

### **Rome's role in *La Grande Bellezza* and *La Dolce Vita***

Following the presentation made on similarities that *La Grande Bellezza* (2013) and *La Dolce Vita* (1960) share with each other, this write-up will provide a more in-depth look into the significance of Italy's capital, Rome, as well as propose the reasons why this city was chosen by Federico Fellini and Paolo Sorrentino as a main backdrop for both films' narrative.

*La Dolce Vita* captures a Roman life of a young journalist Marcello and his everyday encounters with celebrities and friends as well as complete strangers. *La Grande Bellezza* follows a man in his 60s living in Rome and working as journalist and shows him partying, wandering around Rome and reminiscing about the past.

First of all, the two films share a non-linear narrative structure, or as Giddins (2014) states a "picaresque" format often consisting of non-related episodes. It is the city that binds these elements and makes them appear more coherent and each film's audience is invited to explore the Italian capital alongside two main protagonists: Marcello in *La Dolce Vita* and Jep Gambardella in *La Grande Bellezza* respectively - as previously stated, both of which are journalists. Consequently, the spectators do not just wander around the city's streets, they also get introduced to very diverse and often bizarre inhabitants of Rome: from prostitutes and rich men, who get their daily 700-euro Botox injections, to priests and unsuccessful magicians who can easily make a giraffe appear in the middle of the streets and just as easily make them disappear.

It is interesting to also point out, that the directors, just as their lead characters, do not come from Rome. Thus, it enables to alienate the characters and empower them with a role of an observer. Also, Iannone (2013) suggests that Sorrentino's perception of Rome is embedded in Jep.

However, Rome also plays a significant role in creating a unique atmosphere. It sets a certain mood and provides a social, religious and cultural context to both of the aforementioned films.

Rome, as depicted by Fellini, is a city, which lives of Hollywood's stars visiting for film production and their love affairs, appearances, always followed by paparazzi, as well as vague conversations (Bondanella, 2002, p.73). Similarly to Fellini, Sorrentino, according to Iannone (2013), places Jep in Rome's decadence. It is as if the Romans have forgotten where they live and manage to exist outside of the cultural heritage of the Eternal City.

As Collin (2014) notes in his review, the city's beauty is recognised by people coming from the outside – tourists. For instance, right at the beginning, after taking pictures of the surroundings, the tourist faints after overdosing on the Roman glory. As Gargiulo (2013) puts it: "Rome kills with its beauty." Jep's birthday celebration follows and contrasts with the previous scene as he is partying on a rooftop of one of the city's central buildings; an illuminating sign of Martini almost outshines the Coliseum in the background. Such manipulation of *mise-en-scène* might be interpreted as Sorrentino's intention to showcase what are the moral values of the modern artistic stratum of the Eternal City.

Another example is a funeral scene when Jep and his friend attend the burial and the former describes it as "the high society event par excellence". It is a chance for socialites to showcase their outfit and play a certain role in this play (Iannone, 2013).

Hence, both Fellini and Sorrentino attempted to access the moral values of Rome's inhabitants. However, as Hooper (2014) notes, they do it differently: whilst in the 1960s decadence took over the city, it still managed to be a daring and alive. An Italian director, poet and prosaic, Pier Paolo Pasolini, stated that Fellini's depiction of the lively Via Veneto street managed to defeat any sense of emptiness and hopelessness (Bondanella, 2002).

Contemporary Rome, depicted through Sorrentino's camera, in its turn, is dangling 'on the edge of the financial bankruptcy'. Hooper (2014) also suggests that the director has attempted to simultaneously highlight a "moral bankruptcy".

Alongside decadence, both films also incorporate religion as one of their key themes. For instance, Bondanella (2003, p.73) sees the opening scene, where the helicopter is transporting a statue of Christ in a cross-like pose, as “an ironic benediction to the city underneath”. One could argue that Rome’s function is to provide a suitable context. Fellini, according to Bondanella, depicted fake lives of highbrow Romans and Hollywood stars arriving to Rome and by placing such representation against the city’s “ancient and Christian” background, he managed to emphasise the emptiness of their being (2003, p.74).

Iannone (2013) suggested that Sorrentino’s fascination lies in “Rome’s capacity to reconcile the sacred and the profane.” As Hooper (2014) points out, even today’s Rome and Catholicism are two inseparable elements and religion coats the city as an invisible veil meaning it is everywhere even if you do not see it (Goodman, 2014). Whilst walking on the city’s streets, Jep comes across a convent and often contemplates the tourists and the daily life. When Jep meets an Italian cardinal at a party, which, per se, is in itself a bit of an oxymoron and exposes the true face of Italy’s religion institution. Goodman argues that such contrast between “the *flanêur* and the saint” (Goodman, 2014) is a representation of Sorrentino’s attempts to explore the relationship between the artist and the sacred.

In conclusion, despite the fact that *La Grande Bellezza* and *La Dolce Vita* are following two different characters and represent the Eternal City from the 1960s and 2010s, at its core, Rome is an environment where opposites, such as ancient religion and decadence of the bourgeoisie, can exist along each other. And, in this way, Rome indeed is an Eternal City where many things remain the same in spite of the gap between the decades.

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