

2006 Issue

“Images of Italians in Film”



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Introduction

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This issue of Gender Studies—Undergraduate focuses on images of Italians in film and consists of four student papers that are scheduled to be presented at the 14th Annual Undergraduate Conference at Purdue University Calumet, April 21-22.

The papers were written in a class entitled “Images of Italians in the Movies,” which I taught at Benedictine University in the fall of 2005. The papers were revised this semester in a special group independent study and were submitted for presentation at the conference.

“Images of Italians in the Movies” was an advanced research class designed to foster independent student research.

The focus of the investigation was the treatment of Italian men and women in film. The class viewed both films that were made in Italy and films that were made in Hollywood between 1945 and 1975.

The Italian films included Roberto Rossellini’s *Open City* and *Paisan*, Vittorio De Sica’s *The Bicycle Thief* and *Umberto D*, and Federico Fellini’s *La Dolce Vita* and *Amarcord*.

The Hollywood films included Francis Ford Coppola’s *The Godfather* Parts I and II, and Martin Scorsese’s *Mean Streets*.

At the beginning of the semester, students in the class presented research proposals after which I gave them feedback and suggestions for improvement. Then they presented first drafts of their paper presentations followed again by my feedback and suggestions for revisions. Then they implemented those revisions in final oral presentations at the end of the semester. They also

produced final written versions of the papers.

Four papers were then selected to be presented at this conference.

The first paper was co-authored by Noorjabeen Naseer, a senior majoring in communication arts and finance, and Maggie Serio, a senior majoring in communication arts. The paper is entitled “Husbands and Second-Class Citizens: The Hierarchy of the Italian-American Mafia Family in *The Godfather* Parts I and II.” The paper explores gender relationships within the Italian family.

The second paper was written by Deanna Hartley, a senior majoring in communication arts, and is entitled “The Fall of Social Consciousness: An Analysis of Vittorio De Sica’s Films on Italian Neorealism.” The paper offers an insightful discussion of three films: *The Bicycle Thief*, *Shoeshine*, and *Umberto D*.

The third paper was written by Christina Smith, a senior majoring in communication arts, and is entitled “The Absence of Familial Relationships in Italian Cinema as Portrayed in Fellini’s *La Dolce Vita*.” The paper examines the failure of the protagonist, Marcello, to develop meaningful relationships.

The last paper was written by Judith Galvin, a part-time student at Benedictine University and is entitled “The Struggles of Man: Can We Discover That Humanity is Really One Through the Art of Film?” It provides an interesting comparison between Italian and Hollywood films. The films compared are *The Bicycle Thief*, *Umberto D*, *Paisan*, Michael Curtiz’s *Casablanca*, Fred Zinnermann’s *From Here to Eternity* and *The Godfather*.

Husbands and Second-Class Citizens

The Hierarchy of the Italian-American Mafia Family in *The Godfather* Parts I and II

by Noorjabeen Naseer and Maggie Serio

Family is the center of the Italian-American lifestyle. Because this facet of living is looked upon with high regard, the way in which the family is regulated is of great importance. *The Godfather* Parts I and II clearly illustrate this point. These films encapsulate the many personality traits and concerns so commonly associated with Italian Americans. An insightful study of the Italian family lifestyle, the films continuously suggest particular qualities and characteristics held by members of the Italian-American family, namely those to be held by the adult men and women of both the blood and crime families.

The films consistently depict many characteristics of men and women as common traits of the Italian-American mafia family. The personality traits and roles that men and women were expected to uphold was often shown. Most clearly, the traditional roles of one sex established the traits and personalities of the other.

The roles traditionally upheld by Italian-American men in the *Godfather* films shape the roles and characteristics to be maintained by women. The conventional upbringing of the men teaches them to perceive women with a single attitude: Whether saint or sinner, they are looked upon and treated as second-class citizens.

Men are placed in two categories: One is the strong, dominant man who is able to control both the nuclear and mafia families. The other is unable to take control of his own emotions and desires and therefore falls victim to them.

The first, illustrated by both Don and Michael, does not fall prey to his sexual desires. Both are noted for their intelligence, wisdom, and ability to read the intentions of others. Somehow, they maintain an even balance within the paradox of their characters. While mean, ruthless criminals, they remain warm and loving toward their families. For example, when the senator insults Michael and his family, the new Godfather responds by telling him that while they are both of the same type of hypocrisy, that same designation could not be applied to the rest of his family.

The other type of man is one who is overly focused

on obeying the demands of his emotions. The film continuously depicts that a man only concerned with fulfilling his sensory desires is unfit to manage the mafia family. This is the case with both Sonny and Fredo. Their inability to control their emotions inevitably leads to their individual demises. Sonny's hot-headed response to the violence against his sister makes him vulnerable to his enemies and he is killed as a result of his lack of control. Fredo's inability to keep his wife happy and remain faithful to her is a clear sign to his father that he would be unable to take over the family business. His lack of self-control results in his being rejected as the new Godfather.

The images in the films show that Italian-American men are born into the world with a multitude of expectations. There is the general expectation that men are to rule over their families, namely their wives. In candid terms, the man is the dominating force of his own nuclear family. If he is unable to handle his personal responsibility of nuclear sovereignty, he is considered a failure.

The Godfather supports this conclusion when the audience observes that the Godfather takes care in regulating the behavior and actions taken by everyone in the mafia family, but will abstain from passing any judgment regarding his own daughter's abusive marriage. Only Sonny makes the mistake of interfering with this tenet of the Italian family values, eventually leading to his own murder. Sonny violently attacks Carlo because he feels that his sister needs a man to protect her and to relieve the emotional outrage that he is experiencing internally.

We see Fredo salivating for female attention. His interest in women exemplifies the type of man he is, which in this case would be one who is unfit to manage the mafia family. His inability to fulfill his manly duties is later displayed in *The Godfather Part II* in which we are introduced to Fredo's wife, Deanna. Fredo's desperation for a bride who satisfies both his sexual desires and familial obligations results in his only satisfying the former.

During the elaborate dinner party for little Anthony's first communion, Deanna is seen drunk and dancing with another man. Michael observes this and tells his older brother that if he doesn't act, he will have it handled for him. When Fredo attempts to pull her off the floor, she blatantly declares the weakness in Fredo that everyone can already see: "Oh, I know what's the matter with you. You're jealous because he's a real man." This scene illustrates profound humiliation in the film. It is a man's responsibility to control his wife and make her observe the characteristics that an Italian wife is to sustain; to be subservient to her husband, respect his wishes, and trust his judgment. Deanna does none of these, and worse, she shows it publicly, making it clear to the whole Italian community in attendance that Fredo is an embarrassment to his family and the Italian mafia lifestyle.

Another characteristic traditionally held by male family members is the lack of respect for their wives when it comes to honesty. Assuming that a woman's views will conflict with his own objectives, a man feels no obligation to be truthful with her regarding his true feelings on an assortment of matters. This is most clearly depicted in the final scene of Part I, where Kay emotionally poses the question to her husband as to whether or not he has partaken in the gruesome murders that she has gotten word of. Without flinching, he calmly looks her straight in the eye and says no, an obvious lie. Relief immediately fills her body as she hears what her heart wishes to be true. While this declaration is made in the early stages of the saga, Kay herself is already suspicious of this clear-cut claim by Michael, but chooses to accept it knowing that this is the life and the family she has chosen to be a part of. The acceptance of the family's involvement in criminal activity is a task that Don Vito's wife and Sonny's wife have already assumed.

In the films, women also conveniently fit into one of two categories: a wife or a mistress, a saint or a sinner. A woman is either good enough to marry, or she is there for the sole purpose of fulfilling sexual pleasures (a channel of escapism for a man from his family). A woman who attempts to upset the balance between a man's family life and his carnal desire outside the realm of marriage is sure to be disciplined for her unsightly and inappropriate disruption. There is no middle ground between these roles; women can never assume the role of friend or confidant.

Connie is treated like a child who needs help with a bully rather than a capable adult. When Connie pleads

with Sonny not to kill him, she is illustrating the typical woman's belief that she needs a man to take care of her. She would rather have a violent, adulterous husband than none at all.

After being part of an abusive marriage for a couple of years with her now-murdered husband, she resolved to deal with her past pain by behaving much like Fredo's wife. Abandoning the womanly responsibilities her Italian heritage tells her to uphold, she spends her time dating many men and frolicking about while neglecting her children.

There is also a level of reserve that women are expected to maintain when they are in the presence of masculine family members, or men in general. Women are only allowed to unleash their true personalities in the presence of other women. Their conversation with men, however, is limited to topics like the weather and the children. The old saying that has been for decades applied to children in America now applies to the women in *The Godfather*: Women are to speak only when spoken to. Deanna illustrates this viewpoint when she drunkenly exclaims, "These dagos are crazy when it comes to their wives...Never marry a wop. They treat you like shit!" Deanna plainly states the ideas and feelings of the women in the Corleone family and the feelings an outsider may have upon observing them.

Don Vito's wife is painted as the quintessential Italian woman. She perfectly fulfills her role as the wife of an Italian-American mob boss. Nurturing, loving, respectful of her husband and never prodding him about the nature of his business, Carmella is the saintly wife that every man should mold his own spouse into. Carmella successfully fulfills the role of mafia wife because she stays out of her husband's business, cares for her children and grandchildren and prepares the food. This is seen in the kitchen scenes in which she is either shown holding a screaming baby or diligently cooking or cleaning. Carmella illustrates her belief in minding her own business while sitting at the dinner table. While Sonny and Connie argue over Connie's obvious violent struggle with Carlo, Carmella harshly tells Sonny to stay out of their business. She doesn't show any concern for the fact that her only daughter is being abused. She accepts the situation: a man is assumed to be in control of his relationship and therefore, no one is to intervene.

The Catholic Church is of profound importance to members of the Italian-American family. However, the importance to strictly abide by the tenets of the faith is

a compulsion primarily reserved for women. This attitude is notable in the beginning of Part I during the wedding scene where Sonny fails to abide by the seventh commandment. During an event in which two lives are being united in holy matrimony, Sonny, the brother of the bride, is upstairs in a bedroom with a bridesmaid while his children and wife are in the yard attending the reception. As this image is presented so early in the movie, the observer perceives this behavior is to be taken as a usual or common activity of some Italian men. Cheating on one's wife is not regarded as betrayal but simply an expected pastime. Sonny, for example, has a wife who he deemed fit to clean his clothes, cook his food and keep to herself; his sexual desires are to be fulfilled by another. A woman who attempts to upset this balance between a man's family life and his carnal needs outside of the marriage is sure to be punished. For example, when a pregnant Connie confronts her husband Carlo about his extramarital activities, he severely beats her, unquestionably one of the most violent scenes in the film, more so even than scenes in which mafia-style murders take place. Women are expected to stay quiet and accept their subservient role.

The need and demand for women to be chaste and abide by religious code is essential to Italian-American men. If a woman cheats, it is a massive embarrassment for the woman's husband and she would be a primary target for murder. Furthermore, it would be a most shameful situation for the family. As the Italian women are expected to emulate the character of religious figures, particularly the much esteemed Virgin Mary, any such behavior would be not only unusual, but also disrespectful and sinful.

This hypocrisy regarding the church is demonstrated again during the baptism of Connie and Carlo's newborn son. While formally renouncing Satan before a Catholic priest, his order for the mass killing of important mafia leaders is simultaneously taking place. Similarly, when he lies to Kay, Michael is fully capable of living this paradox because he feels it is his obligation to run the family business yet maintain a level of religious responsibility for those family members who aren't entangled in those illegitimate activities. Important family business is to be reckoned with by men, while women are expected to never pass judgment or interfere. Women are to assume the traditional roles that men

expect them to fulfill.

Men are often depicted as Neanderthals who know women for merely their outward sexual allure and responsibility to maintain a household. The Old World traditions they have known prevent them from appreciating the opposite sex for anything other than these specified qualities and capacities.

These illustrations of masculine dominance are a part of an unceasing cycle to maintain male authority over the family. This depiction is seen in a multitude of scenes throughout the trilogy. Scenes depicting this innate desire are most clearly seen in *The Godfather Part II*. In that film, Michael's thoughts are frequently on whether or not his wife Kay will bear a newborn son. This concern is later emphasized during a dramatic scene in which Tom Hagen breaks the news to Michael that his wife had a miscarriage and lost the baby. In an upset rage, Michael's primary concern was not the loss of his child, but the loss of an heir who could potentially assume the role of leading the family in future generations. This is a drastic difference from the way in which a male perceives the importance of his daughter. This is illustrated in the opening scene of Part I. Bonasera speaks to Don Vito regarding the violent beating of his daughter. "She was the light of my life—my beautiful girl. Now she will never be beautiful again." He speaks of his daughter like a possession and measures her worth by her looks and her "honor"—her sexual purity.

The instilled traits in Italian men of gruff domination dictate the women's roles and behaviors. It is because of women like Carmella and those who model after her that the mafia family and lifestyle continue to exist. If it weren't for the women abiding by these guidelines, then the Corleone's method of maintaining the balance between the blood and criminal family would cease to exist as seen in the demise of the family at the end of the saga.

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The Fall of Social Consciousness

An Analysis of Vittorio De Sica's Italian-Neorealism Films

by Deanna Hartley

Introduction

I decided to analyze the three earlier and most widely recognized films of the prolific and profound director Vittorio De Sica, which are considered to be some of the main works in Italian neorealism: *The Bicycle Thief* (1948), *Shoeshine* (1947) and *Umberto D* (1952).

De Sica was once quoted as saying, "My films are a struggle against the absence of human solidarity...against the indifference of society towards suffering. They are a word in favor of the poor and unhappy." This statement is a synopsis of the focus and content of this paper.

After a reflection on and thorough analysis of the films—as well as literature on the subject—I synthesized my findings and articulated my insights to arrive at the following conclusion: by emphasizing the desperate lower-class conditions of ordinary people, De Sica portrays individual failures of the protagonists as a microcosm of the failures of society in postwar Italy.

Before I support my thesis with concrete arguments and demonstrate how it applies to each film, it is essential to first provide a brief background on neorealism, as well as on director Vittorio De Sica and his relationship with screenwriter Cesare Zavattini. I will then proceed to make some final conclusions.

Neorealism

After World War II, a new Italian nation emerged from the disaster of fascism and war. In 1946, a referendum on the Italian government deposed the monarchy and led to the establishment of a republic. The new Italian constitution took effect in 1948 (The Met Museum).

Italian neorealism was a film movement that lasted from approximately 1943 to 1952. It was characterized by stories set amongst the poor and working class, filmed in long takes on location and making frequent use of non-actors for secondary and sometimes primary roles (Wikipedia).

Italian neorealist films contended mostly with the difficult economic and moral conditions of postwar Italy, reflecting the changes in the Italian psyche and the

conditions of everyday life—defeat, poverty and desperation. Because Cinecittà, a studio complex in Rome, was occupied by refugees, films were shot outdoors, amidst devastation (Wikipedia).

Vittorio De Sica and Cesare Zavattini

De Sica's collaboration with author and screenwriter Cesare Zavattini was a creative relationship that gave the world the most significant films of postwar Italian neorealism: *Shoeshine*, *The Bicycle Thief* and *Umberto D*.

In *The Bicycle Thief* and *Shoeshine*, De Sica and Zavattini examined the chaotic urban conditions in the aftermath of the war with incisive simplicity and disarming sincerity (Rialto Pictures). *Umberto D*, which De Sica dedicated to the memory of his father, was his last neorealist film and, temporarily, his last masterpiece. (Rialto Pictures).

Film critic Andre Bazin stated that "in a world...in which reality is scarcely any longer favored for its own sake but rather is rejected or excluded as a political symbol, the Italian cinema is certainly the only one which preserves, in the midst of the period it depicts, a revolutionary humanism."

"Zavattini belabored bourgeois attitudes; declared himself against the 'exceptional' man or hero; called for a sense of solidarity, equality and identification with the common man in the crowd." (MacCann)

Reflections on the Films

In each of the three films, the protagonist is alienated and faces a struggle for dignity in a segmented society, one in which everyone focuses on his or her individual needs.

De Sica "explores the relationship between working and lower-class characters in an indifferent and often hostile social and political environment."

Each film reflects the deplorable human condition at the time. The average citizen was forced to deal with the difficult economic and moral conditions of postwar Italy; these films clearly illustrate the destitute and desperate conditions of common Italian people. These films may appear to highlight or emphasize the failures

of individuals or protagonists, but a deeper assessment reveals the congruency between the failures of individuals and the utter failure of the postwar Italian society at large.

The Bicycle Thief

The Bicycle Thief is set in the poverty and bleakness of postwar Rome and “depicts a meditation of the human condition.” It portrays a society of desperation, and, in particular, empathizes with the tough life of a poor family struggling to make ends meet.

Antonio Ricci, a respectable family man, reached a state of desperation as a result of the apathy of the community and the government in postwar Rome and forfeited his morality by attempting to steal a bicycle. We are able to obtain insights, at various points throughout the film, into the apathy of the society—including the police—towards the plight of the layman.

Bazin states in his book, “In itself, the event [in the film] contains no proper dramatic valence. It takes on meaning only because of the social position of the victim. Without the haunting specter of unemployment, which places the event in the Italian society of 1948, it would be an utterly banal misadventure.”

“Likewise, the choice of bicycle as the key object in the drama is characteristic of both Italian urban life and of a period when mechanical means of transportation were still rare and expensive,” he continued. The details were planned situating the event in political and social history, in a given place at a given time.

In the scene in which Ricci, his friends and his son Bruno were searching for the missing bicycle, Ricci believed he had found both his bicycle and the culprit, but the alleged thief refused to cooperate with the frantic search party. Bruno dragged in a police officer, who was supposed to be a public servant, to force the man to reveal the bicycle to them.

Even though it may have been disappointing that the protagonist was in a helpless predicament, it was even more disconcerting that the officer did not offer more help, but instead shirked his responsibility and duty to serve the public. It is no wonder that the Italian government did not want this film to be shown abroad. It reflects a society that robs the citizens of everything—including their dignity—and reveals a negative, embarrassing image for them.

For instance, De Sica clearly shows that Ricci is not alone in his dilemma. When Ricci and his wife pawned their bed linen, we can see the shot of the clerk climb-

ing up the mountains of already pawned sheets, which demonstrates that many other people have also faced this predicament (In Black and White).

When Ricci first reports the theft of his bicycle to the police, the inspector dismissed it as unimportant and casually placed Ricci’s file on top of a pile of other reports, indicating that this was one of many such incidents (In Black and White). Vague offers of aid were forthcoming, but no real understanding of Ricci’s personal tragedy emerged from a gathering that understood only collective action (Bondanella).

The scene where Ricci and members of his union split up and search through rows upon rows of stolen bikes is a reminder that this is not an isolated event, and that Ricci’s is not an isolated problem (In Black and White).

This apathy extended to the larger society as well to the government and the community. No one paid heed to the fact that at a time of widespread unemployment, an honest man was cheated of his right to earn a livelihood and would doubtless be unemployed again; he had no other option but to resort to desperate measures to fulfill his role of provider and take care of his family’s needs.

“The worker is just as deprived and isolated among his fellow trade unionists as he is walking along the street...because the trade union does not exist to find lost bikes but to transform a world in which losing his bike condemns a man to poverty.” (Bazin)

“The indifference of the trade union is normal and justified because a trade union is striving for justice not for charity. But the cumbersome paternalism of the Catholic ‘Quakers’ is unbearable, because their eyes are closed to his personal tragedy, while they in fact actually do nothing to change the world that is the cause of it.” (Bazin) These statements clearly reveal the failure of the society at the time.

“De Sica shows us bureaucrats, police officials and pious churchgoers who do not understand Ricci’s plight, but the fact that members of his own class are no more sympathetic to him than they are even more devastating. In De Sica’s universe, economic solutions are ultimately ineffective in curing what is a meaningless, absurd human predicament.” (Bondanella)

In the final scene, when Ricci walks alongside his son without being able to look him in the eye after his failed attempt to steal the bicycle, we can almost sense his ignominy, guilt and, above all, his pain when he finally comes to the realization that, as film critic Andre

Bazin put it, “In the world where this workman lives, the poor must steal from each other in order to survive.” This idea could be solely attributed to the blatant apathy of the community and the government after World War II in Italy.

The hostile crowd that captured him after his attempted theft is in direct contrast to the complete lack of assistance Ricci received from another crowd when he tried to prevent the theft of his own vehicle.

It was all the more humiliating for Ricci, not only to be considered a thief by his community, but also to feel as though he had succumbed to corruption and failed in the eyes of his young son, who looked up to him as a role model. His saving grace was that in the film’s concluding frame, his son looked up at him, grabbed his hand and held on tight, as if to reassure his father of his unfailing support and admiration in the midst of the selfish, insensitive society at the time.

“The complicity between father and son is so subtle that it reaches down to the foundations of the moral life. It is the admiration the child feels for his father and the father’s awareness of it which gives its tragic stature to the ending. The public shame of the worker, exposed and clouted in the open street is of little account compared with the fact that his son witnessed it.” (Bazin)

“The tears they shed as they walk side by side, arms swinging signify their despair over a paradise lost. But the son returns to a father who has fallen from grace. The hand that slips into his... is the most solemn gesture that could ever mark the relations between a father and his son: one that makes them equals.” (Bazin)

Bondanella stated that “social reform may transform the immediate situation De Sica described in 1948. Economic development will indeed change a society in which a stolen bicycle may signify hunger and deprivation. But no amount of social engineering or even revolution... will alter the basic facts of life—solitude, loneliness, and alienation of the individual within the amorphous and unsympathetic body of humanity.”

“*Bicycle Thief* renders a two-fold justice: one by way of an irrefutable description of the wretched condition of the proletariat, another by way of the implicit and constant appeal of a human need that any society whatsoever must respect. It condemns a world in which the poor are obliged to steal from one another to survive...but this imposed condemnation is not enough, because it is not only a given historical institution that is in question or a particular economic setup, but the congenital indifference of our social organization, as such,

to the fortuitousness of individual happiness.” (Bazin)

Shoeshine

In *Shoeshine*, De Sica paints an uncompromising picture of the lives of Italian street children abandoned by their parents at the end of World War II (New York Times). This film features two young boys, Giuseppe and Pasquale, in postwar Italy.

“These characters are as real as their backdrop, a country still in the aftermath of a fascist state of affairs.” (IMDb)

They acquired meager earnings by shining shoes, but their dream was to buy a magnificent white horse. Giuseppe’s older brother offered the boys work in which they were required to deal in black market goods, which they accepted in an attempt to make some quick cash.

One day, the naive adolescents were set up by their accomplices, after which they are arrested and sent to a juvenile reform school similar to a prison. Their friendship was gradually destroyed by the social injustice usually associated with the adult world and authority figures. Not only were the two best friends purposely separated, but they were also tricked by the prison authorities into betraying each other. This would ultimately make each boy responsible for the other’s tragic downfall (NYFA).

While Pasquale betrayed Giuseppe by revealing details of the black market operation, Giuseppe betrayed Pasquale by telling the prison authorities that Pasquale had a file in his cell, which led them to whip Pasquale with a leather belt.

Not only were the boys forced to wait in prison before their trial, but they were not even allowed a fair trial. They were presented with incompetent attorneys who clearly sought only to make money and who were completely apathetic to the plight of these youngsters. They did not comprehend that they held the futures of two young boys in their hands.

The defense did not make any attempt to study the case or prepare good closing arguments, thereby sealing the boys’ fates. Pasquale’s defense attorney did not even seek a sentence of ‘not guilty.’ Rather, he only unenthusiastically appealed to the court to give Pasquale a lighter sentence.

The society was apathetic to the plight of the two mischievous boys rotting in prison for years while paying for someone else’s crime. The government and the society merely viewed them as juvenile delinquents who ought to be ostracized and punished. The corruption of the legal system in postwar Italy caused the condemna-

tion of Pasquale's life, as he was blamed for Giuseppe's accidental death.

The boys were forcibly stripped of their innocence and carefree nature at a very young, impressionable age and were deprived of the futures that they, like anyone else, deserved. This film epitomizes the failure of the society as a whole, starting with the ruthless authorities who ran the reform school.

Umberto D

From child neglect in *Shoeshine* to discarded old age in *Umberto D*, this film features the protagonist, in a state of desperation and on the brink of suicide, struggling to survive amidst an uncaring community and government. "It is the story of an old man's struggle to keep from falling from poverty into shame." (Ebert)

Like many neorealist films, *Umberto D* opens in the streets of Rome, where retirees are picketing for higher pensions but are suddenly dispersed by police and dashed into alleys because they lack the proper permits (Cummings).

Umberto D lived in a room infested with ants. Occasionally, adulterous couples could be seen leaving his room just as he returned to it (Ebert). This retired civil servant's pension was insufficient to pay the rent, making his eviction imminent. Reaching a point of desperation, Umberto D also forfeited his morality by resorting to begging and eventually contemplating suicide.

Umberto D is "the story of a man's struggle to retain his dignity in an undignified world." Bazin stated that this film "reports the secret misery, the egoism, the lack of fellow-feeling which characterizes [the middle class.]"

Because Umberto is part of the middle class, his life often revolves around the protection of outward appearances—a clean shirt, proper behavior, good manners—what the Italians call a "bella figura." He is more afraid of losing face—of appearing poor—than of poverty itself.

Umberto's fate seems to be linked with that of his dog Flike. The dog's role is actually more symbolic; Umberto D's predicament is similar to that of a stray dog cast out onto the streets by an uncaring society (Megahey).

The many rows of hungry men eating in the charity soup kitchen that Umberto frequents informs us that his is not an isolated case, but only one tragic character out of thousands. Thus, it is clear that the struggles and failures of the protagonist are directly proportionate to the

failure and indifference of the society towards suffering in post-war Italy. "De Sica and Zavattini certainly seem to place the blame for Umberto's plight on the Italian government." (Russell)

The protagonist fervently attempted—in vain—to raise money just to keep a roof over his head, but when all else failed, he decided to end it all. "Everywhere Umberto goes, people are afraid to give in, to offer something they could miss later on, and every interaction reveals a constant concern for self-preservation." (Cummings)

Throughout the film, we can sense a total disregard of the plight of the elderly in postwar Italy—from the self-absorbed, insensitive landlady whose only concern is wealth and her lavish parties to the people who ran the dog shelter who cared more about making financial arrangements than taking care of the caged, unattended dogs.

Even though Maria, the maid, sympathized with his predicament, there was little she could do other than offer him some companionship. Maria was also a victim of the blatant apathy of the community, as she lived in poverty and braced herself for imminent single parenthood. In one scene, we get a glimpse of her morning ritual—killing ants, grinding coffee and boiling water—the true depiction of an ordinary life.

There is one scene in which Maria's negligence allows Flike to escape. Umberto scolds her for her carelessness, immediately after she had been abandoned by her boyfriend after telling him of her pregnancy. Umberto, concerned for his dog, is completely unconscious of her pain, yet he expects others to be sensitive to his problems (Bondanella). People were too busy taking care of their own problems that they did not have the time or the ability to worry about those around them.

In the heart-wrenching final scene, Flike, Umberto's only companion, literally saved his life and gave him a reason to live. The only reason he decided against suicide was because he could neither find someone to take care of Flike nor pluck up the courage to kill his beloved pet before he killed himself.

In this film, "we are dealing with...a disconcerting and irrefutable observation on the human condition...beyond any category of morality or politics." (Bazin)

Conclusion

Thus, in all three of his masterpieces, De Sica focus-

es on the individual failures of each of the protagonists in moments of desperation, which I believe is a microcosm of the failures of the society at large.

This is adeptly demonstrated through the techniques characteristics of neorealist filmmaking, set amidst the reality of the conditions of the poor and working class in postwar Italy.

By illustrating the sub-standard and rigid hand-to-mouth existence of the protagonists in moments of desperation, I believe that De Sica intended to reveal an underlying theme in each of these films, which was the apathy and failure of the society and the government to the plight of the citizens in postwar Italy.

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The Absence of Familial Relationships in Italian Cinema as Portrayed in Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*

by Christina Smith

As Americans, there is a general stereotype of most Italians and Italian-Americans that is perceived by many. One such image that may come to mind of a “typical” Italian family might be a holiday scene. A large group of people, ranging from babies in mother’s arms to grandparents sipping espresso gathered around an enormous table filled with pasta, meats and bakery.

The air would be festive with much buoyant conversation stemming from all groups of the family, from the teenage cousins discussing fashion to the fathers’ good fortune in the businesses that year. Hugs and kisses would fly, much like the hands of the aunts trying to explain the family’s secret sauce recipe to the newlywed daughters.

The room would be filled with the aroma of fresh basil and herb as the laughter from the dinner table drowned out the tired cries of the newest baby cousin. Mothers would be heaping plates with second helpings as the protests of “I’m already full, Ma” met the sound of music drifting from the family room. There would be laughter in such a scene of an Italian family get-together and an overall sense of connection and love among relatives.

While this may be an example of a contemporary Italian family as we know it, Italian cinema has borne some pictures that portray a feel quite the opposite of this happy, close-knit family depiction. One such example is Federico Fellini’s masterpiece *La Dolce Vita*, translated as *The Sweet Life*.

Far from the familial bond of Italian-Americans in Hollywood pictures like the *Godfather* trilogy, some Italian films like *La Dolce Vita* break the stereotype of typical Italian families quite poignantly. Stepping away from a group or familial unit, as so classically depicted by the Corleone family in *The Godfather*, *La Dolce Vita* instead focuses on the life and character of one man, Marcello Rubini. As the film spans a full week’s time in Marcello’s life, the viewer is taken along to experience just how difficult it is for the discontented paparazzo Marcello, to retain or develop a meaningful, lasting relationship.

Marcello is not teased with the presence of relationships but instead is given full opportunity to make the best of the people in his life. Throughout the movie, though, there are several people that just don’t meet eye-to-eye with Marcello, including his live-in girlfriend Emma, the bored socialite actress Maddalena, Marcello’s new social group at the end of the film, the girlish “angel,” Paola, the sexy innocence of American movie star Sylvia and the tragic genius of friend, Steiner. As all these people are either wanted by Marcello or wanting of Marcello, the viewer may note that there are plenty of opportunities for Marcello to build a family or gather friendships.

The film opens with a helicopter carrying Marcello and a gigantic statue of Jesus. The initial scene is quite ironic as the viewer gets a feel for Marcello and his attitude toward women. With no regard to the sanctity of the symbol of the Christ, Marcello yells down to women sunbathing on a rooftop to try to get their phone numbers. The scene remains lighthearted and the helicopter flies off.

The next scene opens up with an exotic dance show at a party in which the prince is attending. This is where the viewer realizes that Marcello attends this event not as an elite or royalty, but instead as a journalist. While Marcello dusts off a threat from the prince’s camp for his efforts to expose him (“You’re not a journalist”), the audience is introduced to Maddalena. Maddalena promises to be an interesting character. She ultimately seems bored with existence and is wholly unfulfilled, despite all the money she has (Fellini). The two go on a drive and begin to discuss their feelings and seem quite attached to one another, making the viewer believe that the two are a couple.

Maddalena proposes that she would like to live in a new city where she knows no one. Marcello reflects and says “I like Rome very much. It’s sort of a moderate tranquil jungle where one can hide well.” (Fellini) Maddalena falls deeper into her conviction that she just couldn’t leave Rome in order to be happy: “I’d like to hide too, but I can’t. I can’t.” (Fellini)

Here the viewer actually comes to understand the insecurities and anguish Maddalena and Marcello are suffering from. Marcello seems to make it a point about Maddalena's vast supply of money and tells her to buy an island, to relax and not to worry, saying, "You're so rich, if you fall, you'll land on your feet." (Fellini) This scene almost invokes sympathy for the two lost souls, so discontent with what life has given them, but both unwilling to do anything about it.

As Maddalena removes her sunglasses and exposes a bruised eye, she also reveals her position in life—lost. She confesses to Marcello with desperation, "With love there is this tension. Only love gives me strength." Marcello seems to be Maddalena's confidant and for this moment the viewer is inclined to think the two might kiss or perhaps profess their love. Marcello gazes up at Maddalena, seeming to know the very depths of her soul and comforts her: "Long live love, then." (Fellini)

The next scene is somewhat confusing as Maddalena begins talking to a woman from a balcony above and invites her to take a drive with her and Marcello. The viewer soon learns that Maddalena has picked up a whore, whom she offers to drive home despite the admittedly far distance. While the prostitute sits in the back of the car chatting with the two, there is definitely an air of social and class distinction. Although Maddalena is part of the upper society and Marcello merely works in it (although well-known and liked), they both openly talk about the prostitute as if she's not even there in the car with them.

Maddalena seems to test Marcello by asking him if he would ever be with "a woman like her." Marcello's negative response seemed to sit well with Maddalena and the viewer is surprised to see her ask the prostitute to invite them in for coffee. As there is a staleness of character on Maddalena's part—she seems a woman dissatisfied and unappreciative—it is surprising to witness her presence in the woman's flooded apartment.

Marcello comforts the fretting prostitute and she announces that she will begin the coffee. As the seconds pass, Maddalena shows complete disregard for the hospitality of the woman and asks Marcello to close the curtains to the bedroom they have entered. Marcello accepts Maddalena's advances as they make love, with no feelings of regret or disrespect.

This scene leaves the viewer with many questions. Might this relationship between Maddalena and Marcello be a positive, healthy influence of one upon the other? As the two leave the woman's home calmly,

Maddalena pressing money into her hand and kissing her goodbye, the previous scenes of the two at the house seem washed away.

The act of paying the woman to rent a room in her home makes the ordeal seem a business transaction and removes any ideas of lasting love or commitment. Maddalena and Marcello seem best described as two lost, empty souls who sometimes find comfort in each other because of the similarity of their situations. It seems that neither person is in love with or even understands the other as an individual, but instead uses the other for sporadic, but needed comfort.

Another relationship in Marcello's life is introduced in the next scene. The viewer is both surprised and not surprised to find out that Marcello has a live-in girlfriend named Emma. Emma is found slumped in the hallway of their apartment as Marcello walks in from his late night out with Maddalena. A panic comes over Marcello as Emma remains limp and immobile. "What did you do, you crazy fool? Why are you so crazy? Do you want to ruin me, huh? One of these days I'll just let you die. I'll let you die! Emma, answer me. Stop it now." (Fellini) The audience feels an immense panic come from Marcello as he breathes heavily and sweats as he speeds to get Emma to the hospital. Marcello grabs Emma's hand. "My love. Emma!" he pleads with her.

This scene is strange in that Marcello becomes vulnerable for the camera. This calamity caused by Emma's attempt at suicide opens Marcello up to be seen as loving and fearful to lose the one he loves. His genuine concern with Emma would almost be touching but instead, it is confusing. Marcello's initial insults that accompany his worry cheapen the truth and depth of his apprehension and lead the viewer to ask why he has such scorn for Emma.

Upon view of the entire film, it becomes known that Emma's excessiveness and deeply-rooted love for Marcello pushes him away and makes her unattractive to him. But here, in the hospital, Marcello seems genuinely concerned, full of love and compassion, as he takes Emma's hands and kisses them repeatedly and lovingly. He pleads with her, "Emma, why did you do it? Tell me. Why?" (Fellini)

Marcello seems almost guilty and repentant, for he has in mind his actions with Maddalena the previous evening. Here the viewer can distinguish between Marcello's feelings for Emma. Deep down, he cares for her, but his interest to find and better himself will lead to him finding a woman more on his intellectual level.

As Marcello is obviously distraught over Emma's attempt on her life, he definitely belittles his actions of helping her by calling her a fool and telling her that next time he will let her die.

The viewer must sort between positive and poor feelings for Marcello at this point. Here is a woman, desperately in love, being verbally abused by the man she so longs for. Marcello, on one hand, shows compassion, concern and even fear, but his annoyance with Emma cannot be and is not hidden. The verdict on this relationship in Marcello's life is definitely shaky and extremely questionable. He pushes away Emma's suffocating love, leaving himself empty and still searching for something to make his life seem worthwhile.

The next scene opens as a dramatic, fast-paced welcome to sexy American starlet, Sylvia, who has just arrived in Italy. The paparazzi love her and she loves them. Sylvia has a sensual yet innocent air about her and Marcello immediately falls for her. Here the viewer sees Marcello's desperate need to be close to Sylvia, as she represents everything he is looking for in a woman. Although Sylvia is the third consecutive woman to enter the film and Marcello's life as the viewer knows it, she is by far the most sought after by Marcello.

He seems to forget, even wants to forget, any notions of Maddalena or Emma in his life. When the crowd relocates to an indoor press conference, Marcello is shown on the telephone while everyone else fusses about Sylvia. Marcello is on the telephone with Emma, calmly letting her ramble about how she wants to cook for him, make love and spend time together.

Marcello's passive responses lead the viewer to believe that he perhaps does have a rooted, vested interest in Emma, but as her mood changes and she accuses Marcello of being alone with Sylvia, it is apparent that Marcello's interest in Emma is not sincere, and he only wishes to pacify her. Marcello tells Emma that Sylvia is nothing to him, only a big doll, but he is not being genuine at all. Emma's threats and manipulation put Marcello off even more.

Marcello comes completely undone at a nightclub party that he attends to celebrate Sylvia's stay in Italy. As the two dance to soft romantic music, Marcello longingly gazes at Sylvia admitting to her that she is all that he is looking for in the world and in a partner. "You are everything. You're the first woman of creation. You're the mother, the sister, the lover, the friend, the angel, the devil, the Earth, the home. That's what you are: the home!" (Fellini) Sylvia giggles innocently as she soaks in

the moment, feeling exuberant and happy to be alive. Marcello cannot help his feelings and asks "Sylvia, why did you come here? Go back to America, please. What am I supposed to do now?" (Fellini) Marcello lets himself go, enamored with Sylvia's beauty, the perfection he so longs for in his life.

As the camera lends itself to Robert, Sylvia's drunken boyfriend, Marcello makes a desperate attempt to capture Sylvia for himself. "I must see you. I must talk to you at all costs." (Fellini) When Sylvia runs off, distraught over Robert's drunken behavior, Marcello sees it the perfect opportunity to make his move on this woman whom he cannot get enough of. As they fend off the paparazzi to drive away, Marcello seems the most content he has been so far in the film. Sylvia seems saddened about things and admits, "Everything is so difficult, Marcello." (Fellini)

Marcello openly wants to comfort his perfect woman and leans in to kiss her, telling her that he will never find a woman like her. The moment is, of course, interrupted and Sylvia becomes distracted with some howling dogs.

Marcello just cannot seem to win in a relationship. By this point in the film, he has established a dislike for his actual girlfriend, Emma, an indifferent, extraneous relationship with Maddalena and a deeply convicted infatuation with Sylvia, who he perceives as the perfect woman. She is obviously involved with Robert and seems too innocent, helpless and, in a way, disconcerted to fix or leave the situation she is in with him.

As Marcello and Sylvia return from their nightly tour about Rome, the two are met by an infuriated Robert who slaps Sylvia and assaults Marcello, dashing any hopes Marcello has for himself and Sylvia being together. Another relationship falls short for Marcello, he loses again.

The film next introduces Steiner, a friend and role model of Marcello's. The two reunite in a church and the focus of Marcello's affections ditch love and switch to friendship. Steiner, a noted intellect prompts Marcello to move forward in his writing and to change his focus from journalism to his real passion, literature. Marcello is wholly stimulated by Steiner and contemplates Steiner's statement of his work, "It is vivid, passionate, the best of you. Qualities you insist on hiding which nonetheless belong to you." (Fellini)

The two head to the choir loft of the church as Steiner sits down at the organ to play a haunting tune that emits an air of exploration. The scene ends as

Marcello seems to do just that: search himself to find what he really wants out of life.

Next, the viewer sees Marcello entering Steiner's home with Emma. The two arrive at a party that houses every type of elite intellectual imaginable, including painters, authors and musicians, all with a complete and mutual respect for one another. The presence of Emma leads the viewer to believe that Marcello was inspired by Steiner to get his life on track and here Marcello shows that Emma is, in a way, a stronghold or foundation for him. It is a misconstrued notion, however, as Marcello is seen thriving on intellectualism at the party while Emma, though fascinated and excited, is completely out of her element surrounded by people who are not of the same class and social standard as her.

The "oracle" poet Iris puts a damper on Marcello's progress, however, when she prompts him to "Stay free, available, like me. Never get married. Never choose. Even in love, it's better to be chosen. The great thing is to burn and not to freeze." (Fellini) Marcello welcomes this notion of an analysis of life and compliments Iris on her poetry, commenting that it is "strong and sharp," just as he likes it (Fellini).

Marcello continues to engulf himself in the presence of these scholars and their air of mental and reasoned intellectualism, offering that he prefers "a clear and precise art without rhetoric, that doesn't lie, that isn't flattering." (Fellini) Emma is put on the spot by Iris when she is asked what she likes to do. Emma, excited at Iris' request for her opinion, becomes flustered and answers with a non-stimulating response of, "I don't know. And you?" (Fellini)

Iris switches her direction and tells Steiner that he is "so tall that [he] can't hear the voices up there," alluding to his superiority and grandeur (Fellini). Steiner quickly responds telling Iris and the party that he is no bigger than anyone else, perhaps even smaller in comparison to others. Steiner's mood changes as his children enter the scene and he pours his love and adoration of them into a speech about their intellect and innocence.

While Emma takes in this atmosphere of presumptuousness, she approaches Marcello with the assurance (only on her part, of course) that they, too will live in absolute happiness just as Steiner does. Marcello reacts by leaving her to sit on the floor alone and goes to speak with Steiner on the balcony.

Marcello's idolization of Steiner is epitomized when Marcello opens up to his friend. "Your house is a real

refuge. Your children, your wife, your books, your extraordinary friends...Me, I'm wasting time. I won't manage anything anymore. Once I had ambitions, but maybe I'm losing everything. I forgot everything." (Fellini)

Marcello is almost begging for help, an answer from someone who he sees as a complete manifestation of who he, himself, would like to be. Steiner foreshadows his own fate when he prods Marcello to reassess his ambitions. "Safety is not all in one's home—don't do what I did. I'm too serious to be an amateur, but not enough to be a pro. There. A more miserable life is better, believe me, than an existence protected by an organized society where everything is calculated, everything is perfect."

This scene is utterly ironic in that Steiner almost warns Marcello to steer toward another life, yet Marcello finds nothing but wisdom and awestruck veneration in Steiner. The scene ends hauntingly with Steiner worrying out loud about the fate of his children and the unsettling world.

In the next scene, the viewer finds Marcello abiding by Steiner's suggestions, writing alone in an empty restaurant away from Rome. The opening picture is of Marcello vehemently screaming at Emma over the phone to leave him alone while he works and to stop calling. "Go to hell, you wretched woman! I won't tell you when I'm coming back." (Fellini) It seems that Marcello cannot gather his life together as a whole, but that it must fall into place piece by piece. While he has made a move to follow his writing aspirations and regain control of his ambitions, he has decided to do without Emma again. His aspiration to better himself does not include her at all.

Within the same setting, the viewer is introduced to Emma's polar opposite, Paola, a young girl who works in the restaurant in which Marcello is writing. Marcello is immediately attracted to Paola, praising her beauty and prodding into her personal life. Marcello asks her to show her profile and upon doing so, he proclaims her resemblance to an angel. The two chat a bit more, obviously stirred by one another. Marcello stops writing and contemplates.

He then goes over to the phone and calls Emma who anticipatorily answers the phone with a brash "What do you want?" The scene, at once so promising, ends here as Marcello once again slides back into the life he doesn't want. It is almost as if Marcello is scared to

accept his need for growth and change. Although he had only moments earlier been screaming at Emma, he finds himself leaving Paola, the untouched “angel” who arouses his interest and reason to return to what obviously isn’t working in his life, his relationship with Emma.

After the viewer finds Marcello detoured in his goal of a self-improvement realization, his father comes to visit in Rome. Here is the only time in the movie that the viewer meets anyone related to Marcello through lineage, so an air of closeness is expected. The feel is quite the opposite, however. Although both men are happy to see one another, the viewer is immediately hit with the realization that the men do not know each well at all and have not seen each other in a very long time.

Marcello reverts backward in virtue slightly when he puts on a show of importance to impress his father, calling everyone around their table by name and building up his job and apartment “in the decadence of his celebrity subjects.” (Dick) He even denies Emma’s presence in his life and tells his father that she is the cleaning lady. Marcello caters to his father’s wish to go out on the town and the two are accompanied by a paparazzo to the Cha Cha Club.

Marcello’s father, excited to be out and away from the sameness of home, drinks quite heavily and quickly becomes interested in Fanny, a dancer at the club and acquaintance of Marcello’s. Marcello is mostly quiet during the outing, contemplating his father’s presence and catering to his want for a good time. Marcello observes his father’s assuredness with the young, lively Fanny, and is quite captivated to discover a side to his father that he had never witnessed before.

Marcello is a bit taken aback by his father’s demeanor and when his father leaves the table to dance with Fanny, Marcello confides in the paparazzo that he never knew his father, as he was never home. Marcello offers that he was happy to see his father and prompts his friend, “he’s fun, huh?” (Fellini)

A poignant scene at the Cha Cha Club finds Marcello deep in thought watching a lone clown perform his act. The clown plays a mournful, bleeding song of sadness on his trumpet. The clown focuses his performance on the statue of a woman on the stage and then turns to Marcello and locks eyes with him. This scene gives the feeling that Marcello is embodied by the clown’s act. He is sad and forlorn, always looking to direct his attention toward a woman. Even with his father present, Marcello is alone and clueless.

Marcello’s visit with his father is cut short after everyone relocates to Fanny’s apartment. While the viewer may have been inclined to suspect a romantic involvement between the father and Fanny, it is not shown. Instead, Marcello’s father proclaims that he has had too much to drink and that he wants to leave immediately to catch the train home. Marcello almost pleads with his father and tries to evoke sympathy from his father, in that Marcello begs to spend time with him. Almost like a child, Marcello tries everything to get his father to stay.

Perhaps suffering from the guilt of a long night of partying, Marcello’s father deserts his good spirits and declines Marcello’s many requests to stay. As his father enters his taxi, Marcello is left standing alone in the street, saddened by yet another missed opportunity to solidify a relationship, a foundation of family.

Marcello is next seen on the strip in an attempt to find a party, a place to release his tensions by “revisiting his aimless hedonism” (Monaco). He spots his friend Nicolina and asks to accompany her to a party at her fiancé’s castle in Bassano di Sutri. Marcello is welcomed at the party by a vast group of odd socialites who are already drunk from their evenings out. Marcello’s face is covered from behind by a scarf that his held by none other than Maddalena.

The two leave the party together and the old familiar air of desolation again becomes the topic of their conversation. As each speaks of their troubles, including a shared sense of vacancy, neither understands the other nor puts in enough effort to truly be serious. Maddalena plays a game with Marcello, symbolically seating him, in a room adorned with beautiful art, by himself in a lone chair. Maddalena leaves the room and sits outside near a duct and talks to him “through the wall.”

Maddalena then starts confessing her love and will to marry Marcello while he accepts the invitation, proposing that he has felt the same for her. The two trade “confidences” about one another until Maddalena falls silent and Marcello continues to ramble about his love for her. Although Marcello never finds out why Maddalena fails to respond to his outpourings, the viewer watches her begin to passionately kiss a man who walked up to her out of nowhere.

The relationship between Maddalena and Marcello is proven to be dispassionate and, frankly, a lie. The two reverberate their own inner struggles through one another, never reaching an understanding or pinnacle of love at all. This is especially apparent when Marcello

ends up spending alone time later in the evening with Jane, an older American poet. As the party in the Old Villa carries on to a seance, a young lady “possessed” by the summoned spirit cries out the truth in Marcello’s heart, “I want love! I want life! I want truth!” (Fellini) Once again, Marcello is let down. He knows what he wants out of life now, but it hovers above his reach.

Marcello’s experience in Bassano di Sutri seems to have followed him home, as the next scene opens with him and Emma at each other’s throats. Emma cannot, and chooses not to, hold back her anguish from Marcello as she labels him selfish, empty, “heart-locked” and a disgrace.

Marcello fires back that his only disgrace is having met her. The two are involved in a ludicrous game of manipulation to change the other into what is wanted from them. Marcello retaliates again saying that he can’t spend his life loving her or her “selfish, miserable bleakness of ideals” (Fellini). Marcello belittles Emma by saying he doesn’t want a spineless woman who only talks of cooking and bed. “A man who accepts this is a finished man, nothing but a worm. I don’t believe in your aggressive, sticky, maternal love! I don’t want it! I have no use for it, this isn’t love, it’s brutalization.” (Fellini)

Both Marcello and Emma take turns demanding that the other leave but both hold on to the argument and continue screaming out their issues with one another. “You always say that I’m the crazy one, that I live in a dream, outside reality. But you’re the one who’s off the road. Don’t you see that you’ve already found the most important thing in life...a woman who loves you, who’d give her life for you...as if you were the only one in the world? Marcello, when two people love each other, nothing else matters. What are you afraid of?” (Fellini)

Emma’s comments dig deep at Marcello’s heart and in a fit of rage, he zooms off in his car leaving her to stand alone on the road at night. The scene fades as time passes and the morning light brings Marcello racing down the road to retrieve Emma where he left her. With picked flowers in hand, Emma gets in the car, expecting his arrival, and the scene ends with the two of them at home holding hands while sleeping together. For the moment, Marcello has once again found his “happiness,” content with Emma’s love. With no hope for a happy ending, the phone rings and disrupts the couple’s contentment in bed.

Marcello is next seen racing up the stairs to Steiner’s apartment where swarms of paparazzi have gathered. Marcello finds himself with police investigators inside

the apartment, staring at Steiner’s lifeless body. Marcello is utterly shocked and equally bewildered as to why Steiner would commit suicide and kill his children. Shaken to a sweat, Marcello steps to the balcony where he and Steiner shared their private moment and he recollects Steiner’s conversation about his own inadequacy and fear.

The police commissioner asks Marcello if he would know of any reason for Steiner’s actions. The officer asks if Steiner was afraid of trouble, maybe finances or something similar. Marcello responds with, “Maybe he was just afraid. Not in the way you mean. Maybe he was just afraid of himself...of us all.” (Fellini)

This scene appears to be the fall of Marcello. After gaining such hope for a better life from a man who really understood him, Marcello is once again, lost in life. With the suicide of his life’s hero, Marcello has no where to turn and cannot imagine any better fate for himself.

The next scene opens with Marcello breaking through a glass door to admit himself and his friends into the house of Riccardo, another friend who is not present. The viewer witnesses a large crowd of eccentrics and learns that Marcello has abandoned writing to become a publicity agent. Marcello has become lost in his vices, “drained of life like the beached fish,” with no sense of direction in life (Davison). The gathering in itself is sickening as the women proposition stripteases and they all laugh, unaffected.

Marcello is mocked for his supposed intellect and is called upon to liven up this “power party” (Schine). A strange picture follows as Marcello rides the back of a drunkenly-sick young actress around the room throwing feathers from a ripped pillow at her. The scene is surrealistic and perplexing, a depiction of Marcello’s new life with no direction. “It seems all shorthand to justify the morally instructive spectacle of smart people frittering away their talent.” (Romney)

The party wanders outside to the beach where a giant dead fish is being brought up on shore. This symbol is haunting to Marcello as he accuses it of watching him. As Marcello is rather discomforted at the fish that “insists on looking,” he hears his name being called from across the next shore. Marcello squints to find that the waving figure is Paola. Marcello seems to contemplate yelling back but pretends he cannot hear her, gives a weak wave and wanders away back to his friends. Paola is left on the opposite shore smiling and waving, as if inviting Marcello to change his ways under her guidance and encouragement. Marcello knows that he has strayed

too far to come back to reality and ambition, and the movie is left with Paola's smiling offer of salvation left unaccompanied in the sand.

Marcello's quest for totality in life is left to wash away with the waves. With no guidance in life, no family and no concrete or committed relationships, Marcello falls victim to a void he never overcame, clarified by "moral and intellectual depravity" (Renga). With such potential and not much support to develop it, Marcello's cycles of lost love lead to a complete breakdown of hope. Marcello never finds a part in a large, loving Italian family, but instead ends up despising himself and his lonely world.

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The Struggles of Man

Can We Discover that Humanity Is Really One Through the Art of Film?

by Judith Galvin

Identification of the Subject

For this paper, I investigated the way people felt and lived during World War II, as well as in postwar Italy and the United States. The question of how people's lives changed, how the country they lived in and how the government changed examines the struggles that were portrayed in the movies of the neorealist era. In comparison, the Hollywood movies depicting the same time frame will show how through the art of film we can discover that humanity is really one.

Reflective Statement

The subject of this research paper is how people from different countries and different walks of life handle the difficulties of their lives, and how these struggles are portrayed in the movies. The neorealist films of Italy showed the conflicts of people during World War II. These films were a protest to the way people were treated, and the harsh conditions they had to endure. In the same way, the Hollywood films of America also showcased the conflicts of war. Even though the war was not being fought on U.S. soil, it affected the people in many ways.

Therefore, the questions posed; Are people really different? Are their worries different? Are the struggles of life different today? Each film shows us how society was portrayed, how people viewed themselves and the way history viewed them as well.

Review of Literature

The literature I used for my research consisted of the two books required for the class: *Italian Cinema from Neorealism to the Present* and *Hollywood Italians: Dagos, Palooka, Romeos, Wise Guys, and Sopranos*, both by Peter Bondanella.

I also viewed three Italian neorealist movies: *Paisan* by Roberto Rossellini, *The Bicycle Thief* by Vittorio De Sica, and *Umberto D* by Vittorio De Sica; and three Hollywood movies: *Casablanca* by Michael Curtiz, *From Here to Eternity* by Fred Zimmermann and *The Godfather* by Francis Ford Coppola.

The representation of Italians in their neorealist movies during World War II and the American representation of that same era in the Hollywood movies are quite different, but the struggles that each society must endure are not.

Thesis Statement

The neorealist films were made to depict the struggles and problems of wartime in Italy. The people were living in a war-ravaged country in which food, clothing and jobs were hard to come by. They were held captive as a people and as a nation, whereas the non-European countries were affected by the war in a different way. They did not have the battles of war on their soil or Nazi occupation of their country, but their hardships were rationing of food and goods and the uncertainty that war always brings.

There are always worries for your loved ones that are fighting the war, and concerns if the world will be a peaceful place ever again. These films show how humanity is alike no matter where you live, what you do or if you are rich or poor. Through the art of film, we discover that humanity is really one.

Method

These six movies must be examined to support the thesis. The neorealist films of Italy were filmed on actual locations that showed the world how people had to cope and struggle to take care of themselves and their families. These films showed the countryside as it really was during the war: how buildings and cities were destroyed as well as how people were trying to live in ravaged areas. The films also used non-professional actors.

How much better is it to bring to the screen someone who is really going through the troubles of the time? This method helped to depict the true feelings of the people's attitudes and its subsequent devastation.

The Hollywood films were filmed on studio sites that were built to specifications of cities and locations. They built scenery and buildings to show the cities and

surrounding areas. The characters were all actors who had to play the part perfectly so the audience would truly believe the story. Hence, these six films will be discussed to show the struggles and humanity of each society.

Findings

The Italian neorealist films were made to depict the reality that Italians lived in during World War II and the years after the war. During this time, the film industry became a political tool. Instead of producing comedies or romance movies, Italians produced films that told of wartime devastation and the effect the war had on the people. The neorealist movies I chose to discuss in this paper are *Paisan*, *Umberto D* and *The Bicycle Thief*. These movies demonstrate the value of moral judgments, the total destruction of cities and families during wartime and the emotions of the people fighting the war trying to survive.

Neorealist films took on a style of documentaries. They depicted actual locations rather than studio sets. Non-professional actors played the major roles and brought realism to the screen. Many of these non-professionals were going through the hard times they were portraying on screen. The director Vittorio De Sica, who is known for his neorealist films states:

“My films are a struggle against the absence of human solidarity...against the indifference of society towards suffering. They are a word in favor of the poor and unhappy.” (Film 1301, Notes 10, Italian Neorealism)

Prof. Art Sandler, who teaches philosophy at Webster University, tells us that neorealist films began because of a manifesto written in 1942 by Cesare Zavattini. This manifesto told of a new kind of Italian film, not one that told comedy stories or romances but “one that confronted the social reality that Italians lived in.”

The movie *Paisan* is really six stories in one. It begins with a story of American soldiers trying to get through a minefield to set up their camp. They come across Italian citizens who are afraid and don't know if they can trust the Americans. The Italians have lost everything—their homes, their family members and their way of life. Their country is in turmoil.

The American soldiers are trying to communicate with the Italians, but the language barrier is keeping them from trusting the soldiers. They cannot understand what the soldiers are trying to say, so they receive mixed messages. One of the soldiers speaks Italian and

begins talking to the villagers to try and get their confidence and help.

His commanding officer continues to rush him to get the information, but the soldier says, “You don't speak Italian in a hurry.” (*Paisan*) The only one who helps the Americans is an Italian girl who knows how to navigate the minefield because she crosses it everyday in search of her missing father and brother. While she is talking with an American soldier, he shows her a picture of his family. She can relate to his concerns because each is worried about their families.

The Italian girl worries about her brother and father, and the American soldier about the family he left back home. While they are talking to each other, the Germans surround them and kill the American soldier. The girl gets his gun and shoots a German soldier before being killed. The story tells us that both the Italians and Americans are suffering. They miss their families and they are worn out and tired of fighting the war, but they still have a way to go before they can trust each other.

The second story tells us of an African-American GI who gets to know a small Italian boy. This boy has lost his family and is trying to survive on his own. He lives in bombed-out rubble, is wearing old GI clothes and is using any means possible, even stealing, to get food. The young boy steals the GI's boots and tries to sell them. The GI is mad and searches for the boy so he can get his boots back. He finds the young boy living in ruins and he cannot believe it. This GI probably comes from the poor side of town in a United States city, but he feels his small shack is a mansion compared to the conditions he sees here.

He leaves his boots for the boy to sell and drives away because he cannot stand to see the young boy, who should be a happy child playing and being protected from harm by his family, now struggling and stealing and leaving his childhood behind just to survive.

The third story is about an American GI who meets an innocent Italian girl who invites him into her home so that he may clean up after his many battles. The Italians are beginning to trust the Americans because they are helping to drive the Germans out of Italy. The GI barely knows the young girl, but feels friendship and kindness toward her. He tells her he has more battles to fight, and will come back to see her again.

While he is gone the girl needs to survive and turns to prostitution to make money. When the GI returns he doesn't even recognize the young girl anymore and feels

the war has changed everyone and everything. Even the flowering tree in her front yard no longer blooms. The war has taken away everything that is beautiful. They both share this feeling and understand that they can never get back their feelings for each other. The war has changed each of them too much.

In the fourth story, an American nurse is tending for the wounded. She has fallen in love with an Italian partisan and has heard he is in Florence. She must find him. Instead of taking some much needed rest, she decides to search for her loved one, but she must travel through a war zone and risk getting killed herself. She leaves the infirmary with an Italian man who is going to Florence to search for his family. The two of them are united for a time while they travel the bombed cities being held by the enemy. She finally finds out that the man she loves has been killed, and she is devastated.

This story illustrates that the Americans and Italians are beginning to fight together, trust one another and even fall in love with one another.

Next, we have three military chaplains taking refuge in a monastery for the night. One of the chaplains is Catholic, one is Protestant and the other is Jewish. The monks have no problem sharing their roof and what little food they have with them, but are unaware of their diversity. The monastery cook doesn't know how he will feed these three guests, and the head monk tells him that God will provide and he knows the cook will do his best so they will have a great meal together.

The military chaplains share their canned goods of milk, meat and vegetables with them, and the monks are amazed at how food can be stored this way. When the monks find out one of the chaplains is Jewish they begin to fast even though they are starving, so that the Lord will work a miracle and convert the Jewish chaplain so he can be saved. The Catholic chaplain has never known such an act of kindness and he praises the monks for their unselfishness towards all mankind. The monks are only interested in saving the Jewish chaplain who they hardly know, but feel they must work a miracle so his soul will not be lost.

The last story tells of Italian partisans and American soldiers who are surrounded by the German army. The town people help the American soldiers by hiding them and feeding them. The soldiers help the Italians by sharing their food and protecting the town. The Germans then capture them and begin to kill off the Italians. The Americans feel a kinship with the Italians and fight to defend them. They have now become friends and allies.

These stories show how the Italians start out not trusting the American soldiers. They can't communicate because of language differences, but eventually they find they are both faced with the same fears and dangers. As the American troops progress north from Sicily toward the Apennine mountain range they find that they are very much the same and begin to feel friendship and compassion toward one another.

This is not the only neorealist film that shows us the struggle of people in a war-torn nation. We can see the struggle of a family trying to survive in the movie *The Bicycle Thief*. This film is about a man, Antonio Ricci, who finally lands a job (25% of Italians at this time were jobless), feels good about himself and knows he can provide for his family.

Antonio needs his bicycle to help him get around the city to hang posters. Unfortunately, his bicycle is in the pawn shop because he needed money to feed his family. Now he must pawn his wife's dowry and their bed linens to reclaim the bike.

On the first day of work his bicycle was stolen. When the bike disappears, so too do his hopes and dreams. He knows of a group of thieves who steal bikes and resells them for a profit, so Antonio and his son, along with some friends, set out to find the thieves and the bike. There is one scene in which Antonio recognizes the thief and chases him all the way home. Antonio confronts him with the theft, but cannot prove it because he can't find the bike. The thief also has friends who swear he couldn't have done it because he was with them the whole day.

Antonio knows they are lying but he can't prove it. This is devastating for Antonio. We see and feel the despair for him and his son. The police are no help either. They know the stealing is going on, but they really don't do anything to stop it. Without the recovery of the stolen bike, Antonio has no case. At the end of this film, Antonio and his son are shown walking home, devastated.

This film does not give us a happy ending. It is trying to show how there were no happy endings for many people during this period of time. Struggles were happening everyday and families were sometimes never able to overcome these struggles.

One last neorealist film is *Umberto D*. This is a story of a retired man and his dog who is struggling to make ends meet. He does not even have enough money to pay his landlady, and she therefore throws him out of his apartment house. He tries to sell his watch, but no one

has enough money to buy it. He feels devastated and even tries to commit suicide with his dog by standing on the tracks while a train is coming. However, his dog struggles to get away which leads him off the tracks and out of the way of the train. This film is a demonstration against the Italian government. It shows how an elderly person has to confront loneliness and poverty. The government doesn't help the elderly, and society looks the other way in this film. The elderly are struggling every day to make ends meet. They are trying to live on a fixed income, and they feel society doesn't care.

Let us now look at some Hollywood films that depict the trials of World War II. The first film is *Casablanca*. This film was shot almost entirely on studio sound stages. The only real location used was the airport scene at the end of the movie. This movie takes place in the coastal city of Casablanca in Morocco. World War II is starting and many Europeans are trying to escape to America and, thus, to freedom.

Two German soldiers are murdered and the French police are trying to find the murderer. An Italian by the name of Guillermo Ugarte comes in to a cafe and starts talking to the owner, Rick Blaine. Ugarte gives Rick two signed letters of transit out of Casablanca (because he feels Rick is the only person he trusts to hold these letters). He will sell them for a great price and be rich. Rick tells him of the news that the two murdered German soldiers had letters of transit and this insinuates that Ugarte killed the soldiers.

The French policeman, Capt. Renault, warns Rick that there will be some excitement that night and Rick should be careful. Renault has a feeling that Rick has the letters of transit but needs to prove it. A resistance leader and freedom fighter, Victor Laszlo, will be arriving shortly to Rick's cafe. Capt. Renault's orders are to make Casablanca Laszlo's last stop. He must never reach America. Rick bets Renault that Laszlo will get out of Casablanca.

The captain takes the bet and informs Rick that Laszlo is traveling with a mysterious lady, so he will need two exit visas. When Laszlo arrives, the mysterious lady with him is Ilsa, Rick's former love. Rick is devastated. She was to meet him at the train station in Paris so they could flee together. Now, she turns up married.

The next morning, Laszlo and Ilsa arrive and Mayor Strasser tells them they will not receive any exit visas out of Casablanca unless Laszlo tells them the names of all his fellow Underground Resistance leaders. Laszlo refuses. He knows he needs a miracle to get out of

Casablanca and is told, "the Germans have outlawed miracles." (Coppola) Laszlo finds out Rick has two exit visas and offers a tremendous amount of money for them, but Rick refuses. Ilsa goes to Rick's apartment while Laszlo goes to an Underground Resistance meeting so she can plead for the visas. Ilsa vows her love to Rick and they rekindle their feelings for one another. Laszlo is wounded during his meeting and is brought back to Rick's cafe.

Laszlo asks Rick to use the visas to take Ilsa out of the country to safety, and this proves to Rick that Laszlo loves Ilsa very much. Laszlo is then arrested. The next morning Rick plots a release for Laszlo and Ilsa and makes the captain think he will get a reward and praise from the mayor for having Laszlo caught as he is trying to get out of the country. Rick tells Capt. Renault that he will then leave the country with Ilsa. The captain falls for the plot, but when they reach the plane Rick makes the visa out with the names Mr. & Mrs. Laszlo. Ilsa is forced to flee with her husband even though she has pledged her love to Rick.

Rick then gets help from Capt. Renault to flee to the Underground. The Hollywood movie used a war story to tell the struggles of three people. It was different from the neorealist films because the actors needed to convince you about their problems. It also had a good ending unlike the neorealist films that kept us wondering if the people would be alright.

Another Hollywood film is *From Here to Eternity*. This film was shot on location in Hawaii using real army barracks. It was about the military in 1941 just before the attack on Pearl Harbor. Pvt. Prewitt was transferred to Schofield Barracks because of his ability at boxing. Pvt. Prewitt blinded a man during a sparring match and refuses the commanders offer to join the boxing team. The army commander is not happy at this refusal and tells Pvt. Prewitt he cannot be responsible for the harassment of the other soldiers. They want a winning team and Prewitt can help them.

They begin to abuse and emotionally harass Prewitt to try and make him change his mind. They plague him night and day but he continues to refuse. Sgt. Warden wants Prewitt to join because it will make the captain happy. Capt. Holmes feels if he has a winning team it will get him a promotion to major. Sgt. Warden says, "you'll fight Prewitt. You'll fight because Captain Holmes wants to be Major Holmes...And if you don't do it for him, you'll do it for me, 'cause my job is to keep him happy, see? The more he's happy, the less he both-

ers me and the better I run his company.” (From *Here to Eternity*)

Prewitt becomes friendly with another private named Maggio. He is a little Italian and they go to a club for a night out. Prewitt meets a call-girl named Lorene and immediately falls for her. Prewitt comes to visit her regularly and she begins to tell him of her past.

She is from the poor side of a small town. She fell in love with the richest boy in town. They dated for three years but he married a “girl suitable for his position.” Lorene was devastated so she came to Hawaii to make enough money to be financially secure. Prewitt tells Lorene of his mishap with causing a man to go blind while fighting and they find they both have turmoil in their life to deal with. Prewitt wants to marry Lorene but she is afraid to commit to him. She wants to go back home as a proper lady who can show her small town that she made it in life.

Maggio is arrested for drinking while in uniform and is beaten unmercifully by the stockade sergeant and dies. Prewitt seeks revenge for his friend's death and stalks the stockade sergeant. They have a fight and Prewitt stabs him and kills him. Prewitt goes AWOL and heads to Lorene's house to get medical help. While he is there, the Japanese attack Pearl Harbor and Prewitt feels he must return to his buddies and help fight. Lorene begs him not to go. She knows he will be killed. He doesn't listen to her and returns to his troop. He is killed and Lorene takes the next boat home.

She makes up the story of having loved a bomber pilot who was killed in battle and received the Silver Star. She needs to believe that he was a hero and from a very fine Southern family. She can go home now and become a proper lady who was loved by a gentleman that died defending Pearl Harbor.

The struggles of these characters draw the audience into their lives through their struggles and their wanting to be better people. They want to stand up for their beliefs just like the characters in the neorealist films. Prewitt says to Sgt. Warden, “I know where I stand. A man don't go his own way, he's nothin'.”

The last Hollywood film is *The Godfather*. This film is about the Corleone family in New York City. It is August 1945, and the Japanese have just surrendered. Don Vito Corleone's daughter is getting married and the reception is being held in the Corleone's back yard and there are thousands of people in attendance.

While the guests are eating and dancing outside, Corleone is in his home office working on the crime

family business. It is a Sicilian custom that the father of the bride cannot refuse a request on his daughter's wedding day. The father grants favors to all that ask and pay him homage. The problems will be resolved because the Don will “make him an offer he can't refuse.” One of the Don's sons is named Michael. He is a Marine captain and has just returned from World War II. He brings a girlfriend with him to the wedding and explains to her that he is not part of the family business, which is gambling, prostitution and protection rackets. All the dealing is going on inside the house behind closed doors.

Soon after his daughter's wedding the “families” (all of the other crime families) call a meeting. There is talk of getting into the drug business. Don Corleone feels this is too dangerous and says he will not join. His son, Sonny, disagrees and feels they should join. He feels drugs are the next big business. Corleone tells his son, “Whatsa matter with you? I think your brain's goin' soft... Never tell anybody outside the family what you're thinking again.”

Corleone is worried that now the other “families” feel they can split and weaken his family. He sends one of his men to another family to pretend he is not happy and that he wants to quit working for the Corleones. They see through this lie and kill him. Now things start happening against the Corleones. His chauffeur Paulie sets up an ambush for Don Corleone.

He is attacked and the newspapers report Corleone is murdered. Michael sees the headline about his father's death and contacts his family. Corleone is not dead, but is being treated in the hospital. Michael feels another attempt will be made on his father's life, so he moves his father to another section of the hospital. He talks to his father and tells him, “Just lie here, Pop. I'll take care of you now. I'm with you now. I'm with you.”

Michael is now officially involved with the family. It seems to me the more money you have the fewer problems you have, but this does not seem to be the case with the Corleone family. Michael wants to avenge the assassination attempt on his father's life.

He makes arrangements to meet with Virgil Sollozzo and his bodyguard, the corrupt police captain McCluskey. They pick the restaurant and Michael is to meet them there. They meet and start eating. Michael gets permission to go to the bathroom and finds a gun his family hid there for him. He comes out of the bathroom and kills Sollozzo and McCluskey. Michael now needs to flee the country or he will be killed. He goes to Sicily and is being protected by Corleone's partner in the

olive oil business.

Michael falls in love with an Italian girl while in Sicily and marries her. They live peacefully until the other “families” find out where Michael is and put a bomb in his car. Instead of Michael getting in and starting up the car, his wife gets in the car. It explodes and she is killed instantly. Michael comes back to the United States and is the new “Don,” heir to his father’s legacy.

Michael begins seeing his old girlfriend, Kay, and tells her he is now working for his father. He says, “My father’s no different than any other powerful man, any man who’s responsible for other people, like a senator or a president.” Before Don Vito Corleone dies, he warns Michael about the other “families.” They will band together to have Michael killed.

Michael is also asked to be godfather to his sister’s son. While they are at church for the baptism, Michael is systematically having all the other Dons killed. Michael is now the head of his family and all his enemies are dead. The struggles of this family are portrayed perfectly by the actors, bringing the gangster figures to their tragic end.

Conclusion

The films discussed in this paper show that during the neorealist period, the directors used real cities, real people and a real war to show struggles and hardships. In *Paisan*, *The Bicycle Thief* and *Umberto D*, we see many stories and many struggles. Each of these films has an ending that never truly tells us if these people overcame their hardships. Bondanella tells us in his book *Italian Cinema*, “Rossellini remarked that realism was ‘simply the artistic form of the truth’ ... (and) De Sica stated that his work reflected ‘reality transported into the realm of poetry.’” (32).

The Hollywood producers didn’t need real places or real people for their films, but they could still show struggles and hardships just as effectively. You can watch *Casablanca* and feel the desperation in the voice of Rick Blaine when he says, “Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she walks into mine.” He loves Ilsa and doesn’t want to let her go, but knows he must.

Or in the film *From Here to Eternity* when Pvt. Prewitt is killed and the always strong Sgt. Warden says, “You just couldn’t play it smart, could ya? All ya had to do was box. But no, not you, you hard head!” He then gains his composure and barks at his men: “What’s the matter with you guys? Ain’t you ever seen a dead man? Let’s get

this body out of here. We ain’t got all night.”

Or in *The Godfather* when Michael Corleone takes over his father’s business and says, “my father’s way of doing things is over. It’s finished. Even he knows that. I mean in five years, the Corleone family is going to be completely legitimate. Trust me.”

Through the arts, we discover that humanity is really one. All people have the same feelings, emotions, fears, loves and struggles. In both types of movies the art form can show self-preservation. Society will always have troubles, and the arts will always be a venue to bring this out, whether through poetry, paintings, music or films.

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