

The Cinematic Nature of the Literary World Represented in Marco Vichi's Crime Novel *Death in August* (*The First Inspector Bordelli Mystery*)

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This issue of *Forum of Poetics* is devoted to *The cinematic materiality of literature* and, at first glance, this theme seems problematic. First of all, literature has inspired filmmakers for years, representing in detail what film (re)used later. Filmmakers have often experimented with intermedial editing; for example, Quentin Jerome Tarantino used subtitles, toying with the idea of “chapter titles” and “chapter contents,” in *Inglorious Basterds* (2009). Secondly, it would be much easier to study literary techniques in film than *vice versa*. Thirdly, literature was remarkably “cinematic” ages ago, before film was invented, so how can we prove that film influenced literature? The fragmentary nature of Ludovico Ariosto’s works (e.g. *Orlando Furioso*, 1551) and works inspired by Ariosto, such as nineteenth-century digressive poems, are essentially “cinematic,” at least insofar as this word could be understood in the past centuries. Likewise, fragmentation, detail, imagery, and, above all, a narrative strategy in which a camera seems to move from one scene to another, are present in some of the most famous European po-

ems, such as Torquato Tasso's *The Liberation of Jerusalem* (1581)¹ and Antoni Malczewski's *Maria* (1825).² However, *Maria* has not yet been adapted into a movie, perhaps because of its philosophical, reflective, and metaphysical nature. These are all examples of literature from the "pre-cinematic" era. Respectively, cinematic perspectives, e.g. the worm's-eye view or the bird's-eye view, had been used in novels long before the invention of film. For example, in the opening of Bolesław Prus's *Placówka* [The Outpost] everything is shown from a bird's eye view, in a sequence of more and more detailed "close-ups."³ Today, such a technique is often used in films.

In literature, fragmentation and a dynamic structure are most closely associated with the poetics of film. There are many works which employ fragmentation, inspired by cinematic techniques. For example, Leopold Tyrmand's *Zły* [Bad] or Gaja Grzegorzewska's *Kamienna noc* [Stone night] are said to employ cinematic "fragmentary" poetics.⁴ The classic example of drawing inspiration from the big screen is John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* trilogy (1930–1936), in regards to both the books' structure and narration. Dos Passos imitates film editing and employs a so-called "camera eye."⁵ However, interestingly, the trilogy has been adapted into a radio play, a stage play, an audiobook, and even a song, but it has not been adapted into a movie. The reverse is true for literature that is said to be "unadaptable" and yet has been turned into a movie. For example, Dorota Masłowska in her prose plays with language and not imagery or visuality.⁶ Nevertheless, *Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną* [Polish-Russian War under White-Red Flag] has been adapted into a movie.⁷

Adventure and action novels are easy to adapt. We can show different groups of people and different plotlines. Therefore, the realistic or the naturalistic novel, such as Bolesław Prus's *Doll* or Reymont's *Chłopi* [Peasants], are extremely "cinematic," since they present the reader with an extreme long shot of society. They also describe the represented world in great detail.

¹ It has been adapted into a movie a couple of times, e.g. Enrico Guazzoni, *La Gerusalemme liberata*, historical drama, silent movie (Portugal, 1919); Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia, *La Gerusalemme liberata* (*The Mighty Crusaders*), drama – adventure – action movie (France – Italy, 1958). Piotr Salwa and Krzysztof Żaboklicki write about the visual aspect and theatricality of the poem. Piotr Salwa and Krzysztof Żaboklicki, *Średniowiecze, renesans, barok* [Middle Ages, Renaissance, Baroque], vol. 1, *Historia literatury włoskiej* [History of Italian Literature] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Semper, 2006), 302–4.

² On "editing" and Karol Irzykowski's plans to adapt *Maria* into a movie see: e.g. Marek Bieńczyk, "Estetyka melancholii" [The aesthetics of melancholy], in *Trzyście arcydzieł romantycznych* [Thirteen Romantic masterpieces], ed. Elżbieta Kiślak and Marek Gumkowski (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 1996), 17.

³ Bolesław Prus, *Placówka* [The Outpost] (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1975), 5–6.

⁴ Wacław Forajter, *Zły Leopolda Tyrmanda jako literatura środka: tekst i konteksty* [Leopold Tyrmand's *Zły* as literature of the middle: Text and contexts] (Kraków: Universitas, 2007), 93; Klaudia Pilarska, "How Much Crime Novel is there in the Crime Novel? On Genre Reflexivity in Gaja Grzegorzewska's *Stony Night*", *Forum of Poetics*, no. 13 (2018): 26–41.

⁵ Stephen Hock, "'Stories Told Sideways Out of the Big Mouth': Dos Passos's Bazinian Camera Eye", *Literature/Film Quarterly* 33,1 (2005): 20–27; Justin Edwards, "The Man with a Camera Eye: Cinematic Form and Hollywood Malediction in John Dos Passos's 'The Big Money'", *Literature/Film Quarterly* 27,4 (1999): 245–54.

⁶ Zofia Mitosek, *Poznanie (w) powieści - od Balzaka do Masłowskiej* [Getting to know (in) the novel – from Balzac to Masłowska] (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2003); Maciej Stroiński, "Wojna polsko-ruska z flagą i bez flagi" [Polish-Russian War with and without the flag], in *Od Mickiewicza do Masłowskiej. Adaptacje filmowe literatury polskiej* [From Mickiewicz to Masłowska. Film adaptations of Polish literature], ed. Tadeusz Lubelski (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2014), 413.

⁷ Dorota Masłowska, *Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną* [Polish-Russian War under White-Red Flag] (Warsaw: Świat Książki, 2003).

Indeed, some novels are more “visual” than movies. This also applies to crime novels. Thus, perhaps some visual techniques found in crime novels come to life under the influence of cinema and film? Maybe what is ephemeral and fragmentary in film becomes a clear, colorful, and moving image in the novel?

My goal in this article is very specific. I aim to demonstrate how camera angles and representations of the setting are translated into the ways in which spaces and people are described in the crime novel. I shall analyze Marco Vichi’s *Death in August*.⁸ I shall focus on the subjective perspective, which we see primarily in a third-person yet subjective narration (i.e. specific for every character). When we look at the world through the eyes of a given character it is as if we are looking at the world through the camera eye: it moves from one scene, place, and person to another; the camera angles change constantly, as we move from wide shots to close-ups, focusing on details and micro-details and then zooming out again. This form of visual narration is characteristic of the crime novel, and I shall argue that this is because of the subjective third-person narration, which employs film techniques; in other words, film techniques have clearly influenced such a form of narration. The subjective third-person narration registers and “records” the world like a camera.

The third-person subjective narration and the subjective camera

The third-person subjective narration (*personale Erzählung*)⁹ is like a subjective camera: we see the world with the character’s eyes. It is a literal, sensual, and sometimes even behavioral look at the world represented in a given work, insofar as the reader imagines what the character sees (hears, feels). We achieve the same affect in film with the use of the subjective camera. Joseph V. Mascelli observes that:

The subjective camera films from a personal viewpoint. The audience participates in the screen action as a personal experience. The viewer is placed in the picture, either on his own as an active participant, or by trading places with a person in the picture and seeing the event through his eyes.¹⁰

This technique adds to the overall dramatic effect: the subjective camera makes scenes more dramatic, especially when it is used interchangeably with the objective camera. The subjective camera “may be employed to denote a sudden switch to a player’s subconscious, retrospective (...).¹¹ The subjective camera may be employed in a twofold manner. For one:

When subjective shots previously described are preceded by a close-up of a person looking off-screen, the viewer will comprehend that he is seeing what the screen player sees. The shot itself

⁸ Marco Vichi, *Death in August (The First Inspector Bordelli Mystery)*, trans. by Stephen Sartarelli (London: Hachette, 2012).

⁹ Franz K. Stanzel, *Die typischen Erzählsituationen im Roman: dargestellt an Tom Jones, Moby-Dick, The Ambassadors, Ulysses u.a.*, Wiener Beiträge zur englischen Philologie (Wien; Stuttgart: Braumüller, 1955).

¹⁰ Joseph V. Mascelli, *The Five Cs of Cinematography* (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press), 14.

¹¹ Mascelli, 137.

may be filmed in precisely the same manner, but the viewer is no longer on his own — he has traded positions with the on-screen player to view the event as he sees it.¹²

Respectively:

Point-of-view, or simply p.o.v, camera angles record the scene from a particular player's viewpoint. The point-of-view is an objective angle, but since it falls between the objective and subjective angle, it should be placed in a separate category and given special consideration.¹³

It seems that whenever emotions, judgments, irony, humor, and nostalgia – so characteristic of the Inspector – are described, we are dealing with the subjective camera. In the case of more objective descriptions, as if from the point of view of a character, we can talk about the influence of the P.O.V. (point of view). These two strategies – the subjective camera and the P.O.V. – are often used interchangeably:

The inspector continued poking about. Pushing open a door, he entered a sizeable room with several glass-paned chests and a large round table in the middle. On the walls, a few fine melancholy, rustic landscapes. A pair of huge white oxen caught his eye, and he drew near. He wasn't mistaken: a Fattori. But the surprises weren't over yet. Farther ahead there were some Segantinis, a Nomellini, not to mention Signorini, Ghiglia, Bartolena, and others. Bordelli let himself be hypnotized by the colors, though every so often the dead woman's nose would reappear in his mind. He ran his hand over his face to wipe away the image, and went out of the room to continue his tour.

A large, very clean kitchen, a dusty sitting room, a tea room, bookcases, servants' quarters, a variety of strangely scented bathrooms. There was no end to the house. Going up to the first floor, he opened every door, finding only spacious, half-empty rooms with ceilings frescoed in seventeenth-century naif style, enormous carpets and dust-laden crystal chandeliers. In the biggest room, a dark piece of furniture towered like a tabernacle against the shiny, yellowish plaster.

It was hotter on the second floor. All the rooms were completely empty but one, in which it seemed that all the furniture had been stored. Wardrobes filled to bursting with clothes wrapped in plastic, shelves with dozens of pairs of shoes, mouse-eaten armchairs, bedside tables, light fixtures, nightlights. On one chair was a wooden box with *Osborne 1934*¹⁴ written on it. It was full of old greeting cards. Too bad. Bordelli would have been glad to drink some strong alcohol. He squeezed the crumpled packet of cigarettes in his pocket, to convince himself it was truly empty. He felt like smoking again.

Wending his way through the chaos, he bumped a vase with his elbow, tried to catch it on the fly, but it eluded his grasp and fell to the floor with a crash, shattering into a thousand pieces. At once he was struck by the stillness in the house, which so contrasted with the noise a moment before. It was disturbed only by the creaking of the old furniture. Half closing his eyes from weariness,

¹²Mascelli, *The Five Cs of Cinematography*, 13-14.

¹³Mascelli, 21.

¹⁴Osborne is a producer of fine sherries and port.

he sat down in the middle of an old sofa, spreading his arms like a Christ, then extending them along the edge of the back and dropping his head backwards. A faded frieze of intersecting lines ran along the upper parts of the walls, just below the angle of intersection with the ceiling. Bordelli wondered how many people had touched these walls, walked on these floors, used this furniture. There was nothing new, in short. He thought about all the babies that had been born in this big house, all the dead laid into their coffins.¹⁵

The “camera” seems to follow Bordelli and his gaze. The reader sees what he sees; he enters the same rooms as the detective. Such a technique of showing space may be found in many films, especially road movies, but also crime movies, horror films,¹⁶ and thrillers, insofar as showing the protagonist (from the so-called audience’s point of view¹⁷) interchangeably with the p.o.v. camera angles fuels fear. *Death in August* is not a horror movie or a thriller; neither is it an adventure novel. The analyzed quotation demonstrates how space and its exploration are recorded. The perceived space is almost always in front of the main character’s eyes. Vichi is the master of the long shot:¹⁸ he describes the setting – a villa whose owner was murdered – like a brilliant screenwriter (and he is also a screenwriter¹⁹). Bordelli discovers her body. The reader is exposed to both the “audience’s point of view” and a situation in which “the camera acts as the viewer’s eyes.”²⁰ The first sentence in the above quote reads as if it were recorded by “the objective camera” and then it turns into “the subjective camera.” Descriptions of frescoes and ornaments on the ceiling, in turn, correspond to the so-called low-angle shot, in which the camera records the world as if “from below.”

A low-angle shot is any shot in which the camera is tilted upward to view the subject. A low angle does not necessarily mean a “worm’s-eye” view of the setting or action. Neither does it imply that the camera be positioned below the cameraman’s eye-level. (...) Both natural and man-made structures may be given increased height and dominance by shooting up at them. Skyscrapers, church

¹⁵Vichi, *Death in August*, 39-40.

¹⁶Among those I have recently watched, I can name, for example, Nicholas McCarthy’s horror film *The pact* (USA, 2012), in which the viewer walks through the rooms in the apartment, especially a long corridor, several times not only with the characters who are alive, like Annie (Caity Lotz), but also with ... an invisible ghost. In the novel, as in most thrillers and horror films, moving through space often exposes one to evil (e.g. in Paul W.S. Anderson’s horror movie *Resident Evil* (USA et al., 2020). This example is also arbitrary and merely illustrates the rule.

¹⁷When what the viewer sees is filmed from their point of view we talk about the “audience’s point of view” (cf. Mascelli, *The Five Cs of Cinematography*, 24). In thrillers and horror films, the viewer is thus scared twice: they see the terrified protagonist and the surprising and dangerous world around them.

¹⁸Joseph V. Mascelli thus writes about the long shot: “Players’ entrances, exits and movements should be shown in long shot whenever their location in the setting is narratively significant. (...) Long shots establish area of action and players’ positions. (...) Long shots lend scope to a picture, because they play up the size of the setting. Even a sequence taking place within a house should open with an exterior long shot to establish the location. This is particularly important when an entire film takes place indoors, in a series of rooms. Such a picture will appear closed in and lacking in spaciousness. Exterior long shots will open up the picture at intervals and furnish “air” for a breather” (Mascelli, 24-25). Cf. Jerzy Płużewski, *Język filmu* [The language of film] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Książka i Wiedza, 1982), 37 and 57. and: the entry “Plan filmowy” [Camera angles], in Marek Hendrykowski, *Słownik terminów filmowych* [Dictionary of film terms] (Poznań: Ars Nova, 1994), 222-23.

¹⁹“Marco Vichi”, *Wydawnictwo Albatros* (blog), date of access 2 January 2021, <https://www.wydawnictwoalbatros.com/autorzy/marco-vichi/>.

²⁰Mascelli, 13. “Camera may act as eye of audience to (...) be taken on a camera tour of an art museum and shown the paintings. Or, the camera may dolly slowly along an automobile assembly line, giving the viewer a close look at the process.”

steeple, mountains, may all benefit from such treatment. (...) Low-angle shots of players against a sculptured church ceiling (...) would present them against unusually picturesque backgrounds (...).²¹

The description is vivid: it reads as if “the camera were moving.” The reader is asked to imagine the rooms in the villa. There are also stage directions regarding sounds: the vase falls to the floor with a crash; the house is still; and “the old furniture” is creaking.

Let me provide one more example where the extreme long shot and tilting are used interchangeably; we move from an extreme close-up to the long shot and the low-angle shot. The reader as if follows the camera eye and looks at the dead woman’s face or, more precisely, her nose and the decorations on the ceiling:

Then he went and sat down in a chair. Without knowing how, he found himself with a lit cigarette in his mouth. As he smoked I he studied the lady’s sharp profile, her prominent, slightly hooked nose pointing up at the cherub-frescoed ceiling. He was practically powerless to look anywhere else. He cast his gaze into every corner of the room, following the cracks in the walls or the undulations of the spider’s webs, but it always came back to that nose.²²

The narration (not only in this part of the novel) illustrates a process that can be compared to the movements of a sniper.²³ Bordelli is searching for evidence, because just like in crime films and TV series, every detail matters. Only a good actor would show surprise at the fact that the packet of cigarettes is empty or that he finds himself smoking again. The cinematic nature of the novel makes the reader imagine that the camera could zoom in on the nose of the deceased for a few seconds. The nose is an important detail, and it will be mentioned in the third-person subjective narration more than once. As it turns out later, it will help solve the case. Indeed, the nose was the indirect cause of the woman’s death: she died after smelling yerba mate sprinkled on her cat. The camera moves from the nose of the deceased upwards and then down, towards the nose, and then back up. These would be tilt shots. Vichi also suggests that Bordelli is tired and therefore he is looking at the ceiling. When Bordelli “cast his gaze into every corner of the room” it is as if we were dealing with the tilt shift shot: the camera moves dynamically, like in crime movies and TV series, looking for evidence.

We also know that Bordelli is attentive and on the lookout, which corresponds to the movements of the camera, because a number of verbs referring to visual perception are employed. Indeed, there are quite a lot of them on just two pages. Sight plays a more important role than any other sense. And acute senses, in addition to intelligence, are what a real detective or police inspector needs. The eye of the protagonist is the equivalent of the camera eye: “glancing

²¹ Mascelli, *The Five Cs of Cinematography*, 40-42.

²²Vichi, *Death in August*, 37-38.

²³Piotr Śmietana, “Techniki filmowania - kilka zasad, które warto znać!” [Filming techniques: Rules you have to know], *Lepsza fotografia lepszy film* [Better shots, better movie] (blog), 31 October 2017, <https://blog.cyfrowe.pl/techniki-filmowania-kilka-zasad-ktore-warto-znac-2/>. Śmietana discusses long shots, tilt shots, over the shoulder shots, the sniper vision shot, and extreme close-up.

at his watch,” “he looked around for an ashtray,” “spotting a wastebasket in the corner,” “he walked past the bed and noticed something moving on it,” “turning around with a start, he smiled [at the sight of – D.K.],” “perplexed, he looked back,” “started inspecting the windows and doors,” “Bordelli got down on his knees for a better look,” and “He’d never seen anything like it.”²⁴ The following sentence also focuses on the sense of sight: “In Rebecca’s room, the window had been left ajar. Bordelli opened it wide, pulled up a chair, and sat in front of it. The wind gently rustled the trees’ great boughs (...).”²⁵

Smell is a detail that is much more difficult to represent: camera angles are of no help when it comes to smell. And yet it can also be shown. Monika Braun asks:

Is there any specific kind of trauma related to the sense of smell? There are acting exercises whose aim is to develop the sense of smell (and taste). [...] Actors learn how to visualize and verbalize sensory experiences. [...] In keeping with the principle that in order to communicate anything, one must first possess it. [...] The next stage is finding the right forms of expression [...].²⁶

In the third-person subjective narration the reader is told what Bordelli felt, and they imagine how an actor playing Bordelli would show that he can smell, for example, old carpets or bathrooms, dust or cigarettes and an ashtray full of cigarette butts. Vichi suggestively indicates the smells present in a given space and describes how they make Bordelli feel. The reader imagines how the actor would act out the perception of various scents.

From the long shot to the extreme close-up

“A moving shot may be further defined by the type of shot at the beginning and end of the move: such as dolly from the medium shot to a close-up,”²⁷ Mascelli writes. Such shots are characteristic of the crime novel. The author describes the space as more and more confined to finally focus on the details. These details are extreme close-ups:

Detail (or an extreme close-up): shows a fragment of an object, e.g. human eyes, mouth, hands, etc.; a prop or a fragment of a decoration shown on the entire screen. Because it is so suggestive, it is primarily used to increase dramatic tension.²⁸

Extreme close-ups reveal unique details: freckles on the face, curvature of the nose, a stain on a plate, the contents of a clipboard or drawer. Everything else fades into the background and becomes irrelevant, blurred:

²⁴Vichi, *Death in August* 219–20.

²⁵Vichi, 219.

²⁶Monika Braun, *Gry codzienne i pozacodzienne: ...o komunikacyjnych aspektach aktorstwa* [Everyday and non-everyday games: ... the communicative aspects of acting] (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2012), 127.

²⁷Mascelli, *The Five Cs of Cinematography*, 33.

²⁸Hendrykowski, *Słownik terminów filmowych* [Dictionary of film terms], 224; Płazewski, *Język filmu* [The language of film], 53–56. On pages 55–56, the author also discusses the role of extreme close-ups in suggesting: a) tension; b) fear; c) pity.

Full screen close-ups of letters, telegrams, photographs, newspapers, signs, posters, buttons, rings, or other written or printed matter are called inserts. [...] Generally inserts are filmed so that they overlap the frame slightly, thus eliminating the background.²⁹

Details play a key role in both the detective story and any crime film or TV series. However, today intellectual deduction visualized on the screen thanks to computer techniques (see, for example, the latest TV adaptation of *Sherlock Holmes*³⁰) or laboratory tests carried out by specialists (*CSI: Miami*, *CSI: New York*, etc.) are more popular than looking for material clues and drawing conclusions. In the past, detective Monk would carefully pick up even the smallest hair from the ground,³¹ and Hercule Poirot, played by David Suchet, would silently inspect the surroundings.³²

Roland Barthes's "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative" helps one analyze the role played by details.³³ While Barthes questioned his theory in his post-structuralist work *S/Z* (1970), in interpreting the function of the text he drew attention to visual details. He pointed out that narratives are not only verbal (oral or written), but also visual (e.g. stained glass) and audiovisual (film) texts. Barthes analyzed James Bond movies, studying their distributional and integrative functions, in relation to how many telephones were there at a police station and whether someone would answer them. "Some narratives are predominantly functional (such as popular tales) and (...) some other are predominantly indicial (such as "psychological" novels)," Barthes observes.³⁴ Indices refer to minor concepts, which nevertheless are crucial for the story.³⁵

In *Death in August*, dust on the candelabrum, furniture and carpets in the villa are all indices. They demonstrate that the late owner was elderly, ill, and could not manage her estate. Cigarettes also play an important role in the novel. They are not clues but they tell us something important about Inspector Bordelli. They are, as Barthes would say, functions – they show that Bordelli has an addiction and that his profession requires concentration and decisiveness. Cigarettes point to both nervousness and the need to focus. They are also *signum temporis*; after all, smoking was extremely fashionable in the 1960s and Vichi's book is set in the early 1960s.³⁶ "Bordelli extinguished the cigarette against the empty pack, crumbled this up and put it in his pocket."³⁷

This sentence shows that Bordelli is tired and distracted – one would have to be very nervous or distracted to put a cigarette butt in an empty packet into one's pocket. This scene is very

²⁹Mascelli, 32.

³⁰Toby Haynes, Euros Lyn, and Paul McGuigan, *Sherlock*, TV crime drama (UK, 2010).

³¹Andy Breckman, *Monk*, comedy drama detective TV series (USA, 2002).

³²Clive Exton, *Agatha Christie's Poirot*, TV crime drama (UK, 1989).

³³Roland Barthes, "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative", *New Literary History*, 6,2 (Winter, 1975): 237-272.

³⁴Barthes, 247.

³⁵Barthes, 247.

³⁶*Death and the Olive Grove* takes place in Florence in April 1964. *Death in August* takes place in 1963.

³⁷Vichi, *Death in August*, 38.

visual: it could be shown in an extreme close-up. The viewer would interpret it behaviourally and learn more about the Inspector and his *modus operandi*.

The film techniques, such as panning, tilting, sniper vision and different camera angles (wide shot, long shot, close-up, and extreme close-up), employed in the novel, as it were, do not function on their own but often in conjunction. Let us take a look at the villa, first from the outside and then from the inside:

He walked back down to the villa. Beyond the colossal cast-iron gate, at the back of a dark garden full of trees, he could make out the villa's dark silhouette. And, behind a towering hedgerow of laurel parallel to the house, the lighted rectangle of a window. [...]

He tried to push the great gate open, but it was locked. It was also very tall, with pointed spikes on top. He had better find another solution. Walking along the enclosure wall, he found a small side gate. He pushed it open, forcing the accumulated rust. The garden was in a state of abandon, but not completely, as if a gardener tended it perhaps three or four times per year. The villa, with its crumbling façade, must have been from the seventeenth century. Three storeys, five windows per storey, all closed except for the one with the light in it, on the first floor. Through the uneven panes he could see a frescoed ceiling.

Hugging the walls of the villa, he arrived at the rear. There was a large park with very tall trees and a small lane that vanished into the darkness. Beside the house, an enormous, age-old cedar thrust its bristling branches well above the roof. Bordelli threw his head back to look at it, then began to feel dizzy, losing his balance. He leaned against the wall and rubbed his eyes, to ward off fatigue. Returning to the front of the house, he rang the doorbell. He heard a gloomy trill beyond the great door, as in convents. He waited a minute, but nothing happened.

He lit a match and examined the lock. [...] The lock resisted Bordelli's efforts for a good five minutes, then finally yielded. The inspector opened the door and was relieved to feel on his face a breath of cool air typical of old villas.

He crossed the threshold and once inside, called out the signora's two surnames. No reply. The light from the half-open door filtered out from the top of the stairwell. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he began to look around. Some antique furniture, a Baroque mirror, many paintings. A monumental staircase in grey *pieta serena* ascended to the upper floors. A worn carpet of red fabric ran up the center of the stairs.

'Signora Pedretti, don't be afraid. My name is Inspector Bordelli and I'm with the police,' he called, slowly ascending the stairs toward the light.

He stopped in front of the half-opened door and knocked. No reply. He pushed it and felt a slight shudder pass over his face, as if he walked into a spider's web: an elderly woman lay face up across a bed, her nightgown raised up to her belly.³⁸

³⁸Vichi, 35–37.

This vivid description of how Bordelli tries to enter the villa, finding it difficult to open the old gates and the door, adds to the overall mystery and horror.³⁹ It also suggests that all the barriers around and inside of the old villa (on the ground floor and on the first floor) break down when force is used. The villa and the park, with paths vanishing into the darkness, are a giant labyrinth. Vichi employs this metaphor in this description as well. The descriptions of the path that leads through the garden and then the villa, first from the outside and then from the inside, “read” like a classic film sequence: “a series of scenes or shots that constitute a single whole. It can take place in one or more places, starting in the open and ending inside a building, for example.”⁴⁰ The descriptions of successive floors and rows of windows “read” like tilting, panning or the sniper vision shot. The successive tilt shots show the huge cedar tree, and then, already inside the villa, the stairs. Bordelli looks them up and down. The reader who is watching the detective at work has the impression that they are watching a movie which employs different camera angles. Cinematic voyeurism, looking and observing, plays an important role. Bordelli, and thus the reader, is trying to see what is happening in the room seen from the outside. A similar sequence may also be found in Marco Vichi’s *Death and the Olive Grove*.⁴¹

The reader, as it were, also feels and hears the same things as Bordello – they feel the coldness of the old thick walls; they feel the sticky cobweb on their face; and they hear the silence, or silence and echoes. The sentences are straightforward and descriptive, like in a script. They refer to individual actions and sensory feelings (sight, hearing, smell, touch, feeling). Vichi also describes how dark it is in the villa and how the light travels through the empty house. However, the emphasis is on Bordelli’s visual impressions. He is observant; his eye moves on from one thing to another. The eyes adjust to the dark and see more and more details and the camera can show this process through extreme close-ups, play with light, and intershots. The descriptions of the respective floors and rooms, as well as the surroundings of the house, correspond to the sniper shot vision, the tilt shot, and the pan shot. At the end, we as if see the dead woman’s body⁴² in full frame (full shot) and in a slight close-up. The frame is horizontal. The image is unsettling because the body is arranged in an unnatural way: across the bed, with the nightgown indecently exposing the lower part of her body. Vichi is indeed great at moving from the full shot to the close-up (and even the extreme close-up). Once again, once this scene ends, the reader will be reminded of the nose and the mouth. We already know that the sense of smell, to draw on Barthes, is the

³⁹Vichi most often starts with a wide shot, and then moves on to close-ups and extreme close-ups. He employs a similar *modus operandi* in *Death and the Olive Grove*: first he shows the area, then he describes the villa and the garden around it, the interior of the villa, and finally the maid and a Nazi who hired her. The owner of the villa is hiding somewhere abroad. Vichi also employs the third-person subjective narration in *Death and the Olive Grove*. Cf. Marco Vichi, *Death and The Olive Grove* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2003), 18-19.

⁴⁰Mascelli, *The Five Cs of Cinematography*, 23.

⁴¹Vichi, *Death and the Olive Grove*, 79-80.

⁴²Full shot – According to Marek Hendrykowski, it is a medium shot: “actors can be seen from head to toe against some background; this shot was often used in silent films.” Entry: “Plan filmowy” [Camera angle], in: Hendrykowski, *Słownik terminów filmowych* [Dictionary of film terms], 223. “In full shot, the actor fills the frame. The character can be identified. Their actions are clearly seen. So is the background – the viewer can inspect it. The viewer also learns more about the character by seeing how they behave in their environment. It is rarely used, usually as an intershot between the wide shot and close-ups. Sometimes it is used as a substitute for the wide shot, if the setting makes it impossible to use the wide shot.” Płużewski, *Język filmu* [Language of film], 44-45.

core (cardinal function) – the key to solving the case. Let us look at a detailed description (a close-up) – the camera eye as if focuses on the details:

As if obsessed, the inspector turned round again to look at signora's nose. From the dead woman's motionless, half-opened lips a white foam that looked like snail-slime was trickling out. The little bubbles burst and then followed by more bubbles. There was still some movement in that lifeless body. Then the spittle ceased, and the foam dissolved into two tiny droplets that rolled down her cheeks, drying before they reached the bedsheet.⁴³

The kinetization of the description of the deceased – the description that is detailed, almost naturalistic, and of a “living dead” – triggers references not only with the crime story (various scenes, often with an ironic undertone) but also with the horror movie. The detailed description of the saliva oozing from mouth of the dead woman triggers strong emotions in the reader and would also have the same effect on the viewer: “Utilize close-ups to emphasize a particular action or to isolate a player or action by removing all else from view. Use extreme close-ups for full-screen shots of very small objects or actions.”⁴⁴ The choker close-up, a variant of the extreme close-up, shows the face “from just below the lips to just above the eyes.”⁴⁵

Close-ups: Extreme close-ups and the rack focus shot

When we focus on details, we tend to disregard other objects in the background. It is the same in fictional worlds, and in how they are perceived by readers and viewers. Apart from less important objects (Barthes's catalysts) there are also so-called “places of indeterminacy”, as defined by Roman Ingarden. Such places want to be specified.⁴⁶ Not only literature but also film demands this, although film offers ready-made images, though not always. The viewer must often “add to” what they see. This applies as much to the wide shot as to the close-up, on which I will comment in this section. The technique that filmmakers use (focusing on important details) is also used by writers, especially the authors of crime fiction. In *Death in August*, such an important detail is the fact that Bordelli smokes:

The inspector lit his last butt, squeezing it tightly between his fingers, to stop up a tear in the paper. He blew the smoke far away, as if to put a distance between himself and its poison.⁴⁷

The words “far away” correspond to the blurred, out-of-focus, background (this is additionally emphasized by the expression which directly refers to blurred objects: “he blew the smoke”). The tear in the paper should be invisible, but the camera eye zooms in on it and the reader

⁴³Vichi, *Death in August*, 38.

⁴⁴Mascelli, *The Five Cs of Cinematography*, 53.

⁴⁵Mascelli, 32.

⁴⁶Roman Ingarden, *The Ontology of the Work of Art*, transl. by Raymond Meyer with John T. Goldthwait, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1989).

⁴⁷Vichi, *Death in August*, 43.

sees it in a *rack focus shot*. Close-ups are also important in flashbacks. In one flashback,⁴⁸ the reader learns more and more details, including the most important clue. Trying to remember something may be compared to “looking through a fog,” and thus refocusing or focusing on the most important detail is both literal and symbolic:

His thoughts drifted off, searching his memory for things he had read in his youth, but he still couldn't remember ... and slowly they turned to other flies, in April of '45, in northern Italy, the flies swarming round the face of the last Nazi he killed. He had taken aim from afar, and from above, as the German ran by below the embankment. He had set the machine gun for single fire and kept shooting until the target fell to the ground. The Nazi was a blond lad of about seventeen, eyes open wide to the heavens above. His helmet had rolled ahead of him, and Bordelli had picked it up and felt something like a blow to the stomach. On one side was a swastika painted in white, with a large X painted over it in red. Above, at the top of the helmet, was the bullet hole, which passed right through the first N in the name ANNA, written in white paint beside a heart, also white, its point slanted to the left. Bordelli felt the vomit rise into his throat. He had killed a blond boy in love with an Italian girl, not a Nazi. He sat down on the grass and lit one of his hundred daily cigarettes. He had kept that helmet ever since, stowed away in a wardrobe. He never killed anyone else after that, never felt like firing anymore. The notches on the butt of his machine gun stopped at thirty-seven.⁴⁹

To draw on Roland Barthes, the helmet in this retrospection, which constitutes a separate story, would fulfill the cardinal function – it would be the nucleus of the whole story. If it was film, we could easily imagine how the camera moves closer and closer to the helmet – it would be shown in the *rack focus shot* – the helmet would be in focus and the background would play the function of expansion (catalyses, indices, additional information).⁵⁰ Less important objects are as if blurred or “seen through a fog.”

The same happens in films where the viewer draws conclusions about the inner world from the external actions of a character (which are not explained in the voice-over). Such information is behavioral in nature. The sentence “He sat down on the grass ...” emphasizes how shocked Bordelli was when he killed a young compatriot whom he mistook for an enemy. Smoking – something Bordelli does all the time – tells us just how nervous he is. The camera eye as if moves from the so-called *long shot*⁵¹ (“from afar and from above”), through the *full shot* (“a blond lad of about seventeen, eyes open wide to the heavens above”), to an *extreme close-up* (the detailed description of the helmet, which misled Bordelli).

⁴⁸A dictionary of equivalent film and literary terms should be compiled. For example: *flashback* – retrospection; *flashforward* – anticipation; *full shot* – description of characters, etc. The relations between them, both similarities and differences, should be carefully examined.

⁴⁹Vichi, *Death in August*, 209–10. In the next novel in the series, Vichi mentions 24 notches. See: *Death and the Olive Grove*, 74.

⁵⁰Barthes, “An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative”, 260.

⁵¹A *long shot* depicts an area from a distance. It is “a vast view of a landscape or scenery with no people or people shown only in the background; this shot provides information about the place where the action of the film takes place”. Entry: “Plan filmowy” [Camera angle], [in:] Hendrykowski, *Słownik terminów filmowych* [Dictionary of film terms], 223.; cf. Płażewski, *Język filmu* [The language of film], 42–44.

The description of the interrogation of the Morozzis and their wives is also (sarcastically) shown in a rack focus shot. The two couples are having lunch:

Gina and Angela tried to eat without smearing their lipstick. They raised their lips before sinking their teeth into the bread, incisors exposed all the way to the gums; then they closed their mouths and ruminated with lips sealed. They seemed downright batty. Still, their serenity had the look of innocence.⁵²

Facial expressions and gestures, body language, play an important role in the narrative. Monika Braun observes that in “everyday communication, hands are as important as words; indeed, the hands are as interesting and expressive as the face.”⁵³

We must remember, however, that the large lips, with lipstick on them, “raised before sinking [the] teeth into the bread” are hyperboles: Bordelli is suspicious and subjectively perceives the two beautiful married women as “idiots.” The “incisors” which bite into the bread remind the reader of horror movies, filled with werewolves, ghosts and monsters. In a film, we would see monstrous lips, with lipstick on them, and teeth biting into hamburgers. The reader is further disgusted with both women when they learn that their teeth were “exposed all the way to the gums.” This description reads like a slow-motion shot.⁵⁴ The focus of the camera is not on the entire face, but only on the lips which are shown in an extreme close-up. The lips replace the face. And the face is the most important in visual arts, because, as Monika Braun rightly observes, “it is the face that draws our attention. We often archive memories as a gallery of faces.”⁵⁵ In a sense, Bordelli is right to distrust the two women, which is why this detail is conveyed by the means of the third-person subjective narration. It is a hint about the future – the crime will be solved.

Manipulating time: Speeding up and slowing down time

I have already mentioned that slow motion may be employed in literature, but the process itself may only be visualized thanks to film techniques. A chase, a breakaway, a fight – especially in flashbacks – are often depicted in slow motion.

As Joseph V. Mascelli states:

Rather than depict a laboratory experiment as a past event (...), it may be more dramatically shown as occurring now, before the spectator’s eyes. Thus, the event is re-lived as if happening in the present, rather than in the past.⁵⁶

⁵²Vichi, *Death in August*, 269-70.

⁵³Braun, *Gry codzienne i pozacodzienne* [Everyday and non-everyday games], 132.

⁵⁴“[...] each shot is a take.” *The Five Cs of Cinematography*, 13.

⁵⁵Braun, *Gry codzienne i pozacodzienne* [Everyday and non-everyday games], 137.

⁵⁶Mascelli, *The Five Cs of Cinematography*, 69.

Vichi does not simply say that Bordelli had a problem with getting into Signora Pedretti's house. Instead, he slows time down by showing how Bordelli tries to open gates and doors, etc. Then, he notes that Bordelli waited at the door for a minute: "He heard a gloomy trill beyond the great door, as in convents. He waited a minute, but nothing happened."⁵⁷ We can see that the "scene" is shorter than the event itself, and such a chronological shortcut is often employed in both movies and novels. The principles of the ancient theory of tragedy, especially as regards the unity of time, do not apply. Indeed, in a movie, this scene would also be shorter than a minute. According to Mascelli:

(...) the narrative must build in interest as it progresses. Each shot should make a point. (...) Eliminate all non-essentials, for the moment; and isolate whatever significant incident should receive narrative emphasis. (...) Suspenseful composition – in which significant action is hidden, absent, or prolonged (...) – can be a valuable storytelling aid.⁵⁸

The first of these rules also applies to crime and detective novels. "Economical" storytelling is the best. In films, the passage of time is very often shown in a fast-forward mode. Sunrises and sunsets, changing weather conditions, traffic in the streets, vegetation, etc. are recorded in this way. *Death in August* employs similar cinematic "tricks of the trade." A long and monotonous course of events at a police station is summarized in a couple of sentences. Time "fast-forwards" thanks to "moving images":

The individual interrogations began. While awaiting their turn, the other three bided their time in three separate rooms. Once the first round was over, they started all over again. Bordelli's ashtray was filling up faster than you could count the butts. Piras only sighed, resigned to breathing the foul air. He hit the keys hard, striking them with only two fingers: Q and A, Q and A ... Same questions, same answers. One in particular.

'But we were at the coast at that time! Everybody saw us, didn't they?'

And at once the bothersome clacking of the typewriter would fill their ears. Santelia the lawyer sat as still as if he were posing for a sculpture, staring at the person being questioned.⁵⁹

This fragment reads like a movie. The reader notices the passage of time, as if in a "fast-forward" mode: the ashtray is being filled, paperwork is being filled in, and the typewriter is constantly in use. Such narrative tricks are typical of both literature and film. But the reader can imagine the scene, slow it down or fast-forward a given sequence, because they are familiar with cinematic techniques. In the twenty-first century, film editing techniques have influenced the imagination of both the writer and the reader, also in regard to the category of time.

⁵⁷Vichi, *Death in August*, 35–36.

⁵⁸Mascelli, *The Five Cs of Cinematography*, 169, 173, 238.

⁵⁹Vichi, *Death in August*, 269.

Conclusion

In Marco Vichi's novels, and especially in *Death in August*, a third-person subjective narration is employed: this allows the reader to see the world from the protagonist's point of view. This corresponds to the camera eye recording all the details noticed by Bordelli. The inspector has to look for evidence and solve the case. His eyes scan the surroundings, moving from one object or place to another. He notices everything. A similar "visual narration" is employed in film and in the twentieth-century and twenty-first-century crime novels.

Vichi describes how Bordelli scans the surroundings horizontally (equivalent to the panoramic panning shot or the sniper shot vision) and vertically (the tilt shot). Bordelli's eyes move around nervously, as if he were unconsciously looking for details, and yet carefully – he notices details that often turn out to be crucial. It can be said that presenting space in such a way in the narrative corresponds to close-ups and extreme close-ups. They anticipate what is to come: focusing attention on them is not without significance for the development of the story; they allow Bordelli to solve the case. The third-person subjective narration corresponds to the camera angles often used in horror movies, especially the subjective camera.⁶⁰ the audience adopts the point of view of a given character; the audience as if looks through the eyes of a character. Vichi is familiar with these techniques and structures his narrative accordingly, also in subsequent Inspector Bordelli mysteries.

Nevertheless, the techniques found in *Death in August*, as an exemplary crime novel, do not exhaust the spectrum of possibilities that the writer inspired by the secrets of filmmaking can adopt. In Jakub Żulczyk's novels, for example, we find numerous references to fictional characters, making a movie based on one's life, settings that are straight from horror movies, stop motion, and "rewinding the movie," etc. Żulczyk also writes about watching a movie with oneself in it (e.g. in *Institut* [Institute]) or crossing the border between fiction and fiction within fiction and "entering" a different movie or television show (in *Zmorojewo* and *Świątynia* [Temple]).⁶¹ Vichi only makes two such allusions in his novel (and I do not discuss them in my article). Respectively, the structure of the novel cannot be compared to film editing. Fragmentation is not employed; the camera eye does not constantly move around from one scene to another and from one sequence to the next; the narrative is not "edited." On the other hand, this corresponds to Yuri Lotman's principle from *Semiotics of Cinema* (1976). Drawing on Sergei Eisenstein, Lotman argued that in the case of cinema, the juxtaposition of different points of view is best expressed through montage, and the single point of view is best expressed through *photogénie*.⁶² Indeed, in *Death in August*, there are no allusions to film that may be found, for example, in Camilla Läckberg's *The Scent of Almonds and Other Stories*, where two people who try to commit suicide copy the solutions found in film adaptations of

⁶⁰Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza, *Rec*, horror movie (Spain, 2007); Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza, *Rec 2* (Spain, 2009), 2; Paco Plaza, *Rec 3: Génesis*, horror movie (Spain, 2012); Jaume Balagueró, *Rec 4: Apocalipsis*, horror movie (Spain, 2014).

⁶¹I discuss this question in: Dorota Kulczycka, *Film w prozie Jakuba Żulczyka* [Film in Jakub Żulczyk's Prose] (Zielona Góra: Oficyna Wydawnicza Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego, 2020).

⁶²See: Yuri Lotman, *Semiotics of Cinema*, trans. by M. Suino (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1976), 97. Cf. S. Eisenstein, *Film Form*, trans. by J. Leyda (New York: Hartcourt, 1949).

Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes*.⁶³ Indeed, this type of imitation may also be found in crime dramas and television series, e.g. in *Castle* or *CSI Miami*, insofar as fictional criminals find inspiration in other movies and computer games.

Depending on whether we take into account the "physical" factors of film production or the operations taking place at the level of the represented world, we can see that film may inspire numerous new "stories." In my analysis of Vichi's novel, I have demonstrated that while the writer did not use all possible film techniques, their influence is significant.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

⁶³Not the books but the movie. See: Camilla Läckberg, *The Scent of Almonds and Other Stories* (London: HarperCollins, 2015).

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT:

This article examines how camera angles are used to describe space or people in Marco Vichi's crime novel *Death in August*. The focus is on the crime novel because this genre best exemplifies how cinematic techniques may be employed in literature. Specifically, the article examines the analogies between narrative strategies (especially the third-person subjective narration) and the movement of the camera eye. It is demonstrated that some narrative devices characteristic of the crime novel (or the detective novel), especially the ones connected with transitioning from the long shot to the close-up etc., have been influenced by film.

INTERSEMIOTIC GAMES

THE THIRD PERSON SUBJECTIVE NARRATION

camera angles (long
shot, close-up,
extreme close-up)

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