



Journey to Italy

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away the film's ending.

Quite simply, *Journey to Italy* is a very, very great film. A landmark in many respects. One of those masterpieces which feels as if it's becoming a little harder to 'fix' with each and every viewing. Surely no question, then, that the BFI should revive the film.

No question? Actually, once upon a time there might have been a great many questions. *Journey to Italy* – aka *Viaggio in Italia* or *Voyage to Italy*, or even *The Lonely Woman* or *Strangers* as it's sometimes been known (though I've never heard it called *The Italian Trip* or *The Curmudgeonly Man*, which would be almost as appropriate as some of the aforementioned titles) – wasn't always held in the high esteem it commands today.

Rossellini first attracted the attention of the world with *Rome, Open City* (1945) which, like its immediate successors *Paisà* (1946) and *Germany, Year Zero* (1947), pretty much conformed to the notion of neorealist films as stories of the everyday lives of the poor and dispossessed – ideally played by non-professionals – simply trying to get by. (This, of course, is a gross simplification of what neorealism was about, but that's how it's often described and discussed.)

But to many – with the very notable exception of *Cahiers du cinéma* critics like Eric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette and Jean-Luc Godard – *Journey to Italy* seemed something of an aberration. For one thing, it was about upper-middle-class types (what's more, they were English!). For another, the lead roles were played by established stars (Ingrid Bergman, then the director's partner, and George Sanders). And then there didn't appear to be a proper story. The couple it depicted just seemed to be bored. They didn't really do anything.

Which only goes to show how hard it is to define 'realism'. In many regards *Journey to Italy* is truer to the banality of many people's lives than the relatively dramatic storylines of *Ossessione* (1943), *Rome, Open City*, *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) and many other neorealist classics.

In depicting the relationship of the Joyces, whose boredom and frustration with each other after years of marriage are brought into much clearer relief when they abandon the comfort zone of home and everyday habits for a trip to Naples and its environs, Rossellini simply lets the couple slowly drift apart from one another, each forced to fall back on all too recognisably limited resources. Nothing extraordinary occurs; they merely respond, in their tellingly different ways, to the sights, sounds and inhabitants of the unfamiliar world around them.

But it's not just in terms of narrative that *Journey to Italy* feels somehow more 'truthful' than many of the neorealist films. It's in the overall focus. Rossellini's sense of the importance of the social, political and material realities of the world around his central characters was as acute as ever, but what distinguishes this film from its predecessors is the attention he paid to their inner lives: the subtle nuances of the thoughts and feelings which they themselves seem often to barely comprehend.

There is an acknowledgement here of profound mysteries at work, and it feels as if Rossellini was determined to try and shed light on those mysteries, even as he made clear that there would be no easy answers to why his characters do what they do.

In this regard, the film moved beyond neorealism, towards another realm populated by figures like Carl Dreyer, Ingmar Bergman, Michelangelo Antonioni, even Rohmer or – more recently – the likes of Krzysztof Kieslowski, Abbas Kiarostami and Nuri Bilge Ceylan. Indeed, it might even be argued that, along with the earlier *Citizen Kane* (1941), it was *Journey to Italy* which was most instrumental and influential in effecting the transition from traditional forms of cinematic storytelling to something more recognisably modern. And that's probably why the film itself feels so timeless.

Geoff Andrew, bfi.org.uk, 24 April 2019

Journey to Italy focuses on a British couple, Katherine (Ingrid Bergman) and Alex Joyce (George Sanders), visiting Italy to sell some property they have inherited. Their marriage is on the verge of collapse and they have just agreed to divorce when, in the film's sublime final sequence, they find themselves in a town (Maiori) where a religious procession (an actual event into which Rossellini inserted his cast and crew) is taking place. Unable to drive through the crowded streets, the Joyces are obliged to leave their car, that shell which has protected them from too intimate an involvement with the people of Italy, and begin walking.

Suddenly, cries of '*miracolo*' are heard and we see a man walking away from a wheelchair: a cripple appears to have found the ability to walk (though the way he keeps touching his eyes suggests he may have been blind and recovered his sight) – a genuine 'miracle' Rossellini was lucky enough to catch on camera. As various individuals struggle forward to get a better view, Katherine is pulled away from Alex, who runs after her. The couple embrace and the camera pans away but just as we think the film is going to end with this conventional closing shot, Rossellini abruptly cuts to a seemingly insignificant 'documentary' detail: several members of a band standing near a wall while participants in the procession walk past. This shot lasts 18 seconds and concludes with a fade to black as the camera, for no apparent reason, starts panning to the right.

Tag Gallagher, in his 1998 book *The Adventures of Roberto Rossellini*, claims that the bandleader 'smiles knowingly at Alex and Katherine' but it seems to me that this 'character' remains oblivious of the couple. The suggestion is not that star performers are more important than 'extras', but rather that these anonymous musicians have as much right to our attention as Ingrid Bergman and George Sanders. And *Journey to Italy*'s mixture of documentary and fiction functions in much the same way. Where Haskell Wexler showed the stars of *Medium Cool* (1969) interacting with actual rioters in order to make a point about the real-life events, Rossellini does precisely the opposite, allowing real-life events to make a point about the relative importance of his stars.

So what seems to be a clumsy flaw, a poorly thought out decision to end the film with a randomly selected image, proves on closer inspection to lie at the heart of Rossellini's vision, in which the rough is always preferred to the smooth, incompleteness to resolution, involvement to contemplation. If Alex and Katherine are guilty of using their car's windscreen as a protective barrier, we are just as guilty of using the cinema screen in the same way. Like the

Joyces, like the actors who play them – like Rossellini – we must overcome the barrier of ‘fiction’ and experience the external world, flaws and all, without mediation.

Brad Stevens, *Sight & Sound*, July 2013

JOURNEY TO ITALY (VIAGGIO IN ITALIA)

Director: Roberto Rossellini

Production Companies: Sveva Film, Junior Film, Italia Produzione Film, Société Générale de Cinématographie, Films Ariane, Francinex

Producers: Roberto Rossellini, Adolfo Fossataro, Alfredo Guarini

Production Managers: Mario Del Papa, Marcello D’Amico

Unit Manager: Mimmo Salvi

Production Assistants: Pietro Notarianni, Alberto Travaglini

Assistant Directors: Marcello Di Laurino, Vladimiro Cecchi

Scriptgirl: Mary Alcaide

Story/Screenplay: Roberto Rossellini, Vitaliano Brancati

Director of Photography: Enzo Serafin

Camera Operator: Aldo Scavarda

Assistant Camera Operator: Alessandro Serafin

Camera Assistants: Aldo Casalegno, Ottavio Belli, Amadeo Muscitelli,

Corrado Ricci, Ennio Mancini, Orlando Pellegrini, Mario Micheli,

Fernando Bonifazi, Giovanni Di Felice, Rodolfo Filodotto, Ettore Zampagni

Stills Photography: Lorenzo Papi

Editor: Jolanda Benvenuti

Sets: Piero Filippone

Gowns: Ines Fiorentini

Costumes for Ingrid Bergman: Casa Fernanda Gattinoni

Make-up: Manrico Spagnoli

Negatives/Positives: Tecnostampa (Rome)

Incidental Music/Music Conducted by: Renzo Rossellini

Popular Neapolitan Songs/Themes Sung by: Giacomo Rondinella

Sound Recording: Eraldo Giordani

Sound Assistants: Venanzio Lisca, Aldo Zanni, Sergio Zega

Drivers: Pietro Mannetti, Mario Cartocci, Ernesto Cartocci

Made at: Titanus Studios

uncredited

Story/Screenplay: Antonio Pietrangeli

Original Story: Colette

Photography: Aldo Tonti, Luciano Trasatti

Cast

Ingrid Bergman (*Katherine Joyce*)

George Sanders (*Alex Joyce*)

Maria Mauban (*Marie Rastelli*)

Anna Proclemer (*prostitute*)

Paul Müller (*Paul Dupont*)

Leslie Daniels (*Leslie Harris, Judy’s housemate*)

Natalia Ray (*Natalia Burton*)

Jackie Frost (*Judy*)

uncredited

Anthony La Penna (*Tony Burton*)

Lyla Rocco (*Miss Sinibaldi*)

Lucio Caracciolo, Marcello Caracciolo,

Paola Carola (*guest at Duca di Lipoli*)

Bianca Maria Cerasoli (*Miss Notar*)

Adriana Danieli, Mery Martin

Italy/France 1954

86 mins

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