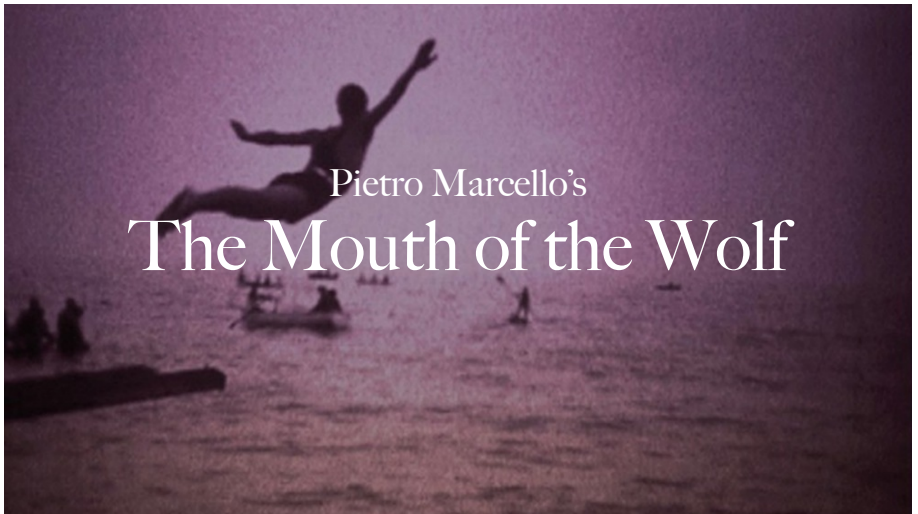


Acropolis Cinema  
presents:



Pietro Marcello's  
**The Mouth of the Wolf**

October 16-22, 2020 – Acropolis Virtual Cinema

# ABOUT THE FILM

Winner of major prizes at the Berlin and Turin film festivals, the hauntingly beautiful debut feature from Pietro Marcello (*Lost and Beautiful*, *Martin Eden*) interweaves two love stories: the 20-year romance between a Sicilian tough guy and a transsexual former junkie whom he met in prison, and a poetic reverie of the Italian port town of Genoa, depicted in all its mysterious, fading glory. Commissioned by the Fondazione San Marcellino, a Jesuit order dedicated to helping society's poor and marginalized, *The Mouth of the Wolf* masterfully combines documentary with fiction and melancholy home movies from the past century with poetic images, sounds, and music of the waterfront today.

68 min. | Italy/France | 2009

## The Mouth of the Wolf by Stephen Holden

*The following article was originally published by the New York Times, August 3, 2011*

“The places we walk through are an excavation of memory — forbidden remembrances of a lost world,” muses the unseen occasional narrator of Pietro Marcello’s impressionistic, extravagantly poetic documentary “The Mouth of the Wolf.”

In this melancholy rumination on time, love and decay, which opens a one-week engagement at the Museum of Modern Art on Thursday, the excavation site is Genoa, the convoluted and crumbling northern Italian seaport, which the movie visualizes as an Eternal City more evocative of European history than Rome itself.

With the same quasi-religious fervor that the British filmmaker Terence Davies compiles Proustian memories of his native Liverpool in “Of Time and the City” this film seeks to conjure the essence of Genoa, a city of about 600,000, between the Ligurian Sea and the Apennine Mountains.

In a fantastic leap of imagination the film parallels Genoa’s history with the story of two real-life lovers worthy of Jean Genet: the mustachioed, supermacho Vincenzo Motta, known as Enzo, and his gentle transsexual partner, Mary Monaco, who met and fell in love while they were in prison.

As you watch them tell their stories, sitting side by side and flanked by their three dogs in a shabby candlelit apartment in a poor section of town, it is impossible not to imagine them as two of Genet’s outlaw lovers, at last released from prison, who have settled down together 20 years later. Enzo, who is probably in his 50s and has a craggy, hatchet

face of a handsomer Jack Palance, is still a preening stud who caresses and flexes the muscles of his lean body in front of the camera. He insists that the simpering, solicitous Mary is the “dominator” in their relationship; she demurs.

Before we are formally introduced to them two-thirds of the way into the film, we’ve listened to the adoring messages they taped for each other while Enzo was still behind bars and Mary was waiting for him. She affectionately called him “bastard,” and he called her “bitch.” The film includes Enzo’s re-enactment of his return from prison.

What does all this have to do with Genoa besides the fact that the couple live there? As I said, it’s a leap. The rest of the film is a high-contrast montage of images of the city and its inhabitants, now and then, to which no dates are applied. The wonderful archival footage gathered from here and there is a mysteriously beautiful scrapbook.

Over all “The Mouth of the Wolf” is a cinematic mediation on creation and destruction that tilts toward destruction. We see the razing of bridges and edifices. A giant ocean liner thronged with waving passengers slowly edges out of the harbor. The gaunt, careworn faces of peddlers on Genoa’s narrow, crowded streets evoke an unchanging urban peasantry.

Enzo and Mary, social outcasts now approaching late middle age, belong to that anonymous underclass. Enzo, a street criminal who exchanged gunfire with the police, tells of how he endured three stints in prison, totaling 27 years. When the lovers met, Mary, an addict who consumed five grams of heroin a day, was sharing a cell with two other transsexuals in a special cellblock. One day a prison worker told her of a man who would give her cigarettes if she sewed the hem of his trousers.

She recalls how intimidating she found Enzo, who surprised her by giving her some poems and letters to translate; a wary friendship developed. As she was leaving the library one day, he grabbed her and kissed her on the lips. Below his brutal facade, she later discovered was “the sweetness of a child.” She fell in love with him, she says, when she watched him cry while watching “Bambi.” She also recalls how fiercely he defended her from persecution from the guards who routinely harassed transsexuals.

The film doesn’t describe the nuts and bolts of their life together and how they eke out a living. It identifies them as mythic, shipwrecked survivors on a ravaged urban waterfront. Their dream is to live in the countryside in a house with an orchard, a veranda and a bench on which they can sit and watch the world go by as they drift peacefully into old age. “The Mouth of the Wolf” will haunt you. ♦

## **The Mouth of the Wolf** **by Diego Semerene**

*The following article was originally published by Slant Magazine, August 3, 2011*

Blurring the lines between documentary and fiction like an essay film whose “I” is never really the filmmaker’s, and splitting sound from its normatively tautological relationship to image, *The Mouth of the Wolf* weaves the love story between Enzo (Vincenzo Motta), an irresistible hyper-masculine brute, and Mary (Mary Monaco), a recovering heroin addict transsexual, with stylistic ingenuity and masterful emotional restraint. We experience the delay of the fantasy of the happy old couple in their country home in cinematic time as, for most of the film, the only body these lovers have is the spellbinding combination of visual fragments serving as apparitions to their voices. Which is haunting which? It isn’t until the very end that we’re allowed to see Enzo and Mary in the same frame offering some kind of direct account of their story. Until then, we hear poetic epistolary exchanges and see a lot of old industrial footage of implosions, explosions, debris. Structures going up and coming down. It’s a stream-of-consciousness collage of memories: nightclub neon signs, men in trench coats, gun shots, and young people dancing the twist. Chris Marker territory, but here the ideas are firmly anchored in specific characters who become more fleshly as the storytelling patchwork unfolds. A colored photograph of a heavily made-up woman may follow grainy sepia film of a girl staring in the mirror, which may follow our rugged mustachioed Enzo in all his virility inhabiting the film’s present tense, getting rowdy at a bar.

The film is very much a contemplation of the split, or non-split, between masculine and feminine, imprisonment and freedom, lover and lover. Their seemingly oppositional “nature” proves to be a matter of performance, not intent, as one is always confounded with the other. This becomes clear in the extraordinary final scene, when Enzo and Mary address us directly. They cherish moments of their coupledness in prison as much more idyllic than anything they could experience outside it. Enzo claims that both of them are dominants in their own way—he through violence, she through outright fierceness. The tough thug is, finally, just a needy boy for whom love, which is always maternal, isn’t a given. He has to seduce her every time, like a kid begging for Mommy’s recognition and promptly wallowing in embarrassment when he gets it. The audience watches Enzo, whom, we have learned, cries watching *Bambi* and has “the sweetness of a child in the body of a giant,” looking downward in infantile awkwardness as Mary sings his praises: his body was spectacular, his strength was the law, and his sweetness did her in. It’s beautiful, it’s incestuous, it’s familiar. And we watch roughness and frailty become the same mottled and binding thing. There are echoes of João Pedro Rodrigues’s *To Die Like a Man* in this relationship, with a less brutal symbiosis between the older transsexual and the hot straight man. It takes very little for Enzo’s masculinity to be sold as legitimate, a certain sentence or a certain swagger. Mary’s femininity also requires very little external manifestation, an ill-fitting black wig or a tiny accouterment. It turns out all is *trompe l’oeil*. ♦



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