



#### **Antonio das Mortes**

O Dragão da malade contra o Santo Guerreiro  
*Director:* Glauber Rocha  
*Production Company:*  
Produções Cinematográficas Mapa  
*Production by:* Claude-Antoine Mapa,  
Glauber Rocha  
*Executive Producer:* Zelito Viana  
*Production Managers:* De Cazvalho,  
Agnaldo Azevedo  
*Administration:* Tacito Val Quintans  
*Assistant Director:* Antonio Calmon  
*2nd Unit Assistant:* Ronaldo Duarte  
*Screenplay:* Glauber Rocha  
*Director of Photography:* Alfonso Beato  
*Camera:* Ricardo Stein  
*Grips:* Pintinho  
*Gaffer:* Roque  
*Editor:* Eduardo Escorel  
*Assistant Editor:* Amauri Alves  
*Art Director:* Glauber Rocha \*  
*Set Decorators:* Paulo Lima, Gil Soares,  
Helio Eitchbauer  
*Music:* Marlos Nobre  
*Additional Music:* Walter Queiroz, Sergio Ricardo  
*Sound:* Walter Goulart, Claudio Della Riva  
*Cast:*  
Maurício do Valle (*Antonio das Mortes*)  
Odete Lara (*Laura*)  
Othon Bastos (*the professor*)  
Hugo Carvana (*Police Chief Mattos*)  
Jofre Soares (*Colonel Horacio*)  
Lorival Pariz (*Coirana*)  
Rosa Maria Penna (*Santa Bárbara*)  
Emmanuel Cavalcanti (*priest*)  
Vinicius Salvatori (*'Maca Vaca'*)  
Mário Gusmão (*Antão*)  
Sante Scaldari-Ferri (*Batista*)  
Brazil 1969  
100 mins  
Digital (restoration)

\* Uncredited

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# **Antonio das Mortes**

Glauber Rocha's *Antonio das Mortes* is surely one of the most astonishing films to come out of Brazil in the 1960s. A well-deserved Palme d'Or winner at Cannes in 1969, it starred Maurício do Valle as the eponymous 'hero' (whose name translates as Antonio of the Dead), a *jagunço* – hired killer – who first appeared in Rocha's 1964 film *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol* (literally, *God and the Devil in the Land of the Sun* but known in English as *Black God, White Devil*), where he is hired to dispose of Corisco, 'the last cangaceiro'. The term *cangaceiro* refers to the social bandits, heroes of the oppressed, who operated in the *sertão*, the lawless northeast of Brazil, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Almost 30 years after the events of the earlier film, Antonio is called in again when a new *cangaceiro* emerges at the head of a small band of rebels – only to realise in the end that it was not the *cangaceiro* he should have been fighting but the landowners.

Rocha was the shooting star of Brazilian film, the *enfant terrible* of *cinema novo*, the Brazilian branch of the Latin American new wave of the day. Born in Bahia in northeast Brazil, he came to cinema as a teenager through film clubs, studied law for a couple of years, made some shorts, wrote prolifically, joined the group around Nelson Pereira dos Santos (whom he called the father of *cinema novo*) and directed his first feature, *Barravento*, in 1962. He would die young in 1981, after a stream of films that had a powerful influence on his contemporaries elsewhere in Latin America, especially Cuba, which gave him refuge for a while when he found himself *persona non grata* with the military rulers in Brazil.

Stylistically, *Barravento* had been a relatively straightforward piece of Latin American neorealism. In his subsequent work, including *Antonio das Mortes*, his first film in colour, Rocha developed a highly elliptical manner of narrative construction, full of emblematic characters performing stylised actions, in a peculiar amalgamation of history and legend, epic and lyric. This makes it very difficult to offer a simple and concise synopsis of the story, so I'm not going to try.

Rocha was not the first Brazilian filmmaker to take up the subject of the *cangaceiro*. Indeed, the first Brazilian film to win the top prize at Cannes was Lima Barreto's *O Cangaceiro* in 1953. The subject-matter of banditry and shootouts obviously lent itself to generations brought up on the Western, and here too there are echoes of the Hollywood genre but in a highly parodic form. In a manifesto widely reprinted throughout Latin America and known as both *The Aesthetics of Hunger* and *The Aesthetics of Violence*, Rocha protested that people for whom hunger is a normal condition are suffering violence – the violence of the social system that makes them go hungry. We know, he said, this hunger will not be cured by moderate reforms, and its tumours aren't hidden but only aggravated by the cloak of Technicolor. It was not only Hollywood he opposed but also the kind of Brazilian artist for whom misery becomes a form of exoticism that, as he put it, 'vulgarises social problems'.

Rocha had a special fascination with the violence expressed in and through popular religious practices. For Rocha the mysticism of Brazilian popular religion, a syncretistic fusion of Catholicism and the motifs of African religion transplanted with the slave trade, became the expression of a permanent spirit of rebellion against unceasing oppression, a rejection and refusal of the condition in which the common people had been condemned to live for centuries. It also provided him with a model for the syncretism of his own film language, where the exuberant rush of images, the mix of mysticism and legend, cult and ritual, was married to a form of symbolism both political and surrealistic to achieve a visionary force. *Antonio das Mortes* is full of long takes, often static or else consisting of slow pans and travelling shots, cutting between wide shots and close-ups, with very little conventional continuity cutting within sequences. This made his films rather difficult for audiences outside Latin America to understand on first viewing. Indeed, I well remember when I first saw *Antonio das Mortes* as a young film critic in the early

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### **Notorious**

Thu 4 Dec 14:30; Thu 18 Dec 20:45;  
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### **The Arbor**

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Chelovek s kino-apparatom + (*nostalgia*)  
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Laura Mulvey)

### **Daughters of the Dust**

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Gli uomini, che mascaloni!

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### **Xala**

Thu 11 Dec 18:15; Sat 27 Dec 11:45

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1970s: I grasped practically nothing but was swept away by a compelling and mesmeric torrent of images and music. I came out of the screening knowing only that it had changed my notion of cinema forever.

Michael Chanan, *Sight and Sound*, August 2010

**SPOILER WARNING** The following notes give away some of the plot.

### **A contemporary review**

*Antonio das Mortes* is set in the ritual framework of the legendary war of the warrior saint against the dragon of cruelty, of which the brightly coloured images of St George slaying the Dragon with which the film opens and closes are a Christian equivalent. After a credits sequence showing the killing of a bandit, the schoolmaster is seen teaching the children Brazilian history, in which such facts as the country's discovery by the Portuguese and its independence end in a historical event to which he gives equal significance – the death in 1938 of the great anti-government bandit Lampião, who had dominated the *sertão* for 18 years and whose severed head, still to be seen in the medical school in Salvador, had to be carried round and exhibited in the towns of the region before the people would believe he had been killed.

Antonio's reminiscences of his bandit hunting include his pursuit of Corisco in *Black God, White Devil*, of which *Antonio das Mortes* is virtually a continuation. In the earlier film Antonio is employed by church and government to destroy the religious fanatics and the bandits, but he also almost unwittingly becomes a liberator from false prophets. But as he says in this film, 'Lampião was my mirror', and with him dead Antonio now becomes a revolutionary. For a time he is himself uncertain which side represents the dragon, because he believes that God writes in crooked lines; but after his crisis he proclaims 'Now I know who the enemy is' as the lorry full of the Colonel's hired killers grinds up the hill. The enemy is in fact the whole corrupt social system, the capitalist oligarchy which Antonio overthrows by force, aided by the intelligentsia in the person of the schoolmaster and tacitly supported by the priest.

Glauber Rocha clothes this revolutionary message in a remarkable visual language in which the primitivism and violence of the religious dances or the scenes of savage slaughter alternate with moments of absolute stillness, as for instance when the girl in white sits icon-like with her black hair falling loose as she confronts Antonio in his crisis with the command, 'Go and walk the fiery roads of earth asking forgiveness for your crimes'. Rocha draws on ballads and folksongs to develop and comment on the action, and his use of colour also enhances the effect of the rituals, for which the blazing heat of the grey landscape of sparse grass and cactus desert provides a timeless setting. The colour sometimes matches the macabre quality of Rocha's imagination, as in the scene where Laura's already lurid purple evening dress is spattered with blood as she stabs Mattos, or when blood pours from her mouth and down her white neck as the schoolteacher kisses her after she has been shot at the end.

Some critics have objected that this flamboyant operatic style conflicts with the political message, or have suggested that the bare bones underneath the theatricality are only those of a Western anyway. But this is no mythical frontier of the past: in the first half of this century the distressed peasants of the arid backlands of the *sertão* continued to turn to banditry or messianic religious movements, but in the fifties and sixties the Peasant Leagues led by Francisco Julião have awakened the Brazilian and American governments to the problem of the landless peasants in north-eastern Brazil, and fears of peasant revolution have led to a crash development programme backed by the dollars which in the film the corrupt police inspector plans to pocket. Glauber Rocha's magnificent film is in fact firmly tied to the present-day political and social reality of his underdeveloped homeland.

Konstantin Bazarov, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, October 1970