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**THE TRANSGRESSIVE DISCOURSE OF ROWLAND BROWN'S
CINEMA (1931-1933):
A BRIEF CAREER IN PRE-CODE HOLLYWOOD**

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ABSTRACT:

This article consists in the analysis of the Rowland Brown director's film work and career, who was one of the first (if not the first) directors-screenwriters of Hollywood. He developed his career during Hollywood's pre-Code era and he only directed three idiosyncratic films linked to the *gangster* genre: *Quick Millions* (1931), *Hell's Highway* (1932) and *Blood Money* (1933). There were a great number of reasons why he was thrown out from Hollywood and he was not allowed to return to direct, among them the highly transgressive and critical discourse of his cinema. Despite of the singularity and originality of his film work, today Brown is a forgotten figure, only recognised by a prestigious group of film historians. His cinema has not been studied thoroughly yet. The final aim of this article it to contribute to filling this gap in the History of Cinema.

KEY WORDS: Rowland Brown – Classical Hollywood cinema – Pre-Code period (1930-1934) – *Quick Millions* (1931) – *Hell's Highway* (1932) – *Blood Money* (1933) – *gangster* genre

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EL DISCURSO TRANSGRESOR DEL CINE DE ROWLAND BROWN (1931-1933): UNA BREVE CARRERA EN EL HOLLYWOODPRE-CODE

RESUMEN:

El presente artículo consiste en el análisis de la obra y trayectoria filmica del cineasta Rowland Brown, uno de los primeros (si no el primero) directores-guionistas de Hollywood. Desarrolló su carrera en el periodo Pre-Code y tan solo realizó tres idiosincráticas películas vinculadas al género *gangster*: *Quick Millions* (1931), *Hell's Highway* (1932) y *Blood Money* (1933). Numerosas razones contribuyeron a que fuera expulsado de Hollywood y no se le permitiera volver a dirigir, entre ellas el discurso enormemente transgresor y crítico de su cine. A pesar de la singularidad y originalidad de su corpus filmico, en la actualidad Brown es una figura olvidada, tan solo reconocido por un prestigioso grupo de historiadores cinematográficos. Su cine todavía no ha sido estudiado en profundidad. Este artículo tiene como fin último contribuir a suplir esa laguna de la Historia del Cine.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Rowland Brown – cine clásico de Hollywood – periodo Pre-Code (1930-1934) – *Quick Millions* (1931) – *Hell's Highway* (1932) – *Blood Money* (1933) – género *gangster*

1. INTRODUCTION

Rowland Brown -playwright, director, screenwriter and author of original stories for the cinema is a cult figure of classical Hollywood cinema. In the words of Don Miller (1971, p. 43), a real *auteurmaudit*. The main reason: directed only three films - groundbreaking and daring - *Quick Millions* (1931), *Hell's Highway* (the road to hell, 1932) and *Blood Money* (1933) - all of them Pre-Code² and belonging to the *gangster* genre, and did not directed again; and suddenly he disappeared almost completely from the screen.

Even more important, he not only directed them, but also wrote them. He was co-author of the original stories of two of them, *Quick Millions* and *Blood Money*, and was the co-writer of the three, something totally unusual at the time. In fact, he began as a screenwriter and playwright and made the leap to direction. Thus, he was

² By Pre-Code it is understood the American films made from 1930 to 1934, during which the films enjoyed unusual freedom because to the real absence of self-censorship the new power of the spoken word was added. In fact, although the film self-censorship existed since 1922, with the creation of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), Hollywood began not to censor firm until July 1934, with the establishment of the PCA (Production Code Administration) which rigorously applied the Motion Picture Production Code (1930). Both MPPDA as the Hays Code popularly Office and Hays Code named due to Will Hays, who took the direction of the MPPDA from 1922 to 1945.

one of the first (if not the first) who assumed the dual role of director-writer, long before the more famous and generally credited for having taken that step, Preston Sturges, John Huston, Billy Wilder and Joseph L. Mankiewicz. Consequently, his films, unconventional and impressive, are their personal expression.

Despite the remarkable quality of his films, their value as critical works and different from the usual product generated by Hollywood, to his pioneering work as writer-director and to the not inconsiderable distinction of having been nominated twice for an Oscar of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) -the first for his original story *The Doorway to Hell* (the path of crime, Archie Mayo, 1930) and the second by that of *Angels with Dirty Faces* (Angels with dirty faces, Michael Curtiz, 1938) -, Rowland Brown is a forgotten figure. His acknowledgement is limited to a prestigious small group of historians who have included him in larger works, such as manuals of the History of Cinema or Dictionaries of directors, which include Paul Rotha and Richard Griffith (1964), Lewis Jacobs (1972) John Baxter (1973), Richard Koszarski (1980), Bertrand Tavernier and Jean-Pierre Coursodon (1997) and Martin Scorsese and Michael Henry Wilson (2001). As for the in-depth studies and analysis about his work, they are practically nonexistent. Not a book published or dissertation devoted exclusively. And only two texts to highlight: an article of rather biographical nature in *Focus on Film* (Miller, 1971) and a chapter which extends to a volume of five directors (Tibbets, 1985). Finally, we also believe it is appropriate to mention an article by Gerald Peary (1976) in *The Velvet Light Trap*, because, although it refers exclusively to *The Doorway to Hell*, has a significant impact on the work of Brown as a writer.

Part of this historiographical neglect is related to the inaccessibility of their films. *Quick Millions*, *Hell's Highway* y *Blood Money* have been very difficult to see for decades, ever marketed in VHS and numbered passes on television in the United States. Of the three, at the time of writing of this text it has only *Hell's Highway* released on DVD and its release is recent. It was distributed for the first time in Spain curiously, by Vertex in March 2014 and in October 2015 was released in North America in the pack TCM Archives. *Forbidden Hollywood Collection*, Vol. 9, Warner Archive Collection. *Blood Money* *Quick Millions* y continue without being commercially available mode.

On the other hand, with regard to Rowland Brown, everything goes into the darkness and mystery. Actually, very little is known about him and much speculated about why his career was cut short so abruptly. Most authors are inclined to point out one fact, which, however, is not proven and is part of the legend of the director: he punched a senior executive of Hollywood, which destroyed suddenly his career (Rotha and Griffith, 1964, pp 354-355; Miller, 1971, p 43; Baxter, 1973, pp 99, 182; Tibbets, 1985, p 180; Tavernier and Coursodon, 1997, p 378; Scorsese and Wilson, 2001, pp 140-141; Maddin, 2007b, p 8). This alleged confrontation took place in 1936 and, true or apocryphal, the fact is that starting from 1937 he barely could return to work. He only managed to sell in a momentary fashion original stories to the studios, along with two late and isolated collaborations as co-writer and responsible dialogues and

additions, in *Johnny Apollo* (Henry Hathaway, 1940) and *The Nevadan* (Gordon Douglas, 1950), respectively collaborations.

Brown was an eccentric character that Hollywood took care to expel. His films are no less eccentric than its creator. Rightly, it has been compared with directors like Erich von Stroheim (Rotha and Griffith, 1964, p. 355) and Samuel Fuller (Tavernier and Coursodon, 1997, p. 378), with which remarkable parallels both historical and aesthetic are perceived.

2. OBJECTIVES

This research aims to study his work and film career, with the ultimate aim to deepen and publicize the idiosyncrasy, originality and transgressive speech of his films. To do this, we intend to specifically achieve the following objectives:

1. To contextualize his film work and provide a comprehensive overview of the same and its different creative facets.
2. To analyze his production.
3. To define the essential features of his filmic corpus.
4. To remedy the mistakes that have occurred in the bibliographical sources regarding facts of his career path and titles mistakenly included in his filmography.
5. To contribute therefore, to a filmography devoid of errors and closer to reality than the existing ones.
6. To examine the many causes that promoted that his career ended and were kept out away from the Hollywood studio system.

3. HYPOTHESES AND METHODOLOGY

To achieve these objectives, we have analyzed in detail the three films where Rowland Brown served as director and screenwriter, based on theme-plot, narrative and plastic factors, as well as their critical and commercial reception. Of his remaining works as a writer, fifteen in all, as a matter of accessibility, have been examined twelve *The Doorway to Hell*, *State's Attorney* (*The last accusation*, George Archainbaud, 1932), *What Price Hollywood?* (*Hollywood in the nude*, George Cukor, 1932), *The Robin Hood of El Dorado* (Joaquín Murrieta, William A. Wellman, 1936), *The Devils Sissy* (*The Devil's a Sissy*, WS Van Dyke, 1936), *Boy of the Streets* (William Nigh, 1937), *Angels with Dirty Faces*, *The Lady's from Kentucky* (Alexander Hall, 1939), *Johnny Apollo*, *Nocturne* (Edwin L. Marin, 1946), *The Nevadan* y *Kansas City Confidential* (*The fourth man*, Phil Karlson, 1952)³.

Since bibliographic texts have been few and brief, to contextualize his career and know his strained relations with the Hollywood industry we have carried out an

³ We could not see the following titles: *Points West* (Arthur Rosson, 1929), *Leave it to Blanche* (Harold Young, 1934, UK) and *Widow's Might* (Cyril Gardner, 1935, UK).

extensive consultation of news and newspaper articles of the time, especially from specialist film publications: *Film Daily*, *Hollywood Filmograph*, *International Photographer*, *Modern Screen*, *Motion Picture Almanac*, *Motion Picture*, *Motion Picture Daily*, *Motion Picture Herald*, *National Board of Review Magazine*, *New York Times*, *Photoplay*, *Screenland*, *Silver Screen*, *The Hollywood Reporter* and *Variety*.

Using this methodology, a combination of film analysis and consultation of historical documents and bibliographic of the period, will allow us to verify that the cinematography of Rowland Brown was characterized by its great individuality, manifested mainly by a strong thematic cohesion, focused on the criminality of the urban world of the underworld. In turn, we show that there is no single reason that explains the conclusion of his time as a filmmaker, but up to a total of six can be inferred.

3. DISCUSSION

Rowland Brown was born in Akron, Ohio, on November 6, 1900, and died in Balboa, California, on May 6, 1963, but almost everything else is uncertain. His professional profile in *Motion Picture Almanac* 1931 (. "Writers", 1931, p 226) and *Motion Picture Almanac* 1932 (. "Writers", 1932, p 192) reads as follows:

He came to Hollywood in 1928 and became a pawn in Fox; then props department boy and gag man. It provided ideas for several screenplays of other writers; then he became a writer himself; He wrote "*Doorway to Hell*" for Warner Bros., worked with Courtnay [sic] Terrett in "*Skyline*" for Fox and in 1931 signed with Fox and wrote "*Quick Millions*".

However, several of these data are wrong. The most significant error, because of its transmission to future texts (Tavernier and Coursodon, 1997, p. 379), is the mention of his participation in *Skyline* (*Skyscraper*, Sam Taylor, 1931), a confusion that results from that was one of the titles when filming *Quick Millions* ("*Rowland Brown's First*", 1931, p. 22). So *Skyline* should be completely excluded from Brown's filmography. Also, the layout omits his work as an expert in *gags* took place in Universal, where he was part of the team that elaborated the comedies of the star Reginald Denny. His first screenwriting credit came in that study, in 1929, with Hoot Gibson western *Points West*.

While still in Universal, Brown wrote a story that sold to Warner Bros. This led directly to fame and laid the foundations of his career. It was *A Handful of Clouds*, which became *The Doorway to Hell*, one of the most emblematic gangster films of the early 1930s. The footprint and responsibility of Brown in the final film, as we shall see, was enormous. According to Gerald Peary (1976, pp. 2-3), who claims that *A Handful of Clouds* was not a story but a play, he was also the author of the original script and at least another one later, before the script were modified (and purged of its political content) by George Rosener, which was recognized as the screenwriter. Thus, the strong connection with all subsequent filmic corpus filmmaker is explained. In fact, the film, though directed by Archie Mayo, is a draft of *Quick Millions*,

regarding the design of the main character, the situations, the plot and even the exact dialogue mechanisms.

The *Doorway to Hell*, inspired by the life of Al Capone, tells -like *Quick Millions*- the rise and fall of a gangster, Louie Ricarno (Lew Ayres). This is not the typical gangster; It has social, literary and historical aspirations (spends five hours a day writing the story of his life) and is obsessed with the organization of his business, with the idea of giving his illegitimate beer scam of a respectable facade. All this, and especially his vision of organized crime as a business, is repeated in *Quick Millions*. Initially, Ricarno brings the other leaders of bands of the underworld Chigago (an evocation of the Conference of Atlantic City in 1929, where Capone met with leading Mafiosi of the country) and presents its case: "We have a great business In hands. The only bad thing is that we need organization ... and we need a boss. I'll take care of both." In *Quick Millions* Bugs Raymond (Spencer Tracy⁴) tells a Mafioso colleague: "This is a big deal. You know, organization.... " The same phrases and concepts come out again and again in the two films, and even resurface in a later work of Brown that was not credited, *The Robin Hood of El Dorado*, where Joaquin Murrieta (Warner Baxter), joining a band of Mexican desperadoes, says, "Who's the boss? Don't you have a boss? There's the failure. You need a boss ... I'll be the boss."

Equivalences, similarities and parallels between *The Doorway to Hell* y *Quick Millions*, in particular, and the rest of Brown's work, in general, are numerous. Both Ricarno as Bugs come from the underworld and began as boys newsboys street, which explains his subsequent life of crime. Brown would address the issue of juvenile delinquency in impoverished neighborhoods specifically in three subsequent stories, which led to *The Devil's a Sissy*, *Boy of the Streets* and *Angels with Dirty Faces*.

On the other hand, the genuine and eccentric universe of Rowland Brown appears in two films by continued insistence on the dialogues about the luxury funerals of gangsters, a theme that is also included in the conclusion of both. At the end of *The Doorway to Hell* Ricarno it is cornered in a motel while their enemies await him outside to riddle him with guns. He gets his tie properly tied, puts a cigar in his mouth, looks at a portrait of Napoleon⁵ and leaves the room. After this the last page of his memoirs is displayed while the noise of a machine gun sounds. We are deprived of his murder, it goes in *off*, and in the written text it is read: "The boy went with his head high and a smile on his lips. He had a big funeral. So great that even stopped traffic" The narrative approach to the end of *Quick Millions* is the same. Accompanied by several gangsters of his band, Bugs is directed in a limousine to the church to abduct the society girl that has infatuated him, who is about to marry another. "Remove the elbow of my ribs," he tells to the one he has at his side. "It's not the elbow," he answers. One of the gangsters closes the curtain of the

⁴ It was his second film, after *Up the River* (Upriver, John Ford, 1930).

⁵ Another interesting aspect of the history of Brown is the assimilation of Ricarno with Napoleon, who is considered a modern equivalent, underscoring the megalomania of his personality. The inspiration came to Brown from the statements of Capone, who referred to Napoleon as "the greatest gangster of history" (Peary, 1976, p. 1).

limousine, gunshots are heard and it is cut to an image of the church. Again, we don't see the killing and when the limousine passes by, Bugs hat is thrown from the inside, rolling on the floor. "Those rich guys know how to organize good weddings!" says the driver. "Yes, but we have better funerals," says the partner.

Ricarno has a younger brother, who he protects and sustains and whose education is at a military academy ("War is big business!" is another phrase uttered over and over again). The film includes one scene where the little brother, fleeing from gangsters seeking to abduct him, is run over dead by a truck, a narrative element that Brown again included in the original story of *Boy of the Streets*⁶ and appears as such in the film.

Finally, the expression "*A Handful of Clouds*", the title of the story (or work) of Brown, explained in *The Doorway to Hell*, and a very similar variation emerges in *Blood Money*. In the first title, the right hand of Ricarno, Mileaway, played by a newcomer James Cagney⁷, says to another gangster: "If you do not care where you walk, you'll find a handful of clouds." "What do you mean by a handful of clouds?" he asks. "I mean those coming out of the barrel of a 38 automatic". In *Blood Money* the protagonist, Bill Bailey (George Bancroft), tells a cabbie, "Friend, would you like to do bubbles?". "What do you mean?", asked the driver. "Open that his big mouth, tell that to those flat feet and I will make one of my friends to put you in a bag and throw you into a river. Then you will make bubbles. "

The Doorway to Hell was so successful that in December 1930 Brown got a contract as a writer on Fox (Wilk, 1930, p. 3). The directors-writers did not exist at that time, but in January 1931 he managed for the production manager Winfield Sheehan to leave him play both roles ("*Rowland Brown's First*", 1931, p. 22).

Quick Millions was presented as a *Rowland Brown Production*, an emblem of prestige that implied a noted authority of the director leading the project and that no other of his works would show. The coining was amply justified because it not only was written and performed by Brown, but contributed to the continuity and mounting, reasons because of which the study rewarded him with a premium of \$1,000 (Char, 1931, p. 18). James Shelley Hamilton (. 1931, p 11) wrote about the film in National Board of Review Magazine:

Quick Millions is also the work of a newcomer, a talent as promising as had not been seen in a long time. His name is Rowland Brown and this is his first film. It would be a good movie if it had been done by anybody -but it is exceptionally

⁶ *Boy of the Streets* con On the other hand, the similarities in the history of Boy of the Streets with Johnny Apollo, a film that did not start from an original story by Brown, are extraordinary, especially in the conclusion.

⁷ This inaugural course influenced allocation for his subsequent role in *The Public Enemy* (*The Public Enemy*, William A. Wellman, 1931), which made him a big star.

remarkable to have been made by a young man from which nobody had never heard before.

However, he added: "It probably will not be a blockbuster: it is perhaps too distant and ironic and intellectual, without any of the qualities known as 'hook' that attract the attention of the masses." The author was right full. Cynicism, irony and political criticism dominate the film, and there is no character with which the viewer can be minimally identified. Even less with the main character, Bugs, cold as ice, an impenetrable subject that does not care about anything except the power, prestige and success, both socially and economically. Just notice the description he makes of himself: "I'm just a guy with some intelligence. Too nervous to steal, too lazy to work." The human side of Ricarno, who had a wife (we already said that he was a unusual gangster), took care of his little brother and had full confidence in Mileaway has completely disappeared in Bugs. It has neither friends nor love anyone. He is interested in a girl of society, but nothing makes one believe he's in love with her. His interest lies in getting the prestige it can bring him and the appearance of legality that yearns for his business. When she leaves him to marry another, he is resentful only because of his wounded pride.

The film tells the journey of Bugs from single truck driver to mafioso and ultimately a businessman who does not hesitate to extort anyone who crosses his path. As Ricarno, when he decides to leave the underworld, his former associates do not allow that and kill him. There is no love story, a symbol that all three Brown films share.

Of complete filmography of Brown, *Quick Millions* is the one that best establishes the connections between organized crime and the political, economic and judicial power, fundamental ideological content of his work that will reappear in *State's Attorney*, *Hell's Highway*, *Blood Money* and *Johnny Apollo*. Brown's message is axiomatic: the gangland is supported by the honorable pillars of society, judges and capitalists, all corrupt. None is saved. This is an unmistakably modern and present vision of society. It is understandable that it did not please the public.

In his study about the director, Miller (. 1971, p 43) states: "Brown had few social or political interests, if he had any ..." We cannot disagree more with the comment. In fact, according to Peary (1976, p. 3), Brown had written in one of the original scripts *The Doorway to Hell*: "The *gangsters* are actually an invention of the capitalists", a dialogue that was later deleted. In *Quick Millions*, where he kept full control, the same idea runs through the film, but especially emphasized towards the end, when the district attorney attacks the supposedly respectable businessmen who have supported organized crime. For Brown man is corrupt *per se* and, consequently, so is society, as it is bowed down to economic interests; there are no class differences in this regard. From first to last, rich and poor, all are vile. At the same time, this is a nihilistic and pessimistic enough view of society. And all this is presented in the film as well, with plenty of cynicism and irony.

"All the work of Brown has -artistic, visual, sexual and moral ... sophistication," wrote Martin Scorsese (2015). Indeed, it is so. Although Brown was a writer, not a stylist, in none of his films he neglected the plastic aspect. In *Quick Millions* stands out the

fragment in which Bugs buddy, Jimmy (George Raft⁸), kills a speaker without his consent. The planning of the scene, a picture angle shot taken from under the table, reveals artistic as well as narrative purposes; we are allowed only to see the feet of both and heard the shots. Again, he prevents us to see the murder. Also, Brown announces visually the end of Bugs; while talking to a policeman in his apartment, his image appears reflected in a mirror and is inscribed into an inverted pyramid, where Bugs occupies the lower vertex of the geometric shape, announcing his imminent fall.

Overall, *Quick Millions* received excellent reviews and was hailed as a different *gangsters* film (Crouch, 1931, p. 36. "*The Shadow Stage*", 1931, p. 56. "*Quick Millions*", 1931c, p. 85). Interestingly, its conciseness, its dramatic construction from short and often fast scenes (other times slows down) and its elliptical montage, qualities highly valued by historians (Jacobs, 1972, p. 277; Tavernier and Coursodon, 1997, p. 378), which were the ones that found major objections (Char, 1931, p. 18; "*Quick Millions*", 1931a, p. 10; "*The Shadow Stage*", 1931, p. 56). Silver Screen stated that it had been photographed exactly like a newscast ("*Quick Millions*", 1931b, p. 45). Now then it was a resounding financial failure.

After the premiere, Brown relations with Fox tightened. Although he was announced as director of numerous productions, none came to fruition. From *While Paris Sleeps*⁹ large posters with his name were printed ("1931 Fox 1932", 1931, p. 28). We believe that its wide dissemination is the cause of AFI Catalog of Feature Films (2016)¹⁰ putting him erroneously as screenwriter of the film. In May *Variety* informed that the reason of so many unsuccessful projects was because Fox had relegated him to the writers department as a disciplinary measure ("Roland [sic] Brown's" 1931, p. 3). He broke his contract and on July 2 signed with Universal ("Laemmle Signs", 1931, p. 8).

In this film maker the same thing happened. They re-shuffled many projects and did not direct any. In December, Universal ceded him to RKO as film director of John Barrymore *State's Attorney*, whose script was preparing his friend Gene Fowler (Meehan, 1931, p. 39). Brown's reputation as a hothead and problematic filmmaker

⁸Quick Millions was the first film of George Raft. Brown himself discovered him at the Brown Derby restaurant in Hollywood, when he had not yet made any films and was a professional dancer. According to Raft (Manners, 1932, p. 85), who recounted what happened in several interviews, two weeks after completing the filming he got a call to play an almost identical character in *Scarface* (*Scarface, the terror of the underworld*, Howard Hawks, 1932), that he will definitely catapulted to stardom. Undoubtedly, the facet of Brown as a discoverer of new talent is another outstanding feature. In *Blood Money* he made possible the debut of theatrical star Judith Anderson, who, after numerous tests to screen, had been rejected by Hollywood for her lack of beauty ("*Inside Stuff-Pictures*", 1933, p. 52). Anderson did not return to film until almost a decade later, when she held her remembered embodiment of Mrs. Danvers in *Rebecca* (*Rebecca*, Alfred Hitchcock, 1940). Not in Hollywood, but on Broadway, Brown was also the discoverer of Lauren Bacall -then called Betty-, to offer her first role on stage in his work *Johnny 2 x 4* (1942), written and produced by him and directed by Anthony Brown (Bacall, 2005, pp. 55-58).

⁹ *While Paris Sleeps* (*While Paris sleeps*, Allan Dwan, 1932).

¹⁰ From here cited as AFI Catalog

begins to take shape at this point. In early February 1932, the day of the start of shooting, left the set and left the film ("Hollywood", 1932, p. 6). According to AFI Catalog, he did that because the study refused to hire the cameraman Lee Games. Thus, contrary to the assertions by some authors (Miller, 1971, p 47; Tibbets, 1985, p 167), he did not film anything of the production. In March, *Variety* fostered his status as conflicting Director and reported that he had just received a suspension from Universal: "Since he directed '*Quick Millions*' for Fox, Brown has broken into a thousand pieces his contracts with Fox, Radio [sic] and Universal ... and he has not directed any film "(" Rowland Brown ", 1932a, p. 6). What is surprising is that in early April he signed a contract with RKO as director-screenwriter ("Rowland Brown", 1932b, p. 2). Equally surprising is that RKO decided to grant him credits as co-writer of *State's Attorney* and then he was included in the team of writers of *What Price Hollywood?* (*Hollywood naked*, George Cukor, 1932), one of the most important productions of the study.

State's Attorney contains abundant similarities with his previous work. It is a criminal lawyer dedicated to defending members of organized crime. The link between politics and power looms again, as they are the gangsters who raise him to the district attorney. When he decides to break away from the criminal life and honestly perform his duties, he is not allowed, as it happened to Ricarno and Bugs. In conclusion, the character confesses a life of juvenile delinquency and passing through a reformatory, which anticipates *The Devil's a Sissy*, *Boy of the Streets* and *Angels with Dirty Faces*. Although *What Price Hollywood?* was commissioned and a film in which many writers participated, Brown footprint is perceptible by the presence of a lesbian at the beginning, at the Brown Derby, an element presaging *Blood Money*. In addition, along with *What Price Hollywood?*, there are several films that Brown developed in the world of cinema or contain direct references to him: *Quick Millions*, *Hell's Highway*, *Blood Money* and *Nocturne*.

In late April 1932, RKO announced that Rowland Brown would lead *Hell's Highway* ("Dad Says", 1932, p. 6). The film describes the brutality and inhumane treatment of prisoners in southern camps where convicts were still subjected to forced labor in chains gangs. The issue of injustice in prisons, especially in the South, was red hot in 1931-32 mainly because of the true story of ex-con Robert E. Burns, who, after escaping a second time a penalty of Georgia, had just told his story in a book: *I Am a Fugitive from to Georgia Chain Gang!* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1932). His story was a major scandal over the inhumane conditions of the camps in the South, only place in the country where forced labor remained in force. Publications like *Harper's Magazine*, *The New Republic* and *The Nation* launched a campaign of condemnation, calling for a reform of the prison system (Davis, 2010, p. 410). Warner Bros. was preparing to film the story of Burns, and *Hell's Highway* was prepared in haste to David O'Selznick to forestall him at the premiere.

The film had a complicated production process. Brown began filming around June 20 and ended in record time of less than one month. However, on July 18, when he was out of the study (had moved to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer), RKO film returned to the stage filming for fear of a lawsuit for plagiarism from Warner. ("Revamp", 1932, p

34; AFI Catalog). To distance it from Burns case, they wanted to make cuts and include extra scenes from the topical at the time, which related to a tragedy occurred in a southern camp prisoners ("Revamp", 1932, p. 34). On June 3, 1932 Arthur Maillefert, a 19 or 22 years, had died in Sunbeam Prison Camp in Jacksonville, Florida, in a "sweat box" (sweat box), strangled by a chain around his neck and feet tied down with straps, and the case was the subject of a wide media coverage ("Revamp", 1932, p 34;. Meehan, 1932, p 16; Chic, 1932, p 21; Blaisdell, 1932, p. 33). John Cromwell rolled the retakes ("Revamp", 1932, p 34;. Wilk, 1932, p. 7; AFI Catalog).

In the film the prisoners build a road -the title of the film- ironically called "Liberty Road". Abused by sadistic guards, whipping them at the slightest sign of fatigue, before any disobedience they were confined to that case. This is a narrow cabin - similar to a coffin and certainly anticipatory, made of metal, to absorb heat, and deliberately exposed to the sun, where prisoners are chained by the neck and shackled by the feet to the death. The main motivation of the protagonist, Duke Ellis (Richard Dix), is elope, but changes her attitude when his little brother Johnny (Tom Brown) is brought on as a defendant. From that moment, all efforts are focused on preventing Duke Johnny is entered in the "sweat box" and can get out alive. Towards the end, the convicts mutiny and put to death the cruel prison director and his foreman. The authorities recruit locals to capture them, and the respectable citizens enjoy shooting them as if they were hunting animals. Johnny is injured, and Duke, though he knows he is exposed to the death penalty if he returns, takes him to the camp to receive medical attention.

However, the Brown film neither ended this way. The reviews of the time tell us that it ended with the brutal death of Duke, killed by a machine gun from a guard (McCarthy, 1932, p 35;. Chic, 1932, p 21;. "Hell's Highway", 1932b, p. 6; Blaisdell, 1932, p 33). After an ironic scene of several citizens included admiring the wonderful views of the road of freedom ("Hell's Highway" 1932c, p. 68). The film went so poorly in the preview that RKO ordered new deletions and another closure to minimize violence. In addition, there were many other cuts to appease the Hays Office, which sought to shift the responsibility of mistreatment of prisoners to a private contractor to exculpate the system (Black, 1998, pp. 149-150). The added footage is perceived easily, especially at first, very confusing, and in the end, clearly imposed, where the governor visits the camp and arrests the contractor for murder, responsible for the installation of the "sweat box". According to *Hollywood Filmograph*, Brown was so upset with the results that he asked his name to be withdrawn from the film ("Hell's Highway", 1932a, p. 7).

However, despite the cuts and scenes filmed *a posteriori*, the film retains the aroma of the best work of Brown and full of memorable moments. For example, the convicts wear a uniform with a big bull's-eye on the back, which made them a perfect target to shoot them if they tried to escape. The sadist field director mistreated prisoners during the day but spends his nights playing the violin, a touch that directly reveals Brown's hand. The desire of provocation of the filmmaker is also manifested by the presence of a homosexual prisoner. The manhunt of prisoners

contains scenes of great impact; the one who shoots Johnny is a young man of his age, which then runs embarrassed and horrified. The citizens who participate in the hunting give the halt to a deaf-mute prisoner, who therefore do not hear them and is shot in the back. At other times the narrative acquires a strong artistic tendency to relate certain facts by drawings made by blacks in their barracks, accompanied by their songs.

It released nearly two months before *I Am a Fugitive from to Chain Gang* (I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang, Mervyn LeRoy, 1932), the first film Hell's Highway fue condemned forced labor and cruelty of the southern camps. However, I soon was overshadowed by the film Warner. There are many causes that can clarify why, as the differences between them. Compared to tape LeRoy, it is incredibly cold. So while Burns is innocent, Duke is an unrepentant thief of banks, making it difficult to empathize and get public identification with the character. Both are veterans of the First World War, but Hell's Highway do not emphasize this heroic condition-beyond a single plane, whose function is informative. In addition, unlike *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*, Brown film lacks only a female protagonist and a young woman appears in a brief scene. Membership in the B series is another significant contrast. It was another resounding failure at the box office. Criticism repeated endlessly that was too brutal, could not be qualified as entertainment and was not suitable for children (McCarthy, 1932, p 35;. Meehan, 1932, p 16;. Hall, 1932, p 18; Chic, 1932, p 21; "Hell's Highway" 1932d, p 58;. "The Modern", 1932, p. 10; "Reviews", 1932, p 48)...

Brown in MGM did not direct any film. The rest of 1932 and much of 1933 passed the same, with many failed projects in almost all Hollywood studios: with Howard Hughes, Columbia, again at MGM, RKO, United Artists, Paramount, Warner, etc. His luck changed when in early June 1933 Darryl F. Zanuck acquired its history *Blood Money* ("DarrylZanuck", 1933, p. 3) for newly created production company 20th Century Pictures, which distributed through UA. In July it was announced that Brown would also direct ("*Dad Says*", 1933, p. 4). He introduced himself as Written and Directed by Rowland Brown¹¹.

Blood Money was his latest creation and is considered by many as his best achievement (Miller, 1971, p 43;. Baxter, 1973, p 97; Tibbets, 1985, p. 163). Scorsese (2010), in fact, places it in third place of his favorite gangsters films.. Certainly, Brown outdid himself and all he had done with *Blood Money*, which is the most subversive, daring and impressive of all his works, giving us another clue to why he was not allowed to direct again in Hollywood.

The protagonist is a man again, Bill Bailey, the guarantor of bonds holding close connections with the underworld - "How many gangster movies have a surety bond

¹¹ At the beginning we mentioned *Blood Money* as a co-written story by Brown because Zanuck also bought the story *Out on Bail*, "Speed" Kendall, to combine with it ("*Speed*' Gets", 1933, p. 3) .

as a protagonist" wrote Guy Maddin (. 2007a, p 8). In this regard, we could infer that much of the failure of Brown films was because, besides being devoid of love story, were strict and essentially masculine, and box office receipts during the era of the Depression in America depended especially the influx of female audiences to theaters. However, in *Blood Money* he presented two superb portraits of women, Ruby Darling (Judith Anderson), the owner of a nightclub with Bill maintained an intermittent relationship, but which is not in love, and Elaine Talbart (Frances Dee) certainly the most fascinating and enduring character of his filmography. Danny Peary wrote about it in *Cult Movies 2* (1983, p. 31): "There is no character in film history as Elaine. She has a fixation with crime, she is also kleptomaniac, nymphomaniac and sadomasochistic. She is excited by danger." Sometimes Elaine Brown seems a translation of himself. Notice the description her father makes of her: "A very nice girl. But he has too much.... "Imagination?" Bill proposes. "Imagination. That's! It has exaggerated a little imagination. It has a fixation with the criminal underworld. She is a fan of gangland films. She's always reading detective stories."

As happened with Ricarno and even more with Bugs and Duke, it is difficult to identify with Bill, because he is a former corrupt cop who lives to take advantage of the poor. Two visits to his office reveal his clientele, the kind of issues it handles and how he runs his business. First come a woman and her big and sinister son of sixteen, charged with rape of a woman of thirty-eight. "Sixteen?" Says Bill, laughing. "Well, you do not have to worry, kid. Absolutely. By the way, Mom, your home is your property?". The second is Elaine, accused of robbery in a department store. Since Bill has bugged the phones, quickly discovers that she is the daughter of a wealthy capitalist of Los Angeles and steals by emotion. As Ricarno and Bugs, Bill has social pretensions and as Bugs, soon falls in love with this young socialite. Even more so when after a while she teaches him unabashedly a lighter to have removed from his table. Elaine is a compulsive kleptomaniac. "She is different. It is unusual," says Bill to Ruby when she berates him to go behind a high-class girl. What Bill does not know is how different is Elaine.

The theme linking *Blood Money* with previous work of the director is very marked. Without exception, Ricarno, Bugs and Bill are rejected outright by the women who fall in love with or those in which they feel interest. To the first his wife is cheating on him with his best friend; the wealthy girl who Bugs courts barely tolerates him; and Bill, too, is abandoned by Elaine. He introduces her to Drury (Chick Chandler), the younger brother of Ruby, which is a bank robber (as Duke), and Elaine, realizing that this is a much more violent and dangerous subject, does not doubts in replacing and betraying him. This very negative view of what to expect from a woman - rejection, abandonment and betrayal- expresses a strong misogynist component in Brown and appears even in the only scene in *Hell's Highway* where women appear. Duke in the camp is visited by her mother, accompanied by Johnny's girlfriend; although it is the first time he sees her, lashes out at her: "Do you realize that 99 of every 100 men who are here have stolen for some lady? And they continue to steal for them." Society women will ruin Bugs and Bill. Because of Elaine, Ruby and Drury will believe that is Bill who has betrayed them and move the gangland against him. And that brings us to another story similarity that *The Doorway to Hell* as *Quick*

Millions and *Blood Money* share. The gangsters should not enter society or abandon their environment; if they do, well, the underworld will not tolerate it; the criminal life does not allow reintegration, their way is unidirectional.

The criticism of capitalism is perceived everywhere. While Bill, Ruby and Drury have their own moral codes and would not dare to break them, Elaine steals and cheats them. Now this review is much more noticeable in an early scene where Brown holds a direct mockery. Bill visits the owner of the department store where Elaine has stolen with the intention to withdraw the complaint. When the character gets up to shake his hand, cut to a plane reveals that sat on a float for hemorrhoids. Bill sees it and does not dissimulate: he bursts into laughter.

The desire to surprise and shock the viewer is constant. Another unusual scene takes place in the club of Ruby. Together with Bill, at the bar, Brown places a lesbian dressed as a man, provided hat, tuxedo and monocle. This drinks her glass in one gulp, as Bill had drunk, and sneers. He offers her a cigar and she replies: "What a fagot!". The dialogues with curses, scathing and ironic are another outstanding feature. The planning of the take is as unusual as its content, the most pure style of Samuel Fuller (Tavernier and Coursodon, 1997, p. 378).

But the transgressor is the end. Abandoned by all, Elaine looks at a girl crying. She explains: "I just had the most horrible experience of my life. I climbed the stairs to respond to this announcement. A man named Johnson was looking for a model ... I had to fight to get out ... I have the arm full of purple ". Hearing this, Elaine's eyes light up. "He hit me. Look at my jaw, "continues the girl. "What did you say your name was?" Asks Elaine, his face full of excitement, after which snatches the newspaper and heads there to be abused, beaten and sexually assaulted by the stranger.

This was too much even for the Pre-Code period. Of course, Hollywood was not prepared for something like that. *Blood Money* met indifference from critics and the absolute rejection of the public. It was the biggest failure of Brown. In Maryland censors held her by "immoral, indecent and inhumane" and the matter went to court ("U.A. Goesto Court", 1933, p. 9). In 1934 he was one of the first films banned and hidden by the PCA (AFI Catalog).

Then Brown moved to England, where his story *February 29* resulted in *Leave it to Blanche*, co-wrote the screenplay for *Widow's Might*. Then he received an offer from Alexander Korda to direct *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (The Scarlet Pimpernel, Harold Young, 1935), but a few days later he was removed from production (AFI Catalog).

Returning to the United States in 1936, he worked at MGM in *The Robin Hood of El Dorado*. He sold his original story study *The Devil's a Sissy* and began directing the film. However, again, he was fired and W. S. Van Dykela filmed it practically from scratch.

Here lies the legend of his fist into a major producer of Hollywood, but historiography has not even agreed to indicate about who was the victim. Allegedly occurred during

the filming of *The Devil's a Sissy* and was what caused his dismissal. Both Irving Thalberg (Tavernier and Coursodon, 1997, p. 378) and producer of the feature film Frank Davis have been mentioned (Scorsese, 2015). Although Baxter (1973, pp. 99, 182) is inclined to David O'Selznick, that shortly after that commissioned Brown the review of the script of *A Star Is Born* (A Star Is Born, William A. Wellman, 1937), which was filmed at end of 1936. The other consulted authors allude to the incident but do not indicate any name (Rotha and Griffith, 1964, pp 354-355;. Miller, 1971, p 43; Tibbets, 1985, p 180; Scorsese and Wilson 2001, pp 140-141; Maddin, 2007b, p 8) .In the press of the time, we have found only a brief mention, nothing explanatory, on his dismissal from MGM film. Variety comes and says: "For the fourth time another director is finishing a film of Rowland Brown in Metro. W. S. Van Dyke has replaced Brown in *The Devil's a Sissy* ' ... " ("Inside Stuff-Pictures", 1936, p. 6). A secrecy that is at least highly suspect. The news also exaggerates; It was not the fourth time, but the third that he left or was removed from a film. It had happened in *State's Attorney* and *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. He could never return to film as a director.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the filmic corpus of Brown has shown that his was a totally cohesive and idiosyncratic work, in which the criminal element was always present. Thus, we can determine that crime is the focus of his films, either as writer-director or in his work as a writer.

From here, we identify many other subtopics, developed invariably in the environment of the underworld of contemporary city: *gangsters*, politics, the notion of organized crime as a business, the inability to leave the underworld, the *gangster* must not be mixed with the upper classes, street children, juvenile delinquency, impoverished neighborhoods, etc. In general, his works reveal a tired pessimistic view of the world and society, not without a strong dose of misogyny.

In addition, the three films directed and written by Brown enclose the same ideological message that today is discovered as a "modern" end: a criticism of the upper echelons of power of capitalism, which are favoring organized crime. They are distinguished, in turn, by its anomalous and groundbreaking speech, and the emergence of corrupt, cynical and unpredictable characters that respond to the particular and eccentric universe of the author. Cynicism, irony and poignancy are another inseparable feature of his films.

At a stylistic level, although we cannot speak of his own label or a way of filming, he often filmed differently and always with imagination and inventiveness.

In short, all the work of Rowland Brown is unique and is permeated by his strong personality. His desire, no doubt, was breaking the rules, provoke, surprise and shock the viewer. He challenged convention, went against the current and paid dearly for his insubordination to the system.

As the end of his career as a filmmaker and he was expelled from Hollywood, such issues cannot be attributed to a single factor, but a combination of at least six of relevance:

1. The history of a punch to a senior executive, although it has not been verified, cannot be ignored, it is undeniable that he was vetoed and, try as he might, he could not redirect. Not even his Oscar nomination for the original story of *Angels with Dirty Faces* opened the doors of the studios and kept him away from Hollywood until 1940.
2. In connection with the above, it should be noted his controversial and explosive personality. Since its inception in Fox, he had earned a very bad reputation as an informal and problematic director, who broke contracts lightly and left the shooting sets.
3. He only directed three films in three years, a very slow pace of work for the time, and the three were resounding box office busts. Thus, it is not unheard that he achieved to direct, as a writer and screenwriter, but that failure after failure allowed him to try again. The last, *Blood Money*, meant such an economic disaster that marked a full stop.
4. The nuances, the subtleties, the cynicism and the daring and transgressive nature of his films, which today become highly prized and incredibly "modern" works were not valued at the time. On the contrary, they considered them as strange and even distasteful creations. No producer would risk to finance his eccentricities.
5. Brown also was typecast. He was associated with the film gangsters and the Prohibition era, which ended in 1933, but had ceased to be in vogue even earlier. The fact that he could not move forward *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, a historical film away from their usual interests, strengthened this belief that he was only fit for a genre that had been left behind.
6. The arrival of strict self-censorship Hollywood in July 1934, with the PCA, was another deciding factor. His films, with homosexuals, lesbians, nymphomaniacs and all kinds of amoral and criminal characters, were among the first to be banned and hidden. Neither Brown nor his films had no place in the new Hollywood governed by the extreme right, and arch-conservative Catholic Joseph I. Breen. His cinema was now impossible to film.

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