

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Stuart Blackburn, Ph.D.

YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW (*Leri, Oggi, Domani*) 1963

Vittorio De Sica

OVERVIEW *Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* is certainly a departure from De Sica's better-known, neo-realist films. It is a romantic comedy divided into three unrelated parts, each set in a different city (Naples, Milan and Rome) and featuring a pair of lovers, played in each case by Sophia Loren and Marcello Mastroianni. In keeping with the tongue-in-cheek tone of this film, we might sum up its three episodes this way: a fecund mom; a rich bitch; and a tart with a heart. Despite the light-hearted atmosphere, however, the film does manage to smuggle in critical commentary on gender, women, social class, the church and prostitution. This mixture of the comic and the critical is what makes this film both charming and acerbic. It was a hit with the public and was De Sica's fourth to win an Oscar for Best Foreign Film. It also won a BAFTA for Best Foreign Actor (Mastroianni)

SYNOPSIS In the **first** section, set in a poor neighbourhood in Naples, pregnant Adelina faces imprisonment for non-payment of a fine incurred from her black-market cigarette sales. She is saved only because Italian law prevents a pregnant woman from going to prison and extends that impunity to a six-month period after giving birth. The problem is that she, and her soon-exhausted husband, must continue producing babies to stay out of jail. After seven kids, the poor husband is ill and she considers using another man to get pregnant but decides against it. She goes to prison but is then freed when her neighbourhood raises the money for to pay her original fine.

The **second** episode consists almost entirely of a conversation between Anna, a wealthy man's wife, and Renzo, her lover and a writer. During their exchange, Anna reveals her superficiality, while Renzo remains cautious about their relationship. She dreams of going away with him to escape her 'empty' life, but when the car crashes and she is offered a lift by a wealthy man, she leaves her dreamboat lover by the side of the road, with a dismissive wave of her hand.

The **third** section focuses on Mara, a high-end prostitute in Rome. The drama begins when she attracts the romantic interest of a neighbour, Umberto, a young man training for the priesthood. Her regular client, Augusto, arrives with his libido in high gear, but he is frustrated by her friction with Umberto's grandmother, who condemns her for her sinful trade. A rapprochement between Mara and the old woman cools the tension, but Augusto is livid when she takes a vow of celibacy as a way of getting Umberto back on the path of righteousness. All ends well when Umberto returns to the seminary and Mara does a striptease for Augusto. Or, almost. Half way through, she remembers her vow and halts her dance to pray to her lighted candles. A resigned Augusto joins her.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Adelina	A woman in Naples arrested for selling black market cigarettes.
Carmine	Carmine is her husband.
Anna	The wife of a wealthy industrialist in Milan.
Renzo	Her lover, is a struggling writer.
Mara	A high-class hooker in Rome.
Augusto	Her devoted client.
Umberto	Her next-door neighbour, is a seminary student.
Granny	Umberto's grandmother.

STORY

Part One: Adelina of Naples

Court order Naples in the mid-1950s. A bailiff arrives in a poor neighbourhood with a court order requiring Adelina to pay a large fine for having been convicted of selling black market cigarettes. She is out, and her husband, Carmine, says they can't pay the fine, so the man says he must impound

their furniture. But, going inside, he sees that there isn't a stick left. As soon as the man leaves, all the furniture is brought back to house by the neighbours. Their joy is short-lived when a lawyer warns them that they are still 'in big trouble.'

Legal loophole Adelina, who is pregnant, and her husband, who is jobless, plead with the lawyer, who sees no hope until he notices that she is expecting. Under Italian law, he explains, a pregnant woman cannot be sent to prison, and she is safe for another six months after birth, as well. When this news gets out, the entire neighbourhood takes up the chant: 'She's pregnant, she's pregnant.' Adelina struts around as the queen of the neighbourhood.

Serial pregnancy Then she realises that her freedom has a time limit. The baby will be born soon and then, after six months, she could be arrested. 'You'll have to get busy by Christmas,' she says to her husband. The festivities arrive but the couple can't join their friends for merry-making because they have a job to do: get her pregnant again. Time passes, and whenever the police come to arrest her, she shows them a doctor's letter that certifies another pregnancy. Carmine helps care for the children, who eventually number seven. Despite the work and chaos, husband and wife are happy. When their friend, Pasquale, kisses Adelina in a sexual way, she is shocked and he apologises.

Hard work Carmine is exhausted by his sexual duties, can't sleep and complains that he only gets a bowl of soup a day for his exertions. His mother suggests that Adelina find someone else to 'help her breed endlessly', but Carmine says he'd kill her if that happened. Meanwhile, Adelina, who looks prettier after each birth, pays a folk healer to bless the marital bed. Then, when Adelina says she's hasn't gotten pregnant, the local women berate Carmine for his lack of virility. The couple visit a doctor, who examines Carmine and declares him undernourished and anaemic.

Prison Near the end of a six-month nursing period, with no pregnancy in sight, Adelina considers asking their friend Pasquale to perform the task. He is willing and starts to make love, but she can't go through with it. With no other option, she takes her two youngest children and goes to prison, where she is put in the maternity ward.

Free Back in the neighbourhood, local people raise money by paying a tax on every purchase. One night, the imprisoned Adelina hears Carmine singing to her from the street, informing her that they've raised the money and that the children are fine. When the money is sent to Rome, Adelina is freed and reunited with her large family. Driven back to the neighbourhood in a fancy car, she receives a heroine's welcome.

Part Two: Anna In Milan

Clean break Anna talks to us as she drives her Rolls-Royce in the centre of town. She lists the things that will occupy her during the next few days—a concert, a meeting with a senator and a committee meeting. She obviously moves in high circles, but she is bored, especially with a charity event for orphans that she must attend. She wants 'a clean break.'

Renzo Then she mentions darling Renzo, 'so free and unassuming.' All this time, we hear her voice and see the city as she sees it, through the front window of the moving car. She picks up Renzo at a certain spot and time by arrangement. He is young and handsome. Then we see her for the first time, also young and stunningly beautiful. From their conversation, we learn that her husband is a rich industrialist, and away on business for a week. She says that she's been thinking about what Renzo told her the night before—about her vacuous life—and knows he's right. She says her husband is an 'addict'—addicted to money, success, work. But he is different, she says, because he makes her 'feel alive.'

Dreams As they talk, her driving becomes erratic, bumping into cars in front and swerving to miss others. She persuades him to take over, though he isn't familiar with such a fancy car. As they talk, we understand that they have been lovers for some time. She dreams airily about getting free of her husband's world of money, and she adores Renzo because he's a writer. Renzo isn't entirely convinced she is sincere but is attracted to her. They stop by a riverbank and are about to make love when workmen distract them.

Crash Resuming their journey, Anna begins to dream of a romantic night with Renzo under the stars. He, too, imagines it and then, distracted, he swerves to avoid a boy selling flowers and crashes into a tractor. Anna is furious, blaming Renzo for the damage to her beloved Rolls-Royce and showing no concern for the boy they almost killed. She demands that Renzo fix her damaged car.

Abandoned Fed up with Renzo's lack of mechanical skill, she flags down a passing car, an expensive convertible driven by a dapper man. When she explains that she 'let a stupid man' wreck her car, this man agrees and says, it's 'like Shakespeare in illiterate hands.' Renzo, having withdrawn to some distance, listens to their flirtatious exchange, with a wry smile. When the driver offers Anna a lift, she accepts with pleasure and orders Renzo to keep an eye on the car for her. Left alone by the roadside, he is approached by the boy and buys a bunch of flowers for 100 lire. All this time, Anna's car radio has been announcing the rising prices on the stock market, which climb into the hundreds of thousands. With a shrug of resignation and a little chuckle, Renzo throws away the flowers.

Part Three: Mara in Rome

Prostitute and priest As the camera pans over the rooftops of the city, we glimpse a young candidate for the priesthood studying on his balcony. Then he notices Mara on a nearby balcony. Only half covered by a towel, she fascinates him. While she sings and tends her plants, he can't continue with his theological reading. One of her regulars, a young man with high political connections, arrives with gifts. They engage in a light-hearted farce of sexual fantasies and he leaves.

Nocturnal chat That evening, Mara and the priest candidate talk to each other while standing on their respective balconies. He explains his severe training regime, and she asks him to hear her confession, but he cannot until he becomes a priest. She disapproves of priests being allowed to marry. 'To me,' she explains, 'priests should be like the moon. Nobody knows what it is.' They talk about religious matters, and she says her saint is good to her, but she doesn't like her job. 'What is it?' he asks. 'A manicurist, she lies. He invites her to go to the seaside with him the following day.

Irate grandmother Their flirtatious conversation is interrupted by the boy's grandmother, who denounces Mara as a prostitute. She defends herself, saying that her clients are respected men and vows to revenge herself against the older woman.

Jealous client Her client returns full of ardour, but she has lost her interest in making love and plans to write a hate letter to the 'old witch.' Hurt by her disinterest, the client leaves but returns the following morning with even greater desire. He is jealous when she speaks to the young man across the balcony, who has taken off his priestly garments and wears a suit in the hopes that she will go to the seaside with him.

Vow of abstinence The grandmother rings her doorbell, but Mara refuses to speak with her, until the old woman starts to cry. Her grandson is ruined, she says. He's given up the priesthood and puts brilliantine cream in his hair. Moved to sympathy, Mara comforts her, and the two women have a heart-to-heart talk. They reach an agreement: If her grandson goes back to the seminary, she will do without...you know what...for a week. Impressed with her self-sacrifice, the old woman now calls her a 'saint' and 'an angel.'

A good deed The next day, Mara buys candles to light during her week of abstinence. She also runs into the priest candidate and offers to buy him a nice cassock, but he is disappointed that she won't come out with him on a date. Crestfallen, he disappears and, when told by his granny that Mara is a high-class prostitute, decides to join the Foreign Legion. Summoned by granny, Mara talks sense into him and he agrees to return to the seminary. In the final shot, she and her client watch from the balcony, as the young man, clad in his priestly black, walks to the bus, accompanied by his grandparents.

Prayer, not striptease Mara and her client celebrate, knowing that they have done a good deed. She starts to do a striptease but stops when she remembers her vow to abstain for a week. He is furious and threatens to leave her for good, saying he resents being treated like a child. Then his

father calls and he acts just like a hysterical boy on the telephone. When the call is cut short, he again goes to leave, but she soothes him and asks that he keep her company. In the final shot, they both sit on a bed, facing the burning candles, and chant a prayer.

THEMES

1. Gender The only theme that runs through all three episodes of the film is that of gender. Overall, the film satirises, very gently, the cult of Italian macho men, unmasking them as ineffectual (episode 1), dispensable (episode 2) and childish (episode 3). In each case, moreover, the man is dominated by a woman (Sophia Loren), who is either stronger, more confident or more mature, or all three. Poor Carmine, the exhausted husband of Adelina who cannot cope with her energy and sexual power, has to resort to medicine to fire up his depleted libido, and even that fails. He is a good parent to the brood of kids, but seems more like a mother than a masculine father. Renzo, the equally effeminate writer in tow to Anna, shows some independent thinking, but his inferior class and financial position means that he is (literally) left behind to lick his wounds. Augusto, the client in the last section, has enough sexual energy, all right, but he is exposed as a childish prat, who answers to 'Daddy' and prays piously with Mara. Although the brunt of the satire is aimed at men, the women do not escape unscathed. Adelina, for example, is a caricature of the Italian 'earth mother,' whose fecundity is celebrated even by schoolchildren dancing in the streets. She is the goddess whose maternal and sexual powers are unlimited. Anna is pilloried as a selfish, upper-class hypocrite whom Renzo should be glad to see the back of. Mara, perhaps the most well-rounded of the female characters, is defensive and too much in thrall to her ritual candles. As a romantic comedy, the film mocks Italian stereotypes of both men and women.

2. Society The genius of De Sica's film is that it manages to convey social messages, too. In the first episode, we see how class solidarity among the poor defeats the indifferent institutions of the state. Adelina is one among many women (and men) who cheat a little by selling on the black market; it is the only way they can make some money. She is fined an enormous sum, which she can't pay, so a bailiff arrives to take possession of their furniture. A weaselly little man, he is an apt representative of a government not trusted by the local people. And they easily trick him by hiding the furniture. Then, we hear of the law that prevents pregnant women from being arrested, and we see a maternity ward in a prison holding mothers with young children. Next, a doctor is unable to understand Carmine's medical condition, and a policeman also expresses shock at 'another certificate' declaring her pregnant. Bailiff, lawyer, legal system, prison system, doctor and police—all of them are portrayed as inept, flawed or indifferent to the lives of ordinary people. Meanwhile, the neighbourhood not only celebrates Adelina's pregnancy, they also band together to raise enough money to spring her from prison. In these ways, the film exposes the class divide in Italian society. The bulk of the population, especially in poor areas of Naples, live a life far removed from the government officials and upper-class professionals who have power over them. The class divide is also revealed in the second episode, though here the tone is more caustic and unforgiving. Anna embodies the moral vacuity of the elite, who treat others (like Renzo) with shocking indifference.

3. Religion A satire of Italian society must also, of course, touch on religion, though De Sica does so with a gentle hand and only in the last episode. Here, Mara and Umberto (the young seminary student) represent the two sides of the age-old conflict between sexuality and the church. As the story unfolds, that gap between the prostitute and the would-be priest begins to narrow. At one point, Augusto, her client, says, 'You think I'm a slave to sex, but I have a soul too, remember that. There's only a hair between a devil and a saint.' By the end of the film, even that hair has disappeared, and we see that a seminary student has sexual desires and a call-girl has deep piety. The young man wants to drop his cassock and cavort on the seaside with lovely Mara, while she admits that she would be a nun if she 'had another life.' She also mentions that, in America, priests are allowed to marry and later tells Augusto that even street-walkers 'have their self-respect.' When the grandmother overcomes her prejudice against Mara and accepts her as a good, indeed an admirable, woman, the film suggests that society as a whole should do the same. The last scene challenges the preconceptions of (male) viewers by showing a sensational striptease that morphs into a prayer session. It is a fitting end to a story that continuously blurs the lines between sin and virtue.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Adelina Adelina is an exuberant character, powerful, belligerent and impulsive. A resident of a poor neighbourhood in Naples, she embodies the independent spirit of ordinary people, especially when interacting with institutions and officers of the government. She is also an attractive, and alluring, woman, oozing sensuality with every move.

Defiant Adelina is defiant from the word go. She will sell her cigarettes, come what may, because she is protected by her pregnancies. In one scene, and there are many similar ones, she is seated on the street in a row of other women, all selling black market items. Suddenly, a man warns them of the police, and the women grab their little tables and run into hiding. But not Adelina. She puts away her contraband but stands her ground. 'Go ahead,' she shouts to the police. 'Arrest me. I have another five months [of her six-month nursing period].' When the police arrive in their jeeps, she shows them her pregnancy certificate and they drive off. Throughout this brief scene, she has a look of belligerence on her pretty face. No one, not even the police, can control her.

Faithful Only once does Adelina even contemplate cheating on her husband, and that only for a good cause. When she is fed up with her husband, Carmine, because he can't perform the act, she decides to have perfunctory sex with their friend Pasquale in order to get pregnant again. She comes to this decision and tells him in a matter-of-fact manner, as if she is commissioning work from a labourer. He, though, is head over heels and begins to paw her. Then, she withdraws and tells him to stop. Crying with both humiliation and despair, she says, 'I want my Carmine!' She has been desperate enough to consider committing adultery, but she is too faithful to her husband to go through with it.

Fiery If Adelina has a flaw, it is her short-fused temper. She is harassed, of course, but she is sometimes too quick to criticise others, including her much-maligned husband. A good illustration of her fiery temperament is the scene in the prison, where Carmine visits her in a room along with many other visitors, overseen by female guards. Her fine has been paid, but because she has not yet been pardoned, she remains a prisoner. When Carmine arrives, she is frustrated and screams at him. 'You're a swine, that's what you are. The fine's paid, but I've got to serve the rest of the sentence!' Carmine says he can't wait for her to get out, so they can resume their love-making, which infuriates her even more. 'Shut up! That's just talk,' she cries. A woman full of powerful emotions, Adelina explodes into fiery anger without justification.

Carmine Carmine, her jobless husband, is a meek person, easily dominated by his spirited wife. He appears feckless, uncertain and reliant on support from his 'mama,' but later on he does show some strength of character and helps free Adelina from prison. He is certainly devoted to her and also shows good qualities in his role as the father of a large family.

Weak After six or seven births in as many years, Carmine is unable to keep up with the demands of impregnating his wife. Exhausted, he goes to his mother's house to get some sleep and advice. He looks a wreck, unshaven, hair uncombed, rumpled clothes and a weary face. Complaining to his mother, he says, 'All that [work] on a bowl of soup a day. I'm not a man of iron.' His mother agrees. 'She bleeding you dry. You are as ugly as an ape,' she says. Carmine is a weak partner to his super-woman wife.

Romantic Carmine may be passive and unable to match his wife's energy, but he is a good husband and father. More than that, he is truly in love with Adelina, and displays a romantic side, too. That quality is on show toward the end of the story when he serenades her outside the prison walls. It is a dark night, and Adelina is asleep in the maternity ward with other mothers. Suddenly, she hears singing and goes to the window, where Carmine has brought a professional singer to give her a message. 'Tell her,' he says, 'the kids are fine, I love her, the petition has been sent to Rome.' Carmine sees Adelina in the window and gestures to her as his words are being sung. It is a wonderful scene, almost out of an opera, that portrays Carmine as a romantic character.

Anna Anna is easily the least likable character in the entire film. Wife of an affluent businessman, she realises that her life is stagnant and wants to escape. She chooses a car and lover Renzo to take herself away from her empty existence. Unfortunately, she is also shallow, self-serving, hypocritical and cruel.

Lonely Anna is bored, with her life, her husband and even herself. This is conveyed during her conversation with Renzo as they drive out of Rome toward the countryside. 'There's emptiness, a vast emptiness,' she confides in him. 'I'm alone. [Even] with all the people I know, I am alone.' Normally, we would feel sympathetic toward someone so lonely, but Anna does not warrant our empathy. Although lonely, she does not know how to reach out and communicate with anyone, not even with her lover, Renzo.

Hypocritical Among her several undesirable traits, hypocrisy is paramount. All during the drive, she has been telling Renzo that she likes him because he is so unlike her rich husband for whom money is everything. At one point, she declares, 'I don't think about money. I swear.' Yet, when the car crashes, so does her pretence of loving Renzo and devaluing money. She immediately blames him for the crash because he's too low-class to know how to handle such a luxurious vehicle. 'How could anybody be so dumb!' she wonders. In a flash, she takes a ride with a 'gentleman' driving an expensive vehicle and abandons Renzo by the roadside, like an spare tire that is no longer needed. Her hypocrisy is not just devious, it is cruel.

Mara Mara, like Adelina, is a spirited woman, with high energy but also a kind heart. Like Anna, she is proud, but she is also unpretentious. Given her piety, she feels guilty, but only a little, about her trade. At the same time, she has fierce self-respect and submits to no one. A subtle blend of sensuality and morality, she embodies the complex social commentary hidden beneath the comic surface of her episode.

Sincere One of Mara's positive traits is her honesty, her lack of pretension and ego, despite her obvious glamour. This quality is shown in the long conversation with Umberto, the young man who is training to be a priest. She saunters out on to her balcony and engages him in a discussion about his routine at the seminary, its rules and restrictions. When he refuses her offer of a cigarette, she says that she once 'saw a bishop with a pipe'. She also confides in him that she'd like him to hear her confession and she mentions his black cassock. 'I love black. I wear it on top and underneath...' she begins and stops, realising that she's straying into forbidden territory. She abruptly changes the topic. And so the conversation rambles on, with Mara opening up to the young man, expressing her dreams and fears. Here, we see that she is a sincere person, who speaks as truthfully as she can.

Proud She is also a proud person, perhaps stung too many times by insults and worse from people who regard her as sinful. As an illustration of this quality, we can cite her first conversation (or slanging match) with the grandmother. The old woman curses Mara and threatens to get a petition going to have her thrown out of the building. 'Four men I counted yesterday,' she screams. 'four of them.' Mara, who is sweetly cradling a cat, defends herself, saying, 'Do you want to put a meter on me?...My clients, are quiet, well-behaved people.' Still smarting from the insult, she marches inside and plans a counter offensive. She'll buy her apartment so that she can't be thrown out by a landlady and so that 'the old witch will be stuck' with her forever. She sits down to write a letter and starts with 'Dear Madam'. Then, she shrieks, 'What is this "dear" for?' and tears up the letter. The letter is (apparently) never written or sent, but her indignation in this scene gives us a good idea of her pride.

Sympathetic Soon after the scene described above, Mara shows how tender-hearted she is. When the grandmother knocks on her door, she tells her to go away. Then, the old woman begins to cry and Mara immediately opens the door and brings her in. Even when the granny accuses her of 'ruining' her family, Mara is kind. 'Tell me what the matter is and we can put everything right,' she says in a soothing voice. Hearing the details of her grandson's spiritual promise and moral decline ('He could have become the next Pope'), she realises that her guest is seriously unhinged and proceeds to calm her down. Mara vows to get him back to the seminary, which she does. In this scene, Mara is a true saint, comforting an old woman whose sorrows threaten her sanity.

Augusto Mara's client, Augusto, is the son of a powerful politician. He is a comic figure, bumbling in his childish devotion to Mara and her sexuality. Like a child, he is impatient to satisfy his needs, but he also has the depth of character to cooperate with Mara in helping the grandmother.

Childish Augusto is not just a client, he is in love with Mara, or at least he thinks he is. He attempts to console Mara after she has been insulted by the grandmother, but she is rude to him. He says he loves her and wants to run away with her. 'Who's chasing us?' she asks dismissively. Being handed a dish to dry, he hangs his head and makes another confession: 'I don't like you going with other men. I'm jealous.' When she suggests the easiest solution is for him to marry her, he is perplexed. 'What for?' he says with his boyish grin. In this scene, he acts like a petulant child, expressing emotions, expecting sympathy in return and failing to see the answer to his problem. He doesn't want to marry because that involves mature commitment, something he has yet to acquire.

Lustful From the very beginning, Augusto is bursting at the seams with lust for his beloved Mara. All through the shenanigans with Umberto and his grandmother, Augusto is attempting to get Mara into bed, which is what he came to her apartment for in the first place. His irrepressible desire reaches a culmination, but not a climax, near the end, when Umberto has been sent back to the seminary. Now, he asks her to perform a striptease for him, just like the one he saw in Paris recently. She puts on a record and starts to undress. He jumps up on the bed, his eyes bulging and his body shaking with excitement. It is so intense, he has to cover his eyes with his hands. He giggles and screams like a young boy. He mops his sweaty brow and waits for more revelations of the flesh. In the end, he is disappointed when the saint remembers her vow of celibacy. The scene is a sensational and comic illustration of his extreme sexual desire.



(Carmine and Adelina in the first episode)



(Anna and Renzo in the second episode)



(Mara and Augusto in the last episode)