FEARS, HOPES, AND REGENERATION IN *TRE FRATELLI*:
THE RETURN OF THE CHILD IN THE 1980S

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Summary: With *Tre fratelli* (1981), Francesco Rosi turns to the troubled years when the nation's ideological fabric began to disintegrate and captures the fear of a nation on the verge of collapse, producing a film of devastating emotional impact. *Tre fratelli* is the tale of three brothers summoned back to their childhood home in Puglia for the funeral of their mother. These very different brothers serve as a cross section for contemporary Italian society: Raffaele, a self-assured judge in Rome whose life is haunted by the fear of terrorist assassination; Rocco, an idealistic teacher who works at a reformatory in Naples; Nicola, a factory worker and labor organizer in Turin. The brothers' estrangement from their cultural roots creates a disaffected young generation, which is symptomatic of Italy's dysfunctional present. The youth's problems are symbolized by the judge's teen-age son Giorgio and Rocco's institutional minors. Only Nicola's eight-years old daughter Marta embodies a solution of regeneration. A magical presence, she gives life to a historical present in which the human soul contains the seeds of the future.

Democracy under Attack: Rome, Tuesday May 9th, 1978, 2:00pm

In the booth of a red Renault R4, the bullet-riddled body of Aldo Moro, Italy's former prime minister and head of the Christian Democrat party, was found after a telephone call alerted the authorities. Moro was killed fifty-five days from being abducted by the Red Brigades on March 16th.¹ The car was left in the very center of Rome, in Via Caetani, half way from the DC and PCI headquarters. A shocking murder had been committed

¹ That morning Moro's car was ambushed in Via Mario Fani on his way to Parliament. His five bodyguards were killed in the shootout; Moro was hurried into a waiting car, which escaped into the Roman traffic. Right to the final days, the BR claimed their right to execute their prisoner should the State refuse to negotiate. In their eyes, Moro represented the anti-proletarian and imperialist politics of the Christian Democrat "regime"; he was an "enemy of the people." Aldo Moro was the artificer of the *compromesso storico* (historic compromise), as the strategy was called. As his widow, Eleonora, would later testify, her husband was in fear of murder, but the party had denied him a bullet proof car. Indeed, his entire family lived in fear.

and the nation teetered on the edge of political chaos. This was no ordinary political crisis; the BR had succeeded in taking hostage the most eminent statesman after Alcide De Gasperi. Their basic aim was to defeat democracy by demoralizing it. The Italian State was able to confront one of the most trying postwar challenges without jeopardizing the democratic institutions the terrorists had hoped to destroy.²

Political crime, particularly in the Moro case, was a traumatic event no Italian can ever forget. These were years when the nation's ideological fabric began to disintegrate and filmmakers were racing to decipher an uncertain present as well as represent the Italians' growing skepticism toward the *classe politica*. The Moro affair alerted the Republic how potentially dangerous the terrorists' war against the State had become. It now stands for an entire era of Italian history. In 1981, Francesco Rosi turns to this troubled period of Italian history in *Tre fratelli* (*Three Brothers*) and captures the fear of a nation on the verge of collapse, producing a film of devastating emotional impact. In particular, Rosi maps a topography of the political and social difficulties facing the Italian nation after years of damaging political factionalism, unnerving crisis and instability. The result is an extraordinarily beautiful film that, as Pauline Kael noted in her review, "keeps you in a state of emotional exaltation because there isn't a frame that fails to sustain the mood" ("The Current Cinema: Francesco Rosi" 164).³

The film might be considered an investigation into the terrorist chaos of the 1970s in Italy, but that is the under-layer, and it is always present. With *Tre fratelli*, Rosi presents an impressive portrait of three characters living in an extreme set of circumstances and struggling to decide whether the choices they are making are indeed justified. The film is freely adapted from the 1936 novella "The Third Son" by the Russian 20th-century writer Andrej Platonov. It is the tale of three brothers summoned back to their childhood home for the funeral of their mother. All three suddenly removed from their separate busy life and transplanted into the rural environs of the Murge, in Puglia, by their aging father's telegram.⁴ All three have lost their roots, each is as estranged from the other brothers as he is from the South

² For this particular period, see LaPalombara, Chapter 7; Ginsborg, Chapter 9.

³ See also Kael's "Coming Home" 52. The film opened the 34th Cannes Film Festival on May 13th, 1981, and was also nominated for a Best Foreign-Language Film Oscar. It found its most enthusiastic reception abroad. For some Italian critics, *Tre fratelli* was too "giornalistico e didattico" [journalistic and didactic] (Morandini 11).

⁴ The film was mostly shot in Altamura and Cassano at the border with Lucania.

itself. These very different brothers serve as a cross section for contemporary Italian society, and each brings to light the social conflicts which he comes in contact with every day: Raffaele (Philippe Noiret), a self-assured judge in Rome, whose life is haunted by the fear of terrorist assassination; Rocco (Vittorio Mezzogiorno), an idealistic teacher who works at a reformatory in Naples; Nicola (Michele Placido), an angry factory worker and labor organizer in Turin, whose marriage has just broken up.

The brothers' estrangement from their cultural roots has produced a problematic generational hiatus: Giorgio, Raffaele's eighteen-year-old son, is quietly disaffected and unable to adapt or to overcome rapid transformations; the Neapolitan petit thieves, Rocco's institutionalized "children," defy his dedicated efforts. Only Nicola's eight-year-old daughter Marta (Marta Zoffoli) represents a solution of regeneration. A magical presence and a necessity for survival, she gives life to a historical present in which the human soul contains the seeds of the future.

Signs of the Times

Once again Rosi's lens probes the Southern Italian landscape attempting to connect the details of local life with the global picture of national political practices. The brothers' life experiences exemplify poignant problems such as the *lotta armata*, juvenile delinquency, and workers' struggles. The atmosphere of death and mourning brings these brothers, and their father Donato (Charles Vanel, at age eighty-nine), to reflect upon their past and rethink their pressing concerns in a projection of hope and fear onto the future. In a 1980 radio interview with Franco Cauli, Rosi explains:

Il mio interesse è sempre stato quello di rappresentare quello che mi circonda, cioè di cercare di capire quello che ci succede intorno [...] Questi tre fratelli, come molti figli di famiglie del sud dell'Italia, si sono separati e hanno cercato la loro fortuna, la loro strada, le loro differenti strade, in differenti città, in differenti lavori, si riuniscono, ed hanno così l'occasione di rivedere il loro passato, di riflettere sul loro presente e di immaginare anche qualche cosa che può riguardare il loro futuro⁵.

I have always been interested in representing what surrounds me, and trying to understand what happens around us [...] These three brothers, like so many other sons from Southern Italian families, separated themselves and searched for opportunities, each taking their own paths in different cities, with different jobs. Eventually they reunite and are given the

⁵ This interview was aired on RAI Radio Uno for the program "Cinecittà" on August 26, 1980. All translations are mine, unless otherwise cited.

chance to revisit their past, to reflect on their present, and even imagine what their future would be like.

Rosi also comments on the inevitable disappointments and failures that await them, and openly acknowledges that *Tre fratelli* represents three aspects of himself:

Faccio mio il discorso del magistrato che dice che questo stato va difeso anche se non è il migliore possibile, il discorso dell'operaio col suo disagio e le sue difficoltà di immigrato e la sua indicazione che la lotta è necessaria anche se lui parla in modo sloganistico, come però è in realtà, e il discorso dell'educatore che è un utopista un po' ingenuo che vorrebbe spazzare via dal mondo, assieme ai ragazzini, quello che c'è di marcio e di corrotto. Ma penso che tutti e tre appartengano a una generazione che è in qualche modo fallita, e per questo ci sono il nonno e la bambina a chiudere il cerchio, a dare il senso al film. (Faldini and Fofi 531)

(I identify with the speech of the judge who claims that the State must be defended even if it is not the best possible; with the speech of the factory worker and his frustrated life as an immigrant, as well as his belief that labor disputes are necessary, even when he expresses himself in slogans (as it happens in reality); with the speech of the educator, who is somewhat utopian and a little naïve, and who would want to brush away from the world, together with his kids, all that is rotten and corrupt. However, I feel all three belong to a generation that in some way has failed, and for this reason there are the grandfather and little girl to close the circle, to give the film meaning).

Francesco Rosi was certainly the best director to interpret the institutional, social, and political spirit of the times. His work, which includes an impressive number of individually celebrated films, occupies a unique place in postwar Italian cinema. It is known for its extraordinarily consistent formal balance and its unflinching look at the historical events and cultural traditions that have shaped the Italian national character.⁶ As many critics have noted, and Rosi himself has observed, his is a cinema “di

⁶ In a 1996 essay Rosi expressed his artistic credo: “Ho sempre creduto nella funzione del cinema come denuncia e come testimonianza di realtà, e come racconto di storie attraverso le quali i figli possano conoscere meglio i padri e trarne insegnamento per un giudizio di cui la Storia costituisce il riferimento” [I have always believed that the main function of cinema is to denounce] and to witness reality and as a medium to tell stories through which sons can better understand their fathers and learn how to judge these stories in the context of History.] “Il ‘mio’ modo di fare cinema” 103.

testimonianza civile” or of civic witness (Pintus 105). Rosi takes special care to dramatize the perspective from which history will be investigated; he adopts a viewpoint intended to provoke an informed response from his audience. This is also the key structuring concept subtending the director’s definition of political cinema: to actively engage the viewer in a dialectical exchange of ideas.⁷ In *Tre fratelli*, Rosi deliberately avoids emphasizing terrorism as such, in favor of depicting the state of fear that came into being in the crevices of a historical trauma, and tries to fully understand its logic, both in its human and political reality.⁸

From the onset, Rosi’s forays beyond the grounds of family culture reveal that his film takes up more than one historical challenge. *Tre fratelli* chooses as its central strategy an investigation of the distant world of the past, thus its self-reflexive tone that suggests much about the challenge of any historical representation and the difficulty of arriving at a definite closure. Rosi probes the limits of rationalist discourse for understanding and settling this past. He provides revelatory glimpses on how we got to where we are, and makes us question the values that we as a nation live by. In the original script, written with Tonino Guerra, he uses a series of working titles in a symbolic way: “Tempo di morte e tempo di vivere” (“Time for Dying and Time for Living”), “Fatica di vivere” (“The Struggle of Life”), and “La vita rovesciata” (“Life Inside out”).

Fear, the Heartbeat of a Nation

Tre fratelli raises the specter of an overriding fear whose grounds are so real and so terrifying that it cannot be written off to the mere judge. It is the fear of an unknown, uncertain future and its challenges. The brothers’ anxieties and longings spill out in dreams, and through them Rosi depicts the agony of contemporary Italy. From the first shot Rosi establishes a contemporary story through the use of geometrical architecture, yet, the second cut immediately reveals the nightmare of this alienating living with the scavenging rats. The haunting building façade, with four windows like empty eye sockets, sets us up for a hopeless sense of things to come. The heartbeat sound dramatically portrays the nightmare of the dreamer, who happens to be Rocco, the social reformist. The audience sees his troubled face in an extreme close up, as he awakes in his bed at the reformatory.

⁷ See Mancino and Zambetti 5-6.

⁸ For Millicent Marcus, Rosi seeks to demystify terrorism in order not to surrender to its tyrannical hold over national attention. “Beyond *cinema politico*: Family as Political Allegory in *Three Brothers*” 117.

Next he opens the door to a dormitory full of bustling minors, whose voices and scampering around evoke the squeaky sounds of the rats. This aural and visual association unfolds in the following scenes when, for example, Rocco is informed by a policeman that his kids escape at night and scavenge the city streets causing trouble. The low angle shot of the carabinieri in the yard, which shows the stature of his power, is matched by the imposing windows of the correction facility, a kind of minatory fortress. On the contrary, Rocco is captured by a high angle shot thus creating the visual effect of a powerless idealist in a bureaucratic world. As if mirroring the hollow windows of the opening scene, the children are last shown amassed behind the windows on the top floor. These youngsters are symptomatic of a dislocation between society and political intervention. They embody a more traditional cinematic representation of youth, one that implies the discovery of a reality without ideals.⁹ Later in the film, in the kitchen of his father's farmhouse, Rocco reads a newspaper and looks at a series photographs of child slavery, poverty, and general societal collapse. He is heard saying:

Finché ci saranno i topi... non soltanto i topi di Napoli ma i topi dell'Africa, dell'Asia, dell'America del Sud... ci vogliono i sacrifici... Chi sta meglio deve sacrificarsi per l'umanità e non solo per il suo popolo o la sua famiglia [...] altrimenti i topi ci invaderanno, oggi qui domani là. (Guerra and Rosi 86)

(As long as there will be scavengers... not just the rats of Naples but also the ones in Africa, in Asia, in South America... we need to sacrifice... Those who are better off need to sacrifice themselves for mankind, not just for their people or their family [...] otherwise the scavengers will invade us, today here tomorrow who knows where).

The images of this neglected youth affect us greatly but part of what we feel about them is their distance from us. Rocco's "unlucky" children are scavengers in a 1970s Italy, as well as in a Third World global setting. But the fact that they are specifically inscribed in a southern city raises the question of whether it is the hegemonic historical rapport between North (industrial) and South (agricultural) that has damaged the young. Thus, Rocco's fear for his children reflects a societal dysfunction, the inability to break out of the boundaries constructed for them. The same fear is projected onto the youngest and most volatile brother, who is suffering from

⁹ On the representation of children in post-war Italian cinema, see in particular De Luca, Chapter 2.

a recent separation from his wife and, as a trade unionist, never shied away from the picket lines at Fiat Mirafiori.

A similar dread overcomes Raffaele, the brother entrusted with rationalizing the world around him. He opposes political action that relies on violent, armed struggle. As he says in a key scene at the local bar, terrorism is “la sostituzione della persuasione con la paura, ma la paura non può essere un sentimento normale su cui si fonda una società. La paura è un’eccezione, la regola deve essere la fiducia” (substitutes persuasion with fear, but fear is not a normal emotion on which to base society. Fear is an exception whereas the rule should normally be trust.) For Raffaele, the problem stems from the fact that people expect to change things immediately; they want to be rich overnight, and thus become profoundly indifferent towards human life. As a judge, he sees the same violence that harms society also suppressing those who could help fight it. Witnesses do not step forward to testify in the terrorist trials because they would put their lives in real danger. They require police protection and are eventually forced into hiding. Raffaele’s dialogue with one of his old friends amounts to a *modus vivendi*. He cannot remain inattentive to his questions about living in constant fear and his general sentiment of disillusionment: “Gli eroismi sono cose che si vedono sulle copertine della *Domenica del Corriere* di quarant’anni fa” (Heroic gestures belong to the covers of *Domenica del Corriere* some forty years ago.) There seems to be little exchange between institutions, political leaders, and citizens; a lack of communication that has historically caused Italians to become “sanguinari, violenti, feroci” (bloodthirsty, violent, ferocious). That is certainly the case, agrees Raffaele, but he disapproves of his friend’s conclusion because it lacks hope. He not only rationalizes but defends his profession, speaking with the dramatic honesty of someone who needs to persuade himself as much as the other. Notwithstanding his positive thinking, the judge is himself haunted by fear: terrorist assassination is an everyday threat.

In another scene set at night, Raffaele leafs through a number of documents with photos of slain corpses (which include a judge, presumed terrorists and their victims) and asks himself why the judges have become the “cuore dello Stato” (heart of the State). Then he pauses on the photograph of a young terrorist killed in action:

Uno dei tanti che vivono della stessa illusione di sconfiggere il potere con “gesti esemplari,” di poter cancellare con un colpo di spugna tutte le corruzioni, gli scandali, le ingiustizie di ogni tipo. Un giovane cresciuto in una famiglia caratterizzata dall’impegno politico a sinistra, vissuto nella delusione di una rivoluzione mancata, fino alla scelta della “via armata”

come unica soluzione. A quell'epoca questa scelta veniva propagandata da un gruppo politico dell'estrema sinistra alla luce del sole, una propaganda "legale." Quali cose abbiamo da rimproverarci noi, le istituzioni dello Stato? E i partiti della classe operaia, i sindacati, fino a quando hanno fatto passare lo slogan "sono compagni che sbagliano"? Di che cosa dobbiamo sentirci colpevoli, nel non aver voluto o saputo o potuto impedire a tempo giusto questo tragico passo?¹⁰

(One of the many who live under the illusion that they can somehow defeat power with "exemplary gestures," that they can erase with a sweep of a sponge all corruptions, scandals, injustices. A young man brought up in a family defined as belonging to the left, living in the disappointment of a failed revolution, thus choosing to join the "armed struggle" as the only solution. At that time, his choice was openly supported by the extreme left as a "legal" one. How can we blame ourselves, the institutions of the State? And the parties of the working class, the trade unions, until they let it go with a slogan claiming "these are just comrades who are making a mistake"? What should we be guilty of? In not having wanted or been able, or known how, to put a stop to this tragic step at the proper time?)

Raffaele is frightened and bewildered as he slips into a nightmare about his own assassination at terrorist hands, his fear intensified by the loud sound of a heartbeat. Were he to agree to preside over a trial of left-wing extremists, death would most likely determine his future. The judge must struggle with his sense of duty and whether or not his actions will make any difference at all. Like his brothers, he strives for a sense of responsibility, but the dread of violence has become part of his daily life.¹¹

To symbolically register the judge's belief of a turbulent and disheartened young generation, Rosi places the telephone calls that define Raffaele's family at the very center of the judge's reflective moments. Consider how carefully the historical and thematic relation of Giorgio to his father is introduced. It begins with Raffaele's first scene with his wife, during which she reports that Giorgio slept out again at night, and does not reply to his mother's calls. She attributes his aloofness to his new love affair with an older woman. When Raffaele calls home from a bar in Puglia, in order to reassure his wife about new terrorist threats, Giorgio is shown standing at the end of the hallway. His body, stiffening in anticipated rejection, takes the characteristic body posture of a common attitude

¹¹ As he says to his wife before leaving Rome, "fare il personaggio sicuro non significa a tutti i costi essere forte" (posing as a self-assured person does not necessarily denote strength).

of revolt. During his brief conversation with his father, his countenance is somewhat expressionless, and concludes with Raffaele abruptly ending the call. Giorgio's rejection of authority goes beyond the most obvious target (his father). As Paul Ginsborg writes, for the first time in the history of the Republic the family comes under attack (304). This scene suggests not only that the middle class youth denounces the inadequacies of the nuclear family, but also that this disrespect applies to the broader aspects of social and cultural life. The young generation is not in touch with anything but themselves, with severe consequences: many of the notable leaders of the students' upheavals in May 1968 came from prominent bourgeois families. The national impact and the iconoclastic force of the early revolutionary groups would later turn into violent armed struggle. In recounting one of the many trials of the times, eminent journalist Eugenio Scalfari describes the students' accounts "pitiless," continually interrupting themselves and bursting out laughing, while ghost-like judges watch their performance in crowded courtrooms (195). Few students went this far, but many harshly criticized and rejected the modern family's values.

A Bitter Diagnosis

In *Tre fratelli*, an immense loneliness accompanies a feeling sense of confusion and fear. On the day of the mother's funeral, at dawn, Rocco looks down into the courtyard and sees his brothers standing at a distance from each other, crying. He joins in. But their crying is not necessarily about the loss of their mother: emotions are fragile and contingent for a generation that, in some way, has failed. For Rosi, this film

rappresenta in primo luogo un tentativo di aprire una finestra sulla nostra contemporaneità, su questa travagliata realtà d'oggi che ci vede insieme colpevoli e vittime. È una diagnosi amara, certo, un quadro doloroso del mondo in cui viviamo; ma non un film pessimista, anzi un atto di fiducia nella vittoria della ragione, nel recupero di quei sentimenti, di quel senso comune, di cui oggi più che mai abbiamo bisogno per vivere. (Zanelli 3)

(First of all it is an attempt to open a window into our contemporary world, into our harsh reality which sees us guilty and victims all together. It is indeed a bitter diagnosis, a painful picture of the world in which we live; but it is not a pessimistic film, on the contrary, it is an act of faith in the victory of reason, in recapturing those feelings and common sense, that are vital to our existence).

Finding a language precise as well as evocative enough to express the marked decadence of key areas of the State apparatus was, by and large, a

challenge. It had to be the language of dreams and imaginings. On the night before their mother's funeral, Rosi advances a final reading of the three brothers' startling realities (and the youth culture) through oneiric sequences, which make us aware of the crisis threatening their future, hence the future of Italy itself.

Rosi begins with a striking shot of Nicola back in Turin, as he slowly walks through a long corridor. He has come to visit his estranged wife, hoping for a reconciliation. The claustrophobic architecture of the apartment building (high walls, narrow corridors) is heightened by the motion of a girl roller-skating. This confining opening to Nicola's dream visualizes an ominous premonition, that something awful is about to happen. What follows is the intimate exchange between husband and wife, which is played out to inform the audience of the economic and psychological factors that affect their domestic situation. The entire scene conveys Nicola's intense desire to obliterate a word, failure, to which the persistent anxiety of his existence has been reduced. He laments the social reality that forced him to emigrate to the North. Yet we should notice that there is a third participant in Nicola's excited tirade of accusations and suspicions. He mentions that Marta is at ease with her grandfather and an environment that, as he acknowledges, "*non c'entrava più niente con me né io con lui*" (had nothing to do with me any longer). Thus the emigrant's true trauma is the ensuing disconnection from his native roots.

The crisis of youth culture has the most brutal prophecy in Raffaele's nightmare, in which he sees himself murdered by terrorists, while Giorgio is shown detached. Raffaele's son is placed at the center of the gazing crowd, an oddly impassive figure holding his mother who weeps in despair, in stark contrast with the commotion that surrounds him. Whatever his personal exasperation, Giorgio will not show it. At a time when all hierarchies of power are under attack, one wonders what his generation is going to put in their place.

Rosi ends with Rocco's radical Utopian vision, one that runs the risk of being judged as the most childish. The educator's dream begins with children sweeping away trash (needles, drugs, guns, and other paraphernalia). The rats of the opening scene are now metamorphosed into a new form: no longer scavengers but idealistic youngsters who wave brooms instead of weapons. In one of history's many ironies we see these characters showered by dollar bills in the midst of a Manhattan-like cityscape, and eventually "sheltered" against economic exploitation by a Russian dome as Pino Daniele sings "*Je so' pazzo*" (I'm crazy). Rosi explains his choice of this particular Neapolitan musician:

The song tells of a mythical figure out of the history of Naples, Masaniello, who has been at the head of one of the most celebrated popular revolts; and one knows well enough that popular revolts, when they don't have a political basis, are no more or less than explosions which end tragically as Masaniello's did. However, there is always this mad longing after revolt, after change... (Codelli 20)

Rocco's wish-fulfillment dream ends with the burning of all the garbage of the world, now set against the backdrop of Naples' Vesuvius and picturesque bay. Rocco's (negative) Utopia cannot heal the "real" world, and Rosi recognizes its limits. But its imaginative vision loses nothing of its force. For this devoted educator, Italy's rejuvenation essentially lies with reforms of the youth, with the making of a new kind of man, even if it is projected onto a speculative future. It is Marta who is entrusted with changing Italian society.

Regeneration through the Child: Marta

Rosi pursues his interest in the contemporary world through the myth of the Child, which must be dissociated from the dream of personal precedence. Not because Rocco's aspirations or Raffaele's commitments are reactive emotions, but because, in the perilous socio-historical context that rules their lives, their actions sound like ineffectual. The brothers' problems find a solution in Marta, the symbol of hope in the film.

Rosi is most compelling in portraying this "minor" character, particularly in the way he introduces her in her father's Fiat 750 on the Autostrada del Sole, the Italian motorway that connects the North with the South. Born in Turin, Marta is an ideal cultural icon with the influence of a southern father and a northern mother. We know very little about her, nor do we need to, but she has our immediate attention when she asks "Adesso il nonno come farà a vivere da solo?" (Now how is grandpa going to live alone?), and does not hesitate to volunteer to keep him company after the loss of his wife. As we read in the published script "c'è qualcosa di più chiaro in lei e di più rassegnato" (there is something about her that is transparent and also resigned) (Guerra and Rosi 52). For Rosi, Marta's instinct for loving care is the individual's primary defense against modern living. Once the little girl arrives in Puglia this atavistic gesture reflects onto the animals and the farmhouse: for example, she plays with the pigeons in the courtyard and the grain in the attic. It is with outward signs, the language of gestures, that Marta communicates her own inward discovery of the fabulous world of nature. In contrast to her father and uncles, Marta engages with her new pastoral surroundings. She is also frank with her father, when

he lies to Donato about his marital crisis.

In a key scene, as she prepares for bed with her grandfather, Marta is surprised as to why he does not set an alarm clock. The old man explains that the cock-crowing and the braying of the donkeys wake them up in the morning. But then, she says, “se io resto con te un po’ di tempo imparo tutte queste cose?” (“If I stay with you for a while, will I learn all these things”), and goes on to clarify that there are no roosters or donkeys in Turin. Donato points to the three stars of the Big Dipper and is quick to reassure her that there are stars in the city. Marta becomes the morning star, the one that appears before dawn. There is hope, and she is the luminous presence announcing a new day.

In another scene, the little girl begins to acquaint herself with time past by exploring a barn full of rusty farm tools. She climbs up to the granary and joyfully plays, while the wake for her grandmother is held below her. The image of Marta burying herself in the grain evokes her grandmother, when, in a flashback, she buries her feet in the sand. These are events which connect magically (Codelli 21). Intercutting between life and death (and by association between Italy’s future and the past), Rosi attempts an epic recounting of human life in its historical setting and cosmic significance. He eventually shows how the little girl discovers her grandma on the death bed from the attic window, a glimpse that symbolizes an enduring connection that reverses the degenerative course charted by the indeterminacies of the living present.

Marta is self-evidently the child whose sensitivity and mental acuity are the response to Italy’s problems: an archetypal, mythic being, with a ‘well balanced’ cultural background. Rosi shares with us his aversion to the modern tendency for rationality (Raffaele) and anarchic militancy (Nicola); life without feeling is a sign of cultural disintegration rather than enrichment.

Life Endearing Moments

In *Tre fratelli* Rosi dramatizes the experience of inner as well as physical travel, traversing spaces where the fictive and the real confront each other. Memory does not suggest nostalgia: it *is* history, in the sense that it summons a critical and moral judgment of one’s personal past and of a national historical past as well. The brothers’ life experiences lead to a recognition scene. The closing image of *Tre fratelli* has Donato offering an egg as a gift to Marta. This simple action liberates the individual from the bondage of the horrific present. The egg is a cosmic birth-giver, a symbol used by Plato and the Vedas. The little girl, who walks away with the old man, holding

his hand, evokes a unity between North and South, and a return to a-historical values. In an interview with Lorenzo Codelli, Rosi makes this claim more explicit:

What one is trying to achieve is the necessary re-establishing of a real and genuine relationship between different generations, and stressing how necessary it is that experience should be a matter for reflection for the young [...] Naturally the relation between the old man of eighty and a girl of eight involves an appeal to feelings. [...] But an absolute priority is that a relationship be established which makes possible a two-way communication between different worlds, different cultures, and different personalities. The civilization in which we live makes all this ever more difficult (20).

The grandfather-child dyad, and the symbiotic relationship that exists between them, explains why the three brothers are a lost generation. It designates a positive spiritual trespass: the death of the old life and the assumption of the new. It promises both a renewal and a fulfillment of human history. Marta will gradually internalize the caretaking capacity arising out of the relationship with her grandfather and will thus develop an ability to function confidently as a "whole" being. In this powerful closing image of life, the imaginative element prevails over the historical situation. Whatever the uncertainties that plague Italy's unnerving political and social instability, they work to provide the best possible assurance anyone can receive: the assurance of Marta.

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