Elite vs. Popular Antiquity: Helen of Troy and Metacinema in *Carnaval Atlântida*

Anglophone studies of Helen’s celluloid afterlife (Cyrino 2007; Roisman 2008; Blondell 2009; Winkler 2009: 210-50; Malamud 2013; Vivante 2013; Nikoloutsos 2016) have focused exclusively on American and European productions, overlooking her reception in Latin American cinema. The paper seeks to remedy this critical omission by calling attention to *Carnaval Atlântida*, a Brazilian *chanchada* (low-budget satire of Hollywood blockbusters that features musical interludes) directed by the master of the genre José Carlos Burle for Atlântida Cinematográfica, a Rio de Janeiro-based studio that dominated the domestic market for over two decades. Released in late 1952, but never internationally, *Carnaval Atlântida* is a film about filmmaking and offers a metacinematic look at the mechanisms and individuals involved in the recreation of antiquity on the big screen. Director Cecílio B. de Milho (a parodic hint at Cecil B. DeMille, as *milho* means corn) sets out to produce the first Hollywood-style epic of the sound era about Helen of Troy and enlists Classics professor Xenofontes (played by the famous comedian Oscarito) to write the script and serve as the academic advisor for the project.

The paper will focus on a scene early on in the plot that takes audiences behind the cameras and illustrates the clash between the elite and the popular respectively represented by the director, an upper-class man of European origins, and the scene’s internal viewer, an Afro-Brazilian janitor played by Grande Otelo, an iconic figure of the *chanchada*. When the latter suggests a mulatta for the role of Helen, de Milho dismisses the idea as “barbarous” and incongruous with the “aesthetic of universal beauty”. Through a close reading of the set, props, costumes, and lyrics the paper will demonstrate how the scene establishes and simultaneously undermines a dichotomy between black and white, high and low culture, Hollywood and Brazilian cinema.

**Word count:** 298 (excluding title)
Bibliography


Audiovisual Aids

If the paper gets accepted for presentation, I will need a projector to show the short excerpt of the film I will analyze. The DVD is not available in the USA, but I plan to distribute a handout with an English translation of the Portuguese script.