
Between Mystery and Stereotypes: Sweden in Italian Films of the 1960s

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Résumé

In 1960s, Sweden (often standing for the whole Scandinavia) was still an exotic area for Italian public, included most intellectuals. The perception of an essentially different country led to several stereotypes, from the idea of a perfectly organized society to the image of a place where human relations were free from the compromises and the hypocrisy ruling in Southern Europe; this last trait was occasionally connected with a more profound experience of nature. Italian cinema explored in the Sixties all these and other features, from the comedy *Le svedesi* (1960, Swedish Girls) to the arguable and much discussed docu-film *Svezia Inferno e Paradiso* (1968, *Sweden Heaven and Hell*). In this context, a peculiar position is taken by the internationally awarded *Il diavolo* (1963, The devil), whose screenwriter, Rodolfo Sonogo, planned to represent Sweden as a sort of land of the future, certainly marked by a high degree of emancipation, but also – and likely above all – by an enigmatic sense of life, which was expressed by silence even more than by provocative conversations. The male protagonist, Alberto Sordi, already a star in Italy, acts as usual as the Italian macho in search of love affairs, but is humiliated during the whole film, while meeting with an irreducible otherness that leads to an almost unique case in his long career, so that this film might be even looked at as a parody of the Italian comedy itself. Another striking example of the image of Sweden at that time is represented by the docu-film *Nude, calde e pure* (1965, Naked, hot and pure), a French-Italian production that sets Swedish society in parallel with Polynesian one, while highlighting both similarities and differences between a very modern world (already in the future!) that is somehow looking back to primitive values and freedom and an ancient and nearly untouched world that is rapidly experiencing modernity, respectively; however naïve, controversial and tendentious, this film remarks – or even builds up – the exoticism of Sweden for Southern Europeans.

Mots-Clés: Image of Sweden, Italian cinema, Stereotypes on Scandinavia in 1960s, Scandinavian exoticism and mystery

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