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## FILM AS HISTORY

### *Fellini's La Dolce Vita as a Historical Artifact*

ZACH ZIMMERMANN

IN 1960, ITALY WAS A COUNTRY IN RAPID CULTURAL TRANSITION. NOWHERE WAS THIS CULTURAL CURRENT, THIS EBB OF CONSERVATIVE ITALIAN VIRTUE AND FLOW OF FLASHY ITALIAN CONSUMERISM, MORE EVIDENT THAN IN ITALY'S AGE-OLD SEAT OF POWER: ROME. DURING THIS TIME, FAMED DIRECTOR FEDERICO FELLINI UNDERTOOK TO ENLIST THE ELEMENTS OF HIGH-MODERNISM AND AUTEURISM IN THE CREATION OF A WORK OF ART THAT WOULD CAPTURE SOMETHING OF THE NEW CULTURE RISING IN ROME. THE RESULT WAS THE NOW CANONICAL FILM *LA DOLCE VITA*. INFAMOUS FOR ITS SENSUALITY, BUT EMINENT FOR ITS MASTERLY ARTISTIC STORY-TELLING, FIFTY YEARS HAVE SEEN THE VALUE OF FELLINI'S FILM FOR FILM CRITICS AND HISTORIANS ALIKE INCREASE SUBSTANTIALLY. HERE, THAT VALUE WILL BE ASSESSED BY AN ANALYSIS OF THE FILM'S RECEPTION AT THE TIME OF ITS RELEASE, FOLLOWED BY A CLOSE LOOK AT THE FILM ITSELF. AN EXPLORATION OF HOW *LA DOLCE VITA* SIMULTANEOUSLY CAPTURES AND CRITICIZES THE PERIOD OF ITS PRODUCTION DEMONSTRATES THIS WORK OF ART'S INVALUABLE STATUS AS A HISTORICAL ARTIFACT.

## INTRODUCTION

As Federico Fellini's infamous film *La Dolce Vita* begins, a helicopter suspends a statue of Christ as it flies over the city of Rome. The helicopter, a man-made marvel, passes an ancient Roman aqueduct as it nears historic St. Peter's Basilica. With this powerful visual, Fellini immediately alerts the viewer to the distinction between the old Rome—the Rome of ancient structures, monuments, and churches—and the new, modern Rome. This opening alerts the audience that the film will consider and reflect on the new Rome. Fellini himself acknowledged that, while intending to make a very different type of film after his previous film, *Nights of Cabiria*, he came to “realize that the Rome he had intended to depict had been replaced by another city, more brash and cosmopolitan.”<sup>1</sup> Instead, Fellini made the canonical film, *La Dolce Vita*, of equal value to film critics and historians alike. As an eminent work of its time, the film and its reception elucidate the climate which produced it; but the film also reacts against that climate in ways which have become historically fascinating in the decades since its release. Indeed, *La Dolce Vita* crystallized something of Italy's understanding of salvation in 1960, and remains, therefore, an invaluable artifact.

*La Dolce Vita* documents the tale of gossip columnist Marcello Rubini, and something of that tale should be told here prior to a discussion of the film. Having left his dreary, provincial existence behind, Marcello wanders through an ultra-modern, ultra-sophisticated, ultra-decadent Rome. He yearns to write seriously, but his inconsequential newspaper pieces bring in more money, and he is too lazy to struggle against this condition. Instead Marcello attaches himself to a bored socialite whose search for thrills brings the pair into contact with a number of fantastical characters. The events that follow form seven distinct episodes of action that are loosely threaded together. Throughout all his adventures, Marcello's dreams, fantasies, and nightmares mirror the hedonism of his waking life. It is these moments of unreality that unify the seven episodes into a coherent whole, culminating with a shrug: while his lifestyle is shallow and ultimately pointless, there is nothing he can do to change it, so he might as well enjoy it.

## RECEPTION AS A GAUGE OF CULTURAL CLIMATE

Upon its domestic release, the film immediately caused controversy. A segment of the Italian population was morally outraged, resulting in “protests on the streets as well as in the papers.”<sup>2</sup> Conservative opinion leaders denounced

the film as licentious and morally depraved, labeling it “the work of a Communist.”<sup>3</sup> Soon after the Vatican—which originally accepted the film—retracted its approval and condemned *La Dolce Vita*, swiftly bringing the clerics who had initially approved of the film into accord with official policy. The press assiduously documented these censures, captivating public consciousness and, ironically, turning “*La Dolce Vita* into a social and cultural event.”<sup>4</sup>

Partly as a result of the controversy, the film became an immediate box-office success in Italy and internationally upon its release abroad.<sup>5</sup> Italians lined up to see the film upon its release. It was a cultural sensation, ultimately grossing over 2,200,000,000 lira. Reflecting on the decade in film, *The New York Times* hailed *La Dolce Vita* as “one of the most widely seen and acclaimed European movies of the 1960s.”<sup>6</sup> The public's clamor to see the film was accompanied by ovations from a majority of prominent critics in Italy and the rest of Europe. *La Dolce Vita* earned the Palme d'Or (Golden Palm) at the 1960 Cannes Film Festival. *The New York Times* reported that the festival ended “with Italy's *La Dolce Vita* as the unanimous choice for the Golden Palm first prize,” its presentation being so overpowering that it had “set the tone of the whole festival.”<sup>7</sup>

When the film was released in America the following year, the film again received praise from critics with some minor exceptions, among which was a notable review in *Time* magazine: “For all its vitality, the film is decadent, an artistic failure,”<sup>8</sup> and ““worst of all, *La Dolce Vita* fails to attract the moviegoer as much as it repulses him, fails to inspire his sympathies as well as his disgust.”<sup>9</sup> Most critics, though, like Bosley Crowther, a writer for *The New York Times*, concluded that the film “proved to deserve all the hurrahs and the impressive honors it has received.”<sup>10</sup> In his review, Crowther writes that the film is an “awesome picture, licentious in content but moral and vastly sophisticated in its attitude and what it says.”<sup>11</sup> *La Dolce Vita* was nominated for four Academy Awards, including Best Director—winning for Best Costume Design: Black-and-White—and received a New York Film Critics Circle award for Best Foreign Film.

Fellini's film was received positively in America due in part to the intellectual climate into which it was released. In the 1950s and 1960s Fellini became, as Joseph McBride puts it, the “director as superstar”<sup>12</sup> for academics as well as the public.<sup>13</sup> Fellini achieved such superstardom primarily because his work as a director—epitomized in *La Dolce*

Uietato ai minori di 16 anni

FEDERICO FELLINI



# LA DOLCE VITA

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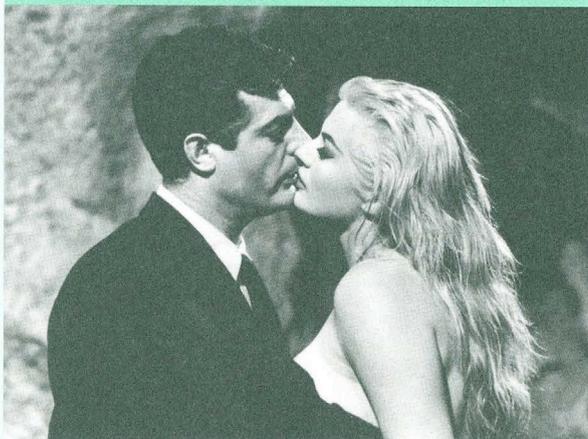
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LA DOLCE VITA BROUGHT THE ALLURE OF ITALIAN CULTURE TO CINEMAS ACROSS THE UNITED STATES.

*Vita* – “dovetailed with three major movements in the arts and in film in the 1950s and 1960s: high modernism, the art film, and auteurism.”<sup>14</sup> High modernism refers to the alignment of modern art with high (versus popular) culture, marking a clear distinction between innovative, exclusive “high” art and art appearing in pop culture, favoring the former. Art film, especially in American vernacular, refers to a film that presents itself as a piece of high art, with such films generally being directed by an auteur, or a filmmaker whose films are primarily guided by his own creative vision. All three of these movements were interrelated and all three were fundamental to Fellini’s international success with *La Dolce Vita*.

*La Dolce Vita* encapsulates the high modern movement in film, being an art film in every sense of the word, especially as it was made under the direction of the auteur. In producing *La Dolce Vita*, Fellini attempted above all else to craft the film into a piece of high art. He drew on modernist literature and experimented with modes of narrative: the film presents seven loosely connected episodes, resembling a collection of short stories that are only marginally bound. Together, this modernist narrative technique, unconventional in film at that time, “confirmed Fellini’s reputation within high modernist circles of the time”<sup>15</sup> and led critics to consider the film one of the greatest art films ever produced. Fellini hoped that *La Dolce Vita* would become a cinematic poem, and most contemporary critics felt that he had done so. Moreover, Fellini’s control over the direction of the film was unprecedented and is rare even today. He crafted each detail of the film so that it truly became his piece of art. Film critic Peter Bonadello compared Fellini’s

THE FILM’S PORTRAYAL OF LOOSE SEXUALITY RESONATED WITH AMERICAN AUDIENCES IN THE 1960S.



construction of his films to “the art produced in the workshop of a Renaissance painter . . . virtually every detail—costumes, makeup, lighting, sets—of every film was minutely sketched out by Fellini with his famous felt-tip marker.”<sup>16</sup> *La Dolce Vita* aspired with unprecedented ambition to make film a core media of high modern art, and the cultural conditions of its production could not have been more auspicious for such an ambition. One begins to understand the critical acclaim.<sup>17</sup>

The cultural climate in America also contributed substantially to the film’s reception by the public, for it enjoyed considerable box-office receipts of over \$19,500,000 in America. This success is tied to the timing of its release, which coincided with a rise in the American people’s interest in international films. As film critic Frank Burke writes, there existed “widespread postwar American movie interests overseas”<sup>18</sup> and Italian (and French) cinema experienced considerable success in American markets. This popular reception reflected two movements in American culture.

First, the reception of *La Dolce Vita*—and Italian film in general—represented a larger cultural fascination with Italy. During the 1950s and 1960s, what America wore, what its citizens drove, and how they looked, was influenced considerably by Italy’s trendsetters, which included fashion designers, film directors, and automakers. If it came from Italy, and the designer’s name ended in a vowel, the American public was buying it. Even First Lady Jackie Kennedy, an icon of America’s style, was enamored with Oleg Cassini designs. This fascination with Italian culture coincided with a peak in American interest in film. In this cultural climate, it is not surprising that Fellini – the Italian director – and his masterwork *La Dolce Vita* experienced such popular and critical success in America.

Second, the reception of the film occurred in the midst of an evolving cultural and sexual revolution in America. Not released in America until 1961, the reception of the film was preceded by three significant events in American cultural history: the issuing of the Kinsey reports (1948 and 1953), the election of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy (January 1960) and the development of the pill (May 1960). The Kinsey reports, two studies by Alfred Kinsey exploring male and female sexuality, challenged widely held beliefs about human sexuality, including prevalent medical literature that posited that women were not sexual beings. More than any previous book, Kinsey’s studies placed sex on the national stage and inspired public dis-

course on American sexuality. These reports had begun to transform American's perceptions of sexual behavior, but by 1960 with the election of the glamorous and sexy Kennedy family, Americans had an entirely new understanding of sex. Unlike ever before, Americans were remarkably open about and interested in sex. This new perspective on sex affected critics' perception of the promiscuity in *La Dolce Vita* and drove the public to the theaters, wanting to see its curiosity played out on the big screen.

A large reason for this film's popular appeal was its sex appeal. International films had more nudity and were generally more risqué than American films. *La Dolce Vita* did not disappoint. The so-called "orgy scene," the final scene of the film excluding the epilogue on the beach, in which Marcello conducts the revelers, was wholly unprecedented in film. Even *The New York Times* reviewer, who lavishly praised the film, noted that the film was "licentious."<sup>19</sup> Roger Ebert postulated that the popular reception of the film was due largely to this element of the film: "We are afraid that, despite the almost extreme good taste with which the movie was filmed, we are afraid that many of the thousands who queued up before the theatre had rather elementary motives."<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, the reception of the film also coincided with serious economic development in America. Given the corresponding social effects of that development on 1950s America, the materialistic Rome that Fellini presented in *La Dolce Vita* was not entirely foreign to American moviegoers; American audiences could relate to the film and its social commentary. By 1949 in America, despite the continuing problems of postwar re-conversion, an economic expansion had begun that would continue with only brief interruptions for almost twenty years. Among the most striking social developments of the immediate postwar era was the rapid extension of a middle-class lifestyle and outlook to an expanding portion of the population. As historian Alan Brinkley remarks, "At the center of middle-class culture in the 1950s was a growing absorption with consumer goods."<sup>21</sup> By 1960 America and Italy had experienced an economic revolution, and portions of both populations were concerned about the social effects of the transition. These Americans viewed Fellini's social commentary as relevant and poignant; Bosley Crowther, a writer for *The New York Times*, captured this feeling in his review of the film: "Of all the intelligent filmmakers who have been trying in recent years to give us a comprehensive picture of the frantic civilization of the present day, it looks as if Federico Fellini has come closest to doing it in

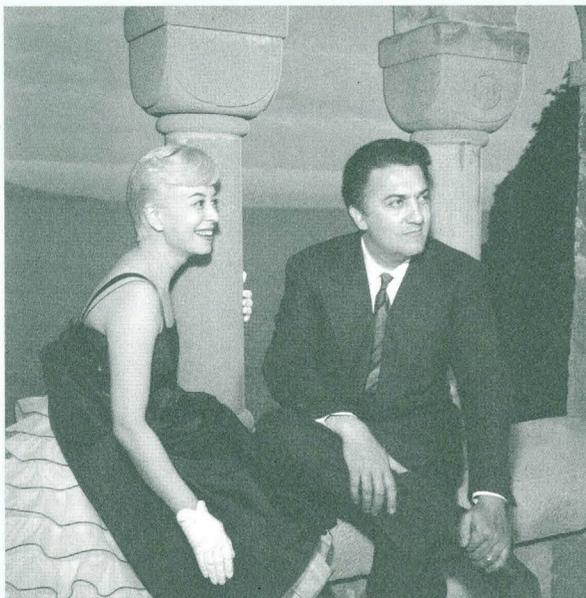
his great Italian film, '*La Dolce Vita*.'"<sup>22</sup> Crowther even suggests that the ills that Fellini portrays are applicable to "almost any highly civilized realm." Crowther's comments, like those from the previously mentioned contemporary critics, reveal the political, social, and cultural climate in which the film was produced.

#### LA DOLCE VITA AS A CULTURAL CRITIQUE

The telling nature of *La Dolce Vita*'s reception suggests its importance to history as a cultural artifact. but beyond documenting the climate of the period, the film offers a commentary. And in the years preceding the production of *La Dolce Vita*, Italy experienced radical changes. During those years, Italy entered a new phase of growth and change. As film critic Stephen Gundle writes, "No longer the predominantly agricultural and only primitively industrial country that had emerged from the Second World War, [Italy] was rapidly developing into an industrial society with a profile of its own."<sup>23</sup> In the immediate post-war period, Italy had experienced a devastating depression, but by the end of the 1950s Italy's economic fortune had turned around, in part due to its newfound allies and newfound resources. In the 1950s, Italy became a member of the NATO alliance—benefiting immensely from the funds allocated by the Marshall Plan—and a member of the European Economic Community (which later became the European Union). Aided by these new allies and the discovery of methane, which reinvigorated the Italian steel

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industry, Italy experienced an impressive economic revival and growth. Suddenly, in the wake of a serious depression, Italians experienced unprecedented prosperity. This economic development, later entitled the "Economic Miracle,"



FEDERICO FELLINI AND ONE OF HIS MANY WIVES, GI-LIETTA MASINA, IN 1957.

began in 1957 and was in full swing in 1959, the year in which Fellini filmed *La Dolce Vita*.

The Economic Miracle had a considerable impact upon the social and cultural climate in Italy, and the film catches the swift changes of rapid development. In the midst of the Economic Miracle, Italy became the location of many out-sourced American films. In the late 1950s, a number of American studios financed films shot on location in Italy, primarily Rome. American studios did so for two reasons: in addition to capitalizing on the American people's fascination with Italy, the studios were able to increase their profit margins given the relatively cheap cost of labor in Rome. American films such as *Three Coins in the Fountain* and *Summertime in Venice* helped feed the frenzy for anything Italian, were received well by the American public, and led to considerable profits for the American studios. Gundle writes, "As Rome became the leading European centre for American location films, so a sizeable movie colony sprang up."<sup>24</sup> In the 1960s in Italy, "the distinction between the [Italian] national film industry and Hollywood film became blurred."<sup>25</sup> Rome became referred to as "Hollywood on the Tiber."

*La Dolce Vita* seizes on a number of aspects of this new movie colony. At this time, American actresses and actors

came to live in Rome, nightly convening together along the Via Veneto. These American celebrities, "unprotected by the studios... found themselves at the mercy of the opportunist photographers"<sup>26</sup> that supplied the tabloid press. The presence of these Americans actors and actresses is "clearly evoked in *La Dolce Vita* via Sylvia and her fiancé, Robert."<sup>27</sup> Likewise, the constant presence of the tabloid photographers, specifically Papparazzo, in the film reflects the seeming omnipresence of the same photographers in contemporary Rome. From the first full scene of the film, Fellini recreates this atmosphere in all its splendor, sensation, and doldrum. After the prologue featuring the helicopter, the film begins in a nightclub on the Via Veneto. This scene captures the banality of the celebrity world as Marcello haggles the waiter to find out what one of the celebrities had ordered for dinner; likewise, Marcello's interaction with Maddalena captures the painful boredom of the in-crowd. As the film proceeds, this boredom—and absence of meaning—becomes more explicit and the Via Veneto is never far, nor are the paparazzi that inhabit it.

The Economic Miracle led to a number of drastic social changes, not all of which were positive. Large-scale urbanization catalyzed a dramatic population shift from the impoverished south to the industrialized north. In increasing numbers, peasants "abandoned rural areas to seek a better life in the cities"<sup>28</sup> and their migration led many Italians to reassess their cultural values: "As the movement occurred, the values of consumerism came to be widely accepted"<sup>29</sup> and as a result of "this new social mobility... an almost instantaneous drop of interest in religious sentiment in Italy [occurred]."<sup>30</sup>

These currents are immediately visible in *La Dolce Vita*. Fellini made these effects visible not only to mark them, but to single them out for consideration and criticism. Most critics agree that the film represents an observation, if not a commentary, upon these changes: "There seems little doubt that [Fellini] wanted to say something critical about the change of culture that was occurring. If Fellini was not a moralist then he was at least satirical."<sup>31</sup> Fellini

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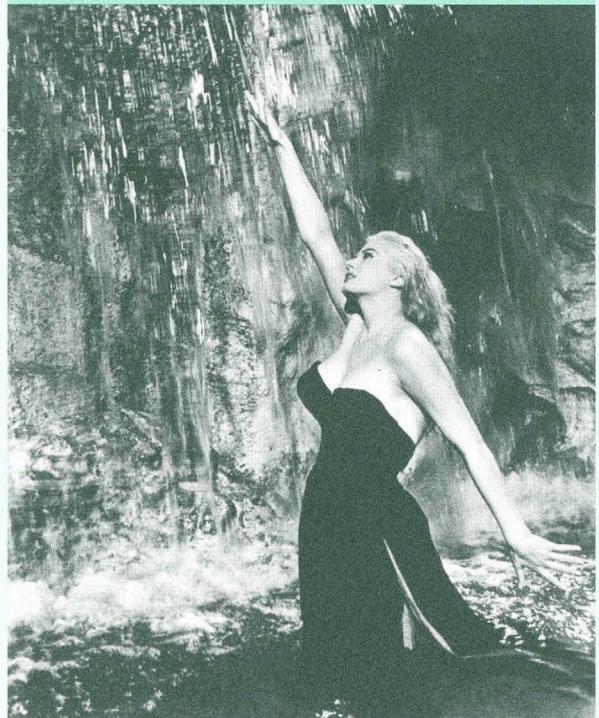
himself noted that with his film he “wanted to put the thermometer to a sick world.”<sup>32</sup> In *La Dolce Vita*, Fellini presents an image of this new Rome in which religion is absent and material and sexual impulses rule. His understanding of the new Rome is clear from the prologue of the film: as the helicopter carries Christ over Rome and “the shadow of Christ falls over the great city, only a few boys pursue the image, and those who bother to glance up do so in a curious, idle way on the living God who is gone now—only idols, of one kind or another remain.”<sup>33</sup> The meandering tale of Marcello that follows demonstrates that life in this new Rome consists of boredom and false idols. The film, thus, lays bare the emptiness of the so-called “sweet life.”

As if to confirm this, Fellini included a number of actual historic events, situating the surreal story within a familiar context. For example, the orgy scene alluded to a “strip performed by the Turkish dancer Aiche Nana at Rome’s Ruggantine nightclub in November 1958.”<sup>34</sup> The strip had caused a large controversy in the press and would be immediately recognized by Italian audiences. Likewise, the image of Anita Ekberg in the Trevi fountain would be familiar to Fellini’s domestic audience. Upon Ekberg’s arrival in Rome, she “had immediately become a favorite of the illustrated weeklies,” and her image filled page upon page of the tabloids.<sup>35</sup> One of the most infamous pictures was when “Ekberg had been photographed in the Trevi fountain.”<sup>36</sup> Like the “orgy scene,” and a number of the other scenes, the Trevi fountain scene would have been instantly recognized. The *Time* review even suggested, perhaps with a bit of hyperbole, that “every episode in the film was suggested by a Roman scandal of the last ten years.”<sup>37</sup> *The New York Times* review echoes the same sentiment: “To most of us American moviegoers, the authenticity of the episodes and, indeed, of the total demonstration may not be as incontestable and richly appreciated as it has been to audiences in Italy, where events identical to these have actually occurred – and what is more important, have been elaborately reported in the press.”<sup>38</sup> Though it may not have been as immediately evident to American filmgoers, Fellini included these familiar events to remind the viewer that the Rome in *La Dolce Vita* is not unlike the actual Rome in which the film was produced. The inclusion of these events indicates that the film is undoubtedly a reaction to the turbulence facing an Italy in transition, but the film also constitutes a response to calamities facing Fellini, in transition himself.<sup>39</sup>

This autobiographical element in *La Dolce Vita* is unmistakable.<sup>40</sup> As film critic Edward Murray writes, “many incidents from Fellini’s past have been woven into his pictures,”<sup>41</sup> and *La Dolce Vita*, in particular, “seems to contain significant autobiographical elements.”<sup>42</sup> In many ways the story of Marcello is the story of Fellini himself. Marcello holds “the same kind of journalist job that Fellini himself once held in Rome.”<sup>43</sup> Like Marcello, Fellini left his home on the coast of Italy behind, migrating to the capital city and taking a job as a journalist:<sup>44</sup> “during his early periods in the Italian capital, Fellini briefly reported police news for *Il popolo di Roma*.”<sup>45</sup> And like Marcello he was not content with this vocation; in interviews, Fellini has “often remarked that this was not a happy period in his life disparaging his mindless work and craving a more artistic medium. Marcello’s vocation and his frustration with that vocation seem to be an allusion to Fellini’s early years in Rome.

In addition, Fellini’s father, Urbano, frequently traveled to the north on business and was largely absent from Fellini’s childhood. In *La Dolce Vita*, Marcello spends an evening with his father, a traveling salesman, with whom he has

ANITA EKBERG’S INFAMOUS BAPTISM IN THE TREVI FOUNTAIN.



never had an intimate relationship. It seems difficult not to conclude that “Urbano Fellini seems to have been the model for the father.”<sup>46</sup> The likelihood of autobiographical reflection is strengthened by the inner turmoil that Fellini faced at the time of production. Midway through production of the film, Fellini’s father passed away and Fellini experienced a complete mental breakdown. In this time of personal transition, critical reflection on one’s personal history would be a natural response.

The presence of these autobiographical elements indicates that the film not only reflects the social turmoil in Italy, but also the personal turmoil within Fellini. Marcello is no hero. By the end of the film he is corrupt, literally waving goodbye to innocence with an air of complete indifference. He has been corrupted by the film industry. And if Marcello’s story is also that of Fellini, then Marcello’s corruption intimates Fellini’s own corruption. The story then functions as a memoir of Fellini’s loss of innocence in pursuit of his art.

Thus, the film is both an individual and an autobiographical story, composing a commentary on Italian society as a whole. From this narrative, Fellini’s concept of salvation emerges. Until the final reel of the film, it seems Fellini’s conception is dim. Both for him and for the larger Italian population, life in this new world seems empty: the “sweet life” is not sweet at all. The old world is gone, and all that remains are false idols and boredom. The first episode—portraying the Via Veneto through Marcello’s and Maddalena’s excursions—shows this hangout of the wealthy and bored, demonstrating how the bored retreat into sensuality—a false idol—for comfort, delaying their perpetual dissatisfaction. The second episode employs Marcello’s encounters with Sylvia (Anita Ekberg) to document the shallowness of the “sweet life” in the vivid bacchanalian festival, ending with the infamous false baptism in the Trevi fountain, representing yet another false idol for the anti-hero. The third episode, the media spectacle of the “miracle,” reveals a world without real religion, where “religion has been replaced by publicity,” rendering the media itself a false idol.<sup>47</sup> In the fourth episode the “natural, ordered, intellectual, traditional, artistic, family group” appears to be the “answer to life’s meaning,”<sup>48</sup> but subsequent suicide shows that even Steiner is not free of the modern condition and has become a false idol. In the fifth episode, Marcello meets with his father only to realize that boredom is at the center of both their lives and that they can teach each other nothing; as the episode concludes, both Marcello and his father “return to his own place of

isolation and boredom,” and to empty ideas of family and home.<sup>49</sup> The sixth episode, the castle scene, further demonstrates the death of the old world and the emptiness of sensuality. In the final episode, in the wake of Steiner’s death, Marcello leads the revelers at the party as “everything is annulled,” and the party celebrates the void, with meaningless (and unexciting) sexual encounters; the revelers do not look for an idol because they know it is not there.<sup>50</sup>

As Marcello progresses through these episodes, he experiences a progressive spiritual and moral deterioration: “Having lost contact with the spiritual and natural worlds, having attempted to computerize and rationalize all experience [Marcello, like all] men has been left weighted with boredom.”<sup>51</sup> Yet Fellini does not suggest that salvation is impossible. The ending is telling, for in the epilogue Marcello sees Paola—the image of innocence in the film—but chooses to leave her behind, waving his hand in indifference. Marcello freely chooses to do so. Marcello, like the other characters, is persistently presented with the opportunity to grow, but he fails to pursue that opportunity: “The film is a story of failed evolution in which characters are unable to grow from physical to imaginative life.”<sup>52</sup> Fellini, thus, leaves open the possibility that the audience can succeed where his characters failed. In the final shot of the picture—Paolo staring at the audience—Fellini challenges the spectator into examining his or her own life and values: “At the end it is not only Marcello left with a choice, with the possibility of turning his life around and becoming a new, and truer man; the viewer is presented with the same option.”<sup>53</sup> With this gorgeous last image, Fellini seems to suggest that though salvation in this new Rome is not plausible, it remains possible.

Fellini, like many of the Italian people, had given up his belief in Christianity. Though he saw the terrible effects of the nation’s and his own transition, Fellini retained hope that salvation was possible. Like the Italian people, he had given up faith in Christianity, but he had not entirely embraced nihilism. He had not given up hope. And his film is a relic of that struggle, which Fellini shared with fellow Italians and with many across the western world. While the Italian people came to lose their faith in Christianity, they searched elsewhere for meaning. *La Dolce Vita* documents that search, showing the Italian people’s struggle and worship of false idols, such as sex and materialism, as replacements for Christianity in 1960s Italy. The film, thus, provides the historian a glimpse not only into the political, social, and cultural climate, but also allows for

insight into Italy's conception of—or rather struggle to contemporize—salvation.

The film, therefore, is an invaluable artifact. An assessment of the film's reception provides the historian an understanding of the social, political, cultural, and intellectual climate in both America and Italy in 1960. Analyzing the film itself allows the historian to move beyond simple characterization and to apprehend something of the feel and popular consciousness of the time. Hence, the historian can gain an understanding of the Italian people's search for meaning and salvation as their faith in Christianity eroded. Just so was Fellini's ambition consummated: not only is *La Dolce Vita* a masterful film, it is a masterpiece of art in the twentieth century.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Gundle (133)
2. Gundle (136)
3. Gundle (136)
4. Gundle (137)
5. Another factor contributing to the success of *La Dolce Vita* in Italy was the influence of Anita Ekberg; to Italian men, the beauty of a blonde woman is incomparable.
6. "Review Summary" *New York Times*, <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/27906/La-Dolce-Vita/overview>
7. Crowther (30)
8. "Cinema: The Day of the Beast," *Time Magazine*, April 21, 1961, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,895311,00.html?artId=895311?contentType=article?chn=us#ixzz0WZcRNk1D>
9. Like most of the negative responses, the *Time* review misinterprets the film, failing to see the underlying currents of satire and sharp criticism. (e.g. "good deal of the picture is out-and-out sensationalism, smeared on with a heavy hand to attract the insects...the film is vulgar and naive.")
10. Crowther (30)
11. *Ibid.*
12. Burke (1)
13. In the cultural and theoretical climate of subsequent decades, which came to deny the autonomy of the individual (i.e. structuralism) "the concept of the modern artist-as-romantic hero was debunked and Fellini became viewed as an egoistic anachronism" (Burke 1). Though, Fellini had been a "a favorite among many academics in the 1960s, he became an outcast among film academics of the 1970s and 1980s" (Burke 2). The development of scholarship on Fellini is beyond the scope of this essay, but it is important to understand that development occurred – further demonstrating that *La Dolce Vita* was filmed in shifting ideological climate.
14. Burke (7)
15. Burke (98)
16. Bondanella (3)
17. The intellectual climate not only influenced the reception of the film, but also the production of the film – for, the intellectual climate not only influenced the critics but also Fellini himself and the patrons that financed his film. The narrative structure of the film is entirely modernist, evoking "comparisons to T.S. Eliot, James Joyce and other major modernist writers" (Burke 103). Fellini had, indeed, read such literature and hoped to mirror it in film. These modernist sympathies ensured that Fellini received the financial backing necessary to create the project. At the time of *La Dolce Vita*'s production, American investment had become critical to Fellini's capability to make movies. And at the time, the Cold War was in full swing and Americans felt that the spread of liberalism "required not only money but the infusion of American ideology" (Burke 9). Accordingly, "American ideology enlisted high art and the cult of the artist as symbols of American individualism and freedom of thought" (Burke 9). Fellini, as an auteur and producer of high art, fit the bill, receiving significant financial support from American investors.
18. Burke (8)
19. Crowther (30)
20. Ebert (1961)
21. Brinkley (887)
22. Crowther, "La Dolce Vita: Fellini's Urbane Film Looks Askance at Life" (119)
23. Gundle (135)
24. Gundle (135)
25. Burke (8)
26. Gundle (135)
27. Gundle (137)
28. Gundle (135)
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*
32. Costello (35)
33. Murray (116)
34. Gundle (139)
35. Gundle (139)
36. Gundle (139)
37. "Cinema: The Day of the Beast," *Time Magazine*, April 21, 1961, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,895311,00.html?artId=895311?contentType=article?chn=us#ixzz0WZcRNk1D>
38. Crowther, "La Dolce Vita: Fellini's Urbane Film Looks Askance at Life." (119)
39. As Fellini's style as a director changed with him. This film is a transitional piece between neo-realism and the aesthetic of his later work, the style that would later be termed Fellini-esque. The film, in many ways, is markedly not a neo-realist film: segments of the movie are filmed in a studio, the focus of the film is not upon the commonplace but upon the extraordinary and the wealthy, the films experimental narrative structure is a stark contrast from the mise-en-scene of neo-realist films. The film, though, retains the goals, if not the methods of neo-realist cinema. Like the neo-realists, Fellini intends for his films to bring about the "transformation of consciousness" (Murray

4). The neo-realists sought to bring it about by showing the negative consequences of the war. Fellini, instead, "sought to offer narrative models of transformation, rooted in the experience and imaginative growth of individual characters" (Murray 4). Likewise, in *La Dolce Vita*, Fellini does not yet embrace the dream sequences of his later films, not altering music, and simply presenting life as he sees it (although the life in focus is that of the wealthy not the impoverished). Like the neo-realist, he is simply directing the facts – even if his focus is different than that of the neo-realists.

40. Whether Fellini would agree with this assessment is questionable. Concerning the autobiographical element in his works, Fellini himself has been (characteristically) inconsistent in his remarks on the subject. As Murray notes, "On the one hand, he has said: 'an artist can only be understood through his work. ....what I have to say, I say in my work. My work can't be anything other than a testimony of what I am looking for. It is a mirror my searching.' On the other hand he has also said: 'I cannot remove myself from the content of my films. If I were to make a film about the life of a sole, it would end up being about me...there is autobiographical vain that is in all my work'" (Murray 4).

41. Murray (8)

42. Murray (9)

43. Costello (36)

44. Admittedly, this allusion is not perfect. Fellini, unlike Marcello, migrated to Rome only after living in Florence, where he was employed as a cartoonist for a number of years.

45. Murray (9)

46. Murray (6)

47. Costello (51)

48. Costello (53)

49. Costello (54)

50. Costello (69)

51. Costello (126)

52. Burke (86)

53. Costello (131)

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