



ITALIAN CINEMA REFRAMED

REVISITING PAST & PRESENT



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Week 2

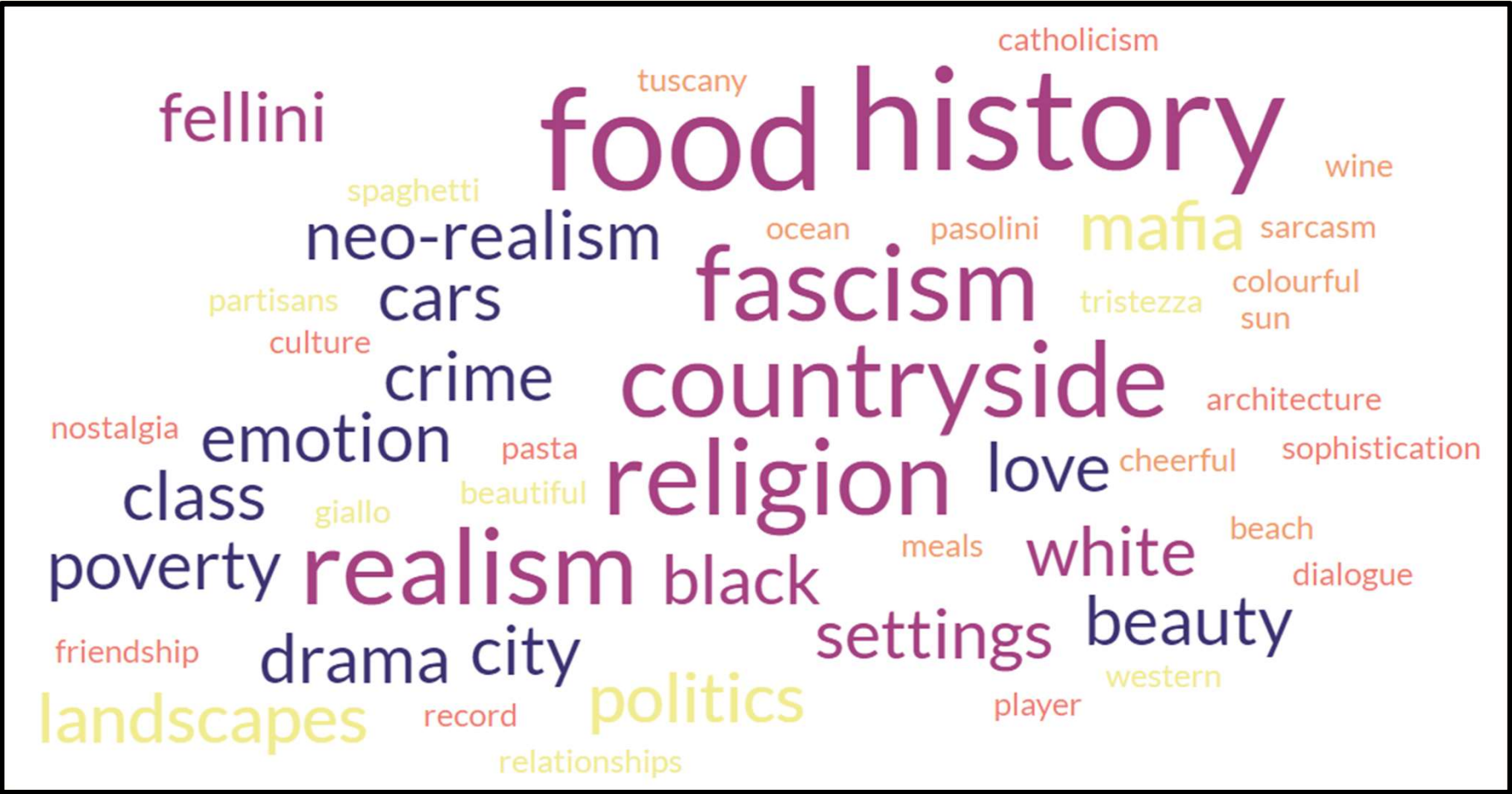
WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH ALLEGORICAL REALISM?



Roadmap

- Your keywords
- Brief historical overview
- This week's movies discussion: intro
 - *Allegorical realism vs. magical realism*
 - *This week's movies: what they mean together*
 - *Zooming in: Rohrwacher*
 - *Production context*
- This week's movies discussion: your turn!
- Intro to next session: Taviani Brothers
- Movie list

Your keywords



History

- As we introduce the essential historical movements of Italian Cinema, we will see how these elements set the foundation for exploring its lesser-known films.

Historical Overview:

- **Early Cinema** (Early 1900s): The pioneering days featured epic historical films, establishing a base for creative storytelling.
- **Neorealism** (Post-WWII): Directors like Rossellini and De Sica captured the stark realities of life, influencing filmmakers worldwide.
- **Commedia all'Italiana** (1950s-60s): This genre blended comedy with social critique, mirroring the societal shifts in post-war Italy.
- **Genre Cinema** (1960s-80s): Giallo, Spaghetti Westerns, and Poliziotteschi demonstrated Italy's flair for diverse cinematic styles.
- **Modern Era**: Today's filmmakers continue to address contemporary issues, upholding a tradition of realism combined with innovative narratives.
- These historical movements are not only foundational but may reappear as we discuss influences, production methods, and the cultural contexts of the films we will explore. This understanding enriches our appreciation and provides a comprehensive backdrop for our exploration of lesser-known Italian cinema.

Introducing allegorical realism

A tendency in this 'Renaissance' of contemporary Italian cinema, of which Matteo Garrone (*Gomorra*, *Dogman*, *Io Capitano*) can be recognised as a precursor and inspiration.

- Representations of the 'margins' – of cities, society, history.
- No-exit scenarios – settings act symbolically to represent characters' hopelessness
- Vivid characters, created sometimes through grotesque, over-the-top performances by actors with peculiar faces and expressions
- Yet – they can become contemporary archetypes, representing a generation of lost hopes/opportunities (a very millennial movement)

Rohrwacher: allegorical *and* magical realism

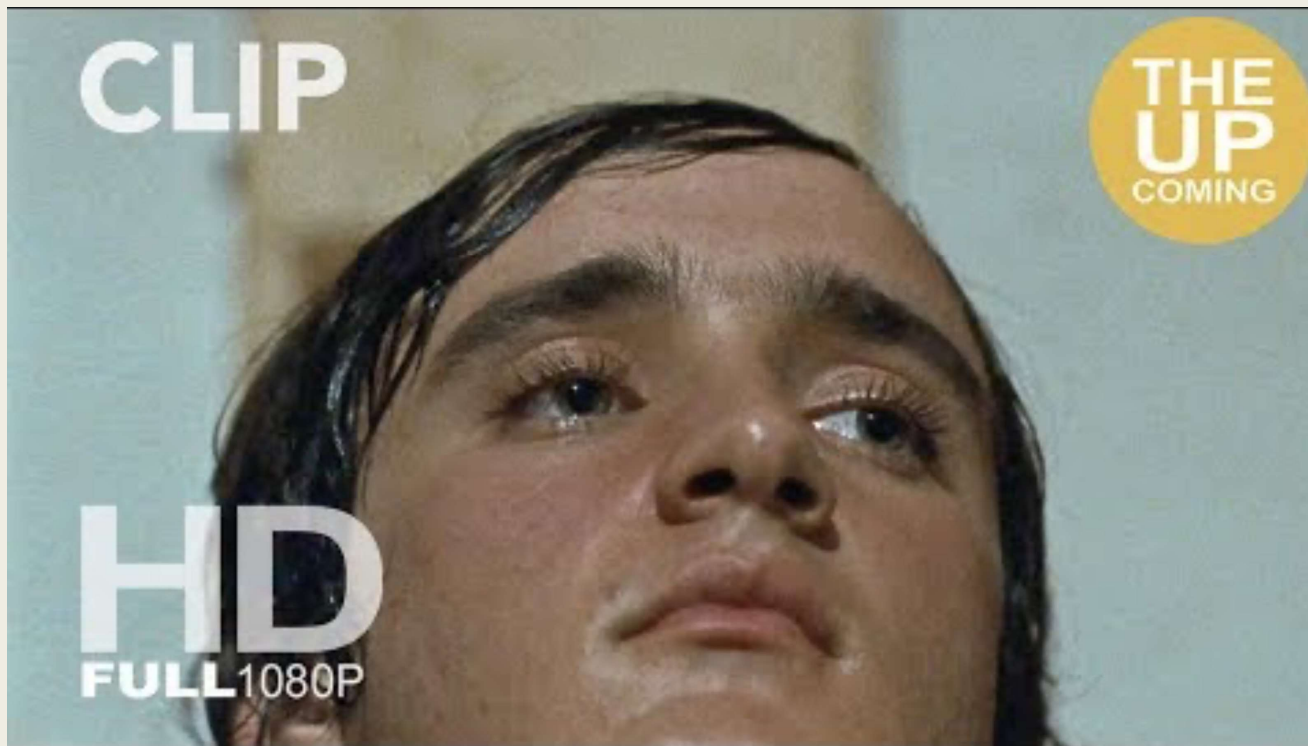
- Magical realism = realistic representations enriched with the unexplainable (magical/mystical elements).
 - *In 'La Chimera': Arthur's gift*
- Can imply a Western, rationalist worldview, or...
- ...it can be immersed in magical and mythical thinking
- Allegorical realism – does not convey its message literally yet does not necessarily slip into the fantastical. It contains “natural balance, odd, unexpected beauty and mystery”(Kevin Sloane).
- In Rohrwacher's films we have both allegorical *and* magical realism, but let's not get them confused!

More examples of allegorical realism

- Swing Ride (Calcinculo), C. Bellosi, 2022 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Orx0afY1kTM&t=90s>
- Wherever You Are (Ovunque Proteggimi), B. Angius, 2018
 - *(notice anything interesting in the framing of the shots?)*

What does allegorical realism look like?

- Example: Let's look at a scene from Alice Rohrwacher's *Happy as Lazzaro* (2018)



Context: Lazzaro's Fever and Recovery

- After falling ill with a fever, Lazzaro is cared for by the villagers. However, their care is driven by the need for his labour, treating him more like a mule than a human being.
- Representations of the 'Margins'
 - Location as a Signifier of Marginalization:
 - *Setting: The modest, primitive room where Lazzaro is looked after reflects the impoverished and marginalized status of the villagers.*
 - *Example: The simple, worn-out surroundings highlight the villagers' low socioeconomic status and isolation from mainstream society, underscoring their marginalization.*

■ No-Exit Scenarios

• Hopelessness Represented by the Setting:

- *Symbolism: The confined, modest room symbolizes the villagers' trapped existence and lack of opportunities to improve their situation.*

■ Vivid Characters

• Lazzaro as a Vivid Character:

- *Expression and Presence: Despite being treated like a mule, Lazzaro's serene and innocent demeanour stands out, making him a vivid character.*

■ Contemporary Archetypes

• Lazzaro and the Villagers as Symbols:

- *Lost Hopes and Exploitation: Lazzaro's vulnerability and the villagers' utilitarian care reflect the theme of exploitation and the dehumanizing effects of poverty.*

- The scene of Lazzaro's fever recovery encapsulates allegorical realism by blending symbolic acts of exploitation with the harsh realities of rural life, highlighting deeper social and moral themes.



La Chimera (2023) and Allegory



■ Visual Allegory in *La Chimera*

• Symbolism of Light and String:

- *Light as Revelation and Hope: The beam of light illuminating Arthur's face amidst the darkness symbolizes revelation, hope, and a transcendent connection to something greater, possibly his lost love.*
- *String as Connection: The descending string serves as a metaphor for a lifeline or a connection to the past, knowledge, or a higher power.*

■ Representations of the 'Margins'

• Setting as a Signifier of Marginalization:

- *Tomb and Darkness: The dark, confined space of the tomb represents the marginalized and isolated state of Arthur's existence. The tomb symbolizes a place of both physical and emotional entrapment.*
- *Example: The image of Arthur kneeling in the tomb, looking up into the light, underscores his position on the fringes of society and his quest for meaning and connection.*

■ No-Exit Scenarios

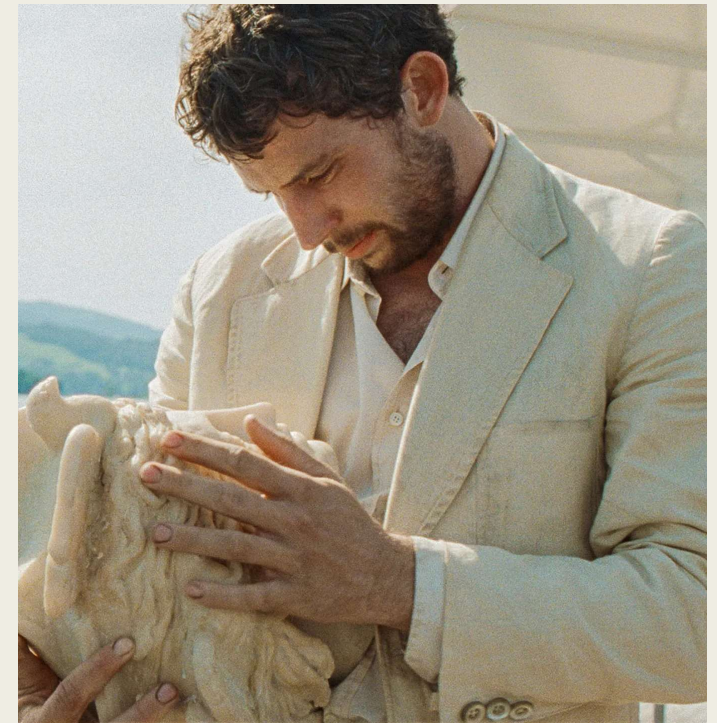
• Hopelessness and Discovery:

- *Symbolism: The confined, dark tomb symbolizes Arthur's seemingly inescapable situation and the darkness of his inner turmoil.*
- *Example: Despite the hopelessness, the light and the string symbolize a breakthrough, a discovery that offers a glimpse of hope and transcendence.*

■ Contemporary Archetypes

• Arthur as a Vivid Character:

- *Expression and Presence: Arthur's intense gaze and the illumination of his face create a vivid, emotionally charged image that symbolizes his quest for redemption and connection to his lost love.*
- *Example: The contrast between the dark surroundings and the light on Arthur's face highlights his role as a seeker of truth and meaning amidst his struggles.*



Why these movies together?

- La Chimera, A. Rohrwacher (2023)
- Bicycle Thieves, V. De Sica (1948)
- Big Deal on Madonna Street, M. Monicelli (1958)
- Happy as Lazzaro, A. Rohrwacher (2018)
- Ovunque Proteggimi/ Wherever You Are, B. Angius (2018)

Neo-realism vs. Allegorical realism

- Literal vs. symbolic
- Desperation vs. acceptance/resignation?
- ...?

What do you think? Let's discuss!



Commedia all'italiana vs. Allegorical realism

- “Commedia all'italiana is this: dealing with dramatic topics in a comedic, amusing, ironic, and humorous manner. This is what distinguishes commedia all'italiana from all other comedies...”
– Mario Monicelli
- I Soliti Ignoti (Big Deal on Madonna Street):
<https://youtu.be/0hCKUT4f5s4?si=LJKI0riIV2IrEHjX&t=5138> (from 1:25:30)

Commedia all'italiana vs. Allegorical realism

Allegorical realism movies are definitely not comedies, however:

- Do they maybe give more space to contentment?
- Do they give more space to laughter and/or the comedy of everyday life?

Let's discuss!

This week's movies: AOB

- Anything goes: what did you think of the movies you watched?
- (for those who received it) Was the handout useful? Any interesting ideas sparked from it you'd like to share?

Next week (3rd June): The Taviani Brothers

- Adrian Wootton of the BFI: Drawing on Italian politics and history, their Tuscan origins, a passion for literature and film, and an absolute belief in the magic of storytelling, the Tavianis have sculpted a unique body of remarkably diverse yet distinctly recognisable films.
- Often overlooked, often underrated, the Taviani's are the Coen brothers of Italy, they have been a powerful directorial duo since the 1960s. And their collaborators agree that the Tavianis direct as one person.
- “For us it was cinema or death”
- Span lots of genres, combine genres, mix genres. Diverse filmography, often autobiographical in parts.

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This week's watchlist:

- *Caesar Must Die (2012)*
- *The Night of the Shooting Stars (1982)*
 - *Padre Padrone (1977)*

Out at Broadway from May 24th:

- *There Is Still Tomorrow, P. Cortellesi (2023)*