

Mann's protagonist Aschenbach and Mahler—star Dirk Bogarde is made up to resemble the composer. It is thus that Visconti deepens and marks the story's connections with Romanticism's apotheosis and demise, with an obsessive and sickly beauty on the brink of the twentieth century.

Elsewhere, very specific choices have very specific and far-reaching ramifications. In Visconti's *Ossessione* (1942) the adulterous protagonists have a chance reunion at a fair; they, along with the wronged husband, enter into a singing contest where a soprano sings the *Habañera* from the first act of Bizet's *Carmen*. In the opera this is the piece by which we are introduced to the fickle, headstrong Carmen. In the film this quote bespeaks carnality, abandon and, if we will, tragedy.

Following the Bizet selection the cuckolded husband rises, and sings a baritone aria from *La Traviata*.²⁴ In the opera this aria is sung by Germont, the father of the rather headstrong, headlong Alfredo. He asks where his son's customary joy has gone, assures him that present imbalances will pass and that contentment will return. Does this selection not subtly shift the story? At first glance we have seen, or because of narrative stereotypes we think we have seen, a brutish oblivious husband and his bruised flower of a wife, who very naturally and properly craves more tender attention. But with further listening we must now factor in the provocative declarations from an infamous hussy, countered by the well-meaning appeal of a firm but loving older man who feels kindly toward youth, wishing only to help it avert its follies. In this setting intertextuality, if we attend to it, generates sympathy for the older generation, which may not fully understand or remember youthful passion, but which is suddenly not all bad.

Visconti's quotes signify beyond the narrative itself. Sweaty, boorish, uneducated Signor Bragana's familiarity with Verdi's high-culture text at least problematizes the universality of the notion that serious music is the property of privilege.²⁵ Or it might become a point of convergence where the auteur's aristocratic background and socialist inclinations meet, where is contained the paradox of the opera director/neorealist. It also explains Visconti's not-so-strange interest in this apparently American pulp fiction—*Ossessione* was notoriously cribbed from James Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*—an idiom