DE ROBERTO AND FAENZA: IDEOLOGICAL SHIFTS IN *I VICERÉ*.

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Summary: This article examines the relationship between De Roberto's *I Viceré* and Faenza's film adaptation focusing on the two texts' different ideological positions and narrative strategies. Both texts depict the mechanisms employed by a ruling caste to remain in power through a period of acute social change. The novel, through a multifocal narration, gives agency to individuals for shaping their environment and presents them in their alienating subjective deformation of reality, casting the history-making process and any interpretation of it in an ambivalent light. The film focuses on the family saga and on the ongoing *trasformismo* of the Italian political system bringing to the fore its resonance with the present. The characters, particularly Consalvo as the principal voice, are represented as victims of a larger socio-political mechanism.

To transpose Federico De Roberto's *I Viceré* to film is unquestionably a challenging and ambitious endeavour, as Roberto Faenza himself acknowledged regarding his 2007 adaptation. According to the director, Visconti and Rossellini had also contemplated transposing this novel into film, but never followed through.¹ The challenge is posed not only by the complexity and size of the novel, but also, and particularly, by its narrative experimentation and its strong, visually grotesque impact, both of which constitute important signifiers in the text's ideological message. The present study proposes to examine how the novel and the film, through the lives of the Uzeda family, princes of Francalanza, portray a period of acute social change and transition

¹ In an interview conducted by Antonella Montesi, published in "L'uscita dei *Viceré* di Roberto Faenza e la ricezione della stampa italiana" Roberto Faenza states "L'idea di portare sugli schermi il capolavoro di De Roberto era già stata accarezzata da molti cineasti: da Luchino Visconti [...] a Roberto Rossellini, che stesero anche un abbozzo di sceneggiatura. Poi Sandro Bolchi, che si fece aiutare da Gesualdo Bufalino per tessere la trama di uno sceneggiato, per il quale aveva già scelto ogni dettaglio." Julie Dashwood and Margherita Ganeri eds., *The Risorgimento of Federico De Roberto* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009) 290. In the same text Ganeri gives details of Lucio Mandarà's contribution in Bolchi's screenplay for the RAI and of his admission that the project fell through because of political and religious censorship. Ganeri also mentions another noteworthy screenplay written for the RAI in the 1990s by Ugo Pirro. This six-episode series was, however, never made because of lack of funding, 5-7.

from an old regime faithful to the Bourbon kings to new political power structures of unified Italy. Both texts focus on the theme of power or, more specifically, on the mechanisms employed by a ruling caste to maintain their hegemonic status. In my analysis I consider how the author's and the film director's representation and narrative strategies produce texts with markedly different focuses and ideological implications.

Notwithstanding the initial critical neglect, De Roberto's novel has more recently come to be regarded as one of the major works in Italian literature.² It has been the object of important critical studies, which have brought to the fore the novel's ironic and scathing representation of a degraded humanity in pursuit of power, its provocative reflections on history and the complex polyphonic and polycentric character of the narrative.³ The novel's complex narrative structure and experimentation—namely, the author's distancing himself from his characters through irony; psychological introspection depicted through the individual character's distortion of reality; reality itself being presented as the clashing of personal obsessions; the attribution of certain racial traits and recurring patterns of behaviour to the main characters—are fundamental contributors to the discourse within the text. Beyond the novel's controversial representation of Italian unification and its overarching anthropological interpretation of human nature, which sees “amor proprio” at the core of all individual

² In “Perché Croce aveva torto,” *la Repubblica* 14-15 August 1977, Leonardo Sciascia defines *I Viceré*, “dopo *I promessi sposi*, il più grande romanzo che conti nella letteratura italiana.” Now republished as an introductory essay in the Einaudi edition of *I Viceré* (Torino, 1990) XXVIII. In his title Sciascia refers to Benedetto Croce's essay “E. Castelnuovo—F. De Roberto—«Memini»,” first published in *La Critica*, 29 July 1939. Croce's condemnation of *I Viceré* created a regrettably influential critical precedent. He defined the novel as “un'opera pesante che non illumina l'intelletto come non fa mai battere il cuore” and suggested that the novel was limited to a fundamental thesis—that of demonstrating “che la gente usa per secoli a dominare, non abbandona questa sua pratica per larghi e profondi che siano i rivolgimenti sociali e politici accaduti.” I am quoting from *La letteratura della Nuova Italia*, vol.6 (Bari: Laterza, 1948) 143.

³ In chapter four of the recent monograph I published on Federico De Roberto, *The Novels of Federico De Roberto. From Naturalism to Modernism* (Leicester: Troubadour, 2011), I provide a synthesis of critical studies regarding the use of history in this novel. The monograph by Rosario Castelli, *Il punto su De Roberto* (Acireale-Roma: Bonanno, 2009) offers an exhaustive assessment on criticism on De Roberto's work as does the reprint of the important monograph by Antonio Di Grado, *La vita, le Carte, i Turbamenti di Federico de Roberto, Gentiluomo* (1998; Acireale-Roma: Bonanno, 2007).

actions, the narrative strategies mentioned above draw the reader to reflect on the mechanisms behind the history making process and on the alienating power of subjectivity. In short, all these elements make *I Viceré* a novel which transcends the naturalist document and ushers in issues pertaining to modernism.

For his part, Roberto Faenza writes that he intended to make a new and updated version of his film *Forza Italia!* (first screened in 1978, but withdrawn soon after). This most evocative film, executed in documentary style, offers a very critical exposé of the Christian Democrats over thirty years as a group of stagnant individuals endlessly recycling themselves, depriving the country of any meaningful social progress. About this intended remake, Faenza states: “mi accorgo ora di aver realizzato questa mia intenzione portando sullo schermo *I Viceré*.”⁴ He further specifies that in his recent film adaptation of *I Viceré* he wanted to narrate “[l]a genesi del nostro paese attraverso il conflitto interno e generazionale di una famiglia” and he talks of a story “che si muove su due piani: la sfera privata e la sfera pubblica, retti dalle medesime logiche di potere, le cui manifestazioni esterne sono proprio il trasformismo e la sopraffazione.”⁵ Thus, Faenza places as the premise at the core of his adaptation the corrosive and corrupting element behind the exercise of a misguided notion of power. This seems to correspond to what Millicent Marcus calls “the preliterate idea, the one that stands prior to its written expression” which a good adaptor “must first infer from a textual source.”⁶ The representation of the workings of power is mostly evident in the depiction of the Uzeda, a family that is rendered dysfunctional through its arbitrary abuse of power, as well as in the manipulations of the politically powerful who pursue their self-interest, thus preventing any possibility of renewal. Even though politics occupies only a small portion of the filmic space, a sense of stagnation, particularly through the practice of *trasformismo*, is prevalent in the film and offers scope to make inferences to a more contemporary political present.

Crucial aspects pertaining to the theoretical debate on film adaptation of literary texts have offered useful insights in assessing Faenza's rendition

⁴ Roberto Faenza, “Introduzione,” *I Viceré*, by Federico De Roberto (Roma: Edizioni e/o, 2007) 5. In 2011, in collaboration with Filippo Macelloni, Faenza made another politically critical film on Berlusconi, using a similar documentary style and authentic recordings. The film is entitled *Silvio Forever*.

⁵ Faenza, 12.

⁶ Millicent Marcus, *Filming the Book. Italian Cinema and Literary Adaptation* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) 15.

of *I Viceré*. Central to the discourse on adaptation is the question of what aspects of literary narration can be transferred into the visual language of film and of most significance is the issue of the independence, stylistic and ideological, of the film itself. The debate had moved well beyond the by now discarded fidelity approach and has drawn attention to both the importance of approaching film adaptations as acts of discourse and of being sensitive to the cultural and social forces that motivate it, as for instance is suggested by Dudley Andrew.⁷ Naturally, an adaptation will always be a product of its own time, cultural values and market exigencies. The most productive way of looking at adaptation would then be one which on the one hand takes into account narrativity and, on the other, the choices made at the level of textual ideology. As Robert Stam argues “one way to look at adaptation is to see it as a matter of a source novel hypothesis’s being transformed by a complex series of operations” and to engage in a criticism which will “give more attention to dialogical responses.”⁸ The issue of present-day relevance of De Roberto’s message for a modern audience and the question of focalization of point of view are fundamental concerns regarding Faenza’s adaptation, as he makes the distinct choice of replacing the novel’s multiple focalization of points of view with the privileging instead of Consalvo’s voice above others. It would be therefore important to consider as Christopher Orr advocates: “a comparison of the narrative strategies in film and literature and the examination of how these strategies affect the positioning of the subject in the verbal and filmic text.” In other words, as Orr emphasises, it would mean “approaching the issue of adaptation from an ideological perspective.”⁹

⁸ Robert Stam, “Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogic of Adaptation.” James Naremore (ed.) *Film Adaptation*. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press 2000) 68, 75. Similarly Cristina Della Coletta speaks of adaptation as an “agoraic space [...] a hermeneutical space with hybrid and expanding boundaries” *When Stories Travel. Cross- Cultural encounters between Fiction and Film*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012) 22. In my essay I have consistently used the term adaptation to describe the process of transposing the novel *I Viceré* into film. This term has caused some controversy because it has been considered to be too close to the Fidelity paradigm, as Carlo Testa claims in *Masters of the Two Arts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002). He argues instead for the use of the term “re-creation”, coined by Millicent Marcus, in *Filmmaking by the Book: Italian Cinema and Literary Adaptation* 15. Testa claims that “re-creation [...] accurately labels the process of a thorough inter-media recasting of concepts and practices previously shaped by a given cultural-historical mould into another mould appropriate to a socially and technologically different moment.” 12.

⁹ Christopher Orr, *Wide Angle* 2(1984): 73

At the level of narrativity, Brian McFarlane makes a useful distinction which underscores the process involved in adaptation.¹⁰ He differentiates between, on the one hand, those elements that can be transferred - that is a series of more or less casually connected narrative events or, using Roland Barthes's terminology, "cardinal functions" and, on the other, enunciation which requires adaptation proper - that is those elements of the work such as character, tone, atmosphere, point of view and so on responsible for the display of narrative. Thus the director, in addition to determining how to give his/her own stylistic and ideological imprint, is also faced with the practical task of selecting what to include or exclude in order to render the interpretation organic while, at the same time, recreating a filmic text that bears some relationship to the source text. In adapting *I Viceré*, Faenza had the unenviable task of reducing a source text of approximately 700 pages - a complex canvas of historical and political events around the birth of the Italian Nation and a comprehensive study of the human condition - into a filmic text of 120 minutes or so.

Faenza was not new to adaptation into film. Of his nineteen films, eleven have used novels as subject, the most recent being the 2012 adaptation of Edith Bruck's novel *Quanta stella c'è in cielo*. In these adaptations he introduced some significant changes. One need only think of *Marianna Ucrìa* (1997), from Dacia Maraini's novel *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa*. In this film he introduces two characters: a caring grandfather who nonetheless allows the marriage of Marianna to the man who raped her as a young child and a family tutor who will act as a mentor for her. Another significant change is the radical ending introduced by the film-maker to *L'amante perduto* (1999), taken from the novel by Abraham Yehoshua, *Ha-Me'avev* (*The lover*). Here, in the final scene, the Palestinian boy and the Jewish father, instead of simply going each his own way, are filmed jointly pushing the car, thus alluding to the need for the Palestinians and for the Israelis to engage in a meaningful dialogue.

In his interview with Flavia Caprara, Faenza claims: "i libri sono solo trama, soggetto nel senso che il corpo letterario non m'interessa."¹¹ In the

¹⁰ Brian McFarlane, *Novel to Film. An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 194-95. Millicent Marcus makes the point that the current debate hinges on the question of the possible separability of story and discourse arguing that this separability is a useful assumption for the adaptor "who must posit the existence of a narrativity that lends itself to cinematic as well as literary forms." Marcus 14.

¹¹ Fulvia Caprara, "Cinema e letteratura: una lontana parentela. Intervista a Roberto Faenza," *Letteratura e Cinema* 28 October 2005. 14 June 2009.

case of his film rendition of *I Viceré* this statement carries some truth. There seems to be little attention to transferring the main narrative features of the novel. Instead, a major preoccupation appears to be that of bringing to the fore the resonance this text has for the political present. In so doing Faenza, as I will argue, makes a political and ideological statement quite distant from De Roberto's position. Faenza aims to emphasize: "Ciò che siamo stati e ciò che siamo, i vizi che ci affliggono, la resistenza a ogni cambiamento e, per contro, la vocazione al conformismo, la tempestività a chinare la schiena di fronte ai vincitori... ecco la pasta di cui è fatta la nostra pellicola."¹² In order of space and, I would say, in order of importance in the filmic narrative, Faenza's *I Viceré* portrays a family saga: the generational conflict between father and son, the machinations devised by Giacomo, as head of the family, to strip his relations of their inheritance, his overwhelming exercise of arbitrary power and the abuses endured by the various members of his family. As concerns the historical background, Faenza's focus is on political stagnation resulting from opportunism and a misguided notion of *trasformismo* as key characters of Italian politics.

Faenza creates a narrative sequence whereby the individual is the object of a superstructure—the corrupt mechanisms of power. De Roberto, on the contrary, gives agency to the individual for the making of history and the shaping of society. He brings to the fore a group of individuals born to rule and through his scathing criticism represents them engaged in a series of nefarious acts. For instance, Lodovico Uzeda's clever manipulations of Church institutions and hierarchies and opportunism in the pursuit of his career from monk to cardinal, his misuse of canon law for family intrigues, and the factions, political and personal, among the religious community get no mention in the film. Likewise, the reactions to key historical events or the duke's and Consalvo's arduous efforts to attain political power, their manipulations in doing so and particularly their dealings with an insurgent society are not included in the filmic narration. In the novel these aspects elicit an image of a dynamic and factious society, torn between rulers and ruled. The emphasis is not so much on how society shapes the individual, as it is on creating a behavioural identikit of people born to rule and the impact they have on the social environment. De Roberto's lens is undoubtedly on the Viceroy, grouped together by a racial discourse as specimens of rulers, but they are incessantly fighting against

<http://62.77.55.137/site/Scuola/Zoom/cinema_letteratura/caprra_faenza.htm>

¹² Antonella Montesi and Luca Pallanch eds., *I Viceré. Un film di Roberto Faenza* (Roma: Gremese, 2007) 10.

dramatic political changes and growing opposition. The narration is open-ended and highly ambiguous. The novel's complex dialogism presents on one narrative level the lives of the Viceroy's confined in their individual obsessions, struggling to maintain power and on another level a multiplicity of voices and situations which reveal the social and political transformation taking place.

The film emphasises instead the stagnation of a corrupt society and how individuals are engulfed by it. This is done in two ways: through the Duke's political engagement and through the re-interpretation of Consalvo as protagonist. The duke's political career, a vehicle for De Roberto's criticism of Italian politics, occupies only three short scenes in the film.¹³ In the animated garden scene (19) at the Belvedere, where the family has retreated to escape the cholera epidemic, the spectator is informed by the duke of the Bourbon kingdom's imminent demise and of the formation of a new liberal party. The duke announces that he has been invited to join this party by the lawyer Giulente and that he intends to accept. Through a series of close ups, highlighting nuanced expressions, body language and physicality the spectator gains an insight into the duke's duplicitous character and cowardice. The clear message, especially in the duke's alarmed reaction to Giulente's news of wanting to join the revolutionary troops, is that the duke will give his allegiance provided that he runs no risks and can take advantage of the privileges. It is zia Ferdinanda's mocking facial expression that throws doubt on the duke's political integrity, while the violent exchange between the duke and his brother, the pro-Bourbon Benedictine monk don Blasco, explicitly reveals each character's self interest. The scene ends with a cut to the balcony and a maid's announcement that Chiara is about to give birth. The baby is born dead and horribly deformed. In the novel this episode marks the end of part one. With brutally evocative prose, Chiara delivers: "un pezzo di carne informe, una cosa innominabile, un pesce col becco, un uccello spiumato; quel mostro senza sesso aveva un occhio solo, tre specie di zampe" (263).¹⁴ This malformed baby, "il prodotto più fresco della razza dei Vicerè" (267), is symbolically made to coincide with the creation of the new Italian Parliament and the

¹³ See scenes 19, 91 and 92. All references to the film script are given parenthetically, indicating the scene number according to the screenplay in Montesi and Pallanch.

¹⁴ All textual citations from the novel *I Vicerè* by Federico De Roberto are given parenthetically and are taken from Mario Lavagetto's edition (Milano: Garzanti, 1976).

election of the duke to it. Giacomo's concluding remarks to his son are: "vedi lo zio come fa onore alla famiglia? Quando c'erano i Viceré, i nostri erano Viceré; adesso che abbiamo il parlamento, lo zio è deputato!" (269).¹⁵ This segment in the film is greatly toned down and the contempt expressed through the connection between the monstrous birth and the duke's election to the new Italian Parliament or through the duke's ignoble struggle from 1848 to 1860 to be elected are not transferred.

The 1860 revolution, placed in scenes 52 and 53, ushers in the theme of the Uzeda's embracing the new political situation. It is a euphoric celebration of the *garibaldini's* victory in Catania. The Uzeda — Consalvo, the Duke and Don Blasco — feature in the foreground, mingling with the populace. Consalvo has been portrayed as a liberal supporter and the insurrection represents for him liberation from the monastery. In the long shot of a rebellious crowd, Don Blasco, the recalcitrant guest, is highlighted in his psychological development by means of the camera foregrounding him through a series of close ups: first in his anger, then fear, then his quick reaction of change of allegiance prompted by the witnessing of a Bourbon soldier being shot. He then joins the crowd shouting with the others "viva Garibaldi" (scene 53). All along, the camera lens never loses sight of the tumult that inspired his fear. In the voice-over Consalvo had just informed the spectator of his father's misdeeds: "si era impossessato definitivamente dell'eredità materna, lasciando agli altri le briciole" (scene 52), a symbolic acknowledgement that the old Bourbon status quo survives despite the new progressive laws abolishing the *maggiorascato*. In fact, Giacomo's reappropriation of what he perceives as his rightful inheritance as head of the Uzeda dynasty could be interpreted as a metaphor of the political changes facing Italy: Giacomo is temporarily dispossessed in the change-over of power from his mother to himself, and works towards re-establishing the previous status quo. Likewise, as power shifts away from the Bourbons, the Uzeda embrace the new political forces.

The spectator learns indirectly that the Duke is a Member of Parliament, through a brief exchange between Lucrezia and Teresa in the

¹⁵ In the film this comment is removed from the specific historical context and related instead by Giacomo to zia Ferdinanda on the day he announces his marriage to donna Graziella: "Ferdinanda: - Cos'è questa roba? Viva la Libertà? Giacomo: - Libertà è una parola che non significa niente, ma che accontenta tutti. Vedete zia, quando comandava il re, noi Uzeda eravamo amici del re. Ora che comandano i pezzenti, bisogna essere amici dei pezzenti... Ferdinanda: - Voltagabbana pure tu, traidor! Giacomo: — Ma no, cosa dite? Libertà significa anche ... che ora che l'Italia è fatta, dobbiamo farci gli affari nostri!" (scene 67).

billiard room of Palazzo Uzeda while another important historical event is announced - the 1870 fall of Rome. Overhearing the noise of a protesting crowd in the streets, Giacomo says to his guests: "Marmaglia! Hanno preso Roma. Ecco il risultato dei Piemontesi al governo." Don Blasco, now in secular clothes, while concentrating on his game of biliards, replies calmly: "Se hanno preso Roma, il papa è fottuto" (scene 83). This constitutes a striking difference from the novel where the event marks the end of part two. Don Blasco is described running from the social club to the prefecture gathering information and taking it upon himself to spread the false news that the duke has received a personal telegram from parliament informing him that the Italian troops have conquered Rome. Now a staunch anti-Bourbon, Don Blasco joins the celebrations, shouting jubilantly in the midst of the crowd "Roma è nostra! La breccia è aperta!" (450). With scathing irony, the author goes as far as depicting the Duke and Don Blasco joining the tumultuous crowd. Don Blasco "con la bandiera spal-l'arme, la tuba un poco di traverso, il colletto monacale madido di sudore, andava in mezzo alla dimostrazione" (451). As the uncontrollable crowd inveighs against his half brother Fra' Carmelo "Morte ai corvi! Giù i tricorni," Don Blasco joins in with "Abbasso!... Morte!... Abbasso!" (452). Faenza in his film has chosen a markedly different tone. They are represented mostly in their own milieu, interacting with their own kind, and behind closed doors adjusting to external pressures. The vulgarity and grotesquery which distinguishes them in the novel and their arduous and ignominious struggle to keep afloat are by and large removed in the film.

The strongest indictment of the Uzeda's misuse of political events is represented in the two other scenes dedicated to the duke's political career, scenes 91 and 92, which depict Consalvo's visit to his uncle in Rome. This encounter does not occur in the novel. Instead, when Consalvo arrives in Rome, his uncle is away and Consalvo discovers the parliamentary world through the assistance of the abhorred "onorevole Mazzarini, giovane avvocato della provincia di Messina [...] pel quale sentiva un profondo disprezzo di razza" (480). After enduring the humiliation of discovering that outside Sicily his princely title carries no weight, that he was "uno qualunque in mezzo alla folla che non gli badava" (478), Consalvo is led to believe, with Mazzarini's help, that he has discovered the way to gain the ruling status he feels he deserves:

vide in un momento schiuder dinanzi la via che andava cercando, quella che d'un umile faccendiere come Mazzarini faceva un uomo importante, riverito e corteggiato; quella che permetteva di raggiungere la notorietà e la supremazia non in una sola regione o sopra una sola casta ma in tutta

la nazione e su tutti. Deputato, ministro — *Eccellenza!* — presidente del Consiglio, Viceré per davvero; che cosa occorre per ottenere quei posti? Nulla, o ben poco.(482)

Consalvo's political motives are thus brought to the fore and the exaggeration in the above statements underlines his megalomania and pathological psychological state. From being a bigoted Bourbon royalist who in his visit to Paris tells Francesco II, "Maistà, ci arriveremo in Napoli, nel palazzo reale di Vostra Maistà" (474), he becomes a left wing liberal, in pursuit of fame and with numerous delusional expectations.

Faenza's representation does not cast Consalvo in the ridiculous and scornful light to be found in *I Viceré*, as well as in *L'imperio*.¹⁶ However, with an entirely new scene, Faenza does emphasize the theme of political opportunism. Filmed standing on the hill of Campidoglio, surrounded by a group of note-taking journalists, the duke scorns the notion of giving women the vote. The interview is cut short by Consalvo's arrival. As the journalists bow to the duke, Consalvo's flippant remark: "Vedo che il giovane stato assomiglia alla vecchia monarchia ... la gente si inchina come alla corte dei borboni"(scene 91), alludes feebly to the failure of political renewal. The film makes its strongest criticism regarding the misuse of political power in the scene that follows, where the duke in his opulent office toasts with champagne to the pursuit of his own future and that of the Uzeda, meanwhile enlightening Consalvo on *trasformismo*:

Destra ... Sinistra, oggi non significano più niente! Di questi tempi tutto cangia talmente velocemente che non possiamo più stare appresso alle etichette [...] La gente? il Paese? Nomi senza senso, astrazioni. Questo Paese non esiste! Esistono soltanto moltitudini di cittadini in mezzo ai

¹⁶ In a stark opposition to Consalvo's deluded dreams of success in politics at the end of *I Viceré*, in *L'imperio*, published posthumously in 1929, De Roberto depicts Consalvo's maiden speech in Parliament as a total flop. He is derided as an unknown, insignificant "A, Bi, Ci, U, Zeta" (10), his speech being hissed irreverently "ma sta zitto art.100" (21), accompanied by noisy "latrati, miagolii, nitriti" (23). His English affectations result in his being scornfully referred to as "il cocchiere dell'ambasciata inglese" (10 and 21). He will be depicted struggling from the back bench for over two decades in a petty and laboured search for political advancement, to then become for a very brief period *Ministro degli Interni* (202) thanks to his manipulation of a fortuitous event. He will then be involved in a scandal and forced to resign shortly after (206). All page references given parenthetically are from Carlo A. Madrigani's edition (Milano: Mondadori, 1994). See also my article "Pessimism as 'il colore del tempo' in *L'imperio* by Federico De Roberto." *Dashwood and Ganeri* 223-243.

quali, se cercherete bene, non ne troverete due soli che siano interamente d'accordo su qualcosa (scene 92).

This brief tirade concludes with the duke's laughing smugly at his continued success and at Consalvo's apparent naiveté. While this brief *mise-en-scène* does satirize the opportunism of a self-driven political class, it is a reductive representation when compared to the vitriolic scorn at the misuse of the political system that the novel engenders. Margherita Ganeri talks of a "pulsione rabbiosa della scrittura" and claims that "il livore della voce autoriale contrasta il pessimismo esplicito sul senso della storia e gli sottende una volontà di rifiuto e ribellione."¹⁷ It is precisely this implicit anger which connects the author with his historical present and which delivers his protest against the abuse of power exercised by Consalvo. The depiction of such negativity and the discrediting representation of a pathological Consalvo add to the denunciation.

While Consalvo features as the protagonist of the film, very little filmic space is allotted to his climb to political power. He decides to enter politics in reaction to Giovannino's suicide. This connection is Faenza's addition. It is his cousin who tells him: "Le vuoi far vincere le tue idee di progresso? E allora devi diventare spietato come lui [Giacomo]... se no finirai come tutti i perdenti di questa terra"(scene 114). The episode is singled out as a turning point in Consalvo's psychological development, a sort of epiphany which will lead him to embark on his political career. Here, then, the ideological implication is substantially different. While the novel projects Consalvo as belonging to the "mala razza di predoni spagnuoli"(607), an active agent going about life in an incessant struggle to prevail, in the film he becomes cynical through his exposure to adversity. In scene 126, while sitting at a café, he asks the duke for his support. The declared motive is to find his role in society, to gain independence from his father. Two very short sunny landscape scenes (128 and 129) illustrate his campaign to gain votes. Scene 128 is set in Catania as Consalvo goes along on his buggy handing out leaflets, assisted by Baldassarre, family butler and illegitimate uncle. Through a voice-over Consalvo recounts the facts. He is preparing for the 1882 elections for which suffrage has been extended. In the subsequent scene Consalvo appears in a quarry talking to the workers,

¹⁷Margherita Ganeri, *Il romanzo storico in Italia. Il dibattito critico dalle origini al post-moderno* (Lecce: Piero Manni, 1999) 77. In her article "Sui Viceré e sull'impegno: Un'intervista con Faenza" *The Italianist* 29 (2009):338-349, Ganeri notes as the principle difference between the novel and the film "l'attenuazione, da parte di Faenza, della durezza e della cattiveria originali." 343.

while in the voice-over he recounts that he enlisted with the left, against the duke's advice. Scene 134 consists of his carefully crafted speech, 1 minute and 48 seconds long, from the Benedictine monastery's balcony. It is a speech full of platitudes on order, peace, reforms and traditions, aimed at satisfying both the conservatives and the liberals, and showing off his artificial erudition: "il passato e l'avvenire ... Machiavelli, ma anche Bacone. E dopo aver studiato Proudhon, sono convinto che la proprietà è un furto... ci sono tuttavia delle proprietà che dobbiamo riconoscere legittime!" He finally concludes with a "viva il re, viva la rivoluzione, viva sua Santità." All the while the camera lens has moved from close shots of a Consalvo always in control, to depictions of an enthusiastic crowd in awe of his every word. In fact, this is the only instance where one can sense some authorial irony against Consalvo. But it seems an isolated incident and almost inconsistent with the character as hitherto presented in the film. By now a faithful rendition of the caustic irony towards Consalvo, evident in his two final speeches in the novel, would be incongruous.

The electoral speech is one of the centrepieces in the novel's portrayal of Consalvo. It is punctuated by applause, contrasted by sneering remarks and derisive opposition. At the end of a nine-page tirade a spectator comments: "Adesso che ha parlato mi sapete dire che ha detto?" (640) Consalvo's historical trajectory and economic theories are presented with the utmost mockery. This speech, which should mark Consalvo's triumph, portrays him in a psychological crescendo as a megalomaniac; it highlights Consalvo's reification and dehumanization. He is depicted in an extenuating, feverish struggle: "Non ne poteva più, sfiancato, rotto, esausto da una fatica da istrione: parlava da due ore [...] si sgolava come un ciarlatano per vendere la sua pomata" (640). In the novel his torment and disgust during the campaign for having to visit the provinces and meet the people are a stark contrast to the scenic, sunny country excursion depicted in the film: "Lì in quelle stanze piccole [...] affollate di povera gente dalle mani callose, cominciava il suo tormento" (612) or "la notte stentava a prender sonno, con la mano scottata dal contatto di tante mani sudice, ruvide, incallite, infette" (616). The narrator makes a point of showing the enormity of his efforts to obtain a result only marginally ahead, with 54 votes, of the next candidate, the bourgeois avvocato Vazza (641). In the film there is no mention of election results or of any other candidate in the running.¹⁸

¹⁸ See my monograph, *The novels of Federico De Roberto. From Naturalism to Modernism* 89-138, for a full discussion on the representation of the Duke's and Consalvo's political careers and the narrative function of historical events. My contention is that De Roberto offers a more complex interpretation of the his-

Faenza's representation, on the contrary, is that of a much more contained, elegant, and demure campaign. All the while Consalvo is projected as a fundamentally good-natured person whose life experience has induced him to fight back in order to survive the ruthless world around him. Faenza says that in Consalvo he saw "la trasformazione di molti giovani del '68, la loro incapacità di perseguire gli ideali di un tempo, spinti dalla necessità di scendere a patti con la realtà."¹⁹ The film-maker's representation overturns the ideological position implicit in the novelist's depiction of Consalvo. The actor's own interpretation also adds to this reversal. For him Consalvo becomes a victim of the system rather than a wilful agent that corrupts the system as in the novel. Preziosi admits to not having read the novel till after the film was made.²⁰ He interprets Consalvo as a contrasting character to Giovannino. He aimed at "laddove lui [Giovannino] rivelava una maggiore freddezza, far apparire Consalvo come una figura estremamente sensibile."²¹

In the novel Consalvo's fundamental tenet is the belief in his right to rule and his trust in the fact that all human activities are based on "amor proprio." Firm in the belief of his superiority, for the pursuit of his self-interest alone and for no other purpose or vision, he scorns "La morale dei più" (512) and recognizes no obstacles: "nel profondo sentimento di sprezzo verso la ciurmaglia, nella ferma opinione d'esser fatto di un'altra pasta, nell'ardente bisogno di comandare al gregge umano come avevano fatto i suoi maggiori, egli era disposto a concedere tutto" (511). He represents a sort of the then fashionable Nietzschean *superman*, but with a pathological, exaggerated self-estimation revealed, for example in his comment to his sister: "credi tu che questo gregge mi apprezzi per quello che valgo?" (519). His narrative function, rather than to discredit history itself, is to depict the ugly nature of human beings' uncontrollable *amor proprio* and its corrosive consequences on social mechanisms and the making of history.²²

torical period which goes well beyond political stagnation or the issues pertaining to the South of Italy or even the specific historical period.

¹⁹ Faenza 13.

²⁰ Preziosi says: "Non so se sono sacrilego o meno ... ma io il libro l'ho letto successivamente e non prima di iniziare a girare. Ho preferito agire sulla base di una serie di intuizioni relative sia al genere, che chiaramente conoscevo, sia ai tratti che mi aveva fornito il regista in più di un'occasione." Montesi and Pallanch 151.

²¹ Montesi and Pallanch 152.

²² Natale Tedesco points out that "se ha disegnato una piccola figura di superuomo nell'aristocratico siciliano, egli coglie quel contrasto per dedurne un concetto dell'inutilità della storia." *La norma del negativo. De Roberto e il realismo analitico* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1981) 125-26. See also Annamaria Pagliaro,

Faenza's focus appears instead to be on the generational conflict between father and son. In the course of the film Consalvo loves and protects his mother and sister, but is very critical of his father's behaviour, even reprimanding him for his paternal failings. He rapes a young country girl, but repents of his behaviour. To a large extent, Consalvo is portrayed as the positive hero in the filmic narrative - positive in the sense that he manifests a critical conscience towards the abhorrent representation unfolding.²³ This, and the need to create a character with whom the spectator can sympathize, are, I would argue, the reasons for which Faenza adapts into a "buono" - as fra Carmelo says in the film: "Voi siete buono, continuate accussi" (scene 74) - what in the novel is fundamentally an abominable, amoral character from childhood to adulthood. Even Giacomo's character is supplied with mitigating circumstances for his actions. In his epic speech, in scene 111, the blame for his perversity is attributed to his mother's hatred towards him. In the novel the critical stance is produced by the relentless irony in the narrative voices and by the physical degeneration and psychological ugliness of the characters and their world from which both the reader and the author distance themselves in repugnance.

The concept of political stagnation is compounded in the film by Consalvo's unproblematic declaration to his aunt that history is a monotonous repetition and that all that counts is to have power (scene 136). This speech is stripped of the ambiguity which in the novel is produced by Consalvo's pathological psychological state. Here the reader perceives his efforts to justify and convince himself: "egli diceva queste cose anche per se stesso, per affermarsi nella giustezza delle proprie vedute" (658). He needs to believe that history is repeating itself and that the new political

"Psychological Portraits of the Mechanisms of Power. Subjective perceptions and deformed visions of reality in *I Viceré* by Federico De Roberto." Antonio Di Grado and Annamaria Pagliaro eds., *Naturalism and Beyond. Fragmentations and Transformations of the Real*, *Spunti e Ricerche* 19(2006): 75.

²³ Antonio Di Grado sees behind Faenza's creation of Consalvo the need for the film to have a character who could hold the plot together, adding: "Perciò Consalvo diviene, non è despótico e votato al potere fin dall'infanzia nel convento dei Benedettini, e il cinismo del neo-deputato scaturisce non da un'atavica vocazione ma da trauma e *illusions perdues*. E perciò Faenza ha ritagliato intorno a lui, eliminando episodi e personaggi, una Bildung coerente e univoca." In "Da De Roberto a Faenza." 3 March 2009. *I Viceré. Progetto Scuole* <<http://www.ivicere.it>>. This article has now been republished in Dashwood and Ganeri 259-63. The above website contains a comprehensive selection of critical material on De Roberto put together by Antonio Di Grado and Margherita Ganeri.

organization will give him the same chances of hegemonic power over his social class. However, his statements show his bias:

certo tra la Sicilia di prima del Sessanta, ancora quasi feudale, e questa d'oggi pare ci sia un abisso; ma la differenza è tutta esteriore. Il primo eletto col suffragio quasi universale non è un popolano, nè un borghese, nè un democratico: sono io, perchè mi chiamo principe di Francalanza”(648)

The reader by now recognizes the false claim, as the text had shown that he won the election by a narrow margin. The passage appears necessarily biased and double-voiced in so far as beneath the deformation, there is the reality of change. Consalvo selects the historical events that suit him and interprets them to justify his wishful dreaming, his desire for a dominant aristocracy in the new power structures. He advocates the maintenance of the hierarchical system, where a prince is always a prince and the bourgeoisie has a subordinate position. His fantasizing reveals his pathological state: “Tacque un poco, chiudendo gli occhi: si vedeva già al banco dei ministri, a Montecitorio” (649). This is made clearer by the imagined act of adding his own name and contribution, as well as that of his great uncle's, to the Mugnòs volume on the history of the aristocracy (649). While appearing as an expression of Consalvo's megalomania, this highly-charged speech, in its subjective deformation, also implicitly reveals the other, actual, side of the story. When Consalvo questions the legitimacy of the Bourbons - “Ma la legittimità loro da cosa dipende? Dal fatto che sono stati sul trono per più di cent'anni... Di qui a ottant'anni Vostra Eccellenza riconoscerebbe dunque come legittimi anche i Savoia...”(649) - he is simply justifying to his aunt and to himself that his fight for power in a new political order is not a debasement of his princely status. But even as close to the events as 1894, one recognises in the words of Consalvo the new historical reality and one senses the effects of the passing of time.

The film, on the other hand, stresses the ineffectual political system, the clinging to power by a political caste, simultaneously rejecting any suggestion of progress. This seems to be the function of the post ending to the film, an addition created by Faenza, set symbolically on the 20th of November 1918, during the first sitting of the Italian Parliament in the new hall of Montecitorio. The spectator views an aged and resigned Consalvo declaring his disappointment that things are still as corrupt as they ever were:

avevamo promesso il regno della giustizia e della moralità, ma le parzialità, le birbonate, le laderie continuavano come prima. I potenti e i pre-

potenti di un tempo erano tutti saldamente ancorati al loro posto. Era stata fatta l'Italia, chissà quando si sarebbero fatti gli italiani. (scene 138)²⁴

Thus Faenza's message about *immobilismo* is reasserted in this final scene. It is an interpretation consonant with many early critiques of De Roberto's work and one that suits the critical analogy Faenza wishes to make with the current political situation.²⁵

²⁴ In the novel an anonymous critical narrator commenting on the duke's growing opposition utters a similar sentence: "l'opposizione al deputato si confondeva così, a poco a poco nel generale malcontento [...] Adesso, dopo dieci anni di libertà, la gente non sapeva più come tirare innanzi. Avevano promesso il regno della giustizia e della moralità; e le parzialità, le birbonate, le ladrerie continuavano come prima: i potenti e i prepotenti di un tempo erano tuttavia al loro posto!" (427) Massimo D'Azeglio's famous sentence, which in the film is an expression of Consalvo's disappointment, finds its correspondence in the novel: "Ora che l'Italia è fatta, bisogna fare gli affari nostri" (427) as a statement attributed to the duke by an anonymous contesting opposition.

²⁵ Consider for instance Gaetano Trombatore who claims that *I Viceré* represents "l'infedamento della rivoluzione," *Riflessi letterari del Risorgimento in Sicilia* (Palermo: Manfredi, 1960) 41, or Vittorio Spinazzola who in *Il romanzo anti-storico* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1990) states: "oggetto del racconto sono la vittoria apparente e il fallimento sostanziale della rivoluzione patriottica in Sicilia [...] Alla persuasione ottimistica d'un ritmo ascensionale del divenire storico subentra la messa sotto accusa della storia, incapace di produrre vere modifiche nel tessuto immobile dell'esistenza" 6; or Nunzio Zago who in his introduction to the 1998 Rizzoli edition of *I Viceré*, claims that the author presents "gli anni cruciali del trapasso dalla Sicilia borbonica allo Stato sabaudo, fino alle elezioni a suffragio allargato dell'82, sotto il segno dell'immobilismo, secondo la filosofia della storia enunciata da Consalvo a chiusura del romanzo"X. In my recent article, "Il Risorgimento e la frammentarietà del processo storico ne *I Viceré* di Federico De Roberto" *Annali della Fondazione Verga* (nuova serie) 3(2012):303-26, in line with the current historical revisionism concerning Italian Unification, I question whether the representation of this period in De Roberto's *I Viceré* should only be viewed in negative terms as several critics have done, mostly based on a Gramscian view of a passive or failed revolution, and I suggest a reading which takes into consideration the plurality of voices and not just that of the Uzeda. I argue that alongside a fierce denunciation which demystifies the idealism shrouding the Risorgimento, there lies a complex discourse which reflects on the history-making process and presents a sense of *malaise*, connected to De Roberto's relativism and in tune with a European critical questioning on the *fin-de siècle* social and intellectual crisis.

The biggest challenge for an adaptation of this novel lies in its multifocal narration. In *I Viceré* De Roberto creates a narrative which unfolds from fifteen or so members of the Uzeda family and a chorus of servants and connected persons. These characters' points of view come in and out of the scene through a highly sophisticated narrative orchestration held together by an underlying caustic irony. They gain their stark individuality through a carefully managed narrative construction, involving the portrayal of their speech type, actions and beliefs systems and alternating external psychological depiction and interior monologue.²⁶ Hence at one narrative level the public persona is projected and at another contrasting level the private person is depicted in his/her inner turmoil, petty rivalries and cravings to prevail. The story is structured in separate narrative segments thus isolating characters in their subjective reality. This coming together of narrative voices presents reality in its multifarious appearance but, at the same time, especially through introspective narration, with its highly expressionistic prose and deformed logic, it negates any sense of an identifiable real. This discourse on the disconnection of the individual from reality, delivered through the text's narrative strategies, is not a feature of this film. Also, to reproduce filmically textual irony and the grotesque would have been in many ways an insurmountable challenge, particularly because of the chosen genre—a period drama which was to have a television version as well.

One ought to consider the fact that much of the irony in *I Viceré* lies in the ambiguity ensuing from the narrative voices and in the force of its descriptive language. Let us take, for example, the pages dedicated to life in the Benedictine monastery, the description of how the Benedictine convent came over the centuries to be moved from the hills to the town centre and how the Benedictine rule is applied in the monks' daily life (172-86). The narrative proceeds with lengthy descriptions by an anonymous narrator who brings to the fore a situation designed to pique the reader. This is intertwined with a blatantly deformed logic in defense of the monks' behaviour, part of it attributed to fra' Carmelo's unreserved support. Equally, the lengthy description dedicated to the hierarchical system which divided brothers from monks according to their degree of aristocratic blood is imbued with scorn (174-75). This reaches its highest degree

²⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of character zone is useful in this context. He refers to those elements of characterization which constitute a second language for the author with which to represent meaning. These are elements such as the specific language used by individual characters, verbally and semantically autonomous, reflecting their value system. *The Dialogic Imagination*, Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 315.

in the passages dedicated to the exaggerated lifestyle of the monks, their gluttony, sloth and licentious behaviour:

I monaci infatti facevano l'arte di Michelasso: mangiare, bere e andare a spasso. Levatisi, la mattina, scendevano a dire ciascuno la sua messa, giù nella chiesa, spesso a porte chiuse per non essere disturbati dai fedeli [...] In città, la cucina dei Benedettini era passata in proverbio; il timballo di maccheroni con la crosta di pasta frolla, le arancine di riso grosse ciascuna come un melone, le olive imbottite [...] dalle mense levavasi un confuso rumore fatto dell'acciottolio delle stoviglie e del gorgoglio delle bevande mesciute e del tintinnio delle argenterie, il Lettore biascicava dall'alto del pulpito, la Regola di San Benedetto: <<...34 comandamento: non essere superbo, 35: non dedito al vino; 36: non gran mangiatore; 37: non dormiglione; 38: non pigro...>> [...] Potevano le Loro Paternità mangiare pane duro? E la sera il pane era della seconda informata [...] Molte altre <<antichità c'erano veramente nella Regola: San Benedetto non distingueva Padri nobili e fratelli plebei, voleva che tutti facessero qualche lavoro manuale, comminava penitenze, scomuniche ed anche battiture ai monaci ed ai novizi che non adempissero il dovere loro, diceva insomma un'altra quantità di coglionerie, come le chiamava più precisamente don Blasco. [...] Egli aveva tre ganze nel quartiere di San Nicola: donna Concetta, donna Rosa e donna Lucia la sigaraia, con una mezza dozzina di figliuoli: e l'Abate lasciava correre, sebbene fosse uno scandalo che tutte quelle mogli e quei figliuoli della mano manca, anzi di nessuna mano, venissero a udire la santa messa recitata dallo stesso Monaco. (177-80)

As critics of film adaptation have aptly noted, realist descriptive language of this type has an intensity of its own which eludes adaptation into filmic dialogue.²⁷ I would also suggest that the very act of reading such powerfully visual descriptions elicits a different process from the one produced by the act of hearing and viewing simultaneously. What the reader can conjure up in his/her mind from the suggestive visual power of such description is different from the impact of a defined audio-visual segment, notwithstanding the intellectual and emotional process elicited by the filmic *mise-en-scène*.²⁸

²⁷ See Ian MacKillop and Alison Plat "Beholding in a magic panorama: Television and the Illustration of *Middlemarch*," Robert Giddings and Erika Sheen eds., *The Classic Novel. From Page to Screen* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000) 78. See also Mc Farlane 131.

²⁸ Cristina Battisti's theoretical excursus on the relationship between the concept of "visual" in Nineteenth Century narrative and film is particularly useful.

The shift from a narrative level which is multifocal, as in the novel, to a filmic narration which, through voice-over narration, privileges the point of view of one character, Consalvo Uzeda, is in itself an ideological choice, as is the choice of often giving the subjective point of view on the unfolding of key events to a young child rather than to an adult. Both of these strategies in the film, in fact, tone down the powerful criticism and eliminate the reaction provoked in the reader by the impact of the constant flow of debased actions, corrupt bickering and grotesque descriptions which characterise the novel. In the film the narration begins in 1853, while Consalvo, a twelve year-old boy, is being punished by his father. He is made to be a much older child than in the novel in order to become a credible voice for the narrative function of giving us an insight on events and characters.²⁹ In other films Faenza has used the child's gaze as a perspective through which to narrate the story. He has done this very subtly and movingly to represent the drama of the *shoah* in his film *Jona che visse nella balena* (1993), taken from the novel *Kinderjaren* (*Childhood*) by Jona Oberski. In *I Viceré*, I would suggest that this is done rather clumsily in parts. The contrast created by the child's gaze witnessing an appalling and traumatic adult world can be powerful, but in this case it is very contrived. In the first part of the film young Consalvo is peeping through the keyhole and unveiling the intrigues of the family a little too much to be convincing. Especially in scenes 24 and 25, relating to Chiara's delivery, to see Consalvo run upstairs and view the birth of the deformed baby through a hole in the ceiling is hardly credible. Equally unconvincing is the scene where he happens to be wandering in his nightgown with his young sister, spying on Chiara while the latter leads her husband and the maid to conceive the child she is incapable of having (scene 39), or when he spies on his uncle Raimondo flirting with Isabella La Fersa, unrealistically too far away for

Battisti, drawing especially on the work of Sergei Eisenstein and the more recent critic Alan Spiegel, discusses the close, but ambiguous relationship between the visual and the mental image and claims that: "è dal parallelo con la fascinazione visiva del linguaggio letterario ottocentesco che emergono le dinamiche concrete di quella che sarà, nel secolo successivo, la visione cinematografica." *La traduzione filmica. Il romanzo e la sua trasposizione cinematografica* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2008) 72.

²⁹ In "Da De Roberto a Faenza," Di Grado notes that Faenza "al punto di vista critico del servo affianca quello sgomento, altrettanto marginale e vieppiù estraneo, dei bambini, che scrutano tra le assi sconnesse dei pavimenti o dalla malsana clausura degli armadi l'orrore sprigionato dall'universo adulto, dai maleodoranti segreti della razza padrona."

Consalvo (and through him the spectator) to hear their conversation (scene 17). Young Giovannino's function to convey the novel's strong anticlericalism and to narrate the corruption within the Benedictine monastery is also unconvincing. He manages to spy through every possible crevice, even with binoculars at hand for the camera lens to reach bedroom scenes of fornicating monks and the likes. As for Tancredi, the illegitimate child of Chiara's husband, he remains fixed as a young child of about six years of age, notwithstanding the passing of time, marked by historical events and dates appearing on the screen.³⁰

The film begins with an inscription on a black screen: "Ma come, Federico De Roberto, quel galantuomo siciliano di cento e più anni fa, pronunziava davvero le frasi presenti nel film, che sembrano oggi scritte da un tribuno estremista o da un guitto irreverente?" From the outset the director invites attention to intertextuality, as well as to the contemporary currency of the novel's message. The voice-over of an adult Consalvo reads out a sentence paraphrased from another text of De Roberto, "Lettere di commiato", from *Gli amori* (1898):

io sento dentro di me dieci, cento persone diverse, una moltitudine di esseri, ciascuno dei quali vorrebbe operare a modo suo. La cosa più strana è che tutti costoro non parlano uno alla volta, ma tutti insieme, interrompendosi, contraddicendosi, confondendosi con gran tumulto. E che ci posso fare?³¹

Thus the spectator is alerted to the psychological drama facing Consalvo and, even more importantly, from the outset we have an allusion to the opportunistic changeability implicit in the concept of *trasformismo* in the film and novel.³² The voice-over continues: "l'età che ricordo di più

³⁰ He is conceived around 1853, as the spectator learns through Consalvo. In 1860, during the Garibaldi insurrection, he appears on the screen as a child of about six years of age. Around 1873, when he should be nearing twenty years of age, he is still the same "piccolo Tancredi" who is spying through the key hole, witnessing Giovannino commit suicide. (scene 117).

³¹ Margherita Ganeri in her article "Il ritorno dei *Viceré* grazie a Faenza," reveals that this is a quote suggested by her to the director.

³² This sense of the fragmentation of the self, here used by Consalvo as a justification for *trasformismo*, is a concept that one finds in other and even earlier works by De Roberto – in the short story "Donato del Piano" from *Documenti Umani* (Milano: Treves, 1889), for instance, or later in *L'imperio* (Milano: Mondadori, 1929).

è quando avevo dodici anni. Ero un bambino tranquillo, ma non passava giorno senza che subissi una punizione inflitta da mio padre” (scene 1), and in fact on the screen, in the cold midday light, we see young Consalvo subjected to a draconian punishment as he is made to walk on his knees alongside Baldassarre. The camera moves from close-ups of Consalvo’s face expressing pain to a low-angle shot projecting up high the imperious face of the father. He is in a dark room, looking down through a glass door at the child being punished. It is an imposing image of the arbitrary exercise of power.³³

The inscription “Catania 1853” appears at the bottom of the screen of a medium-shot of Baldassarre and Consalvo, just as the voice-over gives the Uzeda family’s historical background. At the mention of the grandmother, the principessa di Francalanza, there is a cut to a very stark and dark bedroom segment portraying the dying princess. Another cut brings us back to Baldassarre and Consalvo still on his knees. The dialogue continues in a series of close-ups between Baldassarre and Consalvo in extreme pain. Consalvo’s afflicted mother then enters the scene collecting her son and leading him to the corner of the terrace where the camera focuses on a little girl (Consalvo’s sister) sitting in a corner on the ground, like a discarded doll. With this *mise-en-scène* the principal dynamics of family relationships are set up: the overpowering matriarch dying and being replaced by an equally despotic son, Giacomo, the conflict between father and son, and the subdued servitude of all other surrounding characters. Two very sombre segments follow: Giacomo who in the dark of night goes to his mother’s death bed and then a cut to a baroque, sumptuous and crowded funeral scene in a church enveloped in dark light. The point of view shifts back and forth from young Consalvo to his cousin Giovannino as through their dialogue they introduce the extended family and unveil its scandals and factions.

The main stylistic features of the film are thus set in train: the darkness that draws attention to the ugliness of the world depicted in the novel, the prominent contrasts in lighting between darkness and cold daylight and the juxtaposition of internal and external scenes to highlight the corruption and oppressiveness in family relationships. In the film we witness other scenes of draconian punishments, as part of Faenza’s original depiction of Consalvo’s upbringing. Perhaps the most exaggerated one is of the child’s punishment for having shown his sister the jar containing Chiara’s preserved still born child. For this Consalvo is chained, with what resem-

³³ The same technique is employed when Raimondo is dispossessed of his inheritance (scene 36).

bles a dog collar, and left alone in a dark cellar, with only bread and water and some hay to lie on (scene 41). Consalvo presumably is scarred by this and years later, for his father's wedding to donna Graziella, he brings as a gift a mastiff with a similar collar, telling his father "È un cane un po' irrequieto ... il mio regalo per il vostro matrimonio ... sono sicuro che voi riuscirete a domarlo in poco tempo" (scene 68). The symbolism is somewhat gratuitous. The film, above all, abounds with melodramatic scenes of hatred, family conflicts, enforced marriages and adulteries, ignoring or placing in the background the historical and political events of the novel.

Faenza explicitly stated his intention to create a film which "parte da lontano per avvicinarsi al nostro sentire e per offrire materiale di riflessione."³⁴ The film's ideological stance is unambiguous in claiming that Italian society and its political class are incapable of renewal and in interpreting this period in history as the antecedent to the current political situation. It has clear markers that impel the spectator to draw analogies with the present. The themes Faenza privileges, such as conflicts between parents and children, Consalvo's frustrations in finding his role in society, and his coming to terms with disappointing political realities, the teenagers' star-crossed love story, the foregrounding of Teresa and Consalvo as main characters with their anachronistic freedoms and social behaviour, all point to the film-maker's concern with contemporary relevance.³⁵ The film's characters, in particular, having lost the vulgarity and grotesque visual impact of the novel, connect the spectator with the present. As Robert Stam points out, in a film the spectator is confronted with specific actors and their particular properties.³⁶ In this case, we have the commendable performance of Lando Buzzanca as Giacomo, or the TV star qualities and attractiveness of Andrea Preziosi as Consalvo and Cristina Capotondi as Teresa; all encumbered with their physical features, bodily gestures, expressions, accents, specific costumes and acting abilities. The distinguished

³⁴ Montesi and Pallanch 10

³⁵ To this, one must also add the filtering of the text's original language so as to adapt dialogues to a contemporary use of language. See Amalia Nigro, "*I Viceré: The Novel and Faenza's Screenplay*," Dashwood and Ganeri 256. She states: "In the light of the need for the story in the film to be immediately comprehensible, the screenplay language is forced through a kind of levelling procedure, resorting to a flat verbal code that anyone can understand. In addition, the dialogue between the younger characters is often flavoured with contemporary colloquial language, the language propagated by the mass media, especially in the syntactic construction of their sentences – typically, short and direct."

³⁶ Naremore 55.

performance of zia Ferdinanda, Lucia Bosé, totally captivating in her independence and austere elegance, as she reads her newspaper or smokes a cigar is a far cry from the ugly, uncultured and greed-driven character in the novel: “la zitellona [che] non era parsa mai donna, né di corpo né di anima”(93) and who “sotto i panni mascholini sarebbe parsa qualcosa di mezzo tra l’usuraio e il sagrestano”(87). The degenerating monstrosity that befits the novel’s characters, with its impact for generating meaning, has not been transferred to the film. There is nothing unusual about this. It is an inevitable process of adaptation. The verbally constructed character becomes our virtual character as we respond to the dialogism in the novel. Instead, it has been replaced with a different sort of character that conforms to the niceties of a period film. One also needs to consider the market exigencies Faenza faced, which would require film characters to be palatable and endearing to a wide cinema and TV audience, as well as Faenza’s avowed didactic endeavour to make young people rediscover the novel: a sort of film as digest, as André Bazin would have it, not to be taken negatively.³⁷ The film was launched with a very active school and university program, a *You-Trailer crea il tuo trailer* competition and a web site.³⁸

In his de-composing and re-composing, the film-maker has chosen to focus on the ideological message about the ongoing *trasformismo* of the Italian political system, making overt comparisons with the contemporary situation. Faenza transposes De Roberto’s representation of a ruling class’s endeavours to remain in power at all costs, selling themselves and their ideological beliefs. However the anthropological message implicitly contained in the narrative and emphasized in the very last sentence of the novel “No, la nostra razza non è degenerata: è sempre la stessa”(651) has been largely refashioned. In the book the nefarious portrait of compulsive and obsessive power mongers is compounded by a racial discourse which gives emphasis to the endemic corruption of human activities when the self-centred nature of individuals becomes an aberration. The racial discourse isolates and dissects these rulers in their pathetic and petty conquests and places them in the complex dialogism of a multifocal narration which also casts

³⁷ André Bazin in “Adaptation or the Cinema as Digest” claims “The very word digest, which sounds at first contemptible, can have a positive meaning [...] one could also understand it as a literature that has been made more accessible through cinematic adaptation, not so much because of oversimplification [...] but rather because the mode of expression itself, as if the aesthetic fat, differently emulsified, were better tolerated by the consumer’s mind.” Naremore 26.

³⁸ Dashwood and Ganeri 292-93.

doubt on their hegemonic success. At the same time, through the individual characters' subjective deformation of reality, the history-making process, like the notion of reality itself is cast in an ambiguous light. The novel and the film in their representation of the human condition present a fundamentally different ideological position. In the novel the characters are individuals imploding in their own subjectivity and idiosyncrasies, but remain active agents who shape their society and hence are judged reprehensibly for their corrupting actions. In the film the characters, particularly Consalvo, are represented as victims of a larger socio-political mechanism which affects their psychological becoming, so that any ethical responsibility is refracted from the individual to the environment. Furthermore, the choice of Consalvo as protagonist in what can aptly be described as his *Bildungsroman* renders the narrative continuous. This necessarily entails the discarding of the ambivalent point of view and conflicting realities generated by the novel's large group of characters, as well as the loss of the varying and contrasting levels of narration, which give the novel that discontinuous flavour of a text on the cusp of modernism.

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