



Gomorra

Directed by Matteo Garrone, winner of awards for previous films *Terra di Mezzo*, *Oreste Pipolo*, *Guests*, *The Embalmer* and *First Love*.

Winner of the Grand Prix at Cannes

'One of the things that *Gomorra* makes clear is that in the world of the Camorra the line between citizen and criminal is difficult to draw....many find themselves caught in the mechanisms of organised crime without even knowing it.'

'A Modern Classic' – The Observer, 'Brilliant' – International Herald Tribune

'Extra-ordinary' – Timeout, 'Outstanding' – Empire

'*Gomorra* is a powerful example of that thrilling current of energy which right now is lighting up Italian cinema.' Philip French

Peter Popham The Independent
Saturday, 18 October 2008



The Neapolitan author is only 28, with a single blazingly vivid and courageous book to his name. This is *Gomorra*, the "non-fiction novel" about Neapolitan mafia, the Camorra, which has sold 1.8 million copies in 32 languages, and is now an acclaimed film.

Garlanded with the Grand Jury Prize at Cannes, tipped for a foreign picture Oscar, *Gomorra* the film has just opened to rave reviews in Britain. Shot in the degraded Naples hinterland in a gritty, documentary-like style using local people – one of whom was arrested this week – the film shows a mafia bereft of glamour and style but brutally masterful in its control of the Naples economy.

But this was also the week when the mob turned on the author....The rest of the world was very vague about the Camorra until Saviano came along.

Saviano, who was born and raised in Casal di Principe, the most mafia-ridden town in the whole Naples area, made the Camorra grimly fascinating. Much of the power of the book comes from the fact that, in the advice given to every starting novelist, he wrote about what he knew.

His father, now dead, was a doctor in this town north of Naples, home to 20,000 people and temporary host to 500 soldiers of Italy's Thunderbolt parachute regiment, dispatched there to assert the power of the state against that of the mob. His mother is a teacher from the north of Italy, whose critical distance from the chaos and infamy of the south taught her son a different way of seeing his surroundings.

"I was 13 when I saw my first body," Saviano says. He was to see many more, and by his tally 3,600 people have been killed by the Camorra during his short life. One of those was still alive, the victim of a shooting, when his father reached him and called an ambulance. For that faux pas he was given a fierce beating. "For a long time he didn't want to show his face in public," Saviano remembers. If a mobster is cut down on the street, you leave him where he is, to give the hitmen the opportunity to finish the job. That was the lesson of the beating.

Two weeks ago the uncle of a pentito, or supergrass, whose squealing had led to dozens of Camorra arrests and the confiscation of €100m worth of mob property, was playing cards in a social club in the town centre, under the noses of the paratroopers, when Camorra hitmen burst in and killed him with 18 rounds from an automatic pistol. Everybody fled. Nobody saw a thing.

Saviano and his friends learned the potency of the name of Casal in the area: they would ride their bikes to nearby towns and put local kids to flight merely by mentioning where they came from. "For people in my town," Saviano said recently, "Corleone" – home of the Sicilian Corleonesi clan – "is like Disneyland. I grew up in a cut-throat reality. And I often say that, fortunately or unfortunately, I am made from the same clay as the people I write about. I don't feel any difference in our formation, but in our choices. I didn't choose a different path because I thought that what [the Camorra] do is morally revolting. What I'm trying to do is to understand where their world begins and the legal world ends – and I've understood that they often coincide."

This is the nightmare of southern Italy: you have normal, decent, civilised life and then you have the activities of the gangs, and they seem to be two utterly different realities that have nothing to do with each other. But Saviano learned that in Casal those two worlds are two sides of the same coin. He speaks of a neighbour, a generous, kindly man who invited Saviano to his wedding and who had paid for another neighbour to study abroad. But he was also a gang leader. "It's hard to think that that same clever, generous and kind man could one day kill a guy ... by making him swallow sand, just because he had been flirting with his niece."

Saviano grasped that no one before had ever attempted to put these realities on the printed page, and so he set to work. He took part-time jobs that brought him into contact with the low-level punks who deal drugs or keep watch for the gangs. He kept up with his school friends – 40 per cent of young people in the Naples region are unemployed, and for many of those the gang is the only show in town. He burrowed in police and court records, and he produced his book.

And now he is suffering the consequences. He last appeared in public in his home town two years ago this month, when at a meeting in the town piazza he told the town's young people, "Don't let them take away your right to be happy!" The same day, on information received, Italy's interior minister granted him a bodyguard and ordered him into hiding, and he has been living out his Rushdie-esque fate ever since – though, as Salman Rushdie justly remarked this week, "The mafia poses a much more serious problem than the one I had to face. Saviano is in terrible danger, worse than me."