

Female Liberation and Autonomy in the Films of Federico Fellini

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Abstract

The essay examines the role of women and the portrayal of femininity in the films of Federico Fellini (1920-1993), and the extent to which Fellini's view of women guides the evolution of the plots. Key female characters in Fellini's films are seen as existing on the edges of society—women who are not quite social outcasts but whose way of life leads to them being viewed as misfits living on the fringes. Fellini has made a number of films depicting the hardships endured by female characters, their troubled relationships with men, and the lessons they have learned from their travails. Fellini's films chart the personal growth of female characters towards independence through their interactions with others.

Keywords: Fellini, Federico; Masina, Giulietta; Milo, Sandra; Motion picture film; Femininity in motion pictures; Feminine identity

Federico Fellini (1920—1993) is known for his dreamy fantasy films in which women often play pivotal roles. The director sees female characters as essential to the plot and believes that they are crucial in the construction of the narrative. In a number of productions Fellini cast his wife Giulietta Masina as the key character—she was to be his lifelong muse who, along with Sandra Milo, a voluptuous actress of Tunisian descent, became critical to his continued success as a film director.

Female characters in Fellini's films can nearly always be divided into two distinct types. On the one hand, there are women who are symbiotically attached to their male counterparts by limpet-like silken strands and could not live with or without the object of their affections. Examples of this type include Sandra (Leonora Ruffo), the young wife of the philandering Fausto from *I Vitelloni (The Young Calves)*;¹ the clinging girlfriend of the bohemian Marcello from *La Dolce Vita*;² or Luisa (Anouk Aimée), the nagging wife of the film director Guido from *Otto e Mezzo (8½)*.³ On the other hand, there are those female characters who appear entrapped at first but often throw off unseen ties—characters such as

¹ *I Vitelloni (The Young Calves)*, Federico Fellini (1953; London: Nouveaux Pictures, 2012), DVD.

² *La Dolce Vita*, Federico Fellini (1960; London: Nouveaux Pictures, 2012), DVD.

³ *Otto e Mezzo (8½)*, Federico Fellini (1963; London: Nouveaux Pictures, 2001), DVD.

the good-hearted and trusting prostitute Cabiria (Giulietta Masina) from *Le Notti di Cabiria* (*Nights of Cabiria*),⁴ or the bored and timid housewife Juliet (Giulietta Masina) from *Giulietta Degli Spiriti* (*Juliet of the Spirits*)⁵—women who subsequently find liberty and fulfilment through self-actualization. Indeed, this was the way with nearly all female characters in Fellini's films. The role of the male, on the other hand, was to look at women, react to their charm or vulnerability, and sometimes change direction in pursuit of his feminine ideal. By contrast, the female was likely to know where she was going and more or less the time of arrival, as she embarked on a journey of her own choosing. Men entered her world more like passing ships in the night, but ultimately it was women in Fellini's films who held the key to finding their own destiny. For these screen women, self-determination became achievable and their ultimate freedom was attained largely without male intervention or help.

Fellini's coquettish, often naïve, female characters are played with childlike abandon by actresses cast in roles that seem perfectly suited to them. Fellini's first feature film *Lo Sceicco Bianco* (*The White Sheik*)⁶ places Brunella Bovo centre stage as Wanda (Figure 1), an innocent newlywed just arrived in Rome on her honeymoon with her priggish husband Ivan (Leopoldo Trieste).



Figure 1. The innocent and naïve Wanda (Brunella Bovo) in *'Lo Sceicco Bianco'* (DVD capture)

Ivan has planned the day meticulously—every second is accounted for—from sightseeing to meeting stuffy relatives, followed by an audience with the Pope. Wanda, however, has other ideas and while Ivan takes his nap she sneaks off to meet the White Sheik (Alberto Sordi), a hero of a romantic photo-strip book. The subsequent events become a twentieth-century version of *The Harlot's Progress*⁸ by William Hogarth, a series of six paintings and silver engravings showing the descent of a virtuous country girl to indecency and indigence. In Fellini's film, Wanda goes to the marketing offices of the White Sheik and from there she travels to a beach set with other actors from the picture montage, where she ends up playing a part of a harem girl in the photo-strip. At this stage, Wanda's ignominious slide is all but complete—she is now seductively dressed and soon finds herself as the object of the White Sheik's amorous attentions. Both parties drift out to sea in a small boat as

⁴ *Le Notti di Cabiria* (*Nights of Cabiria*), Federico Fellini (1957; London: Optimum Releasing, 2009), DVD.

⁵ *Giulietta Degli Spiriti* (*Juliet of the Spirits*), Federico Fellini (1965; London: Nouveaux Pictures, 2012), DVD.

⁶ *Lo Sceicco Bianco* (*The White Sheik*), Federico Fellini (1952; London: Optimum Releasing, 2007), DVD.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Hogarth, William, *A Harlot's Progress*, Engravings, 1732.

Wanda swoons in the arms of her imaginary lover. The White Sheik tries in vain to kiss her but is hit on the head by the mainsail boom and the spell is broken. They return to the shore where Wanda discovers the romance to be a sham, and learns that the White Sheik moonlights as a butcher with a shrewish wife. Realizing the extent of her folly, decline and disgrace, she tries to end her life by drowning herself, but her shambolic efforts fail miserably. In Wanda's eyes her unsuccessful suicide attempt only serves to further emphasize her ineffectuality.

The starting point in the development of Wanda's character is her wide-eyed wonderment and utter gullibility. Yet the decisions she takes are her own, prompted as they are by her adolescent fantasies. For his part her husband Ivan, still desperate to make the most of his uncle's ecclesiastical connections and to continue with the charade of concealing Wanda's disappearance, eventually abandons all hope and finds comfort in the arms of a prostitute. It is worth noting that Ivan's moral dilemma is resolved by a lady of the night, while his virginal wife has absconded from the romantic experience—evidence of double standards if you like. This is a recurring theme in many of Fellini's films, which often show provincial small-town ideals condemning and marginalizing prostitutes. These women are, however, embraced and feted by Fellini in his films. The roles they play, even minor ones, bring a touching sense of humanity and compassion to his works. No finger-wagging censure here—only playfulness and sympathy that propel the narrative forward with humanity and relentless good humour. In *Lo Sceicco Bianco*,⁹ Ivan and Wanda ultimately come to terms with each other's transgressions, which encourages a new maturity to develop between them. Solace is found in forgiveness while imperfection and foolhardiness are accepted as an intrinsic part of the human psyche.

Giulietta Masina's episodic role as Cabiria in *Lo Sceicco Bianco*,¹⁰ an impish sidekick to an older prostitute, tracks the significant part she played in many of Fellini's films. In a scene in *Lo Sceicco Bianco* she holds centre stage with her humorous asides, helping to move the narrative along and affecting a positive denouement between the characters that may not have otherwise come about. Masina's comedic delivery, and her choric commentary full of empathy and wisdom, ensures that Wanda and Ivan ultimately find a solution to their honeymoon predicament. In her other roles in Fellini's films Masina often managed to convey a wealth of emotion, sometimes through eye movements alone (*vide* Cabiria in *Lo Sceicco Bianco*,¹¹ Gelsomina in *La Strada*,¹² or Cabiria again in *Le Notti di Cabiria*¹³). She used visual facial cues to progress the narrative effortlessly from scene to scene. Masina led viewers wordlessly from shot to shot, and also let them know that what lay ahead was important and should be taken note of. In her one scene in *Lo Sceicco Bianco*, Giulietta Masina is cheeky and confident, very different to, but nonetheless just as effective as, the character of Gelsomina in *La Strada*.

Female characters in Fellini's 1954 film *I Vitelloni*¹⁴ were not as pronounced or as obvious as the male roles; however, without these characters the narrative would have been lopsided and lacking in balance. Three of the five 'young calves' are backed by strong women: Sandra (Leonora Ruffo), who in the end realizes her own emotional strength as a young wife and mother; Giulia (Lida Baarová), a mature married woman who rebuffs the

⁹ Fellini, *The White Sheik*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *La Strada*, Federico Fellini (1954; London: Optimum Releasing, 2005), DVD.

¹³ Fellini, *Nights of Cabiria*.

¹⁴ Fellini, *I Vitelloni*.

advances of the young Fausto (Sandra's husband as it happens); and Olga (Claude Farell), the hard-working sister of carefree Alberto who sponges off her.

Fellini intended the film to reflect his own youthful memories of growing up in a provincial Italian town on the Adriatic coast. The titular 'young calves', irresponsible and lazy, refuse to get meaningful employment and simply live off their family incomes. One of the young men, Moraldo (Franco Interlenghi), acts as a conscience of the group, becoming the eyes and ears of his mates in an effort to guide them to calmer waters. Another of the young calves, Fausto (Franco Fabrizzi), is an incorrigible libertine who tries to seduce every woman he sees. His sweet young pregnant wife Sandra suffers the continued humiliation of witnessing his peccadilloes. Despite her tearful entreaties, Fausto continues his indiscretions, so that the look of love between the couple has mutated into Fausto's often disrespectful brutishness. His actions finally culminate in a foolish attempt to kiss an older woman, Giulia, the wife of his employer (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Fausto (Franco Fabrizzi) tries to kiss Giulia (Lida Baarová), the wife of his employer in *'I Vitelloni'*¹⁵ (DVD capture)

At this point Fausto's narcissistic gaze implodes and through his own actions he all but condemns his marriage to fail. There was only a brief frisson of reciprocity between Giulia and Fausto during a fancy dress ball, but Giulia quickly retreated back into respectability. Fausto, however, is convinced that his feelings for his employer's wife are reciprocated, and the woman's subsequent rebuff stuns him into silence. Finally it is Fausto's father who teaches him a lesson by beating him like an unruly child. Sandra chooses to accept her wayward husband's contrite apologies, but promises to be like his father and kick him to death if he ever lets her down again as a husband. Her verbal outburst clearly indicates her newly acquired emotional stature and maturity.

For her part Giulia rediscovers a level of loyalty to her husband that was perhaps missing prior to her brief liaison with Fausto. On the other hand, Alberto's sister Olga decides to follow her heart and leave home to start a new life with her married lover. This instigates a crisis for Alberto (Alberto Sordi), which is probably a good thing because he suddenly has to grow up and take over day-to-day familial obligations. In the end it is Sandra's brother Moraldo who, as the only one of the young calves, decides to leave the town, after he has grown tired of his friends' and his own empty life. For the young men who

¹⁵ Ibid.

stay behind any emotional growth must come as a direct result of involvement and influence of some female character: sister, wife, or lover.

The tone of Fellini's next film, *La Strada*,¹⁶ from 1954, contrasts considerably with the light-heartedness and the autobiographical elements of *I Vitelloni*.¹⁷ Gone is the good-natured interaction between the young men and the supporting female characters. Instead, in *La Strada* Fellini made a film that was both harrowing and distressing, chiefly due to Giulietta Masina's touching portrayal of a slow-witted country girl Gelsomina (Figure 3).



Figure 3. The fairground wrestler Zampanò (Anthony Quinn) and his simple-minded assistant Gelsomina (Giulietta Masina) in *La Strada*.¹⁸ (DVD capture)

In the film, a brutish traveling showman Zampanò (Anthony Quinn) literally buys Gelsomina from her impoverished mother. Gelsomina is subsequently enslaved and exploited as Zampanò beats and abuses her, forcing her to perform in his show. With little dialogue to support her performance, Giulietta Masina manages brilliantly to capture the bird-like vulnerability and sensitivity of her screen character. By contrast Zampanò looks but fails to see Gelsomina's inner beauty, as he ruthlessly exploits the girl's giving nature. When Zampanò kills a rival showman, the Fool (Richard Basehart), Gelsomina descends into mania, disconnects from reality and is eventually abandoned by Zampanò. Some years later Zampanò discovers that Gelsomina has died. Broken and distraught, he realizes that the girl's pureness of nature was his salvation, and that without her his hopes of redemption are lost. The dead Gelsomina triumphs in the end—her ability to experience simple joy set her apart from the callous and insensitive Zampanò who realizes too late what he has lost. The closing scenes of *La Strada* show him drunk, violent, and ultimately alone, outside humanity, as he wanders aimlessly on a beach. The final shot reveals Zampanò's prone body lying at the edge of the sea; it is unclear if he is still alive.

After *La Strada*,¹⁹ Fellini returned to the character of the prostitute Cabiria, first introduced in a scene in *Lo Sciecco Bianco*.²⁰ The director clearly felt that this role was worth

¹⁶ Fellini, *La Strada*.

¹⁷ Fellini, *I Vitelloni*.

¹⁸ Fellini, *La Strada*.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Fellini, *The White Sheik*.

developing because in 1957 he went on to make *Le Notti di Cabiria*,²¹ again casting his wife, Giulietta Masina, to reprise her role as a hooker with a heart of gold. Cabiria still believes in romance and true love with a certain naivety that belies her profession. In one scene, the obviously bored Cabiria decides to move her ‘patch’ and walk new ground in search of clients. She encounters two high-class prostitutes dressed in their finest, high heels and top fashion, swaying through the up-market crowd along the fashionable Via Veneto. Cabiria squares up to them in her practical flat shoes and an unfashionable jacket that has seen better days. Once both parties have passed by, she turns to assess them with longing and envy etched on her face: Cabiria’s exaggerated assertiveness belies a deeply rooted sense of insecurity.

Cabiria used to be set upon, assaulted and duped by men, yet she continues to entertain expectations of a happy ending—a marriage and a family that will give her the dignity and peace she craves. Throughout the film Cabiria is taken advantage of: in the opening scene her current boyfriend snatches both her money and bag, adding insult to injury by pushing Cabiria into a river as he makes good his escape. Cabiria nearly drowns, remains afterwards secretly desolate, but recovers and decides to frequent a different location where she meets well-known film star Alberto Lazzari (Amadeo Nazzari). But he too treats Cabiria with disregard. Later in the film Cabiria encounters ‘Oscar’ (François Perier), who pretends to be the man of her dreams as revealed by a hypnotist act in a vaudeville show. The street-wise Cabiria is wary and unsure at first, but soon comes to trust Oscar only to be led by him towards a cliff edge and robbed of her life savings. Realizing the extent to which she has been deceived, Cabiria begs Oscar to kill her. She remains utterly overwhelmed by grief and despair when Oscar walks away, and for a moment viewers are unsure whether the down-trodden Cabiria will not indeed take her own life by jumping from the cliff. Slowly she comes around and, disconsolate, walks towards the road to make her way to the home she no longer has (she sold it and gave the money to Oscar). As Cabiria meanders along, disheveled and dirty, she meets a crowd of teenagers who joyously dance around her. Their exuberance is catching, and bit by bit Cabiria becomes infected by the youngsters’ enthusiasm. She slowly starts to smile, raises her head, her eyes brimming, and proceeds to break through the fourth wall by looking directly into the camera (Figure 4).



Figure 4. The closing shot of ‘*Le Notti di Cabiria*’²²: the downtrodden prostitute (Giulietta Masina) smiles through her tears (DVD capture)

²¹ Fellini, *Nights of Cabiria*.

²² Ibid.

Unlike the male characters in Fellini's films who seem merely to exist, allowing life to pass them by, only interacting with others when they have no choice or need something, women do much more. In Fellini's films men merely react—they wait for something to happen and then decide whether to engage with it or not. Female characters, on the other hand, actively seek out a resolution. They embrace life and live it to the full, finding solace in learning from often bitter experience. The shot of Cabiria in the final moments of the film gives the viewers a sense of hope—an image of a brave and dignified woman, unbroken and undimmed, who has refused to bow before adversity.

Male characters in Fellini's films seem to exist unselfconsciously—they career from drama to drama, unable to reflect on how they arrived at this juncture. Regardless of how unpleasant the outcome is, Fellini's male characters are slow to recognize that maybe they could have played some role in their own destiny; instead, they repeat the same mistakes. By contrast, female characters seize life with both hands. They learn from past mishaps and their personalities grow as a result. From their perspective it is better to suffer the consequences of failure rather than face the fear of inaction. Fellini's men have their desires but they do little to be worthy of the conquest. Nowhere does this seem truer than in the character of Marcello (Marcello Mastroianni) from *La Dolce Vita*.²³

Marcello is a celebrity journalist and compulsive womanizer who makes his living writing gossip columns about the rich and famous. Bored with his life, Marcello goes on a quest seeking romantic fulfilment in fleeting and inconsequential relationships. His current mistress, Maddalena (Anouk Aimée), is wealthy and equally bored with her life. Marcello's unstable and jealous girlfriend Emma (Yvonne Furneaux) tries in vain to prevent his philandering. In pursuit of a new story, Marcello interviews a voluptuous American actress, Sylvia (Anita Ekberg). Along with other bohemian characters, including Sylvia's satyr-like actor friend, they spend the evening drinking and dancing in the ruins of the Baths of Caracalla in Rome (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Sylvia (Anita Ekberg) dances the night away in 'La Dolce Vita'²⁴ (DVD capture)

Marcello's ennui covers a deeper malaise, one which he seems unable to hide. He tries in vain to dispel his unhappiness with ever more desperate efforts as his womanizing becomes more frantic. Of the women caught in his web, not a single one achieves contentment and happiness. None of them even recognizes how doomed they are once

²³ Fellini, *La Dolce Vita*.

²⁴ Ibid.

connected to Marcello's narcissism. The only character who marginally succeeds in attaining some modicum of freedom is Sylvia, although it could be argued that in her supreme self-absorption Marcello has indeed met his match. The equally conceited Sylvia was unlikely to consider that she was anything other than a poster child for his rampant egotism.

In the famous final scene, Marcello is thrown a lifeline by Paola (Valeria Ciangottini), an angelic girl whom he met by accident at a seaside café earlier in the day. She mysteriously arrives at the post-bacchanalian scene on the beach, calling to Marcello to abandon his decadent company and (possibly) join her. The offer is considered and, for the briefest of moments, Marcello traverses the cusp between redemption and inferno. In the end Marcello chooses the flames and goes back to his merry crowd. As in the closing shot of *Le Notti di Cabiria*,²⁵ Paola breaks through the fourth wall and looks directly at the audience. Her reflection appears impassive but compassionate, almost as if Fellini hoped the audience would study Paola's gaze to form their own meaning (Figure 6).



Figure 6. The angelic Paola (Valeria Ciangottini) saying goodbye to Marcello and to us in the closing shot of *'La Dolce Vita'*²⁶ (DVD capture)

The accolades and critical acclaim won by *La Dolce Vita* made Fellini fearful of making another film, lest it be considered less successful. He hesitated for some time before committing himself to another project, and at one stage seriously considered halting production on any new film. When *8½*²⁷ was finally released in 1963, it drew even greater plaudits than *La Dolce Vita*. There was something to be said for the filmmaker's block after all. The character of the film director, Guido Anselmi (Marcello Mastroianni), closely reflects that of Fellini. Except of course that Fellini was not a womanizer and Guido certainly was. In all other aspects Guido mirrored Fellini to the point where it could be said they were *Doppelgängers*: the same insecurities, the same niggling self-doubt and anxiety about realizing (or failing to) the high standards set by oneself. Fellini must have cursed the success of *La Dolce Vita* right up until the moment of a rapturous applause at the closing credits of *8½*.

Under doctor's orders Guido travels to a spa to affect a cure for his anxieties. There he encounters the beautiful and special Claudia (Claudia Cardinale), his feminine ideal, who will from now on fill his fantasies (Figure 7).

²⁵ Fellini, *Nights of Cabiria*.

²⁶ Fellini, *La Dolce Vita*.

²⁷ Fellini, *8½*.



Figure 7. The mesmerising beauty (Claudia Cardinale) offers Guido the elixir of life in '8½'²⁸ (DVD capture)

Guido feels eclipsed by the constant demands of the many women in his life (they all come together in the harem fantasy), but at the same time he encourages confrontation between them as if to keep boredom at a safe distance. During his stay at a hotel his highly strung mistress Carla (Sandra Milo) pays him a visit. As if this was not enough, Guido invites Luisa (Anouk Aimée), his shrewish wife, to drop by—greatly increasing the likelihood of both parties encountering each other. And they do, much to Guido's amusement when he starts to daydream about Carla and Luisa exchanging endless meaningless pleasantries (in Guido's ultimate fantasy his wife and mistress are getting along famously). In one of his flashbacks Guido recalls a wild woman from the beach, La Saraghina, who, complete with birds-nest hair coupled with heavy accentuated make-up, dances a hybridized version of the rumba, Saraghina style. She appears at a later stage during the imagined harem scene where Guido has banished an older demoiselle "upstairs" where he doesn't have to see her. Out of sight, out of mind, and out of fantasy. As Guido adds new ingredients to his dreamlike vision, the once submissive group of women suddenly turns on him. Even in his imagination Guido finds no fulfilment with the ladies of his harem.

For Guido/Fellini the harem women are fated to unhappiness. Guido has clear problems forming intimacy as soon as he connects with any of these women; they become ensnared and seem unable to live without him. The look of love is what binds Guido to the women in his life or, more simply, just the look. Once they become embedded in his gaze, these women's self-determination is annihilated. Women are subsumed into Guido's world to become shadowy entities; no longer mistresses of their own destiny, but rather pawns enthralled to an arch-narcissist. The sole escapee from this melee is the sensual Claudia, Guido's muse.

The journey to self-determination and independence for female characters took on a deeper meaning for Fellini in *Giulietta degli Spiriti* (*Juliet of the Spirits*),²⁹ where the director again gave Giulietta Masina free rein by casting her in the lead role. *Juliet of the Spirits* was Fellini's first colour film, in which he and the art director Piero Gherardi vigorously exploited the excitingly new visual palette. Fellini had absolute faith in his wife's acting talents to play the role of Juliet, a wealthy and bored housewife who loves her husband but suspects him, not without foundation, of being unfaithful. During a séance, Juliet and her friends somehow manage to summon a party of phantoms—a troupe of ghosts who will now visit Juliet night and day. As the film traverses illusion and an equally fantastic reality, Juliet finds herself

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Fellini, *Giulietta Degli Spiriti*.

unintentionally zigzagging between the two realms, becoming enmeshed in the world of her sexually uninhibited next-door neighbour Suzy (Sandra Milo) (Figure 8). Suzy's lifestyle of gaudy spectacle places Juliet's unhappy marriage in the spotlight and further accentuates her anodyne existence.



Figure 8. Juliet (Giulietta Masina) drops in for tea with Suzy (Sandra Milo) in 'Giulietta degli Spiriti'³⁰ (DVD capture)

Juliet ultimately manages to free her own spirit by confronting a sense of guilt inherited from her Catholic upbringing and coming to terms with it. In discovering what lies within her, Juliet casts off the external judgmental gaze, now replaced with the look of love, to finally achieve autonomy. Once unchained from her emotional obsession with her unfaithful husband, she transcends her insecurity to reach a level of tranquility, liberty, serenity, and blessed peace. The spirits that have tormented her earlier have now become her friends.

Giulietta Masina made her final comedic turn with Fellini as director in *Ginger and Fred*,³¹ in which she played Amelia/Ginger, a dancing partner to Pippo/Fred (Marcello Mastroianni). Telling a story of an aging dance couple once feted for their star appeal, the film also sends up the shallowness of contemporary commercial television—a medium that has sold out by eschewing any serious or thought-provoking issues. By directing *Ginger and Fred*, Fellini wanted to make a satirical, provocative comment on modern entertainment and its banalities, and he succeeded admirably.

Amelia and Pippo used to be dance partners in times gone by when they modelled themselves on cinema's famous dance duo Rogers and Astaire. Thirty years later, both partners have grown up and out, losing touch with each other. Now they are matched once more to tread the boards for a gaudy television spectacle. The characters' intensely funny moments have flashes of bittersweet sadness - in all a deeply felt nostalgia for the demise of the noisy dancehalls and vaudeville opportunities, where many young hopefuls first felt that theirs was a talent worth applauding.

In *Ginger and Fred*, Fellini created three different sets of perspectives; four if the audience is taken into account. First, there was of course Fellini's gaze, followed by Pippo's - mostly centered on himself but from time to time also directed towards Amelia. The third set

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ *Ginger and Fred*, Federico Fellini (1986; London: Infinity Arthouse, 2006), DVD.

of eyes is the ubiquitous and intrusive world of television. Finally, there is the audience watching the screen characters watching one another. The film is less about throwing off these types of gaze and more to do with understanding and coping with being in the spotlight. The cloak of fame weighs heavily on Amelia but she accepts the fickle nature of what prompts people to look. Pippo, on the other hand, is completely unaware that fame is fleeting, and that an audience yearning to look today may have a different desire tomorrow. Giulietta Masina's final film with Fellini was more a gentle realization of her feminine power than a bombastic diatribe. For Pippo, the gaze of the crowd has gone but, vain as he is, he still gasps for its return. Amelia knows the price of being looked at but is unwilling to subscribe to the demands, and fully understands that the cost of fame is far greater than she is willing to pay.

Women in these films are portrayed as subjects of scrutiny by nearly all players, male and female, including audiences who naturally follow Fellini's line of gaze. Once intimacy is shared with Fausto, Marcello, Guido and other male characters, the women associated with them seem bound to subordination for eternity. However, many women in Fellini's films do manage to cast off their chains of dependency and rise above their limitations; their femininity becomes an inner strength in which redemption is found through resilience and force of character. Equally, they are allowed flaws and errors of judgement, because only by making mistakes can they learn, grow as persons, and achieve self-sufficiency. Cabiria lives on the fringes of society but she still rises above her oppressors by choosing hope over despair. Gelsomina teaches the lesson of empathy and love to a man who realizes too late that he is beyond saving. Wanda falls pathetically but is brought back to the fold through contrition and honesty. Claudia's path is forged through self-awareness and serene knowing. All these women are mistresses of their own destiny and find salvation through honesty, truth, and self-actualization.

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