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who thus has an extremely mysterious dimension—it seems to me that uniting him in a close-up with Gelsomina, who comes up right next to him and who looks at him with curiosity, underlines with rather great suggestive power Gelsomina's own solitude.

(*Bianco e nero*)

MORALITY

My films never have what is called a final scene. The story never reaches a conclusion. Why? I believe this comes from the fact that I make my characters—it is difficult to explain—into a kind of "conductive wire"; they are like torches that never change, and express from one end of the film to the other the same feeling on the part of the author. They cannot evolve, and this for another reason as well. I have no intention of playing the moralist, but all the same I feel that a film is more moral when it does not offer the audience the solution, if such there be, for the problems of the protagonist. Indeed, a filmgoer who has just seen a character resolve his difficulties, or become good when he was bad at the beginning, is in a much too comfortable situation. He will say to himself calmly: "O.K. I have only to remain the perfect scoundrel that I am; to be unfaithful to my wife and to cheat my friends, because at a given moment, just like the movies, the right solution will appear." My films, on the contrary, give the audience a very precise sense of responsibility. It will be up to them, for example, to decide Cabiria's fate, for it is in the hands of each one of us. If the film moved and troubled us, we must immediately, as soon as we meet one of our friends or wife (because anybody can be Cabiria, that is, a victim), we must begin to establish a new kind of rapport with our neighbor. If films like *La strada, I vitelloni,* and *Il bidone* leave the spectator moved and slightly ill at ease, then they have attained their goal. I believe—and I can confirm it today without the slightest hesitation—that all the stories I invent are designed to symbolize an uneasiness, a constraint, a state of friction in what ought to be the normal relationship between people. In short, I don't want to say anything in my films except the following, and this with more or less insistence: There must be some way, nevertheless, of improving relations between men. If I were a politician I should hold meetings in order to explain this, or I would enroll in a party, or I would go dance barefoot in the public squares. If I had found a solution, and if I were able to explain it in all good faith and in a convincing manner, then, obviously, I would not have been a teller of fables or a filmmaker.

(*La Table ronde,* May, 1960; interview from the Université radiophonique internationale)

THE CRITICS

Are you sensitive to the critics?

As I don't consider myself an extraordinary human being, as I am only a storyteller, each one of my stories is truly a season of my life. Basically, it seems to me that reviews of my works (which are the most sincere, authentic testimony of myself)—whether they are good or bad—are always untimely and indecent, as if someone were trying to judge me as a man, so total and complete is the identity between myself and my work. It seems to me that my work is judged by indiscreet eyes that don't have the right to . . . but of course they do have the right. Yet I always have the feeling that they lack respect and consideration. In the same way, I would never allow myself to criticize the human being who is before me; on the contrary, I would try to understand him. For I have the impression that I never criticize anybody.

(*Cahiers R.T.B.*)

ON BEING A CHRISTIAN

Christian: What does that mean? If by "Christian" you mean love toward one's neighbor, it seems to me that . . . yes, all my films revolve around this idea. There is an attempt to describe a world without love, people who are full of egotism, who exploit one another, in this "gladiatorial" arena. There is always, and especially in the films with Giulietta, a little person who wants to give love and who lives for love. In this sense, it seems to me that even *La dolce vita* could be defined this way. . . .

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form a new creation. As Fellini traveled around Europe and America, accompanying his pictures to festivals, giving interviews, attending cocktail parties, he began to feel that the disquietude he found in his own particular milieu was not isolated but remained part of a more profound and widespread social illness. Hence, "modern man in search of a soul" (to borrow a title from Jung, one of the director's favorite authors) became the subject matter of the new project. Consciously or unconsciously, Fellini also worked into *La Dolce Vita* some of the themes dealt with in his previous films.

Although morally beyond reproach, *La Dolce Vita* was attacked when it first appeared for being "obscene." For example, the Vatican organ *L'Osservatore romano* called it "disgusting." In February, 1959, as Fellini left a Milanese theater where *La Dolce Vita* was having its première, a man spat in his face and snarled: "You're dragging Italy through the mud!" As late as 1964, Fellini's mother had still not recovered from the shock of the event: "*La Dolce Vita*—why did you make such a picture?" she asked her son. When Fellini visited Padua in the early sixties, he discovered a sign on the door of a church which read: "Pray for the salvation of the soul of public sinner Federico Fellini." Not surprisingly, when moviegoers learned that *La Dolce Vita* was "lewd" and "depraved," they flocked to see it; consequently, the picture became an international success (today it still stands high on *Variety's* list of "all-time box-office champs"). Not surprisingly either, when critics saw that *La Dolce Vita* was attracting the masses, many of them deserted Fellini in favor of Antonioni, whose masterpiece *L'Avventura* appeared in 1960, only to be booed at the Cannes Film Festival. Some critics are incapable of being catholic; if they praise one picture, they feel compelled to damn another. For snobs and certain types of neurotics, box-office success automatically spells inferior workmanship, whereas failure guarantees aesthetic values that the vulgar herd can never understand.

Without ceasing to be either cinematic or contemporary, *La Dolce Vita* (The Sweet Life) suggests, in both conception and

execution, a medieval morality play. As Fellini sees it, the "greatest human quality" is "love of one's neighbor"; the "greatest defect" is "egoism." He adds: "There is a vertical line in spirituality that goes from the beast to the angel, and on which we oscillate. Every day, every minute, carries the possibility of losing ground, of falling down again toward the beast." This idea, as will be seen, is embodied in the thematic structure of *La Dolce Vita*. Though Fellini's form is episodic, each sequence remains strictly controlled by the major theme. Within the different episodes, a number of motifs contribute to the complexity of the picture. As the action develops, the motifs coalesce into patterns that support the main structure of meaning.

One unifying element in the film is the progressive deterioration of a journalist named Marcello Rubini (Marcello Mastroianni), whose job takes him to places in Roman society that offer "the sweet life" to those who want it and can afford it. Two other devices that aid coherence in the thematic structure might also be mentioned at this point: one, many of the sequences originate on the once glamorous Via Veneto; and two, throughout the film a group of news photographers (*paparazzi*) plague the lives of the rich and famous who move across Fellini's landscape. It is important to note that *La Dolce Vita* is not just about café society; the film also surveys the intelligentsia, the entertainment world, and even the common man (for example, the mob at the site of the "miracle," to be discussed in due course). By crowding his picture with people of various nationalities, Fellini likewise extends the thematic scope of his action. Some viewers have berated Fellini for presenting so many of the doomed in handsome poses amid elegant surroundings. Such jejune moralizing misses the point. Even a puritan would have to concede that sin, in order to attract, must be appealing, at least in some of its aspects. As I have previously quoted Fellini as saying: "I always like to show both sides of a thing."

In *La Dolce Vita*, Fellini presents an ordered appearance of disorder; the scenes seem fragmented because the lives of the characters are fragmented. Most of the sequences, as Gilbert

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Salachas points out, follow "the same dynamic rhythm; the adventure begins in the evening, reaches its greatest frenzy in the heart of night, and ends in the imprecise haze of dawn. Each daybreak brings a provisory, gloomy conclusion that disperses the nocturnal spell." As in *La Strada*, Fellini structures his film on a two-beat rhythm: a night sequence followed by a day sequence. However, although both films begin in daylight, *La Strada* ends at night, *La Dolce Vita* at dawn. Similarly, whereas Zampanò moves from a "beast" to the possibility of becoming a human being, Marcello—finding no exit from the *inferno* in which he finds himself, or rather not yet able or willing to make use of the exit—gradually degenerates into a "beast." Also, just as Gelsomina represents what is positive in the world of *La Strada*, Paola stands at the opposite end of the spiritual spectrum from Marcello in *La Dolce Vita*. Paola is the "angel" of Fellini's morality tale.*

Let us, however, start at the beginning of the picture and examine the episodes in detail.

La Dolce Vita opens with one of the most celebrated shots in the modern cinema. A helicopter is seen flying over Rome carrying an enormous statue of Christ to St. Peter's Church. Marcello views this flight as a good publicity stunt for his paper; trailing in a second plane, the journalist and a photographer cover the reaction of people below. On a terrace some girls, who are sunbathing in bikinis, stare up at the "entertainment" in the sky. "Oh, look," remarks one girl, "there's Jesus!" As Marcello's helicopter passes over the terrace, he attempts to make a date with one of the girl's; but the sound of the plane's motor drowns out his voice.

Fellini has said that "the star of my film is Rome, the Babylon of my dreams." The opening scene establishes the "setting" for all that is to follow. Fellini is a master of juxtaposition. Here two worlds, or two Romes, are contrasted: the Christian and neo-

* Fellini spent months searching for a girl to play Paola, studying the faces of more than 5,000 teenagers. Even when shooting began on the film, the director had still not found his actress. Finally, at dinner in a friend's house, Fellini met thirteen-year-old Valeria Ciangottini, whom he hadn't seen in years. "Paola" was signed the next morning.

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pagan, the spiritual and material. By opening in such a manne
the artist suggests a scheme of values by which the protagoni
and the other personages can be measured. That the characte
in *La Dolce Vita* possess an inherent dignity is clear. Equall
apparent is Fellini's ambivalent attitude toward the church.
is not only that a religious statue suspended from an airplane
an incongruous sight in the modern world; the statue itself—
like the God it represents—is "dead." The shadow of Chri
falls over the great city; but only a few boys pursue the image
and those who bother to glance up do so in a curious, idle wa
only. Obviously this is not the world of the Old Testament where
men lifted their eyes to heaven with awe, reverence, and wonder
at the prospect of seeing signs of God's presence and majesty
The living God is gone now—only idols, of one kind or anothe
remain.

Fellini replaces the image of the gilt statue of Christ with
shot of two muscular—but sexually ambiguous looking—Siames
dancers in a nightclub. The statue is thus linked associationall
with the entertainers; the sacred is rendered profane by a com
mercial industrial society that allows only "work" and "fun
(and not even work for the aristocratic class). With the di
appearance of man's vital contact with spirit and nature, in
dividuals lose their sense of identity. Behind the masks with
which they confront society, men suffer from loneliness and
the lack of a purpose in life. In the scene under examination
Marcello meets a bored rich woman, Maddalena (Anouk Aimée),
who takes the journalist for a drive in her white Cadillac con
vertible. Manifestly, the protagonist envies the woman's wealth
position; however, Maddalena wearily informs Marcello tha
"only love matters." Though Maddalena is experienced in th

* In his piece on Anouk Aimée, Fellini writes: "There is a great contradic
tion in Anouk that fascinates. She can be so absolutely shy and the nex
moment as tough as a shark, a dweller in the abyss. She can be quick as
bull in doing certain things and then suddenly resume a stuttering timidity
With me, Anouk always maintained her little-girl role, but I feel that behind
the facade of *brava ragazzina*, the good little girl, there was in her at least
little of what I wanted her to show as Maddalena. . . . Her face suggests an
almost metaphysical sensuality."

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and point of view, the same analogy can be drawn in terms of characterization. Marcello is a kind of everyman. He is not drawn in depth; he does not have a complex biography behind him; in short, he is rather "flat." The same observation can be made of the other characters, none of whom are fully developed. In a "realistic" film (narrowly defined) such an approach would be open to censure. Since the mode of imitation in Fellini's picture lies somewhere between realism and symbolism, however, the stylized characterization seems fitting within the overall construction. Three-dimensional character delineation is not an end in itself. More important than whether a specific character remains "flat" or "round" is the question whether the director has infused life into his creation. No one who has seen *La Dolce Vita* is ever likely to forget Marcello, Paola, Steiner, Sylvia, the elder Rubini, or the other characters who inhabit Fellini's Rome.

Visually, *La Dolce Vita* is a delight from beginning to end. If Fellini knows how to contrast scenes and sequences for maximum impact, he is also expert at alternating and varying close-ups, medium shots, and long shots. The cameraman for the picture, Otello Martelli, remarks:

> [Fellini] wanted to use perspective according to his fantasy, often completely in contradiction to the principles governing the use of certain lenses. . . . Federico wanted to use only long-range lenses: 75 mm, 100, and even 150. These lenses are supposed to be used for close-ups, for portraits; however, he wanted to use them while the camera was in motion. What mattered to him was really to focus upon the character, and he was hardly concerned at all about the effect this might have on the depth of the field. He almost never uses the 50 mm lens, which is the normal one for CinemaScope. With the 75, the panoramic shots and the broad movements risk becoming dull; you risk a kind of flickering. I immediately mentioned this to Fellini, but he replied: "What can that possibly matter?" And as is often the case, he was absolutely right. It gave a certain style to the film. A certain severity to the image. A concentration within the frame, a distortion of the characters and the setting.

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