



FLM 390: Italian Cinema from Neorealism to Netflix

Course Syllabus

Fall 2019

Instructor: Elgin K. Eckert, Ph.D.

Credits: 3

Contact Hours: 45 hours

Prerequisites: None

Class Hours: Tu./Th. 12:00-1:30 pm

Office Hours: Mo. 1:30-3:00 pm

Course Type: Standard Course

Lab Fee: None

Course Description

This course provides an in-depth examination of some of the most important Italian films from the post-World War II era to the present day. It will cover ideological and aesthetic rules of film art, reviewing and expanding upon the most important elements of film technique as well as essential topics in the field of film theory and criticism. The course will look at the roots of Italian cinema, closely analyze Neorealism (the cinematic phenomenon that had an important influence on the ideological and aesthetic rules of film as art) and examine the most important directors and genres. It will also consider recent small-screen productions that have had international relevance, such as HBO/RAI television's *My Brilliant Friend* and Netflix's first Italian series, *Suburra*.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, students will:

Learning Outcomes	Assessment Measures Course requirements that will be used to assess students' achievement for each learning outcome
explore the range of Italian cinema and develop an appreciation for Italian cinema and appreciate the complex interactions between films and their historical, cultural, and political context	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Screenings● Classroom discussion● Student Presentations● Midterm● Final
become familiar with basic and more advanced cinematic techniques in order to view films in an active and critical manner;	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Lectures● Response Papers● Midterm● Final

use core critical concepts in film studies to analyze films; become versed in special techniques of film analysis; and	
compose convincing written arguments backed by evidence from films and secondary sources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Research Paper ● Response Papers

Course Materials

Readings

Sikov, Ed, *Film Studies*.

A course reader, including all the indicated readings, will be available at a local copy shop for € 20. Please see “Umbra Institute Course Materials - Textbooks and Readers” handout provided in the orientation folder for more information.

Films (all films are in Italian with English subtitles)

Roberto Benigni *Johnny Stecchino*

--- *La vita è bella* (Life is Beautiful)

Saverio Costanzo *L'amica geniale* (My Brilliant Friend)

Vittorio De Sica *Ladri di biciclette* (Bicycle Thieves)

Federico Fellini *La strada*

Pietro Germi *Divorzio all'italiana* (Divorce Italian Style)

Roberto Rossellini *Roma, città aperta* (Rome, Open City)

Stefano Sollima *Suburra. La serie*

Giuseppe Tornatore *Cinema Paradiso*

Assessment

Preparation and Participation	10%
6 Film Studies Assignments	30%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Student Presentation	10%
Research Paper	15%
Final Examination	15%

Letter grades for student work are based on the following percentage scale:

Letter Grade Range	Numerical Score Equivalent	Student Performance
A	93% - 100%	Exceptional
A-	90% - 92%	Excellent
B+	87% - 89%	Superior
B	83% - 86%	
B-	80% - 82%	
C+	77% - 79%	Satisfactory
C	73% - 76%	
C-	70% - 72%	
D+	67% - 69%	Low Pass
D	63% - 66%	
D-	60% - 62%	
F	59% or less	Fail (no credit)

Course Requirements

Preparation and Participation (10%)

Students are expected to do all reading assignments before the assigned date in order to contribute to classroom discussions. Film screenings and Documentaries are an integral part of this course and must be treated as such (please see [An Important Note on Film and Documentary Screenings](#) below). It is not acceptable to walk out of film/documentary screenings for any reason, use electronic devices, or fall asleep. Any student not paying complete attention to the film screening component of the course will get 5 points deducted from their **Participation** grade for each instance.

6 Film Studies Assignments (30%)

Students will complete 6 short assignments designed to make them critical readers of films.

Midterm Exam (20%)

The in-class midterm exam will focus on film techniques as well as cultural and historical material studied in class and will be composed of identifications, short answer questions as well as a short essay.

Final Student Presentation (10%)

Students will give a conference style presentation of their research project to the class.

Research Paper (15%)

Students in this course will write a 5-7 page research paper.

Final Examination (15%)

The in-class final exam will focus on the historical material studied in class. It will be composed of identifications, short answer questions as well as a short essay.

Course Content Disclaimer

Because of the material covered in this course, we will be discussing subjects that may be disturbing to some students. Some of the films screened in this course contain scenes of sexual interactions, graphic violence (to humans and animals), and murder. Students who anticipate discomfort while screening these films should familiarize themselves with the plot before class, and then sit near an exit so that, when necessary, they may step out of the room for a few minutes. Removing yourself for a moment is perfectly fine, and you may always do so without academic penalty **as long as you let the professor know that you left in order to avoid emotional discomfort**. You will, however, be responsible for any material you miss. If you do leave the room for a significant time, please make arrangements to get notes from another student **and** see me individually to discuss the situation.

An Important Note on Film Screenings

You must treat each film screening as you would a reading. You are expected to be an active viewer, looking for historical, political, economic, social, cultural, narrative, and aesthetic meaning. You must take notes on every film you see. For each film, you are expected to be able to analyze the characters, themes, film techniques, narrative organization, historical significance, relation to history/film history, etc. It is not acceptable to walk out of film screenings for any reason other than those listed in the Course Content Disclaimer (above), use electronic devices, or fall asleep. Any student not paying complete attention to the film screening component of the course will get 5 points deducted from their **Participation** grade for each instance (see [Preparation and Participation](#) above). Missing an evening film screening will automatically lower the students' grade by one grade level (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

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Attendance Policy

Class attendance is **mandatory**. Students are allowed **two “free” absences**, which do not need to be justified. **It is the students’ responsibility to keep them in case of real necessity (sickness or any other unforeseen inconvenience that may prevent students from being in class)**. Each additional absence, unless for a very serious reason, will lower the students’ grade by one grade level (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

If students miss class, they are responsible for obtaining class notes from other students and/or for meeting the professor during office hours. It is also the policy of the Institute that any student who has eight or more absences automatically fails the class.

Except in the case of medical emergencies, absences are not accepted when tests are scheduled; tests cannot be made up. **Furthermore, scheduled times and dates indicated for exams, quizzes, oral presentations, and any other graded assignments cannot be changed for any reason.** Even if more sections of the same class are activated, students may only take exams during the scheduled times and dates for the section they are enrolled in.

Presence during mandatory field trips is especially important for student performance in class. Missing a mandatory field trip, unless for a very serious reason that is communicated to the professor and Umbra Academic Director in a timely manner, will lower students’ final grade by one grade level (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

Academic Integrity

All forms of **cheating** (i.e., copying during exam either from a fellow student or making unauthorized use of notes) and **plagiarism** (i.e., presenting the ideas or words of another person for academic evaluation without acknowledging the source) will be handled according to the Institute Academic Policy, which can be found in the Umbra Institute Academic Policies and Conduct Guidelines.

Classroom Policy

Students are expected to follow the policy of the Institute and demonstrate the appropriate **respect** for the historical premises that the school occupies. Please note that **cell phones** must be turned off before the beginning of each class. **Computers and other electronic devices** cannot be used during class lectures and discussions except with prior permission of the instructor.

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Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

WEEK 1

Introduction to the course

Contemporary Italian Viewing Preferences: from RAI TV's *Montalbano* to Sky cable TV's Gomorrah to Netflix's *Suburra*

Screening of two episodes of *Suburra*

Reading

"Introduction" in Barker, Cory, and Myc Wiatrowski. *The age of Netflix: critical essays on streaming media, digital delivery and instant access.* McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2017.

WEEK 2

Film Techniques: The Shot and Camera Movement

Discussion of Netflix viewings and articles about Streaming

A brief history of Italian Cinema from the Silent Era to Netflix

Readings and Assignments:

Sikov, Ed. *Film Studies: An Introduction.* New York: Columbia UP, 2010. 21-55

Handout Film Assignment 1: Camera Movement

Neorealism and its Directors: Rossellini, Visconti, De Sica

Reading:

Bondanella, Peter. *The Films of Roberto Rossellini.* Cambridge University Press, p. 1-32

WEEK 3

Film Techniques: Mise-en scène

Screening of *Rome, Open City*

Reading:

Corrigan, Timothy, and Patricia White. *The Film Experience: An Introduction.* Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004. 70-84

Handout Assignment 2: Mise-en-scène

Screening of *Rome, Open City* (cont.)

Discussion of *Rome, Open City*

Readings and Assignments:

Bondanella, Peter. *The Films of Roberto Rossellini.* Cambridge University Press, p. 45-63

Assignment 1: Camera Movement due

WEEK 4

Screening of Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette* (Bicycle Thieves)

Reading:

"Naturalistic Mise-en-Scene in Bicycle Thieves (1948)" in Corrigan, Timothy, and Patricia White. *The Film Experience: An Introduction*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004.

Assignment 2: Mise-en-scène due

Discussion of Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette*

Narrative structure in film

Readings and Assignments

Sikov, Ed. *Film Studies*. pp. 74-83, 89-100.

Handout Assignment 3: Analyzing Narrative and Narrative Structure

WEEK 5

Federico Fellini and his films

Screening of *La strada*

Reading:

Bondanella, Peter. *The Films of Federico Fellini*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 7-41.

Screening of *La strada* (cont.)

Discussion of *La strada*

Readings and Assignments

Bondanella, Peter. *The Films of Federico Fellini*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 43-63.

Assignment 3: Analyzing Narrative and Narrative Structure due

WEEK 6

Film Genres: Archetypes and Conventions

- Westerns
- Melodramas
- Musicals
- Horror
- Crime Films
- Comedy

Reading:

Corrigan, Timothy, and Patricia White. *The Film Experience: An Introduction*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004. 321-350

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Italian Cinema in the 1950's and 60,s
Comedy in Italy
Screening of Pietro Germi's *Divorce, Italian Style*

Readings:

Celli, Carlo, and Marga Cottino-Jones. *A New Guide to Italian Cinema*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. 77-99.

WEEK 7

Screening of Pietro Germi's *Divorce, Italian Style* (cont.)
Discussion of Pietro Germi's *Divorce, Italian Style*

Readings:

Rhodes, John David. "Divorzio all'italiana" in Bertellini, Giorgio ed. *The Cinema of Italy*. London: Wallflower, 2004. 113-121.

WRITTEN MIDTERM EXAM

**SEMESTER BREAK
(October 21-25)**

WEEK 8

Film Techniques: Editing
Auteur and Genre theory
Italian Comic and Director *Roberto Benigni*
Screening of Roberto Benigni *Johnny Stecchino*

Readings

Sikov, Ed. *Film Studies*. pp. 55-74.

Handout Assignment 4: Editing

Screening of Roberto Benigni *Johnny Stecchino*
Discussion of Roberto Benigni's *Johnny Stecchino*

Reading:

Aste, Mario. "Satirizing the Mafia: the case of Johnny Stecchino." *American Journal of Italian Studies*, vol. 22, no. 59, 1999, p. 11

WEEK 9

Film Techniques: Sound

Screening of Giuseppe Tornatore's *Cinema Paradiso*

Readings:

Sikov, Ed. *Film Studies*. pp. 74-88.

Handout Assignment 5: Analyzing Sound

Screening of Giuseppe Tornatore's *Cinema Paradiso* (cont.)

Discussion of *Cinema Paradiso*

Readings:

Marcus, Millicent. "Giuseppe Tornatore's Cinema Paradiso and the Art of Nostalgia" in *After Fellini: National Cinema in the Postmodern Age*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2002.

WEEK 10

World War II, Italy, and the Holocaust

The Holocaust on Film

Screening of Roberto Benigni's *La vita è bella* (*Life is Beautiful*)

Assignments:

Sikov, Ed. *Film Studies*. pp. 128-142.

Handout Assignment 6: Analyzing Acting

Screening of Roberto Benigni's *La vita è bella* (*Life is Beautiful*) cont.

Readings:

Marcus, Millicent. *After Fellini: National Cinema in the Postmodern Age*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002. 268–84

Assignment 5: Analyzing Sound due

WEEK 11

Discussion of Roberto Benigni's *La vita è bella* (*Life is Beautiful*)

Readings:

Insdorf, Annette. *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*. Cambridge University Press, 2009. 286-292

Viano, Maurizio. 'Life Is Beautiful: Reception, Allegory, and Holocaust Laughter' in *Annali d'Italianistica* 17 (1999).

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Screening of *Benvenuti al Sud*
Differences in Comedic Styles

Readings:

As required for Final Student Reports

WEEK 12

A Return to Neorealism: HBO/RAI TV's coproduction of *My Brilliant Friend*
Screening of *My Brilliant Friend*

Readings:

Assignment 6: Analyzing Acting due
As required for Final Student Reports

A Return to Neorealism: HBO/RAI TV's coproduction of *My Brilliant Friend*
Screening of *My Brilliant Friend*

Readings:

As required for Final Student Reports

WEEK 13

Student Reports

Student Reports

The Final Exam and Special Academic Events Calendar will be provided later in the semester

Bibliography

- Bertellini, Giorgio. *The Cinema of Italy*. London: Wallflower, 2004.
- Bondanella, Peter. *The Films of Federico Fellini*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bondanella, Peter. *The Films of Roberto Rossellini*. Cambridge University Press.
- Brunetta, Gian Piero. *The History of Italian Cinema: A Guide to Italian Film from Its Origins to the Twenty-first Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Buss, Robin. *Italian Films*. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1989.
- Landy, Marcia. *Italian Film*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Sikov, Ed. *Film Studies: An Introduction*. New York: Columbia UP, 2010.
- Sorlin, Pierre. *Italian National Cinema: 1896-1996*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Wood, Mary P. *Italian Cinema*. Oxford: Berg, 2005.
- Critical Visions in Film Theory: Classical and Contemporary Readings*. eds. Timothy Corrigan, Patricia White, and Meta Mazaj New York: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2011.
- Corrigan, Timothy, and Patricia White. *The Film Experience: An Introduction*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004.
- Marcus, Millicent Joy. *After Fellini: National Cinema in the Postmodern Age*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2002.
- . *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986.