

Silvio Soldini's *Bread and Tulips* (*Pane e tulipani*, 2000) represents the best romantic comedy produced by the Italian cinema in recent decades. Unlike the traditional *commedia all'italiana*, this film employs lesser-known faces rather than the traditional comic masks identified with the actors and actresses of the 1960s–80s, and the film swept the 2000 Italian film awards, winning nine David di Donatello prizes in virtually every category. The formula for the film's plot represents no particular innovation: the emotional and passionate rebirth of a middle-aged, neglected housewife named Rosalba (Licia Maglietta), who plays so small a role in her family's life that she is accidentally left behind by them on a vacation trip. After deciding to take her own vacation by herself in Venice, she meets up with a goofy Icelandic waiter named Fernando (played by the veteran Bruno Ganz) who periodically threatens suicide, falls in love with Rosalba, declaims Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, and encourages Rosalba to fulfill her lifetime dream of playing the accordion. Soldini manages to create a believable cast of lovable and eccentric characters who engage our sympathy without allowing the picturesque quality of the location, Venice, to take over the film. Ultimately Fernando borrows an old delivery van and drives all the way to Rosalba's native Pescara to reclaim her with a bouquet of flowers and a romantic citation from Ariosto in his strange accent, carrying her back to Venice and to a life of playing the accordion.

at local dancehalls, but most of all, back to a life filled with passion and excitement, even in middle age.

Davide Ferrario's *After Midnight* (*Dopo mezzanotte*, 2004) combines a similar thirst for real romance in an otherwise drab existence in Turin with a metacinematic subplot. Instead of mature, middle-aged protagonists, Ferrario focuses upon young people working in dead-end jobs, or even as car thieves. Martino (Giorgio Pasotti) works during the nights as the caretaker of Turin's stupendous Museo Nazionale del Cinema, which is housed in the Mole Antonelliana, a unique building rising to a height of 113 meters. (The Mole had been designed to be the Jewish Synagogue of Turin shortly after Italy was unified in the nineteenth century and before the capital of the new nation became not Turin, the capital of the Kingdom of Savoy, but Rome.) Martino is the incarnation of the mannerisms and comic behavior of his idol, Buster Keaton, and in fact, clips from Keaton's *One Week* and *The Scarecrow* (both shot in 1920) are employed by Ferrario to highlight Martino's character. Keaton is an appropriate choice, since it is not commonly known that Keaton's last film was an Italian comedy made by Luigi Scattini (1927–) entitled *Two Marines and a General*, a.k.a. *War Italian Style* (*Due marines e un generale*, 1966), in which Keaton paired up with the zany Italian comic team of Franco Franchi and Ciccio Ingrassia in a send-up of World War II.¹⁸ One of Ferrario's goals in *After Midnight* is to suggest that the rich heritage of silent film, now housed in the Turin museum's substantial archives, may still provide the fertile ground to inspire contemporary filmmaking. Ferrario pairs Keaton's works with an Italian silent classic, Giovanni Pastrone's *The Fire* (*Il fuoco—la favilla, la vampa, la cenere*, 1916), a film about a passionate love affair that stands in contrast to the relationship between Martino and Amanda (Francesca Inaudi), a proletarian employee at a hamburger joint in Turin who meets Martino after she has thrown the hot grease from the french-fry cooker at her arrogant employer and takes refuge from the police in the museum. Her car-thief boyfriend "Angel," a.k.a. Angelo (Fabio Troiano), complicates matters, and Ferrario's narrative turns into a homage to the *ménage à trois* of Truffaut's *Jules and Jim* (*Jules et Jim*, 1962), the New Wave classic. The role played by the first Fibonacci numbers displayed on one side of the four-sided dome of the Mole Antonelliana gives Ferrario's plot further complexity. These numbers, named after an Italian mathematician (c. 1180–c. 1250), introduce a sequence of numbers beginning with 0 and 1; thereafter each new number in the series is equal to the sum of the previous two: thus 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, and so on. Ferrario suggests that the Fibonacci numbers reflect a kind of universal connection among all sorts of things—natural phenomena, music, economics, and of course human relationships. *After Midnight*'s metacinematic subplot represents yet another use of this theme in the contemporary Italian cinema, while his presentation of the Fibonacci numbers as a mysterious explanation of