

## Document Citation

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# Sex and sloganeering

**All Screwed Up**, written and directed by Lina Wertmuller, Lumiere, California nr. Polk, SF; Act II, 2121 Center, Berkeley.

Attractive male-female relationships have been absent from the movies for so long that maybe audiences have forgotten the pleasures of watching Cary Grant woo Katharine Hepburn or Lauren Bacall make a sly pass at Humphrey Bogart. Hollywood's current idea of great romance is exemplified by *Gable and Lombard*, in which Clark Gable, in the person of James Brolin, tricks his way into the bedroom of Carole Lombard, in the person of Jill Clayburgh, and then treats her rough — and she loves him for it.

Another piece of Hollywood nostalgia now on display, *W. C. Fields and Me* enshrines the misogyny of the movies' least likable comedian. In *Lipstick*, a school teacher rapes Beautiful Person Margaux Hemingway, and the point of the film is that rape is the essence of male-female relations in our consumer society — that our sexist, macho media invite us, spur us to rape. In *Barry Lyndon*, the hero seduces the rich and beautiful Lady Lyndon in order to advance himself socially, and once he has won her hand in marriage, he discards her, abuses her physically.

Lina Wertmuller's *Seven Beauties* suggests the same functional approach to sexual seduction. For Wertmuller's hero, however, sex means something more basic than social advancement — it means survival. As a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp, the hero allows himself to be used by the grossly fat woman commandant, just as his sisters, the "seven beauties" of the title, become whores in order to survive. Wertmuller's bleak view of sex is familiar to audiences from her previous films. Even in *Swept Away*, which more or less takes the form of a romantic comedy, Wertmuller's proletarian hero takes the rich-bitch heroine by force, and she adores it, celebrating the rape by placing a garland of flowers around his penis.

In *Swept Away*'s immediate predecessor, just now released in the United States under the title *All Screwed Up* (the original Italian title translates as "Everything Ready, Nothing Works"), Wertmuller again uses the rape scene for the same purpose. One of the men in the film, Carletto, has been trying to seduce one of the women, Adelina, for something like an hour and a half of the film's running time. Finally, in an echo of those man-to-man scenes in American films in which the hero's father or uncle or brother tells him to "be a man" and "go in and take her," Adelina's cousin tells Carletto it's his own fault that Adelina won't put out. Following the cousin's advice, Carletto takes Adelina on the kitchen floor of their communal apartment, much to the approval of their friends and roommates. The next morning she wakes happy, smiling beatifically, in love.

*All Screwed Up* is a speedy little soap opera about young people who come to the big city

(here, Milan) from their rural homes with energy and high hopes but who are finally crushed by the system. Familiar? *All Screwed Up* begins with a chance meeting at a railway station between Adelina, an innocent young farm girl just arrived in Milan, and two unemployed workers, Carletto and Gigi, who themselves have only been in the city a short while. Adelina is waiting for her cousin, Isotta, the only person she knows in Milan; Carletto and Gigi seem to know only each other.

These four become friends, and gradually they attract others to their group — most importantly Saute (a sad-eyed, droopy-mustached man who stands in front of store windows watching a pretty blonde, Mariuccia, dress mannequins) and Biki (a friend of Isotta's, tough, shrewd, streetwise). Biki organizes the group into a "residential commune," but on a pay-as-you-go basis: if the men want coffee, Biki's price is 50 lire; 100 lire for an ironed shirt; 150 for an hour of TV watching. Not surprisingly, this petty capitalism corrupts the relationships among the communards, and eventually all are destroyed by the system.

Adelina, following Biki's advice, says she won't sleep with Carletto until they have saved enough money to marry, and that, by her calculation, will take ten years. Saute and Mariuccia do marry, but their union produces twins and then quintuplets, wasting Mariuccia physically and forcing Saute into the killing pace of two jobs in an effort to earn enough money to support his family. In a desperate effort to earn a fast lira, Saute tries turning tricks, and when that predictably fails, he joins a rich fascist's band of mercenaries. For like reasons, Gigi becomes a thief, and the once-haughty Isotta becomes a hooker.

All this misery and degradation is captured by Wertmuller and her cinematographer, Giuseppe Rotunno (who also works with Fellini), with bravura energy and style. The scene in which Saute — silhouetted against the black night, hat pulled down raffishly over one eye, cigarette smoke flaring from his nostrils — goes out on the back streets of Milan to turn tricks is a piece of high clowning. And Wertmuller's finale, which takes place in the kitchen of the restaurant where Carletto works as a pizza cook, is an absolute knockout.

This final sequence follows the rebellion of the kitchen workers, when the cooks ran out of the kitchen into the main dining room. In the last shot, the cooks have all returned to the kitchen and are watching one of their number, gone berserk, being carried off to an asylum. Wertmuller has carefully arranged the cooks in still-life groupings, and her camera, in a slow tracking shot, moves the length of the large kitchen over these groupings. Then the cooks go back to work, and the camera takes in the renewed activity in circular pans: the color washes out, the screen turns an eerie blue and white, the circular pans grow faster, virtiginously faster, and finally end in a freeze-frame of blurred, chaotic action.

One could hardly ask for more expert filmmaking, but this is a bang-up ending to a whimpering film. So life ends badly for Wertmuller's new urbanites. So they turn to whoring and thievery. So what? It happens every day on "Search for Tomorrow." Undoubtedly Wertmuller's admirers would argue that *her* soap opera has an analytical depth that ordinary soaps lack, but what is her analysis? Wertmuller throws out a Marxist slogan from time to time, and here and there she hints that all this urban suffering is economically determined, the result of capitalist exploitation, but this is flim-flam. Wertmuller could have made exactly the same film about a group of Ukranian peasants meeting at a railway station in Moscow. To put it sympathetically, Lina Wertmuller is not a philosopher. ■

