

Distant Voices, Still Cinema? Around the Movies

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Abstract

The contribution deals with the contemporary production of neorealist films and photo-romances, a kind of illustrated magazine deploying sentimental narratives through drawings, or mostly stills. Both products were genuinely Italian and marked the country's post-war culture. Whereas the first was advocated as high-brow art and the most remarkable expression of the nation in times of hardship, the latter has been disregarded as cheap popular culture; just in recent times it received the attention that a mass phenomenon deserves. What has been overlooked or only briefly discussed are shared areas between the two. The article tackles three issues: how neorealism partook in and merged into post-war visual culture, to the point that some thresholds and boundaries between highbrow, politically conscious and aesthetically experimental films and formulaic cultural products are hard to detect; the role of intertextuality in this process; and what happened in the transformation that occurred along the passage from the screen to the magazine, by comparing the function narratives had in novelization and in films.

In the early post-war years, immediately following major shifts in the rules concerning governance and citizenship with the turn from monarchy to republic and universal suffrage, a new medium appeared in Italy: the photo-romance magazine. Photo-romance magazines have often been described as escapist and regressive narratives, aimed at an illiterate readership. In fact, these magazines addressed a broader audience than any previous popular magazine, and were aimed at a female reader whom had been widely neglected during the Fascist era. Moreover, the photo-romance's stress on visuality was itself a novelty in a culture that was mostly conceived of and conveyed through a literary language. On 29 June 1946, a minor publisher, Universo, run by the Del Duca brothers in Milan, produced the first issue of what was to become a huge success: *Grand Hotel*. Major publishing houses soon followed suit: Mondadori published *Bolero Film* and Rizzoli *Il Mio Sogno*, later renamed simply *Sogno*.

The focus of this discussion is not a reconstruction and thorough description of the medium's genealogy,¹ which can be traced back partly to category romances and to popular literature broadly. Instead, my argument will focus on national visual culture in the post-war era, with emphasis on two issues in particular. First of all, photo-romance magazines should be read as a product of the general transformation in the previous decade from a traditional to an industrial culture in Italy.² The shift in modes of cultural production created the conditions for and profited from a newly visual culture. It is by no means casual that the main publishing activity of the Del Duca brothers previously, in the 1930s, had been a comic magazine named *L'Intrepido*: comic magazines were a similar product of the new industrial culture insofar as they were serialized and produced on a mass scale, foreshadowing the photo-romance. Even as late as the 1950s, highbrow intellectuals still tended to conflate photo-romance and comic magazines, indicating the continuity of their industrial roots. Second, within this new industrialized culture, cinema, as a mechanical mode of production, held a hegemonic and influential role as a representational and social media model. Again, it is no coincidence that the name of the first, very successful photo-romance magazine makes explicit reference to a famous Hollywood movie: *Grand Hotel* (Edmund Goulding, 1932), starring Greta Garbo, Joan Crawford, and John and Lionel Barrymore. On the front cover of the first issue, a well-dressed bourgeois couple enters the Grand Hotel theatre; the scheduled film shares the title of the issue: *Anime Incatenate (Souls in Chains)* (fig. 1). Another lucrative magazine was named *Bolero Film*, even more directly connecting cinema and the photo-romance (fig. 2).³

¹ For a discussion of photo-romance as a medium, see Jan Baetens, "The Photo-novel: A Minor Medium?" in *Necus*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2012, <http://www.necus-ejms.org/the-photo-novel-a-minor-medium-by-jan-baetens>, last visit 14 July 2013.

² See David Forgacs, *Italian Culture in the Industrial Era, 1880-1980*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1990; Fausto Colombo, *La cultura sottile. Media e industria culturale italiana dall'Ottocento ad oggi*, Bompiani, Milano 1998.

³ Among the ancestors and heirs of photo-romance magazines are novelizations of films, i.e. the adaptation of film narratives through the selection of individual frames, complete with written commentary. The practice of film novelization in Italy has been widely studied recently, cf. in particular: Raffaele De Berti, *Dallo schermo alla carta. Romanzi, fotoromanzi, rotocalchi cinematografici: il film e i suoi paratesti*, Vita&Pensiero, Milano 2000; Id. (ed.), *La novellizzazione in Italia. Cartoline, fumetto, romanzo, rotocalco, radio, televisione*, special issue of *Bianco e Nero*, no. 548, 2004; Emiliano Morreale (ed.), *Lo schermo di carta. Storia e storie dei cineromanzi*, Il Castoro, Milano 2007. See also the PhD dissertation of Stefania Giovenco, *Il cineromanzo in Italia e in Francia negli anni cinquanta e sessanta*, Università degli Studi di Udine / Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3, 2011. On novelization itself see Alice Autelitano, Valentina Re (eds.), *Il racconto del film. La novellizzazione: dal catalogo al trailer/ Narrating the film. Novelization: From the Catalogue to the Trailer*, Forum, Udine 2006; Jan Baetens, "Novelization: A Contaminated Genre?" in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2005, pp. 43-60.

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Fig. 1 – *Grand Hotel*, vol. 1, no. 1, 26 June 1946. Front cover.



Fig. 2 – *Bolero Film*, vol. 1, no. 13, 17 August 1947. Front cover.

The Italian post-war mediascape was characterized by both a new freedom of expression, in political terms, and by Hollywood cinema and American culture more generally. The North-American influence is notable in photo-romance magazines as well as cine-romances (the latter being the adaptation of films in a magazine, selecting film frames and adding them written dialogues and commentary). These publications became a vehicle for a deeper penetration of American mass culture in Italy, and yet at the same time they managed to negotiate the moral values implicit in mass culture, in culturally and socially acceptable terms. In this negotiation, certain journals and individuals played a significant role. A key instance here is the case of Adriano Baracco and the magazines he published: *Hollywood*, *Novelle Film*, and *Cineromanzo*, which together dispersed a form of mass culture that drew upon cinema, stardom and popular narratives.⁴ Originally, Italian cinema was not an source for photo- or cine-romances; however, its progressive relevance grew alongside a renewed industrial stability that emerged with the reinstatement of Cinecittà studios, the growth in film exports and co-productions, and the increase in film attendance. *Novelle Film*, for example, did not adapt an Italian film until three years after its first issue, in 1949. The majority of national film production were popular genre vehicles, including farce, comedies, historical films and, of course, melodramas. From the 1950s on, some of those studios that specialized in popular film genres and intermedial tie-ins turned to cine-romances. This was the case of the Neapolitan company Titanus, who was responsible for some of the most successful melodramas between the 1940s and '50s, and whose production was often

⁴ An overall discussion of the postwar popular press in its relationship to cinema is to be found in Giuliana Muscio, *Tutto fa cinema. La stampa popolare del secondo dopoguerra*, in Vito Zaggarro (ed.), *Dietro lo schermo. Ragionamento sui modi di produzione cinematografica in Italia*, Marsilio, Venezia 1988, pp. 105-133.

novelized as cine-romances in *Novelle Film*.⁵ During this period, high-budget and even neorealist film productions were often turned into cine-romances (figs. 3-5).



Fig. 3 – *Cine-fotoromanzo Gigante*, no. 21, 1 November 1956. Front cover portraying the two main characters of *Il cammino della speranza* (*The Path of Hope*, Pietro Germi, 1950).

Fig. 4 – *Cineromanzo Gigante*, no. 12, October 1955. Front cover portraying Sofia Loren in *La donna del fiume* (*The River Girl*, Mario Soldati, 1954).

Fig. 5 – *Supercinema*, vol. 1, no. 1, 10 December 1950. Front cover displaying Amedeo Nazzari and Silvana Mangano in *Il brigante Musolino* (*Outlaw Girl*, Mario Camerini, 1950).

⁵ See, for instance, *Catene*, in *Novelle Film*, vol. 3, no. 103, 1949 and *Chi è senza peccato*, in *Novelle Film*, vol. 7, no. 264, 1953, both drawn from very popular melodramas directed by Raffaello Matarazzo in 1949 and 1952 respectively. On *Catene* as an intermedial case, see Francesco Di Chiara, *Lacreme italiane: Catene as the Canon of Post-World War II Italian Melodrama*, in Pietro Bianchi, Giulio Bursi, Simone Venturini (eds.), *Il canone cinematografico/The Film Canon*, Forum, Udine 2011, pp. 217-221. On Titanus film productions and the Italian film industry, see Francesco Di Chiara, *Generi e industria cinematografica in Italia. Il caso Titanus (1949-1964)*, Lindau, Torino 2013.

In what follows, I would like to address three issues. First, how neorealism partook in and merged into postwar visual culture, leading to a blurring of the thresholds and boundaries between highbrow, politically-conscious and aesthetically-experimental films, on the one hand, and on the other formulaic cultural products. Within an iconic sphere, modern American visual culture, stereotypes belonging to traditional popular culture, and newly forged realistic forms became intertwined. I would suggest that cine-romances sometimes crystallized these unexpected connections. In this respect, I agree with recent remarks from Stefania Parigi, who singles out the contemporaneity of both neorealist film production and popular magazines.⁶ Nevertheless, I believe that a deeper and more consistent survey, beyond pinpointing shared themes and the links between different parts of the media industry, might shed light on the dynamics at play within postwar visual culture and on further overlooked consonances. Second, my intention is to highlight the role of intertextuality in this process. As a matter of fact, an intertextual methodology enables us to shift from an aesthetic and author-based perspective on neorealism to a more inclusive and broad view on the phenomenon, revealing that neorealism often implied and exploited industrial cultural production. Third, I seek to explain what happened in the transformation that occurred during the passage from the screen to the magazine, by comparing the function of narratives in novelizations and in films.

Photo-romance and cine-romance magazines were part of a growing mass culture, mostly revolving around visual features. In a country that was highly unbalanced in terms of cultural literacy – in the postwar era some areas of Southern Italy exceeded an illiteracy rate of 20%, whereas North-Western Italy's rates were below 5% – this new visual culture to some extent negotiated highbrow models and the needs of the middle and lower classes. Nevertheless, photo-romance magazines were not sold primarily in rural, underprivileged areas, but were aimed at an urban population, who could attend film screenings and experience a recently mediatized cultural consumption.⁷ They seldom reached a highly cultivated readership, as surveys have proved: though photo-romances did begin to penetrate the upper class, the majority of readers belonged to the proletariat or petty-bourgeoisie.⁸ This intermediate position between conservative-highbrow and illiterate cultural models defines the specificity of the photo-romance and its

⁶ See Stefania Parigi, *Neorealismo. Il nuovo cinema del dopoguerra*, Marsilio, Venezia 2014, and specifically pp. 168-169. Some initial remarks concerning the relationship between neorealist cinema and photo-romances are to be found in Paolo Noto and Francesco Pitassio, *Il cinema neorealista*, Archetipo, Bologna 2010, paragraphs 2.3, 2.6, 2.9 and 2.10. A seminal contribution, raising (among many others) the issue of photo-romances, is Francesco Casetti, Alberto Farassino, Aldo Grasso, Tatti Sanguineti, *Neorealismo e cinema italiano degli anni '30*, in Lino Micciché (ed.), *Il neorealismo cinematografico italiano*, Marsilio, Venezia 1999 [1975], pp. 331-385.

⁷ An in-depth survey on cinema and media consumption in postwar Italy can be found in Francesco Casetti, Mariagrazia Fanchi, *Le funzioni sociali del cinema e dei media: dati statistici, ricerche sull'audience e storie di consumo*, in Mariagrazia Fanchi, Elena Mosconi (eds.), *Spettatori. Forme di consumo e pubblici del cinema in Italia. 1930-1960*, Bianco e Nero, Roma 2002, pp. 135-171

⁸ See Anna Bravo, *Il fotoromanzo*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2003, pp. 76-82.

adherence to a new media model that opposed traditional high culture, otherwise still dominant as a national model following authoritarian political action during the Fascist era. In this respect, photo-romances shared the same condition of popular cinema, dime novels, comics, category romances, and so forth. For this reason, many of these genres and formats have for a long time been called para-literature, meaning “a field that contrasts *another* field as *literature*.”⁹

As mentioned, the main point of reference for Italy’s newly established mass and visual production was American culture, as conveyed by mass media and related products and goods. This influence took root between the 1920s and the ’30s, but greatly accelerated after the end of WWII. From the very start, photo-romances looked at (supposedly) American social and moral habits, as the first issue of *Grand Hotel* illustrates through the story of an Italo-American engineer and his romantic affair (fig. 6).



Fig. 6 – *Anime incatenate*, in *Grand Hotel*, vol. 1, no. 1, 26 June 1946.

American cultural models were authoritative in three different respects: social customs, iconography and visual syntax. “Social customs” here refer to the ways of depicting relationships among individuals, and the associated moral values. By “iconography” I intend a set of visual features concerning goods and objects, environments and bodies. “Visual syntax” indicates a way to arrange a set of

⁹ Michele Rak, *Appunti sulla dinamica del sistema dell'informazione estetica: i generi della paraletteratura e la cultura di massa*, in Noël Arnaud, Francis Lacassin, Jean Tortel (eds.), *La paraletteratura*, Liguori, Napoli 1977, p. 17.

individual frames in order to build up a coherent discourse. It is not my intention here to inquire further into how the American way of life penetrated Italian culture through media products before and after WWII. Instead, I would like to sketch out briefly this influence in terms of iconography and visual arrangement. Photo-romances and cine-romances picked from Hollywood cinema a set of goods and objects that were often luxurious, or associated to specific film genres; they also drew on certain melodramatic emotions, such as fear, desire and longing. Stylistic citation appears to have been an effective model for novelized films to downplay their affiliation with the neorealist movement, too, as in *Ai margini della metropoli* (*On the Outskirts of the Metropolis*, Carlo Lizzani, 1953). The selection of the visual score of this politically committed film, partly set in the Roman suburbs, privileges dramatic exchanges among characters, tortured facial expressions, guns, and almost entirely excludes outdoor scenes (figs. 7-8).¹⁰ Though the exclusion of outdoor scenes does not constitute a direct connection to Hollywood iconography, it refers ironically to neorealist film culture, so dependent on crucial outdoor sequences, by denying this link. Instead it conforms to the studio-production standard of contemporary Hollywood film, which in turn was often criticized for excluding the accidental casualties of reality as they might emerge from location shooting.



Figs. 7-8 – Inner passions over outdoor scenes. *Ai margini della metropoli*, in *Novelle Film*, vol. 7, no. 265, 17 January 1953.

¹⁰ See *Ai margini della metropoli*, in *Novelle Film*, vol. 7, no. 265, 1953.

What is most conspicuous in photo- and cine-romance magazines is bodily exhibition, and specifically the female body, which had been almost entirely absent from Italian visual culture until the end of the 1930s. The relevance of the body as a means to express desire, eroticism and attraction was clear from the front cover of photo-romances and cine-romances, and this was strictly connected to stardom. Sentimental interaction was predominantly linked to couples, expressing their passion through the closeness of bodies and faces (fig. 9). However, eroticism was exclusively an allegedly feminine “privilege,” disclosed through a half-naked body displaying a lascivious attitude if not abandoned to its own passion (fig. 10). In this respect, these covers mimic the layout of film posters, as previously mentioned. With regard to visual syntax, photo-romance and cine-romance magazines mostly favoured medium shots, thus privileging characters and indoor scenes over outdoor ones capturing landscapes, despite this latter feature having played such a meaningful role in neorealist culture. Furthermore, the arrangement of shots often adopted classical Hollywood editing as a model, irrelevant of where or how the source film was produced. This happened even when adapted films clearly opposed the Hollywood mode of representation, as per *Umberto D.* (Vittorio De Sica, 1952) and its novelization. Conceived as an almost anti-narrative film, casting a non-trained actor as a main character, *Umberto D.* nevertheless stemmed a cine-romance based on a set of stills laid out according to Hollywood editing (fig. 11).¹¹



Fig. 9 – Faces and passions. *Grand Hotel*, vol. 7, no. 298, 8 March 1952. Front cover.

¹¹ See *Umberto D.*, in *Novelle Film*, vol. 6, no. 222, 1952.



Fig. 10 – Exhibiting heavenly bodies. *Cineromanzo per tutti*, no. 2, 28 May 1954. Front cover.



Fig. 11 – From neorealism analysis to classical editing. *Umberto D.*, in *Novelle Film*, vol. 6, no. 222, 22 March 1952.

As well as making reference to shared popular and visual culture, photo- and cine-romance magazines also included common social experiences of the past. Often their diegetic spaces and events referred to harsh war and postwar realities, as many commentators have remarked, such as war itself, ruins, the Resistance or migration. Photo-romances, and specifically those that adopted photographic stills instead of graphic illustration (such as *Bohero Film*) from the very start, displayed an interest in the difficulty of recent national experiences and assigned a crucial significance to photographic medium itself.¹² Future film director Damiano Damiani played a key role in this respect, directing photo-romances in his early career which made recourse to such aesthetics.¹³ Further, some columns within photo-romance magazines also recounted “real” stories. The “È accaduto” [it happened] column in *Grand Hotel*, for example, reported scoops from everyday life, sharing some features with similar columns published in declaredly neorealist film journals.

The question and function of realism in photo- and cine-romance magazines, or the presence of the popular press in neorealist film, is complex. Certainly, neorealist films did often reflect on the boom in mass culture: in *Riso amaro* (*Bitter Rice*, Giuseppe De Santis, 1949), for example, the main character Silvana browses *Grand Hotel* and dances the boogie-woogie.¹⁴ Furthermore several documentary

¹² Cfr. the stance expressed in Ermanno Detti, *Le carte rosa. Storia del fotoromanzo e della narrativa popolare*, La Nuova Italia, Scandicci (FI) 1990, pp. 104-113.

¹³ On Damiani, see Alberto Pezzotta, *Regia Damiano Damiani*, CEC/Cinemazero/Cineteca del Friuli, Udine 2004.

¹⁴ It should be also noted that *Bitter Rice* was itself novelized at least twice: as a graphic photo-

shorts looked with a mix of curiosity and repulsion at popular media products such as pin-ups or comic and photo-romance magazines, such as *Le fidanzate di carta* (*Paper Fiancées*, Renzo Renzi, 1951), *Zona pericolosa* (*Dangerous Area*, Francesco Maselli, 1951), *L'amorosa menzogna* (*The Lovable Lie*, Michelangelo Antonioni, 1949). Nevertheless, some neorealist directors, such as Giuseppe De Santis and Alberto Lattuada, paid great attention to rising mass culture and consequently moulded their works according to narratives and visual motifs derived from the popular press. To name one striking example, the huge box-office success of Lattuada's ruthless melodrama *Anna* (1951) could not be conceived outside a mediascape that included photo-romance magazines. I would therefore suggest that the question of realism ought to be framed as a trilateral relationship between neorealism, the popular press and postwar melodrama. The latter certainly profited from a realist visual style, as proved by Raffaello Matarazzo's films *Catene*, *Tormento* (*Torment*, 1950) or *I figli di nessuno* (*Nobody's Children*, 1952) or Clemente Fracassi's *Sensualità* (*Sensuality*, 1952),¹⁵ and as well-established scholarship has explained.¹⁶ However, simplified narratives added to the realist setting. In this respect, I agree with Lucia Cardone when she describes photo-romance magazines as belonging to the family of popular realism.¹⁷ It is a family, though, which bears some relationship to a new-born neorealism. Cine-romance magazines took from the multi-layered visual score of neorealist cinema only what could easily be subjugated to clear-cut and singular narratives. Thus, contradictory neorealist urban space and outdoor scenes were typically excluded from cine-romance frames, which instead privileged indoor family groups and situations. Quite paradoxically, this happened with a film like *La terra trema* (*The Earth Trembles*, Luchino Visconti, 1948), whose aim was to depict a family melodrama (it would be a truism to outline the role of melodramatic tradition in Visconti's cinema) that was rooted within a specific archaic space: Eastern Sicily's coastline.¹⁸ Except for the first frame, a sort of establishing shot depicting the fishermen's village and the seashore, all the stills of the cine-romance depict medium shots of the main characters, mostly expressing their feelings or living a simple family life (figs. 12-13) In fact, neorealist films sometimes went in the opposite direction, borrowing highly simplified narratives from melodramas in order to convey political discourse, as was the case with *Riso amaro* or *Non c'è pace tra gli ulivi* (*Under the Olive Tree*, Giuseppe De Santis, 1950).

romance, and as a cine-romance. See, respectively, the extras of the DVD edition *Riso amaro*, Cristaldi Film/Dolmen Home Video 2007; *Riso amaro*, in *Novelle Film*, vol. 3, no. 101, 1949. We might also observe that this latter novelization expressly stresses eroticism through terms of visual and verbal features, thereby enhancing what was already explicit in the film itself.

¹⁵ Also this latter was novelized, as *Sensualità*, in *Novelle Film*, vol. 6, no. 222, 1952.

¹⁶ See for instance Adriano Aprà, Claudio Carabba, *Neorealismo d'appendice*, Guaraldi, Firenze-Rimini 1975; Emiliano Morreale, *Così piangevano. Il cinema melò nell'Italia degli anni Cinquanta*, Donzelli, Roma 2011.

¹⁷ See Lucia Cardone, *Con lo schermo nel cuore. Grand Hôtel e il cinema*, ETS, Pisa 2004.

¹⁸ See *La terra trema*, in *Novelle Film*, vol. 3, no. 14, 1949.



Fig. 12-13 – Taming aesthetic thickness. *La terra trema*, *Novelle Film*, vol. 3, no. 14, 6 August 1949.

Considering intertextuality in photo-romance and cine-romance magazines raises at least three relevant issues: cinema's hegemony in the postwar mediascape, modes of production, and stardom. In postwar Italy, cinema was certainly the hegemonic medium in terms of symbolic power, as well as being the newest and most financially supported medium, therefore determining and crystallizing visual culture by rooting it in complex narratives. In order to be qualified as an art in its own right, cinema needed to incorporate aesthetic categories that were well established in traditional arts, such as visual art and literature. Italian postwar film culture, and more specifically neorealism, worked hard to promote what was acknowledged across Europe following the inter-war period: that the film director was the sole artistic person responsible for the work of art. Photo-romance and cine-romance magazines somehow denied this, given that two basic features determining their very existence: anonymous producers and serial production. In fact the authors of photo-romances and/or those responsible for novelizations were often anonymous, and even when explicitly named they remained almost universally in obscurity. Furthermore, photo-romance magazines fragmented their narratives in a series of publications, whereas cine-romances prolonged the life of the film in another form and medium. Thus cine-romance magazines declared film's multiplicity and stressed the fact that its very existence was not exclusively the outcome of individual aesthetic genius, but the effect of anonymous, powerful narratives and industrial, inertial force. As Emiliano Morreale has stated, "cine-romance belongs to the 'derivative' exploitation of the film product; [...] in the 1950s a particularly interesting articulated system of synergies within the entertainment industry emerged in Italy."¹⁹ Film

¹⁹ Emiliano Morreale, *Il sipario strappato. Introduzione ai cineromanzi*, in Id. (ed.), *Lo schermo di*



Fig. 14 – Ingrid Bergman in *La Settimana Incom illustrata*, vol. 5, no. 51, 20 December 1952. Front cover.

directors affiliated with neorealism are rarely remembered in the pages of cine-romance magazines, perhaps excluding Roberto Rossellini, infamous because of his love affair with Swedish-born Hollywood star Ingrid Bergman (fig. 14).

In reality, stardom as a transtextual phenomenon became a key issue in cine-romance magazines for a number of reasons. First of all, this was because female stars were themselves an identification model for some readers and erotic interest to others. For both these reasons, pictures of feminine stars were often displayed on the front covers of cine-romance magazines. In order to give these appearances a more articulated existence, biographical accounts were printed on the last page of the magazine. Second, because photo-romance magazines were part of a structured mediascape, it enabled young ambitious talent to emerge in the cultural industry, as in the cases of Sofia Loren and Gina Lollobrigida (figs. 15-16). Last but not least, by means of national stardom models cine-romance magazines established a relationship between the Italian and Hollywood film industries. Publishing regular columns such as “Rosa dei venti” or “Sala di soggiorno” in *Novelle film*, underlining both the international and family dimension pertaining to Italian stars, or by including in cine-romance magazines single biographical portraits, as *Cineromanzo* did, the cultural industry promoted alternative, industry-based values, as opposed to authorship and artwork. It was ultimately film’s



Fig. 15 – Getting started. Sofia Lazzaro before Sofia Loren. *Sogno*, vol. 4, no. 49, 2 December 1950. Front cover.



Fig. 16 – Getting started. Gina Lollobrigida. *Sogno*, vol. 1, no. 11. 20 July 1947. Front cover.

aesthetic function that was generally brought into question in photo-romance and cine-romance magazines, which centralized instead its narrative value.

Neorealist films were novelized, as different kinds of film products were. The main transformation affecting neorealist films was the reduction of a multi-layered aesthetic and moral representation into well-built, clear-cut, radically dualistic narratives. Let us consider the shifts occurring in the novelization of a world-famous masterpiece, directed by one of the major neorealist directors, i.e. *Stromboli, terra di Dio* (Stromboli, Roberto Rossellini, 1950). The major changes to the text increase the narrative clarity and reduce everything that is not immediately pertaining to the film. First of all, the cine-romance, originally published in *Cineromanzo*,²⁰ stresses the film's value as a star-vehicle by enhancing Ingrid Bergman's profile on the front cover, as did film posters of her films under Rossellini's direction (figs. 17-19). Second, the novelization elevates narrative information, by including in the plot-line exhaustive references to the past of the main female character, from which the film's narrative abstained. Third, the novelization excludes any description, on both verbal or visual levels, by picking only those frames centred on a character. As a matter of fact, the verbal text provides the characters with complex psychology, which the film representation avoided, thus leaving obscure, deep motivations for actions and feelings. Finally, the cine-romance integrates a hetero-

²⁰ See *Stromboli, terra di Dio*, in *Cineromanzo*, vol. 1, no. 29, 1950.

diegetic and extra-diegetic voice into the narratives with a three-fold function: connecting episodes, in order to clarify obscure passages and provide the reader with full explanation; describing the characters' internal motivation, something the original aesthetic options refrained from doing, to stress moral uncertainty and/or freedom;²¹ and including in the narrative a moral stance that is allegedly external to the events themselves, and therefore supposedly neutral, thus assigning to the characters and their respective conduct a position on the scale of virtue.²² In this respect, voiceover in novelizations did nothing but respond to a basic melodramatic function, i.e. depicting virtue's misfortunes.²³ Thus, voice-over, a recurrent feature of neorealist films (as a truthful component that resembled a neutral documentary voice), was transmuted into its very opposite: a moral, authoritative and authoritarian voice, reducing visual ambiguity in favour of narrative transparency. It therefore becomes a scopic regime where the image functioned as seduction, and the voice as a site of moral redemption.



Fig. 17 – Neorealist stardom. Ingrid Bergman and *Stromboli*. *Cineromanzo*, vol. 1, no. 29, 14 October 1950. Front cover.

²¹ This is particularly true of Rossellini's films, which were morally normalized through their novelization. In addition to the case examined here, see also *Europa 51*, in *Novelle Film*, vol. 7, no. 267, 1953.

²² For a discussion of the voiceover function in postwar novelizations, see Raffaele De Berti, *Il cinema fuori dallo schermo*, in Luciano De Giusti (ed.), *Storia del cinema italiano*, vol. VIII, 1949/1953, Marsilio/Edizioni di Bianco&Nero, Venezia 2003, pp. 116-119.

²³ See Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination. Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1995.

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Fig. 18 – Neorealist stardom and melodrama. Ingrid Bergman and *Stromboli*. *Cineromanzo*, vol. 1, no. 29, 14 October 1950. Back cover.



Fig. 19 – Neorealist stardom. Angelo Cesselon's poster of *Stromboli, terra di Dio* (*Stromboli*, Roberto Rossellini, 1950).