

Document Citation

Title	[I vitelloni]
Author(s)	Arthur Knight
Source	<i>Saturday Review</i>
Date	
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	I vitelloni (The young and the passionate), Fellini, Federico, 1953

The American distributors of "Vitelloni" (API-Janus), a fascinating film by Federico Fellini, sought an adequate English translation for its Italian title without success. For Fellini, the director of "La Strada," has portrayed in it a section of Italian life that actually had no name until this picture came along: the sons of lower middle-class families who feel that they are too good for manual labor. Not rich enough to be called wastrels or poor enough to be bums, they drift along aimlessly, hoping for the break that will give them a definite status in society, living meanwhile on the lira doled out by their indulgent or intimidated families. Translated literally, *vitelloni* means "big calves"—implying that these young men are still living off their parents when they should have been weaned long since. The word, with its special meaning, is now part of the Italian language. Certainly we have the same problem in this country—boys with good education, some money, and no direction.

Its setting is one of the larger towns in northern Italy—too large to be called provincial, too small to afford the scope and opportunities these young men long for. Their main desire is to get away, to find adventure in Rome or in Africa ("like Hemingway," says one of them wistfully). Instead they drink, shoot pool, and worry over petty problems—a goatee, sideburns, their clothes. Fausto, their leader, is the only one who is married—a shotgun marriage. Nevertheless, he still tries his hand at aimless seduction. Riccardo would like to be a singer, while Leopoldo attempts, half-heartedly, to write plays. And Moraldo, the most perceptive of the group, stands by as a semidetached observer, involved in all the schemes, hopes, and crises of his friends, but increasingly aware of the futility of their lives. Eventually it is Moraldo alone who makes the break and goes off to Rome.

As in "La Strada," Fellini displays an uncanny and incomparable gift for selecting the perfect incident, the perfect setting to convey a mood or heighten an emotion. A gay and bawdy masquerade ball, for example, leads to a climax in which one of the *vitelloni* discovers his sister running away from home with her lover. She had supported the household; now Alberto, drunk and still wearing the wig and costume of a woman, is suddenly sick with the realization that he must become "the man of the family." Scenes are played against great empty squares that seem to echo the spiritual emptiness of the town itself. Sometimes—a mocking touch—a silent prostitute ambles by in the background. Often there are shots that have a grotesque power quite devoid of any literal connotation—an idiot boy placing a statue of an angel upon a mound of sand, a seedy old actor beckoning the writer to read his play to him against the roar of wind and waves on a midnight quay. Fellini has this rare feeling for an imagery that reaches through to the spectator without words. —ARTHUR KNIGHT.

Saturday Review
no date