

But there is another difference that really makes the difference, the mysterious influence of language and culture notwithstanding. Genovese had the artistic instinct to instantiate a denouement in *Perfetti sconosciuti* which vaporized all the exquisitely searing humiliations that preceded the denouement. It was all a dream. No secrets had been exposed, and a good time was had by all. Everyone went home psychologically intact, protected by the prophylactic of their hypocrisy. These folks knew the value of hypocrisy, since we are given to understand that they also knew no one was going to change all that much. Hence the Categorical Imperative "Gotta keep those lovin' good vibrations a-happenin..." It must be an Italian thing, knowing this. And that makes sense. After all, Italy is the mother of Europe, and mother knows best.

Bora Dağtekin evinces few artistic instincts. In *Das perfekte Geheimnis*, all the backstabbing and betrayal really is exposed, and thus relationships really are damaged or broken, and self-respect really is given a flogging and so forth. But then, in the endlessly lingering denouement, we find that lessons have been learned, and our characters are trundling on in life, perhaps not totally happily ever after, but much the better for all that they have learned. They are convinced, and want us to rest assured, that they can handle the truth, and use it as a tool for self-improvement. From now on, *totale Ehrlichkeit!*

Herein we sense a fleeting but intense irruption of TW (Teutonic Wokeism). Like good little *gleichgeschaltete Pfadfinder und Pfadfinderin*, one and all are going to strive a little harder to be a little more trustworthy, brave, loyal, helpful, and friendly, and a bit less prone to random licentiousness and betrayal. The trouble with such clumsy didacticism is that it obliterates the possibility of any good vibrations, artistic or otherwise. It is rumored that the Italians, praise be, seem intent on continuing to depend upon that tried-and-true psychological fig leaf, the big H, be it in movies or in life.

Yet miraculously, *Das perfekte Geheimnis* almost redeems itself by faithfully and deftly echoing *Perfetti sconosciuti* in terms of what resonates in our technological space of experience. Marshal McLuhan once famously said that a stripper wears her audience. The iPhone is our psychological cyber stripper (in a transitive sense), wearing us every day and wearing us down and ultimately wearing us out, prior to tossing us off, after first having stripped us of our privacy and autonomy and dignity. If, as McLuhan further noted: "phonetic writing destroyed Greek society without their having the slightest notion of how it happened", then we of the *iPhone-Kultur* had better start quaking in our boots. Rochefoucauld refused to purchase one, and he advised his son not to either. Perhaps Pandora's box can never be closed, but her iPhone should be.

## THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA *Friday Film Fest Series*



### **Das perfekte Geheimnis**

Directed by Bora Dağtekin

April 16, 2021

● 6:30 PM ●

Film, Food & Discussion

The German Society of Pennsylvania

611 Spring Garden St.

Philadelphia, PA 19123

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## Das perfekte Geheimnis (2019)

**Director:** Bora Dağtekin  
**Script:** Bora Dağtekin (adapted from the original by Paolo Genovese)  
**Producer:** Bora Dağtekin  
**Music:** Egon Riedel  
**Cinematography:** Moritz Anton  
**Release Date:** 21-Oct-2019 (Munich)  
**Spieldauer:** 120 minutes  
**Cast:** **Wotan Wilke Möhring** (Rocco)  
**Jessica Schwartz** (Eva)  
**Elyas M'barek** (Leo)  
**Caroline Herfurth** (Carlotta)  
**Frederick Lau** (Simon)  
**Jella Haase** (Bianca)  
**Florian David Fitz** (Pepe)  
**Commentary:** A. Krumm



### *In Praise of Artistic Instinct*

When something resonates, when multitudes eagerly tune in, be it a picture or a poem or a movie or a song, you have to give that something its due. *Perfetti sconosciuti* is such a something. And the resonance keeps on reverberating, as eighteen remakes have been filmed around the world. This movie franchise, if we may call it that, is many things, but it is preeminently a *Lehrfilm* in the guise of a bawdy colloquy, or more precisely a philosophical foray into things utterly human, indeed so pervasively human that few will miss the signal.

This resonance is engendered by the underlying premise of the story, which, like the deep state, is deeply submerged yet painfully evident everywhere we look. That premise was formulated quite some time ago by Francois de la Rochefoucauld: "*Hypocrisy is the homage vice pays to virtue.*" Way back in the 1980s, William Raspberry wrote an article called "In Praise of Hypocrisy", which aptly expounds upon this premise. Paolo Genovese, the director of *Perfetti sconosciuti* (the Italian original) is obviously on the same wavelength as la Rochefoucauld. Bora Dağtekin, the director of the German remake *Das perfekte Geheimnis*, is obviously not.

Before delving into the nature of this resonance, due diligence and a decent respect for the opinions of cineastes requires that we provide feedback from Aphrodite, who is said to be a comic, laughter loving spirit. One might think she would have a ball at the dinner party we are privy to. A rollicking motif of passion, one that would please Aphrodite, certainly has been, and most assur-

edly will again someday be employed to great effect. But not at the German version of the soiree in question. In this alleged comedy her son Eros is constantly being demoted to *the thing in itself*, an obsessively formulaic concupiscent as it were. She was miffed, knowing he had so much more to offer.

In the wake of the screening of the German version which she attended, Aphrodite issued an advisory to movie makers not to employ ostensibly middle aged, quintessentially middle class characters to channel adolescent libidinousness (Italians, she conceded, might be able to get away with this). Perhaps she is not the ultimate role model, given her unseemly parentage and rather checkered past, but Aphrodite has always emphasized the importance of good taste and manners, and wanted her voice to be heard.

Aphrodite emphasized moreover that dialog is supposed to draw you in, to make you feel as if you are participating in the interactions of the characters. Or at least that you really are a fly on the wall, achieving a state of what critic David Thomson called "conscience-free voyeurism". Some viewers might be drawn into the philosophical foray (at least in the Italian version), others might bounce off the surface due to the relentless flow of stagey vulgarity (in the German version). Both sets of viewers might be tempted to believe that there must be a more respectable option for partaking of some genuinely satisfying *conscience-free voyeurism*. For the record, Aphrodite wasn't into voyeurism, given her distaste for spectator sports.

Aphrodite's admonitions notwithstanding, the resonance endures, seemingly undiminished. In other words, audiences continue to love comedy served up as a spicy confection of humiliating exposure. Particularly if it involves heaping helpings of humiliation stemming from the dynamics of that beloved biological imperative, the venerable *Ding an sich*. In particular, people love this movie, or rather this franchise, in spite of its self-inflicted dialogical wounds (or, it must be admitted, perhaps because of them). Maybe they love it also a good bit for the cast (both the Italian and German ensembles are very charming and attractive); maybe they love it as much for its considerable cathartic potential and its implicit universality; maybe they love it for lots of reasons, but however much they love this movie and for whatever reasons, it resonates with them above all because they know la Rochefoucauld had a point, whether they have ever heard of him or not.

It must be said that all of this works much better in the Italian original than it does in the German knockoff. Perhaps it is an unfair comparison. Maybe it is just a language thing – naughty chitchat seems so charming and even profound in Italian. Or maybe Italians are innately equipped for *la dolce vita* (or at least the illusion thereof), while German gifts incline more towards *Ordnung* and Didacticism. A little action now and then might be okay, but it had better be subject to proper discipline, and everyone should be punctual and post facto everyone is duty bound to imbibe and then pass on some socially valuable lessons.