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# Naples and the Nation in Cultural Representations of the Allied Occupation

Ruth Glynn

The Allied Occupation in 1943–45 represents a key moment in the history of Naples and its relationship with the outside world. The arrival of the American Fifth Army on October 1, 1943 represented the military liberation of the city from both Nazi fascism and starvation, and inaugurated an extraordinary socio-cultural encounter between the international troops of the Allied forces and a war-weary population. The impact of that encounter may be traced in a small but significant corpus of cultural representations—memoirs, plays, films, and literary texts—generated primarily by individuals who experienced the Occupation, either on the Italian side or as part of the Allied presence in the city.<sup>1</sup> Recent years have witnessed a resurgence of interest in the corpus, especially in the United States, where the attention to Allied-Occupied Naples is undoubtedly bound up with memories—direct or second-hand—of the American presence in the city and with the contemporary experience of a new wave of US military occupations in Afghanistan and Iraq. The re-publication of John Horne Burns' *The Gallery* (2004) and Norman Lewis' *Naples '44* (2002) was followed by a new translation of Curzio Malaparte's *La pelle* (2013),<sup>2</sup> and all three texts have been subject to widespread, prominent, and lengthy reviews in American newspapers and magazines, detailing the relationship between the texts and their historical context.<sup>3</sup>

In Italy, where considerably less attention has been paid (in terms of cultural representation) to the Neapolitan experience of occupation than to events in the center-north of Italy in the same

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<sup>1</sup>The Italian corpus includes Eduardo De Filippo's 1945 play, *Napoli milionaria!*, and its subsequent cinematic (1950), televisual (1962), and operatic (1977) adaptations; the Naples episode of Roberto Rossellini's 1946 film; *Paisà*, Curzio Malaparte's 1949 book, *La pelle: storia e racconto* (Rome: Aria d'Italia, 1949; repr. Milan: Adelphi, 2010), and Liliana Cavani's 1981 cinematic adaptation of the same; Dullio Coletti's film comedy, *Il re di Poggioreale* (1961); and Roberto De Simone's *Satyricon a Napoli '44*. Representations from within the Allied camp include John Horne Burns' *The Gallery* (New York: Harper, 1947, repr. New York: New York Review Books, 2004); Norman Lewis' *Naples '44: A World War II Diary of Occupied Italy* (London: Collins, 1948, repr. London: Eland, 2002); and Douglas Allanbrook's *See Naples: A Memoir of Love, Peace, and War in Italy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995). Allied experiences are more fleetingly documented in memoirs by servicemen as diverse as William Weaver (*A Tent in this World* [Kingston, TX: McPherson, 1999]) and John Huston (*An Open Book* [New York: Knopf, 1980]). They are also documented in commemorative events such as that hosted by the 36<sup>th</sup> Div. Texas Reenactment Napoli 1943 (2014) and its associated Facebook page. See <http://www.napoli1943.com>, accessed September 22, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Curzio Malaparte, *The Skin*, trans. Rachel Kushner (New York: New York Review Books, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, John Gray, "Bad to the Bone: John Gray on Italian Fascist Curzio Malaparte's Lost Masterpiece," *The New Statesman*, January 15, 2014 [<https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2014/01/bad-bone-john-gray-italian-fascist-curzio-malapartes-lost-masterpiece>], accessed September 26, 2017; Andrew Stuttaford, "Himself Alone: A Review of *The Skin* by Curzio Malaparte," *The New Criterion*, October 2013 [<https://www.newcriterion.com/issues/2013/10/himself-alone>], accessed September 26, 2017; and Michael McCanne, "As Goes Naples," *The New Inquiry*, February 19, 2014 [[https://thenewinquiry.com/as\\_goes\\_naples](https://thenewinquiry.com/as_goes_naples)], accessed September 26, 2017. On *The Gallery*, see David Margolick, "The Great (Gay) Novelist You've Never Heard of," *The New York Times*, June 11, 2013 [<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/16/magazine/john-horne-burns-the-great-gay-novelist-youve-never-heard-of.html?mcubz=1>], accessed September 26, 2017, and Perry Brass, "The Manly Pursuit of Desire: John Horne Burns' *The Gallery*," *Huffington Post*, September 17, 2013 [[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/perry-brass/john-horne-burns-the-gallery\\_b\\_3920912.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/perry-brass/john-horne-burns-the-gallery_b_3920912.html)], accessed September 26, 2017.

period, the republication of Malaparte's *La pelle* in 2010 might be understood less as an indication of renewed interest in the experience of military occupation and rather more as evidence of a growing cultural interest in Naples. Such interest was initially piqued by the upturn in the city's image and fortunes under the mayoral leadership of Antonio Bassolino, but it intensified dramatically in 2006, when a series of mass media and literary exposés—not least Roberto Saviano's best-selling *Gomorra*—brought to national and international attention the extent of the city's toxic waste crisis and the threat posed by the escalation of Camorra violence.<sup>4</sup> Reinforced by the urban waste crisis of 2008 and the concomitant release of Matteo Garrone's cinematic adaptation of *Gomorra*,<sup>5</sup> these exposés punctured the illusion of the “Neapolitan Renaissance,” raised a series of familiar questions about the relationship between the city and the nation-state, and ultimately returned Naples to the infelicitous position of Italy's “problem city” *par excellence*.<sup>6</sup>

The distinctive role played by Naples in the Italian cultural imaginary as either the quintessence of Italian identity or—more often—its vilified Other, a thorn in the side of the modern nation-state, is one that has been studied with great nuance and insight by preeminent scholars of post-Unification Italy.<sup>7</sup> However, rather less attention has been paid to the relationship between Naples and the nation in political discourse and cultural representation alike in more recent historical periods. The years 1943–45 are crucial for any reassessment of that relationship, representing as they do the founding moment of post-fascist Italy. Central to my argument is the fact that both the historical moment itself and the post-war narrative that succeeds it—a narrative encapsulated in the inauguration of the Italian Republic—are characterized by a breach in the integrity of the nation. For, if the military division of Italy between occupying armies in 1943–45 reconstituted the north-south divide of post-Unification Italy and resulted in radically different war-time experiences among Italians residing on either side of the Allied/German battle lines, it also resulted in the production of a post-war narrative that failed to attenuate that divide. In triumphantly conflating national Liberation with anti-fascist Resistance in the period of 1943–45, the founding narrative of post-fascist and post-war Italy speaks almost exclusively to the experience of Italians in central and northern Italy. Italians in the south of the country, liberated by the Allies in 1943 and subjected thereafter to governance by the Allied forces, were prevented from playing an active role in the struggle to reassert Italian

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<sup>4</sup>The most important literary exposés of 2006 are Roberto Saviano, *Gomorra: Viaggio nell'impero economico e nel sogno di dominio della camorra* (Milan: Mondadori, 2006); Jacopo Fo, *Napoli nel sangue* (Modena: Nuovi mondi, 2006); and Giorgio Bocca, *Napoli siamo noi: Il dramma di una città nell'indifferenza dell'Italia* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2006). These were supported by a series of media investigations, including Daniela Hamaui's front page “Napoli perduta” story in *L'Espresso* (September 14, 2006), the second in two years (“Napoli Addio”, September 17, 2005); and the “Come è andata a finire: La strada di Napoli” edition of Milena Gabanelli's *Report* television program (Rai 3, April 3, 2006).

<sup>5</sup>*Gomorra*, directed by Matteo Garrone (Rome: Fandango, 2008).

<sup>6</sup>Where Saviano's *Gomorra* argues that there is a chasm between Naples and the nation-state, as the problems of Naples are ignored by the Italian government and Neapolitan citizens are denied the rights enjoyed by other citizens of Italy, Bocca's *Napoli siamo noi* argues instead that the indifference and corruption endemic in Neapolitan governance was entirely consistent with—if a more extreme exemplification of—Italian political culture as a whole.

<sup>7</sup>Pasquale Villari's *Lettere meridionali* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1878) set the terms and tone for the set of discourses about the Italian South known as the “Southern Question.” As John Dickie observes, Villari is an authoritative dispenser of ethnic stereotypes and moral exhortations to the nation, the success of which will be measured by its ability to civilize the barbarous under-class of the city, which simultaneously represents Italy's “greatest ‘moral danger’ and its ultimate salvation” (John Dickie, *Darkest Italy: The Nation and Stereotypes of the Mezzogiorno, 1860–1900* [Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999], 64).

independence. Unable, as a result, to identify with the national narrative of Liberation as resulting from what President Napolitano would term the “grande moto civile e ideale [...], mobilitazione coraggiosa di cittadini [...] che si ribellavano all’oppressione straniera” [“great civil movement of ideals [...], a courageous mobilization of citizens [...] who rebelled against foreign oppression”], the South is implicitly excluded from the discursive boundaries of the newly-constituted nation founded on the principle of self-determination and freedom from foreign domination.<sup>8</sup>

Even in Naples, where a popular uprising—that of the “Four Days” of September 27–30, 1943—had ousted the Germans from the city and precipitated the arrival of the Allied forces, a celebratory narrative of Liberation was untenable.<sup>9</sup> As John Gatt-Rutter observes, “the Liberation replaced one military occupation with another, and Naples still remained [...] subject to enemy attack and administered for another nine months by the Allied military government, in worse plight, both materially and morally, than it had been up to a month earlier.”<sup>10</sup> Gatt-Rutter alludes here to the black-market racketeering, hyper-inflation, and disease (typhus and syphilis) unleashed in Naples under the Occupation, as well as to the unprecedented levels of prostitution and licentiousness associated with it. It is perhaps symptomatic of the challenge that Allied-Occupied Naples presents to post-war Italy’s ideological reconstruction as a Republic founded on anti-fascist Resistance that, amid the myriad representations treating different aspects of the Second World War, cultural representations of the Occupation are relatively rare.<sup>11</sup> Those that do exist are pervaded by anxieties associated with the deleterious moral and cultural effects of the Occupation, eliciting critical readings that focus on the implications of the encounter between the Neapolitans and the Americans, understood in terms of a nascent post-fascist society and capitalism. I would argue, however, that the relationship between Naples and the nation at the time of the texts’ production is equally important to our understanding of Italian representations of the Allied Occupation of Naples and their reception.

This article addresses the two most prominent texts treating the Neapolitan experience of 1943–45 in the immediate aftermath of that experience: Eduardo De Filippo’s *Napoli milionaria!*, a much-loved play first performed in 1945 and published in 1950, and Curzio Malaparte’s highly controversial work of fictionalized reportage, *La pelle*, published in 1949. Rarely considered together, there are a number of significant points of contact between the two

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<sup>8</sup> Giorgio Napolitano, “Intervento del Presidente Napolitano all’incontro con le Associazioni Partigiane, Combattentistiche e d’Arma nel 69° Anniversario della Liberazione,” April 25, 2014, transcript, <http://presidenti.quirinale.it/elementi/Continua.aspx?tipo=Discorso&key=2854>, accessed September 22, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> On the history of the Four Days and its relevance to the wider story of the Allied Occupation, see Gabriella Gribaudo, *Guerra totale: Tra bombe alleate e violenze naziste. Napoli e il fronte meridionale, 1940–44* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2005), and ead., “Naples 1943: Espaces urbains et insurrection,” *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 5 (2003): 1079–1104.

<sup>10</sup> John Gatt-Rutter, “Naples 1944: Liberation and Literature,” in *Italy and America, 1943–44: Italian, American, and Italian-American Experiences of the Liberation of the Italian Mezzogiorno*, ed. John A. Davis (Naples: Città del Sole, 1997), 77–78. Similarly, Paul Ginsborg concludes that the Occupation was “an unmitigated disaster” (Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy* [London: Penguin, 1990], 37). For a detailed study of the conditions pertaining during the Occupation, see esp. Paolo De Marco, *Polvere e piselli: La vita quotidiana a Napoli durante l’occupazione alleata (1943–1944)* (Napoli: Liguori, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> Although Gribaudo asserts that Naples is “la città italiana più celebrata del periodo 1943–45” [“the most celebrated city of the period 1943–45”], once non-Italian material and texts focused on the Four Days’ revolt are excluded from consideration, the corpus of cultural representations treating the Occupation proper amounts to the fewer than ten items listed in footnote 1. Gabriella Gribaudo, “Napoli 1943–45: La costruzione di un’epopea,” in *Italy and America, 1943–44: Italian, American, and Italian-American Experiences of the Liberation of the Italian Mezzogiorno*, ed. John A. Davis (Naples: Città del Sole, 1997), 297.

texts that invite comparative consideration.<sup>12</sup> Both construct the period of the Allied Occupation in the metaphorical terms of malady or disease, both feminize Italian identity under Occupation, and both denounce the moral degradation suffered by Neapolitans under the Allied regime. However, where *Napoli milionaria!* attributes responsibility for the moral disorder to the Neapolitans themselves yet draws the respect and approval of the local population, *La pelle* exculpates the Neapolitans but gives them great offence and results in the proscription of the author from the city. The radically different reception of the texts on the part of the Neapolitan public may be understood in relation to the extent to which each may be seen to repair the breach between the Neapolitan experience of Liberation as Occupation and the national post-war narrative of Liberation through self-determination and triumph over foreign domination. Deploying a psychoanalytical frame of reference and paying particular attention to the gendering of discourses relating to Naples and the nation, I argue that where *La pelle* gives symptomatic expression to the conditions of the Occupation, underlining the exceptionality of the Neapolitan experience with respect to the national post-war narrative, *Napoli milionaria!* instead seeks overtly to heal the psychological wounds of Occupation by restoring the relationship between Naples and the nation and by aligning the conditions in Naples with those experienced in the center-north of the country; the play thus enables Naples' incorporation into the post-war rehabilitation of post-fascist Italy.

### **Mining the Breach: Curzio Malaparte's *La pelle* (1949)**

I begin by addressing Curzio Malaparte's *La pelle*, which was published later than *Napoli milionaria!*, but offers a more direct and detailed treatment of the experience of Allied Occupation. Subtitled "history and story" and narrated in the first person by "Captain Malaparte," *La pelle*'s intricately dispersive, elusive, and labored account of Allied-Occupied Naples is best located at the intersection of testimony and fiction.<sup>13</sup> The text arises from Malaparte's experiences serving as a liaison officer between the newly constituted Italian army and the Allied forces stationed in Naples throughout the winter of 1943 and spring of 1944. Its testimonial mission is to expose—sometimes with ironic maliciousness and grotesque imagery, sometimes with profound empathy and disarming simplicity—the numerous horrors, humiliations, and moral compromises inherent in the everyday struggle for survival in a society destroyed by war.<sup>14</sup> The title of the book derives from the articulation of that struggle as an ignoble effort to "save one's skin" in the theatre of Occupation, which is negatively compared in

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<sup>12</sup> Gatt-Rutter's comprehensive interrogation of literary representations of Naples includes close analysis of both *La pelle* and *Napoli milionaria!*; his reading, however, does not bring the two texts into direct dialogue, placed as they are within a much broader critical landscape.

<sup>13</sup> Malaparte's highly unstable text recalls Derrida's observation that fiction and testimony—far from being antithetical or incommensurable as traditionally construed—lie on a continuum (Jacques Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, in Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida, *The Instant of My Death/Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000], 26); *La pelle*'s situation at the intersection of the two modes of writing consequently "calls these distinctions into question or causes them to tremble" (ibid.).

<sup>14</sup> As critics have frequently observed, *La pelle* represents the logical sequel to Malaparte's exposé of the horrors of war in *Kaputt* (Naples: Casella, 1944). Though *Kaputt* is primarily focused on the Eastern and Northern fronts of the Second World War, the final chapter is set in Naples, which the observer-narrator presents as more devastated and its people more stricken than any other corner of Europe. On the relationship between the two texts, see Gianni Grana, *Malaparte* (Florence: Il Castoro, 1968), 95–102; William Hope, *Curzio Malaparte: The Narrative Contract Strained* (Hull: Troubador, 2000), 82–88; and Gatt-Rutter, "Naples 1944," 57–58.

the moral economy of the text with the more dignified attempt to “save one’s soul” in the theatre of war.<sup>15</sup> The unforgiving exposé of the ignoble struggle is, however, embellished by the inclusion of ambiguously fictionalized episodes; by an overtly literary style, suffused with intertextual “allusions from the epic to the surreal;”<sup>16</sup> and by a visual quality reminiscent of “horror-film images and technique,” which has invited comparisons with the work of artists like Goya, Dali, and Bruegel as much as it has with that of writers as diverse as Céline, Huysmans, and Poe.<sup>17</sup>

The early pages of the book catapult the reader into the heart of the teeming, stinking city, in the company of Malaparte and his American friend, Colonel Jack Hamilton, as they fight their way through the “terribile folla napoletana squallida, sporca, affamata, vestiti di stracci” [“dreadful Neapolitan mob—squalid, dirty, starving ragged”] (13/7). From the very outset, Naples figures as a latter-day Babel in which crowds of soldiers “composti di tutte le razze della terra, urtavano e ingiuriavano in tutte le lingue e in tutti i dialetti del mondo” [“drawn from all the races of the earth jostled and insulted in all the languages and dialects of the world”] (13/7).<sup>18</sup> Comparative allusions to Sodom and Gomorrah, as well as to Dante’s vision of Inferno, compound the construction of the city as host to all manner of confusion, excess, and transgression: carnivalesque images of statuesque American soldiers courting ugly Italian dwarves sit alongside ironic allusions to colonialism and slavery in the depiction of unwitting black American soldiers being traded among the residents of the city and unforgiving descriptions of the “donne livide, sfatte, dalle labbra dipinte, dalle smunte gote incrostate di belletto, orribili e pietose” [“faded women, with livid faces and painted lips, their emaciated cheeks plastered with rouge—a dreadful and piteous sight”] (19/13) who prostitute themselves and their children to the colonial soldiers of the Allied armies. However, rather than serving to condemn the residents of Naples for their moral failings, such scenes exemplify the terrible consequences of the Allied “Liberation,” articulated throughout as both an imperialist Occupation and the pathogen of a moral plague.

The portrayal of the Allied presence in the city as a form of military and cultural Occupation in which the Neapolitans become subject to—rather than active participants in—the new post-fascist order distances the experience of Naples in 1943–44 from the national narrative of Liberation as self-determination. Juxtaposing frequent allusions to the people of Naples as a “defeated people” with descriptions of the Allies—the Americans, most emblematically—as “conquerors,” *La pelle* construes the Allied presence in Naples as yet another phase in the long history of foreign invasion and domination of the city. The continuity between the Allied presence and the colonial past is most directly addressed in the opening section of Chapter 8. Here, at a dinner held by the Prince of Candia, a fervent anti-fascist who “[era] un esemplare

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<sup>15</sup> In the words of our protagonist-narrator: “È una cosa umiliante, orribile, è una necessità vergognosa, lottare per vivere. Soltanto per vivere. Soltanto per salvare la propria pelle. [...] Gli uomini sono capaci di qualunque vigliaccheria, per vivere” [“It is a humiliating, horrible thing, a shameful necessity, a fight for life. Only for life. Only to save one’s own skin. [...] Men will perform the meanest actions, to live”] (*La pelle*, 43/*The Skin*, 48). All further in-text citations are from these editions, with the Italian pagination given first.

<sup>16</sup> Marisa Escolar, “Sleights of Hand: Black Skin and Curzio Malaparte’s *La pelle*,” *California Italian Studies* 3/1 (2012), 2, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0xr9d2gm>, accessed September 22, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Gatt-Rutter, “Naples 1944,” 58. For an anthology of the critical reception of *La pelle*, see Edda Ronchi Suckert, ed., *Malaparte*, 12 vols. (Florence: Ponte alla Grazie, 1991–96), vol. 8 (1948–49), 515–545.

<sup>18</sup> On *La pelle*’s construction of Naples as Babel and on the text’s deployment of carnivalesque motifs, see Gaetana Marrone, “Il mito di Babele in *La pelle* di Curzio Malaparte: Pathos, veggenza, e l’invenzione nel racconto cinematografico,” *Rivista di Studi Italiani* 19/2 (2001): 219–32.

perfetto di quella nobiltà napoletana [...] fra le più antiche e le più illustri d'Europa” [“exemplified to perfection a Neapolitan noblesse—among the oldest and most illustrious of its kind in Europe”] (232/230), the Americans are complimented for their impeccable manners and implicitly compared with earlier foreign occupiers of the city. In a simultaneous show of subjugation and cultural sophistication, the Marchese Nunziante observes, “Siete sbarcati in Italia con molta cortesia [...] prima di entrare in casa nostra avete bussato alla porta, come fanno tutte le persone bene educate” [“You were very kind when you landed in Italy [...] Before entering our house you knocked at the door, as all well-bred people do”] (231/229). In a similarly urbane manner, the Prince of Candia both commends and needles his American guests, saying that the American army is “uno splendido esercito. È un onore e un piacere, per noi, essere stati vinti da un esercito simile” [“a splendid army. [...] it is an honor and a pleasure to have been conquered by such an army”] (231/229). That the professed honor does not extend to approval of the Allied Occupation is clarified by the admission that the Prince had refused to join the ranks of those who symbolically handed the keys of the city to General Clark. The reasons for the Prince’s refusal are conveyed twice; in the first instance, the Allied Occupation is characterized as an invasion: drawing on the example of a predecessor confronted with the “liberator,” Charles III of France, the Prince is reported to have declared that “non era costume della sua famiglia offrir le chiavi della città agli invasori di Napoli” [“it was not the custom of his family to offer the keys of the city to those who invaded Naples”] (233/231). In the second instance, it is the language of servitude that presides: the Prince’s assertion that “io sono un uomo libero, e soltanto i servi hanno bisogno d’essere liberati” [“I am a free man, and only slaves need to be liberated”] (233/231) simultaneously encapsulates the contradictions inherent in the phenomenon of Occupation and the concept of liberation granted or effected by an external force.

The characterization of the Liberation as yet another stage in a long history of foreign domination and subjugation invites a reading of the portrayal of Naples in *La pelle* in the ethnographic terms of the “contact zone,” as outlined by Mary Louise Pratt. For Pratt, the “contact zone” is a social space “where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, and their aftermath.”<sup>19</sup> Characteristic of the culture of the contact zone is the autoethnographic text, a type “in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them.” Such texts “involve a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or the conqueror,” often constructing “a parodic, oppositional representation of the conqueror’s own speech” in order to “create self-representations intended to intervene in metropolitan modes of understanding.”<sup>20</sup> Evidence of the autoethnographic qualities of *La pelle* can be traced in the first instance in Captain Malaparte’s adoption and reiteration of the Americans’ slurs of Neapolitans and Italians more widely. In response to Jack’s disparaging of the Italians in English as “this bastard dirty people” (17/12), Malaparte declares himself proud to be “un bastardo [...] uno sporco italiano” [“a bastard [...] a dirty Italian”] (17/12) and, throughout the text, expresses his solidarity with the Neapolitans so vilified by the American soldiers, e.g., “Fissavo in viso tutti i napoletani che incontravo [...] e mi sentivo orgoglioso di essere un ‘Italian bastard’ come loro, un ‘son of a bitch’ come loro” [“I looked hard into the

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<sup>19</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” *MLA Profession* (1991): 34.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

faces of all the Neapolitans I met [...] and I felt proud of being an Italian bastard like them, a son of a bitch like them”] (58/53).<sup>21</sup>

The liberal deployment of the language of the Occupiers also serves, however, to locate the specific cultural derivation of phenomena pertaining directly to the conditions of life in Occupied Naples. In a recent article interrogating the racial implications of *La pelle* through the prism of translation studies, Marisa Escolar astutely observes that, despite the fact that Malaparte’s role as liaison officer is to translate and thereby facilitate relations between the Allies and the Neapolitans, “Linguistic boundaries are erected throughout the text, as certain phrases only appear in English: the Neapolitan women’s ubiquitous cry, ‘Five dollars!’, is a reminder that they are for sale only because the allies are buying.”<sup>22</sup> English is once again the language of exchange at the child market, where children as young as eight are prostituted by their mothers to the racially marked colonial soldiers of the various Allied powers (the Moroccans, Indians, Algerians, and Malagasy).<sup>23</sup> Here, we are told, “Le donne gridavano: ‘Two dollars the boys, three dollars the girls!’” [“‘Two dollars the boys, three dollars the girls!’ shouted the women”] (19/14). *La pelle*’s reiteration of such phrases in English serves to locate the origins of child prostitution in the occupied city not in the culture of the Neapolitans—or even in that of the colonized Other of the European powers—but in that of the American authorities responsible for their presence in the city.

That point is driven home at distinct moments in the text that emphasize the unprecedented quality and nature of the degradation of Neapolitan culture. In relation to female prostitution, for instance, the narrator insists that “durante gli anni della schiavitù e della guerra, fino al giorno della promessa e attesa liberazione, le donne [...] non s’erano date ai tedeschi” [“during the years of slavery and war, right up to the day of the promised and eagerly awaited liberation, the women [...] had refused to give themselves to the Germans”] (37/31); it is only with the arrival of the Allies that “la più spaventosa prostituzione aveva portato la vergogna in ogni tugurio e in ogni palazzo” [“prostitution on the most appalling scale had brought shame to every hovel and to every mansion”] (37/32). The contrast between past and present is even more dramatic in relation to the prostitution of children. In Chapter 4, where the child market is described in detail, we are told:

Non s’erano mai viste cose simili a Napoli, in tanti secoli di miseria e di schiavitù. S’era venduto di tutto, a Napoli, sempre, ma non mai i bambini. S’era fatto commercio di tutto, a Napoli, ma non mai di bambini. [...] A Napoli i bambini son sacri. Sono la sola cosa sacra che vi sia a Napoli. [...] è l’unico popolo al mondo dove anche la più povera famiglia, fra i suoi bambini, fra i suoi dieci, fra i suoi dodici bambini, alleva un orfanello preso all’Ospedale degli Innocenti [...] Si poteva dir tutto dei napoletani, tutto, ma non che vendessero i loro bambini per le strade.

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<sup>21</sup> On the prevalence of American vocabulary in the text and its association with colonialist practices, Daniel Gunn writes that “language itself seems invaded” (Daniel Gunn, “‘It is the Fate of Europe to Become Naples’: Curzio Malaparte and the Plague of Benevolent Interventionism,” *InterLitQ* 1 [2007], para. 17, [http://www.interlitq.org/issue1/daniel\\_gunn/job.php](http://www.interlitq.org/issue1/daniel_gunn/job.php), accessed September 22, 2015).

<sup>22</sup> Escolar, “Sleights of Hand,” 3.

<sup>23</sup> Significantly, the linguistic landscape of *La pelle* is comprised only of languages accessible to the European educated reader (Italian, Neapolitan, English, French, and, occasionally, German); it does not extend to the non-European languages of the colonial soldiers, consistently denied both subjectivity and voice.



Ed ora [...] i soldati marocchini venivano a comprarsi per poca moneta i bambini napoletani. (123)

[Such things had never been seen in Naples, in all its centuries of misery and slavery. From time immemorial all kinds of things had been sold in Naples, but never children. All kinds of things had been marketed in Naples, but never children. [...] In Naples, children are sacred. They are the only sacred thing there is in Naples. [...] They are the only people in the world of whom it can be said that even the poorest family brings up among its children, among its ten or twelve children, a little orphan adopted from the *Ospedale degli Innocenti*. [...] One could say anything one liked about Neapolitans, anything, but not that they sold their children in the streets.

And now [...] Moroccan soldiers [...] came to buy Neapolitan children at the price of a few *soldi*.] (119–20)

The labored, repetitive quality of the narration conveys the difficulty in articulating and understanding the emergence of the phenomenon of child prostitution in a culture that had previously exhibited an extraordinary level of altruism toward its youngest members. Moreover, although the practice is firmly associated here with the colonial Other, the earlier framing of child prostitution as tolerated by the Allied authorities—“Era una vergogna, certo, una vergogna di cui la grandissima parte del buon popolo napoletano arrossiva. Ma perché le autorità alleate, che erano le padrone di Napoli, non arrossivano?” [“It was certainly a disgrace, and the vast majority of the good people of Naples blushed with shame because of it. But why did it not bring a blush to the cheeks of the Allied authorities, who were the masters of Naples?”] (20–21/15)—ensures that responsibility for the practice is ultimately ascribed to those same authorities.

## Disease and Abjection

Accompanying the construction of the Allied presence in Naples as a form of imperialist Occupation is *La pelle*'s characterization of the Occupation as pathological in nature. The book's opening sentence—“Erano i giorni della ‘peste’ di Napoli” [“Naples was in the throes of the ‘plague’”] (13/7)—announces the primary lens through which the Allied “Liberation” is to be viewed and understood: that of a metaphorical epidemic. If, on the one hand, the textual allusion to the plague unearths the frequently unacknowledged humiliations associated with the emergence and treatment of typhus in the occupied city,<sup>24</sup> the plague is re-considered here as “una specie di peste morale che [...] non corrompeva il corpo, ma l’anima” [“a kind of moral plague [that...] corrupted not the body but the soul”] (37/31), and its emergence is firmly dated to the arrival of the Allied forces: “La ‘peste’ era scoppiata a Napoli il 1° ottobre 1943, il giorno stesso in cui gli eserciti alleati erano entrati come liberatori in quella sciagurata città” [“The ‘plague’ had broken out in Naples on October 1, 1943—the very day on which the Allied armies had entered that ill-starred city as liberators”] (35/29). Although the Allies themselves are

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<sup>24</sup> For Gatt-Rutter, the metaphorical reference to the plague amounts, “mortifyingly to the Neapolitan reader,” to “the breaking of a taboo observed in every other literary text [...]: reference to the typhus epidemic that swept the resident population, who were so humiliated both by the affliction itself and by the high-handed manner in which disinfectant measures were imposed by the U.S. military authorities that they censored it from consciousness” (“Naples 1944,” 59–60).

shown, with some irony, to be curiously immune to its effects, they are nonetheless portrayed as the source of the malady, the unwitting carriers of its contagious and noxious force. The contact zone of Occupation thus becomes a contact zone of disease, a site of infection or contamination triggered by touch: “tutto ciò che quei magnifici soldati toccavano, subito si corrompeva. Gli infelici abitanti dei paesi liberati, non appena stringevano la mano ai loro liberatori, cominciavano a marcire, a puzzare” [“everything that these magnificent soldiers touched was at once corrupted. No sooner did the luckless inhabitants of the liberated countries grasp the hands of their liberators than they began to fester and stink”] (39/34). All that then follows—from the various scenes treating prostitution to the one dedicated to the homosexual birthing ceremony of the *figliata* (Chapter 5), and from the report of murderous rioting among the crowd sheltering from bombardment (Chapter 3) to the ambiguous account of the *sirena* (child or fish?) served up for dinner (Chapter 7)—may be construed as a complete symptomatology of the moral plague of the Allied Occupation.<sup>25</sup>

As the use of terms like “fester” and “stink” intimate, the symptomatic effects of the plague are constructed in *La pelle* in terms of the abject. According to Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, abjection pertains to the loss of the border or limit that distinguishes between life and death, self and Other, and is deeply imbedded in the psychoanalytical realm of the feminine maternal.<sup>26</sup> The corpse, open wounds, bodily fluids, defilement, and shit are all figures of the abject, signaling the border of our condition as living beings. If abjection represents a “dark revolt [...] directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside,” two types of polluting objects—excremental and menstrual—can be distinguished.<sup>27</sup> Where menstrual blood “stands for the danger issuing from within the identity, [...] excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death.”<sup>28</sup> Though both are present in *La pelle*, figurations of the menstrual type of abjection are reserved primarily for the depiction of the eruption of Vesuvius, a threat posed by the Kristevan “exorbitant inside” of Naples: while the volcano “urlava nella notte, sputando sangue e fuoco” [“was screaming in the night, spitting blood and fire”], the sky “squarciato da un’immensa ferita, sanguinava, e il sangue tingeva di rosso il mare” [“was scarred by a huge crimson gash, which tinged the sea blood-red”] (259/258).

Elsewhere in *La pelle*, consistent recourse to figures of abjection of the excremental type (decay, infection, etc.) signals the external nature of the threat to identity constituted by the “exorbitant outside” of the Allied Occupation. Such excremental figurations of abjection pervade descriptions of both the city and its residents. For instance, in the aftermath of an air-raid, Naples appears to our narrator “come uno sterco di vacca schiacciato dal piede di un passante” [“like a lump of cow dung that has been squashed by the foot of a passerby”] (72/67). The corpses

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<sup>25</sup> In a recent eco-critical reading of the text, Serenella Iovino observes that Malaparte’s “intrinsically hybrid and queer” Neapolitan bodies are “transformed into narrative agencies that testify to the entanglements of politics, violence, illness, moral discourses and survival struggles in a city whose rich and glorious past seems to be turned into damnation” (Serenella Iovino, *Ecocriticism and Italy: Ecology, Resistance and Liberation* [London: Bloomsbury, 2016], 30).

<sup>26</sup> Underscoring the associations between femininity, maternity and abjection, Kristeva writes: “What can the two types of defilement have in common? [...] those two defilements stem from the maternal and/or the feminine, of which the maternal is the real support” (Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez [New York: Columbia University Press, 1982], 71).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

subsequently piled up in the streets, awaiting collection—suggestively, by rubbish trucks—are also described in terms of the abject: “gettati sui pavimenti, accatastati su mucchi d’immondizie, d’indumenti insanguinati, di paglia fradicia, giacevano centinaia e centinaia di cadaveri sfigurati, dalle teste enormi, gonfie per l’asfissia, e turchine, verdi, paonazze” [“on the floors, piled up on heaps of garbage, bloodstained garments, and damp straw, lay hundreds and hundreds of disfigured corpses, their heads enormous, swollen through suffocation and blue, green and purple in color, their faces crushed, their limbs truncated or torn right off by the violence of the explosions”] (78/73); others appear “pieni di vermi e con gli occhi vuoti” [“full of worms, with empty eye-sockets”] (76/71). Finally, the mass of humanity struggling to survive in the war-torn city is characterized in the repertoire of American slurs as, variously, “this bastard dirty people” (17), or “a lot of dirty bastards” (61) and more consistently construed in the terms of the narrator as a variant of “rotten meat” (17/11; 122/125; 125/128).

It is important to emphasize, in light of the long history of tainted representations of Naples but also in response to the negative reception of the text in the city, that figurations of abjection in *La pelle* are not intended to characterize Naples and its residents as inherently abject. As has been noted, the deployment of excremental rather than menstrual metaphors of abjection alerts us to the ambiguous status of the city as host to the foe-turned-ally and to anxieties surrounding the border between sovereignty and subjugation in the occupied city. Moreover, metaphors of abjection are not confined to the portrayal of Naples but extend to Italy and Europe as a whole. Significantly, however, they tend to cluster in those sections of the text that situate Naples in metonymic relation to Italy and address directly the condition of the Italian nation-state. As Kristeva reminds us, “abjection is above all ambiguity,” an ambiguity that acknowledges a danger to subjectivity: “I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and instead of what will be ‘me’. Not at all an other with whom I identify and incorporate but an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be.”<sup>29</sup> In accordance with the ambiguity attending the relationship between self and Other, conceived in collective terms, the clothing of the soldiers of the newly constituted Corpo Italiano della Liberazione—emblematic representatives of post-Fascist Italy—in the bloodied uniforms of Allied soldiers killed by Italian soldiers at El Alamein and Tobruk takes on heightened significance. As Captain Malaparte stands before his fellow soldiers, the specter of the Other who precedes and possesses the very existence of the Corpo Italiano della Liberazione, causing it to be, flashes before his eyes. Struck by a terrible apprehension that the soldiers standing before him are themselves deceased—“mi accorsi, con orrore, che quei soldati erano morti” [“I realized to my horror that these soldiers were dead”] (16/10)—he flounders, abject, at the site of abjection: “un gorgoglio orribile” [“a horrible gurgling sound”] (16/10) gushes from his lips and “il nome Italia mi puzzava in bocca come un pezzo di carne marcia” [“the name of Italy stank in my nostrils like a piece of rotten meat”] (17/11).

Equally emblematic of the abjection of Italy and Italian identity are the mortified sexual terms in which they are discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. In accordance with the conventional cultural alignment of women, nation, femininity, and abjection, it is the female body—its perceived weakness and vulnerability to penetration—that serves as the prime metaphor for the abjection of the occupied nation-state in *La pelle* and the locus of anxieties about Italy under Allied Occupation. In the first chapter, for instance, we are informed that “Le prime ad essere contagiate furono le donne, che, presso ogni nazione, sono il riparo più debole contro il vizio, e la porta aperta ad ogni male” [“The first to be infected were the women who, in every nation,

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 10.

constitute the weakest bulwark against vice, and an open door to every form of evil”] (37/31). The figuration of women as a national door open to vice and the explicit reference to prostitution in the lines that follow provide an early indication of the gendered and sexualized terms in which the period of Occupation will be discussed.<sup>30</sup>

Though voyeurism pervades the text as a whole, it is Chapter 2’s account of the “Virgin of Naples” episode that best encapsulates the voyeurism-abjection nexus theorized by Kristeva and elucidates its relevance to Allied-Occupied Italy.<sup>31</sup> Far from the religious connotations of the chapter title, evocative of Neapolitan street shrines and parish processions dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the episode amounts to a sacrilegious translation and transformation of local customs, which serves to demonstrate the extent to which Neapolitan culture has adapted to and been “infected” by the metropolitan capitalism of the Allied Occupation. As in similar situations where degradation or defilement of Naples and Neapolitan cultural practices are exposed to voyeuristic view, it is the young American officer, Jimmy Wren, who takes Malaparte to witness the phenomenon, thereby usurping the Italian captain’s role as cultural mediator and guide to the city and signaling the alien character of the event to Naples and Italy.<sup>32</sup> The episode itself amounts to a unique form of voyeuristic prostitution based on the cultural premium attached to virginity: Jimmy and Malaparte join a group of soldiers who queue up and pay to watch a local girl expose her pudenda and have her virginity verified by being penetrated digitally by one of their number, a black soldier. That the entire enterprise is orchestrated and policed by the girl’s father and takes place in the family home, surrounded by statues of the Holy Family and a shrine to the Madonna, serves to highlight the degree to which the social and religious structures of Neapolitan culture have been altered by contact with the capitalist logic of the Occupying forces.<sup>33</sup> In the discussion that follows, Malaparte is at pains to point out to Jimmy the psychological mechanisms and the dynamics of power that underpin the voyeuristic drive associated with the spectacle of abasement of the Other:

Dovreste essere soddisfatti di veder Napoli ridotta così” dissi a Jimmy [...] “dev’essere una grande soddisfazione per voi sentirvi vincitori in un paese simile” dissi “senza questi spettacoli come fareste a sentirvi vincitori? Dimmi la verità, Jimmy: non vi sentireste vincitori, senza questi spettacoli. [...] Se queste cose non

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<sup>30</sup> The outburst continues: “ecco che, per effetto di quella schifosa peste, che per prima corrompeva il senso dell’onore e della dignità femminile, la più spaventosa prostituzione aveva portato la vergogna in ogni tugurio e in ogni palazzo. [...] prostituirsi era divenuto un atto degno di lode, quasi una prova di amor di patria, e tutti, uomini e donne, lungi dall’arrossirne, parevano gloriarsi della propria e della universale abbiezione” [“And now, as a result of this loathsome plague, which first corrupted the feminine sense of honor and dignity, prostitution on the most appalling scale had brought shame to every hovel and every mansion. [...] self-prostitution had become a praiseworthy act, almost a proof of patriotism, and all, men and women, far from blushing at the thought of it, seemed to glory in their own and the universal degradation”] (37/32).

<sup>31</sup> “The abject, banished by our culture as taboo, finds expression in literature, where it is accompanied by voyeurism” (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 46).

<sup>32</sup> Gatt-Rutter notes that Jimmy “in fact forces him [Malaparte] to view the obscenities of Naples—the virgin whose father displays her hymen for inspection; the women who publicly expose their pudenda, offering their sexual services for two dollars, the bawds who trade young boys and girls with the Moroccan troopers” (“Naples 1944,” 61).

<sup>33</sup> Alessandro Giardino’s observation in relation to Cavani’s cinematic adaptation holds true for the literary original: “in the abased city of Naples, even virginity becomes a perverted object of commodification” (Alessandro Giardino, “Liliana Cavani’s *La pelle*: Debunking the Fake Promises of Postmodern Sexual Emancipation and the Silencing Effect of Cultural Oblivion,” *Carte italiane* 7 (2001): 108).

vi piacessero, e questi spettacoli non vi divertissero, queste cose non accadrebbero a Napoli” dissi “non si vedrebbero simili spettacoli a Napoli [...] per sentirsi eroi, tutti i vincitori hanno bisogno di veder queste cose. (54–55)

[You people ought to be well satisfied to see Naples brought to this pass,” I said to Jimmy [...] “it must give you all great satisfaction to feel that you have conquered a country like this,” I added. “Without such scenes, how would you make yourselves feel like conquerors? Be frank, Jimmy: you would not feel that you were conquerors without such scenes. [...] If you didn’t like such things, if scenes like that didn’t amuse you, they wouldn’t happen in Naples. [...] to make himself feel that he is a hero, every conqueror needs to see these things.] (49–50)

As Malaparte implies, the penetration of the girl’s body is bound up with the libidinal drive and the power dynamics at play in what feminist theorist Robin Morgan has termed “wargasm.”<sup>34</sup> However, it also serves as a metaphor for the military and cultural penetration of Naples by the Allied forces, generically represented elsewhere in *La pelle* as racialized soldiers: “per i popoli vinti [...] tutti i vincitori sono uomini di colore” [“to conquered peoples [...], all conquerors are men of color”] (219/217).<sup>35</sup> Throughout the chapter, references to sexual abasement are interspersed with references to military humiliation and the denigration of the Italian forces by American soldiers. For instance, in the same place where he had registered the voyeuristic abjection of witnessing a silent row of women splaying their legs “in modo orribile [...] mostrando il nero pube fra il roseo bagliore della carne nuda” [“in horrible fashion [...] revealing their dark sex among the rosy glow of naked flesh”] (60/55) to a group of black soldiers ascending the stairs before him, Malaparte had earlier been subjected to the abuse of soldiers who “guardavano con disprezzo i fregi d’oro della mia uniforme, dicendomi con voce rabbiosa: ‘you bastard, you son of a bitch, you dirty Italian officer’” [“[were] looking contemptuously at the gold braid on my uniform and saying to me in furious voices: ‘You bastard, you son of a bitch, you dirty Italian officer’”] (58/53). The scope of the sexual metaphor extends, then, beyond the confines of Naples to encompass the subjugation of Italy more broadly, and the association between voyeurism, mortified sexuality, and abject Italian identity is established through reiteration of the same phrases to compare Malaparte’s response to scenes of sexual depravity with his response to Italy’s military defeat. In relation to the “Virgin” episode, for instance, the narrator-protagonist states, “mi sentivo miserabile e vigliacco assai più dell’8 settembre del 1943, quando avevamo dovuto buttare le nostre armi e le nostre bandiere ai piedi dei vincitori” [“I felt far more miserable and cowardly than I had done on September 8, 1943, when we had to throw our arms and flags at the feet of the conquerors”] (61/56).

The sexual metaphor culminates in Chapter 3, which opens with a disclosure on the part of the narrator that implicitly constructs the moral plague of Occupation as a form of sexually transmitted disease and overtly aligns Italian patriotism with male sexuality:

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<sup>34</sup> Morgan borrows the phrase from a Weather Underground slogan but extrapolates from it to elaborate a more wide-ranging discussion of the relationship between sex and war, one from which women are excluded and by which victimized. Robin Morgan, *The Demon Lover: On the Sexuality of Terrorism* (London: Methuen, 1989). See esp. Chapter 5.

<sup>35</sup> For further consideration of the racial implications of the text, see Escobar, “Sleights of Hand.”

La prima volta ch'ebbi paura di aver preso il contagio, d'essere stato anch'io toccato dalla peste, fu quando andai con Jimmy dal venditore di "parrucche." Mi sentii umiliato dallo schifoso morbo proprio nella parte che in un italiano è più sensibile, nel sesso. [...] La vera bandiera italiana non è il tricolore, ma il sesso, il sesso maschile. Il patriottismo del popolo italiano è tutto lì, nel pube. (65)

[The first time I felt afraid I had caught the contagion, that I too had been stricken by the plague, was when I went with Jimmy to the "wig" shop. I felt humiliated by the loathsome disease in the very part of my anatomy which in an Italian is most sensitive—in the sexual organs. [...] The true emblem of Italy is not the tricolor but the sexual organs, the male sexual organs. The patriotism of the Italian people is all there, in the pubes.] (60)

It is not until the end of the chapter that the cause of Captain Malaparte's humiliation is identified as the grotesque blond merkins worn by Italian women to camouflage their naturally dark pubic hair in order to satisfy the conqueror fantasies of the black American soldiers to whom they prostitute themselves. Although it is acknowledged in passing that "anche le donne hanno perso la guerra" ["the women have lost the war too"] (82/77), the fact that the entire episode is framed in relation to an offence to national pride expressed in terms of male heterosexuality ensures that attention is directed away from women's experiences and subjectivity in favor of the objectification of women through the conventional alignment of female bodies and national territory.<sup>36</sup> That alignment is further cemented in the closing lines of the chapter: as Jimmy flaunts the pubic wig he has purchased for the entertainment of his friends, Malaparte tearfully laments: "ecco che cosa è ridotta una donna, una donna italiana: un ciuffo di peli biondi per soldati negri. Guardate, tutta l'Italia non è che un ciuffo di peli biondi" ["That's what women have come to, Italian women: a tuft of fair hair for Negro soldiers. See, the whole of Italy is nothing but a tuft of fair hair"] (89/85).

### Occupation as Emasculation

If the seamless alignment between the fate of "Italian women" and "the whole of Italy" is emblematic of the gendering of Italy's subjugation in *La pelle*, the voyeuristic quality of the narrative attention paid to the multiple violations and humiliations of the female body signals the status of the text as symptom. By that, I mean that *La pelle* is not merely a text that portrays the Allied Occupation of Naples in the terms of the abject; rather, its voyeuristic fixation on female genitalia, on violated bodies, and on the multiple humiliations of the Occupation is itself symptomatic of the abjection of Occupation. Recalling Jean Baudrillard's theorization of the obscene as "the total promiscuity of the look with what it sees," the text singularly fails to make sense of the Occupation, to give it shape and meaning.<sup>37</sup> It does not so much portray the

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<sup>36</sup> *La pelle* thus shares with Frantz Fanon's famous essay on colonialism, *The Wretched of the Earth* trans. Constance Farrington (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1963; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), a blindness to women's suffering and a relegation of sexual violence to an offence to male honor. Nonetheless, a later work will reprise the subject matter and offer a detailed interrogation of the experiences of women engaged in prostitution in the Soviet sector of occupied Vienna. Curzio Malaparte, *Anche le donne hanno perso la guerra: Commedia in tre atti* (Bologna: L. Capelli, 1954).

<sup>37</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, trans. Philip Beitchman and W.G.J. Niesluchowski (London: Pluto, 1999), 60.

conditions that pertain in the Occupied city as embody and exemplify them. Thus, *La pelle* illustrates Kristeva's articulation of the symptom as a condition diametrically opposed to sublimation: where the latter may be thought of as a process that keeps the abject under control, in the symptom, "the abject permeates me, I become abject."<sup>38</sup> Viewed in this light, the contagious force of symptomatic abjection both signals the proximity of abjection to trauma as a response to an overwhelming psychological burden and invites consideration of the relationship between the diegetic exploration of abjection in *La pelle* and the extradiegetic response to the text.

Once again, the Virgin of Naples episode provides exemplary illustration. In explicitly addressing Malaparte's response to his reluctant witnessing of the penetration of the "Virgin," the episode also implicitly addresses the voyeuristic and abject position occupied by the unwitting reader in relation to the text. Malaparte is led to the scene without any prior warning of what he would witness but conscious nonetheless that it would involve "qualcosa di doloroso, di umiliante, qualche atroce testimonianza dell'umiliazione fisica e morale cui può giungere l'uomo nella sua disperazione" ["something distressing and humiliating, some appalling evidence of the depths of physical and moral humiliation to which man can sink in his despair"] (47/42). He stands therefore in relation to the events witnessed as the reader to their narration. In the moment of hushed horror that accompanies the penetration of the Virgin's body, Malaparte looks around him at his fellow voyeurs and observes that "tutti erano pallidi, tutti erano pallidi di paura e di odio" ["[e]veryone was pale—pale with fear and loathing"] (53/48). Epitomizing the contagious quality of abjection, the language employed to describe the voyeurs' response to witnessing the defilement of the unnamed "Virgin" echoes that used to describe the response of the girl herself, who regards the soldier penetrating her "con uno sguardo pieno di paura e di odio" ["with eyes full of fear and loathing"] (53/42). The articulation of Malaparte's own response as he berates Jimmy for forcing him to witness the scene of penetration is similarly saturated with the language of abjection: "Non avresti dovuto portarmi da quella ragazza. Non sarei dovuto venire con te a vedere quella cosa orribile. Mi dispiace per te e per me, Jimmy. Mi sento miserabile e vigliacco" ["You shouldn't have taken me to see that girl. I shouldn't have come with you to see that horrible thing. I hate it for your sake and for mine, Jimmy. I feel miserable and cowardly"] (56/51).

Beyond its exemplification of the transmissible or contagious quality of abjection, Malaparte's response to Jimmy is significant because it anticipates the response of the reader to all that is narrated over the course of *La pelle*. The fear, hate, disgust, and shame that characterize Malaparte's response to the multiple humiliations visited upon Neapolitans under the Allied Occupation foreshadow the hostile response of the reading public to their encounter with the textual construction of the Occupation in *La pelle*. Throughout the text, the world is focalized through Malaparte's voyeuristic, abject, and obscene narratorial gaze, which coincides with Baudrillard's articulation of the obscene gaze as a "gaze stuck in the screen of vision."<sup>39</sup> Consequently, despite *La pelle*'s insistence on relating the conditions that pertain in Allied-Occupied Naples to the wider events of the war, within Italy and beyond, the "absolute proximity of the thing seen," in Baudrillard's terms,<sup>40</sup> tends instead to fix the humiliations of the Allied Occupation in the immediate site of the text's voyeuristic, abject gaze: the feminized body of Naples. And just as the diegetic Malaparte berates Jimmy for exposing him to voyeuristic

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<sup>38</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 11.

<sup>39</sup> Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 59.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

abjection by inducing him to witness the penetration of the “Virgin,” the reading public rails against the extradiegetic author for the very same reason.

Thus steeped in the proximity of abjection, *La pelle* cannot but fail to attenuate the breach between the experience of the Allied Occupation of Naples in 1943–45 and that of partisan resistance to Nazi-German Occupation to the north of the battle front. Fixated on the graphic detail of the wounds of Occupation, the text flounders in the realms of the symptomatic, the feminine, the abject, continually exposing the exceptionality of the Allied Occupation of Naples relative to the “national” narrative of anti-fascist resistance to foreign domination. At the same time, however, the extension of the sexual metaphor to include not only the subjugation of the feminized and wounded body of Naples but that of Italy as a whole cements the link between the abjection of the transgressed women’s bodies and that of the nation state and ensures that the vision of Italy that emerges—that of a feminized, subjugated, porous body, its borders overrun—is far removed from and inimical to the emerging rhetoric of the newly formed Republic.

### **Suturing the Breach: De Filippo’s *Napoli milionaria!* (1945)**

An inherently feminized construction of Allied-Occupied Naples also underpins Eduardo De Filippo’s *Napoli milionaria!* and the moral crusade it undertakes. The play shares with *La pelle* an understanding of the Allied Occupation and its effects as a form of moral malady, closely associated with the emasculation or feminization of Italian society. However, in contrast to the extreme proximity of *La pelle*’s approach to the Allied Occupation of Naples, an approach that grounds the text in the symptomatic, the voyeuristic, and the abject, *Napoli milionaria!* eschews narrative fixation on the corporeal wounds of Occupation and systematically avoids reference to the Allied Occupation. It favors instead the language of war, which serves to minimize or even elide the distance between the conditions in Naples under the Allied Occupation and those operating in the center-north of the country. Moreover, by disregarding the Allied Occupiers and interrogating instead the behavior and responsibilities of ordinary Neapolitans, *Napoli milionaria!* addresses not the Occupation per se but the impact of rampant black-market capitalism—carefully contextualized in relation to the experiences of fascism and World War I—on the moral compass of a typical working class family, between the end of 1942 (Act I) and an unspecified time after the Allied landings and the “Liberation” of Naples (Acts II and III).

The play revolves around the figure of Gennaro Iovine, an unemployed tram worker who observes with some disquiet the gradual descent of his family into black-market racketeering, initially under the moribund fascist regime and subsequently—and with increased ruthlessness—under the Allied Occupation of Naples. The dramatic impetus of the play lies in the central conflict between the moral universes of Gennaro and his wife, Amalia.<sup>41</sup> That conflict underpins the play’s effective division into two regimes: the first, in which Amalia holds sway, represents a period of amoral capitalism and a sense of society running amok in the absence of moral restraint and paternal authority, while the second, which sees the ascent of Gennaro, represents the restoration of moral order. In theoretical terms, the trajectory of the drama invites a loose Lacanian reading; Amalia’s “maternal” regime recalls Lacan’s characterization of capitalism as akin to the Imaginary order and premised on the belief that the subject is free, without limits, motivated only by his desire for pleasure, inebriated by his avidity to consume, and driven by a

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<sup>41</sup> On the moral conflict between Gennaro and Amalia, see especially Donatella Fischer, *Il teatro di Eduardo De Filippo: La crisi della famiglia patriarcale* (London: Legenda, 2007), 44, and Yuri Brunello, “Il nazional-popolare di Eduardo De Filippo, ovvero *Napoli milionaria!* nell’Italia della ‘svolta,’” *Relit* 2/1 (2011): 65.



misplaced craving for immediate fulfilment.<sup>42</sup> Gennaro's "paternal" regime, instead, provides a literal manifestation of the legislative and prohibitive function of the symbolic father, intervening in the relationship between child and mother to liberate the subject from an undifferentiated morass of desire, constitutes the subject as a separate structure, and facilitates her integration into the social.<sup>43</sup>

The domestic setting of the play in a typical Neapolitan *basso*, the appearance of which is radically transformed over the course of the play in accordance with the changing economic fortunes of the Iovine family, reflects the more introspective concerns of the play with respect to *La pelle*.<sup>44</sup> The squalid description of the *basso* in the stage directions at the outset of Act I—"un enorme 'stanzone' lercio e affumicato" ["an enormous, dirty, smoke-darkened room"]<sup>45</sup> (13)—and the careful detailing of the effects of bombardment, unemployment, food shortages, and escalating prices throughout the dialogue all attest to the degraded conditions of life in war-time Naples. Far from a bleakly realist portrayal, however, it is the farcical register that prevails in this first Act, which opens with a risible argument over a plate of macaroni and ends with Gennaro playing a corpse throughout a terrifying air raid in order to save the family from arrest.<sup>46</sup>

The tension between the moral universes of Gennaro and Amalia is evident from the outset. Where Gennaro is shown to occupy a marginal position in family life, spatially reflected in his semi-seclusion in a ridiculous, make-shift cubicle to one side of the stage, the astute Amalia takes charge of family and business affairs, operating an increasingly flourishing trade in black-market coffee and other illicit food stuffs with the support of her eldest children.<sup>47</sup> The relative positioning of husband and wife recalls Kristeva's assertion that the "power of the feminine [...] is in fact unleashed only with the help of masculine degradation or bankruptcy—a bankruptcy of the father and manly authority."<sup>48</sup> In his economic inactivity, his tendency to intellectualism, and his inability to command authority, Gennaro not only exemplifies the Kristevan understanding of paternal bankruptcy but also shares much with the figure of the *inetto*, as understood by Jacqueline Reich; he is "the cardinal character caught between the real and the ideal," whose "shortcomings and failings" are "in direct opposition to the prescribed masculine norms deeply rooted in Italian culture."<sup>49</sup> In accordance with that figuration, Gennaro's unwillingness to

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<sup>42</sup> Jacques Lacan, "Du Discours psychoanalytique", in *Lacan in Italia, 1953-1978. En Italie Lacan* (Milan: La Salmandra, 1978), 40; 45-53.

<sup>43</sup> On the importance of the paternal function and its association with speech, prohibition, and law in the constitution of the subject, see Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), 215-21.

<sup>44</sup> Fischer, for instance, notes that "il mondo esterno e la guerra con i suoi orrori, come nell'antico teatro greco, sono rigorosamente tenuti fuori scena" ["as in ancient Greek theatre, the external world and the war with all its horrors remain strictly offstage"] (*Il teatro di Eduardo De Filippo*, 40).

<sup>45</sup> All translations are my own.

<sup>46</sup> As Brunello has observed, much of the humor derives from the deployment of Neapolitan theatrical archetypes and the conflict between Gennaro's embodiment of the "popolano ingenuo e sciocco" ["naïve and foolish commoner"] and his son Amedeo's representation of the "giovane svogliato e fannullone" ["lazy and freeloading youth"] ("Il nazional-popolare di Eduardo De Filippo," 65).

<sup>47</sup> *Napoli milionaria!*'s portrayal of Amalia's black-market trading conforms to the historical record in Act I but departs from it thereafter. According to Gribaudo, prior to the arrival of the Allies, illicit trading was confined to food stuffs and was primarily practiced by women and children. Following the Allied landings, however, the black market diversified and came under the control of organized crime; at this stage, women's involvement came to an end ("Napoli 1943-45," 314).

<sup>48</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 169.

<sup>49</sup> Jacqueline Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover: Marcello Mastroianni, Masculinity and Italian Cinema* (Bloomington; Indiana University Press, 2004) 9.

reconcile himself to his family's illegal trading is viewed by those around him as a failure to adapt to the changed social and economic realities of war-time Italy and for which he is subjected to relentless ridicule and derision. Amedeo, for instance, brushes aside his father's moral objections to the family's illicit trade with the assertion that “vuie cierti ccose nun 'e capite... Site 'e n 'at 'època” [“you don't understand anything... You're from a different age”] (17), and even the five-year old Rita is reported to have described her father as “fesso” [“stupid”] (28). In undermining their father in this way, Gennaro's children signal his incapacity to fulfill the paternal function as traditionally constituted and also expose the crisis of the traditional family structure at a moment in time when state authority, too, has been usurped.

Gennaro himself admits that, though far from stupid, he is “stonato” [“bewildered”] (29) as a result of fighting in World War I, an experience from which he returned intellectually compromised: “quanno turnaie, 'a capa nun l'aiutava cchiù” [“when I returned, my head didn't work anymore”] (29–30). By attributing his forgetfulness and lack of concentration to the traumatic effects of the war, Gennaro's diminished condition and the implicit emasculation of his failure to assert himself—economically, socially, and morally—are constructed as emblematic of the condition of Italy itself, economically, socially, and morally adrift since the end of the First World War.<sup>50</sup> His supposed weakness, however, does not prevent Gennaro from advancing an acute and damning critique of the economics of war. Assuming the role of the “cittadino onesto e soldato della guerra passata, che ha servito la patria con fedeltà ed onore” [“honest citizen and veteran of the past war, who served his country with loyalty and honor”] (34), he seeks to convey “quello che i guai e 'a cattiveria degli uomini hanno spiegato a me, durante la mia tribolata vita” [“what the troubles and wickedness of man have helped me understand, in my troubled life”] (34). The lesson that Gennaro imparts is that the purpose of war is economic: the disappearance of foodstuffs and commodities serves merely to increase the price of goods “sempe a vantaggio lloro e a danno nostro” [“always to their benefit and our disadvantage”] (34), just as the subsequent introduction of price control measures, ostensibly to reverse inflation, renders the population ever more dependent on and subservient to fascist rule. Although the conversation subsequently descends into ridicule and laughter, Gennaro's discussion of the legacy of World War I and his incisive denunciation of cynical governmental drives to exploit the population through the practice of speculation endure. So, too, does his characterization of his fellow Italians as a nation of children infantilized by the totalitarian power of the fascist regime, a characterization that gestures towards Massimo Recalcati's Lacanian articulation of totalitarianism as both “un modo patologico per compensare la crisi sociale dell'Imago paterna” [“a pathological compensation for the social crisis of the paternal Imago”] and “la riabilitazione inconscia del potere folle di un Padre primordiale e invasato” [“the unconscious rehabilitation of the crazed power of a possessed, primordial Father”].<sup>51</sup>

For all his eloquence on the subject of a capitalist society founded on avarice and exploitation—of which the family's black-market racketeering is a blatant example—Gennaro is at a loss to reason his way out of the family's dependence on Amalia's illicit activities. His comic attempts to articulate a logical alternative are, however, soon forgotten as news reaches the *basso* that the police have been alerted and are on their way to inspect the premises. While the ever-resourceful Amalia rapidly transforms the *basso* into a house of mourning, the hapless

<sup>50</sup> Thus, in contrast to the abject feminization of Italy represented by the exposure of female bodies in *La pelle*, it is an emasculated male figure who represents Italy in *Napoli milionaria!*.

<sup>51</sup> Massimo Recalcati, *Cosa resta del padre? La paternità nell'epoca ipermoderna* (Milan: Cortina Raffaello, 2011), 40–41.

Gennaro is recruited to play the corpse, laid out on the bed where the black-market goods are hidden and surrounded by the weeping and keening of his family and neighbors. The moral and symbolic implications of this scene are clear: Gennaro, the diminished and marginalized voice of moral Italy, is brought to center stage only to play dead before the representatives of fascist authority. While the farcical nature of the scene suggests that fascism involves a preposterous performance on the part of citizens and authorities alike, the denouement serves to establish Gennaro's resilience and his potential for moral heroism. In the first of two key encounters between Gennaro and the policeman, Ciappa, a period of intense bombardment sees the majority of the "mourners" run for safety, leaving the two men alone. Confronted with the impressive performance of the "corpse," who remains impassive throughout the terrifying ordeal, Ciappa expresses his admiration for Gennaro's self-sacrificing commitment to the protection of his family. In doing so, Ciappa establishes Gennaro's paternal credentials and acknowledges his as yet unappreciated and unrealized moral authority.<sup>52</sup>

Act II opens on a radically transformed set, which serves to construct Allied-Occupied Naples as a society in which moral and social order have been overturned and traditional values displaced by unrelenting greed and ambition. The Liberation has provided the black market with an abundance of goods and, as the stage directions highlight, the *basso* has acquired "*un volto di lindura e di 'schicceria' fastosa [...] l'arredamento dell'ambiente è fiammante, lustro*" [*the appearance of cleanliness and of lavish 'chicness' [...] the furnishing of the room is garish, gaudy*] (71). Gennaro has been missing for more than a year and, in his absence, his make-shift room has been dismantled and replaced by an enormous coffee machine, signaling both the changing fortunes of the family and the origins of its wealth. Amalia, too, is visibly altered, dressed now in silk and adorned with ostentatious jewelry. Unfettered by Gennaro's restraining influence, Amalia's entrepreneurial activities have escalated; she has gone into business with the local *guappo*, Settebellizze, ruthlessly taking advantage of her clients' desperation and profiting accordingly. So intently focused is she on the accumulation of wealth that she fails to observe the dangers facing her family: her eldest daughter, Maria Rosaria, has been seduced, impregnated, and abandoned by an American soldier, while her youngest daughter, Rita, is on the verge of becoming very seriously ill, and Amedeo has drifted into robbery. Even Amalia's own reputation is compromised, as rumors abound about the nature of her relationship with Settebellizze.

Emblematic of the disruption to social order is the dramatic reversal of fortunes effected by the emergence of a ruthless entrepreneurial capitalism: middle-class Riccardo, having already lost three properties to the ascendant Amalia's merciless profiteering, is now about to lose his family home to her. Appealing in vain to her compassion and understanding, the bewildered Riccardo observes that whereas in earlier days, the need for a home was less marked because "*la vera casa era un poco tutta la città*" [*your real home was the entire city*] (96), the changed realities of Neapolitan life have now heightened the need for a refuge from the city: "*solamente in casa propria uno si sente un poco protetto... Oggi che non appena metti il piede fuori di casa*

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<sup>52</sup> Ciappa's leniency has been subject to keen critical interpretation. For Angelo Puglisi, Ciappa's admiration for Gennaro represents "*la confermazione di uno statuto speciale per la città, la tolleranza dello Stato in nome della questione sociale e delle qualità dei napoletani*" [confirmation of the city's special status, the tolerance of the State on account of the social problems and the qualities of Neapolitans] (Angelo Puglisi, *In casa Cupiello: Eduardo critico del populismo* [Rome: Donzelli, 2001], 102). For Brunello, instead, the dialogue between Gennaro and Ciappa represents an encounter between two distinct social realities, that of the state and that of popular Neapolitan culture ("*Il nazional-popolare di Eduardo De Filippo*," 67). It is only in the final act of the play that the two realities will be reconciled, through Gennaro's assumption of moral authority and his rhetorical alignment of Neapolitan and the interests of the Italian nation-state.

tua, ti sembra di trovarti in una terra straniera” [“only in your own home do you feel a bit protected... Now the moment you set foot outside your front door, you feel as though you’re in a foreign country”] (96). If the construction of the city as a foreign country alludes most directly to the Allied presence and influence on Naples, the fact that Riccardo’s words are spoken in Amalia’s visibly altered *basso* undermines the very concept of the home as refuge from wider societal changes. Indeed, Amalia’s conversion of the family home into a black-market trading post and the hard-hearted attitude she brings to that environment are the epitome of social and moral order gone awry. The relevance of the female gendering of the disruption to social and moral order will become ever more apparent as the denouement of the play unfolds and the shift to the paternal regime is effected, but it is significant that it is Maria Rosaria—heir to Amalia’s maternal role—who first calls her mother to account, condemning her for having abandoned her familial duties and for failing to protect her daughter from the ruination her pregnancy will bring: “vuie putiveve tene’ nu poco cchiù ll’uocchie apierte ncuollo a me! [...] Invece ’e penza’ agli affari, a ’e denare... penzaveve a mme!” [“you could have kept your eye on me! [...] Instead of thinking about business, about money... you should have thought of me!”] (105).<sup>53</sup>

### The Restoration of Paternal Order

Gennaro’s unexpected return to the *basso* after a year’s imprisonment in the north marks a dramatic shift in the direction of the play. Tired-looking, gaunt, and dressed in the bloodied rags of dead soldiers from the various armies occupying the Italian peninsula, Gennaro appears a latter-day Odysseus, whose long-awaited return from war ultimately leads to the restoration of moral and social order, construed in traditional, patriarchal terms.<sup>54</sup> His shabby appearance contrasts dramatically with the luxury of his surroundings, and his initial failure to recognize either Amalia or his home is testament to the radical alteration of the family’s fortunes and values. However, Gennaro himself is also a changed man. Having recounted the odyssey that began when he was wounded during an air-raid, captured by German soldiers, and deported to a work camp, he contrasts the neurotic, querulous impact his previous experience of war had on him—“quanno turnai a ll’ata guerra [...] nevrastenico, m’appicccevo cu tuttu quante” [“when I returned from the last war [...] I was like a madman, picking fights with everyone”] (116)—with his more recent experience. All that he has seen and experienced during his long, slow journey home, “paise distrutte, creature sperze, fucilazione... E quanta morte... ’E lloro e e’ nuoste...” [“whole villages wiped out, children with nowhere to go, shootings... And so many dead bodies... On their side and on ours”] (114), has profoundly changed him, providing him with a maturity he previously lacked: “Io tengo cinquantadue anne, ma sulamente mo me sent’ommo overamente [...] A’ sta guerra ccà se torna buone... Ca nun se vo’ fa’ male a nisciuno. [...] Nun facimmo male, Ama’... Nun facimmo male” [“I’m fifty-two years old and it’s only now I feel like I’ve really grown up [...] You return from this war a good person... You don’t want to do harm to anyone... Let’s not do harm, Ama’. Let’s not do harm”] (116). The comparative frame in which Gennaro’s experience of war is placed reprises Benedetto Croce’s characterization of fascism as a parenthesis in Italian history and similarly serves to bracket off the period of fascist rule as an aberration arising from the trauma of World War I and the inability of an immature

<sup>53</sup> The revelation that Maria Rosaria had fallen pregnant in the family home while Amalia was out with Settebellizze further strengthens the play’s undermining of the home as refuge from wider social upheaval.

<sup>54</sup> On the Odysseus metaphor and the limits of its application to *Napoli milionaria!*, see Fischer, *Il teatro di Eduardo De Filippo*, 38–41.

Italy to be reconciled to itself.<sup>55</sup> Gennaro's experience of World War II, instead, purges him—and, by extension, Italy—of all ills and generates a new ethical stance dedicated to the promotion of the common good over and above the selfish pursuit of individual wellbeing.

However, the insights that Gennaro has gained from his experiences in a world immersed in the tragedy of war are not readily received by those who have shown little interest in the outside world, consumed as they are with the aggressive accumulation of wealth. Gennaro's return, therefore, signals the breach between the experiences of Italians living under the Allied Occupation and those exposed to war and partisan Resistance in the north of the country. Far from being granted a privileged position at the heart of the community, as he was on his return from World War I, he is further isolated by his experience. Repeated efforts to narrate the horrors and deprivations of war are deflected by both family and friends, who are unwilling to listen to his tale and impatient to banish the painful specter of war with phrases such as, "Nun ce penza' cchiù" ["Don't think about it anymore"], and "ccà è fernuto tutto cosa" ["it's all over now"] (120). Overwhelmed by the extravagance of the dinner prepared in honor of Settebellizze's birthday and fatigued by persistent efforts—equally persistently rebuffed—to recount his tale to the family and friends diminished by their good fortune and interested only in their stomachs, Gennaro protests one final time as he retires from the table to sit with his ailing younger daughter that, "A guerra nun è fernuta" ["The war is not over"] (136). Only Maria Rosaria, who appreciates all too well the risks the family has been running, sides with her father and accompanies him to her sister's bedside as the curtain closes on Act II.

The start of Act III places Gennaro for the first time at the center of the action, from where he will embark on a moral crusade, instigating "una 'restaurazione' della famiglia paternalistica, collocandosi al centro del nucleo, e arrogandosi il compito di risolvere i conflitti che imperversano sulla sua casa" ["a 'restoration' of the paternalistic family, locating himself at the center of the nucleus, and arrogating for himself the task of resolving the conflicts wreaking havoc in his house"].<sup>56</sup> Gennaro's re-appropriation of the paternal function operates in accordance with the textual allusions to Homer's *Odyssey*; it presents a resolution to what Recalcati has recently theorized as the Telemachus complex, that is, a drama rooted not in the transgression of authority (as in the case of the Oedipus complex) but in the absence of paternal authority and of the legitimate process of inheritance of the father's role.<sup>57</sup> Where Recalcati's theory responds to the post-1968 crisis of paternal authority and views the crisis as an opportunity to reconfigure paternity in a less antagonistic key, so too *Napoli milionaria!* appears to present Gennaro's re-appropriation of paternity as part of a wider social response to the crisis of fascism and an opportunity to substitute the tyrannical authority of the fascist state with a

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<sup>55</sup> Benedetto Croce, *Per la nuova vita dell'Italia: Scritti e discorsi, 1943–44* (Naples: Ricciardi, 1944). See also David Ward, *Antifascisms: Cultural Politics in Italy, 1943–46. Benedetto Croce and the Liberals, Carlo Levi and the "Actionists"* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996). For discussion of Croce's perspective in relation to its peers, see also Silvana Patriarca, *Italian Vices: Nation and Character from the Risorgimento to the Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 193–201.

<sup>56</sup> Fischer, *Il teatro di Eduardo De Filippo*, 53.

<sup>57</sup> In Recalcati's reading, Telemachus yearns for the return of the father and the reinstallation of the Law of the Father in his house invaded by the suitors; for that reason, Telemachus embodies the invocation of the Law (*Il complesso di Telemaco*, 10).

more clement model of paternity, which is embodied in the final act not only by Gennaro but also by Ciappa and Riccardo.<sup>58</sup>

In accordance with the Recalcatian frame, the restoration of paternal authority starts with the son. At the start of Act III, Gennaro plays host to the policeman, Ciappa, who has come to inform him that Amedeo has been stealing and is likely to be caught in the act and arrested that very evening. Viewed through Recalcati's Lacanian lens, Amedeo's recourse to theft may be understood as an exemplification of the ills attendant on society in the absence of paternal prohibition, especially in regard to the son's ability to legitimately inherit paternal authority. In addressing Gennaro as one father to another—"Io pure tengo 'e figlie [e] m'immedesimo in certe situazioni" ["I have children myself and I can identify with certain situations"] (137)—and deferring to his paternal authority, Ciappa establishes Gennaro's integrity as the moral adjudicator, not only of his family but of social order more broadly.<sup>59</sup> Gennaro's ability to assume that role with authority and equanimity is aptly demonstrated in the first instance by his implacable confirmation that Ciappa must indeed arrest Amedeo if he is caught stealing. The father's moral authority is further demonstrated on Amedeo's return to the *basso* when, in a speech ostensibly delivered to Ciappa but implicitly addressed to his son, Gennaro distinguishes between forms of criminal activity motivated and indeed mitigated by the need to survive in times of war (petty illegality, contraband, corruption, black market, and prostitution) and the crime of theft for which war provides neither motivation nor justification (147–49).

Gennaro's discussion of criminality provides a pretext to address the conditions of Naples under Allied Occupation with reference to the city's reputation and its relationship with Italy. In stipulating that "'O mariuolo [...] nun tene nazionalità. E nun trova posto dint' 'o paese nuosto" ["The thief [...] has no nationality. And there's no place for him in our country"] (147), and in counselling Amedeo that, "quanno te truove e siente ca parlano male 'e Napule, tu, cu tutt' 'a cuscienza, può dicere: 'Va bene ma ce stanno 'e mariuole e 'a gente onesta, comme a dint' 'a tutt' 'e paise d' 'o munno'" ["when you hear people speaking ill of Naples, you can stand up to them with a clear conscience and say: 'Yes, there are thieves there, but there are honest people too, as in all parts of the world'" (148), Gennaro alerts his son to the shame his criminal activity brings on his native city and, at the same time, rebuts negative stereotypes that construct Naples and Neapolitans as inherently criminal in nature.<sup>60</sup> However, his disquisition on the relationship between criminality and war serves two additional purposes. First, it contextualizes the undeniable escalation of criminal activity in Naples in 1943–45 in relation to war-time conditions and portrays it as distinct from deviant criminality. Second, and more importantly, in its preference for the language of war and total exclusion of reference to Allied Occupation, it

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<sup>58</sup> In its elaboration of a new, less conflictual model of intergenerational relations, Recalcati's theory is utopian; it expresses the hope that Telemachus will go beyond the Oedipal parricide and seek in the father not a rival to be killed but an ally with whom to re-discover the law (ibid., 3).

<sup>59</sup> For Mario Mignone, Gennaro becomes "a new version of the father figure in De Filippo's theatre: he abandons the customary passivity of the other male characters and acts, in order to bring about the family's redemption" (Mario Mignone, *Eduardo De Filippo* [Boston: Twayne, 1984], 75). Fischer puts it more simply: Gennaro assumes the role of "padre-giudice" ["father-judge"] (*Il teatro di Eduardo De Filippo*, 53).

<sup>60</sup> Gennaro expands on the history of Naples' negative reputation, "Siccome o' paese nuosto nun porta na bona nnummenata... [...] Appena sentono "napoletani", già si mettono in guardia. Pecché è stato sempe accusi" ["Since our city doesn't have a good reputation [...] As soon as they hear 'Neapolitans,' they are already on their guard. It's always been like that"] (147). On the long history of negative stereotyping of Naples, see Nelson Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

characterizes the city's history and experience not as divorced from, but as contiguous to and directly aligned with, that of Italy more generally.

Building on the restoration of moral order thus set in motion, the following scenes proceed to penetrate the symbolic center of social and moral disarray embodied by Amalia. Gennaro's youngest daughter is now gravely ill and, following a desperate off-stage search for the antibiotics needed to save Rita's life, Amalia returns to the *basso* looking "disfatta, affranta, completamente cambiata dai primi due atti" ["undone, distraught, completely altered from the first two acts"] and presenting to the world what is characterized as "il suo vero volto: quello della madre" ["her true face: that of a mother"] (156).<sup>61</sup> The construction of maternity as Amalia's authentic identity, coupled with the manifold misfortunes that have befallen her children, implicitly characterizes Amalia's entrepreneurial activities as a distortion of her true self and as inimical to maternity and proper—that is, patriarchal—social order.<sup>62</sup> For this reason, the restoration of social and moral order rests upon the subjugation of Amalia, the end of her entrepreneurial reign, and her return to domestic and maternal concerns. As she rails against the profiteering that she herself had so ruthlessly practiced, the very neighbor she had driven to the verge of destitution now appears with the much-needed medicine in hand. Riccardo's entrance initiates what Fischer has termed "una sorta di fustigazione pubblica" ["a sort of public flogging"], with Riccardo operating as yet another father-judge and as a spokesman for Gennaro's moral universe.<sup>63</sup> Confronted with the capitalist logic of Amalia's immediate reaction—"Quanto volete?" ["How much do you want?"] (158)—Riccardo reminds Amalia of her own exploitative profiteering practices before simply offering the medicine without asking for anything in return. He thus illustrates by example the lesson he seeks to impart, which is one of human solidarity and altruism in the face of adversity and in the knowledge that "chi prima e chi dopo deve, ad un certo punto, bussare alla porta dell'altro" ["sooner or later, at a certain point, we all have to knock on our neighbor's door"] (159). By locating the social and moral ills of capitalism exclusively in the person of Amalia and the restoration of moral order in the figure of the benevolent father, variously constructed as Gennaro, Ciappa, or Riccardo, *Napoli milionaria!*, like *La pelle*, feminizes the ills of the Allied Occupation and elaborates an alternative social order that is patriarchal in its norms and practices.

The final scene constitutes a form of epilogue, in which Gennaro and Amalia engage in a process of moral stocktaking. Confronted with the potentially ruinous circumstances facing each of her three children, a chastened Amalia is called upon to examine the tragic quagmire into which her family has plummeted. Her struggle to understand is met with a succinct summation on Gennaro's part: "A guerra, Ama'!" ["The war, Ama'!"] (166).<sup>64</sup> On the one hand, by contextualizing Amalia's wayward behavior and exploitative practices in relation to wider social and political upheavals, Gennaro—like Riccardo before him—displays understanding and

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<sup>61</sup> Maria Rosaria too appears "completamente diversa: veste sobriamente e ha assunto una strana aria dimessa" ["completely different: she is simply dressed and has assumed a humble demeanor"] (149).

<sup>62</sup> Having previously observed to Ciappa that "mia moglie [...] nun ha saputo fa 'a mamma" ["my wife [...] didn't know how to be a mother"] (138), Gennaro now reiterates the same charge to Amalia herself, thereby laying all responsibility for their children's waywardness on her shortcomings as a mother (165).

<sup>63</sup> Fischer, *Il teatro di Eduardo De Filippo*, 58.

<sup>64</sup> An acknowledgment of the distorting and dehumanizing role played by the sudden availability of money on Amalia's horizon (164) precedes Gennaro's conclusive summation that it is war that lies at the root of the family's ills. In this way, the temptations of money are portrayed as but a symptom of the wider malady of war, and they are relegated to a secondary level of explanation for the immoral practices at play within the Iovine family and, by extension, within Naples and Italy as a whole.

clemency and promotes reconciliation between them. At the same time, however, the preference for the language of war over that of Occupation signals the important role played by Gennaro in breaching the divide between city and nation. For if, as Gatt-Rutter has observed, “named after the city’s patron saint, Gennaro speaks with the city’s voice,”<sup>65</sup> then his is the voice of an Italianized Naples. Not only does his trajectory over the course of the play mirror that of Italy’s struggle for maturity and dignity in the wake of World War I, fascism, and World War II, but his odyssey in the north as a prisoner of war and as witness to the conditions there also provides him with a keen understanding of the relationship between the two contexts. Consequently, the specificities of the Allied Occupation of Naples, so painfully dredged through in Malaparte’s *La pelle*, are here willfully overlooked in a bid to reframe the Neapolitan experience not as distinct from the conditions of war north of the Allied/German battle lines but as consistent with them.<sup>66</sup>

Reinforcing that alignment between Naples and Italy in the very final moments of the play is the personification of Italy’s future in the figure of Rita. In asserting that “chella criatura ca sta llà dinto me fa penza ’o paese nuosto” [“that child in there makes me think about what’s happening to our country”] (163), Gennaro transforms his daughter’s illness into a metaphor for the state of health not only of Naples but of the Italian nation as a whole. Just as Rituccia’s health hangs in the balance, so too does that of Italy, so that the moral crusade undertaken by Gennaro within his own family may be seen to speak also to the wider family of the nation. While hope of eventual recovery and a successful return to health is best exemplified by Amedeo’s withdrawal from criminality, his eagerness to return to an honest day’s work, and his deferential recognition of paternal authority in the penultimate line of the play (“Sì, papà” [“yes, papa”], 167), the very closing words of *Napoli milionaria!*—“S’ha da aspettà, Ama’. Ha da passa’ ’a nuttata” [“All we can do now is wait, Ama’. We must see out the night”] (168)—exhort the audience to remain on guard against the temptations of an easy life and the false promises of capitalism and to follow instead a longer path to more enduring and socially sustainable fulfillment.

## Conclusion

In assessing the cultural and psychological work done by representations of the Allied Occupation of Naples, it is illustrative to consider the radically different reception of *Napoli milionaria!* and *La pelle*. As has already been noted, despite exculpating the local population for the humiliations visited upon them, *La pelle* was resoundingly rejected by Neapolitans and deemed to inflict great damage on the image of the city and its residents. In contrast, though quick to identify and denounce local responsibilities, *Napoli milionaria!* was nonetheless rapidly adopted by Neapolitans as “l’immagine ufficiale e riconosciuta della Napoli dell’occupazione alleata” [“the official and recognized image of Allied-Occupied Naples”].<sup>67</sup> The appeal of *Napoli milionaria!* lies in no small part in the redemption of the Iovine family at the play’s close and the family’s incorporation into what has been termed the “hegemonic narrative” of good Italians

<sup>65</sup> Gatt-Rutter, “Naples 1944,” 64.

<sup>66</sup> As Ferdinando Taviani observes, “La Napoli descritta con amarezza da Eduardo [...] pare bene lontana dalle atrocità, dalla fame, dalla corruzione morale che in realtà l’avevano investita” [“The Naples described with such bitterness by Eduardo [...] seems very far from the atrocities, hunger, and moral corruption that had in reality beset the city”] (Ferdinando Taviani, *Uomini di scena, uomini di libro* [Bologna: Il Mulino, 1995], 141).

<sup>67</sup> Gribaudi, “Napoli 1943–45,” 304. Gribaudi also notes that “L’immedesimazione dei napoletani con *Napoli milionaria!* è elevatissima. È pressoché impossibile trovare un napoletano che non la conosca perfettamente” [“Neapolitans identify with *Napoli milionaria!* very deeply. It is almost impossible to find a Neapolitan who doesn’t know the play by heart”] (ibid., 308).



(*brava gente*), which emerged out of the Armistice of September 8, 1943 and the subsequent re-alignment of Italy with the Allies.<sup>68</sup> At the same time, however, the importance of the play's framing of Allied-Occupied Naples within the context of national history and contemporary discourse should not be underestimated. At a moment when the reconstitution of the nation as a moral entity was at the forefront of public and political life, with the Resistance deemed to be accomplishing the democratic regeneration and moral redemption of Italians, *Napoli milionaria!*'s Neapolitan drama appeared to provide a way for Neapolitans to participate in a moral reconstitution from which they were otherwise excluded. In the play's equation of fascist Italy with the war-damaged Gennaro at the outset of the play, and in its promotion of solidarity, altruism, and honest living at its close, *Napoli milionaria!* suggests that immaturity and moral absenteeism had allowed fascism to rise and impose itself and, simultaneously, that only through selflessness and moral rectitude could Italy reform and ensure for itself a sustainable future. The play's gendering of moral waywardness as female and its primary concern with the restoration of moral order via the re-establishment of legitimate paternal authority in the wake of the maturing experience of war also speaks to a national concern with the state of the Italian family in the aftermath of the war's destruction, manifest in the Christian Democrats' emphasis in the first post-war election campaign on "restoring the family to health and morality."<sup>69</sup> *Napoli milionaria!* is, then, unusually prescient and timely, capturing perfectly the post-war Italian zeitgeist. The extent to which its investment in the national narrative necessitates a circumvention of the real-world conditions under the Allied Occupation is perhaps best appreciated only when the play is considered in relation to Malaparte's detailed exposure of those conditions in *La pelle*.

Published four years after the premiere of De Filippo's play, *La pelle*'s brutally unflinching account of the horrors of the Allied Occupation of Naples exposes the limited nature of *Napoli milionaria!*'s engagement with the realities of the Neapolitan experience. Focusing on the numerous horrors, humiliations, and moral compromises inherent in the ignoble struggle for survival in a society destroyed by war, and portraying Neapolitans and Italians alike as a conquered people, Malaparte's text provides a counter not only to *Napoli milionaria!*'s redemptive moral vision but also to the national post-war celebration of Liberation as the originating moment of a new order founded upon the principles of self-determination and freedom from foreign rule. The text's fixation on the wounds of Occupation, its preoccupation with porous and violated bodies, and its mortification of Italian identity enfold and imprison the reader within its feminized and abject construction of the Occupation. The extreme proximity of *La pelle*'s narrative perspective necessarily accentuates the specificity of the conditions in Allied-Occupied Naples and implicitly underscores the distance between those conditions and the situation north of the Allied/German battle front in 1943–44. Published in the wake of the constitutional referendum of 1946, *La pelle* cannot but be seen to further underscore the marked divergence of Naples from "national" post-war Italian political culture and sentiment.<sup>70</sup>

In the context of a city so preoccupied with its own history and so obsessively documented in cultural representation, it is curious that there have been so few significant cultural attempts

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<sup>68</sup> Patriarca, *Italian Vices*, 189–90.

<sup>69</sup> Alessandro Oddone, "Ricostruzione morale", *La Civiltà Cattolica*, XCVII:1 (1946), 15-17 (17), cited in Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 77.

<sup>70</sup> Ginsborg remarks that the referendum revealed a dramatic split in Italian political culture. Where northern and central Italy voted solidly, even resoundingly, for a republic, the south voted equally solidly for a monarchy; the peak of monarchical support was registered in Naples, with nearly 80% of the vote (*A History of Contemporary Italy*, 98).

since the publication of *La pelle* in 1949 to revisit the period of the Allied Occupation. While on the one hand, the scarcity of new cultural representations might be explained by the pre-eminent status enjoyed by *Napoli milionaria!* and *La pelle* among different audiences, it might also be seen to signal the profound anxiety still associated with this founding moment of relations between Naples and the Italian nation in the post-war period and also the difficulty of articulating a meaningful alternative interpretation of the experience of Occupation within that fraught context. Certainly, the tension between the two approaches advanced by *Napoli milionaria!* and *La pelle* speaks eloquently of the difficulty in reconciling a detailed account of the Allied Occupation of the city with a drive to breach the rhetorical and ideological divide between Naples and the Italian nation.

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