Journal of European Studies
2023, Vol. 53(3) 269–283

DOI: 10.1177/00472441231188785
journals.sagepub.com/home/jes


To Woody Allen's Rome with Love: Four city profiles

Deividas Zibalas
Vilnius University, Lithuania

Abstract

This article focuses on Woody Allen's cinematic representation of Rome in *To Rome with Love* (2012). Rome is undoubtedly one of the most intertextually 'contaminated' cityscapes in the world, which means that there are so many pre-existing texts about it, such as paintings, novels, travel guides and films, that our minds are filled with predetermined notions of what the city is like. There are at least two well-established traditions of representing Rome that influence the way the city has been imagined. This article explores where Allen's film stands within the tradition by focusing on four specific semantic profiles or scripts of the city overlooked by the film's reviewers.

Keywords

cinematic city, city profiles, Italian culture, Rome, *To Rome with Love*, Woody Allen

> Inside and outside its famous studios Cinecittà, Rome has always been a cinematic city. Generations of film-makers have been attracted not only by its ancient, decaying grandeur but also by its modern structures, its suburbs, its provinces. From the city's historic centre to its more outlying areas, it would seem that no corner of Rome has escaped the glare of film cameras. (Iannone, 2014: 6)

Rome has inspired countless film productions (see Solomons, 2014). Nearly all of its corners, as Pasquale Iannone has vividly put it, have been exposed to film cameras, perhaps most famously in such films as *Roma città aperta* (dir. Roberto Rossellini, 1945), *La dolce vita* (dir. Federico Fellini, 1960) and, more recently, *La grande bellezza* (dir. Paolo Sorrentino, 2013). Rome has always had a strong cinematic presence in Hollywood films as well. The 1950s and 1960s, the so-called 'Hollywood on the Tiber' period (Balio,

Corresponding author:
Deividas Zibalas, Faculty of Philology, Vilnius University, Universiteto 5, LT-01513 Vilnius, Lithuania.
Email: deividaszib@gmail.com

2010), was especially productive with such classic American romances as *Roman Holiday* (dir. William Wyler, 1953) and *Rome Adventure* (dir. Delmer Daves, 1962), which established narrative patterns that still influence the way Rome is portrayed today.

Rome remains a popular setting for contemporary Hollywood films, as exemplified by *To Rome with Love* (dir. Woody Allen, 2012), which is the focus of this article. Allen's image of Rome has been perpetuated globally, with the film having earned the lion's share of its profit from international audiences. Allen is known for his 'affirmative representations of urban life', so much so that his oeuvre has been deemed a 'continuing love affair with New York' (McArthur, 1997: 33). His more recent career could similarly be described as a string of love affairs with European cities. *To Rome with Love* is the last instalment of a trilogy comprising *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (2008) and *Midnight in Paris* (2011). *To Rome with Love*, however, has been received least favourably out of these three, with many critics pointing out the extensive use of clichés and stereotypes (e.g. Bradshaw, 2012; Johnston, 2012; Romney, 2012).

Rome is undoubtedly one of the most intertextually 'contaminated' cityscapes in the world, meaning that there are so many pre-existing texts about it, such as paintings, poems, travel guides and films, that our minds are 'stuffed and crammed' (Mahler, 2020: 30) with prefabricated images of the city. In fact, there are two well-established traditions of representing Rome that influence the way the city has been imagined. This article argues that the film puts forth four specific semantic profiles or scripts of the city overlooked by the film's reviewers.

Rome studies: Outlining the tradition

Filmmakers are not the only artists to have been enamoured with Rome. To paraphrase Colin McArthur (1997: 19), Rome has been the subject of so many paintings and novels that it is impossible to be completely unfamiliar with it. As a city frequently 'visited' via films, paintings and books, Rome exists as much in the imagination as it does in reality, the two poles intimately intertwined and inseparable, or as Jonathan Raban (2008 (1974)) would put it, the Rome of myths and illusions, or the soft city, is perhaps more real than the hard city identifiable on maps. According to Andreas Mahler (1999, 2020), what makes our experience of cities meaningful are *city scripts*: 'For our experience to become meaningful presupposes some scripted experience preceding ours, some previous (pragmatic) "use", just as much as it relies on the result(s) of this use, which gives it some kind of semantic profile' (Mahler, 2020: 26). In this sense, Rome is an 'over-scripted' cityscape, its image shrouded in a plethora of pre-existing texts, preconceived ideas and pictures.

Specifically, the image of Rome is saturated by two prominent imaginaries, or two well-established ways of imagining the city. As Dom Holdaway and Filippo Trentin (2013: 2) explain:

> The first of these focuses on the fortune, or the decay, of the (historical) city's classical image, with the key paradigm of the city and unwavering point of reference thus being the 'Eternal City'. The second concentrates on Rome's urban and suburban modern growth, highlighting the sharp contrast between the beauty of Rome's ancient city centre and the ugliness or corruption of its modern peripheries.

These two could be understood as 'distinct and complementary approaches' to Rome within contemporary Rome studies (Holdaway and Trentin, 2013). The first approach has its roots in Christian pilgrimages, the Grand Tour of the late-eighteenth century and the guidebooks of the nineteenth century (Malia Hom, 2015). Foreign travellers, such as Lord Byron, 'learned how to see the past, to contemplate the beauty of art and ruins' in Rome, and their views have been disseminated in subsequent guidebooks (Malia Hom, 2015: 7). The second approach is informed by the changes that occurred after the Second World War, specifically the city's rapid expansion (Holdaway and Trentin, 2013). The growing periphery generated an alternative image, which was seen as contrasting with the grandeur of the historical city within the perimeter of the Aurelian Walls.

These distinct yet complementary visions of Rome have been informed by two distinct perspectives, which are compared by David Bass (1997) in his seminal text: 'Insiders and outsiders: latent urban thinking in movies of modern Rome'. Naturally, the outsider's view, informed by the Grand Tour tradition, has been codified by 'jumbling together' images of tourist attractions, whereas the insider's view has been realised through 'the gritty reality of the city and its periphery' (Thormod, 2019: 123). In cinematic terms, the outsider's perspective tends to be realised through what Bass refers to as the *film cartolina*, or a 'postcard' image of the city. According to Bass (1997: 86), 'Such "postcard" movies wrap and fold the city, ignoring and destroying swathes of urban context, to create a film-city "attractions" selected from the real city's obliging scenic reserve'. Is it safe to assume that Allen's *To Rome with Love* will just be such a 'postcard' movie, as Allen is an outsider; unless he can somehow subsume both perspectives.

To Rome with Love: A postmodern narrative

'In this city, all is a story' declares the film's narrator, a traffic officer, at the beginning of *To Rome with Love*. When he utters these words, he is standing in one of the busiest and most chaotic roundabouts in the entire city located in Piazza Venezia. As Elisabetta Povoledo (2021) puts it, 'If, as it's said, all roads lead to Rome, then they intersect at Piazza Venezia'. In fact, it is where four major roads intersect; all the city's major sites can easily be reached from here: the Colosseum, the Forum, the Campo de' Fiori, the Vatican City, the Trevi Fountain, Piazza del Popolo, the Baths of Diocletian and Villa Torlonia. Symbolically, then, the narrator finds himself at a crossroads, probably just like Allen himself, all paths available to him ('all is a story'), but, unlike, famously, the speaker of Robert Frost's poem who has to take a single path, 'less travelled by', the narrator takes four paths, and we are taken on four different journeys, four vignettes of life in Rome.

To Rome with Love does not align with a single tradition. Allen carves out a different path for himself or a *third* way, what has been described as a *postmodern approach*. It 'finds its root in the deconstruction of the classical palimpsest (. . .) and finds instead its theoretical backbone in an anti-universal, anti-eternal, fluid and decentred idea of its cityscape' (Holdaway and Trentin, 2013: 7). In Allen's film, the romantic image of the Eternal City constitutes just one reference point among others. By providing a pluralistic image of the city, he 'problematize[s] the universal idea of Rome' (Holdaway and Trentin, 2013: 3). He does not necessarily focus on 'the gritty reality of the city'

(Thormod, 2019: 123) either, but Rome is nevertheless shown as a modern metropolis characterised by such classical tropes as the overstimulation of the senses (Simmel, 1950 (1903)) which challenges the simplistic paradigm of the Eternal City.

Allen builds his pluralistic vision by turning to a foundational work of Italian literature, Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron*. Originally, the film was supposed to be called *Bop Decameron*, but the title was eventually changed due to the general bafflement it incurred (Jagernauth, 2011). Although *The Decameron* is strictly speaking not a 'Roman' text as such, it has been embraced by the Italian anthology film tradition, and its modern film adaptations have been set in different locations around Italy, including Rome. The most famous cinematic adaptation *The Decameron* (dir. Pier Paolo Passolini, 1971), for example, is mostly set in southern Italy, but *Boccaccio '70* (1962), an anthology film by four directors, including Fellini, is set in contemporary Rome and is preoccupied with questions of morality and love in modern times. By turning to *The Decameron*, Allen signals that he draws his inspiration from the anthology film tradition. Indeed, some of the aspects of his film are very Decameronesque; it prominently explores such themes as sex, lust and adultery and includes bawdy jokes.

Just like in *The Decameron*, the stories in *To Rome with Love* are organised around a narrative frame, as the traffic officer introduces the film's premise and the main characters of the four stories. In the first story, Hayley (Alison Pill), an American tourist, falls in love with Michelangelo (Flavio Parenti), an Italian lawyer she meets in Rome, but soon the story shifts to Jerry (Woody Allen), Hayley's father. The second story includes Antonio (Alessandro Tiberi) and Milly (Alessandra Mastronardi), a newlywed Italian couple from the small northern town of Pordenone, who come to Rome for their honeymoon. While Milly wanders around the city, Anna (Penélope Cruz), a prostitute, pretends to be Milly in front of Antonio's relatives. The next story is about a famous American architect John (Alec Baldwin) who accidentally runs into Jack (Jesse Eisenberg), an architecture student who lives in John's old apartment. The final story focuses on Leopoldo Pisanello (Roberto Benigni), a typical middle-class Italian, who wakes up one morning to find that he has become famous for no apparent reason. The impressive star power of the film, including such Hollywood household names as Alec Baldwin and Penélope Cruz, as well as Italian ones, especially Roberto Benigni, adds to the film's appeal and guarantees its box office success both domestically and internationally. The mixing of American and Italian stars reinforces Allen's postmodern take on Rome as subsuming both insiders' and outsiders' images of the city.

The four stories or episodes all deal with how Rome and Italian culture are experienced through different degrees of 'outsideness/insideness' (Relph, 1976). Rather than presenting the city through one or the other perspective, Allen includes both. Two stories deal with Americans and their interaction with Italians, other Americans and Rome itself. The other two focus on Italians (some of whom are also outsiders in the context of Rome) and their relationship with other Italians and the city. In addition, the film employs several city scripts or frames: high culture, cinema, spectacular architecture and fame. Each of the stories is preoccupied with one particular art form and makes use of a binary opposition to comment on the relationship between different groups of people and their relationship with those art forms and the city. In Hayley's story, it is Italian *opera* and the binary opposition between conservative and avant-garde approaches to art. In Milly and

Antonio's story, Rome is constructed through the paradigmatic representation of *cinematic* cities, through the binary opposition between a small town and a metropolis. In John's story, it is the iconic *architecture* of Rome, as the film plays with the dichotomy between superficial and profound admiration of the built environment and culture in general. Finally, Leopoldo's story deals with *television*/*media* culture and hinges on the dichotomy between being famous and being a nobody.

Rome: The city of high culture

Known for its art and culture, Rome is obviously one of the most frequently visited cities in the world. It is full of palaces, villas and galleries with world-renowned art. Travellers have been drawn to this side of the city for centuries, even before the era of mass tourism, when Westerners, such as Byron, would come to 'contemplate the beauty of art and ruins' (Malia Hom, 2015: 7). Allen's decision to focus on opera in Rome is somewhat unorthodox. It is true that Rome is home to some famous opera houses and theatres, such as Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, where such colossal figures as Enrico Caruso, Beniamino Gigli and Luciano Pavarotti have performed (Romeing, 2018), and Teatro Argentina that features in the film, but other Italian cities, such as Milan or Venice, are better known for opera. Allen's somewhat superficial knowledge of Italian culture shows; Italy is the birthplace of opera, so, it seems, it does not matter for him whether it is Rome, Milan or Venice. Opera seems to be chosen simply as a prototypical example of high art, an aspect which becomes relevant thematically in the film.

Hayley's story focuses on two culturally and socially different households. Hayley's parents, Jerry, a retired opera director, and Phyllis (Judy Davis), a psychiatrist, are representatives of upper middle-class Americans, while Michelangelo's parents constitute a more traditional lower middle-class household, his father being a mortician and his mother a housewife. The film highlights this difference when Jerry and Phyllis are shown on the plane to Rome discussing Michelangelo's political beliefs. Jerry calls him a communist and frets over his daughter marrying into 'Eurotrash'. What initially appears to be a typical love story set in Rome, known from such films as *Roman Holiday*, is soon eclipsed by Jerry and his ambition to revive his career by casting Giancarlo (Fabio Armiliato), Michelangelo's father, in an opera production. Since Jerry is critical of Michelangelo's politics, him being 'a do-gooder' in Phyllis's words, he strives, perhaps subconsciously, for the approval of Roman high society through opera. The strife between the two families over this, especially the tensions between Jerry and Michelangelo, threatens to destroy the relationship between Hayley and Michelangelo, the lovers of the story.

The film employs one of the oldest ploys in the repertoire of romantic comedies, that of a conflict between generations, which has to be resolved before the lovers can reunite (Grindon, 2011). By making Italian culture the key preoccupation of the story, however, Allen adds depth to a simple formula. What is at the centre of the conflict between the two households is Italian opera and the significantly different attitudes the two families exhibit towards culture and art. What appears to be a pastime activity for Giancarlo and his family, something one does privately by singing in the shower, while the stage is reserved for professionals (not such simple men as Giancarlo), is seen by Jerry as an

opportunity to make a name for himself in Italy. He does not care that Giancarlo has stage fright; he is driven by ruthless and blind ambition for renown. Jerry's opera production serves as a meeting point between American and Italian cultures, where the conflict between the two families is re-enacted. The outcome of Jerry's effort is a bizarre avant-garde spectacle, Giancarlo performing while actually showering.

The episode juxtaposes two approaches to art, a kind of conservative approach versus a more avant-garde one, a clash which is enhanced through an overt intertextual reference to the film *Shower* (dir. Zhang Yang, 1999). Yang's film takes place in an old bathhouse in Beijing, which is destined for demolition due to its unprofitability; it is a place where the traditional Chinese bathhouse culture is maintained through such activities as 'the opera, Chinese chess, massage, and pedicure' (Gu, 2018: 30). One of the regulars is known for singing the Italian song *O sole mio* but is able to do so only under running water in the bathhouse, and when he has to do it publicly, a makeshift shower has to be erected. He sings the song for the final time at the end of the film when the bathhouse is about to be shut down, part of the complex already destroyed, the song becoming the symbol of financial concerns eclipsing traditional culture. In this sense, the scene in *To Rome with Love* of Giancarlo singing in a shower in Teatro Argentina, one of Rome's oldest performing venues and a haven of traditional culture, highlights the absurdity of contemporary cultural practices when in order to be seen, to get financing, one has to terrify the audience, to make them outraged (Yaskevitch, 2020).

The film mocks Jerry's interpretation of classical Italian opera and, as an extension, contemporary opera practices. We understand that what Jerry is doing is making a mockery of Italian culture. It is not an accident that the opera Jerry selects is Ruggero Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* (1892), literally translated as 'clowns'. Jerry is the clown, ridiculed by the Italian press and deemed an 'imbecille', which Phyllis helps him interpret as something positive, as him being 'ahead of his time'. She uses the same phrase to describe Jerry's previous work as well, which makes us realise that her husband is not as critically acclaimed a director as he believes himself to be. We learn that he has produced Verdi's *Rigoletto* with the performers dressed as mice. His career as an opera director, then, is characterised by butchering Italian culture. According to Roger Scruton (2020), opera is such a costly endeavour nowadays that in order to receive the subsidies from 'art bureaucracies', it is necessary to 'squeeze the greatest emotion – positive or negative, it hardly matters – from the reviewers'. However contestable his argument is, Jerry's character appears to be a crude parody of such practices. His opera production receives predominantly negative reviews, but he is content as long as he is relevant and in the public eye.

This situation regarding Italian opera anticipates the reception of Allen's film and his representation of Rome. As mentioned beforehand, in several reviews, including Romney (2012) and Bradshaw (2012), *To Rome with Love* is deemed to be a collection of clichés, an absurd postcard image of the Eternal City. However, the film exhibits a high degree of irony; we as viewers are not encouraged to side with Jerry or appreciate his avant-garde take on classical Italian opera. Allen, who plays the role of Jerry, self-consciously critiques contemporary celebrity culture and the Hollywood practices of film production. The film should not be interpreted at face value; the clichés are used as a device to reflect on the absurdity of how culture is produced. Allen constructs the film as a kind of

'pseudo-event' (see Boorstin, 1992 (1961)), a superficial spectacle that generates media coverage, people talking about the big names of the film, from Penélope Cruz to Alec Baldwin, and the fact that it is another film by Allen. The film invites us to partake of the game and to reflect critically on what we are seeing.

Through the lens of comedy, the film reflects on serious topics and highlights the chasm between American and Italian cultures and the problem of transferability of different cultures. Ironically, Jerry is unable to make sense of such a simple Italian word as 'imbecille', which has a direct equivalent in English. If he struggles to make sense of a simple Italian word, how can he produce something as complex as an Italian opera? This raises the question of how Italian culture can be appreciated and experienced authentically by someone from the outside, by an American like Jerry. As an extension, this makes one wonder whether Allen can indeed represent Rome originally without making a mockery of it.

The film suggests that what is necessary to restore the equilibrium between the two households and American and Italian cultures is a compromise, such as that which ends the conflict between Hayley's and Michelangelo's families and leads to the reconciliation between the two lovers. Giancarlo has achieved his dream of performing in an opera, and the Italian press has praised his voice, which also appeases Michelangelo who was afraid that they would make fun of his father. Jerry has satisfied his ambition to stage an opera and to revive his career; he, once more, ends up believing that he is 'ahead of his time' and his production is a success. His opera 'squeezes the greatest emotion' (Scruton, 2020) from the reviewers; it is discussed in the press and, from his perspective, is a great success.

Rome: The city of cinema

In the second episode, Antonio and Milly come to Rome for their honeymoon, but they are also planning to settle down there since Antonio is offered a job by his uncle. Their episode explores the contrast between the high society of Rome and Italians from small provincial towns such as Pordenone in the Veneto region. Their adventure in Rome could be construed as an unsuccessful rite of passage as the process of initiation into the high society of the city is not felicitous. Antonio clearly does not fit in since he is not interested in what his uncle's acquaintances are interested in, mainly football, yachting and hunting, so he convinces Milly to go back home to Pordenone.

In this episode, the cityscape of Rome is constructed as a kind of cinematic palimpsest (see Daković, 2011). Allen's filmic text is a hypertextual construct that builds on previous texts about Rome. He is an avid admirer of Federico Fellini (Sayad, 2013), so it is not surprising that Fellini's *Lo sceicco bianco* (*The White Sheik*, 1952) constitutes a clear hypotext, or 'an earlier text' (Genette, 1997: 5). Both the films are concerned with newlywed couples from small provincial towns who come to Rome for their honeymoon but get separated at the beginning of the film. Both women, Milly and Wanda, meet their favourite actors and go on adventures with them while both men, Antonio and Ivan, try to hide the disappearance of their wives from their relatives. In addition, in *The White Sheik*, the relatives and the husband await an audience with the Pope, while in *To Rome*, Antonio's relatives take him and Anna (who pretends to be Milly) on the tour of Vatican.

In *To Rome with Love*, however, the contrast between Italians from the city and the country is made especially prominent. While Fellini's Wanda sneaks out to meet her favourite actor outside the city, Milly stays at the very heart of the city, in the old Jewish Ghetto.

Allen borrows the narrative structure of *Lo sceicco bianco* to reflect on the contemporary cityscape of Rome and constructs it as an archetypal metropolis (see McArthur, 1997: 21–26). This tradition is most famously exemplified by F. W. Murnau's silent romantic drama *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* (1926), where, just like Antonio and Milly, a young couple experience the pleasures and vices of a big city and return to the countryside. As Claire Sisco King (2013: 192) observes, discussing two other 'late-Woody' films, 'Though neither film references Hollywood or filmmaking directly, each film bears traces of familiar Hollywood tropes and storylines that invite viewers to interpret these films in relationship to the culture of Hollywood cinema'. This is exactly what Allen does in *To Rome with Love* by recycling the city/small town dichotomy, so typical of Hollywood cinematic representation of big cities (but also prominent in other cinema traditions).

The contrast between the city and the small town is obviously played with through the opposition between Anna, a prostitute who pretends to be Antonio's wife, and Milly. As McArthur elaborates, 'the master opposition of country/city' is realised through 'a series of sub-oppositions', especially in the form of the city vs country girl opposition (McArthur, 1997: 21). Dressed in a short red dress, undomesticated and unmarried, Anna is clearly the 'city girl' type, embodying the sexual freedoms and liberties of a metropolis. Forgetting that she has to pretend to be Milly, Anna vociferously declares to Antonio's family, much to his distress and to their shock, that she will never bear children. Milly is constantly contrasted with Anna, not only visually, as she wears a long floral dress and has a hairdo of a 'provincial teacher' (as she describes it herself), but also verbally by Antonio who constantly compares her to an angel and a saint. At least initially, she embodies the typical character from a small town lost in a big city.

The film, however, subverts the typical trope of what Barbara Mennel (2008: 180) describes as 'the urbanite who can exploit the naïve character from the country'. From the moment Milly meets her favourite actor, we can clearly see her being seduced. She is oblivious to his intentions and follows him blindly. The actor embodies the preying type, an older gentleman who dotes on a young woman. He sees her as an object of desires, a naïve girl from a small town he can easily get his way with, but Milly turns out to be less naïve than he thought, and he does not get his way with her. Similarly, Anna is not shown as a typical urbanite seductress, a femme fatale, who preys on a naïve couple from a small town. She not only saves Antonio's face when his relatives stumble upon them in the hotel room but eventually has sex with him, not because she has already been paid, but because she wants to help Antonio become better for Milly who is much more sexually adventurous than he is.

What also contributes significantly to the image of Rome as a metropolis are cinematic devices. Unlike in a typical Hollywood film where continuity editing, or a seamless use of cinematic devices, prevails, in *To Rome with Love*, camera and editing are sometimes used in a somewhat conspicuous manner to construct Rome as a hectic metropolis. The film exhibits a kind of cinematic reflexivity by paying attention to the 'processes and mechanisms of film creation' (Canet, 2014: 18). The camerawork and

editing resonate with films from the silent era where people from the country are often shown completely overwhelmed by a large city, again, as in Murnau's *Sunrise*, where the protagonist's wife, completely unaccustomed to large city life, is almost killed by traffic.

In *To Rome with Love*, it is Milly who cannot cope with the hectic nature of Rome. She ventures out into the city streets to find a hairdresser, but Rome becomes a labyrinth for her. Any notion of 'romantic' Rome is rejected in the episode. The episodic structure of the film highlights her lostness acutely. Interrupted by other episodes, we do not see her path through the city, but rather we witness her asking for directions in four separate locations, specifically at the corner of Via dei Greci and Via del Corso, in Piazza del Popolo, in front of Largo di Torre Argentina and, finally, in front of Fontana delle Tartarughe in Piazza Mattei. This signifies that the city for her is not a network of connected locations she is able to navigate, but rather a one-dimensional collection of unrelated locales.

As a typical heroine from a small town lost in a big city, Milly's experience of Rome is marked by overstimulation of the senses, an experience eerily echoing Simmel's description in *Metropolis and Mental Life* (1950 (1903)). Milly is completely overwhelmed by the masses of passers-by, so much so that she seems to be visually almost inconspicuous in the shots where she is shown lost, not occupying the central position of the frame. The only thing that allows the viewers to distinguish her is her flowery dress, which also distinguishes her as different from the city dwellers. In Piazza del Popolo, the dizziness of the metropolis is marked by a 360 degree camera swivel which symbolises her not knowing which direction to take and being completely overwhelmed. We finally see her leaning absent-mindedly against the Turtle Fountain. She exhibits the kind of *blasé* attitude, typical of modern city dwellers who are apathetic and passive, unable to cope with the overstimulation characteristic of the large, modern city.

The highly cinematic nature of Rome is highlighted further through the 'film-within-film' structure. After roaming aimlessly in search of a hairdresser, Milly accidentally stumbles upon a movie set in Piazza Mattei. Approached by a famous actress, she raises her eyes, and we are shown cameras, lighting equipment and actors in costumes. The square is literally shown as a mise-en-scène, a 'cinematic point', to use Koeck's (2013: 45) phrase, where on-location space is intertwined with a cinematic space. The film clearly points to the highly mediated nature of Rome, how it is one of the paradigmatic cinematic cities, with cinema having always played a significant role in producing the image of the city. Rome is full of these cinematic zones that have featured as a movie set (see Solomons, 2014), and Milly accidentally ends up on one of them.

For Milly, Rome thus becomes a highly cinematic experience, where her imagination fuses with the cityscape, and emerging as simultaneously *real and imagined* (Soja, 1996). When Milly is introduced to Luca (Antonio Albanese), the actor, she seems to be fascinated not by the man himself but by his roles in different films she is able to list quickly. The film ironically reflects on the significance ascribed to people and objects or sites seen on screen. The fact that Luca is considered to be 'the sexiest man in Rome', which Milly mentions as well, stands in stark contrast with his actual appearance, that of a middle-aged, overweight, bald man who clearly tries to use Milly's naivety for his own sexual gratification.

Rome: The city of spectacular architecture

The third story is the only one where the characters actively engage with the famous touristic sites of Rome, commenting on their cultural significance. The camera focuses on famous sites, such as Piazza del Campidoglio, as the characters disappear from the frame, only their voices audible in the background. It is the only story where the ancient city features prominently and is treated as a source of admiration and awe by the characters. Monica and Jack, for example, voice their fascination with the sites and buildings they visit.

John's story provides an outsider's perspective, focusing exclusively on Americans in Rome, their relationship with the city, each other and, more generally, culture. Apart from Leonardo, Jack's Italian friend who he sets up with Monica, the story is void of Italians. The 'Eternal City' paradigm becomes the clear reference point for the episode; there is even a direct reference to it when John's wife declares at the beginning of the episode that 'it's the Eternal City. It never changes'. The images of ancient ruins and iconic buildings pervade the episode. Since Jack, Monica and Sally are non-Italians, it is not surprising that the story provides the most superficial and unauthentic representation of Rome in the film. Bass (1997) himself has argued that this kind of vision of the city is typical of outsiders. An authentic sense of place can only 'derive from insideness, a sense of belonging to a place' (Freestone and Liu, 2016: 3), which the characters lack. In fact, it would be strange if, focusing on tourists in Rome, Allen would have attempted to do anything else than try to play with the touristic or romantic vision of the city. The question is whether this vision is indeed genuine, or Allen uses it as a means to parody the superficial approach to Rome.

No matter how important the love triangle between Jack, Monica and Sally is, the reading of the story as a simple love triangle is complicated by the figure of John, who appears to be visible only to Jack and occasionally Monica. The parallels between Jack and John, the fact that they are both involved in architecture and that Jack is staying in John's old apartment, invite us to view Jack as John's younger self (not to mention the fact that the name *Jack* is diminutive of *John* in English). Soon after meeting Jack in Trastevere, John's character metamorphoses into Jack's inner voice, used to question his every decision regarding Monica. John becomes more of a device to reveal Jack's innermost feelings than a character in his own right. The story, then, is more about John reliving his past in Rome rather than about Jack and Monica. It is John who is introduced by the traffic officer at the beginning of the film and not the other characters.

This reading is further established through the obvious intertextual reference to Allen's film *Stardust Memories* (1980), specifically through the use of the phrase 'Ozymandias melancholia', which is uttered three times in the film. Refusing to go on the tour of the ancient sites of Rome with his wife at the beginning of the film, John explains that 'All those old ruins just depress me. I'll get Ozymandias melancholia'. The phrase is foregrounded when his wife repeats it, laughing and asking where he learnt it (the film provides a possible answer when the phrase is uttered once more by Monica to Jack when gazing upon the Colosseum, which strengthens the idea that Jack stands for John's old self). The phrase itself is coined by Allen in *Stardust Memories*, where Sandy Bates (played by Allen himself), a film director, remembers his past relationships when

invited to a retrospective of his own films. This image of a film director reliving his life through his films then metamorphoses into an architect reliving his love affair in Rome.

The affair serves as a pretext for Allen to reflect on the relationship between individuals and culture, specifically Italian culture. The film mocks and parodies the superficiality of admiring cultural clichés, an attitude encapsulated by Monica. She, as is aptly observed by John, is a 'pseudo-intellectual', even a 'con artist', an expert at creating an illusion that she knows more than she really does. She hides her lack of knowledge behind the façade of name-dropping. She mentions poets, architects, literary works, such as Rilke, Pound, Gaudí, *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *Stavrogin's Confession*, but is only able to cite single lines, or reference their most famous works, such as Gaudi's the Sagrada Família. Monica simply consumes culture without reflecting on it, accumulating surface knowledge, clichés and cultural signs that she uses to present herself as a connoisseur of art and culture. She is not interested in gaining depth or really understanding the specific works she mentions.

This contentment with the superficial is reflected in the representation of Rome as the episode provides a beautiful postcard image of the city. It focuses on tourist clichés, ignoring 'swathes of urban context'. Monica, with Jack as her guide, takes the most stereotypical tour of the city possible. Her attitude towards Italian culture and Rome is that of a tourist in the most pejorative sense of the word; she is content with seeing the iconic buildings, uttering a couple of clichés about them and moving on at the first opportunity possible when she is offered a job in Los Angeles.

The phrase 'Ozymandias melancholia' captures this superficial admiration of the ancient ruins in the film. The phrase is used to establish a dialogue not only with Allen's previous film but also with Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem Ozymandias (1818) about a traveller who stumbles upon the remnants of an ancient civilisation in a desert (see Siegal, 1985: 81–82 for a discussion on the relationship between Shelley's *Ozymandias* and *Stardust Memories*). The traveller is literally preoccupied with interpreting the surface signs of a once-great civilisation, the only visible sign being the shattered visage of a pharaoh's statue, which still conveys the initial emotion carved by the sculptor. The traveller's pensive tone stands in sharp contrast with Monica's superficial approach to the ancient ruins of Rome. Since 'Ozymandias melancholia' is associated with Monica, it is significant that initially John uses the same phrase to reject seeing the touristic sites of the city with his wife. It signals his desire to reject a simple reading of the ancient city.

Rome: The city of fame

In the fourth and final episode, Leopoldo Pisanello steps outside his flat one morning and is swamped by countless paparazzi. He appears in multiple interviews throughout the episode, answering bizarre questions about his personal life. It could be argued that media and celebrity culture become the means by which the image of Rome is constructed in Leopoldo's episode. As in the other three, meaning is generated through a binary opposition, namely between being famous and being a nobody. Leopoldo's life oscillates between anonymity and fame; first he becomes a celebrity, and by the end of the film, he becomes a nobody again. By means of this opposition between fame and anonymity, the episode reflects on Rome as the site of mass tourism, and it comments on the relationship between the locals and the tourists.

As Leopoldo's vignette provides an insider's perspective, focusing exclusively on Italians in Rome, it is more concerned with the domestic and ordinary spaces (Leopoldo's flat is located on Via di Villa Belardi 17, outside the city centre) frequented by celebrities once Leopoldo gains fame. It is stressed that he is an 'average Roman citizen of the middle class', which indicates that the episode could be interpreted as a kind of allegory. His character could be treated as the representative of all middle-class Italians of Rome whose daily life is marked by the mind-numbing routine of waking up at the exact same time, having breakfast and complaining about the economy of the country, going to the office, watching a film in the evening and repeating it all again the next day. He is described as dependable, agreeable and predictable by the narrator, and his life is shown to lack excitement until, that is, he becomes famous one morning.

The film mocks media-generated contemporary celebrity culture and, by extension, the superficial experience of Rome as one of the most famous cities in the world, a tourist mecca that receives millions of tourists per year. Nowadays, the emphasis has shifted 'from achievement-based fame to media-driven renown' (Cashmore, 2006: 7). Fame has become an end in itself, with celebrities being famous not necessarily for some skill or talent that they possess but being famous for being famous. The situation when Leopoldo has to answer all the pointless and absurd questions on the news and the interviews, such as what he eats for breakfast and whether he sleeps on his stomach or on his back, parodies contemporary media culture, specifically talk shows and interviews that verge on the pointless.

Contemporary celebrity culture and mass tourism share many points of affinity. Many tourists flock the streets of Rome not necessarily because they are interested in the city's rich history but because the image of the city has currency, meaning that everyone talks about it, and it features in films, novels, postcards and so on. Rome has undergone what Urry and Larsen (2011: 12) helpfully call 'a process of sacralisation', whereby a cultural artefact becomes 'a sacred object of tourist ritual'. In other words, Rome has acquired a celebrity-like status, the streets filled with tourists and paparazzi-like figures who point their camera lenses towards the famous sites. Rome is intimately intertwined with the practice of paparazzi, the term itself having derived from Fellini's character Paparazzo, a photographer, in *La dolce vita* (Fossard De Almeida, 2015). Fellini's film has contributed significantly to the sacralisation of the city (see Koeck, 2013: 42), turning it into a celebrity-like entity. *To Rome with Love* plays with the challenges of a city having a celebrity-like status.

The abundance of cameras that feature in Leopoldo's story, indeed, points to one of the most popular mediums of exploring Rome, that of a camera lens. This marks a very superficial relationship with the city, a mindless consumption of images that do not lead to a more profound understanding of the city and its people. Without even trying to familiarise themselves with the environment of the city, tourists frequently experience the city through countless pictures they bring home. Like the paparazzi that record every moment of Leopoldo's day, Rome is exposed to ceaseless flashes of the camera that often invade the personal space of the locals. After the initial confusion and then pleasure of being famous, Leopoldo begins to feel like a hunted beast; he cannot escape the paparazzi and their cameras. He is no longer able to enjoy his city, or rather, he has to choose other locations where the cameras will not reach him.

Leopoldo's story reveals a complex relationship between the locals and the tourists. Leopoldo embodies the experience of typical middle-class Italians living in Rome who constantly have to deal with tourists and their cameras. He cannot go anywhere without countless paparazzi surrounding him, and he is extremely annoyed with the situation. This aptly captures the ambivalent attitude the locals harbour towards the tourists that visit Rome. On the one hand, they see tourists as a nuisance, a loud mass of people that fill the streets and public squares of the city. On the other hand, Rome and the Italian economy are dependent on the tourist industry, with tourism being one of the largest industries of the country. Once Leopoldo becomes a nobody again and the cameras move on to another random person, he realises that he needs fame. No matter how much of a nuisance the tourists may be, they are necessary for the prosperity of both the city and the locals.

Conclusion: Woody Allen's pluralistic Rome

Allen combines several well-established traditions of representing Rome rather than just following a single one. The film could be construed as a kind of postmodern take on Rome, used to reject a unitary image of the city. To argue that *To Rome with Love* puts forth a 'cinematic souvenir T-shirt of Rome' (Romney, 2012), or a 'postcard' image of the city (Bass, 1997), oversimplifies the film. In essence, the viewer is in Jack's position. Like Jack, we oscillate between this seductive but superficial take on culture as embodied by Monica, while, at the same time, we are constantly reminded by the sobering voice of John to reflect on the superficial and to search for depth. We partake of the game: If we get seduced by Monica and only stay on the surface, the film becomes nothing more than a collection of clichés. John clearly invites us to be critical; he warns us not to fall for the superficial however seductive it may be.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Almantas Liudas Samalavičius for providing useful comments during the writing process of the manuscript, to Nijolė Keršytė for organising the seminar during which the manuscript was discussed as well as for providing many insightful observations and suggestions about the analysis of the film, and to Irina Melnikova for her extensive review of the manuscript as well as the allusion to Zhang Yang's film, *Shower*.

References

Balio T (2010) *The Foreign Film Renaissance on American Screens, 1946–1973*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Bass D (1997) Insiders and outsiders: latent urban thinking in movies of modern Rome. In: Penz F and Thomas M (eds) *Cinema and Architecture: Meéliès, Mallet-Stevens, Multimedia*. London: British Film Institute, pp. 84–99.

Boorstin DJ (1992 [1961]) *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*. New York: Vintage Books.

Bradshaw P (2012) *To Rome with Love* – review. *The Guardian*, 13 September. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/sep/13/to-rome-with-love-review

Canet F (2014) Metacinema as cinematic practice: a proposal for classification. *L'Atalante* 18: 17–26.

Cashmore E (2006) *Celebrity/Culture*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Daković N (2011) Imagining Belgrade: the cultural/cinematic identity of a city at the fringes of Europe. In: Pizzi K and Weiss-Sussex G (eds) *The Cultural Identities of European Cities*. Oxford: Peter Lang, pp. 61–76.

Fossard De Almeida A (2015) Shooting 'sublime blondes in tight dresses': the paparazzi in fiction film and television from *La dolce vita* to *Dirt. Celebrity Studies* 7(1): 34–44.

Freestone R and Liu E (eds) (2016) *Place and Placelessness Revisited*. New York: Routledge.

Genette G (1997) *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

Grindon L (2011) *The Hollywood Romantic Comedy: Conventions, History, Controversies*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Gu Z (2018) Nostalgia in urban cinema: a comparative analysis of Zhang Yang's *Shower* (1999) and Jia Zhangke's *24 City* (2008). *Journal of Languages, Texts, and Society* 2: 25–47.

Holdaway D and Trentin F (2013) Introduction: Rome, postmodern narratives of a cityscape. In: Holdaway D and Trentin F (eds) *Rome, Postmodern Narratives of a Cityscape*. London: Routledge, pp. 1–18.

Iannone P (2014) Rome: city of the imagination. In: Solomons G (ed.) *World Film Locationsrome*. Bristol: Intellect Books, pp. 6–7.

Jagernauth K (2011) Woody Allen changes confusing title 'Bop Decameron' to still confusing 'Nero Fiddled'. *IndieWire*, 13 October. Available at: https://www.indiewire.com/2011/10/woody-allen-changes-confusing-title-bop-decameron-to-still-confusing-nero-fiddled-115802/

Johnston T (2012) To Rome with Love. *TimeOut*, 11 September. Available at: https://www.time-out.com/movies/to-rome-with-love-1

King CS (2013) Play it again, Woody: self-reflexive critique in contemporary Woody Allen films. In: Bailey P J and Girgus S B (eds) *Cine-Scapes: Cinematic Spaces in Architecture and Cities*. New York: Routledge, pp. 188–206.

Koeck R (2013) *Cine-Scapes: Cinematic Spaces in Architecture and Cities*. New York: Routledge.

McArthur C (1997) Chinese boxes and Russian dolls: tracking the elusive cinematic city. In: Clarke D B (ed.) *The Cinematic City*. London: Routledge, pp. 19–45.

Mahler A (1999) Stadttexte – Textstädte: Formen und Funktionen diskursiver Stadtkonstitution. In: Mahler A (ed.) *Stadt-Bilder: Allegorie – Mimesis – Imagination*. Heidelberg: C. Winter, pp. 11–36.

Mahler A (2020) City scripts/city scapes: on the intertextuality of urban experience. In: Kindermann M and Rohleder R (eds) *Exploring the Spatiality of the City across Cultural Texts*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 25–43.

Malia Hom S (2015) *The Beautiful Country: Tourism and the Impossible State of Destination Italy*. Toronto, ON, Canada: University of Toronto Press.

Mennel B (2008) *Cinema and the City*. London: Routledge.

Povoledo E (2021) Return of traffic cops to landmark piazza brings unlikely joy in Rome. *The New York Time*, 20 March. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/20/world/europe/rome-coronavirus-traffic-officers.html

Raban J (2008 [1974]) *Soft City*. London: Picador.

Relph E (1976) *Place and Placelessness*. London: Pion Limited.

Romeing (2018) The opera scene in Rome. Available at: https://www.romeing.it/the-opera-scene-in-rome/

Romney J (2012) *To Rome with Love*, Woody Allen, 112 mins, 12A. *The Independent*, 16 September. Available at: https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/reviews/to-rome-with-love-woody-allen-112-mins-12a-8142179.html

Sayad C (2013) The stand-up auteur. In: Bailey PJ and Girgus B (ed.) *A Companion to Woody Allen*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, pp.15–34.
Scruton R (2020) The assault on opera. *The Imaginative Conservative*, 5 November. Available at: https://theimaginativeconservative.org/2020/11/assault-opera-timeless-roger-scruton.html
Siegal M (1985) Ozymandias Melancholia: the nature of parody in Woody Allen's *Stardust Memories. Literature-Film Quarterly* 13(2): 77–84.
Simmel G (1950 [1903]) The metropolis and mental life. In: Wolff KH (ed.) *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. New York: Free Press, pp.409–24.
Soja EW (1996) *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
Solomons G (ed.) (2014) *World Film Locations: Rome*. Bristol: Intellect Books.
Thormod K (2019) *Artistic Reconfigurations of Rome: An Alternative Guide to the Eternal City, 1989–2014*. Leiden: Brill Rodopi.
Urry J and Larsen J (2011) *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
Yaskevitch I (2020) Opera of postmodernism and new challenges of opera criticism. *Critical Stages/Scènes Critiques* 21. Available at: https://www.critical-stages.org/21/opera-of-post-modernism-and-new-challenges-of-opera-criti

Author biography

Deividas Zibalas is a lecturer and a PhD student at the Department of English Philology, Vilnius University. Among his chief research interests is fictionalised representations of cities, and his doctoral dissertation focuses on the relationship between cinema and the city, specifically the way Rome is represented in contemporary Hollywood cinema. His most recent publication in English is 'The Other, the New, and the Old. Three Images of Leith in Irvine Welsh's *Porno*', *Literatūra*, 63(4), 2021: 32–44.