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Analysis Paper 3

After World War II, the American society went through drastic changes, becoming one of the world’s superpowers from a previously non-influential country. While America experienced booming economic growth and rapid social changes, Italy was struggling to rebuild after the war and was still following social customs from decades earlier. The traditional customs of the island Sicily are scrutinized in Pietro Germi’s film, *Divorce Italian Style.* At this time in Sicily, divorce was illegal, leading people to find other means to get out of unhappy marriages. The escape route showcased in Germi’s film is murder. Germi examines the cyclical nature of Sicilian society, however, there are a few points in the film where Sicilian culture is regarded warmly. The film also depicts how the Sicilian citizens, especially the women, have fallen victim to the outdated laws that were still in place.

Through the course of the film, Fefe is able to plot his murder of Rosalia by mimicking the way a women murdered her husband for cheating on her. He is also able to imagine what his lawyer will say in his defense, and what the jury will think, at his trial. For example, he acknowledges his missed opportunity to murder Rosalia, however he chooses not to kill her there. He knows that the jury will be more understanding if it is a “crime of passion” and not premeditated, even though the entire plot is. The fact that Fefe is able to predict how the jury will perceive his actions shows the cyclical nature of Sicilian society. Honor killings have happened in the past and they will continue to happen in the future. The audience is given a clue that Fefe might suffer the same fate as his late wife, when the camera pans down to show Angela rubbing her foot against that of the sailor. Given the nature of the Sicilian society, the audience can almost be certain that Fefe will be subjected to the same end as Rosalia.

Germi depicts the repetitive nature of Sicilian society in a tragic manner, however the pride shown by the characters in their home, presents Sicily in a positive light. In the opening shot, Fefe is returning from jail, riding on a train through Sicily. Although the film is shot in black and white, it is easy to see that the landscape is nearly barren. Yet when Fefe talks of his homeland, the tone of his voice is nostalgic and loving. Although the audience sees a bare countryside, Fefe sees his home. Germi shows that, even though his life was miserable, Fefe is still fond of his home. The citizens in Sicily will not leave, simply because it is there home. This quality is also shown in Fefe’s father. He had to sell everything to pay off his gambling debts, even part of his home. He did not, however, sell the family crest. Germi latches on to the pride of their home instilled into the Sicilian people to show the positive sides of the culture.

Although the Sicilians have pride in their homeland, they are also victimized and exploited by the societal norms. The women living in Sicily are more susceptible to this than the men. In the Italian family there is an “overt identification between female chastity and family honor” (Giovannini 408). Women are burdened with holding the family honor, and are punished if this honor is lost. In the film, when Angela’s father believes that she is having an affair, he takes extreme measures to ensure she is still a virgin. He has a midwife brought in to examine her and then ships Angela back to her all girls school, away from any potential lovers.

The maid of the palace, Sisina, is also a victim of the patriarchal society. Every move she makes is interpreted by Fefe’s father as a attempt at seduction. However, she is simply trying to work. He is always groping her and making lewd comments towards Sisina. Even when Sisina complains to his wife, she simply tells her not to bend over any more (Germi). Because she is a woman, Sisina must simply give in to being tormented and objectified. She is also victimized by Carmelo. He leads her to believe that he is interested in her and could possibly love her. However, she finds out that he is not only married, but has three children with his wife. Then Sisina is made to feel like she is the adulteress, even though it is Rosalia who is having the affair with Carmelo.

Angela and Sisina are not the only female characters victimized by the patriarchal system of Sicily. Rosalia is also exploited by the male dominated nature of this society. Once Fefe decides that he will try and find Rosalia a lover, he shamelessly parades her around displaying her hips and shoulders to the men of Sicily when they go to the theatre. Sisina is blatantly put on display by her husband, yet she is unaware of his plot. She feels guilty that she is contemplating cheating, however her our husband is the mastermind behind her entire affair. The Sicilian system also is against Rosalia since her husband is allowed to kill her for having an affair. Even though Angela and Sisina are victimized, Rosalia ends up dead as a result of the patriarchal laws in Sicilian society.

The patriarchal system in Sicily does not only exploit the women in the society; the men of Sicily fall victim as well. In the Italian family, the “man’s responsibility is to provide for the material needs of his family” (Giovannini 409). The men in this film have clearly not successfully provided for their family. Fefe’s family lives in an empty palace with only the family crest and the title ‘baron’ left to remind them of their fortune. The system is not as harsh on males as it is on females, who are kept hidden behind shuttered windows, however the men still suffer if they are unable to provide for their families.

The people of Sicily may have pride in their homeland, however the patriarchal system of laws has negative impacts on all of its citizens. The women are forced to remain chaste and bare the burden of upholding the family’s honor, while being harassed by the men around them. The men are forced to provide and protect their family, especially the purity of the women. The worst consequence of the patriarchal system in place is its repetitive nature. As long as divorce is illegal, the people will continue to try and find other ways out of the marriage. Most of them will murder their spouse either to preserve their honor, like Carmelo’s wife, or to marry another, like Fefe. The patriarchal system of Sicily victimized all of its citizens and forced them into a vicious cycle of marriage and murder.

**Bibliography**

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