



FILM: **THE GARDEN OF FINZI-CONTINIS**

FDG RATING: 3.5 ☺☺☺☺○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Vittorio De Sica: *director*  
Dominique Sanda: *actress, Micol*  
Lino Capolicchio: *actor, Giorgio*

DATE: July 17, 2022

## DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **THE GARDEN OF FINZI-CONTINIS**

Several discussion participants who saw *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* in the 1970s remember that the film made a powerful impression. Watching it in 2022 was a different experience since we have seen so many Holocaust films over the years that have been intensely graphically visual about the horrors. We still appreciate the insight and perspective presented by the internationally acclaimed director, Vittorio De Sica, especially since this film, possibly more than others, focuses on the privileged life of wealthy Jews living an insulated life sheltered from the growing anti-Semitism in their country.

The film is based on the true autobiographical story by Giorgio Bassani. The Finzi-Continis, are an intellectual aristocratic family living in Ferrara, Italy, on an idyllic estate with a magnificent walled garden. Siblings Alberto and Micol regularly hold parties and invite their affluent friends who are Jewish, non-Jewish, some Socialists, to play tennis on their home courts, especially after Jews are excluded from the tennis club. The Fascist government of Mussolini has declared the ordinary tennis clubs off limits for Italian Jews. But the Finzi-Continis live in their own insulated world; they hardly seem to know, or care, what is happening around them. They don't even look Jewish sporting blond hair and fair skin.

Micol's friend, Giorgio, from a less affluent Jewish family, has been helplessly in love with her since they were both children, and deceives himself that she loves him. It's interesting to watch this second story line and see the youthful pain caused by an unattainable romantic relationship while a more serious pain is bubbling as Mussolini's racial laws are beginning to clamp down on the rights of Jews including no servants, no phone listings, no library privileges, no public schools, no obituaries. And that is just the beginning.

Giorgio's younger brother, sent to France to study, finds out to his horror about the German concentration camps and exposes this atrocity at a dinner when he returns from France. There has been no word about this in Italy, of course. Like the layers of skin being peeled away from an onion, the life they know is being peeled away. The Finzi-Continis family thought their wealth and generations of intellectual and social position protected them.

We know what is going to happen so our anticipation is tinged with dread. Fascism gradually shatters their world. One published critic noted that Italy in those final prewar years is painted by De Sica as a perpetual wait for something no one admitted would come: war and the persecution of the Jews. Giorgio's father begins to worry that even though he is a Fascist member in good standing, he may not be able to escape the evil net that is engulfing others. De Sica's film creates a feeling of nostalgia for a lost time and place.

One of the most emotional final scenes is seeing the proud the Finzi-Continis family huddled with other Jewish families, in a waiting room, each holding a few belongings, as they await their fate. It is 1943 and Fascist officials are deporting them to Auschwitz.

The cinematography was gorgeous and the acting outstanding. In 1971 the film was awarded the Oscar for best international film. In the 1970s we would have showered *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* with our highest scores, but now in 2022, our reactions have been tempered by time and many other powerful Holocaust films, so a slightly wilted 3.5 is our final score on a scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!

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