

Document Citation

Title	Mario de Vecchi presents La Terra Trema
Author(s)	
Source	<i>New Yorker Theatre</i>
Date	
Type	press kit
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	5
Subjects	Visconti, Luchino (1906-1976), Milan, Italy
Film Subjects	La terra trema (The earth trembles), Visconti, Luchino, 1948

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From Roger Greenspun
New Yorker Theater
2409 Broadway
New York, New York

The EARTH WILL SHAKE (La Terra Trema)

Mario de Vecchi presents

LA TERRA TREMA

(The Earth Will Shake)

a film by Luchino Visconti

Produced by

Salvo d'Angelo

Written and directed by

Luchino Visconti

Assistant directors

Franco Rosi
Franco Zeffirelli

Photography by

G. R. Aldo

Edited by

Mario Serandrei

Music arranged by

Luchino Visconti
Willy Ferrero

The cast is composed
of the people of a
small fishing village
in Sicily.

English titles by

Herman G. Weinberg

Running time: 2 hours 40 minutes

For further information
contact Roger Greenspun
EN 2-6330 TR 4-9189

or

Mario de Vecchi
765-9777

SYNOPSIS

Economic life in the Sicilian village of Acitrezza is controlled by the wholesale fish merchants, who provide the equipment with which the town's fishermen earn their livelihood and then buy their catch at a low fixed price. The fishermen, who earn a meager and dangerous living, cannot hope for financial independence.

The Valastro family is possibly a little better off than its neighbors. The Valastros own their house and they own their boat, although they do not own the nets and supplies that they need in order to fish. The father of the family has recently died at sea, and his place in the family boat has been taken by the grandfather who goes out each night with his four grandsons to work the nets. The women, the mother and her daughters, work at home, waiting each morning for the return of their men.

Toni Valastro, the oldest son, has been in the navy and has seen more of life than his fellows have. Struck by the injustice of the fishermen's bondage to the wholesalers he attempts organizing a refusal to sell the catch for a set low price. Rather than sell he throws his fish and the scales on which they are weighed into the sea. He succeeds only in getting himself and his friends into jail.

Because he is an excellent fisherman whom the wholesalers need, he is released. He immediately begins planning for his own family's welfare. The Valastros will mortgage their house, and with the money they will buy their own equipment, fish for

Synopsis--continued

themselves and sell to whom they please. Toni's plan is especially bold in that it violates the long-standing customs of Acitrezza fishermen, and his neighbors do not let him forget it. His girl, Nadda, is impressed with his potential wealth, but his oldest sister, Mara, may lose her suitor, a young mason who feels that the Valastro family is about to rise hopelessly above his own economic station.

For a while everything succeeds. The mortgage is arranged, the equipment bought, and the first night's catch is a boatload of valuable anchovies. To buy salt for preserving the anchovies the family spends its last money, and everybody joins in the salting.

But on a subsequent voyage Toni takes the boat out in rough weather, which no other fishermen in Acitrezza will face. His foolhardiness rewards him with almost total disaster. The Valastro boat returns, ignominiously towed by a rescuer, with all its equipment lost and with its hull so damaged by the storm that it is no longer seaworthy.

The only resource left to the family is the catch of anchovies, which they are forced to sell to the wholesalers for a very low price. The people of Acitrezza have little sympathy for the Valastro family, and misfortune piles upon misfortune. The grandfather becomes sick and is removed to a hospital in the nearest city. Nadda refuses even to see the now impoverished Toni. The second oldest sister, Lucia, succumbs to the questionable attractions of the town's customs officer. One of

Synopsis--concluded

the Valastro brothers runs away to join a group of smugglers. And the bank forecloses the unpaid mortgage, forcing the family out of their home. Only the poor mason pledges his loyalty to Mara, promising her enough to eat and a place to live if she will have him.

Toni looks for work unsuccessfully and then begins drinking. Finally, moved by a kind word from a stranger and by the sight of his family's complete misery, he decides upon a humiliating course of action. The wholesalers have thrived and have outfitted a new fleet of fishing boats for Acitrezza. Toni signs himself and his remaining brothers as crew members on one of the boats, to the delight of the triumphant wholesalers. He sets out to sea again, now the least privileged ^{participant} in his town's new-found prosperity.

About the Director and the Film

Luchino Visconti began his career as assistant director to Jean Renoir on such films as A Day in the Country in the 1930's. He then went on to direct his own films at rather infrequent intervals for more than twenty years, beginning in 1942 with Ossessione (a version of The Postman Always Rings Twice, as yet unreleased in this country) and continuing into 1965 with Vaghe Stelle del'Orsa (shown as Sandra at the Third New York Film Festival). Over the years he has also staged opera and directed a notable series of plays in the Italian theater.

Although La Terra Trema has rarely been seen and has never before had theatrical distribution in the form in which Visconti made it in 1948, it is possibly his most celebrated film. The 1962 Sight and Sound international critics' poll voted it one of the ten greatest films ever made, and it has been frequently cited as the outstanding example of Italian neorealism. Originally La Terra Trema was planned as the first part of a trilogy dealing with Sicilian life, all of which was to have been called La Terra Trema, with the first part subtitled "The Episode of the Sea". To some extent a second part to the trilogy was realized in the production of Rocco and His Brothers (1959), with which the present film offers analogies in theme, in situation, and, the neorealist label notwithstanding, in style.