

Federico Fellini and *Il Corriere dei Piccoli*: the Influence of “Low” Art on the Director’s Cinematography

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The distinguished Italian director Federico Fellini mentions his favourite childhood magazine *Il Corriere dei Piccoli* on various occasions, yet scholars and critics have not looked further into this connection in order to understand Fellini’s films. Labelled an ‘auteur’ and an ‘artistically distinctive filmmaker’, Fellini is placed in the “high” art tradition, with artistic influences to match. In this essay, I focus instead on the influences from the director’s childhood, which played a particularly influential part in his artistic development. I analyse Fellini’s films with reference to one of his most lasting childhood influences: the comic strips of *Il Corriere dei Piccoli*. In pointing out various visual, technical and narrative similarities between Fellini’s films and several comic strips found in this important Italian weekly magazine for young readers, I argue that this popular artistic output was inspirational for Fellini and deserves greater attention than it has received in the existing scholarship.

1. Introduction

The terms ‘ornate’, ‘extravagant’, ‘flamboyant’, ‘grotesque’ and ‘bizarre’ have been used to describe Federico Fellini’s unique and distinctly personal style of cinematography (Cardullo, 2006: xii); however, the question of his artistic influences remains largely unanswered.

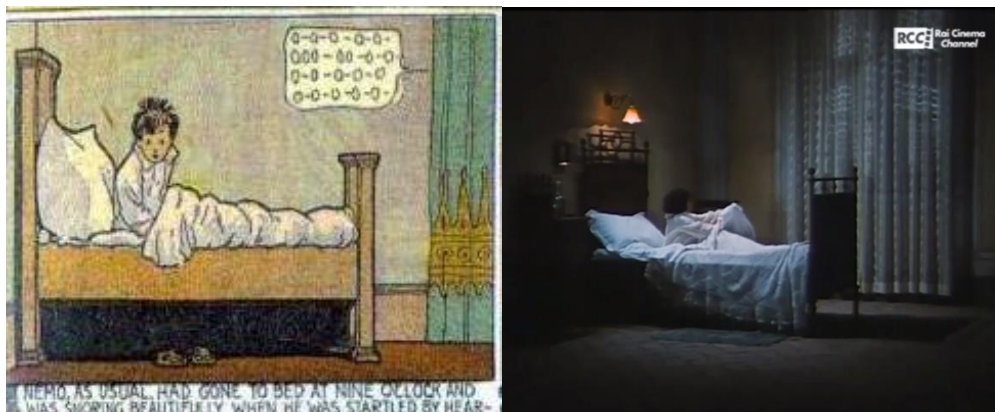
There is a scene from Fellini’s *I Clowns* (1970) that depicts one of the director’s significant childhood memories: the first time he discovered the circus. The scene starts with young Fellini sitting up from his bed, then heading towards his bedroom window as he hears strange noises coming from outside. Young Fellini then looks out the window and sees that the noise is coming from men who are hoisting up a circus tent. Fellini’s childhood memory, as it is here depicted, seems to recall one of his favourite childhood comic strips: Winsor McCay’s *Little Nemo*, which was published regularly from 1908 in *Il Corriere dei Piccoli*, an Italian weekly magazine that published comic strips primarily for young readers. McCay’s comic strips narrate the adventures Little Nemo has in his dreams, with the first panel always starting off with the protagonist sat up in bed, awake in his dream. Little Nemo’s dreams were flamboyant, packed with magical elements: there were strange creatures, flying and talking animals, kings, queens, gods, talking stars and other similar flights of fancy.

The parallels between the scene in Fellini’s *I Clowns* and McCay’s *Little Nemo* are striking (figures 1-4), and they raise several questions. Did Fellini too wake up in a dream? Fellini himself openly confessed: ‘i ricordi me le invento tante volte’¹ (Fellini, 2004: 16.35-16.50). Is it not possible that this memory also came from his imagination rather than from something that really happened? Fellini could be comparing Little Nemo’s flamboyant dreams with the circus, inventing his childhood memory and using McCay’s comic strip as inspiration. The circus was something fantastical and magical for Fellini, so perhaps he

¹ ‘I make up my memories a lot of the time’ (my translation)

wished to represent his first encounter in the same manner. In this way, Fellini portrays his memory of the circus in a manner that is just as fantastical as Little Nemo's imagined dreams. After all, the director had said: 'Uno degli eroi della mia infanzia era Little Nemo [...]. Che rivelazione! C'era qualcuno come me che faceva quelle cose fantastiche. Era uno stimolo per la mia immaginazione'² (Chandler, 1995: 25-26, my emphasis). In *I Clowns* we see, through the white beds sheets, night gown, bed posts and curtains, that this 'immaginazione' is reflected in Fellini's creative output and in his portrayal of his childhood memories.

Fellini in another instance stated that 'da bambino andavo sempre a letto sperando di fare sogni come quelli di Little Nemo [...]. Credo che i miei sogni fossero influenzati da *Little Nemo*'³ (Chandler, 1995: 26), suggesting that this comic was at the root of Fellini's imagination and perhaps also his creativity. It is then no wonder that he continued to see himself as Little Nemo since, thanks to McCay's work, Fellini grew both fond of the circus and attentive to the importance of dreams. What better way to represent such a momentous time of Fellini's life than through the eyes of one of the sources of his lifelong inspiration, Little Nemo? Such discoveries expand the way in which we are to look at Fellini's cinema. Films such as *Amarcord*, *I Viteelloni* and *8 1/2* show us how Fellini's childhood memories influenced his films, but what *Il Corriere* has brought to light, as seen in *Little Nemo*, is that Fellini's childhood literature was likewise of great importance, which in consequence determined the representation of his childhood memories and his films.



Figures 1 & 2: *Little Nemo* 14th January 1906 comic strip and Fellini's *I Clowns* (1970)



Figures 3 & 4: *Little Nemo* and a still from *I Clowns* showing young Fellini getting out of bed and looking out of his window

² 'One of my childhood heroes was Little Nemo [...]. What a revelation! There was someone like me who imagined all those fantastical things. He was an inspiration for my imagination.' (my translation)

³ 'As a child I would always go to bed hoping to have the same dreams as Little Nemo [...]. I believe my dreams were influenced by *Little Nemo*.' (my translation)

Looking at Fellini's personal history, we note how comics were a great part of his life, inspiring his early work as a caricaturist and his later work on cinema. The importance that comics, caricatures and even fairy tales had on Fellini's personal style is seen throughout his work, and it fittingly connects to his engagement with Jungian psychoanalysis in the middle of his cinematic career. However, scholars and critics continue to connect not comics or popular art but rather "high" art and artists to Fellini's work. As we will see, there are clearly also "low" art references throughout Fellini's films, often deriving from *Il Corriere dei Piccoli*, which are continuously overlooked by critics.

Hava Aldouby (2014) examines Fellini's personal library, picking out books the director owned on renowned artists and demonstrating how those artworks and artists had influenced his cinema. Aldouby cites examples such as Millias' *Ophelia* in *Giulietta degli Spiriti* and Bosch in *Satryicon*, declaring that Fellini evokes 'an eclectic array of art-historical intertexts' (Aldouby, 2014: xv) in his films. Similarly, pointing out all the books he had on celebrated artists, Brunello Rondi argues that Fellini indeed had favourite artists such as Velazquez and Brueghel but stresses that these artists are to be looked at as 'pictorial nourishment, *without explicit reference*' (Aldouby, 2014: 4, my emphasis). This is something with which Aldouby notably disagrees, as she still continues to argue her case.

Fellini, who considered himself an artist, must have had a wide knowledge of visual culture and must have given it great importance, as Aldouby contends. But what perhaps has not been noted is the context in which Fellini made these 'art historical references', which was shaped by the influence of "low" art culture, in this case from *Il Corriere dei Piccoli*. As we will see, not only Little Nemo, but also other various comic strips from *Il Corriere dei piccolo* influenced Fellini's cinema through narrative, iconography and technique.

2. The Influence of Comics and the Relationship with Cinema

Throughout history, comics have been considered 'infantile, vulgar, or insignificant' (Groensteen, 2001: 3), a "low" art form for the subliterate, and as a consequence, in their studies of Fellini, critics have often been more interested in the "high" art influences on his work. As Clive James (2008) rightly notes, critics have been looking to Proust and Joyce for the source of Fellini's "Freudian dreams" [...], [when] the answer lies much closer to hand', in the comic strip, which was 'the first art-form to exploit image-generating possibilities' (James, 2008: 203). Such possibilities are not acknowledged in the scholarship, where there lies a clear cultural distinction between the mass produced and the unique piece. Recalling Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936), we can grasp that for many, "high" art obtains what Benjamin calls the 'aura', that is, the authority that an artwork acquires through its uniqueness and originality. Comic strips, in this sense, lose their 'aura' because they are constantly reproduced, and thus they are denied their importance and authority in the arts world. Perhaps as a consequence, in Fellini scholarship they often go uncited.

Despite their diminished cultural status, comics held evident interest for Fellini and this is clear from his personal library. Main subjects that seem to take over his library are first and foremost works on psychoanalysis, including Jung, and books on Fellini himself and his cinematic works. However, Fellini seemed also to have possessed a vast selection of fiction, fables and comics, as well as books on the circus, clowns, and quite a few on Pinocchio: all subjects that are filled with imagination, fantasy, narrative and creative expression. Such components had interested Fellini as a child and had later on led to his engrossed absorption of comic strips, which he saw and read in *Il corriere dei piccoli*. This interest then seemed to stick with Fellini throughout his life, which in consequence influenced his cinema.

Scholars such as Rosita Copioli (2008) and Tullio Kezich (2002) note the importance comics played in Fellini's life, inspiring him to 'legare inscindibilmente il racconto all'immagine'⁷ (Copioli, 2008: 40). Fellini's curiosity about comic stories introduced him to the way in which he himself would then go on to narrate a story through separate singular image panels that accompanied the story narrated.

Comparatively, comics are an open and deconstructed version of cinema: they give room for speech and narration while simultaneously portraying the visual action. Unlike fine art and paintings, comics represent diegetic and non-diegetic sounds visually, while portraying sequenced panels to create narrative. If comic strips indeed influenced Fellini to work with film, this would not have been the first time this happened in the history of cinema. Director Alain Resnais said: '[W]hat I know about film has been learned from comic strips as much as from the cinema – the rules of cutting and editing are the same as for the cinema.' Michelangelo Antonioni, Jean-Luc Godard and Arthur Penn have made similar confessions (Murray, 1976: 9). It has even been argued that 'there is a closer link between cinema and comics than between cinema and other visual arts' (Gordon, Jancovich & McAllister, 2007: 2). Similar arguments are also noted by Francis Lacassin in his essay *Comic Strip and Film Language* (1972), who stated that 'it is no accident that such film makers as Federico Fellini (...) are assiduous readers of comic strips' (Lacassin, 1972: 11). Lacassin further explains in his essay that both media share elements such as the succession of shots, montage, sequence, frame manipulation and illusion of static/dynamic duration; elements that preceded film, initially starting within the comic strip. A comparison can also be made in the segmentivity of both media. Brian McHale (2013: 31) states that 'the space between one shot and the next is one of the places where meaning is made in cinema (...) [as] is the space between the panels that mobilizes meaning-making in comics'.

Thus, as has been rightly acknowledged by Edward Murray (1976: 9), comics 'not only supplied [Fellini] with part of his future subject matter, but may have also taught him some valuable lesson about cinematic form'.

3. Polarization and Archetypes

Another important feature of comic strips is that they have little space and time to convey information, so they have to send messages quickly to the reader, enticing the artist to 'use stereotypes to convey information quicker' (Walker, 2001: 3). As Ernst (1978) mentions, the style of cartoons and caricatures releases expressive forms of the unconscious and caricature returns to typical elements in the graphic forms of expression (drawings) of the child. The simple drawing makes the action in the panel easy to interpret, thus giving a quick acknowledgment of what is going on, leading to certain aspects and characteristics being emphasised and more distinguishable, and thus polarised.

This distinction between characters and polarisation in comic strip stories seems to have inspired Fellini when creating his on screen characters, such as the feminine and sensual Gradisca in *Amarcord* (1973) or the brutish and macho Zampanò in *La Strada* (1954). This polarisation helps to clarify the initial influence of Fellini's distinguishable and clichéd characters and explains his later interest in Carl Jung and the archetype. Fellini himself said:

'Non ho mai tentato di fare un disegno che non fosse una sintesi caricaturale [...] non so disegnare in un'altra maniera che non sia un appunto grafico che tende a esprimere

⁷ 'inseparably bind the story to the image' (my translation)

sinteticamente *il tipo, l'aspetto, il connotato più evidente di un personaggio*⁹ (Mollica, 2000: 93, my italics). This comment suggests that Fellini's characters can be described with certain traits that distinguish their screen personalities, conjointly formed through his caricature sketches of them as seen in figures 5 & 6. For example, his films depict beautiful women with huge breasts and small heads, emphasising their femininity and imprudence as exemplified by characters such as Silvia in *La Dolce Vita*, or giant women with demonic facial features like la Saraghina in *8 ½* (figures 7 & 8). These examples also illustrate how Fellini inflects his supposedly 'infantile' art medium' (Soper, 2012: 116) with its erotic and demonic content.



Figures 5 & 6: Fellini's sketches extracted from *Il Libro dei Sogni*



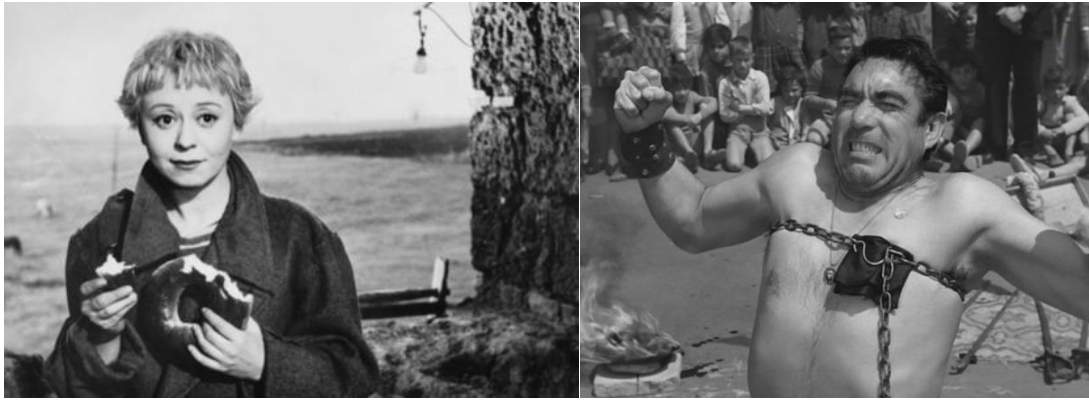
Figure 7: Sylvia in *La Dolce Vita*



Figure 8: La Saraghina in *8 ½*

Further examples of such "polarised" characters are seen throughout Fellini's films. For instance in *Giulietta degli spiriti* (1965) Fellini portrays Giulia as the good, modest and faithful housewife; a perfect example of the mother archetype, while her husband who is a cheater and liar, represents more of a trickster archetype. Similarly, in *La Strada* (1954), we are shown the innocent Gelsomina, with light and airy facial features and clumsy gestures in contrast to the manly, muscular and aggressive Zampanò (figures 9 & 10):

⁹ 'I have never attempted to draw in a manner that wasn't concisely caricatural [...] I am only able to draw in a manner that tends to express in a nutshell the nature, the appearance and the most evident connotation of a character' (my translation)



Figures 9 & 10: Gelsomina and Zampanò in *La Strada*

4. Comic Strip Characters as Self-Representation

In cinematic history, Fellini is regarded as an auteur due to his recognisable artistic vision. Yet this vision, identifiable in his chosen themes and characters, appears to have initially emerged, at least in part, from *Il corriere dei piccoli*. Fellini stated that the characters of his films, such as Gelsomina in *La Strada*, had come out of one of his sketches (Murray, 1976: 10), suggesting that his film characters were born as unique individuals through his own imagination and caricature drawings. On looking at the comics he read as a child¹⁰, however, doubts emerge about this statement's veracity, calling into question his initial and allegedly personal iconography of these characters as being purely the fruit of his imagination.



Figures 11 & 12: Fellini's sketches of Gelsomina

¹⁰ Such as *Bibi e Bobo*, *Fortunello*, *Little Nemo*, *Girellino e lo zingaro Zaparra*, *Flash Gordon*, *Pier Lambicchi e l'arcivernice*, all published in *Corriere dei Piccoli*.



Figure 13: Gelsomina in *La Strada*



Figure. 14: Fortunello

For example, I have identified a striking similarity in the character of Gelsomina (figures 11 to 13) with Fortunello (figure 14), both comical and clown-like characters with distinctive visual similarities seen in their round shaped head, googly eyes, stapled smile and rosy cheeks, right down to the green jacket and tilted hat. Fellini himself mentioned and referenced Fortunello in the character of Gelsomina (and also Cabiria).¹² But the strongest resemblance is seen in Antonio Rubino's less popular comic strip *Girellino e lo zingarro Zapparra*, published in *Il Corriere*. The similarity is seen not only through the traits of the characters but also through various storyline references.



Figures 15 & 16: *Girellino e lo zingarro Zapparra* and *La Strada*



Figures 17 & 18: Zapparra and Zampandò

¹² Fellini: 'In my films, Gelsomina and Cabiria are two augustes. They aren't female, they are asexual. They are *Fortunello*' (Murray, 1976: 124, my translation)



Figures 19 & 20: Girellino and Gelsomina



Figure 21: Zampanò

Paola Pallottini (1997) notes, ‘tutto il film *La Strada* documenta un doppio livello di identità con le avventure pupazzettate di *Girellino e Zarappa*’¹⁴ down to the names of the characters. Girellino, an innocent child-like figure, alongside his monkey Lolita (comparable to the Matto in *La Strada*), has traits similar to Gelsomina. Note the striped top under the oversized jacket, the abnormally clown-like shoes or the large hat they both wear underneath their short and blonde flicked up haircut (figures 19 & 20). Zarappa, on the other hand, is a strong masculine primitive male character and is similar to Zampanò (figures 15 to 18 & 21). Comparable traits are their dark and aggressive facial features, large muscular body and overall alpha male characteristics. More importantly, Rubino’s character Zarappa is a gypsy, just like Fellini’s Zampanò.

Comparable storylines can be identified in a 1919 publication where Girellino is sent away from home to earn money for the family (figure 22), a narrative parallel to that of Gelsomina, who was also sent off to work with Zampanò to earn a living and send money back home (figures 23 & 24). On comparison, we see both protagonists happily waving goodbye to their loved ones as they are ready to leave, receiving a less cheerful expression in return. We can also observe the similarities in the location and home of Gelsomina and Girellino (figure 22). As is seen from their rundown house, worn clothes and scarce food, Girellino and his mother are clearly penniless. His house contrasts the newly developed buildings in the back drop, which is also seen in the first scene of *La Strada*. Gelsomina, too, lived in a decadent house in the midst of newly developed buildings (figures 25 & 26).

¹⁴ ‘the entire film of *La Strada* documents a parallel identity with the puppet-like adventures of *Girellino* and *Zarappa*’ (my translation)



Figure 22: Panel in *Corriere dei Piccoli*, 18.05.1919



Figures 23 & 24: Gelsomina waving goodbye to her family as she leaves



Figures 25 & 26: Location of Gelsomina's home

Giulietta Masina, stated that the character of Gelsomina is a reflection of Fellini (Kezich, 2002: 157), but if Gelsomina is also a reflection of Girellino, as is seen when comparing the images, then is Fellini not initially seeing himself as this comic character Girellino? This suggests that Fellini's childhood fantasy and imagination continued to influence how he saw himself and how he identified himself. If Fellini were continuously referring to his favourite childhood characters, such as Girellino, as self-representation in his films, we can say that his distinguishable character as a director is partly in the interest of this particular children's comic magazine, as is illustrated in *La Strada*, and it is here that Fellini creates this contradiction. It is through these "low" art comic strips that Fellini established his "high" status as a unique and particular director, and it is why we see this aspect and character repeated in other films he made.

In addition, Fellini also seemed to identify people in his everyday life with certain comic characters: ‘I personaggi di quel foglio colorato, non avevano niente a che fare con il mondo che ci circondava. Però erano altrettanto veri del bidello e dell’arciprete. Tanto che alle persone reali affibbiavamo proprio i soprannomi di quei personaggi. Così l’arciprete diventava Padron Ciccio, quello che aveva una mula cattivissima, la Checca che stampava i ferri di cavallo sul sedere...oppure il vicino di casa che mia mamma, (...) aveva chiamato Arcibaldo come il personaggio creato da Geo Mc Manus’¹⁶ (Passa, 1993: 55). In this way, Fellini’s life and work seemed to co-exist with comic strip stories and characters, which bore a strong connection to his childhood, a subject matter much repeated in his films.

Fellini’s self-representation as a comic character was noticed in the director’s early years, and throughout his career as a caricaturist. In 1997 Caruso and Casetti exhibited their research on Fellini’s lost and forgotten *fumetto* called *Il mio amico Pasqualino* (figure 27), whose protagonist was, they argued, Fellini’s alter ego. Their research analysed how Fellini reproduced his real-life events and thoughts through his Pasqualino character as he also did for other publications in *Marc’ Aurelio* and *Il Travaso*.¹⁷ He thus placed and represented himself as the protagonist of this comic just as he would go on to do with his cinematic reference to comic strip protagonists such as Little Nemo, Girellino and Pier Cloruro de Lambicchi.

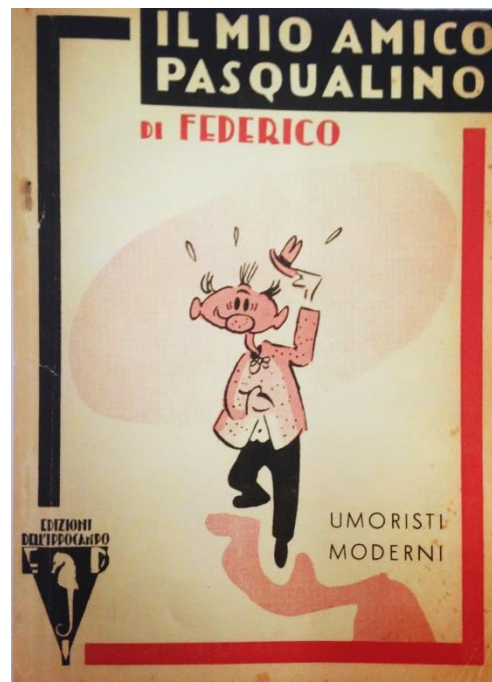


Fig. 27: Cover of Fellini’s *Il mio amico Pasqualino*

¹⁶ ‘The characters of those coloured pages [comic strips] had nothing to do with the world that surrounded us. However, they were quite accurate in regards to the janitor and the archpriest. So much so that we assigned those characters’ nicknames to people in our everyday life. So the archpriest became Padron Ciccio, the one who had the evil mule, the Checca, who kicked her horseshoes on peoples backsides... or our neighbour, whom my mother had named Arcibaldo, the character created by Geo McManus.’ (my translation)

¹⁷ ‘[In *Marc’ Aurelio*] Federico (Fellini) raccontava la sua storia [...]. Mi resi conto poi, che la gran parte dei capitoli del libro *Il mio amico Pasqualino* coincidevano quasi del tutto con i racconti brevi del *Marc’ Aurelio* (Casetti & Caruso, 1997: 15-16); ‘[In *Marc’ Aurelio*] Federico Fellini tells his story (...) I then realized that most of the chapters in his book *Il mio amico Pasqualino* coincided almost entirely with his short stories in *Marc’ Aurelio*’ (my translation).

4. Characters as ‘Creative Possibilities’

Pier Cloruro de Lambicchi e l'arcivernice was published in *Il corriere dei piccoli* from 1927 till 1950. The protagonist of this comic, the work of artist and cartoonist Giovanni Manca, was Pier Cloruro, a scientist who invents a varnish which makes his paintings or images come to life. Manca's work seems to have been another source of inspiration for the director's short film segment *Le Tentazioni del Dottor Antonio* (1962) with a comparable protagonist, Dottor Antonio.

Fellini's film has been described as ‘a big satirical comic strip’ and as the director's ‘little fairy-tale’ (Kezich, 2007: 231). Fellini himself refers to it as ‘una storiellina per *Il corriere dei piccoli*’¹⁸ (Borini, 2009: 67), a confession that both demonstrates unmistakably how *Il corriere dei piccoli* remained a point of reference throughout his cinematographic career, and how it predetermined this film's minor success.



Fig. 28: *Piero Cloruro de Lambicchi*, 08.06.1930

Giovanni Manca bestowed onto Pier Lambicchi a magical varnish which, once painted over the painting (figure 28 & 29), brought to life the subject matter, usually Medieval or Renaissance figures.¹⁹ This corresponds to Fellini's scene in *Le Tentazioni*, in which the

¹⁸ ‘a little story for *Il Corriere dei Piccoli*’ (my translation)

¹⁹ As is shown in figure 28, Pier Cloruro varnishes over the painting and then the medieval man walks out of the frame and into the town.

poster of Sylvia (Anita Ekberg) comes to life after a night of rain, just like Lambicchi's paintings did after a varnish over the surface. This clear similarity demonstrates how Manca's creativity for this young reader's comic strip influenced Fellini's surreal and fantastical short film, showing that to obtain his distinctive narrative he only need look at the literature of his childhood.



Fig. 29: Giovanni Manca's strip in *Il Corriere dei Piccoli*, 13.07.1930

The billboard image of Sylvia (figure 30) is a clear reference to Titian's *Venus* (figure 31).²⁰ We especially see the resemblance through the gaze of *la Venere* and the traditional nude pose on the bed. The director himself gave a description of the type of woman he wished to portray: Titian's *Venus Reclining* (Kezich, 2002: 238). To an extent, therefore, Aldouby's emphasis on high art in Fellini's films would be appropriate here; however, taking into consideration that Pier Cloruro seemed to varnish over quite a few Renaissance subjects, Fellini's high art reference seems to be borrowed from the Renaissance subject matter as depicted in Manca's comic strips.



Figure 30: *Le Tentazioni del Dottor Antonio*

²⁰ *Venere di Urbino* (1538), *Venere con Organista e Cupido* (1548) and *Venere con pernice e Cupido* (c1550)

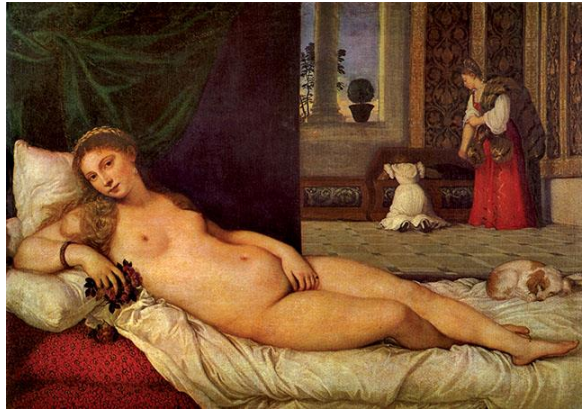


Figure 31: Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, 1538

Additionally, we note that not only does Sylvia come to life, but Antonio himself becomes the horseback warrior from the painting that was hanging in his house (figure 40), a subject identical to Raphael's *San Giorgio e il drago* (1504-06) (figure 41). Raphael's painting depicts San Giorgio in full armour on a rearing horse as he is about to attack the dragon. Antonio, too, was shown in full metal armour, just like St. George (figure 42), while trying to fight the devilish "dragon" Sylvia. There is even a shot in which Antonio is framed throwing his spear towards Sylvia. Simultaneously, a rearing horse statue is framed (figure 43) in the same shot, thus re-rendering the image in a way that is remarkably similar to the San Giorgio painting. In this instance, Fellini is creating a clear connection between the painting in Antonio's living room and Antonio himself, continuing the surreal theme of static imagery coming to life.

By making paintings and billboards come to life, just like in Manca's comics, Fellini used cinema to put his fantastical imagination into a space of what seemed like reality, thus creating an illusionary space and breaking the boundaries of cinema, which at that time was used primarily or at least authoritatively as a medium to represent realist and non-hallucinatory and bizarre events.



Figure 40: Still from *Le Tentazioni* showing painting of *San Giorgio e il drago*



Figure 41: Raphael's *San Giorgio e il drago* 1504-06



Figures 42 & 43: Stills from *Le Tentazioni del Dottor Antonio* with Antonio as St. George

In 1945 Manca's comics were still being published in *Il Corriere dei Piccoli* and it was in this year that Giovanni Manca published a story in which Pier Cloruro was horrified at poster advertisements that were placed outside his home and insisted they to be removed: 'Questo muro qua, voglio subito vedere senza pubblicità'²¹ (figure 32). The cleaner, however, accidentally used Pier Cloruro's *arcivernice* to remove the circus advertisement, making the elephant come to life. This panel and complaint of Pier Cloruro visually mirrors that of Dottor Antonio in Fellini's film, who likewise complained and insisted that the billboard of Sylvia be removed (figure 33): "io abito lì, e voi mi piazzate il manifesto proprio di fronte

²¹ 'I want to immediately see this wall here without any advertisements!'

alle finestre?’²² Observe both characters as they point in anger towards the unwanted advertisements while demanding for them to be removed. Iconographic similarities are further seen in details such as the smart clothing and glasses they both wear.



Figure 32: Pier Cloruro de Lambicchi in *Corriere dei Piccoli*, 28.01.1945



Figure 33: Still from *Le Tentazioni del Dottor Antonio*

The character of Dottor Antonio seems to emulate that of Pier Lambicchi, and although Dottor Antonio did not paint varnish over the billboard like Pier Lambicchi did with his paintings, he did order that sheets be placed over the ‘blasphemous’ billboard. That same evening it rained, causing the removal of the white sheets that Antonio had hung. It didn’t take long after the rain for Sylvia to magically come alive and walk out into the streets of EUR. It was as though the rain had made her come to life and walk out of her set panel, as if she had been brushed with Lambicchi’s magical *arcivernice*. Chiara Borroni has described this scene as a ‘pioggia liberatrice’²³ (Borroni, 2010: 16), one that allows the oversized Sylvia to free herself from the panel and wander the streets. Fellini could have simply let Sylvia come to life on a normal night, but he chose for it to happen following the rain that falls on the billboard after Antonio has ordered for it to be covered with sheets (figures 34 to 37), suggesting that either the sheets or the rain triggered the magical and fictional event. This is compelling as it implies that without the rain or covering sheets, the billboard would not have come alive, just as Lambicchi’s subjects would have remained lifeless without the *arcivernice*.

In Manca’s comic, Pier Lambicchi is seen as a sort of magician, with the capability of making paintings and images come to life. Is Antonio seen as a Lambicchi figure? Perhaps, but nevertheless I would also argue that it is Fellini who sees himself as Pier Lambicchi, an artist who is able to give life and bring magic to his films.

²² ‘I live there, and you decide to place the poster right in front of my windows?’ (my translation)

²³ ‘liberating rain’ (my translation)



Figures 34 to 37: Stills from *Le Tentazioni*



Figures 38 & 39: Sylvia roaming free out of her billboard and Pier Cloruro's Renaissance lady walking out of her painting

There are also suggestive similarities between *Le Tentazioni del Dottor Antonio* and *Little Nemo*, as seen in the figures below, which show Sylvia walking among the Fascist buildings in EUR, just as Little Nemo does in his dream.



Figure 44 : *Le Tentazioni del Dottor Antonio*



Figure 45: Detail from *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, 29.09.1907

What *Le Tentazioni* shows is that Fellini refused to confine himself within any limits. That is, like a cartoon strip, Fellini's characters in *Le Tentazioni* become something illusionary, fantastical and surreal. As Burke (1984: 123) noted: 'Dr Antonio is the first film in which Fellini [creates] [...] human images which function not as people but as creative possibilities'. In the same way, cartoon characters are given all sorts of possibilities by the artist. Burke (1984: 125) likewise noted that in *Le Tentazioni*, 'Fellini begins to compress enormous narrative significance within each individual image'; that is, rather than depending on the movement of the film for his narrative, he packs each frame with fictiveness, blurring the boundaries and differences between these two mediums.

If Fellini, a highly respected director, was so influenced by comic strip narratives, imagery and characters created by "low" artists such as Giovanni Manca or Antonio Rubino, perhaps one should begin to question the status accorded to these cartoonists and illustrators. Fellini himself said that the talent of the cartoonist Windsor McCay demonstrated 'quella padronanza artistica [che] era aldilà delle mie possibilità'²⁵ (Chandler, 1995: 26). In part, it is thanks to the "low" art of comics like McCay's that Fellini obtained his status as auteur, as

²⁵ 'that artistic mastery [which] was beyond my own abilities' (my translation)

these offered him both fantastical elements and creative possibilities, as well as the connection to his childhood. We can see all this clearly in *I Clowns*, which shows us how Fellini used cinema as a medium to reinterpret and depict himself through characters that he had looked up to and admired from his childhood onwards. Fellini's opening scene in *I Clowns* not only demonstrates his obsession with the circus and dreams, but also his obsession with *Il corriere dei piccoli*, all interests beginning during his childhood; thus rendering this period in his life as a predominant point of reference for his artistic influence and self-expression.

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