



Journal of Religion & Film

Volume 23
Issue 1 April 2019

Article 13

1-28-2019

Dolce Fine Giornata

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Recommended Citation

Lyden, John C. (2019) "Dolce Fine Giornata," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 23 : Iss. 1 , Article 13.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol23/iss1/13>

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Dolce Fine Giornata

Abstract

This is a film review of *Dolce Fine Giornata* (2019) directed by Jacek Borcuch.

Keywords

Xenophobia, Terrorism

Author Notes

John Lyden became Editor of the Journal of Religion & Film in 2011. He was Professor of Religion at Dana College from 1991-2010 and is now the Director of the Liberal Arts Core at Grand View University. He is the author of *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (NYU Press), and the editor of the Routledge Companion to Religion and Film and co-editor (with Eric Michael Mazur) of the Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture. He was the 2008 recipient of the Spiritus Award for Outstanding Contributions to the study of Religion and Film.



Dolce Fine Giornata (2019), dir. Jacek Borcuch

Maria Linde is a Nobel Prize winning poet, a survivor of the Holocaust and a refugee to Italy where she settled and married. She lives in a beautiful house in the Tuscan countryside enjoying the privileges of the elite and erudite. But there are challenges to this picture. She is having an affair with a young Egyptian immigrant, which suggests her refusal to abide by social expectations. But all comes to a head when a terrorist attack in Rome put everyone on edge, just as she is scheduled to give a public talk. She uses this as an opportunity to give political commentary, and her speech goes viral on the internet. She has no interest in publicity and barely recognizes that this has happened. But the controversial nature of her statements follows her and causes everyone to react differently to her.

Specifically, she called the terrorist attack “a work of art,” which while not intended as a compliment is taken as offensive language by many across Europe. What it appears she meant is that terrorist acts are designed to provoke a response, to be media and theatrical events like

performance art that sends a message. She raises the question of what message Europe should send in response, and criticizes the inhumane conditions of refugee camps and the fear of outsiders as inappropriate. Because she is so disappointed with the xenophobia of Europe, she refuses the Nobel Prize, and her book tour is canceled. Meanwhile, her Egyptian lover's tavern is burned to the ground (even though he is a Coptic Christian with no connection to the terrorists) and attacks on anyone with brown skin become more common, even in their town. She receives hate mail as well as love mail, but Maria does not wish to be a political figure, rejecting opportunities to side either with those who like or dislike her remarks.

Director Borsuch said at the screening that he did not intend any obvious moral message, and Maria seems to represent his own vision as an artist. She objects to the fear and demonization of refugees as well as the violence of terrorists, and does not wish to be forced to either support the “war on terror” or terror. As a poet, she seeks to celebrate life and compassion, but the polarization of European politics increasingly forces her—and everyone there—to take sides. The artist resists this, wishing instead to be the voice of humanity. As a refugee herself, she knows that suffering and does not wish to draw more boundaries between herself and others. The other characters have trouble accepting her attitude, seeing it as an effort to stand above or apart from the fray. And truth be told, she does have a certain arrogance, found in everything from her speeding through traffic stops to smoking where it is prohibited, and of course in her unwillingness to take responsibility for the effects of her speech.

Maria proves to be a somewhat frustrating although poignant character, reluctant to grow old—Frank Sinatra's nostalgic and touching rendition of “It was a very good year” runs diegetically and otherwise through the film—and yet sympathetic as another victim of the dualistic narrative into which Europe has forced itself in the face of the refugee and immigration crisis. By

the end of the film, she is literally locked away and isolated from others who walk by without acknowledging her. The camera backs away from her to show people following their daily routines, suggesting that we like them may fail to see the crisis in our midst. Borsuch does not wish to be a heavy-handed moralist, however, and largely succeeds through an indirect self-portrait of the artist as impotent critic whose pronouncements are not less relevant for being largely unheeded.