

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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MARRIAGE ITALIAN STYLE 1964 (*Filumena Marturano; aka Matrimonio all'italiana*) Vittorio De Sica

OVERVIEW *Marriage Italian Style* continued the director's collaboration with Sophia Loren and Marcello Mastroianni, who also starred in his previous film (*Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*). This later film contains the comic flavour of the previous one but tells a more complicated story about marriage, sexuality and Italian law. The story itself was taken from a stage play, which also generated an earlier screen adaptation in 1951. Relayed largely through flashbacks, De Sica's film exposes negative attitudes toward women in general and prostitutes in particular. Again, the director's clever mixture of comedy with drama and social commentary makes this an accomplished and enjoyable film. It was well received by critics and the public, though it did not win any major awards.

SYNOPSIS Filumena, a house servant, is lying on her deathbed in the house of her employer, Domenico. In her dying moments, she arranges a marriage with him. Although he has a young fiancé elsewhere, he consents because she has been his lover for a long time. Then, through a series of flashbacks, we see that Filumena first met Domenico when she was a young prostitute and fell in love with him. Over the years, she becomes his mistress and business manager, but never his wife. Back in the present, Filumena has finally achieved that status by faking her illness and is very much alive and in control of his household. Domenico manages to get the marriage annulled, but then she reveals that she has three children and that one of them is his. After a lot of anger and mistrust, they finally fall into each other's arms and marry a second time. The three boys accept Domenico as their father, even though no one, it seems, knows which son is his.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Filumena	Filumena is a prostitute who becomes a mistress, servant and then wife of Domenico.
Domenico	Domenico owns a thriving patisserie in Naples.
Alfredo	One of Domenico's servants.

STORY

Filumena and Domenico A taxi rushes down crowded streets in Naples, screeches to a halt and a woman, looking deathly ill, is carried into a large house. Everyone is concerned for her. 'I knew this would happen,' a woman says. 'She worked too hard. Poor Filumena. Where is Domenico? He's always absent when we need him.' Filumena is a maid in Domenico's house, and Domenico is a successful businessman. This grim opening is followed by a happy scene of Domenico and his young fiancé selecting her wedding dress.

Call a priest A house servant is sent to fetch Domenico from his restaurant, where the fiancé works as a cashier. Rushing home, Domenico is told by a doctor that Filumena's condition is serious. He is very worried and goes to her bedside, where he tries to comfort her, saying he's called for another doctor. But she says, 'No doctor. I want a priest.' The whole household, with its army of servants, contemplates the worst.

Meeting (Flashback 1) As a seventeen-year-old prostitute, Filumena meets a young Domenico in a bordello when an air raid forces all the ladies and their customers to scurry out of the building half-dressed. Nonchalant Domenico takes his time, putting on his coat and tie. Filumena also hesitates to leave because she is ashamed of being seen as a prostitute. With the building shaking from bombs, and their lives in danger, he protects her. From a momentary glance, she falls in love with him and he realises that they have created a bond.

Reunion (Flashback 2) Some years later, after the war, they meet again by chance in Naples, where she is still a prostitute but has risen up the ranks and has better customers. Soon, he is her only client and takes her on day outings but never to public events or places. She is hurt by his unwillingness to publicly acknowledge their relationship and tells him she wants to end their affair.

Not willing to let her go, he installs her as his mistress in her own flat with a balcony and two servants. She revels in her new status as 'Signora, the lady of the house' and dreams of a married life. But Domenico makes it clear that she is his mistress only.

Friction Because he is often away on business trips, Filumena becomes a de facto manager of his restaurant. She confronts him again with her wish to get married. When she claims that he doesn't love her, he points out everything he's done for her and them. She is only mollified when he takes her home to meet his mother.

His mother She is very old and ill and has been told that Filumena is from a rich family in Naples. Filumena stays in the family house as the mother's nurse, with the task of handling her bed pan. Crucially, she does not share a bedroom with Domenico. When the mother dies and Domenico hosts a wake in his house, he forbids Filumena to join the mourners, even to bring a tray of coffee. One day, Filumena comes to the restaurant and sees Domenico kissing the new cashier.

Back to the present: marriage The priest comes out of the sick room with a heavy heart. A moment later, he puts on his vestments and has Domenico kneel at the bedside, as if he is about to conduct the last rites for Filumena. Instead, he conducts a brief marriage ceremony. Shocked but unable to protest, Domenico says 'I do.'

Tricked Domenico calls his fiancé, the cashier, and explains that 'it won't be long before the poor woman dies.' Suddenly, Filumena appears, full of health, and screams that she is alive and they are husband and wife. He is furious at being tricked, but she explains that she was fed up with his philandering and now there is nothing he can do.

Secret Children (Flashback 3) This time, we see the past through Filumena's eyes. She is working at the bordello when she gets a phone call and hurries to a farmhouse outside the city. Inside, a young child is crying. It is her child, whom she has given to another family to look after, without telling Domenico anything. Then, we find out that she has two more children, whom she also loves and who are also being raised in other families.

Revelation Having been tricked into marriage, Domenico says he will 'destroy' Filumena and all the servants for their wicked betrayal. During a heated argument, Filumena tells Domenico about her three children. They are not his, she says, but she wants them to have his family name, which is her name: Soriano. That's why she married him. She also proceeds to rearrange the house, taking over his dead mother's bedroom since she is now 'the lady of the house' and setting up a room for her children.

Annulment Domenico summons his lawyer, who explains that their marriage is not legal because it was based on her faked illness. However, in one of the illogicalities of Italian law (which De Sica liked to expose), if she had died, she would have died a married woman. Although Filumena accepts the annulment, she invites her three sons to visit the house. Aged twenty, seventeen and twelve, they know that the lady of house was a man's mistress but they know nothing about their parentage.

Mystery son Now, she introduces herself to them as their mother. She explains how she was brought up in a slum and became a prostitute as a way to make money. After they all accept her as their mother, she tells Domenico that one of the three is his son (contradicting what she told him earlier), but she won't say which one.

Settling accounts Finally, one more revelation. On the day that his son was conceived he paid her the usual 100 lira note for her services. She wrote the date on it and kept it. Now she returns it, having torn off the piece with the date, saying, 'No charge for a son.' Then, she leaves him and the house.

Domenico's search One afternoon at the race track, Domenico thinks he sees his son but can't be sure. Desperate to find out which son is his, Domenico tracks down Filumena, but she refuses to help him. Next, Domenico visits each son individually, and incognito, and looks for similarities. He meets Filumena in a lonely spot in the countryside and demands to know which one is his. She again refuses, saying that if he knew and supported that one only, it would divide her sons. They argue, struggle and end up on the ground. They kiss, and her love for him is rekindled.

Wedding The next scene takes place in a church, where Domenico and the three boys wait for Filumena to arrive for their wedding ceremony. Again, he tries to discover which boy is his by having them sing, but they blend their voices together. After the ceremony, the family of five take up

residence in the house. When the boys leave the newly-weds, the older ones address Domenico by his formal name, while the youngest one says, 'Bye, Papa.' The other two repeat it, making Filumena cry with happiness.

THEMES

1. Marriage The primary theme of this enjoyable film is the paramount importance of marriage in Italian society. The story is essentially one woman's struggle to have her intimate relationship with the man she loves legitimised in the eyes of the public by becoming his wife. At the beginning, we sense that the young Filumena is in love with Domenico, while he is merely attached to her sexually, although that attachment is strong and grows stronger. At various points, Filumena expresses her desire to be seen in public with him and to become the 'lady of the house.' However, the only position she occupies in his life is nurse to his old mother and manager of his patisserie. Resourceful to her fingertips, she manages to trick him into marrying her on her supposed deathbed. Now, she has what she wants, but wait a minute. Italian law, often the villain in De Sica's films, rescues Domenico through clause 144b of the penal code, which declares invalid any marriage secured through fraud. She accepts the annulment but plays another card, which also depends on marriage. Because marriage would legitimise her three children and bring them the status of Domenico's family's name, she tells him that she has three sons. Eventually, she adds that one of them is his. Desperate to find out which one, Domenico is drawn back into her orbit, which results in them marrying for a second time. If at first you don't succeed, marry him again!

2. Gender Threaded through these somewhat comical shenanigans about marriage is a sharp satire on conventional Italian attitudes about women and sex. At the time of the film, and to a certain extent now, a clear double-standard existed: men could enjoy guilt-free sex with any woman, whereas respectable women should be virgins until marriage and remain faithful to her husband afterward. In this respect, the film enlarges on a similar theme in the third segment of De Sica's previous film (*Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*). Domenico takes his sexual pleasure with Filumena but does not allow her to enter his public or family life. She does move up the ladder from whore to mistress to nurse and manager, but, for him, she remains a woman whom you pay for services. After she pulls off the first marriage by deceit, she explains his sexist behaviour to him. Widespread sexist attitudes have branded her immoral, while he escaped all social ostracism. Sex-workers are tolerated but not acknowledged in upper-class society, which has meant that she couldn't tell her sons that she was their mother. What son would want to know that his mother was a prostitute? She fell into prostitution as a young girl in the slums, with no other way to make money. In this largely light-hearted film, De Sica asks Italians to look at themselves in the mirror and own up to their deeply rooted sexist attitudes.

3. Love

Throughout the film, it is clear that Filumena is in love with Domenico. Even if he does not return her love, and treats her as a paid companion, she does not swerve from her fierce passion for him. Even when she becomes angry at his mistreatment of her, and even when she says she wants to leave him, she is still enthralled by him. In fact, the totality of her romantic commitment is what makes her so miserable and then so furious with Domenico. In the final third of the film, after she has fooled him and accepts the annulment, we may think she has fallen out of love with him. But the final scene, when they wrestle on the ground and he kisses her, proves us wrong. No matter what happens, what he says or that he does, she remains in love with him.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Filumena Filumena is a complex character, with different qualities revealed at different points in her story as she graduates from young prostitute to middle-aged mistress. She was born in the slums and took to prostitution out of necessity, engendering in her a life-long desire to gain social respectability. She is vulnerable but also shrewd and resourceful. At the end, she displays powerful emotions of love, revenge and forgiveness.

Vulnerable In the first flashback, we see Filumena as a seventeen-year-old girl, who has taken to prostitution to make some money. During an air raid (it's the 1940s), Domenico discovers her cowering in a closet. He urges her to join him and the others in the underground shelter, but she says, 'No, I can't. The whole town is down there. I'm ashamed.' As the bombs fall, she becomes more frightened and keeps repeating, 'I'm afraid, I'm afraid.' She is caught between her fear of being killed by the bombs and her fear of being identified as a hooker. The scene ends when, frightened to

death by another bomb, she collapses, grabs hold of his legs and looks into his handsome face with the love-struck eyes of an innocent girl. Here is the core of her character. She has a sense of dignity but she is vulnerable and needs a protector.

Grateful From that moment onward, her life changes, becoming Domenico's favourite, almost like a mistress. She wears nice clothes and jewellery, and holds her head up high. We understand the depth of her gratitude to Domenico in a brief scene, during the second flashback, when they are sitting in his shiny, new red car. When he says he wants to take her to the race track tomorrow, she gasps and cries, 'You just said the most beautiful thing in the world. You want to take me out with you. I'd be like a lady.' This is her life-long aspiration to leave behind her life as a prostitute and be recognised in society as a respectable woman. Domenico has chosen to take her to the race track when there are no races, but she doesn't know that yet. For the moment, she is immensely grateful.

Hurt Although she has become the favourite of a rich man and wears nice clothes, Filumena begins to resent being just a mistress. She expresses her hurt feelings in a scene late one night, when Domenico drives her back to the bordello. Parked in the dark street, she pouts and complains about his treatment of her. He says he does go away but always returns to her. With her eyes flashing in anger, she says, 'I wish you'd stay away for good. I wish the whole thing was over.' After being his lover for so long, she feels she deserves better, that he should show his affection, if not love, in some public way. She is angry, but underneath is the pain she feels.

Shrewd Driven by her desire for respectability, Filumena devises a clever plot to achieve it by marriage to Domenico. She fakes an illness, calls a priest and has him conduct an 'emergency' wedding at the side of her deathbed. Domenico is surprised but thinks she will die soon, allowing him to marry a much younger woman. Her moment of triumph comes when she overhears Domenico talking to his fiancé on the telephone. 'No, it won't be long,' he says. 'The poor woman is dying.' Then she appears before him and announces, 'The poor woman isn't dead after all!' She is very much alive, married to Domenico and lady of the house, the goal she has sought for twenty-two years. Although her triumph is later deflated by the niceties of Italian law, she has pulled off a shrewd manoeuvre to hoodwink the exasperating Domenico.

Proud In one of the film's most moving scenes, Filumena confronts Domenico in his house. After the annulment of their fraudulent marriage, she tells him that one of her three sons is his, but she won't say which one. He says he doesn't care and tells her to get out of his house. Before she leaves, she says she has 'a little account' she wants to settle with him. From a locket hanging around her neck, she extracts the 100 lira note that he paid her on the night that his son was conceived, many years ago. Back then she wrote the date on the note. Now, she carefully tears off that part before throwing the crumpled note in his direction. 'No charge for a son,' she says in cold anger. Filumena is too proud to accept money for impregnating her with a son.

Domenico Domenico is domineering, flippant, self-assured and arrogant. A good-looking and successful business man, he treats people as his servants and the world as his fiefdom. He may show kindness, and even affection, but only when it is convenient. If he were aware of his insensitivity, he might regret it, but even that is not certain. At the end, he does display some tenderness towards the boys who might be his son.

Blasé Domenico cuts a cool figure. Even during the chaos of the bombing raid, he remains unflappable. The bombs are falling, the building is shaking, and the girls and their customers are fleeing half-dressed to the underground shelter. But Domenico slowly dresses himself, neatens his tie and stops to look at a photograph of Italian soldiers in the Great War of 1914-1918. He goes closer and says, 'How the devil can you expect to win a war with people dressed like that?' Next, he calmly closes the shutters and turns off the phonograph before proceeding to the door. This is quintessential Domenico, blasé, confident and flippant.

Insensitive He is also insensitive, especially toward Filumena, the young girl he protected in the bordello that night and later made his mistress. The list of his sins toward her is long, but one particular example illustrates his cruelty better than most. He announces that he wants to take her to 'the race track,' which pleases her immensely since it means she will be seen with him in polite society. However, when they arrive at the track, there is no crowd, polite or otherwise, because there are no races. 'There are no races on Tuesday,' he says casually and without apology. 'But it's more beautiful. More poetic,' he adds, pointing to the countryside visible beyond the empty track. It is a cruel trick, making her think she would be seen with him in a big social event. He did it deliberately,

raising and then dashing her hopes.

Misogynistic It goes without saying that the charming and arrogant Domenico is a misogynist, but sometimes he surpasses our expectations in that department. He is livid when he realises that Filumena has tricked him into marrying her. The two of them engage in a shouting match in the kitchen, trading insults and accusations. 'Nobody but your kind of woman would have done what you've done,' he says. 'A woman like you, all you do is pay her. You don't marry her.' This is the essence of the film. Domenico pays people for services, servants, employees and prostitutes. Even after twenty-two years, he regards Filumena as someone he pays for his sexual gratification.



(The 'newly-weds' shouting in the kitchen)



(Filumena and Domenico at the empty race track)



(The second, and legal, wedding ceremony)