The Art of Transgressing Boundaries: The Sacred and the Profane in Pier Paolo Pasolini's Cinema

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Abstract: *This article examines Pasolini's political discourse on the "sacred" and the subproletariat. I will explore how this has been articulated in his early cinema through intermedia experimentation. I will take into consideration the so-called "national-popular" phase of his cinema, namely* Accattone *(1961),* Mamma Roma *(1962),* La Ricotta *(1963) and* Il Vangelo secondo Matteo *[*The Gospel according to Matthew*] (1964). I will first argue why the concept of adaptation is limited when it comes to analyse Pasolini's films and his poetics. Second, I will illustrate how Pasolini's filmic style was mainly influenced by literary theory and, more precisely, by Erich Auerbach's masterpiece* Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, *which was translated into Italian in 1956. I will analyse how Pasolini mixed artistic references from our cultural heritage to associate the figure of Christ to the subproletarians of his films. Ultimately, the aim of the article is to demonstrate how, by translating literary theory into film practice, Pasolini developed a unique style and multimodal discourse on sacredness and class.*

Keywords: *mimesis; Pier Paolo Pasolini; Erich Auerbach; intermediality; realism*

Introduction

Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975) was one of the greatest, most sophisticated, and eclectic artists of Italian culture. His art of transgressing artistic boundaries makes him a perfect case study of what we call today intermediality studies, namely the discipline which has spread in the last few decades in conjunction with the diffusion of postmodern and digital hybrid works. By *intermediality* I mean the variety of phenomena that regard the relationship between the arts, including the convergence of different artistic media such as literature, cinema, painting, music, photography, drama in individual works, the transfer of motifs, themes and narrativity from one artistic medium to another (generally known as *transmediality*), intermedial transpositions of genres, formal structures and semiotic complexes, or the thematization of one medium into another. Intermediality does not only underpin the eclectic aestheticism of his cinema, but it also informs Pasolini's poetry, prose narrative, drama, journalism and critical activity. One could argue, in fact, that Pasolini's artistic activity is one untiring attempt to overcome the representative boundaries of each artistic medium he used. For example, painting and music are dominant elements in much of his Friulan and Roman poetry, photography is used as a narrative strategy in *La Divina Mimesis*, the *fotoromanzo* figures as a key model in his documentary *Comizi d'amore*. In his cinema, notable examples of intermediality include the experimentation of his early "national-popular" cinema, such as *Accattone* (1961), *Mamma Roma* (1962), *La*

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Ricotta (1963) and *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* [*The Gospel According to Matthew*] (1964), his series of adaptations of classics, such as *Oedipus Rex* (1967), *Medea* (1969), and *The Trilogy of Life*, comprised of *The Decameron* (1971), *The Canterbury Tales* (1972), *The Arabian Nights* (1974), and certainly the emblematic short film *Che cosa sono le nuvole* [*What are Clouds*] (1968), a cinematographic re-representation, or re-mediation, of the theatrical performance of Shakespeare's *Othello*. While various forms of intermediality characterize Pasolini's artistic activity throughout his career, re-representations of one artistic medium in another and "conceptual fusions" of different arts become prominent in his work especially from the 1960s on.

Interartistic practices were quite common in Pasolini's times. In the 1960s and 1970s, Italian avant-garde journals, such as *Marcatré*, *Malebolge*, and *Continuum*, hosted lively discussions on intermediality in their debates. Various artists and intellectuals revolving around these journals had a strong connection with international movements such as Fluxus and some of its key figures, including Dick Higgins, the author of *Intermedia* (1966). Pasolini was not part of these intellectual circles and he took a rather different approach to intermediality. Like these avant-garde groups, however, he did not only express his creativity and communicate through a variety of artistic and non-artistic media — including poetry, fiction, documentary, journalism, cinema, theatre, painting, photography and, last but not least, television — but he also theoretically and creatively explored their convergences and contaminations. From the very beginning, the question of artistic "languages" and the symbolic intermediation of communication in the arts and society was at the core of his theoretical reflection and artistic experimentation.

The concept of "adaptation" thus proves to be limited in Pasolini's work. Pasolini did not aim at "translating" the literary works into filmic language. Instead, he appropriated and mixed a variety of original texts and cultural references, together with their inherent meanings, in order to create a new hybrid "intersemiotic discourse" through moving images. A practical example is the use of the figure of Christ in his so-called "national popular" cinema, including *Accattone* (1961), *Mamma Roma* (1962), *La ricotta* (1963), and *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (1964). As I will discuss more extensively in this article, in these films the figure of Christ is associated with the sub-proletariat so as to suggest their common destiny of victims in society. In other words, for Pasolini, intermediality was not merely a question of formal experimentation and disruption of language, as it was especially the case of the Italian neo-avantgarde literature, but a style which allowed him to create complex visual meanings about the present, drawing upon and challenging our cultural heritage. I will first argue about why the notion of "adaptation" is inadequate to describe Pasolini's experimentation across arts and media and how, instead, it was the German philologist Erich Auerbach who influenced his cinematographic style. I will then concentrate on a number of films in which he

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mixed a variety of cultural and artistic references to review sacred representations in his cinema. I will look especially at the so-called "national-popular cinema" – *Accattone* (1961), *Mamma Roma* (1962), *La ricotta* (1963), and *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (1964) – and how the figure of Christ has been used to articulate his discourse on the sacredness of the sub-proletariat.

Beyond Adaptation: Auerbach's "Figural Realism" in Pasolini's Cinema

The relationships between the arts in Pasolini's cinema have been mainly examined through the lens of adaptation studies, intertextuality, contaminations and artistic "influence" (such as the "influence" of painting in Pasolini's cinema), leaving the functions and meanings of intermedial figurations within these films largely unexplored. The notion of "adaptation", especially, has proven to be insufficient and problematic to tackle Pasolini's cinematographic transpositions of classics, because they were not conceived to be "faithful" to the original — being a general expectation of "fidelity" of films to classical texts implied in the idea of adaptation, at least before Linda Hutcheon. Intermediality, rather than "adaptation", with its attention on the "conceptual fusion" of different arts and on other interartistic phenomena, is a much appropriate term to define Pasolini's cinematographic practice and one that can be applied, transversally, to a number of other works that cannot be strictly identified as "adaptations" in his cinematographic activity — see, for example, the complex semiotic compositions of *La ricotta* (1963) or *Salò or the 120 Days of Sodom* (1975). For this reason, with its focus on the relationship and interconnection between the arts, rather than on a given relationship of subordination between original and imitation, intermediality studies provide excellent tools to analyse Pasolini's work; the aim of intermediality being precisely that of uncovering what such "media synthesis" signifies.

The premise of intermediality studies, namely that "all media and art forms are interconnected and that intermedial qualities always inhere in cultural phenomena" (Rippl 3) strongly resonates with Pasolini's poetics and politics of representation. His "corsair" artistic theory in fact reinforces one of the main beliefs of intermediality, namely that the boundaries of arts are simply based on "conventional conceptualizations, material restrictions and affordances" of media. This is what he argued, for example, in *Heretical Empiricism*, where he juxtaposed the restraints of literary language to the creative freedom of the language of cinema. When Pasolini moved from literature to cinema between the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s, with his first film *Accattone* out in 1961, he was in search for a new medium of representation. As he claimed on the occasion of the Strega Award celebration in his poem "In morte del realismo" (1960) ["The Death of Realism"], a certain period of linguistic experimentation in poetry and literature had come to an end. Various reasons contributed to its crisis, including the constraints of the literary medium. As Pasolini argued especially in some of his essays of *Heretical Empiricism*, the contamination of high and low cultures

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attempted through plurilingualism in the 1950s in works such as *Ragazzi di vita* (1955) and *Le Ceneri di Gramsci* (1957) could not entirely overcome the symbolic barrier of verbal language. As a palimpsestic and performative medium, cinema, instead, allowed a greater degree of freedom in the semiotic composition. It is within this context that Pasolini found Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (translated into Italian in 1956), and especially two of its key concepts, "mingling of styles" and "figural realism", proved to be particularly useful to formulate his own cinematographic style. Any investigation on the relationship between the arts in Pasolini's cinema cannot ignore how these concepts became essential constituents of his new ideal of fictional representation in his shift from literature to cinema, shaping his cinematographic style and idea of "represented reality".

This crucial intermedial encounter between literary and film theory was recorded by Pasolini himself soon after his collaboration with Federico Fellini for *Le notti di Cabiria* [*The Nights of Cabiria*]: "Fellini dragged me through that countryside lost in a honey of ultimate seasonal sweetness as he told me the plot of the *Nights*. A Peruvian kitten next to the big Siamese tomcat, I listened, Auerbach in my pocket" ("Nota su *Le notti*"). As Pasolini further discusses in this article, the Fellini-Auerbach combination produced in his mind an idea of cinema as "*amalgama*" where a figural level, which was the level of surrealism in Fellini, is "overimposed" on the physical material level of the moving bodies. This allowed the creation of a completely new language with multiple signifying possibilities. Auerbach's concepts of "mingling of styles" and "figural reality" happened to be most useful in this direction, but in order to understand how Pasolini employed them in his cinematographic style, we need to go back to their original meaning in *Mimesis*. By "mingling of styles" Auerbach meant the contamination of tragic and comic, normally separated in the literary tradition, but mingled in two emblematic cases of cultural history, namely in *The Bible* and *The Divine Comedy*. While tragic and comic were respectively used to tell stories of sublime and everyday life subject matter, in *The Bible* and the *Divine Comedy* the divine and the human meet, therefore encouraging a transgression of the normative boundaries of genres. On the other hand, *figura*, firstly introduced in his homonymous 1938 article, was employed by Auerbach to refer to those historical characters or events in Dante's *Comedia* that acted as a prefiguration of their divine destiny.

Pasolini's original contribution consisted of translating the concept of mingling of styles not only into a contamination of genres,[1] but also into a form of "fusion" of artistic media (such as painting, music, literature, and cinema), using the concept of *figura* to create semiotic interconnections between the protagonists of his films (Accattone, Ettore, Stracci, and Jesus Christ) and the *figura Christi.*

[1] See, for example, the twist dance which opens the film *La ricotta.*

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The "amalgama" was thus created by using images, music and texts from our cultural tradition, mixing them in complex semiotic constructions and, at montage level, associating them with the moving bodies performing on stage. His cinematographical style was thus intended as a living "figural integration" of artistic languages and physical reality, as first theorized on the set of *The Nights of Cabiria* with Fellini. Mingling of styles and figural realism were used as an aesthetical strategy to re-define the hierarchical boundaries of social representation. Like in *The Bible* and *The Divine Comedy*, Pasolini mixed everyday reality with the sublime to represent the lives of his subproletarians. More specifically, his early cinema can be seen as a progressive figural approximation of his protagonists — the subproletarians Accattone, Ettore, Stracci — to the figure of Christ, first only suggested through symbolic associations with music (such as Bach's in *Accattone*), paintings (such as Mantegna's *Cristo morto* or Pomtorno's *Deposizione* in *La ricotta*), and sculptures (the figure of the Angel and the cross in *Accattone*), and then through the full identification with Christ in person in *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*.

The Figure of Christ and the Sub-Proletariat

In un debole lezzo di macello
Vedo l'immagine del mio corpo:
seminudo, ignorato, quasi morto.
E così che mi volevo crocifisso
con una vampa di tenero orrore
da bambino, già automa del mio amore.
[Pier Paolo Pasolini, "L-ex-vita", in
L'usignolo della chiesa cattolica, 1958]
In a faint stench of slaughterhouse
I see the image
of my body:
half-naked, ignored,
almost dead.
It is so that I wanted myself crucified
in a flush of tender horror
as a child, already the automaton of my own love.

The identification with the figure of Christ was certainly not new in Pasolini's work, as the opening quotation from "L'usignolo della chiesa cattolica" and various references in *Ragazzi di vita* and *Una vita violenta* demonstrate. All the same, it became particularly significant in his early cinema. What *Accattone* (1961), *Mamma Roma* (1962), *La ricotta* (1963), and *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (1964) all share is the theme of the Passion and a formal aesthetics based on creatural realism, the mingling of styles, and various hybrid forms of intermediality. In fact, the four films read as variants of one narrative — the

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unresolved relationship between subproletarians and the bourgeois world — epitomized in the social injustice witnessed in Jesus' life. Auerbach's concept of *figura* is here crucial to understanding the association Pasolini established, at a representational level, between sacredness and exclusion from bourgeois society through the identification with Christ. In *Le regole di un'illusione* (1961), published exactly the same year *Accattone* was released, Pasolini explains the relationship between the subproletariat and Christ:

> Cristo è un sottoproletario, che va con i sottoproletari. Il rapporto storico fra Cristo e il proletariato esiste, egli non avrebbe fatto nulla se non fosse stato seguito dai proletari [...]. E il proletario sarebbe rimasto immerso nelle tenebre della sordità, se non fosse intervenuta la predica rivoluzionaria di Cristo.
> [Christ is a subproletarian, who goes with subproletarians. The historical relationship between Christ and the proletariat does exist, he would have done nothing if he hadn't been followed by the proletarians [...]. And the proletarian would have remained plunged in the soundless dark without the intervention of Christ's revolutionary gospel]

The victims of Pasolini's films (Accattone, Ettore, Stracci, Jesus) are indeed all *figurae Christi*: they are excluded from society and their death is just the demonstration of their impossible integration, which is what preserves their sacredness. In *Homo sacer* (1998), Giorgio Agamben, who was also a character in *Il Vangelo*, argues that *sacer* is anything "set apart" from common society: the hallowed, the cursed. Hence, those excluded from law are sacred men. This relation between exclusion and sacredness can be traced back to the Roman Empire, when the *homo sacer* (sacred man) was indeed a man who had committed a crime and was banned from society. He could be killed by anybody, but his life was considered "sacred" and therefore he could not be sacrificed in a ritual ceremony. Similarly, in Pasolini sacred is what is sacrificed, expelled, banned. What Pasolini wanted to represent in this "national-popular" phase of his cinema was indeed the sacredness of his protagonists as a form of necessary exclusion from society. What Pasolini conveys in his early cinema through his creatural realism is precisely a sense of empathy and identification with "the excluded", namely, with the victims of society, who are for him the weakest ring of the chain of neo-capitalism. On the other hand, by making them all die, Pasolini saves his characters from this world, bringing them back to the "other dimension" they belong to.

The significant relationship between Auerbach's figural realism, the process of victimization, and the imitative function has been highlighted in recent studies. As Pierpaolo Antonello pointed out, *figura* is the recognition of the mechanisms of persecutions, as narrated from the point of view of the victims. In this respect, Antonello clarifies:

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> Nello schema mitico c'è una pletora di colpevoli che vengono continuamente espulsi e non fanno "sistema", ma partecipano alla trasformazione ciclica del mondo; mentre con il riconoscimento dell'innocenza della vittima entriamo in un contesto figurale. Figura è il sistema di riconoscimento dei meccanismi vittimari e di persecuzione, visti, percepiti e narrati dal punto di vista degli ultimi, del popolo, di coloro che subiscono più facilmente di altri i meccanismi sociali di esclusione persecutoria. E la Passione e morte di Cristo è il centro di senso verso cui questa storia tende. (Antonello, "Realismo e secolarizzazione" 10)
> [Within the scheme of myth is a plethora of guilty beings that are continually being expelled and do not build a "system", but rather share in the cyclical transformation of the world; whereas with the recognition of the victim's innocence we enter a figural context. Figure is the system of recognition of the victimizing and persecutory mechanisms, seen, perceived and narrated from the point of view of the lowly, of the people, of those who are more easily than others subjected to the social mechanisms of persecuting exclusion. And the Passion and death of Christ is the cluster of meaning towards which this story tends.]

In this sense, figural realism equals the representation of what is excluded from society and persecuted by its power forces. It is the way Christian ethics understands otherness in time and space exercising compassion for the victims. From this perspective, a humble unknown subproletarian becomes a historical *figura* of the universal suffering of the poor, contributing to the epic storytelling of Christ's life. Essentially, by identifying with the victims, the humble feel included in the representation. In this respect, Antonello further remarks that:

> Il realismo figurale e sacrificale affonda le sue radici nella dinamicità antropologica dell'uomo che, attraverso il riconoscimento della realtà di questa descrizione, può ricavare conoscenza e consapevolezza di sé. È l'inizio della Bildung, che è mimetica, che è imitativa in quanto riconoscimento empatico di un dramma familiare. Il realismo figurale fornisce all'uomo una forma di rappresentazione che lo include, e non che lo esclude, rispetto ai riferimenti culturali a lui non immediatamente disponibili. (Antonello, "Realismo e secolarizzazione" 10)
> [Figural and sacrificial realism sinks its roots in the anthropological dynamism of man who, through a recognition of the reality of this description, can gain knowledge and awareness of the self. This is the beginning of Bildung, which is mimetic, which is imitative insofar as it is the empathic recognition of a family drama. Figural realism provides man

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with a form of representation that includes him, rather than excluding him, with respect to the cultural references not immediately available to him.]

Similarly, the aim of Pasolini's cinema was that of instilling compassion and empathy for the characters, to emphasize the epic-religiosity of characters and give an aura of sacredness to the lowest and most squalid aspects of existence. What Auerbach's *Mimesis* suggested to Pasolini was a way to rethink the representation of "the excluded" by means of the stylistic contamination of this sublime sense of sacredness given by the evocation of Christ's life and the physical suffering of his characters. The arts were used in different ways: his mingling of styles, music, and poetic verses served to elevate the tone and register of popular scenes and conceptualize feelings, while it is especially through the plasticity of some of his favourite painting that Pasolini achieved the best visual expression of his "*creaturalismo*". Pictorial influences mostly derive from Pasolini's "fulgorazione figurativa" experienced during Roberto Longhi's lectures on Masaccio, Masolino, Piero della Francesca, and Caravaggio during his university years, which represented, as we have noted, a sort of "revelation" for him.[2] In general, most of Pasolini's films are constructed as multi-layered representations of art and nature. They prove that, at this stage, for Pasolini reality is indeed a *figura*, it is the sign of a submerged reality which the artist should let emerge; at the same time, they demonstrate that Pasolini's new mimetic ideal was based on the assumption that art is the matrix of the real – or better, of our perception of the real.

The Sacred and the Profane from *Accattone* to *Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo*

The so-called "national-popular" phase of Pasolini's cinema stands out as one narrative of the Passion of Christ as the passion of subproletarians, initially just hinted at through cultural associations with sacred music and painting,[3] then fully represented in *Il Vangelo*, in which Christ finally becomes the symbol of all "the excluded". This process of representation is achieved through a technique that emphasises the contrasting association between the physical experience of suffering of the sub-proletarians and their sacredness. Auerbach's stylistic model is used with a number of references to Dante, but now the text of Dante's *Comedy* is

[2] As some of Dino Pedriali's photographs demonstrate, just a few days before dying in his house in Chia, Pasolini was offering his last homage to his professor by tracing Longhi's portrait on some big white sheets — on that occasion saying that he should have probably been a painter rather than a writer, so strong was his aesthetic passion.

[3] For example, see Galluzzi (1994) and Marchesini (1994). Furthermore, as Corrado Bologna underlines, Roberto Longhi's lessons and his "fulgurazioni figurative" when at Bologna University (Giotto, Masaccio, Fiorentino, and thirteenth-century painting) had deeply informed Pasolini's cinematic imagery. Longhi's lectures were organized in a sort of cinematographic way. They were given in the darkness of a lecture theatre where Longhi commented on projected frames.

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mainly used to create the complex semiotic construction of his narratives. Let us consider how this is achieved in the four films. *Accattone* (1961) offers a supreme example of negotiation between different artistic media, even in its compositional history. The screenplay was written between 1960 and 1961, the film was completed in 1961, and finally it was turned into a book of stories, *Alì dagli occhi azzurri*.[4] In *Accattone* the protagonist, Vittorio Cataldi, is a thieving pimp who earns his money thanks to his companion prostitute, Maddalena. When she is arrested, his life declines miserably, until he meets the innocent Stella, a sort of Pole Star, leading him to a possible redemption. Stella encourages him to find a job and start an honest life, but he falls back into thievery and one day, after a little theft, a truck kills him while he is trying to escape from the police. The narrative of the film suggests Accattone's movement from an infernal dimension to one of salvation. Interestingly, the two main aesthetical models in *Accattone* are precisely those that Auerbach had recognized as the most representative of the mingling of styles: the Bible, with the figure of Christ, and the *Comedia*, with the figure of Dante. There are various associations between Vittorio's experience and Dante's, and they especially mark the shift from Inferno to Purgatorio. First, the opening titles are accompanied by baroque sounds with Dante's Purgatorio V (104–07) — "l'angel di Dio mi prese, e quel d'inferno | gridava: — O tu del ciel, perché mi privi? | Tu te ne porti di costui l'etterno | per una lagrimetta che 'l mi toglie" [I was taken by God's angel, | but he from Hell cried: "You from Heaven-why | do you deny me him? For just one tear | you carry off his deathless part"]. Second, Stella is a sort of Beatrice-like figure, as we can see in this scene: "ACCATTONE Come ti chiami, te? | STELLA (alzando gli occhi verso di lui) Stella. | ACCATTONE Io Vittorio, piacere! (ci pensa un po') Eh, Stella, Indicheme er cammino!" [ACCATTONE What's your name, you? | STELLA (looking up at him) Stella. | ACCATTONE I'm Vittorio, pleased to meet you! (he pauses, thinking, then) Hey, Stella, show me the way!] (PC I, p. 50). Moreover, like Dante, Vittorio washes his face with the Tiber water in a sort of ritual that recalls Canto I of the Purgatorio, verses 121–29:

> Con improvvisa docilità, Accattone si mette in ginocchio, sulla sabbia. Appozza le mani sull'acqua, faticosamente, e si lava il viso due tre volte. | Poi alza la faccia, tutta gocciolante, e sempre docile e buono, si guarda intorno come in un sogno. | Ma gli viene un nuovo impeto di rabbia convulsa, una esplosione intrattenibile di nervi: sempre in ginocchio, affonda la faccia nella sabbia nera e sporca, strusciandola rabbiosamente. | La rialza: è un mascherone nero, con la sabbia appiccicata sulla faccia

[4] For an extensive analysis of the different phases, see Blakesley (2009).

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> bagnata, contro le palpebre, il naso, le guance, la fronte, il mento. Non ha più niente di umano. (PC I, p. 103)
> [With sudden meekness, Accattone kneels on the sand. He lays his hands on the water, laboriously, and washes his face two or three times. | Then he raises his face, all dripping, and always docile and meek, looks around as if in a dream.| But he is seized by a new bout of convulsive rage, an unstoppable explosion of the nerves: still on his knees, he sinks his face into the grimy black sand and rubs it in angrily. | He looks up again: a rough black mask, sand sticking to his wet face, to his eyelids, his nose, cheeks, forehead, chin. He has nothing human left]

Arguably, Pasolini's intention is to remove his protagonist from his daily infernal experience (Vittorio's facial expressions are also connoted as "infernali", "l'allegria gli spurge dalla bocca, dagli occhi, infernali" [mirth splurges out his mouth, his hellish eyes] PC I, p. 66) and lead him to a dimension of salvation. We are, thus, far from the infernal characterization of *Ragazzi di vita* that was somehow celebrating the self-contained space of the hellish borgate. By emphasizing the element of sacredness, Pasolini is claiming that they belong to "another" dimension. The verses quoted in the opening titles recall the dispute between the good angel and the bad angel, in which the former takes the soul of Bonconte from the latter. This is precisely what Bonconte's life teaches: although he lived a sinful life, he escaped the eternal damnation of Hell because he shed tears of repentance worth his salvation. Likewise, Pasolini gave Accattone, if not eternal salvation, at least "sacred" human dignity.

There are several signs that associate Accattone's life with Christ's sacrifice: the bridge on the Tiber leads to Castel Sant'Angelo, Renato's prophecy ("Eh! Sei caduto in disgrazia! Ormai chi te salva più! Nemmeno la penicillina!" [Well! You're down on your luck! Who's gonna save you now! Not even penicillin!] and Accattone's answer: "Mbeh, tanto, come dice er Vangelo, è più facile che un cammello passi per la cruna di un ago che un ricco vada in paradiso!" [Well — anyway, like the Gospel says, it's easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to go to heaven!], the ringing of the dead bell when he is going back home, together with Balilla's sign of the cross and the small funeral march, the prophetic dream of his death, the final destination, "Ar Divino Amore", and the final sentence before dying, "Aaah ... Mo' sto bene!" [Aah... I'm all right now]. In this respect, one of the most remarkable examples at the beginning of the film is indeed the frame with Accattone and the marble angel with a cross on the top of the bridge on the Tiber when he is about to dive. Whether the association suggests that Accattone is the "real" angel or it anticipates his salvation, this is one of the signs that contribute to creating the meaning of Accattone's destiny.

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At a stylistic level, the combination of salvation/sacredness of the protagonist is highlighted through the unusual association between the sublime iconography and music employed in the film and the popular environment.[5] Bach's *St Matthew's Passion* (in C minor, baroque pitch) is the most evident reference.[6] Such mingling of styles is recurrent in the most dramatic moments of the film: for example, during Accattone's fight with his brother-in-law in the dusty street,

[5] The association between music and poetry had been previously explored by Pasolini in his early essay "Studi sullo stile di Bach" (1944–45), now in *SLA* I, pp. 77–90. Thanks to his Slovenian friend, violinist Pina Kalc, in those years Pasolini started appreciating Bach's music and exploring its effects in terms of meaning. This study is particularly relevant to understanding how Pasolini combined music and images with a precise poetic intention. Already at this stage he was particularly interested in the battle between body and heaven, human and metaphysical, which music had the power to figure.

[6] Pasolini recalls his discovery of Bach in the following words: "Era soprattutto il 'Siciliano' che mi interessava, perché gli avevo dato un contenuto, e ogni volta che lo riudivo mi metteva, con la sua tenerezza e il suo strazio, davanti a quel contenuto: una lotta cantata impassibilmente tra la Carne e il Cielo, tra alcune note stridule, terse, astratte. Come parteggiavo per la Carne! Come mi sentivo rubare il cuore da quelle sei note, che per un'ingenua sovrapposizione d'immagini, immaginavo cantate da un giovane Siciliano dal petto bronzeo e gaudente. E come invece sentivo di rifiutarmi alle note celesti! È evidente che soffrivo, anche lì, di amore; ma il mio amore trasportato in quell'ordine intellettuale e camuffato da Amore sacro non era meno crudele". [I was most interested in the "Sicilian", because I had given him a content, and each time I heard him again, with his torn-open tenderness, he set me in front of that content: an impassively-sung struggle between Flesh and Heaven, amid some screeching, terse, abstracted notes. How I rooted for the Flesh! How I felt my heart stolen by those six notes, that through a naive overlapping of images I imagined as sung by a young Sicilian with a bronzed, pleasure loving chest. And conversely, how I felt myself shunning the heavenly notes! Evidently, there too, I was suffering from love; but, transported into that intellectual order and camouflaged as sacred Love, my love was not any less cruel]. See Pasolini, *Lettere. 1940–1954*, lx–lxi.

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Maddalena's beating by the Neapolitans, and finally Accattone's escape from the police and his death. Ultimately, in his representation of the "other" in *Accattone*, the mingling of styles is used by Pasolini to create the semiotic connection between the subalterns' exclusion from this world and their salvation. Sacrifice, as a form of resistance, is thus the only strategy able to preserve their difference. And difference is what makes them sacred: it is at once a destiny and a destination.

This aesthetical approach is further explored in *Mamma Roma* (1962), which is, not unexpectedly, dedicated to Pasolini's *master* Roberto Longhi ("cui sono debitore della mia 'folgorazione figurativa'" [to whom I owe my "figurative fulguration"]). *Mamma Roma*, played by Anna Magnani, the figure of the suffering tragic mother par excellence,[7] is the name of a prostitute who is trying to change her life and offer her son Ettore a better existence in the petty bourgeois neighbourhood of Cinecittà. Yet she struggles to get free from her pimp Carmine, so she regularly goes back to prostitution. When Ettore finds out what her mother does for a living, he leaves his job and becomes a thief. He ends up in hospital, where he finally dies. In this final scene, the representation of Ettore's death, the death of a Cristo passerotto as an imitation of Mantegna's *Dead Christ* is an excellent example of Pasolini's creatural realism. Ettore is indeed another *figura Christi*, and his sacrifice is the price to pay for his mother's ambition to enter the INA-casa, the symbol of the emancipation from their subproletarian status. This recalls Tommaso Puzzilli's destiny, rather than Accattone's. Yet again, as we can see in *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*, it is the son who sacrifices himself and dies before his mother — which is precisely what happens in Pasolini's real life.

[7] Pasolini had already anticipated this scenery in one of his poems, "La ricchezza", in *La religione del mio tempo*: "... ecco...la Casilina, | su cui tristemente si aprono | le porte della città di Rossellini ... | ecco l'epico paesaggio neorealista, | coi fili del telegrafo, i selciati, I pini, | I muretti scrostati, la mistica | folla perduta nel daffare quotidiano, | le tetre forme della dominazione nazista ... | Quasi emblema, ormai, l'urlo della Magnani, | sotto le ciocche disordinatamente assolute, | risuona nelle disperate panoramiche, | e nelle sue occhiate vive e mute | si addensa il senso della tragedia." [... here... the Casilina, | over which the doors | of the city of Rossellini sadly open... | here is the epic neorealist landscape, | with its telegraph lines, the paving stones, the pine trees, | the flaking low walls, the mystical | throng lost in its daily business, | the grim forms of the Nazi domination... | Almost an emblem, by now, Magnani's scream, | under her tousled absolute hair, | rings out in the desperate panning shots, | and in the sharp wordless looks she throws | the sense of tragedy is coagulating]. See *TP* (937–38).

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In *La ricotta* (1963), the mingling of styles is developed at a more sophisticated level of intermediality. The Passion is again the main theme of the "film within the film" that a pretentious director, played by Orson Welles, is trying to make on the outskirts of Rome. The main character, Stracci, is instead a poor subproletarian who works as an extra. He desperately tries to get something to eat, but when he eventually finds some ricotta cheese, he eats it too avidly and dies from indigestion, precisely while he is being "crucified" near Jesus. For Pasolini, Stracci is the real Christian, while he clearly condemns the corruption of Italian Roman Catholicism — here represented by the members of the film production team who are more interested in the superficial beauty and frivolous aspects of life. Despite his marginal role in Welles' film, he is in fact the tragic protagonist of Pasolini's comedy. His only concern is to save his lunch, the *ricotta*, for his family and himself, but he will die of indigestion on the cross. His suffering — ignored by anybody on the set, as well as in society — is then elevated to myth.

The Passion is mainly represented at a meta-narrative level by juxtaposing the two classes of the bourgeois and subproletarians for the first time. They both perform it, but in different ways: the former do it through two *tableaux vivants* reproducing Pomtorno's *Deposizione di Cristo* and Rosso Fiorentino's *Passione di Cristo*, and the latter finds his symbol in Stracci's film-in-the-film. In the first case, many disrupting elements (voice, inappropriate music, over-long breaks) interrupt the performance, making it appear ridiculous and meaningless. For example, the cha-cha-cha dance wrongly played in the middle of the sacred representation is significant of an opposite application of the mingling of styles. The rich table set with sophisticated food reinforces a sense of the profane that clashes with what should be the sacred atmosphere of the performance. This suggests that there is no sacredness on the set; the real sacred event is happening at the margins of that representation. Once again, the sacred is "the excluded" from the normative representation. The juxtaposition between the "sacred representation" on the set and the representation of the sacred outside the set (Stracci) suggests the difference Pasolini wanted to highlight between the solemn but empty formalism of Catholicism as an expression of power and the simple sacredness of Stracci.

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The performance of the deposition of Christ is static and not emotionally felt by the actors, suggesting a loop in the narration, as if to reflect the mechanical and repetitive gestures of secularized religiosity. On the contrary, the Passion experienced by Stracci is exhibited in the most sensual way through his suffering body and accompanied by the *Dies Irae*, once again to anticipate Stracci's death. A sort of incommunicability also divides the two classes, indicating that, as Pasolini believed, integration is impossible. Stracci's death is in fact commented upon by a voice in the background with the following words: "Povero Stracci, aveva bisogno di morire per dimostrare che anche lui era vivo!" [Poor Stracci, he needed to die to show that he too was alive!], which underlines that he cannot be integrated in the symbolic order of the society, here represented by the set.



Il Vangelo secondo Matteo (1964) closes this first series of Pasolini's cinema. After this film, Pasolini will move to rather different genres: *Uccellacci e uccellini* [Hawks and Sparrows] (1966), *La terra vista dalla luna* [The Earth Seen from the Moon] (1967), *Edipo Re* [Oedipus Rex] (1967), *Che cosa sono le nuvole*

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[What are Clouds] (1968), *Appunti per un film sull'India* [Notes for a Film on India] (1968), *La sequenza del fiore di carta* [The Paper Flower Sequence] (1969), *Porcile* [Pigsty] (1969), *Medea* [Medea] (1969), *Appunti per un'Orestiade Africana* [Notes for an African Orestes] (1970), *Il Decameron* [The Decameron] (1971), *Le mura di Sana'a* [Sana'a Walls] (1971), *I racconti di Canterbury* [The Canterbury Tales] (1972), *12 dicembre*, [12th December] (1972), *Il fiore delle mille e una notte* [The Arabian Nights] (1974), *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* [Salò or the 120 Days of Sodom] (1975).

Pasolini's Jesus comes as a young leftist revolutionary who attacks hypocrisy and social injustice and defends the humble. He was the most emblematic personification of the unacceptable Real. The identification between Christ's life and his own is quite evident from the choice of characters: Jesus was initially meant to be a poet, and then the role was performed by the Catalan student Enrique Irazoqui; the old Mary was performed by the director's mother, Susanna Pasolini, and many other friends figured as characters. In general, most characters recall Pasolini's poetic and historical world, from the faces of the poor Southerners to the aggressive behaviour of Herod's "fascist" soldiers. As Pasolini states in this respect: "I soldati di Erode come potevo farli? Potevo farli con i baffoni, i denti digrignanti, vestiti di stracci, come i cori dell'opera? No, non li potevo fare così. Li ho vestiti un po' da fascisti e li ho immaginati come delle squadracce fasciste" [Herod's soldiers — how was I going to do them? Was I going to do them with big moustaches, gnashing teeth, ragged clothes, like opera choruses? No, that wouldn't do. I dressed them up sort of like fascists and imagined them as fascist hit-squads].[8]

The text of the Gospel is faithfully reproduced with no additions. Yet Pasolini's style is evident in the choice of the music, actors, and setting, which draw a line of continuity with the previous films, proving that they are fragments of the same narrative. His Jesus reacts to the excessive aestheticism, formalism, and lack of spirituality that were already condemned in the tableaux vivants of *La ricotta*. The first scene opens up with an eclectic soundtrack mingling the joyful piece of the *Glory* of the Congolese Missa Luba, with clear references to Third World instances and its vitality, and Bach's *St Matthew's Passion*, which evokes instead transcendence, death, and a sense of the tragic. The spiritual song *Sometimes I Feel like a Motherless Child*, which highlights the sacredness of Mary and her child, emphasizes the scene when Jesus meets the Three Kings. In order to add to and enrich the atmosphere of sacredness, he creates compound images inspired by art: the first close-up of Mary recalls Dreyer's *La passion de Jean*

[8] For the role of Jesus, Pasolini initially thought of the Russian poet Evtuscenko, then of the Americans of the beat generation, Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, and also the Spanish anti-Franchist Juan Goytisolo, but he eventually chose Enrique Irazoqui, a student who went to meet Pasolini in Rome.

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d'Arc, while the full shot of her reminds us of Piero della Francesca's *La Madonna del parto* (Pasolini, *Le regole di un'illusione* 104).





While Pasolini asks for pity and redemption for his characters — the association of Accattone and Dante's Purgatory is significant here — he does not suggest any social emancipation for them, but rather a celebration of such diversity doomed to remain "excluded" from this world. This is also what distinguishes these films from neorealism: unlike neorealist films, poverty, violence, and misery are not morally condemned, but embraced, as the remaining site of resistance to the bourgeoization of society. While in neorealist films the "excluded" aspired to an honest life which could integrate them into "normal society", Pasolini celebrates the deviation from the norm. The aspect Pasolini focused on was thus compassion for the unjust suffering of his humble characters and their destiny of eternal exclusion and sacrifice. In this sense, the mythical dimension of persecution portrayed in his films after *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (*Medea*, *Edipo Re*) reinstates precisely the regression to a "Dopostoria". The destiny of his characters was doomed to be tragic, and outside history.

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