WORLD FILM LOCATIONS FLORENCE

Edited by Alberto Zambenedetti

WORLD FILM LOCATIONS FLORENCE

Edited by Alberto Zambenedetti

First Published in the UK in 2014 by Intellect Books, The Mill, Parnall Road, Fishponds, Bristol, BS16 3JG, UK

First Published in the USA in 2014 by Intellect Books, The University of Chicago Press, 1427 E. 60th Street, Chicago, IL 60637, USA

Cover photo: *A Room With A View* (1986) ©Merchant Ivory/Goldcrest / The Kobal Collection

Copy Editor: Emma Rhys

A Catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

World Film Locations Series
ISSN: 2045-9009
eISSN: 2045-9017

World Film Locations Florence
ISBN: 978-1-78320-360-4
ePDF ISBN: 978-1-78320-344-4

Printed and bound by
Bell & Bain Limited, Glasgow

WORLD FILM LOCATIONS FLORENCE

EDITOR
Alberto Zambenedetti

SERIES EDITOR & DESIGN
Gabriel Solomons

CONTRIBUTORS
Eleanor Andrews
Stefano Ciammaroni
Marie-France Courriol
Nathaniel J. Donahue
Natalie Fullwood
Barbara Garbin
Brendan Hennessey
Danielle Hipkins
Dom Holdaway
Pasquale Iannone
Charles L. Leavitt IV
Ellen Nerenberg
Joseph Perna
Marco Purpura
Dana Renga
John David Rhodes
Monica Seger
Luca Somigli
Sara Troyani
Roberto Vezzani

LOCATION PHOTOGRAPHY
Alberto Zambenedetti, Elizabeth Williams and Valeria Castelli

LOCATION MAPS
Greg Orrom Swan

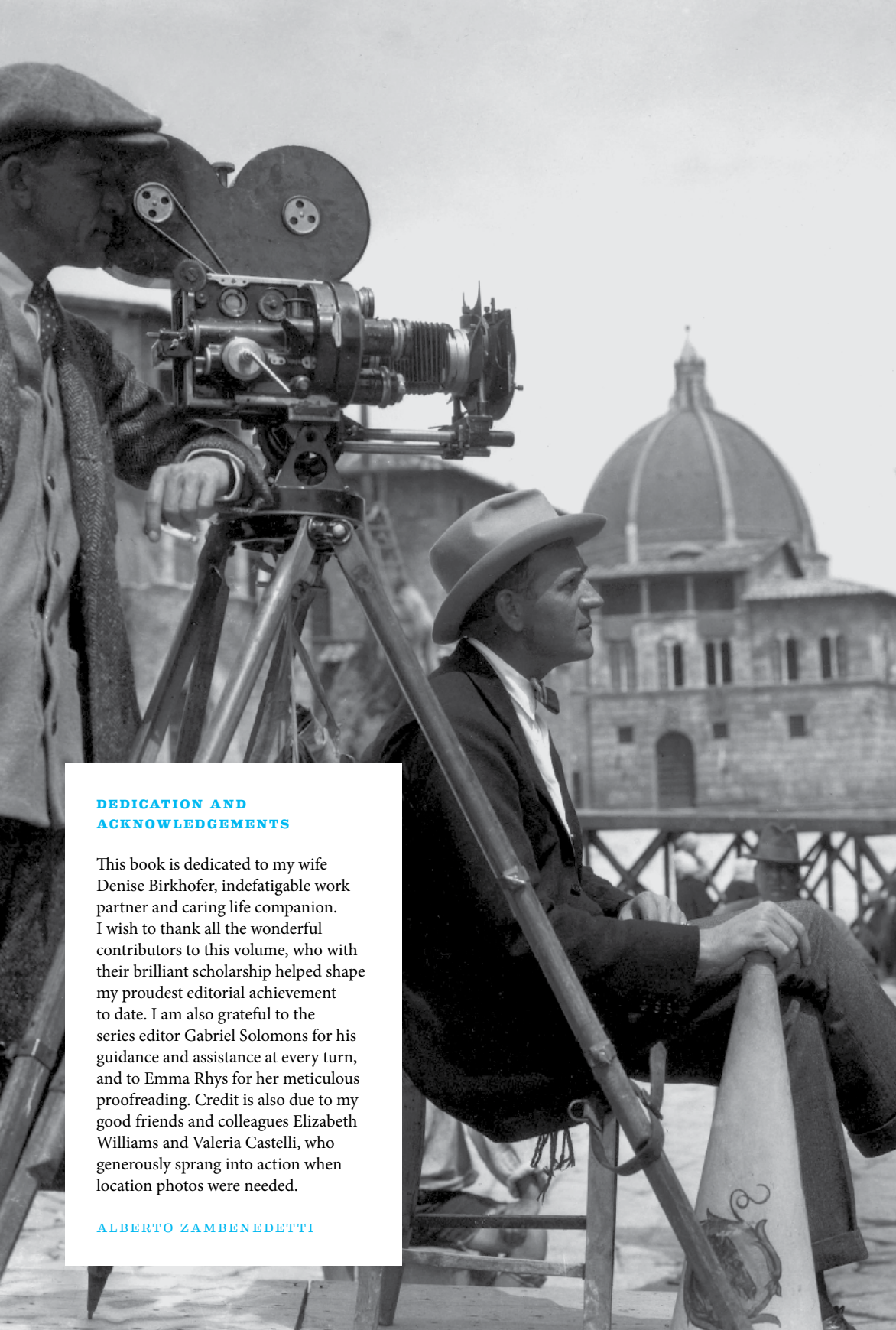
PUBLISHED BY
Intellect
The Mill, Parnall Road,
Fishponds, Bristol, BS16 3JG, UK
T: +44 (0) 117 9589910
F: +44 (0) 117 9589911
E: *info@intellectbooks.com*

Bookends: View from Piazzale Michelangelo (Alberto Zambenedetti)
This page: *Under the Tuscan Sun* (Kobal)
Overleaf: *Romola* (Kobal)

CONTENTS

Maps/Scenes

Essays



DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is dedicated to my wife Denise Birkhofer, indefatigable work partner and caring life companion. I wish to thank all the wonderful contributors to this volume, who with their brilliant scholarship helped shape my proudest editorial achievement to date. I am also grateful to the series editor Gabriel Solomons for his guidance and assistance at every turn, and to Emma Rhys for her meticulous proofreading. Credit is also due to my good friends and colleagues Elizabeth Williams and Valeria Castelli, who generously sprang into action when location photos were needed.

ALBERTO ZAMBENEDETTI

INTRODUCTION

World Film Locations *Florence*

The afternoon
goes away.
The sunset approaches,
a stupendous moment,
the sun goes away (to bed)
it is already evening all is over.

THIS POEM, titled 'The Sunset', was written by 9-year-old Nadia Nencioni on 24 May 1993. On 27 May, the explosion of a car bomb parked by Florence's Torre dei Pulci caused the death of nine people. Nadia was among the victims of this despicable attack orchestrated by the mafia. The city laid a plaque, engraved with her poem, to commemorate the massacre of Via dei Georgofili. Forever memorialized in stone, Nadia's unforgettable verses are quite possibly the sincerest celebration of Florence ever committed to the page. Their extraordinary power stems from the love of a child for the exceptional light that bathes her city every day at magic hour. Her timeless words perfectly encapsulate the warm pink and orange hues colouring the sky over Florence as the sun travels west, toward the beaches of Livorno and Viareggio. The buildings on the north shore of the Arno River – those illustrious palaces and churches with their majestic towers and prodigious domes – glow resplendently in the last moments of the day, until the city finally begins to cool down, lulled by the deep blues of the fresh Tuscan night. Generations of artists, including film-makers, have worked with this unique light, trying to capture its ineffable beauty, the subtleties of its palette and to harness its power to elevate their art.

This volume is a collection of essays and descriptions of movie scenes written by some of the finest contemporary scholars of cinema. By no means an exhaustive catalogue, it nevertheless seeks to investigate the special kind of affection that film cameras seem to feel for this unique city. Hundreds of films have been shot in Florence: some have been so enamoured with its calm, glistening surface that they have not attempted to get to its core, its inner rawness, its violent past. Others have tried to engage its mystery, scratching the glossy patina and finding beauty in its troubled history. This book celebrates both approaches, because they are, in a sense, true to what the city has come to represent. A towering achievement of human ingenuity, home of unparalleled architectural treasures, once the artistic centre of the world, Florence is more than just a pilgrimage destination for artists. It is a city with a rich and complex history, whose layers must be peeled with the utmost care and attention just to discover that epidemics of Black Death, murderous coups, Nazi bombings and disastrous floods all lead to the words of a creative 9-year-old and her desire to celebrate beauty – to make beautiful art, in Florence, and about Florence. ⁜

Alberto Zambenedetti, Editor

FLORENCE

City of the Imagination

Text by
ALBERTO
ZAMBENEDETTI

THE CITY THAT GAVE BIRTH to the Italian Renaissance has quite fittingly had a long-standing relationship with the visual arts, including cinema and photography. Florence's picture-perfect cityscape and breath-taking countryside have been utilized by numerous film-makers to varying results: while some integrated the landscape into their filmic discourse with truly remarkable skill, others were unable to master its complexity and flattened it to make it fit their forgettable, bi-dimensional movie postcards. Yet cameras from around the world return routinely, undeterred, to try to capture the famously ideal urban environment, its surrounding hills, and the picturesque towns that dot the Tuscan countryside. Far from the result of some utopian urban plan, Florence's beauty was forged by centuries of conflict, back-room dealings, flimsy allegiances and murderous betrayals. Its famous architectural and artistic landmarks are, more often than not, the fruit of an aggressive patronage of the arts that was born out of a desire to upstage rivals rather than to enrich the cultural landscape. To quote Orson Welles as Harry Lime in *The Third Man* (Carol Reed, 1949)

You know what the fellow said – in Italy, for thirty years under the Borgias, they had warfare, terror, murder, and bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and the Renaissance. In Switzerland, they had brotherly love – they had 500 years of democracy and peace, and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock.

The Renaissance, widely acknowledged as the most important and influential cultural and artistic moment of the second millennium, has been at the centre of many cinematic investigations, from artist biopics to period dramas, from adaptations of literary masterpieces to spoofs and comedies. Perhaps inspired by Harry Lime's quip, Sir Carol Reed himself directed *The Agony and the Ecstasy* (1965), a biography of Michelangelo played by a tormented Charlton Heston opposite Rex Harrison as an often-irate Pope Julius II. Still the golden standard for biopics of mercurial Tuscan artists, Reed's film had many successors, including *Una vita scellerata*/*A Violent Life* (Giacomo Battiato, 1990), which draws from Benvenuto Cellini's own account *Vita*, written by the artist between 1558 and 1562. While Leonardo da Vinci appears as a character in hundreds of titles, he becomes the protagonist only in the 1971 miniseries *La vita di Leonardo da Vinci*/*The Life of Leonardo da Vinci* (RAI Radio Televisione Italiana), directed by Renato Castellani and starring the suave French actor Philippe Leroy as the eccentric Tuscan genius.

The Grand Tour brought many educated travellers to Florence; eager to experience first-hand its artistic treasures, these illustrious tourists recorded their journeys in travelogues that would become essential reads, such as William Thomas Beckford's *Dreams, Walking Thoughts and Incidents* (1783) or Johann Wolfgang von

Opposite *West of Paperino* (1982) / **Below** *Light in the Piazza* (1962)

Goethe's *Italian Journey* (1816–17). The modern equivalents of these volumes are the many films that use Italy's landscape as a backdrop for journeys of self-discovery, such as *Under the Tuscan Sun* (Audrey Wells, 2003), based on the 1996 bestseller by Frances Mayes, or the Ryan Murphy-helmed blockbuster *Eat, Pray, Love* (2010), a globally inclined descendant of the Florence-centred classic *Light in the Piazza* (Guy Green, 1962), in turn based on the eponymous, bigoted 1960 novella by Elizabeth Spencer. But not all the (primarily female) descendants of Grand Tourists consume the Tuscan landscape, food and men, with nonchalant levity: Jane Campion's ambitious 1996 adaptation of Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* is a brooding affair that approaches themes of love, lust and obsession with the appropriate gravitas.

While Florence's art and architecture have been at the centre of many foreign productions, domestic film-makers have focused more on what it means to be from Tuscany and, specifically, to have Florentine origins. Struggling under the enormous weight of its prestigious history, humble characters move through the lesser travelled corners of the city, sometimes plagued by a sense of melancholy and nostalgia, such as in the mid-century adaptations of Vasco Pratolini's eponymous novels *Cronache di poveri amanti*/*Chronicle of Poor Lovers* (Carlo Lizzani, 1954) and *Le ragazze di San Frediano*/*The Girls of San Frediano* (Valerio Zurlini, 1955). In an Italy struggling to find its moral compass, disoriented by 21 years of Fascism and World War II, these films provided a comforting picture of a humble, hard-working, well-meaning, yet somewhat provincial country on the brink of the epochal socio-economical shift that would later be known as the economic boom. At the same time, films like *Porta un bacione a Firenze*/*Give Florence a Kiss for Me* (Camillo Mastrocinque, 1956) constituted a domestic alternative to the Technicolor spectacles manufactured by the rising 'Hollywood on the Tiber'.

While Florence's art and architecture have been at the centre of many foreign productions, domestic film-makers have focused more on what it means to be from Tuscany and, specifically, to have Florentine origins.

The long tradition of humour and satirical pamphleteering in Florence, and Tuscany at large, find their cinematic equivalent in the work of the Giancattivi trio (Francesco Nuti, Alessandro Benvenuti and Athina Cenci), the globally recognizable Roberto Benigni and Leonardo Pieraccioni, among others. Pieraccioni's 1995 debut *I laureati*/*The Graduates*, for example, wittily tackled the issue of Italian 'mammoni' (menchildren) by investigating the lives of four thirty-something men sharing an apartment in Florence; unfortunately, the director subsequently lost his bite and retreated into the facile formulas of romantic comedies, casting himself as a lead against the tabloid bombshell of the hour. Conversely, the resilience of Benigni's quintessentially Tuscan humour – an eclectic mix of lowbrow jokes and highbrow references, sometimes delivered in song – has characterized his long and successful career up to his Oscar-winning performance in *La Vita è bella*/*Life is Beautiful* (1997). Co-written and directed by Benigni, the film is set in an idealized Tuscan town – a composite of Arezzo, Montevarchi, Castiglion Fiorentino, Cortona, Ronciglione, Rome and Papigno. Lastly, in their debut film *Ad ovest di Paperino*/*West of Paperino* (Alessandro Benvenuti, 1982), the Giancattivi comedians painted the Florentine landscape in a light much different from that of the Grand Tour films: far from the pristine urban extravaganza that perhaps existed only in the Anglo-Saxon imagination, Florence becomes a city like any other, in which the rich and the poor must uneasily co-exist, and in which beauty and dreariness often cross each other's paths. ✣

SPOTLIGHT

VIEWS FROM THE GRAND TOUR(IST)

Text by ELEANOR ANDREWS

Florence and Foreign Consumption

IN THE FILM ADAPTATION of E. M. Forster's 1908 *A Room with a View* (James Ivory, 1985), a young Englishwoman, Lucy Honeychurch (Helena Bonham Carter), is taken on a carriage ride through the Tuscan countryside. During the journey she declares that she is a tourist, happy to be sent like a parcel from Venice to Florence, Florence to Rome. Tourism, certainly as far as Italy is concerned, is a vestige of the European Grand Tour, which had its origins amongst the British aristocratic classes of the seventeenth century. Filtering down through society from the nobility to the wealthy and then to the middle classes, this extended visit operated as an instructive rite of passage, with a fairly standard itinerary through France and Italy in a quest for art and culture, with consideration of the natural beauty afforded by the landscape a later addition. The principal purpose of the Grand Tour was to present the cultural legacy of classical antiquity and the Renaissance to these travellers, as well as introduce them to fashionable European society, and give them the opportunity to acquire artefacts and antiquities. Florence was one of the key sites on the itinerary, with a visit to the Duomo and the Uffizi Gallery being considered as essential.

The Portrait of a Lady (Jane Campion, 1996) and *Room with a View* are both partially set in Florence. The films share a number of themes, since the protagonist of each is a young woman whose life will be changed forever following a trip to Italy. Both narratives address the issue of personal freedom or the lack of it as well as demonstrating the contrast in the ways of life at home and abroad. The aroused sensuality felt by the female protagonists is contrasted with the restricting mores of their times in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, in comparison with *A Room with a View* and also *Tea with Mussolini* (Franco Zeffirelli, 1999), *The Portrait of a Lady* shows little of the tourist aspect of Florence. When the monuments of the city, such as the Duomo, are displayed in Campion's work, they are seen at unsettling oblique angles suggestive of turmoil in the state of mind of the young female protagonist, Isabel Archer (Nicole Kidman). The elaborate, opulent and sometimes overwhelming interior *mise-en-scène* serves as the backdrop to the increasingly suffocating relationship between Isabel and her husband Gilbert Osmond (John Malkovich), rather than being examples of Italian design and cultural artefacts.

In *A Room with a View*, Florence and the Italian way of life is under the close scrutiny of

Opposite *Tea With Mussolini* (1999) / **Below** *A Room With A View* (1985)

the Edwardian English upper-middle-classes. The narrative tells of the sexual awakening of the heroine, Lucy, thanks to the liberating effects of the Tuscan countryside and the Latin temperament. On the one hand, the English characters are shocked at the brutality and passion they witness, which contrasts with the genteel, but frequently artificial, nature of the English way of life; on the other, they are seduced by the loveliness of both the natural (Tuscany) and man-made (Florence) environments they have come to observe. Novelist Eleanor Lavish (Judi Dench) treats the visit to the city as a great adventure. She despises those visitors who slavishly follow their Baedeker travel guides, and aims for a more spontaneous experience. As though dealing with wildlife specimens, she finds 'the Italians unspoiled in all their simplicity and charm'. Lucy, in contrast, describes the Italians as being 'so kind, so loveable' but 'at the same time so violent'. In the Piazza della Signoria Lucy witnesses a fatal stabbing at close hand. The photos that she had purchased only moments before, as a souvenir of the beauty of the square, are spoiled by the blood of the murder victim. On the journey into the countryside surrounding the city, Lucy watches the amorous behaviour of the young Italian carriage driver and his sweetheart through the binoculars with which she is supposed to be surveying the landscape. The guileless actions of the Italians are condemned by the Reverend Mr Eager, and yet, later on, it is the intuitive understanding of this driver which engineers the meeting and subsequent kiss between Lucy and George Emerson (Julian Sands). After a period of confusion and indecision back at home, Lucy finally rejects her stiff, affected English fiancé, Cecil Vyse (Daniel Day-Lewis) in favour of George, the man she fell in love with in Italy. The final scene reveals a happy ending, following the marriage of Lucy and George. The couple sit by an open window, with a view of Florence in the background. Lucy's soft, casual clothing and her tumbled hair show the transfigured, passionate protagonist who might appear as the heroine in the latest novel by Eleanor Lavish.

In *A Room with a View*, Florence and the Italian way of life is under the close scrutiny of the Edwardian English upper-middle-classes.

A more nuanced, and sometimes jaded, perspective of the Italians is given by the resident English ex-patriots in 1930s Florence in *Tea with Mussolini*. The film opens in the English Cemetery by the tomb of the English poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who with her husband, Robert Browning, made Italy her home for fifteen years in the nineteenth century. The choice of this figure and this particular location serves to reinforce the notion of the strong links forged between the two countries at that time, and highlights the shocking nature of the events in World War II which damaged these bonds. There is a similar contrast between nations made in this film, but the transformative power comes not from the Italians or their city, but from the spirit of the *Scorpioni* (scorpions), a small group of elderly English ladies who lived in Florence in the 1930s and 1940s. Once again playing the role of the artistic Englishwoman abroad, Judi Dench as Arabella says the Italians are 'not like us cold English', and, referring to the cultural heritage of the country, she declares, 'I've warmed both hands before the fires of Michelangelo and Botticelli.'

The choice of Florence as a setting for these films offers the spectator a visual and narrative comparison between, on the one hand England and America, and on the other Italy, based on an Anglo-Saxon notion of the Italian stereotype, which suggests that Italians are passionate and pleasure-loving, artistic and impulsive, musical and imaginative, religious and revengeful. ✣

N

LOCATIONS MAP

FLORENCE

maps are only to be taken as approximates

FLORENCE LOCATIONS
SCENES 1-8

1.
ROMOLA (1925)
The Arno River
page 12

2.
CONDOTTIERI (1937)
Loggia dei Lanzi, Piazza della Signoria
page 14

3.
TRAGIC NIGHT/TRAGICA NOTTE (1942)
Lungarno Soderini, east of the Ponte Vecchio
page 16

4.
SORELLE MATERASSI (1944)
Lungarno Torrigiani,
west of the Ponte Vecchio
page 18

5.
PAISAN/PAISÀ (1946)
Vasari Corridor
page 20

6.
SEPTEMBER AFFAIR (1950)
Ristorante Orcagna, Piazza della Signoria
page 22

7.
THE WORLD CONDEMNS THEM/
IL MONDO LE CONDANNA (1953)
Via di Rifredi
page 24

8.
CHRONICLE OF POOR LOVERS/
CRONACHE DI POVERI AMANTI (1954)
Via del Corno, a Florentine residential street
page 26

ROMOLA (1924)

LOCATION *The Arno River*

A FLORENCE BESET BY religious and political turmoil furnishes the backdrop for Henry King's adaptation of the George Eliot novel (1862–63). Set in the year 1492, King unfurls a story of adventure and romance into streets populated by such historical figures as the firebrand preacher, Savonarola (Herbert Grimwood), and the opulent Medici family. The film begins with the main character, Tito Malemma (William Powell), and his encounter with the esteemed scholar Bardo Bardi (Bonaventura Ibáñez), who mistakes Tito for a respected man of letters. Tito seizes on this error to enter high society through a propitious marriage to Romola (Lillian Gish), Bardi's daughter, despite already being married to and fathering a child with the milkmaid Tessa (Dorothy Gish). When Romola realizes she has been duped and Tito attempts to usurp the city's throne, the Florentines turn against him, forcing him from a window into the river below. We first see shots of the river early in the film when Tito courts Tessa. There, King embeds the two star-crossed lovers in the idyll of the city's central waterway. When he plunges into the river to escape, however, the comedy and romance that dominate much of the film fade into tragedy. Tito allows Tessa to sink to the river's bottom then is drowned by the father he betrayed. The ominous swirl of the Arno's deadly current makes a perfect complement to the tempestuous love-triangle portrayed in the film, as well as the turbulence of fifteenth-century Florence.
Brendan Hennessey

Photo © Alberto Zambenedetti