

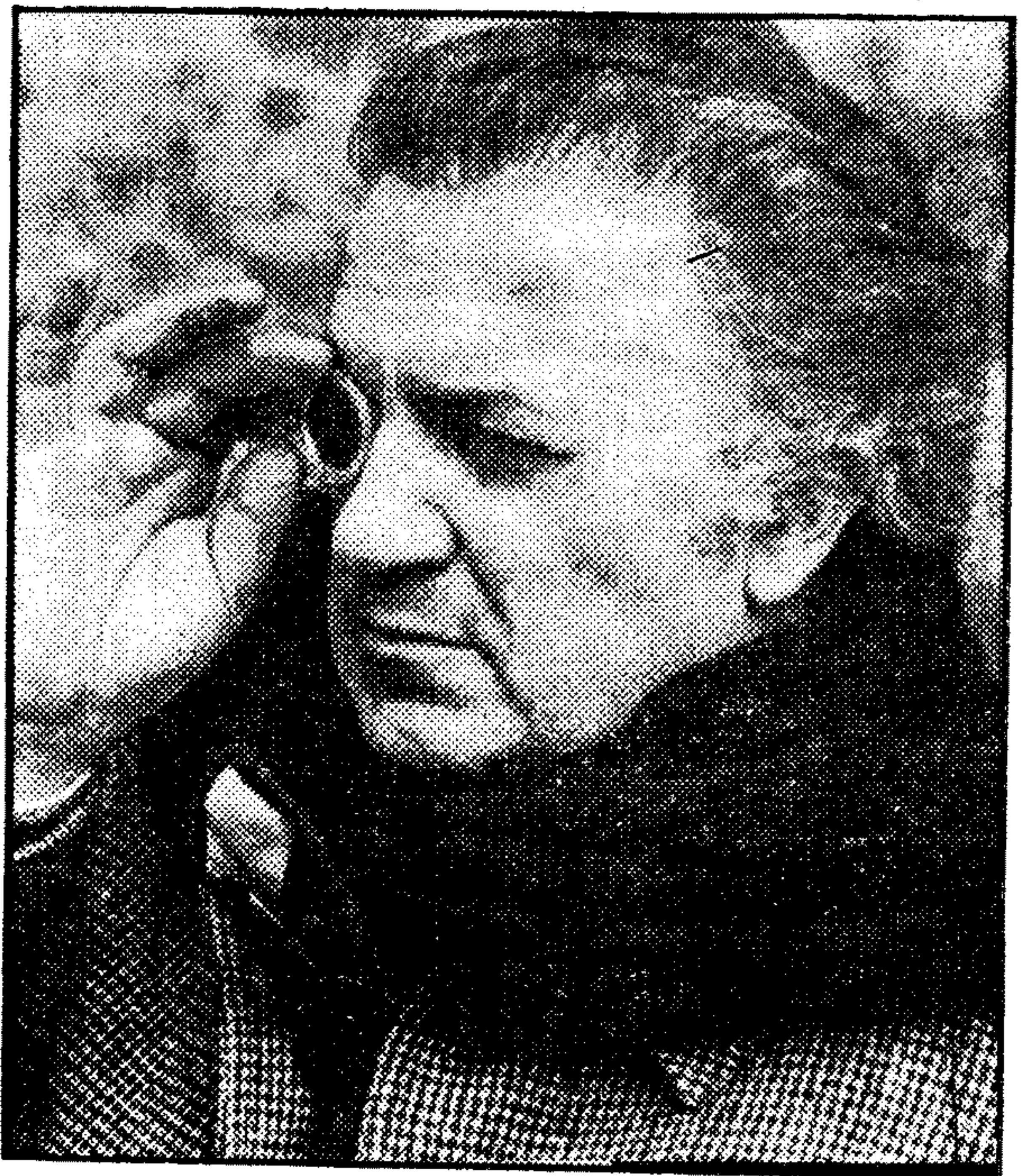
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Contenders Explore the Past

FEDERICO FELLINI

Says Fellini, "I start to make a picture 30 years ago, and I am still shooting that picture."



BY TOM SHALES

● Where are the dwarfs, the prostitutes, the clowns? There ought to be clowns. Instead, there are just the publicist, the agent, the interpreter, the photographer and Federico Fellini. It is an entourage, but one had expected a circus.

Fellini sits on a couch in his New York hotel suite looking no larger than life—round, mischievous, proletarian—in an untucked navy blue shirt that pulls at the belly. He may not appear to be, but this is the man who created some of the richest visions ever seen in the movies, for "La Strada," "La Dolce Vita," "8½" and others.

In recent years, some have declared him to be in a slump. Critics have not been jubilant over a Fellini film since "Juliet of the Spirits" a decade ago. But Fellini's overwhelming new movie, "Amarcord," has brought the critics—and the public—back to him.

The film is a two-hour dream set in the village of Rimini, where Fellini grew up. It tells, in terms that are raunchy, affectionate and surreal, parallel tales of people who may not have lived there. The word "Amarcord" is being translated as "I Remember," but there is no strict literal meaning. Fellini made it up. "I am an inventor of words," he says. "Sometimes of nice words. Sometimes of dirty words. 'Amarcord' is a word of Italian slang. And it means 'I hope the picture goes very well in the States.'"

He looks to his interpreter and she laughs, just as he wanted. Her name is Vivian Wayne. She is a student at Columbia University, and she was discovered for this job while riding a subway wearing an Italian T-shirt. Fellini lapses into Italian now and then and she jumps in with English. Fellini hates to make "intair-view" and Miss Wayne is helping to see him through. She is, by any standard, beautiful.

The laughing subsides. "Really, 'Amarcord' means 'I remember but I remain—the moments come to me, it is not that I go to them.' It is a judgment and a tenderness."

As usual, the movie is filled with lavish, potent images—an enormous woman in a tobacco shop, a luxury liner passing

ghostlike in the night—and, most unforgettable, a peacock opening its tail during a snowfall. That must have been hard to shoot.

"No, it's not very difficult to force peacock to do like this," says Fellini, his chubby arms spreading. "You have to talk in the language of peacock." Miss Wayne laughs. "That is an electronic peacock. Yes. But don't disappoint the readers and the audience, no, no. Say that it is a real peacock, a peacock who has a lot of admiration for Fellini."

The snow isn't real, either. It's a chemical concoction. But it certainly looks real. Super real.

"That is a movie of Fellini. Everything is possible."

And the cry of the peacock is actually a combination of electronic sounds. "That's why I make movies. To make fun with electronic sound." Miss Wayne laughs. "Why you laugh? Why you laugh?" He starts to laugh himself.

"Everything is crazy. Everything can be tremendous difficulty when you make a picture. Why a man at 54 years old has to stand in artificial snow with electronic peacock and with motor of airplane blowing snow around and screaming in the megaphone? Why? It's a madman. But if you like to do it and you think it is your life, it makes you very, very—how you say—enthusiastic."

Fellini's enthusiasm, unquestionable, has not been shared by some critics in recent years. They generally disliked his films "Satyricon" and "Roma," and neither made much money in this country. Fellini does not pretend that he was not upset by this reception.

"I have to be very careful, really, because on that point I am very vulnerable. To realize that what you say is liked by people, it's good, nourishing, stimulating. But the critics that are bad, against—I am very weak; I think that maybe they are right. For a creative person to be criticized can be very dangerous. A creative person needs an atmosphere of approval. Like a fighter. Even a strong fighter, if the atmosphere around him is against, he feels weaker. You need to be

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A Vision With the Fellini Stamp

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drunk, you need to be exalted, to believe in what you are doing."

"Amarcord" is set in the mid-'30s, when Fellini himself was entering puberty and Rimini was seeing the first of the Fascists. They stage a pompous parade through the city's streets which is really rather comic.

"Comic? No they are grotesque. The Fascists are so stupid that they appear naive, they don't exist anymore. They are not dangerous. There is a different power now. A power much more dangerous. A new power made from the TV power, the culture of TV and giving an image of life in which you have to buy this certain kind of shoes, a certain kind of butter. That is the real power. That is the new fascism. To give a vision of life that you are born just to buy these things. It becomes a very dangerous and continuous corruption that makes you alienated from the meaning of life and the mystery of life.

"In the United States, I think you start to come away from this degeneration. I have that feeling."

In a movie of Fellini—everything is possible. "I start to make a picture 30 years ago, and I am still shooting that picture," he says. Incidents and images from his past films stay in the mind, mingle and revolve, and many can be called up at a moment's notice—his outlandish and earthy and ravenous characters marching perpetually in the parade that ended "8½."

What he has to say, he says in those movies and through those characters. Asked for the meaning of this, an explanation of that, his feeling about whatever, he withdraws and evades, and even lets go of Miss Wayne's hand.

"I am not someone who can say every time the same things. And I don't want to define things. I don't want to make things very clear. I don't want to understand the world. Why the world has to be understood by me? I refuse to make clear ideas about life."