

Document Citation

Title	City of women
Author(s)	
Source	<i>New West</i>
Date	1981 Jun
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	La città delle donne (City of women), Fellini, Federico, 1980

EXCEPT FOR the one-shot glow of *Amarco: d*, inspiration has not come easily to Federico Fellini in the sixteen years since *Juliet of the Spirits*. The movies continue to flow from Rome, but they don't seem to involve him anymore, or, if they do, he's been unable to communicate that involvement. So what is best about Fellini's new **City of Women** is that it reaffirms how vibrant a director he can

be when properly stimulated. What is worst, however, is the way that stimulation runs out well short of the film's two-hour-and-eighteen-minute length. If ever a movie cried out to be cut, this is it.

The subject that so intrigues the old maestro is women and feminism, and his thoughts on it—what he himself has called “the point of view of an aging man who cannot help regarding feminism with fear and bewilderment”—will hardly make everyone happy. Fellini sees women as either threats or baubles. He wants desperately to possess them, but he is scared of their power, their sexuality. Women couldn't be further from equals here, but the visual energy Fellini at least initially brings to creating his cosmos is a great relief after the tired parade of gargoyles and grotesques that made up so much of *Fellini Satyricon*, *Roma*, and *Casanova*.

City of Women opens in a train compartment with Fellini's inevitable alter ego, Marcello Mastroianni, whose delicately weary face has become a road map of Italian cinema, eyeing the woman opposite him. He attempts to seduce her, she leaves the train, and Mastroianni—called Snaporaz here—follows, right into a huge hotel that has been entirely taken over for a feminist convention.

Women are everywhere, everywhere, laughing, screaming, complaining about phallic narcissism, chanting “cas-tra-tion, cas-tra-tion,” cheering a woman with six husbands, chanting “all women are young, all women are beautiful.” Snaporaz wanders through it all like a lost soul, trying to remain bemused, always fascinated if quite a bit afraid, as Fellini himself is. It's all obviously an exaggeration, but the director's eye for the arresting face, the interesting detail, the surrealistic situation, has never been sharper, and the entire hotel sequence has a liveliness and a spirit that reflect the sureness of a master.

Yet, like all interlopers, Snaporaz eventually gets booted out of the convention, and the film never recovers its momentum. There is a small handful of remarkable scenes left—including a “wall of conquests” in which the unfortunately named Zubercock has installed pictures and voices of the 10,000 women in his life—scenes that have the dreamlike daring we associate with Fellini at his best. But these moments are outnumbered by stretches of impassable tedium that play like the worst of Antonioni.

Fellini's charm and strength as a filmmaker have always been the way he can function so close to the unconscious, but that closeness has lately impaired his judgment as to what works on the screen; he's become a director who finds it increasingly difficult to concentrate properly. *City of Women* proves that when a situation really hooks him he can carry it off effortlessly, but those long moments between inspiration are getting harder and harder to take. ■