Academy Award: Best Foreign Film; nominated for Best Director and Best Screenplay

Directed by Federico Fellini
Writing Credits Federico Fellini and Tonino Guerra developed the story and wrote the screenplay.
Produced by Franco Cristaldi
Music by Nino Rota
Cinematography by Giuseppe Rotunno
Film Editing by Ruggero Mastroianni

Cast
Bruno Zanin...Titta
Magali Noël...Gradisca, hairdresser
Pupella Maggio...Miranda Biondi, Titta's mother
Armando Brancia...Aurelio Biondi, Titta's father
Giuseppe Ianigro...Titta's grandfather
Nando Orfei [it]...Lallo or "Il Pataca", Titta's uncle
Ciccio Ingrassia...Teo, Titta's uncle
Stefano Proietti...Oliva, Titta's brother
Donatella Gambini...Aldina Cordini
Gianfranco Marrocco...Son of count
Ferdinando De Felice...Cicco
Bruno Lenzi...Gigliozzi
Bruno Scagnetti...Ovo
Alvaro Vitali...Naso
Francesco Vona...Candela
Maria Antonietta Beluzzi...the tobacconist
Josiane Tanzilli...Volpina

FEDERICO FELLINI (b. January 20, 1920 in Rimini, Italy—d. October 31, 1993 in Rome, Italy) is best-known as a director of films he wrote, and deservedly so, but before he started directing he co-scripted some of the great films of the Italian neo-realist era, among them Roberto Rossellini's *Roma, città aperta* (*Rome, Open City* 1946) and *Paisà* (*Paisan*, 1946). Fellini directed 24 films, some of which are *La Voce della luna* (1989), *Ginger e Fred* (1986), *Casanova* (1976), *Amarcord* (1974), *Roma* 1972, *I clowns* (1971), *Satyricon* 1969, *Giulietta degli spiriti* 1965, *8 ½* (1963), *Notti di Cabiria* (1957), and *Vitelloni* (1953). He was nominated for 11 writing and directing Oscars (including both for *La Dolce Vita*) but won none of them. Four of his films received the Best Foreign Language Film award: *La Strada*, *Notti di Cabiria*, *81/2* and *Amarcord*. After Federico Fellini rejected the idea of Paul Newman for the lead role of *La Dolce Vita*, Dino De Laurentiis suggested Gérard Philipe. He thought Marcello Mastroianni was "too soft and goody-goody; a family man rather than the type who flings women onto the bed." His death could have been a scene from one of his movies: While recovering from difficult heart surgery he choked on half a mozzarella ball. Enza Da Castro, his production secretary, and Roberto Mannoni, his production director, were with him. Da Castro called a doctor and two nurses into the room and told them Fellini was choking. The doctor yelled "Heart attack!

Heart attack" and began giving him heart massage. When Da Castro and Mannoni again told her he was choking, she ordered them out of the room. Mannoni called Fellini's doctor, Professor Turchetti, and told him to come immediately. After 15 minutes, according to Mannoni, another doctor arrived with a resuscitator and other instruments, and a few minutes later Turchetti got there. But by then Fellini was dead.

TONINO GUERRA (b. March 16, 1920 in Santarcangelo di Romagna, Emilia-Romagna, Italy—d. March 21, 2012 (age 92) in Santarcangelo di Romagna, Emilia-Romagna, Italy) was an Italian poet, writer and screenwriter who collaborated with some of the most prominent film directors in the world. Guerra first started writing poetry when interned in a prison camp in Germany, after being rounded up at the age of 22 with other antifascists from Santarcangelo. He worked with such filmmakers as Michelangelo Antonioni, in *L'avventura* (1960), *La note* (1961), *L'Eclisse* (1962), *The Red Desert* (1964), *Blowup* (1966), *Zabriskie Point* (1970) and *Identification of a Woman* (1982); Federico Fellini, in *Amarcord* (1973); Theo Angelopoulos, in *Landscapes in the Mist* (1988), *Eternity and a Day* (1998) and *Trilogy: The Weeping Meadow* (2004); Andrei Tarkovsky, in *Nostalghia* (1983); and *Francesco R*osi, in *The Mattei Affair* (1972), *Lucky Luciano* (1974) and *Exquisite Corpses* (1976).

GIUSEPPE ROTUNNO (b. 19 March 1923, Rome) has worked with some of the greatest names of the golden age of Italian cinema, including Dino Risi, Vittorio De Sica, and Federico Fellini. Originally a still photographer, his entry into film was operating the camera for legendary cinematographer G.R. Aldo. In 1955, Rotunno became a full-fledged lighting director and due to his versatility, became one of the most in-demand cinematographers. His work ranges from the epic, operatic compositions of Visconti's *The Leopard* (1963) to the daguerreotype-influenced style of Monicelli's *The Organizer* (1963). He has shot several of Fellini's films as well as Mike Nichols's *Carnal Knowledge* (1971), Bob Fosse's *All That Jazz* (1979) and Terry Gilliam's *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* (1989). For Visconti's *Rocco and his Brothers* (1960) Rotunno shot with three cameras simultaneously, which he remembers, "For Visconti…was ideal. But it was horribly complicated…because there wasn't enough space on the set for the lights." Speaking in an interview, the cinematographer points out that just as music has only seven basic notes, cinematography has only three lights: "You've got the key light, fill light, and back light, out of which comes an infinity of results. The light is like a kaleidoscope, but those three lights mixed together are more touchy than the kaleidoscope. It's difficult to ask a painter, 'How did you paint the picture?' I go with my eyes and intuition. I like so much to light, and I cannot stop. When I was shooting with Fellini, I was always lighting the next shot, because I was afraid to lose the idea of the light." These are some of the other films he worked on: *Wolf* (1994), *Regarding Henry* (1991), *La Fine del mondo nel nostro solito letto in una notte piena di pioggia/The End of the World in Our Usual Bed in a Night Full of Rain* (1978), *Casanova* (1976), *Amarcord* (1973), *Roma* (1972), *Man of La Mancha* (1972), *Satyricon* (1969), *Candy* (1968), *Lo Straniero/The Stranger* (1967), *On the Beach* (1959), and *Le Notti bianche* (1957).

NINO ROTA (b. Giovanni "Nino" Rota on December 3, 1911 in Milan, Lombardy, Italy—d. April 10, 1979, age 67, in Rome, Lazio, Italy) was born into a family of musicians. Considered a child prodigy, by the time he was a teenager Rota was a well-known composer and

orchestra conductor. His first oratorio, "L'infanzia di San Giovanni Battista," was performed in Milan and Paris as early as 1923 and his lyrical comedy, "Il Principe Porcaro," was composed in 1926. He briefly moved to the United States to study under Fritz Reiner before returning to Italy to teach. In 1937, he began a teaching career that led to the directorship of the Bari Conservatory, a title he held from 1950 until his death in 1979. Throughout the '40s and '50s, Rota branched into opera and by the '60s he was scoring ballets. His work in film dates to the early forties and the composer was known for the volume of his output in a short amount of time. Averaging around 3 film scores per year, Rota is also said to have worked most ferociously in the period of 1949-54, where he would produce close to 10 film scores per year. His is most well-known movie scores are for Fellini's films from *The White Sheik* (1952) to *Orchestra Rehearsal* (1978), and especially the 1963 classic *8½*. While the latter film may appear to be in disorder, Rota's tracks helped synchronize the entire production. Other directors the composer worked for include Renato Castellani, Luchino Visconti, Franco Zeffirelli, Mario Monicelli, and Francis Ford Coppola. Rota's score for the *The Godfather* (1973) earned him his first Oscar nomination for Best Original Score, a prize he would win for his score in *The Godfather: Part II* (1974). He also composed the music for many theatre productions by Visconti, Zefirelli, and de Filippo.

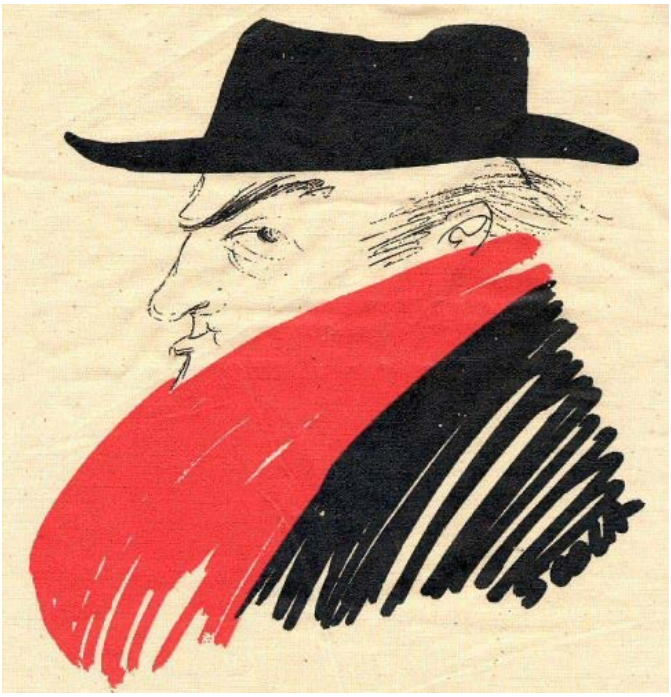
BRUNO ZANIN (b. April 9, 1951, Vigonovo, Veneto, Italy), after a life on the road including time in jail, became an actor by accident when Federico Fellini chose him among thousands of young men for the role of Titta in the 1973 film *Amarcord*. He went on to appear in numerous films and television (27 credits) with Italian and foreign filmmakers such as Giuseppe Ferrara, Marco Tullio Giordana, Giuliano Montaldo, Franco Brusati, Luigi Faccini, Lucian Pintilie and Lina Wertmüller.

MAGALI NOËL (b. June 27, 1931 in Izmir, Turkey—d. June 23, 2015 (age 83) in Châteauneuf-Grasse, Alpes-Maritimes, France) left Turkey for France in 1951, and her acting career began soon thereafter. She acted in multilingual cinema (97 credits) chiefly from 1951 to 1980, appearing in three Italian films directed by Federico Fellini—*La dolce vita* (1960), *Satyricon* (1969), and *Amarcord* (1973), where she played Gradisca, provincial pin-up—for whom she was a favorite performer and known as his muse. She acted in films directed by Costa Gavras (a notable role in *Z* by Costa-Gavras, Palme d'Or at Cannes in 1969), Jean Renoir (*Elena and Her Men* from 1956, with Ingrid Bergman), and Jules Dassin (*Riffi* in 1955). A new generation of directors then gave her roles: Chantal Akerman (*Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*, 1978), Claude Goretta (*La Mort de Mario Ricci*, 1983), Tonie Marshall (*Pentimento*, 1989) , Andrzej Żuławski (*La Fidélité*, 2000), Jonathan Demme (*La Vérité sur Charlie*, 2002)

PUPELLA MAGGIO (b. April 24, 1910 in Naples, Campania, Italy—December 8, 1999 (age 89) in Rome, Lazio, Italy) debuted on stage aged twelve years old, as the sidekick of her brother Beniamino. She later worked with several companies, including the ones led by Rina Morelli and by Eduardo De Filippo, where after the death of Titina De Filippo she inherited most of her roles. Maggio also appeared in several films (37 credits), including Vittorio De Sica's *Two Women* (1960) and winning the Nastro d'Argento Award for Best Supporting Actress for her performance in Luigi Zampa's *Be Sick... It's Free* (1968).

ARMANDO BRANCIA (b. September 9, 1917 in Naples, Campania, Italy—d. June 20, 1997 (age 79) in Naples, Italy) started his acting career at a mature age playing some minor roles in several RAI TV-series. His breakout came in 1973, with the role of Aurelio Biondi in Federico Fellini's *Amarcord*. Following the critical and commercial success of the film, he started an intense career as a character actor working for notable directors

including Luigi Comencini, Nanni Loy and Franco Brusati. He retired in the second half of the 1980s.



from *World Film Directors, Vol. II.* Ed. John Wakeman. The H.W. Wilson Company NY, 1988, entry by Derek Prouse

Italian director and scenarist, born in Rimini, a small town on Italy's Adriatic coast, son of Urbano Fellini, a traveling salesman, and the former Ida Barbiani. The four or five years he spent as a boarder at a school run by priests in nearby Fano were rigorously formative. A regular punishment was to make the culprit kneel for half an hour on grains of maize, and a wintry Sunday treat was to be marched to the beach, there to kneel and gaze at the sea wile reciting a prayer. Priests were to find their ritual place in many of Fellini's films, as was the circus that he encountered for the first time on a stolen day off and where he remained, entranced, until his truancy was discovered and he was returned to the school. The only aptitude Fellini showed at school was for drawing. In his final year, he and some of his friends were frequent truants, leading the idle, aimless street life he was to recall in *I Vitelloni*.

This, at any rate, is an approximate account of Fellini's childhood. He enjoys obfuscation, and his own recollections vary according to whim. At some point in his late teens—in 1937 or 1938—like Moraldo in *I Vitelloni*, Fellini escaped from the hopeless limbo of Rimini. He made his way first to Florence, where he worked as an illustrator for a comic-strip story magazine. After six months he moved on again to Rome, joining a Bohemian set of would-be actors and writers. He began to sell stories and cartoons to the humorous weekly *Marc' Aurelio*, and before long was hired as one of the writers of a radio serial based on the magazine'd most popular feature, which retailed the marital misadventures of Cico and Pallina—Italy's answer to Blondie and Dagwood.

In 1939, tiring of this chore, Fellini joined his friend, the comedian Aldo Fabrizi, on an odyssey across Italy with a vaudeville troupe. Fellini himself earned his keep as a sketch writer, scenery painter, bit player, and "company poet." Years later he told an interviewer that this was "perhaps the most important year of my life….I was overwhelmed by the variety of the country's physical landscape and, too, by the variety of its human landscape. It was the kind of experience that few young men are fortunate enough to have—a chance to discover the character….of one's country and, at the same time, to discover one's own identity."

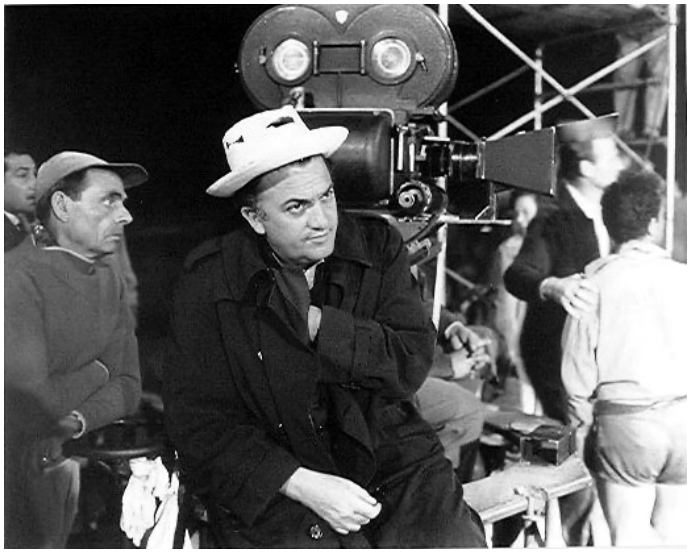
Back in Rome, Fellini began a new career as a gag writer for the movies, and in 1942, when Aldo Fabrizi was offered the lead role in a film comedy. Fellini supplied the storyline, going on to a growing success as a film comedy writer. Meanwhile, a new actress, Giulietta Masina, had taken over the role of Pallina in the radio series. Intrigued by her voice, Fellini began a four-month courtship that led to their marriage in 1943. Her distinctive personality, puckish, vulnerable, but resilient, clearly fired Fellini's creative imagination, and together they were to forge a unique alliance in the Italian cinema. In 1944 Masina gave birth to a son who lived for only three weeks.

With the liberation of Rome, Fellini and some of his friends opened the "Funny Face Ships," supplying caricatures, voice recordings, and other mementos for the occupying Allied soldiers to send back home. One day Roberto Rossellini came into Fellini's shop and invited him to collaborate on the script of *Open City* (1945), a landmark in the development of neorealism and the revival of the Italian cinema, and also the film that made Aldo Fabrizi's reputation as a dramatic actor.

Fellini's collaboration with Rossellini continued with *Paisan* (1946), on which he served as both coscenarist and assistant director. Two years later, after Rossellini had made a short film based on Cocteau's "La Voix Humaine: and needed a companion piece to make up a feature-length picture, Fellini wrote and acted in "Il Miracolo" (The Miracle). He played the part of a mute

vagabond whom Anna Magnani, as a deluded shepherdess, takes to be St. Joseph and by whom she becomes pregnant. The film was a *succès de scandale*, outraging Catholic opinion everywhere.

During the same period Fellini started to work with another director, Alberto Lattuada. He collaborated with Lattuada on the screenplays of two notable successes: *Senza pietà* (*Without Pity*, 1948) and *Il mulino del Po* (*The Mill on the Po*, 1949), and then with Pietro Germi on *In nome della Legge* (*In the Name of the Law*, 1949). Back with Rossellini, he worked as scriptwriter and assistant director on *Francesco, giullare di Dio*. After that his chance came, with Lattuada, to codirect *Luci del Varietà* (*Variety Lights,* 1950).



Nowadays, Fellini is no longer certain who directed what in the film. "I wrote the original story and the screenplay and I chose the actors. And the tawdry vaudeville routines I'd recalled from a touring troupe with Aldo Fabrizi. I can't remember exactly which scenes were directed by Lattuada and which by me, but I regard the film as one of mine." Certainly the work is dense with moments and images that bear the Fellini stamp: the old hunchback who guides the camera to the advertising display outside the theatre where Checco (Peppino De Filippo) is presenting his show; the vivid detail of the company's arduous trek through the provinces to their dubious Roman goal; the progress of Liliana (Carla del Poggio) from ambitious provincial amateur to opulently befurred Roman soubrette; and, above all, Checco's hopeless bid to possess Liliana and thereby recapture his waning powers and youth.

It is significant that in this partial directorial debut Fellini had already enlisted several of the colleagues who were to work with him with remarkable consistency throughout his future career: the cinematographer Otello Martelli and the screenwriters Ennio Flaiano and Tullio Pinelli. Giulietta Masina appears as Checco's fiancée Melina; the film seems to have been very much a family affair as Carla del Poggio was Lattuada's wife and Masina, of course, Fellini's.

Fellini's first solo work as director was *Lo sceicco bianco* (*The White Sheik*, 1953), based on a story by Michelangelo Antonioni which the latter had hoped to direct himself. It was inspired by the *fumetti,* the enormously popular magazines telling romantic stories in photo-strip form. Fantasy and reality disastrously intermingle as in many of the director's later works, but here the vein is more comical, sometimes even farcical. Albrto Sordi plays the absurdly vain *fumetti* star in whom a provincial bride, honeymooning in Rome with her boring husband, temporarily invests her romantic dreams….Fellini's subtle guidance of his actors is already evident, and the plight of the romantic young wife (Brunella Bovo) emerges as both funny and touching...Several critics have pointed out the resemblances between this film and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, another story about a woman who prefers illusion to bourgeois reality.

I Vitelloni (*The Wastrels*, or, in England, *The Spivs*, 1953) gained Fellini his first distribution abroad and won the Silver Lion at Venice. The term "*vitelloni*" lacks an exact equivalent in English; meaning literally "overgrown calves," the expression was current in Fellini's native Rimini to describe the goalless sons of middle-class families—idlers content to hang around bars or the fountain in the square hoping to encounter an amorous adventure….Fellini depicts his provincial scene with a humor that is never rancorous, and is perfectly served by the musical score by Nino Rota—a composer who was to make an invaluable contribution to all of Fellini's films thereafter until his death in 1979….Acknowledging the film's value as a social document, other critics nonetheless see it as a step away from the social preoccupations of neorealism and toward the development of Fellini's conception of character. He himself says that he was portraying not "the death throes of a decadent social class, but a certain torpor of the soul."

After an eighteen-minute episode entitled "A Matrimonial Agency" in Zavattii's neorealist production *Love in the City* (1953), Fellini embarked on a film that

was to earn him worldwide acclaim, *La Strada* (*The Road*, 1954).

Gelsomina (Giulietta Masina), a diminutive and simple-minded peasant girl is sold by her mother to Zampanò (Anthony Quinn), a street entertainer performing a strong-man act who needs her as his assistant. A brutal and morose character, he subjects her to harsh training as they move from town to town, and also rapes her. Nevertheless, in her clownish fashion, she loves him and tries to establish a human relationship with him, but he always rejects her. She is befriended by a tightrope walker (Richard Basehart)—an ambiguous Christ figure whom Zampanò accidentally kills, causing Gelsomina to lose her tenuous hold on sanity. It is only after her death that Zampanò realizes the extent of his emotional dependence on her. The film ends, as it begins, on a beach, where Zampanò, in Edouard de Laurot's words, "is finally struck down by a cosmic terror and realizes, in his anguish, man's solitude in the face of Eternity." It is a kind of redemption, earned by Gelsomina's love and self-sacrifice.

...Suzanne Budgen in her book on Fellini writes: "The tenderness that [this key work] ...shows for the dispossessed, its great comic fancy, its preoccupation with circuses and circus people, the importance in it of the sea, and perhaps above all, its air of mystery...mark it as belonging to the very nerve-centre of Fellini's creative talent." Arthur Knight thought that *La Strada* was neorealism on a new plane, a mixture of realism and poetry. *La Strada* is Fellini's own favorite among his films, and is regarded by many as his masterpiece. It received more than fifty awards, including the Silver Lion at the Venice Film Festival and an Oscar as best foreign film.

Il bidone (1955), which followed, aroused curiously little critical interest….*Il bidone* was followed by a resounding success, *La notti di Cabiria* (*The Nights of Cabiria*, 1956). The character of Cabiria, ketched by Masina in *The White Sheik,* reappears as the star of the show. She haunts the Roman periphery, a lonely irascible little prostitute with a grave professional handicap—a tendency to fall in love, and with men whose main concern is to shove her into the Tiber or over cliffs in order to acquire her modest savings….And yet, as Fellini says, Cabiria is in the grip of "an incoherent, intermittent force that cannot be gainsaid—the anguished longing for goodness."...Masina won the award as best actress at Cannes, and was described in *Newsweek* as "the best tragi-comedian since Chaplin."...To those who found *Cabiria* overly episodic and unstructured, André Bazin replied that Fellini had introduced "a new kind of script," based not on dramatic causality but on the revelation of character by an accumulation of episodes and examples: it is "the long descriptive sequences, seeming to exercise no effect on the unfolding of the 'action' proper [that] constitute the truly important and revealing scenes….Fellini's hero never reaches the final crisis (which destroys him and saves him) by a progressive dramatic linking but because the circumstances somehow or other affect him, build up inside him like the vibrant energy in a resonating body. He does not develop; he is transformed; overturning finally like an iceberg whose center of buoyancy has shifted unseen."…

The time was ripe for the ebullient Fellini to embark on a more ambitious project. The turbulent publicity that surrounded the making of *La Dolce Vita* (*The Sweet Life*, 1959) was an expression of the spirit of Rome at the time, poised to take over the mantle of Hollywood. The Via Veneto was becoming the Roman Sunset Strip and Hollywood Boulevard combined; actors whose American careers were on the wane flocked to Rome in the hope of achieving a professional renaissance there.

The *paparazzi* (the photographers for the scandal sheets) buzzed like predatory wasps around the sidewalk cafés, ever alert for the eruption of a brawl or an indiscretion. The aristocracy, in *decadenza*, were eager to rent their crumbling palaces as film sets—even to figure on the payroll as extras, although *La dolce vita* did give them second thoughts when they discovered

that they were not necessarily to be presented in a becoming light.

The film's opening shots are of a huge statue of Christ, suspended from a helicopter. Thie extraordinary scene juxtaposes from the outset the film's two worlds: the old Christian Rome, now as lifeless as the statue; and the voyeuristic moral chaos of the modern city, Babylon on the Tiber. Later that evening he meets a neurotic aristocratic woman (Anouk Aimée) who rents the bed of a compliant whore to make love with Marcello. When he returns home, it is to find that his mistress (Yvonne Furneaux) has attempted suicide. His next day's assignment takes him to the airport to meet a sexy American actress (Anita Ekberg), who is to star in a biblical epic. Marcello is captivated by this fatuous narcissist and wades with her into the Trevi fountain for a kind of pagan baptism (at which the fountain ceases to flow). Other incidents in Fellini's ambitious fresco (its runnig time is 173 minutes) include a scene outside Rome where two children pretend to have seen a vision of the Madonna in a field, and where the sick and afflicted gather in hope of a miraculous cure. After that, a visit to his intellectual friend Steiner (Alain Cuny) jolts Marcello into the realization that his own life is a spiritual vacuum. Yet Steiner eventually shoots his two children and commits suicide. This shattering event drives Marcello into even wilder debauchery, and it is he who leads the final bacchanalia. At dawn, as the revelers drift down to the beach, they catch sight of a monstrous, mystical fish that some fishermen have hauled ashore. Marcello glimpses an innocent girl whom he had noticed before in a café and found intriguing. She calls to him, but her voice is borne away on the wind.

Some contemporary critics accused Fellini of feigning to expose the decadence of his Roman scene while secretly reveling in it. This was tantamount to asking a leopard to change its spots: pointless to look to Fellinni for the measured, sardonic approach that Erich von Stroheim, for example, brought to his depiction of Vienna in *The Wedding March.* Two of the mainsprings of Fellini's creative drive have always been his exuberance and his sentiment. He consistently draws his inspiration from his surroundings, from his personal obsessions and his experiences. One gets the feelings that Marcello's mounting spiritual crisis, which links the film's disparate incidents might well have been Fellini's own, if he allowed himself, as does Marcello to surrender to the frenzied life around him. In the pathetic scene in which he is visited by his father, Marcello is made bleakly but unsentimentally aware of how far he has traveled from his simple provincial origins. Fellini's orgiastic scenes (it is their drab aftermath that evokes the director's deepest *emotional* response), though wild and bizarre, are not sensual—even his whores lack this quality. Perhaps the chief, and very considerable merit of *La dolce vita* nowadays is as a testimony to a particularly turbulent period in the cinema's history which changed, during its heyday, the character of an ancient city.

The film won the Grand Prix at Cannes, championed by Georges Simenon and Henry Miller against stiff opposition from other jury members, and also the New York Film Critics Award. It collected the now ritual plaudits and brickbats from reviewers. One London critic described it as " a poem in verses and stanzas making up an apocalyptic fresco of seven nightmarish nights and seven sobering dawns." Alexander Walker found it "by turns exhilarating and exhausting. It grips and it bores." The Soviet *Izvestia* "deplored the fact that *La dolce vita* received only two minor Oscars while *West Side Story* won ten major ones"—this despite the fact that the Soviet people were not permitted to see the film.

An episode in a mammoth production entitled *Boccaccio '70* followed in 1962. Visconti, de Sica, and Monticelli also contributed, though for reasons of length Monicelli's episode was deleted from the film's first showing at the Cannes Film Festival. Fellini's section was entitled "Le tentzioni del dottor Antonio." Concerning a predatory temptress (Anita Eckberg) who materializes from a black board to provoke an aging puritan....After the lip-smacking publicity surrounding

the making of *La dolce vita*, Fellini retreated into complete secrecy about his next film, *Otto e mezzo* (*8 ½*, 1962). Whereas, formerly, his Roman offices near the Spanish Steps were a milling beehive of journalists, friends, and well-wishers presided over by Il Maestro with evident enjoyment, *joie de vivre*, and a word for everyone, now the order of the day was silence and the sets were closed to visitors. His enemies often labeled Fellini a *buggiardo*, a big liar—even his wife said that he only blushed when he told the truth. But his friends discerned in him a rare sincerity. I wondered whether this new silence concerning *8 ½* was a calculated publicity ploy to offset the hysteria surrounding *La dolce vita*. On behalf of *The Sunday Times* I went to Rome to ask him about it. We talked in the stifling heat but merciful quiet of the Roman summer when everyone else had repaired to the beach.

"I couldn't talk to people about *8 ½",* Fellini declared, "the film wasn't clear even to me. I had a vague idea of it even before *La dolce vita*: to try to show the dimensions of a man on all his different levels; intermingling his past, his dreams, and his memories, his physical and mental turmoil—all without chronology but giving the impression that man is a universe unto himself. But I couldn't resolve it and so made *La dolce vita* instead. Then I thought of an end: the man must find himself at a point of complete mental and physical crisis: an awful, mature stage of doubt when, devoured by his complexes, his incapacities and impotence, he is forced to try to understand himself. Then, when suicide seems to be the only solution, all the characters, real and imagined, who had contributed to his confusion reveal their positive aspects to him and invest him with new hope."

But the project refused to cohere. "We made months of tests. Laurence Olivier was one actor I tried to get to play the part. But I still went on delaying, playing for time, secretly hoping that the confusion in my own mind would clear. We had to have a title put on the actors' contracts so I decided on a temporary working one, *8 ½,* which was the humber of films I'd made, counting my episode in *Boccaccio '*70 *as the half.*

"Suddenly—and it's amazing how sometimes the obvious can strike you with such blinding force—I thought: Why not make the leading character a film director who is trying to make a film and, in his debilitated state, falls a prey to awful doubts? From that moment, as if I'd found the courage to make a confession, it started to go well. But would the problems of such a man strike audiences as unfamiliar? That was the disquieting possibility. One would need to be utterly sincere, not autobiographical in the ordinary sense, but to tap a more profound, private, and personal outlet. Then the problems would be recognized as universal. It would be like walking a tightrope and one's only chance of success would be to stay utterly faithful to the internal ear. That's why I knew we had to work as undisturbed as possible."

Marcello Mastroianni plays Guido Anselmi, a famous film director who goes to a spa resort to fend off a nervous breakdown. He is wrestling with a script about survivors of a third world war escaping to another planet, but is losing faith in the project and in himself, and is meanwhile besieged by demanding actors, writers, and producers. Guido overcomes his "block" when he recognizes that his real need is to make not an apocalyptic epic but an uncompromisingly honest personal statement, a confession. The film showing how Guido arrives at this discovery *is* the film he really wanted to make: *8 ½*.

"Think what a bale of memories and associations and all we carry about with us," Fellini remarked to Eugene Walker. "It's like seeing a dozen films simultaneously. There's memory, there's memory that's been sorted out and filed, what they call subconscious. There's a kind of idealized set of sketches of the dinner party we'll go to tomorrow night. And there's also what is happening around us, visible and invisible." All of these modes of experience are presented in the film, which cuts from flashback to fantasy to current reality to dream, from objective to subjective, ignoring structural continuity in favor of free association. The three women in Guido's life are his mistress (Sandra Milo), his wife (Anouk Aimée), and Claudia (Claudia Cardinale, in white), an unattainable vision of purity and salvation.

Guido's co-scenarist Daumier (Jean Rougeul), endlessly disapproving, serves as his neorealist conscience (and gets himself hanged in fantasy for his pains).

The opening sequence is typical. Guido is trapped in his car in a soundless traffic jam. An initial impression of realism is soon rendered problematic by the silence, by a glimpse of a bare-breasted woman in another car, and by Guido's mounting claustrophobic panic. Suddenly he rises out of his car and soars above the traffic, higher and higher, until he is drifting free and joyful over sparkling water. And then he realizes there is a rope around his ankle. Like a tethered balloon, he is dragged down, down, into the waters of the unconscious. This pattern of crisis, liberation, and fall recurs throughout the film, as Timothy Hyman points out in one of the essays in Peter Bondanella's collection.

At the end, Guido (told all along that he doesn't "know how to love") rejects all the exclusive claims made on him by others, and learns to embrace all of the various aspects of his life and his nature. Coming to terms with himself, he is freed as an artist. For Fellini, "*8 ½* is a film of liberation—nothing more."

Timothy Hyman writes that "*8 ½* demonstrated how a film could be made about a temperament: the events it dealt with were interior events….In *8 ½* , Fellini renounced the political or social emphasis of neo-realism, and the new relation between the artist and the outer world that resulted has since become fundamental to much Italian cinema….the transition from neo-realism to what might be called neo-symbolism."...For Hyman, "it is the oscillation of light and dark, the precise length of their duration, which finally shapes *8 ½* and this music of interval is combined to maximum effect with with the actual music of Nino Rota….The syntax of the film becomes the embodiment of Fellini's doctrine that our experience is cyclic, that pleasure comes out of pain, true out of false, comedy out of tragedy."

Christian Metz, in another essay in the same collection, discusses the "double mirror construction" of *8 ½*. "It is not only a film about a director, but a film about a director who is reflecting himself onto his film….The ordinary interplay of reflection would never have yielded such a wealth of echoes and relationships between Fellini and his character had it not been reflected by the reflecting of that character himself; filmmaker and reflecting filmmaker, Guido is doubly close to the man who brought him to life, doubly his creator's double. "In the penultimate sequence, all the film's characters, real and imaginary (except the elusive Claudia), parade around the rim of a circus ring and, having organized his fantastic dance, Guido, holding his wife by her hand, *himself now enters* the circle…..this author who dreamed of making *8 ½* is now one of the characters of *8 ½*....No longer is Guido at the center of the magic circle; now it is only the small child dressed in white, and blowing his pipe, the ultimate and first inspirer of the whole fantasy—Guido as a child has become the symbol of Fellini as a child." *8 ½* won first prize at the Moscow Festival, and both an Oscar and the New York Film Critics' Award as best foreign film.

Giulietta degli spirti (*Juliet of the Spirits*, 1965), like *8 ½*, explores and inner landscape, but this time that of a woman, played by Giulietta Masina. Was this, then, Masina's *8 ½*? Fellini was characteristically ambiguous: "This woman, Juliet, is not *precisely*, my wife, the marriage is not *precisely* my marriage."...Throughout the film, as in *8 ½,* the narrative is densified by her visions, fantasies, memories, and dreams….Fellini himself said of the film that "the story is nothing. There *is* no story. Actually, the picture can be described in ten different ways. Movies have now gone past the phase of prose narrative and are coming nearer and nearer to poetry. I am trying to free my work from certain constrictions-a story with a beginning, a development, an ending. It should be more like a poem, with meter and cadence."….

In 1967, abandoning a long-projected film called "The Voyage of G. Mastorna," Fellini became seriously ill, suffering what was called "a total physical collapse." He went back to work the following year, directing an episode in a three-part French production, *Histoires extraordinaires* (1968), based on stories by Edgar Allan Poe. Fellini's contribution, "Toby Dammit," starred

Terence Stamp as a film star whose hallucinations on a trip to Cinecittà led to his death. The most admired of the three episodes, it seemed to Penelope Gilliatt "fluently comic, sober, barbed, a little desperate, with a droll and perfectly earnest belief in Heaven and damnation."

Also in 1968 Fellini, commissioned by NBC-TV, made a seldom-seen 54-minute film called *A Director's Notebook.* It includes a glimpse of what the uncompleted "Mastorna" might have been like, scenes from Fellini's Rome, a passage cut from *Nights of Cabiria*, Fellini's reminiscences of his childhood moviegoing, and a long concluding sequence showing a collection of bizarre characters auditioning for his next film, *Satyricon*. Joseph McBride claims that if, at first glance, the *Notebook* seems to be "a disconnected grab bag of gags, skits and memorabilia, it is actually a rigorous development of the theme of artistic stasis which Fellini pursued in *8 ½*."

Fellini Satyricon (1969) is an uninhibited and extremely loose adaptation by himself and Bernardino Zapponi of *Satyricon*, the satirical romance written in the first century a.d. by Petronius, Nero's master of the revels….Fellini himself has been even more than usually obfuscatory in his comments on *Satyricon*, in some interviews pointing out similarities between pre- and post-Christian Rome, in others asserting that the film's atmosphere "is not historical but that of a dream world"; claiming it as autobiographical and as anything but. He has more consistently stressed the objectivity and detachment of the film, saying "I have made no panoramas, no topography, only frescoes, and so the cutting is very fast. It has no real time. It is like riffling through an album. There is no psychological movement in the characters." It is also "a film made up of static shots—no tracks, no camera movements whatsoever."

...With *I clowns* (*The Clowns*), commissioned by the RAI network and first shown in Italy in 1970 as a Christmas offering on television, the critical atmosphere warmed considerably….Fellini's *Roma* (1972) is an evocation, mingling memories and fantasies, location shooting and elaborate studio work, of the city which has done so much to fire his imagination….*Roma* had a mixed reception. Most reviewers found something to praise—sequences rich in Felliniesque humanity—but many thought it too long and too diffuse. Richard Schickel said that he was tired of being fed Fellini's "visions of Rome as combination brothel, freak show and symbol of the decline of the West." Dilys Powell called the film "a huge dream, an offshoot from his *Satyricon*, grotesque, horrible, beautiful." She hoped that Fellini might now find his way back to "the mysterious organism, more complex than Rome—the human being."

This he did with considerable success in his next film *Amarcord* (1973), which in the patois of his native Rimini means "I remember" (*a-m'arcord*). We are back in the provincial town of *I Vitelloni*, though this account of four consecutive seasons there during the Fascist 1930s was shot mostly on vast sets constructed in the Roman studios…..There are many passages that reveal the director at his imaginative best, such as the one where a frightened but defiant old man is interrogated and tortured by the *fascisti*, or the ludicrous family trip to the country with an idiot relative who climbs to the top of a tree screaming "I want a woman" and who is eventually reclaimed by a severe midget nun….

Earning an Oscar as best foreign film, among many other awards, *Amarcord* was found uneven but rewarding, less strident, more mellow and affirmative than Fellini's other recent films. But the decline in his reputation continued with *Casanova* (1976), freely drawn by the director and Zapponi from the memoirs of the famous Venetian libertine, and featuring in the title role the utterly un-Italianate Donald Sutherland equipped with a strangely heightened forehead. Fellini's conception of Casanova is as a victim of his own legend, a joyless coupler with everyone from a libidinous nun to the mechanical doll which seems to provide him with the greatest satisfaction….

Three years elapsed before *Prova d'orchestra* (*The Orchestra Rehearsal*, 1979). "I'd like to do more little films, " Fellini told an interviewer, "but if I go to a producer with a very low-budget story, I see the lack of interest, the humiliation on his face. For him Fellini

should shoot a ten-million-dollar film. The film doesn't count at all, what counts is to build a business on me, the Fellini affair, and then to construct an immense financial edifice. And there I am, rooted in my film with all the problems it poses for me, and next to me is growing this huge labyrinthine construction to satisfy producers' appetites, piranha-distributors who hope to make the deals of their lives."…

La città delle donne (*City of Women*, 1980) found Fellini back in the superproduction category and once again generally out of favor with the critics. "I have the feeling that all my films are about women," Fellini declared at the time. "Women represent myth, mystery, diversity, fascination, the thirst for knowledge and the search for one's own identity...I even see the cinema as a woman...Going to the cinema is like returning to the womb; you sit there, still and meditative in the darkness, waiting for life to appear on the screen."

In *City of Women*, the merely (and chauvinistically) male hero is once more played by Mastroianni, here called Professor Snàporaz. He is traveling in a train that unexpectedly stops and like a latter-day Alice, is lured through the fields to his Wonderland not by a clothed rabbit but by an exotic fellow-passenger….The film inspired a very successful Broadway musical, *"Nine."*

In 1983 Fellini made *E la nave va* (*And the Ship Sails On*). He described his film as a dream, an evocation of the subconscious. "I want people to see it without trying to understand it." …

Fellini's latest film, *Ginger e Fred* (*Ginger and Fred*, 1985) unites Mastroianni, once again as Fellini's alter ego, and Giulietta Masina, Fellini's wife, for the first time in their careers. It reveals Fellini, now in his sixties, in a mood paradoxically both more sour and more mellow. Sour in the way he portrays television as an inimical purveyor of garbage, a world run by ghouls, and Rome itself as a putrescent dump; mellow in the way that he depicts his protagonists as finally capable of affection, of fleeting tenderness, united, momentarily, against the crass world that surrounds them.

Amelia and Pippo are two ex-variety artists who, long ago, were a touring team performing their mediocre imitations of the Astaire-Rogers routines. Lovers for a time, they had split up in the 1950s and had never met since. Now they are invited to make an appearance on a nostalgic TV Christmas Special, presided over by an unctuous veteran played by Franco Fabrizi, the shiftless young husband in *I Vitelloni.* Amelia is now a faintly prim provincial housewife in late middle age. Pippo has become a boozy, arthritic door-to-door salesman, and at their first meeting fails to recognize her. They find themselves in an alien city, rife with vagrants and junkies. The television show in which they are booked to appear is an assemblage of freaks, celebrity lookalikes, a levitating monk, and a miracle woman who has endured for three months the agony of not watching television. When Amelia and Pippo eventually perform their dance routine it is, despite a stumble on his part and a studio blackout, strangely touching. For a brief moment the couple experience a flickering of their old intimacy before once more setting off on their separate ways.

Orson Welles said of Fellini in 1967 that his "limitation—which is also the source of his charm—is that he's fundamentally very provincial. His films are a small-town boy's dream of the big city. His sophistication works because it's the creation of someone who doesn't have it. But he shows dangerous signs of being a superlative artist with little to say." As Joseph McBride points out, "Welles undoubtedly picked up that last line from Guido's declaration [in *8 ½*] that he has nothing to say but he is going to say it anyway." And so, fortunately, is Fellini. "Does Fellini always make the same film?," asks Aldo Tassone, "Certainly! But the language of the different chapters of this unique film is incessantly renewed….'It is precisely because it repeats recurrent motifs that Fellini's fantasy appears unsurpassed,' Casiraghi writes very correctly."

"I, Fellini" (Reprise) from *I, Fellini* by Charlotte Chandler, 1995

Our minds can shape the way a thing will be, because we act according to our expectations.

The hard thing is beginning. Whatever you want to do in life, you must begin it. The point of departure for the journey I must begin for each film is generally something that really happened to me, but which I believe also is part of the experience of others. The audience should be able to say,"Oh, something like that happened to me," or "I'm glad it didn't happen to me." They should identify, sympathize, empathize. They should be able to enter the movie and get into my shoes and the shoes of at least some of the characters. I first try to express my own emotions, what I personally feel, and then I look for the link of truth that will be of significance to people like me.

The picture I make is never exactly the one I started out to make, but that is of no importance. I am very flexible on the set. The script provides the starting point, as well as offering security. After the first weeks, the picture takes on a life of its own. The film grows as you are making it, like relationships with a person.

I must keep a closed set, though I make many exceptions and welcome good spirits, as long as there aren't too many of them. But if I become conscious of one wrong person watching me, my creativity dries up. I feel it physically. My throat becomes dry. It's insidiously destructive to work when there are long faces.

Understanding what makes a thing difficult doesn't make it less difficult, and understanding how difficult it is can make it more difficult to attempt. Pictures do not get easier for me to make, but more difficult. With each one, I learn more of what can go wrong, and I am thus more threatened, Its always satisfying when you can turn something that goes wrong into something that is even better. If I saw that an actor like Broderick Crawford was a little drunk on the set, I tried to make it part of the story. If someone has just had an argument with his wife, I try to use his upset state as part of his character, when I cannot correct the problem, I incorporate it.

Fellini said:

"For me, the artist is someone who is called by demons and must reply to this summons. Doing so he is cast into a kind of galaxy with which he has special, arcane relationships. The problem is to recognize the sounds, the colors, the signs that correspond to the voice that called him. Once this problem is resolved, he need do nothing except perform in extrasensory fashion. When I enter into this state of grace, it is not I who directs the film, but the film that directs me. A huge amount of sensitivity is always required: you have entered a city you don't know but in which you must move with the lightness of a vampire, without ideas, ideologies, preconceptions, if not without everything. This is like the prologue, the atrium, the anteroom of creativity; only afterward do your practical experience, your craftsmanship and professionalism come in; in other words, the hard work of making creativity materialize. An artist does not do what he wants, but what he can: this tension is what constitutes art."

"I'm not fascinated by theater; I'm fascinated by all forms of spectacle, theater, circus, cinema itself. These all contain congenial elements; when I show the atmosphere of show business, I speak of myself because my life is a show. I am a man wholly devoted to spectacle; I am one of those who tells stories to others."

"Often I mix languages to express the truth of a situation."
"I try to love everything in life, not only what we usually consider proper, honest, charming. I always like to show both sides of a thing." "I invented a non-existent Via Veneto, enlarging and altering it with poetic license until it took on the dimensions of a large allegorical fresco."

"Cinema is an art of illusion and sometimes the illusion must show its tail."

"Certain forced vocations make the organism show irregularities. Obligatory chastity, like that of a nun, can well bring such hair to the face."

"I don't want to see my old films; they are like diseases, the germs of my fantasy."

"Realism is a bad word. In a sense everything is realistic. I see no line between the imaginary and the real."

"Film is only images. You can put in whatever sound you want later and change and improve it."
"It's absolutely impossible to improvise. Making a movie is a mathematical operation. It is like sending a missile to the moon. Art is a scientific operation. What we call improvisation is, in my case, just having an ear and an eye to things that occur during the time we are making the picture. The history of 4 months, 5 months of shooting is not only the private story of the director making the picture, it is also a story of a trip, of mutual relationships, of love, of enemies, of vanity.... If you see that the picture is suggesting something new, you have to be open to that kind of suggestion, because sometimes it is the picture that directs you when you work in an open and honest way. That is not improvisation, that is just being faithful to what you are doing."

"All art is autobiographical. The pearl is the oyster's autobiography."

Peter Bondanella: "*Amarcord*" (Criterion Essays, 1999)

Amarcord presents a scathing satirical critique of Italian provincial life during the 1930s, the height of the fascist period (1922–43). In this era, Mussolini's dictatorship enjoyed its greatest popular support. While Fellini's depiction of the provincial world under fascism provides a complex political and cultural interpretation of the period, his portrayal of the everyday lives of the inhabitants of Rimini, Fellini's birthplace, awarded him international acclaim. The worldwide magnitude of the film derives from its stylistic playfulness and ability to fluctuate between humorous images and serene depictions of human existence. Not only was the film successful at the box office, it received the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film in 1974.

The inhabitants of Fellini's imaginary Rimini are not divided into good anti-fascists and evil fascists. Instead, all of the characters are sketched out in masterful caricatures, comic types with antecedents in Fellini's earlier films. Fellini's fascists are not sinister, perverted individuals but pathetic clowns, manifestations of the arrested development typical of the entire village. As Fellini himself wrote in an essay-interview entitled "The Fascism Within Us": "I have the impression that fascism and adolescence continue to be . . . permanent historical seasons of our lives . . . remaining children for eternity, leaving responsibilities for others, living with the comforting sensation that there is someone who thinks for you . . . and in the meanwhile, you have this limited, time-wasting freedom which permits you only to cultivate absurd dreams . . ." Yet the hilarious portrait Fellini draws—of the ridiculous parades, the gymnastic exercises in uniform, and the small daily compromises necessary to live under a dictatorship—speak volumes about what life was like in that era. Through the sequences in which the Amarcordians greet a visiting fascist bigwig, and the scene in which they row out in the sea to catch a glimpse of the passage of the *Rex* (an enormous ocean liner that was the pride of Mussolini's regime) coming from America, Fellini reveals the mechanism behind the mimicry of the cinematic image; he discloses film's function as a mediator of authentic sexual desire. These scenes expose the townspeople as people dominated by false ideals and idiotic dreams of heroic feats and romantic love. Such public behavior has its direct psychological parallel in numerous scenes of daily life at home, in schools, and in church, with the clever comic touch that is Fellini's trademark.

More than any other Italian film treatment of fascism, Fellini's *Amarcord* manages to explain the public lives of its characters by minute details of their private lives. The sense of intimacy and immediacy that the film creates allows the audience to recognize certain aspects of themselves in these characters. One of the

most interesting stylistic features of *Amarcord* is the proliferation of narrative points of view. In the original Italian print, we discover a complex mixture of direct addresses to the camera by various characters, as well as voice-overs providing information or commentary on the film's action. In a few significant instances, this voice-over presence is provided by Fellini himself, something rendered moot when viewing prints dubbed in English. To define *Amarcord* as merely another "political" film would fail to do justice to such a poetic work. The film's title means "I remember" in one of the dialects of Fellini's native province, but this does not amount to a strictly autobiographical interpretation of work. While *Amarcord*, as its title suggests, contains a great deal of nostalgia, Fellini's use of nostalgia as a means of romanticizing the past serves to underline his belief that fascism was based upon false ideals, and also his recognition that regret or nostalgia is as inevitable a sentiment as refusal.

Thus, Fellini offers *Amarcord* not just as a political explanation for a dark period in Italy's national life, but as an important clue to the understanding of Italian national character as well. Though the film denounces the state of perpetual adolescence and illustrates Fellini's belief that refusal of individual responsibility characterizes Italian society, it never degenerates into dogmatic treatise.
Instead, *Amarcord* performs a certain magic that only a master of the cinema could accomplish.

Michael Joshua Rowin: "A Man for All Seasons" (*Reverse Shot*, 2008)

With references to his work in recent films by Tim Burton, Wes Anderson, Todd Haynes, and Gus Van Sant, Federico Fellini is, perhaps, making a comeback. On its face that would seem to be a ludicrous statement: due to tireless self-promotion and on the strength of a wholly unique body of work, Fellini is still one of the most famous names in the history of cinema. And yet, since his death in 1993 Fellini's importance has been downgraded to relatively minor status (the same can be said for recently departed Antonioni and Bergman). Despite the fact that Fellini was one of the leading European art cinema imports of the Fifties and Sixties, his influence has waned in the United States, where he has been derided by some of the best and the brightest—Kael, Farber, and Thomson all *hate* him—culminating in an increasing intellectual backlash against the director and his artistic celebrity.

The growing antipathy may be universal—David Lynch spoke of his outrage upon seeing Fellini getting booed at Cannes for the screening of his last movie, *The Voice of the Moon*. Yet Fellini seems to particularly rankle a tough, rational strain of the American sensibility. Romantic, mystical, tender, and grotesque among a plethora of contradictory qualities, Fellini's cinema has consistently resisted categorization—is he a showman, an ironist, a bleeding heart?—along with any solid claim to either high art (he's one of the few canonical directors who can revel in a fart joke) or, from *8 ½* onward, audience-pleasing accessibility. Even Orson Welles paid Fellini a backhanded compliment by calling him a small-town boy ceaselessly agog at the big city—compared to the sophisticates, as he would have it, Fellini is just a creative bumpkin, more naively intuitive than intellectually deep.

Welles's description is superficially proven accurate by *Amarcord,* Fellini's 1973 cinematic return to his seaside hometown of Rimini—we're back in the artist's formative womb—after the study of Italy's capital in *Roma* just a year earlier. Rimini figures in a number of Fellini's films, most notably in 1953's *I vitelloni*, his quasi-neorealist breakthrough. The Fellini of 1973 was a fully formed auteur whose approach toward the same autobiographical subject matter, that of small-town life and adolescent sexuality, had remarkably changed. But matured? Well, that's an interesting question, because though *Amarcord* is on one hand a work of characters as caricatures, body-obsessed ribald humor, and nostalgic whimsy (a mood buttressed by longtime collaborator Nino Rota's beautiful carnivalesque score), it's also the most deceiving of Fellini's later films, a bittersweet remembrance of the vanished world of pre-WWII Italy serving as a Trojan horse for a disarming, understated critique of the fascist mentality. Where Fellini's maturity seems to have regressed, his sensibility has actually flowered into

something complex and multifaceted. It's appropriate in this regard that *Amarcord* has at least two major narrators: the town lawyer (Luigi Rossi), whose academic, pedantic telling of Rimini's history directly to the camera is openly ridiculed by off-screen vandals (Fellini himself?); and Titta (Bruno Zanin), the young high school student whose voice-over lead-ins that open several of the film's picaresque episodes are constantly undermined by an authorial commentary skeptical and questioning beyond this hero's few and unwise years.

Fellini's Rimini unsurprisingly revolves around the director's main obsession: women. The ritual that opens the film, the town's annual bonfire celebrating the coming of spring, is initiated by the local glamour queen, redheaded hairdresser Gradisca (Magali Noël), whose fiery sexuality ("I feel spring all over me already," she provocatively oozes) symbolically sparks the torch that she uses to set the pile of wooden debris aflame. Like spring, Gradisca ("whatever you desire") and her fellow female citizens unleash the barely controllable urges of all around them, and in typical Fellini fashion, these vixens are unabashed cartoons in behavior and presence. Volpina, the town nymphomaniac and prostitute, turns up every once in a while like a stray, horny tomcat, teary-eyed, frazzled and practically clawing at herself from insatiable lust. One of Titta's mercilessly mocked schoolteachers, statuesque and well-endowed, is similarly compared to a lion, while the town tobacconist (Maria Antonietta Beluzzi), whose gargantuan breasts might be the biggest pair in movie history (Russ Meyer's oeuvre excluded), presents herself as a mountain of a woman to be conquered by our hero. Indeed, Titta's bizarre encounter with this voluptuous woman is depicted as a sort of strength test. Titta proves his manhood by repeatedly lifting the tobacconist, arousing them both, but the woman's intimidating sexuality (expressed by one of Fellini's signature expressionistic lighting schemes, in which her shadow exaggeratedly dwarfs Titta) and the boy's sexual inexperience (confronted with her suffocating breasts, he blows on them) conspire to bring the tryst to a quick end. Leaving in humiliation and dissatisfaction, Titta's failure to lift the store's gate is the rim-shot punchline to his unprepared lovemaking skills. In the end, women devour Titta, elude his grasp, or—in the case of one of the film's few unsexualized females, his mother—are lost to death.

If Titta's unprepared for the true demands of passion, it's because he and his chums are more familiar with these women in fantasy than reality. Gradisca becomes the prize of a car race in one of Titta's daydreams (while his real attempt to rub against her in an empty movie theater is met with a withering put-down); tubby friend Ciccio (Fernando de Felice) imagines winning the affections of snobby object of affection Aldina (Donatella Gambini) and having his wedding presided over by the giant head of Mussolini; the whole group masturbates in a rocking automobile while name-checking the physical attributes of the town's beauties; Biscein (Gennaro Ombra), food vendor and honorary adolescent, lies about stumbling upon a visiting emir's harem at the town's grand hotel. All this would resemble nothing stronger than "boys will be boys" schoolyard nostalgia and legends if it weren't for the thick layer of sardonic criticism Fellini applies to them. Few directors are associated with the power of fantasy more strongly than Fellini, whose very name has become an adjective for the bizarre, excessive, and indulgent, but a film like *Amarcord* should be exhibit A in demonstrating how the director's relationship to the fantastic was not merely that of a naïve artist's to idealistic notions of creative fancy. For Fellini, spectacle is the ultimate act of externalized fantasy—whether in the form of officially sanctioned art such as the cinema, spectacles within everyday life such as parties, or the spectacle of life itself—but in *Amarcord* spectacle degenerates into the collective expression of Rimini's power-worshipping mindlessness.

At crucial intervals the playful and entertaining juvenilia of *Amarcord* slides into fascist spectacle, with parades of jolly, black-clad idiots marching in time, giving the fascist salute, and shouting inanities like, "All I can say is Mussolini's got two balls this big!"—the carnal chaos aroused by women must be met by the phallic authority of the father. Upon the release

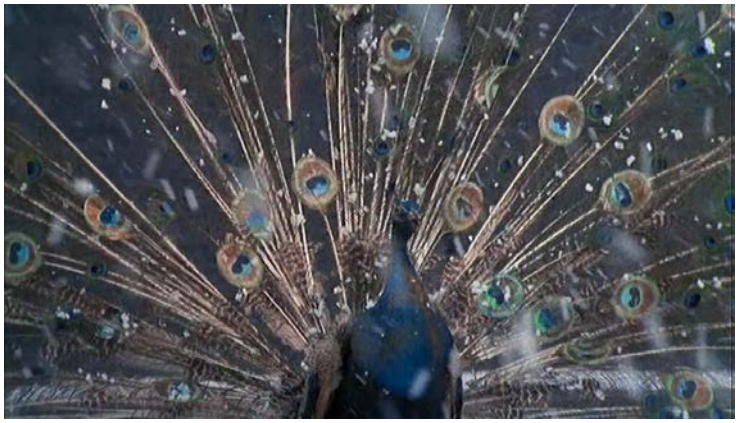
of *Amarcord*, Fellini made clear his disdain for the fascist corruption of spectacle as "the ridiculous conditioning, the theatricality, the infantilism, the subjection to a puppetlike power, to a ridiculous myth . . . The pretext of being together is always a leveling process. People stay together only to commit stupid acts. And when they are alone, there is bewilderment, solitude, or the ridiculous dream of the Orient, of Fred Astaire, or the myth of luxury and American ostentation. It is only ritual which keeps them together. Since no character has a real sense of individual responsibility, or has only petty dreams, no one has the strength not to take part in the ritual, to remain at home outside of it." The seemingly adorable adolescent mentality and hijinks of Rimini's citizens—as well as the failure of the Church and the school system to command any sort of respect because of their hypocrisy, or engage their charges' imaginations because of their cowed resignation to by-the-book teaching—exact a price.

Despite the harshness of the above quote, however, watching *Amarcord* again is to realize how subtly, at least by Fellini's standards, this message is conveyed. Aside from the overblown pomp and circumstance of the fascist parade (in which the leaders arrive in an appropriately obscuring veil of smoke), Titta's father's cruel questioning by party officials for his role in blasting the "Internationale" from a record player in the town square, and the people's celebration of another phallic symbol, the enormous steamship S.S. Rex, sailing in a plastic ocean, as "the greatest thing the regime ever built," the majority of *Amarcord* shows Italy's fascist era as slipping by as an undercurrent rather than an epochal moment in history (as always, time in Fellini's films is fragmentary but also fully accounted for as an unstoppable, if circular, progression). Even when Gradisca's marriage to a fascist higher-up ironically brings the movie to a seasonal, cyclical close, it's difficult to pinpoint exactly where Fellini's wide-eyed affection for his characters ends and an incisive understanding of the roots of delusional groupthink begins.

If *Amarcord* is often fondly recalled as Fellini's love letter to his hometown through invented childhood memories—and thus a film that has served as a prototype for countless gauzy magical realist depictions of small-town Europe—it's partly due to audiences' wishing away of the darkness that seeps in from the edges of this evocation of provincial life as comic strip, but also partly due to Fellini's use of the film as a temporary comic interlude during the blackest period of his work. Though it follows in the footsteps of the nostalgic *The Clowns* and *Roma* (and even uses the self-deprecating "mockumentary" template of *Fellini: A Director's Notebook* and those other two films), *Amarcord* is less aesthetically challenging than 1969's *Satyricon*, the strangest, bleakest, and most challenging of his films, and not nearly as relentlessly devastating a commentary on "eternal adolescence" as would be *Casanova*, the grandiose companion piece to Amarcord released three years later to universal disdain. Here *Satyricon*'s scrolling tracking shots of characters arranged in tableaux staring into the camera and returning the spectator's gaze occur far less frequently, nor are they as confrontational and conspicuous, melding almost imperceptibly into the film's far more typically unobtrusive long shot style, picking out actions from a wide range of actions among an ensemble cast; while set design, costuming, and actors' gestures barely begin to compete with *Casanova*'s hallucinatory and distancing artificiality, which mocks its protagonist's hubristically soulless fantasy life. *Amarcord* is a work of caricature, but compared to the aliens and automatons of *Satyricon* and *Casanova*, it is a work of identifiable human beings, and a humanistic one at that.

One might dare to ask: between *Satyricon* and *Casanova*, had Fellini gone soft? What with it being Fellini's last real critical and commercial success (it garnered Fellini's fourth Academy Award for Best Foreign Film, though to be fair, the Academy actually rewarded deserving films back then) it's certainly tempting to dismiss *Amarcord* as a film that connected with

audiences at the expense of continuing the harsher aesthetic investigations of Fellini's riskiest and most fecund period. While at certain moments *Amarcord* feels cheap—Titta's family's dinner table dysfunction does nothing new with the cliché of hysterical Italian home life; Gradisca's pathetic posing for a prince she attempts to seduce is one of the rare cruelly mocking scenes in all of Fellini's work—there are far more that rank among the finest examples of Fellini's ability to evoke wonder and melancholy without resorting to sentimentality. The episode involving Titta's uncle Teo (Ciccio Ingrassia), a mentally ill patient of an insane asylum, effectively navigates the multiple emotional registers Fellini often compartmentalizes throughout *Amarcord* by combining familial warmth, gross-out humor, pathos (Teo's repeated cry of "I want a woman!" while refusing to come down from a tree reinforces the film's theme of stunted sexual frustration), and absurdity (after futile efforts to drag down Teo, a dwarf nun offers Teo an unheard chastisement and succeeds where the others fail). Even more ineffable is the episode in which the entire town gets lost in a silent fog. It's *Amarcord*'s heaviest symbol, but Fellini refuses to oversell it, calmly rendering the once familiar spaces of Rimini a disorienting shadow play of now fake-looking, jagged trees eerily suggestive of the world beyond, an idea possibly lifted from the unrealized project *The Voyage of G. Mastorna*, in which the deceased title character walks through landscapes recognizable and yet not—"If death is like this," Titta's grandfather (Giuseppe Ianigro) muses, "I don't think much of it." Death and dreams: the fog also inspires fantasy, as Titta and his classmates peer into the grand hotel and form an imaginary dancehall and band outside, ethereally rocking to Rota's light jazz motif. "Where are you, my love?" Titta asks, eyes closed, to his absent partner.



These scenes demonstrate a sensibility unique to Fellini, who cut his artistic teeth on neorealism and the circus: a feel for the inexplicable correspondences between the rational and the irrational—the former manifested in *Amarcord*'s sympathetic but also severe portrayal of its escapist townspeople, the latter in virtually everything else about the film that resists purely intellectual understanding. It's this sensibility that's sorely missing in the recent revival of simplified Felliniesque imagery in American cinema, from *Big Fish* to *The Life Aquatic* to *I'm Not There*. Intrusions of fantasy into reality, self-reflexive nods to moviemaking, constant streams of freakish countenances falling into the frame of a celebrity-addled star's point of view—it's not any one of these devices, so easily bungled, but an attitude toward life at once sharp and dirty, celebratory and lamenting, that makes the Felliniesque the Felliniesque.

THE SPRING 2022 BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS #44:

All films in the series but two (*Notorious* and *The Power of the* Dog) are available from Criterion or Netflix: **c** after a title indicates it is available on Criterion, **p**=Amazon Prime, **p$**=Amazon Prime with an extra $4 fee. *The Power of the Dog* is available, for now, only on Netflix. *Notorious* is available on FlixFilm (low-resolution versions are free on YouTube and Tubi.). All four subscription services let you cancel at any time, so you should have access to all 24 films for well under $100. *The Gunfighter* is on Amazon Prime and, in low rez, free on Tubi. Nine of the films—all with "UB" after the title—are available free to anyone with a UB email account via the UB Library's Swank and Kanopy portals. Five films are available only on non-UB streaming services: *Le Corbeau, The Gunfighter, Naked, Salesman* and *The Power of the Dog*.(The Swank titles will be available at UB's Library for a year; the Kanopy titles for 3 years.)

Feb 1: 1921 Victor Sjostrom, ***The Phantom Carriage*** c UB-Kanopy
Feb 8: 1934 Frank Capra ***It Happened One Night*** c p$ UB-Swank
Feb 15: 1941 John Huston ***The Maltese Falcon*** p$ UB-Swank
Feb 22: 1943 Henri-Georges Clouzot ***Le Corbeau*** c
Mar 1: 1946 Alfred Hitchcock ***Notorious*** FlixFling, YouTube, UB-Swank, Tubi (free)
Mar 8: 1950 Henry King, ***The Gunfighter*** *p$,* Tubi (free), YouTube (free)
Mar 15: 1958 Orson Welles ***Touch of Evil*** p$ UB-Swank
Mar 29: 1962 Yasujiro Ozu ***An Autumn Afternoon*** *c p$b* UB Kanopy
Apr 5: 1973 Federico Fellini ***Amarcord*** *c p$* UB Kanopy
Apr 12: 1993 Mike Leigh ***Naked*** c
Apr 19: 2002 Phillip Noyce ***Rabbit-Proof Fence*** p$ UB-Kanopy
Apr 26: 2016 Asghar Farhadi ***Salesman*** *p*
May 3: 2021: Jane Campion ***The Power of the Dog*** *NETFLIX*
May 10: 2011 Martin Scorsese ***Hugo*** *p$* UB-Kanopy

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The Buffalo Film Seminars are presented by the State University of New York at Buffalo