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Antonello Borra and Christina Pausini. *Italian Through Film: The Classics*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2007. 213p.

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Using the great films from the fifteen years after the end of the Second World War to teach conversational Italian is, it seems to me, problematical. It is not a matter of availability. By now most of the landmark films of the great directors, Rossellini, De Sica, De Santis, Visconti, Antonioni, Rosi, and even Olmi and Scola, have been restored and if not yet part of university libraries, they can be rented from Netflix or as a last resort, purchased from Ebay. Films like *Roma, città aperta* and *Ladri di biciclette* give impressions of Italian life like no other medium. Yet it is challenging to learn to speak Italian with the so-called classic Italian films even though their story lines are admirably concise. Details of *mise-en-scene* and contrasts among scenes and among character types as well as actors' gestures are more useful than replaying the linguistically difficult bits. Most obviously, despite careful restoration, the sound tracks are often fuzzy to the point of being unintelligible; but perhaps more critically, these films lovingly dwell on the particularity of spoken language that comes from a time before spoken Italian had become standardized by the universal diffusion of radio and television. Consequently, for political, aesthetic, and historical reasons, many characters in neorealist and political-documentary films speak in dialects that are often difficult to understand, as characters from a Spike Lee movie might be for students of English.

So is the project of *Italian Through Film: The Classics*, a sequel to Professors Borra and Pausini's *Italian through Film: A Text for Italian Courses* slanted more towards culture than language? That will depend on who is designing the course. Mechanics of language acquisition are well covered. As in their earlier book, *Italian Through Film: A Text for Italian Courses*, films are well presented with fairly simple introductory essays and vocabularies followed by exercises (with answer key) that test whether students can discuss the main elements of each film. Further exercises and suggestions for skits, discussions, free essays, and research provide opportunities to drill words and concepts and to learn more about the directors and their times. At the end of each chapter is an exemplary excerpt or essay by a director or one of his or her contemporaries with comprehension questions that may compensate for the often poor auditory and nonliterary qualities of the films' dialogues. Everything is pulled together in several well-organized lesson plans included in the book's introduction. But it seems to me that only advanced university students will really "get" the films, and only with a lot of work on the part of the instructor and through well

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guided and carefully researched projects presented by individuals or groups, will they appreciate and understand what it was like to live (and speak) in Italy during the post-war period. It is up to the instructor to propose an Italian grammar and choose supplementary exercises as needed and to suggest stylistic and thematic connections among the films.

The authors wisely suggest that their book can be used to supplement lower-level and intermediate courses or as the basic text, along with an Italian grammar, for a stand-alone upper-level or adult education courses covering one or two semesters. Fifteen films are presented in individual chapters: *Roma, città aperta*, *Ladri di biciclette*, *Riso amaro*, *I vitelloni*, *I soliti ignoti*, *Rocco e i suoi fratelli*, *La notte*, *Divorzio all'italiana*, *Il posto*, *La commare secca*, *Il sorpasso*, *Il decameron*, *Mimi metallurgico ferito nell'onore*, *Una giornata particolare*, and *Tre Fratelli*. Of these all but two, *Il sorpasso* and *Riso amaro*, have been converted to Region 1 DVDs. It almost goes without saying that there is a wealth of critical literature treating these films. The extensive bibliography lists biographies for the directors and several standard histories and studies of relevant topics such as the place of women in society, divorce, and the mafia. Most of these books have an extra pedagogical benefit: since they will not be in individual university libraries, students will have to learn how to use the interlibrary loan service.

The prospect of designing an Italian language course devoted to “classic” Italian film is now more exciting than daunting. Professors Borra and Pausini’s text covers the essentials of language learning while granting the instructor freedom in tailoring such a course to his or her own interests. In sum, everyone will be able to say much more about these treasures of Italian film than before. Thank you to Borra and Pausini! ✱