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PATTERNS OF PUGILISM: ROCCO E I SUOI FRATELLI (1960) AND THE BOXING FILM

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Visconti's family melodrama reflects boxing's ascendancy in Italian popular culture in the 1940s and 1950s, fuelled by the favourable results of Italian boxers in the ring and numerous Hollywood and Italian boxing films in theatres. An examination of this cinematic intertext in the preparation, production, and presentation of the film reveals a disruption to any ontological link between the film and the migrant crisis, introducing generic codes not normally associated with an auteur like Visconti. Moreover, attention to the body of the boxers redirects criticisms that Visconti embedded a personal, racist perspective on southern Italians within Rocco e i suoi fratelli. How this cinematic archetype was deployed to narrativize a hot-button social issue highlights the limits of the canonical means for interpreting the film: neorealism, adaptation, and impegno.

KEYWORDS: *boxing film, auteurism, migration, genre, realism, race*



Figure 1: Luca at the conclusion of *Rocco e i suoi fratelli*

If boxing is a sport it is the most tragic of all sports because more than any human activity it consumes the very excellence it displays – its drama is this very consumption.¹

A brief summary of boxing in *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (Luchino Visconti, 1960) is a necessary starting point. After arriving and establishing themselves in Milan, four of the five Parondi brothers search for work to support each other and their mother, Rosaria. Rocco, Simone and Ciro gravitate to a local boxing gym frequented by Vincenzo, the one brother already established in Milan. The nefarious promoter Morini identifies Simone as a potential talent, offering to transfer him to a superior facility where he will be groomed by the trainer Cerri. When Simone's commitment and potential are questioned after a humiliating loss, Cerri assumes Rocco to take his place. Then, following a violent altercation between Simone and Morini, Rocco commits to an exploitative contract to pay off Simone's debt. Rocco rises to the status of national champion; Simone, destitute, murders the prostitute Nadia and is betrayed by Ciro to the police. The film concludes with a shot featuring the youngest brother, Luca, touching a series of posters promoting Rocco's next bout.

In a 1960 interview, Visconti limited the significance of boxing in *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (henceforth identified as *Rocco*, not to be confused with Rocco, one of the film's main characters), rejecting any association with a generic boxing film:

Scoraggiati perché non trovano lavoro, angosciati, i ragazzi finiscono per diventare dei boxeurs. Ma soprattutto non si dica: 'Visconti fa un film sulla boxe.' Questo non è che un elemento esterno, accessorio; e nello stesso tempo un simbolo della violenza fisica. Davanti alle difficoltà i ragazzi capitolano, l'uno dopo l'altro.²

Elsewhere, he asserted boxing's metaphorical status as analogous to the 'carico di lupini' from Verga's *I Malavoglia*, and therefore symbolic of the same proletarian struggle treated in his second feature-length film, *La terra trema* (1948). Rather than a cinematic intertext, Visconti stressed a literary antecedent as the primary inspiration for the choice of boxing:

Là [*I Malavoglia*] 'Ntoni e i suoi, nella lotta per sopravvivere, per liberarsi dai bisogni materiali, tentavano l'impresa del 'carico dei lupini': qui i figli di Rosaria tentano il pugilato: e la boxe è il 'carico dei lupini' dei *Malavoglia*. Così il film si imparenta a *La terra trema* – che è la mia interpretazione de *I Malavoglia* – di cui costituisce quasi il secondo episodio.³

Within the context of what has been described as Visconti's signature mode of Gramscian literary adaptation,⁴ each ill-fated enterprise triggered the disintegration of the nuclear family: in *I Malavoglia*, 'Ntoni's ship sinks, and with it, the solitary piece of capital held by the Valastro family; in *Rocco*, Simone's failure to advance in boxing signals his and the Parondi family's decline. This deterioration includes Rocco, whose success in the ring is clouded by being compelled to fight unwillingly in order to pay off his brother Simone's debts.

The privileged link with *La terra trema* crystallizes three key coordinates guiding readings of the film, introducing a critical trinity – *impegno*, neorealism, literary

adaptation – that overwhelm any and all other potential reference points for *Rocco*. *La terra trema* represents a direct, militant engagement with social and political exploitation consistent with the creed of political commitment, or *impegno*. This principle stipulated that Visconti deploy both a political (Partito Comunista Italiano) and theoretical (Gramsci) set of weaponry to denounce the ills of contemporary Italian society.⁵ Secondly, in its seamless link with the reality of the Sicilian situation, *La terra trema* represented a canonical contribution to neorealism and its attendant overdetermination of transparency and documentariness. *Rocco*'s registration of southern migrants in northern cities was seen as a homecoming of sorts, channelling *La terra trema*'s documentary charge to address a recent social problem.⁶ Evoking the adaptation of Verga's *I Malavoglia* as the primary source text for *La terra trema*, finally, introduces literary adaptation, Visconti's preferred cinematic mode that matched the director with the foundational author of Italian *verismo*. These three elements fit neatly within the director's profile as a realist. His neorealist trilogy (*Osessione*, 1942; *La terra trema*, 1948; *Bellissima*, 1951) had anointed him as 'l'apostolo della via italiana al realismo', and with *Senso* (1954), Visconti was celebrated for inaugurating a transition from neorealism to realism.

Boxing, Visconti insisted, was just one operative device for vocalizing the realist tones of immigrant Milan:

Nel mio film voglio dare un quadro della condizione umana di questa gente ... Di scorcio vorrei mostrare il mondo della boxe, quel groviglio di interessi sordi e potenti, un vero e proprio ingranaggio di ghenghe che sfruttano la fatica degli atleti e l'entusiasmo delle folle Il sadismo morale di questo ambiente andrà ad aggiungersi a quello della grande città.⁷

In this light, the brothers' toil in the ring stood for the social and political crisis facing millions of southerners, with Visconti shedding light on the 'true' conditions of the immigrant plight, opening a window onto 'la realtà di tutti i giorni'.⁸

Not all interpreters of the film moored *Rocco* to the cinematic anchorage of adaptation or *neorealismo impegnato*. Some recognized how boxing, boxers, and the atmosphere in and around the boxing ring appeared similar to Hollywood films of the period. In his set of responses published in *Cinema Nuovo* in 1960, Italo Calvino noted how *Rocco*'s urban 'groviglio' resembled other cinematic underworlds:

Il problema dell'inserimento di masse di paesi sottosviluppati nelle metropoli era alla base d'una delle più illustri tradizioni di racconto cinematografico: il film *gangster* Americano. Il film di Visconti nelle sue parti migliori riprende e approfondisce ed esaspera il linguaggio d'immagini e di ritmo e di luci e di asprezza dell'epopea metropolitana del film *gangster*.⁹

Calvino's mention of the Hollywood gangster film introduces a non-national, generic point of reference that would also be observed by others.¹⁰ Vito Pandolfi acknowledged affinities between the boxer-brothers, *Rocco* and *Simone*, and cinematic boxers of Hollywood origin:

Nella produzione hollywoodiana non mancano certi film sulla boxe e i suoi retroscena (perché a questo in realtà si giunge, nonostante i richiami a Gramsci). Ma quale altra incisività e umanità dal vecchio *Champ* con Wallace Beery e Jackie Coogan, a *Qualcuno lassù mi ama*, anche se Visconti aspira a una visione più complessa e densa di significati.¹¹

Pandolfi refers to King Vidor's *The Champ* (1931) as a classic Hollywood boxing film, while *Somebody Up There Likes Me* (Robert Wise, 1956) was an example of a something more proximate to *Rocco*. Of course, Pandolfi hedges against labeling *Rocco* a boxing film outright. He lauds *Rocco*'s relative density ('densa di significati') in contrast with more conventional, less burdensome Hollywood products. So too does Andrea Cappabianca in his book on the international boxing film, *Boxare con l'ombra* (2004), where he carefully differentiates *Rocco* from the typical boxing film. Cappabianca positions boxing within the critical dyad of realism and melodrama, essential pillars of Viscontian auteurism:

Rocco e i suoi fratelli (1960) di Luchino Visconti non è, ovviamente, un film sul pugilato. È un'opera d'autore, che si pone all'incrocio, molto viscontiano, tra realismo e melodramma e al tempo stesso si può assumere come documento sociologico (sia pure filtrato dalla fiction) della situazione italiana di quel periodo.¹²

He goes on to contend that Italy never created a boxing genre to call its own, reaffirming that *Rocco* was more indebted to neorealism than generic categories: 'Il film di boxe non diverrà mai in Italia un vero e proprio genere (o sotto-genere), ma non potrà non risentire, in seguito, della lezione neorealista'.¹³ By denying any contamination with the boxing genre film, Visconti, Pandolfi, and Cappabianca seem to agree: *Rocco* should be regarded as anything but a 'film sulla boxe'.

Heretofore, canonical approaches to Visconti's cinema have done little to address boxing's central position in *Rocco*.¹⁴ Critics of his oeuvre continue to bolster a somewhat dated representation of the auteur's *aura*, who as the film's sole creative progenitor, operated in the ether of Crocean singularity, far from the more earthly district of the Italian film industry. Visconti helped originate this characterization. As displayed in his comments above, he repeatedly accentuated the unique nature of his creative agency, even implying that he was a cinematic version of the literary author that he never became.¹⁵ As a politically engaged communist director, traces of generic formulae, 'forme di compromissione con le logiche del capitale della mercificazione della coatta cultura nazionale', would be ideologically unacceptable.¹⁶ Instead, *Rocco* is seen as another articulation of the verisimilar where 'realism and authorial expressivity [...] will be the means whereby the art film unifies itself'.¹⁷

Rather than denigrate the presence of generic markers in art films, others have recognized their creative moxie, and not just in Hollywood films.¹⁸ And contrary to the director's own representation of the sport's relative insignificance, boxing and the boxing film were key points of reference for *Rocco* from the film's inception. The world of boxing was a major feature of Giovanni Testori's collection *Il ponte della ghisolfa*, a fundamental (if frequently overlooked) literary source for *Rocco*. The first version of the film's screenplay concluded with Rocco's dramatic death in the ring, victim of injuries suffered in a previous bout. When asked about the

film's subject prior to the extensive screenwriting phase, Suso Cecchi D'Amico responded, 'Non so altro. So che ci sono cinque fratelli e che c'entra la boxe'.¹⁹ Of the film's 695 shots, 136 represent training and prize-fights featuring Rocco and Simone in the ring, while a further 98 display fisticuffs between southerners (the *rissa* following Simone's first bout), Rocco and Simone (their drawn-out fist fight following Nadia's rape), or Simone and the promoter Morini (who come to blows after Simone rebuffs Morini's sexual advances).²⁰ All told, roughly one third of the film's duration is dedicated to the scenes in the locker room, training and fighting in the ring or boxing gym, or to reproducing physical altercations of a decidedly pugilistic nature. More recently, the film was sold together with an issue of the sports newspaper *Tuttosport*, where it was included as promotional material marketing *Rocco* as an Italian boxing film.²¹ The film's legacy is now tied to its status as a model boxing film.²² The sport was presumably to figure centrally in the planned remake of *Rocco* for RAI television, originally set to begin shooting in 2014. Luca Argentero, fresh off his role as boxer Tiberio Mitri in the TV miniseries *Tiberio Mitri: il campione e la miss*, was to star as Rocco in a 4-installment series to be produced by Guido Lombardo and the late Carlo Bixio of Publispeil.²³

My assessment of boxing will focus on the cinematic referent for the film's tragic tale of immigrant fighters. An exploration of boxing in sport and film will provide insight into *Rocco* as a projection of boxing's prominence in the Italian popular imagination of the boom years. I argue that while Visconti falls short in depicting *real* immigrants in Milan, he successfully crafts *cinematic* ones, his boxers carving out the familiar narrative pathway of the immigrant fighter omnipresent in national and international boxing films. This attention to boxing, real and represented, is not arbitrary. In the years leading up to *Rocco's* release, the sport was becoming a widespread leisure activity for diverse audiences throughout Italy. 'Both Fellini and Visconti', Sorlin observes, 'demonstrated the spread of new forms of entertainment: music-hall, dance-hall and, above all, sporting competitions' with sports becoming, 'the big fashion of the "miracle years", a passion common to all classes'.²⁴ That boxing's popularity was reaching new heights around the time of the 1960 Rome Olympic Games was not lost on Visconti. To contextualize the widespread refusal to classify *Rocco* as a boxing film or 'film sulla boxe', I address how critics continue to adhere to certain notions of realism when dealing with *Rocco*. In 1960, references to neorealism and Visconti's political engagement were utilized to defend the film, first from censors, and later from its snub by Italy's cinematic establishment.²⁵ Now, they condition thoughts on non-national, 'popular' cultural and cinematic elements of *Rocco*, burying them beneath more firmly established interpretative paradigms.

Viscontian realism, I contend, encompasses a composite intertextual landscape in which genre occupies a significant position alongside more canonical forms such as literature, painting, and opera. In the first section, I remark on cinematic and scholarly critiques of racial stereotyping in *Rocco* that centre specifically on boxers Rocco and Simone. In the second, I situate *Rocco* within the context of Italian and Hollywood boxing films to scrutinize an almost unanimous resistance to associating the film with genre cinema. The body of the immigrant boxer as site of contested portrayals of race and subjectivity is the subject of the third section. The article concludes with a brief discussion of the screenwriting phase and problems

of authorial signature in *Rocco*. Rather than a trivial element, boxing grounds a cinematic vision quite distant from Bazin's 'art of the real'.

BETWEEN PARODY AND AUTHENTICITY: RACIAL CODING IN *ROCCO*

In the wake of its outstanding run in Italian theatres as one of the most popular Italian films ever made, *Rocco* became the immediate source of cinematic parody. The years 1961–62 brought to light two *Rocco* spoofs: *Rocco e le sorelle* (Giorgio Simonelli) and *Walter e i suoi cugini* (Marino Girolami). Both films enact a comic twist on Visconti's migrant epic, each mocking *Rocco*'s contrast of northern and southern values structured around a dubious representation of southern customs, rituals, and race. While Visconti's film may conventionally fit alongside other dramatic portrayals of Italian workers in the late 1950s by auteur directors (*Il ferroviere*, Pietro Germi, 1955; *Il grido*, Michelangelo Antonioni, 1957), *Rocco*'s parodies can be inserted in a parallel group of comedies, poking fun at the influx of southern immigrants to northern cities. Films like *Napoletani a Milano* (Eduardo De Filippo, 1954) and *Totò, Peppino e la ... malafemmina* (Camillo Mastrocinque, 1956) effectively anticipate the south-north dislocation featured in the two parodies of *Rocco*. In *Rocco e le sorelle*, actor Tiberio Murgia plays Rocco, reprising his role as the autocratic, moustachioed southern brother, first made famous in *I soliti ignoti* (Mario Monicelli, 1958). While accompanying his sisters north in search of prosperity, the family encounters a series of mishaps that land Rocco in a Roman prison, leaving his sisters to be courted by a variety of flatterers. Here, Visconti's tragic denunciation of southern masculine mores receives a sharp comic treatment, with the quadruplicate matrimonies at the conclusion – the literal marriage of southern peasant and northern proletariat – lampooning Gramsci's *Southern Question*.

A similar multiplication closer to the original *Rocco* is performed in *Walter e i suoi cugini*. Walter (played by Walter Chiari) has relocated from Puglia to Milan where he takes up residence in a boarding house. His weak efforts in his job as a sparring partner deliver an early and ironic inversion of Visconti's title boxer. Walter's integration into Milanese life is disrupted by the arrival of his two cousins, Rosario and Nicola, both also played by Walter Chiari, and the ensuing hijinks pivot on the confusion between Walter and his cousins. Walter Chiari in triplicate, the comedy of misrecognition, recalls Chiari's double-role in *L'inafferabile 12*, Mario Mattoli's 1950 football comedy in which twins, separated at birth, encounter one another on the football pitch.

The faux *andriese* that Chiari speaks, the proliferation of indistinguishable Walter/southerners, and the romantic intrigues they encounter launch directly from themes, motifs, and figures in Visconti's film. Rosario is an entertaining play on Simone: he is characterized by great physical strength and arrogance that bolster a boyish *donnaiolo*, eager to pursue Walter's dowdy girlfriend with his considerable, if dim-witted, charms. Visconti's cramped interior spaces crowded with the various members of the Parondi family are also caricatured, with Walter's *residenza* being overrun by his cousins, who hide in the apartment's armoire and constantly vie for use of the toilet. Chiari's multiple voices and derisive language exude an exceptional polyphonic quality of Bakhtinian parody, unbalancing the 'serious' portrayal of the migrant crisis that underpins Visconti's film.

At their core, these comic versions of *Rocco* poked fun at the troubling racial stereotyping of southern Italians in Visconti's film. When *Rocco* was released, many criticized Visconti for forwarding a specifically northern-Italian concept of southern inferiority. Pasolini panned the film for its 'manneristic southerners [...] schematic characters', while others suggested that Visconti had little knowledge of the south.²⁶ More recently, Veronica Pravadelli has keenly argued that within the film's melodramatic coding, Visconti inscribes his own distinctly Milanese perception of the south. Rather than display a coalition between peasant and proletariat, 'Visconti seems to favour the transformation of Southern peasantry into the proletarian class of Northern industrial society'.²⁷ This point is also argued by John Foot, who contends that *Rocco's* northern perspective is laced with stereotypes of southern transplants:

Rocco is a film 'about' migration, 'about' specifically southern migrants, so this is where the political and social thrust of the work stands or falls [...]. *Rocco*, very simply, reinforces and reinforced the stereotypes and the racism about and towards southern immigrants in the north in the 1950s and 1960s. What was the content of these stereotypes and this racism?²⁸

Foot goes on to list some of the most common stereotypes that *Rocco* reproduced: 'southerners were backward, lazy, dirty, passionate, "lively", bound by antique codes of honour and family ties, violent, loud, sexually potent and yet sexually backward, and criminals'. A look at Rocco, Simone, and Rosaria would seem to confirm these accusations. The brothers embody the quintessence of a regressive southern worldview, tied to antiquated notions of family, honour, and masculinity that were woefully out of step with the modern, technologically-advanced society of Milan. They are joined by Rosaria who cuts a conventional figure of the southern matriarch; domineering, combative, and lachrymose *in extremis*, she is both literally and figuratively a Greek heroine appropriate for the stage of tragic theatre.²⁹

The continued interest in the film's problematic stereotyping of southerners reflects the persistence of *impegno* as a shifting category for evaluating filmmakers like Visconti, who 'become intellectuals to the extent that they are *impegnati* in the process of defining the nation and its proper direction'.³⁰ Visconti repeatedly failed to meet the standard of intellectual engagement set by Italy's Marxist intelligentsia while also attracting charges of excess and immorality from audiences. The case of *Rocco* demonstrates early fissures in the *impegno* monolith that have been discussed in scholarship focusing on the Italian postmodern.³¹ Individual evaluations of the film contour a certain political standard that Visconti failed to live up to. *Rocco*, for example, offered little in the way of recommendations for dealing with the immigration crises. It did not include a set of instructions for integrating southerners into Italy's northern industrialized economy, or hint at actively radicalizing the peasantry by making an explicit call for collective action. Finally, in channelling an operatic melodrama of swirling passions interconnecting multiple characters, Visconti had diluted the potential for *denuncia* in the film, prompting one reviewer to observe that 'non pone in alcun modo problemi di arte nuova, socialista o proletaria, come vorrebbe insinuare la sequenza finale davanti ai cancelli dell'Alfa Romeo'.³²

When it was first released to a firestorm of criticism, Visconti and Guido Aristarco strongly defended the film's progressive political message. For them, *Rocco* reflected

Gramsci's call for an alliance between workers and peasants through the figure of *Ciro*, whose transition from southern poverty to northern prosperity was apparently a crucial component. *Ciro* is seen early in the film diligently studying to become a specialized engineer before ultimately landing a job as a skilled worker at Alfa Romeo. He rejects family ties when he turns Simone in to the police, then consummates his disavowal of his native south when he couples with a blonde, middle-class northerner. Visconti went out of his way to highlight *Ciro's* crucial location within *Rocco's* Gramscian framework. Here, he does so through reference to Verga and the 'method' of *verismo*:

Il mio tentativo è stato quello di estrarre dalle radici stesse del metodo verghiano, le ragioni prime del dramma e di presentare al culmine dello sfacelo [...] un personaggio che chiaramente, quasi didascalicamente (non ho paura della parola) le mettesse in chiaro, qui, in *Rocco*, non a caso questo personaggio è *Ciro*, il fratello divenuto operaio, che non soltanto ha dimostrato una capacità *non romantica*, *non effimera di inserirsi nella vita, ma che ha acquistato coscienza di diversi doveri discendenti da diversi diritti*.³³

Ciro, the director suggests, was to be emblematic of both Gramsci's ideal peasant and the actual experience of southerners living and working in Milan.

Given the relative marginality of *Ciro* in the film's final cut, Visconti's comments are unsatisfactory. More than likely, naysayers were correct in noting how Visconti indulged in the brimming pathos built through the cause-and-effect of the *Rocco-Simone-Nadia* love triangle, their romantic entanglement overwhelming any 'progressive' intent that he may have had. The brothers and their love interest pressed representations of factory work and workers to the film's margins, and indeed, hardly any actual work or workplaces are featured in *Rocco*.³⁴ Did *Rocco*, therefore, fail to successfully portray Italy's immigration 'crisis'? In the next section, we will begin to look both at boxing in *Rocco* and *Rocco* as a boxing film to postulate a cinematic context for the racialized figure of the immigrant boxer.

BEYOND VERISIMILITUDE: THE GRAMMAR OF THE BOXING FILM

Comparatively, *Rocco* reproduces many ways in which immigrant boxers have traditionally been represented in cinema, mirroring a certain system of conventions. Boxing films often encapsulate the immigrant aspirations to overcome material difficulties through athletic achievement. Fortunes in the ring set *Rocco* and *Simone* on separate, yet interlaced, boxing pathways of rise and fall, from their shared introduction to the sport to their encounters with success and failure. Here, boxing subtends the most customary reading of the film that identifies three narrative macrosections: a) the *Parondi* arrival in Milan; b) the family members' successful and failed attempts to integrate into their new industrial environment; and finally, c) the disintegration of the traditional family at the end of the film.³⁵ On the one hand, this arc suggests the typical, tragic degeneration characteristic of all Visconti films. On the other, boxing as a potential and especially dangerous avenue for upward mobility exposes a clear intersection between this Italian immigrant story and the boxing film species.³⁶

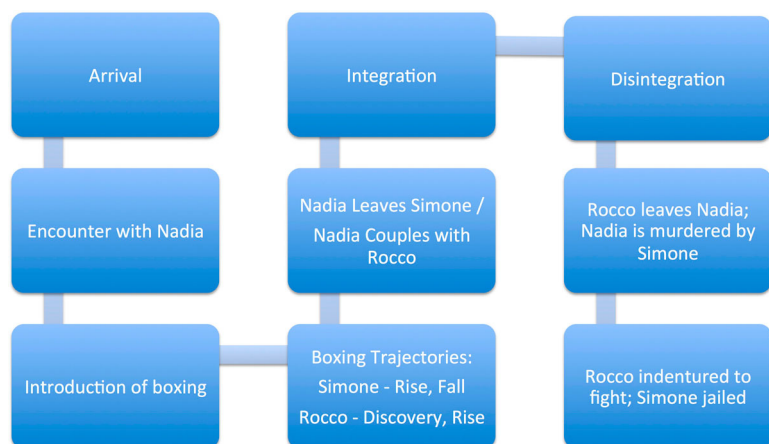


FIGURE 2. Nadia, Boxing, and the Immigrant Saga.

What ties the fighting in the ring to the thread of the immigrant story is Nadia, the prostitute who introduces the Parondis to boxing, then follows both boxers romantically before being raped and murdered by Simone. Her rape foreshadows this violent end at the dramatic climax of the film. Nadia's murder at the *idroscalo* was one of the main sources of moral outrage by censors who eventually disfigured the scene, as well as some audience members who allegedly came out in droves to 'protestare il loro sdegno'.³⁷ Nadia effectively sutures the boxing story with the immigrant saga (Figure 2).

She is the first to introduce boxing as a potential means for economic gain. When she meets the Parondis in their basement apartment, she sees a newspaper clipping of Vincenzo dressed as a fighter, then recounts the tale of a boxer she knew who struck it rich. The prostitute is a seamless counterpart to the boxer; for hire, she initially personifies the competitive spirit for accumulating wealth and redemption through physical toil, crystallizing values of boom Italy. Nadia will later make these parallels between prostitution and boxing plain, describing both as working 'per passione'.³⁸ Pairing the figure of the strong man with that of the prostitute – Samson to Delilah – is a motif in a variety of boxing films, where the boxer's female complement is recurrently defined as either saint or seductress. Nadia in this role points to the noirish women in *Rocco* and other Visconti films (consider Giovanna in *Ossessione* and 'la prostituta' in *Le notti bianche*, both played by Clara Calamai), where unmarried women portend danger and death for male characters.

By promoting the fantasy of boxing as a means to material gain, Nadia is also tied to Morini, the corrupt manager who Rocco and Simone encounter early in the film.³⁹ Morini personifies the pitfalls dotting boxing's illusory path to fame and riches. His speculation on the Parondi brothers is both financially and physically predatory. He fronts the money to gamble on Simone's future victories in the ring, then to extort sex; finally, he signs Rocco to an extended fighting contract as collateral for Simone's robbery.⁴⁰ This avatar of moral and financial corruption is omnipresent in Hollywood boxing films of the 1930s like *Kid Galahad* (Michael Curtiz, 1937), *The Crowd Roars* (Richard Thorpe, 1938), *Golden Boy* (Rouben

Mamoulian, 1939), and a backstory in many films of the 1950s such as *On the Waterfront* (Elia Kazan, 1954), *Somebody Up there Likes Me* (1956), and *The Harder They Fall* (Mark Robson, 1956).⁴¹

The chain of causation illustrated above demonstrates *Rocco's* difference from typical *films d'art*, with Simone playing out the relatively conventional storyline of the boxer's rise and fall.⁴² Here, the boxer shows early promise and success, only to fade into physical and moral decline. This conventionality was underscored, at least in part, by the film's cinematography.⁴³ After Simone's opening victories, defeat leads him onto a path of progressively more serious crimes, from petty theft to rape to homicide. He is humiliated when he learns that Rocco will supplant him in the ring and with Nadia, motivating Nadia's rape and Rocco's beating. Unlike *Ciro*, whose distanciation from his family is executed through a mastery of his new environment of a skilled worker, Simone is absorbed into the city's criminal viscera, taking Nadia with him.

To gird the authenticity of this dark environment, actual boxers and trainers were lifted directly from the world of Italian professional boxing: 'Inoltre, al seguito di Fiermonte, molti autentici pugili hanno preso parte alle riprese: da Choca a Rocco Mazzola, da Bruno Fortilli fino al procuratore Barravecchi, uno dei veteran creatori di campioni'.⁴⁴ Visconti inserted these real-life boxers to compose unified cinematic spaces that conjured the unvarnished world of boxing. This engrossing, 'absorptive realism', teeming with the visual data of the material boxing world, recreates the gym's spatial integrity that buttressed the interpretation of *Rocco* as a sociological portrait.⁴⁵ The physical presence of the professional boxers paired with the spatial authenticity of the boxing settings – the gyms, theatres, dressing rooms – was largely based upon information gathered during an intense anthropological study of Milan and its outskirts by Visconti and his collaborators. This localized vision gained new prominence with the excision of the film's planned prologue set in Basilicata that would have opened the film far from its Milanese centre. Visconti travelled to Basilicata, probably in December of 1959, to photograph and experience the land from which *Rocco's* characters were escaping. He intended the landscape to foreground the family's geographical roots and southern identity.⁴⁶ The first version of *Rocco's* screenplay opened with a view of the rocky Lucanian shore, Rocco and Simone depositing their father's coffin into the sea. Simone states: 'Se tu non fossi morto d'inverno, ti portavamo a sotterrarti a Bernalda, dove c'è un cimitero. Adesso dappertutto c'è fango e frane e strade non ce ne sono. Sempre avevi paura di morire d'inverno'.⁴⁷ This rural setting would materialize a pictorial link to the seascape in *La terra trema*, conjoining *Rocco* to Visconti's neorealist masterwork.

Basilicata and the southern coordinates abandoned in the final screenplay, Milan became the determining model for locations and characters. 'We spent countless hours in gymnasiums', Suso Cecchi d'Amico recounted, 'I spent a year in them, and I don't like boxing. Gradually, the subject took shape'.⁴⁸ Unearthing the unknown areas of Milan and its periphery was an arduous process, and research for the film was recorded meticulously through a collection of photographs of which 44 were boxing scenes taken in both Milan and Basilicata.⁴⁹ The importance given to reflecting the city's actual boxing spaces was not limited, however, to featuring professional boxers in boxing scenes or choosing authentic-looking shooting locations.⁵⁰ It also extended to the bodies of the actors themselves. In pre-

production, Renato Salvatori and Alain Delon were subjected to extended physical training:

Basti pensare che Salvatori per cinque mesi è stato allenato da Enzo Fiermonte ('Rena, tu ciai troppi soldi: non saresti stato un gran ber pugile', gli disse l'ex campione alla fine degli allenamenti); mentre a Parigi Delon, per altrettanto tempo, ha avuto per maestro Choca.⁵¹

Such physical transformations, made most famous by Robert De Niro's drastic weight gain during the filming of *Raging Bull* (Martin Scorsese, 1980) or, more recently, by Jake Gyllenhaal's sculpted frame in *Southpaw* (Antoine Fuqua, 2015), are typical of the boxing films, where actors physically transmute to resemble the athletic fighters they play.

This emphasis on the body stems from how verisimilitude is regularly assembled through the figure of the boxer himself, thus making the casting of a professional relatively commonplace. The most famous fighter from the early years of sound film was Primo Carnera, whose intersecting careers in boxing and cinema reveal the interconnectedness of popular entertainment, boxing, and the international film industry. Carnera first gained attention as an attraction in a traveling circus where his massive size and feats of strength distinguished him as the wrestler, 'Terribile Giovanni'. His meteoric rise from circus showman to global champion culminated with a title victory over Jack Sharkey in 1933 for the World Heavyweight Championship. The early 1930s are identified as one of the most competitive decades in the history of the sport, when boxing's popularity as a legitimate enterprise was beginning to penetrate new international markets, including Italy's.

Carnera's success in the ring coincided with the beginning of his career in cinema, both in Italy and Hollywood.⁵² In the 1930s, Hollywood represented the gold standard for the boxing film with films like *The Champ* (King Vidor, 1931), *The Prizefighter and the Lady* (W.S. Van Dyke, 1933), and *Kid Galahad* (1937) establishing a genre that would experience a boom following WWII, when Richard Rossen's *Body and Soul* (1947), Robert Wise's *The Set-Up*, Mark Robson's *The Champion* (1949), and John Sturges' *The Right Cross* (1950) became popular and critical hits. Other films were set in and around boxing (Stanley Kubrick's *Killer's Kiss*, 1950) or wrestling (Jules Dassin's *Night and the City*, 1950) with some featuring the figure of the ex-boxer (dramatically in *On the Waterfront*, 1954; comically in John Ford's 1952 *The Quiet Man*).⁵³ As Calvino's comments on *Rocco* suggest, the boxing films of this era offered a portrait of the urban underworld also forwarded by the American gangster film. The fixed fight, the corrupt manager, organized crime, drug use, violence, physical mutilation, and the decadent erotic pleasures associated with the short-lived fortune and fame of the champion are all part of the gangster genre.⁵⁴

Linked to these Hollywood productions were numerous boxing films made in Italy between the early 1940s and 1960, with many, like *Rocco*, featuring Italian professional boxers. Carnera appeared in *Harlem* (Carmine Gallone, 1943), a film that borrowed dramatic devices directly from the Hollywood production, *Kid Galahad*.⁵⁵ Specific to Visconti's film, the figure of Rocco was based

loosely on Italian champion Rocco Mazzola, a Lucanian boxer from Potenza who also made an appearance in *Rocco*. Many of the film's other fighters led successful film careers in Italy. Middleweight Enzo Fiermonte starred in *L'ultimo combattimento* (Piero Ballerini, 1940) and *Il campione* (Carlo Borghesio, 1943), then directed and played the protagonist in *L'atleta di cristallo* (1946), before being cast as one of the 'real' boxers in *Rocco*. A more prominent boxer-actor to participate was Tiberio Mitri, 'Il Tigre di Trieste'. Mitri became Italian middleweight champion in 1948, European champ in 1949, and would contend for the world championship belt against 'Raging Bull' Jake LaMotta at Madison Square Garden on 7 July 1950, losing in a 15-round decision. In 1950, Mitri married Fulvia Franco, an ex-Miss Italia and screen actress. Their relationship was dramatized in the TV film, *Tiberio Mitri: Il campione e la miss* (2011), one of a few recent boxing films like *Tatanka* (Giuseppe Gagliardi, 2011) and *Acqua Fuori dal Ring* (Joel Stangle, 2012) set in Italy. Shortly following his marriage, Mitri began acting in popular Italian films, first in Mario Soldati's swash-buckling adventure, *I tre corsari* (1952), then as a boxer in *Era lei che lo voleva!* (Marino Girolami & Giorgio Simonelli, 1952) starring Walter Chiari and Lucia Bosè. He then worked in boxing films like Vittorio Duse's melodrama, *Il nostro campione* (1955) and *Un uomo facile* (Paolo Heusch, 1958). These fighters symbolized the sport's rising popularity in Italy, where other than the dominance of the European Lightweight belt from 1940 until 1946, Italian boxers controlled multiple European weight classes during the 1950s and 1960s. A crescendo of favourable results culminated in 1960 with the Rome Olympic Games, where under the tutelage of coach Natalino Rea, Italian boxers put on a commanding display, winning three gold medals, three silvers, and a bronze.

Boxing was not limited to dramatic films, but also appeared in various Italian comedies of the 1950s such as *Al diavolo la celebrità* (Steno & Mario Monicelli, 1951), as well as the aforementioned *Era lei che lo voleva!*, and *I soliti ignoti*. Notwithstanding these boxing films and the sport's increased national relevance, the notion of an Italian boxing film has always been met with scepticism. *Harlem*, for example, was met by critical rancour in Italy, with Antonio Pietrangeli lambasting director Carmine Gallone for trying to recreate a Hollywood film.⁵⁶ The enforcement of national boundaries that surround a film like *Rocco* has been a formidable barrier to comparing the film's Italian story of internal migration to generic categories. This is intimately tied up with the marriage between cinema and national identity, and the way in which neorealism and its auteurs were privileged in their representations of the Italian national character. Paolo Noto, referring to generic markers in Italian cinema of the 1950s, remarks:

A metà strada tra un modello di cinema nazionale (valorizzato in termini di impegno, artisticità e realismo) e un modello importato, o imposto dopo la fine della Seconda guerra mondiale (caratterizzato da evasione, divertimento e spettacolarità), il cinema prevalentemente di genere degli anni Cinquanta finisce ancora una volta schiacciato da quelle che sono interpretate, non solo all'epoca, come opposizioni categoriche. Il genere, così come qualsiasi altra pratica (anche autoriale) che metta in discussione l'indissolubilità del legame realismo/cultura nazionale il contatto con le culture dominanti, rischia di essere qualificato come *straniero* o comunque *estraneo*, indipendentemente dalla sua effettiva origine produttiva.⁵⁷

The *ex post facto* process of defining genres and cycles evenly pits the Hollywood boxing film against more nationally-bound, Italian categories such as neorealism. Analysing the camerawork used to capture the figure of the immigrant boxer demonstrates how Viscontian realism combines various ‘regimes of verisimilitude’, obliterating the imagined impediment between Hollywood and Italian types of cinema.⁵⁸

GENERIC MARKERS OF THE MINORITY BOXER

In the choice of French actor Alain Delon for the title role (he claimed to have written *Rocco* specifically for Delon), Visconti indicated how verisimilitude would provide only a partial means for understanding *Rocco*. On the whole, Delon’s lithe physique, unblemished visage, and plodding footwork make him a most improbable boxer. The casting of Renato Salvatore to play his brother and boxing counterpart only increases Delon’s questionable suitability for the role. While arguably more ‘Italian’ looking than the non-Italian Delon, Salvatore’s mimicry of the *slugger* boxing style, characterized by raw power to counteract a lack of technique, cuts an infinitely more credible portrait of the boxer. Together with his imposing physique, Salvatore embodied all of the vainglory and brutality that define the fictional persona of the debauched-boxer, whose sexual dalliances and taste for the high-life inevitably provoke failure in the ring.⁵⁹

To say that Delon was miscast misunderstands at least part of Visconti’s overall dramatic strategy, however. Most of *Rocco*’s cast came from outside of Italy, making the choice of the non-Italian Delon more the rule than its exception. More importantly, Delon presents a slippery figure for notions of national cinema. His work was transnational, with roles in French and Italian films as well as French-Italian co-productions like *Rocco*. The dubbing of Delon into Italian to an audience so accustomed to such a practice would also seem to question the actor’s national difference. Catherine O’Rawe notes how Delon’s Italian voice melds with a visual strategy that emphasizes both character and actor alike:

The interplay between face and voice is here important in underlining the complex nature of how Delon’s performance is constructed in this film, both vocally through the dubbing of his voice and in terms of cinematography that makes proximity to his face its key characteristic.⁶⁰

As O’Rawe suggests, to say that Delon did not fit the mould of the ideal southern Italian – or any Italian for that matter – ignores the cross-cultural coding inherent to an actor of Delon’s international activity, the local context in which *Rocco* was viewed, as well as Visconti’s rather complex pairing of image with sound.

Seen more broadly, the use of a figure as indexical of cinema as Delon is compatible with much of the rest of the film’s dramatic apparatus. Blending literary, operatic, and theatrical tropes to reinforce the film’s overall melodramatic structure created an ‘excess of style’, resembling anything but Bazin’s ontology of the photographic image.⁶¹ Consequently Visconti was harshly criticized for the film’s tendency towards ‘l’inverosimilianza’.⁶² The constructed nature of the film is on extravagant display with the montage juxtaposing Rocco’s victory in

the ring with the murder of Nadia. This scene – what is perhaps the most commented-upon moment in all of Visconti’s cinema – marks both a dramatic and technical climax: the cross-cutting of victory with defeat, borrowed from Bizet’s *Carmen*, is a pageant of cinematic expertise. Still, *mise-en-scène*, not montage, is generally regarded as a more ‘viscontian’ site of auteur technique.⁶³ Accordingly, a look to another boxing sequence displays Visconti subtle establishment of racial difference, distinguishing the Parondis from their surroundings, then Rocco from Simone.

Initial boxing scenes, like the opening in Milan’s central station, successfully establish the Parondis as racially different. When the brothers first enter the gym, they are immediately marked as *terroni*, derided with laughter for appearing clad only in tattered underwear (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Ciro, Rocco, and Simone first visit the boxing gym

The visual and sonic accents solidify the brothers as objectified southerner-outsiders, and particularly debased ones at that. Similar to the dimly lit, shadowy arrival at the train station in the film’s incipit, the discrimination against the Parondis in the gym becomes the next stage in Visconti’s strategy to situate the southerners uncomfortably within a northern regional context. A more objective treatment continues into the training sequence where Visconti achieves deep spacing through a tracking shot of the gym, capturing the multi-layered action of numerous boxers in motion. Viewed as a hallmark of cinematic realism by Bazin and his fellow compatriots at the *Cahiers du cinéma*, Visconti combines deep focus with the sport’s natural diegetic sounds: rhythmic pummelling of the speed bag, fighters receiving direction – noises one might easily associate with a real boxing space. This sense of a realistic, authentic visual link to the gym’s interiors, established by the deep focus photography, is fleeting, however.



Figure 4: Three images from the Rocco zoom sequence

Here, the camera shifts away from Simone and concludes with a zoom, closing rapidly on Rocco gazing at himself in a body-length mirror (Figure 4). The

sudden zoom dislodges any conduit with the real that may have been suggested by the deep focus, bringing to bear the encounter between actual and virtual. In doing so, Visconti supplants a jolting ambiguity of meaning in what was once the clarity of a unified plane: Rocco's look in the mirror raises the psychological interiority to a level of visual prominence, fusing the boxing present with Rocco's obsession with past, a dominant motif throughout the film.⁶⁴ Indeed, Rocco is among the film's most maudlin characters, seen reflecting on the family's Basilicata roots and repeatedly invoking memories of their 'paese'. This takes on its most lyric visual quality in the mellifluous shot-counter-shot of Rocco's conversation with Nadia when she is released from prison in Livorno. It is likewise a pattern attached to Rocco from his first discussion of returning to the homeland early in the film. The presentness of boxing is intimately tied to his disgust for the circumstances in Milan, expressed most clearly following Rocco's victory conversation with Ciro.⁶⁵ Rocco's inability to adapt to his new surroundings combines with his position as an 'exceptional' (i.e. 'different') fighter, whose acumen in the ring will only compound his dissimilarity.

In addition to rejecting an enigmatic link between filmic and profilmic, the zoom on Rocco's face unsheathes the mediated nature of photographic representation, breaking down any attempt to give 'an impression to remain of continuous and homogenous reality'.⁶⁶ This is an early adoption of the zoom in Visconti's filmography before the technique became a staple, with subsequent zooms attracting critical praise (in *Morte a Venezia*) and derision (in *Lo straniero* and *La caduta degli dei*). Chronologically, *Rocco* followed the oneiric *Le notti bianche*, a film where Visconti combines objective detachment with the subjectivity of dream. *Le notti bianche* projects illusion and fantasy through voice-over, flashbacks, and a constructed 'neorealistic' film set, all invoking the artifice beneath Italian cinema's famous realist moment. In *Rocco*, the zoom prefigures the more subjective phase of the so-called 'secondo Visconti',⁶⁷ in which following the transitional work of *Il Gattopardo*, Visconti allegedly transitioned from objective to decadent realism.⁶⁸ Similarly, the zoom in *Morte a Venezia*, where the director had to 'immergersi' in the perspective of a character, indicated a symbolically charged disclosure of the filmic mechanism.⁶⁹

This seemingly innocuous sequence of the zoom can be situated between the cross-cutting montage linking boxing with Nadia's murder and the more conventionally-filmed fight sequences of the film's first half. Simone's first bout and the street brawl that follows are guided by a more classical cinematic representation of boxing. The camera tends to survey the fight from the distance of a long shot, then to medium shots where the jostling camera follows the two fighters engaged. Frames equate Simone, his opponent, and the crowd as collectively southern, the restricted area of the boxing gym conflating the boxers with volatile group of spectators, who contract the sport's violent impulses and transport them to the street. This altercation marks the porosity of the boxing ropes, universalizing the clichéd southern 'passion' of the crowd and exposing the community's internal divisions, making the various arguments about Visconti's racial profiling of southerners even more convincing.⁷⁰

Like the classic boxing film, however, ethnicity serves an important function in *Rocco*. With regard to Hollywood boxers, Leger Grindon remarks:

The boxer's physical being and the social consequences of this condition define him as different, and that difference generates conflict as the boxer pursues

opportunities in the fight game. Ethnicity accentuates the boxer's body as the source of difference. Even during the classical studio period the pugilist was often a member of an ethnic minority [...]. Ethnic identification intersected with class difference, characterizing the boxer as a poor worker selling physical labor in an industrialized economy which found little value in his skills.⁷¹

Hollywood boxing films offer a multiplicity of examples in which similar trajectories of enfranchisement and disenfranchisement of ethnic minorities through boxing are featured. Charlene Regester specifically analyses the presence of African-American characters:

The black athlete, in all of his violence, aggressiveness, and threatening behavior, became a spectacle to be exploited for financial purposes, and there were repeated calls for the black athlete to return to the screen [...]. Their overwhelming size, physique, and aggressive behaviour rendered them threatening, while at the same time, positioned them as desirable.⁷²

Early Hollywood fight films staged interracial tensions popular in American society, providing a space for 'manifestations of battles for racial superiority'.⁷³ The same might be said of the southern boxer in *Rocco*, whose position is akin to the African-American boxers in films like *Body and Soul* (Oscar Micheaux, 1924) and *The Emperor Jones* (Dudley Murphy, 1933), where physical prowess and sensuality are matched by a complex psychological interiority.⁷⁴

The black boxer who appears as Simone's opponent in his final match punctuates the ethnic equivalence with the southern boxers. 'Webster' (played by middle-weight Jerome Adjer) soundly beats Simone, leading to an ignominious surrender that triggers Simone's downspiral into criminality. Once again, there is a correspondence between minority boxers, this time matching a black fighter with a southern one. Such casting of a black boxer was a mainstay in Italian boxing films at the time. The aforementioned *Harlem* concludes with the battle between the Italian Tommaso (Massimo Girotti) and a black boxer performed before a racially-divided crowd in New York's Madison Square Garden. In *Il nostro campione*, the figure of the African-American boxer emerges, with the main character Cesare (Tiberio Mitri) trained by Raimondo, a former world champion played by actor John Kitzmiller. This extended to non-boxing films as well, such as *Il mulatto* (Francesco De Robertis, 1950), where the young boy Angelo is eventually retrieved by his uncle, an African-American boxer. That southern Italians pivoted between black-other and white-northerner underscores the in-betweenness that was typical of the Italian migrant experience.⁷⁵

Rather than accuse Visconti of projecting his personal, northern bias against southern Italians, it is equally reasonable to suggest that through the figure of the immigrant boxer, the director trafficked in a conventional cinematic figuration that was widespread at the time. Globally speaking, Visconti's films repeatedly forwarded deeply problematic representations of race, gender, and sexuality that are likely offensive to our present-day values. *Rocco* is exemplary in this respect. One need look only as far as the southerner-murderer Simone; or to Nadia, the female figure who is clearly scapegoated for the entire Parondi downfall; or to Morini, the avatar of exploitation who, uncoincidentally, is homosexualized. Instead of

suggesting these figurations are symptomatic of some implicit prejudice, percolating through the artwork from the depths of Visconti's psyche, we might also consider the way in which cinematic figures (the boxer, the femme fatale, the corrupt manager) are used to achieve specific dramatic aims in the collective act of making a film.

CONCLUSION: *ROCCO E I SUOI FRATELLI*, ITALIAN BOXING FILM?

Rocco continued Visconti's shift towards large-scale, commercially viable filmmaking inaugurated with *Senso* that would prevail in select big productions such as *Il Gattopardo* and *La caduta degli dei*. Unlike other auteur films of the era, *Rocco* managed to spread beyond Italy's urban centres, stretching into rural markets and their audiences. Discussing the popularity of the film outside Italy's main metropoli, Vittorio Spinazzola remarked:

La fortuna del film è stata in larga misura affidata alle platee di periferia e di provinciale; insomma, allo spettatore popolare. Visconti ha dunque finalmente realizzato un largo colloquio proprio con quel tipo di pubblico che più gli sta al cuore [...] due anni più tardi, egli vorrà definitivamente consolidare il suo prestigio di uomo di spettacolo ricorrendo ai tradizionali mezzi delle superproduzioni hollywoodiane: divismo, colore, scenografia, movimento di masse, al servizio della riduzione cinematografica di un *bestseller* libraio.⁷⁶

The mass market for *Rocco* introduces the social nature of a Visconti film across large swaths of the Italian populace, where he was in dialogue with a plurality of spectators who engaged with the film in multiple ways. The inspired discussion of the *Rocco* by Italian workers represents a prime example for challenging notions that popular audiences in Italy were essentially passive.⁷⁷ In an interview with Aristarco, Visconti addressed the changing landscape of Italian film tastes at the time, remarking how audiences were bridging the gap between the movie theatre and the art house:

Aristarco: 'Dunque anche il pubblico, come la critica, cambia atteggiamento dinanzi alla tua opera, si sta facendo più sensibile e maturo? Indubbiamente, esso ha guadagnato molte posizioni negli ultimi anni'.

Visconti: 'Quel pubblico che c'è stato sino a poco tempo fa, che si adattava a qualunque prodotto, che soprattutto voleva cose di tutto riposo che non lo facessero né sgomentare né impaurire né angosciare, quel pubblico per fortuna non c'è più, o, meglio, c'è ancora solo in parte. Mi sembra che ci sia stata un'evoluzione in questo senso, nella ricerca di temi più importanti, più attuali, anche di emozioni più vere, più profonde e sentite'.⁷⁸

How *Rocco* triangulated with film audiences on the one hand, and the Italian film industry on the other, represents a relatively unexplored area in our understanding of the film's distribution and reception. The same can be said for how Visconti's films interacted with genre cinema.⁷⁹ These lacunae stem from a privileging of the numerous high-cultural components of Visconti's works that the director himself underlined in interviews, published articles, and public statements. Intimations of the popular, furthermore, clash with Visconti's identification as the unofficial

filmmaker of the Italian Communist Party; an institution hardly amenable to popular culture.⁸⁰

Judging from the film's large box-office returns, Visconti's individual indictment of the state of immigrant Milan blurred with its status as a form of entertainment and a consumerist product of the Italian film industry. Yet, even before its debut, *Rocco's* pre-production phase reveals a considerable debt to direct contributions from Titanus hired hands, pointing to the film's origins as a collective effort with Visconti as one of many contributors. Screenwriting was an exhausting process, involving numerous contributions from writers and producers across the duration of about a year. It created a large paper trail demonstrating how a variety of narrative elements were introduced, then jettisoned in subsequent drafts.⁸¹ The final version was a collection of individual sections, with Suso Cecchi D'Amico responsible for the character Simone, Enrico Medioli for Ciro, and Pasquale Festa Campanile and Massimo Franciosa for Vincenzo and Rocco. Visconti himself wrote the scene at the Idroscalo.⁸²

The various participants in stages of the film's production context are also noteworthy. *Rocco* began as Vides Cinematografica project under producer Franco Cristaldi who funded the initial screenwriting by Visconti, Vasco Pratolini, Suso Cecchi D'Amico, and Enrico Medioli. When disagreements arose, Cristaldi passed the film to Goffredo Lombardo and Titanus, who brought in Pasquale Festa Campanile and Massimo Franciosa to collaborate on the screenplay. Other than Nicola Badalucco who contributed to *La caduta degli dei* (1969) and *Morte a Venezia* (1971), this was the only time that Visconti expanded his usual team of writers to include others. Campanile and Franciosa had previously worked in the comic vein of the *neorealismo rosa*, screenwriting films like Mauro Bolognini's *Gli innamorati* (1955) before gaining notoriety for their highly successful triptych of Titanus films by director Dino Risi: *Poveri ma belli* (1956), *Belle ma povere* (1958), and *Poveri milionari* (1959). Their identification with the world of commercial Italian cinema was not a mark in their favour, and Campanile and Franciosa admitted to being received coldly when they first arrived to work on *Rocco*.⁸³

Rocco was not the first boxer Campanile and Franciosa created. They previously wrote the 1957 boxing comedy, *Il cocco di mamma* (dir. Mauro Morassi), about gadabout boxer Aldo, who falls madly in love with Laura, then must prove his dedication by being disfigured in the ring. His willingness to self-sacrifice in the form of physical punishment is not unlike Rocco's, who fights only to pay Simone's debts. Both writers were comfortable working within the Titanus production context and many Campanile and Franciosa screenplays put forward that same Italian dream of advancement that is evident in *Rocco*, albeit through a comic, optimistic mode. These were consistent with a certain Titanus model that was prevalent at the time. D'agostino notes:

Il modello Titanus perfezionato anche nel senso che si precisa l'adattamento delle istanze neorealiste ai tempi che stanno mutando. Comincia a farsi sentire il benessere [...], e questo clima e questi personaggi pieni di 'ottimismo' rappresentano e incarnano la tendenza a vedere, o meglio il desiderio di vedere la vita tinta di rosa: una vita 'facile,' molto più facile di quanto non sia in realtà, in generale e per loro. Che sono giovani e belli e pieni di vita, ma pur sempre poveri. E la

loro ricchezza è la speranza o l'illusione, l'aspirazione a qualcosa che verrà e che forse non avranno mai. Ma l'età e l'amore li lasciano sognare ...⁸⁴

Campanile and Franciosa, both from Basilicata, were initially brought in to help with the authentication of the Parondi characters with the prologue to be set in their native region. According to Campanile:

Io e Franciosa fummo chiamati alla sceneggiatura perché entrambi siamo lucani e la storia si imperniava su una famiglia lucana. C'era questo trattamento, in cui la storia aveva un'ampiezza letteraria, era proprio un grande affresco d'ambienti. Visconti aveva sentito subito il bisogno di inserire le illuminazioni essenziali in un ordine aggressivo, in una successione di capitoli ognuno dei quali raccogliesse la tensione dei precedenti e aiutasse il film a crescere verso la catarsi.⁸⁵

This delegation of writing responsibilities and piecemeal process of screenwriting fits uncomfortably with assertions that *Rocco* was the product of Visconti's complete control, problematizing a traditional identification of the auteur as the film's creative mainspring.⁸⁶ Enrico Medioli asserted that audiences perceived artistic harmony, not a patchwork: 'I don't think the audience realizes that different hands have been working on the script. Besides, the one who creates the unity is the director'.⁸⁷ Still, Nowell-Smith insinuates *Rocco*'s troublesome evolution as an auteur film. He first establishes Visconti as *Rocco*'s primary visionary ('The building up of the story was contributed to by various hands, but the ultimate control at every stage rested with Visconti himself'), only to acknowledge the limits of this characterization: 'As a result changes have taken place in the structure of the film which Visconti perhaps did not fully foresee and which he would not necessarily recognize as having taken place'.⁸⁸

Recently, Visconti's identity as a neorealist auteur has located the director on the wrong side of an energetic debate in Italian film studies that has portrayed the study of neorealist filmmakers as passé, even counterproductive to the field.⁸⁹ Many directors of his ilk have been cast in a paternalistic light, shifting the interest to less-canonical figures and popular forms of cinematic production.⁹⁰ Addressing the issue of the popular in Visconti's works, Michèle Lagny underscores an essential contradiction at play: 'Parlare di Visconti a proposito di cultura popolare può sembrare al tempo stesso ovvio e assurdo'.⁹¹ This perceived condescension radiates from Visconti's portrayal as member of an aristocratic elite, whose affluent family background, class, and education located him beyond – even above – typical film-going audiences. Certainly, if we are to view popular culture in the strict sense of 'popular culture born from the people for the people', the rich, effete, high-brow Visconti makes a most unlikely producer.⁹² As others have recognized, 'popular' can mean many things in the context of Italian cinema.⁹³

In her reading of *Rocco* that considers the high-low counterbalancing as the engine of Visconti's creative machinery, Veronica Pravadelli writes:

Visconti's dual nature is the result of his ability to combine intellectually challenging narratives drawn from a whole array of literary and artistic sources, with

highly spectacular *mises-en-scène*, or, in other words, to merge strategies of art cinema with those of popular cinema.⁹⁴

This high-low blend attracted enormous audiences during the boom years following the peak of Italian viewership in the mid-1950s,⁹⁵ a period in which *campioni d'incasso* were tending towards national products and away from non-national ones.⁹⁶ This phase has been called the 'watershed years in the history of consumption'⁹⁷ when Italian films were meeting the desires of Italian audiences as well as those of international spectators beyond European borders.⁹⁸

That Visconti's films borrowed from a broad cultural horizon that would include the boxing film seems hardly novel. A comprehensive look at his career reveals a director who resourced a wide range of artistic forms and features, from literature to cinema, high to low. This was especially the case during the 1960s. From *Rocco* to the historical film *Il Gattopardo* (1963), the gothic *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa* (1965), and on to the Nazi film *La caduta degli dei* (1969), Visconti's works of this decade consistently mined transnational cinematic forms to reach massive audiences. While interpretations of *Rocco* generally couch boxing in purely metaphorical terms, the sport, both cinematic and real, represents a constituent part of this textual assortment; one that is additive, not detrimental to more established categories such as neorealism, adaptation, and *impegno*.

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NOTES

- ¹ J. Carol Oates. *On Boxing* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), p. 16.
- ² From *Cahiers du cinéma*, 106, April 1960, 37–41. Reprinted in Luchino Visconti, *Leggere Visconti*, ed. by Giuliana Callegari and Nuccio Lodato (Bologna: Cappelli, 1976), p. 77.
- ³ Gianni Rondolino, *Luchino Visconti* (Turin: UTET Libreria, 2003), p. 398.
- ⁴ Carlo Testa bifurcates Italian literary adaptations into two camps, placing Visconti as co-figurehead of one: ‘Verily there seem to be two separate and largely non-communicating film-and-literature traditions: the one that developed within the Gramscian-Viscontian context, and the one that didn’t’. Carlo Testa, *Masters of Two Arts: Re-creation of European Literatures in Italian Cinema* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), p. 8.
- ⁵ Visconti’s politics were frequently weighed against his aestheticism. Rohdie, for example: ‘Visconti, a committed political artist, in the very act of underlining political meanings in his fictions, came close to affirming a faith in art against contemporary reality [...]. Could it really be argued that an escape into Art and Beauty as enduring values with which to accuse the present was an advanced progressive politics?’. Sam Rohdie, *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (London: BFI Publishing, 1992), pp. 31–32.
- ⁶ Gian Piero Brunetta, *Cent’anni di cinema italiano, 2: Dal 1945 ai giorni nostri* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2004), pp. 74–80.
- ⁷ Mauro Giori, *Luchino Visconti: Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (Turin: Lindau, 2011), p. 204.
- ⁸ Quote from a ‘Woman from Varese’, ‘Specchio dei Tempi’, *La Stampa*, 15 November 1960, p. 2.
- ⁹ Elena Gremigni, *Pubblico e popolarità: il ruolo del cinema nella società italiana, 1956-1967* (Firenze: Lettere, 2009), pp. 252–53.
- ¹⁰ Calvino’s early questioning of the discourse on *impegno* began around the same time he was commenting on *Rocco*. Pierpaolo Antonello and Florian Mussnug, eds., *Postmodern Impegno: Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Italian Culture* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), p. 11.
- ¹¹ Vito Pandolfi, *Film 1961: avventure e prospettive del nuovo cinema*, ed. by Vittorio Spinazzola (Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 1961), p. 24.
- ¹² Alessandro Cappabianca, *Boxare con l’ombra* (Recco [Genova]: Le mani, 2004), p. 154.
- ¹³ Cappabianca, p. 147.
- ¹⁴ Giori’s 2011 book, the most comprehensive study of the film available, is one indispensable exception. For his reading of boxing within the film’s adaptive strategy, see the section entitled ‘Il bacillo della boxe’, Giori, *Luchino Visconti*, pp. 202–12.
- ¹⁵ Visconti’s incomplete novel, *Angelo*, was one of the director’s literary ‘tentativi’. For Visconti’s other literary pursuits, see René de Ceccatty’s preface to *Angelo* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1993), pp. XIX–XX.
- ¹⁶ Pierpaolo Antonello, ‘Di crisi in meglio. Realismo, impegno postmoderno e cinema politico nell’Italia degli anni zero: da Nanni Moretti a Paolo Sorrentino’, *Italian Studies*, 67.2 (July 2012), 176.
- ¹⁷ David Bordwell, ‘The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice’, in *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, 6th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 779. In the context of Italian cinema, Mary P. Wood forwards the notion of the auteur as a crossroads where realism, individual flair, and generic conventions convene. Mary P. Wood, *Italian Cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), p. 111.
- ¹⁸ Leo Baudry notes: ‘When we perceive the function of vampire-film conventions in *Persona* or boxing-film conventions in *On the Waterfront* as clearly as

- we note the debt of Kurosawa's samurai film to American westerns, or that of the New Wave films to American crime films of the 1950s, then we will be able to appreciate more fully the way in which films can break down the old visions between elite and popular art to establish, almost unbeknown to aesthetics and criticism, a vital interplay between them'. *Film Theory*, p. 669.
- ¹⁹ Rondolino, p. 394.
- ²⁰ For a breakdown of the film's shots, see Giori, pp. 21–31.
- ²¹ John Foot, 'Cinema and the City: Milan and Visconti's *Rocco and his Brothers*', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 4.2 (1999), 211.
- ²² S. Holden, 'The Movies that Inspired Martin Scorsese', *New York Times*, 21 May 1993.
- ²³ Micaela Urbano, 'Un film per la tv fa rivivere *Rocco*', *Il Messaggero*, 19 December 2010 <<http://www.cinema.gay.it/dosart.asp?ID=19781>> [accessed 20 October 2015].
- ²⁴ Pierre Sorlin, *Italian National Cinema, 1896–1996* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 118.
- ²⁵ A lucid account of the film's encounter with censors is available in: John Foot, 'La gente e il buon costume: Luchino Visconti's *Rocco e i suoi fratelli*. Censorship and the Left in Italy, 1960–1961', in *Reflexivity: Critical Themes in the Italian Cultural Tradition*, ed. by Prue Shaw and J. F. Took (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2000), pp. 9–36.
- ²⁶ Foot, *Cinema and the City*, p. 221.
- ²⁷ Veronica Pravadelli, 'Visconti's *Rocco and His Brothers*: Identity, Melodrama, and the National-Popular', in *Negotiating Italian Identities*, ed. by Norma Bouchard (Annali d'italianistica: Volume 24, 2006), p. 239.
- ²⁸ Foot, *Cinema and the city*, p. 220 (italics are Foot's).
- ²⁹ The Greek actress Paxinou highlights the film's many 'theatrical' elements that include boxing. Schifano notes: 'All through the film Visconti hinted that opera and theatre had that sort of relationship to prize-fighting. For the "unnatural activity of boxing" is so close to show business with its rituals, its daily training, its days of glory and pitiless failures, its public displays of bodies triumphant or battered and defeated'. Laurence Schifano, *Luchino Visconti: The Flames of Passion* (New York: Collins, 1990), p. 318.
- ³⁰ Alan O'Leary, 'Marco Tullio Giordana, or The Persistence of *Impegno*', in *Postmodern Impegno*, p. 221.
- ³¹ Antonello and Mussnug, pp. 4–7.
- ³² Pio Baldelli, *Luchino Visconti* (Milano: G. Mazzotta, 1973), p. 201.
- ³³ Visconti, p. 50, italics in original.
- ³⁴ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, 'The Italian Cinema and the Italian Working Class', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 59 *Workers and Film: As Subject and Audience* (Spring 2001), 46–47.
- ³⁵ For the placement of the other brothers in this scheme, see Gianni Canova, 'Rocco e i suoi fratelli: Visconti e le aporie anestetiche della modernità', in *Il cinema di Luchino Visconti*, pp. 177–80.
- ³⁶ Woodward explains: 'Boxing has a long history as a route out of poverty, which has not only been seized upon by individuals but also recognized by government, for example through the provision of boys' clubs, gymnasias and the development of provision in schools. More recently sport has become a target of interventions which seek to promote social inclusion and new versions of citizenship'. Kath Woodward, *The 'I' of the Tiger: Boxing, Masculinity and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 17.
- ³⁷ Enzo Biagi, 'Mentre si discute la morale di "Rocco" un'enorme folle si precipita a vederlo', *La Stampa*, 19 October 1960, p. 3.
- ³⁸ For more on the figure of Nadia and the prostitute in Italy at the time, see: Danielle Hipkins, "'I Don't Want to Die": Prostitution and Narrative Disruption in Visconti's *Rocco e i suoi fratelli*', in *Women in Italy: 1945–1960*, ed. by Penelope Morris

- (New York: Palgrave, 2006), pp. 193–210.
- ³⁹ This corrupt gangster-promoter figure, popular in Hollywood boxing films of the 1930s (*Kid Galahad*, 1937; *The Crowd Roars*, 1938; *Golden Boy*, 1939) and that would evolve throughout the 1940s (*Body and Soul*, 1947; *The Set Up*, 1949) and 1950s (*On the Waterfront*, 1954; *The Harder They Fall*, 1956), is an obvious precursor to the figure of Morini, the lecherous promoter in *Rocco*.
- ⁴⁰ For one extended reading of the fractious homosexual desire in the Simone-Morini pairing that analyses the degrading touch of the homophobic homosexual, see Eugenio Bolongaro, 'Representing the (un)representable: Homosexuality in Luchino Visconti's *Rocco and His Brothers*', *Studies in European Cinema*, 7.3 (2010), 221–34; Giori (especially pp. 205–08) offers an illuminating interpretation of the corrupting relationship between boxing and homosexuality.
- ⁴¹ Grindon, *The Boxing Film*, p. 405.
- ⁴² Bordwell states: 'the art cinema defines itself explicitly against the classical narrative mode and especially the cause-effect linkage of events'. *Film Theory*, p. 717.
- ⁴³ Rondolino remarks: 'Anche la tecnica di ripresa sottolinea questa continuità della recitazione che ne mette in luce, non già la naturalezza o la cinematograficità, ma la convenzionalità e l'artificio'. Rondolino, p. 407.
- ⁴⁴ Gaetano Carancini, *Rocco e i suoi fratelli: storia di un capolavoro* (Roma: minimum fax, 2010), p. 99.
- ⁴⁵ For Singer, 'absorptive realism' involves the most suspension of disbelief and acceptance of the film representation as reality. Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 5.
- ⁴⁶ Teresa Megale, ed., *Visconti e la Basilicata* (Venice: Marsilio, 2003), p. 14.
- ⁴⁷ Sandro Bernardi, 'Affioramenti viscontiani: il sopralluogo in Basilicata', in *Visconti e la Basilicata*, p. 32.
- ⁴⁸ Schifano, p. 313.
- ⁴⁹ These 44 photographs were contained together with 200 shots of Fogliano Lake (held in container 26.6 at the Fondo Visconti), perhaps for the sequence of Nadia's murder, the culminating moment in the film written by Visconti. Bernardi, *Basilicata*, p. 31.
- ⁵⁰ Teatro Manzoni in via Urbana is one example of a space transformed into a boxing ring/stage. Carancini, pp. 98–99.
- ⁵¹ Carancini, p. 99.
- ⁵² Carnera appeared as a boxer in films like *The Bigger They Are* (dir. Arthur Hurley, 1931), *The Prizefighter and the Lady* (dir. WS Van Dyke, 1933), *Mr. Broadway* (dir. Johnnie Walker, 1933), *Harlem* (dir. Carmine Gallone, 1943) then a wrestler in *Il tallone di Achille* (dir. Mario Amendola, 1952). He was cast repeatedly as a generic, Maciste-esque strongman in big-budget period pieces of the era: a tough-guy in *La nascita di Salomè* (1940), an archer in *La corona di ferro* (1941), a swash-buckler alongside Doris Durante in *La figlia del corsaro verde* (1941). Carnera's career in films would fittingly end with his role as Anteo the giant in *Hercules Unchained* (1959) starring Steve Reeves, the next strongman extraordinaire of Italian screens.
- ⁵³ These were not limited to Hollywood films, other French boxing films of the period include: *Martin Roumagnac* (dir. Georges Lacombe, 1946), *L'Idole* (dir. Alexandre Esway, 1947), *L'Homme aux mains d'argile* (Léon Mathot, 1949), *Mon Curé champion du régiment* (dir. Émile Couzinet, 1955), *Fernand Clochard* (dir. Pierre Chevalier, 1957).
- ⁵⁴ Leger Grindon, 'The Boxing Film and Genre Theory', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 24.5 (2007), 405.
- ⁵⁵ In Curtiz's film, *Kid Galahad* (Wayne Morris) is a naïve Okie fresh off the

- train who finds work as a bellhop in Midtown Manhattan hotel. During a cocktail party, he knocks the heavy-weight champ to the ground for offending the pretty lady, Fluff (Bette Davis), then is hired by the Italian-American promoter, Nick Donati (Edward G. Robinson) and groomed for the championship. This is virtually identical to the scene shot a few years later in *Harlem*, when Tommaso gains attention for punching out the champ during a cocktail party. The gangster-promoter Chris in *Harlem* is also a direct descendent of that same figure in *Kid Galahad*, played by Humphrey Bogart.
- ⁵⁶ 'L'America in cui è ambientata la vicenda è tutta di maniera, rifatta di quarta mano, se si pensa che è tolta di peso dalle indicazioni astratte dei film americani i quali, a loro volta, rappresentavano già una cifra ostinato e irrimediabile, stinta e convenzionale. Gli autori del film hanno – in sostanza – voluto dare al pubblico un surrogato di quei film americani le cui fasciose suggestioni hanno ancora tanta presa sul nostro pubblico'. Antonio Pietrangeli, 'Harlem', *Bianco e nero*, 7.6 (June 1943), 34–35.
- ⁵⁷ Paolo Noto, *Dal bozzetto ai generi: Il cinema italiano dei primi anni Cinquanta* (Turin: Kaplan, 2011), pp. 31–32.
- ⁵⁸ Neale adopts this couplet from Todorov, who recognized the ramifications for realism that their interplay created. This is useful for Visconti's appeal to authenticity throughout *Rocco*. S. Neale, 'Questions of genre', *Screen*, 31.1 (Spring 1990), 47.
- ⁵⁹ Simone fits seamlessly into one of the boxing master plots that Grindon titles 'Debauchery', in which 'The boxer abandons his previous regimen or training for parties and the fast life'. Grindon, p. 58.
- ⁶⁰ Catherine O'Rawe, 'Dubbing Delon: Voice, Body, and National Stardom in *Rocco e i suoi fratelli/Rocco and his Brothers* (Luchino Visconti, 1960)', in *Alain Delon: Style, Stardom and Masculinity*, ed. by Nick Rees-Roberts and Darren Waldron (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 59–73, p. 70.
- ⁶¹ Pravadelli, p. 242.
- ⁶² Baldelli illustrates this line of criticism nicely: 'Al film vengono rimproverati l'inverosimiglianza, l'inesattezza, l'esagerazione, la magniloquenza, la mancanza di dosaggio e di giusta misura, le dissonanze stridenti, gli eccessi istrionici, l'indulgenza per il superfluo e la compiaciuta esibizione sessuale. Poi via via: la maniera oratoria, l'ingombro letterario, l'exasperazione forsennata, la sproporzione tra l'imponente messinscena e la modesta levatura dei personaggi [...]. Per concludere – come fa F. Sacchi – che quel sovraccarico nella moltiplicazione dei particolari e nella condotta delle scene costituisce il motivo per cui il regista "perde di vista l'essenziale, cioè il tema collettivo: il problema dell'inserimento del gruppo familiare meridionale nella città industriale del Nord.'" Baldelli, p. 194.
- ⁶³ In his 1958 *Cahiers du cinéma* essay, 'Bergmanorama', Jean-Luc Godard opposes Visconti to Ingmar Bergman, remarking that while Bergman represents a *cinéma libre* ('cinema of freedom'), Visconti a *cinéma rigoureux* ('cinema of rigour'). Jean-Luc Godard, 'Bergmanorama', *Cahiers du cinéma*, 85 (1958), 1–5.
- ⁶⁴ For Deleuze, this is the crystal-image: 'Time has to split at the same time as it sets itself out or unrolls itself: it splits in two dissymmetrical jets, one of which makes all the present pass on, while the other preserves all the past. Time consists of this split, and it is this, it is time, that we see in the crystal'. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 81. For an interesting rebuke of Deleuze's reading of 'crystals of time' in another Visconti film, see: Lucio Angelo Privitello, 'The Impossible Language of Natural Aristocracy: Deleuze's Misreading of Visconti's *Leopard'*, *Senses of Cinema* 37 (October

- 2005)<<http://sensesofcinema.com/2005/feature-articles/leopard/>> [Accessed 20 October 2015].
- ⁶⁵ Rocco exclaims: 'Mi è stato facile di vincere perché non ho visto più lui davanti a me. Era come vedessi qualcuno su cui sfogare il mio odio. Tutto l'odio che mi si era accumulato qua dentro. È orribile Ciro!...'. Visconti, p. 155.
- ⁶⁶ André Bazin, *Orson Welles: A Critical View*, trans. Jonathan Rosenbaum (Los Angeles: Acrobat, 1991), p. 77.
- ⁶⁷ Micciché marks *Il Gattopardo* as a turning point in Visconti's filmography: 'Transizione dal "second Visconti" (in cui il mondo oggettivo riesce a prevalere – largamente anche se non totalmente – sulla vena soggettiva, tutta intenta – lo si percepisce fin da *Ossessione* – alla sconfitta, alla distruzione, al destino e alla morte –, al "second Visconti" (dove le grandi tematiche del decadentismo e del crepuscolo di un mondo intento a commuoversi della propria agonia, hanno il sopravvento sulle urgenze della storia, dell'ideologia e della politica)'. Lino Micciché, *Visconti: un profilo critico* (Venice: Marsilio, 1996), p. 47.
- ⁶⁸ Lino Micciché, 'Il principe e il conte', *Italica*, 73.2 (1996), 173–94; especially 179–83.
- ⁶⁹ Augusto Sainati, 'Lo zoom e la bellezza', in *Il Cinema di Luchino Visconti*, ed. by Veronica Pravadelli (Venice: Marsilio, 2000), p. 277.
- ⁷⁰ Foot, *Cinema and the City*, p. 227.
- ⁷¹ Grindon, *Body and Soul*, p. 55.
- ⁷² Charlene Regester, 'From Gridiron and the Boxing Ring to the Cinema Screen: The African-American Athlete in a pre-1950 Cinema', *Culture, Sport, Society*, 6.2–3 (2003), 269.
- ⁷³ 'Despite the heavyweight color line and the legal prohibition of interracial bouts in New York, California, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, nearly half of all the fight films produced between 1900 and 1915 depicted blacks battling whites'. Dan Streible, 'A History of the Boxing Film, 1894–1915: Social Control and Social Reform in the Progressive Era', *Film History*, 3.3 (1989), 242–43.
- ⁷⁴ Regester, p. 272.
- ⁷⁵ Shelleen Greene, *Equivocal Subjects: Between Italy and Africa – Constructions of Racial and National Identity in Italian Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2012), p. 176.
- ⁷⁶ Mario Sperenzi, *L'opera di Luchino Visconti: Atti del convegno di studi Fiesole 27–29 giugno 1966* (Firenze: Trip a Lipari, 1969), pp. 310–11.
- ⁷⁷ Gremigni, pp. 239–72.
- ⁷⁸ Gremigni, p. 248.
- ⁷⁹ 'Indeed, the status of Visconti's authorship is inextricably intertwined with his use of Italian popular forms, especially melodrama, while his 'return to Verga' is part of the collective Neorealist effort to establish a national cinema rooted in the Italian high literary tradition'. Pravadelli, p. 233. For a fascinating study of Visconti and notions of high and popular melodrama, see Chapter 3 (129–181) L. Bayman, *The Operatic and the Everyday in Postwar Italian Film Melodrama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015).
- ⁸⁰ This political element was intimately tied to Visconti's cine-literary pursuit. Tommaso Chiaretti in 1975 noted the presence of the avant-garde in some Italian films of the post-war period: 'Ma non in Visconti, che è invece perfettamente inserito nella politica culturale ufficiale della sinistra condotta da Togliatti a Alicata, pronto ad accettare su di sé il peso niente affatto oppressivo ma orgoglioso, della tradizione: intendendo per tradizione quella ottocentesca del romanzo, e soprattutto del romanzo verista'. Tommaso Chiaretti, 'La maniera di Visconti', in *Il neorealismo cinematografico italiano: Atti del convegno della X mostra internazionale del nuovo cinema*, ed. by Lino Micciché (Venice: Marsilio, 1975), p. 285. For a discussion of Rocco's problematic reception amongst communist intellectuals, see:

- Stephen Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 99–105.
- ⁸¹ Giori, pp. 33–48.
- ⁸² ‘Visconti affrontò in sede di scrittura la parte culminante del film, con la costruzione e l’orchestrazione di talune scene di altissimo livello drammatico – qual è la morte di Nadia all’Idroscalo – e che pensiamo siano *cresciute* addirittura nel “girato”, sviluppandosi visivamente in tutta la loro tensione tragica e umamente dialettica’. Rondolino, p. 395.
- ⁸³ ‘Di primo acchito, Visconti rifiuta la collaborazione dei due sceneggiatori, insospettito della loro compromissione con il cinema commerciale e contrario all’imposizione produttiva’. Andrea Pergolari, *Pasquale Festa Campanile, ovvero, La sindrome di Matusalemme* (Rome: Aracne, 2008), pp. 66–67.
- ⁸⁴ Pergolari, pp. 61–62.
- ⁸⁵ Pergolari, p. 65.
- ⁸⁶ ‘In addition to the idea of permanent crisis, key themes include the relation of cinema to national history, incorporating the idea of cinema as mirror to the nation (“lo schermo si fa specchio della vita nazionale”), an obsession with great auteurs and with what Christopher Wagstaff calls “authorial art cinema”. Catherine O’Rawe, “I padri e i maestri”: Genre, Auteurs, and Absences in Italian Film Studies’, *Italian Studies*, 63.2 (Autumn 2008), 174–75.
- ⁸⁷ Henry Bacon, *Visconti: Explorations of Beauty and Decay* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 106.
- ⁸⁸ Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Luchino Visconti* (London: BFI, 2003), pp. 124–26. The critic is consistent in that he regards those problematic ‘changes’ to have been the result of decisions made by Visconti during filming.
- ⁸⁹ The manifesto is Alan O’Leary and Catherine O’Rawe, ‘Against Realism: on a certain tendency in Italian film criticism’, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 16.1 (2011), 107–28.
- ⁹⁰ In a review of film panels at the American Association for Italian Studies conference held in 2012, for example: ‘A giudicare soltanto dall’AAIS di Charleston, sembra che l’interesse per Luchino Visconti, Vittorio De Sica, Roberto Rossellini e via dicendo stia svanendo’. See: Riccardo Antonangeli and Luca Peretti, ‘Panel e paper sul cinema alla conferenza annuale della forma del American Association of Italian Studies (AAIS) del 2012’, *The Italianist* 33.2 (2012), 336–43.
- ⁹¹ Lagny herself perpetuates an image of Visconti as above the popular fray. She highlights how the director’s populism – his representation of the people – is counterbalanced by a sort of elitist didacticism, in which he attempted to coax popular audiences into learning to enjoy the ‘authentic’ culture of high art. Michèle Lagny, ‘Visconti e la “cultura popolare”’, *Studi viscontiani*, ed. by David Bruni and Veronica Pravadelli (Venice: Marsilio, 1997), 241–50, p. 241.
- ⁹² As Lagny argues, the very idea of a film coming ‘from the people’ is absurd given the unlikelihood of the technical and financial means to make anything more than home movies. Michèle Lagny, ‘Popular Taste: The Peplum’, in *Popular European Cinema*, ed. by Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 163–80.
- ⁹³ Christopher Wagstaff, ‘Italian Cinema, Popular?’, in *Popular Italian Cinema*, ed. by Louis Bayman & Sergio Rigoletto (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 29–32.
- ⁹⁴ Pravadelli, p. 233.
- ⁹⁵ Sorlin notes: ‘Paradossalmente, il regresso nella frequenza del pubblico coincide con l’inizio del boom economico, nel 1957’. Pierre Sorlin, *Gli italiani al cinema: immaginario e identità sociale di una nazione* (Mantua: Tre Lune, 2009), p. 43.
- ⁹⁶ Corsi notes: ‘I film americani distribuiti nelle sale prima visione passano dai 283 del 1957–58 ai 160 del 1959–60, e negli anni successivi rimangono sempre al di sotto delle 200 unità, con una punta minima nei primi anni ’60

(123 nel 1961–62)'. Barbara Corsi, *Con qualche dollaro in meno: storia economica del cinema italiano* (Rome: Editori riuniti, 2001), p. 73.

⁹⁷ David Forgacs, 'Cultural Consumption, 1940s to 1990s', in *Italian Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, ed. by David Forgacs and Robert Lumley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 273–90, p. 275.

⁹⁸ As Gian Piero Brunetta remarked, 'Poi, grazie all'intervento e al successo

imprevisto di film come *Le fatiche di Ercole* (1958) di Pietro Francisci, Cinecittà non solo va alla riscossa, ma può giungere persino a pensare di partire a sua volta alla conquista del pubblico Americano'. Gian Piero Brunetta, 'La lunga Marcia del cinema americano in Italia tra fascismo e guerra fredda', in *Hollywood in Europa: industria, politica, pubblico del cinema, 1945–1960* (Florence: Casa Usher, 1991), 75–87, p. 87.

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