

IN NEOREALISM'S WAKE: THE ITALIAN CINEMA OF RECONSTRUCTION

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This text is dedicated to the memory of Dr. David Lavery. His profound love of cinema and erstwhile dedication to his students continues to inspire me in all my endeavors.

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ABSTRACT

In Neorealism's Wake: The Italian Cinema of Reconstruction

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Studies of Italian post-war cinema have traditionally relied on a historiography that divides the field into two categories: neorealist and post-neorealist. This enduring periodization has allowed for rhetorical distinctions between the pure neorealist aesthetic of the immediate post-war period and the various auteurist styles that developed in neorealism's wake. While this dichotomy acknowledges differences between the spartan productions of the late 1940's and the more elaborate, often set-bound pictures of the 1960's, the tendency to valorize these specific periods has underplayed important dimensions of Italian cinema in the 1950's. This study demonstrates that the early films of five now-celebrated directors bear the mark of the country's reconstruction while also engaging the complex discourse of neorealist aesthetics and filmmaking practices that have come to dominate the study of Italian cinema. Each of five chapters focuses on two films that share thematic and artistic resonances, subjecting them to interpretations that foreground historical and material circumstances affecting Italy's new republic at mid century.

Chapter one examines the relationship between Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* (1943), an unauthorized adaptation of James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934) that is often treated as a proto-neorealist text, and Michelangelo Antonioni's debut film, *Cronaca di un Amore* (1950), which recapitulates noir tropes in the post-war

period. Chapter two pairs Visconti's *Senso* (1954) and *Le Notti Bianche* (1957) to demonstrate how the director's experiments in romantic decadence and modern minimalism continue his neorealist engagement with the material realities of Italian life in both historical and contemporary settings. Chapter three focuses on two well-known films by Federico Fellini, *La Strada* (1954) and *Le Notti di Cabiria* (1957), to show how Fellini's belief in redemption shapes his portraits of the Italian populace in the mid 1950s. Chapter four pairs Michelangelo Antonioni's final films of the decade, *Le Amiche* (1955) and *Il Grido* (1957), to determine the ways in which stylistic and thematic idiosyncrasies attributed to Antonioni's masterpieces of the 1960's are prefigured in these earlier works, along with the subtle ways in which Antonioni represents crises of gender in two disparate social milieus. Chapter five moves to the early 1960s with Pier Pasolini's first films, *Accattone* (1961) and *Mamma Roma* (1962), two depictions of subproletarian life in the neglected, improvised slums surrounding Rome known as the *borgate*. This chapter highlights the means by which Pasolini reappropriates neorealist corporealism in his construction of human bodies excluded from Rome's then-booming economy.

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INTRODUCTION: THE ITALIAN CINEMA OF RECONSTRUCTION

“One is drawn to new themes, interests change, and with them directions. There is no point in tarrying among the ruins of the past. We are all too often mesmerized by a particular ambience, the atmosphere of a particular time. But life changes, the war is over, what was destroyed has been rebuilt. The drama of reconstruction has to be told.”

-Roberto Rossellini

In the years immediately following the Second World War, Italian neorealism inaugurated a new way of looking at the world, a cinematic paradigm that privileged careful attention to the material and historical realities afflicting a populace still reeling from decades of fascist rule. Through its emphasis on documentary realism and themes relating to the struggles of everyday life, Italian neorealism can be read as a reaction to the heavily censored and propagandistic cinema that flourished under the supervision of Benito Mussolini. Though critics have often positioned neorealism as a corrective to its ideologically overdetermined forerunners, it is still a product of a particular moment in Italian history. *Roma Città Aperta* (1945), the Roberto Rossellini film that is typically considered the impetus for Italian neorealism, draws its memorable conclusion from the radical open-ness presented by the possibility of a reconstructed, postwar Italy in which the memory of the anti-fascist Resistance movement would unify the populace under the goal of creating a new, more equitable society.

Through neorealism, Italian cinema gained enormous international acclaim. A cadre of young filmmakers, including Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio De Sica, Luchino Visconti, and others, found themselves well positioned to develop distinctive, auteurist

styles that would enable them to create deeply personal, undeniably Italian cinema for burgeoning international audiences hungry for stories of European reconstruction following the devastation of World War II. Similarly, an emergent group of film critics and scholars, chief among them André Bazin, championed neorealism as a uniquely political and socially engaged style of filmmaking whose emphasis on the use of location shooting, nonprofessional actors, and plots detailing the banal realities of life made it an accessible paradigm for filmmakers worldwide who had little access to the kind of financial capital necessary for Hollywood-style spectacle. The enormous talent of the Italian filmmakers who emerged during the neorealist period combined with the critical attention garnered by the body of work that those filmmakers produced have had the effect of making neorealism virtually synonymous with the Italian cinema in general.

Though the critical discourse surrounding Italian cinema has privileged neorealism as an aesthetic through which all other aspects of that nation's postwar cinema must be considered, it was a relatively short-lived movement. By the dawn of the 1950s, many of the chief contributors to the school of neorealism had consciously distanced themselves from the style that defined their earlier work. The decade following the end of the war brought about vast and rapid change in Italian society. The country found itself industrializing at a meteoric rate, and Italy quickly emerged as an economic powerhouse of sorts. This substantial and unevenly distributed development triggered waves of internal emigration in which those from Italy's perennially neglected south moved north in search of steady work and a small slice of the country's booming economy. Italy's largest cities, Rome, Naples, and Milan, experienced extraordinary

growth and all manner of shantytowns, referred to as *borgate*, sprung up around the outskirts of these urban areas. This period of development, known as *Il Boom* or the Economic Miracle, peaked in the 1960's and is obviously reflected in the cinematic masterpieces of that decade, such as Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (1960) and Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Eclisse* (1962). These developments in the socio-economic makeup of Italy resulted in an outgrowth of new subjectivities and sociological paradigms that challenged previous methods used for examining the relationships, monetary and otherwise, between members of the Italian populace and the various private and public apparati that gave structure to daily life.

On the intellectual and political fronts, the establishment of a liberal democracy in Italy, spearheaded by the Christian Democratic Party's coalition of the emergent industrial class and the remnants of the aristocracy, reignited debates over Italy's status as a nation-state with a unified cultural identity shared by all its citizens. Despite all of its obvious shortcomings and the atrocities committed on behalf of the fascist political program, the Italian Fascist Party had propagated the mythos of a unified, unproblematized Italian identity, language, and culture stretching back to the Roman Empire, a fairytale of homogeneity that was quite attractive to many Italians. In reality, the various dialects spoken throughout the nation were barely mutually intelligible and there was significant disagreement on what Italy's relationship to the rest of Europe and the world should be. Though the nation's chief left-wing party, the PCI, was largely excluded from the governing coalition, it remained a regional power, particularly in the industrial north, and many of the premier intellectuals and artists of the 1950s were

party members who remained deeply suspicious of the promise of a postwar economic order based on international capitalistic enterprise, even though a good number of them would break with the PCI over its hard pro-Stalin stance. The reconstruction period was defined by an effort to jumpstart Italy's political modernization. Despite the best efforts of the political elite to smooth over the significant conflicts between the leftist and rightist poles of political life in Italy, disagreements over the nature of the Italian state would continue to plague the nation for decades, leading to the paramilitarism of the Years of Lead in the 1970's.

In considering the profound social, economic, and political upheaval entailed by Italy's reconstruction, a portrait emerges of a nation that, despite its position in the emergent trans-Atlantic hegemony, was acutely divergent from the model Italy anticipated by the rhetoric of neorealism. In just a few short years, a country that had long been considered a backwater of southern Europe was transformed into a symbol of postwar prosperity, exporting both its material goods and its cultural products throughout the world. However, this transformative process served to exacerbate socio-economic inequities in Italy, elevating the nation's industrial class to previously unseen levels of wealth and power while many Italians still struggled to make ends meet. Similarly, the political class that rose to power in the vacuum left by the fall of the Fascist Party was made up of many of the same figures who had prospered during Mussolini's reign, leading many Italians to conclude that the postwar government was complicit in preventing a Nurembergian reckoning for those who had abetted the brutal, terroristic tactics employed by the fascist regime. In this respect, Italy's reconstruction

can be seen as both an explosion in development and modernization as well as a papering over of the same rigid hierarchies that had controlled the nation for decades.

It should come as no surprise that the generation of filmmakers who contributed to the rise of neorealism and developed their artistic sensibilities in its wake should be forced to reconsider their own relationship toward that movement in light of the historical developments of the postwar period. For many, this process involved a rigorous deconstruction of neorealism itself and the historical narratives undergirding its artistic project. For others, it entailed a rejection of the specific model of cinematic realism insisted upon by the critical discourse surrounding neorealism in favor of modes that borrow from both the classical cinema as well as the avant garde school of film art. Regardless of individual orientations toward neorealism and other cinematic paradigms, this need to re-examine Italian cinema in light of the global popularity of neorealism had the effect of rendering filmmaking in Italy an intensely discursive act through which a complex web of citation, parody, and other methods of reappropriation was woven. This mesh of styles and appropriations lends the cinema of reconstruction a distinctive self-consciousness that presages the works produced by the various new waves, which are imbued with the distinctive cinephilia of their creators and a tendency towards meta-cinematic commentary. The dissolution of neorealism can be viewed as a stylistic splintering, in this respect, opening up space in the Italian cinema for a diverse array of deeply personal, auteurist visions that bear some trace of neorealism's emphasis on material and historical reality while discarding its narrow aesthetic register.

The difficulties of making sense of the reconstruction era and the films it produced is reflected in Italian cinema studies, a field which has often relied on a periodization that divides the postwar cinema into neorealist and post-neorealist eras. This historical narrative of Italian cinema privileges neorealist films and post-neorealist films while overlooking many key works produced in the intervening years due to their incongruence with this stylistic dichotomy. In recent years, scholars have begun to reconsider the dominant framings of Italian cinema, with particular emphasis on the establishment of neorealism as a critical discourse foisted upon a rather diverse array of films, many of which share few characteristics beyond a rejection of classical, studio-bound filmmaking and some relationship to socio-political themes. This work, undertaken in texts such as Angelo Restivo's *The Cinema of Economic Miracles: Visuality and Modernization in the Italian Art Film* (2002) and Karl Schoonover's *Brutal Vision: The Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema* (2012), has allowed for a reconsideration of postwar Italian cinema as a global, as well as national, phenomenon that is informed by Italy's unique status following the Second World War—a nation defined in the discourse of international politics by its anti-fascist Resistance movement whose noble aims were aided by the military intervention of the United States, rendering it an exemplar of the trans-Atlantic cooperation that would undergird the establishment of NATO as a Cold War bulwark. This framework for understanding postwar Italian cinema gives lie to the notion that neorealism can be viewed as a non-ideological project concerned solely with developing new methods of capturing the world as it really is. By extension, such a

paradigm also calls for a re-examination of film texts ignored or defined entirely through the neorealism-centered discourse of Italian film studies.

SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

The purpose of this study is to understand the study of postwar Italian cinema through an analysis that highlights the ways in which Italy's reconstruction is reflected in films of the 1950s. In service of that goal, I have prepared five chapters, each discussing two films, that explicate various aspects of the Italian cinema of reconstruction. The films I have chosen range from the extremely well-known to the critically understudied. I selected these works with an eye towards the reconsideration of films that have been generally cited as evidence of their creators' abandonment of neorealism in favor of inferior filmic styles or as early works that lack the intellectual rigor and aesthetic refinement of the filmmaker's later masterpieces. Though these films vary, in terms of form, content, and ideological orientation, I will show through close readings that the cinema of reconstruction comprises a field of inquiry that has been consistently underrepresented in Italian cinema studies.

If the films I have selected lack the easily identifiable, stylistic hallmarks that are insisted upon as guarantors of neorealist bona fides in more reductive accounts of Italian cinema, they nonetheless share characteristics such as an insistence on ambiguity and ambivalence as basic elements of the human experience, a post-neorealist interest in explicating the social reality of life in Italy, and a deep suspicion of the tendency of Italian institutions to abet historical amnesia in respect to the fascist era and the institutions that enabled Mussolini's rise to power. Similarly, these films often reflect

the perceived incommensurability of outdated philosophical modes with emergent, modern lifestyles and cultural affects. In this respect, the films also share an aesthetic preoccupation with developing new, modern ways of representing the world through cinema, similar to the manner in which the neorealists pioneered a new vision of filmic realism to capture the brutality of the war and the destruction left in its wake. Though few of these films directly engage the notion of Italy's reconstruction in a literal sense, they are undeniably the product of a historical moment defined by sweeping changes to the socio-political landscape of the country. This reconstructed Italy demanded the innovation of new cinematic motifs and paradigms, leading to a period of extraordinary creative fecundity that gave birth to some of the most prominent filmmakers of the mid-century.

CHAPTER 1: THE POSTMAN'S RING REVERBERATES: ANTONIONI'S *CRONACA DI UN AMORE* AS A RECONSTRUCTION OF VISCONTI'S *OSSESSIONE*

This chapter, which focuses on Michelangelo Antonioni's first feature film, *Cronaca di un Amore* (1950), considers the evocation of reconstruction as a motif in Antonioni's loose adaptation of James M. Cain's novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934) by way of Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* (1943), an important proto-neorealist work in its own regard. By highlighting the manner in which *Cronaca di un Amore* draws on both an American literary source as well as a Visconti film that can be seen as a covert statement of anti-fascist resistance, I demonstrate the ways in which the Italian cinema of the 1950s develops complex discursive relationships to a variety of creative influences as well as the real-world history of Italy. Similarly, I analyze the film's themes

of investigation as a means of reconstructing a historical narrative in order to explicate the difficulties proposed by such a task in a nation where war has disrupted every aspect of daily life. In its deconstruction of the notions of guilt and the exploration of past misdeeds, *Cronaca di un Amore* can be read as a veiled critique of dominant Italian institutions that sought to occlude inquiries that might assign culpability to officials who wielded power during the fascist era. The film also serves as an important harbinger of the tendency of works in the cinema of reconstruction to develop meta-cinematic commentary on neorealism and other Italian film styles through both direct citation and more subtle forms of reappropriation.

CHAPTER 2: *SENSO* AND *LE NOTTI BIANCHE*: VISCONTI'S RECONSTRUCTION

MELODRAMAS AS HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY COMMENTARY

The second chapter of this text analyzes two films by Luchino Visconti: *Senso* (1954) and *Le Notti Bianche* (1957). In pairing Visconti's well-known treatment of Camillo Boito's novella *Senso* (1882) with his more obscure adaptation of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's short story "White Nights" (1848), I underscore the manner in which the director appropriates self-consciously theatrical modes of visual representation in order to continue his neorealist engagement with the forces of history and the material realities of life in Italy in both historical and contemporary settings. In *Senso*, Visconti borrows from the models of opera and classical period pieces in order to present a story of the Risorgimento, the nineteenth century conflict that pitted nascent Italian nationalism against the forces of the Austrian empire. Despite *Le Notti Bianche's* obvious aesthetic differences from *Senso*, the former's evocation of a modernist,

theatrical minimalism to tell a story of contemporary Italian alienation also speaks to the capacity for fantastical cinematic modes to evoke the sort of socio-political commentary associated with neorealism and other examples of cinematic realism.

CHAPTER 3: RECONSTRUCTING THE INDIVIDUAL: FELLINIAN REDEMPTION NARRATIVES

IN *LA STRADA* AND *LE NOTTI DI CABIRIA*

In this third chapter, I analyze two of the most famous Italian films of the 1950s, Federico Fellini's *La Strada* (1954) and *Le Notti di Cabiria* (1957), in light of their individual depiction of personal redemption and the manner in which they can be said to evoke a portrait of the Italian populace in the 1950s. Though these films are often treated as an example of a personal, neorealist vision, as a means of reasserting Fellini's position within the corpus of neorealism, my own readings downplay this apologetic approach in favor of an analysis that centers on the ways in which these films dramatize the conflict between the innermost dreams and desires of the individual and the crude, often humiliating realities of modern life. Through the characters of Gelsomina and Cabiria, each portrayed by the director's wife Giulietta Masina, Fellini creates loving, sympathetic portraits of the downtrodden and the desperate, not entirely unlike those favored by neorealism, but with a psychological complexity that suggests the importance of dreams and unexpressed desires to the subjectivity of the individual.

CHAPTER 4: CRISES OF IDENTIFICATION: ANTONIONI'S *LE AMICHE* AND *IL GRIDO*
 THROUGH THE LENS OF RECONSTRUCTION

Chapter four pairs Michelangelo Antonioni's final films of the 1950s, *Le Amiche* (1955) and *Il Grido* (1957), in order to examine the ways in which the stylistic and thematic idiosyncrasies attributed to Antonioni's masterpieces of the 1960s are reflected in earlier works that have not received the critical attention of his tetralogical collaboration with actress Monica Vitti. Both *Le Amiche* and *Il Grido* can be construed as dramatizations of gendered subjectivities. Whereas the former draws upon the examples of the women's film in order to examine issues of feminine morality, careerism, and romance in the context of Milanese high society, the latter is an existentialist examination of the disintegration of the masculine ideal portrayed via an elliptical journey through the misty and mysterious Po River valley. Though these films draw on different aspects of the unique formalism that defines Antonioni's contribution to the Italian cinema, they can be viewed as important precursors to the director's most acclaimed film texts.

CHAPTER 5: LIFE AND DEATH IN THE BORGATE: PASOLINI'S *ACCATTONE* AND *MAMMA ROMA*

This final chapter considers the first films of Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Accattone* (1961) and *Mamma Roma* (1962), each of which engages in specific refutations of neorealist portrayals of the Italian proletariat through the director's portrayals of life in the neglected, improvised slums surrounding Rome known as the *borgate*. In substituting the noble, hardworking exemplars of proletarian diligence that people the films of

Italian neorealism for the subproletarian, eponymous protagonists of *Accattone* and *Mamma Roma*, Pasolini reappropriates the corporealism so central to neorealist practice as a means of constructing the bodies of those totally excluded from Rome's booming economy. In reappropriating the motifs and visual style of neorealism, Pasolini configures his characters and the microcosm they inhabit as sites of resistance in a world where other forms of class warfare have been disallowed or fully colonized by hegemonic forces.

CHAPTER I: THE POSTMAN'S RING REVERBERATES: ANTONIONI'S *CRONACA DI UN AMORE* AS A RECONSTRUCTION OF VISCONTI'S *OSSESSIONE*

At face value, *Cronaca di un Amore* (1950) is a noteworthy film in that it is the first narrative feature by Michelangelo Antonioni, a director who would play a central role in defining the Italian art cinema during the latter half of the Twentieth Century. However useful it might prove in an auteurist reading of the development of Antonioni's singular obsessions and film style, *Cronaca* takes on a different significance when viewed in light of one of the foundational texts of neorealist aesthetics, Luchino Visconti's debut feature *Ossessione* (1943). *Cronaca di un Amore* functions as a prime example of the cinema of reconstruction in that it quite literally reconstructs *Ossessione*, itself an unauthorized adaptation of James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934), transposing the characters and events explored in Visconti's film into the postwar period, replacing privation with opulence and the class conflict between the subproletariat and the petit bourgeois with that of the aspirationally middle class and the capitalist elite. The transpositional relationship between these films indicates both the influence of Visconti on Antonioni as well as the increasing discursivity of Italian cinema during the reconstruction period, enabling a complex language of references and reappropriations to develop. A close reading of *Cronaca* in parallel to *Ossessione* will reveal that Antonioni's first film functions as a new permutation of the elements at play in Visconti's noirish vision of lust and murder. This rearrangement allows for both the staging of reconstruction as narrative event as well as the enaction of a redemptive

arc for the film's male protagonist, who ultimately finds himself absolved of guilt and freed from the influence of the femme fatale.

Ossessione occupies a unique position in the historical narrative of Italian cinema due to the historical and artistic circumstances under which it was created. Though *Ossessione* was conceived of and produced under the supervision of fascist officials, who controlled the totality of film production in Italy at the time, it managed to somehow subvert that censorious regime and was released briefly in 1943 before being banned outright by order of Mussolini's government. Likewise, the film is posited by many histories of neorealism as an early exemplar of the threadbare aesthetic and attention to social and economic reality which would be fully realized in the neorealist masterpieces of the late 40's. In this manner, the film is connected to the construction of neorealism as an act of resistance against the fascist government. Though there is nothing overtly critical of the Italian government in *Ossessione*, critics have connected its dark and melodramatic depiction of life on the margins of society to a general critique of the realities of existence under fascism, thus rendering *Ossessione* a possible point of origin for what Andre Bazin called "The Italian School of the Resistance," preceding the emergence of neorealism in the following years (32).

Ossessione's narrative material hews relatively closely to the text of Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934), a novel which has been the source of numerous film adaptations and can be viewed as one of the premier examples of the hardboiled detective fiction that gave rise to film noir. Visconti transfers the events described in the novel from an American milieu to an Italian one, trading the original subtext of interwar

malaise and dissatisfaction for the repressive, stultifying air of fascism. In the most general terms, the film tells the story of a love triangle between a put-upon housewife, Giovanna, her restaurant proprietor husband, Giuseppe, and an aimless drifter, Gino. The burgeoning relationship between Giovanna and Gino, portrayed by Clara Calamai and Massimo Girotti, respectively, motivates the narrative action. Due to the taboo nature of their relationship, they find themselves tempted to murder Giuseppe in order to continue their affair without sacrificing the meager material comforts his income as owner and operator of a roadside tavern/gas station provides them. Driven to murder by a combination of lust and economic desperation, Giovanna and Gino find themselves suspects in a police investigation that dooms them to the prospect of punishment or life on the run, shattering their dreams of domestic bliss. Gino struggles with his guilt over Giuseppe's murder and attempts to flee Giovanna's influence only to find himself inexorably drawn back to her. This dramatic reunion culminates in a car chase and an accidental wreck that kills Giovanna and leaves Gino to the mercy of the police.

Ossessione is a traditional melodrama in most respects. The protagonists are doomed from the outset. Their taboo desire for one another renders them abject within the dominant social order. However, they seem powerless to resist their urges, no matter how blatantly self-destructive. At no point is there any chance that Gino and Giovanna will be able to attain a normal life, free from the specter of Giuseppe who seems to loom larger in death than he ever did in life. The exact desires that motivate their illicit affair and the murder that follows it remain nebulous, never more specific than a general sense of lust and desperation in the face of life's banality. In her article

“The Phantom Self: James M. Cain’s Haunted American in the Early Neorealism of Visconti and Antonioni” (1984), Allison Graham notes the ways in which Cain’s novel stages an Oedipal drama of sorts, although she finds that instead of inviting any sort of Freudian or psychological reading, these mythic overtones that have rendered *Postman* such a fecund source material for filmmakers actually mask “its most adamant stylistic and thematic feature: its absolute denial of psychology” (48). This denial of interiority in favor of what Graham posits as a model of identity as pure image projected outward, revealing “the terrific prospect of an inner emptiness” leads to an understanding of Cain’s Depression-era drifter, Frank Palmer, as a man haunted, not by the repression of desire but by the suspicion that “in a culture devoted to the endless possibilities of mutable identity, there is nothing to be” (51).

Ossessione can be mapped onto the oedipal triangle, as well. Gino functions as a symbolic son to Giovanna and Giuseppe who, in lusting after his mother, finds himself driven to murder his father and eventually assume his role as head of the patriarchal order. In “Queer Neorealism: Luchino Visconti’s *Ossessione* and the *Cinema* Conspiracy Against Fascism” (2019), Lorenzo Fabbri connects this deconstruction of the familial myths that undergird Italian society as a direct attack against the fascist regime that promised the re-entrenchment of patriarchal control and tradition, writing that “Visconti’s melodramas are characterized by an aesthetics of excess which explodes the stable identity of the viewers and pushes them to feel another potential life pulsing beyond the life that is merely possible in the here and now...” (13). In literalizing the metaphorical relationships inscribed in the oedipal triangle, Visconti’s film could be said

to offer a latent critique of the strict and irreproachable hierarchies posited by fascism. Fabbri's treatment of *Ossessione* as an example of "Queer Neorealism" functions through an understanding of Visconti as a queer artist, not in the sense of his sexual orientation but in a sense of radical alterity in which queerness is representative of general otherness in the face of strictly enforced social codes. This exploration of alternative ways of existing in the world, paths and desires foreclosed upon by fascism's repressive apparati, is connected to *Ossessione's* roots to the subversive, left-wing milieu surrounding the editorial board of *Cinema*, an Italian film periodical (Fabbri 9-11). It is from this nucleus of anti-fascist filmmakers and critics that the films which would come to be seen as the definitive works of neorealism emerged.

Fabbri's work in connecting *Ossessione*, a film that seems to violate many of the principles of neorealism, to the *Cinema* cell and its efforts to produce a uniquely Italian cinema that challenged fascism's stranglehold on the institutions of art and culture leads to an understanding of Visconti's first film as an ideological, if not aesthetic, template for the more resolutely neorealist films which would follow in its wake. Even though it was censored, underseen, and not officially distributed abroad until the 1970's, it would have undoubtedly held a certain mystique and prestige in light of Visconti's emergence as one of Italy's major filmmakers of the postwar, especially considering the explicit Marxist discourse expressed in a film like *La Terra Trema* (1948), the Visconti film that best coincides with the original corpus of neorealism in terms of the date of its release and its use of nonprofessional actors, location shooting, and a story focusing on the struggle of the downtrodden poor to assert themselves in the face

of economic exploitation. One can easily see how a young Antonioni, on the verge of assembling his first feature film, might have been drawn to *Ossessione* as a text worthy of revision and recreation in that it embodied a sort of clandestine nexus through which neorealism was conceived. A reading of *Cronaca* that privileges its intertextual relationship to *Ossessione* therefore allows for a reconsideration of neorealism's roots in literary and cinematic modes circulating in the pre-war period, before the arrival of the body of films that would announce Italian neorealism as a major film movement.

Graham's readings of *Ossessione* and *Cronaca* are premised upon the central observation that what the Italians have borrowed from Cain's novel is a sense that identity itself, the cluster of signifiers and relationships, both economic and social, is a myth propagated in order to support the notion of individualism central to American identity in the Twentieth Century (52). This sense of identity as ultimately illusory is easily adapted into the context of resistance toward Italian society under fascism, in which the fixity of identity within a strictly regulated social hierarchy is endemic to fascism's strictly hierarchical social order. In the aftermath of fascism's defeat, the certainty it promised was replaced with the profound chaos and disorder experienced in Italy during the late 1940's and early 1950's, as the country struggled to rebuild itself. Given this backdrop, it is easy to see why Antonioni would have been drawn to a text that resonates with the common refrain of the modern subject's inability to make sense of the complexity of the world they inhabit. This understanding of the difficulties posed by identification, particularly for the male subject, is a central component of the film noir genre, a mode that inspired the earliest expressions of neorealism. This observation

serves to underline the idea that neorealism, even at its earliest stages, involves a profound probing of identity, national and personal, in a modern, capitalist society. This intellectual project would prove central to both the cinema of reconstruction as well as the post-neorealist films which followed. This suggests that the cinema of reconstruction inherently entails an examination of, and a recapitulation of the cinematic motifs used to make sense of and oppose the horrors of fascism. Therein, Antonioni's recreation of *Ossessione* in a post-fascist, post-liberation historical moment must both engage with the critique of fascism presented by Visconti's original film as well as positing a new perspective on the Italy that has emerged in the aftermath.

Cronaca di un Amore's intertextual relationship to *Ossessione* is more complex than the term "remake" would imply. Allison Graham lands upon the term "rethinking" to describe the act of adaptation through which Antonioni transforms Visconti's bleak vision of marginality and the suffocating claustrophobia of heteronormativity into an exploration of bourgeois vacuity as a condition of postwar prosperity (60). *Cronaca* seems to distill the narrative elements of the original film to their most basic symbolic forms in order to recontextualize and re-examine them in light of the historical developments that had occurred in the interim since *Ossessione's* conception. It achieves this task through the imposition of a parallel narrative structure that entails a gaze into the past, a historical moment rendered opaque and illegible by the chaos and traumas of the war, as well as a gaze into the present, a historical moment wherein traumatic guilt and iniquity accumulated in the past is pathologically revisited until it can be meaningfully resolved. The relationship between temporal registers of past and

present undergirds the entire structure of the film, disrupting the normal flow of time in favor of a model in which the past and present seem to overlap, rendering any sense of forward momentum impossible. The melodramatic angst of the characters is attached to cycles of behavior that suggest a compulsive, overarching obsession with a past, an inability to escape the narrative pathways predetermined by the film text and mitigated by the real socio-historical forces that inform the plot. This cyclical process of obsession and lust draws its basic shape from *Ossessione* but also presents a considerably more complex scheme in which the intrusion of the present into the past inevitably contaminates the present and restarts a deadly pattern of desire and murder once more.

The gaze into the past, as it is constructed in *Cronaca*, is explicitly a gaze of reconstruction narrativized through the investigation of a private detective hired by a suspicious husband, Enrico, to look into the murky past of his young wife, Paola. This is not a look into the past visualized through the mechanic of flashback. Instead, the camera follows the detective, existing in the diegetic present, on his journey from Milan to Ferrara to attempt to piece together the narrative of Paola's life prior to her marriage to Enrico. The detective collects personal accounts, delves into historical records, and attempts to use the available evidence to make sense of the young woman who showed up in Milan without a past and married the wealthy industrialist Enrico. This is the narrative frame that inaugurates the plot of *Cronaca*. It will also intrude upon the main narrative at key moments, so as to motivate events that result in the film's conclusion. The threat of reconstruction hangs over the film throughout, creating an air of menace

that serves to induce the characters to engage in all manner of deceit and subterfuge so as to avoid detection. In other words, the film's protagonists must elide a truthful reconstruction of the past in favor of an imperfect reconstruction that obscures their guilt and allows them to escape consequences for their actions.

It is through this reconstruction of Paola's past that the parallel love triangles determining the film's conflicts are enacted. The first of these occurs entirely within the diegetic past and is defined by the relationship between a young woman, Giovanna, her fiancé, Guido, and her best friend, Paola. This is achieved strictly through allusion and reconstruction, as the character of Giovanna is banished to the past. The moment of her death is central to the film's plot but inaccessible to filmic depiction. It is worth noting the obvious connections between these characters and the cast of *Ossessione*. Massimo Girroli portrays Guido in Antonioni's film, a clear homage to Girroli's star-making turn in *Ossessione*, and both films feature the death of a woman named Giovanna who is engaged in a relationship with Girroli's character. This intertextuality reinforces the sense that the events depicted in *Cronaca* are premised upon the themes and plot of *Ossessione*. While there is no strict continuity between the films, *Cronaca's* correspondence with its predecessor, in terms of casting and plotting, renders it immensely difficult to consider that film without discussing *Ossessione*, especially in regard to Giovanna who is transmuted from romantic object to tragic victim in Antonioni's rethinking of the *Postman* mythos.

In *Cronaca*, Giovanna is never depicted on the screen as she has fallen to her death in an elevator shaft before the events depicted in the film. Giovanna's death is a

structuring absence within the text, a central unknowability around which all manner of ambiguities propagate and circulate. As viewers, we can never know the truth about the events that befell Giovanna. Even the private investigator, who functions as an arbiter of truth and falsehood in the film, cannot attach a definite meaning to Giovanna's death. Is it pure accident, suicide, or murder? Her demise cannot be rationalized through the system of the law. It is an unresolvable enigma that ensnares Paola and Gino, sole witnesses to Giovanna's fatal plunge, in a liminal state between innocence and guilt, never fully exonerated and never directly accused of malfeasance. As Graham notes, "The irony, of course, is that the couple actually did nothing to prevent the accident or to aid the girl, and it is their very passivity which they want to hide" (61). They are not guilty of taking active measures to ensure Giovanna's death. Instead, it is through passivity that they are burdened with guilt. In failing to act to prevent a death, the lovers find themselves at the same impasse as Guido and Giovanna in *Ossessione*, unable to continue an affair due to the guilt of a crime necessitated by the continuation of their affair, a pure ethical paradox. Unlike Guido and Giovanna, however, Gino and Paola are free to go their separate ways in an attempt to hide their guilt and suppress their unseemly desire for one another, setting the stage for the resumption of their tragic affair in the post-war period.

The investigation into the suspicious death of Giovanna sets off the chain of events that leads to Paola and Guido's reunion in the narrative present, demonstrating the power of the historical guilt that binds them to re-emerge despite their best efforts to elude detection. This resurfacing of past guilt defines the geometry of a second love

triangle between Gino, Paola, and Enrico. Enrico functions as a symbol of all that is modern and emergent in Italian society circa 1950. He is a wealthy entrepreneur, owner of many industrial concerns and a member of the most elite echelon of Milanese society. He is the midcentury capitalist personified, the exact type of self-assured man who could seize upon the opportunities provided by Italy's reconstruction to make himself extremely wealthy. His proprietary attitude extends beyond business concerns and affects his personal life as well, rendering him a jealous and possessive husband. It is this possessiveness that causes him to engage the services of the private detective, therein stirring up the inert material of the past and indirectly bringing about the events which will result in his death.

Like Giuseppe in *Ossessione*, Enrico is a business owner and member of an established class within society, setting him up as a foil to the shiftless drifter embodied by Gino/Guido. However, the magnitude of the class difference posited between the character of the proprietor/cuckolded husband and the drifter/lover is greatly increased in Antonioni's rethinking of the scenario. Whereas Giuseppe is but the humble proprietor of a tavern wherein his own wife slaves over the stove and washes the dishes, Enrico is the head of a business empire, engaging in international trade, and taking meetings with all manner of important dignitaries. Giuseppe is a friendly buffoon, an unsuspecting dope who shows Gino nothing but kindness in offering him a place to live and a steady job, only to find himself dead despite his charitable actions. Enrico is a powerful and dominant member of the bourgeoisie, well-connected and capable of spending a good deal of money in order to unearth his wife's secrets and, therein, make

his control over her absolute by rendering the full narrative of her past legible to himself. Giuseppe is killed and disposed of summarily, reinforcing his relative powerlessness and his tangential relationship to the film's narrative arc. The film does not even depict the moment of his demise. It is only in the aftermath of his death that the genuine conflict between Gino and Giovanna can make itself known. In contrast, Enrico's death, purely coincidental though it may be, can only occur at the film's ending due to Enrico's important role in sponsoring the investigation into his wife's past and prolonging the anguish of the would-be couple. In spite of Guido and Paola's scheming, he is killed in a random car accident after becoming upset due to a telegram from the private investigator. His death, accidental or fated, becomes the ultimate expression of the passivity that afflicts the couple and serves only to motivate Guido's final attempt to assert himself meaningfully by leaving Paola and Milan once and for all.

Similarly, the characters of Gino and Guido are differentiated in the fact that Gino is a man without any sense of identity or past who must choose between a life of domesticity premised on murder and a life of freedom on the open road, while Guido is a man with too much past, dragged down by the guilt he has born since Giovanna's death. This burden seems to affect his prospects at future prosperity more dramatically than it has affected Paola's ability to reinvent herself in Milan, suggesting their differing mechanisms for coping with guilt and the underlying psychologies of the characters. In a key scene, Guido pours out his heart to Paola, admits that he has been unable to find meaningful employment since the end of the war, drifting from town to town and barely eeking out a living for himself. His travels to see Paola after learning of the investigation

into their past have all but wiped him out. He is the perfect counterpoint to Enrico's embodiment of postwar prosperity. He is trapped in the past, unable to be meaningfully integrated into the postwar socioeconomic order that favors the bold actions of the capitalist over the passive wanderings of the itinerant laborer.

However different they may be, both Gino and Guido are motivated to kill by the needs of their lovers. Both are responding to economic uncertainty and privation and seek to usurp the position of a man more established and materially secure than they are. Both seem trapped in a sort of limbo wherein they cannot accurately discern their place in the world. Their identities are in flux throughout, unable to attain the status and stability offered by employment and heteronormative romantic relationships. They exist outside the bourgeois social order of their respective contexts. Gino struggles with the demands of a bourgeois life of diligence and thrift at the tavern, and Guido struggles with Paola's unwillingness to abandon her life of comfort in Milan for a life of romantic fulfillment with him. Both men eventually accept murder as a necessary pre-condition for their future fulfillment. Gino kills and suffers the loss of Giovanna in return. Guido has already lost his Giovanna and turns to murder as means of cementing his relationship with Paola only to find that fate has made his action unnecessary and that Paola is incapable of love or devotion. This renders his previous struggles moot but also affords him one last chance to assert his agency and escape into the uncertain future. This is the central difference between the two men. At the end of his story, Gino has lost everything that gave his life the barest sense of meaning. He is deprived of Giovanna, the woman he has killed for, and of the possibility of freedom, the desire for which

represented his only path beyond the impasse of domesticity and the code of bourgeois repression it entails. Guido, a character even more tortured by vacillation than Gino, finally finds the strength within himself to take action, to kill Enrico. However, he finds that this action is ultimately unnecessary and, having been spared the guilt of murder, is free to turn his newfound resolve toward severing his toxic relationship with Paola which has driven him to contemplate murder twice and seems destined to end in death and destruction for them both.

The relationship between the women depicted in *Ossessione* and *Cronaca* is more complex than the pairings of Gino and Guido or Enrico and Giuseppe due to the introduction of a third term that must be accounted for. On the surface, it is obvious that *Ossessione's* Giovanna and Paola occupy roughly parallel roles. They fall in love with a drifter depicted by Massimo Girroli and ultimately convince their lovers to murder their husbands, thus severing their loveless marriages and allowing for their extramarital relationships to be legitimized, at last. However, *Cronaca* complicates this formula by also introducing its own Giovanna, in the form of Guido's dead fiancé, who, though unseen, manages to make her presence felt repeatedly through the guilty consciences exhibited by Guido and Paola throughout the film. The choice of the name Giovanna for this character inevitably draws a direct connection between the woman whose death concludes *Ossessione* and the woman whose death inaugurates the events depicted in *Cronaca*. In this sense, the tragic conclusion of *Ossessione* looms over Antonioni's film, always threatening to repeat itself, to tear apart the murderous lovers. Giovanna is always already dead in the diegesis of *Cronaca*, limiting her impact on the plot to the

weight of memory and culpability. Guido's guilt over the death of his first love functions, within the dramatic economy established by these two films, as a continuation of the anguish suffered by Gino at *Ossessione's* end. Instead of being gunned down by the police, a fitting end for a femme fatale, his bride-to-be falls helplessly down an elevator shaft. Neither having been pushed nor having jumped of her own agency, she plunges endlessly into the epistemological abyss at the center of a film in which the past is unknowable and the future unthinkable.

If one adopts the position that Visconti's Giovanna and Antonioni's Giovanna should be considered recapitulations of the same characteristics and narrative impulses, further possibilities open up for an exploration of Paola as a character who provides the motive for murder, in a manner similar to Giovanna, while also revealing herself to be considerably more amoral and self-serving than the humble wife of Giuseppe. This sense of her complete and total amorality, a sort of detached hedonism in which her desires are discarded as soon as they threaten to be fulfilled, is expressed through both the death of Giovanna, her closest companion, and the planned murder of Enrico, the husband who has provided her with a life of wealth and luxury. Both deaths are motivated by the same desire: her lust for Guido. However, neither iteration of this relationship can be meaningfully fulfilled due to her own vacillations and selfishness. If *Ossessione* mines its tragedy from the total impossibility of Gino and Giovanna ever meaningfully realizing their desires to build a life together, the most sinister suggestion *Cronaca* musters is the idea that Guido has nearly thrown his life away twice for a woman totally incapable of truly loving him, a woman whose facade of normalcy and

bourgeois respectability conceals neither depths of untapped passion nor closely guarded vulnerability, but a profound hollowness which can never be satisfied, no matter what means Guido undertakes to please her.

Whereas Visconti's Giovanna is a working woman, more or less a domestic servant who is depicted falling asleep next to a mountain of dirty dishes in one of *Ossessione's* most stirring scenes, Paola is a well-kept and doted upon housewife, treated to whatever consumer commodities she desires, allowed to maintain her own independence, even having her own room to sleep in. There is a sense in which she chafes against the masculine control exerted by Enrico, analogous to Giovanna's sense of claustrophobia in her marriage to the boorish and aged Giuseppe. However, this does not account for the death of Giovanna, an event for which she feels somewhat responsible. Though the exact nature of her guilty conscience is never explored, her efforts to deceive Enrico about her past reveal the incommensurability of her past and present. Unlike her counterpart in *Ossessione* who is presented with no opportunities to escape a tragic end, Paola demonstrates significant agency in bringing about her own unhappy conclusion, even if she is spared the violent deaths meted out to the two Giovannas.

When Guido and Paola resume their affair, he repeatedly offers to run away with her, to start a new life where they left off before. However, Paola consistently refuses to consider abandoning the life of luxury to which she has become accustomed. This strengthens the sense that her reasons for resenting Enrico have little to do with mistreatment or privation. Instead, they are expressions of ennui, of the ultimately

unfulfilling nature of her life at the heights of society. In resuming her affair with Guido, Paola seeks to recapture an erotic charge missing from her sterile and comfortable existence. She is drawn to danger and subterfuge, rendering her a much more stereotypical femme fatale than the ambiguously malevolent Giovanna of *Ossessione*. Even when presented with the perfect opportunity to begin their lives over again, having been acquitted of guilt in Giovanna's death and spared the need to kill Enrico, she spoils their moment of happiness by losing her resolve and threatening to pin Enrico's death on Guido before he can tell her about her late husband's accident. Above all else, Paola is the villain in her story, Guido the hero. This is a dynamic that is wholly absent from *Ossessione*. Though Visconti's Giovanna does come to represent the opportunity for a bourgeois lifestyle that would curtail Gino's freedom, he ultimately returns to her with the desire to live out their lives together. In the end, having come face to face with Paola's true nature, Guido can only flee into the night never to be heard from again.

Cronaca's plotting is dependent upon both a melodramatic portrait of an unsustainable love triangle, as informed by Visconti's treatment of Cain's original material, as well as the socio-historical context of Italian reconstruction following World War II and the overthrow of fascist governance. Though the events of the pre-war era are only alluded to in general terms, this period of time becomes an object of fascination as it is revealed to be ultimately unknowable to any third party attempting to reconstruct the past via secondhand accounts and historical materials. This haze of ambiguity renders any distinct assignment of guilt for past crimes virtually impossible,

even in cases where circumstantial evidence is overwhelming. Similarly, the crimes or misdeeds which motivate the drama of *Cronaca* always hinge on moments of passivity or inaction, as opposed to the conscious acts of violence or betrayal which determine the plotting of *Ossessione*. This air of unknowability, suggesting an impermeable barrier between past and present that can only be transcended by firsthand, bodily experience, perfectly captures the historical moment of a post-war, post-fascist Italy. Though *Cronaca* avoids direct political commentary, it is impossible to ignore the fact that the dislocation expressed between past and present in the film is a product of chaos generated by the war and the circumstances of Italian fascism. The worldview expressed in *Cronaca* is one undeniably tinged by the guilt and trauma experienced by those who survived the war to find themselves in the moment of reconstruction.

The unshakable ambiguity of the historical past is introduced in the first moments of *Cronaca* in which the private detective hired by Enrico pores over an envelope of photos depicting Paola in her youth, a period of her life about which her husband knows absolutely nothing. In the photos, Paola appears happy and carefree. These images depict youthful innocence and carefree plenitude. There is nothing the least bit suspicious or suggestive about these photos besides the fact that they depict a Paola so very different from the woman her husband has come to know. It is the dissonance between these photos, functioning as a discrete record of the historical past, and Paola's present circumstances that reveals the gulf of obscurity, impermeable to epistemological entreaties or investigations, that drives the narrative action of the film. The private detective, initially a hired hand carrying out the behest of his employer,

comes to be obsessed with Paola's past and the secrets it holds, suggesting an overpowering drive to dispel the mysteries of the past and the guilt they enshroud which goes beyond the simple, financial motive of a private eye working a case. Though absented entirely from the primary storyline of the film, interacting with the main characters through indirect means such as telephone or telegram until his fortuitous visit to Enrico's office at the film's conclusion, the private investigator's efforts to reconstruct a conclusive narrative detailing Paola's past becomes the catalyst for all the subsequent conflicts which drive the film. He functions, in a sense, as an off-screen protagonist, doggedly pursuing the truth by exercising his skills of detections long after the film itself seems to have abandoned this film noir premise in favor of exploring Paola and Guido's descent into obsessive lust.

It is worth considering the importance of the photographs of Paola and the ways in which they introduce uncertainty as a plot element into the text of *Cronaca*. As Karl Schoonover notes in his introduction to *Brutal Vision: The Neorealist Body in Postwar Cinema* (2012), theories of the photographic image have traditionally espoused that the violence of World War II and the Holocaust "triggered the catastrophic breakdown of all traditional means of visually representing reality," whereas the film culture of the 1940's and 50's, from which neorealism emerged, "heralded the cinematic image as a uniquely sensitive and complex form of graphic expression capable of assembling a global audience" (xiii). That the parcel of photographs depicting Paola's youth function as a signifier of Enrico's incomplete understanding of the historical past suggests that Antonioni is, on some level, pushing back against the primary theoretical conceit

underlying neorealism that posits photography as an artform that offers unmitigated access to the materials of reality and, by virtue of that access, truth itself. In this manner, one can see that Antonioni's insistence on ambiguity and obscurity as a primary facet of the world explored in *Cronaca* functions as a direct rebuttal to the unproblematized system of knowledge and sight proposed by neorealism wherein the differentiation between fascists and partisans, oppressors and oppressed, perpetrators and victims, is always perfectly clear. In Antonioni's film, the reality of Italy in 1950 cannot be adequately represented through the tropes and motifs of neorealism as they insist upon the ability of the camera to render the real perfectly legible. Instead, Italy in the midst of reconstruction must be explored through a mode of cinema that engages fully with the contradictions embodied in a society where the collapse of fascism brought forward not the vision of a new and unified Italy presented in the conclusion of *Rome Open City* (1945), but a society marked by profound inequity and economic opportunism, as reflected in the vision of Milanese high society presented in *Cronaca*.

Cronaca's depiction of the city Ferrara and its denizens emerges as a function of the investigator's probe into Paola's past and serves to underscore the uneven development of a nation struggling to recover from the hardships of war and totalitarianism. In service of this goal, Ferrara is depicted as a clear counterexample to the modern, urban setting of Milan wherein most of the action will occur. At the school Paola and Guido attended, the investigator, posing as an old friend of Paola's father, begins to unspool the story of Giovanna's death and Paola's role, or lack thereof, in causing it. In these scenes, Ferrara is depicted as a bygone, run-down city. The walls of

the school are covered in tendrils of ivy which stretch to the top of ancient brick walls. The streets are cobblestone and littered with detritus. The apartments the investigator visits have a pronounced air of faded splendor. In other words, the investigator's journey to Ferrara is a journey into the past itself. Ferrara becomes a symbol of Italy's un-reconstructed past, a place where the scars left by fascism are more obvious on the faces of the buildings and the people, alike. Unlike Milan, which seems to have flourished in the aftermath of the war, Ferrara is the epitome of depression and decline.

This depiction of Ferrara as a depressed and death-stricken environment is heavily underscored in a scene depicting the investigator's conversation with Matilde, an old acquaintance of Paola and Giovanna, and her husband. The couple are depicted as dissolute and miserable. The husband is unemployed, and he and Matilde are shown to have a quarrelsome and unhappy relationship. Matilde is immediately suspicious of the investigator, suggesting that she bears some vague relationship to the events which befell Giovanna. She and her miserable husband serve to depict the fate that might have befallen Guido and Paola if they had never left their hometown: descending into domestic resentment and economic privation, doomed to live out the rest of their days in the dank squalor of a disintegrating apartment. When we see the state of Ferrara and the people who populate it, we understand why Paola might have been motivated to flee this place and reinvent herself in Milan. Though Matilde's role in the story is brief, it serves a crucial purpose in that her life in Ferrara underscores the desperate circumstances still affecting Italians outside of the major urban centers like Milan which had yet to bounce back from the hardships enacted by the war. Similarly, it is the letter

which Matilde writes to Guido, after the investigator's visit, that alerts Guido and Paola to the possibility that someone is looking into Giovanna's death, thereby providing them the pretense to renew their relationship after a long period of estrangement. In poking about in the past, the investigator unwittingly reinvigorates paranoia and lust long dormant, setting into action a course of events that will end in the death of his client, Enrico.

The film immediately juxtaposes its depiction of Ferrara with images of Milan at its most affluent and refined, finding Paola, Enrico, and their friends just as they depart from a night at the theatre. Paola is bedecked in a massive fur coat and extravagantly jeweled earrings. Stepping out of the theatre, she is spotted immediately by a man on the street. He gazes at her across the barrier imposed by the train tracks. She is visible but inaccessible to him. They share a meaningful look. She appears to recognize him but chooses not to greet him, instead retreating to her husband's enormous and luxurious car to be swept back to their opulently decorated home. The night has ended peacefully, but the appearance of the strange man has punctured the perfect facade of her life. Arriving home, she brushes her husband off with claims of a headache and retreats to bed, pensive and anxious due to this unusual encounter.

The strange man is revealed to be Guido who, having received Matilde's letter, seeks to speak with Paola to ensure that they have nothing to fear from an investigation into their past. From the moment when he makes his presence in Milan known to Paola, by way of a phone call, her existence is unalterably ruptured. The life she has made with Enrico and the material comforts it entails has been entirely premised on her repression

of the past in favor of a carefree, hedonistic lifestyle enabled by her marriage. Guido's reappearance signals the re-emergence of a historical moment, none too distant in temporal terms, that, nonetheless, must seem impossibly distant to Paola given all of the steps she's taken to distance herself from the scene of Giovanna's death and her relationship with Guido. The secrets she has maintained thus far must now be sustained through conspiracy and outright deceit, complicating her luxurious existence and societal status.

When the pair are initially reunited, the film offers no hint that their relationship will take on a romantic component. Paola seems relatively content in her stable, if passionless, marriage with Enrico, and Guido is primarily concerned with ascertaining the degree to which they should fear the investigator who has been asking around Ferrara for information related to Paola. It is not until Guido makes his financial precariousness known to Paola that they begin to engage in the deception of Enrico that will eventually evolve into a full-blown love affair and a plot to murder her unsuspecting husband. Guido presents himself as a would-be car salesman who, through general aimlessness and lack of prospects, has fallen on hard times, stating explicitly that he has been floundering, personally and professionally, since the cessation of the war. Whereas Gino enters the plot of *Ossessione* as a carefree drifter, unshackled from the concerns that will ultimately come to dominate his relationship with Giovanna, Guido's character is fundamentally determined by his economic stature, the specter of indebtedness and financial ruin preceding the romantic conflict as a source of possible tragedy.

The dynamic that emerges between the wealthy Paola and the dissolute Guido can be viewed as a commentary on broader social phenomena affecting Italy during reconstruction. In this dichotomous relationship, Paola and Enrico represent a class that rushes toward the future, embracing Italian modernization and the economic opportunities it entails. In contrast, Guido's characterization expresses an inability to move beyond the past, broadly construed as the horrors of war and the traumas suffered by its survivors. It is this inequity between the social and economic positions expressed by these characters that motivates the deceitful and murderous actions undertaken by Guido and Paola as the drama intensifies. The divide between rich and poor, haves and have-nots, is so immense as to render any possibility of Paola and Guido interacting as true peers without readjustment of the power imbalance between them unthinkable. Guido's financial dependence on Paola sets the stage for the emotional co-dependence that will define their affair. The transition from financial to emotional dependence allows the well-meaning and guilt-ridden Guido to be gradually convinced of the necessity of Enrico's murder by the self-serving and avaricious Paola, whose primary concerns are the maintenance of current lifestyle and the prevention of Enrico's discovery of her past.

The film introduces this confusion between economic and emotional attachments through a scheme in which Paola, endeavoring to help Guido after he refuses to accept money given charitably, devises a plan by which they will convince Enrico to buy her a Maserati from Guido, thereby earning him the sales commission and staving off his financial ruin for a little while longer. As they have to maintain Enrico's

ignorance of their relationship to one another, Paola and Guido are careful to behave as if they are complete strangers, enlisting a middleman to facilitate the transaction. What begins as a relatively harmless scheme, at the conclusion of which their recently renewed friendship can be severed once more, quickly reveals itself to be but a flimsy pretense for the former lovers to fall back into one another's arms, all sense of propriety and economic motive abandoned. This plan is enacted in a sequence that finds Paola, Guido, and Enrico occupying the same space for the first and only time in the film as Paola and Guido attempt to suppress their emotional distress, brought about by the investigation and their reunion, in order to convince Enrico to purchase a top-of-the-line luxury vehicle as a belated birthday gift for his wife. Ultimately, their efforts are for naught and the sale of the car is not brought to fruition. However, this sequence of events does serve an important structural role in the film as it establishes characterizations of Paola and Enrico that prove integral in enacting the film's conclusion while also providing a scenario in which Paola and Guido can fall victim to their desires and embark on their affair.

The plan begins with a visit to a charity auction in which Paola is meant to facilitate the meeting of Guido's business partner and her husband so that the sale of the Maserati can be arranged at a later date. Even this relatively simple task is immediately frustrated by the fact that Paola grows intensely jealous when she happens to spot Guido dancing with another woman, his business partner's mistress. This momentary outburst, a histrionic display that flies in the face of their elaborate plan, serves to foreshadow her mercurial and self-serving nature. In her complete willingness

to abandon Guido and the plan they have concocted, Paola's untrustworthiness is hinted at. From this point forward, her relationship with Guido will always be defined by her emotional instabilities and outbursts, the consequences of which will only be fully realized after their intentions to kill Enrico are elucidated. The film endeavors to establish this characterization early on because it is only through the depiction of Paola as a force of chaos and disorder, the ultimate agent through which transgression and violence enter the film, that the film can chart a trajectory for Guido that results in redemption and escape, as opposed to the tragic end suffered by his cinematic forebearer, Gino.

Immediately after the scene at the auction, the film cuts to shots of an open highway in the countryside. In a parked car, Guido and Paola kiss and embrace passionately, their affair having been consummated in the ellipsis between this scene and the one immediately preceding it. There is no dramatic reversal of fate that forces them into one another's arms. It is depicted as an inevitability, the result of some inexorable emotional gravity which has drawn the star-crossed lovers into each other's orbits once more. In that moment, they have completely lost all interest in the scheme at hand. They cavort brazenly, displaying no fear of being caught, no sense that Enrico might discover them even though we, as viewers, are aware that he must be somewhere nearby. In the distance, an enormously powerful engine can be heard. Tires squeal. An accident is narrowly averted. They are rejoined by Enrico and the business partner. Enrico summarily denounces the car as far too powerful for a woman, and the deal is off. He was nearly killed by a stray dog that wandered into his path as he

travelled down the highway at a fantastic speed. The specter of death raised by this near miss is impossible for him to ignore. The scheme which was initially meant as a means for the destitute Enrico to escape Milan results in complete and utter failure. However, its significance in a film littered with repetitions and reflexivity cannot be ignored. It is merely the dress rehearsal for the film's final act, which will find Enrico dead by the side of the road, victim of an accident eerily similar to the one which nearly befell him while test-driving the Maserati.

The relational dynamics enacted by the car-selling scheme and its narrative results underscore the mechanics of fate and action as key thematic concerns in *Cronaca*. As noted previously, the film is defined by the mirrored love triangles enacted between Paola-Guido-Giovanna and Paola-Guido-Enrico. It is this sense of the past ceaselessly repeating itself which lends the film its sense of eeriness, perhaps even an element of horror, as one considers the ways in which the film suggests that Guido is doomed to repeat the exact series of events which led to Giovanna's death. All of this comes about due to the plan to sell the car to Enrico, an event which could not have taken place if it were not for the investigation instigated at Enrico's behalf, an investigation which would have proved fruitless and futile if Guido and Paola did not have a secret past that they must endeavor to conceal. In this manner, the film sustains a careful balancing act in which causality and happenstance are both maintained as elements which affect the unspooling of the story in its second half. Causality remains in that it is impossible to ignore the manner in which the events that unfold are each the product of some past occurrence enacted by the characters. However, the actions of

characters never achieved their desired result. It is always chance that intervenes and sets the stage for Paola and Guido to be united as a romantic couple. Just as chance seems to have dictated Giovanna's fall down the elevator shaft, it is chance which derails the plan to sell the car. Just as chance dictated that a dog would run across the road and nearly cause Enrico to wreck, souring him on the prospect of buying the car, it is an operation of chance, of happenstance, that saves Guido from enacting his plan to kill Enrico, therein providing him an opportunity to both realize Paola's true nature and escape Milan free of criminal culpability.

From the moment that their romantic relationship is reignited, Guido and Paola seem fated to face, once more, the prospect of a murder that promises to remove the primary obstacle from their pursuit of a life together. The film configures the murder plot that develops as a function of Paola's greed and inability to give up her life of upper-middle class comfort. Guido's offers to flee Milan and begin life anew elsewhere fall on deaf ears. Her socioeconomic position must be maintained, no matter the cost. Neither Paola nor Guido are willing to take the necessary action which might end their suffering. In Paola's case, this would entail divorce and a loss of social standing. For Guido, the only course of action which might spare him further suffering is to abandon Paola entirely and attempt to put the past behind him. He even attempts this once, after a long conversation in which the two discuss Giovanna's death and the fact that their clandestine relationship cannot continue indefinitely without Enrico's knowledge. He resolves to leave Milan, once and for all, and attempts to do so before calling Paola from the train station to scold her for sneaking a wad of cash into his wallet while also

admitting that, despite his best intentions, he can no more tear himself away from her than she can tear herself away from the wealth to which she has grown accustomed. They remain stuck at a terrible impasse, once again victims of their own inaction. They are capable of desire, capable of yearning, but fundamentally unwilling or unable to act on those desires, to realize them in a manner which would allow them to live happily without the burdens of secrets and guilt. Like Gino and Giovanna before them, Guido and Paola turn to murder as the means to achieve their desires. By partaking in the ultimate taboo, the taking of human life, they hope that they might somehow launder their relationship, having been established under dubious circumstances, twice, and therein be recuperated into the dominant social order.

Though the possibility of murder is first uncorked after Guido broaches the subject of Giovanna and their past in Ferrara, suggesting that this unsavory insinuation is what motivates his abortive attempt to flee Milan, Paola's resolve to be rid of Enrico is shown to strengthen significantly after the official cessation of the investigation into her past by the private eye. Having had his trepidations about his wife's past momentarily allayed, Enrico becomes even more possessive and doting than ever before. All of his anxieties about Paola's uncertain character and her sudden appearance in his life following the war have been resolved and Enrico is, therefore, free to once again project his fantasies of domestic bliss and bourgeois propriety onto his wife. The cessation of the investigation that should come as a significant relief to both Paola and Guido instead functions to intensify the former's discontent and force the latter into a position where the insinuation of murder crystallizes into genuine possibility. As Guido and Paola

engage in another secret meeting, in which Paola expresses her increasing distaste for Enrico and the degree to which she now feels suffocated by his affections, they stand next to the cables of an elevator that begin to hum and buzz with energy, acting as a blatant symbol of Giovanna's death in the elevator shaft, a death that once promised to unite the lovers. The obviousness of this symbol is so great as to almost exceed the realistic diegesis of the film, suggesting that metaphysical forces are at play, dooming Guido and Paola to revisit the scene of Giovanna's death, this time with the clear imperative that they must take action if they are to realize their dreams.

An interesting scene occurs as *Cronaca* approaches its climax in which a seemingly inconsequential encounter between Enrico and a woman with whom he shares only a tangential connection introduces the possibility that he might somehow escape Paola's nefarious influence. This scenario plays out as a brief conversation between Guido, having grown increasingly miserable thanks to Paola's emotional instability, and the would-be business partner's mistress, of whom Paola became so jealous at the charity auction. This woman has sought out Enrico to meet with him, having perhaps sensed some latent attraction between them at their first meeting. She reveals that her previous relationship ended as she eventually came to the realization that her partner would never leave his wife and that she would be doomed to a life of secrets and regrets if she did not break things off. In this sense, her position mirrors that of Guido; she fell in love with a married man and was eventually forced to sacrifice this love for the promise of greater happiness. It is clear from her mannerisms that she is

interested in Guido as a romantic partner, although this possibility is not seriously sustained by the film and the woman disappears entirely after this brief interlude.

Despite the briefness of their encounter, one must assume that it makes an impression on Guido and informs either his resolve to attempt to murder Enrico or his decision, at the film's finale, to leave Paola in his past. The story that she tells Guido is noteworthy in that it suggests that, on some level, Guido needs to take action to realize his desires and become truly fulfilled. The woman seems kind and intelligent, capable of clear knowledge of herself and her desires, a reflective perspective that Guido is completely unable to achieve due to his dysfunctional relationship with Paola and the traumas it has entailed. In that sense, this woman is presented as both an alternative to the femme fatale, Paola, and to the self-destructive path that Guido has set himself on. One can almost imagine a version of this film in which the narrative concludes with Guido rolling off into the future with this woman on his arm. Despite the fact that the film denies us this conclusion, it seems likely to imagine that somewhere in the back of Guido's mind, her story repeats itself, providing the kernel of hope needed to give him the strength to ultimately abandon Paola, therein taking charge of his life.

As the film draws to a close, Paola's emotional distress has become untenable. There is no sense that their relationship has continued to be fulfilling, on a physical or emotional level. The affair that once reintroduced passion into Paola's life now merely serves to underscore her feelings of dissatisfaction with Enrico and the sense that she will never be able to escape their marriage without sacrificing the life she has come to know. Whereas the murder and its aftermath serve as the primary catalysts of the

drama that unfolds in *Ossessione*, the attempted murder depicted in *Cronaca* can only come about after desperation and distress have mounted, after Guido's will and desires have been completely subsumed by Paola's emergent hatred of Enrico and her desire to have him neatly excised from her life. Once more, the prospect of running away together is broached. Once more, it is dismissed. Paola suggests that Enrico could be dispatched with a gun. Guido balks at this. Their rut is deepening. The only solution available to them seems unthinkable. Remaining forever in a state of inaction seems unbearable. Guido's refusal to consider murder as an option is not dramatically reversed by any visible cause. It seems to simply erode after a period of attrition. As Paola sits bored and restless at another upper-crust soiree, she receives a call from her lover, newly energized and excited. They are to meet and formulate the plan, to set in motion the final chain of events which will kill Enrico and allow Paola to be freed of his oppressive presence permanently.

Having finally given into Paola's will, Guido, far from seeming resigned and unsure in the film's final scenes, takes on an air of newfound vitality, as if he has been invigorated by the possibility of action itself, even if that action entails an act as despicable as murder. In outlining his plan to kill Enrico, Guido has become self-assured, almost driven. It is as if he has some experience in arranging such things. The plan he has formulated is a simple, guerilla-style ambush, in which he will lay in wait for Enrico's car on a dark evening and, in shooting him while he drives past, cause him to wreck, destroying any evidence of foul play. His description of the operation is almost militaristic in its forthrightness and professionalism. Are these skills Guido might have

learned in the war? If so, it seems likely that he would have fought on the side of the partisans, a member of the Resistance who might have used such tactics to waylay German occupying forces. Though there is nothing to directly suggest a reference to the Resistance in Guido's actions, the echoes of the war in his plan to dispose of Enrico are unmistakable. The specter of the past rears its head. An Italian landscape once marred by the violence and destruction of war will be visited, once again, by bloodshed.

In a strange reversal of roles, as they discuss their plan while overlooking the very highway where it is to take place, it is Paola who has become unsure and nervous. Faced with the prospect of actually realizing her desire to be rid of Enrico, she flinches and seems to lose her mettle. When Guido matter-of-factly states that they were responsible for Giovanna's death and that they will now be responsible for another corpse, Paola begins to panic and blames Guido for Giovanna's death, attempting to assert a narrative which absolves her of any guilt for her actions. In response, Guido slaps her forcefully and declares that they shared the guilt then and will share it once more as he is determined to murder Enrico, no matter what. Their destinies are irreparably intertwined in this moment. They will either live together in full knowledge of the horrible toll their love has enacted on those close to them or find themselves torn apart in the aftermath of the violence they have set into motion, like Gino and Giovanna on that desolate beach.

One crucial event interferes with this carefully constructed plan, unbeknownst to Paola and Guido, setting the stage for the film's dramatic anti-climax and rendering all of their scheming utterly pointless. On the very evening in which Guido is to ambush

Enrico, the latter is visited at his office by the private investigator who has prepared a final report on his findings, a report which threatens to reveal Paola and Guido's past together as well as the nature of their affair. This is the first time that the investigator has intervened directly in the events of the film, announcing the conclusion of his parallel narrative of reconstruction and investigation while also rupturing the separation which has maintained Enrico's ignorance of Paola's past up to this point. The full contents of this document are never revealed to the viewer, rendering them another ambiguity in a film riddled by uncertainty. After poring over the documents, Enrico speeds away into the night, seemingly distressed by what he has read. As Guido hides near the roadside, anticipating Enrico's arrival, he hears a crash in the distance and arrives to find a horrible wreck, witnessed only by a few peasants. It is Enrico's vehicle. He was killed instantly by the impact of the crash.

The nature of Enrico's death introduces yet another ambiguity into the body of the film. It raises an inevitable question of causality: Did Enrico purposely steer his car off the road to commit suicide or did he accidentally lose control due to his evident propensity for reckless driving and his disturbed emotional state after the cessation of the investigation? No matter how this death is interpreted, there is one unavoidable fact which must be confronted: it is the investigation conducted at Enrico's behest that inadvertently leads to his death. His quest for knowledge, for a narrative which will adequately explain his wife's past, results only in the realization of painful, highly distressing facts which have such a profoundly negative effect on his state of mind as to cause him, either purposefully or accidentally, to take his own life. The mirroring of the

circumstances of Giovanna's death are finally completed. Through no direct action of their own, Paola and Guido have caused another death whose circumstances will undoubtedly leave them free from criminal blame but could, nonetheless, be said to enact a horrible toll on their consciences.

The aftermath of Enrico's tragic accident plays out quickly, with a dose of dramatic irony well-suited to the denouement of story which is defined throughout by failures of knowledge, misapprehension, and unknowable variables which always seem to intervene in the fiery relationship which threatens to consume Guido and Paola. Before Guido can return to Paola and explain the circumstances of Enrico's death, the police arrive at her home and, fearing the worst, Paola prepares to flee into the night rather than face indictment for murder. Guido arrives just in time to intercept her at their planned meeting place, and she collapses into hysterics, immediately threatening to blame the entire crime on Guido, to take whatever actions necessary to completely exonerate herself. After this shocking revelation, Guido calmly explains Enrico's death, causing Paola to immediately reverse course and once more express her undying love for Guido. As they return to her home, Paola sobs uncontrollably and clings to Guido for dear life while he stares into the distance, cold and silent. It is clear that, on some level, they both understand that Paola's fit of panic has driven a wedge between them. There is no possible scenario in which Guido will ever be able to forget the quickness with which she was ready to denounce him for the crime he undertook at her behest. The film ends when Guido promises to return for Paola the next day before departing in his taxi, requesting to be driven to the train station. As the car drives into the distance, the

camera does not follow it, remaining stationed in the street in front of Paola's home. Slowly, it disappears into the inky night as the image loses focus and the screen fades to black. Guido disappears into a nebulous future, having finally severed his ties with Paola in a decisive act which, though undoubtedly painful, will render her enervative influence over him null and void.

The conclusion of *Cronaca* represents a profound development on the themes and plot devices explored in *Ossessione*, a story which derives its finality from the incongruence between Gino's ultimate decision to pursue a life with Giovanna and her death at the hands of the police hell-bent on exacting justice on the pair of murderers. It is only in its ending, which hinges on Guido's escape from the woman he was previously willing to commit murder for, that the film's purpose becomes clear. Though both films hinge on questions of identity and action in a world that seems to nullify any attempt at stability, *Cronaca* is primarily an examination of the relationship between past and present, between history and guilt, which transfers the national traumas enacted by fascism and the Second World War onto a melodramatic treatment of love and obsession. In rejecting Paola, Guido manages to break the cycle of lust and violence that has ensnared him. The film makes clear its reflexive structure, the many ways in which *Cronaca* stages a return to the secrets and crimes of the past which haunt Gino and Paola in order to enable the protagonist to ultimately redeem himself and refuse to maintain a relationship with Paola, despite the fact that their path is now cleared by the convenient death of Enrico. It is only through confronting his past with Giovanna and his

own culpability in her death through the restaging of those events in his dealing with Paola and Enrico that Guido can put the past behind him.

In this manner, Guido is representative of the consciousness of the Italian subject following the fall of fascism. He is conflicted about his past, unsure of how to atone for his sin of inaction at the scene of Giovanna's death. The shared past of Paola and Guido is analogous to Italy's fascist period, a historical moment that, though resisted by a section of the populace, also found its share of enthusiastic collaborators and passive subjects willing to turn a blind eye to its worst excesses. Though Guido and Paola both bear guilt for Giovanna's death, it is only Guido who seems capable of admitting his culpability in any sense. Whereas Guido arrives in the film as a man cut adrift, devoid of any meaningful identification in a world he no longer understands, Paola has managed to recreate herself in the image of the modern, urbane Italy which has emerged since the end of the war. She manages a personal reconstruction which seems complete and impermeable, offering no trace of her connection to a historical narrative which exists prior to her arrival in Milan. Paola and Enrico, in their economic and social positions, represent the bright and shining facade of the reconstructed Italy, a modern and industrialized state which promises unmitigated opportunities for wealth and power-brokering for those willing to embrace the opportunities for development provided by the country's destruction. Paola, of course, must live forever in the fear that her past will be discovered, and Enrico, in encountering the truth of Paola's past, is obliterated by the knowledge, unable to reconcile it with his previously held image of her as a perfect bourgeois subject, untainted by the past and its moral quandaries.

Through transposing *Ossessione's* examination of identity and guilt into the postwar period, Antonioni reveals the degree to which the "New Italy" proposed by the neorealist films which emerged in the war's aftermath is posited upon an erasure of fascism's legacy and a fundamental unwillingness to confront the past. In this sense, *Cronaca* expresses the notion that the Italian republic established after the war, which draws legitimacy from its appeal to the memory of the Resistance as historical mythos, is premised upon a historical amnesia, the very same amnesia which enables Paola to abandon her life in Ferrara and reinvent herself as a stylish, cultured denizen of the upper echelons of society during the chaotic years immediately following the war. In confronting this amnesia, Antonioni reveals the degree to which the traumas of fascism, figured here as personal traumas, are doomed to be repeated unless they are meaningfully confronted by a consciousness, embodied by Gino's state of mind at the end of the film, that challenges the dominant historical narrative of Italy's reconstruction that must inherently posit a clean break between the recent past and the present in order to neutralize feelings of guilt or shame over the legacy of Mussolini and his fascist party. In returning to the characters and scenarios of *Ossessione*, *Cronaca* builds upon that film's melodramatic exploration of identity and conformity under fascist rule to suggest that the same forces which cause Gino's alienation have only been intensified by Italy's dramatic reconstruction. The same process of sociopolitical realignment meant to purge the remnants of fascism from society might also draw its impetus from a latent desire to escape a full accounting for the death and suffering caused by Mussolini's regime, just as Paola's reinvention of herself in Milan allows her

to escape any accountability for Giovanna's death until Enrico's investigation attaches her to a historical narrative which accounts for her actions before the war's end.

CHAPTER II: *SENSO* AND *LE NOTTI BIANCHE*: VISCONTI'S RECONSTRUCTION

MELODRAMAS AS HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY COMMENTARY

Luchino Visconti is widely considered to be one of the most accomplished and meticulous stylists of the Italian cinema. His filmography, stretching from *Ossessione* (1943) to *L'innocente* (1976), encompasses films which both presage and embody neorealism as well as providing examples of a singular, post-neorealist style that draw from *fin-de-siecle* literary sources and are often noted for their lavish depictions of late-nineteenth Century decadence. Visconti can be configured as one of the chief contributors to the canon of neorealism as well as one of the most striking examples of the abandonment of neorealism as an aesthetic principle. This has rendered him something of an anomaly in the critical discourse of the Italian cinema as many writers and theorists have struggled to produce a coherent reading of Viscontian style which accounts for films as aesthetically and ideologically disparate as *La Terra Trema* (1948) and *Senso* (1954), separated, as they are, by the passing of only a few years in terms of their conception, filming, and distribution. In order to mitigate the difficulties proposed by his body of work, Visconti's trajectory as a director has typically been defined by a transition from his early, neorealist films, situated as they are in the contemporary socio-economic realities of Italy in the 1940's, to his historical melodramas, which are said to represent an abandonment of the political principles espoused in his earliest films in favor of purely aesthetic formalism. This trajectory has been configured as either a descent into decadent apoliticism or an ascent into the heights of pure cinematic

artistry, depending on the rhetorical position afforded to the periods created by this dichotomous view of Visconti's output.

Taking into account the dominant reading of Visconti's career proffered by scholars of Italian cinema, any consideration of the director's films from the period of Italian reconstruction must be considered in light of his perceived transition from neorealism to melodrama, from a concern with contemporary realism to historical romanticism. A reconsideration of two Visconti melodramas from the 1950's, *Senso* (1954) and *Le Notti Bianche* (1957) will demonstrate that Visconti's contributions to the cinema of reconstruction entail a repurposing of the aesthetic and narrative principles of melodrama with the end result of developing new modes of cinematic exploration that, while demonstrating a clear rejection of strictly neorealist filmmaking, nevertheless reflect a concern for both historical and contemporary social realities. Though *Senso* and *Le Notti Bianche* embody different aspects of Visconti's visual style and take as their subject different periods in Italian history, each film can be said to demonstrate Visconti's development of a cinematic mode that would allow him to move beyond the aesthetic limitations of neorealism while also maintaining a focus on the socio-historical forces at play in Italy.

Speaking generally, both *Senso* and *Le Notti Bianche* can be broadly located within the genre of melodrama in the sense that they create drama from heightened emotional states and utilize a visual style that renders the spaces and landscapes captured by the camera in a blatantly subjective fashion. In other words, the emotional states experienced by the characters that populate these melodramas have a direct

effect on the viewer's perception of the diegetic of the film. Likewise, in keeping with Visconti's typical practice, both films are drawn from literary antecedents, *Senso* (1882) by Camillo Boito and *White Nights* (1848) by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, although both films take considerable liberties with their respective sources. Despite these generic similarities, the films themselves are incredibly disparate in subject matter, tone, and visual texture. Whereas *Senso*, by far the better known film of the two, is a lush, Technicolor period piece that resembles Hollywood's historical epics in terms of its cinematic style and scale, *Le Notti Bianche*, largely ignored by the critical discourse, is an intimate film, shot in black and white, that focuses on a brief relationship between a man and a woman in contemporary Italy, lacking the obvious historical and political valences of its predecessor.

If *Senso*, as many critics have noted, is analogous to the opera in terms of its grandeur and indulgence of spectacle, *Le Notti Bianche* is a modern drama for the stage, making use of few settings and employing a small cast of characters to flesh out its relatively realistic world. Therein lies the crucial distinction between these films: whereas *Senso* returns to the scene of the historical struggle which gave rise to the modern state of Italy, *Le Notti Bianche* is an intensely personal exploration of loneliness in a mid-century, urban environment. In other words, *Senso* demonstrates the influence of the moment of Italy's reconstruction through its return to a pre-fascist Italy, to a country on the cusp of modernity where nationalistic fervor has brought about the historic development of a new political consciousness among the Italian populace. Conversely, *Le Notti Bianche* embodies the cinema of reconstruction in an entirely

different manner in that it pioneers a new mode of exploring the alienation endemic to postwar, urban existence, while also engaging in meta-cinematic commentary on the status of narrative itself, raising questions of perspective and agency typically elided by the classical cinema. Both films demonstrate the complex interplay of established generic tropes and emergent cinematic modes that, while still bearing traces of neorealism's legacy, evince Visconti's crucial role in furthering the development of an Italian cinema that reflects the rapidly shifting landscape of Italy in the 1950's, as the process of reconstruction continued.

Senso is a film that perfectly embodies the contradictions inherent in Visconti's identity as a filmmaker and social critic; it is simultaneously enamored with opulence and deeply suspicious of the social hierarchy that underwrites the existence of the aristocracy. Visconti, sometimes known as "The Red Count" due to the incongruity between his professed communist beliefs and his highborn social status, navigated his fascination and revulsion with decadence throughout his career, creating many films that seem to mourn for the loss of Italy's pre-modern social order. Critics have long been divided on whether to chalk this up to Visconti's unwillingness to give up the cultural affects of aristocracy or to a critical examination of the historical forces which rendered Italy's nobility untenable in the face of necessary and inevitable historical change, as suggested by the typical Marxist historiography that posits a guiding telicity to each stage of socio-political development.

In his article, "Luchino Visconti: Critic or Poet of Decadence" (1988), Guido Aristarco makes the case for a reading of Visconti's career that reconciles his realist and

decadent impulses by calling upon György Lukács's theory of literary realism, a critical intervention which allows Aristarco to conclude that *Senso* "was not 'decadentist' but about decadence. The film's refined elegance, much vilified for appearing to idealize and mourn an oppressive class, underscored the decadence of that world" (61). Tempering this with the admission that Visconti "bore traces of decadentism" and that his work demonstrates a *fin de siècle* consciousness that informs the director's "personal obsession with death," Aristarco's overview lends itself to an understanding of Visconti as a director whose fascination with documenting decadence and decline is informed by the sense that his own historical moment is located at the conclusion of an epoch (61). Aristarco's defense of Visconti's aesthetic predilections underscores a crucial insight which demonstrates *Senso's* position within the cinema of reconstruction: that Visconti's entreaties into the past, instead of devolving into fantasies of a period before political strife and privation, maintain a clear sense of history as a complex interaction of social and political forces. This necessitates that any treatment of *Senso* that attempts to locate the film's position in the development of postwar Italian cinema must consider the historical significance of the events that provide the backdrop for the sordid affair between Franz Mahler and Livia Serpieri. In considering the manner in which *Senso* dramatizes Italy's unification in the nineteenth century, it will become apparent that it is a film which probes the relationship between Italian nationalism and German occupation as a means of expressing the crisis of identification brought about by the legacy of fascism and exacerbated by the socio-political turmoil of Reconstruction.

In order to explicate the relationship between the historical consciousness expressed in *Senso* and the period of reconstruction during which it was produced, it is necessary to consider the Risorgimento as the historical development that gave birth to the modern nation-state of Italy and the ways in which the forces unleashed by the movement for an Italian nation-state can be viewed as precursors to the events that gave rise to fascism in Italy. The cause of Italian unification serves to ground *Senso* in a discrete historical moment and provides the film with a central ideological concept that can then be brought into conflict with the adulterous affair at the center of the film's depiction. It also provides the necessary backdrop for an analogical interrogation of Italian national identity in the post-fascist era. This period of reconstruction rendered suspect the various nationalisms that had animated European political life for the greater part of a century and were intimately connected to the root causes of the World Wars that had devastated continental Europe and left Italian identity in a state of flux following the elimination of Italy's fascist government.

The Risorgimento coincided with the wave of nationalist sentiments that swept across Europe in the nineteenth century. Though the process of Italian unification stretched across multiple decades, *Senso* depicts the final years of this struggle, known as the Third War of Independence, during which a nearly completed Italian state successfully expelled the Austrian Empire from Venice, essentially establishing Italy's modern boundaries in the process. In enacting the ideals of Italian nationalism, the Risorgimento was informed by the sense that Italians were a distinct ethnic group with a unique history, language, and culture whose roots could be traced back to ancient

Rome. In that sense, Italian nationalism can be seen as calling upon the same narratives of ethno-national homogeneity and the identification of modern Italy with the Roman Empire that informed the fascist movement's own obsession with the reinstatement of ancient hierarchies and the safeguarding of a racially and culturally homogeneous Italian identity. There is also an obvious connection between the Third War of Independence and Italy's experiences in the Second World War in that both conflicts were defined by the occupation of Italy by a German-speaking military force whose presence motivates the banding together of disparate elements of Italian society in order to eject the foreign interlopers.

In terms of national identification, one can see the ways in which the shape of the Risorgimento's historical narrative as depicted in *Senso* mirrors that of the anti-fascist Italian Resistance by way of *Rome, Open City* (1945), a classic of neorealism which depicts the formation of post-fascist Italy in the crucible of historical struggle between German Nazis and Italian patriots of diverse ideological leanings. These similarities between *Senso's* depiction of the Third War of Independence and the Resistance movement celebrated by the foundational texts of neorealism demonstrate the ways in which Visconti's film can be said to represent a return to the questions of Italian national identity and the forces which brought the nation-state into existence. By using a historical referent (Risorgimento) and aesthetic (operatic melodrama) that had not been monopolized by neorealism, Visconti is able to create space to engage with the problematics explored by earlier neorealist films from a new angle.

Considering its relationship to melodrama as a filmic genre, *Senso* is most typically melodramatic in that its narrative is defined by a doomed love affair, a feature which it shares with *Le Notti Bianche*. However, instead of presenting a traditional story of lovers kept apart by fate and circumstance, the affair at the center of *Senso* functions primarily as a means of inscribing the historical-political conflict unfolding in the background at the level of character. Therein, Visconti is able to maintain a focus on the denizens of the aristocratic class, whose developing sense of national identity drove the conflict. By choosing the mode of romantic melodrama as the means of delivering this plot, Visconti subverts the triumphalism one might expect from a tale of national unification in favor of a pronounced decadence created by the doomed affair between an Austrian, Franz Mahler, and an Italian, Livia Serpieri who find themselves at a nexus of opposing personal and political affiliations.

As a Venetian countess, caught between vague but acutely felt nationalist sympathies and her obsessive devotion to the handsome and dashing Mahler, Livia becomes a locus for the film's discourse on the historical emergence of the Italian state and the national identity. Through her husband's alliance with the Austrian occupiers, Livia's social position in Venice is secure. However, she experiences a crisis of conscience as the film unfolds due to the fact that her beloved cousin, Roberto Ussoni, is one of the chief militants seeking to expel the Austrians from Italy. Though there is no hint of romantic attraction between Livia and her cousin, her parallel relationships with Roberto and Franz Mahler can be said to form a sort of love triangle, in the sense that Livia's affections toward them cannot be sustained simultaneously, leading to a climax

wherein she must ally herself with one at the expense of the other. In this manner, the gap between the personal and the political is bridged; the outcome of Livia's love affair becomes a direct expression of her shifting loyalties in the Third War of Independence, a narrative strategy which allows *Senso* to make use of a sensuous and intoxicating visual style without sacrificing the historical subtext that allows Visconti to explore the forces that brought Italy into being.

In setting up Franz Mahler and Roberto Ussoni as the chief competitors for Livia's loyalty, *Senso* cannot help but betray a sense of the historical inevitability of Italy's coalescence into a modern nation-state. After all, any viewer of the film must understand that Austria's defeat at the hands of the Italian partisans is a certainty, given the historical perspective afforded to denizens of the twentieth century. The film underscores the impossibility of an Austrian victory at every turn, taking particular pains to draw a distinct contrast between the two figures who act as symbols for the powers fighting over the future of the Italian peninsula. Whereas Roberto's devotion to the cause of Italian unification is unswerving and self-effacing, Franz is shown to be incapable of true loyalty, personal or political, embodying what Aristarco calls a "moral exhaustion," a complete inability to connect meaningfully to the imperial project of Austria which expresses itself through his repeated attempts to avoid the fighting at any cost (60). In this respect, the film does not attempt to establish these characters as equals. Though Roberto is largely relegated to the background of the film, appearing every so often to complicate Livia's burgeoning attachment to Franz, his loyalties are never problematized. He pursues his goal ceaselessly, never fearing for his life or

wavering in his devotion to the ideal of a unified Italy. In direct opposition to Roberto's constancy, Franz reveals himself to be a phony and a coward, a refutation of every chivalric myth which configures the soldier as a paragon of virtue and steadfastness. Whereas Roberto is constantly revitalized by the urgency and necessity of his cause, Franz can only descend into drunkenness and cruelty, lacking any ideology or cause to give his existence meaning, suggesting the clear distinction between the historical forces driving the Risorgimento and Austria's doomed attempts to maintain its continental territories.

The inevitability of Italy's victory and Austria's expulsions bears an almost paradoxical relationship to *Senso* itself as it is a film whose primary affective register is that of tragedy and defeat. As the majority of the film is focalized through the experiences of Livia, its mode of depiction becomes infused with her subjectivity. Her absurd devotion to Franz persists despite every indication that their affair is doomed and will never live up to the fantasy of romantic bliss. Nonetheless, Livia pursues it doggedly, her inability to comprehend Franz's true nature underscoring the fatalism that infuses the film throughout. In other words, the fortunes of Livia and Franz are in direct inverse to the fortunes of the Italian unification movement. As the partisan victory becomes more obvious, so does Livia's betrayal at the hands of Franz. Instead of presenting the Risorgimento as a patriotic triumph, a cinematic symbol of Italy's enduring glory, *Senso* instead utilizes the tragic inevitability of disappointment and defeat endemic to the melodrama as a means of retracing the moment in which one historical epoch disappears and another is born.

Visconti's paradigm shows the influence of Marxist historiography, configuring the fall of the ancient regime and its monarchical political entities as a consequence of the emergence of nation states more accommodating to the interests of bourgeois subjects who lack aristocratic lineage. Though Livia lives on the cusp which separates the old, dying world from the new world that waits to be born, she lacks the necessary consciousness which would allow her to become a subject of the new, Italian state. Her interests, romantic and political, are perfectly well-served by the status quo presented at the start of the film. Whatever affinity she feels toward the unification movement is no match for the intense romantic passions stirred by her affair with Franz Mahler, another symbol of the dying aristocratic order. She has effectively been rendered obsolete in her lifetime, unable to navigate the contradictions presented by her class status and nationality at a historical moment when national consciousness emerges as an ascendant force which will remake Europe in its image. In infusing the tragic overtones of melodrama with a historical consciousness born of a Marxist reading of class struggle, Visconti subverts the romanticization inherent in the cinematic period piece so as to highlight the historical forces which brought about the end of the aristocratic culture of the nineteenth century and set the stage for political crises which would define the first decades of the twentieth century.

Senso manages to subvert traditional cinematic realism while also maintaining a historical consciousness that locates the film within the discourse of reconstruction by way of the aesthetic principles enacted by Visconti. In his text *The Poetics and Politics of Cinematic Realism* (2015), Herman Kappelhoff devotes an entire subsection in his

chapter on the development of postwar cinematic realism to a discussion of Visconti's historical films and the issues they propose for any scholarly account of realism in the Italian cinema. Kappelhoff's account of Viscontian aesthetics is premised upon a critique of the dominant critical narrative appended to the director's output. This critical position is similar to Aristarco's defense of Visconti's filmography, which holds that the "pessimistic worldview, aesthetic mannerism, and mythological glorification" that detractors have cited as proof of the filmmaker's descent from the zenith of his powers during the neorealist period are, in actuality, evidence of Visconti's attempt to explore "the possibility that cinema could produce an image of memory that would be collectively valid" (Kappelhoff 73-74). In other words, Kappelhoff holds that the dominant readings of Visconti's historical films, which are based on appeals to existing models of the relationship between film and history, fail to account for what he calls "a specific modality of aesthetic experience" proposed by a film like *Senso* that would allow for new entreaties into the relationship between filmic narrative and the material of history (73). This critical entreaty for a consideration of Visconti's historical films as something more than the afterbirth of his neorealist masterworks forms the foundation of Kappelhoff's reading of the aesthetic strategies embodied in *Senso* and, therein, makes him a useful resource in the project of describing Visconti's relationship to the cinema of reconstruction, a project which can only be completed if the simplistic dichotomy of neorealism and post-neorealism is interrupted by the introduction of new terms which account for the specific developments made within the Italian cinema during Italy's reconstruction.

The experience of viewing *Senso* is determined by the sense that one is in the presence of a truly virtuosic piece of film art. This virtuosity, which Kappelhoff notes is commonly held against Visconti as evidence of his abandonment of the political program of neorealism, is evident in the film's presentation of an overwhelming and meticulous mise en scene, elaborate art direction, and a melodramatic style of acting, which serve to produce a stylized and decadently sensuous portrait of Venice in the 1860s (74). Nowhere is this more evident than in the film's opening, a scene that deliberately juxtaposes the historical conflict between the forces of Italian nationalism and Austrian imperialism with an operatic display of martial bravery and melodramatic bombast. The first action depicted in the film's opening takes place on a clearly demarcated stage in full view of spectators in the form of a prominent scene from Verdi's *Il Trovatore* (1853). As Kappelhoff notes, the credits roll over the singers, giving a sense that the performers named in the superimposed text are participants in the opera, instead of those relegated to the role of spectator during this performance (81). The interplay between historical and aesthetic modes of experiences is underlined in this opening sequence, establishing the opera as a privileged exemplar of both the particular mood of the historical moment depicted as well as an affective template for the film itself.

Visconti uses the film's start to make clear the exact dramatic principles which will be enacted in *Senso*. The dramatic scene that unfolds at the opera remains one of the film's most celebrated moments because of both its painstakingly beautiful composition and the manner in which it succinctly establishes all of the major parties to

the conflict which will unfold thereafter. When Roberto Ussoni and his compatriots prepare to make a dramatic act of defiance in full view of the Austrian officers who have gathered to watch the opera, the site of visual interest is reversed, as the action on stage is rendered secondary to the political intrigue playing out amongst the spectators. The symbolic act of rebellion planned and facilitated by Roberto establishes the sense of the diegetic Italy depicted in *Senso* as one infused with the spirit of opera, the world rendered Verdian. As a traditional act of spectatorship is disrupted by showers of red, white, and green confetti, so is the narrative construct that separates the performance of *Il Trovatore*, acknowledged as performance within the text of the film, from the encompassing diegesis with its pretense of a real depiction of historical action.

In his account of the film's opening, Kappelhoff highlights the specific similarities between the text of the opera being performed and the overarching structure of the film itself, highlighting the fact that the scenes from *Il Trovatore* depicted within *Senso* correspond directly to the nationalist sentiments embodied by Roberto and the Italian nationalist forces:

While colored handbills fall from the upper balconies, the feeling of unrest and threats literally jumps over to the other side. The affect changes form, the singing changes into political action. What had previously given the impression of a society, collecting and assembling, presented on the flat image of the screen, now emphatically becomes the space of action executed in the space of the audience

(83)

Kappelhoff connects this transference of affect between stage and spectators to what he posits as “the fundamental axiom of Visconti’s poetics of the historical film”: the staging of material things and places imbued with aesthetic qualities so as to inscribe the transformation of historical and social reality (86). Therein lies the key to describing the relationship between Visconti’s neorealist films and *Senso*; the director utilizes the Verdian register of operatic melodrama as a basis for the aesthetics of his film because the romantic nationalism embodied in the tradition of Italian opera provides the aesthetic means for rendering the abstract historical forces driving the Risorgimento perceptible in a cinematic medium.

In Visconti’s historical-cinematic paradigm, the forces that drive history’s march are rooted into the emotional and psychological states of historical subjects. The feelings of expectation and of explosive rebellion, made so tangible in the depiction of the opera house, drive the action of both the characters on the stage and Roberto’s compatriots. This suggests a relationship in which *Il Trovatore* is both a motivating factor for and reflection of the revolutionary furor which exists as an ambient affect in 1860s Italy, reinforcing both the historical specificity of the art object while also making space in the project of cinematic realism for a consideration of the aesthetic and affective forces that bear down on the subject as surely as the material effects of economy and politics. Through pioneering new methods for representing a collective experience of history, methods which do away with the faux-documentarian incidentality of neorealism, Visconti enacts one of the key movements that would allow the cinema of reconstruction to develop beyond the formulae that initially brought international

attention to the Italian cinema after the fall of fascism. By crafting such a unique cinematic style, Visconti can produce films which exploit the full capabilities of the cinematic medium of the 1950s without sacrificing a sense of realism that allowed for film storytelling that still corresponded with the historical movements and conflicts that gave rise to the modern nation of Italy.

As Livia's doomed romance with Franz Mahler plays out, the tenor of her longing for the irresolute officer grows more and more intense, eventually causing Livia to separate entirely from any alliance to Roberto and his cause in order to allow her to hold onto her doomed attachment to Mahler for a little while longer. In symbolic terms, it is obvious that Livia comes to represent the historical consciousness of an aristocratic class within Italian society whose specific material and political interests make them more amenable to the imperial hierarchy imposed by the occupying Austrian forces than to the upsetting of the status quo in favor of some new social reality that would be brought about by the victory of the nationalist forces. The political valences of Livia's romantic attachment to Mahler are never made explicit in the film, beyond the fact that she would rather give money held in security for Roberto to Mahler than honor a promise to her cousin. However, there is an unmistakable sense that the handsome Austrian, whose debonair confidence and patina of refinement signify his belonging to the upper-crust, presents a more recognizable and sympathetic figure to the countess than the downtrodden petit bourgeois who are depicted as forming the popular base supporting Roberto's cause.

Though Livia shows some attachment to the aesthetics of Italian nationalism at the start of the film, supporting Roberto in his protest at the opera, it would seem that Mahler offers greater attraction through the youthful and libertine sexuality he embodies at the early stages of their affair. The allure of a liberatory yet nonthreatening means of escaping her loveless marriage to Count Serpieri presents an appealing prospect to Livia, satisfying her desire for an aesthetic rebellion against the status quo, a desire previously satisfied by her attachment to Roberto and the cause of Italian nationalism. Once the romance is initiated, Livia's attachment to Mahler becomes inexorable. No matter how many times Mahler disappears or disappoints, Livia's devotion to him is always rekindled instantly. Mahler is shown to be a master manipulator, deploying his rakish smile and penetrating stare in order to break down Livia's defenses, eventually causing her to enter a seemingly psychotic state in which she completely eschews her own dignity and physical well-being in a last ditch effort to be reunited with her lover. For Livia, Mahler comes to represent a return to normalcy and safety amidst the immense upheaval caused by the war. Forced to abandon her life of comfort and opulence in Venice, Livia finds herself in increasingly uncomfortable locales. Her decline into mental instability can be read as an expression of her increasing horror at the historical change embodied by the war. Livia's world and way of life are slipping away into the past while she still lives, so she clings to Mahler as a symbol of normalcy amidst the chaos, setting the stage for the betrayal that ultimately destroys the doomed lovers.

As the plot of *Senso* draws to a close, there are several key developments that both heighten the plot's dramatic tension in preparation for its crescendo while also providing commentary on the events of the Risorgimento itself. Following Livia and Mahler's reunion in the countryside, Roberto and the forces of the Italian national army have just suffered a serious defeat, caused in part by Livia's decision to betray Roberto and give his emergency funds to Mahler so that he might purchase a phony medical discharge from his military post. Though the overall military campaign to unite Italy would ultimately prove successful, Visconti chooses to underscore this moment of defeat so as to emphasize the severity of Livia's betrayal, driving home the fact that her duplicity was more than symbolic and led to the deaths of many Italian soldiers. Amidst the turmoil caused by the increasingly bloody conflict, Livia receives a letter from Mahler that relays his gratitude and indirectly alludes to the fact that he has escaped his position through nefarious means. Her hopes rekindled once more by this missive, Livia hurries to Verona, hoping to find Mahler at the apartment he has rented with the money she provided. Urging her driver onward through the torrent of men returning from the front, Livia arrives in the city to find that a mood of apocalyptic abandon has settled over the scene. In this atmosphere of unchecked vice and despair, Livia and Mahler are reunited for the last time. This fortuitous meeting sets the scene for a final shattering of Livia's misguided hopes for a return to comfort and normalcy and provides the motivation for the bittersweet vengeance she will enact on her lover, his true nature having been revealed.

When Livia finds Mahler in his richly upholstered apartment, he cuts a rather ignoble figure, having given himself over to drunkenness in order to quiet his pained conscience. He wastes no time in denigrating his lover and benefactor, placing the blame squarely on her shoulders for his desertion as he would not have been able to purchase a medical exemption without her intervention. Similarly, he flaunts his new companion, a prostitute whose wages are paid with the same funds provided by the countess, adding another layer of venomous insult to his callous indifference. Livia is now confronted with Mahler's true nature and is horrified to find that the man she considered the love of her life views her as nothing more than a means to an end, a way of staving off his duties in Austria's doomed attempt to maintain control of the Italian peninsula.

Mahler's rantings in this section prove quite revealing. His words correspond perfectly to the historical sentiment expressed by the film overall, noting that he and Livia find themselves at the end of a historical epoch and that the new world prophesied by Roberto holds no allure to him as it would entail a complete reconfiguration of the social relations which have defined his existence up to this point. Mahler reveals that a profound sense of *fin de siècle* anxiety has brought about his descent into nihilistic hedonism. In his final rebuke to Livia, he screams, "I am not your romantic hero," shattering irreparably the illusions which have sustained Livia and causing her to experience a psychotic break in the process. She can only scream and cry hysterically as Franz chases her from the apartment, his mocking insults ringing in the air as she enters the inky night once more.

Running madly through the streets of Verona, Livia finds that the town has been transformed by the sense of doom and despair wrought by the war. Amorous and drunken soldiers cavort openly with prostitutes and make lewd remarks to the countess as she makes her way through the darkened and nightmarish city. Arriving at the Austrian military headquarters, Livia wastes no time in enacting her revenge, requesting an audience with the general and immediately presenting him with Mahler's letter, the text of which makes obvious his desertion. Though the general rebukes her vengeful motives, he wastes no time in preparing for Mahler's execution. Despite Mahler's extraordinary efforts to avoid a violent death, he cannot escape his fate and is subjected to a quick and impromptu firing squad, devoid of any sense of dignity or honor.

In the end, Livia is driven mad by the realization that the world as she knows it has come to an end. The next historical epoch, waiting to be born from the ashes of her aristocratic age, signals her obsolescence and incompatibility with the socio-political order that will replace her world of noble privilege. Utterly dislocated and separated from everything and everyone she has ever known, Livia can only wander Verona in a haze, calling out for the lover she had put to death. She is a woman without a country, without a title, and without a home. The Italy she knew is on its deathbed and the new Italy has yet to emerge, trapping her in an untenable state in which she can neither return to her comfortable past nor move forward into the future.

As *Senso* reaches its conclusion, every aspect of the film is utilized to create an air of oppressive dread and defeat. The very air itself seems infused with the mood of the historical moment. Italy's hopes for a quick and glorious unification have been

momentarily delayed, and the stage has been set for Austria's ultimate defeat. Livia and Mahler, the ultimate symbols of the nineteenth century aristocracy which has been rendered anachronistic by the emergence of Italian nationalism, cannot help but find themselves obliterated in the crucible of historical progression. Mahler has betrayed the martial code which he had sworn to uphold, and Livia has been confronted with the falsity of her supposedly chivalrous lover, all hope that they might live out some fairy-tale ending dispelled.

In this manner, Visconti demonstrates the consciousness of the historical subject facing his/her own obsolescence. The narratives and myths which have made possible the existence of figures such as these star-crossed lovers have been foreclosed upon, opening up an enormous chasm into which Livia and Mahler are cast. The maw of history beckons and they cannot resist the twin drives of madness and death, each promising erasure and closure as the future in all its horrifying uncertainty intrudes into the present. Visconti's epic tale of romance and betrayal ends with the unmistakable sense that the historical cinema of Italy is a cinema which must reconstruct the past so as to create a collective memory of what has been lost or occluded in the rush toward modernity. Though the fates of Livia and Mahler are inevitable and, in a sense, historically necessary, they are nonetheless tragic in that they entail the loss of an entire world, a way of being which can only be reclaimed indirectly, through melodrama and operatics.

Like *Senso*, *Le Notti Bianche* is infused with the spirit of theatricality, creating its drama from the interplay of emotional states demonstrated by a pair of unrequited

lovers. However, there is a key difference in the particular modes of theatricality evinced by these two films. Whereas *Senso* is clearly inspired by the opera, *Le Notti Bianche* draws from the traditions of modern drama in its portrayal of a love story unfolding in contemporary Italy. In the article "Theatrical Space in Luchino Visconti's *Le Notti Bianche*" (2011) Brendan Hennessey connects the film to the German tradition of the *kammerspiel*, or chamber drama, a theatrical genre which is often set in enclosed spaces as a means of highlighting themes of claustrophobia, panic, and mental decline (165). In a sense, the city of Livorno becomes the chamber to which the principal characters are confined. They are brought together by the happenstances of city life, and their romance plays out against the backdrop of a bustling urban milieu, recreated in a deliberately oneiric style on what is obviously a studio set. In this manner, *Le Notti Bianche*'s set design coincides with Fellini's legendary recreations of Roman locales in films like *Le Notti di Cabiria* (1957) and *La Dolce Vita* (1960), creating a hybrid cinematic-theatrical space that allows for the interplay of social realism and the depiction of internal, emotive states. This melodramatic insistence on the ability of subjective states to affect the perception and depiction of reality demonstrates *Le Notti Bianche*'s rejection of the neorealist mode while also demonstrating the cinema's ability to interrogate its own narrative prerogatives as well as the experiences of Italians at the dawn of the Economic Miracle.

In form and content, *Le Notti Bianche* comprises a playful, metacinematic deconstruction of the typical romantic melodrama. At its heart, it is a simple story of romance between Mario, a lonely Italian worker brought to Livorno by the demands of

his career, and Natalia, a sheltered, Slavic immigrant who comes to love Mario despite her unrequited affections for another man whose character and motivations remain shrouded in mystery. The primary narrative thread of the film concerns Mario's infatuation with Natalia and his efforts to persuade her to abandon the hope that the original object of her affections, an unnamed boarder, will return and consummate their relationship. This level of narration is focalized through the character of Mario, portrayed by Marcello Mastroianni, and is therefore subject to his desire to dislodge Natalia from what he sees as misguided devotion to the mysterious boarder. The second narrative thread maintained by the film is established via flashback sequences which correspond to Natalia's own narrative of her life and travails before encountering Mario. As Hennessey notes, Natalia's remembrances have the distinctive air of a fairy-tale, populated as they are by a watchful grandmother, a beautiful but repressed heroine, and a knight in shining armor who materializes and promises to deliver the heroine from the drudgery of her daily existence (163). Though the events occurring in the narrative present have a distinctly oneiric quality, underscored by the minimalistic sets and Nino Rota's musical accompaniment, the dreamlike nature of Natalia's memories is even more pronounced. These competing narrative threads create the potential for the film's metacinematic engagement with the tropes and stock characters of the romantic melodrama, allowing Visconti to reconstruct Dostoyevsky's story within a postwar Italian environment.

The conflict of the film emerges when Mario's desire to build a serious, romantic relationship with Natalia comes into conflict with her commitment to the boarder, who

has promised to reunite with Natalia as soon as he is able. Though Mario is not the world-weary and cynical type with which Mastroianni is often associated, he is certainly more worldly and experienced than the sheltered naïf Natalia. As the majority of the film's narration is focalized through Mario, it is his perception of Natalia that comes to dominate the story. He sees himself as a realistic alternative to the false hope embodied by the boarder's promise to return and, therein, takes action to assure that Natalia will eventually abandon her supposedly childlike belief in the boarder's devotion to her. He even goes so far as to deceive Natalia into believing that her absent love has ignored a letter Mario has promised to mail on her behalf. The moral ambiguity created by Mario's dishonesty, employed in service of his infatuation with Natalia, challenges the empathetic response that the audience might normally feel toward the protagonist in a romantic drama. By presenting the plot of *Le Notti Bianche* through the perspective of a sympathetic but compromised hero, Visconti encourages a mode of viewing that is both interrogative as well as voyeuristic. In this manner, the director sets the stage for the reversal of perspective and expectation that defines the film's conclusion by introducing elements of uncertainty and instability into what would otherwise be a relatively predictable romance.

The conflict between Mario's worldly realism and Natalia's unshakable belief in her idealized romance sustains a tension throughout the film between competing worldviews that inform the characters' respective actions. The theatricality endemic to the film comes to represent more than a simple stylistic choice; as Hennessey writes, it comes to "underscore the artifice of the cinematic object and to emphasize illusion

rather than reality" (161). The film invites the viewer to sympathize with Mario's perception of what is real, thereby underwriting his paternalistic attitude towards Natalia. However, the film's play with the boundaries between the realistic and the theatrical is drawn sharply into focus when the conclusion reveals that Mario is actually the victim of a crucial misapprehension, therein reversing the expected trajectory of the plot and endorsing Natalia's belief in the trustworthiness of the boarder and the strength of his devotion to her.

If the film invites us to initially accept Mario's skepticism of Natalia's seemingly fantastical narrative of love-at-first-sight and enduring fidelity, it does so in order to demonstrate the capacity for a particular mode of subjective, emotionally driven storytelling to occlude as much as it reveals. If we too eagerly accept the notion that Mario's abuse of Natalia's confidence serves her best interests as well as his, we run the risk of assuming that the seemingly realistic perspective embodied in the former will inevitably trump the romantic, fantastical notions of the latter. Though Mario's worldview may initially appear to be pegged to a sort of social realism, a sophisticated understanding of the social and economic relationships governing life in contemporary Livorno, his perspective is just as influenced by dreams and desires as Natalia's. His masculine, worldly presence as a member of the Italian bourgeoisie grants him an authority that the film seems to question, even deliberately undermine, as its plot develops. Just as *Senso's* development is tied to an inverse relationship between its central romance and the revolution unfolding in the background, so does *Le Notti Bianche* hinge on the ironic distance between the perspective embodied in the

character of Mario and the eventual fulfillment of a romantic narrative that seems to undercut his authority as the privileged pole in a romantic triangle.

The play between realism and fantasy, central to the film's interrogation of narrative and perspective, is reinforced by the use of set decoration and what might be broadly construed as world-building. The microcosm of Livorno, as depicted in *Le Notti Bianche*, is defined by minimalism and a certain genericity. The city is a world of apparitions and shades of grey, and the other human figures appearing in the frame are seldom elevated to the level of character, serving only to advance plot points or to embody abstract, thematic qualities. The only true characters the viewer encounters are Mario and Natalia, besides the brief interlude between Mario and a prostitute. The film's action unfolds over the course of a few locales: Natalia's home, the bridge where Mario and Natalia first meet, and the boarding house where Mario lives. The first of these is only depicted in Natalia's flashback, so the vast majority of the film unfolds in the streets of Livorno, populated as they are by a number of generic restaurants and bars that Mario frequents in order to alleviate the loneliness which characterizes his existence in the city.

The plainness of the setting allows the film to achieve a certain universal quality, rendering it more of a record of a particular emotional experience than a recreation of a complex social reality. Though the social does sometimes intrude into the film's structure, to dramatic and somewhat shocking effect, *Le Notti Bianche* stands in stark contrast to the neorealist practice of mining drama from the socio-economic relationships that define modern life. Despite the fact that Mario is brought to Livorno

by his employer and is clearly suffering from the alienation which is a hallmark of modern, urban existence, his actual labor is never depicted on screen. Instead, it is rendered completely subsidiary to his mounting obsession with Natalia. Livorno, as a cinematic locale, becomes completely subsumed by emotions and desires swirling around Mario and Natalia, establishing it as an overtly theatrical space, bearing a referential relationship to the real world but untethered from the demands of a rigorous realism.

The overarching mood of *Le Notti Bianche* is one of loneliness. A stray dog, a wandering prostitute, a young salaryman, a sheltered immigrant: *Le Notti Bianche* gives us many symbols which establish the sense of alienation which hangs over Livorno. It is a town that appears simultaneously well-peopled and abandoned. Its nights are illuminated by neon and the walls are papered over with advertisements, making Livorno appear almost like the setting for a film noir. *Le Notti Bianche's* stark black & white photography allows Visconti to make use of the dramatic shadows and anonymity offered by the cityscape at night. However, shots of Mario and Natalia tend towards being more classically lit, capturing every minute gesture and expression performed by Mastroianni and Schell. Typically, the characters are depicted in a medium closeup with shallow focus, rendering the background gauzy and indistinct. This visual style renders every other element of the film ancillary to Mario's pursuit of Natalia. Other performers seem to wander in and out of the frame at random, giving the stylized mise en scene a sense of contingency which serves to temper the film's least realistic elements. These nods toward the contingent, a hallmark of neorealism, are always rendered secondary

to the elements that render Livorno acutely surreal and haunting, blanketed in heavy fog and reduced to the most basic symbols of urbanity.

The film's first sequence serves to establish the setting and tone, demonstrating many of the thematic and stylistic elements which will define *Le Notti Bianche*. The camera finds Mario wandering the main strip, having just spent the day in the countryside with his employer. He encounters all manner of passersby. Gazing expectantly at them, he is desperate for some moment of connection, but the others walk past him as if he was ephemeral. Wandering alone into the hazy night, his figure is nearly completely subsumed in the darkness that dominates the frame. It is only when the camera pulls in for a closeup that the chiaroscuro lighting renders Mario's visage legible again. It is at this moment that all of the film's most important elements are brought into play. Mario encounters a stray dog on the street. He attempts to win its affections but is rebuffed. Then, he spots Natalia who is in the midst of keeping her nightly vigil at the bridge, waiting for a lover who may or may not return. In the background, they spot a wandering prostitute. She gazes at Mario and Natalia before wandering into a nearby bar, the camera following her momentarily before she enters the edifice, leaving the lovers alone once again.

The importance of the prostitute will be discussed at length when she enters the narrative in full, as the film draws to its conclusion. However, it is worth noting that she is played by none other than Clara Calamai, the co-star of Visconti's *Ossessione*, rendering her an obvious symbol of neorealist cinema and casting a clear contrast to the blond, obviously foreign Schell with her undeniably Italian countenance. Calamai will

reappear throughout the film, often lurking in the background, making her desire for Mario quite apparent. Though she is never remarked upon by the other characters and delivers no dialogue until her final appearance, the camera always singles her out amongst the anonymous masses, rendering her a haunting and mysterious figure, ambiguously threatening in her ubiquity and her muteness.

The first meeting of Mario and Natalia sets the stage for Natalia's retelling of the events which led her to fall in love with the boarder. This story-within-a-story is presented in roughly the same visual style as the rest of the film, although the musical score that accompanies it is even more obviously melodramatic than the other pieces found in the film. At the moment of her story's conclusion, the film provides a clear visual cue that underlines Mario's desire to replace the boarder as the object of Natalia's affections. Utilizing a match cut, the final meeting between Natalia and her unnamed beau transitions seamlessly into a shot of Natalia and Mario occupying the exact same location. In this sense, this combination of images reflects the romantic impasse which sustains the central conflict of the film. Mario must engage in a battle for the heart of Natalia with a man he has never met, a vision of pure benevolence and romantic masculinity. Mario has wandered into a fantasy that is already in progress. He must disrupt its further development if he is to attain the object of his desire.

As Natalia's story ends, Mario immediately proclaims its absurdity and wonders if she has lost her mind. He cannot help but compare her faith in the boarder to a child's belief in fairy tales. Mario's attempts to convince Natalia of her would-be lover's untrustworthiness continue in this vein throughout the film, ranging from harmless

romantic competition to moments of manipulation and dishonesty, suggesting that Mario's loneliness might compromise his moral stature if left unchecked. When he valiantly offers to help Natalia compose a letter to the boarder, the staging highlights the newfound influence he has over the impressionable Natalia. As he sits at a well-lit table, Natalia stands in the background, largely obscured by shadows. Her nearly disembodied voice dictates her letter, but Mario quickly takes over, imposing his own will upon the situation. However domineering he might seem in this moment, Mario's attempt at bravado is quickly undercut as Natalia presents him with an already composed letter, stamped and addressed, that was on her person all along. This occurrence can be read as a subtle hint of Mario's fundamental misapprehension of the situation in which he has become entangled. It would seem that Natalia is not as naive as she appears and that she has carefully thought out the steps she should take to rekindle her romance with the boarder.

Now in possession of Natalia's letter, which he has promised to mail, Mario is faced with a clear moral dilemma. As he wanders the streets alone, letter in hand, the air becomes choked with a smoky, dense fog, casting the entire scene in a haze. Mario finds himself walking over the very bridge where Natalia waits each night and gazes into the water below. Behind him, Calamai's prostitute appears again and signals that she would like a light for her cigarette. As Mario obliges her, she looks at him with unadulterated longing, but he walks away without a word. Only a few steps away from this strange woman, Mario shreds Natalia's letter and tosses the detritus into the water. All the while, Calamai continues to stare at him. He turns to face her, and her smile

widens for just a moment before he turns and walks away. In this moment, the camera abandons Mario to follow Calamai, resting on her as she stands alone in the middle of the street, nearly erased by the fog. The presence of the prostitute seems to suggest that in a city like Livorno, there exist persons even lonelier than Mario whose lives on the streets are a far-cry from the impositions of his lower-middle class existence, a rather neorealist image in the midst of this semi-fantastical melodrama.

There is another key scene that serves to disrupt the diegesis of the film and introduce a moment of pure theatricality into the film's stylistic vocabulary. As their relationship continues to develop, Mario and Natalia find themselves at a small, smoky cafe frequented by hip teenagers and young adults. While the couple sits and attempts to converse, the jukebox begins to play "Thirteen Women (And Only One Man)" by Bill Haley & His Comets and the gathered youths spring into action, like automatons activated by an aural cue. As Hennessey notes, the inclusion of a diegetic song which was released in 1957 establishes *Le Notti Bianche's* narrative as the product of a particular historical moment, highlighting the influence of American culture on an Italian populace which had experienced significant cultural exchange with the United States over the course of the previous decade (163). Strangely, this scene could be said to function as both a means of grounding the narrative of the film in the cultural moment of the late 1950s, while also standing out as the film's most fantastical and stylized sequence. As the youths engage in their well-rehearsed dance routines, their movements grow frantic and agitated, evincing a style of dance somewhere between ballet and the most frenetic examples of the swing style common to early rock'n'roll

culture. For Hennessy, the manic energy evinced in this scene serves to set the stage for Natalia's dramatic abandonment of Mario wherein she returns to the bridge, having nearly neglected her nightly vigil (175). This is certainly the case, but there is also a sense of threatening sensuality expressed in the scene which seems to suggest the development of a frightening new culture of Americanized excess.

Throughout the first half of the dance sequence, Mario attempts to fight through the crowd to reunite with Natalia, only to find himself rebuffed by the sea of whirling bodies. When they find each other on the crowded dance floor, they sway awkwardly together, seeming to enjoy themselves but clearly uncomfortable in the midst of the more skilled dancers. In a shot from a high angle, the dancers' bodies are captured in full, highlighting the extravagance of their motions. A man takes to the center of the floor in order to display his skills for the others. He wears a haunting, somewhat sinister grin, and when he turns to stare at Natalia, she hides her face in fear or embarrassment. As the man finds a willing partner and tosses her about with complete abandon, Mario takes the floor and performs a few awkward steps of his own, acting as a clown for the delighted onlookers. In this moment, the dance draws to its climax, and Natalia is clearly overjoyed by Mario's exuberance. The end of the song finds the couple embracing warmly.

As the driving rhythms of Bill Haley are replaced with a slow, somber love song, it would seem that Mario has finally won Natalia over; their romantic reverie is at its peak. However, their bliss is shattered by a shout from the streets, announcing that the hour of ten has come and passed. Natalia immediately becomes distraught and rushes off

into the night, horrified at the thought of having missed her rendezvous with the boarder. Mario finds her collapsed on the street, seemingly overwhelmed with sorrow. He rebukes her harshly and announces his intentions to sever their connection permanently, despondent at the thought that he has made no progress in dislodging the memory of the boarder from Natalia's mind. At this point, Mario can only sink further into his nadir. As he walks alone, awash in anger and frustration, he comes across the prostitute once more and seems to momentarily entertain the possibility of indulging her obvious desire for him. However, he quickly changes his mind and attempts to flee, causing the prostitute to call out that she's been taken advantage of. In the resulting fracas, Mario is badly beaten and further demoralized, setting the stage for his eventual redemption at the film's conclusion.

Mario's encounter with the prostitute creates an extreme contrast between the storybook-like nature of his infatuation with Natalia and the gritty realism embodied by Calamai's character. Hennessey writes that the prostitute is a powerful symbol of "a debased, prostituted realism that had been one of the mainstays of Italian cinematic productions following the war" (174). In other words, the prostitute can be read as a symbol of neorealism itself, the very style which *Le Notti Bianche* seems to distance itself from in exploring what Hennessey calls "intimate, subjective states" of its characters (175). Surely enough, the beating Mario suffers does not signal the shift of the film into a more patently realist mode. It merely acts as a means of motivating his return to Natalia, albeit significantly humbler after his brush with reality. Having reached rock bottom, Mario is ready to confess that he never mailed Natalia's letter. She accepts

this and expresses a desire to begin their romance in earnest, seemingly having come to terms with her feelings for the boarder. As Natalia and Mario ride a small boat through Livorna's canals, a light snow begins to fall. It would seem that the couple's newfound joy has motivated a change in the weather, rendering Mario's romantic triumph all the more poignant. However, a final reversal reveals that this literal white night has been engineered to set the scene for another development that will render Natalia and Mario's relationship short-lived.

As Mario and Natalia make their way home, the streets have become covered in snow. Mario shouts to the sky that he is a new man, that he has a new outlook on life which has dispelled the gloom and despair of his loneliness. The couple walks arm in arm through the sleepy city. As they approach Natalia's home, there is an unmistakable figure on the bridge. Natalia recognizes him immediately. It is the boarder, having returned at last. She apologizes briefly to Mario before running shrieking toward the boarder. The camera remains behind, capturing Mario's silent dejection. Before she truly greets the boarder, Natalia returns and apologizes to Mario who, in turn, gives her his blessing to return to the boarder. He has made peace with this development and states that his brief moment of happiness with Natalia was significant enough to make life worth living, representing a genuine change in his perspective towards love and life in general.

As Natalia and the boarder are reunited at last, the camera enacts a reversal of perspective, making this couple its focal point while Mario is rendered an insignificant dot in the background. This staging makes obvious the fact that what once seemed a

story of the blossoming love between Mario and Natalia was really just a segment of a longer narrative arc in which Natalia and the boarder were to be reunited, thereby endorsing Natalia's faith in the power of romance and the truth of the boarder's promise to return to her. Wandering alone in the snowy dawn, Mario is once again joined by a stray dog who eagerly approaches him and follows him home. In the film's final moments, he is none the worse for his encounter with Natalia and is even granted the suggestion of new companionship, in the form of the dog. Try as he might, Mario was unable to overcome the forces drawing Natalia and the boarder together, suggesting his own subsumption into a larger narrative that is not motivated by his desires or his perspective.

Both *Senso* and *Le Notti Bianche* demonstrate the fact that by the mid-1950s, Visconti had begun to experiment with more emotionally subjective and formally challenging modes of cinema, moving away from the neorealist style that he had a large part in defining. However, as demonstrated, these melodramatic forays into more personal, sometimes historical fare did not result in a complete abandonment of the socio-political pretenses that had originally motivated the development of Italian neorealism. Whereas *Senso* returns to the exigency of modern Italy in order to unpack the personal and political upheaval of the late-nineteenth century, *Le Notti Bianche* explores the contemporary cultural moment using the same thematic devices of alienation and loneliness that would prove similarly productive for more overtly social realist cinema seeking to explore life in modern, urban environments. The cinema of reconstruction, as it is embodied in the work of Visconti, represents a search for new methods to express

the experience of life in Italy following the exhaustion of neorealism as an aesthetic force. By turning to melodrama, either in the form of opera or the modern stage play, Visconti is able to continue his exploration of the social and political forces determining the broad trajectory of Italian history and contemporary reality in the first decade after fascism. Though he would still return to a more traditional, neorealist style with 1960's *Rocco e i Suoi Fratelli*, the general arc of Visconti's career would find him exploring literary adaptations and period pieces much more in line with *Senso* than any of his films of the 1940's.

CHAPTER III: RECONSTRUCTING THE INDIVIDUAL: FELLINIAN REDEMPTION NARRATIVES
IN *LA STRADA* AND *LE NOTTI DI CABIRIA*

Like the other filmmakers discussed here, Federico Fellini found himself historically positioned to witness the birth of Italian neorealism and develop his own artistic sensibilities in its aftermath. From his earliest collaborations with Roberto Rossellini, including a writing credit on *Roma Città Aperta*, to the singular masterpieces that he created at the peak of his career in the 1960's, Fellini's filmography encompasses many of the most essential, beloved movies to emerge from Italy. Beginning his directorial career with *Variety Lights* (1950), Fellini quickly established himself as one of the most interesting, if not financially successful, directors in Italy. These early films contain some evidence of the stylistic and thematic preoccupations that would come to define Fellini, particularly the deeply personal *I Vitelloni* (1953), but they were much more in line with the standard Italian cinema of the late 1940's/early 50's. Showing a decided taste for the thoughtfully comic, Fellini's first films find the director working through his influences, adopting elements from a variety of genres and aesthetics and developing his own sensibility in the resulting amalgamation. This meant that by the mid-1950's, with Italian reconstruction in full-swing, Fellini was perfectly positioned to fulfill the desire, domestic and global, for Italian cinema that evinced the new, post-war reality.

This chapter will focus on a pair of films, thematically and texturally similar, that heralded Fellini's arrival onto the world stage and embody many of the principles central to the cinema of Reconstruction: *La Strada* (1954) and *Le Notti di Cabiria* (1957).

This pair of films, anchored by stellar performances from Fellini's wife and collaborator Giulietta Masina, represent a pronounced movement away from the neorealist depiction of wartime horrors and the moral decay of Italian society. In maintaining an obvious concern for the marginalized, these films ring true thematically, if not aesthetically, with neorealism. Despite their similarity to the neorealist films that preceded them, *La Strada* and *Le Notti di Cabiria* demonstrate Fellini's development of a new mode of socially-aware cinema defined by the use of Masina's tragicomic screen presence, thematic emphasis on issues of identity and desire, and plotlines that are resolved through moments of transcendent redemption. In this manner, Fellini's contributions to the cinema of Reconstruction can be seen as crucial links between the neorealist canon of the 1940's and the auteurist masterpieces of 1960's Italian cinema.

Though *La Strada* and *Le Notti di Cabiria* may seem more whimsical or fantastical than other examples of reconstruction-era cinema, at their most basic level, they are stories of dislocation and the struggle for identification in a world that has become increasingly stratified and complex. Similarly, these two films also represent important efforts in the development of new aesthetic territories outside of neorealism and other cinematic precursors. In its treatment of a modern, urban vision of Italy, *Le Notti di Cabiria* is particularly indicative of the efforts of Italian filmmakers to develop new methods for expressing the crisis of identity faced by the nation in the aftermath of the war, though it does stop short of engaging in anything that might be considered social reportage. Despite the fact that both films deny any specific historicity in their plotting or characterizations, they nonetheless present portraits of post-war Italian-ness, a

fraught identity that reflects a society and culture caught between tradition and novelty. While both *La Strada* and *Le Notti di Cabiria* engage with elements of fantasy and desire, they nonetheless remain grounded in highly empathetic portrayals of the downtrodden and oppressed, thematic concerns influenced by neorealism. What separates these films most decidedly from their predecessors is their narrative arc towards personal redemption, an approach strengthened by Fellini's particular talent for rendering the dream-desires and fantasies of his characters in vivid cinematic detail. If this pair of films stops short of far-reaching socio-political commentary, it is because Fellini's vision of Italian reconstruction is premised upon the redemptibility of the individual, whether it be the misogynistic Zampano or the easily misled and discontented Gelsomina.

The traditional critical treatment of Fellini's development as a filmmaker is not necessarily at odds with an approach that privileges the notion of Italy's reconstruction in the 1950's. As exemplified by Peter Bondella's influential writings on Fellini's oeuvre, collected in *The Films of Federico Fellini* (2002), *La Strada* and *Le Notti di Cabiria* are often seen as the first truly Fellinian films. In support of this supposition, they are said to demonstrate a development that Bondanella characterizes as a thematic shift from the social and ideological focus of Fellini's earlier, neorealist films to a focus on poetics, lyricism, and the conflict between the desires and fantasies of the individual and the norms and demands of society as a whole (47-49). Bondanella's treatment of Fellini privileges the idea that neorealism as a creative endeavor had become constrained by the ideological demands of Marxist criticism, thus causing directors such as Rossellini, Antonioni, and Fellini to move toward a "cinema of the individual." This individualistic

focus is presented as a refutation or negation of the social realism insisted upon by Marxist orthodoxy in favor of a cinematic mode more favorable to the exploration of what Antonioni called “a kind of internal neorealism” (48).

The notion of an individual neorealism, as opposed to a collectivist or socially-oriented neorealism, corresponds neatly with the defense of Fellini’s developing style presented in André Bazin’s analytical review of *La Strada*, which the critic characterized as an example of “neorealism of the person” (151). The critical discourse surrounding these films demonstrates the uneasy status of neorealism and its by-products in the mid-1950s. As the anti-fascist partisan movement that had provided neorealism with its initial ideological underpinnings subsided, neorealism, as a critical term, becomes subject to the general Cold War trend of suspicion towards any art that might be suspected of harboring communistic messages. As Bazin notes, Fellini and Rossellini found themselves at a difficult juncture as Italian reconstruction had fundamentally altered the artistic and political landscape of the country over the span of just a few years. These filmmakers were aligned with neither the Marxist intelligentsia who controlled the critical apparatus nor the Catholic-backed Christian Democrats who had come to dominate Italy’s political institutions (152). Given Fellini’s precarious situation in regard to the institutions that had come to see themselves as safeguarding neorealism, one can see why the twin successes of *La Strada* and *Le Notti di Cabiria* have been viewed as signaling a sea change in Italian cinema. When viewed through the discursive lens utilized by Bondanella and Bazin, these films could be said to establish Fellini as a director of global stature, while also signaling the triumph of an

individualistic and poetic realism over a rapidly stagnating neorealism, rendered suspect due to its political overtones and the critical apparatus that sustained it.

While obviously functioning as a corrective that allows for the rather limited scope of a dogmatic reading of neorealism to be expanded to include other filmmaking tendencies, the idea that Fellini's films perpetuate certain aspects of neorealism in a more personal or individualistic form is not without its merits. After all, *La Strada* and *Le Notti di Cabiria*, strange and fantastical though they may be, are still a far cry from *La Dolce Vita* (1960) and *8 ½* (1963), films that would find Fellini developing the set-bound, spectacle-driven style that would define the majority of his output for the remainder of his career. For all the ways in which *La Strada* and *Le Notti di Cabiria* engage with fantasy and explorations of individual psychology in a decidedly non-neorealist manner, they are still stories of downtrodden, marginalized characters who inhabit a reality that seems to roughly correspond to the historical and material circumstances of Italy in the late 1950s. However, any social commentary presented in these films is always filtered through the particular subjectivities of his protagonists, instead of the disembodied, observational style that is a hallmark of neorealism. This approach to storytelling allows Fellini to make use of certain neorealist techniques while maintaining a focus on the internal lives of characters, creating pronounced tension between the social reality depicted by the film and the psychological states of his protagonists.

In many ways, *La Strada* and *Le Notti di Cabiria* can be configured as a singular unit for analysis, given their many narrative and formal similarities. Both films are driven primarily by performances delivered by Giulietta Masina. These films could be

considered Masinian products as well as Fellinian. The heroines of each film, Gelsomina in *La Strada* and the eponymous Cabiria, are defined by their naivete, their belief in mythical narratives that seem to fly in the face of the unfortunate circumstances of their lives. These films draw a good deal of their conflict from material that reflects the specific challenges faced by women in Italian society. As Bondanella notes, the turn away from a stricter naturalist aesthetic in Italian cinema was also accompanied by a shift in focus toward female protagonists, particularly in the films of Antonioni, Rossellini, and Fellini (47). Perhaps, these films that more explicitly grapple with the experiences of women in Italian society could be said to represent an emergent feminist consciousness, in keeping with the general post-war trend of greater gender parity across Europe and North America. They also represent an obvious departure from the neorealist tactic of utilizing male protagonists to represent the working-class everyman of Italy. In a sense, the heroines of *La Strada* and *Le Notti di Cabiria* are inscribed doubly with marks of difference and exclusion. The existences of Gelsomina and Cabiria are circumscribed explicitly by their exclusion from the economic and social orders that might offer them a degree of normalcy in the face of the upheaval and instability that defines their lives, conditions reinforced both by their class position as well as the added stigma of their shared status as unmarried, adult women. They are both victimized by the men in their lives and are shown to yearn for an idealized romantic relationship, a partnership that could render the suffering and hardships they have endured palatable.

The narrative structures of both films lean toward the contingent, event-focused style of neorealism, as opposed to carefully plotted classical cinema. As Cabiria and

Gelsomina wander through their respective worlds, a sense of randomness dictates the figures and happenings that they encounter. This apparent randomness is tempered by an underlying causality that guides the narratives toward their conclusions, wherein both films reach their emotional crescendos. The scenarios that present themselves to the protagonists always maintain a pretense of happenstance, reinforced by the elliptical nature of Fellini's storytelling. However, each event displays a clear sense of the developments in character and narrative elicited by each event, accomplished through visual and narrative techniques that center the subjective experiences of the individual. This approach to plotting enables Fellini to people his films with all manner of interesting and thematically evocative characters while maintaining the central positions of Gelsomina and Cabiria within their respective narratives. Though the world depicted in these films is comparable to Italy during reconstruction, Fellini's microcosms are far from a slice of life. They are reality by way of fantasy, imbued with all the symbolic and poetic power of dreams.

The use of music in both films also merits discussion. The composer Nino Rota's music plays an enormous role in establishing the tone of both *La Strada* and *Le Notti di Cabiria*, serving as both a general backdrop for the stories as well as offering thematic reinforcement through the use of motif and modulation. Tom Brown's *Breaking the Fourth Wall: Direct Address in the Cinema* (2002) uses the term "cross-diegetic" to describe the use of music as means of direct address, highlighting the manner in which the score sometimes seems to exist simultaneously as an element of the diegetic world inhabited by the characters as well as the extra-diegetic space wherein the events

captured by the camera are reproduced for the benefit of an audience (15). Though cross-diegetic music plays a crucial role in *Le Notti di Cabiria*'s finale, it is even more central to *La Strada*, whose main theme exists simultaneously as a tune taught to Gelsomina by Il Matto, therein becoming the former's theme, as well as a musical motif embedded in the score that recurs in the film after Gelsomina has exited the frame permanently. By allowing musical motifs to transcend the diegetic boundaries of cinema, the film score becomes another tool through which Fellini can direct focus to the ephemeral, abstract qualities of human experience that cannot be easily captured in a visual medium.

The ambiguous role of Nino Rota's music in Fellini's films can be viewed as another example of the ways in which the director plays with acknowledgements of cinema's artificiality. Bearing the clear influence of both classical film comedies as well as movie musicals, Rota's cross-diegetic scores seem to reflect both the attitude of a film towards its characters as well as the internal states of the characters themselves. This is reinforced by the specific qualities of the themes associated with each protagonist. Whereas Gelsomina's theme is melancholy and somber, reflecting her lonesome existence, Cabiria is accompanied by a mambo whose lively and modern rhythm reflect her urbane, worldly life. As Brown notes, nothing is inherently groundbreaking about this practice, as such musical interventions were already commonplace in Hollywood (12). However, acknowledging the inherent musicality of *La Strada* and *Le Notti di Cabiria* can serve as a reminder of the ways in which Fellini's films straddle the

border between realism and spectacle, detached observation and embedded subjectivity.

For all their similarities, distinctive differences are at play in *La Strada* and *Le Notti di Cabiria* that must be delineated. In general terms, the former is a mytho-poetic tale of desire and loss, of a woman's suffering and death that culminates in a man's redemption. *La Strada* contains only the barest hints of societal critique in any form and is defined primarily by its depiction of the relationship between the childlike, innocent Gelsomina and the uncaring, callous Zampano with every other element of the film subjugated to the depiction of their (anti-)romance. In contrast, *Le Notti di Cabiria* is a story of a woman's yearning to fit into the mainstream society that consistently excludes her and the myths and mystifications that make her life bearable. Cabiria is not the docile, innocent Gelsomina. She is a streetwise prostitute, unapologetic for her trade, who nevertheless believes wholeheartedly that she will someday find a romantic pairing that will allow her to escape her life of abjection and marginality. *Le Notti di Cabiria* provides a broader portrait of the society its protagonist inhabits, reflecting themes of impoverishment, the transition of Italy into a modern, consumer-driven culture, and the increasing complexity of Italian society as the economic miracle wears on. Though both Gelsomina and Cabiria are defined by marginality, Cabiria's marginal existence bears the distinctive stamp of her role as prostitute, forever rendering her abject and unworthy of respect in the eyes of the bourgeois society she so desperately seeks to enter. It is from these differences that an understanding of *La Strada* and *Le Notti di Cabiria* as interrelated, but not identical, film texts can emerge.

La Strada is marked throughout with a sense of mythic grandeur, presenting the viewer with a distinctly moral vision whose thesis is underlined in a conversation between Il Matto, the Fool, and Gelsomina, the clown: "Everything has a purpose." The fairytale-like tone creates and sustains a tension between moments that underscore Gelsomina's sense of wonderment and her ultimately unfulfilled desire to find love and acceptance. The chasm that seems to permanently separate Gelsomina from a life of stability and comfort that is just out of reach suggests a fundamental incompatibility between her childlike notions of what life should be and the unforgiving reality she experiences as Zampano's companion. The story of Gelsomina's journey is a tidy and obviously circular narrative, beginning and ending at the sea, a natural feature that often serves to reinforce the absurdity of human existence in the Fellinian iconography, e.g., Marcello's encounter with the sea monster at the conclusion of *La Dolce Vita*. The world of *La Strada* is one populated by types, generic figures who call up all manner of associations and symbolic meanings in their plainness. Like John Bunyan's famous Pilgrim, Gelsomina wanders the mythic landscape encountering the embodiment of all manner of vices and virtues, her innocence and ignorance providing the perfect perspective through which to perceive the world as ambiguously mystical and equal parts frightening/exhilarating. In this manner, Gelsomina's experiences as a second-rate circus clown come to structure the paradigmatic vision of the film itself. Each character plays its role under the big tent, stepping aside once its purpose is accomplished to make room for the figure that will succeed it.

In contrast to the more pronounced fabulism of *La Strada*, *Le Notti di Cabiria* embodies a more modern narrative logic, based on contingency and colored by the increasingly complex, stratified Italian society of the 1950s. Though Cabiria's night-time wanderings through Rome also bring her into contact with a broad cast of characters representing various types, these are not the nuns, fools, and widows of Gelsomina's world. Instead, the figures that populate Cabiria's Italy are social types, explicitly defined by their roles within a consumer-capitalist society. They are prostitutes, starving indigents, middle-class merchants, and even movie stars. The diegetic Rome of *Le Notti Cabiria* announces its contemporaneity through them, allowing the film to develop the contrast between Cabiria's quotidian, usually depressing, reality and her fundamental desire to be accepted and loved in spite of her status as an outcast and a prostitute. Cabiria is much more worldly and self-possessed than the innocent, pre-civilized Gelsomina. In some ways, this worldliness and self-possession makes the former's unshakable desire for social acceptance and romantic love even more ironic than the latter's. After all, who is further removed from the mythic ideal of everlasting romance than the prostitute, a figure explicitly excluded from the body of polite society but nevertheless sustained by the gulf between the moral codes of bourgeois society and the sexual proclivities of the men who dominate that society? In a sense, both Gelsomina and Cabiria are held captive by master narratives of life and romance that structure the subjectivity of women in respect to the societies they inhabit. However, their specific subjectivities are differentiated by their differing levels of worldliness, or integration into society at large, as well as inverse relationship between their disparate

levels of innocence and the agency afforded them by their socio-economic circumstances.

Having established a general sense of each film and the mechanics that sustain its narrative, it is now possible to explore the ways in which *La Strada* and *Le Notti di Cabiria* correspond to the development of Italian cinema in the era of Reconstruction, beginning with the issue of performance. Masina's interpretations of the characters Gelsomina and Cabiria are crucial in establishing these films as distinct from the tradition of Italian neorealism. The issue of performance as it relates to cinema, particularly the rarefied sub-corpus of the *art cinema*, is relatively problematic as it requires attention to both the pro-filmic act of the performer him/herself as well as the process through which that pro-filmic performance is integrated into the narrative structure of the film through the mechanism of characterization. In the art cinema of the mid-century, performance was a relatively undervalued aspect of filmmaking. One is reminded of Alfred Hitchcock's famous refrain that "actors are cattle" and the manner in which critical literature often praises directors such as Michelangelo Antonioni and Robert Bresson for their ability to overcome traditional methods of characterization through greater emphasis on formalism and use of relatively opaque characters whose inner-lives are either deliberately ambiguous, as a means of underscoring their alienation, or are of little to no interest in respect to the film's overall purpose. This paradigm of actors as models, reduced to aesthetic figures manipulated by the camera in a manner akin to a landscape or any other inanimate object or surface, could not be further removed from the energy and performativity that Masina brings to her two

major collaborations with Fellini. She is, for all intents and purposes, the heart and soul of *La Strada* and *Le Notti di Cabiria*, both the personage in which the audience is invited to invest its drives toward empathy and pity and the structuring point-of-view that colors its experience of the world conjured up by the camera.

Masina's movie-star presence dominates both *La Strada* and *Le Notti di Cabiria*, rendering them as much Masinian products as they are Fellinian. However, crucial differences mark her embodiment of the diffident, submissive Gelsomina and the confident, confrontational Cabiria. Whereas *La Strada* utilizes the actor's comic potential through Gelsomina's narrative role as Zampano's assistant and clownish foil, Masina's embodiment of Cabiria is defined by a tragic irony in that the character's most basic desire is to be rendered unremarkable and normal in the eyes of others. However, her penchant for explosive anger and eagerness to demonstrate her superiority to her peers renders her a natural target for laughter. The contrasts between Gelsomina and Cabiria can be attributed to the differences between the films themselves. After all, Gelsomina's shy naivete renders her the perfect foil to her dramatic counterpart, Zampano, the character whose stubborn resistance to her benevolence must be reversed in *La Strada's* conclusion. Given that Masina has no true co-stars in *Le Notti di Cabiria*, only an array of supporting players, the film provides more space for her to capitalize on her capabilities as a performer of both comic and tragic modes. In this sense, Cabiria could be said to fully embody the interplay between performativity and realism at work in Fellini's films, though Gelsomina's diegetic status as a performer presents opportunities to deconstruct this relationship as well.

Due to the tension between the films' most neorealist aspects and the performativity that undercuts them, Masina's characters come to occupy ontologically ambiguous positions, simultaneously of the world of the film and distinct from it. When we first encounter Gelsomina, she is in the midst of her family but is already marked as distinct from it, both by her childlike behavior and her appearance. Similarly, Cabiria is often seen in the midst of her peers, the prostitutes who walk the streets of Rome, but the diminutive, almost cherubic Masina always appears out of place among these more traditionally sensual, heavily made-up women. The choice to render Masina's characters so distinctive within their respective milieus serves to both highlight their roles as privileged players within the film texts, and to reinforce themes of identification and longing for social acceptance. As viewers, we are always conscious of the fundamental difference or exclusion experienced by Gelsomina and Cabiria. By extension, the audience's empathetic response to these characters becomes tied to their status as atypical members of their respective societies, outcasts who are keenly aware of their own inability to fit in either amongst other outcasts or within the mainstream.

In addition to being central to the thematic content of the films, Masina's performances also demonstrate the problematized state of the on-screen body and corporealism in Italian reconstruction cinema. Neorealism utilizes on-screen bodies as a mark of integrity, ensuring that the pro-filmic actions captured by the camera bear the corporeal presence of authentic human beings whose worn and battered visages announce to the viewer that they embody suffering and deprivation. This effect is reinforced through the use of nonprofessional actors whose bodily verisimilitude is

doubly ensured through their supposed lack of self-conscious performativity. Though Gelsomina and Cabiria inhabit social milieus and experience hardships that are a direct product of their socio-economic statuses, they are marked indubitably as characters, constructs of the film itself, whose actions and reactions are contingent upon the demands of a script. The ambiguity created by the larger-than-life presence enacted by these characters renders these films prime sites for deconstructing the rhetoric of corporeality in Italian cinema. If neorealism utilizes the body and its gestural potential as a means of grounding the artifice of cinema in an unshakeable materiality, Masina's performativity unsettles the notion of a corporeality based in debasement and suffering in favor of new models of cinematic humanism.

According to Karl Schoonover's "Histrionic Gestures and Historical Representation: Masina's Cabiria, Bazin's Chaplin, and Fellini's Neorealism" (2014), neorealism's insistence on the human body as a site of unproblematic access to the historical record results in "deploying corporeal spectacle as a privileged means of historical representation" (95). Schoonover's reading of Masina's corporeal presence on the screen draws its impetus from a commonly invoked critical citation: that of Masina's indebtedness to the legendary slapstick of Charlie Chaplin and his signature character, The Tramp. Focusing particularly on Masina's embodiment of Cabiria, Schoonover argues convincingly that her physicality "intervenes in the politics of Italian post-war cinema by citing incommensurate cinematic physicalities: neorealism's politicized cadaver collides with the slapstick body" (96). This sense of the importance of corporeality to the rhetoric of neorealism will serve as a useful means for making sense

of the contrast between the relatively realistic worlds presented in *La Strada* and *Le Notti di Cabiria* and the overt performativity embodied by Masina that serves to render Cabiria and Gelsomina othered in respect to society at large.

To begin his analysis of Masina's gestural performance in *Le Notti di Cabiria*, Schoonover explicates the film's opening scene, in which Cabiria is traumatically robbed and thrown into a rushing river by her lover, enacting the central trauma from which the character's search for love and belonging will emerge. Schoonover connects this scene of peril and rescue to specific antecedents involving drowning and imperiled bodies in the neorealist films *Paisan* (1946), *Ladri di Biciclette* (1948), and *Roma Città Aperta* (1945), suggesting that the film revisits neorealist scenarios in order to disrupt "the epistemological premise of neorealism" in which the truthfulness of the film's images are corroborated by the suffering of the on-screen body (96). This restaging is accomplished in this particular incident by the development in which Cabiria is rescued by the selfless actions of several young boys who help to pull her from the water and various laborers who resuscitate her afterwards. In this moment, tragedy is averted. Cabiria has been dramatically rescued from the malfeasance of her former boyfriend because of the intervention of concerned bystanders, strangers without any clear connection to the protagonist who nonetheless take it upon themselves to save her. Following this rescue, the film immediately upsets the viewer's expectations again. Upon being revived, Cabiria immediately flies into a fit of embarrassed rage, lashing out at her rescuers and immediately searching for the man who pushed her, seemingly eager to reconcile with him.

Schoonover relates this unexpected explosion of wrath to a general tendency in neorealist film in which bodies are imperiled for the gaze of a disembodied bystander, helpless to intervene, therein transmuting the imperilment of the body into a mark of authenticity, the guarantor of cinematic realism (97). In the traditional epistemology of neorealist filmmaking, the subjectivity of this disembodied bystander is defined by passivity and empathy, confined as it is by the bystander's extra-diegetic position in respect to the corporeal characters on the screen. When Cabiria springs back to life, seemingly unharmed, she is immediately aware of the bystanders whose intervention saved her life. When her inert form is dragged from the water, Cabiria becomes the center of a spectacle. It is clear that the gaze of these men, benevolent though it might be, upsets her immensely. The emotion she experiences in this moment is best understood as embarrassment, the profound awareness of becoming the object of another's attention in a way that seems unflattering or undesirable by oneself.

Her histrionic reaction to being rescued contains none of the content that one might expect. She expresses no gratitude toward her rescuers and rebukes them harshly for handling her unconscious body. As Schoonover suggests, this behavior establishes Cabiria as a decidedly different sort of character than that of the traditional neorealist protagonist who suffers all manner of indignities and hardships without the aid of intervention or awareness of the bystander's gaze. Cabiria is intensely aware of the manner in which she is perceived by others. In fact, the desire to be rendered unremarkable, to be decidedly unspectacular, is her driving motivation throughout the film. In acknowledging what Schoonover refers to as the inherent "semantic

indeterminacy that haunts all filmic bodies,” Masina’s performance as Cabiria challenges the idea that the filmic image can function as a register of pure bodily contingency by causing the audience to question the degree to which the actor’s physical responses and expressions are natural reactions to diegetic stimuli or affectations structured explicitly by awareness of the camera’s gaze (99).

This question of the performer/character’s awareness of the camera’s gaze is crucial in considering *Le Notti di Cabiria*’s conclusion. This emphasis on the relationship between the seeing and the seen casts light on the manner in which Cabiria’s desire to avoid her own spectacularity seems to contradict her tendency toward humorous outbursts and rants, a trope that the film returns to over and over again. These fits serve to both announce Cabiria as a larger-than-life persona whose immense physicality threatens to rupture the film’s sense of realism as well as a tragic figure whose chief desire in life is destined to be thwarted by some aspect of her fundamental nature. Above all else, Cabiria wishes to escape the ghetto of otherness in which she finds herself. Though she is a prostitute, shown to walk the streets every night, she is separated from the other prostitutes whom she considers her peers. Similarly, Cabiria’s lifestyle demonstrates her difference from the other prostitutes as well. She owns a home and desires the comfort and security of a long-term monogamous relationship, dreaming of marriage and everlasting love. This desire signals Cabiria’s need to abandon her particularity and be rendered anonymous amongst the ranks of the bourgeoisie. She wants all the trappings of modern, middle-class existence, both material wealth and moral uprightness. The incompatibility between Cabiria’s innermost desires and the

manner in which her character is viewed and judged by the gatekeepers of respectable society is a source of both comedy and tragedy. The audience is invited to laugh at the ways in which Cabiria unknowingly flaunts social conventions, *a la* The Tramp, and to cry at the circumstances that bring the generally benevolent and loveable character to the precipice of complete dissolution.

If Cabiria's inherent histrionics can be said to represent her inability to conform to behavioral codes of polite society, Gelsomina's idiosyncrasies can be connected to *La Strada's* overtly religio-moral framing, in which the protagonist's childlike innocence and wonderment render her an angelic figure in an otherwise fallen world. Sam Rohdie's *Fellini Lexicon* (2002) begins with an entry on the subject of angels, noting that while the director's films never depict these metaphysical beings literally, his body of work is littered with characters who could be said to resemble angels or behave angelically. In other words, "The Fellinian angel is born of metaphor" (Rohdie 3). The notion of a Fellinian angel perfectly describes Gelsomina and her journey through the world of *La Strada*. In "Fellini's *La Strada* as Transitional Film: The Road from Classical Neorealism to Poetic Realism" (2011), Philip Booth notes the film's reflection of the Catholic Church's dominance of Italian life through its proliferation of religious icons and depiction of religious fervor (707). Despite her angelic countenance and the contrast she casts with the worldly, lustful Zampano, Gelsomina finds no solace in the Church or its teachings. She experiences the religiosity of the Italian populace as a fascinated but alienated observer. Religious experience and practice in *La Strada* and *Le Notti di Cabiria* come to

represent a kind of collectivity that is highly attractive but ultimately unattainable for the lonesome Gelsomina and Cabiria.

As a Fellinian angel, Gelsomina's search for purpose cannot be simply resolved through conventional forms of religious belief and devotion. Instead, her journey is ultimately defined by her failure to find the love and acceptance that she so desperately desires, until it is too late. Il Matto, first encountered by Gelsomina in the personage of a parodic angel capering on a high-wire, teaches her that every creature, great and small, has a purpose. This simple moral carries a dark irony when considered in light of the fates suffered by these characters, each ultimately falling victim to the wrath and the selfishness of Zampano before his moment of redemption. Both Il Matto and Gelsomina, each clown-angels in their own right, suffer bodily harm and ultimately die due to Zampano's wrath and selfishness. Their angelic, artistic temperaments are fundamentally incompatible with the worldly, hypermasculine pridefulness embodied in Zampano. In this sense, Masina's performance as Gelsomina evokes the double-edge of the transition from innocence into experience: wonderment at the mysteries of the world and disappointment at its inequities and cruelty. It also establishes Gelsomina as a pseudo-messianic figure whose death is necessary for the redemption of the iniquitous Zampano.

From the first moment Gelsomina enters the story, her uncomprehending and innocent nature is obvious to the viewer. In the film's first scene, she is sold to Zampano by a desperate mother who has already lost another daughter to the mercurial strongman. She is like a visitor from another planet, seeing many wonders and gaining

an understanding of the world's cruelty and unfairness before dying and returning to whence she came. Somewhat surprisingly, the two male leads of the film, Zampano the Strongman and Il Matto the Fool, are rendered similarly out-of-place in the world of La Strada. Though they both lack Gelsomina's innocence and wonderment, they are marked as outsiders by the fact that both are portrayed by American actors in a film otherwise peopled by Italians. In tying Gelsomina's fate to the actions of characters portrayed by Hollywood actors, she becomes what they are: types, generic characterizations fulfilling specific roles and patterns of behavior. Zampano is the embodiment of gruff, uncompromising masculinity, wandering the countryside and performing feats of strength for unremarkable onlookers. Il Matto is the impish trickster, delighting in tormenting the self-serious Zampano. He performs as well, delighting audiences with his nimbleness, physical and verbal. His wit is his strength, allowing him to temporarily frustrate the belligerent strongman and to entrance Gelsomina. Inaugurated into their world of performance and spectacle, Gelsomina becomes an apprentice who must choose her own master. She is the clownish angel, enamored of Il Matto's levity but connected inseparably to Zampano as wife-slave-assistant. The incongruities between these overlapping roles render Gelsomina's innermost desires unfulfillable, setting the stage for her tragic demise and the redemption it prefaces.

Any discussion of Fellini's radical departure from neorealism must also consider the ways in which the films dramatize subjective experiences of recognition and identification through cinematographic innovation as well as plotting. Booth writes that

the gaze of Fellini's camera is noteworthy in that it enables the extension of sympathy to characters as disparate as the innocent Gelsomina and the flawed Zampano, "whether refracted through the lens of broad comedy, neorealism, poetic realism, or the increasingly exploratory and self-referential stylistic approach of his post-1950s films" (715). Booth's characterization of Fellini's visual sensibility as one defined by a myriad of stylistic precursors captures the degree to which *Le Notti di Cabiria* and, to a lesser extent, *La Strada* demonstrate the director's ability to transition between the inobtrusive camera work of the classical cinema, neorealist reportage, and modes of poetic realism, depending on the demands of a scene. In both films, the most obvious departure from the norms of visual storytelling serves to underscore moments of profound emotionality or inner turmoil, suggesting an excess of feeling and signification that cannot be suitably rendered by the disembodied, observational gaze of neorealism.

The framing of the neorealist film is, nearly invariably, one that invites the viewer to sympathize with a suffering, downtrodden character whose motives are legible, sensible responses to social stimuli. In order to capture a more psychologically complex vision of human action, one that acknowledges the ambiguity and sometimes contradictory nature of human thought and social identity, Fellini must utilize the full range of cinematic techniques, visual and otherwise, so as to bring the abstract, emotional turmoil experienced by his protagonists into focus. Like other contributors to the cinema of reconstruction, Fellini develops these techniques in order to reflect the complex relationship between the individual subject whose thoughts and feelings organize the filmic image and the shared conception of reality on which the notion of

cinematic realism is premised. This allows for both technical innovation as well as thematic emphasis on the breakdown of fixed, unproblematized meaning ascribed to social signifiers accompanying Italy's rapid modernization and the country's entrance into the post-war hegemony. His willingness to transgress against the rigid visual logic of cinematic realism allows Fellini to imbue images that would otherwise seem banal or unremarkable with a sense of their import to the individual, suggesting that the power of particular sites and experiences to impact the individual lies at the intersection of socially constructed, shared ways of seeing and intensely personal associations irreducible to the level of generalization.

The most obvious site of this tension between the collective and personal associations conjured by an image or symbol can be located in the films' depictions of religious processions and practices. Both *La Strada* and *Le Notti di Cabiria* feature crucial scenes in which the protagonists attempt to take part in the Catholic religious life of Italy, only to find that such experiences quickly give way to banal reality. This cynical view of religiosity reflects the Catholic Church's role as a major force in Italian economic and political life in the 1950s, a position that seems to directly contradict the church's rhetoric of metaphysical salvation and redemption through adherence to the scriptures. In *La Strada*, this pattern is accomplished through the depiction of Gelsomina's experiences with a religious carnival in Rome. Following a procession of musicians playing a jaunty, carnivalesque tune, Gelsomina quickly finds herself a part of an enormous parade, accompanied by all manner of icons on a march to the cathedral. Nino Rota's score establishes the solemn, semi-mystical weight of the procession,

transforming the whimsical tune played by the musicians into a solemn, funerary dirge. Gelsomina finds herself lost among a jostling, worshipful crowd who mob the streets in order to get a glimpse of the icons of Catholicism: crucifixes, Madonnas, and all manner of other ostentatious relics whose rarefied bearings immediately captivate Gelsomina. Fellini chooses to represent the chaos and fervor of the crowd through alternating shots that depict Gelsomina's point-of-view alongside coverage of the crowd from an observational perspective, interspersed with establishing shots of Gelsomina herself. While Gelsomina's perspective is indicated by tightly framed shots of the aforementioned icons, coverage of the crowd comes from an overhead vantagepoint, demonstrating the immensity of the procession and the vaguely menacing energy of the throngs that have gathered to bear witness to it. This point-of-view transitions to somewhat shaky handheld footage depicting clergymen up-close as well as Gelsomina's own position among the crowds. From Gelsomina's perspective, the icons tower above her, like ancient and inscrutable monoliths that suggest much but impart little. Momentarily finding belonging and purpose as a member of the anonymous, worshipful crowd, Gelsomina ultimately finds herself shut out of the Cathedral, the ultimate symbol of the church's authority, before she can pursue these religious stirrings further.

The narrative significance of this sequence is underscored by Gelsomina's momentary separation from Zampano, which makes her sojourn to the festival possible. Freed from the burden of his presence, Gelsomina is free to experiment with a new method of belonging, of meaning-making. As Gelsomina is caught up in the energy of the crowd, the viewer sees her bow and cross herself reverently. When the camera pulls

back to give a fuller sense of the composition of the crowd, these icons are dwarfed by the hundreds of people crowding the narrow streets and the enormous multi-story buildings that comprise this modern city. However, from Gelsomina's perspective, these looming symbols of religious reverence completely consume the mise-en-scene. Looking up at these portrayals of the Madonna and her child or Jesus on his crucifix, one can imagine no one more deserving of the forgiveness and salvation they embody than poor Gelsomina. As quickly as this moment of awe begins, it ends when the icons are brought into the church where Gelsomina does not or cannot follow. Entering the Cathedral, the camera begins a dramatic pan upwards, towards the ceiling, before cutting immediately to the next scene. Foreclosing on the possibility that this moment of religiosity will give way to some epiphany or paradigm shift, this experience becomes another brief stop along the road for Gelsomina, who must soon be reunited with Zampano and continue their journey through the countryside.

Cabiria's brief brush with religion is, in many ways, analogous to Gelsomina's experiences at the festival. However, Cabiria is not the helpless passenger that her counterpart is and, therefore, must enter into her encounter with the icons of Catholic faith through her own agency. Similarly, the depiction of religious observance in *Le Notti di Cabiria* is more overtly cynical than that of *La Strada* in its emphasis on the Italian belief in the power of icons to perform spontaneous and miraculous healings and the economic exploitation enabled by this belief. Cabiria's encounter with religiosity is arranged through a series of events that serve to suggest the protagonist's susceptibility to the sort of communal belonging offered by religion before revealing the crass reality

of Catholic observance in this society. Standing at the spot where she and the other prostitutes meet their clients, Cabiria is informed that her friends plan to visit a chapel the following Sunday so that they might ask for a miracle from the Virgin Mary. It seems irreverent that a group of prostitutes would embark on a religious pilgrimage, but the motives of the women seem pure, reflecting the general influence of the Catholic church on even the worldliest Italians. Initially, Cabiria is skeptical but suggests she might tag along, perhaps excited to be included in a group outing or somewhat entranced by the notion that such a pilgrimage might allow her to make a direct entreaty to God. Interrupting this conversation, a religious procession passes the women and their pimps. The camera follows their dutiful steps through the night. Cabiria is immediately transfixed by the sight and steps forward in order to get a better look before beginning to follow them into the distance until she is interrupted by another customer. This moment contains a hint of transcendence, the barest suggestion that Cabiria might give up the life that she has known and follow these pilgrims into the night. However, the reality of her life and her material needs render this action an impossibility. Cabiria joins her John in the cab of his truck while the procession continues into the misty evening.

This encounter with the procession is immediately juxtaposed with an episode in which Cabiria, walking home alone from her latest assignation, encounters a minister tending to people so poor that they have been reduced to hiding in caves in the ground. This scene begins with a misrecognition. In the immense darkness that threatens to swallow the frame, Cabiria sees a man step from a car and fearfully attempts to evade

him. However, he approaches her calmly and asks if she also lives in the caves, before going about his routine of delivering food and supplies to the desperate occupants of the caves. The camera briefly abandons Cabiria to depict the minister's charitable acts before pulling back to a great distance, showing Cabiria and the minister standing in a desolate field near a gaping hole. The vast emptiness of the field stands in stark contrast to the crowded environment of the city that can be seen in the background, suggesting a position of marginality, both literal and figurative, greater than Cabiria's own. This experience serves to contextualize Cabiria's own struggles to attain financial independence within a larger socio-economic order. It also serves as the film's most direct commentary on the post-war Italian state's failure to provide any sort of protection or standard of living to the poor. While Cabiria exists in a marginal position, her desperation is nothing compared to the plight of the cave-dwellers, literally banished to the underground, the symbolic realm of the dead and damned. The camera mimics her downturned gaze at these impoverished men and women, gazing at them from a distance that she chooses not to diminish, perhaps fearful of coming into contact with individuals as abject as these.

A particularly stirring moment occurs when Cabiria recognizes one of the cave dwellers, a prostitute named La Bomba who asserts that she was once a great beauty before the ravages of age and deprivation took their toll. As the cheerful talkative woman emerges from her cave, Cabiria greets her with a smile, overjoyed to have found a familiar sight in this strange and forgotten place. This joy is short-lived and is immediately replaced by pity and worry, the obvious subtext being that Cabiria might

find herself consigned to such a fate if she does not manage to escape life on the streets. This moment of recognition, though far less emphatic than Gelsomina's experience with Osvaldo, which will be discussed below, serves as an embodiment of Cabiria's worst fears. That she might be reduced to a figure of such abject pity is deeply troubling to a woman who takes immense pride in her aspirationally bourgeois independence and diligence. However, this experience is positive and uplifting for Cabiria as she has borne witness to the minister's solitary acts of beneficence. Though he is powerless to offer the kind of overwhelming material aid that would be required to significantly alter the circumstances of the cave dwellers, it is clear from the warm and familiar welcome that these wretches give him that the minister's aid is greatly needed and appreciated. Touched by the minister's kindness and his offer of a ride back to the city center, Cabiria returns to her home, primed to experience whatever mode of religious engagement a visit to the chapel might offer her.

Upon her arrival at the chapel, the scene that presents itself to Cabiria is more akin to a carnival midway than a scene of solemn worship. The sick and the needy drag themselves towards the chapel, drawn by the promise that this temple dedicated to the mother of Christ might heal their ailments, while merchants sell candles and all manner of foodstuff and memorabilia to the crowds. Cabiria is ill at ease among devotees of the Madonna. Her eyes search the room anxiously while she joins the others in singing a hymn. The camera captures her in medium closeup, highlighting the claustrophobia inherent in such a throng. Intercut with the shots that serve to establish her position amongst the crowd are shots that mimic Cabiria's point of view. Every inch of the walls

and ceiling are covered in icons, and all manner of prosthetics, crutches, and other medical implements hang suspended in the air. These symbols of the supposed power of the chapel to heal those who seek the Madonna's mercy threaten to overwhelm the film's narrative, in this moment. Disorienting shots of the crowd show men and women jostling for position before Cabiria emerges, her petite frame dwarfed among the outstretched arms bearing candles. She looks up and sees the name "Maria" enshrined in electric lights. This strange sight is held in a panning shot that renders it eerie and foreboding. As the worshippers approach the altar, Cabiria looks pained and confused. Gazing up at an image of the Madonna, Cabiria begs for help to change her life. At a moment when her catharsis seems within reach, the camera's focus shifts back to an invalid man, the uncle of a pimp, who, in a moment of desperation, attempts to stand without the aid of his crutches only to fall crashing to the ground, undercutting the air of solemn prostration and pleading.

This sequence is followed by a wipe that finds Cabiria and her friends cavorting in a field near the chapel, surrounded by all manner of detritus and merrymaking. Even Cabiria's most serious attempt to experience grace and salvation is interrupted by the sudden realization that this is another realm of empty symbols, capable of instilling fear and reverence but offering little in the way of lasting comfort and assistance. Cabiria bemoans the intransigence of her friends and herself, remarking that nothing has changed and that the characters have immediately fallen back into their well-worn patterns of behavior. Frustrated with the lack of grace or redemption offered by the chapel, Cabiria vows once again to change her life by selling her possessions and

abandoning her friends and the lifestyle they embody. Spotting a procession bearing a banner in the distance, Cabiria drunkenly accosts them and demands to know if their own religious experience was more authentic or long-lasting than her own. She shouts and waves her fists impotently before fleeing her friends and falling to her knees amongst the mud and garbage. Gazing forlornly at the figures in religious garb, Cabiria's eyes well with tears as she considers their unshakable seriousness and sense of purpose in contrast to her own listless wanderings. The orderliness of the procession becomes a symbolic representation of the straight-and-narrow, a mode of existence that offers clear and overwhelming meaning in the face of all obstacles, something Cabiria desperately desires for herself. The solace offered by religion is revealed to be fundamentally inaccessible to Cabiria, incommensurate with her way of living and her identity as a whole.

These moments of religious reverence enter the frameworks on *La Strada* and *Le Notti di Cabiria* in order to suggest modes of experience that are alien to Gelsomina and Cabiria, demonstrating both the power of religious iconography as well as the incongruity of these moments of profound belief with the everyday reality in which the characters exist. In the same way that these scenes call upon specific cinematographic techniques to capture the point of view of the protagonists, other key moments in each film are achieved through the intervention of the camera in order to highlight shifts in consciousness brought about by particularly powerful sights or mental states. In Gelsomina's case, this shift in consciousness occurs during her encounter with Osvaldo, a mentally disabled boy whom she meets at a home in the countryside. While everyone

else is distracted by wedding festivities, Gelsomina, in the guise of a clown, is led upstairs by children to entertain Osvaldo whose condition has rendered him bedridden. For one brief moment, Cabiria stares into the eyes of this young boy and experiences a profound emotional resonance, before being disrupted by Osvaldo's caretaker. This look is rendered all the more striking due to Gelsomina's emotional opacity in this moment. Her face, hidden beneath the makeup of a clown, expresses a look of surprise, of shock, of confusion.

Philip Booth reads the look shared by these characters as one of recognition on Gelsomina's behalf, an understanding of her own unique mental state and social position expressed metaphorically through the image of a terrified child (711). This reading certainly gives this strange scene thematic significance. When Cabiria ceases her clowning and begins to earnestly look at the boy, the viewer is shown Osvaldo in medium close-up, gripping his blankets and staring wide-eyed at the strange figure before him. These images of Osvaldo serve to establish the object of Gelsomina's intense scrutiny as she approaches him. However, they do not represent her point-of-view. Instead, they capture the poor child from another angle, rendering the viewer an outside party to the exchange between these characters. As the camera cuts between Gelsomina's face and Osvaldo's face once more, the former's eyes are opened as wide as possible, soberly contemplating the latter's visage in this darkened space. Though this moment of contemplation is brief, interrupted as it is by the return of the caretaker, it is undeniably arresting and provides one of the film's most stirring images. In this instance, the viewer gazes thoughtfully at Gelsomina who gazes thoughtfully at Osvaldo,

transformed into a powerful and mysterious symbol of self-knowledge. When the camera captures Gelsomina's confrontation with her own condition in the form of a frightened, disabled child, the film's narrative becomes momentarily suspended, all narrative momentum halted. The profundity of the emotion experienced by Gelsomina is rendered palpable, even while the exact quality of this emotion remains unclear. In engineering this exchange of looks between characters and audience, Fellini gives cinematic representation to the abstract, psychological processes at work inside Gelsomina without resorting to inner-monologue or soliloquy. In a film defined so much by all that Gelsomina does not comprehend, it is this moment of comprehension that is among the film's most memorable and unsettling images.

Cabiria also experiences her own moment of transcendent, epiphanic realization, which is emphasized by specific cinematographic effects. Unlike the brief encounter between Gelsomina and Osvaldo, however, this moment has major narrative importance as it sets the stage for the developments that will bring Cabiria to her nadir in order to facilitate her redemption. Immediately upon ending the chapel sequence, which finds the protagonist despondent at the lack of any significant change brought about by her brush with piety, the film finds Cabiria entering a small theatre at night wherein a mesmerist is performing his act for a boisterous and masculine crowd. Unwillingly, she is brought to the stage and made the center of spectacle, causing her to lash out at the crowd and attempt a hasty exit. However, the mesmerist, wearing a hat of devil's horns, is able to instantly place her under his hypnotic control. The sequence that follows is undoubtedly one of the most famous in Fellini's oeuvre, its importance

reinforced by the fact that a similar mesmerist appears in *8½*, a film that carries the self-referentiality and subjectivity explored in the director's films of the late 1950s to their obvious conclusion. Even more obviously than Gelsomina's encounter with Osvaldo, this is a sequence that transcends the depiction of material reality in order to insist upon the primacy of Cabiria's inner-life, the importance of her fantasies and desires in shaping her actions both previous with her interaction to the mesmerist and the denouement that follows.

As Cabiria surrenders to the mesmerist's powers, her change in consciousness is reinforced both by Masina's facial gestures and the composition of the frame. She is captured in a medium close-up, her white blouse contrasting sharply with the hazy darkness behind her. Her face is beatific, bearing a hint of smile. She experiences a serenity unknown to her, since the start of the film. The audience is reduced to indistinct figures. Only the tinkling of piano keys can be heard. A single spotlight illuminates her. The camera tentatively hovers around the flower-crowned Cabiria, its movements barely perceptible at first. The mesmerist walks her through a peaceful scenario in which she encounters a man named Oscar, her ideal lover and companion. The camera captures her from afar, suggesting the vantage point of an audience member who might either be amused or enraptured by Cabiria's ethereal tranquility under hypnosis.

As Cabiria glides gracefully across the stage, lost in the pastoral fantasy described by the mesmerist, the camera follows her every move, maintaining a framing that largely obscures the audience. Cabiria imagines herself dancing a waltz with Oscar,

revealing her true name, Maria, and details about her childhood and adolescence. In the midst of her fantasy, she seems to experience a moment of lucidity, wondering how this could be true, questioning whether or not she is being fooled. It is at this moment that the mesmerist breaks his spell and Cabiria is returned to consciousness. Simultaneously, the world comes back into focus. A shot of the crowd shows them as noisy and as boisterous as ever. The band begins to play a raucous tune. Cabiria is horrified, exposed, embarrassed, reliving her worst fears of being seen as abnormal, as being made the object of a joke. In this moment, her fantasies and reality have been brought into conflict once more. She is seen and known by the audience in a way that violates the prickly facade she projects as self-defense. Their prurient pleasure in her discomfort emphasizes the voyeuristic nature of this exchange. This figurative undressing is more than Cabiria can bear.

Cabiria's experience with the mesmerist serves several narrative functions. It serves to reinforce the psychological dimension of the film's conflict, pitting Cabiria's fantasies of romantic love against her experiences, her inner-experience against the perception of others. Similarly, her unconscious revelation of her desires allows for the *real* Oscar to enter her life. After the show is done, Oscar appears, seemingly having materialized for the sole purpose of realizing all of Cabiria's desires. He is kind and respectful, well educated, and employed, the living embodiment of the bourgeois normalcy and respectability that has been Cabiria's ultimate goal from the outset. By heightening the sense of serenity that she experiences under hypnosis only to shatter it with the braying laughter of the crowd, Fellini foreshadows the deception and despair

that will characterize the film's final act. Oscar enters the film as a figure of profound ambiguity, thereby presenting Cabiria with an emotional conundrum that must be resolved: Is Oscar the fairytale prince of her dreams, brought into her life by happenstance or the machinations of fate, or is he just another opportunist like the man who threw her into the river to die? Having experienced the realization of her fantasies so viscerally while under the mesmerist's charm, it is of little surprise that Cabiria opts for the latter option, allowing herself to be whisked off her feet by the seemingly perfect Oscar. Just as Gelsomina's encounter with Osvaldo brings her to the edge of a frightening form of self-knowledge, so does Cabiria's descent into the mesmerist's world of fantasy bring her to a precipice, literal and figurative, wherein her fantasies must be reconciled with reality.

The conclusions of *La Strada* and *Le Notti di Cabiria* resolve their respective plots through moments of redemption, occurrences that allow major characters to recover their humanity. Though these endings are comparable in the manner that they extend empathetic understanding to characters, empathy is expressed differently in the two films due primarily to the manner in which the plotting moves towards resolution. Whereas Cabiria's moment of redemption finds her exactly where the film began, betrayed and left for dead by a lover, *La Strada* shifts focus in its brief final act, requiring the viewer to accept Zampano as the film's ultimate protagonist after Gelsomina's disappearance from the screen. The obvious contrasts between the characters of Zampano, a victimizer, and Cabiria, a victim, necessitate different approaches to their redemptions and can also be viewed in terms of Fellini's development of his own post-

neorealist sensibilities. Whereas Zampano's redemption is one of personal realization, a matter of moral reawakening, Cabiria's redemption requires a semi-fantastical intervention from outside forces that allows for the conflict between her desires and her social reality to be momentarily reconciled.

As *La Strada* draws towards its end, the character of Zampano is fully revealed in all his cruelty and selfishness. This revelation is accomplished through the deaths of Il Matto and Gelsomina, respectively. Whereas Il Matto meets his demise at Zampano's hands, Gelsomina is merely the victim of his indifference and unwillingness to make moral reckoning with the consequences of his actions. In the wake of Il Matto's killing, Gelsomina fully withdraws from reality. Alternately catatonic and hysterical, her presence becomes a burden that Zampano is no longer willing to shoulder, so he abandons her by the side of a snow-covered highway as she sleeps. The final scene shared by these two characters and the scene depicting Il Matto's death are strikingly similar. Just as Il Matto seemed to fall into a deep sleep, losing consciousness after a vicious blow to the head delivered by Zampano, so does Gelsomina's loss of consciousness present Zampano with his opportunity to abandon her. Faced with a tough choice, the strongman does the only thing he knows and takes to the road again, hoping that time and distance will separate him from accountability or recompense.

Zampano's escape hasn't been as clean as he might have hoped, however. When the film finds him again, he is weary and defeated, possessing none of the bravado that once defined him. His journeys have brought him once more to the sea, the location where he first met Gelsomina. Killing time before his daily performance, he wanders

absentmindedly and happens to hear a familiar tune, the very song that Gelsomina was taught by Il Matto, her theme. This chance encounter allows him to discover that Gelsomina survived her abandonment only to die a few months later, alone and anonymous. That afternoon, Zampano performs once more, barely mustering up the enthusiasm to complete his feats of strength. In the evening, he is drunk and belligerent, dragged screaming from a bar into the deserted streets. Wandering towards the ocean, he wades into the water and splashes himself before collapsing on the sand. Looking to the heavens, he experiences a moment of realization and begins to sob while gripping fruitlessly at the sand that slips between his fingers. As the camera retreats from Zampano, he is shown prostrated and alone against a backdrop of endless beach and sea. Zampano's moment of redemption entails the reclamation of his own humanity, his capacity to love and mourn. Only through the destruction of the angelic and selfless Gelsomina can the worldly and callous Zampano come to grips with the value of human life. In this final moment, the absent Gelsomina becomes almost messianic in her martyrdom. By her suffering, Zampano experiences a breakthrough. Though this epiphanic awakening comes too late to save the victims of his cruelty, it bears the suggestion that even the most irredeemable wretches possess the inherent capacity to rediscover some kernel of humanity deep inside themselves and, in doing so, be redeemed.

Whereas *La Strada* relegates Gelsomina's ultimate fate to the off-screen, in order to elevate her to the status of sainthood, *Le Notti di Cabiria* must follow its eponymous heroine to the culmination of her journey so that her fantasies of romantic

fulfilment and social acceptance can be completely dashed before she is redeemed through an intervention that seems to drastically alter the relationship between Cabiria and the world she inhabits as well as the diegetic structure that separates the character of Cabiria from the gaze of the viewer. Having hastily accepted Oscar's marriage proposal, Cabiria finds herself a long way from home on her honeymoon. It would seem that all of her most heartfelt desires have been realized and that she will soon begin a new life as the morally upstanding and faithful wife of a member of the petit bourgeois. On what begins as a romantic walk in the forest, Oscar reveals his true intentions as well as his cowardly inability to act on the devious schemes that have led him to this point. Standing by a cliffside overlooking a majestic body of water, Cabiria is robbed of her life's savings, threatened with death, and abandoned. The sublime beauty of the vista creates a startling contrast with her abject suffering as she begs for death, a fate preferable to the prospect of returning to her old life, penniless and homeless, to face the taunts and jeers of her peers. In both *La Strada* and *Le Notti di Cabiria*, the shores of bodies of water come to represent limit points, spaces where the extremes of human emotion and action can play themselves out, free from the social mores that would otherwise modulate them.

As Cabiria writhes in the leaves and dirt, she is even more desperate and betrayed than she was moments after being resuscitated in the film's opening sequence. As night begins to fall, Cabiria drags herself to her feet and begins to wander through the woods toward some unknown destination. As she approaches the road, a cheerful tune is heard, and Cabiria finds herself in the company of all manner of young

people, singing in unison and playing instruments after returning from a party. Without realizing it, Cabiria becomes enmeshed in their procession, surrounded by smiling, youthful faces. They look into her eyes and she looks back at them. She is greeted and accepted by them without comment. Having found the community and acceptance that she has longed for, her tears of pain turn to tears of joy as she looks about at the joy that surrounds her. Life's inherent beauty is reaffirmed. At the last instant, before the film fades to black, Cabiria looks directly into the camera and nods slightly, seeming to acknowledge its gaze. With this glance, Cabiria unsettles the relationship between viewer and viewed, unsettling both the diegesis of the film as well as the voyeuristic pleasures enjoyed by the audience.

Karl Schoonover reads this ending as one of irresolvable ambiguity, a disruption of the "typical unidirectional movement of meaning from text to viewer" that serves to bridge the distance between the viewer and the view (114). Such a means of direct address, defined by Schoonover as a sort of "pre-Godardian" intervention, serves to disrupt the strict diegetic structure observed by Italian neorealist films (115). If Zampano's redemption can be viewed as a mild violation of neorealism's principles in its spontaneity and psychological interiority, Cabiria's brief gaze into the camera's eye threatens to disrupt the entire premise of the neorealist cinema as a means of observation and reportage. Through *Le Notti di Cabiria*, Cabiria has frequently found herself to be the subject of spectacularity, the object of many gazes. In finally returning this gaze, Cabiria asserts her own self-worth and dignity, defying the observational gaze that has so often turned her suffering and degradation into its own amusement and

pleasure. In this brief moment, Fellini forecasts emergent forms of cinema in which the strict neorealist delineation between subject and observer, born, as Schoonover suggests, from the desire to develop a cinematic mode that could accurately represent Italy's destruction for an international viewership, would be rendered obsolete. Cabiria's crisis of self-perception and unrealized desire cannot be resolved through adherence to neorealist principles of story and character. Instead of abandoning Cabiria to her fate, as Zampano abandons Gelsomina, Fellini elects to discard the pretense of realism in order to fulfill her fantasies.

With *La Strada* and *Le Notti di Cabiria*, Fellini manages to reconfigure the basic elements of Italian neorealism into new forms that reflect the realities of life during Reconstruction. While maintaining a basic level of concern for the marginalized and downtrodden, the director opts for an approach to character and story that relies on internal, psychological experiences as a driving force, instead of the socio-historical forces that determine the fates of neorealism's subjects. Gelsomina and Cabiria are both victims of overriding forces far greater than themselves, economic and otherwise, but the viewer's experience of their struggles is always firmly situated in the perspective of the individual, caught up in the play of psychology and fantasy. Though both films trade in the sort of heart-wrenching tragedy that is the hallmark of neorealism's most renowned products, they maintain trajectories that arc towards redemption, on personal and spiritual terms, suggesting modes of experience incompatible with notions of socially determined realism. If the cinema of Reconstruction reflects the changing landscape of Italy following the cataclysm of the war, Fellini's films can be said to

demonstrate the emergence of new, individualistic modes of expression that would culminate in the ground-breaking masterpieces of Italian cinema in the 1960s. The era of reconstruction finds Fellini becoming Fellinian, developing the singular obsessions and abstractions that would become his trademark, building upon the foundation of Italian neorealism in order to produce new forms of cinema that could reflect the spirit of a particular age while remaining grounded in a humanistic concern for the dignity and intrinsic value of the individual.

CHAPTER IV: CRISES OF IDENTIFICATION: MICHELANGELO ANTONIONI'S *LE AMICHE*
AND *IL GRIDO* THROUGH THE LENS OF RECONSTRUCTION

By the mid-1950's, the cultural and political forces motivating Italy's reconstruction were in full swing. The economic boom was well underway, industrializing the countryside and giving rise to a robust and affluent middle class. Similarly, the Italian cinema found itself evolving as well. Directors such as Roberto Rossellini and Vittorio de Sica began to move away from the neorealist preoccupation with the war's aftermath and the socio-political discontent it sowed in favor of films that reflected the urbane, consumerist lifestyles that were propagated in Italy's expanding municipalities. Though neorealist aesthetics would continue to exert a strong influence over Italian cinema well into the 1960's, the cinema of reconstruction reflects a clear shift in identification away from the downtrodden, indigent figures depicted by neorealism in favor of bourgeois subjects whose travails are more personal than political or economic. Similarly, films of the reconstruction era often include story elements that suggest the unsettling of traditional gender roles as a source of significant anxiety in Italian culture. These developing identities and the crises they entail are reflected clearly in Michelangelo Antonioni's last films of the 1950's: *Le Amiche* (1955) and *Il Grido* (1957). Though markedly different in tone, subject, and visual style, these films can be said to demonstrate Antonioni's artistic maturation, setting the stage for his most accomplished works, as well as attempts on the filmmaker's part to work through moral and psychological problems endemic to the era of reconstruction.

Prior to beginning work on *Le Amiche* and *Il Grido*, Antonioni had already amassed a small, but stylistically varied, filmography that served to establish him as one of the most promising young filmmakers in Italy. In Jonathan Rosenbaum's review of the rarely seen *La Signora Senza Camelie* (1953), he notes that even lesser works by Antonioni demonstrate the director's "genius for composing a scene," highlighting his use of a mobile camera to capture the bustling action of a film set, as well as the film's thematic and formal dichotomy between the glamorous public life of a movie starlet and the increasing loneliness and alienation she experiences in private (Rosenbaum). Though his talent and artistic temperament are already somewhat apparent in his earliest efforts, Antonioni's final works of the 1950's demonstrate indubitably his ability to balance concerns of genre and plotting against the cinematic experimentation that was central to the development of Italian cinema under reconstruction. The interplay of generic concepts and Antonionian visual style are essential to a consideration of the two films at hand, particularly in regard to *Le Amiche*, which displays a much more obvious generic identity than its counterpart. Despite their many points of divergence, *Le Amiche* and *Il Grido* can be read, within the context of Antonioni's overall filmography, as key components in the interplay between form and content that is central to the critical appeal of the internationally acclaimed masterworks that would establish Antonioni as an arthouse icon. In order to understand the relationship between these films and the director's overall artistic trajectory, as well as the historical development of Italian cinema as a whole, we must consider the critical strategies that have allowed

for an auteurist reading of Antonioni, with particular regard for his unique visual-spatial compositions and their relation to questions of theme.

Relative to many of his contemporaries in the Italian cinema, the body of critical literature devoted to Antonioni's stylistic and thematic preoccupations is vast and varied, touching on all manner of critical and theoretical modes and perspectives. Such readings of the director's filmography are invariably predicated upon the content and quality of the director's most celebrated films: namely, his four collaborations with muse and companion Monica Vitti. This grouping of films, sometimes considered a tetralogy, served to establish Antonioni's position within the cinematic pantheon and thereby occupy a privileged position within the director's oeuvre. Given their highly idiosyncratic nature and their long-lasting influence on filmmakers who came of age in the 1960s and 1970s, it is no surprise that the stylistic and thematic innovations they embody have come to define the Antonionian aesthetic. The immense attention afforded to Antonioni's films of the 1960s has resulted in a dearth of writing devoted to his earlier films. By engaging with *Le Amiche* and *Il Grido* through the context of the era of reconstruction, this chapter will explore the manner in which these films comprise a crucial stage in the director's career, as one of the great modernist auteurs of the mid-century.

Despite the diverse approaches applied to his filmography, ranging from the most quotidian criticism to every imaginable theoretical paradigm, an overview of the literature devoted to Michelangelo Antonioni reveals key terms and categorizations that emerge as definitive of Antonionian style. In "The Object Antonioni," Angelo Restivo

catalogs the “most often noted marks of [Antonioni’s] authorship” as an obsessive concern with framing, the prevalence of *temps mort* i.e., sequences that seem to serve no purpose in advancing the plot, and a tendency to offer repeated views of non-human objects (116). In a general sense, this brief list encompasses the major formal concerns that auteurist readings of Antonioni have privileged. Other commonplace observations about Michelangelo Antonioni might include his key role in the modernization of Italian cinema, his stylistic tendency towards what András Bálint Kovács calls “analytical minimalism,” and his reappropriation of the genre of melodrama, a stylistic shift most often connected to his retreat from the model of realism and objectivity embodied by Italian neorealism (149). From these critical generalizations, a portrait emerges: Antonioni is configured as a cinematic modernist whose filmmaking “addresses the issue of the object of the cinematic enterprise itself” (Restivo 101); a minimalist who “strives with cool and passionless distance to record vigilantly, precisely and insightfully the world which seems to have neither meaning nor purpose in his pictures” (Winter 240); and a crafter of open-ended plots, “where narrative closure is resolutely denied, in favor of an openness that attempts to register the emergence of some new thing, new emotion, new mode of being” (Restivo 120). So that we might understand the development of these traits and obsessions in their immediate historical context of Italy’s reconstruction following the Second World War, we must return to the films that facilitated that development and chart their relationship to the auteurist masterpieces they preceded, as well as the generic and aesthetic precursors that informed them.

At first glance, *Le Amiche* and *Il Grido* may appear to be highly dissimilar films; while the former hews relatively faithfully to the model of the classical melodrama or woman's film, the latter clearly announces itself as a modernist text, denoting a sea change moment in Antonioni's filmmaking. These easy categorizations are reflected in the critical literature in that *Le Amiche*, when it is acknowledged at all, tends to be grouped with Antonioni's early films, whereas *Il Grido*, slightly better represented than its counterpart, is regarded as a precursor to the alienation tetralogy. While this periodization allows for a simplistic chronology of Antonioni's development as a filmmaker, it overlooks key aspects of both films, downplaying the complex interplay of influences, neorealist and otherwise, that served to catalyze and crystalize the director's immensely influential style at the end of the 1950s. In order to avoid reproducing this reductive dichotomy between mature and immature films, i.e., films deserving in-depth analysis and films worthy only of brief citation, this account of Antonioni's final films of the reconstruction era will demonstrate that *Le Amiche* and *Il Grido* can be read as attempts, successful to varying degrees, to develop a visual language capable of enunciating the experience of Italy's reconstruction and the reordering of Italian society that such a process entailed.

Though the subjects of this reading deal with entirely different milieus and utilize different formal techniques so as to effectively represent them, these films display a similar structure. Both *Le Amiche* and *Il Grido* are obviously circular in construction, beginning with an inciting incident and concluding in a manner that deliberately revisits and resolves that incident. This structural similarity extends to the level of theme as well

in that both films end with the suicide of a major character, seemingly frustrated by his or her inability to meaningfully reconcile the issues that initially give rise to the conflict in their respective plots. While both films can be interpreted as broadly circular in nature, the relationship between this circularity and the frustrations it involves is modulated by key aspects of plotting and the concerns of both films. Whereas *Il Grido* is a film thoroughly suffused with the subjectivity of its protagonist, Aldo, a tortured and confused man who ultimately falls victims to the aforementioned suicide, *Le Amiche* is focalized primarily through the character of Clelia, an outsider to the environment in which the action unfolds who serves primarily as an audience-insert bearing witness to the callous, amoral actions of the social circle surrounding Rosetta, a young woman whose impending suicide looms over the film throughout. However, it is worth noting here that *Le Amiche's* usage of Clelia as a strong, unwavering presence at the center of the plot serves to resolve elements of the film that might be objectionable or threatening. The strong moral themes of *Le Amiche* establish it as a mixed product of classical and modernist influences, as opposed to *Il Grido*, which fully embraces a more modernist approach to issues of morality and character motivation.

Circular plotting and the themes of ambiguity and intransigence that it reinforces are central to the understanding of Antonioni as well as the cinema of reconstruction. Though this type of plotting is often remarked upon directly as an example of Antonioni's preference for films that could be considered open texts, resulting in what Rainer Winter, in his article "The Politics of Aesthetics in the Work of Michelangelo Antonioni: An Analysis Following Jacques Rancière" (2014), calls "decentered, elliptical

narrative structures which remove the drama from the plot," it can also be extended to a consideration of the formal aspects of Antonionian style (240). In their article "Cinematic Space in Rome's Disabitato: Between Metropolis and Terrain Vague in the Films of Fellini, Antonioni, and Pasolini" (2011), an account of the importance of physical space that is ill-defined and disconnected from social activity to Italian cinema, Manuela Mariani and Patrick Barron write that, "These various forms of *terrain vague* seem to indicate snarls of desire, loss, and change," representing physical as well as emotional barriers to character movement and plot development (322). This description, particularly evocative of Aldo's wanderings in *Il Grido*, points to the specific interplay between the psychological and the formal or spatial that is central to Antonioni's evocation of alienation and ennui. It also serves as a reminder of the relationship between Antonioni's obsession with documenting the object world, often noted as a particular permutation of cinematic realism, and what Pier Paolo Pasolini termed "free indirect discourse," or the ability to evoke the psychological, emotional subjectivity of characters through the poesis of the cinematic image. Though the theoretical schema referred to in the preceding remarks has been developed in response to Antonioni's auteurist masterworks of the 1960s, it can also serve to untangle the complex relationships between the objects and environs of modernity and the psychological states of humans who interact with them, as they are evinced in *Le Amiche* and *Il Grido*.

Unlike the majority of Antonioni's films, *Le Amiche* is a literary adaptation, drawing its source material from Cesare Pavese's 1949 novella *Tra Donne Sole*, a text whose setting in the immediate post-war period is traded for mid-1950s Turin in the

filmic version. In adapting Pavese's original text for the screen, Antonioni transforms what is described by Peter Lešnik in "Pavese, Antonioni, and the Spectres of a Silenced Past: Adaption and the Transmission of Historical Trauma" (2019) as a literary treatment of the traumas of fascism and their subsequent repression, as reflected in the novella's representation of powerlessness in the face of an "amnesiac culture," into a melodrama of womanly morals with a romantic subplot (4). The film primarily concerns the relationship of Clelia, a Turin-born woman who travels from Rome to manage a salon in her hometown, to a circle of wealthy women, the titular *Amiche*, whose lives of leisure and pleasure-seeking have rendered them cynical and cruel. Clelia is inaugurated into this social group by the attempted suicide of Rosetta, an impressionable young woman, in the hotel room next to her own. Rosetta's suicide attempt leads to the introduction of Momina, the domineering matriarch of the social circle who embodies all the cynicism and amorality of the bourgeoisie in one person. Momina acts as the film's primary antagonist and serves as a foil to the hardworking and sensible Clelia.

In one sense, the film's conflict involves a struggle for influence over Rosetta between competing maternal figures: Clelia and Momina. The source of Rosetta's suicidal ideations is an unrequited infatuation with the self-centered and resentful artist Lorenzo, whose own relationship with the ceramicist Nene is strained by her burgeoning success and his inability to support himself by means of his paintings. The basic development of the plot proceeds from the romantic triangle formed by Rosetta-Lorenzo-Nene, with Momina encouraging Rosetta to pursue an affair with Lorenzo despite the chaos it might bring. Besides this love affair, a romantic subplot evolves

between Clelia and the clean-cut architect's assistant Carlo, whom she meets at the construction site for the salon she is to manage. Though several scenes in the film are dedicated to the development of this plotline, it is nonetheless entirely secondary to Clelia's dealings with Momina and Rosetta and has very little bearing on the film overall until the coda following Rosetta's suicide, wherein Clelia is forced to decide whether she will choose her career or remain in Turin and pursue a relationship with Carlo. Much of the film's tonal inconsistencies can be said to stem from the Clelia-Carlo subplot, as it dramatizes a rather generic storyline of a working woman forced to choose between career and love in the midst of a larger film where the conflict between personal and professional commitments is quickly overshadowed by the melodrama enveloping Rosetta and her doomed relationship with Lorenzo. Nevertheless, it does provide opportunities for the development of Clelia's characterization outside of her dealings with *le amiche* as well as ruminations on her poor upbringing in Turin's slums, underlining the hints of class conflict between the protagonist and Momina.

The thematic elements produced by this plotting largely correspond to the social and economic differences between Clelia and the Turinese women she comes to meet. As the framework of the film overall is undoubtedly a moral one, these differences are typically expressed through the behavior of the characters, which Clelia is allowed to observe with the ineffectual disapprobation of an outsider amongst old friends. Though Clelia has roots in Turin, she has spent much of her adult life in Rome, building a career in the fashion industry that eventually brings her back to her hometown. In this respect, *Le Amiche* subverts a trope in Italian cinema wherein characters travel from the

provinces to Rome, only to find it a city of cynical exploitation and iniquity. Alternatively, this film dramatizes the protagonist's journey from Rome to Turin as one that brings her into contact with deleterious moral influences, ultimately requiring her to return to Rome and reclaim the normalcy she knew there. A liminal figure, native to Turin but also foreign to the cultural milieu of its upper-class, Clelia is simultaneously enmeshed in and distanced from the moral rot affecting Momina and Rosetta. This disparity allows her to exist as an unproblematic protagonist whose proximity to malfeasance and poor judgment never threatens the viewer's sympathy for her attempts to steer Rosetta away from her inevitable demise.

Clelia's status as manager, though not owner, of a salon provides her with the upward social mobility necessary to come into contact with Momina and her associates, while also maintaining her separateness from these wealthy, unemployed women. This class differentiation also becomes inscribed at the level of morals in that Clelia's professional status becomes an emblem of her hardworking, honest nature, in opposition to the enervative effect that lives of luxury and diversion seem to have had on the moral character of the Turinese women. This opposition is reinforced when Clelia attempts to give Rosetta a job at the salon in hopes that meaningful employment will distract her from her romantic woes and perhaps motivate her to steer clear of Lorenzo. Nonetheless, this effort fails because Rosetta lacks any pressing obligation to keep a job as her material needs are entirely satisfied by the immense wealth of her parents. The film's insistence on the importance of Clelia's career aspiration and the necessity of her continued employment provide the story with a sense of socio-economic realism. These

story elements also afford an opportunity for Antonioni to ruminate on the burgeoning fashion industry and the attendant issues of image, commodification, and consumption, foreshadowing his obsession with the ephemera of bourgeois culture. In marrying the moral certainty of a more traditional film to a melodramatic depiction of the vacuity of the wealthy, Antonioni takes important steps towards the fully modernist melodramas that would define the most successful period of his career. As such, the characterization of protagonist Clelia can be seen as a middle-ground between the working women of traditional genre fare whose station in life would locate them firmly within the proletariat class and the characters typified by Vittì's roles in Antonioni's films whose material needs are always pre-satisfied or entirely disregarded.

Whereas *Le Amiche* exhibits certain incompatibilities between story and style, demonstrating the difficulty of adapting a modernist text into a coherent film, *Il Grido* exhibits a more resolutely modern sensibility in plotting and presentation while also returning to a terrain central to the legacy of neorealism: the Po River Valley. The misty, muddy shores of the Po are the subject of one of Antonioni's earliest film projects, the short documentary *Gente del Po* (1947), which is often cited as an early example of proto-neorealist techniques as well as early evidence of Antonioni's fascination with landscape rendered through lingering shots that seem to stretch far beyond what traditional editing would allow. The director returned to this setting for *Il Grido*, staging this tale of alienation and a search for meaning against an otherworldly backdrop of grey and undifferentiated landscape, reflecting the protagonist's mental state through the features of the natural world he inhabits, giving the film's images a poetic resonance

that sharply distinguishes them from the quasi-documentarian style of neorealism. // *Grido* tells the story of Aldo, a mechanic living and working in Goriano, who leaves behind his life of relative comfort and stability to roam the countryside after his long-time mistress announces her intention to leave him for a younger man. This sudden severing of their relationship coincides with Irma learning that her husband has been killed while working in Australia, setting the stage for the couple to legitimize their daughter, Rosina. Cut adrift by Irma, Aldo sets off, Rosina in tow, to attempt to build a new life. He visits a succession of women, including an old flame, only to find himself drawn back to Goriano where he ultimately falls to his death from a tower at the facility where he once worked. Even more perfectly circular than *Le Amiche*, *Il Grido* demonstrates Aldo's profound inability to make sense of Irma's rejection or to find a new way of being in the world. His wanderings, which make up the majority of the film, are thereby rendered futile, serving only to draw him inexorably back to the scene of his initial trauma.

The death of Irma's husband, which might have facilitated the long-awaited marriage of Aldo and Irma, serves only to catalyze Aldo's lonesome wanderings along the Po. This failure of a plot development to facilitate an expected outcome establishes a pattern wherein the film disallows any positive development in Aldo's circumstances. The film begins with the traumatic dissolution of a romantic relationship and draws its story from the purgatorial aftermath. Aldo attempts to explore several possible avenues for happiness, represented by a succession of women, only to find himself abandoning each after a time for reasons that he does not seem to fully understand. He attempts to

recapture the past by visiting an old flame, briefly lives with the proprietor of a roadhouse, in a sequence eerily reminiscent of another vision of existential crisis at the Po, Visconti's *Ossessione* (1943), and even attempts to woo a prostitute. Despite all of these efforts, he is unable to reconcile himself with the reality of Irma's absence. Like a ghost, he wanders through a wasteland at the margins of the modern world, returning home to the relative modernity of Goriano so that he might die and find peace at last. More than Antonioni's preceding films, *Il Grido* is a chronicle of man's emotional and intellectual struggle to make sense of a changing, modernizing world. Antonioni returns to the dream-space of the Po in order to document the terrain of the soul, suggesting that the emotional and narrative structures previously used to make meaning of the world have become woefully obsolete.

Le Amiche dramatizes a moral conflict between women in a milieu wherein they hold equal, if not greater, power than the men they encounter. Though heteronormative romances provide the narrative momentum for the plot, these male-female relationships are inevitably tainted or unsustainable due to outside forces or psychological pressures. Given the gender dynamics on display in this film, it is worth considering how this representation corresponds to the theorization of the woman's film as a distinctive sub-category of Hollywood cinema. Mary Ann Doane defines the woman's film as a useful, if not fully generic, category, demarcated primarily by the exploration of transgressive female subjectivity that typically concludes with the reaffirmation of traditional gender roles through the loss of the protagonist's autonomy or freedom (qtd. in Pravadelli 103). The advent of the woman's film coincides with the

general trend toward greater gender parity brought about by wartime necessities and the expansion of the labor market. As such, the woman's film was at its peak in the 1930's and 1940's, declining in popularity as the 1950's brought about a reaffirmation of the gendered division of labor and a temporary foreclosure on the economic opportunities an open job market brought to women. Given this historical context, it becomes clear that the woman's film is intrinsically related to issues of economic and interpersonal autonomy, amplified as they were by the upheaval brought about by a global military conflict and the subsequent removal of most adult men from the labor market. Despite a tendency in the woman's film to explore transgressive subjectivities while ultimately denying women fulfillment outside of patriarchal structures of marriage and motherhood, the woman's film still functions as a nexus of gender discourse in the immediate post-war period, as it gives rise to new images of womanhood divorced from the traditional context of hearth and home.

The character of Clelia fits neatly into the post-war context of the woman's film. She is depicted throughout *Le Amiche* as a competent, intelligent worker, capable of ensuring that the construction of her salon is completed on time and innately attuned to the financial concerns related to the fashion industry. Similarly, she is shown to be lacking in interpersonal relationships, both homosocial and heterosexual, because of her commitment to her work and the dislocation it has required. This conflict suggests a trade-off between personal and professional fulfillment, a common trope expressed in films that explore women's experiences in the workplace. The primary differences between Antonioni's film and more classical examples can be attributed to the former's

keen awareness of social class and its relationship to the development of women's autonomy in post-war Italy. After all, the other women depicted in the film are not shown to be particularly dependent on masculine support, economic or otherwise. Momina, the essential embodiment of upper-class womanhood, is separated from her husband and lives completely free from any restraint that he might impose. She has her own luxuriously furnished apartment and takes as many lovers as she pleases. In exploring the possibility of a relationship with the working-class Carlo, Clelia comes closer to a genuinely fulfilling partnership than any other character in the film, even briefly considering the possibility of long-term coupling when it appears that she might remain in Turin after losing her job. Though the Clelia-Carlo relationship receives far less emphasis than the moral drama of Rosetta-Lorenzo-Nene, it represents a somewhat radical rejection of traditional depictions of feminine fulfillment as inseparably tied to heterosexual romance.

The dynamic of Clelia's relationship with Carlo seems to suggest a reversal of the trajectory charted in Doane's definition of the woman's film. The transgressive alternative that Clelia explores before returning to normalcy is romance and marriage. The tragic events depicted in the film bring her to a point of emotional crisis, as depicted in Clelia's excoriation of Momina and her role in Rosetta's untimely death at the salon, thereby dispelling the possibility that she will be able to maintain her role as operator of the business. After all, Clelia's actions throughout the film reaffirm her employment as a reflection, if not source, of her strength of character. This distinction is what most definitely separates *Le Amiche* from its generic precursors. The film's emphasis on

Clelia's professional role as a central aspect of her identity that cannot be abandoned in the service of romance reinforces the notion that it is a film that takes seriously Clelia's self-presentation as an industrious member of the managerial class, even if the film's melodramatic overtones sometimes distract from this aspect of the plot. This notion of the importance of professionalization as a means through which women can find purpose outside of romance and marriage is underlined when Clelia offers Rosetta a job, hoping that it will give her a *raison d'être* outside of romantic fulfillment. However, Clelia fails to anticipate the young woman's imperviousness to the freedoms and economic opportunities offered by a career. Clelia's paradigm of hard work and diligence is incommensurate with Rosetta's life of luxury and diversion. Whereas Clelia can only engage in a romantic affair or become entangled in interpersonal drama in the brief moments of leisure afforded by her busy schedule, Rosetta is free to throw her whole body and soul into her relationship with Lorenzo, despite all indications that he is incapable of returning her feelings. As such, *Le Amiche's* anti-romantic conclusion is another direct expression of this class difference between Clelia and the women of Turin.

In considering *Le Amiche's* treatment of gender in a romantic and economic context, the character of Lorenzo emerges as a particularly interesting study of masculinity in crisis. Unlike Momina and her peers, Lorenzo does have a career of sorts: he is a modernist painter who struggles to find a market for his work. Despite the hardships that this struggle implies, he and his partner Nene experience no economic privation. The couple seems to fit seamlessly into the social circle explored by the film,

their status as artists smoothing over whatever social incompatibilities might present themselves. The crisis in the Lorenzo-Nene relationship is primarily one of professional jealousy; Lorenzo is unable to make peace with Nene's success as a ceramicist and grows to resent her profoundly as his own self-loathing intensifies. Far from embodying a suave lothario who preys upon the innocent Rosetta, Lorenzo is presented as a profoundly confused man, unable to make headway in his personal relationships or his professional career. In fact, his relationship with Rosetta does not begin until he learns that her unrequited love for him was at least part of the reason for her first suicide attempt, suggesting that their affair is sustained by Lorenzo's own desire to feel needed by someone less functional than himself. Even when Nene assents to his relationship with Rosetta and all obstacles are cleared from his path, he lashes out at those around him and rejects the devoted, lovestruck Rosetta, an event that directly precipitates her death by suicide. If Clelia embodies the modern woman, self-possessed, thoughtful, and in control of her emotions, Lorenzo underscores the sorry state of the modern man, insecure and full of impotent rage that renders him incapable of loving or being loved.

Whereas *Le Amiche* explores the personal and professional relationships inherent to modern womanhood, *Il Grido* focuses entirely on masculinity in crisis, a theme embodied in the character of Aldo. At the film's start, Aldo begins an ascent into despair and ennui that continues unabated until his death. Before Irma breaks off their relationship, Aldo possesses all of the traits that one associates with masculine fulfillment: a home, a beautiful romantic partner, a steady job, and a child. However, Irma's rejection of the suggestion that they should be married sends Aldo into a tailspin,

seemingly shattering his preconceived notions of self in the process. The loss of his lover leads Aldo to abandon the trappings of his relatively comfortable life in favor of an itinerant existence on the boundaries of modern life. Despite his rejection of the village of Goriano and the stability he had attained there, Aldo clings to his relationship with daughter Rosina, and resolves to bring her with him on his circular journey. Eventually, the role of fatherhood becomes more than Aldo can bear, and, at the urging of a new lover, he sends Rosina back to her mother in Goriano, abandoning the last link to the life he once knew. Shedding all the roles (father, husband, worker) that gave his life structure and teleology, the protagonist is rendered anonymous and spectral, bereft of substantive connection to either individual or collective identity. He becomes hollow and effervescent, dissolving into thin air when his emotional malady pangs him and re-substantiating himself elsewhere when the film's elliptical narration resumes.

Aldo's slow disintegration is configured in the film as entirely internal, following the external cause of Irma's separation from him. In "Oedipus on the Po: Antonioni's *Il Grido*" (1984), Christopher Orr notes that Aldo must be considered a bourgeois subject, despite his apparent milieu, due to the ways in which he is constructed as a character outside of time or place (10). Despite the trappings of his working-class life in Goriano, when Aldo sets off on his journey, he engages in a series of attempted identifications, each failing, that result in his complete alienation from the world at large. Orr connects this alienation to the myth of Oedipus, suggesting that Aldo's trauma results from his inability to reconcile his identity as a man with Irma's exercise of agency in rejecting him (11). When she leaves him for a younger man, with whom she eventually has a child,

Aldo is cut off from his maternal figure and spends the rest of the film exploring substitutes for Irma, only to find them lacking or unsatisfying. Everywhere he travels, he discovers opportunities, romantic and economic. In visiting his ex-lover Elvia, he finds her more than willing to resume their relationship in a village where his skills as a mechanic are in high demand. He abandons Elvia, nonetheless. Similarly, when he finds himself at a random gas station, he takes its owner, Virginia, as his lover. In short order, they dispel the obstacles to their romance, Virginia's father and Rosina, respectively, only for Aldo to set off once more. In this sense, the film highlights Aldo's inability to move beyond the trauma of his separation from Irma despite the many opportunities that might facilitate some sort of positive development in his life.

Unlike the protagonists of neorealism who are thwarted by historical and economic forces, Aldo is a tragic hero suffering from a psychological malaise, so intense and all-encompassing as to render him incapable of anything more than fleeting pleasure. Peter Lešnik uses adaptation theory to trace the lineage of the trans-historical trauma of the Second World War, as expressed in Pavese's *Tra Donna Sole*, through Antonioni's films subsequent to *Le Amiche*. In highlighting the efforts of post-war Italian institutions to repress the trauma of the war, Lešnik suggests that Antonioni adapts aspects of Pavesian characters who exist in "an existential and historical in-betweenness," caught in the midst of a reconstruction premised upon the erasure of the legacy of fascism. In respect to this critical position, Aldo becomes a "spectre of a radical social fragmentation, and of an insurmountable temporal and existential intransitivity," an expression of "the generalized impossibility within the Italian post-war society to

smoothly attune to the designs of institutionalized oblivion” (Lešnik 8). Though Aldo’s sufferings are affective, rather than economic, his inability to achieve meaningful action or convalescence renders him a potent symbol of reconstruction-era Italy and the collective trauma of the Italian populace.

The opening of each film establishes Antonioni’s visual idiom. As James S. Williams notes in “The Rhythms of Life: An Appreciation of Michelangelo Antonioni, Extreme Aesthete of the Real” (2008), Antonioni’s camera seems to eliminate the traditional hierarchy between human and non-human elements of the *mise en scene*, using such techniques as deceptive point-of-view shots, short focal lengths, and deliberately artificial framing to cause the viewer to ponder the relationships between objects, landscapes, and humans (53). The examples of *Le Amiche* and *Il Grido* are well-suited to this description because the former expresses Antonioni’s burgeoning fascination with consumer goods and the banal ephemera of modern life and the latter exemplifies his use of landscape as a symbol of alienation and existential angst. Though both films contain sequences that could be used to demonstrate either of these tendencies in Antonioni’s visual compositions, this bifurcated approach invites a fuller understanding of the distinctive qualities of both films and their relationships to Antonioni’s filmography overall.

Le Amiche’s opening establishes all of the important narrative dynamics that define the film, introducing Clelia and the supporting characters and outlining the subtleties of their interpersonal relationships. The first shot following the opening credits finds Clelia drawing a bath and gazing into a mirror. Mirrors and other reflective

surfaces are practically ubiquitous in this film, serving to foreground the character's own consciousness of image or vanity and offering alternate, refractory vantages that suggest multiple points of view from which the action might be surveyed. Clelia's bathing routine is interrupted by a maid who needs access to the adjoining room. As she navigates the divided space of her hotel room, Clelia is often framed in doorways and other architectural features. Antonioni's camera draws our attention to the winding paths the characters must take to navigate such a compartmentalized space, which is dominated by furnishings and the functional demands of the private-public space of the hotel setting. From the next room a scream is heard, and a frontal shot depicts the maid running from the neighboring room, shouting "My God, she's dead!" while Clelia looks on. The camera's angle prevents us from gaining any new information about what has happened in the next room. We are divorced from Clelia's viewpoint by her prominence in the frame, but we have no more information than she does about the fate that has befallen her neighbor. When she runs to the doorway that has just been vacated by the maid, the camera remains behind, depicting Clelia's shocked reaction but not the object of her gaze. As Clelia begins to walk into the room, a cut is used to follow her. The next image we see is that of Rosetta's body in bed, a sight immediately occluded as Clelia's path carries her, out-of-focus and indistinct, directly across the camera line. Calmly checking the body for a pulse, Clelia picks up the phone and requests a doctor, establishing that Rosetta is still alive and might yet be saved. In the background, Rosetta sleeps peacefully, fully unaware of the ballyhoo her attempted self-destruction has caused. Shortly thereafter, Momina arrives at the hotel, enlisting Clelia in a conspiracy

that uncovers Lorenzo as the source of Rosetta's heartache, thereby setting into motion the events that will lead to a second, successful suicide attempt and Clelia's retreat from Turin.

This opening scenario artfully establishes the dominant characterizations that drive the plot, alongside the camera techniques that define the film's visual style. Clelia is shown to be resolute, proactive, and sensible, traits reinforced by both her calm and rational reaction to the discovery of Clelia's body as well as her practical, but fashionable manner of dress. Similarly, our first view of Rosetta is that of an inert corpse, entirely passive, yet overwhelmingly beautiful in a white lace gown, itself a symbol of innocence and impending matrimony. Though the camera's point of view is entirely bound by the confines of the spaces inhabited by the characters, it suggests nothing of the subjective vantagepoint of Clelia or any other character. Instead, the camera's viewpoint denotes a detached, narratorial perspective that underlines the opacity of the characters' motives and psychological states. This distanced relationship between viewer and character is doubled within the narrative by Clelia's own position in relation to Rosetta and her friends. The ambiguity of motive and emotion fostered by the cinematography reflects Clelia's own ambivalence toward the social scene in Turin. Simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by the glamorous Momina and the modern amorality she represents, Clelia vacillates between detached indifference and active advocacy for Rosetta's well-being, both physical and moral. When the character of Momina is introduced, her costuming suggests an entirely different set of priorities than those embodied by Clelia. Bedecked in an elegant fur coat and pillbox hat, Momina's

demeanor suggests extravagant wealth and privilege. The veil that covers her face foreshadows her predilection for duplicity and deceit. Momina's type is immediately obvious, before she utters a single word. Her concern over Rosetta's fate is one of morbid curiosity, as opposed to genuine care for her friend's well-being. Momina's acquaintance with Clelia allows the latter to be drawn into the microcosm wherein the action will take place. That the action seems to unfold around Rosetta, intimately connected to her actions but somehow indifferent to her fate, is underscored throughout the film. Though Rosetta's suicide attempts bookend the plot, it is the intertwining narratives of Clelia's personal and professional development that dominate the film, straying from her personage only when it is absolutely necessary.

Il Grido's opening similarly wastes little time in establishing its major characterizations and central conflict. As the credits roll, Irma makes her way through the hazy streets of Goriano, a factory town whose regimented flats stand in contrast to its ancient cobblestone streets. She learns the news of her husband's passing and heads immediately to the factory where Aldo works. Aldo is called down from the top of a large tower, the same tower from which he will plunge to his death. Before he can reach the bottom, Irma flees to their home. When Aldo arrives, Irma is nowhere to be found. Their daughter, Rosina, arrives and Aldo tends to her. Irma reappears and delivers the news of her husband's passing to Aldo. Aldo is overjoyed at first, believing that he and Irma are finally free to be married and legitimize their relationship. Irma seems sad and distant. It is only after the couple has stepped out of doors that Irma can communicate her true intentions: she is terminating her relationship with Aldo. Aldo is immediately

thrown into a state of confusion, remarking on the futility of life and all of his endeavors thus far. From this moment forward, Aldo's attitude towards Irma vacillates between impotent rage and desire for reconciliation. Irma immediately sets about her daily chores, gathering the objects necessary to provide a meal for Rosina. Aldo attempts repeatedly to engage Irma in a conversation about what has gone wrong in their relationship, but she is distant, unreachable. Irma flees from the house once more, with Aldo in pursuit. He attempts to win her favor with gifts of fine handbags and jewelry, but Irma will not be swayed. Aldo seeks counsel from his mother while Irma seeks reassurance from her sister. Aldo's mother is cold and indifferent to his plight, suggesting that she is ashamed of the fact that her son has fathered a child out of wedlock. In their final confrontation, Aldo brutally slaps Irma in the town square, in full view of dozens of onlookers, and attempts to assert his dominance over her. Irma remarks that this incident is truly the end of their relationship. They go their separate ways.

This brief summary of *Il Grido's* opening compresses the events that pass over the course of the first twenty-three minutes of the film, a stretch that is considerably longer than the opening scene in *Le Amiche*. That is because the former scene is elongated by shots of Aldo's pursuit of Irma, through various locations, traversing the strange, fog-cloaked city of Goriano. From the film's first frame, this oppressive, gloomy atmosphere impresses itself upon the viewer. Before viewers sense the plot's trajectory or the relationship between Aldo and Irma, Goriano is depicted in this manner. This representation of Goriano suggests that the depiction of the landscape as a desolate

and ghostly one is not merely a reflection of Aldo's inner-turmoil. Instead, it could be said to suggest the profound indifference of the environment to Aldo's sufferings. In the long, dialogue-less takes that depict Aldo's feeble attempts to reconcile with his partner, every aspect of the frame's composition suggests that the protagonist must bear the weight of his emotional distress alone. No one (and no thing) can empathize with him. Whether it be the townspeople of Goriano or the landscape itself, no aspect of the larger world that he inhabits seems to respond to Aldo's attempts to provoke any sort of reaction. He is fully powerless in the face of this existential crisis. Aldo attempts to relate to Irma through a variety of means: buying her gifts, engaging her in conversation, and even violently assaulting her. Each of these attempts at connection serves only to alienate him further. The possibility of meaningful action is foreclosed upon before the film's story unfolds.

Aldo's impotence in the face of Irma's rejection establishes the film's discursive treatment of masculinity, and its relationship to femininity. Though Aldo will go on to encounter women who offer him solace and attempt to genuinely connect to him, the figure of Irma, seemingly dismissive and indifferent toward Aldo's pain, looms large throughout the film. Offering few reasons for the termination of their relationship, Irma can only obliquely refer to an insurmountable emotional distance between them, which renders further efforts at continuing their relationship pointless. When Aldo seeks comfort from another maternal figure, his own mother, he finds her similarly dismissive. She can only scold her son for cohabitating with Irma, a married woman, and producing an illegitimate child. Only Rosina, a symbol of childlike innocence and the object of

Aldo's paternal affection, seems to offer the wounded Aldo any succor. Rosina's important role in the first part of the film suggests the centrality of Aldo's identification as a father. Having been stripped of the identity of husband/lover by Irma, he rejects his identity as a breadwinner by quitting his job at the factory. However, he clings to his fatherly duties to Rosina as a final remnant of the life he once knew. For the remainder of the film, the trajectory of Aldo's existence will be determined by women, some benevolent and some largely indifferent to his well-being. In an effort to resolve the crisis invoked by Irma's rejection, Aldo seeks to assert his wounded masculinity in new forms and onto new objects. These ultimately unsuccessful attempts demonstrate his inability to progress emotionally beyond the traumatic break suggested by the film's opening, demonstrating that all the subsequent events depicted in the film must be interpreted in light of the figure of Irma and her relationship to Aldo.

In their beginnings, *Le Amiche* and *Il Grido* establish basic problematics that sustain the dramatic structures of the films: Rosetta's attempted suicide and Irma's decision to sever her relationship with Aldo, respectively. The director's tendency towards radical, open texts that deny traditional notions of closure or resolution is often noted as one of his most distinctive and influential idiosyncrasies. Though the circular structures exhibited by the two films at hand do offer a greater sense of closure than any of Antonioni's films of the 1960s, their plots are inscribed with what Lešnik identifies as banality saturated with "ominous incomprehensibility" (7). This incomprehensibility, expressed through methods particular to each film, becomes most apparent when the plotting seems to approach a sense of resolution, only to pull away

from it at the last moment. The ambivalence displayed in these films toward traditional notions of closure also reflects the general trend in reconstruction-era cinema to do away with narrative forms that provide tidy resolutions in the form of the unproblematic fulfillment of the protagonist's desires or the decisive mitigation of conflict.

The centerpiece of *Le Amiche* takes the form of a lengthy scene at the apartment of Momina. Tastefully decorated and furnished, this apartment is the film's most striking example of Antonioni's fixation on object and architecture. The narrative information delivered during the duration of this scene is modulated and determined by the spatial confines of the structure itself. The scene accomplishes several tasks in service of narrative: setting Rosetta on the path towards self-destruction vis a vis her relationship with Lorenzo, intensifying the moral conflict between Clelia and Momina, and establishing Nene as a secondary victim to Momina's meddling. When the scene begins, Clelia has arrived at Momina's apartment. When greeted at the door, Clelia learns that Rosetta is not present despite promising to attend the gathering. As she enters the living room, we see that the women are joined by Nene and Mariella, a young friend of Momina's. As the women settle in, the camera explores the glamorously decorated domicile, capturing its many arched doorways and enormous windows. The camera seems to hover unobtrusively, depicting the conversation in long takes, only cutting to navigate around spatial obstacles. Rosetta arrives, clearly in a disheveled state. She apologizes to Clelia for failing to report to the salon for work. Her blouse is unbuttoned, and her hair is a mess, suggesting that she has just come from a sexual liaison with

Lorenzo. As she steps into the other room, Rosetta is joined by Momina and Clelia, leaving Mariella and Nene behind. The older women immediately begin to question Rosetta's whereabouts, leading to the revelation that she has embarked upon an affair with Lorenzo. Clelia is clearly uncomfortable with this development, discomfort made all the more potent by the sight of Nene in the background, completely oblivious to the conspiracy unfolding just a few feet away. However, Momina encourages Rosetta to continue the affair, noting that Nene's relationship with Lorenzo is doomed because "a woman with more talent than her man is truly unfortunate." Momina expounds upon her experiences as a married woman and suggests that Rosetta should pursue the affair while she is young and free. In the other room, Mariella and Nene make up their minds to find the others. When they enter the room, Nene borrows Rosetta's matchbook and finds that it bears a small portrait drawn by Lorenzo, thereby informing her of their affair. She hides her reaction to this information but appears greatly upset by it. The architect, Cesare, arrives at the apartment with hopes of romancing Momina, only to be disappointed to find that they are not alone. Momina and Cesare discuss their romantic prospects until they realize that they are being watched through the window, by a figure standing in the street below. They close the blinds and the figure on the street approaches the door where he is greeted with a kiss and an embrace from Momina's maid, who thereafter invites him into the building.

The scene in Momina's apartment is central to *Le Amiche* in several respects. Its chief function is to serve as a crucial turning point in the developing relationships between the characters. It establishes Clelia as a passive observer to the unfolding

drama, as evidenced by her reaction to news of Rosetta's intentions to carry on an affair with Lorenzo. Though she initially seems appalled by Momina's callousness towards Nene, she quickly assents to Momina's guidance. This shift in attitudes is reinforced at the level of staging. When the central trio (Momina/Clelia/Rosetta) separate themselves from Mariella and Nene, their spatial relationships to each other and women outside reflect the flow of knowledge and emotions amongst them. When Nene is relegated to the off-screen with Mariella, she becomes secondary to the narrative concerns. Though she can briefly be seen in the background, Clelia occludes our view of her by drawing down a set of blinds, thereby ensuring their privacy and creating a distinctive boundary between their quarters and the general living space of the apartment. As the conversation unfolds, Clelia initially stands face to face with Momina before she gradually withdraws to the back of the frame. As Momina explains her views on men and relationships, Clelia sits on the bed behind her, looking pensive and withdrawn. What begins as a tripartite conversation descends into a one-way inculcation, with Rosetta internalizing the problematic advice delivered by Momina. Rosetta's passive assent to Momina's worldview is established at the end of this conversation when she joins Clelia on the bed, seated before the pedagogue Momina. Having been cloistered away for the sake of private conversation, Clelia and Rosetta find themselves neutralized in the face of Momina's dominating presence, a power dynamic enabled by the physical space of the apartment itself.

The primacy of space and artifice in relation to story is reinforced in the scene's final developments as well. When Nene and Mariella penetrate the secrecy of the space

wherein Momina has colluded with Rosetta and Clelia, it sets the stage for Nene to learn the truth about Lorenzo's relationship with Rosetta. Notably, this revelation is not accomplished through dialogue but through the visual means of the matchbook. In seeing the small portrait scribbled onto this object, Nene reaches an unavoidable conclusion about Lorenzo's infidelity. However, she is unable or unwilling to act on this information at the moment of discovery. As the gathering has taken place in Momina's domain, Nene, whose relationship to the girlfriends has been rendered ambiguous by Rosetta's actions and Momina's words, finds herself powerless to seek any kind of resolution in regard to this upsetting realization. It is not until she is able to corner Rosetta at Clelia's salon, a neutral space for both characters, that the women are able to come to an understanding regarding Lorenzo.

Similarly, Cesare finds himself in an odd position when he arrives at the apartment. The architect occupies a scant role in the film, serving primarily to offer another unification of Clelia's personal and professional spheres. When he arrives at Momina's home, his hopes that they might consummate their flirtation are dashed when he realizes that he is outnumbered by the women present. In other words, a situation where he hoped to exercise his masculine dominance by bedding Momina has been reversed, rendering him passive to Momina's designs. As he sits sulkily on a sofa, Momina entreats him to look at their reflection, noting that they make a handsome couple. The omnipresent mirror allows these characters to engage their own images, scrutinizing and interpreting them. As they stare into the mirror, they become briefly enamored with its reflection, basking in their own aesthetic perfection for a moment. As

the lovers embrace, finally free to indulge their desires in private, a figure is revealed in the corner of the window, a man in an overcoat. From the street-level, the camera captures Momina angrily drawing the curtains while the man watches in silence, before proceeding to the door to complete his own romantic rendezvous. This complex interaction of looks demonstrates Momina's particular attunement to issues of image and appearance. If Cesare represents a proper match for the fashionable, cultured woman, there is still something to be feared from the gaze of an outsider. The presence of an observer shatters the privacy offered by Momina's apartment. However, this fear of judgment from prying eyes is quickly revealed to be foolish, as the man who watched their sexually charged embrace is only present to carry on an affair of his own. This brief encounter reinforces the notion that all of the misdeeds and immoralities that swirl around Momina and her social circle take place in plain sight. Even the secret meant to be kept from Nene is revealed almost instantly. Despite the readily available knowledge of Momina's lack of moral stature, no character steps in to counteract. Each onlooker is as complicit as the last.

Il Grido's centerpiece concerns Aldo's attempts to re-establish a life similar to the one he had known in Goriano, as well as the citation of another influential Italian film. When Aldo first departs from his home, with Rosina in tow, he flees to the home of Elvia, a former lover who seems more than willing to take him in and begin their relationship anew. However, a visit from Irma seems to unsettle Aldo, at which point he and Rosina set off on their journey once more. After hitching a ride from a truck driver, Aldo arrives at a roadside gas station operated by Virginia, a strong-willed young widow,

and her alcoholic father. This sequence of the film, shot on a lonesome, desolate highway alongside the Po River, undeniably mirrors the plot of *Ossessione*, a film treated at length in the first chapter of this text. However, instead of depicting a love triangle between a man, a married woman, and her husband, Virginia and Aldo's relationship is complicated by the presence of the alcoholic father and Rosina. If Aldo's brief stay with Elvia can be said to represent an attempt to return to the past by replacing Irma with an old flame, his time with Virginia comprises an attempt to establish a new way of life in an entirely new environment. This effort, the most developed and long-lasting of Aldo's journey, is ultimately unraveled, not by any dramatic twist of fate or emotional crisis but by the inertia of Aldo's grief, which drives him inexorably backwards, towards Goriano and towards death.

The life that Aldo falls into at the gas station seems to present the perfect opportunity for him to reclaim the structure and purpose that he has lacked since absconding from Goriano. He has everything he could desire: a beautiful lover, work as a mechanic, and a welcoming environment for his daughter. However, complications quickly arise, rendering the situation untenable and setting the stage for his abandonment of Virginia. The first of these complications comes in the form of Virginia's father, an inveterate alcoholic, whose combative behavior and brushes with the law create stress for Virginia and draw her attention away from her relationship with Aldo. This tension reaches a breaking point when the father wanders off, followed by Rosina, to harass the proprietor of a nearby farm that was once owned by his family. As Virginia and Aldo relax in bed, Virginia briefly alludes to the death of her husband and her

decision to sell off the farmland in order to purchase the gas station. Their moment of introspection is shattered by a voice screaming Virginia's name. Outside, Virginia and Aldo are told that the father has been making trouble, accompanied by a little girl. Clearly fearing for his daughter's safety, Aldo runs off-screen while Virginia pleads for him to stay. Later, Rosina and the father bond over food and song. The father, in his childlike and drunken manner, is the perfect match for the little girl's precocity. In this sense, the film begins to equate the characters of the father and Rosina, configuring them as obstacles to the burgeoning relationship of Virginia and Rosina. Shortly thereafter, the former resolves to send her father to a retirement home, suggesting that his antics have become too much to bear.

With the father removed from the scenario, Virginia, Aldo, and Rosina are freed to become an ersatz nuclear family, re-enacting the dynamic of Aldo's previous relationship with Irma, the unwed mother of his child. As the trio heads home from the retirement facility, they stop by the side of the road. While Rosina naps, Virginia and Aldo sneak off for a tryst, only to be interrupted by the curious child. Wandering among abandoned industrial spools, Rosina comes across her father and Virginia kissing near the roadside. Though both characters are fully clothed, the sexual nature of the scene is obvious, causing Rosina to flee from the scene. Virginia begins to sob at the thought of destroying Rosina's innocence in such a way while Aldo watches wordlessly as Rosina runs into the distance. In this moment, it becomes clear that Aldo's roles of father and lover are incommensurate. He cannot enjoy a sexually liberated relationship with Virginia while also fulfilling his paternal duties to Rosina. The desolate landscape of this

waystation, far-flung from the communal setting of Goriano, is inhospitable to children. Aldo reaches an inevitable conclusion: he must send Rosina back to her mother. As he loads her onto a bus, he promises her that he will return, that he will someday be able to work, live, and love as he did before. As the bus disappears into the dusty landscape, Aldo realizes that what he's said is untrue. He approaches Virginia as she waits in a nearby terminal, only to turn away at the last moment. In the next scene, Aldo has fled once more, hoping to ply his trade elsewhere.

The importance of the events surrounding Virginia and his time at the gas station cannot be overstated. They demonstrate the absolute intractability of the emotional turmoil that afflicts Aldo. If his problems could be resolved by re-establishing a life similar to the status quo that was shattered at the start of the film, his relationship with Virginia would seem to present the perfect resolution. It is not enough for Aldo to reconstruct his previous existence. He must seek out new, unknown paradigms before resigning himself to annihilation. The sequence's recapitulation of *Ossessione* becomes more than homage, in this context. After all, Visconti's film dramatizes the inability of a transient, alienated man to achieve a life of bourgeois stability. Whereas the issues raised by that film deal with murder and criminality, rendering issues of guilt and regret in concrete terms, *Il Grido* transposes those issues into an existential, psychological context better suited to the period of Italy's reconstruction. Aldo reveals no clear reason for choosing to abandon Virginia after making the weighty sacrifice of sending Rosina back to her mother. Instead, this decision becomes merely another reflection of his inability to make any sort of decisive action or commitment. He is only able to make the

decision to part with Rosina by promising her, and himself, that this separation will be temporary, that someday his life will be what it once was. But in the moment after they part, he seems to understand that these were hollow words, that by giving up Rosina, he has given up his last connection to his past. Now, set adrift in a vast and indifferent world, Aldo is free to succumb to his malaise. His journey through the spiritual wasteland at Italy's margins strips him of the relationships that formed the core of his identity, demonstrating the difficulties of applying traditional paradigms of family and love to a rapidly modernizing world, while also prefiguring the narratives of alienation and irresolvable existential crises that characterize Antonioni's films of the 1960s.

As it approaches its conclusion, *Le Amiche* must provide closure to both of its narrative threads: Clelia's short-lived affair with Carlo and the intrigue surrounding Rosetta and her burgeoning relationship with Lorenzo. While the former storyline provides the final scenes of the movie, firmly establishing Clelia's well-being and moral turpitude as the film's main focus, the latter more directly demonstrates the ambiguities of the text overall, vacillating as it does between detached observation and melodrama. Following the consummation of her relationship with Lorenzo, it seems as if all of the obstacles in Rosetta's path will resolve themselves amicably. Nene willingly concedes her claim over Lorenzo and is happy to step aside so that the lovers might pursue a legitimate relationship. None of the other members of their social circle offer any objection or criticism, despite the unorthodox manner in which their pairing came to be. Despite this lack of external impediments, their relationship is doomed to end tragically due to Lorenzo's own emotional instabilities. Though Rosetta is the ultimate victim of

his callousness, the most pitiable figure is Lorenzo, whose interior life is revealed to be a yawning emptiness of insecurity and narcissistic selfishness.

In order to resolve Rosetta's plotline, the friends are gathered for a celebratory dinner in honor of their various successes: Clelia's successful salon-opening, Nene's imminent departure for America, and the realization of Rosetta's romantic desires. All of the major characters of the film, minus Carlo, are present. It seems that it will be an evening of drunken jubilation and indulgence. However, the mood is spoiled from the outset because Lorenzo has learned that Nene is willing to let him go, suggesting both that she is no longer in love with him and that he is now in a position wherein he will be forced to act on all of the sweet promises he made to Rosetta in the earliest days of their furtive courtship. Lorenzo, always evasive and acutely aware of his perceived inferiority, immediately picks a fight with Cesare, the architect and Momina's lover, before storming out into the night. Before pursuing him, Rosetta shares a charged exchange of glances with Nene, suggesting that in this moment, Rosetta is fully prepared to accept responsibility for Lorenzo's tortured emotional state, a charge once borne by Nene. In the darkness of the alleyway outside, Lorenzo rejects Rosetta, telling her that he feels himself incapable of love or commitment. Traumatized by this sudden reversal of fate, Rosetta flees into the night, disappearing into the middle-distance, never to be seen again. This image of an empty alleyway immediately cuts to the brightness of day as Rosetta's corpse, draped in cloth, is carried away from the riverside, having been removed from the water's depths in the ellipsis between scenes. Rosetta is dead, having realized the suicidal intentions that provided the inciting incident for the

film. However, unlike that first scene, we are not permitted to view her body. Instead, Rosetta's unseen corpse disappears, hardly to be mentioned again except as fodder for Clelia's final reassertion of her moral superiority to Momina and the Milanese world she has temporarily called home. The last shot of Lorenzo, occurring after news of Rosetta's suicide has circulated, finds him once again in the arms of Nene who seems to have taken him back, despite all the trouble he has caused. He is right back where he began, none the worse for wear and facing no consequences for his actions.

The immediate aftermath of Rosetta's suicide firmly re-establishes melodrama as the dominant tone of *Le Amiche*, first through Clelia's excoriation of Momina and once more through her final dealings with Carlo. Before she can leave Milan and return to the off-screen haven of Rome, Rosetta must reclaim an unproblematic moral stance and reassert herself as a capable and committed career-woman. The first of these aims almost forecloses upon the second when Clelia confronts her nemesis in the very salon that brought her to Milan in the first place. In full view of the salon's owner, Clelia verbally assaults Momina, calling her callous and domineering and self-centered, placing the blame for Rosetta's death largely on Momina's shoulders while also admitting that she might have been more proactive in protecting the young woman herself. Momina offers little resistance to this characterization and is subsequently vanquished from the film, having fulfilled her purpose as dramatic foil to Clelia. Though her anger is righteous, it is clear that Clelia's attack against Momina has violated the professional ethics that dictate behavior in the space of the salon. As the camera follows Clelia's retreat from the scene of her undignified speechifying, the proprietor of the salon can

be seen comforting the unsettled customers and attempting to restore the commercial atmosphere of the storefront.

Following this unprofessional outburst, Clelia assumes that she is now unemployed and cries alone in her hotel room until she is contacted by Carlo. This occurrence immediately brings a smile to her face, causing one of the several emotional reversals that characterize the film's last fifteen minutes. She arranges a meeting with Carlo, who has indirectly learned of the events that have transpired, quickly dressing herself before they rendezvous in the lobby. On her way downstairs, Clelia is intercepted by her employer who inquires what the young woman will do before beatifically offering Clelia her old job in Rome. This intervention by the kindly older woman, who seems to empathize with Clelia's commitment to career, allows the film to complete its circular construction by sending its heroine back to whence she came. In resolving her brief professional crisis, Clelia now finds herself at a crossroads in regard to her relationship with Carlo. Only a short time earlier, she was fully prepared to embark on a relationship with him, but now she is free to resume her life where she left off, before Milan and its enervative influence threw her orderly existence into disarray. Explaining her sudden change in attitude to Carlo, Clelia makes clear that she sees romance and career as mutually exclusive lifestyles for women. She knows her place in the world and is happy for a return to normalcy, even if it entails an abandonment of whatever potential existed between herself and Carlo.

With her departure imminent, Clelia promises to meet Carlo for one last drink at the train station's bar. However, the hour of their appointment passes, and he is

nowhere to be seen. As she approaches the train tracks, Carlo is shown sneaking about in an effort to see Clelia one last time without being detected. Clelia looks somewhat forlorn as she boards the train, staring out the window in hopes of catching one last glance of Carlo. However, Carlo's subterfuge is effective, and he escapes notice as the train pulls away from the terminal. Though this final, failed meeting carries bittersweet connotations, it is hard to see it as anything other than a positive development for Clelia. Unlike those who must remain behind and make sense of the emotional turmoil churned up in her work, she is free to reclaim an unproblematic and comparably peaceful life in a home far removed from Milan and its culture of degenerated morals and ersatz relationships. In this sense, the film's finale rectifies all of the issues that have plagued Clelia while also reaffirming her identity as a character defined by bourgeois professionalism and self-sacrifice, in comparison to the hedonistic and vapid aristocrats she has found herself temporarily associated with.

In comparison to *Le Amiche's* emotionally fraught but overall positive conclusion, *Il Grido's* ending demonstrates an entirely different narrative logic in relationship to its protagonist. Whereas Clelia ultimately reclaims her identity and is able to return to her home, Aldo instead continues his slow march toward oblivion. After having parted ways with Virginia, Aldo finds himself wandering once again. Falling in with a crew of workers who plan to travel to South America, where work is abundant and laborers are well-compensated, Aldo briefly considers joining them in their expedition before becoming distracted by the prospect of another romantic entanglement. It is interesting to consider this episode with the workers in light of the film's opening, wherein Irma's

husband who similarly emigrated in order to find work is revealed to be dead. For a brief instance, Aldo nearly duplicates the path of his predecessor, abandoning Italy entirely due to economic pressures. However, Aldo's emotional malaise has not been motivated by concerns of money or employment. Unlike Irma's husband, he must return home to die, in full sight of his ex-lover and the community he once belonged to.

Aldo becomes enamored with a prostitute, Adreina, and the two cohabit for a period in an improvised shack near the banks of the Po River. Aldo's encounter with Adreina represents the nadir of his experiences in the film, ultimately causing him to return to Goriano, the scene of his initial trauma. As heavy rains buffet their shanty, Adreina heads out into the night to exchange sexual favors for food, so that she and Aldo might have something to eat. Though he has been laid low by his many months of wanderings, this transaction still inflames Aldo's sense of propriety. He pursues Adreina and attempts to dissuade her from carrying out her designs. The pair arrives at an empty and darkened restaurant whose owner is a regular customer of Adreina's. In the eerie darkness of the dining room, Adreina rebukes Aldo, betraying no sense of shame or guilt for what she is about to do. In this moment, it becomes clear that Aldo, despite all of his experiences and his apparent desire to abandon the trappings of bourgeois life, is unprepared for the realities of life on the margins of society. Chastened and disheartened, he flees the scene of another rejection and begins his journey home.

On the way back to Goriano, Aldo finds himself at the filling station he once called home. Virginia recognizes him and returns his valise, while alluding to a postcard from Irma that she claims to have misplaced. Though Virginia is clearly still upset with

Aldo, he displays no emotion upon seeing her again. This encounter could be said to represent a final chance at salvation for the hero. In that moment, he might have apologized to Virginia, begged her forgiveness, and asked to remain at the station with her. Instead, totally defeated and alienated, he merely resumes his travels back to Goriano. Upon arriving home, Aldo wanders the streets like a wraith haunting a cemetery. Through a window, he catches a glimpse of Irma with a baby in her arms. She is happy and fulfilled, her newborn child symbolizing the life she has built in Aldo's absence. He turns to leave but is noticed by Irma as he vanishes into the foggy distance. She breathlessly pursues him, shocked at his sudden reappearance after a lengthy absence. Her pursuit will prove to be short and fruitless.

In the background, a struggle plays out between the villagers of Goriano and military forces sent to supervise the construction of a new airfield that has necessitated the seizure of lands previously belonging to the townspeople. This secondary drama can be read as another opportunity for Aldo to find meaning through class struggle and revolutionary protest. Instead, he ignores this unfolding conflict entirely, allowing himself to become subsumed in grief and confusion. In his final moments, Aldo returns to the very same refinery tower wherein he was first depicted. Making his ascent up the structure, he seems to seek perspective and a greater range of vision. Upon reaching the top, however, he falls to his death. His corpse is discovered almost immediately by Irma who lets out a pained scream as the camera pulls back from the scene.

Aldo's death is rendered in an ambiguous manner, neither decidedly accidental nor suicidal. Despite this uncertainty in regard to his intentions, his demise seems

entirely unavoidable within the dramatic economy of the film. In completing this perfect circle of plotting, the film bears the suggestion that Aldo would have found himself in the same position, dead at the base of this tower, if he had thrown himself from its summit in the film's first scene, before he learned of Irma's reason for visiting him at work, thereby saving himself the trouble of struggling for months in the semi-wilderness of the Po River valley. Each attempt at re-inserting himself into society ends fruitlessly, as Aldo self-sabotages and then flees into the distance. In spite of his seemingly aimless journeys through Italy's periphery, he is drawn back towards home and towards death, as if he had been dead all along but unable to recognize it. In becoming a symbol of living death, Aldo reflects the profound incompatibility between the traditional codes of masculinity and the modern world that threatens to render them obsolete.

At the most basic level, both *Le Amiche* and *Il Grido* can be understood as films that dramatize crises of identity, the former in a feminine context and the latter in a masculine one. The crisis of identification, a key term in the discourse of Italian cinema that emerges in the reconstruction era, must draw its impetus from evolving subjectivities, ways of being in the world, emerging from the intersection of ideological constructs and the banal materiality of everyday life. Both Clelia and Aldo find themselves ensconced in worlds that they can scarcely understand. Whether navigating the elite social codes of a hyper-modern Milan or wandering the misty nightmare realm of Italy's periphery, these protagonists share a sense of being disjointed in time and space. They are removed from the dominant social context that defines their worlds, differentiated deliberately from the other characters they encounter and never truly

able to find a sense of belonging or community. This search for meaning, in both the heart of Italian society and the country's most far-flung regions, would become a central feature of Antonioni's filmography in the 1960s. However, he would never again return to endings as conclusive as those explored here. In Clelia's case, she is able to flee from the scene of her traumatic encounter with Milanese high society, returning to a Rome that promises normalcy in both personal and professional relationships. For Aldo, the only logical endpoint is death, a final rest that promises to bring an end to his wandering and self-pitying. Though neither Clelia nor Aldo could be said to have reached a fully satisfying conclusion, both characters have at least removed themselves from the immediate cause of the discord in their lives, though the aftermath of these conflicts promises to be as fraught and traumatic as the conflicts themselves.

Le Amiche and *Il Grido* represent the end of the first stage of Antonioni's career, while presaging certain aspects of his tetralogic collaboration with Vittì. In becoming the chief cine-poet of Italian modernity, Antonioni revisits and refines the themes and contexts explored in these formative works to an obsessive degree, creating a vision of Italy that is as defined by post-modern urbanity and consumer culture as it is by haunting landscapes wherein the industrial and the ancient collide. Whether relaxing in the salons of Turin or wandering the banks of the Po, the Antonionian protagonist is a figure for whom the crises precipitating and concurrent to reconstruction are keenly experienced as existential angst. Though they differ greatly in terms of cultural affect and general temperament, Clelia and Aldo both demonstrate the difficulties faced by the Italian populace in navigating the historical moment of reconstruction. Through his

attention to the architectural and natural spaces that define the modern world as well as his keen expression of the confusion wrought by modernization in the individual, Antonioni develops a unique idiom for expressing the affective reality of life in reconstruction-era Italy that highlights both the sleek urbanity wrought by economic upswing as well as the overarching alienation caused by such meteoric historical developments.

CHAPTER V: LIFE AND DEATH IN THE BORGATE: PASOLINI'S *ACCATTONE* AND *MAMMA**ROMA*

Periphery and center, Catholicism and Marxism, oppressor and oppressed: these dichotomies define the early films of Pier Paolo Pasolini, a filmmaker who embodies the post-neorealist moment in Italian cinema. His first features, *Accattone* (1961) and *Mamma Roma* (1962), can be viewed as ironic re-appropriations of neorealist techniques and images, almost satirical in their strident disavowal of Rossellini's hopeful anticipation of post-war equanimity and De Sica's portraits of the noble, yet downtrodden proletariat. Though not the first filmmaker to cast aspersions at the claim that neorealism comprises a transhistorical methodology of cinematic realism, Pasolini's critique of the neoreal, constructed through his films themselves, plays a key part in problematizing the discourse of realism in Italian cinema, thereby rendering any subsequent appeals to neorealism as a guiding ethos suspect, if not outright *déclassé*. In examining the false promises of the reconstruction years, Pasolini develops a cinematic portrait of an emerging social class, the urban subproletariat, whose very existence seems to spit in the face of neorealism's romanticized working poor, while also tracing the socio-economic development of Italian life in the midst of the economic boom that brought an end to reconstruction and signaled Italy's arrival as a major cultural and industrial powerhouse. With his films *Accattone* and *Mamma Roma*, Pasolini directly confronts the claims that neorealism renders visible the invisible drama of the everyday, while also revealing that the model of realism embodied by the classics of the neorealist

movement is determined primarily by a specific ideological protocol that looked forward towards a new Italy that the reconstruction period failed to manifest.

More ink has been spilled about Pasolini than perhaps any other Italian filmmaker of the twentieth century. From his polemical political and critical writings to the mysterious and scintillating details of his murder on the shores of Ostia, Pasolini has proved an irresistible subject to those seeking to understand the rapid evolution of Italian cultural and political life in the post-war period. The director seems to embody all manner of contradictions. He is enraptured with both Marxism and Catholicism, although his relationship to both ideologies is heterodoxic, to say the least. Similarly, he is rendered the perpetual outsider, despite the enormous fame he achieved during his lifetime, due to his outspoken homosexuality and his penchant for iconoclastic interrogations of the pillars of authority in contemporary Italian society. Despite all of the attention paid to the life and career of this iconic filmmaker and public intellectual, there are relatively few studies that present interpretations of his early films. Thankfully, in recent years, texts such as Maurizio Viano's *A Certain Realism: Making Use of Pasolini's Film Theory and Practice* (1993), Colleen Ryan-Scheutz's *Sex, The Self, and the Sacred: Women in the Cinema of Pier Paolo Pasolini* (2007), and John David Rhodes' *Stupendous Miserable City: Pasolini's Rome* (2007) have gone a long way to refocus the study of Pasolini on his films themselves, in favor of an approach that positions his films as useful tools for delineating the Marxist and semiotic theories that Pasolini expounded in his critical writings.

Pasolini's first feature films can be viewed as a revitalization of the very principles that gave rise to neorealism through formal and narrative techniques that deconstruct the legacy of Italian post-war filmmaking. This revitalization is accomplished through the development of a cinematic paradigm that insists on both the sacred, spiritual resonance of the cinematic image as a means of escaping the banal reproduction of the ruling ideologies of the day, while also presenting a historical-material reconstruction of the profane, vulgar realities of daily life for the citizens of the borgate. The slums and shantytowns of Rome's periphery, wherein ascension to the traditional working class is both an unthinkable betrayal of an emergent lifestyle and an unreachable goal for the criminalized and virtually forgotten underbelly of society, become the site of Pasolini's inquiry into the development of new subjectivities that seem to exist outside of capitalism, comprising, for the director, a more authentic way of being in the world. Simultaneously, the borgate represents a logical development in what Pasolini calls "neo-capitalism," the encroaching industrial-political hegemony of the mid-century that caused the rural poor from Italy's under-developed regions to flock to the outskirts of the city in hopes that they might find themselves subject to a promised embourgeoisement. *Accattone* and *Mamma Roma* each insist upon the borgate as a locus of historical and material forces wherein Italy's past and present are brought into conflict, rendering it a privileged site wherein to observe the amalgamation of centuries-old traditions, the discourses of Italian modernity, and the vital, improvisational lifestyles informed by necessity and privation.

Both films clearly speak to the end of Italy's reconstruction and the outgrowth of new subjectivities in its aftermath. *Accattone*, Pasolini's debut feature, draws upon the literary works that Pasolini produced in the late-1950's, examining the masculinist subculture of the *ragazzi*, boys and young men occupying the borgate who often turn to sex work or petty crime to make ends meet, rather than occupying traditional working-class roles such as industrial laborer or even head of a household. The film's titular character, whose name literally means "beggar", is a small-time pimp, recently elevated to that position by the imprisonment of a rival pimp, Ciccio, whose lover/prostitute, Maddalena, now works for Accattone. The protagonist, portrayed by frequent Pasolini collaborator Franco Citti, and his friends, themselves petty crooks, hustlers, and pimps, despise the idea of work itself, refusing to be cowed into so-called honest labor by the scorn and bourgeois sensibility of the workers in their midst. They pass their days engaging in braggadocio and wagers, asserting their masculine bravado through a counter-intuitive refusal to be exploited by employers, whom they frequently refer to as "bloodsuckers" and "parasites."

Accattone, who already bears an uneasy relationship to the lifestyle of pimping and prostitution, due to his own unshakeable status as a beggar or bum, finds himself thrown into turmoil when Maddalena is injured in a motorcycle accident, thereby hindering her ability to walk the streets to provide for herself and Accattone. This situation is made even more dire when she is assaulted by associates of her former pimp, Ciccio, and is subsequently imprisoned for falsely identifying her assailants so as to settle a grudge. Accattone finds himself in increasingly desperate straits, going so far

as to beg for money and food from his estranged wife, Ascenza, causing him to be beaten badly by his brother-in-law before Accattone resorts to stealing a chain from the young son he abandoned.

Afterwards, Accattone experiences a brief revival of fortunes when he encounters the beautiful and virginal Stella, an innocent young woman who toils in the same scrap heaps as Ascenza in order to provide for her own family. Accattone successfully seduces Stella and even convinces her to walk the streets before realizing that she does not have the temperament necessary to make her a suitable prostitute. In a last-ditch effort to alleviate his financial woes, Accattone entreats his brother to help him find legitimate employment. However, he finds this work backbreaking and utterly unbearable. In the meantime, the imprisoned Maddalena has learned of Accattone's dealings with Stella and, in a vengeful mood, she denounces him as her exploiter to the authorities. Subsequently, Accattone is placed under strict surveillance by undercover officers of the law, setting the stage for his demise.

In the film's final act, Accattone has a premonition of his own death wherein he walks with his own funeral procession only to find himself barred from entering the cemetery itself. After climbing over the wall that separates him from his final resting place, Accattone convinces the gravedigger to bury him on a sunny hillside, instead of amongst shadows and darkness. In waking life, Accattone joins the thief Balilla in his efforts to find a truckload of goods to pilfer. In the company of two thieves, Accattone enters the city center and locates a truck full of cured meats. As soon as they attempt to enact their crime, the would-be crooks are apprehended by the police officers who have

been tailing Accattone. Desperate to avoid prison, Accattone steals a vespa and flees into the distance only to be killed in a collision. As his companions rush to his side, Accattone dies with words of beatific contentment on his lips.

In contrast to *Accattone*, which dramatizes the unwillingness of its protagonist to adopt a lifestyle sanctioned by society at large, *Mamma Roma* tells the story of a woman desperate to enter the middle class, through any means necessary, so as to escape the life of prostitution and poverty she has known. At the film's start, a drunken and cheerful Mamma Roma, portrayed by Italian screen legend Anna Magnani, leads a trio of pigs into the wedding reception of her former pimp Carmine, and his new bride. The gathered guests congratulate the newly wedded couple as well as Mamma Roma, who has been freed from her economic bondage from Carmine, portrayed by Accattone himself, Franco Citti. After engaging in a good-hearted contest of songs with Carmine and his wife, Mamma Roma leaves to begin her new life, having seemingly put her days of prostitution behind her.

As she attempts to turn over a new leaf, Mamma Roma is reunited with her teenage son Ettore, who was raised by relatives in the countryside due to his mother's unconventional lifestyle and occupation. Briefly cohabitating in her cramped apartment, the pair eventually move to her new apartment in a public housing development on the outskirts of Rome, an area known as the EUR. Here, Mamma Roma hopes to re-establish herself as a merchant so that Ettore can attend school with all the privileges of a middle-class upbringing near the center of Italian cultural life. Ettore quickly develops a bond with the mother he hardly knows. In one scene, they dance together to a recording of

the song "Violino Tzigano," and Ettore seems to genuinely enjoy the loving affection of Mamma Roma. However, he begins to fall in with a crowd of local youths who are involved with petty thievery. Similarly, he becomes entangled with Bruna, a slightly older young woman and mother to an infant, who casually prostitutes herself for favors from the local boys. This affair leads Ettore to steal the record he had danced to from his mother and sell it to a fence so that he might buy a gold chain to win Bruna's affection. The conflict between Ettore's fascination with street life and Mamma Roma's aspirations for him propels the film from this point forward.

Mamma Roma's dreams of easily ascending into the respectable middle-class of Roman life are complicated when Carmine reappears, seeking one last influx of cash from Mamma Roma, forcing her to walk the streets once more. He subsequently visits her again at her new apartment in Rome, having abandoned his new life in the countryside, and indicts Mamma Roma for his inability to settle into a normal life of work and family due to her enervative influence on him. Out of fear that he will reveal her past to Ettore, Mamma Roma intermittently walks the streets at night to provide the extra income that Carmine demands. Mamma Roma fears that she will never be truly able to put her past behind her and achieve a stable life outside of the illegitimate realm of thievery and prostitution to which she once belonged. Meanwhile, Ettore struggles with his feelings for Bruna and is badly beaten by his friends when he attempts to assert some kind of possession over the young woman whom they generally consider to be communal property. Ettore nonetheless continues to associate with these young men.

Parallel to her struggles with Carmine, Mamma Roma endeavors through a series of schemes and deceits to counter the bad influences of Ettore's friends and Bruna. In order to obtain a job for her son at a busy *trattoria*, Mamma Roma enlists her friend Biancafiore and her pimp to help her blackmail the owner of the eatery. They stage a scene in which the restaurant's proprietor is interrupted *in flagrante delicto* with Biancafiore by the pimp, posing as her infuriated brother, before Mamma Roma arrives and calls off the scorned "brother." Similarly, Mamma Roma entreats Biancafiore to sleep with Ettore so that he might forget about Bruna and focus on his new job. In celebration of his newfound employment, Mamma Roma buys her son a motorcycle and they take a joyous ride together. This mood of happiness culminates in a night-time scene where Mamma Roma and Biancafiore watch as Ettore works at the *trattoria* as a server. Mamma Roma becomes overwhelmed with emotion and bursts into tears, suggesting that this brief moment of peace and satisfaction cannot last.

Mamma Roma's plans begin to unravel rapidly after Ettore learns from Bruna that his mother once worked as a prostitute. This recognition causes him to abandon his job and his schooling, giving himself over fully to the petty criminality of his peers. He begins to dominate their gang of thieves, acting as the go-between who exchanges their ill-gotten goods for cash from the fence. Mamma Roma attempts to confront Ettore and convince him of the error of his ways. However, he has by this point completely rejected her maternal authority and flees into the distance with his peers. In the midst of this dissolution of their family life, Ettore becomes stricken with a fever. He ventures to visit the hospital where he and his friends frequently steal from patients on their deathbeds.

However, all but one of his friends refuse to accompany him as they fear that they have visited the ward one too many times and will be caught. Ettore rejects their counsel and heads off with one accomplice to steal a radio from a man thought to be near death and, thereby, incapacitated.

At the hospital, Ettore is caught in the midst of his crime by his would-be victim, portrayed by Antonio Ricci, star of *Ladri di Biciclette* (1948), and is promptly thrown into jail. His mother despairs over his fate but decides to return to work where the other vendors attempt to comfort her and suggest that the stay in jail is just what Ettore needs to set him straight. In the jail, Ettore quickly becomes feverish and incoherent. A group of inmates recites Dante while he writhes in agony. As one of them sings “Violino Tzigano,” a song he associates with his mother, Ettore cries out for her. Later, he is strapped to a table in an isolated and dark chamber. He struggles for his freedom in a final effort to extricate himself until losing strength. He promises to be good and calls out to his mother once more. However, no one can hear his cries. At home, Mamma Roma looks out over the city while thinking of her son. She laments her inability to properly provide for him. Shots of Ettore’s final moments are intercut with Mamma Roma’s daily labors in the marketplace. When she is informed by the authorities of Ettore’s death, with paparazzi in tow, she rushes home and, after catching sight of the discarded clothes on his bed, attempts to throw herself out the window, only to be stopped by her concerned neighbors. Together, they stare out at the ancient city of Rome, struggling to comprehend the miseries that have befallen them.

While it is generally true that both *Accattone* and *Mamma Roma* invoke elements of neorealism as a means of critiquing this influential film movement, the films use different methods in order to accomplish this task. In his introduction to *The Cinema of Economic Miracles: Visuality and Modernization in the Italian Art Film* (2002), Angelo Restivo notes that, for Pasolini, neorealism represents a superstructural phenomenon that has outrun its base (8). In other words, the historical-material conditions described by, and in some ways, predicted by, neorealism differed greatly from the conditions observed by Pasolini in the intervening two decades since the emergence of the neorealist aesthetic. Maurizio Viano connects Pasolini's conscious rejection of neorealism to the proposition that "The basic values of the very society criticized by neorealists were unwittingly reinforced: honesty, heterosexuality, the worth ethic, socioeconomic aspirations" (70). If neorealism, a cinematic mode that purports to speak for and about the working class, projects the values of the bourgeoisie onto the oppressed masses, Pasolini labors to create a cinema that both captures the cultural and historical realities without resorting to bourgeois moralism while also examining the harmful effect of the myth of upward social mobility on those desperate to escape the borgate. In pursuing this goal, Pasolini created *Accattone*, a film that, in the words of Fabio Vighi, elevates "the anti-social condition of non-participation that typified the Roman sub-proletariat of the 1950's and 1960's" to the status of radical opposition (79); and he created *Mamma Roma*, a film that actively parodies neorealism, through the citation of some of its most famous scenarios and characters, in order to explore the possibility of embourgeoisement in Roman society. Though each film represents a

complex engagement with the realities of Italian life and the discursive narratives of the contemporary culture irreducible to simple commentary on the state of cinema itself, explicating their relationship to neorealism is central to understanding Pasolini's relationship with the project of reconstruction and his influential rejection of previous models of cinematic engagement with the lower classes.

As the film debut of a public intellectual and artist already renowned for his iconoclasm and willingness to court controversy, *Accattone* seems, in retrospect, destined to generate strong reactions from Italian audiences. It is reported that its Roman premiere was met with riots by neo-fascists gangs and denunciation by all manner of left-wing and right-wing authorities (Brill 220). The most common words used to describe the film might include the terms "bleak," "hopeless," and "nihilistic." It is a story of exploitation, desperation, and privation that ends in the death of its tortured, morally compromised protagonist. However, to use moral denunciations of the character of *Accattone* as a means of dismissing the film itself is to fall into the very same tautological trap that caused Pasolini to reject neorealism's depictions of an ennobled, mythic proletariat. In watching *Accattone* it becomes clear that Pasolini is completely disinterested in turning this spiritual biography of a pimp into a fable of misbehavior. Instead, we must turn our attention to what Restivo calls the film's "only glimmer of hope": the sense of an "erotic solidarity" between the camera and *Accattone* himself (149). The physicality of the protagonist and his peers, imbued with an undeniable eroticism by the camera's gaze, becomes a profound symbol of opposition to the hegemonic order of the day. *Accattone*'s body is subject to all manner of harm

and threats of harm throughout the film, by way of enemies, friends, and the nebulous authority of policing. In a sense, Accattone's body becomes a record bearing testimony of his absolute exclusion from the dominant society of Rome. At first glance, this emphasis on the body could seem to be a recapitulation of the rhetoric of corporeality that Schoonover posits as central to neorealism in his text, *Brutal Vision* (2012). However, the key difference here is that neorealism utilizes the depiction of suffering bodies in order to present an argument that the oppressed classes need to become more fully assimilated into the dominant society, whereas Pasolini exults in the exclusion and difference represented by Accattone. His bodily testimony becomes a text of class struggle through the Pasolinian aesthetic of contamination that juxtaposes high and low culture in order to interrogate the legacy of Italian realism as well as the forces that create the borgate and the underclass that inhabits it.

In some ways, this emphasis on the body itself as a nexus of discourses on labor, capitalism, criminality, and punishment could be said to presage the Foucauldian notion of biopolitics, with its emphasis on social controls placed on bodily autonomy and the expression of sexuality. As Stefano Baschiera notes in "The Embodiment of the Bourgeoisie: Body and Social Class in Pasolini's *Mamma Roma* and Fassbinder's *Martha*," "Accattone's body is a body that can survive hunger, beatings, and jumping with a full stomach into the Tiber, but that cannot bear a single day of work" (70). Accattone's body, the ultimate site of Pasolini's emphasis on the materiality and cultural embeddedness in filmmaking practice, is a body characterized simultaneously by toughness and weakness. As Viano notes, the film is ripe with symbols of ambivalence

that challenge traditional, vertically ordered hierarchies of dominance and submission (71). From the film's opening scene, in which Accattone goads his friends into purchasing him a large meal so that he might prove that one can swim across the Tiber on a full stomach, the viewer is acclimated to experience the bodies and faces of the characters as "central and indissolubly connected with the surrounding space, both for extension and contraposition" (Baschiera 69). In *Accattone*, the bodies depicted by Pasolini represent a kernel of identity that, while afflicted by the overwhelming ambivalence of the film's whole, do attest definitively to a subjectivity that escapes containment and subjugation, if only temporarily, within Italian society.

Whereas *Accattone* positions the subproletariat as a sort of universal Other, whose very existence presents testimony to the failure of the hegemonic order to fully colonize all aspects of modern life, *Mamma Roma* examines a woman's attempt to transform herself from a prostitute into a respectable mother and member of the merchant class. Baschiera connects Mamma Roma's difficulties in enacting her own long march through the institutions to a desire for transformation rendered problematic by "the strenuous resistance of the body to the shaping of social class" (65). As her relationship to the practice of prostitution hinders her attempts to assert herself as a member of the petit bourgeois, Mamma Roma's identity is rendered ambivalent and unstable in a manner similar to Accattone's own shifting roles of beggar, pimp, lover, and thief. However, *Mamma Roma* achieves another level of significance at the level of citation in that its titular character is played by Anna Magnani, whose widely celebrated role in *Roma Città Aperta* has rendered her both a symbol of neorealism and the Italian

resistance movement that film depicted. Though Pina, the character portrayed by Magnani, is killed in a scene that is considered by many to be exemplary of the revolutionary potential of neorealism, it is not difficult to imagine *Mamma Roma* as a sort of alternate history in which an emblem of noble self-sacrifice in the immediate aftermath of the war becomes a degraded victim of the failures of the Italian state to deliver on its promises of prosperity and social equality for all.

Beyond the choice to cast Magnani in a role that deliberately contradicts her public persona and the symbolic import of her image, *Mamma Roma* contains other references to neorealism and the Italian cinematic tradition. These include other choices in casting, such as utilizing the actor Antonio Ricci in the role of the hospital patient who catches Ettore in the act of stealing a small radio. His forceful cries of “Ladri! Ladri!” comprise a clear reference to the famed final scene of De Sica’s masterpiece in which Ricci himself is apprehended while attempting to steal a bike in order to avail himself in the face of a society that seems completely indifferent to his suffering. However, unlike the touching, if somewhat depressing, end to *Ladri di Biciclette*, Ettore’s capture leads to imprisonment and death instead of momentary embarrassment. Likewise, Pasolini includes an obvious nod to *La Strada* and *Le Notti di Cabiria*, both directed by his one-time collaborator Federico Fellini, in the form of a marching band procession that appears out of nowhere while Ettore works at the trattoria where his mother’s scheming has secured him a position. This moment that should be the zenith of Mamma Roma’s striving is immediately undercut when Mamma Roma begins to sob uncontrollably, bearing the unmistakable suggestion that this is but a passing fantasy of

normalcy. In fact, this scene signals the dramatic turn of the film's last half wherein all of the efforts that Mamma Roma has made to better life for herself and her son are undone in quick succession. In this manner, *Mamma Roma* presents a direct engagement with the narrative tropes and symbols that populate the discourse of neorealism in order to demonstrate the impossibility of transposing them meaningfully onto the socio-economic realities of Italian life circa 1962.

Maurizio Viano notes that Pasolini's cinematic aesthetic is defined, in large part, by polysemy, a device that allows him to introduce ambivalence at the basic level of the cinematic sign, another manner in which Pasolini differentiates himself from the neorealist whose images can be characterized as monosemic in that they suppose a set of universal, humanistic values that can be evoked in any spectator (70). Beyond the indeterminacy that characterizes his plots and visual style, polysemy is also invoked in *Accattone* and *Mamma Roma* at the level of casting. When one considers the films side-by-side, it is impossible to ignore the fact that many of the same faces populate both films. The most striking case of this phenomenon is Franco Citti's performances as Accattone and Carmine, twin pimps of the borgate. However, Pasolini includes other cases of twinning such as Bruna-Maddalena and the various members of Accattone's degenerate entourage that reappear as denizens of Mamma Roma's own microcosm. Though nothing about either film explicitly necessitates a side-by-side reading, the through-lines that connect the two movies are so numerous and obvious that to discount the manner in which Pasolini engages in a play of identity and screen presence would be to do the director and his works a major disservice. The diegeses evoked in

Accattone and *Mamma Roma* are distinctive and unique. However, these films can be said to comprise a sort of visual and intertextual dictionary of the borgate, cataloging and exploring all manner of personas and locales unique to this emergent milieu. The relationship between these films escapes reduction to terms like sequel, prequel, side-quel, etc., but it bears examination because of the manner in which the profilmic bodies captured by Pasolini force a confrontation between elements of the *mise en scene* that draw attention to the cinematic artifice and the neorealist rhetoric of corporeality that is seemingly reinforced by Pasolini's use of non-professional actors to people his on-location shoots in the Roman periphery.

As established previously, the characters that populate *Accattone* and *Mamma Roma* exist on the margins of Roman society, eking out their meager existence in liminal spaces where concepts such as legality, morality, and community become nebulous and difficult to define. John David Rhodes' *Stupendous Miserable City: Pasolini's Rome* provides an inventive and thorough reading of the geographic spaces documented in Pasolini's early films, connecting the growth of the borgate to Fascist-era programs that sought to relocate economically oppressed populations away from the city center of Rome through the construction of high-density housing in the city's outskirts (6). Later, these half-finished housing projects, originally envisioned as a form of class sanitation that would rid Mussolini's capital city of possible rabble-rousers, became the landing point for internal emigrants who came to Rome from Southern Italy in search of work (Rhodes 12). Rhodes writes that the vast sprawl of public and private housing developments "spread like architectural cancer in massive blocks and rows, creating

dense, inchoate outgrowths of the city center that continued to be concentrated in the southern, southwestern, and, to a lesser degree, the northeastern reaches of the city” (12-13). The uneven postwar development of Italy itself is replicated on a smaller scale in the Roman borgate, creating the unplanned, ceaselessly expanding, increasingly remote spaces explored in Pasolini’s first narrative features.

The strangeness and haphazard nature of the borgate is a clear theme of *Accattone* and, to a lesser extent, *Mamma Roma*, the former set in the shantytowns of the periphery and the latter largely taking place in a housing complex in the EUR district of Rome. Accattone ventures into the city center twice: once at the film’s start when he dives from the Ponte Sant’Angelo into the Tiber and at the film’s conclusion when he is killed after a failed attempt at thievery in a Roman shopping district. Vighi notes that the film’s opening sequence establishes Accattone’s drive towards death, a sense of longing for the closure of annihilation that is re-established time and time again throughout the film (85). When Accattone ascends the bridge to take his dive, he proudly proclaims that he would like to die with his gold on, like a pharaoh. After he emerges from the water unscathed, he retorts that he must make many more people sad before he dies. All of this detail and dialogue underscores the sense that, for Accattone and his peers, the city itself is fraught with death and danger. Counterintuitively, the borgate, with all their attendant hazards, are actually the safest spaces for the subproletariat. As Viano states, the film’s “vertically-ordered” ambivalence challenges hierarchies of beauty and death, high and low culture, center and periphery, by allowing Accattone’s presence to

contaminate sites such as the Ponte Sant'Angelo, and, in turn, showing that such a contamination is revisited upon the protagonist in the form of death (72).

As is evidenced by her very name, the character of Mamma Roma bears a more direct relation to the city itself, as opposed to the perpetual outsider-status granted to Accattone. From the film's first scene, Mamma Roma is always careful to distance herself from the "hicks" of the rural communities surrounding Rome. Though she moves with her son to the EUR, relatively far removed from the city center, she does so in order to prevent him from becoming one of these hicks by bringing him into contact with (sub-)urban life. The city center in *Mamma Roma* becomes an ambivalent space of opportunity and exploitation as the film progresses. When Mamma Roma is forced to return to prostitution by Carmine, she must walk the city streets at night, enveloped in an inky abyss that seems to excite and horrify her. However, it is the city center that provides Ettore his one chance at honest work, when he is briefly employed in the busy trattoria. Likewise, Ettore and his friends venture into the city proper to search out opportunities for petty criminality, only to return to the borgate to sell their stolen wares to a fence. Like Accattone, Ettore's death is associated with his journeys into the city, as such transgressions of the informal spatial boundaries of Rome bring the underclass into conflict with law enforcement and the threat of imprisonment and death. Rome's haphazard reconstruction has brought wealth and industry to the city proper while dooming its less fortunate residents to an eternal half-life of privation and dependence on the economic run-off of the capital, in the form of prostitution, thievery, and demand for unskilled labor.

One other dichotomous relationship is explored in these films that commentators typically neglect: that of day and night. One of the dominant features of the mise en scene in Pasolini's early, black and white films is the presence of strong natural light, by way of the sun, that sometimes threatens to overwhelm the screen image entirely. The first line of dialogue spoken in *Accattone* relates the flower-seller Fulvio's surprise at seeing Accattone and his friends up and about in the daylight. They are citizens of the night, banished from sunlight due to their extra-legal proclivities for pimping and petty crime. Viano notes that Accattone and his friends seem to live in an eternal, existential night, wherein "one does not see things; one is simply informed of them" (77). Night-time defines the epistemological position of the characters, even if they are rarely ever depicted after sunset. Throughout the film, the only scenes that take place at night are Maddalena's beating at the hands of the Neopolitans and Accattone's failed attempts to inculcate Stella into prostitution. The viewer is acutely aware of the sunlight that bears down constantly on Accattone, rendering him almost painfully visible. As previously noted, visibility can mean danger for marginalized figures, as it carries the risk of detection by police or other authorities. However, the scene depicting Maddalena's beating underscores the night's own dangers. On a hilltop overlooking the city, she is violently raped and assaulted before being left for dead. Despite screaming repeatedly for help, no one emerges from the night to save her. Instead, the remoteness of this location combined with the cloak of night renders her all the more helpless. When Maddalena seeks recompense in the light of day, she finds herself imprisoned for false accusations while her assailants go free. Similarly, it is

Stella's abandonment by a would-be John and the brief panic it engenders in Accattone that convinces him to abandon pimping as a means of supporting himself, setting the stage for his attempts at honest labor and thievery. Though he is a creature of the night, *Accattone* finds its protagonist attempting to navigate a world in which daylight does little to lessen the ambivalences that define his existence. Instead, it merely serves to bring the irresolvable conflicts at the center of his being into sharper contrast.

Though *Mamma Roma* shares with *Accattone* its prevalence of daytime scenes, the relationships its characters bear to day and night are slightly different due to the film's emphasis on Mamma Roma's attempts to escape from the nocturnal world of prostitution. As previously noted, the film's depictions of Rome at night are among its most stylized and quasi-surreal elements. In these scenes, it is impossible to develop any realistic sense of spatial relations or setting. Mamma Roma seems to wander down long, darkened streets without end while all manner of passers-by approach her, only to be swallowed once more by the twilight. In these scenes, Mamma Roma is given lengthy monologues in which she expounds on her first marriage to an elderly fascist and describes the events that led her to become a prostitute, with remembrances of Ettore's father. Night and the locales associated with it come to represent a space in which Mamma Roma is powerful and comfortable. Her presence organizes all of the negative and undefined space of the *mise en scene*, rendering her the viewer's sole focus in an otherwise unornamented visual composition. However, her relationship to night is fundamentally altered when she is forced to return to walking the streets against her will by Carmine. Though she is most often depicted in the light of day, going about her

daily tasks as mother and merchant, her nocturnal activities are what come to define Mamma Roma's own troubled self-perception and the fear that her past will be discovered by Ettore. Mother and son bear an inverse relationship to day and night, in this respect. While Mamma Roma works in the marketplace by day, Ettore wanders aimlessly with his friends instead of going to school or pursuing some other goal. The only time the viewer is shown Ettore at night, he is hard at work in the trattoria, while his mother, in the company of Biancafiore, admires the results of her extortion plot. As with *Accattone*, Ettore's death and the emotional fallout it creates is presented in the daylight and is brought about by the intervention of authorities that, otherwise absent from the film, appear only to heap greater miseries upon the heads of the protagonists. For Mamma Roma, another creature of the night, the night represents both power and exploitation, creating a space where she finds a sense of comfort and community while also reinforcing an identity that she must shed if she is to ever complete her ascent into the bourgeoisie.

A typological framework underscores the various roles inhabited by the director's subjects, as illuminated by Colleen Ryan-Scheutz in *Sex, the Self, and the Sacred: Women in the Cinema of Pier Paolo Pasolini* (2007) and by Julia Khrebtan-Horhager and Carl Burghardt in their article "Pasolini and the Women of *Accattone*: Challenging Eternal *Ragazzi* in the Eternal City" (2016). Though Khrebran-Horhager and Burghardt find fault with Ryan-Scheutz's analysis in its underestimation of "the intersectional and fluid, and thus eventually transformative, nature of women's identities," both pieces highlight the complex, hierarchical power dynamics between the

men and women of the borgate as depicted in *Accattone* and *Mamma Roma* (Khrebtan-Horhager and Burgchardt 230). As Viano notes, Pasolini's sociological filmmaking explores and deconstructs binary categories such as beauty/death, man/woman, and mother/prostitute in order to reveal the vertically-ordered nature of Roman society as well as the possibility that the marginalized might subvert or escape traditional hierarchies of oppressor and oppressed by virtue of their very exclusion from the hegemonic system that maintains them (72). This notion of a radical ambivalence, engendered by marginality, is drawn into particularly clear focus in considering the relationship between social roles and gender in Pasolini's early films.

The work undertaken by Scheutz and Khreban-Horhager and Burgchardt hinges upon the depiction of women in Pasolini's films. As noted by the latter, "despite the traditional scholarly interpretation of *Accattone* as predominantly patriarchic, the most dynamic and vital characters of the story are women, whose complex identities fuse motherhood (biological or symbolic), prostitution, and womanhood" (228). Scheutz's survey of Pasolini's films focuses on a series of broad categories—mothers, prostitutes, daughters, saints, and sinners—in order to examine Pasolini's depiction of womanhood in both realistic and mythical contexts. The first two of these are the dominant modes of femininity examined in *Accattone* and *Mamma Roma* and could be said to characterize their discourse of womanhood. Though Scheutz might treat these as distinctive categories that are largely mutually exclusive, Khreban-Horhager and Burgchardt insist upon their interrelatedness: ". . . [Pasolini] portrays the real-life mothers as impoverished, tired, and burdened by the bodies of children. Moreover, Pasolini

normalizes prostitution by characterizing it as ‘what all women do’ (243). In bringing his trademark ambivalence to bear on the topic of prostitution and its relationship to motherhood, Pasolini seeks to upset the entire discursive framework that has sustained the dichotomy between saintly, virginal motherhood, as embodied by the Madonna, and prostitution, most commonly configured as the ultimate perversion of feminine purity.

The relationship between motherhood and prostitution is made most evident in the character of Mamma Roma, whose entire narrative arc is defined by her inability to square the bourgeois ideals of motherhood with her participation in sex work. Ryan-Scheutz notes that Mamma Roma’s name conjures associations between motherhood and the community of Rome: “Society’s well-being is thus implicated in Mamma Roma’s identity. Therefore, as she pursues her petite bourgeois dreams, she puts society at stake” (55). By extension, as Mamma Roma struggles to redefine herself within a social context that denies her authenticity and vitality, she dooms Ettore to a half-life of cultural inauthenticity, a member of the sub-proletariat caught up in “the project of a lasting ideological transformation” (55). As Mamma Roma attempts to assert herself within the sphere of petit-bourgeois mercantilism, transitioning from the illicit sex trade to a sanctioned mode of commodification, she ultimately finds herself unable to inhabit the role of mother, a bitter irony as her desire to provide a stable, middle-class existence for Ettore is the *raison d’être* that has motivated her to attempt transformation, in the first place.

Another character in *Mamma Roma* underscores the relationship between motherhood and prostitution: Bruna, the young mother who serves to initiate Ettore into the world of adult sexuality and whom Mamma Roma comes to view as a rival of sorts, when she fears that Bruna's influence over her son is leading him to a life of petty criminality. Though Bruna bears a more casual relationship to sex work than Mamma Roma, it is clear that she trades sex for material gifts that would be unavailable to her due to her position as an impoverished and unwed young mother. The film also subtly underlines her position as a parallel figure to Mamma Roma by revealing that her own young child has taken sick with fever and is unlikely to survive, a fate mirroring Ettore's own demise. Ryan-Scheutz sees Bruna as a static character whose position in the filmic text is that of the "subproletarian mother before her awakening to class consciousness," thereby removing her from the ideological struggle that makes Mamma Roma such a tragic figure (56). Ettore's decision to engage in petty thievery to win Bruna's favor provides the first opportunity for the young man to begin to develop an identity separate from that of his own mother. This development necessitates Mamma Roma's intervention by procuring Biancafiore's help in seducing her son, thereby indirectly asserting her role as motherly protector through the means of prostitution. Likewise, it is Ettore's attempt to assert some kind of possession over Bruna that leads his newfound friends to brutally beat and abandon him, with Bruna casually assenting to this violent mode of commerce, leaving Ettore alienated from both the mother who seeks to transform him into a member of the bourgeoisie and the mother-figure who might provide him access to a more authentic mode of existence in the borgate.

In *Accattone*, it is the character of Maddalena who can be said to embody the prostitute-mother problematic. Though her motherhood is only figurative, it is keenly expressed in her relationship to Accattone, who is helpless to provide for himself in her absence. Khreban-Horhager and Burgchardt describe Maddalena as a character defined by ambivalence and the transgression of traditional roles in that she occupies positions associated with both masculinity and femininity; she is a prostitute who chooses her own pimp, a woman who acts as the chief provider for her household, and a scorned lover who exercises her agency to indirectly, though decisively, bring about Accattone's death (233). If Accattone is a perpetual adolescent who struggles to inhabit the roles expected of an adult man in Italian society, it is largely due to his dependence on Maddalena, which he mournfully expounds on when intoxicated with the Neapolitan pimps who have come to punish Maddalena for the arrest of Ciccio. As Khreban-Horhager and Burgchardt note, an odd interplay of nurturing and menace is at work in the relationship between Maddalena and her pimp, a vacillation between devotion and utter scorn, that borders on the absurd. However, the critics argue that situated within "cultural (including social class and gender) specificities of the post-war Italy, [this relationship] worked, as long as the mamma/ragazzo dichotomy (in all its perversity) remained intact, and Accattone could enjoy the questionable luxury of eternal immaturity and daring youth" (234). If Mamma Roma embodies the incongruities between the ideological constructions of prostitution and motherhood in a bourgeois context, Maddalena demonstrates the fluidity of prostitution-motherhood in the sub-

proletarian context of a household defined by the dependence of a pimp upon a prostitute as the sole means of sustenance.

As implied by this discussion of prostitution-motherhood, such a dichotomy inevitably creates its own inversion: a relationship between the roles of son and pimp. Accattone is every bit the epitome of a helpless and petulant child when Maddalena's maternal presence is removed from his life. The absence created by Maddalena's imprisonment leads Accattone to first seek out his estranged wife, Ascenza, a member of a hardworking family that resents the desperate pimp for his dissolute ways and then attempts to find a substitute for his missing counterpart in Stella, a naive and virginal young woman who quickly reveals herself to be unsuitable for prostitution and becomes totally dependent on Accattone, leading him to attempt to provide for himself and others for the first time in his life. As the film unfolds, Accattone becomes a character who rejects both the roles of exploiter and exploited, leaving him at a critical impasse as he finds himself with a dependant, in the form of Stella, while also discovering that his body and temperament are ill-suited for the backbreaking labor that he would need to undertake to provide for her using traditional means. The disruption of the pimp(son)-prostitute(mother) relationship between Accattone and Maddalena proves so crucial and insurmountable that it leads to the former's death, in short order.

Stella's role in *Accattone* embodies one of the categories highlighted by Ryan-Scheutz that is otherwise ignored in the pair of films discussed here, that of daughter. Angelo Restivo defines Stella as the film's second major icon of ambivalence, after Accattone himself (73). When one considers Stella's small but crucial role within the

operations of the text, this proclamation seems fully justified. When Accattone first encounters Stella, she is laboring in the same refuse heap as Ascenza. However, her blond hair and fresh-faced appearance immediately differentiate her from the other women portrayed in the film, with particular respect to Maddalena whose position she eventually usurps. Khreban-Horhager and Burgchardt highlight this first encounter between the two as an instance of “the contrasting imagery of Stella’s timeless beauty and her working environment,” which serves to emphasize “Pasolini’s critique of the new order as human exploitation” (239). Stella is rendered remarkable in this respect because she is somehow unsullied and transcendently beautiful despite her utterly depressing surroundings. It is this transcendent, sublime quality that causes Accattone to attempt to escape his eternal *ragazzo*-hood. Similarly, it is the devotion Stella inspires that incites Maddalena to sic the authorities on Accattone. As Khreban-Horhager and Burgchardt note, “in that act of jealousy and despair, Maddalena’s primary identity is not of a prostitute, nor a (figurative/symbolic) mother-provider, but a loving and hurting, betrayed woman” (235). Stella’s presence in Accattone’s life comprises a double-edged promise of redemption and annihilation, revealing new depths to his character while also reinstating the fundamental impossibility of his becoming anything other than what he is.

Carmine in *Mamma Roma* also embodies the pimp-son relationship through his own dependence on the film’s primary maternal figure. At the start of the film, Carmine is to be married to the daughter of a land-owning rural family, whose agricultural lifestyle presents a possibility for him to leave behind his life of pimping and, by

extension, his dependence on Mamma Roma. Mamma Roma's drunken, boisterous presence at the wedding emphasizes how happy she is to be freed of the burden of Carmine's dependency. However, this joy is destined to be short-lived as Carmine quickly returns to his old ways, materializing at Mamma Roma's doorstep to demand that she return to the streets once more, and on the eve of her move to her new apartment in the EUR, no less. Despite Mamma Roma's threats and pleadings, Carmine is unmoved by the woman's plight. He is crueller and more overtly exploitative than Accattone, bearing none of his predecessor's ambivalence to the profession of pimping. However, when Carmine returns to darken Mamma Roma's doorstep for a second time, he expounds roughly the same justification for his behavior as was related by Accattone; he was but a poor, innocent boy when he met Mamma and has now become so utterly addicted to the easy money provided by her street walking that he is unable to force himself to labor on his own behalf. He states that he has been "ruined" by Mamma Roma's influence on his life and that he has no choice but to extort her with the threat of revealing her past to Ettore.

The discursive formulation laid out by Carmine in this justification for his actions is noteworthy in that it seems to be a complete inversion of the typical narrative of pimping and prostitution, wherein the prostitute is typically said to have been seduced into a life of sex work by the nefarious influence of an older and more experienced pimp who seeks to exploit a young and innocent ingenue. Carmine's expression of his own self-image, in which he has been but a helpless victim to Mamma Roma's enervative influence, suggests that he should be viewed not just as a pimp but as a secondary son

who sees himself as being scorned and abandoned by his mother figure. If Ettore embodies the open possibilities of a new, bourgeois life that lead Mamma Roma to labor so arduously to escape marginality, Carmine is the threatening spectre of a past that cannot be fully reconstructed or paved over. He is a debased vision of masculinity stunted irrevocably by the presence of a larger-than-life, overbearing mother figure. In the sense that Ettore's own death can be seen as a product of his inability to achieve a distinct identity outside of the aspirationally bourgeois one foisted upon him by his mother, Carmine can be seen as a dark reflection of this dynamic between Mamma Roma and her pimp-son(s).

Completing this typology of the borgate's inhabitants is a figure who escape the dichotomous dependent-provider relationships outlined previously; it is the thief, a role ultimately embodied by both Accattone and Ettore, who suggests a criminality more overt and cautionary than the pimp, whose actions, though illicit, are informally sanctioned by society at large. After all, it is the concept of the thievery that gives *Ladri di Biciclette* its dramatic heft. When Ricci takes steps at the film's conclusion that lead him to transgress the boundary that separates the desperate but honest proletariats from the thieves of the world, he must be forcibly reminded of his place in society, leading him to become so prostrate that even his young son can look down on him with piteous sympathy. As noted previously, the finale of *Ladri di Biciclette* is directly cited in the scene of Ettore's capture at the hospital ward. However, the concept of thievery also becomes a key term in Accattone's attempted transformations, representing a final step beyond pimping and his failed attempt at traditional labor.

Restivo states that thievery in *Accattone* exists outside of the exploiter-exploited dichotomy (76). When Accattone turns to theft at the film's conclusion, it is because he has exhausted all of the options available to him within the borgate. The only path forward must involve making some claim to the prosperous plenitude embodied by the city of Rome itself. By taking this daring action, Accattone risks bringing himself into conflict with the authorities who maintain law and order in the Eternal City, largely by keeping the marginalized in their margins and far from the mercantile districts where the very goods that the poor are so desperately in need of are bought and sold in thousandfold. In the company of Balilla and another of the young *ragazzi* who frequent his bar, Accattone finds himself in the city center in search of some valuable property that might be stolen and resold. The trio is unsuccessful in their quest until they come across a truck full of sausages. That a foodstuff becomes the object leading directly to Accattone's death is noteworthy, given how often Accattone is heard to remark on his hunger pangs and the great lengths that he is shown to go to in order to secure a free meal. Though Accattone has existed, even thrived, in marginality and a degree of criminality throughout the film, it is the theft of these sausages that seal his fate and foreclose on all other outcomes besides imprisonment and death, which, we will see while considering Ettore's own turn to thievery, are not all that dissimilar.

Mamma Roma's depiction of thievery lacks the sense of transformation with which the act is associated in *Accattone*. After all, Ettore is revealed to have a penchant for theft early on, when he steals and sells his mother's record so that he might purchase a small gift for Bruna. When the film returns to the subject of thievery as it

nears its conclusion, it is implied that Ettore and his peers have become experienced, petty criminals, as they discuss the possibility that the hospital might no longer be a suitable venue for their crimes due to the fact that they have visited it so frequently. Unlike Accattone, who has been driven to theft by pure desperation, Ettore's criminality is borne of adolescent confusion and rebellion, a condition symptomatic of his continued inability to inhabit any positive social or familial roles after the disintegration of his relationship with his mother. Whereas a relatively depersonalized crime leads to Accattone's death, Ettore's final theft seems decisively exploitative and debased, as the boys scheme to steal a small radio from a man they believe to be nearing death. The senselessness of this crime, committed by a young man whose mother would gladly provide for him whatever he might ask, is emphasized by Ettore's feverish state. Already in the throes of the sickness that will ultimately kill him, Ettore seems to be suffering from both a physical and moral malady. When he is quickly caught and imprisoned for his crime, it comes as no surprise given the apparent stupidity and pointlessness of the act. Ettore has fallen into criminality not due to any particular rational cause, but as a means of expressing his utter hopelessness in the face of his inability to be suitably integrated into the petit bourgeois microcosm of the EUR.

The idea of community, an obvious counterpoint to the thematic emphasis on alienation and the breakdown of traditional social orders, proves crucial to unraveling the conclusions of *Accattone* and *Mamma Roma*. Throughout both films, various examples of communities are explored. Accattone and his peers share an undeniable camaraderie. They laugh at, tease, and cajole one another, but theirs is a special bond

strengthened by their complete exclusion from other means of collective identification in Roman society. Though they seem to be young adults, they behave like teenagers attempting to assert themselves as men, through feats of strength, wit, and cruelty. At times, their hypermasculine posturing even gives way to affection and warmth, demonstrated when Accattone, waiting for Stella to return from the Appian way, rests his torso against the back of a friend seated on a motorcycle. This display of affection between friends is more prolonged and significant than any physical affection depicted between a man and a woman in the film. There is a special closeness reserved for male-male bonding. By extension, Accattone only reaches his nadir after he has been rejected and beaten up by his friends, rendered anathematic to them by his decision to pursue manual labor as a means of supporting himself and Stella. Theirs is a camaraderie founded upon perpetual adolescence and exclusion. When Accattone betrays their informal code, he is no longer privy to the comforts that these friendships provide.

A similar degree of homosocial bonding is also present in Ettore's relationships with his peers. When Mamma Roma first encounters Ettore, she finds him playing in a field with other boys. In the midst of their frolicking, Ettore questions each of them about the theft of his cigarettes, going so far as to smell the breath of each of his playmates so as to ascertain who the thief might be. This seems to suggest that before Ettore is relocated to the city, he enjoys a circle of close friends and might even be a leader of sorts. The relationship between Ettore and these boys is revisited, in a distorted and threatening form, through the new friendships Ettore finds in the housing complex. By way of these new bonds, Ettore finds Bruna, the joy of thievery, and his

ultimate imprisonment and death. Like Accattone, Ettore must struggle with belonging, with the conflict between familiar folkways and the social codes of embourgeoisement. Even after Ettore is assaulted by his friends for attempting to claim Bruna for himself, they still enjoy each other's company because the beating functions not as a final kiss-off but a pedagogy of sorts. It instructs Ettore to avoid forming exclusive, romantic bonds with Bruna because such an attachment would inevitably lead to conflict with his friends who also view Bruna as an object of sexual desire. Similarly, when Ettore becomes further alienated from his mother by the revelation of her past, he finds himself more and more entangled in the life of petty criminality enjoyed by his friends. In his emotionally and physically disordered state, Ettore finds himself unable to heed the last piece of advice from his friends: attempting further thefts at the hospital will result in capture and imprisonment.

In her own way, Mamma Roma also demonstrates the strange functionings of community at the margins of society. At Carmine's wedding, Mamma Roma is the life of the party, known and beloved by all. However, she gives up this familiar and comfortable life for one of bourgeois penny-pinching and diligence in the hopes that it might allow her to ascend the limitations of her subproletariat caste. Whenever Mamma Roma finds herself in the midst of her fellow prostitutes, she seems relaxed and efficacious, able to pull together complex schemes like the extortion of the restaurateur with the help of her faithful companion, Biancafiore. This is not to say that her attempts to establish new roots in the housing complex are completely fruitless. Over time, she is shown to develop a sense of belonging amongst the petty merchants of the EUR. When

Ettore becomes enamored with Bruna, they inform her of his lovesickness, causing her to take action to prevent this attachment. When he is eventually imprisoned, they comfort her with assurances that he will return from his stint in jail scared straight and ready to leave his criminal past behind him. Mamma Roma is undeniably charismatic and likeable, seemingly able to integrate herself into a variety of social contexts without too much incongruity. However, she is unable to extend this gift of belonging to her son, Ettore. As the conclusion of *Mamma Roma* demonstrates, she comes to find herself fully accepted into a new community but at the cost of her child's life.

As *Accattone* draws to a close, the eponymous protagonist finds himself facing the consequences of a totalizing and unavoidable alienation. He has lost his friends, his livelihood of pimping, and the possibilities of building a new life through honest, manual labor have been foreclosed upon by the weakness of his body. This sense of impending doom is reinforced through a striking dream sequence in which Accattone visits the site of his own burial and seems to make peace with imminent death. As Restivo notes, the dream sequence creates a space wherein Accattone can make sense of his desires "far from the eyes of power" (82). However, his fantasy is not one of escape or triumphalism. Instead, he seems to long for death and the finality it will bring. Accattone encounters his friends dressed in their finest clothes, accompanying a casket that is to be interred. However, he is unable to join them in the graveyard, barred from entry to this paradise just as he has been excluded from any sense of comfort or security in life. After scaling the wall to the cemetery that is to be his final resting place, Accattone encounters the gravedigger preparing his burial plot. Noticing that he is to be buried in

the shadows, Accattone requests that the grave be dug in the sunshine so that light might fall on him while he rests. Having accomplished this goal, Accattone awakens and sets into action the course of events that will lead to his death.

It is often noted that, for Pasolini, death can be said to represent a final fixing of meaning, dispelling the ambiguities and play of shifting meanings that define our lives (Restivo 82). In that sense, it should come as no surprise that Accattone's death is not a scene of great tragedy but one of quiet acceptance and even a degree of muted joy. Before attempting the final theft that will end in Accattone's death, he sits with his compatriots on a dusty street corner and they laugh together uproariously—at the stench of their fatigued bodies, at the foolishness of their exhaustive efforts, at the absurdity of life itself. After this moment of levity, the thieves quickly locate their object and prepare to head home with the fruits of their labors. Accattone speaks cryptically of providence and Stella, suggesting that she has instilled some small amount of hopefulness in him. However, the men are quickly confronted by the police. While his friends are content to give themselves up and face whatever punishment is meted out to them, Accattone flees on a stolen motorcycle only to be killed moments later in a collision with another vehicle. His fellow thieves, joined by a crowd of concerned onlookers, rush to his side and bear witness to his final words: "Ahh... Molto bene..." Accattone dies with a sigh of relief and words of contentment on his lips. He has been freed from the struggle and turmoil of life, no longer sentenced to wander the dusty, sunbaked paths of the borgate any longer.

Like Accattone, Ettore's death occurs at a time when he is removed from the typical context with which he is associated. However, while Accattone dies during an attempted escape, Ettore must suffer the bodily and psychological miseries of imprisonment before expiring. In explicating the scene of Ettore's lonesome death in the prison-sanitorium, Baschiera notes three levels of control enacted upon the body: literal, in the form of straps and restraints that control his feverish thrashing; pictorial, in the scene's citation of high art depictions of crucifixion; and ontological, in the sense that the cinematic camera itself serves to segment and obscure the phenomenological body of the nonprofessional actor portraying Ettore (71). As he moans and wails in his final moments, there is an unmistakable sense that Ettore is being tortured. However, this scene of torture is unlike the famous example of Giorgio's death at the hands of the SS in *Roma Città Aperta*. Instead of being subjected to instruments of mortification in the service of sadism, Ettore is a victim of neglect and privation. His life is ultimately claimed not by violence visited upon him by the authorities, but by an untreated fever. As Ryan-Scheutz notes, despite all of his efforts to distance himself from his mother, Ettore expires while calling for her, longing to return to the maternal comforts that he has previously rejected now that he has experienced the cruelty of the laws of the father (54).

When Mamma Roma learns of Ettore's death, news of his passing immediately spreads through the marketplace, demonstrating the communality of the suffering experienced by the protagonist in this final scene. As the authorities describe Ettore's fate to his distraught mother, a paparazzo appears to take photographs, presumably for

some tabloid that would capitalize on such a lurid, sensational story. However, before he can successfully complete his task, the paparazzo finds himself waylaid by an onlooker, seemingly outraged at this rank exploitation of Mamma Roma's immense suffering. When Mamma Roma flees to her apartment, many of her peers from the market follow her, desperate to prevent her from taking drastic action in her disturbed state. Arriving home, Mamma Roma sets her eyes on Ettore's discarded clothing draped across his bed before attempting to fling herself out the window, only to be stopped at the last moment by the intervention of her neighbors. In the film's final shot, Mamma Roma and her rescuers share a communal vision of the distant city center, stark white and otherworldly in its classical finery. Though this gaze directed toward the city is one of horror and incomprehension, it is a communal gaze strengthened by multiplicity. Mamma Roma has discovered that all of her efforts toward social ascension have come at the cost of her son, but she now finds herself in the midst of a community who cares for her, who shares in her grief and her outrage. In this way, even the profound horror of the loss of a child is tempered with a subtle suggestion of solidarity in the face of injustice and inequity.

Pasolini's visions of the borgate in *Accattone* and *Mamma Roma* suggest an incipient site that is resistant to the forces that characterize Italy's reconstruction. Present in these films is a sense that the world has been subject to an embourgeoisement, an extension of the values and attitudes of the middle class, across broad swathes of Italian society. This embourgeoisement only intensifies the acute marginalization experienced by the titular characters of these films. Whereas other

filmmakers in the cinema of reconstruction might have utilized ambivalence as an expression of Italy's rapid modernization and the confusion it has wrought, Pasolini renders ambiguity as an essential characteristic of the urban subproletariat, an emergent stratum whose position within the hierarchy of modern capitalism and relationship toward both traditional ways of life and the consumer culture of the mid-century is essentially nebulous, even evanescent. Though neither of these films displays much in the way of hopefulness for the future of Italy, the populace of the borgate represents for Pasolini a sort of corporeal resistance to the totalizing grasp of the new hegemony. In their strange amalgamation of folkways and social codes built on privation and necessity, a connection to vital authenticity exists that is severely lacking in modern life. By recontextualizing the favored subject of neorealism within the socio-economic conditions of Italy at the dawn of the 1960s, Pasolini demonstrates that the process of reconstruction has created a new populace that, far removed from the benefits of the economic boom, will continue the process of class struggle by the very nature of its marginality and exclusion.

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