ITALIAN CINEMA’S MISSING CHILDREN

Submitted by

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work
has been identified and that no material has been previously submitted and approved
for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

.......................................... Roger Graham Pitt
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ABSTRACT

The aim of this doctoral thesis is to analyse the range of resonances surrounding the lost or endangered child (or adolescent) in six Italian films made between 1992 and 2005. By drawing on and expanding Emma Wilson’s proposed understanding of the term ‘missing child’ in Cinema’s Missing Children (a transnational, cinema-based study published in 2003), this thesis will seek to open out new ways of exploring both contemporary Italian cinema and the ‘missing child’ paradigm. To this end, the following research questions are pivotal to the discursive trajectory of this thesis as a whole: What does it mean to ground contemporary Italian works which broadly correspond to the term ‘missing child’ (as proposed in Cinema’s Missing Children) within the specific context of Italian culture and society? How would recourse to a range of specifically Italian filmmaking, socio-cultural, or historical phenomena shape (or reshape) our understanding of this topos?

In order to fully engage these concerns, this thesis will begin by establishing a rigorous interdisciplinary methodology. In Chapter One, I will address questions of critical reception with particular emphasis on the possible pitfalls of conventional recourse to neorealism as a means of reading the missing child in contemporary cinema. In Chapter Two, I will extend this necessary emphasis on critical reception and related notions of possible distortion and oversimplification, to include the dialogic relation between Italian cinematic articulations of (missing) children, childhoods and the experience of (biological and non-biological) parenthood, and clusters of cultural and political concerns and anxieties. In chapters Three, Four, and Five, I will bring this interdisciplinary methodology to bear on three sets of primary sources. Whilst this close textual analysis will contend with the missing male child (in a range of guises), it will also bring to the fore new ways of thinking with and about the critically neglected female child. By moving away from more normative critical frameworks (including neorealism) this thesis will not only attempt to reset and refresh understandings of important works of the last two decades, but will also work towards a recuperation of the critically disavowed gender identity (and concomitant role and status) of ‘missing’ female children.
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