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## The Auteur as Adapter: From Literature to Film in Rossellini, Godard, and Pasolini

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The Auteur as Adapter: From Literature to Film in Rossellini, Godard, and Pasolini

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature of Bard College

by  
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## Introduction

After viewing the film adaptation of a novel it is common for people to judge which between the two was better. For the most part, people understand literary to film adaptations to be the “film of the book.” What people may not know is that the very notion of adaptation is far more nuanced and complex. While most commonly adaptations remain faithful to their source, there is a long tradition of categorizing and understanding adaptations with more nuance than simply fidelity. In his *Concepts in Film Theory*, Dudley Andrew writes an essay on “Adaptation” that invents a typological method for categorizing adaptations from literary sources to film. Through this typology, Andrew conceives of three distinctive modes for classifying literature to film adaptations which are “borrowing,” “intersection,” and “fidelity and transformation.”

Andrew suggests that in “borrowing,” “the artist employs, more or less extensively, the material, idea, or form of an earlier generally successful text”<sup>1</sup> and in doing so, “the adaptation hopes to win an audience by the prestige of its borrowed title or subject.” Andrew gives the example of bible stories adapted into medieval paintings or *Don Quixote* becoming a tonal poem by Strauss. An example of “borrowing” in film could be Baz Luhrmann’s adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, where Luhrmann modernizes Shakespeare’s play, having the same events play out in a modern setting.

Andrew’s second mode “intersection,” is seen as the opposite of “borrowing.” In this mode Andrew describes “uniqueness of the original...is intentionally left unassimilated in adaptation.”<sup>2</sup> Bresson’s *Diary of a Country Priest* becomes the key

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<sup>1</sup> Dudley. “Concepts in Film Theory” (p. 98)

<sup>2</sup> Dudley. “Concepts in Film Theory” (p. 99)

example for understanding the “intersecting” mode of adaptation. André Bazin “claimed that in [*Diary of a Country Priest*] we are presented not with an adaptation so much as a refraction of the original.”<sup>3</sup> In Bresson’s *Diary of a Country Priest*, some scenes are taken directly from Bernano’s novel, and instead of “cinematizing” these scenes, “Bazin claims that the film is the novel as seen by cinema.” In Bazin’s famous metaphor which defines “intersection,” he states “the original artwork can be likened to a crystal chandelier,” while “the cinema would be a crude flashlight interesting not for its own shape or the quality of light but for what it makes appear in this or that dark corner.” As Andrew states, “a great deal of Bernanos fails to be lit up, but what is lit up is only Bernanos.” This “intersection” with the source then becomes a sort of allusion to the literary author where there is nothing lost between the two works. The original maintains and the adaptation merely opens up a dialogue in its “intersection.” The source then becomes a jumping-off point for further cultural discourse. What is created is no longer an adaptation, rather it is something entirely original that initiates a “dialectical interplay between the aesthetic forms of one period with the cinematic forms of our own period.”<sup>4</sup>

Andrew’s final mode, “Fidelity and transformation,” is, as he states, “unquestionably the most frequent and most tiresome discussion of adaptation.” Andrew explains how for this mode, “the task...is the reproduction of something essential about an original text” so that “the skeleton of the original” source becomes “the skeleton of the film.” Andrew argues that this form struggles in its “fidelity to the

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<sup>3</sup> Dudley. “Concepts in Film Theory” (p. 99)

<sup>4</sup> Dudley. “Concepts in Film Theory” (p. 100)

spirit, to the original's tone, values, imagery, and rhythm, since finding stylistic equivalents in film for these intangible aspects is the opposite of a mechanical process." In this mode, the adaptation attempts at translating the novel into a film. Inevitably much is lost in translation as the new medium, cinema, will introduce discrepancies. As Andrew states, "it has been argued variously that [fidelity] is frankly impossible" due to the multiplicity of interpretations that one can have from a literary text, which leads us to the topic of auteurs, directors who claim ownership of and lean further into the individuality they bring to an adaptive work.

The notion of *politique des auteurs* was brought into the forefront of conversation for film theorists and critics by François Truffaut in his article *A Certain Tendency in the French Cinema*. In his article, Truffaut proposed "the revolutionary notion that the director is the true author of a given film."<sup>5</sup> The *politique des auteurs* were then further developed by "the loosely knit group of critics who wrote for *Cahiers du Cinéma*."<sup>6</sup> Truffaut's notion was far from unanimously accepted by film critics of the time. For instance, André Bazin, in his article "On the politique des auteurs," "reproached [*Cahiers du Cinéma* critics] for their disengagement."<sup>7</sup> Bazin, who was more "politically concerned," worried that *politique de auteurs* would write off films that he saw of merit, and therefore saw the notion to be somewhat highfalutin. Andrew

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<sup>5</sup> *The Criterion Collection*, "François Truffaut, Original Auteur."

<sup>6</sup> Wollen, Peter. "Signs and Meaning in the Cinema: Peter Wollen."

<sup>7</sup> Grosoli, M. "The Politics and Aesthetics of the 'politique des auteurs'"

Sarris, on the other hand, saw an opportunity for defining the theory, stating, “as far as I know, there is no definition of *auteur theory* in the English Language.”<sup>8</sup>

Sarris, while giving the *Cahiers* critics full credit for their formation of the idea, ran with the concept of *politique de auteurs*, and in his article, “Notes On The Auteur Theory In 1962,” invented criteria for what defines a filmmaker as an auteur. Sarris states, “the three premises of the *auteur* theory may be visualized as three concentric circles: the outer circle as technique; the middle circle, personal style; and the inner circle, interior meaning.”<sup>9</sup> In regards to technique, Sarris states it is “simply the ability to put a film together with some clarity and coherence.” Sarris explains how a film with an “expert production crew,” even with a “chimpanzee in the directors chair,” could make a technically proficient film, and therefore the notion of technique is understood through a director’s pattern of work. Therefore, “a great director has to at least be a good director,” and have a body of work that supports their technical proficiency. For his second criterion, Sarris explains how “over a group of films,” an *auteur* “director must exhibit certain characteristics of style, which serve as his signature.”<sup>10</sup> Insinuating that an *auteur* director should have some sort of visual style that can be identified throughout their body of work which makes their films immediately recognizable as directed by them. More importantly, the “ultimate premise of the auteur theory is concerned with interior meaning, the ultimate glory of the cinema as an art. Interior meaning is extrapolated from the tension between a director's personality and his material” For this point, Sarris suggests that, while in film there are many roles, such as

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<sup>8</sup> Sarris, Andrew. “Notes On The Auteur Theory In 1962” (p. 131)

<sup>9</sup> Sarris, Andrew. “Notes On The Auteur Theory In 1962”(p. 133)

<sup>10</sup> Sarris, Andrew. “Notes On The Auteur Theory In 1962” (p. 132)



the producer, that carry a large say over how a film is made, an auteur ultimately makes a film which is somehow a reflection of their personality and unique view of the material.

Film adaptations tend to treat their literary work in one of two ways: the more common approach is to cautiously hug the material, in an attempt to produce a devout visual remake. The less frequent route, as it can be more risky, is to boldly dare to use the material as a point of reference from which to expand on, with further inquiry and conversation. In this more unpredictable approach, the text is treated as an original reference point; freeing the adaptation from the need to do its literary counterpart justice, and opening it up to the possibility of finding new and stimulating dialogue in its intersection. In order to gain greater insight into how adaptations can realize synergy with their original material, I will look toward comparative analysis as a means of gleaning ways in which adapted films can open meaningful dialogue with their literary counterparts. I will explore that which makes an adaptation a dialogue with its original text, as opposed to merely an attempted translation. I will argue that an auteur is necessary for opening a dialogue with the original text because in order to further discourse in a meaningful way, a visionary with a strong point of view is key. It is amongst the intersection of masterful writers and imaginative auteurs that synergy is found. This project works to unveil that which distinguishes an auteur's treatment of literary texts as a jumping-off point, rather than a blueprint, for furthering cultural discourse; through a study of Roberto Rosellini's *Voyage to Italy*, Godard's *Contempt*, and Pasolini's *Theorem*.

## Chapter One

James Joyce originally conceived of the short story *The Dead* while he was on a trip to Rome<sup>11</sup>. It is no coincidence that the protagonist couple in *Voyage to Italy* share the surname Joyce. Rossellini is not only tying his *Voyage to Italy* to Joyce's work, but he also connects his work to Joyce himself. By giving the protagonist couple the surname Joyce, the audience is immediately queued into thinking about James Joyce, and from there begins the string of meta connections between Joyce and Rossellini. In many ways, the evolution that Rossellini makes with his *Voyage to Italy* from realism to the less tangible but equally as real spiritual reality parallels a shift that Joyce makes in his work. For Joyce, this shift begins with his short story *The Dead*. Rossellini, conscious of this shift, aptly ties his *Voyage to Italy* with Joyce's *The Dead*. He ties these works both thematically and stylistically and on top of that, through the conscious parallels he draws between himself and Joyce, Rossellini adds meta-elements that delight the imagination. Rossellini's approach to adaptation is unique in its "intersection" with the source material. For many directors, an adaptation becomes simply the same work tried in a different medium, however, for Rossellini adaptation isn't seen as a way of understanding a text differently, but rather as a vessel for thinking about and exploring questions that arise from a text.

Prior to *Voyage to Italy*, Rossellini was known as the father of neorealism, earning that title with his *Rome, Open City*, the film which inspired the entire movement. After *Rome, Open City* (1945), Rossellini continued down the neorealist

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<sup>11</sup>Munich, Adrienne Auslander. "Form and Subtext in Joyce's 'The Dead'"

track with the films *Paisan* (1946) and *Germany Year Zero* (1948). Rossellini's beginnings in neorealism were a response to "previous Italian films, made under the indirect but palpable duress of the Fascist regime" that "for the most part contented themselves with nationalist propaganda."<sup>12</sup> Just before the liberation of Italy, the "white telephone" films were there "to keep the masses oblivious to the deterioration that underlay the regime's optimistic slogans." This left the post-fascism directors, led by Rossellini, with a responsibility to share what the conditions in Italy were actually like behind the curtain of fascism. By the time he was directing *Voyage to Italy* (1954), Rossellini couldn't be more established as the great neorealist film director. *Voyage to Italy*, however, very much represents a shift in Rossellini's filmography. With Mussolini almost a decade out of power, the responsibility of showing the underbelly of fascism was becoming less crucial. As a result, Rossellini saw a need to evolve, stating "neorealist reality is incomplete, official, and entirely reasonable; but the poetry, the mystery, everything that completes and enlarges tangible reality, is completely missing."

<sup>13</sup> Rossellini decided to take his realism in a new direction, no longer aiming to depict the harsh realities of the working class, but rather grappling with the less tangible but equally as real spiritual reality of human existence. Rossellini, aware of this shift, aptly ties his *Voyage to Italy* with Joyce's *The Dead*. This is done thematically and stylistically, though Rossellini also uses his knowledge of Joyce's career to add an extremely rich meta element to his *Voyage to Italy*.

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<sup>12</sup> Brunette, Peter. "Rossellini and Cinematic Realism"

<sup>13</sup> Thomas, Paul. "Journey to Italy: Fun Couples"

For Joyce, *The Dead* represented the beginnings of an evolution in his artistic voice both thematically and stylistically. The first fourteen short stories of Joyce's *Dubliners* are naturalistically written slices of life that give a glimpse into the lives of the poorer classes of Dublin. These early stories from Joyce, which are heavily concerned with realism, parallel Rossellini's early work in film. In Joyce's career, Valery Larbaud, a contemporary writer of Joyce's, describes his work to shift from a "predominantly naturalistic approach to his subject matter in *Dubliners*" to a "symbolic method in *Ulysses*."<sup>14</sup> *The Dead* represents the beginning of this shift that continues into his next novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and evolves again with *Ulysses* as Larbaud describes. In her article, "Form and Subtext in Joyce's 'The Dead,'" Adrienne Auslander Munich brilliantly sums up Joyce's self-realized artistic evolution that takes place in his writing of *The Dead*. She states:

The apparently disparate battle images in "The Dead" offer a symbolic account of the author, in a hellish exile, struggling with his earlier literary forms. The young artist's grandiose scheme in *Portrait* to forge the uncreated conscience of his race required purging old patterns in the soul's smithy; in "The Dead" the title refers not only to the story's moribund characters and their preoccupation with the past but also to the kind of artist Joyce was putting behind him.<sup>15</sup>

Through this Munich is suggesting that Joyce's, *The Dead*, represents a self-realized evolution of his personal style as an artist. While Rossellini adapts Joyce's "haunted atmosphere that blurs the lines between the past and the present and keeps characters at the impasse between memory's aura and the bitter shortcomings of lived events,"<sup>16</sup> he also uses the context of *The Dead* in relation to Joyce's career to suggest the same

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<sup>14</sup> Rice, Thomas Jackson. "The Geometry of Meaning in 'Dubliners': A Euclidian Approach"

<sup>15</sup> Munich, Adrienne Auslander. "Form and Subtext in Joyce's 'The Dead'"

<sup>16</sup> Luzzi, Joseph. *A Cinema of Poetry: Aesthetics of the Italian Art Film* (p. 55)

self-aware shift in himself as an artist. Just as Joyce suggests that *The Dead* will be the beginning of a shift in his writing, Rossellini, through his understanding of Joyce's career and references to his work, suggests that his *Voyage to Italy* will too represent an evolution in his work.

An issue that arises in regards to *Voyage to Italy* as an adaptation of *The Dead* is that the film doesn't draw from the text in a traditional manner as for example Visconti does in his adaptation of Lampedusa's, *The Leopard*, of the same name. Rossellini confuses this issue even further by having the film revolve around a literary text, a poem, that is completely made up. Using a made-up source of adaptation in the text hints at Rossellini's disinterest in adapting in the traditional sense of fidelity. In his "Rossellini's Cinema of Poetry: Voyage to Italy," Joseph Luzzi states:

For Rossellini, the literary text functioned, more often than not, as pretext: a bearer of some hint, suggestion, or theme to be prodded and teased out in the name of a goal or ideal of which he himself, as an emphatically intuitive filmmaker, was often not wholly aware<sup>17</sup>.

For many directors, an adaptation becomes simply the same work tried in a different medium or "a sustained reading or interpretation of an original text."<sup>18</sup> For Rossellini, adaptation wasn't a way of answering a question about a text, but rather, "Rossellini showed with *Voyage in Italy* the possibility of developing cinema into a thinking tool." As Bruno Torri states, for Rossellini, cinema was "a cinema of questions, not answers."<sup>19</sup> Rossellini invents his own nuanced form of adaptation that doesn't take from the

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<sup>17</sup> Luzzi, Joseph. *A Cinema of Poetry: Aesthetics of the Italian Art Film* (p. 56)

<sup>18</sup> Vettore, Enrico. "Voyage to Italy"

<sup>19</sup> Brunette, Peter. "Roberto Rossellini" (p. 127)

original text as much as it gives its own cinematic insight into the literary themes at hand.

While the connection between *Voyage to Italy* and *The Dead* is far deeper than a surface-level recreation, in the most thematically crucial scenes from both works, Rossellini takes the scene's dialogue almost exactly as it is written in *The Dead*. In this scene, Alex and Katherine are basking in the sun while drinking wine on the terrace of the Villa that they are in Vesuvius to sell. The lines of Katherine Joyce, played by Ingmar Bergman, are almost verbatim what Joyce's character Gretta Conroy says to Gabriel in *The Dead*. Katherine and Gretta both reveal early in their scenes that they are viscerally reminiscing about a past admirer. For Gretta, this is revealed "in an outburst of tears"<sup>20</sup> when she states, "I am thinking about that song, The Lass of Aughrim." Gabriel, at this moment concerned and tender, asks "what about the song? why does that make you cry?", to which Gretta slowly reveals through her description of events was a past admirer. For Gabriel, this revelation causes "the dull fires of his lust...to glow angrily in his veins," described by the narration. Joyce uses the narration to indicate Gabriel's interior anger and agitation at his wife bringing up a past admirer. This contrasts with how Gabriel acts externally towards his wife, creating a tension between what he is thinking versus what he is saying.

In *Voyage to Italy*, Rossellini sets up Alex to be relatively disinterested in Katherine until he gets threatened by her affection for Charles. At this moment, Alex outwardly expresses his jealousy in the form of insults towards Charles. The tension is

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<sup>20</sup> Joyce, James. *Dubliners* (p 281)

created through Katherine's contempt for Alex for the way he speaks of her deceased past admirer. Katherine begins the scene by subtly muttering a poem, "temple of the spirit / no longer bodies, but pure ascetic images," then casually brings up the poet, "do you remember poor Charles?" At first, similar to Gabriel, Alex doesn't realize that Katherine is talking about a past admirer, though as opposed to being tender like Gabriel, Alex is more dismissive. This is until, just as Gretta does, Katherine begins to reveal more details, and Alex understands she is talking about an admirer, causing him to pay closer attention to her. His internal feelings, unlike James Joyce's narration of Gabriel's anger, are expressed through Rossellini's editing. Rossellini, while Katherine is talking about this past admirer, keeps Katherine and Alex in wide shots where Katherine is framed in the foreground. As Katherine speaks, Alex pays little attention to what she says. Just as what she is saying is in the foreground of Alex's thoughts, Rossellini blocks the scene so that Katherine is positioned in the foreground of the shot. When Katherine starts to speak more passionately about the poet, Rossellini cuts to her closeup. In her description of the poet's appearance, Katherine displays an affection for Charles. Halfway through the delivery of these lines, Rossellini cuts to the first closeup of Alex, who, noticing the passionate way Katherine is describing Charles, reacts by turning and listening closely. At this moment, through the editing and blocking, Rossellini reveals Alex's internal feelings towards Katherine's bringing up a previous love interest. This editing creates the subtext of Alex's jealousy. He is only really interested in the story when it becomes clear that Katherine had an affection for Charles. Alex takes an unreasonable dig at Charles, "you can tell more about a man from his cough than his

words.” When Katherine asks in response, “what did Charles cough tell you?” Alex says “that he was a fool.” Rossellini uses his editing to create the same sort of subtextual tension that Joyce expresses through the narration. Despite this, Rossellini’s adaptation of Joyce’s theme of the ghostly admirer of the past is taken in a new direction.

As this scene evolves, Katherine and Gretta tell the same story of a past admirer who, in their minds, died for their love. The reception of these stories is handled very differently and with this narrative change, Rossellini offers a new perspective to the explorations that Joyce made in *The Dead*. In *The Dead*, Gretta describes a night when Michael Furey came to visit her in her grandmother's house as she was packing for Dublin:

...I heard gravel thrown up against the window. The window was so wet I couldn't see, so I ran downstairs as I was and slipped out the back into the garden and there was the poor fellow at the end of the garden, shivering...I implored of him to go home at once and told him he would get his death in the rain. But he said he did not want to live...He was standing at the end of the wall where there was a tree.<sup>21</sup>

After Gretta left for Dublin she says that Michael Furey passed away a few weeks later. This grand gesture before his death causes Gretta to hold on to the passionate moment they shared. She states, “I think he died for me.” Gabriel is supportive of Gretta as she is emotional when she tells her story, however, internally Gabriel harbors obsessive thoughts regarding Gretta’s story and the image of Michael Furey continues to haunt him:

In the partial darkness he imagined he saw the form of a young man standing under a dripping tree. Other forms were near. His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead. He was conscious of, but could not apprehend, their wayward and flickering existence. His own identity was fading

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<sup>21</sup> Joyce, James. *Dubliners* (p. 285)



out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself, which these dead had one time reared and lived in, was dissolving and dwindling.<sup>22</sup>

Gabriel realizes that despite all he has managed to attain in his life he could never make an impression on someone, even on his own wife, as deeply as Michael Furey did that night. Suddenly a whole lifetime of accomplishment is diminished in light of a fleeting moment of connection.

In *Voyage to Italy*, Katherine tells an almost identical version of the story that Gretta shares. She states:

I was packing my bags when I heard the sound of pebbles on my window. The rain was so heavy that I couldn't see anyone outside. So I ran out into the garden, just as I was, and there he stood. He was shivering with cold. He was so strange and romantic. Maybe he wanted to prove to me that in spite of the high fever he had braved the way to see me or maybe he wanted to die.

Rossellini keeps Katherine in a close-up for the delivery of the story. The editing mixed with Ingmar Bergman's sentimental performance shows Katherine's harbored passion for Charles Lewington. Rossellini cuts towards the end of Katherine's story to the medium shot where Alex is framed in the foreground and Katherine is in the background of the shot. Without looking over or reacting much at all to Katherine's passionate telling of the romantic moment she shared with Charles Lewington, Alex responds sarcastically "how very poetic, much more poetic than his verses." Katherine looks at Alex with contempt for his dismissive remarks about the deceased Charles Lewington.

In *The Dead*, Gabriel coddles his wife when she emotionally brings up a past romantic encounter with Michael Furey. As a result of not expressing his internal

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<sup>22</sup> Joyce, James. *Dubliners* (p. 287)

feelings of agitation, Gabriel is further tormented by the haunting image of the ghost of Michael Furey. By the end of the story, Gabriel sees how the dead are still very much living in the ghostly form of memories within the minds of those who remember them. In *Voyage to Italy*, Alex is dismissive of Katherine when she sentimentally reminisces about Charles Lewington. Katherine doesn't outwardly express how she feels towards Alex for his sarcastic remarks which causes Katherine to resent him and eventually want a divorce. This resentment is shown in the close-up shots of Katherine driving to the museum that Lewington writes about. As she is driving her agitation can barely be contained, "he thinks he understands life. He ought to be punished for his pride, his self-assurance." Alex's dismissiveness towards Lewington's experience in the Naples Museum causes Katherine to want to give credence to Lewington's verses by visiting the museum herself. When she goes, however, her opinion of Lewington's verses changes. She states, "poor Charles, he had his own way of seeing things." Katherine doesn't view the sculptures as ascetic or starved figures but rather full of flesh and life. With this, Katherine sees something eternally full of life, even within the long deceased. At the end of the film, Katherine and Alex witness the "objects of bodies" reconstructed after 2,000 years. The bodies reconstructed are of a couple, man and woman, perhaps husband and wife at their time of death. For Katherine, these 2000-year-old figures are very much alive as she reacts with an outburst of emotion when they are uncovered. Seeing the molds of a couple together after 2,000 years changes Katherine's world view and she decides to forgo divorcing Alex.

Through Rossellini's allusions to *The Dead*, *Voyage to Italy* shows how an adaptation that builds away from the direct text can be effective in stimulating a dialogue between the two works. Just as writers respond to other writers through their works, Rossellini proves that film can have a similar relationship to the novel. Rossellini's conscious back-and-forth with James Joyce, despite the difference in medium, shows how the two can intersect on an equal playing field. This implementation of intersecting adaptation recalls Dudley Andrew's classification of this more sophisticated form of adapting. This "preferred adaptation is like the intersection of the flashlight (cinema) with a crystal chandelier (prior literary work)"<sup>23</sup> that Andrews describes as "an experience of the original modulated by the peculiar beam of the cinema." An adaptation that alludes to and references a text such as *Voyage to Italy*, creates a dialogue between the two works in a way that is stimulating and allows for the imparting of wisdom between author and director. This form of "intersection" George Raitt describes in his "Still Lusting After Fidelity?" to "connote a degree of selection and foregrounding of the original text, and cinematic creativity, which allows the film to stand as a work of art not repeatable by other filmmakers." This concept of originality and the idea that "intersecting" can lead to a non-repeatable standalone work of adaptation is heavily tied to auteur theory, which defines a filmmaker whose originality is so unique that they are credited as the sole author of the film.

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<sup>23</sup> Raitt, G. "Still Lusting After Fidelity?"

## Chapter Two

Godard's film *Contempt* is an adaptation of Moravia's *Il disprezzo*, a novel about a playwright who writes a screenplay adaptation of Homer's *Odyssey*. In his choice to adapt a novel about the film industry, Godard creates a highly self-aware film. Through his adaptation of a novel about an adaptation, Godard's film adds to Moravia's insights into the complexities inherent to adapting another work. Godard continues down the track of Rossellini in creating a film that is in dialogue with the themes of a novel, affirming the position of the film director as on an equal playing field with the literary author. Godard alludes to *Voyage to Italy* directly, creating a dialogue between the two works. Both films have rich meta-elements that blend their respective narratives with real life, and both are dealing in a kind of psychological or spiritual realism. Godard continues the notion of using film as a vessel for thinking about and exploring questions regarding a text. In his *Contempt*, Godard produces a free-form film adaptation of Moravia's novel *Il disprezzo*. Godard uses his knowledge of and connection to cinematic history to unpack tropes of the medium and create a highly self-aware adaptation of Moravia's *Il disprezzo* that intersects with Homer's *Odyssey*.

Godard invites the viewer to think about *Contempt* as self-reflective from the very first scene when an on-screen camera pans and tilts so that the viewer is looking directly down the barrel of a lens. Godard also breaks away from the standard of using title cards to display the opening credits by instead narrating the credits himself. This narration is done over a static shot at a Cinecittà production lot where a woman is being tracked by a cinematographer on a dolly and a boom operator. The group slowly moves towards the

frame. Godard starts his narration by saying, “it’s based on the novel by Riccardo Molteni.” The audience, unfamiliar with *hearing* opening credits, listens to the narration at first expecting it to be a part of the narrative, however, it soon becomes clear that these are the credits. Right away the process of filmmaking becomes intertwined with the narrative and Godard is literally showing his hand in his creation by narrating the credits himself. As the narration continues, the women and film crew get closer in frame, and Godard states, “‘the cinema,’ said Andre Bazin, ‘substitutes for our gaze a world more in harmony with our desires.’ Contempt is a story of that world.” Just as Godard finishes his narration, the cinematographer dolly towards us, taking up the whole frame, then pans and tilts the camera until the audience is staring directly down the barrel of the lens. Through this shot, Godard is showing the audience the process of filmmaking within his film, highlighting that this film will be in direct reflection of the process of its making. On top of this, Godard is responding to the notion of “passivity of the audience in a movie theatre”<sup>24</sup> where “it is said that the act of watching a film does not require any effort on the part of the spectator.” Godard combats the notion of the “passive viewer” in cinema.

Moravia’s novel is a memoir written by the protagonist, Riccardo Molteni. On the surface, the story is about a successful playwright, Riccardo, who takes a job as a screenwriter to afford his wife Emilia a fancier apartment, something he believes necessary to the success of their relationship. In working on a screenplay, a medium which he views with far less esteem than playwriting, Riccardo sacrifices his ideals,

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<sup>24</sup> Korte, W. “Godard’s Adaptation of Moravia’s ‘Contempt’”

causing him to, in his mind, as well as lose Emilia's respect. While working on the film, which is an adaptation of *The Odyssey*, Emilia begins having an affair with the producer, Battista. Riccardo sees his situation as strikingly similar to that of Odysseus when Penelope is unable to recognize him after his return from his odyssey. In an attempt to get his wife back, Riccardo declares that he will stop writing the screenplay which he sees to mirror his life. By this time it is too late and Emilia claims she will always hold Riccardo in "contempt" because she believes Riccardo gave her up to Battista for the screenwriting job. At the end of the novel, Emilia and Battista are involved in a fatal car crash.

While this is a linear description of the story, Moravia presents the events in a non-linear fashion where the narrator, Riccardo, is reflecting on the events that led up to his wife's affair and eventual death. In the novel, the events that take place are not presented in the exact order that they happen. Instead, the novel centers around Riccardo's obsessive psychological attempt at justifying the circumstances that led to Emilia's affair. Riccardo states, "I must have an explanation with her, I must seek out and examine, I must plunge the thin, ruthless blade of investigation into the wound which, hitherto, I had exerted myself to ignore."<sup>25</sup> Riccardo obsesses over the past and, as a result, comes up with completely irrational justifications for what led to him and Emilia separating. Ironically, when the director of the film, Rheingold, states that in regards to the adaptation of the *Odyssey* Riccardo should, "open it up, as a body is opened up on the dissecting table"<sup>26</sup> and "examine its internal mechanism," Riccardo

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<sup>25</sup> Moravia, Alberto. *Contempt* (p 56)

<sup>26</sup> Moravia, Alberto. *Contempt* (p 139)

feels “the particular gloom, entirely mechanical and abstract in quality, of psychoanalysis.”<sup>27</sup> Riccardo knows that the effect of picking apart a relationship and analyzing every “internal mechanism” will only lead to gloom. Despite this, Riccardo is unable to recognize how his compulsive thoughts are fabrications of the truth that are the result of his over-analysis of the past. The primary tension of the novel becomes whether or not Riccardo’s obsessive intellectualization of every moment with Emilia was the cause of their demise.

While Moravia’s story is told in the past tense, Godard's *Contempt* unfolds in the present tense with all the events described in the novel actually taking place in the film. Godard thereby eliminates the psychoanalysis of Moravia’s novel by choosing to not include closeups in the film. Godard takes the main plot points that Riccardo describes in his memoirs and establishes them linearly to form a story that unfolds with a more traditional narrative arch. Through this change, Godard shifts the entire emphasis of the story from the unreliable narrator in Riccardo to the objective narrator of the camera. In life, we are never privy to the psychological cause and effect of why people make certain actions. In fact, it is debatable if such a cause and effect exists or if they only result in an oversimplification of something endlessly complex. As a result, Godard forces the viewer into the spectator role that we always take in life. Almost faithfully, all the events described in the novel occur in the film. The difference is that instead of internally looking at the characters, Godard invites the viewer to actively psychoanalyze the characters themselves. This film becomes as much about the experience of the

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<sup>27</sup> Moravia, Alberto. *Contempt* (p 144)

characters as it does the experience of the spectator watching the characters. In order to achieve this, Godard is constantly reminding the viewer of their participation.

One way that Godard keeps the audience in the role of the exterior viewing and doesn't allow them to fully immerse in the narrative, is through the casting. Godard casts the German director Fritz Lang to play himself, representing the director Rheingold from Moravia's novel. Fritz Lang, outside of the fictional story, famously directed *Metropolis*, which is one of the most innovative and influential films ever made. In the infamous taxi scene in the movie, Paul introduces his wife, Camille, to Lang and says, "he's the one who did that western with Dietrich." With this reference, Paul is referring to a real film that Lang directed, one which contemporary viewers would possibly recognize, called *Rancho Notorious*. In response, Lang states, "I prefer M," another famous film directed by Lang. Through his casting of Fritz Lang, Godard is throwing a recognizable character from the real world into the fictional narrative of his film. Now the viewer is reminded of movies that they may have seen or heard of and is invited to think about their own preferences between the films. This is something some of the contemporary viewers may have already done, though in any case, these films would be relevant to the contemporary viewer. Godard uses the casting of Lang as himself to add a meta-layer that keeps the viewer in the active participatory role as the audience is brought out of the film to think about our own opinions of Lang's films.

In Moravia's novel, Emilia is heavily objectified and superficially sought after on the basis of her beauty. Riccardo states, "I had not married a woman who could understand and share my ideas, tastes and ambitions; instead I had married, for her



beauty, an uncultivated, simple typist.”<sup>28</sup> Just as Riccardo doesn’t view his wife for much more than her body, Riccardo believes that Emilia only sees him for the material life he can give her. After securing a fancier flat for Emilia, Riccardo describes how, in the brand new unfurnished place, they “made love on the floor.” Riccardo states that Emilia was “pulling me down to the floor.” Riccardo describes “the ardor of that embrace” to be “so unrestrained and so unusual.” This moment on the cold dirty floor is the most passion we see from Emilia throughout Riccardo’s memoirs. Riccardo notices Emilia’s particular interest, causing him to state that he was not only conscious “of the love she felt for me at that time, but more particularly of the outpouring of her repressed passion for a home, which in her expressed itself quite naturally through the channel of unforeseen sensuality.”<sup>29</sup>

Riccardo’s unreliable thoughts regarding Emilia’s superficiality are complicated by some of Riccardo’s actions prior to buying her the fancier apartment. For instance, when Riccardo sends Emilia off with the Battista in his sports car and takes a taxi, leaving the two together, Riccardo describes how Emilia “looked at me with a hesitating glance, a glance of mingled pleading and repugnance.”<sup>30</sup> Riccardo perceives this glance to indicate that Emilia saw Riccardo to be prostituting her off to Battista in order to secure a high-paying job. Another incident that complicates the notion of Emilia’s superficiality is when Riccardo describes “Emilia opening the door at the moment when I was kissing the typist.”<sup>31</sup> Riccardo briefly describes a time when Emilia caught him in

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<sup>28</sup> Moravia, Alberto. *Contempt* (p. 21)

<sup>29</sup> Moravia, Alberto. *Contempt* (p. 19)

<sup>30</sup> Moravia, Alberto. *Contempt* (p. 5)

<sup>31</sup> Moravia, Alberto. *Contempt* (p. 92)

an act of infidelity which could have been a big factor in her loss of love. Despite these complications, in the end, Emilia decides to leave Riccardo for the wealthier Battista with the fancy sports car and villa in Capri, highlighting that Riccardo and Emilia's relationship was superficial on both sides.

Godard aptly casts Bridget Bardot to play Camille, the equivalent of Moravia's Emilia character. In his casting of Bridget Bardot, a femme fatale and sex symbol of her time, as a woman who is exploited and preyed on by a sleazy producer, Godard adds an ironic layer to his adaptation of Moravia's novel that serves to critique the very film world in which he operates. Raoul Coutard who was the cinematographer of *Contempt* said "when we showed the film to the Americans, they were furious. They'd spent lots of money, and they wanted to see Bardot's bottom."<sup>32</sup> Though Godard had no intention of showing Bardot completely naked after his first cut of the film, the producers were adamant, stating, "the film is beautiful but not commercial."<sup>33</sup> The producers were far more concerned with the potential commercial success of a film that depicts a naked Bardot on screen than they were with creating a piece of art. Joseph E. Levine, an American producer on the film, is quoted to have said, "It's no good. I want to see Bardot nude and she isn't,"<sup>34</sup> in regards to the first cut of the film. The producers told Godard "we'd like a scene in the beginning where Bardot and Piccoli are naked in bed, making love. We'd like the same thing in the middle and at the end."<sup>35</sup> Godard says that he explained to the producers, "at the end is impossible and in the middle as well, since

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<sup>32</sup> "Raoul Coutard on *Contempt*." *The Criterion Channel*

<sup>33</sup> "Jean-Luc Godard on *Contempt*." *The Criterion Channel*

<sup>34</sup> "Raoul Coutard on *Contempt*." *The Criterion Channel*

<sup>35</sup> "Jean-Luc Godard on *Contempt*." *The Criterion Channel*

they're no longer in love." The lack of understanding of how these scenes would not narratively work in the middle and end of the film demonstrates that producers hadn't even bothered to understand the script of the film they were paying to make. Despite this, Coutard states, "Jean-Luc was forced to reshoot those scenes. Otherwise the Americans wouldn't have paid the final installment." In need of funds to complete the film, Godard stated, "I can do it another way that you'll still like."

In order to appease the producers, Godard took a small passage from Moravia's text where Riccardo is describing Emilia's body, "...she had the most beautiful shoulders, the most beautiful arms, the most beautiful neck I had ever seen, full and rounded, shaped in form and languid in movement,"<sup>36</sup> and turned it into a conversation between a naked Camille and Paul in bed. Camille goes through her body parts and asks if Paul likes them. At one point she asks "and do you like my shoulders." Paul responds "yes" and Camille says, "I don't think they're round enough." The camera begins panning down Bardot's naked body as she lays flat on the bed. In having Camille talking about each body part and her insecurity around them while the camera is sensually scanning her body, Godard appeases the producers and also adds to the irony of Bardot's objectification. In the interview, Godard states in regards to this scene, "I find it very good now, and wouldn't remove it." The demands of the producers of the film becomes as much a part of the story as the demands of the producers *in* the film. Godard ironically leveraged the allure of Bardot as a sex symbol as a means to funding a film

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<sup>36</sup> Moravia, Alberto. *Contempt* (p. 29)

that is ultimately a stark look at the moral corruption of an American producer's objectified view of women.

For the Italian producer Battista of Moravia's novel, Godard casts Jack Palance to play the American Jeremy Prokosch. In changing the producer from an Italian to an American, Godard unpacks the trope of the corrupt, money-centric Hollywood producer. In *Contempt*, Lang is at odds with Jeremy Prokosch about his commercialized envisioning of Lang's script adaptation of Homer's *Odyssey*. Prokosch hires Paul to rewrite the script the way that Prokosch envisions it. In a scene where Lang is sharing some of what has been shot with Prokosch, we see a naked Penelope swimming. Prokosch has a crude and juvenile reaction to the naked Penelope on-screen and states, "I have a theory about the Odyssey, I think Penelope has been unfaithful." Lang turns to Paul without acknowledging Prokosch's fantasy and begins quoting Canto XXVI of Dante's *Inferno*. He asks Paul if he knows what he is quoting and Paul states, "I know it well," and finishes Dante's verse, showing that Paul, unlike Prokosch, is an intellectual. As they watch the next scene, Paul is able to appreciate a shot of Odysseus conquering a large sharp rock in the ocean. Just as Paul becomes inspired by Lang's vision, Prokosch has a violent outbreak where he crashes film canisters out of the hands of an assistant delivering them. Prokosch uses intimidation to show his disinterest in Lang's faithfulness to Homer. Prokosch forces a female assistant to bend over in front of him and uses her as a surface to write a check for Paul, paying him to begin rewrites on Lang's script. This scene demonstrates Prokosch's buyout and coercion tactics as well as Paul's intellectual comradery with Fritz Lang. Godard places Paul in the midst of an

internal strife, torn between his European ideals of artistic integrity represented by his allegiance to Fritz Lang's character, or the lure of being able to provide his wife with luxury, which he sees necessary to keeping her, by appeasing Prokosch, who represents the commercial Hollywood system.

With his changes to Moravia's Battista, Godard creates an entirely new character who represents the corruption of commercialized Hollywood on the cinematic art form. The strife that Godard creates within his protagonist between the European and Hollywood style of filmmaking is one which is deeply personal. Highly reminiscent of Godard's real-life interactions with the American producer Joseph E. Levine on the film, at one point in *Contempt*, Prokosch states, "you cheated me, Fritz, that's not what is in that script." Fritz Lang, irate, proclaims, "it is!" to which Prokosch demands to see a shooting script. Prokosch comedically reads for a moment then states, "yes it's in the script." This scene is meta as it recalls the struggle between Godard and Levine when the producer requested that Godard add naked scenes of Bardot in the middle and end of the script. Just as Levine doesn't read Godard's script then has demands when he doesn't see what he wants on screen, Prokosch does the same to Fritz Lang in Godard's film. Godard's choice to work with Levine makes *Contempt* ironic as he is funding his film through the very same kind of producers that his film works to morally undermine. The producers are so caught up with getting Bardot naked to make *Contempt* marketable that Godard is able to expose them from right beneath their noses.

While *Contempt* is an adaptation of Moravia's novel, Godard layers his sources by having the film "intersect" with Homer's *Odyssey*. In a conversation with Paul, Lang

describes how, in his interpretation of the *Odyssey*, Ulysses took ten years to return because “he doesn’t really want to return.” Lang explains his theory:

He told her to accept their gifts. He didn’t see them as real threats. Knowing her to be faithful, he told her to be nice to the suitors. That is when Penelope, being a simple woman, began to despise him. She found she’d stopped loving Ulysses because of his behavior. Ulysses then realized too late that he’d lost Penelope’s love.

Just as Paul leaves Camille with Prokosch to ride in his sports car and as a result, Camille feels unwanted and grows contempt, Lang suggests that, in Ulysses not coming back home right away after his journey, Penelope also feels unwanted and as a result stops loving Ulysses. Just as Camille sees Paul as offering her to Prokosch, Penelope sees Ulysses to be offering her to the suitors. When Paul hears Lang’s theory he immediately sees how his life is mirroring the dynamic between Ulysses and Penelope. As a result, there is a scene where Paul finally expresses his true feelings about the film and confronts Prokosch in an attempt to regain Camille’s respect and love. In the same way that Ulysses is too late in regaining Penelope’s love, Paul, too, is unsuccessful in rekindling his love with Camille. Through his “intersection,” recalling Dudley Andrew’s mode, Godard creates an interplay between a work written in the 8th century and the modern medium of film. Through intersecting with an ancient text, Godard continues the imparting of wisdom between period and medium, keeping Homer’s *Odyssey* as an eternal source for further questioning and understanding.

In the same way that Rossellini uses Joyce’s *The Dead* as a pretext for an entirely unique film in *Voyage to Italy*, Godard takes the framework of Moravia’s plot in *Il disprezzo* and uses it to an entirely new effect. The main tension of Moravia’s novel is

Riccardo's over-intellectualized obsession with trying to understand his wife's thoughts prior to her affair and death. By the end of the novel, it becomes more and more evident that Riccardo's obsessive over-analyzing of every moment with Emilia could have very well been the cause of their relationships' demise. Godard's film uses the same plot, though removes the psychological overthinking aspect of Riccardo's character. Instead, *Contempt* becomes very much about Paul's strife between his artistic integrity and the financial promise of commercial Hollywood. The film is ultimately about the process of filmmaking and the complications of how closely tied art is to money in the film medium specifically. With his changes, as Walter Korte states in his "Godard's Adaptation of Moravia's 'Contempt,'"<sup>37</sup> not only does Godard move "cinematic narrative in new directions," he also shows "how a novel may serve as the pretext which provides the catalytic elements for an entirely new creation." Godard follows in the footsteps of Rossellini in his creation of a film adaptation that only uses the source as a jumping-off point in the synthesis of something unique. His inspiration from Rossellini is openly alluded to in *Contempt* when Godard has his characters go see *Voyage to Italy* in the film. With this, Godard's film is in dialogue with Moravia, Homer, Dante, and Rossellini, furthering the cultural discourse between different mediums and time periods.

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<sup>37</sup> Horton, A. Godard's "Contempt": Alberto Moravia Transformed."

### Chapter Three

Pier Paolo Pasolini wrote the book *Theorem* while he was in the process of making the film of the same name. In summary of his own words, “it was as if the book had been painted with one hand while with the other he was working on a fresco - the film.”<sup>38</sup> While an adaptation presupposes a source, neither the film nor the book was written first. The film, therefore, is not an adaptation of the book, nor is the book an adaptation of the film in a traditional sense. Instead, through his parallel creations, Pasolini invents an entirely unique form of personal “intersection,” where his works become two distinct renderings of the same general events. Recalling Dudley Andrew’s mode Pasolini’s work also, for one scene, “intersects” with a passage from Tolstoy. Through his parallel works, besides exploring a vast array of deeply personal themes such as repression, sexuality, Marxism, religion, etc., Pasolini creates a dialogue between the written word and images that is truly insightful. Pasolini shows the written word’s ability to conjure cinematic images, though more importantly, Pasolini demonstrates the relationship that cinema can have with poetry. Through the verse in his novel and the poetic montage in his film, Pasolini explores how cinematic images can invoke metaphors as well as how cinema can be viewed on the same playing field as written poetic verse.

Pasolini gives his novel a self-aware narrator who addresses the reader directly, “as the reader will have already noticed, this, rather than being a story, is what in the sciences is called a ‘report’: so it is full of information, therefore, technically its shape

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<sup>38</sup> Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Stuart Hood. *Theorem* (introduction)



rather than being that of a ‘message,’ is a ‘code.’”<sup>39</sup> Pasolini suggests that the novel should be viewed as something to be deciphered, like a code, not something that is explained, like a story which may have a clear message. Ironically, Pasolini’s narrator confuses his *Theorem* by also describing the work as a parable in the novel. The narrator states, “we repeat, this is not a realistic story, it is a parable.”<sup>40</sup> Pasolini’s use of the first-person plural “we” adds to the notion that this text was written like a scientific report, insinuating it was a team who studied the bourgeois family that the novel and film are examining. Furthermore, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a parable as “an allegorical or metaphorical saying or narrative; an allegory, a fable.” An allegory or fable implies a clear message, though the narrator previously stated that the film is a code and not a message. Pasolini then suggests that while his work is allegorical, the allegorical meaning, unlike a fable, will have to be deciphered by the viewer, like a code. A parable is also defined as “a (usually realistic) story or narrative told to convey a moral or spiritual lesson or insight; *esp.* one told by Jesus in the Gospels.” Pasolini’s description of his work as a parable also plays on this separate definition of the word as he alludes to the New Testament in his work.

Pasolini uses the written word to conjure visual images, demonstrating how novels can tell stories with cinematic components. Pasolini’s visual images, as his narrator suggests, are to be deciphered as opposed to explained. For instance, when the family receives the telegraph that they are expecting a visitor, Pasolini writes, “the father raises his eyes from the bourgeois newspaper he is reading and opens the telegram in

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<sup>39</sup> Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Stuart Hood. *Theorem* (p. 9)

<sup>40</sup> Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Stuart Hood. *Theorem* (p. 11)

which is written ‘I SHALL ARRIVE TOMORROW.’”<sup>41</sup> The narrator provides the image of “the father’s thumb cover[ing] the name of the signatory.” Through this, Pasolini demonstrates how words become images. Instead of giving the audience an internal view of the characters, through the image of the father’s thumb covering the name of the signatory, Pasolini keeps the audience on the outside looking in. This exterior role that Pasolini places the reader in is reminiscent of how audiences watch films. In novels, the reader often gets an internal view of the characters, while in film the audience typically interprets the exterior actions of the characters. In this case, Pasolini shows how the novel can give the reader a similar exterior viewing of the characters as a film. By hiding the name of the guest in both the film and novel, Pasolini leaves it up to the audience to decipher what the guest may allegorically represent. In his own words, “it is not important to *understand* Teorema,”<sup>42</sup> instead Pasolini states, “I leave it up to the spectator...is the visitor God or is he the Devil?”. No matter what the viewer or reader chooses to believe the guest allegorically represents, Pasolini affirms that “the important thing is that he is sacred, a supernatural being. He is something from beyond.”

While much of the prose, if read superficially, has been criticized as being mere descriptions of the scenes from the movie, a deep reading and viewing will render elements of the prose that give further insight into Pasolini’s *Theorem*. For instance, there is no narrator in the film who explicitly describes how the film should be viewed as a “report” that contains a “code,” but also as a “parable.” While Pasolini does describe the film as a parable and a “mysterious theorem” in an interview following the film’s

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<sup>41</sup> Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Stuart Hood. *Theorem* (p. 12)

<sup>42</sup> Flatley, Guy. “One Man’s God, Another Man’s Devil”

release, the book, released months prior to the film, deeply informs the way in which the film is to be dissected. To go along with this, in his prose, Pasolini instills in the reader the importance of not understanding time in relation to the events of the story.

Throughout the novel, the narrator will constantly remind the viewer that the timing of events is of no importance. The narrator begins one chapter by stating, “it is afternoon in late spring (or, given the ambiguous nature of our story, of early autumn.)”<sup>43</sup> A few chapters later the narrator asks the audience, “does some time pass?”<sup>44</sup> undermining their own authority surrounding time. Even when the narrator states, “perhaps it is still the same night as when we left Pietro contemplating the sleeping guest. (We underline it for the last time - the facts of this story are as one in place and time,”<sup>45</sup> such lines are continuously written throughout, reminding the viewer of the unimportance of time. This theme, which is fully fleshed out in the novel, is only briefly referenced in the film. The very opening scene of the film shows documentary-esque footage outside a factory with the workers being interviewed on camera, “your boss gave you workers his factory. What do you think of his gesture?” It is only at the end of the film that the audience realizes that this is the Father’s factory which, after the guest leaves, he gives to his workers.

Through denying the importance of time, Pasolini rejects plot and invents a new kind of formula or as the title of his work suggests, a *Theorem*. A traditional plot can be described as the order in which important events of a story occur. In a traditional story, events occur as a result of other events until these events lead to an inevitable end.

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<sup>43</sup> Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Stuart Hood. *Theorem* (p. 16)

<sup>44</sup> Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Stuart Hood. *Theorem* (p. 24)

<sup>45</sup> Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Stuart Hood. *Theorem* (p.27 )

While defining plot in his *Poetics*, Aristotle states, “parts of the events ought to have been put together so that when a part is transposed or removed, the whole becomes different and changes.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, the audience's understanding of time is a crucial aspect of a conventional plot as, if the order of events were to change, it would compromise the cause and effect relationship intrinsic to plot. Pasolini's structure to *Theorem*, therefore, unlike a traditional plot, is similar to a mathematical equation where if A x B then the result is X. In other words, if one of the characters (X) has sexual relations with the guest (A), then the result will be (B). While the result of having sex with the guest is different for each family member, each reaction generally supports the theory that “if brought into contact with the ‘sacred,’ *then* the bourgeoisie will catastrophically and irreversibly collapse under its own contradictions.”<sup>47</sup> When the formula is applied to the peasant maid Emilia, after performing a miracle of removing the sores of a sick child, she becomes suspended in the sky while those around her at the farmstead are, as the narrator states, “recognizing before their own eyes the ancient and well-known presence of God.” By having the peasant maid become a saintly figure after her presence with the divine, Pasolini suggests a spiritual void among those of the rich industrial bourgeoisie class.

Instead of following the traditional logic of plot where all events are directly motivated, *Theorem* depends “upon a mechanism external to the narration to keep it in motion” so that the plot then is “manipulated by an abstract logic, the logic of the theorem, which imposes its own rigid, alien structure on the events of the storyline.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Aristotle. *On poetics* (p. 26)

<sup>47</sup> Luzzi, Joseph. *Italian Cinema from the Silent Screen to the Digital Image* (p. 344)

<sup>48</sup> Marcus, Millicent. *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism*. (p. 249)

This abstract logic that Pasolini uses to progress the story makes “narrative structure itself the subject of the film, rather than anything it chose to relate.” Through this “predetermined structure,” Pasolini “turns the film into a formal creation or, to use Pasolini's words, an 'object' rather than a representation of reality.” Pasolini, who had a background in neorealism, made what many consider the last film of the Italian neorealist movement, called *Accattone* (1961). Similar to how Rossellini wanted to invent a new kind of realism, Pasolini, too, wanted to distance himself from the tradition. Pasolini stated, “in neorealist films, day-to-day reality is seen from a crepuscular, optimistic, credulous, and above all naturalistic point of view,”<sup>49</sup> whereas Pasolini saw his *Theorem* to “introduce a certain realism, but it would be hard to define it exactly.” Just as Rossellini examines a spiritual as opposed to naturalistic realism in his *Voyage to Italy*, Pasolini does the same with his *Theorem*.

In his prose throughout the novel, Pasolini integrates the image of a desert, invoking a metaphor. For instance, at one point in the middle of the novel, the narrator states:

The Oneness of the desert was like a dream that allows no sleep and from which one cannot waken...the desert began to reappear once more in everything that existed - and in order to see it again like this - desert and nothing but desert - one only had to be there...The desert with its horizon ahead and its horizon behind, continually unchanging, kept [Paolo] in a state of delirium.<sup>50</sup>

Pasolini plays on the vast unchanging “Oneness” of the desert as a way of metaphorically exploring the spiritual void of his characters as a result of their class, in this case comparing the void, which causes Paolo’s delirium, to the desolate nature of the desert.

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<sup>49</sup> Marcus, Millicent. *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism*. (p. 250)

<sup>50</sup> Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Stuart Hood. *Theorem* (p. 73)

In the film, this metaphor materializes through the image of a desert which recurs “again and again at crucial points throughout the film – fourteen times in all – especially at moments of intense crisis.”<sup>51</sup> In these moments, the desert becomes a metaphor for “a sort of a place outside history or culture, where all identity is lost.” Through intercutting brief scenes of the desert throughout the film, Pasolini demonstrates how cinematic montage can invoke metaphors.

Furthermore, in the final chapter of the novel, Pasolini breaks again into poetry, where an image of Paolo walking across a desert is described in verse:

Oh my naked feet that are walking  
 across the desert sand...I AM FILLED BY A QUESTION WHICH NO ONE CAN  
 ANSWER.  
 Sad result, if I have chosen this desert  
 as the real and true place of my life!  
 Is he who was searching in the streets of Milan the same as the one who now  
 searches on the roads of the  
 desert?<sup>52</sup>

In the film, these poetic words materialize into poetic images. After removing all his clothes in the middle of a train station, there is a close-up of Paolo’s naked feet walking through a crowd of people. Pasolini match-cuts this scene with another close-up of Paolo’s feet as he is walking through the desert. Pasolini then cuts from this close-up to a wide shot of a desert. Just as in the prose, “he who was searching in the streets of Milan” now “searches on the roads of the desert,” by invoking the same sort of poetic metaphor through images that the novel creates through its poetic verse, Pasolini creates a dialogue between the poetry of film and the written word.

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<sup>51</sup> Blasi, Luca. “The Scandal of Self-contradiction: Pasolini’s Multistable Subjectivities”

<sup>52</sup> Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Stuart Hood. *Theorem* (p. 175)

Once the guest announces he must leave, in the film, each character has a scene with the guest where they poetically express the void that his departure will leave them yearning to fill. In the novel, after the guest announces his departure, the next chapter breaks entirely into poetic verse. The confessions that the characters make to the guest in the film and the poetic verses in the novel are entirely unique from one another, though both explore the same themes. For example in the film, Lucia, the mother, tells the guest:

I realize now that I've never had any real interest in anything. I don't mean anything grand. Just the simple, everyday interest my husband takes in his work, or my son in his studies, or Odetta in family life. I've had nothing like that. I don't know how I lived with such emptiness, yet I did...Now I realize you filled my life with a real and total interest. So by leaving, you're not destroying anything that was there before, except my chaste bourgeois reputation.

In the novel, this same theme of “interest,” or lack thereof, is explored differently and through a unique poetic verse, seemingly written by Lucia:

My husband's interest in his industry  
 was born with him, was indistinguishable from him...  
 ...His interest in his own work  
 and in his own earnings (enormous and, as our enemies define them, unjust)  
 is the same as drives us to act in our dreams.  
 Necessary and vague. In short, he has never had an objective interest,  
 pure and cultural, in existence.<sup>53</sup>

While this is only a small segment of Lucia's verse about her husband, she continues to give long descriptions in her analysis of each family member's “interests.” Perhaps Lucia's obsession with her family's interests reflects the contradicting expectations of a woman of her time and class to be social, yet also a homebody, and above all docile.

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<sup>53</sup> Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Stuart Hood. *Theorem* (p. 85)

Lucia feels repressed by her fixed position and her void is only filled by the presence of the guest:

It was difficult to say how I lived;  
 how in order to live I required only the naturalness of living-  
 to think about my house, about my affections, almost like a peasant woman in her  
 family nest who fights tooth and nail for existence!  
 How was I able to live in such a void? Yet I did live in it.<sup>54</sup>

Whether or not Passolini's verses confuse or simplify the audience's understanding of his characters, is, in a way, besides the point. Through inventing wholly unique verses in the novel that tease out the same themes that scenes in the film address, Pasolini invents more modes for exploring the spirituality, or lack thereof, of his characters. As Pasolini explained, his *Theorem*, ironically, isn't going to offer answers, rather Pasolini's novel and film were made to stimulate questions. In the footsteps of Rossellini's "cinema of questions, not answers," with his novel and film, Pasolini gives multiple forms for the synthesis of questions and further personal discovery. Just as spirituality has no affirmative answer, neither does the cinema which seeks to explore the reality of spirituality in the human experience.

Pasolini alludes to several literary texts in his *Theorem* by having his characters reading them in the film. The authors' Pasolini references include Konrad Lorenz, Arthur Rimbaud, and Leo Tolstoy. With his reference to Tolstoy, Pasolini goes beyond having his characters reading the work when he has the guest perform an action directly emulating the film. In *Theorem*, the guest alleviates some of Paolo's pain by holding the ill man's legs on his shoulders. This scene "intersects" with a passage from Tolstoy's *The*

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<sup>54</sup> Pasolini, Pier Paolo, and Stuart Hood. *Theorem* (p. 74)



*Death of Ivan Ilich*, where he writes, “Ivan Ilyich would sometimes call Gerasim and get him to hold his legs on his shoulders, and he liked talking to him.”<sup>55</sup> In her essay, “Pasolini’s *Theorem*: The halfway revolution,” Millicent Marcus unpacks this allusion, stating “*The Death of Ivan Ilich* is very much a parable on the morally appropriate and inappropriate ‘readings’ of life experience.”<sup>56</sup> Marcus suggests that Paolo “proves to be an ideal reader of Tolstoy” when he “acts on the knowledge that came to Ivan too late,” which is, as Tolstoy writes, “everything which you have lived by is a lie, a deception, which conceals from you life and death.” Thus, Marcus argues that like *Death of Ivan Ilich*, “*Theorem* too is a parable, and hence it too makes a moral claim on the viewers to take its teachings to heart.” In making a reference to another parable, Pasolini hints at how his film should be interpreted by providing us with a source that follows a similar logic. Recalling Dudley Andrew’s mode of adaptation, this “intersection” Pasolini makes with Tolstoy is reminiscent of the way Rossellini’s *Voyage to Italy* intersects with Joyce’s *The Dead* and how Godard’s *Contempt* intersects with Homer’s *Odyssey*. In Pasolini’s “intersection,” however, *The Death of Ivan Ilich* doesn’t become a jumping-off point for further exploration but instead suggests a text the viewer may visit in order to gain further insight into the form of *Theorem*. Furthermore, the way that Pasolini gives his character’s their own personal readings of classic literature and real-life artists, is reminiscent of *Contempt*, where Godard’s characters discuss their opinions on literature and film.

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<sup>55</sup> Tolstoy, Leo, and Michael R. Beresford. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. (p. 114)

<sup>56</sup> Marcus, Millicent. *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism* (p. 253)

Pasolini, like Rossellini and Godard, was interested in the “intersection” between literature and film. In his film *Theorem*, Pasolini uses the framework of a passage from Tolstoy to make an allusion to a work that follows a similar logic. Instead of using Tolstoy’s themes as a pretext for further exploration, Pasolini points the viewer to Tolstoy’s method in his *Death of Ivan Ilich*, as a way of adding to the viewer's understanding of *Theorem*. On top of Leo Tolstoy, Pasolini alludes to the work of Konrad Lorenz and Arthur Rimbaud by having his character’s read them. Pasolini’s parallel creation of novel and film invents a new form of “intersection,” where his own personal works become two distinct renderings of the same general events. While most of the details in the prose of the novel resembles much of the film, Pasolini creates a distinct poetry in both that offers more modes of thinking about his themes. Pasolini then adds something new to the conversation of the literature to film relationship. Just as Rossellini suggests that the novel and film can interact on an equal playing field, Pasolini suggests that cinema can invoke metaphors and intersect with poetry.

### Conclusion

When an auteur realizes an adaptation that brings meaningful nuance to the original work, not only is the auteur furthering enlightening discourse, but it then becomes an argument itself for the visual medium. This is because the adaptation is doing more than reproducing the work in a new form, it is arguing that further discourse becomes possible with an adaptation. Film becomes integral for understanding literary works in a new way. If a director commits to fidelity, it begs the question of the adaptation's own existence: why make a movie if one can understand everything from the book? Auteurs make a case for the necessity of their medium; asserting that without their film, a deeper understanding of the original literary work becomes out of reach.

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