

Please note: The photo-essay simply tells the story of the film in intermediate-level Italian. This is a basic, literal translation to assist Italian learners understand the text. In writing the photo-essay, we aimed for a more fluid Italian and wrote a translation to match it. We hope that this language-learning tool will be engaging and enlightening. It's no substitute for material written at a native-language level that explores the film in depth!

The images are an important part of the photo-essay. Even if you don't understand Italian, please read this translation alongside the Italian version on the blog, so that you can see the screenshots that go with the text. These visuals help us to know the movie better: they not only enrich the story, but they also show camera movements, editing, the symbols chosen by the director and thematic ideas. You will also have access to the video clips and [links](#) to other references in the blog itself.

Thank you, and enjoy!

Il sorpasso

Regia di Dino Risi (1962)

Photo-story summary

Bruno (Vittorio Gassman), carefree and boisterous, meets up with the studious young Roberto (Jean-Louis Trintignant) and the two take off on a road trip, in this film with its abundance of people, places and things of the 1950s boom years in Italy.

The opening title sequence of *Il sorpasso* sets the mood of the film: jazz music, a sports car – showing some damage on the side – a determined driver at the wheel. The driver speeds right past a 'do not enter' sign onto a street where all the stores are closed.

It's *Ferragosto*. The public telephone isn't even in the driver's reach. He leaves.

The driver pulls over by the side of the road for a drink of water. He notices a man looking at him from a window in a nearby building. He calls up to the guy, who backs away from the window.

"Are you hiding?" ("Yes," the window man might answer, "I'm hiding from life. I'm just an observer of life, here from my window.")

“Everything’s closed!” exclaims the driver. He asks the man at the window to make a phone call for him. From the street, he gives the phone number along with a useless strategy for the window man to remember the numbers. We see that this is a man with his own sense of logic.

“Tell Marcella I’m coming and that we’ll pick up the others as well!” he yells.

The window man starts to make the call, but he needs more information, so he suggests that the driver come up and make the call himself. Actually, in this moment, he is inviting the driver into his life.

The driver skips and sings as he goes to the apartment. When he arrives, he apologizes for the intrusion. That day Rome seems “like a graveyard.” That offhand line is a foreshadow.

The two introduce themselves. The driver is named Bruno. The young man is named Roberto and he’s a law student. Bruno makes a little fun of Roberto’s studies, of the fact that he doesn’t smoke, and of his mom, who he has seen in a photograph and who he calls “fat.”

After Bruno makes his call, the two say goodbye, but a moment after Roberto has closed the door, the doorbell rings again. It’s Bruno again who invites Roberto out for a drink. The student protests that he has to study. In fact, he hasn’t done much that day... “It’s my fault!” the guest insists, and convinces him, explaining that buying him a drink would be a way of making up for the disturbance. A logic all his own.

The two take off for their drink, or whatever it actually is that Bruno has in mind. We see the two against the Roman landscape. Bruno, at the wheel, constantly interacts with – and against – the world that surrounds them: he speeds down a one-way street, causing a police officer to come running out and blow his whistle; he yells at a pedestrian who’s walking his dogs.

And all the while, we spectators get to enjoy beautiful some views of Rome filmed by cinematographer Alfio Contini.

And now we see the *sorpasso*, with Bruno overtaking various cars and trucks. He speeds wildly, honking his horn, yelling, making obscene gestures. Roberto is terrified.

The film is full of sets loaded with typical elements of Italian life of the time. In this scene, Bruno pulls into a cafe with tables outside, and plows through, terrifying everyone. The scene lasts less than 30

seconds, but the viewer could watch over and over, or re-watch it in slow motion to try to absorb every detail.

In the next scene, the guys have pulled over to have lunch in a trattoria. For Director Risi, it's an opportunity to put different modes of transportation in the shot. There's a ship, a train, some cars and the motorcycle of the policeman who is going to give a ticket to one of these parked cars. Not the car of our heroes, though, because Bruno has taken the ticket that was on another car and put it on his own. By the way, there's no shot of air transportation here, but there had been one earlier: Bruno was given a traffic ticket after a helicopter saw him commit numerous infractions.

And our heroes are in the trattoria. While Roberto gets their table, Bruno is fooling around in the kitchen, again interacting with the people and spaces where he doesn't belong.

Now, the two are being served; Bruno eats with gusto. He has his eye on the waitress; maybe he'll give her a try later ...

In this scene, we learn that Roberto is secretly in love with his neighbor, Valeria. He even has a photo of her with him. But he barely knows her; they've only spoken once, at the university. And the photo is not very clear because Roberto took it while he was hiding at the window. His friend can't believe it and he advises the student to find a way to meet her again.

Then, outside the trattoria, the director treats us to another vibrant scene rich with typical Italian people and things: men with musical instruments, moms dragging their children, a priest who says goodbye to a woman with a kiss, a boy eating an enormous slice of watermelon, two cops escorting a man in handcuffs who proclaims innocence, an upset woman who says that her suitcase was stolen and who pleads for help.

Roberto starts to assist the woman, but Bruno dissuades him. It would not be much fun for him to spend his *Ferragosto* in a police station.

Roberto has decided that he doesn't feel comfortable with Bruno and he has already decided to take off. He'll take the bus to visit some relatives that live nearby, but Bruno insists on taking him.

Again, he drives recklessly, arriving at the estate, blowing the horn like a crazy person.

Roberto introduces his aunt and uncle and Bruno behaves in a friendly and charming way with them.

The student, on the other hand, is shy with his aunt. He has had a crush on her since he was little. But seeing her now, he is aware of how plain she is. Seeing his aunt as others see her represents a step out of childhood for him. The film starts to take on the tone of a “coming of age” film.

He leaves her to go upstairs where he gazes out the window at a village scene that reminds him of his visits here years ago. This trip is a revisiting of a childhood place. It will be his last time here.

Roberto returns downstairs and finds that Bruno has charmed the entire family. In fact, Bruno seems more like a member of the family than Roberto.

In this important scene, Roberto leaves his childhood and his innocence behind a little. He has seen his aunt as she really is. He sees his relatives – who used to fawn over him during his childhood – being charmed by the oaf, Bruno. And he sees himself as others must see him, too: a quiet guy, not so much fun.

Bruno bursts into the life of Roberto’s aunt; re-awakens youthful excitement in her; then leaves her.

In the next scene, Risi shows us another set packed with real Italians.

The two friends drive by an outdoor country dance. They make good-natured fun of the characters doing the twist: an old man, a girl with glasses, a guy with a funny hat.

A kind of love is growing between Bruno and Roberto, as often happens between buddies in road movies. In fact, here Bruno tells Roberto, “Well done! I like you like that. When you laugh, you’re more fun to be with. Oh, Robe’, leave all that sad stuff behind.”

They drive onto a street that is completely dark, arriving finally at the house of Bruno’s ex-wife. He hasn’t seen his wife for years, yet she doesn’t seem that struck by seeing him again.

Bruno is astonished when he sees his daughter again. She has changed a lot. She reminds him that kids have to grow up. This seems to be a message from her about him and his immature ways.

That night, Bruno makes a pass at his ex-wife, but is not successful. Rebuffed, he decides to take off, so he pulls Roberto out of bed and takes him to the beach. There, the two consider: what is the best way to live? To look before you leap? Or just to leap? They fall asleep in their beach chairs.

The next morning, Bruno is awakened by children playing around him. He searches for Roberto, who has gone for a walk. Again, Risi has designed a set abundant with people practically posed as in a tableau... or a Norman Rockwell painting (Italian beach version).

Meanwhile, Roberto has gotten daring. He decides to call Valeria, the neighbor he has a crush on. She's not there; he's too shy to leave a message. He tells Bruno about the call. Bruno is happy about it; finally, his friend has decided to leap.' He offers to take him to Viareggio where Valeria is on vacation.

On the way, they talk about what to do next. Roberto says that they shouldn't make plans. They can wait and see. The young Robe' – as Bruno has been calling him throughout the story – is euphoric. He has been completely seduced by Bruno and this new way of life without limits. No studies, no responsibilities, constant surprises, living to the fullest. The last two days have been the best days of his life. Maybe this *Ferragosto* is the first time he has ever really lived.

While they talk, Bruno goes faster and faster, passing cars along the way. Roberto urges him on. They're celebrating the escape, the easy life. This beautiful sports car is like a liberation for Robe'.

As Alberto Lattuada did in the *commedia all'italiana Mafioso*, Risi gives us a lot of clues, but then waits until the end to show us that this is not really so much fun, after all.

Suddenly, from around the bend, a truck appears in the path of our carefree friends, bearing down on them. Bruno swerves to avoid the truck and is thrown out of the car. But Roberto is trapped inside as the car tumbles down the rocky cliff.

A policeman asks Bruno if Roberto is a relative. Bruno is forced to admit, "I don't know his last name. I just met him yesterday morning."