Borrower: ZLM

Lending String:
*VVN,VXX,SYB,DKC,TFW,WHE,PGM,KEN,WEL,BUF

Patron:

Journal Title: Stars and masculinities in contemporary Italian cinema /

Volume: **Issue:**
Month/Year: **Pages:** 45-67

Article Author: O'Rawe, Catherine, author.
O'Rawe

Article Title: Comedy and Masculinity, Italian Style

Imprint: New York, NY : Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

ILL Number: 205229478

Call #: PN1995.9.M34 O83 2014

Location:

ODYSSEY ENABLED

Charge
Maxcost:

Shipping Address:
ILL Sojourner Truth Library
SUNY at New Paltz
300 Hawk Drive
NEW PALTZ, New York 12561-2493
United States

Fax:
Ariel:
Email: ill@library.newpaltz.edu
Odyssey: 137.140.1.132

of masculinity itself, as Stephen Cohan notes: "The boy who is not a man [...] disturbs the ease with which Hollywood's representation of masculinity collapses sexuality onto gender" (1997: 259). Being a male heartthrob, especially in Italian cinema, and enjoying the gaze of the fans, appears to be a stage that can be comfortably occupied when one is young, and part of the process of maturation for these male stars is to learn to throw off the role and the fans. The gaze of Scamarcio interpellates the (female) fan, brings her into the frame, and complicates simple ideas of feminization of the heartthrob. The agency of the fan has been overlooked, as, indeed, has the agency of Scamarcio himself, until he becomes a serious star. A performance like that in *L'uomo perfetto* shows his awareness of occupying that heartthrob role, which is in tension with the status of the "serious actor" role. Kegan Gardiner reminds us of the need to think about age with gender, and that current conceptions of masculinity "define being a man not only in opposition to being a woman or to being a male homosexual but also in opposition to being a boy" (2002b: 91). Male stars who have to define themselves as "not boys," and as no longer objects of young female adoration, are having to negotiate the anxiety provoked by the gaze on the male body, as well as claiming the space for themselves to be considered as serious stars. Seriousness is something, clearly, that can only be claimed by mature men, though as we will see in the next chapter, maturity in popular Italian comedy is a highly contested issue.

CHAPTER 2

Comedy and Masculinity, Italian Style

Introduction

This chapter examines contemporary comedies about the average Italian man, the *italiano medio*, in crisis. These popular films usually depict the thirty- or forty-something male professional who is suffering from anxiety relating to paternity, maturity, ageing, or monogamy (often all of these issues are addressed through multiple overlapping storylines). The corpus of films I am working with includes (but is not restricted to) the following: *Posti in piedi in paradiso* (Verdone, 2012), *Baciami ancora* (Muccino, 2010), *Scusa ma ti voglio sposare* (Moccia, 2010), *Maschi contro femmine* (Brizzi, 2010), *Femmine contro maschi* (Brizzi, 2011), *Amore, bugie e calcetto* (Love, Soccer, and Other Catastrophes; Lucini, 2008), *Immaturi* (The Immature; Genovese, 2011), and *Solo un padre* (Just a Father; Lucini, 2008), several of which share directors, writers, and/or stars. This analysis of fragile masculinity also depends upon a study of the function of music and soundtrack as melodramatic commentary on and mediation of narratives of "victimized" men, focusing particularly on the reuse of Frankie Valli's song "Can't Take My Eyes Off You" to soundtrack privileged moments of homosocial bonding. Finally, I argue that what is elided in these narratives is ethnicity: with the exception of films like *Bianco e nero* (Black and White; Comencini, 2008), *Lezioni di cioccolato* (Chocolate Lessons; Cupellini, 2007), and *Lezioni di cioccolato 2* (Chocolate Lessons 2; Federici, 2011) in contemporary comedies nonwhite masculinity appears only very occasionally in order to shore up white Italian masculinity and to restore it to its central place in Italian society. The chapter concludes by arguing that these comedic narratives of crisis serve to remind us that crisis itself is the privilege of the white middle-class male, and that by deploying the familiar trope of the family as synecdoche of the nation the films reassuringly reconstitute Italian masculinity as central.

Some difficulties immediately present themselves in talking about these films as comedies, not least that of genre definition: comedy is notoriously hard to define as a genre, and as Neale and Krutnik (1990) note, "Perhaps the most striking thing about comedy is the immense variety and range of its forms." They conclude that "any single definition of comedy, or any definition of comedy based on a single criterion, is bound to be insufficient and therefore unsatisfactory" (10). Given its ubiquity in cinema and its appearance as an element in a wide array of other genres, including more serious ones, we might do better to refer to comedy as a "mode," as Geoff King does, "a manner of presentation" (2002: 2).[1] The films I am looking at are, for the most part, *film a episodi* (episodic films), films with interlocking plotlines that link characters together, or *film corali*, choral films with a large cast, and are therefore also characterized by a multiple audience address. De Pascalis argues that the "film a episodi" (2012: 162), which has a long history in Italy, with classic examples from *commedia all'italiana* such as Risi's *I mostri* (Opiate '67; 1963) has transformed, with the *Manuale d'amore* trilogy, into what she calls the "choral romantic comedy," influenced by international films such as *Love, Actually* (Curtis, 2003) and *Valentine's Day* (Marshall, 2010). Although romance is present in all of these films, they are not conventional boy-meets-girl rom-coms, which is a subgenre that Italy does not produce in any quantity[2]; Kathleen Rowe argues that the rom-com "demands a place for women in the narrative" (1995: 102), and as we will see, that place is not assigned in these films. Despite their devotion to the maintenance of the homosocial bond, such films are not even what Tamar Jeffers McDonald (2009) has termed "homme-coms," referring to scatological bromances such as the films of Judd Apatow. Again, Italian mainstream comedy tends to shy away from that bodily focus in the gross-out vein, with the exception of the *cinepanettone*. However, I would argue that these Italian comedies offer much space for what Rowe calls the "melodramatized man" (1995: 196), the male comedy protagonist who "appropriates female suffering in the service of a beleaguered masculinity."[3] Ultimately, I will argue, this emphasis on male suffering in these narratives works to recenter white, heterosexual masculinity as normative.

Most of these films share a unity of style and tone, including similar poster art and a relatively uniform visual style and set design, with a color palette consisting mainly of fresh whites and bright primary colors. The repetitive formulae of the films clearly speak to Italian audiences: Casetti and Salvemini's 2007 industrial and market analysis of recent Italian cinema, as we saw in the last chapter, argued that

the indigenous film industry was in relatively rude health, and that in fact "Italian cinema seems to be blooming in this new era," thanks largely to Italian-made comedies. In fact, they argue convincingly that comedy ought to be considered Italy's "national" cinematic genre, based both on its commercial popularity, and on its ability to "touch on themes that are particular to and very close to the culture" (25). It should also be borne in mind that most of these comedies are not exported and are viewed strictly within Italy: Medhurst (2007) sums up "inexportable" comedies thus:

> centred on favourite performers who tended to portray either recurring, stereotyped figures or elaborated versions of their own already established personas [. . .] which were aesthetically unambitious in terms of cinematic technique, though they often showcased very talented performances; which were aimed squarely at popular, often regional tastes, and were indifferent to the negative comments of critics; and in which the role of the director was so minimal as to preclude any chance of these films being hailed by critical discourse as recuperable for "auteur" cinema. (205)[4]

As further proof of the popularity of Italian comedy, a study of young Italian spectators in 2008 found that both male and female viewers declared their favorite genre to be "comic films starring Italian actors."[5] Recent reports also confirm that Italian cinema's ability to hold its own at the domestic box-office is largely due to films that "have satisfied the tastes of the public."[6] Of the 30 top-grossing Italian films between 2010 and 2012, all but one can be described as comedies.[7] The array of male stars who populate these films is fairly repetitive, and includes actors such as Claudio Bisio, Fabio De Luigi, Raoul Bova, and many supporting players, including several stars who are not primarily associated with comedy such as Pierfrancesco Favino, who stars in *Posti in piedi in paradiso* and *Baciami ancora*, but who is probably better known for more serious roles, such as his performance as crime boss Libanese in *Romanzo criminale* (Placido, 2005), or as the corrupt cop in *A.C.A.B* (Sollima, 2012).[8] The popularity of these stars emphasizes that they offer audiences what "local stars" provide, that is, "reflections of the known and close at hand, typologies of the contingent" (Babington 2001: 10).

The choral nature of the films, with protagonists often from different generations, clearly permits a multiple address in generational terms, and the use of nostalgia in films like *Immaturi* and its sequel *Immaturi: il viaggio* (The Immature: the Holiday; Genovese, 2012), with their imagined returns to high school exams of the late 1980s also

inscribes such an address. In terms of a gendered address, particular stars and pin-ups, both male and female, clearly target sectors of the audience, although De Pascalis is correct to note the "averageness" of physical appearance generally on display[9]; in addition, the films' frequent recourse to plots involving the battle of the sexes situate audience members firmly in gender terms and deliver well-rehearsed gender commonplaces. The purported "averageness" of the Italians on the screen and the address to a national audience elide the fact that the films are offering opportunities for spectatorial recognition that are heavily class-based (the white collar managerial middle class is most often the subject), and racially marked (whiteness is proposed as universal and taken for granted, and ethnic minority characters are exceptional and comically ancillary, as we will see).

Despite their popularity, these films, and indeed recent Italian comedy more generally (with the exception of the *cinepanettone*), have been more or less critically ignored.[10] Indeed, apart from *commedia all'italiana*, critically redeemed by its connections to neorealism and its perceived function of social critique, Italian comedy in general has attracted relatively little discussion until very recently, and has tended to be read as both homogeneous and conservative. Gianni Canova argued in 1999 that contemporary Italian comedy, in what he saw as its vulgar monotony, exercised "a real kind of colonial domination over the public's preferences and the formation of its taste" (10), and that its hegemony in Italy served only to "canonize the defects of the *italiano medio*." He concluded memorably that "with its upbeat and consolatory realism, comedy has been the sausage-grinder of our cinema." However, rather than being seen as merely consolatory and reactionary, comedy has also been read influentially by Karnick and Jenkins as "allowing a culture to negotiate [...] both commonly shared values and the possibility of change in response to competing desires and needs" (1995: 12). It is in this context, I would argue, that it becomes urgent to look at the discursive work that comedy does in Italian culture: here I draw upon Andy Medhurst's argument that comedy focuses on the "binding and marking of symbolic boundaries" (2007: 18), working ceaselessly to "draw lines of difference and exclusion" (19). If discussions of *commedia all'italiana* have often been dominated by a "reflectionist" critical model, whereby the films merely reflect and describe social change, genre theory can help us understand and think through the ways in which genres participate in and mediate social change, and shape behavior[11]; so rather than mirroring change, genres such as comedy are "competing, at different moments in history, to become the most relevant ways of visualising

given aspects of life" (Deleyto 2009: 13). Thus, rather than a straightforward ideological critique, such as that employed by William Hope (2010), whereby films are judged according to the progressive or retrogressive portrait of gender relations that they supply, I am interpreting these films as texts that evoke a generic "world," that is, in Ryall's terms, "a particular configuration of 'fictional reality' with its own rules of behaviour, its particular fictional trajectories, its distinctive visual surface, its overall verisimilitude or structure of plausibility" (1998: 336). This conception of the fictional or generic world is helpful in dealing with this body of markedly similar films, all of which are anchored in a recognizable, if aspirational bourgeois (domestic) setting. As Ryall argues, questions of generic definition (or ideological correctness) become less important than the question of "what is/are the world/worlds invoked by aspects of this film which will enable it to be situated and understood, its narrative trajectory anticipated, its characters constructed, and so on?" To that end, these films are situating spectators within a particular ideological framework, one in which the "gender war" is a familiar device for playing on commonsense notions of gender difference; these fictional worlds are understood by spectators as both fantastical and as plausible, in Ryall's sense.

Through its negotiation and mediation of contemporary anxieties around masculinity, comedy calls into question and makes visible seemingly natural and invisible categories such as whiteness, middle-class belonging, and sexual difference itself. The anxieties addressed in the films relate to a cultural understanding of masculinity as "a new sensitive surface, a problematized space" (Matthews 2001: 100), which can be addressed through the lens and license of comedic masculinity. The first of these overlapping and intersecting anxieties I will examine is masculinity in a time of economic crisis. The social function of contemporary Italian comedy was validated in 2009 by Italian president Giorgio Napolitano, who delivered an address to cinema professionals in which he emphasized the importance of comedy in times of economic and social crisis: "In times of crisis the rebirth of Italian comedy can help us to smile at ourselves and to face tomorrow with a smile: that is not nothing" (quoted in Morgoglione 2009: 34).

Homo oeconomicus: Economic Crisis and Homosocial Spaces

Responses to the economic crisis are depicted strikingly in Carlo Verdone's *Posti in piedi in paradiso*, which took €10m at the box office; the film was released in March 2012, and attracted wide critical

praise in Italy for its perceived response to the current recession there and elsewhere. The plot involves three Roman men: Ulisse (Carlo Verdone), who runs an unsuccessful record shop; Fulvio (Pierfrancesco Favino), a film critic reduced to writing gossip columns; and Domenico (Marco Giallini), who works for an estate agency, but supplements his income by working as a gigolo for middle-aged female clients. All three are reduced to near-bankruptcy by the financial demands of their ex-wives, and the comic core of the film is their reluctant decision to cohabit in order to save money. The film combines moments of broad farce (Domenico takes an overdose of Viagra, Fulvio and Ulisse break into the apartment of one of Domenico's clients to rob her while Domenico is forced to make the client undertake a series of absurd S/M practices to distract her) with melancholic reflection on the degraded state of current Italian masculinities. Verdone himself describes the film as a response to a "social emergency," that is, not just the current economic crisis, but the particular situation of divorced or separated men who find it difficult to maintain payments for the upkeep of their children as well as paying for their own accommodation.[12] Alberto Crespi agreed, calling the film "the true comedy about the crisis," and "a terribly sad, desperate film" (2012: 42). The film fits into a wave of films in a more tragic key, in which the male protagonist is forced, by the death or absence of his wife, to become a single parent.[13] These will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, but it is notable that in this film, as well as in *Baciami ancora* and *Scusa ma ti voglio sposare* straitened economic and personal situations lead to male cohabitation and the creation of a temporary "homosocial paradise"; the homosocial paradise is a space where men can regress to a state of play, free from the nagging of their wives: it relies on what Robert Walser calls the "exscription of the feminine" (1993: 110), or "the total denial of gender anxieties through the articulation of fantastic worlds without women." However, these worlds are constantly under threat from the risk of feminization, as we will see. In *Amore, bugie e calcetto* Filippo Nigro's character offers to become a house-husband in response to his wife's ambition to return to work, and in both that film and *Femmine contro maschi* (Fausto Brizzi, 2011) the male bonding group, which meets at the bar, the football ground, or the band rehearsal room, provides the only respite from domestic and workplace troubles, while also indicating a failure of maturity. In the words of Hanke (1998: 82), popular comedy often seems to showcase such "anxiety about further dissolving the boundaries between men's and women's spaces."

In these environments white masculinity can be effectively shored up against the real threat, which is not the economic crisis, but the inroads made by punitive mother-wives who are intent on getting men to grow up. So, for example, in *Femmine contro maschi* the male protagonist, Piero (Emilio Solfrizzi), an ardent Juventus fan, is "rebooted" by his wife (played by Luciana Littizzetto) after he suffers amnesia, by being told by her that he hates football, and being deprived of his football-watching. De Pascalis has aptly commented upon Brizzi's "essentialist vision of sexual difference, linked to biology" (2012: 170) (as one character notes, "women don't understand football, only San Remo" [a popular televised musical contest]).[14] Soccer is obviously a key space for the maintenance of the homosocial (as in *Amore, bugie e calcetto*) and the childlike—in *Femmine contro maschi* another protagonist, Rocco (Ficarra), is dumped by his nagging girlfriend because of his love of Panini stickers and playing in a Beatles tribute band. Her scathing words when she, a teacher in the school in which he works as a janitor, catches him playing with his stickers, "When are you going to grow up? I'm going to get you sacked," makes evident the dynamic of power and emasculation at play.[15] The resolution, of course, sees her attend one of his gigs in amused resignation—clearly, like Bridget Jones, the male protagonists of Italian comedy are just looking for someone who will love them "the way they are." The value of play as "natural and innocent" (King 2002: 87) is constantly endorsed by the films, although it is contested by the heterosexual couples. Rocco's girlfriend is described as "arid" as she is unable to enjoy play and is consumed by work, which of course is symptomatic of the films' general suspicion of the career woman.[16] With their seemingly contradictory emphases on both play and the ultimate necessity of maturation, the films suggest, in King's terms, that male characters can "indulge some of the pleasures of the pre-Oedipal while asserting the ultimate necessity of the Oedipal" (2002: 86).

A film like *Posti in piedi* can be read symptomatically, though, in relation to what it is unable to say: the repressed of Verdone's text is, first, homosexuality, always lurking as a menace in Italian films that revolve around the cementing of the homosocial bond. Sergio Rigoletto has argued in relation to the 1960s *commedia all'italiana*, which often focus on male pairs or groups, that "in order to continue to appear as inclusive and universal the trope of the *italiano medio* must reassert its heterosexuality as normal, time after time" (2010: 41). In order to do this, as Rigoletto points out, "clear-cut abjections

of homosexuality" are needed (44), and to this end functions the character of the rather camp friend of Verdone's love interest, whose only role at the party the three men attend is to roll his eyes and constantly cross his legs in outrage at their behavior and to announce that he will only marry "when we get the green light."[17]

The threat of feminization is everywhere for the men: Fulvio complains that he has been downgraded from "respected critic" (author of the book *Mistica dell'immagine nel nuovo cinema asiatico* [Mysticism of the Image in New Asian Cinema]) to gossip columnist. At the beginning of the film he is living in a convent, given a strict curfew by the mother superior, and is reduced to dating an aspiring soap-opera actress who is of course superficial and uncultured. Domenico's work as a gigolo embarrasses him, particularly as the women are middle-aged and he has to resort to Viagra to satisfy them all. Ulisse is the only one who avoids this, partly through his music geekery and his Jim Morrison fandom (the plot device through which he saves his shop, selling off the belt of Jim Morrison he has been keeping for years, positions him neatly both as baby boomer ex-groover and as Everyman). Alberto Crespi (2012), writing in the left-wing paper *L'Unità*, anticipates some feminist objections to the film:

> We can already hear the post-feminist objections: what about the mothers? They don't come out of it well, and Verdone will have to expect, unfortunately, some accusations of male chauvinism. He should console himself by thinking that those accusations will come from people who don't watch films, or who watch them but don't understand them, because the men of *Posti in piedi in paradiso* are three sadsacks, victims of their feelings and of globalization. Nothing about them screams "macho," not least their use of Viagra. (42)

The argument that the exclusion of women, or their status as the butt of jokes (literally, in the case of Domenico's daughter, who features in a running gag about her thong underwear), is negated or compensated for by the men's patheticness is interesting. Verdone clearly agrees, referring to the trio as "poor beggars" (Ugolini 2012). The deployment of masculine crisis as a preemptive defense against accusations of sexism illustrates how the discourse of crisis functions to direct attention onto allegedly failing masculinity, and to carve out a new emotional space for it.

Verdone's status, made clear in nearly all the Italian reviews, is now that of national treasure and elder statesman of comedy: it is notable

that in an early scene, discussing rare bootleg vinyl with a male friend in the record shop, the two are interrupted by a middle-aged woman asking for a cheesy compilation CD of Festivalbar (a long-running national pop song competition). Ulisse's sardonic response to her, that she should try a motorway service station shop, is greeted with giggles by his friend and with annoyance by the woman. The shoring up of male friendship happens here explicitly at the expense of the middle-aged woman, perhaps the most abject category of Italian comedy (tellingly both *Solo un padre* and *Maschi contro femmine* use cosmetic surgery to register anxieties about mature women's control of their sexuality and sex appeal).[18] Ultimately, *Posti in piedi* tells us that this is comedy whose popular appeal is located in its deployment of notions of cult fandom, perceived as masculine territory, even as Verdone's film is being watched and enjoyed by a broad audience. The female audience is here being invited, presumably, both to enjoy the spectacle of male misery and to appreciate the reassertion of gender boundaries that these and similar films provide.

The economic crisis is therefore revealed to be a pretext for the escape from punitive women: in *Posti in piedi in paradiso*, the indignities of sharing a (not-very-luxurious) flat are preferable to enduring the nagging of ex-wives (those of Ulisse and Domenico appear only to ask them for money or to complain) or their depression—Fulvio's ex-wife's postnatal depression pushed him into the affair that destroyed his marriage and he describes her as "a woman ruined by post-partum depression." Likewise, in *Baciami ancora* Paolo (Claudio Santamaria) relapses into depression, which he blames on his girlfriend, who becomes a kind of mother-wife (he is also living with his mother who is unable to help him). The thankless character of Livia (Sabrina Impacciatore), who in the first film, *L'ultimo bacio* (The Last Kiss; Muccino, 2001), was the nagging, scolding, and unappreciated wife of Paolo's friend Adriano (Giorgio Pasotti) and mother of his child, is now the nagging and scolding girlfriend of Paolo, attempting to help him through his depression, but unable to trust him with her son. The following exchange between them sums up the dynamic of mothering that these man-children attract or demand: to Livia's statement to Paolo after he has stopped looking after himself and taking his medication that "I want you to become a trustworthy person," he angrily responds, "If you took care of me I'd be okay." As Nicole Matthews points out, "Responsibility is feminised in common-sense culture" (2001: 113), and as we will see, this presents particular problems for comic discourses around paternity.

Paternity

In *Scusa ma ti voglio sposare* comic scenes of the cohabiting men baby-proofing the house for their neurotic friend who is a single father recall the homosocial high jinks of *Three Men and a Baby* (Nimoy, 1987). Lucy Fischer discussed *Three Men and a Baby* in terms of its deflection of the "spectre of male motherhood" (1991: 69) and the male appropriation of feminine roles.[19] Likewise *Amore, bugie e calcetto* features a father who decides to stay at home and finds his masculinity disintegrating: he is jokingly called a "housewife in crisis" by his wife, to which he replies with a succinct "fuck off," and he also asks her nervously if he might return to part-time work once their baby gets a nursery place. He attempts to learn what is supposedly natural for women, and goes to a meeting of the group *Uomini Casalinghi* ("Male Househusbands"), and asks housewives for advice in the supermarket on which product to buy.[20] In *Solo un padre* the widowed father is mockingly addressed as "mamma" by his mates (and also has to chat with mothers, who pityingly call him "poor thing"). In the contemporary context, as we will see in the next chapter, Italian men actually enjoy more privileges than ever before, including custodial rights, and exercise greater hands-on parenting, but simultaneously, the role of the male carer is racked with anxiety. This taps into a widespread sociological discourse in Italy around the figure of the *mamma*, the male "mamma," or the *padre materno* ("maternal father")—and cultural representations fail to acknowledge the problematic nature of such a term, which, rather than permitting a reconsideration of gender categories and roles, once again invokes the specter of male feminization.

I will address in more detail the prevalence of the single father, and of the "evacuation of the mother" (Harwood 1997: 102–23) in contemporary Italian cinema in the next chapter, but here I would like to note the uncertainty of tone around these comic representations: while in *Posti in piedi* Ulisse is redeemed by the love of his adult daughter, and even Domenico manages to establish some sort of bond with his children by the end, for fathers of infants there is more ambivalence. In *Scusa ma ti voglio sposare* Enrico (Luca Angeletti) is labeled an imbecile by his mates as, after being abandoned by his wife and left with their baby, his excessive devotion to the child provokes mirth and suspicion, as his attention to the baby is read as neurosis ("I've never seen a parent more neurotic than him," comments one) and his baby voice is ridiculed ("He's gone crazy, he only talks in this annoying cutesy voice") (figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 The neurotic father is regarded with suspicion by his friends in *Scusa ma ti voglio sposare*

The character can only be recuperated into traditional masculinity by forming a romantic relationship with the baby's young nanny. In *Baciami ancora*, the marriage of Marco (Pierfrancesco Favino) is ruined by his obsession with having a child, and yet the film ends with him happy to parent the child that his wife is giving birth to, a product of her short-lived fling with another man, despite his hysteria throughout the film.[21] The agreement to parent another man's child also marks the ending of *Amore, bugie e calcetto*, when Piero (Andrea De Rosa) decides to take responsibility for the baby fathered by his friend Adam (Andrea Bosca) with Piero's girlfriend. Matthews argues that films representing nonbiological fathers "can address every man as a father" (2001: 108) and also work to suggest that while "conception and motherhood is an easy option for women [...] fatherhood is a non-biological matter, laden with difficulty and responsibility" (106).[22]

The child, or the idea of the child and of fatherhood, is always presented as the solution, despite everything, as at the end of *Amore, bugie e calcetto*, when Lele and his wife (Claudia Pandolfi), having endured the near-breakdown of their marriage after her return to work and Lele's adoption of the caregiver role, discover she is again pregnant and embrace the news. Likewise, in a film like *Immaturi*, in which paternal responsibility is opposed to the pleasures of group nostalgia, Raoul Bova's character ultimately accepts his girlfriend's pregnancy as a necessary step in his maturity, even though the character is described, at thirty-eight, as a "young father," and thus as retaining

the crucial link with childhood and the life of the peer group. If forty, according to Stefano Accorsi's character in *Baciami ancora*, is "the age of maturity," the age at which Italian men must reluctantly grow up, the films depict them as being constantly pulled back toward the pleasure of youth. *L'ultimo bacio* ended with Accorsi's character deciding to settle down with his girlfriend after the birth of their child, seemingly a decisive moment, but the second film shows him pulled back into the peer group and that relationship over, with fatherhood not having done the trick of catapulting him instantly into maturity. The lure of the past and of play is often too strong: in *Amore bugie e calcetto*, the finale is a five-a-side match against a team called "Old Boys" featuring ex-professional footballers such as 1990 World Cup hero Totò Schillaci and others. Our protagonists, the "old boys" of Italian cinema, put up a valiant fight, but get annihilated once the real Old Boys decide to turn on the style.

Thus regression and nostalgia are linked, and the aural pleasures of nostalgia are on display in many of these films: specifically, in *Immaturi: il viaggio*, Luca Bizzarri's character hosts a radio show called "Vorrei tornare" (I'd Like to Go Back) in which callers ring in and name the time or place to which they would most like to return. Bizzarri's opening monologue explicitly situates this nostalgia in the 1980s: "It was the '80s: Ustica, and the Bologna massacre, the murder of John Lennon and the death of Bob Marley, Licio Gelli and P2, but also *Perestroika* and *Solidarność*, *Thriller* and *The Wall*, the World Cup in Spain and Nelson Mandela, the end of Pinochet and Noriega" accompanied by a version of Blondie's "Call Me."[23] The monologue fits into the trend for nostalgia and 1980s revivalism in Italian cinema, popularized particularly by Brizzi's *Notte prima degli esami*, discussed in the previous chapter.[24] Renga (forthcoming) in her analysis of *Romanzo criminale* as "tainted heritage" notes how that film's admixture of music, fashion, spectacular Italian settings, and crime "seals over the traumatic ruptures and breaks" (Kaplan 2001: 203) of the *anni di piombo*"; likewise here the Bologna bombing and Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, the mysterious 1981 Ustica plane crash and Bob Marley are equally freighted with nostalgia.[25]

Can't Take My Eyes Off You: Music, Melodrama, and the Hysterical Man

These homosocial bonds—the usual uncertain mixing of homosocial longing and homophobic panic—are cemented through music in suggestive ways. Particularly interesting is the use of Frankie Valli's

1967 hit song *Can't Take My Eyes Off You*, famously used in Cimino's *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and reused in *I laureati* (The Graduates; Pieraccioni, 1995) and *Baciamia ancora*. The song is used in *Baciami ancora* as a soundtrack to the reunion of the male bonding group, as the scene explicitly comments on and anticipates the issues of mental illness, anxiety about paternity, and ageing. First, as the five friends are reunited at Paolo's house for the first time in ten years, a sound bridge of the song takes us from the maternal scene (a shot of Paolo's mother's worried face as the men leave, and Marco reassuring her that they will look after Paolo) via an abrupt cut to the men in Marco's car, singing along to the song which is on the car radio. However, it is clear that, although Paolo and Alberto are singing along lustily, and the others are nodding along and grinning, Paolo's investment in the song is excessive. He shouts the words, pushes the seats in front of him, and grabs at Adriano and Marco in the front seats even as they push him away, emphasized by the frontally positioned camera that gives an intimate, bordering on claustrophobic, feel to the interaction. The fragility of the moment of homosocial pleasure is demonstrated when Adriano playfully slaps Paolo and asks him, "So are you okay?" Paolo's response, its manic delivery suggestive of his precarious emotional state, which outlines how he has now found a doctor who is giving him "the right pills" unlike his last one who told him he was schizophrenic, makes the other four men noticeably uncomfortable; Paolo's joking conclusion, "Your mother's a schizophrenic!" associates his mental illness with the maternal, and reminds us of his failure of maturity, still living with his mother at forty. The wincing reaction of Carlo (Stefano Accorsi), seemingly the most stable of the guys, settled with his child and a partner, testifies to this failure.

The scene, however, positions itself in a homosocial genealogy, going back, in Italian cinema, to *I laureati* (cowritten by Giovanni Veronesi), another comedy about a homosocial paradise, in which four men share a flat in Florence and attempt to negotiate monogamy and maturity.[26] In the film excessive male emotion is both ubiquitous and disturbing: when the grandmother of Rocco (Rocco Papaleo) dies he lapses into uncontrollable weeping, and in order to help overcome his grief his friends accompany him to a pizzeria. Leonardo (Pieraccioni) offers to lighten the mood as his friend stares disconsolately into space. As "Can't Take My Eyes Off You" plays diegetically in the pizzeria, Leonardo makes an offer: "I'll pay this evening. But I don't mean I'm paying the bill, eh? I'm offering myself as payment." He turns up the volume on the restaurant's stereo and begins to dance to the song, in an awkward and comedic fashion. After a moment in which the entire

restaurant gazes at him in wonder, a couple get up and join him, and he then pulls his two friends up. Almost immediately the entire restaurant is dancing, and Pieraccioni's sacrifice of himself has achieved group cohesion. Although the pretext of the dancing is heterosexual couple-dom (both of his friends dance with women), the scene ends with Rocco ecstatically embracing Leonardo. Leonardo's dialogue with the waiter as he turns up the volume ("I've done it a few times before. It works really well") suggests the ritual quality of the dance, although the comic nature of the display works to disavow the spectacle of the male dancing for other men.[27]

Ramsay Burt argues that "dance is an area in which some of the holes in the construction of male identity can sometimes be revealed" (1995: 13), and if we look at the ur-scene of this in *The Deer Hunter* (Cimino, 1978), the master male melodrama, there are instructive parallels. The famous scene depicts the characters, Nick, Mike, Stan, Stevie, and Axel, played by Christopher Walken, Robert De Niro, John Cazale, John Savage, and Chuck Aspegren, drinking and playing pool in the bar in their Pennsylvania steel town, as they wait for Stevie's wedding, and for their departure for Vietnam. As "Can't Take My Eyes Off You" plays diegetically on the jukebox, the men play pool and sing along, with Walken's character executing some dance moves. As the chorus builds the men gather together to sing along lustily in unabashed homosocial pleasure (Stevie is even kissed by the bar chef John). They are interrupted by Stevie's mother, who irrupts into the bar and drags him furiously away to prepare for his wedding; as he is led from the bar three of the men serenade him with open arms to the line "I wanna hold you so much." Again, the comic disavowal of emotion, and the scapegoating of the middle-aged woman who spoils the homosocial paradise, do not lessen the affective power of this moment. Here, dance (and affective, bodily engagement with music) are ways of "transcending narrowly masculine ways of being in the world" (Gard 2006: 204). In relation to the *Deer Hunter* scene, Gledhill argues that the female spectator's "search for recognition through the central players in their more nuanced performance of gesture, body movement, behavioural traits, 'grain of voice,' turns of phrase, etc., both holds masculinity up to view while also aestheticizing it" (1995: 80). Ian Inglis has meanwhile, uncontroversially I think, read this use of the song as a "vehicle through which group cohesion can be ritually maintained in the face of potential and serious invasions" (2005: 67). Of course the incipient invasion in *The Deer Hunter* is the trauma of Vietnam, whereas in the Italian films the trauma is simply that of being an Italian man at the turn of the century.

All three scenes stage "moments of gendered exclusion" (Gledhill 1995: 79): *Baciami ancora* and *I laureati* are more or less self-conscious in their acknowledgment of the debt to Cimino's film, and the incorporation of male melodrama into comedy. All three scenes use music to accommodate the excessive emotion that melodrama, and in particular, male melodrama, generates. The weight of unspoken affection, the intensity of the homosocial bond that both bespeaks and disavows homosexual desires, accords with Nowell-Smith's classic reading of melodrama:

> The laying out of the problems "realistically" [in melodrama] always allows for the generating of an excess that cannot be accommodated. The more the plots press towards a resolution the harder it is to accommodate the excess. What is characteristic of the melodrama [. . .] is the way the excess is siphoned off. The undischarged emotion which cannot be accommodated within the action [. . .] is traditionally expressed in the music, and in the case of film, in certain elements of the mise-en-scène. That is to say, music and mise-en-scène do not just heighten the emotionality of an element of the action: to some extent they substitute for it. (1977: 117)

If for Nowell-Smith, "'excess' acts as a safety valve, siphoning off the ideological contradictions that cannot be resolved in the narrative of the melodrama" (Mercer and Shingler 2004: 24) his Freudian reading of melodrama also acutely observes the connection between the somatic manifestation of hysteria and the melodramatic text's expression of its own "unaccommodated excess."[28] The textual disturbance caused by these moments of music and spectacle maps onto the somatic disturbances that masculinity experiences in these films. As we saw in *Baciami ancora*, the Frankie Valli song formed the background to the out-of-control ramblings of Paolo: as the music fades and the scene cuts to the five men drinking outside, Paolo continues his rant ("I see how awful the world is, it depresses me and I want to kill myself"). Paolo's out-of-controlness (he threatens to jump off a high wall during this scene, and the narrative mounts toward his suicide) makes him, however, only the most egregiously unstable character in this film, and indeed, in all the films under examination here. The hysterical man is literally all over the place in these films: hysteria and panic attacks are widely depicted and *Baciami ancora* shows its male characters uncontrollably weeping, shouting, and suffering. The film also explicitly shows how the effects of gender anxieties are often somatic: Carlo's fainting fits, initially diagnosed as due to a brain cyst, and which endanger his fitness for the workplace, are eventually

attributed by his doctor to stress. The doctor, however, acknowledges that the cause is mysterious, alluding to the complex processes of the (male) body, and laughing at Carlo's desire for a "medical explanation": "Medical science can only take us so far. We're connected by a very fragile thread. That's life." In a similar vein the anxious father Flavio in *Scusa ma ti voglio sposare* suffers from panic attacks, as does Silvio Orlando's character in Brizzi's *Ex* (2009).

The specter of physical decay also hangs over all these men: in *Posti in piedi* when we meet Ulisse he is suffering from arthritis in his shoulder, and Domenico has a heart attack after taking too much Viagra. This plot point is also present in *Amore, bugie e calcetto*, when Vittorio (Claudio Bisio) has a heart attack after taking Viagra and other pills, both to satisfy his younger lover and to keep up with his young teammates on the football pitch; similarly, in *Maschi contro femmine*, Diego's erectile dysfunction is caused by stress ("Your penis...is in a very deep coma," pronounces the female urologist) and can only be "cured" by romantic love. Danielle Hipkins has noted how plots focused on "technologies of sexiness" for men are addressing men's sexual performance rather than appearance: "The question of expert or medical intervention is crucial to the 'technology of sexiness' and the boundary between active bodies and passive ones becomes dangerously blurred."[29] This anxiety about technological intervention into sex and reproduction can also be seen in the plots about paternity in which infertility becomes a topic that preoccupies men: for example, Marco in *Baciami ancora* is placed in a comic scenario in which he has to produce sperm for testing, a scenario that also appears in Paolo Virzì's *Tutti i santi giorni* (Every Blessed Day; 2012) to similarly comic effect.

So the hysterical man is given his narrative space and place in contemporary Italian cinema, in a move that might seem to contradict the commonsense association of hysteria with the female subject. In fact Elaine Showalter has discussed the documentation of male hysteria since the seventeenth century, and noted how "hysteria in men has always been regarded as a shameful, 'effeminate' disorder" (1993: 289).[30] If the male hysteric has historically been seen as "unmanly, womanish or homosexual," the characters in Italian comedies are to be sympathized with, as they suffer and search for their happy endings. Indeed, their hysterical symptoms and failing bodies testify to the perceived effects of their inability to adapt to the reversal of gender norms. In this context, Showalter has argued that hysteria is historically a response to powerlessness (305), and this would appear to be an example of what Kimmel (2010: 20) calls the "wind chill factor," in that it doesn't matter what the reality of gender relations is, but how it *feels* to the subjects involved. If a cultural narrative of male victimization has taken hold, then male hysteria can be represented as widespread and seen to naturally "arise from a disturbance of gender" (Micale 2008: 133). Interestingly, the Freudian view that hysteria was more disruptive for men because it took them away from their work (Showalter 1993: 315) resonates with the representations studied here, as the immature male protagonists of Italian cinema flee from responsibility via illness, hysteria, and "feminization." Here the supposed feminization of the workplace and the rise of "affective labor" also comes into play, as many of the films articulate contradictory feelings about what constitutes "real work."[31]

Race and the Work of Impersonation and Feminization

What is elided in these narratives, however, is ethnicity: with the exception of films like *Bianco e nero* and *Lezioni di cioccolato*, in mainstream comedies nonwhite masculinity appears only very occasionally in order to shore up white Italian masculinity and to restore it to its central place in Italian society. The appearances of these minority characters are significant: in *Femmine contro maschi*, the character of Ahmed, who works with Piero at the petrol pump, functions to utter ironic truths about Italians in the face of the casual racism Piero displays.[32] Ahmed is called "Pakistan" by Piero for two years, until the bump on Piero's head reboots his personality and makes him into a decent person. However, in the first scene in which the two men appear, near the beginning of the film, they are arguing over the definition of Italianness: Piero tells Ahmed that "you're guests here," to which Ahmed responds in a slightly over-the-top comedy accent, "But you are coming from Puglia to the north." As Piero argues that now all Italians are the same, regardless of accent or place of origin, Ahmed's reaction is merely to roll his eyes (figure 2.2).[33]

When Piero then goes off in the car with the female client with whom he has been having an affair for three years, the comic climax of the scene is reached: Ahmed shakes his head sadly and mutters balefully, "These Italians." While this use of the foreign character to show up the flaws of Italians is familiar from films such as the Checco Zalone comedy vehicle *Che bella giornata*, the film aligns Ahmed with Piero's wife, as both judge his behavior and endeavor to change him: when Piero's wife's scheme to reformat him has worked, and he has become a considerate, devoted husband who enjoys cooking,

Figure 2.2 Ahmed (Hassani Shapi) and Piero (Emilio Solfrizzi) hash out their differences in *Femmine contro maschi*

giving his wife massages and playing piano, he is finally able to relate to Ahmed. When Ahmed tells him that "in two years you have only ever called me Pakistan," Piero is appalled, and asks, "Was I, by any chance, a bit racist before?" Ahmed's reply implicates Piero's greatest homosocial pleasure—football, and specifically Juventus: "You always said that black and white can only sit next to each other on the Juventus shirt." Piero shakes his head sorrowfully, and the climax of his plot sees Ahmed invited to the football stadium for the first time with Piero and the other guys. Ahmed's integration into the male bonding group occurs simultaneously with Piero's reconciliation with his wife, who uses the big screen at the Stadio Olimpico to make a declaration of love to her husband. The wisdom of the migrant here functions to recenter white Italian masculinity, and to reinscribe Italian heterosexual coupledom and the Italian family as central. The migrant also performs an analogous function, that of what Young calls the "serviceable other" (1995: 284) in the comedy *Nessuno mi può giudicare*, when Hassani Shapi's character gives refuge to Paola Cortellesi's racist boss, and plays an important role in her redemption and her romance with Raoul Bova.

The focus on masculinity and work, as well as masculinity as work, is sharpened in *Lezioni di cioccolato*: this is one of the few films where the world of blue-collar work is depicted, rather than the white-collar managers in crisis who populate Italian comedies. The film stars Luca Argentero as a construction manager who runs a building site in which he cuts corners on safety and materials and employs undocumented

migrant laborers. The plot of the film revolves around the comic process by which Argentero's Mattia has to change places with his Egyptian laborer Kamal, after the latter is injured in a fall on the site. In a desperate attempt to stop Kamal from reporting the site's conditions, Mattia agrees to take his employee's place on a prestigious chocolate-making course, run by Perugina chocolate. The physical transformation of Mattia into Kamal via ten sunbeds in a row and a curly perm is played for comedy (as is the transformation of Italian sex symbol Argentero into an Egyptian man); however, the impersonation of Kamal that Mattia is forced to engage in as he attends the course involves, of course, an adoption of non-Italian values. Kamal praises the value of family, of love, of hard work and sacrifice as opposed to a society of consumption and spectacle, denouncing Italy thus: "This is a backward country. The only people who are respected are the ones who appear on TV." Kamal is prone to uttering sententious pedagogic maxims on the value of work and family life, which Mattia passes off as his own, in the same broken Italian, to impress his Italian lover. The Cure song "Why Can't I Be You?," which plays during the scene of Mattia's physical transformation, acts as a nondiegetic suggestion, which the film seems to regard as too subtle: at the film's end Mattia laments to Kamal, "Why can't I be like you? You have values. Family, children, God, relatives, perfection." Kamal instructs Mattia on masculinity, criticizing his "bad masculinity" and forcing him to cut off his long hair ("Cut off that long hair that makes you look like a woman!").

The logic of impersonation is equally important to the sequel: in the second film Mattia again dresses up as Kamal but this time he is nearly beaten up by racist Italians in the street as he is busking some Arab music. As they shout "Go home! First you take our jobs..." Mattia assures Kamal that he defended the honor of Egyptians, before a quick cut shows him running away shouting in broken Italian "Not Egyptian! Not Egyptian!"[34] Here the impersonation of the migrant, or the attempt to pass as one, is also an appropriation of the migrant's suffering. While appearing to bring white and nonwhite character together, and indicate a slippage between their conditions, it actually reinforces the boundaries between them, as Mattia is able to return to his white identity. However, it also suggests the fragility of that white Italian identity, so envious of the other. O'Leary has made this point about the use of nonwhite characters in the *cinepanettone* films, whose broad and over-the-top portrayal is part of a strategy of what he terms, drawing on the work of Stallybrass and White, "displaced abjection": "These marginal characters clarify, by what they are not, the lineaments

of the normative identity in the *cinepanettone*, but their necessary reappearance in film after film points to the fragility of the identity thereby established" (O'Leary 2012a). So in mainstream comedies the identity of the *italiano medio* must be constantly bolstered by these others, whose narrative position, however, can never be central.

The film's discourse around race and work is even more interesting: the illegal building yard becomes the focus of the film's discussion not of the illegal use of immigrant labor (although low pay, lack of workers' rights and fear of being reported for not having correct papers are all touched on) but of ideas of quality and pride in one's work. When the film begins Mattia is running his building site by cutting corners on raw materials, arguing that nobody will notice if pipes and floorboards are below standard. The counterargument of his foreman, that in thirty years if the building is falling apart it will represent a poor advertisement for their workmanship, is dismissed, as Mattia is concerned only with short-term profit. However, the lessons of Kamal on enjoying the quality of life, and his growing understanding of the hardships of life as a laborer change Mattia: when Kamal tells him the story of how he had to leave Cairo and his patisserie business to support his nephews and nieces, he undergoes a change of heart. This change of heart intersects with the equally sententious pronouncements uttered by Mattia's Italian teacher on the chocolate-making course (played by Neri Marcorè). His views on the need for quality materials and produce, and the luxury of the product being made, are repeated several times, as is the need not to cut corners ("We must not skimp on anything…we are producing moments of ecstasy"). As in *Femmine contro maschi*, the final integration of the migrant accompanies and permits the reconciliation of the heterosexual couple (Mattia and Kamal decide to become partners in a patisserie business, and Mattia and his girlfriend decide to get married). The reconciliation of Italian and non-Italian happens through the production of Mattia and Kamal's winning chocolate recipe, based on an ingenious mixing of Egyptian dates and Perugia nuts. Mattia's reframing as an artisan seems quintessentially Italian, and it is firmly placed in a context of Italian branding and global visibility through the prominent display of the well-known logo of Perugina chocolate throughout the film.[35] The impersonation of Kamal by Mattia, and his co-optation of Kamal's subject position, has allowed him to become a better man, a better lover, a better employer, and a better Italian businessman, as well as expanding his emotional sphere. The emotional labor Mattia puts in to his chocolate making is appropriated from the migrant, and from the Italian woman (both Kamal and Mattia's girlfriend Cecilia [Violante Placido] have a pedagogic function, educating him on the importance of emotion and affect in the workplace). Tellingly, though, both can be sidelined, as it is always Mattia and his journey of self-improvement that is the center of the narrative.

Bianco e nero is one of the few films I am examining that is not episodic or choral, but is a more straightforward rom-com, with pretence to social commentary. O'Healy describes it as a "crowd-pleasing, interracial romance" (2009: 191), differentiating it from the bulk of Italian films dealing with race, which are in the vein of social realism; in the film Carlo (Fabio Volo) meets the Senegalese Nadine (Aïssa Maïga) and begins an affair with her, despite them both being married. Carlo is the odd one out in the quartet of spouses: he is the only one whose job does not place him squarely as an upper middle-class professional (Nadine works at the Senegalese embassy, her husband and Carlo's wife work for a charity promoting Africa, while Carlo repairs computers). The film deals with the difficulties caused to Carlo and Nadine's fledgling relationship not so much by their betrayal of their spouses but by their perceived racial betrayal, which both protagonists' families discuss in disapproval. Perhaps more interesting, from my point of view, is that, as O'Healy notes, "the film is articulated as a typical story of male maturation, focusing on the rather infantile if charming Carlo and his personal encounter with a world that he had never known before" (2009: 192). The emphasis on maturation is strengthened by the casting of Fabio Volo in the lead role: known for his roles as sympathetic Everyman, Volo also, as O'Healy points out, has "a trace of the *inetto*—that quality of ineptitude, which, according to Jacqueline Reich, characterized his more famous predecessor Marcello Mastroianni" (197, n. 40).

The *inetto*, as described by Reich in relation to *commedia all'italiana*, "articulates the traditional binary opposite of the masculine, as it is constructed in Italian culture and society and as it relates to sexuality: the cuckold, the impotent and feminized man" (2004: 9). The tensions inherent in the performative nature of masculinity mean, she argues, that "the Italian man is 'good at being a man' precisely because he masks the *inetto* beneath the performance of hyper-masculinity" (9–10). In the scene that marks the comparison with Mastroianni, Carlo reenacts the famous Trevi fountain scene from Fellini's *La dolce vita:*

> After briefly doubting the possibility of visually transforming the ethnoracial composition of Fellini's famous scene, Carlo scoops up the astonished Nadine in his arms and wades into the fountain, thus pointedly

> substituting the spectacle of her body (which clearly bears the contours of that age-old object of desire, the Black Venus) for that of the blonde, Swedish-American bombshell, Silvia, played by Anita Ekberg. (O'Healy 2009: 193)

However, unlike Mastroianni's character Marcello, who is unable to do anything but gaze at Silvia and whisper "Who are you?," Volo picks up Nadine bodily and throws her into the water joining her in joyful splashing. Having wondered aloud, "A black woman in that scene from the film...it can't work," Carlo then shouts ecstatically as the music builds to a climax and Nadine embraces him in the fountain, "It works! It works!" The music here is significant: Grace Jones's version of the Edith Piaf song "La vie en rose," which is used throughout the film here, comes to its climax, and it is significant that a song by a white woman famously "made over" by a black woman is used. This deliberate intertextual reference signals both the durability of the *inetto* and the normative quality of white masculinity. The female character can be substituted in this representational economy, as she is not seen as a threat but rather as an exotic object of conquest.[36] Carlo freely describes himself as a "loser," and, unlike the others, is ignorant of geopolitics, not even knowing the capital of Senegal. However, it is partly his playful quality that attracts Nadine, who is tired of lectures on the state of Africa from her husband and friends; interestingly, Carlo's wife Elena is a typical Italian nagging wife, telling him off for his unwillingness to accompany her to work events. At the end the *inetto* triumphs—the Italian loser is still preferable to the serious Senegalese husband with his lack of playfulness, or to Nadine's brother-in-law, an inveterate womanizer and upholder of outdated patriarchal values. The white male in crisis still trumps the black man, and his emotionalism and immaturity are seen as positive, and a sign of how deserving of love he is.

Conclusion

The expansion of the domestic role for men, and the incorporation of male "affective labor" into the terms of the gender war is a source of comedy in many of the films examined here, and the very repetitiveness of many of the tropes of that gender war exposes the extent to which they are expressions of unfulfilled desires. The need to shore up fragile Italian masculinity in these films takes place in the domestic space, which is reclaimed by male characters, albeit in highly overdetermined fashion. Comedy, according to Purdie, "involves at once

breaking rules and 'marking' that break, so that correct behaviour is implicitly instated" (quoted in Fullwood 2012: 20) and both the break, and the mark of it, are visible in these texts; the inevitability of heterosexual coupling and the happy endings that conclude these comedies do not disguise the effort of remapping the domestic terrain, or the disquieting aspects of the fantasy of a world without women, which will be explored further in the next chapter.

If the *italiano medio*, that quintessentially Italian staple of mainstream cinema, is a figure whose absurd behavior audiences are invited to both recognize and laugh at, he is also, as Rigoletto argues, a discourse, "a term that is made intelligible and culturally meaningful by reference to its ability to reflect some of the putative attitudes and shortcomings of average Italians" (2010: 33); as such, he acts as a conduit for anxieties about paternity, about maturity, and testifies to the ways in which masculinity, whiteness, and heterosexuality are articulated through each other in Italian cinema. He also occupies a fantasy space prior to a maturity that must inevitably happen, but which is coded as an end or loss. It is this space between fantasy and anxiety, conjuring up the prospect of a world without women and of single fatherhood, that is inhabited by the melodramatic men who are the subject of the next chapter.