

CINEASTE

AMARCORD: Fellini & Politics

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Source: *Cinéaste*, 1992, Vol. 19, No. 1 (1992), pp. 36-43, 32

Published by: Cineaste Publishers, Inc.

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41688067>

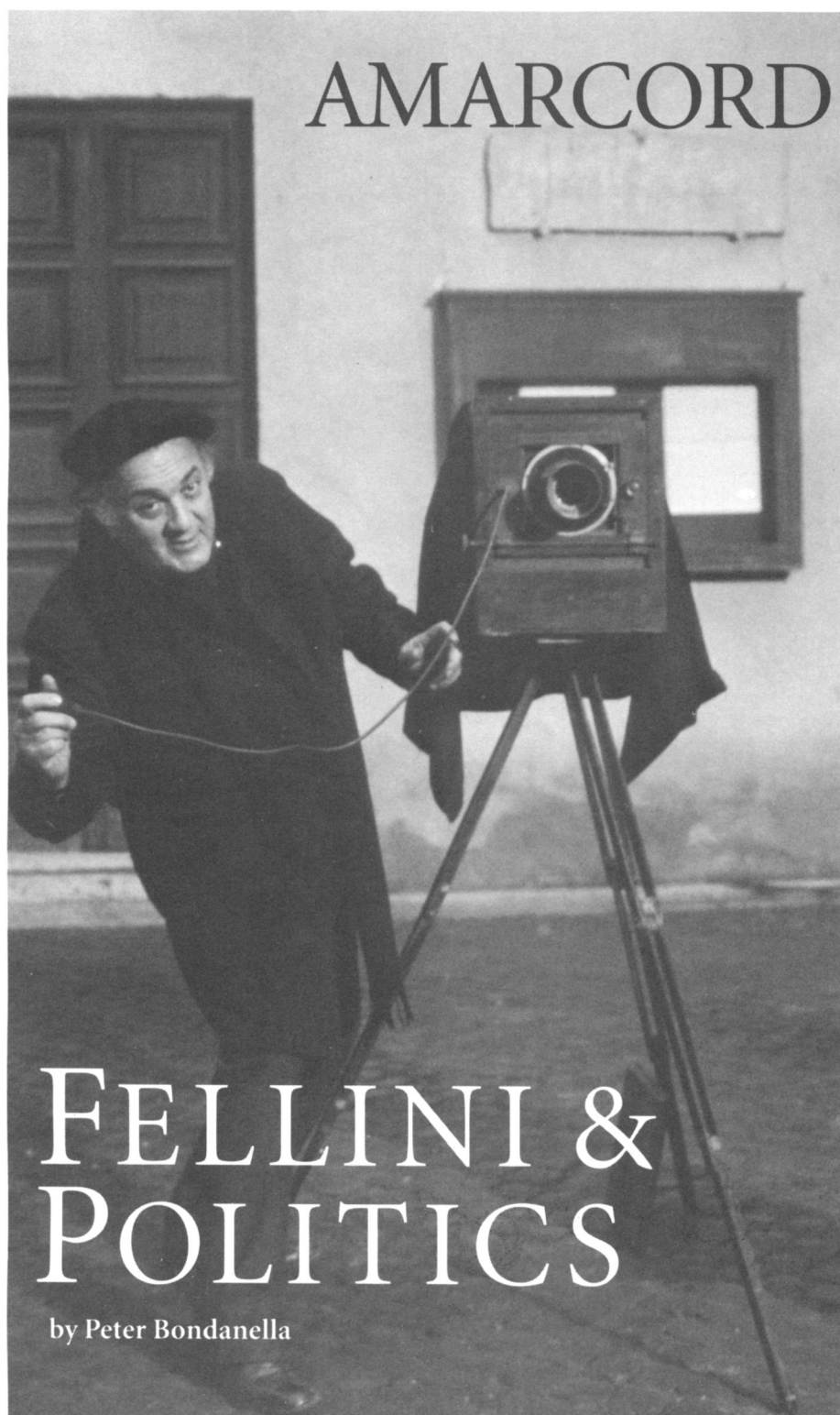
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The critical commonplace that Fellini is totally uninterested in political or social problems and that, unlike many other Italian directors, whose films quite frequently depart from clear ideological perspectives, Fellini's cinema aims only at an egocentric representation of the director's private fantasy world, is a gross misinterpretation that was first advanced during the 1950s at the height of the polemical debates surrounding *La strada* and *Le notti di Cabiria*. At that time, in their attempts to direct Italian cinema toward what would surely have resulted in an artistically barren brand of socialist realism, leftist critics in Italy and France tried to denigrate Fellini's early films as conservative works that embodied the most reactionary aspects of prewar Italian culture.² And yet, over the years, Fellini's early films have endured and have been praised not only for their artistic achievements but for their sociological value as well. While many of the ideologically 'correct' films leftists praised during the 1950s now seem dated and are rarely shown, such early films as *Lo sceicco bianco* and *I vitelloni* continue to garner praise not only as entertaining works of art but also as penetrating portraits of provincial life in the Italy of the period. The very films from Fellini's subsequent 'trilogy of conversion'—*La strada* and *Le notti di Cabiria*—that evoked the most negative responses from critics on the left are now more correctly seen as among the most original cinematic expressions of the dominant philosophical issues of the post-war period, treating problems of communication and alienation identified by European existentialism within a society characterized by rapidly changing values and disruptive economic development. The thirtieth anniversary of the release of *La dolce vita* was celebrated in Italy with a number of articles and interviews that quite rightly defined this masterpiece as a brilliant fresco of a new, media-conscious society that had emerged from the sleepy, provincial culture of Italy in the 1950s and which had anticipated by at least a decade contemporary concerns over the domination of popular culture by mass media images, a theme continued and broadened in a number of Fellini's more recent metacinematic works to include what he considers to be the insidious influence of commercial television. And, in spite of the vulgar simplification that reduces Fellini's images of women to representations of grotesque whores and sexually promiscuous women sticking out their tongues at the camera to signify their availability, Fellini not only anticipated the feminist movement in Italy with his

The following article is an abridged version of a chapter from Peter Bondanella's *The Cinema of Federico Fellini* to be published this Spring by Princeton University Press (see ad this issue). Bondanella is one of this country's foremost scholars of Italian cinema and literature, having previously published *Federico Fellini: Essays in Criticism* (Oxford University Press, 1978), *La Strada: Federico Fellini, Director* (Rutgers University Press,

1987), *The Eternal City: Roman Images in the Modern World* (University of North Carolina Press, 1987), and *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present* (Continuum, 1983; second revised edition, 1990). Bondanella recently completed another new book, *Roberto Rossellini, due later this year from Cambridge University Press*, and he is now working on an anthology of Fellini criticism published during the last two decades.—Ed.



Members of the comic cast of characters in *Amarcord*

bittersweet analysis of matrimony in *Giulietta degli spiriti*, but in two other works focusing on male sexuality (*Casanova* and *La città delle donne*), Fellini provided devastating critiques of images men have projected upon women that he and his generation inherited from Italy's traditionally male-dominated culture. As Lina Wertmüller, a director with much clearer ideological assumptions, has pointed out, in spite of Fellini's overriding interest in the representation of his own fantasy world, "Federico has given us the most significant traces and graffiti of our history in the last twenty years. He declares he is not concerned with politics and is not interested in fixed themes or ideological lay-outs, but he is, in the final analysis, the most political and sociological, I believe, of our authors."³

Thus, while Fellini's cinema does not ignore the many social and political problems that have arisen since he first began making films, the approach Fellini takes to such themes and the cinematic style with which he treats such questions differ radically from that typical of the so-called political film, which became popular in Italy during the 1960s and the 1970s. The dozens of such political films produced by such figures as Bernardo Bertolucci, Marco Bellocchio, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Luchino Visconti, Liliana Cavani, Elio Petri, Francesco Rosi, Gillo Pontecorvo, or the Taviani brothers, usually view Italian politics from a Marxist perspective; they often contain a hybrid mixture of Marxist and Freudian social theories. While the best of such films succeed in blending their ideological messages with great commercial appeal at the box office, their political content reflects a period in Italian culture when various forms of Marxist ideology dominated the thinking of Italy's intellectuals.

Numerous explanations of Italian

fascism have been advanced, some based upon scholarly research, others reflecting the ideological prejudices of their proponents. The most popular of these theories during the prewar period while Mussolini was still in power advanced the notions of a "moral crisis," the "intrusion of the amorphous masses into history," the idea that psychological disabilities gave birth to the movement, or the Stalinist-inspired doctrine that fascism was an instrument of the capitalists' attempt to suppress the class struggle. Explanations of fascism in the Italian cinema have

*"Especially as regards passion for politics, I am more Eskimo than Roman...I am not a political person, have never been one. Politics and sports leave me completely cold, indifferent."*⁴

tended to follow theories developed before the fall of the fascist regime and thus, before much of the important scholarship of the postwar period based upon extensive archival research had been published and disseminated. Such cinematic treatments usually follow a combination of psychoanalytical and Marxist theories. As an economic and political explanation, Marxist thought depicts the fascist movement as a tool of agrarian or industrial capitalism to suppress the working class. On the level of social psychology, Freudian or neo-Freudian theories depict the individual fascist as the product of destructive influences from

childhood or adolescence, usually sexual in nature.

While Fellini's works have provided audiences with significant images of Italian society in the course of representing the director's own artistic concerns over a period of four decades, *Amarcord* and *Prova d'orchestra* are unique in their concentration upon political issues. In *Amarcord*, (Fellini's last commercial success and the winner of an Oscar for Best Foreign Film among dozens of other awards), Fellini combines a nostalgic look back at his own provincial origins with a relentless dissection of the origins of Italian fascism that some critics initially defined as only a bittersweet remake of the provincial milieu of *I vitelloni*. As a portrait of the provincial world of the 1930s during Mussolini's reign, Fellini's *Amarcord* distinguishes itself from most other Italian films on the *ventennio* by its refusal to portray Italy's fascist past through the prism of the politically 'correct' Marxist or psychoanalytical ideologies so popular in the political film in Italy. That is to say, he does not give his audience the opportunity to dismiss their fascist heritage by showing us bloodthirsty fascists in black shirts and jackboots, like Bertolucci's Attila (Donald Sutherland) in *Novecento*, or cowardly conformists who kill in order to be accepted by their peers and to compensate for a traumatic sexual event in their past, such as Marcello in Bertolucci's *Il conformista*. Fellini believes that if the heinous crimes of such individuals can be explained away by their pathological personalities, the inevitable result of such images of fascism will be a comforting and self-congratulatory feeling on the part of the audience watching such films. Since 'normal' people do not feel they share such deviant characteristics, they can consider themselves uncontaminated by their fascist heritage:

Fascism is not viewed, as in most political films that are made today, from (how can I put it?) a judgmental perspective. That is, from the outside. Detached judgments, aseptic diagnoses, complete and definitive formulae always seem to me (at least on the part of those of the generation to which I belong) a bit inhuman. The province of Amarcord is one in which we are all recognizable, the director first of all, in the ignorance which confounded us. A great ignorance and a great confusion. Not that I wish to minimize the economic and social causes of fascism. I only wish to say that today what is still most interesting is the psychological, emotional manner of being a fascist. What is this manner? It is a sort of blockage, an arrested development during the phase of adolescence...I don't wish to say that we Italians have not yet gone beyond adolescence and fascism. That would be an excessive and unjust affirmation. Things are certainly very much different from then, that is obvious...And yet...Italy, mentally, is still much the same. To say it in other terms, I have the impression that fascism and adolescence continue to be, in a certain measure, permanent historical seasons of our lives: adolescence of our individual lives, fascism of our national life. That is, this remaining children for eternity, this leaving responsibilities for others, this living with the comforting sensation that there is someone who thinks for you (and at one time it's mother, then it's father, then it's the mayor, another time Il Duce, another time the Madonna, another time the Bishop, in short other people); and in the meanwhile, you have this limited, time-wasting freedom which permits you only to cultivate absurd dreams—the dream of the American cinema, or the Oriental dream concerning women; in conclusion, the same old, monstrous, out-of-date myths that even today seem to me to form the most important conditioning of the average Italian.⁴

As the astute interpreter of Italian popular culture Fellini has always been, the director believes that the average Italian during the fascist period had very little familiarity with political ideologies, and the years of popular support generated for Mussolini before foreign wars destroyed his regime cannot be explained away by positing a nation of sexual deviates, or a conspiracy theory that defines the regime as a capitalist tool to repress the working classes. Fascism dominated Italy for over two decades precisely because it exploited an archetypal Italian weakness: eternal adolescence.

The unique emotional impact of *Amarcord* upon audiences all over the

world—and not just those Italian spectators whose age or nationality made them especially interested in the fascist era—is a direct result of Fellini's refusal to produce a 'political' film that intends merely to denounce an embarrassing situation in Italy's past history. As Fellini himself underlines above, he recognizes himself in the portrait he paints of Italy's past. *Amarcord* also seems to be Fellini's most purely autobiographical work, since nearly all the major characters in the film are also discussed as figures from Fellini's childhood in Rimini in his essay, "La mia Rimini," which has been published a number of times and even translated into English.⁵ The authenticity of the regional atmosphere is further increased by the collaboration on the script of Tonino Guerra, a poet who composes verse in the dialect of Fellini's region and who is best known for other important scripts written for Antonioni, Rosi, and the Taviani brothers, as well as for Fellini.

Fellini's *Amarcord* departs from the typical portrayal of fascism in the Italian cinema, for both Fellini's memoirs and *Amarcord* avoid dividing the inhabitants of this Rimini of his imagination into 'good' heroes (the antifascists) and 'bad' villains (the fascists). Instead, the townspeople are sketched out in masterful caricature portraits as comic types, all of whom have antecedents in Fellini's earlier works. Indeed, some of the same figures make their first appearance in *I clowns* and *Roma* in sequences devoted to Fellini's provincial origins. Instead of being sinister, perverted individuals, Fellini's fascists are first of all pathetic clowns, manifestations of the same arrested development within the individual that all the townspeople share. Much of the film's narrative focuses upon a typical family of the period, a likable group in most respects but with important defects and weaknesses. Aurelio, the father (Armando Brancia), is a relatively successful construction foreman of working class backgrounds whose anarchist origins are not forgotten by the local fascists whenever there is a political disturbance. A relatively gentle man, he is nevertheless capable of violent fits of irrational anger directed against his children, especially Titta (Bruno Zanin), the young man whose misadventures occupy a major portion of the film. Aurelio's wife Miranda (Pupella Maggio), the long-suffering archetype of Italian motherhood, defends her son Titta even when he deserves punishment and spoils her brother Lallo (Nandino Orfei), or "Il Patacca" as he is affectionately called by his *vitelloni* friends.⁶ Lallo lives with

his sister's family without ever seeming to have to earn a living, and he may be considered the prototype of the young male loafers Fellini made famous in his earlier film, *I vitelloni*. Miranda is also capable of hysterical fits of anger in her perennial arguments with Aurelio. Titta's grandfather (Peppino Ianigo), a likable old man whose mind is still dominated by sexual fantasies, also lives with the family. Uncle Teo (Ciccio Ingrassia), Aurelio's brother, has been confined to an insane asylum and is visited by the entire family in one important sequence.

The comic representation of the townspeople of *Amarcord* owes an obvious debt to Fellini's background in cartoons and comic vignettes. Their one or two typical traits that Fellini deftly reveals to us establish their strange or grotesque characters as soon as they appear on the screen. Since Fellini's purpose in sketching out the entire population of the town is to underline the causes for the eternal adolescence of its inhabitants, the largest group of characters comes from Titta's school. The portraits of the Pope, the king, and Mussolini hanging in the classrooms make it clear that the school's purpose is to perpetuate the ignorance and confusion Fellini believes is typical of the fascist era. Almost nothing of any importance is taught there. Titta's classmates are all immediately recognizable as stereotypical caricatures of truant students found in the classrooms of any society in any historical period: Naso (Alvaro Vitali), his name emphasizing his protuberant nose; Il Ciccio (Fernando de Felice), the class fat boy; Aldina (Donatella Gambini), the local beauty who is completely indifferent to Ciccio's attentions; Giglio (Bruno Lenzi), the organizer of the practical jokes played on the hapless Candela (Francesco Vona), a slightly effeminate young man; and Ovo (Bruno Scagnetti), a small imp of a boy who is incapable of pronouncing Greek syllables.

The school children seem almost normal, however, when compared to their teachers. Zeus, the schoolmaster (Franco Magno) continues his authoritarian manner from *Roma*. The Professor of Fine Arts (Fides Stagni) has breakfast during her inane lessons on Giotto's perspective. While the Professor of Mathematics (Dina Adorni) tries to teach her class the rudiments of algebra, the only things the students can think of are her enormous breasts and her feral expression. The professor of Italian (Mario Silvestri) bores the students with monotonous recitals of patriotic verse by Vittorio Alfieri, trying to inspire a warlike spirit in his hopeless pupils. The philosophy professor (Mauro Misul) delivers a delirious paro-



The fascist *federale* and his entourage make an athletic appearance in town

dy of the fascist philosophy of Giovanni Gentile to his inattentive class. Don Balosa (Gianfilippo Carcano), the parish priest and religion instructor, offers a superficial definition of the Holy Trinity while wiping his glasses, as half of the class sneaks out of the room on tiptoe. Later while confessing Titta and his friends, the priest is primarily interested in whether the boys are masturbating or not, warning them that the saints cry when they do so.

Gradisca, the village beauty (Magali Noël), with whom the entire village is infatuated, joins other caricatures of masculine desire, such as the nymphomaniac Volpina (Josiane Tanzilli), or the buxom tobacconist (Maria Antonella Beluzzi). Other figures include the slightly mad Conte di Lovignano (Antonino Faà di Bruno), the local aristocrat; the town idiot, Giudizio (Aristide Caporale), a figure Fellini employs as early as *I vitelloni*; and a street vendor named Biscein (Gennaro Ombra), who regales us with tall tales of sexual adventures in the harem of a visiting Arab sheik at Rimini's Grand Hotel. A likable but rather pompous and pedantic lawyer (Luigi Rossi) often interrupts the narrative to explain various details

of the town's history to us, as does Giudizio and Biscein. And, last but not least, Fellini also shows us various characters who represent political authority: the local fascist *gerarca* (Ferruccio Brembilla); and the visiting *federale* (Antonio Spaccatini) whose histrionic gestures are modeled after the regime's public style developed by Achille Starace, head of the Fascist Party for some years. A blind accordionist, an unidentified motorcyclist who roars about the city streets at night and on the nearby dock, and the owner of the local Fulgor Cinema, called "Ronald Colman" because of his physical likeness to the American movie star (Mario Liberati), round out this incredibly funny population.

Given the large number of the town's inhabitants that Fellini takes great pains to characterize in caricatures, it would be accurate to speak of Fellini's *Amarcord* as a 'choral' film, since so much of the narrative concentrates upon presenting this large group of comic figures during moments in the life of the town when they interact together as a group. This emphasis upon the group begins with the first major sequence of the film, that devoted

ed to the celebration of the coming of spring and the passing of winter on St. Joseph's Day (March 19th) with the burning of a witch in effigy on a bonfire called a *fogarazza*. Almost every one of the numerous characters discussed above first appears during this celebration, and the choral nature of the film continues during other important sequences in the film, especially that devoted to the arrival of the fascist *federale* on April 21st, the traditional anniversary of the founding of Rome and a holiday celebrated by Mussolini's regime; and again when the entire town sails out into the ocean to catch a glimpse of the passage of the Rex, the enormous ocean liner that embodied Mussolini's plans to rival other great powers in all fields, especially those where such technological advances had propaganda potential. Finally, Gradisca's wedding to a *carabiniere* officer closes the film with almost the entire village present. In addition to these four major sequences, there are numerous other aspects of *Amarcord* that underline how the destructive mythologies of fascist popular culture have pervaded all levels of life in the provinces: in the detailed vignettes Fellini provides of

misinstruction in the public schools and of misdirected piety in the church during confessions; during the squabbles at the dinner table as the large, extended nuclear family typical of Italy during the period represents a microcosm of the larger town; during the various promenades in the town square where all the people strut back and forth, looking at others and placing themselves on parade as well. As Fellini notes in discussing the *federale's* visit—but his argument fits all the group activities in *Amarcord*—"living in this kind of environment, each person develops not individual characteristics but only pathological defects."⁷ Taken separately as individuals, these comic characters seem only to have

*manias, innocuous tics: and yet, it is enough for the characters to gather together for an occasion like this, and there, from apparently harmless eccentricities, their manias take on a completely different meaning. The gathering of April 21th, just like the passing of the Rex, the burning of the great bonfire at the beginning, and so on, are always occasions of total stupidity. The pretext of being together is always a leveling process. People stay together only to commit stupid acts. And when they are alone, there is bewilderment, solitude, or the ridiculous dream of the Orient, of Fred Astaire, or the myth of luxury and American ostentation. It is only ritual that keeps them all together. Since no character has a real sense of individual responsibility, or has only petty dreams, no one has the strength not to take part in the ritual, to remain at home outside of it.*⁸

In Fellini's depiction of both the *federale's* visit to town and the passage of the Rex, the director employs the ritualistic behavior of the entire town to ridicule fascism as a political movement. Imitating Starace's athletic and frenetic style (employed by the regime to underline the vitalistic, energetic, youth-oriented image the movement projected), all of the inhabitants present themselves at the train station to greet the *federale*: after he arrives in a great puff of smoke, a recurrent symbol in the film which, along with fog, provides an eloquent concrete metaphor for the obscurantism of the period. Unlike most of the rest of the buildings in the town, which were built on the grounds of Cinecittà, to film the *federale* sequence Fellini used the already present entrance to Cinecittà itself, constructed by Mussolini in the typically fascist and modernist architectural style. But by using this studio complex as the backdrop for the arrival of the *federale*, Fellini also subtly suggests a

major theme of *Amarcord*, the continuity of the psychological state of mind in Italy that once produced fascism but still exists today as

*that aspect of us which is stupid, shabby, weak-willed: an aspect which has no party affiliation, of which we should be ashamed, and for the repulsion of which it is not enough to declare, 'I serve in an antifascist party,' because that aspect is inside of us and, already once in the past, fascist has given it expression, authority, standing.*⁹

A figure such as the Professor of Mathematics seemed only comically grotesque in her classroom. But when she stands before a symbol of the regime's power, such as the *federale*, her grotesque nature takes on a more ominous tone and borders upon delirium, her personality magically transformed by her fascist uniform. Without a touch of the irony that the director obviously intends in his treatment of such a scene, the teacher can then declare imperiously: "It's marvelous... this enthusiasm that renders us young and ancient at the same time... Young...because fascism has rejuvenated our blood with luminous ideals...but ancient, because never before as now do we feel we are the children of Rome!"¹⁰ Immediately after this statement echoing the regime's propaganda aiming at portraying Italy as both the inheritor of ancient Rome and the vanguard of a new youth cult, Lallo the *vitellone*, also now in uniform, delivers his own interpretation of Mussolini's significance to us while staring directly into the camera eye and employing a vulgar gesture: "Ah! I say only this...Mussolini has two balls this large!"¹¹

Something of importance is almost always communicated whenever Fellini resorts to such a metacinematic device. Here, the causal connection between a misdirected sexuality based upon an arrested state of psychological development and the pervasive presence of fascism in the town of *Amarcord* that Lallo's exclamation suggests, constitutes one of the most important themes in Fellini's film. Gradisca, the object of desire of the entire town, almost faints with sexual excitement as she tries to touch the passing *federale*. Later, when the town turns out to see the Rex, Gradisca experiences a similar moment of comic sensual arousal. During the excitement following the *federale's* arrival, Ciccio fantasizes the final success of his attentions to Aldina. Standing before an enormous face of Mussolini constructed from pink and white flowers, he finally succeeds in his daydreams in taking Aldina as his "fascist bride."

Fellini believes that while fascism exploited the perennial lack of sexual maturity endemic in Italian culture, the ultimate blame for such sexual repression and frustration tormenting the inhabitants of *Amarcord* lies with the Catholic church. The sexual exhibitionism typical of Latin and male-dominated cultures, for Fellini, also represents a manifestation of fascism: "[Sexuality] should be an emotion and, instead, it is in danger of becoming a show, something clownish and useless, an ugly thing which women endure passively and dumbfoundedly."¹² For this reason, Fellini prefaces the visit of the *federale* and the group hysteria connected with the regime's symbols by the individual confessions of Titta and his classmates in church. While Gradisca will try to 'touch' the visiting fascist official, in contrast the parish priest seems only interested in making sure that the boys avoid touching themselves! But as Titta asks himself during confession, how could you not touch yourself when you are surrounded by sexually arousing images, such as the buxom tobacconist with a sensual voice, the richly endowed professor of mathematics, the plump peasant women with enormous bottoms seated on their bicycles, the nymphomaniac Volpina prowling about town in search of her prey, and, most especially, Gradisca, the woman who is the object of the entire male population's frustrated lust? As Titta refers to each of these tempting females, the film rapidly cuts in a succession of brief shots to each of these women.

The sequence devoted to Gradisca is the most interesting, for it develops inside the Fulgor Cinema and is the archetype of all such cinematic liaisons in Fellini's films. In his imagination, Titta follows Gradisca into the totally deserted cinema. As Titta moves from one seat to another, closer and closer to Gradisca with each successive cut, Gradisca stares at the silver screen, as if in a trance, which displays a close-up of Gary Cooper from *Beau Geste*, a film made in 1939 but released in Italy only after the end of the war. Such a conscious anachronism underlines the metacinematic intentions of the entire sequence. Titta and the rest of the village have transformed Gradisca into an object of mediated desire, since their passion for her is determined by the model of the Hollywood movie star. Gradisca relates to Gary Cooper, her own sexual fantasy, in a similar manner, searching endlessly for the equivalent of a movie star in her own life. Eventually, she will have to be satisfied with a mere officer of the *carabinieri*, just as the young boys will eventually be forced to marry women who cannot possibly realize the fantasies they have



The townspeople celebrate the passing of the ocean liner Rex

known only in the movies. When Titta gazes at Gradisca through the thick cigarette smoke enveloping this female figure, as one perceptive critic has noted, the smoke (again symbolic of another of the many cultural mystifications in the town) glamorizes her as if she were seen through a soft focus movie lens.¹³ As we gaze at Titta as he gazes at Gradisca gazing at Gary Cooper, we are provided with a double vision, enabling us both to experience Titta's "mystified perspective, while we judge it as the product of an inexperienced youth."¹⁴ We are prompted to evaluate both Titta and Gradisca as two characters who relate sexually to members of the opposite sex only through a form of mediated sexuality that originates in the cinema. This brief but brilliant sequence captures the implicit link between repressed sexuality and public behavior in the popular culture of the town, but it also deconstructs and demystifies the complicated cultural operation of mimetic desire that mediates passion with external models from the movies.

The sequence in which Fellini presents the passage of the Rex expresses a similar metacinematic theme and has equally demystifying intentions. This ocean liner, which actually existed and established records for transatlantic crossings between Italy and New York during the era, was one of the regime's proudest achievements. Its passage

provides the excuse for another gathering of the entire town. A number of complex tracking shots follows the various inhabitants to the seashore where they all embark in small boats to sail out onto the ocean to meet the Rex. Subsequent long shots show us the boats leaving the harbor and riding upon the sea, waiting for the sun to set. This first section of the sequence employs real boats on a real ocean filmed on an outside location by the sea, but as night draws nearer, we suddenly become aware that Fellini has shifted the scene from the ocean inside a movie studio. The rocking of the boats in the water is obviously produced by artificial means; some boats are motionless in the background while two boats in the foreground rock from side to side, not bobbing up and down as would be most natural. Furthermore, the sea upon which the people are floating is revealed in the final shot to be a series of black, plastic sheets obviously blown by a wind machine and sprayed with water. Fellini's Rex is an artificial ocean liner painted upon a billboard construction near the Cinecittà pool with back lighting suggesting its portholes. As Fellini simulates the ship's passage by camera movements past the stationary set construction, his Rex seems to flop over into the water, emphasizing its status as both a product of cinematic artifice and as a false and mystifying image proposed by

a regime that is founded upon equally artificial ideals. Once again, Gradisca is moved as she had been by the presence of the Fascist *federale* or by the image of Gary Cooper on the movie screen. In the Fulgor Cinema sequence, Fellini revealed the mechanism behind the apparatus of the cinematic image by disclosing its function as a mediator of authentic sexual desire. Now with the Rex sequence, he employs similar metacinematic devices to demystify a much more sinister political myth.

The *federale's* visit, introduced by Titta's sexual fantasies in confession, is followed by the family's visit to the asylum to see their insane Uncle Teo. Fellini uses Teo as an extreme example of the devastating results of sexual repression. During a country excursion, Teo escapes, climbs up into a tree, and screaming at the top of his voice, he exclaims over and over again: "I want a woman!" He refuses to descend until a midget nun, a grotesque representative of the repressive force of the same church that has contributed to reduce Teo to such a state, orders him to do so. Teo's pitiful cry might well be taken as the emblem of the entire male population of *Amarcord*. The fact that the Rex sequence directly follows the Uncle Teo sequence provides a demonstration of how such destructive sexual behavior may be transferred from an individual psychological level to motivate the behavior of

an entire group of people. Failing to discover a proper channel for their sexual drives, and lacking an unmediated object of sexual desire, the townspeople must either go mad or displace their stifled desires onto political symbols skillfully manipulated by the regime.

To complete the dismal picture of an entire society immersed in the "lack of information, in the lack of awareness of problems which are concretely real, in the refusal to go deeper into matters of life out of laziness, prejudice, convenience, and presumption,"¹⁵ Fellini then follows the Rex sequence by a troubling sequence in which Titta's grandfather is so disoriented by the thick, smothering fog typical of the Po River region that he cannot even recognize his front door and wonders if he has died. The fog provides a poetically concrete visual metaphor for the isolation and alienation typical of the entire town. The sense of hermetic closure to new ideas the fog bank suggests is also emphasized by the beautiful and mysterious appearance of a peacock during a snowstorm, the traditional symbol of vanity that serves as a general commentary on the entire city. Fellini's masterful interconnection of sketches or vignettes of individual comic characters with sequences that reveal the consequences of such individual behavior on a group level represents one of the most original features of *Amarcord* and provides the viewer with a coherent and persuasive portrait of Italian fascist culture that few political films of the period can equal.

One of the most interesting stylistic features of *Amarcord*, an aspect of the film that emphasizes its choral nature, may be found in its proliferation of narrative points of view. In the original Italian print, we discover a complex mixture of direct addresses to the camera by various characters, as well as voice-overs providing information or commentary on the film's action. In a few significant instances, this voice-over presence is provided by the voice of Fellini himself, something that will be overlooked when viewing prints or videocassettes dubbed in English. Giudizio, the town idiot, opens the film by plucking from the air one of the puff-balls (the "*manine*") that poplar trees give off to announce the arrival of spring in the town. Then, "with the self-assurance of the ignorant," as the script notes, Giudizio proceeds to provide an officious explanation for these puff-balls. As he does this, it is obvious to anyone who has ever seen Fellini shoot on location that the actor is merely repeating his lines while receiving verbal prompts from the director himself behind the camera.



Titta's attempted seduction of Gradisca in the Fulgor Cinema

This is Fellini's normal procedure in shooting scenes with both professional and nonprofessional actors. As the filming is not done with synchronized sound, Fellini usually removes his voice and other extraneous sounds from the track during the dubbing process. Giudizio's awkward and unnatural manner of speech and the fact that he is speaking directly into the camera call attention to the artificial manner in which his commentary unfolds.

Moreover, the fact that Fellini has chosen the village idiot to open the film casts doubt upon the reliability of the narrative process itself. In the original shooting script, Giudizio's explanations are interrupted by two ironic questions Fellini himself addresses to him: "What do you want to tell us?" and "What sense does that make? Speak clearly!"¹⁶ Later when the townspeople are heading to the ocean to see the Rex, Giudizio peers into the camera once again and asks where they are going. Another eccentric character, the street-vendor Biscein, repeats a similar operation twice. At the end of the film after Gradisca's wedding, he turns directly toward the camera and says goodbye to the audience. Earlier, after Fellini has recreated his fantastic account of his sexual adventures in the harem at the Grand Hotel, Biscein turns to the camera and counts how many times he made love there. In the midst of his extravagant enumeration that by itself belies the truth of his story, another narrative voice-over, that of the lawyer, interrupts Biscein, announcing that the street-vendor made love twenty-eight times! A third eccentric peasant appears during the visit to crazy Uncle Teo, giggles over Teo's desperate cries from the tree, and he, too, stares into Fellini's camera eye. Such repeated devices throughout *Amarcord*'s narra-

tive function to prevent the viewer from ever relying completely upon the various narrative points of view expressed in the film or from ever taking the images on the screen as an authentic historical reconstruction of Italy's fascist past. First and foremost, *Amarcord* represents a fiction, but the fictitious, artificial quality of *Amarcord*'s narrative is employed by Fellini in an original way to say something of importance about fascist popular culture.

Since Titta represents one of the film's most important figures (not to mention the fact that the director's memoirs of his adolescence in Rimini identifies Titta as one of Fellini's best friends), it is not surprising that *Amarcord* reflects Titta's point of view at crucial moments in the narrative. The confessional sequence culminating in Titta's attempts to touch Gradisca in the Cinema Fulgor after listing all the other objects of feminine desire in the village (the buxom tobacconist, the math teacher, the peasants with large bottoms on the bicycles, Volpina) quite naturally is accompanied by Titta's voice-over explanation, as the soundtrack reflects his stream-of-consciousness during his confession with Don Balosa. But two other remarks listed in the published script as delivered by Titta's voice-over—the first remark wondering who is at the beach introducing a cut to Volpina, the town nymphomaniac; and a second explanation of Uncle Teo's identity—are delivered in the completed film not by Titta but by Fellini himself.

The most complicated narrative commentary delivered in the film involves the pompous lawyer, who appears five times during the film, stares into the camera eye each time, and delivers a number of somewhat pedantic remarks. Our perception of

his role as an omniscient, reliable narrator is undercut immediately upon his first appearance after the *fogarazza* sequence has introduced the entire population of the town. As the lawyer tries to explain the ancient origins of the town, citing Dante, Pascoli, and Carducci as only a few of the famous poets who have lauded the virtues of its inhabitants, he is repeatedly interrupted by the vulgar sound of a raspberry delivered on the soundtrack by Fellini himself! When the lawyer loses his patience and demands that his tormentor come out into the open ("Show yourself! I am ready to give you any explanation face to face!"), he receives only another raspberry and an ironic address.¹⁷ The lawyer later comes before the camera to explain the architectural styles of the town (asking for the audience's comprehension when the local madame passes by in her carriage with the newly arrived prostitutes for the brothel). He later explains the political symbolism behind celebrating April 21st, the mythical date of Rome's foundation and the day when the fascist *federale* visits the town. Later, he discusses the sexual fantasies connected with Rimini's Grand Hotel.

In connection with the Grand Hotel, the lawyer's commentary introduces both Gradisca's tryst with the prince and explains the origin of her name as a result of her celebrated invitation to the prince to join her in bed. "Gradisca" may be translated into English as "Please do"; the dubbed English print of *Amarcord* distributed in the United States renders her name as "S'il vous plaît." The lawyer then casts doubt upon Biscein's version of his endless lovemaking with the harem girls lodged in the hotel. Finally, while discussing the historic proportions of the unusual snowstorm preceding the appearance of the peacock in the town square, the lawyer is struck by a snowball thrown by some unidentified person off camera. The lawyer declares that the person who threw the snowball was not one of the boys in the town, and given his disrespectful treatment by the raspberry delivered by Fellini earlier, the obvious conclusion is that Fellini has also thrown the snowball at him. Such an energetic interjection of the director into the action he is filming is not unusual. Gideon Bachman's documentary of the making of *Satyricon*, shows Fellini taking part in throwing food at the pedantic poet Eumolpo during the filming of Trimalcione's famous banquet scene.¹⁸

In spite of the frequent republication of Fellini's Rimini memoirs that describe a number of the major characters (Gradisca, Titta, Giudizio, "Ronald Colman," the school teachers, the priest) later to appear in *Amarcord* as

actual individuals from the director's past, Fellini has consistently refused to consider his films autobiographical and insists, as he puts it in his major treatise on filmmaking, that "my films from my past recount memories that are completely invented. And in the end, what difference does it make?"¹⁹ Fellini himself is aware that his own writings about his provincial origins present the critic or historian with ammunition for the construction of a reductionist interpretation of *Amarcord*, based upon the director's autobiography, but he has- tens to insist that this approach to the film is a misleading one:

I'm always a bit offended when I hear that one of my films is "autobiographical": it seems like a reductionist definition to me, especially if then, as it often happens, "autobiographical" comes to be understood in the sense of anecdotal, like someone who tells old school stories. So much so that at the beginning, I felt a great reluctance in speaking about it. I continued to say: be careful, "Amarcord" doesn't mean "I remember" at all; instead, it is a kind of cabalistic word, a word of seduction, the brand of an aperitif: Amarcord...I felt that authorizing a viewing of the film with an autobiographical "key" would have been a grave error. So much so that at one moment I wanted to entitle it simply Viva l'Italia! Then, I thought that this would have been too mysterious or too didactic. Another title I wanted to give it was Il borgo in the sense of a medieval enclosure, a lack of information, a lack of contact with the unheard of, the new...Then, finally, scribbling little sketches for the title, this word came to me—Amarcord; but you have to forget its origin. For, in its mystery, it means only the feeling the characterizes the whole film: a funereal feeling, one of isolation, dream, torpor, and of ignorance.²⁰

The historical veracity of the events recorded in *Amarcord* or in Fellini's memoirs have little or nothing to do with their artistic function in Fellini's film, as the director quite correctly has- tens to underline in almost every discussion of his work. As Fellini has declared, by recreating his past through the fictional prism of his cinema, he has canceled it out to the point that "now I can't distinguish what really happened from what I made up. Superimposed on my real memories are painted memories of a plastic sea, and characters from my adolescence in Rimini are elbowed aside by actors or extras who interpreted them in my films."²¹

It is precisely because Fellini wishes to avoid the close identification between his own past and the province depicted

in *Amarcord* that he uses such a complex and ironic series of narrative perspectives in the film. The choral nature of these perspectives draws attention away from possible sources in Fellini's biography and emphasizes their shared origins in the culture of the period during Fellini's adolescence. At the same time, the irreverent manner in which Fellini presents his narrators—greeting the most important one with raspberries and snowballs—makes it clear that no presumptuous and authoritative interpretation of Italy's fascist past, as have been attempted by so many other more ideological directors, is intended in *Amarcord*. Fellini is a storyteller, not a political scientist or a historian, and the constant addresses to the camera eye by his not completely reliable narrators also serve to emphasize the fact that the world he has created from Italy's past is a cinematic artifact, not a historical 'fact' that is susceptible of historical proof or documentation. The intrusion of the director's voice on the soundtrack or his even more energetic intrusion into the action by throwing a snowball at his mouthpiece character, the pompous lawyer, also constitutes a clear admission that Fellini considers himself to be one of the Amarcordians, as ignorant and confused during his provincial years under the fascist regime and as eternally an adolescent as the rest of his characters he criticizes and satirizes. Without completely condemning any of them, he represents them all in the usual nonjudgmental manner typical of Fellini's portraits of Italian life since his first works appeared in the 1950s.

The extraordinary international success of *Amarcord* proved that Fellini's fictional interpretation of Italy's fascist heritage had transcended mere histori-

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Lilly Library of Rare Books/Fellini Archive

The Lilly Library of Rare Books at Indiana University possesses several unique film collections, including archives devoted to Sergei Eisenstein, John Ford, and Orson Welles, plus some 35 manuscripts acquired from Fellini and his scriptwriter, Tullio Pinelli. Peter Bondanella's *The Cinema of Federico Fellini* is the first study of Fellini's cinema to incorporate research from these archives. Included are previously unpublished scripts written by Fellini during the immediate postwar period for Alberto Lattuada, Luigi Comencini, Pietro Germi and other neorealist directors; scripts that were never filmed; unpublished treatments of major works such as *La Strada*, *I Vitelloni*, and *Roma*; and important sketches and drawings by Fellini. For information, contact The Lilly Library of Rare Books, William Cagle, Librarian, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405, phone (812) 855-2452, fax (818) 855-3143.

under the FOIA but when they release a page, sometimes ninety-five percent of it is blacked out, so is that released or not? According to Jim Lesar, who runs the Assassination Archives in Washington, there are probably 250,000 pages of material being withheld.

The problem is that both the House Select Committee and the Warren Commission relied on information that the CIA and FBI provided them. They did not get the original CIA and FBI files, the raw documents. We now have a CIA document which was released in 1981 which describes Robert Blakey, the General Counsel for the House Select Committee, going to see the CIA files. It says—and I'm paraphrasing here—"He spent about half an hour talking to us, and he spent about half an hour looking at files. He did not go to"—and then there's a deletion—"and he did not go to building"—another deletion—"and he never looked at the nine file cabinets full of stuff on Oswald."

So what we know is that the files that have to be opened are not just those of the House Select Committee and the Warren Commission, but also those of the CIA and FBI that they are supposedly based on. I have very little hope that that will happen. Oliver North gave us a good example of what happens to the important files—they shred them—and I presume that many of the most important files have already been shredded. In his 1967 *Playboy* interview, Garrison mentioned an important document on Oswald which the CIA said burned up during photocopying. This took place on November 23rd, the day after the assassination, and Garrison commented that a great deal of spontaneous combustion must have taken place in Washington that day.

Cineaste: Are there other positive political consequences that could result from the controversy surrounding JFK?

Sklar: Apart from opening the files, we need a citizens' movement to get the CIA and FBI under control, to make them accountable, and to eliminate their covert operations.

Basically what we have is a shadow government totally unaccountable to the American people and I hope the film will heighten people's awareness of that.

I think there could also be a movement to change the way that the history of the assassination is taught in our schools. Currently most high school history textbooks have a paragraph which says that Kennedy was assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald, a lone nut or communist or whatever, and there may be a sentence which says that some people think there was a conspiracy. That's not enough. Young people coming out of this film are outraged and they ought to be. That's what history books should do—get them to think, to feel, and to act. A history book that puts people to sleep and tells them lies to boot is not doing its job. That's how a democracy falls apart. If this film encourages young people to do further research—go to the library, read books, talk to people, question the government, learn how history is written—that's all to the good. Parents can also get involved by putting pressure on textbook companies to update and revise the simplistic history that their children are taught.

Cineaste: Do you see the plans to publish an annotated version of the script as a way to rebut some of the film's critics?

Sklar: Yes, and I believe it's going to be the complete shooting script, so in that sense it will contain more than the actual film. It will provide the evidentiary basis we used. This isn't to say that the facts we present in the film are undisputed, it's just to say, "Look, we didn't make this up out of thin air. If you think this sounds crazy, well, this is where it came from and here are the sources notes for it." Then people can check the original sources for themselves. Those who attack this film as a pack of lies have no idea how much research went into it. The published screenplay will give them some idea anyway, and if they take the time to check the sources—as we did—perhaps they'll come to a different opinion. ■

AMARCORD (Continued)

cal recreation. It obviously struck a responsive chord in non-Italian viewers who had never lived under a fascist regime and who had probably never even heard of Mussolini. But there is something quite disturbing in *Amarcord* for any spectator of this film. While the characters in it are obviously comic types and the political regime they lived under has long since vanished, the Amarcordians are nevertheless far more familiar figures than the sexually traumatized conformist Marcello Clerici in Bertolucci's *Il conformista* or the even more abnormal and monstrous fascist killer appropriately named Attila in Bertolucci's *Novecento*. Their tics and manias are not so far removed from our own, and our bemused observation of the humorous antics of Fellini's characters never relieves us of the feeling that there on the screen, but for an accident of historical circumstance, we, too, could well be depicted. *Amarcord* stands as Fellini's most complex visual representation of a political theme, even though the ideological dimensions of the film do not exhaust its artistic achievements. Presenting a human comedy and transcending historical, ideological, or geographical boundaries, *Amarcord* speaks to our common humanity. ■

END NOTES

1 Federico Fellini, *Comments on Film*, ed. Giovanni Grazzini (Fresno: The Press of California State College at Fresno, 1988), p. 15.

2 Examples of these early attacks may be found in the previously cited polemics over *La strada* and *Le notti di Cabiria* in Peter Bondanella, ed., *Federico Fellini: Essays in Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), and in Federico Fellini, *"La Strada": Federico Fellini, Director*, eds. Peter Bondanella and Manuela Gieri (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987); a more recent example of this point of view may be found in the broadside attack upon Fellini's "irrelevance" in Robert Kolker's *The Altering Eye: Contemporary International Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

3 Cited in Franca Faldini and Goffredo Fofi, eds., *L'avventurosa storia del cinema italiano...1960-1969* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1981), p. 275 (author's translation).

4 Fellini, "Amarcord: The Fascism Within Us," in Bondanella, ed., *Federico Fellini: Essays in Criticism*, pp. 20-21.

5 An English version, "Rimini, My Home Town," can be found in *Fellini on Fellini*, pp. 1-40.

6 Lallo's nickname, "Il Patacca," is also a slang word from Fellini's province that refers to the female sexual organs and may be translated as "cunt." Its use in the film as a familiar term of address functions in much the same manner as the Venetian *mona* ("cunt") or the Florentine *bischero* ("prick"), two other words with sexual meanings that are also employed by Italians in formal speech and which may also be used as familiar and affectionate forms of address among good friends.

7 Fellini, "Amarcord: The Fascism Within Us," in Bondanella, ed., *Federico Fellini: Essays in*

Criticism, p. 21.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

10 Cited from Fellini, *Il film "Amarcord" di Federico Fellini*, p. 199 (author's translation). This published script was created from an analysis of the film on a moviola, but the final copy of the film still contains a number of important changes, forcing the scholar to use the script with the usual caution that must be employed with all of Fellini's Italian scripts.

11 Fellini, *Il film "Amarcord"*, p. 199 (author's translation).

12 *Ibid.*, p. 22 (author's translation).

13 Millicent Marcus, "Fellini's *Amarcord*: Film as Memory," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 2 (1977), p. 423.

14 *Ibid.*

15 Fellini, "Amarcord: The Fascism Within Us," in Bondanella, ed., *Federico Fellini: Essays in Criticism*, p. 22.

16 While these particular questions were eventually changed in the final dubbed print of the film, Fellini intervenes in the narrative of *Amarcord* on a number of occasions.

17 See *ibid.*, pp. 138-139, for the script (which identifies the tormenting voice-over only as "The Voice of a Man." In the dubbing of the film, Fellini inserted his own voice.

18 See Gideon Bachman, *Ciao, Federico!* (1969), available on videocassette.

19 Fellini, *Fare un film* (Turin: Einaudi, 1980), p. 141 (author's translation).

20 Fellini, "Amarcord: The Fascism Within Us," in Bondanella, ed., *Federico Fellini: Essays in Criticism*, pp. 24-25.

21 Fellini, *Comments on Film*, p. 39