

Naples and the Anglo-American Allied Forces: John Horne Burns's *The Gallery* and Francesco Rosi's "Napoli '44"

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Mapping out a Discourse

I briefly wanted to address my approach in constructing this essay within the context of the cultural relations between Great Britain and Italy. I chose a filmmaker who, although honoured and favourably reviewed by the English press throughout his career, had somehow eluded to adapt his films from British literary sources. Yet, he had relied on French (Prosper Mérimée, Edmonde Charles-Roux), Russian (Andrei Platonov), and Colombian (Gabriel García Márquez) novelists, besides the Italian Gian Battista Basile, Emilio Lussu, Leonardo Sciascia, Carlo and Primo Levi.¹ As the film critic John Francis Lane wrote in the mid-1970s:

In Britain Rosi has begun to make his mark amongst connoisseurs thanks to the recent prestige success of *The Mattei Affair* which earned serious articles about his work in papers like *The Times* and *Guardian* [...]. Rosi has not had the fashionable success that Lina Wertmuller, for example, has been getting lately.

1. I am referring to *Carmen* (1984), *Dimenticare Palermo* (To Forget Palermo, 1990), *Tre fratelli* (Three Brothers, 1981), *Cronaca di una morte annunciata* (Chronicle of a Death Foretold, 1987), as well as *C'era una volta* (More Than a Miracle, 1967), *Uomini contro* (Just Another War, 1970), *Cadaveri eccellenti* (Illustrious Corpses, 1976), *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* (Eboli, 1979), *La tregua* (The Truce, 1997).

There may be an explanation. Rosi's films do not have much sex in them [. . .]. Perhaps some day Rosi will make a film *about* sex, or anyway about permissiveness as a political issue.²

In this respect, I purposely selected “Napoli ’44”, a project that Rosi never realized but somehow has particular meaning for several of his films. In fact, “Napoli ’44” might have been *that* film about permissiveness as a political issue: it documents how the Neapolitans were liberated by the Allied troops and were thrust violently into a city of chaos. To explore this claim, I focus on the relationship between the British and the Americans while dwelling on passages and scenes which I believe bear special import.

Naples: The Author's own Journey

Born in Naples on 15th November 1922 into an upper-class family, Francesco Rosi belongs to a generation for whom the Second World War produced profound changes in personal attitudes, which eventually developed into anti-fascist and reformist beliefs. He attended the prestigious Liceo Umberto I and became an assiduous movie buff at a very young age. He learned his life lessons from his exuberant family and the culture of the South; he developed an eagerness to pursue experiences that could carry him into unbounded realms of thought and feeling. In his artistic investigation of contemporary life and form, Rosi evolves over time, but the bond with the artistic heritage of Naples remains a repository of specific notions and ideas throughout his long career. He will not be afraid to venture his moral credibility on a wide range of potentially controversial subjects concerned with the complex actuality of postwar Italy.

Through the centuries Naples has remained influential, serving as a model for representing national identities. In the 1950s, Rosi began to feel invested with the role of interpreter of his city's social sphere, overloaded with tensions and contradictions. Naples is the

2. J.F. Lane, “Films and Politics in Italy: Francesco Rosi's Example”, *Films and Filming*, 22:8, May 1976, p. 16. To his credit, Lane, who also had cameo roles in *Il momento della verità* (The Moment of Truth, 1965) and *Lucky Luciano* (1973), first met Rosi in Sicily in 1962 on the set of *Salvatore Giuliano* and covered his career ever since.

subject of a number of unfilmed projects which precede *La sfida* (The Challenge, 1958), among them “Napoli ’44”, which Rosi announced as his third film after *I magliari* (The Swindlers, 1959).³ In a personal interview, he swiftly defines it as “a story about Naples seen through the eyes of an American soldier after the liberation” (my translation).⁴

The initial idea for the film was born in 1959, when Rosi proposed “Napoli ’44” to Franco Cristaldi, the legendary producer of *La sfida* and *I magliari*, and of *Salvatore Giuliano* three years later. It was based on John Horne Burns’s *The Gallery* published by Harper and Row in 1947, to great critical acclaim. In the words of one reviewer, Gore Vidal, it was simply “the best book of World War II.”⁵ In seventeen chapters, or better still “Portraits” and “Promenades”, Burns recounts life in occupied North Africa and Naples in 1944 from the point of view of several diverse characters. In 1942, he was drafted into the United States Army as a private, then sent overseas in 1943, and served in military intelligence in Casablanca, Algiers and, for a year and a half, in Italy. Plans to cooperate on a screenplay with Sergio Amidei and Paul Jarrico were made in November 1959. Amidei had worked with Roberto Rossellini on *Roma città aperta* (Open City, 1945) and *Paisà* (1946), Jarrico was an American screenwriter who had moved to Europe after being blacklisted in Hollywood during the years of McCarthyism. But after several months of negotiations and a couple of meetings, the plan for the film fell through: the participants kept arguing about Burns’ negative depiction of the Neapolitans as well as the Americans, and could not agree (in particular Jarrico) on Amidei’s approach, which was: “make it gutsy, human, stark, and

3. T. Chiaretti, “Il suo terzo film è Napoli 1944”, *Mondo Nuovo*, 31st January 1960, p. 10. See also M. Liverani, “Rosi pensa ad un film nella Napoli del 1944”, *Paese Sera*, 20 November 1958, p. 3.

4. Personal interview, Rome, 10th December 1999.

5. “That same year Burns and I met several times”, Vidal writes, “each a war novelist, and each properly wary of the other. Burns was then 26 but looked older, with a receding hairline above a face striking in its asymmetry, one ear fiat against the head, the other stuck out.” G. Vidal, “Speaking of Books, John Horne Burns”, *New York Times Book Review*, 30th May 1965, p. BR2. Hemingway and John Dos Passos, among others, also praised the book.

don't say much."⁶ Meanwhile Rosi ventured to Berlin to meet with William Holden to offer him the leading role for his film. But Holden, who was at the peak of his career with the enormous success of *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957, dir. David Lean), was disdainful toward the young director for his limited experience.⁷ Amidei eventually walked out, and Jerrico was instructed by the production not to proceed with the treatment. In August 1960, Rosi finally told him that the film was indefinitely postponed. Most importantly it had become too complex for Cristaldi to raise the money. The project was shelved but Rosi felt the haunting presence of *The Gallery* for many years to come.

Men at War

What caught Rosi's attention in Burns's novel was not the anti-heroic stories about the liberating army but the peculiar conditions of the war's political and economic dynamics it symbolized. It was its bold, realistic portrayal of the condition of men at war, with the corruption that inevitably follows in the aftermath of victory, the humiliation and degradation of the hungry, the social divide between the occupiers and the occupied. Burns's culturally pivotal reportage enabled Rosi to revisit the historically common experience of his hometown as symptomatic of larger national issues.

From the outset, Burns warns his readers that, while his characters are fictitious, "the descriptions of Casablanca, Algiers, and Naples are based on fact."⁸ Indeed, life in the Allied-occupied Naples is depicted with a reality of detail that preserves a strong veneer of objectivity and matches Rosi's definition of *film documentato*. For Rosi, the director must, first and foremost, formulate a "documented" understanding of his subject.⁹ A film, he

6. L. Ceplair, *A Biography of Paul Jarrico: The Marxist and the Movies*, Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 2007, p. 182. In the book, Jarrico describes Amidei as "temperamental, arrogant, chauvinistic", a bull who always vented his fury on the weakest person in the room." *Ibid.*

7. Personal interview, Rome, 6 June 2003.

8. From the inscription to J.H. Burns, *The Gallery*, New York, Harper and Row, 1970, no pages.

9. F. Rosi, "Documentario? No, film documentato", *L'Unità*, 1st August 1999, p. 21.

has said, “sees, documents, denounces, imagines, and narrates” (my translation).¹⁰ Moreover, it is a responsible act. Throughout his career, what interested Rosi most is how characters react to the social norms and economic structures that define their historical condition. Burns’s *The Gallery* is at once an unbound historical field and a receptacle of social consciousness in which the facts disclose their human meaning.

In streamlining the material, Burns is not linear. In North Africa he is too little involved with navigating the borderless world of the Allied Forces wrestling with survival. In Naples, however, he finds their geographical place of action in one of the city’s architectural marvels: the Galleria Umberto I, a spectacular arcade through which the many characters pass by. Dedicated in 1892, the Galleria was traditionally the commercial, social, and artistic center of the city, with its entrance opposite the Teatro San Carlo, and located in the vicinity of the harbour.

There’s an arcade in Naples that they call the Galleria Umberto Primo. It’s a cross between a railroad station and a church. You think you are in a museum till you see the bars and the shops [...]. In August 1944, it was the unofficial heart of Naples. It was a living and subdividing cell of vermouth, Allied soldiery, and the Italian people.

Everybody in Naples came to the Galleria Umberto. At night the flags, the columns, the archangels blowing their trumpets on the cornices, the metal grids that held the glass before the bombs broke it, heard more than they saw in the daytime. There was the pad of American combat boots on the prowl, the slide of Neapolitan sandals, the click of British hobnails out of rhythm from the vermouth.¹¹

And so begins Burns’s semi-autobiography. The Galleria provides the structural framework for a display of portraits – grotesque, sad, touching. The promenading narrator describes the largest gathering space in the city as an embodiment of the coalescence of public life

10. A.G. Mancino and S. Zambetti, *Francesco Rosi*, rev. ed., Milan, Il Castoro, 1998, p. 5.

11. Burns, p. 1.

at wartimes. More importantly, he vividly literalizes the assimilation of the British with a cadence *out of rhythm*.

The British, the Americans, and the hustling Neapolitans

The British were the predominant influence during the Italian Campaign. General Harold Alexander led the amphibious landing near Salerno on September 9, 1943 and remained in command until December 1944 when he relinquished his powers to General Mark W. Clark.¹² On 1st October 1943, the “Kings Dragoon Guards” entered Naples closely followed by the Allied Forces. Among those arriving with the British troops there was one of the most renowned war correspondents, Alan Moorehead (1910-1983), who wrote for the London *Daily Express* and whose dispatches covered the war, with incise simplicity, from the western African front to the shores of Normandy. “From the summer of 1943 onwards the Allies, and the British in particular”, writes historian Paul Ginsborg, “staked their claim to Italy. Control of the Mediterranean was traditionally a strategic aim of the British, and the Americans acquiesced to the British desire to be senior partner.”¹³ Churchill, who had been an admirer of Mussolini, favoured the continuance of the traditional social order. King Victor Emanuel and Marshal Pietro Badoglio were the most compliant partners the British were going to have. In August 1944, the Foreign Office drafted a document advocating that Italy “should remain under British control until her people had learned from the British how to behave in a democratic fashion.”¹⁴ But not all British nationals shared this condescending view towards the Italians. For example, in his military memoirs entitled *Naples '44* (1978), Norman Lewis, an officer in the Army Intelligence Corps, describes the horrors and travails of civilians under shells and bombs.

12. Clark became the Supreme Commander of the Allied Force Headquarters and led the Fifth Army in its liberation of Rome in June 1944. In Curzio Malaparte’s novel *La pelle* (the Skin, 1949), Mark Cork is a disguised allusion to General Clark.

13. P. Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988*, London, Penguin Books, 1990, p. 39.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

The British hegemonic contempt played an important role at wartime but it was countered by a rather different American position which was strategically less hostile. The differences between the two Allies can best be illustrated by the catch-phrases that they used for their policies in Italy: “the British proclaimed their intention to ‘prevent epidemics and disorders’, the Americans to ‘create stability and prosperity.’”¹⁵ There is no doubt which is more appealing.

This proportionally alternate view is alluded to in Burns’s Seventh Portrait dedicated to Giulia, a nineteen year-old who never batted an eyelash at the bombings and rarely took to the shelters:

In 1943 the Allied bombers hit Naples incessantly. They came in the afternoon with a noise like mad cicadas [...]. The English bombers made sorties almost daily from noon to fifteen hours. While families scurried screaming underground [...]. Often the American planes dropped nothing but leaflets telling Neapolitans that the Allies were coming as friends.¹⁶

After the reassuring pamphlet bombing, Giulia, “had long arrived at the conclusion that it mightn’t be such a bad thing to be liberated after all.”¹⁷ She knew the score.

In the summer of 1943, Giulia may set the base for America to become the major nation of reference, economically and politically, during the postwar era. By early October, however, when Naples fell to the Fifth Army, this comforting feeling over the liberators was doomed to crumble. Giulia reverts to emotions far more ominous than during the air raids: she begins to wonder whether suffering and adversity unite people or rather divide them. Naples had become a city of chaos, with the food shortening and the black market. The Neapolitans had entered “a desert of hopelessness”; they had kept

15. *Ibid.*, p. 41 The British conservative stand over the entire process of liberation will eventually play down the role of the Resistance for fear of unpredictable political consequences in the leftist sense.

16. Burns, p. 232.

17. *Ibid.*

alive during the German occupation and now discovered that “they hadn’t been liberated from anything after all, that the war was just beginning for them [...]. Everyone in Naples agreed only in saying that the Allies were worse liars than the Fascists.”¹⁸ The Allies had promised the Italians democracy and security but by August 1944, social and collective decency no longer existed in Naples. The Americans are now viewed differently as well. Burns sadly records that “one of the most tragic spectacles in all history was the Italians’ faith in us.”¹⁹

Some unfathomable force is at work that diverts Burns’s adventuring spirit and discloses what underlies the surrounding ordinary daily life at wartime. He no longer tingles with delight as when he scorned the British soldiers at the Allied Force Headquarters in Algiers:

In the AFHO offices there was an Englishman to counter-balance every American. Thus the streets of Algiers clomped with British hobnails. The British wore shorts till 1800 hours. Through the leafy heat their legs bobbed like brown pistons. They wore canvas gaiters and short sleeves and berets designed after the queen’s own tam [...]. They scratched their bare legs, bitten by the anopheles mosquito.²⁰

On their part, the British despised the Yanks, who were better off than they were, and resented their good rations, their cigarettes, their women, and their cinemas. After grinding through the alien habits of the Limeys, as he calls them, Burns admits that “the Americans and the British rarely liked one another” and that “neither understood the other, or tried too.”²¹ The British are eventually dispatched to Naples. In the land of sunshine, Burns dwells more on particular individual portraits. Now beneath the contempt, there lies a vivid cynical streak. The Galleria Umberto I, the site of a

18. *Ibid.*, p. 243.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 281.

20. *Ibid.*, 125.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 165, 166. Limeys is the North-American slang name originally referring to Royals Navy sailors.

collective form of leisurely life, is a swarming place of back market activity as well as sexual encounters. The Galleria is where Momma's bar is housed.

Momma has survived the ruins of her apartment in March 1943 and consequently relocates to a dreary room on the third floor of the Galleria. She swiftly learns how to make space for herself in the cultural hybrid of the liberated city. She is allowed to open a bar and her only desire is to be renowned as a great patroness. Momma proudly exhibits furs, lovely dresses, and black market goods; she essentially embodies the malicious vitality of survivalism: "And now that the Allies were in Naples, the Neapolitans were united in milking them", or "They thought the world owed them a living, so they preyed on one another."²² Such passages confirm the realist ethics propounded in Eduardo De Filippo's celebrated play *Napoli milionaria* (1945), which represents the plight of the poor drifting away and the corruption of the illegal trade.

Momma, whose character and prospects are identified with her bar, lives only for the Allied soldiery. She bows to the Americans and rescues those she thinks need affection. But, in the summer of 1944, psychological liberation is not easily attained, a fact Momma acknowledges in conjuring the British. She hardly accepts them whether it is the Desert Rat, the handsome English boy who fought at El Alamein and never spoke to a soul, or the two hawkish gay sergeants who shriek like parrots and prey on other costumers. It is telling to read what she has to say about them:

There now arrived the only two Momma did not rejoice to see, two British Sergeants wearing shorts draped like an old maid's flannels. They were almost twins, had peaked noses and spectacles that caused them to peer at everyone as though they were having difficulty in threading a needle from their rocking chairs [...]. Their conversation was a series of laments and groans and criticism of everyone else present [...]. They were disdainful and envious and balefully curious all at the same time. They reminded her of old

22. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

women who take out their false teeth and contemplate their photograph of forty years ago.²³

The picture is sharp and Momma's resolve clear. Burns reaches a pungent *crescendo* when he brings up the British one last time, molding them in a depraved show. In his Sixth Promenade, Burns walks in the heart of the city, through piazzas and alleyways, in a sort of tribute to a Naples alive and furious with life. As he strolls and looks around, this officer turned *flâneur* chronicles a kaleidoscopic metropolis: the mobile crowds laughing, crying, shouting, gesticulating; the children swarming the streets; the stores with their windows half empty; the walls of public buildings stuck with movies posters; and the playbills of the Teatro San Carlo. Then, he begins to pivot in a somewhat different direction: near the Opera House rises "the palazzo where the Limeys took their tea and the British officers got drunk on their roof terrace and poured gin on pedestrians passing into the Galleria Umberto."²⁴ As opposed to the spectacle of the Neapolitans so rich by merely being alive, the British come to the fore as a strident discord.

Burns's trail of urban wondering ends with an emotional pronouncement: "Napoli? . . . I've had it . . . or it's having me . . ." ²⁵ Undergoing a spiritual conversion, Burns begins to reassess the American dream as a topos centered on superiority and democratic freedom:

Yet after a little while in Naples I found out that America was a country just like any other, except she had more material wealth and more advanced plumbing. And I found out that outside of the propaganda writers (who were making a handsome living from the deal) Americans were very poor spiritually. Their ideals were something to make dollars on. They had bankrupt souls.²⁶

Burns's America is at a critical crossroad.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 144-145.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 225.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 231.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 280.

Imagining the Allies

Equally critical is Rosi's journey through liberated Naples. Using the visual, his memory travels from delightful episodic encounters to a lesser heroic image of wartime Americans. Rosi's tales of Allied occupation in Naples are initially astonishing for their exuberant tone. Nothing is more inspiring than the impact of the Americans on the social customs of his city:

The Americans had brought us bread, but also the cold cuts. In other words, freedom. They made us see that an inferior person could communicate to a superior while both resting their feet on the desk. It was the end of an authoritarian era, which had existed in Naples from the beginning of time (my translation).²⁷

Another thing the Americans were well known for was their inexhaustible thirst for the visual. Both Rosi and his father Sebastiano, an amateur photographer who also loved to sketch, made numerous amounts of sketches, well paid. For Rosi, there was a common denominator between the Americans and the Neapolitans, and that was their strong desire to survive.

A bid for survival is in Rosi's mind when he returns to Naples in October 1944. In early 1943, young Rosi was drafted into the army and sent to Tuscany for training. After Mussolini was arrested on 25th July, he first joined the resistance and then began his journey back home. The Naples he found was unexpectedly transfigured. As he tells Michel Ciment,

It was hell. The ruins were lit incessantly by the lights of military trucks. I arrived late one night and dared not to go home since I feared the worst. So I walked and walked through the city until dawn. I was in choc. When I left, Naples had already been heavily bombed, but what I saw that night was terrifying. You can find it in Burns' novel *The Gallery* (my translation).²⁸

27. C. Cosulich, "Colloquio con l'autore", in F. Rosi, *Uomini contro*, edited by C. Cosulich, Bologna, Cappelli, 1970, p. 55.

28. M. Ciment, *Le Dossier Rosi*, rev. ed., Paris, Ramsay, p. 107.

This imagery functions as a shared collective memory, but more importantly feeds into the soul of the future filmmaker. In the working script of *Salvatore Giuliano*, Rosi includes newsreels of the Anglo-American forces landing in Sicily on 10th July 1943 intercut into the actual scenes.²⁹ The Allies's armed occupation of the island triggered the rise of the Sicilian separatist movement. Giuliano, who became an outlaw in September 1943, was its nominal colonel. But it is in *Lucky Luciano* (1973) that the director dramatizes his city's wartime shortages and deprivations. The film is set against the backdrop of Mafia collaboration and all kinds of illegal commercial activities. The Allied Military Government had placed known mafiosi in liaison positions and allowed them to control the black market using U.S. military trucks. Take, for example, the flashback that details the collaboration between Charles Poletti, an American Colonel, and Don Vito Genovese, who was in charge of the public administration in Southern Italy and made millions by selling American goods (flour, penicillin, cigarettes, olive oil, sugar) destined for the poor people. Rosi captures the atmosphere of his city in a montage set to the music of Glenn Miller and Benny Goodman at the Army Officers' Club. He focuses on a gallery of faces with girls devouring sandwiches and chocolates as they dance with drunken soldiers. The poorer women had turned to prostitution. As Rosi confesses to Giuseppe Tornatore:

The sequence of the Americans who dance with the girls evokes my own memories in many ways. This theme was at the heart of Burns's novel, *The Gallery*, from which I always wanted to adapt a film, even though one of the most important facts was not included: the relationship between the Mafia and politics (my translation).³⁰

29. S. Cecchi d'Amico, E. Provenza, F. Rosi, and F. Solinas, "La prima sceneggiatura," in T. Kezich, *Salvatore Giuliano: un film di Francesco Rosi*, with the collaboration of A. Levantesi, Rome, Cinecittà Holding, 1999, p. 163. The Allies' armed occupation of the island triggered the rise of the Sicilian separatist movement. Giuliano, who became an outlaw in September 1943, became its nominal colonel.

30. F. Rosi and G. Tornatore, *Io lo chiamo cinematografo: conversazione con Giuseppe Tornatore*, Milan, Mondadori, 2012, p. 314.

This flashback comes to an end with Genovese delivering a deceitful speech on the collaborative efforts with the occupying forces in order to fight corruption and help the hungry people. Rosi relied on the report of a sergeant in the Army's Criminal Investigation Division, Orange C. Dickie, who began to retrace the losses of the vital supplies and discovered a widespread operation headed by Genovese.³¹

Politicians, criminals and Allies became an organic component of Naples' organization of government after the liberation. In Burns's novel, civic degradation materializes in the difficult alliance between the liberators and the local population at large. If the name of Naples "spelled a certain freedom and relief to him" when he arrived, it progressively became a dry land, where the women, who owned silk stocking, were prostitutes in Via Toledo, and the black market in Via Chiaia was "patronized by Americans."³² Burns's increasingly pessimistic view of the liberators takes us to another foul situation of the war in the portrait entitled "Queen Penicillin." Everyone knew in Naples that you could buy the medical supplies if you had the price. This chapter evokes the end of Eduardo's *Napoli milionaria*, with the psychological and cultural crisis that came with the loss of moral identity during the allied occupation of the city. Rosi directed this play at the Teatro San Carlo in 2003, with the Compagnia di Teatro Luca De Filippo. He also planned to adapt a film but was unable to find an enlightened producer. As he tells Alessandra Levantesi, "If I had been given the opportunity to make a film from *Napoli milionaria*, I would have finally fulfilled my dream of adapting *The Gallery*, the film I had scripted with Amidei" (my translation).³³

Burns's novel ends under the dome of the Galleria Umberto I where everyone in Naples came sooner or later in August 1944.

31. This report is published in L. Jannuzzi and F. Rosi, *Lucky Luciano*, Milan, Bompiani, 1973, pp. 183-218.

32. Burns, pp. 2, 136.

33. A. Levantesi, "C'era una volta un futuro regista: conversazione con Francesco Rosi", in *Francesco Rosi: cinema e verità*, Assisi, ANCCI, 2008, p. 34.

The Neapolitans came to the Galleria to watch the Americans, to pity them, and to prey upon them. The Americans came there to get drunk or to pick up something or to wrestle with the riddle. Everyone was aware of this riddle. It was the riddle of war, of human dignity, of love, of life itself. Some came closer than others to solving it. But all the people in the Galleria were human beings in the middle of a war. They struck attitudes. Some loved. Some tried to love [...]. They were all in Naples, were something in them got shaken up. They'd never be the same again-either dead or changed somehow. And these people who became living portraits in this Gallery were synecdoches for most of the people anywhere in the world.³⁴

Burns and Rosi speak to us in important ways. They succeed in portraying eyewitness testimony as a narrative of first-person experiential knowledge which emerged in liberated Naples. Both go beyond the haunting realities of everyday life, as a muted hope courses through their descent into the depths of memory. For even in the midst of the night, they cling to a moment of recovery.

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34. Burns, p. 372.