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Puoi baciare lo sposo / My Big Gay Italian Wedding. Directed by Alessandro Genovesi. Colorado Film Production in collaboration with Medusa Film and Sky Cinema, 2018. 90 minutes.

On June 5, 2016, a law came into effect that recognized same-sex civil unions in Italy. Surely the law has had many material and legal consequences for same-sex couples in the country; but its symbolic significance for Italian (cultural) life is hard to miss, considering the complex and specific relationships that marriage has formed with family and the Catholic Church. Based on Anthony J. Wilkinson's 2003 off-Broadway play of the same title, *Puoi baciare lo sposo* is a feel-good comedy film that places its examination of contemporary Italian gay male relationships within this context. Baby-faced, boy-next-door Antonio lives with Paolo, a gay "bear," in cosmopolitan Berlin. Under pressure from Paolo, Antonio decides to bring him back to his native town, Bagnoregio (province of Viterbo), with the intention to marry him. Antonio's mother, Anna, supports the union from the very beginning and takes charge of organizing the ceremony, while Antonio's father, Roberto, also mayor of the town, only agrees to marry them after much resistance. The local priest and most of the churchgoers in the film are also warmly receptive to the matrimony. The only real obstacle to the couple's happiness is Antonio's ex-girlfriend, Camilla, who pursues him throughout the years after their separation and then tells the guests at the ceremony how they made love, even after Antonio declared his love to Paolo. Nonetheless, Antonio's tender kisses and his performance of a musical number at the end of the film help him reconcile with Paolo and consummate their civil union.

It is easy to see from this plot summary that *Puoi baciare lo sposo* rehearses many stereotypes of gay people and their families in contemporary Italian (and Western) culture, offering moments of temporary satirical and comedic relief, but leaving the larger gender order, which is closely bound to family and Catholicism in Italy, unchallenged. For example, Antonio's mother and father's differing views of his gayness are juxtaposed along the lines of their respective and separate spheres of influence. In line with conventional views of femininity and the household, Anna's key scenes involve food consumption. It is during a dinner that Antonio comes out to his parents and clarifies his intention to marry Paolo, to which Anna reacts by expressing understanding, while Roberto claims it is a farce. The next morning, during breakfast, Anna explicitly gives the two men her support for the union, while Roberto refuses Anna's request to officiate the civic marriage for them. The film further resorts to the conflict and the dichotomy between the father and the mother in numerous subsequent scenes involving food. Whereas Anna's world is that of the traditional household, Roberto's is that of bureaucracy, a decidedly masculine domain in Italy: in order to offset further depopulation in Bagnoregio, in a town meeting he defends his decision to have brought in refugees and he hopes to open the town even more to welcome tourists. In the worldview of the film, the forward-looking practices embraced to save the town from erosion and decline would not sit comfortably with his backward view of his son's gayness and his worry that the town would turn into a "ricchionopoli" (queeropolis). Even the town's priest is in favor of the union and is, therefore, willing to breach the strictures of the Vatican to perform a religious wedding for them. He plays a crucial role in persuading Roberto to open his mind to the marriage. Eventually Roberto agrees to preside over Antonio's wedding ceremony, where he delivers a speech about mutual love, much in alignment with the priest's sermon. Thus, the fights between the mother, a staunch defender of her son and his homosexuality, and the father, a chauvinistic Italian man converted into a loving father, are stereotypically depicted with many jokes and ironic comments about their gender practices.

The conflicts that contemporaneously arise between Antonio and Paolo are even more telling about (self)-stereotyping of gay men and the gender/sexuality regime to which they subscribe. With no sex scenes, or even display of sexual intimacy, Genovesi draws our attention to a brief but crucial instance of talking about sex, and to kissing, as the film's title underscores. Camilla asks Antonio to

kiss her one final time and he obliges, for which an unhappy Paolo is only comforted by Antonio's kiss. At the ceremony, Camilla reveals that Antonio and she had sex after the men were already together, a fact which causes Paolo to abandon the ceremony, as he realizes that Antonio had lied and dodged his question the night before. Kissing here refers to Antonio's possible bisexuality only very fleetingly, and a possibility that the character quickly suppresses or denies. Kissing in the movie is not meant to be sensual, and it is used almost as a mockery of sexual possibilities other than those pertaining to the two couples that we have just examined. What kissing represents in the film has to do with human affections, as the film tirelessly repeats that love conquers all, and as the marriage planner reminds us, how emotional the two men and he, himself, must feel about the lavish ceremony. Kissing also refers to domesticity, socially sanctioned by both civil and religious marriage institutions in the film.

From these perspectives, the rather chaste world of *Puoi baciare lo sposo* illustrates homonormative ideals. According to Lisa Duggan, in an observation about the early 2000s' gay politics in the United States, homonormativity is "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (*The New Homonormativity* 2002, 179). In this lens, Genovesi's film resembles the didactic nature of a RAI documentary series, Giampaolo Marconato's *Stato Civile: L'amore è uguale per tutti* (*Civil State: Love is Equal for All*, 2016-17) on Italy's same-sex civil union law and its immediate effects on ordinary people. The film also adopts a similar reconciliatory tone that we can detect in fiction films such as Ferzan Özpetek's *Mine vaganti / Loose Cannons* (2010) and Ivan Silvestrini's *Come non detto / Tell No One* (2012), where the integrity of families is jeopardized by the revelation of the characters' sexuality and then remedied when the same-sex stories are founded based on the principles of heterosexual romances. On the other hand, the film is radically different from other recent films on the topic of Italy's contemporary same-sex relations. For example, Gianni Amelio's documentary film *Felice chi è diverso / Happy to Be Different* (2014) provides a window into older gay men who offer a variety of perspectives on their sex and gender lives in post-WWII Italy. Fabio Mollo's *Il padre d'Italia / There is a Light* (2017) features a gay male protagonist who chooses not to marry his partner who wants to start a family with him, before entering into "accidental fatherhood" with the child left to him by a woman that he befriends. When we compare *Puoi baciare lo sposo* to films such as Luca Guadagnino's *Call Me by Your Name* (2017), Francis Lee's *God's Own Country* (2017), and Barry Jenkins' *Moonlight* (2016), where the narratives focus on coming to terms with the pains and ambiguity caused by sexuality and gender, we further confirm the conformist nature of Genovesi's film. These other films also tend to intersect migrations or other types of mobilities with gender fluidity and ambivalence, resulting in more nuanced portrayals of gender arrangements in globalized societies. The audience must make up its own mind about whether to embrace a movie with clear support for same-sex civil unions, but with rigid gender regimes like those expressed in *Puoi baciare lo sposo*, or, rather, for films that expound more complex views of human agency through sexuality.

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