

## Ornament & Crime: Power, Gender, and Domestic Opulence of Gomorrah (2014-21)

### Abstract

Italian TV series *Gomorrah – The Series* (2014-21) presents a contemporary dramatisation of the lives of the Neapolitan Camorra based on Roberto Saviano's novel (2006). This visual analysis critically examines the symbolism of the fictional domestic interiors of the main protagonists, Genny Savastano and Ciro Di Marzio, who inhabit the La Scampia neighbourhood of urban Naples.

The rise in quality contemporary TV dramas which give high attention to character development, relationships and the elongated storyline, has allowed the production quality to flourish. Thus, fictional interiors within quality TV series, such as *Gomorrah*, have become integral for the viewer to assimilate narrative and meaning from the interior spaces. In this close analysis, I use the lens of interior design to examine the *mise-en-scène* via the combination of components from the atmosphere, set, lighting, and narrative. June Whiteread suggests the *mise-en-scène* of film and TV seeks to: '*whisper softly in our ear, whispering suggestions, conjuring a mood, evoking emotions and responses*' (Whitehead, 2017:10). It allows our eyes and imaginations to consider how it might feel to be in, to smell and to emulate the emotion within the fictional interior. Key to this visual scrutiny is how the curation of objects, furniture, colour palettes, ornamentation and decorative motifs serve as narrative backdrops. This critical analysis explores the boundaries of power, class and gender through the fictional interiors of *Gomorrah*, where the hard, masculine architecture conceals the jewel-like interiors encased within the darkness.

**Keywords:** Ornament / Brutalism / Interior / Opulence / Masculinity/ Femininity

Pamela Flanagan, Programme Leader BA Hons Interior Design

**Email:** [p.flanagan@gsa.ac.uk](mailto:p.flanagan@gsa.ac.uk)

**Address:** Glasgow School of Art, 164 Renfrew Street, Glasgow G3 6RQ

### Bio:

Pamela Flanagan is the Programme Leader for BA Hons Interior Design at Glasgow School of Art. Her current research uses interior design practice as a tool to analyse fictional spaces represented within Film/TV and their contribution to the narrative and viewer experience. In particular, her interest lies in how space creates a dialogue between fiction/reality and narrative/character to inform, imagine and examine the interpretation of fictional interiors.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1194-1442>

## Introduction

Located on the urban edge of modern-day Naples, *Gomorra - The Series* (2014-21), represents the dark and brutal underworld of organised crime gangs based on Roberto Saviano's acclaimed novel (2006) within the La Scampia neighbourhood. The drama centres on the Camorra, the traditional term established as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century which describes the specific mafia groups in the Italian region of Campania. The Camorra is more than just a criminal gang trading drugs, counterfeit products, and money laundering; this is a historical structure which is business-driven and permeates the economic and political systems (Saviano 2020, Cautiero 2023).

*Gomorra* ran for five seasons, with the producer Sky Atlantic selling the series to over 150 countries therefore reaching a global audience and gaining critical acclaim for its genuine and engrossing characters (Povoledo, 2021). The unique Naples dialect, the use of untrained actors and the real-life location further enhance the authenticity for the viewer. The story of *Gomorra* can transcend cultural and geographical boundaries for international audiences as a relatable story of underground gangsters and organised crime that exists in all corners of societies across the world.

The two main protagonists, *Ciro Di Marzio* (Marco D'Amore) and *Genny Savastano* (Salvatore Esposito) represent a modern version of the Neapolitan Camorra. The dramatisation unfolds the adversity of their violent lives caught in the complex web of organised crime with heavy and brutal expectations upon them for differing reasons. *Ciro*, nicknamed *L'Immortale*, is a consigliere to *Pietro Savastano*, the *Padrone*. He has been appointed as the mentor to *Pietro's* son, *Genny*, who is being groomed for succession. *Ciro* and *Genny* perform their masculinity through acts of violence and displays of arrogance conveyed through the physicality of their assertive posturing and abrupt mannerisms which are complemented by their smart-come-streetwear regalia. Throughout the viewing of the series, the characters of *Genny* and *Ciro* are testing for the viewer as exceptionally violent and morally undesirable beings, however as this viewer-protagonist relationship develops through the series, our bias', allegiance and affiliation towards the protagonists constantly fluctuate as we embrace the world of *Gomorra* (De Pascalis 2018, Renga 2019, Smith 1995).

In *Gomorra*, the viewer is invited into the narrative world via the interior contexts, and it is this interplay of the interior and characters where visual markers within the domestic interiors expose intimate facets of their characters beyond the brutality of their lifestyle. Through *mise-en-scène* analysis, the visual survey seeks to uncover the darkness within the homes rather than the external and public spaces of violence within *Gomorra*. Therefore, this essay focuses on the domestic interiors of the main protagonists by dissecting and interpreting the aesthetic language of the fictional interiors via the *mise-en-scène* (Gibb, 2002). The core of the analysis explores how the somewhat mundane domestic interior reveals a deeper

understanding of the protagonists through gender, power and domestic opulence. These domestic interiors, as a foil, operate as visual cues using the curation of objects, furniture, ornamentation and motifs to perform a narrative dialogue, allowing insight into *Ciro* and *Genny* within the private sanctuary of their homes. The composition of the domestic landscape with ‘emotional paraphernalia’ (Begiato, 2018:23) of the self through this curation makes visible to the viewer how to understand the character’s individuality, status and cultural positioning within the narrative.

This close analysis from the lens of interior design seeks to reveal an alternative perspective of the *mise-en-scène* of fictional interiors. Although the disciplines of interior design and set design have similar attributes, skills and creative conceptual approaches there appears to be a missing connection to bring both disciplines together within a theoretical and academic discourse. This analysis aims to demonstrate the potential for interdisciplinary perspectives to harness a critical framework in the study of spatial-character narratives within contemporary TV dramas and how this relationship provides a unique visual insight into popular culture studies.

### **Le Vele de Scampia: The Brutalist Interior of the Camorra**

The Brutalist architecture of *La Scampia* stands like a fortress, a walled city cold in its demeanour on the edge of the city of Naples. The infamous phrase ‘see Naples and die’ (Anon), is at odds with the vision of Naples presented in *Gomorra*, and rather can be a literal interpretation of the brutality of killing within the drama. The unsightly, decaying, and austere landscape enhances this foreboding sense of darkness, presenting a place of unease, paranoia and death. Before the advent of the modernist architectural invasion of urban Naples, Benjamin and Lacis, in their 1925 essay, described the city of Naples as ‘craggy’ and ‘grey’ (1995:165). Despite this assumingly negative description, they lamented the city for its sense of theatre, from the secret and concealed entrances that behold beautiful churches and the intrigue experienced in the myriads of alleyways. These observations ring true to this modern version of Naples in *Gomorra* which is the antithesis of the picture postcard representation of Italy. The uninviting *La Scampia* neighbourhood is a paradox; it is a theatrical set for the Camorra who move within the compressed and inconspicuous landscape which conceals the private domestic opulence within.

*Le Vele di Scampia* is a genuine housing estate located on the Northern edge of Naples and is the home of *Gomorra*, (*Figure 1*). As a Modernist vision of post-war Italy, the collection of seven buildings was conceived between 1962 and 1975 by Italian architect Francesco di Salvo, whose utopian proposition for contemporary urban Neapolitan life sought to reimagine the distinctive nature of the traditional alleys and courtyards of Naples. Sadly, the vibrant re-interpretations of Old Naples did not transpire, and *Le Vele* became a place where there were little to no opportunities, or resources for its community (Saviano, 2020). The estate stands

on the edge of the city like an abandoned ship on the coastline. Its tiered, jagged form is unwelcoming, yet in equal part, the Brutalist form is visually appealing to the architect and designer's eye. And there lies in the predicament of this upturned hull of concrete that emulates a constant contradiction of the desired intent of the outsider versus the harsh reality of those within.

The architectural style of Brutalism has been codified as an honest architecture which holds authenticity, practicality and realism as its core with concrete used in its purest form, structural junctions and details left exposed (Banham, 1966). The Brutalist way of living dictated a reframing of the relationship between the exterior and the interior, and a downplaying of the individual through the modular and systematic interiors (Shonfield, 2020). This Brutalist monolith is anti-decorative – there is no place for sentimentality or attachment to the historical old-style Neapolitan aesthetics. In Le Vele, the architectural vision failed, or rather fought against the poetry of the archetype Italian lifestyle as coveted by the revered architect Gio Ponti in 1928: '*From the interior, the Italian-style home comes back out into the open with its porticoes and terraces...comforting inventions for serene dwelling*' (Bosoni, 2002: 150).

In contrast, the dark alleys and compressed walkways of Le Vele create an ideal criminal terrain providing corners for hiding and ambush (*Figure 2*). Simultaneously, the inward-facing apartment aspect and courtyard aspiration served as a modernist version of a panopticon to observe, control and confine the occupants within. This 18<sup>th</sup>-century architectural concept of Panopticons, conceived by Bentham(1748-1832) and further defined in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Foucault (1926-184), sought to use aspects of architecture and the interior for surveillance as a power dynamic through the organisation and control of activity and the seen and unseen gaze of the occupants within spatial structures (Fontana-Giusti, 2012).

Le Vele is, metaphorically, an essential character within the Gomorrah narrative (Brodesco & Mattiucci, 2017).

### **Casa Savastano: Power and the *nuovi ricchi***

Pietro Savastano casts a long shadow over the neighbourhood, one that his only son, Genny also exists under and within. As the Padrone, he is a feared and respected figure in La Scampia. To understand the domestic interiors of Ciro and Genny, we first must look at the home of Pietro Savastano to set the scene.

In series one of *Gomorrah*, the family home is occupied by Pietro, his wife Imma, and then teenage son Genny. The Savastano's villa appears proximate to La Vele di Scampia, yet it is isolated, and it differentiates from the concrete landscape of the neighbourhood with the aesthetics of a traditional Villa which would be more at home in the Italian countryside (*Figure 3*). The aesthetic vernacular of pink stucco, traditional window shutters, ornate

plaster details and palm trees detract from the dichotomy of traditional and contemporary as the villa is protected by bodyguards and digital surveillance. The power dynamic of the Panopticon comes into play with an intriguing question of who is watching whom. The Villa, like Pietro, occupies a prominent position within his kingdom and the gaze is restricted. The occupants of Le Vele are reminded of the Villa's elevated status in its aesthetic difference in its level of protection and scale. The palatial size contrasts with the compressed modular living within the modernist blocks as another assertion of status and power over the people.

The dominance of hierarchy continues into the interiors of the home which conveys a decidedly traditional patriarchal arrangement of the interior associated with 19<sup>th</sup>-century Western domesticity (Kinchen, 1996) and which serves the ego in a visual reinforcement of Pietro's status. The Savastanos can be defined as *nuovi ricchi* (new money) which is represented through the curation of furniture, objects and decoration as symbolisms of intellect, power and class. The home is an expression and extension of the self to '*reproduce own image and revel in possessions*' (Baudrillard [1968] 2020:21). From the bourgeoisie to the nuovi ricchi, taste and power provided a fertile area of study for 20<sup>th</sup>-century thinkers (Bachelard, Baudrillard, Benjamin, etc.) by whom and how taste is defined.

The question of what denotes cultural taste is apparent within the Study. Behind Pietro's desk hangs a gold-framed family portrait. The portrait can be interpreted as a naïve or self-taught style of painting (figure 4). Given Pietro's status, one would have anticipated a Masters' style painting to reinforce the illusion of self-appointed aristocracy. However, the viewer is permitted to decipher how the curation of Savastano's *nuovi ricchi* home curates the image of the self and taste concerning fine art and the applied art of interior decoration. Architectural critic Franco La Cecla intimates this aesthetic tension within the opulent Italian interiors as the creation of a 'grossness' (Bosoni, 2002:48) in the pompous decoration choices of those with financial privilege and positions of power, which manifests within the interior curation as a display of a particular lurid machismo. The selection of objects, artefacts and decoration communicate as an interior dialogue as discussed in Baudrillard's 1968 essay *Systems and Objects* (2020).

As a traditional masculine space (Kinchen 1996:169, Wigley 2002:72) the Study defines its gendered territory in dialogue with the framing of Pietro's desk. The desk is flanked with a bespoke fitted wall unit in which leather-bound books line the shelving alongside decorative ornaments and family heirlooms. Two symmetrical niches house life-size black ceramic panthers as symbolic protectors. Pietro is front and centre, seated on his throne, an old leather and mahogany carved chair, where he asserts the role of the conductor directing and orchestrating his empire from his headquarters (*Figure 4*). This is Pietro's room into which you must be invited and are at his behest. There are few seats in the Study; therefore, when the inner circle convenes, the hierarchy is reinforced through the arrangement of his soldiers forced to stand whilst orders are dictated. The material makeup of the room suggests a room that has overtones of old money, of a life passed down generations, a transference of wealth and knowledge. This is reinforced in the longevity of the fabrics and crafted furniture with a

palette of muted greens, leathers, dark wood and gold-gilded, which also postures as a working territory of prestige within the ranks. These materials endure and, over time, contain traces of patina and resilience to external forces.

In Italian culture, the dining room is perhaps the most important interior of the home which facilitates the tradition of a family gathering around food (Bosoni, 2002). However, there is a lack of warmth in the Savastano's Dining room (*Figure 5*). Their interactions are cool, distant and distracted by a dominating large flat-screen TV streaming 24-hour newsfeed. The constant movement of the digital screen is reflected on the shiny surfaces such as the glass tabletop, wine glasses and wall sconces. The illumination level is high and cool white, adding to the stimulation of the interior. The Dining table is adequate to seat an extended family in one sitting, but for a family of three, they are lost in the scale of the table, distanced from one another – it is hardly a cosy family dinner. This room is not one of love and warmth, this is a place for family business where the only nurturing is one of brutality and survival. The dining room further exerts male dominance with a regal palette of royal blue and gold, symbolic of Pietro's status. In contrast to the family portrait in the Study, a sexually provocative portrait of Imma is mounted in a gold gilded frame behind Pietro which demeans Imma to a trophy wife – she is reduced to an object which reinforces his dominance and power. Pietro's authoritative occupation of the interior is evident as he sits upon a reproduction Baroque couch with ease and entitlement. This is not a home of rest; it is a serious interior that requires its occupants to be switched on to command at a moment's notice. Thus, the body performs in conjunction with the objects of home (Begiato, 2018); the lurid patterns which festoon walls, surfaces, and upholstery act as a constant visual stimulant to keep the mind alert and the body upright by virtue of the rigidity of the furniture.

There are parallels between the curation of Savastano's and the Italian fashion designer, Gianni Versace's villa - the gilded frames, the inclusion of artworks, objects upon mantles, and gold and blue colour palettes (Versace, 1996). In both interiors, the feminine qualities of the delicate and the decorative are contained within defined, serious and substantial masculine framing (Soulillou, 2002:314). This masculine application of proportion and order frames the layers of gaudy patterns within the room. To compare these homes brings forth questions of class bias in how taste is acceptable or not. Versace's home was one curated by a designer who was immersed in fashion society, therefore the value of the aesthetic is placed more highly as one who sets the trends. Whereas Savestano's is the layman's interpretation of the classical style and is thus defined as chintzy or kitsch. The 'florid aesthetics' (Johnson-Schlee, 2022:31) are demoted from classical to chintz as a class derision of aspiring to the upper-class aesthetic of the home.

Italy is a country synonymous with high art culture, fashion and design (Bosoni, 2002), yet the Savastano's grandiloquent interiors challenge the preconceived perception of Italian

culture and taste (*Figures 5- 7*). As an Interior Designer, I am visually compromised by these interiors through the over-application of ornamentation, clashing patterns and colourways; the high level of shiny surfaces offers my eyes no sense of comfort or pleasure. I am recoiled by the interior styling due to the connotations that align with the homes of the aristocracy, traditional luxury hotels, and the homes of egotistic men in power. How has this become a thing? From demagogues to dictators and the Camorra, the predilection for gaudy, baroque interiors appear to be part and parcel for those with egotistical psychopathic tendencies – like a predator camouflaged within the jungle of a chaotic patterned interior. The aesthetic seeks to reinforce their occupant's sense of power and to demonstrate their wealth and class. As Jules Lubbrok eloquently states, '*If you want to see bad taste, go to the houses of the rich*' (1995:202). From this analysis of the Savastano's home, we can explore the influence of cultural traditions, class aspirations, and power and how this filtrates down into the domestic interiors of Ciro and Genny.

### **Ciro: The interior as protector**

The centre of Ciro Di Marzio's world is his daughter Maria-Rita and wife Debora. Having been orphaned and brought up on the godforsaken concrete streets of La Scampia, Ciro serves the role of protector for his family. Di Marzio's home appears adjacent to the infamous La Vele, in a failed post-war building that is equally unloved, decaying and defaced. However, the threshold into the apartment contrasts the hard exterior which beholds the soul of the family within. The idea of home may mean more to Ciro, given the loss of his parents at a young age. Therefore, his own home represents more than just a place; his home, consequently, is his existence (Wise, 2000:391).

The boundary between the exterior world is defended with layers of security and surveillance. The protection starts at the first boundary, the steel gate, which is guarded by one of the Disciples of the Camorra. Flanked a traditional family shrine, which consists of a collection of carefully placed religious artefacts, including two framed depictions of the Virgin Mary and Child, Saint Padre Pio and, intriguingly, several old family photos (*Figure 8*). The shrine is dressed like an altar with an intricate handmade lace cloth, and one wonders if these artefacts may be the only remnants of his family. In effect, these artefacts act as memorial devices to people (Begiato, 2018) and to the Catholic faith, as both a protector and a surveyor, which is intertwined in the fabric of everyday living.

The front door is a transition between two worlds: the violent streets outside and the sanctuary of home within. The door is reinforced, no doubt to be bulletproof, with a red-padded velvet panelling which metaphorically provides womb-like protection and muffles the sounds outside the home (*Figure 9*).

The Catholic surveillance continues like a Holy Trinity of protection: the Virgin Mary above the door frame, a framed image of Jesus adorned and a single set of rosary beads inside the entrance door. On the adjacent wall another makeshift family altar with artificial flowers, a traditional padded silk pillow and an edge-worn prayer card (*Figure 10*). These personal

devotional items infer personal meaning and an emotional connection to not just their family but also the iconic Catholic family. The traditional state-sanctioned iconography is disrupted by a kitsch statue of Jesus with an LED halo in the hall to greet and watch over its occupants. Perhaps we would not expect a young couple to prioritise religious decoration within a modern family home. These enchantments are culturally inherited rituals and objects to emote servitude in return for protection and to provide a sense of stability and pacify the mind in times of trouble (Wilson, 2014:98). They may be fearful to remove these bearers of spiritual protection; as Joanna Begiato explains, there is a complexity in the relationship to cultural objects that are signifiers in the wider society and with our inner world (Begiato, 2018:242). Given *Ciro's* status within the ranks of the Camorra, he is always a target. Despite all the physical barriers of a gate, reinforced door, bars on windows, spiritual armour, and his nickname of *L'Immortale*, *Ciro* is as vulnerable as the next man.

Like the Savastano's interior, *Ciro's* home exhibits characteristics of the male power archetype through the opulent feminine interior: renaissance furniture, gold plated detailing, fleur de lis motif, and patterned curtains adorned with swags and tails. The masculine dominance is reinforced in the heavy and ornate wooden display cabinet (*Figure 11*). Behind the glass protection, a range of objects, from traditional glassware and porcelain dinner sets, are displayed, which may be assumed as items passed down or wedding gifts. Daniel Miller argues the duality of how we present ourselves in the home for others and for ourselves is complex due in part to the combination of identity, culture and status like a mirror that is 'broken, torn and made whole' (Miller, 2001:15). Equally these objects are memories contained and displayed as souvenirs of the domestic (Stewart, 2007:157). For example, the Alessi silverware displayed on the lower shelf appears to conflict with the traditional wares. The combination of old and new creates the many fragments that constitute the richness of home, as claimed by Andrea Branzi (Bosoni, 2002:157), which is furthered by Alessi's brand ethos, which seeks to add poetry to the mundane of everyday (Bosoni, 2002)

*Ciro's* home gives the impression of being authentically a family home through the warmth of decoration in the interior, unlike the regal symmetry applied within the Savastanos where nothing appears out of place. The complexity of *Ciro's* home, while it presents authoritative aesthetics, there are hints of diversion and sophistication. In particular, the family portrait is a photograph which captures their joy and love unlike the staid painted portrait of the Savastanos (*Figure 12*). However, the portrayal of a loving family is decimated when *Ciro* strangles Deborah to death as she threatens to expose him. The family portrait takes on new meaning and becomes a shine to the lost family. The juxtaposition of the loving husband and murderer contradicts the world presented within the home and amplifies the complex, indoctrinated life in the Camorra. The elements within the interior of the home, such as the family photo, the Catholic icons and the general warmth of domesticity, contribute towards building compassion with *Ciro* despite his violent traits (Rosso, 2017:13).

### **Genny: Hyper-masculine interior**

Genny's shift from apprentice to the master, captures a tension through the opposition of body, space and furniture. We witness how Genny Savastano evolves from a stropy teenager, dressed in a sportswear hoodie to a barbaric commander suited and booted in black, a look underpinned by violence and authority (Bari, 2020). Genny seeks to reinforce his newly acquired status through the reconstruction of self and remoulding of the Savastano name into his own. In *Figure 13*, the young Genny is perched on the edge of the faux renaissance chair, exhibiting an uncertainty in his body-space relation – the body hunched over and made smaller in deference to this father. In Casa Savastano, he will always be the child and play the inferior role within this domain of his father. In contrast in *figure 14*, the adult Genny presents himself with authority, asserting his body-space with a defiant gaze. With the confident posturing within his interior, we can consider the furniture as an extension of the body-self (Kingwell, 2002:173), unlike the young Genny, where there is unease and a sense of not belonging in the chair. Genny's physical adornment conveys a more masculine presentation. Gone is the incessant twisting of the family signet ring on his finger, symbolic of an unequivocal anxiety to the Camorra family. He now presents as the measured leader announcing his masculinity in the immaculate tended beard and refined attire to communicate his status as head of La Scampia.

Within Genny's version of the Study, the interior reinforces gender and power within. In *Figure 14*, the framed image appears to be a work of art, not yet a family portrait, as his initiation of empire building in La Scampia is just beginning. There is a clear rejection of the classical ornamentation of his family home with artworks framed with modern, sleek chrome frames. The refined aesthetics co-ordinate with his attire with the palette of satin black and polished gold highlights. Overall, this setting composed of a minimalist-meets-bling palette creates a compositional balance of taste rather than the gaudy and busy interior of his parents. The Savestano's home asserted its traditional form of masculinity through the over-application of the feminine elements of pattern and decoration, reliant upon historical domestic aesthetics. Genny, however, exudes the toxic masculinity of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – one which is both hyper and toxic. It is an aesthetic which promotes the masculine over the perceived feminine palette.

The aesthetic rejection of the traditional home can be interpreted as the assertion of self and elimination of his father's control over him. In his own interior Genny can reproduce his own image and revel in his possessions (Lawrence, 1987:184). This reconstruction of the self and family is furthered in the emergence of the matrimonial home of Genny and Azzurra. Located in a modern high-rise residential building there is a significant contrast to both the Savestano's Villa and Ciro's tenement apartment. There is a noted absence of visible security, which given Genny's status one might question this arrogance. However, it appears the apartment is located elsewhere – Genny has not just broke free from his father but also the fortress of La Scampia. The disassociation negates the need for vigilance. This sense of superiority and arrogance are emblematic in the positioning of the apartment which overlooks

La Scampia from afar and symbolises their rise to the top of the empire, literally and figuratively.

The disintegration of traditional domestic boundaries and thresholds continues within the interior of their open-plan apartment, allowing free movement between each designated function, from living to dining to the bedroom (*Figure 15*). Interior elements of masculine and feminine intertwine more succinctly within Genny and Azzurra's home, perhaps an analogy for the relationship dynamic. Azzurra is an independent woman and has no intention of being dominated or a long-suffering Camorra wife.

The equality of feminine and masculine is evident in the decoration and furniture throughout their apartment. A military Prussian blue palette to walls and columns is adorned with a metallic copper feather motif, which glistens under the light emitting from the designer gold wall sconces (*Figure 16*). The furniture is a hybrid of old and new. The contemporary interpretation of a Chesterfield suite upholstered with a plush velvet flocked with an abstracted traditional vine pattern. The furniture arrangement has less of a rigid and impersonal appearance, unlike Pietro and Imma's home. There is intimacy provided by the proximity of placement of furniture for conversation, not business. For example, the mirrored dining table is an appropriate scale for the room, and although Genny and Azzurra sit opposite ends of the table the distance is sociable and one of equals.

The interior is adorned with artefacts displayed on black shelving and glass furniture pieces. These objects are not displayed as enchantments, these are new and purposefully selected in the curation of themselves. They are not hand-downs laden with memories or antiques to reinforce status; rather, this is more like a show home where objects are placed to project an aspirational lifestyle where the occupant is not emotionally attached to possessions as in previous generations. There is no sentimentality here, unlike *Ciro's* home, which exuded a lived-in family home. Like the old Savestano's home, there is an underlying edge of status and power. However, there is no suggestion that Genny conducts his business within the home, that is contained within the boundaries of La Scampia.

One object which stands out in the living room is the royal blue statue of the Goddess Nike, a symbol of victory. It is in this object the absence of religious icons or paraphernalia is observed – might Nike be a symbolic play on Azzurra as the Virgin Mary, the matriarchal head of the new Trinity of Savestano's and no longer being in the shadow of Pietro or *Ciro*? The combination of black (Genny) and blue (Azzurra) throughout the home is symbolic of their relationship as a partnership, in business and marriage. The regal and godly combine to demonstrate wealth and dominance as applied decoration; a fleur de lis wallpaper adorned with a three-dimensional appliqué crown set against angel wings. Above the sofa, a pop-art-inspired portrait of Azzurra hangs which is the opposite of the sexualised painting of Imma. Azzurra's face, centred in the dollar note, is decorated with diamantes personifies her as a woman with power and autonomy, not a sexualised object for consumption. (*Figure 15*).

In Genny's parental home, the interior was harshly lit with cold white lighting, but within his apartment, the lighting accentuates the regal and modern decoration. A blue LED lighting around the window frames the cityscape below allowing Genny to survey his Kingdom from a safe distance (*Figure 17*). Unlike the Savestano's, where the gaze was restricted from the interior to the exterior for security purposes, or Ciro's heavily draped windows. Dressing a window was not only practical but also a traditional indicator of wealth, with sumptuous fabrics to adorn windows and doors (Hollander, 2011). However, in Genny and Azzurra's apartment, there is no added protection or restriction to the view in or out with layers of voiles, blinds or curtains. Quite the contrary, they do not perceive the need to camouflage either the interior or themselves, and they boldly expose themselves to the world outside.

The blue theme continues with a neon blue love heart encased in a clear acrylic frame above the marital bed which contains a subtle nod to Catholicism with the inclusion of a small crucifix within the neon heart. An oversized bedhead is embellished with two gold crowns and a faux antique gold plaque, which appears to depict a historical reference - perhaps a reference to Azzurra's Roman connections. Dark satin sheets adorn the bed and, like a black mirror, reflect the neon blue haze like a city street at night - dark, moody and sexy. A leather throw on the bed, perhaps the masculine companion to the softness of the bed sheets - peculiar coupling much like Genny (the rough) and Azzurra (the refined). The manifestation of the old-new hybrid is evident – the contemporary play on a damsel damask wallpaper, the silver painted 20<sup>th</sup> century sideboard re-appropriated as a dressing table and the re-appropriate gilded frame as a mirror to reflect the ultimate self-portrait (*Figure 18*).

In contrast to his parental home, the interior of Genny and Azzurra's apartment is not dependent on traditional furniture, ornate patterns, oversized objects or symmetrical placement. The curation of the interior appears to be in dialogue with the occupants and symbolic of a marriage of partnership between two alphas. It does, however, like his parent's home, assert power and identity which is distinguished.

## **Conclusion**

*Gomorra* presents a rich viewing experience in which the interior plays a pivotal role in the overarching narrative. The dynamic relationship between the protagonists and the domestic interiors is emphasised through the melodramatic narrative, which, as Diedre Pribam argues, 'makes sense of our sociocultural worlds' (2020:148).

In this close analysis, I have sought to explore how the interior as a *mise-en-scène* provides an insight into themes of identity, status and power of the male occupants. In dissecting the content of the main protagonist's homes, we can understand the significance of objects, furniture, colour palettes, ornamentation & decorative motifs within the telling of the story. And the importance of how the interaction of these components constructs and reconstructs

identities, familial ties and a sense of belonging (Begiato, 2018). The interdependence of masculine and feminine elements provides compelling contradictions. The predilection for overtly ornate, floral and effeminate interiors seems to be a common aesthetic in the domestic domains of powerful, patriarchal and violent men. The house, as a masculine domain, seeks to control and organise through feminine decoration; thus, it is done so to please the dominant gaze and occupation of the male (Wigley, 1992:360). Therefore, enshrouding oneself within a nature-meets-gaudy sanctuary serves as an interior counterbalance to the rough, brutal exterior and bloody corruption of the home. All these interiors contain ornate and opulent components, yet each interior tells the unique stories of the characters through their status in the hierarchy of the Camorra, their relationship to the neighbourhood of La Scampia and to each other. The authoritative palatial interior of Pietro Savastano follows traditional patriarchal systems and harks back to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century home. Ciro's protective family home inhabits an interstitial space between two loyalties – his wife and daughter, and the Camorra. His home sits somewhere between the traditional and a yearning to break free from territorial constraints. Whereas Genny differentiates himself from the traditional with his hyper-masculine apartment as he forges a new path and aesthetic language to convey his power.

The Brutalist architectural form of Le Vele is a masculine symbol of power which dominates the neighbourhood physically and psychologically. The modernist canon is rejected via the interior to allow the occupants of this monolithic structure to assert individuality through decoration upon and within this seemingly impervious brutalist architecture. Further contradictions extend with opulent domestic interiors as a foil of social class and power concealed within the façade of an underprivileged neighbourhood. La Vele di Scampia contradicts and holds a curious tension as being both held as a utopia as a modernist architectural vision and as a living dystopia as affirmed by its real and fictional occupants. And, by virtue, the fictional representation of *Gomorrah* lives up to its biblical namesake as a city ravaged by tribal patriarchalism, organized crime and utter brutality.

Like a geode dissected the unassuming stone defies all expectations to reveal the unexpected crystal within the hard, monolithic exterior. Le Vele, Ciro and Genny illustrate this metaphor, each with an impenetrable exterior that belies the most intriguing darkness within their complex interior worlds.

### References:

- Banham, R. (1966), *The New Brutalism : Ethic or Aesthetic?*, London: Architectural Press
- Baudrillard, J. (2020) *The System of Objects*, London: Verso
- Bari, S. (2020), *Dressed: A Philosophy of Clothes*, New York: Basic Books

Ornament and Crime: Power, gender and domestic opulence in Gomorrah (2014-21)

Begiato, J. (2018) *Moving Objects: Emotional Transformation, Tangibility, and Time Travel*, in Downes, S et al (eds)., *Feeling Things : Objects and Emotions through History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Benjamin, W & Lacis, A. (1995) *Naples*, in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, New York: Random House

Bola, J J. (2019), *Mask off: Masculinity Redefined*, London: Pluto Press

Bosoni, G. (2002), *Italy - Contemporary Domestic Landscapes 1945-2000*, London: Thames & Hudson

Brodesco, A & Mattiucci, C. (2017), *Being there: Le Vele as characters in Gomorrah – The Series*, in *The Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies*, 5:3, pp 321-332

Cautiero, F. (2023), *A Brief History of Camorra Mafia Organisation Part Three, The Devil Among Us*, <https://medium.com/the-devil-among-us-stories-and-articles-about/brief-history-of-camorra-mafia-organization-part-three-60494e8371c3>. [Accessed June 2024]

Fontana-Giusti, G & Foucault, M. (2012), *Foucault for Architects*, London: Routledge

Gibb, J. (2002), *Mise-en-Scène: Film Style and Interpretation*, New York: Columbia University Press

*Gomorrah*, (2014-21), Italy: Fandango and Sky Italia

Hollander, A. (1978), *Drapery*, in L. Weinthal (ed) *Towards a New Interior*, 2011, New York: Princeton Press, pp 91-101

Johnson-Schlee, S. (2022), *Living Rooms*, London: Pennisula Press

Kinchen, J. (1996), *Interiors: nineteenth-century essays on the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' room*, in M, Taylor & J, Preston (ed) *Intimus: Interior Design Theory Reader*, 2008, Chichester: John Wiley, pp 168 – 172

Kingwell, M. (2002), *Tables, Chairs, and Other Machines for Thinking*, in M, Taylor & J, Preston (ed) *Intimus: Interior Design Theory Reader*, 2008, Chichester: John Wiley, pp 173 - 179

Lawrence, R. (1987), *Social, Spatial and Temporal Factors*, in M, Taylor & J, Preston (ed) *Intimus: Interior Design Theory Reader*, 2008, Chichester: John Wiley, pp 184 - 186

Lubbock, J. (1995), *The Tyranny of Taste*, in M, Taylor & J, Preston (ed) *Intimus: Interior Design Theory Reader*, 2008, Chichester: John Wiley, pp 200 -203

Miller, Daniel. (2001), *Home Possessions : Material Culture behind Closed Doors*, Oxford: Berg

Pascalis, I. (2018), *An Italian Ecosystem: Reading Contemporary Serial Television Universes*, London: Routledge

Povoledo, E. (2021), *Gomorrah Is Back, as Bloody (and Gripping) as Ever*, New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/29/arts/television/gomorrah-naples.html> [Accessed August 2024]

Pribram, D E. (2020), *Victims, Heroes, and Villains: Imaginary Beings in Contemporary Television Serials*, in *Criminals As Heroes in Popular Culture*, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, pp. 147–65

Renga, Dana. (2019), *Watching Sympathetic Perpetrators on Italian Television: Gomorrah and Beyond*, Cham: Springer International Publishing

Russo, P. (2017), *Storylining engagement with repulsive antiheroes. Towards a cognitive poetics of TV serial drama narrative: The case of Gomorrah – The Series*, in *Journal of Screenwriting*, 8:1, pp 5-21

Saviano, R. (2020), *Naples is Demolishing Le Vele, Symbol of its Camorra past*, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/08/naples-camorra-vele-demolition-im-not-celebrating-roberto-saviano>. [Accessed May 2024]

Shonefield, K. (2000), *The Walls Have Feelings*, Oxford: Routledge

Soulillou, J. (2002), *Ornament & Order*, in M, Taylor & J, Preston (ed) *Intimus: Interior Design Theory Reader*, 2008, Chichester: John Wiley, pp 314 – 322

Smith, M. (1995), *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion and the Cinema*, Oxford: University Press.

Stewart, S. (2007), *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, North Carolina: Duke University Press

Versace, G (1995), *Do Not Disturb*, Italy: Leonardo Arte

Whitehead, J. (2017), *Creating Interior Atmosphere: Mise-En-Scène and Interior Design*, London: Bloomsbury

Ornament and Crime: Power, gender and domestic opulence in Gomorrah (2014-21)

Wigley, M. (1992), *The Housing of Gender*, in B. Colomina (ed) *Sexuality and Space*, New York: Princeton University

Wilson, A. (2014), *Kitsch, Enchantment & Power: The Bleeding statues of Templemore 1920*, in Moran, A & O'Brien, S (ed), *Love Objects : Emotion, Design, and Material Culture*, London: Bloomsbury, pp 87-98

Wise, M. (2000), *Home: Territory & Identity*, in M, Taylor & J, Preston (ed) *Intimus: Interior Design Theory Reader*, 2008, Chichester: John Wiley, pp 391 – 396