

# The Railroad Man (Il ferroviere)

Italy | 1956 | 118 minutes

## Credits

<b>Director</b>	Pietro Germi
<b>Screenplay</b>	Luciano Vincenzoni
<b>Photography</b>	Leonida Barboni
<b>Music</b>	Carlo Rustichelli

## Cast

<b>Andrea Marcocci</b>	Pietro Germi
<b>Sara Marcocci</b>	Luisa Della Noce
<b>Giulia Marcocci</b>	Sylva Koscina
<b>Gigi Liverani</b>	Saro Urzi

## In Brief

He has a good job working as a railroad man, but Andrea Marcocci is not happy. An obscure disease haunts him. His daughter Giulia leaves her husband, seeking shelter in the arms of another man, who does not love her. Andrea's good-for-nothing son storms out after one argument too many with his father. Unable to face these troubles alone, Andrea starts to drink. Inevitably, the booze interferes with his work and he causes a serious rail accident. Desperately trying to hold onto his job, he goes to work on a strike day, further alienating himself from his friends and colleagues.

Severely attacked by the leftist Italian critics of its time, *The Railroad Man* is a heartfelt cry against many of the problems that plagued Italian society during the mid-50's. An undisputed masterpiece of its director, co-writer and star Pietro Germi it features a magnificent score by maestro Carlo Rustichelli and an extraordinary ensemble cast.

Italy, 1956. Only a decade removed from the horrors of fascism and WWII, the Italians had moved on with their lives and recovered to be a cornerstone of Western Europe. Behind this facade, the age-old problems of communication still plagued society - and these problems were not discussed. A case of what you don't know can't hurt you. But filmmakers such as Pietro Germi ripped into this illusion with 'neo-realism' movies such as *The Railroad Man* - a no holds barred look at the true life of an Italian family in the 1950's.

Andrea Marcocci is a typical Italian father - he has a doting wife Sara, a beautiful daughter Guila, a hardy son Marcello, and a younger boy Sandrino. Andrea works as an engineer on the railway's passenger line; a good job that keeps his family fed and a glass or two of wine in his hands. But all is not as it seems. It's Christmas, and Sandrino meets his father at the train station to bring him home for the holiday. Andrea decides to stop at the bar for "a drink with the boys" - he sends Sandrino onward to tell Sara he'll be home soon. At the apartment, Sara is upset because Guila is waiting - and she's quite pregnant. As her husband Renato and Marcello discuss business, Sara sends Sandrino back to the bar to hurry Andrea along. But his Papa is having a roaring good time singing with the trainmen, so Sandrino stays at the bar and waits...and waits. When they finally get back home the apartment is deserted. Andrea passes out (he's quite the drinker), so Sandrino reads Sara's note and goes to Renato & Guila's flat. When Sandrino gets to his sister's place, the place is a flurry of activity. Renato rushes Sandrino into a back bedroom. He remembers when Guila revealed she was pregnant - Andrea flew into a rage and forced her to marry Renato, a man she doesn't love. Now, it turns out Guila has lost her baby. Sandrino ponders how death will affect life...

Life moves on. Andrea continues working hard at his job, but his drinking starts to increase because he feels guilty about not being there to comfort his daughter when Guila miscarried. On his run, a suicidal man leaps onto the tracks - there's nothing Andrea can do to stop the train in time. Driving back to the yard, a distracted Andrea runs a red light and almost collides with another train. Can his day get any worse? Meanwhile, Guila has frozen Renato out of her life. Sara tries to convince her to at least talk to him, but her daughter refuses Mama's request. Marcello continues to loaf around the house; he has no ambition to actually getting a job. And Sandrino is doing badly at school, much to Sara's dismay. Andrea must face the Railroad's inquest into the suicide incident. He goes through a battery of tests - the doctors tell him to stop drinking, but Andrea scoffs at their advice. The union is reluctant to support Andrea's position, and so, the inquest demotes him. 30 years a railroad man, and now Andrea world crumbles around him; his work, his family, his life. Can he find the strength to pick himself up persevere? Sorry, Act One is over....

As with most societies, there are certain conventions that are said to be 'out of sight, out of mind'. In postwar Italy, still feeling the effects of Mussolini and the Fascists, this caveat was very real. Pietro Germi unleashed *The Railroad Man* and was roundly criticized for his depiction of the working class. If anything, Germi's film was too honest, too real, and hit far too close to home for many Italians - the story of *The Railroad Man* refuses to compromise its depiction of life in the city. Every facet of the script is true to the characters and their lives - the audience can't help but see themselves reflected in the ups and downs of Andrea and his family. The actors bring a sincerity to their respective roles that few films can match; Germi himself excels in the tragic hero role of Andrea. Edoardo Nevola is an amazingly gifted child actor - as the 'narrator' of *The Railroad Man*, he conveys maturity far beyond his years. Production-wise, the film is an overall excellent creation.. Germi uses only a few locales, but all are used to maximum effect; his editing keeps the scenes moving even when there isn't much dialogue. As with really good B&W directors, Germi also uses his lighting well to enhance the emotional state of the characters. Overall, you'd be hard pressed to find a better example of Italian "neo-realism" than Pietro Germi's *The Railroad Man*.

*The Railroad Man* is a sometimes brutal, sometimes beautiful, but always honest drama of the Italian working class. Germi's direction, script and acting refuse to compromise his desire to show the truth of society -and the solution is the simplest truth of all. Just talk to each other. If we communicate, there is no problem we cannot solve together - as true today as it was 50 years ago. When will we listen to *The Railroad Man*?

J. Read



# The Railroad Man (Il ferroviere)

## Italian for beginners

By Edward Lamberti

The names of Fellini, Antonioni, Rossellini, Pasolini, Visconti, Bertolucci, de Sica etc. tower above the pantheon of Italian cinema. But there's another filmmaker who should really be on that list, who should spring to mind as readily, who should be as well-known and as admired. That hasn't happened because his work has, for some reason, been very hard to come by. In the past couple of years, though, five of his movies have crept into the DVD marketplace, mainly in Italy but with two coming out in the United States. So now, and not before time, we are getting to see the wonderful films of Pietro Germi.

His most famous and acclaimed work is *Divorzio all'Italiana* (Divorce Italian-Style, 1961), but all of the available films are terrific. There's *Sedotta e Abbandonata* (Seduced and Abandoned, 1964), which is just as scathing in its depiction of Italian masculine codes of honour and full of outrageous humour; while *Un maledetto imbroglio* (The Facts of Murder, 1959), is a glittering police thriller with as many twists in the tail as you care to count. Both are out on DVD in Italy. Then there's *Il ferroviere* (The Railroad Man, 1955), recently released in the US under its English title by NoShame Films. And just out in Italy is *La città si difende* (Four Ways Out, 1950), a heist movie featuring Gina Lollobrigida. Any one of these amply displays Germi's acute sense of cinematic style and his ability to tell complex stories in a very appealing, entertaining way. As screenwriting collaborator Furio Scarpelli says of him, 'He didn't just film the screenplay - he celebrated it.'

Germi was also an actor, both for other directors and in some of his own films. He plays the railroad man, Andrea Marocci, a husband and father whose train one day hits a man crossing the track. Marocci seeks refuge more and more in drink, which affects his work. He alienates his colleagues when he crosses a picket line, and his family life begins to come apart - all of this narrated by the youngest child, Sandro (Eduardo Nevola). *Il ferroviere* is a melodrama, a tragedy, even - but it is a joyous experience because of the beauty of the acting, the confidence of the mise-en-scène, and Carlo Rustichelli's emotional score.

Rustichelli, who died only last year, scored many of Germi's films, including *Un maledetto imbroglio*. Although the Italian disc has no English subtitles, it still comes highly recommended because the movie is so seductive and entertaining. It begins languidly with a haunting song which seems to say to the audience, 'You are entering a wistful tale of human failing.' This is intriguingly contrasted with the dynamic acting by Germi, as the chief investigating officer, and Saro Urzì as his sidekick. Such a contrast can be found running throughout Germi's work - the melancholia of so many hearts left wanting by life, and the sheer exuberance of telling stories for the cinema.

This exuberance reached its apex in *Divorzio all'Italiana*, a model of comedy and cinematic precision, and surely one of the best-written movies ever. It began life as another drama but, as co-writer Ennio de Concini has pointed out, Germi realised that by taking the tragic events and making them even more tragic, he could turn them into superb comedy. Baron Cefalù (Marcello Mastroianni) is bored with his wife (Daniela Rocca) and in love with his teenage cousin Angela (Stefania Sandrelli). Under Italian law at the time, divorce is illegal, but if a man discovers that his spouse is cheating on him, he can kill her in defence of his honour and receive only a brief jail term. So the Baron sets out to find a lover for his wife...

What emerges from anecdotes and testimonies of Germi is a difficult, blunt man, feared by many for his temper, but a filmmaker who earned respect and affection for his integrity and his talent. How can you not like someone who chose to live in a seventh-floor Rome apartment in a building without a lift so that he would be forced to keep fit climbing the stairs every day? Germi, it seems, was darkened by his difficult relationships and by his exacting way of living and working. He was not patient with child actors (although he got very appealing, natural performances from them) and he intimidated his co-writers by remaining silent for stretches of time while they talked themselves blue - like some scene out of *Persona*. Yet people are now inspired to speak of him with great enthusiasm and fondness.

Also we get a sense of why he has been sidelined by critics and by film history. For starters he didn't fit easily into any particular category or pigeon-hole. Although his roots (like those of so many Italian directors of his generation) lay in neo-realism, he very quickly moved on to a more elegant, fluid cinema which sought to portray the world not through 'realist' means but through the stylizing of emotional and sociological truths. His films were popular and so couldn't be considered art-house but they were too cutting and socially conscious to be truly mainstream. And as Germi didn't align himself with any particular politics, he bewildered critics on both the left and the right.

He has also become something of a victim, in career terms, of his own early death in 1974, aged sixty, just as he was embarking on *Amici Miei* (eventually directed by his friend and contemporary Mario Monicelli). Had Germi died ten years earlier, his *commedie all'italiana* would have been his crowning achievement; whereas had he lasted, his longevity might have ensured his reputation. As it is, he slipped away as Italian cinema itself came down from heady decades of international success, and it has taken this long for his films to be readily available again. Hopefully there's more to come: *In nome delle legge* (In the Name of the Law, 1948), a 'Western' set in Sicily; *Signore e Signori*, which won the Cannes Film Festival in 1966; *Un uomo di Paglia* (A Man of Straw, 1957), with another acclaimed lead performance from Germi; *L'immorale* (1967) with Ugo Tognazzi; and *Alfredo, Alfredo* (1971) with Dustin Hoffman - these all sound particularly enticing. Meanwhile, we have five of his movies available on DVD. It really is a cause for celebration.



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