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Strategia del Ragno
(The Spider's Strategy)
(ITALIAN—TECHNICOLOR)

Venice, Aug. 26.

RAI (Radio Televisione Italiana) presentation of a RAI-Red Film (Giovanni Bertolucci) coproduction. Features entire cast. Directed by Bernardo Bertolucci. Screenplay, Bertolucci, Marilu Parolini, Edoardo de Gregorio; based on story, "Theme of the Traitor and the Hero," by J. L. Borges. Camera (Eastmancolor-Technicolor), Vittorio Storaro, Franco di Giacomo; music from Giuseppe Verdi's "Rigoletto." Previewed at Venice Film Festival, Aug. 25, '70. Running Time, 100 MINS.

Athos Magnani Giulio Brogi
Draifa Alida Valli
Also: Tino Scotti, Pippo Campanini,
Franco Giovanelli.

If "The Spider's Strategy" is a valid advance sample of output and intent, then it marks an important national, and international, debut in feature film production of a company rather firmly established in another field: RAI, the Italian teleweb.

For item, lavishly lensed in 35m and in no way linked technically, artistically (or budget-wise) to the smallscreen medium which instead gave the director virtual carte blanche in every department, is another very firm step forward in the career of its young (28) director, Bernardo Bertolucci. Coupled with his recent Berlin Fest hit, "Il Conformista," it now firmly places him with the top talents on the local scene.

"Spider" is a political whodunit which, however, works and seizes on several levels, combining the more superficial merits of a number of other successful films of its genre into a differently attractive package. It can be taken as a relatively straightforward suspenser, or, more enjoyably, on the more intricately spun and thought-provoking ideological levels explored by the writer-director.

From his story outline, Bertolucci has taken a slim volume by Argentinian author J. L. Borges, set in Ireland, and suitably relocated it into the Italian Po Valley. Here, in an attractively remote small town, a young man tries to uncover the mystery of the violent death, some 30 years before of his anti-fascist father, whose deeds are commemorated around town by a monument, a street named in his honor, and the reverential reminiscences of the townspeople.

According to the legend, he was slaughtered by a gang of local fascists for plotting to kill Mussolini during the Italian dictator's planned visit to inaugurate the local opera house. Slowly, despite passive and violent resistance to his quest, the son begins to guess the truth with which most townspeople have been silently living for years. His father was not a hero but a coward, shot at his own behest by his own pals after revealing the aborted plot to the fascists. A dead hero, he decided, was worth more to his cause, than a live coward. The entire town had continued to play out the farce until this day, and now the son too, in a symbolic finale which bears several topical implications, finds himself caught in the father's web.

With the possible exception of some stylistically exaggerated scenes, in which the director's otherwise adroit and colorful portrait of a little-known part of Italy is jarred by overstress, the film is an almost flawless exercise in style and content, boasting superb color lensing, a deliberately slow pace, and some fine acting, both by such pros as Alida Valli, Giulio Brogi (who portrays both father and son) and Tino Scotti, but also by two first-time thespis, Pippo Campanini and Franco Giovanelli, who contribute one recitative gem after another as two of the father's cronies.

Careful handling could see pic into chosen export situations, with lingual versions, due to pic's intricacy, a key factor in ultimate impact. It is not per se, except perhaps in its high-key lighting, a film "made" for television, though its ambiguous story, which begs some reflection, will certainly not be harmed by the intimacy of the box. But simply as a prestige item, wherever and however seen, it's a feather in the cap of its "neophyte" producer.

Pic is also scheduled for showing at the New York Film Festival and on the Museum of Modern Art's "salute" to RAI-TV, next year.

Hawk.

Sept. 9, '70