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Silvia Angeli

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## The Ultimate Freedom? Suicide as 'Exit Strategy' in Marco Bellocchio's *Il regista di matrimoni* (2006) and *Sorelle Mai* (2010)

Silvia Angeli 

University of Westminster, Harrow, UK

### ABSTRACT

This article examines the portrayal of suicide in two films by Marco Bellocchio, *Il regista di matrimoni* (2006) and *Sorelle Mai* (2010). I first suggest that voluntary death represents in Bellocchio's work an 'exit strategy' that allows his characters to overcome an existential and ideological deadlock. I then turn to the implications of such a radical gesture, situating it within the millennia-old debates surrounding the topic of suicide. Finally, I examine the two case studies, teasing out their cultural, social, and political significance. In *Il regista di matrimoni*, the character's suicide is targeted at disrupting the clientelist system governing Italian cultural life. In *Sorelle Mai*, the suicidal character opts instead for a spectacular self-sacrifice, for an ending that is also a return to his origins. Overall, in Bellocchio's films, suicide comes to be a locus of tension and resolution, a marriage of opposite impulses marked by ambiguity and undecidability.

### SOMMARIO

Questo articolo prende in esame la rappresentazione del suicidio in due film di Marco Bellocchio: *Il regista di matrimoni* (2006) e *Sorelle Mai* (2010). Motivo ricorrente nella filmografia del regista, la problematica relativa al suicidio ha tuttavia ricevuto scarsa attenzione dalla critica a livello accademico. È mio proposito rilevare in che modo la morte volontaria rappresenti nell'opera di Bellocchio una via di fuga che permette ai personaggi il superamento di uno stallo esistenziale e ideologico. Considero poi le implicazioni di un gesto così radicale, contestualizzandolo nelle teorie sviluppatesi da millenni su tale argomento, ed evidenziando la complessità e l'ambiguità che lo caratterizzano. Infine, prendo in esame i due film, sottolineandone il significato culturale, sociale e politico. Ne *Il regista di matrimoni*, il suicidio di uno dei personaggi mira a scuotere il sistema clientelare che governa la vita culturale italiana, reclamando il doveroso riconoscimento a opere di valore come quella da lui prodotta. In *Sorelle Mai*, il personaggio opta invece per un'autoimmolazione spettacolare, aspirando a tornare all'autenticità originaria dell'ambiente in cui è nato e vissuto. In ultima analisi, il suicidio in Bellocchio configura un momento di tensione e risoluzione, punto di convergenza di impulsi opposti, caratterizzati da ambivalenza e indecifrabilità.

### KEYWORDS

Marco Bellocchio; Italian cinema; suicide; personal freedom; protest; *Il regista di matrimoni*; *Sorelle Mai*

### PAROLE CHIAVE

Marco Bellocchio; cinema italiano; suicidio; libertà personale; dissenso; *Il regista di matrimoni*; *Sorelle Mai*

**CONTACT** Silvia Angeli  S.Angeli1@westminster.ac.uk

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## Introduction

One of the most enduring themes in the work of Marco Bellocchio is the contestation of authority figures and powerful institutions. In his films, individuals find themselves at odds with their larger society, engaging in micro- or macro-level acts of rebellion against the establishment. Such contestations are, at least in the director's early works, doomed to fail,<sup>1</sup> often producing what have been considered rather tragic outcomes. On this note, Armando Maggi observes that 'it is fair to say that Bellocchio's cinema is thematically monotonous. It is a "cinema della crudeltà" ("cinema of cruelty") that stages a "trauma" and a reactive "gesto sacrilego" ("sacrilegious gesture") that attains no solution and finds in folly its sole possible outcome'.<sup>2</sup>

While folly is by no means the only possible outcome, it is fair to say that Bellocchio's films – populated as they are by a number of characters who descend into madness or even take their own lives – comprise a constellation of unfortunate personal trajectories. However, if on the one hand the director stages enterprises of quixotic proportions and unresolvable conflicts that lead to ideological and existential deadlocks, on the other he also provides his characters with a way out. In particular, Bellocchio conceives three 'exit strategies' for his characters: suicide, descent into madness, and a creative transformation of history through the use of oneiric sequences. While it could certainly be objected that none of these approaches is particularly productive, each nevertheless creates cracks in the horizons of power, suggesting alternative modes of existence and social organisation.

Examples of the three types of exit appear throughout Bellocchio's filmography. Indeed, his cinema is riddled with characters who suffer from mental illness, a central theme in works like *Matti da slegare* (*Fit to Be Untied*, 1975) that also figures in his 1999 adaptation of Luigi Pirandello's novella *La balia* (*The Nanny*, 1999), *L'ora di religione* (*The Religion Hour/My Mother's Smile*, 2002), and *Vincere* (2009).

Similarly, oneiric sequences have been a staple of Bellocchio's cinema since *Vacanze in Val Trebbia* (*Vacation in Val Trebbia*, 1979), arguably a result of the influence of the director's encounter with psychoanalyst Massimo Fagioli in 1977.<sup>3</sup> Their use is particularly effective in *Buongiorno, notte* (*Good Morning, Night*, 2003) and *Sangue del mio sangue* (*Blood of my Blood*, 2015), two films that marry historical reconstructions with fictional elements. In both works, these sequences see the two imprisoned protagonists – Christian Democrat Aldo Moro and the young nun Benedetta – defying circumstances and fleeing their confinement, envisioning not only a different path for themselves but also a radical transformation of history.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, suicides and attempted suicides are featured in a large number of Bellocchio's films: *Nel nome del padre* (*In the Name of the Father*, 1971), *Salto nel vuoto* (*A Leap in the Dark*, 1980), *Gli occhi, la bocca* (*The Eyes, the Mouth*, 1982), *Diavolo in corpo* (*Devil in the Flesh*, 1986), *Il regista di matrimoni* (*The Wedding Director*, 2006), *Sorelle Mai* (*The Sisters Mai*, 2010), *Bella addormentata* (*Sleeping Beauty*, 2012), *Sangue del mio sangue*, and *Fai bei sogni* (*Sweet Dreams*, 2016).<sup>5</sup>

In spite of its being one of the most frequently recurring motifs in Bellocchio's cinema, the question of suicide in his films has received strikingly little critical and scholarly attention. The reason behind this gap might be linked to the fact that these self-killings are generally relegated to the background. Indeed, with a few notable

exceptions that include this article's case studies, suicides in Bellocchio's cinema tend to happen off-screen and are only tangentially relevant to the main narrative. It is hardly ever the films' protagonists who take their own lives; instead, it is usually a secondary character. However, this scholarly lacuna may also belie a certain reluctance to engage with the complex, layered, and ambivalent topic of voluntary death. In fact, 'a climate of discomfort' – to borrow Georges Minois's phrase<sup>6</sup> – surrounds the question.

Truthfully, the director has never made a mystery of the deeply personal reasons behind such thematic reoccurrences, observing in interviews how deeply he was affected by his twin brother Camillo's suicide in 1968, an event he addresses in his most recent film, *Marx può aspettare* (*Marx Can Wait*, 2021).<sup>7</sup> However, it would be reductive to ascribe Bellocchio's interest in suicide merely to reasons of biography. For the director, there is something else at stake in such a radical gesture – namely, the very notion of personal freedom and self-determination. Indeed, as Clodagh Brook notes, Bellocchio's filmography hinges on 'the complex issues surrounding the interrelationship of the public and the private, the political and the personal, the collective and the individual'.<sup>8</sup> Bellocchio's interest in voluntary death is hardly surprising, then, because suicide is a gesture that straddles these spheres. Not only is it an act of defiance and self-affirmation, which holds great fascination for Bellocchio, but it also allows him to dramatise complex questions like the relationship between past and present and the cultural and political paralysis gripping Italian society. It is something that transcends personal trajectories to illuminate larger ethical and social issues; as such, it is not merely a personal choice but a quintessentially political one.

Given the necessarily limited scope of a journal article, I focus here on Bellocchio's portrayal of suicide in two films, where the contrast between personal and political is more explicitly foregrounded: *Il regista di matrimoni* and *Sorelle Mai*.<sup>9</sup> There are numerous points of contact between the two works. They share a leading actress, Donatella Finocchiaro, who plays Bona in the former and Sara in the latter. Additionally, both are highly elliptical and intertextual works. In particular, *Il regista di matrimoni* makes repeated and explicit reference to Alessandro Manzoni's novel *I promessi sposi* (*The Betrothed*) and its 1941 cinematographic adaptation by Mario Camerini.<sup>10</sup> *Sorelle Mai*, for its part, quotes from the likes of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Most importantly for the purpose of this article, however, both films depict an on-screen suicide. The first section of the article examines the question of suicide, highlighting the complexity and ambiguity that characterise such a radical gesture, and the portrayal of self-killing in Bellocchio's works. I then turn to the article's two case studies, where I analyse the communicative functions of the two suicides by teasing out their cultural, social, and political significance. Given that the main aim of the article is to delve into the reasons behind the two acts and how they are indicative of Bellocchio's position on the topic, my analysis – while duly taking into account the films' mise-en-scène and soundtrack, and the pronounced symbolism that characterises the suicidal sequences – privileges their characters and dialogue.

### **'Better Disappear': The Question of Suicide**

In the opening sequence of Bellocchio's 1986 film *Diavolo in corpo*, we see a woman walking on the roof of a building, talking to herself and lashing out in desperation. Fearing that she

might jump, a neighbour tries to dissuade her: 'Miss, please calm down. Look at me! I'm a Catholic priest. [...] Miss, Christ said that our life isn't ours, but God's. You can't cut it short!'<sup>11</sup> These words contrast sharply to those spoken by another of Bellocchio's characters, Uncle Nigi, in an early sequence of *Gli occhi, la bocca*. Nigi tells his nephew Giovanni, who is feeling guilty over his twin's death: 'Pippo committed suicide because he wanted to, in absolute freedom. Luckily, this freedom still exists. [...] Suicide is a right to defend at all costs!'

These opposing views well summarise the millennia-old debates surrounding voluntary death. Indeed, even the quickest review of the historical perspectives on suicide cannot help but reveal the extent of disagreement around the subject and the range of different attitudes towards it displayed in Western societies and their legal, political, and religious institutions. Traditionally, such discord has followed two lines of thought: the first is a more mystical–spiritual perspective that often coincides with the Judeo-Christian tradition and sees suicide as an aberration, a cowardly evasion of one's responsibilities to both God and one's community. The other, more libertarian approach, allows for – and sometimes even prescribes, as among the ancient Greeks and Romans – the possibility of taking one's own life.<sup>12</sup> In the words of Minois:

On rare occasions acclaimed as an act of heroism, suicide has more often been subject to social reprobation because it was considered an insult to God, who gave us life, and to society, which provides for the well-being of its members. Refusing God's gift and the company of our fellows at the banquet of life is a dual offense that the agents of religion, who dispense divine largesse, and those of politics, who organize the social banquet, find intolerable.<sup>13</sup>

And, while it is true that, over the course of the centuries, there has been a shift from a more intransigent to a more flexible attitude towards voluntary death and from viewing it a sin and a crime to considering it a mental health issue,<sup>14</sup> self-killings continue to baffle.

The complexity surrounding the act itself has prompted scholars working in suicidology – an eclectic and slightly anarchic field of inquiry, which draws from a variety of disciplines including sociology, psychology, medicine, and literature – to approach voluntary death as a multi-dimensional, multi-faceted phenomenon, 'an interplay of individual, relationship, social, cultural, and environmental factors', as Antoon Leenaars puts it.<sup>15</sup> Attempts to understand and classify suicidal acts have been numerous, starting with French sociologist Émile Durkheim's groundbreaking 1897 study *Suicide*, in which he categorises the varying forms of self-killings as egoistic, fatalistic, anomic, or altruistic.<sup>16</sup>

As Eva Kuttenburg observes, 'despite lively scholarly debates in psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and psychology, suicide remains an enigma'.<sup>17</sup> There is in fact something about suicide that – rather unsurprisingly, considering what is at stake in the gesture itself – resists easy schematisation and exceeds understanding and rationalisation. More specifically, a series of salient questions lingers: is suicide an impulsive, foolish gesture or the outcome of a meditated, rational decision? Is it the finest expression of personal liberty and autonomy, or does it suggest an inexplicable desire for self-destruction? Is it selfish and cowardly or selfless and heroic? It goes without saying that there can be no easy and definitive answers to such queries. Indeed, as Andrew Bennett notes, 'suicide fundamentally and irrevocably involves duplicity, undecidability, and ambivalence: it is both an act of agency, of "will", a self-assertion and, at the same time, an act of self-abnegation, annihilation'.<sup>18</sup>

These irresolvable contradictions have, however, hardly discouraged examinations of suicide; indeed, rivers of ink flow on the subject. Not only is voluntary death an eminently human affair – with French sociologist Jean Baechler going so far as to suggest that it is ‘the price we pay for being human’<sup>19</sup> – but writers and philosophers have also repeatedly identified it, across centuries and latitudes, as humankind’s chief preoccupation. One need only think, for instance, of the Shakespearian *Hamlet*’s eponymous protagonist’s blunt assessment: ‘To be or not to be, that is *the question*’.<sup>20</sup> This urgency is echoed and expanded upon, centuries later, by Albert Camus in his essay ‘The Myth of Sisyphus’:

There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest [...] come afterwards. These are games; one must first answer.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, suicide concerns everyone: it is a ‘permanent possibility’, as Jacques Derrida puts it.<sup>22</sup> Bennett reminds us that ‘we are all suicide survivors in the sense that no one alive has yet undertaken the act for which almost all are uniquely equipped’.<sup>23</sup>

It is no wonder, then, that Bellocchio – a filmmaker deeply fascinated by humankind’s idiosyncrasies, keenly interested in the exploration of interpersonal and intergenerational conflicts, and fully committed to testing the boundaries between personal autonomy and passivity – has found in the question of suicide a great, effectively endless, source of inspiration. As noted in the introduction, throughout his prolific career Bellocchio has engaged with topics intersecting the private and public spheres, creating stories where individual fates unfold against the backdrop of particularly relevant moments in Italian history, such as the kidnapping of Aldo Moro in *Buongiorno, notte* and the rise of fascism in *Vincere*. His is at once an unapologetically personal, autobiographical cinema<sup>24</sup> and one that is profoundly concerned with the *res publica*. In his works, he is an adamant advocate for the preservation of individual liberties and their defence against the interference of oppressive institutions, whether secular (the government, the media, the army, psychiatric institutions) or religious.<sup>25</sup> In *Bella addormentata*, for instance, this tension between the individual and the collective and the private and the public is dramatised through a multifaceted treatment of the question of euthanasia in Italy, drawing inspiration from the real-life story of Eluana Englaro, which had sparked fierce debates in the country.

It is not surprising, then, that Bellocchio sees suicide through the same lens; namely, as a gesture equally personal and political and one that speaks both to an unresolvable individual inner conflict and a more widespread social malaise. In particular, the possibility of choosing one’s death is for the Italian filmmaker an inalienable right, an act that can be considered the ultimate affirmation of human free will and agency. This view is well condensed by Antonin Artaud:

If I kill myself it won’t be to destroy myself, but to rebuild myself. For me, suicide would only be a means of violently re-conquering myself, of brutally invading my being, of anticipating God’s unpredictable approach. I would reintroduce my designs into nature through suicide. For the first time I would give things the shape of my will.<sup>26</sup>

In this sense, the act of ending one’s own life becomes, as Thomas Osborne puts it, ‘a positive force, an assertion of the singularity of the self beyond any determinate

morality, an exercise in the aesthetics of freedom'.<sup>27</sup> What emerges from Artaud's excerpt is an understanding of suicide as the purest (and most extreme) example of self-governance and as a means to not only reinstate some form of control but also to truly author one's own story and put a stamp on one's own destiny. This conception does not view voluntary death as the fruit of a passive, indolent disposition but rather as a vital – even productive – force. This is particularly significant in the case of Bellocchio's cinema, where the main characters often find themselves trapped in existential and ideological cul-de-sacs, reluctant to make any change and take ownership of their own lives.<sup>28</sup>

However, it is worth pointing out that the path of suicidal characters in Bellocchio's films is usually intertwined with that of another character – often a close relative – who remains alive. This is the case of Mauro and Marta in *Salto nel vuoto* and Pippo and Giovanni in *Gli occhi, la bocca*, and, as we will see in the next section, Orazio Smamma and Franco Elica in *Il regista di matrimoni*. The use of characters who die by suicide works as a foil for those who survive, a doubling that highlights both the two characters' similarities and their differences. This is openly acknowledged by Bellocchio, who observes in relation to Smamma and Elica: 'He's part of him, without being like him'.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, witnessing their filmic counterpart's suicide often has the effect of jolting the protagonists out of their existential stupor.

As noted above in this section, while taking one's own life is certainly a personal choice, its repercussions are also inevitably public. This is even more true when the act's declared aim is to challenge ossified systems and institutions. On this note, it is worth pointing out how Richard Brandt defines suicide as

doing something which results in one's death, either from the intention of ending one's life or the intention to bring about some other state of affairs [...] which one thinks it certain or highly probable can be achieved only by means of death or will produce death.<sup>30</sup>

Bellocchio's suicidal characters often aim to challenge the status quo. They struggle with personal circumstances but at the same time are very keen to leave behind some kind of mark and – in some instances – even prompt change. Indeed, as Cheryl R. Jorgensen-Earp reminds us, it is 'one function of protest suicide to take a private feeling and to legitimize it and give it instrumental power by making it manifest in a public act'.<sup>31</sup>

My intention here is not to create a typology of suicide in Bellocchio's cinema; nor do I intend to suggest that these readings are exclusive. Instead, I propose two interpretations for the two gestures. Smamma's voluntary death in *Il regista di matrimoni* is an act of protest and defiance, aimed at both challenging the political, social, and especially the cultural status quo and at prolonging, as counterintuitive as that might seem, his own existence after his passing. In *Sorelle Mai*, by contrast, Schicchi's suicide takes the shape of a highly stylised performance, where the agent/victim, conscious of his own irrelevance, bids farewell to the town and community he loves.

### **Protest and Durability: *Il regista di matrimoni***

*Il regista di matrimoni* follows director Franco Elica (Sergio Castellitto) as he flees Rome for Sicily after being unjustly accused of sexual harassment. There, he meets and falls in love with Bona, the daughter of the Prince of Gravina (Sami Frey) and tries to prevent her from

going through with her arranged marriage. At the end of the film, the two run away to freedom, although it remains unclear whether they are a couple.

One night, on a beach during his Sicilian stay, Elica spots his colleague Orazio Smamma (Gianni Cavina) as the latter slowly wades into the water fully dressed and smoking a cigarette. Elica is understandably confused; a few days earlier he had learned of the man's passing on the news. Nevertheless, when he sees the water reaching Smamma's waist, he is jolted into action, steps into the sea, and grabs him. He asks, 'aren't you Orazio Smamma? Didn't you die a month ago?' while dragging the man back to shore. The two then sit down on the beach, where Smamma explains how he had faked his own death. This elaborate scheme was an experiment to prove his thesis; namely, that 'dying is the only one way to win. [...] In Italy, it is the dead who are in charge', referring to the country's reactionary tendencies. He then presents his evidence: his film *La madre di Giuda (Judas's Mother)*, initially ignored by critics, has been garnering praise since his death. He believes that this gives him a chance to win the *David di Michelangelo*, an overtly ironic reference to Italy's Oscars, the *David di Donatello*, awarded annually by the Italian Cinema Academy.

In Smamma's monologue, there is a clear accusation levelled not only at contemporary audiences but also and especially at a certain portion of the Italian intelligentsia, particularly the film industry, who according to Bellocchio's filmic mouthpiece Smamma are tangled up in a lobby-style system and can only operate under a logic of quid pro quo. Awards, in particular, are a quintessentially political affair and never reward courage or originality; ultimately, they are the death of culture rather than its celebration. Bellocchio elaborated on this idea in an interview with Fabio Ferzetti:

[Italy is] a country, which –politically, culturally – shows no signs of courage [by embracing] the new but tends [instead] to defend itself by entrenching itself in the past. In Italy the past tends to dominate; there are no signals, no shocks, no movements.<sup>32</sup>

On this note, Manuela Marchesini acutely observes that 'the dead do not only belong to the bigoted Italian past [...]. They are not just the mass audience that has allegedly given in to the hypnotic effect of television brought about by the airwaves' liberalization and privatization of the Berlusconi era'.<sup>33</sup> Instead, they are also

the current dominant culture and whoever, regardless of her or his political allegiances, buys into the market-driven commodification or literalization of all things, intellectual items included. In truth, all ideological 'parrocchie' (parishes) or 'famiglie' (families) of the political artistic spectrum [...] have bought into the logic of the market.<sup>34</sup>

However, Smamma's monologue is not merely a narrative device that serves to convey the director's contempt for the Italian cultural establishment. Much like the character of Gianni Schicchi in *Sorelle Mai* – as we see in the next section – Smamma represents a way to look at things, an ideological stance that no longer fits the current Zeitgeist: he and his art are at odds with contemporary culture and values. This is something that he addresses very clearly, as he tells Elica: 'We are through because we don't know how to live, and as such we don't know how to represent – through images – the world around us, today's world'. He then concludes that 'that world' – the world as they both know it – 'does not exist anymore'. The only reasonable solution, then, is to



die or at least pretend to die, as Smamma quips: 'Better disappear. We matter more if we are dead'. This prescription is also implicit, as is often the case in Bellocchio's works, in the characters' surnames: while Smamma could be translated as 'Beat it!', 'Elica' means 'propeller', which also conveys an idea of movement and flight.

There is no doubt that Smamma's fake death and both his attempted and actual suicides are retaliatory in nature. At the same time, they are also aimed at posterity and garnering recognition. On this note, speaking of writer Yukio Mishima's self-killing by *hara-kiri* in 1970, Maurice Pinguet observes that 'it was a public piece of self-advertisement, the story of the century, a convenience food for the television society'.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, and also taking its cue from Mishima's highly aestheticised suicide, Osborne observes:

The point about such performances [...] is to impress a mark upon the course of time. Such suicides are not intended as singular events that fade away once they are done. On the contrary, aesthetic forms of suicide are designed to *prolong the presence of the will* rather than to erase it. Such suicides are not, then, really to be understood as 'negative' acts at all. On the contrary; the suicide, in this sense, is seeking to assert his or her own existence, to prolong that existence.<sup>36</sup>

Reflecting on Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Osborne similarly observes that the protagonist's suicide is ultimately 'an act of power. He is attempting not to end his existence but to make his existence persist'.<sup>37</sup> This is exactly what Smamma is doing: as paradoxical as it might sound, he ceases to exist precisely in order to prolong his existence.

In the interview with Ferzetti, Bellocchio explains that he was particularly keen to represent, through Smamma, the anguish that comes from a lack of artistic recognition. He goes on to suggest an interesting equation between life and recognition: 'Smamma even pretends to be dead because he's afraid of not existing, whereas, once dead, maybe he'll be recognised for what he thinks he's worth'.<sup>38</sup> Bellocchio adds that the way one dies also plays a crucial role in being acknowledged: 'If you die at 90 it's one thing, but if you are killed or commit suicide [...]. Think of Pasolini: his death has certainly increased his fame!'<sup>39</sup>

However, later in the film *Elica* sees Smamma again and actually witnesses his real death. Once again on the beach, a drunk Smamma comes looking for our protagonist at dusk, shouting that he has been proven right and his film has obtained eleven *David di Michelangelo* nominations, more than any other film in the competition. 'I have won!' he screams: 'You have to acknowledge this: I have won!' Frustrated by his friend's absence, he turns around and starts climbing the stairs which lead to the top of the village, with Elica quietly following. Muttering to himself, he finally reaches a promontory overlooking the central square of the town. Here, exhausted, he sits down on a bench and lights up a cigarette. At the same time, a huge iron cross lights up with white fireworks. As they die down, Smamma murmurs 'Mom', throws the cigarette away, and jumps into the void, as Elica looks on, this time unable (or unwilling) to stop him.

These sequences are clearly imbued with a strong religious symbolism. Smamma's climb is a peculiar yet easily recognisable *via crucis* and, while he may not be carrying a literal cross, a blazing, glowing cross nevertheless awaits him at the top of the rock.

This adds to the biblical theme already associated with the character through his film *La madre di Giuda*, which is about Judas Iscariot. Like Judas, Smamma also commits suicide and, while Matthew records that Judas hanged himself,<sup>40</sup> the Acts of the Apostles reports that he threw himself off a cliff and fell on some jagged rocks, with the result that 'he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out'.<sup>41</sup>

However, a fundamental question lingers: why does Smamma kill himself, given that he has finally obtained what he was so desperately seeking; namely, artistic recognition? Let us start by focusing first on the reasons behind his faked death. As he explains to Elica upon their first encounter on the beach, pretending to be dead was a friend's suggestion. Smamma's friend, it appears, was in fact worried that he would either kill himself or carry out a massacre. Killing himself, then, becomes the way for Smamma to manifest his dissent. It is a form of protest – certainly the most drastic and extreme – but a form of protest nevertheless. On this note, Scott Spehr and John Dixon describe a protest suicide as 'meaningful social action – a purposive political act – intended to change oppressive political policies or practices'.<sup>42</sup> In her study, Jorgensen-Earp argues that the ultimate goal for those who commit suicide as protest is nearly always to persuade an opposing force to review and reform its policies. The suicide believes that 'through his or her death, a social or political cause would be advanced'.<sup>43</sup> This sentiment can certainly be found in Smamma: while prey to a strong, even debilitating, sense of impotence and disillusionment, by taking his own life he nevertheless attempts to reshape unfair circumstances, to call attention to and possibly rectify a perceived injustice.

### **Performance and Sacrifice: *Sorelle Mai* – A Farewell to the Past**

*Sorelle Mai* is, simply put, an odd product. Considered upon its release Bellocchio's 'most intimate, definitive' work,<sup>44</sup> it is a cross between a documentary and a work of fiction. It was conceived within the context of Bellocchio's summer directing and acting workshops 'Fare Cinema', which began in 1997 in the Piacenzan town of Bobbio. The film itself is actually six short films realised in collaboration with students between 1999 and 2008 and features, as often happens in Bellocchio's cinema, the director's family and friends in the main roles.

Predictably, *Sorelle Mai* focuses on the titular family. Sara (Donatella Finocchiaro) is an actress looking for her big break. She has a young daughter, Elena (Elena Bellocchio), whose care she has entrusted to her elderly aunts, Letizia (Letizia Bellocchio) and Mariuccia (Maria Luisa Bellocchio). Giorgio (Pier Giorgio Bellocchio) is Sara's brother and also an aspiring actor with an ambivalent relationship with his hometown: he claims to feel suffocated there, yet he keeps returning. This rather loose-knit family unit is held together by friend and administrator Gianni Schicchi (played by Gianni Schicchi, yet another staple in Bellocchio's filmography). He acts as a *paterfamilias*, not only overseeing the Mais' financial affairs but also always offering valuable advice and even helping Elena with her homework.

Given the circumstances of the film's inception and its episodic nature, it is no surprise that its narrative is loose and highly elliptical. However, a straightforward plot is hardly Bellocchio's concern here; he is more interested in creating impressions, evoking atmospheres, and establishing thematic correspondences with some of his earlier

works, such as *I pugni in tasca* and *Vacanze in Val Trebbia*, and other works of art. Indeed, as is often the case with Bellocchio, *Sorelle Mai* is a highly intertextual film that cites not only his other films (beyond *I pugni in tasca*, we see clips of 1999's *La Balia*) but also Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, Verdi's *Il trovatore*, Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and Luchino Visconti's *Senso* (1954). Additionally, the film's lack of narrative and stylistic coherence, its polymorphism, and its idiosyncrasies are offset by its thematic circularity. *Sorelle Mai* in fact follows an odd pattern of repetition: in spite of the passing of the time, the family seems to grapple with the same issues, which are incidentally often related to money, over and over again. Similarly, with the exception of Elena, who transitions from a young child to an adolescent, there is no character evolution: Sara is perpetually lost, Giorgio invariably frustrated, and Letizia and Mariuccia endearingly resigned to their monotonous existence.

Given its setting and focus on family dynamics, *Sorelle Mai* forms a diptych with *I pugni in tasca*, a link the director openly acknowledges by intercutting sequences of his cinematic debut at key junctures. Indeed, *Sorelle Mai* reprises some of *I pugni in tasca*'s core themes, such as psychological immobilism, frustration, and fear of failure. These are addressed both directly through dialogues and obliquely through citations and references. For instance, throughout the years, we see Giorgio returning to read a specific excerpt from *Three Sisters*, where Andrei Sergeevich laments his fellow citizens' conformism and their lack of ambition and initiative.<sup>45</sup>

However, Bellocchio's approach to the material in *Sorelle Mai* is unquestionably different, as it lacks the visceral anger of his debut, which the director has acknowledged in an interview.<sup>46</sup> In this sense, *Sorelle Mai* can be read as more of a reconciliation with – and even a tribute to – the hometown, the family, and the bourgeois mentality that he so ferociously attacked in his first work. After all, as Luca Malavasi notes in his review of the film, it was precisely those attacks that made Bellocchio's success possible: 'If the land hadn't been so barren, and the family so sterile, [his] rebellion wouldn't have had either sense or force, and [his] art wouldn't have been driven by such powerful necessity'.<sup>47</sup>

The sequence I analyse here occurs, quite tellingly, at the end of the film. Here, we see Gianni Schicchi, dressed in tails and top hat, calmly marching into the River Trebbia in front of a small crowd gathered on its bank; Giorgio is filming the scene with a small digital camera at Schicchi's request. Unexpectedly, the man does not re-emerge. Giorgio and other bystanders promptly jump into the river to help him but are only able to recover the hat.

This admittedly ambiguous ending – how could Schicchi's body have vanished so quickly in such clean, calm waters? – has been described as 'enigmatic', 'oneiric' and even 'metaphysical'.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, while many interpretations can be given to the disappearance of Schicchi's body, there is no doubt that the man walks into the river with the intention of killing himself. Indeed, the act had been meticulously planned, as we shall see in the forthcoming sections of the article.

The scene presents a number of interesting elements that are certainly worth unpacking, starting with the use of the diegetic music. As Schicchi walks into the river, a man plays Domenico Modugno's 1955 song 'L'uomo in Frack/Vecchio Frac' on guitar. This is a particularly relevant element in light of the film's storyline, as the song is about a gentleman, wearing a tailcoat and top hat, wandering about town at night. At dawn, he

commits suicide by throwing himself into a river. Interestingly, the song itself was inspired by a real-life event: the suicide of nobleman Raimondo Lanza di Trabia, who jumped from a window in Rome's Hotel Eden in 1954.<sup>49</sup> Modugno's song is reprised, this time extra-diegetically, over the credits, as we see the hat floating on the river.

It has been argued that all suicidal acts can be viewed from a theatrical perspective: from the *Romana mors* to the Japanese *seppuku* to kamikaze attacks, voluntary deaths incorporate an element of performance. On this note, David Lester and Steven Stack observe how 'suicidal individuals stage their suicide, devoting serious consideration as to how to present the act to others and how to obtain the desired reaction from family members, friends, and strangers'.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, writing about voluntary deaths in ancient Rome, Miriam Griffin points out that commentators highlight its strong theatricality and flair for performance, which are made evident by the length of the scenes and the presence of a large audience.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, these self-killings are also marked by a pronounced social character, as the agent/victim engages in arguments and debates with the audience. As noted by Timothy Hill:

The *Romana mors* is [...] famous in large part because it was so dramatically public in character. By the time of the Julio-Claudians the Roman etiquette of self-killing appears to have demanded the presence of several witnesses to the act, whose role it was to assist the self-killer in his or her deliberations, to record the act for posterity, and to serve as an admiring audience for the deed.<sup>52</sup>

All these elements are certainly applicable to the sequence in *Sorelle Mai*. Indeed, while Schicchi does not talk to anyone (he only briefly acknowledges his wife by perfunctorily patting her arm as she adjusts his bowtie), there is no doubt that he remains very much aware of the presence of an audience as he walks with determined strides towards the water. He even asks that the event be filmed so that it can be truly immortalised.

Another key characteristic of the *Romana mors* is the suicide's attitude towards death. On this note, Griffin remarks how the agent/victim's demeanour is generally described as calm and self-possessed.<sup>53</sup> There appears to be no fear at all: rather, there is genuine concern for others (family members or the audience) and a pragmatic, matter-of-fact attitude, prompting Hill to observe that

a certain suicidal *sang-froid* is found also in Roman philosophical writings on self-killing, which unanimously emphasize the potential of the act to be rational and deliberate, and make very little reference, if any, to the emotions attendant upon this kind of decision.<sup>54</sup>

Preparation and premeditation thus appear to be at the roots of the Roman death. On this note, Joseph Rubenstein points out how, more generally, 'suicidal dramas, ancient or modern, sacred or secular, require "scripts"'.<sup>55</sup> That there was a rough 'script' in Schicchi's case is clear from the phone call he makes to Giorgio the day before he walks into the river. He begins the conversation by stating, 'tomorrow I'm doing the number, *L'uomo in frac* [...] Why don't you shoot the scene? It's a farewell, to *L'uomo in frac*...' He then sings a bit of Modugno's song: '*Adieu adieu, addio al mondo* [farewell to the world]'.

There is, however, something else at stake here for Schicchi. His suicide – no doubt a well-orchestrated spectacle – is indeed also a self-sacrifice, an offering, a tribute to his origins. In order to understand this point, it is necessary to reflect on what Schicchi

represents in the film. As noted above, he is not a mere bureaucrat but also a trusted friend: he is fiercely protective of the Mai family and looks out for them. For instance, he questions Giorgio's fiancée about both her motives and her financial situation; he turns out to be a great judge of character when we later learn that she has indeed left Giorgio. He is also pragmatic and adopts a no-nonsense approach: when Sara announces that she has finally been cast in a good role, he immediately dampens her enthusiasm by asking her whether they are actually paying her. He has an old-fashioned mentality, not unlike the two elderly Mai sisters, and often laments changing mores, yearning for bygone days. He seems to be very much stuck in the past: it is no coincidence, then, that he is the one who helps Elena with her Latin (a dead language) homework. Much like Count Basta, the protagonist of another Bobbio-set film, *Sangue del mio sangue*, and Orazio Smamma in *Il regista di matrimoni*, Schicchi is out of sync with his contemporary world. Even marrying Silvia (Silvia Ferretti), a much younger woman – who, incidentally, is in love with Giorgio – has not helped. This is something of which Schicchi is all too aware, as he carefully scripts his heartfelt farewell tribute through his alter ego: 'L'uomo in frac', the top-hatted gentleman of Modugno's song.

The hypothesis that the whole film is indeed a 'a farewell to the past', as Massimo Lechi points out while referring to both Verdi's famous aria and Bellocchio's 2002 film about the Italian composer,<sup>56</sup> has been confirmed by reviewers and Bellocchio himself. In an interview, the director observes that the film is 'a bit of a long farewell. [...] Even Gianni Schicchi's death at the end – the man in frac who's sinking in the river – represents the physiological end of the past'.<sup>57</sup> Interestingly, this very notion is already inscribed within Modugno's song. In an interview, the Italian singer explained that he could not understand why Lanza di Trabia had decided to end his life, so he interpreted the desperate gesture as the sign of 'the end of an era'.<sup>58</sup>

In his review of the film, Malavasi describes Schicchi's gesture as a 'pagan baptism', stating, however, that this also coincides with a 'definitive disappearance *within* the place'.<sup>59</sup> In this sense, the choice of location for the suicide is certainly significant. Indeed, commentators have observed that the river holds film some sort of 'hypnotic appeal'<sup>60</sup> and can be described as a nearly 'amniotic element'.<sup>61</sup> Certainly, it is a catalyst in *Sorelle Mai*. Not only do the characters often bathe in it in 'unintentional daily rituals of purifications', as Michele Favara puts it,<sup>62</sup> but it also the setting for other relevant scenes. For instance, in an earlier sequence, Sara had recited lines from the famous Lady Macbeth sleepwalking scene, which signals her descent into madness, furiously rubbing her hands and immersing them in water, further highlighting the link between water and purification.

Why, then, does Schicchi commit suicide here? As Stack notes, suicides in nature (from parks to beaches to waterfalls) are far from uncommon.<sup>63</sup> The reasons for such a choice are generally twofold. The first is quite pragmatic: natural areas, often remote, tend to be less crowded, which in turn means that there is a smaller chance that someone might witness and stop the act. There is another reason which has to do with the beauty associated with natural landscapes. As Steven Stack and Barbara Bowman put it, 'for some persons, seeking a natural area may be motivated by an urge to return one's body and soul to nature'.<sup>64</sup>

Even among natural environments, bodies of water carry additional meanings. Water is connected to notions of purification and – paradoxical as it may be, considering that the avowed purpose of suicides is to end life – renewal. As Theodor Schwenk and Wolfman

Schwenk put it, 'water's flow constantly links life and death. It is the mediator between the two, and its surface provides a common frontier in nature where they meet. *Death is continuously being overcome there*'.<sup>65</sup>

Rivers are particularly associated with often contrasting meanings, such as change and continuity, flux and permanence, unity and separation. As G. M. M. Grobler notes, 'the river image is in itself susceptible to opposing interpretations, exactly because the river *keeps together or unites and keeps apart or separates* at the same time'.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, rivers are often linked with the sacred, as evidenced by rituals of purifications taking place in the River Ganges or baptisms in the River Jordan. Given the multiple meanings associated with rivers, it is not uncommon for people to end their lives there; Virginia Woolf's suicide comes immediately to mind. In fact, there are numerous references to riverine suicides in literature and film.<sup>67</sup>

The river also has a particular significance in Bellocchio's filmography and occupies a prominent place in several of his works, prompting Sergio Arecco to refer to *Vacanze in Val Trebbia*, *Sorelle Mai*, and *Sangue del mio sangue* as Bellocchio's 'river trilogy'.<sup>68</sup> In an interview, Bellocchio confirmed the importance of rivers in his emotional topography, observing how the river to him represents 'freedom, the open space, the flowing of life without any barriers, but also the pleasure of solitude'.<sup>69</sup>

By drowning himself in the River Trebbia, Schicchi is thus returning not only to nature but also to Bobbio. He offers himself up for a place in the Mai sisters' crowded funerary chapel and joins the ranks of the dead, the ever-growing ghostly community who have such power over the living. Confronted with his own irrelevance, his only option is to step aside, or rather *inside*: inside the river, inside the belly of the town – a gesture as inevitable as it is foundational, crepuscular as it is regenerating.

## Conclusion

Suicide is an ideological and existential knot in Bellocchio's cinema, a *locus* of tension and resolution. An act that inherently straddles the line between private and public, personal and political, it is a marriage of opposite impulses like passivity and autonomy, altruism and selfishness, hope and disillusionment, destruction and production, and death and renewal, inevitably marked by ambiguity and undecidability.

These characteristics become obvious when focusing on the portrayal of suicide in *Il regista di matrimoni* and *Sorelle Mai*, two dramatisations that present both differences and similarities. For instance, Smamma is instantly identifiable as a suicidal character: the first time we see him – if one discounts his photo quickly flashing in the news – is when he is wading into the sea, determined to end his life. His target is more outwardly political, and the reasons behind his decision are discussed at length in the film. Conversely, Schicchi's death arguably comes as a surprise, leaving the audience to extrapolate clues from the scene's set-up and elaborate *mise-en-scène*. While Smamma's dramatic gesture is targeted at disrupting the clientelist system governing Italian cultural life and allowing deserving works – like his – to be recognised, Schicchi opts for a spectacular self-sacrifice, for an ending that is also a return to his origins: to the womb of his beloved Bobbio.

That said, the two acts also share many similarities. In both cases, the character's decision seems to be driven by a desire to simultaneously end life and prolong existence, to leave some form of legacy which can be remembered by posterity, whether an

underappreciated film, as in Smamma's case, or a well-orchestrated performance, as happens with Schicchi. Additionally, if these self-killings bely a sense of defeat and resignation, they nevertheless also reveal a strong vital impulse, an attempt to bend circumstances to one's own desired shape and form, making a clear statement and producing a shock that jolts those witnessing the act out of their existential stupor. In this sense, while these gestures are certainly self-destructive, they are also generative insofar as they allow for a re-assessment of the status quo and for the production of new meaning. This feature is highlighted in both cases by the characters' association (if only partial for Smamma) with water – something that speaks to their desire for beauty, purification, and renewal. Finally, and arguably more importantly, the two acts also allow Bellocchio to address wider issues that are particularly dear to him, such as the relationship with one's past and origins (*Sorelle Mai*), and the lack of creativity and courage that characterises contemporary cultural endeavours (*Il regista di matrimoni*).

## Notes

1. This is the case, for instance, of Alessandro in Bellocchio's debut *I pugni in tasca* (*Fists in the Pocket*, 1965), Camillo in *La Cina è vicina* (*China Is Near*, 1967), and Roveda in *Sbatti il mostro in prima pagina* (*Slap the Monster on Page One*, 1972). Things hardly improve in situations where the struggle takes on a collective dimension, as in *Nel nome del padre* (*In the Name of the Father*, 1971), which tells of two different rebellions against the priests running a school. If anything, Bellocchio appears to be even more critical of what he perceives as nothing more than puerile and narcissistic acts of disobedience and ineffective contestations that are fuelled by political and ideological short-sightedness. Nevertheless, scholars have rightly pointed out that there appears to have been an evolution over the decades in Bellocchio's portrayals of power conflicts between the individual and institutions, as his more recent works present in fact some (at least partially) successful trajectories. For instance, Ernesto in *L'ora di religione* and Bona in *Il regista di matrimoni* do appear to eventually escape the grip of their families. As Brook puts it, 'the shift from a position of impotence [...] to a position of at least limited power comes only when the desire for change becomes focused on smaller, less complex, and more personal goals'; Clodagh Brook, *Marco Bellocchio: The Cinematic I in the Political Sphere* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), p. 151.
2. Armando Maggi, 'The Monuments to Death: Contemporary Rome in Marco Bellocchio's *L'ora di religione* (*Il sorriso di mia madre*)', *Annali d'Italianistica*, 28 (2010), 363–74 (p. 365) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24016402>>.
3. On this topic, see Clodagh Brook, 'The Oneiric in the Cinema of Marco Bellocchio', *Italica: Bulletin of the American Association of Teachers of Italian*, 84.2/3 (2007), 479–94 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40505712>>.
4. On Bellocchio's reimagining of history, see Gabriele Rigola, 'Lo sguardo politico nell'ultimo Bellocchio: Impegno e sistema mediale tra storia, cronaca e privato', *Transalpina: Etudes Italiannes*, 16 (2016), 71–84 <<https://doi.org/10.4000/transalpina.440>>.
5. *Marcia Trionfale* (*Victory March*, 1976) could arguably be on the list, depending whether one reads Captain Ascittuto's death (he purposely ignores the sentinel's orders to stand back, lest he be shot) as a suicide.
6. Georges Minois, *History of Suicide: Voluntary Death in Western Culture*, trans. by Lydia Cochrane (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 1.
7. In the film, which mixes footage from a 2016 family gathering with interviews with relatives and friends, home movies, and excerpts from his earlier works, the director delves into his family history with the aim of understanding what might have driven his twin to commit such a desperate gesture. An unflinchingly frank yet never uncompassionate documentary, *Marx può aspettare* is as much a tribute to Camillo as to those who have survived his death.

8. Brook, *Marco Bellocchio*, p. 3.
9. While an interplay between the personal and the political is certainly also central to *Marx può aspettare* – as indicated by the film’s title – this is nevertheless a very different product and should thus be analysed separately.
10. On the film’s many references to other Italian films, see Daniel Winkler, ‘New Italian Migrant Cinema: Between Nostalgia and Trash’, in *The Cinemas of Italian Migration: European and Transatlantic Narratives*, ed. by Sabine Schrader and Daniel Winkler (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2013), pp. 53–67.
11. Unless otherwise specified, all translations from Italian are mine.
12. Avital Pilpel and Lawrence Amsel, ‘What Is Wrong with Rational Suicide’, *Philosophia*, 39 (2011), 111–23 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11406-010-9253-x>>.
13. Minois, p. 3.
14. Judith M. Stillion and Bethany D. Stillion, ‘Attitudes towards Suicide: Past, Present, and Future’, *Omega*, 38.2 (1999), 77–97 <<https://doi.org/10.2190/OT85-B3H5-JG6T-QFXG>>.
15. Antoon A. Leenaars, ‘Suicide: A Cross-Cultural Theory’, in *Suicide Among Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups: Theory, Research, and Practice*, ed. by Frederick T. L. Leong and Mark M. Leach (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 13–37 (p. 14).
16. Émile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952).
17. Eva Kuttenburg, ‘Suicide as Performance in Dr Schnitzler’s Prose’, in *A Companion to the Works of Arthur Schnitzler*, ed. by Dagmar C. G. Lorenz (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2003), pp. 325–45 (p. 325).
18. Andrew Bennett, *Suicide Century: Literature and Suicide from James Joyce to David Foster Wallace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 11–12.
19. Jean Baechler, *Suicides*, trans. by Barry Cooper (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), p. 35.
20. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, in *Four Tragedies: Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*, ed. by David Bevington and David Scott Kastan (New York: Bantam Books, 2005), III.1.56–60; my emphasis.
21. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. by Justin O’Brien (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 11.
22. Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 156.
23. Bennett, p. 2.
24. Marina Pellanda, ‘Declinazioni autobiografiche nel cinema di Marco Bellocchio’, *Bianco e Nero*, 582–83 (2015), 46–52 <<https://doi.org/10.7371/82649>>.
25. Many works dedicated to Bellocchio address these themes. See, for instance, Sandro Bernardi (1978), *Marco Bellocchio* (Florence: La nuova Itali, 1978) and the volume edited by Adriano Aprà: *Marco Bellocchio: il cinema e i film* (Venice: Marsilio, 2005). On Bellocchio’s complex relationship with Catholicism, see Virgilio Fantuzzi, ‘Marco Bellocchio: tra sacralità e dissacrazione’, in *Marco Bellocchio: il cinema e i film*, ed. by Adriano Aprà (Venice: Marsilio, 2005), pp. 70–91; Clodagh Brook, ‘The Spectacle of the Unseen: Marco Bellocchio and Lure of the Catholic Church’, *Italian Studies*, 68 (2013), 399–410; Victoria Surliuga, ‘The “Fantastic” Roman Catholic Church in Italian Cinema’, in *Roman Catholicism in Fantastic Film: Essays on Belief, Spectacle, Ritual and Imagery*, ed. by Regina Hansen (Jefferson: McFarland, 2011), pp. 219–31; Silvia Angeli, ‘Caught in Between: Profanation and Re-Sacralization in Marco Bellocchio’s *Nel nome del padre* (1971)’, *Religions* 9 (2018), 252–65 <<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9090252>>.
26. Antonin Artaud, ‘On Suicide’, in *Collected Works, Vol. 1*, trans. by Victor Corti (London: Calder, 1968), pp. 157–59 (p. 157).
27. Thomas Osborne, ‘Fascinated Dispossession: Suicide and the Aesthetics of Freedom’, *Economy and Society*, 34.2 (2005), 280–94 (p. 282) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/03085140500054677>>.
28. On this note, Roberto Chiesi rightly observes that Bellocchio’s films are dominated by an ‘existential and physical immobility’; see Chiesi, ‘Immobili in perpetuo’, *Cineforum*, 548 (2015), 13–15 (p. 13).



29. Fabio Ferzetti, "'In Italia comandano i morti': Intervista a Marco Bellocchio', in *Il regista di matrimoni* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2006), pp. 5–24 (p. 6).
30. Richard Brandt, 'The Mortality and Rationality of Suicide' in *Suicide: The Philosophical Issues*, ed. by M. Pabst Battin and David J. Mayo (New York, St. Martins, 1980), pp. 117–18.
31. Cheryl R. Jorgensen-Earp, "'Toys of Desperation': Suicide as Protest Rhetoric', *Southern Speech Communication Journal*, 13.1 (1987), 80–96 (p. 85) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/10417948709372714>>.
32. Ferzetti, p. 17.
33. Manuela Marchesini, "'In Italy the Dead Rule": Marco Bellocchio's "Italian Difference" Between Manzoni–Camerini and Bene–Godard', *Forum Italicum*, 48.3 (2014), 363–97 (pp. 366–67). <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0014585814540422>>.
34. Marchesini, p. 367.
35. Marcel Pinguet, *Voluntary Death in Japan* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p. 283.
36. Osborne, pp. 282–83; my emphasis.
37. Osborne, p. 283.
38. Ferzetti, p. 16.
39. Ferzetti, p. 17.
40. Matthew 27.1–10.
41. Acts 1.18.
42. Scott Spehr and John Dixon, 'Protest Suicide: A Systematic Model with Heuristic Archetypes', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 44.3 (2013), 368–88 (p. 383) <<https://doi.org/10.1111/jtsb.12047>>.
43. Jorgensen-Earp, p. 81.
44. Alessio Guzzano, 'La famiglia è per sempre', *Il sole 24 ore*, 27 March 2011 <[https://st.ilssole24ore.com/art/cultura/2011-03-27/famiglia-sempre-082419\\_PRN.shtml](https://st.ilssole24ore.com/art/cultura/2011-03-27/famiglia-sempre-082419_PRN.shtml)> [accessed 2 June 2021].
45. The excerpt reads: 'Our city has existed for about two hundred years, in it there are a hundred thousand inhabitants, and there is not one person, who is not exactly like the others, not one rebel, in the past or in the present, not one scholar, not one artist, not one person who is even a little bit noteworthy, who could inspire envy, or a passionate desire to emulate him'; Anton Chekov, *Three Sisters*, trans. by Sharon Marie Carnicke (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company), IV, p. 67.
46. Massimo Lechi, 'Intervista con Marco Bellocchio – Il lungo addio' in *FilmDoc*, 92 (2011) <<https://www.filmdoc.it/2011/03/intervista-a-marco-bellocchio-il-lungo-addio/>> [accessed 2 June 2021].
47. Luca Malavasi, 'Sorelle mai Marco Bellocchio: Riconosci te stesso', *Cineforum*, 503 (2011), 20–22 (p. 22).
48. See Lechi, 'Intervista con Marco Bellocchio'; Michele Favara, 'Sorelle Mai', *Gli spietati*, 3 January 2010 <<https://www.spietati.it/sorelle-mai/>> [accessed 2 June 2021]; Natasha Senjanovic, 'Sorelle Mai – Film Review', *The Hollywood Reporter*, 14 October 2010 <<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-reviews/sorelle-mai-film-review-30019/>> [accessed 9 October 2021].
49. Marcello Sorigi, *Il grande dandy: Vita spericolata di Raimondo Lanza di Trabia, ultimo principe siciliano* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2011).
50. David Lester and Steven Stack, 'Conclusion', in *Suicide as a Dramatic Performance*, ed. by David Lester and Steven Stack (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 323–31 (p. 324).
51. Miriam Griffin, 'Philosophy, Cato, and Roman Suicide I', *Greece & Rome*, 33 (1986), 64–77 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/643026>>.
52. Timothy D. Hill, *Ambitiosa Mors: Suicide and Self in Roman Thought and Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 2.
53. Griffin, pp. 64–77.
54. Hill, p. 2.
55. Joseph Rubenstein, 'Ritual, Dramatic Performance, and Suicide: An Anthropological Perspective', in *Suicide as a Dramatic Performance*, ed. by Lester and Stack, pp. 5–10 (p. 6).

56. Lechi, 'Intervista con Marco Bellocchio'.
57. Lechi, 'Intervista con Marco Bellocchio'; on this topic, see also Guzzano, and Paolo Vecchi, "'A Bobbio! A Bobbio! A Bobbio!" Bellocchio à rebours', *Cineforum* 503 (2011), 23–24.
58. Laura Laurenzi, 'La vera storia del principe che diventò l'uomo in frac', *La repubblica*, 7 April 2011, <<https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2011/04/07/la-vera-storia-del-principe-che-divento.html>> [accessed 2 June 2021].
59. Malavasi, p. 22; original emphasis.
60. Alice Cati, 'Seguire le tracce dei temi generatori', *Cineforum*, 503 (2011), 25–27 (p. 26).
61. Vecchi, p. 24.
62. Favara.
63. Steven Stack, 'The Location of the Suicidal Act', in *Suicide as a Dramatic Performance*, ed. by Lester and Stack, pp. 73–76.
64. Steven Stack and Barbara Bowman, 'Suicide in the Grand Canyon National Park', in *Suicide as a Dramatic Performance*, ed. by Lester and Stack, pp. 129–50 (p. 134).
65. Theodor Schwenk and Wolfram Schwenk, *Water: The Element of Life*, trans. by Marjorie Spock (Great Barrington, MA: Steiner Books, 2003), p. 23; my emphasis.
66. G. M. M. Grobler, 'And the River Runs On ... : Symbolism in Two African Novels', *South African Journal of African Languages*, 18.3 (1998), 65–67, p. 67 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/02572117.1998.10587190>>; emphasis and bold in original.
67. On this topic, see Remo Cesarini, 'Fiume/fiumi', *Italica*, 82.3/4 (2005), 624–43.
68. Sergio Arecco, 'Della ragion familiare', *Cineforum*, 548 (2015), 10–12 (p. 10).
69. Dario Cresto-Dina, 'Marco Bellocchio: A Bobbio lungo il fiume ho sfiorato la Felicità', *La Repubblica*, 26 July 2011 <<https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2011/07/26/marco-bellocchio-bobbio-lungo-il-fiume-ho.html>> [accessed 10 May 2020].

## ORCID

Silvia Angeli  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3009-0102>