

ENG 305: Italian Cinema



Spring 2013 Dr. Sean Doyle (smdoyle@geneva.edu)

Course Description

In this course, we will study Italian cinema from its Golden Age in the 1940s and 50s to the present. We will look at films of early master directors such as Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio DeSica, and Federico Fellini, among others, as well as more recent actor/directors like Roberto Benigni and Giuseppe Tornatore. Along with the well-known Italian “high art” genres of neorealism and commedia, we will also view some lesser-known and appreciated genres such as the Spaghetti Western. Films can be important artifacts of the past. As Peter Rollins suggests, “films register the feelings and attitudes of the periods in which they are made.” During the course of the semester we will discuss together what those feelings and attitudes might be. Additionally, we will gain basic knowledge of the technical and theoretical vocabulary of film analysis, learn to write film reviews, and we will collectively develop a method for viewing and enjoying films as Christians. As one of the most recent artistic forms, films provide an exciting and enjoyable way to consider the human maker of films as an image bearer of God who makes art out of light. The power of the multi-billion dollar film industry, according to critic Mark Coppenger, has progressed so far that film has “replaced the pulpit as the primary moral/spiritual influence in our society.” While various more recent electronic media might be replacing film’s supremacy, nevertheless, film remains a potent cultural force. As audience members and film analysts, we will use our interpretive skills to understand the claims to truth and artistry found in Italian film.

Course Goals

- To learn basic technical and theoretical vocabulary of film analysis
- To develop criteria for the analysis of film
- To expand your appreciation and enjoyment of a wide range of Italian films
- To develop a method for viewing and enjoying films as a Christian
- To learn the process of writing a film review
- To appreciate Italian film's place in the world of art
- To develop an awareness and sensitivity to personal limitations in viewing films

Course Requirements

Movie Screenings, Responses, and Discussions – As a community, we will watch and talk about a selection of films as part of the course. Discussion participation during film screenings is an expected part of your successful completion of the course. At the conclusion of each film, you will be asked to write a response (300 words minimum) to the film, and these responses will constitute a portion (10 points per film) of your grade for the course.

If you must miss a screening / discussion session, please let me know in advance. You will, however, be responsible for watching the film on your own and submitting the film response and film review (the film review must be submitted on time). It is permitted to miss one film screening / discussion session during the course of the semester if necessary.

Movie Reviews – Italian Cinema is a writing intensive class—you will write a series of four formal reviews during the course of the semester, chosen from the list of eight movies below.

Chose **four** from among the following films to write a formal film review:

- a. *Cinema Paradiso*
- b. *Roma, Cita Aperta*
- c. *Ladri di Biciclette*
- d. *La Strada*
- e. *La Dolce Vita*
- f. *The Battle of Algiers*
- g. *The Good, The Bad, The Ugly*
- h. *The Tiger and the Snow*

In preparation for writing your formal film reviews, you must find and read at least two published reviews for each film. Please read the published review only after seeing the film (I don't want you to be positively or negatively influenced by the reviewer before seeing the film). You can find movie reviews at the following websites:

www.mrge.com

www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/filmstudies/filmreviewsintro.html

www.inkpot.com/movielinks/academic.html

www.lib.lsu.edu/hum/FilmResearch.html

www.rogerebert.suntimes.com

www.imdb.com

After the Monday screening, you may want to discuss the movie further with your classmates, read some professional reviews, and even re-watch the film; then you should **THINK** for a while about the critical question, professional reviews, and your own understanding of the film; and, finally, you should write your review.

Each review should be at least 1000 words. In your review, you should briefly report on (summarize) and respond to two critical reviews of the film by reputable and professional film critics. As you develop **your own response** to the professional critic, consider whether you agree or disagree with the critic's review of the film. Your review should also include your own assessment of the film, making reference to elements of the film itself. In your paper you must make sure that you provide bibliographic citations for the professional reviews you have chosen in a separate section at the end of your paper. The citation should include the name of the reviewer, publication information, and date of review; also, within your comments you should reference the reviewer by name (for instance: "Joe Schmoe in his April 1956 *New York Times* review of *Cinema Paradiso* says . . .").

Whatever else you do, **DO NOT retell the plot** of the film in your paper. This paper is a work of critical analysis, not plot summary.

Each paper will be scored on a **25 point** scale based on the following: (1) the paper includes all required parts; (2) coherence of thought and organization, including effective transitions between paragraphs; (3) validity and thoroughness of analysis and explanations; (4) accuracy of evidence; (5) clarity and accuracy of written expression; and (6) bibliographic documentation for the film, all reviews, and any additional research / reading you did to write the paper.

Review Due Dates - Reviews are **due at the beginning of the following week's Monday class**. Unless there are overwhelming and unavoidable difficulties (severe technical glitches with internet connections and/or illness), you should not submit a late paper.

Current Film & Response Paper – In addition to the in-class films, you must go to a movie theatre somewhere in Italy (most likely Rome) to see one current Italian film—the film **MUST** be shown in Italian (not English). Don't worry that you do not understand the language; I want you to have the experience of attending a film screening with native speakers. If possible go as a group and/or with some of your new Italian friends!

After attending the film, you must submit a response paper. This response should be no longer than 750 words. Unlike your other reviews, in this response please **DO** relate the plot of the film as far as you could understand it; you **DO NOT** have to consult professional reviews. You should comment on what you did and did not like about the film, and you should comment on the whole experience of going to the movies in Italy: What was it like? What did you notice about the people in the theater? Did you respond the same as your friends? What was the same and what was different compared to going to the movies in the United States? Did you have any moments of confusion or hilarity based on your status as cultural outsider? You'll have the most fun with this assignment if you go to the movie with your friends from the program and/or with your new Italian friends. **DO NOT** agonize over this paper! Simply watch the film and write about your response to it. This response is worth **20 points** and is **DUE ON OR BEFORE WEDNESDAY, April 3.**

FILM CONTENT Part of being a discerning audience member means knowing when to walk out of a film (or close your eyes). Under no circumstances should you feel compelled to continue watching a film that you find profoundly disturbing. It could be that the contemporary film you choose to see in the Italian theatre contains content you believe you should not watch—and you may not know how bad it is until you get there; it may be that the film is just poorly made and simply awful. You can walk out. If you have seen enough of the film before leaving to complete the above assignment, part of your response could and should discuss why you left. Otherwise, you should attend another film in order to complete the assignment. The films shown in class are either classics of the Italian cinema repertoire with, in my opinion, acceptable content, or the film's potentially distressing content is part of a well-made and significant work of art that may make the film more suitable for classroom viewing. In any case, I have been careful to choose films that are appropriate for a college-aged audience, and I will warn you in advance of scenes that you will likely find challenging. There are not many at all, and at those times please feel free to close your eyes, look away, or step out of the room. You will not be penalized for doing so.

How Your Grade Will Be Determined

Weekly film responses: 9 x 10 points each	90
Formal Film Reviews: 4 x 25 points each	100
Current Film Response Paper	20
Participation and Attendance	75
Total Points	285

Total Percentage	Letter Grade	G.P.A.
92% and above	A	4.0
90% - 91.9%	A-	3.7
88% - 89.9%	B+	3.3
83% - 87.9%	B	3.0
80% - 82.9%	B-	2.7
78% - 79.9%	C+	2.3
73% - 77.9%	C	2.0
70% - 72.9%	C-	1.7
68% - 69.9%	D+	1.3
63% - 67.9%	D	1.0
60% - 62.9%	D-	0.7
Less than 60%	F	0.0

Policy on Disruptiveness/Inattentiveness

Because we are living and learning in community, bad attitudes and disrespectful behavior are especially harmful to the Semester in Rome program. You must arrive on time for the film screenings, so as not to disrupt the viewing of the film. Tardiness will result in loss of points. Sleeping in class or talking during discussions/movie viewings will be penalized heavily, at the professor's discretion. I have a *zero tolerance* policy with disrespect, and your grade will be dramatically reduced should you exhibit such behavior. Any form of cheating in the course will result in failure of the assignment, and possibly the course.

Course Outline and Film Screening Dates

The Joy of CINEMA

Monday, Jan. 28 *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso* (1988), dir. Giuseppe Tornatore

NEOREALISM and POETIC REALISM

Monday, Feb. 4 *Roma, Citta Aperta / Open City* (1945), dir. Roberto Rossellini

Formal Review due on *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso

Monday, Feb. 11 *Ladri di Biciclette / Bicycle Thieves* (1948), dir. Vittorio De Sica

Formal Review due on *Roma, Citta Aperta

Monday, Feb. 18 *La Strada / The Road* (1948), dir. Federico Fellini

Formal Review due on *Ladri di Biciclette

THE GROWTH OF ITALIAN CINEMA

COMMEDIA ALL' ITALIANA

Monday, Feb. 25 *I Soliti Ignoti / Big Deal on Madonna Street* (1958), dir. Mario Monicelli

Formal Review due on *La Strada

FELLINI'S FORMALISM

Monday, Mar. 18 *La Dolce Vita / The Sweet Life* (1960), dir. Federico Fellini

POLITICAL FILM

Monday, Mar. 25 *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), dir. Gillo Pontecorvo

Formal Review due on *La Dolce Vita

THE SPAGHETTI WESTERN

Monday, April 1 *Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo / The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly* (1966), dir.

Sergio Leone

Formal Review due on *The Battle of Algiers

Wednesday, April 3 CURRENT FILM REVIEW DUE

RECENT ITALIAN CINEMA

BENIGNI

Monday, April 8 *La tigre e la neve / The Tiger and the Snow* (2005), Roberto Benigni

Formal Review due on *The Good, The Bad, The Ugly

Monday, April 15 ***Formal Review due on *The Tiger and the Snow***