From Page to Screen: the Role of Literature in the Films of Luchino Visconti

by

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Abstract

This dissertation focuses on the role that literature plays in the cinema of Luchino Visconti. The Milanese director based nine of his fourteen feature films on literary works. As such, a study of his cinema provides ample opportunity to analyze the ways in which literature can be used to create cinema.

I have developed the hypothesis that there can be different modes of cinematic adaptation. I have termed these modes source, influence, and blueprint. I have selected three films from Visconti's filmography to illustrate how each mode can be defined. Chapter 1 examines Visconti's second film, La terra trema (The Earth Trembles, 1948). This chapter illustrates how a literary source can give a film a precise artistic, historical, and ideological grounding; at the same time, the source's message can be moulded in order to modernize the meaning of adaptation. I have labelled this use of literature as "source." Chapter 2 examines the 1954 film, Senso (The Wanton Countess). This chapter analyzes the way in which Visconti employs specific literary and artistic "influences" to advance his experiment with cinematic neorealism in a unique way. Combining a critical rereading of history and the genre of melodrama, Visconti heads in a new and controversial direction with Senso. Finally, Chapter 3 examines Il Gattopardo (The Leopard, 1963). This chapter presents a case in which Visconti follows a literary text very closely, to the point that one can speak of that text as a "blueprint." Based on Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's 1958 novel, the film aims to prove that similar effects can be achieved in literature and in film despite the differences between the two media.
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Introduction

Establishing the Parameters: Visconti, Neorealism, and Literature

Quando ebbe risolti alcuni dei suoi problemi tecnici, il cinema, da documentario divenuto racconto, comprese che alla letteratura era legato il suo destino.
(De Santis and Alicata 62)

Neorealism constitutes la via maestra of Italian film, [...] it is the point of departure for all serious postwar cinematic practice, and [...] each director had to come to terms with it in some way [...] (Marcus, Italian Film xvii)

Visconti is the only filmmaker who has truly succeeded in perpetuating the literary tradition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
(Bacon 188)

Luchino Visconti, the Milanese filmmaker who helped to define post-World War II Italian cinema, is celebrated for his contributions to Italian neorealism. To be sure, while his artistic contributions in the advancement of neorealist ideals are noteworthy, there are other associations that one can make when one thinks of Visconti and of his body of work. One can think of him as one of the principal auteurs of Italian post-World-War II film. One can also make a strong association between the works of Visconti and the world of literature. Of Visconti’s feature films, a mere five, Bellïssima (Bellïssima, 1951), Vaghe stelle dell’orsa ... (Sandra, 1965), La caduta degli dei (The Damned, 1969), Ludwig (Ludwig, 1973), and
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Gruppo di famiglia in un interno (Conversation Piece, 1974), do not have a primary written source. And, even among these, precise literary references and allusions can be uncovered without too great an effort. As interesting as it may prove to discern and categorize the origins of the many literary references in Visconti's cinema, it is an exercise that has been attempted and successfully executed by many critics. It is also an exercise that exhausts itself quite quickly; to know that Proust and Dostoevsky, for example, are influences on the director is important, but to limit oneself to uncovering the precise reference points in which shades of these two authors may be found in Visconti's body of work, is not productive nor original. It is far more useful, rather, to approach Visconti's cinema with the intention of seeing the process by which that which is "literary" is transformed into that which is "cinematic," and to evaluate the ways in which, as has been suggested, that which in Visconti is "cinematic," can also be termed "literary." Because a filmmaker's working process does not develop in a vacuum, it is crucial to evaluate the historical, social, and aesthetic environment of the period in which the films were made, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the works in question.

I would like to postulate that Visconti's cinema provides examples of a variety of methods for adaptation. Specifically, I can identify three different modes of adaptation in Visconti, which I would like to define as source, influence, and blueprint. These three modes constitute three different uses of literature in the process of creation of the cinematic text. I will explore one of these modes in each chapter of the dissertation, using one of Visconti's films to illustrate each mode. The modes can be best defined by describing the way in which each is contextualized in the three chapters of this work. To begin with, Chapter 1 examines an instance in which the director uses a distinct literary source to breathe life into his film and

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1I developed this idea of the three different uses of literature in Visconti during a meeting with Manuela Gieri. I wish to acknowledge her contribution here.
to give it a precise artistic, historical, and ideological grounding; in so doing, he moulds the source and changes it substantially in order to modernize the message of the original. Thus, one witnesses the use of literature as "source." I shall use *La terra trema* (*The Earth Trembles*, 1948) to examine this mode. Visconti's second feature film owes much to its Verghian source, and the parallels between the two texts and between their larger contexts are examined in Chapter 1. The ways in which Verga's 1881 novel influenced cinematic neorealism are also analyzed in this chapter, as are the principal aesthetic and social tenets that influenced Verga and that manifest themselves in *I Malavoglia*. In Chapter 2, I will examine the way in which the director draws from his own literary encyclopaedia² to enrich his films with distinct, literary "influences;" *Senso* (*The Wanton Countess*, 1954) is the film that I will use to illustrate this point. Based on Camillo Boito's 1883 novella, *Senso* combines an astounding variety of influences from the worlds of literature, visual art, and opera. The film showcases Visconti's penchant for the melodramatic, a theatrical form which, not accidentally, has historically borrowed from various genres and media, resulting in a modern, eclectic genre. Chapter 3 examines a case in which Visconti follows a literary text very closely, to the point that one can speak of that text as a "blueprint:" *Il Gattopardo* (*The Leopard*, 1963) will be the focus of my study here. My notion of blueprint comes closest to the general, mainstream notion of the term "adaptation," in that it partially follows the assumption that a film director consciously strives to be faithful to a source text that he has chosen, in some form or another. The parameters and limits for studying an adaptation in close relation to its original text are

²I am using the term "encyclopaedia" in the way Umberto Eco uses it throughout *The Role of the Reader* (see *Role 7*, for example). Eco speaks about the notion of encyclopaedia as a sort of personal, cultural repertoire. Eco uses the term in reference to the reader of a text, not its creator, but I believe it is relevant to use it here, for Visconti must be thought of as a reader of his source texts as well as a creator of new, cinematic texts.
examined in Chapter 3. However, it must be clear that, generally speaking, the notion of fidelity in adaptation is one that I wish to explore only in very specific, well-defined ways, and only in my discussion of *Il Gattoiardo*. My analysis of the 1963 film will aim to show that thematic, contextual, and even formal elements of a narrative literary text can be “translated” and depicted by the cinematic medium. I will demonstrate that conventions unique to the cinematic medium can be used as alternatives for literary techniques, and that, when used skillfully, such conventions can be used to express a variety of elements that exist in a literary text. Generally, however, it is my contention that an exploration of the fidelity of an adaptation is quite limited, subjective, and also diminishes the value of the cinematic medium itself. The notion that a cinematic adaptation can or should resemble closely the text on which it is based, implies that the ultimate success of the film depends on its adherence to the original. This implication is unappealing, for I maintain that as a medium, film is autonomous, and does not need to rely on other media to give it meaning or value. My interest in the influence of literature on film stems from the idea that learning about the source text and about the process of adaptation can enrich one’s experience of a film. However, I in no way wish to imply that a study of the literature on which any given film is based, is necessary for an appreciation of that film, or, more to the point, for an aesthetic judgement to be made about the film.

From the outset, it is important to acknowledge that different methods of employing literature and literary references within cinema are often interspersed and used freely within one film. In other words, I do not mean to suggest that the modes of adaptation identified here are explicitly adhered to by Visconti, nor that each film seems to manifest only one of the defined modes. Rather, the definitions of these modes have been developed as tools to aid in
the identification of specific, recognizable tendencies and techniques. The three films that I have chosen seem to illustrate three different tendencies well, and I therefore believe that they will be suitable for the type of analysis that I wish to undertake. Moreover, as a sort of “unit,” these three films are matched well together for other reasons. For one thing, each one represents a different phase in the director’s career, having been made, respectively, in 1948, 1954 and 1963. La terra trema, Visconti’s second film and the first piece covered in this study, represents a time in the director’s life when he was at his most political and experimental. It is a key piece not only within the director’s filmography but also in Italian post-war cinema, for it stands as a watershed within the spectrum of attempts at neorealism. The chapter on La terra trema will delve into the history of cinematic neorealism a little more deeply, and will focus on the way that Verga and more specifically I Malavoglia were used to take the neorealist experiment into a very specific direction. Senso, the second film in this study, was made in the mid-1950s, a time when the director had achieved maturity and success, and had begun to experiment both with a more “theatrical” manifestation of cinematic expression, as well as with literary influences that were not as overtly political or “neorealist” in any way, but that served his political purposes well nonetheless. Il Gattopardo, the final film in the analysis, was made as Visconti was entering what could be considered the final stage in his career. It was produced when the director was at the peak of his success, and had fully developed his critical and directorial skills. Finally, my choice of films stems from the fact that there are certain crucial issues within the filmography of Visconti, that are prevalent in these films. These issues can both help to showcase Visconti’s aesthetic and social “priorities,” so to speak, and can also provide a certain unity to my study. Thematically, these include the issue of Italian history, with particular attention to Italian Risorgimento and to the
questione meridionale, the so-called “Southern question.” Aesthetically, these films probe to a
greater or lesser degree the role of art in the representation of life. Therefore, my choices
provide enough of a variety to help me to understand Visconti’s artistic sensibilities and yet
supply a certain degree of continuity or unity.

Several issues that are necessary to lay the groundwork for this study will be discussed
in the remainder of the Introduction. These include:

- an elucidation on the issue of literature and film from a critical
  perspective;
- a survey of the history of the exchanges between literature and film,
  specifically in Italy;
- an examination of the rise of neorealism in Italy, and of the
  relationship between literature and film during the years in which
  cinematic neorealism was prevalent;
- a review of the filmography of Luchino Visconti, and specifically
  the positioning of the films in question within it.

0.1 A Critical Perspective

Although the relationship between literature and film has grown extremely complex
over the decades, the most conservative, mainstream critical discussions on this topic have
traditionally revolved around the notion of fidelity of the adaptation. The discussion of the
faithfulness of a film to its literary source has often taken centre-stage in discussions
regarding the relationship between literature and cinema. Historically, it has not been
uncommon for films that are based on literary works to be judged primarily on whether they
are “faithful” to their originals. In film criticism, however, many have acknowledged,
particularly in more recent times, that a study of adaptation based on fidelity criticism is unsatisfactory.

Fidelity criticism depends on a notion of the text as having and rendering up to the (intelligent) reader a single, correct 'meaning' which the film-maker has either adhered to or in some sense violated or tampered with. [...] the fidelity approach seems a doomed enterprise and fidelity criticism unilluminating. That is, the critic who quibbles at failures of fidelity is really saying no more than: "This reading of the original does not tally with mine in these and these ways."

(McFarlane 8-9)

As previously stated, judging a film by comparing it to its literary source diminishes the film and limits the appreciation that one can feel for it. I would argue that this type of approach in judging a film is outdated and is a throwback to the very early days of cinema, to a time in which critics, writers, and filmmakers scrambled to prove (or perhaps to disprove) the artistic merit of film, for it calls into question the potentialities of the cinematic medium in being able to express certain concepts. Moreover, in an age where the lines between media are increasingly blurred and genres contaminate each other constantly, it would seem that a more "holistic" approach towards examining the complex relationship between literature and film would be necessary.

Prior to focusing on the specific socio-historical context of my topic, that of Visconti and the years in which he worked, it is necessary to examine the issue of literature and film from a theoretical perspective. Many theories of literature and film have sought to define
criteria for comparing the two media. In the introduction to the collection entitled *Film and Fiction, the Dynamics of Exchange*, Keith Cohen writes:

> Both words and images are sets of signs that belong to systems and [...] at a certain level of abstraction, these systems bear resemblances to one another. More specifically, within each system there are many different codes (perceptual referential, symbolic). What makes possible, then, a study of the relation between two separate sign systems, like novel and film, is the fact that the same codes may reappear in more than one system. (Cohen 3)

Cohen acknowledges that this last idea, i.e., that the appearance of like codes in the two different systems of signs makes possible a comparative study of film and fiction, comes from Christian Metz’s seminal work, *Langage et cinéma*. And certainly, such a study *should* be possible. Brian McFarlane, in discussing the issue of adaptation, concurs that elements can be “transferred” successfully between one medium and another. He defines what he means by “transfer” i.e., elements that can be reproduced “faithfully” in film. Elements that can be transferred include: story (as opposed to plot); “distributional functions” (as defined by Roland Barthes³); characters’ functions within a plot (as defined by Vladimir Propp⁴); and mythical and psychological motifs (as defined by Claude Lévi-Strauss⁵), (McFarlane 23-26).

On the other hand, one element that cannot be transferred is the plot.

The plot component of narrative texts must be seen not as the definitive component, but as one among many. In fiction we find descriptive, imagistic, symbolic, rhythmic, and other components that have little to do with plot construction; similarly, in film we find

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⁴ See Propp’s seminal work, *Morphology of the Folktale*.
⁵ See *Structural Anthropology*, particularly “The Structural Study of Myth” (206-31).
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photographic, montage, proxemic, musical, and other components equally slighted by plot obsessiveness. In a given text, any of these components may have far greater aesthetic significance than the plot. [. . .] Novel / film relationships are worth studying — as source relations, as parallel cultural perspectives, as repositories of shared codes containing similar structural elements and the like. Creative filmmakers have made complex and satisfying films based upon good novels and have certainly been helped in the process by the existence of the novels. [. . .] But the films neither draw their aesthetic value from the novels nor recreate them, any more than Verdi’s Otello draws its aesthetic value from Shakespeare’s play, or Shakespeare’s play draws its value from its source, Cinthio’s Hecatomithi. The filmmaker creates a film using a number of elements present in the novel to form an aesthetic construct functioning in an essentially different way with radically different materials.

(Luhr 36)

The debate on whether or not a true adaptation is possible can be interesting, but it constitutes only a small part of any discussion on the relationship between film and literature. In Chapter 3, Roland Barthes’s “Structural Analysis of Narratives” will be used to concretize many of the ideas reproduced here by McFarlane, Luhr and others, and will help to establish some parameters for discussing a literary adaptation in this light. However, the influences of the cultural and social milieu in which the source text was produced, as well as the context in which the filmmaker lived and worked, all contribute to shape the film derived from the literary work. It is essential, therefore, to unravel the many sources and influences that the cinematic text employs.
0.2 Literature and Cinema: the Ties that Bind

Since the advent of the medium of cinema, filmmakers have sought to produce films with appealing, gripping content. Born at the end of the nineteenth century, the seemingly magical medium captivated the imagination of creative people who wished to capture the adventure and the drama of life. Even prior to the distinction of proper genres within the medium, it became clear that the human propulsion to tell stories, to narrate, would dominate in film. And, of course, the appeal of the narrative was not lost on early filmgoers, either. Seeing newsreel-type footage may have thrilled audiences, but it was their thirst for the strong story that allowed film to become a dominant form of entertainment (and art).

By the time [of] Edwin Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), in which scenes set in different locations are spliced together to tell a story, the cinema's future as a narrative art was settled, and no subsequent development of its techniques has threatened the supremacy of that function.
(McFarlane 12)

Given that narrative film was so appealing even early on, it is not surprising that filmmakers looked to literature for inspiration and for a starting point for their cinematic works.

As soon as the cinema began to see itself as a narrative entertainment, the idea of ransacking the novel — that already established repository of narrative fiction — for source material got underway, and the process has continued more or less unabated for ninety years.
(McFarlane 6-7)

Even in the time of film's infancy, pioneers in the genre such as Georges Méliès used narrative literature as a resource in their filmmaking. For example, Méliès's very early project,
Le voyage dans la lune (A Trip to the Moon, 1902), was based on a Jules Verne story (Wagner 59).

In Italy, the process of adapting narrative works into films was as popular as in other countries, and, in fact, it may be said that Italian cinema relied on literature to define its existence:

Tra il 1905 e il 1912 il cinema italiano, nato “ritardato” (e quindi constituzionalmente ipotonico), ci fa assistere a una massiccia immissione di vitamine e proteine letterarie nel suo corpo. “In principio fuit traductio”: già dai primi soggetti si assiste a un processo di conversione, ridefinizione e riduzione di tutti i motivi della memoria storica e letteraria, concepita come un unico testo, un giacimento aureo inestinguibile entro cui attingere a larghe mani senza il minimo complesso di inferiorità. L’epica, il romanzo, il teatro, la poesia, la letteratura popolare, subiscono lo stesso trattamento. [...]

Nei primi anni il cinema italiano non introduce nel suo spazio visivo, e nel suo elementare sistema combinatorio, alcun elemento nuovo: la riduzione del testo ai suoi elementi minimali consente di fissare nell’immaginazione del destinatario, o riproporre, in una variante animata, immagini e stereotipi letterari noti. I momenti risultanti da questa operazione sono quelli forti, i gesti quelli codificati dalla tradizione dei manuali ottocenteschi di recitazione teatrale e lirica. (Brunetta, Cent’anni 50-51)

In addition, not only was there an aspect of reliance on literature to create a film style and a film language, but an idea also developed in Italy among producers that the cinema could be used as a vehicle for widening the public’s cultural horizons (by introducing them to literature) and as a method of exporting the national (literary) culture outside the country’s borders (Brunetta, Cent’anni 51-52). What occurred, therefore, was a proliferation of transformations from page to screen in the first decades of the cinema in Italy:
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Tra l’8 e il ’23 si realizzano cinque versioni dei Promessi sposi, nel 1913 si realizza un'importante trascrizione del Pilgrim’s Progress di John Bunyan destinata soprattutto al mercato americano. Nel 1908 un Rigoletto apre la strada a un filone ricchissimo di trascrizioni cinematografiche di opere liriche. L’anno successivo entra in campo Shakespeare. La Saffi tenta di muoversi dai classici ai contemporanei, dal feuilleton al libro di successo contemporaneo. Nel 1909 la Saffi, oltre a un contratto con D’Annunzio per la realizzazione di sei film tratti dalle sue opere, realizza la prima versione dei Promessi Sposi e una Sepolta viva dal romanzo omonimo di Mastriani. L’anno successivo sarà la volta di Xavier de Montépin, mentre tutte le case, dalla Film d’arte alla Cines, saccheggeranno la storia, il teatro, la Bibbia, i Vangeli, la letteratura popolare, passando dalla Beatrice Cenci di Francesco Venosta a Cyrano de Bergerac di Rostand, o a Capitan Fracassa di Gauthier.

(Brunetta, Cent’anni 52)

In the latter part of this phase, most specifically in the decade following the end World War I, Italian cinema saw a period of high production, but of relatively low-quality films. While on the international scene, revolutionary figures such as Lang, Pabst, Eisenstein, Lubitsch, Buñuel, and Vidor, were producing films that would become classics and shape the direction of the medium, Italian audiences were being presented outlandish, improbable, and melodramatic tales, many of them about nobles in distress. The tag lines for some of these films reveal much about this type of cinema: (Brunetta, Cent’anni 138-39): “Nel castello di Corteille si agitano tragedie sentimentali, intrighi dovuti a lontani rancori.” (from L’amante della luna, (The Moon Lover, Achille Consalvi, 1919)); “La principessa Dusnella di Belfiore viene sorpresa, accanto a una polveriera nell’atto di dar fuoco a un potente esplosivo. Tutte le apparenze sono contro di lei.” (from Agguato della morte, Amleto Palermi, 1920). As a final example, Gian Piero Brunetta describes Augusto Genina’s Principe dell’impossibile (The Prince of the Impossible, 1919) in the following way: “Il principe di Avrezac […] è talmente annoiato della propria vita, che decide di farsi passare per l’assassino di un uomo nel cui
cadavere ha inciampato per caso,” (Brunetta, Cent’anni 139). In what perhaps may be defined as the first period of “crisis” within the Italian cinema (one hesitates to utilize this somewhat over-used term in the context of the Italian national cinema), filmmakers could not manage to keep up with the fierce international competition:

I pionieri e i direttori artistici più blasonati non avvertono la necessità di rinnovarsi, di esplorare nuove possibilità narrative e stilistiche. Rispetto alle altre cinematografie il tempo del cinema italiano si è così rallentato da sembrare, nei primi anni venti, spinto solo da una debolissima forza d’inerzia. Da un certo momento in poi i diversi soggetti in campo — registi, produttori, attori, critici e pubblico — sono incapaci di comunicare tra loro. (Brunetta, Cent’anni 143)

Despite this period of struggle, however, Italian filmmakers managed to cling on to one “lifeline” which helped them to produce films that banked on sources that had proven to be successful: that lifeline was literature (drama included) (Brunetta, Cent’anni 142-47). The tendency to create cinematic versions of successful texts, be these texts classics or pieces taken from popular literature, continued to drive cinematic production, and allowed producers to leverage off the popularity or acclaim of the source works even during the film industry’s most difficult times. Therefore, as the years marched on and the Fascist regime took hold of the country and of the film industry, the link between literature and film did not weaken.

What did continue to weaken and decline throughout the 1920s, however, was the film industry in general. By the time Mussolini focused on finding ways that he could use the industry as a tool to depict his desired image of the country and to thereby spread propaganda about his party, the industry was in a state of complete devastation.
At the beginning of the fascist era, the film industry was in disarray. The development, in fact the rebuilding, of the Italian film industry was a formidable task, as formidable as the problems of capitalization and modernization in other sectors of the industry the regime attempted to revamp. (Landy, *Fascism in Film*)

This disarray was caused not only by a lack of creativity within the industry, but also by a lack of good management on the production end, a lack of interest from foreign markets, and devastating competition with Hollywood cinema (Landy, *Fascism in Film*).

With the dawn of the 1930s, the intervention of the Fascist regime in the Italian fiction film industry gradually helped certain specific trends in Italian cinema to crystallize and become well-defined. The power of the medium of film had been recognized by the regime in the 1920s when they had founded the *Istituto Luce* in 1924 in order to produce domestic, documentary-style newsreels, and to censor their foreign counterparts (Landy, *Fascism in Film*). However, for the most part, the powers-that-be had left the decaying commercial film industry alone for a few years following that. Then, in 1931, the regime designed some quotas to which cinema owners had to adhere strictly in order to help promote Italian films (Landy, *Fascism in Film*). For example, among every ten films shown in theatres, one film had to be an Italian production. There were also strict rules about the dubbing of foreign films: no foreign reel could be shown unless it had been translated into Italian. Throughout the first half of the decade, intervention increased, and in 1934, the regime appointed Luigi Freddi to the role of director general of cinematography (Landy, *Fascism in Film*). With this appointment there began various project and initiatives to harness the potential of the industry.
for the shaping of the public image of Italy and Italians, as well as for the financial advancement of the party.6

With all the attention placed on film production in the latter half of the 1930s, the industry saw a period of great success, and again, the use of literature continued to be evident. It would not be appropriate to enter into a discussion of Italian film trends under Fascism in great detail at this point, for this topic is covered in Chapter 1. However, it would be useful to point out that the relationship between literature and film continued to thrive even as strict guidelines and restrictions were placed on the film industry. For example, Luigi Freddi (321-24) lists all of the films produced by the Cines production company, either on its own or in conjunction with Universalcine, and he makes as his first observation regarding the productions: “Dodici soggetti sono stati da opere letterarie di scrittori come Grazia Deledda, Matilde Serao, Luigi Capuana, Aldo Palazzeschi, Emilio De Marchi, Maurice Dekobra, Joseph Conrad, Umberto Notari, Luigi Pirandello, Onorato di Balzac, Ivan Turghenieff,” (324) with fifteen works based on plays by authors such as Pirandello, d’Annunzio, and Goldoni, and only twenty-two works based on original screenplays.

There were probably several reasons for the proliferation of cinematic adaptations during this period of Italian history. Some of these reasons were undoubtedly political.

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6 Various critics have pointed out that the interest of the Fascist regime in the popular cinema was only in part political, and that in many ways, the attention that it placed on the industry was rooted in an awareness that commercial cinema could be a highly lucrative venture. For additional information on this topic, see especially Marcia Landy, Fascism in Film, and Silvio Guarnieri, “Cinema e letteratura: dal fascismo al dopoguerra.”
Consider the stance taken by Vittorio Mussolini towards the potential of the cinematic medium in Italy:

Non è un segreto per nessuno che le comparse dei nostri film spesso sono scelte troppo a caso e con una indulgenza che poi va a detrimento del film stesso. Ciò che non avviene mai o quasi mai, invece, nella cinematografia americana, espertissima nella cura dei particolari come nella scelta delle figure. Tanto che si può ben dire che la loro propaganda razziale gli americani l'abbiano già fatta e sì sia imposta nel mondo da lungo tempo. Togliere quelle figure che riescono sgradevoli allo sguardo, quando proprio non siano indispensabili alla trama; cercarne invece di piacevoli, di belle senz'altro, che destino nello spettatore un certo orgoglio di sentirsì parte di un popolo come il nostro, oltre a quel dilettto che sempre accompagna la vista d'una bella fisionomia o di un bel corpo umano. Questo è ciò che occorre perseguire innanzi tutto nella realizzazione di un film che voglia dirsi tipicamente italiano, frutto di una civiltà e di una cultura che il fascismo ha oggi definito nei suoi termini più distinti, naturali e concreti.

(Mussolini 33)

Given the Fascist insistence on the depiction of the bourgeois class and on the positive, glamorous, (and constructed) aspects of society, it became common for filmmakers to make use of elaborate, well-developed novels as material for their screenplays. Among the many examples of successful adaptations produced under the Fascist regime one can include Mario Soldati's *Piccolo mondo antico* (*The Little World of the Past*, 1940) and *Malombra* (*Malombra*, 1942) (based on works by Antonio Fogazzaro); Renato Castellani's *Un colpo di pistola* (*A Pistol Shot*, 1941) (based on an Alexander Pushkin short story); Luigi Chiarini's *Via delle cinque lune* (*Five Moons Street*, 1942) (based on a work by Matilde Serao); Alberto Lattuada's *Giacomo l'idealista* (*Giacomo the Idealist*, 1942) (based on the Emilio De Marchi novel); Ferdinando Maria Poggioli's *Addio giovinezza* (*Farewell, Youth*, 1940) (based on a work by Nino Oxilia and Sandro Camasio); and many other films of the early 1940s. Such
calligraphic films were perfectly suited to the reigning ideology of the time. They suited the aesthetic that Fascists insisted upon throughout their reign.

Another reason for the prominence of cinematic adaptations in these years may come from the perceived link between the two media on behalf of literary critics and litterati, who were arguably finding it difficult to justify the rise of the cinematic medium. Feeling marginalized, some literary figures spoke out in defense of the writer, claiming that he must take a central role in the production of cinematic works if the industry really wanted the medium to succeed. For example, writing a piece entitled “Posto agli scrittori” in Lo schermo in 1937, Lucio D'Ambra calls for writers to get involved in the cinema in order to improve the quality of films produced. He states that film and literature are constructed in a similar fashion, and that therefore writers should become more involved in the production of films:

Poiché la cinematografia è racconto che si svolge attraverso a una concatenata serie d’episodi e di scene sembrerebbe — e all’estero così sembra per lo più, — che romanzieri e autori drammatici dovrebbero essere chiamati a immaginare coi loro estri più vivi e più liberi le favole, le vicende e le passioni di quei racconti sceneggiati. (D’Ambra 30-31)

D’Ambra also makes the assertion that many of the most popular films ever made were literary adaptations or at least were successful due to the involvement of litterati in the production of the films.

Se ci si volge a guardarsi indietro negli anni si vedrà che tuttavia i film di cui serbiamo ancora più degna memoria del nostro spirito furono tutti — a cominciare dalla mirabile Cabiria di Gabriele d’Annunzio e sino alla recente Cavalleria di Salvator Gotta — opera di scrittori. (D’Ambra 30)
D’Ambra cannot but conclude that writers must become more involved in filmmaking, in order to help raise the artistic quality of cinema:

E quando finalmente gli scrittori italiani non saranno più ai margini di quest’arte nuova, ma, artisti e artigiani contemporaneamente, ne avranno il pieno e libero comando, i nostri autori dovranno, risuscitando le grandi figure della storia italiana, creare l’atmosfera eroica dei nostri schermi e sempre più insegnare al popolo di Mussolini, le virtù civili della gente nostra attraverso i secoli e per i secoli venturi.
(D’Ambra 31)

D’Ambra’s words hint at the underlying insecurity that writers may have felt at having to compete with filmmakers for the attention of consumers, and his stance indicates both a desire to re-establish the eminence of the written word, as well as a quest to undermine the legitimacy of the relatively new medium.

Leaving aside the political and artistic reasons for the fortification of the link between literature and film during the age of Fascism, it is worth considering that some of the reasons for the success of literary adaptations during this period were purely economic. It has been noted that reading had never been as popular in Italy as it was during the period between World War I and World War II. Giuseppe Petronio observes:

Quel fenomeno che si è detto “allargarsi della base sociale” provoca, naturalmente, uno spostamento dell’interesse dei lettori (dei lettori comuni, non “letterati”) dalla lirica alla narrativa, in quanto nella lirica lo scrittore, per ragioni intrinseche al “genere”, esprime sentimenti, affetti, moti individuali, che possono anche assumere una significazione universale e diventare metafora del sentimento e del destino di tutti, ma a patto di passare per una elaborazione formale che il lettore comune difficilmente è in grado di afferrare e gustare.
(813)
Conceiving of the film industry as a money-making venture, the individuals driving the Fascist propaganda machine likely wished to capitalize on the expanding base of readers on Italian territory. Unquestionably, basing a film on an already-successful literary work could help to ensure the success of that film. This highly commercial motivation for creating adaptations has, and continues to be, highly prevalent in the film industry, and surely it must not have escaped those in power during the Fascist regime.

0.3 The Use of Literature in Cinematic Neorealism

0.3.1 An Unexpected Combination

In tracing the development of the complex relationship between literature and film in the years leading up to the period in which cinematic neorealism developed and flourished, I will survey a longer period of time than is generally examined in traditional histories of neorealism: the early 1930s to the early 1950s. Indeed, I feel it is important to examine the decade leading up to the Resistance, as well as the decade following the Resistance, for several reasons. First off, because this period was a formative one for Visconti and for Italian cinema in general, a survey of the activities of these years can provide insight into the director’s filmmaking process and into the foundation of modern Italian cinema as a whole. Such a survey will also allow for the consideration of a reality that was not acknowledged in film history books for a very long time: that the roots of neorealism took hold well within the era of Fascism. The complex, sweeping changes seen throughout Italy and the rest of Europe in the span of these two decades enriched the experience of authors, filmmakers, and artists in general; it left an indelible mark that moulded their ideas and influenced their work for years to come. Visconti was not an exception to this rule, and it is therefore important to understand
some of the key trends that influenced the director’s formation during the first part of his career. The richness and complexity of experiences that Visconti had in these decades were surely instrumental in the development of the artistic sensibility that motivated him to make specific choices in filmmaking, some of which will be discussed throughout this dissertation.

In order to unravel the complex evolution of cinematic neorealism and the role that literature played within it, I wish to fast forward in time, so to speak, to a point when neorealist techniques had become prevalent within a certain sphere of cinema in Italy, and ideas on neorealism had already matured. In a now famous 1950 interview given to Elio Petri and entitled “Basta coi soggetti,” Cesare Zavattini spoke on the subject:

_Dicevo che la letteratura è tanto più avanti del cinema. È la ragione è, a mio avviso, che il cinema è veramente un rapporto dell’occhio con le cose viste. Perché l’immaginazione e l’occhio sono proprio la chiave del mezzo tecnico. La macchina quindi non fotografa, non deve fotografare ciò che abbiamo pensato, ma fotografare ciò che pensiamo nell’atto stesso in cui vediamo. È quindi un modo di servirci di un mezzo ben differente dalla letteratura, e che ha dei punti di contatto con la pittura, proprio per questo rapporto assoluto tra l’oggetto e la sua espressione. Quando dico “Basta con i soggetti” è perché con l’inventare una storia mi pare di tradire questa immediatezza e freschezza della macchina da presa alla quale si domanda così un’opera di traduzione e non un’opera di coesione: tra il momento del pensiero e il momento in cui la macchina realizza questo pensiero ci corre troppo tempo attualmente._

(71)

Zavattini states, furthermore:

_Come ai bambini ai primi passi si dà una spinta perché imparino a camminare, così bisogna buttare oggi i giovani con una macchina da presa in mezzo alle strade, in mezzo alle cose. Questi giovani, quindi, devono essere buttati in mezzo alla realtà senza soggetti predisposti o concetti stessi della realtà._
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Although filmmakers contemporary to Zavattini who were interested in neorealism each had unique ideas on style, technique, rhythm, etc., the motivation behind Zavattini’s sentiments had been embraced by many of those directors in one form or another by the time of this now-famous interview. The expression of the spontaneous somehow seemed to indicate a sort of authenticity that was important for such directors to recreate.

It is useful to consider how this quest for authenticity brought together a diverse group of filmmakers to a degree that they could all be categorized as “neorealists.” Generally speaking, the group of directors who strove to create a new brand of cinema by experimenting with neorealism, were quite different one from the other. However, if one had to describe some of the similarities among them, it would be by citing the most basic, mainstream
definitions of neorealism. In general, directors experimenting with neorealism went to
painstaking lengths to represent and / or reconstruct "reality." This attempt was seen both in
their technique and in the content of the films they developed. As far as technique was
concerned, they attempted to give their films a gritty, documentary-like feel. Many refused to
use well-known actors, opting instead to give unknown, non-professionals principal roles.
Many rejected the use of artificial sets and lighting, preferring the "natural" look of authentic
locations and outdoor lighting. Several directors also preferred the use of dialect to that of
standard Italian, and encouraged their actors to improvise their lines (Visconti himself, of
course, explored this technique to its maximum in La terra trema). As far as subject matter
was concerned, directors commonly chose stories about strata or individuals in society that
had not traditionally been depicted in the cinema, particularly during the years of Fascist
domination of the country and of the cinematic medium. Directors stayed away from tales of
the bourgeois, middle and upper class, believing these to be contrived and uncharacteristic of
most of the populace. These very basic tenets of neorealism indicate that as a trend,
neorealism had as its first priority the rejection of the constructed. Given this propensity for
refusing to depict anything "artificial," it would seem that a complete rejection of the notion
of the process of literary adaptation should have occurred during neorealism. Writing on this
subject, Vito Attolini states: "Nessun tipo di cinema più del neorealismo appare all'esterno
cosi refrattario a qualsiasi influenza letteraria, al punto da far pensare ad un insanabile
divorzio fra film e romanzo." (Dal romanzo al set 85). And yet, such a rupture did not occur.

7 I do not mean to imply that the production of films that have been classified as
neorealist did not involve artifice. Neorealist directors went to great lengths to
construct their scenes; indeed, some directors, such as Vittorio De Sica, were
meticulous and spent a great deal of time assembling single shots. However, the point
being made here is that in general, neorealist directors strove for the semblance of
"reality" or "authenticity" in their films.
Although one would think that the use of literature would be in contradiction with the neorealist aesthetic, in reality, substantial use was made of literary texts in films produced between the early 1940s to mid-1950s, films that in one way or another have been defined as “neorealist.” In fact, as is evident in the case of *La terra trema*, in some instances, the choice of literary text even contributed to the refinement of a neorealist style, to the point that some critics, such as Guido Aristarco, have seen as the ultimate example of neorealism, and as part of a development towards cinematic *realism*. The debates surrounding the issue of neorealism and realism and Visconti will be presented in Chapters 1 and 2.

**0.3.2 The Shift Towards Neorealism: a Rupture?**

In its mandate to maintain the status quo, the Fascist regime had heartily endorsed the creation of elaborate film projects that would keep the movie-going public daydreaming about the romance and mystery stories similar to those that they were reading. Because of the appeal of the “good story,” it was essential that a film maintain the same qualities as the successful novel that had inspired it. Vito Attolini observes of the state of literary adaptation during the Fascist era:

> La traducibilità della pagina sullo schermo si risolve in termini di meccanismo narrativo di stampo tradizionale e, quel che più conta, i punti di riferimento letterari sono funzionali a tali obbiettivi. *(Dal romanzo al set 35)*

If the Fascist regime had an influence on the way in which literature was employed in filmmaking, it would be worth examining how the end of Fascism affected the creative process in the arts, and in particular, in the way filmmakers adapted literary texts. This is a complex issue and one whose answer may not be obvious. The end of the Fascist regime in
1943 facilitated the development of innovative ideas for intellectuals and artists, ideas that had been suppressed for years. Experiments with neorealist techniques in film and narrative led to declarations on the part of critics of a total upheaval, a revolution in art. Although the revolutionary aspect of neorealism is undeniable, it is also indisputable that certain things did not change. The individuals who became prominent in the mid-1940s for their innovations in literature and in cinema, had also lived and worked during the age of Fascism, and it is therefore imprecise to think that a total rupture in thought occurred with the end of the Fascist regime in 1943. For one thing, it is indisputable that many neorealist authors had been formed under Fascism and had therefore the imprint of “decadentismo,” or had had brushes with Fascism, even if they wanted to distance themselves from that fact; Giuseppe Petronio sees Vittorini, Pratolini, and Bilenchi, among others, as falling under this category (862-63). In the realm of cinema, the aesthetic and social ideals associated with neorealism, which became widespread after the fall of Fascism, were indeed expressed during the period of even the strictest censorship, and undoubtedly influenced the intellectuals of the time. Notice, for example, the cry for simplicity made by Leo Longanesi in 1933 in the journal L’italiano:

Non credo che in Italia occorra servirsi di scenografi per costruire un film. Noi dovremmo mettere assieme pellicole quanto mai semplici e povere nella messinscena, pellicole senza artifizi, girate quanto più si può dal vero.

È appunto la verità che fa difetto nei nostri film. Bisogna gettarsi alla strada, portare le macchine da presa nelle vie, nei cortili, nelle caserme, nelle stazioni. […] La vita di una strada è davvero sorprendente! Meraviglia come tutto possa muoversi tanto naturalmente, in un’armonia così disordinata; si assiste ad una rappresentazione di cui non si conosce la trama. […] Una donna che passa in fretta e scompare dietro una carrozza, diventa a volte un’apparizione straordinaria, di una verità insospettata. Accade così di scoprire durante brevi attimi una realtà diversa dall’ordinario, più profonda e netta, che non sapremo più evocare. […] Un film italiano,
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andrebbe concepito e costruito in questo senso. Non si tratterebbe di semplici documentari, ma di trasportare sullo schermo certi aspetti della realtà bianca che sfugge al passante, e domina in ogni ora la vita degli uomini e delle cose.

(118)

Consider another example: here, Tullio Cianetti makes a strong anti-bourgeois statement on the pages of *Cinema* in 1936:

Se si vuole non tanto attirare il popolo agli spettacoli (ché la corrente dei fedeli al cinema ha bisogno di pochi incoraggiamenti), ma impadronirsi della sua anima, bisogna liberarlo dall’eterna visione borghese e piccolo-borghese che imperversa sugli schermi.

Non si può giurare davvero che il mondo dei frak e delle capigliature al platino siano tutto un mondo; ma i sentimenti che suscita il cinema non restano al di qua e al di là della ribalta: essi prendono interamente possesso del pubblico. Tutti si mettono in frak e tutte posseggono chiome platinate. E dopo, è una delusione che scava solchi profondi non solo con l’invidia verso una società irraggiungibile, ma con l’umiliazione di sentirsi dei riformati della vita, la quale si svolge soltanto in un dato ambiente: triste o lieto che sia. [. . .]

Preferiamo restare ottimisti sull’evoluzione antitradizionalista e antiborghese del cinema. Bisogna immettere, senza esagerazioni e senza programmi prestabili, altri temi di vita in quelli consueti e preferiti per abitudine.

(27)

Other ideas that would become embraced by neorealists were surfacing more and more as the 1930s came to an end and as Fascism marched towards its demise. Consider the following excerpt from an essay entitled “Aria ai soggetti,” which was signed “Scaramuccia” but was eventually attributed to Gianni Puccini. The piece was published in *Cinema* in 1942:

La vita, purtroppo, non è solamente la storiella sentimentale di Titina e di Giorgetto che alternativamente si fanno i dispetti e si sbaciucchiano per duemila metri di pellicola, per finire immancabilmente a farsi suonare la marcia nuziale! La vita è una cosa maledettamente seria, un
arcobaleno dove i colori cupi sono in prevalenza, un frutto agrodolce
dove l’amaro, il più delle volte, ha il sopravvento sulla parte
zuccherata. E gli uomini, anche gli italiani, non sono stinchi di santo.
E le donne non sono tutte fiori di virtù. [. . .] Non è, riteniamo, enorme
il pensare che, se esistono agenti investigativi e tribunali, qualche
Tizio con la fedina penale poco pulita dovrebbe pure esserci; e che
qualche signora che fa uno strappo alla fede coniugale, ancora c’è.
[.. . .] Non si domanda l’esaltazione del delitto e tanto meno che il
cinema si metta a fare l’apologia del reato. Ma togliersi un poco dal
clima e dal tema obbligato della bontà a tutti i costi, entrare qualche
volta con la macchina da presa, come con un bisturi, nel vivo di una
piaga, prendere a tema la cupezza di un’anima, il dolore di una
tragedia, l’angoscia di una perdizione, l’urlo di una disperazione, non
già per fame un modo esemplare di vita, ma per poter raggiungere,
attraverso una strada irta di spine, la bellezza di un’opera d’arte;
questo, crediamo, dovrebbe essere possibile.
(Scaramuccia 39)

Aside from expressing clear anti-bourgeois sentiments, these pieces all seem to
prefigure the ideas that prominent neorealist filmmakers, particularly Cesare Zavattini in the
above-quoted “Basta con i soggetti,” would make years afterwards in total freedom, outside of
the shadow of Fascism. What all of these quotations hopefully illustrate is that there was some
kind of continuity of thought as Italy made its swift and bloody transition away from Fascism
to a freer, more democratic society. The rich tradition of exchanges between literature and
film that had developed over the decades, therefore, was not denied or forgotten even during
the time of radical change marked by revolutionary events such as the Resistance. Moreover,
the anti-Fascist ideas that one tends to associate more closely with the latter half of World War
II, with the Resistance, and most notably with the period directly following the end of the war,
were in existence and were voiced publicly even during the times of strictest censorship. This
fact indicates that a certain continuity of thought did exist even throughout the most turbulent historical periods.

What changed in the arts during this period, therefore, was not so much the way of thinking, but the context in which one could think. The quotation that follows deals more specifically with literary figures, but is true of other arts, as well:

No, nel secondo dopoguerra non c'è una cesura netta rispetto al passato. Non c'è nessun “nuovo” virgineo che esploda chissà dove, *tutt'altre* uomini, *tutt'altre* ambienti, *tutt'altre* gruppi culturali rispetto agli anni Trenta. C'è una storia precedente che continua, [...] (Mughini, screen 1)

In cinematic adaptations, the change that occurred was in the *treatment* of the primary source material. Politically-motivated filmmakers rejected the idea of meticulously reconstructing decadent and escapist stories, and opted for the selection of source texts that would allow for a realist interpretation and reconstruction that would bestow on their work a quality that can be referred to as “literary.” The key change, or shift, did not occur because, as Zavattini insisted, literature ought to be rejected in order to create an authentic brand of cinema.

È bene chiarire subito che proprio per la sua natura rigorosamente narrativa fu nella tradizione realistica che il cinema trovò la strada migliore: visto che il realismo, non come passivo ossequio ad una statica verità obbiettiva, ma come forza creatrice, nella fantasia, d'una “storia” di eventi e di persone, è la vera ed eterna misura di ogni espressione narrativa. (De Santis and Alicata 62)

In their watershed essay, “Verità e poesia: Verga e il cinema italiano” (1941), Giuseppe De Santis and Mario Alicata made several astute observations on the topic being discussed here.
These observations are crucial for an understanding of the cinematic production that occurred in Italy following World War II:

Resta dunque evidente che quando il cinema comincia a costruire i suoi primi personaggi e a veder risolversi l’anima degli uomini nei suoi concerti rapporti con un ambiente, esso subisce necessariamente il fascino del realismo europeo dell’Ottocento che da Flaubert a Cecov, da Maupassant a Verga, da Dickens a Ibsen, sembrava consegnare una perfetta sintassi psicologica e sentimentale e insieme una poetica immagine della società ad essa contemporanea.
(De Santis and Alicata 62)

I will return to De Santis’s and Alicata’s ideas on Verga and the cinema in my discussion of La terra trema in Chapter 1. For the moment, however, I wish to extract from their words the notion that film was influenced by realist literature during the 1940s because it followed the same path that realist literature followed in the nineteenth century, during a time when society was in a state of development similar to that of the period following World War II. In other words, the social and political context in which neorealist cinema was born, was similar to that in which realist literature flourished in the nineteenth century. These similarities in context resulted in a keen interest on the part of neorealist artists (filmmakers, authors, as well as individuals involved in other arts) in the literature of the nineteenth century, and specifically in Verga. Dealing with Verga’s influence on film, De Santis and Alicata state:

Giovanni Verga non ha solamente creato una grande opera di poesia, ma ha creato un paese, un tempo, una società: a noi che crediamo nell’arte specialmente in quanto creatrice di verità, la Sicilia omerica e leggendaria dei Malavoglia, […] ci sembra nello stesso tempo offrire l’ambiente più solido e umano, più miracolosamente vergine e vero, che possa ispirare la fantasia di un cinema il quale cerchi cose e fatti in un tempo e in uno spazio di realtà, per riscattarsi dai facili suggerimenti di un mortificato gusto borghese.
(De Santis and Alicata 65)
The common points between the society that inspired Verga and that which fostered a spirit of change in the 1930s and 40s are important to examine. It is because of the similarities between the two eras that intellectuals such as De Santis and Alicata, Visconti, and others developed an interest in the literature of Verga’s time. This interest lay both in the forms developed in the literature, as well as in the content; in the subject matter as well as in the expression. It will be the aim of Chapter 1 to analyze the connections between the two time periods and the artistic trends that developed within them, when I examine _La terra trema_, a film that was created during neorealism’s peak period.

**0.3.3 Literary Neorealism vs. Cinematic Neorealism**

To round out the discussion of neorealism, I wish to look briefly at the influence of literary neorealism on film. Like its cinematic counterpart, literary neorealism was not a uniform trend. The many writers who have been labelled as “neorealist” manifested a very diverse set of interests, priorities, and sensibilities. Speaking with Carlo Bo on this subject, Elio Vittorini states:

> Si, possiamo parlare di neorealismo anche per la nostra letteratura ma non nello stesso senso in cui possiamo parlarne, ad esempio, per il nostro cinematografo. In questo campo l’espressione ha un valore critico decisivo che definisce qualità e difetti, aspirazioni e atteggiamenti comuni a tutti i nostri registi. Usata invece in letteratura non definisce niente d’intrinseco che sia comune a tutti i nostri scrittori o anche solo a una parte di essi. Se tu dici che Moravia è un neorealista tu non dici nulla di criticamente essenziale su quello che è Moravia. E così se tu dici che Alvaro è un neorealista, che Brancati è un neorealista, che Piovene è un neorealista, che Pratolini è un neorealista, che Pavese è un neorealista e via di seguito, tu non dici nulla di criticamente essenziale su quello che è Pavese e su quello che è Brancati, su quello che è Alvaro, su quello che è Piovene, su quello che è Pratolini e via continuando. Tu non indichi un modo di vedere e giudicare la realtà che essi abbiano in comune e tanto meno un modo comune di concentrarla. Via via che dici la parola tu la devi riempire
di un significato speciale. In sostanza tu hai tanti neorealismi quanti sono i principali narratori mentre l'inclinazione innegabile dei più giovani a fare una cosa sola non ha ancora dato frutti tali da permetterci di considerare l'opera dei primi alla luce di quella dei secondi. (Bo 27-28)

According to Vittorini, it would seem that the common characteristics of literary neorealism are difficult to list. However, a summary of the tendencies and trends of neorealism's main protagonists can shed some light on the general characteristics of literary neorealism. To begin with, it is safe to state that narrative was the most common of literary genres used in neorealism. Because of its aims, i.e., to represent the people and to be accessible to people, neorealism “operò soprattutto nella narrativa: il genere, ancora una volta, accessibile a un pubblico largo, disponibile a una scrittura distesa, e vi si incontrarono, intrecciarono, accavallarono uomini ed esperienze diverse,” (Petronio 863). Some authors, Pratolini, Vittorini, Bilenchi, had sympathized with Fascism. Others, such as Pavese and Levi, had been vocal anti-Fascists, and had even suffered punishment because of their beliefs. Still others, like Moravia and Jovine, were completely uninvolved in politics. As for the focus of their work, many of these authors, Vittorini and Pratolini included, made it a priority to depict the lower classes, even though many were from bourgeois, middle-class families (Petronio 863). Some drew inspiration from the styles and themes of contemporary American realism (Asor

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8 Literary historians Alberto Asor Rosa and Giuseppe Petronio point out that neorealism was evident in other genres, as well, but that its influence was limited. They both indicate that Eduardo De Filippo was almost single-handedly responsible for bringing neorealism to the theatre (Asor Rosa, Storia 623-24, Petronio 859). Petronio points out that some poets could be loosely categorized as neorealist: Saba, Govoni, Ungaretti, Montale, Sereni, Quasimodo, Gatto, Fortini (Petronio 859), but he admits that the link between neorealism and poetry is tenuous. Perhaps it is not until years later, with the poetry of artists such as Pier Paolo Pasolini, that one may speak of the influence of neorealism in poetry.
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Rosa, *Storia* 602-03; Bo 28-29, 57). Others drew inspiration from the various forms of European realism of the nineteenth century. Some focused on northern Italy, while many focused on the issues of the Mezzogiorno, the Italian South. Some, particularly in the 1950s and even beyond, were interested in depicting World War II and its aftermath (Moravia, Primo Levi, Vittorini).

Thus, neorealist authors were a diverse a group, not unlike their cinematic counterparts. Their works also shared a very similar spirit with neorealist films. A crucial common point between the literature and the cinema of post-war Italy, for instance, can be identified in the political and social motivation for change.

Il clima letterario degli anni immediatamente successivi alla guerra (ma almeno fino alla metà degli anni ’50) è tutto dominato dall’esigenza di dare una forma concreta e soddisfacente alla missione sociale e civile del letterato. Siamo quindi agli antipodi del clima dominante (più o meno per libera scelta, più o meno per necessità) nel corso degli anni ’30. La polemica contro il ‘disimpegno’ dell’intellettuale e contro l’”autonomia” dell’arte divampa violentissima, ed investe anche le autorità più costituite: da Benedetto Croce agli ‘ermetici’, per intenderci, è tutto un settore della cultura italiana del Novecento che in questo modo viene rifiutato. Da questo punto di vista, il trauma della guerra e della Resistenza è avvertito in maniera molto forte, e grande è il convincimento (o l’illusione) che le cose, anche in letteratura, debbano cambiare molto. (Asor Rosa, *Storia* 617)

While it is definitely true that the Resistance and the fall of Fascism were catalysts in allowing for freedom of expression on the part of anti-Fascist innovators in all of the arts, it is also true, as I stated above when dealing with the cinema, that so-called “neorealist” ideas were expressed even during the age of Fascism. Many Italian authors who have traditionally been linked to neorealism, such as Moravia (with *Gli indifferenti*, 1929), Vittorini (with *Viaggio in Sardegna* 1936) and *Conversazione in Sicilia*, parts of which were published in
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1938-39, then 1941), Pratolini (Via de 'magazzini, 1942), Silone, (Fontamara, 1930) and Pavese (Paesi tuoi, 1941), were active in their craft well before the war and the Resistance. As Eugenio Montale declares in an interview with Carlo Bo:

Nego che il neorealismo sia fenomeno di questo dopoguerra, e quindi nato come reazione all'ultima letteratura. Il neorealismo è una tendenza letteraria cominciata ad affermarsi in Italia intorno al 1930, col sorgere di una nuova narrativa che, all'autobiografismo critico-lirico dei 'frammentisti' e dei 'saggisti' della Voce e della Ronda, e ai modi evocativi, al paesismo elegiaco della letteratura allora dominante, intendeva contrapporre la rappresentazione strenuamente analitica, cruda, drammatica di una condizione umana travagliata, fra volontà e velleità, dall'angoscia dei sensi, delle convenzioni della vita borghese, dalla vacuità e noia dell'esistenza. Le polemiche che negli anni successivi al 1930 si dibatterono intorno a formalismo e contenutismo, sono strettamente congiunte con l'affermarsi di cotesta tendenza. Contenutisti, non occorre dirlo, furono chiamati i neorealisti; ricordo di aver per mio conto adoperato questo termine nel 1931. E dico questo, naturalmente, non per stabilire un primato, ma per documentare quella nascita relativamente remota. Altri neorealismi di cui oggi si parla, come quello cinematografico, essi, si, sono di data più o meno recente: ma ciò non deve indurre a equivocare circa l'origine e le caratteristiche del primogenito.
(Bo 23)

If one can agree with Montale, then one might also state that neorealist literature helped to lay the groundwork for cinematic neorealism. In all of its shapes and forms, neorealist narrative was accessible to individuals in the environment in which Visconti, Rossellini, De Sica, Zavattini, and others operated. One might even postulate that authors were able to express themselves during Fascism in ways that perhaps filmmakers were not allowed to, given the very strict, programmatic censorship to which cinema was subjected. Such rules of censorship were not as stringent for other artistic industries:
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Apparently Mussolini believed that intellectuals producing art and exchanging ideas would have little impact in a country run by a party of the masses and entertained by a blossoming film industry. And so, though it was wise for the critically minded writers to exercise a degree of self-censorship, they were not completely silenced. A few were deported to remote corners of the south, where they actually expanded their understanding of the squalor behind the façade of "official" Italy. When they returned, they were even allowed to write about what they had experienced.

(Bacon 10)

It is also true that anti-Fascist filmmakers were able to release their works despite the Fascist censors. However, it would be fair to state that because of the crucial role that the cinema played in the Fascist propaganda machine, perhaps censorship within that industry was more stringent, and that the strict regulations regarding film releases were adhered to very closely. One might say, then, that a greater variety of ideas that have been categorized as "neorealist" were diffused via literature, at least before the Resistance. If this is the case, it follows that literary neorealism in fact influenced cinematic neorealism. Anti-Fascist ideas were openly being expressed among intellectuals via literature, and these ideas helped to shape those young intellectuals who were interested in conveying anti-Fascist messages through film and experimenting with subversive forms in that same medium. The trends that have come to be associated with post-war committed cinema were initiated by neorealist writers (who, in turn, were influenced by realist trends from other countries and/or from previous times). The portrayal of the lower classes, the focus on the living conditions in the South, the depiction of rural Italy and other environments that did not conform to Fascist criteria of the status quo,

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9 The films of Alessandro Blasetti come to mind, particularly 1860 (1860, 1933). The often-quoted trio of Quattro passi tra le nuvole (A Stroll in the Clouds, Blasetti, 1942), I bambini ci guardano (The Children Are Watching Us, De Sica, 1942), and Visconti's own Ossessione (Obsession, 1943) are other examples of subversive films that were screened even during periods of strictest censorship.
and the general rejection of the contrived and deceiving depictions of Italy that were so insidiously a part of Fascist propaganda, all of these notions circulated in the environment of the intellectuals living and working in Italy in the 1930s and early 1940s. With the war and the liberation of the country serving as a binding force, filmmakers were able to convey these notions on film in a variety of ways. Then, the advent of the Resistance and its bloody but triumphant aftermath served as a unifying force for young filmmakers, and at the same time, freed them from the oppression of the regime. It also gave them a common experience that they could depict and utilize as part of the subject matter of their works. The foundation for these ideas, however, had been laid in the literature of the 1930s and 1940s.

If indeed one can speak of literary neorealism's *influence* on cinematic neorealism, one must be careful to point out that this influence does not involve the activity of adaptation per se. Adaptations of literary works that have been categorized as neorealist were undertaken more frequently only in the later stages of cinematic neorealism, and beyond. One can only speculate as to the possible reasons for this, but practically speaking, I would postulate that neorealist film adaptations of neorealist literary works were not common simply because the development of neorealism within both genres was linked closely in time, and consequently, from a pragmatic point of view, it would have taken some time before any neorealist work of fiction could generate enough interest and thought on the part of a given director, before a film based on that work could be produced. I have included a short list of adaptations of neorealist literary pieces below. The title of the film, the year of its release, and its director, are listed first, followed by the name of the author and the year of publication of the original work. This
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List is by no means exhaustive, and is meant simply to illustrate that neorealist literature serves as an ongoing source of inspiration to Italian directors.

- *Cronache di poveri amanti* (*Tales of Poor Lovers*, 1954), Carlo Lizzani (Vasco Pratolini, 1947)
- *Le amiche* (*The Girl Friends*, 1955), Michelangelo Antonioni (Cesare Pavese, 1943)
- *Il bell'Antonio* (*Bell'Antonio*, 1960), Mauro Bolognini (Vitalino Brancati, 1949)
- *Cronaca familiare* (*Family Diary*, 1962), Valerio Zurlini (Vasco Pratolini, 1947)
- *Metello* (*Metello*, 1970), Mauro Bolognini (Vasco Pratolini, 1955)
- *L'agnese va a morire* (*Agnes Goes to Die*, 1976), Giuliano Montaldo (Renata Viganò, 1949)
- *Il garofano rosso* (*The Red Carnation*, 1976), Luigi Faccini (Elio Vittorini, 1948)
- *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* (*Christ Stopped at Eboli*, 1978), Francesco Rosi (Carlo Levi, 1945)
- *Fontamara* (*Fontamara*, 1980), Carlo Lizzani (Ignazio Silone, 1930 in German, 1934 in Italian)
It is interesting to note that in this short list of adaptations, the first three films listed were made in 1954, the same year in which Visconti’s Senso and Fellini’s La strada (La Strada) were released. These two films sparked off an animated, bitter debate on the so-called betrayal of neorealism; and yet, in the same year, film directors were turning to neorealist sources in order to create cinematic works. Perhaps this fact speaks to the ongoing influence of neorealist literature (and of neorealist ideals) in Italian cinema.

0.4 Visconti’s Filmography

Before I begin my detailed analyses of La terra trema, Senso, and Il Gattopardo, I wish to look at the way in which Visconti’s filmography lends itself to a study of the relationship between film and literature. A brief survey of the director’s work reveals the appropriateness of using his works as a vehicle for examining the relationship between literature and cinema in an Italian context.

Visconti made fourteen fiction films and three documentary-style short films in his career. The influence of and the reliance on literature is evident throughout his filmography. He made his cinematic debut in 1943 with the release of his controversial film, Ossessione. Inspired by the American realist novel The Postman Always Rings Twice (James M. Cain, 1934), Ossessione is considered by many to be a turning point in Italian cinema, away from the reactionary brand of filmmaking of the Fascist era, and towards a more socially motivated and politically aware cinema. Its depiction of an unfortunate series of events that take place in squalid surroundings in rural northern Italy, constituted a first for Italian movie-going audiences of the Fascist era, who were accustomed to glamorous depictions of the bourgeois

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10 On the debates surrounding Senso and the betrayal of neorealism, see Chapter 2.
upper classes on the big screen. The end of the war drew Visconti to a project that stands out in his filmography for several reasons, *Giorni di gloria* (*Glory Days*, 1945). This anti-Fascist documentary on which Visconti worked, along with key figures of the period such as Mario Serandrei and Giuseppe De Santis, is one of the rare non-fiction works in the director’s filmography. In 1948, Visconti’s *La terra trema* proved to be the ultimate neorealist experiment. Visconti once again employed the techniques and themes of realist literature, this time taken from Italian realism. In 1951, Visconti worked on a collaborative, non-fiction piece, this time with noted neorealist writer Vasco Pratolini. The exposé, entitled *Appunti su un fatto di cronaca* (*Notes about a News Item*), reconstructs the murder of a young girl named Annarella Bracci, whose purported murderer recants his confession. In retelling little Annarella’s tragic story, Visconti and Pratolini focus not as much on the characters involved, as they do on the environment and the social context of this “tragedia dei poveri” (*De Giusti* 50). While it is not a work of fiction and not based on a literary work, *Appunti* allows Visconti to continue the exploration of neorealism that he had begun with his feature films. In that same year, Visconti used an original screenplay for his next film, *Bellissima*. This delightful Anna Magnani vehicle about a desperate stage mom and her awkward young daughter indicated for some critics the “ritorno del personaggio” (*Micciché, V. e il neorealismo* 194). The film had little to do with literature and shows no substantial influence of the literary medium; in fact, Lino Micciché has rightfully termed it “un film sul cinema,” (*Micciché, V. e il neorealismo* 201). The film constitutes a light-hearted divergence, in some respects, following the bleakness and seriousness of Visconti’s first two feature releases. Visconti returns to working with Anna Magnani for one episode of *Siamo donne* (*We, the Women*), in 1953. It was the aim of this ensemble piece made by various directors and spearheaded by
Cesare Zavattini, to depict episodes in the lives of five actresses and to demystify those actresses by proving that they were merely women. Visconti's episode recounts an argument between Magnani and a taxi driver over a surcharge that the driver demands, to transport Magnani's dog. This film stands in stark contrast to Visconti's next cinematic venture, *Senso*. Released in 1954, the film brought Visconti's art to a different plane altogether. This adaptation of Camillo Boito's nineteenth-century novella is a critical rereading of the Italian *Risorgimento* and implicitly draws a parallel between that era and contemporary Italy. It is with *Senso* that Visconti expands his own definition of neorealism, so much so that his supporters claimed that he had achieved "realism" with this film, whereas his detractors maintained that he had betrayed neorealism. Perhaps it is not by accident that Visconti chose *Le notti bianche* (*White Nights*, 1957) as his subsequent project. Based on the Dostoevsky short story of the same name, the film differs from the original in a way that is similar to the way that *Ossessione* diverges from *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. The setting of the short story is transplanted onto Italian soil. The interesting difference between this film and those that precede it, particularly *Ossessione* and *La terra trema*, is that Visconti insisted on creating artificial sets and having a very stylized look to the film. This was, perhaps, Visconti's response to critics who were so insistent on specific definitions of "realism" in art. *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (*Rocco and his Brothers*), made in 1960, revisits themes presented in *La terra trema* and places them in a contemporary context, and provides a stark contrast to the stylized *Le notti bianche*. This tale of a family from Lucania that slowly and tragically disintegrates...
after its members emigrate to Milan can be viewed as Visconti’s return to the neorealist experiment. The film takes inspiration from several literary works:

“Giuseppe e i suoi fratelli” di Thomas Mann, due racconti di Giovanni Testori compresi ne “Il ponte della Ghisolfa”, la letteratura meridionalistica di Rocco Scotellaro ("Contadini del sud") e Carlo Levi ("Cristo si è fermato a Eboli"), le esperienze di *mise en scène* dell’"Arialda" di Testori e "Uno sguardo dal ponte" di Miller, ma soprattutto "L’idiota" di Dostoevskij dal quale riceve luce e suggestione il personaggio centrale di Rocco [. . .]
(De Giusti 77)

Although Visconti in large part left the neorealist experiment behind following the making of *Rocco*, some of the crucial themes, techniques, and even settings, that had come to be associated with his brand of neorealism, are present in Visconti’s later films. And, of course, the director continued to use literature as a means of inspiration, exploiting the skills he had refined over two decades, and creating films that could be labelled “literary.” On the heels of *Rocco*, Visconti collaborated on another ensemble film, *Boccaccio '70* (*Boccaccio '70*, 1962). Visconti’s episode, entitled *Il lavoro* (*The Job*), is loosely based on the Guy de Maupassant 1883 short story, “Au bord du lit,” but the story of the original is once again transposed in space and time, into a tale of an unhappy bourgeois Italian housewife who resorts to prostituting herself to her husband in order to make her own way. The style and sensibility of *Il lavoro* predict the more baroque, stylized approach that Visconti would develop in the 1960s and 1970s. *Il Gattopardo*, the film that comprises the final portion of my detailed analysis, has some significant commonalities with what had come before, but also closed a phase in the director’s career and served to open a new phase, one in which the director turned towards using literary sources in a more personal and idiosyncratic way. Visconti’s choice of source
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text, the 1958 novel by Giuseppe Tommasi di Lampedusa, was defined as a historical novel by the eminent authority on the subject, George Lukács:

The new important historical novels, like Halldor Laxness’s The Bell of Iceland and Lampedusa’s The Leopard (particularly its first half) confirm the principles I arrived at in a positive direction.

(Lukács 14)

Following Il Gattopardo, Visconti made a series of films in which literature continued to play a principal role. These films are somewhat more stylized and show less of an interest on the director’s part in the social issues that had been prevalent in his previous films. In 1965, the director made Vaghe stelle dell’Orsa ... . The title of the film is itself inspired by Giacomo Leopardi’s poem, “Ricordanze” (1829). As for the story in the film, Visconti admitted that he was inspired by Aeschylus’s Oresteia, as he explores the tortured past of Sandra, the beautiful and mysterious main character. His interest in the depiction of the bourgeois growing, Visconti directed an episode of the 1967 film Le Streghe (The Witches) entitled La strega bruciata viva (The Witch Burned Alive). The episode examines the alienation of a film diva even when she is surrounded by friends. Although this work is not based on any specific literary work, its theme of alienation indirectly links it to Visconti’s next feature film and

11It is perhaps ironic that a good portion of the literary criticism on the novel Il Gattopardo focuses on the debate whether the novel can be labelled as a historical novel. Artists and critics were heavily influenced by the writing of Lukács from the time that the Russian critic’s works were first published in Italian in the early 1950s; and yet some critics refused the idea that the Lampedusa text could be considered a historical novel proper. See especially Simonetta Salvestroni, Tomasi di Lampedusa and Giorgio Masi, Come leggere Il Gattopardo di Giuseppe Tomasi Lampedusa. My interest in this label, “historical novel,” stems from the fact that, when the notion of the historical novel was being defined and debated in the mid-1950s, Visconti’s own Senso was likened to a “historical novel.” Visconti’s use of history to make contemporary social statements was in fact similar to what Lukács had in mind when he discussed the notion of the historical novel.
cinematic adaptation, *Lo straniero* (*The Stranger*). Based on Camus’s 1942 landmark work, *L’Ètranger*, this film has been criticized by most critics for its failure to depict Camus’s Algeria and, more specifically, the existential nature of Mersault. Following this, Visconti once again tackled a project with no direct literary predecessor, but with several literary influences. *La caduta degli dei* (1969) tells a tale of the downfall of an influential industrial family, the Essenbecks, in Nazi Germany. Part of Visconti’s so-called German trilogy, the film takes inspiration from Thomas Mann’s *Buddenbrook* as well as Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*.

Continuing his exploration of German literature, Visconti next directed *Morte a Venezia* (*Death in Venice*, 1971), based on Thomas Mann’s 1930 novella. Once again the director transposed certain details to fit his intentions and perhaps even his medium, making the protagonist a composer rather than a writer. Rounding out the German trilogy is *Ludwig* (1973), a film that allowed Visconti to explore history once again, and to dramatize it for the purposes of his art. In the film, Visconti recounts the history of young King Ludwig von Wittelsbach of Bavaria, as he descends into obsession, madness, and finally drives himself to supposed suicide. Visconti’s second to last film was based on an original screenplay; *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno* (1974) examines the ambivalence of a retired professor towards the unusual and disturbing tenants who force themselves into his house. The darkness and violence to which the professor is exposed because of this strange family leads him to contemplate his own mortality, and ultimately, to await his own death. As often happens in Visconti’s films, even in cases where there are no direct literary sources, literary influences

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12 Mersault was played by Marcello Mastroianni in the film, and much of the negative criticism regarding Visconti’s depiction of Mersault revolved around the idea that Mastroianni had been miscast. The legendary actor, however, had been Visconti’s second choice for the role; the director had cast him when he discovered that Alain Delon was unavailable.
can still be found. This film is no different. The professor reminds us at times of Thomas Mann’s Aschenbach, at times of Lampedusa’s Prince, or even Il Gattopardo’s Don Calogero. And, as far as the influence of Mann goes, the film explores the theme of deception, as seen, for example, in Mann’s short story, “The Betrayal” (De Giusti 143). For his final project, Visconti again opted for an adaptation, this time D’Annunzio novel, L’innocente (The Innocent). The 1976 film allowed the director to come full circle: while there had been a definite evolution in his cinema, he had continued to make extensive use of literature to make his cinema, and he had chosen texts that, although spanning decades and miles, had many elements in common. The darkness of most of the literary texts allowed Visconti to dramatize subjects that he seemed to explore in his mind over and over: deception, betrayal, isolation, and death.

Visconti’s choices of literary sources enabled him to explore the two tensions that he dramatized in his films throughout his career: one was tragic, the other melodramatic. Visconti used both masterfully, and developed his sensibility during his years of experimentation with cinematic neorealism. I have attempted to emphasize the crucial role of neorealism in the development of Visconti’s cinema. It is true that this dissertation focuses on the role of literature in the films of Visconti; however, one must not lose sight of the role that neorealism played in his filmography, as well. Indeed, the director’s motivation for using literature, particularly in the time span covered by the films in this dissertation, was often his interest in neorealism. Visconti has often been characterized as one of the masters of neorealism along with Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio De Sica, and Cesare Zavattini. However, in many ways Visconti is “a thing apart” from the other two filmmakers, and it is partly because of the literary tools that he used that he is different and that he achieved realism in art, the
same way writers such as Tolstoy, Flaubert, and, in an Italian context, Verga, achieved realism. Visconti’s works do not fall in line with those of Rossellini’s and De Sica’s; his films serve to punctuate neorealism. He breathed life into the words that he read on a page and gave them shape, life, and relevance. It is important to remember that Guido Aristarco, staunch supporter of Visconti and a proponent of Visconti’s brand of cinematic realism, likened Visconti’s work to the great historical novels. In his 1955 essay “È neorealismo” Aristarco compared Visconti’s films in general and Senso in particular, to historical novels of sweeping scope such as War and Peace. Aristarco saw Visconti as an artist capable of taking a small story of a few individuals, and of turning it into a tale of epic proportions that is expressed the way it would be in a great work of literature; he therefore made use of literature as a tool to expand the breadth, the range, the meaning, the very medium of film. Aristarco’s stance was controversial at the time, and was attacked by critics such as Luigi Charini, who refuted the idea that a film such as Senso could be likened to works of historical realism, and who, in fact, abhorred any connection that was made between Visconti and realism. Regardless of this specific debate, Visconti continued to be recognized as a master of adaptation, and continued to be praised (as well as attacked) for his treatment of literature.

13 For a summary of the debate surrounding Senso and its so-called betrayal of neorealism, see Chapter 2.
Chapter 1

La terra trema

In no case is the irrelevance of fidelity criticism more evident than in Luchino Visconti's *La terra trema.*
(Marcus, *Filmmaking* 25)

It is with these words that Millicent Marcus begins her discussion on "the typology of adaptation" in Visconti's 1948 film. Because several logistical and practical factors, as well as ideological and artistic ideals, came into play during the making of *La terra trema,* it would be improper to speak of *La terra trema* as a "faithful" adaptation of *I Malavoglia,* as I have discussed in the Introduction. However, it is undeniable that *I Malavoglia* (and, more generally, Giovanni Verga) served as a source for the film, in several different ways.¹ Verga's novel is a source text in that its basis and spirit are clearly present in *La terra trema,* but its story and message undergo several transformations. Visconti's intent was not merely to dramatize *I Malavoglia* on film, but rather, to incorporate his own ideas of neorealism and realism, on history and the working class of the South, as well as his political ideas, into a film that was based on Verga's 1881 novel. The director had for years considered Verga an

¹Traces of Verga may be found in other Visconti films, as well. For instance, Gianni Rondolino has pointed out that the character of Don Calogero in *Il Gattopardo* very much resembles Mastro Don Gesualdo (Rondolino, *Luchino Visconti* 442). Conversely, traces of Verga texts other than *I Malavoglia* can be found in *La terra trema,* Rondolino identifies "Jeli il pastore" and "Rosso Malpelo" as additional sources (Rondolino, *Luchino Visconti* 203). It is not surprising that Verga should have inspired Visconti to such an extent, given the influence of the nineteenth-century author during Visconti's formative years. See Rondolino, *Luchino Visconti* 89-99 for a discussion of the influence of Verga on Visconti and the *Cinema* group. For additional information on the *Cinema* group, see page 62.
attractive source for a possible film project. And, because of the newly-found interest in Verga shared by his colleagues of the Cinema group, it is not surprising that Verga should have been considered a viable literary source for Visconti. As for the selection of *I Malavoglia*, the novel provided a rich story with epic sweep, with deep humanity and therefore with great potential for expressing significant ideas regarding the realities of human beings in society. In addition, the stark beauty and simplicity of the setting and of the characters of the novel afforded Visconti the opportunity to create an aesthetically striking work of art. It will be the purpose of this chapter to define the ways in which *I Malavoglia*, a watershed work in the development of modern Italian literature, was used as a source for a cinematic text that would constitute a turning point in Italian film history, as well.

1.1 The Development of a Neorealist Sensibility

The relationship between literature and film in the time of neorealism has been described in the Introduction. It would be useful at this time to delve a bit more deeply into the evolution of the cinematic medium from the 1930s into the 1940s, during the years when cinematic neorealism gradually established itself as the most significant trend of post-World-War II cinema in Italy. This survey will provide insight into Visconti’s early years as a filmmaker, and will consequently uncover some of the aesthetic as well as political ideals that the director held when he tackled the production of *La terra trema*. 
1.1.1 Italian Cinema from Fascism to Neorealism

One of the primary factors to consider when dealing with any issue related to Visconti’s cinema, is the development of the director’s stylistic point of view. When Visconti embarked on the project of *La terra trema*, his main interest was to create a new, authentic film language. The director had been very much involved in the atmosphere of reform initiated by figures such as Roberto Rossellini, Cesare Zavattini, and Vittorio De Sica. These so-called “fathers of neorealism,” all strove, each in his own way, to create a kind of politically committed and “realistic” cinema. They rejected the dominant trends in Italian film that had been popular before the war, which tended to celebrate, in one form or another, the values of nationalism and of Fascism. To better understand what neorealists were refusing, it is useful to understand the scope of Fascist cinema. To begin with, despite the regime’s strong influence on the cinematic industry in Italy, the most overtly Fascist films produced were relatively small in number. As Morando Morandini points out:

After 1930, there were only four films made about the ‘Fascist revolution’—its origins in ‘squads’ and their march on Rome of October 1922, which was in actual fact more of a stroll. These were: *Camicetta nera* (‘Blackshirt’, 1933) by Gioacchino Forzano; *Aurora sul mare* (‘Dawn over the sea’, 1935), by Giorgio C. Simonelli; *Vecchia guardia* (‘Old Guard’, 1935) by Alessandro Blasetti; and *Redenzione* (‘Redemption’, 1942) by Marcello Albani, adapted from a play by Roberto Farinacci, the so-called ‘ras di Cremona’, a Fascist ‘ultra’ and one of Mussolini’s henchmen.

(Morandini, *Italy from Fascism* 354)
Other significant examples of political films that in some way endorsed Fascism can be also be identified from this era. However, these, too, are a minority:

Fascist propaganda is also evident in around thirty other films (out of 722 produced between 1930 and 1943), and these may be divided into four categories:

1. Patriotic and/or military films: from documentary footage of the First World War to Scarpe al sole (‘Shoes in the sun’, 1935); from Cavalleria (‘Cavalry’, 1936) to Luciano Serra pilota (1938) by Goffredo Alessandrini [. . .] Francesco De Robertis’s semi-documentary Uomini sul mondo, (‘Men in the deep’, 1941) and Roberto Rossellini’s La nave bianca (‘The white ship’, 1941).


4. Anti-Bolshevik and anti-Soviet propaganda films: these include two films on the Spanish Civil War, both from 1939: L’assedio dell’Alcazar (‘The siege of the Alcazar’) by Genina, made with powerful choral elements, and the less polished Carmen tra i rossi (‘Carmen and the Reds’) by Edgar Neville, who went on to direct Santa Maria (1941). Other films in this category are L’uomo della croce (‘Man of the cross’, 1943) by Rossellini, Odessa in fiamme (‘Odessa in flames’, 1942) by Gallone, and Odissea di sangue (‘Blood odyssey’, 1942) by Righelli. Alessandrini’s turgid romantic diptych Noi vivi - Addio, Kira (‘We the living’ | ‘Farewell, Kira’, 1942), adapted from novels by Ayn Rand, is a somewhat different case, since it is Stalinism rather than Communism itself which is attacked. (Morandini, Italy from Fascism 355)
Several other tendencies emerged during the Fascist era, but one dominant trend that must be mentioned here is that of the *cinema dei telefoni bianchi*, which prevailed in the 1930s and into the 1940s, and which was the primary type of cinema to which directors such as Visconti were opposed.

The driving force behind Italian cinema remained the escapist film, or as Luchino Visconti had it in a 1943 polemic, 'a cinema of corpses'. Its style was much closer than is commonly acknowledged to Hollywood products of the same period: it split into distinct genres; it relied on the cult of stars; and it cultivated, with only occasional success, the image of the director as a professional and author-figure. [...] The principal genres were comedy, melodrama, and costume-cum-historical drama. The comedies were for the most part sentimental, and after 1937 increasingly frivolous and vacuous, based on a rejection of reality in favour of an anaemic, dissipated characters who live in an absurd excess of luxury and who talk to each other via the shining 'white telephones' which gave their name to the genre. The discretion was minimal, and always secondary to the set and its furnishings, and to the taste for window-shopping.

(Morandini, *Italy from Fascism* 355, 357)

One of the other main characteristics of the *cinema dei telefoni bianchi* was its reliance on a star system, a phenomenon which saw the meteoric rise of many Italian actors. Among the main players that should be mentioned here are Vittorio De Sica, Assia Noris, Elsa Merlini, Maria Denis, Isa Miranda, Amedeo Nazzari, Alida Valli, and Clara Calamai.²

By the time Visconti came to work on *La terra trema* in 1947, Italy had undergone several radical changes as a result of the war and of its aftermath. Many parts of the country had been totally destroyed following Italy's entry into the conflict and the outbreak of a civil war on Italian territory. The country had barely had time to recover from its devastation. As

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² For a detailed overview of the star system that developed in Italy during the era of the *cinema dei telefoni bianchi*, see Chapter 13 of Gian Piero Brunetta's *Cent'anni di cinema italiano*, "Divi in camicia nera."
for the cinema, the style and content of the films described above had been abandoned by several key filmmakers, and many important steps had been taken in order to establish the style of a new cinematic realism as the via maestra for an engaged Italian film. Of course, it is generally recognized today that films that are categorized as "neorealist" were not the prevalent nor the most commercially successful films of the era; Peter Bondanella reminds us of this basic fact:

Of the some 822 films produced in Italy between 1945 and 1953 is that only about 90 (or slightly over 10%) could ever be called neorealist films [...] (Bondanella 35)

Nonetheless, it is indisputable that experiments with neorealism were highly influential at the time, and contributed to the development of Visconti’s vision and style.

Several films produced in the early 1940s have been cited by countless critics as being harbingers of neorealism. I have already mentioned Alessandro Blasetti’s Quattro passi tra le mure, Vittorio De Sica’s I bambini ci guardano, and Visconti’s own cinematic debut, Ossessione (1943), transitional films that had portrayed scenes that adhered more closely to the reality of the Italian people, than had the more lavish films of the years which preceded them. In the period following the end of the war, several films that have since been labelled as "masterpieces of neorealism" were released. As I shall discuss below, the directors who experimented with neorealism each had his own specific style and artistic priorities, and often these were unique and differed from one director to another. However, there are certain common elements and indeed certain films that have been recognized as being somehow characteristic of neorealism. The most famous examples may be the films of Rossellini’s war trilogy, Roma, città aperta (Rome, Open City, 1945), Paisà (Paisan, 1946) and Germania,
anno zero (Germany: Year Zero, 1947). Released in rapid succession, these works exemplify some of the new and innovative techniques that came to be closely associated with the trend. The use of natural lighting and the rejection of sets, the employment of non-professional actors, the documentary-like footage, the rejection of elaborate scripts, all served to give the films the illusion of reality, and a certain kind of grit, of "realism," that had been lacking in the cinema under Fascism. The refusal to use standard Italian and the use of regional Italian, dialects, and foreign languages added to the films' sense of authenticity. Finally, in terms of subject matter, the films dealt with the war and its aftermath. This was significant for several reasons. For one thing, it allowed Italians to come to terms with the grim reality of the suffering of their country, and it did so in a very public way. This was a revolutionary circumstance, for under the Fascist regime, Italian filmmakers had, as a rule, avoided subject matter that depicted Italy and its people in a negative light. This type of cinema also made a very powerful political statement against the destructive nature of the Fascist regime. Furthermore, it allowed for the exploration of several other aspects of Italian culture that had remained unexplored. In all three films, Rossellini made it a point of investigating the effects of the war in parts of the country that Italians were not accustomed to seeing on the screen. In Paisà, for instance, Rossellini swept his cameras upwards through the peninsula, seemingly documenting the aftermath of the war in small corners of the country that had never been shown on screen previously. The investigation of the fallout of the war on the Italian peninsula also provided a platform for exploring socially relevant themes. The effects of the catastrophe of war on a variety of characters from different geographical regions and walks of life could be explored.
Just as Rossellini had established himself as one of the principal neorealist filmmakers, so, too, had the duo of Vittorio De Sica and Cesare Zavattini helped to shape the notion of neorealism as we know it today. With films such as *Sciuscià* (*Shoeshine*, 1946), *Ladri di biciclette* (*Bicycle Thieves*, 1948), and *Umberto D.* (*Umberto D.*, 1951), they contributed greatly to the neorealist experiment. Although they tended to work with more elaborate plots and film techniques than Rossellini, they strove to recreate a sort of freshness and spontaneity that elevated reality “to the realm of poetry,” (Bondanella 57). Zavattini, the legendary script writer responsible for the development of the notion of *pedinamento*, injected his sense of freedom and effortlessness into the scripts he wrote for De Sica, resulting in a style that seemed to capture moments in people’s daily lives. Like Rossellini, De Sica and Zavattini focused on social issues pertaining to Italy’s lower classes. Poverty, homelessness, unemployment, were all themes that De Sica and Zavattini touched in the 1940s and early 1950s, as they experimented with neorealist techniques.

As the 1940s drew to a close, a number of Italian directors began to experiment with the themes and techniques used by the “masters of neorealism.” Moreover, some of the “masters” explored the boundaries of neorealism, as well. Because these experiments were performed by a diverse group of directors, different effects were achieved, resulting in what some defined as a watering down of, and eventually a betrayal of, neorealism. The main protagonists of this era of Italian cinema were characters as unique as Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, Pietro Germi, Dino Risi, and Luchino Visconti himself. Although I shall not expand on this issue since it exceeds the parameters of my topic, it is perhaps

3 Related to the ideas that he spoke about in “Basta con i soggetti,” Zavattini’s notion of the *pedinamento* suggests that a filmmaker should be able to take a camera and to follow, to *pedinare*, a person going about his everyday life, and in so doing, would create something worthy of artistic merit.
necessary to make a few general observations on the nature of neorealism. Many critics agree that neorealism was not truly a “movement” proper, that it was not programmatic and could not be achieved using a specific formula. Furthermore, several critics, particularly in more recent times, have acknowledged that the directors involved in the neorealist experiment were aware that “neorealist” techniques and styles were just that: techniques and styles. They were not *bona fide* ways of depicting “reality” (whatever that could be). Peter Bondanella summarizes this point well:

The controlling fiction of neorealist films, or at least the majority of them, was that they dealt with actual problems, that they employed contemporary stories, and that they focused on believable characters taken most frequently from Italian daily life. But the greatest neorealist directors never forgot that the world they projected upon the silver screen was one produced by cinematic conventions rather than an ontological experience, and they were never so naïve as to deny that the demands of an artistic medium such as film might be just as pressing as those from the world around them. In fact, in many of their films they underlined the relationship of illusion and reality, fiction and fact, so as to emphasize their understanding of the role both played in art. Thus, any discussion of Italian neorealism must be broad enough to encompass a wide diversity of cinematic styles, themes, and attitudes. No single or specific approach was taken and, therefore, much of the discussion which arose in the next decade over the ‘crisis’ of neorealism or its ‘betrayal’ by various directors was essentially groundless and founded upon ideological disagreements between various critics rather than any abrupt change on the part of the filmmakers themselves. Directors we label today as neorealist were a crucial part of a more general post-war cultural revolution which was characterized by a number of aesthetic and philosophical perspectives, all united only by the common aspiration to view Italy without preconceptions and to develop a more honest, ethical, but no less poetic cinematic language.

(Bondanella 34-35)
I tend, therefore, to shy away from any theory that espouses the idea that neorealism was surpassed because of its “betrayal” on the part of various directors. It is my contention that as time passed, directors who had experimented with neorealism pushed their explorations into different directions, and that eventually, their artistic priorities caused Italian cinema to move along different lines. Moreover, even during the most fruitful production period, when “classics” such as Rome: Open City, Bicycle Thieves, or even La terra trema, were being released, it was clear that each filmmaker had his own unique vision. For example, Rossellini opted for less scripted, more spontaneous scenes, whereas De Sica tended to create meaning by creating very complex, elaborate shots, thereby achieving a very different effect. The stories told by the former tended to be a series of vignettes whose tone would swing back and forth between comic and tragic, whereas the stories created by the latter were more focused and elaborate, with a more dramatic tone. Visconti himself had a predilection for melodrama and for the epic, and he therefore created stories that had a more sweeping and timeless quality. His desire to connect his stories to the ebb and flow of history distinguished him from the other “masters of neorealism.” As is discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, he became more and more interested in expressing what to him were “real” issues in Italian society in more elaborate ways, experimenting with a more melodramatic style, but retaining the interest in social issues that had affected Italian society not just in contemporary times, but throughout the history of the country, as well. No matter the direction taken by individual directors working in the 1940s and 1950s, it is indisputable that the exploration of “reality” and “authenticity” left an indelible mark on Italian cinema, and laid the groundwork for the directions that the national cinema would take thereafter.
1.1.2 Visconti's "Formative Years"

For the purposes of discussing *La terra trema*, it is important to understand in specific terms the way in which Visconti contributed to the neorealist experiment. I would like to turn now to director's experience as I begin to investigate his interest in literature and, more specifically, in Verga.

1.1.2.1 Renoir and French Realism

During the first phase of his career, Visconti took neorealism in a distinct direction, primarily with the controversial and experimental *Ossessione*, his cinematic debut, and with the film in question, *La terra trema*. However, in order to better understand Visconti's approach to neorealism, it is useful to examine his own early influences. The director's interest in both depicting a more "authentic" reality as well as in employing literature were born gradually, and were fostered by his French experiences throughout the latter half of the 1930s. This phase in Visconti's life may well have constituted one of the more formative periods in his professional development.

French cinema in the 1930s was more diverse than its Italian counterpart, due to the relatively high degree of political freedom that existed in France. Despite the variety of styles that existed, I wish to focus specifically on French realism, which is most relevant to the subject at hand.

Based on realist literature or original scripts and usually set in working-class milieux, Poetic Realist films featured pessimistic narratives and night-time settings, and a dark, contrasted, visual style prefiguring American film noir. Many great auteurs of the time chose this idiom: Pierre Chenal (*La Rue sans nom* ('The nameless street'), 1933; *Le Dernier Tournant* ('The last turning'), 1939), Julien Duvivier (*La Bandera*, 1935; *Pépé le Moko*, 1936), Jean Grémillon (*Gueule d'amour* ('The face of love', 1937); *Remorques* ('Trailers'), 1939-40),
Jean Renoir (La Bête humaine (‘The beast in man’), 1938), Albert Valentin (L’Entraîneuse (‘The dance hostess’), 1938).
(Vincendeau 345)

From this definition, it is apparent that some of the characteristic elements of French realism surely must have caught the attention of the young Luchino Visconti. Indeed, 1930s French realism included some of the same elements that were used in Visconti’s neorealist works, including La terra trema. The interest in realist literature, the working-class setting, the gritty and dark style, all of these became characteristics of Visconti’s own brand of neorealism.

To be sure, Visconti’s French experience shaped him in more than a casual way, for it is during these years that the young Visconti collaborated with one of the fathers of French realism, Jean Renoir. Renoir, along with several contemporaries, had a profound influence on cinema in the 1930s, both nationally and internationally. French realist directors sought to depict a social kind of realism, and they looked to literary realism for inspiration:

Gli autori citati stabilirono un rapporto con il pubblico di udienza relativamente larga, soprattutto Renoir e la coppia Prévert-Carné, i quali, unitamente a Julien Duvivier e Jacques Feyder, dominarono, come vedremo, il cinema francese degli Anni Trenta. Nella loro opera si andò sempre più affermando un contenuto genericamente populista, democratico, che si manifestava in uno stile che potremmo definire ‘realista’, per quella corposità delle immagini, quella verità della rappresentazione, quell’approccio diretto a una realtà umana e sociale che furono le caratteristiche peculiari del cosiddetto ‘realismo cinematografico’ francese. E se dietro a queste opere, più che l’eredità dell’avanguardia, era possibile rinvenire l’eredità del naturalismo di fine Ottocento, della letteratura di Zola, della cultura socialista del principio del secolo, con elementi, più o meno dichiarati, di anarchismo e di intelletualismo; i temi che esse affrontavano e i modi della rappresentazione riflettevano la situazione della Francia, avviata verso l’esperienza del Fronte Popolare, con tutte le contraddizioni e gli errori ma anche con gli slanci ideali e le speranze dell’epoca.
(Rondolino, Storia 312)
In hindsight, many key elements of 1930s French realism must have had a deep resonance for Visconti, for the interests and the stylistic and aesthetic priorities of the future director of La terra trema were to go along the same lines. The influence is undeniable. However, the degree to which Visconti collaborated with Renoir on several of the French filmmaker’s projects has been a subject of contention; there seems to be no clear agreement among critics regarding the extent of the collaboration. Visconti reportedly acted as one of Renoir’s assistant directors on the unfinished Une partie de campagne (A Day in the Country, 1936). It is said that he also had input on Toni (Toni, 1934), Les bas-fonds (The Lower Depths, 1936), and La grande illusion (Grand Illusion, 1937) (Rondolino 54-65). Some critics have denied that this collaboration ever took place. Regardless of the extent of the collaboration, it is a fact that the two men met and exchanged ideas. And, upon examining Renoir’s projects, one can uncover many similarities in technique, style, and vision with Visconti’s films.

Indeed, the affinities between Toni and Ossessione are most striking of all:

D’altronde, già in Toni, prodotto da Marcel Pagnol nel 1934 e girato prevalentemente in esterni, Renoir aveva accentuato i caratteri realistici della storia — ancora una volta d’amore e di morte — per metterne in luce i risvolti drammatici in modi e forme inconsueti nel panorama del cinema francese di quegli anni. E il film, proprio per questo suo aspetto ‘antispettacolare’, fu considerato poi un precedente illustre del neorealismo italiano. (Rondolino, Storia 320-21)

TONI has often been called the first “neorealist” film, preceding Luchino Visconti’s OSSESSIONE by seven years; since the Italian director was one of Jean Renoir’s assistants on the project, its influence on his work seems clear. Basing his film on police files dealing with an incident that occurred in the small town of Les Martigues, Renoir, seeking authenticity, brought his crew to that town and used its citizens as characters. The story centers on Toni (Charles Blavette), an Italian laborer who falls in love with his landlady (Jenny Helia) and then with a Spanish woman, Josepha (Celia Montalvan).
After receiving permission from Josepha's father to marry her, Toni discovers that she has been raped by a sleazy foreman, whom Josepha ends up marrying, eventually deserts, and accidentally kills. Not surprisingly, Toni takes the blame. [TONI is a]n insightful portrayal of male-female relationships and a skillful rendering of its near-pulp novel plot (again predating Visconti's adaptation of James M. Cain). (Monaco 986)

It is not difficult to conclude, therefore, that Visconti's realist impetus was also rooted in the French tradition, and that he was profoundly influenced by Jean Renoir.

1.1.2.2 The Cinema Group and the Influence of Italian Literature

Soon after Visconti had been exposed to the innovative ideas of Renoir and to the creative environment in which the French director worked, he continued to develop his artistic ideas on Italian soil. In the period between 1939 and 1940, Visconti came to know Mario Alicata, Giuseppe De Santis, Pietro Ingrao, and Mario Puccini, a group of young, anti-Fascist intellectuals who continued to influence him during a period in which the cinema industry in Italy was essentially under Fascist domination. Many of the young men in Visconti's social circle wrote for the journal Cinema, and on the pages of this periodical they often extolled the virtues of films that they labelled as "realistic." Among the films praised by the Cinema group (including Visconti) were those of Renoir, as well as Carné, Duvivier, Vidor, and Ford, to name a few (Rondolino 87). The group also had a taste for naturalism and verismo. In fact, it was during this period that De Santis and Alicata composed the ground breaking essay that was discussed in the introduction, "Verità e poesia: Verga e il cinema italiano," which greatly
influenced the young Visconti. It would be opportune at this point to repeat the passage from this essay that was quoted in Introduction, and to place it in its larger context:

... è bene chiarire subito che proprio per la sua natura rigorosamente narrativa fu nella tradizione realistica che il cinema trovò la strada migliore: visto che il realismo, non come passivo ossequio ad una statica verità obbiettiva, ma come forza creatrice, nella fantasia, d'una 'storia' di eventi e di persone, è la vera ed eterna misura di ogni espressione narrativa. [...] Giovanni Verga non ha solamente creato una grande opera di poesia, ma ha creato un paese, un tempo, una società: a noi che crediamo nell'arte specialmente in quanto creatrice di verità, la Sicilia omerica e leggendaria dei Malavoglia, [...] ci sembra nello stesso tempo offrire l'ambiente più solido e umano, più miracolosamente vergine e vero, che possa ispirare la fantasia di un cinema il quale cerchi cose e fatti in un tempo e in uno spazio di realtà, per riscattarsi dai facili suggerimenti di un mortificato gusto borghese. [...] i racconti di Giovanni Verga ci sembrano indicare le uniche esigenze storicamente valide: quelle di un'arte rivoluzionaria ispirata ad una umanità che soffre e spera.
(De Santis and Alicata 62, 65)

On the topic of what attracted Visconti and other directors to verismo, there is much that can be said. As a style, nineteenth-century Italian realism was quite appealing to Visconti's circle. It is not surprising that directors should take up the neorealist experiment, and be so successful, because, given the potential of the medium of film to reproduce sights and sounds, it could be used to develop a set of conventions that were much more “realistic” than those of literature. Thus, cinema could take up where verismo, with its limits, had left off. At one point, Visconti himself pondered the question of the tradition of literary realism and of its possibilities in a visual medium.
Sembrerà magari ovvio, ma mi son chiesto più volte perché, mentre esiste una solida tradizione letteraria la quale in cento diverse forme di romanzo e di racconto ha realizzato nella fantasia tanta schietta e pura "verità" della vita umana, il cinema, che nella sua accezione più esteriore di questa vita parrebbe dover essere addirittura il documentatore, si compiacca invece di avvezzare il pubblico al gusto del piccolo intrigo, del retorico melodramma dove una meccanica coerenza garantisce oramai lo spettatore anche dal rischio dell'estro e dell'invenzione. (Visconti, "Tradizione" 30)

In this 1941 quotation, one can also see the questioning and criticism of the kinds of bourgeois films mentioned previously, which depicted trivial elements of Italian society that, in the opinion of the neorealist directors, were lacking in social value. But there was much more about verismo that was appealing to Visconti and the intellectuals of his generation. In the section that follows, I shall examine the importance of verismo and of Verga to the Leftist intellectuals of the early 1940s.

1.2 The Significance of Verga

Verga's peasant Sicily offers the laboratory conditions most conducive to clinical observation of man's fate since the simplicity of its subjects enables the experimenters to keep his number of variables to a minimum. (Marcus, Italian Film 12)

Simplicity was a key priority for Visconti and his peers. Verga's clarity appealed to neorealist filmmakers from the outset. During the early 1940s, the years during which directors and intellectuals first conducted their cinematic "experiments," the simplicity of Verga's themes seemed extremely attractive, especially at a time when cinema seemed to be unrealistic and completely unreflective of the desperate social conditions of real life. Of course, much of the simplicity of Verga's work comes from the pastoral setting of Sicily. "For
Visconti [. . .] Sicily stands in polar opposition to something else, be it the decadent bourgeois world of Fascist culture [. . .], or the filmmaker’s personal aesthetic formation.” (Marcus, *Filmmaking* 27). Sicily, in fact, represents the antithesis of modern society for Visconti.

Millicent Marcus outlines a series of oppositions that can aid us in understanding, on the one hand, the precepts that Visconti and other like-minded intellectuals of the time were rejecting, and, on the other, alternatives to the precepts, which they were embracing (*Filmmaking* 27):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sicily</th>
<th>vs.</th>
<th>Modern Society</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verga</td>
<td></td>
<td>Manzoni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stasis</td>
<td></td>
<td>changeability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>turbid passions</td>
<td></td>
<td>intellectual clarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prehistory</td>
<td></td>
<td>modernity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>epic heroism</td>
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<td>human drama</td>
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The notion of Sicily as “prehistoric” and as standing in opposition to so-called “modern society” seems to be central here. Sicily was seen as pure, untouched by the social struggles that the rest of the country had seen since the time of Italian unification. From a socio-historical perspective, “modernity” can be seen as the point in which political struggles began in order for unification to take place. The ancient island at the foot of the Italian peninsula seemed not to have undergone the radical changes that the rest of the country had experienced in the decades following the *Risorgimento*. Sicily’s society was perceived as having remained in a perpetual state of “innocence,” in a system where instinct and emotion ruled, and the
mythical, rather than the political or the intellectual, seemed to dominate. The "purity" of Sicily, therefore, appealed to Visconti and to his contemporaries.\(^4\)

1.2.1 Verga vs. Visconti

If one considers the influence of Verga on nineteenth-century literature and compares it to the influence of Visconti on filmmakers of his own time, it becomes apparent that there are marked similarities between the two.

Con *Malavoglia* Verga trasgredisce i codici letterari del tempo e offre un caso clamoroso di sperimentazione narrativa. La sua è una sfida coraggiosa verso il pubblico dei lettori, che non riuscendo a recepire la novità rivoluzionaria del romanzo testimoniano, dal punto di vista sociologico, l'incapacità del ceto borghese e urbano a comprendere il ruolo sociale delle plebi meridionali.

(Romano 15-16)

Verga himself confirmed his interest in the "plebi meridionali," and maintained that in observing everyday southern scenes, he could find "art":

Certamente in mezzo a quella calca, i viandanti frettolosi anch'essi, non hanno tempo di guardarsi attorno, per esaminare gli sforzi plebei, le smorfie oscene, le lividure e la sete rossa degli altri, gli spasimi di quelli che cadono, e sono calpestati dalla folla, i meno fortunati, e qualche volta i più generosi. L'osanna dei trionfatori copre le grida di dolore dei sorpassati. Ma visto davvicino il grottesco di quei visi anelanti non deve essere evidentemente artistico per un osservatore?

(Riccardi XLV)

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\(^4\) This notion of Sicily as an unchanging place where myth rules was one that motivated Visconti in his choices of literary sources well beyond the years in which he experimented with neorealist techniques, as I shall explore in Chapter 3. This precise notion was investigated in detail in Tomasi di Lampedusa's *Il Gattopardo*, making the 1958 novel an understandable choice for a cinematic adaptation.
Thematically, therefore, Verga ventured to explore the role of the agrarian proletariat of the South, rejecting analyses of the bourgeoisie. This choice of focus, so revolutionary in the nineteenth century, appealed greatly to Visconti, who, as has already been pointed out, aimed at a similar rejection of bourgeois values, and opted for a more socially aware art form. Verga and Visconti’s intentions were so similar, in fact, that their work achieved quite similar effects and had a comparable influence each within its own genre. This point becomes evident when one juxtaposes the process that each artist used in the creation of his work. Compare, for instance, the methodology described by each of the two. Of the procedure employed in order to compose his novel, Verga says:

Ho cercato di mettermi nella pelle dei miei personaggi, vedere le cose coi loro occhi ed esprimere le loro parole — ecco tutto. Questo ho cercato di fare nei Malavoglia.

(Chiappelli 30-31)

In relation to his own filmmaking, Visconti maintains:

Il film viene girato [...] a partire dalle situazioni che vengono a crearsi sul posto, seguo uno schematico canovaccio che viene modificato a poco a poco dalla forza delle cose. I dialoghi li scrivo a caldo, con l’aiuto degli stessi interpreti, vale a dire chiedendo loro in quale maniera esprimerebbero un determinato sentimento, e quali parole userebbero. Da questo lavoro nascono dunque i dialoghi e il testo mantiene di conseguenza un tono non letterario e autentico che mi sembra prezioso.

(Serandrei 27)

It is well known that Visconti allowed the fishermen and townspeople of Aci Trezza to be the protagonists of his film, and that he encouraged them to improvise some of the dialogues. In this way, Visconti was able to “mettersi nella pelle dei suoi personaggi,” and in a manner that
was similar to Verga’s. The media used by the two artists varied, and therefore the tools varied, but the intention, as well as the effects, seem quite similar.

1.2.2 The Risorgimento vs. the Reconstruction

One can argue that the similarity in focus between Verga and Visconti is not a casual one. Furthermore, Visconti’s work is not a mere product of *aemulatio*. In fact, there are historical reasons for the similarity between the two. Both artists lived in times of great social change and upheaval. The first, Verga, lived in post-*Risorgimento* Italy, and the second, Visconti, in post-World War II Italy. In both historical periods, the Italian people had witnessed great social and political change, revolutions that promised a more functional and democratic society. Understandably, however, such revolution caused uncertainty, and such uncertainty led to a search for more concrete, solid tenets. Consequently, in both historical periods, artists searched for a new, more authentic mode of expression. According to Massimo Romano, Verga’s work manifests what he terms an “anticapitalismo, che nasce da due fattori: 1) la delusione risorgimentale, che ha situato la Sicilia ai margini del processo storico; 2) la crisi di identità del ruolo intellettuale, che determina la sua condizione di testimone isolato dal processo di lacerazione della struttura socio-economica italiana,” (Romano 13). Thus, the similarities that may be drawn between the work of Verga and Visconti, exist not only because Visconti made a conscious effort to utilize Verga’s literature as a source for his own work, but also because the conditions in which the two lived and worked were analogous. Indeed, Visconti was drawn to stories created in and about that time period because he considered the *Risorgimento* a crucial moment in the history of his country. The director saw affinities between the Italy of the 1880s and the Italy of the 1940s, and he made extensive use of texts written in the *Risorgimento* and about the *Risorgimento* in order to make a clear statement
about contemporary Italian society. The parallels that the director saw between the years immediately following the end of World War II and the period after Italian unification were very evident, and in order to make a relevant social statement with his art, Visconti deliberately drew from and shaped historical and artistic sources from the period of the Risorgimento. As I discussed earlier, if one surveys the director’s filmography, it becomes obvious that he placed importance on the historical period in which Verga lived. The other objects of my study, Senso and Il Gattopardo, are striking examples of this, the former text being contemporary to Verga’s own, and the latter being set during the same period in which the other two were written. In both cases, Visconti examines the confusion and upheaval caused by Italian unification, a movement which had been praised historically, but which, to Visconti, had fallen short in its promise of a more positive society. It is also worth noting that the parallel between the two time periods had been made not only by the young director, but by other intellectuals, and most notably by Antonio Gramsci.5

The Risorgimento had not been the kind of social revolution to forge a new nation. For most Italians, it was just another chapter in history. Nor was it given much scholarly attention until Antonio Gramsci [sic.], during his imprisonment in the Fascist years, started rewriting Italian history. Gramsci’s [sic.] main conclusion was that the Risorgimento was not a true people’s revolution, and that the rhetoric about unification being a result of the will and the activity of the people was simply untrue. In many provinces the people actually resisted being subjected to the Piedmontese king; the only groups

5 Although Gramsci died in 1937, prior to World War II, his writings on the Risorgimento were published as part of the Quaderni dal carcere in 1949 (Biondi 6). Visconti could not have been directly influenced by this text while he was working on La terra trema itself, because the film was released prior to the publishing of Gramsci’s work. Indeed, Gramsci’s first volume of the Lettere dal carcere was published in 1947 (Insalaco 13), which indicates that it is questionable that the director was at all influenced by Gramsci during the making of La terra trema. The point to keep in mind here, however, is that many intellectuals, including Visconti, saw affinities between their own era and that of Verga’s.
really interested in the unification were the industrialists and the intellectuals, who for once had found a common interest.

Gramsci's [sic.] ideas took root after the Fascist period, when Italians felt a great need to affirm their national identity and to settle their accounts with the past. (Bacon 68-69)

It is not surprising that Gramsci's writings became popular among Leftist intellectuals in the years following the end of World War II. His questioning of the revolutionary aspects of *Risorgimento* struck a chord in individuals such as Visconti, who eventually began to doubt that the Resistance and the overthrowing of the Fascist regime would make a significant difference in Italy. If the strong connection that Visconti and others made between contemporary society and the *Risorgimento* was justified, then I would conclude that artists living in the two periods, such as Verga and Visconti, may have been moved by similar forces and influenced by similar circumstances.

1.2.3 The Southern Question

A key element of Verga's work is the portrayal of social life in Sicily, the southernmost region of the Italian Mezzogiorno and a long-standing symbol of the Italian south. Visconti's interest in the living conditions and the social life in Sicily are evident in the 1948 film, which can be seen as a critical rereading of *I Malavoglia*. The film, while depicting a post-war situation and examining the vicissitudes of the fishermen from a precise historical and ideological standpoint, portrays a family, the Valastros, whose living conditions and way of life are not substantially different from those of the Malavoglia family. They make their living the way the Malavoglia do, fishing and struggling to survive; they live in a house similar to that of the Malavoglias; they are at the mercy of their neighbours' gossip just as the
protagonists of Verga’s novel. Therefore, by maintaining these key elements and yet injecting them with a contemporary sensibility, Visconti makes a clear statement on the stagnation of social conditions in the South.

What transpired to convert Verga’s passive resignation into neorealist activism was, of course, the Resistance. This movement gave its generation the confidence to believe that the ideal could impinge upon the real and that man could forge his own destiny in accordance with his highest moral promptings. Art, which for Verga bore passive witness to the underlying dynamism of the historical process, becomes the instrument for motivating radical change in the hands of the neorealists. That vestige of classical realism which fused with nineteenth-century positivism to form Verga’s aesthetic is thus taken one step further by the neorealists, who develop the cognitive program into an incentive for action. The scientific pretensions of nineteenth-century naturalism survive in the neorealist aspiration to an objective, disinterested analysis of the social order. But where Verga could maintain the pretense of scientific impartiality because of his resigned acceptance of the status quo, the neorealists could not uphold this pretext against the weight of their urgent didacticism. (Marcus, *Italian Film* 25-26)

Visconti’s concern with the social conditions in southern Italy and his political point of view are of fundamental importance here. The phrase *questione meridionale*, in reference to Visconti, once again calls to mind a factor which contributed greatly to the director’s cinematic “rereadings” of this and other literary texts, that being the works of Antonio Gramsci. As noted above, it is questionable that Visconti was truly familiar with Gramsci’s work at the time that *La terra trema* was made. Lino Micciché seems to provide rather convincing evidence that Visconti did not become acquainted with Gramsci’s work until a later time (Micciché, *V e il neorealismo* 81-82). Micciché states what I have already noted, i.e., that at the time of release of *La terra trema*, the only Gramsci text to have been published was *Lettere dal carcere*, a text with little relevance in terms of *La terra trema*. Regardless, it is
clear that Visconti was sensitive to the *questione meridionale*, and when the director later dealt with the issue in films such as *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* and *Il Gattopardo*, he was influenced by the writings of the influential Marxist thinker who had died in a Fascist prison decades earlier. *Rocco e i suoi fratelli*, in a sense, takes up the discourse left open by *La terra trema*. It deals with the destruction of a southern family who had migrated to Milan to make a more prosperous life for themselves. Thus, the glimmer of hope given by the end of the 1948 film (with the departure of Cola and the refusal of 'Ntoni to accept defeat) is taken up, and shattered. On the other hand, *Il Gattopardo* deals with the death of the nobility at the time of Italian unification, as well as with the justifiable inability and unwillingness of the South to change with the times even during a period of revolution as great as the *Risorgimento*. These different examinations of the *questione meridionale* begin with Visconti’s critical and political (i.e., Communist) rereading of Verga in *La terra trema*. One might say, therefore, that Verga provides the initial impetus for Visconti to explore one of the main issues that he will explore throughout his filmography.

**1.2.4 Art as Experiment**

In addition to the thematic and political innovations introduced into literature by *verismo* and into cinema by Visconti, it is important to remember that Verga’s work also precipitated aesthetic innovation; again, the same may be said for the films of the Milanese director. Romano Luperini considers *I Malavoglia* a “romanzo sperimentale:” “Verga non si propone [...] uno studio ‘dal vero:’ suo obiettivo è piuttosto quello di dare un equivalente ‘scientifico’ della realtà, una sua ‘modellizzazione’ capace di fornire [un’] illusione completa”

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6The characters of Ciro and Luca, Rocco’s younger brothers, do seem to leave the viewer with the sense that there may be hope, but the central characters of Rocco and Simone are broken at the end of the film.
(Luperini, *Verga. L'ideologia* 73). Critics are in agreement with regard to the experimental nature of realism, and of Verga's *verismo* in particular. Much could be said here about experimentalism and *verismo*. The author's language, for instance, is quite innovative, a mix of various registers and regionalisms. In her introduction to *Tutte le novelle*, Carla Riccardi describes Verga's use of language in the following way:

L'esperimento è consegnato all'impacciata e faticosa mimesi dei dialoghi di personaggi 'plebei' (battute a botta e risposta, senza didascalie introduttive, uso del proverbio e della parola generatrice di discorso, in minima percentuale, però), negli incerti accenni di discorso indiretto libero, evidenziato con la puncteggiatura o con il corsivo, nel lessico sostanzialmente normale (con parecchi toscanismi, residuo dello sforzo di formarsi uno strumento linguistico popolare), corpi estranei, segnalati come tali dal corsivo.
(Riccardi VI)

Luperini points out that Verga was alive during a time of transition, and this may explain, in part, the exploratory nature of his work:

È [. . .] il Verga — almeno fino alla piena maturità del *Mastro* — sempre incerto, alla ricerca di un'ideologia, romantico e positivista insieme, uno scrittore di transizione, insomma, perché vissuto in un'età di transizione, contrassegnata dal passaggio dall'idealismo romantico dell'Italia risorgimentale al per lo più scettico positivismo dell'Italia borghese, avviata ad un chiaro sviluppo capitalistic, di dopo il '60.
(Luperini, *Pessimismo e verismo* 3-4)

Antonio Viti also indicates that the shift in Italian society towards exploring the more "concrete" aspects of life helped to lay the groundwork for a more "scientific" and "studied" form of literature.

Intorno al 1850 la vita spirituale e culturale degli italiani assume un aspetto nuovo. All'esaltazione romantica, fatta di splendidi sogni e di
La terra trema

sublimi ideali, e che aveva improntato di sé tutta la prima metà del secolo, succede ora [...] un atteggiamento più pensoso, più grave, più aderente alle obbiettive situazioni delle cose, dei fatti, della realtà. A tutto ciò che di troppo astratto e di troppo esasperato il romanticismo aveva rappresentato, reagisce ora, con voce sempre più consistente, una tendenza a rimanere aderenti agli aspetti concreti della natura e della vita, a muoversi secondo le reali possibilità di azione, a rivolgere l’occhio e la mente alla grigia tristezza della quotidiana esistenza. Ricerca quindi del concreto nel pensiero, nell’azione, nell’arte: ubbidienza non più al cuore ma alla ragione: meno fantasia e più scienza, meno poesia e più prosa.

(Viti 15-16)

Thus, the move away from Romanticism constituted a radical shift, making the move towards realism an experimental one.

[..] il distacco dalla tradizione e il progetto di classificazione socio-ambientale del presente si intrecciano [...] nell’adesione, prima entusiasta, e poi sconsolata e ‘impersonale’, del verismo verghiano. Continuità o rottura col passato, storicismo o evoluzionismo, disagio o accettazione del presente, sono le forme di coscienza attraverso cui gli intellettuali del secondo Ottocento si confrontano con la società.

(Patrano 9)

As with the other issues that connect Verga and Visconti, on the topic of realism and its experimental nature, it is once again apparent that Visconti was attracted to the Sicilian author because of the affinities Verga’s work had with the art being created in 1940s Italy. Visconti’s experiments with neorealism led him on a quest to produce a characters that were “authentic” and “human.” The “humanity” that he attempted to inject into the film came in large part from the non-professional actors that were hired to play the characters in the film, and from the process that Visconti used while shooting the film. Not relying on a script but on his own understanding and knowledge of the Verga characters and on the inventiveness of the townspeople of Aci Trezza who had been hand-picked to portray the members of the Valastro
family, Visconti was able to strike a balance between his own design and the improvisation of his actors. In using the locals of the Sicilian town, Visconti was able to experiment with language in a way similar to Verga, and he was able to make similar social statements.

The combination of Verga's *verismo* and Visconti's unique brand of cinema culminated in a film that brought about much debate on the issue of neorealism. From the time of its release, *La terra trema* was criticized by some for completely betraying neorealist and even realist ideals. Among the critics to put forth this opinion after the release of the film was André Bazin, who found the film to be slow and stylized (Wollen 132). Contemporary critics have also pointed out the "anti-realist" effect of the 1948 film: "Visconti's fanatic adherence to realist procedural demands [...] had the paradoxical effect of sabotaging the film's realism by requiring expedients of a formalist sort." (Marcus, *Filmmaking* 29). Marcus cites the use of dialect and subsequent addition of subtitles, the absence of a screenplay which gave absolute power to Visconti, and the recourse to a literary model, for what was to have been a documentary on the plight of the Sicilian proletariat — according to Marcus, this is the most serious antirealist implication. On the other hand, others have seen *La terra trema* as a key contributor to the continuation of the neorealist experiment. Still others have gone further, stating that the development of a realist aesthetic in cinema was achieved with *La terra trema*, a film that brought the neorealist aesthetic to its maximum, point, and which

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7 The debate surrounding neorealism vs. realism and Visconti began with *La terra trema* and continued and intensified through the years, culminating in the heated debates on *Senso*. The issue of realism and Visconti is discussed in Chapter 2.

8 See especially Lino Micciché, *Visconti e il neorealismo. Ossessione, La terra trema, Bellissima.*
brought cinema in a different direction. Whatever the opinion, there seems to be a consensus that *La terra trema* constitutes a transitional point in Italian film history:

> Questo ritorno al cinema [con *La terra trema*] fu per Visconti un’esperienza di straordinaria importanza e significato. Non solo, ma costituì un termine di riferimento obbligato per le discussioni, le analisi, i programmi, le teorizzazioni che in quel periodo accompagnarono criticamente l’affermarsi del cosiddetto neorealismo cinematografico italiano. Anche per questo, *La terra trema* si colloca in una posizione che potremmo definire di spartiacque, nel senso che indica un punto d’arrivo d’una ricerca contenutistica e formale che coinvolve in primo luogo Visconti e i suoi amici e collaboratori, in secondo luogo un po’ tutto il miglior cinema italiano di quegli anni; e contemporaneamente segna una frattura, sul piano estetico e su quello politico, in un momento in cui, dopo la vittoria delle forze moderate nelle elezioni del 18 aprile 1948, la società italiana si avviava ad attraversare un lungo periodo di restaurazione ideologica e di imposizione di una pace sociale, che nascondeva o cercava di nascondere i veri conflitti di classe. (Rondolino, *Luchino Visconti* 195-96)

Taking into account the ideology of the time and the conventions that were being sought to portray “realism,” the notion that *La terra trema* is the point of passage from neorealism to realism in Visconti’s filmography is a reasonable one. I would add that if this statement can be made, it is, in large part, because of the source material Visconti utilized: the writing of Giovanni Verga. If we compare *La terra trema* to Vittorio De Sica’s *Ladri di biciclette*, for example, another classic of Italian cinema released in the same year and one of the more commonly-cited examples of neorealist cinema, some significant differences can be noted. The contemporary subject matter of De Sica’s film, and the focus on a working-class man’s struggle to provide for his family in post-war Rome gives the film a much different feel than Visconti achieves with *La terra trema*. The tale of the Valastros seems to have a more timeless

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9See especially Guido Aristarco, “Dal neorealismo al realismo: *Senso* di Visconti.”
quality. Although similar techniques are utilized in both films, La terra trema seems to tell a tale of epic proportions.

Ma, ed è qui una delle vitali contraddizioni de La terra trema, tutto questo formulario, la cui ricchezza neorealista non trova riscontro in alcuna altra opera del cinema italiano postbellico, viene da Visconti interamente fuso in personale materia poetica, facendogli assumere una stilizzazione altissima che trasfigura tutti i dati della (illusoria) oggettività neorealista in dati funzionali della (inevitabile) soggettività poetica. Così la quotidianità si sublima una assottigliazione del gesto; le denotazioni 'autentiche' — gesti e volti, muri e stracci, sfondi e oggetti — si trasformano in connotazioni atopiche ed acroniche; i dialoghi nella 'lingua dei poveri' finiscono per inserirsi più nella zona musicale che in quella concettuale dell'opera; le maglie bucate degli uomini e i vestiti neri delle donne diventano, da sintomi di uno status, elementi compositivi di una costante tensione figurativa. Nessun film postbellico — lo si è detto — deregola la realtà filmata, in modo così radicale, rovesciando la cronaca in epica, ovvero usando alcuni topoi del modo di produzione neorealista per approdare ad esiti oppasti. (Micciché, Visconti e il neorealismo 182-83)

Given the elements described in the above quotation, the labelling of La terra trema as a "realist" film is, admittedly, is a problematic one. I would like to postulate that the polemic arises because of Visconti's insistence on certain principles and techniques that appear in Verga, and with which the director experiments. Consider the definitions Visconti himself provided through the years, when asked about the definitions of neorealism and realism:

Penso che il neorealismo non sia una rigida forma stilistica legata alle contingenze di un determinato periodo, bensì l'inizio dell'evoluzione del cinema, come fatto d'arte, su un piano di sempre più approfondito accostamento alla vita nelle sue varie istorie e di una sempre più approfondita conoscenza della realtà umana. (Visconti, "Dichiarazioni" 48)
Io parlo più di realismo, che di neorealismo. Noi dobbiamo porci in
una attitudine morale di fronte agli avvenimenti, alla vita: in un
atteggiamento, insomma, che ci consenta di vedere con occhio
limpido, critico la società così come è oggi, e raccontare fatti che di
questa società sono parte. Neorealismo fu un termine inventato allora,
perché uscivamo da quel cinema che sai, e avevamo bisogno di novità.
Ma abbiamo trattato i temi che ci si consentiva di trattare da
quell’angolo visuale che è stato sempre tipico di un artista realista.
(Chiaretti 57)

It must be noted that both of these definitions are given after the fact, in the decades following
the flourishing of neorealism. Despite this, however, they give some insight into Visconti’s
notions of realism. I will continue the discussion of neorealism and realism in Chapter 2,
when I cover the controversy surrounding the release of Senso. Rather than being linked to a
rigidly-defined, programmatic trend, Visconti’s notion of realism was more broad, and
focused on varied and complex manifestations of the vicissitudes of human beings.

1.3 Malavoglia as Source: an Analysis

It would be opportune at this point to enter into a more detailed analysis of La terra
trema, examining the ways in which Verga serves as a source for Visconti. I have hopefully
established that La terra trema owes much to its Verghian source, but I do not wish to enter
into a discussion on the notion of fidelity to the Verghian text:

... l’‘assistenza’ che il romanzo di Verga forni a Visconti — sia pure
per rileggere, ricostruire e riaffabulare nel secondo dopoguerra del
Novecento, la realtà acitrezzina del quart’ultimo decennio
dell’Ottocento — appare, a conti fatti, talmente ‘continua’ da fare de
La terra trema un caso esemplare, fra i molti praticati dal suo autore,
di ideale rapporto fra cinema e letteratura: quello di un testo
(cinematografico) che usa un altro testo (letterario) non già come un
semplice canovaccio da seguire, o come un copione da illustrare, o
come un plot da modificare con le varianti d’uso; bensì come una vera
e propria realtà da, appunto, leggere, interpretare, [ri]costruire e
affabulare liberamente, né più né meno di un fenomeno naturale, o sociale, o antropologico che venga ‘autorialmente’ letto, interpretato, [ri]costruito e affabulato in una mimesis di primo grado.”
(Micciché, V. e il neorealismo 128)

Visconti himself must have had some awareness of the limits that he set when adapting I Malavoglia, as is evidenced by the fact that in the opening credits of La terra trema, there is no trace of recognition of the fact that the film is based on Verga’s 1881 novel; rather, we see only the subtitle, “Episodio del mare.” The omission of the former and the inclusion of the latter are a testament to the way in which the film project developed. It is a well-known fact that La terra trema grew into the film we know today in an almost accidental manner.

Beginning as a documentary on the plight of the Sicilian proletariat, or rather, as a work of “docu-fiction,” (Micciché, Visconti e il neorealismo 85), the project was to serve as a kind of propaganda picture for the Italian Communist Party (PCI) before the elections of 1948. The film was originally to be an interweaving of three different episodes held together by a grand design which was to illustrate the coming together of the proletariat for the common goal of overcoming their oppressors and of asserting their own power. The first episode narrated the story of a group of fishermen, the second, a team of sulphur miners, and the third, a group of farmers. The three episodes were to illustrate a crescendo of social awareness and of collaboration, culminating in a scene of revolution in which the labourers came together to combat against the bourgeois enemy. Because he was not working with a script, Visconti encountered difficulties when he realized the complexity of the story he had in mind for the episode of the fishermen, (Marcus, Filmmaking 30). It was at this point that the director decided to exploit what for him had been a very valuable resource, the literature of Verga.
Visconti’s passion for the realist author had struck him years before during a previous trip to Sicily in 1941:

A me, let tore lombardo, abituato per tradizionale consuetudine al limpido rigore della fantasia manzoniana, il mondo primitivo e gigantesco dei pescatori di Aci Trezza [...] era sempre apparso sollevato in un tono immaginoso e violento di epopea: ai miei occhi lombardi, pur contenti del cielo della mia terra che è ‘cosi bello quand’è bello’, la Sicilia di Verga era apparsa davvero l’isola di Ulisse, un’isola di avventure e di fervide passioni, situata immobile e fiera contro i marosi del mare Jonio.

Pensai così ad un film sui Malavoglia.
(Visconti, “Tradizione” 30-31)

Much transpired, however, between the writing of these words and the time of making of the 1948 film.

L’esperienza della guerra e della Resistenza ha inciso profondamente sull’atteggiamento ideologico di Visconti. Al fascino per le passioni primitive e ‘titaniche,’ che aveva caratterizzato il suo primo accostamento alla Sicilia di Verga, si unisce ora la ricerca delle ragioni storiche, economiche e sociali della questione meridionale.
(Bencivenni 20)

As previously mentioned, the search for historical, economic and social motivations that could explain the state of the country, in conjunction with a quest for artistic innovation, motivated Visconti as he employed *I Malavoglia* within the cinematic experiment that became *La terra trema*. One could contend that Verga’s text lends itself extremely well to a

Communist re-reading, for, in *I Malavoglia*, Verga seems to demonstrate a kind of resistance to the conservative ideas emerging with the dawn of industrialization. Even in 1881, Verga seemed to be showing a type of “anticapitalismo” that arose from the disappointment over the *Risorgimento*, and from the intellectual crisis experienced by authors during this time period
(Romano, 13). Thus, Visconti's choice of source text, along with the social sensibility that he had developed throughout the Resistance and its aftermath, aided in shaping the end product into a socially-conscious work of art.

In the Introduction I alluded to the fact that exchanges between literature and cinema have been copious throughout the history of cinema. They have also been rather unexpected: in the case of La terra trema, it must be pointed out that elements of the Verga text may be seen as corresponding to techniques similar to those of the cinema. This point may seem to be a controversial one, in that it could be argued that it is not possible for a text written just before the invention of cinema to contain elements which may be deemed “cinematic.” However, as both media are narrative in nature, some similarities in technique can be found. One could speculate that Visconti selected texts that he not only found interesting for artistic and ideological reasons, but that also included cues which he could take up in his artistic medium, the cinema. One ought to remember that Visconti was an extremely successful theatre director, and that drama, by its very nature, forces one to reconstruct a written text into a performance text. Therefore, Visconti's propensity for “reconstructing” texts as part of the artistic process, was one that probably drove him to choose the literary works he chose for their particular “visual” or “cinematic” qualities.

1.3.1 The “Visual” in Verga and Visconti

Although literature is not a figurative art, it can be highly descriptive, and as such, it can be used to build detailed and elaborate series of images. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to speak about visual representation and I Malavoglia. Verga's descriptions are extremely vivid, almost scenic, giving the reader the sensation that the narrator is providing an eye-
witness account of the action. Massimo Romano is in agreement on this point. Speaking of the use of space in *I Malavoglia* he states:

> È uno spazio di tipo scenico, luogo privilegiato dei movimenti, dei gesti, delle parole e dei pensieri degli attori della vicenda. Esso coincide con il villaggio di Acitrezza, ordinato in una serie di momenti scenici ...

(Romano 33)

As one reads the novel, it becomes apparent that it is almost possible to create a physical map of Aci Trezza based on its descriptions, so strong is the visual aspect of the narration. The spaces of Aci Trezza are reproduced quite faithfully in *I Malavoglia*:\(^{10}\) the sea, the beach, the hill, the church, the *osteria*, the salt shop, are all described precisely by Verga. Furthermore, these spaces are described in such a way as to simulate a visual description. In *I Malavoglia* one witnesses scenes that almost seem cinematic. In the second chapter, for instance, Verga describes conversations occurring among three different groups of people. Piedipapera and Cipolla are “sugli scalini della chiesa.” “Sull’uscio della bottega” are don Franco and don Silvestro, and in the Malavoglia house are the women, who are speaking of the love affairs of the various inhabitants of Aci Trezza (*Verga, I Malavoglia* 40-59). Verga cuts back and forth between the three groups, creating an effect similar to one that is often seen in the cinema, with cuts occurring back and forth in order to convey simultaneity of action.

It may be said, therefore, that what Verga reproduces linguistically, Visconti reproduces with a camera. Lino Micciché, in fact, makes the point that Verga’s text contains

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\(^{10}\)Ironically, in the case of the geography of Aci Trezza one can speak of “reproduction” in the original text more so than in Visconti’s film, as Verga was forced to reproduce linguistically what already existed in real life. For Visconti, this kind of reproduction was much simpler, as the only tool required for him to reproduce the town was the camera.
what could be the linguistic equivalent of a cross-dissolve, and that Visconti’s film is in fact divided into a series of forty-seven “capitoletti narrativi” (Micciché, _V. e il neorealismo_ 123) that are also divided by cross-dissolves. Micciché defines the purpose of the cinematic dissolve as to “separare-suturare due inquadrature,” (120). For _I Malavoglia_, Micciché uses the term “dissolvenze incrociate letterarie.” (123). Of the novel’s fourteen chapters, Micciché notes that ten are connected in a methodical manner. A word or concept is used in the final sentence of a chapter, and then the same word, or a slight variation thereof, is repeated in the first sentence of the chapter that follows. Micciché points out that the same occurs within the chapters, between two separate episodes. One could posit that certain visual techniques or conventions that are typically thought of as being unique to the cinema, like the cross-dissolve, or the series of cuts from one location to another to simulate contemporaneity of action, may have actually been borrowed from literature.
### 1.3.2 Character

A comparison of character in Verga and Visconti will hopefully reveal some interesting ties between novel and film. Consider the detailed character map assembled by Lino Micciché (*V. e il neorealismo* 128-29):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>La terra trema</strong></th>
<th><strong>I Malavoglia</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the grandfather (Padron Giovanni)</td>
<td>the grandfather (Padron Ntoni)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the mother</td>
<td>Mara la Longa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Sebastiano Valastro)</td>
<td>[Se]Bastiano Malavoglia (called Bastianazzo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ntoni Valastro Cola Valastro</td>
<td>Ntoni Malavoglia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mara Valastro</td>
<td>Mena Malavoglia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucia Valastro</td>
<td>Lia Malavoglia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfio Valastro Vanni Valastro Lia Valastro</td>
<td>Alessi Malavoglia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicola (the bricklayer)</td>
<td>Alfio Mosca (the carrettiere)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don Salvatore (the town mashall)</td>
<td>Don Michele (the customs officer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janu</td>
<td>Rocco Spatu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nedda</td>
<td>Barbara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raimondo Nino Conte Pandolla Lorenzo</td>
<td>the “bad” wholesalers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zio Crocifisso Padron Cipolla Massaro Filippo Piedipapera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the “bad” rich</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Visconti reduces the number of characters because his plot revolves around one central theme, the attempted emancipation of Ntoni Valastro. The characters that could be defined as the human antagonists (for it must be remembered that the greatest antagonist of the Malavoglia
family is Fate) are numerous in the novel. Millicent Marcus reduces these characters to
types11 (Filmmaking, 32): the gossips (la Zuppidda); the intriguers (Don Silvestro,
Piedipapera); the shrews (la Vespa); the weaklings (Don Franco, Turi Zuppido); and the
hypocrites (Zio Crocifisso). All of these “types” would have been superfluous in La terra
trema, since the focus of the film is different. The fishmongers, the bankers, are all the same;
they are all antagonists, because they are all part of the privileged and ruthless class which
exploits ’Ntoni and his family. Thus, the “enemy” is really reduced to one, and for this reason,
the other characters are not necessary.

In addition, the characters who are retained in the film are simplified, and so, too, are
their dramatic functions. For instance, in the novel, Alfio Mosca is: 1) Mena’s love interest; 2)
the Malavoglia’s neighbour; 3) a participant in the Malavoglia’s plight — he is present when
Bastianazzo dies and when the grandfather is brought to the hospital (Micciche 133). In other
words, he is a witness to the entire saga of the Malavoglia family. On the other hand, Alfio’s
cinematic counterpart, Nicola, is portrayed only as Mena’s love interest. He is a bricklayer
who works near the Valastro home. No additional information about him is provided.

Una rete di incastri e di trasposizioni permette al regista di mantenere
intatti quasi tutti gli episodi che ricava dai Malavoglia. Li inserisce in
una storia che del romanzo ha lo stesso sviluppo (lo sfacelo
progressivo di una famiglia ridotta alla miseria), con una variante sola:
il film trascura la serie di conflitti che oppongono I Malavoglia
all’ambiente, e imposta un conflitto unico, quello di ’Ntoni con i
grossisti del pesce (i quali diventano l’avversario sociale che
sostituisce la fitta trama di una speculazione non organizzata, nel
romanzo, intorno a un nucleo preciso).
(Bencivenni 20)

11The term “type” is my own, not Marcus’s. Marcus divides these characters into
categories to prove a different point than the one that I am attempting to make here.
As Bencivenni maintains here, the plot changes made by Visconti stem from the fact that *La terra trema* is propelled forward by young 'Ntoni's struggle to overcome social injustice, as opposed to the family's struggle to overcome the difficulties of life and Fate. Again, Visconti simplifies the Verghian text, and he does so in order to further his social statement, that is, the exploitation of the proletariat, and of their need for emancipation.

### 1.3.3 Language

An interesting and significant point of comparison between *I Malavoglia* and *La terra trema* is the use of language. Indeed, such a comparison reveals much about the social function of *La terra trema*. In order to achieve a realistic tone, Verga experimented with language in a specific way, by employing various techniques that make the 1881 text seem “authentic.” In a sense, Visconti takes up where Verga left off, and employs language in a similar way, utilizing it as a tool not only to give his film realism, but also as a means of reinforcing his social statement. I will now investigate the way Verga makes use of written language, exploring the way in which Visconti incorporates elements of the language of *I Malavoglia* into his own text, altering certain elements in order to further his political agenda and to reinforce the social statement he makes with the film.

I would describe the language of *I Malavoglia* as a sort of “Sicilianized Italian”, an *italiano sicilianizzato*. The function of this language construct is to reproduce Sicilian on the page. The examples of this are innumerable. For instance: “... i forestieri vanno frustati,” (128) which comes from the Sicilian proverb, “frùsteri, frùstili,” (128). We also see the use of words such as “minchione,” (145). There is the use of the improper article in “il zafferano” (201); and the use of the simple past in the dialogue, such as when 'Ntoni says, “Venni per vedervi,” (298). Very often the syntax of sentences, the word use, the metaphors, the sayings,
found their origins in Sicilian. For instance, the narrator uses Sicilian sayings such as “Lo zio Crocifisso strillava come se gli strappassero le penne mastre,” (40). *Penne mastre*, according to Sarah Zappulla Muscarà, the editor of the version from which I am quoting here, refers to “le penne remiganti, proprie dei volatili,” (Verga, *I Malavoglia* 40, footnote 1). The use of Sicilian, therefore, gives the reader a taste of the spoken language of the Malavoglia family.

In the case of Visconti, the director was working with the medium of film, and he was therefore able to simply record the spoken language. For this reason, it may be said that working with the relatively new medium of cinema allowed him to find a solution which Verga, restricted to the written word, could not have used.

Depurando il dialetto da ogni venatura folcloristica, con *La terra trema* la lingua dei pescatori di Aci Trezza viene restituita, oltre che alla sua dignità di strumento espressivo di alta drammaticità, al suo significato più profondo; quello di uno dei modi, e non certo il minore, mediante cui si esprime la reclusione storica inflitta ad una società costantemente relegata ai margini dello sviluppo del paese.

(Attolini, *Dal romanzo* 112)

Unfortunately, Visconti’s use of Sicilian caused him much criticism. He was charged with being elitist, in that his use of very tight Sicilian in the film did not allow his audience to understand the film. In fact, the incomprehensible nature of the dialogue eventually forced Visconti to re-release the film with Italian subtitles. This led critics such as Sipala to state that the dialect of the film impedes “l’espressione del dramma dei Valastro in termini universalmente comprensibili” (42). Visconti may easily be defended from this criticism, in that the use of dialect makes the text more “genuine,” more “authentic,” it brings the language of the film closer to the language of the people about whom the text speaks. It brings the characters to life with an authenticity that is typically realist, even verista: “... ai nostri
narratori veristi è stato dato il nome di provinciali: Verga e Capuana hanno ritratto la loro Sicilia, Deledda la sua Sardegna, [ecc.],” (Viti 27-28). Visconti discovered what the veristi had discovered decades earlier: that there was no better way to portray the “provincial,” than by using the language of the common people.

I veristi italiani, in generale, vollero studiare e riprodurre dal vero i diversi aspetti della vita, ma senza concentrare esclusivamente lo sguardo sugli elementi deteriori e più perversi. Nel complesso da noi il verismo si ispirò alla vita del popolo, degli umili, dei poveri; cercò di individuare e far rivivere nel romanzo le caratteristiche spirituali ed ambientali delle varie regioni, documentando le condizioni e le aspirazioni dei singoli e delle popolazioni.

Per questo ai nostri narratori veristi è stato dato il nome di provinciali [...]
(Viti 27)

As previously mentioned, Verga’s language is heterogeneous. Dialectal forms, be they at the level of grammar, of syntax, or of vocabulary, appear throughout the text. They are introduced in the dialogues as well as in the narration. For Verga, therefore, authenticity is given to the text by the use of a sort of “pseudo-Sicilian,” that he recreates on paper. In La terra trema, Visconti uses the Sicilian dialect to a different end. Visconti makes a distinction in his film between the use of Sicilian and the use of Italian; in doing this, he manages to reinforce his ideological position. The commentary, or perhaps narration, of the film, is given in standard Italian. In addition to this distinction, there is another made among the characters. The Clandestino, the character who lures Cola out of Aci Trezza, speaks Italian, albeit a typically Southern Italian. The same is true of the bank officials who come to inspect the Valastro home. It is clear that Visconti makes such distinctions in order to distinguish the social classes. This fact is also explicitly stated in the famous opening of the film:
I fatti rappresentati in questo film accadono in Italia e precisamente in Sicilia, nel paese di Acitrezza, che si trova sul Mare Ionio a poca distanza da Catania. La storia che il film racconta è la stessa che nel mondo si rinnova da anni in tutti quei paesi dove uomini sfruttano altri uomini.

Le case, le strade, le barche, il mare, sono quelli di Acitrezza. Tutti gli attori del film sono stati scelti fra gli abitanti del paese: pescatori, ragazze, braccianti, muratori, grossisti di pesce.

Essi non conoscere lingua diversa dal siciliano per esprimere ribellioni, dolori, speranze. La lingua italiana non è in Sicilia la lingua dei poveri.

(\textit{La terra trema} 1948)

A final observation on language in the two texts, is that Visconti makes use of a linguistic element that is of fundamental importance in Verga’s text: the proverb. Visconti uses many proverbs, quite often lifting them verbatim from the pages of \textit{I Malavoglia}. In both versions (but particularly in the film), the repetition of proverbs, particularly by the grandfather, contributes greatly to the works, in that it emphasizes the differences between the older generation and its stoic nature, and the hope in a better future that ‘Ntoni has.

... ogni proverbio è in realtà il risultato di un certo processo verbale: di osservazioni, di esperienze, di giudizi, di connessioni che non si sono dati per mitica rivelazione, ma che sono nati da una storia. Tuttavia la storia vi è come inavvertita, non se ne ha più coscienza; ed ogni proverbio per chi lo ripete con intima adesione, è \textit{ab aeterno}: un detto antico appunto. La storia vi si è contratta, fino ad annullarsi: cristallizzata [. . .] La storia c’è, ma nascosta e ciò che più conta, negata.

(Cirese 79)

“Padron ‘Ntoni — protagonista dei \textit{Malavoglia} — ancora tutto preso dalla rassegnazione e dai proverbi antichi, lascia il posto, nel film, al nipote: vale a dire il passato al presente.”

(Aristarco, “È neorealismo” 871). The transfer of emphasis from the old generation to the new
once again serves Visconti’s political agenda. It changes the tone of the text from the pessimism of the original. As Aristarco observed in 1960, five years after he wrote the preceding statement:

Visconti, artista legato al suo tempo come lo fu il Verga, supera pertanto l’epoca storica dello scrittore siciliano: la oltrepassà. Tanto è vero che padron ’Ntoni, protagonista nel romanzo, nel film lascia il posto alla figura del nipote: cioè il passato, ancora tutto preso dalla rassegnazione e dalla saggezza dei proverbi antichi, al presente: a una evasione non dalla vita, ma da una vita. E il giovane ’Ntoni non ha nulla a che vedere con quello de I Malavoglia [...] [Questo] [...] alla fine è costretto ad abbandonare il paese [...] [Quello] prende a poco a poco coscienza del suo stato attraverso una intuizione di giustizia sociale e di libertà. (Aristarco, Storia delle teoriche 375-76)

By emphasizing the new generation, and ending the film with the focus on ’Ntoni, Visconti creates a much more positive tone. This can be seen principally in the recharacterization of ’Ntoni Malavoglia into ’Ntoni Valastro. Contrary to ’Ntoni in I Malavoglia, who leaves before daybreak because he does not want the villagers to see his defeat and shame, Visconti ends his film by showing us Antonio, also at daybreak, rowing energetically and with an expression that suggests a strong will to undertake once more in due time and with better results what he had previously undertaken and failed (Hatzantonis 46). It is certainly true that the final shots of ’Ntoni rowing out to sea seem to suggest that he is not broken at the end of the film, that he will continue the struggle for independence from the fishmongers. This fact is supported by the speech ’Ntoni makes in the presence of Rosa, the little girl who approaches him as he stands by the broken boat:
... Chissa è 'a varca d’i vicchiareddii mia! 'U viri com’è ridotta? Dicinu tutti ca fa curpa mia ca s’arriduci a 'stu statu ... [Scrolla il capo e guarda a destra, lontano verso il mare.] ... Ma veni 'u iornu ca 'u sannu sentiri tutti ca iu ci aiu raggiuni! Allura, a pèrdiri tuttu 'cussi comun mi finiu a mmia, à statu bbeni ppi tutti! ... [Guarda di nuovo Rosa.] ... Bisogna ca nn’imparamu a vullirinni bbeni unu cu’ 'nn’autru, e a essiri tutti 'na cosa ... Allura si, ca si po’ gghiri avanti!...

(La terra trema 189)

'Ntoni’s words, which allude to a hypothetical future in which everyone will be united and all will be peaceful, and in which his own hardships will have been for the future good of his people, call to mind the original, tripartite plan for the film. It must be remembered that the “episode of the sea” was designed to illustrate the failure of the people to unite, and it was only in the second and third episodes that the audience was to witness the solidarity of the people.

1.4 Conclusion

The use of Giovanni Verga’s I Malavoglia as a literary source in Visconti’s La terra trema results in a text that has a definite imprint of the original. At the same time, the Verga novel is used by Visconti as a vehicle to advance his own artistic experiment. By utilizing artistic techniques from the past, Visconti makes a comment on the present state of art and society, and looks to the future.

[Con La terra trema, Visconti] riflette, da una parte, sulle lunghe suggestioni del testo verghiano (“ridotto” in diverse riprese e

12The translation of the dialogue is as follows: “Questa è la barca dei miei poveri vecchi! Vedi come è ridotta? Dicono tutti che è colpa mia se è ridotta in questo stato... Ma verrà il giorno che tutti sapranno riconoscere che io ho ragione! Allora, l’aver perso tutto come è successo a me sarà stato un bene per tutti! ... Bisognna (sic.) che imparino a volersi bene l’uno con l’altro, e ad essere tutti una cosa sola ... Allora si che si può andare avanti!” (La terra trema 200)
sceneggiato in varie pagine) dove la misera materia siciliana si trasfigurava nel mito; mentre, dall’altra parte, meditava sugli avvenimenti contemporanei della cronaca insanguinata: il massacro dei contadini a Portella delle Ginestre e la congiura politica della mafia, poi Melissa, l’occupazione delle terre [...] Acitrezza diveniva il luogo geometrico dove potevano incontrarsi il passato remoto (la vita feudale, immobile) e il futuro sconvolgente (la coscienza solidale degli sfruttati). ed ecco che la terra trema.
(Baldelli 60)

Although *I Malavoglia* was an integral part of the basic plan for *La terra trema*, the contemporary ideological slant resulted in a text with a different focus. Regardless of this, Verga’s imprint is still very much on the film, and the employment of the novel in many ways aided Visconti in pushing the neorealist experiment to the maximum. *La terra trema* is a unique experiment in the history of cinema, and it is so, due to the amalgamation of its source text, *I Malavoglia*. 
Chapter 2

Senso

Ispirazione, non traduzione ... 
(Aristarco, “Dal neorealismo” 90)

Anche nella vita esistono personaggi melodrammatici, come esistono in Sicilia pescatori analfabeti ... 
(Visconti, “Da Une partie” 68)

La terra trema had the magnitude and the nobility of opera; Senso has the density and the import of reality. 
(Bazin, “Senso” 161)

In 1954, Luchino Visconti released the beautiful and controversial Senso. The film’s combination of literary and non-literary artistic influences, and historical and contemporary social themes, makes it a complex cinematic text that demonstrates the director’s keen ability to weave together several influences and to transform them into a coherent, historically relevant, and artistically admirable work. As far as the issue of literature is concerned, the film is somewhat similar to La terra trema, in that it does take its inspiration for its characters and plot from one literary source (in this case, the source is the 1883 novella by Camillo Boito of the same title, “Senso”). The basic story line is then moulded, shaped, and transformed so as to depict situations and themes that were artistically interesting and socially relevant to Visconti, and, presumably, to the society in which the director worked. Unlike in La terra trema, however, in Senso Visconti introduces a wealth of elements from the world of opera, music, and the visual arts, all of which allow us to speak of the issue of literature, and more
generally, art, as influence, that is to say, as an instrument of inspiration used to create new cinematic forms as well as innovative content. It will be the purpose of this chapter to outline the various external influences that shaped Senso and to examine the way in which these influences, literary and otherwise, function together to create a work that is original and subversive in its forms and its content. The issue of influence will be analyzed within the context of melodrama, for Senso is influenced by this dramatic genre first and foremost. Being a compendium of many genres, the melodrama is, almost by definition, a collection of influences. Given Visconti’s propensity for weaving together various artistic resources in order to create his cinematic works, and given the preference for the melodramatic genre that he expresses throughout his body of work, it would be appropriate to analyze the influences in Senso by examining them within the framework of the melodrama.

2.1 Realism vs. Spectacle

As I have shown with La terra trema, one cannot fully appreciate Visconti’s filmmaking without placing each film in its historical context. An analysis of the film’s context is no less vital in the case of Senso. From the beginning, Senso was seen as a polemical film, generating many disputes among critics. Some of these focused on illustrating the ways in which the film allowed for a new definition of realism, while others rejected the notion that the film contributed to advancing the artistic discourse on realism in film, and focused on the so-called “spectacular” aspects of the film. Without a doubt, the main proponent of Senso’s value as a realist film was Guido Aristanco:
Visconti parte dal racconto, dalla ‘storiella vana’ di uno scapigliato, e arriva al romanzo, al respiro della grande e distesa narrazione, ferma l’individuo nella sua concretezza umana, nei suoi rapporti con la società e con gli altri individui. Nessuno l’ha notato: ma in questo consiste l’importanza — e la novità prima — del film di Visconti; in questo indicare, lui che ha aperto le strade della nostra civiltà cinematografica, una delle vie più logiche e congeniali per approfondire il discorso del neorealismo cinematografico. (Aristarco, “Dal neorealismo” 89-90)

Aristarco was a staunch supporter of the idea that Senso constituted the “true” and “proper” direction to be taken in order to further the neorealist “experiment” in cinema towards realism. He continued to support the film by using the vehicle of Cinema Nuovo. In articles such as “Senso” (from which the above quotation is taken) and “È neorealismo,” he affirms and defends his position on the film.¹ Aristarco, however, was not alone in his view. It suffices here to consider, for instance, the words of a young Vittorio Taviani, who wrote a letter to the editor of Cinema Nuovo which read:

L’ultimo film di Visconti ci sembra la conseguenza più coerente delle premesse del neorealismo. Se il nostro cinema del dopoguerra è nato dalla Resistenza — come resistenza soprattutto al fascismo — era inevitabile che, dopo aver volto lo sguardo al presente, cercasse di giungere alle radici del fenomeno politico e sociale: si incontrasse cioè col Risorgimento come col momento storico che segna la nascita dell’Italia come nazione moderna. Ed era anche inevitabile che a un esame attento, condotto sulla scorta dei risultati più illuminati della corrente storiografica che fa capo a Gramsci, a Gobetti, a Salvatorelli, la rivoluzione borghese tradisse la sua caratteristica fondamentale di rivoluzione incompiuta. Spingendo a fondo la sua indagine nel tessuto della vita nazionale, Visconti apre nuove prospettive al cinema e raccoglie nello stesso tempo l’eredità del passato. (Taviani 881)

¹ Although he supported Senso as taking a legitimate direction towards the expansion of the notion of neorealism, it is interesting to note that Aristarco was very much opposed to other directors’ experiments with neorealism. The most striking example of this is the critic’s strong stance against Fellini’s La strada (1954).
Such positions sparked a heated debate. The most vocal opponent on the other side of the debate was that of Luigi Chiarini. In the article, “Tradisce il neorealismo,” for instance, Chiarini defined in very specific terms what the notion of “neorealism” had been, how it had originated and what elements it had had:

“Neorealismo” poteva anche essere una denominazione impropria; comunque con essa si volevano indicare quei film come *Roma, città aperta, Paisà, Sciuscià, Ladri di biciclette, La terra trema, Umberto D.*, per citare solo i più importanti che, con limiti, difetti e atteggiamenti diversi, avevano in comune uno spirito nuovo, nato dalla Resistenza, che si rilevava nell’illuminazione di una nuova forma, frutto di un approfondimento, quasi una conquista del linguaggio cinematografico. Di qui il loro successo in tutto il mondo, che riscopriva con essi [...] i valori espressivi del film in una nuova dimensione di tempo e di spazio. Ai personaggi delle passate e convenzionali narrazioni si sostituivano gli uomini nella loro realtà; alle vicende prefabbricate dei romanzi o delle commedie le ‘cronache’, se così vogliamo chiamare quelle colte sul vivo dell’esistenza quotidiana, eccezionale o comune che fosse; ai virtuosismi figurativi o pittorici il palpitante documento fotografico; alle scene di cartapesta e alle comparse le città e le campagne con la gente che effettivamente le popola. Questa è l’Italia, si disse, coi suoi dolori, le sue miserie, le sue ingiustizie, le sue grandezze e si cercò di darne un ritratto quanto più fedele e veritiero possibile, si che codesta realtà, senza fatturazioni e intrusioni apparenti, sembrasse parlare di per sé sola. I registi non erano saputi, ma, curiosi, volevano conoscere per far conoscere.

(883)

Chiarini then went on to discuss *Senso* within the context of neorealism:

E veniamo a *Senso*, l’oggetto della polemica. Io ho affermato non potersi definire neorealista questo film non perché seguirebbe un passo avanti, il passaggio al realismo come dicono i miei contradditori, ma perché, invece, tornando indietro sul tradizionale piano spettacolare (letterario, teatrale) rappresenta un’aperta contraddizione del neorealismo: una negazione anziché uno sviluppo e un approfondimento. [...] L’equivoco in cui sembrano cadere quanti sostengono il contrario è caratteristico di un astratto contenutismo che, per essere indifferente alla forma, giudica il film dal soggetto, valutato
in base a moduli letterari (personaggio, eroe positivo che sia), e si fa sfuggire il vero contenuto, legato necessariamente ai modi della rappresentazione.

Senso è innanzitutto uno spettacolo, di altissimo livello, ma uno spettacolo. (883)

As is evident from Chiarini's quotation, the two "sides" in this polemic on Senso debated the issue openly, each addressing (and attacking) specific arguments that the other had put forth. One of the striking elements of the debate is that critics on both sides tended to use the same issues to argue contradicting points. Looking specifically at the issue of literature, in the above examples, both Aristarco and Chiarini bring into question the notion of literature as it relates to neorealism and to the film. Aristarco supports his argumentation by writing that Visconti turns a little story into a "grande e distesa narrazione." In the above-cited article, Aristarco makes the point that Visconti's technique allows him to follow in the footsteps of the great historical novelists, and that in doing so, he is following the most valid direction to be taken in order to continue a theoretical discourse on realism. On the other hand, Chiarini refers to what he calls a "tradizionale piano spettacolare (letterario)" as being an open contradiction to neorealism. The debates, therefore, focused around very specific points that seemingly could not be reconciled.

These initial debates in the first year after the film's release influenced the criticism published about Senso for years to come, and, for the most part, critics writing about Visconti continued to fall on either one side of the issue or the other. There is, therefore, the prevalence
of two, opposing notions of the film: one is the notion of Senso as spectacle or melodrama.

and the other is the notion of Senso as a work of cinematic realism.

Quando apparve Senso (1954) [...] nascevano dibattiti [su Visconti come] quello (favoloso) del superamento del neorealismo nel realismo (ossia il passaggio dalla cronaca alla storia) e l’altro dell’arretramento (compiuto dal medesimo film) dalla condizione neorealistica alla condizione minore di spettacolo. Posizione, questa, che centra la sua critica a Senso sulla distinzione tra spettacolo cinematografico e film: riconosciuti ai film meriti particolari (politici, ideologici, estetici), ne indica i limiti: la ricerca di effetti destinati a far prevalere il modo della rappresentazione sulla sostanza della cosa rappresentata, le ‘scene’ che vengono prima che raggella la narrazione, ecc.: ‘assistiamo’ a questo film, ma non ‘partecipiamo’, non siamo persuasi a prendere posizione: se lo fossimo, avremmo vero cinema, mentre qui compaiono le convenzioni spettacolari. Il realismo si esprime, dunque, in forma attenuata, proprio per il peso di una cultura che grava ancora sul film ...

(Baldelli 154)

In this 1972 piece, Baldelli, like Chiarini, disagrees with Aristarco and others when they say that the film marks the passage from neorealism to realism. “Anche a me, naturalmente, apparve ingiustificata la tesi del passaggio dal neorealismo al realismo (dalla cronaca alla storia), da parte di Senso,” (Baldelli 154). In the years that followed, many other eminent critics also rejected Aristarco’s idea, and they often constructed their arguments on the film with explicit references to Aristarco’s position. For example, in writing on Senso, Lino Micciché wrote:

[Senso] fu meglio definito come ritorno al ‘melodramma’. In effetti più che di un ‘passaggio [...] dal neorealismo al realismo’ come, con una formula successivamente ripresa a proposito del pratoliniano Metello, si disse allora per Senso, si trattava di un ritorno al realismo colto, carico di accenature liriche e di invenzioni spettacolari ... (Micciché, “V. e le sue ragioni” 68)
It is safe to say that critics on either side of this issue have points that are relevant and that contribute to a more thorough understanding of the film. Each side of the argument illuminates us on aspects that are relevant to a deeper understanding of the film. One must be careful, however, when attempting to define Senso as either merely melodramatic or realistic, for a rigid attempt to classify the film diminishes it. The film functions as a distilled and dramatic historical snapshot that holds within it an astoundingly rich array of technical and thematic components which give it texture and breadth, and which allow for the marriage of historical fiction and the so-called “melodramatic imagination.” Creating a rich and complex work was part of Visconti’s design, and the partial motivation of the Milanese director was to push the envelope with regards to the representation of “realism.” The film, in fact, did much to advance and complicate film goers’ perceptions of the way in which realism in cinema could be represented. However, it did so using the vehicle of melodrama. More recent criticism supports the idea that assessments of reproductions of reality in the arts are subjective.

A major complaint about melodrama has been its assumed antirealistic style. This assessment has been based on notions of realism which are derived from naturalism with its privileging of ‘objective’ social reality and a fidelity to character and setting. The writings on realism in recent decades have suggested, however, that the assessments of cultural production are themselves ideological. What is realism in one era may become escapism in another. The criterion of fidelity to external reality is a latecomer in aesthetics and in no way need preclude other forms of representation. The concept of realism demands not only reexamination but the critique of realism as well. (Landy, *Imitations of Life* 18)

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²I am borrowing the term “melodramatic imagination” from Peter Brooks’s landmark work on melodrama, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess.*
To see realism and melodrama as mutually exclusive, therefore, may not prove to be a very fruitful method of artistic assessment. In the case of Visconti, in fact, the director relies on the marriage of these two seemingly contradictory sensibilities in order to weave together influences that interested him and to explore an array of issues, both artistic and social.

2.2 Senso as Spectacle

If one scans the many pages of criticism on the film, it becomes clear that the term “melodrama” is ubiquitous, for numerous film scholars have analyzed the film within this context. Pio Baldelli points out that to see Senso is akin to seeing a melodrama from backstage. His long but lucid description illustrates very clearly some of the ways in which technical aspects of the film and contextual juxtapositions create a dramatic feel at the beginning of the film, which sets the stage, so to speak, for the melodrama that unfolds afterwards:

Si vede [durante la scena iniziale alla Fenice] il melodramma sul rovescio, dal di dentro. L’inquadratura è statica, ora ci accosta ai tappeti, ai tavoli grossolani, ai rozzi fondali, ora alle quinte da cui sbucano a curiosare operai col camiciotto e il berretto; poi è messo in risalto il marionettistico raduno delle comparse che fanno parti di soldati o l’interprete inquadrato di spalle che marca il suo gesto goffo quando smuda la spada, batte il piede con fragore sulle tavole della ribalta e infine attacca l’antifona. Il regista taglia riempiendo il margine inferiore del quadro con una fila di orchestrali quasi a mostrare i congegni dello spettacolo. Si fa evidente il proposito di mostrare l’influsso melodrammatico (e il proseguimento del melodramma) nel comportamento dei protagonisti (Livia nel palchetto e in palcoscenico Leonora sola nella notte presso la torre ove sta l’amato prigioniero). Specie di prologo in palcoscenico alla vicenda che inizia ‘melodrammatica’ (lancio di manifestini, coccarde, invocazioni alla patria, fervore, sfide, ecc.) con successivo smontaggio di questi sentimenti, sino a conclusioni crude e smaschere. Una realtà melodrammatica che si sfascia e mostra l’inerte spaccato non appena si solleva una realtà più autentica, magari cinica e sordida,
quando — proprio secondo l’invito del regista — il melodramma lo guardiamo da dietro le quinte. Comincia, insomma, smontando l’argomento del melodramma sul palcoscenico per passare a demolire il melodramma della platea, dei palchi e delle coscienze [italics mine]. L’incontro viene sigillato stupendamente nelle inquadrature della partenza precipitosa di Livia dal palco della Fenice, tra gli inchini e i baci amanti degli ufficiali, con quel velo che le avvolge il capo e lo sfarzoso mantello sulle spalle, mentre sulla colonna sonora passa l’accompagnamento struggente del canto di Leonora fuori campo. (Baldelli 132-33)

It is through the “demolition” of the melodrama, to which Baldelli alludes above, that we discover, or unveil, the nature of melodrama as an event. By deconstructing the melodrama, Visconti unveils the melodrama that exists in life, as well as in the film. This “demolition” is effected through the juxtaposition of art and life that occurs at various levels, within as well as outside of the diegesis of the film. Within the diegesis of the film, this very fiction is laid bare by showing the oppositions (as well as the parallels) between “art” (the on-stage melodrama) and “life” (the characters’ reaction to the staged drama). There is a mirroring between what is inside the drama and what is outside of it.

This play between fiction and reality, as I shall discuss below, begins with the staging of Il Trovatore, but does not end there. The film is staged and shot in such a way as to constantly make reference to its own fictionality, its own theatricality. For instance, when Franz and Livia first spend time together, they walk through the deserted alleyways of Venice. The city depicted in this scene is not terribly “real,” nor are Franz and Livia’s movements very “natural”: 
Ecco, non si tratta di una città ‘reale’, con due persone che passeggianno e conversano, ma di un vasto spazio, con quinte e proscenio, dove la ‘persona’ ha lo stesso peso (colore, suono) di ogni altro oggetto sparso nel quadro.

(Baldelli 134)

This playing with theatrical techniques continues throughout the film.

In realtà, anche se crediamo di essere usciti dalla Fenice, Senso continua a rinviare da un sipario all’altro, come nella scena delle mille porte spalancate da Livia quando decide di consegnare a Franz il denaro che dovrebbe dare a Luca; e l’ultimo sipario è il velo nero, divenuto lentamente fittissimo e impenetrabile, che Franz strapperà alla donna dopo averle urlato in faccia la verità.

(Fink 91)

It may not be an exaggeration, in fact, to say that most shots in the film are constructed so as to simulate visually the look of a stage. Columns, windows, mirrors, curtains, doorways, etc., are used in many shots in order to frame the protagonists and to give the impression that they are on a stage.

Aside from the play on various stage props (wings, curtains, etc.), Visconti’s direction of the actors in Senso is such that it reminds one of a stage drama, most specifically an opera. Livia’s movements are exaggerated. In the villa of Aldeno, she often turns her head sharply in one direction, pauses, then moves quickly in another direction, the way an opera actor would do on-stage. Even the final shot of the field on which Franz is executed, mirrors the opening scene, in that it reminds us of a (now-empty) stage: “Il film si conclude con una inquadratura
2.3 Melodrama and Influence

Melodrama is a form that includes within it many different components, including history, music, and art, and as such, seeing Senso within the context of melodrama is of fundamental importance when discussing “influence.”

Melodrama pillaged happily in epic, legend, and history for its subjects, but the principal source was probably always the novel, the genre to which it is so closely related. (Brooks 86-87)

Thus, inspiration from various artistic forms, most prominently the novel, helps in the shaping of the genre of the melodrama. As a result, one can link together the idea of melodrama and the idea of influence, for both in form and in content, melodrama is a genre that lends itself perfectly for the purposes of combining together various forms and subjects. And, because many of these influential forms deal with issues revolving around the human condition, the resulting drama is one that is full of the stuff of life. It can be said for this reason that melodrama is an artistic form that exists on the border between reality and art, and it is therefore the perfect “mode” for Visconti, an artist who was very much concerned with the realities of human beings in society as well as with issues relating to art. Melodrama allows Visconti to produce a reflection of reality, a reproduction of the most poignant and intense moments in life, intense to the point of being dramatic.
2.3.1 Defining "Melodrama"

I will now make some generalizations about melodrama, which I will then use to illustrate the ways in which Senso is melodramatic. I will make some allusions to the historical developments and diverse use of the term in different countries; however, the main focus of my definition process will be to capture the range of connotations that this term may have evoked in the mind of someone with the breadth of knowledge that Visconti had.

Historically, the term "melodrama" has been used in different ways in various parts of Europe (England, France, and Italy) in order to signify essentially different genres. The common denominator, however, was the musical component within the drama, as the etymology of the word indicates: "The word derives from the Greek melos (music), and with this root meaning of music-drama was a common eighteenth-century synonym for opera — a meaning which the Italian melodramma retains today" (Smith 2). In modern criticism, the multitude of meanings of the term has created a lot of ambiguity and confusion. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term has the following meanings:

1. In early 19th c. use, a stage-play (usually romantic and sensational in plot and incident) in which songs were interspersed, and in which the action was accompanied by orchestral music appropriate to the situations. In later use the musical element gradually ceased to be an essential feature of the 'melodrama,' and the name now denotes a dramatic piece characterized by sensational incident and violent appeals to the emotions, but with a happy ending.

b. The species of dramatic composition or representation constituted by melodramas; the mode of dramatic treatment characteristic of a melodrama.

2. transf. A series of incidents, or a story true or fictitious, resembling what is represented in a melodrama; also, in a generalized sense, melodramatic behaviour, occurrences, etc.

(Oxford English Dictionary)
The definition found in the *Cambridge Guide to Literature in English* helps to shed
some light on the difficulties involved in constructing a precise definition of the term:

What began, perhaps with Rousseau's *Pygmalion* (1770), as an art
form in which words and music were used in counterpoint or parallel,
remains in opera as a term to define spoken passages with musical
accompaniment. In drama there is no such precision, and 'melodrama'
must serve to describe a mass of plays and films from the anonymous
*Maria Marten* (1830) to Hitchcock's *Psycho* or from Schiller's *Die
Räuber* (1782) to next week's episode of a television detective series.
(*Cambridge Guide*, 653-54)

Part of the difficulty in defining melodrama stems from the fact that the definition of
the term historically has differed in France, in England and in Italy, while retaining common
elements.

melodrama, termine indicante, nel teatro inglese, un genere
drammatico di tipo avventuroso-romanzesco, con effetti scenici
altamente spettacolari, sovente a carattere catastrofico. Parallelo, come
nascita e sviluppo, al → mélodrame, ebbe in comune con esso anche
temi, testi e messe in scena, ma se ne differenziò per una maggiore
vitalità: ebbe infatti origine verso la fine del XVIII sec., ma si concluse
solo verso il 1930. Spesso privo di pretese letterarie, capace di
suscitare, attraverso facili emozioni e arditi tecnicismi, un vasto
consenso popolare, il m. ebbe fortuna anche negli Stati Uniti fra il
1850 e il 1930. Paragonabile per certi versi al romanzo d'appendice, il
m. può essere considerato l'ispiratore di buona parte della produzione
cinematografica di consumo (gialli, thrilling, horror film), nonché di
molta letteratura a fumetti.
(*Enciclopedia Garzanti dello spettacolo* 411-12)
mélodrame, termine francese correntemente abbreviato in mélo.

In origine indicava un’azione drammatica in prosa e musica: poi, caduta la parte musicale e coreutica, indicò il dramma a forti tinte, complicato nell’intreccio, moraleggiante nella finalità, ricco di colpi di scena quanto povero di valori letterari, ma capace di sollecitare l’emozione e la commozione degli spettatori più ingenui. Ebbe la sua maggior fioritura fra il XVIII e il XIX sec. con tardi e rari epigoni nel XX. Elementi caratteristici del m. furono la virtù e l’innocenza minacciate dal vizio e dalla prepotenza, il finale trionfo del giusto sull’ingiusto attraverso complesse peripezie, straordinate agnizioni e insospettabili rivelazioni. Tra gli innumerevoli cultori del m. basterà ricordare Daubigny (I due sergenti, 1823), Ducange (Trent’anni o la vita di un giocatore, 1827), Cormon e Dennery (Le due orfanelle, 1874), Moreau e Delacour (Il corriere di Lione, 1850), X. de Montépin (La portatrice di pane, 1889). Oggi il m. ha valore come testimonianza di un’epoca: è in questa chiave che Barrault riprese (1949) Il gobbo di P. Féval.

(Enciclopedia Garzanti dello spettacolo 412)

In an Italian context, the term melodramma is used interchangeably with the terms “opera lirica” and “spettacolo lirico,” among others (see Tintori 5-9). This is probably due to the fact that in Italy, the genre sees various incarnations that begin with sung dramas in the seventeenth century, and develop into different types of dramatic manifestations set to music. Melodrama continues to develop into the nineteenth century, and develops in the direction of opera, with protagonists as different as Rossini, Puccini, and Verdi (to name but a few) coming to the forefront.

Generally speaking, the history of these genres, which have all been labelled as “melodrama,” could in some cases seem to be a form of entertainment for the upper classes, about the upper classes. In reality, according to many scholars, melodramas were written that
were deeply rooted in specific political contexts, and had both popular appeal and social content. This is true of melodrama in England:

In terms of the early melodrama in England, the claim for a linkage between the melodrama and the political and social conditions of the world in which it emerged seems quite unproblematic. Most critics would agree, for example, that the work of Thomas Holcroft, who is often credited with launching the genre in England, is grounded in the populist radical rhetoric that erupted in England in the aftermath of the French Revolution. (Hays and Nikolopoulou viii)

In England, therefore, it was not unheard of to have melodramas with social content. Some additional examples of English, nineteenth-century melodramas with social themes include: “Jerrold’s The Factory Girl (1832), G.F. Taylor’s The Factory Strike; or, Want, Crime, and Retribution (1838), Haines’s The Factory Boy (1840), and Stirling’s Man of Manchester; or, The Spirit of the Loom (1847) [. . .] The Labour Question (1861), Boucicault’s The Long Strike (1866), Free Labour (1870), and The Miner’s Strike (1875), and George Fenn’s The Foreman of the Works (1866) and Work and Wages (1890)” (Ilsemann 192).

As Hays and Nikolopoulou point out above, the French Revolution seems to have had an effect on the crystallization of this genre and on its rather political nature. This view is substantiated by many critics.

That melodrama should have been born during the Revolution, and come of age with Coelina in 1800, is far from an accident: in both its audience and its profound subject, it is essentially democratic. It represents a democratization of morality and its signs. (Brooks 43–44)
Similarly, Naomi Greene writes:

The vast social and political fresco against which these films are played out [. . . ] suggest[s], in particular, historical melodrama, which was one of the forms taken by melodrama at an early date. Born at a troubled historical moment — when the old world order, embodied in the French monarchy, was approaching its convulsive death throes, to be followed by decades of turmoil in the Terror and the rise and fall of Napoleon — early melodrama often turned to real events and characters.

(388-89)

Italian critics also substantiate this idea. Giuseppe Tintori writes:

Sarà lo spirito dell’illuminismo a conferire vita all’opera seria, saranno tutte le idee che porteranno alla Rivoluzione francese e il recupero delle tradizioni popolari (il Singspiel) a creare un dopo Gluck dove domina la figura di Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

(39)

What can be concluded from even a brief survey of the history of melodrama is that the genre has been used historically, and indeed, in part was born, as a vehicle to present ideas that were democratic and revolutionary in nature. One can therefore say that it was appropriate for Visconti to choose melodrama as a framework within which to present his subversive ideas. Unlike the frequently-held view that it is reactionary and void of artistic merit, melodrama, from its inception, was seen and employed as a modern form for a modern world, for a society coming to terms with a new world order. It was a democratic new genre for a new class, the middle class. This idea is supported in Peter Brooks’s landmark work, The
Melodrama [. . .] appears to be a peculiarly modern form, and there is a specific relevance in the genre labeled melodrama as it comes to being in an historical context. The origins of melodrama can be accurately located within the context of the French Revolution and its aftermath. This is the epistemological moment which it illustrates and to which it contributes: the moment that symbolically, and really, marks the final liquidation of the traditional Sacred and its representative institutions (Church and monarch), the shattering of the myth of Christendom, the dissolution of an organic and hierarchically cohesive society, and the invalidation of the literary forms — tragedy, comedy of manners — that depended on such a society. Melodrama does not simply represent a “fall” from tragedy, but a response to the loss of the tragic vision. It comes into being in a world where the traditional imperatives of truth and ethics have been violently thrown into question, yet where the promulgation of truth and ethics, their instauration as a way of life, is of immediate, daily, political concern. (Brooks 14)

Thus, with the genres of the time becoming, to a certain extent, obsolete, melodrama became a viable form for artistic expression. In addition, the position in which melodrama found itself, neither comedy nor tragedy, made it a hybrid form, containing elements of both, and therefore being more rich in its potentialities of expression. Finally, from an ideological point of view, melodrama provided artists with adequate tools to represent relevant contemporary social issues:

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3Brooks defines what he terms “classical” melodrama within a historical context, and uses the French tradition as his main source for his definition of the genre: “[. . .] my remarks here will be largely based on Pixerécourt and his principal rivals and emulators, particularly Louis-Charles Caigniez, himself dubbed the ‘Racine of the Boulevards,’ and Victor Ducange [. . .], in the period extending roughly from 1800 to 1830,” (Brooks 28-29).
The ritual of melodrama involves the confrontation of clearly identified antagonists and the expulsion of one of them. It can offer no terminal reconciliation, for there is no longer a clear transcendent value to be reconciled to. There is, rather, a social order to be purged, a set of ethical imperatives to be made clear.

(Brooks 17)

2.3.2 Melodrama and Visconti

Many aspects of melodrama must have appealed to Visconti. His disillusionment in the years following the end of World War II, and the limits that he had reached with the neorealist "experiment," in combination with his wide and varied interests in literature and other arts, are all factors that made melodrama the most appropriate form to express his specific and diverse interests.

In armonia con le analisi gramsciane, [Visconti] è consapevole di quanto, nel ciclo storico e culturale del Romanticismo, sia stata gregaria la posizione dell'Italia, alla ricerca dell'unità geografica, in un'Europa che viveva conflitti di classe di ben altra portata. In una cultura secondaria e periferica, come quella dell'Italia ottocentesca, esisteva una sola forma artistica non provinciale: il melodramma. A questa fa appello Visconti: ampliando la prospettiva storica e ideologica del racconto, ne amplia di conseguenza anche quella culturale. Alla musica di Verdi affianca quella di Bruckner; alle citazioni del Foscolo, quelle di Heine; ai riferimenti pittorici di Hayez, di Fattori e dei macchiaioli, quelli di Feuerbach, di Stevens, di Durand. Al libretto di Boito, alcune suggestioni dai grandi romanzi del mancato compimento della rivoluzione borghese: la scena di Aldeno e il tema della simulazione dei sentimenti da Il rosso e il nero; la sollecitudine di Livia per il cugino dalla Sanseverina; la delusione di Ussoni a Custoza, dal passaggio di Fabrizio del Dongo dietro le linee di Waterloo; cioè da quella Certosa di Parma che Visconti si propone più volte di girare.

(Bencivenni 35)

In harmony, therefore, with the egalitarian ideas of Gramsci, melodrama was an appropriate vehicle to discuss the social issues that had preyed on the mind of the director
during the years of reconstruction following World War II. As far as the political ideas that the
director wished to put forth with Senso, as mentioned in Chapter 1, Visconti saw the society
that had been built up after the war as not having the promise of freedom that had been fought
for during the Resistance. In addition, this failed attempt at producing a more promising
society had not been the first in Italy's history; as he looked back to Italian unification, he saw
a very similar situation of a rivoluzione mancata. The similarities between these two eras (that
of Italian unification and his own) were so marked that to Visconti, a critique of the
Risorgimento was the equivalent of a critique of contemporary times, as well. Visconti himself
spoke about the parallels between his own time period and the time period that he chose for
his melodrama:

Sia chiaro che io non ho voluto fare il film storico come qualcosa di
diverso da quanto ho fatto fin qui. In Senso c'è la materia per fare un
discorso agli altri: un discorso per quelli che vogliono capire e anche
per quelli che fingono di non capire. Anche se nel 1866 la gente si
vestiva in maniera diversa, i problemi, le situazioni non cambiano. Noi
poi sappiamo che è sufficiente che diverse storie siano raccontate
attraverso lo stesso sentimento e la stessa emozione perché siano
insieme un solo discorso di uno che sente il bisogno di comunicare con
gli altri.
(Visconti, "Riflessioni" 67)

Thus, the Risorgimento was an ideal setting for the film, for it allowed Visconti to
make a profound statement on the state of affairs in Italy past and present. The former stood as
a metaphor of the latter, and associating the two allowed Visconti to illustrate the unfortunate
continuity between the two periods. And, given the lavish nature of the classes with whom
Visconti dealt and the grandeur of the story that he wished to tell (the story of a patriotic
Italian countess and her Austrian lover) the story could be told in a most fitting way as a
melodramma, a musical drama of epic proportions. This complex and intricate collection of
inspirations, ideas, situations, and forms complemented each other exceedingly well and found a perfect union within Visconti’s melodrama, a hybrid, eclectic genre that could contain within it tragedy as well as spectacle.

2.3.3 Melodrama and Senso

It is valuable to examine the ways in which particular characteristics of melodrama were applied within Senso in order to produce the kind of effect that Visconti wished to achieve. The work of James L. Smith with regard to melodrama sheds light on the definition of the genre, and aids one in unravelling the elements that are interwoven in the film, in order to create a drama with a very specific message. First off, Smith’s notion regarding the melodramatic character is fundamental to an understanding of Senso.

In melodrama man remains undivided, free from the agony of choosing between conflicting imperatives and desires. He greets every situation with an unwavering single impulse which absorbs his whole personality. If there is danger he is courageous, if there is political corruption he exposes it, untroubled by cowardice, weakness or doubt, self-interest or thought of self-preservation. [...] It follows that the undivided protagonist of melodrama has only external pressures to fight against: an evil man, a social group, a hostile ideology, a natural force, an accident or chance, an obdurant fate or a malign deity. It is this total dependence upon external adversaries which finally separates melodrama from all other serious dramatic forms. (Smith 7-8)

The notion of the undivided character, distinctively melodramatic, is embodied in Senso principally by Roberto Ussoni. Ussoni’s character is introduced exclusively by Visconti; Boito makes no explicit reference to such a character in his version of the story. He stands as a metaphor for the ideology of the Resistance as well as that of his own period, the Risorgimento. He fights unwaveringly for the ideal of a free and unified Italy, against the
enemy (in the case of Senso, the Austrians, who occupy his region of Veneto), and in an indirect way, fights against the confusion / corruption of Livia and Franz. The two protagonists of the film stand as polar opposites to the Count Ussoni.

Once the opposition is set up between the undivided figure and the forces that work against him / her, extreme conflicts can be set up, conflicts that can be pushed to dramatic limits.

Characteristically, melodrama presses its own extreme conflicts to extreme conclusions. Only three are possible, for when an undivided protagonist opposes a hostile world — whether in real life or on the stage — the result must be stalemate, victory or defeat. [...] The essential point is that resolutions of triumph or defeat indicate not different dramatic structures but simply alternative formulations of the same conflict, opposite extremes of the same melodramatic spectrum. (Smith 8)

Within the melodramatic spectrum, therefore, there can be a drama of victory, of defeat, or of protest. All of these can be played out within the context of melodrama, but it is the latter type defined by Smith, the melodrama of protest, that I would like to look at more closely in relation to Senso:

Protest theatre has many aims: to stimulate political awareness, question established values, expose injustice, champion reform, fuel arguments on ways and means and sometimes to incite direct support for bloody revolution. The result may be a satire, homily, cartoon, revue or straight-play-with-a-message, but underneath the fashionable trimmings the essential form is melodrama. Take, for example, the crusading hero up in arms against some manifest corruption. A whiff of indecision would destroy his moral stature and might induce his followers to think again; crushing every private doubt, he declares himself wholeheartedly devoted to a cause he says is just, and fights for Right against those necessarily external forces symbolizing Wrong. And since no compromise is possible between such mighty opposites, the drama always ends in triumph or defeat. Either serves to
rally new supporters to The Cause, and both provide a satisfying, simplified catharsis.  
(Smith 72)

Peter Brooks, like James Smith, makes some astute observations about melodrama that can help us to understand what Visconti achieves with Senso. Brooks’ first crucial point is that melodrama allows for an expression of an immense amount, an everything:

The desire to express all seems a fundamental characteristic of the melodramatic mode. Nothing is spared because nothing is left unsaid; the characters stand on stage and utter the unspeakable, give voice to their deepest feelings, dramatize through their heightened and polarized words and gestures the whole lesson of their relationship. They assume primary psychic roles, father, mother, child, and express basic psychic conditions. Life tends, in this fiction, toward ever more concentrated and totally expressive gestures and statements. 
(Brooks 4)

In Senso, the “everything” is manifested in the dramatization of tensions and struggles, both internal and external, in Italian modern society, at the time of the country’s unification as well as in the aftermath of World War II. The “everything” that Visconti is capable of expressing by using melodrama, furthermore, pertains not only to the content of the work, but to the form, as well. The theatricality of the film, and its achievement in being able to portray events from venues and spaces as diverse as the theatre, the boudoir, the streets of a city, and the battlefield, contribute to the viewer’s sense that the story being depicted is sweeping in scope and grand in nature.

The next point by Brooks that I would like to highlight is that of the melodrama as a depiction of the struggle between good and evil.
Without now entering into the characteristics of stage melodrama [. . .] we can note that we find there an intense emotional and ethical drama based on the manichaestic struggle of good and evil, a world where what one lives for and by is seen in terms of, and as determined by, the most fundamental psychic relations and cosmic ethical forces. The polarization of good and evil works toward revealing their presence and operation as real forces in the world. Their conflict suggests the need to recognize and confront evil, to combat and expel it, to purge the social order. Man is seen to be, and must recognize himself to be, playing on a theatre that is the point of juncture, and of clash, of imperatives beyond himself that are non-mediated and irreducible. This is what is most real in the universe. The spectacular enactments of melodrama seek constantly to express these forces and imperatives, to bring them to striking revelation, to impose their evidence. (Brooks 12-13)

Similar to Smith's notion of the undivided self, this concept of the struggle between good and evil allows human struggles to be expressed in their purest forms. There are no complications to be depicted and the "right" side can clearly be seen. In Senso, the "right" side is the side of integrity, of support for a just cause: Italian unification. The structure is rather complex in this case because the "right" and "wrong", the "good" and "evil", stand a bit outside the core of the story (i.e., the relationship between Livia and Franz). Franz, while being crucial to the story, is the embodiment of evil, although not strictly as a villain, but more as a negative presence that is not willingly overcome by Livia.

Within the context of these definitions, Livia stands as rather a problematic figure. On the one hand, she is a victim of Franz and of the "illness" that befalls her (i.e., the love that she feels for him), and can therefore be seen as melodramatic. However, this placement of Livia within the melodramatic scheme is not fully satisfactory. In a sense, Livia stands as a tragic figure within the melodrama, for her downfall is self-inflicted and is the result of a conscious choice that she makes. She turns away from all that is "good" in her life (Usson and his patriotic cause) and embraces the "bad" (Franz, an Austrian traitor who does not hide that he
is using her for her affections and for her wealth). I would still argue, however, that she is, ultimately, a melodramatic figure, for Visconti indicates that in her final moments, she seems to lose awareness, and is ultimately a victim of herself and of her circumstance. As the film comes to an end, we see her wandering around in the dark streets of the dangerous Verona, after curfew, screaming her dead lover's name. Her apparent descent into madness indicates that she is not conscious of her actions. I shall return to the topic of Livia and madness when I discuss the influence of literature on Senso.

2.4 Senso as Influence: an Analysis

2.4.1 Opera as Melodrama

Given the characteristics of melodrama and of Senso outlined above, it is understandable that Visconti should have gravitated towards this mode of expression for its potential to interweave a spectrum of influences taken from a variety of different contexts, influences that were combined in order to put forth ideas and to ask questions relevant to his time. However, while it is likely that the director was influenced by the rich heritage of melodrama from throughout Europe, because his artistic sensibilities were developed within an Italian context, the principal definition from which he must have consciously worked is that of melodrama as opera. As I now proceed, therefore, to unravel some more specific influences that exist in Senso, I would like to begin by looking at the influence of opera on the film. As has been previously discussed, the film is extremely theatrical. The actors (and specifically Livia) move and express themselves using grand gestures. The shots are often framed so as to simulate the presence of curtains, of wings, etc. Added to the theatricality is a musical element, which exists both in literal and metaphorical manifestations:
Lo stesso mondo dei melodramma in senso stretto (l’opera lirica), che Visconti ha frequentato autorevolmente dal vivo, in Senso è come inventariato: non per quello che ha di vivo, passionale, trascinante per personaggi, interpreti e spettatori, bensì per il freddo senso di morte che l’attraversa. Così, tutto l’impianto linguistico del film è improntato a fascinosa ripresa dei moduli scenici dell’opera lirica: i personaggi agiscono come in duetti e concertati, inquadrati sempre un po’ dall’alto con gli sfondi ‘oggettivamente’ dritti, senza gli effetti prospettici dell’inquadratura cinematografica libera ‘soggettiva’. Sfondi reali, tra l’altro, che cercano di simulare l’effetto pittorico della cartapesta, sempre all’insegna di quella contraddizione dialettica che è cifra stilistica dell’opera viscontiana.

(Marchelli 149)

And, because music is a fundamental component of the melodrama, Visconti concentrated on the selection of an appropriate score to punctuate the grand events of his tale. One of Visconti’s main musical choices for Senso was to include the music of Brückner:

Da parte di Visconti [Bruckner] fu una scelta certamente ‘vilologica’, come sempre in lui quando si trattava di definire nei minimi dettagli un ambiente storico. Bruckner fu il musicista che in certo senso preannunciò la decadenza del mito absburgico, la sua musica, contemporanea alla vicenda del film, ne poteva essere il contraltare sul piano sonoro. Ma fu anche una scelta espressiva.

(Rondolino, Luchino Visconti 314)

Scandito con accorta misura dell’impeto turgido e tardo-romantico della “VII Sinfonia” di Bruckner, sostenuto da un’eccezionale dignità cromatica, il dramma di Livia Serpieri e di Franz Mahler (i loro ripetuti duetti) si sviluppa implacabilmente con la perentoria necessità di un melodramma che si fa tragedia e che ha nella conclusione la più impietosa sconfessione del suo romanticismo.

(Morandini, “Senso: melodramma” 65)
Thus, Bruckner's music helps to create a most appropriate melodrama.  

2.4.2 Il Trovatore

If discussing the subject of music in Senso, one cannot forget the truly operatic music that is included. As I have already discussed, the film begins with an overt reference to a melodrama, that is to say, Il Trovatore. Morando Morandini writes:

(Morandini 295)

The opera, then, gives a perfect introduction to the drama that unfolds between the characters of the film. Within the diegesis of the film, the action on the stage serves to complement the action that is unfolding onstage. As has been previously discussed, the line that separates the “art” of the Trovatore and the “life” of the characters becomes a mirror, and

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4 The topic of the influence of music on Visconti could itself be the focus of a monographic study. I will limit myself here to mentioning the influence.
the latter becomes an image of the former. Like all images, this one is a reflection, and yet a partial distortion, of the other.

As the above quotation indicates, there are specific connections between the act of the *Trovatore* being staged, and the action of the film. In the opera, the heroic Manrico, a rebel fighter born of nobility but raised as a gypsy, evokes in the viewers of the musical drama at La Fenice a fervent optimism in their own “rebel forces,” that is, in the Italian troops who are attempting to win back the territory of Veneto from the Austrians.

[. . .] within a few bars [Manrico] has plunged into “Di quella pira”, electrifying us with the single-minded devotion of a commander about to lead a forlorn hope, a sort of Sebastopol charge with only disaster ahead. No wonder Camillo Cavour, hearing that the Austrians were about to embark on a similar military mistake, feeling the urge to burst out singing automatically tackled “Di quella pira” in his excitement. He was celebrating, whether he was aware of it or not, the impending doom of the Austrian armed forces rather than the diplomatic triumph of his own engineering. (Godefroy 243)

Thus, making “Di quella pira” the focal point of the opening scene an the catalyst for the action that soon unfolds, is a very appropriate way of immersing the viewer in the historical reality of the time.

In addition, the notion of Manrico as courter and lover of Leonora, mirrors the offstage *melodramma* of Livia and Franz’s relationship, which is about to be born. The major difference between the two, of course, is that while Manrico and Leonora’s love is noble and gives the characters strength, the “love” between Livia and Franz (and it is doubtful that Franz ever even feels true “love” towards Livia) leads to weakness and destruction. One might argue that in a way, the imminent death of the two lovers onstage foreshadows the disaster that will strike for the protagonists of the film.
In more general terms, the opera acts as a suitable companion for Visconti’s film. This Verdi *melodramma*, which was in development between 1850 and 1853 (premiering on January 19, 1853 at the Apollo Theatre in Rome), was created when Verdi had come into his own as a composer and was extremely adept at causing a stir with his allusions to revolution. The opera is adapted from an early nineteenth-century play by Antonio Garcia Gutierrez (itself, therefore, an indirect influence on *Senso*), and resembles the play closely in several ways. This was a point on which Verdi insisted from the beginning, as his early correspondence with Salvatore Cammarano, the librettist for *Il Trovatore*, indicates:

> Ho letto il vostro programma, e voi, uomo di talento e di carattere tanto superiore, non vi offenderete se io, meschinissimo, mi prendo la libertà di dirvi che se questo soggetto non si può trattare per le nostre scene con tutta la novità e bizzarria del dramma spagnolo, è meglio rinunziarvi.
> (Rinaldi 142)

The composer, in fact, gave Cammarano very detailed instructions regarding where he should follow the text closely and on which specific points he could diverge from it (Rinaldi 142). It is debatable whether the finished opera follows the play closely, however, it is definitely true that Verdi kept the source text of the chivalric play in mind as he composed and as he instructed Cammarano.

Like the Gutierrez play, *Il Trovatore* contains subversive elements that suited Visconti well. Consider, for example, the “alternative” version of Spanish history that the opera tells:

*Il Trovatore* is traditionally supposed to have a very complicated plot. This is because it is based on events that took place before the curtain rises. […] But a sort of obscurity does pervade this opera, partly because it seems to be historical yet it is not the history we were taught at school; and partly became in its clash between a just establishment and a selfish rebellion law and order are represented by the baritone
villain, while the heroic tenor is on the side of the trouble-makers. So we get a topsy-turvy picture of events; our loyalties are misdirected; our comprehension misled. (Godefroy 230)

This "alternative" version of history includes many elements that must have appealed to Visconti, including rather minor details such as the "democratic" depiction of the "common folk." Consider, for example, the nature of the gypsies as they work (illustrated during the famed "anvil chorus"):

These gypsies in the Biscayan mountains live unfettered by the cloistered and balustraded protocol of their civilized betters. The music tells us this at once, sprightly and with plenty of trills, scored without brass but made piquant by the addition of a triangle. [. . .] The anvils, metallically clanging an octave apart in turn, artlessly rivet the rhythm. [. . .] These happy gypsies swing democratic hammers, and when their works foreman bids them pack up, they obey cheerfully and depart [. . .]." (Godefroy 234)

While the majority of the opera is not included nor alluded to in the film, all of these details about the opera surely must not have escaped Visconti’s attention, and they consequently act as influences on the director (and, it could be argued, on the viewer of the film). Thus, the impact of this particular Verdi opera on the film is significant and it creates an undeniable resonance within the cinematic text. Therefore, not only is Il Trovatore an influence, but indeed, its composer is, as well.
2.4.3 Giuseppe Verdi

The influence of Verdi on Visconti and on Senso must be looked at in historical terms.

Giuseppe Verdi held a special role within the history of Italy.

Verdi was the greatest artist of [the Risorgimento]. Throughout his work its values, its issues recur constantly, and he expressed them with great power. In a country divided by local dialects, customs, and governments his music provided a bond for all sorts of men and women. In his person – starting life humbly, living it honestly, even nobly – he became for many a symbol of what was best in the period. If he and his art were partly shaped by the Risorgimento, they also in part shaped it.
(Martin 4)

The clamorous reaction to Verdi’s work during the period that Visconti depicts in Senso was astounding, and to depict the opening scene of Senso by using the raucous reaction to Il Trovatore on the part of the Italian audience is both realistic and appropriate. With his penchant for composing operas that could evoke the most patriotic of sentiments in audiences and his tendency to treat his subjects in a way that allowed audiences to make connections between the heroes of his melodramas and their own liberal sensibilities, Verdi became in his lifetime an artistic conduit for the revolutionary ideals of the time. Ciro Manganaro describes an event that would be repeated often throughout this revolutionary era:

La marcia della rivoluzione era in atto e inarrestabile, le file dei patrioti si ingrossavano sempre di più e già alla fine del 1858 sotto il vigile e sospetoso sguardo della sbirraglia austriaca, sui muri delle case in tutte le città italiane, le scritte “Viva V.E.R.D.I” significavano chiaramente “Viva Vittorio Emanuele Re d’Italia.”
(Manganaro 10)
To have one's own name become virtually synonymous with the symbol of a new political union is not a small feat, but Verdi, by expressing such powerful sentiments through his music, was able to accomplish just that. From early in his career, Verdi evoked reactions similar to those depicted in the opening scene of *Senso*. This was inevitable given the insistence within the composer's work on the themes of revolution, slavery and liberation. For example, the composer's renowned third opera, *Il Nabucco* (1842), tells the story of Nebuchadnezzar's pride, downfall, and subsequent acceptance of Jehovah, whose people he had taken captive. Even early on in his career, the staging of such a powerful work caused a commotion:

All over Italy, as the opera passed from town to town, Italian patriots heard in that chorus their own emotions after failing so often to end their Austrian captivity.

[... ] Oh, mia patria si bella e perduta!
Oh, membranza si cara e fatal! [...]

At the opera's premiere at La Scala in Milan and at most later performances elsewhere, despite police prohibitions against repeats audiences demanded the chorus be sung again. The police disliked repeats for they were apt to become demonstrations against the Austrian officials in the boxes, but if the audience insisted, what could the conductor do? Generally he shrugged his shoulders and later pleaded that it seemed more dangerous to balk the audience than to satisfy it.
(Martin 10)

The excitement that audiences showed over Verdi's operas did not diminish. The composer and his librettists, in fact, did much to ensure that their works could incite their audiences. Following *Il Nabucco*, for example, Verdi presented *I Lombardi alla prima*
crociata (1843), about a family feud arising from two brothers’ fight over the same woman.

The brothers’ struggle is resolved years later during a crusade to the Holy Land.

At the premiere the audience identified itself with the Lombards and cast the Austrians as the Saracens defiling the Holy Land; it advanced the crusade into the future and greeted with frenzy a chorus calling the Lombards from despair to battle. The tenor cries, “La Santa Terra oggi nostra sarà”, to which the chorus – and the audience – replied, “Si… Guerra! Guerra!” Pandemonium followed, and the police were unable to prevent a repeat.

Such scenes were not accidental. Verdi and his librettists deliberately wrote as close to sedition as the censors could be persuaded to allow. (Martin 11)

Thus, when Verdi’s works were staged, they often caused an uproar that no amount of police or military threat could quash. At performances of his operas, the Italian audiences would often call for the composer to appear onstage, particularly in cases where there were Austrians among the audience members. Even when he appeared in public, Verdi would generate a scene, as crowds would spontaneously form and break into cheer (Martin 18).

George Martin points out that Verdi went out of his way to incite (11). Even in an opera that seemed to have no place for the theme of revolution or liberation, he included snippets that could be construed by the audience as relating to the national cause. As an example, Martin cites Macbeth (1847), which includes an aria entitled “O patria oppressa.” Verdi’s musical contributions to the “cause” of inspiring positive sentiment toward a unified Italy are perhaps too numerous to catalogue here, but I should perhaps mention that his Trovatore, along with Rigoletto and La Traviata, have been seen as a trilogy, the “trilogia popolar,” which represents the “quintessence of the Risorgimento,” (Martin 17). In their depiction of, among other things, the selfless giving over of individual interests to “higher” principles (Martin 17), these works
represent the true spirit of Italian unification, a sentiment which, moreover, was felt not only during Verdi’s time, but also during the Resistance, the time period that is at the forefront of Visconti’s thoughts when he came to the making of Senso in the 1950s.

In addition to Verdi’s artistic and inspirational contributions to the Risorgimento, one must remember that the composer in fact played a role in the politics of the time, as well.

Nel 1859 troviamo il Verdi politico: infatti il 20 giugno, egli si faceva promotore di una sottoscrizione ‘per i feriti e per le famiglie di coloro che morirono per la Patria’: il 15 settembre presentava a Vittorio Emanuele II il plebiscito dell’Emilia (ricordato in una stampa alla Civica Raccolta Stampe Bertarelli di Milano); il 15 ottobre dava incarico al Mariani di acquistare i fucili per la Guardia Nazionale e ne anticipava tutto il denaro necessario.

Nel 1861, sebbene riluttante, Cavour lo chiamava nella prima Camera dei Deputati, in seguito (1874) fu nominato Senatore del Regno.

In politica fu libeale di destra.
(Manganaro 11)

Verdi’s special role within the history of Italian unification was fully recognized and respected by Visconti. In Senso, this historical phenomenon is illustrated prominently in the first scene, in which the staging of the Trovatore is interrupted by shouts from the audience. I have already alluded to the fact that Verdi’s name was used as an acronym for the name of the reigning king during the time of unification, Vittorio Emanuele. However, the shouts of “Viva VERDI” during the time, which are reproduced in Visconti’s film, had another significance, as well. In alluding to the opening scene of the film, Visconti observes:

In realtà, per gli Italiani dell’epoca gridare ‘Viva Verdi’ non significava soltanto gridare ‘Viva Vittorio Emanuele re d’Italia’, significava anche ‘Viva Giuseppe Verdi’. Significava anche che si amava una musica determinata, uno spirito determinato, ed è prima di tutto una questione di secolo e di situazione. La verità è che un regista
To open *Senso* with a scene from a Verdi opera, and to depict the frenzied reaction of the Venetian audience, therefore, not only enriches the Visconti text from an artistic point of view, but it also adds a historically relevant touch to the film. It captures the mood of the time in an accurate way and gives the viewer a key to interpreting the film, as well. Moreover, the extreme and *melodramatic* nature of the scene (i.e., with the audience showering the theatre with red, white, and green flyers and bouquets among shouts of “Viva VERDI! Viva l’Italia!”) brilliantly makes the point that sometimes in life there are moments as dramatic as those in any opera, and therefore allows Visconti to convincingly illustrate that realism need not be as stark and unemotional as some artists and critics insisted.

### 2.4.4 Visual Arts

Now that I have examined the influence of Verdi and of his *melodramma* on *Senso*, I wish to examine the impact of the visual arts had on the film. The influence of painting is rather striking in *Senso*. The employment of various types of painting techniques, and, more specifically, the overt references to specific painters and paintings, can also be traced back to an element that is characteristic of the melodrama, that is, the tableau. Peter Brooks, on examining the importance of muteness in the melodrama, observes, “Even the scenes constructed of words tend toward a terminal wordlessness in the fixed gestures of the tableau,” (61). He sees tableaux as being used in melodrama in order to convey climactic and critical moments in melodrama. Tableau “[. . .] gives the spectator the opportunity to see
meanings represented, emotions and moral states rendered in clear visible signs" (62). Finally, Brooks observes that: “Occasionally the tableau will strive toward the memorability of a well-known painting [. . .]” (61).

“Well-known paintings” are used throughout Senso, in different ways and to achieve various effects. For one thing, Visconti makes use of actual paintings and frescoes in order to decorate the villas of the Serpieris. The frescoes used in the Aldeno villa (which is the villa Godi di Loneda or villa Valmarana, a Palladian villa built in 1537) are by Giambattista Zelotti and Battista del Moro, two students of Veronese. Roberto Campari points out that there seems to be much contamination between the paintings and the shots in the film. Campari quotes Piero Tosi, costume designer on Senso: “Così la vestaglia di Livia alla villa Valmarana è in armonia con le linee riche e corporese degli affreschi. Sarebbe stata inadeguata e meschina una vestaglia sgonfia, realistica accanto ai solari déi dell’Olimpo, al Trionfo della Serenissima in ampollosi broccati” (Campari 57-58). Like almost all the shots in the film, the one described by Tosi is very constructed, very artistic, and seems almost a painting itself.

In terms of specific influences from the visual arts on Senso, the Macchiaioli are often cited as having had an impact on Visconti. That these Italian realist painters of the nineteenth century should have had an impact on Visconti is not surprising, for their propensity to depict “real” scenes from Italian contemporary life, and their principles of freedom and democracy, were very much in tune with the director’s sensibilities:

The Macchiaioli [. . . ] represented a new cultural formation which unfolded in Florence just after mid-century and lasted until the late 1860s. The strategy of their dissent took the form of anti-academicism but in fact was aimed at foreign, specifically Austrian, domination of Tuscan institutions. Their grouping attracted individuals from other parts of the Italian peninsula who had fled their various indigenous, subordinated cultures or were otherwise displaced by the ferment of
the revolutionary years 1848–49. Despite the autocratic government of Grand Duke Leopoldo II of Lorraine, life was more tolerable in Florence than almost anywhere else in Italy; it was an environment these patriotic-minded artists could exploit. (Boime, “The Macchiaioli” 33)

Visconti himself has denied this influence. In the following interview, suggestions that the director may have been influenced by Giovanni Fattori, a Macchiaiolo who focused in part on portraying Risorgimento battle scenes, are rejected by Visconti.

[Doniol-Valcroze and Domarchi.] ‘È esatto che in Senso avete cercato di ritrovare l’estetica di certi pittori italiani? Sadoul cita Fattori.’

[Visconti.] ‘No, evidentemente conoscevo Fattori, che ha dipinto scene di battaglia contemporanee a Senso, ma non ho mai voluto copiarlo. Ho semplicemente cercato di avvicinarmi alla verità, e poiché Fattori aveva dipinto la verità, si ritiene che le nostre opere coincidano su un certo piano.’ (Visconti, “Da Une partie” 71)

How reliable is the director’s answer? That cannot be known, although there are fairly complex shots in the film that seem virtually identical to paintings of Fattori and others. While many shots in the Custoza battle scene are reminiscent of Fattori’s depictions of war, there is one specific shot of a covered wagon in which Giovanni Fattori’s Il campo italiano dopo la battaglia di Magenta “è saccheggiato in ogni dettaglio [. . .] mantenendo il punto di vista del pittore, sempre di spalle rispetto all’azione,” (Campari 59). Other Macchiaioli paintings seem also to have influenced Visconti while he was making Senso; Campari cites Telemaco Signorini’s La toilette del mattino and La lettera, Francesco Hayez’s Il bacio, and Silvestro Lega’s Il canto dello stornello, for example (Campari 57-59). Regardless of whether Visconti may have had Fattori, Signorini, Hayez, and Lega in mind when he orchestrated certain shots,
his answer in the above-cited interview brings up a crucial point regarding the notion of
influence, that it is often not direct and that perhaps it is not even conscious.

2.4.5 Literature

Up until this point, I have identified a variety of influences that make up the
melodrama that is Senso. I cannot, however, neglect the many influences that are at the heart
of Senso and at the centre of my study of Visconti: the literary influences. Literature of
numerous genres and from various eras have left imprints on Visconti's film. In fact, in
speaking of the influence of literature on Senso, one could speak of an entire web of
influences, a web whose true sources may be rather difficult to unravel.5

2.4.5.1 “Senso”

To be sure, the reference that is at the core of the work is Camillo Boito's novella of
the same title. Although Visconti and his screen writer, Suso Cecchi D'Amico, had more than
one working title in mind for the film as they were writing (Custoza, Uragano d’estate, I
vinti), they decided to select the title that had come from the Boito text, and even included a
reference to the short story and to Camillo Boito in the opening credits of the film.6 Boito's
novella serves as the main inspiration for the film. There are several ways in which the novella
influences the film: in its basic definitions of the characters; in its reference to the time period
that interested Visconti; and finally, in its adherence to the spirit of the Scapigliatura, which in
many ways represents a historical trend that, one may speculate, Visconti could easily have
been a part of had he been living at that time. A brief analysis of the similarities and

5 The concept of the web of influence is quite a suitable one to use when speaking of
Visconti, and I shall return to a discussion of this concept later in the chapter.
6 As previously stated, this kind of acknowledgement is not present in La terra trema,
where neither Giovanni Verga nor I Malavoglia was included in the credits.
differences between Boito’s text and Visconti’s will shed some light on how Visconti shaped this key literary source in order to achieve an essentially melodramatic tone and a politically-charged story.

One of the main points of influence in Boito comes from the depiction of Livia. The author's depiction of the female protagonist contributes much to Visconti’s text. The similarities between the two characters are marked, with Boito’s protagonist clearly serving as an influence for Visconti, aiding him to create a character that works perfectly within the scheme of the melodrama that he intended to make. At the same time, however, the differences between the two Livias indicate that Visconti’s aim was to tell a tale with political and social significance. I will now compare and contrast Boito’s Livia and Visconti’s Countess Serpieri.

Upon reading Boito’s “Senso,” there are two marked characteristics that leap off the page, so to speak, when one reads the Countess’s secret journal: one of these characteristics is her beauty (of which Livia herself continually reminds the reader) and the other is her vanity (of which the reader is aware in large part based on the character-narrator’s insistence on her own beauty). The following quotation, which starts off the recollection of Livia’s affair with Remigio Ruz (who becomes Franz Mahler in Visconti’s version of the tale) illustrates both Livia’s beauty and her immense self-centredness:

A Venezia rinascevo. La mia bellezza sbocciava intiera. Negli occhi degli uomini brillava, quando mi guardavano, un lampo di desiderio; sentivo le fiamme degli sguardi rivolti sulla mia persona anche senza vederli. Persino le donne mi fissavano in volto, poi mi ricercavano giù giù sino ai piedi, ammirando. Sorridevo come una regina, come una dea. Diventavo, nella contentezza della mia vanità, buona, indulgente, famigliare, spensierata, spiritosa: la grandezza del mio trionfo mi faceva quasi apparire modesta.
(Boito 342)
The Boito text is full of Livia's descriptions of herself, and all of these suggest the character's exceptional beauty while at the same time illustrating a vanity that can be described as extreme. Livia is well aware of this vanity:

Ho bisogno di mortificare la vanità. Alla inquietudine, che rode la mia anima e che lascia quasi intatto il mio corpo, s'alterna la presunzione della mia bellezza: né trovo altro conforto che questo solo, il mio specchio.
(Boito 339)

There is much irony in this statement. The attachment that Livia feels towards her mirror and the obsession with her own appearance are so excessive that they occupy her (or perhaps preoccupy her) to the point of leaving space for no other sentiment or action (including, according to her reasoning, her vanity). For a substantial portion of the novella, in fact, the reader almost has a sense that there is little or no action in the story, simply because Livia's detailed descriptions of herself often delay or prolong the narration of events. For example:

Una mattina, mentre guardavo sulla mia coscia destra una macchietta livida, forse una contusione leggera, che deturpava un poco la bianchezza rosea della pelle, udii fuori un romore come di persona, la quale nuotasse rapidamente.
(Boito 346)

This sentence, which essentially states that one morning Livia heard a noise made by someone who was swimming rapidly, contains a rather long and involved flourish that indicates both the generally flawless appearance of the character as well as the extreme lengths that she goes to in order to observe herself. Sentences such as these are common throughout the first half of the novella, during the recounting of Livia's stay in Venice and the development of her relationship with Remigio. (Note that these vain and detailed descriptions become less
common as Livia’s feelings for Franz become more fierce, obsessive. The focus within the narrative then shifts from her appearance to the events that unfold, and, to a degree, to her frazzled and declining emotional and physical states.)

In Visconti’s Senso, the viewer sees a Livia who is definitely beautiful, at least in the beginning of the film. The “construction” of Livia’s beauty has many layers. To begin with, Visconti’s choice of actor to play the Countess, Alida Valli, afforded him the luxury of having to work with a personality who was widely acknowledged as being beautiful at the time. In addition to being physically striking, Livia Serpieri is also depicted as being glamorous, and, at least in part, aware of her beauty. Livia’s glamour comes from her costumes, her clothing, her hairstyles, her accessories. Her many elaborate gowns, particularly the one that she wears in the first scene at the theatre, draw attention to her face, her figure, and give her a very dramatic look. This drama is further emphasized by Visconti’s use of flattering lighting, soft camera filters, and veils and capes. (Of course, as her feelings for Franz lead her to despair, Livia’s beauty seems to deteriorate in a way similar to that in the short story.) In Livia Serpieri, however, the vanity is absent. The viewer rarely sees Livia admiring herself in the mirror (despite the fact that Visconti includes mirrors in many shots of the film), nor does Livia make any references to her own beauty, the way she continually does in the novella. This difference in characterization is significant, for in place of the vanity Visconti uses her patriotism as a defining characteristic. For example, the first action that Livia performs is that of placing a red, white, and green bouquet that had been tossed by a member of the crowd onto the Austrians at the performance of II Trovatore, into the neckline of her gown (an object that her husband quickly takes from her when he realizes that she intends to go into the atrium of the theatre wearing the patriotic bouquet). Subsequently, Livia’s protection of her cousin,
the civilian underground fighter, Roberto Ussoni, illustrates her sympathy towards the Italian patriots' cause. She tries to protect Roberto by pleading with Franz not to duel with him, and by pleading with her husband for assistance once she realizes that Franz, unwilling to duel, is about to have Roberto arrested. She also gives Franz the following explanation regarding her views on the Austrians:

Vede, mio marito ed io abbiamo opinioni molto diverse riguardo gli Austriaci. Lui è disposto anche ad accettarli e ne sollecita anche i favori. Io sono come mio cugino, una vera Italiana.
(Senso, 1954)

Finally, she becomes involved in the patriots' cause herself, promising to convey messages to Roberto's partners in Aldeno, and later, holding the patriots' treasure for safekeeping. Of course, Livia's obsession with Franz prevents her from following through on her patriotic impulses, and leads her to even betray the Italians' cause. The fact remains, however, that the patriotic side of Livia initially defines her character, just as Boito's Livia is defined by vanity.

A third characteristic that can be compared in the two versions of "Senso" is Livia's resolve, her moral strength. Specifically, one can compare her desire to avoid her Austrian lover in both texts, and one can trace the way in which Livia's resolve weakens as the story progresses. In the short story, it is clear that Livia desires order and discipline. As readers, who are, in a sense, voyeurs looking into the Countess's secret journal, we read the words on paper and come to realize that with the exception of the notorious affair in her past, Livia is a woman always in control.

The novella Senso is a compilation of Livia's egotistical jottings. These are never made in haste or at random. They are calculated, organized and revelatory in a posed controlled manner; they expose
Livia’s perceptions, heighten her sensations, and glorify her independent assertiveness. They are her defence against chaos. (Partridge 51)

The “chaos” is the lack of control experienced by the Countess throughout her love affair.

From reading about the way Livia deals with other lovers, one realizes that this chaos existed only with Remigio, and that otherwise she was always able to control her emotions. For instance, Livia remembers one of her first encounters with a male in the following way:

A sedici anni avevo assodata già la mia fama scherzando con l’affetto di un bel giovane del mio paese e disprezzandolo poi, sicché il misero tentò di uccidersi e, guarito, scappò da Trento in Piemonte, e si arruolò volontario, e in una delle battaglie del ’59, non mi ricordo quale, morì. Ero troppo giovane allora per sentirne rimorso; e dall’altra parte i miei genitori e parenti e conoscenti, tutti affezionati al governo dell’Austria, che servivano fedelmente quali militari e impiegati, non avevano trovata altra orazione funebre in onore del povero esaltato se non questa: – Gli sta bene. (Boito 342)

Although she claims to have been too young to feel remorse, her tone suggests that she would not have felt remorse, regardless of her age. Her coldness is also seen in her dealings with the “avvocatino Gino,” the young man who courts her during the present time of the narration:

Questo avvocatino Gino mi secca. Guarda con certi occhi stralunati, che spesso mi fanno ridere, ma qualche volta mi fanno gelare; dice che non può vivere senza la carità d’una mia parola d’affetto; implora, piange, singhiozza; mi va ripetendo: – Contessa, si ricorda quel giorno in cui li sull’uscio, voltandosi, mi disse con la voce di un angelo: Sperate? – ed insiste e torna ad invocare pietà, a singhiozzare ed a piangere. Non ne posso più. (Boito 347)
This merciless stance, which Livia maintains despite her past experience with Remigio, is her way of overcoming her past weakness with the Austrian officer, a weakness that almost destroyed her.

Comparing this figure of the woman attempting to maintain control to what we see in Senso, Visconti’s Livia, the Countess Serpieri, also claims to be in control. Rather, her narration at the beginning of the film (which, incidentally, aids in giving us a feel that is similar to that of the scartafaccio) indicates that she had, up to the point of the beginning of the affair with Franz, always had the moral fortitude to be in control:

Ormai era l’alba. La città ricominciava a vivere. E adesso io provavo quasi un senso di vergogna. Come avevo potuto passare un’intera notte con uno sconosciuto? Un Austriaco, un ufficiale. Io, una donna italiana, sposata. Una donna che non aveva mai commesso leggerezze in vita sua …
(Senso, 1954)

In both the novella and the film, we see that Livia is unable to maintain the control that she prides herself in having. The difference, though, lies in that the protagonist of the short story is accustomed to dealing with her “senses” and keeping them in check, whereas Livia Serpieri is not used to handling lovers and keeping her feelings under control. The latter has a much simpler set of rules for living her life: she is faithful to herself; she is faithful, as much as she can be considering her different political views, to her husband; and she is faithful to her cousin Roberto and to the cause that he loves, Venice’s movement towards unification with Italy. All of these principles are slowly but surely shattered as she gives in to Franz. Her undoing is more radical, more complete, more melodramatic than that seen in Boito, for unlike Boito’s protagonist, Visconti’s Livia had never compromised herself or her ideals.
before, and when she does so, she compromises everything that she had stood for in her life.

Her compromise is utter, complete and disastrous.

The degeneration of both characters, in any case, is somewhat similar. In the novella, Livia describes that she is powerless against Remigio’s charms from the beginning. Even prior to their first formal meeting, Livia is drawn to Remigio uncontrollably: “Avrei dato non so che cosa per poterlo vedere, tanto m’attravano l’agilità e la forza” (Boito 346). It does not take Livia long to realize that she is obsessed with Remigio, that she is extremely jealous where he is concerned, and that she cannot be without him. While the two are still in Venice and their affair is developing, Livia quickly realizes that she cannot bear the thought of her lover being with anyone else, and her emotions are extreme:

Compresi allora che il tenente Remigio era la mia vita. Il sangue mi si gelò, caddi quasi priva di sensi sul letto nella camera buia, e s’egli non fosse apparso in quell’istante all’uscio, il cuore in un parossismo di sospetti e di rabbia mi si sarebbe spezzato. Ero gelosa fino alla pazzia; avrei potuto diventare all’occasione fino al delitto.
(Boito 349)

As the above quotation illustrates, the lack of control in Livia is so excessive that it often manifests itself through physical symptoms as well as mental alteration. These changes in Livia’s being become more acute as the affair intensifies:

Il conte, ritornando dalla campagna, mi trovò, dieci o dodici giorni dopo la partenza di Remigio, smagrita e pallida. Soffrivo in realtà moltissimo [..] sentivo delle accensioni alla testa e mi venivano dei capogiri, tanto che tre o quattro volte, barcollando, dovetti appoggiarmi alla parete.
(Boito 352-53)
Finally, when she discovers Remigio’s betrayal, Livia’s physical and mental balance are completely thrown off:

Tante emozioni m’avevano affranto: l’ira, che bolliva dentro di me, aveva messo in tutto il mio corpo una febbre ardente, che mi faceva tremare le gambe. Non sapevo dove fossi ...
(Boito 366)

Boito’s descriptions serve Visconti very well. Livia Serpieri, like Boito’s protagonist, slowly degenerates into a weak creature, one who is at the mercy of Franz and of the emotion that she feels towards him. After having spent a night walking the streets of Venice with Franz, Livia wonders how she could have spent the night with him, but then she continues:

Eppure, dopo quattro giorni, quattro giorni passati nella vana speranza d’incontrarlo, quattro giorni dopo, io correvo da lui.
(Senso, 1954)

Although she temporarily seems to recover from the influence that Franz has on her (she refers to her stay at Aldeno as a “convalescenza”), when Franz visits Livia at her villa, her obsession with him becomes stronger than ever. It is so strong, in fact, that she commits an unspeakable act of betrayal when she aids him in acquiring a fake letter of discharge from the Austrian army by giving him the treasure of the Italian rebel fighters so that he can pay some corrupt doctors. Once this awful deed is done, Livia’s physical and mental undoing proceed rapidly, and she manifests several symptoms of illness as she hastens to Verona to be with Franz. Physically, she seems ill and feverish while in Verona, and emotionally, she acts as if
she is unstable. Visconti seems to take cues from Boito regarding the undoing of Livia, and the execution is very effective.

Thus, Visconti takes significant inspiration from the female protagonist of Boito's novella, but he shapes the characteristics of the protagonist in order to serve the purposes of his social melodrama. The other main characters in the novella, the Count, and Remigio (who becomes Franz in the screen version of the tale), receive analogous treatment by Visconti.

Boito's count, an aristocrat with no clear conviction, is quite similar to Visconti's count, a rather spineless, self-serving creature who is just as comfortable siding with the Austrians as he is supporting the Italian rebels, so long as his own comfort is preserved. He, too, is a useful instrument for Visconti, perhaps illustrating in some ways the weak stance that Italy had taken historically, particularly during the two world wars. Boito's Remigio, who becomes Franz in the film, is clearly more negative towards Livia from the beginning of the novella, but with him, too, Visconti's changes suit the melodrama well. Franz does not flaunt his vile nature to Livia (his carousing with other women, his tendency to take their money, his cowardice) the way he does in the novella (although his negative traits in the film are fairly clear to the audience from early on). As far as the melodrama is concerned, one way of looking at the melodramatic tensions in the film is to see Franz and Livia as a combined negative force, one that works against the positive influence of Ussoni and of his rebels. It is interesting to note that this union of the two characters is in part constructed by using the characteristics of Boito's Livia and by distributing these characteristics among the two cinematic protagonists.

Stereotypically feminine traits held by Boito's Livia "transferred" by Visconti into the character of Franz. I have already examined examples of Livia's vanity above. I have concluded that Livia's obsession with her appearance is very obvious in the novella. I have
pointed out that Livia takes comfort only in her mirror. In the film, Franz is obviously made to seem the more vain of the two, and the manifestation of this vanity seems to have been derived directly from Boito’s Livia. Consider, for example, what Franz tells Livia when they arrive at his house after they have spent the entire night walking through the deserted streets of Venice:

[Livia] Che cosa ha trovato?
[Franz] Un pezzetto di specchio.
[Livia] Perché si guarda con tanto interesse? Le piace tanto guardarsi?
[Franz] Si, mi piace. Non passo mai davanti ad uno specchio senza guardarmi.
[Livia] E perché le piace tanto?
[Franz] Mi piace guardarmi per essere sicuro che sono ... io.
(Senso, 1954)

The effect that Visconti achieves by transferring a key (feminine) trait of Livia’s into the character of Franz is, in a sense, to fuse the two together into one “force” within the structure of the melodrama, an entity that in and of itself constitutes the “evil” of the melodrama, the force against which Ussoni must fight.

Ussoni himself does not appear in the Boito short story. His presence supports my hypothesis that Visconti takes every opportunity to shape the Boito tale into something with political and social meaning. Roberto Ussoni is the true hero of the tale; he is, one might say, the Manrico of this melodrama. Like Manrico, he fights the establishment in order to try to achieve freedom, and like Manrico, he is defeated by the negative forces at play. One may conclude that the characteristics that Visconti inherits from Boito are filtered so as to create a viable, social, melodrama.
In both versions of the tale, we are aware that the story is unfolding during the turbulent time of the Risorgimento, but whereas Boito’s tale uses the Risorgimento merely as a backdrop for the story, Visconti uses it as the force that moves the characters into action. Unlike Boito’s Livia, Livia Serpieri is motivated by her love of Italy and her respect for the cause of the rebels who are trying to defeat the Austrians. Unlike Boito’s Livia, Visconti’s female protagonist is metonymically linked to the culture and the time in which she is created, and as such represents the intellectual spirit of the time. In general terms, therefore, it may be said that the process of conversion from literary text to cinematic text in Senso is quite similar to that in La terra trema. In both cases, we can see a definite politicization of the literary text for the purpose of creating an artistic work with social relevance.

2.4.5.2 The Scapigliatura and its Literary Heritage

Senso is influenced by literary themes, tropes and devices used not only in Boito but also in other literature from Boito’s time, the literature of the Scapigliatura. Moreover, these literary devices come, in turn, to Visconti, to Boito, and to the Scapigliati, as influences from literature throughout the Italian literary canon. A web of influences that begins with the courtly literature of the Troubadours, progresses in Italy in the Middle Ages with the Dolce Stil Novo and continues into the Renaissance can therefore be traced. I will not attempt to define and trace such influences in great detail, for to do so would fall outside the scope of my work. However, I will briefly outline this web of influence, by looking first at the Scapigliati, and then at the literary precedents that influenced them.
Gli 'scapigliati' sono [dei] 'vinti': intellettuali che rifiutano il progresso e il positivismo avanzate; rifiutano la scienza; non accettano le strutture borghesi, nelle quali vedono la negazione delle loro illusioni, dei loro ideali di arte, dei valori in cui credono ...

(Paronio 595)

Like that of Boito's Livia, the spirit of the Scapigliatura is one of ambivalence and of rebellion. The Scapigliati, both attracted to and repulsed by society, lived at its margins, attempting to gain some control, some order, with their writing. Livia, a metonymy for the culture of the Scapigliati, is constructed in a similar fashion. Living within a structure that yields her both privilege and frustration (i.e., her marriage into the upper class of an Italy that sympathized with Austria), she exists at the margins, and, although she wishes to be part of the tide of change, she is relegated to the fringes of society because of the unfortunate events that unfold. This is true, to varying degrees, of both Boito's and Visconti's versions of Livia, and consequently, the spirit of the Scapigliatura makes an imprint on Boito's novella which then makes its way into Visconti's Senso.

As was mentioned above, several themes and figures used by Boito and taken up by Visconti are found within the Scapigliatura but have their basis in previous Italian literary traditions, most notably, that of Medieval love poetry. An example of this can be found in the construction of the female image that I have already discussed. As a specific character created within a particular literary work, Boito's Livia serves as an undeniable influence on Visconti's 1954 film. However, the depiction of Livia within the novella is itself derived from many influences in previous literature. It must be remembered that Boito had a rich tradition of literature to inspire him. Among the most famous figures within Italian literature have been women, and have been created by the most celebrated artists of all time: think, for instance, of Dante's Beatrice, Petrarch's Laura and Boccaccio's Fiammetta. These figures were in turn
inspired by literature that came before, that of the *Dolce Stil Novo*, of the poetry of the Sicilian school, and that of the Troubadours. Boito’s text draws on this rich tradition, and Visconti uses the same tradition to create a modern work. The notion of Livia’s extreme beauty, for instance, is reminiscent of heroines or early Italian literature. Boito’s descriptions of Livia evoke, to cite one example, Petrarch’s descriptions of Laura. In turn, Visconti uses these same images to construct Livia, particularly as she is seen in the eyes of Roberto, who, just as Dante might say of Beatrice, refers to her as his “angelo custode.” There are thematic allusions to courtly literature, as well. For example, the notion of love as illness is explicitly used both in Boito and in Visconti. I have already cited numerous passages from the novella above, passages that illustrate Livia’s physical and mental deterioration as she becomes more and more obsessed with Franz. These allusions to ill health, both physical as well as mental, are preserved by Visconti. For instance, when Livia goes to Aldeno, she narrates that her days there reminded her of past periods of convalescence. Her health continues to improve, however, when Franz follows her to Aldeno; the fire of her obsession is rekindled, so to speak. By the time she reaches Franz in Verona, she is burning up, as the fever caused by her intense love rages. Finally, in the last scene, after Franz is executed, we see Livia running alone through the dark, dangerous streets of Verona, shouting out Franz’s name; her actions by this point indicate that her mental well-being has been completely shattered.

At the core of the Medieval literature from which Visconti draws these images and tropes is the notion of courtly love, which was born within a very specific historical and cultural context:
Courtly love is the expression of the ideals and values of an aristocratic class, which has its own pattern of behavior and derives its sense of superiority by thinking and acting in ways others cannot. The courtly code of conduct, of which love is an essential part, evolved in the late eleventh century to fill the needs of a relatively new and still fluid class, the knights. Young men from noble families but without lands of their own went into the service of more powerful men in order to make their fortunes or to engage in their favorite occupation, fighting: some simply wandered in search of combat and booty. They took their identity from the community of fellow knights; to counterbalance the violence, crudity and instability of their lives they needed an ideal or secular code. In a period of increasing culture, of heightened self-awareness, of literate rulers and ladies who patronized the arts, it is not surprising that this code found literary expression in all forms of vernacular literature. (Ferrante and Economou 4)

The notion of courtly love was very well-defined.

Courtly love first appears as a literary convention in the lyric where the poet, playing the role of the lover, gives voice to aspirations of the courtly class. It is his love which defines the poet as a member of that class. Love makes him noble, for if he were not noble, he could not love. [. . .] The essence of his love is the worship of an ideal, incarnated in or transposed to a woman. The continual striving to be worthy of, to attain that ideal, is what ennobles the lover and provides an example for those who can understand and follow him. (Ferrante and Economou 5)

In the literature of courtly love, which was composed and disseminated in large part by the Troubadours, the notion of love and the notion of woman were interchangeable; both represent not a flesh and blood woman, but an ideal that the male is striving for, an ultimate
nobility and gentility that constantly eludes him. Thus, this literature is concerned more with the male than with the female (Ferrante and Economou 1).

As time went on, notions of courtly literature mutated in specific directions in Italian literature:

The trouvères, whose songs were set in a court, were primarily interested in exploring and developing the possibilities of figurative language; courtly life was not the subject of their lyrics, but rather the context which determined their figures of speech and their diction, and in this respect its function was no different from the context of any utterance. [. . .] The stilnovists, though they inherited much from the troubadours, completely rejected the courtly setting and every theme associated with it. They sought to create a new lyrical rhetoric and a new setting for their songs: they substituted for the real courts of the troubadours and the Sicilians an even more exclusive fellowship of poets, and the language they developed was not intended for the celebration of the ethical effect of love. They sought, by their difficult vocabulary, to make their language the unifying force of their intimate and exclusive circle. [. . .] the lady in the Italian lyrics is not a figment of the poet’s imagination, which remains perfect only so long as he believes in it. Instead, she is God’s creation, perfect by virtue of His endowments; she has a reality of her own and, potentially, a real power over the poet which he cannot control. (Ferrante and Economou 11-12)

There is much that could be said on the topic of the ways in which this rich literary tradition influences Boito in particular. From the rich heritage of the Troubadours and the Stilnovists are derived several notions, both thematic and linguistic, which can be identified in “Senso.” Boito’s use of literary devices and tropes from the past is deliberate, but it is also ironic, for unlike the heroines of early Italian literature, Livia is a force that drives men to destruction, not to salvation. The same literary figures used by different generations of Medieval poets are employed by Boito not to communicate elegance and nobility, but to convey human weakness and failure. Livia’s beauty does not help Franz to elevate himself; in
turn, Franz's ignoble nature is neither heroic nor desirable. Thus, Boito's depiction of Livia, while very similar to depictions of female figures in the poetry of the Troubadours and of the Stilnovists, is used in an ironic, and therefore subversive, way. The principles in aristocratic society that were being praised in the Middle Ages via its literature, are questioned, perhaps even mocked, by Boito. The subversive nature of this stance must not have been lost on Visconti, who employed Boito's short story to create a modern, eclectic text, a melodramatic text. Visconti's social melodrama uses literary tropes that were once employed in order to elevate the aristocracy, and manipulates them in order to make the opposite statement: that the aristocracy is an institution in decay.

2.4.5.3 Closing the Loop: Boito to Courtly Literature to *Il Trovatore*

Before concluding, I should like to add that given the tradition of courtly literature that influences *Senso*, the introduction of the story of Livia and Franz via *Il Trovatore* becomes even more poignant. The opera includes descriptions of love, valour, and heroism, that are deliberately reminiscent of the types of literature that have been outlined above. For example, in Act II, scene II, Leonora describes her love for Manrico in the following way:

> Di tale amor, che dirsi
> Mal può dalla parola,
> D'amor, che intendo io sola,
> Il cor s'inebriò!
> Il mio destino compiersi
> Non può che lui dappresso ...
> S'io non vivrò per esso,
> Per esso morirò!
> (Cammarano 60)
Later, when Leonora and Manrico are together (in the scene that Visconti uses at the opening of the film), the troubadour professes his love for Leonora by saying to her:

Amor ... sublime amore,
In tale istante ti favelli al core.
Ah! Si, ben mio, coll'essere
Io tuo, tu mia consorte,
Avrò più l'alma intrepida,
Il braccio avrò più forte.
(Cammarano 134)

The inclusion of such themes and language in Senso, as has been discussed, is quite subversive. The image of the brave hero, Manrico, finding nobility and strength in the love of the woman, is juxtaposed in an ironic fashion to the image of Livia and Franz conversing in the opera box. Like Boito, therefore, Visconti uses these images taken from courtly literature to create a sense of irony within the work.
2.5 Conclusion

Using melodramatic forms and social themes, and combining these with influences originating from a multitude of genres and from throughout history, Visconti arrives at what he himself referred to as “realismo romantico.” The various connections between influences are many and are not trivial. Consider, for example, that the time of the Scapigliatura is also the time of Verdi, and in fact, something very real connects Giuseppe Verdi and Boito, for Camillo Boito’s brother Arrigo was one Verdi’s librettists. There are many such connections related to the making of Senso and to the various sources that were used within it. The web of influence, therefore, is very intricate, and also extends outside of Italy (Stendhal and Heine, among others, are also direct influences on Senso). The multiplicity of literary and artistic influences adds dimension to the text. It allows Visconti to create a melodrama that is very similar in spirit to the works of Verdi. It is a lyrical, complex work, that both manifests beauty and addresses the issue of social unity as an ideal.

I am not suggesting that all of these literary (nor other artistic) sources are direct influences on Visconti. Rather, I am attempting to illustrate that a web of influences has helped to shape the text of Senso in a way that made the work uniquely modern. In reality, influence is often not direct nor specific. As I have pointed out, for instance, in the case of the influence of painting on Visconti, there may have been many instances where the director did not have a specific source in mind when he crafted his film, but the fact that he was concerned with themes that were also relevant for a Fattori or a Hayez, may have led to an artistic output

7 Stendhal’s Charterhouse of Parma has been quoted in this chapter as having been an influence on Senso. Indeed, Visconti in interviews often spoke of Stendhal as an influence. As for Heine, the poet is quoted directly by Franz during his and Livia’s first night together on the streets of Venice.
that results in a similar sensibility. In the realm of ideas, it is not unlikely that aesthetic or ideological notions can seep into the collective unconscious, and can thereby influence different individuals in a similar way, even if they are separated by space or time.
Released in 1963, *Il Gattopardo* is a landmark piece within the filmography of Luchino Visconti. The film allowed the director to revisit some of the themes that he had explored previously, such as the issue of the Italian *Mezzogiorno* and that of the *Risorgimento*. The former had been touched upon in *La terra trema* (1948), as Visconti modernized Verga’s impressive nineteenth century realist work by emphasizing the social injustices suffered by Sicilian fishermen at the hands of the establishment. He continued his exploration of the *questione meridionale* with *Rocco e i suoi fratelli*. This film is an exposé of internal migration within the Italian peninsula. It depicts the gradual undoing of a southern Italian family after they migrate to northern Italy on the mother’s hope that the sons will find better opportunities than they would have had in their impoverished homeland. As for the issue of the *Risorgimento*, Visconti used *Senso* to draw parallels between this era of “failed revolution” and his own age, the period immediately following World War II. His interest in these social issues, and his skill in depicting them masterfully within fiction films, made the director’s choice of adapting Giuseppe di Lampedusa’s 1958 best-seller about the decline of Sicilian
nobility during the *Risorgimento* an understandable choice as he once again turned to the works within his library to find inspiration.

With respect to the focus of my study, I shall examine how Lampedusa’s novel acts as a *blueprint* for the film. As previously mentioned, the notion of blueprint brings me as close to examining mainstream connotations of fidelity in adaptation as I shall discuss in this investigation. While I have avoided the approach of fidelity criticism, I must acknowledge that there may be sufficient correlations between a source text and its cinematic equivalent to speak of that source text as having been the main starting point for the film, with the film being clearly based on and taking significant cues from the original text (in other words, with the film being an *adaptation* of the written text, in the conventional sense of the term, i.e., as a remaking of a written text for the screen). The similarities between the novel and film, in this case, suggest the proximity between the two artists who created them, Lampedusa and Visconti, for the two were contemporaries and had similar sensibilities. Extremely literate, well-travelled, and a descendant from aristocracy, Lampedusa is arguably closer to Visconti than any other author used by the director throughout his career. However, the focus of this study is not on the parallels between the lives of the two artists but rather on those between the two texts. My discussion will focus on strategies that one can use in order to compare literature and film in an effective manner.
3.1 Blueprint = Adaptation?

Quando un film viene tratto da un'opera letteraria, bisognerebbe cercare di valutarlo per il suo valore intrinseco, giudicarne, cioè, l'opera cinematografica indipendentemente dal romanzo o dal racconto che l'ha ispirata. Ciò è possibile se il testo letterario è pressoché sconosciuto o se, come avviene in molti casi, è servito al regista solo come spunto per la realizzazione di un'opera assolutamente autonoma. Nel caso contrario viene naturale paragonare il film all'opera letteraria dalla quale è stato tratto, per vedere se e in quale misura il regista è rimasto fedele a quanto lo scrittore ha voluto esprimere nelle pagine del suo romanzo.

(Fumagalli 23)

Paola Fumagalli's words are à propos as an introduction to the issue of adaptation in relation to Il Gattopardo. I have already described two “modes” of adaptation, in Chapter 1 (literature as “source”) and in Chapter 2 (literature as “influence”). With Il Gattopardo, I will now analyze the role of literature as “blueprint,” exploring the notion that the film is an “adaptation” proper. This is a relevant approach to use with the 1963 film, for with its release in 1963 there began some of the more vivid debates surrounding the issue of adaptation that Visconti ever provoked. Aside from the fact that the film does seem to bear several key similarities to the novel (as my subsequent analysis will illustrate), there is another issue that calls for an analysis of the two texts in the context of “literary adaptation.” As Paola Fumagalli suggests, the notoriety achieved by the Lampedusa novel and the animated debates surrounding it could not but ignite an even more fiery set of controversies when the film based on the novel was released, five years after the publication of the Lampedusa text. Given the critical and popular success of the novel and given the amount of attention that it received, the release of a film based on this work just a few years afterwards, could not but provoke additional discussions on the subject matter presented. Hence, it was understandable that the
film be discussed by critics (perhaps more so than previous Visconti productions) as an adaptation of the Lampedusa text, and that much of the flurry of critical activity be focused on the issue of adaptation. Speaking on the subject of adaptation and *Il Gattopardo*, Visconti made the following statements:

Capita spesso, leggendo quanto viene scritto a proposito di un film che ha tratto la sua ispirazione da un romanzo di autore, di vedere affiancare e confrontare le due opere, quasi che dovessero essere la stessa cosa. Quando, per la natura stessa dei mezzi di espressione di cui si servono, un film e un'opera letteraria non possono assolutamente essere la stessa cosa. Film ed opera letteraria non possono essere la stessa cosa neppure nel caso di una narrativa realistica e naturalistica i cui temi principali hanno una certa affinità con l'espressione cinematografica. Figuriamoci *Il Gattopardo*. (Visconti, “*Il Gattopardo*: romanzo e film” 70)

Il mio film non è, né potrebbe essere, una trascrizione in immagini del romanzo [. . .] Sia pure conservando una grande fedeltà al romanzo che lo ha ispirato (e spero che sia il caso del mio *Gattopardo*) un film per essere valido deve avere una sua originalità espressiva. E non parlo soltanto del lato visivo. (Visconti and Trombadori 94)

In the above quotations, Visconti is, in effect, denying the validity of fidelity criticism. How is it possible, then, to discuss *Il Gattopardo* as a text that is inspired by, based on, and that follows closely, the story laid out in the original? After all, how can the essence of a text be preserved and expressed using such a radically different form? In Chapters 1 and 2, I suggested that in the process of transforming a literary work into a film, the literary work is “filtered,” for lack of a better term, through the sensibilities of the director, so that the vision of the writer mutates into something different, which may or may not complement the vision of the original. But to answer the question of whether the film keeps the author’s vision intact (and I maintain that there is always a degree of subjectivity in this type of exercise), it is
important to examine the general tools required for analyzing a cinematic adaptation.

Millicent Marcus provides a clear synopsis of the different positions within criticism on this subject (Filmmaking 14-15). She states that the debate around the issue of literary adaptation revolves around the notion of whether a narrative can be "preserved" using different means of expression. On the one hand, there is a stance that a story can exist independently of the discourse used, and can be conveyed using different media.

According to Paul Ricoeur, Roland Barthes, and A.J. Greimas in France, Angelo Moscariello and Gianfranco Bettetini in Italy, and Seymour Chatman on this side of the Atlantic, there exists a universal, nonspecific code of narrativity which transcends its embodiment in any one particular signifying system. (Filmmaking 14)

On the other side of the debate one finds those who maintain that narration of a story is completely dependent on the medium and that a story narrated using one means of expression cannot be conveyed satisfactorily using a different means. Marcus sums up the stance of this group of critics:
Those who oppose the story / discourse distinction, including Jean Mitry, and Gérard Genette in France, Luigi Chiarini, Emilio Garroni, and Galvano Della Volpe in Italy, insist that meaning is indivisibly bound to the concrete material terms of its realization in art and that it is absurd to posit a significance separable from, and equally available to, a plurality of discursive systems. According to such critics, adaptation per se is impossible. For them, it is more proper to speak of inspiration or "resymbolization" — the attempt to recreate, in another medium, the aesthetic experience of the textual source.

( *Filmmaking* 14)\(^1\)

For this latter group, therefore, one must totally transform a text in order to adapt it.

It is my contention that it is possible to obtain a reconstruction of a text, which, although created using a different type of discourse, can preserve fundamental elements of the original that are clearly identifiable, and that can retain some crucial reference points that can allow a close comparison. In other words, as a master of the literary and performance arts once wrote:

> Non è possibile, insomma, una riproduzione della medesima espressione originale, ma tutt'al più la produzione d'un'espressione somigliante, più o meno prossima ad essa.

(Pirandello 217)

When closely comparing adapted films to their original sources, it is essential to keep in mind the point that Pirandello makes here. The proposition of analyzing an adaptation can fall very easily into a discussion of fidelity, i.e., are the themes represented in the novel adequately reconstructed in the film? Are the scenes in the film reconstructed faithfully in

\(^1\)See the Works Consulted for titles of selected works by the critics mentioned by Marcus here and above. Marcus does not provide a detailed bibliography for this topic, but I have attempted to suggest some texts by all of these critics which may act as a starting point for an understanding of the debate on "the story / discourse distinction" in literature and film.
comparison to the images evoked by the written narrative? While this approach can prove interesting, it has limits. It may be interesting to see where a film differs from the original text and where it conforms to it, but there is not very much to be learned about the process of making meaning. A study of this type merely points out to what degree the individuals who created the two works may have differed in their views and even in their interests, in their exploration of the subject matter. Moreover, this type of study is rather subjective, as there are no criteria for the interpretation of the two texts and for the subsequent comparison of the two. For these reasons, it is essential to establish that a film cannot be identical to its source work, its literary blueprint, both because of the differing points of view, as well as because of the limits imposed by the two different media. Having laid out these premises, it is possible now to outline the focus of my analysis of Il Gattopardo. This study will focus not as much on the faithfulness of Visconti's adaptation as it will on the techniques used in the reconstruction of the Lampedusa text and in the response that this reconstruction evokes in the viewer (vis à vis the reaction that the reader may have to the written text). The divergence between the two texts will be identified according to specific categories, but not within the context of the potential success or failure of the adaptation. The preservation of the thematics of the Lampedusa novel will be not be the focus, but rather, the notion of narrativity of the two texts will be defined, and it is in this light that the two texts will be ultimately compared.
3.2 On Adaptation

A cinematic adaptation of a literary text is essentially an interpretation of the original text using a different medium.² It is fundamentally a translation, from one medium to another, of a narrative. It could be argued that the process of adaptation or intralinguistic³ translation is more complex than an interlinguistic translation, in that the former deals with a transfer of meanings between two series of signs that are completely different from each other, whereas the latter deals with a transfer between two systems that, while having different cultural influences and nuances, have the same substance.

In an adaptation from novel to film, there is a process that produces two new texts, i.e., there are two adaptations. T₁, the novel (or short story), is adapted into T₂, the screenplay, which is then adapted into T₃, the film. T₃, as with any adaptation, acquires its own depth and meaning, and tends to cancel out the traces of T₂ (which in turn tends to cancel out the traces of T₁). In my study, I will leave aside the screenplay, for, while demonstrating some interesting discrepancies that could shed some light on the decisions made in the adaptation process, including the screenplay in my equation would change the focus of the analysis. The point to remember, however, is that in the process of adaptation, there is an intermediate step in between the creation of the two texts, which acts as a transitional point between the two.

Both plays and stories generate fictional contexts, [...] but a performance or enactment (whether of a play proper or of a story dramatized for the occasion) alters the way in which a fictional context is generated. (So, too, of course, does cinema). (Scholes 33)

² The ideas in this section were developed during a course at the University of Toronto with visiting Professor Paolo Fabbri (Sept.– Oct., 1991).
³ That is to say, a passage between two types of discourse.
If cinema "alters the way in which a fictional context is generated," one must devise a way of comparing fictional contexts of a novel and of a film. Using the notion of adaptation as intralinguistic translation, to translate within a language, i.e., from one type of discourse to another, one could think of an adaptation as one system of signs being translated into a different series of signs. (I use the Saussurian notion of "sign" as developed in *Course in General Linguistics* and develop it using concepts conveyed by Paolo Fabbri in 1991.)

\[
\text{FORM} \quad \text{SUBSTANCE} \\
\text{SIGN} = \text{SIGNIFIER} = \text{EXPRESSION} \\
\text{SIGNIFIED} = \text{CONTENT} \\
\text{\|} \\
\text{FORM} \quad \text{SUBSTANCE}
\]

This scheme requires some explanation. It is best to begin with the Saussurian notion of the sign. Saussure explains the "nature of the linguistic sign" in part one of his work, as he defines "sign," "signifier," and "signified," (see *Course in General Linguistics*, parts one and two, 65-78). According to Saussure, the sign is the basic building block of language, and is composed of two elements that are linked together arbitrarily, the concept "out there" in the world that must be named (the "signified") and the arbitrary symbol, be it written, uttered, or otherwise communicated (the "signifier"). In his course, Paolo Fabbri expanded on this notion of Saussure's, postulating that a signifier was also an expression or utterance, whereas a signified constituted the true content of that utterance. Finally, Fabbri argued that both expression and content each had an identifiable "form" and "substance."
In an adaptation, there is a translation of the expression of the text, or rather, a transformation both of the form and of the substance of the expression. In any case, one must keep in mind that the changes to the expression may affect the content, as well, given the intimate relationship between the two. Still, a cinematic reconstruction can preserve some of the same meanings as its blueprint, and can convey those meanings in a manner that affects the consumer of the text in very similar ways.

Having said this, I must affirm that the literary sign is quite different in nature from the cinematic sign. The substance of the expression of the two varies greatly:

There are two distinct formal dimensions to narrative utterances: a presentational form, which is immediate (language, gesture, etc.), and a represented form, which is at one remove from the level of performance itself. In a novel, for instance, there is the language of the author, at one level, and the representation of the character, situation, and event at another. In a play there are the language of the author, the performance of the actor, and the deeds of the character to consider: three easily discerned levels at which form is perceptible. And film adds at least one level to these, just through the processes of photography itself: camera angle, lighting focus, and so on. (Scholes 58-59)

Here Scholes identifies the difference between literary narrative and film. To round out his definition of narrative, I would add the language of the narrator, which distinguishes itself from the language of the author. As for the levels alluded to in film, there is the level of the film “author” or director, and other technical dimensions such as sound, editing, etc. In

\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{4}}\text{Technically, therefore, in creating an adaptation one translates the form as well as the substance.}\]
any case, it may be said that the cinematic text has a larger range of components than the literary text.

To continue to expand on my distinction between literature and film, I will use the words of Christian Metz:

In the literary text, the function of the language is to assure a first layer of intelligibility (called "literal meaning" and which corresponds in general to *denotation*), while writings involve a second level of meaning, which is of the same number as connotations. In the cinema, the first comprehension of audio-visual elements is assured — only partially [...] — by the ensemble of codes which are constitutive of analogy, ... (perceptual codes, codes of iconicity, codes of identification, etc.): they make it possible to recognize visual and auditory objects which appear in the film thanks to the similarity for which they are responsible. These codes do not result from a conscious work of a small group of men, but are rooted profoundly in the entire social body (socio-cultural classification which enumerates perceptual "objects", etc.), and even in psycho-physiological processes (perceptions as such). These are stable structures, highly coherent and "integrated", with a slow and unconscious evolution, largely free from the action of individual innovations. In all this, they somewhat resemble spoken language, to which, moreover, they are in part linked.

(*Language and Cinema* 269)

To put it another way, cinematic language functions on elements of immediate perception, the likes of which are not found in literary language. In the cinema, there is a constant *explicitness*. For example, in a novel, there may be a need to repeat a feature of a character's appearance numerous times; in a film, this is unnecessary. Therefore, there are not only a greater number of levels in the cinematic text, but these levels are also different than in the written text.

I will now explore the criteria that can allow for a comparison of a film to the literary work on which it was originally based. Is it worthwhile to compare a cinematic text to the
written text by which it is inspired? As variously suggested, I would like to postulate that common categories can be found in narratives, and, in the case of an adaptation from one medium to another, these common categories can be compared, in order to determine where similarities and differences lie between the two texts. In order to compare novel and film, therefore, the individual texts must be reduced to their basic structural building blocks, and the internal relationships within each set of building blocks must be examined to determine if any strong similarities exist.

Before turning to an analysis of the two texts in question, it is useful to review the work of Roland Barthes in the field of narrative, for his contribution can be used as a proper framework for my study. I shall refer specifically to Barthes's "Structural Analysis of Narratives," a landmark piece that puts forth several notions that can be used as a springboard for my discussion of Il Gattopardo. In this essay Barthes introduces the idea that all narrative can be decomposed into key elements, which are the same for each narrative, regardless of the medium. According to Barthes's scheme, all narratives are made up of small functions, and these are the units that create meaning: "A narrative is never made up of anything other than functions: in differing degrees, everything in it signifies," (Barthes 89). Barthes categorizes the narrative functions into different classes, making the point that the units exist at various levels of the narration:

The functional units must be distributed into a small number of classes. If these classes are to be determined without recourse to the substance of content (psychological substance for example), it is again necessary to consider the different levels of meaning: some units have as correlates units on the same level, while the saturation of others requires a change of levels; hence, straightaway, two major classes of functions, distributional and integrational.

(Barthes 91-92)
Barthes provides examples of distributional functions: "[...] the purchase of a revolver has for correlate the moment when it will be used (and if not used, the notation is reversed into a sign of indecision, etc.); picking up the telephone has for correlate the moment when it will be put down [...]." (92). He then defines integrational functions in the following way:

The integrational units [...] comprise all the 'indices' (in the very broad sense of the word), the unit now referring not to a complementary and consequential act but to a more or less diffuse concept which is nevertheless necessary to the meaning of the story: psychological indices concerning the characters, data regarding their identity, notations of 'atmosphere', and so on. [...] The relation between the unit and its correlate is now no longer distributional (often several indices refer to the same signified and the order of their occurrence in the discourse is not necessarily pertinent) but integrational. In order to understand what an indicial notation 'is for', one must move to a higher level (characters' actions or narration), for only there is the indice clarified. (Barthes 92)

I would conclude, therefore, that to conduct a comparative analysis of narratives within different media, one must do so by discerning the relationships within different levels of functions within the text, and reconstructing their implied meanings. Only in this way can the process of narration or narrativity be uncovered, and the two texts can consequently be examined. Barthes's notions of functions and indices are fundamental to his study of the structural analysis of narratives, and while I do not wish to delve too deeply into the explanations of these two categories of units within a narrative, it is important to point out that Barthes's framework for dissecting a narrative allows for a comparison of two texts by identifying similar functions within the two texts and then identifying similar correlations within each text.
A final idea introduced by Barthes that is pertinent to my study is that a narrative is not a linear entity. He points out that, "[...] each part of the narration radiates in several directions at once," (118); and that "[...] meaning is not 'at the end' of the narrative, it runs across it [...]" (87). This, too, is a key notion, because if a narrative is not a linear entity,^5 then it can be concluded that narratives composed using two different media should not be compared by executing a line-by-line or story analysis. In other words, as I have already stated, one should not seek out points where the adapted story is faithful to the story from which it originates.

3.3 \textit{Il Gattopardo} as Blueprint: an Analysis

In order to compare the two versions of \textit{Il Gattopardo}, one must reduce the distance between the two media. Given that both the written text and the cinematic text are made up of a system of signs, in order to be able to compare the two, one must discern the relationships, or, as Barthes labels them, the \textit{correlations} (Barthes 89) between the signs in both texts. In addition, it is essential to discover the common categories in the texts. My aim is to accomplish this via my analysis of \textit{Il Gattopardo}, which will consist of two parts. I will begin with a comparison of general thematic and discursive categories within the text. Examples from both versions of \textit{Il Gattopardo} will reveal cases where comparisons between the two texts can be made. For the general analysis, I will focus on the following aspects of the two texts:

^5 William Luhr, in discussing the way that Barthes sees a narrative, uses the term \textit{vectorial} (Luhr 35). This term captures Barthes's concept of the non-linear nature of a narrative quite lucidly.
- the plot structure of the novel vs. the plot structure of the film
- the construction of the theme of death in the novel vs. that in the film
- narration in the novel vs. narration in the film

Once I have analyzed the texts at this general level, I will move on to a more detailed analysis. Because of the richness of the texts with which I am dealing, a close comparison is de rigueur here, for it will allow for the uncovering of similarities that one might otherwise miss. The close comparison of the texts will focus on the ball scene in the film, that is to say beginning with scene LXI to the end of scene LXXXV of the screenplay (Cecchi d'Amico 125-49). This will be compared to part VI of the novel (Lampedusa 189-211). In my analysis of the two versions of the ball at Ponteleone Palace, I will be comparing specific elements of the two texts:

- objects: how does Visconti combine objects and film techniques to produce meanings that are similar to those in the novel?

- the segmentation in the text: every text has divisions and internal rhythms; can those of the novel be compared to those of the film?

- narrativity: are there parallels between the narrative structure of the novel and that of the film?

In executing a close comparison of these elements, I can then begin to make connections between my findings regarding the ball scene and my general observations on the two texts. These links can hopefully lead to some conclusions about the nature of cinematic adaptation as executed by Visconti.
3.3.1 Plot Structure

To begin with, I will compare the plot structure of the novel to that of the film. A comparison at this level is useful in that it allows me to define the more obvious discrepancies between the texts from the outset, and therefore enables me to move beyond theses discrepancies to more involved comparisons. It may be fair to contextualize this comparison by linking it to what has been arguably the principal debate surrounding Visconti’s adaptation of the Lampedusa novel. It seems that critics have associated the “success” of Visconti’s adaptation to their perception of whether the structure of the novel had been followed. A part of the debate surrounding *Il Gattopardo* as a cinematic adaptation, in other words, deals with the structure of the two texts. Moreover, the debate on structure is one that was born beginning with the publishing of the novel itself:

Contrariamente ai non pochi patiti delle resezioni chirurgiche di appendici considerati inutili, dunque, mi pare che le parti V, VII e VIII siano da considerare (con Bassani) essenziali alla vera comprensione del romanzo. Del resto, chi volesse avere un’idea dell’effetto della storia espurgata del presunto superfluo può rivedere il film di Visconti, che è necessariamente altro rispetto al romanzo: un quadro dai colori e dalle luci straordinarie, una sontuosa rappresentazione dei momenti visivamente più accattivanti del libro (il pranzo a cui interviene Angelica, l’esplorazione del palazzo di Donnafugata, il ballo) e di quelli dramaticamente più efficaci (il colloquio fra il Principe e Tumeo, quello con Chevalley). Il viaggio di Padre Pirrone, la morte del Principe, la fine di tutto, essenziali nell’economia sottilmente ‘meditativa’ del libro, sono estranei a quella essenzialmente spettacolare e narrativamente lineare di questo film (è per questo che va perduto, ad esempio, il *flashback* delle udienze concesse da re Ferdinando a Don Fabrizio).
(Masi 59)

Given that Visconti eliminated parts V, VI and VII of the novel from the cinematic version of the text, and given that the quality and usefulness of these parts of the novel had
been debated by critics of Lampedusa, it is interesting to note that the literary debate, in a sense, is carried over into a debate of the film. It is not a coincidence that Visconti eliminated from the structure of the film the very parts of the novel that several critics found to be extraneous to it. Visconti’s deliberate choice to leave out Padre Pirrone’s voyage to San Cono, the death of the prince in 1883, and the 1910 epilogue that illustrates the decay foreshadowed throughout the novel, hint at the fact that Visconti, like other critics of the novel, was not satisfied with the lack of “stylistic and dramatic unity” (Marcus, Filmmaking 46) that these parts of the novel introduced. Perhaps more importantly, however, the reduction of the plot of the original text allows Visconti to emphasize certain elements that have merely an expository role in the novel, but that are of primary importance to the director. I am referring specifically to the political underpinnings of the Lampedusa text, which are made explicit in the film and are used to put forth Visconti’s ideological stance. This “stance” leads to the introduction of various scenes that are not present in the novel, all of which deal with a critical depiction of the political events of the time. For example, Visconti depicts the battle of Palermo, in which Tancredi is wounded and some local officials are lynched for being supporters of the Bourbon. This point is supported by Millicent Marcus:

This editorial decision [to eliminate parts of the novel from the plot structure of the film] also focuses our attention on the final political developments of the story — Garibaldi’s defeat at Aspromonte, which gives rise to Visconti’s most momentous addition to the novel in the inclusion of the news that the rebel prisoners will be shot at dawn. (Filmmaking 46)

The result of these changes in plot structure is to shift the focus of the original text slightly, so that the story acquires a political significance that is perhaps not as developed in the novel. “The addition and subtraction of scenes thus amounts to a deliberate politicizing
strategy on Visconti’s part” (Marcus, Filmmaking 47). This strategy may have been in part a
defensive one, as Visconti must have been very aware of the attacks from the Left that had
been made on the novel. Once again, then, the critical debate over the novel may have perhaps
in part shaped the cinematic text, as Visconti worked to give the plot a depth that Leftist critics
had failed to see in the novel.

Thus Visconti’s Leopard is a polemic response to the debate
surrounding the novel, a prise de position in the heated political
atmosphere of early 1960s Italian critical thought. What makes
Visconti’s cinematic defense of the novel so unassailable […] is his
use of Marxist cultural heroes — Gramsci and Lukács — against The
Leopard’s detractors within the Left.
(Marcus, “Visconti’s Leopard” 45)

Once again, Visconti’s political views help to shape a cinematic reworking of a literary text,
and lead him to make specific choices in the creation of that text.

3.3.2 The Depiction of Death

Now that the basic differences at the level of plot structure have been identified, I wish
to compare the treatment of one of the primary themes within both texts, that is, death. Death
is one of the fundamental themes of the Lampedusa novel. It is a theme that recurs constantly
and becomes a leitmotiv within the text. The opening words of the novel already introduce the
theme of death. Part I opens with the line: “Nunc et in hora mortis nostrae. Amen”
(Lampedusa 23). It is as if these opening words set the stage for the many deaths to come. For
instance, the recurring symbols of blood and of slaughter (Meyers, 2017), both human and
animal, serve to continually remind the reader of the inevitability of death. Such symbols are
repeated throughout: in part I, there is Don Fabrizio's recollection of the soldier found dead in the garden:

Ricordava il ribrezzo che le zaffate dolciastre avevano diffuso in tutta la villa prima che ne venisse rimossa la causa: il cadavere di un giovane soldato del 5° Battaglione Cacciatori che, ferito nella zuffa di S. Lorenzo contro le squadre dei ribelli era venuto a morire, solo, sotto un albero di limone. Lo avevano trovato bocconi nel fitto trifoglio, il viso affondato nel sangue e nel vomito, le unghie confitte nella terra, coperto dai formiconi; e di sotto le bandoliere gli' intestini violacciavevano formatopozzanghera. Era stato Russo, il soprastante, a rinvenire quella cosa spezzata, a rivoltarla, a nascondere il volto col suo fazzolettono rosso, a ricacciare con un ramiotto le viscere dentro lo squarcio del ventre, a coprire poi la ferita con le falde verdi del cappottone; sputando continuamente per lo schifo, non proprio addosso ma assai vicino alla salma.  
(Lampedusa 27)

In part III, there is the dead rabbit during the prince’s hunt:

Arguto deposesi ai piedi del Principe una bestiola agonizzante. Era un coniglio selvatico: la dimessa casacca color di creta non era bastata a salvarlo. Orrendi squarci gli avevano lacerato il muso e il petto. Don Fabrizio si vide fissato da due grandi occhi neri che [...] lo guardavano senza rimprovero ma che erano carichi di un dolore attonito rivolto contro tutto l’ordinamento delle cose: le orecchie vellutate erano già fredde, le zampe vigorose si contraevano in ritmo, simbolo sopravvissuto di una inutile fuga; l’animale moriva torturato da un’ansiosa speranza di salvezza, immaginando di poter ancora cavarsela quando di già era ghermito, proprio come tanti uomini [...]
(Lampedusa 102)

The landscape itself evokes images of death: “Intorno ondeggiava la campagna funerea, gialla di stoppie, nera di restucce bruciate; il lamento delle cicale riempiva il cielo; era come il rantolo della Sicilia arsa che alla fine di Agosto aspetta invano la pioggia,”
(Lampedusa 61). The sun is frequently used to evoke the image of deathly heat, of destruction,
and even the vegetation seems to remind the reader of death in no uncertain terms.

Accompanying the vivid descriptions of colours and textures are the many suggestive adjectives such as “funerario,” which explicitly and constantly remind the reader of death.

Finally, death is often on the mind of the prince. As the narration alternates between the omniscience of a third-person narration and the subjectiveness of a first-person narration, the reader becomes privy to thought patterns of the prince, such as the following, which occurs towards the end of the hot and uncomfortable trip to Donnafugata:

Risvegliatosi ai primissimi albori, immerso nel sudore e nel fetore non aveva potuto fare a meno di paragonare questo viaggio schifoso alla propria vita, che si era svolta dapprima per pianure ridenti, si era inerpicata poi per scese montagne, aveva sgusciato attraverso gole minacciose per sfociare poi in interminabili ondulazioni di un solo colore, deserte come la disperazione. Queste fantasie del primo mattino erano quanto di peggiore potesse capitare a un uomo di mezza età; e benché don Fabrizio sapesse che erano destinate a svanire con l’attività del giorno ne soffriva acutamente perché era ormai abbastanza esperto per sapere che esse lasciavano in fondo all’anima un sedimento di lutto che, accumulandosi ogni giorno avrebbe finito con l’essere la vera causa della morte.

(Lampedusa 65)

The above contemplation of death, of course, is not the lone one in the novel. In one of the more well-known passages, Don Fabrizio ponders the subject of death during the Ponteleone ball in front of a copy of The Death of the Just Man by Greuze:

Si mise a guardare un quadro che gli stava di fronte: era una buona copia della “Morte del Giusto” di Greuze. Il vegliardo stava spirando nel suo letto, fra sbuffi di biancheria pulitissima, circondato dai nipoti afflitti e da nipotine che levavano le braccia verso il soffitto. Le ragazze erano carine, procaci, il disordine delle loro vesti suggeriva più il libertinaggio che il dolore; si capiva subito che erano loro il vero soggetto del quadro. [. . .] Subito dopo chiese a sé stesso se la propria morte sarebbe stata simile a quella: probabilmente si, a parte che la biancheria sarebbe stata meno impeccabile (lui lo sapeva, le lenzuola
This passage reveals much about the notion of death as presented in the Lampedusa text. It clearly suggests that all of the imagery of death is in support of the one, most significant death in the novel, that of the prince. At the same time, however, Don Fabrizio’s death itself stands as a metaphor for the death of his line, of his class, and of the life that they will no longer enjoy once the imminent political and social changes have been executed.

In truth, it may be fair to say that death itself is one of the protagonists of *I Gattopardo*; it is for this reason, perhaps, that Lampedusa (or rather, Don Fabrizio) portrays death as the long-awaited female figure whom Don Fabrizio summons at the end of part VI:

Don Fabrizio sospirò. Quando si sarebbe decisa a dargli un appuntamento meno effimero, lontano dai torsoli e dal sangue, nella propria ragione di perenne certezza?

(Lampedusa 211)

and who finally comes for Don Fabrizio at the end of part VII:

Fra il gruppetto ad un tratto si fece largo una giovane signora: snella, con un vestito marrone da viaggio ad ampia *tournure*, con un cappellino di paglia ornato da un velo a pallottoline che non riusciva a nascondere la maliosa avvenenza del volto. Insinuava una manina inguantata di camoscio fra un gomito e l’altro dei piangenti, si scusava, si avvicinava. Era lei, la creatura bramata da sempre che veniva a prenderlo: l’ora della partenza del treno doveva esser vicina. Giunta faccia a faccia con lui sollevò il velo e così, pudica ma pronta ad esser posseduta, gli apparve più bella di come mai l’avesse intravista negli spazi stellari.

(Lampedusa 225)
Thus, death is embodied as a young woman metaphorically ready to be taken by the dying man.

One final observation on the theme of death in Il Gattopardo is that the last two parts of the novel, which cover the death of Don Fabrizio and the subsequent revelation of the unravelling and decline of the Salina line, are brimming with images of death. Aside from the depiction of the expiration of the prince (which, as described by Lampedusa, resembles closely the Greuze painting described in part VI), practically every description in these parts of the novel evokes an image of death. For example:

Era il mezzogiorno di un Lunedi di fine Luglio, ed il mare di Palermo compatto, oleoso, inerte, si stendeva di fronte a lui, inverosimilmente immobile ed appiattito come un cane che si sforzasse di rendersi invisibile alle minacce del padrone; ma il sole immoto e perpendicolare stava lì sopra piantato a gambe larghe e lo frustava senza pietà. Il silenzio era assoluto. (Lampedusa 216)

And from part VIII:

Per chi conoscesse i fatti, per Concetta, essa era un inferno di memorie mummificate. Le quattro casse verdi contenevano dozzine di camicie da giorno e da notte [. . .] quei chivastelli non si aprivano mai per timore che saltassero fuori demoni incongrui e sotto l’ubiquitaria umidità palermitana la roba ingialliva, si disfaceva, inutile per sempre e per chiunque. I ritratti erano quelli di morti non più amati, le fotografie quelle di amici che in vita avevano inferto ferite e che per ciò soltanto non erano dimenticati in morte [. . .] Se si fosse ben guardato nel mucchietto di pelliccia tarlata si sarebbero viste due orecchie erette, un muso di legno nero, due attoniti occhi di vetro giallo: era Bendicò, da quarantacinque anni morto, da quarantacinque anni imbalsamato, nido di ragnatele e di tarme, aborrito dalle persone di servizio che da decenni ne chiedevano l’abbandono all’immondezzaio [. . .] (Lampedusa 236-37)
Death, therefore, is omnipresent in the Lampedusa text. It permeates the landscape and it penetrates the mind of the protagonist. Lampedusa fills the reader’s mind with imagery of death. Even seemingly “innocent” descriptions of elements such as landscape, food, etc., are depicted in such a way as to constantly remind one of decay and mortality. By using death imagery at various levels of the text, in similes and metaphors, in the actual objects depicted in the novel and seen by the characters, in the events that are part of the narrative, the achieved effect is a sort of layering, i.e., layer upon layer of death imagery is laid out, almost like themes and variations within a musical piece. The music builds and builds to a crescendo, and with the death of the prince, we hear the climactic moment in the piece, after which a coda is appended to the piece, one which, once again, is a variation on the same theme. All of this imagery, including the actual death of the prince, is itself a metaphor for the ultimate death that is alluded to in the novel, the death of the aristocracy and of the world in which this class lived and thrived. Thus, the novel can be seen as a novel about death, the death of an era.

Turning now to the cinematic adaptation, I will examine the strategies that are used in the film to evoke images of death, and attempt to uncover whether Visconti achieves similar effects in his depiction. A good deal of Lampedusa’s death imagery comes in descriptions of scenery as well as in the interior monologues of the prince, and all of the descriptions are reinforced by adjectives and by metaphors that explicitly evoke decay and death.

Anche Visconti, [...] come lo scrittore siciliano, fa della morte il leitmotiv dell’opera; nel film come nel romanzo, essa si è impadronita di tutto: del paesaggio, degli interni di palazzo Salina e di palazzo Ponteleone, dell’amore e di tutto ciò che cade sotto lo sguardo del principe di Salina, perché è proprio attraverso gli occhi del protagonista che ‘vedono’ Lampedusa e Visconti, due uomini accomunati da un’angoscia esistenziale che rende le loro opere ‘ambiguamente’ vive, proprio perché dense di morte. (Fumagalli 46)
In the film, it is a death that disrupts the peaceful scene of the family reciting the rosary: the death of the same soldier depicted in the opening pages of the novel (see page 167 above). In the film, there is a significant transposition, in that in the novel, the death occurs in a time prior to the opening of the novel and the image evoked is in Don Fabrizio's mind. In the film, on the other hand, the soldier's death is an explosive intrusion and interruption within the opening scene, one that sets the stage for the violent events that will follow. In addition, the death is quickly linked to the landing of Garibaldi in Sicily and to the imminent revolution, as the prince reads Malvica's letter about the Piedmontese landing in Sicily while his staff deal with the issue of the corpse on the Gattopardo property. The pace, therefore, is rather different than in the novel, and the associations that the family makes with the death instill panic in the entire family (save for the prince) and cause them to fret about the imminent political revolution.

Other images from the novel are present in the film. The arid landscape is reconstructed. For example, in the scene where Tancredi initially leaves to fight with the rebels, we witness the women seeing him off with their parasols, as the blinding sun beats down on them. In the meantime, Tancredi departs, with a huge cloud of dust lifting behind him, showing the aridity of the ground. It is clear from this scene that the harshness of the Sicilian elements are being used to evoke images of death. Vegetation sways in the wind, and yet one cannot help but sense that the wind is stifling and does not help to relieve the landscape (and its inhabitants) from the effects of the scorching sun. This, and most external shots, include all of the harsh elements of sun, dust, and wind. In another example, during the plebiscite scene, as Don Fabrizio and Padre Pirrone walk towards the polling station, Don Fabrizio coughs and holds a handkerchief to his mouth. He says to Padre Pirrone, "Non siate
così triste, Padre. Non stiamo seguendo un funerale, mi pare.” to which Father Pirrone responds, “Il vento, questo vento schifoso!” to which the prince retorts “Ringraziamo il Signore, invece. Senza vento, l’aria sarebbe un putrido stagno” and he continues to cough, (Micciché, Il Gattopardo 142-43).

The sequence reconstructing the battle of Palermo is also filled with images of violent death. This scene, which is not present in the novel, links death to politics and to the revolution, just as the death of the soldier had done in the opening of the film. Many violent acts are depicted in this realistic reconstruction of the battle. We witness lynchings, see a hanged man, people dying in hand-to-hand combat; fires rage and violence erupts.

Yet another image of death can be seen during the voyage to Donnafugata, when the prince’s family stops at a peasant dwelling. The shot of the Salina family members sleeping silently in a dilapidated bedroom, all of them in close quarters, reminds us of decay and evokes images similar to those in the novel. As the Salinas lie sleeping, Don Fabrizio scratches his torso, to indicate discomfort and heat. The scene is similar to the one described in the Lampedusa passage on page 168 above. It is fair to assume, in fact, that this shot constitutes the reconstruction of that passage, for it occurs at precisely the same point in the story in both texts. As the camera pans across the bedroom, the bodies lying still remind us of corpses in a tomb worn down by time.

Another scene that is replete with death imagery is that of the arrival at Donnafugata. Dust is pervasive in this scene. The family arrives in a cloud of dust, and as they descend from their carriages, several of them shake the dust off themselves. Then, as the family marches in a sort of procession towards the church, their lack of energy (due to the long, difficult voyage and heat) is made very evident, particularly in juxtaposition to the music being played by the
band as they all march (the piece is the Verdi aria “Noi siamo zingarelle”). Some of the characters appear as though they are about to fall over as they enter the church. Later, seated in their pews, the family members, still pale and languishing from the dust, appear to be especially “cadaverous.” As the camera scans their faces, a cloud of dust actually rolls by each one of them. Thus, the physical actions of the actors, the mise-en-scène, and the camera movements, all function together to evoke images of death.

The rabbit caught in the hunt described by Lampedusa is also depicted in the film, and illustrates the subtleties of Visconti’s filmmaking and the director’s attention to detail. Many shots in the film are rich with meaning, and the scene in which the hunted rabbit appears is no exception. The rabbit is shot during Don Fabrizio’s and Don Ciccio Turno’s hunt. In the next sequence, as Don Ciccio and the prince discuss the bogus results of the plebiscite and the family of Don Calogero, the dead rabbit is seen hanging from a tree, and, although not terribly evident, is present in several of the shots in this sequence. At one point, though, the prince calls the viewer’s attention to the dead rabbit as, while asking Don Ciccio about Don Calogero, he begins to stroke and pat it. This seemingly inconsequential action is a direct reference to the dead rabbit described in detail by Lampedusa in the novel.

Just as in the novel, images of death surround Angelica and Tancredi as they explore the empty rooms of the palace at Donnafugata. Visconti goes to great lengths to depict the decay of the castle. The empty, cavernous rooms are home to mice (as is reported by Angelica), to run-down wardrobes, pieces of broken furniture and moth-eaten paintings, and

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6 Just as in Senso, Visconti employs Verdi several times in this Risorgimento tale. In this case, the choice of the whimsical aria from La Traviata is meant to be ironic. The piece is intended to be sung by youthful girls, and yet it is being played during a scene that depicts how decrepit the Salina family seems. Note that Visconti will showcase an unpublished Verdi waltz later in the film, during a pivotal scene. See below for additional details.
to pounds and pounds of ever-present dust, which is stirred up as the characters walk through the rooms.

In addition, as with the palace scene, the scene in which Don Fabrizio contemplates death in the library during the ball is constructed with the images of the novel in mind. The prince is clearly depicted as being in a contemplative state when he notices the painting. He stares at it. He lights a cigar slowly and deliberately. Then he begins walking around the room, but once in a while seems to be compelled to return his gaze to the painting. When Angelica and Tancredi enter the library (as they do in the novel), the prince utters the words that are reported by the narrator in the novel verbatim (see page 169 above). He wonders aloud whether his own death will be like the one in the painting.

As the end of the ball draws near, there is a sequence in which the prince stares at himself in the mirror. There is a close-up of his tired face. A tear falls down his face, and as he turns away from the mirror and wipes away the moisture, he sees a room filled with dirty pots and dishes from the ball. This sequence, like many others at the close of the ball, is symbolic and rich with implied meaning, all suggestive of the death that is to come. Following several sequences in which good-byes are said, the prince, obviously tired and ill (as is made apparent by Tancredi’s question as the prince leaves, “Zione ... ti senti poco bene?” (Micciché, Il Gattopardo 211)), leaves the ball on foot, alone. In the closing sequences, we witness what I could call a “literary” scene, in which the prince kneels down in the street and utters words that are reported indirectly in the novel: “Oh Stella, oh fedele Stella, quando ti deciderai a
As I have illustrated, death is prevalent in Visconti's adaptation of *Il Gattopardo*. Where Lampedusa uses vivid (or perhaps morbid) descriptions peppered with funereal adjectives and metaphors of death, Visconti uses objects, montage, and camera work to convey similar meanings. It is clear that the director makes a point of using the means at his disposal to create death imagery, as is perhaps most evident with his use of the elements — wind, dust, sun — and of decrepit objects. In the end, however, death is left as something that is perhaps imminent, but still at some distance. While the viewer is aware that the prince and his class have reached the inevitable end of their glory, that end is not made real within the confines of the text, and the viewer is not forced to witness its aftermath. Moreover, the aforementioned focus on the political aspects of the Gattopardo story causes a shift in meaning between the novel and the film, and this shift changes the function served by death within the film. In the novel, the notion of death is more personal, existential, whereas in the film, the clear links between death and the imminent revolution hint once again at the fact that the fundamental discourse at the heart of the film is not one of existence but one of political struggle in history.
3.3.3 Narrative Strategies

Now that I have examined the predominant theme in the written and film versions of Il Gattopardo, I will analyze different aspects of the narration of the texts. First off, I will review the techniques used by Lampedusa to construct the fictional world of the prince of Salina, and compare these to the narrative strategies employed by Visconti in the construction of his cinematic text. Lampedusa’s style is defined by Simonetta Salvestroni as “explicit.” She states:

Se Lampedusa avesse voluto [. . .] restare fedele al gusto dell’“implicito” per tutto il libro, avrebbe dovuto sopprimere circa metà delle pagine del romanzo. Basta ricordare ad esempio come è sviscerata in tutti i suoi possibili sottintesi, che potrebbero restare oscuri al lettore medio, la frase del Principe Ponteleone: “Ed aspettiamo anche il Colonnelio Pallavicino, quello che si è condotto tanto bene ad Aspromonte” [. . .] Di passi di questo genere nel Gattopardo ce ne sono molti. È vero che in certi episodi sembra raffiorare il gusto dell’“implicito”, ma Tomasi non resiste quasi mai alla tentazione di analizzare e spiegare tutto. (16)

Salvestroni also observes:

Nel romanzo c’è poi chiaro e evidente quello che [. . .] Tomasi definisce ‘il difetto di tanti romanzi’, quello cioè di rilevare l’animo delle persone attraverso ciò che esse dicono. Nel dialogo con Chevalley (capitolo IV, pp. 204-218), Don Fabrizio mette a nudo la sua anima, con le angosce e i tormenti che la travagliano, proprio attraverso le parole, con una confessione diretta fatta ad un estraneo, senza nascondergli niente. (16-17)

Recalling the words of Christian Metz (Language and Cinema 269), this type of explicitness is also characteristic of a cinematic text. In fact, the specific strategy of having a character reveal his or her state of mind by vocalizing it to other characters is typical in genres
such as theatre or cinema. The explicitness of the Lampedusa text, therefore, makes it a viable candidate for an adaptation (and perhaps makes the adaptation a viable target for critics).

But the explicitness of the novel does not come only from the clear revelations of the characters' states of mind. The text is sumptuous, sensuous, and tactile. Each sentence is pregnant with meaning. Descriptions are deliberate, specific, colourful, and imagery and metaphor are prevalent. As illustrated by my analysis of death in the novel, the narrator is often able to convey a sentiment by describing a scene from the outside world, by defining it in vivid detail using sights, sounds, scents, and tactile sensations, and by using metaphors and allusions to make the image more clear.

This style is replicated quite faithfully in the film. The use of the little-known filming technology of Technirama (Micciché, Il Gattopardo 85) resulted in an ultra-vivid print that made the film a feast for the eyes. The sets, costumes and objects recreate very closely the scenes described on the pages of the novel. The film was shot on location in Sicily, adding a layer of “authenticity.” Many descriptions in the novel were reconstructed in painstaking detail, with attention paid to paintings, colours, music, sounds, and all the slightest nuances on the pages of the novel. In addition, the pace and camera work both aid in creating a very lush, very sensual film. The rhythm is often slow and deliberate. There are numerous scenes that have no dialogue but that show a person or a group of people involved in the most mundane of actions. The shots of the dinner table during the soirée in which Angelica and Don Calogero are introduced into the Salina household convey a sense of leisure; the many shots of the guests at the Ponteleone ball depict characters sitting, chatting (with inaudible dialogue), eating, fanning themselves, smoking, etc. This rhythm adds a sort of weight or depth to the film, and gives one the sense that one is witnessing the most minor details of the characters'
lives unfolding. As for the camera work in the film, in addition to the fundamental contribution that the shots make to the pace, the studied movement and focus of the cameras aid in generating meaning within the text, in that they serve to generate or at least to capture visual metaphors in the film. Many of these metaphors can be seen, for instance, during the ball scene, which I shall analyze next.

3.3.4 A Textual Comparison of the Ball Scene

The aspects of Visconti's *Il Gattopardo* discussed in the above analysis can be reinforced if one analyzes the text more closely. I will now focus on the key scene in the film, the ball scene, which is the equivalent of part VI of the novel. The scene depicting the Ponteleone ball has been chosen for specific reasons. It is interesting to note that the biggest point of contention with respect to the success of Visconti's adaptation of *Il Gattopardo* lay with the treatment of the ball scene, for Visconti envisioned the scene as lasting one hour or a full one-third of the entire film. The expansion of the scene is seen in a negative light by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith:

In *The Leopard* the pomp and splendour of the aristocratic ball and the patriarchal figure of Burt Lancaster as the Prince appear almost to have taken precedence over the themes developed earlier in the film, and gradually edged them out to allow for the tremendous finale. Not only has the episode grown in physical size, so that contrary to original indications it now lasts, in its complete form, for well over an hour. It has also acquired a character of unquestioning nostalgia. Where the film had previously taken a critical attitude to the events described, it now slides gently into sharing the point of view of one of the protagonists. Given the manner in which the Prince has been idealised as a figure right from the beginning, the move into "indirect

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7 Moreover, this use of *temps morts* links *Il Gattopardo* to Visconti's experiments with neorealism, and, going further back in time, to the French realist heritage to which Visconti was exposed in his early career.
"fibre" can be interpreted only in one way, as identification by Visconti with the central figure.
(Nowell-Smith, Luchino Visconti 110-11)

On the other hand, there are Gianni Rondolino’s observations:

Il ballo in casa Ponteleone occupa circa un terzo del film e si colloca in chiusura, a suggerlo di quanto vi è stato rappresentato e ad anticipazione simbolica di quanto sarebbe accaduto storicamente nei decenni successivi alla vicenda del Gattopardo. Visconti, in altre parole, distorcendo la struttura narrativa del romanzo, ne coglieva cinematograficamente le potenzialità drammatiche e la giusta chiave di lettura ideologica. L’osservazione minuta e precisa dell’aristocrazia al tramonto condotta con quello sguardo, proprio del migliore Visconti, che si posa sugli oggetti, sui corpi, sui volti, sui costumi, sugli atteggiamenti, sui gesti, nella grande sequenza del ballo, in cui tutti i personaggi maggiori e minori paiono confluire in un quadro di noia esistenziale e di sfacelo etico ed estetico, conferisce all’insieme non soltanto una straordinaria unità espressiva — nonostante l’apparente dispersione degli elementi drammatici e narrativi in un flusso informe di piccoli fatti e dialoghi smozzicati —, ma anche un significato politico-sociale non equivoco. Davvero il ballo interminabile diventa la metafora d’una classe al tramonto; ed è la sua lunghezza inusitata a produrre quell’accumulo di elementi caratterizzanti, la cui stratificazione dà come risultato un giudizio critico severo e impietoso.
(Rondolino, Luchino Visconti 436)

These contrasting observations may prove quite useful for the purposes of my analysis.

3.3.4.1 The Use of Object and Metaphor

The surface elements described in the novel are represented very faithfully in the film.

We note Concetta’s and Carolina’s “vestiti identici,” (Lampedusa 191); we see the “pantofoloni di pelle lucida del Principe,” (Lampedusa 191); we even see small details replicated, such as donna Margherita’s “triplice collana di smeraldi,” (Lampedusa 194).

However, as much as the objects described in Lampedusa’s narration are replicated in an
“authentic” manner, there are certain elements that cannot be translated. Consider the following description:

La sala da ballo era tutta oro: liscio sui cornicioni cincischiato nelle inquadrature delle porte, damascinato chiaro quasi argenteo su meno chiaro nelle porte stesse e nelle imposte che chiudevano le finestre e le annullavano conferendo così all’ambiente un significato orgoglioso di scigno escludente qualsiasi riferimento all’esterno non degno. Non era la doratura sfacciata che adesso i decoratori sfoggiano, ma un oro consunto, pallido come i capelli di certe bambine del Nord, impegnato a nascondere il proprio valore sotto una pudicizia ormai perduta di materia preziosa [. . .]
(Lampedusa 199-200)

Despite the similarity in appearance of the hall in which the scene takes place, the camera cannot communicate the meanings of these objects as they are constructed in the written narration. The gold of the cinematic hall may be pale gold, but that it is “come i capelli di certe bambine del Nord” cannot be reproduced (and the irony of that simile cannot be conveyed). The resonance of such a statement is lost in the translation, so to speak. (The issue of the “untranslatable” will be picked up again on page 188.)

On the other hand, using a medium such as film, objects can be used to acquire a different kind of significance. For example, the uniforms of the Piedmontese officials are very noticeable even in the very crowded shots during the ball scene. There are numerous instances where an aligned group of officials crosses a shot in a diagonal movement, from right to left, from the top to the bottom of the screen. In this way, they create a sort of blue stripe that crosses the screen, one that almost seems a larger version of the aqua-coloured stripe on the individual uniforms. The mere presence of these “blue stripes” has a deep meaning within the context of the narrative, and the visual game mounted within the cinematic text serves to emphasize the significance of the attendance of the Piedmontese officials. The military
presence of the Northern (Italian) officials at a social gathering of the Sicilian élite reminds us of the new social and political reality that the Gattopardo and his class must deal with.

The visual is mixed with the aural to create even deeper meaning. This is evident, for instance, in the opening of the scene. It begins not with a visual, but with a sound queue, that is, the sound of then-unpublished Verdi waltz that is heard throughout the last part of the film. After the music is heard, the shot, which captures peasants working on a hill, dissolves into a shot of the inside of the Ponteleone palace. The superimposition of the piece by Verdi, who has historically been seen as a hero of the Risorgimento and a patriot, onto a visual of a social class so humble that is left untouched by the “triumph” of a united Italy, is very symbolic, and indeed, ironic. Visconti plays with such elements to create a text whose every nuance exudes meaning.

Returning to the visual elements, the ball scene is filled with what I would term “visual metaphors.” When Tancredi, Angelica and the prince leave the library and return to the ball, they form a triangle, with Tancredi at the head. This is meaningful for various reasons: it represents Tancredi’s jealousy, to which Angelica alludes in the novel (Lampedusa 204). It is also representative of the shift in power from the Gattopardo to the young Falconeri, from the old world order to the new. In addition, it establishes the nature of the link between the young lovers, for it is because of the prince’s rather Machiavellian manoeuvring that the two are joined together (and that, in an albeit diminished and inferior form, the power of the prince can continue).

Visual metaphors are ubiquitous in the ball scene. The dancers, seen from above, seem to make up one, harmonious body, moved by a singular energy. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith observes: “Even the dance is only an enactment on human scale of the eternal gyration of the
stars,” (Nowell-Smith, *Luchino Visconti* 116). This visual, therefore, reminds us of the movement of the stars that is often referred to in the novel. Moreover, unlike in the novel, there are no explicit references to the stars throughout the ball in the film, save for Don Fabrizio’s expression of the desire to have an appointment with the stars (which is adapted from some indirect speech at the end of part VI of the novel, p. 211). These visual metaphors that remind us of the stars, therefore, enrich the text in the same way that Lampedusa’s verbal metaphors do.

The decline of the prince’s world is also expressed using visual metaphors in the ball scene. Don Fabrizio is often moving away from the camera, while the Piedmontese soldiers are often moving towards the camera. This choreography could be suggestive of the passing of the old regime, and the coming of the new.

Thus, the cinematic text offers some images that are comparable to those evoked by Lampedusa’s words. While the metaphors cannot always be reconstructed in the same way because of the essentially different natures of the two media, the shades of meaning of the Lampedusa text have been “translated” by Visconti and incorporated appropriately into the cinematic text.

### 3.3.4.2 Segmentation of the Texts

Another aspect that can be compared in the two texts is the internal divisions of the two. The Lampedusa text contains deliberate, metaliterary separations. The index of the novel reveals that part VI is made up of eight segments defined by Lampedusa as follows:

(Lampedusa 250)
This segmentation is parallel to one that exists in the cinematic text. The film includes a crucial segmentation mechanism that is achieved through the use of music. In the ball scene, there are few moments in which no music is to be heard in the ball scene. There are six different dances played in the scene: a mazurka, a polka, a quadrille, a gallop, and two waltzes. Therefore, the film scene has been reconstructed in such a way as to maintain similar internal rhythms and divisions. These divisions can be broken down, analyzed, and compared at a greater level of detail, as well. For instance, the eight divisions traced by Lampedusa in the novel can be subdivided into eleven narrative segments:

- going to the ball
- the ball
- entrance of Pallavicino and of the Sedara family
- Don Fabrizio's melancholy
- the dance hall
- in the library
- Don Fabrizio and Angelica dance
- the dinner
- conversation with Pallavicino
- the ball dies down

8 One of the waltzes has the distinction of being the only musical pieces not composed by Nino Rota exclusively for the film. The previously-unpublished waltz by Giuseppe Verdi is, significantly, the waltz to which the prince of Salina and Angelica dance. This is meaningful not only because of the special importance that was attributed to Verdi during the Risorgimento, but also because, as I have outlined in Chapter 2, Visconti used Verdi in his depiction and exploration of the time period. The use of this Verdi waltz, therefore creates a resonance at various levels.
There is a similar division in the text, one that is punctuated by music:

- Waltz₁ (Verdi)
- Mazurka
- Waltz₂ (Angelica and Tancredi dance)
- Mazurka
- Unidentified piece (in the library)⁹
- Waltz₁ (Don Fabrizio and Angelica dance)
- Silence (conversation with Pallavicino)
- Polka
- Quadrille
- Waltz₂
- Gallop (the ball subsides)

Notice that the waltzes serve to "punctuate" the text. They create a certain symmetry within the scene. Angelica dances to both pieces, one with Tancredi, one with Salina. This acts as a metaphor within the text. Salina represents the last true Gattopardo, while Tancredi symbolizes the new species. The visual metaphor of the triangle described previously further reinforces this image.

⁹This is the only piece during which no dancing is seen; this emphasizes the importance and the seriousness of the scene in the library.
3.3.4.3 The Duration of the Ball Scene

The length of the ball scene\(^{1}\) contributes much to the process of signification in the film. By lengthening the scene in the way that he does, Visconti is able to translate relevant aspects of the novel in unique and creative ways. For instance, the novel contains various references to time, which make evident that the ball at the Ponteleone palace lasts an entire night: “Erano soltanto le dieci e mezza,” (Lampedusa 192); “erano già le due,” (Lampedusa 202); “si fecero le sei del mattino,” (Lampedusa 209). By making the ball scene so long, Visconti succeeds in rendering the idea that the ball is “interminabile” as Lampedusa describes (222). This is done in very subtle ways, without having to make use of other tools of exposition such as a clock, a character’s announcement of the time, etc.

In addition to communicating the notion of time passing, the unfolding of such a long scene creates a deeper meaning, as well. In the novel the narrator reminds us quite often that Don Fabrizio is tired, and indeed, references to the prince’s state are accompanied by references to time: “Fino a questo momento l’irritazione accumulata gli aveva dato energia; adesso con la distensione sopravvenne la stanchezza: erano di già le due” (Lampedusa 202). The length of the scene helps to convey this feeling of fatigue and weariness. The viewer,

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\(^{1}\)It is quite clear that Visconti took every opportunity to lengthen the scene. There are several moments in which the camera records scenes with no action. For example, at one point, the camera focuses on the dancers, who wait while the musicians tune their instruments. At least ten seconds pass before the action picks up again. While it may be true that these *temps morts* are used partially for “historical” reasons (i.e., to recall the neorealist elements with which Visconti had experimented over the past two decades), in the case of this film, the effect created is one of weariness.
having already been watching the film for over two hours, begins to feel a “literal” sense of tiredness.\textsuperscript{11}

In addition, Salina’s fatigue is not limited to a physical fatigue that can be restored; it is the tiredness felt by someone who is at the end of life. It is therefore a fatigue mixed with melancholy, or, at the very least, with a reflective state.\textsuperscript{12} The evidence of this is in the prince’s remembrances, such as his voiced musings on his old lovers like Eleonora Giardinelli, whom he calls “un cigno su uno stagno fitto di ranocchie” (Lampedusa 198).

In part VII of the novel, the reader discovers that the prince’s life draws to a close. In the film, the ball, which in essence closes the film, acts as a metaphor that preannounces his death. One witnesses the “death” of the ball itself. When the guests leave the Ponteleone palace, the hall is almost empty. The image of a few dancers, who, curiously are dancing the gallop, a very lively and spirited dance, reminds us of the opening shots of the ball, in which countless couples were dancing energetically to the waltz music. The two images are in stark contrast. The very different camera work at the beginning of the ball and at the end of the ball add to the contrast. In the opening shot of the ball, the view is from above looking down, whereas the final shot is at floor level. This visual metaphor works in various ways. It emphasizes the contrast between the energy of the guests at the beginning of the ball and at

\textsuperscript{11}In the performance arts, to have a very lengthy scene towards the end of a piece goes against convention, as viewers typically are more restless towards the end. It could be argued that other artists have used the technique of lengthening the final scene in order to create a sense of weariness in the viewer. Think, for instance, of Eugene O’Neill’s \textit{Long Day’s Journey into Night}, whose four-act structure goes against dramatic convention by having a final act that is the longest of the four in the play.

\textsuperscript{12}Nowell-Smith is right when he uses the term \textit{nostalgia} when he describes the scene. Where he errs, however, is in not seeing that the same element is present in the novel, and that its presence in the film shows Visconti’s desire to convey the same tone that is created in the original text.
the end. The two differing images remind us that the enchantment, the splendour, and the celebration, have all come to an end; and, so, too, has the prince’s life. Of course, at another level, this metaphor also preannounces the death of Salina’s class, the aristocracy, and therefore, in a certain sense, takes the place of part VIII of the novel, in which the reader is witness to the changes that occur in Sicily fifty years after the beginning of the narration. Therefore, the ball constitutes a crucial metaphor within the cinematic text, a metaphor that would not be as effective were it not as developed as it is.

3.3.4.4 The “Untranslatable”

Despite the fact that there are elements of a written text that cannot be “translated” literally, a creative adaptation can include traces of the meaning generated by the original elements. Let us look at the following description of the hall in which the ball takes place:

Nel soffitto gli Dei, reclinì su scanini dorati, guardavano in giù sorridenti e inesorabili come il cielo d’estate. Si credevano eterni: una bomba fabbricata a Pittsburgh, Penn. doveva nel 1943 provar loro il contrario.
(Lampedusa 202)

The irony expressed in the last sentence cannot be translated. However, if we take the metaphoric meaning of the passage, we can find affinities in the cinematic text. At the level of metaphor, the gods alluded to stand for the Sicilian people, who have felt themselves immortal, but who are not aware of the “death” of their civilization that is about to occur with the unification of Italy. In a more restricted sense, the “gods” are the aristocrats of Sicily (as is
stated explicitly by the prince in both versions of the text\textsuperscript{13}). And, as has already been discussed, the metaphorical meaning of the ball includes the death of the nobili Siciliani. The guests at the ball, who are smiling and gay, are not aware of the fact that they have reached the end of their glory days. This metaphor is reinforced by the camera work, as previously discussed. The ball is shot from above in the beginning of the scene and throughout it, but at the end, when the hall is empty, it is shot at floor level. This technique creates the same sort of effect as the written metaphor of the gods falling from the sky, albeit in a much more subtle way.

3.3.4.5 The Notion of Narrativity

In order to draw some conclusions from my analysis, I should now examine briefly the notion of narrativity, and establish whether comparisons may be made between the narrativity of Visconti's \textit{Il Gattopardo} and the Lampedusa text. To define narrativity, I will consider Robert Scholes's work, "Narration and Narrativity in Film and Fiction." In it, Scholes defines narration as "a process of enactment or recounting that is a common feature of a cultural experience" (Scholes 60). Narrative occurs "when this process [i.e., the process of narration] is sufficiently coherent and developed to detach itself from the flux of cultural interchange" (60). Next, Scholes defines the term story, which is "distinguished by certain structural features in presentation which in turn require of the perceiver an active participation that I should like to call 'narrativity'." Scholes defines this narrativity as "the process by which a perceiver actively constructs a story from the fictional data provided by any narrative

\textsuperscript{13}In part IV of the novel, Don Fabrizio recounts a personal anecdote in which he had explained to some English marine officials that the Garibaldini could never have taught good manners to the Sicilians, as he says, "perché siamo degli dei" (Lampedusa 166).
medium,” (60). By narrativity, therefore, I do not intend the construction created by the sender of the message (i.e., the creator of the text), but the process of creation on the part of the receiver of the message. In other words, narrativity is created in the process of reading and viewing, not of narrating.

As I have already discussed, because of their different substances, the process of signification in the reading of the novel is different from that in viewing the film. In the reading of the sentence “Angelica e Tancredi passavano in quel momento davanti a loro, la destra inguantata di lui posata taglio sulla vita di lei, le braccia tese e compenetrate, gli occhi di ciascuno fissi in quelli dell’altro,” (Lampedusa 202), the reader translates the graphical symbols on the page into a mental image, using the categories of “Angelica,” “Tancredi,” and so on, that have been constructed throughout the course of reading. There are, however, some empty categories (for example, the colour of Tancredi’s gloves), the concretization of which “will depend on an interaction between (the sender’s) narration and (the receiver’s) narrativity” (Scholes 66).

In the film, Visconti reconstructs the action described in the above sentence. The process of signification is completely different. There are no empty categories; all of the potentialities have been developed for the staging of the scene. The camera acts as a heuristic instrument (Bordwell, Making Meaning 162-63), filling all of the categories that may have been empty or only partially full in the reading of the novel.14 There is, however, a different “problem” with the film text: the transmitted sign is closely related to a referent, that in turn may be linked to a concept linked to category, or to a series of concepts through a process of which the receiver may or may not be fully aware (Scholes 66). For example, the receiver sees

14 Whether the reader of the film text notices or not, Tancredi is wearing white gloves.
“Angelica” and “Tancredi” dancing, but can superimpose onto this image the fact that in reality, the two dancers are Claudia Cardinale and Alain Delon, actors who are playing the parts of these fictional characters. The referent is assigned to a category “that is fictionally correct but factually false,” (Scholes 66). In a written narration, of course, this process cannot exist.

Given this large gap between a written narrative and a filmed narrative, one could once again ask whether there are techniques for generating meaning within the reader and / or the viewer that can allow a comparison between literature and film. After having analyzed the two versions of Il Gattopardo, it is my contention that indeed, comparable techniques do exist in fiction and film. Using techniques similar to those highlighted here, a film can convey similar themes and construct meaning in a way that is analogous to that in a written text. For instance, using object and colour, movement, sound, and camera work, a director can invoke in the viewer the same reaction that metaphor and imagery can conjure in the reader.

3.4 Conclusion

In a review of Visconti’s version of Il Gattopardo, Pauline Kael writes:

The movie isn’t what we normally call ‘novelistic’ [. . .]; everything comes to us physically. Visconti suggests Don Fabrizio’s thoughts and feelings by the sweep and texture of his life. The fabrics, the medal-laden military uniforms, the dark, heavy furniture, the huge palaces, with their terraces and broad marble staircases, and the arid, harsh landscapes they’re set in — are all made tactile.
(Kael 50)

It is rather ironic that the phrase ‘not novelistic’ be used to describe the film. The lush and tactile world created by Luchino Visconti was made possible in part by the rather similar
world constructed by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa. Filled with objects, colour, music, scents, and texture, the novel provides excellent raw material to be transformed into a visual representation. As previously discussed, there are elements of the novel that can be deemed "cinematic." Undeniably, the novel contains many elements that are "untranslatable," as the vivid descriptions of the external world are almost always accompanied by rich metaphors and images that give the written text its depth and dimension. However, by combining the physical objects with camera work, music, and timing, Visconti creates similar metaphors and images within the cinematic text. And, in this sense, Visconti's work may be termed as "literary." The two texts have more in common than I Malavoglia and La terra trema or the literary and cinematic versions of Senso. In this sense, Visconti's Il Gattopardo can be labelled a blueprint according to the criteria that I have defined.

To conclude, even in cases where there are divergences in form and content, Visconti manages to employ various filmmaking techniques that allow the viewer to keep in mind important themes and motifs of the film; these techniques reconstruct the motifs developed by Lampedusa in the novel. Undeniably, there are deviations from the original text, inspired partially by the restrictions posed by the conventions of the film medium, and partially by Visconti's interest in exploring ideological and political issues that are not present in Lampedusa's novel. However, I can conclude by stating that, at the very least, Visconti's film functions as a masterful and thought-provoking response to Lampedusa's novel.
Conclusion

Visconti tende ad 'usare' il romanzo verghiano quale aggregato di 'materiali': quasi si trattasse, per così dire, di inquadrature e/o di brevi sequenze di un film di attualità, da de-contextualizzare e ri-contextualizzare, mutandone, e talora rovesciandone ampiamente, il senso originario nel proprio racconto. Nella storia del rapporto (viscontiano) fra cinema e letteratura, questo atteggiamento è più vicino alla posizione che Visconti assumerà nei confronti del Boito di Senso, del Testori di Rocco e i suoi fratelli, del Maupassant de Il lavoro – per non dire del D'Annunzio di Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa, e per Cain di Ossezione – che non alla posizione, assai più 'fedele' alla lettera del testo letterario, che il regista adotterà per il Tomasi di Lampedusa de Il Gattopardo, per il Camus de Lo straniero o per il Mann di Morte a Venezia.

(Micciché, V. e il neorealismo 152-3)

In conclusion, the works of Luchino Visconti, a director who influenced and shaped film not only in Italy but in Europe and indeed on a global level, are suitable choices if one wishes to examine the role that literature can play in the production of film. Visconti's works are appropriate not only because of the director's tendency to incorporate literary works into his films. The role that the director himself had within the history of Italian film is also a significant factor in this study. Visconti worked in the cinema between the early 1940s and the mid-1970s, and his influence in those years is indisputable, most notably with respect to the impact that he had on the development of neorealism. This much-studied, much-discussed, almost mythical moment in cinematic history revolutionized the medium of film in Italy, and had a profound impact on literature, drama, and the visual arts, as well. It introduced audiences to a socially aware kind of cinema that had never been seen on the screen before. Curiously, what should have been a "natural" rejection of literature on the part of filmmakers never occurred during neorealism, and in fact, the filmmaker whose works I have discussed
here, Luchino Visconti, successfully employed literature to take the neorealist experiment into a unique direction. It is consequently instructive to examine the role of literature in Visconti’s films by using his post-war films as a starting point, because this period follows one of the more formative experiences in the life of the director (and in the modern history of the country). Visconti himself once pointed out:

Il periodo più interessante della mia vita è quello della Resistenza; quel poco che ho potuto dare al movimento della Resistenza, quello mi pare il periodo migliore.
(Costantini 50)

The portion of Visconti’s filmography that I have selected, therefore, provides a significant look into the history of the Italian national cinema and into an important formative period in the life of Visconti. At the same time, it gives a sense of continuity that has allowed me to examine different methods for adapting literature from the point of view of one individual. The films that I selected for my study, *La terra trema*, *Senso*, and *Il Gattopardo* span a period between 1948 and 1963. These years were historically significant for the director as well as for Italian cinema. For Visconti, this period of time allowed him to experiment with his ideas on neorealism, as well as on history and contemporary society. His artistic sensibilities and his socio-political ideas developed and crystallized, and were also put to the test. The films that he produced were often criticized and attacked from the Right as well as from the Left, from anyone who wished to pigeonhole not only Visconti, but the national cinema, as well. The heated debates surrounding neorealism and its betrayal of the late 1940s and early 1950s, the discussions of whether a film can have the same sweep and effect as a so-called *romanzo storico*, all involved the director directly. Despite criticism and censorship, Visconti continued to make films on his own terms throughout this period, and in
many ways, the films made in these years are a testament to the director’s determination at exploring crucial aesthetic and social issues in contemporary Italy. The parameters of neorealism and of the medium of film, but also the pressing social issues identified by figures influential in Italy at the time such as Antonio Gramsci, George Lukács, etc., are depicted with mastery and conviction. From an analysis of the various ways in which the *Risorgimento* failed to live up to its promise, to an expose of the exploitation of the South, to an investigation of the possible limits of the medium of film and of the well-constructed story, all of these thematic and formal issues are analyzed by Visconti in the three films that I have selected, and within the span of time that the films cover. Impressively enough, all of these issues are analyzed by using literature as the starting point of Visconti’s investigation.

### C.1 Other Areas for Study

I have chosen a very specific perspective for each analysis in this dissertation. I explored how the adaptation of *La terra trema* fit into the context of neorealism. I have questioned the motivation for the debate on *Senso* and the boundaries of neorealism by examining how Visconti’s melodramatic style allowed him to explore crucial issues in the development of Italian history, issues that for critics who had attacked Visconti could only be expressed via a very specific brand of “realist” art. Finally, I have examined how the debates surrounding the issue of literary adaptation and Visconti could potentially be put to rest, by examining some strategies that were used by the director as he adapted a text written by an author whose sensibilities were close to his own. Of course, there are many other approaches that one could use when discussing the topic of the role of literature in Visconti. The one that immediately comes to mind is to employ the notion of *auteur* cinema to analyze the strategies
used by the director in the selection and adaptation of literary texts. As I have indicated indirectly throughout the course of this study, Visconti's interests and point of view are quite specific, and, despite the substantial evolution that the director goes through from the early 1940s to the 1970s, it is fairly evident that there is a degree of consistency in the themes that the director attempts to explore throughout his entire filmography. For example:

Pressoché tutto il cinema di Visconti, da *Ossessione* a *L'innocente*, è intriso dall'idea proustiana che l'amore è autodistruzione. 
(De Giusti 7)

This notion of love as self-destruction (itself taken from the literature of Proust) is only one of the threads that one could follow if one were to examine Visconti's choice and use of literary texts. One could examine the director's fascination with death. From a stylistic point of view, one could also look at the propensity towards tragedy or towards melodrama. The study of Visconti as auteur and his use of literature would certainly be worthwhile and offer much insight into his films.

A possible extension to this type of study would be to see the ways in which cinema, and specifically Visconti's cinema, has influenced and continues to influence literature. A variety of critical perspectives on the influence of film on literature have been expressed over the years and could be useful for this type of analysis. For example, in "A Future for the Novel," Alain Robbe-Grillet laments the stagnation of the genre of the novel, and compares it to the more "realistic" and immediate (and more popular) medium of the cinema. Robbe-Grillet calls for the construction of "a world both more solid and more immediate" (21) within narrative fiction. In *The Nickel was for the Movies. Film in the Novel from Pirandello to Puig*, Gavriel Moses looks at the way in which the invention of cinema has influenced numerous
novelists, all of whom have chosen to represent some aspect of the cinema within their narratives. In a conceptually similar but more semiotically based study, Keith Cohen's *Film and Fiction: The Dynamics of Exchange* takes a look at the influence of the medium of film on what he terms "modern novels" by Gertrude Stein, Jules Romains, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf. Given the debate surrounding Visconti and the *romanzo cinematografico*, it could prove useful to examine the influence of Visconti's work in literature. One wonders, for instance, to what extent the themes, tone, and sensibility of *Senso* could have affected an author such as Tomasi di Lampedusa, whose *Gattopardo* clearly echoes, whether consciously or unconsciously, the work of Visconti. Admittedly, this area of exploration is as yet completely unexplored, and I am putting it forth as a mere hypothesis.

Another potential area for analysis that I have left untouched here is Visconti's later cinema. Perhaps the issue of influence that I explored in Chapter 2 is the most relevant for discussion of the director's later work, for, as much as some continuity can be traced in the films from *Vaghe stelle dell'orsa* to *L'innocente*, from an ideological standpoint, the director seemed to retreat from the outward-looking, socially-committed issues that he covered in the first two decades of his work, and seemed to focus on his own personal interests and influences. The more inward-focused, idiosyncratic kind of cinema that the director produced in his last years perhaps requires an analysis of the *web of influence* that includes direct as well as indirect literary sources from the director's own *encyclopaedia*. The concept of the web of influence already mentioned in Chapter 2 can be seen even in my very brief discussion of Visconti. Interesting connections can be traced, which allow one to see the significance of director's choices more clearly; this type of approach could prove fruitful in a discussion of
the director's later work, because of the fact that there is no strong ideological grounding in these films, and the themes explored are more personal.

Related to the previous point, an analysis of Visconti and melodrama may also prove to be a solid starting point for an analysis of Visconti and literature. I have looked in depth at the way in which *Senso* is melodramatic, and the way that melodrama is conducive to the assembly of an eclectic mix of influences. Given that melodrama may be seen as a compendium of many genres and given the melodramatic nature of Visconti's style, one way to examine the director's oeuvre would be in light of the melodrama. The melodramatic nature of Visconti's films is undeniable. Even works that Visconti created using a relatively stark style can be examined as melodramas. The storm scene in *La terra trema*, in which the Valastro women stand at the edge of the water wondering what will become of the male members of their family, who are trapped at sea, is an appropriate example of Visconti's tendency. The montage evokes strong emotion. We see dramatic shots of the women staring immobile at the tempest-tossed sea, and we see close-ups of their distraught faces (reminiscent of the tableaux described by Peter Brooks in *The Melodramatic Imagination*). The sounds of the storm contribute to the drama. Moreover, when speaking of *La terra trema*, Visconti often spoke about the musical aspect of Verga's novel, which suggests that his approach even when reading a narrative text was to see it in terms of a "musical drama." One must not forget that Visconti was far more prolific as a theatre director, and, more specifically, as an opera director, than he was as a film director, which in and of itself provides one with motivation to examine the role of literature in Visconti using melodrama as the key.
Thus, what I have presented here, is only a starting point for an analysis of the role of literature in the films of Visconti. I have by no means exhausted the topic. What I have attempted to do, has been to initiate a discussion on a topic that could be extended in several directions and/or applied to the entire filmography of the director.

C.2 How Can One Speak about “Adaptation”? 

[... ] sul piano artistico, di fronte alla realtà, regista e scrittore si trovano nella stessa posizione: sul piano tecnico, per quel che riguarda come esprimere quella realtà, non vi può essere punto di contatto. Il romanziere non dispone di simultaneità d’azione e di descrizione, e nella sua tecnica vi sarà sempre un dato convenzionale: il regista, invece, tanto meglio si esprime quanto meglio saprà servirsi della simultaneità di cui tecnicamente dispone. Non per nulla dire ‘romanzo cinematografico’ o ‘film letterario’ equivale a una limitazione, ad un giudizio negativo. (Bo 72)

Given my analyses of the three Visconti texts and given my coverage of the topic of the relationship between literature and film, it would be appropriate to attempt to address the issue of the nature of adaptation before I conclude. Although I have, for the most part, stayed away from dealing with the notions of adaptation and of fidelity to a literary work, my study of Il Gattopardo has hopefully shown that we cannot, and perhaps should not, avoid this issue altogether. What constitutes a literary “adaptation”? Might one say that Il Gattopardo is more of an adaptation than Senso or La terra trema because it follows the original text more closely, because it is more faithful to the Lampedusa text than are Senso and La terra trema to their literary source texts? After all, I did speak of the novel version of Il Gattopardo as a blueprint for Visconti’s film, which may lead one to say that the film follows the novel closely. What makes Il Gattopardo a “translation” is the fact that the source text has the same sensibility as
Visconti's translation of it. This fact constitutes a difference between *Il Gattopardo* and the other two films, which are both based on texts whose points of view have strong affinities with Visconti's own, but that are ultimately written under very different circumstances. However, I must admit that, like many discussions on the faithfulness of an adaptation to the literary text on which it is based, this kind of assertion can be rather subjective, and has limits. One can, using a variety of methods, analyze the influence of literature on film, but the cinematic medium is mature and complex enough that one can gain pleasure from experiencing it without having to compare it to other media. The depth of expression of the cinematic medium allows for the incorporation of a variety of sources that can enrich the cinematic experience, but that need not be analyzed in order for a film to be satisfying. After all, as my discussion of Visconti has hopefully shown, a film that is derived from literary sources has a life of its own, and has an intrinsic value that can be judged and appreciated in its own right. Through an almost magical kind of artistic alchemy, the combination of elements from the original text, the point of view of the director, and the masterful use of the tools of the cinema, camera work, sound, editing, and so on, all combine to create end products that can be enjoyed on their own. Ultimately, as the saying goes, the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts.
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