

The Characters in Rossellini's Films

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1. Open

a) Edmund (*Germany, Year Zero*) Edmund, the young boy in the Kohler family, is a sweet child with the face of a troubled adult. He is the emotional centre of the story, although his motives and feelings are often vague. At times, he seems lost, like the city and the country he lives in. His loss of innocence is emblematic of a wider collapse, and even corruption, of the society around him.

b) Martin (*Paisan, episode 5*) Martin is a burly, gregarious American military chaplain. As a Catholic, he feels at home with the monks in the monastery where he and his associates are guests. He offers them gifts of tinned food and cigarettes, and he admires their kitchen garden. He is also a thoughtful man, who tries to explain to the monks that Jews and Protestants are not 'lost souls.' As he says, they just follow a different faith.

c) Garibaldi (*Viva L'Italia*) Garibaldi is a gregarious, cheerful man, with a rich mane of hair and thick beard. He is thoughtful and courageous in equal measure. A man of the people, he never speaks down to his men. While not highly educated, as a passionate freedom fighter, he is given to poetic statements about tyranny and justice. In dealing with his enemies, he is never angry or vengeful, believing that hate and envy are useless emotions. His men and those whom he liberated from foreign rule treat him almost like a god.

d) Rosa (*Viva L'Italia*) Rosa is a young woman, who lives in Calabria, southern Italy. She is the daughter of a leading man in the local conspiracy to overthrow the government. In her only significant scene, she says nothing but her action paves the way for Garibaldi's invasion of the mainland, which is the crucial event in the film.

2. Closed

a) Celestino (*The Machine that Kills Bad People*) Celestino is our flawed hero. He is kind but naïve in his understanding of good and evil, a simplistic view that results in his moralistic crusade through the town. He has good instincts—to support the poor and fight the rich—but he learns that life is more complicated than dividing up the world in that fashion. In the end, he is chastened by the devil disguised as the saint.

3. Agreeable

a) Nanni (*Love*) Nanni is a poor woman, in the second story ('The Miracle'), who herds goats and only has a place to sleep because the monastery takes pity on her. She is a marginalised person and appears simple-minded. But she doesn't need others because she has a deeply satisfying emotional bond with Saint Joseph. Her religious faith is both a source of mockery by others and of strength for herself.

b) Carmela (*Paisan, episode 1*) Carmela is a young Sicilian girl, probably in her mid-teens, who agrees to lead the American soldiers on a hunt for the Germans. She is independent and somewhat surly but softens and shows bravery and loyalty in the end.

c) Francesca (*Paisan, episode 3*) Francesca is an attractive young woman in Rome, who makes money through prostitution. But, only six months earlier, she was a sweet, demure girl welcoming the Allies into liberated Rome. She is ashamed of her moral decline, especially when she meets the American soldier she fell in love with earlier. She attempts to resurrect that earlier romance but is bitterly disappointed.

d) Harriet (*Paisan*, part 4) Harriet is an American nurse serving with the Red Cross outside Florence. Some time earlier, she lived for two years in the city and met a painter for whom she still carries a flame. She is a spirited and determined person, brave and resolute, and also a little reckless. Her determination overcomes obstacles, but in the end she is left in despair.

e) Francesco (*Rome, Open City*) Francesco is a tall, handsome man. Unlike his fiancé, he is not religious, though he is tender toward her and her son. His commitment to the cause of resistance is unconditional and his confidence in its righteousness is unwavering. Of the major characters, only he survives until the end, though we do not know what happens to him afterward.

f) Old man (*The Machine that Kills Bad People*) The (unnamed) old man is a complicated and fascinating character. Part old man, part fake saint and part failed devil, he has the wisdom of experience and is able to counsel Celestino to curb his righteous campaign. He gains our sympathy in the end as a poor devil who has lost his job, but, even then, we are not quite sure what to make of him.

4. Disagreeable

a) Alex (*Journey to Italy*) Alex is a dour business man, who nearly always wears an expression of disapproval, of Italy and of his wife. He is querulous, sarcastic and downright hostile to Katherine. A workaholic, Alex finds Italy a curious mixture of noise, boredom and insects, and he can't stop thinking about the business deals back home in London. Cold, distant and complacent, he has an epiphany at the end and finds a hidden source of compassion.

5. Conscientious

a) Eva (*Germany, Year Zero*) Pretty and young, Eva is the rock of the family. She has a boyfriend still held as a POW; her father is dying; her older brother is a coward; and Edmund is too young to help the family out of poverty. She is the one with fortitude, who stands in the ration queues and manages to put a little food on the table. In the absence of a mother, she takes on the maternal role, scolding her brothers and keeping house. Without her, we feel, the family would have fallen apart sooner than it does.

b) Burton (*Journey to Italy*) Mr Burton is not a major character, but he does play an important role in the drama. An Englishman who married an Italian and lives in Naples, Burton is an affable person, full of warm thoughts and memories, presenting a contrast with the irascible Alex. Burton is also an archaeologist who works at Pompeii, just outside Naples.

c) Dale (*Paisan*, part 6) Dale is the leader of a small American OSS unit operating behind German lines in the Po River delta. He is a leader with compassion, who is concerned with the welfare of his men. When he gives orders, he speaks calmly, as if he's making a suggestion. He treats his men and his partisan allies with equal dignity. He is battle-hardened but retains his humanity.

d) Giorgio (*Rome, Open City*) Giorgio is a severe man. He is a committed resistance fighter and a difficult man to love. He rarely smiles and usually wears a sceptical look on his weary face. Even at the end, when he is tortured, and that face is battered beyond recognition, he seems to be scowling at the world. Not much of a lover, he is an inspirational and courageous member of the resistance movement.

e) Don Pietro (*Rome, Open City*) The character of Don Pietro is based on an historical priest who supported the partisans in Rome and was executed for his resistance to German occupation. The character in the film is exactly that kind of man, deeply religious but also deeply sympathetic to the suffering of others. He justifies his political actions by saying that he helps those in need, but there is no doubt that he shares the ideals of the anti-fascist movement. Throughout the film, in which he is the real star, he shows forbearance, charity and bravery. A remarkable man.

f) Bandi (*Viva L'Italia*) Bandi, a young and handsome man, is an officer in one of the royalist armies who defects to Garibaldi's movement. Although he has a speaking part in only two or three scenes, he is one of the men upon whom Garibaldi relies for advice. The historical Giuseppe Bandi wrote a famous memoir of the war, which is the main textual basis for Rossellini's film.

g) Menotti (*Viva L'Italia*) Menotti is Garibaldi's son. Only twenty years old at the time of the events in the film, he is nevertheless an important character because he has special access to the

leader. And although he has a speaking part in only one scene, it is critical to the story as a whole and sheds lights not only on his character but on his father's, as well.

6. Unconscientious

a) Joanna (*Fear*) Joanna, who is slightly younger than Irene, appears to be devious, vindictive and cruel. Having lost out to Irene for Erich's affections, she wants revenge. She is devious and can be menacing in her demands. However, as we learn later, she also has a compassionate side. Her character is complicated by the fact that she is herself putting on an act.

b) Bardone (*General Della Rovere*) Emanuele Bardone is an aging, petty swindler, who finances his gambling addiction by selling fake jewels and bilking money from the families of men held by the Gestapo. He is thoroughly deceitful, from first to last, although this does not mean that he lacks empathy for the suffering of his fellow citizens or that he cannot rise to heroic heights as he does in the end. By choosing to focus the story on this man, with his tangled web of motives, the director emphasises the ambiguous attitude of many Italians toward the war.

c) Karl-Heinz (*Germany, Year Zero*) Karl-Heinz, the older brother in the family, is a character of weakness and self-pity. He suffered terribly during the war, in which he fought to the end, making him a target for the Allied authorities. He dare not register for a ration card or work permit for fear that they will imprison him. And so, he hides at home while his family half starves. He is called a coward by his sister and by his father, and only at the very end, when it is too late, does he show any courage.

d) Marina (*Rome, Open City*) Marina is a young woman who works as a showgirl, and an occasional prostitute, and has a drug habit. She grew up the hard way and had to look after herself. Rather than make her self-reliant, though, she turned out to be weak and superficial. The Germans, through the evil Ingrid, prey on her weakness and she succumbs although she has pangs of conscience at the end.

7. Emotional

a) Irene (*Fear*) Irene is a capable woman who runs a large factory while married with two children. She is a loving mother, but she cheated on her husband while he was a prisoner after the war, and now she lives with that shame and guilt. She has a strong will, but she is unable to cope with the fear that her husband will find out about her infidelity.

b) Katherine (*Journey to Italy*) Katherine is the weaker one in the conflict, a wife whose husband belittles and blames her. She has a distracted air, partly caused by her marital trouble, and partly by her romantic temperament. Although lost and lonely, she does fight back in the marital slanging matches and gets a few good punches in. Mostly, though, she is both hurt and angered by her husband's behaviour. 'You don't realise how mean you can be sometimes. It's more than anyone could stand,' she tells him. That is Katherine, outspoken yet forgiving at the same time.

c) Unnamed woman (*Love*) The woman in the first story ('The Human Voice') is middle-class and perhaps in her thirties. She lives alone, except for a dog that she shared with her partner. She is suffering badly from the news that her lover/husband is leaving her for another woman. She oscillates between a pretence of calm acceptance and suicidal instability. As a coping mechanism, she tries to deceive herself and also to blame herself for the break-up.

d) Joe (*Paisan*, episode 2) Joe is a black American military policeman in Naples. For most of his episode, he is drunk and belligerent. He is also lonely, depressed and dreams about a homecoming from the war that he knows will never happen. At the end, he gains some insight into the lives of Italians and, as a result, his own life.

e) Pina (*Rome, Open City*) Pina, the nominal heroine of the story, is a middle-aged woman who used to work in a factory until the Germans arrived. Now, she is widowed with a young boy and has lost her looks. But she is a sympathetic character, deeply in love with her fiancé, a worried mother, a pious Catholic and a loyal supporter of the resistance.

f) Joe (*The Machine that Kills Bad People*) Joe is the embodiment of an American go-getter. He is an optimistic, enthusiastic, bubbly businessman who sees opportunities everywhere. He even smokes the emblematic long cigar. Again, like the other characters in this semi-farce, he is an exaggeration of a type yet still realistic enough to be convincing.

8. Rational

a) Albert (*Fear*) Albert is a scientist who works on experiments to develop antidotes for paralysis during neuro-surgery. He spent some years in a POW camp after the war, he appears to be much older than his wife and he is conservative in his social (and possibly political) views. In some ways, he is a more complex character than Irene. For one thing, and like Joanna, the other actor in his clever blackmail plot, Albert is not what he appears to be. He is loving and considerate to his wife, but there is also a streak of sadism in him, reminiscent perhaps of a Nazi past.

b) Col Müller (*General Della Rovere*) Col Müller is a soft-spoken Gestapo officer. Charming, polite and reluctant to resort to torture, he fits the profile of the 'good Nazi'. From the beginning, he makes friends with Bardone and jokes with him. He is dignified in his interview with the real Mrs Della Rovere and even, feels a tinge of remorse, when he orders executions at the end of the story. In some ways, he is portrayed as Bardone's German alter ego: apolitical, convivial and wanting to avoid confrontation. But war is war, and like Bardone, he must do his duty.