

Roma, città aperta (1945)

During the Nazi occupation of Rome in 1944, the Resistance leader, **Giorgio Manfredi**, is chased by the Nazis as he seeks refuge and a way to escape.

Director: Roberto Rossellini

Writers: Sergio Amidei (screenplay), **Federico Fellini** (collaboration on screenplay)

Stars: Anna Magnani, Aldo Fabrizi, Marcello Pagliero

Academy Awards, USA 1947

Nominee Oscar	Best Writing, Screenplay Sergio Amidei Federico Fellini
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Cannes Film Festival 1946

Winner Grand Prize of the Festival	Feature Film Roberto Rossellini
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Storyline

Nazi occupied Rome. As Rome is classified an open city, most Romans can wander the streets without fear of the city being bombed or them being killed in the process. But life for Romans is still difficult with the Nazi occupation as there is a curfew, basic foods are rationed, and the Nazis are still searching for those working for the resistance and will go to any length to quash those in the resistance and anyone providing them with assistance. War worn widowed mother **Pina** is about to get married to her next door neighbor **Francesco**. Despite their situation - Pina being pregnant, and Francesco being an atheist - Pina and Francesco will be wed by Catholic priest **Don Pietro Pelligrini**. The day before the wedding, Francesco's friend, Giorgio Manfredi, who Pina has never met, comes looking for Francesco as he, working for the resistance, needs a place to hide out. For his latest mission, Giorgio also requests the assistance of Don Pietro, who is more than willing as he sees.

Open City, a powerful Italian film directed by Roberto Rossellini in **1946**, is a **historically-based story of the Italian Resistance movement** and its struggle against Nazi occupation.

With the city's studios destroyed, **Rossellini was forced to shoot his film in the streets** on stock that was purchased bit by bit, then taped together. **It was shot almost immediately after the city was liberated from the Germans while the Germans still occupied the streets.** The resulting film, however, is unique and deeply moving, and is a film of historic importance.

Open City was the first of the great Italian Neo-realist films (followed by *Paisan*, *The Bicycle Thief*, *Shoeshine*, *I Vitteloni*, and *Umberto D*). **These films were characterized by the use of non-professional actors, natural lighting, location shooting, the desire to get closer to everyday reality, and the struggle for dignity of the masses of people.**

Open City, though depressing in its presentation, remains hopeful. This hope for the future is symbolized at the end of the film by the children making their way back down into the streets of Rome after witnessing an execution. This attitude is also expressed by Francesco as he talks to Pina (Anna Magnani) in the flats, “We must believe it, we must want it.” „ We mustn't be afraid because we are on the just path. We're fighting for something that must come. It may be long...it may be difficult, but there'll be a better world.”

What is most outstanding is Rossellini's compelling storytelling. Instead of showing us a documentary account (due to lack of film-equipments) he gives us **a moving story of resistance.**

If one can look beyond the poor technology of the film, *Roma Città Aperta* is one of the most powerful films of its genre. Though the film may depress, and at some point horrify the viewer, the ending is profound and hopeful. In the end, **it's a story about fear, courage, integrity and hope.**

Over time, Rossellini's legacy has been overshadowed by that of his contemporaries Fellini and de Sica. There are reasons for this. Fellini had a unique cinematographic eye and a gift for abstract symbolism. De Sica was able to capture the incidental and indeterminate in a way that practically elevated it to the level of the holy. His use of non-actors was far more effective than Rossellini's, as was Fellini's use of actors. Rossellini's scripts were often two-dimensional, his cinematography spotty and his editing odd.

In fact, Rossellini was not a neo-realist, but a realist. Compared with products of the neo-realists, his films are thin and wooden. If, on the other hand, one views them as works of tragedy, they are excellent. From the very start of the film, it is clear that the seeds of disaster are sewn. A pregnant mother is to be married to a member of the resistance. Members of the clergy and children are also involved in fighting the Nazis. Italians are united against a common enemy: Fascism. Yet we know that, while victory is inevitable, so is death. Perhaps it is the darkness of the tight, seedy interiors that tips us off. Perhaps it is because we do not feel that sense of endlessness beyond the screen, but that we are being led through these building and streets along with the characters. Whatever it is, **we feel the march of destiny leading us to some terrible conclusion.** Fate can never play a role in neo-realist work; it is constructed organically and arrives at its destination as if by chance. Tragedy can only be the purview of the realist.

Roberto Rossellini's *Open City* **contains characters so real and emotions so powerful** that it is not unusual for audiences to wonder whether the drama being played out on the screen is in truth a bona fide documentation of events surrounding the Italian Resistance during WWII. A study of the production history reveals that the film is closer to a combination of pure documentation (most accounts will go into detail about the location shooting and the presence of real soldiers) and dramatic reconstruction of actual events (like the execution of priest Don Morosini by the Nazis) with some lyrical filmmaking thrown in for good measure (the children whistling in defiance of their oppressors).

Anna Magnani, one of the greatest performers in the history of Italian cinema, is absolutely amazing in this film. The acting was quite good. Magnani plays her part well, and her chemistry with Annichiarico is prominent, though not the same can be said between her and Francesco. She gives a moving performance in her last scene as well, with her desperation and emotions traversing the screen. Fabrizi as well gets into the shoes of his character well and plays the part of the priest convincingly. Francesco and Pagliero as part of the resistance to the Nazi occupiers don't really seem to be doing anything but talk.

Additionally, some characters are well developed, while others are ambiguous or stereotypical. Pina seems to be the protagonist and her character is pretty well established but she doesn't carry the narrative (not in the second half anyway). Don Pietro is another well-established character who has no surprises. Francesco and Manfredi are depicted as the heroes but not in the conventional sense (as they don't do heroic stunts), and the other female characters in the film are shallow and presented as stereotypes.

Reviews:

<https://filmforum.org/film/rome-open-city-film>

<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-rome-open-city-review-20150220-column.html>

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/film-news/10679847/Rome-Open-City-review.html>