

# The dialogue established between the United States of America and Italy through the representations of the Italian comic book character Tex Willer

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## Abstract

*This article was born from a concluded research during the graduation and it continues into the master course in history, which thematic surrounds the comics Italian character Tex Willer, produced in Milan since 1948 through Giovanni Luigi Bonelli's and Aurelio Galeppinni's hands. The research has, as main focus, the male representations of the male hero beyond his adventures, to think how the character become a hero, and how, feet by feet he assumes some other identities and also what those images represent in the hall of his historical trajectory (from both the character and the magazine).*

**Keywords:** Tex Willer, Italy (XXth century), United States of America (XIXth century).

## 1. Introduction:

This is an article resulted from a journey of more than four years of researches, with the development of two Projects of Scientific Initiation (in Portuguese: PIBIC) between the years 2013-2014 and 2014-2015, which resulted in the monograph defence under the title: *Tex Willer: the American hero myth produced in Italy*, held in 2015.

I bring here discussions about the object chosen for analysis inserted in the context of cultural history, that is, thinking how my object of research is within the field of culture and how, in addition, we can use authors considered cultural historians as basis for the development of this. The Tex's magazine production period extends from 1948 to 2016, including the adventures of the character in Italy and its publication in Brazil (since 1971), however, the selection proposed is thematic, focusing on his first and main adventures, whose periods will be presented later. I specifically bring up the adventures that portray Tex's marriage to a woman of the Navajo ethnicity: Lilyth. The historical documents analysed are the magazines that tell the history of the character, thinking its construction as a hero who over the years (both the publication as the character's life) constitutes his as a ranger, spouse of a Navajo chief, agent Indian and even sheriff. I also bring to the discussion the object circumscribed in theoretical parameters of cultural history, based on historiographical discussions of this kind of research.

First it is needed to present both the object, as its main features, to later observe it in the cultural field. The sources used here are the magazines Comics Italian (*fumetti*) whose main character is Tex Willer

- name that also entitles the magazine. It was created by Giovanni Luigi Bonelli (1908-2001) and Aurelio Galleppini (1917-1994) in Italy after the 2nd World War in 1948 (Milan) and his adventures are situated in the final decades of the nineteenth century in the United States (between the years 1860 to 1890) and is a representation of a cowboy westerns, "typically American" - the cowboy we see in Hollywood western movies of the 1950s (from the filmmakers Sergio Leone and John Ford, for example).

Over the adventures, he becomes an outlaw, ranger, head of the Navajo tribe (getting the indigenous name of Night Eagle – in Italian: *Aquilladellanoche*), he marries Lilyth (White Lily), an Navajo Indian, with whom he had a son, called Kit Willer, in that order of events in his character's personal life, but not necessarily in chronological order of publications of magazines. This adventures portray his path, constituting him as a hero and assuming gradually all these identities. This explains why we read about Tex's marriage to a Navajo Indian and only years later we know that she died soon after their marriage.

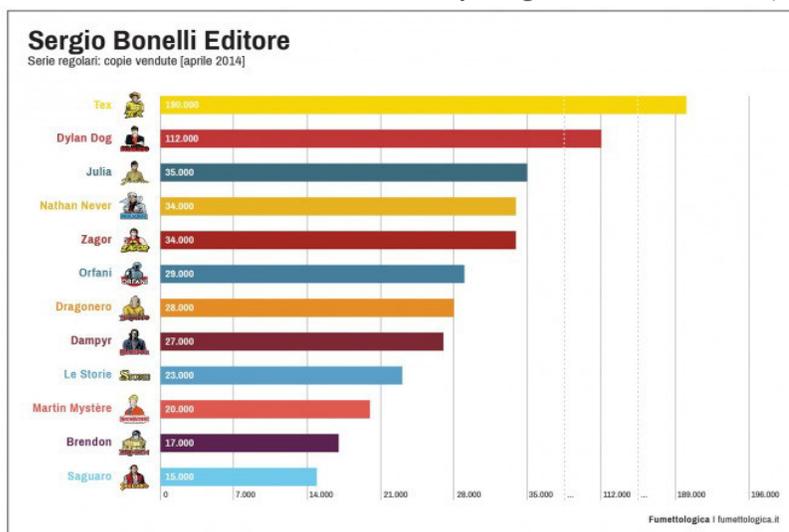
Tex is also considered avenger and defender of all those taken as minority groups of the West, by common sense, generalist way and disregarding the complexities involving these "classes", these groups. They are blacks, women and Indians. This defines the character, but they are characteristics that were acquired gradually over years of publications and does not have been designed since his first adventure. That explains why is needed to select the first magazines as sources.

My thesis is that Tex, as a character, and as a cultural product, a world known magazine, was not born the way he currently appears in the comics. He was being "enhanced" as the authors resolved to give him new features and according as they perceived as the consumer market received these new identities that are slowly being "hung" the hero, as in the cultural industry in general.

## 2. "Tex is culture!"(CARSAN, 2009: 264).

Tex as an object of study in the field of cultural history is a recent topic. There are no published works in Brazil using the character in the specific area of history, so it has not been studied yet. Tex is not cultural trash, it is not disassociated from an Italian cultural throughout the period in which it is located, but on the contrary, it appears as a product that is part of the Italian imagination. It can be stated from the chart below that shows the amount of Tex comic books sold in Italy in 2014. This attest that he is part of the Italian social imaginary.

**FIGURE 1 - Number of comic books sold by Sergio Bonelli Editore (SBE).**



Source: <http://www.fumettologica.it/2014/06/quanto-vendono-i-fumetti-bonelli-i-dati-2014/>.

It is a purpose of this article, to think historically, which means with the history and not just about it, as stated by Carl Schorske (2000). To take Tex as a cultural object, a product of culture of the Italian social imaginary of Bonelli and Galep, a representation of the USA [re]produced in Italy, assuming that Bonelli is not authentic, he is steeped in a cultural melting pot that dialogues with different languages, practices, crossings and intersections.

According to Offenstadt (2009), understanding representations as a possibility, which seeks to ascertain the multiple ways in which the men of the past thought their presence in the world, giving meaning to their actions or modelling his memory, which is therefore is collective. Perceiving the world of representations as part of the real and not autonomous.

The mains purpose of the cultural history studies is to identify how, in different places and times, a given social reality is constructed, thought, given to read, so we also realize that the representations of the social world are always determined by the interest of a group that forget through his speeches, produced from a place of power, hence the need to relate the speeches with the position of those who use them, to think like the authors of Tex. Bonelli and Galep reproduce or produce certain discourses about the perception they had about the West and the character present there. It is, therefore, reflect on what are the processes that build the world as representation?

The notion of representation can be seen as, more than the concept of mentality, an relationship with the social world, the practices that make a social identity, the symbolism of the society. Chartier (1990) is careful to differentiate between the creation of consumption, production reception, which is closely related to the reflections presented here about Texas. According to him, it is important in first place identify how intersections of different cultural forms are made. The Bonelli magazines bring joints between Italy and the United States, the scripts and designs. We must restore the historicity of the comic book, of creation and the character, which "requires first that the 'consumption' cultural or intellectual is itself taken as a production, which of course does not manufacture any object, but its representations are never identical to the producer, the author or artist, invested in his work".

### **3. Comics as a cultural product:**

According to the author Rodrigues (2014), despite the fact that the comics are nowadays seen as an established art, it still suffers rancidity to be considered a minor art.

The comics should not been used as mere illustration and not only as an incentive for literary reading, a gateway to the literature, for example, but should be contextualized, analysed by the script, and the image sequence of adventures. For the historian Rodrigues, comics can be historical sources, since losing his fictional character, literary, pure narrative and simply, and be seen in their production context (time and space) as well as all editorial path (production, publishing, editing, distribution, consumption).

The methodology developed at this research sought to contextualize the comics as an historical object, inserted in the specific area of history and culture, on the assumption that Tex is culture (as laid in one of the previous subheadings). It was necessary, therefore a theoretical discussion about what is meant by cultural history, as we can now make a historical approach to cultural production, and contextualize Tex magazine in Italy after 2<sup>nd</sup> World War and the character in the United States of the nineteenth century in the period expansion to the West, looking denature, for example, pre-data concepts, naturalized, as the Western term, cowboys stereotypes of Indians, blacks, women, Chinese and other groups appearing in Tex magazines.

#### 4. Stereotypes in *Tex* - the magazine:

For Vergueiro and Ramos (2010) understand that comics can help to prepare the interpretation of a given reality in their historical, social and cultural relations of production, as well as understanding their movement through the mapping of consumption and scope that they obtained in their practices appropriation of the social culture are extremely necessary in a historical research. These were premises that led to this article and the analysis of production of Tex character.

In the comics, especially those superhero magazines, is striking the (*almost*) exclusive focus on the male figure. There is a numerical predominance (more men than women) and qualitative (the drawings of the male characters have a better preparation). In general, the comics productions are essentially male, as are the publishers who produce these heroes (with writers and artists predominantly men).

We observed marked stereotypes of male figures at comics that are not restricted only to them, but are adapted and "borrowed" by other industries that are also in dialogue with the American comics market, such as the *fumetti* its own. Hence the interest in researching and thoroughly analyse the construction of this hero and Tex as a man, "white", "civilized" ranger, "cowboy" and other "labels" that he gets along his adventures.

We can not disregard the freedom of choice and interpretation of Bonelli. To make possible to recreate this cinematic universe in the comic books, portraying the main character as an exception to the rule of Hollywood cowboys. This is where his Tex is portrayed as a friend of the Indians, for example.

The Bonelli cowboy is specific in that he goes against most of the major characters of movie time it was created. On the other hand, he is also the representation of all the inhabitants of the United States fractured by the Civil War, for example, and which refers to an Italy also poorly unified as permanently resistant to homogenize its regional differences, which had gone through wars for a late unification, by a very strong cultural separatism among its regions (particularly represented in the division between North and South), but it went on to defend the prevalence of the Union, national unity, cemented by nationalism, by being Italian.

Tex is a representative hero of his American people, marked by the encounter with the other through a marriage between the white European [descendant] and the Navajo Indian. It was a settler, but also a vigilante when the state was not organized and had not been installed in the west. And he can also be read as an Italian hero as readers of *Sergio Bonelli Editore* - which are not few - recognize in Willer, in his sense of justice, in his struggle for Law, using the means to get it in a territory (the West) where it is still necessary to enforce through the colt 45. Tex is the representation of the law, is the representative of Italian society that has a Christian sense deeply rooted in its history, and therefore advocates justice, equal treatment and revenge to "assert (and prevail) justice" to an end: to be fair. He does in the comic book what many fans would like to do on a daily basis in situations that require the presence of the state as a coercive and punitive institution: he does justice with his own hands, he makes prevails the phrase "an eye by an eye and tooth by tooth".

Analysing the graphic design of the character, we perceive subtle and gradually changes sometimes that the general superhero body exceeds the common force (normal") since his function, while man is to protect the weaker sex (damsels in Danger). Main characters of comics, for example, are presented as a "typical" man: stressed muscles and disproportionate to the human body, squares and large chins, and body as an inverted triangle: wider shoulder to the waist. In addition to the physical characteristics, these main characters must affirm through their psychological characteristics their heterosexuality, manhood, even if the use of violence is necessary to reinforce their identities as a "Man."

Masculinities taken as identities male, historically and socially constructed as a set of attributes, an image of what it means male, which, according to Cornell (2015), "are social practices settings that refer to

male bodies, as they were both related to the symbolic order and institutional of our society as the individual aspects of its subjects inserted" (64).

In this sense, the male is white, western and belongs to the ruling class, thus closing the framework, the stereotype, the archetype to which must be submitted to all the characters that are male. In addition, all the characteristics that defines them as men should be stepped up (to become superheroes): more muscle, more virility and more violence than the other characters of the sagas / magazines / comic books; which are often their enemies / opponents.

Despite being marked by many of these characteristics taken as masculine and manly, on the other hand, Tex odds with some of this stereotype, as a character who marries a Navajo (Lilyth - *White Lily*) and have a son mestizo called Kit Willer. This is only possible because Tex authors' start from a certain place (Italy, 1948), but not as a blank page. They dialogue, for example, with readings of literature and Western cinema very common at this time and from this they produce their own readings. From the US history they can recreate and use, with literary freedom, anything to his character westerns: the drawn, the script, the characters, and also the landscape. However, the authors try to be trustworthy to History, in general. One of the most important characteristics of Tex's plot is the verity of the landscape and also the historical references: geography, habitus from the West, characters, and themes such as: Secession War, the murder of the President Lincoln, for example. Tex, is therefore the result of a transversality tangle of cultural dialogue established through the ink of Galep and Bonelli scripts, between Italy and the United States.

Another factor, and perhaps the most important is the understanding of how Tex magazines contribute to the idea of America that they want to convey, from Italy (and not the own USA territory), however, which is in close dialogue with cultural production of the United States itself. Tex, as well as several other westerns, is an Italian production that makes references to other territory, even never visited by its creator (Luigi Bonelli) until 1948. This leads us to question: to what extent these comics are informed in previous research (made by the writers and the designers of Tex) seeking historical accuracy in Bonelli representations, and to what extent the representations relate to the context of production of the same in Italy of this (for 1948 onwards)? What are the speeches that Bonelli chose to highlight in his scripts?

From the perception that male identity is constructed socially and historically and characters of the comics are obedient to this and are a reflection of this, they "[...] as any dimension of the culture industry generates expectations, reinforces behaviours, produces and reproduces reality, reflects and intervenes in it" (Silva, R., 2014) and Tex as a worldwide publishing phenomenon is not out of these striking stereotypes of hero, already present in Hollywood, but modified by Bonelli.

Even concepts such as human(s), Female(s), Black(s), Indian(s), Chinese(s) are naturalized and treated as a homogeneous whole in the comic book, we need to have clarity that they are built speeches with concepts created, appropriated, modified, and therefore needed to be historicized. It is necessary to deconstruct concepts such as "West", "Western", notice the gradual construction of a comic book character that is "American" but created in Europe, in Italy in 1948. During the research all of these concepts appearing in Tex and need to be understood as stereotypes that not only speak of a place, but also that exclude different representations, wider or detract from what is shown in the comic books.

The marriage of the two characters is a key event in the personal life of Tex, as it is only from this that it can become husband, father, and Bonelli can bring to the scene discussions about indigenous presence in US territory through his scripts. It is only with the wedding that Tex can also become chief of the Navajos, blood brother of the Indians, mediator among the various indigenous groups and the government in Washington, for example. That can explain the choice of the adventures here addressed, with a thematic cup in the hole research of the master course, despite of a temporal or historical choice. It was given priority to

the theme of the engagement of Tex and Lilyth (the white and the “red”; the “civilized” and the “uncivilized”) as a main events during the hole life of both the character and the magazine (comic/scripts).

Women, in this comic books, are represented as prostitutes - women who are away from home, in the social environment, but whose only space that can occupy is that of prostitution to serve men "savages" of Western; or as conservative, occupying the internal social place, home, family, characterized as colonials that had been exploring the territory, while maintaining "its place" alongside her man. And in the midst of all this, we have Lylith, Tex's wife, who marries not for love, but to prevent what she would consider a wildness (Tex's death). The romance does not appear in the comics, love, appears after, in the words of the fans.

Lilythoscillates between a warrior and a housekeeper, but later she appears as a hindrance in the life of the hero. However, even participating actively in one or two adventures next to "her man", or assuming the marriage to a stranger interrupting the rite of death, she can not continue to exist in the comics because back in time, westerns movies, which were inspiration for Bonelli's scripts, have no women as heroes, as main actress. They were, by the other hand, the weakness, the ladies ready to be saved by the cowboy.

FIGURE 2–Lilyth interrupts the death ritual of Tex<sup>1</sup>.



Source: TUTTOTEX *Il patto di sangue*, n. 07. EditorialeDAIM PRESS SpA<sup>2</sup>: Milan, 1986, p. 79.

Suddenly, the chiefs' daughter interrupts the ritual of death with her left hand raised on hold gesture: “I wish the hand of my blood brother to stop! The white man will be my husband”. Tex is in the background with his chest marked where it should be shot the arrow to kill him. The character, despite being white and have not been presented as knowledgeable of indigenous practices in the comic, identifies, unblinking, the fact of Lilyth stopping and saying that he is her man as a result in an Indian wedding.

For her, the death of white man is unacceptable as a way of fight, the marriage is plotted inside a bigger narrative in the comic in which we have a recurrent problem between the government of the USA in Washington, the “red” people abandoned far away from DC and the rangers as representatives of the government.

<sup>1</sup> All the figures brought in the article, from the plot, are original and so in Italian. When needed to the hole understand of the text I will make some appointments of the characters words and will make the translations.

<sup>2</sup>Nown today as *Sergio Bonelli Editore* (SBE).

FIGURE 3 - Preparations for the wedding Tex Willer and Lilyth.



Source: TUTTOTEX *Il patto di sangue*, n. 07. Editoriale DAIM PRESS SpA: Milan, 1986, p.80.

In this sequence, continuation of the story, the couple is preparing for the ritual and Lilyth explains to her future husband why she stopped the ritual of death and have chosen to marry the "white man". According to her civilizing white education, acquired through education in the Jesuit mission of Alamosa, she has a less savage attitude toward her blood brothers (Navajos). Because she does not agree to unnecessary killings, she interrupts Tex's death with the only way possible to be respected: claiming him as husband and not for love. However, she expects him to help with the problem.

Even though Lilyth is a woman, and those are represented as submissive in the comics and not as important figures (mostly), she plays a big role in the plot: that marry is her choice, as daughter of the Chief; she has the power to choose, her decision to change the course of events in the life of Tex (*fumetti*) is full of power. Although, Lilyth is an educated Indian in the white fashion "civilized", and may not be indigenous power, or woman, interrupting the prisoner Tex death rite, but the white speech "civilized" that she learned in missions Jesuit and that she takes this time.

Sometimes, she is also a housewife in the passages accompanying Tex, who receives in his tent always in the passive posture, woman who takes care of her household duties, but withal all, a subject policy ordering the interruption of the death of a stranger and marries him fulfilling indigenous rites, she makes her voice heard by the tribe without challenge it immediately part to the preparations of a wedding. The transition is quick and accepted without challenge by all the characters, perhaps for leaving herself, the daughter of a Navajo chief, the only one with white education.

Despite this heroic posture of Lilyth, she must be removed from the comic to Tex bloom as a lonely hero, so he can live adventures by land throughout the United States, without worrying about a weak point (the wife) left home at every adventure. Quickly, Lilyth marries, gives birth to Kit and dies (all this told to the readers in two adventures with a long distance from each other in what concerns the publication time in Brazil), leaving free Tex path to go towards other adventures.

FIGURE 4 - Tex swears revenge for the death of Lilyth, in front of her tombstone.



Source: TUTTOTEK *Il giuramento*, n. 104. Sergio Bonelli Editore: Milan, 1991, p. 78.

With his *Il giuramento*, cursing the past (Lilyth's death), Tex is trapped in the promise of getting kill the murderers of his wife, on the other hand, free for his adventures before, unlikely, with his wife and their little son. He can keep his promise only years later –in the fictional character's life, and in many subsequent comic books - in the editorial life, with the support of its partners: Kit Carson (ranger), Jack Tiger (Navajo) and his son Willer Kit (ranger), already grown up. It is also in this adventure that we are told (readers) what had happened to Lilyth and why she had disappeared from the adventures published between *Il patto di sangue* and *Il giuramento*, which, as we can see, are quite spaced temporally. She contracted smallpox, which was, in fact, a disease that contributed to almost eliminate natives in America. There was a big gap in the stories that was only completed later this also put because of the big editorial problems in Brazil related to Tex publications that were solved only when Mythos Publisher assumes the character in 1999.

Lilyth figure is therefore extremely important in personal life of Willer: she enables him the marriage, love, to has a child, a family, also allows the rapprochement between white (Tex) and Indians (Navajos), but there in the scripts, a repressive power, enforcement of the comic book language: Bonelli strip Lilyth scene for her being a woman and he did not see the women present in the Western films of the period. In addition, Italy from 1950-1970, is a chauvinist country where women can not be heroin, can not occupy the public space – the place for politics, for men. Lilyth must be removed abruptly, violent and arouse the anger of Tex; it was the key point of the heroic formation of character.

These adventures published in *fumetti* are a product of cultural apprehension of Italian projecting on the creation myths and unification of another country, namely the United States, and from this seizure build a representation with particularity associated with their culture of origin.

In addition, Tex magazine's give clues about different representations presents in portraits of gender relations, power, territory, race, enabling analysis of different cultural interfaces (mass, the cultural industry) and then present stereotypes. It also allows an insight into the production context (Italy of the twentieth century), consumption and reception (many countries in the XX<sup>th</sup> and XXI<sup>th</sup>), circulation of American culture (XX<sup>th</sup> century) produced on the construction of its own territory and, their training, highlighting the West, myth appropriated for other countries (such as Italy), tradition and persistence and reinvention and recreation of the character over the years, as they conquered a consumer audience, initially in their country of origin and later in other countries, such as Brazil and Portugal.

### **5. Final considerations:**

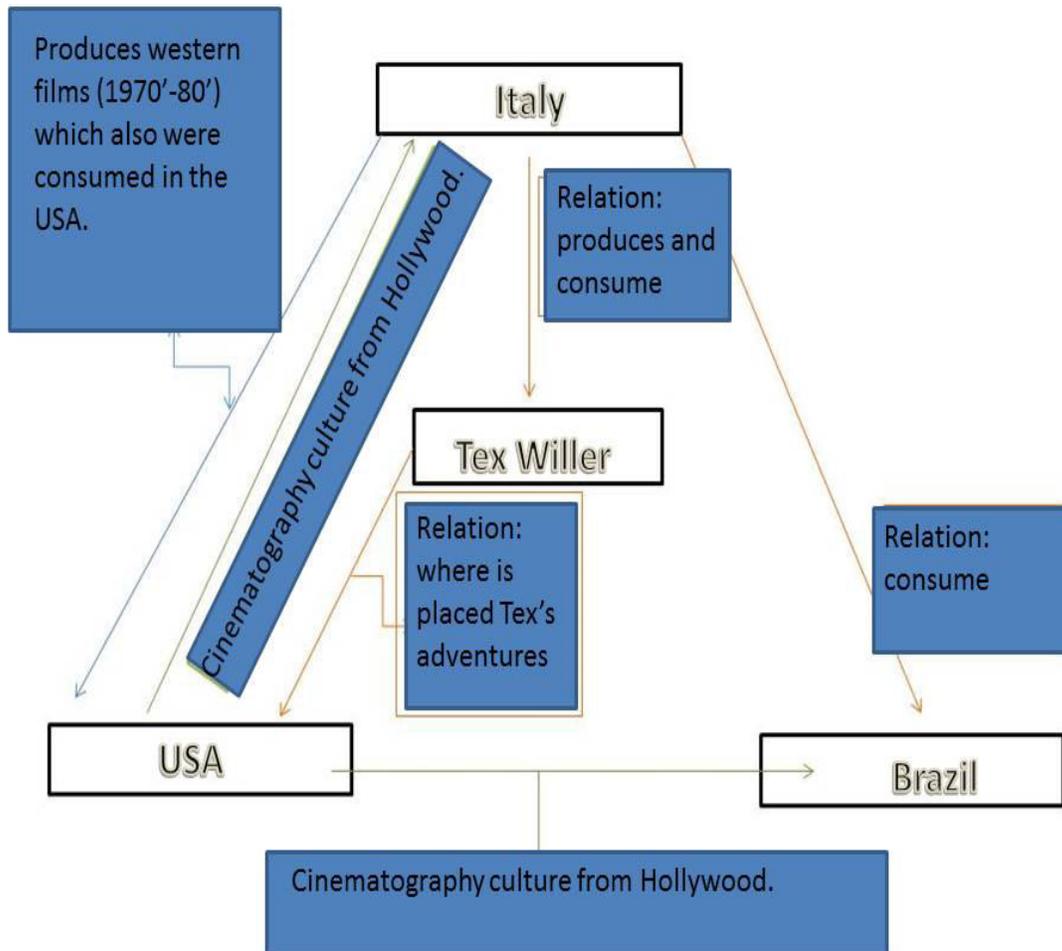
The objective of this research was to present preliminary discussions about the representations of subjects from historical conditions that bring their statements and speeches and that are always "contaminated" by the reality of the writers for example. They are always in contact with the "other" which is, in case, the United States. Was also to emphasises the relations established in the scripts: Tex in relation to Lilyth, assuming that the construction of their identity goes through this time; their marriage is a key in personnel construction of Tex Willer as a market product and as a character. On the other hand it is also an article that brings the comics and Tex to the historical discussions which is very original.

The main issue raised in the beginning of the research aimed to understand how to give the representations in the comic books. Since the US through, first, the stories produced on the east coast in the nineteenth century, and then were appropriate and disclosed in the movies, and that fuelled a global industry with their national myths. In the movies (especially) we observe how that reported speech, forged and contributed to his own reworking produced by the Italians. Since then, Tex Willer and his companions circulate and feed the American West mythology around the world (including Brazil), but I ask myself, after all, why this mythology is both support and projection? What are the values that discloses? And then, how does this character carries this representation to other countries, such as Brazil, Portugal, USA, and Italy itself.

The comic made in Italy of the twentieth century reaffirms the elaborate myths about the United States in the nineteenth century (the man of the border, west of the myth, the individual and the distant masculinity of European vices more to the west it follows the hero lonely pioneer of virgin nature to the west), which were widely publicized by the culture of American media in the twentieth century: cinema, western tales, books. The claim is that this is disclosed culture, about the Wild West myth, are appropriated by Italian authors for creating Tex Willer.

It is through the identities / representations conveyed in the dialogue of cultures established with the culture of the US, and across the world in the twentieth century, the authors produce Tex: is the film of western, the years 1930-1950 by Western novels they are based for writing and drawing Tex. From this produce reading and *re-reading*, also subject to Italian mentality of the twentieth century ideologies of this place, to own cultural values that formed them and fed perceptions of the sense of justice, as well as training of the territory. It is an exchange, a relationship that can articulate "experiences" and "American myths" (on the formation of the country) with the values and the Italian issues experienced in the formation of the Italian State's nation in 2<sup>nd</sup> World War and then in rebuilding the country fractured by the conflict.

**FIGURE 5 - Explanatory chart of the dialogues and crossovers present in Tex magazine.**



Source: prepared by the author.

We must have critical sense to realize that these adventures are not choices of the author, and neither was rational and necessarily thought so, is something of the history, is a movement that can not be denied, as historians, is present in "who" are these authors with whom they converse and what were the speeches contained in this period, appearing in Tex as a cultural product that runs between the cinema, comics, the United States, Italy, Brazil. The research object chosen here, has "one foot" in the US and one in Italy and this is what I tried to emphasize throughout the course of the research: these influences, these dialogues, intersections, times and spaces in a comic book whose theme is the myth of the American Wild West, which is also shown in the figure above. Through this research I realized the historicity of representations of male identity Tex Willer established along the adventures that characterize the construction of this character, especially regarding the relationship between male Tex and the feminine represented by Lilyth in the narratives, which sometimes overlapped or intersected, but these relations, which are part of the male and masculine identity of Tex Willer, the *Aquilladellanoche*, It defines his subsequent comics adventures through more than 60 years of publishing.

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