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*The Films of Roberto Rossellini* traces the career of one of the most influential Italian filmmakers through close analysis of the seven films that mark important turning points in his evolution: *The Man with a Cross* (1943), *Open City* (1945), *Paisan* (1946), *The Machine to Kill Bad People* (1948–52), *Voyage in Italy* (1953), *General Della Rovere* (1959), and *The Rise to Power of Louis XIV* (1966). Beginning with Rossellini's work within the fascist cinema, it discusses his fundamental contributions to neorealism, a new cinematic style that resulted in several classics during the immediate postwar period. Almost immediately, however, Rossellini's continually evolving style moved beyond mere social realism to reveal other aspects of the camera's gaze, as is apparent in the films he made with Ingrid Bergman during the 1950s; though unpopular, these works had a tremendous impact on the French New Wave critics and directors. Rossellini's late career marks a return to his neorealist period, now critically reexamined, in such works as the commercially successful *General Della Rovere*, and his eventual turn to the creation of didactic films for television. Emphasizing Rossellini's relationship to cinematic realism, *The Films of Roberto Rossellini* also explores in depth the aesthetic dimensions of his working method.

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PETER BONDANELLA



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For Harry, *il miglior fabbro*

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# Preface

This introduction to what I consider the most interesting and significant films by Roberto Rossellini, a small percentage of his total artistic production, aims at analyzing the truly original elements of Rossellini's style and defining the many ways in which he helped to shape the history of postwar Italian cinema. Until only a few years ago, critical discussions of Rossellini virtually ignored his work during the fascist period, but I trust my overview of Rossellini's career and the chapter devoted to a film from this period will demonstrate how mistaken such a perspective was. Although Rossellini himself constantly refers to a search for truth and realism in his cinema (and is universally acknowledged as the father of Italian neorealism), his notion of exactly what kind of "truth" could be conveyed by the art of the cinema evolved drastically until the latter part of his career when he abandoned the commercial cinema completely for work in the upstart medium of television.

This book considers only seven films, but I believe they are the films that will continue to define Rossellini's genius in the future or will be deemed crucial in explaining the evolution of his cinematic style regardless of the ideological foundation of the critic examining Rossellini's works. Although this new series on great directors is not the proper place for academic polemics, I have also tried to suggest in the notes how a number of critics, particularly those associated first with *Cahiers du Cinéma* and more recently with *Screen* and their Marxist followers in the United States, have used their interpretations of Rossellini's works in their polemical arguments with their intellectual or academic opponents. My own point of view should be apparent in this book, but I have tried to present all such critical perspectives in a fair and impartial light.

However, the focus of my study is Rossellini's cinema, not Rossellini's

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critics. Because the format of this new series does not permit a completely exhaustive consideration of every aspect of each individual film, I have chosen my emphasis in each chapter carefully so that when I cannot analyze a problem in depth, I have at least suggested its existence and encouraged further thought on it. My hope is that the style of the book will satisfy the general educated reader and that the intellectual level of the discussion will not disappoint the academic specialist and the student.

My thanks go to the general editor of the series, Ray Carney, and my editor at Cambridge, Beatrice Rehl. Mary Corliss of the Museum of Modern Art's Film Stills Archives and Guido Cincotti at the Centro sperimentale di cinematografia provided invaluable assistance in obtaining photographs. A grant from the Indiana University Office of Research and Graduate Development helped to defray the costs of the photographs and funding from the Center for West European Studies at Indiana University allowed me to complete this book.

I have dedicated this book to Harry Geduld, a gesture long overdue for his constant encouragement of my interest in Italian cinema. More years ago than either one of us will care to recall, I gingerly suggested to him that as there were practically no courses devoted to Italian film in the entire country, it might be a good idea for me to organize such a course at Indiana University. No colleague could have been a better friend or a more inspiring model to follow during the almost two decades that have passed since that time. I hope this book will meet Harry's high standards for readability and analytical insight.