



An Interview with “Seven Decades of Fellini” Lecturer, Dr. Franco Gallippi

Cultural Tuesdays recently made its return with the seven-part virtual lecture series, “Seven Decades of Fellini” with Dr. Franco Gallippi. We recently asked Dr. Gallippi a few questions about these new online presentations and the importance of Federico Fellini.

Q: What is the importance of Federico Fellini to Italian cinema?

A: Fellini is often referred to as “the maestro,” and I think he did become, at some point of his career, the teacher for many younger Italian directors who were looking for a role model. He has influenced so many who went on to become famous themselves, like Nanni Moretti, Lina Wertmüller, and Roberto Benigni. The screenwriter for the Oscar-winning “*La Grande Bellezza*” (“The Great Beauty”, 2013), Umberto Contarello, considers Fellini’s work on the same level as ‘The Odyssey’ by Homer, a kind of reservoir where one can find infinite resources for telling a worthwhile story: “If you make a film about a journey, it’s impossible not to unconsciously make reference to ‘The Odyssey.’ A film that has Rome as a principal character fixed in space can’t help but draw on its foundational archetype, which is Fellini’s ‘*La Dolce Vita*’”.

Q: What does Federico Fellini mean to Italian culture and heritage?

A: I think no one like Fellini has attempted to capture the essence of Italian culture in his films. He never ceased to interrogate the role and the presence of the Church in Italy, for instance. He never ceased to scrutinize the politics of Italy, its contradictions, and orderly chaos. He never ceased to look at the Italian family as a wonderful and suffocating experience within a Catholicism that poses limits, but within these limits, a most incredible “game” and celebration of life is made possible.

Q: What do you want people to learn in these lectures?

A: It would be nice if people learned that there is always something to learn. Fellini’s imagination was inexhaustible, and he really strived to understand the nature of creativity and how important it is in life, not only as a successful artist but in the daily lives of so-called regular people who are not considered artists in the sense of producing artwork. The impulse to create is natural in human beings and finding a healthy and natural outlet for that creativity is something Fellini knew had to be satisfied. Fellini demonstrates this with his films. When he talked about his films, he uses terms that describe a natural process, as if the films came out of him when they

were ready and ripe. This, for him, was the essence of creativity: nothing forced but the bearing of fruit as an apple tree bears apples.

Q: Why should people attend these lectures?

A: I think if people have heard of Fellini and have been intrigued and somehow caught by certain elements in Fellini's films, then it is not a bad idea to explore what they were intrigued by or what caught their interest. Fellini challenges sensibilities and goes to the heart of a human being's conflict system. He forces one to find the relevance and the necessity of the things that often govern our daily lives.

Q: What is a fun fact about Federico Fellini or one of his films?

A: There is a story about when Fellini met Nino Rota, the composer who would go on to create the most memorable music for Fellini's films. Here is the story told by Tullio Kezich in his famous biography on Fellini:

“Fellini and Rota meet directly after the war. Fellini is coming out of the offices of Lux Film on via Po and sees the maestro Rota standing at the bus stop. He asks which bus he's waiting for, and Rota names a bus that doesn't pass there. But as Fellini is trying to explain that Rota is standing in the wrong place, the bus incredibly appears. The scene, like something Fellini himself would have invented, typifies the relationship between director and composer, which will go on for twenty-five years – a phenomenon of empathy, irrationality, and magic.” (Kezich. *Federico Fellini*. New York: Faber and Faber, Inc., 2002. 125-26).