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# BAVL FILM STUDY GUIDE

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PAISAN (Italian 1946)

Direction - Roberto Rossellini, Filmed by O. Martelli, Music by Renzo Rossellini.

Once upon a time there was a journal called WORLD FILM NEWS. It published contrary notices by different critics writing about the same films. This is always an instructive thing to do, especially about a film which may well rank as "great" when our period of film-making is seen in perspective. Here are excerpts from such a series with additions by our scrapbook editor.

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## A GREAT FILM

Roger Manvell: "Paisa is possibly the greatest film to have been made in Europe since the war." (FILM - 1950) "Here is film art at its best, demonstrating a remarkable attainment in 50 years of rapidly evolving experiment." (EXPERIMENT IN THE FILM - 1949)

Richard Winnington: "Paisa will stand as one of the few great comments on the 2nd World War to be made by contemporary cinema...Humorous and tragic, (it) fully the depleted title 'great.'" (NEWS CHRONICLE)

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## NOT A GREAT FILM

Jympson Harman: "These incidents have no apparent link of purpose and the continuity within them is poor." (EVENING STANDARD)

Special Critic for THE OBSERVER: "He may one day feel ashamed at having merely done well in haste by a theme that deserved to be done better at leisure."

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## ROSSELLINI'S HUMANISM

Film Critic of THE LONDON TIMES: "It's impulse is a kind of imaginative realism which knows how to take into account the inconsistencies, the paradoxes, the maddening inconsequences of human behaviour..."

Stephen Watts: "Few films have said so much about war and about humanity--and never with more perceptive economy."

William Whitebait: "It is no exaggeration to say that Paisa, with its warm shifting episodes, gives a greater and more heartrending sense of the totality of war than any other film, more than the same director's Open City. He shows again the same careless genius for welding document and story, actors and actuality." (NEW STATESMAN)

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### ITALIAN DOCUMENTARY OR NEO-REALISM

Paul Strand (Famous U.S. photographer of THE WAVE): "I think that the impact of such films as Open City, Paisa, Shoeshine...is quick...on American audiences...precisely because we too have a tradition of realism which is close to theirs in its simplicity and directness of statement...It is wonderful to find real people doing real things on the screen...Consciously or not, the Italians have rediscovered many of the valuable elements of the silent days, the expressive value of objects, of pantomime and the tremendous value of honest photography." (SIGHT & SOUND Jan. '50)

M. T. McGregor: "(My) reactions...frustration and shock of so much passion conveyed in crude news-style photography." (TIME AND TIDE)

Basil Wright (of SONG OF CEYLON): "It may well be asked...why this film is considered a documentary. The answer is that Paisa may well prove to be not only the climax of all documentary development, but also an influence on all types of film production as profound and far-reaching as that of Potemkin." (DOCUMENTARY '47).

Cesare Zavattini (Scenarist for De Sica): "In fact Paisa, Open City, Shoeshine, Bicycle Thieves...all contain elements of an absolute significance--they reflect the idea that everything can be recounted; but their sense remains metaphorical, because there is still an invented story, not the documentary spirit." (S&S.Oct'53)

Matthew Norgate: "...it is technically slovenly...No regard for continuity, the cutting is positively slapdash and the acting uneven..."

R. Winnington: "With the exception of the 5th (monastery) each episode is permeated with a sense of tragic irony and given a de Maupassant flick at the end."

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### BEST EPISODE

Winnington liked the three episodes that have gained the most favorable comment: "The Naples (Negro G.I.), Monastery, and Po Valley (marshlands) sequences display Rossellini's talents to the full."

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### HOW ROSSELLINI WORKS

"Normally on location and not in a studio; when the mood is upon him with complete absorption. Refuses to use a hard and fast script. The writer, Serge Amidei, is an important influence in his films. Dialogue is often worked out on the spot, with professional and amateur actors mixed. This inspirational way of working is reminiscent of the film's earliest days. He must feel right about the human elements in his films. He tries to keep his personal views out as much as possible and the "anti-Allies elements" may have just leaked in thru character improvisation. He gives the stories a twist because he thinks it necessary, to round them off or point them up before withdrawing. His films may seem raw because both human emotion and indifference are allowed to come over with little dramatization. For these reasons he is praised for his authenticity, and condemned for his cynicism." Rodger Manvell. (Penguin Film Review #9)