

Melancholy and Melodrama as Queer Masculinity in the Films of Valerio Zurlini

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Introduction

In Jacqueline Reich's influential monograph on Marcello Mastroianni, *Beyond the Latin Lover*, she analyzes the famous actor as the embodiment of the *inetto*, an alternative male type in Italian culture who is characterized by his inability to attain those attributes associated with ideal masculinity: decisiveness, effectiveness and especially, heterosexual prowess¹. Reich argues that Mastroianni's performances are a counterweight to the stereotypes of the image of the Latin Lover that have been prevalent in notions of Mediterranean manhood, and instead exemplify the ascendance of the *inetto* in postwar cinema to the extent that it became "the dominant cultural representation of masculinity" in Italian film². Film scholars have since expanded on Reich's interpretations of Italian masculinity onscreen by identifying the preponderance of modalities of male fragility and non-normative sexuality in Italian cinema of the era, often interpreting such characterizations as emblematic of a crisis of male identity that reveals profound insecurities in a time of rapid social, political and economic transformation in Italy³.

Such re-readings of this era of Italian cinema provide a significant challenge to assumptions regarding hegemonic masculinity in popular film, yet they leave some lingering questions about male sexuality in Italian cinema. If the spectacle of male fragility, emotionality, and ineptitude is indeed the dominant mode in Italian cinema, where does this lead us in our assessment of the heteronormative impulse that accompanies those representations? In this article I seek to extract the *inetto* from its predominant interpretation as the articulation of manhood in a society in the midst of rapid social, economic, and

technological changes, and instead reposition this depiction of masculinity onscreen as an expression of queer identity. Using the mode of melodrama, specifically in the films of the director Valerio Zurlini (1926-1982), we can see how an alternative vision of masculinity became articulated through representations that have previously been critically clustered under the concept of *inetto*. In so doing I argue that the range of masculine identities in Italian cinema has been much wider than previous interpretations have suggested, and that these representations can contribute to a growing critical understanding of queer cinema in Italy⁴.

Queer Italy and the Question of Melodrama

In a 2014 article, John Champagne makes what he declared to be an “immoderate proposal” by stating that the dominant mode through which Italian cultural production has represented masculinity is in itself queer. Beginning his analysis with Greco-Roman traditions in visual arts and literature and extending all the way through Matteo Garrone’s *Gomorra* (2008), Champagne argues that Italian masculinity has always been framed within the context of male-male intimacy, with an outsized emphasis on the glorification of the male physique. In this way, the term ‘queer’ encompasses the way that Italian cultural codes of masculinity are constantly “deconstructing binaries of masculine and feminine, homosexual and heterosexual, adult and child, active and passive, seeing and being seen”⁵. Champagne elaborates on this concept in detail in his book, *Italian Masculinity as Queer Melodrama*, in which he links the notion of queerness to the longstanding artistic tradition of melodrama in Italian fine arts, music, and cinema⁶. Asserting that melodrama is a particularly Italian contribution to Western culture, he notes that its development within a variety of media is linked to national concepts of masculinity that privilege the visible suffering, both emotional and physical, of the male subject. It is this merging of melodrama, masculinity and queer identities that is most resonant with my discussion of the films of Valerio Zurlini. In the films that emerge from the later years of the *miracolo economico*, men often become configured as the central victims of melodra-

matic plots, whose personal crises come to a head when romantic and familial obligations collide. The film melodrama is well-known as a mode that privileges the female subject. Yet in the Italian case, male-centered melodramas have always been a strong *filone* of the genre, beginning with Italian Neorealism, whose pathos-infused plots centered primarily upon male protagonists, from Amedeo Nazzari's performances in the Matarazzo weepies of the 1950s, and up through the contemporary era⁷. This tradition suggests that, unlike the development of Hollywood melodrama, Italian melodramas have been as much, if not more, concerned with the emotions of men that with those of female protagonists.

This phenomenon, however, does not necessarily work against valorizing hegemonic masculinity, for as Catherine O'Rawe notes in her analysis of contemporary Italian male melodramas: "[the] emphasis on male suffering works to re-center white, heterosexual masculinity as normative"⁸. In other words, the dramatizing of male emotion often serves to reemphasize that men who are currently in a state of loss or disempowerment are worthy of pathos, a circumstance that inherently invokes that notion that this vulnerable positioning of men is neither natural nor ideal. Moreover, the decentering of women from the melodramatic narrative is another means of diminishing female subjectivity from one of the few cinematic expressions in which women's perspectives have traditionally been at the foreground. However, while undoubtedly the privileging of male over female subjectivity serves to reinforce a male-dominated expression of gender in Italian culture, in many films it also provides a unique opportunity to critique modes of ideal masculinity that do not necessarily lead back to a reparative vision of masculine norms. Melodrama can also serve to reinforce a sense of a queer world, an alignment that some critics have argued is deeply embedded in the melodramatic mode. As Jonathan Goldberg argues in his queer theorization of melodrama, "melodrama is an aesthetics of an impossible situation" wherein the moral contradictions within the melodrama provide a space for the expression of ineffable desire, and therefore make palpable a queer perspective on the status quo⁹.

This resonates in many respects with the dramas depicted in Zurlini's cinema, which problematize the transgressive nature of men's intimate relationships both with women and with each other. Beyond the representation of the heterosexual couple as victim of historical changes and social mores, we can see instead that the heterosexual impulse itself becomes sublimated. As Claudio Bisoni has noted in his study of masculinity in Italian melodrama, the problem that is posed through the complications of sexual relations between men and women is "one of a continued *deviation* and *deficit* of desire"¹⁰. While Bisoni does not delineate what lies behind this re-configuration of male desire in the melodrama, it is suggestive that, ultimately, the male protagonists cannot be integrated within a heteronormative schema. In fact, more so even than the earlier Italian melodramas of the 1950s, Zurlini's films decline to proffer a potential restoration of heterosexual norms. As we will see in the examples discussed here, through the refusal to effectively allocate leading men to a successful heterosexual paradigm and instead privileging male-male intimacy, non-normative sexuality, and the spectacle of the isolated male star, a reexamination of Zurlini's films illustrates ways in which queer masculinity can be found in Italian cinema.

The Melancholic Body: The Queer Cinema of Valerio Zurlini

Laura Mulvey has aptly described the melodrama:

the strength of the melodramatic form lies in the amount of dust the story raises along the road, the cloud of overdetermined irreconcilables which put up a resistance to being neatly settled, in the last five minutes, into a happy end¹¹.

If the melodrama is particularly resistant to hard and fast definitions or satisfying conclusions, likewise the ambiguous placement of its male protagonists results in a confusion of clear, normative identities that therefore aligns them with the notion of queer subjectivity. Nowhere does this become more evident than in the cinema of Valerio Zurlini, whose eight feature films made between 1955 and 1976 earned the filmmaker a modest reputation as a creator of somber, intimate, and

melancholic portraits of quiet desperation. Zurlini's films center upon male protagonists who, in the words of Francesco Savelloni, are characterized by *differenza*:

I personaggi di Zurlini, insomma, vivono e sentono sempre di più rispetto alla norma, rispetto all'*attualità* e, inevitabilmente, la loro eccedenza, in quanto esubero ritenuto superfluo, è destinata all'espulsione, al rifiuto, all'incomprensione¹².

The men who populate Zurlini's world attempt, yet fail at, achieving happiness through the romantic ideal of the heterosexual couple. For Zurlini, this was an expression of his essentially pessimistic assessment for the possibilities of romantic love, which he outlined in this interview with Jean Gili:

Per me la coppia è sempre impossibile e non soltanto quando c'è una differenza sociale o una barriera esterna. La fusione della coppia è una cosa fatalmente effimera, destinata a morire. [...] Se nei miei film io creo situazioni fatte per rendere la coppia impossibile a priori, questo è solo il riflesso romanzato e drammatico di una convinzione più profonda: la fatale impossibilità della coppia¹³.

Such sentiments are epitomized by figures such as Daniele Dominici, Alain Delon's character in Zurlini's penultimate film, *La prima notte di quiete* (1972), a character considered by the director's friends and colleagues to be an alter ego for Zurlini himself. Dominici is an intellectual, a listless high school teacher suffering from "melancholia senza rimedio," and his ill-fated infatuation with one of his students leads him to acts of desperation and eventually to his own tragic death. Daniele's death offers a clear example of the way Zurlini thematizes melancholy and reinforces Julia Kristeva's assessment of artistic expressions of melancholy that situate "the image of death as the ultimate site of desire."¹⁴

Such a grim expression of man's existential frustration with the alienating world of post-boom Italy may in part account for the somewhat muted reputation Zurlini's films hold in the canon of Italian cinema. Yet the critical reception of Zurlini's films has in fact failed to address some of the features that are most salient in his vision of melancholy men: namely, the representation of the body as a site of sexual anxiety

and as an expression of a disaffected relationship to gender norms. I propose that one of the stumbling blocks for critics of the director's output is a failure to read his films as a queer expression of masculinity in a period of dramatic changes in social mores in Italy. Through films such as *Estate violenta* (1959), *Cronaca familiare* (1962), *La prima notte di quiete*, and up through Zurlini's most acclaimed film, *Il deserto dei tartari* (1976), we can interpret the isolation of the individual and the impossibility of romantic attachments as an expression of sexual ambiguity in a moment of personal crisis.

Another stumbling block is precisely Zurlini's deployment of melodrama, as it does not coincide with much of the cinematic output in Italy that has become collocated under the term. His career flourished after the postwar heyday of film melodrama in Italy, whose production, as Louis Bayman notes, diminished markedly after the mid-1950s.¹⁵ Moreover the Italian preference for the family melodrama, in which despair within the domestic sphere of the nuclear family unit becomes dramatized in exalted form, does not describe the varied milieu of Zurlini's work: certainly kinship ties are at times crucial to the emotional core, particularly in a film like *Cronaca familiare*, yet this rarely poses a commentary upon the articulation of the heterocentric family unit as such. On the other hand, his films also eschew the operatic aesthetics that would characterize the melodramatic *cinema d'autore* exemplified by Luchino Visconti, the most internationally prominent practitioner of Italian melodrama, and notably one who is often credited with aligning melodrama with queer perspective¹⁶. This is not to say that Zurlini's cinematic style is anathema to that of Visconti: for example music, particularly orchestral music, has an important function for eliciting emotions in his works. However, the other hallmarks of operatic cinema are absent: choral scenes; elaborately staged action sequences set against prominent historical events; sumptuous sets; and the build-up to dramatic climaxes within a multi-act narrative structure. The renunciation of operatic aesthetics in Zurlini thus enables some viewers to miss the melodramatic imprint of his style. But if, as Bayman tells us, Italian melodrama is primarily concerned with the "private intimacy of emotion,"¹⁷ then Zurlini's films are a compelling

example for their profound exploration of the sentimental conditions of the men who are the center of their narratives.

In articulating a pattern of queer male leads in the films of Zurlini, it is ironic to note that his first feature, one that he himself was reluctant to direct, was about a perpetual womanizer; the working-class Don Giovanni known as Bob (Antonio Cifariello) in his 1955 adaptation of Vasco Pratolini's novel *Le ragazze di San Frediano* (1949). Perhaps the most atypical of Zurlini's work, the film is intended to be a comedy, yet it ends up a discomfiting vision of its protagonist's repeated and ill-fated seductions of the women of his neighborhood. Far from centering upon the concerns of the young women referenced in the title, and who occupy a much more prominent narrative space in Pratolini's text, the story instead follows the perspective of Bob as he romances a variety of women, with few indications as to why precisely he pursues or abandons one or the other. Bob appears to derive little joy from his conquests, and this articulation of the futility of the protagonist's exploits is one of the fundamental failures of the film's coherence as a comedy. The predicaments that aligned the film with the *filone* of *neorealismo rosa* fall flat when they are juxtaposed against moments that depict the character's internal emptiness. One such moment comes when Zurlini introduces a trope that, as I will discuss further, becomes emblematic of his cinema. This comes during a party sequence at a night club where Bob is the guest of one of his paramours, a fashion executive ensconced in the jet set of Florentine society. Bob is clearly out of his element with the older and more sophisticated revelers, and becomes distracted when he espies a former lover, Mafalda (Giovanna Ralli), dancing with another man. In a series of shot/countershots, Bob stares at her in an expression of brooding displeasure. Their subsequent spat relegates this brief sequence to an expression of Bob's jealousy, all the more pointless because the viewer by now knows that Bob has no enduring objectives as far as any women are concerned.

This renders this scene however all the more intriguing, for it dramatizes both the voyeuristic gaze and male impotency but complicates them by making a spectacle of a thwarted desire that for all intents and

purposes does not exist. Since in Zurlini's the success of heterosexual love relations is occluded a priori, the *inetto* here is no longer the man who wants to but cannot, but rather is a man whose own desire is placed into question as either a ritual or a performance. By presenting a protagonist who fails to embody his own self-imposed conceptions of ideal Italian masculinity, *Le ragazze di San Frediano* can be seen as prototypical in establishing the themes that will pervade the rest of the director's work. Although Bob does not have the emotional range or introspection that characterize other Zurlinian protagonists, his series of half-hearted love affairs result in a quasi-tragic figure who is doomed to end up alone and ostracized within the small social circuit of the Florentine neighborhood that is his hunting ground. Hence the first Zurlinian melancholic body, in which heterosexual prowess writ large has precluded any possibility for meaningful intimacy or self-affirmation.

Zurlini's second film, *Estate violenta*, pushes further the vision of deviation from normative masculinity. In this melodrama set at the height of the Second World War, the protagonist Carlo is a draft-dodger who is characterized by his lack of meaningful action in any sphere. While in the previous film Bob is suffering from an absent father, which is implied to be a partial explanation for his callous promiscuity, in *Estate violenta* paternal authority is instead overbearing, emblemized by Carlo's father who is a high-ranking Fascist official. Carlo rejects the normative masculinity that would require him to embrace military duty and instead he occupies himself again (like Bob) with a somewhat indifferent romantic attachment to a young woman named Rosanna. Carlo soon becomes enamored of an older widow named Roberta (Eleonora Rossi Drago), although such an attachment is deemed socially inappropriate. In a dance scene that cements its status as a hallmark of Zurlini's films, Carlo dances with Rosanna while staring longingly at the older Roberta, disrupting his age-appropriate romance with one of ultimate impossibility. As this sequence precedes their affair, it also rehearses the now familiar visual positioning of the male protagonist as a passive spectator within a heterosexual love triangle, in this case with an added party that even further displaces

the possibility of the lovers as their own discrete entity. In fact Carlo's subsequent relationship with Roberta seems less a celebration of star-crossed romance than the result of an unresolved Oedipal complex as it is constantly intertwined with scenes of paternal conflict with Carlo's authoritarian father. The threat posed by their love affair is literally shattered in the concluding scene of the film, where amidst an air bombing Carlo abandons his plans to leave with Roberta in favor of finally joining the war and attempting to regain the male status that was imperiled by their romance¹⁸.

Carlo's passion for Roberta is presented as a form of one young man's search for the lost mother, a theme that figures prominently in *La ragazza con la valigia*. In Zurlini's third film, Lorenzo (Jacques Perrin), a delicately-featured teenage boy with a dead mother and a perpetually absent father, becomes smitten by Aida, played by Claudia Cardinale, a would-be nightclub singer who has been morally compromised by Lorenzo's older and unprincipled brother. In what becomes a pattern of male doubling in Zurlini's work, Lorenzo tries to correct his brother's immoral behavior by attempting to rescue Aida from a life on the streets. Through the affections of the older Aida, Lorenzo is also seeking the mother figure, and in one drunken moment he begs her not for her physical affections but for her to sing to him a lullaby. Lorenzo's attraction for Aida is as much a function of her status as his brother's wronged mistress as of her fulfilment of his Oedipal needs, showing how sexual attraction for Zurlini's protagonists is filtered via the mediation of other men.

We can see this enacted via the most striking example in Zurlini's opus of the trope of the man watching the woman he desires while she is dancing with another man, in a notable sequence in which we see Lorenzo staring with palpable discomfort as Aida dances with a lecherous older man. This creation of a potential love triangle could be read as another expression of the director's statement of the futility of the romantic couple. As we have seen, *Le ragazze di San Frediano*, *Estate violenta*, *La ragazza con la valigia*, and later *La prima notte di quiete* all rely on extended sequences that foreground this concept of frustrated male desire. In all cases, the romances are not consid-

ered socially appropriate, which corresponds to the director's own professed belief that social conditioning destroys any possibility for long-lasting intimacy. Yet by representing the male gaze through the presence of other men, it also queers the process of looking relations by refusing to isolate the heterosexual couple within the confines of their own love story and emphasizing the placement of the male protagonist as passive voyeur rather than active lover.

A similar process occurs in the director's adaptation of another Pratolini text, *Cronaca familiare*, which tells the story of the relationship between Enrico (Marcello Mastroianni) and Lorenzo (Jacques Perrin again), two brothers whose family was placed in such dire financial straits that they had to be raised in separate households. This time, the family unit itself becomes a network in which the desire for masculine affection is channeled, this time in a fraternal sense. Again, the mother is absent, having died giving birth to the younger Lorenzo, but through the brothers' repeated visits to their moribund grandmother languishing in a rest home they forge a close relationship with each other. Thereby through the one female family member who is associated with them, the grandmother, we find another woman intermediary who can act both as mother substitute and a conduit of male-male sentiment. This finds echoes in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's identification of the frequent use in literature of a female love-interest as an intermediary for male-male desire as a means of displacing, while simultaneously expressing, the possibility of male homosexuality¹⁹.

This intimacy between men is a striking feature of Zurlini's work. Lorenzo and Enrico's attachment becomes the central node of a sentimental melodrama whose centerpiece is the extended sequences of the brothers' tearful exchanges of regret and affection as the young Lorenzo lies on his deathbed. While there is no suggestion of a sexual dimension to the emotional bond between these two men, what is indeed queer is the emphasis placed on their newfound connection that excludes all others. We learn that Lorenzo has married and fathered a child with a woman, yet she never appears in the film, and instead his expressions of longing and need are directed towards his older brother, whom he repeatedly implores to embrace and kiss him and

greeted with melodramatic statements such as “Io vivo giorno e notte per queste ore che tu vieni.” The judicious use of tender, romantic music underscores the melodramatic aspect of these scenes. Hence masculine affect is the centerpiece of the film, which both begins and concludes with scenes of a tearful Marcello Mastroianni weeping over the death of his younger brother in extended close-up, a formal hallmark of Zurlini’s films that privileges the male physiognomy and the expression of his protagonists’ pervasive sense of melancholy and loss. The physical closeness of the two men depicted in this film coincides with the other films in which female figures are either marginal or completely absent. *Il deserto dei tartari* chronicles the entry of a young Lieutenant Drogo (again played by Jacques Perrin) into the fictional Bastiani Fortress on the margins of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Women are only briefly glimpsed in early scenes of Drogo’s departure from his mother and fiancé. Indeed it is an unnamed male friend who accompanies him to his departure point for their final adieu, deemphasizing the place of the protagonist within a traditional family schema and foreshadowing the exclusively homosocial world of the Bastiani fortress that will become an inescapably seductive space to which Drogo will be repeatedly drawn back. The alternative world of exclusively masculine attachments will be emphasized in a scene that takes place soon upon Drogo’s arrival at the fortress, where the departing Lieutenant Rathenau (Giuseppe Pambieri) takes his final leave of his sickly friend, Lieutenant von Hamerling (Laurent Terzieff), who himself finds it impossible to leave the fortress. The fatal attraction of these characters to the liminal nature of this no-man’s land, on the border between civilization and an unknown terrain populated by a mysterious Other, itself suggests a space of desire for escape from the rigid norms of society and for an alternative environment with its own codes of behavior and opportunities for homosocial bonds. The closeness of men in isolation is also seen in Zurlini’s *Seduta alla sua destra* (1968), a Marxist-Catholic allegory of colonialism and heroism. Here Zurlini gives a thinly veiled depiction of the assassination of Congolese politician Patrice Lumumba through the story of the unlikely friendship forged between an African liberation leader, La-

lubi, and Oreste, an Italian thief with whom he is imprisoned. Their physical confinement, accompanied by the beatings and torture to which the men are subjected, offer opportunities for compassion and visions of physical intimacy as Oreste, played by Franco Citti, becomes a disciple of Lalubi, who is portrayed by former American football player and decathlete Woody Strode. Physicality is essential to the casting of these two protagonists, as Strode's muscular physique will be central to the film's attentions to the violence suffered by Lalubi, while the casting of Citti references the actor's sexualized physical presence in his previous roles, particularly in the films of Pasolini. The positioning of these two prisoners as objects of the spectator's gaze is effected by having high points of the drama played out under the observing eyes of another hostile prisoner who shares their cell. This voyeuristic framing device is achieved through a sustained emphasis on the close-up shot as a means of transmitting masculine emotion. In addition, we have a palpable expression of masculine closeness in the physical attentions that Oreste gives Lalubi: removing his shirt to cradle his head, dressing his wounds with oil, and embracing him in his arms as the two men are carried towards their eventual assassination. The use of the close-up on the male face is another aspect of Zurlini's work that at times destabilizes the focus on the heterosexual couple, and on the woman as object to be desired. This is not to say that the beauty of the female stars Zurlini employs, such as Eleonora Rossi Drago, Anna Karina, Claudia Cardinale, and many others, is disregarded. However, the prevalence of close-ups of male stars within the emotional contexts of his films gives an exceptional weight not only to the affective dimension of these actors' performances but also to their beauty. Many critics have noted that the attention to male corporeality on-screen can have the effect of feminizing the male star, and therefore classical narrative films find a way to compensate for this risk, either by placing the male star in especially macho environments or mitigating their "to-be-looked-at-ness" by making the male *divo* inaccessible²⁰. Zurlini's camera, however, forces us to look at his male stars much longer than usual within the standard visual economy of narrative cinema. For example, one unbroken close-up

shot of Jacques Perrin during the dance sequence in *La ragazza con la valigia* remains upon his face for more than 60 seconds, an almost agonizingly extended time period for a sequence that itself lasts almost 4 minutes and contains almost no dialogue or action. Moreover, Zurlini's preference for male stars renowned for their attractive faces, such as Alain Delon and Mastroianni, as well as for younger actors with smooth, almost feminine features, such as Tomas Milian, Jacques Perrin, and Jean-Louis Trintignant, also give force to a reading of his narratives as a repositioning of the straight male gaze.

My argument is not that Zurlini's films are deliberately gay narratives that simply replace the gender of the romantic couple in order to make those narratives palatable to wide audiences. Homosexuality is rarely a credible subtext in his films, although there are overt mentions of homosexuality in *La prima notte di quiete*, always in derogatory fashion, in which Alain Delon's character Daniele is referred to as "mezzofrocio di merda" and "frocio sifilitico" by women who find his attentions to them inadequate. Yet while the film still reassures us as to Daniele's attraction to women, it reinforces that such attachments are fruitless and doomed to failure (while interestingly, male attachments appear to prevail past death, as the film concludes with Daniele's friend Spider, who is clearly infatuated with him, attending Daniele's funeral). To read Zurlini's cinema as queer is to acknowledge that what is often referred to as melancholy is also a repudiation of the binary norms that divide sexual identity and desire into categories of hetero and homo. This invokes the interpretations of Freudian concept of melancholia as part of the formation of gender and sexuality, such as Judith Butler's famous assertion that "rigid forms of gender and sexual identification, whether homosexual or heterosexual, appear to spawn forms of melancholy as their consequence."²¹ If melancholy is a means of expressing a queer subjectivity, and the dissatisfaction with the sexual status quo, Zurlini's protagonists are a compelling indication of this process.

Conclusion

My reading of male intimacy and non-normative masculine representations in the cinema of Valerio Zurlini is in accordance with recent developments in queer film criticism, which seek to push past the recuperation of gay subtexts in cinematic history. This is borne out through recent scholarship such as that of Shane Browne, who in his recent study of male intimacy in early cinema asserts: “queer cinema surely goes beyond ‘manifestations of homosexuality’ in film in order to include many forms of otherness within representations of gender and sexuality”²². Certainly one can find such representations in many periods of Italian filmmaking; as Derek Duncan observes: “If it is the case that Italy has not produced much queer cinema, it has certainly not been afraid to represent nonnormative sexual subjects across a variety of cinematic genres or modes²³”. The queer masculinities we find in Zurlini’s melodramatic narratives from the 1950s up through the early 1970s, which notably featured some of the most popular national and international stars familiar to Italian cinema, help revise our understanding of binaries of masculine versus feminine roles. Once we look past how men within these films are ‘inept’ (*inetto*), it becomes clear that the nuanced depictions of male-female sexual relations, homosocial intimacy and masculine affect that these films provide invite a critical re-visiting and offer new possibilities in understanding sexual identities on Italian screens.

¹ J. Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover: Marcello Mastroianni, Masculinity, and Italian Cinema*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2004. The author wishes to thank the anonymous reviewers whose insights were extremely helpful in the revision of this article.

² Ivi, p. 2.

³ See G. Manzoli, *Crisi e mascheramenti della sessualità maschile nel cinema italiano degli anni Sessanta*, "Cinergie. Il Cinema e le altre Arti", Vol. III, n. 5, 2014, pp. 11-22, and S. Rigoletto. *Masculinity and Italian Cinema: Sexual Politics, Social Conflict and Male Crisis in the 1970s*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

⁴ See D. Duncan, *The Queerness of Italian Cinema*, in F. Burke (ed.), *A Companion to Italian Cinema*, New York, Wiley Blackwell, 2017, pp. 467-483 and M. Giori, *Homosexuality and Italian Cinema: From the Fall of Fascism to the Years of Lead*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

⁵ J. Champagne, *Italian Masculinity as Queer: An Immoderate Proposal*, "gender/sexuality/Italy," no. 1, 2014, p. 1, <<http://www.gendersexualityitaly.com/italian-masculinity-as-queer/>>.

⁶ See J. Champagne, *Italian Masculinity as Queer Melodrama : Caravaggio, Puccini, Contemporary Cinema*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

⁷ For more on postwar Italian melodrama, particularly in relation to Neorealism and the Matarazzo films, see L. Bayman, *The Operatic and the Everyday in Postwar Italian Film Melodrama*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2014 and M.E. D'Amelio, *The Ideal Man: Amedeo Nazzari, Fatherhood, and Italy's Melodramatic Masculinity*, "gender/sexuality/Italy", n. 5, 2018, pp. 20-35, <<http://www.gendersexualityitaly.com/2-the-ideal-man-amedeo-nazzari-fatherhood-and-italys-melodramatic-masculinity/>>.

⁸ C. O'Rawe, *Stars and Masculinities in Contemporary Italian Cinema*. London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 46.

⁹ J. Goldberg, *Melodrama: An Aesthetics of Impossibility*, Durham, Duke University Press, p. 155.

¹⁰ C. Bioni, "Io posso offrirle soltanto l'immenso calore del mio affetto". *Masculinity in Italian Cinematic Melodrama*," "The Italianist", Vol. xxxv, n. 2, 2015, pp. 234-247: p. 239. Emphasis in the original.

¹¹ L. Mulvey, *Notes on Sirk and the Melodrama*, in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave, 1989, p. 40.

¹² F. Savelloni, *La spiaggia nel deserto. I film di Valerio Zurlini*, Firenze, Firenze Ateneum, 2007, p. 10. Emphasis in the original.

- ¹³ Interview with J. Gili, *Intervista con Valerio Zurlini*, in S. Tofetti (ed.), *Valerio Zurlini*, Torino, Lindau, 1992.
- ¹⁴ J. Kristeva, *On the Melancholic Imaginary*, “New Formations”, 3 (1987), pp. 104-123: p. 10. This citation is in reference to a Gérard de Nerval poem that describes the “black sun of Melancholy,” and Kristeva would use the term “Black Sun” for the title of her book on melancholy and psychoanalysis. Interestingly, at the end of his life Zurlini wrote a screenplay for a never-produced film entitled *Il sole nero* (1978).
- ¹⁵ L. Bayman, *The Operatic and the Everyday in Postwar Italian Film Melodrama*, cit., p. 3.
- ¹⁶ For a philosophical interpretation of Visconti’s films as expressive of a queer point of view, see A.G. Düttman, *Visconti: Insights into Flesh and Blood*, tr. Robert Savage, Stanford [CA], Stanford University Press, 2009.
- ¹⁷ L. Bayman, *The Operatic and the Everyday in Postwar Italian Film Melodrama*, cit., p. 3.
- ¹⁸ For more on the Oedipal dimensions of Carlo’s sexuality in *Estate violenta*, see R. Bauman, *Visions of Virility: Masculinity and Memory in the Italian War Film*, in T. Cragin and L.A. Salsini (eds.), *Resistance, Heroism, Loss: World War II in Italian Literature and Film*, Lanham [MD], Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2018, pp. 139-156.
- ¹⁹ E. K. Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1985.
- ²⁰ R. Dyer, *Don’t Look Now: The Male Pin-up*, “Screen”, Vol. xxiii, n. 3-4, 1982, pp. 61-73; S. Neale, *Masculinity as Spectacle*, “Screen”, Vol. xxiv, n. 6, 1983, pp. 2-17.
- ²¹ J. Butler, *Melancholy Gender - Refused Identification*, “Psychoanalytic Dialogues”, Vol. v, n. 2, 1995, pp. 165-180: p. 175.
- ²² S. Brown, *Queer Sexualities in Early Film: Cinema and Male-Male Intimacy*, London and New York, I.B. Tauris, 2016, p. 2.
- ²³ D. Duncan, *The Queerness of Italian Cinema*, cit., p. 473.