



Dolce Vita Confidential: Fellini, Loren, Pucci, Paparazzi, and the Swinging High Life of 1950s Rome

Shawn Levy

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In the dizzying wake of World War II, Rome skyrocketed to prominence as an epicenter of film, fashion, photography, and boldfaced libertinism. Artists, exiles, and a dazzling array of movie talent rushed to Rome for a chance to thrive in this hotbed of excitement. From the photographers who tailed the stars to the legends who secured their place in cinematic fame, *Dolce Vita Confidential* resurrects the drama that permeated the streets and screens of Rome.

Dolce Vita Confidential: Fellini, Loren, Pucci, Paparazzi, and the Swinging High Life of 1950s Rome Details

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From Reader Review Dolce Vita Confidential: Fellini, Loren, Pucci, Paparazzi, and the Swinging High Life of 1950s Rome for online ebook

Studvet says

Competently written, detailedly informative of an era of stars that have nearly disappeared. Would appeal mostly to a certain generation, but to those familiar with the films and stories of this era it colours in and informs the detail of an almost magical time when stars were stars and much larger than life.

Yourfiendmrjones says

Perhaps not as breezy as I had hoped given how I rocketed through his Rat Pack Confidential book. The sections on fashion might have benefitted from more photos as it is hard to picture what he is talking about. The best parts are the charting of Sophia Loren's and Fellini's careers but his attempt to frame it all by which paparazzi covered which incident or event or person felt like a stretch sometimes.

Louise says

In this book, author Shawn Levy accomplishes the goal which he states in the Acknowledgements: "... to explore a certain cultural epoch, to celebrate a set of personal heroes and favorite works of art, to identify the moment when various elements of the modern world first came together..." In meeting this goal, the book showcases Rome as a center of film, fashion and street photography and how it came to be.

There is background on how Mussolini appreciated film and fostered its growth. In 1937 he consolidated his film operations in a state of the art, 73 building studio city on a 145 acre (walled) compound. It produced propaganda newsreels and light comedies. After the war, it became a refugee camp, and, side by side with the refugees, filmmakers appeared. Levy details how the post-war film industry was aided by this studio and by protectionist legislation that made it worth-while for American producers to film in Italy. In the number of filmed in Italy titles, stars and Oscar nominees and winners, you see what was hiding in plain sight: Italy's major contribution to film in the post-war years.

As Levy tells it, the Italian fashion industry has a debt to Giovanni Battista Giorgini, a Florentine noble whose family fortune was in marble quarries. His dedicated efforts gave Italy's seamstresses and fashion designers access to American markets by convincing major department store buyers to extend their Paris season and attend an Italian runway show at his villa. He gave them first class treatment and showcased Italy's best design. You get a step by step of how he accomplished this, recruiting the fashion artists, getting the buyers interested and following up.

The Via Veneto with small restaurants and places to hang out became the place to for stars and celebrities unwind and be seen. Capturing the right someone at the right time, place and pose could bring a hungry young man much needed cash. A cottage industry sprung up. The life of the Via Veneto was glamorized in Fellini's "La Dolce Vita" and the word "paparazzi", a take on the name of one of the photographers in the

film, entered the world-wide vocabulary.

As noted, Levy profiles his heroes, the best profile being that of Federico Fellini (here's hoping Levy has a bio in the works) Sophia Loren and Emilio Pucci. There are many clips (some are cameos, others are a bit longer) other stars and directors, Italian fashion creators and some of those soon to be called "paparazzi".

This was a brief moment in time, the end of which Levy traces to the 1960's cultural explosion. Beatles clearly did not appeal to those whose international stars were Dominico Mondugno and Mario Lanza. Similarly, the youth culture was not a good fit in a country that lived in extended families.

I'd like to see more development on why it ended. The Berlusconi media empire, begun in 1973, with its emphasis on sensationalism, and its growing monopolistic power was surely a factor. Italian fashion has continued its world-wide prominence, admittedly in northern Italy, while the focus of this book is Rome.

I'm grateful to Norton for publishing this book. It will have a small but eager readership. It is clearly fills a niche and is not likely to be a big seller.

Peter W Blaisdell says

Shawn Levy's *Dolce Vita Confidential* gets 4 stars for its breezy, easy tone in describing an exuberant period in modern Italian cultural history. In one sense, the topic is feather light. However, Rome during the 50's, with its notions of cheerful sensuality, still exerts considerable influence on today's cinema, fashion, and how we view privacy, celebrity and scandal. Further, Levy has a keen eye for setting, the Roman neighborhoods and, particularly, the Via Veneto which engendered the flowering of creativity across all manner of art and life – though there is a special focus on Fellini's film *La Dolce Vita* as the distillation of this era's effluence.

Dolce Vita's charm is its focus on the cultural milieu, but it would be illuminating to learn a bit more about how Italy's post-war economy and politics enabled the burst of artistic inventiveness during the 50's. Also, being an efficient writer, Levy seems to have used research from his numerous other books to flesh out *Dolce Vita*; justifiable, I suppose, but sometimes the reader gets the sense that Levy provided extensive detail on a given individual or situation simply because he already had the homework on hand.

I write literary fantasy novels, a genre rather remote from *Dolce Vita*. Nonetheless, I can certainly learn from Levy's sense of setting and vivid exploration of an era of exaggeration, when everything was dialed up to eleven. Levy's descriptions evoke an Italian beauty zipping past the Spanish Steps on a Vespa.

Jessica says

I received this book for free through Goodreads' First Reads.

This isn't a book I would typically pick up, but I still enjoyed it. It was really fun learning about Rome in the 50's. I had no idea it was that crazy. The author's writing style was very engaging, making it a pleasurable read.

Overall, I would recommend this book to anyone who wants to learn more about Rome during this time period.

Mimi says

interesting cultural history of Rome in the 50's-70's, heyday of paparazzi, films, fashion.
a 3.4

Stephen O'Donnell says

THIS is the real deal. Shawn Levy is the real deal. Until the last decade or so, I was always a non-fiction reader - history, the arts, dance, music, fashion - and I actually wanted to write books on those topics, myself. With all the years, all that reading, I've developed a really good sense of when the non-fiction author really knows their stuff, when they - THE most important thing - are solid in differentiating between good and junk sources; I'm continually shocked that so many lauded non-fiction writers don't have that essential ability. And I think I'm a good judge of this even when I don't know the subject all that well. Shawn - clearly - gets it right, here. Widely, deeply researched, he gives us the big picture - and - the rich detail. The stories he relates are fascinating, often wild, but there's a lack of suspicious hyperbole; his sources seem really "clean". I can only imagine that was a tough nut considering the subject, but not once in 400 some pages did he set off any "alarms"!

On top of that, as a writer, he's such a beautiful craftsman. The structure of the book is - exactly - what it needs to be. Clear, richly textured, with a graceful forward momentum. There's so much information put across in this book, but it's all delivered with a wonderfully light touch. His writing is subtle and accessible and elegant. Simply, this is a great book.

Pamela says

Review to follow

Daniel Etherington says

I had to read this really: I lived in Rome for a couple of years, I've read a bit of Roman history (including of the modern era), I've also done a masters in film studies and I worked as a film journo for about a decade.

That's not to say I loved this. I'm not a huge fan of the idiom Levy is using and I did skim when he went extensive detail about fashion. The book, however, is worth it for its fantastic description of the evolution of the trashy photo-journalist we know today as paparazzi, and for the global reaction to Fellini's film, *La Dolce Vita*.

La Dolce Vita not only gave us the term paparazzi, with one of the characters a photographer called Paparazzo, it's also the quintessential Rome film, and the production, the cultural artefact, that Levy

constructs his book around.

Raquel says

1950s Rome was the epicenter of culture: fashion, film, luxury cars, Vespas, race car driving, celebrity and paparazzi. How did a city in ruins after the destruction of WWII transform itself into the epitome of glamour and fame? The answer to this is found in Shawn Levy's book *Dolce Vita Confidential*. In the book Levy paints the picture of postwar Italy and how luck, good timing and lots of talent transformed how the world saw Italy and how Italy saw itself.

Full review here: <http://www.outofthepastblog.com/2016/...>

Ellen says

Got a little bit repetitive. Bit too much felt like padding towards the end.

Claire White says

Ok, so bear with me here, but this might be one of my favourite books. Ever.

This is the second group biography I've read this year which detailed an era and place (the other, *The Riviera Set*) but this one was such a JOY to read.

Some history books drag or seem dense, but not this one.

You can tell in every single word how excited and passionate the author is about this period, and it makes for such an enjoyable read, I didn't want to stop.

The topic is hella niche, but if you have any interest in the 1950s high life in Rome, in celebrity culture, fashion, and/or Italian cinema (granted, I had only seen *La Dolce Vita*, *Rome: Open City* and *Roman Holiday* prior to reading this), I cannot recommend this book enough. ???

Andrew says

And it was amazing too! I have been 'un inglese italiano' for some years now & can happily revel in the heretical & transgressive behaviour of post-war Romans, epitomised by the packs of paparazzi & the vortex of new money, new ideas but the eternal, ever-powerful, dirty, old habits - no, not unwashed, unfrocked monks! - but the primeval & earthy forces of a society in rapid change.

Rome in the 50s was where 'it' was happening in lurid, well-lit colours & violent, dangerous moods: Fellini's 'La Dolce Vita' serves as a portrait of the time, when black-&-white films were artistic, & all the razzmatazz of technicolor film & new, productive energy was in full-flow at Cinecitta...the legendary studios outside the eternal city, to whose portals many Hollywood stars beat an eager path...all roads, briefly, lead to Rome...for brilliant fashion, for exotic, big-budget films & an effervescent vitality that defied any rational explanation!

Shawn Levy's exciting survey captures so much of this decade or so, drawing-on a variety of printed sources - he focuses particularly on the places & personalities that attracted the world's attention like rare butterflies in a common or garden setting - in this case, a dull street named Via Veneto, in the beating heart of Rome, which, like a butterfly, fluttered briefly & spectacularly, before the Fellinesque circus left town. There is so much to entertain here that I heartily recommend this book to any reader with a spark of humanity, a reader who enjoys the cut-&-thrust of real people in an unreal moment...a decade of decadence, a brief interlude in this absorbing city's monumental place in western civilisation. The notorious Nero may have fiddled...but never as enthusiastically as this!

Jackie says

It was a little too long. I think Levy could've wrapped it up in 320-350 pages. With that said, it was well written, informative and funny.

F.R. says

DOLCE VITA CONFIDENTIAL is a book which purports to be the story of Rome in the 1950s when it was the centre of the fashionable world. A city of impossible glamour that most of the world's cities will never get within a whisker of. (The last Shaun Levy book I read was about London in The Swinging Sixties, but even then London had the cool without the chic). However, despite its claims, I think - as the title suggests – what Levy is most interested in is detailing the making of Fellini's LA DOLCE VITA, but putting it into full context of the time.

So, we get the whirl of fashion and tabloid photography that inspired the film, characters sketches of the main players in the film (and the likes of Sophia Loren, who it would be impossible to ignore) and what comes from this is a great conjuring of a long lost beautiful black and white world.

I like Levy's prose style and its breeziness suits this subject perfectly. I have seen LA DOLCE VITA, but once and more than twenty years ago. (I'll be honest with you, most of the Italian movies I've seen are Spaghetti Westerns or Giallo.) However, this is a book which seems to capture the essence Rome in the fifties, and in doing so makes me want me to ride a scooter, drink an espresso and start watching all the other Italian cultural milestones I haven't seen but should have.
