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## «SE QUESTO MATRIMONIO ... S'HA DA FARE»

### *Gli occhiali d'oro* and the Dynamics of the Encounter Between Fiction and Film <sup>1</sup>

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Via, dunque, giù, giù, tristo fantoccio odioso!  
Annegato, là, come Mattia Pascal! Una volta per uno!  
Luigi Pirandello, *Il fu Mattia Pascal*

Giorgio Bassani's much-cited piece entitled *Il giardino tradito* – a firm *prise de position* against Vittorio De Sica's adaptation of *Il giardino dei Finzi Contini* – has often obfuscated Bassani's other reflections on the practice of cinematic adaptation. Bassani was neither dismissive of cinema as an art form nor fundamentally opposed to the transposition of novels into films. In fact, he displayed a keen and sustained interest in film, and collaborated in various ways with directors such as Mario Soldati, Michelangelo Antonioni, Alessandro Blasetti, Luigi Zampa, and Luchino Visconti <sup>2</sup>. Author and co-author of «a dozen» of screenplays (some with Pier Paolo Pasolini), Bassani also wrote essays on film and film reviews <sup>3</sup>. References to movie houses, actors, and films pepper

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<sup>1</sup> The 'edited' quotation from Manzoni is Bassani's own (1966c, 65).

<sup>2</sup> Bassani wrote and co-wrote numerous screenplays, including: *Le avventure di Mandrin* (1952, directed by Mario Soldati), *Villa Borghese* (1953, directed by Gianni Francolini), *La provinciale* (1953, directed by Mario Soldati), *Il ventaglio* (1954, an episode directed by Mario Soldati in the film *Questa è la vita*), *Casa d'altri* (1954, an episode directed by Alessandro Blasetti in the film *Tempi nostri*), *La mano dello straniero* (1954, directed by Mario Soldati), *La romana* (1954, directed by Luigi Zampa), *La donna del fiume* (1954, directed by Mario Soldati), *Senso* (1954, directed by Luchino Visconti), *Il prigioniero della montagna* (1955, directed by Luis Trenker), and *Teresa Étienne* (1958, directed by Denys de la Patellière). On Bassani's views on the 'subaltern' role of the screenplay writer, see Bassani 1966a, 238.

<sup>3</sup> Bassani 1966a, 236. Bassani dubbed Orson Welles in Pasolini's *La ricotta*.

Bassani's novels and short stories, and underscore his awareness of the increasingly pervasive presence and socio-cultural relevance of cinema in the world he was depicting. Conversely, filmmakers showed interest in Bassani's work, and three of his fictional pieces were adapted to the screen <sup>4</sup>. My reading of Giuliano Montaldo's adaptation of Bassani's short novel *Gli occhiali d'oro* starts from Bassani's own reflections on the translations of novels into films and weighs these reflections against recent discussions on the adaptive practice <sup>5</sup>.

By questioning fidelity-based views of adaptation as the duplication of the original text and its author's intent, these discussions have contributed to freeing film from subjection to a hermeneutics of authority. The fidelity argument, with its assumption that the master text is a source of absolute meaning that is imparted upon a derivative or subaltern form, has been replaced by a notion of adaptation as a process of «transcoding» and reculturalization of diverse intertexts <sup>6</sup>. While it defies the primacy of a single authoritative literary source over its reverential cinematic copies, the latter approach to authorship and adaptation must come to terms with notions of creative identity and ethical commitment. In Bassani's case, especially, the writer's inclusion of a first-person narrator (a persona for the author-survivor as the caring witness and pious guardian of a world that the Nazi-Fascist regime had vowed to obliterate) is important to understand Bassani's engagement with the aesthetic enterprise as a fundamentally *moral* event. Is it possible, then, to think of adaptation in ways that are neither dismissive of Bassani's belief in this vital authorial function nor limited to an interpretation of the director's role as that of a mere producer of (faithful) replicas? Giuliano Montaldo's cinematic adaptation of Bassani's *Gli occhiali d'oro* is an ex-

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<sup>4</sup> The first adaptation from one of Bassani's stories was *La lunga notte del '43* directed by Florestano Vancini in 1960, followed by De Sica's *Il giardino dei Finzi Contini* in 1970, and Giuliano Montaldo's *Gli occhiali d'oro* in 1987.

<sup>5</sup> Bassani published *Gli occhiali d'oro* in 1958. Reprinted in 1960 as part of *Le storie ferraresi*, it was revised for the 1974 edition of *Il romanzo di Ferrara*. A further revision occurred for the 1980 edition of *Il romanzo di Ferrara*. All page references in this essay are to the 1974 edition.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed discussion of how early adaptation studies tended to promote the «intellectual priority and formal superiority of canonical novels» and have regarded cinema as «belated, middlebrow, or culturally inferior», see Naremore 2000, 6; Micciché 1972, 153; Leitch 2007, 2-5; Stam 2000, 54-76. In the ample field of fidelity studies, the defense of a film's need to remain true to the literary original corroborates the normative cultural authority of literature over film. Bassani argued against the «complessi di inferiorità o superiorità che affliggono tanti uomini di cinema nei confronti della letteratura» (1966a, 236-237).

cellent case study to examine how fidelity to the spirit of a precursor text does not imply unimaginative subjection to a principle of authority but rather involves the creation of a plural interpretive community sharing a similar ethos and promoting the same values.

Bassani tackled the practice of adaptation, albeit in an unsystematic manner, in a number of essays that offer a sketch of the ways in which he framed the fiction-film encounter <sup>7</sup>. In an essay devoted to Mario Camerini's *I promessi sposi*, Bassani argued that adaptation is based on a principle of fidelity to the «spirit», more than the «letter», of the precursor text. In Bassani's view, Camerini's film, which emerged from the culturally restricted climate of the Fascist era, had failed to mirror the cosmopolitan, enlightened, and providential «spirit» of Manzoni's novel. Whereas Manzoni was writing a parable that both encompassed and overcame the historical specificity of seventeenth-century Italy, Camerini had merely treated his viewers with a provincial and narrow scenery, limited to the love story of the two protagonists. «Lo spirito che li ha evocati, lo spirito che ne giustificava l'invenzione», Bassani wrote, «quello, purtroppo, è del tutto assente». The «significato più vero e più profondo del libro», he concluded, had been hopelessly lost in translation <sup>8</sup>.

Bassani's concern returns in his essay *Il giardino tradito*, where, besides listing all the contingent problems related to his complicated relationship with the producers of the film *Il giardino dei Finzi Contini*, he revisited the notion of spiritual fidelity to the source text and its ultimate meaning <sup>9</sup>. In this case, De Sica's cinematic betrayal of the

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<sup>7</sup> Bassani expressed concern for what he considered the tendencies of «volgarizzazione» and «deformazione» of revered masterpieces (1966c, 63). He chastised what he called «commercial transcriptions», which, in Italy, he saw as emphasizing the theatrical, sexual, spectacular, and folkloric aspects of narrative. Bassani would rather be open to accept the potential consequences of «impopolarità» implicit in real «arte cinematografica» rather than concede to the vulgarizations of the movie business (1966c, 64).

<sup>8</sup> Bassani 1966b, 60.

<sup>9</sup> In *Il giardino tradito*, Bassani explains that Documento Film purchased the rights to adapt *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* in 1963. Directed by Valerio Zurlini, the film was based on a screenplay by Zurlini and Salvatore Laurani. After the failure of this project, the producers hired Franco Brusati and Tullio Pinelli to work on a viable script. In Bassani's views, these screenwriters merely patched up the original rather than concentrate on complete rewrites. In 1970, Documento hired Vittorio De Sica to film *Il giardino*, and Bassani was also employed as consultant. Bassani, however, was disappointed with Vittorio Bonicelli's script, which, in his view, provided, once again, a mere «lavoro di ricucitura» of the earlier mediocre scripts, rather than a new text. Mindful of Bassani's negative review, Documento hired Bassani to write a new script with Bonicelli's collaboration. After the script was completed, the producers reserved the right to revise it following their own

novel consisted, for Bassani, in the film's failure to separate the narrative's temporal levels: the past of the narrated events and the present of the narrator's *discours* – the present, that is, of memory's act of willful aesthetic resuscitation of the dead. While he generally criticized the way in which De Sica had cast his characters in the film, Bassani reserved his most scathing attack for the film's protagonist, Giorgio. Anonymous narrator in the novel, this character represents the self-consciously powerful figure of the survivor, witness, and artist. Persona of the writer, he is the custodian of a world that history would have otherwise consigned to oblivion. Having lost this creative dimension of memory, the cinematic Giorgio is a «personaggio sbiadito e minore», rather than the affirmation of the «scrittore che ricorda e giudica se stesso da giovane»<sup>10</sup>. De Sica's *Il giardino dei Finzi Contini* (just like Camerini's *I promessi sposi*) lacks the broader allegorical dimension of its literary predecessor. The «spirit» of the text, in Bassani's view, is, therefore, its creative *vital* core: the «I» that, through the act of remembering and writing, resuscitates his people and wins over the forces of silence and death.

Bassani's argument rests on the assumption that a literary work contains an «originary essence» that must be respected in the transition from fiction to film. Bassani sees the adapter as the perceptive decoder of the *mens auctoris* – an ideal reader who shares the author's «particular [...] artistic temperament and preoccupations»<sup>11</sup>. This view risks seeing the director as a mere «replicant», charged with the task of duplicating the sanctioned meaning of a subject matter as its original author had intended it. In the realm of adaptation studies, this notion corresponds to what Robert Stam aptly defined the «chimera» of fidelity, the aspiration, that is, of faithfully transposing a novel into a film and evaluating the film in terms of its closeness to the original. More recently, adaptation scholars have rather suggested that any aesthetic expression has no exclusive mode of existence, but comes into being only as a partner in a cooperative intertextual venture with several other narratives and multiple other interpreters. In this view, the practice of adaptation becomes a complex operation, where the linear transaction between an original (mostly single) authored text and its (ideal or implicit) reader

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consultant's feedback (Ugo Pirro). Failure to consult with Bassani regarding the changes that Pirro made to the script resulted in a text that, according to Bassani, had «betrayed» his novel. Bassani sued the producers and obtained the right to have his name removed from the list of screenwriters for De Sica's *Il giardino dei Finzi Contini*.

<sup>10</sup> Bassani 1984, 319-320.

<sup>11</sup> Sinyard 2000, 147.

leaves space for a multivoiced and kaleidoscopic exchange that includes numerous producers, testers, and transformers of meaning. Rather than seeking an elusive and more or less «extractable» essence, adaptation views the literary text as a space of *heteroglossia*, which can «generate a plethora of possible readings» and can be «reworked by a boundless context. The text feeds on and is fed into an infinitely permutating intertext, which is seen through ever-shifting grids of interpretation»<sup>12</sup>. Mindful of Bakhtin's lesson, Robert Stam writes:

Both novel and film have consistently cannibalized antecedent genres and media. The novel began by orchestrating a polyphonic diversity of materials – court fictions, travel literature, religious allegory, jestbooks, into a new narrative form, repeatedly plundering or annexing neighboring arts, creating new hybrids like poetic novels, dramatic novels, epistolary novels, and so forth. The cinema subsequently brought this cannibalization to its paroxysm. As a rich, sensorially composite language, the cinema as a medium is open to all kinds of literary and pictorial energies and symbolism, to all collective representations, to all ideological currents, to all aesthetic trends, and to the infinite play of influences within cinema, within the other arts, and within culture generally.<sup>13</sup>

The two positions – that of an authorial 'I' who is the loving guarantor of the ultimate 'spirit' of the text and that of the heteroglot self who comes into existence also through the voices of others – are not mutually exclusive. Bassani himself argued against the uniqueness and self-contained unity of the art form, and posed the view that the artistic creation is always the result of a «contaminazione fra l'esperienza e l'estro individuale, da una parte, e la cultura, dall'altra»<sup>14</sup>. All of Bassani's novels

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<sup>12</sup> Stam 2000, 57.

<sup>13</sup> *Ivi*, 6-7.

<sup>14</sup> Intervento sul tema: cinema e letteratura (Bassani 1966a, 236). In this uneven essay, Bassani starts off by defending the shared *narrative* foundation of both arts, and thus implying the possibility of a practice of contamination and hybridization between cinema and literature. In the course of the essay, however, Bassani retreats into the fortress of literature. After having advocated the possibility of a «marriage» between the two arts, he argues this marriage would result in an «abbraccio mortale» (237). Bassani concludes that «tra cinema e letteratura si leva la barriera discriminante rappresentata da due 'mezzi' fondamentalmente diversi (l'autore cinematografico si esprime per mezzo dell'immagine in movimento, lo scrittore per mezzo della parola e dei segni d'interpunzione)» (*ibidem*). Undoubtedly, Bassani echoed a widely shared opinion: one can only think of George Bluestone's facetious assertion that the similarities between fiction and film are comparable to those between ballet and architecture (1957, 5). Bassani's retreat, however, has less to do with the practice of adaptation proper than with Bassani's concerns with what he considers the subaltern task of writing screenplays: «Vuole un regista rivolgere un augurio davvero fraterno a uno scrittore? Sì? E allora lo inviti, invece che a

are tributes to intertextuality and cross-narrative dialogue, and he viewed adaptation itself as part of this cultural «contamination». As Linda Hutcheon points out, the adapter's decoding and recoding of novelistic materials occurs in both culturally and formally specific contexts:

Stories [...] do not consist only of the material means of their transmission (media) or the rules that structure them (genre). Those means and those rules permit and then channel narrative expectations and communicate narrative meaning *to someone in some context* and they are created *by someone* with that intent.<sup>15</sup>

Adaptation implies a conscious act of recontextualization, a journey from one communicative environment to another. But, unlike current adaptation theorists, Bassani was not willing to entirely give up the notion of authorship in the creative journey from novel to film. Multiple, changeable, contradictory, and heteroglot, his authorial 'I' was bound, in his opinion, to carry over to the cinematic space, in a symbiotic merger with the creative self of the film's director. The 'spirit' of the predecessor text coincided, for Bassani, with an inclusive and relational notion of aesthetic selfhood, a notion that, while dialogical and transformative, was not, however, a disposable one. What was at stake for Bassani was not a mere notion of authority and predominance – it was, more deeply, the very notion of Jewish identity.

As Giusi Oddo De Stefanis pointed out, Bassani's *oeuvre* can be seen as a progressive movement toward introspection and self-display, according to the «esigenza sempre più impellente – ammessa dall'autore stesso – di volgere 'il riflettore', come egli dice, anche su di sé»<sup>16</sup>. Significantly, Bassani's transition to a first person narrative occurs in *Gli occhiali d'oro*. In his essay *Laggiù, in fondo al corridoio*, Bassani wrote:

Dopo aver finito di scrivere il terzo capitolo di questa storia [*Gli occhiali d'oro*], che non è più un racconto, ma un romanzo a sé stante [...] [mi resi conto che] al punto in cui mi trovavo, Ferrara, il piccolo, segregato universo da me inventato, non avrebbe più saputo svelarmi nulla di sostanzialmente nuovo. Se volevo che tornasse a dirmi qualcosa, bisognava che riuscisse di includervi anche colui che dopo essersene separato aveva

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collaborare alla stesura delle proprie sceneggiature, a essere più che mai scrittore, a essere il più possibile poeta in proprio, insomma a esprimersi con assoluta e totale pienezza e libertà nella lingua che è solo sua. Le unioni veramente felici e positive non avvengono che nella uguaglianza dei diritti» (1966a, 238).

<sup>15</sup> Hutcheon 2006, 26.

<sup>16</sup> Oddo De Stefanis 1984, 97.

insistito per molti anni a drizzare dentro le rosse mura della patria il teatro della propria letteratura, cioè me stesso.<sup>17</sup>

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that Bassani's use of a first person narrator creates what Bakhtin would call a monological novel. *Gli occhiali d'oro* is a masterful example of a plural narrative self – a self that, while saying 'I', includes multiple voices and records different points of view, often engaging them in the modes of wit, irony, and affectionate participation. Through the act of remembering, the author, who explicitly places himself in a discursive space that is removed chronologically from the time of *histoire*, gives narrative form to his earlier self. Disseminated in the diegetic process of narrative construction, this self is marked by reciprocity, fragmentation, plurality, and becoming. Eminently «intersubjective», the 'I' builds itself in a complex relationship of identification with and separation from its socio-cultural milieu and, especially, from the narrative's other protagonist, Athos Fadigati<sup>18</sup>.

The discursive space of the narrative is set in 1958. The narrator, now 41, remembers and recounts the life of Fadigati, a Venetian physician who, after settling down in Ferrara in 1919, had opened a successful medical practice in the central Via Gorgadello. Fadigati had earned the respect of his townspeople by adhering to their rules of style, discretion, and decorum, only to be shunned and victimized when failing to conceal his homosexuality during a vacation in Riccione, a resort town on the Adriatic coast, in the summer of 1937. Covering approximately 18 years, the novel can be divided into four ample narrative blocks, progressing, as in a slow tracking shot, toward the plot's 'core': the increasingly self-reflexive memory of the relationship between Fadigati and the first-person narrator. In the antefact (chapters 1-3, covering, in summary form, the years from 1919-1936), the narrator introduces Fadigati mainly through the point of view of the Ferraresi. In the 'train sequence' (chapters 4-7), the narrator's memories evoke the relationship between his own peer group – the college students who commute from Ferrara to the University of Bologna – and the older physician. The 'Riccione sequence' (chapters 8-12) documents the fracture between the narrator's gradually more explicit viewpoint and that of the Ferraresi. The conclusion (chapters 13-18) is set in the Fall of 1937, back in Ferrara, and marks the convergence and ultimate separation between two

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<sup>17</sup> Bassani 1974b, 814.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of the notion of the «intersubjective self», see Benjamin 1968.



'solitudes': Fadigati's and the narrator's. The narrator's process of self-formation occurs in a narrative that reflects (and reflects upon) the crisis of the social interactions that should guarantee the positive development of individuals and communities alike. While Fadigati's suicide by drowning (dubbed as an «accident» by the regime's censoring rhetoric) marks the plot's tragic conclusion, the final catharsis consists in the narrator's overcoming the temptation of isolation and self-effacement, as he becomes the witness, guardian, and creative scribe of the fragile stories that his times were determined to erase <sup>19</sup>.

*Gli occhiali d'oro* begins with the narrator recording the collective perspective and mimicking the bourgeois voice of a provincial town as passed on to him by the oral narratives of the town's surviving elders. The narrator displays himself as being both part of that collectivity and separated from it, both fellow citizen and ironic judge of that very citizenry:

Il tempo ha cominciato a diradarli, eppure non si può ancora dire che siano pochi, a Ferrara, quelli che ricordano il dottor Fadigati (Athos Fadigati, sicuro – rievocano –, l'otorinolaringoiatra che aveva studio e casa in via Gorgadello, a due passi da piazza delle Erbe, e che è finito così male, poveruomo, così tragicamente, proprio lui che da giovane, quando venne a stabilirsi nella nostra città dalla natia Venezia, era parso destinato alla più regolare, più tranquilla, e per ciò stesso più invidiabile delle carriere ...). Fu nel '19, subito dopo l'altra guerra. Per ragioni di età, io che scrivo non ho da offrire che una immagine piuttosto vaga e confusa dell'epoca. <sup>20</sup>

As this *incipit* points out, the narrator's voice and perspective are double: his own as well as that of the Ferraresi (climaxing in the ambiguously hybrid *nostra città*). The dominant discourse of the bourgeois collective self is thus both appropriated and fractured, as the narrative voice's ironic undertone undercuts the apparent homogeneity of his own «società per bene»:

Ciò che li persuadeva maggiormente all'indulgenza nei riguardi di Fadigati, e, dopo il primo moto di allarmato sbalordimento, quasi all'ammirazione, era appunto il suo stile. Intendendo, per stile, in primo luogo una cosa: la sua riservatezza, il palese impegno che aveva sempre messo, e continuava tuttavia a mettere, nel dissimulare i suoi gusti, nel non dare scandalo. Si – dicevano –: adesso che il suo segreto non era più un segreto, adesso che tutto era chiaro, si era capito finalmente come comportarsi con lui. Di giorno, alla luce del sole, fargli tanto di cappello; la sera, anche a essere

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<sup>19</sup> On Bassani's choice to structure his narrative according to the conventions of a tragedy by Corneille or Racine, see Bassani 1966a, 237.

<sup>20</sup> Bassani 1974a, 191.



spinti ventre contro ventre dalla calca di via San Romano, mostrare di non conoscerlo. Come Fredric March nel *Dottor Jeckyll*, il dottor Fadigati aveva due vite. Ma chi non ne ha? <sup>21</sup>

Like Fredric March, the actor playing the double role of Jekyll and Hyde in Rouben Mamoulian's adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's novel, Fadigati has a double life. Respected professional in the daytime and gay pedestrian prowler at night, Fadigati embodies the duplicity of the bourgeois norm, a norm that he has internalized to the point of appearing to be its active promoter. Based on a binary ethos (good/evil; day/night; heterosexual/homosexual; acting/being; insider/outsider), the bourgeois order tolerates Fadigati (as all 'others' and 'deviants') only as long as he accepts upholding the power of the norm. Dissimulation is the ability that is required of the other to wear the mask of the same, while underscoring that it is only a mask – that no real wholeness is possible. In a certain sense, Fadigati imposes an antiphrastic rule to his self: the successful professional («medico bonario» and «ricco borghese») of the daytime declaring the very opposite of what the nighttime prowler reveals. In a reversed mirror image, then, the narrator's ironic discourse appropriates Fadigati's doubleness, brings it back to the binary code of the bourgeoisie (the rule of the surface appearance as masking or negating the repressed self) and attacks it, thus actively unmasking and condemning the hypocrisy to which Fadigati instead submitted himself.

In the central part of the novel (the train sequence), the present of the narrator's act of remembering and writing becomes more emphasized. The 'I' of the *discours* (with his many «ricordo» and «vedo») stands against the inclusive 'noi' of the *histoire* – the group of college students who commute on the local train from Ferrara to the University of Bologna: «siamo tutti quanti assieme, una decina» <sup>22</sup>. At the same time, the use of the present tense, rather than the imperfect, creates the opposite effect of putting chronological distance into brackets. Both participant in and detached observer of the narrated events, this fluid narrator moves freely between two temporal levels, crossing back and forth from intra- and extra-diegetic narrative levels, to borrow Gérard Genette's terminology <sup>23</sup>. In this double role, the narrator reconstructs

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<sup>21</sup> *Ivi*, 199.

<sup>22</sup> *Ivi*, 10.

<sup>23</sup> See, also, Oddo De Stefanis' perceptive analysis: «non si può fare a meno di sentire ancora nel Narratore un distaccato osservatore che, mimetizzato fra gli altri, li guarda e li giudica nel loro scambio con Fadigati, l'omosessuale che lentamente si invischia nella

his earlier perceptions of Fadigati's isolation in the train compartment, filling it with omens of political persecution and incarceration: «Per qualche tempo continuò a stare segregato, durante l'intero tragitto, nel vagone di seconda classe. [...] Dietro lo spesso cristallo del suo scompartimento, osservava la gente. [...] Pareva poco meno che un recluso: un confinato di riguardo, in viaggio di trasferimento a Ponza o alle Tremiti per restarci chissà quanto»<sup>24</sup>.

The mobility of the narrative voice contrasts with the confinement of Fadigati, while the interplay of mutual gazes (the narrator observing Fadigati who observes the group of students to which the narrator belongs) creates a subtle and unspoken connection between the two.

In sharp contrast to the poignant affinities so subtly evoked, Bassani introduces the characters of Eraldo Deliliers and his friend Nino Bottecchiari:

Dirò poi di Deliliers che non gli rivolgeva mai la parola, affliggendolo, ogni volta che gli capitava, con trasparenti allusioni, con brutali doppisensi. [...] E lui? Era strano, a vedersi, e anche penoso: più Nino e Deliliers moltiplicavano le sgarberie nei suoi confronti, e più lui si agitava nel vano tentativo di riuscire simpatico. Per una parola buona, uno sguardo di consenso, un sorriso divertito che gli fossero venuti dai due, avrebbe fatto qualsiasi cosa.<sup>25</sup>

In the games of duplication and mirroring marking the text, Deliliers' voice is also double, but his *trasparenti allusioni* unveil their meaning by the very act of masking it. The *double entendre* makes the underlying contempt more biting through the implied reference to a shared code, a communal ethos of inclusion and exclusion, to which Fadigati self-destructively subjects himself. Here, the narrator breaks that code of duplicity with the unequivocal and firm «dirò», which separates his present self from Deliliers' hypocritical innuendos, Fadigati's passive subjection, and his younger self's non-committal inclusion with his peer group.

In the Riccione sequence, devoted to Deliliers' tryst with Fadigati, the narrator's 'I' builds itself against the words of «una delle più autorevoli ispiratrici dell'opinione pubblica cittadina»<sup>26</sup>, Signora Lavezzoli, who chastises Fadigati: «Ma venire a esibirsi proprio a Riccione, dove certo non ignorava come fosse conosciuto; venire a dar spettacolo proprio da quelle parti, mentre in Italia, volendo, se ne trovavano

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rete del loro schermo e viene fatto zimbello» (1984, 102).

<sup>24</sup> Bassani 1974a, 209.

<sup>25</sup> *Ivi*, 218.

<sup>26</sup> *Ivi*, 226.

migliaia di spiagge, nelle quali non c'era pericolo di imbattersi in un ferrese che sia uno!»<sup>27</sup>. Fadigati's perceived infraction is not the fact that he has a younger male lover, but, rather, that he does not conceal the relationship, thus breaking the code of silence that marks the provincial ethos. While 'public opinion' casts Fadigati in the role of the perpetrator («Un uomo della sua condizione, della sua età, non era scusabile»)<sup>28</sup>, the narrator views him as a mere tool for Deliliers' narcissistic act of *épater le bourgeois* – and ultimately, as the victim of another form of self-denial and self-deception. By replacing his respectable gold-rimmed spectacles with a pair of aviator glasses as he is driven along the Adriatic coast in a sporty Alfa Romeo, Fadigati changes his outward persona, yet maintains a role of voyeuristic passivity against Deliliers' overstressed sexual prowess: «Guidava sempre Deliliers. Biondo, abbronzato, bellissimo nelle sue magliette aderenti [...] evidentemente era a lui, al suo esclusivo capriccio che la macchina ubbidiva. [...] Lui si limitava a farsi scarrozzare su e giù, costretto nel sedile a fianco del compagno»<sup>29</sup>. The narrator's homoerotic fascination with Deliliers' 'Aryan' looks, and the sense of guilt it provokes, results in his condemnation of Deliliers' «cattiveria» towards a man whom the narrator sees as deprived of freedom and agency, as emphasized by the untypical use of the verb «costretto» to describe Fadigati's placement in the Alfa Romeo's passenger seat. In turn, the narrator's feelings of both rancor and absolution toward Fadigati («Fadigati mi dispiaceva, senza dubbio» and «Fadigati non aveva colpa»)<sup>30</sup> mirror his own unresolved and unspoken emotions towards Deliliers and the perceived danger these emotions represent: in this case, as played out by Fadigati, the attachment of the slave to his master<sup>31</sup>. Disseminated among these characters, the narrator's youthful 'self' is neither independent nor whole but reflective of contrasting images of a selfhood caught between *être* and *paraître*, reality and illusion, desire and repression, longing and denial, autonomy and dependence.

The transition to the last section of the novel occurs with the narrator's trip to the Mura degli Angeli:

Finii, verso sera, sulla Mura degli Angeli [...] e in breve [...] fui all'altezza del cimitero israelitico.

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<sup>27</sup> *Ivi*, 227.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>29</sup> *Ivi*, 225.

<sup>30</sup> *Ivi*, 227.

<sup>31</sup> See Masochism and Sadism in Girard 1965, 176-192.

Guardavo al campo sottostante, in cui erano sepolti i nostri morti. [...] Mi sentii d'un tratto penetrare da una gran dolcezza, da una pace e da una gratitudine tenerissime. Il sole al tramonto, forando una scura coltre di nuvole, bassa sull'orizzonte, illuminava vivamente ogni cosa: il cimitero ebraico ai miei piedi, l'abside e il campanile della chiesa di San Cristoforo poco più in là. E sullo sfondo, alte sopra la bruna distesa dell'abitato, le lontane moli del castello Estense e del duomo. Mi era bastato ritrovare immutato il volto materno della mia città, riaverlo, ancora una volta, tutto per me, perché quell'atroce senso di esclusione che mi aveva tormentato nei giorni scorsi, cadesse di colpo. [...] L'illusione tuttavia durò poco, almeno per me.<sup>32</sup>

From this elevated position, the narrator's gaze pans over the architectural markers signaling the coexistence of Jews and Gentiles in the bosom of a nurturing Renaissance town. But the monumental time emerging from the narrator's feeling of ancestral wholeness proves to be a pious construct at best. Ferrara is as duplicitous as its inhabitants are, and the historic semiotics of communal belonging hides a parallel script of separation and marginalization: «mi sentivo tagliato fuori, irrimediabilmente un intruso»<sup>33</sup>.

Just as social pressure forces Fadigati to live in a state of division, inhabiting two separate selves, *à la* Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, without promise of synthesis and fullness, the narrator finds that his identity as Italian *and* Jew is being torn apart by the impending promulgation of the race laws: «Che cosa dovrei fare», he asks Fadigati, «Accettare di essere quello che sono? O meglio: adattarmi ad essere quello che gli altri vogliono che io sia?»<sup>34</sup>. What others want him to be is «un ebreo e soltanto un ebreo»<sup>35</sup>. In a tragic refutation of the myth of the autonomous self, the narrator denounces the fact that others control and construct his own individuality. Essentialized by adversarial definitions of identity, the narrator not only realizes that his self is being shaped by the ideology of the regime, but, more devastatingly, that the effortless cohabitation of «Italian» and «Jew», so foundational for his social sense of self, was, at best, tolerated as a duplicitous fiction. Now, it is denounced as an impossibility in terms. In this sense, his experience parallels that of Fadigati who is, simultaneously, and impossibly, a 'borghese' and a 'homosexual'. Once the part of the self that has been concealed through either repression or marginalization (in the space

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<sup>32</sup> Bassani 19741a, 251-252.

<sup>33</sup> *Ivi*, 255.

<sup>34</sup> *Ivi*, 256.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*.

of the night or within the walls of the ghetto) is forced into the open, it becomes the victim's sole defining element: «un ebreo e soltanto un ebreo». In Bassani's political allegory, therefore, the Aryan-looking Deliliers and the Nazi-Fascist regime have the same function (in Proppian terms): that of breaking apart the fiction of 'bourgeois belonging', but not in view of a more open and inclusive form of social participation. On the contrary, they sever the self from its complex socio-cultural, sexual, and ethnic identity, blocking it within narrow racist and homophobic parameters.

This allegory of selfhood finds its meaning in intertextual terms, as Fadigati becomes the mirror image of two literary figures invoked in the narrative: Sophocles' Philoctetes and Beatrice, the protagonist of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Rappaccini's Daughter* (1844)<sup>36</sup>. The Greek hero and the maiden from Padua share peculiar traits: both are isolated from their communities and are infected with poison. Abandoned by his mates on the island of Lemnos, Philoctetes suffers from a wound caused by snakebite, and his pain is so unbearable that he begs to have his rotting foot cut off. Beatrice, as innocently beautiful as she is deadly, is confined to a locked garden lush with poisonous plants. Her father, the scientist Dr. Rappaccini, has raised her in utter isolation to share the venomous essence of his strange botanical creations until Giovanni, a young student from Naples, falls in love with her. Giovanni soon finds out that he has become poisonous too and, after accusing Beatrice of corrupting him, he offers her an antidote, which, rather than destroying the poison inside, kills her outright.

In Hawthorne's psychosexual allegory, Beatrice dies because of Giovanni's inability to accept her complex nature, her mixed human potential. In his perceptive reading of *Rappaccini's Daughter*, Frederick Crews argues that the poison attributed to Beatrice represents a projection of Giovanni's own sexual fears and obsessions<sup>37</sup>. Just like Fadigati's, Beatrice's sexuality is *constructed* as evil. Seen as «morally corrupt» (poisonous), she is believed to spread her venom to those who are exposed to her, while Giovanni takes on the role of absolute moral judge when, deciding on a single «truth' for her»<sup>38</sup>, he exclaims: «Accursed one!»

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<sup>36</sup> The epigraph that opens *Gli occhiali d'oro* is a citation from Sophocles' *Philoctetes*. Fadigati cites the plot of *Rappaccini's Daughter* in a conversation with the group of students as they are commuting to Bologna, only to be interrupted by Deliliers' sarcastic sexual innuendos (Bassani 1974a, 215-216).

<sup>37</sup> Crews 1966, 119.

<sup>38</sup> Pahl 1989, 75.

with «*venomous* scorn and anger»<sup>39</sup>. Transposed into Bassani's text, Hawthorne's carefully crafted game of mirror images creates an unspoken analogy between Beatrice, Fadigati, and the narrator himself. The implicit subtext evokes the long history, so carefully traced in René Girard's *The Scapegoat*, where anti-Semitic readers *interpreted* the Jews as harbingers and disseminators of poisons and plagues. As a whole, Bassani's intertextual clues draw attention to the ideological underpinnings of interpretation – the perspectives by which individuals and communities impart meanings to people and situations while arguing that these meanings are merely found in, precisely, these very people and situations. The analogy between Beatrice, Fadigati, and the narrator is that they are placed within the same hermeneutical framework, and subjected to the same scapegoating mechanism: they are presented as «exceeding the norm» in order to be «persuaded to submit to control and confinement»<sup>40</sup>.

The way these characters deal with this hermeneutical violence is, however, substantially different. Beatrice reacts against Giovanni's violence and asserts her perspective: «Farewell, Giovanni! Thy words of hatred are like lead within my heart [...]. Oh, was there not, from the first, more poison in thy nature than in mine?»<sup>41</sup>. Fadigati, instead, fully internalizes the victimization process, making of others' interpretations his inner truth:

Dopo ciò che è accaduto l'estate scorsa, non mi riesce più di tollerarmi. Non posso più; non debbo. Ci crede, se le dico che certe volte non sopporto di farmi la barba davanti allo specchio? Potessi almeno vestirmi in un altro modo! Ma mi vede, lei senza questo cappello... questo pastrano... questi occhiali da tipo per bene? E d'altra parte, così, mi sento a tal punto ridicolo, grottesco, assurdo! Eh no, *inde redire negant*, è proprio il caso di dirlo! Non c'è più niente da fare, per me, senta!<sup>42</sup>

Unlike Beatrice, Fadigati has convinced himself that his trajectory of self-definition moves from the personal to the social, from the interior being to the outer shell. If he considers his bourgeois looks («cappello», «pastrano», and «occhiali da tipo per bene») as a grotesque and absurd masquerade, his inner self, which he identifies with his sexual orientation, is something that he abhors. As the quintessential victim, Fadigati has internalized the socially imposed sense of blame to the point of self-

<sup>39</sup> Hawthorne 1937, 1068, emphasis added.

<sup>40</sup> Baym 1973, 97. See also Schneider 1986, 91-96.

<sup>41</sup> Hawthorne 1937, 1065.

<sup>42</sup> Bassani 1974a, 264.

loathing and utter alienation. Having shown the 'excess' that should have remained concealed, Fadigati is reduced to a pariah and condemned to social death. In a sense, the citation that opens the novel, Philoctetes' pained entreaty to cut off his poisoned foot, already contains the end of Fadigati's narrative. The self cannot be divided lest diminution and death, as Fadigati – the quintessential victim – tragically knows when he chooses to commit suicide by drowning himself in the river Po.

The point of closer contact between Fadigati and the narrator is represented by their mutual solitudes<sup>43</sup>. But, unlike Fadigati with Delilieri, the narrator does not «turn eagerly to those who show, by their contempt for him, real or apparent, that they do not belong, like him, to the race of the accursed»<sup>44</sup>. By refusing this type of barter, the narrator severs himself from the pact that still ties his father with the Gentile community: «Ero disperato, assolutamente disperato. [...] La gioia di mio padre – pensavo – era quella del bambino cacciato fuori di classe, il quale dal corridoio deserto dove fu esiliato a espiare una colpa non commessa, d'un tratto, contro ogni aspettativa, si veda riaccolto in aula tra i cari compagni»<sup>45</sup>. Though he sees himself as the victim of an injustice, the narrator's father falls into the bond of submission and reverence. The narrator, instead, replaces his father's compliance with his own «intense... *hatred*»<sup>46</sup> only to succumb to the sense of shame that such hatred causes him: «*Goi, goim*: che vergogna, che umiliazione, che ribrezzo, a esprimermi così! Eppure ci riuscivo già – mi dicevo –: come un qualsiasi ebreo dell'Europa orientale che non fosse mai vissuto fuori dal ghetto»<sup>47</sup>.

Bassani's perceptive analysis of the difficult negotiations of a young man's attempts to build his social sense of self in 1937, recalls Hannah Arendt's readings of the Jewish condition in *We Refugees* (1943) and *The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition* (1944). The shamed temptation to retreat into narrow parochialism and sectarianism that the narrator demonstrates in a moment of crisis reflects Arendt's own meditations on the dangers of seeing Jewish history as separate rather than tied to that of all other nations<sup>48</sup>. Bassani juxtaposes what Arendt called the

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<sup>43</sup> «Il senso di solitudine, che mi aveva sempre accompagnato in quei due ultimi mesi, diventava [...] ancora più atroce: totale e definitivo» (*Ivi*, 273).

<sup>44</sup> Girard 1965, 178.

<sup>45</sup> Bassani 1974a, 273.

<sup>46</sup> Girard 1986, 10.

<sup>47</sup> Bassani 1974a, 256.

<sup>48</sup> Arendt 1978b, 66.



«narrowness of caste spirit» to the attitude of the narrator's father, a prototype of what Arendt defined as the «social parvenu»<sup>49</sup>. Social parvenus are the Jews who, with the «hopeless sadness of the assimilationists», are willing to become «loyal Hottentots, only to hide the fact that [they are] Jews»<sup>50</sup>. In the process, the parvenus become tragically blind to «how ambiguous [is] the freedom which emancipation has ensured, and how treacherous the promise of equality which assimilation has held out»<sup>51</sup>. Against the type of the parvenu, Arendt famously placed that of the «pariah», the outcast who rejects society's insidious promises and «the tender mercies of assimilationist propagandists»<sup>52</sup>. By doing so, the pariah runs the risk of creating a world of «nature and art» in which he thinks he «might dwell unmolested» from «social or political assault»<sup>53</sup>. In *Gli occhiali d'oro*, Bassani sketches this type in a brief aside regarding the Finzi-Continis, with their «'tipico' gusto di starsene segregati in una grande casa nobiliare»<sup>54</sup>.

The narrator's identity-building process occurs *ex negativo*, here, as he experiments with and/or evaluates a series of identity-types that prove to be, in one way or another, unsatisfactory. The narrator of *Gli occhiali d'oro* shares Arendt's belief that it was no longer possible for a Jew to be either a parvenu – foolishly attempting to «wear masks», striving to blend in and become «indistinguishable» – or a pariah – «calmly enjoying the freedom and untouchability of outcasts»<sup>55</sup>. Arendt traced a third course, that of Kafka's «man of good will», as exemplified by the protagonist of *The Castle* – the man who forgoes naive claims to absolute freedom and inviolability and «modestly contents himself to lead a simple, decent life»<sup>56</sup>. With Arendt, Bassani was aware that this third course was simply impossible in contemporary society. «Charged continually with being superfluous, 'unwanted and in everyone's way,'» the Jew-stranger in the Castle (like Fadigati in *Gli occhiali d'oro*) is driven to isolation and death<sup>57</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>50</sup> *Ivi*, 63.

<sup>51</sup> Arendt 1978a, 68.

<sup>52</sup> *Ivi*, 67.

<sup>53</sup> *Ivi*, 83.

<sup>54</sup> Bassani 1974a, 257. See also the narrator's portrayal of his father in the enclosed space of his living room: «Separato, là, chiuso, protetto. Come dentro a un bozzolo luminoso. Dormiva, avvolto nella sua mantella, col viso ingenuo offerto alla luce [...]» (*ivi*, 274).

<sup>55</sup> Arendt 1978a, 90.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*.

Like Kafka and Arendt, Bassani is aware that isolation festers on the poison of forgetfulness – the «exhaustion» of a people's shared memories: «We were told to forget; and we forgot quicker than anybody ever could imagine»<sup>58</sup>. For the narrator of *Gli occhiali d'oro*, recapturing the past means acknowledging the complex workings of identity building in a relational framework. The act of remembrance and the practice of writing, then, acquire a vital *self-reflexive* function. The journey into the past reveals the tragic fallacy of the belief in the absolute autonomy and unity of the self, as well as the dangers implicit in strategies of identity building based on various forms of self-deception. The narrator's 'I' acquires a sober wisdom, as he learns to recognize and thus, at least in part, overcome the crushing mechanisms of power, subjection, and «exhaustion» that, in their most radical and extreme embodiments, nurtured the deadly ideologies of Nazi-Fascist Europe.

Giuliano Montaldo's cinematic adaptation of *Gli occhiali d'oro* begins with the novel's ending, at Pontelagoscuro, as we see a small row boat transporting Fadigati's body ashore. The rest of the film functions as an extensive *analepsis* – a flashback that inexorably leads us towards this tragic conclusion. By recuperating Bassani's hermeneutics of memory in a medium-specific context, Montaldo underscores the fact that his film is, in a sense, a recollection in the nth degree – his own creative remembering of Bassani's half-fictional and half-historical memories of the events of 1937, as presented through the filter of a first person narrator. The radical switch of ending into beginning underscores Montaldo's creative engagement with Bassani's narrative materials, while infusing the cinematic plot with a sense of predestination. From the beginning, we know that Fadigati will die – his fate is, therefore, a *fait accompli*. In the film, the emphasis is not on the plot's tragic *dénouement*, but on Montaldo's engagement with the subjective filters through which interpretation occurs. Like Bassani, Montaldo works as a ventriloquist of sorts, focusing on multiple voices and intersecting perspectives that construct the analysis of what caused Fadigati's death, why it occurred, and how its significance exceeds the story of a single individual.

The theme of filtered perspective emerges from the film's opening sequence, which consists of a self-consciously slow camera movement, climaxing in a close-up of what turns out to be a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, as they are washed ashore by the sluggish current of the river

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<sup>58</sup> Arendt 1978b, 56.

Po. At first, in the desolation of the natural scenery, the glasses do not represent Fadigati's well-tailored façade of respectability and wealth. The camera work and the object in close-up rather underscore the presence of the various lenses that make the mechanism of interpretation possible. They also mark the transition from the 'I' of the novel to the eye/I of the director, with the intersection of subject positions that allows for the construction of meaning in Montaldo's cinematic adaptation. In a subtle homage to Bassani's cultured intertextual dialogues, Montaldo plays out an original hermeneutical encounter here: not with Hawthorne or Sophocles, however, but with Luigi Pirandello. Montaldo frames Fadigati's *death by water* in light of the plot of *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, and in connection with the cinematic versions by Marcel l'Herbier, Pierre Chenal and Mario Monicelli <sup>59</sup>. The analogy between Fadigati and Mattia Pascal highlights the self's duality, and the sense of *estraneità* of the exterior being from its inner core: «rassetandomi gli occhiali sul naso, provavo una strana impressione: mi pareva quasi di non essere più io, di non toccare me stesso» <sup>60</sup>. It also refers to the notion that self-hood is a social construct, and, self-consciously, that 'life stories' are, also, 'storied selves', that is, representations of *narrative identities*, built (and rebuilt) according to the conventions of specific media.

Contrary to the cliché that, in the Italian language, often refers to adaptation in terms of *riduzione*, Montaldo enriches Bassani's novel with a number of additions that are not part of the precursor text, but that create a broader continuity with Bassani's *oeuvre*. Montaldo substitutes for the narrative 'I' of the novel the character of Davide Lattes (Rupert Everett) and builds the film's plot on the intersections of two relationships: that of Davide with Eleonora Treves (Valeria Golino) and that of Fadigati (Philippe Noiret) with Eraldo Delilieri (Nicola Farron). Delilieri's betrayal of Fadigati mirrors Nora's betrayal of Davide, as she chooses to move to France and convert to Catholicism. Nora's mixture of love and fear, sincerity of emotion and self-preservation, authenticity and calculation, reflects the contradictions in Delilieri's character. Montaldo enriches the figure of Delilieri by developing references to his socio-economic background that are absent from the precursor text. Reminiscent of Malnate in *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini*, Delilieri is not

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<sup>59</sup> Marcel l'Herbier's *Feu Mathias Pascal* was released in 1929. Pirandello's novel has also been adapted as *L'Homme de nulle part* by Pierre Chenal (1937) and *Le due vite di Mattia Pascal* by Mario Monicelli, starring Marcello Mastroianni (1985).

<sup>60</sup> Pirandello 1988, 101.



A mirror image of Mattia Pascal, Fadigati contemplates death by water.



Mirror games: Deliliers and Fadigati.

a member of the high middle class of Ferrara, but, unlike Malnate, he has no political conviction of his own. His character is fluid, as he inhabits different personas and moves freely across social classes, sexual orientations, and political affiliations. Unlike Fadigati, his youth and good looks grant him the right to play with multiple identities in the superficial society represented by Signora Lavezzoli (Stefania Sandrelli). Though Deliliers' actions may develop from sentiments of exclusion, emotional need, and desire to live well (*vivere bene*), his hypocrisy and

cynicism become all too apparent when from betrayed he turns into a betrayer, and he abandons Fadigati after publicly humiliating him and stealing his belongings. In this sense, Delilieri is a darker mirror image of Nora, as his rejection of Fadigati is not prompted by the all too real fears of persecution and death that had inspired Nora's abandonment of Davide. By underscoring Delilieri's duplicity and betrayal, Montaldo evokes a sinister similarity with the Ferrarese Gentile community, suggesting that it may have displayed attitudes of marginalization of and disloyalty toward the city's Jewish population.

The rich and dynamic representation of the social environment in the cinematic rendition of *Gli occhiali d'oro* replaces the subjective development of the narrating 'I' in Bassani's novel. Davide Lattes' function in Montaldo's film is that of a focalizer for the evolution of the other characters, namely, Nora, Delilieri, and Fadigati. In his commitment to Nora, loyalty to his Jewish roots, friendship with Fadigati, and political acumen and foresight, Davide is the moral center of the film. A student at the *facoltà di lettere* of the University of Bologna, Davide is a persona of Bassani himself («he became a writer famous all over the world» reads the caption at the end of the film). Writing and reading, in fact, constitute a recurring theme in Montaldo's *Gli occhiali d'oro*. Nora scolds Davide for not writing to her while she was in France, and Fadigati interrupts Davide as he is attempting (and failing) to write a love letter to Nora. Fadigati himself tries to write a letter to Delilieri and sadly defines his effort as «un manoscritto in una bottiglia». Remembering this encounter at film's end, Fadigati tells Davide: «quella sera ... ho scritto per due ore ma non era proprio una lettera, era quasi un testamento. Il testamento di uno che non ha nessuna intenzione di morire e che gli altri possono a malapena sopportare da vivo».

All these examples emphasize communicative efforts that fail to reach their targets, and types of writing that remain sterile and self-enclosed. However, while Fadigati dies a victim of the isolation to which he has been subjected, Davide does not remain a writer without an audience. Montaldo introduces a scene where Davide delivers some library books to Professor Perugia, the Jewish scholar who has lost his post at the University of Bologna, and now teaches evening classes in the 'ghetto' of Ferrara. When the professor asks him to be a guest teacher, Davide addresses the class by remembering and paraphrasing the words with which Petrarch praised the art of writing and the consolation of literature in times of suffering, violence, and strife in a famous letter to Boccaccio in his *Senilium rerum libri* (XVII.2). Working from memory, Davide recites:

Perché leggere. Perché scrivere. Una volta un grande poeta scrisse una lettera a un grande scrittore. Il poeta si chiamava Francesco Petrarca e lo scrittore Giovanni Boccaccio. Adesso io non ricordo esattamente le parole di quella lettera ma più o meno diceva: «Non c'è cosa più leggera della penna e non ci sono cose più belle delle parole». Uno scrive parole e dopo mille anni ci saranno persone che continueranno a leggerle e ad amarle. Oggi è tempo di persecuzioni, di violenza, di guerra, ma quando io leggo una lirica di Petrarca io sento che è una celebrazione della vita. [...] Le ultime parole della sua lettera le ricordo molto bene: «Poiché devo morire spero che la morte possa trovarmi intento a leggere e a scrivere.»

Montaldo's reference to Davide's translation into Italian of Petrarch's words to Boccaccio (originally in Latin) underscores the ties between writing, memory, and life itself with which an ideal intellectual community (Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Bassani after them), defied all ideologies of violence and death. The spiritual brotherhood so movingly evoked by Davide's extemporaneous lecture has wider implications, too. The classroom context emphasizes the practice of interpretation and education: «spieghi a questi studenti», the professor tells him, «cosa vuol dire scrivere, insegnare». Davide's epistolary reference involves the cluster of letters that include Petrarch's epistle on his Latin translation of the Griselda tale in the *Decameron*. In this letter, Petrarch told his friend and disciple that he had not neglected «that saying of Horace in his *Art of Poetry*, 'You will not try to render word for word,/You trusty dragoman'». Petrarch added: «I have told your story in my own words, or rather adding or changing a few words at some points in the narrative because I believed that you not only would allow it to be done, but would approve it»<sup>61</sup>.

Montaldo's evocation of the figure of the writer-scholar (Davide, a persona for Bassani, who freely quotes Petrarch from memory) is also a representation of the translator-as-interpreter. The often-used analogy between translation and adaptation is a useful tool if the goal of translation is intended as not the achievement of an absolute «likeness to the original» but, rather, as «a transformation and renewal» by which the «original undergoes a change»<sup>62</sup>. Both adaptations and translations can alter the so-called original by means of what in the context of Montaldo's adaptation of Bassani, can be called «principled mistranslations». Montaldo alters the original script in significant ways. At the same time,

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<sup>61</sup> Petrarca 2005, 656.

<sup>62</sup> Benjamin 1968, 73. «All translation», writes Theo Hermans, «implies a degree of manipulation of the source text for a certain purpose» (1985, 11). More generally on adaptation as translation, see Stam 2000, 62-64, and, especially, Cattrysse 1992, 53-70.



he adheres to, and supports, the ethos of the precursor text – its crucial commitment to an aesthetics of witnessing, understanding, remembering, and re-counting stories of adversity and resilience (one should recall, here, that the topic of the story of the patient Griselda includes precisely these two themes).

*Gli occhiali d'oro* reframes the notion of Jewish identity (and the process of identity building in general) in a relational way as something specific and changeable, historically grounded and depending upon the standards and constraints of social interaction. Novel and film tackle the problem of the construction and preservation of selfhood in a society that «has discovered discrimination as the great social weapon by which one can kill men without bloodshed»<sup>63</sup>. As they produced sober reminders that «the comity of European peoples went to pieces when, and because, it allowed its weakest members to be excluded and persecuted»<sup>64</sup>, Bassani and Montaldo also created discursive spaces rich with intertextual and intermedial encounters. By countering the ideologies of isolation and exhaustion with their intertextual interconnectedness, these discursive spaces included Jewish and Gentile voices in what Arendt called «the general spiritual life of the Western world»<sup>65</sup>. In this sense, Montaldo also demonstrated his understanding of Bassani's ideas about the adaptive practice. The film *Gli occhiali d'oro* shares the *spirit* of the precursor text, but not in an essentialist, normative, and derivative manner. As the precursor text had already inscribed its narrative with a notion of authorial agency that was eminently dialogical, relational, and polyphonic, Montaldo found a measure of originality by enriching and furthering these dialogues with novel voices and enduring memories.

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<sup>63</sup> Arendt 1978a, 65.

<sup>64</sup> *Ivi*, 66.

<sup>65</sup> *Ivi*, 68.



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