

UNSUTURABLE REALITIES: SPACE AND SUBJECTIVITY IN
THE SPIDER'S STRATAGEM AND TOBY DAMMIT

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INTRODUCTION

Regarding the adaptation of written narrative into cinematic form, the classic measure of loyalty to a film's source text has given way to a more complex judgment that takes into account not only a director's fidelity to the original work, but the creative value of the director's product in its own right. According to the vision of film critic André Bazin, an adapted work must not simply be judged in light of its source text, but should rather be placed on a spectrum between faithfulness and creativity. Describing this very spectrum as an approach to the study of adapted novels in particular, he explains that the

dialectic between fidelity and creation is reducible ... to a dialectic between the cinema and literature. There is no question here of a translation, no matter how faithful or intelligent. Still less it is a question of free inspiration with the intention of making a duplicate. It is a question of building a secondary work with the novel as foundation. In no sense is the film 'comparable' to the novel or 'worthy' of it. It is a new aesthetic creation, the novel so to speak multiplied by the cinema. (142)

The relationship between novel and film proposed here by Bazin clearly emphasizes the independent character of the secondary, cinematic text, encouraging critics to use a more just system of evaluation and granting directors a great deal of freedom both as interpreters of the stories of others and as creators of their own filmic narratives. And if we accept this approach with respect to novels adapted to the screen, we must also extend it to include the adaptation of short stories, whose condensation of themes and technical constraints particularly invite directors to set literal loyalty aside for the sake of individual creativity, as so many feature-length films find their way out of the shortest of stories. Such is the case of two films that reflect the unique tendencies of their directors as much as the structures, themes, and style of the short stories from which they were

adapted: Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Spider's Stratagem* (1970), based on Jorge Luis Borges' "Tema del traidor y del héroe" (1944), and Federico Fellini's *Toby Dammit* (1968), inspired by Edgar Allan Poe's "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" (1841).

Both of these films, each one an episode in the life of a relatively young male protagonist, touch upon such themes as artistic creation, the interpretation of art, history, and reality itself through undeniably metacinematic devices. While introducing us to Athos and Toby, Bertolucci and Fellini also address our role as spectators, forcing us to abandon rather than associate ourselves with a protagonist, to invent rather than observe key moments in the plot, to untangle rather than simply receive complex sequences and perspectives, and to recognize rather than ignore the cinematic devices implemented to tell their stories. It should not surprise us, then, that the written stories upon which these films are based reflect such themes as literary, historical, and ontological interpretation, that they require an active and imaginative reader, or that they expose the creative process through a self-reflexive treatment of literary devices. The active reader of Borges and Poe essentially finds his counterpart in the alert, observant spectator of *The Spider's Stratagem* and *Toby Dammit*, but, as with any aspect of cinematic adaptation, the process by which this shift occurs, as Bazin insists, is not one of simple translation. Considering these films along the lines of Bazin's dialectic between fidelity and creation—acknowledging each work's literary foundations and its original contributions, recognizing the shift from written to cinematic narrative without reducing it to translation, and identifying the ways in which the stories' elements are expanded and multiplied on the screen—this essay will examine the concepts of space and subjectivity both in the onscreen realities constructed by Bertolucci and Fellini and in the act of reception experienced by the viewers of these films. From the physical spaces and structures first conveyed in the stories of Borges and Poe and later made visual through the concrete and stylistic representations of Bertolucci and Fellini, to the discursive spaces of literary and cinematic characters, subjects through whose eyes we may or may not see a

fictional world unfold, to the interpretive spaces offering subjectivity to the active reader of a story and the active spectator of a film, we will address several manifestations of space and subjectivity within the four works as we observe the common and disparate features between them.

Additionally, while this study is certainly informed by the notions of adaptation as expressed by Bazin, the theoretical approach with which it more directly engages is the area of suture theory. A branch of psychoanalytical film theory based on the mechanisms of reception, this set of theories first proposed in the 1960s basically accounts for the process by which a spectator connects, or “sutures,” the visual information presented by a film with the perspective of a character onscreen, taking the unsettling unknown and tying it to a familiar subjectivity. As we will observe in the chapters that follow, this approach sheds light on the technical and stylistic choices of both Bertolucci and Fellini, though it figures more prominently in *The Spider’s Stratagem* than it does in *Toby Dammit*. For in the case of the former, Bertolucci’s deliberate failure of suture pervades his film and complicates the reading of his entire work, while in the case of the latter there are only two key moments in which similarly unsutured scenes prevent the spectators from assigning a known perspective to the images that Fellini presents. And while suture theory is primarily restricted to addressing the experiences of cinematic reception, as it is within the context of this study as well, it should be noted that its relation to the processes of literary reception will also be highlighted, demonstrating in our two adaptations the ways in which each director preserves certain readerly structures as he brings them to the screen, heightening the effects of narrative gaps and omissions as he transforms them into unsutured gaps in the eye of the viewer.

Starting with Bertolucci’s *The Spider’s Stratagem* in Chapter I, we will find that from three brief but crucial bits of information in Borges’ “Theme of the Traitor and the Hero,” Bertolucci creates both concrete and abstract representations of a series of spaces that fall into the categories of circular labyrinths, spaces of remembrance and devotion, and the space of the theater. The shots

that convey these spaces make use of such disorienting and dramatic effects as disrupted rotating pans, representations of motion impossible in the physical world, and devices that withhold information from the viewer, all of which call attention to that which is lacking onscreen.. In addition to the examination of these features and their relationship to the subjective interpretation and reception of the film, we will explore the generic conventions that Bertolucci either reproduces, rejects, or multiplies as he stretches the traditional detective story to its limits, as well as the cyclical structures that he amplifies from Borges' narrative in order to convey his own political messages regarding the repetitions of history, the burden of inheritance from father to son, and the collective responsibility of the present for the mistakes of the past.

Building upon the notion of unsutured subjectivity proposed in the study of *The Spider's Stratagem*, Chapter II explores the narrative structures at play in *Toby Dammit*, delineating the shift from third- to first-person narration in the adaptation of Poe's "Never Bet the Devil Your Head." In this film, Fellini not only substitutes Poe's humorous ridicule of Transcendentalism for a satirical representation of Rome's film industry, stretching the generic conventions of satire as Bertolucci similarly exaggerates the traditional crime story, but also makes significant adjustments to the figure through whom he portrays that sector of society, his protagonist Toby Dammit. While Poe's Toby is overshadowed and silenced by the voice of a narrator, Fellini's creation becomes his own narrator, appearing in the film as both character and teller of his story, a division especially apparent during key scenes of voiceover narration and unsutured perspectives. Through the course of the chapter we will see that the narrative authority either withheld from or granted to each protagonist determines his relationship to language, either allowing him to communicate through verbal discourse or forcing him to use the physical signs of the mechanical and animal worlds. Finally, in tracing the narrative cycles of each Toby through his various stages of communication, we will find that just as Bertolucci

transfers the circular structures of his source text to his film, Fellini preserves the cyclical structures inherent in Poe's narration as well.

While the examination of Bertolucci's and Fellini's structural, thematic, and aesthetic choices will confine much of our investigation to the limits of their works, we will also come across certain interrelated, extratextual issues that question the reasons behind each director's interest in and selection of the story that he chose to adapt, the personal and professional state in which he found himself at the time of production, and his social, political, and personal motives for portraying sectors of Italian society in the way that he does. With such elaborate and original appropriations of their source text's components, it is easy to concentrate on the creative side of Bazin's dialectic when examining *The Spider's Stratagem* and *Toby Dammit* side by side. However, we will see that Bertolucci and Fellini also create a space for their respective predecessors within their films, as the stories of Borges and Poe remain a part of the secondary texts created in their name, becoming the film's foundation without losing ground as an independent creation itself. Commenting once again on the question of fidelity, Bazin suggests that "...it is more fruitful to speculate on their differences rather than on their resemblances, that is, for the existence of the novel to be affirmed by the film and not dissolved into it. It is hardly enough to say of this work ... that it is in essence faithful to the original because, to begin with, it *is* the novel" (143; emphasis in original). Following Bazin's dialectic between cinema and literature, creation and fidelity, we will therefore seek the presence of "Theme of the Traitor and the Hero" in *The Spider's Stratagem* and "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" in *Toby Dammit*, we will observe the transformations, additions, omissions and magnifications from written narrative to film narrative, and we will find that each of these differences return us once again to similarities.

CHAPTER I

FROM BORGES TO BERTOLUCCI: LABYRINTHS, MONUMENTS, AND THEATERS

In an interview first published in *Le Cinéma Italien* in 1978, Bernardo Bertolucci recalls the process of adapting Jorge Luis Borges' short story "Theme of the Traitor and the Hero" (1944) into the feature length, originally made-for-television film, *The Spider's Stratagem* (1970). Leaving behind a professional and psychological low with the close of his previous project,¹ Bertolucci approached this film as a turning point in his career, welcoming the opportunity to work with fellow scriptwriters Marilù Parolini and Edoardo De Gregorio in the adaptation of Borges' complex, if brief, tale. Commenting on the process, he insists that "the whole myth of auteur cinema is bound up in the fear of communicating with your collaborators and especially with the public: the public, in the end, being the real collaborator of the film, the one that loves it, hates it, participates in it, surrenders to it" (Gili 135). While Bertolucci would go on to mark *The Spider's Stratagem* with his individualist, if not auteurist, style and tone, he would maintain the self-referential, metanarrative structures present in Borges' short story, creating the same demand for viewer participation that he mentions here, and preserving the call for readerly collaboration found in "Theme of the Traitor and the Hero." The particular narrative style that Borges uses to structure his story, as we will soon see, calls attention to the processes of literary creation and reception, requiring an active reader to fill in narrative gaps, to come to terms with ambiguity, to essentially produce and interpret the text himself. This subjectivity granted to the reader of Borges' written narrative finds its place in Bertolucci's adaptation through a series of technical devices that now provide the cinematic

¹ Bertolucci describes his experience filming *Partner* (1968), and says that *The Spider's Stratagem* "represented the first opening up after *Partner*. *Partner* was an experience I lived like an illness; it was a totally neurotic film, a sick film, schizophrenic" (Gili 136).

spectator with a sense of subjectivity. What in the short story is seen as a narrative gap becomes in the film a visual absence, imaginatively filled in by the viewer through a process called “suturing.”

Suture, Spectator, and Subjectivity

First presented by Jacques Alain Miller in 1966 and brought to the field of cinema by Jean-Pierre Oudart in 1969, the concept of suture can be defined generally as “the name given to the procedures by means of which cinematic texts confer subjectivity upon their viewers,” allowing them to resolve that which is absent or lacking (Silverman 195). In a *Screen* article entitled “Notes on Suture,” Stephen Heath reconciles the theories of a number of critics, describing the process as “the effacement (or filling in) of the absence, the suturing of the discourse—its movement as in a continuity of articulation—by the reappropriation of the absence within the film, a character in the film coming to take the place of the absent one posed by the spectator” (3). One of the most common procedures used to exemplify this process is the shot/reverse shot technique, which resolves the displeasing lack of information (that which the viewer cannot see or assign to a perspective) by associating the absent subjectivity with the gaze of a fictional character, thereby turning the discomfort of the unknown into a benign subjective presence. While such traditional techniques as the shot/reverse shot formation serve to mend “the hole opened in the spectator’s imaginary relationship with the filmic field” and to maintain subjectivity, in *The Spider’s Stratagem* Bertolucci makes use of techniques which call attention to such holes (Heath 5). However, while denying the benign subjectivity created by sutured gaps, Bertolucci’s unsutured gaps create a greater space for the viewer’s interpretive act: because the cinematic text fails to connect the discomforting, unknown perspective with the harmless gaze associated with a specific character, the uneasy task of interpretation is consequently forced into the hands of the spectator, ultimately creating a stronger sense of subjectivity than that offered by successful suturing.

By playing with and breaking such traditional forms as the 180° rule and the shot/reverse shot pattern, *The Spider's Stratagem* is constantly withholding information from the spectator, calling attention to a lack that is defined in opposition to the dizzying display of that which is present. Incomplete and segmented circular pans, unrealistic representations of movement, and shots that continuously hide the desired object all call attention to that which is missing. While these disruptive and self-conscious visual techniques persist throughout the course of the film, their use as related to the creation of symbolic spaces is especially notable. Each of these devices is used in the translation and amplification of Borges' written spaces—communicated through seemingly insignificant references in passing—into the physical and metaphorical spaces of the film. In examining these formal aspects of the film, I essentially suggest that the intentional gaps left by Borges' written narrative become unsutured gaps in Bertolucci's adaptation. The role of the active reader therefore becomes that of the active spectator, a transformation that can be seen through Bertolucci's expansion of three symbolic spaces: the circular labyrinth, the monument, and the theater.

From Ireland to Italy: A Detective Story Adapted

In spite of the apparent differences between “Theme of the Traitor and the Hero” and *The Spider's Stratagem*—Borges' Irish protagonist, Ryan, researches the death of his great-grandfather Fergus Kilpatrick, while Bertolucci's Italian Athos Magnani investigates the death of his father, after whom he is named—the story's basic plot remains the same. As Ulrich Wicks summarizes in his study of the adaptation, the superficial structure of the story can be reduced to five elements:

- 1) A man has been martyred. 2) History (either oral or written) proclaims and perpetuates him as a hero. 3) Many years later, a descendant investigates the life of that man. 4) He discovers that his ancestor has really been a traitor. 5) He decides to keep his discovery to himself and to preserve the public version of the (hi)story. (26)

While the central elements may be easily transferred from written to film narrative, the implied participation of the reader is less automatically translated. In what begins as a series of references to three individual spaces—the labyrinth, the monument, and the theater—Bertolucci comes to visually represent the subjective experience offered to Borges' reader, extending that subjectivity to his spectator as well.

As Bertolucci's protagonist, Athos Magnani II, traverses the various manifestations of these three spaces during his time in Tara, the connections between the film's formal aspects—its disorienting, unsutured narration—and its thematic use of the traditional detective story become increasingly intertwined. In an article on Antonioni's *Blow-up* (1966), Domietta Torlasco makes a nevertheless relevant observation about the connections between suture theory and the detective genre, both of which rely on the balance between the revealing and withholding of information. Referring to the work of Ernst Bloch, she lists the genre's fundamental characteristics as including “the suspense connected with the process of guessing; the conjectural activity that, through a careful evaluation of clues, leads to the act of discovery; and, most important, the omission of the pivotal event” (77). In the case of *The Spider's Stratagem*, Bertolucci's withheld visual information and the perplexing nature of the information that he does present, result in the same readerly responses as the conventions identified by Bloch and Torlasco: we are held in constant suspense, left to guess not only what is missing and what will come next, but also how to interpret that which has not been withheld; we must extract and assemble visual clues which lead to the act of interpretation; and the pivotal scene not only remains unseen throughout the film, but becomes engulfed in yet another enigma as soon as it is revealed. On both visual and thematic levels, Bertolucci takes the traditional elements of the detective genre and expands them, stretching them to their limits as Athos II and the viewer search for the truth.

The concentration of Bertolucci's techniques of unsuture around the metaphorical and literal representations of labyrinths, monuments, and theaters, demonstrates this magnification of the detective genre's conventions. As Athos visits these sites, rather than simply accumulating a clue towards discovery, he encounters in each of them further contradiction, confusion, and responsibility. Though these locales may be scenes of investigation on the part of Athos II, we will find that they are in many ways crime scenes in themselves, evidence of Athos I's guilt, and increasing reminders of Athos II's implication in the secret plot. In describing *Blow-up* and additional films, including *The Spider's Stratagem*, Torlasco emphasizes that

[t]he center around which these films revolve is the image of the crime scene—the spatial and temporal configuration in which a murder is committed, witnessed, and investigated ... these films present us with a crime to be 'seen,' not once and for all but over and over again, in the folds of the landscape, as well as on the faces of people and things. They appear as strange and unsolvable detective stories in which continuous, linear time dissolves, and the privileges of the seeing eye are challenged by the very scene under analysis. (78)

As the time between a father's crime and a son's investigation collapses within the space of Tara's town limits, the temporal and spatial configuration of these three symbolic sites—the labyrinth, whose walls mark the time one spends within, the monument, whose sacred space connects past and present through memory, and the theater, whose art, like the seventh art, is at once spatial and temporal—take on the characteristics of the "omitted" crime scene with Bertolucci's refusal to present them in a clear, realistic, traditional way. In turning each of the spaces into a, if not "the," crime scene, the original event is fragmented across time and space, just as the guilt of the accused becomes assigned to innumerable culprits and participants, fragmenting the blame and the weight of a murder across Tara's landscape and onto the faces of her inhabitants. For it is with the eventual

glimpses of Tara from afar and the aged faces of the elderly women who tell Athos' story that we come to discover the role of the masses in the crime of a single man. As we will now see in an examination of each of these three subjective spaces, Bertolucci's formal choices provoke our collaboration as viewers and interpreters as much as his political message implicates us in the formation and falsification of history.

Circular Labyrinths and Memorial Monuments

Beginning with our first category of symbolic space, the idea of the circular labyrinth first appears when Borges' narrator tells us of Ryan's early findings regarding the death of his great-grandfather. We learn that "from these circular labyrinths he is saved by a curious species of proof which immediately plunges him into other labyrinths even more inextricable and heterogeneous" (125). Labyrinths and mirrors are two structures that appear often in Borges' narration and Bertolucci makes use of them in both visual and metaphorical ways. On the visual level, we see actual mirrors placed within several scenes, and mirrored images occur throughout the film as well. For example, when Athos visits the home of one of his father's friends, we see two chairs facing each other as though perfectly reflected in a mirror. An additional scene makes use of two mirrored shots, essentially forming a perfect circle as the camera captures all 360° of its surroundings. This scene takes place when Athos is on his way back to the hotel from Draifa's house; he approaches and then passes between two old men who are arguing in a dark passageway (fig. 1). As he nears the bickering pair, there is the expectation that he will break the symmetry, or at least break the men from their discussion. However, they pay him no attention and we see the two men from exactly the other side, with Athos now walking away from them (fig. 2). What is expected to disrupt the symmetry of this scenario actually reinforces it due to the way that Bertolucci sets up the equal but opposite successive shots. We see that Athos is unable to disrupt the repetitions of these people, just

as he and Ryan Kilpatrick are unable to disrupt the cycles of history. Finally, the fact that it is an argument that Athos passes through is significant because the men, having started their argument the day before when Athos first asked them for directions, are not really communicating or settling anything; their words themselves possess a labyrinthine structure.

Unlike Bertolucci's stationary mirrors, his circular labyrinths are created through various rotating shots that appear throughout the film. As each segment begins, it does not appear to be problematic beyond its dizzying effects², but as the camera continues to move it becomes clear that something is visually wrong. For example, the rotating shots of the bust of Athos Magnani show us a shifting background despite the fact that the statue rotates with the camera, always facing it in a position that defies realistic movement. While this scene will be discussed later along with other examples of monuments, it figures as one of the three circular pans that occur through the course of the film, the other two being the establishing pan of Draifa's garden the first time Athos visits her home, and the table scene in which his father's old friends reminisce about their past. In both of these cases, the circle is incomplete; although the first shots appear to be nearly seamless, parts of the circle are skipped, images that should not be part of the circle are incorporated into it, and the rotation does not end where it began.

Arriving at a metaphorical interpretation of these circular shots, the example of Draifa's garden brings us back to the original quotation from Borges' story. This is the film's first circular sequence, and it is also the first exchange in which Athos receives information about his father. Just as Ryan experiences figurative labyrinths, getting more tangled with each discovery, Athos only finds more questions when he receives Draifa's answers. The circular shot is incomplete and disorienting

² In fact, several critics, including Wicks, fail to recognize the fragmentation and unrealistic motion that makes these shots unsettling: "There is much tracking and panning, the latter emphasizing the circularity of the story as well as of the narration, as in the 360° pan when Athos Junior first arrives at Draifa's vine-covered villa, and in the use of subjective camera when Athos looks at his father's statue" (30).

because the information he will obtain here is just as incomplete and will send him in many directions. In contrast to the ironic establishing nature of this pan, the rotating shots of the table scene move from face to face as the old men discuss their community's past, but once again, in spite of the camera's steady movement the individual shots are disordered and the fragmented circle never comes to a close. During both of these visual representations of Borges' circular labyrinths, the viewer is unable to determine whose perspective provides these images, and because Athos either appears in, or is seen to be asleep during these shots, they cannot be associated with his point of view. The disorienting sequences cannot be sutured, and in the words of Jacques Alain Miller, the process of "taking-the-place-of" does not occur; nothing replaces the unknown perspective and the dizzying labyrinths force us as spectators to interpret them (1). While they can be seen as representing Athos' chaotic quest or as alluding to the theme of cyclical time as suggested by the short story, the visually impressive nature of these techniques suggests an additional layer of meaning. By highlighting our inability to suture these images, Bertolucci is signaling the presence of formal filmmaking devices as well as his own presence in the film as its creator.³ Because the two scenes document the telling of the past, it can be said that Bertolucci is essentially narrating narration itself, and making it known in much the same way that the self-reflexive Borges comments on the process of literary narration in "Theme of the Traitor and the Hero."⁴ Peter Bondanella reiterates the connection between Borges and Bertolucci with respect to narration as subject matter, a theme that will reappear in the context of Fellini's *Toby Dammit*. Bondanella observes,

³ Wicks observes the same effect, albeit in a different context. Referring to one of Athos Junior's first interviews during which several cuts interrupt the narration without a significant loss of time, indicating the passage of mere seconds, Wicks playfully notes: "The film calls attention to itself narrating while Gaibazzi [a friend of Athos Senior] is narrating part of the story that the film is narrating" (31).

⁴ Borges' narrator makes clear that he is not actually telling a story, but that he has rather "imagined the following argument, which I shall doubtless develop" at some time in the future (123).

Bertolucci's shot changes (cuts, fades, dissolves) as often as not confound our expectations. They work to deny the viewer a coherent and consistent chain of cause and effect, undermining the very essence of chronological duration. As a result, as in Borges, the very act of narration itself in Bertolucci's film becomes the object of our contemplation, interest, and suspense, just as literary narration emerged as Borges' true subject in the short story. (9)

In forcing the viewer to take note of the film's technical presentation, Bertolucci grants us the space for subjective interpretation while maintaining the metaliterary structures of his source text.

Another way in which Bertolucci amplifies a spatial element of the story begins with the mere statement in the text that the hero's "sepulchre was mysteriously violated" and that his "statue presides over a gray hill amidst red moors" (123). The aforementioned spinning statue scene clearly stems from this image, but Bertolucci expands the extent to which the town of Tara has memorialized their hero. He creates several symbolic spaces of honor and remembrance for Athos I, three of which are emphasized very early in the film. As we follow Athos II upon his arrival to Tara, we see that the camera pans from right to left over the street sign for "Via Athos Magnani," soon followed by a sign for the "Circolo Culturale Giovanile Athos Magnani;" we are then introduced to the square containing his statue. The camera movement from right to left suggests a regression, a movement into the past in which the son must retrace the steps of his father. It is also one of the first moments in the film that grants a sense of unsutured subjectivity to the spectator. As Marta Acosta notes, "the camera lingers on the signs while the character walks away. When the camera must then hurry to catch up with Athos, the viewer becomes aware of his or her own perception as distinct from Athos, Jr.'s," and our inability to associate this perspective with Athos or anyone else remains unreconciled (66).

Arriving at the plaza honoring Athos I, the manner in which we first see the statue—first eclipsed by Athos Junior as he stands between the camera and the bust of his father, revealing it to the viewer only when he steps aside—indicates a greater link between father and son than we see in the short story’s more distant relation between great-grandfather and great-grandson. As Athos begins to circle the pedestal, the rotating pan first appears to be a subjective shot associated with his point of view, but it soon becomes clear that this image cannot be seen through the eyes of our protagonist. As Sante Matteo summarizes, “we can see the buildings move by the frames as the camera circles,” but when “the statue remains facing the camera, turning with it as if on the same platform,” the shot becomes problematic (17). Once again, Bertolucci prevents the comfortable recognition of a perspective tied to a known subjectivity, calling attention to his technical choices as he makes suturing impossible.

Turning now to the commemorative space of the “sepulchre,” Bertolucci expands the reference to a mere gravesite into a monumentalized tomb, and the unknown violator of that site into the hero’s very son.⁵ Athos shines a light to the grave, seeking out a truth that he then destroys as he scrapes away his father’s name and the dates framing his life, indicating as he does so the destructive nature of this information: the closer he gets to learning the truth of his father’s plotted heroism, the closer he gets to destroying it, to revealing the history as false. Further, the ease with which the characters are erased from the stone in this scene reveals the sense of façade and illusion that Athos II is essentially stripping away throughout his search. But because he is now part of the plot, “in trying to destroy, he too becomes a collaborator” (Wicks 27). As we noted in the case of the circular labyrinths, the way that Bertolucci presents his monumental spaces—showing them

⁵ Christopher Wagstaff incorporates the Freudian father-son relationship into his political interpretation of this and other films directed by Bertolucci. Referring to *The Spider’s Stratagem* and *La tragedia di un uomo ridicolo* he notes: “The partisan struggle against Fascism had been for Bertolucci an Oedipal struggle of the sons against their bourgeois fathers” (209).

from inexplicable perspectives that not only cannot be reconciled, but which at times also defy the physical world—leaves the interpretation up to the viewer. He reproduces Borges' active reader in the form of an active spectator, at the same time maintaining the story's theme of the cyclical patterns of history, now using the father-son relationship to do so.

A Figurative Stage: "All Tara Will Become a Theater"

While Borges' circular labyrinths make their way to the screen in an abstract form, his monuments remain physical spaces that actually appear within Bertolucci's film. The final example of adapted space, the theater, is also concrete in the sense that it is the physical location where Athos Magnani was murdered; but when the entire town of Tara becomes involved in maintaining the fiction, the concept of the theater is extended beyond the walls of the murder scene. In terms of both the theater's actual space and visual allusions to it, Bertolucci constructs several scenes and creates significant representational images based on the fact that in Borges' short story, "Kilpatrick was assassinated in a theater" (124). The first of several references preceding the climactic glimpses of the town's physical theater occurs very early in the film. After arriving to Tara and finding lodging, Athos II asks the hotel owner for directions to Draifa's house, the place where, unbeknownst to him, his investigation will begin. When the owner of this seemingly empty hotel tells him that the distance is too far to walk, he brings out a bicycle and leads Athos through the curtains that partially cover the front entrance and out to the street, where we hear him giving specific directions to ride to Draifa's house. As soon as Athos is out of sight, several elderly men rush to the curtains and peer through them as though they were actors watching the action of a play from backstage (fig. 3).⁶ The timing of this image is significant as it marks Athos' initiation into the

⁶ The framing of this shot creates an image identical to several frames of Bertolucci's *The Conformist*, made in 1970, the same year as *The Spider's Stratagem*. In one of *The Conformist's* final scenes, Bertolucci calls attention to the theatricality and metacinematic nature of the murder of Professor

theatrical spectacle that is his father's story and it is the first indication that the citizens of Tara are also collaborators in the perpetuation of this fiction. In spite of the suggestion that these men play an active role as collaborators, however, the voyeuristic implications of the scene are undeniable and, like many other references to the theater, speak to both the theme of film spectatorship and Bertolucci's thoughts on political responsibility and historical inheritance. The dual role that these men play as both actor and spectator, creating a fiction and then watching it play out, hints at our role as the film's actual viewers through the metacinematic figure of a fiction within a fiction, making us voyeuristic spectators of spectatorship. But like these men, we are not only observers of the action, but active collaborators in the interpretation of that which we see.

Just as Borges makes his reader responsible for filling in gaps and drawing conclusions, Bertolucci visually forces us to partake in the film's creation. However, going a step beyond readerly cooperation, both the author of the source text and Bertolucci take advantage of this formal collaboration to involve the reader thematically: in the case of Borges, as Dieter Janik summarizes, "la lectura del artificio titulado 'Tema del traidor y del héroe' transforma a cada lector en detentador y cómplice de un secreto histórico que la historiografía desconocerá definitivamente" (180). Bertolucci similarly makes his viewer an accomplice of the citizens of Tara who invent and perpetuate the fiction of Athos I's story, a collaborator to subsequent generations who uphold fictitious accounts of the Fascist resistance, and, by extension, a participant among all parties responsible for forming and promoting all of history's fictions. In other words, in addition to insisting upon our creative collaboration as external reader's of the film, the director involves us in the collaborative efforts going on within the film, placing us on the side of Athos I's collaborators

Quadri, a figure compared to Bertolucci's own mentor, Jean-Luc Godard. While being stabbed by several assailants, the image of the professor is repeatedly revealed and concealed by one of the attacker's coat tails, filling the frame like the rising curtains on a theater's stage. The similarities between these "curtains" and those in Athos Magnani's inn, as well as their metacinematic functions, are quite striking.

before Athos II even joins them, in fact before he is even aware of their existence. This is made clear through several spatial associations when, rather than finding ourselves visually tied to our protagonist—a figure whose benign subjectivity often replaces the withheld unknown in conventionally shot films—we find ourselves opposite him, on the side of Tara’s collaborators. But rather than receiving more information from this position, we begin to identify ourselves with unknown faces, information that characters onscreen can see, but information that is withheld from us as viewers.

The first time that our subjectivity becomes unexpectedly aligned with that of an unknown collaborator occurs when Athos II wakes to the sound of a knock on the hotel room door after spending his first night in Tara. As he rises from his bed and walks to the door, the camera stays on him until the film cuts to a shot of the door itself, an image that we assume to be Athos’ side of the walls, as we have not received any indication of traveling beyond the space of this hotel room. However, when the door slowly opens and we see not the face of the person who has knocked, but Athos’ face, looking inquisitively at this man over whose shoulder we and the camera now find ourselves, we realize that our vision is no longer associated with the protagonist as we had initially expected (fig. 4). More than an element of surprise, the setup of this shot and the shot that follows is our first lesson on how to read this film, and we learn that we cannot count on the comforting subjectivity of a familiar character. Curiously enough, we seem to be taught just the opposite when the following shot returns us to Athos’ side of the door and presents us with an undeniably subjective angle, tying our vision to the very perspective that we were denied only a moment before. Our vision now fused with Athos’ sight, we see the face of the stranger outside the door as his lifted fist moves slowly toward the camera in a contrived, seemingly rehearsed gesture, presumably striking Athos just as the screen goes black (fig. 5). One might wonder, if the film’s editing has just demonstrated a rejection of the comforting norm by subtly disorienting the viewer, why should it

return to the convention of the subjective shot the very next instant? On one hand, the sharp contrast created between these two moments and between their messages to the viewer—disorienting and later orienting him once again—serves to heighten the importance of the original lesson, calling attention to the fact that we, the spectators via the camera, are not mere followers of the protagonist's actions but are rather on the side of those who push him along in his search for the truth.

On the other hand, the view through Athos' eyes carries a great deal of meaning on its own. The images that follow this fleeting subjective moment contribute to its sense of importance as they reestablish the boundaries between Athos' perspective and our own. When the black screen and the sounds of commotion give way once again to the calm vision of the room's interior, we are now outside of Athos' subjectivity, placed behind him as we watch him rise from the floor, as though the strike to his jaw sent our momentarily joined perspectives in two separate directions. After standing and orienting himself, as we the spectators must do as well, Athos walks over to a mirror to examine his face at a relative distance from the camera and our watchful eyes. The image of his vision turned on itself and distinct from our own reminds us that we are already on separate sides and that we cannot rely on Athos' knowledge or perspective as the reader of a traditional detective story might hope to do, seeing all evidence and learning each clue through the eyes of the protagonist. In fact, the only other subjective shot of the entire film does not occur until Athos officially, consciously, and publicly becomes a collaborator himself, upholding the fiction created by Athos I and his friends by commending their actions in a speech during the presentation of yet another monument dedicated to his father. As Athos II looks out into the sparse crowd gathered below him, he outwardly maintains his father's secret while an interior monologue on his own doubts, confusion, and guilt overlays the public address (fig. 6). Only when he has decided to let Tara remain a

metaphorical theater does his vision intersect with our own, engulfing us in the burden of responsibility that he is now forced to carry.

Later, as Athos becomes acquainted with his father's friends and principal collaborators, we are often presented the view from their perspective, once again looking back at our protagonist from within the collaborator's home, from his side of the table, or inside his vehicle. In the latter case, for example, as an unidentified driver pulls up alongside Athos's bicycle and calls out to him, it is clear that we are inside the car, sitting beside the driver in the passenger seat, and yet we are prevented from seeing the face of the man sitting next to us. Instead, we see Athos' confused face as he first ignores the driver's shouts and later agrees to speak to him (fig. 7). While the dialogue reveals that this man, Gaibazzi was a friend of Athos I, the uneasy reaction that accompanies the withholding of visual information does not dissipate until the film cuts to the interior of the man's home and we finally see the face of this seemingly intimidating figure. Although he turns out to be a friendly, harmless elderly man and the most likeable of Athos I's collaborators, the way in which he first enters the film—by our side and yet threateningly hidden—signals both his sinister involvement in the plot and our own responsibility as viewers, interpreters, and creators of this story and, outside of the movie theater, of our own histories. This scene, like so many others throughout the film, puts us in the same position as Tara's actors, and whether they are the authors and keepers of the secret or the equally culpable citizens who maintain its fiction, all are responsible for turning the entire town into a metaphorical theater.

In addition to these manifestations of a figurative theater based on myth and fiction, there are several concrete spaces that serve as theaters, and one in particular serves as a sort of bridge leading us from metonymic and allegorical representations of the theater to the physical space itself. As a sort of double to Tara's actual theater, we find Athos in the outdoor movie theater owned by his father's friend, Costa. It is here that he makes a certain discovery, noticing the mirrored plans for

the murder of Mussolini and the murder of his father, Athos Senior. After making this connection, he helps the owner of the theater roll up the screen in such a way that once again resembles a rising curtain on the stage of a theater. The angle from which this image is shot leaves no room for doubt when contemplating Bertolucci's metacinematic emphasis as the theater's screen is filmed head-on, fitting perfectly within the frame to show a screen within a screen (fig. 8). In the context of Athos' search for truth about his father, this is an ironic image since, by discovering his father's plot, he is essentially pulling up a curtain that reveals another stage. This scene's interpretation by Wicks also contributes to Bertolucci's cinematic translation of Borges' metaliterary structures. Referring to the rising curtain, he suggests that "Bertolucci is self-reflexive not only toward his own film but toward the cinema as such with its powers of illusion, just as Borges in his verbal narrative reveals the storying and de-storying powers of narrative" (30).

Another moment in which Bertolucci alludes to cinema's "powers of illusion," albeit a less explicit reference than the image of the movie screen, occurs during a flashback to a secret meeting between Athos I and his three friends and collaborators, Costa, Rasori, and Gaibazzi. Having decided to attempt the assassination of Mussolini upon his arrival to Tara, the four men contemplate the logistics of an attack in the town's theater during a performance of Verdi's *Rigoletto*. After considering the option of sending a collaborator to the theater as an extra responsible for shooting Mussolini, a member of the audience, from the stage, Costa approves of the plan and moved by its prospects begins a speech about the theater: "The theater, how beautiful at night in the dark, with that red bulb lit, with the scenes projecting on the stage. They seem like actors, reciting, singing. It's full of holes and corners. You can't see behind flats!" (00:42:48). While Costa may be referring to the space of the theater as an ideal location for a murder plot, his comments are clearly connected not only to the image of a movie theater, but to Bertolucci's approach to filmmaking and film spectatorship as well.

First of all, that Bertolucci should choose Costa, the owner of a movie theater, to make this speech is quite telling and strengthens the extension of his words on the theater to the realm of the film's moving picture. The darkened interior that he speaks of could easily refer to a movie house, but it is the choice of the word "projecting" that definitively changes the course of his discussion, leaving behind Tara's theater and corporeal actors and referring now to the images that only "seem like actors," highlighting the metacinematic nature of the film and the experience of the viewer. The assassination plot alone recalls suture theory's threatening onscreen presence since, in the exaggerated context of the theater, an onstage presence shall threaten the life of one of its audience members, Mussolini. That being said, Costa's references to the "holes and corners" of a stage set and the inability of the spectator to "see behind flats" only escalate this connection, confirming the idea that he is in fact referring to film spectatorship, and the spectatorship of this very film in particular. By alluding to the deceptive, withholding, concealing powers of cinema through the words of Costa, Bertolucci not only recognizes the viewer's uneasiness with the task of subjective interpretation, but articulates the mechanisms by which his film produces such a reaction, once again incorporating his narrative techniques and its results into the narration itself. While discussing the place of cinema among the other arts, Bertolucci once said in an interview that "cinema is made of very crude material woven on a loom of dreams. For this reason I find moviemaking much closer to poetry than to prose, to music than to theater. Even cinema at its seemingly most theatrical uses the theater as a ruse, as a disguise" (Gili 131). Although he denies the formal connections between theater and film, it is clear that in this scene of *The Spider's Stratagem* Bertolucci uses the theater in just this way, as a disguise to mask his statements about film in general and this film in particular. As he warns his audience of these points of deception, he essentially confirms the impossibility of suturing his scenes, of recognizing a benign subjectivity, and of putting the film's interpretation in the hands of anyone but the spectator.

Tara's Theater: The Scene of the Crime

Leaving behind the symbolic and figurative manifestations of the theater as well as the parallel space of the outdoor cinema, we finally enter the town's theater, a climactic moment in itself, when Athos is granted an equally anticipated meeting with Tara's wealthy landowner and his father's principal Fascist enemy, Beccaccia. While the spatial dynamics of this scene are certainly crucial to the theme of the theater and its relationship to Bertolucci's grander messages, the circumstances leading up to the encounter are equally relevant. Prior to this eventual meeting Athos has experienced two run-ins with Beccaccia, first on his estate at the insistence of Draifa and later at Draifa's home after the table scene described earlier. After learning of the antagonistic relationship between his father and Beccaccia, Athos arrives at his residence in search of more information, only to be met with mildly violent resistance on the part of Beccaccia's attendants as they forcefully place him back on his bicycle and send him teetering down the drive of the estate. Recalling the almost slapstick, seemingly rehearsed punch that met Athos at the door of his hotel—an event read at the time as a message to our protagonist warning him of some threatening force working against his investigation—this episode leads us to believe that Beccaccia does perhaps have something to hide from Athos and his questions. Affirming this suspicion even further, Costa, Rasori, and Gaibazzi confront him at their meeting on Draifa's patio, where the rotating shots of the trio contrast the still, straight shots of Beccaccia's serious gaze. Apparently assuming his guilt, they tell him, “Beccaccia, confess you killed Athos Magnani. Tonight you must confess,” significantly during the only moment in the scene where Athos is certain to be awake and attentive, though presumably out of sight, as he listens to this final exchange before the men depart for the evening (01:04:01).

While the details of these two encounters appear to be plausible clues that will eventually culminate in the recognition of Beccaccia's guilt, the theatricality of their placement becomes clear when we learn the truth behind Athos I's murder and see that the trio of collaborators were just as

responsible for staging his death as they are for staging his son's search for the truth, the obstacles he encounters, and Beccaccia's guilt. However, rather than pointing towards the easily targeted wealthy Fascist in an attempt to divert the recognition of their own blame, Costa, Rasori and Gaibazzi lead Athos II through their web of fiction, suspense, and confusion so that he may in fact discover their blame and the complexities that lie behind it. By arranging and inventing such scenarios as threats against Athos and the guilt of the first likely suspect, these three men, with the help of Draifa, are essentially doing to Athos what authors of detective fiction do to their readers, presenting him with what Verónica Cortínez calls a story's "varios caminos posibles para llegar a la verdad del crimen" (129). Referring at the moment to the detective tales of Edgar Allan Poe, she explains:

El narrador omite, a propósito, aquellos datos necesarios para completar el rompecabezas. Por otro lado, se desperdigan pistas, potencialmente reveladoras, pero que el lector sólo es capaz de reconocer como tal retrospectivamente, una vez terminado el relato. Más aún, el narrador aprovecha esta incapacidad del lector para distinguir las pistas verdaderas, y le ofrece algunas que son falsas, llevándolo a la confusión y al suspenso. (129)

Recognizing the fact that it is not only the director who offers his audience false leads but his characters who author these distractions for the sake of other characters within the film itself, we see once again Bertolucci's play with the conventions of the detective genre and his incorporation of these very conventions into the realm of his characters' grand theatrics. And when Athos and Beccaccia do eventually meet in the dark, quiet space of the empty theater, the theatrical design behind their previous encounters visually materializes as Athos confronts his father's adversary in the heights of the theater's balcony.

On the eve of Athos' induction into his father's secret, a fact unbeknownst to him, he and Beccaccia hold their meeting sitting on opposite balconies within Tara's theater. That the culmination of false leads and dead-ends should take place here is certainly symbolic and echoes the widespread theatrical performance that has been going on ever since Athos passed through the improvised stage curtains at the hotel, making himself at that very moment one of many characters in the fiction authored by his father. Additionally, the sense of height conveyed by the framing of this sequence—a series of disconnected shots of each man on his respective side of the balcony without any anchoring views of the seats below or orienting images of the theater's stage—signals Athos' proximity to the truth, for in order to understand the secret he must learn to see Tara from above, as did his father when he strategically turned the town into a vast theater to preserve his myth. Hovering at an indeterminate height above the theater, Athos will soon take on such a perspective, finally seeing his labyrinthine investigation, its clues, and its path to the truth from a figurative bird's-eye view.

As Athos and Beccaccia call out to each other across the empty theater, we notice that the disparate shots of the two men not only fail to orient us within the space of the theater, but also fail to bring Athos and Beccaccia together within the same frame. Further, each time they appear onscreen the men are shot from a different angle facing a different direction, disrupting any sense of continuity or dialogue as they are not only separated by physical distance, but cannot even seem to face each other as they speak. This formal decision once again demonstrates Bertolucci's break with convention, here in direct rejection of the easily sutured shot/reverse shot pattern that traditionally orients the viewer during dialogue. Also related to the director's choices in the setup of these shots is an ironic contrast between the visual arrangement of their bodies onscreen and the verbal content of their discussion. With the urge for Beccaccia's confession fresh in our minds from a previous scene, the first images of the theater's interior offer a striking visual opposition between the two men, who

are positioned to recall not a criminal, legal confession, but a confession in the Catholic Church. Addressing one another from opposite sides of the theater house, Athos and Beccaccia do not face each other but rather sit facing forward, allowing the camera access only to their profiles as they are framed within the box of the balcony as though seated in a confessional (figs. 9, 10). Yet with Beccaccia's convincing, unimpassioned declaration of innocence, we learn that, ironically, neither of them has anything to confess. This ultimate meeting with the investigation's last culprit leaves Athos unable to point fingers at anyone else, and as the scene's visual layout tells us, Beccaccia can be no guiltier than Athos himself.

By placing the story's antipodal characters—the young, progressive, innocent protagonist and the wealthy, conservative, easy villain—on equal visual and discursive fields, Bertolucci marks them as equally guilty of propagating Athos Senior's fiction and, by extension, demonstrates the implication of everyone in the formation of history, confirming the guilt of the anti-Fascists as well as the Fascists in their responsibility toward Italy's past and the present that it has created. As Joan Mellen notes in her readings of both *The Spider's Stratagem* and *The Conformist*, Bertolucci “condemns the default of intellectuals to devise and lead the necessary resistance to the rise of fascist power” as much as he condemns the actions of the Fascists (3). More than simply denouncing Italy's failure to prevent a Fascist takeover in the first place, however, Bertolucci also criticizes the ideology behind the anti-Fascist resistance, suggesting that the blind praise that it received and continues to receive from subsequent generations of Italians differs very little from the obligatory support that Fascist ideology required in its historical moment. As Peter Bondanella observes, Bertolucci portrays “the political mythology of the anti-Fascist Resistance not only as a vital part of post-war Italian culture but also as a fiction, a comfortable illusion consciously created by man and employed to manipulate political opinion. In short, Bertolucci defined the Resistance as not merely a historical ‘fact,’ but an *ideological* phenomenon” (13; emphasis in original). When Athos I and his collaborators set out to

construct an equally manmade and manipulative mythology to surround his heroic death, they too create an illusion so effective that, as with ideology, people accept it, play their roles, and ensure its transmission without even knowing that they do so.⁷ Describing the assassination plot Draifa insists that “by means of looks, words half-whispered, we’ll build a void around him, an inferno” (01:15:24), and it is this inferno, this man’s legendary status, that comes to symbolize the equally subjective, manipulated stories that form a nation’s history.

As we see Athos II sitting in the empty theater across from his father’s now aged enemy, it is clear that his father’s battles now rest on his shoulders, that by mere inheritance he is subject to the responsibilities left to him by the previous generation. Throughout the film there are several indications of this blurred division between father and son—from their names, to the actor who plays both parts, to scenes like the eclipsed monument described earlier—and in addition to recognizing the psychological significance of such choices, it is also necessary to place this element within Bertolucci’s ideological framework. Just like Athos I’s legend, political mythologies are passed from one generation to the next, leaving the youngest generations just as responsible as their predecessors for coming to terms with the weight of their collective past. As Athos I and his collaborators plan the assassination of Mussolini, Gaibazzi tells Athos, sending a clear message to the viewer as well, to “just remember, Fascism will continue. Fascism is now embedded in people” (00:40:14). The notion that Italy’s Fascist past continues to inform her present is not only a theme that Bertolucci develops in this and other films, but a belief deeply entwined with his personal, political understanding. As he insists in an interview, “*The Spider’s Stratagem, The Conformist, 1900,*

⁷ In a story entitled “The Sect of the Phoenix” (1952), Borges poses a riddle in which a secret is passed down through a similar process from generation to generation, though it is never taught and rarely mentioned. As Emir Rodríguez Monegal explains, “the Secret—whose gradual revelation Borges wishes to produce in his reader—is none other than copulation, which insures the reproduction of the species and, therefore, grants ‘eternity to a lineage if its members, generation after generation, would perform the rite’” (128).

aren't historical films; they are films that seek to 'historicize' the present. All of my films are films about the present, even when they are about the beginning of the century, the twenties or the birth of Fascism" (Gili 142). Finally, making his statement even clearer, Bertolucci emphasizes the message of political and historical responsibility that we see in *The Spider's Stratagem* stating, quite simply, "to talk about Fascism means to talk about the present" (Gili 143).

Though the first glimpses of Tara's theater document Athos' proximity to the conclusion of his investigation, his last moments of naïveté in front of the collaborators' theatrics, and signals of the burden of guilt he will soon carry, the theater later becomes a space not of fictitious simulacrum but of access to the truth, if only for Athos and if only to discover that the truth is, in fact, a fiction. As in the previous scene with Beccaccia, when Athos returns to the theater for a performance of *Rigoletto* (the opera during which Mussolini was to be assassinated by Athos I and his friends, during which Athos himself was assassinated, and during which Athos II discovers the plot of his father's assassination), we are never shown the stage. We see rows full of audience members with their eyes on the stage, but the information regarding what it is they see is consistently withheld from us. Reminding us of Costa's masked warning about the corners, holes, and concealed threats of cinematic interpretation, not to mention the planned attack on the audience during this very aria of the opera, these unsutured images remain entirely unreconciled, forcing our attention away from the action onstage and toward the events going on once again in the balconies. As though reiterating the notion of both Borges and Bertolucci that the true creative act of a work occurs at the moment of interpretation rather than the moment of production, the camera stays on Athos and his fellow audience members rather than venturing toward the intersection of all of their gazes onstage.

As the scene progresses, however, Athos is not only watching the performance but is also monitoring the opposite balcony containing Costa, Rasori, and Gaibazzi, finding that each time he glances over, one of them has disappeared until the box remains empty. In these very seconds

leading up to Athos' discovery, as the trio disappear one by one, there is an instant-long cut that pulls us outside of the theater, showing us a moonlit Tara shot from a distance. This brief image not only contributes to the drama and mounting tension soon to culminate in Athos' revelation, but reiterates the idea of Tara as an extensive theater, connecting the performance within the theater to the many performances going on outside. Back indoors, in a sort of reenactment of Athos Magnani's assassination, we watch Athos II as the door to his balcony slowly opens and the faces of Costa, Rasori, and Gaibazzi appear behind him, though we do not immediately realize that the camera is not in fact pointed towards this door. Rather, it captures the image through a mirror positioned in front of Athos, who therefore watches the men enter as well, and finally understands that because his father recognized and expected the faces of his assassins, he must have had a part in his own assassination plot. After a long, labyrinthine investigation of false paths and dead-ends, Athos finally discovers the role that his father played in his own murder—planning the “execution/martyrdom of the traitor/hero” as a way of absolving his treason (Matteo 15).

Like the glimpse of Tara from afar, Bertolucci's symbolic treatment and visual presentation of this stageless theater emphasize the role of the public as actors in a play, much like the performance of the Swiss *Festspiele* to which Borges alludes in his story.⁸ And when we hear Athos Magnani I's own words in the film's final flashback, his theatrical plot is confirmed. As though rejecting Gaibazzi's warning of the mark that Fascism has left on everyone, Athos I finds his penance in the writing of a fictional Fascist crime, or on an allegorical level, the writing of an anti-Fascist ideology. Asking to be taken to Tara's highest point, he looks down on the town below and says: “We'll offer the spectacle of a dramatic death to catch the people's imagination so they will continue to hate, increasingly hate Fascism. It will be the legendary death of a hero, a great theatrical

⁸ Referred to by the narrator, these plays are described as “vast and roving theatrical representations ... which require thousands of actors and which reiterate historic episodes in the same cities and mountains where they occurred” (125).

spectacle. We will rehearse as though at the theater. Hundreds of actors. All the people of Tara will recite without knowing it. All Tara will become a great theater” (01:28:03). As with the circular labyrinths and the monuments, the shots that show us the theater, which constantly make us aware of the absent information, actually allow us to see that it is the whole town that is the stage, not simply the construction within the theater. This visual withholding forces us to participate in the film, to interpret and fill in missing information just as Borges’ reader completes the story’s narrative gaps. Finally, having put together all the pieces of his father’s puzzle, Athos talks through the implications of the collaborators’ decision and begins to recognize his own role in the plan, stating that someone was called to discover everything, “but this someone is forced to keep silent about what he has discovered. Because he realizes he is part of the story of Athos Magnani” (01:30:17). Acknowledging that he must carry the weight of this secret, Athos is really describing himself, and within the frame of Bertolucci’s film is once again narrating narration.

Time and Space in a Town Forgotten: The Burden of Inheritance

Although both Borges’ Ryan and Bertolucci’s Athos make the decision not to reveal their discovery to the public, implicating themselves in the web spun by their antecedents, one central difference between the film and the short story can be seen in the way that each of the works ends. While Ryan is content to uphold the lie by publishing “a book dedicated to the glory of the hero,” acknowledging that “this, too, no doubt was foreseen” by his great-grandfather’s original plot (127), the consequences of Athos’ decision take on both spatial and temporal manifestations in the film. From the beginning of the story to its very end, there are several indications that time has somehow frozen in Tara, trapping its inhabitants, and now Athos, in both time and space as the past and the present, Athos the father and Athos the son, seem to converge. Referring once again to Antonioni’s *Blow-up*, Torlasco makes an observation about temporal and spatial representation that is equally

relevant in the case of *The Spider's Stratagem*. She notes that “Antonioni’s spatial arrangements coincide with forms of convoluted time—configurations in which the present cannot be isolated from the past and the future, and death cannot be relegated to a single temporal dimension” (84). We have seen the way in which Bertolucci collapses time and space through his visual labyrinths and memorializing monuments, and by the end of the film it is clear that the mythology surrounding Athos Magnani’s mysterious assassination has preserved him in a state of heroic youth and has turned the historical event into a timeless ideological phenomenon. A feature yet to be mentioned, however, is Bertolucci’s choice in using the same elderly actors to play Draifa, Costa, Rasori, and Gaibazzi as both their characters in the present and their young counterparts during flashbacks, without resorting to the artificialities of makeup, wigs, or clothing to differentiate their bodies in two separate moments in time. That the aged Draifa, for example should look the same in her talks with Athos II as she does during her affairs with his father offers a visual indication of the convoluted time to which Torlasco refers. However, Draifa’s role in conveying this view of time does not end with Alida Valli’s double role as her character. When she first meets with Athos II in her home, giving him all the information she has about his father’s death, she mentions Athos I’s good friends, Costa, Rasori and Gaibazzi, and looks off in the distance as though absorbed in meditative memory. When Athos asks her if they are still alive, she answers, unbroken from her trance, that they are not, only correcting herself after a slight pause. Later, she tells Athos more plainly that “here everything stopped the night they killed him” (00:12:05).

While each of these statements suggest to us that time has, perhaps, supernaturally come to a halt in this little town, several visual signals demonstrate the symbolic fusion of Athos I and Athos II into a single subject, at the same time surrounding the latter with a sense of confinement, as though physically trapping him within the walls of Tara. Earlier we saw the overlap of father and son when Athos entered the piazza named for his father, eclipsing the statue’s head with his own as he

paused in front of the monument. Bondanella points out the significance of a similar moment in which the line between the two characters blurs as Bertolucci takes advantage of the actor's role as both Athos and his father:

Confusing the identity of father and son with constant flashbacks, he further increases the viewer's sense of entrapment in time, a sense of the uncanny shared by his protagonist Athos, Jr., by photographing the running figure with a swiftly moving camera. While the figure of Athos attempts to run out of the camera's frame, the camera's movement imprisons him, and the background of the figure in the frame—the straight, leafless poplar trees so typical of river beds in Emilia-Romagna—cannot help but suggest to the viewer the confining bars of a prison. By virtue of the flashbacks, which present the running figure as at one and the same time both father and son, Bertolucci achieves a brilliant visual evocation of the protagonist's predicament. (9)

Like the statue scene, this sequence is suggestive of Athos' and his father's merging identities, but goes beyond that symbolic confusion of boundaries by literally confusing the spectator, making it very difficult to separate the images of Athos I from those of Athos II as they both flee from the riverside meeting spot, leaving behind Costa, Rasori, and Gaibazzi, whose unchanging faces make it no easier to distinguish between past and present. Finally, the sense of Athos' usurpation of his father's role is addressed explicitly during his last meeting with Draifa when, after insisting that he must catch a train, she answers, "you can't go away anymore" (01:15:44). Reflecting Bertolucci's psychoanalytical leanings, she goes on to propose that he stay and replace Athos I, forcing him into his father's old jacket, offering him the simulacrum of a happy family with her niece playing the role of their daughter, and, in a gesture more pathetic than threatening, locking him in the room so that he cannot leave. However, the ease with which he breaks the lock, shoving the door open as though

it were made of mere cardboard on the set of a stage, emphasizes the artificiality of the town, its inhabitants, and the mythology that they uphold, while demonstrating Athos' attempt to reject the burden that his father has placed upon him.

Whether we consider that burden to be the knowledge of the truth surrounding Athos' death, the task of keeping such information a secret, or the physical price he must pay by remaining in Tara, the weight of his inheritance seems to be most oppressive during a speech that Athos gives to the townspeople as yet another monument is unveiled in his father's honor at the end of the film. With our perspective and Athos' reunited in the movie's second and final subjective shot, the combination of three simultaneous, overlapping levels of information bombard the viewer, reminding us that not even the resolution of the investigation, the discovery of the secret, or a reinstated alignment between ourselves and the protagonist will make this film any easier to read. On one hand, the scene's visual elements present us with Athos' view as he gives the speech, the crowd that surrounds him, and an old man kissing the plaque of the new monument, while one level of audio offers us his kind speech that recognizes Costa, Rasori, Gaibazzi, and above all Athos' father as true heroes. With these two levels of text alone, Athos' decision to keep the secret hidden would seem quite firm, unhesitant, and we might even imagine that he, like Borges' Ryan, would feel confident in his decision, knowing that it too was foreseen by the original plotters. On the other hand, however, the third layer of information becomes entwined with the other two, inserting a certain doubt that undermines the message of both his speech and the images that we see. At an opportune time for the only voice-over narration of the film, Athos' voice directly addresses the viewer, telling us of his uneasiness at the event and wishing that he was somewhere else, that his name was not Athos Magnani. In addition to demonstrating the peak of Athos' hypocrisy as he quite literally says one thing and thinks another, the insertion of the voice-over at this very moment also marks his full induction into the fiction, turning him into a character within a character as he

narrates his role within his father's grand narrative. As in the case of Toby Dammit, as we will later see, Athos Magnani II is at this moment split between the roles of narrator and character, and the access granted to his subjective vision confirms this ultimate transformation.

The hesitance that this monologue demonstrates with respect to Athos' acceptance of his role as keeper of the secret distinguishes *The Spider's Stratagem* from the more playfully ironic tone of "Theme of the Traitor and the Hero," whose ending omits a decisive turning point on the part of Ryan, replacing it with a more complacent acceptance. In spite of this difference, however, in both of the stories it is made clear that with each decision the descendant has taken on a burden, willingly or not, left and planned by his predecessor. In the case of Bertolucci, the connection between Athos' guilt, the wider message of political and historical responsibility, and the struggle between fathers and sons has been made clear, and as Bondanella summarizes, "each generation is condemned to discover, like Athos Magnani Jr., that its parents possessed a dark political secret, and this sense of inherited political guilt in society finds a parallel on the psychological and personal level in the relationships between fathers and sons as explained by Freudian psychoanalysis" (13). And it was, of course, Borges' story that inspired *The Spider's Stratagem's* "dark political secret," making it also a family secret with the deliberate choice of great-grandfather and great-grandson as the main characters, an element that Bertolucci clearly preserved with the adjustment of a smaller generation gap between father and son due to the more recent political past with which the film engages. However, this theme of inheritance and the burden of secrets, expectations, and responsibility passed from one generation to the next not only unites Borges and Bertolucci within the examination of these two texts, but is a theme that informs several of their works and one that even speaks to the personal experience of both men as artists and sons themselves.

Borges, Bertolucci, and the Weight of Legacy

In the case of Borges, the themes of responsibility and identity pervade his many fictions, including “The Shape of the Sword” (1942), whose message—“whatever one man does, it is as if all men did it”—Emir Rodríguez Monegal considers to be the prototype for many stories that would follow (112). Such a proposition surely relates to Bertolucci’s beliefs regarding political responsibility and collective obligation and can be seen to precede the burden of legacy that would later appear in “Theme of the Traitor and the Hero.” However, an even clearer articulation of the theme of inheritance, and one that resonates more deeply with the plot of *The Spider’s Stratagem*, comes from “The Sect of the Phoenix.” In this series of veiled descriptions of a secret rite passed from one generation to the next, we can observe several parallels between this mysterious act and the assassination of both Fergus and Athos I, imagining Athos II and Ryan as the first of many Kilpatrick and Magnanis to be initiated into the unspoken secret plots of their predecessors. However, while Athos II’s secret is revealed to the viewer at the end of the film, Borges’ riddle proved to be too cryptic for some readers, including Ronald Christ, who eventually had the chance to confront the writer directly. As he wrote in *The Narrow Act: Borges’ Art of Allusion*,

He leaned over and whispered into my ear so that no one else could hear: “Well, the act is what Whitman says ‘the divine husband knows, from the work of fatherhood.’—When I first heard about this act, when I was a boy, I was shocked, shocked to think that my mother, my father had performed it. It is an amazing discovery, no? But then too it is an act of immortality, a rite of immortality, isn’t it?”
(qtd. in Rodríguez Monegal 128)

Though the content of this story’s secret and the autobiographical discovery behind it greatly differs from the discovery made by Athos II in Bertolucci’s film, both secrets essentially come down to the notion of immortality. By involving his son in the plot Athos I ensures the continuation of the

secret, the propagation of the truth in the eyes of the next generation, while at the same time securing his own paradoxical immortality, preserving his symbolic status as a public martyr and a hero by privately dying a traitor and a coward. Just as the copulative act becomes a shameful secret to be held by the following generation, the product of the act itself, the fiction surrounding Fergus' and Athos' deaths comes to rest on the shoulders of those who uncover it.

Like Borges, Bertolucci also extensively examines the themes of repressed and revealed secrets, the weight of inheritance, and the struggle between fathers and sons in many of his films, a fact of little surprise considering the large role that his personal experience with psychoanalysis and his thematic inclination toward Freudian theory have played in his creative productions.⁹ As we saw in *The Spider's Stratagem*, in addition to portraying the weight of a father's legacy on the conscience of his son, Bertolucci also creates an Oedipal tension between the protagonist and his father's mistress, an allusion that culminates in the explicit suggestion that he take his father's place by her side. Certainly not limited to this film, Bertolucci's representation of the Oedipal struggle appears elsewhere, including in the film *Novecento*, where, according to Christopher Wagstaff's reading, "for Bertolucci, the Oedipal situation is the metaphor for human existence, both individually and sexually, and socially and politically. In fact, for him, the sexual is political, and he elaborates on the Oedipal struggle between father and son, relating it to patriarchy, selfhood and repression, and transforming all this into a language for expressing the political reality of class relations" (206). Beyond this film, the Oedipal theme also figures prominently in the dynamics between the characters of *The Conformist*. Here the leitmotif is threefold as the director builds an uneasy tension between the protagonist, Marcello, and his mother, between Marcello and the father figure in his former professor, and between Bertolucci himself and his own cinematic mentor and paternal figure,

⁹ In fact, Bertolucci began his psychoanalytical regimen when he started filming *The Spider's Stratagem*. As he said in an interview, "it wasn't a coincidence that when I began the film, I also started psychoanalysis; or, better yet, a psychoanalytical career parallel to a filmmaking career" (Gili 136).

Jean-Luc Godard. With several critics reading Professor Quadri's character and Marcello's relationship with him as representative of the mentoring Godard and Bertolucci's later rejection of his teachings,¹⁰ the manifestations of Bertolucci's personal life in his creative works are well recognized, and perhaps do not end with his relationship with the French filmmaker.

In fact, before working with Godard, Bertolucci began his cinematic career as an assistant to Pier Paolo Pasolini, going on to direct his first feature film, *The Grim Reaper* (1962), an adaptation of one of Pasolini's stories. When Bertolucci has spoken of this time, a similar tension as that between himself and Godard, though expressed less harshly than the onscreen murder of Godard's fictitious counterpart, can be detected, especially when he refers to questions of the film's authorship: "I think that while shooting I was attracted and inspired by different things: I was already beginning to get a confused idea of my own identity as a film director. And so, I was very irritated—I was very young then. I was twenty-one—whenever anyone said that *The Grim Reaper* was a Pasolinian film" (Gili 131). In addition to these two father-like figures that influenced his cinematic writing and direction, Bertolucci also recognizes the role that his actual father played in his artistic development. Being the son of a famous poet, he admits, shaped his decisions and made an artistic career—first in poetry and later in the film world—seem like a natural choice for him. In the same interview, he says:

...since there was a poet in the house, my father, Attilio Bertolucci, I started composing poetry as soon as I learned how to write, that is, from the age of six. So this could be seen as a very strong emulation of my father. However, as my father was also a film critic in a provincial town—Parma—I often used to go with him to see movies that he was supposed to review ... By the time I turned twenty, making

¹⁰ Wagstaff, for example, summarizes the main arguments of the connection between the fictional character and the real life mentor: "In *Il Conformista*, the anti-Fascist philosophy professor, who is assassinated with the help of one of his pupils, lives at Godard's Paris address, has Godard's telephone number, and shares a Christian name with him" (202).

movies seemed quite natural. When you think that something is natural, it's also natural that it comes naturally" (Gili 129).

Between Godard, Pasolini, and Bertolucci's own father, the basis for the treatment of Oedipal struggles, the unease of inheritance and the sense of entrapment within the legacy of a forebear perhaps shed light on his choice in adapting one of Borges' stories that most prominently deals with such themes.

Regarding Borges' interest in these themes in the first place, if a connection can be drawn between Bertolucci's life and his work, the same can be suggested in the case of Borges who, like the Italian filmmaker, found his career "naturally" chosen for him as well. Like Bertolucci, Borges grew up under the literary influences of a writer father, but in contrast to the success enjoyed by Attilio Bertolucci, Jorge Guillermo Borges' limited authorial career was cut short with the onset of blindness. As Jorge Luis Borges explains in *Un ensayo autobiográfico*: "Desde la época en que yo era niño, cuando le llegó la ceguera, quedó tácitamente entendido que yo debía cumplir el destino literario que las circunstancias habían negado a mi padre. Esto fue algo que se dio por descontado (y tales cosas son mucho más importantes que las meramente dichas). Se esperaba que yo fuera escritor" (16). Recognizing the unspoken expectations behind his drive toward writing whereas Bertolucci accepts as natural his inclination toward poetry and later cinema, Borges would go on to examine the themes of responsibility and inheritance in his writing, placing similar expectations on characters such as Ryan Kilpatrick in a story that would one day catch the interest of Bertolucci.

Given the extraliterary influences upon the thematic choices of not only Bertolucci but on those of his source text, it is of little surprise that *The Spider's Stratagem* should take Ryan Kilpatrick's ironic burden and expand it into a quite physical entrapment of Athos Magnani, just as it explodes Borges' labyrinths, monuments, and theaters into a complex network of recurring symbolic spaces and stylistic arrangements. The more subtle allusions to Tara's frozen time and Athos' inescapable

burden that fuses his identity with that of his father culminate in the final moments of the film when that intangible tension becomes a visible reality. Having finished his speech and returned to the train station, Athos finds that his train has been delayed and asks for a newspaper. Yet another indication that Tara has been abandoned in the past, the attendant tells him that the paper has not arrived, that “sometimes they forget we exist” (01:34:47). But it is not until the final frames of the film that we, and Athos, actually see that he has become trapped in this forgotten town. As the camera moves from right to left along the tracks—in a gesture opposite the left-right regression that followed Athos into town when he first arrived—the sense that time will now progress as normal is countered as we notice that the tracks become increasingly overgrown with grass. This closing image suggests not only that Athos cannot leave, but also that he never arrived from elsewhere, that, the product of his inherited past, Athos has never existed outside of Tara. As Wagstaff puts it, “he is trapped, as it were, in the past, in the dead realm of memory” (208). Tara, therefore, is not only a theater, but also a prison where both temporal and spatial forces close in around Athos, demanding that he face the responsibility that has been left to him.

This ultimate example, along with the symbolic spaces of the circular labyrinth, the monument and the theater, demonstrate the profoundly individualist appropriation of Borges’ themes on the part of Bertolucci. Yet they also show us that, in spite of the original manner in which he expanded each of these elements, the way that he transformed Borges’ narrative gaps into his own visual inconsistencies and absences transforms the role of an active reader of literature into an active reader of film. By refusing to reconcile problematic circular shots, unrealistic representations of movement and hidden information, Bertolucci performs the double task of calling attention to the artificiality of film and granting the spectator a greater opportunity for subjective interpretation than the role offered by traditional techniques—all through the use of the unsutured perspective.

Athos Magnani: Traitor or Hero?

We have seen that through a number of formal and stylistic structures both Borges and Bertolucci have left in their texts several unfinished, unresolved, and unseen elements that must be reconciled and completed by the text's recipient. In an ultimate gift of interpretive space, Borges and Bertolucci also leave a thematic judgment in our hands, never untangling the paradox found in Borges' title and Athos II's question: "But what was the story of Athos Magnani ... who is Athos Magnani? A traitor or a hero?" (01:30:47). Returning to the previously cited story that Borges wrote as a predecessor to "Theme of the Traitor and the Hero" among others fictions, the notion of collective responsibility revealed in "The Shape of the Sword" once again speaks to the ambiguous status of Fergus Kilpatrick and Athos Magnani as each man is somehow both traitor and hero. As Vincent Moon tells the narrator, "whatever one man does, it is as if all men did it. For that reason, it is not unfair that one disobedience in a garden should contaminate all humanity; for that reason it is not unjust that the crucifixion of a single Jew should be sufficient to save it" (qtd. in Rodríguez Monegal 112). The choice of man's expulsion from Eden and his later redemption as the character's examples already demonstrates the paradoxical ambiguity that will appear in Borges' later stories, such as "Three Versions of Judas" and "The Theologians," in addition to "Theme of the Traitor and the Hero." But more than that, it also summarizes the complex position in which Fergus and Athos find themselves, each one being "both a hero and a coward, a victim and a victimizer, a creator and the creature created" (Rodríguez Monegal 112).

Paradoxically fitting into all of these categories, Athos Magnani and Fergus Kilpatrick cannot be said to fit into any of them. For how can one be a hero if heroism was brought about by cowardice? How can one be called a coward after willingly sacrificing his life for a cause? Both an Adam and a Christ figure, yet neither completely one nor the other, Athos, like Fergus, has committed a traitorous sin, making an individual decision that nevertheless affects all, barring his

society from the truth and forever condemning his fellow man to the realm of fiction. At the same time, however, he is celebrated as a martyr as a self-inflicted justice redeems his original sin. Athos essentially absolves the town of Tara of her Fascist past by sacrificing himself for the sins of all, offering relief to all who continue to believe and tell his story. Occupying the simultaneous roles of the assassinated and the assassin, the investigator of treason and the proven traitor, and the author of the plot and the character within it, Athos Magnani becomes a figure turned in on itself, initiating an cyclical pattern that not only denies his definition under one label or the other, but that dissolves linear chronology into convoluted time and crosses the generations to complicate the roles of father and son. As we observed, Athos Magnani's single decision to sacrifice, victimize, and fictionalize himself through death not only suspends him in the stagnant time of mythology, but suspends his son in the forgotten time of Tara, and suspends multiple signifiers over a single signified.

Just as Adam's expulsion from a pre-linguistic Eden initiates the division between language and the reality to which it refers, Athos' plot makes it impossible to assign a symbolic signifier to the referent that he has become. Neither simply a hero nor a traitor, and yet possessing qualities of both Athos creates a situation in which multiple signifiers hover above a single signified, making a symbolic correlation even more impossible than the fragmentation provoked by the biblical fall. In other words, if Adam's sentence disrupted the union between symbol and meaning, Athos' self-condemnation goes a step further by disrupting the symbolic relationship between the already fragmented parts, preventing his fellow characters and the viewer from judging him as either innocent or guilty while allowing us to recognize the erred judgment of those who deem him a true hero. By inducting us into Athos' secret without resolving its paradox, Bertolucci invites our participation in the exclusive truth while at the same time burdening us with the interpretive weight that such knowledge carries.

As we will see in Federico Fellini's adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's "Never Bet the Devil Your Head," the protagonist, Toby Dammit, experiences a similar cycle, but one that recreates not a fall from Eden but a fall from language itself. While Toby rejects empty words for more physical forms of communication, his attempt to reunite signifier and signified provokes the opposite effect of Athos' plan, though his efforts eventually fail to restore the Edenic union.

CHAPTER II

FROM POE TO FELLINI: TOBY DAMMIT'S FALL FROM LANGUAGE

Arriving at the second adaptation considered in this study, the jump from Bernardo Bertolucci to Federico Fellini—from 1970's *The Spider's Stratagem* to the 1968 premiere of *Toby Dammit*—seems at first glance, a much more reasonable transition than the leap from Jorge Luis Borges to Edgar Allan Poe. However, chronology, nationality, and native language aside, the short story to be examined here, “Never Bet the Devil Your Head: A Story with a Moral” (1841), as well as Poe's approach to narration in general, has a great deal in common with the style and stories of Borges. Beside the fact that the latter was an avid reader and apparent imitator of the American poet and writer of tales, there are numerous points of comparison between “Never Bet the Devil Your Head,” and “Theme of the Traitor and the Hero,” not least of which include their complex narrative situations and the participatory readers required to untangle them. However, while Borges may have found inspiration in the mysterious, macabre stories that made Poe famous, Fellini found in “Never Bet the Devil Your Head” a tale that, though it entails its own type of narrative deciphering and active interpretation, satirizes more than it horrifies.

While the concrete spaces of the labyrinth, the monument, and the theater informed our analysis of the subjective, interpretive space granted to Bertolucci's viewer through unsutured images, the subjectivity concerning us here is that offered by the discursive space occupied by each protagonist. Just as Athos II can be seen to narrate his own role within the stories spun by his father and the film's director, the Toby Dammit of both Fellini's film and Poe's tale respond to their narrative situations, demanding, rejecting, or abandoning their space for linguistic discourse according to the narrative structures that present their stories. In a comparative look at both the

written text and the cinematic work, we will approach Fellini's adaptation through the narrative structures transformed in their journey from word to image, observing the effects of such transformations on the discursive space of the protagonist, on the interpretive space of the viewer, and, finally, on the space that Fellini creates for himself within the film as adapter.

American Transcendentalism to Italian Film Culture: A Satire Adapted

When offered by a French production company to participate in *Histoires extraordinaires* (U.S. title, *Spirits of the Dead*, 1968), a three-episode series of Edgar Allan Poe adaptations,¹¹ the importance of narrative structure and reader participation was, perhaps, less present in his mind than the opportunity to create his own biting satire when he finally settled upon “Never Bet the Devil Your Head.” Considering that the story unambiguously ridicules Transcendentalism, mocking its spiritual and literary ideals through Poe's clever subtitle, his moralizing narrator and a protagonist, Toby Dammit, ailing from a case of the ‘transcendentals,’ it is no surprise that Fellini would use such a story as the basis, or as he called it, the “jumping-off point,” for the much more broadly critical work that would be *Toby Dammit* (Samuels 108). For while Poe jabs at some specific Transcendentalist writers quite recognized in the social and literary atmosphere of 1841 New England, Fellini takes aim at a much wider range of societal elements that apparently surround him in his especially fragile mental, physical and professional state. Just as Bertolucci found in *The Spider's Stratagem* a new psychological stability and a transitional phase in his career, *Toby Dammit* returns

¹¹ Originally told he would be working with Ingmar Bergman and Orson Welles, Fellini agreed to do the film, only to discover that two French directors, Louis Malle and Roger Vadim, would in fact direct the other episodes (“William Wilson” and “Metzengerstein,” respectively). However, because this contract freed him from a previous commitment to film the unfinished *Il viaggio di G. Mastorna*, Fellini remained onboard the project (Samuels 108).

Fellini to the screen following a cinematic failure and a subsequent psychological decline.¹² But rather than simply overcoming the destructive features of the industry and the criticism surrounding his own career, Fellini takes issue with them onscreen. John Stubbs summarizes the obvious victims of satire in “church officials, fashion models, traffic jams, celebrity interviews, and awards ceremonies” (207), while Robert Eisenhauer points to such targets as “the paparazzi, the pop publicity machine, movies ... romantic excess ... materialism,” and bringing it to the personal level, “Fellini’s uncertain status as legendary auteur in constant need of psychological and financial backing, [and] the negativity and creative nullity of critics and theorists” (136).

Although the two works—Fellini’s film and the story from which it was “liberally” adapted¹³—do, of course, come from radically different media and historical circumstances, several critics are quick to suggest that Fellini maintained nothing more from the source text than its satirical tone and the eventual decapitation of the protagonist.¹⁴ A closer look, however, and, more importantly, a comparative one, reveals some deeper connections between the two works on both structural and thematic levels. One of the strongest indications of Fellini’s careful reading of Poe’s tale—despite his claim to have read the story only *after* shooting the script¹⁵—is the presence in both texts of the theme of communication and the opposition between the rational use of language and the empirical, physical, animal world. The deterioration of language is central to the development of

¹² *Toby Dammit* was Fellini’s first film after the failure of *Mastorna*, which had coincided with a psychological crisis and serious physical illness that prevented him from completing the film and from working at all during a two-year period.

¹³ The opening credits of *Toby Dammit* label it a “*libre adaptation cinématographique du conte d’Edgar A. Poë*.”

¹⁴ Stubbs, for example, says quite explicitly that “certainly very little of the Poe story was used by Fellini and Zapponi [a screenwriter]: only the protagonist’s name and the tale’s grisly end” (208). Porcari has a similarly limited view of the elements that Fellini “takes” from Poe’s story (9).

¹⁵ Lilliana Betti, Fellini’s assistant at the time, provided the director with summaries of several Poe stories, and it was from her summary of “Never Bet the Devil Your Head” that he supposedly chose this particular tale and wrote and shot the script (Betti, Colta and Zapponi, *Tre passi nel delirio*, 1968, cited in Stubbs 208).

both Toby and the narrator of Poe's story, and Fellini maintains the weight of this theme even as he adjusts it to fit the needs of his own Toby Dammit. While these protagonists exhibit similar relationships to language, however, the narrative structure of each of their stories determines one of their greatest differences: all of the information about Poe's Toby arrives to the reader through one voice alone, that of a first person narrator with his own set of beliefs and attitudes, whereas Fellini's Toby tells his own story, the view of and from his consciousness generally unmediated by the control of a narrating presence. In other words, while the original Toby only exists as an object in the words of a subject with an agenda, Fellini's Toby has his own agenda, split between the roles of narrator and character, but in control of the information brought to the viewer.

By examining this central difference in the telling of each character's tale, I hope to show that in both the film and the story upon which it is perhaps not so loosely based, the narrative situation that defines each Toby—the silenced Toby of “Never Bet the Devil Your Head” and Fellini's authorial protagonist—determines and reflects the relationship that each of them has to language—the former never having had the ability to communicate and the latter losing his capacities little by little. Finally, I argue that, in adapting the narrative structure that presents the original, written Toby's story, Fellini gives us a protagonist whose fall from language demonstrates in his choice of the physical world over verbal abstraction, image over word, the process of adaptation itself.

Narrative Structure and Toby's Discursive Authority

Beginning with the narrative determinants of each work and each protagonist, we will first see exactly how their stories come to be told and how each Toby comes to exist in the eyes of his reader and spectator. Upon delineating the narrative situations that define each of the protagonists, we will then examine the various manifestations of (mis)communication in both works as related to

the opposition between verbal and physical modes of expression, hopefully demonstrating a link between each text's narrative structure and Toby's abandonment of language. Returning first to the idea of "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" as a story requiring the deciphering interpretation of an active reader, the narrative complexity that Poe creates here relies primarily on the distinction between author and narrator, both of whom, of course, are responsible for the creation and presentation of the subject, Toby Dammit. By placing an ironically ignorant narrator between himself and the protagonist, Poe achieves his satirical goals and invites the reader to revel in them. As Daniel Royot points out, in taking on the Transcendentalists and their insistence that literature serve a moral purpose, "Poe's abhorrence of the didactic prompt[s] him to enlist his reader as an accomplice. Nudged toward laughter through the medium of satiric irony or sheer extravagance, the latter was expected to be tickled out of conformity" (57). However, this accomplishment only succeeds at the expense of Toby's head, body, and voice.

A product of the narrator's words from beginning to end, Toby is never given the chance to take part in the telling of his own story. And while the narrator's treatment of Toby's decapitation (first confused for "hurt feelings"), the disposal of his remains (dug up and sold for dog's meat after the Transcendentalists refuse to pay for a proper burial) and his explosive reactions to moralizing lectures certainly contain enough ironic absurdity to provoke laughter, Toby is quite clearly sacrificed for the greater good of Poe's critical objectives. Although some of his words do make it to the story in the form of paraphrased summaries and supposed quotations, the extent to which Toby is silenced and sentenced to the whims of the narrator is apparent in the fact that his death not only ends the story, but also begins it. While, logically, at the fictional time of narration Toby would not have been alive to offer his own story, Poe's narrator makes it clear to the reader almost immediately that Toby has already died, telling us that "it is not [his] design...to vituperate [his] deceased friend, Toby Dammit" (215). The significance of this brief bit of information lies in the fact that, from the

perspective of the reader, we learn that the protagonist of the tale is identified as “deceased” before he is identified by name, suggesting from the start the impossibility of an assuredly faithful telling of his story.

Additional statements made by the narrator as he explains his relationship to Toby not only signal Toby’s inability to defend himself or his lack of control over the information conveyed, but also emphasize that he only exists as a subject created through the narrator’s voice. For example, describing his attempts to mentor the delinquent Toby, he characterizes his task as an attempt to “awaken him to a sense of his situation,” granting him consciousness just as he grants, and later takes away, Toby’s literary life through the process of narration (218). And if the narrator can be seen as the controller of Toby’s fate, narrating him into and out of existence, his prediction of Toby’s end—redundant in the fact that he has already assured us of Toby’s death and self-affirming in the fulfillment of his own prophecy—eventually brings it about: “I went down upon my knees forthwith, and, uplifting my voice, made prophecy of his ruin” (215). One of several plays with the structures of ascent and descent in the attack on transcendence, this statement also reiterates the narrator’s powers to save or condemn Toby Dammit.

Additionally, the dynamics of a powerless protagonist whose fate lies in the voice of his narrator has a complex effect on the reception of this story. On a rollercoaster ride of a reading, we begin the story in a position of superiority to the narrator, condescending from our equal plane with Poe as we pick up on the irony of such statements as, “...it has been shown that no man can sit down to write without a very profound design. Thus to authors in general much trouble is spared. A novelist, for example, need have no care of his moral. It is there—that is to say it is somewhere—and the moral and the critics can take care of themselves” (214). Later, as the narrator begins to describe Toby and his deviant behaviors (among them gambling at six months of age, kissing girls at seven months, and refusing to sign the Temperance pledge at eight months), we align

ourselves with his narrative voice, laughing *with* rather than *at* him as we now, together, direct our condescending gazes toward Toby and his antics. Ultimately, however, this common standpoint dissolves into two distinct positions once again, only this time leaving us below the narrator who fooled us into collaboration. As Eisenhauer explains:

The reader, an unseen third party, is compelled to enter into a contract with Poe's narrator, in effect sharing his movie, taking voyeuristic delight, for example, in Toby's 'pigeon-winging.' In the aftermath, voyeurism may be seen as sadism. Only in the grim and cruelly brief rush of the final paragraph—a diabolically dirty trick played upon sympathetic *conscience* and echoing Toby's decapitation—does Poe make the reader experience the cold shower of a romantic nihilism. (141; emphasis in original)

By forcing the gradual descent of our position as readers relative to the position of the narrator, Poe reiterates the impossibility of transcendence through literature as we, like Toby, find ourselves manipulated by the words of a controlling, although ignorant narrator. However, whereas Poe's Toby and his story exist only in the words of a mediating presence, the Toby of Fellini's film addresses his spectators unhindered, telling his own tale through an equally complex, if less indirect, process of narration.

Described by critics as “a film about consciousness” (Burke 147), one that “externalize[s] the burned-out state of Toby's consciousness” (Eisenhauer 135), and by Fellini as a story “seen from a drugged perspective” (Samuels 109), *Toby Dammit* unarguably presents its protagonist's story through his own words and, when they fail him, through his eyes, imagination and memory. The first indication that the information onscreen comes from a subjective vision of the world occurs at the film's very start, as Toby's voice falls over images of clouds, describing his arrival by air to Rome. However, while it may be the first, Toby's narrative voice-over is certainly not the strongest

indication of his authorial presence since, with the exception of this and one other brief moment of narration, it is not Toby's words but a dizzying display of images and sounds that present to the spectator the details of his stay in Rome, the "Catholic Western" he is to star in, and the awards ceremony that brings him to the city in the first place. Throughout the film we are overwhelmed with a concentration of information, including a strange assortment of photographers, nuns, gypsies, priests, journalists, models and actors; discordant audio-visual information as mouths move to the sound of mismatched voices; and Toby in a range of emotional states as he passes through timid, aggressive, sedate, intoxicated, frustrated, sarcastic, and exhausted phases; all of which are presented through a variety of camera angles, color filters, and sudden cuts.

While this narrative style, with its technical flourishes and exaggerated camerawork, may call our attention to the artificiality of the devices in front of us, it is nonetheless a subjective account of events from the perspective of Toby Dammit. As George Porcari points out, "there are abrupt shifts in visual syntax using a variety of cinematic techniques that refuse to cohere, that in fact contradict each other, as if incompleteness itself were the key factor in organizing the film's narration" (9). However, this style of "willed incoherence," Eisenhauer counters, disorienting as it may be, is hardly the result of chaotic images "left to chance" (139), but rather demonstrates the complexities of (sub)consciousness, memory and imagination, all at play in the protagonist's reconstruction and telling of his story. Porcari also suggests that this style, characterized by a saturation of conflicting and incomplete information, "makes it difficult to see where the scene will go from second to second," resulting in a "resistance...to narration itself" (9). It may very well be true that the barrage of input heaped upon the spectator makes it initially difficult to distinguish a narrative sequence of

events, but rather than a failed attempt at narration, this style seems to be just Fellini's goal,¹⁶ as it was Poe's goal to create narrative complexity in his story. Michael Begnal's reading of both works takes into account the intended disorienting effects on the reader/spectator. As he explains,

The moral, if there is any, is clearly that there is no conventional moral in these works, and it is not the responsibility of the artist to provide one. But this does not mean that either artist is turning his back on humanity or sensitivity. Such a situation is obviously intended to place the burden of comprehension upon the audience, to force the viewer from a passive into an active position. (131)

In other words, just because Fellini's film reflects thematic and technical choices that self-consciously complicate its reception does not mean that it resists coherence; it simply requires some effort on the part of the viewer to distinguish the narrative structure from the deluge of images that surround it.

As we will now observe, narration is not only possible but is achieved, quite significantly, through a combination of words and images, all presented in a cinematic equivalent to the first person. Through an array of voice-overs, subjective shots and other perspectivized images, the narration moves us from the airplane, where we first hear Toby's voice, to Rome's airport, where we first see his body, through the city by car, on to the television studio where he is interviewed, inside the awards ceremony where he is honored, bringing us, finally, to the labyrinthine streets of Rome that lead Toby to his end. During the trek through these spaces there are just two moments of verbal narration: the establishing voice-over that situates us within a descent towards Rome and within Toby's authorial control, and a flashback from the car-ride back to the airport during which Toby tells us of and shows us the Devil for the first time. While these two scenes demonstrate a split

¹⁶ With respect to the self-reflexive, artificial devices that produce this disorienting approach, Fellini told Samuels: "Cinema is an art of illusion, and sometimes the illusion must show its tail. A great magician pretends to make a mistake sometimes" (96).

between Toby's roles as narrator and protagonist—for in the first case, although we do not yet see his body, he is both a passenger on the plane and the narrator of his thoughts as the plane lands, and in the latter we both see Toby's image and hear his voice explaining the flashback—there are also two moments that, like many key scenes in *The Spider's Stratagem*, may be deemed unsutured due to the unsettling impossibility of assigning the presented perspective to Toby's subjectivity. Turning first to Toby's spoken narration and then to these unaccountable perspectives, we will see just how the narrative structure that Fellini creates differs from that utilized by Poe, as well as identify the role of these structures in the development of each Toby and in the reception of each text.

Voice-over Narrative

As the film opens, disorienting processes are already in effect as we see the passing of clouds through several color filters, unable to detect whether we see them from the ground, from above, or from some parallel angle. The camera zooms into them, apparently seeking something that never materializes, as we finally learn that we are in fact above the clouds, which clear not to reveal the negative space of the sky but, rather, the bird's eye view of what we will find out to be Rome. With our eyes on these clouds, Toby's voice situates us within an airplane with the following words:

The plane continued flying over the airport without deciding to land. It was the first time I was coming to Rome and I had the sensation that this trip, which had taken me so long to decide upon, was very important for me. So much so that at one point I had the absurd hope that the plane would turn back and take me far away. Home. This was impossible. Already the invisible webs of the airport had captured the plane. They were pulling it, unresisting to the Earth. (00:00:18)

Because the view within the plane does not appear until Toby mentions it, we immediately associate the screen's images with his perspective, understanding from the very start the split between Toby

the narrator, describing events past, and Toby the protagonist, being recalled and reconstructed before our eyes, eventually available to us in a visual present. What's more, we understand the latter as a result of the authoritative presence of the former. Unlike Poe's Toby, the cinematic protagonist controls not only his own fate, but also the manner in which it is presented, directing his words straight to an audience rather than diverting them through the perspective of another. However, as we have seen in the descriptions of Fellini's stylistic choices, the fact that his perspective is unmediated does not mean that his message, "reality," or the events as they happened arrive to the viewer unhindered. Rather, the aesthetic recreation of such psychological processes as memory, the sub-conscious dream world, and imagination affect the film's reception in the same way that Poe's first-person narrator interferes with a trustworthy representation of his protagonist's story, though perhaps to a lesser extent. For as we will notice in the second and only other voice-over narration in the film, Toby's capacity to share his own experience, distorted as it may be by the usual suspects of first-person narration, still grants him not only an exceptional amount of control but also the momentary gift of language, both of which are withheld from his literary counterpart.

The second and final scene in which Toby verbally asserts his presence as the film's narrator occurs during his ride from the airport to the television studio, already in the grasp of his producers and directors but fixed on the episode that just occurred at the airport. This time the split between Toby's two roles is even clearer as the film simultaneously presents us with his troubled, reflective expression, seated in the car's backseat, and the sound of his voice, also reflective and explaining in past tense his thoughts at that moment: "Once again I had seen her. She had been waiting for me at the airport" (00:08:12). Just as in the opening airplane scene, the images only materialize after Toby indicates the location. At this moment we return to the airport, but unlike the previous voice-over narration in which we are situated within a space—the airplane—for the first time, we now witness the recreation of a scene that has already occurred, not only in terms of narrative temporality but in

the sense that we, the spectators have already observed this scene from another perspective. Prior to the flashback, Toby walks through the airport and, harassed by a crowd of paparazzi, is pushed onto an up-escalator, entering a trance-like state before he descends from the top,¹⁷ apparently distracted by something that neither the photographers nor the viewers can see. Minutes later, this scene, temporarily unsutured in its withholding of information, is resolved through the flashback during which Toby the narrator essentially edits the story he has given us thus far, filling in the missing details. When the image catches up with the voice-over and we see the escalator once again, the narration continues: "...with her white, silent ball. I kept telling her to go away, but she always came back. She seemed to know that sooner or later I would join in her game. But when?" (00:08:18). During this recreation we finally understand what it was that caught Toby's attention on the escalator through a combination of images we have already seen and new, undoubtedly subjective sequences shot from the point of view of the Toby that we saw earlier. This time, a white ball bounces up the escalator toward the camera that shares Toby's gaze, resisting gravity in much the same way that the statue of Athos Magnani seemed to defy the physical forces that realistically govern objects (fig. 1). But, when we see Toby reach out to catch it we are once again outside of his consciousness and the ball has disappeared from our sight, though we conclude it remains in his (fig. 2). Finally, when we return to his perspective, we see the first glimpses of the little girl in white, a figure we will later discover to be an eerie manifestation of the Devil who tempts Toby to his demise (fig. 3).

In addition to being one of two narrated perspectives into Toby's consciousness, this scene is also significant for its pivotal placement as the turning point between narrator-mediated telling

¹⁷ Toby's overall descent in the film, beginning with the landing plane, continuing with the truncated ascent on the escalator and subsequent descent on the staircase, and his final descent into the bridge's abyss, can all be seen as nods to Poe's similar play with vertical motion ultimately reflected in Toby's, the narrator's, and the reader's failed transcendences.

and visually subjective showing. For while the sequence begins with the comforting guidance of a narrator—disconcerting as the information he shares with us may be—and takes us within the flashback as Toby interacts with the girl, it leaves us completely abandoned by this very narrator, not only once we return to the car but for the duration of the film. This segment, the film's only flashback and only visual emphasis of the split between narrator and character, essentially confirms the subjective nature of the story's telling, even as it transfers Toby's authority from the verbal to the visual. In the two following scenes to be examined—the film's opening and closing shots—we will see a progression from a combination of verbal and visual narration to visual representation alone, both scenes creating the disquieting effects of unsutured vision.

Scenes of Unsuture

First, the disorienting style of the film's initial sequence as we move from the strange clouds and eerie music to the airplane, the commotion within, and the grid-like view of Rome below, clearly establishes the tone and the density of information that will follow, just as Toby's voice confirms from the outset the story's perspective. But what makes the scene particularly unsettling, in this way setting it apart from the scenes to come, is not the quantity of information presented at once but rather the information that is missing or withheld. Unsutured in the sense that the spectator has not yet seen a subject with whom to physically associate the gaze, this moment initiates what Fellini's co-writer Bernardino Zapponi referred to as “a single sustained note which,” as opposed to the mounting tension of the traditional narrative crescendo, “disturbs us deeply through its persistence” (qtd. in Stubbs 208). Taking this model from Poe's stories, Fellini and Zapponi create the same effect visually by failing to fully explain what, and from whose perspective, we see the interior of the plane.

While such critics as Christopher Sharret believe that “we suddenly find ourselves in the cockpit of a commercial aircraft, looking at the scene from Toby’s perspective,” the mise en scène of the shot suggests otherwise (128). As Sharret himself points out, the view is not that from a passenger seat, but from within the cockpit as pilots and flight attendants go about typical landing procedures (fig. 4). The gaze that is constructed here, focusing in on a stewardess, hovering over the pilots’ shoulders, and falling on the face of a man whose role is unclear but who seems to be communicating with ground control, can belong to neither Toby the character nor Toby the narrator. First, it would be impossible for the character to be present in the cockpit at the time of landing, and secondly, while Toby as narrator has authorial control, he is not an omniscient figure and therefore would not have access to this information seeing as he did not experience it the first time around, as character. This unresolvable subjectivity, human in its shifting focus and tracking sight, is disquieting, since while we know who is speaking we do not know who it is that is ‘seeing.’ In this way, the disparity between vision and voice, present thematically as well as structurally throughout the film, is made clear from the beginning.

In contrast to the unresolved, unsutured scenes that resist reconciliation throughout the entirety of *The Spider’s Stratagem*, the displacement of voice, vision, and body in the initial scenes of *Toby Dammit* only remains unreconciled for two minutes of subjectively shot wanderings through the airport. Suddenly, spotted by a gang of photographers and journalists, the shadow and then the face of Terence Stamp as Toby Dammit finally appear in front of the camera, but only after one of the journalists calls Toby’s name. At this moment missing information is filled in, unsutured subjectivity sutured, and voice and vision assigned a body as the narrator takes on the role of character. As Frank Burke similarly concludes, “disembodied point-of-view shots inside the airport imply that he continues to exist without a body until his name is called by a reporter, whereupon his point of view merges with a visible body or image” (153). Just as Poe’s Toby is only granted literary consciousness

through the work and voice of another party, in his case the narrator, Fellini's, already a narrator, only embodies the readable, filmic, physical presence of a character in the proximity of another subject, one who identifies him by name. However, whereas Burke considers Toby to have "no voice and no identity" up until this moment of recognition on the part of the reporter (148), it would seem more appropriate, especially considering the narrative structure of the work and the previous voice-over, to consider the moment a transformation from one identity to the other during which he is initiated into his own story as character, rather than viewing it as the solidification of a single identity. In other words, he must have had a voice and an identity before this moment seeing as he is the narrator, the identification therefore splitting his identity into two instead of granting him one in the first place. Further, the journalist does not merely call his name, he also yells "Wake up!" (00:02:03), suggesting that he, like the unfortunate Toby of the short story, must be "awaken[ed]...to a sense of his situation" as protagonist in order to fragment the singular role with which he begins his story, that of authoritative narrator (Poe 218). This sequence, beginning in the clouds and ending with the first images of Toby Dammit, can be considered both an end to the disquieting effects of unsutured visual information and the beginning of Toby's adventure as self-represented character.

If the temporarily anonymous perspective in this first scene haunts its fellow subjects within the plane and at the airport, and distresses the viewer through its failure to declare itself from the beginning, the completely unidentified perspective in the second scene of unsutured subjectivity remains entirely unresolved, leaving the spectator with a far eerier sense of discomfort as the film comes to a close. Soon to end his reckless ride through the streets of Rome, Toby approaches a damaged bridge, smashing through a set of barricades which stop him short of the edge where the middle of the bridge has collapsed. Toby gets out of his Ferrari, looks across the bridge's gap, sees for the last time the little girl in white, twirling playfully with her ball, gets back in the car and, finally,

takes off at full speed towards the opening, presumably giving in to the Devil's game and attempting to reach the other side. However, while we hear the screech of tires as Toby rushes to the edge, there is no sound of a crash at the point in which the Ferrari should hit the bottom of whatever it is that lies beneath the bridge. Instead, the image of a metal wire painted red with blood comes slowly into focus, bouncing with a squeaking noise as we look past it to the bouncing ball and then to Toby's severed head lying on the pavement. Alone in the frame, it is clearly the only part of the Ferrari-driver duo that makes it across, and yet we have neither an auditory nor a visual explanation of what has happened to the bodies of Toby and the car. Noting the inexplicable nature of this only partially presented place of Toby's demise, Porcari asks,

What is this space? He drives his Ferrari headlong into an abyss, yet the depth of this abyss is an imaginary space since we never actually see it. It remains shrouded in darkness and fog, a space without boundaries; its incommensurability expressing the impossibility of apprehending all with the eye or of controlling all with the intellect.

(13)

Focusing on the visually absent, Porcari expresses the way in which this scene confuses and perhaps frustrates the spectator. The absence of explanatory sound, though, plays just as important a role, and in addition to complicating the intellectual reading of the film, the failure of this scene to explain itself also disquiets, even disturbs the viewer. Because the camera never ventures down after Toby's body, and because the soundtrack cooperates with this withholding of information, the gap between the two halves of the bridge becomes an unsuturable space, one that remains unexplained by the film's closing shots.

Additionally, while his view from the safe side of the bridge may have been Toby's last vision of the Devil, it is not the last time that we, the viewers, see her. Toby's severed head lies alone for just a brief second until the white ball enters the frame and rolls toward it. Just when the ball and

the head are about to meet, there is a close-up of the smiling girl looking at the camera (fig. 5), followed by a shot of her reaching for and picking up Toby's head. While the content of this closing scene, though notably artificial in its depictions of blood and decapitation, may be considered disturbing in itself, the components of its technical presentation contribute an eerie sense to already unpleasant subject matter. In addition to recognizing that our protagonist is obviously deceased and that the earlier voice-over narrations must therefore be postmortem, a significant realization that we will later examine in more detail, we first must ask ourselves, from whose perspective do we see the little girl? Each of the appearances of this Devil—in the flashback to the escalator, during Toby's interview, and on the far side of the bridge—are presented in such a way that we undoubtedly associate her image with Toby's subjective vision. In the first and the latter of these scenes, a contrast is clearly established between what Toby sees and what the subjects around him see, as the photographers, journalists, and we the viewers watch while Toby becomes transfixed by some invisible force, and as the two men at the bridge telling Toby not to go on see an empty road, ignorant of the little girl dancing on the opposite edge. So whether established by camerawork and *mise en scène* in these cases of the flashback and the bridge scene, or by the clear representation of subjective memory and verbal explanation during the interview,¹⁸ the vision of the girl in white is a highly subjective, perspectivized image associated only with Toby's interior consciousness. Therefore, when we are still able to see her after his sudden death, the subjective association with which we have been comforted and to which we have been accustomed for the length of the film no longer holds up. And whether this means that she was truly there all along or that the unidentified, hovering presence that began the film and now ends it is not, after all, accounted for by Toby's identity, the effect that this vision produces is certainly unsettling. No longer able to assign the

¹⁸ When asked by the interviewer if he believes in the Devil, Toby answers, "Yes! In the Devil, yes... To me the devil is cheerful, agile." And as we see her face as before, at the airport, Toby continues, "He looks like a little girl" (00:12:40).

image of this girl to the perspective and consciousness of an unstable man, we must come to terms with both her disturbing persistence outside of Toby's consciousness and with the unidentified subjectivity that now sees her. Ultimately, although this scene may have a greater impact than the first scene of unsuture which takes place in the airplane, both contribute to the disturbing tone that characterizes the entire film, one which Fellini wanted to be "disquieting;" as he says, "the whole tale is meant to have that effect: a drive toward death," and the unsutured nature of these moments in particular leads us to and leaves us with Toby's disquieting fate (Samuels 109).

In delineating the narrative forces that present *Toby Dammit*, we have seen that Toby's narrative discourse, his role as character, and the existence of an unidentified narrating presence at the film's start and close, all contribute to the complex representation of a series of events as understood and told by his consciousness. In comparison to the source text of this adaptation, in which Toby's tale is not only told by another, but told by an idiot, a first person narrator mocked by Poe and, eventually, condemned by the reader,¹⁹ Fellini's protagonist exerts far greater, if not total control over his story, therefore demonstrating, as we will now examine, a similar control over his capacity for linguistic and social communication. For just as they exhibit different levels of narrative authority in structural terms, each Toby also possesses a resulting, unique expression of language within the content of each work: Poe's Toby, doomed from the beginning by the control of his narrator, has never had a socially acceptable command of language, whereas Fellini's Toby consciously decides to abandon language just as he controls his own fate and the retelling of his death. However, while in the short story we accept Toby's anti-linguistic state as an unchanging part of his character and in the film we witness Toby's gradual rejection of linguistic communication, both works create a clear opposition between the physical, animalistic means by which both

¹⁹ Recited by Fellini's Toby as he accepts his award (00:25:48), the words of Macbeth could very well describe "Never Bet the Devil Your Head," "a tale told by an idiot," whose protagonist is merely a "poor player" whose fate lies in the hands of another.

protagonists come to communicate, and the hypocritical, artificial use of language by those that surround them.

Poe's Toby and the Absence of Language: Verbal vs. Physical Communication

Beginning with the Toby of "Never Bet the Devil Your Head," this opposition is apparent in the long-winded, rhetorical lectures given by the narrator to an uncooperative Toby who understands the world only through literal, concrete interaction with it. For example, the most important of Toby's vices is, as the title suggests, his "propensity...for backing his assertions by bets," a habit that in itself demonstrates a physical correlation between an object and one's words and actions, and one that allows Toby to assign a tangible value and meaning to his and others' linguistic statements (216). Further, of all of the bets that grant meaning to his assertions, the one that puts his most concrete possession at stake becomes his preferred statement. As the narrator tells us,

I will not be bound to say that I ever heard him make use of such a figure of speech as "I'll bet you a dollar." It was usually "I'll bet you what you please," or "I'll bet you what you dare," or "I'll bet you a trifle," or else, more significantly still, "*I'll bet the Devil my head.*" This latter form seemed to please him best ... At all events the phrase in question grew daily in favor ... In the end, he abandoned all other forms of wager, and gave himself up to "*I'll bet the Devil my head,*" with a pertinacity and exclusiveness of devotion that displeased not less than it surprised me. (217; emphasis in original)

The amount of text dedicated to this escalation of Toby's bets signals the importance of his statement not only to the title and to Poe's critical agenda, but also to his reliance on an empirical understanding of his surroundings. Rejecting the wager of a dollar, Toby refuses to gamble for something that is useless on its own, an object only valuable in a representative relationship with

whatever it is worth. After suggesting the wager of a trifle, a concrete, self-contained article, Toby settles on his most tangible object, his own head. Incapable first of understanding linguistic statements without attributing to them a visible value, Toby later avoids all that is figurative and finally ups the ante, paying his debt quite literally with his head.

A similar reliance on the physical over the linguistic can be seen not only in Toby's reported behavior, but also in the reaction that Toby provokes in the narrator himself. Much like the escalating wagers in the previous example, the narrator's actions demonstrate a comparable, though temporary descent as his ineffective linguistic feats give way to a visible, nearly animalistic response during yet another failed attempt at moral transcendence. Try as he may to remain in a socially superior position, the narrator is eventually dragged from the height of his condescending linguistic lesson, down to Toby's own infantile, physical level of communication. Trying to lecture Toby out of his gambling habits, the narrator begins with the high aims of preaching to him, telling him that "the habit was an immoral one...a vulgar one...discountenanced by society...forbidden by act of Congress" (216). Already we can see the transition from spiritual reasoning ("immoral," "vulgar"), to more perceptible arguments (social consequences), and finally to cited, concrete conclusions (legal consequences). Additionally, the chain of verbs that the narrator uses to describe this ineffective encounter indicates a similar descent into the physical: "I remonstrated ... I demonstrated ... I entreated ... I implored ... I preached ... I threatened ... I kicked him ... I pulled his nose" (216). Just like Toby's own bets, the narrator's statements are increasingly backed by tangible counterparts, as can be noted in the transition from "remonstrating" to "demonstrating," the difference between "imploping," which has no apparent repercussions, and "threatening," understood to represent a concrete consequence, and in the final resort to physical harassment.

As the tale continues and the narrator gives one final lecture in an attempt to change his friend's ways, we observe an even more intense opposition between Toby's deferral to meaningless,

physical signs and the narrator's wordy appeals and descriptions. After apparently sticking to verbal pleas this time, the narrator tells us of Toby's "equivocal behaviour" upon hearing the lecture:

For some moments he remained silent, merely looking me inquisitively in the face. But presently he threw his head to one side, and elevated his eyebrows to great extent. Then he spread out the palms of his hands and shrugged up his shoulders. Then he winked with the right eye. Then he repeated the operation with the left. Then he shut them both up very tight. Then he opened them both so very wide that I became seriously alarmed for the consequences. Then, applying his thumb to his nose, he thought proper to make an indescribable movement with the rest of his fingers. (218)

Toby's first response of silent inquisition suggests the image of an animal unresponsive to human language, as though the narrator has just given his speech to an uncomprehending dog. As for the reactions that follow, void of readable significance they are unintelligible to the narrator and to the reader, both of whom exchange information linguistically and know not what to make of Toby's signals. However, beyond the opposition between rhetorical language and animal non-language during the actual 'conversation,' the manner in which the narrator presents the event heightens the contrast between the two forms of communication even more. The linguistic means by which the narrator converts a supposedly physical sequence of gestures into a literary description calls attention to language itself, making the narration of the actions even more absurd than the incomprehensible actions themselves, while also proving the inefficiency of a language incapable of reproducing these "indescribable" signs. From Toby's gambling habits, gestures, and the increasingly physical effect that he has on those around him, we can conclude that his relationship with language, just like his limited narrative authority, is dominated by the narrator who communicates all of the information that we receive about him. Because our information is restricted by the perspective of the former,

the latter's voice never reaches us in a reliable way. As a result of the narrative situation that Toby is subject to, the use of language is essentially withheld from him, both as a means to tell his own story and as a use of his voice within the story. Therefore, the structural and thematic manifestations of communication in "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" function to the same end, silencing Toby for the sake of Poe's satirical, anti-Transcendentalist message. But while Poe's Toby can neither tell his story nor control his speech within it, Fellini's protagonist is capable of both, and equally defined by the narrative situation that presents him, chooses to abandon his capacities as the film progresses.

As we have seen through the narrative structures of both works, Fellini can be said to have amplified or complicated the narrative situation established by Poe, trading a secondary source narration for the complexity of a primary telling. During the same process of adaptation, the thematic opposition between language and physical communication, a notable but secondary theme in "Never Bet the Devil Your Head," explodes onto Fellini's screen manifesting itself in myriad ways. In the translation from story to film, Toby takes control of his tale and the question of successful and failed communication becomes increasingly important to the reading of the film and consistently apparent in the visual and auditory information that it presents. Additionally, while the treatment of communication in Poe's story creates a binary opposition between the realm of linguistic abstraction and the concrete, physical world, Fellini's treatment of the theme amplifies the artificiality of the former and the animalistic nature of the latter, while introducing the novel element of the mechanical to both realms. Further, the characters that maintain the opposition between physical and linguistic communication in Poe's story—Toby and the narrator—eventually venture into the other's terrain, the narrator becoming physically violent and Toby attempting to answer him linguistically on occasion. Likewise, the opposition as presented by Fellini shows graded rather than absolute divisions between verbal and non-verbal forms of communication: while those around

Toby use the artificial spoken language of show business society, hints of their own mechanical and animalistic traits can be seen in their behavior before we see them in Toby's own decline.

Fellini's Toby and the Failure of Language: Human, Animal, and Mechanical Communication

Beginning with Toby's arrival in Rome and continuing on through the interview and awards ceremony, there are numerous indications that the language surrounding him, as well as the society that uses it, is void of meaning, a system of empty signifiers that correspond to nothing. As we saw earlier, the first images of flight attendants, pilots, monitor screens and airport crowds are overlaid with mismatched tracks of feminine voices while men are speaking, masculine voices when women speak, and the din of radio correspondence, loudspeaker announcements, and non-diegetic music. From the very start, communication seems impossible as verbal, visual, and mechanical signifiers blend together only to cancel each other out. For example, when the navigating pilot, isolated by his dark sunglasses and thick headphones, attempts communication through the large, mechanical microphone in front of him, we hear only the recorded voice of a woman streaming through the airport to which we have not yet arrived. In addition to the disparity between words and meaning presented in the film's initial sequence, we meet several characters, principally women involved in the entertainment industry, who use language as an empty exercise, and who, unlike Poe's Toby, do not back their words with tangible actions or meaning of any kind. The first of these women arrives at the airport to greet Toby along with the producer and directors of the Catholic Western he is to star in. Beyond her position as one of the motion picture industry cohorts, the role of this woman as interpreter—translating from Italian to English for the British actor—lends her a great deal of significance, especially considering her failure to effectively manage linguistic input and output. One of several links between the languages at play in this film—English, Italian, and French—the interpreter admits to Toby that she does not understand the theoretical ramblings of the film's

producer and directors and cannot fully translate what it is they are saying. Therefore, even as a link between the languages, this figure tells us that communication within the realm of show business is truly impossible.

During the scenes that take place at the awards ceremony, Toby comes into contact with several other women, this time actresses and models, whose manipulation of language demonstrates its falseness even as they use it outside of the staged lines of their inherently artificial occupation. Awaiting the announcement of his own award, Toby listens as three beautiful actresses accept their trophies, the film cutting quickly from one speech to the next in order to emphasize the repetitive lack of originality and meaning behind their words. Three times in a row we hear, “I’m overcome with emotion. All I can say is ‘thank you,’” with music and applause roaring up each time as though the audience, unaware of the identically meaningless acceptance speeches, were equally moved by all three of them (00:19:48). The final example of a woman whose words, though empty, most closely impact Toby during the course of the film is the unidentified model or actress who approaches the intoxicated, distraught actor as he dozes in his chair offstage. And just as the music heightens the effect of the three awardees in the previous example, the soundtrack of this scene contributes to the false, almost dreamlike presence of this woman and her words. Set to the sound of Ray Charles’ “Ruby,” a song whose lyrics warn of a woman who is “like a dream, not always what you seem,” this encounter is a one-sided conversation involving the mechanically recited, seemingly rehearsed lines of this Ruby figure. She caresses Toby’s hair and tells him:

Don’t worry. I will look after you. I understand you, I already know you. I’ve always known you. From this moment you will never be alone anymore. I will always be next to you. You will never have to feel abandoned again. Every time you put out your hand you will find mine to hold. You won’t have to try and escape anymore. At last you can stop running. Your loneliness is over. We will have a perfect life, the one

we've always been looking for. I know that you have been searching. Now that you found me you won't have to search any longer. I am the one you have always been waiting for. And now I am here, with you, forever. (00:22:20)

As though taken directly from a movie script, these words lull Toby into a state of comfort, just as the classic, traditional Hollywood film distracts its viewers from reality and invites them into the dreamlike fantasy of the fictional. But just as we, the viewers of Fellini's film, find ourselves unaccompanied in the act of interpretation and left abandoned by the narrator, Toby wakes to find himself alone. Whether this woman was one of his visions or a real entity hardly matters as Toby and the audience recognize the artificiality of her words regardless of her status or intentions. While her message implies the warmth of a true, communicative connection, the way in which she delivers it suggests quite the opposite, demonstrating in her false security the meaninglessness of words mechanically conveyed without the actions to back them up. This final example of a show business woman who cannot use language in a truthful, authentic way shows us the social circumstances that surround Toby on the verge of his abandonment of language. However, the same artificiality is also present in his own behavior and speech, even in the earlier part of the film before his decline into the non-verbal, physical world.

Since Toby's narrative moments come at the film's start, it is not surprising that the content reflect its structure, allowing his most verbose moments to take place along a similar timeline before the abandonment of language by both narrator and character. Therefore, while relatively silent at the ceremony and having given up on verbal communication by the end of his high-speed ride through Rome, Toby's display of language can be seen in the first half of the film with his most artificial linguistic feats taking place during the television interview. As the hostess introduces him and two sound technicians in white lab coats are cued to play the applause track of an artificial audience, Toby realizes the absurdity of the situation. Asking them, "What's going on, are you serious?," the

dismayed Toby immediately stands out as the only ‘real’ person in the room, surrounded by cameras, equipment and people who mechanically interact with him, in a sense consuming him to sell their own product (00:10:20). When asked why he has come to Italy, Toby answers in all honesty that he agreed to come to Rome because of the Ferrari that his producers promised him. The artificial audience responds with laughter, despite the genuineness with which Toby answered the question. At this point he seems to understand that the reporters are only concerned with his celebrity status, and his answers to their questions become absolutely empty since they will be recorded and applauded regardless of their intended meaning. Knowing that he is not being taken seriously, Toby responds similarly, treating their inquiries in a sarcastic and immature manner. For example, when asked if he had a difficult childhood, he answers “No, my mother was very gay when she beat me” (00:11:18), and when asked if he has had “undignified” jobs he says, “Yes. But *never* a TV interviewer” (00:12:02). In the latter response, Toby’s failure to participate fully in this artificial exchange is expressed once again in his reaction to the laughter track played after his remark. “What a shame,” he utters under his breath, as though exhausted by the continuous maintenance of his celebrity façade. Finally, while this scene demonstrates quite humorously his ability to hold his own in the world of show business interviews, Toby does not only respond by participating in the falseness of linguistic feats, he also begins to reject language, even in this stage of the film. Much like Poe’s Toby, Fellini’s Toby responds quite childishly to the discourse being directed at him, using gestures rather than words when he is displeased with an interviewer. When asked what he most dislikes in the world, Toby responds “my public” (00:10:56); the interviewer then says, “They say you no longer have a public, Mr. Dammit,” to which Toby replies by sticking out his tongue, much to the delight and applause of the interviewer herself. It is clear that no matter what his response, Toby will be rewarded for his celebrity alone, even as he abandons language to respond with vulgar, physical gestures.

A final aspect of this scene that links it to several moments during the awards ceremony and the Ferrari ride has to do with Fellini's representation of the mechanical and animalistic forms of communication that oppose Toby's dwindling linguistic capacities. Although his first resort to physical signs takes place during the interview, the grotesque combination of animalistic and mechanical expression does not yet exist within Toby's behavior, but is at this point reflected in those that surround him. Through several gestures of the producers and interviewers, we see the animalistic and the human come together in this strange portrayal of the entertainment industry. The first indication that we are in a television studio is the image of a seated Toby as someone comes up to him and slips a microphone around his neck as though tightening a leash and collar around the neck of a dog. Next, a producer paces before the show goes on air, wagging a handkerchief behind him like a tail, while the hostess warms up for the show, moving her head from side to side and sticking out her tongue like a lizard, snapping into action when the cameras begin to roll, and crawling away on her hands and knees when her lines have been recited so as not to interfere with the shot of Toby Dammit. Also, during the middle of the interview a distracted Toby looks to an adjacent set, finding a woman lively and dancing one moment, stiff and robotic the next, having somehow changed from an organic, human figure into a mechanical, artificial object. Later, when an interviewer asks Toby what the devil looks like, she guesses, "a black cat or a goat or a bat?" (00:12:48), still oblivious to any meaning or implications behind Toby's answers. This particular interviewer displays a similar union of the animal and the physical as she swoops around the set on the platform of a giant camera, capturing Toby from various angles. In fact, many of the cameras and microphones take on animal-like qualities in this scene, seemingly darting about the room at their own will.

While there are several references to and imitations of animals in this relatively short segment, they are certainly not limited to the space of the studio, but can also be found as part of

the artificial and empty society that surrounds Toby at the ceremony, and as signals of Toby's abandonment of language along the path to his death. First, still among the actors, directors, photographers and producers that form Toby's circle, several visual and verbal signifiers continue to equate the language of show business to the debased, animal world that perhaps lurks behind their empty statements. On the stage a performer imitates an ape, a journalist holding a puppy pitches a project to Toby, a comic duo named Lion and Tiger are honored with an award, the ceremony's trophy is a wolf, and a blind comedian jokes about his cat's eye, which wants to chase mice while his other eye sleeps. In each of these examples, the grotesque combination of animal and human features reflects the opposition between the latent physical, instinct-based world of the animal which lies beneath the artificial rhetoric of linguistic expression present, perhaps, in all human interaction, but most certainly in the world that welcomes Toby and that we can imagine surrounds Fellini as well.

Beginning with his remarks at the television studio and slowly escalating during the awards show, Toby's frustration with this world seems to reach its peak during this very routine of the blind comic. It is at this moment that he completely breaks down, pulling himself together only with the comfort of the perhaps imaginary Ruby woman, just in time to be called to the stage. Considering this setting—the space itself a simulacrum of an outdoor theater, filled with people making a living out of imitation, who are being honored by meaningless awards and accepting such attention with meaningless words—it is not surprising that Toby's ultimate rejection of language takes place here. Rising to the stage, Toby begins reciting the lines from *Macbeth* that he has agreed to perform upon receiving the award, beginning with “All our yesterdays have lighted fools...” (00:25:48). However, when he reaches the famous “sound and fury” line, he is unable to go on, instead laughing into the microphone and beginning a personal rather than scripted monologue, his last attempt at honesty and authentic verbal discourse. But what makes Toby admit that he is not a good actor, that he has

been unemployed for the last year because of alcoholism, that he has not, in fact, been waiting for the Ruby woman? It is not that Toby cannot remember the lines that follow his truncated monologue; rather, he is already aware that his words, both at the interview and at this very moment onstage are “signifying nothing,” as are the empty words of the show business animals that surround him. Further, that his final use of public language be a refusal of the mechanical woman of his dreams suggests not only a rejection of the woman herself but, more significantly, of the artificiality she embodies and the language that she uses.

Having gradually recognized the meaninglessness behind verbal discourse, Toby the protagonist abandons language for the more immediate, concrete pleasures of physical and mechanical forms of expression, just as Toby the narrator has already done through the substitution of word with image. As he approaches the Ferrari that will free him from the confines of a false and empty society governed by language, he examines the vehicle with an almost sensual touch, sealing his choice of the physical world as the mechanical sounds of the engine overpower the voices of the producers who chase after him. Finally having left their world behind, Toby begins his late-night tour of the streets surrounding Rome. At one point he stops the car to cry out, first bellowing like an animal as though physically unable to speak, and later revving the engine as though substituting the machine’s voice for his own as he takes off once again. Driving at high speeds through narrow streets and sharp turns, Toby passes several non-verbal signifiers that indicate his full acceptance of this animal-mechanical world without language. From images and sounds of barking dogs, a herd of sheep, and a donkey, to pictogram street signs and billboards of mouths uttering nothing more than onomatopoeic characters, all of these images let us know that Toby, having abandoned language, is only capable of understanding the world through its concrete, tangible forces. Similarly, once he arrives at the blown-out bridge, a man tries to tell him that he must take a detour. Perhaps because the man speaks Italian, or perhaps because he pays him little attention, Toby appears to be quite

confused and kicks a barrel in frustration. Turning to get back in the Ferrari, Toby hears a crashing sound as the barrel presumably rolls off the edge, into the gap between the bridge's two sides. He spins around, only now understanding through physical test and empirical observation what he failed to understand through language, as the abyss literally becomes illuminated with Toby's knowledge of it. As for his ultimate abandonment of humanity and language, Toby's voice and the Ferrari's engine finally become one as he gives in to the physical world, the Devil, and his fate, trying and failing to transcend the world he has left behind.

As for the viewer, when our narrator-protagonist makes the decision to take his fate into his own hands—fleeing from society and its language in the first place and willingly jumping into the Devil's arms—we find ourselves eerily alone, abandoned by both figures. With the words of Toby's narrative voice long gone and the voice of the protagonist recently silenced, we are left only with image. But even in these ultimate moments of silence, it is clear that, in comparison to Poe's Toby, Fellini's protagonist exerts a great deal of control over his narration, his relationship with language and his own death. His literary counterpart, on the other hand, never has a role in the telling of his story, lacks the capacity for linguistic expression within it, and hesitantly succumbs to his fate, forced not only by the Devil but by the narrator who encourages his jump as well. Despite their differences, it should now be clear that each Toby and his command, failure or rejection of language, is the product of the narrative structure that either presents him—in the case of Poe's protagonist—or allows him to present himself—in the case of Fellini's.

An Uroboric Metaphor of Adaptation

While the literary character remains silent from the beginning to the end of the story, the cinematic portrayal of Toby Dammit and his linguistic fluctuations still requires some attention with respect to its status as adaptation. Because by the end of the film the spectator is aware that Toby's

initial voice-over narrations must be postmortem, Toby's dynamic relationship with language becomes cyclical rather than linear and paradoxical rather than definitive: it is Toby's fall from language and his desertion of society that eventually grants him the capacity to use language once again, this time as narrator, in a creative, purposeful and social way. In other words, only after abandoning the society that turns him away from language can Toby find the discursive space from which to tell his story. Just as Athos must first become a coward to reveal his heroism, Toby must abandon language and the world that demands it if he is to redeem himself through the meaningful discourse of narration.

While Toby's role as simultaneous narrator and protagonist has received little attention from critics, this paradoxical, cyclical structure in itself has not gone unnoticed. As part of an autobiographical reading linking Toby to Fellini, Walter Foreman notes the transformation not of character to narrator, but of actor to director as Fellini "looks at his own problem as a director from the position of an actor hero" turned director (112). According to Foreman, this transformation occurs when Toby takes control of the Ferrari just as Fellini takes control of the camera, becoming a director of his story rather than the actor who must follow lines written by others. Burke also notes this "evolution from actor to filmmaker," also characterizing Toby's postmortem directing as paradoxically cyclical:

The film's end is in its beginning, and vice versa, making its structure and its very nature uroboric. (The Uroborus is a snake biting its own tail in Egyptian mythology, signifying the power of self-begetting, self-slaying, self-wedding). As author of the tale, Toby is no longer a mere part of the fiction, as he would be as actor or talking head, but he is the total fiction. (154)

However, while both Foreman and Burke recognize and gain meaning from the film's uroboric structure, neither of them recognize as its point of origin a similarly cyclical structure present in "Never Bet the Devil Your Head."

Within the context of an adaptation rather than an autobiographical film, *Toby Dammit's* cyclical nature can be seen as yet another element stemming from Poe's story. The self-consuming structure that places the end in the beginning and the beginning in the end is present in "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" as both an organizing principle and as a structure scattered throughout the tale. Beginning with the title itself and its subtitle in particular, this "Story with a Moral" moves its lesson, the very didactic element that Poe aims to mock, from its traditional position at the end of a tale to the first position possible, the title. Structuring the story around this inversion, preserved to the very end through the anticlimactic and amoral closing statements, Poe continues to hint at the reversal, playing with a satirical position on didacticism through the story's content as well. For example, at one point the narrator blames Toby's behavior on the manner in which he was disciplined as a child. Describing Toby's mother, he says, "...poor woman! She had the misfortune to be left-handed, and a child flogged left-handedly had better be left unflogged. The world revolves from right to left. It will not do to whip a baby from left to right. If each blow in the proper direction drives an evil propensity out, it follows that every thump in an opposite one knocks its quota of wickedness in" (215). If we equate educating a child with the Transcendentalist goal of educating a reader, we can say that the effective form of accepted didacticism involves one direction (placing the moral at the end), while the other, sinister in its opposite orientation, creates the opposite effect (placing it at the beginning). In this way Poe's own tale, proving that a Transcendentalist reading is unnecessary and impossible, identifies itself and its inverted structure as a counteractive, anti-moral story that creates an effect opposite to that of the moralizing parable: satire. By placing the moral at the start of the story and by referring to this inverted structure within

the narrator's moralizing discourse, Poe initiates the uroboric structure that also presents Toby Dammit to the reader.

First mentioned by the narrator as his deceased friend, Toby Dammit is introduced as a character who no longer exists before we, the readers, even know that he existed in the first place. Once again, the end of the story, which coincides with Toby's end, is placed at the beginning, reversing the traditional crescendo characteristic of didactic structure. More important than the narrator's decision to begin with Toby's death, however, is the description that immediately follows this initial information about our protagonist. After presenting Toby's name for the first time, the narrator tells us that "he was a sad dog, it is true, and a dog's death it was that he died" (215). Although this early association between Toby and a canine may raise little suspicion at this point in the reading, the subsequent development of Toby's behavior and anti-linguistic communication might shed greater light on the choice. However, it is not until the chronological end of the story and the physical end of Toby's remains that the uroboric image is complete. When the Transcendentalists refuse to pay the narrator for Toby's burial, he says, "I had Mr. Dammit dug up at once and sold for dog's meat" (226). Gruesomely and unexpectedly, the narrator brings us back to the beginning where Toby was first equated with a dog, now being fed to the dogs in an image that clearly recalls the self-consuming Uroborus.

Returning now to *Toby Dammit* and the manifestation of this cyclical structure in the hands of Fellini, several critics see Toby's cycle from actor to director as the opportunity to find some optimism behind the bitter satire that characterizes the rest of the film. For example, Foreman sees Toby's ultimate, metaphorical filmmaking as "the preparation for a new beginning" (121), and Stubbs reads the film's end as the positive rebirth of "a society that has reached a decadent final stage of overripeness and needs to die in order to begin anew" (205). Yet, once again, these analyses of *Toby Dammit*, valid as they may be, limit themselves to the film alone and ignore the presence of

the source text on which it was based. Reading the film as an adaptation of “Never Bet the Devil Your Head” rather than as the self-reflexive creation of an *auteur*, all of the events leading up to Toby’s death suggest that his attempt at transcendence, just like that of the literary Toby Dammit, is ironically truncated and irreversibly denied. The strange eyes through which we see the little girl reach out for Toby’s severed head cannot reflect anything but the pessimistic condemnation of a sad soul who tried, but failed to transcend his earthly surroundings. Toby, the tale’s protagonist, is condemned not to the mysterious abyss, but to the endless cycle of language abandoned and restored as he lives out his fate through the process of self-narration.

This ending does not simply grant him the privilege of creative language, but more significantly forces him to live only through the language from which he tried to flee. If the fall from Eden banished man from a pre-linguistic paradise, condemning him to the world of language, Toby’s fall not from Eden but from language itself paradoxically condemns him to the same fate: his attempt to transcend to a pre-linguistic realm is refused, his language restored by his position as narrator. In effect, the literal and figurative failure to transcend does a great deal more justice to Poe’s story than many critics would care to believe. Looking beyond the obvious borrowings of Toby’s name and final decapitation, stronger connections such as the opposition between verbal language and physical communication, the failed and mocked attempts at transcendence and the uroboric structures present in both texts make it difficult to believe that Fellini did not read Poe’s story with great care, let alone that he never read it at all.

Finally, while there may very well be certain autobiographical elements in Fellini’s *Toby Dammit*—it does, after all, depict the atmosphere of Rome’s film and publicity industries in the 1960s, obviously familiar to the director—perhaps the most significant presence that he has in the film is that of adapter, inevitably writing Poe into his script as well. By representing the adaptive process as a personal struggle, Fellini indirectly presents both artists—nineteenth century writer and

twentieth century filmmaker—side by side, each given a space in the ultimate creation. Fellini’s portrayal of a Toby who replaces verbal discourse with visual input, word with image, recreates the process of cinematic adaptation from written narrative to film narrative, one never entirely dominating the other as reflected in Toby’s own condemned cycle. Because the adaptation never completely erases the text from which it sprung, Toby’s translation from word to image is incomplete and eternal. This metaphorical recreation of the adaptive process, as well as the previously listed connections between the two works, go to show that even in the eyes of the great *auteur*, a liberal adapter unafraid of straying from an original work,²⁰ an adaptation is never complete nor is it ever a completely individualist work.

Conclusions

Returning to the equally collaborative work that is *The Spider’s Stratagem*—as Bertolucci himself noted, finding collaborators in his fellow scriptwriters, his viewers, and, regarding adaptation in general, in the author of the adaptation’s source text²¹—we have seen that Bertolucci narrates the filmmaking process, invites the viewer to participate in his work, and unavoidably makes Borges a part of his film, just as Fellini creates a metaphor of adaptation, an active viewer, and a space for Poe through *Toby Dammit*. But in addition to these common elements, as well as such shared autobiographical circumstances as the director’s nationality, the historical moment of production, and his professional and psychological state at that moment, the connections between the two films go well beyond the extraliterary factors that may have influenced them, the unconventional style that marks each one, and the label of liberal adaptation. In examining the common ground between *The*

²⁰ In addition to *Toby Dammit*, see *Fellini Satyricon* (1969), *Il Casanova di Federico Fellini* (1967) and *La voce della luna* (1990).

²¹ Referring at the time to the script of *The Grim Reaper*, he said: “I felt that through my writing, I had to gain possession of a story which in the beginning had belonged to someone else” (Gili 131).

Spider's Stratagem and *Toby Dammit* on thematic, structural, and aesthetic levels, we find that both adaptations demonstrate the ideal balance of Bazin's dialectic between fidelity and creativity.

On the thematic plane, both works engage with the genres of their source texts while at the same time pushing the limits of convention in order to convey the director's particular message. And while Bertolucci dialogues with the detective genre to convey his ideological leanings and Fellini takes on his society through satire, both directors bring their universal claims to the local, their general criticisms to the specific, by portraying the crisis of an individual and reflecting the ills of an entire society on the personal struggle of a single man. On one hand, the themes of collective responsibility and historical inheritance are communicated through Athos II's failed search for identity outside of his father's past as he is forced to come to terms with the truths behind political mythology and constructed history; and on the other hand, the flaws of the entertainment industry and consumer society manifest themselves in Toby's similar search for identity, surrounding him as he seeks a means of expression within the meaningless language implemented by Fellini's many targets of criticism. Additionally, even though Athos and Toby respond differently to their respective crises—Athos accepting the dual nature of language that his father, traitor and hero, has used to his advantage, injecting it with multiple meanings, Toby rejecting the empty shell of language and finding his own discourse—both protagonists' reactions commence a self-consuming cycle that pervades the very structure of the film.

As we have seen in the paradoxical cycle that both affirms and denies Athos I's status as traitor and hero and that initiates Athos II into the circular time of Tara, as well as in the uroboric process by which Toby essentially sacrifices language in order to restore it, both films possess a cyclical structure which not only inverts beginning and end or overlays past and present, but which recurs in numerous ways throughout the film. Taking their cues from the circular patterns in "Theme of the Traitor and the Hero" and "Never Bet the Devil Your Head," Bertolucci and Fellini

reproduce such structures while once again putting them to work towards their personal goals as creators of their own stories. When Bertolucci represents such cyclical repetitions through his visual effects, or when Fellini chooses to make Toby's narrative and linguistic fluctuations follow the cycles of the decadent society around him, they are balancing their fidelity to the original text with their own motives by transforming the structures that inform that text's reading into the structures that organize a film's viewing.

In addition to the thematic and structural parallels between *The Spider's Stratagem* and *Toby Dammit*, a final consideration of the aesthetic adaptation of each work—taking into account the reception of written narrative as opposed to cinematic narrative and the ways in which each director encourages a similar interpretive experience between short story and film—leads us to the same middle ground on Bazin's spectrum. As was demonstrated in the examination of *The Spider's Stratagem's* disorienting techniques and unsutured images, the active participation required by Borges' reader was successfully transferred to the viewer of Bertolucci's film due to the sense of subjectivity imparted by these devices, in spite of the exaggerated expansion of many of Borges' narrative subtleties. Similarly, we noted that Fellini's own unsutured perspectives and voice-over narrations recreated the multiple narrative positions of Poe's reader while sustaining the disturbing tone of the original satire, despite the drastic shift from literary third-person narration to first-person cinematic subjectivity. In both cases, the preservation of the source text's readerly effects required a visual style and the execution of convention-breaking techniques, creating in the adaptive process itself a paradoxical cycle: the adaptation of both "Theme of the Traitor and the Hero" and "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" demanded a unique, imaginative, original approach on the part of Bertolucci and Fellini in order to faithfully preserve the physical, interpretive, and discursive spaces that began in the story of another.

A. FIGURES: *THE SPIDER'S STRATAGEM*



Fig. 1. Mirrored shots: Athos approaches the arguing men.



Fig. 2. Mirrored shots: Athos walks away from the arguing men.



Fig. 3. Old men watching Athos through theater-like curtains.



Fig. 4. A suddenly exterior view of Athos in his hotel room.



Fig. 5. A subjective view of Athos' assailant.



Fig. 6. A subjective view of Athos' audience.



Fig. 7. Athos as seen from Gaibazzi's car.



Fig. 8. Costa's rising movie theater screen.



Fig. 9. Athos in Tara's theater.



Fig. 10. Beccaccia in Tara's theater.

B. FIGURES: *TOBY DAMMIT*



Fig. 11. A subjective view of the mysterious ball.



Fig. 12. An exterior view of Toby as he reaches out for the ball.



Fig. 13. The first subjective image of the little girl/Devil at the bottom of the escalator.



Fig. 14. A view of the cockpit from an unsutured perspective.



Fig. 15. A view of the little girl/Devil from an unsutured perspective after Toby's death.

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