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1955

IL BIDONE Federico Fellini

Script: Fellini, Ennio Flaiano and Tullio Pinelli. Photography: Otello Martelli. Music: Nino Rota. Art Direction: Dario Cecchi. Editing: Mario Serandrei and Giuseppe Vari. Cast: Broderick Crawford (Augusto), Richard Basehart (Picasso), Franco Fabrizi (Roberto), Giulietta Masina (Iris, Picasso's wife), Lorella De Luca (Patrizia, Augusto's daughter), Giacomo Gabrielli (Vargas), Alberto De Amicis (Rinaldo, the drug dealer who hosts the New Year party), Xenia Valderi (Luciana, Rinaldo's girl), Sue Ellen Blake (Susanna, the crippled girl), Irene Cefaro (Marisa, a girl at the party), Mara Werlen (Maggie), Maria Zanolli (Stella Fiorina, a woman who gets swindled), Ettore Bevilacqua (Bevilacqua, man who gets swindled at the housing project).

Goffredo Lombardo for Titanus/S.G.C., Italy/France. 9842 ft., 109 mins.

Fellini continues his meditations about relationships between people: the main theme of *La strada* was a simple girl's search for the sense of existence; *Il bidone* (the Italian slang word for "swindler") is a film about mutual understanding. To Fellini people are separated from each other by near-astronomical distances; while living side by side they remain unaware of their own loneliness and do not enter into genuine relationships despite needing each other so much.

Augusto, a weary and cynical crook, has only himself to blame for his loneliness; about to enter the wilderness of old age, he feverishly searches for human warmth. With his two confederates,

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Il bidone

CINEMA, THE MAGIC
VEHICLE! A GUIDE TO
ITS ACHIEVEMENT JACK
- ADAM GARCIA & KLINOWSKI

Picasso, a youngster who dreams of being an artist and Roberto, a weak-willed and opportunist con-man, Augusto makes a living by exploiting the poor and gullible. Disguised as priests they trick two peasant women with a story of buried treasure; later they impersonate representatives of a town council and collect deposits on imaginary flats from poor slum-dwellers. Augusto attempts to establish a contact with his teenage daughter Patrizia who intends to be a teacher. When this ends disastrously with his being arrested for some past crime in Patrizia's presence, when both his accomplices quit, Augusto attempts another "buried treasure" fraud with a new gang. Disguised as a priest he is asked to bless a crippled peasant child whose tragedy moves his soul, softened by the anxiety for the future. He tells his accomplices that he refused to take the money from the child's parents (he intends to keep it for Patrizia); they discover Augusto's deception, take the money, stone him and leave him to die on the roadside in the mountains. In agony, he manages to crawl to the road and whispers after a passing group of happy peasants: "Wait, I'm coming with you."

Il bidone is the least coherent internally of Fellini's great films: on the one hand it captivates with its poetry and humanism, on the other it repels with its ration of deplorably literal melodramatic situations and the moral which slips out from under the director's hand despite, as it were, his striving to achieve ambivalence of the situations. This latter circumstance would probably have ended in artistic defeat, were it not for the conceptual indecision, which results precisely in the complexity of the film's ethical context--in the Augusto character and, even more, in Picasso's. Fellini planned a picaresque story much less dramatic in tone than the final result; it appears that during the shooting of the slum episode he met with such depressing cases of human greed and predation that this prompted him to alter the relationship between the crooks and their victims in Il bidone. The picture grew to over 15,000 feet in length and Fellini shortened it very considerably before release--thus the incoherent editing, but also the reflection-inspiring diversity of its meaning, the mixing together of superficial and of brilliant episodes. To the latter belongs the symbolic expedition in cassocks for the "buried treasure"--a scene far from verbatim in its complex overtones. It is thanks to such fragments that Il bidone manages to avoid the dangers of becoming a glib lesson and becomes a moving probe into the motivation of people in search of support and human warmth, a picture which contains more spiritual restlessness and tragic poetry of loneliness than is found elsewhere in Fellini's work.