Shakespeare in Italy 2016  
Films, Books, and Internet Sites

Dear Fellow Travelers,

July will be upon us sooner than you might think, and here are some movies, videos, and websites to whet your appetite for Italy. Please note that these are only suggestions for your own enjoyment and that you are not required to watch any of these movies or videos or visit any of these sites—I’m sure you’re busy enough right now, and this summer you’ll be occupied with Shakespeare—but if you have a free evening and would like to watch a movie, or if you’re surfing the internet, here are some possibilities.

Movies (of varying quality) have been made of all the Shakespeare plays we will read this summer. The 1953 version of *Julius Caesar*, starring Marlon Brando, James Mason, and John Gielgud is reputed to be excellent, while the 1970 version with Charlton Heston and (again) John Gielgud is not so well regarded. The 2004 *Merchant of Venice* is generally good, especially Al Pacino as Shylock and Jeremy Irons as Antonio. The BBC has filmed productions of all 38 of Shakespeare’s plays. They are of uneven quality, however, as some are overly stagemy. But I particularly like the BBC version of *The Taming of the Shrew*, as it stars John Cleese (of Monty Python fame) as Petruchio, and he brings a twisted energy to the role that I find wonderful. The Richard Burton-Elizabeth Taylor version from 1967 is, I think, like several Zeffirelli films, overblown and not as successful, but if you want to see these outsized movie celebrities do Shakespeare, it’s kind of fun.

Too many movies have been set in Venice to list, but we’ll name a few. *The Tourist*, starring Johnny Depp and Angelia Jolie, is a fun caper from 2010 with a few twists and turns, and makes Venice look beautiful. One Dr. Moran likes is *Summertime*, featuring Katherine Hepburn as an American spinster vacationing in Venice. A very sweet Venice movie is the 1979 *A Little Romance*, starring Sir Laurence Olivier and a very young Diane Lane. Two young runaways hear from an old man (guess) that if they kiss while riding a gondola under the Bridge of Sighs, they will be together forever.

Scores of movies have been set in the Eternal City of Rome, our future home away from home, but none boast so lovely a heroine as Audrey Hepburn in *Roman Holiday*, which is charming. More somber movies, indeed deeply tragic ones, are *The Bicycle Thief* and *Umberto D*, considered some of the masterpieces of Italian cinema. Both are set amidst the desperate poverty of post-World War II Italy, whereas Federico Fellini’s *La Dolce Vita*, portraying the stylish and cynical jet-set crowd of 1960s Rome, hints at the remarkable economic recovery which made Italy one of the world’s wealthiest nations.

Fellini, considered one of the masters of not only Italian but world cinema—he won an Oscar for lifetime achievement in 1993—also directed the funny and poignant *Amarcord* (about his boyhood) and the tragic *La Strada*. Some more recent Italian movies have also been well received by American audiences, such as *Cinema Paradiso*, *Il Postino*, and *Life is Beautiful*, all of which can be found at a local video store. Some (but by no means all)
of these we have listed are, or would be today, rated “R”, so you will have to decide which you would prefer to see.

I suppose we should mention *The DaVinci Code*, which, thankfully, has faded from most people’s consciousness of late. I’ve neither read the book nor seen the film, so I won’t pass judgment, except to say that please realize there’s not a shred of historical truth to 99% of what the book or the movie propose. But I imagine most of you know that already.

For those of you interested in Italian architecture, check out Rick Steves’ two videos, “Rome” and “Florence and Venice.” “Gore Vidal’s Venice” is a video that gives one a taste of Venetian culture and history along with lots of great views. For those interested in art, I recommend “Sister” Wendy’s documentary “The Grand Tour” and the “Renaissance” and “Baroque” volumes of her series *The Story of Painting*. You may also want to pick up an art history book and read about some of the artists whose work we’ll be seeing, such as Michelangelo, da Vinci, Raphael, and Giotto. We’ll be spending an afternoon at the Galleria Borghese, where many of Bernini’s greatest statues are, so you may want to read about him too.

There are a million websites relating to Italy to visit. Two that provide basic tourist information are [www.initaly.com](http://www.initaly.com) and [www.goitaly.about.com](http://www.goitaly.about.com). To learn all about Venice, *la repubblica serenissima*, check out [www.doge.it](http://www.doge.it), which is excellent. To learn more about Padua, try [www.virtourist.com/europe/padua](http://www.virtourist.com/europe/padua). One of the many sites for students to learn about ancient Rome is [www.crystalinks.com/rome.html](http://www.crystalinks.com/rome.html), while [www.roma2000.it](http://www.roma2000.it) is a good general guide to the city.

Again, these are for your own fun if you have the time. Come July 8th, however, we won’t need videos and the internet to get our fill of Italy.

Sincerely,

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Director, *Shakespeare in Italy*