

Avanti a lui tremava tutta Roma: opera, melodrama and the Resistance

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Italian neorealism is conventionally read as the authoritative cinematic chronicle of Italy’s experience of the Second World War and the Resistance, through canonical films such as Rossellini’s *Roma città aperta* (*Rome, Open City*, 1945). It is important, however, to restore a full picture of the array of genres which narrated and refracted the Resistance experience in the post-war period. To this end, this article looks at a key genre that has been overlooked by scholarship, the opera film or *melodramma*. In examining *Avanti a lui tremava tutta Roma* (*Before Him All Rome Trembled*, Gallone, 1946), the article considers Mary Wood’s contention (in *Italian cinema*. Oxford: Berg, 2005, 109) that in this period ‘realist cinematic conventions were insufficient for the maximum perception of the historical context’, and that the ‘affective charge’ of melodrama was essential for restoring this complexity. It assesses the appeal to the emotions produced by the film, and the ways in which this is constructed through the bodily and vocal performance of the opera *divo*, and questions the critical division between emotion (always viewed as excessive) and authenticity (seen in neorealism, the mode of seriousness) which has seen the opera film relegated to the margins of post-war Italian film history.

Keywords: emotion; Italian neorealism; *melodramma*; melodrama; opera film; performance; Magnani

Introduction

Although in recent years more nuanced accounts of the post-war period have discussed some of the complexities of its genre production (see Günsberg 2005; Wood 2005), Italian film studies has not yet fully explored the rich array of genres and sub-genres that composed domestic post-war output. Instead, a rather reductive critical opposition has prevailed between the neorealist films that documented the war, occupation and Resistance (i.e. *Roma città aperta* (Rossellini, 1945), *Paisà* (*Paisan*, Rossellini, 1946), *Ladri di biciclette* (*Bicycle Thieves*, De Sica, 1948)), and a popular film-making that is assumed to have been incapable of intervening in debates on the state of the nation. One of the last genres to be critically re-evaluated is the opera film, or *melodramma* to give it its Italian term, and this article will examine a neglected opera film of 1946, Carmine Gallone’s *Avanti a lui tremava tutta Roma*. It will situate the film in relation to debates on popular genres, and will discuss the extent to which such a film might not have a merely escapist function, as critics have assumed, but can be read as operating on a more profound level,

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and may actually have 'satisfied the emotional needs of the Italian people' after the horrors of war and occupation (Wood 2005, 39). By integrating recent theories on affect and emotion into an account of the historical context of post-war Italian cinema, this article will offer a more complex view of the possible functions of such a film.

Most histories of post-war Italian cinema have insisted upon the close connection between neorealism and the representation of the Italian Resistance, neglecting the large amount of genre production that also undertook this representation. The equation between the Resistance and neorealism has been enduring, from André Bazin's designation of the latter in 1948 as 'the Italian school of the Liberation' (Bazin 2005), to Millicent Marcus's affirmation that it was 'the cinematic offspring of the Resistance' (Marcus 1986, xiv). Gian Piero Brunetta's statement that 'for some time, everyone hopped on the neorealist bandwagon [by using war and Resistance themes]' (Brunetta 2009, 140) is indicative of the erasure of the many ways that different genres and styles of film-making used the Resistance experience. Indeed, the link between the Resistance and the filmmaking that it is felt to have produced was a topic of heated debate in cinema journals of the post-war period.¹ The severest formulation of this linkage between neorealism and the Resistance came in 1956 from Piero Nelli, ex-partisan and director, in the *L'Unità* report on *cinema popolare* with his lapidary statement: 'enemies of the Resistance, enemies of realism' (Nelli 1956), an example of the 'discourse of neorealism', which has been so persuasive and persistent in Italian culture.²

Avanti a lui tremava tutta Roma stars well-known baritone Tito Gobbi, and tenor Gino Sinimberghi, as well as *Roma città aperta* star Anna Magnani. In the film, the plot and performance of Puccini's opera *Tosca* are interwoven with a Resistance story: Magnani and Sinimberghi play opera singers Ada and Marco, preparing to sing *Tosca* at the Teatro Reale dell'Opera in occupied Rome in 1944. They are also involved in supporting partisans, and shelter an English soldier in Marco's villa; they come under Nazi suspicion due to Ada's relationship with a German officer, and the second half of the film cross-cuts the staged performance of *Tosca* with off-stage events. *Tosca* is, famously, the only Puccini opera to engage very directly with real historical events: set in Rome in June 1800 one of its key elements is the defeat by Napoleon of the Austrian forces at the Battle of Marengo, a prelude to the French occupation of Rome. The character of Cavaradossi, the painter with republican sympathies, is paralleled by Marco, the Resistance sympathiser, so that the arrest of Cavaradossi by Austrian forces led by the evil Scarpia (Gobbi), is intercut with the Germans' preparations backstage to arrest Marco. The film offers a happy ending in place of *Tosca*'s famously overwrought plot: in the opera Cavaradossi's staged execution at the hands of the Austrians turns out to be real, whereas in the film Ada conspires with the stagehands to arrange for his escape through a trapdoor in the stage at the moment of his execution, and the escape of Marco and Ada from the theatre thus avoids the climactic suicide of *Tosca*. The eventual triumph of Napoleon at Marengo is paralleled by contemporary events, so that Marco replicates Cavaradossi's famous *Vittoria!* (Victory!) aria at the film's end, on receiving news of the Allied liberation of Rome.

The film came third in the Italian box-office rankings for 1946, taking 159 million lire.³ Its reception by the Italian press, however, was largely unfavourable: the *Rivista del Cinematografo* criticised the plot's historical inaccuracies: 'for those who lived through the famous nine months of the German occupation, it is rather laughable to see the Teatro Reale dell'Opera – such a welcoming refuge for Hitler's troops – transformed into

a hotbed of partisan action' ('pissime' 1947, 15). To this criticism of the film's perceived dishonesty, the reviewer adds that 'apart from this, the film is too self-evidently commercial to make an impression'. *Il Tempo* agreed: 'we hoped that the end of the war would at least spare us from Gallone films, and instead, here he is back again, melodramatic and pompous... indulging himself in flights of fancy in the only area for which he has any remaining suitability, the opera film'.⁴

The perceived cynicism of Gallone's motives in making this film – as a kind of hijacking of the neorealist 'bandwagon' – has coloured some critics' views of it: Gallone, whose output under Fascism was so closely aligned at times with the regime, particularly *Scipione l'africano* (*Scipio Africanus*, 1936), had been subjected to purging in 1944 by the 'Committee for the Purging of Cinema Directors, Assistant Directors and Screenwriters', presided over by Alfredo Guarini.⁵ Gallone's 'appropriation' of the Resistance in *Avanti a lui*... has thus easily been read by some critics as 'atonement' for his role in Fascist film-making, as 'rehabilitation', or even as a desire to 'remake himself as an anti-fascist' (Casadio 1995, 164).⁶ The film was produced by Excelsa Film, which had also produced *Roma città aperta*: in fact Pescatore describes the film as a 'reply in the form of opera to Rossellini's masterpiece' (2001, 47).⁷ The parallels between the two films, in relation to the presence of Magnani, the plot similarities and the score composer (both films were scored by Renzo Rossellini, brother of Roberto), might give us pause: I don't wish here to 'compare' the two films, but it is worth, I think, exploring some of the reasons why one type of film was critically consecrated and the other discarded.⁸

Melodrama

The dismissal of the film as 'melodramatic and pompous' reminds us that *Avanti a lui*... is an example of *melodramma* in its original Italian sense, where the term, until relatively recently, was used to denote opera or musical film.⁹ In the post-war period it was used as a descriptive category in journals alongside other terms such as 'opera film' ('film operistico', Spinazzola 1975, 57), or 'sung *melodramma*' ('melodramma cantato', Caldiron 1999, 32).¹⁰ The 'opera film' comprises a range of films popular from 1945 to around 1955, which Casadio divides into four categories: filmed operas, prose operas, biographies of musicians, and films made using opera stars (1995, 7). The extraordinary popularity of the genre in the late 1940s made it a 'completely Italian approach to a spectacular and successful popular cinema' (Pescatore 2001, 27). Gallone himself was a central figure in this genre, responsible for successful films such as *Rigoletto* (1946), *Addio Mimi* (1947), *Il trovatore* (1948), and *La forza del destino* (1949), until his last such film *Casa Ricordi* (1954).¹¹

The neglect of such a commercially successful genre is part of the slight critical suspicion with which melodrama, in all its forms, has been regarded in Italy.¹² The view of Gramsci on *melodramma* been influential in this regard, although his condemnation of its 'pestiferous' encouragement of "'artificial" poses in the life of people' is, nevertheless, complicated by his recognition of the affective power of *melodramma* for the lower classes, albeit in an escapist key:

To many common people the baroque and the operatic appear as an extraordinarily fascinating way of feeling and acting, a means of escaping what they consider low, mean and contemptible in their lives and education in order to enter a more select sphere of great feelings

and noble passions . . . Remember that we are not dealing with superficial snobs, but with something deeply felt and experienced.¹³

Although in recent years the relationship between neorealism and melodrama has been re-evaluated in the light of Christine Gledhill's formulation of the latter as less a genre than a mode or modality that spans texts and genres, earlier critics failed to value the melodramatic as an essential component of neorealism (Gledhill 2000, 229).¹⁴ Bazin's designation of the 'demon of melodrama' that in his opinion marred neorealism is testament to this.¹⁵ Even the pioneering works in the 1970s, first by Vittorio Spinazzola, and then by Adriano Aprà and Claudio Carabba on popular Italian cinema, failed to fully re-evaluate the *melodramma* beyond a sense of its 'consolatory function' (Aprà and Carabba 1976, 41) for the Italian public after the trauma of war and occupation: according to Spinazzola, 'the opera film excited and soothed the tumultuous feelings of a public that had just left behind the nightmare of war, lifting them to a higher plane'.¹⁶ Spinazzola's view is tied to his conception of this popular genre as founded on 'retrograde ideological principles' (1975, 8), and this notion of the limited function of the opera film is closely related to his view of its audience, the 'lower classes' or 'ceti popolari', 'hungry for opera', watching the films in 'second-run cinemas on the outskirts of cities' (Casadio 1995, 11).¹⁷ Yet Spinazzola also interestingly hints at an important ulterior function of these films for this 'starving' public who were also able to choose from a large range of Hollywood films: 'the formula of the opera film guaranteed for a huge audience of fans emotions that no American film could guarantee' (Spinazzola 1975, 57).¹⁸

Emotion and affect

The role of emotion in working through the traumas and challenges of the post-war period has been elaborated more recently by Mary Wood, who notes that melodrama is usually understood to flourish in times of social change, and states that the 'affective charge' (2005, 207) of melodrama needs to be considered as a means of restoring complexity in representations of the post-war period. For Peter Brooks, as for Wood, melodrama, in its visual, narrative and gestural excess, is not just as an escapist or consolatory mode, but signals a 'possibility of moral, emotional and ethical expression' (Brooks 1976, 55).

In *Avanti a lui* . . . the affective charge of *Tosca*'s 'political melodrama' (Rutherford 2008, 47) can be read most obviously in the key scene in which Gino Sinimberghi as Marco sings Cavaradossi's famous aria 'E lucevan le stelle', the character's nostalgic evocation of his passion for Tosca as he contemplates his own death.¹⁹ The first part of the scene is cross-cut with the opera's backstage preparations of the stage-hands who are working to help Cavaradossi escape. Then, when the second part of the aria begins, with the plaintive 'O dolci baci, o languide carezze', there is a sustained focus on Sinimberghi, who is performing on-stage in front of a painted backcloth of St Peter's. As he sings, Sinimberghi's bodily intensity and investment in the performance increase: he rises from the desk at which he is writing his farewell letter to Tosca, and throws his arms wide, swaying unsteadily on his feet. The singer's sob as his voice breaks on the final line, 'Muio disperato, e non ho amato mai tanto la vita, tanto la vita', becomes a quasi-swoon, as he staggers backwards and collapses at his desk weeping.²⁰ There are multiple levels of meaning in this moment of performance: the famous aria from a famous opera that a cinema audience has been awaiting, the character in the opera who thinks that he is going

to die and is saying farewell to life and love, and the film character (Marco) who is contemplating his own arrest and imminent torture, thus encouraging the audience to think of the sobs as 'real'. The cross-cutting in previous scenes between the opera performance and the torture by the SS of Marco's Polish maid and Jewish music teacher has already made effective links between on-stage and off-stage events.

This release of feeling on the part of Marco/Sinimberghi/Cavaradossi is highly significant: the swoon with which the aria ends and the sobbing in which he indulges put on display the emotional body of the male protagonist in an unusual way in this period. Peter Brooks has written of eighteenth-century stage melodrama as a 'text of muteness' in which gestural excess suggests other meanings that cannot be generated by the linguistic code (Brooks 1976, 72). In relation to opera he goes further: 'the habitual recourse of Romantic drama and melodrama to the gestural trope of the inarticulate suggests... why these genres tend towards a full realization in opera, where music is charged with the burden of ineffable expression' (1976, 75). In Sinimberghi's performance the gestural code of opera, together with the music, clearly clashes with a naturalistic or realistic performance style, but the histrionics of Cavaradossi and his bodily involvement in performance communicate a 'repressed affect' via the signs of the body (Brooks 2000, 119).²¹

The film stages, particularly through Marco, an emotional and performative excess that has always been regarded by film critics as somehow suspicious: the prejudice against such a style rests partly on the affect that it tries to draw from the spectator. The affect of the presumed spectator (weeping, rapture, goose-bumps, shivering, what Michel Poizat calls 'the strange pleasure indeed that admits all the affective signs of a bereavement'; 1992, 4) is intense,²² and indeed Linda Williams has aligned melodrama with horror and pornography as 'body genres', where 'the body of the spectator is caught up in an almost involuntary mimicry of the emotion or sensation of the body on the screen' (1991, 4).²³ For Williams the 'sensational body' of the spectator of melodrama is stimulated by a female body expressing its emotions on screen, whereas in *Avanti a lui...* the audience is authorised to sob because the 'repressed affect' is transmitted in a scene of metaperformance, in which the *divo's* bodily performance diegetically encodes the trauma of suffering and occupation, and signals to an audience both a nostalgia for a better time, and a final relief that suffering has ended.²⁴ This scene, with its combination of gestural excess and lyrical nostalgia, offers both a model of heroic masculinity that complicates itself through emotional display, and, of course, a showcase for Sinimberghi's performance.

Marco's weeping has further interesting connotations. In the context of the immediate post-war period, marked by male stars who were largely solid symbols of a slightly severe masculinity (Amedeo Nazzari, Raf Vallone, Gino Cervi, Fosco Giachetti, Andrea Checchi), the emotionality of Sinimberghi's performance, particularly in the Resistance context, is striking. Mary Wood has written of Amedeo Nazzari, star of 1930s cinema and then of many Matarazzo films of the late 1940s, that his 'openness to affect and emotionality' (2004, 139) was perceived as necessary to make sense of a changing world. However, she is referring to his persona in these Matarazzo films of the late 1940s. The models of masculinity associated with the Resistance in this period are heroic, sacrificial and largely stoic: Manfredi and Francesco in *Roma città aperta*, Bruno in *Due lettere anonime* (*Two Anonymous Letters*, Camerini, 1945), the partisans of *Paisà*, of *Un giorno nella vita* (*A Day in the Life*, Blasetti, 1946), and of *Il sole sorge ancora* (*The Sun Still Rises*,

Vergano, 1946).²⁵ The correlation between this restrained model of heroism and a *performative* restraint is articulated by Gian Piero Brunetta, when he writes of *Roma città aperta* that 'the action is reduced to a minimum. The acting is unnoticeable' (Brunetta 2003, 63). Whilst there is much more work to be done on the figure of the partisan in Italian post-war cinema, it is certainly true, as Ruth Ben-Ghiat says, that 'the heroes of many Resistance movies, for example, responded to the challenge of elaborating a non-fascist model of an armed and virile Italian manhood' (2005, 338).²⁶

What is crucial in *Avanti a lui* . . . is that the hero is, of course, ostensibly performing his emotion within the diegesis, on-stage, and off-stage. Sinimberghi's character is not expressive in the same way. This division between a space of performativity and a space of 'authenticity' is crucial to conceptions of the hero's emotionality. For example, in the opera we first see Sinimberghi launching into the famous sung outburst 'Vittoria!' ('Victory!') at the news of Napoleon's victory at the battle of Marengo. In the scene, Cavaradossi has been dragged in from the torture chamber, and told that Tosca has betrayed him to save his life. The theme of torture has already been seen off-stage in the film, as the Jewish music teacher kills himself in prison after hearing the cries of prisoners being tortured by the Nazis in the next cell. Cavaradossi has fainted due to torture, and it is only at the news of the victory that he is able to lift himself from the couch: Sinimberghi drops to his knees, as if his body cannot support his weight, and is lifted up by Magnani. He staggers over to Scarpia and, still supported by Magnani, strikes a declamatory posture, arm outstretched, one leg forward and eyes upturned to heaven as he sings 'Libertà sorge, crollan tirannidi!'. He collapses before being dragged off stage by Scarpia's men, completely limp.

The second appearance of the 'Vittoria' motif is at the film's ending, when Marco and Ada are in hiding, in ordinary clothes, bickering over their fate, and are interrupted by news of the liberation of Rome. Marco flings his arms into the air and, accompanied by an invisible orchestra, sings the first line of the 'Vittoria!' outburst. It is only through such a moment of excess, which interrupts the naturalistic *mise-en-scène* and performance styles in this part of the film, that true emotional expression is seemingly possible. The film, however, then immediately cuts to the stage of the Teatro Reale, where the aria continues in front of a rapturous audience of Allied troops. This time, though, the camera studies the effects of the singing, rather than the performance itself, focusing on the rapt faces of the intradiegetic audience: we are clearly invited to think that the soldiers (one of whom is the Englishman sheltered by Marco and Ada), who are absorbed in Cavaradossi's performance) are understanding the parallels between the victory at Marengo and the Liberation of Rome. As the last lines fade out, and Cavaradossi is once again dragged off stage, the film immediately cuts to the audience rising to applaud the opera's conclusion, so that Cavaradossi's 'Vittoria!' becomes the final performance of the film.

In addition to the emotional performance and bodily investment of the star, it must be remembered that the text within the film, *Tosca*, is one that was seen, particularly in Italy, as feminised. Alexandra Wilson has discussed Puccini's reputation in Italy as a 'feminised composer' whose sensuality, eroticism and internationalism compromised his potential to be the next great 'national' composer after Verdi. In particular, *Tosca* has been labelled 'cheap melodrama' (Wilson 2007, 69) or, in Kerman's famous words, 'a shabby little shocker' (1989, 206), an opera that is insincere and fraudulent precisely because it is about deception, fraud and performance.²⁷ The choice of *Tosca* as the opera that parallels the activities of the Resistance is significant: as well as being Puccini's attempt to write an

Italian national story, it is also an opera which, in its recounting of the Napoleonic invasion of Italy, 'gestures towards an imaginary national unity' (Tambling 1996, 116). The film's use of *Tosca's* plot points to a postwar parallel with the nineteenth-century nation that was not yet brought into being in *Tosca*, and suggests a deeper significance of the popularity of the opera film in this period, with its widespread use of nineteenth-century operatic texts.

On a further level, Tambling's reading of *Tosca* as an opera that points out the hysteria of fascism itself (1996, 132), with Scarpia read as a proto-fascist (1996, 25) opens up interesting avenues of exploration. Whilst Verdi's operas have been extensively read in terms of patriotism and collective feeling, Puccini's mobilisation of Italian history for ends that are avowedly decadent and absorbed by their own hyperbolic emotion is appropriated by Gallone and reworked, so that the suicide of Tosca, 'singing's most symbolic gesture', is avoided.²⁸ Instead Ada and Marco escape and prosper, so that they can return to the Teatro Reale and perform again, and again we do not see the opera's ending and Tosca's leap. We never see it in the film and this may be both celebration (Tosca is not doomed, the forces of evil are defeated), and historical fantasy: Italy is, in this film, perpetually rejoicing at its liberation, forever poised on the verge of re-making itself.

Magnani

If the role of Cavaradossi offers Sinimberghi a chance to enact a type of male emotionality rare on screen in postwar Italy apart from in melodrama, the role played by Anna Magnani is equally intriguing. Danielle Hipkins writes that postwar Italian cinema 'displaced a sense of guilt onto female sexual behaviour', often through the character of the prostitute (2007, 102). *Tosca's* dangerous proximity to Scarpia is mirrored in Ada's dangerous involvement with the Germans: both are inadvertently at fault for the arrest of their lover. Their complicity is linked to their status as performing women, who inevitably rely on duplicity and feminine wiles to further their aims. Magnani's character survives precisely because she does not have the authenticity of a Pina in *Roma città aperta*, who cannot and will not conceal her feelings and emotions.

However, the film ultimately circumvents 'the undoing of women' that Catherine Clément posits as opera's essence, in having Tosca avoid the jump from Castel Sant'Angelo, and instead allows Ada's competence to win the day, through her orchestration of Mario's escape, and her contacts with the stagehands. It is significant that Magnani's role here plays with the diva figure: Clément describes Floria Tosca, the opera singer, as the part in which 'the myth of the prima donna find[s] its perfect fulfilment' (Clément 1999, 38). And as Mary Wood points out, Magnani's screen persona in this period reconciles her image as the 'anti-diva' with an emotionality which is 'metonymic of the sufferings of women in the period of postwar chaos' (2000, 154).²⁹ Interestingly the film somewhat downplays Magnani's displays of emotion relative to Sinimberghi's: her 'Vissi d'arte' is heard offstage, and is mostly rendered through its effect on Cavaradossi in the dressing room. This lack of singing may be partly driven by the obvious dubbing of Magnani, which rather undermines the effectiveness of her *Tosca* performance. During the opera parts of the film, Magnani is obliged to do a lot of silent acting as the director seems to want to avoid showing her dubbed singing; instead, she reacts to Scarpia and Cavaradossi as they sing, or we see long sequences of her moving

without singing, for example when she has killed Scarpia and moves silently around his body, places candlesticks on the floor beside him, and pauses for a long time to look at his corpse.

Although Magnani gets to demonstrate less of her characteristic verve and unruliness than usual, she does use her femininity to attract the German officers with whom she flirts, extracting money from them which she then secretly passes to the Resistance. She slips between two modes: she is both a *femme fatale*, archly telling her maid to prepare an extremely low-cut dress for her dinner with the Germans, and her more characteristic *popolana* (woman of the people) figure, sympathetically asking the hotel waiter for news of the partisans, and later seeking him out to hand over the money. Magnani's famously voluble and unruly persona is here interestingly inflected: her earthiness, spontaneity and authenticity, which were so prized by critics after *Roma città aperta*, are combined with a gestural expressiveness that seems to belong to the world of opera, rather than that of neorealism.

The perceived authenticity of Magnani's *popolana* persona after *Roma città aperta* ignores the fact that many of her films of the 1940s rely on a star image that is actually 'theatrical and melodramatic', and which is authorised by a skilfully delivered 'illusion of authenticity' (Landy 2004, 92). In fact, Magnani was primarily known for playing performing women prior to *Roma città aperta*, including in *La fuggitiva* (*The Fugitive*, Ballerini, 1941), *Teresa Venerdì* (De Sica, 1941), *La vita è bella* (*Life is Beautiful*, Bragaglia, 1943), and *L'ultima carrozzella* (*The Last Wagon*, Mattoli, 1943), and it was only later, after the influence of *Roma città aperta* spread, that she became associated with authenticity and with 'organic forms of representation' (Landy 2008, 91). This valorising of a perceived authenticity has meant that some of her other roles have been less critically appreciated and analysed. Pina's impassioned cry as she runs towards the lorry taking away her partner and is gunned down has heralded as the ur-scene of neorealism;³⁰ the duplicity and survival skills of Magnani as Tosca, who subverts the opera's famous ending, and ensures her partner's survival at the possible expense of the stagehands', have been overlooked.³¹

Conclusion

Angela Dalle Vacche has argued that neorealism effected a transition from the 'operatic' style of fascist cinema, in which 'the body is bound to statuesque poses and gestures' (1992, 6) to films in which the body 'produces an effect of spontaneity' and is no longer monumental. She states that neorealism offered a type of bodily expression based on nuanced gestures: 'in contrast to the marble heroes of fascist cinema, the body in Rossellini's neorealism is a human organism inhabited by the antithesis of sheer biology, the soul' (1992, 181). This body that expresses emotional truth thus takes the place of the 'operatic' body of fascism and public history, a body that clearly cannot be trusted to reveal anything, and the opposition suggests a reluctance to acknowledge the critical affective force of emotion and gesture in any context other than that of neorealism, or keyed into anything other than a politics of sacrifice. The ending of *Avanti a lui . . .* offers us the film's most realistic *mise-en-scène* and performance style, as Magnani, dressed in ordinary clothes, hair unkempt, rows with Sinimberghi's character over their actions. Sinimberghi, however, ruptures the codes of realism with his ecstatic 'Vittoria!' at the news of the Liberation, a cry that offers aural pleasure whilst also pointing up the limits of

realism in conveying to spectators the force and joy of this moment, a moment that requires bodily transport. The fact that, as noted earlier, the film then switches back to the space of the theatre to restage *Tosca* shows that the film holds firm to the view that only a melodramatic climax in the truest sense will suffice. The operatic or melodramatic body, as Gramsci was quick to recognise, offered pleasures that were deep and complex for spectators, from a distinctively Italian emotional register to a bodily performance that could provide 'through intensity of emotional involvement the opportunity to rehearse safely and work through new ways of acting and being in the world' (Wood 2005, 43).

Although *Avanti a lui tremava tutta Roma* was criticised for its lack of realism, and for its melodrama, Guglielmo Pescatore writes that because *Tosca* is so embedded in the Italian imaginary it is actually 'complementary to neorealism' (Pescatore 2001, 44–45).³² In the same way, melodrama and realism are not opposed, but complementary modes, and ways of playing out the same tensions between authentic behaviour and the desire for survival in the postwar period. Analysing the importance of body, voice and gesture and their production of emotion in these films offers us another way to read these tensions, and this analysis has only just begun: it can also demonstrate that popular forms such as the opera-film have an ideological significance beyond the merely consolatory and reactionary.

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Notes

1. See Forgacs (1989) on the contested status of neorealism in the postwar period.
2. The 'discourse of neorealism' can be understood as 'a set of prescriptive conditions, exclusions and institutions that circumscribe as well as generate utterances about Italian film. The discourse of neorealism is part of a broader privileging of realism in Western culture, but also one of its prime exhibits' (O'Leary and O'Rawe 2011, 107–08).
3. See Pistagnesi, Aprà, and Menon (1977, 40).
4. *Il Tempo*, December 8, 1946 ('*Avanti a lui tremava tutta Roma*'). There are some exceptions: *Cine Teatro* called it an excellent film (Valdata 1946, 8), whilst *Candido* ambiguously termed it a 'magnificent mess' (Bianchi 1946).
5. The other two directors 'purged' were Goffredo Alessandrini and Augusto Genina: all three were banned from cinematic activity for six months. See Di Giammatteo (1994, 68–70).
6. Casadio's words are actually 'rifarsi una verginità antifascista'. Spinazzola talks of Gallone's film as an 'example of the appropriation of some of the motifs of the Resistance in a popular and musical fashion' (Spinazzola 1975, 10); White says that 'we can only surmise at this distance in time that [*Avanti a lui...*] was atonement on Gallone's part for the cast of his earlier career' (White 1994, 281, emphasis in the original); Brunetta (1982, 476) writes that 'Gallone was seeking ideological rehabilitation after the brief formal period of purging that he had been subjected to'. Hillman calls the film a 'mixture of bad conscience and self-compromise' (Hillman 2002, 222).
7. Likewise Hillman (2002, 221) describes the film as '*Rome Open City* meets *Tosca*'.
8. In addition, Forgacs notes that *Roma città aperta* exemplified Rossellini's 'post-war self-making' (2000, 63), after his Fascist past; however, he believes that the film 'was not merely an opportunistic or cynical self-recycling' but a sincere recantation.

9. Pitassio notes the absence of the term *melodramma* from critical discourse in the 1930s in any sense other than in the sense of film adaptations of opera (Pitassio 2007, 81). Paolo Noto (2010) has traced this absence right through Italian criticism of the 1950s.
10. Caldiron is careful to distinguish 'sung opera' or 'melodramma cantato' from the *mélo*, which he understands as synonymous with 'feuilleton-style cinema' or 'cinema feuilletonistico' (Caldiron 1999, 33).
11. It is important to note that Gallone was also known for his earlier opera films, including *E lucevan le stelle* (1935), *Casta diva* (1935), *Giuseppe Verdi* (1938), *Manon Lescaut* (1940), *Il sogno di Butterfly* (1939), as well as co-writing the 1941 version of *Tosca* directed by Renoir on which Visconti also worked.
12. Casadio (1995, 10) mentions the 'almost unanimous chorus of protests and refusals in respect of this film' among film and music critics of the period.
13. Forgacs (1999, 373).
14. On the melodrama of *Roma città aperta*, see Forgacs (2000) and Landy (2004).
15. 'Unfortunately the demon of melodrama that Italian filmmakers seem incapable of exorcising takes over every so often, thus imposing a dramatic necessity on strictly foreseeable events' (Bazin 2005, 31). In Bayman's words: 'melodrama was treated by both Italian and French critics as foreign to the aims of neorealism' (2009, 51). Yet the 1955 polemic between Guido Aristarco and Luigi Chiarini over Visconti's *Senso*, concerning the critical function of the film's melodramatic representation of the Risorgimento, is testament to the ability of melodrama to trouble notions of realism held by left-wing Italian critics. See Marcus (1986, 164–87) for a concise account of this polemic.
16. Spinazzola notes, in fact, that 'the first postwar *divi* were two singers: Tito Gobbi and Gino Bechi' (Spinazzola 1975, 57).
17. Casadio also cites Torri, who says that these films were 'Division Two products', which would be passively received by audiences (Casadio 1995, 10).
18. Two films of this period that did unite 'cinema canzonettistico' and the Resistance were the Neapolitan dramas '*O sole mio* (Gentilomo, 1946) and *Il monastero di Santa Chiara* (Sequi, 1947), films that exemplify the 'contamination' between neorealism and the Neapolitan 'sceneggiata' form (Caldiron 1999, 34).
19. Rutherford refers to this moment as 'automourning' (2008, 47), while Tambling describes it as a kind of erotic consolation (Tambling 1996, 125).
20. Russell (1984, 151) writes rather dismissively of 'the usual tenor sobs' that this aria provokes.
21. Pescatore also discusses the peculiar somatic qualities of the voice in opera: 'The singing voice, in opera must... have a somatic quality. Shivering, throbbing, trembling... the voice is body' (Pescatore 2001, 14).
22. In a similar vein Landy (1996, 117) discusses opera's creation of a 'circuitry of affect that brings audience and text together in a bond of commonality'.
23. Gianni Canova comments on this critical disavowal of bodily affect: 'This diffidence on the part of "highbrow" critics raises the suspicion that the repression or interdiction [of pathos] are aimed not so much at individual films or genres, as at the emotional and bodily reactions that they arouse in the spectator' (1987, 30).
24. Although we can only speculate on how film audiences in 1946 responded to these scenes, it is certainly true that reception works in complex and unexpected ways. Clément points out that in the 1920s '*E lucevan le stelle*' had taken on, for some, a peculiar ideological meaning: 'when Sacco and Vanzetti began their last walk – to their execution, they sang Mario's aria from the last act of *Tosca*: "O dolci baci, o languide carezze..." Oh sweet kisses, oh languid caresses, the prisoner sings in the moment of execution: in the opera it was a farewell to life. In the American prison where the two convicts were going to die, like the fictional Mario, from police abuse under a racist regime, it was a farewell to the Italy of their childhood, an operatic farewell' (1999, 10–11).
25. Landy (2004, 102) notes that the male figures of *Roma città aperta*, Manfredi, Francesco and Don Pietro, 'are drawn from the repertoire of Western images of heroism and sacrifice'. Their passionate outbursts in the service of the partisan cause are counterpointed to the self-pitying exclamations of the cowardly Austrian deserter.

26. Dell'Agnese writes in a similar vein that, in literature and film depicting the Resistance, 'to the brave partisan, represented as the new model of heroic masculinity, are opposed Fascists (and Nazis) who are not only not heroic but not even manly' (2007, 14).
27. Indeed Hillman criticises the film for being too contrived and 'operatic': 'dramatic effectiveness fades at the end of Gallone's film, however, with a highly operatic deus-ex-machina effect that expels dramatic tension' (Hillman 2002, 222).
28. Clément (1999, 38).
29. Harvey (1988, 7) notes that Magnani 'literally assumes the mantle' of legendary Italian diva Francesca Bertini, who had played Tosca in the 1918 film directed by Alfredo De Antoni.
30. Marcus (2008, 428) calls it the 'scena madre' of neorealism.
31. Thirteen years later, Rossellini would make a film about precisely this topic: *Il generale della Rovere*, in which Vittorio De Sica impersonates a Resistance hero, and employs his performative skills in the service of personal survival.
32. Pescatore adds that '*Tosca* necessarily had to come into contact not only with postwar cinema but with neorealism'.

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