

The Dichotomy of Classical Antiquity in *Viaggio in Italia*

Ever since the release of Roberto Rossellini's *Viaggio in Italia* (i.e. *Journey to Italy*) in 1953, critics have struggled to come to grips with the film's aporetic stance. Although the film's malaise bedevils analysis as a work that is wholly antithetical to conventions of Hollywood cinema, the antitheses themselves as well as their juxtapositions, such as the inextricability of life and death, are fundamental to any interpretation of *Viaggio in Italia*. In order to show the symbiosis of such paradoxes, Rossellini calls upon the city of Naples to be "the third person"¹ in a *ménage à trois* with the protagonists, Katherine and Alex Joyce, so that the two may experience "the feeling of life eternal."² In a land where "death has an archaeological meaning,"³ this feeling must be discovered by peeling away the layers of Naples' classical past.

It is with this image of excavation in mind that I propose to elucidate the process by which these heavily-stratified, primordial, and sublime ruins from antiquity occupy a position which may be likened to the dialectical structure of the film's narrative as a whole. This palimpsest which Rossellini fashions in turn speaks to the unique ability of Naples as a kind of Freudian "psychical entity" to transcend the confines of mortality itself by virtue of the omnipresence of the city's archaeological vestiges. By probing the depths of the disintegrating marriage of the Joyces vis-à-vis the artifacts of Naples, with detailed considerations of the National Archaeological Museum, the Sibyl's Cave at Cumae, the Phlegraean Fields, and the ruins of Pompeii, I will demonstrate that Rossellini inextricably binds antiquity to modernity, fiction to reality, and ultimately death to life for the film's protagonists by means of the physical landscape.

¹ P. Brunette. *Roberto Rossellini*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987: 155.

² T. Gallagher. *The Adventures of Roberto Rossellini*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1998: 397.

³ Brunette 166 n. 24.