

On the *Circumvesuviana*
and
The Vesuvian Imaginary:
The Woman's Journey to Naples in Three Texts

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Bachelor of Arts (Honours)

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of the University of Western Australia
Discipline Group of English and Cultural Studies

2009

Abstract

“On the *Circumvesuviana*” is a collection of poems that explores what it is to have been born and raised in Australia without knowledge of an Italian father and a family in Naples. Travelling between “here” and “there,” Australia and Naples, this work necessarily involves a renegotiation of self and place. The poems draw on memory, family stories, objects and myths to articulate both the joy and dislocation of this experience.

The metaphorical relationship between the poems and the critical work is broadly articulated through notions of the hidden or buried, journeys, and narratives of self-reconstruction. Both approaches, the poems and the textual analysis in the exegesis, sit inside a wider tradition of women’s journeys to Italy read as transformative experiences, and focus specifically on this tradition in relation to Naples.

The exegesis considers women’s journeys to Naples in Roberto Rossellini’s film *Journey to Italy*, Shirley Hazzard’s novella *The Bay of Noon* and Mario Martone’s film *L’amore molesto*. It examines how setting can elicit similar stories and comparable sets of representational concerns, tracing intertextual relationships between Rossellini’s influential film and the other two texts, and locating these journeys inside wider contexts such as the Grand Tour, the motif of the heroine transformed by Italy, the construction of the Italian South as Other, and the long association between Naples and the feminine. It locates and traces a Vesuvian narrative from outsider to insider views that posits the central paradox of Naples as a site of catastrophe and a space that offers each heroine the chance of self-reconstruction. I argue in readings of the three texts that the central female protagonists turn inwards away from the famous panorama of the Bay of Naples to investigate ruined spaces and radical sites of anti-spectacle.

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Acknowledgements

My thanks to the Discipline Group of English and Cultural Studies, and the Graduate Research School, for supporting this work through even the most challenging times. I have had the great, good luck to have had wonderful supervision. My biggest debt must go to Professor Gail Jones who has helped me immeasurably to conceptualize this work, and who has lent me her strength and her critical acumen. I was blessed to have additional supervision at the beginning by Professor Dennis Haskell and at the end by Assoc. Professor Judith Johnston. Without their help and good humour, the job would have been much harder, my very warm thanks to them both. Special thanks, as well, to Dr. Kieran Dolin for always patiently helping me through the paperwork trail.

I owe a great debt to the following friends who have kept me afloat with their generous support – my heart-felt thanks to Aaron Hales, Gerri Cox, Sally Scott, Susan Midalia and Mojgan Sadighi. I would also like to thank my publisher Professor Ivor Indyk and my poetry mentors, Jean Kent and Paul Hetherington, for their on-going support. I value their judgment and generosity greatly.

Lastly, I want to thank my family for putting up with me through this demanding time. I owe a particular debt to the Ferrara family in Naples for their unfailing hospitality and for sharing knowledge about their elusive city. *Mille grazie*. My biggest debt of all I owe to my family here – to Tim, Larry, Dan and Julia Dolin for their daily love, patience and support. It would not have been possible to do the job without you.

Because this work is about a number of strong women who come to terms with life's vicissitudes in Naples, I dedicate it, with love, to all the strong women in my family both at home and in Naples, and to the memory of Dorothy and of Rosa.

On the *Circumvesuviana*

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I: Origin Uncertain

I know that it is by being unknown to myself that I live.

Hélène Cixous, *rootprints: memory and
life-writing*

Wayside

My body wants
the long way back
just to find lost land
rehearsing what it will be –
unexpected flowerings
locked tight in seeds.

I have searched for this
as one seeks origin:
to find the errant sower
jaunty in a book of days,
the uncertain map
of family trees.

It is that ur-place
of first collections –
black furred caterpillars,
glass jars and grass rash,
time in suspension,
place as mood.

Seeds in my pocket
put me in mind
of the strange, small plants
we grew in the cupboard –

an experiment
that claimed my pity.

And of my *nipote*,
a love child too,
who took me aside
and mimed at fireworks
with hands and eyes,
his fingers sprayed.

*We're like this, you see,
all kaboom and splutter –
who knows where we'll fall.*
Somewhere between
Piazza Dante and Piazza Gesù
is all I am told.

My body wants
the dark of a city
when paths were lit
by shrines, by love,
their frail flames
petals no-one owns.

Compact

The day of the row
about true fathers
we hide in the lean-to.
My sister soothes
my telling skin.
Skilled as a bush doctor,
she works from the clam
of her compact
until my face is set to dissemble.

Her fingers are smooth
as crepe strips
of paperbark, her powder
fine as the stuff they release.
When the hinge of her compact
shuts, it sounds out its sound
on pact – the secrets between us
of lies and lineage;
and my face – the unsure “O”
of my mouth – is closed
in her mirror-palm
taken by stealth, by love,
she will keep it safe,
this counter heirloom.

Summers before I had
played in my father’s garden,

lopping the bowing heads
off wind-blown flowers.
As each head hit the ground
I thought of queens,
of “off with her head” (thought quietly
“off her head”) and then only of a means
to keep my own counsel.
But that garden is gone
and my sister leaves me grown-up
games of gin and make-up
and a deep breath in, she promises,
will hold this spell for hiding tears.

I breathe with the lean-to for a while.
Its ship-like listings
forecast storms ahead.
I’m left to court strange blood
as the gin burns through
the buried scarlet of my cheek.
I try to straddle this uneven ground,
figure-head sturdy.
I might build an internal Armada.
The day overhead pales
and everything fades out
to a queen’s powder white.

On Looking Back

Somehow I'm hunched in the garden
and my dress is too short.
It's the kind of hunch that says
to the adult world without words –
I don't know – this could be me or
a minute back I was play-acting
a woman throwing love's words to the flames.
See this silver tree, its limbs are not for cutting.
But no-one listens, so I hunch off
to copy those forebears I never knew,
recuperating in various poses against walls,
turning the earth over, for good or bad, with sticks.
In all this scooped out time of mud-pies
and their foil homes that cut my hands,
of sacred, rounded houses to the sky
that I swept with brooms made from certain plants,
that kept my feet silky with dirt,
that looked from high up like giant, orbless eyes,
in all this time there were bounty hunters who rode
the perimeters and asked my parents rather rudely
where I'm from:
to which my father replied proudly, I think, on looking back,
with a silence, and to me, a half
indulgent lip-pursing that was a dismissal.
He let me hunch off in my short print dress
to the smooth, cool eyes of sand –

a salvation made from my own devising
that in those years
whispered an open-ended embrace
in strange markings.

Thickly then

Thickly then with jam,
the guilty pleasure
of white bread and American shows,
latch-key afternoons
in my grandmother's empty room.

Fingers trailing,
testing many surfaces
to know, to understand
something unsaid:
old suits, a grass-skirt
the strange, padded tweed
of the TV's speaker
that emitted dust like sound.

Living in the cupboard
were a colony of grey heads
my father called maquettes –
practice heads.
I pulled faces back
at their mouldering collusions
then shut the door tight.

In this time
I learned to love loneliness
and hugged my singularity close,
the last child – big gaps.

I dismantled the room
and found no clues
but everything had an over-fullness:
untwinned cuff-links
baby teeth, school pins.

I stared at the sun
until it grew a black rim,
stumbled blind to the kitchen,
my mother just home
turned, astonished, and said
my darling – don't do that,
don't you ever do that again.

The Chest

There is this attic memory for me,
a chest that stood at the bottom of the bed
and haunted us. A man made out of cloth rose from it:
spectral husband, killer, stained bride
or another self–unknown, uncountenanced.
All my childhood threats lay coiled in that chest,
ropes that led a snake dance down to other worlds.
I should not climb in or I will be found,
a blue child clad in rotting lace.
I should be sensible and never shut myself in,
even though at times, believe me,
I yearned to be strange cargo
showing the whites of eyes through openings,
to wake at sea to jolting cold and foreign voices.

Beyond the chest hung curtains patterned with an orchard
that cast a pied light made for wanderings.
I packed myself away with the sweat of tissue relics
and proclaimed–stowaway, chrysalis, cats for drowning
–that when I burst out I would not be me.
It was in this room that my father warned my mother not to stand
against the drapes for fear of calling up the types who slithered
on the smooth earth below or listed in clumps of rushes
further in the darkness by the river,
barely human, don't think to call them so,
and where my mother had told my sister and I about blood.
I hid in the chest after that and dreamt about this new dark river–
the force of how it ran and how to hide it.

This morning I stretched out of myself in bright winter light
and remembered the gift of a glory box from the father that I did not know.
Sturdy as a small coffin, it found me close to his own death.
What it should have held—voile for weddings, swaddling clothes—
has been an empty ache to it. O life spun around me alright
with all its attendant wrappings but never so tenderly
as the words glory speaks—put on glory raiment like a king or queen,
those glowing souls of the ones who went before
and kept things shining and folded.
Or there is a word in his own tongue for glory box—*lettucio*—one to wake to
far off out to sea, borne away in a self unknown, uncountenanced—
which is a kind word that belongs to boundless days
in orchard light when all the room contracted to a chest.

Close it up then. But first or last just one more thing—
a man stands at the head of another open chest
and places his hand upon the heart, feels the solid pumping life of it,
a small fist that hits and hits again into his palm.
At season's change, the dark month, I lift the lid and curl inside,
my heart, peculiarly, opening out.

Monstrous

He was like all the broken things
she had ever rescued.
If possessions were perfect
she would bestow them
on the unsuspecting or the avaricious.
Anything with a flaw
was kept and cherished.
She would spit on it
and shine it up
with her clever elbow.
Even this ex bus-driver
with a weakness for gambling
was not too much.
Occasionally, come Spring, her family railed
against her sullied collections
and threatened to throw them all out,
including the ex bus-driver,
but that would have been as monstrous
as taking candy from a baby.
Perhaps she understood the gambling.
*Be careful now, she would warn,
pity can get to be
such a habit.*

Head in the Sand

I tell my sister
I don't want to decorate
with the dead
I don't know
so she sticks you
standing on your head in the sand
over the face of
K-Mart's idea
of someone dearly departed.
You don't fit the frame
but that was always the case.

(Weird, isn't it, the way they put anonymous ancestors in photo-frame merchandise?
That's one big floating book of the dead. What if you walked past your great great-
grandmother while you were juggling non-essentials? The old dead look god-fearing,
unflawed. As a child I looked for clues in photos of my father. For years I had my head
in the sand about this one.)

All one summer
under the canvas umbrella –
our beach atelier –
we made heads in the sand.
I watched you build cheekbones
with the flat of your hand
and hollow eye-sockets
gently with your fists.

I copied these sure anatomies
just to be as much
like you as I could.

(When you died I had a double grief. My sister and brother would carry parts of you effortlessly. On the flight home, the one that would end beside you in the morgue, I tried to tell my companion about the dead-end of my inheritance. He said, “You’re wrong.” “How, I asked, “tell me?” He said, “You do something just like your father – you twist your mouth when you think.”)

The grainy head of Christ you made
was left out on the grass to harden.
An un-forecast Judas rain
reduced it to a small red river.
I sat forlornly by,
enjoying tears,
the sharp smell
of damp, worked terracotta.
Never mind, you said,
I made it to cast,
to break, in any case.

Not Mine

It is gone –
the world is rent –
from the moment I say
the words to you
Papa holds me this way too
my birth father
is lost to me.
This is your memory
not mine
but when you give it back to me
something falls from my skin
and lies irretrievably
in the grass.
Oh look away, look away
let it slither away
that glistening half-said
hurt. For the first time
we see that we are different
and we are all, all
expelled from the paradise
of one another.

I Went...(that words can't)

I went to my mother at the Trade Winds Café
and she said this is my story, not yours.
There and then the winds turned South.

I went to my father that I call my father
and he said don't make me get that DNA test...
I'll do it!

I went to my uncle in the Mountains
who wrote a long letter to stop up the gaps.
He said you're a fairytale,
a chance meeting on a bus without suspension,
a cabin full of roses.

I went to my dying aunt who added
I always loved you a bunch.

I went to my future husband
with beers and the long sorry story.
He said you're all class.

I went to my sister who said
she always wanted the accordion
and the big doll they took away.

I went to my children
but always, and from the moment of their births,
they wanted me for other things.

I went to my sisters and brother in San Giorgio
and they said we have no word for half,
your face belongs here.

I went to the mirror
and the mirror said don't look at me
I can't help it if your face says things
that words can't.

I went to the ashes of my
father that I call father
and my mother's lover
and asked them if they thought
we could all rub along together.

Finally, nobody said anything
and I was happy with that.

II: Rivers, Oceans

“The sea,” she said. “It always seems so far away...”

Russell Hoban, *Turtle Diary*

L'avventuro

In one frame
there is a figure
perched on rocks by the sea
and then she is gone
from the next frame.
Her disappearance exists
outside the camera's knowledge.
The story must go on without her.
People walk out of train wrecks like this
and start new lives.
Is this what you did
when you jumped ship?
You edited yourself
out of your own life
to give me mine,
inserted only fossil words
so that when I hear your language
I pause and grasp
at painful early memory.
For some reason
hearing Italian voices
always makes me want
to do everything more carefully.

Lost Rivers

We are walking *Los Ramblas*
and there's a veritable flow,
an ark almost,
of street life roaring towards the sea:
hares, buskers, fortune-tellers.
When you show me the story
of the lost river's life
picked out in the driest colours
I am thinking of a spread of pages
in the small library at home:
*all histories of Naples begin
with the story of the lost river
but nobody today can trace its source.*
We are walking *Los Ramblas*
with the ghosts of shy river gods
and I can almost sense
the tang of an absent ferny breath.
As we are carried along
I want to say and don't
how comfortable I have become
with the idea of lost rivers.

Circlet

I'm glad we came down
to the sea that day
It might be the only time this time
Black weed netted our shins
and we talked up waves
that weren't there
caught this one, this one and
the next – more promise
most promise yet
We meant to go
but stayed for more
The way dark water held us
puts me in mind of the time
on the trip here I hit my head
the doctor laid me back in bed
and I woke to a circlet
a thin device
of fine reed about my wrist
It was not from here
but somewhere deep
that had claimed me

A Wedding

Washed up,
sailor maddening song
had left you.
You still had beauty,
a shape that showed
you had been loved.
You pushed up on white arms
in the wet sand,
comely as a sea calf
and curious folk gathered round.
Some saw in your sea-flecked gaze
the gates of a new city.
They shifted on their feet
and murmured to cover your skin;
pressed a coin into your palm,
no currency you knew –
stamped with the face
of a young river god.

You awoke more fully.
This must be true.
You sensed not far inland
the calm commerce
of just such a river
You worship him?
The people shrugged.
Maybe once, long ago.

You stood straight as a lily
and parted the crowd.
For years on jagged outcrops,
your own howls head splitting,
you had yearned for the civility of a river,
for waters that carried good news.
You travelled a trail of stones
smooth as your toe-nails
until you found the young god
fretful in a grove.

You stroked his beardless face,
took hold of the pearly horn
that sprouted from his forehead
and coaxed him to run again.
Your name – Parthenope –
maiden's voice
brimmed forth from your lips.
Seibitos cleansed your wild ways.
In the sea you had sensed his touch
and now this new lightness
was all over you,
a garment of water
the villagers marveled at,
could not match.
Your union brought a sweetness
to all their doings
and they built the city
they had found in your eyes.

Your Birth

one more thing about your birth
(you always ask and I forget to say)
you waited for your grandmother – all that time –
so long they put me on a kick chart

the day she came
we drove out to a sale
in the old town where the big ships used to come
your nan was angry with me
why did you take us here
so far away from hospital?
but I felt as safe as you
we bought red blanket (I want to say
ticking – what is that anyway? – your nan
would know)

you came slap-dash the way you still do things
with a new moon
too fast
and after I shook *like the toothache*
your nan held me told me
to let the pain break through me like a wave
we walked a long way back
to fine white sand
and I lay down
bewildered as Parthenope
you filled my field of vision
you were all the places in the world

The Mice

my mother took them to the river
with a packet of weetbix
their carousel – that scampering
round-about of who am I –
their dense, burrow smell
I could add them to the list
of things with which I never played
gifts from my wayward father
that were out-of-bounds
the idea of mouse – a rumour
frantic in abandoned parts –
she unlatched the cage and said
kids, you're on your own

but they come back
these feral colonies
I could not tend
they come back
with their cold little paws
we've been away for such a long time they chant
they are the chorus of what could have been

when I was a child
story books were full of mice
their thin limbs poking from dimity smocks
and neat waistcoats
lost mice – untraceable country cousins

that stretch of land by the river
it really was wild
a wasteland then
we lay in clumps of bamboo
and smoked our first cigarettes
bamboo bumsuckers
the lost mice clamoured inside
my headspins
the priests came down
to practice their golf
they gave us their soft Irish brogue
glimpses of secular ankles
as they pulled up their cassocks
to wade into swampy land
we retrieved their lost golf balls
and with the rewards
bought more cigarettes
holy cigarettes
taboos were built into everything
that happened in the bamboo clumps

the other day
I went back for the mice
and saw a man sitting
on a fold-out chair
just at the edge
of where it used to be wild
he faced away from the view
towards the road
I wanted to pull over

and not exactly talk to him
just reclaim a little rank whiff
from the poshed-up frontage
there was something wrong
with the man
he seemed to be doing an imitation
of a man sitting in the sun
like me
the place was lost on him.

Beneath Us

Lost fathers
lost sisters
and brothers too
swim a pantomime
for miles
eyes bugged out
cheeks bulging
they mouth hello
to all strange fish
in hope.

The lost ones
in watery chambers
tread a wheel
of encrusted walls
holding signs
like those left
waiting at airports.

So long so long these
wet thought-bubbles read.
Casual swimmers
could not say for sure
if this sounding
means only goodbye
or a measure of time.
Their dangling feet feel

the words as vibrations
and dismiss them for weeds

but later in the sun
close their eyes
to a jointless underwater dance
by Pierrots and Columbines
who seem at one moment
to grasp each other fully
yet at the next step
be parted by some great
inner tempest
that eludes the eye.

III: A Journey In

One needs leisure; one needs imagination. And something more: vulnerability. Vulnerability to time interleaved; to experiences not accessible to our prompt classifications, and to the impenetrable phenomenon of place, which no one, to my knowledge, has ever explained.

Shirley Hazzard, *The Ancient Shore*

The Foal

There is a membrane
in front of my Italianness
I push at it sometimes
to see if it might yield
but I remain
the foal in the glistening bag

I speak in baby-talk
tell my family
I am cold, hungry, tired
after all the most basic needs
run behind heredity
it is blood and bone and sperm
we share
and I crawl tongue-tied
over the spaghetti freeways
beneath Vesuvius
to stand up here in the fog

Cumae

Could you find her, even if you wanted to,
and with what technology?

What would lead you there:

the way that certain coordinates of the night sky
have appeared on your chest since,
since when? – the details don't matter.

But if you made safe passage,
your fingers scrabbled along the golden tufa,
your blind hands reading the way back,
nervously, before you ever arrived.

What then?

What would you ask her?

The riddle of this place?

The riddle of you in this place?

Draw the lines, move the tent pole
along that old axis

until you are a point in the universe,
a pin-pricked mole on the skin,
a mouth, an opening, an orifice
asking

asking finally

what all children thirst to know.

Dislocation

My reclaimed family
tell me my face belongs here.
But in Naples, I'm lost
without the words
for old things
when you fall hard on marble
from a high bed.

The house is shuttered
for siesta and your pain.
That night I strap you close,
sleep with an extra limb.
You wake lopsided
and rock awkwardly
down the street of the bronze horses
to the corner with its baby turtles,
their tiny flippers all intact.
At Bar Sportivo
the dentist holds a pencil
you cannot lift your hand to grasp.

I cry at Santa Bono Hospital
because everything breaks out
in your own small frame.
At two, you are stronger
in your grandfather's town
than me. You take this place,

the strangeness of a whole
new family into your bones.

On the flight home
I hold you near
and think of the grace
of love without words;
and of the saint whose blood,
liquefying in a vial each year,
protects the city
buried in its lights below.

You sleep so calmly
with your tethered wing.
How you chose to mend
might say a lot.

The Charm

He buys her a charm, his lost sister –
that one, it's the one she wants, a heart
in pieces. She must wear it always, *sempre*, he insists.

He has missed her not growing up where she belongs
above the bay and all its buried years.
He can't yet quite make out her songs,

the warm strange words she speaks
to him in her mother-tongue – it's a father
they share. His likeness sleeps

in the darkness of their eyes, their gestures.
Until now she has been a part missing
in a puzzle. He has only half guessed her

intent: that each small stone of the heart
on fire in the paleness of her palm might
name the days they have lived apart.

At the blasted summit something grows,
and all of Naples, improbable as hearts
that can keep time, beats below

Green Pool at San Giorgio a Cremano

The park holds strange hours.
Spotless men come and go
tending the muddy skirts
of this suburban Flora
but she remains closed.
Beyond her gates
the ghosts of orchards
resist creeping tenements.
Their hidden symmetries
keep growing the past
into our present.
Every night we sit above
this tangled living theatre,
Vesuvio sleeping to our left,
the faded villas and the sweep of the bay.
My sisters, who are strangers,
smoke and smile their sad, carved smiles.
They sit like two archaic sirens,
their arms held out, curved in a beckoning.
Below us, the green pool
is a still unblinking eye
made for children, made for fish,
made for the three of us
to count the slippery back of each year
missed, and fill these constellations
with a soundless wish.

The Ties My Sister Makes

The silk ties my sister makes
lie sheathed in plastic sheets
in their pigeon holes
in the factory
beneath the volcano.

They hold all the colours of the sea
and are scaled like fishes too
so that when I first see them
laid out in their obedient ranks

I want to exclaim like Willmouise to Shelley
at the Roman fish-market
che belle cose!

My sister's ties
will be dispatched about the world,
their underwater silvers and greens
flashing in the dark aquariums of costly shop windows.

I think of all the necks they will encircle:
the men who will make their deft adjustments
and the women who will stroke them and roll them away
with socks or hang them inside wardrobe doors,
unaware of my sister's labour;
her name
inside the label
beating out its silent syllables
next to their husband's hearts.

And I think, too, of my sister's voice
in the sunlit factory
beneath the volcano
saying *Please, please*
take for your friends.

The Sisters

After the surgery
no one has articulated their concern
so tenderly but you
your voice through the house, hesitant,
hon-ney, ah hon-ney
and that quick gesture
to your breast:
Is OK?

Our sister, a survivor,
daily reminder
that this can be got through
the good girl
such the good one
who wears the world
crookedly
in her face.

Her fingers deviate
from a circle – *non è simmetrica* –
Vump! – our father's hand.
She is showing me
a history I don't know.
A Latin lover
you both nod
resignedly

Yet if that's a taste
of love Latin style
I do not want it

but only to sit here
with you both
even though words
thwart us
I hear you saying

wait
resta con noi
not now – don't go

The Bracelet

It rests on my wrist
broken
all jumbled up
the heroine
with a gloved hand
pulls down a screen
a scrim
the membrane
ancient actors
stood behind
perhaps a veil
between one world
and the next
In any case
there are these links
on a bracelet
bad old photos
Blues too blue
and cacky browns
You would need
a magnifying glass
or perhaps a boat
and they sailed away for a year and a day
to decode this ground
you would need
a Grand Tour
and unlimited funds

I try to recover
the market
my mother bought this from
How did it entice her?
Why this one?
ah Neapolitan markets
glorious confusion in the storehouses
I swear I swear
believe me
when I tell you
that at the market
by the sea
I saw
Breton's head
in an open drawer

I know one true thing
about these links
This is a journey
in and down
through burning fields
to oracles
I walk my fingers
around each scene
linger on the place
my mother's pulse
would have beat

At Villa Bruno

At Villa Bruno

the presiding nymph
has black texta circles
around all her bits.

She watches us
with her nipples, her navel,
as we trail on opposite sides
of the long garden bed,
swapping names:

my bay for your *lauro*,
your *arancia* for my orange,
until our paths meet.

We fall into the spaciousness
of another century.

We might have trailing skirts, masks.

I take the crushed leaves, the proffered fruit,
and feel the blind nymph's
cool bemusement
as we step outside all drawn rings.

Nothing before
has tasted so close
to its wild estate.

Crying in Public

Tears

Near *Santa Chiara*

I saw a girl

crying in the street.

Something from her phone

had upset her

and in another tongue

I could just make out

her blurred indignation.

I could not find quick words

or arrange my holiday face

to say the world is kind.

She flailed, a cast

come suddenly to life.

Her tears cut a molten track

through the crowd;

her distress so marked

from victims safe in the past

and unlike the decorous ways

in which people here

pull out of the stream,

their suffering a bubble

clamped surely around them.

In Things

Days later in the newspaper, a bundle
of Tracy Emin's favourite things
like goods one might hawk
to the afterlife.

This world's orphan
with her cat's bed and blanket stitch,
a grandmother's hold-all for mending,
nail polish of the most violent blue.

If I gathered the same,
what would I choose?

No tricks,
simply possessions redeemed
by a life lived through them.

Leave off, be tender
they might say—
this is the shorthand for me
in things.

Hail

Outside the laundromat
I stood in hail
just to be undone,
to be taken back
to a boy's bareness;
the world beating
its outrage
hammer and tongs
on my skin.
I cradled the week

in dry clothes
inside my jacket
and ran, flapping,
pregnant with just lived days,
ran right out into
the world embracing
the fulsome barometer drop,
coherently broken.

I wanted to find
that girl in Naples,
show her the one thing
that might hold it all—
this shattering.

Thresholds

At Paestum

The sylphide diver
on the board
hovers between
this life and the next

We approached here
by field
true pilgrims
our route, indirect

I have a smoking photo
of you – Vesuvian-
leaning insouciantly
by the temples

300 years back
and you could have been
in stovepipes, a top-hat
clutching your *cartolina*

Somewhere in us deep
a voice tolls *dive dive*
but we are not ready yet
to enter the past so fully

We catch the next train back
to Rosa's kitchen
meet with gentle admonishments
for going so far back

At Caserta

Do you know
when you go down
there is sometimes a talking door
(I remember it happened
at my father's death
I was at a certain juncture
and the door said
don't take that path)

At Caserta
we played with
the long view
barbaric to resist
this particular door's legend:
you know now that I've found you
how can I bear to let you go?
surely this question
waits patiently in all views

Somehow we were here already
in the split second
before Actaeon's dogs
turned on him and
in the ghost trail
of Emma's white arms

entrancing the crowd
with her attitudes

That's what we have
just shapes of the past
we can inhabit briefly

Outside the grand house
I went into a recess
and nursed my child asleep
People passing took me for a gypsy
and left me *spicc'* and sweets

You knelt with me
at the grotto
your hands brushed the crazy paving
and you said
here especially
they have tried to make it
look like the past

A Ruin

I told you
I loved a ruin –
uneven ground – but now
I am not so sure.

What was it
that I raked over
as I strayed in the artful salvage
of your stanzas?

A sepia smile,
the pattern on a woman's dress?
A way of holding oneself
that is no longer possible.

Somewhere there is warmth –
Locate it!—the scant fires
our hands make
brushing up the pieces.

Holes

it is possible that one day
you were walking around
thinking that the earth
beneath you was solid
and then the next day
you discovered that it
was pocked with
lacunae, worse, true holes
you tap the surface for echoes
the tools they gave you are adequate
(thank you) and when you find
the right shaped hollow
it is also possible for you
to pour a new liquid self in there
but be careful
not to let it set
and tread lightly
you could be treading
on other holes

A Question

I want to go back to Naples
to get away from words,
to walk the streets
just to be engulfed
by it being there;
and hold the hands
of old people
who knew my father
who will be clucking
that I have his teeth, his chin

I want to ask them
what it was like
when *Sterminator Vesuvio*
lit up the black out in '43
or where were they,
where was he,
when the poor
all rowed out
to the islands
looking for shelter and food?

Passport

Green suede shoes
with the faux ivy
that I bought
where the old world
lunges up to meet the new.
The man in the shop
strokes my son's hair,
bello no?
It's an absent-minded gesture,
unthinkable where I am from
and I am at ease here too
so filled with joy
in my father's city
knowing nothing, everything,
the taxi drivers telling me
it is *destino*.
Let these green ironic shoes
be my passport –
Yes, I say, *yes*
he is beautiful.

On the *Circumvesuviana*

Did you, too, own the city
on hot nights?
If I could follow your little body
back through the streets...
I stand lamely outside
the dereliction of your boyhood home,
testing my scant record
of sure things I know:
you arrived in Australia
with a notebook
bearing the legend *temi*
but you never filled it,
you kept crickets for pets
and your mother sent you to school
with bread, saying
fai questo bello "C".
Oh my father
this letter we indelibly share
your voice spectral on the phone
hon-ney I gotta the cance
and even more ghostly
I glimpse where I'm from
or what I could have been
the pinch faced girl
with the accordion
begging on the *Circumvesuviana*
who we shoo away blithely
touristically
to keep at bay
this damned theatricality
of selves – this constant circus
of being wedded

to a place, a story,
as worn out and
full of grace as this.

The Vesuvian Imaginary:
The Woman's Journey to Naples in Three Texts

Introduction

Naples Outside-In

In Naples you remembered being happy and never why.

(Peter Robb)¹

Time is long here, but a town with a volcano is no place to forget mortality.

(Shirley Hazzard)²

Landscape is not only a matter of exteriority: the impact of landscape extends inwards, into one's own interior landscape...exterior and interior are representationally connected.

(Giuliana Bruno)³

The paradoxical position that Naples holds in the cultural imaginary as “a source of peril and discovery” cannot be divorced from its dramatic geography and political construction as a non-Western European city.⁴ Naples is a city marked historically by extremes. Its proximity to an active volcano, its centuries of unstable governance, and the contrast between its ancient centre and modern business district, all contribute to this quality.⁵ In the critical and imaginative literature about the city the words catastrophe and crisis recur constantly, but these negative and ambivalent terms are balanced by observations of joy and attachment to life.⁶ There is, in other words, a strong reciprocal

¹ Peter Robb, *Midnight in Sicily: On Art, Food, History, Travel & La Cosa Nostra* (Boston: Faber & Faber, 1998) 175.

² Shirley Hazzard and Francis Steegmuller, *The Ancient Shore: Dispatches from Naples* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008) 55.

³ Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002) 376-77.

⁴ Naples is described as a “a source of peril and discovery” in Áine O’Healy, “Revisiting the Belly of Naples: The Body and the City in the Films of Mario Martone,” *Screen* 40.3 (1999): 256. For a discussion on the construction of Naples as a non-Western European city see Tommaso Astarita, *Between Salt Water and Holy Water: A History of Southern Italy* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2005) 242.

⁵ For a reading of the enigmatic and paradoxical character of Naples see Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) 104-07.

⁶ O’Healy argues that Naples is both idealized and vilified in the imaginary. She notes Alfred Sohn-Rethel’s and Gustaw Herling’s conceptions of the city as a site of catastrophe. See O’Healy, “Revisiting the Belly of Naples: The Body and the City in the Films of Mario Martone,” 240-41. See also Chambers,

relationship between imminent catastrophe, in the material form of Vesuvius, and a sharpened attachment to life which emerges as a key theme in imaginative texts. As Shirley Hazzard's narrator in *The Bay of Noon* notes: "It was this sense of catastrophe, impending and actual, that heightened the Neapolitan attachment to life and made an alleviation out of every small diversion or absurdity."⁷ The Italian-American cultural theorist Giuliana Bruno has argued that it is possible to trace a Vesuvian narrative from Katherine Joyce, the central character in Roberto Rossellini's influential film *Journey to Italy*, all the way to Susan Sontag's recreation of Emma Hamilton's life in the novel *The Volcano Lover*.⁸ But what would the defining characteristics of such a narrative be? Do texts linked to a region of such distinctive geography share certain common traits? Is the pairing of peril and discovery repeated in different texts? How can it be that the city of catastrophe is also so often figured as the site of self-reconstruction in imaginative texts?

The work that follows sets out to answer these questions by analyzing three texts set in Naples: Rossellini's *Journey to Italy*, Hazzard's *The Bay of Noon* and Mario Martone's film *L'amore molesto*. In each of these texts the presence of Naples as a setting is so significant that all of the creators involved have acknowledged that it is almost as central as a main character.⁹ In these three imaginative responses to the city, the experience of being in Naples is focalized through a female character in crisis. Two of

Migrancy 106-07. On joyous responses to Naples see Shirley Hazzard, *The Bay of Noon* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) 64-5. See also David Malouf, "The South," *Heat*.1 (2001).

⁷ Hazzard, *The Bay of Noon* 65. Further references to the novel are incorporated into the text

⁸ Bruno, *Atlas* 396.

⁹ On the centrality of Naples for Rossellini see Ingrid Bergman's statement that '[h]e was only looking for a story into which he could put Pompeii and the museums and Naples and all that Naples stands for' quoted in Peter Brunette, "Visual Motifs in Rossellini's *Voyage to Italy*," *Closer Viewings: An Anthology of New Film Criticism*, ed. Peter Lehman (Florida: University Presses of Florida, 1990) 43. In an interview with Paul Kavanagh, Hazzard has indicated that she only used first-person narration in *The Bay of Noon* so that the narrative would not sound like a travelogue: 'it was the only means I found to use the city of Naples – which is the real heroine of the story'. See Paul Kavanagh, "Shirley Hazzard, Astronomer of Souls," *Southerly* 45.2 (1985): 217. Martone has stated that his characters 'offer access to "the sense, feel, atmosphere of Naples"' and is quoted in Lesley Caldwell, "Imagining Naples: The Senses of the City," *A Companion to the City*, eds. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) 63.

these heroines – Katherine in *Journey to Italy* and Jenny in *Bay of Noon* – are northern outsiders who bring with them the freight of the traditional division between a cool, intellectual north and a warm, sensuous south.¹⁰ Only Martone’s heroine, Delia, is Neapolitan but she is also in some ways an outsider-insider in that she represents the troubled relationship that an expatriated local can have to their city of birth.¹¹ It will be seen that there are strong grounds for considering Rossellini’s *Journey to Italy* as the *Ur*-text for the journey of self-discovery precipitated in a woman by a stay in Naples. Hazzard’s novel, I will argue, obliquely divulges its strong intertextual connection to Rossellini’s film in several ways, whilst Martone has openly stated the ties that exist between his own film and *Journey to Italy*.

In her work on the construction of identity in Neapolitan cinema, Pauline Small considers the ways in which the use of heroine and setting in both *Journey to Italy* and *L’amore molesto* intersect. This emphasis on the centrality of female identity in Neapolitan culture belongs, she argues, to a tradition already well established and traceable in a range of imaginative texts, including novels, plays, and films.¹² Small identifies three shared elements that interlink the use of heroine and setting in the film texts by Rossellini and Martone. These are:

¹⁰ For a discussion of the ways in which the South of Italy became defined against the North of its own country and a general idea of Northern Europe see Nelson Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) 1-9.

¹¹ Delia’s profound ambivalence about her home town reflects perhaps the younger generation of Neapolitan artists’ and intellectuals’ unease. See O’Healy, “Revisiting the Belly of Naples: The Body and the City in the Films of Mario Martone,” 240.

¹² Examples noted by Small that have helped to shape the centrality of representations of female identity in Neapolitan culture include Eduardo De Filippo’s play *Filumena Marturano* and Elene Ferrante’s novel *L’amore molesto*, the novel Martone adapted for his film. See Pauline Small, “Constructing Identity in Neapolitan Cinema,” *Journal of the Institute of Romance Studies* 8 (2000): 198. But this is a very rich tradition and many more examples across the arts could be given, particularly the short stories and personal essays of Fabrizia Ramondino; the films of early Neapolitan director Elvira Notari; and the journalism of Matilde Serao. For individual essays on the work of Ramondino and Serao see Maria Ornella Marotti, ed., *Italian Women Writers from the Renaissance to the Present* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996). For a detailed study on the films of Notari see Giuliana Bruno, *Street-Walking on a Ruined Map: Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[a] central female protagonist, and an exploration of setting (of Naples) through the perceptions of that central character; a dynamic inter-relationship between the female character and the setting in which setting and character are linked through either shared, or explicitly contrasted qualities; the use of the female body to articulate the setting: that is, the strategy of using the female body to give form to cultural perceptions of the city of Naples.¹³

There is demonstrable critical literature in English about such Vesuvian narratives, to borrow Bruno's term, which is focused almost solely on film.¹⁴ However, the shared elements that Small identifies are also extremely apposite for a reading of Hazzard's *Bay of Noon* and they could equally be applied to that novel.¹⁵ Furthermore, the most compelling feature that these texts share – the driving point of their narratives, I would argue – rests in the ways in which each heroine's confrontation with the overwhelming presence of the past in Naples initiates self-transformation. In varied readings of Vesuvian narratives, Giovanna Capone, Lesley Caldwell and Sandro Bernardi have all noted the mythic dimensions entailed in these journeys through Naples.¹⁶ The buried, the ruinous, the underground, the volcanic, the labyrinthine – all these dark, eccentric Neapolitan spaces negotiated by Katherine, Jenny, and Delia – are open to highly symbolic interpretations. In a journey through a landscape in which Avernus (the ancients' Hell) is now also a bus terminus, it is clear to see why the journey south also has such potential as a site of self-excavation.¹⁷ All of these narratives describe a

¹³ Small, "Constructing Identity in Neapolitan Cinema." 197-98.

¹⁴ See work by Bruno, *Atlas*, Laura Mulvey, "Vesuvian Topographies: The Eruption of the Past in *Journey to Italy*," *Roberto Rossellini: Magician of the Real*, ed. David Forgacs, Sarah Lutton, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: British Film Institute, 2000), Caldwell, "Imagining Naples: The Senses of the City." Small, "Constructing Identity in Neapolitan Cinema."

¹⁵ Hazzard's *Bay* was given considerable critical attention in the 1970s and 80s. Her sensitive and detailed recreation of Naples in *Bay* preempts many of the central observations in the later critical literature but it is never mentioned. It is possible that this neglect relates to both the form of the work as a novella and also to Hazzard's expatriate Australian writer status. I would argue that the significance and value of *Bay* has been overlooked, particularly as it so strongly relates to other Vesuvian narratives.

¹⁶ See Giovanna Capone, "Shirley Hazzard: Transit and *the Bay of Noon*," *Australian Literary Studies* 13.2 (1987); Caldwell, "Imagining Naples: The Senses of the City" and Sandro Bernardi, "Rossellini's Landscapes: Nature, Myth, History," *Roberto Rossellini: Magician of the Real*, ed. David Forgacs, Sarah Lutton, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: British Film Institute, 2000).

¹⁷ In wonderment at the persistence of the mythic in a contemporary landscape, Malouf notes 'the entrance to the underworld out by the lake of Avernus (a place you could take a bus to)'. Malouf, "The South," 121.

sentimental education: they belong to that tradition of the *Bildungsroman* in which the risk of personal danger in a foreign city enlivens the protagonist's senses. But in order more fully to understand and appreciate the cluster of elements which these narratives share, it is necessary to consider the ways in which this version of Naples as a site of self-transformation has been, in part, constructed over time by outsider views. From its Grand Tour associations to Walter Benjamin's "thought images" of the city, Naples has delighted and confounded outsider commentators.¹⁸ Their reactions have, in turn, provided artists with a means of approaching a place so layered, so overwhelmed by its histories, myths, and folklore.

What broader cultural, historical and political contexts helped to shape the imagined Naples that Rossellini, Hazzard and Martone all draw on and focalize through the movements of their heroines? When Bruno begins to consider Katherine Joyce's journey south she states that as "a female traveler to Italy, Katherine steps into a complex social history of travel."¹⁹ This is complex territory indeed, for when the heroines of each text under consideration embark on their journeys to Naples, they are stepping into a web of cultural and historical interrelations that involve the centuries-long practice of the Grand Tour, the established motif of the woman traveller transformed by Italy, and the political construction of Naples as part of the Italian South. In addition, *Journey to Italy*, *Bay of Noon*, and *L'amore molesto* are all texts with strong connections to the post-World-War-II period, which adds an important dimension to the genre of the northern heroine's encounter with the Mediterranean south. The narrative of *L'amore molesto* shuttles via flashbacks between contemporary Naples and Delia's childhood in the 1950s. *Bay of Noon* was written in the 1970s but set in the 1950s, and its action is contemporaneous with that in *Journey to Italy*, which was

¹⁸ Gilloch uses the term 'thought-images' to describe Benjamin's method of representing 'social forms and patterns' through 'particular incidents' and 'specific images'. See Graeme Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996) 30.

¹⁹ Bruno, *Atlas* 373.

set in or around the year it was made (1953). This shared time setting is not, I would argue, coincidental. In *Journey to Italy* and *Bay of Noon* the heroine's narrative of self-reconstruction must be understood within the context of this larger cultural project of postwar reconstruction, whilst in Martone's film, Italy's fascist legacy is recalled through reference to contemporary politics, and the spectre of the postwar years is evoked through the general dilapidation of the city.

Lastly, the novel and the two films at once draw upon, contribute to, and critique the long history of the picturesque representation of Naples, and all are involved in the problems of renegotiating and refreshing the perilous cliché of the Vesuvian panorama.²⁰ The tradition of taking the view of Naples – the celebrated vista of the city, the bay and the islands, the volcano, and the headland – could be said to bring outsider and insider subjectivities into an overlapping relationship. Small notes that the seventeenth-century home grown industry of *vedutismo* or view painting “aimed at conveying cultural as well as visual qualities of the city through the use of panoramas, scenes of city street life, and views of family life in the interiors of the *bassi*.”²¹ The visual vocabulary of this genre belongs to the broader conventions of the picturesque, an outsider way of looking that helped to establish the stereotype of Naples as quaint, backward, and closer to nature than cities in the Italian north.²²

Katherine's and Jenny's tours draw directly on the tradition of the Grand Tour.²³

Katherine's itinerary, in particular, importantly reframes this predominantly privileged

²⁰ On Naples and the problem of over-representation see O'Healy, “Revisiting the Belly of Naples: The Body and the City in the Films of Mario Martone,” 241. O'Healy notes Naples's ‘long literary and pictorial tradition’ and its ‘daunting legacy of accumulated cinematic images’. See also David B. Clarke, ed., *The Cinematic City* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) 47-48.

²¹ Small, “Constructing Identity in Neapolitan Cinema,” 196.

²² Moe has investigated the ways in which dissemination of picturesque images of the south via popular magazines such as *Illustrazione italiana* helped to construct the region as quaint and backward, especially to middle and upper-class readers in the north. See Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* 4.

²³ For a reading that focuses explicitly on Rossellini's reworking of the Grand Tour see Bruno, *Atlas* 369-99. See also Mulvey, “Vesuvian Topographies: The Eruption of the Past in *Journey to Italy*,” 95-107.

male seventeenth- and eighteenth-century practice through the experience of the lone woman tourist. The robustly embodied liveliness – and disconcerting erotic languor – of the South is contrasted to her suffocated, deadening existence, and this Grand Tour traces the re-education of her emotional life. As Small notes, the docile female protagonist is often used to heighten the contrast between character and setting in Italian journey texts, and this is certainly the case with Bergman’s portrayal of Katherine, which captures in Bergman’s striking facial features the confrontation between northern and southern sensibilities.²⁴ Although this confrontation has a profound impact on her inner life, the film’s representation of the Otherness of the Neapolitan populace is never breached. In Jenny’s interactions with the Neapolitan setting in *Bay of Noon*, too, the ghost of the Grand Tour abides in her trips to both Herculaneum and the sea ruins near Capri, and also in her practice of trawling markets for “the meaner fragments of the eighteenth century” (50). But from the beginning of her explorations she is less confronted by cultural difference and more open to the sensuousness of her Southern journey. Her sense of Naples is also negotiated much more firmly by the central Italian characters of *Bay of Noon*. These local intermediaries are largely absent from *Journey to Italy*. Martone’s modern dystopian city sits a very long distance from the idyll of the South in privileged travel narratives to which *Journey to Italy* and *Bay of Noon* both belong. However, as Bruno notes, *L’amore molesto* and *Journey to Italy* touch “the same topic – a woman’s collision with the city and the ancient popular culture of Naples.”²⁵ The figuration of this ancient popular culture as arcane stretches back to the infernal nature of the stops on the Grand Tour. Here, tourists encountered a mythic

²⁴ Small, “Constructing Identity in Neapolitan Cinema,” 198. For a consideration of Bergman as Northern outsider in the Bergman-Rossellini collaboration see Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, “North and South, East and West: Rossellini’s Politics,” *Roberto Rossellini: Magician of the Real*, ed. David Forgacs, Sarah Lutton, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: BFI Publishing, 2000) 12-13.

²⁵ Bruno, *Atlas* 402. O’Healy also notes that both films ‘are for the most part focalized through the perspective of a woman who arrives in Naples from elsewhere at a crucial point in her life, and whose encounter with the city triggers an existential crisis. See O’Healy, “Revisiting the Belly of Naples: The Body and the City in the Films of Mario Martone,” 248.

landscape punctuated by spaces that held a very deep sense of time: the buried cities, Cumae, the Phlegrean fields, and Vesuvius itself.²⁶ These mysterious spaces are echoed in the contemporary undergrounds (elevator shafts, underground railways, ancient baths and the *bassi*) that Delia must negotiate in order to rediscover her mother and her mother city.

From very early on, this intersection of geography and myth laid down a template for seeing and touring Naples and its surrounds.²⁷ In their re-gendering of the Grand Tour as a form of affective education, the outsider characters of *Journey to Italy* and *Bay of Noon* enter the tradition of the female traveller transformed by Italy. Whilst the Grand Tour was predominantly practiced by privileged Northern males, from the 1830s onwards travel to Italy was opening up to women.²⁸ The longing that the many real and fictional predecessors of Katherine and Jenny felt for Italy is well documented, as is their passionate reactions to the landscape, museums and architecture.²⁹ Their reactions to the Vesuvian landscape focus particularly, as Foster notes, on a “new sense of bodily vigour” that came, in part, from proximity to those ingredients of the sublime: terror and delight.³⁰ Anna Jameson’s famous accounts of her Vesuvian wanderings testify to these feelings:

I have just seen a most magnificent sight; one which I have often dreamed of, often longed to behold, and having beheld, shall never forget. Mount Vesuvius is at the moment blazing like a huge furnace; throwing up every minute...columns of fire and red-hot stones ... I can hardly write, my mind is so overflowing with astonishment, admiration and sublime pleasure.³¹

²⁶ For a reading of the ways in which the mythic and infernal echoes of stops on the Grand Tour in the Campania helped to link the region to the weird and the arcane in the cultural imaginary see Astarita, *Between Salt Water and Holy Water: A History of Southern Italy* 220-29.

²⁷ It could even be argued, as Bruno does, that this template, with its sketch-pads, diaries, guide-books and maps, could be seen as the forerunner to film itself in the region. See Bruno, *Atlas* 370.

²⁸ Bruno, *Atlas* 373.

²⁹ See Shirley Foster, “Italy: The Land of Dreams,” *Across New Worlds: Nineteenth-Century Women Travellers and Their Writings* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990) 27-68.

³⁰ Foster, “Italy: The Land of Dreams,” 46.

³¹ Anna Jameson, *The Diary of an Ennuyée* (Boston: Tickner & Fields, 1886) 212-13.

In *Desiring Italy*, Susan Cahill considers what it is precisely that has attracted women travellers to Italy for centuries and precipitated this new sense of vigour. To the categories of art and love she adds a sense of “wholeness”: the lack of a schism between the body and the spirit, the sacred and the secular, that is so dominant and alienating in the “Protestant ethos of northern cultures and climates.”³² From Amy Dorrit in Dickens’s *Little Dorrit* (1855-7), Dorothea Brooke in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (1871-2), Isabel Archer in Henry James’s *A Portrait of a Lady* (1880-81), and Lucy Honeychurch in E.M. Forster’s *A Room with a View* (1908), to the representations of demure or inhibited heroines liberated by Italy in more recent popular films such as *Enchanted April* (1992) and *Under the Tuscan Sun* (2003), the narrative of female transformation persists. As Maria H. Frawley notes, these fictional experiences were often mirrored by many Victorian women travellers, “who felt a strong sense of having encountered a place, a history, and a people very unfamiliar, who were changed by the experience.”³³

Italy offers a space for growth and liberation in these texts, therefore, but it is the growth and liberation of outsiders. Katherine’s and Jenny’s privileges are denied to Delia, whose journey back to Naples ensnares her in the devastating gender politics from which she has sought to distance herself, making a new home in safely distant Bologna. Martone’s insider narrative takes a necessarily more complex approach to the question of whether Delia’s Italianness precludes her from the conventional transformation narrative. Even though her time in Naples is figured as a descent into her childhood, her mother’s past, and the underground spaces, the *bassi*, associated with her hidden trauma, it holds none of the assured mythic or folkloric distance that is available to the outsider views of Rossellini and Hazzard. The ghost of the Grand Tour’s mythic

³² Susan Cahill, ed., *Desiring Italy* (New York: Fawcett Colombine, 1997) xi.

³³ Maria H. Frawley, “Into the Temple of Taste,” *Travel Writing by Women in Victorian England* (London Toronto: 1994) 46.

associations flows through a very different figuration here in the images painted by Delia's jealous unstable father. These are paintings of voluptuous gypsies and African slaves that obliquely encode the exoticization of Naples inside a much broader colonialist narrative.³⁴ Interestingly, Verdicchio argues that the construction of Naples as Other shares common ground with colonial ways of looking. For him, the work of a younger generation of home-grown Neapolitan film-makers critiques the transformation narratives of *Journey to Italy* and *Bay of Noon*. In discussing the construction of southern cities, and particularly Naples, in Italian cinema, he argues that

[t]heir function has been limited to acting as instruments for any number of programs or agendas, whether political, national, or personal, that do/did not directly include the interests of either the region or its inhabitants.³⁵

But as Áine O'Healy notes, even Martone's work, despite claims that he wishes to avoid what Bruno has called the dangers of "the folkloric and picturesque," displays at times a nostalgia and openness to the construction of Naples as exotic Other.³⁶

This "folkloric" lens was created, in part, by the picturesque tradition of viewing the panorama of the Bay that stretches back to the seventeenth-century tradition of view-painting and on into the clichéd imagery of *napoletanità*, "the popular, internationally disseminated construction of Naples"³⁷ represented in sentimental films such as Vittorio De Sica's *Gold of Naples* (1954), in which the region becomes associated with abundance, bright sunshine, and a poor but happy-go-lucky population. This popularizing of the aesthetic of the picturesque is connected, Small argues, with a certain kind of female figure whose beauty and fecundity are extensions of Naples

³⁴ O'Healy argues that the kitsch images that Delia's father paints fit into a broader dialogue about 'knowledge, power and privilege' in Martone's film. See O'Healy, "Revisiting the Belly of Naples: The Body and the City in the Films of Mario Martone," 255.

³⁵ Pasquale Verdicchio, "'O Cuorp' 'E Napule: Naples and the Cinematographic Body of Culture," *Italian Neorealism and Global Cinema*, ed. Laura E. and Kristi M. Wilson Ruberto (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007) 269.

³⁶ O'Healy, "Revisiting the Belly of Naples: The Body and the City in the Films of Mario Martone," 242. O'Healy argues that Martone's work is 'not immune to some of the myths generated by those who have viewed Naples from the outside'. Bruno examines the construction of Naples as 'folkloric and picturesque' in Clarke, ed., *The Cinematic City* 47-48.

³⁷ O'Healy, "Revisiting the Belly of Naples: The Body and the City in the Films of Mario Martone," 240.

itself.³⁸ Here, we encounter the very long tradition of Naples as eternal feminine, and more especially as a figure for maternity. As the anthropologist Marino Niola notes, “there still exists today a series of stereotypes in the Italian imagination: Naples as a female city, a belly city, a city of the heart; in short a mother city.”³⁹ This is not only an outsider construction, of course, but one fundamental to the Italian national imagination: in the immediate post-Unification period the civilized, industrialized North annexed the South as its own proximate Other, assimilating the extreme physical beauty and antiquity of the region to a disorganized, economically backward social nightmare.⁴⁰ What is interesting about the representation of Naples in *Journey to Italy*, *Bay of Noon* and *L'amore molesto* is that these texts turn away from the overdetermined picturesqueness of the panorama of the Bay to explore ancient alleys, catacombs and ruins. Katherine, Jenny and Delia's existential crises are a long way away from the light-hearted clichés of *napoletanità* and the almost absence of children in these texts also starkly contrasts these heroines to the stereotype of Neapolitan abundance. In turning inwards to investigate ruined spaces, I want to argue that these texts investigate radical sites of anti-spectacle and that the self-reckonings of the three heroines are aided by access to the hidden and the buried.

The model of access to knowledge through a breaching of boundaries between the present and the past, and the living and the dead, can be approached via Walter Benjamin and Asja Lacis's notion of porosity. How could Naples, “built on the roof of the underworld,” not prompt a spatial interpretation?⁴¹ The most influential reading of Naples as a social and geographical space was produced by Benjamin in collaboration with the Bolshevik actress and director Lacis. Benjamin had spent time in the city in

³⁸See Small, “Constructing Identity in Neapolitan Cinema,” 202. Small uses the example of Sophia Loren's association with codes of seeing Naples in this way.

³⁹Niola is quoted in Small, “Constructing Identity in Neapolitan Cinema,” 197.

⁴⁰Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* 1-9.

⁴¹ See George L. Hersey, *Architecture, Poetry, and Number in the Royal Palace at Caserta* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983) 15.

1924 when he was completing his study of Baroque drama whilst living on the island of Capri.⁴² The essay “Naples” poetically describes, through the word and concept of porosity, the unique ways in which a people and a place intersect. With his larger enterprise of privileging spatial experience over the temporal, it is not hard to see the attraction the baroque city held for the German philosopher.⁴³ Benjamin first constructs Naples, as Hazzard will do later in *Bay of Noon*, as an illegible city, a city that hides its assets from even learned visitors.

But the banal tourist fares no better. Even Baedeker cannot propitiate him. Here the churches cannot be found, the starred sculpture always stands in the locked wing of the museum.⁴⁴

Nothing is navigable in the ordinary sense. There are no house numbers but, Benjamin explains, “shops, wells and churches are the reference points.”⁴⁵ This image of the labyrinth lays down the blue-print for the Benjaminian model of dream-like city wanderings that will be expounded in his later work on Paris and Berlin.⁴⁶ Benjamin’s central notion is that northern cities, with their discrete, straightforwardly legible insides and outsides, are orderly and respectful of the privacy of their citizens. But space is porous in Naples. This is a city constructed out of permeable stone, and Benjamin notes the interchangeability of indoor and outdoor living spaces, and the means by which various ephemeral items and actions travel about the city. He is also fascinated by the ways in which the beginnings and ends of secular and sacred buildings are blurred together. Ultimately, Benjamin’s conception of porosity is about access to that which is usually hidden, as Gilloch argues:

⁴² Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis* 21-22.

⁴³ Gilloch argues that Benjamin formulates in his essay on Naples the three spatial images that came to dominate his work on cities: the labyrinth, the ruin, and the theatre. See Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis* 34. It is interesting that these three images all come together in Hazzard’s use of Herculaneum as the setting of Chapter 4 of *The Bay of Noon*.

⁴⁴ Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street* (London and New York: Verso, 1979) 168.

⁴⁵ Benjamin, *One-Way Street* 170.

⁴⁶ Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis* 22-23.

Ruination and the reversal of interior/exterior space combine to fracture the superficial appearance of things, thereby permitting illumination of what is hidden. Porosity fundamentally involves the discovery of what lies concealed.⁴⁷

It has been suggested that Benjamin's reading of Naples as a porous space has been used in an unquestioning way in the critical literature, and has been uncritically accepted even into insider conceptions of the city.⁴⁸ The lack of social or political critique in Benjamin's response to Naples rests in part with the nature of the piece itself which is impressionistic and more focused on finding a verbal equivalence for explaining the character of the city and the experience of being there.⁴⁹ As O'Healy suggests in her reading of *L'amore molesto*, "the familiar 'porous' space of Naples provides a particularly interesting theatre" for the exploration of intersections of "spatiality with the performance of gendered identities" precisely because its fluid boundaries are "at once a source of peril and discovery."⁵⁰

Perhaps when Benjamin encountered the deeply unique ways in which space and social organization functioned in Naples it conjured for him the etymologically adjacent *aporia*, with its suggestive connotations of impasse and puzzlement. I would like to argue that Benjamin's notion of porosity offers a means of approaching a poetics of indeterminacy, of impasse and puzzlement, where stable boundaries are breached. This is certainly figured in the physical intersection of heroines and setting in the three texts to be discussed in the chapters that follow. It is there in the many instances in which body and place intersect almost to a point of crisis and it is inextricably connected to an earthiness, an excavation, a Vesuvian eruption: it is there in Katherine poised above the

⁴⁷ Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis* 28.

⁴⁸ Verdicchio, "'O Cuorp' 'E Napule: Naples and the Cinematographic Body of Culture," 260-61.

Verdicchio's concern is that the notion of porosity has been 'accepted uncritically'. He argues that a positive cultural formation can be extracted from the philosopher's idea and this relates to improvisation and the salvaging of cultural spaces in an otherwise 'malfunctioning nation'. He applies this idea to the work of the new generation of Neapolitan film-makers that includes Martone.

⁴⁹ Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis* 35.

⁵⁰ O'Healy, "Revisiting the Belly of Naples: The Body and the City in the Films of Mario Martone," 256.

Pompeiiian lovers; in Jenny succumbing to malaria; and in the earth that Delia finds in the pocket of her dead mother's silk robe. In all these images, the conventional boundary between the living and the dead is crossed. Finally, this model of a porous Naples offering access to hidden knowledge provides a compelling alternative to the conventional plot of "the heroine transformed by Italy" and it also goes some way in articulating what it is that these eccentric spaces offered Rossellini, Hazzard, and Martone, and why all their heroines make a journey back to their senses.

Chapter One

The Recasting of the World: *Journey to Italy*

Natalia: Tell me, did you imagine that Naples would be like this?

Katherine: Oh, I can't say, not quite as it is, perhaps.

Natalia: You haven't the faintest idea what Naples is like. I must show you.

(*Journey to Italy*)

Roberto Rossellini's *Journey to Italy* (1953) tells the story of a bored, estranged English middle-class couple, played by Ingrid Bergman and George Sanders, who must visit southern Italy to dispose of an inherited property. Their voyage south is portrayed as a metaphorical descent, an interior journey in which they confront and repair the ruin of their love.¹ *Journey to Italy* was shot in and around Naples and was the neorealist director's third collaboration with the Swedish-born Bergman who, in 1949, had abandoned her lucrative Hollywood career and her wholesome star persona to work with Rossellini.² Like the two movies that Rossellini made prior to it with Bergman as the central expressive figure – *Stromboli*, *Land of God* (1949) and *Europe 51* (1952) – *Journey to Italy* was a failure at the box office and attracted hostile critical attention in both America and Italy.³ American critics could not forgive Bergman and Rossellini for

¹ For readings of the metaphorical implications of the journey South that the Joyces make, particularly Katherine, see Bruno, *Atlas* 396-99. See also Mulvey, "Vesuvian Topographies: The Eruption of the Past in *Journey to Italy*," 96-97. Sandro Bernardi claims that *Journey to Italy* has all the mythic dimensions of a journey to the underworld. He goes as far to say that it "may be considered the *nékyia* of Italian cinema. See Bernardi, "Rossellini's Landscapes: Nature, Myth, History," 58.

² For detailed accounts of Bergman's Hollywood star persona and its implications for her collaborations with Rossellini see Ora Gelley, "Ingrid Bergman's Star Persona and the Alien Space of *Stromboli*," *Cinema Journal* 47.2 (2008). and Stephen Gundle, "Saint Ingrid at the Stake: Stardom and Scandal in the Bergman-Rossellini Collaboration," *Roberto Rossellini: Magician of the Real*, ed. David Forgacs, Sarah Lutton, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: British Film Institute, 2000).

³ On the unfavourable critical reception of films in the Bergman-Rossellini collaboration see David Forgacs, "Rossellini and the Critics," *Roberto Rossellini: Magician of the Real*, ed. David Forgacs, Sarah Lutton, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: British Film Institute, 2000) 3-4. Peter Bondanella states that perhaps "in no other Rossellini film is the director's refusal to follow conventional Hollywood expectations of spectacle more marked than in *Viaggio in Italia*, and this single fact alone certainly

their then-scandalous affair, and Italian critics on the political left lamented Rossellini's marked departure from what they interpreted as the truer focus of the neorealism of the immediate postwar films, *Rome, Open City* (1945) and *Paisà* (1946). In a consideration of Rossellini's critical reception, David Forgacs notes that:

with the Bergman cycle (1949-54), critical responses were deeply mixed, and the critics who had lauded Rossellini in 1945-46 as the standard bearer of a new realist aesthetic and a new kind of committed cinema now saw him as guilty of "involution," a turning inwards, away from a social aesthetic into a rather dubious sort of spiritualism.⁴

Rossellini's Bergman film cycle alienated Italian Marxist film critics such as Guido Aristarco, who famously attacked his new psychological and spiritual orientation and abandonment of neorealist principles.⁵ The reception of *Journey to Italy* fared no better with general audiences who were mystified by the very stylistic qualities that so appealed to the young emerging directors of the French New Wave.⁶ French New Wave directors valued *Journey to Italy* greatly for what they saw fundamentally as its stylistic modernity and were to be heavily influenced by Rossellini's long shots, and also his rejection of both the Hollywood shot-reaction shot schema and the harnessing of plot to climactic editing.⁷ This, they believed, helped the camera find a new poetic space in cinema, one that was capable of communicating the interiority of character without recourse to the usual dramatic convention. They favoured looser plot structures and a rhythm of camera movement freed from classical cinema's shot-reaction-shot. This

explains the commercial failure of the film as well as the many critical attacks". Peter Bondanella, *The Films of Roberto Rossellini* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 101-02.

⁴ Forgacs, "Rossellini and the Critics," 3.

⁵ Guido Aristarco's 1952 *Cinema nuovo* review of *Europe '51* in which he attacked Rossellini's representation of working-class characters is reproduced in translations in David Forgacs, Sarah Lutton, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Roberto Rossellini: Magician of the Real* (London: BFI Publishing, 2000) 156-57.

⁶ For discussions of Rossellini's significance for the French New Wave see Bondanella, *The Films of Roberto Rossellini* 99-100 and Forgacs, "Rossellini and the Critics," 4. Bondanella points out that the French New Wave directors and critics often made comparisons between Rossellini's introspective neorealism of the fifties and modernist music and visual arts. Bondanella, *The Films of Roberto Rossellini* 99-100.

⁷ See Gelley, "Ingrid Bergman's Star Persona and the Alien Space of *Stromboli*," 43-44. In her discussion of the way the camera represents Bergman in *Stromboli*, Ora Gelley gives an excellent general summary of the hallmarks of Rossellini's shot compositions that could be equally applied to the representations of Bergman's character in *Journey*.

rejection of the illusory nature of classical cinema would eventuate in *auteur* style. In this perspective, up and coming French directors such as Eric Rohmer, François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard were highly influenced by the views of the Catholic film critic and co-founder of the journal *Cahiers du Cinema*, André Bazin, who emerged as one of the strongest supporters of Rossellini's new 'neorealism of the person', a phrase he coined himself.

This new conception recognized that as time moved away from the Second World War, neorealism was no longer wedded to historical crises and was free to explore metaphysical dimensions of reality. Millicent Marcus notes that Bazin's phrase "neorealism of the person" presents a holistic approach to the emotional and divided debate over the so called crisis of neorealism in the fifties. Bazin and Federico Fellini were both ardent supporters of the metaphysical turn that neorealism was to take in this period with its shift from a collective vision to one more centered on individual experience. Marcus notes that the image of the road in *La strada* 'might be Fellini's journey from the classical neorealism of the 1940s to a new version of it'. It may be that the long shot of the road ahead at the beginning of *Journey to Italy* functions similarly.⁸

The qualities of *Journey to Italy* that the nascent French New Wave so admired, particularly its poetic, non-dramatic narrative, have continued to draw significant critical attention. More recently the film has received compelling critical attention from the film theorist Laura Mulvey, who, like the New Wave directors before her, reads *Journey to Italy* as the first truly modern film and has considered the ways in which Rossellini's interest in archeology speaks back to the medium of film-making itself.⁹ Giuliana Bruno has focused on the significance of the film's Neapolitan setting in

⁸ For a detailed discussion of neorealism in transition see Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) 144-46.

⁹ See Mulvey, "Vesuvian Topographies: The Eruption of the Past in *Journey to Italy*," 98.

relation to the well established tradition of a heroine transformed by a journey to Italy.¹⁰ In this last aspect, the journey metaphor of the film as a return to some sense of plenitude or a lost home has also inspired autobiographical work by Bruno again,¹¹ and has been used as a framing title by the film director Martin Scorsese for his documentary on Italian cinema, *My Voyage to Italy*. In some ways this journey south has come to stand in not just for Italy itself but precisely, in part, for the history of Italian cinema. More recent work by film theorists, such as Pasquale Verdicchio, has questioned why Rossellini chose to attach the power of miraculous reconciliation of the hero and heroine of the film to the environs of Naples without really considering the poverty and degradation suffered by the region which remains, he believes, difficult for many Italians to face. The Naples Rossellini's film constructs, with its "restorative supernatural powers," is only another version of the familiar outsider narrative, Verdicchio argues, which claims Naples once more as an exotic space.¹²

Despite box office failures, *Life* magazine featured Rossellini as the heroic artist-saviour of a new postwar Italy, claiming that in making *Rome, Open City* and *Paisà* that he had restored to the country a dignity and grace shattered by Fascist rule and the war years.¹³ This attention elevated both Rossellini himself and neorealist film style, which could have only emerged as a dominant aesthetic in the climate of scarce resources in the immediate postwar period, to a position of international celebrity.¹⁴ From these

¹⁰ See Bruno, *Atlas* 396-99. Bruno's Chapter 11 "Views from Home" contains an extended discussion of the female traveller and Italy as a site of yearning and personal regeneration.

¹¹ Bruno, *Atlas* 401-21.

¹² Verdicchio, "'O Cuorp' 'E Napule: Naples and the Cinematographic Body of Culture," 268. In a sense Verdicchio's argument about *Journey* is a revalidation of the Italian Marxist critics' dislike of growing introspection and spirituality of Rossellini's style.

¹³ Martin Scorsese, *My Voyage to Italy: A Martin Scorsese Picture*, Umbrella Entertainment, 2004. Martin Scorsese gives information about *Life* Magazine championing Rossellini's immediate postwar films in the documentary's commentary.

¹⁴ Bondanella, *The Films of Roberto Rossellini* 12-13. After noting Rossellini's instant international fame following the American and French releases of *Rome Open City*, Bondanella argues persuasively that "the imposition of this work by an unknown Italian director upon the international market, Italian neorealism was forever identified with Rossellini, and not a few of the misunderstandings about his future career would be the result of this hasty identification."

immediate postwar works film-making in Italy was indelibly linked to cultural reconstruction and a very large part of that narrative was to construct the neorealist film project as a clean and revolutionary break with Italy's Fascist past.¹⁵ But the very ground and stylistic tenets of Italian neorealism grew out of making movies during war-time conditions. Several young directors who would go on to play a key role in the development of a neorealist aesthetic learned their trade making war documentaries and Rossellini was amongst them. Through this work, a neorealist aesthetic emerged: a documentary style filmed on location with an interest in the lives of ordinary people (in these first instances, military personnel) that often used non-professional actors and that did not privilege the stories of individuals but was interested in a collective humanity.¹⁶

When Rossellini received Bergman's fan letter in the spring of 1948 offering her acting services to him,¹⁷ the now famous neorealist director had already begun to move away from the collective or choral qualities of *Rome, Open City*, and *Paisà*, the films that had so inspired Bergman, towards a greater focus on individual psychology and existential

¹⁵ For a discussion of the strong relationship between reconstruction and neorealist film in the immediate postwar years see Verdicchio, "'O Cuorp' 'E Napule: Naples and the Cinematographic Body of Culture,'" 266-67. Bondanella, *The Films of Roberto Rossellini* 3. See Bondanella for a discussion of the fraught ground surrounding neorealist film's critically silenced dependency on film making in the Fascist period in Italy. He argues that "[c]ritics, film historians and politicians, and even veterans of the film industry who had learned their trades during the fascist period had every interest in emphasizing the originality and revolutionary quality of what succeeded the fascist cinema – Italian neorealism – and to denigrate everything that came before it."

¹⁶ Bondanella, *The Films of Roberto Rossellini* 5-8. Bondanella explains that the roots of neorealism are intertwined with Fascism in other ways too. Firstly, Mussolini himself championed the cinema as a means of mass communication and in his reign very significant film infrastructure was developed, including the opening of Cinecittà and the professional film school, Centro sperimentale di cinematografia. He opened Cinecittà himself on the anniversary of the founding of Rome. This event provides an excellent example of the ways in which Mussolini's regime symbolically intertwined imagery of classical Rome with the Fascist state. Secondly, Mussolini's son, Vittorio, a left-wing fascist, produced the influential film magazine *Cinema*. Unlike his father who believed that cinema should be used to keep the masses happy and distracted, Vittorio supported a practice of high moral seriousness and he played a key role in supporting the early careers of emerging neorealist film-makers, including Rossellini, whose career he supported during the war years.

¹⁷ This letter is reproduced in Gundle, "Saint Ingrid at the Stake: Stardom and Scandal in the Bergman-Rossellini Collaboration," 65. Gundle explains that this was not the first time Bergman had written to directors with whom she wished to work.

explorations.¹⁸ In considering this particular combination of events, Rossellini's evolving version of neorealism and both his artistic and personal relationship with Bergman, it is not hard to understand that film critics, with different agendas, and audiences that so admired either the Hollywood version of Bergman or Rossellini's immediate postwar film might have become easily disenchanted. Rossellini responded that the conditions that had made neorealism a moral imperative had changed and that he was fatigued at the prospect of having to continue making films in war-wrecked cities.¹⁹ Increasingly, the settings of his films were to move from an external ruinousness to locate the same quality in the figure of the postwar isolated modern subject²⁰. So, whilst this new orientation, this emphasis on an individual's story, is partly a function of changing postwar conditions, it is also an understandable and traceable development from a choral neorealism to a neorealism of the person. Yet, I want to argue that this new focus on interiority presents a challenge for neorealism because of its antipathy to the usual cinematic means of representing subjective experience that include such elements as a dramatic plotline tied to editing, dramatic dialogue and the close-up as character revelation. Rossellini's solution is also cinematic but it is connected to the frustration that film can only show the outside of the world. In this sense, Bergman's outsider status takes on an extra dimension as does the film's banal dialogue. The interiority of the characters emerges, instead, from Rossellini's decision to represent access to psychic material through the filming of pregnant empty spaces, the use of dead time and the close-up offered as puzzlement rather than revelation. Bergman and Sanders's first dialogue exchange of "Where are we?"/ "I don't know exactly" is echoed throughout the film in their micro expressions of

¹⁸ David Forgacs argues that critics from the left failed to see in Rossellini's evolving neorealism of the person a continuation of his political involvement and social awareness which he locates in "their tight interweaving of personal anxiety and collective trauma." Forgacs, "Rossellini and the Critics," 4.

¹⁹ Fred Camper, *Volcano Girl*, 2000, Chicago Reader Movie Review, Available: <http://www.fredcamper.com/Film/Rossellini.html>. Accessed 21 June 2009.

²⁰ Bernardi, "Rossellini's Landscapes: Nature, Myth, History," 55.

incomprehension and frustration. In these lingering close-ups of a marriage in crisis it is as if the camera is waiting and hoping to learn something but all it can do is pick up the surface signs.

The isolation suffered by Bergman's outsider characters in what is referred to as both the 'Sentiment' or the 'Solitude' trilogy is already present in the child figure of *Germany Year Zero* (1947) and in both the singular characters and their different spiritual quest in the *Il miracolo* episode of *L'Amore* (1947-8) and *Francis, God's Jester* (1950).²¹ In the other episode of *L'Amore* which is based on an adaptation of a Cocteau play, we see the beginning of the use of a single actor's face and body, in this case Anna Magnani's, as the central expressive point of the film:

The Cocteau adaptation was probably more revolutionary in terms of cinematic style, for in it Rossellini began experiments with a cinema of psychological introspection that is characterized by extremely long takes, organizing actions normally filmed in a series of shots tied together by montage editing with a single complex take, concentrating the entire force of the episode on a single actress, her facial expressions, and her individual suffering...this is the direction he would later take with the five films he made with Ingrid Bergman.²²

In the Bergman trilogy the searching film style that Rossellini learned in his documentary apprenticeship that he served during the war years moves to focus on the charged interchange between the character and the landscape. In all of the films that Bergman and Rossellini made together, Gelley notes

[b]oth actor and landscape, while different in nature, refer to each other, and reflect each other, without it being possible to say which is primary, and tend *ultimately* to become fused to a point of indiscernibility.²³

Critics really did not know what to do with this anti-drama aesthetic or with a Hollywood star stripped of her conventional stardom and thrust into alien and extreme environments (see figure 1). Karin in *Stromboli*, Irene in *Europe 51*, and Katherine in

²¹ Bondanella, *The Films of Roberto Rossellini* 15-16.

²² Bondanella, *The Films of Roberto Rossellini* 15.

²³ Gelley, "Ingrid Bergman's Star Persona and the Alien Space of *Stromboli*," 48. On the relationship between landscape and character specifically in *Journey* see also Bruno, *Atlas* 396-99. Bruno refers to Katherine's relationship with the Neapolitan landscape as a "reciprocal *Carte de Tendre*".

Journey to Italy are in one way or another all nonconformists. Karin refuses to accept the socio-sexual strictures of her new island life; Irene refuses to play the bourgeois wife; and Katherine, to the mystification of Alex, attempts to make a connection with the alien and confronting past of Naples.²⁴ In each character's case their non-conformity hinges on the state of their marriages. As Forgacs notes, in the Bergman cycle Rossellini came to locate "the deeper problems of the contemporary world" in "failures of communication" and "problems of marriage and sexual relations."²⁵ This focus, it has been suggested, also mirrors facets of the notoriety of Rossellini and Bergman's own personal and artistic relationship.²⁶ This tension between art and life is in itself, after all, central to neorealism. Bergman, as suffering non-conformist outsider, also brought to her collaboration with Rossellini the still strong Hollywood created persona Saint Ingrid. This saintliness, sustained by David Selznick, despite the fact that Bergman played plenty of more sensuously tortured characters than saintly ones, was accentuated by her portrayal as Joan of Arc in Victor Fleming's 1948 film of the same title.²⁷ But I would argue that it is another saint in Rossellini's oeuvre that we need to consider in order to understand his increasingly metaphysical neorealist style in the Bergman collaboration and his depiction of the outsider heroine's engagement with the Italian landscape, and particularly, the Southern Italian landscape

Between *Stromboli* and *Journey to Italy*, two films that pitch the Bergman isolate into a primal South, Rossellini made, among other projects, the film *Francis, God's Jester*. Following on from the sanctity of Bergman's character in *Stromboli* and projecting on into the comfortable bourgeois housewife character of *Europe 51*, who gives up

²⁴ Geoffrey Nowell-Smith argues that the isolation of the characters Bergman played for Rossellini also reflects "her role as a foreigner, a northern European, in Italy." See Nowell-Smith, "North and South, East and West: Rossellini's Politics," 12-13.

²⁵ Forgacs, "Rossellini and the Critics," 3.

²⁶ Mulvey, "Vesuvian Topographies: The Eruption of the Past in *Journey to Italy*," 100.

²⁷ See Gelley, "Ingrid Bergman's Star Persona and the Alien Space of *Stromboli*," 30. Gelley discusses Selznick's marketing of Bergman as 'a healthy and uncomplicated "Nordic natural"'.

everything to care for those in need, I would like to posit the notion that the historical figure of Saint Francis would have held considerable appeal for Rossellini, especially when we take into account his dismay at a perceived loss of values in the postwar period.²⁸ The Franciscan creed of rejecting decadence for a life of living simply, of paring the experience of the world back to basics and of seeing an equality amongst all things, is not so very far away from the neorealist project. This paring back, this poverty aesthetic, later to become so beloved of the French New Wave, was understood by Federico Fellini, as early as 1946 during the making of *Paisà*:

I think I can honestly say that what I most owe to Roberto Rossellini's teaching is his example of humility, or better, a way of facing reality in a totally simplified way; an effort of not interfering with one's ideas, culture, feelings...when I came in touch with Rossellini, I saw at first a completely new world, the loving eyes through which Rossellini observed everything to make the world alive through his framings.²⁹

Here we recognize what amounts to a Franciscan aesthetic in Fellini's emphases on Rossellini's humility, simplicity and gift for seeing the world through loving eyes. We come across the Franciscan gaze again in Bazin's defense of Rossellini in the letter to Aristarco. For Bazin, Rossellini's

love not only for his characters but for the real world...lies at the heart of his conception of the way a film is to be directed, and that it is precisely this love that precludes him from putting asunder what reality has joined together, namely, the character and the setting.³⁰

Neorealism is not an analytical, scientific naturalism, in other words, but an actively synthesizing realism – not merely a mechanical recording of the objective world, but a selective apprehension which must always be ethical and ontological “in the sense that the image of reality [which the photographic image] restores to us is still a whole,” as Bazin declares: “a true imprint of reality, a kind of luminous mold.”³¹ Again this is suggestive of the Franciscan aesthetic that Rossellini seems to be pursuing in his

²⁸ Forgacs, “Rossellini and the Critics.” 3.

²⁹ Fellini quoted in Bondanella, *The Films of Roberto Rossellini* 30-31.

³⁰ André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) 98.

³¹ Bazin, *What is Cinema?* 98.

extension of the neorealism of the forties and the fifties: the capacity to represent things so completely as they are, with absolute respect for, and love of, their own quiddity, which entails at the same time the intervention of the film-maker's creative consciousness, so that the image restores the referent to itself.

Bazin's characteristically Catholic formation of Rossellini's moral neorealism – curiously reminiscent of the moral realism of the English Pre-Raphaelites, painting almost exactly a century earlier – shows both how far Rossellini has in fact come since *Rome Open City*, and how, again like the Pre-Raphaelites, Rossellini's realism may be explained in the continuity between two distinct phases: an earlier austerity, and a later more explicitly spiritual and introspective aesthetic. It also suggests how, as in earlier realisms, Rossellini's cinematic realism generates its meanings from the tension between documentation and artifice. In 1860, Delacroix, responding to Courbet's shocking *Funeral at Ornans*, wrote in his journal:

Realism should be defined as the antipode of art. It is perhaps more odious in painting and in sculpture than in history and the novel ... What, in sculpture for example, would a realistic art be? Mere casts from nature would always be superior to the most perfect imitation which the hand of man can produce: for can one conceive a case in which the mind would not guide the hand of the artist?³²

Yet how could any 'style' have made sense of what Rossellini's camera had to do in *Rome Open City* or *Paisà*? Like the Pre-Raphaelites before him, and like Courbet, Rossellini had to actively create a new visual vocabulary that could contain and express a new reality. And like these earlier over-throwings of 'mannerisms', this one too held a strong moral dimension. Bernardi claims that we can perhaps best consider Rossellini's work alongside the European anthropologists and philosophers such as Mircea Eliade, Lucien Levy-Bruhl and Walter Benjamin who looked in the "residues of the ancient

³² Charles Harrison, Paul Wood and Jason Gaiger, eds., *Art in Theory, 1815-1900* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) 363.

world” in order to better understand modernity.³³ In *Journey to Italy* this dig into the past becomes literalized through the images of the body casts at Pompeii. Here is the embodiment of problems to do with representing interiority. There is really nothing there, just hollows in the ground, but Rossellini’s camera digs down past the surface to fill the void of modern subjectivity symbolized by the Joyces’ estrangement to make things solid, whole, full and real. Here, too, is a visual equivalence for Bazin’s “imprint of reality,” his “luminous molds.” But to understand more fully what Rossellini attains in this climactic scene of *Journey to Italy*, we need first to consider the narrative that the film recasts and why a journey to Italy is really a journey to Naples.

Journey to Italy reworks the narrative of the Grand Tour itinerary of earlier centuries.³⁴ The title of the film itself, borrowed from Goethe’s *Italienische Reise*, announces its indebtedness to this tradition. Katherine’s itinerary of sites follows in the footsteps of the ways in which the region was explored by earlier tourists.³⁵ In a structural sense, the interlinked scenes of her tours provide a pattern to an otherwise near non-existent plot-line.³⁶ The five Grand Tour stops that Katherine Joyce makes to The National Archeological Museum of Naples, Cumae, the Phlegrean fields, the Fontenella catacombs, and finally to Pompeii, are very different in tone to the lingering ghost of the expansiveness of the privileged male practice of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in which young men of refinement and curiosity toured the celebrated sites of the Classical world in order to round out their educations. Even though the remnants of the ancient world had already stirred up a Romantic angst about human transience, the

³³ Bernardi, “Rossellini’s Landscapes: Nature, Myth, History,” 50-51.

³⁴ For a reading of *Journey* that centres especially on the Grand Tour see Bruno, *Atlas* 369-81.

³⁵ Bruno, *Atlas* 370. In making this Grand Tour reading of *Journey*, Bruno also traces the ways in which the genre of illustrated travel writing is a fore-runner of film itself. Similarly, some of the very first tourist photographs were shots of Italian cities. Anna Jameson’s niece married Robert Macpherson, a Scots photographer domiciled in Rome, who produced photos for tourists in the late 1850s.

³⁶ See Bondanella, *The Films of Roberto Rossellini* 105. See also Bruno, *Atlas* 369.

postwar context of Katherine's tours brings with it a freight of modern ruinous associations. As Bernardi writes of Rossellini's earlier film *Germany Year Zero*:

ruins englobe all the western world, desolation rules uncontested and absolute. The war and history turn the world to stone, transform the inhabited buildings into a vast necropolis, such as we will find again only in Katherine and Alex Joyce's visit to Pompeii.³⁷

If in their grand tours the young privileged male travellers of earlier centuries found a vibrancy and power in ancient remains – and one that they could appropriate for that other grand narrative of imperial expansion – then what Katherine faces is the sense in which her own world is in a way more ruined than these monuments of the past. As a guest at the high-society party says to Katherine during her Naples stay: “In a sense, we are all shipwrecked.”

In the two Naples of *Journey to Italy*, ancient and modern, the camera animates a primal life-force in the looming statues, the sibyl's echo, the wind, the smoking lava fields and the freshly poured Pompeiian casts that is reflected back in the everyday life of the city. For instance, the scenes framing her visit to the cave of the sibyl at Cumae show the large presence of women on the contemporary city's streets (see figure 2). Through Katherine's focalization the film makes a connection between ancient and contemporary femininity – the strength and mystery that both modern street life and the legendary figure of the sibyl hold. Again, when Katherine and Natalia set out for the Fontenella catacombs, a place at which Natalia explains to Katherine that modern Neapolitan families adopt ancient dead bodies to replace their own lost loved ones, Katherine witnesses the city passages of many pregnant women. This is one of the several points in the film in which ideas about life and death intersect. What Katherine is confronted by at all the sites she visits is not so much an unbridled sensuality that is contrasted to her own Northern culture, but that in these places she intuits energies, ancient rhythms

³⁷ Bernardi, “Rossellini's Landscapes: Nature, Myth, History,” 55.

and mysteries, and particularly a tension between the living and the dead, motion and stillness, the past and the present, that she reaches for but cannot quite grasp. In essence, these remnants of the past and the ancient dead are more alive than she or her husband Alex or their disintegrating childless marriage.

The intensity of Katherine's reaction to the weight of this past also recovers memories of the ghost of a former lover, the sensitive, sickly poet Charles Lewington. Katherine recalls to Alex that Charles had been posted to Naples in the war and had written poems about that experience. At Cumae, a geographical point not far from the landing of British troops, Katherine encounters Charles's ghostly presence in the echo that the guard makes in the famous tunnel to the sibyl's cave. This echo represents not only a haunting by Charles but a generalized uncanniness; the ways in which the guide's clapping and shouts return from an unlocated beyond. These dreamy memories of Charles drive a further wedge between herself and her jealous, restless husband who makes a connection between Katherine's sight-seeing and these memories which he dismissively refers to as her 'pilgrimages'. Consequently, most of Katherine's tours are undertaken alone.

This lively power of the ancient Neapolitan world is established in Katherine's first tour of statues in the National Archeological Museum. Here we first hear Renzo Rossellini's atmospheric score that interlinks all the touring scenes and is used to convey not only the energy and mystery of the past but also functions as an affective register of Katherine's reactions.³⁸ In the museum scenes the score is used to choreograph the sense of the camera bestowing movement and dynamism on the ancient sculptures (see figure 3). Reflections on the relationship between the past and the present recur in these

³⁸ Although Renzo Rossellini's score creates this unity between the touring scenes, it is interesting to note subtle tonal changes. For instance, it is at Katherine's witnessing of all the human remains at the Fontanella catacombs that the score creates the most foreboding atmosphere. After the crisis at Pompeii it creates a more hopeful tone that helps to pave the way towards the Joyces' reconciliation.

scenes in which the statues seemingly come to life through the tracking of the camera. These are not relics locked up in a museum, the film suggests, but personages bristling with disconcerting energies and individual histories. Later when Katherine tries to explain her experience at the museum to Alex, she tells him “[t]o think that these men lived thousands of years ago and you feel they’re just like the men of today.”

In Katherine’s touring scenes the living mystery of the past is communicated by the camera’s insistent searching. At Cumae the guide tells Katherine that he won’t ascend the stairs with her to the Temple of Apollo because the wind is too cold up there.³⁹ When she does enter the ruins of the Temple alone, she thinks that she sees something in the nearby trees. At first, the camera delivers her point of view but then it lingers on this unseen presence in the trees for so long, capturing the wind’s movement, that the cinema frame literally becomes an un-scene. This moment reveals the ways in which Rossellini’s unconventional long shots free moments of film from narrative and create silent poetic spaces that evoke a character’s emotion via location and environment.⁴⁰ Gelley’s reading of the interchange between landscape and character, noted above, is helpful here. Her point is echoed by Camper who suggests that “Rossellini subtly weaves together humans and their surroundings” and in so doing is very different from “most Hollywood dramas” in which “characters are the masters of their setting.”⁴¹ This absolute equality between characters and their surroundings takes us back also to those loving eyes of Saint Francis. As Bernardi argues, in this cinema that is learning how to see alongside its characters, we are both with and not with Katherine who at these points

³⁹ The role of guides at the museum, Cumae and the Phlegrean Fields must be noted. Smaller in stature than Katherine, they are gruff and directive. They command “You see here lady” and “This way lady”. They insist that things will be seen in a certain way but this very insistence reinforces the sense in which both Katherine and the camera are searching for something they cannot locate, something lost. Katherine and the guides almost have the resonance of Virgil leading Dante.

⁴⁰ Bernardi links the filming of the wind in the Temple of Apollo scene of *Journey*, which he calls “a manifestation of the invisible” to both the skene curtain used in classical theatre and the mysterious elements of early cinema that impressed audiences. See Bernardi, “Rossellini’s Landscapes: Nature, Myth, History,” 59.

⁴¹ Camper, *Volcano Girl*.

at which the camera draws beyond the capability of her perception, “sees that she does not see.”⁴²

This evocation of the almost intangible spirit of a place is revisited in the alternative Grand Tour that Katherine makes by way of the view from her car window (see figure 4). These framing scenes to the toured sites bring both Katherine and the viewer another Naples different in its contemporary appearance but the same in its ancient aliveness. Here is, as it were, the common and human-scaled flip-side of the paradoxically empty/full poetry of the past. Katherine views from her car window, which doubles as an alternative film frame and a screening out device, an array of pregnant women, babies in prams, courting couples and traditional Neapolitan funeral corteges.⁴³ This street panorama that seems to encompass life from the cradle to the grave discomposes Katherine and this is shown through nuanced facial expressions that range from mild vexation through to alarm. It not only impinges on the space of her car and her progress, a motif of the film, but it is also enmeshed with her grumbling self-dialogue about the state of her life with Alex. Its fecundity – en route to the catacombs Katherine and her friend Natalia do a street count of all the pregnant bellies they can see from the car window – only further accentuates the sterility of the Joyces’ lives. In this gendered streetscape of courtship, pregnancies, motherhood, and even street shrines to the Madonna, *Journey to Italy* draws on the imagery of the long tradition of representing Naples as a feminine city, a belly city.⁴⁴ Katherine’s pre-tour driving scenes take place in the ancient centre of Naples. This location, argues Áine O’Healy, “is historically the

⁴² Bernardi, “Rossellini’s Landscapes: Nature, Myth, History,” 57. I have borrowed Béla Balázs’s phrase “we see that we do not see,” quoted by Bernardi. See also Camper, *Volcano Girl*. Camper notes “in every frame Rossellini manages to suggest more than is visible.”

⁴³ Bondanella, *The Films of Roberto Rossellini* 108. Bondanella notes that the Joyces have “shielded themselves from the emotional impact of life” in Naples and that their English car is “the most important symbolic motif that underlines this theme in the film.”

⁴⁴ See Bruno, *Atlas* 393-94.

site of poverty and crime but also of vibrant popular traditions.”⁴⁵ It is an area, O’Healy continues, “popularly referred to as *il ventre di Napoli*, the belly – or the womb – of Naples.”⁴⁶ These symbolic associations, the very tribal quality of the Neapolitan people and the way in which Katherine in her English car is cut off from them, emphasize further her Northern outsider status, and accentuate her own childlessness.

Throughout the film, this division between a hard working emotionally repressed Northern Europe, represented by Alex Joyce, and the *dolce fa niente* (‘sweet do nothing’) philosophy of a lazy, feminized South is deftly upheld with small continuous touches.⁴⁷ This configuration is another way in which Alex and Katherine’s conflict is explored in the film. They have become strangers (*The Strangers* was an alternative title to the film), in part because Alex has a Northern male work ethic and has no time for the romantic attention that Katherine craves. They respond differently to Naples because of this contrast in their temperaments. Alex’s reactions to *dolce fa niente* are expressed by irritation and incomprehension, whereas Katherine, though also bewildered at times, is portrayed as more empathetic to the different rhythms of Neapolitan life. Her touring scenes, in particular, open up a contemplative space for considerations of a range of metaphysical issues that include notions about the very long reach of history and human transience. In this way, Rossellini manages to take the genre of a woman’s travel diary and marry it to both the symbolic freight of the Grand Tour and the construction of Naples as feminine. Furthermore, in using the figure of Bergman he is able to unite the essentially documentary nature of a travelogue with Hollywood Romance, and in so doing he enlivens the clichéd visual vocabulary of the touristic gaze with a surprising

⁴⁵ O’Healy, “Revisiting the Belly of Naples: The Body and the City in the Films of Mario Martone,” 249.

⁴⁶ O’Healy, “Revisiting the Belly of Naples: The Body and the City in the Films of Mario Martone,” 249.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of this North/South construction see Anna Maria Torriglia, *Broken Time, Fragmented Space: A Cultural Map for Postwar Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002) 121-27. *Journey* continually draws attention to this division. See, for instance, the scene in which Alex goes in search of a drink during the siesta to the incomprehension of the Italian servants.

new power. But, with Naples, and Naples standing in as a synecdoche for all of Italy here, he is doing much more.

This journey to Italy is not a journey to Rome, Florence, Venice or Milan but a journey to Naples. From the beginning of the film, we are given a clue about why Rossellini might be interested in making Naples a synecdoche for Italy. In casually naming Alex's dead relative from whom he has inherited the property Uncle Homer, Rossellini is drawing on the living links between the past and present that the film explores in myriad ways, but this name also reminds us that Naples's origins are not Italian but Greek. With this one deft stroke the unscripted film wrenches its version of Italy away from the now fascist co-opted pasts of the Roman empire and the Italian Renaissance with its conventional iconography of Italy (the Colosseum, the Forum, Michelangelo's *David*) to the deeper anthropological past of the South. Naples, it could be argued, offers Rossellini a mid-way point between the natural extremities of the primal landscape he had already explored in *Stromboli* and the over-determined and fascistic monumentality of Rome. The tourist site locations of the film in which Katherine travels successively back through layers and layers of time until her journey literally hits a rock-bottom stratum in Pompeii, allows her emotional trajectory to be fully contained in and expressed through a real location with its deep histories and associations.⁴⁸ In reassigning Italy an alternative past as Naples, Rossellini's camera digs down and away from the spectacle of the bay to excavate into layers of time and human experience. The camera, in fact, dispenses with views of Vesuvius, the Bay, and the Sorrentine peninsular in a most peremptory fashion in the scene in which Katherine and Alex first arrive at Uncle Homer's villa. More film time is given to the tiny pocket Vesuvius at the Phlegrean Fields than to the volcano itself. *Journey to Italy* is far more interested in the

⁴⁸ Mulvey, "Vesuvian Topographies: The Eruption of the Past in *Journey to Italy*," 103. Mulvey notes that Katherine's tours follow "a series of archeological strata."

porous, the stony, the smoking, and the buried, and in traces of human habitation such as sculptures, human relics, and religious beliefs, than in the famed view.

This conception of things, this turning away with a bored shrug at the panorama of the bay as Alex and Katherine do even as they are mouthing “how lovely,” is entirely in keeping with the anti-spectacular aesthetic of neorealism. Rossellini has stated that his films often begin notionally as a single image, for example the dead partisan floating down the river Po in *Paisà* or Katherine and Alex at a turning point, transfixed by the casts of the ancient bodies in the ground coming to life, as it were, before their eyes (see figures 5 & 6). The rest of the film then becomes a means of arriving at that summary image.⁴⁹ Elsewhere, he has explained that he is interested in waiting for the film to find this revelatory moment.⁵⁰ These two elements go some way to elucidating the signature searching camera in *Journey to Italy* and its interest in almost invisible anti-spectacles such as wind and wisps of smoke. It also suggests that what creates dramatic tension here is not sign-posted as external plot but is driven by this waiting for the character (and the camera) to reach this point of self-reckoning.

The camera’s dive down from the Sibyl’s cave, to the pocket Vesuvius at the Phlegrean Fields, and finally to the buried couple at Pompeii, gradually moves Katherine’s sight seeing further and further away from the cultural towards the natural. In fact it could be argued that her engagement with the troubling presence of the past begins with the ‘made’ sculptures in the archeological museum, continues with the seemingly ambiguous half-human half-stone body she sees at the catacombs, and ends with the ‘real’ bodies at Pompeii. It is in this particular tension between artifice and reality that we find another reason why Italy as Naples was so compelling to Rossellini in *Journey to Italy*. Just as Naples itself offers the mid-way point between the natural and the

⁴⁹ Forgacs, *Roberto Rossellini: Magician of the Real* 152. This observation of Rossellini’s is taken from a 1952 interview with Mario Verdone reproduced in Forgacs.

⁵⁰ Camper, *Volcano Girl*.

cultural, the casts at Pompeii are not quite sculptures but neither are they complete bodies. These “luminous molds,” these “imprints,” offer a mid-way point between art and life. It is as if all along that the film has been making its own internal Franciscan argument about the stripping back of artifice to find this meta-filmic comment on cinema.⁵¹ When you reach this point, this stratum, you are offered the chance of starting again, seeing anew. This extra dimension of reality makes up part of the emotional power of the film’s climactic scene. Here, the landscape has literally raised dead doppelgängers of Katherine and Alex but there is no possible aesthetic distance because the reclaimed shape of human remains is not art. This unearthed ancient embrace speaks too emphatically to the absence of intimacy in Katherine’s lived experience. This landscape, alive itself, gives birth metaphorically to the shape of love.

At this climatic point in the film the interpersonal crisis and the cinematic challenge of trying to solve the problem of representing interiority merge. The body casts, with their voids, their emptiness now filled, are a symbolic enactment both of the Joyces’ reconciliation and also of the way by which Rossellini has told the story of his characters’ inner lives without recourse to the usual filmic conventions connected to the representation of interiority. The aesthetic of the cast also keys into *Journey to Italy*’s investigation of the limits of perception. Here, seeing that you don’t see is transformed into a revelation of seeing that which is usually hidden – the interiors and undersides of the world.⁵²

Turning away from this ancient shape of love, Alex and Katherine wander the ruined streets of Pompeii and decide that they will get a divorce. They leave, sheltered once

⁵¹ Mulvey, “Vesuvian Topographies: The Eruption of the Past in *Journey to Italy*,” 98. Mulvey points out that in both archeological remains and film “the past [is] fossilized in time.”

⁵² The work of the artist Rachel Whiteread draws attention to this particular formal feature of the casts to reveal an alternative reality. She has cast the undersides of various objects and the interior of a house. It is also interesting to consider Rossellini’s use of the cast in relation to the film’s utilization of dead time which is also another version of negative space and something that we do not normally see. This returns us, too, to the interpenetration of spaces configured in Benjamin’s notion of Naples as a porous space.

again in their Bentley, and they drive through the streets of a small town, but Katherine, still shaken by what the earth has divulged, asks Alex if he thinks their marriage would have been stronger if they had conceived a child. At this moment, a child passing by runs into the shot and is framed by the car's side window behind Katherine (see figure 7). When Alex summarily dismisses Katherine's thought, the running child disappears from the shot. This small moment signals something interesting that is about to occur. In these last scenes of the film Alex and Katherine are entering a territory in which to name something is to make it happen. They are, once again, waylaid in their rational Northern trajectory by the surging crowd of a religious procession, and must abandon their car. When they do, Katherine is suddenly swept away from Alex, almost as if she were engulfed by a catastrophe like Pompeii. Two sound events occur in proximity. Katherine calls out to Alex. All through the film, the minimalist dialogue has been punctuated by the strange, desolate sounding birdcall of Katherine calling her husband's name ("Alex, Alex") which he has almost always ignored. In this final and dramatic separation scene it is as if he truly hears his wife for the first time. He battles the crowd to embrace her and as he does so a voice calls out "miracolo!" The viewer can never really pin down what miracle, apart from the reconciliation of the lovers, has really occurred. Perhaps a blind man's sight has been restored and this would certainly be in keeping with the transformation of Alex and Katherine.⁵³ Rossellini's ending also provides an anti-spectacle, a stepping sideways to see, in this instance, what we usually do not see. The expansive camera pans away, in its signature long take, from the embracing lovers and allows the processing crowd to pass by (see figure 8). If you want to know what love really is, Rossellini's camera seems to be saying, forget conventional Hollywood endings. Love is really these very ordinary people, who might also be

⁵³ Blindness, once again, draws attention to perceptual limits. It also ties into the tentative nature of the lover's reconciliation. All Katherine and Alex can do at this point is to follow the crowd's lead in 'blind faith'.

figures in an ancient frieze, participating in a collective and bonding knowledge that is ultimately about healing.

Chapter Two

Another Journey to Italy: Intertextuality in *The Bay of Noon*

That epoch, our time at Naples, seems historic now. It doesn't seem like modern life. But it didn't seem like modern life then either, it was more like life than modern life, more lifelike, livelier, likelier.

Hazzard)¹

(Shirley

But, the South of culture is never visited alone. One is always accompanied by memories – one's own and those of others.

(Jonah Siegel)²

Journey to Italy is a film haunted by the presence of the dead: all the dead generations, which weigh, as Marx famously put it, like a nightmare on the brains of the living, reminding us that we may make our own history but not just as we please – “not under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”³ And what happens at the level of the story in Rossellini's film (and the level of history) happens, too, at the level of the text (and its histories): *Journey to Italy* is also haunted by the presence of James Joyce's famous story “The Dead.” The plot of “The Dead” offered Rossellini a perfect foil for his portrait of a marriage in crisis. The haunting presence of the past and the remembered vivacity of youthful love that never has to weather the years in Joyce's story are paralleled in *Journey to Italy* by the strength of the presence of the past and the vitality of the ancient dead. The film is shadowed by cultural forms given and transmitted from the past: not just the oppressively overdetermining ancient and recent pasts of Pompeii 79AD and Fascist Italy, that is, but the literary past, and the recent past of literary modernism in

¹ Hazzard, *The Bay of Noon* 153. Further page references to the novel appear in the text.

² Jonah Siegel, *Haunted Museum: Longing, Travel and the Art-Romance Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) xiv.

³ Marx, *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*. In *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978) 595.

particular. Film itself – or at least the post-war art cinema in which *Journey to Italy* is a landmark work – is haunted here by the ghost of the written word, which weighs heavily on its living, growing, developing forms.⁴ It is not that the earlier story of Gabriel, Gretta, and the ghost of Michael Furey is so completely absorbed into the story of Katherine, Alex and the ghost of Charles Lewington that no borrowing is meant to be detectable (their surname, Joyce, announces this); nor on the other hand that Rossellini is discreetly annexing the honorific status of the literary. Rather, the ghost of Charles Lewington, the long dead boy-aesthete, *is* the ghost of the literary. He represents the shadowy presence in film of the expressive possibilities of writing by evoking Joyce's story. It is not Lewington but his poetry, in fact, that haunts the film, as Laura Mulvey argues:

The lines of his poetry, which return like a refrain into Katherine's mind and for which she seems to be searching for a meaning, finally find their significance outside her consciousness in the image of death that pervades the film:

Temple of the Spirit. No longer bodies
But pure ascetic images.⁵

Katherine ultimately finds these pure ascetic images, as Mulvey notes, in the ash-cast figures being excavated at Pompeii: they are images of death.⁶ The late-Romantic Lewington, preserved in Katherine's memory as perfectly as one of these entrapped, fugitive Pompeians, represents the condition of poetry – itself a temple of the spirit – and represents as well the instinct of the filmic image to incorporate and thereby to supersede the poetic image, to supersede written language altogether (as Rossellini attempted to do by abandoning the written film-script in *Journey to Italy*). In this regard the ghostly Lewington functions in two ways. He refers to and yet simultaneously represses the literary inter-text (Joyce's story).⁷ At the same time, in so doing

⁴ On the significance of *Journey* in the emergence of art film see Mulvey, "Vesuvian Topographies: The Eruption of the Past in *Journey to Italy*," 60.

⁵ Mulvey, "Vesuvian Topographies: The Eruption of the Past in *Journey to Italy*," 107.

⁶ Mulvey, "Vesuvian Topographies," 107.

⁷ Graham Allen, *Intertextuality*, The New Critical Idiom (London: Routledge, 2000) 179.

Rossellini's film strives symbolically to overcome the high-art cinema's intertextual dependency on literature.⁸

It was several years before *Journey to Italy* was recognized (first by the young filmmakers of the French New Wave) for what it was: the founding text of that phase of high-modernist European cinema that would reach its zenith with Antonioni and Godard. By 1970, however, when Shirley Hazzard's novel of Naples, *The Bay of Noon*, was published, *Journey to Italy*'s reputation was firmly established and its version of cinematic modernism was already canonical. At the same time, the film's radical infusion of the visual style of documentary realism with a new psychodramatic intensity, a new symbolic complexity, accomplished an extraordinary transformation – in effect a *modernization* – of the old Neapolitan imaginary. Rossellini's camera takes in the over-familiar panorama of the bay, the volcano, the peninsula, and the islands, emptied out of meaning by centuries of touristic appropriation, and suddenly reimbues them with energy and mystery, taking the viewer as it were *into* them, following Katherine's tour down into the buried mirror city, with its obscure laneways, crowded streets, underground churches and catacombs. Instead of the "straightforward candour" of the photographic image, which takes in a "swarm of objects ... which are just *there*,"⁹ Rossellini uses Naples' iconic picturesque scenery to simplify and stylize the *mise-en-scène*, and uses its heroine's open-mouthed, mostly silent bewilderment to express an inward drama which is heightened by the startling juxtaposition of images. In this and other ways *Journey to Italy* demands that film be recognized as a compelling alternative to the subjective complexity of literary modernism (with its stream-of-consciousness, imagism, and other devices).

⁸ See T. Jefferson Kline, *Screening the Text: Intertextuality in the New Wave French Cinema* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

⁹ Julien Gracq, *Reading Writing*, trans. Jeanine Herman (New York: Turtle Point Press, 1980) 282, 78.

Little more than a decade after the film's release, *Journey to Italy* already weighs heavily on the literary enterprise of *The Bay of Noon*. Can prose fiction capture at once the immediacy of experience, the material density of the past, and the existential mystery evoked on the surface of the human face? And how was it possible for Hazzard to tell the retrospectively self-narrated story of a young woman's coming of age in a journey to Italy *without* reference to Rossellini's film? The problem surfaces surreptitiously in a brief exchange almost at the end of the novel – indeed, just as the narrator-heroine, Jenny, is leaving Naples:

I took up the newspaper that Gianni had bought at the station. There was a broad headline: Russia had put a dog into space.

“Good lord,” I said to Gianni. “Have you seen the news?”

“Yes,” he said. “I meant to tell you. Bergman is divorcing Rossellini at last.”¹⁰

This exchange tells us what we need to know: that the recollected events of the novel took place in 1953; that Naples was then being established as a strategic port in cold-war Europe (Jenny, who is English, has come to work for Allied Forces Southern Europe, one of the two major NATO commands in the Mediterranean area); and that Jenny and Gianni and their friends have been sharing the city, the bay and the peninsula with others – the Hollywood stars of *Journey to Italy*, the film's imagined English characters, and the archaeologists excavating Pompeii (whom Rossellini was given permission to film). What it also tells us is that *The Bay of Noon* is not merely an after-text of *Journey to Italy*, just as *Journey* is not merely an after-text of “The Dead.” It is a text that seeks to control its anxiety about the unexpected reversal of intertextual power relations, and to take up the language of Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*, its own belatedness:¹¹ literature takes refuge from the new hegemony of the cinematic in a

¹⁰ Hazzard, *The Bay of Noon* 138. Further page references to the novel appear in the text.

¹¹ See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

version of what Jonah Siegel calls the tradition of the “art romance.”¹² This is the literary tradition, developed in a range of texts since the eighteenth century, including Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, Madame de Stael’s *Corinne*, and Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, which trace the Northern European journey into a fantasy south, a space of erotic excitement, heightened experience, and, most importantly, art. For Siegel, these travellers are all doomed artists whose histories encode “the relation between artistic self-imagination and the fantastic encounter with what Europe stands for...access to the place of creative origin.”¹³ What the art romance records is the impossibility of securing that point of “creative origin,” despite an incessant “circling back to antecedents, to emblematic places or events identified by precursors.”¹⁴

The art romance, in other words, is characterized by its “inability to arrive at an origin for which it is nevertheless never able to stop reaching” towards;¹⁵ and what *The Bay of Noon* takes from the tradition – from Hawthorne and James, Freud and Proust, Forster and Mann, and others – is this compulsive repetition of the quest for authentic experience in the realm of the aesthetic. At the same time, however, *The Bay of Noon* is engaged in another kind of art romance, the compulsive repetition of the novel’s quest to go beyond the limits of its form, beyond narrative to poetry, and beyond the immateriality of language to the material density and plasticity of the visual arts. The risk, for the novelist, is the loss of historical coherence and legibility, the risk of fragmentation. This is what preoccupies Hazzard’s narrator-heroine, Jenny. Is the past a story that can be retold and made sense of, or is it suspended in a few fugitive memories: “a lilac dress Gioconda wore...or the Siena-coloured curtains of the apartment” (9)? This is a question that speaks to the tension in painting, sculpture, photography and, pre-eminently, cinema (and especially *Journey to Italy*, as Mulvey

¹² Siegel, *Haunted Museum: Longing, Travel and the Art-Romance Tradition* xiii.

¹³ Siegel, *Haunted Museum* xiv.

¹⁴ Siegel, *Haunted Museum* xiii-xiv.

¹⁵ Siegel, *Haunted Museum* xiv.

points out¹⁶) between movement and matter, animation and stillness, life and death. And it is a question that opens the novel to the problems of history. As in *Journey to Italy*, the desire in *The Bay of Noon* to breach the material boundaries of the medium – as if a statue could be brought to life by the camera as Rossellini’s film attempts, as if bodies could be turned to stone as the narrator imagines in the novel (86) – generates a pattern of imagery that vacillates between arrested motion and reanimation. It is, we might say, part of the magic of the Neapolitan setting, where life *has been* turned to stone, in the human remains of the buried cities. As Sigmund Freud so resonantly suggested in his reading of Wilhelm Jensen’s *Gravida*, in Pompeii the “disappearance of the past [is] combined with its preservation.”¹⁷

The Bay of Noon incorporates *Journey to Italy*, then, by conjoining itself, and by implication Rossellini’s film, to the art-romance tradition and its established figure of the Northern outsider heroine whose geographical and psychological descent into Naples becomes a journey of emotional reckoning. The novel even repeats *Journey to Italy*’s incorporation of “The Dead,” making use once again of the buried story of the piteous death of a youthful lover artist, Gaetano. In doing so, the novel is attempting to evade the immediate problem of literary versus cinematic representation, integrating it into the larger representational problem – the grand problem of Lessing’s *Laocoön*, no less, as well as *Journey to Italy*¹⁸: the problem of seriality and plasticity – which arises from the different (and competing) modes of visibility and narrativity in painting, photography, and poetry, as well as cinema. What is at stake here is not merely the competing capabilities of rival art-forms but their different capacities to respond to what

¹⁶ Mulvey, “Vesuvian Topographies: The Eruption of the Past in *Journey to Italy*,” 102-6.

¹⁷ Sigmund Freud, “Delusions and Dreams in Jensen’s *Gravida*,” *Writing on Art and Literature*, ed. James Strachey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) 45.

¹⁸ Mulvey, “Vesuvian Topographies: The Eruption of the Past in *Journey to Italy*,” 102-7. Lessing’s famous essay focuses on the different nature of the mediums of poetry and painting. He considered poetry to be a medium tied to time. Conversely, he believed that painting operated primarily in space. Consequently, unlike the painter, ‘the poet is not compelled to concentrate his picture into the space of a single moment’. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. E. C. Beasley (London: Longmans, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1853) 22.

might be called the trauma of time in post-war Europe. Time, argues Torriglia, emerges as a “repeated motif” in “postwar sensibility...precisely because time, in its diachronical unfolding, provided the (albeit equivocal) continuum against which a person could carve his or her identity.”¹⁹ This, in part, explains the prevalent anxiety in *The Bay of Noon* about time and the ways in which the past might be both confronted and retrieved.²⁰

For this reason the novel rejects outright the idea of intertextual anxiety or competition, emphasizing rather the mutually regenerative potential of inter-art relations. Once again, as in *Journey to Italy*, the post-war reconstruction of Italy and particularly of the devastated Naples is a crucial context for this attitude. The necessity for cooperation in the cultural reconstruction that followed the *Ventennio* (the twenty years of Fascist rule) was stark, as Anna Maria Torriglia notes:

[p]ainters, writers, and intellectuals were all dealing with the uneasy task of confronting the nation’s Fascist heritage and were entrapped in an effort of almost Promethean dimensions. On the one hand, they were striving to erase their individual and collective pasts; on the other, they were willing to construct a better present and, possibly, future for themselves and their country.²¹

In Italy at this time culture was “‘the locus’ where a new assemblage of the national identity could happen,”²² and cultural reconstruction required a conscious effort to reclaim lost cultural narratives with the *bricolage* of whatever was available among old and new cultural technologies and forms. In this way, Hazzard links the long tradition of intertextual exchange and formal transposition in the art romance to a discourse of urgent cultural recovery and rescue. For this reason, the novel presents itself not as an art-romance *per se* but as something more like an ‘art-world romance’. What interests

¹⁹ Anna Maria Torriglia, *Broken Time, Fragmented Space: A Cultural Map for Postwar Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002) xiii.

²⁰ Baym notes that the “‘discourse level” of the story, wherein the narrative reflects on itself...is quite prominent,” Nina Baym, “Artifice and Romance in Shirley Hazzard’s Fiction,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 25 (1983): 233.

²¹ Torriglia, *Broken Time* xi-xii.

²² Torriglia, *Broken Time* xii.

Hazzard here is not the heroine's direct encounter with the "stupendous fragmentariness" of Naples.²³ Jenny's affective *bildung*, her coming to her senses, takes place instead through her encounter with a group of creative artists – the painter Gaetano, the poet Gioconda, and the film-maker Gianni – whose own encounters with Naples (and interdependently with each other's art-forms) help her to see and experience a very different place in a very different way.²⁴ These are all small, local, almost inconsequential acts of intertextual engagement, discussed below, but what they achieve, I suggest, belongs to the imaginative reconstruction of a Naples buried by centuries of tourism and years of war. This Naples is unseen in *Journey to Italy* because it is a city resistant to the cinematic way of seeing – or perhaps I should say to the *singularly* cinematic way of seeing, for *The Bay of Noon* valorizes the cinematic, the poetic, the novelistic, the photographic, and the painterly only insofar as they are dialogically interdependent with each other.

This sense of the necessity for alliances between cultural forms and creative practices – a sideways reference to the official NATO rhetoric of cultural cooperation and rebuilding across war-torn Western Europe – is examined in the novel in a series of episodes and images which explore the expressive limitations of individual forms and the possibilities for (personal and artistic) renewal in inter-art encounters. When Jenny escapes the NATO compound and follows the advice in her guidebook – the "traveler who would know Naples...must take himself to Spaccanapoli, the split of Naples" (13) – she comes to know the Naples that waits on the other side of the tourist sites (a staple of the art-romance plot). As she explains: "I waited for the city, and its intervention" (11). Her chance comes when she decides to follow up on an introduction to Gioconda, the poet, from an English acquaintance. On her way to San Biagio dei Librai, she

²³ Eliot, George. *Middlemarch*. Ed. Rosemary Ashton (London: Penguin, 1994) 192.

²⁴ Previous criticism has not considered the novel's representation of artists, and has demonstrated only a passing interest in its World War/Cold War context: on the latter, see Robert Sellick, "Shirley Hazzard: Dislocation and Continuity," *Australian Literary Studies* 9 (1979) 186.

becomes momentarily lost, and pauses in front of a church. Conscious of the “excessive normality” that is required of her if she is to remain inconspicuous, as a woman sight seeing alone, in the face of the city’s dense, eccentric “profligacy of imagination,” the narrating self is, for an instant, split off from the narrated self, the tourist self:

The day had deteriorated, it was winter again, and the piazza was abandoned for the siesta. One pre-war Fiat, as lonely, as historic as the single car on an antiquated postcard, had been parked in the middle of the square. And I, perhaps, walking away from the church door, would have something now of the same anonymous arrested look – captured, as the saying goes, in the picture; serving to show, merely by human contrast, the dimensions of the buildings, to date the photograph unwittingly with my clothes and hair; somebody purloined from a crowd to act as an example. The light itself has dwindled to the joyless sepia of an old photograph.

The picture is re-animated – rather, it dissolves to life. (14)

At no point in the novel is the heroine’s retrospective self-narration a straightforward enterprise of remembering and recounting, but in this scene it becomes particularly unstable.²⁵ The sudden deterioration of the day brings about a momentary radical disordering of time. Tenses veer between past, present, and past conditional, and there is a suspension of indicative narration in an elaborate speculative fantasy (“And I, perhaps ...”), as well as a small catalogue of Gothic effects (the empty piazza, the dwindling light) that transform it into an uncanny de Chirico dreamscape. To be “captured” in the airless confinement of the still image – for the past self to be fixed in such a way, like an “antiquated postcard” or a “sepia...photograph” – is to become estranged from oneself. Here, the *doppelgänger* as anonymous tourist is caught in one’s own snapshot, a mute point of reference for an unredeemable past time and place.²⁶ To resume the narrative, the heroine must be rescued from the photographic image and brought (back) to life. But something is sacrificed, as the double meaning of the term ‘dissolve’ suggests so

²⁵ The mythic associations of this threshold scene in the novel have been discussed by Giovanna Capone. See Capone, “Shirley Hazzard: Transit and *the Bay of Noon*,” 177.

²⁶ Baym considers Hazzard’s use of the photograph in the short story “Cliffs of Fall” and notes the ways in which it is employed to suggest the central character’s detachment both from her life and the narrative. Nina Baym, “Artifice and Romance in Shirley Hazzard’s Fiction,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 25 (1983): 227.

well: the reanimation of the freeze-frame reclaims the narrative but wipes out the image. Neither the lucid fixity of the photographic still nor the unfolding meaning of the cinematic sequence can quite deal with the confounding variety of Naples; but nor can language alone, and the baroque descriptive prose that follows this passage struggles to capture, or to find a language-centered equivalence for, the material density of Naples.

Photographs, as the novel repeatedly insists, fall short of being able to capture and hold a moment or represent a character fully. In some cases, photographs are used as points of departure for a radical re-visioning of character, spectacularly in the case of Gianni. Jenny first encounters Gianni in photographs at Gioconda's flat in which he is depicted in shots of a stagey machismo. His body language in these photographs and his "lordly strut" are starkly contrasted to Gaetano not needing "to make any impression on the world" (58). Interestingly, Jenny's rather reductive notion of Gianni's character is challenged when on a visit to his apartment she sees "a great picture: a landscape seen through tears of joy." (91). But generally the photographic image is inadequate: the pictures of Gaetano that Gioconda shows Jenny reveal only "a cadaverous man in a heavy sweater" (62), and a remembered gesture of Gioconda's recalls her to Jenny "more...than any photograph could do" (17).

The deficiencies of photography in representing the weight of the past are approached once again when Gioconda and Gianni take Jenny to Herculaneum, a sequence where much else is going on besides. The scene in which Gioconda captures Gianni on film, her camera making its "tiny sound" from within the labyrinth of the ruined city, just after he has attempted unsuccessfully to seduce Jenny in the niche of a small Roman theatre, combines the photograph as trace and its ruinous setting. In this instant of a double exposure that is both mechanical and emotional, questions of the trustworthiness of the material preservations of the past arise. For how can we ever really know the

truth of the whole story? The photograph of Gianni approaches the ruin in its inability to represent the past more fully. Ironically, Gioconda announces that she has indeed captured Gianni: “‘It was so natural,’ she said. ‘So like you’” (36). In a confusion of present pasts – the rebuffed kiss, the photograph that Gioconda later gives to Jenny, and the material remains of the ancient city – the scene evokes the freeze-frame again: a live girl composing herself in the niche that was built for a now-absent statue, and the faithless film-maker frozen by the camera. Again, language can tell us more than the static image of the photograph, but not everything. And this ‘theatre’ of manners (Gianni tells Jenny that he was “only observing the conventions”) (36), this game of statues, reminds us of the greater historical folly. As Gianni puts it:

The ships were waiting to take them off. Ash and lava were streaming down on them. But they had dinner, they talked, they went to the baths, they slept. And then it was too late. (36)

The cast elements of the lava-preserved ruins share with the photograph an indexical status, in that they are the imprint of an original.²⁷ They represent a moment at once caught and lost: a catastrophe of time which is horrifically apposite for the post-Hiroshima, Cold-War world that is being run, as Jenny observes, by the NATO men “who perceived solutions in the violent deaths of numberless others, and who passionately advocated this view” (42).

Against the background of these relative limitations of cultural technologies, cultural media, and forms of artistic expression, and with an eye on its own complex borrowings and adaptations, *The Bay of Noon* explores two major possibilities for creative partnerships between language and image. Crucially, both of them involve poetry. The first is the partnership between Gianni, the film-maker, and his writer-collaborator, Gioconda, whose prose poem, *Del Tempo Felice* is salvaged by Gianni. We learn little

²⁷ For discussions of the status and aesthetics of indexical signs see Mulvey, “Vesuvian Topographies: The Eruption of the Past in *Journey to Italy*,” 97-98. See also Kitty Hauser, *Shadow Sites: Photography, Archaeology, and the British Landscape, 1927-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 61-62.

directly about this collaborative practice, just enough to position the two collaborators within the shifting terrain of neo-realism in the late forties and early fifties.²⁸ Gioconda's poem, with its overt reference to Dante, reworks the novel's (and neo-realism's) central theme of suffering, and more specifically alludes to the Dantean (and post-war) motif of remembering happy times during sad times. She tells Jenny:

Then I wrote that book, you know, *Del Tempo Felice*... In sleep I would tell myself all that had happened so I wouldn't wake up thinking myself still there – at that place – because remembering happiness was the worst of all, just as the poets say. In suffering everything is as the poets say.(61)²⁹

Gianni's film of *Del Tempo Felice*, with its “darkly photographed interiors and flickering close-ups” (12-13), and its poetry in sub-titles, is therefore an example of a film which has incorporated a literary text (which has itself incorporated Dante's *Divine Comedy*) and which is itself interpolated into a literary text (the novel).³⁰ It is also, moreover, still another version of “The Dead.” At the end of the war, Gioconda had become the lover of Gaetano, a struggling painter. He is, of course, another figure for the boy-aesthete, a Michael Furey or Charles Lewington. Gaetano – his patron was Gioconda's father, who ultimately rebuffs the young artist when the latter refuses to join up with the resistance movement – is killed by a land-mine (a neo-realist touch), leaving Gioconda to write a version of his story as the prose poem *Del Tempo Felice*. In Gianni's film, therefore, the intertextual relationship between cinema and poetry rests on an act of emotional and textual rescue. This is the means by which Gioconda survives, and by which a marginal text survives within a stronger medium: “It was a

²⁸ Mark Shiel, *Italian Neorealism: Rebuilding the Cinematic City* (London: Wallflower Press, 2006) 3-4. Shiel argues that by the fifties as prosperity rose neorealism lost its artistic coherence and momentum.

²⁹ This echoes yet another poet writing not of poets but painters – Auden's lines “About suffering, they were never wrong,/ The old Masters – and in so doing, disturbs again the boundaries between poetry and painting. See “Musée des Beaux Arts” in W. H. Auden, *Selected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1976) 79-80.

³⁰ Later in the novel, Jenny tells of a more recent collaboration between Gioconda and Gianni. It receives no critical acclaim at its release but is later revived in art house cinemas. This is surely yet another echo of *Journey to Italy*. See *Bay* (152).

rescue,” she says: “He devoted himself to me, to that work of mine” (61). Gianni’s heroism in using the cinema to salvage what would otherwise be lost dramatizes the reconstructive project of neo-realism itself. As Gioconda tells Jenny: “I think that’s why films were such a big thing in Italy after the war. It was something fresh, untainted – an art whose practitioners hadn’t as yet disgraced themselves” (95).³¹

In the novel Gianni has a larger visual project too. He is essentially given the role of inducting Jenny into a new way of looking at the world that relates to the poetic quality and counter-intuitiveness of Neapolitan spaces and histories. For example, Gianni commends to Jenny the eccentric building practices of the Bourbons (34) and the “uncanny...means of access” (39) to the ancient apartment she rents above the Bay. He also champions the strange passivity of the inhabitants of Herculaneum in the face of the volcanic eruption: ““You see how it is with us,’ he said” (36). He is, if you like, her guide into the arcana of Naples. He tells her:

It’s the city, the phenomenon of Naples itself, that knows something. It’s like an important picture, or a book – once you’ve taken it in, you can’t believe there was ever a time when you didn’t know it...This will change everything for you being here. Naples is a leap. It’s through the looking-glass. (38)

When Hazzard introduces the notion of Naples as a “looking-glass” and Jenny looks “out at the oval mirror of the bay,” this joins a string of interrelated images to do with looking in the novel: the aquarium, the city as a theatre backstage, and later, the windows of Jenny’s Posillipo apartment as a theatre box. This interlinked imagery of frames, glass and mirrors lends a material presence to the twinned themes of looking

³¹ In this Hazzard presents a very idealistic notion of the untaintedness of film in immediate post-war years. See Torriglia for a discussion of the ways in which Fascist cultural configurations persisted after the war. For instance, Rossellini collaborated with Mussolini’s son, a key figure in introducing Italian film-makers into Hollywood. Torriglia, *Broken Time, Fragmented Space: A Cultural Map for Postwar Italy* 30.

and self-transformation.³² Here, the ghostly imprint of film itself is submerged in this lens-like imagery.

Whereas Gioconda's prose poem aspires, by its annexation of Dante, to speak for all Italy in the grand manner – *Del Tempo Felice* proclaims itself in its title as a kind of latter-day vernacular epic – the work that inspired it, Gaetano's painting, is far more modest and, the novel implies, far more important. In the same way that Gioconda's and Gianni's film is contextualized by a contemporary arts' practice, neo-realism, Gaetano's style is given a historical contemporary marker by being compared to the work of the Italian painter-poet Filippo de Pisis (53).³³ And like *Del Tempo Felice*, Gaetano's "La Ginestra" or "The Broom" is also based on poetry, Leopardi's famous poem of the same name.³⁴ The painting represents symbolically the story of Gioconda and Gaetano's war-wrecked love, but it is also the central symbolic image of the novel, holding as it does a special political and representational significance for the novel's Southern Italian setting. The image of the flower is crucial, moreover, to the novel's correction of the cinematic point of view made dominant by *Journey to Italy*. As Nelson Moe has shown, Leopardi's poem signifies a revision of the picturesque tradition associated with Vesuvius and announces another way of looking, not from an idyllic distance (across the Bay or from the North) but in proximity to the volcano as destructive force. In fact, the view shifts to the top of the volcano itself, in all its "geological materiality."³⁵ In this way, argues Moe, Leopardi's poem contains a critique of Northern, progressive ideals: we think we can distance ourselves from suffering through progress but the volcano, synecdoche for the South, reminds us that suffering is an ineradicable part of the picture

³² See Capone for a discussion of imagery to do with looking in the novel and its relation to identity: Capone, "Shirley Hazzard: Transit and *the Bay of Noon*," 176-77.

³³ De Pisis, inspired by the metaphysical school of de Chirico, is best known for still lifes, especially those depicting flowers.

³⁴ For an account of Hazzard's use of Leopardi's "La Ginestra" in *Bay* see Algerina Neri, "Ripening in the Sun: Shirley Hazzard's Heroines in Italy," *Westerly* 28.4 (1983): 42.

³⁵ Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* 122-24.

and that human tenure on the earth is brief and fragile. This anti-picturesque summation of Vesuvius as exterminator is echoed by Jenny's own observations:

That view of the Bay of Naples has passed the point where it can ever find its master, its Guardi or its Canaletto; has become virtually a comic sight in art, its configurations too intimately known, even to those who have never seen them, now to be revealed. It gives an impression of indifference to the role humanly assigned to it – as if it will go on, now, lending itself to posters, to chocolate boxes, without ever giving itself away; just as Vesuvius goes on absorbing the tributes of those it clearly intends to exterminate.(39-40).

The wild broom functions in Leopardi's poem as a reworking of the lilies of the field, and despite its precarious position growing on the slopes of Vesuvius, returns each Spring, offering an image of frail defiance in the face of likely extermination.

Like Leopardi's broom, Gaetano is humble and lowly.³⁶ He is described in Gioconda's recounting of their lost love as being "solitary as a scarecrow, with the speech of a poor Roman" and "workman's clothes" (54). A conscientious objector, he keeps on painting in an isolated fisherman's hut south of Rome, where Gioconda finally joins him, until the landmine kills him – ironically, just after the end of the war in 1946. Gaetano's story valorizes the practice of art as a form of political resistance. Leopardi's image of the broom that he paints – wild and lowly – symbolizes this resistance itself, and in the reconstructionist landscape of the novel his own frail broom-like defiance offers an alternative to the taking up of arms in a return to a primal place and practice. His stance of art-making as resistance is contrasted to the active political resistance of Gioconda's father.³⁷

³⁶ In his reading of Leopardi, Moe notes "[p]roximity and lowness are crucial to the representation of the true condition of humankind". Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* 124.

³⁷ This conflict between Gaetano and Gioconda's father makes visible the generational differences involved in responses to Fascist rule. See Torriglia, *Broken Time, Fragmented Space: A Cultural Map for Postwar Italy* 14-15.

To my father it was indecent, in those circumstances, to shut oneself in a room. Any resistance, organized or futile, seemed better to him than that. To the painter, it was the only course – to stay in one’s room and go on painting. (57)

Just as Gioconda’s poem is figured as a “message” sent by a “castaway” (61), the painting “La Ginestra” manages to encode and transmit in its single image all the power of Leopardi’s pro-South position. Together with this, the silent language of Gaetano’s broom is the flower language of a *memento mori*; it operates as it does in Leopardi’s poem to remind us that “our destiny is in the earth,”³⁸ to remind us of the dead. Like Michael Furey and Charles Lewington before him, Gaetano functions to remind us of death precisely because he was so singularly alive and authentic.³⁹

Through this borrowing and reworking of Leopardi’s broom, which, it could be argued, becomes a floral symbol for the frailty and resilience of Naples itself, Hazzard finds a unifying symbolic scheme for her whole novel. The name Ginestra is echoed in all the central character’s names: Jenny, Gianni, Justin and Gioconda. This, Neri argues “does not mean that they are not unique, but that they share a frail mortality, and an ennobling determination to live more intensely, to flower more brightly.”⁴⁰ The bright yellow of the broom travels beyond Gaetano’s canvas to recur as a colour motif throughout *The Bay of Noon*. It resurfaces in the detail of the yellow roses, “these ironic flowers of Naples” (31), that Jenny buys after her first real foray into the ancient heart of the city, and in her malaria-yellow skin towards the novel’s close. This recurring use of Naples yellow becomes closely associated with a painted city, a city buried under the weight of not only the threat of an active volcano but also the weight of its own visual history.⁴¹

³⁸ Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* 124.

³⁹ Gaetano is represented as being “without postures, with no sense of a role” and he has steered clear of a public life in the arts in which “Integrity itself must be a pose.” (54-55).

⁴⁰ Neri, “Ripening in the Sun: Shirley Hazzard’s Heroines in Italy,” 42.

⁴¹ The Italian cinematographer Luca Bigazzi has noted the yellowness of Naples. See Caldwell, “Imagining Naples: The Senses of the City,” 60.

Gaetano's image travels in other ways too. In a mirroring scene of Gioconda's father first glimpsing Gaetano's work through the open doorway of a gallery in Rome, Gioconda stumbles across "La Ginestra" at a Madison Avenue gallery in New York:

The girl at the desk kept saying, "check your shopping bag. Check your bag, Miss," and I was staring at his yellow canvas across the room. They had a notice, *Please do not touch the paintings*; they should forbid the paintings to touch *you*. ... 'It was nothing unpredictable, was it, after all? But then I felt it like a violence done to me. Gianni and I had just become lovers. (62)

Gioconda's encounter with Gaetano's painting speaks to Torriglia's argument (quoted above) about the work of reconstruction, in part, also being the work of forgetting. She is drawn into the "light and carpet" of the gallery to keep warm but she cannot, as in the present scene of telling Jenny Gaetano's history, keep the cold out. This recalls the kind of cold that Gabriel in "The Dead" tries vainly to prevent from streaming in.⁴² But here Gaetano's far-from-ghostly return also represents the robust materiality and survival of the painted image.⁴³ At its new home in New York, it speaks back to two statements made by Gioconda about the trauma she has suffered: that "the idea of Gaetano is always with me" (62), and that sometimes the best way to go on loving a place or a person is by missing them (52).

In these ways, then, the novel deals with the proximity and power of Rossellini's *Journey to Italy* by offering its heroine a very different kind of journey through the visual culture of the past, and by suggesting a very different set of social and cultural conditions for the inter-art relations that animate both novel and film. The art romance –

⁴²See David Seed, "'British Modernists Encounter the Cinema,'" *Literature and the Visual Media*, ed. David Seed (Cambridge: D.S.Brewer, 2005) 53. Seed discusses the literal and metaphorical uses of Gabriel attempting to shut out the cold in "The Dead".

⁴³The transit of Gaetano's painting to New York recalls the cultural migrations of Elvira Notari's *dal vero* films to that city. Giuliana Bruno argues that a visual synergy exists between New York and Naples because they are both restless cinecities. Bruno describes the ways in which a generation of immigrant Italians kept a sense of Italy in America alive through the commissioning of small films of their home towns. The painting "La Ginestra" shares with Notari's films a radical sense of regionalism. See Bruno's essay "City Views: The Voyage of Films" in Clarke, ed., *The Cinematic City* 46-58.

the heroine's quest for authentic experience in the realm of the aesthetic – is in this fashion modified to explore those conditions, and the novel's direct engagement with *Journey to Italy* is therefore of special significance to its wider themes. The imagery of *The Bay of Noon* bears the marks of modernist literature's predictable interest in the techniques of film, and the novel pays homage to Naples as a significant city whose cinematic identity emerges from the Grand Tour traditions of the famous panorama of the Bay.⁴⁴ In her extensive work on the visual culture of Naples, especially Naples in film, Giuliana Bruno has traced the ways in which this culture of viewing, of looking, developed out of tourist practice itself.⁴⁵ In this way, the Northern outsider heroines of both Hazzard's novel and *Journey to Italy* are the distant daughters of those Grand Tourists who came to Naples to connect with the aura of a venerable past, who came to look. The danger is always, however, a certain reductiveness, a certain predictability about Neapolitan imaginary which the novel projects back to *Journey to Italy*, and is anxious to avoid in itself. In the chapter in which Jenny visits the ruined town of Herculaneum with Gioconda and Gianni, for example, the scene in which Jenny rebuffs Gianni's advances is flanked by details that relate strongly to *Journey to Italy*'s recreation of a particular kind of Naples, one imbued by the irrational and the primal. The novel's echoic use of Neapolitan song, donkeys blocking the road, and the fortune teller gesture to the ways in which it encodes a kind of clichéd napoletanità in these debased filmic supernatural details. In Mulvey's reading of *Journey to Italy* she argues that "the inscription of the human figure onto celluloid is one more layer, one more trace, of the past fossilized in time."⁴⁶ Here, it could be argued, on a meta-narrative level, *The Bay of Noon* gestures to the fossil of the film it holds within itself.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of the ways in which literary Modernism mobilizes film techniques see Seed, "British Modernists Encounter the Cinema", 48-52.

⁴⁵ See Bruno, *Atlas* 362-70.

⁴⁶ Mulvey, "Vesuvian Topographies: The Eruption of the Past in *Journey to Italy*," 98.

Journey to Italy begins abruptly with forceful and soulful Neapolitan folk singing. It cuts from its credits to the representation of a journey by road, which, as Mulvey argues, has not only a narrative function but also a metaphysical one.⁴⁷ A little way into this journey South by road, the impatient, out-of-sorts travellers are slowed by a herd of oxen. In this crossing of borders they have crossed also into a space in which time moves differently and in which the rhythms of life are still linked more emphatically to nature.⁴⁸ In the exposition of Chapter Four of *The Bay of Noon* Hazzard draws on just such details to confer a similar sense of the primal languor of the South. Gianni sings as they drive along. Significantly, he champions songs by Libero Bovio and Salvatore di Giacomo that are specifically related to the revival of songs in dialect. Here, for atmospheric effect, Hazzard utilizes the ‘soundtrack’ of the South, so well established in films like *Journey to Italy*.⁴⁹ And when Gianni’s song is done, Rossellini’s herd of oxen is replaced by “a dozen stunted donkeys” that apply “their muzzles humidly to the Maserati as it inched among them.” (35). Jenny, Gianni and Gioconda are also, at this point, crossing over into a primal landscape.

Similarly, Jenny’s trip to Herculaneum can be linked to Katherine’s sight-seeing trip to Cumae. The guide placing Katherine in the pose of Christian prisoners chained by Saracens is echoed by Gianni placing Jenny in the niche of the Roman theatre. When the contemporary heroine plays statues with an idea of the shape of the past, the presentness of the past is forcefully represented.⁵⁰ The notional ground for which Cumae stands

⁴⁷ Mulvey, “Vesuvian Topographies: The Eruption of the Past in *Journey to Italy*,” 96-97.

⁴⁸ On a sense of the difference between Southern and Northern time see Mulvey, “Vesuvian Topographies: The Eruption of the Past in *Journey to Italy*,” 97. On the South constructed as a timeless, ahistorical zone and the significance of the road journey post-war see Torriglia, *Broken Time, Fragmented Space: A Cultural Map for Postwar Italy* 119.

⁴⁹ See Bruno, *Atlas* 383-84. Bruno states that “[f]ilmic city tours such as Rossellini’s *Voyage in Italy* [*Journey*] and Martone’s *L’amore molesto* have interestingly “pictured” the Neapolitan cityscape through its sound.”

⁵⁰ On the ways in which contemporary Neapolitans were seen as having a direct bodily link to bodies in the past see Astarita, *Between Salt Water and Holy Water: A History of Southern Italy* 248-49. Astarita writes that “the Neapolitan cleric, archeologist and museum curator Andrea de Jorio (1769-1851) compared Neapolitan gestures to those he saw on ancient vases and paintings. Neapolitan culture, he

is also carried over in other ways to the novel. As Mulvey argues, “Cumae brings with it an accumulation of resonance, trace and relic,” being “a place of mystery, or rather “the mysteries,” the “secrets of the religion, whether of the oracle or of early Christianity.”⁵¹ This oracular presence is replaced in *The Bay of Noon* by the fortune teller in the restaurant scene that occurs just after the visit to Herculaneum. This debased oracle, “her gypsy costume topped by a worn grey cardigan” (37), is at first, through the observation of Jenny and her companions, seen as a dubious figure. But the tone of the scene changes when the fortune that is told sobers the couple who have paid to hear it. This “premonition of loss” (38) suggests again the ways in which the power of the past so strongly haunts the present in Naples. The presence of the fortune teller in this scene creates a metaphysical level of inquiry too, or as Gioconda puts it: “The possibility that someone really knows, and has got the upper hand of it all.” (38). Access to this epistemological plenitude is, in this scene, finally conferred by Gianni on Naples itself.

What Naples knows, finally, and what it has offered to Jenny, is a kind of consolation. In giving her a new past and a “place to miss” it also offers its great past. Its ancient backdrop, a constant reminder of catastrophe and human fragility, functions as a foil to the NATO men with whom Jenny works, men who are implicated in the idea of mass exterminations. Writing about a deep sense of the past Kitty Hauser argues that

[t]he archaeological imagination comfortingly saw the past as essentially ineradicable, despite the destructive and alienating effects of modernity, and of war. The past was not gone altogether, then; death, too, could surely not be final. The survival of the past in the landscape could function as a powerful metaphor for other kinds of survival – of nation, in particular; but also the survival of memory, the self, and the soul.⁵²

concluded, perpetuated ancient life in living, bodily form.” In Hazzard’s novel, Jenny sees Gioconda as vitally linked to an archeological past when she imagines her as an ancient bronze (86).

⁵¹ Mulvey, “Vesuvian Topographies: The Eruption of the Past in *Journey to Italy*,” 105.

⁵² Hauser, *Shadow Sites: Photography, Archaeology, and the British Landscape, 1927-1955*, 55-56.

Despite a history of catastrophe and trauma, then, and despite the extreme vulnerability of individual human lives in the face of such massive forces, Naples represents survival. Life continues in the shadow of the volcano, and the terrible clutch of death (expressed iconically in *Journey to Italy* as the clutched dead Pompeiian lovers) is also ultimately the embrace of life. For both *The Bay of Noon* and *Journey to Italy* the fundamental relationship between life and death is captured in the archaeological relationship between motionlessness and animation. Both Northern heroines are living a kind of life in death but they have entered a territory in which, as in Joyce's story, the dead are more alive. They are reanimated by experiencing the consolations of a deep continuity between the present and the past that is realized in both film and novel in an interchange of imagery between that of stillness and animation: the empty spaces of the bodies underground reanimated by plaster (metaphorically the reanimation of a buried love); Gioconda stilled as an ancient bronze; and in the interplay between film and novel, too, one medium is rescued and comes back to life in another.

The novel's layered inter-lacings of other texts, especially ones that belong to visual cultures, allows for an ongoing investigation of a dynamic between stillness and animation, a relationship that is laid down in the very histories of the buried cities and the presence of Vesuvius. Life goes on about the volcano but it holds the power to still time as it did in AD79. Writing on Fabrizia Raimondino's Neapolitan world, Maria Ornella Marotti observes that "Neapolitans are caught between magic enchantment at the natural beauties of the bay...and a feeling of suspension over an abyss."⁵³ This feeling of suspension is caught in Hazzard's title itself in which the words "bay" (space) and "noon" (time) seem to hang in balance. The temporal turning point of noon confers the sense of a hinge between orders of reality that offers a secret space of possibilities.⁵⁴

⁵³ Marotti, ed., *Italian Women Writers from the Renaissance to the Present* 176.

⁵⁴ Midday and midnight are traditionally times of mysterious happenings. Jensen's Gradiva, an imagined frieze come to life, walks Pompeii at midday in Norbert Hanold's dream.

It relates forward to the echoes of jumping through the looking glass into a space that promises transformation; however it is not a place in which to stay. It is only a pause.

Conclusion

Naples Inside-Out: *L'amore molesto*

Certainly, if you come to know Naples you will never cease to rail at its woes – joined in your laments by Neapolitans too courteous, perhaps, to inquire how other societies are likely to look by their third millennium.

(Shirley Hazzard)¹

Persephone
was used to death. Now over and over
her mother hauls her out again.

(Louise Glück)²

The value of Naples, both socially and aesthetically..., may lie not in its pretended uniqueness but in its capacity for dispersal, for losing itself and thereby escaping the predictable.

(Iain
Chambers)³

Naples is obviously not a pause for the characters who are born there, however, and part of the problem in outsider representations is the extent to which the extreme hardship of life in a corrupt, decrepit, poorly governed metropolis is aestheticized, or at worst invisible. The art romance is a fantasy of the leisured – the Goethes, the Dickenses and Ruskins and Jamesons; the Katherines and Jennys – who are away from home for a time and are, as it were, writing back to a non-Neapolitan audience.⁴ But there is no romance on the inside: that is where artists starve, as Gaetano does in *Bay of Noon*, or produce kitsch images of gypsies for the tourist trade, as Delia's poverty-stricken, disaffected and failed artist father does in Mario Martone's *L'amore molesto* (1995). Martone has

¹ Hazzard and Steegmuller, *The Ancient Shore: Dispatches from Naples* 242.

² Louise Glück, *Averno* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2006) 76.

³ Chambers, *Migrancy* 106.

⁴ On Goethe's love of Naples see Astarita, *Between Salt Water and Holy Water: A History of Southern Italy* 221. On the more ambivalent responses of Dickens and Ruskin see Verdicchio, "'O Cuorp' 'E Napule: Naples and the Cinematographic Body of Culture," 259. On Jameson's ecstatic response to Naples and its surrounds see Jameson, *The Diary of an Ennuyée* 195-244.

openly acknowledged his debt to *Journey to Italy*, but interestingly his estranged Neapolitan heroine Delia is perhaps a more direct (if unknowing) descendant of Hazzard's Gioconda, who survived a wartime exile in the Abruzzi to return to the bombing of Naples, and lost her lover to a land-mine. Throughout the novel Gioconda displays a complex, unsentimental and ambivalent love for the city of her birth, and for Italian culture as a whole. In Chapter 10 of *Bay of Noon*, Jenny glimpses beneath Gioconda's façade to see "that she had come to hold herself steady, in the way that long-suffering women do, so that you can practically see the blows that have been rained on them, to which they have not bowed" (102). In this unguarded moment the body language is accompanied by the words of a folksong that Jenny and Gioconda hear drifting up to their apartment from a cockle-shell boat on the bay, music that issues, as Jenny remarks, from "a collective respiration" (101):

Those who are right
Let's admit they're right;
As for those who are wrong –
Let's admit they're right too. (102)

These lines express a shared ancient resignation that belongs to the singers and to Gioconda, who sings the words back to herself in the mirror and, by association, to the collective identity of Naples itself, the survivor of so many catastrophes and vicissitudes.

To conclude this reading of the three texts that share a Vesuvian trajectory of transformed identities, I want to argue that both these Neapolitan female characters perform a resilience that is aligned to the notion of Naples itself as a survivor. It is as if the accumulated experience of a place bestows on these characters a fortitude for which the place is itself renowned. This dynamic between place and character, it might be argued, is another version of the porosity which permits exchanges and flows between

character and place. This is echoed in accounts of the experience of Naples where, as Hazzard notes:

Even the grandest edifices are not “monuments” but expressions of temperament in their nobility, their strangeness or sweetness, their theatricality. The simplicity with which, in all Italy, citizens will treat some great shrine as a familiar is almost reciprocal at Naples, where the very buildings draw vitality from the populace, who in turn seem nourished on color, form and line.⁵

In his record of a visit to the city, Jean-Paul Sartre put things less poetically than Hazzard, but he, too, remarks on the reciprocal relationship between the inside and the outside, people and place:

Walking down a street in Naples, we pass a clump of people sitting outside, busy doing everything the French do in private...The image forced me to feel the generosity and obscenity of the streets of Naples, where thousands of families turn their stomachs inside out...Everything is outside, you understand, but everything remains contiguous, interlinked, organically connected to the inside.⁶

Here again we come across another version of Benjamin’s Naples: the space that confuses the boundaries between interior and exterior. We also reencounter the metaphor of the belly which, as we know, has a long association with the old centre of the city and was used to effect by Rossellini in *Journey to Italy* to symbolize both vitality and the strong presence of women – in the form of both pregnant passers-by and shrines to the Madonna.⁷ In Martone’s *L’amore molesto* we will also find this specific image of the belly, and an emphatic continuation of the imaginative linking of Naples to the feminine. But, as Caldwell suggests, here we will see a “rendering of Naples from the inside” as the viewer journeys to the literal and figurative underworld spaces of Delia’s childhood and birth city.⁸

⁵ Hazzard and Steegmuller, *The Ancient Shore: Dispatches from Naples* 54.

⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *Witness to My Life: The Letters of Jean-Paul Sartre to Simone De Beauvoir*, trans. Lee Fahnestock and Norman MacAfee (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1992) 64-67.

⁷ In his essay on Naples Benjamin observes in the city centre “tenement blocks...held together at the corners, as if by iron clamps, by the murals of the Madonna.” Benjamin, *One-Way Street* 170.

⁸ Caldwell, “Imagining Naples: The Senses of the City,” 57.

L'amore molesto tells, once again, the story of a woman transformed by a stay in Naples. The Neapolitan director belongs to a generation of homegrown filmmakers, including Pappi Corsicato, Antonio Capuano, Stefano Incerti and Antonietta De Lillo, who came to prominence in the broader cultural renaissance of the 1990s with projects centered on the renegotiation of outsider images of their city. The so-called Vesuvian school of film makers has produced work that is naturally in dialogue with the freight of earlier cinematic images associated with the city and has been particularly concerned to distance itself from the clichéd and folkloric aspects of *napoletanità*, even though this might inform its work in knowing ways.⁹ In the films of this generation, dubbed “the children of neorealism,” we encounter the recuperation of Naples from the alien viewpoint. What these younger film makers share with Rossellini is their social engagement, which

parallels that of the old neorealists’ assumption of social responsibility through film. The poverty of resources with which this new generation had to contend and the political ends of their films also can be traced to that earlier group...in addition to which their very lives and the places they inhabit were in the past the subjects of neorealist representation¹⁰

The Naples that Martone creates in *L'amore molesto* is unquestionably indebted to neorealism in its focus on the everyday lives of people, its refusal to romanticize its subject matter and setting, and, importantly, in the sense of its interest in a collective rather than a solely individualist vision. But other stylistic elements are also at work. In creating “an urban environment that seems to be both familiar and strange, contemporary and archaic,” Martone blends this inherited realism with codes from film

⁹ On the position that this new generation of Neapolitan film directors hold and their reactions to the representational history that they inherited see Bruno, *Atlas* 367-69. Bruno notes that “the new wave of Italian filmmaking...has its centre in Naples”. See also Verdicchio, ““O Cuorp’ ‘E Napule:Naples and the Cinematographic Body of Culture,” 270.

¹⁰ Verdicchio, ““O Cuorp’ ‘E Napule:Naples and the Cinematographic Body of Culture,” 260. Verdicchio refers to Martone, Corsicato and Capuano as “the children of neorealism” on this page.

noir and also from his background in theatre.¹¹ Martone's earlier involvement in the establishment of a Neapolitan theatre company, *Teatri Uniti*, is apparent in his film work in several ways: his ongoing collaboration with an ensemble of actors including Anna Bonaiuto (who plays Delia), his shot composition, and his commitment to the use of Neapolitan dialect, which, as O'Healy notes, has limited his film's audiences.¹² We can therefore say that Martone's work is firmly rooted in the culture, and cultural industry, of its locale, and for this reason it also fits more broadly within the tradition of European art cinema, where the directors' lives and preoccupations strongly texture their film work.¹³ We could say, then, that Martone's work is both profoundly local and international; and this is why Delia's story is so powerful, because it speaks to both the particular and the universal. To the strands of social realism, film noir, and theatre, we could also add the mythopoeic. In *L'amore molesto*, we meet a Naples that is at once more gritty, dystopian and dissonant than those of Rossellini or Hazzard, and one that's mythic quality does not belong to the imposed desires of an outsider's views but is embedded in the psychic life of the place itself.

In *Journey to Italy* and *Bay of Noon*, place gets inside the central protagonists. What Katherine and Jenny have to learn remains, in the first instance, barely articulated, and in the second, "a place that could be missed" (145). At times, they both struggle to express the process of what exactly happens to them in Naples. But in *L'amore molesto* Delia's task, as the estranged local, is to get back inside the city and the childhood secret that is buried there. There are no tourist views, no bay, volcano or petrified cities here, precisely because these are simply not the kinds of spaces that Delia has to come to terms with again. The weight of the past inheres instead in the shadowy film-noir

¹¹ O'Healy, "Revisiting the Belly of Naples: The Body and the City in the Films of Mario Martone," 239. On *noir* codes in *L'amore molesto* see Pauline Small, "Representing the Female: Rural Idylls, Urban Nightmares," *Italian Cinema: New Directions*, ed. William Hope (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005) 167.

¹² O'Healy, "Revisiting the Belly of Naples: The Body and the City in the Films of Mario Martone," 256.

¹³ Caldwell, "Imagining Naples: The Senses of the City," 56.

interiors and alleys of the old city. It has been noted above that both Rossellini's and Hazzard's texts also explore the anti-spectacular, but Martone's work is the most strongly involved with the revisionary project of representing Naples in this way, belonging to a generation, as he does, whose work is both a critique of clichés and stereotypes of the city but who still display a nostalgia for some of these.¹⁴

This complex relationship to the traditions of representing Naples belongs most emphatically to native-born artists, and it could be said that this type of envisioning has a double quality:

Naples is composed of two cities. The first consists of elements that have survived of the ancient city, still retraceable in the faces, language and behavior of the part of the population that has managed to resist modernization. The other aspect of Naples is composed of what has grown up around the old city like a parasite on a plant: the contemporary city, rife with real estate speculation, petit bourgeois competitiveness, and a tradition of corruption based on the collusion of political power and organized crime. These two cities are not isolated from each other; the contemporary city distorts many aspects of the older part, it vampirizes, feeds off it, transforming it into a phantasm.¹⁵

I want to put forward the argument that *L'amore molesto* is a dramatization of Martone's notion of Naples as two cities in its insistent quality of doubling. Moreover, it is also an attempt to reconcile the two versions of Naples that Martone perceives and this process is interiorized in the experience of Delia's return. In part, the film is a detective story. The initial and more straightforward mystery that it presents involves the death of Delia's respectable mother in dubious circumstances. But this is only a surface layer of a much more complex story. When Delia returns from her chosen Northern home of Bologna to investigate her mother's death, an interiorized detective counter-plot commences, still tied to the mystery of the mother but focused more fully on a traumatic event in Delia's childhood. Perhaps it is she, after all, who has been dead,

¹⁴ O'Healy notes that Martone's work is "not immune to some of the myths generated by those who have viewed Naples from the outside." O'Healy, "Revisiting the Belly of Naples: The Body and the City in the Films of Mario Martone," 242.

¹⁵ O'Healy quotes this from Martone's book *Teatro di Guerra: un diario*. O'Healy, "Revisiting the Belly of Naples: The Body and the City in the Films of Mario Martone," 240.

or dead to a past that she must work out in order to heal and move on. As with the other texts about Naples that we have considered, we enter the territory again of the dead being more alive than the living. It is also, in this way, a story about a daughter and a mother 'dead' or lost to one another through the violence of excessively patriarchal gender politics, a daughter who defines herself against both her mother and her mother city. Her tentative renegotiating of place brings Delia to a greater, more compassionate understanding of her mother's life, and renews her connection to her early home and revitalizes her identity.

Doubling is the central structural premise of *L'amore molesto*, therefore. Its action occurs over two days and spans two time frames, the film's 1990s present and the flashbacks to Delia's memories of her 1950s childhood. Martone's sense of Naples as two cities, "ancient" and "contemporary," emerges not only via these two timeframes and their representational differences, but also in the vestiges of the old within the new.¹⁶ O'Healy notes the ways in which both gender roles and generation mark the ways in which character can move around the city, and also differences in their gestures and their language.¹⁷ In the characters of Amalia, Caserta, and Delia's uncle, we meet Martone's ancient tribe corralled in a city they no longer understand. And we meet, as well, Delia's unease and bewilderment at these older, more dramatic, argumentative and politically incorrect modes of identity and expression. In the contrast between the older generation and Delia's reaction to it, the film provides an image of two superimposed realities. Although Martone recognizes the damage that rigid gender roles have done to different generations of Neapolitans, and to both women and men, these are not judged

¹⁶ Martone's conception of an ancient Naples concealed inside a contemporary one, resonates with the ways in which the sense of a long past abides in the present in both *Journey* and *Bay*. It is interesting to note that this is linked particularly to the body and to gesture. Examples include the way in which the guides in *Journey* make comments about likenesses between bodies in the past and the present; and Jenny comparing Gioconda to an ancient bronze statue in *Bay*. In Martone, the emphatic gestures of the older generation seem outmoded and hold the sense of another time. Caldwell notes that "'pastness' forms an intractable aspect of Mediterranean cities and their associations". Caldwell, "Imagining Naples: The Senses of the City," 59.

¹⁷ O'Healy, "Revisiting the Belly of Naples: The Body and the City in the Films of Mario Martone," 254.

excessively but seen as part of a larger and longer history of deprivation. Ultimately the film is an attempt to reconcile both a personal and a collective history of trauma to a more positive future.

Another striking quality of this creation of the sense of two cities is reflected in the ways in which Martone has managed to blend together a sense of the contemporary and archaic through a layering of social realism with the mythopoeic in a way that adds to our understanding of the relationship between the city and femininity. Caldwell points out that *L'amore molesto* is one of the only contemporary Italian films to explore in depth the mother-daughter relationship, and I would argue that one of the ways in which it does this is through female mythic figures strongly associated with the Naples region, although these are subtly embedded and do not intrude into the film's contemporary *mise-en-scène*.¹⁸ Martone draws strongly on the foundational mythic narratives of both Demeter and Persephone, and the siren Parthenope.¹⁹ In addition to this, the film's highly symbolic use of colour imagery, exchanged garments, and underground spaces all work to augment this reading.

The Demeter-Persephone myth, which is deployed in the film loosely, not prescriptively, relates the story of a daughter lost to a mother, a daughter kidnapped by Hades, lord of the underworld. It is in essence a story about a female child swapping a matriarchal economy for a patriarchal one; and a myth about cyclical or seasonal recovery and renewal (through the ritual return of the daughter, who is won back for

¹⁸ Caldwell argues that the mother daughter relationship is 'embedded in Naples'. Caldwell, "Imagining Naples: The Senses of the City," 61.

¹⁹ The connections between these myths and the Campania region are discussed by Jordan Lancaster. Both myths express geographical relations to Naples in that Demeter creates the Southern volcanoes in order to illuminate the search for Persephone by the sirens after her abduction. The most famous of the sirens was Parthenope who drowned herself after she failed to lure Ulysses. When Greek colonists found her naked body washed up in the Bay of Naples they named their city after her. Martone clearly references these myths in the relationship between Delia and Amalia; and in the image of Amalia's body washed up in the Bay. For discussions of the myths of the Campania region see Jordan Lancaster, *In the Shadow of Vesuvius: A Cultural History of Naples* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2005) 9-11. See also Hersey, *Architecture, Poetry, and Number in the Royal Palace at Caserta* 29-30.

part of each year). Its story of the interpenetration of spaces, the flight to undergrounds or underworlds, is told in some form in all of the texts considered here: like Katherine's and Jenny's excursions into hidden, eccentric spaces, Delia's journey, too, goes into dark places that are symbolically linked to the work she must do. And like Katherine in particular, Delia must also "speak with the dead." When she first returns to her mother's darkly lit and dilapidated apartment she speaks to the strong presence of Amalia whilst applying make-up in the mirror: "You are a ghost. I don't look like you," she says. In numerous small details, the film establishes that Delia has rejected the world of her mother, screened out the longing she still feels for her, and rejected at the same time her mother city and the dialect of her mother tongue. This is shown simply and dramatically in the interpolated memory scene in which Martone directly references the tradition of thinking about Naples as a belly city. Amalia, in response to a direct personal question, encourages an unwilling Delia to touch her aged belly, from which her daughter physically recoils (see figure 9). The traumatic memory of being abused as a child by a family friend is so deeply repressed that she has transferred this event onto her mother's sexuality as a pretext for its denial. Delia's character is established as educated and androgynous, whilst her mother's character vacillates between the respectable matron and a more sexualized, unpredictable identity. In both time frames of the film, Amalia is also represented as the archetypal attentive Neapolitan mother, and the grown-up Delia is represented as being at pains to reject both her mother's ministrations and the values that accrue to this identity.²⁰ But as colour symbolism and the exchange of garments suggests in the film, these feminine roles are not fixed.²¹ These devices underscore

²⁰ For a discussion of the Neapolitan mother figure see Small, "Constructing Identity in Neapolitan Cinema," 205. Small argues that whilst the film representation of the Neapolitan mother figure shows a strength and power, it is still ultimately a restrictive gender identity. She goes on to suggest that the representation of female characters in the younger generation of Neapolitan filmmakers naturally challenges such stereotyping.

²¹ In identifying colour as part of the mythopoeics of the film it is interesting to note Mary Beth Haralovich's argument about the 'two contradictory impulses' of colour use in films 'towards realism and towards spectacle'. She goes on to explain that colour 'has the ability to reproduce the "natural" look of

Martone's theatre background with the simplicity and elegance of stage costumes; they also belong to part of the way in which the Demeter-Persephone myth resonates throughout.

The ubiquity of undergarments in the film seems strange at first, but it has multiple meanings. On a realist level it is used to represent the tiresome task that Delia has to deal with after her mother's death when she discovers a bag of worn out undergarments left in Amalia's apartment. These are also an image of prudence and poverty and also perhaps a signal of Amalia renouncing the stringencies of her earlier life. But there are other nuances. Delia is literally trawling through her mother's underwear to try and make sense of the latter's mysterious death, but in so doing the garments become a metaphor for feminine intimacy itself. She is getting closer to a naked truth and closer to what her mother has to say to her beyond death. In a broader structural sense the undergarment motif suggests that Delia's identity needs to be rebuilt from underneath and within. The brand-new, luxuriously lacy brassiere that is found on Amalia's dead body is the initial evidence, connected as it is through the film's editing to the ancient centre of the town itself. A close-up shot of this garment as evidence dissolves into the next scene, a middle-distance shot of the *centro storico* superimposed on Delia who has buried her face in the brassiere (see figures 10 & 11). The musical score at this moment creates an atmosphere of mystery and wildness. From the opening scenes of the movie, then, the city is inextricably bound up with mythic femininity in the form of the brassiere and the trace of its makers, the three Vs of the Vossi sisters – legendary makers of fine lingerie – who are since dead but seem to belong to an even longer sense of history, having in their triumvirate nature the air of the Fates or sirens. Amalia herself

the world and thereby evoke reality. Yet colour can also draw attention to itself and is therefore capable of disrupting realism'. Mary Beth Haralovich, "All That Heaven Allows: Colour, Narrative Space, and Melodrama," *Close Viewings: An Anthology of New Film Criticism*, ed. Peter Lehman (Tallahassee: The Florida State University Press, 1990) 62. It is certainly the case that the use of colour in Martone's film disrupts its realism.

is connected to the figure of Parthenope. Her naked washed-up body, as I have suggested, recalls the story of Parthenope's own death and the founding story of the city. There is in this web of associations, I would argue, a parallel being drawn between myth and undergarment that suggests that myths are the undergarments of places themselves.

The economy of garment exchange in the film is bound up with the colours red and blue. From the opening shots of the film Amalia is connected to the colour blue and all the fifties flashbacks have a blue tint.²² The old Amalia is connected to a worn blue suit, the garment that Delia finally tracks down in the lair of her mother's old suitor, and that she puts on just before she is able to relive her childhood trauma. When Delia finally dresses in Amalia's suit, her identification with her mother and her mother city is repaired as she gains a full and adult understanding of what had been repressed.²³ Blue seems to have a connection to both the past and to societal strictures, unlike red, which is connected in the film to sensuality. Amalia disappears on Delia's birthday and in this sense the movie figures her death as part of her daughter's present. Delia, drawn back to Naples because of a family death (as Katherine had been in *Journey to Italy*) experiences a heavy and unexpected menstrual bleeding at her mother's funeral. This again connects the colour red to Amalia and also works to suggest a crossroads between life and death. It relates, too, to the symbolism of fertility and death in the Demeter-Persephone myth. The garment that Amalia has left behind for Delia's present is a revealing red slip dress. Donning this garment and wearing it in the notorious neighbourhood of her childhood, Gianturco, forms part of the process by which she remakes her identity. There is a particularly memorable scene in which Delia walks in the red dress in a typical Neapolitan market. Enlivened by the life of the streets, she

²² The palette of the film is in general very low-key and wintry. This connects to the Italian word for winter, *Averno*, which is also the ancient name for the entrance to Hell. This wintry palette makes the introduction of red all the more startling and effective.

²³ See Verdicchio, "'O Cuorp' 'E Napule: Naples and the Cinematographic Body of Culture," 285.

buys a bag of cherries. This is a minor but significant detail as red fruit is associated with Persephone's return to the world above. On Delia's visit to her mother's aged neighbour, for the first time we glimpse her natural vivacity as she decorates herself and the old lady with ear-rings made from the cherries; a gesture that marks the beginning of a return and re-acceptance of her home. Additionally, the red fruit return us to the lyrics of a song that Amalia has always sung, a song about ripe cherries, love-making and the spring. In a subtle way, the film encodes Demeter's orchestration of Persephone's spring return.

This masquerade of rebuilding something from the inside out, from undergarments or slip to full suit, could be read as an allegory of the work of a younger generation of Neapolitan film makers who have had to try on myths associated with Naples in order to move beyond them. Verdicchio argues that Delia's transformation could be read as an allegory of the revival of the city itself.²⁴ Just as it has been suggested that Gioconda represents Naples in *Bay of Noon*, the parallel between setting and character here is strong. And just as we saw the way in which actor and role overlap in the Bergman-Rossellini collaboration, the use of Anna Bonaiuto is also of interest in a reading of Delia as the embodiment of Naples. She is an actress strongly associated with the cultural life of the city, bringing to her role the integrity of a both a classical training and a long local theatre career.²⁵ Angela Luce's role as Amalia also refers to much more than itself. O'Healy notes a particular poignancy in the scene of her imagined death. After carousing by the fire on a beach dressed in gypsy garb, she tearfully removes her red clothes and walks naked into the sea. This scene encodes the end of the masquerade and her ultimate rejection of stifling gender codes such as the ones that belong to the exotic women that her husband used to paint. It is at this moment of reverie about the

²⁴ Verdicchio, "'O Cuorp' 'E Napule: Naples and the Cinematographic Body of Culture," 285.

²⁵ Small notes that Bonaiuto 'served a long apprenticeship in Martone's experimental Teatri Uniti group in Naples'. Small, "Representing the Female: Rural Idylls, Urban Nightmares," 168.

scenario of her mother's death that Delia is pictured leaving town and announcing her new identity as 'Amalia'. O'Healy argues that Luce's final scene of walking naked into the waves also refers back to her place in Italian cinema, especially as the very sexualized character that she played in Pasolini's *Decameron* (1971).²⁶ As O'Healy rightly notes of Bonaiuto's role in *L'amore molesto*:

Though the leading actress appears on screen throughout the action, often scantily dressed and occasionally nude, her body is never fetishized as object of the gaze. Photographed without flattery or compromise, her appearance grows increasingly haggard and fatigued as the film progresses, though the spectator's sympathy for her character's predicament is sustained by the narrative throughout.²⁷

Here, Delia/ Bonaiuto becomes another version of Naples in a similar way to Gioconda in *Bay of Noon*. She might be suffering but she has not given in. 'Nakedness' in these instances of Gioconda at the mirror, Amalia walking out into the sea, and Delia running through the city in her red dress (see figure 12), approaches a truth that is close to John Berger's distinction between nakedness and nudity: 'To be naked is to be oneself. To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself.'²⁸ But can one ever really get at a "naked" sense of Naples? It changes its clothes in a masquerade of countless identities. What Naples performs in the end is the image of its own survival through myriad interpretations, celebrations and rejections. The Neapolitan sojourns of Katherine, Jenny and Delia show the ways in which this broader narrative of survival is embodied in individual stories of self-reconstruction.

From Benjamin's conception of city spaces as labyrinth, ruin and theatre, it is the theatre that is most apposite for Naples. In its threshold designation between nature and

²⁶ O'Healy, "Revisiting the Belly of Naples: The Body and the City in the Films of Mario Martone," 256.

²⁷ O'Healy, "Revisiting the Belly of Naples," 256.

²⁸ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London and Harmondsworth: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972) 54.

culture it offers a performative space for trying on new selves.²⁹ When Delia, on board a train, scribbles a luxuriant new hairstyle over her own photograph, a fellow passenger asks “Is your identity out of date?” On this journey out of Naples, she answers “yes.” If on their own departures Katherine and Jenny had been asked this question, then I think that their answers would be the same.

²⁹ I have taken this final notion of Naples as a threshold from the work of Adalgisa Giorgio who is quoted by Small in Italian. See Small, “Constructing Identity in Neapolitan Cinema,” 206. I am grateful to Lesley Dougan for the following translation of Giorgio: “The association between Naples and the maternal which the work of Ramondino invites us to make, links to [Fernand] Braudel’s vision of Naples as a door from the East to the West and vice versa...As a city/threshold, Naples participates in both cultures, and as a city woman/mother, she occupies a marginal position between Nature and Culture, which gives her the possibility of moving freely from one to the other”.

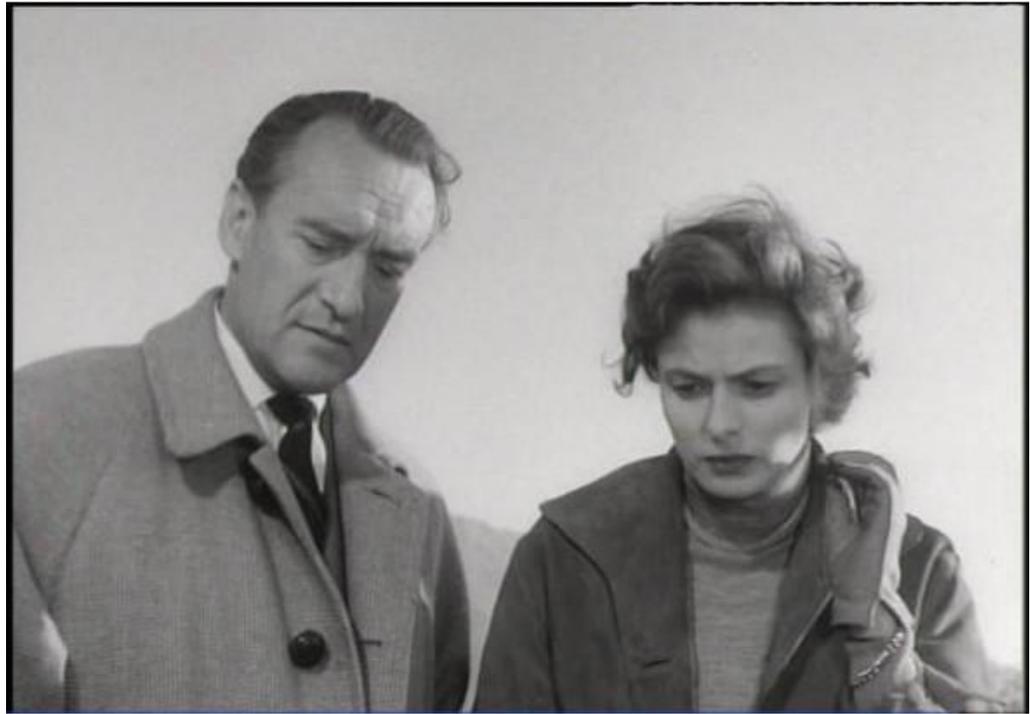
Figures



Figs. 1 and 2



Figs. 3 and 4



Figs 5 and 6



Figs 7 and 8



Fig. 9



Figs 10 and 11



Fig.12

Sources of Figures

Figure 1 Gordon Parks. Ingrid Bergman at Stromboli. New York: *Life Magazine*, 1949. <http://www.delart.org/.../ingrid_bergman.jpg>. Accessed 23 May 2009.

Figure 2 Still from. *Journey to Italy*. Dir. Roberto Rossellini. 1953. BFI Video Publishing, 2003. DVD.

Figure 3 Still from. *Journey to Italy*.
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Figure 4 Still from. *Journey to Italy*. Dir. Roberto Rossellini. 1953. BFI Video Publishing, 2003. DVD.

Figure 5 Still from. *Journey to Italy*. Dir. Roberto Rossellini. 1953. BFI Video Publishing, 2003. DVD.

Figure 6 Still from. *Journey to Italy*. Dir. Roberto Rossellini. 1953. BFI Video Publishing, 2003. DVD.

Figure 7 Still from. *Journey to Italy*. Dir. Roberto Rossellini. 1953. BFI Video Publishing, 2003. DVD.

Figure 8 Still from. *Journey to Italy*.
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Figure 9 Still from *L'amore molesto*. Dir. Mario Martone. 1995. Arrow Films, 2007. DVD.

Figure 10 Still from *L'amore molesto*. Dir. Mario Martone. 1995. Arrow Films, 2007. DVD.

Figure 11 Still from *L'amore molesto*. Dir. Mario Martone. 1995. Arrow Films, 2007. DVD.

Figure 12 Still from *L'amore molesto*. Dir. Mario Martone. 1995. Arrow Films, 2007. DVD.

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