

ARTICLES / SAGGI

FREUD AND GIDGET GO TO ROME BUT UNCLE SAM DOESN'T: THE ROMAN FEVER FILMS 1953-1963

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Sommario

Questo articolo si propone di prendere in esame alcuni film di Hollywood, da Roman Holiday a Gidget goes to Rome, che furono realizzati a Roma negli anni della guerra fredda. Tematicamente incentrata sulla generale ambivalenza dei concetti di casa, amore e morte, questa serie della 'febbre romana' conserva tutti i tratti caratteristici della nevrosi romana di cui Sigmund Freud aveva scritto circa mezzo secolo prima. Come nell'esperienza di Freud, i film della 'febbre romana' narrano dell'incontro con la capitale italiana caratterizzato dal tentativo di resistere alla sua seduzione e dall'inevitabile capitolazione finale. Come tante cartoline spedite a casa, questi film offrono anche un punto di vista provocatorio sulle frustrazioni e ansie politiche che contraddistinsero la presenza degli americani in Italia negli anni Cinquanta. Dovendo confrontarsi con la bizantina complessità dello scenario della politica italiana e il ruolo centrale del partito comunista all'interno di esso, l'amministrazione USA basò il suo intervento sull'ignoranza e sulla diretta contrapposizione. Fu lasciato a Gidget e Audrey Hepburn il compito di esplorare e districare le articolate supposizioni della politica americana in quest'aria strategica dell'Europa durante la guerra fredda.

“Hollywood on the Tiber” is now little more than a marketing concept intended to lure tourists to emulate the *dolce vita* days of Rome in the late 50s and early 60s. Undoubtedly, with epic productions such as Martin Scorsese’s *Gangs of New York* (2002) being shot there, *Cinecittà* studios still play their part in Hollywood’s thirst for offshore production. Bumping into the Olsen twins outside McDonalds, however, on their only day off in a two week shoot for *When In Rome* (2001) is hardly the same thrill as spotting Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor in *Alfredo’s* in 63, or cruising with Tennessee Williams in the Borghese Gardens any time after 1947. Gore Vidal, Aldous Huxley, John and Jackie Kennedy, Truman Capote — they were all there, at one time or another, playing a part in the curiously Anglophone international set resident in Rome after the war — drawn by Hollywood money as much as by the traditional delights of Italy. For, in a sense, Hollywood was stuck there. So great were its local profits pouring into the Trevi Fountain, and freezing there in Italian Lire, that the legendary promise to return to Rome was being circumvented altogether and Hollywood could not leave. For Hollywood, the price of recapturing its European distribution market — forty percent of its entire distribution market — was to spend its profits in the countries where they were made (Guback, 1976:403). And so Rome, the capital of Italy and the source of so much of that European profit, became both a centre of Hollywood filmmaking to rival Hollywood and a bastion of glamorous, decadent but slightly sad Hollywood stars and those who fed off them (Bondanella, 2002:68).

Born of necessity rather than convenience, Hollywood on the Tiber and many of its, so-called, runaway productions are often considered to be runaway disasters (Guback, 1976:400-402). *Cleopatra* (1963) stands as a marker of the chaos and insanity, which might prevail when production went offshore and away from the prying eyes of the west coast production

houses and their New York front offices.¹ Nevertheless, in box-office hits like *Roman Holiday* (1953) and *Three Coins in the Fountain* (1954) we can see that being stuck in Rome provided Hollywood with certain advantages. With good weather, cheap studio space and labour, strong local star talent to farm and the obvious artistic and historic values in its locations (Bondanella, 2002:68), Italian production gave Hollywood a great deal in addition to maintaining its local distribution market and doing its pro bono bit for the local tourist trade. Although rarely embracing any of the major currents of European auteur-modernism in this period, Italy-based production also provided Hollywood studios with a down-market quasi art film to further displace the emerging international art cinema product, already impaired in its access to the U.S. via the Hollywood monopoly over home distribution (Guback, 1976:399).

As in the case of *Cleopatra*, it is usually the large-scale ancient world epics such as *Ben Hur* (1959), which have attracted critical attention to Hollywood on the Tiber in the past. There are, however, a number of other films produced in Rome in the 50s and 60s, which tell us a great deal about the phenomenon of the late-Hollywood Roman runaway. Of particular interest here are British, Hollywood and international co-productions such as *Roman Holiday*, *Three Coins*, *Indiscretion of an American Wife* (1954), *It Happened in Rome* (1957), *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* (1961), *Rome Adventure* (1962) and *Gidget Goes to Rome* (1963). In stark contrast to the Roman and Bible epics, these films are set in contemporary Rome. In general they tell the adventures of an American virgin or menopausal tourist immersing herself somewhere between Rome the Eternal city and Rome the hub of the international set. This narrative

¹ See Brodsky, J. & Weiss, N. (1963). See also Wanger, W. & Hyams, J (1963).

is also played out in Venice by a lonely and mature secretary (Katharine Hepburn) in David Lean's *Summertime* (1955) and by two cuckolded Hollywood male-menopausal stars Mario Lanza in *Seven Hills of Rome* (1958) and Kirk Douglas in *Two Weeks in Another Town* (1962). Thematically concerned with a general psycho-sexual ambivalence over notions of home, love and death, this Roman Fever series bears all the hallmarks of the Rome neurosis Sigmund Freud experienced and wrote about half a century earlier.² Like Freud's experience, the Roman Fever films tell of an encounter with the Italian capital that is marked by resistance and unwanted seduction but ultimately, by complete surrender. As postcards sent back home, these films also offer a tantalising perspective on the political frustrations and anxieties that marked the U.S. presence in Italy in the 1950s. Faced with the Byzantine complexities of the Italian political scene and the central place of Italian Communism in that scene, the U.S. administration there settled on ignorance and resistance. It was left up to Gidget and Audrey Hepburn to explore and articulate the more elaborate fantasies of U.S. policy in this highly strategic location during the Cold War.

A traveller's tale

There was nothing new in filmmakers of the 1950s and 1960s concentrating on themes of home, family, repression, sex and death in relation to Rome. The idea of Rome confronting the traveller with her/his own psychosexual conundrums is as old as the city itself. Travellers indulging in the Roman holiday have consistently written up their exploits according to the symptoms of the Roman Fever films. In the twentieth

² I take the term "Roman Fever" films from Edith Wharton's story of the same name (Cahill, 1997:224-237).

century alone foreign visitors and semi-residents as diverse as Edith Wharton, Tennessee Williams, Martin Boyd and Elizabeth Spencer have all rendered the Roman experience as one rich in the pursuit of desire and potent in its ability to bring the sensitive soul to a peaceful accommodation with death.³ One of the most ardent Roman Feverists, and perhaps the most resistant, was Sigmund Freud. His Rome neuroses, born in a strong personal ambivalence about visiting the capital, is possibly the clearest expression of the mental processes of the Rome neurotic, not the least because it is the most ambivalent. Phobic, resistant but in the end completely seduced, Freud's encounter with Rome is very much that of the Roman Fever films. His experience provides us with a useful psychological geography of Roman Fever and a specific history, which might account for its expression in popular culture. Just as ambition, aggression and a deathly eroticism lurked behind Freud's Rome encounter, the Roman Fever films bear similar desires, which tell us a great deal about their potent, but ambivalent, nature.

Clearly Freud had a thing about Italy. In his letters to Wilhelm Fliess between 1897 and 1899 Freud describes a strange beauty and a sense of the perverse throughout Italy, which, creatively, he found enormously stimulating (Masson, 1995:263 & 308). Beyond the place of Italy as a site of inspiration, the letters show the prominence of Italy in his thoughts and dreams during this period, and this is also evident throughout *The Interpretation of Dreams* that he was writing at the same time. More

³ In his memoirs Tennessee Williams nominates Rome as "the only place I'd go to die, if I had any choice" (Williams, 1975: 237). In *Voices*, Frederic Prokosch recalls taking Dylan Thomas to Keats' grave in Rome's Protestant cemetery where Thomas asks to be buried also. Later that day Dylan Thomas says, "I hear the murmuring of the sibyl. That is why one comes to Rome, isn't it? To hear the voice of the sibyl [...] In England it's impossible to hear the truth. But in Rome one grows reconciled. It's the rhythm of antiquity" (Prokosch, 1983:197-8).

privately and largely confined to the Fleiss letters, the relationship between these thoughts about Italy and the progress of his research and his academic promotion is also very clear. Between his trip to Italy in September 1897 and his Vienna letters of November and December the same year, longing for Rome, we have the key letters of September 21, seemingly renouncing his infamous seduction theory, and of October 15, outlining Oedipal desire as a universal event of early childhood (Masson, 1995:264 & 272). A year later he is still longing for Rome, and by March of 1899 he is associating Rome with “the realisation of a secret wish” which perhaps alludes to his hoped-for professorship (Masson, 1995:332 & 347).

As Peter Gay explains, Rome is a highly significant symbol in Freudian thought (Gay, 1995:132-6), and it is hard to pass by Freud’s “deeply neurotic longing” for the Italian capital as the source of both his general fascination with Italy and, more significantly, a fountain of psychoanalysis (Masson, 1995:284). So many royal roads to the Freudian unconscious, it seems, lead to Rome. At the core of Rome as a symbol of the Freudian unconscious is the way it incites a high degree of ambivalence in Freud himself. As the Fleiss letters and the *Interpretation Rome Series* bear out, Freud’s longing for Rome is equally tempered by a phobia and a Semitic loathing for Rome and the Catholic repression and anti-Semitism it represented to him. This ambivalence derives from Freud’s classical education and his particular boyhood worship of the great Cathaginian general and enemy of Rome, Hannibal, whom Freud regarded as a “Semitic hero” (Masson, 1995:284). Like Hannibal, despite his many forays into Italy between 1897 and the end of 1898, Freud could never quite make it to Rome. As in a nightmare, he kept getting nearer Rome but something would always stop him making the final leg of the journey. In *Interpretation* he puts this down to the problem of there being

only one suitable time for him to visit Rome and that this is a time when travel there “must be avoided for reasons of health.” In a 1909 footnote to this phrase he adds that he has since found that with only “a little courage” this problem can be overcome, seemingly emphasising the strength of his original phobia (Freud, 1976:282). Probably in a perverse and self-conscious celebration of his ambivalence, and in memory of his hero Hannibal, Freud got as close as Lake Trasimeno, fifty miles from Rome, in September 1879 but went no further. Like Hannibal himself, having conquered Italy thus far he could not then march on Rome.

Having published *Interpretation* in 1899/1900, however, Freud did eventually break down his own resistance and finally made it to Rome in August/September 1900. He wrote to his wife, Martha, in feverish excitement, “So this is what I’ve been afraid of all these years!” calling Rome “this divine city” and telling her that one particular afternoon had left “impressions off which one will live for years” (Gay, 1995:135). His letter to Fleiss of September 19, however, best sums up his enthusiasm and, one suspects, his relief:

I should write to you about Rome now, but that is difficult. It was overwhelming for me too and, as you know, the fulfillment [sic.] of a long-cherished wish. As such fulfillments are if one has waited too long for them, this one was slightly diminished, yet a high point of my life. But while I was totally and undisturbedly absorbed in antiquity (I could have worshiped the abased and mutilated remnant of the Temple of Minerva near the forum of Nerva), I found I could not freely enjoy the second [the medieval Christian] Rome; the atmosphere troubled me. I found it difficult to tolerate the lie concerning man’s redemption, which raises its

head to high heaven — for I could not cast off the thought of my own misery and all the other misery I know about. [...] I was frugal in my pleasures, though, and did not try to see everything in twelve days. I not only bribed the Trevi [fountain], as everyone does, I also — and I invented this myself — dipped my hand in the Bocca della Vertia at Santa Maria Cosmedin and vowed to return. (Masson, 1995:449)

Given Freud's eventual and enthusiastic embracing of Rome we must ask what was behind the anti-Catholicism and the Semitic protest at the heart of his phobia? Gay highlights the oedipal nature of his desire for Rome hinted at throughout the dream book. Considering Freud's own view of this wish as "a cloak and symbol for a number of other passionate wishes" (Freud, 1976:285), Gay puts this desire and its repression succinctly:

A charged and ambivalent symbol, Rome stood for Freud's most potent concealed erotic, and only slightly less concealed aggressive wishes, and glanced at their secret history. (Gay, 1995:132)

Largely Freud's phobia is his oedipal desire masquerading as (or favouring) the patricidal impulse but concealing the all-important desire for the maternal. Just as Rome, as symbol of power, authority and anti-Semitism had become associated with Freud's manifest and aggressive desires for the authority and recognition of a professorship, Rome would also be associated with the shattering of that masquerade and what it repressed in the oedipal scenario. Once he understood repression in the oedipal relationship and had published this discovery in *Interpretation*, Rome no longer held any terrors for him. Rome moved from being a sign of his repression, and the resulting phobia and neurosis brought on by his feelings of professional outrage and injustice, and became the sign of his

personal and professional triumph in solving the riddle of the Sphinx. By 1914 he could add a new footnote from Livy to *Interpretation* concerning the oracle, “which prophesied that the conquest of Rome would fall to that one of them [the sons of Tarquin] who should first kiss his mother” (Freud, 1976:523). What is more he could do this with confidence because in solving the dilemmas of oedipal desire — he had perhaps seen beyond the simple and somewhat petty will-to-power aspect of desire and had himself embraced the mother which gave him the far more significant conquest over Rome and all she signified. It is against such ideas of resistance, seduction and complete surrender that the Roman Fever films pit themselves and their protagonists. These three notions are manifest in the film through concepts of *Casa* (home), *Amore* (love) and *Morte* (death).

Casa

As a group of films largely dealing with the tourist and expatriate experience, it is not surprising that they exhibit a complex sense of home. Like all tourists these films see the experience of temporary displacement as a chance to think about the truer values of home. This notion is largely driven by the ambivalence over the idea of home as “family” and this is the experience of most of the non-Italian protagonists in these films. Indeed, in all these films, it is the need to escape home and family and to re-negotiate such bonds that is the motivation for the protagonists and the narrative itself. When they consider the problems of cultural difference and estrangement, however, these films reveal a more developed sense of home. Rome, the foreign city, the place where the dilemmas of home are put into perspective, readily becomes Rome the U.S. colony and also Rome as seat of the European-based international set. As the former, it stands as a safe and friendly travel destination for the naive tourist of the

new world. As the latter, it becomes a site of old world sophistication better suited to the more experienced traveller. Rarely, in any of these contexts, is Rome presented as anything more than a literal home for the Romans.

Whether the foreign tourist of these films learns of it in Rome, before leaving Rome or before setting out, his/her literal sense of home is one of oppression. For Princess Ann (Audrey Hepburn) in *Roman Holiday* the pressures of assuming roles, engaging in rituals and paying obedience to the family ideal are given heightened expression in her royal context. Following another stultifying embassy reception and facing the prospect of another day of foreign office enslavement in Rome, Ann responds with an hysterical outburst and a flood of tears and requires a doctor's injection before she will calm down. In *Rome Adventure* Prudence Bell (Suzann Pleshette) is a refugee from the sexual repression which underwrites the entire idea of home in these films and which is contrasted with the more uninhibited expression of love found in Italy. When Prudence, Assistant Librarian at Briarcroft College for Women, is reprimanded before the school board for lending a senior her copy of the proscribed book, *Lovers Must Learn*⁴, she resigns saying, "I'm going to where they really know what love's about—to Italy. *Arrivederci* Briarcroft."

The middle American family stands as, perhaps, the most general and well-meaning site of containment at the source of these Italian adventures. Gidget (Cindy Carol) is not yet college age and so if her father's cheerful, controlling manipulation of his daughter seems more acceptable, it is no less bombastic. In addition to giving her the opportunity to "fly the nest",

⁴ *Rome Adventure* is based on Irving Fineman's novel of the same name.

for Gidget, growing up in Rome in the summer of 1962 will also be about the desire to free herself from the mundane entities centred around the family, the suburbs, the kids and the beach, where Moondoggie “pinned” her in the summer of 61. Fortunately we never meet Maria’s (Maggie McNamara) parents in *Three Coins*, but from her own description of her father’s Indian Museum in the back of his gas station off the highway we can have little doubt about what she is running from.

The domestic and family situations of the more mature Roman travellers in this group of films are more distant from the narrative focus, but perhaps more potent for it. In *Indiscretions* Mary’s (Jennifer Jones) family in Philadelphia, and her husband in particular, are described as sweet but perhaps dull and demanding. When she tells her Italian lover, Giovanni (Montgomery Clift), about her husband, Howard, she speaks of him as if he were a child. She really sees no future of her own with Howard but seems resigned to be part of his. In *Summertime* Jane Hudson’s (Katharine Hepburn) Venice romp with Rossano Brazzi is an escape from the sexless existence of a “glorified secretary” living in a community of married friends. In *Three Coins* Shadwell (Clifton Webb) paints an even more desperate picture for his secretary, Frances (Dorothy McGuire) should she leave the palatial Roman splendours of his employ for a hot, one room New York apartment, visited by her nobody.

For Karen Stone (Vivien Leigh) in *Roman Spring* and for Jack (Kirk Douglas) in *Two Weeks* it is their professional families that they are fleeing as well as their own personal failings to live up to the expectations of these communities. At 45 Karen feels that she is washed up on the stage because she can no longer play Rosalind in *As You Like It*. Broadway for her is a place she must escape when the age discrimination rampant in the theatre strikes a cord with her own vanity and her

reluctance to act her own age. For Jack, a burnt-out Hollywood has-been, his failure and the oppressive nature of Hollywood is not so much indicated by the cause as by the cure. When *Two Weeks* opens all we see of his Hollywood world is the sanatorium it has led him to. Like Marc Revere (Mario Lanza) in *Seven Hills*, it is not the aging that has led Jack to suffer burnout in his professional community. What these two performers are suffering is emasculation at the hands of two ermine and pearly American heiresses cruising the insubstantial pageant of the Hollywood scene.

As a place for the American to feel at home abroad, these films provide a vast array of comforting institutions and individuals, as well as the social and economic comforts which come with world dominance. There are a number of examples of official and quasi-official U.S. agencies that make frequent interventions into these narratives. In *Roman Holiday* Joe Bradley (Gregory Peck) is a newspaper journalist working, not for the well-known Rome *Daily American* or *The Herald Tribune*, but for the rather more official sounding, *American News Service*. In *Three Coins* Mary and Anita (Jean Peters) both work for the United States Distribution Agency. What the USDA distribute, if not Mutual Security Program aid or films⁵, is unclear. What is clear, from the imperious establishing shot of the U.S. Government's insignia on the agency door, is that the agency asserts a highly visible presence on the Roman scene. The paternalism of this presence is further asserted by the way in which the USDA chief, Burgoyne, and his wife impose themselves on the social life of their female employees by forbidding them to fraternise with the local men. A similar government presence is obvious in *Gidget* when she is accused of

⁵ Hollywood put between 668 and 222 films a year into Italy between 1946 and 1953 (Guback: 1969: 39).

spying on the Sorelle Fontana and when she is caught taking an illicit dip in the Trevi Fountain, both incidents requiring the intervention of the U.S. Embassy. As we see in *Two Weeks*, outside the sphere of government control, the presence in Rome of Hollywood itself again demonstrates another U.S. institution active and imposing in the Italian capital during these years.

Hovering around these institutions is a tribe of Americans who seem to turn up on every street corner in the Roman Fever series. In films such as *Rome Adventure* and *Summertime* these Americans can be tourists, although generally it is the naïve and inexperienced main character that plays the tourist as the American tribes pose as locals. Another common example of the non-governmental American abroad is the semi-resident. This character is usually an artist such as the Jackson Pollockesque Eddie (Darren McGavin) in *Summertime*, or a graduate student like Don (Troy Donahue) in *Rome Adventure*, or even a wealthy and leisurely tourist like Carlotta (Cyd Charisse) in *Two Weeks*, who seems to have about half a year to be as bored hanging out on the Via Veneto as she can be on Rodeo Drive. Scoring even higher on the scale of decadence is the American exile in Rome, such as Shadwell in *Three Coins* or Daisy (Constance Ford) in *Rome Adventure*. Having given themselves over to anti-social aestheticism, in Shadwell's case, and sexual licence, in Daisy's, these characters are immorally anchored to Rome, seemingly forever.

What these characters and companies are doing in Rome is, of course, living well and cheaply on the strength of the American dollar against the Lira. In *Roman Holiday* Ann can buy shoes, a gelato and a haircut in the tourist section for less than a thousand lire — or what Joe calculates as “about a dollar and a half”. The three girls in *Three Coins* live in a palatial style apartment because they are paid in dollars and the exchange rate

favours them. And so, with a friendly American business or government agency in the vicinity of every major tourist trap, a fellow countryman walking along every street and a weak local economy ripe for exploitation, Rome provides the American tourist with an extremely comfortable alternative to that bastion of repression she has left behind her.

Amore

Central to the agenda of the Roman Fever films is the depiction of the Italian capital as the city of history, art, style and beauty. As Augustan ruins and high Renaissance architecture, as fashion houses and café society, this Rome is rendered unashamedly in a style not unknown to anyone lucky enough to have attended a neighbourhood slide evening or a home movie viewing. Nonetheless, the splendour of the Roman past and present is obvious and these values provide the films with a substance behind their tales of the ultimate Roman encounter. Love among, not only the ruins but also the contemporary chic they have spawned is clearly the theme and the Roman Fever films effectively exploit the popular desire for travel romance.

The travelogue format common in this series did not go unnoticed by contemporary reviewers of *Three Coins*, *Summertime*, *Rome Adventure* and *Gidget Goes*.⁶ As is evident in the pre-title prologue to *Three Coins* — a montage of the fountains, lakes, gardens and modern buildings of the city set to the sound of Frank Sinatra singing the title song — these films

⁶ *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 21 (247) August, *Variety*, 8 June 1955, *Hollywood Reporter*, 169 (22) March, *Variety*, 21 March 1962, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 29 (341), June, *Kine weekly*, n. 2926, 31 Oct.

made no bones about using magazine format to place the Colosseum, the Forum, the Trevi Fountain, the Spanish Steps, the Piazza Navona, the Capitol and St. Peter's Square to the front of their concern. Exterior shooting is almost always the norm. This is, of course, not unexpected when it comes to classical sites such as the Baths of Caracalla, where the line between interior and exterior is almost indistinguishable. When it comes to Renaissance and baroque Rome, however, it is a different story. Certainly key scenes in *Three Coins* and *Gidget Goes* are set inside museums where the young tourists may sample collections of ancient, Renaissance and modern art. Churches, however, are another matter. Whatever the extent of Catholic support for the American alliance in Italy, and however much Hollywood worked to smooth its way into the approval of the Catholic Church (Wanrooij, 1994:250), interior shooting in churches is almost entirely absent. Only in *Rome Adventure* do we see inside a church and that is on a side trip North, where a prayer in the church at Lago Maggiore is required to offset Prudence's dirty weekend away from Rome with the dangerous Don.

When it comes to the delights of contemporary *vita romana*, and particularly to the pleasures of food, fashion and *feste*, locations are more available. The studio of the Sorelle Fontana in *Gidget* is one such example, as is the Ulpia club in *Seven Hills*. Both films include scenes at Roman fashion houses and also place their naïve American tourist in the hub of the international set gathering at fashionable parties and street cafes. Throughout the rest of the series our intrepid travellers are found at embassy parties, fashionable restaurants, the opera, dancing at the Ponte S. Angelo, the beach and some rather risqué jazz clubs.

The representation of Roman history, art and life operates as backdrop to the romantic tale which might take place anywhere with an ounce more of

the exotic than Culver City. Beyond the explicit travelogue sequences of *Three Coins* and *Roman Holiday*, these rather superficial cavalcades of Bella Roma are easily integrated in the action of the narratives as both settings for particular events and in moving panorama glimpsed from Vespas or through car windows. Thus somewhat distanced from the romantic affairs of their characters, the delights of Rome act as their scenic backdrop, standing and watching these summer fools from a distance.

The first manifestation of Rome as stimulus for an exotic but safe affair in the Roman Fever series lies in the narrative trope of the safe all-American return home. This characteristically takes the form of the heroine eschewing the local colour and using Rome as the setting for negotiating her relationship with an American male with whom she will eventually return. In *Gidget Goes* the action places its heroine in a romantic crush with Paolo Cellini (Cesare Danova) who is her guide and the passive object of her desire. Set up by Gidget's father and old enough to be him, having learnt a thing or two in Rome that summer, she can safely return to the arms of Moondoggie and they can safely return home together. Prudence takes things further with her Italian 'beard', Rassano Brazzi, although *Rome Adventure* is essentially concerned with negotiating the safe return of her relationship with Don. Brazzi is highly obliging and she seems to fully enjoy trying to hear the bells when he snogs her on the Ponte Sant'Angelo, but these obliging Italians merely act as the forerunners to the safe locking up of these desiring girls in married life. As we will see, the final pairing with an Italian partner is not forbidden in the Roman Fever series, but virtually no one is permitted to return home with an Italian.

For those who engage in a less savoury local liaison and are required to leave, Rome provides the *mise en scène* of the happy memory. Joe Bradley in *Roman Holiday* is not an Italian but we may read him, in the context, as equally dangerous. The Roman fever series provides an array of dissolute locals who prey on innocent foreign tourists. Just as Dino's (Louis Jourdan) aristocratic facade covers over his reputation as a wolf in *Three Coins*, and Rassano Brazzi dupes Katharine Hepburn both about the provenance of a red glass goblet as well as his own provenance as a married man, Joe too is cast as a local with a dark side. Penniless and longing to get back to America (and willing to do anything to address both shortcomings), like Mario Lanza in *Seven Hills*, Joe looks a lot like the model of the Italian male character, seen in such films as *The Godfather*, whose longings are the same. Joe's dirty secret is, of course, that he is a character of dubious morality and few journalistic ethics, who is willing to lie to Ann and to flirt with her to get the story. Like Dino and Rassano Brazzi, the power of love naturally transcends these concerns and Ann has little doubt about his ultimate morality and truthfulness, despite the fact that he has been duping her all along. However, just as Gidget must leave Paolo in Rome because he is safely married, Prudence and Jane Hudson manage to leave Rassano Brazzi in Italy, Ann can neither give up all for love and stay in Italy, nor take her rough trade home with her.

For these women, the Roman holiday must remain just that. Their walk on the wild side with Latin lovers who give them a glimpse of desire can only last as a happy memory. Like the photos of Ann breaking a guitar over the head of her own secret police officer and like these very Technicolor memories of Roman history, art and culture, these Italian romances can only have the status of souvenirs — as Ann says when she is asked for her Royal tour highlight, “By all means Rome. I will cherish my visit here in memory as long as I live.”

Despite the general sense of impossibility about such relationships and the apparent ban on returning home with an Italian, staying in Italy and marrying happily is not out of the question. In *Three Coins* and *It Happened* the girls remain in Rome and marry their Italian sweethearts. In Maria's case, Dino is very rich and she has met his mother and gained her approval. Rassano Brazzi is a less secure prospect, but given his general decency and the fact that he is studying to be a lawyer he is safe for her. In *Seven Hills* Mario Lanza seems to rediscover his real Italian self when he realises his love for Rafaella. In neither case is anything lost. All are to be securely married, no one threatens to bring any foreigners back home and even if Mario Lanza does, he is well coded in the film as not really 100 percent American anyway.

Morte

If the Roman Fever films generally portray the voyage to Italy as a happy and romantic souvenir, these films also demonstrate a dark undercurrent. For all the joy of the Hollywood Roman Holiday, death and decay are implicit in the experience. In so far as we have looked at the historical and artistic site of Rome leaving a warm and fuzzy feeling in the American abroad, they can also produce the opposite effect. In Rossellini's *Viaggio in Italia* (1952), a film that might well be argued into a place in the Roman Fever series, Ingrid Bergman and George Sanders have this very experience. Confronted by the aggressive sexuality of the statuary in Naples Museum, the Southern Italian culture of death in the Naples Ossuary or the shocking revelation of the dying husband and wife at Pompeii, the unhappily married couple are terrified and moved by what they see. In a simple but direct strategy of camera movement, editing and sound editing, Rossellini makes these sites speak in ways that are

uncomfortable to the tourist. This revelation of the idea of the historical and aesthetic site as disturbing is picked up in various examples in the Roman Fever series.

In *Roman Holiday* the dark side of Joe — and that of Ann to an extent — is brought into focus in their encounter with the Bocca della Verità at S. Maria in Cosmedin. The scene plays with the idea that both are liars and then turns to an aesthetic of horror when Joe pretends to have his hand bitten off in the mouth of truth. Not only does this point to Joe's as the bigger and more dangerous lie, but it is clearly a scene of castration.⁷ Through the agency of the mouth of truth, Rome is cast as the horrible castrating mother. For Joe who wants desperately to leave, and Ann who must leave, Rome is not simply some happy postcard memory. It is this, but these feelings are clearly mixed with fears of being devoured and destroyed. There is little reason, in this context, to be surprised that neither character makes any attempt to toss the traditional coin into the Trevi.

When Gidget gets waylaid in the National Roman Museum Paul Wendkos borrows Rossellini's technique for the scene in *Viaggio in Italia* in the Naples Museum. Here Ingrid Bergman is beset with the raw sexuality of the Farnese Hercules, the violent insanity of the Roman emperors and the aggression and explosive energy of the Farnese Bull. Rossellini almost attacks Bergman with these statues, using the gruff, course descriptions of her museum guide in tandem with his camera circling around, panning across and zooming in on each group of statues, before cutting back to Bergman for her troubled reaction. Wendkos has Gidget hearing the

⁷ I thank Barbara Creed for pointing this out.

voices of Jeff and Daniella, as well as the mocking laughter of the rest of their group as she looks at a statue of an emperor and a Roman matron. Panning left and right, right and left, then tilting and repeating the panning with the voices going on in her head, Gidget's encounter with these antiques leaves her on the verge of madness. Luckily she is restrained by the museum guards, who think she is 'crazy' and her apparent outburst lands her in the only place it can be sorted out — under the smiling photo of President Kennedy, yet again, at the U.S. embassy.

One Roman site of spectacular dimension, although hardly of breathtaking beauty is the Termini station. In *Rome Adventure* and *Three Coins* characters have various bits of business there and both films pay its architectural features just as much time as they provide any other buildings in Rome. It is spectacular in its scale and has a certain fascination for the Roman tourist who frequently has to spend a great deal of time there. As they know, however, it is also a place to be avoided. When Marc and Rafaella arrive there in *Seven Hills* the station's unsavoury reputation is immediately made clear when a group of sleazy Italian soldiers harass Rafaella. It is this highly distasteful aspect of the Termini which is most clearly articulated in *Indiscretions* where the cheery and functional modern station becomes a cavern housing all the anxieties of modern life. Here Mary is confronted with the poor, the sick and the unemployed as a sad backdrop to her own illness of illicit love. The station becomes an inescapable setting for a horrible nightmare. Neither Mary, Giovanni nor Paolo seems to be able to leave. Mary is thus caught in a space where she must suffer not only the pangs of forbidden desire but Giovanni's physical and mental abuse and the shame and guilt at the public exposure of their affair.

Gidget is commanded to attend a party at the villa of Prince Bianchi whose role in this film is not the only echo of *La dolce vita*. Escorted by Paolo, Gidget finds an explicit parody of Fellini's Mantalban party complete with emaciated avant-garde poets, cockney countesses playing bridge and a duchess "who just loves to dance". When someone asks the dancing duchess if she saw *La dolce vita* she replies, "What a bore. Can you imagine having to sit still for three hours?" Withheld from the summer travelogues, this side of Roman life gives these films both a note of the exotic as well as pointing to the ultimate Old Europe decadence to which Roman life may stoop. What is more, given the emphasis on foreigners in residence in the Roman Fever series, these tableaux offer a note of caution to the naive American abroad who is contemplating remaining.

In *The Roman Spring* the community in focus seems a world away from that of *Three Coins* were its function not so similar. Just as, when stripped bare, the smug travelogues in the Roman Fever series are about women coming to Rome to look for love, Mrs Stone is about making this love for sale. The parties here and the dinners are in many ways the same; the rich international set convening to celebrate their ennui. But above all, these are the working environments of the Contessa (Lotte Leyna) who pimps to the desires of wealthy men and women, preening and polishing the rough trade of Rome for the delight of wealthy visitors. There is, in this set, a highly developed stench of viciousness in the exploitation of sad and lonely women.

Perhaps the most outstanding threat to the civilized lady tourists in Rome is Roman men. Whether the Roman male does the right thing and withdraws or does the next best thing by proposing, he is inevitably cast from the start as a wolf when it comes to sexual appetite and a gorilla

when it comes to his potential for violence. As we see with Rassano Brazzi in *Summertime* and Montgomery Clift in *Indiscretions*, these characters have little respect for their own marriages or anyone else's. This theme is even flirted with in *Gidget Goes* when the family man Paola gets to pretend to be Gidget's suitor under the mask of being her protector. While not stomping on anyone's vows, in *Rome Adventure* Rassano Brazzi shows little regard for any notion of sexual propriety when he finds his way into Prudence's cabin, shuts the door and proceeds to unpack her sexy nightgown. Typically this is all part of the harmless fun but, as is common in the Roman Fever films, underneath this calm is the ever-present sexual threat of Roman masculinity. Just note the extent of arse pinching that goes unpunished in these films.

If our heroines need little convincing, we need to do a great deal of lateral thinking to dismiss the sexual back stories of these little Romuli. How many women have become "Venice girls" after succumbing to Dino's charms and how many more will be Venice girls after he is married to Maria? How much will Karen Stone be taken for before some kept boy, as Paolo predicts, slits her throat and leaves her to drown on her own pillow in a pool of expensive hair oil? Such questions arise in the mind as we consider the danger and criminality of these characters and the threat — ultimately of destruction — they pose to the US lady tourist. The most extreme example of this is to be found in *Indiscretions*, where Giovanni slaps Maria in the face in full view of her young nephew Paolo. It is this type of behaviour which is perhaps easily dismissed as an example of "Italian passion". It is, however, this very idea which is clearly so dangerous and potentially destructive to the Rome traveller.

For all the brutality and violence which may be lurking behind the Roman wolf these films are not unconcerned with the theme of the female tourist

as exploiter. As we see in *Summertime*, *Roman Spring*, *It Happened* and *Indiscretions*, the brutal Roman wolf is not wrong when he complains of the power, the money and the freedom the lady tourist enjoys at the expense of Italy and the Italians. This complaint is largely part of a power game in the Roman theatre of cruelty. It is designed both to soften the appeal of the Roman wolf and also to appeal to the vanity of the film spectator who desire him. However much it engages with the pleasure these films seek at the expense of the naïve American woman abroad, the theme does tap into the notion of the American tourist as exploiter. The idea uncovers the darkness behind the simple act of tourism, so beneficial to the local economy, but so dependant on the exploitation of the economy and its human capital. The rich American widow can also leave behind her a trail of decay ultimately leading to her own. This is what is really at stake in these narratives — the utter contamination of the American woman in the eternal decadence of Rome.

Finally, for all the fuss in these films about water and coins it is interesting that only Gidget, Maria and Florence actually throw a coin in the Trevi Fountain. This perhaps signals the ultimate ambivalence of the Roman Fever series towards Rome itself and this ambivalence is based on the repression of the fact of death — which is the ultimate form of desire for the mother. Given the predominance of the maternal waters of desire in Rome it seems that these films subscribe to the belief that Garibaldi articulated as ‘Roma o Morte’ when all the facts presented suggest that there is no option.

Rome Neurosis and U.S. Italy Policy

From the liberation, the inter-penetration of Hollywood and the U.S. State and Trade Departments with regards to business in Italy was significant.

Hollywood called on the U.S. government to help it protect its distribution concerns in Italy and in return it gave the State Department a popular instrument of mass propaganda.⁸ This tells us something about factors influencing the content of Hollywood domestic productions scheduled for distribution in Italy, but very little about the Roman Fever series which was aimed at U.S. domestic consumption. What the extensive work done in this field by scholars such as Elwood, Jarvie and Swann does tell us, however, is that the connection between Hollywood on the Tiber and the U.S. government in Italy was certainly intimate. This in turn suggests the possibilities of Hollywood Roman production responding to certain currents of thought buzzing around the Rome embassy and leaking out at cocktail parties where U.S. officials and Hollywood personalities rubbed shoulders as employees of the two largest American businesses in town. And so while being an inadequate explanation for any relationship between U.S. operations in Italy and the Roman Fever series, this connection does suggest the possibilities for reading a strong resonance of U.S. Italy policy in these films. In particular this resonance extends to the way the Rome neurosis of the Roman Fever films reflects the very ambivalence, frustration and anxieties of U.S. involvement in Italy in the 1950s. That is to say, the way U.S. concern over the Italian political scene, and the importance of Communism to it makes itself manifest as issues of desire in the Roman Fever series.

In their Italian “hearts and minds” campaign after the war, the U.S. government were not merely interested in the overt ideological benefit of films to dissuade the Italian population from Communism. The U.S. were

⁸ See Guback (1969 & 1976), Jarvie, Swann (both 1994), Seagrave (1997) and Ellwood (*History Today*) all dealing with the collaboration of the U.S. government and Hollywood in Europe after 1945.

also interested in the possibilities of covert operations involving psychological warfare. Mario Del Pero has examined U.S. “psywar” operations in Italy between 1948 and 1955 and has made a number of observations that benefit our purpose here. Primarily Del Pero paints a picture of the State department’s psywar units as being naive, frustrated and generally flummoxed by the political climate in Italy. Their inability to come to terms with the complexities of the political scene, and especially the question of Communism, was only really outdone by their own internal confusion, disorientation and ultimate failure. Like the characters in the Roman Fever series, the U.S. psywar effort in Italy found itself caught in a state of ambivalence. With contradictory feelings about its role there and facing a largely incomprehensible local attitude to the threat of that great other, Communism, the U.S. psywar effort comes to resemble something like Gidget style diplomacy.

Both Truman and Eisenhower administrations saw the benefits of psychological tactics in their ultimate goal of dispelling the Italian Communist Party (PCI) from influence in Italian politics. Until 1951, however, covert operations were the second choice of U.S. policy in Italy (Del Pero, 1310). The defeat of the Communist left at the Italian elections of 1948, following what Ginsborg has described as the “breathhtaking intervention” of the Americans in the process (Ginsborg, 1990:115-6), convinced the U.S. that their pro-development policies and support for like-minded parties in the Italian spectrum was sufficient to achieving their objectives (Del Pero, 1306). When the PCI vote increased at the nation-wide local elections of 1951, however, more comprehensive plans were put into place. Various plans and operational units were established between the Summer of 1951 and the Spring of 1952. In general these were set up to work within the Italian democratic system to bring about standard measures like the displacement of Italian Communists from

public sector and union positions. Furthermore, the outlawing of the PCI was also considered a possible outcome (Del Pero, 1310-5). Withholding American aid — through Mutual Security Program offshore military procurement programs — from projects which involved strong Communist union and factory floor presence was also part of these covert operations (Del Pero, 1316ff). This was the case at least until Clare Booth Luce advocated a more flagrant intervention policy, following her appointment as U.S. Ambassador in 1953 (Del Pero, 1321).

Italy was obviously of significant strategic importance to U.S. interests during the Cold War, just as it had been regarded the “soft underbelly of Europe” towards the end of the Second (Del Pero, 1322). The political experience, as seen through Del Pero’s case study of the psywar effort, appears to have been largely incomprehensible and frustrating to U.S. officials stationed there. Generally the impression we receive from Del Pero’s account is that in Italy the U.S. did not really understand the forces they were up against. The Byzantine complexities of Italian politics, particularly when mixed with the post war Communist question, were largely beyond the U.S. political organisation there. Frustration caused by its own ignorance played a part in its subsequent inability to create a coherent and effective psywar operation to achieve their objectives.

Del Pero highlights four errors of judgement which display U.S. misreading of the Italian situation and which provided U.S. government operatives with significant frustrations to their work, beyond their own organisational confusion and lack of coherence (Del Pero, 1317-9 & 1330-1333). Primarily, U.S. psywar operatives overestimated their own ability to achieve results in Italy and this was clear to the State Department back in Washington (Del Pero, 1319). Clare Booth Luce’s administration was, in many ways, more savvy, but Del Pero sees the

initial naivety of Italian domestic affairs as continuing under her tenure at the embassy (Del Pero, 1322). Secondly, they discovered too late that aiding economic and physical reconstruction in the country was not going to simply turn Italians away from Communism (Del Pero, 1312). Thirdly, they were mistaken in seeing Government and Christian Democrat (DC) resistance to many of their proposals as weakness, passive conservatism, apathy and ineptitude (Del Pero, 1308-12). Finally, the U.S. operatives almost complete inability to fathom the attitude of the DC to the, at times, extreme U.S. initiatives, blinded the U.S. to the fact that the Italian Government were exploiting the threat of Communism to induce more U.S. finance under the doctrine of economic reconstruction (Del Pero, 1326). A useful summary of the U.S. ignorance of the situation presented by Del Pero highlights that the 1948 Italian constitution was based on the mutual recognition of the two mass parties, the Communists and the Christian Democrats, and that this was a mutual recognition of legitimacy that the U.S. simply did not understand. The idea, at least initially, that any democratic institution could work with Communists was incomprehensible to the U.S. Cold War mind-set. This suggests a naivety and ignorance indicating a complete disregard for both Italian politics and history.

Like Freud, the U.S. administration in Italy was faced with a choice in Rome. This choice revolved around their individual sites of repression and how to deal with them. Freud chose, at least temporarily, to release himself from his aggressive will-to power ambitions with their roots in the fairly loose chains of Semitic patriotism and boyhood bravado. He did this in order to come to terms with, and embrace, the much more dangerous and challenging elements of Oedipal desire which Rome symbolised. What challenged and disturbed the U.S. in Rome was obviously the threat of the power of Communism — nothing repressed there. What was

repressed, however, was the idea that the Roman holiday might have the power to seduce the healthy, new world U.S. to shake off its own brand of patriotism and childish bravado and be transformed, Gidgetlike, by Italy. Like any of the Rome adventures we have considered on film, this transformation threatened to induce a radical shedding of repression and a submission to desires that once dared not speak their name. In the context of U.S. policy in Italy this suggests the recognition, at least, of Communism, not as some perverse and unfathomable Eastern political desire, but as an alternative social and political world view which might be seen to be as reasonable as its own. This might then have instilled in the U.S. government a true understanding about Rome. That is the knowledge that the art of Cold War politics in Italy would, at some point, have to include negotiations with the PCI. This is, of course, something that DC controlled governments since the war had understood very well. The fact that it was not until the Kennedy administration that the U.S. were able to come to even a position of playing political hardball with the Italian left, indicates that the repression was not lifted in the 1950s. Unlike Freud's, the Rome neurosis of U.S. administration remained in place well into the 1960s.⁹ What Freud and Karen Stone understood about Rome, and even Gidget came to terms with, it took the U.S. government some twenty years to work out.

Space does not allow for further development of this argument but it is fascinating to note that what seems to confirm the neurosis was the appointment of Clare Booth Luce as Ambassador in 1953. When Clare

⁹ Ginsborg argues that Kennedy's unwillingness in 1961 to oppose the DC courting the near left (in order to isolate the CPI) is significant evidence of his relative support for the initiative. This is in spite of his reluctance to oppose his Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, who opposed the move outright (258).

Booth Luce was handpicked by Eisenhower for the Rome job she was the first woman to represent the U.S. at a major embassy and only the second ever appointed as ambassador. Following a career as Republican Congresswoman, journalist and playwright,¹⁰ her appointment as Ambassador was an almost inevitable step in her highly celebrated career. When her ship arrived at Naples the crowd which came to get a look at “La Signora d’America” had to be held back by police and the celebrated Signora was ushered off the ship in the relative secrecy of the tourist-class gangway (Morin, 1995:32). Despite her spectacular entry into the country, or perhaps because of it, Booth Luce soon found her way into the papers as the stereotypical air-headed American woman we have seen in the Roman Fever films. Understanding no Italian she arranged a gift of precious butterflies for Prime Minister and part time etymologist, De Gasperi whom she mistakenly understood to be an entomologist (Morin, 1995:34). Jokes about social and mental butterflies abounded but Booth Luce would soon lose her Gidget reputation in exchange for that of combination of Carlotta and Karen Stone. As Del Pero and Ginsborg have indicated, Booth Luce clearly gave as good as she got. In today’s terms she was clearly a hawk on foreign policy and her blatant and ardent anti-Communism became legendary.

Accounts of her tenure, of course, differ but after three years in Rome Booth Luce resigned over an internal embassy matter. The success, or otherwise, of her tenure is not so important here as the very fact of her appointment. Certainly there were political favours involved which required the President to do something for Clare’s husband Henry Luce, publisher of the pro-Republican *Time* and *Life* magazines, but it is

¹⁰ Clare Booth Luce was the author of the stage play, *The Women*, which became a major MGM film, directed by George Cukor in 1939.

tempting to ask why Rome and why such an important centre of the Cold War? This is not the place to answer these questions in their political detail but her appointment and tenure in the Rome embassy does provide a stimulating background to the women and impaired men who play such an important part on the Roman Fever front. These characters, it seems, were all part of the canary diplomacy effort which the U.S. required in Italy — sent into the mine to test for air or be sacrificed if there is none. In this case they were sent into the quagmire of the Italian situation to test what were considered to be the dangerous and disturbing realities of Rome during the Cold War. This was perhaps supposed to make it look back home as if the U.S. were so strong and secure in Italy that it was safe for women to go there alone. This certainly aided the cause of the travel industry and Hollywood teen comedy and melodrama (sub)genres. What it actually suggested, however, was the very the opposite. Italy, it seems to say, was considered so weird, so abject, so perverse that only women and feminine men could go there. They were, the perverse logic goes, contaminated already and unlikely be corrupted to the extent that it is any great loss. Should they become reconciled to some Freud-like perversion in Rome the Roman Fever films still allow for their safe return home. If not, like Karen Stone, they will get what they deserve in Rome, whether they like it or not.

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*In memory of my mother, Joan Lorraine Nicholls 1938-2005.
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