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Pasqualino Settebellezze: Italian Identity through Holocaust Tragedy

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Undergraduate Honors Thesis

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The idea of Italian identity is one of the most interesting topics of discussion within the field of Italian Studies. It is a concept that has been discussed heavily throughout Italian history, particularly since the country's unification in the late 19th century. The reason that this idea is so interesting and often discussed is because it is virtually impossible to define what it means to be Italian. To an outsider, it may sound strange hearing that the word "Italian" is difficult to use to correctly describe someone or something, but in reality, very few things are quintessentially Italian. The notion of what it means to be Italian is fragmented and disconnected, ill-defined, and almost impossible to pinpoint. It is difficult, if not impossible, to find anything on which the majority of Italians agree. Whether this is food, politics, language, or culture at large, Italians are far from similar to one another. To better understand why this is the case, it is important to understand a little about the centuries of history that created this problem that persists today.

Following the collapse of the Roman Empire, around the time of the fifth century, the Italian peninsula fell under the custody of innumerable different states and rulers. For centuries, wars raged while foreign invaders both conquered and influenced the culture throughout the entirety of the peninsula. Throughout the peninsular history, rulers over portions of the land were from France, Greece, Spain, the Holy Roman Empire, and even nations from the Arabic Middle East. Each state was isolated from the next; separated by borders, culture, currency, language, and leadership, to name only a few. Amidst this disunity, writers and thinkers such as the Florentine literary giant, Dante Alighieri, hinted at the idea of a united Italy in the 1200-1300s. In his *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, Dante reviewed each of the major dialects that existed and thrived throughout the peninsula in an attempt to find the one that had the potential to be a true "national" language. Ultimately, he chose Florentine, which did interestingly become the dialect

on which standard Italian was built. Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* discussed Italian identity as he searched for a political leader to unite Italy and liberate the peninsula from barbarian rule. However, this unification would not come for hundreds of years following Dante and Machiavelli's deaths. Following the death of Napoleon Bonaparte, a period of bloody Italian resurgence known as the *Risorgimento* raged throughout the peninsula. Spearheaded by the family of Savoy from the Piedmont region, and militaristically led by Giuseppe Garibaldi, the peninsula was finally unified under a common banner in 1870. As time passed, however, it became evident that although the peninsula was united as a single sovereign state, the Italians who lived within these borders were far from homogeneous. Centuries of disconnection and difference among these people could not be so simply erased by a militaristic unification. Precisely put, Massimo D'Azeglio, an Italian statesman and scholar, famously said of Italy after the unification: "*L'Italia è fatta. Restano da fare gli italiani*" ("Italy has been made, now it remains to make Italians") (D'Azeglio 1876).

To this day, it still remains to make Italians. Countless numbers of dialects of the standard Italian language dominate vernacular speech, northern Italians look completely different from southerners, cuisine changes greatly from town to town, let alone from region to region, and a myriad of other characteristics vary greatly from one Italian to the next. To speak of a common "Italian identity" was, and still is, utterly impossible. Arguably, if one was to ask any Italian with what identity he or she identifies, the response will not be "Italian," but rather, the response will be of a particular region or even of a particular town within that region. This lack of Italian identity has been heavily debated and discussed during the history of modern Italy. Throughout these years, countless scholars, artists, and writers have contributed to the conversation, each adding their own analysis and opinion. In the 1970s, Italian film director

Lina Wertmüller gave her take on what Italian identity was during the years under the rule of Fascism in Italy. In 1975, Wertmüller wrote and directed *Pasqualino Settebellezze* (released as *Seven Beauties* in English), a film set amidst the backdrop of Italian Fascism, World War II, and the Holocaust. While it may at first seem that this is simply the story of a Neapolitan man held prisoner inside a Nazi concentration camp during World War II, Wertmüller is actually arguing the thesis that Italian identity during the 1930s and 1940s, while seemingly masculine, brave, and proud, was in actuality submissive, cowardly, dishonorable, and survivalistic. Her continued emphasis on identity is seen through character analysis, especially with respect to Pasqualino, cinematic analysis, most prominently including the soundtrack and its importance in either supplementing the visual image or ironically overturning the visual, as well as an analysis of the film at a more analogical level with its references to history and politics.

Just as Italian identity is fragmented, the film's layout is also fragmented. The entire story is told through a series of disconnected flashbacks. To analyze the film in the order of the *syuzhet* would be incoherent and difficult to follow, thus it is better to analyze this film based on the *fabula*. Therefore, the *fabula* of the film tells the story of Pasqualino Frafuso, a Neapolitan man who kills his prostituting sister's pimp in an attempt to avenge the honor of his family. He is found guilty of murder, pleads insanity, wins the case, and is sent to an insane asylum to serve his sentence. After raping a woman in the asylum, he is punished further by being forced to serve in the Italian Army during World War II. While in the army, he becomes a deserter and is ultimately captured by German soldiers and sent to a prison camp. While imprisoned, he chooses to seduce the female German commandant in an attempt to save his own life. Surprisingly, he is successful and survives the war to return to Napoli. This being the case, there are several sections of the film that will constitute an outline to follow. The first is a montage

that sets up the film's major theme of identity, followed by Pasqualino's walk through Napoli and his interaction with various minor characters. This walk is followed by Pasqualino's murder of the local pimp, Totonno, the trial and sentencing of Pasqualino. The final sections account for Pasqualino's time in the German prison camp as well as his return to Napoli after the war. At each stage in this chronology, Pasqualino's identity is challenged and slowly eroded. At the beginning of the film, Pasqualino walks proudly through Napoli, but upon his return from Germany, he is an entirely changed man; stripped of his honor, masculinity, humanity, and ultimately his identity.

Before following the chronology of the film, Wertmüller begins the film with a montage of visual footage taken from World War II and Fascist Italy which she uses to begin her argument that this film is discussing Italian identity. Scenes depict everything from Mussolini addressing the crowds of supporters below his balcony, to bloody massacres on the battlefield. In fact, the very first scene depicts Benito Mussolini shaking hands with Adolf Hitler as they sign the Iron Pact of 1939, which joined the two nations in the war against the Allied Forces. While this footage rolls, the visual image is underlaid with a soundtrack that may initially seem out of place. A saxophone-organ duo plays in the background in a style of music that one can hardly help but notice does not fit with the visual image. The black and white, grainy footage on screen seem out of date in comparison to the more modern and upbeat music. But as one will soon see, Wertmüller is notorious for juxtaposing two things that at first glance seem contradictory. One can hear the words of Enzo Jannacci, a Milanese singer, as he recounts the words originally written by Beppe Viola (this translation taken from the subtitles of the film):

“The ones who don't enjoy themselves even when they laugh. Oh yeah.
 The ones who should have been shot in the cradle. Pow! Oh yeah.
 The ones who say, ‘Follow me to success, but kill me if I fail,’ so to speak. Oh yeah.
 The ones who say, ‘We Italians are the greatest he-men on earth.’ Oh yeah.
 ...

The ones who vote white in order not to get dirty. Oh yeah.
The ones who never get involved with politics. Oh yeah.
...
The ones who still support the king.
The ones who say, 'Yes, sir.' Oh yeah.
...
The ones who believe in everything ... even in God.
The ones who listen to the national anthem. Oh yeah.
The ones who love their country.
The ones who keep going, just to see how it will end. Oh yeah.
...
The ones who lose wars by the skin of their teeth.
The ones who say, 'Everything is wrong here.'
The ones who say, 'Now let's all have a good laugh.' Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Oh yeah."

Using this opening montage, Wertmuller sets up the case that she is ultimately talking about Italian identity within the first few minutes of the film. The montage is choppy and scattered both visually and auditorily as the scenes flash from one to another with no perceivable pattern, but Wertmüller does so to demonstrate that social identification is scattered just as much as the scene is (Ravetto 198). While the words "Those who say follow me to success, but kill me if I fail, so to speak. Oh yeah" are said, a clip of Mussolini addressing the adoring crowds beneath his balcony is shown. Wertmüller uses this line as well as the visual clip to refer specifically to the attitudes of both Mussolini, the figurehead for Italy under Fascism, as well as the fascists who followed him to "success." Here, she is criticizing those who followed Mussolini blindly and without question, a criticism that will return later in the film (Ravetto 199).

Continuing with the opening montage, Wertmuller adds to the list of Italians that she is ultimately criticizing. Enzo Jannacci addresses those who say "We Italians are the greatest he-men on earth." While these words sound, another clip of Mussolini rolls, as he is the self-prescribed image of what a "he-man" truly is. Fascism, a sort of prolonged adolescence, fit perfectly into this "he-man" mold. Wertmüller introduces a topic here that she will focus greatly on throughout the remainder of the film. That idea is the panic of male identity that is entwined

with the national fascist notions of manliness (Ravetto 191). This idea and attitude of Italians will come into play more and more throughout the film as Pasqualino is identified as the prototypical man seeing himself in such an image, but for now, Wertmüller is simply setting up the salient themes of the film. To fully understand symbolic value that Mussolini as a man carried within Fascist Italy, Sergio Luzzatto adds analysis through his book *The Body of Il Duce: Mussolini's Corpse and the Fortunes of Italy*. He argues that Mussolini, while both alive and dead, carried massive symbolic meaning. He was always depicted as a great athlete, a vigorous lover, and a theatrical speaker. Luzzatto claims that Mussolini's idea of leadership was linked to physical prowess. His whole style of politics created a relationship with Italians, both male and female, in a somehow physical way (Siegel).

As the montage continues, Janacci will describe Italians from many different philosophies and walks of life, ultimately negating the existence their specific identities as well as Italian identity as a whole. For example, he speaks of those who “never get involved with politics,” or the politically ignorant and unengaged. He also speaks of those who “vote white in order not to get dirty.” Perhaps this second group of Italians to which he is referring is more intriguing. This group includes those who voted on the side of the victorious party, not only so as to avoid political “dirt,” but out of fear as well. This even brings to mind the idea of Italian *qualcunismo*, better described as the Italian “pastime” of not taking a firm stance on anything, but choosing sides based out of necessity (Perra 114). He addresses “those who still support the king” as well as those who “love their country” and “listen to the national anthem.” It may sound as though within these three groups of people, he is addressing nationalistic, well-defined, and identifying Italians, but it is important to note that at the end of every line, Jannacci adds the phrase “oh yeah.” This addition to every line is not of pure aesthetic value, but rather, in it lies

the key to understanding the tone and overall meaning of the lyrics. Jannacci uses these two words to add cynicism and sarcasm to that which he has just stated. He is not glorifying, for example, “those who love their country,” but he is, in a sense, rolling his eyes at these people. He is basically mocking them, just as he clearly mocks those who claim that “We Italians are the greatest he-men on earth.” With each passing line, Jannacci speaks to a different group of people, eventually addressing almost every man and woman in Italy, ultimately making a mockery of their identifying quality. His satire through each line negates all that which he states, implying that he is negating the idea of Italian identity at large. These lyrics are pivotal in setting up this theme of identity (or lack thereof) for the remainder of the film. It is, in a sense, Wertmüller’s introduction and thesis statement for *Pasqualino Settebellezze*. Thus, this montage which may have originally seemed out of place, is actually the first step in setting up her argument, and is a key element in understanding the deeper meaning of the film.

Following the montage sequence, the fabula of the story begins with the viewer’s introduction to the main character as he makes his way through Napoli. Pasqualino “Settebellezze” (“Seven Beauties”) Frafuso undoubtedly gets his nickname not only from his seven sisters, but from his reputation around Napoli. He is not only the protagonist and main character of the story, but he is representative of the “common Italian male” during Fascist Italy (Ravetto 203). His family runs a mattress-making shop while his own personal job consists of nothing more than garnishing respect for his family. Early in the morning, Pasqualino is getting himself ready, fixing his hair, grooming his clothes, as he prepares for his ritual walk through the town for the day. His family adores his presence and practically worships the ground on which he walks. Saluting them, he leaves the house and begins the tour of his town. He walks, hat pulled low over his brow, cigar in mouth, hands in pockets, with an unmistakable swagger that

can only be reminiscent of his internal macho attitude. As he goes around, he blows kisses to every woman he sees in the streets as they smile and blush on account of simply receiving attention from Pasqualino.

Since the *syuzhet* film is set up in flashbacks, Pasqualino's walk around town is not the first time the viewer sees the main character. The first time he is seen, he is running frantically through the woods, supposedly somewhere in Germany during the war. It paints a very different picture than his slow, deliberate stroll through the Neapolitan streets. At first, this complete overturning of his character might seem like a contradiction, a paradox, but really, this schizophrenic attitude shift is completely in line with the theme of Italian identity during the 1930s. Pasqualino represents the common Italian man (effectively, Italy) in a multitude of ways both at home in Napoli, and abroad in the German concentration camp in which he will eventually be held captive. Benito Mussolini attempted to create this attitude of unrivaled machismo among Italian men during the time of fascism, and in some sense he succeeded. Like discussed earlier, his body and persona were objects worshiped like idols and gods by both Italian men and women for years. Italians would hope for nothing more than to get a glimpse of him as he rode through the streets or addressed the crowds from his balcony. A common myth at the time was that even his glance was enough to impregnate a woman. An excellent example that shows this common attitude is Ettore Scola's film *Una giornata particolare*. In this film, the co-protagonist and Italian housewife during the time of Fascism, Antonietta, tells Gabriele, a political outcast, that one afternoon she was in the Villa Borghese in Rome, when she saw Mussolini riding through on his horse. She made brief eye contact with the Italian dictator and she fainted. It was that very same day that she learned she was pregnant with their youngest son. While the example of *Una giornata particolare* is fictitious, it certainly helps to explain the

common attitude of many Italians during the 1930s. With Pasqualino's walk through Napoli, Wertmüller calls into question the imaginary constructions of masculine virility and the national and sexual identities that emerge from such images through her character of Pasqualino (Ravetto 192).

This Neapolitan stroll around town brings to mind a stroll that Mussolini himself may have taken, calling to mind the idea that Pasqualino is representative of not only Italy, but *Il Duce* as well. Throughout Fascist Italy, the common man was notorious for exalting *Il Duce* for bringing honor and a manly image to Italy and the Italian people (Ravetto 203). As Pasqualino makes his way through the streets, Wertmüller makes the viewer feel as if Pasqualino himself is truly *Il Duce* based upon the reactions and treatment he receives from the fellow townspeople even though he is only a common Italian who is simply embodying the attitude set forth by the nation's ruler; just one of many Italians who walk around their respective towns and demand respect from all that they see. As if his masculinity is constantly being challenged, Pasqualino needs to perpetuate his self-image to all that he encounters (Ravetto 188). However, as remains to be seen, this entire macho attitude is nothing but a front; both for Italy, as well as for Pasqualino, the metaphor of his country. Underneath this manliness and bravery, the immense sex appeal and suave charm, lies a spineless coward willing to do anything, no matter how disgraceful, in order to survive.

As the first section of the fabula comes to a close and Pasqualino finishes his walk through the Neapolitan streets, he comes across a young girl being beaten by an elderly woman. Through further analysis this young girl will ultimately serve as a metaphor for Italian identity and loss of innocence. He walks up to the young girl, asks what has happened and she explains that she is supposed to sing in order to raise money for her family, but that she never really could

sing well to begin with. Moreover, the men of the town yell and whistle at her as she sings. He comforts her by saying that if anyone bothers her, she is only to tell them that they must answer to Pasqualino “Settebellezze,” and to tell them that she is his fiancée. Although it is not true now, Pasqualino says to her that it may be true in a few years. With a smile from ear to ear, undoubtedly put there by the thought of ever being the fiancée of Pasqualino “Settebellezze,” she walks off and begins singing “*tira a campà*” (loosely translating to “the struggle to barely survive”); lyrics that will come around once again, and ones hold a great deal of meaning. This young girl is an important secondary character throughout the film, although she only appears in a handful of scenes. Here, she represents the innocence of Italian people before the war. Without flashy clothing, a showy hairdo, or even makeup, the young girl is naturally beautiful and Pasqualino certainly notices this. Because of her innocence, she hates the thought of the men of the town whistling at her as she sings. She is young, pure, virtuous, and incorrupt, but this representation of the young girl will change as the story unfolds and she will ultimately serve as a metaphor for Italy and its loss of innocence and identity during World War II.

Immediately after interacting with the pure young girl, a stark contrast is made when Pasqualino walks in on his eldest sister, Concettina, ultimately representative of Italy in her own way, dancing burlesque on stage in front of a crowd of rowdy Italian men. Immediately, the scene seems more than absurd as Concettina is repulsive in every way. She is very overweight, with a great mole on her cheek, her hair is disheveled, she is shouting obscenities at the booing crowd, and the music that is accompanying her routine is hardly pleasant. Not unlike the choreography, the music seems unruly, clumsy, and in a sense, almost plump sounding. Even her name, Concettina, which calls to mind a petite girl, does not fit with her persona; the entire scene is bizarre, but meaningfully so. As is seen many times, Wertmüller constantly sets every

aspect of the film up in great contradictions and mismatches. So as the song to which she is dancing is a propaganda song that speaks of the beauty of Fascism, Wertmüller is overturning this beauty by extenuating Concettina's ugliness. Like so many other minor characters throughout the film, Concettina is used to describe Italian identity, but this fact may not be so easily seen unless seen in conjunction with another character that Pasqualino meets later in the fabula of the film.

Pasqualino meets this other character, ultimately representative of Nazi Germany, while he is in Germany and becomes a deserter from the army, later in the chronology of the film. In search of food, he stumbles upon a house in the middle of the woods and slowly creeps inside. Within, he sees a buxom blonde woman playing an excerpt from *Die Walküre* by Richard Wagner on the piano. As she plays and sings, her white robe is only barely draped over her shoulders revealing her pure, Aryan, nude body. Around her, the room is full of German artwork from centuries past. In the presence of great German art and music, she embodies all that the Nazi ideals strived for in a pure Aryan race, and the touch of Wagner only adds to this embodiment. Adolf Hitler is known for having admired Wagner and appropriating his works to fit the Nazi ideals. He saw in Wagner's operas an embodiment of his own vision of the German nation (Kurbjuweit).

The Aryan woman in the German house is not the only woman in the scene that holds analogical meaning. When Pasqualino enters the kitchen in the German house, he sees an elderly German lady who has prepared quite the feast that now lies on the table. Pasqualino plunders the fruits of her labor as he shoves food into his mouth and coat, hurriedly mumbling in Italian to her. Throughout the entire scene of Pasqualino ransacking the feast for food, she is mute and is confined to a corner of the room. This woman is very much a symbol of the

generation of German people that came before the Third Reich. The woman has prepared a feast to support the younger woman living in the house, just as the previous generation of German people, through their own prosperity, created an environment out of which the Third Reich could grow and flourish. But now, the woman is silent, shocked at what she is witnessing, just as that older generation of Germans was shocked and in disbelief of what is happening in their homeland under Hitler's reign. While these two women deal with the identity of Germans during the 1930s, it is interesting to note that Wertmüller is dealing with the idea of identity throughout the entirety of her film, whether Italian or not.

After having observed the young German woman, it is easy to see that the German woman is in stark contrast to Pasqualino's sister, Concettina, both physically and musically. There is no doubt that the woman is representative of Nazi Germany, but based upon Wertmüller's style of directing, often juxtaposing contrasting elements, Concettina must also have representative meaning. Deductively, the only possible answer is that Concettina is representative of Italy. Throughout the film, Wertmüller often hyperbolizes and exaggerates an array of conventional stereotypes, including political ideologies, Italian and German national identities, and images of Nazism and Fascism (Ravetto 187). Not unlike the spectacle that is Fascism, Concettina's show is outrageous and grotesque. Using stereotypical images, Wertmüller describes Germans as being orderly, romantic, but cold, while Italians are comical, familiar and disorderly (Ravetto 206). While this example is only a small glimpse into the complex understanding of Italian identity, it brings to mind once again the fact that identity, and specifically Italian identity, is always on the docket of topics she is discussing.

The next section along the timeline of the fabula of the film is Pasqualino's murder of Totonno, which will ultimately serve to tear down Pasqualino's mentality as a "he-man". When

Pasqualino discovers that Concettina has become a prostitute for a local pimp, known as Totonno “18 Carati,” in order to provide for the family, he is outraged. Going to the local brothel, he confronts Totonno with the same macho attitude that he has displayed throughout the entirety of his time in Napoli. With an energetic and lively musical background, one that is almost representative of a Western showdown, Pasqualino challenges him so as to avenge the honor of his family. As seen before, honor and respect are two of the most important traits to a man, in the eyes of Pasqualino. To him, if his family is without these, his family is nothing. Unfortunately for the Neapolitan protagonist, the pimp is neither intimidated nor scared by this macho attitude. Pasqualino is easily trumped, only enraging himself more. Now, according to Pasqualino’s reading of the Neapolitan custom, the only appropriate course of action is to kill Totonno.

The assassination of Totonno falls right in line with Wermuller’s continued use of absurdity throughout her film to describe the absurdity of Italian identity. During the assassination scene, the viewer gets a first glimpse of the crack within the macho attitude of Pasqualino. First, the murder is not thought out; it is rash and unskilled. No true Neapolitan “man” would have been as clumsy as Pasqualino is, only adding proof that not only has he never committed murder before, but this entire macho identity is nothing but a front. As Totonno lies in his bed, Pasqualino stands over him, gun pointed at his head. The camera angle suggests that Pasqualino is in the position of power but the dialogue proves otherwise. Totonno remains calm and collected, while Pasqualino is clearly panicking. Shaking and scared, Pasqualino pulls the trigger on Totonno, almost as if by accident; but the murder itself is only the beginning of Pasqualino’s woes. Petrified and drinking to deal with his predicament, he now must dispose of the body and does so by cutting it into pieces and shipping them all over Italy.

This murder scene is one of the more pivotal scenes in the overturning of the Italian identity that the viewer has, to this point, been conditioned to believe in. The macho identity, directly in line with the identity that Mussolini himself carried, as well as the one he hoped to create for all Italians under his reign, is starting to show flaws in its structural integrity. At this point, Wertmüller begins to show that machismo for Pasqualino is only surface-deep. Since, as proposed, Pasqualino is a symbol for the “common Italian” under Fascism, it implies that machismo for Italians at large is surface deep as well. Under the pomp and circumstance of appearance, Wertmüller is arguing that Italians were far less “manly” during the time of Fascism than they made themselves out to be. As seen during Pasqualino’s murder of Totonno, Italian identity is better identified as being cowardly, dishonorable, and survivalistic.

As a consequence of Totonno’s murder, Pasqualino is caught and tried for his actions. Perhaps one of Wertmüller’s most masterful uses of soundtrack to expand on her argument of Italian identity occurs during the court hearing for Pasqualino’s assassination of Totonno. Throughout the scene, not a single word is spoken, but so much is said simply through gazes and looks between characters. In an entirely shameful and cowardly display as a human being, Pasqualino and his lawyer plead that the murder was an act of insanity so as to produce a lighter sentence. Although they win the case, Pasqualino is ashamed, not for his act of murder, but for his act of cowardice in pleading insanity. This may pose the question, however, if he would be ashamed of pleading insanity, why do so? The answer to this question lies once again in the fabric of Italian identity. The situation calls to mind famous words spoken by Giulio Andreotti, the 41st Prime Minister of Italy, from 1972-1973. When asked to comment on his mentality of “*tirare a campare*,” which loosely translates to “to barely manage to survive,” he responded saying, “*meglio tirare a campare che tirare la corda*,” which means “It’s better to barely

manage to cause a nuisance” (Mariacimini). Thus, the only sound that can be heard throughout this aforementioned court scene is the background music calling to mind the words “*tira a campà*” (Neapolitan dialect for *tirare a campare*) over and over. The melody in the background brings to mind these words because it follows the same tune that the young girl in the streets sang when she met Pasqualino earlier in the film. This idea of “*tira a campà*” is not unique to Pasqualino and Giulio Andreotti, but in fact, it is a common saying throughout Italy. In some sense, *tira a campà*, being a commonly spoken phrase, is more like a motto and a metaphor for the Italian way of life, especially during the time of Fascism and World War II. For these reasons, this scene is particularly descriptive of the Italian identity that Wertmüller is labeling within this film. The motto of *tirare a campare* is one on which she is putting one of the most elusive adjectives, one that is so difficult to use correctly; she is calling this motto “Italian.”

Following the murder and trial scene, the fabula of the film continues when Pasqualino meets a man (a socialist) in a train station while waiting to depart to serve his sentence in the insane asylum. This scene serves to give the viewer a glimpse of the consequences of deviating from the Italian identity that Benito Mussolini attempted to set up for the country. After introductions, Pasqualino smugly admits that his sentence is for only twelve years, while the other man replies saying that he had received twenty eight years and four months. In disbelief, Pasqualino asks him why, to which the man replies “*ho pensato*” (“I thought”). He comments saying that it is the “most atrocious crime a citizen can commit” under Mussolini’s reign. The conversation that follows is pivotal in discussing the common man’s attitude toward Mussolini during the time of Fascism. Pasqualino admits that politics do not interest him, yet he continues to comment on all the “good” he feels that Mussolini is bringing to the nation. For example, he comments saying that before Fascist reign, Italians were laughed at, but now they are respected.

Once again, the same macho principles of life hold a high position of status in Pasqualino's mind. But the socialist thinker, humorously repulsed by Pasqualino's ignorance, responds with a series of facts that demonstrates that public opinion was often clouded and masked in the great spectacle that was Italian Fascism. For example, he comments saying that salaries are half of what they were in 1919, while the cost of living has risen 30%; all to fund this macho mentality that Pasqualino is so proud of. While he does not necessarily convince Pasqualino to change his mind regarding politics, there is a moment in which he seems shocked and in disbelief at the facts the socialist is telling him. Ultimately, he dismisses these facts and continues along his path as a convinced, stereotypical Italian citizen under Fascism. This scene is as much a political commentary as it is a commentary on the common Italian identity under Fascism, only adding to the overall analysis of identity throughout the entirety of the film.

Chronologically, after the scene in the station, Pasqualino spends time in the insane asylum before he is enlisted and deserts from the Italian army. He and his fellow deserting friend Francesco are captured by German soldiers and sent to a concentration camp, which will serve as the setting for his greatest losses of identity throughout the film. The viewer is introduced to the concentration camp with stomach churning views of men being hanged, nude and lifeless bodies being thrown into piles, while Richard Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries* sounds in the background. The music in this scene does not add legitimacy to the visual subject, but instead, it accentuates the sense of criticism through irony (Ravetto 200). The music is so stereotypically nationalistic German music that it helps add condemnation to both the actions on screen as well as the identifying nation behind said actions. Now enters perhaps the most stereotypical German figure throughout the entire film; the (female) German prison camp

commandant. She is truly an atrocious sight; massive in stature, manly in appearance, with a grotesque personality that can only accompany such a role as a Nazi leader.

This Nazi commandant will serve as the catalyst for stripping Pasqualino of his identity as a man and as a human during his time in the prison camp. After a short time there, it is evident to Pasqualino that he will either *tira a campa* or die a prisoner. Pasqualino abandons his honor and his “integrity” in one of the most grotesque displays of survivalism in the film. He decides to seduce the commandant using his Neapolitan charm. Whistling “Maria, Mari,” a famous Neapolitan folk song, he captures her attention, although her facial expressions during this pitiful musical display remain unchanged. Pasqualino is trembling in fear throughout the ordeal. His eyes, usually filled with determination and passion, are melancholy and miserable as they dart back and forth between her and the ground. Inexplicably, his charm is enough to win her over and she brings him back to her room in the camp. Keeping with the theme of Italian identity, this scene calls to mind the pact made between Hitler and Mussolini during World War II. At the onset of the war, Germany could have dominated Italy with little to no effort, yet Italy survived and ended up allying with the Third Reich. In the film, Italian charm and quintessentially Neapolitan music saved Pasqualino’s life. This scene is the climax of importance for music throughout the film. It represents Pasqualino’s identity as it continues to describe his life at various points in the film (Ravetto 2006). Thus, if music is Pasqualino’s identity and his lifeline, one can argue that, Pasqualino’s identity is the reason that he survived the prison camp.

In a scene that pays homage to Dante’s *Inferno*, Pasqualino must now serve his *contrapasso* as he enters his own personal circle of Hell. In a masterful overturning of Pasqualino’s earlier life, Wertmüller places him on the opposite side of that which he is used to.

Weakened by his time in the prison camp, Pasqualino is unable to perform for the Nazi commandant. Reduced to nothing and unable to perform, Pasqualino is given a bowl of food then is made to quiver at the woman's feet while the camera angle underlines his worm-like state (Bondanella 363). Even the commandant finds Pasqualino's "unheroic" desire to survive immoral and impure (Ravetto 215). She calls him and Italians at large "*brutti, schifosi macaroni...italiani di merda*" ("ugly, disgusting macaroni...shitty Italians"). These comments are Wertmüller's description of Italian identity when seen through a Nazi German lens. She says to him, "*Ora tu mangi, dopo tu scopi... se non scopi, ti ammazzo*" ("Now you eat, then you fuck... if you don't fuck, I kill you"). Pasqualino "Settebellezze," the man who was once so adamantly against the prostitution of his sisters so that the family could survive, has now prostituted himself to the German commandant so that he himself may survive. This scene underlines the supreme irony in Pasqualino's existence which leads to his total submission (Bondanella 365).

After the seduction of the Nazi commandant, one may think that Pasqualino can sink no lower; however, the climax of the film comes at Pasqualino's lowest point of humanity. Because of his newfound relationship with the commandant, Pasqualino is made the leader of his particular quarters and is ordered to choose six men at random to be killed. Up to this point in the film, Pasqualino may have lost his honor, pride, and his masculinity, but he has yet to lose his humanity. That, however, is about to change. In yet another survivalistic act of selfishness, he does choose six prisoners to be killed. But in the final descent in Pasqualino's character, his only friend, Francesco, the man with whom Pasqualino was captured, rebels against the Nazi leaders in a screaming spectacle of defiance. Throughout the film, Francesco represents the "questioning fascist" as he is the one who tried to tell Pasqualino that they had made a mistake in

giving in to Fascism (Ravetto 217). He says to Pasqualino while arguing the uselessness of defying Mussolini, "*Non è inutile, un'uomo deve dire no a Mussolini, invece abbiamo detto si a Mussolini*" ("It's not useless, a man must say no to Mussolini, instead we said yes to Mussolini"). But because of his defiance, Francesco is now detained and kneels in front of the fellow prisoners while the German commandant hands Pasqualino a gun and orders him to shoot Francesco. He obliges.

If the ultimate sacrifice is to give one's own life for the life of another, Pasqualino commits the ultimate "anti-sacrifice." He takes the life of another for the sake of his own. Even more disgraceful is that he took the life of his only friend. At this point in the film, it is interesting to consider how far Pasqualino has fallen. The man who was once full of virility, honor, pride, machismo, strength, and bravery has now been reduced to a man full of cowardice, dishonor, weakness, and shame. His sole need is to survive and he will go to any length to do so. The identity of Pasqualino, therefore, has also changed throughout the film. The macho-Fascist identity of the common Italian man has been stripped away to reveal the true nature of Italy; an identity that, like Pasqualino, is full of weakness, shame, and dishonor.

Following Pasqualino's aforementioned complete loss of his identity while in the prison camp, he returns to Italy after the war has ended in a scene that recaps all that has happened throughout the film. He returns home to find his family, but more importantly, he returns home to find the same young girl he met earlier in the film. While Pasqualino is speaking with his mother, the girl runs into the house and makes eye contact with Pasqualino for the first time in years. Unlike their first meeting, where Pasqualino's eyes were filled with bravery, honor, and life, his eyes are now filled with shame and death. In fact, it is almost as if Pasqualino is a different man. The girl looks entirely different as well. The natural beauty she had when the two

first met is gone. She has her hair done, earrings in, makeup on, and immediately Pasqualino understands. He asks her, “did you become a whore too?” to which she replies simply, “yes.” Around the same time as this conversation, soldiers can be seen walking through the streets, laughing and smiling with the Italian women. These soldiers are very much unlike those that Pasqualino saw throughout his time in the war; they are American. So while Pasqualino prostituted himself to the German commandant in order to save his own life, the young girl prostituted herself to the Americans to do the same. Not only does the girl represent the loss of innocence, but she is a metaphor for the Italian people who, following World War II, gave themselves up to American culture and influence, forever changing the fabric and identity of all that was pure and “Italian.”

Pasqualino and the girl continue their conversation; during which he proposes that they marry. Unlike his mock proposal to her at the beginning of the film, this proposal is in a much different spirit. In a sense, Pasqualino almost demands, with a hint of begging, that she marries him. This proposal is not out of love, but instead, it is a pure act of survival. He has been stripped of all his masculinity, his honor, his pride, and to some extent, his life; and now in an attempt to gain these traits back, he equates masculine virility with vitality and demands that the two “*fare figli, molti figli perché il numero è potenza*” (“have children, many children, because there is power in numbers”). This once again shows Mussolini’s hand upon his mindset, because it calls to mind the infamous dictate to multiply, predicated on the fear of the consequences of a declining population (Ravetto 218).

Following his conversation with the now not-so-young girl, the viewer is given a final look at just how far Pasqualino has fallen. The film’s final, and perhaps one of its most haunting, scene shows Pasqualino standing in front of a mirror in his house. His mother stands behind him

and is overjoyed at the fact that he has returned alive. Pasqualino hesitates and with a vacuous look he replies, “*si, son vivo*” (“yes, I’m alive”). In reality, however, this response is a lie. He is far from alive; in fact, he has died many deaths. He has witnessed the death of his family’s honor, his pride as a man, his conscience, his soul, and ultimately, his identity (Ravetto 224). From the beginning to the final scene of the film, Pasqualino, the symbol for the common Italian man, has lost everything. He first lost his own personal identity in giving in to Mussolini’s “he-man” mentality while he was still just a citizen of Napoli. He then lost his identity as an innocent man when he became the murderer of Totonno. He lost his identity as an honorable man when he unjustly pled insanity. He lost his identity as a family man when his sisters all turn out to be prostitutes. He lost his identity as a fascist when he becomes a deserter from the Italian army. In the concentration camp, he lost his identity as a man in general when he submits and prostitutes himself to the female German commandant. And finally, in the most despicable act of cowardice and survival, he lost his identity as a human being when he sacrifices the life of his only friend, Francesco, to save his own life. This idea that Pasqualino is now hardly a reflection of his previous self is demonstrated by the camera angle at which the scene is shot. Although he is looking into a mirror, the scene shows his reflection as being twisted and distorted; his face is not even visible. This camera shot exemplifies that Pasqualino is a disfigured, fragmented reflection of his former self. So when Pasqualino, having returned from all of this, claims “*si, son vivo*,” it is none but a lie.

The story of *Pasqualino Settebellezze* is more than simply the story of an ordinary Neapolitan man who survives World War II. Instead, this film tells an even more interesting and intricate story. It speaks of Italian identity in all its complexity and convulsion; it speaks of the seemingly unattainable understanding of *italianità*. By fragmenting the film using flashbacks,

Wertmüller continues to describe the fragmented, ill-defined, and incoherent nature of Italian identity. With Pasqualino representing the common Italian man during the time of Fascist Italy, Wertmüller is able to set him on a path that not only serves to describe him as a character, but more importantly, as a symbol for Italy. Just as Pasqualino's identity is weak; one that he is willing to abandon on a whim to save his own life, the concept of Italian identity was, and still is, weak. Wertmüller ultimately makes Pasqualino out to be a coward, a dishonorable and submissive man, and one who is willing to abandon all that makes him human to survive. On the second level, she is commenting on Italy's cowardly, dishonorable, and submissive actions during World War II that were done out of pure survivalistic needs. These actions helped to further strip Italy of any identity that it could have had before World War II, and solidified its lack of a concrete national identity afterward.

This question of Italian national identity is one that has existed for centuries and Lina Wertmüller's film represents only a small sample of the intellectual work that has been done on the topic. As time goes on, Italian identity will likely continue to be a fervently discussed subject, especially as the Italian population is drastically changing. One of the more modern social issues in Italy is the influx of African and Middle Eastern immigrants. It will be interesting to see how these imported identities affect the existing Italian identity (or lack thereof). Perhaps this absence of a true national identity will persist, or perhaps the preexisting Italians will become more closely identifiable due to the new influx of the "other." What ultimately happens to Italian identity remains to be seen, but what is almost certain is that further literary and artistic commentaries on the subject will be made. But until then, *l'Italia è fatta, restano da fare gli italiani*.

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