to by his lover. Apparently, what was being read in the Italian newspapers differed very little from what was appearing the American fan magazines, who were also intent on giving accounts of the ups and downs of the couple. However, if we really look more closely, we can see that the story was subtly altered, becoming one of the many examples of how the rather free-spirited behavior of the American movie stars, especially the female ones, were put across and stigmatized.”<sup>30</sup>

In this way Italian readers discover, “Hollywood never gets to see a smile on Gary Cooper’s face”<sup>31</sup>:

he has disappeared for the umpteenth time. Every once in a while he can be seen getting away from Hollywood in his red convertible without leaving a trace. Bad-minded people say that in *The Wolf Song* Lupe Velez had made a vagabond passion for mountain solitude rise up in him and then provoked such a desire to live his real life next to the woman he loved that he is now forced to seek out some succor for his immense suffering in his flights to far-away places!<sup>32</sup>

Cooper’s many flights followed one another and the reason always seemed to be his passion for Lupe Velez:

Gary Cooper has disappeared from circulation for the third time. Right after he finished *Seven Days Leave*, he got in touch neither with Paramount nor with the circles of friends he usually frequented. These sudden flights of the actor are causing a lot of worry in people. Some people say that it has always been his passion for Lupe Velez that has made him such a runaway.<sup>33</sup>

Much more than in the American version, Cooper, in his Italian version, becomes the good young man who is a victim of love, a victim of a woman temptress who is cruel and evidently little inclined to marriage. A good example of this interpretation is an article that appeared in the July 1929 issue of the *Leco del cinema*, a monthly published in Bologna is exemplary. At this time, rumors were circulating about a previous relationship with Clara Bow:

Poor Gary, it was really a pity that he was obliged to meet women only in the guise of some of the most fascinating, dynamic and explosive ladies of Hollywood. After

<sup>30</sup> See Victoria de Grazia, *Le donne nel regime fascista* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1993), especially 280-84.

<sup>31</sup> *Cine Mondo*, IV, 62, April 5, 1930, 31.

<sup>32</sup> *Cine Mondo*, IV, 55, January 5, 1930, 27.

<sup>33</sup> *Cine Mondo*, IV, 62, April 5, 1930, 31

all, certain young much with such antique illusions... antique for America, should not have gotten engaged to Clara Bow... the flapper type *par excellence!* *What is great is that Gary deeply believes, despite all of this, in sincere love even though he does not expect to find it* [my italics]. When people tell him that marriage, in the best of all cases, can become monotonous, he rebels against this with these words: "I know a married couple in Hollywood who have been together for four years. She is a foreigner and knows how men should be treated. She would kill her husband if he were unfaithful. They are the happiest people that I know. She protects him and he stays behind her as if he were a little boy. They play together like little kids. There is nothing monotonous in their everyday life because they know how to make it romantic. There is nothing that can ruin a love like this or make it common." It is sure that Gary really believes everything that he has said with such power and such... regret. And if it is true that he hopes to meet a girl like the one he described in Hollywood one day, then it is really true that if he picked the wrong city, he picked a really wrong one.<sup>34</sup>

Hollywood is not the right place to find a wife and poor Gary was being turned into a predestined victim of women who were too free and dominating. We should not be too surprised about the insistence on his pains of love when we consider reading between the lines of these articles, where we find space for an attitude that is hostile and often pejorative towards the myth of America and the world of Hollywood. The "bizarre antics of Lupe Velez easily lend themselves to being stigmatized from the moment we realize they put forward a model that is totally opposed to that which was being outlined for Italian women, who were destined for the "domestic hearth, confined to their destinies as mothers."<sup>35</sup>

At the same time, Cooper's torments may be the result of the deplorable behavior of the divas (and of American women, to be frank), but they also serve to reinvigorate the myth of Italic virility. The big overgrown American kid may be animated by good marital prospects and by "antique illusions," but he is too insipid, restless, and compliant to serve as a model for young Italian men. The cultural battle between Italy and the United States was also being fought on this level and on these pages, which were meant for a public including the lower classes, prevalently women. In fact, the illustrated film magazine is not a simple sounding box for the American film industry, as Raffaele De Berti has illustrated. The biographies of the stars and the goings on in Hollywood become an instrument for spreading a code of behavior that is "very coherent, where every transgression is shown off in order to confirm a system of rules and Italian social traditions that had already been consolidated."<sup>36</sup> In fact, in the news reports and the biographies of the lives of the stars, the censors' biggest worry has always been that of

<sup>34</sup> Gabriella Amati, "Hollywood, una dura scuola", *L'eco del cinema*, VII, 68, July 1929.

<sup>35</sup> See Victoria De Grazia, *Le donne nel regime fascista*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Raffaele De Berti, *Dallo schermo alla carta*, 49.

criticizing their overly reckless behavior and of underlining, instead, “the calls for the values of the family, love, and marriage as an inviolable bond.”<sup>37</sup>

The Velez-Cooper couple becomes a shining example of bad Hollywood behavior in regard to love affairs. As the decade went on and at the full height of his rise, Cooper is a melancholy, sad, and restless man who has little faith in women<sup>38</sup> and is sometimes almost pathetic. A good example of how the actor’s image is being defined in this way appeared in the *L’eco del cinema*:

There is no look like his look – penetrating and infinite. His eyes have a mysterious language that penetrates the heart and leaves you a trace of memory. There is no man like him who *holds in his look a story of pain and of a heart’s breakdown*. [My italics]

Oh Garry [sic]!

What were you thinking about when you lifted your pupils in that very sweet smile? In order to live the short life of glory on the screen, you may be regretting the games of your youth? Your first love, the one that you left in your far-away land? What are you carrying in your boyish heart? I do not know if it is only a dream of glory or a dream of love, but your face, in its perfect beauty, cannot hide a spirit that is madly in love with his dream!<sup>39</sup>

We have passed from his restless eyes to a look that holds sorrow and a “heart’s breakdown.”

### 5. *The Magnificent Barbarian Lands in Italy*

The good news finally arrived on August 30 1930:

Gary Cooper, that likeable actor from Paramount has regained his beautiful serenity and sworn that love would not take him away from his work, which is most

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> On this, see Gabriella Amati’s “Non fidatevi delle donne”, in *L’eco del cinema* (VII, 68, July 1929). In fact, this article is a rather free translation of “You Can’t Trust Women” an article by Elisabeth Goldbeck in *Motion Picture Classic* (6, February 1929). Interestingly, the two articles are presented with different layouts. In the American article, the text is accompanied by a photo of a smiling Cooper in the center of the page. In the Italian article, there is a photo of Cooper with a serious and pensive face accompanied by a caption not present in the American magazine: *Se nella vita vuoi trovar fortuna / fuggi la donna bionda e quella bruna / Donne vezzose ve n’è mille e una / donne sincere non ve n’è nessuna*. [The words of this popular ditty read: if you want to find your fortune in life / flee the women, blond and brunette / There are a thousand charming women and one / and of sincere ones, there are none.]

<sup>39</sup> Giuseppe Carci, “Il fascino degli occhi di due strane bellezze. Dolores e Garry”, *L’eco del cinema*, IX, 85, December 1930.



beautiful thing in life. We in Italy will see him this year in *Nevada*, a film that will give him a way to demonstrate his great talents as a precise and sensitive actor.<sup>40</sup>

Free from the torments of love, the actor can finally get back down to work. Besides, Paramount was worried about re-launching his image from the promotional point of view as the premiere of Joseph von Sternberg's *Morocco* was approaching. The figure of the bachelor and the conscientious actor is the most apt for the release of the first film of a German diva who has immigrated to Hollywood, Marlene Dietrich.

The years 1931-32 marked the definitive consecration in Italy of Gary Cooper as a star of the first order. What contributed to this substantially was a trip to Italy that the actor made in the summer of 1931. The phenomenon of an American star landing in Europe and visiting Italy had an illustrious and, to a certain extent, inimitable precedent – the grandiose, highly publicized and acclaimed trip that Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks made in 1926.<sup>41</sup> As demonstrated by the clamor that the most celebrated couple in Hollywood raised, their visit to Italy was a promotional operation that was useful for the Americans and the Italians as well. Besides, it was a way to establish a direct contact between the stars and the public. The stars from across the sea appeared in flesh and blood in front of cheering crowds. They met the authorities and film people. (Mary and Doug were even received by Mussolini.) They visited and praised the beauties of Italy and foresaw a shining future for the renaissance of Italian cinema. The regime welcomed the guests benevolently and treated them exceptionally. While this trip had been planned precisely in order to reinforce the position of United Artists on the Italian market, Cooper's trip was a private one, a vacation from Hollywood, and a kind of flight. Cooper's decision had solidified after a period of intense work, physical debilitation and growing disputes with Paramount. However, no news of their contractual arguments had reached Italy. According to the news reports, Cooper landed in Italy for a voyage of pleasure in June 1931, where he was received with great good will. This was not an accident because American stars have always been "remote and frustratingly out of reach"<sup>42</sup> of the eyes of their Italian fans but also of the very journalists who had been writing so much about them. A visit to Italy and the chance to see the creatures of the screen up close were factors that contributed to making the Hollywood myth more accessible.

The June 24 1931 issue of *Cinema Illustrazione* reported the news of Cooper's arrival in Naples, where "the reception he had in the social and artistic circles of the city of song filled him with enthusiasm." He declared that he was very glad that he had chosen such an enchanting city for the first leg of his trip. A little further we can read, "his youth passed by at an accelerated and intense rhythm and perhaps this is what marked his face

<sup>40</sup> *La rivista cinematografica*, XI, 16, August 30, 1930, 38.

<sup>41</sup> See Lorenzo Quaglietti, *Ecco i nostri. L'invasione del cinema americano in Italia*, 41-50.

<sup>42</sup> Stephen Gundle, "Film Stars and Society in Fascist Italy". Jacqueline Reich, Piero Garofalo, eds., *Re-viewing Fascism: Italian Cinema 1922-1943*, 323.



with that expression of virile power, the first feature of the actor's success."<sup>43</sup> Once he left his pains of love behind him, Cooper presented himself to Italians in a guise that was much different than the one that the illustrated magazines had been getting across up to a few months before then – a man of few words, but an ironic, curious and affable one. He was elegant but not affected, virile and extraordinarily tall. He was a star without any quirks. In the process of continuous negotiation that Italy establishes with the Hollywood myth, always balanced between fascination and skepticism, Cooper ends up playing the role of a cultural mediator, probably the best one so far that has reached Italy.

Cooper met several journalists in Rome, who added some significant comments to what the actor said. Eugenio Giovannetti wrote:

He travels for study and not for love... He wants to teach himself simply, like a good American who is thinking about getting a serious education for himself. He travels alone without secretaries or attendants of any kind, without any of the pomp that by now American stars have gotten us used to. Take a look at a man, I would say, a human being among so many arrogant stars! Take a look at a Hollywood that is much truer than the one that the European and American fans dream of. With all of its defects, American cinema is still founded on a robust moral health. The power of the American film industry is still entirely in this positive foundation of disciplined humanity... I do not know what my romantic female readers will say, but it seems to me that Gary Cooper has precisely the moral fiber fitting for his physique, that pure white sense of decency that distinguishes true from ostentatious masculinity.<sup>44</sup>

It was up to the flesh and blood Cooper to incarnate the healthy and morally whole face of Hollywood – no extravagance, no haughtiness, but dedication to work and discipline. America with the real-life features and the straightforward ways of Gary Cooper becomes less threatening, more “true,” and a little naïve. Ettore Prudenti met the actor June 22 1931 and walked around the streets of Rome with him. He wrote, “his is a calm wandering about in search of the most interesting points while, for me, the most interesting thing is to follow the agile motions of his robust body in his loose and comfortable clothes without any pretense of excessive elegance.”<sup>45</sup>

What leaks out between the lines of these articles is the Italians' attitude of paternalistic superiority of towards the American without culture and without history. Prudenti again recounts the words of Cooper who said he envied Ramon Novarro for

<sup>43</sup> “Gary Cooper in Italia,” *Cinema Illustrazione*, VI, 25, June 24, 1931, 2.

<sup>44</sup> Eugenio Giovannetti, “Gary Cooper. L'artista della Paramount in vacanza in Italia”, *L'eco del cinema*, IX, 93, August 1931, 16-17 (The article first appeared in *La gazzetta del popolo*).

<sup>45</sup> Ettore Prudenti, “Mezz'ora con Gary Cooper a Roma”, *Cinema Illustrazione*, VI, 26, July 1, 1931, 4.

having had the chance to stay in Rome during the shooting of *Ben Hur*, “intimately” experiencing “your grand ancient epoch.”<sup>46</sup>

The figure of the tourist, which is perfectly incarnated by Cooper, lends itself well to the balancing game, the constant negotiation between the old and the new, which becomes urgent the minute the star lands in Italy and starts walking down the streets of our cities. Italy submits to the fascination with the stranger. The journalist looks admiringly at the agile and trim figure of the American but, to come to his aid, the artistic beauties of Italy, its past glories, and the fullness of Italian life come forward. In Prudenti’s words, “I look at the tall figure that stands out against the wall – what a magnificent barbarian! For Gary Cooper too, Rome, the universal, would be a magnificent backdrop.”<sup>47</sup>

Handsome as a statue, Cooper looks yearningly at the

Monuments, women, *tagliatelle con le regaglie*, *Castelli* wine. An uninterrupted rosary of magnificent things! I’m certainly not even counting the museums and treasures of art. I am not competent enough to judge them and I am satisfied to appreciate what is within grasp of my simple senses.<sup>48</sup>

His simple senses, his barbarous actions are overcome with the beauties of our country even though he does not know how to distinguish their importance and beauty. There is a photo of Cooper taken during his visit to Rome on the left side of a page of *Cinema Illustrazione*. In the background there is the fountain of the *Naiadi*, the water nymphs, in Piazza Esedra. Why is this particular fountain in the picture? It is because, as Giovannetti tells us: “He came to Rome like a student who is a little naïve, stopping, despite his fatigue, to look at the fountain of the *Naiadi* in Piazza dell’Esedra. When they told him that Rome had even more beautiful fountains, he did not want to believe it.”<sup>49</sup>

Against the background of one fountain among many and not even the most beautiful one, Cooper looks like one tourist among many. This photo brings the Hollywood myth back to human proportions. Cooper is, in fact, much smaller than the monument behind him. This image functions as a mediator between provincialism and the diffidence of Italian reporters, on the one hand, and an America, which, thanks to Cooper, appears nearer, less aggressive, and less extravagant, on the other. It was no accident that his face would begin to appear more and more often on the covers of Italian magazines,<sup>50</sup> thus definitely opening the way for the success of the star and his films in Italy.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Eugenio Giovannetti, “Gary Cooper. L’artista della Paramount in vacanze in Italia”.

<sup>50</sup> See the covers of *Cinema Illustrazione* 13 May 1931 and 20 May 1931, of *Cine-Romanzo* 20 December 1931 and 14 January 1932, and *La rivista cinematografica* 29 February 1932.