Emanuele Stochino

Pier Paolo Pasolini and the Sacred

Pier Paolo Pasolini (1923–1975) fashioned poetry, prose, cinema, and theatrical works, and how he conceived of the sacred is more thoroughly understood in relation to his working biography. Two films, *The Gospel According to St Matthew* and *La Ricotta*, together with his tragedies, overwritten on the Greek plays *The Eumenides* and *Medea* are here in focus, indicating why Pasolini drew on Mircea Eliade's method of integrating historical, phenomenological, and hermeneutical approaches. Declaring himself a Marxist, Pasolini did not accept Eliade's theory in full, while the two concepts that most link him to Eliade are the latter's 'eternal return' and 'hierophanies'. Pasolini had grown up immersed in the natural world of Friuli, Northern Italy, and he considered hierophanies as an immanent manifestation of the sacred in nature. In doing this, he discovered both the immensity of the archaic peasant world and the cosmogonic matrix of his religion. Pasolini's ontological vision of being led him to define the eternal return as the cyclical time of nature, the movement of life in respect of the inscrutable laws of the cosmos and the transcendent supernatural. Cyclical time meant death and resurrection and thus the possibility of regeneration, like a seed that dies to become a plant.

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BOTH Pier Paolo Pasolini (1923–1975) and Emanuele Eliade (1907–1986) regarded symbols, rituals, and the expression of the sacred through 'hierophanies'.[1] Eliade, like his predecessors Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) and Gerardus van de Leeuw (1890–1950), took a phenomenological approach to the sacred, distinguishing between two types of human beings: *homo religiosus* and *homo areligiosus*. *Homo religiosus*, who, through his spirituality, believes in the sacred and transcendence, brings his values to society, shaping the social group to which he belongs; these values include lawful as well as illicit behaviours, and a perceived difference between profane places and sacred ones, where votive rites may be performed. *Homo areligiosus*, on the other hand, denies transcendence and is more inclined towards self-accomplishment on earth – something that is both individualistic and hedonistic. Consequently, *Homo areligiosus* loses his traditional social values. *Homo religiosus*, by contrast, precisely because of his search for transcendent sacredness, leans towards earthly realization and adheres to the rules of the Supreme Being in which he believes. For Pasolini, mysticism corresponded to Man's identification with the cycles of the cosmos, aspiring to become an integral part of them. Pasolini stressed how peasant Man identified with these cosmic cycles and with Christ:

> The time of the Christ-like agricultural gods was a 'sacred' or 'liturgical' time whose cyclicity, the eternal return, was of such worth. The time of their birth, of their resurrections, was a paradigmatic time on which the time of life was modelled periodically.[2]

As the 'original gift' was announced through sacred hierophanies, the annual manifestation of the cycles of nature – the 'eternal return'– was conceived by pre-industrial humanity as a non-repetitive dynamic event. The reality lived by pre-industrial communities was considered to be mysterious since it was looked upon as a

unity of presence and absence of the sacred. Cosmogonic rites were intended to propitiate the rebirth of a new cycle of luxuriant nature. For Pasolini, mysticism was the spiritual experience lived by humans through in-depth knowledge and contemplation of the divine. This enabled individuals to aspire to becoming part of the cosmic cycles and to acquaint themselves with the immanent sacred world.

In his analysis of the sacred, Pasolini considered it appropriate to employ the same technique that Eliade had used in his integral method when studying the history of religions. Eliade maintained that 'the sacred does not pertain to mere "transcendence", but rather to material reality itself which, by virtue of the symbolic dimension of sapiens, is interpreted and experienced in the light of what manifests itself in matter and through it'.[3] He studied religious phenomena by using a comparative approach that connected historical, phenomenological, and hermeneutic aspects. The historical approach aims to reconstruct the economic, social, cultural, and political history of areas where religions developed; the phenomenological approach classifies phenomena according to shape and type; while a hermeneutical approach consists of interpreting hierophanies in a general perspective.

Hierophany as a Manifestation of the Sacred

Both Eliade and Pasolini placed the sacred in juxtaposition with the profane. Both represented religious phenomena on a phenomenological level, and both used the term 'hierophany'. Every religious phenomenon is a hierophany: a way of manifesting the sacred. A hierophany reveals itself as a reality dependent on an order that differs from the order of nature. The basic difference between Pasolini and Eliade is in their perception of transcendence. Pasolini regarded hierophanies as an expression of the sacred in an ontological world, while Eliade considered them a means of 'identifying the presence of the transcendent in human experience'.[4] Pasolini defined religiosity like this:

> It is found in style; that is, when I talk about the Roman *borgate* [i.e. lower-class dwellers pushed to the periphery of cities], I never make an objective, naturalistic fact out of them . . . the *borgate* appear to me precisely as an apparition (hierophany), a stylistic dream, as a shrine of the underclass, as a world which has ended.'[5]

While defining himself as a Marxist and an atheist, Pasolini possessed a strong sense of the sacred, which he developed. In the words of Massimo Fusillo:

> From the central importance that myth plays in his conception of the world, we see that Pasolini was attentive to those forms of organization of life characteristic of the pre-modern agrarian community which drew principles, even of mythical origin, from the mythical transposition of nature based on which a community established its formation and constitution.[6]

Yet, given his atheism, Pasolini, in a 1969 interview, explained why he believed in the religious and the divine, saying that the 'pre-industrial man' of peasant civilizations 'could feel the presence of the sacred in any object and in any event; any earthly apparition could be a hierophany . . . in stones, in trees, in one's neighbours, in certain words . . . anything could be a representation of the sacred.'[7]

As Giuseppe Conti Calabrese remarks:

> Like Eliade, Pasolini conceives myth in a phenomenological vision since he considered it the most effective form of thought for understanding how the sacred is described in all its various aspects in religion. If, for Pasolini, at the basis of any profession of faith there is always a way of corresponding to myths or mythologems, this is the basis on which *homo religiosus* organizes and shapes his social and economic life.[8]

Myths, according to Eliade, 'describe the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred (or the "supernatural") into the World. It is this sudden breakthrough of the sacred which really *establishes* the World and makes it what it is today.'[9]

The Importance of Matthew's Gospel and the Figure of Christ

Two films by Pasolini are to be taken into consideration in this discussion, the first being *The Gospel According to St Matthew*. In 1963, Pasolini was present at an Italian filmmakers'

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convention organized by Pro Civitate Christiana in Assisi – an invitation sent to all guests regardless of their creed or political ideology.[10] Unexpectedly, at the same time, Pope John XXIII (1881–1963) went to Assisi to pray at the tomb of St Francis. To avoid the crowds that the Pope's visit had generated, Pasolini decided to stay in his room where, on his bedside table, he found a copy of the Gospels. Opening it at St Matthew's Gospel, he read it from start to finish, later recalling:

> As soon as I had finished a first reading of the Gospel According to St Matthew, I felt the need to do something: a terrible energy, almost physical, almost manual. It was the 'increase in vitality' that Berenson had spoken about. The increase in vitality which generally occurs when attempting to understand the exegesis of a work critically.[11]

In 1963, while corresponding with Luciano Caruso (1931–2013), a leading figure in Pro Civitate Christiana, Pasolini declared he was an atheist at a rational level and told Caruso that he did not regard Christ as the son of God. Even though Pasolini looked upon Christ as the epitome of humanity, rigour, charity, and compassion, he did not consider him to be divine. Poetry, he said, was an irrational means for communicating his irrational feeling;[12] and he was inspired to make a film version of the Gospel According to St Matthew because of his admiration for its poetics and his general respect for the Christian tradition. His intention was to have the film follow the Gospel's dialogue to the letter. He told Caruso that 'as the days and then the weeks went by, this idea became more and more overwhelming and exclusive: it has pushed all the other ideas I have in my head into the shadows.'[13]

On the suggestion of Don Giovanni Rossi (1887–1975), the head of Pro Civitate Christiana, Pasolini went to Israel in 1963, prior to shooting the film. However, he was unable to find either the locations or actors there for the film that he wished to make. He was accompanied on the trip by the theologian Don Andrea Carraro, who was there to advise Pasolini should he require any historical or theological explanation. Faced with Pasolini's disappointment at not being able to find a possible location for the film in the Holy Land, Don Andrea asked: 'What are your spiritual impressions of Israel, and why are you speaking of practical disappointment?' To which Pasolini replied:

> Don Andrea, the word 'spirituality' has a slightly different meaning for the two of us. When you say 'spiritual', it has a slightly different meaning from when I use it. When you say 'spiritual', you mean 'religious'. For me, 'spiritual' corresponds to 'aesthetic'. When I came here, finding myself before the barren Israeli landscape, I felt a practical disappointment . . . the preaching of Jesus has become an aesthetic, and therefore spiritual, idea.[14]

Pasolini considered the aesthetics of his works as 'technical sacredness', something which he would then invest in dramatic landscape and characters. When making *Accattone* (1961), Pasolini used a documentary-style technique. However, despite the fact that Pasolini's approach to shooting the film was technical, it is nonetheless possible to recognize his vision of the sacred and his sense of aesthetics. Pasolini believed that, since there would be no young and marginalized lower-class people in front of the camera for *The Gospel According to St Matthew*, but only actors dressed as Christ and the Apostles, this same technique would be inappropriate. In his opinion, a documentary-style technique could not portray the reality lived by Jesus and the Apostles in Palestine two thousand years ago; it could only risk presenting the impression of amateur dramatics. He did not consider himself in a position to tell the story of Jesus without introducing some sort of contamination, and the adjustment he wished to make was to tell the story, not in the first person, but as seen through the eyes of another – a believer. Hence Pasolini's decision to present the story as Matthew had done it.

As he observes in his 1965 essay 'The Cinema of Poetry':

> The presence of the camera can always be felt . . . the alternation of different lenses, a 25mm or a 300 mm on the same face, the zoom, which expands things like over-leavened loaves, the drawn-out tracking shots, incorrect editing for expressive reasons . . . everything. This technique arose out of [my] intolerance for rules, out of provocation,

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and out of an authentic enjoyment of the taste of anarchy. However, it immediately became a canon, a linguistic heritage . . . affecting all world cinema.[15]

'Pasolini found himself compelled to invent a new way of making cinema,' commented Don Fantuzzi,

which he was later to call the 'cinema of poetry'. As he wrote in his 1965 essay . . . stylistic conversion does not correspond to the real personal conversion of Pasolini as understood in the Catholic tradition. Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St Matthew*, according to widespread opinion, is a work of poetry. In poetry, style is everything.[16]

Eventually, Pasolini decided to shoot the film in Southern Italy, which, although part of the modern world, allowed him to represent the ancient world without having to reconstruct it for his purposes:

By analogy, the simple fact that I made this film means that I was not interested in accuracy. I had to choose between an exact reproduction of Palestine two thousand years ago and the juxtaposition of reality today. I could only opt for the latter 'in the analogical reconstruction' that there is the idea of myth and epic, which I have talked about so much. Therefore, in telling the story of Christ I did not want to reconstruct Christ as he was. Not believing that Christ is the Son of God, at most I would have made a positive or Marxist reconstruction. I want to re-consecrate things as much as possible. . . . I did not want to reconstruct the life of Christ as it really was, I wanted to represent the history of Christ and two thousand years of Christian tradition; it is two thousand years of Christian history that has mythologized this biography, which otherwise, like many others, would have been virtually insignificant. This was my intent.[17]

When casting the film, Pasolini considered both the physical features and personal traits of the biblical characters whom his actors would perform, and the actors he chose were, for the most part, non-professional. For the role of the young Mary, he selected Margherita Caruso, whom he had met by chance a few days before shooting began. He was struck by this sixteen-year-old proletarian girl who, he believed, embodied the simplicity that he had envisaged for the role: 'For me, beauty is always a "moral beauty",' Pasolini continues. 'However, only after having been mediated does this beauty reach us: through poetry, philosophy, or practice. Only in the Gospel have I experienced an instance of "moral beauty" which is unmediated, immediate, and pure.'[18] In *The Gospel According to St Matthew*, Pasolini gave an exegetical and human interpretation so in tune with Matthew's thinking that it took audiences, as well as non-militant critics, aback. Without straying in any way from the original text, Pasolini succeeded in creating one of the most coherent film versions of the Gospel ever presented (Figure 1).

Figure 1. *The Gospel According to St Matthew* (1964). Enrique Irazoqui Levi as Jesus Christ. Courtesy of Cineteca di Bologna/Angelo Novi.

The second film at issue regarding Pasolini's religiosity is the episode titled *La Ricotta* that he made in 1962 for the collaborative film *RoGoPaG*, and it reflects the anthropological change that he perceived among Italians. The following comment appears at the beginning of the episode on the screen, set against a black background:

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Dictated by pure bad faith, it is not difficult to anticipate criticism of my story. Those who feel affected will try to insist that the object of my controversy is history and those texts of which, hypocritically, they consider themselves to be the defenders. This is not at all the case: to avoid misunderstandings of any kind, I want to declare that the story of the Passion is the greatest one I know, and that the texts which narrate it are the most sublime that have ever been written.

La Ricotta is a film-within-a-film based upon a day's work on the set. The director, played by Orson Welles, is shooting a version of the Passion of Christ. At a certain point, the director is interviewed by a reporter who asks:

REPORTER: What is this new project trying to express?

DIRECTOR: My intimate, profound, and traditional Catholicism.

REPORTER: What do you think of Italy?

DIRECTOR: The most illiterate masses and the most ignorant bourgeoisie in Europe.

REPORTER: What do you think of death?

DIRECTOR: As a Marxist, I never give it any thought.

REPORTER: What is your opinion of our great director, Fellini?

DIRECTOR: He . . . dances.[19]

Following the interview, and with the Reporter still present, the Director recites the following poem:

I am the force of the past; tradition is my only love. I come from ruins, churches, altarpieces, forgotten hamlets in the Apennines and the foothills of the Alps where our brothers dwelled. I walk the via Tuscolana like a madman . . . I behold the twilight and the mornings over Rome . . . like the first acts of post-history, which I witness by privilege of birth from the furthest edge of some buried past age.[20]

On finishing his recital, the Director asks the Reporter if he has understood its meaning. Rather shyly, the Reporter replies that he has understood very little. The Director continues: 'Write this down. You understand nothing because you're an average man, right?' The Reporter answers that this is indeed the case, to which the Director retorts: 'And are you proud of this, proud of being an average man? But you don't know what an average man is. He's a monster. A dangerous criminal. A conformist . . .'[21]

In the film-within-the-film, the role of the penitent thief in *La Ricotta* is played by the professional actor Mario Cipriani. The working-class character he plays is called Stracci, and he suffers from hunger. Stracci offers the food he is given during the production of the film to his starving family. Using a ruse, he manages to find some extra food for himself, only for it to be eaten by the leading actress's dog, which, desperate for money, he then sells. With the money earned from the sale, he buys himself a huge amount of ricotta cheese, which he is seen devouring with great relish (Figure 2). He then suffers an attack of indigestion, and dies just as he is being filmed on the crucifix.

Stracci represents the pre-industrial lower working class; he has a sense of family, religion, and respect for the sacred. He is a staunch critic of the injustices perpetrated by the middle class. Owing to his lowly origins, Stracci's language is steeped in dialectical scurrility, and his way of relating to others is somewhat coarse. Nonetheless, he distinguishes himself from the other cast members who are seen, rather irreverently, dancing the twist on the set of *The Passion.* The difference comes to the fore when, in juxtaposition, we see the respect Stracci, and he alone, shows towards the three crucifixes visible in the background. He believes that there must be a distinction between places that recall the sacred, albeit indirectly, and those which are profane. As Pasolini himself commented:

The fundamental intention was to represent, alongside Stracci's religiosity, the mocking, ironic, cynical, incredulous vulgarity of the contemporary world. This is said in my verses, which are read out during the film. The music tends to create an atmosphere of aesthetic sacredness, at the various times in which the actors identify with their characters. Moments interrupted by the vulgarity of the surrounding world . . . With their vulgar, superficial, and foolish tones, the extras and speaking actors come to represent the fundamental disbelief of modern man, with whom I am indignant. This occurs not when they identify with their characters, but when they break away from them. I am thinking of a sacred representation of the fourteenth century, the atmosphere of sacredness inspired by

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Figure 2. *La Ricotta* (1962). Mario Cipriani as Stracci. Courtesy of Cineteca di Bologna/Angelo Novi.

those who represented it and those who attended it. I cannot but think with indignation, with pain, with nostalgia, of such atrociously divergent aspects and their occurrence in the modern world.[22]

The Anthropological Change of Italians

In a 1974 televised interview, Pasolini defined Jesus like this:

I consider him as the archetype of every possible relationship with the world and the highest I know. This is because I was born in 1922 and I was educated in my early years in Friuli in Northern Italy. Now, this idea I have of Christ is, in my opinion, understood by people of my age and by few others. Young people . . . are no longer able to understand Christ. In this sense there has been a turning point in the last five or six years. There has now been an irremediable revolt in the history of humanity – the advent of the neo-capitalist consumer society. I do not think we can go back. For example . . . for a man born in recent years . . . the agricultural metaphors of the Gospel . . . are incomprehensible to him. You must explain them to him . . . along with most of the terminology used in the Gospel. I mean that the Gospel and Christ are the expression of an archaic peasant world that has survived for 2,000 years. This is because until twenty years ago, essentially the world had changed very little in substance; peasants still valued the seasons and they worked their fields while waiting . . . for the eternal return, the problem of good and evil. Having said this, production is no longer a cyclical fact of the earth. Production has created a second nature, which is that of industry, of liberation, of the development of the agricultural world. This also allows us to perceive possible new relationships between the people living in the countryside and city dwellers.[23]

In this interview, 'the last five or six years' to which Pasolini referred corresponded to the anthropological change of Italians, which took place between the 1950s and the late 1960s. This period witnessed an industrial boom that was to transform the Italian people. Hitherto, Italy, a substantially agricultural society, found itself catapulted directly into a post-industrial era, skipping both an industrial and preparatory period that would have

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allowed for social and urban change. In this post-industrial society, the values which emerged were consumerism and hedonism, and they came at the expense of previously held values such as God, the Homeland, the family, and tradition.

The arrival of television accelerated the unconscious acceptance of new social values, which were no longer those handed down from one generation to another but promulgated via TV advertising. As Zrinka Lovrić observed: 'What Italians need is found on television screens, in advertisements, in fashion, in the falsity of tolerance, and all this has led to a homologation of the Italian people. There are no longer any visual differences between peasants and the bourgeois.'[24] These changes led to a palingenetic transformation both social and economic, and contrary to what Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) had theorized, the Italian people witnessed a political hegemony of alliances rather than specific social-group domination.

Gramsci's idea of social renewal was based on the principle of the seizure of power by the proletariat from the bourgeois class. He considered the education of the working classes to be one of the most powerful tools available to enable the proletariat to take control, writing in *Quaderni dal carcere* (*The Prison Notebooks*) that the 'formation and the widening of the ruling class, the need for establishing more intimate and safer relationships between leading groups and national-popular masses, is the need for reorganizing cultural hegemony'.[25] However, due to the social palingenesis occurring in Italy, the class struggle was attenuated; the spread of non-essential consumer goods meant that interest in changing the status quo had waned. As a result, the proletarian class, both in its attitudes and in its political thinking, was becoming bourgeois.

Pasolini considered Gramsci's theory to have been superseded and, with regret, he noted that the archaic peasant society had dissolved in the space of only a few years. This meant that the values of the society to which Gramsci had referred were now disappearing. As a result, Pasolini was forced into making some important decisions regarding his target audience and set out, in this period, to produce works for a cultural elite rather than for the working classes. However, in a televised broadcast titled *Italia 70*, Pasolini pointed out that the cultural elite at issue also included avant-garde members of the working class who had a sense of the poetic.

Realizing that the Marxist ideal of class struggle no longer existed in Italy, the anthropological change in Italians threw Pasolini into a profound crisis. He had believed that Italian people before this change had been tied to pre-industrial values and class struggle, and so those living in the peasant world and in working-class areas were capable of perceiving the sacred better than others outside these zones. Caterina Verbaro claims the following:

> Let us consider texts such as *Poesie a Casarsa*, *Ragazza di vita* [*Boys of Life*] ([or] films like *Accattone* and *Mamma Roma*): it is not just a matter of dressing a popular collective subject in a poetic aura, but of the sacralization of an entire world through the representation of its craters of immutability and exclusion from history (for Pasolini, the peasants and sub-proletariat). Take life out of its historical dimension, [take life] founded on the eternal return, which is the key to archaic and sacred civilizations.[26]

The Relationship between Pasolini's Theatre and Ancient Greek Tragedy

The value of the sacred diminished as the ideals of hedonism and consumerism progressively took root in both the peasant and proletarian worlds. In his bid to re-position the sacred at the centre of society, Pasolini began to adapt Ancient Greek tragedies. He set about overwriting original versions which included director's notes for both film and stage representation. He also insisted that his actors did not improvise in their performances when these tragedies were staged, which was something he had previously allowed them to do. In film versions, however, he did allow a certain amount of improvisation from non-protagonist actors who were required at times to speak in dialect. Just as in ancient theatre, Pasolini's adaptations represented the present through the imagery of a very distant past as he set out to portray the tragedy of contemporary times.

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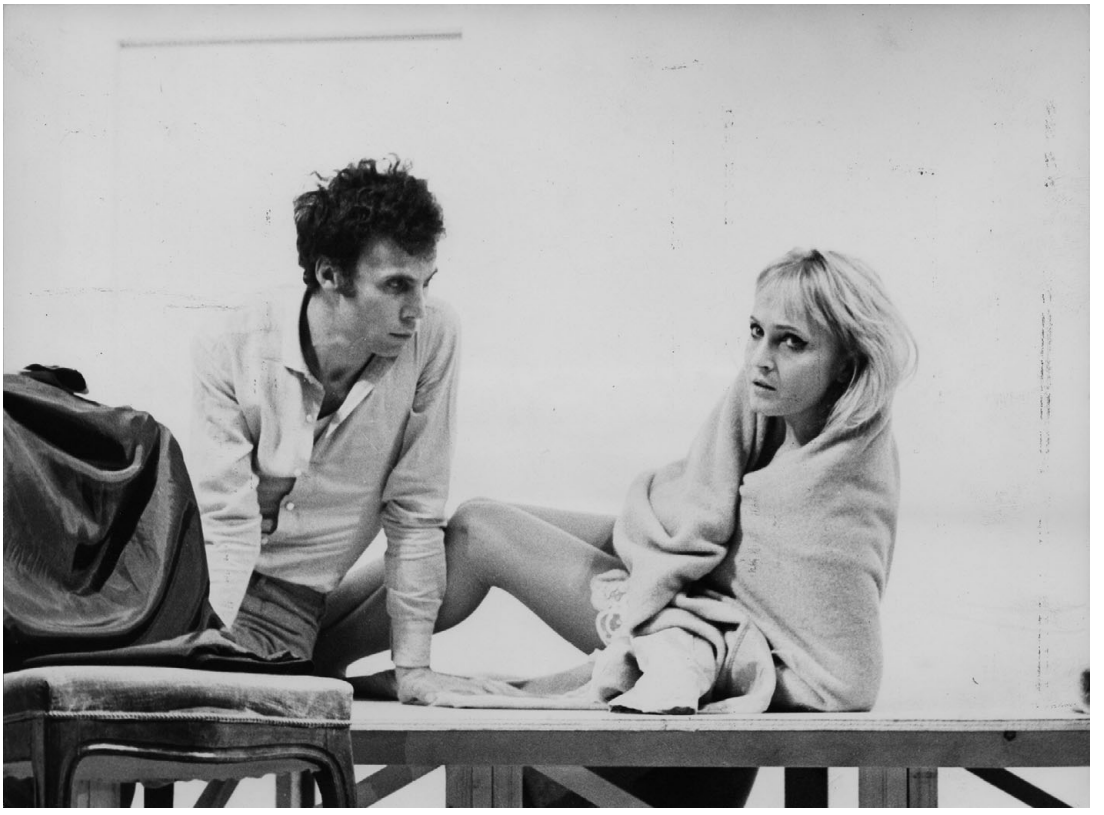

Figure 3. *Orgy* (1968). Luigi Mezzanotte and Laura Betti. Photographer: Valentino Divetti. Courtesy of the Teatro Stabile Torino.

In addition to the tragedies cited in this article, Pasolini created several other tragic works for performance in the theatre. These include *Orgy*, *Pylades*, *Affabulation*, *Calderon*, *Style Beast*, and *Pigsty*, which was later adapted for film release in 1966. In 1968, Pasolini's 'Manifesto for a New Theatre' was published in the magazine *Nuovi Argomenti*, proclaiming that 'theatre should be what theatre is not', and that its audience would be the new elite of the intellectual groups now present among the bourgeoisie, 'those few thousand intellectuals in every city whose cultural interest is perhaps naive, provincial, but real'.

For Pasolini, theatre meant 'the Word', and it required 'the almost total absence of action on stage'. In a 1974 interview, he explained his use of the suspension of meaning in his theatre works. In the words of Francesca Tommasini, 'This is a suspension of an existential nature and, theoretically, something which could be defined as abstinence from judgement in the face of the mystery of existence.'[27] To help his audiences understand 'suspension of meaning', as propounded in his 'Manifesto for a New Theatre', Pasolini invited audiences not to 'whistle or applaud, but to discuss'. Accordingly, staged by the Teatro Stabile di Torino, Pasolini presented *Orgy* at Deposito d'Arte Presente, a permanent theatre in Turin, on 27 November 1968 (Figure 3). Following a successive performance of the tragedy in January 1969 at the Teatro Gobetti, a branch of Turin's Teatro Stabile, Pasolini spoke directly with the audience to discuss it (Figure 4). On this occasion, he pointed out, as he had done in his theatre manifesto, that the appellation 'Theatre of the Word' was derived from the way a theatre work was written in poetry.

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Figure 4. *Orgy*. Pasolini (second from right) at the after-show talk at the Teatro Gobetti, 29 November 1968. Photographer: Valentino Divetti. Courtesy of the Teatro Stabile Torino.

Pasolini was convinced that only those who were attracted to poetry could understand 'the Word'. He admitted reluctantly that he was aware that, at that very time, there were few readers of poetry. Nevertheless, he decided that such readers should be his new target audience (Figure 5).

'Theatre', for Pasolini, was not a building, it was the spoken word, and he believed that the script was more important than props or costumes, as had, indeed, been the case in Ancient Greek theatre. Words, then, were his real characters, and although he took the structure of Ancient Greek theatre as a model, Pasolini stressed how fully aware he was that he could not bring it back in its purest form: the reason was that this type of theatre was originally staged both as a form of entertainment and a form of political and religious ceremony.[28] Pasolini's theatre also differed from the classical Greek model because it was conceived for an audience made up of a small elite of advanced bourgeois groups who contested the very notion of 'mass audience'.[29]

The post-industrial bourgeoisie of the period only distinguished between 'the consumer' and 'the non-consumer', and the masses had abandoned the theatre for such less demanding pursuits as television and the cinema. Pasolini was aware that the past had cultural roots in agrarian civilization, which had disappeared with the advent of post-industrialization (Figure 6). By referring to the archaic history of Western society and its rites, he was able to profile bourgeois society in all his works while using the past for understanding the present.[30]

Two of Pasolini's Overwritten Tragedies

Pasolini began to overwrite the script of *The Eumenides* by Aeschylus in 1960 for his own theatre version.[31] In his words:

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Figure 5. Pasolini directing *Orgy*. Courtesy of the Teatro Stabile Torino.

I immediately started with enthusiasm. But I had just a few months ahead of me. Then I had nothing left but to follow my deep, greedy, voracious instinct. With the brutality of instinct, I arranged three texts around the typewriter: *Eschyle* (volume II) from Les Belles Lettres (Paris, 1949), translated by Paul Mazon, *The Oresteia of Aeschylus*, edited by George Thomson (Cambridge, 1938), and *Eschilo: le Tragedie*, edited by Mario Untersteiner (Milan, 1947). In the event of disagreement between the texts or their interpretation, I did what my instinct told me: I chose the text and the interpretation that I liked best.

The general linguistic tendency was to change sublime tones into civil tones: a desperate correction . . . Hence, the turn to prose, to low locution.[32]

Orestes, who is charged with matricide but is defended by Apollo, is pursued by the Erinyes, who are obscure archaic divinities, the Greek deities of Vengeance, and the protectors of matriarchy and its social order. Apollo suggests Orestes seek help from the City of Athens, where he stands trial for the murder of his mother. He is tried and acquitted, although not by a court consisting of gods, but by a jury made up of Athenian citizens. He is tried at the Court of Areopagus, established specifically for the case by Athena, the goddess of Reason. Athena acts as the judge, the Erinyes as prosecutors, and Apollo as the defence.

As far as Pasolini was concerned, the meaning of *The Eumenides* was solely political:

> Above all, Orestes and Apollo are symbols or tools to express ideas [and] concepts, in a scenic way, to narrate what we now call an ideology. The plot of Aeschylus' tragedy is this: in primitive society the feelings that predominate are primordial, instinctive, and obscure (the Erinyes). However, against these archaic sentiments, stands Reason, which overcomes them, creating other, modern institutions for society: assembly and suffrage.[33]

At several points in this tragedy, Pasolini uses the Erinyes to emphasize how the young Apollo and Athena disregard archaic tradition: 'The god of Prophecy (Apollo) goes beyond the

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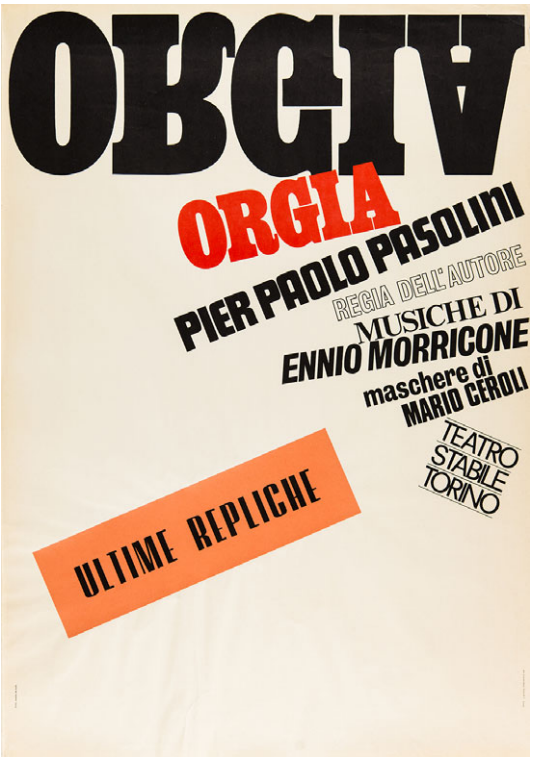

Figure 6. The original 1968 poster for *Orgy*. Courtesy of the Teatro Stabile Torino.

law of the gods to protect a man (Orestes), who has violated eternal norms.'[34] The Erinyes express themselves through the Chorus in a defensive harangue, explaining that their task is timeless since they protect society from those who commit blood crimes. To remove this mandate from the Erinyes would be akin to endorsing the impunity of offenders and to weakening the foundational values of society. The Erinyes declare:

> We will take charge of this! We will spare the gods even though they are elected judges! God may keep impure blood far from his sovereign gaze. It is our duty to destroy where death was brought to a family. Let us chase [the murderer] and no matter how strong he is, let us drink his oozing . . . blood. So it is: in the mechanism of the end, in the memory of evil, we are a sign of horror, we perform a disgusting duty, which separates us from God. We are merciless with those who see the sun's rays and with those who cannot see them.[35]

Despite opposition from the Erinyes, the jury returns and delivers its verdict of 'not guilty'. Athena too casts her vote in favour of Orestes' acquittal, saying:

> It is my turn, the last to speak. I will be the one who gives the vote to Orestes. I did not know a mother when I was born. I am all for men, and with my heart: a virgin, I am on my father's side. Therefore, I cannot be indignant over the fate of a woman who has murdered her husband.[36]

The victory of reason embodied in Athena depicts a clash between two civilizations. On the one hand, there is archaic barbarian civilization based on tribal laws and values connected to a sense of the sacred. On the other hand, there is also civilization founded upon reason, but with the difference that this reason delivers an autonomous democracy free from a sense of the sacred as well as that of old traditions.[37] Pasolini explained to Jean Duflot during an interview that, when he used the terms 'archaic barbaric civilization', he 'simply' meant 'the state which precedes our civilization (history) – [which is] that of common sense, foresight, a sense of the future'.[38] In his translator's note, he pointed out that the passage from pre-history to history also corresponds to the passage from a matriarchal society, as expressed by the Erinyes, to a patriarchal society, as symbolized by Apollo and Athena.

In 1960, Pasolini still believed that traditions could be incorporated and dominated by reason: history could hold on to its ancient roots, even when the ancient was reread and adapted to the present. After Orestes' acquittal, the Erinyes curse the city: 'Alas, young gods, tear up tradition, steal what is mine . . . I will show you. I must terrorize this city! The Unhappy Daughters of the Night [the Erinyes], the Wounded Daughters, have suffered. Alas, how much they have suffered!'[39] On hearing these words, Athena says:

> I understand your anger: you are older than me. But . . . God gave me reason as a gift. . . . Here, in the glorious centre of this city, you will see processions of men and women bringing you gifts. I tell you that you will regulate every human relationship. Whoever does not understand that it is

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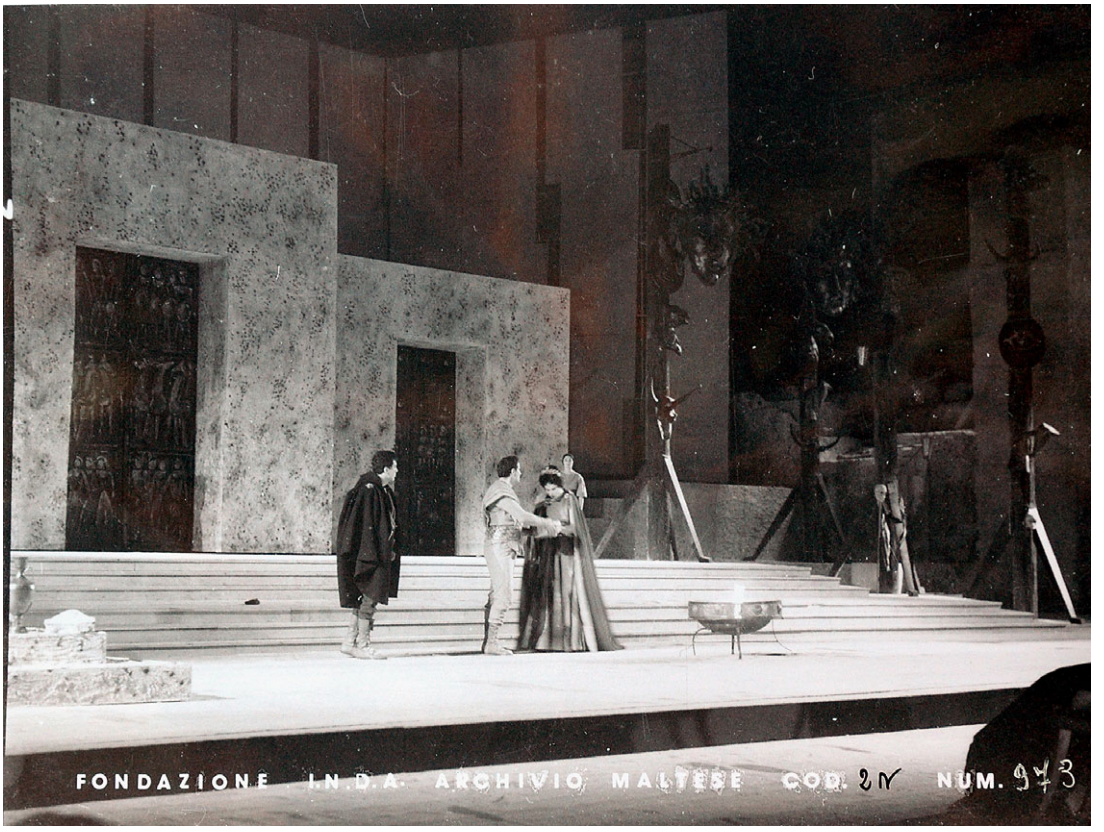

Figure 7. *The Oresteia* (1960).Vittorio Gassman (centre) at the Theatre of Siracusa. Photographer: Angelo Maltese. Courtesy of AFI Archivio Fondaziona INDA Siracusa.

right to accept these primordial divinities does not understand the contrasts of life.[40]

In agreement with Athena's proposal, the Erinyes begin to bless the city and change their name to the Eumenides (Figure 7).

The second tragedy considered here is Pasolini's 1970 film version of *Medea.* He did not use Euripides' original text for the film but drew inspiration from it. He reduced the quantity of dialogue and overwrote it by using language that had the diction of contemporary Italian.[41]

The plot of Pasolini's version does not stray far from Euripides' structure. However, he took poetic licence by portraying the early life of Jason, his voyage to Colchis, and the inclusion of a second Centaur, at the beginning of the film. The film was shot partly in Turkey, where the kingdom of Colchis once stood, and partly in Italy: the Grado Lagoon, which was used as the backdrop for the film's prologue, and the Piazza dei Miracoli in Pisa, used for the scenes set in Corinth. Different in morphology and architecture, these locations mirrored the clash between the barbaric world of Colchis and the world of Corinth, governed by the laws of *logos.* These two worlds were to be in conflict, and one of them was destined to perish. Pasolini's cinematographic language was visually immediately understandable, and it offered a faithful representation of reality.

In an interview with Aldo Tassone in 1980, Bernardo Bertolucci, Pasolini's assistant on *Accattone* (1961), commented: 'One of the qualities of Pasolini's early films was his invention of a new language. Even when he became more technically proficient, he continued to employ the apparent stylistic

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roughness of his beginnings.'[42] Shot between May and August 1969, *Medea* was Pasolini's eighth full-length film and, technically speaking, Bertolucci's observations are borne out by Pasolini's camerawork. The film may well lack the slickness that modern cinemagoers are now used to. However, its rawness, at times misconstrued by critics, gives *Medea* its unpolished authenticity, as well as a sense of the distant past. Its no-frills approach to filming, together with its straightforward immediacy, suggests to the audience that what they are watching is not only a film, as seen from a cinema auditorium, but also a stage performance, as seen from the theatre stalls.

In *Medea*, Pasolini juxtaposes dialogue with silence, and frenzy with stasis. These contrasts are then echoed and accentuated through the music, selected under the guidance of Elsa Morante for his soundtrack: primal Tibetan chant, gentle Persian santur, and a powerful Balkan chorale.[43] Opting for stark interiors, a barren Middle Eastern landscape, and haunting choral music to suggest the presence of a physical chorus, Pasolini was able to evoke the spartan minimalism of an Ancient Greek stage, and succeeded in preserving all the canons of tragic Greek theatre.

Luchino Visconti (1906–1976) considered Maria Callas (1923–1977), the most highly regarded opera singer of her time, to be 'one of the greatest living actresses', and she was, of course, well acquainted with *Medea*, having interpreted the title role in Cherubini's operatic version on many occasions, each time to rapturous critical acclaim.[44] Even before completing the screenplay, he had already singled her out as his leading lady, stating in an article published in 1970 that 'sometimes I write the screenplay without knowing who the actor will be. In this case, I knew it would be Callas, so I always calibrated my script according to her' (Figure 8).[45]

Even though Callas had previously turned down all requests from film directors, regardless of their eminence, she accepted what was

Figure 8. *Medea* (1969). Maria Callas and Pasolini during a break from filming. Courtesy of Mimmo Cattarnich/Maurizio Presutti.

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to be her one and only film role. Pasolini did not ask Callas to sing, and he was only interested in her dramatic stage presence and outstanding acting abilities. With her powerful facial beauty, which perfectly fitted into the iconic and frontal dimension of Pasolini's cinema, Callas helped to create the sense of sacredness that he aimed for in his film. Inspired by the Danish director Carl Theodor Dreyer, Pasolini had a predilection for frontal, medium close-ups, and he had the camera linger on his characters' faces.[46] Using this technique in *Medea*, he was able to exalt Callas's hieratic and hypnotic facial expressions, which mesmerized audiences. During the making of *Medea*, Pasolini and Callas forged a deep friendship, which was to last until his death in 1975.

Medea can be divided into four parts, the first two of which have no chronological relationship to each other. They are the prologue on Jason's upbringing by Chiron the Centaur since his birth; Colchis; the arrival of Medea in Iolcus; and the tragic final act in which Medea takes her revenge on Jason. In the prologue, Chiron reveals Jason's origins to him, relating the story of the Golden Fleece through a series of scenes taken from Jason's future life: 'It all started because of a ram's hide. It was a talking ram, it was divine.'

Despite his age, now thirteen, Jason had never questioned his belief in the sacredness of existence. Chiron takes him aside and explains to him that:

> Everything is sacred, everything is sacred. Remember, my boy: there is nothing natural in nature. When it seems natural to you, it will be the end. Something else will start. Goodbye, sky, goodbye, sea. Maybe you think that, besides being a liar, I am also too poetic. But for ancient man, myths and rituals are concrete experiences, which are also included in daily existence. For him, reality is a totally perfect unit, and the emotion he feels at the sight of a summer sky, is equal to the more internal, personal experience of modern man.[47]

Now a young man, Jason takes a rational, pragmatic approach to life at the expense of his previous sacred vision. At this point, Chiron explains to him:

> The traditions of this world are realistic but only because those who are mythical are realistic. Because only he who is mythical is realistic, and vice versa. This is what our divine reason foresees. What it cannot foresee, sadly, are the errors it will lead you to. Who knows how many there will be? . . . That which man has witnessed in the cultivation of grains, that which he has understood from seeds, as they are reborn, represents a definite lesson: the resurrection. But this lesson is no longer useful. That which he has gleaned from seeds holds no more meaning for you. It's like a distant memory that no longer affects you. In fact, there are no gods.[48]

Pasolini depicts Colchis as a mythical place:

> Agrarian civilization is founded on cyclical time. Sowing is understood as a cycle of death and resurrection, an element summarized by the only comment made by Medea (during the scene of human sacrifice): 'Give life to the seed and be reborn with the seed.' [This is a] worldview which would have supplanted that of prehistoric man, and which would have survived for twelve millennia, resisting the linear conception of the Christian religion, only to be destroyed by neocapitalism.[49]

In the first scenes set in Colchis, its inhabitants are seen working the land with dedication and religious respect (Figure 9). Medea, priestess of Hecate, is preparing to sacrifice a young man to receive the earth's blessing and secure a rich harvest. Pasolini's notion here of human sacrifice for human benefit coincides partly with Eliade's view on the subject and partly with that of James George Frazer (1854–1941) in his *The Golden Bough.* As Constanza Ratti usefully explains,

> Eliade conceived sacrifice as the main road to the experience of the sacred, a sacred considered irrational and ambivalent, inaccessible to rational thought and understandable only through the emotional and the religious sphere. James George Frazer views magic as a rudimentary attempt to exert control over nature. Magic works according to a principle of correspondence whereby man imitates nature and believes that it too will be magically forced to follow his example. The rite fulfils this function of soliciting and directing the course of nature to one's advantage. Thus, for example, primitive man will be convinced of stimulating the growth of the crops by spreading his own seed in the fields.[50]

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Figure 9. *Medea* (1969). Maria Callas as Medea, and the Turkish non-professional actor Kuvret Nersir as Eeta (Aeëtes), Medea's father. (The other non-professional actors cannot be identified.) Courtesy of Mimmo Cattarnich/ Maurizio Presutti.

After having greeted Chiron, Jason returns to the kingdom of Iolcus to reclaim the throne from his uncle King Pelia, who had dethroned Jason's father, his own brother. Pelia accepts Jason's request for him to step aside, but on one condition: Jason must bring the Golden Fleece from Colchis to ensure Iolcus's lasting power.

Accompanied by his fellow Argonauts, Jason sets sail for Colchis. On their way to the temple of Hecate, where the Golden Fleece is kept, Jason and the Argonauts commit many acts of violence and destruction. Through these scenes of devastation, Pasolini indicates the profanation of the archaic world by a modern and pragmatic one.

Medea goes to the temple and, when Jason arrives, they fall in love by a simple exchange of glances: 'Eros appears as a disruptive force, which destroys the balance between Medea and her environment.'[51] Medea asks her brother Apsirto to steal the Golden Fleece and escape with her when she flees with Jason. The Colchian army chases them and, to stop the pursuit, Medea kills and dismembers her brother so that the soldiers are forced to stop and collect his remains. Before taking the ship back to Iolcus, Jason and the Argonauts set up camp, but without paying homage to the gods. Seeing this as sacrilegious, Medea escapes from the camp and, in dismay, invokes the gods of the Earth, Sun, and Stone:

> Earth, talk to me! Let me hear your voice! Sun, talk to me! You, grass, talk to me! You, rock talk to me! Let me hear your voice! Sun, talk to me! Where is the bond that joined you to the sun? You, grass, talk to me! You, rock, talk to me![52]

The gods do not respond to her through hierophonies, and Medea, disoriented, realizes that the further she goes from Colchis, the less contact she will have with her religious world. Medea's world is linked to nature, and thus it is considered backward by more advanced civilizations like those found in Iolcus and Corinth.

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Medea, Jason, and the Argonauts sail back to Iolcus with the Golden Fleece. Now in possession of the Golden Fleece, King Pelia tells his nephew: 'Today you will experience something unexpected. You will find out that kings are not always obliged to keep promises.' Jason replies:

I understand. Here it is. Keep the fleece, symbol of transient power and order. My quest has shown me that the world is bigger than your kingdom. If you want, I will tell you what I think the truth is: away from that land, this fleece has no meaning.[53]

Jason has understood that, since a hierophany is not considered a manifestation of the sacred in a non-religious, utilitarian society, it loses its power. In such societies as Iolcus, and subsequently in neo-capitalist societies, objects have pragmatic and economic value but no symbolic value whatsoever. Medea and Jason leave Iolcus for Corinth, where Medea, obliged to dress in the clothes of the more 'advanced' society of Corinth, discards her usual attire, thereby losing her religious symbols.

One day, while Jason is walking towards Medea's house, he hears a voice calling his name. It is the voice of the Centaur, but he is not alone for there are now two of them. One is the half-bearded Centaur Jason had seen as a child, and the other a beardless Centaur he now sees as an adult. Confused by the presence of two Centaurs, Jason begins to lose his own sense of identity, certainty, and trust in the half-bearded Centaur who was his mentor. The beardless Centaur explains to Jason that, like Jason, he too had experienced a split between his past and present life: 'You knew two. A sacred one, when you were a boy and a desecrated one when you became an adult. But the sacred part is kept alongside the desecrated form. Here we are, one beside the other.'[54]

According to Francesca Ricci, Pasolini believed that Chiron 'embodies the mythical projection of Jason's interior being':

His interiority is split between the ancestral components, of which Medea is the symbol, but which are also present in Jason's unconscious state, and components that are modern, rational, and conscious.

On an ideological level, the fundamental point is precisely this: the world that Jason sees as a child is a sacred world in which God inhabits everything and in which nature is supernatural. This world has a meaning that goes beyond its materiality: 'Everything is sacred,' says the Centaur. The world that Jason sees as an adult is a desecrated world in which there is no longer any trace of divinity, in which matter has no meaning other than itself, and nature is only nature. In the first part of the film the sacred and the deconsecrated are in antithesis, and are therefore perceived as the result of natural evolution, of growth from childhood to adulthood from the mythical world to the rational, from the primitive to the evolved.[55]

Given Jason's prolonged absence, Medea decides to go to Corinth where she finds him dancing at a gathering. Medea understands that the celebration is being given in honour of Jason's marriage to Glauce, daughter of Creon, the King of Corinth. Distraught, Medea returns home.

Pasolini presents two vision of Medea's revenge on Glauce through Creon and Jason. The first is dreamlike in nature, and the second is a vision of what will actually occur at the end of the story. In the first, the Sun asks Medea, who has fainted: 'Don't you recognize me?' Medea replies: 'Yes, you are my father's father.' The Sun continues: 'What are you waiting for? Be brave!'

Medea calls her nurses and exclaims:

Oh, God! Oh, justice, dear to God! Oh, sunlight! The victory I foresee over my enemies will be marvellous! I'll avenge myself, as I must! Listen to my plans! One of my women will tell Jason to come to me. I'll be loving and tell him: 'You must marry the King's daughter.' I'll tell him: 'This marriage will be useful to our sons.'[56]

In the second, the vision of the future, Jason comes to Medea: 'You wanted me to come. Here I am. What is it?' While Jason is talking, Medea gives their children the wedding gift to take to Glauce – a wedding gown that will ignite on contact with skin. After having apologized to Jason for the misunderstandings between them, Medea asks him to take care of their children, which Jason promises to do. When they arrive at Creon's palace, the children give Glauce their mother's gift and message: 'Mama, sends you this gift for your

wedding. She says she doesn't hate you but wishes you well.' As soon as Glauce puts on the wedding gown, it catches fire, and she is seen running out of the palace, engulfed in flames. She dies together with her father, as he tries to save her.

In the first scene of this vision, Glauce sheds tears of anguish on receiving Medea's gift, feeling guilty over her forthcoming marriage to Jason, which will destroy his ten-year marriage to Medea. On seeing his daughter weep, Creon goes to Medea's house to banish her and her children from the city. Medea's question ('Why my sons too?') is met with:

> Because you frighten me. I am afraid for my daughter. Everyone here knows you are expert at spells because you come from a barbaric land. You are different from us, so we do not want you here. It is not out of hatred or suspicion of your difference that I am afraid, it is for fear of what you could do to my daughter.[57]

Medea asks Creon to allow her one more day in the kingdom, and Creon agrees. As in the first, dream-like, vision, Medea calls Jason to make peace. However, in this second vision, Medea and Jason make love before parting. The second vision then continues in the same way as the first, the only difference being that the gown the children take to Glauce has not been immersed in poison; when Glauce puts it on, she throws herself from a tower. In a moment of folly, having seen his beloved daughter kill herself, Creon does the same. Medea then kills her own children and sets fire to her house (Figure 10).

From the roof of the burning building, Medea sees Jason running towards her and shouts, 'Why do you try to pass through the fire? You can't do it! It's useless to try! You can talk to me if you want, but I don't want you near me!' Jason shouts back: 'What have you done? Aren't you suffering too now?' Medea replies, 'I want to suffer!' and Jason exclaims that her own god will condemn her. Medea asks, 'What do you want from me?' and Jason asks her to allow him to bury their children. 'Go and bury your bride!' she rejoins, which Jason says he will do, but not without his sons. Medea's final words are: 'The tears you are shedding now are nothing! You'll realize when you are old. Nothing is possible any more.'[58]

Critical Reception

La Ricotta

La Ricotta had a particular and troubled genesis. On 8 February 1963, Paolo Pedonte, the Deputy Public Prosecutor in Rome, seized the film before its release. Without having seen it, Pedonte ordered its seizure on the basis of information disclosed by Pasolini through the press. Pasolini was accused of contempt for the State Religion and the investigation was passed over to Pedonte's colleague, Giuseppe Di Gennaro. As no Catholic institution had filed an official complaint concerning the film, judicial proceedings were brought against Pasolini at the behest of the Prosecutor's Office. In his final indictment, Di Gennaro emphasized the fact that Pasolini clearly preferred Stracci to Jesus Christ as he had used sacred music by Bach in his portrayal of Stracci while using popular music in his depiction of Christ. He also stressed other elements he deemed scandalous: the presence of an actress, dressed as a saint, who performs a sort of striptease, and several extras who are seen dancing to a popular song in front of the table of the Last Supper. Since the Censorship Office had not found any doctrinal anomaly regarding the Catholic Church in the film, Di Gennaro cited the above fragments in his condemnation. Pasolini was found guilty and sentenced to four years' probation but was later acquitted when the case was brought before the Appeal Court.

Published in *L'Osservatore Romano*, a judgement delivered on 24 February 1963 by the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico listed *RoGoPaG* among films neither recommended nor prohibited from viewing. The reason given was that, by portraying Stracci's death on the cross, Pasolini did not depart from the Christian perception of redemption. The film was eventually released on 12 November 1963, newly titled *Laviamoci il cervello* (*Let's Wash our Brains*). In this version, *La Ricotta* was shortened, and parts of the screenplay were revised.

Figure 10. *Medea* (1969). Maria Callas. Courtesy of Mimmo Cattarnich/Maurizio Presutti.

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The Gospel According to St Matthew

The Roman Catholic Church appears to have understood the formal beauty of *The Gospel According to St Matthew* – as it did not in the case of *La Ricotta* – for it was not totally criticized for its content or the unorthodoxy of its transposition to film. Essentially, criticism focused on how Pasolini had expounded the message of the Gospel through a poetic reading of the original. *L'Osservatore Romano*, for example, wrote: 'The film is faithful to the story but not to the inspiration of the Gospel.' *L'Unità* stated: 'The adherence to the letter of the text is to be considered more as a poetic fact than a sacred message.' The film was awarded two prizes at the 1964 Venice Film Festival: one by the Grand Jury, and one by the Office Catholique Internationale du Cinéma. On 23 July 2022, *L'Osservatore Romano* published another article on *The Gospel According to St Matthew*, saying that Pasolini had given new vigour to the Christian word and had rendered the Gospel more topical, concrete, and revolutionary. *The Gospel According to St Matthew* is indeed a masterpiece, and probably the best film ever made about Jesus.

The Eumenides

Produced by the National Institute of Dramatic Art, *The Oresteia* was staged for the first time by the Compagnia Popolare di Gassman in 1960. The critics of the time saw only the purely translational aspect of *The Eumenides* and not Pasolini's intention to translate *The Oresteia* as a whole in a poetic fashion; they criticized him for leaving out countless details in his overwritten version and for his lack of linguistic, structural, and cultural intelligence. It was only towards the 1980s that critics began to understand that Pasolini's work was not a literary translation but was centred on a poetic vision. Nadia Fagiolo, for instance, pointed out that Pasolini and Aeschylus shared what she defined as a 'passionate-political vision of the world'.[59]

Medea

Despite being occasionally misinterpreted, *Medea* was generally well received by cinema audiences as well as film critics. In a review published on 29 October 1971, the *New York Times* cinema critic Vincent Canby wrote:

> Pier Paolo Pasolini's very free, very barbaric *Medea*, which is less an adaptation of the Euripides play than an interpretation of it, is not completely successful, but it is so full of eccentric imagination and real passion. Under Pasolini's direction, Maria Callas becomes a fascinating cinematic presence . . . In Pasolini's conception, Medea is a primeval soul who erupts almost spontaneously when transplanted into a civilization ruled by order. And this, I think, is where the film goes awry. There is no real conflict between Pasolini's conception and Euripides'. Pasolini's supplements the other's, but because nothing in Pasolini's imagery in the scenes in Corinth is equal to the passion of the original text, or to Pasolini's own scenes early in the film, the movie seems to go thin and absurdly melodramatic.

On 29 December 1969, Giuseppe Grazzini, film critic for the *Corriere della Sera*, wrote:

> *Medea* recommends itself to the viewer for its extraordinary visual qualities and musical accompaniment. Even those unable to penetrate the metaphors, or decipher the links of the fragmented narrative, will at least appreciate the mythic climate and sacred harmony of Pasolini's fairy-tale narrative . . . *Medea* finds in Maria Callas an interpreter of rare depth and expressive flexibility. Putting to good use her celebrated scenic skills and feeling for ancient dramatic resonance, Callas supplies the agony and blood to an otherwise unreachable character, and therefore also brings to the cinema an emblem of that artistic personality which justifies and renews the praise of her admirers.

Conclusions

Pasolini wrote the screenplays and scripts of all his cinematographic and theatrical works, and took charge of music and stage costumes. This comprehensive interest expressed his belief that every single element of a film, or a tragedy in the theatre, had a decisive role to play in conveying his thoughts to his audience.

Until the early 1960s, Pasolini's work had been influenced by Gramsci's theories, as noted earlier, but, as neo-capitalism continued

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to permeate all social classes, contrary to Gramsci's expectations regarding working-class resistance and triumph, so did his impact on Pasolini's thinking wane. In the first half of the 1960s, Pasolini asked himself many existential questions, which led him to a crisis of values. Even so, he never doubted his sense of the sacred. From his earliest writings up to his final work in 1975, Pasolini continued to probe his sense of the sacred and how to transmit it through his art.

Stracci in *La Ricotta* represents a pre-capitalist society that still believes in God. The director in the film is imbued with the neo-capitalist values of the time, and Stracci is his alter ego. Turning to *The Gospel According to St Matthew*, Pasolini had to make a great effort to identify with Matthew while making the film, given that he had always professed to be a communist and a Marxist. It was precisely while making this film, together with the tragedies that he wrote from 1964 onwards, that he found his unique style – the poetic style of his 'cinema of poetry' and his 'theatre of poetry'.

Stracci and the Director character in *La Ricotta*, together with Matthew in *The Gospel According to St Matthew*, stand for Pasolini's intellectual rigour. He did not wish to articulate his own ideas through these figures but to project those of a poor dweller of the periphery, a cynical director, and Christ. The actors whom Pasolini chose for these roles succeeded in portraying the prototypical characteristics laid down in the director's cut without taking anything substantial away from the story being told. Since 'the Word' was the main element of Pasolini's tragedies, sets and costumes played a secondary role. Very often he turned to music by Bach, Mozart, and composers of light or ethnic music to highlight the key moments of his actors' performances.

Pasolini considered theatre to be a political rite, and he was committed to being aware of history, thinking that knowledge of what had gone before would guide society into the modern world with minimal turmoil. The law embodied by Athena in *The Eumenides* reflected the laws of today's world; these were the laws that had more importance than the values underlying them. Historical knowledge is what allows an understanding of the 'laws of man', and it thus allows individuals to make informed choices as to whether to follow the law or not.

Pasolini championed social development, but was not in favour of technocratic progress, which, he believed, depersonalized individuals and turned them into mindless consumers of goods. Many of Pasolini's works were awarded prestigious national as well as international prizes, and he discussed his works on public platforms in Italy and abroad. Pasolini believed that the intellectual's role was to act in society so as to bring out its strengths and weaknesses. Being a heterodox communist, he did not shy away from addressing social issues close to his heart; nor did he hesitate to incorporate them in his works so that his audiences might become aware, or more aware, of them.

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19. Walter Siti, *Pasolini e il cinema: La Ricotta* (Milano: Mondadori, 2001), with reference to the translation given in Simon Callow, *Orson Welles: One Man Band* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2015), p. 371–2.

20. Ibid., p. 372.

21. Siti, *Pasolini e il cinema: La Ricotta*, p. 338.

22. Pier Paolo Pasolni, quoted in Giordano Lupi, 'Approfondimenti su "La ricotta", scritto e diretto da Pasolini', *Il Salto della Quaglia*, 28 April 2021, <https://www.ilsaltodellaquaglia.com/2021/04/28/approfondimenti-su-la-ricotta-scritto-e-diretto-da-pasolini/>, accessed 24 June 2022.

23. From the RAI broadcast 'Cristianesimo e libertà dell'uomo', in the episode 'Tra campagna e città', transmitted on 8 March 1974.

24. Zrinka Lovrić, 'Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma attraverso gli occhi di Pier Paolo Pasolini [Salò or the 120 Days of Sodom through the eyes of Pier Paolo Pasolini']', Master's thesis (University of Zadar, 2002), <https://repozitorij.unizd.hr/en/islandora/object/unizd:6234>.

25. Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni dal carcere*, ed. Valentino Gerratana (Turin: Einaudi 1975), Vol. 3, p. 2346.

26. Caterina Verbaro, *Pasolini: nel recinto del sacro* (Rome: Perrone, 2017), p .25.

27. Francesca Tommasini, 'Tra Teoria e Scrittura. La Sperimentazione Drammaturgica di Pasolini', in *'L'ora è confusa e noi come perduti viviamo': Leggere Pier Paolo Pasolini quarant'anni dopo*, ed. Francesca Tommasini and Monica Venturini (Rome: RomaTre-Press, 2017), p. 119–134 (p. 126).

28. See, for example, Paolo Bosisio, *Teatro dell'Occidente* [*The Theatre of the West*]: *elementi di storia della drammaturgia e dello spettacolo teatrale*, 2 vols (Milan: LED, 2006).

29. Francesca Tomassini, 'La sperimentazione teatrale di Pier Paolo Pasolini nel panorama drammaturgico novecentesco [Pier Paolo Pasolini's theatrical experimentation in the twentieth-century dramaturgical panorama]', doctoral dissertation (University of Rome Tre, 2002), <https://arcadia.sba.uniroma3.it/bitstream/2307/4199/1/Tesi Tomassini Francesca.pdf>, p. 57–8.

30. See Simona Cigliana, 'Pasolini: Una ricerca identitaria tra mito e modernità', *Italogramma*, II (2012), <http://italogramma.elte.hu/wp-content/files/Italogramma_Identita_207-221_Cigliana.pdf>, p. 207–21 (accessed 16 February 2023).

31. *The Oresteia* is a trilogy made up of *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Eumenides.*

32. Pier Paolo Pasolini,'Lettera del traduttore', in Pasolini, L'*Orestiade di Eschilo* (Milano: Garzanti, 2020), p. 179.

33. Ibid., p. 180.

34. Ibid., p. 143.

35. Ibid., p. 150–1.

36. Ibid., p. 165.

37. Barbara Castaldo,'"Usare la Non Ragione contro la Ragione": *Pilade* e *Medea*', in *Pasolini e il teatro*, ed. Stefano Casi, Angela Felice, and Gerardo Guccini (Venice: Marsilio, 2012), p. 149–58 (p. 150).

38. Pier Paolo Pasolini, in *Il sogno del centauro*, ed. Jean Duflot (Rome: Edizioni Riuniti, 1983), p. 87.

39. Pasolini, *L'Orestiade*, p. 167.

40. Ibid., p. 169.

41. See Filippo La Porta, *Pasolini* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2012), p. 92.

42. Cited in Pasquale Iannone, '5 Ways to Recognize a Pasolini Film', BFI (2 November 2015), <https://www.bfi.org.uk/features/5-ways-recognise-pasolini-film>.

43. Chiara Servaggini, 'La *Medea* di Pasolini in rapporto al modello Euripideo', unpublished doctoral dissertation (Università degli Studi della Tuscia, 2005–2006), p. 84–5.

44. For example at the Maggio Fiorentino in 1953, when the same production was also staged at La Scala.

45. Guido Santato, *Pier Paolo Pasolini: L'opera poetica, narrativa, cinematografia, teatrale e saggistica: Ricostruzione critica* (Rome: Carocci, 2021), p. 371.

46. Virgilio Fantuzzi, 'Pier Paolo Pasolini: dalla poesia al cinema sotto il segno del regresso', *Cabiria: Studi di Cinema*, No. 193 (September–December 2019), p. 21–9 (p. 24).

47. Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Medea*, in *Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo, Edipo Re, Medea* (Milan: Garzanti, 2020), p. 476 (scene 6).

48. Ibid. (scene 7).

49. Massimo Fusillo, *La Grecia secondo Pasolini: Mito e cinema* (Rome: Carocci, 2007) p. 122.

50. Constanza Ratti, 'Il sacrificio nell'Israele antico: Evoluzione dei rituali e delle credenze dall'età nomade all'epoca persiana (IV sec. a.C.) ['The Sacrifice in Israel: Ancient Evolution of Rituals and Beliefs from the Nomadic to the Persian Age (fourth century BC)]', doctoral dissertation (University of Bergamo 2014–15), <https://aisberg.unibg.it/bitstream/10446/62486/1/Costanza Ratti-IlSacrificionell%27Israele Antico.pdf>, p. 83 (accessed 16 February 2023).

51. Fusillo, *La Grecia secondo Pasolini*, p. 127.

52. Pasolini, *Medea*, p. 498 (Medea 'escapes from the camp but in search of what? She is looking for the sacred which she abandoned in Colchis with the carnal attraction she felt when meeting Jason at the *Centre* of the Omphalos where the Golden Fleece was kept').

53. Pasolini, *Medea*, p. 501 (scene 59).

54. Duarte Mimoso-Ruiz, 'La transposition filmique de la tragédie chez Pasolini', *Pallas*, XXXVIII [*Dramaturgie et Actualité du Théâtre Antique*] (1992), p. 57–67 (p. 62–3).

55. Francesca Ricci, 'La *Medea* di Pasolini', in 'Griselda, il Portale della Letteratura' (griseldaonline: University of Bologna, 2003), <https://site.unibo.it/griseldaonline/it/didattica/carlo-varotti-medea-medee>, p. 2 (accessed 16 February 2023).

56. Pasolini, *Medea*, p. 511 (scene 72).

57. Ibid., p. 505 (scene 66).

58. Ibid., p. 531 (scene 97).

59. Pasolini, speaking on a radio broadcast (RAI, Ruggero Jacobbi, January 1968), 'Le Belle Infedeli, ovvero i Poeti a Teatro': 'I have tried to represent the Ancient Greek text not by translating literally, which is impossible since the meanings of words changes in every era . . . but I have only tried to create an adapted translation . . . by analogy.'