



Directed and written by Lina Wertmüller
 Produced by Arrigo Colombo and Lina Wertmüller
 Original Music by Enzo Jannacci
 Cinematography by Tonino Delli Colli
 Film Editing by Franco Fraticelli

Giancarlo Giannini... Pasqualino Frafuso
 Fernando Rey... Pedro the Anarchist Prisoner
 Shirley Stoler... Commandant
 Elena Fiore... Concettina
 Piero Di Iorio... Francesco

LINA WERTMÜLLER (14 August 1926, Rome, Italy) has directed 30 films, among them *Peperoni ripieni e pesci in faccia/Too Much Romance... It's Time for Stuffed Peppers* (2004), "Francesca e Nunziata"/"Francesca and Nunziata", *Ferdinando e Carolina/Ferdinando and Carolina* (1999), *Ninfa plebea/The Nymph* (1996), *Metalmecanico e parrucchiera in un turbine di sesso e di politica/The Blue Collar Worker and the Hairdresser in a Whirl of Sex and Politics* (1996), *In una notte di chiaro di luna/As Long as It's Love* (1989), *Imago urbis* (1987), *Nocte d'estate con profilo greco, occhi a mandorla e odore di basilico/Summer Night, with Greek Profile, Almond Eyes and Scent of Basil* (1986), *Un Complicato intrigo di donne, vicoli e delitti/Camorra (A Story of Streets, Women and Crime)/Camorra: The Naples Connection* (1986), *Sotto... sotto... strapazzato da anomala passione/Softly, Softly* (1984), *Scherzo del destino in agguato dietro l'angolo come un brigante da strada/A Joke of Destiny/A Joke of Destiny, Lying in Wait Around the Corner Like a Bandit* (1983), *Fatto di sangue fra due uomini per causa di una vedova - si sospettano moventi politici/Blood Feud* (1978), *Fine del mondo nel nostro solito letto in una notte piena di pioggia, La/The End of the World in Our Usual Bed in a Night Full of Rain* (1978), *Pasqualino Settebellezze/Seven Beauties* (1975), *Travolti da un insolito destino nell'azzurro mare d'agosto/Swept Away... by an Unusual Destiny in the Blue Sea of August* (1974), *Tutto a posto e niente in ordine/All Screwed Up* (1974), *Film d'amore e d'anarchia, ovvero 'stamattina alle 10 in via dei Fiori nella nota casa di tolleranza/Love and Anarchy* (1973), *Mimi metallurgico ferito nell'onore/The Seduction of Mimi* (1972), *Mio corpo per un poker, Il/The Belle Starr Story* (1968), *Non stuzzicate la zanzara/Don't Sting the Mosquito* (1967), *Rita la zanzara/Rita the Mosquito* (1966), *Questa volta parliamo di uomini/Let's Talk About Men* (1965) and *Basilischi, I/The Basilisks/The Lizards* (1963)



TONINO DELLI COLLI (20 November 1922, Rome, Italy - 16 August 2005, Rome, Italy, heart attack) shot 137 films, among them *La Vita è bella/Life Is Beautiful* (1997), *Death and the Maiden* (1994), *Bitter Moon* (1992), *La Domenica specialmente/Especially on Sunday* (1991), *La Voce della luna/The Voice of the Moon* (1990), *L'Africana/The African Woman* (1990), *Stradivari* (1989), *Intervista/Federico Fellini's Intervista* (1987), *Der Name der Rose/The Name of the Rose* (1986), *Ginger e Fred/Ginger and Fred* (1986), *Once Upon a Time in America/C'era una volta in America* (1984), *Fantasma d'amore* (1981), *Viaggio con Anita/A Trip with Anita* (1979), *Fatto di sangue fra due uomini per causa di una vedova - si sospettano moventi politici/Blood Feud* (1978), *Primo amore/First Love* (1978), *Anima persa/Lost Soul* (1977), *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma/Salo, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (1975), *Pasqualino Settebellezze/Seven Beauties* (1975), *Lacombe Lucien* (1974), *Paolo il caldo/The Sensuous Sicilian* (1973), *Storie scellerate/Bawdy Tales* (1973), *Il Racconti di Canterbury/The Canterbury Tales* (1972), *Il Decameron* (1971), *Homo Eroticus/Husband, Italian Style/Man of the Year* (1971), *C'era una volta il West/Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968), *Il Giorno della civetta/Mafia* (1968), *Il Buono, il brutto, il cattivo/The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966), *Le Soldatesse/The Camp Followers* (1965), *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo/The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964), *La Bella di Lodi* (1963), *Mamma Roma* (1962), *Accattone/The Procurer* (1961), *Il Ladro di Bagdad/The Thief of Bagdad* (1961), *Morgan il pirata* (1961), *Arrivederci Roma/Seven Hills of Rome* (1958), *Primo amore/First Love* (1958), *Poveri ma belli/A Girl in Bikini* (1957), *Dov'è la libertà...?/Where Is Freedom?* (1954), *Il Sacco di Roma/The Pagans* (1953), *Nerone e Messalina/Nero and the Burning of Rome* (1953), *Il Tre*

corsari/Three Corsairs (1952), *Il Padrone del vapore* (1951), *Città dolente/City of Pain* (1948), *Nada/Nothing* (1947), *O sole mio* (1946) and *Finalmente sì* (1944).

GIANCARLO GIANNINI (1 August 1942, La Spezia, Italy) has appeared in 135 films and tv series, among them *Bastardi* (2008), *Liolà* (2008), *Casino Royale* (2006), *Man on Fire* (2004), *Il Cuore altrove/The Heart Is Elsewhere* (2003), *Darkness* (2002), *Ciao America* (2002), *The Whole Shebang* (2001), “Francesca e Nunziata”, *Hannibal* (2001), *Milonga* (1999), *Mimic* (1997), *The Disappearance of Garcia Lorca* (1996), *A Walk in the Clouds* (1995), *Giovanni Falcone* (1993), *Once Upon a Crime* (1992), *Blood Red* (1989), *New York Stories* (1989), *Saving Grace* (1985), *American Dreamer* (1984), *Fatto di sangue fra due uomini per causa di una vedova - si sospettano moventi politici/Blood Feud* (1978), *La Fine del mondo nel nostro solito letto in una notte piena di pioggia/The End of the World in Our Usual Bed in a Night Full of Rain* (1978), *L'Innocente* (1976), *Pasqualino Settebellezze/Seven Beauties* (1975), *Travolti da un insolito destino nell'azzurro mare d'agosto/Swept Away... by an Unusual Destiny in the Blue Sea of August/All Screwed Up* (1974), *Film d'amore e d'anarchia, ovvero 'stamattina alle 10 in via dei Fiori nella nota casa di tolleranza/Love and Anarchy* (1973), *Paolo il caldo/The Sensuous Sicilian* (1973), *Mimi metallurgico ferito nell'onore/The Seduction of Mimi* (1972), *Un aller simple/One Way Ticket* (1971), *Mio padre Monsignore* (1971), *The Secret of Santa Vittoria* (1969), *Arabella* (1967), *Non stuzzicate la zanzara/Don't Sting the Mosquito* (1967), “Lo Squarciaragola”, *Rita la zanzara/Rita the Mosquito* (1966) and *Libido* (1965)

FERNANDO REY (20 September 1917, A Coruña, Galicia, Spain - 9 March 1994, Madrid, Spain, cancer) appeared in 236 films and tv series, among them *El Cianuro... ¿solo o con leche?* (1994), *Al otro lado del tunnel/On the Far Side of the Tunnel* (1994), *L'Atlantide* (1992), *La Marrana* (1992), *Después del sueño/After the Dream* (1992), *1492: Conquest of Paradise* (1992), *Diceria dell'untore/Breath of Life* (1990), *La Batalla de los Tres Reyes/Drums of Fire* (1990), *Moon Over Parador* (1988), *Pasodoble* (1988), *Mi general/My General* (1987), *El Bosque animado* (1987), *El Túnel/The Tunnel* (1987), *Hôtel du Paradis* (1986), *Saving Grace* (1985), *Rustlers' Rhapsody* (1985), *Un amour interdit/Una Strana passione* (1984), *The Hit* (1984), *Monsignor* (1982), *Quintet* (1979), *Le Dernier amant romantique/The Last Romantic Lover* (1978), *Rebeldía* (1978), *Cet obscur objet du désir/That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977), *Voyage of the Damned* (1976), *Striptease/Insanity* (1976), *French Connection II* (1975), *Pasqualino Settebellezze/Pasqualino: Seven Beauties* (1975), *La Femme aux bottes rouges/The Woman with Red Boots* (1974), *Tarot* (1973), *Le Charme discret de la bourgeoisie/The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972), *Antony and Cleopatra* (1972), *The French Connection* (1971), *The Light at the Edge of the World/La Luz del fin del mundo* (1971), *Historia de una traición/The Great Swindle* (1971), *Tristana* (1970), *The Adventurers* (1970), *Guns of the Magnificent Seven* (1969), *Land Raiders* (1969), *Villa Rides* (1968), *The Desperate Ones* (1968), *Cervantes* (1967), *Return of the Seven* (1966), *El Greco* (1966), *Il Grandi condottieri/Gideon and Samson* (1965), *Due mafiosi contro Goldfinger/Two Mafiosi Against Goldfinger* (1965), *Fin de semana/Weekend* (1964), *Échappement libre/Backfire* (1964), *The Ceremony* (1963), *The Running Man/Carol Reed's The Running Man* (1963), *Shéhérazade* (1963), *Tierra brutal/The Savage Guns* (1961), *Fantasmas en la casa* (1961), *Goliath contro i giganti/*

Goliath Against the Giants (1961), *Viridiana* (1961), *Sonatas* (1959), *La Venganza/Vengeance* (1958), *Don Juan* (1956), *Playa prohibida* (1956), *Cómicos/Comedians* (1954), *Cabaret* (1953), *La Señora de Fátima/Our Lady of Fatima* (1951), *Si te hubieses casado conmigo* (1948), *Don Quijote de la Mancha* (1947), *Nuestra Natacha* (1936) and *Fazendo Fitas* (1935)

SHIRLEY STOLER (30 March 1929, Brooklyn, New York—17 February 1999, New York, New York, heart failure) appeared in 35 films and tv series, among them *The Deli* (1997), *Me and Veronica* (1993), *Malcolm X* (1992), “Law & Order”, *Frankenhooker* (1990), *Miami Blues* (1990), “Kate & Allie”, *Sticky Fingers* (1988), “One Life to Live”, “Pee-wee's Playhouse”, *Brass* (1985) (TV), *Desperately Seeking Susan* (1985), “The Brass Ring”, *Second-Hand Hearts* (1981), “The Edge of Night”, *Below the Belt* (1980), *Seed of Innocence* (1980), “Skag”, “Charlie's Angels”, *The Deer Hunter* (1978), *Pasqualino Settebellezze/Seven Beauties* (1975), *Klute* (1971), *The Honeymoon Killers* (1970)

WERTMULLER, LINA. From *World Film Directors, V. II. Ed. John Wakeman. The H.W. Wilson Co., NY, 1988*



Wertmuller, Lina (Arcangela Felice Assunta Wertmüller von Elgg Spanol von Braueich), Italian director, scenarist, and dramatist, Baron Erich Wertmüller von Elgg, is said to have fled to Italy from Zurich after killing a man in a duel over a woman. Lina Wertmuller is the daughter of Frederico Wertmuller, a successful Roman lawyer, and Maria Santa Maria Wertmuller. According to Lina Wertmuller, her father was a domestic tyrant who gave her mother “a hell of a life” for fifty years, until in 1973 she walked out on him.

Frequently in conflict with her father, Lina Wertmuller was no more susceptible to discipline at the rigidly Roman Catholic schools she was sent to and claims she was thrown out of fifteen of them. Autocratic as he was, her father seems to have had ambivalent feelings about the Fascist regime—she recalls “there

were a lot of anti-Fascists” in her home during her childhood, and “I remember that we hid a family of Jews...for five months.”

After the war, having obtained a teacher’s certificate, Lina Wertmüller was urged by her father to follow him into the law and by her best friend—a young actress named Flora Carabella—to try the theatre. She enrolled simultaneously at law school and at the Stanislavskyan Academy of Theatre in Rome, discovering at once which she preferred. Graduating from drama school in 1951, Wertmüller and some friends launched an avant-garde theatre company in Rome. It soon foundered (not least because they charged no entrance fee), and then she toured Europe with Maria Signorelli’s puppet company. The group aroused controversy wherever it went with a repertoire that included plays derived from Kafka and other works considered (at least by parents) unsuitable for juvenile audiences.

During the next ten years Lina Wertmüller worked as an actress, stage manager, set designer, and publicist; and co-authored nearly a dozen musical comedies for Italian television. In 1962 her friend Flora Carabella, by then married to Marcello Mastroianni, introduced her to Federico Fellini, and Fellini took her on as assistant director of *8 1/2*. “It was one of those experiences that opens new dimensions in life,” she says. Not that Fellini taught her how to direct—“you really can’t learn anything from Fellini...you can’t learn art. What you *can* learn is the freedom of art”; she was “totally enlightened by his personality.”

And this encounter opened the way to Wertmüller’s own first film as a director, *I basilischi* (*The Lizards*, 1963). She made it with the crew of *8 1/2* and with financial backing partly raised by Fellini. Written as well by Wertmüller (like all her films), it was shot in Apulia with mainly non-professional actors and was originally to have been called “A Provincial Oblomov.” Reminiscent of Fellini’s *I vitelloni* (and even more of Chekhov), it centers on Antonio (Toni Petruzzi), a languid law student frittering away his youth in a sleepy southern town. After a visit to Rome he is seized by an ambition to carve out a career in the capital but soon sinks back into the comfortable lethargy of bourgeois provincial life.

“The film is really an account of a town,” wrote Penelope Gilliat, “a place where nothing happens but the arranging of marriages and the hysterical satisfying of empty forms of honor. Time crawls like a snake on a stone, broken up by absurd brawls taht are never about the real crisis beneath; people are full of anguish, and the anguish runs into the sand.” Isabel Quigly found it “a view of an appalling way of life that somehow managed to be undepressing, even lively and in retrospect almost cheerful....Gianni Di Venanzo’s marvellous camerawork manages to transfer these human qualities to the landscape, to objects. The conventionally picturesque streets of twisty, shuttered houses manage o seem dry and lifeless, like the lives they enfold; the glare of sunlight is as incessant and as painful as the ugly accent and the shrill, loud voices.... If anything could be calculated to take the remnants of romance from our view of the Italian south, it’s this

film; yet it isn’t bitter or angry or even (in a sense) unaffectionate.” *I basilischi* won the Silver Sail at Locarno in 1963, and there are critics who maintain that Wertmüller has never surpassed this complex and quirkish first feature.

Returning to television, she wrote and directed *Giornalino di Gian Burrasca* (*Gian Burrasca’s Diary*, 1965), a musical starring Rita Pavone and satirizing Italian bourgeois life at the turn of the century. *Questi volta parliamo du uomini* (*Let’s Talk About Men*, 1965), Wertmüller second feature film, consists of four vignettes exploring some of the ways in which men abuse women. She describes it as “my theatrical film,” and it seems to have been something of an exercise in style and technique, passing from the comic to the surrealist to the neorealistic. It brought Nino Manfredi, the male lead throughout, his first Silver Ribbon (the Italian equivalent of an Oscar).

Although her first two movies were enthusiastically received by the critics and fared reasonably well at the box office, Wertmüller was for a time unable to find backing for a third and instead *Rita la zanzara* (*Rita the Mosquito*, 1966), another Rita Pavone musical. Presumably on account of male prejudice in the television industry, Lina Wertmüller, who adopted the comedy

from a story by Sergio Bonotti, directed it under the pseudonym “George Brown,” being officially credited only as director of the musical numbers. This piece is of some interest in that it was the first film in which Wertmüller directed Giancarlo Giannini, whom she had met in 1963 after praising his performance as Puck in a stage production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. *Rita la zanzara* began a collaboration between the little-known director and the already established young actor that benefited both careers and has continued to this day.

The same principals starred in a sequel, *Non stuzzicate la zanzara* (*Don’t Sting the Mosquito*, 1967), which had Franco Fraticelli as its editor and the sculptor Enrico Job as art director. These two have become permanent members of the director’s production team, and Job and Lina Wertmüller were married in 1968. The same year Job designed sets and costumes for Franco Zeffirelli’s extremely successful production of Wertmüller’s play *Due più non fa più quattro* (*Two and Two Are No Longer Four*); the star was Giannini, who had taken the script to Zeffirelli in the first place. “More than anybody,” according to Enrico Job, “it was Giancarlo who helped Lina launch into films, introducing her to producers, backers, and so on. Without him, she would probaly still be waiting for a chance.”

In terms of international recognition, at least. Wertmüller’s chance came with her third film, *Mimi metallurgio ferito nee’ onore* (*The Seduction of Mimi*—literally “Mimi the Metalworker, Wounded in Honor,” 1972). Satirizing both sexual hypocrisy and political expediency, it has Giannini as Mimi, a macho Siciolian buffoon who nevertheless has the courage not to vote for the Mafia candidate and goes off to work in a Turin plant. There he falls in love with Fiore, a liberated communist (Mariangela Melato). Politically and sexually inspired (if somewhat confused), Mimi stands up to the Mafia and its various authoritarian associates (each of whom is identified by a pattern of



three moles on his right cheek). In the end, however, Mimi is undone by the double standard. Back home, he finds that his “frigid” wife is pregnant by another man and “wounded in honor,” himself impregnates Amalia, the grotesquely obese wife of the man who cuckolded him. Later he is falsely accused of the latter’s murder and has to accept help from the Mafia. He loses Fiore and winds up a mere functionary of the Brotherhood.

Ernest Ferlita and John R. May, in their *Parables of Lina Wertmüller*, maintain that, “if Mimi is the victim of the Brotherhood, it is because its values and his are fundamentally the same. The ruthless defense of name and honor subverts individual and society. Mimi, like Wertmüller’s other machos with a cause, abandons common cause for the security of personal phallic power.” John Simon thought that Wertmüller “is perhaps the first totally unfeminine female director....At this stage of her development, the director is good at unsentimental tragedy and uncomplaisant comedy, and has an admirable visual sense...But Miss Wertmüller hardly ever relaxes; most of her scenes...have rather more individual vitality than ability to flow into one another....Yet she handles her camera, dialogue, and actors with such sturdy control and incisive intelligence that one must hope she will eventually relax into a more easeful fullness.” *Mimi* brought Wertmüller the best director award at the 1972 Cannes Film Festival, and the following year the same festival voted Giannini best actor for his performance in Wertmüller’s fourth feature.

This was *Film d’amore e d’anarchia (Love and Anarchy, 1973)*, set in the 1930s. Giannini plays Tunin, a simple, idealistic country boy who sees a friend murdered by the Fascists and sets out to avenge him by assassinating Mussolini himself. In Rome he contacts Salome (Mariangela Melato), a prostitute who milks information from her clients to further the anarchist cause. Tunin also meets Tripolina (Lina Polita), who works at the same brothel, and they fall in love. When it is time for Tunin to set forth on his mission, Tripolina refuses to wake him: “What the hell is politics to us?” Tunin goes berserk when he finally does wake up, shoots down several policemen, and is beaten to death in a Fascist police cell. The film ends with a quotation from the Italian anarchist Enrico Malatesta expressing detestation of assassination as a political expedient—a view that Wertmüller presumably shares.

The American art collector Herbert R. Stienman saw *Love and Anarchy* at Cannes and was so impressed that he formed a consortium to buy the US distribution rights. Slightly cut to quicken its pace and with the addition of a prologue in the form of a montage of news photographs, it was shown in New York in 1974. Paul D. Zimmerman thought it communicated brilliantly “its vision of passion and politics at irreconcilable odds” and called Lina Wertmüller “the most exciting woman director on the international scene and the most remarkable new talent from the Continent since Bernard Bertolucci. Stimulated by this and other similarly ecstatic reviews, New Line Cinema, which was sitting on the American rights to *The Seduction of Mimi*, cut nearly thirty minutes from that movie and rushed it into release. This was also received with great

enthusiasm by most critics, though there were some feminist objections to the scene in which Mimi manfully seduces Amalia, whose grossness is cruelly exaggerated by the lens distortion.

There was a relatively cool reception for *Tutto a posto e niente in ordine (All Screwed Up, 1974)*, which deals with a group of young people from the impoverished south who move into a Milan tenement, form a kind of commune, and become victims of the consumer society. There are some memorable sequences, like one in which the slaughter of cattle in a meat-packing plant is counterpointed against the measures of a baroque concerto, and scenes in a vast kitchen, presented as a vision of hell, with hordes of workers slaving over great ovens. The film ends with a slow 360-degree pan of the kitchen, gradually accelerating to the accompaniment of a Wagnerian soundtrack “until the screen is streaked by a dizzying whirl of images.” Apart from such set pieces, the film was generally dismissed as “rambling and raucous.”

The feminist objections to some of the scenes in *Mimi* swelled considerably in response to *Travolti da un insolito destino nell’azzurro mare d’agosto (Swept Away by a Strange Destiny on an Azure August Sea, 1974)*. On a tropical cruise, the rich Rafaella (Melato) amuses herself by humiliating the deckhand Gennarino (Giannini). The situation changes when, thanks to Rafaella’s foolhardy whim, these two find themselves shipwrecked on a desert island. Realizing that his tormentor is now wholly dependent on him for survival, Gennarino turns the tables and forces her to grovel. She falls deeply and worshipfully in love with him and remains so until they are rescued; then, to Gennarino’s astonishment, the old order is restored.

This updated version of *The Admirable Crichton* received the Grand Prix at Tehran and seemed to Rex Reed “as challenging, perceptive and beautiful a film as you are likely to see this season.” Judith Crist, likewise, thought it “as witty as it is wise, as ferocious as it is funny and as touching as it is truthful.” But by no means everyone shared these sentiments. The British critic Derek Malcolm called it “the typical Wertmüller film. I hate it. It is loud, vacant, spuriously clever, hopelessly bereft of real argument, ridiculous in its technical excesses, and enormously grandiose in concept.”

Responding to feminist complaints, Wertmüller explained in the *Village Voice* that Rafaella “respects bourgeois society, therefore she represents the man. That’s what women don’t understand. The [female] character was really a man.” Pauline Kael thought there was “no argument with this kind of thing,” but tried anyway: “Maybe one can say that [Gennarino] isn’t hitting a woman, he’s hitting the capitalist class. However, when she kisses his feet and gathers flowers to garland his phallus she isn’t the

capitalist class, she’s a woman who finds fulfillment in recognizing a man as her master...a solid reassurance for the men in the audience that women want only to be mastered, yet are sly little beasts, never to be trusted.” Maureen Orth saw both points of view: “The plot is outrageous and an insult to feminists. But beneath the easy reading, Wertmüller is giving us food for thought about the kind of society that breeds messed-up



characters like these and about the difficulty of escaping from self-made roles.”

The gap between Wertmüller’s apologists and her opponents widened in the reviews and articles inspired by her next movie, *Pasqualino settebellezze* (*Seven Beauties*, 1975). After an introductory montage of documentary war footage accompanied by a song satirizing militarism, we encounter Pasqualino (Giannini) and his friend Francesco Piero Di Orio). They have deserted from the Italian army and are on the run somewhere in Germany. Their story is interrupted by flashbacks to Pasqualino’s earlier life. A pompously macho young Neapolitan, he had both exploited and ruthlessly protected his seven unlovely sisters. Though he himself had often enjoyed the local whores, he had been outraged when he discovered that one of his sisters was on the game. Defending the family honor, Pasqualino had murdered and dismembered her pimp, avoiding a death sentence by pleading insanity. At the asylum he had tried to rape a female patient and had been punished with electric shock treatments, finally escaping further suffering by joining the army. Pasqualino’s troubles are by no means over, however. He and his fellow deserter Francesco are captured by Nazi soldiers and sent to a German concentration camp. In this hellish place, Pasqualino survives by using his only talent—he seduces the camp commandant (Shirley Stoler), a repulsive and perverted monster who forces him to abet her in the murder of other prisoners. In a climactic scene in a great hall full of kneeling prisoners, he shoots his friend Francesco after the latter assures him that he is “tired of living in terror.” Pasqualino survives the war and is welcomed home to Naples by his seven beauties—all of them whores now, just as he is. He announces his intention of fathering a dozen children.

The psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, himself a concentration camp survivor, discussed the film in a long article in the *New Yorker* (August 2, 1976). He concluded that it gives “visible form and symbolic expression” to the view that survival is all, and found the movie abhorrent on that score. Terrence Des Pres, on the other hand, praised Wertmüller in an essay in *Harper’s* (June 1976) for her ability “to present hard truths wrapped in laughter which trails off finally into a profound awareness of the deformity of life as it is.” Ernest Ferlita and John R. May in *The Parables of Lina Wertmüller* reject both of these views, maintaining that the message of the film is the Christian one: “Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it.” They suggest that Francesco had consciously sacrificed his life for his friend and is “the closest Wertmüller comes in her films to the *genuine* man.” They also find an element of optimism in the character of another prisoner, Pedro (Fernando Rey), who, before drowning himself in excrement in the latrines, expresses his faith in “a new man who can rediscover harmony within himself....That’s the only hope...man in disorder.”

The professional movie critics were equally divided John Simon decided that the film propelled Wertmüller “into the highest regions of cinematic art, into the company of the major directors.” William Wolf called it “a great film,” and many American critics were scarcely less absolute in their praise. For Pauline Kael, however, the picture was “a triumph of insensitivity” in which the humiliations, the punishments, the horrors don’t develop out of the characters or situations. They’re just injected into the clowning-around atmosphere. They’re hypes for us—kicky effects to give us a charge. But with the pious moralizing on top of them.... Wertmüller turns suffering into vaudeville.”

Cult figure or *bête noire*, Wertmüller was at least news in the United States, and at this point in her career Warner Brothers

signed the production company she owns in partnership with Giannini to make four English-language films. The first (and only) result of this deal was *The End of the World in Our Usual Bed in a Night Full of Rain* (1978). Through a series of flashbacks, the movie traces the ten-year marriage of Paolo (Giannini), an Italian communist and journalist, and Lizzy (Candice Bergen), an American photographer and “aspiring feminist.” The conflict between his old-world machismo and her yearning for self-realization is, as Robert Hatch wrote, enacted through “hitting, kicking, scratching, upending and generally bruising each other to the accompaniment of uncontrolled weeping and breathless profanity.” Gene Siskel called it “a mess,” and this time Wertmüller found few champions, though Simon suggested that the picture’s shortcomings were attributable to its having “clearly been thought and felt in Italian, and thinking and feeling are much harder to translate than words.”



The Warner Brothers deal collapsed after this fiasco, and Wertmüller’s next film was made in Italy, with an even longer title than usual, *Fatto di sangue fra due uomini per causa di una vendova. Si sospettano moventi politici* (*Blood Feud/Revenge*, 1979). Set in a Sicilian village at the beginning of the Fascist era, it concerns a woman (Sophia Loren) whose husband is killed by the Mafia. Championed by an anti-Fascist lawyer (Marcello Mastroianni) she falls in love with him and also with a small-time gangster (Giannini), entertaining each of them in the other’s absence. In a final shoot-out with the Fascists, both men are fatally wounded but each is told before he dies, that he is the father of the heroine’s expected child. John Gillett found “felicities in the acting” but thought that “almost everything is flattened under the weight of Wertmüller’s shooting style, her obsession with huge, unrelenting close-ups here reaching ridiculous proportions.”

Scherzo des Destino in agguato dietro l’angolo come un brigante di strada (*A Joke of Destiny, Lying in Wait Around the Corner Like a Robber*, 1983) was not well received by American critics. The film’s story of how a high government official finds himself trapped in his elaborate, terrorist-proof limousine was termed a “crudely made political allegory” by the *Daily News*. Vincent Canby in the *New York Times* noted how “the jokes that

provide the film's energy slowly go as dead as the limousine's batteries." *Un complicato intrigo di donne, vicoli e delitti* (*Camorra*, 1986) was described by *Variety* as a departure from the director's usual style of grotesque comedy. Starring Angela Molina, this is an exuberant action picture in which a group of Neapolitan women take on the city's mobsters and drug dealers.

Puzzling over the decline in the director's reputation, the *Village Voice*'s Diane Jacobs wrote, "Lina Wertmüller's fall from critical grace has been nearly as mystifying as her rise." Few British critics have ever taken Wertmüller seriously, except at the beginning of her career. The same is true in Italy, where the press is baffled by the acclaim she has received in the United States: one writer there suggested that perhaps America is suffering from a lack in political perspective that makes it easy to be taken in—from the Left as well as dead center—by the brilliance of a highly polished and well-packaged product." In fact, even in the United States, there has never been anything approaching a consensus about Wertmüller's work. While Diane Jacobs calls her an "Italian Aristophanes" and "a political filmmaker in the tradition of Chaplin rather than Costas-Gavras," Brooke Ripley finds her "expedient and sloppy" in technique and a "clever, energetic, daring, and competent boulevard director." Michael Wood writes that her "style alternates like her moods, by sudden switches from long shot to close-up, with nothing in between" and concludes that she has "a stunning visual intelligence accompanied by a great confusion of mind."

Ellen Willis, writing in *Rolling Stone* accuses Wertmüller of having "what amounts to an obsessional conviction that women have no souls" and says that she "is not only a female woman-hater...but a woman who pretends to be a feminist." Wertmüller indeed maintains that she is with the feminists on most issues "to the death." She points out that, if the women in her films are inadequate, the men are worse: "All vain, arrogant and stupid, real chauvinists who believe in the superiority of the penis." In the sexual humiliations that are central to many of Wertmüller's films, the man is often the one humiliated; but this is often accomplished by a frightful or disgusting woman.

Wertmüller is a member of the central committee of the Italian Socialist party and, according to Lucy Quacinella, a former assistant, belongs to the party's conservative wing. Glenys Roberts reports that the director "sleeps, eats, breathes her movies, casts all her friends in them, writes them herself and totally supervises." Mariangela Melato says that she has "never seen so monstrous a vitality. When you work with Lina, you can forget you have personal problems, emotional states, responsibilities. You dedicate yourself entirely." And Candace Bergen recalls that when she first went to work with Wertmüller she thought she was "having a nervous breakdown. But then I realized she very much controls the level of the tension and that she is very happy living in tension. It gives her great energy, and I have to admit that I have never been in such an energizing work context."



The source of all this excitement is a short, slight woman with cropped reddish-brown hair, who invariably wears glasses with white plastic frames and who is liable to appear "draped in shawls and chains, clanking with bones and driftwood, jingling with silver bracelets." Her "scratchy, deep voice" is said to "generate excitement." She herself says that her aim is to provoke, and this she undoubtedly does.

from Italian Cinema From Neorealism to the Present. Peter Bondanella. Continuum, NY, 1999. Chapter 10 The Contemporary Scene and New Italian Comedy

The Italian cinema's preoccupation with politics and ideology remains a factor to this day, and it seems highly unlikely that the best directors will ever turn primarily to escapist entertainment, even if the bulk of the industry's annual production aims at a relatively low-brow audience. Several important developments in the last decade, not unconnected to the general trend toward political themes already noted, should be signaled for special treatment here. (1) For the first time in the history of the Italian cinema, women—Liliana Cavani and Lina Wertmüller—have gained prominence as directors....

With Lina Wertmüller's masterpiece *Seven Beauties* (*Pasqualino Settebellezza*, 1975), [Liliana Cavani's *Night Porter*] stands as a more controversial and thought-provoking view of the existential dilemma life in the posed for inmates....

Unlike Liliana Cavani's films, those of Lina Wertmüller were enthusiastically greeted by American critics and scholars alike; five of her screenplays were even published in English translation though they are still unavailable in Italian, and the first monograph on her works was in English rather than Italian. Her

films were championed by the most improbable of all American critics, the usually caustic John Simon. And yet, in Italy Wertmüller is rarely taken seriously. Perhaps the explanation for this strange turn of events is contained in Liliana Cavani's assessment of the difference between film critics in Italy and in the United States. In Italy, critics tend to punish a

director for commercial success, admitting only American films to the category of popular entertainment that may also embody great art; paradoxically Italians are the least provincial of all peoples in their openness to foreign cultures and their cinemas, but this cultural openness has its price—everything from abroad is considered better than the domestic product! But American critical taste is also mercurial: with the arrival of her first five films in this country, Wertmüller's critical fortune seemed assured; then, after her collaboration with American production companies in a sixth film, she was relegated to critical obscurity almost overnight.

Perhaps only the work of Fellini and Bertolucci enjoyed the acclaim that greeted her first group of excellent films: *The Seduction of Mimi* (*Mimi metallurgico ferito nell'onore*, 1971);

Love and Anarchy (*Filmd'amore e d'anarchia*, 1972); *All Screwed Up* (*Tutto a posto e niente in ordine*, 1973); *Swept Away* (*Travolti da un insolito destino nell'azzurro mare d'agosto*, 1974); and her acknowledged masterpiece *Seven Beauties*. Greatly indebted to the exuberant imagery of Fellini, Wertmüller combined a concern with topical political issues and the tradition of Italian grotesque comedy, with its vulgarity, its stock characters, and its frontal attack upon accepted values and mores; therefore, much of the critical confusion over the intentions of her films stems from an ignorance of her work's cultural background. But within the genre of the Italian comic film, Wertmüller's works emerge as the most complex and visually rich of the last decade....

With *Swept Away* and *Seven Beauties*, the glaring inconsistencies and obvious flaws of plot structure typical of her other films are removed, and Wertmüller's art combines its exuberance and photographic virtuosity with a storyline well under control.

...



With *Seven Beauties*, Wertmüller's art reaches its culmination in what must be termed a masterpiece. Once again, she combines the familiar themes of Southern comedy with political issues, but now they involve much more than class relationships and include a treatment of the Holocaust, the concentration camps of World War II, and the moral questions involved in man's survival through this nightmare. In flashbacks, the film's plot moves from wartime Nazi Germany to prewar Fascist Italy—specifically Naples. The main character, Pasqualino Frafuso, nicknames "Pasqualino Seven Beauties" (Giancarlo Giannini) is a Neapolitan *guapo*, a dandy who lives by his wits primarily off the wages of his seven adoring but rather plump sisters; when one of them, Concettina (Elena Fiore) disgraces the family honor by dancing in a music hall and later becoming a prostitute in a brothel, Pasqualino feels compelled to kill Totonno, the man who seduced her into a life of this sort; he disposes of the body by mailing pieces of it all over Italy. Caught, he is first sent to prison and then to an asylum (when he feigns madness), but when he rapes a fellow patient, he is forced to join the army and eventually finds himself on the Eastern Front; after deserting, he is caught by the Nazis and interned in a concentration camp. Though Naples is known for the cunning of its citizens, who survive from day to day in a miraculous economic balancing act, Pasqualino may well be the ultimate Neapolitan. His cleverness always saves him from a situation he fears, but in each instance he is placed in an increasingly more desperate predicament; when he winds up in a death camp his ingenuity and his drive for survival meet their most difficult challenge. Nevertheless, he manages to seduce the buxom female commandant (Shirley Stoler), who then forces him to

murder his friend Francesco in order to save his own life. At the film's end, we see him back in Naples—a virtuoso survivor who has sacrificed everything in order to remain alive.



Recounted in this fashion, Wertmüller's plot seems straightforward enough, but as in Bertolucci's *The Conformist* the chronology is completely juggled by flashbacks that explain Pasqualino's story only in bits and pieces. By avoiding a linear narrative, the director draws paradoxical parallels between the Neapolitan segment (involving a single murder for an affair of honor) and the German segment (involving the wholesale slaughter of many, many people in the death camps.) The prevalent tone of the work thus becomes not completely grotesque or tragic but, rather, tragi-comic, as hilarious Neapolitan sequences are juxtaposed to chilling, horrifying German ones. Naples never becomes Germanic, but in Pasqualino's single-minded drive for survival, the potential is always there. The overriding instinct for survival that Wertmüller shows so humorously in a single individual can, when allowed to develop unchecked by any higher moral values, degenerate into a dehumanized obsession to live at any price, no matter how high. Ultimately, life is not worth the price Pasqualino pays, and the characters who receive the director's approval are those camp inmates who rebel and are killed rather than submit to the Nazi system: Pedro (Fernando Rey), the anarchist who believes in "man in disorder," a humane disorder meant to oppose the insane order of the German Reich; or Pasqualino's friend Francesco (Piero de Orio), who sees the guilt implicit in Italy's alliance with Nazi Germany.

Rarely has any film on the Holocaust treated the material with such a combination of comic and tragic moods, and it is this only apparent levity that offended some critics, who believed it implied Wertmüller's equation of petty crime and mass murder. But Wertmüller realized that only with this juxtaposition of moods could she move her viewer to react most fully to the horror of the state to which Pasqualino would eventually be reduced. Many of the Neapolitan sequences could be anthologized as classic moments in Italian film comedy. They reflect Fellini's influence on Wertmüller's broad, sometimes vulgar satire, and they show her skill in handling large numbers of actors and brilliant imagery. For example, there is the masterful music-hall scene in which Concettina's obscene performance scandalizes her puritanical brother; the graphic but comic murder of Totonno, who is cut into tiny pieces like a slaughtered steer; the slapstick comedy scene where Pasqualino steals food from a German farmhouse, where a buxom blond woman plays Wagner's "Dreams" on the piano, a romantic prelude to the more terrifying entrance into the death camp (where Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" introduces the enormous camp commandant); or Pasqualino's murder trial in Naples, done completely in pantomime and exploiting the

expressive talents of Giannini's face and eyes. Yet, the most memorable sequences of the film are in the death camp, pictured as a nightmare version of the bath sequence from *8 1/2*, and indebted in its imagery not only to Fellini but also to Dante's vision of Hell. Here, Pasqualino touches rock bottom in his obsession with survival, and he is forced to earn his survival with a feat of sexual prowess, the seduction of the commandant.

Since our hero has been reduced by life in a camp to a physical wreck, the woman first makes Pasqualino eat a bowl of food, then forces him to quiver at her feet, a shot taken from an angle that underlines his worm-like state: "Now you eat, then you fuck...if you don't fuck, you die!" The braggart Neapolitan dandy has been reduced to nothing: once a macho rapist, to save his hide he has now been forced to perform a sexual act that disgusts him. It is the supreme irony in Pasqualino's existence, and it leads inevitably to his total capitulation, his collaboration with the guards, and the eventual execution by his own hand of his best friend. And when he returns home to postwar Naples, he discovers that everything he has done to safeguard the honor of his family—the entire train of events that led him from a relatively insignificant murder to collaboration with the greatest crime of the century—was done in vain. Now all of his sisters, and even his young virginal fiancée, have become prostitutes, selling themselves to American soldiers in order to survive. Their decision echoes his own. The final close-up of Pasqualino's haggard face convincingly suggests that some values are more vital to human existence than survival.

UB HUMANITIES INSTITUTE ANNUAL CONFERENCE:
"The Other Side of Reason: The History of Madness Today,"
UB Center for the Arts, Oct. 31-Nov. 1, 2008:

Friday, October 31

9:30 a.m. Registration, Center for the Arts, North Campus
 9:50 a.m. Welcome: **Tim Dean**, Department of English, Director, Humanities Institute, UB; **Bruce McCombe**, Dean, College of

Arts and Sciences

10:00-11:30 a.m.: **Elizabeth Lunbeck**, Departments of History and Psychiatry, Vanderbilt University: *Narcissism Normalized: Heinz Kohut's Psychoanalytic Revolution*

Moderator: **Susan Cahn**, Department of History, UB

11:45 a.m. - 1:15 p.m.: **Guy Le Gaufey**, Psychoanalyst, École Lacanienne de Psychoanalyse, Paris: *Knitting Foucault, Purling Foucault*

Moderator: **Steven Miller**, Department of English, UB

2:30-4:00 p.m.: **Benjamin Reiss**, Department of English, Emory University: *Creative Writing and Psychiatric Surveillance: Virginia Tech and the Politics of Risk Management*

Moderator: **Carrie Tirado Bramen**, Department of English; Executive Director, Humanities Institute, UB

4:15-5:45 p.m.: **Bruce Jackson**, Department of English, University at Buffalo: *Out of Time and Doing Time: When Madness Became Criminal*

Moderator: **Lisa Szeffel**, Department of History, Pacific University

Saturday, November 1

9:30 a.m. Registration, Center for the Arts, North Campus

10:00 a.m. - 11:30 p.m.: **Marjorie Garber**, Departments of English & American Literature; Visual & Environmental Studies, Harvard University: *Mad Lib*

Moderator: **Donald E. Pease**, Humanities Institute Distinguished Scholar in Residence

11:45 a.m. - 1:15 p.m.: **Elizabeth Povinelli**, Department of Anthropology, Columbia University: *The Exclusions of Reason: Ab-Original Truth, Rhetoric, Genealogy*

Moderator: **Ana Mariella Bacigalupo**, Department of Anthropology, UB

2:30-4:00 p.m.: Screening: *Titicut Follies* (1967)

Frederick Wiseman's controversial documentary about the treatment of criminally insane inmates at the Massachusetts Correctional Institution. Moderators: **Diane Christian** and **Bruce Jackson**, Department of English, UB

Coming up in the Buffalo Film Seminars:

Oct 28 Elia Kazan *A FACE IN THE CROWD* 1957

Nov 4 Krzysztof Kieslowski *BLIND CHANCE (PRZYPADK)* 1981

Nov 11 Wim Wenders *PARIS, TEXAS* 1984

Nov 18 Wong Kar-Wai *IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE (FA YEUNG NIN WA)* 2000

Nov 25 Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck *THE LIVES OF OTHERS (DAS LEBEN DER ANDEREN)* 2006

Dec 2 Stanley Kubrick 2001: *A SPACE ODYSSEY* 1968

CONTACTS:

email Diane Christian: engdc@buffalo.edu...email Bruce Jackson bjackson@buffalo.edu

for the series schedule, annotations, links and updates: <http://buffalofilmseminars.com>

to subscribe to the weekly email informational notes, send an email to addto_list@buffalofilmseminars.com

for cast and crew info on any film: <http://imdb.com/>

The Buffalo Film Seminars are presented by the Market Arcade Film & Arts Center and State University of New York at Buffalo with support from the Robert and Patricia Colby Foundation and the Buffalo News