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CATTOLICA
del Sacro Cuore

Italian Masterpieces: Portrayal of a Culture through its Cinema

PROF. MARA PERBELLINI

Term	Summer 2026
Area of study	Cultural Studies
Area code	FS/CMS310su
Credits	6 ECTS
Dates	6 – 17 July 2026 (2 weeks)
Method of instruction	In person

Course description

The course will introduce students to the magic world of the “director superstar” Federico Fellini, who influenced the art of cinema all over the world.

Here’s a quotation from American director David Lynch, to give an example of how influential Fellini was to international directors: “If I had to choose films that represent, for me, examples of perfect filmmaking, the first would be 8 ½, for the way Federico Fellini managed to accomplish with film what mostly abstract painters do – namely, to communicate an emotion without ever saying anything in a direct manner, without ever explaining anything, just by a sort of sheer magic”.

After “meeting” the Master, students will discover the main trends and filmmakers in contemporary Italian cinema. Since cinema is a mirror to our world, students will learn a lot about contemporary Italian society through the seventh art.

Course contents

In the first part of the course, after an introduction to cinema language and Italian cinema, we will focus on Federico Fellini’s career, from his debut as screenwriter during Neorealism to the masterpieces of the ‘50s and ‘60s.

We will then explore the boundaries of contemporary Italian cinema with the most significant directors and their movies: Roberto Benigni, Gabriele Salvatores, Matteo Garrone and Paolo Sorrentino (who won for best film in a foreign language at the Academy Awards 2014).

Prerequisites

None



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Method of teaching

Screenings of films, Lecture and film analysis, discussion of 7 mandatory films to be watched in class.

Starting from the second mandatory film, a student will lead the film discussion together with the Professor (students will rotate in this role).

Course requirements

Students will watch the 7 mandatory films that will be screened at Università Cattolica. The film will then be discussed in class with the Professor.

Grading

Class participation (including film discussions and presentations)	50 % of final grade
Final written exam	50 % of final grade

Rules of conduct

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory and no absence/s will be excused. Please consider that Field Trips are considered equal to regular classes and indeed you are expected to attend the visits. Unexcused absences will not be accepted. An excused absence will only be granted if you are seriously ill and can support your claim with a local doctor's certificate dated the day you missed class (therefore you must go to the doctor that same day) that has to be delivered to the Professor or to Cattolica International Office. Any other absence will not be excused and will result in not being admitted to the final exam, which corresponds to a 0 (zero) in the final exam.

Exam Date: The exam date cannot be re-scheduled. Should the dates of the final exams be moved for force major reasons, Cattolica International Office and the Professor will promptly inform you in class and/or via e-mail on the new date agreed. Unexcused absences to the exams will result in a failing grade in the course.

In cases of unforeseeable circumstances such as illness or injury on the day of the exams, you must submit a medical certificate and communicate your absence to the Professor and Cattolica International Office via email prior to the exam. If the student does not justify his/her absence through sufficient documentation and with adequate notice before the final test, you will receive an automatic Failed. Absences for other unforeseeable circumstances will not be accepted and will result in a failing grade.

Course reading and materials

All the required readings will be available in a course pack and the lecturer's slides will be available on Blackboard.

Required reading (excerpts):

- Peter Bondanella, *The cinema of Federico Fellini*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey 1992.
- William Hope, *Italian Film Directors in the New Millennium*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2010.

Required films (with English subtitles):

- *Le notti di Cabiria* (1956) by F. Fellini



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- *La dolce vita* (1959) by F. Fellini
- *Otto e mezzo 8 ½* (1962) by F. Fellini
- *La vita è bella* (1998) by Roberto Benigni
- *Io non ho paura* (2003) by Gabriele Salvatores
- *Io, capitano* (I, Captain, 2023) by Matteo Garrone
- *La grazia* (2025) by Paolo Sorrentino.

Schedule

Lesson	Date	Time	Content
Week 1			
1	6 July	5 h: 2pm - 7pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to cinema language. • Guidelines to film analysis. • Screening of <i>Le notti di Cabiria</i> (1956) by F. Fellini
2	7 July	5 h: 9am - 2pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Italian cinema and Federico Fellini. • Discussion and film analysis (1): <i>Le notti di Cabiria</i> (1956) by F. Fellini • Screening of <i>La dolce vita</i> (1959) by F. Fellini
3	8 July	5 h: 9am - 2pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More on Fellini. • Discussion and film analysis (2): <i>La dolce vita</i> (1959) by F. Fellini
4	9 July	4 h: 10am - 2pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit to MIC. • Screening of <i>Otto e mezzo 8 ½</i> (1962) by F. Fellini.
5	10 July	4 h: 9am - 1 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion and film analysis (3): <i>Otto e mezzo 8 ½</i> (1962) by F. Fellini • Contemporary Italian cinema. • Screening of <i>La vita è bella</i> (1998) by Roberto Benigni.
Week 2			
6	13 July	5 h: 9am - 2pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benigni. Discussion and film analysis (4): <i>La vita è bella</i> (1998) by Roberto Benigni. • Salvatores. • Screening of <i>Io non ho paura</i> (2003) by Gabriele Salvatores.
7	14 July	5 h: 9am - 2pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More on Salvatores. • Discussion and film analysis (5): <i>Io non ho paura</i> (2003) by Gabriele Salvatores • Garrone. • Screening of <i>Io, capitano</i> (2023) by Matteo Garrone
8	15 July	5 h: 9am - 2pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More on Garrone. • Discussion and film analysis (6): <i>Gomorra</i> (2008) by Matteo Garrone. • Sorrentino.



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			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Screening of <i>La grazia</i> (2025) by Paolo Sorrentino.
9	16 July	4 h: 9am - 1pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussion and film analysis (7): <i>La grazia</i> (2025) by Paolo Sorrentino.• More on Sorrentino.
10	17 July	2 h: 9am - 11am	Written in class FINAL EXAM. It will be a written exam with 1 film analysis on 1 of the 7 mandatory films (as explained in class) and 2 essay questions on the issues discussed in class: all the slides from blackboard; the selected chapters from your textbooks (on your course-pack).

Bio of instructor

Mara Perbellini is a dramatist, headwriter and scriptwriter for major film and TV production companies. After her B.A. in Italian Humanities and her master's degree in Screenwriting at Università Cattolica of Milan, she studied filmmaking at the New York Film Academy (NYC and L.A.-Universal Studios) and at the London Academy of Radio, Film & TV: while there, she directed, wrote and edited 4 short films.

In 2006 Mara joined the Faculty of IES Abroad Milan, where she teaches History of Italian Cinema. In 2012 she joined the Faculty of Università Cattolica where she teaches Italian cinema. She teaches courses for the Screenwriting Master Program (MISP) at Università Cattolica and at the film-making summer course at the School of Visual Arts in NYC (2009-2019).

She worked as a story analyst for Rai Fiction and Eagle Pictures. She also worked as assistant director on the TV-movie "Una famiglia per caso" for RAI 1.

Her first commissioned work was the TV animation series *Uffa che Pazienza!* (Rai) which earned the Pulcinella Award at Cartoons on the Bay 2008. Since then, she wrote many prime-time mini-series and series, such as *Distretto di polizia 8* (Canale 5), *Ci vediamo a Portofino* (DAP), *La vita che corre* (Rai 1), *Eleonora Duse* (Publispei) and *Ombre sulla neve* (Casanova Multimedia). In 2009 she got an Award for best screenplay at the Fiuggi International Family Film Festival with the film "Il sirenetto".

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Recent filmography

- 2021-24: Head-writer of the tv series *Dakota* (Swiss e-motion / RSI / C-films)
- 2022: Writers' room co-producer for the HBO Max series "Home sweet Rome"; writer of episode 8 (story and teleplay)
- 2022: Writer of 2 episodes of the prime-time tv series "Che Dio ci aiuti 7" (LuxVide / Rai1)
- 2021: Writer of 1 episode of the prime-time tv series *Viola come il mare* (LuxVide / Canale 5)
- 2020-2021: Head-writer of the tv series *Marta & Eva* (2 seasons of 20 episodes; 3zero2 / Rai)
- 2020: Writer of 7 episodes of the animated tv series *Nina & Olga* (enanimation / Rai), winner of the Pulcinella Award at Cartoons on the Bay 2021, in the category Upper Preschool Tv Series
- 2019: Screenwriter of *The last days of the Republic*, an epic historical film that won the StoryLab competition 2019.
- 2016-19: Writer of 2 episodes of the TV series *Made in Italy* (Taodue – The family for Mediaset / Amazon Prime, 2016-19).
- 2018-19: Head-writer of the TV series *Penny on M.A.R.S.*, seasons 2 (10 eps) and 3 (13 eps; 3zero2-The Walt Disney Company Italia).