

*“The way up is the way down”:
Curzio Malaparte’s “Il Cristo Proibito”
and Krzysztof Kieślowski’s
“Three Colours: Red”*

ABSTRACT. Paul Coates, “The way up is the way down”: Curzio Malaparte’s “Il Cristo Proibito” and Krzysztof Kieślowski’s “Three Colours: Red”. “Images” vol. XXIV, no. 33, Poznań 2018. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. Pp. 47–59. ISSN 1731–450X. DOI 10.14746/i.2018.33.05.

The statement ‘the way up is the way down’ may imply that the spiritual way to perfection lies through humility. It may however also apply to the physical world that is the source of such spiritual metaphors, and within which the actions play out of fictional characters who themselves serve as metaphors for real ones. I will argue that both meanings apply to both of these films, with a comparison between the two films enabling one to employ Malaparte’s explicit prohibition of a Christ-like position to make apparent a similar prohibition that is only implicit in Kieślowski’s film. Such physical movements provide an appropriate topography for the concern with judgment, knowledge, revenge, isolation and humiliation embodied in the male protagonists of the two films. In each case, the protagonists’ eventual divestment from programmes of judgment and revenge may be related to the prohibition Malaparte formulates explicitly: that upon human re-enactment of the Christ-like position that is the one of judgment. Here a destructive and self-destructive movement downwards, in the sense of dehumanization and extreme isolation, is countered eventually by a downward one that, in fact, leads upwards through an embrace of the humiliation of inaction. The paper examines various ways in which the object of both texts is to rediscover a ‘we’ that is rather one of solidarity than complicity.

KEYWORDS: doubling, judgment, fraternité, Christianity, revenge, descent into Hell

The phrase “the way up is the way down”[1] may be read as implying that the spiritual way to perfection lies through humility. It may however also apply to the physical world that is the source of such images of spiritual topography. I will argue that both meanings apply to the remarkable films I will juxtapose here, Curzio Malaparte’s *Il Cristo proibito* (1951) and Krzysztof Kieślowski’s *Three Colours: Red* (*Trzy kolory. Czerwony*, 1994), with the explicit prohibition of a Christ-like position by Malaparte’s characters arguably helping disclose a similar prohibition in Kieślowski’s work, where it is only implicit. Quite apart from the fact that Malaparte’s film deserves more attention than it has been accorded, its comparison with Kieślowski’s can serve heuristic ends, enabling an attempt to render explicit some of what the late Kieślowski characteristically leaves unsaid, secreted enigmatically ‘between the lines’.

[1] T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, London 1970, p. 41.

Comparison of the two works is further justified inasmuch as each represents a crossing, from opposite sides, of the border between literature and film: Malaparte's being the first and only film by a man already established as a novelist; Kieślowski's, an attempt to represent the immaterialities he believed literature was best-equipped to dramatize.[2] Moreover, given their structuration around lengthy one-on-one dialogues, one could characterize both as Anthony Lane did, reviewing Kieślowski's upon release: "a plain account of the film would make it sound talk-heavy",[3] as it displays a greater "literariness" than is usual in cinema. Each comes towards the end of its author's career, as if embodying a willingness to countenance working in a way that may end it, enforcing T.S. Eliot's dictum that "old men ought to be explorers." [4] Lane could even remark that *Three Colours: Red* "feels like a late work".[5] Whatever features may constitute a late work, which for Adorno meant a "ripeness" that is "commonly not round but furrowed or even torn", [6] these films suggest they may include such border crossings, perhaps in preparation for an ultimate passage.

Considered formally, each begins with a camera-flourish dramatizing issues of height and depth, Malaparte's heading via helicopter to the hillside where two of his characters are walking, then plunging down towards them, and Kieślowski's diving to simulate the tracking of a phone signal beneath the English Channel, then rising up to the second-floor location of a Geneva destination phone. Physical movements up and down generate an appropriate topography for the concern with judgment, justice, knowledge, revenge, isolation and humiliation embodied in the trajectories of the two films' male protagonists. In each case there may be said to be a prohibition of repetition of the way taken by Christ – both films stepping away from the Christian Imitation of Christ, Malaparte explicitly, Kieślowski implicitly, but both doing so primarily on the grounds of the inadequacy of the foundations of human judgment, in every sense of that word. That inadequacy causes the protagonists' eventual occupation of lowered positions, be it the final prostration of Malaparte's protagonist Bruno before the tower where he has mistakenly killed a friend, or retired judge Joseph Kern's descent in Kieślowski's film, from mountainous Switzerland to the flatland near Calais, then his look upwards from a theatre pit where he is conversing with Valentine, his young female friend. These positions match the symbolic abasement associated with both protagonists' renunciation of the traditionally male prerogative of action, their embrace of what might be derided as 'feminization': whence the sympathy with the female who has compromised her sexual purity in Malaparte's film, and with the principle of femininity in Kieślowski's trilogy in general. Both films' central

[2] D. Stok (ed.), *Kieślowski on Kieślowski*, London and Boston 1993, pp. 194–195.

[3] A. Lane, *Nobody's Perfect: Writings from The New Yorker*, New York, 2002, p. 89.

[4] T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, op. cit., p. 32.

[5] A. Lane, *Nobody's Perfect: Writings from The New Yorker*, op. cit., p. 88.

[6] T.W. Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, Stanford 2003, p. 215.

encounters begin with a climbing of hills: Malaparte's, with the post-war return through adjacent hills to his Italian home-town of Siena by Bruno, who will seek to learn who betrayed his younger brother to the Germans; Kieślowski's, with the visit to the judge's house above the city by Valentine, whose car has run over his dog, which she is returning to him. If an atmosphere of self-hatred hangs over Bruno's Tuscan village, whose inhabitants feel that the war's ending has yielded neither liberty nor justice, in Kieślowski's film the self-hatred is that of the judge whose undignified eavesdropping of his neighbours receives a retrospective, putative aetiology from his double's listening at his treacherous lover's door, allowing one to imagine the judge as once having done likewise. The judge's impulse to exact revenge is transformed in the film's course into a desire for an alternative life that generates the suggestion of the strangely real fiction of his reincarnation in a young man whose life will eventually duplicate his own more happily. In the meantime, he pursues an electronic surveillance of his neighbours that both translates the actual spying on his lover into the more tolerably indirect acoustic realm and prolongs his self-hatred, be it over his inability to exact revenge or the shamefulness of his monitoring. It is surely significant that Kieślowski's various descriptions of human beings as torn in his laudatory article on Bergman's *The Silence* (*Tystnaden*, 1963) should conclude with one "between a keen sense of humiliation and the joy of revenge". That article's contrast between "the fear of death and the longing for rest" surely also speaks to the judge's life-situation.[7]

In each case, the protagonists' eventual divestment from programmes of judgment and revenge may be related to the prohibition Malaparte's title formulates explicitly: that upon human re-occupation of a Christ-like position defined in terms of the prerogative of judgment. The image of Christ as a judge who renounces judgment is articulated in the Gospel of John, in such statements by Jesus as "Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son" (John 5.22); and "You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. But if I judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father who sent me" (John 8.15–16) (both quotations NIV). Judgment is forbidden by Christ's self-denying ordinance. Yet even though, as Parker Tyler notes, in Malaparte's film "[w]e see that the Christian spirit is prevailing through the collective will" one should add, as he does, that "something beyond Christianity is also speaking to us".[8] The prohibition on judgement is also the collectivity's one on individuals breaching its ranks and acting independently – the very thing Christ did to save the community, and does also in the lives of individuals he calls and thereby individuates. Whether such a paradox can be deemed the heart of a mystery is unclear, but it is surely significant

[7] K. Kieślowski, 'Bergman's Silence', trans. P. Coates, [in:] *Post-war Cinema and Modernity: A Film Reader*, eds. John Orr and Olga Taxidou, Edinburgh 2000, p. 423.

[8] P. Tyler, *Classics of the Foreign Film: a Pictorial Treasury*, New York 1962, p. 205.

that 'mystery' is a keyword in the vocabularies of both Malaparte and Kieślowski, Malaparte arguing in *The Skin* that Italy is "a mysterious country, where men and the circumstances that make up their lives seemed not to be governed by reason and conscience, but by obscure subterranean forces"[9], while Kieślowski spoke of "the mystery that we actually face every day"[10].

In Malaparte's case replicating a Christ-like position appears to be doubly-forbidden: because no one individual can die for others (instead, many have died: the foreign soldiers who perished on behalf of Italians), and because human judgment is fallible and shades into Vengeance. In Kieślowski's case, the prohibition on judging may seem the key factor, though it is surely significant also that anyone who dies appears to do so only for himself or his double. This, the pattern of his *The Double Vie of Véronique* (*La double vie de Véronique*, 1991), is replicated less directly here. As it benefits Auguste, the judge's sacrifice is not just a Christ-like laying down of his life for friends, and humanity in general.

Despite the considerable differences between the 'surface structures' of the events of the two films, one can posit a strong similarity at the level of their 'deep structures'. In each case a destructive and self-destructive physical movement upwards that initiates a symbolic descent, towards dehumanization and extreme isolation, is countered eventually by a downward trajectory that in fact leads upwards, through an embrace of the humiliation of inaction. Each protagonist dreams of revenge, but vengeance does not solve the problem. This is demonstrated in Malaparte's film by the status of Antonio, the man Bruno kills, as "the wrong man", something underlined by his death's replication of the "killing" of a fairground cardboard sideshow target by the knife-throwing Bruno. In Kieślowski's screenplay, though not in his film, the judge describes experiencing "a nice feeling of revenge" while presiding over the trial of Hugo Hölbling, with whom his girlfriend had betrayed him[11]; the persistence of the habit of eavesdropping, however, even after the guilty verdict and Hölbling's death by heart-attack, suggests a marring of any sense of satisfaction by continued entrapment in the memory of betrayal. Inasmuch as Auguste is the judge's double, his depiction leaning against his girlfriend Karin's door to monitor events beyond it establishes the scene of listening as painful, primal, paradigmatic. Moreover, the judge tells Valentine that "at first I wanted to kill him. And I would have done it if it would have changed anything". Given the judge's apparent magical ability to engineer certain events, for instance by flipping a coin to correctly choose "bowling" as the evening activity of Auguste and Karin, one may even speculate whether

[9] C. Malaparte, *The Skin*, trans. D. Moore, Vermont 1988, p. 33.

[10] P. Coates, "»The inner life is the only thing that interests me«: a conversation with Krzysztof Kieślowski", [in:] *Lucid dreams: the films of Krzysztof*

Kieślowski, ed. P. Coates, Trowbridge 1999, p. 167.

[11] K. Kieślowski and K. Piesiewicz, *Three Colours Trilogy: Blue, White, Red*, trans. D. Stok, London 1998, p. 285.

he caused Hölbling's heart-attack. The generalized revenge against the community by shutting himself off from it – a gesture found also in Malaparte's *Bruno* – persists, as if Valentine was right to say that the judge did not know why he had been betrayed. Since that ignorance implies that Hölbling cannot be deemed really responsible, it is as if no-one – and hence everyone – is: as if all are caught up in the collective guilt Adorno identified with myth, perhaps because in the ancient community the individual has not yet precipitated out of the solidarity of the group.

If that solidarity is very hard to separate from complicity, and is shadowed by duplicity (note for instance the pharmacist in Malaparte's film whose public display of an image of Stalin is countered by his back-room saluting of a hidden one of Mussolini), the object of both texts is to cleanse the "we", and hence all the "I"s constituting that "we", from such a taint, perhaps through running togetherness (Kieślowski's "fraternité") back from the community to the first "we", that of the couple (Bruno and Nella in Malaparte's film, Auguste and Valentine in Kieślowski's), or alternatively to the two interconnected couples of the triangle: man and woman, and man and male adversary. In each film this dream of a second beginning suggests a directorial response to a sense of the stained quality of community. In Malaparte's case, the stains are those of war and fascism, and the community's menace is embodied in the adults' hoods and the children's masks in the procession of the Virgin. In Kieślowski's, the sully lies in the after-effects of the Soviet occupation of Poland, regarding which he believed that only a dying out of the generations who had lived under People's Poland would end the diseases associated with it.^[12]

For Valentine, the young woman who befriends the judge, the drive up the hill is the beginning of a descent in another sense, one into hell, the private one of the judge himself. The prohibition of the Christ-like trajectory in Kieślowski's film is figured both in the fact that salvation comes from contact with a woman, and in the way that on entering a church in pursuit of the judge's dog she does not cross herself (as she did in the screenplay co-written with the explicitly Catholic lawyer Krzysztof Piesiewicz^[13]). The Christian's identification with the cross is erased even more completely than in Malaparte's film, where this theme appears in the sexton's mockery of the unwillingness of any member of the processional crowd to climb the church steps and undergo attachment to the cross he brandishes. "Are you Christians and afraid of the cross?", he jeers, adding, as if anticipating Kieślowski's cancellation of Valentine's crossing of herself, "Do you think a sign of the cross is enough to make you a Christian?". The steps at whose top he stands represent a height no-one will climb. The cross is associated not with life but with the dead soldiers dotting the hills nearby.

[12] *Kieślowski on Kieślowski*, ed. D. Stok, London and Boston 1993, p. 125.

[13] K. Kieślowski and K. Piesiewicz, *Three Colours Trilogy: Blue, White, Red*, op. cit., p. 222.

In both films, there is a doubling and spectralization of characters and events. This is more obvious and pervasive in Kieślowski's film, where an air of the uncanny surrounds the judge's apparent ability either to control or predict events – one that prompts a bemused Valentine to ask “who are you?” – and it is both echoed and played with in the “popular uncanny” to which Valentine subscribes, believing that winning on slot machines corresponds to lucklessness in love. Elsewhere in the film that key element of the repertoire of the uncanny, the double, manifests itself in the recapitulation in Auguste's life of decisive events in the judge's. Doubling is less pervasive and explicit in Malaparte's film, being localized in the scene between Bruno and Maria in Maria's room, though the uncanniness of the hooded and masked processional figures and of Bruno himself, arguably dehumanized by his allegorical identification with Vengeance, feed into this theme. The Bruno-Maria scene is remarkable. Maria tells him how during his absence she would close her eyes and call to him, after which he would appear to her “like a spectre” in the mirror when she opened them. This time she asks him to turn the mirror to the wall, perhaps because his reality makes this traditional aid to conjuration no longer necessary, but also as if responding to the presence in the house of another spectre, his dead brother Giulio, or to Bruno's own personification of Death. This mirror's uneven surface may recall the visual effects achieved through flawed glass in Kieślowski's *The Double Life of Véronique*, that companion-piece to *Three Colours: Red*, the only other one in which Irène Jacob was Kieślowski's lead actress. Disturbances of the mirror's normal exact reproduction disturb both realism and reality. Maria tells Bruno he can no longer love her, as she is not who she was. Having heard a report of his death, she gave herself to Giulio as he hid from the Germans. She adds: “It was as if I had given myself to you. Loving him was the only way to be yours”. If this could be seen as another form of the betrayal Giulio suffered, this would only render the brothers doubles; while Maria herself would be double in the sense of split – unsurprisingly, with a mirror opposite her bed – and hence not really treacherous. The possible innocence of promiscuity, particularly in the “state of exception” that is wartime, is then underlined by Nella's account of giving herself to Germans to stall their pursuit of the town's partisans, of whom Giulio was one. Bruno tells Nella that her eyes are unlike his; they are not malicious. Rather as in *Three Colours: Red*: if woman can betray, she can also save, and this may well be a key, overdetermining reason for the prohibition of the Christ-like role: salvation is less likely to come from the male. It is also as if the mirror's continued presence in Maria's room had suggested in the past that Bruno himself could be present again, and is so in the form of Giulio: as if Giulio, on entering the magical space of a room with a mirror, has been absorbed into it and extruded as Bruno – and all the more easily inasmuch as brothers often mirror one another to some extent. (The motif of a confusion of times is one to which I will return.) “Brotherhood” – *fraternité* – is of

course the keyword of Kieślowski's film, so in this respect both films may conceptualize the brother-brother relationship as the deep-set nucleus of an individual-community nexus which places both terms in question. The primacy of "brotherhood", and agonistic and antagonistic social organization by males, is questioned itself by the need to consider "sisterhood", brother-sister relations: in Malaparte's film Nella's brother Pinin is revealed as having betrayed Giulio, while a leitmotif of Kieślowski's is Valentine's concern for her brother Marc, who takes drugs and feels alienated from the family. In the world of doubling, divisions between good and evil migrate to the space within characters, and fantasy persists in the form of a dream of their eventual clear-cut separation. No wonder Michel Cieutat should evoke "la troublante complexité de la dialectique qu'offre l'intrigue"[14] in Malaparte's film, or that a similar complexity characterizes Kieślowski's.

In Kieślowski's film a fantasy of the kind Maria cherishes hovers around the judge and is then acknowledged in part by Valentine, with her question about his identity. Insofar as the fantasy involves doubling, however, it appears to be introduced in two ways: visually and through events. Within the judge's house the doubling enters visually through the movements of Valentine, who is often reflected in the glass of its doors: as if, as in Cocteau's *Orpheus* (*Orphée*, 1950), the mirror is a door, and vice versa. Reality can be accepted only once fantasy has become reality. Once Valentine's pairing with Auguste has been ensured by their joint survival of the ferry-sinking, the judge looks directly at the camera through one of the window-panes shattered by neighbours angered by news of his audio-surveillance of them.

If Valentine comes late to the suspicion that the judge may not be all he seems, this is because she is not privy to the many strange coincidences Kieślowski shows the spectator, who is encouraged to fantasize about the judge's status – and all the more so perhaps inasmuch as his imperturbability figures as a mask, suggesting intentions at which one can only guess. Indeed, the judge may be masked, that is, hidden, even from himself: he states that he is unsure whether during his career he was or was not on the right side, while his suspicion that his professional occupation of the judgment-seat means that – as he puts it to Valentine – this rendered his status even worse than that of "a cop" (*un flic*). The theme of sacrifice pervading both works includes the sacrifice of certainty. The judge's final unmasking dispels fantasy through destruction of the main entity by which it enters everyday life, the reflecting surface.

The doubling thematized clearly at one point in Malaparte's film, and pervading Kieślowski's both implicitly and explicitly, may be related also to the thematics of the proscription of the Christ-like position, for – as in *The Double Life of Véronique* – sacrificing one double appears

[14] Michel Cieutat, "Le Christ Interdit: Morale sans issue", "Positif" 2014 (Nov.), no. 645, p. 98.

to preserve the life of the other. Under the terms of what is in a sense an unwritten sacrificial contract, Auguste benefits from the judge's experience; while in Malaparte's film Bruno is "saved" from the guilt of revenge by Antonio declaring himself the guilty party and so taking on the death Bruno has come to administer. But Malaparte's Tuscan town also benefits from the sacrifices made by mostly foreign soldiers, whose fulfilment of duty Bruno extols to the sexton (in a *mise-en-scène* which places him between the sexton and Antonio, in the in-between position so often occupied by the hero, with an ironic doubling between him and the sexton inasmuch as the sexton has his back to the crucifixion behind him while behind Bruno sits Antonio, whose taking upon himself of a death for something he has not done will be to a certain extent Christ-like; ironically, he is invisible so long as Christ is visible). The position of the image of the crucifixion encapsulates a further irony, as the sexton's framing below it can associate him with it, yet he turns his back to it; Bruno, meanwhile, may be facing the crucifixion, but is framed as having nothing behind him, not even Antonio, whose presence behind him is invisible at this stage. The sexton states that "we" chased away the Germans, this "we" being the poor who therefore have a right to inherit the earth; another speaker however argues that if Christ was only for the poor he would not believe in him. At issue is whether or not the hunger for justice with which the prisoners have returned can be slaked by land redistribution. It is the sexton, through his statement that in the present Christ is prohibited, whom the film's title apparently endorses; Christ may be said to be cancelled by his framing with a man who makes partisan class arguments, while Bruno arguably "seconds" that prohibition inasmuch as he is framed without Christ and of course seeks a revenge that contradicts Christian forgiveness. If Bruno can state that only the soldiers' deaths prevented "us" from becoming a people of scoundrels, the sexton's response is to ask: "Their sacrifice saved us?". The efficacy of such a sacrifice, which might resemble Christ's own determination to "lay down his life for his friends", is doubted. When Antonio, prodded by the sexton, counters the sexton's question "Aren't our sufferings enough to save us?" by stating that "what saves us is that we suffer for others", the sexton has what appears to be the last word, retorting "No-one wants to suffer for others any longer. To repeat Christ's sacrifice is forbidden". In a further irony, however, this final statement can be read as an orthodox Christian honouring of Christ's sacrifice as once-and-for-all. Antonio, meanwhile, is outraged by the word "forbidden", seeing that prohibition as "why all is going badly in the world". The sexton concludes by drawing a contrast: as long as someone suffers for himself and his own, he is deemed a good citizen and father; "but the moment you suffer for those who are poor, those who are humiliated, you become dangerous. You become an enemy of society". The implication is that the prohibition on acting as Christ did is the one that motivated the persecution of Christ himself. It is not that Christ's position was permitted once and now is forbidden; it

has always been forbidden. Implicitly the film asks whether the sexton in fact views contemporary society through the lens of the Game of the Cross, in which the crowd's refusal to mount the Cross suggests a ritualistic recognition of the greatness of Christ's sacrifice, as it will emerge that one individual at least – Antonio, who tells Bruno that he is the only one who can help him – is prepared to die to save another.

Furthermore, as Bruno and his friend Andrea approach the town across the hills at the film's opening, the imagery itself suggests a reading of the title, which viewers have just seen in the credit sequence, in terms of the loss of the Christ-like position through its diffusion in a mirror-maze of deaths that would preclude viewing any one as truly expiatory. The many crosses on the many hills suggest a Golgotha whose multiplication in a sense depletes it. If it appears as if there is no salvation for this society because the uniqueness of the Christ's position has been lost, it is surely significant therefore that the ending's return to these hills, where Bruno confronts his brother's betrayer Pinin, is overseen by only one cross, as if the recovery of the image of the singular cross prefigured Bruno's decision to spare Pinin, allowing Bruno to speak words reminiscent of Christ's sacrifice: "he also paid for you". In *Three Colours: Red*, meanwhile, the issue of the salvation of society as a whole appears not to arise: inasmuch as the judge's life is sacrificed, it benefits Auguste alone. Yet inasmuch as Auguste is a double of the judge, the justice that preoccupies both Malaparte and Kiesłowski may be said to be done – but only in a sense. For the ferry sinking from which Auguste and Valentine are saved also sees the rescue of the principal characters of the two previous sections of Kiesłowski's trilogy, forging a mini-fraternity of these characters. The fraternity thematized here, however, no longer has the wide and metaphorical resonance it possessed when first launched as a watchword of the French Revolution; instead, it has shrunk down to having relevance for only a very few people. The death of so many in the ferry disaster places a question mark beside it. It may well be an example of Kiesłowski's famous, piercing irony that the word is applied to a story of fragmented individuals who appear to come together only by the chance Camus termed "the only reliable divinity", acting apparently through a disaster in which over a thousand die.

Since in folklore the double's appearance often heralds that of death, a text using either death or the double explicitly may be hypothesized as using the other implicitly, and vice versa. The work done by such images of death as real skulls, skull-masks and real and model animal heads in Malaparte's film may be performed by the images of doubling in Kiesłowski's. Thus in *Il Cristo proibito* skulls appear behind glass before tombs in the church, as if their bookending of Bruno's refusal to take communion reflects the death on his mind. During the Game of the Cross procession, one of the figures wears a death's head; another, surely that of the butcher whose shop Bruno passes on the evening of his return, the head of a calf that doubles the severed calf's head seen earlier.

Bearing in mind judge Joseph Kern's age and disposition of renunciation, one might meaningfully juxtapose the skulls looking out through glass in Malaparte's film with Kern's final look towards the camera through broken glass. This in turn connects with Bruno's glance down at his hand as he stands in the church and looks out through a closed and barred window, as if pondering the description of the miracle of the immaculate conception given by a woman in its courtyard, who likened it to the sun's passage through glass without breaking it: as if he is considering breaking the window himself. When he simply opens it to address the sexton, the latter's mention of how Bruno does not have blood on his hands suggests the effects that breaking the glass with them would have had, placing the viewer's reception of this moment in the realm of the conditional (and hence subconscious fantasy) inhabited by Kieślowski's film, allowing us to imagine his breaking of the glass as connoting a transgression and having happened already in the negative space of the imagination. The bars meanwhile suggest the potential ineffectiveness of any such breakage. In the judge's case, the shattered glass represents a secular miracle, his opening up to the world. It may be read also as prefiguring a stepping outside his own filmic world by Kieślowski, who announced his retirement after the release of *Three Colours: Red* and who had once told Bożena Janicka that "[a]ll my films were made as if through glass".^[15] The direct look at the camera breaks more than just the diegesis. Kieślowski ends his career as he began it, coming full circle to the look at the camera that is so typical of the documentary form with which he began, as if the shattering of glass and its reflections marked the end of the regime of fiction.

That double of the double, the reflection, appears very early in Malaparte's film, as Bruno approaches the town across desolate hills and spits at his own image in the water. His soiling of it reflects his sense that it is soiled already. It as if Christ's image is forbidden already because the human one is spat at not by tormentors but by the human being itself, as it lacks innocence. In Kieślowski's film, set in the far more modern environment of a major late-twentieth metropolis, Geneva, doubling enters primarily through the reflective surfaces whose native hardness and multiplicity introduce into relations recurrent, unpredictable possibilities of distancing, distortion, dispersal, and loss. This disorientation can affect interpersonal relations in general, though the frequent reflections of Valentine within the judge's house may also correspond to his haunting by the spectre of his former love, of whom Valentine is a reincarnation who remains ghostly, because untouchable, even on entering his material abode. When their hands align with one another, it is in farewell, and on either side of the window of his car (an image that haunted Kieślowski himself, as it occurs also in one of the sections of *Blind Chance* [*Przypadek*, 1982/1987], its recurrence here

[15] Krzysztof Kieślowski: *Interviews*, eds. R. Bernard and S. Woodward, Jackson 2016, p. 50.

suggesting that, like the judge's love, it had had the dislocated quality of something looking for its right place in time). Here "the way up is the way down" in the sense of rejuvenation arising through a descent into the realm of the dead. Kickasola remarks fittingly of the first scene in the judge's house that "[f]rom the state of the house and its abandoned rooms, it appears as if he might have been sitting there for decades. The distorted sounds of the radio suggest that perhaps he is dead".^[16] Following a similar intuition, Anthony Lane describes Valentine's entry into the judge's house as one into "what appears to be the early stages of a horror movie".^[17] The descent also inclines away from summer, a journey into the autumn in which Bruno returns, a season whose association with brown, yellow and red suits Kieślowski's film, with its red-related colour scheme. The entry into Malaparte's film, meanwhile, across sandy hills dotted with crosses, seems to pick up where *The Skin*, his reminiscences of entering Italy as a liaison officer attached to the Allied army of liberation, had left off. He is accompanied by the American soldier Jimmy.

Left alone, Jimmy and I set off for the spot where we had parked our jeep. It seemed to me that I was walking on the cold crust of a dead planet. We, perhaps, were the last two men in creation, the only two human beings to have survived the destruction of the world.^[18]

Imagery and dialogue appropriate to a descent into hell recur in Malaparte's film. The meeting between Nella and Bruno suggests one in Hades, as she responds to his "we are not the same but we're alive" by questioning the word "alive". Just as Kieślowski's judge agrees with Valentine that stopping breathing would be a good idea, Nella's answer to Bruno's encouragement to wish on the new moon is "I'd like to die straightaway". She and Bruno have climbed up to a church from outside which they look down on the town. Outside the town's walls they have space and time to talk, much as Valentine and the judge do in his upper-city house. If, as Nella remarks, "you don't know what liberty cost us" this is one reason why she regrets that they are no longer children. He says he had never noticed her because she was only a child, and the suggestion of a possible love frustrated by age-difference is another theme the two films share. The possible love between them was spoiled by the war taking him away, she says, doubling Maria here. Bruno's statement that "not even liberty has made free men of us" resembles ones made by Kieślowski in the 1990s, and could have occurred in *Three Colours: Red*, in a musical reprise of the explicit thematization of the question of liberty in the first of the *Three Colours* films, as each film re-scores the main themes of other sections as sub-themes.

Malaparte's most important dialogue occurs near his film's end, between Antonio and Bruno. In terms of the doubling thematized in

[16] J.G. Kickasola, *The Films of Krzysztof Kieślowski: The Liminal Image*, New York and London 2004, p. 303.

[17] A. Lane, *Nobody's Perfect: Writings from The New Yorker*, op. cit., p. 88.

[18] C. Malaparte, *The Skin*, op. cit., p. 342.

Kieślowski's film, it may be classified as a form of the internal dialogue the judge may have conducted within himself on various occasions, such as before resigning as a judge or, during this film's course, before denouncing himself to the authorities. Antonio presents himself to Bruno as a double under the sign of death: if Bruno kills his brother's killer, he will be just like Antonio himself, who killed an overseer who had hit him. He has lived the subsequent twenty years in hell. Bruno retorts that Antonio killed for justice. Earlier Antonio had argued that "those who arrogate to themselves the right to judge others, and who judge today in the name of liberty, judged yesterday in that of tyranny". One guilty person less means one assassin more, Antonio says, adding – as if concerned with a keyword of Kieślowski's trilogy that arguably matters as much to this episode as its keyword, fraternity – "for there to be equality". The dialogue's inauguration by Antonio's dimming of the light implies that it may not be enlightening, as well as (rather as in the novels of Joseph Conrad) allowing a privileging of language over sight. The darkening of the issue becomes most patent as Antonio misrepresents himself as the betrayer of Bruno's brother, receiving immediately thereafter at Bruno's hands the gift of the death he yearns for. In exchange, as it were, he seeks to grant Bruno insight into what it means to kill for justice, as well as to grant the community, which only desires peace, an end to the revenge cycle that can destroy it and that fatally recalls the recently-concluded war. Antonio describes his own death as one for the actual traitor, whom Bruno should not harm. Here, as earlier, when the sexton mocked the crowd members' unwillingness to be attached to it, the cross judges: Antonio crucifies himself in self-judgment over the killing he once performed. Ironically, when he later reveals his true status as not the man Bruno seeks, Bruno's knife exacts no more real justice than the one he threw into the heart of the cut-out at the fairground stall. As in the crucifixion itself, the wrong man is killed. The real intention of the crucifixion, whose perversity would accord well with the bitter paradoxes of Malaparte's thought, may have been to debase the image of innocence that convicts men of guilt. That imputation of negativity to the signifier of innocence may underlie the village's view of Antonio as both saintly and insane. A carpenter who dies outside the city walls, he fatally conjoins key elements of the image of innocence that is Christ. They are only fragments of a shattered image, however. Even if it still existed in unitary form, in the present it would be obscured by accretions of human guilt. Kieślowski's judge too ends as an outcast, having sacrificed himself also; and, as with Bruno and Antonio, his innocence lies long in the past.

The difficulty of recovering a childhood or childlike innocence preoccupies both films. Geoff Andrew has described Valentine's expression as often "faintly puzzled"[19], as if she is a child in a world whose

[19] G. Andrew, *The "Three Colours" Trilogy*, London 1998, p. 64.

norms baffle her. Such disorientation marks her reaction to the judge's auditory surveillance: initially believing the best response would mean informing his neighbours, seeing a man's daughter eavesdropping on her father's homosexual avowals of love (an image that itself confuses traditional notions of innocence) dissuades her from direct action. Ending as they do, the desire for revenge expunged, both films seek to excavate a possibility of innocence, which Malaparte identifies with the child Bruno once was, but also with the realization that "betrayal" can be innocent, like Bruno's mother's blurting out of Pinin's role in Giulio's death – out of her fear that Bruno has killed him. The fusion and confusion of past, present and future in her fear resembles that of Kieślowski's film, which locates innocence in a delocalized present whose conditionality discloses an open-ended, eschatological dimension of time that recapitulates and reorders a disordered past around the unsullied spirit of Valentine.

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