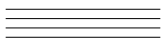


R O M A C I T T À A P E R T A



K A R L K I R C H W E Y

At the end of *Roma città aperta* by Rossellini,
after the S.S. officer has given the coup-de-grace
to the Catholic priest played by Aldo Fabrizi,
the scab-kneed children who watched through the fence
troop downhill, and St. Peter's is in the background,
its dome floating like a miracle they do not notice.

I watched the movie again last night. Beyond
my window were patches of filthy snow
as grudging winter yielded and spring returned;
but only when the bloody-handed thugs in the Via Tasso
had tortured the Resistance leader to death
with the blowtorch, the pliers, the lash, and the priest was forced to
listen to his cries as others amused themselves with
cognac and Chopin in another room
and the woman who betrayed him had fainted at the truth
in the fur coat they bought her for: as I say, it came
only slowly, after the pregnant Anna Magnani
had been shot dead in the street in wartime Rome,
with a blot of crimson and a concussion of dismay
like the red-bellied woodpecker in the catalpa hammering
at the reluctance of each lengthening day,
that dawn had broken, and it was Easter morning.