

Document Citation

Title	Film : The story of pity, rage and laughter
Author(s)	Nancy Scott
Source	<i>People's World</i>
Date	1965 Jan 23
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Roma, città aperta (Open city), Rossellini, Roberto, 1945

FILM

The story of pity, rage and laughter

OPEN CITY. Directed by Roberto Rossellini. Screenplay by Federico Fellini and Sergio Amidei. (Seen in S.F. at the Surf.)

IF YOU'LL allow it, we are going to take a deep breath and try to draw a line from Rome, 1945, to Mississippi, 1965. Or Vietnam. Or anyplace else that demands those emotions and that clarity provoked by Rossellini's film "Open City," conceived while the Nazis were still in Italy and released in 1945.

It has been rarely — too rarely — seen since its initial release. It has not diminished in strength or relevancy. It was, in fact, made with such rage, such pity as to overshadow every niggling contemporary complex, all the sophistry, the ifs and buts with one unarguable statement about the value of human beings.

AND, though the rage is single minded, the statement is rich and varied. Both reflect another unarguable fact about the "enemy" — that he is the one, for whatever social reasons, who does not value human beings, who has been turned, for whatever social reasons, into a beast.

The Nazis in this story are

as bestial as any we have ever seen filmed; the methods of torture are explicit and the pain for the viewer is as close to reality as film can come; closer, perhaps, because one is put, through Rossellini's camera, into the shoes of the victim and the shoes of the priest who is forced to watch and himself suffers God knows what mental torture.

And it would all, of course, be either unbelievable or unbearable if it were not placed within the larger story where pity and courage and laughter are as viable as rage.

THE HERO is dual: Manfredi, a Communist partisan (Marcello Pagliero) and Don Pietro, a Partisan priest (Aldo Fabrizi). For most of the film the Communist is on the run through the streets and apartments of Rome. The plot is encompassed through a series of incidents leading to the capture and death of both men.

Each incident is crowded with the faces of Rome: the children playing soccer with Don Pietro — a plump umpire who cannot resist a good kick himself and is smacked by the ball for his efforts. The children, dressed in tatters of uniforms, blowing up a gasoline



VITO ANNICCHARICO AND NANDO BRUNO
"Well done . . ."

truck, told gravely by their 10 year old leader, "You did well, Comrades . . ."

Anna Magnani, with magnificent comic scorn, pushing aside a Nazi soldier . . . shot down in the streets a minute later . . .

Maria Michi, as the informer, bouncing across her lush apartment to a tinny war-time jazz song . . . then facing, in the final scenes, the result of her betrayal . . .

Don Pietro hiding a gun and grenade under the bed covers of an iracible grandfather whom he conks with a frying pan so he can pray over his "dying" body as the suspicious Germans arrive . . .

THEIR visual reality is unquestionable. It is also documented (by critic Norman Dorn, S.F. Chronicle, Jan. 3). The Gestapo commander (Harry Feist) was an amalgam of "two much feared German

commanders in Rome"; the priest, "two churchmen executed . . . for helping resistance heads . . ." and Manfredi, "an ordinary sort of man who rose to heroic stature by his tortuous death, was based on real life . . ."

And the film moves as reality moves — suddenly from laughter to horror without a contrived narrative line or expectation beyond the viewers' general knowledge of the possibilities of war. The sub-titles struck us as more inadequate than usual although they do give a curious hint of Fellini's — even then — preoccupation with the contradiction of a loving God (in the figure of Don Pietro) and evil men.

If you have a small independent theater in your area — ask the manager — he might be able to obtain the film. It ought to be seen.

—NANCY SCOTT



MARIA MICHI
facing her betrayal . . .