

REWRITING HISTORICAL NEOREALISM IN MATTEO GARRONE'S *GOMORRA*

Katherine Elizabeth Greenburg

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Approved by:

Advisor: Dr. Dino S. Cervigni

Reader: Dr. Federico Luisetti

Reader: Dr. Ennio Rao

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ABSTRACT

Rewriting Historical Neorealism in Matteo Garrone's *Gomorra*
(Under the direction of Dino Cervigni)

A response to the highly censored films of the Fascism, Neorealism took an apparently inglorious approach to daily lives of Italian citizens. To employ realism in their films, neorealists often shot on location instead of using sets, used nonprofessional actors, conversational speech rather than highly scripted dialogues and shot in a documentary-like style. The stylistic characteristics continue to have an influence on Italian filmmakers, as can be seen in the recently released Italian film *Gomorra*, directed by Matteo Garrone. Based on the novel of the same name by Italian journalist Roberto Saviano, *Gomorra* centers on the daily lives of members of the Neapolitan mafia, the Camorra. Garrone investigates the culture of the Camorra using stylistically typically neorealist techniques. While examining the concepts behind realism in literature and film, the present study aims to investigate the influence of neorealist thought on Italian film today, found through a critical viewing of Matteo Garrone's *Gomorra*.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The neorealist films of the *dopoguerra* highlighted the social issues facing Italians with a resoluteness Italians had not witnessed before. A response to the highly censored films of the Fascist period, neorealism took an apparently inglorious approach to the daily lives of Italian citizens. Neorealist filmmakers, in the words of Peter Bondanella, “were seeking a new literary and cinematographic language which would enable them to deal poetically with the pressing political problems of their time” (31). Films of the neorealist period focused on the poverty and desperation throughout Italy following World War II. The traditional characteristics of neorealist film included, as Bondanella writes, “realistic treatment, popular setting, social content, historical actuality, and political commitment” (31).

To employ realism in their films, neorealists often shot on location in a documentary-like style instead of using sets. They also used nonprofessional actors, deploying conversational speech rather than highly scripted dialogues. The stylistic characteristics of neorealism continue to have an influence on Italian filmmakers today, as can be seen in the recently released film *Gomorra*, directed by Matteo Garrone.¹

¹ The film *Gomorra* was nominated for many awards, including the Palme D’Or at the Cannes Film Festival and the Golden Globe for Best Foreign Film. It also won the Grand Prix at Cannes, the Ari-Zeiss award at the Munich Film Festival, and the European Film 2008 Best Film Award.

Based on the book with the same title by Italian journalist Roberto Saviano, *Gomorra* centers on the daily lives of *camorristi*, members of the Neapolitan mafia, the Camorra.² The film version follows the stories of five characters involved in the Camorra. The stories span the entire age spectrum, ranging from Totò, a thirteen-year-old boy trying to prove his bravery, to Don Ciro, an old man who distributes money to the families that remain loyal to the Camorra. According to Jay Weissberg, Garrone is “interested in how the average inhabitant becomes drawn into the cycle of corruption and violence” (22).

As a style of film, neorealism was characterized by the stories of the poor and working class citizens of Italy. The subjects of the films faced adversity and dire financial situations. However, out of the desperateness portrayed in the storylines of neorealist film arose a sense of hope for the future of Italy out of the ruins of the long war. The circumstances of the war are no longer present in Italy, and there is some prosperity present for the poor of the South that Garrone has chosen as his subject, but there also is the phenomenon of the Camorra, creating a different war for the people of Naples.

The Camorra represents much of how the South of Italy has tried to escape from the extreme poverty it has faced in the past. Southern Italians, especially members of the Camorra, want to become self-made men, much like the American dream. Instead of going about this by legal means, however, use of violence and illegal forces often determines a man’s success. Many of the inhabitants of Naples

² Saviano now lives in hiding under police protection. He was able to work as a screenwriter for the film version of *Gomorra*.

and the areas under the jurisdiction of the Camorra feel there is no way to escape the cycle of violence and crime perpetuated by the organization. There is no sense of hope for a more legitimate future, not even within the youth of the suburbs, who instead are enamored of the Camorra lifestyle. The children of the Camorra, according to Adriana Cerami, “will kill and die for the gains of the System (a monopoly over clothing and construction businesses) because it means their own gain as well (trivial items such as *motorini*, clothing, cell phones, etc)” (15). Rather than trying to find legitimate jobs, such as working in a caffè, the youth of suburban Naples prefer to become involved in the more glamorous world of crime.

The neorealist filmmakers often depicted an Italy shattered by war and Nazi occupation, but there was a message of Christian Marxist humanism in their works. In neorealist film the characters may feel hopeless, but in certain characters, primarily the children of the films, there can be found a sense of hope in a stronger Italy and a better tomorrow. In *Gomorra*, Garrone has chosen to depict the Camorra exactly as it is, and how the people of Naples do not see any way around the Camorra. While examining the concept of reality and its literary and filmic representations in Italy, as well as the stylistic and ideological characteristics of neorealism, the present study aims to investigate how Garrone distorts the humanist ideology of neorealist filmmakers in *Gomorra*, while adhering to the stylistic characteristics of the movement.

What is Realism?

The question of how to portray reality has long plagued artists, writers, and filmmakers. There are multitudes of perspectives on reality, with each individual

having his or her own respective reality. Realism in general is difficult to define. According to Millicent Marcus, “realism is always defined in opposition to something else, be it romanticism in nineteenth-century literature, modernism in twentieth-century art, nominalism in medieval philosophy, or idealism in eighteenth-century thought” (4). Marcus also explains that all realisms “share certain assumptions about the objective world: that it exists, that it can be known, and that its existence is entirely separable from the processes by which we come to know it” (8). Authors and filmmakers attempt to portray the reality of daily life, but there is always a sense of artifice, especially in film.³

Realism has played an important part in literature, and works that are considered realist allow the audience greater insight into a certain view of reality. In the world of written texts, much literature belongs to experiences that have been lived by the authors themselves. For Erich Auerbach, reality in literature has been taken to mean “an active dramatic presentation of how each author realizes, brings characters to life, and clarifies his or her own world” (Said XX). Authors ranging from Dante to Zola have attempted to render a real view of humanity and reveal the inner workings of their created worlds. When a work is considered to have a realist perspective, it characteristically has, according to Marcus, “a grasp of the underlying dynamics of historical development, a corresponding vision of the future which will emerge from the movement of history so discerned, and a belief that the social order is modifiable and therefore perfectible” (9).

³ Bazin writes that “every form of aesthetic must necessarily choose between what is worth preserving and what should be discarded” (Bazin 2, 26).

In a majority of works characterized as realistic, the author is attempting to provide the audience with an insight into his or her own reality, and thus help the reader experience events that are occurring in the author's own life or his/her perceptions of life. How can the reader understand the reality as perceived by the author? Auerbach writes that reading the works of realist authors who are providing insight into their worlds will bring a "change in our manner of viewing history" which will "out of necessity soon be transferred to our manner of viewing current conditions" (433). For readers to understand literary realism they must be like realist authors and attempt to understand the reality of life from their own personal perspective.

The Development of Realism in Unified Italy

Realism has a long and distinguished history in Italian literature, beginning with Dante, arguably for the first two canticles of the *Divine Comedy*, continuing through the Renaissance, and resurging in popularity in the years following the Italian Risorgimento. At the time of Italy's unification writers such as Alessandro Manzoni and Ippolito Nievo were writing historical novels that were glorifying progress and nationalism. In the more isolated areas of Italy, such as Sicily, the promises of reform and progress were not fulfilled, creating a disenchanted public. As a response to the historical novels of the Risorgimento, towards the end of the nineteenth century, Sicilian writers such as Giovanni Verga undertook to write novels that showed what was really happening in certain regions of Italy, thereby providing a snap-shot view of the daily life of a specific regional area. Out of their works developed the literary movement of *verismo*.

Verismo finds its roots in the naturalist literary movement characteristic of France, made popular by Émile Zola. For Luca Clerici, the influence of France on the *veristi* came from the “persistenza di una tradizione nazionale idealista e spiritualista, sia alla situazione storico-economico del paese” (26). Zola condemned the social corruption of the political regime of Napoleon III in France and wrote novels that represented the natural and social history of France during this time. He and other French writers were also impressed by the scientific discoveries made by such naturalists as Charles Darwin and Gregor Mendel and their use of scientific method. According to Giulio Carnazzi, “Zola sostiene che il metodo scientifico deve essere applicato anche alla ricostruzione dei fatti, delle idee, dei sentimenti, delle passioni, che sono oggetto della riproduzione artistica” (11). By using the scientific method and a keen observing eye, Zola was able to provide insight into the reality faced by the bourgeoisie of France.

The *veristi* agreed with many of the ideas of Zola and his contemporaries. For the Sicilians, the works of Zola and other French naturalists, according to Dombrowski, “provided a general methodological blueprint which, however, was destined to undergo revision in the Sicilian context” (463). The *veristi* believed they were incorporating the scientific method of the naturalists, but their fiction did not promote Zola’s belief that science could change social conditions. For the *veristi*, the novel, instead of being a scientific exercise in cause-and-effect relations, “must give characters and events the liberty to be what they naturally are” (Dombrowski 464). The principal concern of the Sicilian *veristi* was how to best express the reality of daily life for the people of Sicily in a way that the general reading public of Italy

would understand. Giovanni Verga, the major proponent of *verismo*, “championed scientific precision in the creativity of an autogenous art that was an objective, unbiased investigation of human life and upheld the priority of real, demonstrable human events” (Dombrowski 464). In the introduction to his novel *I malavoglia*, the first novel in his uncompleted series *I vinti*, Verga outlines his theory of *verismo*, proposing a “sincere and dispassionate” study of human social life through all the social classes. The disenchantment with how the Risorgimento had affected Sicily extended into Verga’s works, providing him with an anti-progressive attitude. He and other *veristi* ultimately believed that the novelist can only “observe the weak who have fallen by the wayside, victims of mankind’s forward march” (Dombrowski 465). This desire to portray the Italian lower classes in their suffering, again victims of man’s forward march, would resurface in Italian literature and film in the following century, especially in the form of neorealism.

From *Verismo* to *Neorealismo*

In the early twentieth century there was a departure from realism in Italian literature. Literary movements such as *decadentismo* and *futurismo*, glorifying progress, invention, and grandeur, were a far cry from the *verismo* of the late nineteenth century.⁴ With the rise of Mussolini and Fascism, Italians tried to recreate the Italy of myth and the glory of the Roman republic and empire. The image of man and Italy moving towards progress became the ideal of the age. During

⁴ *Decadentismo* was a literary movement popularized by Gabriele D’Annunzio which, again in Dombrowski’s words, “sprang from the belief that the reality of the outside world is in itself unknowable; that its objects are nothing but material signs of some hidden and mysterious essence of life” (473). *Futurismo* is a literary, artistic, and cultural movement of the early 20th century initiated by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti which exalted “the rule of technology and the beauty of industrial civilisation” (Dombrowski 495).

the Second World War, many Italians who had been supportive of Mussolini and his attempt to rebuild an Italian empire became disenchanted with Fascism and its ideals in the face of great poverty and unemployment. Beginning with the onset of German occupation, and continuing through the end of the war, Italy was in economic shambles. Italy had not become a reincarnation of the Roman Empire, a machine of progress. Instead, there were shortages of food and jobs, much sickness, and an overall sense of defeat. As a response to the hardship faced by Italian citizens, writers and filmmakers alike felt a desire to describe what the reality of life was in the *dopoguerra*.

Realism appeared in both literature and film under the term “neorealism” in post-war Italy. The term is often applied more to the world of film than literature, but it holds a place among Italian writers of the era.⁵ During the fascist rule there had been much political censorship, with the majority of works displaying fascist rhetoric. After Italy’s liberation, Italians were able to investigate their country and themselves and come to terms with the harshness and barbarity of war and “seek political renewal for the Italy that was taking shape out of the ruins of war” (Gatt-Rutter 533). One of the main issues facing writers in Italy at the time was the struggle between placing precedence over political beliefs or literary creativity. The authors who were considered neorealist urged a retelling of the Resistance and an individual’s responsibility to history. Cesare Pavese, one of the most prominent Italian neorealist writers, notes that neorealists, in Bondanella’s words, “wanted to

⁵ According to John Gatt-Rutter, the term *neorealismo* “was first coined in the 1940s to describe the objectivist and epic perspective of film-makers like Visconti and Rossellini, who had taken their cameras out of the studio and on to the streets and squares and fields of contemporary Italy” (535-36).

view their world afresh and from a new perspective, thereby creating a 'new reality' through an artistic means" (34).

In the world of film, people were seeking an alternative to the films of Fascist Italy, such as fascist propaganda or "white telephone" films. Screenwriters and film critics alike wanted to return to reality, wishing to express what life was like for Italians in the *dopoguerra*. For them, realism in film was to be set against "expressionism, aestheticism, or more generally, against illusionism" (Marcus 4). The neorealists found their model in Giovanni Verga and the Sicily of *verismo*. Mary Wood writes that Verga's *verismo* "depended on the evocation of particular geographies of place and atmosphere through the building up of detail" (86).

Like Verga, neorealist filmmakers wished to portray sections of the population that did not receive much attention, such as the lower classes. They also wished to show the characters of their films in a social context that would help to explain the harsh reality of post-war Italy. The films of neorealism worked on building a sense of historical authenticity, as well as a reality of time and space. Neorealists were looking to portray a "'correctness' of historical vision (as opposed to beauty and pleasure, for example)" (Wagstaff 21). Neorealism was the repository of hope for the partisans in postwar Italy wishing to find social justice. It was "the artistic expression of a historical period" and "represents an important revolutionary moment, not only in cinema, but of Italian thought" (Marcus 4).

CHAPTER 2

THEORY BEHIND REALIST FILM

With the end of the 1920s came the end of the glory days of silent film. The invention of sound in film allowed a new art form to develop, leading to stirring directions in film. The popular silent Soviet films of the mid to late 1920s heavily relied on the use of montage, a trend that would continue into the birth of the sound era. From the 1930s through the 1940s, the Hollywood cinema reigned supreme. Multiple popular dramas developed, including comedy, burlesque, vaudeville, the gangster film, the psychological and social drama, and the western (Bazin 1, 28). The Hollywood machine generated star-focused films, full of glitz and glamour. Films were heavily edited and followed a distinct pattern. All of this was bound to change with the advent of realism in the world of film.

An element of reality had been present in the works of Soviet filmmakers such as Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Dovjlenko, who used non-professional actors and natural sets rather than studios. Their heavy use of montage continued to be popular throughout the 1930s, but Andre Bazin believed that “in many cases editing could actually destroy the effectiveness of a scene” (qtd. by Giannetti 178). Bazin was a critic and theorist, and for many years was the editor of *Cahiers du Cinema*.⁶ Giannetti writes that Bazin’s realist technique was “based on his belief that photography, TV, and cinema, unlike the traditional arts, produce images of reality

⁶ Cahiers du cinema is an influential French film magazine founded by Bazin in 1951. The magazine is still printed today.

automatically, with a minimum of human interference” (178). Bazin was aware that cinema “like all art -- involves a certain amount of selectivity, organization, and interpretation” (Giannetti 180). Though the films of directors such as Renoir, Welles, as well as the Italian neorealists, created a sense of reality lacking in the films of the Hollywood age, there was a use of artifice to develop the real aspect of the world present. Renoir and Welles chose to achieve a continuity of scenes through deep-focus photography. Unlike the Italian neorealists, they did use manufactured sets, professional actors, and artificial lighting, which detracted from the reality in their films. The Italians were not without their artifice though. Because they used hand-held cameras to film in the busy city streets, Italian filmmakers had to resort to the use of sound dubbing. The use of hand-held cameras allowed for longer shots and easy mobility, as well as a documentary quality, but the lack of original sound adds an artificial aspect to neorealist film. For Millicent Marcus, however, the artificial illusions in the neorealist filming technique “find their ultimate justification in their service to a higher truth: the revelation of the world order in a way that would otherwise escape our unaided notice” (6). Bazin and his support of realism in film, especially neorealism, would be highly influential in the worldwide popularization of neorealist film.

Though Bazin is probably the theorist most associated with film realism, in Italy Cesare Zavattini was also formulating ideas in regards to realism in film, more specifically neorealism. Zavattini was a long-time collaborator with Vittorio De Sica, one of the most prominent filmmakers in Italy and wrote most of the neorealist scripts that De Sica brought to the screen. For Zavattini, the ideal realist film

“entailed rushing with a minimal crew to the scene of an everyday news event, using the actual people involved to perform their own roles in the event, and hurrying it onto screen, just as a newspaper publishes its chronicle the morning after” (Wagstaff 78). He also advocated “the notion of *pedinare*: tailing someone like a detective, not determining what the character does in a normal way of the artist, but instead seeks to find out what is about to ensue” (Wagstaff 78-79). By using this investigative manner of filming, common in documentary work, he believed the viewer would obtain a greater awareness of his or her reality through the knowledge gained through cinematic interpretation.⁷ Zavattini was not a fan of the big budget Hollywood films that had been quite popular in previous years. He believed that film should not be so concerned with aesthetics, such as large sets, perfect lighting, and big name stars, but rather having an ethical purpose. Film, for Zavattini, had a duty to portray humanity in its most real moments. Zavattini’s theories in regards to portrayal of reality would come to define much of the characteristic stylistic and psychological choices made in neorealist film.

The Stylistic Characteristics of Neorealist Film

There were many stylistic choices that represented the reality that neorealist filmmakers wished to portray. The stylistic features of neorealist films are easily identifiable. According to Gianetti:

The stylistic features of neorealism include (1) an avoidance of neatly plotted stories in favor of loose episodic structures that evolve organically from the situations of the characters, (2) a documentary visual style: (3) the use of

⁷ Zavattini believed “what cinema can foster through *conoscenza* and *coscenza* is *covivenza* (‘living in fellowship’)” (Wagstaff 79).

actual locations – usually exteriors – rather than studio sets; (4) the use of non-professional actors, sometimes even for principal roles; (5) an avoidance of literary dialogue in favor of conversational speech, including dialects; and (6) an avoidance of artifice in the editing, camerawork, and lighting in favor of a simple “styleless” style. (478)

By choosing to use the above-mentioned characteristics in their films, neorealist filmmakers were able to preserve a reality of the situations being filmed for their audiences.

The stylistic characteristics that mark neorealist film were originally situational. After the war, in fact, the Germans, according to Wood, “had taken much filmmaking equipment with them as they retreated; Cinecittà was used as a refugee camp and there was a shortage of filmstock to make films” (86). The war had also left Italy shattered economically. There was not much money to finance films, so filmmakers had to make do with what they had. Filmmakers used whatever film stock they could find and shot on location because it was free. Shooting on location also meant that natural light could be used, instead of having to find enough electricity to operate professional lighting equipment. Directors were also able to cut costs by hiring nonprofessional actors because they did not demand big-budget salaries that professional actors were accustomed to. These originally budgetary considerations became the hallmark of neorealist film and directors continued to follow these stylistic standards even when they had financial backing.

The stylistic choices made by neorealist directors aided the presence of reality in the cinematic world. For example, the selection of performers from the

streets of Italy instead of hiring professional actors, or the choice to shoot on location were specific choices made to preserve reality. For Wagstaff,

choosing from “reality,” a “person” to “be” the part is a movement away from “iconic” reference (imitation) towards “indexical” reference, in which you want to represent (the same principle applies to location shooting): it is a bringing together (in a theoretically questionable way perhaps) of fiction with documentary. (32)

The specific choice of moving towards reality allowed for a movement away from the convention and artifice found in films of previous generations.

The Ideological Characteristics of Neorealism

Neorealist films had an easily identifiable aesthetic style, but the films also proposed a certain ideology. The majority of films made up until World War II had been dominated by such genres as comedies, melodramas, period pieces, and big-budget Hollywood affairs (Moscati 143). The films of the golden age of Hollywood were not concerned with an accurate portrayal of reality or with sending out an ethical social message. Neorealist filmmakers chose to make movies about the war and its aftermath, as well as demonstrate the social injustice and poverty experienced by many lower class Italians. There was a clear social agenda in neorealism. For Gian Piero Brunetta, neorealist film had invented “una nuova tradizione, un’etica del vedere e del narrare e una capacità di investire il più anonimo gesto quotidiano del senso e del valore di un’epopea collettiva” (VIII).

The moral message that neorealist filmmakers wished to portray was quite evident in their films. They returned to many of the ideas present in the *verista*

works of Giovanni Verga. Giannetti explains that the main ideological characteristics of the movement include:

(1) a new democratic spirit, with emphasis on the value of ordinary people such as laborers, peasants, and factory workers; (2) a compassionate point of view and refusal to make facile moral judgements; (3) a preoccupation with Italy's Fascist past and its aftermath of wartime devastation, poverty, unemployment, prostitution, and the black market; (4) a blending of Christian and Marxist humanism; and (5) an emphasis on emotions rather than abstract ideas. (477-78)

Like Verga, the neorealists wanted to portray the plight of the lower classes, people who were not shown compassion in the aftermath of the war. Unlike Verga, the neorealists believed that by focusing on the emotions of their characters and portraying, in Bondanella's words, "a message of fundamental human solidarity," their audiences would be shocked into political and social action (31).

The humanist ideology of neorealism is one of the most important characteristics of the movement.⁸ Filmmakers such as Rossellini and De Sica were attempting to "shape political reality according to a moral idea" (Marcus 28). The moral message of neorealism is rooted in Christian Marxist humanism. Giannetti explains that "most theories of realism have a moral and ethical bias and are often rooted in the values of Islamic, Christian, and Marxist humanism" (476). This blend of Christian and Marxist ideology may seem a strange combination, given that the Catholic Church of Italy was often at odds with the Communist party. The majority

⁸ Humanism is a comprehensive life stance that upholds human reason, ethics, and justice.

of neorealist filmmakers were left-wing in their political beliefs, which explains the focus on lower class workers and peasants in their films. They also understood Christian doctrine, and aimed to bring a message of kindness and charity towards the lower classes in their films.

The characters most essential to the humanist message of neorealism are the children present in the films. Why children often embody hope and compassion can be better explained by the idea of *sermo humilis*. Erich Auerbach defines *sermo humilis* as a low style, which is clear and simple for the audience to understand and opens up deeper levels of understanding (39). For Wagstaff “children are, in social terms, ideal embodiments of *sermo humilis*” (90).⁹ Children are supposed to have an air of innocence and helplessness about them so when faced with adult situations and problems their reactions provide the shock factor neorealist filmmakers were looking for. The children of neorealist film provide the judging eyes that see what is wrong with Italian society and often make decisions that ingrain a sense of compassion that is missing in the lives of the adult characters, as well as providing hope that with these children Italy will have a better future.

Roberto Rossellini’s *Roma città aperta*

Greater insight into neorealism can be provided through an analysis of the important films of the movement. The film considered to be the earliest and most influential over other neorealist filmmakers was Roberto Rossellini’s *Roma città aperta*. Massimo Moscati writes, “Lo *shock* che provoca nel pubblico e nella critica la proiezione di *Roma città aperta* di Roberto Rossellini, il 26 settembre 1945 in un

⁹ Erich Auerbach writes that *humilis* “is related to *humus*, the soil, and literally means low, low-lying, low stature” (39).

cineteatro romano, ha consacrato questa data come la nascita ufficiale del neorealismo” (141). The film was indeed a shock for the Italian public, as well as to audiences around the world. The story centers on the lives of members of the Italian Resistance during the German occupation of Rome. The film includes such characters as Don Pietro, a local priest who is helping protect Resistance workers; Pina, a single mother who is engaged to be married, but who is also an influential member of the women’s Resistance; and Manfredi, a critical member of the Resistance and a Marxist. The film chronicles the struggles of these and many more characters as they fight to liberate Italy from the Nazis.

Roma città aperta was shot at the very end of the war, which made the film difficult to complete. According to Marcus, the “lack of studio space, the absence of sophisticated equipment, and the scarcity of film stock forced Rossellini to adopt the simplicity of means that was responsible for the authentic and uncontrived look of his finished product” (34). Rossellini is also noted for his use of location shooting and his understanding of lighting, which adds to the documentary quality of the film.¹⁰ A large amount of the movie was shot outside so that Rossellini could use natural light as well as locations that were actually a part of the lives of the characters of the film. Christopher Wagstaff writes that “the film reconstructs accurately, using whenever possible the original locations and the events of the Roman resistance to German occupation: it is a documentation of historical fact” (97). Though the use of location shooting became a style standard of neorealist film, the choice was also due to the fact that electrical power was incredibly difficult to

¹⁰ Louis Giannetti further explains that many neorealists “began their careers as journalists, and Rossellini himself began as a documentarist” (476).

find in the city, and there was no production funding to be found. The choice to use nonprofessional actors was also due to budgetary concerns. Rossellini was able to hire Anna Magnani and Aldo Fabrizi to play the main characters of Pina and Don Pietro, but after hiring them he had very little money for the rest of the cast.¹¹ Rossellini coped well with the situation and made a film that was to become incredibly influential. Out of the necessity of adapting to the economic conditions of post-war Italy, Rossellini created a style in *Roma città aperta* that came to be the model for many neorealist filmmakers, including those for whom funding was not a concern.

Roma città aperta is also an important film of neorealism for the message of Christian and Marxist humanism that it projects. Rossellini showed concern for the common people of Rome, much like how Verga was concerned for the lower classes of Sicily. He wanted to create a film that demonstrated how common people were affected by the tragedy of warfare. For Bondanella, “Rossellini almost effortlessly captured forever the tension and the tragedy of Italian experiences during the German occupation and the partisan struggle against the Nazi invaders” (37). Rossellini hoped that his film would shock his audiences into the political and social action of which Italy was in such great need. Mary Wood writes that “the film mobilizes melodramatic techniques to increase the affective charge by the use of emotive music, loved ones in peril, abuse of positive characters, violence, heroism, and horrific events” (94). The melodrama found in the portrayal of the common

¹¹ Anna Magnani and Aldo Fabrizi were famous vaudeville and regional theater actors, specializing in comedy rather than drama.

people and proletariat of Rome aids the emotional apprehension of the audience, allowing them to feel compassion for the characters.

Most important to Rossellini's ideology was the element of humanism. Rossellini himself was a Marxist, but he had "a deep respect for the power and dignity of the Christian message" (Marcus 50). He chose to include both Christian and Marxist characters in his film, and he does not project that either side is better than the other. Marcus comments that, "whether the participants in the struggle are Marxists, humanists, monarchists, or Christian soldiers does not matter as long as the fight is directed toward the divinely sanctioned end of social justice" (52). Rossellini is attempting to end the social injustice faced by many Italians in the *dopoguerra* and join the people of Italy together in human reason and justice. He best illustrates his humanist goals in the characters of children in the film.

The majority of the characters in *Roma città aperta* meet horrible ends. Pina's fiancé Francesco is captured by Nazi soldiers on their wedding day, and as she is running after him trying to save him she is shot and killed. Manfredi and Don Pietro are both captured and killed, Manfredi by torture and Don Pietro by firing squad. There does not seem to be compassion or charity shown towards any of the characters. Rossellini does manage to bring a ray of hope into the picture with the children in *Roma, città aperta*. This is most obvious in the final scene of the film after Don Pietro has been killed. A gang of neighborhood boys, including Pina's son Marcello, who want to have their part in the Resistance, have just witnessed the firing squad. These boys have appeared throughout the whole film fighting in their own mini-resistance. Led by Romoletto, the boys walk down one of the hills of Rome

back towards the city. Looming in the background is St. Peter's basilica. Bondanella explains that Rossellini's last shots

accentuate the religious tone of the entire film: Romoletto, Marcello, and the other children walk away from Don Pietro's execution and are followed by the panning camera which sets them, Italy's future, against the backdrop of St. Peter's Cathedral. Out of a moment of tragic despair, Rossellini has created a vision of hope from the first of many symbolic images associated with children that will characterize almost all of the great neorealist classics. (42)

The image of the young boys walking towards the city of Rome signifies a new era for Italy, and a hope in the youth to change the country for the better. Millicent Marcus writes, "Rossellini's Romoletto will look to the past for his model and his justification in refounding the city, but he will select a republican Rome rather than an imperial Rome, as his historical exemplar" (49). Romoletto and his gang have just witnessed a terrible spectacle, with their spiritual leader being killed. Their march into the city is a movement towards reestablishing Italy with justice for the masses. In the words of Mary Wood, "Rossellini's film attempts to stop at the delineation of injustice and to suggest a commonality of purpose for the Italian people, that is, the need to provide for a new generation, the children seen walking back into the city" (93).

Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette*

According to Marcus, Roberto Rossellini initiated "a taste for simplicity, location shooting, and authorial intervention that subsequent filmmakers were forced into creating through elaborate technical means, and illusion of technical

poverty” (57). Rossellini may have initiated the neorealist movement in film, but Vittorio De Sica developed it into a venerable style with his film *Ladri di biciclette*. Set in Rome in the post-war period, *Ladri di biciclette* tells the story of Antonio Ricci, a man from the lower classes of Rome who has been unemployed for two years. Ricci is called one day for a job hanging movie posters around Rome by his local unemployment office. The requirement is that Antonio must have a bicycle for the job. Antonio and his wife Maria are forced to sell their wedding linens to pay for repairs to his old bicycle, selling these precious belongings because they are desperate for Antonio to have a job. The first day on the job, for which he has waited so long, Antonio’s bicycle stolen. The rest of the film follows Antonio and his young son Bruno on a search throughout Rome for the missing bicycle. A seemingly simple plot, the movie is not simple in the least bit, tugging at the heartstrings of the audience with its use of melodrama.

De Sica continued to use many of the stylistic techniques used in previous neorealist films even though he had financial backing.¹² He shot a majority of the film on location, which helped to denote the time and place of the story. Since he was shooting in Rome, De Sica chose to use Roman dialect rather than “standard Italian” (Wagstaff 319).¹³ The choice to use dialect, instead of standard Italian, added to the purveying sense of reality throughout the film, since this would be the language the characters truly spoke. De Sica was quite concerned with the authenticity of his characters and took great care in the choice of actors for his roles.

¹² Christopher Wagstaff adds that David O. Selznick had offered to provide financial backing for *Ladri di biciclette*, but only if Cary Grant was cast in the title role. De Sica quickly turned him down. (303).

¹³ Wagstaff also writes that “Neorealism is credited with the entry of dialect into the Italian cinema, and *Ladri di biciclette* is noteworthy for its consistent use” (319).

According to Wagstaff, “De Sica chose his actors for their immediate visual appearance, without knowing them as people, and without seeing how they behaved or hearing how they spoke” (317-18). An example of his use of nonprofessional actors would be De Sica’s casting of two nonprofessional actors for the principal roles of Antonio and Bruno Ricci in *Ladri di biciclette*. Bondanella states that the nonprofessional actors portraying Antonio and Bruno “were carefully selected because of particular mannerisms in their walk and their facial expressions” (57).¹⁴ De Sica’s preoccupation with preserving reality in film helps to underline the struggle faced by Antonio Ricci and his family, and the hopelessness of their situation.

De Sica collaborated often with Cesare Zavattini, who was previously mentioned for his theories in regard to realism in film. De Sica did not agree with everything Zavattini proposed, but he did have similar feelings about how reality should be portrayed in film. Mary Wood comments that De Sica felt that

ordinary rather than exceptional people had to be the subjects of contemporary stories, and he suggested that, when ordinary situations were depicted in an analytical way, they became dramatic spectacle, going beyond the illusion of reality to suggest a deeper truth. (96)

De Sica upholds many of the ideological characteristics of neorealist film in *Ladri di biciclette*. The main characters are ordinary people, common workers from the lower classes of Rome. These characters are faced with the devastation that came in the aftermath of the war. Unlike Rossellini, though, he does not have an optimistic

¹⁴ Lamberto Maggiorani (Antonio Ricci) was found in a factory, while Enzo Staiola (Bruno) was found at a casting call in the area of Rome where De Sica was filming.

view of Italy's future. He is more along the lines of Giovanni Verga's somber attitude towards life, documenting how persons of the lower classes are often left to fend for themselves and struggle to survive. Although there is not much compassion demonstrated throughout the film, one character provides a glimmer of hope to the situation: Antonio's young son Bruno.

Before Antonio received his new job and obtained a bicycle, Bruno was – as it were – the breadwinner for the family, working as an apprentice at a gas station. Bruno is quite happy when his father receives his job, because he may now resume his rightful place as a child being supported by his parents. Bruno has been forced to see the world through the eyes of an adult. He is “young, sensitive, vulnerable, in need of care and protection” (Wagstaff 124). Throughout the father and son's search for the missing bicycle, Bruno provides the reminder of what is at stake for Antonio should he not retrieve the bicycle.

Bruno never turns against his father. However, when Antonio becomes so desperate for a bicycle that he steals one, Bruno provides the judgmental eyes for the audience, “staring in horror at the spectacle of his father turned thief” (Marcus 61). Rather than condemning his father, Bruno provides a humanizing example, extending his hand to his father and walking home with him in solidarity. With Bruno's grasping of Antonio's hand, he is able to provide some comfort to his father through his compassion. De Sica does not provide his audience with hope for Antonio retrieving his bike, but he does provide hope through the generosity of Bruno, showing that “no amount of determinism or fatalism can destroy the special relationship between Bruno and his father” (62).

CHAPTER 3

NEOREALISM TODAY: MATTEO GARRONE'S *GOMORRA*

Currently in Italian cinema some filmmakers take the teachings of their neorealist predecessors and are creating films that focus on the human condition and the struggles of Italian citizens today. One of the best examples to come of late is Matteo Garrone's *Gomorra*, released in 2008. Precisely in reference to Neorealism in cinema, Mario Pezzella states that "after Rossellini few had described a reality so steeped in the metaphysics, tragedy, and unredeemed destiny" as well as Garrone (246). Michael Covino calls Garrone's film "a post-neorealist docudrama" that "provides a searing look into the Camorra" (74). Garrone uses such stylistic elements as shooting on location, employing non-professional actors, use of conversational speech, as well as a documentary style of shooting, common in the neorealist films of the *dopoguerra*.

Gomorra addresses one of the biggest problems in Italy today, mafia involvement in various levels of Italian life. The film's subject is the daily life of citizens of the suburbs of Naples and the influence of the Camorra, the local crime

organization.¹⁵ The Camorra has been able to grow extensively over the years, largely as a result of “the extreme economic and social problems in the South” (Behan 4). Southern Italy has a long history of economic and political strife, dating back to the post-Risorgimento era, often represented in the tales and novels of Giovanni Verga. The South lacks the industry of the North of Italy and for many years has been a largely agrarian society. The suffering of the lower classes of the South has bred dissatisfaction among its people, an environment perfect for the growth of organized crime. Since the 1980s the Camorra has had unprecedented growth, having a hand not just in the typically illegal activities of drug dealing, gambling and weapons trading, but also in clothing production and toxic waste disposal. Crime and violence reign supreme in Naples, creating much political and social unrest, similar to that generally felt by the Italians of post-war Italy.

The film is structured to chronicle the daily lives of Italian citizens, much like the films of neorealism. It follows five diverse storylines spanning the entire age spectrum, including Totò, a thirteen-year-old boy trying to prove his bravery and Don Ciro, a middle-aged go-between delivering money to the families that remain loyal to the Camorra. The film represents various levels of involvement in the organization, ranging from clothes manufacturing, waste disposal, and drug sales. Besides showing the business dealings of the Camorra, *Gomorra* also demonstrates the high level of violence present in the Neapolitan suburbs. Many of the film’s characters are either wounded or killed, which comes as a shock to the audience,

¹⁵ The Camorra has a long, but ill documented history in Naples. Tom Behan writes that the word Camorra was used for the first time in 1735. He claims that the word is “an amalgamation of *capo* (boss) and the Neapolitan street game, the *morra*” (9-10).

but not to the inhabitants of such areas as Secondigliano or Scampia, for whom Camorra killings are a daily occurrence. Umberto Curi states that Garrone “gives us a bitter and sorrowful reflection on the human condition, on the structurality of the evil immanent in the organization of society, on the indelible role that violence, in all its forms, plays in the concrete relations between individuals” (242). *Gomorra* provides a searing view of the reality of the Camorra, much as Giovanni Verga portrayed the life of lower-class Sicilians in the post-Risorgimento and the neorealists portrayed the lower-class citizens of post-World War II Italy.

The Novel, *Gomorra*

Garrone’s film *Gomorra* is based on Roberto Saviano’s tell-all novel of the same name. The novel, an exposé on the inner-workings of the Camorra, became, in Donadio’s words, “a literary sensation” upon its publication in Italy, “selling an astonishing 600,000 copies” (1). *Gomorra* provides different stories and histories that explain the depth of corruption of which the Camorra is capable. Saviano was raised in the suburbs of Naples, more specifically Casal di Principe, the capital of the Camorra’s entrepreneurial power.¹⁶ Growing up at the heart of Camorra action, as well as being an investigative writer and reporter, has provided Saviano with great insight into the inner workings of the “System.”¹⁷ The novel describes in great detail the history of the Camorra, the many gang wars that have erupted in recent years, and the thousands upon thousands of deaths that have occurred at the hands of the

¹⁶ Saviano writes that being from Casale “era come una sorta di garanzia di immunità, significava essere più di se stesso, come direttamente emanato dalla ferocia dei gruppi criminali casertani” (206).

¹⁷ Saviano defines the Secondigliano System as “un meccanismo piuttosto che una struttura” (48). He explains that it is a more eloquent term that describes the criminal organization that directly works with the economy.

Camorra. Saviano draws on court reports as well as his own reporting to provide an in-depth analysis of not only the Camorra's corruption of Naples, but of Italy and various other areas of the globe. Though Saviano's book is steeped in facts and history, it also includes personal stories about different encounters the author had with *camorristi*. It is from these personal and witnessed elements that the five storylines of *Gomorra* the film are taken.

The film version of *Gomorra* is not a documentary on the Camorra and its inner-workings, but rather a realist work that allows the audience to follow five different stories of the daily lives of *camorristi*. Garrone worked with Saviano to develop a script that was based on the novel, but not just a retelling of murder statistics. The film provides a view of what it is actually like to be involved in the world of organized crime. The characters from the novel brought to the film are Pasquale, a tailor who makes imitation designer clothing and also teaches the Chinese in their clothing factories how to sew and make patterns; Don Ciro, a "submarine" who delivers money to the families of loyal *camorristi* with family members in jail; Franco, a rich man who works in illegal waste disposal, and his young sidekick Roberto; Totò, a young boy who wants to become a member of the System; and Marco and Ciro, two knucklehead teens who are trying to start their own gang and override the local Camorra boss.¹⁸ The five storylines weave in and

¹⁸ Saviano explains that the term "submarine" is attributed to the fact that the money distributors "strisciano sul fondo delle strade" (154). Some of the characters' names have been changed from the novel. For example, Totò is based on the character of Pikachu, and Marco and Ciro are based on the characters of Giuseppe and Romeo. Also, the character of Roberto is loosely based on Saviano himself.

out throughout the movie, showing the diverse ways the Camorra can infiltrate the lives of Neapolitans.

Though the movie is indeed based on the novel, the film lacks the condemnatory nature of Saviano's novel. Rather, the documentary style and shocking nature of *Gomorra* the film intends to provoke the audience into their own condemnation of the Camorra. Saviano ends his novel with his condemnation of the Camorra. He describes a trip he made to an area of Naples called the "Land of Fires," where the Camorra burns hazardous waste.¹⁹ During this visit he broods over the power of the Camorra and tries to grasp how he can survive without being devoured by its corruption. The novel includes this discourse by Saviano in regards to survival:

Porsi contro i clan diviene una Guerra per la sopravvivenza, come se l'esistenza stessa, il cibo che mangi, le labbra che baci, la music a che ascolti, le pagine che leggi non riuscissero a concederti il senso della vita, ma solo quello della sopravvivenza. E così conoscere non è più una traccia di impegno morale. Sapere, capire diviene una necessità. L'unica possibile per considerarsi ancora uomini degni di respirare. (331)

Saviano is very much like the neorealists, providing a work that points out the numerous problems with Italy as a country, hoping to shock the public into action. The film, by contrast, is pervaded by an overall attitude of indifference and

¹⁹ Saviano reports that the Land of Fires consists of "trentanove discariche, di cui ventisette con rifiuti pericolosi" (326).

resignation. Daniel Lindvall writes that the film version of *Gomorra* “tends to present existing social relations as simply given and unalterable” (4). Although the film shows no avenue for hope, and the majority of characters in the film do not stand up and denounce the Camorra, out of cowardice and fear, the style of filming, as well as the subject matter, shocks the viewer and urges the Italian public to condemn the Camorra. Though *Gomorra* may be based on Saviano’s condemnatory novel, and stays loyal to the stylistic characteristics of neorealism, it does not outright condemn the corruption of the Camorra, but rather leaves the audience to come to its own conclusions.

***Gomorra’s* Documentary Style**

One of the most common stylistic features of neorealist film is the use of actual locations instead of studio sets. Originally, location shooting was a necessity for Italian filmmakers in the post-World War II period because Italy was in an economic crisis, and filming in studios with elaborate sets was quite costly. The use of location shooting became a trademark of neorealist cinema, which Matteo Garrone has chosen to uphold in *Gomorra*. The setting of the film is from everyday Neapolitan life: “la citta, la periferia, i campi fradici” (Masoni 7). The film *Gomorra* was shot in La Scampia, a suburb of Naples notorious for its Camorra activity.²⁰ According to Tim Parks, much of the film takes place in a “housing estate made up of three dilapidated apartment blocks with long open-air walkways and gloomy underground spaces” (38). The sense of corrupt and frightened “community” is evident against the backdrop of ugliness and poverty, which is also reminiscent of

²⁰ In 2004 there was a gang feud in Scampia between the Di Lauro clan and a breakaway faction. This became known as the Feud of Scampia. This feud is discussed in great detail in Saviano’s novel.

neorealist film, but in reality goes far beyond anything we have seen in neorealism, of which this film lacks also its hope.²¹ The scenery does not show the beautiful, vibrant landscapes of Naples, but rather the gloom and untidiness of La Scampia, “cluttered with relics and abandoned buildings” (Parks 38). Jay Weissberg believes that Garrone “makes expert use of the dingy housing projects of the Neapolitan suburb” (22). The use of a location where members of the Camorra actually live in Naples brings the audience closer to understanding the frightening social and cultural context out of which the camorra has emerged, without justifying it, however.

Filmmakers of the neorealist period wanted the stories they were portraying to have “believable characters taken most frequently from Italian daily life” (Bondanella 32). The use of nonprofessional actors for both major and minor roles in neorealist film contributed to the believability of the struggles and hardships faced by the characters in the stories. Garrone chose to use nonprofessional actors in *Gomorra* as well. Anthony Lane writes that many of the actors “were recruited from the area, presumably on the basis that they already knew the ropes, not to mention the Kalashnikovs” (81). Megan Ratner comments that many of the actors “were having a hard time keeping their real lives separate from the acting” (78). It was later found out that “no fewer than three members of its cast have been arrested on suspicion of illegal activities” (Lane 81). By using actual *camorristi* in his film, Garrone contributes to the validity of the story and the scenes of violence and crime are even more believable.

²¹ The only film of neorealism to have a similar, indeed even worse, sense of despair, is Rossellini’s *Germania anno zero*.

The use of nonprofessional actors contributed greatly to the sense of reality in neorealist film, but so did the use of actual dialect of the characters in the films. Prior to its unification in 1861, Italy was split into numerous states and kingdoms ruled by various other countries. Because of Italy's divisiveness, each region of Italy has its own characteristic vocabulary, at times more similar to another language than simply a dialect. The standard Italian language is taught in all Italian schools, but many Italians speak their respective dialects at home and with their friends. During the post-war period many Italians in the underdeveloped regions of Italy, especially in the South, did not even understand the national language. Even though Italians today are taught standard Italian in schools, dialect is often spoken at home and throughout the neighborhoods of Italy. Garrone chose to film *Gomorra* using the Neapolitan dialect spoken by the inhabitants of suburban Naples. Parks states, "to underline the community's suffocating enclosure and isolation the film is spoken in a dialect so strong that subtitles are provided even for Italian viewers" (39). Masoni has similar thoughts, saying that the film "anzi si rinchiude in un'area territoriale ristretta, linguisticamente connotata e 'unica'" (475). The use of colloquial speech also allows the actors to truly express their emotions, not having to search for meaningful words in a language that is not a part of their daily lives.

Further cinematic techniques link *Gomorra* with neorealist films. A noticeable characteristic of neorealist film is the documentary aspect of the films released during the period. According to Giannetti, the camera in neorealist film "is regarded as essentially a recording mechanism rather than an expressive medium in its own right" (476). Neorealists believed that cinema was "an extension of

photography” and shared with it “a pronounced affinity for recording the visible world around us” (476). Garrone has chosen to employ much of the documentary-like aesthetics of the neorealists in *Gomorra*. Commenting on the documentary style filming, Weissberg states that Garrone utilizes “a mesmerizing documentary style that studiously avoids glamorizing the horrors” of Camorra life (22). The camera-work in the film also adds to the documentary-like quality of *Gomorra*. Many scenes are filmed using hand-held cameras with “close-up camera work and low, or chiaroscuro lighting” (Parks 39). Pezzella finds “the frequent use of the hand-held camera” to be “an insistent echo of cinéma vérité” (246). Even Garrone’s choice of music in the film maintains a documentary-like feel by “including contempo pop songs played by the characters themselves” (Weissberg 22). These techniques provide authenticity to the scenes, as well as emphasize the sense of entrapment felt by the inhabitants of the Neapolitan suburbs. Garrone has chosen to uphold the stylistic characteristics of neorealist film so that the audience may see how the Camorra operates through real life characters. By paying homage to the neorealists with his stylistic considerations, Garrone has proved that Neorealism has continued to influence Italian film today. One could even suggest that Neorealism’s narrative and technical strategies were the only ones Garrone could possibly employ to portray a Camorra with so many echoes of the biblical Gomorrah.

The Departure from Humanism

As one attempts to establish connections between Neorealism and *Gomorra*, one could ponder such questions as, “What did Neorealism as a phenomenon represent?” and “What is *Gomorra*’s purpose?” As stated previously, Bondanella

writes that Italian Neorealism reflects an emphasis on social realism as can be seen “from one very typical list of its general characteristics: realistic treatment, popular setting, social content, historic actuality, and political commitment” (31). The majority of neorealist films acted as social commentary of actual problems facing Italian citizens through the use of contemporary stories and believable characters. The common aspiration of neorealist filmmakers was “to view Italy without preconceptions and to develop a more honest, ethical, but no less poetic cinematic language” (Bondanella 35). This honest approach to subject matter is what has made Neorealism an influential movement in the art of film.

As one ponders the neorealist elements of *Gomorra* several interesting questions arise. If *Gomorra* had been released during the period of neorealism, would it have been considered a film of the movement? Is the ideology of the neorealist filmmakers such as Rossellini and De Sica present within the film? Some of the neorealist ideology is certainly alive in Garrone’s film. For Rajko Radovic, through Garrone’s “patient exploration of environment and his passionate search for authenticity of gesture and action, he reveals his kinship to Roberto Rossellini, the godfather of the Italian post-war cinema of compassionate realism” (9). The film focuses not just on the lives of ordinary people, a trait characteristic of the *veristi* and the neorealists, but rather on the ordinary folks who have totally failed the idealized aspirations for a just society that neorealism sought to portray and have totally succumbed to the horrors of the war that the camorra at times evokes. Furthermore, *Gomorra* also points out flaws with the current political situation in Italy, but not in the same way as its neorealist predecessors. Neorealist films posed

stories with moral messages that alluded to the Italian economic crisis and the consequent downtrodden lives of Italian citizens. Instead, *Gomorra* displays all the wrongdoings and social hazards brought about by the Camorra, but does not outright denounce them or provide any hope for action against the organization. And yet, the film's message is clear: this Camorra-governed society is totally despicable, and all viewers must do something about it. Curi concludes that there "is no moralism in this film, which is positively icy in its pragmatic disenchantment" (242). Although this statement may seem true overall, there is one gesture in the film that could be seen as a condemnation, that of the young man Roberto. Having worked as Franco's assistant in his toxic waste disposal enterprise, Roberto has seen the horrors of the illegal activity of the Camorra. He takes the one action that can be seen as moral throughout the film by quitting his job after Franco throws out a container of peaches he knows to be toxic. Surprisingly, Franco allows him to leave, but only after telling him that he will never be able to truly escape the Camorra and that he will be stuck making pizzas. Even though one character takes a small stand, the overall sense of resignation towards the actions of the Camorra prevails, a sense that the evil is inescapable.

Neorealist film often had a moral emphasis, with "a compassionate point of view" (Giannetti 477). The principal characters of neorealist film were often good people in dire situations to whom bad things happened. The audience was able to identify with the struggle of the downtrodden characters and feel empathy for them. *Gomorra* in fact does not want to evoke compassion because it cannot do so: we cannot feel pity for anyone involved in this type of activity. The film evokes

repulsion and condemnation in the audience with its incredibly graphic imagery and indifference towards the welfare of its characters. The film surely succeeds in its goal of shocking the audience. In the words of Parks, “the film has no one around whom it can build any pathos,” except, one may add, a pervasive sense of disgust and condemnation (39). Parks further goes on to say that to engage the audience and provide optimism at any point in the film, the story would need “someone, anyone, who was in conflict with the Camorra and whose welfare we could care about” (39). Anthony Lane comments that there is “a terrible numbness to the grownups, spun in the endless cycle of revenge” (82). The film’s purpose is not to arouse sympathy, like that of neorealist film, but rather repulsion and condemnation.

None of the characters truly rebel against the *camorrista* lifestyle, not even the children, who were often the only vehicles of hope and compassion in neorealist film. Even the young characters in the film have been infiltrated by the Camorra’s grasp, and they make no attempt to rebel against the corruption of their society. Ultimately, for Radovic, “bullets fly, life goes on” (7). Hopefully, aware, the viewers will rebel against this utter corruption.

Two of the five storylines in *Gomorra* follow young people involved in the Camorra. Firstly there is Totò, a young boy trying to make his way into the System. Totò seems innocent in the beginning of the film, helping his mother deliver groceries to the families for whom the Camorra provides, playing with friends, splashing in a pool. He decides after watching a drug bust and picking up some cocaine left on the scene that he wants to become a member of the “System”. Totò

attends a meeting of young boys from the neighborhood where the *camorristi* suit the children up with bullet-proof vests and shoot them to see how resilient they are. Totò survives his test, proving himself to be a “man” and able to help with operations. This begins his downward moral spiral, which ends in his final scene in the film. The young boy and his colleagues have witnessed one of their friends being killed by the son of Maria, a woman to whom Totò delivers groceries. The youngsters take the situation into their own hands and decide to kill Maria as revenge. Totò does not want to see Maria dead because she has always been an older friend to him, but he wants to prove his loyalty to the Camorra. Instead of standing up for what is right, the scene ends with, in the words of Petrakis, “the startling image of a young boy hurrying down the street, ignoring the cries behind him, as his trusted friend is murdered in the background” (43).

Even more shocking than the story of Totò is that of the other young people in *Gomorra*, Marco and Ciro, two teens who are “mindless, selfish and themselves steeped in Camorra culture” (Parks 39). Marco and Ciro want nothing more than to be bosses in the Camorra, but they do not want to go through the chain of command like Totò. Michael Covino comments that the two teens “are so puffed up with self-importance they think they’re a gang onto themselves” (75).²² Like young children, they play games of pretend, running around an abandoned house playing that they are Tony Montana from *Scarface*. The boys gallivant around suburban Naples, ripping off local Colombian drug dealers, stealing weapons from the local syndicate’s secret stash, and visiting strip clubs for lap dances. Marco and Ciro are

²² Radovic also comments on the boys’ bravado, calling them “two other pups without collars, whose unbridled arrogance spurs them on to roam the territory of run down tenements and projects” (9).

far from the innocent children of neorealist film. They may believe they are mature and clever enough to become Camorra bosses, but their reckless behavior will bring their downfall. The boys end up crossing the local boss and “will end up face down, folded together like a balled-up kleenex mixed up with human recyclables” (Radovic 9). The boss ends up eliminating the boys so that they do not cause any more damage, and the movie ends with their bodies being carried away by a dump truck off to the ocean, “another consignment of illegal toxic waste to be dumped” (Covino 75). This shocking end emphasizes the total lack of hope in Garrone’s film, presenting the deaths of the young boys as a normal occurrence of every day life, the shocking reality of the Camorra. The destiny of these two teenagers is unfortunately a reality of many an adolescent involved in the Camorra. With the film ending on such an appalling note, the audience is hopefully repulsed enough to take action and condemn Camorra activity.

Conclusion

The representation of reality in literature and film has continuously evolved over time. Realist interpretations have been present in Italian literature since the primordial of literature, adapting through each century to the changing realities of Italy's diverse political situations. In post-unification Italy, realism appeared in the form of *verismo*, a reaction to the disenchantment of writers with Italy's progression after the Risorgimento. Sicilian authors such as Giovanni Verga denounced Italy's political situation by writing about the struggles of the lower classes, the people who were left behind and totally neglected by progress and were unable to fend for themselves. Verga's snap-shot view into the lives of the lower classes of Sicily and the careful attention paid to a truthful portrayal of reality continued to influence Italian writers and also filmmakers in the twentieth century.

The neorealist filmmakers of post-World War II Italy were also disenchanting with the political situation in the aftermath of Fascism. Italy was in a dire economic situation and unemployment and poverty were rampant. The neorealists took a page from the *veristi* and chose to make films that provided insight into the daily lives of the lower classes of Italy and the struggle faced in the *dopoguerra*. Since filmmakers like Roberto Rossellini had difficulty finding funding for their filming,

they were forced to make stylistic decisions, such as shooting on location, utilizing natural lighting, and employing non-professional actors to meet budgetary constraints. Such stylistic considerations became hallmarks of neorealist film, further aiding the representation of the harsh reality of the lives of lower-class Italian citizens. More importantly, though, neorealists had a moral message to convey in their films, wishing to portray a message of compassion and hope for a better future for Italy. This was most often demonstrated through the characters of children in neorealist film. Children, with their assumed innocence, were the perfect characters to point out the flaws in Italy's political situation and to show that there is a chance for a better tomorrow.

Neorealism, much like *verismo*, has continued to influence filmmakers in present-day Italy. Evidence of dedication to the neorealist style is demonstrated in Matteo Garrone's film *Gomorra*, but obviously with different purposes because of the different historical circumstances and nature of the social and economic issues examined. An investigation into the daily lives of members of the Neapolitan mafia, *La Camorra, Gomorra* delves into the endless series of violent acts that has permeated and polluted Italy. Though Garrone has upheld such stylistic characteristics as shooting on location, employing nonprofessional actors, using dialect instead of standard Italian, and having an overall documentary-like style, Garrone does not—and cannot—portray the Christian/Marxist humanist message of the neorealist filmmakers. Though apparently indifferent towards the extreme violence and corruption of the Camorra, it nevertheless condemns it. It also condemns all official institutions, all virtually absent from the film, from the Church,

to all forms of government. It is shocking to observe, as David Lindvall comments that “the youth of the working class suburbs of Naples are rightly shown to have very little to choose between, beyond minimum wage casualization and a life of crime” (4). Unlike the youth of neorealist films, who were often vessels of righteousness and compassion, the young characters of Gomorra choose the life of crime, a distressing departure from the humanist message of compassion and hope of Neorealism. The film’s message to all, not just in Italy, but all over the world, is powerful, even though it is never expressed explicitly: Are we going to accept this utterly perverse and corrupt society – one that corrupts even its youngest members – or are we going to stand up to it?

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