

Rome, Open City, Part I

Director: Roberto Rossellini (1945)

Screenplay: Sergio Amidei & Federico Fellini

Cinematography: Ubaldo Arata

Please note: In writing our photo-stories, we aim for a fluid, standard Italian, albeit at a high intermediate level. Then we write an English translation – which is naturally at an intermediate level of English – to match it. This translation document is not a *literary* translation of the photo-story. It's a tool to assist intermediate-level Italian learners understand the text.

We write the dialogue verbatim from our films. So, if you are reading our written dialogue from the blog as you watch the film – not a bad exercise! – you will find some differences between our English dialogue and the subtitles you read. There are two possible reasons for this: 1) The translator of subtitles often needs to shorten the lines in order to make the subtitles readable. We have no such space restriction, so our readers get the benefit of all the spoken dialogue. And, 2) sometimes the subtitles are simply not accurate. This may be because the translator has made a mistake or has done an unnecessary 'creative' re-write or has chosen a literal translation that doesn't really work in the target language. We labor intensively over our translation into English to make the dialogue an accurate representation of what the characters say.

There are a few exceptions to this in this film:

Of course, as a language-learning blog, we need the Italian to sound as real Italians would speak it. In some past photo-stories, when a foreign language-speaker uses incorrect Italian and that incorrect speech is a part of their character, we've retained the incorrect speech, pointing out the error to readers. In *Rome, Open City*, however, the Italian spoken by the Germans is actually not so bad! At times, it just needed a little adjusting so that it would sound more as Italian is actually spoken. For example, we have changed the German officer's line from "Io quest'uomo l'ho già visto *in qualche luogo!*" to "Io quest'uomo l'ho già visto *da qualche parte*" simply because the phrase is more commonly used and thus more useful to a student reader.

As always, we've updated some vocabulary that – 75 years after the film was made – is no longer in use. Throughout the photo-story for this film, we've changed the old fashioned formal "voi" to the more standard, modern "lei."

Finally, in some instances, the English translation retains a little of the Italian syntax to give students a feel for the Italian language. For example, in translating the phrase, "Francesco mi parla sempre di lei," in order to reinforce the Italian syntax, we kept the "mi" though that is not so commonly used in English: "Francesco always talks (to me) about you."

Though you will note the Roman accents of the players in the film, there is not so much Roman dialect as in our other Italian films, so that did not impact the translation as it normally does!

The images are an important part of the photo-story. Each paragraph refers to specific images. Even if you don't understand Italian, please read this translation alongside the Italian version on the blog with photos, so that you can have context for the words. Consider as well that these visuals help us to know the movie better: they not only enrich the story, but they also show camera movements, editing, the symbols chosen by the director and thematic ideas. You will also have access to the links to other references in the blog itself. Note that an underline in the translation document indicates a hyperlink

in the cineracconto on the blog. Please see the blog for more information about our translation philosophy.

During the Nazi occupation of Rome, Pina, a widow with a young son, is about to marry. The day before the wedding her fiancé Francesco, a member of the Resistance, escapes a raid by the SS, which operates throughout the city with the cooperation of the Italian military and police. Meanwhile, Don Pietro, the neighborhood priest, has sympathies with the Resistance that may land him in trouble. What will become of the people of Rome?

As the opening titles appear, the camera pans over the rooftops of Rome around Piazza di Spagna, beginning at the dome of Saint Peter's Basilica. Somber orchestral music gives way to the voices of German soldiers singing a battle hymn. It is 1945, during the nine months of Nazi occupation. The events of the film are based, in part, on the wartime experiences of Teresa Gullace (transformed into the character Pina, who is played by Anna Magnani).

Marching through the streets of Rome, the Germans are shadowy figures in the night. We can barely make them out – nor can the local residents, though they are very aware of the invaders' presence. A truck stops in front of a residential building. Soldiers emerge from under its white cover. As suspenseful music plays, they pound on the front door.

Upstairs, a door cracks open, and the sound of *London Calling Europe*, a radio broadcast,* drifts out onto the balcony. A woman peeks out. Looking down into the street, she sees the truck, which clearly displays a big red cross.** “Oh, Jesus!” the woman says, and goes quickly back inside, shutting the door.

**As part of the Allies' wartime propaganda outreach, the BBC broadcast these English-language programs to occupied Europe.*

***The red cross identifies the truck (falsely) as a vehicle to transport the wounded and thus protects it from being bombed from the air.*

A man emerges from a rooftop door, putting on his jacket. He is Giorgio Manfredi (Marcello Pagliero). He shuts the door and runs across the roof. Light is gathering before the dawn, and the skyline is a line of geometric silhouettes: buildings and a spray of leaves.

Looking down, Marcello sees the German soldiers at the door.

After a moment's thought, Marcello takes off running, jumping from one rooftop to another. The dawn highlights the old stone buildings in the lingering dark.

In response to the soldiers' knocking, the woman who had peeked out the balcony door earlier calls out, “I'm coming! I'm coming!” She is the maid. She has thrown a wool overcoat over her nightgown. Crossing herself, she opens the door, and SS soldiers force their way in. Pointing his gun at her, one asks, “Engineer Giorgio Manfredi?”

“He’s not here.”

“Where is he?”

Another woman appears, saying, “We don’t know. He doesn’t always come to sleep at home.” This must be the landlady.

“Where does he go?”

“I don’t know. You know how it is. He’s a young bachelor!”

“Of course. Which is his room?”

The landlady points. “That way.”

“Search the room!” he orders the two soldiers in German. He goes to Giorgio’s room, with the landlady following.

She turns on the light as they enter the room.

“Do a lot of people come to see him?” the man in charge asks.

“Before, yes, but no one has come for a while.”

“Yes, of course,” he replies, as he searches through a dresser. He walks over to the desk and looks in the drawer. “How many other lodgers do you have?”

“Two.”

Abruptly, we hear a telephone ringing. “Where’s the phone?” the German demands.

“End of the hallway,” she says, pointing, and he rushes out to answer it.

In the hallway, the housekeeper is about to answer the phone, but the SS man says sharply, “Stop! I’ll answer it!”

She stands back. He picks up the phone. “*Hallo?*” he asks, in the German style, then switches to Italian: “*Pronto!*”

We see who’s at the other end: a young woman, sitting in bed, wearing a nightgown. “Is Giorgio there? The engineer Manfredi?” She pauses. “Who am I speaking to?”

“I’m a friend of the engineer,” the officer answers gruffly.

“What friend?” she asks, beginning to get suspicious.

“Who am I speaking to?” he demands in an authoritarian tone.

Looking worried, the caller hangs up the phone, without replying.

The soldier hangs up the phone too. “That was a woman,” he says. “Who is she?”

“How should I know? I didn’t see her.”

Turning to a subordinate, he asks, in German, “Find anything?”

The young soldier jumps to attention. “No, nothing.”

“That door?” the officer asks the landlady.

“It’s the terrace.”

“Ah! The terrace!” He walks over and opens it. He climbs the stairs beyond the doorway, as the other soldiers follow him.

“Keep calm, please!” the landlady tells the maid, who responds, “Jesus!”

We see the soldier’s silhouettes crossing the rooftop terrace, the two women following behind. Two potted plants stand like calligraphy against the half-lit sky.

Solemn, helmeted, the officer stares across the rooftops, trying to understand how the engineer made his escape. Noticing the roof of a nearby building, he asks the women, “Who lives there?”

“That’s the Spanish embassy.”

“Ah.” He does not expect that the engineer would be hiding out in the embassy of a German ally.

And so we are in the midst of things: the invaders knocking in the night, hunting for those who might resist. We’ll soon meet the other players in the story: a widow about to be married; her young son, involved in clandestine activities; and a priest sympathetic to the partisans.

As we’ll see, the Germans have their brute strength and their arrogance, but the Romans of this neighborhood have a tight-knit community that will not readily surrender.