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"Fake It Until You Make It:" A Reflection on Film, Hypocrisy, and Christian Ethics

Abstract

I will argue that a representative group of films including *Mr. Lucky* (with Cary Grant), Rossellini's *Il Generale della Rovere*, and *Galaxy Quest* affirm an assumption that is as well known as it is offensively false to many: i.e., we acquire a virtue or quality of character by pretending that we already possess it—the ethic colloquially and popularly known as “fake it until you make it.” The importance and power of this ethic, as thoroughly secular as it seems to be, is best understood in the context of its Roman Catholic and ancient philosophical provenance, which for the most part has been pushed aside by secular appropriations. The theme is not exclusive to film but is especially suited to it, invested as it is in theatricality and performance *per se*. These films (they are few among many), accordingly, are especially well positioned to confront the collateral anxiety associated with virtue ethics inasmuch as hypocrisy seems an unavoidable condition of moral growth—these films explore this problem by featuring protagonists who are confidence men or actors, who perform virtuously without originally intending to be virtuous. At the same time, the films and innumerable other films like them, profoundly challenge the other and dominant ethic of our time--“Be true to yourself”--which is itself a vestigial, secularized remnant of the hostile Protestant reaction to the Catholic tradition and which takes particular exception to “fake it until you make it.” In this way, old theological and philosophical battles have left their trace on modern popular culture even though their origins have been forgotten.

Keywords

Virtue Ethics, Theatricality, Hypocrisy, Confidence Man, C.S. Lewis, Aristotle, J-J Rousseau, Roberto Rossellini, *Galaxy Quest*, *Mr. Lucky*

Author Notes

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An Unnamed Genre

Consider the following films as belonging to a genre—a genre as yet unnamed: *Mr. Lucky* (1943), *Il Generale Della Rovere* (1959), and *Galaxy Quest* (1999). In the most general sense, one could say that they cluster together as film adaptations of what most people know as the *Bildungsroman* or novel of formation or development. It tells a story about growing up, an experience that is not exclusive to the young, who are its usual pre-occupation, but, rather, an experience available to all ages—for, as these films remind us, one is never too old to grow up. But this general and familiar designation doesn't capture what is truly noteworthy about these films (they are few among many) inasmuch as they propose that theatricality and imposture are the propulsive mechanisms of this growth. The principle is simply and colloquially stated: "Fake it until you make it"—a principle that, as I will argue shortly, is a vestigial, secularized remnant of a once potent and unquestionably Christian, Catholic source, a principle that is still powerfully and habitually active in the cinematic imagination. Even so, active as it is, we need to do some work to recover the rationale of this rich line of thinking, and how it provides a foundation for the provocative reflection on and defense of hypocrisy that we find in these films.

The assumption behind the imperative to "fake it until you make it"—as commonplace as it is strange and perplexing, and to many, even offensively false—is that we acquire a particular virtue or quality of character by first pretending that we already possess it; that is, through repeated practice, through the habitual performance of virtue, we actually become virtuous. A simple hint of what this notion could mean and of its wide circulation in popular culture, along with its faintly operative Catholic relevance, appears

in the first episode of the second season of *West Wing* (1999-2006); President Bartlet (Martin Sheen) tells White House Chief of Staff, Leo McGarry (John Spencer), that he, Leo, has too much faith in him, a faith he doesn't share himself. Leo offers this bit of advice: "Act as if ye had faith, and it shall be given to you.' Put another way, fake it until you make it."¹ It is helpful to know that McGarry is an Irish Catholic born in Chicago and raised in Boston.² It is also well known that "fake it until you make it" is a therapeutic tool for building confidence in Alcoholics Anonymous. So it is for Amy Cuddy, of the Harvard Business School, who, in a well-known TED Talk, puts the commandment to work in her very successful self-help program.³ She gives the same advice to people in any number of stressful situations ranging from business meetings to job interviews. Arguing that one's behavior can shape one's mind, she claims, to take one of her examples, that "power posing"—standing in a posture of confidence, even when we don't feel confident—will lead us to actual self-confidence. Tweaking the commandment, she urges: "Don't fake it till you make it. Fake it till you become it."⁴

But there is a nagging and troubling implication: the reliability and plausibility of this claim about how we grow and change is oddly confirmed even as it is challenged by the example of fictional characters in a range of films who have no intention of becoming good people and yet somehow they do become so. At this point, it is important to be clear: I am not mistaking fictional characters for real people—rather, they are *possible* people who can be as engaging as real people and whose circumstances, however hypothetical, are possibly even more compelling. The central figure in the kind of story I'm talking about here is the confidence man, who is inevitably a skillful actor—or, alternatively, a protagonist who happens to be an actor, sometimes a professional actor, who,

accordingly, has an aptitude for fraud. This character either seeks to dupe strangers for some purpose, whether for money or self-esteem or reputation, or as a matter of professional practice, sometimes maliciously, sometimes not. To that end, he (it's usually a he)⁵ pretends to be someone he is not, who begins, in the process, to diverge from, even to contradict his original intentions and expectations—and, even beyond his control, to take on virtues, and a host of collateral loyalties, feelings, dispositions, and skills he didn't happen to have beforehand. At a critical moment he is exposed as a fraud, but is given the opportunity to show that he is a changed man and to recover the trust of the people he has deceived. That, generally speaking, this kind of character does change further suggests that no character, however distant from virtue, is beyond this kind of redemption. In these films, hypocrisy, in fact, outright imposture—so obviously adverse to virtuous practice, is, paradoxically, a cause of it, or at least, establishes the conditions that make it possible. Accordingly, the two senses of “hypocrite” are activated: we are reminded of its root sense in Attic Greek (*hupokritēs*), which means “actor on stage” and, as it first emerges in the Greek *New Testament*, of its later and lasting pejorative sense of “dissembler, pretender, fraud.”

These films are, thus, conversion narratives of an extraordinary kind insofar as they confront a paradox: that intentional imposture is not only *not* an impediment to acquiring virtue, but a final demonstration that even the most hardened and recalcitrant character, even the sociopathic can be redeemed by means of his or her fraudulence. Put another way, these films explore, affirm, and relish the ironic conjunction of hypocrisy and virtue. The paradox is built into the very phrasing of “Fake it until you make it;” as a pointedly balanced rhetorical antithesis, it captures and announces this paradoxical con-

nection, sealed and emphasized by the rhyme of “fake” and “make” that binds the two terms together conceptually; the apparent contradiction provokes us and demands resolution. This pattern is a good deal easier to demonstrate than to account for—a pattern that is certainly not confined to these particular films, or to film *per se*.⁶ Film, nevertheless, founded as it is in performance, calls attention to itself as performance in ways relevant to understanding the relationship between theatricality and moral development. And although I will discuss all the films I’ve mentioned here, I will spend perhaps a greater portion of my time with *Il Generale Della Rovere*, which I think is a particularly fitting, even beautiful instance of this genre.

Apart from clear family resemblance and the fact that some films listed here are, in my view, better than those that are not listed, there is a certain arbitrariness to my selections, which is one kind of proof of just how pervasive works in this genre are: there are simply too many of them; one doesn’t need to search for them systematically; one runs into them accidentally. If the genre is yet to be named, I can make no claim to having discovered it. It, whatever it is to be called, has been sufficiently well noticed by the on-line site, *TV Tropes*, whose geekish taxonomies of pop culture phenomena are legendary. It identifies, catalogues, and categorizes the numerous variants and refinements of plot lines and subplots found within the general category of a recurring theme it calls “Becoming the Mask.” *TV Tropes* draws this name from George Orwell’s “Shooting an Elephant.” In that essay, Orwell observes despairingly of his experience in Burma in which he finds himself pretending to be a colonialist autocrat and turning into one as a result. As he says of any man in his position, “[h]e wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it.”⁷ The relevant story line in our case, and not Orwell’s, is that of the bad man pretend-

ing to be a good man although Orwell shows that it clearly works in the opposite direction. Here is how *TV Tropes* describes it:

The Mole or the Con Man takes on a fake identity in order to gain something: information, money, a safe place. As time progresses, he grows to love his new identity and the way people treat him. His new friends prove reliable and he is struck by the contrast. He might even fall in love with another person whom he is explicitly supposed to be taking advantage of. Either way, he wants to remain in his new identity forever.⁸

The number of films—animated or not—begins to multiply. *TV Tropes* lists *The Postman*, *Chicken Run*, *The Wedding Crashers*, *Ant's Life*, *The Music Man*, *Dave*, *While You Were Sleeping*, *Tropic Thunder*, *From Russia With Love*, *Mother Night*, *Avatar*, and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. Other films, not listed, apart from the many other films one could list, include: *Dangerous Liaisons*, *Valmont*, *About a Boy*, *Somersby*, *Six Degrees of Separation*, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, *My Favorite Year*, Antonioni's *The Passenger* and Kurosawa's *Kagemusha*.⁹

Sources

Before we can see how this paradox is addressed in these films, we need to look to the historical sources that call this paradox forth and give it some depth. *TV Tropes* usefully provides us with only the shadow of a well-worked out tradition of thinking. As I've already claimed, if "fake it until you make it" has any currency in the 21st century, it is because it has a deeply and habitually ingrained, if culturally forgotten Christian source—more specifically a Catholic or an Anglo-Catholic one. The idea has, as one might expect, an ancient provenance. Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, argues that one becomes virtuous or vicious through making corresponding sorts of actions habitual. The process

begins with *doing*: “the virtues . . . we acquire by first having put them into *action*, and the same is true of the arts. For the things which we have to learn before we can do them we learn by doing.” Just as “men become builders by building houses, and harpists by playing the harp . . . we become just by the practice of just actions, self-controlled by exercising self-control, and courageous by performing acts of courage” and so on through all the virtues and vices. He adds: “To sum it all up, in a single account, a state of character results from the repetition of certain activities.”¹⁰

At the same time, becoming virtuous will always involve the imitation of role models as a natural route to acquiring a virtue that one doesn’t have, and hence there is a natural caution about keeping young people out of range of unacceptable models.¹¹ And so the argument runs, from Plato through to Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, which assumes, as Lionel Trilling observes, “that the impersonation of a bad or inferior character will have a harmful effect on the impersonator”¹² This is why Sir Thomas Bertram in *Mansfield Park* is so horrified when he learns that his children are engaging in amateur theatrics in his home. Bad habits are as easy to acquire as they are difficult to undo and actors are particularly susceptible to this.¹³

Ultimately, this idea that virtue is acquired through repeatedly performing virtuous acts was absorbed into Christianity especially by way of St. Thomas Aquinas and Erasmus, who did much to crystalize this tradition. C.S. Lewis, who never took the step from Anglo-Catholicism to Catholicism, aligns himself with that tradition as he simply and clearly lays out the connection between virtue and performance in *Mere Christianity*—although some might say more simply than clearly. In a chapter entitled “Let’s Pretend,”¹⁴ Lewis mentions the old story, which suggests a provenance embedded in the

wider culture—the obverse of the one which we have just heard in connection with Orwell--“about someone who had to wear a mask; a mask which made him look much nicer than he really was. He had to wear it for years. And when he took it off he found his own face had grown to fit it. He was now really beautiful. What had begun as a disguise had become a reality.”¹⁵ He means to elicit and illustrate a principle relevant not only to Christianity but to education generally, which is perhaps as obvious as it is unfashionable. As Lewis puts it, “very often the only way to get a quality in reality is to start behaving as if you had it already.” This is why children’s games, he adds, are so important: “They are always pretending to be grown ups—playing soldiers, playing shop” and the like, so that “the pretense of being grown up helps them to grow up in earnest.”¹⁶ In another chapter, Lewis clarifies this process when he discusses how we acquire the virtue of charity. He says:

Do not waste time bothering whether you love your neighbour; act as if you did. As soon as we do this, we find out one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you love someone, you will presently come to love him If you do him a good turn, not to please God and obey the law of charity, but to show him what a fine forgiving chap you are, and put him in your debt, and then sit down and wait for his gratitude, you will probably be disappointed But whenever we do good to another self, just because it is a self, made like us, by God, and desire its own happiness as we desire ours, we will have learned to love it a little more or, at least, to dislike it less.¹⁷

To the extent that we do make the passage from faking (from, that is, a semblance of virtue) to sincerity is, again, finally a matter of grace—we need the help of God’s free offer of grace and our free acceptance of it to take that step towards loving another self a little more, or, at least, disliking it less.

Thus, figuratively, we wear a mask, or we “put on” love like a garment as Paul commands in Colossians 3:5-8: “And above all these things put on charity, which is the

bond of perfectness” because you have “have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”¹⁸ Thus, we “put on Christ”—the ultimate role model—when we emulate him. The traditional insistence on “habit” merges with another sense of the term, in English and in Latin, in which habit, or *habitus*, is raiment, clothing, and dress—a guise; a habit, as costume, invites the development, at first through pretense, of new habits in keeping with putting on the appropriate external manifestations of it.¹⁹

As Lewis suggests, it’s likely that we wear the mask or put on the garment or habit (in both senses) for the wrong reasons—at the outset, anyway. That is, we perform a virtuous action without yet being virtuous—we feel we ought to because we are told we ought to do so but don’t yet know why, or we seek the praise of others. We have to put on clothes we don’t ordinarily wear and which don’t fit. Nevertheless, our performances, as they become habitual, reshape us; they move us to alter our patterns of thinking and feeling in keeping with the increasingly familiar role that we are playing. As we perform, we might gradually come to understand its true end and value and, furthermore, we gradually learn to desire practicing it for its own sake. We become gracious, although whether we are or not is not for us to judge. We choose, but it is a choice we only gradually grow into. Love, like any other virtue, is not in this sense a feeling but a habitual practice.

Here, Lewis echoes the comfortable distance the Catholic tradition has maintained from the problem of distinguishing the counterfeiting of or faking the virtues from a sincere embrace of them, and whether or not acting as if one were virtuous weren’t tantamount to endorsing hypocrisy as a path to virtue. For Aristotle, a deceptive gap between the sincerely virtuous and a mere appearance of virtue was a normal part of the process of

habituation. Catholic tradition was prepared, with some difficulty and ingenuity, to concede that acting the part of virtue is not always a vice so long as it was strictly seen as part of the necessary preparation for a sincere embrace of virtue, the work of which is attended by a divine offer of grace.²⁰ In this way, what begins as a disguise—even though it gives a false impression—becomes, or approaches, a reality. Lewis is careful to make clear that the practice of charity is never purified of performance this side of the grave: as Lewis says, we learn to love another self, or perhaps at best, to dislike it a little less. This is in keeping with Aquinas, who precisely distinguished between what counts as hypocrisy and what does not. For Aquinas, as Jennifer Herdt puts it, “[p]erforming characteristically virtuous actions that do not reflect one’s actual state of character is not hypocrisy unless these actions are performed for the sake of appearing virtuous. If they are performed instead for the sake of becoming virtuous, they are innocent actions.”²¹

The tension between hypocrisy and virtue that the Catholic tradition tries to minimize comes to life with Friedrich Nietzsche, discarding as he does the Thomistic distinction between a culpable hypocrisy and innocent dissimulation. Growing into virtue is somewhat less a matter of an original honest intention, but, rather, an intention which is the collateral residue of hypocritical habit:

The hypocrite who always plays one and the same role finally ceases to be a hypocrite; . . . If someone obstinately and for a long time wants to *appear* something, it is in the end hard for him to be anything else. The profession of almost every man, even that of the artist, begins with hypocrisy, with an imitation from without, with a copying of what is most effective. He who is always wearing a mask of a friendly countenance must finally acquire a power over benevolent moods without which the impression of friendliness cannot be obtained--and finally these acquire power over him, and he is benevolent.”²²

For Nietzsche, in his post-Christian habitude, there is neither the comfort of grace nor of a tactical retreat from hypocrisy as he brazenly enlists hypocrisy as a condition of virtue, accepting even as he endorses its paradoxical efficacy.

Reactions and Refinements

To concede, as Nietzsche does, that virtue can begin with hypocrisy is an irony that prepares us for and keeps company with the thematic territory of our films. But before we can turn to the films, we need to take one more step. The legitimacy of the school of “fake it until you make it,” as a model and a mechanism for how we grow into virtue, has had to contend with, and is conditioned by a more systematic and comprehensive challenge than the inherent and potent dangers of misplaced imitation. That reactive challenge, which gives a final defining edge to this tradition, is found in the profound cultural impact of the Protestant argument against theatricality *per se*, especially among the Puritans and other Reformed Churches in England and America since the 17th century. With the success of that challenge we perhaps find the reason why “fake it until you make it,” even though it is still alive, can in some sense seem exotic, and in need of historical recovery.

This hostility has been particularly intense in the Calvinist tradition because the competence granted in the Anglo-Catholic and Catholic tradition to individuals in redirecting their own lives away from sin through imitation, through putting on virtue was harshly judged as too optimistic an account of spiritual regeneration—even though the success of this aim strictly depended on the free offer and acceptance of grace. To a Cal-

vinist, we are either flatly damned or flatly saved without regard to the works we perform. What capacity we have for virtue is the fruit of an undeserved and arbitrary gift of divine grace to the utterly depraved soul, a soul so damaged by the Fall that there can be no question of self-repair, no possibility of a soul that can play any role in securing grace, a soul which, in fact, does not even have the power to refuse grace. The actor in such a regime can be nothing more than a trifling hypocrite and an object of intense scorn; actors can only cultivate appearances, can only pretend to be what they are not—trifling because what they pretend to be can have no bearing on who they are or will be. There can be only one worthy performance of self, the one in which we see the true, unitary, given, and unmalleable self in perfect alignment with outward appearances.²³

But a much stronger challenge not only to the tradition of virtue ethics but also Reformed Christianity itself is the later cultural triumph of the ethic of being true to oneself—a line of thinking about the nature of the self and its consequences for education, which was decisively influenced by the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. It is a view that, indeed, grows out of the Protestant tradition. For Rousseau, of Geneva—the city of Calvin—proves himself an heir of Calvinism in the precision with which he inverts a Calvinist line of thinking: humankind, for him, is as naturally and as absolutely innocent and good as humankind is, for Calvin, utterly depraved. According to Rousseau, as Jennifer Herdt puts it, we are “made as evil as we were made sociable.”²⁴ A socialized self means the loss of this original, authentic self and its substitution with a constructed, artificial persona who postures, who is essentially an *actor* and, so, can only make a false display of him or herself to others. The proper aim of education should be to protect the natural, authentic self from such corruption; habituation, or any habit forming behavior, accord-

ingly, is nothing more than slavish obedience to rules and conformity with examples set by others, which means ultimately a loss of freedom and autonomy. As Rousseau says in *Émile*, “[t]he only habit the child should be allowed to acquire is to acquire none.”²⁵ Actors, once again, have to take cover: “What then is the spirit that the actor receives from his estate? A mixture of abjectness, duplicity, ridiculous conceit, and disgraceful abasement which renders him fit for all sorts of roles except for the most noble of all, that of man, which he abandons.”²⁶

Film and Efficacious Faking: a Preamble

These three films not only explore the causal link between habitual hypocrisy and the development of moral character; one can't help feeling a certain defensive intensity, as if each film were taking aim at the cultural disposition I've just described that devalues the role that pretense and habituation play in moral growth. In the process, the anti-theatrical tradition gets its face rubbed in what amounts to a naked defense of hypocrisy, and cinema proves to be the appropriate medium to return fire. This is not to say that the target is so sharply defined or that these films are intentional commentaries on the relevant intellectual and theological battles that have ensued over the centuries. They *do*, on the one hand, resist the extreme pessimism of the Calvinist tradition that essentially dictates that people can't change just as they resist the extreme optimism of the Rousseauistic tradition that insists that people themselves don't need to change. That old argument is, of course, too distant from these films, but the films demonstrate that the habits of thinking and feeling that this debate engendered are still alive and active in Western culture. One

can still detect an optimistically polemical tone to these films—again, the suggestion that no character, however hardened and distant from virtue, is irredeemable.

The films are, in any case, as I mentioned before, energized by the ironic implications of action that conjoins habitual hypocrisy and virtue—through, that is, proposing an action in which the hardened confidence man or actor/fraud are protagonists, whose talent for virtuous mimicry is utterly divorced from the end of attaining virtue; yet in the course of the films these intentions unravel as these protagonists, while they succeed in deceiving others, are gradually awakened to and converted through a process of habituation to genuine virtue. Self-serving, unashamed, and apparently unregenerate hypocrisy itself is a preparation for virtue, to the point where habit seems to trump vicious intention. We are once again reminded of Nietzsche's tolerance of hypocrisy: "If someone obstinately and for a long time wants to *appear* something, it is in the end hard for him to be anything else."

***Mr. Lucky*: "You don't mind if I double-cross myself?"**

In H.C. Potter's *Mr. Lucky* (1943), Joe "The Greek" Adams (Cary Grant), is a professional gambler and confidence man during the Second World War before Pearl Harbor. The story is a framed narrative, delivered as a flashback and told from the point of view of "Swede" (Charles Bickford), Joe's friend and the master of Joe's casino ship, the *Fortuna*. In the opening movement of the film, after Swede's introduction, we learn that Joe's plans to open a new casino in Havana are thwarted when he discovers he has been drafted. However, already of uncertain name and identity ("Joe Adams" is likely not his

true name; as he says, “Who says it’s my own name?”), he assumes another identity, this time the name of a dying Greek-born sailor, Joe Bascopolous, a crew member of the *Fortuna*, because he learns that Bascopolous has also been drafted and is classified 4F. He quickly gets down to business. Needing a substantial stake to get his casino venture going, Joe talks a women’s war relief agency into staging a fund-raising casino while planning to walk away with the proceeds. He pretends that he is a Greek patriot to convince Dorothy Bryant (Laraine Day), one of the leaders of the women’s group, that he is sincere in his desire to help out in their current efforts to send a relief ship to Greece, recently occupied by the invading Germans and Italians.

But the more attentively and habitually he acts the part, the more involved he gets with the charity, and the more he is distracted from his initial intention to swindle the women. The ladies begin the process of softening him by teaching him how to knit, and true to the pattern discerned by *TV Tropes*, he finds himself falling in love with the woman he tries to swindle. As his confidence game unfolds, his imposture as a Greek patriot exposes and attunes him to the real depredations of the German-Italian invasion of Greece, to the point where he decides, in the end, that war relief is his true business.

The slow process of Joe’s conversion, so to speak, is finally completed when he finds himself drawn even more deeply into his impersonation of Bascopolous with a far greater emotional investment and entanglement than he could ever have anticipated. The crucial sequence begins when he comes into possession of a letter, written in Greek, to Bascopolous. Concerned that the police are still after Bascopolous for past crimes (he is, previously unknown to Joe, a “three time loser”), Adams is hoping that the letter will give him information about Bascopolous that could throw the police off his trail. The

very evening of the charity ball, he takes the letter to a Greek Orthodox priest to translate. When he learns that the letter is from Bascopolous's mother, Joe is no longer interested, and he says: "Thanks father, I just wanted to know who it was from." But the priest bids him to listen as he reads it out loud—and Joe is arrested by it. In it, the mother gives an account of how Bascopolous's brothers led their village in a battle against invading German paratroopers until every last defender was killed. Already primed by his pretended and gradually habitual patriotism, Adams, now as the pretending son and brother, connects with the mother's grief and pride, and is moved by her abiding love for her wayward son as if he were that son; Adams takes on the son's burden of shame and sorrow as the son might or should have carried it himself, in light of the brothers' sacrifice, for leading the life of crime he shares with Bascopolous just as he is implicated in the suffering of his family—as if it were his own family, indeed, as if he had become, as the priest says, "the brother of all men."²⁷ [<https://youtu.be/C6KAMNSIEwg>]

In short, those emotional burdens and feelings of connection become his own. He then returns to the charity event resolved to turn over the cash raised at the casino to the charity, after he pays off "the boys," unhesitatingly prepared, as he says, to "double-cross myself" [<https://youtu.be/MiHWFMEKeOE>]. So, he grows into charity, but only by performing it first. The Church is, indeed, an agent in this process, and Joe may even have had a moment of grace, but the film shows no awareness of the religious tradition supporting the actual efficacy of performing virtue. The priest's primary agency is that of a translator and not that of a minister.

The film also makes clear that if Joe is implicated in the sufferings of this family, he is implicated in the sufferings of his adopted country. It is no less appropriate for him

to call himself, or submit to being called “the Greek” than it is to be considered a son or a brother of all men: that sense of universal brotherhood begins with and grows out of local sympathetic connections. The film spends a bit of time puzzling over why this might be possible for Joe; we remember that before Swede begins to tell his story, he asks the harbor policeman on the scene if he has heard of “Joe the Greek”—a name Joe evidently doesn’t acquire until some time after the story that Swede tells ends and when it becomes public knowledge. The policeman has heard of him but wonders if Joe is really Greek; Swede answers that no one knows for sure, but the point the film makes is that, even if he isn’t Greek, he is nevertheless entitled to make the claim. There is a sense in which, because he pretends to be Greek beginning with his theft of Bascopolous’ identity, he becomes Greek. In any case, no one questions the name. Once faked, like his charity, his Greekness is now, in every important sense, fundamental to his identity. He is, in a sense, more genuinely Greek, even though he was not born a Greek, than Bascopolous was.

***Galaxy Quest*: “We’re actors, not astronauts”**

Dean Parisot’s *Galaxy Quest* is a comically provocative exploration of the paradoxical relationship of hypocrisy and virtue. In the film, the lead actors from a long defunct *Star Trek*-style TV series are reduced to attending fan conventions signing autographs in costume. We notice how Jason Nesmith (Tim Allen), in particular, who plays Peter Quincy Taggart, the commander of the *Protector*, seems to be all too willing to relive his fictional role at such occasions; he takes inordinate pleasure in indulging his fans who blur the real with fiction and persist in regarding him as the heroic commander. He answers ques-

tions about his fictional adventures in the television series as if they were actual adventures. That his sense of dignity hypocritically and self-deceptively depends on the borrowed dignity of a fictional character is exposed when he goes into an angry funk after he overhears in the bathroom the mockery of a young man: "Nesmith? He actually gets off on all those retards. He has no idea he is a laughing stock."²⁸

But then, *real* aliens, a delegation of Thermians, led by Mathesar, introduce themselves to Nesmith. They have come to Earth to recruit the man they believe is Commander Taggart to solve a real interplanetary crisis—reptilian humanoids led by Sarris (Robin Sachs) want to destroy the Thermians. The guileless Thermians, who have no concept of fiction and who lack any sense of theatricality, have mistaken episodes of the show for "historical documents" and have, accordingly, also misidentified the actors as real heroes. The Thermians, who are octopus-like in their natural form, have even assumed, with comic awkwardness, human form not only to communicate with their heroes, but also to emulate humans and to in some sense become human.²⁹ The Thermians have also managed to duplicate the starship *Protector* based on the "historical documents" and have made the phony technology of the series operational. Once the crew are aware that the Thermians are in real trouble, they balk, in spite of Nesmith's enthusiasm—and for what seems to be an obvious reason: as Gwen DeMarco (Sigourney Weaver) who plays Lt. Tawny Madison, protests to her colleagues: "We're actors, not astronauts!" Nesmith also has to answer to the skepticism of another cast member, Alexander Dane (Allan Rickman), who has no faith in Nesmith's leadership ability; he is constantly critical of how acting the role of a commander goes to Nesmith's head, reminding Nesmith that he is only "wearing a costume, not a uniform."

The central crisis of the film arrives when the Thermians discover that *Galaxy Quest* is in fact only a fiction, as Sarris, having taken over the ship, forces Nesmith to confess to Mathesar that he is only an actor and, thus, a liar and a hypocrite [<https://youtu.be/4MQo4LOG99g>]. The revelation, as Sarris maliciously hoped, crushes Mathesar's spirit. But Nesmith, the cast, and fiction itself are redeemed. The very fact that Nesmith and the others are actors has prepared them to be the courageous, quick-thinking heroes they only pretended to be as they rise to the occasion and ultimately turn the tables on Sarris. They can do so because they are able to draw on and adapt their repeated in-character experiences in fictive scripted scenarios and improvise in new and unexpected moments of danger; they are able to discover what they must do because of what they pretended they could do.

There are representative moments in the film where Nesmith himself can't think outside of his past scripted roles in particular episodes of the series as he awkwardly, slavishly, and uselessly reenacts, to take one example, the clichéd, choreographed body rolls he used as an evasive tactic in a particular episode (the so-called Episode 81). He mechanically deploys this tactic as a response to the anticipated attack of the vicious diminutive beryllium miners as if he were dodging laser fire; however, at the end of the film, in his final confrontation with Sarris, Nesmith performs the same maneuver spontaneously and perfectly in a precise adjustment to the circumstances; he gets the drop on Sarris, which enables him to vaporize him with a Thermian-created laser weapon; thus, in accordance with a now familiar pattern, 'putting on' the costume both literally and figuratively, becomes putting on the uniform, as the actor becomes the hero he once only por-

trayed. He has the moves; now he has the right occasion to make use of them. Once again, the former—faking it—is a condition of the latter—making it.

Il Generale Della Rovere: "I've taken you to heart."

The richest and most complex of this group of films is Roberto Rossellini's *Il Generale Della Rovere*. The protagonist, Emmanuele Bardone (Vittorio de Sica), also known as "Colonel Grimaldi," is a pimp, and like Joe the Greek, a gambler and a con man of uncertain identity. Bardone earns a living and tries to keep pace with his gambling debts by swindling relatives of the imprisoned or the missing during the German occupation of Italy; he persuades them that his motives are compassionate, professing more than once to his prospective victims: "I've taken you to heart."³⁰ He claims to have contacts in the SS. He is caught, but an observant SS officer, Colonel Mueller (Hannes Messemer), notices Bardone's talent for acting the concerned and compassionate go-between. He accordingly recruits him, in exchange for his life and freedom, to impersonate Generale Della Rovere, a partisan leader, who has been inadvertently shot and killed when he resists arrest. Bardone is placed among political prisoners who know the general by reputation only and is ordered to spy on the prisoners, and, later, to identify another recently captured partisan leader known only as 'Fabrizio' whom Mueller is certain is now an inmate, but whom no one knows by sight. However, gradually, Bardone, behaving as if he were a genuine aristocrat like Della Rovere, as well as a leader of men and a hero, becomes that leader and hero—he learns who Fabrizio is but rather than reveal him, he willingly faces the firing squad.³¹

The disparity between his hypocrisy and the actual practice of virtue is at first extreme. We later get a full glimpse of Bardone's disreputable career as a former cavalry officer; he was convicted of embezzlement, fraud, "swindling the disabled," possession of drugs, drug dealing, and bigamy. But we can track how the film renders plausible the gradual transformation of Bardone into a truly compassionate and a courageous man. There are early signs that his pretended compassion for his victims might be finally distinguishable from a sincere, compassionate desire to help them. His one success in the film as a go-between comes thanks to the unexpected intervention of Colonel Mueller, who earlier, after a chance encounter, had taken a liking to Bardone. Mueller unexpectedly orders, as a favor, that a prisoner named Borghesio, for whose family Bardone is an agent, not be deported to Germany. With an unguarded and unmixed elation, arguably because of the good for which he has a small measure of responsibility, Bardone, as soon as he can get to a telephone in a café, enthusiastically gives the good news to the family.

Yet, his charitable intentions, if distinguishable from his old habits, are by no means disentangled from them. Even as he delivers this good news, it appears that Bardone is attempting to maintain and refine his role—imperfectly—as an intermediary; for example, we find Bardone trying to imitate Mueller's professional aloofness and condescension that he displays towards him when he was pleading Borghesio's case to Mueller. He subsequently turns it on Borghesio's father. When Mueller orders that Borghesio not be deported, Bardone is profuse in his "blessings and thanks," but Mueller rebuffs him: "I don't like blessings or thanks." Bardone parrots the same phrase to Borghesio's father over the telephone in obvious response to a similar outburst: "I don't like blessings or thanks." His emergent sincerity blurs and coexists with his habitual hypocrisy as he

strings the family along with the hope that the prisoner might be released so that he can continue to squeeze them.³² We note that Mueller offers not even a hint that release is a possibility. And in the same café, moments later, Bardone returns to his normal routine as he meets with a woman searching for her husband whom Bardone assures her is still alive and about to be freed, but whom she already knows has been executed: he is caught in a lie; she has already informed on him to the police, who arrest him in the café.

Colonel Mueller happens to be the officer in charge of the investigation and interrogation, and he is now fully aware of Bardone's record. And yet again, we see signs that Bardone's motives are not so simply reducible to the disreputable; they are, in fact, deeply ambiguous, as if Bardone were lost in the transition between faked compassion and sincere compassion, between the kind of man he evidently would like to be, and isn't yet, and the man he currently is—between, that is, one kind of habit and an opposing, emergent kind. When Mueller confronts Bardone with a large group of people whom he has cheated, Bardone steps forward aggressively and declares in his own defense, at the outset of an extraordinary monologue: "Maybe I was wrong—I was wrong, but for good reason," thus suggesting that his compassion for his victims and his desire to help them ought to weigh against the harm that he caused them, which he does faintly acknowledge [<https://youtu.be/22qE70HzqVA>].

On the one hand, it is not at all clear that Bardone doesn't sincerely believe that he was helping his victims; so impassioned and eloquent is his self-defense that his victims appear to assent to it ("Si, Colonel Grimaldi!"). What else was he to do (he asks rhetorically) but to give false hope where no hope existed of discovering the whereabouts of loved ones or of securing their safe return? When he learned of their final fates, what else

could he do other than to keep quiet to shield their families from the fact “that they slept ten to a cell, standing up like horses, that they were beaten and tortured, and packed into sealed trains headed for Mauthausen. . . . I kept quiet. I didn’t have the heart to tell them.” On the other hand, it’s not clear that this performance isn’t a perfect masquerade of compassion. There are many motives at work here that are hard to separate from each other; the masquerade could be a hypocritical diversion by which Bardone might mitigate the penalty at the hands of the SS given that he is at the mercy of his new friend, Mueller—admittedly, an unlikely outcome. More likely, he might deflate the vengefulness of the people he deceives, and it appears he has succeeded in this since no one speaks against him or contradicts him in front of Mueller; or the masquerade is a narcissistic self-justification by which he would at the very least deceive himself into thinking that this exhibition would morally, if not legally, exonerate him in spite of the facts of his case. In any case, without saying so, Mueller takes it as a masquerade. And, fortunately for Bardone, his performance proves to be an audition that saves him from the firing squad, for Bardone evidently impresses Mueller that he is more than an ordinary scoundrel. One thing is clear—if Mueller believed that Bardone were capable of genuine sincerity, he would not have used him as a stand-in, as a changeling for Generale Della Rovere.

The rest of the film proves that Mueller was mistaken in his expectations of Bardone and in his underestimation of the power of fakery. At first, Bardone takes to his new purely mercenary role as Della Rovere as he skillfully assumes the dignified and chivalrous manner of an aristocratic soldier and partisan hero even as he harbors a certain contempt for him: “Such men have everything given to them,” he confides to Mueller. “I am a self-made man.” And once again, in the literal and metaphorical sense that we are now

familiar with, he “puts on” the General like a garment—as we learn later that he actually wears Della Rovere’s clothes, which the Contessa, his wife, provides to the prison. We discover that Bardone becomes what he pretends to be as he settles more deeply into his role and as he acquires a deeper sense of engagement and solidarity with his fellow prisoners; this deeper sense of community turns him, like Joe the Greek, into a true patriot. It is built on a sense of connection that is prepared for in the earlier scenes in which we witness his growing into compassion. In a remarkable scene, his performance of courageous leadership becomes the real thing for perhaps the first time. One night, there is an Allied air raid. He demands that the guard let him out of his cell into the courtyard so that he can speak to his terrified fellow prisoners still locked up in order that he might calm them. He steps into the role with some hesitation and he is clearly fearful for his own safety, before and after he speaks to the men, but when he does assume the role, it is no longer clear that he is merely acting [<https://youtu.be/QpXas9TzB7M>].

However, Bardone’s conversion is not yet assured. Mueller makes one last attempt to flush out “Fabrizio,” who is expected to make contact with Della Rovere. The opportunity comes when Mueller orders the execution of ten prisoners in reprisal for the assassination of a Fascist official by partisans. He knows that, whoever Fabrizio is, he will be among the new prisoners who are selected for execution and so he puts Bardone in the holding cell with them. All of the men expect that some or all of them will face a firing squad and Mueller expects that Fabrizio will expose himself to Bardone as a result. Clearly Bardone is still thinking of complying with Mueller’s wishes—Mueller has offered him a large amount of cash and safe passage to Switzerland—as we see him scanning the room and sidling up to likely candidates. Finally Fabrizio makes himself known,

but what he says perhaps moves Bardone to complete the passage from hypocrisy to virtue because it is precisely the passage Fabrizio has made himself from faking it to making it: “Who would have thought we would have met here? ... I would say I was a bank clerk, but I’m not much better. I was never a soldier, but I found myself in charge of thousands of men. I was able to bear such enormous responsibility because I believe I was fighting for a better world.”

Inspired by the example of a fellow traveller, Bardone, after Mueller pulled him out of the line of men being led out for execution, refuses to reveal who Fabrizio is [<https://youtu.be/B1DoefISNd4>]. Realizing that Bardone is lost to him, Mueller helplessly stands by as Bardone keeps his secret, and chooses death over betrayal, and resistance over servitude as confirmed in his final words to the men who are about to be shot: “Gentlemen, in our final moments we remember our families, our country, and His Majesty the King. Long live Italy!” Bardone is by no means lost in his role as Della Rovere as we have come to suspect of some hard-core method actors; he is no more Della Rovere than Jason Nesmith is Peter Quincy Taggart, only the stakes in *Il Generale Della Rovere* are much higher. To the extent that he remains Della Rovere, Bardone stands in for him; Bardone continues Della Rovere’s inspirational work as a partisan, courageously sacrificing his own life as Della Rovere did for the Italian cause. He comforts Della Rovere’s wife in an act of actual compassion (he writes in a final note to her, “My thoughts are with you”) that his habitually insincere performances of compassion prepared him for. In the end, Colonel Mueller implicitly recognizes this transformation of hypocrisy into virtue by admitting to his failure to anticipate it. When his subordinate points out that one man, Bardone, was executed by mistake, Mueller insists that “the mistake was mine

All mine”— the portentous repetition of “mine” drawing out the sense of his mistake as being his failure to anticipate Bardone’s unlikely moral growth.

Conclusion: The Fictive and the Real

Thus, all of these films are recognizable instances of a genre—still unnamed, with the added sense of “genre” not simply understood as a particular thematic pattern and a structure, and not just literary, and, finally, not only as a model of reality, but also as a way of thinking about and understanding human experience. These films are compelling primarily because they advance and explore a particular understanding of how we change and grow, or how we could, even as they have built into them the strongest possible argument for why this change is implausible—inasmuch as the process begins with a bald-faced lie, with unashamed hypocrisy. It is an understanding of change which has profound Christian roots, and which has survived our cultural memory of those roots. At the very heart of that understanding is the implausible notion of change that above all relies upon a traditionally maligned source: the transformative power of fiction, which one justly fears will never escape a culture-wide and even atavistic suspicion of fraudulence. This theme, as I stated earlier, finds its natural home in cinema, the most potent form of fraud our culture has known. For film itself accepts that, as fiction, it is a kind of confidence game perpetrated by a conspiracy of professional and brazenly unapologetic fakers: directors, writers, actors, cinematographers, production designers, costumers, sets dressers, and so on, all dedicated to drawing us into the most vivid illusions of the real, in order to disclose to us how thoroughly the fictive is implicated in the real or, rather, how thoroughly

it ought to be—that, in the end, we do great damage to the prospects of our lives and of our culture by failing to understand that it is impossible to live well without seeing that what really counts as real is only so because one must first imagine it.

¹Adam Sorkin, “In the Shadow of Two Gunmen, Part 1,” *West Wing*, season 2, episode 1, directed by William Schlamme, aired 4 October 2000 (Burbank CA: Warner Home Video, 2006), DVD.

² The same line, but with not quite the same spin, is given to Paul Newman in Sidney Lumet’s *The Verdict* (screenplay David Mamet, 1982). Newman, as Frank Galvin, a Boston-Irish lawyer, in his summation of his client’s malpractice suit, says: “In my religion, they say, ‘Act as if ye had faith... and faith will be given to you.’ *If...* if we are to have faith in justice, we need only to believe in ourselves.” Justice, in this light, is an already given, internal disposition and *not* a matter of habituation—Galvin is asking the jurors to trust the authoritative promptings of their hearts, to a virtue that is already implanted. See also Mary McCarthy’s *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1957), 112-123. McCarthy gives an account, in a neat and precocious reversal of the injunction, of her actually losing her faith by first acting as if she lost it in order to get attention from her Catholic high school peers.

³ Amy Cuddy, “Your body language shapes who you are,” *TED: Ideas Worth Spreading*, http://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are.html?quote=1224, accessed September 9, 2017. My thanks to Tanja Szabo of Georgetown University for pointing out this TED Talk to me.

⁴ That a wider secular culture has appropriated the idea is neatly demonstrated in an accidental encounter with the horoscope in my local daily newspaper, where, for example, I find the following advice to those born in the sign of Leo: “You don’t actually have to be brave to do brave things. It’s more about acting as a brave person would, and then making a habit of that. Follow through time and time again. Before you know it, you’re the real deal.” See Holiday Mathis, “Your Daily Horoscope.” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 27 April 2017, B9.

⁵ An outstanding exception: Glenna Headly as Jane Colgate in *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, directed by Frank Oz, performed by Michael Caine, Steve Martin, Glenna Healy. Twentieth-Century Fox, 1988

⁶ One thinks, of course, of novels like *Don Quixote*, *Madame Bovary*, and *Le Rouge et Le Noir*. See René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1961). Heading in a direction not strictly relevant to my present concerns, Girard discusses these novels in the context of his fundamental notion of “mimetic desire.”—and, so, of the complexity in the relationship between the imitated and the imitator, of how, for example, the model one imitates can become a rival of the imitator.

⁷ George Orwell, “Shooting an Elephant,” in *A Collection of Essays* (London: Mariner Books, 1970), 150.

⁸ “Becoming the Mask,” *TV Tropes*, accessed September 9, 2017. <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/BecomingTheMask>

⁹ The list goes on and on: *Yentl*, *Mrs. Doubtfire*, *Tootsie*, *Victor*, *Victoria* together constitute a subgenre of stories generated by transgender impersonation.

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962). 1103a32–1103b1.

¹¹ For a psychoanalytic view of the power of impersonation, see Ted Perry, "Impersonation of the True Self," *Psychoanalytic Review* 94,6 (December 2007): 975-989. Perry, noticing the common theme of impersonation in *Generale Della Rovere*, *Kagemusha*, and *The Passenger*, places the death wish of the central characters as the organizing motive. These characters substitute through impersonation a perceived "true self" for a "false self," in D.W. Winnicott's terminology, but as Perry says of the protagonists of these films, death, and not virtue is the paradoxical fulfillment of this process of transcendence: "The ego needs served by dying are uppermost, more important than any possible service to a cause or to other people." Perry, 976.

¹² Lionel Trilling, "Mansfield Park," in *The Opposing Self: Nine Essays in Criticism* (New York: Wylie, 1955), 427-8.

¹³ One recent film that strikingly exemplifies this sort of negative habituation as an insidious, barely noticeable process is Tina Fey's *Mean Girls* (2004) in which the nice math-smart new girl, Cady Heron (Lindsay Lohan), painstakingly works out her revenge against Regina George (Rachel McAdams), the leader of the high-school alpha girls clique, the Plastics. The plan requires Cady to infiltrate the Plastics, but this in turn requires Cady to put on a Regina-like meanness and, in the process, she soon surpasses Regina in meanness.

¹⁴ Thanks to Deborah Leiter of Southern Illinois University for calling "Let's Pretend" to my attention.

¹⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco CA: Harper, 2001), 187.

¹⁶ Lewis, 188.

¹⁷ Lewis, 131.

¹⁸ Colossians 3:5-8 KJV

¹⁹ Hamlet says as much to his mother, using the metaphor of putting on clothing: "Assume a virtue if you have it not." If you lack a virtue, first pretend you have it—the virtuous actions you perform are like "a frock or livery/That aptly is put on." Gradually "use," custom, and habit can "change the stamp of nature." William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Sylvan Barnet (New York: Bantam 2005) 3.4.158-172. Aryeh Kosman points out: "Hamlet's advice to Gertrude has another more Aristotelian ring to it. For the assumption of virtue, by itself a mere act is when repeated, the instrument by which virtue is produced: ...virtue comes about from repeated just and moderate actions. Virtue, in other words, is itself shaped by the impersonation of the virtuous." See Kosman, "Acting: Drama as the *Mimesis* of *Praxis*" in *Essays on Aristotle's Poetics*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 61.

²⁰ For a thorough discussion of the history of this movement from ancient virtue ethics to Christian ethics and its secularized appropriations, see Jennifer A. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: the Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

²¹ Herdt, 82.

²² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book For Free Spirits*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986), 39-40.

²³ For a detailed discussion of Protestantism, the problem of hypocrisy, and the theatre, see Herdt, chs. 6-7 and Barish, ch. VI.

²⁴ Herdt, 291.

²⁵Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, or On Education*, introduction and translated by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 63. In a similar vein, and with possibly even wider effect—certainly in the English-speaking world—Ralph Waldo Emerson emerges as an apostle of being true to oneself in another precise inversion of Puritan depravity. In his most famous and influential essay, “Self-Reliance,” he declares that “envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide.” Instead, he urges: “Insist on yourself; never imitate. . . . That which each can do best, none but his Maker can teach him. No man yet knows what it is, nor can, till that person has exhibited it. Where is the master who could have taught Shakespeare? Where is the master who could have instructed Franklin, or Washington, or Bacon, or Newton? Every great man is unique.” See Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” in *Collected Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 545.

²⁶Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. D’Alembert on the Theatre*, introduction and translation by Allan Bloom (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1960), 80. At a tantalizing moment in *Minima Moralia*, Theodor Adorno reacts against this idea of the “authentic” self, of the “genuine individual” as a pernicious legacy of the Enlightenment, pernicious because it abstracts the self from social particularity. “Genuineness is nothing other than a defiant and obstinate insistence on the monadological form which social oppression imposes on man.” This drive to reduce individuals to ultimate and “original” units of being is, as a result, “a last bulwark of individualistic ethics [which] is a reflection of industrial mass production;” the individual as such becomes commodified, is fungible. In response Adorno defends the “inauthentic” impulse to imitate as efficacious resistance—in effect, reversing Rousseau’s argument: “Anything that does not wish to whither should rather take on itself the stigma of the inauthentic. For it lives on the mimetic heritage. The human is indissolubly linked with imitation: a human being only becomes human at all by imitating human beings.” The mimetic impulses of the inauthentic experience are evident “in the first conscious experiences of childhood.” These impulses “always contain an element of imitation, play, wanting to be different.” See Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 1997), 153-4.

²⁷*Mr. Lucky*, directed by H.C. Potter, performed by Cary Grant, Laraine Day, RKO, 1943. DVD. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.

²⁸*Galaxy Quest*, directed by Dean Parisot, performed by Tim Allen, Sigourney Weaver, Allan Rickman. DreamWorks, 1999. DVD. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.

²⁹There is an inconsistency here given that this imitation is essentially a kind of hypocrisy, of pretending to certain qualities that the Thermians do not yet possess. At the same time, the Thermians regard the fictive thinking this would involve as nothing more than a form of lying.

³⁰*Il Generale Della Rovere*, DVD, directed by Roberto Rossellini, performed by Vittorio de Sica, Hannes Messemer, Sandra Miro (Criterion Films, 2005). All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.

³¹The screenplay was written by Indro Montanelli, which was an adaptation of his novel, *Il Generale Della Rovere* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1959). In turn, he based the novel and the short story it grew out of on his own encounter with one Giovanni Bertone, whom he met in prison during the Nazi occupation, who posed as Della Rovere. Tag Gallagher describes Montanelli’s version of the imposter as a “simple megalomaniac who persists in his role inspiring courage because the role incarnates what he actually wants to be” who simply “delighted in playing his role.” He contrasts this with Rossellini’s version: “a poor devil who takes so much courage from others that he wants to die for them,” who was “a deviant Neapolitan soul yearning to display itself.” See Tag Gallagher’s video essay “The Choice” in *Il Generale Della Rovere*, Criterion Films, 2005.

³²Bardone has what Prince Myshkin in Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot* would call “double thoughts.” He refers to this in a scene in the novel that Gary Saul Morson calls attention to. In Morson’s summary the good-hearted but disreputable Keller “comes to Myshkin to confess his evil deeds, and does so sincerely, as Myshkin appreciates. But Myshkin realizes that he also wants to borrow money, and anticipating the request, offers it to him. Admitting the ulterior motive, Keller admits that at first he prepared his confession,

"bathed in tears," and then "a hellish thought occurred to me: 'Why not, when all's said and done, borrow money of him after my confession?' So that I prepared my confession, so to say, as though it were a sort of 'fricassee with tears for sauce,' to pave the way with those tears so that you might be softened and fork out one hundred and fifty roubles. Don't you think that was base?" Myshkin says to Keller: "But most likely that's not true; it's simply that both things came at once; that often happens. It's constantly so with me. I think it's not a good thing, though; and do you know, Keller, I reproach myself most of all for it. . . . I have sometimes fancied," Myshkin went on very earnestly, genuinely, and profoundly interested, "that all people are like that; so that I was even beginning to excuse myself because it is awfully difficult to struggle against these *double* thoughts; I've tried. God knows how they arise and come in the mind. But you call it simply baseness!" . . . (I 293-4) Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York, 1962). See also Gary Saul Morson, "Misanthropology." *New Literary History* 27,1 (1996), 65. Tag Gallagher notices, in the same spirit, a "double person"—"the more he robs his victims despicably, the more he tries to save them." See "The Choice."

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