

La Dolce Vita: Imagining Escapism, Passion and Self-Growth in American Films set in Italy

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Introduction

“Italy retains an almost mythical status in the minds of many who believe its groundbreaking artistic heritage, voluptuous natural beauty, deceptively simple yet elegant cuisine, and *la dolce vita* perspective have no equals on earth.”
(Hom 49).

Italy: a place known for its long-standing history, rich culture, and beautiful landscapes. Our perception of the country, as well as its people, has been shaped over the last couple of centuries by a variety of factors, ranging from the experiences of Italian immigrants to the association of them with mobster-related incidents through various media platforms, such as news media, film, and TV series. Cinema specifically has played a big role in our perception of Italians and their culture. *The Godfather*, a cult classic and highly acclaimed film that follows an Italian family through their reign as the head of the mafia in New York, was one of the many movies that focused on, and in a way ingrained, the Italian mob stereotype. For a few decades, this was the predominant way Italians were portrayed and perceived, not only in the entertainment industry, but also in our society at large.

In recent decades, however, Italy has become a reoccurring backdrop in the depiction of extravagant and passion-filled lifestyles, also known as *la dolce vita*,¹ or the sweet life. With its haute couture, beautiful scenery, delectable food, and infectious passion, who wouldn't want to live *la dolce vita*? The film industry has discovered the intrigue that this country and culture sparks in audiences, which explains why the idealization of Italy is now a staple in many romantic comedies. In fact, Italy was ranked the fifth most popular filming location for American films (Deidre). While various factors have led to the proliferation and growing

¹ *La dolce vita* was the title of Federico Fellini's 1960 film, which marked a significant shift in the global perception of Italy. The term has come to signify the glamor, sex appeal, and adventure associated with Italy.

glorification of *la dolce vita*, my thesis will examine the recent glorification of Italy and Italian culture in films, through the themes of Italy as an escape mechanism, Italy as an incubator for passion, impulsion and indulgence, and Italy as a place for self-growth, all of which are related to this idealization, and the contributing factors behind them. Within my analysis, I will also explore the impact that tourism has played in such ethnic marketing.

The aggrandizement of Italy is closely intertwined with the exponentially-growing tourism industry. In fact, Italy attracted approximately 58.3 billion tourists in 2017, making it the fifth most popular tourist destinations in the world (Cripps). However, Italy's popularity among tourists is far from new, as one of the first instances of organized tourism to Italy was the Grand Tour, which developed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Initially, the Grand Tour was exclusively for northern European elites, who used the voyages around Europe as a means of education and to uphold their image (Black 3). It wasn't until the late nineteenth century that the Grand Tour spread to the masses.

Following the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, members of the upper-middle- and middle-classes from northern Europe and North America were finally allowed to travel freely around Continental Europe. Advancements in transportation helped to proliferate this rise in middle-class tourism, as trains and steam boats made traveling more widely-accessible (Casillo and Russo 160). Although the Grand Tour featured various regions around Europe, Italy eventually became a chief tourist destination for a few reasons. First, the Napoleonic wars strongly discouraged people from traveling to France, as it was considered visiting the "national enemy." Second, the concurrent Age of Enlightenment catalyzed a vast obsession with antiquity and the classical world, both of which are prominent throughout Italy. Finally, Italy was easily accessible to a majority of travelers, making it one of the more convenient, as well as

fashionable, places to visit (Black 9). The coinciding development of photography and film in the mid-nineteenth century additionally contributed to the commodification of Italy.

Photographic postcards presented the country's picturesque landscapes and people in a romanticized and naturalized way that drew attention to the country's history, culture, and artistic achievements and mimicked international travel literature (Bertellini 50). This phenomenon carried over from the nineteenth century into the mid-twentieth century.

Following World War II, the reconstruction of Italy led to drastic changes in the country's film industry, fashion industry, and, in turn, international image throughout the 1950s and 60s. After new cinema-related legislation² was passed, Hollywood not only bombarded Italy with countless American films to make up for lost profit during the Fascist ban, but also took over Cinecittà studios³ to produce what are referred to as *American runaway productions*. These productions were identified by their use of Italian landscapes and monuments that transformed the country into a "picturesque commodity for American tourists," (D'Amelio 21). As Rome gradually became a prominent international filmmaking location, a period commonly known as Hollywood on the Tiber,⁴ numerous blockbusters were produced that enjoyed global commercial success. Overtime, the glamor associated with Hollywood and Hollywood stardom spread to the

² Law 958, or the "Andreotti law" named after the former state secretary in charge of entertainment, was passed on December 29, 1949 in order to protect the Italian film industry. In the end, however, it was what led to Hollywood's invasion of Italy, as it allowed American companies to import commercial films again (Paulicelli 164).

³ Cinecittà Studios was founded by Benito Mussolini in 1937 as part of his efforts to promote his fascist agenda through film. American filmmakers would utilize Cinecittà due to the cheap prices they offered (Paulicelli 167).

⁴ Hollywood on the Tiber occurred for various reasons. Around this time, the witch hunt in Hollywood was occurring, during which many filmmakers were blacklisted due to the fear of communism. Additionally, Italy underwent rapid industrialization after the war that thoroughly disrupted the traditional rural order that resulted in unbalanced advancements between the northern and southern regions. In turn, Italy lacked a strong national popular culture that worked amongst the social classes, making it easy for American culture to take over (D'Amelio 23).

Italian film industry and its own celebrities.⁵ Stars such as Silvana Mangano, Gina Lollobrigida and Sophia Loren became important personifications of the glamorous fashionable lifestyle affiliated with Italian society at the time, as well as representations of the country's strength and resiliency after the Fascist period (Gundle 142). Likewise, the Italian fashion industry, which flourished simultaneously with Hollywood on the Tiber, diffused the notion of Italian glamour. Italian fashion houses would frequently collaborate with costume designers to create clothes for stars of American runaway productions, whose fame and allure would help enhance the global status of Italian fashion (Paulicelli 167).

Then, in 1960, Federico Fellini released his infamous film, *La Dolce Vita*. The movie not only embodied the essence of life in Rome during Hollywood on the Tiber, but also marked a notable shift in the world's perception of Italy; "no longer was the country simply a picturesque backwater; now it was infused with an air of scandal and sex appeal... a new era of Italian glamour," (Hom 59). To this day, the term *la dolce vita* has been used to market Italian glamour, fashion, and style in Italy and abroad.⁶

The 1950s and 60s brought Italy an economic miracle, and during this time the film, fashion, and tourism industries experienced economic and cultural prosperity. Films "transported" global audiences to Italy, allowing them to travel to places they couldn't afford to visit and witness the fashions and styles that they might not otherwise have the chance to see (Paulicelli 158). Thus, the country gradually transformed into a commodity for foreigners to

⁵ American blockbusters frequently utilized stars as promotional tools, exploiting the public's fascination with celebrities' glamorous lifestyles off-screen. Italian producers began implementing this practice with their own films, casting actresses that combined Hollywood sex appeal with Italian beauty ideals (D'Amelio 33).

⁶ Italian fashion houses revived *la dolce vita* lifestyle when they underwent rebranding in the 1980s and 90s. In their attempts to expand globally and "Italianize" more American cities, these fashion houses utilized Hollywood celebrities to make Italian brands synonymous with luxury, appealing to the Americans' who were formerly fascinated with Federico's *La Dolce Vita* (Cinotto 198).

consume, as Italy became synonymous with glamor. Cinema was and is a crucial instrument in establishing Italy's reputation abroad; thus, it is important to examine what role films play in our society.

A variety of recent blockbusters portray this aggrandized image of Italy, such as *Eat Pray Love*, *The Lizzie McGuire Movie*, and *Under the Tuscan Sun*. All of these films have similar plotlines; the main character desires an escape from her monotonous and unhappy reality, so she travels to Italy, where she finds not only happiness and love, but also herself. Though the plot is trite, audiences keep asking for more. With the added images of decadent food and wine, a few moped rides, and fashion-forward wardrobes, these films embody the modern-day *dolce vita* that so many spectators desire but have only ever witnessed on the screen. Other movies that have similar characteristics include *Letters to Juliet* and *A Room with a View*.

I will analyze the films listed above, drawing on a few older films that provided some history and context, such as *La Dolce Vita*. I will additionally look at various historical, social and cultural phenomenon, like globalization, ethnic marketing, etc., in order to uncover the foundations on which the themes of these movies are built. The analysis that follows will be primarily thematic, with additional attention to filming techniques and cinematographic choices, in order to cross reference this information with my other sources to provide more support for my arguments. As my thesis largely revolves around *Eat Pray Love*, *The Lizzie McGuire Movie*, *Letters to Juliet*, *A Room with a View*, and *Under the Tuscan Sun*, each chapter will be dedicated to a specific theme or topic that is commonly associated with the idealization of Italy and the representation of *la dolce vita*.

My first chapter looks at the representation of Italy as a place to escape from reality. I will explore the origins of this notion, analyzing the cultural discrepancies between the

Mediterranean's values and those of other protestant-dominant regions, such as the notion of *dolce far niente*, which is one of the many things that established the association of Italy with an escape from reality. I will also analyze how the tourism industry and its marketing techniques have fueled this idealization of Italy. Then, I study the utilization of this escapism technique in modern films, referencing a few of my sources that look into the psychological processes that allow films to fulfill the spectators' unmet desires. Throughout the chapter I will look at how this theme is presented in a few of the films, particularly *The Lizzie McGuire Movie*, *Eat Pray Love*, and *Under the Tuscan Sun*.

In my second chapter, I explore the subject of Italy as an incubator for love, impulsive passion, and indulgence. By first examining the long-standing stereotype of Italians as being overly passionate and emotional beings, I will provide more context and understanding of where this perception came from. To relate it back to the film industry, I will trace the history of this stereotype in films, starting with Rudolph Valentino's stardom during the silent era and ending with more contemporary examples, such as *Letters to Juliet* and *A Room with a View*. By looking at how this motif has evolved, I will analyze how this has reflected and also influenced societies' values and beliefs on the topic of passion. Although the reference to indulgence in some of the films signifies indulging in potentially transgressive love, other films, such as *Eat Pray Love*, present this notion as an indulgence in tasty foods. Therefore, I will explore indulgence in both senses, as well as the analogic relationship between them.

My third chapter will examine the overarching theme of self-growth. I will explore all that self-betterment encompasses, such as through finding love, happiness, and acceptance, as it is portrayed in a variety of ways in these films. As with the previous two chapters, I will provide some background information about the conceptualization of Italy as a place for self-discovery.

Finally, I will draw connections between self-growth and the prior themes, and how the interconnectivity between them is depicted in each of the films.

In my conclusion, I will consider the social and economic significance of these films, referencing some cultural theories about the impact of cinema. I will describe the influence films have on our society, whether that be simply reflecting or shaping our values. I also explore the potential issues that could result from these films, such as the proliferation of negative stereotypes and the ethics and consequences of ethnic marketing. Finally, I will offer my own suggestions for ameliorating some of the issues associated with biased representation of Italians and other ethnic groups in cinema.

As stated by Timothy Corrigan, author of *A Short Guide to Writing about Film* and professor of cinema studies at the University of Pennsylvania, “analyzing our reactions to themes, characters, or images like these can be a way not only of understanding a movie better, but of understanding better how we view the world and the cultures we live in,” (Corrigan and Corrigan 4). Thus, it is vital to examine the films that are prominent in our society in order to better comprehend not only where the stereotypes presented within them originate, but also the impact that these films have on our culture and values.

Chapter 1: Escapism

“Not only does the joyless regularity of industrialized existence reduce the individual’s capacity to respond to the world variously and spontaneously, but the imperative of production limits opportunities for art and love, those Italian virtues which Stendhal defines as the supreme happiness, and which, being forms of play, demand leisure and hence freedom for the merely necessary or useful.”
(Casillo and Russo 122).

A predominant motif one can find not only in film, but also in Italian tourism marketing is the perception of Italy as an escape from reality. This concept implies that Italy is a place where one can free themselves from the responsibilities and pressures of everyday life. For example, the terms “get away” or “retreat”, which are commonly used in reference to Italy as a vacation destination, are fundamentally based on the idea of escape. In the films *Eat Pray Love*, *The Lizzie McGuire Movie*, and *Under the Tuscan Sun*, many of the protagonists also manifest this mindset, traveling to Italy to evade their realities and/or find adventure. This concept of Italy as an escape mechanism dates back to the industrial revolution, with the Grand Tour playing a large role in its origination.

Although it was characterized as an extension of the northern European elites’ education, the Grand Tour was primarily a form of vacation. Thus, the travelers associated their visited destinations with fun and relaxation, as it provided them an opportunity to live without the constraints of their everyday lives (Black 127). The travelers developed a fascination with Italians, as the Grand Tour brought to light the differences in their cultures and way of life (Black 3). This fascination, of course, later spread to America. One American wrote:

The coming of Italians has worked to enrich the emotional life of America.

Colorful, buoyant, with a freer attitude toward certain traditions of American life

than displayed by the descendants of the Puritans or staid middle westerners, the Italians as a whole were able to look on life with a greater light-heartedness.

(Pisani 255).

When the Industrial revolution came, the discrepancy between the northern Europeans and Americans' work ethic and that of the Italians became much more apparent. For the Italians, the phrase *il dolce far niente*⁷ came to signify and embody their way of life. Although, it generally has positive connotations, denoting the Italians' "sunny temperament", ⁸ it originally referred to the high rates of poverty, unemployment, and slow industrial advancements in Italy, particularly in the southern regions. Some tourism collateral during this time circulated images of the southern Italians' impoverishment and idleness to promote *il dolce far niente* (see fig. 1). A few politicians actually believed the Italians' idleness not only slowed their formation as a political state, but also prevented their industrialization process. In fact, there was a common German term, *Italienische Nachlässigkeit*, meaning Italian carelessness or negligence (Hom 55).



Fig. 1 Postcard from 1910 that the Touring Club Italiano used as part of their marketing collateral. The image shows Naples' *scugnizzi*, commonly known as street urchins, engaging in *il dolce far niente* (Hom 55).

⁷ While there are various translations, the phrase generally means the sweetness of doing nothing and is commonly used to describe the Italians' leisurely approach to life.

⁸ In describing the Italians' *joie de vivre*, Howard B. Grose said, "they come from a land of beauty and fame, song and sunshine, and bring a sunny temperament not easily soured by hardship or disappointment," (Pisani 117).

On the other hand, the northern Europeans and Americans' industrial mode of work and capitalist tendencies generated a greater desire for relaxation. Because Italy and its people had already been associated with leisure through the Grand Tour, many longed for the Italian's way of life despite the negative connotations associated with *il dolce far niente*. Stendhal referred to Italy as, "that land where, unlike contemporary northern nations, the obligations of organized work weigh least upon the individual and thus provide him with the greatest amount if not of leisure in the full sense then of untroubled free time in which to enjoy himself," (Casillo and Russo 142). Likewise, after the first World War, war veterans in particular admired the Italians' values that went beyond those of the industrialized society, referring to Italians as "children of the sun," (Casillo and Russo 179).



Fig. 2 Postcards that exemplify the montage style that was commonly used in twenty-first century tourism collateral (Hom 78).

The tourism industry and its related content have further proliferated the idea of Italy as an escape destination into modern day society. Prior to the contemporary digital media promotional tools, photographs and postcards were very instrumental in marketing Italy as a

tourist destination to consumers. Collage-type images and aerial shots became common for tourism promotion, particularly of popular sight-seeing destinations (see fig. 2).

The Alinaris' Series,⁹ for example, exemplified the frequent photographic monetization and simultaneous construction of a “picturesque”¹⁰ image of Italy (see figure 3). Thus, “cosmopolitan tourism and photography commodified and naturalized picturesque landscapes and peoples of Italian South,” (Bertellini 47).



Fig. 3 Photograph in the Alinaris' Series titled, *Colosseum, Meta Sudans, and, on the Right, the Arch of Constantine* from 1890 (Hom 53).

Likewise, the recent trend in marketing of ethnicities has led to the tourism and film industries' selling of the Italian experience, or *la dolce vita*. Crammed with “authentic” images of fashionable Italians driving around in sports cars and mopeds, large plates of Italian dishes, and beautiful and vibrant landscapes, tourism advertising continues to depict a stereotypical

⁹ The Alinaris' series was a collection of photographs that captured Italian society and landscapes, relying on “plein air views” to construct seemingly candid narratives of Italians that closely aligned with tourists' stereotypes of their sensuality and exoticism (Bertellini 50).

¹⁰ Picturesque became the chief photographic style that the elites most often utilized to, “render their cultural experience of Mediterranean Europe, which it translated into imaginative and comforting views of distant landscapes and exotic characters,” (Bertellini 3).

“sun-kissed image of the Mediterranean” that has helped fulfill the consumers’ desires for an escape (Casillo and Russo 206).

In recent years, restaurants have also started to commodify the Italian experience by incorporating various Italian-identified values into their marketing and branding, such as their décor, music, costumes and menu language. While this trend is not exclusive to Italian food, Italy’s culinary practices have harnessed special attention due to the culture’s popularity in movies, cookbooks, fashion, and other pop culture mediums. These ethnic marketing techniques can be seen in restaurants like Olive Garden that capitalize on their ability to “simulate” the Italian experience. One of the primary motives for the exploitation of Italian culture is to provide customers unique experiences that differentiate their business offerings from that of their competitors. Likewise, the elements that these restaurants commodify embody the stereotypical values of Italian culture that Americans admire, including romance, passion and family values. As stated by Fabio Parasecoli, an author featured in *Making Italian America: Consumer Culture and the Production of Ethnic Identities*, “when attention is paid to the cultural and contextual nature of “authenticity,” the main focus remains on the practical usefulness of theming in allowing patrons to enjoy the illusion of a different environment, exotic but not threatening,” (Cinotto 245). Although customers of these restaurants and tourists alike often seek authenticity in their consumption of such ethnically-commodified goods and services, these restaurants, guidebooks,¹¹ and advertisements are inauthentic in their representation of Italy and Italians.

The film *Eat Pray Love*, an adaption of a 2006 memoir of the same name, perfectly exemplifies the notion of Italy as an escape mechanism, as its theme is largely based on this

¹¹ One instance of this can be found in the 2001 edition of *Ricky Steves’ Italy Travel Guidebook*, in which it mentioned “la dolce far niente”, incorrectly placing the feminine “la” prepositional pronoun instead of the masculine “il”. This exemplifies how such guidebooks simply portray a façade of authenticity, when in actuality, their representation of Italy embodies’ the tourist idea of an artificially constructed image (Hom 59).

concept. In fact, the entire plot revolves around a woman trying to avoid her current reality in search for passion and excitement. In the beginning of the story, the audience is given a glimpse into the failing marriage of Elizabeth Gilbert, commonly referred to as Liz. In the middle of the night, Liz realizes she is no longer satisfied with her current life, and she impulsively asks her husband for a divorce, provoking a messy divorce lawsuit.

As a distraction, Liz begins teaching herself Italian before starting a new relationship with a much younger man, David. Initially, their relationship is passionate, impulsive, and exciting; exactly what she needed to divert her emotions following the divorce. Gradually, however, she realizes that he is not the solution to the emptiness in her life, and thus, she decides to take a year off work to travel to Italy, India, and Bali, all three of which provide her various means of self-discovery, hence the title *Eat Pray Love*.¹²

The connection between Italy and escapism is relayed early on in the film. The first instance occurs when Liz goes to buy divorce-related self-help books at a nearby bookstore. While checking out, the cashier tells her that there's a whole other section specifically for divorce. Liz awkwardly smiles, and the audience sees a closeup of her facial expressions that depict her obvious embarrassment for being called out. Then the camera cuts to an Italian dictionary on display that catches her eye. This quick shift in her attention highlights how the Italian dictionary acts as a distraction from the divorce-shame she feels in the moment at the store. By having the camera cut from a closeup to Liz to the dictionary, the scene depicts how the idea of Italy is able to take her attention away from herself and her current situation to something new and unrelated

¹² Although I analyze Liz's motives to travel to Italy throughout the chapter, she chose to visit the other two destinations for various reasons. At the beginning of the film, she visits a medicine man in Bali who not only predicts her divorce, but also asks that she return to help him with his English; thus, she initially returns to Bali to work with this medicine man. She decides to go to India to stay at the ashram of the guru she and her ex-boyfriend's would pray to.

to her divorce. This scene also foreshadows how Italy provides her an escape from her post-divorce life later on in the film.

As her divorce unfolds, the dictionary continues to act almost as a crutch that gets her through the process. In one scene in particular, Liz is seen flipping through the book in her friend's bathtub. In the background, you can hear her friends discussing her post-divorce mental state in whispered-tones: "She's having... a nervous breakdown," "This is what girls do. She's processing," "Why doesn't she get drunk or laid?" Throughout their conversation, Liz stops reading to listen to what they have to say, before focusing her attention back on her book. This juxtaposition between the emotional messiness of Liz's divorce and her intrigue with the Italian language further promotes the motif of Italy as a place for her to escape.

When Liz decides to take her year-long trip, her friend wonders if her travels would simply be another distraction that she's using to push away her sadness. In a long monologue, Liz explains why she wants to get away, specifically to Italy:

Do you know what I felt when I woke up, Delia? Nothing. No passion, no spark, no faith, no heat. Absolutely nothing... I used to have this appetite for food, for my life, and it is just gone. I want to go someplace where I can marvel at something. Language, gelato, spaghetti, something.

(Eat Pray Love)

By drawing on such idealized and stereotypical features of Italy (i.e. passion, gelato, and spaghetti), she is accentuating the idea that Italy is the perfect place to not only escape to, but also to stimulate one's senses and feelings of passion, a common perception used for modern day tourism marketing.

The film addresses *il dolce far niente* when Liz's new Italian friends are discussing the difference between Americans' work ethics and the Italians' ability to relax:

Americans know entertainment but don't know pleasure. You work too hard. You get burned out... You don't know pleasure. You have to be told you've earned it, but an Italian doesn't need to be told. He walks by a sign that says, "you deserve a break today," and he says, "Yeah, I know." (Eat Pray Love).

The contrast between Americans' workaholic tendencies and Italians' laid-back approach to life¹³ simply supports the idea that Italy is the place to escape the pressures of work, as those who travel to Italy absorb the *dolce far niente* lifestyle and don't feel the need to justify it.

Even when Liz escapes from her reality back in America, she faces instances in which she relies on distractions to keep herself afloat mentally. Food, for example, plays a large role as one of her escape mechanisms in Italy. In one scene, she sits alone at a restaurant. There is a montage of various couples and their impassioned public displays of affection, as Liz observes with a somber yet longing expression. Yet as soon as her food comes out, she is completely entranced by the large plate of spaghetti in front of her. There are numerous closeups of her mouth, eyes, nose and food as she eats, juxtaposed intermittently with close shots of the couples caressing and kissing one another. By bringing close attention to areas that signify the stimulation of her bodily senses (i.e. taste, sight, touch and smell), the film encourages the spectator to perceive how the

¹³ The contrast between the Americans and northern Europeans' "protestant work ethic" and the Italian's *dolce far niente* is one the commonly cited reasons for travelers' fascination with Italy as a tourist destination. While the discrepancy in the two cultures' values and lifestyles was brought to light through the Grand Tour, it became even more perceptible when the Industrial Revolution altered the work force in America and northern European regions, bringing about greater work pressures on the Americans and northern Europeans. Thus, their desire to escape the responsibilities of their daily routines increased greatly (Casillo and Russo 178).

food has taken over her complete being and shifted her attention away from her prior thoughts of loneliness. The juxtaposing edits between Liz eating and the couples flirting accentuate the paralleling intimacy and sensual nature that accompanies both the experience of eating and infatuation. This scene, moreover, draws on the use of food as a part of tourism and experiential marketing, especially because the meal she's consuming is a large plate of pasta, which frequently serves as a metaphor for Italy.

The film further accentuates Italy as an escape mechanism through its shifts in color balance. In the beginning of the movie, the colors in the frame are mostly dark, neutral tones. The scene in which Liz awakens in the middle of the night and asks her husband for a divorce is particularly monotone, with gray-based blue being the primary color. The color palette reoccurs when she and her husband are working out the legality of their divorce, thus solidifying the connection between the cool, gray tones that reflect the emptiness she feels. Moreover, the scenes in the beginning seldom feature a strong source of light, especially sun light. While Liz is still in America, the scenes are all set either at night, in a fairly dark setting, or when it's raining. It isn't until she lands in Italy that the sun makes a visible appearance and the color palette switches to more vibrant, warm toned colors. In fact, the first shot in Italy is a panoramic view of Rome at sunrise, and the sun lays a golden tint on everything in the frame, emphasizing that her trip alone is what she really needs to start feeling whole again. This panoramic shot mimics the types of images that became popular for postcards and guidebooks (Italy in Early American Cinema 3).

Escapism is also a fundamental theme of *the Lizzie McGuire Movie*, as it is incorporated throughout the film's plot. Following an embarrassing fiasco at her eighth-grade graduation, Lizzie McGuire is more than eager to leave for her three-week long school trip to Rome. When

she arrives, Paolo, a famous popstar, mistakes Lizzie for his singing partner, Isabella, who she closely resembles. He convinces Lizzie to sneak away from her school group so she can perform at an award show as Isabella, who he claims was not cooperating. Through this opportunity, Lizzie is able to experience the typical star treatment, including crazed fans and a complete makeover. In the end, Isabella exposes Paolo's plan to publicly embarrass Lizzie at the award show, and Lizzie performs a solo version of she and Paolo's duet.

From the start of the trip, Lizzie makes it her mission to make the most out of her time abroad; she and her close friend Gordo make a pact to find adventures and do whatever they want to do. Because they have just graduated junior high, they also perceive this trip to be a great chance to start anew. Their mindset going into the trip embodies a common touristic belief that going abroad, particularly to Italy, is the perfect opportunity to have fun and let loose. This scene takes place as the two look out over the city, which further solidifies the connection between their longing for adventure and their time in Rome.

Throughout the film, there are various scenes that include archetypal Italian activities. One instance is when Lizzie takes part in her own personal fashion consultation with a famous Italian designer. Another example is when Paolo gives Lizzie a tour on his moped throughout the city, during which there's a montage of images of Rome. Finally, most of the "surreal" moments in the film take place in front of well-known Italian landmarks; Lizzie meets Paolo for the first time in front of the Trevi Fountain, Lizzie performs in the Colosseum, and she and Paolo go on a romantic date in the Tivoli Gardens. All of these scenes feature images or experiences that not only appeal to escapism, but also exemplify characteristics of tourism marketing. Experiences associated with escape from reality often comprise something extraordinary that takes the individual's attention away from their current reality and figuratively transports them elsewhere.

The fashion scene for instance embodies a sense of escape, as the average person, such as Lizzie, has probably never had such an opportunity. The consultation is an experience that is distinctively more glamorous than what occurs in Lizzie's everyday life, and this discrepancy is accentuated by the movie's opening scene that includes a "homemade" fashion show in Lizzie's bedroom and bathroom. Additionally, the fashion-focus of the consultation draws upon the glamor and esteem that is associated with the Italian fashion industry.

The montage scene on the moped similarly embodies touristic escape in various ways. The moped is a stereotypical symbol used in tourism marketing for Italy, as it is frequently associated with adventure or exploration. Moreover, because mopeds are identified with Italy through such marketing, the experience of riding one has foreign connotations. Thus, the adventure, exploration, and foreignness associated with this vehicle all denote the opportunity to try something new, a fundamental piece of touristic escape. The montage-editing of the various Roman landmarks also mimics the montage pictures common in tourism collateral (See fig. 2).

The numerous scenes that feature historically-significant Roman landmarks as backdrops proliferate the aggrandized view of Italy that is commonly associated with tourism. By having such surreal moments set in various destinations around Rome, the film solidifies the identification of Italy as an escape from what's real, as they draw on the sense that what's happening is almost too good to be true. The camera further accentuates the whimsical, unrealistic feel of these moments by utilizing slanted frames that capture the scenes from above or below. In the end, when it is revealed that Paolo has been in fact deceiving Lizzie, it becomes apparent that these scenes were actually more fantasy than reality.

The garden scene in particular simulates a fantastical feel, as it utilizes an aerial shot of Paolo and Lizzie as they watch the fireworks. By removing the personal feel associated with the

previously-used close ups, the shot allows the audience to see the scene unfold from above, thus accentuating the dreamlike disassociation from reality that Lizzie is experiencing. Similarly, the camera work during these romantic moments between Lizzie and Paolo primarily utilizes close up shots, bringing the audience's attention to the characters' faces and obscuring the background settings. Through the removal of their surroundings, the close-up frames embody Paolo's role as an instrument for escape, drawing Lizzie away from what's truly around her.

As with *Eat Pray Love*, the colors shift throughout the movie to mimic the plot and abstractly represent Italy as an escape. In the beginning, the color palette is predominately comprised of royal blue; her graduation gown is blue, her clothes are mostly blue, and the airport and airplane feature blue on their seats and signage. However, once she lands in Italy, the colors are warmer and more vibrant. At the end, when Lizzie and Isabella reveal Paolo's intentions, the stage lighting shines royal blue on the characters. Thus, this shade of blue comes to signify reality throughout the movie.

Lizzie's "Isabella" persona provides her an additional level of escapism. During the scene with the fashion designer, Paolo tells Lizzie that she needs to act more like Isabella and stand up for herself, which is exactly what she does. Following the consultation, where Lizzie reveals her newfound self-assurance, she says "Goodbye, Lizzie McGuire. Hello, fabulous!" Thus, Isabella becomes Lizzie's alter ego, providing her exclusive access to the praise, privilege and opportunities that comes with stardom, which starkly contrasts what she experiences in her normal life.

Under the Tuscan Sun is another film that draws on escapism and divulges in touristic depictions. The movie follows newly-divorced Frances Mayes' travels to Italy after she discovers that her husband is cheating on her and is forced to move out of their house. When she

is left with no other option but to reside in a motel, referred to as “divorce camp” because of the many recently-divorced residents, her friends offer her a trip to Tuscany in hopes of getting her out of the post-divorce rut. Similar to Liz’s journey to Italy in *Eat Pray Love*, Frances’ travels are also used as an escape from her unfulfilling reality. Italy acts as a source of escape again for her friend, Patti, who joins Frances in her villa after her wife leaves her with a baby. Both Frances and Patti, as well as Liz, go into their trips with a utilitarian and touristic idea that their time abroad will help fill whatever is missing from their lives, whether it be happiness, passion or general *joie de vivre*.

Frances’ inclination toward an idealized view of Italy appears when she helps a man on her trip write a letter to his mother; “clichés converge in this naval corner of the world... these Italians know how to have fun more than we do.” The scene features a montage of her surroundings, which include a crowded farmers market, beautiful scenery, nuns, and kids running around eating gelato. These images of the local life and landscapes that appeal to tourists’ stereotypical perception of the local life in Italy parallel the “plein air views,” which depicted aggrandized images of the local life, that became popular in the Aliaris series (See fig. 3).

Katherine, one of the secondary characters in *Under the Tuscan Sun*, acts as a personification of *la dolce vita*, guiding Frances as she adjusts to her life in Italy. Katherine’s physical appearance and stylish fashion choices resemble the glamorous essence of the 1950s’ Hollywood on the Tiber and the stars that embodied this phenomenon, such as Sophia Loren or Gina Lollobrigida. Likewise, Katherine’s persona exudes sexual appeal, as she is often seen sensually eating ice cream or caressing objects in her surroundings. In fact, her character’s backstory includes an interaction with Federico himself, the director of *La Dolce Vita*, who apparently said

that she was his “image [for *La Dolce Vita*] coming to life.” Throughout the story, Katherine encourages Frances to embody *il dolce far niente*, advising her to slow down and enjoy what life presents to her. Her character also exhibits impulsive decisions and taboo activities, such as her decision to jump in a crowded fountain fully clothed or her job as a nude model. The character of Katherine embodies the type of spontaneity and adventure for which many tourists come to Italy to experience.

Similar to the other two movies, *Under the Tuscan Sun* utilizes a shift in color as the plot advances. Blue is also the chief color in the beginning, lacking much saturation or contrast. The sun is also not noticeable to the audience in any of the scenes set in America. Once Frances lands in Italy, the colors shift to warmer tones, with a particular attention to green. Likewise, the sun becomes a reoccurring feature in the frames. The romantic scenes between Frances and her love are also set in Positano and feature numerous aerial and montage-type shots of the beach and colorful landscapes. The bright colors and various panoramic shots are reminiscent of a tourism promotional videos, presenting a picturesque, post-card perfect image of Italy to the audience.

As with *Fotoromanzo*,¹⁴ these films create “dreams of illusory luxury and escapism,” for the spectator (D’Amelio 81). The use of tourist-gaze shots and references to popular tourism sites and activities associated with Italy illustrates how closely related the film and tourism industry are to one another in their roles as instruments of escapism. On the other hand, the films themselves allow viewers to evade their own lives and place themselves within the emotional and physical positions of the characters presented to them on screen. In fact, research shows that there is a psychosomatic impact of films on individuals, as the mere process of watching a film

¹⁴ *Fotormoanzo* was a weekly magazine that featured romantic narratives in a visual form. It was considered an “Americanized form of cheap entertainment that would corrupt the working class through dreams of illusory luxury and escapism,” (D’Amelio 170).

embodies some psychological phenomenon related to the identification of the self.¹⁵ For instance, Francesco Caseti, a film studies professor at Yale University, found that spectators do not find themselves “receiving” films; rather, they find themselves actually “living” the films, adopting the sensations, perceptions, feelings, mental images and ideas of the characters on screen (Chateau 53).

Certain camera angles, particularly those that illustrate the protagonist’s point of view, can also catalyze the spectator’s enthrallment in the character’s emotional and physical position, as well as their state of mind within that moment of the narration (Bruno et al. 36). In *Eat Pray Love*, for instance, the first scene in Italy is a point-of-view (POV), panoramic shot of Rome. The scene not only imitates the tourism-perspective commonly used in tourism collateral, but also exemplifies the type of shots that facilitate the spectators’ psychological processes of self-identification with the characters on screen.

As stated by Caseti, films are an example of the marketing of experience that is characteristic of tourism content. Films act a type of “air travel,” allowing audiences to visit the places that they could not afford otherwise, as well as showcasing the cultures, lifestyles, and fashions that they don’t have another chance to see for themselves (Paulicelli 162). The way in which they present Italy as a destination not only utilizes various long-standing tourism marketing techniques, but also transforms the spectator into a tourist. Nevertheless, the image of Italy that such films promotes disregards the other less glamorous but real parts of the country and culture that are crucial to its identity. Because films have such an impact on our society, on both the micro and macro level, it is critical that spectators consider the subjectivity and romanticized aspects of films.

¹⁵ To learn more about the psychology behind spectator identifications during films, refer to John Ellis’ *Visible Fictions*.

Chapter 2: Passion, Impulsion and Indulgence

“This work defines Italy as the country where erotic passion and pleasure escape social convention and hypocritical limitation.”
(Leisure, Tourism and Their Discontents 119).

The conceptualization of Italy as a mechanism for escape is closely intertwined with the next theme: the idea that Italy is an incubator for love and passion, along with the portrayal of Italians as impulsive romantics who are largely driven by their emotions. This theme often manifests itself in films through Latin lover characters, revenge-filled mafia storylines, and the use of Italy as a setting to romantic comedies. Although this notion now seems to paint a picture of Italy and its people with an aura of passion and romance, it has a long history that derives from the perception of Italians as primitive and uncontrollable.

The first reference to the perception of Italians as overly impassioned comes from the myth of Rome’s beginnings. According to legend, a nearby tribe prohibited their daughters from marrying the new Roman inhabitants, so the Romans raped and forcefully took the women in order to secure stability for the future of Roman civilization. Thus, Romans made their ideals of sexual aggression and conquest a fundamental part of their identity and culture (Clark 26). This stereotype of Italians continued through various forms of art and literature. Gothic fiction, for example, started to depict the Mediterranean men and women as people who exude passion and “plotting intrigue,” (Woll and Miller 276). Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* diffused this perception, as the storyline revolved around feuding families and forbidden love (Thomas 113). Then in the eighteenth century, Giacomo Casanova,¹⁶ who was notorious not only for his travels

¹⁶ Giacomo Casanova was an 18th century diplomatist, ecclesiastic, soldier, spy and writer, known for his autobiographies about his adventures around Europe and his sexual promiscuity. In his autograph titled *Histoire de ma vie*, or the *History of My Life*, Casanova details his life and was one of the main factors that established his reputation as a typical “womanizer,” (Giacomo Casanova).

around Europe, but also his womanizing activities, became one of the first Italians to be named a Latin lover, thus solidifying the association of Italian males as being overtly sexual and promiscuous beings (D'Amelio 114).

As mass tourism and the Grand Tour became popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and northern Europeans and Americans started to interact more with the Italians, they began forming notions of Italians as impulsive, emotional, lazy and overtly sexual (Casillo and Russo 494). One of the primary differences between the tourists and the Italians was the Italians' heavy use of gestures, which came off as an aggressive and primitive way of communicating (Pisani 118). The stark contrast between the two cultures established early xenophobia in America, and the Americans perceived the Italians as the "scum of Europe" and "a criminal class deported from Italy," (Pisani 183). On the other hand, traveling abroad provided the tourists the opportunity to take part in sexual adventures, gambling, and drinking (Black 123). This helped conceptualize Italy not only as an escape from reality, but also as a place for sexual promiscuity and liberation.

As popular travel photography shifted to more *plein air view* style images¹⁷ and the simultaneous southernism¹⁸ phenomenon grew, the idea that Italians were primitive and backwards spread throughout Europe and into America (Bertellini 69). In fact, Cesare Lombroso, a physician and criminologist of the late nineteenth century, released a study saying that southern Italians were "Arabic delinquency," (Bertellini 75). Consequently, his "scientific" and frankly eugenics-based findings gave the public more evidentiary support for this racist perception of

¹⁷ *Plein air view* style images idealized the southern regions of Italy and the residents' "barbaric" ways of life. Refer to the third and fourth footnote in chapter one for more information on *plein air view* style images.

¹⁸ According to Giorgio Bertellini, author of *Italy in Early American Cinema*, Southernism "regarded [Italy] as backward and primitive" and Italians as "unredeemable subjects, inherently inferior and largely ruled by their own superstitions, emotions and ignorism," (Bertellini 69).

Italians. Related mafia stereotypes also spread to the US with Italian immigrants during the 1830s, as southern Italians' association with the Brigands¹⁹ and the mafia²⁰ had traveled with them to America (Bertellini 76). One guidebook that welcomed a man to America even went as far to warn him of the Italians' inclination toward violence and crimes of passion (Pisani 119).

Although cinema's portrayal of Italians has continued to shift overtime, the depiction of Italians as emotionally and impassioned personalities played a large role in the dispersal of the above stereotype starting in the 1920s. The silent film era set the stage for the Italians' role as Latin lover through their depiction of Italian characters as artistic, passionate and criminally-inclined (Casillo and Russo 491).

During the silent era, Rudolph Valentino played a large role in solidifying this notion of Italians as Latin lovers and is even considered the epitome of a Latin lover (Casillo and Russo 498). Despite the prevalent xenophobia toward Italians during this time, Valentino was a symbol of sexual desire for women through his roles as an exotic and enticing love interest. His stylish clothing off screen reinforced not only his allure, but also the association of Italians with high fashion (D'Amelio 116). Valentino's feminine masculinity was greatly influential in the evolution of Hollywood's ideals of masculinity, as his foreign appeal and sensual dance moves had the ability to disrupt the several important sexual and ethnic conventions (Ginneken 25). As Allen L. Woll and Randall M. Miller said in their book *Ethnic and Racial Images in American*

¹⁹ The Brigands, or *Briganti* in Italian, were peasant rebels who revolted against the new Italian state after the unification of Italy in the late 1800s. National media coverage of the fight against the Brigands was extremely racist, referring to the peasants as "primitive, brutal, and rebellious," and was one of the chief reasons that people considered the Italians to be barbaric and violent (Bertellini 75).

²⁰ The Mafia started in Sicily, which had been ruled for centuries by various foreign invaders, such as the Romans, Arabs, French and Spanish. To establish their own system of justice retribution, native residents started to form their own groups for protection. These groups later became known as the mafia, who were initially involved in the business of protection and extortion due to Sicily's economic vulnerability and high profit exchange at the time (Bertellini 76).

Film and Television, “[Italians had a] commercial appeal as symbols of emotional liberation and sexuality in an age when Americans are struggling to get in touch with their true feelings,” (Woll and Miller 296).

Nevertheless, the charisma and romantic nature that were originally the Latin lover’s greatest strengths gradually came to be perceived as threats to American masculinity. This was largely due to the Latin lover’s resemblance of the *homme fatal*, the male equivalent to the *femme fatal*. The *homme fatal* is characterized as a male character whose desire not only threatens the family unit, but also warrants grave punishment (D’Amelio 66). The male protagonist of Hollywood cinema was typically the breadwinner of the family and a loyal husband who was primarily focused on family and child rearing (D’Amelio 71). Thus, the Latin lover was considered a “dream lover” that was nevertheless more violent, more irresponsible, and thus, more temporary than the Hollywood male protagonist, as the Latin lover frequently lost in battles of love to this typical American male figure (Thomas 3).

By the 1940s, Italians were predominately associated in cinema with either mafia-related criminals or Latin lovers, both of which acted off of impulse and emotions. Although films started to provide insight into these characters’ inner turmoil and motivations, providing justification for their actions as victims of the harsh American society, they were still depicted as vengeful and overly-emotional characters who lacked control over their impulses (Bertellini 205). Moreover, the disparity between the values of the northern European and American societies and those of the gangsters and Latin lovers accentuated the “otherness” phenomenon between them, leading to increased xenophobia.

Fellini’s *La Dolce Vita* further highlighted the sexual appeal of Italians, bringing their sensual nature to the forefront of films. As previously mentioned, the film marked a new concept

of Italy that was filled with glamor, sex, and promiscuity (Hom 60). Likewise, the female stars at the time, such as Sophia Loren and Gina Lollobrigida, developed off-screen personas that played off of the Italian stereotypes; they became “passionate, unrefined and extrovert,” (Gundle 152). They accentuated this image through large gestures, loud tone of voice, accented Italian, and assertion of their femininity. Due to their wide recognition on the global stage, these personas made significant contributions to Italy’s national image (Gundle 153).

By the 1960s, the new ethnicity trend and coinciding ethnic revival in the United States lead to an increase in minorities’ appearances in films. These phenomena, which initiated many Americans’ fascination with the discovery of their own ethnic roots, were the result of the various ethnic movements that were happening around this time. Because these movements were largely built on the promotion of civil rights, social justice, human equality, and pride in one’s ethnicity, filmmakers were encouraged to amend racially-based stereotypes to be less generalized in their representations of these ethnic groups (Cortes 110). Thus, Italians’ were increasingly placed in more urban settings and also portrayed as street-smart throughout various forms of entertainment in the 1970s. However, with the end of the Hollywood Hays Code in 1968,²¹ which lead to a “movie flood of explicit ethnic sex and violence,” (Woll and Miller 116), the Italians were still identified with strong emotional impulses and acts of vengeful violence (Woll and Miller 17).

Thus, there were polarized ways of perceiving the Italians and Italy itself, both on and off screen. One put an emphasis on the Italians’ *joie de vivre*; they were carefree, easy going personifications of *il dolce far niente* that were driven by romance. The other took a more

²¹ The Hays Code was comprised of 36 restrictions put on Hollywood filmmakers between 1934 to 1968 that promoted high moral standards and modesty. The code included prohibitions on films’ inclusion of taboo-related behaviors, such as nudity, excessive consumption of alcoholic beverages, and violence (Mondello).

pessimistic view of these characteristics; they were irresponsible, lazy, and “high spirited with hot blood,” (Pisani 119).

The 1985 film *A Room with a View* not only manifests the concept of Italy as an incubator for love, impulsion and indulgence, but also illustrates the conflicting ways of perceiving Italy and Italian culture. The movie follows Lucy Honeychurch and her cousin Charlotte, two English tourists, as they travel around Florence, Italy on vacation during the 1900s. Lucy, who is rather reserved and stern, falls in love with another English man named George Emerson, who is far more free-spirited than she. Although Lucy initially resists George’s romantic attempts, getting involved with a more uptight Englishman named Cecil, the two come back together in the end, despite the stark differences in their characters.

Unlike the other movies, however, *A Room with a View* does not solely rely on idealizations of Italy, as there are various references to the negative stereotype of Italians being overly emotional, violent, and impassioned throughout the film. The first instance occurs early on in the film, when Lucy and George have their first one-on-one interaction. As Lucy walks around the city by herself, she comes across a violent brawl between two Italians right before one of them stabs the other. This incident causes Lucy to faint, which is when George comes to catch her before she falls.

The fight in itself refers to the perception of Italians as violent and “high spirited with hot blood,” (Pisani 118). By having the brawl set in the open daylight, the scene implies that Italians are either unafflicted or unaware of the shame associated with their violent actions. The filming techniques additionally help to emphasize the chaos of the violent occurrence. For instance, the camera is hand held when filming the large group of Italians fighting, underlining the instability and intensity of the scene, as well as of the Italians. All of the men involved in the fight are

dressed in all black or dark colors, and this further replicates a sense of pandemonium, as it is hard for the spectator to keep up with what's going on.

The post-production editing of the sequence also accentuates the quick escalation of the fight, thus drawing on the Italians' impulsive tendencies. Intermittently between the fast jump cuts of the fight, the camera shows Lucy's point of view, especially during the graphic and bloody scenes. Through the presentation of the incident from Lucy's close perspective, the audience feels as if they are there, assuming her disgust and appall toward the entire situation. The scene switches between the fast-paced, shaky images of the Italians to stable shots of Lucy alone in the frame. By quickly jumping between the two images, the scene highlights the vast discrepancies between the Italians' "violent and emotional" ways compared to the more reserved and controlled behaviors of the northern Europeans, such as Lucy. Furthermore, Lucy is wearing a light blue dress, which underscores the contrast between the two images even more since the Italians are all dressed in dark colors. After Lucy regains consciousness and she is discussing the situation with George, she says, "Italians are so kind, so lovable and yet at the same time so violent." This draws on the divided ways that northern Europeans and Americans viewed Italians' *joie de vivre*.

Another stereotype that *A Room with a View* incorporates is that Italians are overly sensual and unable to control their impulses. In one scene when Lucy, Charlotte, and two other Englishmen are riding around in a carriage, the Italian driver continues to caress and make out with the girl he has brought with him to his work shift. The two Englishmen are ashamed of the Italian's behavior and lack of control, claiming it is impertinent since he is supposed to be on duty. Lucy, however, is intrigued by their public displays of affection. Unlike the prior shots in the sequence that feature some of the landscape views around the carriage, the camera takes on

the view of Lucy's binoculars as she gazes at the couple, focusing the audience's attention solely on the couple's caressing of one another. Therefore, this scene not only refers to the sexual Latin lover concept, but also emphasizes Lucy's undivided attention to and fascination with the sensual acts in front of her.

Beyond the stereotypes mentioned in the film, the role Italy plays in George and Lucy's blossoming relationship is blatantly acknowledged throughout the plot, thus referencing the positive association between Italy and romance. First, in the beginning of Lucy and Charlotte's vacation in Florence, their friend Eleanor theorizes that "there's something in the Italian landscape which inclines even the most stolid nature to romance," after which she predicts Lucy will probably be transfigured by Italy. In the following scene, Lucy and George travel separately to the country side the day after he threw her pictures into the river. There are various shots from afar that capture the beautiful, green mountain landscapes in the background, making it a significant part of the frames and scene. George, who was previously silent and somber at the start of the film, screams from the top of his lungs, "Beauty! Love! Truth! Joy!" loud enough for Lucy to hear from further away. To this, his father explains to the other men present that George must be overcome with emotions from the beautiful scenery, therefore reiterating Eleanor's statement about Italy's transfiguration capabilities.

Later that same day, when George and Lucy come across each other, they passionately kiss before Charlotte catches them. The angle of the shots when they are kissing exaggerate the height of the grass surrounding the two, making it appear as though it comes up to their waists. As the two characters are nearly engulfed by the green of the grass, the scene depicts how deeply enthralled they are by not only the beauty of the Italian landscape, but also by their passionate love for each other.

Furthermore, the transition title cards throughout the movie, which state the title of the upcoming scene as well as the characters' locations for the parts filmed in Italy, signify the importance of these locations in the scenes that follow. The establishing shots in the scenes in Florence likewise draw the audience's focus to the surrounding landmarks. Some examples include the scene set in *la Piazza della Signora*, which initiates with closeups of the various statues of *la Loggia dei Lanzi*, and the scene set in *la Basilica di Santa Croce*, which opens with closeups of the various art pieces. After these initial establishing shots, the first shots to feature the characters are often long shots that include a good view of the characters' surroundings. In fact, many of these long shots are from such a far distance that the characters' presence isn't initially apparent until a few seconds later.

The stress put on the location of the scenes throughout Italy makes them a significant part of the film's storyline, therefore solidifying the notion of Italy as a place to find passion and romance. Moreover, these scenes also provide the spectator with a good sense and image of these popular tourist destinations, thus embodying the touristic-perspective that was mentioned in the previous chapter. The film ends with Lucy and George looking over the Arno with a beautiful view of Florence from their room's window, hence the title of the movie. Lucy and George's return to the same hotel from the beginning of the film emphasizes Italy's vital role within the story and Lucy and George's relationship.

The other films similarly manifest the connection between Italy and romance, impulsivity, and indulgence. In both *Eat Pray Love* and *The Lizzie McGuire Movie*, the two main characters go to Italy with the mindset that it will be the place to find passion and adventures, respectively. Frances' friends in *Under the Tuscan Sun* likewise persuade her to go on a romantic getaway in Tuscany, as they believe it is what she needs to get out of her post-divorce rut. Sophie

and her fiancé in *Letters to Juliet* also go to Tuscany on a romantic pre-honeymoon trip before their marriage. Thus, all four of these women decide to visit Italy, as they perceive the country as the place where passion and excitement will thrive; this is closely related to the previous chapter's theme of Italy as an escape mechanism.

Liz and Frances in particular maintain the idea of self-fulfilling love, as they travel to Italy to find love that satisfies their craving for intimacy and passion. The idea of fulfilling love is a long-standing perception that's still prevalent in today's society. Numerous myths²² have fathomed an explanation for the "other half" ideation of love, and philosophers have tried to understand the phenomenon through examining its principals and what role it plays in society. For example, *Love: A Secret History* compiles four images of love that are referenced in *Plato's Symposium*, *the Book of Deuteronomy*, and *the Book of Leviticus*. The four tenets include, "1) love makes us 'whole' as individuals; 2) love is aroused by beauty (of character, soul and virtuous deeds); 3) love enables us to go beyond a superficial relation to things; and 3) love brings the best out of lovers, above all virtue and wisdom," (May 3).

The Lizzie McGuire Movie, like *A Room with a View*, highlights the role Italy plays as a facilitator of love and passion. Many of the romantic scenes between Paolo and Lizzie are set in front of popular landmarks; in fact, the settings of these scenes play a large role in the progression of their relationship. For instance, Lizzie's first encounter with Paolo happens right in front of the Trevi Fountain, after she throws a coin in to make a wish. When the two meet up again the next day at the same landmark, Paolo says he in fact made a wish that Lizzie would show up. The chance of their first meetings is fundamentally tied to a Trevi Fountain-related

²² According to Aristophanes' Myth from *Plato's Symposium*, humans, who were originally comprised of two bodies conjoined together, tried to climb to Olympus to fight the Greek Gods. As punishment, Zeus cut all of them in half. Thus, people spent the rest of their lives roaming the earth in search for their "unique other half, longing to become complete again and to discover a lost happiness," (May 5).

tradition, thus establishing this popular monument as vital to the start of the relationship. By having the characters return to the same location, the film also establishes it as almost “their place.”

Later in the film, the Tivoli Gardens similarly helps advance the development of Lizzie and Paolo’s relationship. For example, when Paolo tells Lizzie about their performance at an award show, he tells Lizzie to trust him through the process of preparing for the show. During this moment, the two are hidden behind a curtain-esque water fall. The establishment of trust in their relationship is not only illustrated but also fortified by this feature of the garden, as it provides them with a feeling of privacy, intimacy, and security. The fireworks at the end of their date further mimic and accentuate Lizzie’s infatuation with Paolo, as their explosive and vibrant nature closely resembles the intensity of her feelings of love.

In each of these scenes, as well as many of the other romantic moments between Lizzie and Paolo, the camera work predominately utilizes close up shots, bringing the audience’s attention to the characters’ facial expressions and simulating feelings of intimacy between the two. Other scenes between Lizzie and Paolo feature montage-type clips of their surroundings. In the moped scene in particular, the song *Why Not* plays in the background. The whole premise of the song is about taking risks; the chorus’ lyrics are:

*Why not take a crazy chance
Why not do a crazy dance.
If you lose the moment,
You might lose a lot.
So why not?*

Therefore, while the montage of Roman sights and landscapes connects Italy to the idea of escape in relation to a touristic perspective, as stated in the previous chapter, the incorporation of this song into the montage reinforces Italy’s other function in the film as a place to let loose and act impulsively.

Nevertheless, Paolo is not only the primary love interest in the film, but also the Latin lover personality. As said earlier in the chapter, the Latin lover is described as an exotic male, whose danger comes from his charisma, allure, and sexual appeal. Moreover, the Latin lover often has a certain feminine energy that is emphasized through their dancing and style, and Paolo manifests all of these characteristics. His Italian accent accentuates his foreign appeal, while his fame establishes his intrigue and glamour. He teaches Lizzie how to dance and sing, and takes her on over-the-top romantic dates. Again, the scene in which Paolo and Lizzie are watching the fireworks and the camera captures the moment from an aerial view simulates a storybook-fairytale feel for the spectators. Many of the scenes between Lizzie and Paolo also employ close ups of their faces. These shots create not only a sense of intimacy and closeness, allowing the spectator to put themselves in the position of Lizzie, but also highlight how alluring Paolo is, as he is the primary subject of the frames and Lizzie's attention.

Then in the end of the film, when it's revealed that Paolo was simply acting out of revenge and manipulating Lizzie the entire time, his role as the Latin lover is reiterated as Latin lovers are often portrayed as analogous to the *homme fatal*, which "threatens the family unity and ultimately proves fatal to the character himself," (D'Amelio 66). Likewise, Gordo ends up "beating" Paolo in the battle for love, thus reinforcing Paolo's role as the Latin lover, who generally loses in the end. It can therefore be implied that Gordo is the American male counterpart, as he is the one who successfully wins over Lizzie. Because Paolo is manipulative and vengeful, he also personifies the stereotype that Italians are largely driven by their emotional impulses. Thus, it can be seen that the film draws on the downfall of the Latin lover, as his overly passionate ways threaten the other characters' fulfillment of true love.

Under the Tuscan Sun incorporates the Latin lover stereotype in a similar way. Marcello, Frances' love interest, is an attractive, fashionable Italian man. As with Paolo, Marcello's scenes are placed intermittently between landscape shots of the beautiful mountains and beaches of Positano. The more romantic moments between Frances and Marcello are captured with very vibrant color palettes, such as the colorful houses in Positano or the sea's deep blue color. The hues seem to manifest the intense emotions related to what's happening within the scenes. The part in which Frances and Marcello kiss is particularly rainbow-esque, which was obviously an effect added in post-production. The artificial coloring in this scene could then be seen as an abstract representation of the artificial love of the Latin lover, as Marcello, like Paolo, does not end up being the final love interest but is instead replaced with an American man.

Beyond the incorporation of the Latin lover, *Under the Tuscan Sun* draws on similar stereotypes presented in *A Room with a View*, in particular the perception of Italians as overly romantic and overtly sexually. Two of the men that Frances encounters attempt to seduce her within their first few interactions with her. One of them, who is very persistent and overly flirtatious, is actually married. Nevertheless, he tells her, "flirting is a ritual in Italy. Just enjoy it." Later in the film, when she is exploring Rome alone, three Italians start yelling out cat calls toward her. When she starts to walk away, they follow her until they are nearly chasing her. By including these two moments in the plot, the film is encouraging the idea that Italians are aggressive in their emotional expressions and endeavors of love.

A separate instance that embodies this type of emotional Italian stereotype is the scene in *Eat Pray Love* in which Liz is learning the various gestures that Italians use. The scene is set up almost like a tutorial; first a situation is presented to the audience that portrays when an Italian would use a certain gesture, then the camera cuts to Liz and her friends doing the gesture before

a freeze frame appears with the gesture's meaning. Most of the gestures included were based on archetypal Italians' emotions; "Screw you," "Suck it," and "That meal was excellent." As mentioned previously in the chapter, gestures were one of the differences between the tourists and the Italians that initiated the labeling of the latter as violent. The film's selection of gestures includes the ones with emotional and angry significances, thus they reiterate the perceived aggressiveness of Italians. Moreover, because the scene is edited as more of a tutorial than the rest of the scenes, the director gave unique attention to the gestures and made it a notable part in Liz's adaptation to Italy and the Italian language. The tutorial layout also depicts gestures as something foreign that one must learn.

Letters to Juliet is another film that features a Latin lover, and this character is actually a vital component to the storyline. The movie follows Sophie, a fact checker for *The New Yorker* who desires to become a writer. When she and her fiancé, Victor, go on a pre-honeymoon to Verona, Italy, Victor spends a majority of his time researching cooking techniques and exploring the local cuisine in preparation for the opening of his restaurant. Sophie, who feels quite neglected by her fiancé's personal agenda, discovers a wall filled with "letters to Juliet" in Juliet's courtyard. She decides to use her hours of free time to help the Secretaries of Juliet respond to the numerous letters seeking love advice.

Sophie comes across an unopened letter written by Claire Smith that she obviously left there a long time ago. In the letter, Claire wrote that she had just left her love, Lorenzo, who she was supposed to run away with. She asked "Juliet" for advice, as her parents didn't approve of Lorenzo and she was about to return home to Britain. Sophie decides to write back, advising her to reunite with Lorenzo, despite the many years that have gone by. Claire takes Sophie's word

and returns to Italy with her grandson, Charlie, in search of her former lover. Charlie, however, is quite skeptical of the whole thing, as he believes it will create false hope for his grandmother.

Throughout the story, there are many references to the role Italy plays as an enabler of passion. Like the main characters in the other films, Sophie is going into the trip with the prior notion that Italy will be the place for romance to flourish, as she and Victor are traveling to Verona as a romantic pre-honeymoon. The film is also based around Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and even takes place in the same location at which the play was set. One scene in particular is greatly derivative of the famous balcony scene between Romeo and Juliet. Thus, the incorporation of the balcony into the film's storyline relies on pre-established connotations between romance and *Romeo and Juliet*, thus reinforcing the link between Italy and stories of love.

The film closely incorporates many of the filming techniques used in the other films, particularly those in *A Room with a View* and *The Lizzie McGuire Movie*. Their search for Claire's former lover turns into a long journey around Italy, during which there are various montage sequences of the landscapes. Over the period of the search, Sophie and Charlie begin to fall in love; as with Lucy and George's love story in *A Room with a View*, the significance placed on the Italian landscapes helps to establish the association between passion and Italy for the audience. The aerial shot of Charlie and Sophie's first kiss nearly mirrored the scene between Paolo and Lizzie, both of which mimic the experience of reading a romantic storybook for the audience.

Letters to Juliet additionally alludes to some of the prominent Latin lover stereotypes in *The Lizzie McGuire Movie* and *Under the Tuscan Sun*. Initially in the film, Claire's Lorenzo was considered the Latin lover, as he was the exotic, romantic man who ended up losing Claire when

they were younger. However, Lorenzo diverges from the Latin lover because he gets the happily ever after. Nevertheless, the 60 Lorenzos that Claire meets in the search for *her* Lorenzo all depict various stereotypes of Italians: a scorned man looking to take revenge on his former lover, an overtly sexual and passionate man, and a rich older man with a group of young women around him.

Similar to their roles as mechanisms for escape, these films also allow the spectators, especially the female spectators, to fulfill their desires for love. According to Lea Melandri, one of the authors featured in *Off Screen: Women and Film in Italy*, the modesty that women are often expected to display acts as a veil to protect not only their taboo desires for intimacy and eroticism, but also excessive emotions of any type (i.e. superfluous joy, severe loneliness, etc.), all of which are frequently met with public humiliation and shame. However, such romantic movies put these private desires on display for large audiences without losing their “aura of privacy,” as they are able to witness the fulfilment of their longings without fear of judgment or having to actually act upon them (Bruno et al. 54). Melandri describes these forms of entertainment as, “a particular kind of material [that] is instantly recognizable to everyone and holds its audience spellbound with a magic, self-contained totality, wholly remote and separate from any actual experience,” (Bruno et al. 51). Moreover, such films also create a “dream of love,” which enchants the spectators, who, in turn, do not question or criticize the narratives presented to them on screen (Bruno et al. 54).

These films not only shape stereotypes of Italians, but also influence how the spectators perceive love. Although the xenophobia toward Italians is not as apparent in modern day films, it still manifests itself through Latin lover characters and revenge-centered plot lines. As stated by Anna Clark, author of *Desire: A History of European Sexuality*, “unconventional sexual

behaviors or desires did not inevitably destabilize the conventional order.” (Clark 7).

Consequently, problems related to sexual desire are frequently derivative of exaggerated and/or fabricated consequences that sexual deviance could lead to, such as crisis in society. By associating these “problematic” sexual behaviors with certain classes or races, these films are not only drawing on the socially constructed hierarchy of classes and races, but also promoting implicit biases that these marginalized groups are the source of the potentially “destabilized conventional order.”

Therefore, it is vital that spectators consider the impact that such films may have in proliferating prejudices, even if these prejudices aren’t apparent on the surface. The film industry’s continued reliance on connotations between Italians and their way of embracing romance plays a large role in the configuration of individually held values, specifically those of love and romance, even when these themes are nuanced. Because love and romance are already fundamental to society, romantic comedies, such as those mentioned in this chapter, have a grander influence on society than is likely apparent.

Chapter 3: The role of escapism and love in relation to self-growth

“Italy is portrayed as the specially favoured place where passion mingles with repose and timeless reverie. It is an atemporal realm where, under the seductive influence of nature, art, and love, and amid surrounds of nearly death-like tranquility, the self-willingly surrenders its awareness of time and all the social duties and obligations that accompany it.”

(Casillo and Russo 141).

In discussing the prevalent themes found within American films set in Italy, it is vital to acknowledge how these two motifs, escapism and passion, act in service of the process of self-growth and its relation to the experience of Italy. Though this theme is perhaps less perceptible compared to the others, analyzing these films uncovers the significance of self-growth and its associated progressions with Italy.

The process of bettering oneself is deeply interconnected with comprehensive self-awareness, which requires the freedom to explore one’s unfiltered beliefs, desires, values, etc. without the influence of societal pressures or life’s responsibilities. Hence, the classification of Italy as a place to escape has helped establish an association between the country and the concept of “finding” one’s self.

From this perspective, Italy’s role as a mechanism for escape and its relation to self-betterment can be seen in Lucy’s evolution throughout *A Room with a View*, as her transformation largely revolves around the idea of Italy as a place for self-realization and emotional fulfilment through letting go of societal standards. At the beginning of the movie, Lucy is uptight and aloof. The scene in which Mr. Emerson, George’s father, and Lucy are taking a self-guided tour around *la Basilica di Santa Croce* perfectly exemplifies her reserved nature. When Mr. Emerson calls her out for being so stoic and emotionless, she responds by saying, “I’m thoroughly happy and having a splendid time,” with a deadpan expression and apathetic tone of voice. The discrepancy in her facial expression and tone with her statement of

enjoyment highlights her cautiousness and/or unwillingness to express how she is genuinely feeling. One could thus consider Lucy to be a personification of the “protestant” approach to life that is much more distant and self-controlled than that of the Italians.

After George helps Lucy following the violent brawl in the plaza, he throws the photographs she had with her into a river because they are covered in the injured Italian’s blood. The camera follows the pictures floating down the stream, as Lucy asks George what compelled him to do this. He responds by saying, “something tremendous has happened to me and you.” It can then be implied that this marks a change in the story, particularly an alteration in these two characters. The photographs act as a metaphor that represent the shift that Lucy is about to undergo. George disposes of the photographs, which are no longer picture perfect due to the Italian’s blood, into the body of water that carries them away. This further illustrates Lucy letting go of her standards of perfection and self-discipline following her exposure to the Italians’ way of self-expression and candidness, thus foreshadowing what is to come later in the film. Similarly, the photographs being carried by water is analogous for Lucy learning to go with the flow and her acceptance of *il dolce far niente*.

The camera work additionally helps to convey the change in Lucy’s emotional expressiveness and fulfillment throughout the story. In the beginning of the film, the solo shots of Lucy are primarily captured from a distance to where her facial features are slightly obscured and indecipherable to the audience. Since her expressions are not made a significant part of her unaccompanied scenes, it is implied that her emotions are either not a significant part of who she is, and/or they are not expressive enough to be perceptible to her peers as well as to the viewers. Likewise, by slightly concealing her facial expressions from the audience, the shots parallel Lucy’s concealment of her own emotions. It is only when she is in the presence of George that

her facial expressions are clearly presented in the frame. Following the scene in which George throws her photographs into the river, more solo shots of Lucy's expressions are incorporated into the scenes. Therefore, as Lucy becomes more open and vulnerable with George, and her emotions become more apparent and candid, the shift in shots helps to abstractly illustrate her transformation.

Over the course of her time abroad, Lucy begins to realize that her relationship with George and the self-expressiveness he encourages is much more fulfilling than her relationship with her fiancé, Cecil, who requires Lucy to maintain the typical submissive housewife role in their relationship, despite the fact that she is quite stubborn. George acknowledges this when trying to convince Lucy to leave Cecil; "He doesn't want you to be real, to think and to live. He doesn't love you, but I love you. I want you to have your own thoughts and ideas and feelings, even when I hold you in my arms." Lucy's acceptance of the Italians and George's emotional expressiveness is manifested in her change of hairstyle at the end of the film. In the beginning of the movie, her hair is always in a tight up do that is perfectly slicked back. However, in the final scene, she has let her hair down, representing her more spontaneous nature. The film's ending reiterates the role Italy played not only in the development of Lucy and George's relationship, but also in Lucy's process of self-growth, as the culture facilitated her self-realization, which, in turn, led to her attainment of emotional fulfillment.

Italy takes on a similar role in *the Lizzie McGuire Movie*, as the two degrees of escape Lizzie experiences during her time abroad help her reach a degree of self-actualization. The first level of escape is her actual trip to Rome, which allows her to remove herself from the demands and anxieties she feels back at home in order to experience new adventures. The second is her "Isabella" persona, which provides her access to the praise and exclusive opportunities that

comes with stardom. Likewise, this Isabella façade offers her a level of self-assurance that starkly contrasts the awkwardness she feels in her everyday life as herself. For instance, during the scene with the fashion designer, Paolo tells Lizzie that she needs to act more like Isabella and stand up for herself, which is exactly what she does. Following the consultation, she says “Goodbye, Lizzie McGuire. Hello, fabulous!” which demonstrates her newfound confidence. When Lizzie reveals her true identity at the end of the film, she realizes that she needs neither the Isabella persona nor the perks of fame to be happy, confident, and successful; instead, she herself can achieve these things if she simply puts her mind to them. As a result, the level of escape that the Isabella persona provides Lizzie helps facilitate the self-actualization she needs to become more confident in herself, as well as grateful for what she already has to offer.

Another aspect of the theme of escapism, which not only aids in one’s process of self-betterment, but also is one of Italy’s chief selling points as a tourist destination, is the overarching association of the country and its people with *il dolce far niente*. As shown with Lucy in *A Room with a View*, a fundamental component of *il dolce far niente* is the ability to slow down, enjoy the present moment and go with the flow. Hence, a handful of cinematic characters embody the values of this notion during their time in Italy.

For instance, Frances’ journey of self-growth in *Under the Tuscan Sun* parallels the piecemeal restorations she makes to the house throughout the film, as she learns to enjoy the journey and embrace gratefulness. When she first moves into the villa, there are a variety of structural issues that need to be addressed; likewise, Frances is at a very low point emotionally and mentally. She is largely focused on all that her life is lacking and her inability to achieve the things she expects of herself, such as a romantic partner, a family, and financial stability. However, after a big storm that causes a lot of damage to the villa, she realizes that she must approach the restorations

to the house with kindness and patience. Through the course of her renovations, Frances translates that same kindness and patience with her own journey of self-growth, signifying that her gradual process of home improvements acts as a metaphor for her steady self-growth in Italy.

Frances' acceptance of these two virtues, patience and kindness, are also embodied in the story of the train that is frequently mentioned throughout the film; "They say they built the train tracks over the Alps before there was a train that could make the trip. They built it anyway. They knew one day the train would come." The legend reminds Frances to maintain a peace of mind that what is meant to be will eventually happen. Instead of focusing on the future and when the "train" will come (i.e. when she will find another lover or have a large family), she learns to simply sit back and enjoy the present, enjoying the progression of home and self-improvements rather than solely focusing on the end goal, as is encouraged with *il dolce far niente*.

The film's emphasis on its Italian setting helps to underline the role that Italy plays in Frances' personal development and discovery of true happiness. For instance, the title *Under the Tuscan Sun* signifies that the Tuscan setting of the film, and thus the country of Italy, is significant to the storyline as a whole. The reoccurring sunflowers further help solidify the connection between Frances' character development and Italy, as they act almost as a metaphor for Frances herself. Sunflowers are not only associated with happiness and prosperity, but also require sunlight to bloom. Likewise, Frances experiences her personal development "under the Tuscan sun," which implies that Tuscany and therefore Italy are vital to her self-growth, as the sun is to the sunflowers. The sunflowers' appearance during the beginning, middle, and end of her journey additionally reinforces their metaphorical significance to her self-improvement. As with the sunflowers, the film's incorporation of Italian culture, such as the train legend or the flag throwing contest in Montepulciano, reiterates Italy's role in Frances' process of self-

betterment. As these pieces of Italian culture are placed intermittently amongst stages in her journey of self-growth, the film makes the connection between the Italian setting and her achievement of happiness. By the end of the film, Frances recognizes the beauty of the present and embraces the principles of *il dolce far niente* that are necessary for self-betterment.

Another vital piece of not only self-growth, but also the experience of Italy, is the ability to reflect on one's emotional and mental state in order to obtain optimal emotional fulfillment. As stated by Lea Melandri in *Off Screen: Women and Film in Italy*, the source of "genuine self-fulfillment and the acquisition of real autonomy" is friends, freedom from the demanding pressures and worries of the outside world, and self-reflection, the latter which helps one to see the logical fallacies of one's anxieties (May 60). Hence, Melandri denotes the connection between the facets of *il dolce far niente*, such as the copious amounts of free time encouraged by the Italians' laidback approach to life, and the use of these aspects in service of self-growth and fulfillment.

Sophie in *Letters to Juliet* exemplifies the usage of both *il dolce far niente* and self-reflection in regard to her own self-growth. Unlike some of the other films, this one does not feature a voiceover narration of Sophie's contemplation throughout the story; instead, the shots visually illustrate her increased reflection and resulting satisfaction during her time in Italy. In the first few scenes of the film, a majority of the sequences that feature Sophie utilize moving shots that follow her as she walks around, capturing her from a side or rear view so that her face and facial expressions are obscured from the audience's view. The camerawork in these initial scenes of the film denote Sophie's rushed and almost robotic approach to life: two characteristics that are commonly identified with Americans' "protestant work ethic," which starkly contrasts the Italians' relaxed lifestyle (Casillo and Russo 160). The concealment of her expressions also

emphasizes her apathy and emotional detachment from her life at the start of the movie. It is implied that Sophie is unable to slow down, enjoy the moment and contemplate her feelings. She is simply going through the routine of her daily responsibilities without reflecting on how she actually feels about her career as a fact checker or her unfulfilling relationship with Victor.

However, once Sophie discovers the group of women in the Secretaries of Juliet, as well as Claire's letter, the scenes utilize more still and contemplative shots as well as point-of-view (POV) shots. For instance, the scene in which she first comes across Juliet's balcony where the thousands of letters are placed implements a slow-moving POV shot. The angle and perspective of this sequence mimic the contemplation and curiosity Sophie has toward the discovery of this site, as both she and the audience are able to deliberately and meticulously take in all that the site encompasses (the letters, the many emotional girls, the balcony, etc.). The scene in which Sophie comes across Claire's letter is similarly presented from Sophie's subjective perspective.

The shift in camera angles from the beginning of the film to the time in Italy places increasing importance on Sophie's viewpoint, contrasting earlier scenes that were primarily shot from a figurative third person's objective perspective. By gradually drawing more attention to what incidents or things are significant to Sophie through the use of still POV shots, such as at the site of Juliet's balcony or of Claire's letter, the film depicts Sophie's growing reflection on and interest in these certain discoveries. The simultaneous increase in contemplative frames of Sophie's facial expressions imply that she is experiencing more emotions and is thus able to actually reflect on how she feels. These alterations in camerawork also coincide with her developing relationship with Charlie and fulfillment through journaling their road trip around Tuscany, both of which lead her to realize how dissatisfied she is with her job as a fact checker and her one-sided relationship with Victor.

Sophie's growing relationship with Charlie provides her another degree of self-growth through the attainment of self-acceptance and self-realization. Although initially the two characters seemed severely incongruent with one other, Sophie and Charlie gradually form a relationship built on mutual understanding since they have both experienced the loss of their parent(s). Thus, are able to relate on a new level that Sophie and Victor cannot reach. Charlie appreciates where Sophie comes from, embracing a more comprehensive version of who she is in comparison to the version Victor accepts. The two characters' reciprocated empathy and acceptance is reflected in the scene in which Charlie looks back into the rearview mirror of the car he is driving during their road trip around Tuscany, and we see a center-frame view of Sophie. The camera cuts to Sophie's view of Charlie's face, which is similarly unobscured and center frame. Because each character sees the other within their own reflection, the angle evokes the idea that they somehow see themselves within the other. Because Charlie makes her feel whole, understood and adequate, Sophie is able to translate these feelings to her sentiments about herself. In turn, she realizes that Victor is not permitting the same degree of acceptance and contentment that she gets from her relationship with Charlie. Like *A Room with a View*, *Letters to Juliet* demonstrates Italy's function in the process of self-improvement, manifesting not only in Sophie's increased self-reflection that leads to her emotional fulfillment, but also in her and Charlie's relationship that leads to their acceptance of one another and, in turn, themselves.

A more nuanced aspect of self-growth and its relation to self-reflection is the solitude necessary for one to genuinely contemplate one's mental and emotional situation in order to achieve optimal emotional fulfillment. As described by Stendhal, a nineteenth century travel writer, the experience of Italy consists of tender solitude and a contemplative state of mind in which one loses all sense of time and worry (Casillo and Russo 144). Although Stendhal

references the connection between *il dolce far niente* and the contemplation and emotional satisfaction necessary for self-growth that Melandri made earlier, the solidarity of such self-reflection can also arouse strong feelings of loneliness. In fact, James Russell Lowell, one of the many sixteenth-century New Englanders who visited Italy on the Grand Tour, stated that the very essence of the country reinforces sentiments of loneliness. According to Lowell, the various monuments, ruins, and tombs remind spectators of their mortality, provoking a sense of uneasiness as they then can only focus on their own eminent death. Instead of feeling rejuvenated after their time of solitude, the spectators face the inevitable truth that they will die alone, which could be considered the ultimate manifestation of loneliness (Casillo and Russo 201).

This fine line between contemplation and loneliness appears in *Eat Pray Love* and *Under the Tuscan Sun*, in which both of the protagonists narrate their time in Italy. Liz only narrates transitional moments in *Eat Pray Love*, such as when she first arrives in Italy or right before she is about to leave. On the other hand, Frances in *Under the Tuscan Sun* starts to relay her feelings to the audience through voiceover once she moves into the villa. Throughout these two films, the characters' provide insight into their thoughts and reflections, allowing the audience to see how the characters' time in Italy gradually shifts the way in which they perceive their lives and emotional states. However, instead of verbally stating their emotions and thoughts to another person, Liz and Frances relay their sentiments through voiceover narrations. While their accounts sound as though they are meant to share with another character, only the protagonists are able to hear their deliberations, besides of course the audience. This emphasizes the isolation the two characters are feeling, as they have no one else to communicate these thoughts to.

Nevertheless, the seclusion these characters undergo are vital to their personal growth, as the notions of loneliness and solitude are fundamentally built on seclusion. Referring back to James

Lowell, loneliness is simply “feeling disconnected or alienated from positive personas, places, or things,” whereas solitude is something one must choose for oneself (Casillo and Russo 201).

Loneliness can then be seen as a form of solitude; but, it is the responsibility of the individual to reframe their perception of the situation. This overlap between loneliness and solitude can be seen in the progression of Liz and Frances’ mindsets throughout the two films.

At the beginning of Liz’s trip in *Eat Pray Love*, she is overwhelmed by her own thoughts of loneliness. In one scene, she sits alone in her bed and looks at the word *solo* in her Italian dictionary, which means “alone.” She repeats “*Sono da solo*,” or “I am alone,” suggesting that she associates being alone with loneliness. Moreover, it shows her inability to enjoy her time abroad because she is too consumed by her feelings of isolation. Throughout the rest of her time in Italy, Liz is often shown walking around and exploring the city alone. The shots in these scenes depict not only her mindset of loneliness, as there no other people in the background, but also her sentiments of insignificance through camera angles that portray her to be quite small in comparison to her surroundings. The scene during which Liz diverts her attention to her meal marks the beginning of the shift in her perception of solitude.²³ Her indulgence in food provides not only an escape from her loneliness, but also an alternative type of sensuality and source of passion that provide her fulfillment. By the second-to-last scene set in Italy, she actually chooses to spend some time alone rather than meeting up with her friends, using this time to enjoy food and reflect on herself and her emotional state.

By the end of her time in Rome, Liz comes to perceive her time alone as revitalizing instead of crippling. Her transition from loneliness to self-affirming solitude is also apparent in the

²³ Refer to chapter one for a more in-depth examination of this scene in *Eat Pray Love*.

metaphor she makes between the Augusteum²⁴ and her own life; “Ruin is a gift. Ruin is the road to transformation. Even in this eternal city, the Augusteum showed me that we must always be prepared for endless waves of transformation,” she says while looking around the interior of the site. Through the comparisons between the landmark and her own life, Liz faces the revelation that change is inevitable, likening her own mistakes to the monument’s transformations throughout history. Despite the fact that the landmark has been abandoned, burned and adapted from its origins, Rome continues to revolve around the Augusteum. Comparingly, Liz has undergone unexpected changes and devastation, but she continues to move forward. The Augusteum and the historical significance of Italy itself help her find closure in her heartache and abrupt divorce, as these difficulties are vital for improvements in the grander scheme of her life.

Without these feelings of loneliness, Liz wouldn’t have been able to achieve the solitude necessary for self-reflection and emotional healing. Likewise, by having some aspect of Italy play in her journey to self-discovery, such as the cuisine to distract her from loneliness or the Augusteum to reveal the beauty of heartbreak, the film insinuates that the country was instrumental in her personal development. Finally, the placement of this realization in the last scene before she continues on to India signifies that Liz’s acceptance of the principles *il dolce far niente* is the most significant thing she took away from her trip to Rome.

The changes in light source throughout the film also mimic Liz’s self-growth over the course of her time in Italy. As mentioned in the first chapter, the first few scenes of the film set in

²⁴ The Augusteum, named after Emperor Augustus, was the epicenter of roman religion during Imperial Rome. The site acted almost as a temple, where people would go to show their loyalty to the emperor and practice worship. It gradually degraded and was buried under dirt and overgrown vegetation, until it was transformed into a castle and then a concert arena. Mussolini had the site closed off to restore its status as a historical landmark (Daley).

America lack a source of light, particularly sunlight. There is one scene, however, that features bright white, overhead light during which Liz sees David for the first time performing in a play she had written. The lighting creates a heavenly, ethereal aura, presenting David almost as an angel. While this is one of the only scenes in the beginning of the film that includes a strong source of light, it is nevertheless artificial, only simulating the look of sunlight. Accordingly, the light's deception parallels the false sense of fulfillment and security Liz feels in her infatuation with David. He appears to be the solution to her problems, or the light missing from her life, when he is really just a temporary distraction. Yet once she lands in Italy, the film has its first feature of a strong source of light from the sun. Thus, the sun and its first prominent appearance in the film occurring in Italy emphasizes the concept that Liz's true fulfillment comes from the happiness, freedom and indulgent nature of her trip, rather than the passion that she so desperately craved after her divorce.

Frances undergoes a similar transformation through self-reflection in *Under the Tuscan Sun*. As mentioned before, her initial perspective of her time abroad is rather pessimistic; she predominately focuses on the various problems she has uncovered in her recently purchased villa, as well as the doubt she has about her impulsive decision to move there. As she settles into the house, she narrates, "I have inherited 10,000 empty wine bottles, one grape, every issue of *La Nazione* printed in 1958, and assorted previous tenants [a scorpion]," thus, emphasizing what little the villa has to offer. Similarly, she tells her real estate agent that she often considers herself "the stupidest women in the world [for buying] a house for life [she] doesn't even have," such as a family to fill it, people to cook for, and someone to love. In contrast to her early pessimism, as the storyline progresses, Frances becomes more introspective, and her doubts and cynicism transfigure to a more self-opportunistic perspective. Through her reflections, she comes to the

realization that she has everything she asked for: a family with Patti and the baby, a large group of friends comprised of the house workers for whom to cook, and love for herself and her friends.

The changing colors of the film further portray the fulfillment that comes from her friends and her new peace with herself; as the storyline progresses, the color palettes come to represent the satisfaction Frances feels from not only romantic love, but also platonic love. The moments that feature Marcello and Frances incorporate a particularly vibrant color palette. The kissing scene between the two characters is especially colorful. Later in the film, moments that aren't related to Frances and Marcello's love story also utilize the same array of bright colors, such as the scene in which Patti and her baby are sitting in a big field of bright red and yellow flowers. Another exemplary scene occurs with a Polish boy named Pawel performs in a flag ceremony to prove his love for Frances' Italian neighbor, and the scene is filled with a variety of colors from each of the flags. While these two scenes have tangible sources of colors (i.e. flowers and the flags), the scene with Marcello was obviously re-colored in post-production. Similar to David's simulated provision of light in *Eat Pray Love*, the artificial colors of Marcello's scene parallel his "artificial" love, as he is only the Latin lover, and the lack of genuine fulfillment Frances receives from their relationship. On the other hand, Patti and her baby and the young couple's moments are filled with that satisfying love that is necessary for self-growth and improvement rather than simply infatuation. Likewise, the film incorporates more green tones as the story progresses. Because green is often associated with growth and prosperity, such as with plants or wealth, the use of the color implies Frances' development and well-being.

Claire and Sophie's relationship, though not romantic, also facilitates Sophie's attainment of self-acceptance and self-actualization. Because Sophie's mom left her when she was a baby, she

never had a mother figure to look up to; thus, Claire takes on this maternal role and provides Sophie the motherly love she craves. Their relationship draws on Freud's ideas about the mother-daughter relationship.²⁵ Through this relationship, as with her relationship with Charlie, Sophie feels accepted for who she is in a way that she hadn't prior; likewise, Sophie gets the fulfillment necessary for her to feel complete. The self-realization from their relationship is demonstrated in the scene in which Claire comforts Sophie as they look at one another in the mirror. As with the scene between Charlie and Sophie, the reflective angle represents an instance of emotional fulfillment and acceptance of the other. Because Claire is reflected back to Sophie through the mirror, it is implied that she has in a way become part of Sophie, as her maternal love makes her feel whole again. Through both her relationship with Charlie and Claire, Sophie is able to witness Italy's ability to facilitate romantic love, as well as promote personal development through the acceptance and authentication that she receives from the other two characters. Because the progression of both of these relationships occurs intermittently between their journey around Tuscany and the various landscape shots of the region, the film stresses the significance of Italy in this process.

Il dolce far niente and the corresponding elements of this phenomenon guide these cinematic characters to undergo transformation during their time in Italy. Through their escape from the stressful realities of their everyday working lives, they are able to step back and achieve the emotional fulfillment that's a vital component of self-improvement. Likewise, many of the characters gradually come to appreciate Italy as something to simply enjoy rather than a means to an end, even though they initiated their trips with utilitarian motives. Their adoption of *il dolce*

²⁵ According to his Freud's theory about mother-daughter relationships, girls look up to their mothers as their "ideal ego," living vicariously through their mother since they are too young to have any self-autonomy. Thus, the mom is a point of reference for the daughter, acting as a part of her self-identification (Bruno et al. 47).

far niente also guides them toward gratitude, as they are able to appreciate in what they already have not the expected romantic type of love, fulfills their emotional needs to lead them to their discovery of genuine happiness.

The films' portrayal of Italy's ability to catalyze self-realization and self-acceptance is reminiscent of the New Englanders who traveled to Italy on the Grand Tour. According to John Paul Russo and Robert Casillo, the authors of *the Italian in Modernity*, the New Englanders believed Italy would provide them access to their former lives in Europe, from which they were exiled. Due to the country's juxtaposition between antiquity and modernity, "it mixes life, death, and rebirth in ways that are suggestive and homologous to an individual life." (Casillo and Russo 185). Similarly, Margaret Fuller, one of the New England travelers, compared her trip to Italy to a mother receiving her long lost child (Casillo and Robert 229). This implies that coming to Italy is analogous to coming home to something that is not only familiar, but also critical to the self. The importance of Italy in the protagonists' journeys of self-growth is emphasized by the reprising final scenes.

In *A Room with a View*, for example, Lucy and George return to the same window with a view of the Arno, which Lucy requested at the beginning of the film. A similar instance occurs in *Under the Tuscan Sun*. In the first scene of the film, Frances is confronted by a writer, who she had previously negatively critiqued in a review of his work. This writer is the one who informs her of her husband's infidelity, initiating her negative emotional spiral that leads her to Italy. Near the end of the film at the young couple's wedding, another writer, Ted, confronts Frances about a negative view she had written. However, this writer ends up becoming Frances' love interest at the end of the film. Likewise, in *The Lizzie McGuire Movie*, Gordo and Lizzie return to the same view of Rome at which they agreed to find adventure at the start of their trip. By

having the characters return to the same place and/or situation where the movie started, the audience is able to better reminisce and thus perceive how much they have changed from the start of the story. Moreover, by setting these scenes in Italy, especially with visible views of the Italian landscape in the background in the case of *The Lizzie McGuire Movie* and *A Room with a View*, these final scenes solidify the role Italy played throughout their journeys of love, liberation and self-improvement.

Beyond Italy's role in personal growth and improvement within cinema, the films themselves can act as an outlet for the audience members to feel a sense of gratification and self-realization of their own yearnings for an escape to somewhere new. John Ellis, a former professor of media arts at the University of London, stated in his book *Visible Fictions* that films closely mimic day dreaming, appealing to the spectator's various conscious and subconscious desires. The pleasure that is linked with the experience of watching a film thus derives from the pleasure of seeing their desire(s) being fulfilled (Ellis 48). Likewise, Giulia Alberti related these psychological processes to Freud's Oedipus complex; even though what's occurring on screen isn't directly happening to the individual, this experience is even more fulfilling because it takes the pressure off of the spectator to actually accomplish that dream or desire (Bruno et al. 26). Through films, the spectators are then not only able to witness the satisfaction of their own desires without fear of failure or uncertainty, but also able to actualize their subconscious desires and become aware of what they need for their own fulfillment.

Moreover, the spectators can undergo self-realization through these films, as they help them to identify and define themselves. According to Michael Richardson, author of *Otherness in Hollywood Cinema*, the spectator's concept of "the self" cannot exist without "the other," or the characters on the screen. Humans' identities are established through the acknowledgment of the

difference between “the self” and “the other” (Richardson 12). Hence, these films provide an outlet for self-reflection; the spectator puts themselves into the mental and physical position of the characters presented to them on screen, which forces them to personally confront the characters’ conflicts for themselves. They then must decide how they would act accordingly, which allows them to consider their own beliefs and values, relative to the those of the characters on screen.

While Italy was not the sole factor in their self-acceptance transformation, the motivations behind tourists and cinematic characters’ journeys to Italy embody the essentials for self-discovery and self-acceptance. Liberation from the tedious routines and pressures of everyday life, freedom to indulge and act spontaneously, and experience of genuine and self-fulfilling love; while they may present themselves in unexpected ways, these elements are all vital components to the process of self-acceptance. Because these three motifs are predominately referenced in Italy-based cinema and tourism collateral, the association between Italy and self-discovery continues to be at the fore-front of people’s minds, aiding to the idealization of the country and its people.

Conclusion

In the preceding chapters, I have examined three prominent motifs found within Italian cinema: Italy as an escape from reality; Italy as a catalyst for passion; and Italy as a site for self-growth. Likewise, looking into the origins of such conceptualizations of Italy and Italians has helped reveal the stereotypes that are behind these themes. Therefore, it is critical to discuss the impact that these films have on society's perception of Italians, as Hollywood has played a large role in the diffusion of these very ethnic stereotypes.

While a lack of diversity is a long-standing characteristic of not only Hollywood films, but also the Hollywood film industry itself, criticism about the scarce representation of minorities has grown exponentially within the last decade.²⁶ Various film and media studies specialists have additionally examined this issue in search of some possible causes. Following the end of Hollywood's Hays Code in 1968 and the coinciding ethnic revival²⁷ in the 1970s, caricature-esque representations of ethnic minorities gradually became more and more popular, leading to the aforementioned "movie flood of explicit ethnic sex and violence," (Cortes 116).

Since then, ethnic minorities have generally been placed in archetypal roles based off of commonly held stereotypes and prejudices, such as the Latin lover or the fashionable Italian. One reason for this is the very nature of Hollywood's blockbuster films. The Oxford University Press defines blockbuster as, "a thing of great power or size, in particular a movie, book, or other product that is a great commercial success," ("Blockbuster"). In order to appeal to a broad enough audience to achieve blockbuster status, these films have to rely on commonly held

²⁶ In 2015, the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite went viral on Twitter as backlash to the lack of ethnic diversity in the Academy Awards' list of nominations. For the 2016 Oscars, various stars boycotted the awards show, including Will Smith and Spike Lee. In the past two years, the gender inequality in nominations has also been scrutinized, with many stars referencing the issue throughout the show (Harris and Sachdev).

²⁷ Refer to chapter two for more information on the Hays Code and the ethnic revival.

ideological trends and values in society. Although such films are intended to attract a large population, white audiences in prominent cities are often the chosen demographic, as they have enough purchasing power to make the film commercially successful (Ginneken 67).

Likewise, if and how certain ethnic groups appear in films largely depends on the group's profitability and commercial appeal, as marketing concerns often surpass all other considerations in Hollywood (Woll and Miller 4). Therefore, many ethnic-based films predominately exploit well-known stereotypes of foreign groups, as they are familiar to those influential audiences.

This would help explain why so many films have parallel plot lines and characters, but also stereotypical references. For instance, *Eat Pray Love*, *Room with a View* and *Under the Tuscan Sun* all begin with the protagonist trying to escape their reality. In fact, two of the characters go there after their divorce. In addition to these three films, *Letters to Juliet* and *A Room with a View* include the stereotype of overly sexual and passionate Italians into their plots. Nevertheless, because all of these movies are blockbuster romantic comedies, it is simply status quo to rely on commonly held perceptions of Italians.

Similarly, the use of European actors helps to satisfy Americans' craving for the exotic other (D'Amelio 112). In relation to the Italians, the shift in their cinematic presence mimics the shift in America's perception of them; it wasn't until after Hollywood on the Tiber and *la dolce vita* phenomenon in the 1950s and 60s, when Italy became associated with glamor and fashion, that Italians started making more frequent appearances in films. Likewise, as mass tourism developed and more people became intrigued by the touristic image of the country, the film industry exploited people's *wanderlust* and made films that appealed to the beautiful, idealized version of Italy that travelers demanded to see. As Stephen Gundle said, "Italian glamour combined sex and style for foreigners. The country became an image to be consumed, to be bought into and to be

savored in small doses, by means of a film, a vacation, a meal in a restaurant, an item of clothing, or a domestic appliance... celebrity, surface, and image triumphed” (Hom 60).

When filmmakers do actually decide to feature foreign cultures and society, they exploit them for the enjoyment of the audience. As described by Richardson in his book, *Otherness in Hollywood Cinema*, Hollywood films set in “exotic” locations are, “joy-ride roller coasters, utterly insensitive to cultural difference, [that] play upon the credulousness of the viewer who takes the presentations of a theme park for reality,” (Richardson 36). This “theme-park” phenomenon can be seen especially in *the Lizzie McGuire Movie*, in which the most significant scenes are set in popular landmark destinations. For instance, there are two separate occasions in the film in which Lizzie and Paolo are riding around in their scooter looking at the many monuments and landmarks, such as the Spanish steps, the Trevi Fountain, etc. However, these moments are not short, transitional scenes but rather purposefully placed sequences to appeal to the audiences’ touristic view of Rome. In fact, these scenes have no purpose to drive the story forward but solely to emphasize the location of the film and present popular destinations to the spectator. Then at the end of the film, the big performance scene between Lizzie and Paolo is set in the Colosseum; rather than acknowledging the historical significance of this landmark, the film simply utilizes it as a backdrop because it is recognizably Italian to even the younger audiences to which the film appealed.

The “social insulation of Hollywood producers,” which researchers say are the primary source of the biased perspective of Hollywood films, creates a distorted view of the world. Such false reality is alarming as it is easily and widely spread throughout the public, due to film’s significance within American society (Woll and Miller 13). Therefore, because audiences regard Hollywood’s accounts of ethnicity as authentic representations, whether consciously or

subconsciously, such perspectives become deep rooted prejudices that viewers project on to actual humans with whom they have no prior interaction. Children are especially susceptible to these generalized portrayals. Gordon Berry found that children learn a lot about social classes and the implications that come with them through television (Woll and Miller 299). Because Italians are accurately often portrayed as violent or manipulative Latin lovers, as with *the Lizzie McGuire Movie*, children begin to view these portrayals as reality since they are unlikely to question what is presented to them on screen. Moreover, the idealization of Italy in these films also instills a touristic mindset into younger generations, establishing a superficially-based preference for what is aesthetically pleasing and glamorous over the authentic historical and cultural value of Italy and its people.

While these archetypes generalized portrayals of Italians have their negative consequences, such as the pervasion of prejudice and bigotry against them, Michael Richardson argues that stereotypes are a vital component of cultural representation that are impossible to evade. He claims that all representations are distorted by omission, subjectivity, and the nature of representations themselves; because every single person experiences and perceives things in a manner that is strictly unique to each individual, it is impossible to represent these things in a way that isn't partially subjective. Thus, he argues that it is impossible for films to completely eradicate the use of stereotypes (Richardson 30)

Instead, Richardson says that the director must take responsibility of making the nature of these stereotypes apparent rather than playing them off as reality, as he believes the chief problem of these films comes from the perception of them as accurate depictions (Richardson 32). He believes that this is the best option moving forward in cinematographic representations

of foreign others since it is impossible for a non-Italian filmmaker to portray the experience of being Italian in a way that accurately represents the experiences of all Italians.

While it would be beneficial for films to disclose their reliance on stereotypes, perhaps prior to the film in either the opening credits and/or the previews for the movie, it almost destroys the whole essence of cinema and its ability to figuratively transport the spectators to the mental and emotional position of the characters. Likewise, films made prior to the implementation of Richardson's proposed disclosure would be unaffected, permitting them to continue their storylines and characters as realistic depictions.

One possible solution for directors moving forward is to balance out their representations of these ethnic groups and cultures by depicting both the positives and the negatives. *A Room with a View*, for example, illustrates a more comprehensive image of Italy and Italian culture than the other films that solely idealize the country. By featuring the cynical side of Italian stereotypes, such as the idea that they are violent and overly-emotional, with the more romanticized conceptualizations of Italy, such as its role as an incubator for Lucy and George's love, the movie offers an equalized perspective of Italian culture and its people.

But perhaps it is actually the audience's responsibility to recognize the subjectivity within these films and to acknowledge that it is impossible to separate biases from representations. Just as the public can't expect the news to alter the stories that reference certain ethnic groups, film audiences can't anticipate directors to do the same. The actual implementation of this suggestion would, of course, require a lot of changes. The education system, for instance, could start to incorporate stereotypes and prejudice into the curriculum early on so children can be aware of the issues as they grow older.

Nevertheless, being able to separate prejudice from perception and generalizations from reality, within films as well as within one's own thoughts, is a critical skill that society should work toward improving beyond the context of films. Stereotypes will continue to be an element of society and interactions with ethnic groups that are different from one's own; therefore, it is essential to learn to look past these and recognize that generalizations and representations are innately inaccurate.

Similar to the alcohol industry's famous "drink responsibly" slogan, the film industry could implement a "watch responsibly" slogan to encourage audiences to consider the potential consequences of these films if consumed carelessly. As with alcoholic beverages, films are made for society's enjoyment; nevertheless, the detriments of both alcoholic drinks and films are also very real and prevalent if not considered during consumption. Thus, "watch responsibility" denotes these potential consequences, but still encourages audiences to enjoy these films for their entertainment value. Besides, who wouldn't want to take advantage of the free "air travel" to Italy that such films provide?

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