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IRONY AND THE AESTHETICS OF NOSTALGIA:
FELLINI, ZANZOTTO AND CASANOVA'S REDEMPTION

"E il cinema - quasi - sembra ... la poesia
cattura tutto in poesia - un'altra"
(A. Zanzotto, "Filò" in *Filò* 52)

I. This essay is about the encounter of a poet and a filmmaker, and their mutual interest in an aesthetics of nostalgia that might be neither regressive nor reactionary but, rather, critical and ironic. Nearly two years after beginning production on *Fellini's Casanova*, Federico Fellini wrote to Andrea Zanzotto, soliciting his collaboration on his most recent film. "Dear Andrea, ... I'm writing to you now, a bit hesitant, because deep down I do not really know what I want and hate to bother you. My intention is confused, I have no idea whether my proposal is achievable" (*Peasants Wake* 5). Fellini asked the famous poet from Pieve di Soligo – who would return to assist the director with *E la nave va* – to compose Venetian dialect poetry as background to two of the most visually and verbally poignant sequences of the film: the ritual of the Venetian Carnival which frames the film and Casanova's encounter with the circus giantess Angeli in London. Despite his evident aversion to and possible distrust of the film-world,¹ Zanzotto expresses his immediate interest in the project (Sillanpao 296), an attraction that stems from Zanzotto's growing concern in experimenting with dialect as well as his admiration of Fellini's work, especially his sophisticated and complex use of the soundtrack.²

Fellini and Zanzotto are members of the same generation, a generation that matured as Fascism developed and grew stronger; their birthdays are just one year apart, 1920 and 1921 respectively. In their life's work,³ they both went on to explore and actively contest fascism both as a political regime and, in Foucault's terminology, a mentality. As Foucault explains in the preface to Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Fascism is "not only historical fascism, the fascism of Hitler

and Mussolini - which was able to mobilize and use the desire of the masses so effectively - but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us" (xiii). Fellini's films and Zanzotto's poetic texts destabilize fascistic constructions of power - whether they be political, social, or gender based - and in doing so offer up alternatives that are devoid of the necessary signifiers that could aid in constructing a "fascist" consciousness. Fellini's most obvious deconstruction of a collective fascist consciousness can be found in his film *Amarcord*, a film that looks back - as is clear from the title meaning "I Remember" - on the fascist experience in terms of personal lore and obscured memory. Zanzotto's specific recollections of fascism are fewer and connected with war. The landscapes of his earlier collections such as *Dietro il paesaggio*, represent a country grown tired by the devastation of the war. "The Infirm Love of Day" gives space to that which has survived the war, yet still remembers its tragedies and impressions: "The cemeteries dark deluges/ have gathered the smell of rubble" (*Selected Poetry* 61).

Yet as artists, Zanzotto and Fellini both combat fascistic oppression on multiple levels that have to do with the survival, re-emergence and expansion of totalitarian and dehumanizing tendencies even after the collapse of "historical" fascisms and the emergence of a postmodern society. They share, for example, a profound interest in how, in contemporary society, the individual becomes controlled by consumer media. This theme and concern emerge in the moral and intellectual depravity of Fellini's Roman jet-setters of *La Dolce Vita* as well as his later depiction of the hyper-media cosmos of *Ginger and Fred*. In Zanzotto's ironic prologue to the poem "Yes, the Snow Again," the child abandons any interest in ontology, play and wonder, choosing to latch on to the material products that can be obtained at the local drug store: " 'Are you glad you came into this world?' Child: 'Yes, because there's the 5 and 10'" (*Selected Poetry* 215). Fellini and Zanzotto's interest in the ontological impact of the contemporary hyper-consumerist postmodern age is particularly evident in the representation of Casanova's character. Zanzotto points this out while answering Sillanpao's inquiry regarding reading the film as a "rebuttal to the consumer sex of contemporary cinema" (304). Zanzotto explains his allegiance with Fellini, continuing that he felt Fellini was right to create an archetypal character rather than a "human-historical personage." Zanzotto feels that Casanova's character is bound to the present, and instead of interpreting him as the representative of love/*eros*, Zanzotto feels that he approximates more closely

death/*Tbanatos*. He explains that death in this sense is productive as "it holds *eros* in counterpoise," continuing that in the film "there is a luxuriant filiation of images charged with so many nuclei of mythologies in formation" (Sillanpao 305). Fellini as well sees his project as a study not specifically in death, but in non-life, and he explains that he wants to tell the story of: "un uomo che non è mai nato, le avventure di uno zombi ... un <italiano> imprigionato nella ventre della madre" (*Fare un film* 176). Both Fellini and Zanzotto view *Casanova* as a work in formation, whose ontology has explicit repercussions into the world of the present. Fellini and Zanzotto's encounter with *Casanova* represents an attempt to revisit a cultural emblem, revitalizing it and offering fresh perspectives on the problems of cultural, linguistic as well as gender representation in a postmodern era.

II. The name "Casanova" resonates with multiple descriptive adjectives: lover, seducer, philanderer, womanizer, don juan. The exploits of an important literary and cultural figure of the Enlightenment are often thus boiled down to an over-stereotyped and free-floating sexual prototype.⁴ Fellini's *Casanova* deals directly with these multiple associations, grappling with these images in an attempt to furnish some dimension of depth to the cliché while at the same time exploiting it and deriding it. Fellini chooses to re-represent *Casanova* as an artist in exile in search of a more profound meaning for his chaotic existence and who ultimately most secretly desires to return "home." In the course of this problematic portrayal, Fellini explores several of the recurrent themes so common to his opus, particularly the role played by memory and myth in constructing the historical subject, including the idea of the mythical female who acts as both a terrifying agent of castration and a source of artistic inspiration. In fact, Fellini's treatment of *Casanova* is so self-conscious that the historical adventurer ends up being an icon for Fellini's ultimate concern, the complex processes of aesthetic self-representation. Furthermore, *Casanova*'s proverbial voyeurism, his eroticism of the gaze and the look, make him a perfect (if uncanny) embodiment of the scopophilic aesthetics of cinema.

Criticism of Fellini's film has focused primarily on the director's "love/hate" relationship with the historical *Casanova*, which resulted in, as many reviewers have pointed out, a highly negative and subversive depiction of the legendary lover.⁵ Despite Fellini's strong apparent prejudice against both the historical *Casanova* and age of the Enlightenment to which *Casanova* belonged,⁶ Fellini's interests, as a few insightful critics have noted,⁷ are not that shallow. Although Fellini's representation has been judged reductive and static, this is far from a legitimate description of the film. Indeed,

Casanova's character illumines a space of activity and self-evolution that not only challenges century-old associations of gender determinations, but also offers a reevaluation of the character's place within a literary as well as a cultural tradition. Fellini's success in his interpretation is due in part to his ability to reinvent Casanova.⁸ His choice of Donald Sutherland to interpret the role of the Latin lover is the first, and possibly most evident, step towards a self-conscious deconstruction of the stereotype. When Fellini is asked by an American producer from Universal Studios why he chose to make Casanova into a "zombie," the director comments:

Looking at the big face of that fine megabucks American, who made a pile of films with Gary Cooper, Joan Crawford, Huston, Billy Wilder ... I didn't know what to answer. I stammered something about the amniotic sac, Casanova locked in the amniotic sac of a prison-mother, mother-Mediterranean-lagoon-Venice, and of a birth continuously postponed, never achieved: 'Casanova – I concluded, blurting it out – was never born. His is a non-life, understand?' (*Federico Fellini: Comments on Film* 205)

Fellini's image of Casanova as a non-evolving, non-developing character becomes crystallized in the face, gestures and voice of Sutherland, an actor who interprets a character lost among the backdrop of an historical time-frame of which he cannot, despite various attempts at self-proclamation, become a part. Fellini chose Sutherland not only because he contrasts so conspicuously with the American stars mentioned above, but also precisely because his physical attributes so obviously contradicted the image of the cultural icon: "The true motive of my choice is precisely the 'lunar' face of Sutherland, totally estranged from the conventional image that people have of Casanova: the Italian with dark, magnetic eyes, raven hair, swarthy complexion, the classic type of Latin lover, in short, his archetype. And therefore the operation that I want to perform with Casanova, of estrangement, or overturning the traditional model, is precisely this."⁹ Rather than reinforcing the prototypical gender icon of Italian masculinity embodied by Casanova in the popular imagination, Fellini chooses to defamiliarize the character as much as possible. Donald Sutherland's Casanova searches for a sense of life and identity not through his proverbial "male" qualities, but instead through his multiple defining encounters with figures of maternity and womanhood to which Fellini alludes in the passage quoted above.

Fellini's rendition of Casanova is one of multiple possible models of representation of the "original" literary figure. In *Simulations*, Jean Baudrillard explains the implications inherent in simulating a copy of an original source

that does not really exist. Fellini's postmodern depiction, being itself a replication of a non-existing original model, is not less "real" than its original. Baudrillard explains: "All the possible interpretations, even the most contradictory - all are true, in the sense that their truth is exchangeable, in the image of the models from which they proceed, in a generalized cycle ... [and] ... in fact power, genuine power, no longer exists, and hence there is no risk of seizing it or taking it over" (32-33). Fellini's depiction is in effect based less on the historical figure of Giacomo Casanova (1725-1798) than on the constellation of imaginary clichéd meanings that has been constructed around his mythic image. It is precisely this distance and difference from the "original source" that allows for a deconstructive reading of Fellini's text, a reading that details insight and promotes reflection into a self-consciously estranged reproduction. This perspective discloses the short-sightedness of those critics who have attacked the film's lack of realism and/or absence of an historically valid interpretation of the literary figure. In addition, and most importantly, Fellini's film is also remarkable from a gender perspective, for it points to the fallacy of gender and power relations that were traditionally associated with Casanova as a cultural icon. Fallacies of male power, virility and absolute reason become apparent as Fellini's reproduction weakens the "authorial" role of previous models, whether the model is the historical figure himself, or the aura of masculinity and rationality that has been attached to the famous name for multiple generations. Thus, the film implicitly articulates a critique of Enlightenment rationality as based on an exclusively masculinist reason that, like Casanova in his popular mythic image, objectifies, seduces, exploits and finally debases all that is feminine.

The film's beauty and originality lie precisely in the self-conscious artifice of the multiple simulations that are presented throughout the work. These "reproductions" might be evidenced in the physical and intellectual qualities of the artist himself or also in the explicitly unrealistic replicas of the many locales visited during the exile's travels to Venice, Paris, Parma, London, Rome, Switzerland, Dresden, Württemberg or Dux. The film demands an acknowledgment of these forms as illusory in order for the viewer to perceive the infinite distance from "historical" truth and meaning. This semiotic duplicity is presented at the very beginning of the film, as the viewer is warned early on to avoid a literal reading of Fellini's representation of Casanova's character, not to mention of the screen's visual and verbal signs. At the beginning of the Venetian Carnival sequence, the initial verbal utterance directly contradicts the visual image. The title scene is composed of a reflected image of Venice in the waters of the canal, a likeness that is accom-

panied by Nina Rota's eerie and unstable soundtrack. The title "*Fellini's Casanova*"¹⁰ is then superimposed on the reflection on the water. The title signifies the artist's re-appropriation of the historical Casanova, but the image and sound also suggest that this re-interpretation is as unstable and inconstant as the fluidity of water. The camera then cuts to the evidently artificial recreation of Venice that includes an improbably compressed representation of the Rialto, St. Mark's and the Campanile. Immediately after the music fades and before the title disappears, the words "true form, true essence" – the beginning of Andrea Zanzotto's dialect poem "Recitativo Veneziano" – are heard off-screen. It is an ironic juxtaposition, for obviously the set design of the Grand Canal is far from an accurate historical representation. The viewer is cautioned to question notions of "essence" and "truth." Fellini's "truth" then resides precisely within the very process of simulation, and in Benjaminian terms, the farther that the copy is distanced from its initial source, the less obliged it is to depend on the semiotic coding that shaped the original's form.¹¹ In the seemingly utterly artificial world of *Fellini's Casanova*, the rational scientific character so typical of Enlightenment philosophy is replaced by the vision of a self-doubting and unstable protagonist, realism is replaced by the hyperreal, and mythic stereotype is destabilized and reinterpreted. Ironically, it will be precisely the artifice of Fellini's re-creation that will allow life and form to be given to what would otherwise be a vapid caricature.

Casanova's first appearance in the film alludes precisely to this sense of duplicity and questionable self-identity that Fellini explores so profoundly throughout his film. During the chaos of the carnival sequence, the viewer hardly notices a man masked as Pierrot – a descendent of the *Commedia dell'arte* character Pedrolino – who appears three times throughout the sequence. By choosing to dress as Pierrot, Casanova presents himself as a clown, someone who is forever unlucky in love, and is often the victim of mockery and derision. Hence, the Latin lover himself performs a type of auto-critique, thus preparing the viewer for a less virile and masculine and more vulnerable and powerless version of his own image. This image is furthered when Casanova is shown in his cell of the Piombi prison – he is unclean and discontent, with his costume still hanging from his back. Despite his multiple boastings to the high court, he is unable to present himself as a serious literary or scientific figure, and his tattered and torn costume reminds the viewer of his own vulnerability. Casanova's initial visual ambiguity has much to do with the rapid pace of the Venetian carnival sequence – which lasts less than 4 minutes and is comprised of 44 shots – as the

Pierrot figure is present in only six shots. In his initial appearance, Pierrot brings a scimitar to the doge so that he may "cut the placenta," so beginning the ritual of birth accompanied by the rise of a goddess head out of the Venetian lagoon. He is then seen standing amongst the crowd, and finally he is delivered a letter. In the visual pandemonium of quick cuts – the average shot lasts about 5 seconds – chaotic camera movement, alternating camera angles, objects such as masks that literally intrude into the foreground of the frame and flamboyant use of color and extras, the viewer is not meant to notice this character's presence, let alone ponder his significance.

It is not until the next sequence, at the beginning of Casanova's encounter with the nun Maddelena, that Pierrot removes his mask, exposing against the lightning-filled sky in striking profile the physical attributes least associated with the mythical icon of Casanova: a pallid gaunt face, hollow eye sockets with small unimposing eyes and a generous sloping forehead. This presentation points towards Fellini's interest in "unmasking" the cultural figure, while at the same time cautioning the viewer to avoid literal interpretations of visual and verbal cues. Fellini's film begins with an unmasking, but as in Pirandello, illusion and reality are often conflated as the removal of one mask signifies the appropriation of another, as self-identity is both unstable and continually in flux. Pirandello comments on mask as symbol, proposing the instability and fluctuation of individual identity and discussing the difference between personal projection and appearance:

Ciascuno si racconcia la maschera come può - la maschera esteriore. Perché dentro poi c'è l'altra, che spesso non s'accorda con quella di fuori. E niente è vero! Vero il mare, sì, vera la montagna; vero il sasso; vero un filo d'erba; ma l'uomo? Sempre mascherato, senza volerlo, senza saperlo, di quello tal cosa ch'egli in buon fede si figura d'essere: *bello, buono, grazioso, generoso, infelice, ecc.*" (*L'umorismo* 156)

Pirandello's discussion of ontological multiplicity mirrors the construction of many of Fellini's male protagonists including *La strada's* Zampanò, *La dolce vita's* Marcello, *8 1/2's* Guido and of course, Casanova.

Elements of uncertainty and self-reservation are reinforced by the mise-en-scène of Casanova's "seduction" of Maddalena, a sequence that follows immediately the Carnival scene and is filled with elements of voyeurism and performance. The setting for their tryst is replete with disjointed and blurred mirrors and the architecture is itself disordered, as the small hideaway is composed of a long hallway and a main circular entry way connected to another circular bed chamber. Casanova's image is reflected in the thousands

of mirrors, which become themselves fractured and divided, echoing the disarray of Casanova's psyche. A further element that adds to the multi-faceted interpretation of the lovers' acrobatics is the presence of Maddalena's lover, the Ambassador De Bernis, who has been hiding behind the bed-chamber the whole time, watching the two through the eye of a painted fish. After their performance, and subsequent "approval" by the Ambassador, Casanova attempts to assert his intellectual qualities, but, as Marcus points out, an extreme close-up "of the empty socket confirms our worst suspicions – the voyeuristic eye that rivets itself on Casanova's erotic performance is 'blind' to the artist's higher gifts of intellect and taste" ("Adaptation by Self-Projection" 213). In just the first few moments of the film, Casanova has come across as the fool Pierrot, a sought-after and over-amplified sexual performer as well as a dismissed diplomat, scientist and engineer. None of these incarnations should be taken at face value, as each one merely alludes to one of the multiple qualities of Casanova's character.

The manipulation of point-of-view, the presence of the multiple mirrors as well as Casanova's clear and self-conscious positioning as spectacle in the Maddalena encounter constructs Casanova's sexuality as essentially scopophiliac. As such, it conspicuously doubles the scopophilia of narrative cinema as defined by Laura Mulvey. In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Mulvey discusses scopophilia in mainstream cinema as a system of repression and projection on the part of the audience, allowing for a projection of their own "voyeuristic fantasies" (17) onto the actors while simultaneously identifying with the projected "male" image and fetishizing the female protagonist. In that Casanova's performance is so deliberately staged, the audience has no possibility of either identification or fetishization, and therefore Fellini's film deconstructs Mulvey's notion of identification, and instead places the viewer in the position of critic.

The aesthetics of Fellini's film reinforce the character's multiplicity and artificiality as the film's visual images and verbal cues are consistently presented as being in discord with realist cinema. *Fellini's Casanova* is laden with various sophisticated technical devices that rupture the formal conventions of cinematic realism. The film foregrounds dream sequences, narrative voice-overs, flashbacks, intrinsic editing as well as a highly repetitive musical score, which turns from diegetic to extra-diegetic with hardly a warning. All of these elements interact so subtly that traditional rendering of space by film and of film language itself are transcended at virtually every moment. Films, or parts of films, which rupture formal cinematic coding are described by Gilles Deleuze in *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* as "Any-space-what-

evers”:

We have passed...from physical space to spiritual space which restores a physics (or metaphysics) to us. The first space is cell-like and closed, but the second is not different, it is the same in so far as it has merely discovered the spiritual opening which overcomes all its formal obligations and material constraints by a theoretical or practical evasion...*Space is no longer determined, it has become the any-space-whatever which is identical to the power of the spirit*, to the perpetually renewed spiritual decision; it is this decision which constitutes the effect, or the “auto-effection,” and which takes upon itself the linking of parts. (117)

Rather than draw attention to the film’s lack of realism, these technical elements allude to a space of heightened signification. Examples of these multiple filmic elements include ornate costumes, markedly simulated set designs, obsessive reliance on an unstable first person point-of-view narrative and repeated use of allegorical symbols such as the Venetian goddess head, the mechanical bird or the various forms of water throughout the film.¹² Such elements should be classified as more than simply “Fellini-esque” as these manifold technical devices enhance the rhetorical nature of the film, and overdetermine the aesthetic investigation into the compound building-blocks that constitute the “spirit” – to borrow Deleuze’s terminology – of a man who is essentially an artist in exile.

III. Loss, nostalgia and exile are passionately foregrounded in the scene of Casanova’s famous escape from the Piombi prison. It is here, as Marcus notes, that the sense of artistic “nostalgia” can be felt at its strongest. Marcus states that this is “the richest source of that nostalgia which so typifies the film’s poetic mood” (“Portrait of the Artist” 32). Upon escaping the prison, Casanova is forced to abandon Venice, his home, and to be in continual exile. This scene aligns the audience with Casanova’s perspective not only through his voice-over narration, thematizing his grief, but also through the point of view shot as he surveys the city. At this moment Casanova is now a definitive exile, robbed of his primary counter of self, the city of Venice. In the film Casanova actually spends one evening of “real time” in the city of Venice before he is put in prison, in the rest of the film. Venice is literally behind him. The source for the nostalgic tone of this scene, however, is problematic as although Casanova does yearn for his metaphorical homeland throughout the film, the notion of “nostalgia” itself becomes deconstructed as the idea of origin itself is undermined – and with it originality. This is apparent in the film as there is nothing “real” to be nostalgic for: Fellini’s Venice is perpetually represented as artifice and simulation, a simu-

lacrum that is so distanced from the model that there is no chance of re-approximation. Baudrillard explains the role of nostalgia and origin in *Simulations*:

When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity. There is an escalation of the true, of the lived experience; a resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared. And there is a panic-stricken production of the real and the referential. (12)

The city that Casanova mourns is represented in terms of lack, lack of original presence, suggested in fact by Casanova from the rooftop as non-recognition when he does not recognize his object of sight: "I had never before seen Venice from so high a vantage point, and I found it hard to recognize my beloved city, which I was being forced to abandon, forever." Casanova's exile marks the beginning of his journey through a figurative landscape of metaphor and symbol. Casanova, and with him Fellini, strive to regain the lost origin through various forms of aesthetic re-representation whether they be recollection, voice-over, flashback, dream, and subconscious symbolism.

One of the most subtle ways in which the thematics of nostalgia is furthered by the Piombi escape scene is by the score, strangely and for the only time in the film composed of the film's main musical themes. As Casanova peruses Venice from the rooftop, the music begins. An instrumental motif is heard that was previously present in the opening credits and which will return to be the theme music of Rosalba, the automaton whom Casanova calls his perfect creation. As the shot of Casanova's point of view begins, the tune becomes combined with an instrumental version of the second poem that Zanzotto composed at Fellini's request for the film, "Cantilena londinese." These two main musical themes accompany Casanova's encounters with some of the film's most important female protagonists. In each case the themes help qualify Casanova's personal and artistic journey as a painful return – to refer to the etymology of "nostalgia" itself – towards a sense of past identity, continually approximating that sense of "home" which Casanova yearns to re-accomplish throughout his journeys.¹³

The emotional yearning present in the Piombi escape sequence can be understood by reviewing what Fellini intended the "Cantilena" to achieve. A brief history of the inclusion of Zanzotto's two poems within the film will be helpful in illustrating their effects upon the protagonist. In a letter to Zanzotto, Fellini first describes the effect he wants to accompany the appear-

ance and subsequent disappearance of the goddess-head in "Recitativo veneziano:"

Like every ritual that, in order to become a liberating element, needs to feed on an enkindled psychic force expressed in verbal or mimetic formulas, so too the emergence, the appearance of the dark female simulacrum, should be accompanied by proprietary prayers, repeated pleas, seductive sounds ... a gamut of uneasy skepticism to exercise the dreaded failure of the event. (*Peasant's Wake* 4-5)

He continues to describe the desired consequences of the encounter with Angeli, the giantess, who sings "Cantilena londinese": "The locations, the situations, the atmosphere in which the meeting takes place, the very aspect of this extraordinary female incarnation make up that mosaic of childish shudders, painful, fabulous and terrifying, which most emblematically defines Casanova's neurotic relationship with women, i.e., with something obscure, engulfing, overwhelming" (5). The effect Fellini desires for the dialect poetry is to verbalize Casanova's impossible relationship with the female, qualifying his seemingly linear journey through the bodies of his female conquests as a circular attempt to return to the infantile and the guttural. As a result, the functions of Casanova's female conquests were to appear much more dubious than they seemed as their characters become shrouded in doubt, fear and loss.

Zanzotto is a follower of both Heidegger and Hölderlin and as such adheres to many of their insights into the nature of the written word. In "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry" in Heidegger states: "Poetry is the establishment of being by means of the word" (281). Zanzotto's poetry, both dialect and otherwise, explores universal origins of language and (being the Lacanian that Zanzotto is) as such human "Being" regardless of the contemporary desire to objectify existence as an historical fact. In the same essay, Heidegger suggests that it is possible to discern the "essence of poetry" (270) within Hölderlin's poems. Heidegger states that Hölderlin, through his poetry, "... determines a new time. It is the time of the gods that have fled *and* the time of the god that is coming. It is the time of *need*, because it lies under a double lack and a double Not: the No-more of the gods that have fled and the Not-yet of the god that is coming" (289). Heidegger's poet is a displayer of meaning in a godless world, someone who has the ability to demonstrate manifold layers of universal and historical Being and to subsequently show this investigation to the public. The poet operates in a world without order – whether divine or otherwise – with the intention of writing

in order to let things be in their complexity.

Like Hölderlin, Zanzotto writes in a godless era, but, as is also the case with Hölderlin, he is not a pessimist. Within Zanzotto's poetry nothing is fixed, most of all his use of language, but that does not mean that all will lead towards chaos. Rather, the human element of being in the world, at a number of levels, finds a way to exist within the pandemonium of over-signification. Zanzotto expresses his sentiments regarding the individual's relation to the excessively crowded contemporary world that teems with an overabundance of ciphers and symbols in a prose statement that acts as an introduction to his poetry in *The Favorite Malice*:

It seems that for quite a while it has no longer been a question of word or silence or of related betrayals: there's too much stuff that sizzles and cracks, on pyres or not, ... or else just *sits there*, not having anything to do with, at a stalemate with, the <full moon> impudence ... Today it seems that everything has gone into gelatin, an excellent one, made of chicken, or perhaps the plasma of daily drippings of blood... It feels as if we are in gel, not in Cocitus or in Swanson: in something that is more... Comfortable? (135-136)

Zanzotto then determines that the philosophical debate regarding the relationship between silence and the word is no longer an issue that can be studied in contemporary culture. The above mentioned "gelatin" has infiltrated the space in between these two components, and as such all possible forms including history, philosophy, biography, pop culture etc. become part of this relativized substance.

Zanzotto's "gel" approximates Baudrillard's discussion of the negotiability of truth in postmodern culture that is inundated with hyperreal simulation. Baudrillard's discussion in *Simulations* posits that the motivations of, consequences for and truths behind such seemingly disparate phenomenon as ethnology, Disneyland, Watergate, media culture and war are all relativized. In the postmodern world of the hyperreal there is no original source or symbol that is motivated by or that motivates the model, all is interconnected without origin or destination. Zanzotto's idea of "gel," as well, is made up of every possible source, whether from the past, present or future, as does his poetry. Zanzotto's poetic lexicon, however, attempts to navigate through the impasse of the hyperreal, seeking out origins presumed lost and unretrievable. Hierarchical distinction has no place within Zanzotto's poetic glossary, as within his lyrics he proposes a relative cosmos that leads towards awareness and integration, not sublimation and fragmentation. In his poet-

ry he combines the incongruous, whether languages, grammatical structures, allusions, citations or symbolism, yet, much as within Fellini's films, where the viewer/reader would expect to find disorder, there is instead a comfortable zone of ontological exploration foregrounded by redolent aesthetics.

The choice of dialect over codified language in the poems commissioned for the film strengthens the effect, exemplifying a desired return through the postmodern "gel" towards the pre-symbolic. In a sort of afterward to his poem "Filò" Zanzotto expresses his thoughts on the signification of dialect:

Dialect, all things considered, is an absolute freedom, capable of tracing consistent/mutable limits ... [it] ... poses itself like a "first mystery," which escapes every possible contemplation as well as every objectifying detachment ... Dialect is felt as coming from a place where no writing exists ... nor "grammar": the location, therefore, of a logos that remains always *erchómenos* (coming), which never freezes in a slice of event, which remains almost infantile even in its speaking, which, at any rate, is far from any throne. (88-90)

For Zanzotto, dialect implies a space of non-signification, the inconstant nature of the linguistic subject, of a type of primordial existence before the advent of grammatical codification. As Zanzotto makes explicit in one of his most well known poems, "L'elegia in petèl" from *La beltà*, dialect alludes to a wish to return to the pre-symbolic¹⁴ and the elusive feminine,¹⁵ an image which has a strong presence not only in *Fellini's Casanova* but also in *Amarcord*, *La Dolce Vita*, *8 ½* and *The City of Women*.

Julia Kristeva's notion of a linguistic "Revolution" in "Revolution in Poetic Language" could be applied to Zanzotto's use of language, in particular his employment of dialect. Kristeva argues that specific types of modern poetic language penetrate and undermine the ideological, social and/or political constraints of contemporary society. In going "through" language rather than analyzing it psychoanalytically or scientifically, it is possible to tap the "Semiotic *Chora*" which is "neither model nor copy, the *chora* precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularization, and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm" (453). The *chora* is inherently maternal, a womb-like space of creation and destruction; it is, like Zanzotto's dialect, a domain of pre-language and the pre-symbolic that continually threatens to override the symbolic order, and therefore must be regulated and kept in check by the very symbolic order that it threatens. When poetic language succeeds in liberating the *chora*, the subject becomes aware of society's restrictions, and rather than being governed by civilization and its laws and symbolic struc-

tures, she/he becomes a "subject in process," aware of her/his place within the social order and therefore capable of resisting governing discourses of power.

As dialect is predominantly an unrecorded form of communication with no prior written referent, it is emblematic of the poet's desire to reconcile the self with the world of unconstrained signifiers – which in Fellini and Casanova frequently proliferate in the sexual domain. Zanzotto's poetry speaks of a world of overabundance and excessive signification. Within such a universe it would seem possible that individuality could become lost. Instead, it is within the inconstant nature of the world and language that poetic subjectivity is avowed. Zanzotto pronounces the constitution of being regardless of the multifaceted presence of the other; reconciliation with the world/word of and in desiring language is the perfect receptacle for the affirmation of the ontological principle. Hence, the multi-faceted presence of Zanzotto's dialect poetry within Fellini's film helps qualify Casanova's personal and artistic journey as a "painful return" through the overabundantly loaded present towards a sense of past identity that continually approximates that sense of "home" which Casanova yearns to re-accomplish throughout his travels. What Casanova yearns for, however, is not his actual home, the city of Venice itself, but an imaginary homeland, or rather a homeland of the imaginary. Throughout the film Venice is represented as an intangible and unreachable entity, continuously exemplified as a city of artifice and reflection, conjured up in dreams and flashbacks. What Casanova truly seeks is Kristeva's semiotic *chora*, the place of absolute being with the (m)other, and that is the place of his true "origin."

IV. Casanova's imaginary homeland, or "Venice," is often displaced onto the female characters and icons of the film. Frank Burke discusses the relationship between Casanova's much sought after women and his nostalgia for his own birthplace, concluding that Casanova is performing a "process of substitution as home becomes woman becomes Casanova's seemingly endless pursuit and loss/abandonment of women." (224) These multiple references to female characters and/or icons and their subsequent loss include the goddess head from the Venetian carnival episode that reappears at the end of the film as mysteriously as it disappears in the opening sequence. As the carnival sequence comes to a close, the immense emblem representing the tie between Venus/Venice or *eros*/homeland sinks out of sight, lost, but not forgotten. There is also the giantess Angelì whom Casanova encounters at the circus in London who is herself in a type of exile from the mountains around Venice, and who sings Zanzotto's lullaby "Cantilena londinese."

Then, when Casanova encounters his mother at the opera in Dresden, he asks after news of their Venetian relatives, a question that is left unanswered. Finally, there is also the ultimate female experience, according to Fellini at least, that is captured in the automaton Rosalba. This encounter alludes to the Pygmalion myth, and therefor to the goddess Venus, and so Casanova's relationship with Rosalba allows him to attempt again to approximate a representation of his birthplace.

I will now go on to analyze these revealing and moving sequences in which Casanova has his most profound experiences with questions of femininity and sexuality: These relationships are constructed to reinforce unusual, strange or foreign elements in Casanova's habitual eroticism, as these figures are often associated with castration, regression and lost innocence and youth. These elements all contribute to de-eroticize the typically voyeuristic dimension that characterizes Casanova's exploits, with the aging Casanova rejecting the scopophilic elements he indulged in earlier in so many escapades. Thanks to these key experiences, it becomes clear that sexual desire is deeply implicated with questions about individual origin and absolute power.

A central instance linking many aspects of the visual and poetic tropes of the film is the appearance of the circus performer Angeli, who sings "Cantilena londinese." Angeli is associated with the goddess head at the beginning of the film. Both disappear as mysteriously as they appear to Casanova. Both represent love and earth. The head is addressed as both Venice and Venus, and Bondanella points out that this coupling "...establishes the link in Fellini's film between Casanova's birthplace (Venice) and the ancient goddess of love (Venus)" (310). The head is called "vera figura," and "vera natura" and is described as "futuro nostro." Both figures have childlike qualities as well, as Angeli is shown with her dolls, and in Zanzotto's poem "Recitativo veneziano" the goddess head is referred to as "putina perla, putina unica" who promises future gifts: "...chissà dopo / cossa che la ne dona." Most importantly, both are figures of loss in that the goddess head disappears in the beginning of the film, and Angeli withdraws herself from Casanova's life as enigmatically as she entered it. Fellini's goddess head represents a Venice that, like Thomas Mann's some years later, is in decline, approximating its demise and literally fighting to remain above the water. This perception of Venice is echoed in Fellini's letter to Zanzotto, in which Fellini describes "the kind of sub-aqueous iconography that characterizes the film," as "the placental, amniotic image of a decomposed and shifting Venice of algae, mossiness and musty dank darkness" (*Peasants*

Wake 6). Fellini, and with him Zanzotto, present an image of a city that resists advancement and assists in postponing its own birth. Much like Casanova himself, who continuously searches out his own origins throughout the film in order to revert to earlier stages before the advent of symbolic implication, and not solely systematically advancing in his life, the goddess head is wedded to aqueous images of degeneration and regression.

The goddess head as described in Zanzotto's dialect poem represents the very moment when language itself becomes aware of its inability to last, endure and promote consistent meanings and reactions. In "The Symbolic Order" from "The Function and Field of Speech in Psychoanalysis," Lacan discusses the problematic relationship between the spoken word and that which it references:

Through the word – already a presence made of absence – absence itself gives itself a name in that moment of origin ... And from this pair of sounds modulated on presence and absence ... there is born the world of meaning of a particular language in which the world of things will come to be arranged. Through that which becomes embodied only by being the trace of a nothingness and whose support cannot thereafter be impaired, the concept, saving the duration of what passes by, engenders the thing. (65)

A discussion of the scene in which the goddess head appears to the city will assist in illustrating the connection between language acquisition and the symbolic implication of the goddess head. As the head is slowly raised from the water, its significance as a crucial symbolic icon for the city of Venice is made clear. As the reader of "Recitativo Veneziano" begins reciting Zanzotto's poem in the film, the crowd collaborates and cheers him on. In stating "we are you, you are we," the evident desire of the Venetians to create a future sense of cultural identity based on the representative of eros/motherland is made clear. Visually, the scene weds the fate of the onlookers to that of the goddess head by repeatedly cutting from the head as it is raised from the pale green waters of the canal to the crowds of observers – in the brief scene, the camera switches between the goddess head and the spectators nine times. Upon realizing that the attempt to raise the head is doomed, the camera zooms out from a medium shot of the goddess head, and then in the following scene a similar zoom of the crowd on the Rialto is present, strengthening the connection between the emblem and the mass. As the crowds disperse, one woman exclaims "It's a disaster, an evil omen! Make the sign of the cross, bless yourselves ... We'll never see her again!" In this way the woman reiterates not only the goddess head's

symbolic signification, but also her spiritual consequence. Finally, after she sinks below the waters, there is a concluding shot of her bright white eyes that stand out amongst the murky blue-green backdrop of the sea. There are no sounds from above the surface, and all that can be heard are the bubbles she emits as she settles into her subaqueous realm. In Lacanian terms the silence that engenders this brief moment represents the inability of word or image to hold onto and maintain a specific referent. The Venetians hoped that the manifestation of the goddess head would create direction in their lives through both becoming and governing the citizens. After her non-birth, the film moves to a realm of non-language and non-narrative, conscious of the inability to promote unilateral significance. The Venetian dialect in which the poem is written tells of the desire to resist linguistic integration into hegemonic language systems. Fellini's film then advances the notion of reflection rather than action as the failed event once more reiterates the overall thematics of the film: the continual postponing of progress and advancement in positivist terms. In addition, this failed birth and the collapse of the head is actually a type of beheading and hence once again a figure of castration as well as an allusion to the darkest side of the Enlightenment.

Angeli is initially presented as a figure of both salvation and castration for Casanova. Her presence saves him after his inability to perform sexually resulting in an over-staged suicide attempt in the Thames. Angeli disrupts the pomp of his suicide attempt with a slight laugh, and this introductory act of her verbal utterance heightens the concept of her words being more important than her physical appearance throughout the film. Her presence in this sequence also serves to disrupt and contrast the traditional Italian literary canon, as she diverts Casanova's attention from his citation of Tasso's verses on death: "Deh, vien morte soave, ai miei lamenti, / vieni pietosa e con pietosa mano / copri questi occhi e queste membra argenti" (*Il Casanova* 148). Tasso, and with him Orazio, Dante, Petrarca, and Ariosto (all authors that Casanova hopes to converse with in his afterlife) are all forgotten as Casanova shifts his focus to Angeli, whose literary ramifications have no place in the traditional canon of Italian literature. Thus, Angeli represents a form of castration of the Italian canon in that her presence "cuts off" Casanova's interest in his so-called fathers. Castration is a leitmotif associated with Angeli: she publicly humiliates, dis-empowers and emasculates Casanova, for example, when she beats him at arm wrestling after he begs her to let him win. She is also shown in flashback in a large cage-like wrestling ring, where she swiftly defeats every man who challenges her to a match. Metacinematically, she is also associated with castration when

Casanova searches for her by entering the great whale “Mona” – meaning literally “cunt” – a name borrowed from Zanzotto’s “Recitativo Veneziano” in the opening sequence of the film. During Casanova’s quest, images of the *vagina dentata*¹⁶ are projected on the side of the great whale, thematicizing a mythical fear of female sexuality as something that consumes the man, a trope that is reinforced as a close-up on the last of these images appears literally to call Casanova’s name, beckoning the protagonist into its snare. Casanova’s encounter with such a castrating image of female power comes only briefly after he has been already publicly “castrated” by the Charpillon women, who threaten to publicize his most recent lack of virility. This encounter then leaves him feeling worthless, and almost leads him to take his own life. The whale Mona, and with her Angeli, are constructed as universal figures of woman. Mona is all that creates and destroys in the world. She is a “burier”, a white sugar mountain, a furnace where all – including all of the men that line up to enter into her – is consumed. The circus announcer tells us that “Out of Mona explodes the world with the trees and the clouds and the races of man and Mona has come out of Mona as well.” Through Mona the female gender is endowed with absolute power (including self-generation), castration and control. Just before Angeli defeats Casanova in arm wrestling, he notes her accent and asks after her origins. She states that she is a Venetian, from the mountains, and we later find that she too is in a type of exile from the mountains around Venice, as she has been sold by her husband “like a circus animal.” The arm wrestling scene is crucial in constructing Angeli’s identity for the spectator. Up until that scene, and during part of it, she is cloaked in mystery. She is a veiled woman, and her physical identity does not become apparent until she speaks for the first time, asking “what are you trying to do” when Casanova begs her to let him retain his honor. Thus, her physical presence and female power for Casanova as well as the viewer are strictly tied to her origins, and not to her sexuality, as was the case with many of Casanova’s previous conquests.

A close textual examination of the scene which includes Zanzotto’s “Cantilena londinese” will assist in illustrating my point. This scene is comprised of seventeen shots and is constructed in a way that emphasizes what could be called the “spectacularity” of the film. As Casanova opens the tent to begin spying on Angeli, “Cantilena londinese” begins. Angeli is constructed as an unaware spectacle for the viewer as well as for Casanova. The sequence includes point of view shots from Casanova’s perspective as Angeli prepares for and takes her bath. The presence of the dolls throughout the sequence simultaneously reinforces the theme of the song which is a lament

for lost innocence and youth and contributes to de-eroticizing the act of voyeurism. A parallel could also be drawn between the audience, Casanova, and the dolls themselves, who are all positioned to be "looking" at Angeli in the tub: all three act as voyeurs with Angeli as object. As evident in the comparison between two of the shots, Casanova then leaves the opening of the tent, and with his exit the audience adopts his former perspective. Through this manipulation of perspectives culminating in a close-up on Angeli's face, the viewer is implicated as voyeur and as such is forced to rethink Casanova's experience. Formerly constructed as sexual performer *par excellence* in the scene with the Monaca and in the competition for the best sexual performer, Casanova now inexplicably walks away from a spectacle that has the makings of a sexual adventure. Consequently, the viewer, too, questions whether we have understood his motivations. Mulvey argues that film is a medium which creates and reinforces desire through objectifying the threatening female characters.¹⁷ The logic of Mulvey's theory of castration anxiety does not comply with the film's montage as this scene is constructed so that the viewer experiences voyeurism as a self-reflexive and de-eroticized act. This scene is constructed to reinforce a foreign element in Casanova's habitual eroticism. The aging Casanova rejects the scopophilic elements which he earlier indulged in so many escapades, especially in his first sexual exploit with the Monaca. As he leaves the tent and falls into a deep sleep, the audience senses that sexual desire is deeply implicated with questions of individual origin and thwarted fantasies of absolute power.

The desired regression inherent in Casanova's contemplation has as its source Zanzotto's lullaby "Cantilena londinese," which is sung in Casanova's dialect and accentuates the nostalgia attached to the loss of innocence and youth. The lullaby combines nursery rhymes with poignant images of sexual and emotional maturation with a desire to regress to the simple life of a little girl. The poetic subject desires to return to childhood before "le nosse," symbolizing lost innocence that, in Lacanian terms, signifies language acquisition after entering into a hegemonic system (the symbolic) that leads towards social integration into pre-established norms. Angeli sings roughly one-third of Zanzotto's lullaby within the film, and her diegetic song is composed of multiple verses taken from the majority of the nine stanzas of the original poem. The original dialect poem is divided into four primary sections, each comprised of two stanzas except for the first section that includes an extra introductory stanza paraphrasing the nursery rhyme that inspired the poem. The initial stanza of each section is 5-17 lines in length and describes either the activity, physical qualities or emotional distress of the

poetic subject while the second stanza is a two to four line lament, ending in the refrain “che jeri la jera putéa” (“of the girl who was a child only yesterday”). The style and vocabulary are simple and contained, with minimal punctuation – in the 67 line poem there are only six dashes, five commas and one period, question mark and quotation – while the verses are replete with anaphora, alliteration, hyperbaton and general repetition of both individual words and phrases. These stylistic qualities endow the poem with a highly lyrical and sonorous quality, and Zanzotto himself explains his motivations for these specific stylistic selections: “As soon as Fellini let me see the film, which at that point was only filled with blocks of sound, my ear immediately sensed the initial phonic-rhythmic motifs coming into being. Thus, the sing-song motif, no? ... Finally, certain phonic-rhythmic suggestions came to me after long walks in the marshlands around Venice ... hints of sounds which then became lodged among my daily sounds back on dry land” (Sillanpao 301-2). The lullaby then was inspired by Fellini’s visual interpretation of Casanova’s encounter with Angeli as well as originating specifically from the *terra materna* that Casanova perpetually searches out.

The nursery rhyme that begins the poem is a slightly revised popular lullaby, composed of many untranslatable neologisms. The content of the first section of the poem flows well with the introductory rhyme as it addresses the images previously associated with Annamaria: innocent childish games of needlepoint and dress-up. The second section, however, includes multiple innuendoes of sexual maturation as well as voyeurism as the poetic subject is constructed as an object of desire for an external viewer. The stanza begins with a question “Pin pidin / cossa gastu visto?” (“Pin pidin / what have you seen?”) that is answered in an eight line response highlighting the physical attributes of a young girl on the verge of corporeal development. Interestingly, variants of the word “questo” begin or are present in seven of the eight lines,¹⁸ heightening the physical presence of the young girl’s material qualities. She is initially portrayed as vulnerable as she is presented in the diminutive without any clothes on: “Sta piavoleta nuda” (“This naked little doll”). Further references to her soft skin – “sta pele lissa” (“this silk-smooth skin”), – her breasts – “ste rosete” (“these rosettes”) and “ste suchete” (“these little pumpkins”) – and her sexual organs – “sti pissigheti de rissi” (“these tiny curls that tickle”) and “sta sfeseta” (“this little slit”) – accentuate her exposure to an external eye. The thematics of looking are reinforced as the young girl is described as actively gazing at her soon to be lover: “sti oceti che te varda fissi / e che sa dir ‘te vói ben’” (“these eyes that watch you intently too/ and seem to be saying ‘I love you’”). Although the

girl is described as in control of the gaze, this is not the case as the repetitive external description allows her no objectivity. Rather, the initial question of the stanza, "cossa gastu visto?," is never answered as her gaze is appropriated by the object of her apparent declaration of love, similarly to the way Casanova's gaze becomes appropriated by the audience within the film. The final stanza of this section references the young girl's nuptials, immediately followed by the refrain of lament of forfeited purity: "che jeri la jera putéa." Thus, sexual maturation directly leads to social integration and deprived youth.

In the third section of the poem, rather than being described externally, the poetic subject is given a voice to express her despondency and dissolution following her initiation into the sexual world of the symbolic. As she is initiated into the world of language she acquires her own voice in order to question the construction of her own ontology. The poem states: "te serco inte'l fogo inte'l giasso / te serco e no ghe riesso / te serco e no ghe la fasso." ("I search for you in ice and fire / I search for you but never find you / I search for you and can't go on"). What is being searched for is the origin of the self and of one's own language. Within Zanzotto's poetry as well as Fellini's film, self-realization cannot be boiled down to sexual conquest on behalf of an over-stereotyped sexual prototype. Rather the poetic/filmic subject must travel through a landscape obscured by symbols and interpretations, continually approximating the unattainable, yet never abandoned, objective. The apparent resignation within the search ("te serco e no ghe la fasso") is annulled through repetition, and the journey of the poetic subject does not end when the destination appears obscured. Rather than symbolizing finality and escape, sleep and death are both presented within the stanza as a form of regression and anticipated return: "chi mi fa dormir / chi mi fa morir / tuta pa'l me amor / chi me fa tornar." ("who makes me sleep / who makes me die / all for my love / who makes me return"). These sentiments can be evidenced within the film during Casanova's encounter with and abandonment by Angeli.

Two stanzas later, in the fourth section, the seemingly futile search continues through, within and behind the signifier: "te serco drento inte'l masso / te serco fora dal masso / te serco te serco e indrío sbrisso" ("I search for you in the bouquet / I search for you outside of the bouquet / I search and I search for you and I slip behind.") These lines reference Zanzotto's first collection of poetry, "Dietro il paesaggio," in which the poet searches for sense and meaning not within the signifier, but behind it as he investigates the ontology of experience as a continual process of creation and renewal

within the natural world. The “mazzo,” or “bouquet” of the search references the unfulfilled promises associated with the wedding bouquet, while the following four lines, all beginning with “chi,” longingly remind the reader of the delusion and disappointment associated with the expulsion from the pre-symbolic. The last four lines of the poem intimate a return to the realm of fairy tale, play and the make-believe: “i xe zoghessi de la piavoleta / le xe le nosse e caprissi di chéa / di chéa / che jeri le jera putèa.” (this is the make-believe of the little doll / the wedding and the whims of the girl / of the girl / who yesterday was a child at play.” The search is not relinquished, for the poem takes on an utopian dimension, as the games of the present may attempt to re-approximate the innocence of the child expressed by the imperfect “jera/was.” The poetic subject – either within the lullaby, Angeli or Casanova – continues to travel through the world of language, continually approximating the illusory “homeland” of Kristeva’s semiotic *chora*.

The lullaby has a profoundly ironic and estranging effect upon Casanova. The thematics of nostalgia, regret and loss inherent in the lullaby belong as much to Angeli’s narrative as to Casanova’s. Casanova identifies with the young girl of the lullaby whose uncomplicated actions and simple desires ironically contradict many of Casanova’s extravagant sexual scenarios and convoluted orations. Rather than represent the traditionally “masculine” qualities of sexual and literary imperialism associated with the myth of Casanova, the “Cantilena” succeeds in feminizing the cultural figure. Zanzotto’s poem is an example of *l’écriture féminine* in that it literally tells the story of the female body. In writing the body, the lullaby gives voice and space to an arbitrary and evolving subject-in-process rather than a rational and finalized gender stereotype. As Hélène Cixous explains in “The Laugh of the Medusa,” in writing herself, the subject “will return to the body which has been more that confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display” (350). Casanova’s performative sexuality has no place in his encounter with Angeli, rather the feminized protagonist gives up his position as voyeur, allowing himself instead to sleep, dream and regress.

It is in the Angeli scene accompanied by Zanzotto’s poem that Casanova seems, albeit temporarily, to transcend the limited meaning of his erotic nature so aptly described by his friend Egard in the tavern. After entering the great whale Mona, Casanova runs into Egard and tells this seemingly belligerent friend that he “prefers to travel in the real world.” Egard’s response reaffirms the above-mentioned notion of the linear nature of Casanova’s exploits: “But your travels take you through the bodies of women and that

gets you nowhere." Thanks to his encounter with Angeli, Casanova is not depicted as a sexual conqueror *per se*; rather he is allowed a brief moment to contemplate the nature of his own ontology. It is precisely within Casanova's interaction with Angeli that the human element of being in the world, at a number of levels, seeks to find a way to exist within the pandemonium of over-signification of visual and verbal systems.

V. Casanova's ultimate distance from his own origins is most poignantly demonstrated in his surprise encounter with his own mother at the opera in Dresden.¹⁹ As the opera ends, Casanova bows to the royal box, and becomes as Marcus states, "transfixed by this image of inaccessible glamour" ("Adaptation by Self-Projection" 215). As the opera house suddenly empties and the lighting fades, the massive candelabra fall and are ritually spent, and Casanova remains in the opera house, the final witness to what could be looked at as the end of yet another failure in his proclaimed political, social, scientific and/or literary career. The thematics of disappointment following Casanova's sexual relations is not uncommon in the film, in fact more often than not Casanova's sexual exploits are followed by feelings of inadequacy (in his relationship with Maddalena the nun and her lover De Bernis), loss (for example is his relationship with his "true love" Henriette, who abandons him shortly after their meeting), embarrassment (following his impotence with the Charpillon women) or, in the case of the orgy in Dresden, melancholy.

After Casanova finds himself to be completely alone in the opera house his mother surreally appears in one of the boxes, whispering his name and laughing dissonantly. Their conversation is disquieting and uncanny in that the distance and difference between mother and son are repeatedly emphasized. Not only does he barely recognize her – Casanova states "Mama, can it be you?" – in addition the audience soon discovers that Casanova has not even bothered to look her up, knowing full well where she currently resides. Their conversation as well further demonstrates Casanova's current sense of self-doubt and rejection as he attempts to explain to his mother that he is in Dresden on business: "I am here on business, a project of mine, the minister himself is very interested in, an entirely new invention of mine. Excellent..." His confident statement is decidedly interrupted and ridiculed by his mother who counters: "Ah you haven't changed I see, always bragging about your ridiculous ideas." Visually Fellini puts Casanova in his place as well, as his mother is shot from a low angle in extreme close-up, while he is presented through a medium shot at low angle. His mother then is one more in a long string of critics to question Casanova's "higher talents."

Casanova's reunion with his mother does not bring him closer to that sense of self-identity and home that he has continuously sought out throughout the film. Rather, the mother becomes an enigma that perhaps holds an interpretive key to Casanova's long and complex relation with the female other. This difference is thematized by her multi-lingual discourse – she speaks French, Italian as well as German – that at some points in their conversation is unintelligible to Casanova. As he poses more questions to her about her deceased husband, current residence and their relatives in Venice, Casanova becomes visually and verbally different. He is no longer the braggart, pompous adventurer of many previous encounters such as at the dinner parties at either the Marquise D'Urfé's salon in Paris or at Du Bois' residence in Parma. Rather, his voice is strained and tinged with concern and his gaze is concerted and contemplative.

Her ultimate and unbridgeable distance is most powerfully demonstrated when Casanova carries her to her coach on his back, in an image that deconstructs the notion of stable parental "foundation."²⁰ This image also alludes to the extremely uncanny nature of Casanova's relationship to not only his mother, but also to Annamaria, Rosalba, Angeli and the goddess head – all of which painfully remind him of his homeland. His mother is both "familiar and old – established in the mind and ... alienated only through the process of repression" (Freud, "The Uncanny" 241). Their final visual exchange forces Casanova to confront his own repressed fears of death and old age as her concluding image reminds Casanova of his approaching fate: through the clouded glass of the carriage, his mother appears much older than her years, yet with her curled white hair, pale skin and concave eye-sockets she resembles Casanova remarkably. When she does take leave of Casanova, her carriage disappears into a snowy, barren and dismal landscape while her son is left to look on after her, seemingly moved by their chance meeting. This final visual image is accented by the presence of the subtle, whistling wind that will reappear after Casanova's "seduction" of Rosalba as well as in the final sequence of the film. This representation shares many affinities with not only Casanova's point-of-view shot as he searches for Angeli amidst the remains of the vague and dreary deserted circus, but also during his final vision of a frozen and oneiric Venice. Following Casanova's encounters with the most significant female agents in his life, the visual imagery of the film links with his psyche, echoing his feelings of coldness, introspection and loneliness. Through this process of externalization, Fellini allows Casanova to project his feelings to the viewer, creating sense and giving meaning to his continual struggle for approval and acceptance.

As Casanova ages and that sexual prowess which had always classified his reputation – regardless of his continual and oftentimes failed desire to assert his more dignified attributes – degenerates, he turns towards a third type of female entity to achieve sexual and emotional fulfillment. The first type is represented by the women who were lost as soon as they were attained. It is these, who abandoned him, who apparently had the greatest emotional and psychological impact upon him: Henriette, Isabella, Angeli, his mother. The second type of sexual encounter which did not have such an effect, had an undeniably scopophilic flavor: as is clear in his encounters with Maddelena the nun, in Mdm. D'Urfé's impregnation ritual, in the sexual competition in Rome and the orgy with the acting troupe in Dresden. The ultimate female experience, according to Fellini at least, is captured in the automaton Rosalba. Of course this encounter alludes to the Pygmalion myth. After dancing with Rosalba – his final "seduction" in the film – Casanova wonders whether she had an incestuous relationship with her creator.²¹ This "uncanny" relationship does not simply serve to reinforce Casanova's narcissism and desire to continually objectify his sexual conquests as has been commonplace with many of his earlier relationships. More importantly, his relationship with Rosalba – who could be thought of as the ideal object – allows Casanova to attempt again to approximate a representation of his birthplace. Pygmalion's statue, which was later brought to life by Venus, was of Venus herself, and this intertextual reference reinforces the protagonist's desire to re-create the idea of Venus/Venice that has eluded him throughout his exile.

Casanova's relationship with Rosalba represents his desire to regress to an earlier existential condition in order to ward off his own death. His choice to recite Petrarch's sonnet 292 to the doll as he places her on the bed is telling of his desire to prolong his ever-fleeting mortality. Casanova recites only the first 7 lines of the sonnet, those which praise Laura's beauty that turns the poet's temporal world into a heavenly paradise: "Gli occhi di ch'io parlai sí caldamente, / e le braccia, e le mani, e i piedi, e 'l viso, / che m'avean sí da me stesso diviso, / e fatto singular da l'altra gente; / le cresse ch'io me d'òr puro lucente, / e 'l lampeggiar de l'angelica riso / che solean fare in terra un paradiso." Were he to continue his recitation, line 8 of the sonnet resonates with morbidity as all of Laura's beauty has turned to dust after her death: "poco polvere son, che nulla sente." The final two tercets reinforce Laura's demise, addressing the plight of the poet left alone to continually mourn her loss throughout his desperate, hopeless existence. In his relationship with Rosalba, Casanova is able to adopt the verses of Petrarca

that suit him, and ignore those that evoke his own mortality. In the *Canzoniere* Petrarca's Laura is the object that mediates the poet's desire. As a signifier she enables him to investigate that which he consistently seeks: himself projected in language by means of aesthetic creation. Along the same lines, Casanova's relationship with Rosalba allows him to project himself as an artist and breather of life into another being. This becomes clear during their sexual encounter as Rosalba comes to occupy the cinematic position typically held exclusively by Casanova. In his sexual encounters with Maddelena, Annamaria and Mdm. D'Urfé, the camera is positioned below Casanova, and he is shown from a low angle, framed in the center of the screen. Moreover, during these encounters, he is utterly isolated from his counterpart, and after the sexual act is almost never shown in the same frame with her. Rosalba, however, with Casanova's help, adopts his former position as well as relation with the camera. This scene thus becomes a mirror image of many of the other sexual scenes throughout the film. Here after the sexual act, the two are united in the same frame, for the only time in the film, suggesting a more intimately bound relationship between Casanova and his sexual "conquest." Casanova moves on to study his indistinct and blurred reflection for the first time throughout the film in the cracked and dusty mirror, an act that intimates a rare sense of self-contemplation and regret rather than self-promotion. In his old age, the protagonist has finally seemed to acquire both a sense of humanity and a degree of self-reflection.

Of course, Casanova's relationship with Rosalba brings out one of the most ironic elements of the film: his attempt to hold onto his ever-fleeting mortality through his re-found virility only points towards his impending death. The following scenes strengthen this trope as he has aged considerably, is depicted alone, is relegated to eating in the kitchen with the servants at the Castle of Waldentsein and is ridiculed by both his peers and a group of young courtiers. Casanova's encounter with Rosalba, like many of the female simulacra throughout the film, results not in Casanova's integration and realization, but in estrangement and difference. Paul de Man defines these qualities of irony in "The Rhetoric of Temporality:"

The act of irony, as we now understand it, reveals the existence of a temporality that is definitely not organic, in that it relates to its source only in terms of distance and difference and allows for no end, for no totality. Irony divides the flow of temporal experience into a past that is pure mystification and a future that remains harassed forever by a relapse within the inauthentic. (222)

In his relationships with Rosalba, Annamaria and his mother – all characters connected to his imaginary homeland – Casanova realizes, albeit temporarily, the temporal division that presents his past/Venice/the womb as a mystified distant space of the pre-symbolic and his future/death/desired return as a journey through the present that is over-laden with signs and symbols of loss.

VI. Throughout the film Casanova constantly searches for the “elusive feminine,” which could give meaning to his life and facilitate his integration into a cosmic order. His search leads him to travel continuously and performatively through the bodies of women. And this, as his friend Egard states, gets him nowhere. In the scenes accompanied by the film’s main musical themes, reflective rather than physical experience is heightened, as though to suggest that it is a privileged means of returning the artist to the spiritual home from which he has been exiled. The last few episodes of the film at the Castle of Dux reinforce Casanova’s sense of exile, as he is simultaneously ridiculed and ignored. In the final sequence of the film Casanova recounts a dream infused with images of repressed desires of acceptance and homecoming. It is here that he finds himself face to face with an image of himself as an exile and an aging man who looks back on a representation of his life as an eternal attempt to create himself by distance from his origins, and as Marcus writes, celebrates the act of the artist as creator (“Portrait of the Artist” 33).

In the last moments of the film, Casanova is allowed a final return to Venice, his birthplace. The setting is the same as the opening Carnival sequence, only the space is deserted, the waters of the lagoon are frozen over and the only sound is that of the wind. The silence that fills the scene alludes to a constructed space of memory, regret and nostalgia. The Venetian goddess head is also present in Casanova’s final dream, buried but not forever lost, a crystallized memory resisting extinction beneath the unstable ice, much like Zanzotto’s beloved dialect as expressed in the poetry of *Filò*. Next, four groups of various personages from Casanova’s life – most of whom are women whom he either seduced or lost, including Henriette – all evade him in a series of seven shots. Although Casanova attempts vaguely to follow these manifestations of the unattainable other as they depart, he concludes by watching impotently as these illusory forms surreally disappear or float off-screen. Rather than show rage, embarrassment or despair at their departure (his typical reactions to previous abandonments) Casanova accepts their loss, focusing his attentions on an elaborately decorated gold carriage pulled by four white horses that carries both his mother and the

pope (his surrogate father figure) into the center of the frozen canal. Both as signifier and metaphor this carriage is quite different from the carriage that took Casanova's mother from him in the earlier scene. Rather than embodying the coldness and loneliness of imminent death and unbridgeable distance, this carriage originates from the realm of fairy tale and therefore symbolizes happy endings and fulfilled desires. In a scene redolent of the central thematics of Fellini's cinema, Casanova has been given "approval" by both his mother and the pope to dance with Rosalba. Rosalba magically appears in front of the Rialto, in roughly the same location from which the last set of imaginary women vanished. When Casanova encounters Rosalba, her theme music begins, and she turns towards him, beckoning him to dance with her. The musical tone of the final scene intimates a return to the pre-symbolic. It constructs a poetic space in which the fragmented self transcends objectification, and is capable of existing without asserting itself by objectifying the female other.

Casanova follows Rosalba in her dance and as the pair twirls together on the frozen ice, there is an abrupt cut to an extreme close-up of Casanova's red watering eyes and tensely knit brow that reunites the spectator (both Casanova and the film viewer) with the particular memory. Marcus reads this scene as Casanova's appropriation of the performative and sexual voyeurism that he is previously associated with, and she concludes that Casanova finally realizes that what counts is not the external voyeuristic eye, but rather "the self's view of the self" ("Adaptation by Self-Projection" 224). In addition, and I would argue more importantly, this sequence comments on the possibilities of cinematic invention. Through Casanova's dream/memory, cinema is demonstrated as capable of constructing a poetic space of the imaginary, a poetic space of absolute belonging and re-established homeland. This is clear as the film cuts back to Casanova and Rosalba's dance, and rather than controlling their actions, Casanova forfeits his own creative power, becoming, with Rosalba, himself manipulated by some unseen source as they spin motionless and frozen on an hidden axis. Casanova is now represented as both statue and Pygmalion, only now he chooses not to sculpt out his life as he would like it to be, but rather to accept it as it is, with all of his shortcomings and failures.

Ironically, Casanova has finally found himself to be truly at "home" in a visual space replete with simulacra. Rather than attest to the hopelessness of integration and completion in such a (dis)simulated order, the city of Venice, the goddess-head, Casanova's mother as well as his multiple female conquests including Rosalba all assist in creating, constructing and enforcing a

new aura of spirituality and self-acknowledgment rather than delusion. As he approaches his death, Casanova travels within his dreams and memories through the postmodern age of the inauthentic. It is here that he becomes a true ironic subject as he is made aware of the distance between his present self as he approaches annihilation and his subconscious dreams, desires and fears. Rather than reject an image of himself which could be interpreted as an egotistical last attempt to objectify and control his female counterpart, Casanova finally recognizes that the objective of his life-long exhausting search for his origins, although unattainable in the actual present, may be achieved within his own consciousness.

Zanzotto, in *Filò*, links the Venetian goddess head with Angeli, describing the association as a “vera mama,” who “fursi che spèta un sposo tant eterno / cofà éla – e che l’è éla Logoz ercomeuoz” (who waits perhaps for a bridegroom / eternal like her – and that is her -, *logos erchomenos*). In the final moments of the film, Casanova is at last ultimately linked with a representation of the eternal feminine – Rosalba, the Goddess Head, His Mother, Venice – that has so often eluded him throughout his life’s work and exhaustive journeys. Rather than attempt to manage and make sense of the manifold symbols peppering the screen, the protagonist joins them in their own eternal “becoming,” capable of being with the other without the need to dominate or exploit. In this final moment of self-acceptance, Casanova’s nostalgia has finally led to the creation of his true aesthetics.

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NOTES

¹ Zanzotto’s poem *Filò* actually begins “I’m not talking about movies- / I’d like to talk about movies- / I get carried away by movies- / I’m scared by movies- / because they fill our brains with bubbles and buds / and almost a poisonous color” (*Peasants Wake* 55). All translations from Zanzotto’s collection *Filò* are taken from J. Welle and R. Feldman’s translation published as *Peasants Wake for Fellini’s ‘Casanova’ and Other Poems*. Occasionally the translations have been modified.

² The obvious linguistic challenge of writing not in his own dialect of the Soligo valley, but in a mixed dialect in an historical as well as a geographical sense – Fellini writes that he desires Zanzotto to “restore some freshness to [the Venetian dialect], render it more alive, penetrating, mercurial, keen” (*Peasants Wake* 5) – was also a deciding factor in his cooperation.

³ Zanzotto also actively fought against Fascism during the war as a member of the Partisan Resistance.

⁴ To the futurist leader F.T. Marinetti, for example, “Casanova” was, along with Cagliostro and D’Annunzio, an emblem of virility, seduction, and aggressiveness, and thus

essentially a proto-fascist figure ("Futurismo e fascismo" in *Teorie e invenzione Futurista*).

⁵ M. Marcus's "Adaptation by Self-Projection" includes multiple references to negative reviews of Fellini's film. They include Andrew Sarris' "*Fellini's Casanova*: Venice on Ice," *Time* 107, May 17, 1976, Stephen Farber's "*Casanova*: Love's Labors Lost," *New West* 2, January 31, 1977 and Christopher Porterfield's "Waxwork Narcissus," *Time* 109, February 21, 1977.

⁶ Fellini discusses his feelings towards Casanova's *Memoirs* as well as the '700 in *Fare un film*: "Ma perchè questo soffocante interminabile librone piace tanto agli intellettuali? ... [T]utte le volte che ho provato a sfogliare le *Memorie* a un certo punto ho dovuto smettere, mi veniva quasi da tossire sperduto e abbandonato in quel polveroso deserto cartaceo" (85); "Dal punto di vista figurativo, il Settecento è il secolo più esaurito, esausto e svenato da tutte le parti. Restituire l'originalità, una nuova seduzione, una visione nuova di questo secolo è sul piano figurativo un'impresa disperata" (175).

⁷ See M. Marcus, "Portrait of the Artist" and "Adaptation by Self-projection", P. Bondanella's section on this film in *The Cinema of Federico Fellini*, F. Burke's section on this film in *Fellini's Films: From Postwar to Postmodern* and Kevin Moore's article "*Fellini's Casanova* or the Fate of Formalism."

⁸ In *Fellini's Films: From Postwar to Postmodern*, Burke discusses the differences in representation between the historical figure and Fellini's cinematic invention: "Casanova is not a person or a representation of one: he, like everything else in the film, is an ungrounded fiction produced entirely by his and Fellini's texts" (224).

⁹ *Il cinema di Federico Fellini* (32), as quoted in M. Marcus. "Adaptation by Self-projection" (206).

¹⁰ All references will be to the English dubbed version of the film.

¹¹ "[T]he technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition ... Aura is tied to presence; there can be no replica of it ... [T]he singularity of the shot in the studio is that the camera is substituted for the public. Consequently, the aura that envelops the actor vanishes, and with it the aura of the figure he portrays" ("The Work of Art in the Age on Mechanical Reproduction" *Illuminations* 221 and 229).

¹² Fellini himself affirms that in part because of his collaboration with costume designer and prop coordinator Danilo Donati, he considers *Fellini's Casanova* and *Satyricon* to be his two most "attractive" films from a visual point of view (*Comments on Film* 187-188).

¹³ The first page of the original script establishes Casanova's character as melancholic, as his initial voice-over, although omitted from the film, relates his feelings for his city: "I have all four temperaments: the phlegmatic, the sanguine, the choleric, the melancholic ... Above all I loved my city, ancient and bright, cruel and tender, yielding" (*Fellini's Casanova* 1).

¹⁴ In this poem Zanzotto problematizes the possibility of grasping universal linguistic origins: "Là origini - Mai c'è stata origine" (176).

¹⁵ Zanzotto includes a nursery rhyme written in *petèl*, the dialect which mothers speak to their children: "Mama e nona te dà ate e cuco e pepi e memela" (176).

¹⁶ Bondanella discusses the importance of the projections of the *vagina dentata* in *The Cinema of Federico Fellini*. He states: "This link of the projection of male sexual fantasies (or fears) to the Enlightenment equivalent of the cinema cannot help but recall Fellini's views on the feminine qualities of the cinema" (315).

¹⁷ In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" L. Mulvey states:

In psychological terms, the female figure poses a deeper problem. She ... connotes something that the look circles around but disavows: her lack of a penis implying the threat of castration and hence unpleasure... The male unconscious has two alternatives of escape from this castration anxiety: preoccupation with the re-enactment of original trauma (...demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation,

punishment or saving of the guilty object...or else complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous. (21)

¹⁸ "Sta" or "questa" is used four times, "ste" or "queste" once, "sto" or "questo" once and "sti" or "questi" twice.

¹⁹ This sequence immediately follows a circus-like orgy whose staging is so elaborate that it almost downplays the sexual act, highlighting instead the performative and theatrical nature of the event. One performance follows another, and as the orgy comes to a close, the scene cuts to the end of the opera in Dresden, staged by the same characters that earlier occupied Casanova's bed chamber. The music reinforces the evident comparison between the two sequences as a sound bridge is employed, and the equivalent melody associated with Casanova's phallic bird becomes the diegetic music of the opera. Of course, the Wagnerian grandiosity of the mise-en-scène of the opera sequence ironically contradicts the earlier squalor of the orgy sequence, and Casanova literally is put in his place, forced to occupy one of the least prominent sections of the theater.

²⁰ Frank Burke points out: "The notion of maternal origin or 'roots' is visually reversed by the image of Casanova's mother up off the ground, piggyback, 'grounded' by her son" (226).

²¹ An obvious reference to Freud's "The Uncanny" is present in the Rosalba sequence as the relationship between Rosalba, a beautiful life-size doll, and Casanova is strikingly similar to Freud's retelling of Hoffman's "The Sand-Man." In the story the young man Nathaniel falls madly in love with Olympia, a life-size mechanical doll partially created by the man Nathaniel fears the most – the optician Coppola.

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