

Document Citation

Title	Lo Sceicco Bianco
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Source	<i>Dartmouth Film Society</i>
Date	
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	Fellini, Federico (1920-1993), Rimini, Emilia-Romagna, Italy
Film Subjects	Lo Sceicco Bianco (The White Sheik), Fellini, Federico, 1951

Dartmouth Film Society

LO SCEICCO BIANCO

(THE WHITE SHEIK) Italy (1951)

The White Sheik
Wanda

Alberto Sordi
Brunella Bovo

Ivan Cavalli
Cabiria

Leopoldo Trieste
Giulietta Masina

and Lilia Landi, Ernesto Almirante, Fanny Marchio, Gina Mascetti, Enzo Maggio, Polidoro.

Original story by Michelangelo Antonioni, Federico Fellini and Tullio Pinelli. Scenario by Federico Fellini, Tullio Pinelli and E. Flaiano. Photographed by A. Gallea. Music by Nino Rota. Produced by Luigi Rovere for PDC-OFI.

Directed by FEDERICO FELLINI

THE WHITE SHEIK was Federico Fellini's first solo-directed film, and his only comedy. It is interesting not only because it is excellent entertainment, but also because it introduces certain themes and characters which will be more fully developed in later works.

In order to understand this film, some comments on the institution of "fumetti" are necessary. The word itself means "little bits of smoke" and refers to the balloon captions on the top of comic strips. But the cartoons in this case are not drawn, but are rather photographs of real people.

Each week in Italy, a volume of "fumetti" is issued, usually as part of a series. Famous stories from world literature are used, and also themes of the "True Confessions" variety. These comics are produced in the same way as a film. A story outline is prepared, then a script. A director and cameraman are hired, but they shoot the story in stills rather than moving pictures.

The popularity of these comics is enormous. The budget can run to \$50,000; sets and costumes can be extremely lavish, and famous film stars have appeared in some of them. Both Gina Lollobrigida and Sophia Loren were discovered for films after having appeared in "fumetti". According to one report, Vittorio Gassman appeared in a version of Romeo and Juliet and Giorgio Albertazzi (of MARIENBAD fame) acted in a condensed Wuthering Heights. Secrecy of story line is very important, for production companies vie with one another for the most sensational offering. Name actors have been paid as much as \$1500 for their appearance in a series.

The idea for today's film came from Michelangelo Antonioni, later to become a famous director, who saw a very funny subject in the plight of a young woman who skips out on her bridegroom to meet her dream-hero, the "White Sheik" of a "fumetti" series. The whole story is treated with lightness and true comic style; one is almost sorry that Fellini doesn't direct humorous films any more.

Fellini's films usually deal with people subsisting on the strength of an illusion; at some point the illusion is broken, but it is mercifully restored in the end. The director was beginning to form this philosophy in THE WHITE SHEIK, but he hasn't quite arrived at it as yet. However, the film introduces the character of the prostitute Cabiria, who was to have a film all her own in 1956. She is played by Giulietta Masina, Fellini's favorite actress, and his wife off-screen.

THE WHITE SHEIK was a box-office failure in Italy, and didn't make much of an impression when it was released in America some years ago. The main reason is probably that audiences in the United States did not know what the "fumetti" were all about and the point of the satire was lost. However, a series of recent revivals of THE WHITE SHEIK, spurred by the success of LA DOLCE VITA and 8½, has brought about a re-estimate of the film's importance in the canon of Fellini's work for the screen.

Although it seems rather strange, the film was blasted in Italy by The Roman Observer, the semi-official newspaper of the Vatican. Its critic wrote, "A product of inferior

quality, morally reprehensible, one that does not even hesitate to poke fun at pontifical audiences, this film tries to please only a public of trite tastes, with jokes and patter that go over in a neighborhood house." On the other hand, the British Film Institute described the film (which has never been released in England) as "Fellini's most delightful film... Shrewd and sardonic, it is perhaps at its best in the magnificently funny scenes parodying the fumetti." It was also reported to have been the major hit of a major Fellini retrospective showing in Europe recently.

THE WHITE SHEIK is excellent entertainment, funny and biting. But it is more than this. It gives a fascinating hint of ideas to appear in Fellini's later films; inasmuch as his later works are so well known to the majority of American film-goers, this point is not lost on the average viewer if he looks for it.

--David Hull

Films of Federico Fellini: (as a scriptwriter) L'Ultima Carrozella (1943); Open City (1945); The Crime of Giovanni Episcopo (1946); Paisan (1946); Senza Pieta (1947); The Miracle (1948); In the Name of the Law (1948); The Mill on the Po (1948); The Little Flowers of St. Francis (1950); Il Cammino della Speranza (1950); La Citta si Difende (1951); Il Brigante di Tacca del Lupo (1952); Europe 51 (1952). (As a director) Variety Lights (co-dir. Alberto Lattuada, 1950); The White Sheik (1952); Vitelloni (1953); La Strada (1954); Il Bidone (1955); The Nights of Cabiria (1956); La Dolce Vita (1959); Boccaccio '70 (one episode, 1962); 8½ (1963); Giulietta of the Spirits (1965). Also one episode "Matrimonial Agency" in Love in the City (1953).

Our short subject is a condensed version of Valentino's THE SON OF THE SHEIK, which should give our viewers an idea of the source of the name of the title-character of the Fellini film. THE SON OF THE SHEIK was Valentino's last film, and is considered by many to be his best work, directed by the excellent George Fitzmaurice, whose RAFFLES was seen earlier on our series.

On Friday, the series of Japanese films sponsored by the special Japan program continues with LIFE OF A WOMAN, directed by Kenji Mizoguchi. This film won the Grand Prize at the Venice Film Festival, but was not seen in America until last year. It will be shown at 4:00 and 8:30 pm and there is no admission charge. The 8:30 pm showing will be introduced by Mary Evans Richie, film critic of the Japan Times of Tokyo, who will speak about Mizoguchi and his work.

Our last program of the season is Orson Welles' superb THE LADY FROM SHANGHAI, perhaps his most bizarre creation. It stars Mr. Welles, Rita Hayworth, Everett Sloane and Glenn Anders. Although this film is almost unknown, it ranks with Welles' best films and is fascinating entertainment. It is presented Saturday at 10:30 pm and Sunday at 4:00 pm.