



The  
Resurrection  
of the  
Body

**PIER PAOLO PASOLINI**

FROM SAINT PAUL TO SADE

ARMANDO MAGGI

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*The University of Chicago Press Chicago and London*

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The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 60637

The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London

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Printed in the United States of America

16 15 14 13 12 11 10 09 1 2 3 4 5

ISBN-13: 978-0-226-50134-5 (cloth)

ISBN-10: 0-226-50134-5 (cloth)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Maggi, Armando.

The resurrection of the body : Pier Paolo Pasolini from Saint Paul to Sade / Armando Maggi.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-226-50134-5 (cloth : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-226-50134-5 (cloth : alk. paper) 1. Pasolini, Pier Paolo, 1922-1975—Criticism and interpretation. I. Title.

PN1998.3.P367M34 2009

858'.91409—dc

2008028193

© The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1992.

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# Acknowledgments

My most sincere thanks to the friends who have read and commented on parts of the manuscript: Rebecca West and Michael Syrimis. Mike rescued me from a tragic but not serious error. Writing on Signora Maggi's tales on the joy of coprophilia in *Salò*, I mistakenly attributed all her embarrassing statements to another of the four storytellers, probably because subconsciously I could not accept that a member of my well-respected family could say those dirty things.

I would like to express my gratitude to those colleagues and friends who provided me with relevant bibliographical references: Paul Lachance, Christopher Lane, Rebecca Arellano, and Victoria Gayle Tillson.

A special thanks to my student Nicholas McMaster, who took my Pasolini class the first time I offered it at the University of Chicago, and to all the students of my most recent Pasolini seminar (academic year 2006–7). It was an unforgettable class, at least for me.

Douglas Mitchell, senior acquisition editor at the University of Chicago Press, believed in this new project of mine, even though it differed from my previous books. My heartfelt thanks to him and to Timothy McGovern, Doug's kind and encouraging assistant.





## Sodom, Its Inhabitants, and Its Language in Pasolini's Final Works

In the heyday of gay and lesbian studies, Jonathan Goldberg edited an important collection of essays, entitled *Reclaiming Sodom* (Routledge, 1994), that loosely revolved around the theme of sodomy. The reference to Sodom as a place that needs to be revisited and appropriated—the original place that witnessed the birth of a paradoxical practice that negates birth—was addressed in Rocky O'Donovan's short piece by the same title, "Reclaiming Sodom." Gay women, O'Donovan writes, have Lesbos, an "actual space which they can dream of and re-create and hope toward."<sup>1</sup> Unlike lesbians, gay men do not have a "space/time to claim as [their] own." One day, O'Donovan continues, he had a sudden insight. He realized that he should consider himself a "Sodomite-American." O'Donovan contends that, as Africa is a mythic birthplace for many black people in the United States, so Sodom is the land of gayness, the place to which gay identity must return to get in touch with its roots. Like Africa, Sodom is at once a place of the past and a utopian land of the future, a land where gay identity creates and recreates itself. "I want to (re)claim Sodom for our own," O'Donovan contends, "so I speak a new myth."<sup>2</sup> But it is worth remembering that Sodom is a burnt-down place, a landscape of desolation. To reclaim Sodom means to visit a desert of ashes.

The people who deny life (to follow the biblical and O'Donovan's "myth") come from a country that has been "denied."

O'Donovan is certainly right when he stresses the importance of identifying and retrieving a mythic place of origin for male homosexuals, an initial "somewhere" that would grant a mythic history to a sexual identity. To go back to O'Donovan's metaphorical and amusing expression "Sodomite-American," this "somewhere" would be the place where gay men's "ancestors" first spoke the idiom of sodomy. O'Donovan, however, seems to opt for an ironic answer. "I like Sodom now," he states in the last paragraph of his essay, "I feel comfortable here. Of course god destroyed it . . . And now Sodom is ours. . . . Let's rebuild there. They always give us wastelands and we always turn them into music and gardens." O'Donovan does not seem to notice the derivative character of his hypothesis. "They" would grant the land on which the new Sodom would arise. O'Donovan must have in mind the gay districts of many American cities, urban "wastelands" that the gay community has appropriated and revitalized. Not a return to or retrieval of the original birthplace, the new Sodom would resemble a Las Vegas casino, a reassuring place of cultural oblivion, a shopping mall where differences go unnoticed because overlooked by ignorance. The paradox of a mythic location of original presence is that it is at once a persistent memory and an urgent project, an obsessive request that comes to us from a past preceding memory. Sodom is a place that cannot be rebuilt or transformed.

To be a sodomite means to stand still (like the angels at the gate of Eden) at the center of an experience of annihilation that has taken place and is about to take place. Read in this manner, the inhabitants of this inhospitable place become the messengers of the end itself. Similar to angelic spokesmen of divine will, the sodomites both recall and announce annihilation. Their presence and their language speak annihilation. It is almost superfluous to remember that, throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, instances of natural devastation were related to the presence of sodomites within the walls of a city. Just a few years ago, the reverend Pat Robertson (whose prophecies about God's present or future vendettas have intensified lately) stated that God would severely punish the city of Orlando, Florida, for having hosted a Gay Pride Parade. A sodomite is the *mythème*, as Levi-Strauss would say, of a reality that is approaching its end.<sup>3</sup>

In *The Letter of Jude* (7), Sodom with its "sexual immorality" that "pursued unnatural lusts, [is] put before us as an example [of] the penalty of eternal fire."<sup>4</sup> Sodom is at once a symbol of a fallen identity and a warning of annihilation. It is unquestionable, however, that Sodom is also

an apocalyptic city, an inhospitable place that shows the signs of its imminent obliteration. According to St. Paul's *Letter to the Romans* (1:24–27), sodomy is not what leads God to abandon the sodomites. On the contrary, sodomy arises as a result of divine abandonment. Speaking of the gentiles, St. Paul holds that since they “exchanged God’s truth for a lie,” “God abandoned them to degrading passions . . . their women have exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural practices; and the men, in a similar fashion, too, giving up normal relations with women, are consumed with passion for each other.”<sup>5</sup> In this instance, sodomy is a mark of abandonment, similar to what we find in the Book of Revelation (16:1–2). According to John, the “people who had been branded with the mark of the beast” received “disgusting and virulent sores” after the first of seven angels carrying seven plagues “emptied his bowl over the earth.”<sup>6</sup> These are the basic terms of this mythic narrative. Sodom is the city of an apocalyptic conclusion, a place whose inhabitants are branded with the mark of abandonment. In St. Paul’s words, intimacy and sexuality are paradoxically the primary signs of the sodomite’s alienation.

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I would like you to approach this book by seeing Pier Paolo Pasolini as the ambassador from this original land of total destruction. We shall see that Sodom and its practice against nature dominate the last phase of Pasolini’s poetics.<sup>7</sup> Sodomy as an agonizing disease that originates in the mind and extends to the body is the central theme of his screenplay *Saint Paul*, which is the topic of the first chapter of this book. In Pasolini’s rendition, Saul’s sexual difference plays a pivotal role in the apostle’s prophetic message. The first part of the scenario *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, which Pasolini wished to turn into a film after *Salò*, takes place first of all in the two damned cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. I discuss *Porn-Theo-Colossal* in the second chapter. The key to understanding Pasolini’s monstrous novel *Petrolio*, the subject of the third chapter, is the concept of “anal birth” as a synonym for “sodomitical birth,” which also governs the unforgettable film *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*, which I examine in the final chapter. I intend this book to be more than a descriptive monograph about a giant of twentieth-century Western culture. Reversing its basic premises, we could say that this work investigates the myth of Sodom through an analysis of the Italian artist’s final creations.

My main approach is a traditional and meticulous close reading, a critical method I have applied in all my previous books. I am not the first to embrace this critical technique. In my view, the best essays on

Pasolini published in the last twenty years or so are close readings of his screenplays and films. In this book, the screenplay *Saint Paul*, the scenario *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, the novel *Petrolio*, and the film *Salò*, are carefully examined also in the light of their multiple sources. As you shall see, the four works analyzed here are strictly connected to one another and obsessively revolve around the problem of sodomy and the sodomitical subject. I hope this book will bring to the fore a different and more compelling image of Pasolini. Here you will rarely read about his Marxism, which may distress some Italian readers used to hearing ad nauseam about Pasolini's criticism of capitalistic consumerism and his faith in some sort of Marxist utopia. The insistence on Pasolini's political prophecies is especially evident in the studies published in Italy, whereas the Anglo-American academy tends to see Pasolini primarily as an original and influential filmmaker who also wrote books. For some scholars less familiar with Italian culture, Pasolini is the author of one and only one film, *Salò*. I do not believe that Pasolini's legacy lies in his troubled Marxist views. Decadence and death are certainly two central points of Pasolini's poetics but, as the great poet and critic Franco Fortini has pointed out before me, they are not correctly expressed through his "fragile" Marxist views.<sup>8</sup> Even his spiels against the decadence of the Italian language and the corruption of modern "humanism" can be easily traced back to the thought of Marcuse and Norman O. Brown. In particular, the concepts expressed in Brown's two major bestsellers *Life against Death* and *Love's Body* are great sources of inspiration for Pasolini, as I show throughout this book. From Brown's *Love's Body* Pasolini derives a crucial insight on the nature of his cinema, which he links to Brown's discourse on the schizophrenic subject. This is explicitly stated in *Petrolio*.

Like his Marxism, Pasolini's view of sexuality is also very questionable and unpersuasive. As I explain in chapter 1, most critics believe that Pasolini tries to make sense of his homosexuality by endorsing a rigorous and now outdated Freudianism, which molds both his political views and his poetics. Freudianism and Marxism were the cultural idioms available at the time, but they certainly do not exhaust the artist's message. A reading of Pasolini's oeuvre that moves beyond the ideological strictures emphasized by the author himself has been the concern of many a critic for a long time. In a short but powerful essay, Nicola Merola had already detailed this critical impasse in 1992.<sup>9</sup> Guido Santato had already spoken of "a critical impasse" in 1983, when he remarked the seeming inability of the contemporary critical readings to transcend the celebratory and hagiographical approaches to Pasolini and return to a

textual analysis of his artistic legacy.<sup>10</sup> In 1992 Merola rightly contended that “critical reservations” and “fanatical” approaches to the “lay saint” Pasolini were still present, although the Italian critic believed that at that time the “less pleasant excesses” from both sides “tend to disappear.”<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, “fanatical” approaches are still a dominant presence in the field of Pasolinian studies.

I believe that Pasolini's lesson lies much less in the details of his failed political analyses than in his open hatred of all forms of social, political, and intellectual conformity. The core of Pasolini's poetics is his relentless opposition to conformity, because he rightly contends that conformity identifies with social and cultural oppression, intellectual death, and violence. Pasolini's works teach us a method of reading reality, not a set of historical beliefs. Pasolini understood that no political or intellectual attitude, no academic discipline, no religious belief is inherently free from the blindness of conformity. In a recent article in the *New York Review of Books*, Nathaniel Rich persuasively claims that, rather than his moot Marxist utopia, Pasolini's “refusals” are his true and unique legacy: “Pasolini stood against . . . political ideologies of all kinds, the complacency inherent in the established social order, the corruption of the institutions of church and state. . . . It is refusals that animate his legacy with an incandescent rage.”<sup>12</sup>

New and original studies that focus less on the trite reiteration of the same handful of concepts have been published with greater frequency for more than ten years now. See, for instance, the three fascinating books written by his friend Giuseppe Zigaina (recently republished in one volume called *Hostia*), who contends that Pasolini carefully planned and acted out his death as self-sacrifice in a sort of Christlike ritual. My approach to Pasolini considers both his unquestionable death drive and his sexuality, which acquires an unmistakably apocalyptic tone in the conclusive part of his oeuvre. The theme of homosexuality of course runs through the entire corpus of Pasolini's production. At the end of his life, however, sodomy becomes something else, as I intend to show. A grossly partial interpretation might point to Pasolini's new rapport with his sexual partners, the underprivileged men from the *borgate*, a loose term indicating the poor and usually post-war areas of Rome. I use the word *borgate* throughout the book because, as John David Rhodes rightly states, “the term *borgata* does not have an exact equivalent in English. Dictionary translations usually offer something to the effect of ‘working-class suburb.’ The term, pejoratively derived from the term *borgo*, which simply means ‘district’ or ‘neighborhood,’ was coined as an official term by the Fascists. . . . When one thinks of unofficial *borgate*, images of abject,

crudely made, single-story houses come to mind. . . . Official borgate, on the other hand, are those large housing projects built during Fascism."<sup>13</sup> The men of the Roman borgate, in Pasolini's view, are not what they "used to be." One could say that Pasolini's concept of a sodomite has changed because the heterosexual men he has sex with have changed. The Italian poet attributes this radical metamorphosis to two important cultural events: first, the "economic boom," as it is usually called, that transformed Italy into a modern, capitalistic society and corrupted the "pure" and mythic men of the borgate with its perverse consumerist values; and, second, the "sexual revolution," which modified the sexual relationship between the two genders. According to Pasolini, Sodom, the mythic name of a corrupted and apocalyptic society, is also the symbol of modernity.

In order to grasp the basic premises of Pasolini's apocalypticism, we must consider two fundamental referential points of his poetics: Mircea Eliade's seminal works on myth and Ernesto de Martino's groundbreaking analyses of religious beliefs and practices primarily, but not exclusively, in Southern Italy. The juxtaposition of Eliade and de Martino (1908–65), the great Italian ethnographer and student of religion, is of particular importance also because de Martino convincingly criticizes Eliade's view of the sacred and the numinous. In an essay against the sterility of Italian bourgeois culture, Pasolini accuses the Italian intellectuals of being detached from "popular culture." "No wonder they don't know de Martino," Pasolini states.<sup>14</sup> For him, de Martino symbolizes a unique kind of intellectual, whose groundbreaking work is founded on the study of premodern cultures, not on bourgeois abstractions. Notwithstanding his great respect for the Italian ethnographer, we will see in a moment that Pasolini misrepresents his basic ideas. Eliade is a much more suitable point of reference for him.

A key concept of Eliade's thought is the emphasis on the significant contrast between history, which dominates modernity, and metahistory, which in his view is the core of the pre-modern mind. In *The Sacred and the Profane*, a crucial book for Pasolini, Eliade underscores that "the religious man"—meaning the "primitive" in the broadest sense of the word—"lives in two kinds of times, of which the more important, sacred time, appears under the paradoxical aspect of a circular time, reversible and recoverable, a sort of eternal mythical present that is periodically reintegrated by means of rites."<sup>15</sup> According to Eliade, "religious man assumes a humanity that has a transhuman, transcendental model."<sup>16</sup> In *La fine del mondo* (The end of the world), de Martino's vast and complex examination of the concept of the Apocalypse and the summa of his

thought, the Italian scholar attacks Eliade's view of the "religious man." In de Martino's words:

To say that a primitive regards as significant only those events that have a meta-historical (mythic) model, and that for a primitive an event is insignificant if it lacks a mythic antecedent amounts to saying that things are like that because they are like that. It means to describe a primitive conscience in its limitations. . . . A basic humanistic conscience . . . is present in every man regardless of its limits. A humanistic conscience is the recognition of a sphere of actions that depend on man, that is, it is the awareness that if a man does not take the initiative, does not elaborate certain techniques . . . he will not attain certain results.<sup>17</sup>

Human beings, de Martino writes in *Furore simbolo valore*, constantly "detach themselves from situations"; they "are constantly asked to transcend passing situations."<sup>18</sup> In *La fine del mondo*, the "situations" from which man detaches himself are defined as "nature": "The historical-cultural detaching oneself from nature, one's being always immersed in this process of detachment, founds natural 'things.'"<sup>19</sup> This unavoidable act of "detaching oneself" from nature accompanies man's permanent feeling of "risk," of a possible loss of presence. De Martino's emphasis on the "humanistic conscience" present in every human being is at odds with Pasolini's belief in a sharp dichotomy between the "then" of a premodern condition and the "now" of a post-history, which he envisions as a free falling from grace (capitalism; bourgeois culture).<sup>20</sup> Pasolini tends to undervalue the importance of "conscience" in his praise of the "primitives" (the men of the Roman borgate and, more generally, all those populations living in premodern societies), since for him "conscience" is a synonym for bourgeois "conscience," which is irredeemably detached from the sacred.

Pasolini dramatizes his view of the modern, bourgeois man's "detachment" from nature in the screenplay *Il padre selvaggio* (The savage father, 1962). Again, for him only the bourgeois "detaches himself" from nature. The primitive lives in perfect harmony with nature. This screenplay presents the case of an African youth, Davidson, who after being intellectually seduced by his European teacher, who brings with him a small library of European books, suddenly "sees for the first time the forest of his native village, which he had certainly seen many times during his childhood."<sup>21</sup> This unexpected revelation identifies with a new sight, as if the young student now saw his native landscape through the eyes of a European traveler who was seeing the beauty of that sunshiny forest for the first time. Davidson has acquired a sight that "detaches" him



from his own land, since “before” he identified with that landscape and therefore did not have the critical distance necessary “to see” it. This unexpected revelation accompanies the young man through a painful process of initiation that eventually turns him into an intellectual and poet.

Pasolini is deeply fascinated by Eliade’s “religious man,” who constantly reads the events produced in reality as *hierophanies*, that is, divine disclosures. In this regard, it is extremely revealing how Pasolini misinterprets, in my view, de Martino’s interpretation of the sacred. In his bestseller *Sud e magia* (South and magic, 1959), de Martino offers a very different interpretation of the relationship between history and metahistory in a premodern society as he could find in southern Italy. De Martino does not oppose premodern and modern conscience. He contends that all human beings perceive an unsettling “risk” of “losing one’s own presence” in the world, with the subsequent “experience of being acted upon” (*l’esperienza di essere agito da*).<sup>22</sup> This “feeling of void” derives from the human being’s deep-seated awareness of a possible, pending loss of active presence within his or her society. At a personal level, this “void” can lead to schizophrenia, as it does in the main character of Pasolini’s *Petrolio*. According to de Martino, to deemphasize history in favor of a metahistorical view of reality (what exists only exists as a function of a past mythic event) serves to create “a protected regime of existence.”<sup>23</sup> The “agony of our present time,” de Martino holds, lies in the contemporary crisis of the sacred as a protective system against the perils of history.<sup>24</sup> The problem is that in our industrialized society we struggle “to transcend the technical valorization of the world.”<sup>25</sup> Pasolini appropriates and, in my view, rephrases de Martino’s ideas in a slightly incorrect manner. In an article on the use of drugs primarily among young people in modern societies, Pasolini quotes de Martino’s expression “fear of losing one’s own presence” but distinguishes between the primitive’s “alienation due to nature’s conditioning” and the modern’s “alienation due to society’s conditioning.”<sup>26</sup> Pasolini opposes a man living according to nature and its “risks” to a man bound by the unnatural laws of modernity. In reality, de Martino does not envision two sorts of alienations but two ways of responding to the same existential challenge. For de Martino, the perception of the “void” threatening the subject is the same in the primitive and in the modern man. What differs is how they cope with this threat. De Martino speaks of “the agony” of our present times because modernity seems to be losing both myth and the sacred as ways to transcend the “void” of history. The new challenge, de Martino contends, is to find

new coping mechanisms, so to speak, not to mourn the irretrievable loss of magic and the sacred, as Pasolini instead reiterates throughout his oeuvre.

This brief reference to the debate between Eliade and de Martino and Pasolini's subsequent distortion of de Martino's position helps us clarify a central point of the Italian intellectual's ideology. For Pasolini, there is an almost ontological dichotomy between those who live according to "nature" and those who live according to modernity. The primitive and the modern man cannot, in Pasolini's view, harbor an identical ontological "void" at the core of their identity. The bourgeoisie, thinks Pasolini, is the manifestation of that fall from nature that occurred with the rise of industrialization. The bourgeois is intrinsically evil and unable to perceive the sacred. In Pasolini's view, by analogy, what is *pre-* (premodern, pre-history, pre-Fall) also coincides with the personal origins of every human being, that is, *pre-* is for Pasolini the time of the mother, the time that precedes the birth of intellectual consciousness and emotional independence from the mother.<sup>27</sup> Mother equals nature, and both concepts signify a past time before the subject's (Adam's) perception of his nakedness, according to Genesis.

In the first phase of his poetics, Pasolini considered the men of the Roman borgate as spokesmen of that mythic, before-the-fall and thus pre-historical society dominated by Mother Nature. By loving them, Pasolini honored the land and the atemporal time of the mother, a time of brotherly (sexual) solidarity and lack of sinful consciousness. These men were the sons of the mother, whose society preceded the fall of modernity. Untainted by middle-class education and values, these men used to walk the earth like the "sons of God" in chapter 6 of Genesis, who saw that the women were beautiful and mated with them. The sodomite Pasolini saw himself invested with a double role. In his view, the sodomite first of all manifests and speaks of the fall of time. The sodomite's very existence proves that we live at the end of time. Similar to an Old Testament prophet, the sodomite recognizes the signs of the end of time and announces it to all of humanity. Second, in his alienation from society the sodomite is free to worship the name of the mother by giving himself to the "real" and pure men of the borgate, whose mythic nature the sodomite is able to see thanks to his difference and alienation from the rest of (capitalistic) society.

It is essential to understand that Pasolini used to idealize these men also because, in his view, their poverty, their living at the margins of society, reflected his, the sodomite's, alienation. Although the pure and natural men of the borgate could not and were not supposed to have

feelings for the sodomite, their similar condition allowed some form of secret and intuitive bonding. Seeing himself as a creature against nature, the sodomite agreed to serve the natural and pure man of the borgate by offering him sexual pleasure as a pseudo-woman and money, when and if this natural and pure man needed them. The sodomite played the role of the woman before the real man could marry his fiancée and enter the sacred and traditional institution of marriage, which Pasolini beautifully stages at the end of his documentary on Italians' sex habits called *Comizi d'amore* (Love meetings). In Pasolini's view, the sodomite, a freak whose perversion also lies in his having failed to solve his Freudian Oedipus complex, used to support the maternal order by loving the pure and natural men of the borgate, the sons of the mother. The sodomite's exile from the mother's land is at once betrayal (the sodomite son engages in unnatural sexual acts) and expulsion (the mother expels the corrupted son from her garden of Eden).

In his well-known essay "Abjuration of the *Trilogy of Life*," Pasolini contends that at the end of the sixties Italy underwent a dramatic shift, which he defines as the triumph of "the unreality of mass culture." He believes that "then . . . the last bulwark of reality seemed to be 'the innocent' bodies with the archaic and dark violence of their sexual organs." He had tried to convey his view of this alleged "archaic" physicality in his successful trilogy of films *Decameron*, *Canterbury Tales*, and *Arabian Nights*, but "now" he realizes that his exaltation of these "archaic" people (the men of the Roman borgate; the populations of Northern Africa; etc.) was nothing but an idealization. According to Pasolini, the poor men living at the outskirts of modern cities are "human trash" (*spazzatura umana*). We could say that Pasolini knew these "archaic" people neither "then" nor "now." He used them to give life to his apocalypticism without having real contact with those people, who in less than a decade went from being archaic representatives of a mythic condition to being "human trash." Pasolini's incensed and disparaging comments come from his own inability to establish a real rapport with these people, whom he reads through the lenses of his ideology. "The collapse of the present," Pasolini concludes, "implies the collapse of the past." The essential problem of Pasolini's bleak view of the present derives from his sense of himself as a man who has lost a social identity that "before" presented him as a prophet of doom, but who "now" sees himself deprived of every referential point. In the same essay, he also points out that the so-called new sexual freedom has caused a "trauma" to those individuals who, like him, lead a "private" sexual life.<sup>28</sup> The sodomite's pristine, sacred role is now shattered.

This brief introduction opened with a reference to Paul and Sodom. The myth of Sodom is the central topic of the second chapter (the scenario *Porn-Theo-Colossal*) and St. Paul, his epistles, and the Acts of the Apostles are the theme of the first chapter on the screenplay *Saint Paul*, which never became a film. This film project is an "allegorical" interpretation of the apostle's life and legacy, as Pasolini notes at the beginning of his script. By "allegorical," he means that the film would transfer the events of Paul's biography to our modern times, as if Paul were alive and active now. In the film, for example, New York would stand for ancient Rome, and modern Rome would represent ancient Athens. In this film project, the scene of the apostle's martyrdom would be shot in the same location where Martin Luther King Jr. met his violent death. Whereas the film sets would be the streets and squares of our contemporary Western cities, the actor playing Paul would speak only through literal quotations from the Pauline letters, although a close analysis shows that Pasolini actually manipulates the apostle's first-person statements through an astute editorial process. The contrast between modern sets (Paris, Rome, New York, etc.) and Paul's ancient words would manifest the sacred "otherness" of the apostle's message.

According to Pasolini's interpretation, Paul of Tarsus is a divided and contradictory figure. Pasolini presents the apostle as the founder of a new repressive Law and a closeted homosexual who becomes sick with a devastating and mysterious disease when he first senses his homoerotic desire. The title of this book, *The Resurrection of the Body*, alludes to a famous passage from St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (15:42–44), which Pasolini faithfully transcribes in the screenplay of his failed "theological film," *Saint Paul*. In this apocalyptic text, Paul speaks of the new "flesh" that human beings will acquire at the end of time. Pasolini imagines that the apostle delivers a speech to the poor who live at the outskirts of Rome, which, in his "allegorical" transformation, represents ancient Athens. What becomes apparent from reading Pasolini's *Saint Paul* is that, according to the Italian artist, Paul himself is the "flesh" that needs to die and resurrect. Paul's body suffers from an unspecified and excruciating disease directly linked to his homosexuality. It is evident that the apostle himself, like the sodomites in Paul's Letter to the Romans, announces the annihilation that will occur at the end of time. As we will see in chapter 1, Paul's violent death ends with a literal, visible purification of his shed blood.

In Pasolini's screenplay, the apostle Paul is the sodomite whose primary role in society is to speak annihilation. Paul's apocalyptic message

is in direct contrast with his febrile effort to construct a new religious repression. In *Saint Paul*, the apostle experiences his private recognition of his homosexual desire as a mystical insight. We could say that Paul lives his homosexuality as the apprehension of a new idiom that in actuality has been lying dormant inside of him. This idiom translates into a physical disease that contradicts his other language of law and domination (the creation of the Church as a repressive order). Homosexuality, we could infer, is a language that undoes its speaker. Pasolini's Saint Paul paradoxically envisions the new "flesh" arising at the end of time as "the flesh that dies." The apocalyptic flesh theorized by Pasolini's St. Paul is a physical presence (Paul's flesh) whose primary and exclusive idiom is death. This is the sodomitical flesh (the flesh of those who practice death), as the apostle emphasizes in his *Letter to the Romans*.

As I said earlier, the four works analyzed in this book are four facets of the same poetics. In the scenario *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, which Pasolini intended to film right after *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*, the city of Sodom is the first stop in a Magus's Christmas journey to the baby Jesus. This text underwent a series of radical modifications. Originally, it was supposed to be a sort of sequel to Pasolini's *Hawks and Sparrows* (Uccellacci e uccellini). This new film would retain the picaresque structure of the previous film and the same two protagonists, the comic actor Totò and Pasolini's beloved Ninetto Davoli. Because of Totò's premature death, however, this project acquired a radically new meaning and a new lead. The great Neapolitan playwright and actor Eduardo de Filippo became the protagonist of Pasolini's Christmas story. De Filippo, one of the most famous Italian playwrights of the twentieth century but almost unknown in the United States, is the author of a Christmas drama, *Natale in casa Cupiello* (Christmas at the Cupiellos' [1931]) whose central message is reflected in Pasolini's scenario. As far as I know, this crucial connection has never been noted before. Both texts revolve around the concept of decadence and death, and the destruction of the pristine family values suffocated by contemporary culture. In both texts Eduardo de Filippo, who played the lead in his own drama throughout his life, is an old, poor, but dignified man who is alienated from modern society. Both Eduardo's play and Pasolini's scenario take place at Christmas time. In both works, Eduardo expresses a sincere and melancholic attachment to the Nativity Scene, which for him represents the safety of long-established beliefs. In *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, Eduardo leaves Naples to follow the comet that leads the shepherds to the manger. His servant Ninetto follows him in his religious quest.

Both *Christmas at the Cupiello's* and *Porn-Theo-Colossal* end with Eduardo's death. In the play, Eduardo has a stroke when he realizes that his daughter has left her husband and his son is nothing but a petty thief. In Pasolini's scenario, Eduardo embarks on a journey that first takes him to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and ends in the Iraqi desert, where the pilgrim learns that Jesus was born and died a long time ago. Moreover, a fellow Neapolitan steals Eduardo's gift for the baby Jesus, a little mechanical Nativity Scene. As in the play, a profound sense of loss causes Eduardo's death. Accompanied by his servant Ninetto, who turns out to be an angel, Eduardo comes out of his dead body and ascends to heaven, which is essentially an undefined void, an unspecified empty place outside of the world. From this non-place, the two spiritual beings hear the chants of an approaching revolution. What kind of revolution? The text does not offer a clear answer. The entire scenario seems to lack closure. What we do know is that this revolution occurs after the death of the Magus Eduardo. The revolution is unmistakably linked to the man's death due to an unbearable suffering (the death of Jesus; the loss of the Nativity Scene).

The conflation of two distinct temporal moments in the history of divine revelation constitutes a significant aspect of the scenario. The comet announces the Savior's birth when Sodom and Gomorrah are about to be destroyed. Genesis and the Gospel turn into the opening chapter and the conclusion of a new biblical narration. It is impossible not to remark Pasolini's puzzling identification of the erasure of Sodom and the disclosure of God's final message of redemption through his Son's death and resurrection. Pasolini posits an unquestionable mirroring between the sodomites' death and Christ's. In *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, however, the Savior is nowhere to be found, and his death seems to exert no influence on the creation. The Neapolitan pilgrim's resurrection and not the Savior's is the last step in the human process of ascension from the decadence of the flesh to the eternity of a spiritual condition. The pivotal point of this text is the opposition between the present of the fallen flesh (the sodomites and their cities exist now) and the imminent present of a cleansing of the flesh (the Neapolitan pilgrim becomes some sort of angel). What matters here is less the resurrection per se than the tension between the sodomitical flesh and its annihilation.

The revolution evoked at the end of *Porn-Theo-Colossal* is the resurrection of "the flesh that dies," a sort of living dead (the deceased Eduardo takes a break in his flight into nothingness because he needs to pee). The elderly pilgrim attains his end, his death and metamorphosis, as the

retrieval of an original, before-the-fall condition, a status of living nonexistence in a void somewhere outside the world. Eduardo passes through the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah the day before their destruction as if this Neapolitan gentleman, like an angel of the Apocalypse, announced their final erasure. Eduardo perfectly embodies the Pasolinian subject in that his journey toward his death and resurrection coincides with the announcement of the end. In this regard, like the sodomites, Eduardo evokes an imminent end and embodies that end itself.

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If *Porn-Theo-Colossal* and *Saint Paul* focus on an apocalyptic death and rebirth of the flesh, the vast and erratic novel *Petrolio* and the scandalous film *Salò* tackle the theme of birth in its poetic, social, and sexual connotations: as a new artistic form; as the idiom of a new societal order; and as the result of sodomitical intercourse. These three apparently unrelated meanings of the term *birth* are in reality three facets of the same apocalyptic condition. In these two works, birth is a synonym for Apocalypse, in that Pasolini's concept of birth concerns the outcome of a new human condition resulting from the new capitalistic order. In *Petrolio*, birth is first the birth of a new "form," as Pasolini explains at the beginning of the novel. Pasolini underscores that *Petrolio* is his attempt to create a new form and not to recount a story. *Petrolio* relates innumerable journeys (for instance, through the netherworld; through the lands described in *Argonautika* and the mythic retellings of Alexander the Great's heroic adventures; through modern Iraq and other Arab countries) and physical metamorphoses (two men who transform into something that resembles two women, or two homosexual men with female organs, or who are simply very passive and effeminate; a businessman whose feces whine like a baby), but its goal is not the unfolding of a plot but the construction of a "form" through a narrative mosaic. Pasolini explains that *Petrolio* is similar to Henri Michaux's texts made of nonalphabetic signs. We could say that Pasolini envisions *Petrolio* as a new organism (a new form) "that speaks but doesn't have anything to say." This paradoxical birth has the form of a journey, of a perennial dying and separation, of a perennial announcing of the Apocalypse.

"Anal birth" is the most appropriate name for this paradoxical form, as my analysis will show. Interpreting a basic tenet of Freudian psychoanalysis, Pasolini intends "anal birth" both as fetus and as feces. If the sodomitical subject embodies death and speaks death, an "anal fetus" comes to the world as a living product of an intercourse "against nature."

The very foundation of *Petrolino* lies on this concept of “form” (literary form; offspring) as “anal birth.” Not only does the Italian author make an explicit reference to the “whining turd” in a key passage of the book, he constructs the entire novel as a modern descent to a “shitty” netherworld that constitutes the land of the mother. The basic inspiration of Pasolini’s hell is not so much Dante’s *Comedy* as Strindberg’s autobiographical novel *Inferno*, in which the Swedish playwright and novelist mentions that, according to the mystic Swedenborg, hell is a place where everything turns into shit. According to Swedenborg, a damned soul at first does not realize that he or she is in hell because everything looks normal and familiar, but slowly the entire landscape reveals itself to be an immense swamp of feces. Furthermore, in Pasolini’s new version of hell, Virgil acquires the traits of a sub-proletarian young man whose name is “The Shit.” This young and indigent man, who belongs to the social class Pasolini used to idealize, is the offspring of our contemporary capitalistic order. He resembles a turd because, like a turd, he is produced, used, and discarded by capitalism. As I show in detail in chapter 3, The Shit is also a quotation from Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, where we read of a strange population whose babies smell like shit. Swift’s masterpiece is one of the numerous books a leftist intellectual, one of the fleeting characters of *Petrolino*, inadvertently leaves on a train. In my reading of *Petrolino*, I try to determine how Pasolini appropriates and even quotes from these innumerable books without acknowledging them explicitly. I do not limit myself to alluding to them in passing; I investigate the relationship between the referential texts (the leftist intellectual’s books left on the train) and Pasolini’s novel.

“Anal birth” is also the name of a new apocalyptic regeneration, of a new “form.” As I mentioned in the previous paragraph, Pasolini’s netherworld derives from Swedenborg’s hell made of shit, as Strindberg says in *Inferno*. Pasolini makes clear, however, that hell is not just a lump of feces, it is also the realm of the mother. Whereas she was originally the ruler of an archaic land of purity and sexual normalcy, the mother has now turned into the queen of the “shit land.” Although her residence has changed, the mother still exerts a fundamental influence over the sodomite son. Whereas the sons of the mother (the poor heterosexual men from the borgate) have metamorphosed into The Shit, the sodomite son is still the spokesman of the mother. If before the mother compelled the sodomitical poet (the son expelled from her land of purity) to sing the distance between the now and the then of her mythic land, she now orders him to mourn the perennial death that lives in her shit hell. Pasolini’s “anal” form (a form that speaks but says nothing; a form that



only speaks distance and exile; a paradoxical form that, like feces, recalls a living fetus and is something to be discarded) celebrates the void that reigns in the world abandoned by the mother. The mother indeed expresses a paradoxical order: to express her absence. The mother's shit hell is the here and now of her death.

I would like to emphasize that, as my close analysis of *Petrolio* shows, this scatological element is more than a repulsive metaphor for our modern capitalistic society. "Shit" is the synonym for a new literary expression. It does more than indicate Pasolini's disappointment with the possibly revolutionary power of literature and cinema. Pasolini's new form is the idiom of death. It is the language of a post-mortem condition. This is why Pasolini compares his form to Michaux's texts written with nonalphabetic characters. Pasolini's new form is meant to give birth to a perennial and living death. A "turd," like Michaux's evocative signs, has somehow the form of a living and screaming little baby. A turd lives as an echo of a living organism, although it "comes to life" as something to be discarded. This contradiction is the core of Pasolini's form.

The birth of a sterile form (feces) that recalls a living form (fetus) serves as the conceptual key with which to decode not only Pasolini's final literary monster (*Petrolio*) but also his last repulsive film *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*. In a one-sentence fragment of *Petrolio*, Pasolini writes, "At the end of the reception, quote sentence of a schizophrenic patient (Róheim cited by Brown)." Placed in a pivotal moment of the novel, this laconic reference to *Love's Body* is actually a compelling synthesis of Pasolini's final view of literature and cinema. In *Love's Body*, Norman O. Brown discusses a passage from Róheim's *Magic and Schizophrenia*, where the famous psychoanalyst reports the story of one of his American schizophrenic patients, who held that reality was "like a diluted reel of film in my brain." In other words, for this young man reality is a movie projected on the inner wall of his mind. For this patient, reality becomes real when its external images become internal projections, as if the patient were sitting in a movie theater and enjoying a private film recounting his (present) life. A schizophrenic's existence is at once past and fictional (a reassuring invention distant from its viewer) and the present appropriation of one's own life, which is however taking place somewhere "out there." Like Pasolini's new concept of a form that is a sterile reminder of a living organism, the schizophrenic's "diluted reel of film" in Róheim's and Brown's books touches upon the core of Pasolini's vision of cinema. Like *Petrolio* and the schizophrenic's experience of reality, *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* summons a close narrative space (a

"form") in which what looks real and external is in actuality the private experience of an eternal deprivation and abuse.

My study of *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* brings to the fore the direct and indirect connections with Sade's novel. As far as I know, *Salò* is usually compared to Sade's *The 120 Days of Sodom* in a broad, general manner. I offer a detailed close reading of both works and attempt to reveal subtler, less visible and obvious connections. This final chapter shows that both Sade and Pasolini constantly allude to the themes of motherhood and anal birth. Like the previous three chapters, my analysis of *Salò* is a meticulous close reading of the film, which I interpret in the light of the Marquis de Sade's novel. Pasolini borrows from Sade the hatred of nature and its productions and, like the marquis, directly links nature to the mother. Both authors compose a text founded on the defilement of the mother. The shit scenes in *Salò* are probably the most notorious and disturbing of the entire film. The allusions to shit and the mother, however, go beyond a few well-known images. If we read Pasolini's film carefully, we see that *Salò* echoes Sade's explicit references to motherhood through an astute manipulation of his narrative. For example, in Sade's novel, we encounter Constance, a beautiful, pregnant woman who dares to defy the libertines' violent order. She is the last victim to be slaughtered in a highly theatrical ritual at the very end of the novel. Her dead fetus extracted from her belly symbolizes the libertines' symbolic victory over Mother Nature.

Pasolini identifies the two main female characters in Sade's novel who are linked to the concept of motherhood: Constance, the pregnant young woman, and Sophie, whose mother died in the attempt to save her from the libertines. Pasolini turns these two female characters into one female victim, Renata. We all remember the scene in which Renata is forced to scoop up a libertine's feces from the floor. In Sade's novel, it is the pregnant Constance who has to go through the same ordeal. But Renata is also Sophie, the girl who mourns her dead mother throughout the film. At the end of the film Renata, like a second Christ, is tied to the ground between two young men in the center of the courtyard that has become a temporary torture chamber.

The final chapter of this book is a close reading of Mario Mieli's *Elementi di critica omosessuale* (Elements of homosexual criticism; published in English as *Gay Liberation*). Mieli published his book two years after Pasolini's death (1977). Pasolini and Mieli share some basic sources, primarily Norman O. Brown and Marcuse, as well as some fundamental philosophical concerns. What I find extremely fascinating is the unques-

tionable resonance between this early example of a queer studies manual and Pasolini's final poetics. Like Pasolini, Mieli advocates a radical renewal of the body. He envisions a future society based on transsexuality, which he intends as a successful overcoming of every possible sexual barrier (not the transformation from one sex to the other through surgery). The new human being of Mieli's utopia will be pansexual, which does not mean bisexual, because for Mieli bisexuality is a hypocritical form of sexual conformity. Mieli's manifesto contends that this sexual liberation will also lead to a social revolution, a new way of seeing human relationships and political interactions. Although Pasolini and Mieli respond to the same utopian culture, they end up formulating radically different views of this apocalyptic renewal. For the young and naive Mieli, the future transsexuality will lead to a new form of humanity of the kind he (and Pasolini) finds in Norman O. Brown's *Love's Body*. Mieli sees the signs of this forthcoming transformation in his own flesh, which is the most compelling aspect of his book. Mieli was at times a transvestite who had sex with heterosexual men.

In *Petrolino*, Pasolini describes some sort of transsexual transformation in the two main characters by the same name, Carlo, who both turn into something like a homosexual man-woman who has sex as a passive homosexual man and as a woman. But in Pasolini this polymorphic sexual body is another expression of that "form" that points to the present void left by the mother. Pasolini's transsexual characters echo the "form" of the novel, an idiom that speaks a form of death. This, I believe, is the core of Pasolini's final message.

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I would like to add a few final remarks concerning the structure of the four chapters and the relationship between this new book and my previous publications on Renaissance spirituality. Given the length and complexity of the four sections of this book, I thought a clear and succinct outline at the beginning of each chapter would serve as a useful tour guide for the reader. Moreover, each chapter contains several subheads that signal and explain a new thematic segment.

Finally, I would like to explain the connection between my interest in Renaissance mysticism, Neo-Platonism, demonology, and this new study of Pasolini's last works. In my two books on demonology and spiritual beings in early modern culture published by the University of Chicago Press (*Satan's Rhetoric* [2001] and *In the Company of Demons* [2006]), I intended to show that the study of demonic presences and possession,

a central issue of Renaissance culture, necessitated a shift from its external conditions (historical, sociological, social, cultural, etc.) toward its inner workings, so to speak. In other words, I explained demonology as a densely philosophical, scientific, and theological system that can be understood fully only if we investigate how it functions in the recesses of the mind, or better yet, of the brain, at the boundary between the conscious and the subconscious. This liminal area of the mind between sleep and consciousness is where the battle between good and evil takes place.

To a certain extent, it seems that, unlike any other artist, Pasolini holds no secrets. Take for instance his film *Salò*. It is not uncommon to read that *Salò* does not hide anything. What *Salò* has to say is evident and totally visible. Like a porn flick, *Salò* exposes its message to a frontal, unambiguous view. We would then be dealing with a work of art that, unlike any other in the history of mankind, is only its official, external message. And in case you have never heard this before, *Salò* is about the corruption of capitalism. The victims are commodities. The scenes about feces would signify the circularity of consumerism. Pasolini, the most outspoken enemy of every form of conformity, has generated a widespread intellectual conformity. Pasolini knew well that conformity is a disease that mutates constantly. It seems to me that Pasolini has become a victim of his own anticonformity.

My study is an attempt to shift the focus from Pasolini's political presence to the "inner workings" of his texts and films. My detailed close reading of *Salò's* relationship with its Sadean referential text shows that, far from being an obvious film, the Italian film harbors a complexity that has been grossly overlooked. The interior landscape of Pasolini's poetics does not coincide with his well-known political assertions. This does not necessarily mean that to examine Pasolini's politics is wrong. It only means that his views of social issues and psychoanalysis certainly do not exhaust the poet's discourse. I could simply rephrase this point by saying that my study does not try to see how Pasolini's art reflects his political persona. This is what many, and very sophisticated, analyses have already accomplished. My book is a traditional textual analysis that is not guided by the artist's beliefs and statements but by the inner structure of the texts themselves. I think it is time to turn down the volume of Pasolini's loud political sermons and to listen to what is whispered in his works.

My focus on his last works also responds to my keen interest in the relationship between religion and literature. The final phase of Pasolini's oeuvre is intensely religious. We will see that the apostle Paul is a recurrent figure in the filmmaker's last essays and fictional texts. The sacred,

also in its sexual expressions, becomes the center of Pasolini's poetics, much more than in the previous stages of his art. *Petrolio*, for instance, has often the feverish and hallucinatory character of a religious insight. *Salò* is also a ritual that in some scenes acquires explicit sacred connotations. To conclude, as my previous books investigated the inner workings of a mind in dialogue with the demonic, this new book on Pasolini investigates the internal logic of his artistic expression.



## A Body of Nostalgia: Pasolini's Self-Portrait in the Film Project *Saint Paul*

*A basic concept of Pasolini's poetics is analogy, which he sees as a paradoxical rhetorical device that includes both similarity and opposition. The reader should keep this essential point in mind while reading this chapter. For Pasolini, opposition is also analogical in that it creates a connection between two entities by highlighting their stark contrasts. This view of analogy has a broad, multifaceted application in Saint Paul, Pasolini's film project on the life and message of the apostle Paul. A first application of analogy is the transposition of Paul's life to our modern times. Through a close reading of the text, we bring to the fore the meanings of the diverse forms of analogical expression present in Saint Paul. But an even more interesting analogical level is detectable in the ideological similarities the poet sees between the apostle and himself. Both the Italian poet and the apostle are figures carrying an apocalyptic message. Saint Paul is a double biography, of Paul the apostle and of Pier Paolo the artist. Moreover, Pasolini contends that Paul is a divided figure, a figure of internal oppositions. Paul is both a priest, that is, the founder of a repressive institution (the Church), and a prophet who announces the apocalyptic end of that institution. For Pasolini, analogical is also the apostle and the poet's view of time and the sacred. In Pasolini's interpretation, the apostle lived in a historical era split between the past of Jesus' sacred time, and the present dominated by a longing for that original manifestation of the sacred. Rather than interpreting Paul's life as a continuation of divine revelation, Pasolini sees it as the first awareness of a fall from an original grace (the sacred embodied by Jesus' time). In Pasolini's view, however, Paul spoke sacred words in that Jesus' sacred message was still understandable and Paul served as echo of that pristine sacred idiom. Pasolini believes that in our present times Paul's statements have lost their sacredness because modernity cannot understand the longing that characterized the apostle's message. For Pasolini, today to yearn for the sacred means to yearn for something that does not exist. To manifest the sacred through poetry or cinema amounts to manifesting the void lying within the present*

*reality. We define Pasolini's longing for the sacred as nostalgic in that nostalgia is the rejection of the present in favor of a past that the subject has never experienced and will never experience.*

In an article entitled "My Provocative Independence" published on January 11, 1969, Pasolini writes as follows:

For years I wanted to make a film on Saint Paul's life at all costs. The screenplay was ready. My imagination was already at work, desperately. Now I can't make it anymore. I won't say why. Just by chance this morning [...] I learned that a filmmaker who is part of the opposition's intelligentsia has attacked me violently. It is just one more attack. But there's always an attack that goes beyond our level of tolerance. . . . Now, at the beginning of a new year (this analysis of my present situation happens to take place at the beginning of a new year) what am I supposed to do? I am *completely alone*.<sup>1</sup>

Pasolini's sense of total isolation, his being an independent and provocative intellectual, his being subject to his detractors' violent attacks are also the most recurrent traits of the apostle Paul's life according to Pasolini's screenplay *Saint Paul*. This "film project" that Pasolini began writing in the sixties and then edited and expanded in the years preceding his death without being able to shoot, is Pasolini's most direct and sincere self-portrait, his most explicit autobiography.<sup>2</sup> No other poem, novel, or film compares to his "theological film" *Saint Paul*, as he defines it, because in Saul of Tarsus Pasolini sees an unmistakable reflection of his own existence.<sup>3</sup> If an autobiography aims to summon the overarching meaning of its author's life—that is, it tries to compose a coherent self-portrait (a face that "says" both its author's unique character and how he responded to his life's vicissitudes)—then *Saint Paul* works as a powerful revelation of what Pasolini identified as the ultimate sense of his work and existence. Not only does the Italian artist insert explicit allusions to his own life in his biography of Paul, he also makes clear that Paul's role in his contemporary society is close to his (Pasolini's) personal experience. Paul's existence mirrors and enlightens Pasolini's.

In Gary Wills's recent *What Paul Meant* we find a cogent synthesis of Paul's intellectual profile:

"We never see pure Pauline thought being developed at leisure by its own inner logic; rather, we see Paul always thinking under pressure, usually in the heat of immediate controversy." . . . He is a mystic and a deep theologian, but also a voluble street fighter, a man busy on many fronts, often harried, sometimes exasperated. . . . Paul is our expert on the risen body, and he shows a fascination with it. He writes about the longing for it.<sup>4</sup>

Exasperation is also what we read in the quotation from one of Pasolini's innumerable newspaper articles that opens this chapter. Like the apostle, Pasolini is a "street fighter," an intellectual always involved in "controversy" and always "under pressure." Like the apostle, Pasolini is a "deep theologian" and an "expert on the risen body," as I intend to show. Pasolini's final poetics, we could say, is indeed "theological" and apocalyptic, although the artist's apocalypticism has a blasphemous and revolting nature. The concept of "risen body" runs throughout this book and has its most explicit formulation in the film *Salò* and the novel *Petrolio*. If the term *revolution* points to the core of Pasolini's poetics, the poet and filmmaker stresses that revolution first takes place in the body: "A 'body' is always revolutionary, because it represents what cannot be codified. . . . Moreover, if the body lives 'a life that does not deserve to be lived' (a black person, a Sardinian, a gipsy, a Jew, a homosexual, a loser) it is also openly revolutionary. . . . A poor or unhappy person is always also heroic."<sup>5</sup>

To understand *Saint Paul* better, the reader should bear in mind that this screenplay is founded on two basic rhetorical devices: opposition and allegorical identification. These two apparently contradictory concepts dominate, first and foremost, the nature of its protagonist, the apostle Paul, as well as the narrative sequences, the interaction among the characters, and their words. Pasolini recognizes in Paul of Tarsus a fundamental and paradoxical opposition. Pasolini contends that Paul both founds the Church as the everlasting manifestation of a political and repressive power, and inaugurates the end of times according to the contemporary Christian view of the imminent return of Christ. As Giuseppe Conti Calabrese correctly states, Pasolini's interpretation of the apostle has a strong apocalyptic tone.<sup>6</sup> For Pasolini, the Catholic Church, which Paul created, has two basic facets. On the one hand, it shows the decadence of the sacred in our modern times, because clericalism has stifled the original nature of the Gospel.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the Church is also the primary repository of the lost sense of the sacred. A hypothetical retrieval or recreation of the sacred cannot help but involve a reformation of the Church. A fundamental problem of Pasolini's concept of the sacred is that, as Giulio Sapelli points out, Pasolini detects the sacred only in connection with Catholicism and rural areas outside modern cities.<sup>8</sup> Unable to conceive of a universal perception of the sacred, Pasolini holds that a middle-class (bourgeois) person is deprived of this experience. In the introduction, we saw how Pasolini distorts what Ernesto de Martino says about the "risk" of nothingness threatening the subject's presence, a "void" that according to the Italian anthropologist is the same for all



human beings, and not different according to social classes or cultural backgrounds (the primitive versus the corrupt bourgeois).

It is essential to understand that, according to Pasolini, in our present time, a time of separation from the mother and from nature, the perception of the sacred is itself based on separation and division. Division leads the subject to a religious experience that exists only as paradox, contradiction, and impossibility.<sup>9</sup> In this sense, to contemplate or analyze the decadence (division) of the Catholic Church is in itself a contemplation of the sacred. The screenplay *Saint Paul* is "the dramatic space" in which Pasolini stages our modern relationship with the sacred.<sup>10</sup> Summarizing the main idea of his film project in a letter to don Emilio Cordero, the director of the San Paolo Film Society, Pasolini states that his film would "narrate the story of two Pauls: the saint and the priest."<sup>11</sup> In other words, the basic concept of division as the sole modern path to the sacred is reflected in the apostle himself.

But what is sanctity for Pasolini? "Grace, the gift of the sublime," he claims, "is something that one either has or attains. . . . Initially, it is only a moral behavior, . . . the transmutation of the self in an idealistic sense. . . . Later, sanctity can become rejection of the world, asceticism, . . . a quest for an unreachable self-understanding."<sup>12</sup> If sanctity identifies with an idealistic and ascetic, but also confused and doomed, process of self-knowledge, priesthood signifies its exact opposite. "In my conscience, Paul is a PRIEST," Pasolini reiterates in his late poetry collection by the Dantean title *Trasumanar e organizzar* (To transcend and to organize).<sup>13</sup> For Pasolini, Paul at once promulgates a code of repression and intimates its forthcoming erasure. Paul is a divided presence in the history of modernity. In Paul of Tarsus, modernity in fact finds its most cogent expression. If Pasolini's poetics is centered on the dichotomy between what he calls "premodern" (the mythic life of the Roman borgate or the Friuli, the region where his mother was born, the "land of the origins") and modern era, between a time preceding time and the decadence of time, Paul of Tarsus lives between these two worlds. In Pasolini's view, Paul is a figure of the past who enters modernity to announce its end. Pasolini's view of Paul is a radicalization of Eliade's concept of the "religious man," who "assumes a humanity that has a transhuman, transcendent model." A religious man, according to Eliade, whose writings Pasolini knew well, "wishes to be *other* than he is." In Pasolini's depiction, Paul of Tarsus expresses Eliade's emphasis on "religious nostalgia" (the longing for the original, before-the-fall union with the divine) as an inner division that manifests itself as a mysterious and ravaging sickness, whose origin is linked to Paul's first homoerotic feelings.<sup>14</sup>

## Pasolini's Nostalgia

As Svetlana Boym points out in *The Future of Nostalgia*, nostalgia “is a yearning for a different time—the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams. In a broader sense, nostalgia is a rebellion against the modern era of time, the time of history and progress.”<sup>15</sup> In Boym’s definition of nostalgia we cannot help but hear distinct echoes of Pasolini’s poetics obsessively focused on the decadence of our times in contrast with a vaguely premodern (pretime) condition of natural and sacred existence, the time of the mother. “Unlike melancholy, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness,” Boym continues, “nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory.”<sup>16</sup> Boym distinguishes between two kinds of nostalgia: “the restorative and the reflective.”<sup>17</sup> Whereas the former emphasizes a “reconstruction of the lost home,” the latter “thrives in *algia*, the longing itself” and “dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity.” David Lowenthal synthesizes this idea as follows: “It is no longer the presence of the past that speaks to us, but its pastness.”<sup>18</sup> Pasolini’s poetics is based on a “reflective” form of nostalgia, a nostalgia that feeds on the pastness of the past. Patrick Rumble rightly defines Pasolini’s concept of nostalgia as a reaction to the “derealization” of the present.<sup>19</sup>

Pasolini talks about his nostalgic longing in a poignant short article called “Un bimbo non amato” (A neglected child), which came out on April 5, 1969. “Last night, half asleep,” he writes, “I had [a] revelation” (*illuminazione*).<sup>20</sup> What the writer saw was a visualization of nostalgia: “Monuments, old things made of rock or wood or other material, churches, towers, the facades of palaces, all of this, turned into an anthropomorphic form and divinized as a single and cognizant Figure, who has realized that he is not loved anymore. He is only surviving. Therefore, he has decided to kill himself: a slow, silent, but irrevocable suicide.” In a similar manner, a child neglected by his parents “subconsciously decides to become sick and die.” Pasolini’s oneiric insight merges viewer and external view. The feelings of uselessness and decadence are of course in the dreamer, who projects his “revelation” onto visible signs of the past (monuments, churches, etc.). The withdrawal and “death” of ancient buildings is portrayed as a rejection coming from those who, instead of revering their divine nature, ignore them, thus depriving them of meaning and plunging them into oblivion. Like the baby who has never experienced parental love, the buildings kill themselves in an act of despair,

since they have been cut off from their intrinsic sacredness and have become foreign to themselves. In a like manner, an abandoned child who had found meaning in his parents' loving gaze lacks any means of survival. The analogy between the child, the buildings, and the dreamer point to an identity founded on an original loss.

While reading Pasolini's dream, we cannot help but remember the ancient buildings of Sana'a in Northern Yemen in *The Walls of Sana'a* (Le mura di Sana'a, 1974), Pasolini's "documentary in the form of an appeal to UNESCO" for the preservation of this "medieval" city. The protagonist of this twelve-minute film on the rapid "corruption" (modernization) of Yemen is the "mysterious," "almost excessive" beauty of the buildings "inside the walls of enclosure." "The main entrance of Sana'a," Pasolini says, "looks out onto places where until a few months ago, in the desert, its marvelous walls stood." The walls that protected the inner city from the corruption of history have collapsed and time is now rushing through the "dirty and poor" streets and threatens the existence of its medieval buildings. Pasolini resorts to analogy to make his point more explicit. He juxtaposes two "medieval" cities, Sana'a and Orte in central Italy. "Destruction" (*distruzione*) is the word that Pasolini uses to connect the last close image of a building of Sana'a and the first long shot of Orte: "The Yemenite ruling class . . . has certainly decided upon its destruction. In any case, the destruction of the ancient world, that is, of the real world, is taking place everywhere." Like the suicidal edifices in his dream, the buildings of Orte and Sana'a are alienated presences that are slowly withdrawing from reality.

The two basic concepts of opposition and analogical identification, which I see as the rhetorical foundation of Pasolini's screenplay on the apostle, could be seen as originating from the poet's essentially nostalgic approach to history and to his personal biography. "Religious man," Eliade explains, "experiences two kinds of time—profane and sacred. The one is an evanescent duration, the other a 'succession of eternities.'"<sup>21</sup> According to Pasolini's poetics, "sacred time" can be conjured up only as absence, that is, as a nostalgic longing for what has vanished. This is particularly evident in his reading of Saint Paul's experience. The birth of the Christian movement is usually perceived as a mythic time, a time in which the Church lived its most authentic and glorious moment. In effect the Reformation was a dramatic attempt to retrieve that original birth. We could say that Luther and Calvin were nostalgic theologians. But in Pasolini's interpretation of the apostle Paul, those "original" times were already marked by sickness and decadence with regard to Christ's pristine message of salvation. "Saint Paul," Pasolini wrote in 1975, "prob-

ably was unaware of his [sexual] difference. . . . Removed [from his consciousness], it created in him that pathological condition that all recognize in him and that he confesses in his letters."<sup>22</sup> Although it is not a given at all that the apostle's "pathological condition" is universally interpreted as repressed homosexuality—epilepsy is the most frequent guess of scholars—what matters here is Pasolini's insistence on Saint Paul's "difference," his sickness, his embodiment of a longing for a pristine sexual health that he himself has betrayed.

In the foreword to *Saint Paul*, entitled "Project for a Film of Saint Paul," Pasolini states that the "poetic idea" of his film is "a transposition of Saint Paul's life to our times."<sup>23</sup> In *Il sogno del centauro* (The centaur's dream) he offers a few basic examples of his analogical approach to Paul's life: "I have tried to transpose, through special and temporal analogies, the story of that man who moves from one extreme to the other. For example, Saul (Paul), a Pharisee, in the film becomes a Nazi French collaborator during the occupation of Paris. Saint Stephen's martyrdom finds its counterpart in the violent death of a fighter in the Resistance."<sup>24</sup> However, this seemingly straightforward project harbors a number of challenges, all revolving around Pasolini's concepts of "real" and "realism." First of all, Pasolini opposes analogy to literal expression. For Pasolini, analogy has something to do with falsification, for it is a rhetorical figure that claims that something is similar to something else, even though the two visual or linguistic events (Saint Stephen's death and that of a member of the French Resistance) have nothing objective in common; that is, analogy makes the reader or viewer believe in an otherwise false, inexistent connection between two totally unrelated facts.

Analogy is the rhetorical device that evokes the longing that characterizes a "reflexive nostalgia," in Boym's words. "Reflexive nostalgics," she explains, "see everywhere the imperfect mirror images of home, and try to cohabit with doubles and ghosts."<sup>25</sup> Pasolini's poetics could be indeed summarized as the disquieting creation of "imperfect mirror images" and "doubles." His sense of longing is not a quest for a lost place of belonging, a motherland that once existed and now is gone forever, but the evocation of the space between two analogical reflections, two halves that never form a unity. Pasolini's films never attempt a naturalistic recreation of a past Golden Age. Even his retellings of mythic stories, such as *Edipo re* or *Medea*, bring to the fore the decadence already existing within the atemporal settings of the myth. This is particularly explicit in *Edipo re*, which stages two opposite temporal levels, similar to what we find in the project *Saint Paul*.<sup>26</sup> In *Edipo re* a modern reenacting of the myth frames Pasolini's reconstruction of its ancient, original version. Both

versions mourn a previous and vanished condition of universal harmony. The nostalgic evocation of this failure constitutes Pasolini's "realism."

### Realism and Reality in Pasolini

It will be enlightening to recall that a poetics founded on analogy and opposition is the quintessential trait of the Italian Baroque, as the Jesuit Emanuele Tesauro synthesizes in his fundamental *Cannocchiale aristotelico* (The Aristotelian telescope, 1st ed., 1654).<sup>27</sup> Tesauro's monumental analysis of metaphorical expression revolves around two essential figures: metaphor of similitude and metaphor of opposition.<sup>28</sup> It is relevant to note this connection between seventeenth-century sensibility and Pasolini's poetics not only because Pasolini's work has been repeatedly labeled as a new form of Mannerism, the sixteenth-century Italian style of visual arts that defied the Renaissance emphasis on harmony and perfect correspondences and that led to the Baroque. Remember, for instance, Pasolini's allusions to two Manneristic painters, Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino, in the short film *La Ricotta*.<sup>29</sup> What interests us here is not to point out Pasolini's visual citations but to highlight a fundamental similarity between the Baroque and Pasolini's poetics. Emanuele Tesauro underscores that the fundamental goal of a metaphor of similitude or opposition is the evocation of a "marvel" (*meraviglia*), which he defines as follows: "[*Meraviglia*, "marvel"] is the mind's attentive contemplation of some new and remarkable object. Ignoring its origin, the soul is suspended and wishes to know it [the object's origin]."<sup>30</sup> Marvel is a form of "brief rapture" (*breve rapimento*) that "alters man in a sensible way." The well-known concept of the Baroque "marvel" in fact involves an intellectual suspension. The viewer or reader faces an unknown visual or verbal event and is compelled to retrieve the "origins" of his disconcertment. This sudden and sharp sense of an original loss is of central importance. The vague sense of a loss, of something missing, permeates Pasolini's cinematic expression. A didactic connotation is also detectable in both Tesauro's and Pasolini's poetics. But what we also notice is a similar emphasis on the subject's disorientation (a "rapture" for Tesauro), the void and bafflement created by the mirroring of the two contrasting images.<sup>31</sup>

Pasolini's heretical concept of realism vis-à-vis mainstream Italian Neorealism has been the object of numerous studies. I limit myself to highlighting what I consider essential for a correct understanding of Pasolini's reading of Saint Paul. According to Maurizio Viano's insightful and accurate definition, "[Pasolini's] realistic reading acknowledges that

artistic consumption is not an exclusively mental thing [and] is constantly aware of the subjective nature of interpretation. . . . Realism transforms viewing into an experience with a reality-value, that is, an experience which increases the subject's awareness of his/her position within the language of reality."<sup>32</sup> Pasolini detested Naturalism, because he saw it as an attempt to silence the viewer's awareness of its fictional representation. Pasolini's realism is less an image on the screen than an emotional and intellectual awareness, a form of "distrust" toward the realistic appearances shown on the screen.<sup>33</sup> The viewer's discomfort derives from his perception that the reality depicted in the film (the Roman borgate, for instance) indirectly points to something that lies behind the image, a "something" that the image evokes without revealing. Viano calls this aspect of Pasolini's realism "mystical."<sup>34</sup> Given the widespread negative connotation of this word but also because *mystical* refers to an actual encounter with the divine, I would rather use the term *sacred*, which describes the subject's active quest for meaning beyond the visible rather than a passive acceptance of a divine enlightenment.

In *Il sogno del centauro*, explaining why he vehemently opposes abortion, Pasolini defines his view of reality and the sacred as "Gnostic."<sup>35</sup> "I don't feel totally detached from the primordial waters of [the] maternal womb," Pasolini adds. His sense of the "sacred character of everything" as the echo of an original symbiosis with the mother pervades his philosophy of cinema. Abortion thus comes to symbolize the modern rejection of the sacred. His view of the world as a constant *hierophany* (*hieros* = "sacred" and *phainein* = "to show"), a term that he finds in Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane*, functions as a sudden (Gnostic) perception of the void existing within reality. Eliade speaks of the "paradox" represented by hierophany: "By manifesting the sacred, any object becomes *something else*, yet it continues to remain *itself*."<sup>36</sup> Isn't this the core of Pasolini's poetics? For Pasolini, the vertiginous void within the visible world is created by the coexistence of two opposite realities, the present, which is visible, and the past, which is invisible but arises as remembrance from within the present. Analogy is the main rhetorical means through which the Italian artist stages his sacred, Gnostic, evocation. Analogy is for Pasolini a ritual.

### Analogical Superimposition: *The Sequence of the Paper Flower*

Pasolini's concept of analogy as an imperfect and disconcerting mirroring of two images can be elucidated through a brief analysis of his

*Sequenza del fiore di carta* (Sequence of the paper flower), Pasolini's shortest film, made in 1968, the same period of the first version of *Saint Paul*.<sup>37</sup> The plot of this simple and linear "parable," as Naomi Greene has rightly defined it, is a retelling of the Gospel story of the fruitless fig tree.<sup>38</sup> Pasolini first meant to call this short film "The Innocent Fig Tree."<sup>39</sup> As Maurizio Viano reminds us, this biblical narrative had already been dramatized in *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*.<sup>40</sup>

In the early morning, as he returned to the city, he felt hungry and, noticing a single fig tree by the roadside, he walked to it and found on it nothing but leaves. He said to it, "Let there be no fruit from you anymore and forever." And instantly, the fig tree withered. (Matthew 21:18–19)

The metaphor of the tree or seed to signify an active or indolent disciple is frequent in the Gospels (see Matthew 7:15–20; 12:33; Luke 6:44; John 15:2) and is already present in the Old Testament (for instance, Psalms 1:3; Ezekiel 17:8). We could synthesize Pasolini's rendition of this biblical passage as follows: Ninetto walks down Via Nazionale in Rome; he interacts with some people, and from time to time short, black-and-white sequences from war documentaries are superimposed on the screen. Suddenly, God's voice speaks to Ninetto about his, Ninetto's, innocence, which God sees as a crime (*colpa*). God demands a sign from the young man. At times, Ninetto saunters down the street holding a big poppy-like paper flower. Ninetto holding this huge, fake flower recalls the image of the child carrying a big, red balloon in Albert Lamarisse's famous short film *The Red Balloon*, which won the Grand Prix of the Cannes Film Festival in 1956. Receiving no answer from the oblivious and thus sinful Ninetto, God strikes him dead. Like Saul on the way to Damascus, one of the most dramatic scenes of the contemporary *Saint Paul*, Ninetto must respond to a God baffled and upset by the man's disrespectful behavior.<sup>41</sup> But unlike Saul, Ninetto ignores his divine interlocutor and suffers the ultimate consequence of his silence. Like the young protagonist of *The Red Balloon*, Ninetto embodies a childlike innocence, which, however, in this Italian film, is not a good quality but a deadly sin.

The opening scene is a frontal long shot of Ninetto sitting at the fountain of Piazza della Repubblica, the square that leads down to Via Nazionale. Right after this shot, we see a large and complete map of planet Earth. Some kind of connection must exist between the concept of "Republic," "Nation," and the rest of the world. Ninetto sits at the center of this intersection. A diagonal backward tracking shot follows



Figure 1

Ninetto at distance while he walks from the fountain down toward the sidewalk at the left. The *Sequence* is a long, backward-tracking shot, which Pasolini had already and very successfully used in *Accattone*. This device has a special significance for Pasolini, as we will see more in detail in the chapter on *Petrolio*.

A pan shot shows Ninetto approaching a worker (*operaio*) who is digging the ground. We hear Ninetto ask this man about the meaning of those holes in the earth, and the man responds that they are necessary “to get by” (*per tirare avanti*).<sup>42</sup> The first black-and-white short sequence from a documentary is a series of national flags like those surrounding the United Nations, then a platoon marching on a street, and the dead body of Che Guevara (fig. 1). These black-and-white documentary sequences do not replace the images of Rome and Ninetto in colors. The colors of the present (downtown Rome in a busy morning) and the black-and-white sequences of war documentaries overlap, as if the documentary images arose from the background of modern Rome and revealed their existence within the “color” of the present.

As Nicholas McMaster explains in his essay on the *Sequence*, in the seventies superimposition was considered as an outdated technique, which had been popular in the past either to evoke supernatural presences (ghosts, demons, etc.) or to visualize the chaotic or inebriated mental condition of a given character.<sup>43</sup> In Pasolini’s short film, the documentary images arising from the screen do have an eerie nature, as if coming from an ancient past that the modern, colorful present wishes to forget. McMaster also underscores that Pasolini later uses this technique again in *Medea* (1970) with a similar effect. Unlike the great variety of documentary images in the *Sequence*, in *Medea* Pasolini superimposes only the same still of Medea awakened at dawn by the sun that incites her to pursue justice against her husband Jason. It is a powerful still that Pasolini repeats several times during the second part of his film. It depicts





Figure 2



Figure 3

a moment of mystical rapture: Medea enlightened by the sun's ray in a sort of mute frenzy. Medea's insight reveals the perennial existence of a mythical past embodied by the sunlight that returns to her to sustain her in her just revenge.<sup>44</sup>

Let us go back to the *Sequence*. A close-up now shows the big paper flower and then moves down to the young man holding it. The noise of the Roman traffic is silenced. In this new silent scene, Ninetto looks very joyful and oblivious. The sudden appearance of images and sounds of bombs falling from airplanes breaks this silence (figs. 2 and 3). The images and noise of war fade away, while our cheerful Ninetto keeps walking down the street, now without the flower. At this point we hear God's voice. This quick transition from the silent close-up of Ninetto and the flower to the piercing noise of black-and-white images of bombs and back to Ninetto without the flower exposed to God's voice is significant. We first see a silenced Rome and a silently cheerful Ninetto holding the huge and ridiculous (fake) paper flower. Later we see Ninetto without the flower and addressed by God's voice. The present (the modern "National" and "Republican" Rome) contains and hides the tragedies of

a universal history, but at the same time it is also a silenced space of oblivion. In this space of modern ignorance, the “innocent” Ninetto is the icon of an atemporal, innocent condition. Ninetto, like the apostle Paul in Pasolini’s screenplay, is a foreign presence that visits the present. Ninetto is “out-of-this-world.” In effect, he has never entered the world, so to speak, because his innocence has never bothered to question it.

Two sorts of documentaries (war documentaries and Pasolini’s documentary-like shots of contemporary Rome) are linked to each other by Ninetto’s atemporal presence. The main theme of this short film is in fact the idea that Ninetto *is and is not from here*. Similarly, the apostle in the film *Saint Paul* would be *from somewhere else*. Pasolini’s hypothetical film on Paul would emphasize the apostle’s relentless journey through innumerable foreign places. The core of Paul’s identity is his *not being from here*. Saint Paul and Ninetto, however, give their foreignness totally opposite meanings. Paul enters modernity to evangelize, that is, to denounce its crimes and its decadence, whereas Ninetto’s arrival, his mysterious strolling with a huge, fake flower, denies any real contact with the present.

Both Saint Paul and Ninetto in the *Sequence* are sacred presences, in that their visible difference questions reality. Ninetto is the only fictional character of the *Sequence*, although, like most of Pasolini’s actors, his heavy Roman accent and his poor and often vulgar vocabulary, his face, and his mannerisms constantly betray his modest origins and thus give his performances a nonprofessional connotation. In all Pasolini’s films, Ninetto seems always to play himself, as if his fictional role and his real identity almost coincide. Pasolini’s frequent use of the same actors, especially amateur ones, is not simply the result of the familiarity and friendship developed through the years. In Jean Sémolué’s words, these familiar faces have an “indexical values” (*valeur d’indices*).<sup>45</sup> In Ninetto’s case, for instance, his often joyous and playful appearance signifies a gleeful, youthful, and oblivious alienation from the world (his being a messenger or a young man on a journey). In Pasolini’s poem “Comunicato all’Ansa (Ninetto)” (Announcement to Ansa [Ninetto]) in *Trasumanar e organizzar*, we find a description that suits both the real Ninetto (Pasolini’s Ninetto) and the fictional one in the *Sequence*:

Joyfulness is his only property

... in order to be, he must be a bystander: his relationships with others are contractual: he doesn’t believe,  
as a modern young man, in myths: although it is well-known,  
only what is realistic is mythic, and vice versa.  
Of course he doesn’t believe in fairy tales: his life

is a fairy tale made of nothing.  
 Very soon he loses the presence of others:  
 he doesn't remember their faces anymore. He travels;  
 his clothes are olive drab. He is like a dog with a mouth full of goodness.  
 He is led by a destiny in which *the completion*  
*of his task* is almost nothing; *the intervention of an ally*  
 is not essential (I am an ally)

...

He laughs heroically,  
 innocent pariah: yes, untouchable, but also unreachable.<sup>46</sup>

The two Ninettos are "innocent pariah[s]"; both are "unreachable" (*inattigibili*), as God will realize at the end of the short film. Both Ninettos are forgetful. Their interactions with others, as the film confirms, are superficial and sterile. Finally, both seem unable to perceive the "mythic" character of reality.

The *Sequence of the Paper Flower* presents a multilayered form of visual contamination. The film presents two (real) documentaries: the images of a typical morning in the Via Nazionale and the clips from documentaries detailing the atrocities of the war. The technique of superimposition undermines their veracity or, better yet, it shows the incompleteness of their mere visibility (they are more than what they show). Ninetto's fictional and nonfictional nature (he is acting but is also being himself) adds an additional level of doubt and suspicion to the viewer's experience.

Ninetto's "joyfulness," his sole "property," as Pasolini states in the above poem, reveals its troubling essence when God first addresses him. God's voice is in actuality a series of different male and female voices. The first divine voice sounds clerical and condescending, like the voice of a benevolent priest teaching catechism. It is through God that we learn that Ninetto's name is Riccetto. Even a child speaks as God. Two voices deserve a special attention. One is the voice of a middle-aged woman, who sounds like a mother. She speaks after Riccetto begins talking with another young man who says that he needs to work because he is married, and his son was born only three days ago. God's female voice interrupts the conversation: "I will speak to you anyway, Riccetto, even if you don't want to give me any sign" (*Ti parlerò lo stesso, Riccetto, anche se tu non mi vuoi fare alcun segno*).<sup>47</sup> Riccetto resumes the conversation with the young man by telling him, "In any case, the son will drink his mother's milk!" as if to say that the father does not really need to work too hard to support his family.

Through this brief interaction, we sense the dichotomy between Riccetto and the present. If the fusion mother-son is the core of Pasolini's fixation with a hypothetical archaic time, in the *Sequence* it is the mother who challenges Riccetto's passive clinging to the past of that mythic union. The mother tries to make Riccetto see that their original union is no more. The mother-God asks her son for a sign. It is certainly ironic that God has to beg the young man to show him (her) a sign, since it is usually the other way around. And it is also very significant that the divine mother's voice occurs during the son's rare interaction with a man who has just had a baby. He is a working-class man, the kind of man idealized by Pasolini, who embraces his role as father. Riccetto limits himself to evoking an idyllic and reassuring image of a mother breastfeeding her baby, as if the mother's mere presence will solve all problems. But the mother herself, the God-mother, reminds Riccetto of the "sign" he needs to give her.

The second voice we need to consider is Pasolini's. Like the God-mother, Pasolini-God asks for a sign: "Riccetto, listen to me. Just a nod, a glance to the sky would be enough for me." What is the sign or "nod" that God demands? To enter the present means to perceive its sacred nature. To give God a "nod" means to look beyond what is merely visible and become a "religious man," in Eliade's words. Riccetto's "mortal sin" is not just a form of social disengagement. If reality is God's perennial revelation, Riccetto's "nod" would signify his acknowledgment of God's presence. As he does with Saul in the Acts of the Apostles, God knocks Riccetto down. A shot of the sky of Rome is followed by the sound of thunder. Then we go back to documentary sounds and images of war—explosions and dead bodies scattered on the ground. The last image of a dead young man fades into the image of Riccetto's dead body, which lies on the ground in a similar position.

Both Saul and Riccetto experience a sudden and violent encounter with God. In both cases God's wrath is provoked by their rejection of the sacred (Saul's persecution of Christ's followers; Riccetto's disinterest in God's presence). We could say that, like Saul, Riccetto experiences a form of conversion, a literal transformation. Ninetto enters reality at the moment of his death. The two superimposed images (Ninetto's body lies in the same position as the dead body in the documentary; see figs. 4 and 5) signify a final irruption of history within the body of the "innocent pariah," as Pasolini states in his poem. Riccetto's corpse acquires a conscience thanks to its echoing of a "historical" death. Riccetto's body has been transfigured.



Figure 4



Figure 5

### Riccetto, Jesus, and Saul as Analogical Presences

In Pasolini's interpretation, Riccetto, Saint Paul, and Jesus share a similar, out-of-this-world character. "As . . . in *The Gospel*," Pasolini writes in the introduction to *Saint Paul*, "none of Paul's words will be invented or reconstructed analogically." The lines pronounced by the character Saint Paul were to be a series of direct quotations from the apostle's epistles. This is an important but also misleading aspect of Pasolini's poetic manifesto. In terms of linguistic quotation, in *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* Pasolini's Jesus repeats the Savior's words from the Gospels, and similarly, in *Saint Paul*, Paul would recite passages from Paul's letters and first-person sentences from Acts.<sup>48</sup> We shall see that Pasolini's claim about his faithful way of citing Paul's words is problematic.

The Italian filmmaker's technique of literal quotation betrays its questionable nature already in *The Gospel*. "Many viewers," Zygmunt Baranski points out, "claim that the film [Pasolini's *The Gospel*] is a respectful and faithful adaptation of Matthew's Gospel . . . because its muted tones are so different from the garishness and melodrama of Hollywood."<sup>49</sup>

Echoing Auerbach's analysis of the Gospel narrative in *Mimesis*, Millicent Marcus rightly underscores that "the episodic, disjointed nature of Scriptural narrative itself [the Gospel of Matthew] forces us to seek unity not in the horizontal progression of events but in their vertical connection to an overarching idea."<sup>50</sup> Pasolini's stern and austere Jesus has long, uninterrupted speeches that are patchworks of Gospel citations. Pasolini's *Gospel*, Marc Gervais states, "is entirely consecrated to the Word."<sup>51</sup> In *The Gospel* "Jesus' preaching," Bart Testa remarks, "is seen in close-ups, which makes it paradoxically intimate and distant. . . . Indeed, the Sermon on the Mount, the first and the longest discourse, has virtually no listeners at all. Pasolini renders it with an intercut series of close-ups, verse-by-verse, completely suppressing the counter-shot."<sup>52</sup>

In his important essay on the relationship between Pasolini's screenplay on the Matthew gospel and the film on the one hand, and the biblical text on the other, Baranski contends that "Pasolini really followed the Gospel's structure at the beginning and end of his adaptation. . . . In the space between Jesus's temptation in the desert and his arrival in Jerusalem. . . . Pasolini completely subverted the narrative sequence of his source; and he even introduced major changes into Christ's early years and last days."<sup>53</sup> We could say that Pasolini's statement about his "literal" transposition from a biblical source cannot be taken literally. Baranski also explains that the Sermon on the Mount, for instance, is severely reduced "with the resultant loss of over half of Jesus's words." Furthermore, Pasolini "omits just about all Jesus's speeches on the Kingdom of Heaven (one of the main features of Matthew's Gospel), on the Last Judgment and on salvation."<sup>54</sup>

Another aspect of Pasolini's strategy that will enhance our understanding of *Saint Paul* is the "analogical" rapport, as he would say, that *The Gospel* founds between the "letter" of the Gospel text and his visual background. *The Gospel* is set in the modern ruins of an ancient and rural (what Pasolini defines as "premodern") civilization. Pasolini had chosen to make a film based on the Gospel of Matthew because, as he stated in an interview, he (wrongly) believed that "the Gospel of Saint Matthew is the most epic of the four [and] the most archaic."<sup>55</sup> In choosing the harsh landscapes of southern Italy and its dilapidated rural villages, Pasolini created an "analogical" relationship between the words of the Savior according to what he saw as the most "archaic" gospel and the contemporary landscape in which the character Jesus delivers his sermons.

In creating this "analogical" agreement between words and images, Pasolini's "quasi-documentary" also makes a statement about the contemporary decadence of a pristine mythic landscape.<sup>56</sup> As Sam Rohdie

points out in an insightful essay, whereas “the narrative sense of Neo-realist films always came *a posteriori*, in Pasolini’s films the sense existed *a priori*.”<sup>57</sup> This is an essential tenet of Pasolini’s poetics. “In Pasolini’s films,” Rohdie continues, “reality was not found or encountered or revealed, as in a Rossellini miracle, but created.” In *The Gospel*, Jesus speaks in an ancient world that is still real and visible, but in a process of decadence. This process of decadence is contemporary to the viewer of the film, and consequently also to the Gospel message expressed by the character Jesus in the film. It is impossible not to perceive that the images (the Italian landscapes, its ancient and poor villages, the amateur actors) enhance, clarify the literal meaning of Christ’s words, and that, vice versa, the Savior’s words make what we see on the screen more visible and eloquent.

Unlike *The Gospel*, *Saint Paul* would make the visual and the verbal levels clash. Rather than blending in the literal and the analogical as he did in *The Gospel*, Pasolini would make a film based on a stark contrast between what we hear and what we see. Pasolini would make the character Paul recite precise citations from the Pauline Letters and the Acts but would “transpose” the events of the apostle’s life from the origins of the Christian era to our contemporary times. If in *The Gospel* analogy unites the past of the Gospel to the present decadence of an ancient, premodern reality, in *Saint Paul* analogy paradoxically manifests the harsh difference between two realities (Saint Paul’s times versus ours). “What is the reason of my decision to transpose [Paul’s] experience to our modern times?” Pasolini asks himself. “It is very simple,” the author replies. Through this unambiguous analogical opposition, he will be able to show the “contemporary relevance” (*attualità*) of Paul’s religious experience “in the most direct way” (*San Paolo*, 5).

Pasolini’s straightforward synthesis of his project oversimplifies the complexity of his endeavor. We must remember that, according to the Italian poet, the apostle Paul lived in a time that already showed evident signs of decadence. In *Saint Paul*, the apostle’s statements would not be totally out of context, because the events recounted in the film would replicate the events narrated in the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>58</sup> Since Pasolini grants great importance to the mythic substratum of human history, this is not a minor aspect of his film project. We can visualize this intricate dialogue among different temporal levels as follows:

Eternity	Present Past	Present
Paul’s words	events in Acts	modernity

The present exists as an echo of past events, which were already distant from the divine (Paul's revelation). We live in a time of empty duplications, in the sense that modernity limits itself to reliving a past of decadence. In real life, Paul does not utter his words anymore. We are not even given a chance to perceive the tension between the sacred and the profane. We live our profane time as blind and senseless repetition because the profane is no longer in opposition to the sacred, since the sacred has withdrawn once and for all.

### ***Saint Paul* and Pasolini's Concept of the Screenplay**

The unique structure of *Saint Paul* must be understood in the light of Pasolini's theoretical approach to screenwriting. His well-known definition of a screenplay in *Heretical Empiricism* is "a structure that wants to be another structure." Pasolini's stance could be seen as contradictory. At the beginning of his seminal essay, he states that "what interests me about a screenplay is the moment in which it can be considered . . . a work complete and finished in itself." However, he later contends that a screenplay is a paradoxical artifact in that it is an "autonomous," and thus self-contained, text that also "hints" at the meaning of a "potential film." A screenplay, the filmmaker concludes, "is a structure morphologically in movement."<sup>59</sup> A screenplay is itself and what might be or, in the case of *Saint Paul*, what might have been and will never be.

What makes a screenplay a unique artifact is its natural vocation toward something else. A "successful" screenplay literally evokes a future visible presence (the film) resulting from the past written page of the screenplay.<sup>60</sup> Its dynamic nature renders a screenplay a shifty, frustrating artifact, which resists a firm interpretation, given that it is at once itself and something else (the subsequent film). Metamorphosis is the core of the screenplay. We could say that a screenplay is an organism that longs for transformation. Read in this manner, *Saint Paul* had to remain a screenplay. The inherent tension Pasolini sees within the apostle Paul (the founder of a dead text, the Law of the Church, versus the living text of the Spirit) mirrors the tension regarding "expression" within the screenplay *Saint Paul*. *Saint Paul* is a "sacred" text (Pasolini calls it his "theological" work) in the sense that it embodies a conflict that the reader appropriates as an inner experience. As we have said, this intrinsic tension, the space evoked between two opposite realities, constitutes Pasolini's view of realism.



The reader's act of visualization is intrinsically drawn toward an impossible future when the apostle Paul would become incarnate (what this or that would look like *if* the screenplay had turned into a film).<sup>61</sup> It is of essential relevance that *Saint Paul* did *not* become a film. I cannot agree with Philippe Sollers who, writing about Pasolini's *Saint Paul*, contends that "images, and not writing, are the core of Pasolini's poetics," and therefore Pasolini's screenplay remains an incomplete endeavor.<sup>62</sup> The concept of an "image" itself must be approached in an analogical way. As I said at the beginning of this chapter, *Saint Paul* is a "failed" text. The apostle Paul is a "failed" presence within the history of the Church as the primary repository of the sacred. The apostle Paul has an apocalyptic body, a body that will be seen *later*, as the organism of the screenplay still awaits a necessary, albeit impossible (*later*), metamorphosis.

### **Pasolini's Appropriation of the Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline Epistles**

Unlike all the other characters in *Saint Paul*, the apostle would exclusively repeat quotations from his Epistles and Luke's Acts of the Apostles.<sup>63</sup> The two literary sources represent a serious problem. Whereas the film *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* derives from one and only one narrative source written in the third person and filled with Jesus's long, direct speeches, the screenplay *Saint Paul* strives to harmonize the apostle's epistles and Luke's Acts, two very different kinds of texts. On the one hand, Acts is a "historical monograph" that is also reminiscent of an Alexandrian novel and is written by a *homodiegetic* author, that is, a narrator who is also a character of the story and thus uses both the third and the first person (the plural "we") when he witnesses a given event.<sup>64</sup> As Hans Conzelmann explains, the prologue and dedication of Acts show that Luke intended to give his writing a "highly literary level," which is also apparent from his ability to use different biblical styles.<sup>65</sup> Luke saw his gospel and Acts as two parts of the same book: "In my earlier work, Theophilus, I dealt with everything Jesus had done and taught."<sup>66</sup> The Gospel was about "Jesus' time," whereas Acts addresses "the Church's time."<sup>67</sup>

In Luke's Acts, Paul is only one of the main characters. Paul's Epistles, on the other hand, are first-person, didactic texts with almost no narrative connotation. An important initial problem in Pasolini's project is that, even though in his film Paul's words were to be literal quotations from the apostle's statements, these words would be frequently

pronounced in narrative situations that neither directly nor analogically recall their original contexts. What was a “literal” quotation in *The Gospel* cannot be a “literal” quotation in *Saint Paul*. *Literal* means two different things in the two works. In *Saint Paul*, what the protagonist does and what he says cannot coincide because his words and his acts come from two distinct and unrelated literary sources written by two different authors, Luke and Paul.

I would like to add only one example to clarify the conflict between the two concepts of “literal” in this film project. In scene 40, Pasolini first presents Paul and Barnabas in prayer along the banks of Lake Geneva and then reports the following dramatic dialogue between the two apostles:

Paul: “Let’s resume our journey. Let’s go back and check on the brothers to whom we announced the gospel during our first trip.”

Barnabas: “Yes, and let’s bring John, called Mark, as well . . .”

Paul: “John called Mark? Don’t you remember that in Pamphylia he abandoned us and left us out on a limb?”

Barnabas: “Why should this matter? He’s a good brother” . . .

Paul: “Well, let’s break up then!” . . .

Barnabas: “Ah, is this what you want?”

Paul: “Yes, let’s break up! Feel free to go with John called Mark wherever you want. I’ll take Silas with me to Syria and Cilicia” (*San Paolo*, scene 40, 59–60).<sup>68</sup>

This dialogue is derived from the following passage in Acts 15:36–41:

On a later occasion Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord, so that we can see how they are doing.” Barnabas suggested taking John Mark, but Paul was not in favor of taking along the man who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had refused to share in their work. There was sharp disagreement, so that they parted company, and Barnabas sailed off with Mark to Cyprus. Before Paul left, he chose Silas to accompany him and was commended by the brothers to the grace of God. He traveled through Syria and Cilicia, consolidating the churches.<sup>69</sup>

In Acts, Luke makes Paul express himself in a direct speech only at the beginning of his conversation with Barnabas. Dramatizing what in Acts is a third-person narration, Pasolini turns an indirect speech into a direct one (Acts: Paul was not in favor of taking along the man who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had refused to share in their work; *Saint Paul*: Paul: “John called Mark? Don’t you remember that in Pamphylia he abandoned us and left us out on a limb?”), and then makes up the

rest of Paul's lines. The tension between several kinds of "literal" language is apparent in the above passage. Moreover, as we will see in more detail later, the "literal" appropriation of Paul's words is inserted in a context that is not literal (unlike *The Gospel*) but metaphorizes only one of the two sources of the screenplay. Whereas the Epistles could be perceived (and often are) as atemporal documents, Acts is a historical narration.

Pasolini emphasizes that his anachronistic use of biblical citations reflects the contrast between "sanctity" and corruption, between myth and modernity: "Through this process [biblical words uttered in modern settings], my film will reveal its essential theme, which is the opposition between "current times" [*attualità*] and "sanctity"—the world of history that in its excess of presence tends to fall into a form of mystery, abstraction, pure question—and the world of the divine, which in its religious abstraction descends among us and becomes concrete and active" (*San Paolo*, 7).

I have translated Pasolini's "*attualità*" as "current times" because of the complexity of the Italian term also in its opposition to "sanctity." In Italian, *attualità* means both "the present historical moment" and "what is considered relevant now" and "what is commonly accepted at this present moment." *Attualità* is thus linked to the concept of "conformity" (*conformismo*), a central and well-known aspect of Pasolini's poetics, which is frequently considered as an expression of his Marxist ideals.

The filmmaker insists on the term *abstraction*, giving it two opposite connotations. For Pasolini, modernity is a time of a generalized blindness. Related to our "current times," "abstraction" is the inability to perceive the sacred nature of reality. Modernity, Pasolini contends, is a "pure question." Contrary to modernity, "the world of the divine" is an "abstraction" in the sense that it is the invisible sacred that "descends among us" (as the Holy Spirit descends among the apostles at Pentecost in Acts 2:1–4) and reveals itself as sudden instances of "concrete" visibility. In an interview that he gave in 1964, Pasolini explains that his "vision of the world" is certainly "epic-religious" (*epico-religioso*).<sup>70</sup> For Pasolini, the word *epic* is strictly related to *religious* in that *epic* signifies a victorious, fervent, and atemporal condition dominated by a natural and premodern religiosity. *Petrolino*, the final summa of Pasolini's poetics, is entirely based on the epic *topos* of the journey, as found in Apollonius Rhodius's *Argonautika*. Pasolini's interpretation of the Oedipus myth in the film *Edipo re* also emphasizes this aspect by visualizing Oedipus's repeated passages from and to his birthplace.

## The Tension between the Real and the Sacred: The Role of the Poor

According to Pasolini, the epic journey toward the sacred finds its most significant crossroad in the places inhabited by the poor, the oppressed, those who live outside the “conformity” of our capitalistic society. The poor are messengers from the land of the sacred. The places of their existence (the ugly areas at the outskirts of a modern megalopolis) are the last remaining outposts of the sacred. Pasolini’s creed could be easily, and correctly, read as a seemingly Marxist reformulation of the distinction between the “world” and Christian revelation. In this sense, the choice of Paul of Tarsus as an apocalyptic figure, the announcer of the end of our (current) times is perfectly appropriate. In the same interview mentioned in the preceding paragraph, Pasolini also clarifies that his attitude toward cinema is shaped by his “love” for the “miserable characters” (*personaggi miserabili*) of his films, the ambassadors of the archaic and the divine.<sup>71</sup>

If I have been able . . . to render the epic-religious magnificence [*grandezza*] of these miserable characters; if I have been able to render this aspect through the stylistic devices [*stilemi*] of my film; through the rhythm of the narration; through the way in which I make them move and the atmosphere in which I plunge them; through the light, the sun, the ambiance around them; if I have been able to give this idea of them, it means that I love them.<sup>72</sup>

What does Pasolini mean by “love”? Pasolini’s “love” regards the way in which these “miserable characters” have revealed their “magnificence” to him. *Love* is here a term indicating a receptive acceptance of a revelation. But it also expresses a profound sense of nostalgia. Pasolini immerses the poor in a “light” or “sun” that highlights not only their numinous nature, but also the irrevocable distance between the land of the sacred and us. The lover of these “miserable” people yearns to return to a distant place that he or she has never visited because it disappeared a long time ago. Through cinema, Pasolini thus attempts to respond to the miserable characters’ gift (their revealing the religious-epic nature of reality) by visualizing this “idea of them” (the sun and light, the ambiance in which he chooses to depict them; the rhythm of his visual narration, the shots, etc.).<sup>73</sup>

As in every love experience, however, Pasolini’s attraction to the poor and miserable also involves a great deal of ideological projection and thus a considerable lack of dialogue. Pasolini’s inability to engage these men in a real rapport soon led him to the notorious statements contained in

"Abjuration of the *Trilogy of Life*," where he calls these same men "human trash," simply because they have contradicted his blind idealization.<sup>74</sup> In the French documentary *Pasolini l'enragé*, by Jean-André Fieschi, Pasolini complains with Franco Citti, the protagonist of *Accattone*, about those critics who accuse him of using and then discarding the poor who act in his films. Citti, of course, answers that Pasolini never abandons anybody and that if someone is good for a film, it does not necessarily mean that he should work in every film Pasolini makes.<sup>75</sup> Pasolini turns Citti's friendly and flattering feedback into a tirade against the petit-bourgeoisie's greed and anxiety about the future, whereas "people like you" (*gente come te*) do not care about the future because "you" (poor men like Citti) are like the lilies of the field mentioned in the Gospel, who live in the beauty of the present. Needless to say, Citti's words and the filmmaker's anti-bourgeoisie's rant do not match. Pasolini's love for the poor men of the borgate is tinged with a vivid, solipsistic nostalgia for a lost mythic, religious purity (the lilies of the field and the birds on the trees). For the filmmaker, the main aspect of these men's cultural corruption is their looking to the middle class and its values as their new referential model, which, however could be also seen as a natural and justified desire to attain a stable living condition.<sup>76</sup>

In an insightful essay on Pasolini's "erotic gaze," Christoph Klimke points out that the Italian filmmaker's poetics has some essential points of contact with Andrej Tarkovsky's. In Klimke's view, both artists share a "religious" and "mythic" view of the past and a "fundamental love for humankind."<sup>77</sup> The protagonists of Pasolini's and Tarkovsky's films are outcasts, failed citizens of the modern world. Klimke underscores that Tarkovsky chose Italy as the setting for the film *Nostalghia*, his most explicit meditation on his mythic view of Russia. The Russian director dedicates this film "To the memory of my mother," in an inscription at the end of the film. Like Pasolini, Tarkovsky identifies the past of a mythic condition with the mother and, like Pasolini, perceives the Italian landscape as the last vestige of a luminous and almost erased past. In *Nostalghia* the poet Gorchakov visits Italy to collect material on the Russian serf composer Beryózovsky (1745–77), who had been sent to Italy to study classical music. Notwithstanding his numerous successes, Beryózovsky eventually returned to Russia, where he soon committed suicide.<sup>78</sup> Like Beryózovsky, at the end of the film Gorchakov realizes that in Italy he is seeking traces of a Russia that is the maternal locus holding the secret to a past memory of belonging. He understands that this mythic Russia does not exist. In Tarkovsky's words:

Italy comes to Gorchakov's consciousness at the moment of his tragic break with reality (not merely with the conditions of life, but with life itself . . . ) and stretches out above him in magnificent ruins which seem to rise up out of nothing. These fragments of a civilization at once universal and alien are like . . . a sign that mankind has taken a path that can only lead to destruction.<sup>79</sup>

The "tragic break with reality" mentioned by Tarkovsky is the fundamental tenet of Pasolini's cinema. Gorchakov's tragic insight on the sterility of his longing permeates all of Pasolini's films. Pasolini, however, differs from Tarkovsky in that, whereas the Russian director makes his protagonists aware of their alienated condition, Pasolini makes his characters victims of their ontological ignorance, as in the case of Accattone. The bourgeois "consciousness" of Tarkovsky's characters is often absent in the protagonists of Pasolini's films, with a few significant exceptions, such as the northern Italian bourgeois family in *Teorema*. Pasolini's outcasts and poor are subjected to a condition in which they live without self-reflection. This is what makes them announcers of the sacred.

In passing, and without trying to posit an easy and unjustified identification, I would like to point out that, in his *Testament*, Francis of Assisi describes the enlightenment granted by the outcasts and the poor in terms that are not distant from Pasolini's view. For Francis, conversion was an instance of renewed sight. Like Pasolini, Francis recognizes a religious "magnificence" in those who are miserable and poor. Francis writes that, since he lived in sin, to see the lepers seemed deeply bitter ("nimis mihi videbatur amarum videre leprosos") to him.<sup>80</sup> But the Lord led him among them. When he withdrew from them ("recedente me ab ipsis"), what before had looked bitter to him ("quod videbatur amarum") turned into sweetness of soul and body ("conversum fuit mihi in dulcedinem animi et corporis").<sup>81</sup> I have reported the original in parentheses to stress Francis's insistence on the act of seeing ("mihi videbatur amarum videre leprosos"). Francis's "sweetness of soul and body," his love for the lepers, was in fact a reaction to the revelation that the lepers had granted him. "Sin" (Pasolini's "current times" or the "world") prevented Francis from seeing that the divine inhabited and revealed itself in the lepers.

### Revelation and the Desert in Pasolini

Allow me to repeat that Pasolini's interpretation of Eliade's concept of hierophany revolves around the void, the empty space resulting from

the contrast between the present ("our current times") and the sacred. In Pasolini's work, the sacred manifests itself in the here and now as the perception of its absence. This no man's land is the frontier between reality and the sacred and is embodied in the urban deserts where the outcasts live. The regression or withdrawal of the sacred from the world could be seen as a form of desertification. Before exploring this *topos*, which frequently recurs in Pasolini's oeuvre, it is important to note that early in his screenplay Pasolini associates the concept of desert with Luke himself, the author of the Acts of the Apostles. In *Saint Paul*, Luke plays a fundamental role. He is one of the two authors of the text, the other being Pasolini himself. Luke, however, owns the story, so to speak, because he composes the Acts of the Apostles, at times shows up in the story he narrates, and is also a character in *Saint Paul*.

We first encounter a puzzling reference to Luke in an early scene (21), which is in effect a pause in the narrative. It is a monologue that an unknown character delivers while looking at the camera. Undefined in terms of its possible set and unconnected to the story, this scene presents itself as a revelation that occurs in the open (Pasolini's only remark is "Exterior-Day Time," [*Esterno giorno*]). Let us remember that, according to Pasolini, the sets, rhythms, and pauses within his films contribute to exalting the sacred nature of a given character. In this case, Pasolini interrupts the narration of the first episodes of Saint Paul's life to linger a moment on this mysterious male figure. The undefined background stresses the non-narrative nature of this scene. Pasolini also mentions that it takes place during the day, thus alluding to the "light" and "sun" that, as he explains, signify the "epic-religious" connotation of this brief scene. Pasolini, moreover, makes his mysterious character look directly at the camera, as if to mark the more-than-fictional quality of his words. He is an "elderly, noble, mysterious man, whose face is marked by fatigue and whose eyes are extremely gentle."<sup>82</sup>

"Speaking directly to the viewer," this man states that "no desert will be ever more desert than the desert of a house, of a square, of a street where people live a thousand nine hundred seventy years after Christ. Solitude is here. . . . No other metaphor for the desert is more powerful than that of daily life." Daily life, this man holds, "cannot be portrayed [*è irrapresentabile*] because it is the shadow of life."<sup>83</sup> The character concludes his monologue by revealing his true identity: "I am the author of The Acts of the Apostles." An additional problem is the contradiction between this Luke (a "noble," elderly man whose face looks pensive, gentle, and tired) and the Luke who participates in the events detailed in the screenplay. This second Luke is presented as a cynical and diabolical

man who is hand-in-glove with Satan. Luke's duplicity mirrors Saint Paul's. Like Paul, Luke seems to be afflicted with a disease (his fatigue) that comes from a pessimistic view of reality, what he calls "the shadow of life," the "desert of daily life." At the same time, by writing the Acts of the Apostles, Luke collaborates with Paul in the construction of a new religious law. One Luke works to expand the "desertification" of modernity, while the other perceives its alienating nature.

The image of the desert is a *topos* of Pasolini's poetics. In the film *Teorema*, the desert is the scorched landscape of mount Aetna, which Pasolini also uses as the setting of one of the two plots of *Porcile* (Pigsty), the one recounting a medieval story of cannibalism.<sup>84</sup> It would be reasonable to imagine that Pasolini would shoot the desert scene in *Saint Paul* in this same location. The passage of *Saint Paul* introducing the mysterious author of the Acts of the Apostles and emphasizing the "desert" as the main landscape of modernity occurs in response to Paul's previous statement about his keen desire to go into the desert (scene 20). Here are Paul's words: "PAUL: I will not consult [*non consulterò*] the flesh and blood, and will not go to Jerusalem, to those who became apostles before me. I will go into the desert . . ." (*San Paolo*, scene 20, p. 35). This is a quotation from Galatians 1:17. This allusion to the desert ("Arabia" in Galatians) is absent from Acts.

Scene 20 is set in Barcelona, which stands for Damascus, where Paul preaches immediately after his conversion to Christianity (Acts 9). In particular, scene 20 depicts Paul's hasty departure from Barcelona-Damascus because his life is in danger (Acts 9:23–25). Whereas in Acts Paul moves to Jerusalem (Acts 9:26), in *Saint Paul* the apostle refuses to go to Jerusalem and decides to withdraw into the desert, as the apostle explains in Galatians. We must remember that, in *Saint Paul*, Jerusalem is Paris, the "cultural, ideological, civic, and in a certain way religious center, that is, the sacred place of an enlightened and clever conformity" (*San Paolo*, 6). Thus, both Paul's words in scene 20 and the sudden appearance of the mysterious author of the Acts in scene 21 are extremely important in the overall economy of the screenplay. At the very beginning of Paul's journey of proselytism, Pasolini wishes to posit a clear, unquestionable opposition between Paul's desert, which is an echo of Christ's forty-day stay in the desert (Matthew 4:1–2), and the desert of our "current times" blinded by the "excess" of reality, as Pasolini clearly says. These two opposed "deserts" also embody two opposed religious concepts: salvation and damnation. According to Pasolini's screenplay, Paul's stay in the desert lasts for the symbolic time of three years ("*passaggio di tre anni nel deserto*"), as Paul says in Galatians 1:18. Before this



brief temporal note, Pasolini writes, “discourses [of the] devils [*discorsi diavoli*]” (*San Paolo*, 36). This is not the first allusion to some diabolical presences in the screenplay. At this point of Paul’s life, we could simply connect these demons to the temptations that Christ fought in the desert.

### **Satan As the “True” Author of the Acts of the Apostles: The “Falsified” Nature of This Biblical Text**

In *Saint Paul* the most important reference to the fallen angel concerns Luke himself, the author of the Acts of the Apostles. If we read further, we understand that the mysterious man from scene 21 is in reality a demon, although in scene 21 nothing betrays his evil nature. In his description of the author of Acts, who recalls the image of a hermit suffering from a great fatigue in the desert (apparently from fasting and praying), Pasolini seems to have in mind a frequent topos of hagiographic literature, that is, the devil tempting a holy person by taking up the appearance of a pious monk who usually tries to convince the holy person not to pursue harsh sacrifices because God would not be pleased. This interpretation is consistent with Pasolini’s declared view of Acts as the official and falsified document of a perverted institution. But I have also explained that in the above peculiar monologue, Luke does not betray any diabolical trait, but only the intense pain resulting from his awareness of the alienated conditions of modernity (the desert), which he has also contributed to creating through the composition of Acts of the Apostles. It seems to me that, at least at this stage of his writing, Pasolini is still not sure about the role and nature of the character Luke. The late insertions of “demons” in the screenplay, especially at the end of Luke’s mysterious monologue about the desert, reveal that Pasolini doubts that his film on the apostle Paul will succeed in conveying the false, duplicitous nature of the biblical narrative. Would the images of creepy demons convey the sinfully false nature of Acts and consequently of *Saint Paul*?<sup>85</sup>

Theologically speaking, the devil embodies the concept of division or separation. Being set apart is the result of sin, but in *Saint Paul* the apostle Paul is himself “set apart” from the other apostles, as Acts itself states. For Pasolini, separation signifies both the birth of priesthood, and thus of religious conformity, and the distance between history and its later, falsified transcription (Luke’s Acts of the Apostles). Pasolini shows

the identification between the devil and Luke at the end of scene 29, set in Geneva (Antioch), which corresponds to Acts 13:2, where the Holy Spirit speaks to the men gathered in prayer and demands that Paul and Barnabas be “set apart” for the work He has chosen for them (*San Paolo*, 47). The biblical text adds, “These two, sent on their mission by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and from there set sail for Cyprus.”<sup>86</sup> In Pasolini’s rewriting of this concise episode, the departure of Paul and Barnabas symbolizes a dramatic separation, that is, the birth of priesthood as the enforcement of a new Law (Paul and Barnabas are “set apart” from the rest of the community).

We will come back to the issue of priesthood later. At this point of his screenplay Pasolini greatly expands the biblical text and imagines a long scene in which the two apostles plus “a third missionary, John called Mark,” are now in Marseille (Seleucia) ready to board a big ship. A noisy crowd of passengers, servants, and sailors surrounds them, as if the whole scene aimed to echo the departure of immigrants for a distant and foreign land at the turn of the twentieth century. To underscore the unique role of this scene of departure, Pasolini imagines that “nothing seems to have a sound or a meaning” (*San Paolo*, 48). An “overwhelming, impetuous music” silences all noises.<sup>87</sup> At the end of this scene of disorder and detachment, in the last rewriting of his screenplay, Pasolini adds a few lines about the presence of Satan in the narration. Satan orders one of his devils to possess Luke (“to become incarnate in Luke”), who, “after finishing the Gospel, is about to write the ‘Acts’, and Satan recommends that he write this text with a false, euphemistic, and official style.” It is important to bear in mind that all references to demonic presences are later insertions.<sup>88</sup>

These late and vague additions are particularly meaningful because Pasolini only rarely uses demons in his films. Sudden instances of angel-like revelations or actual angelic apparitions are frequent occurrences in Pasolini’s works because they serve as visual rhetorical devices indicating a sudden and contemplative narrative suspension, as he explains in his essay on *cinema di poesia*. Demons, on the contrary, do not interrupt a story; rather, they make explicit the evil connotation of a given scene. In other words, demons are signifiers, rather than marks of suspension, question marks. I am obviously referring to the closing scene of the last story of *The Canterbury Tales*, the vision of a Bosch-like hell where demons are naked men painted in red and wearing fake horns and masks.<sup>89</sup> The use of these demon figures in *The Canterbury Tales* is helpful in understanding their hypothetical presence in *Saint Paul*. The

concluding scene of *The Canterbury Tales*, which is inspired by “The Summoner’s Prologue” in Chaucer’s book, opens with an angel standing on the window sill of a friar’s bedroom.<sup>90</sup> The boy playing the angel wears two big paper wings and is about to laugh. He will be the friar’s guide to hell. This young man looks like a teenager playing an angel at a school recital. In this episode, the apparition of the angel and the demons seen in hell are not visual suspensions that defy the narrative flow, but rather campy, satirical figures very much embedded in a decadent reality.<sup>91</sup> It is worth noting that in the Italian version of *The Canterbury Tales*, the actor dubbing the greedy friar also lends his voice to the most repulsive of the four libertines in *Salò*. Moreover, this demon scene in *The Canterbury Tales* recalls *Saint Paul*’s emphasis on the Church as an institution of corruption. Right after the vision of demons in hell, *The Canterbury Tales* ends with an official religious parade and a long shot of the Canterbury Cathedral. Would demons in *Saint Paul* serve as a similar satirical commentary on the “falsified” stories of Acts of the Apostles? Would *Saint Paul* contain satirical intermissions that would work as comical commentaries on the otherwise moralizing narration?

What is “false” in Acts—its style alone or the events narrated altogether? Of course, this is not a minor question. In the few lines concluding scene 30, Pasolini writes that Satan orders a demon to possess Luke “and” recommends that the apostle compose Acts in a false style. Is it reasonable to conclude that, for Pasolini, both the historical events in Acts and the style used to narrate them are somehow “false, euphemistic, and official”? By using these three adjectives, Pasolini seems to be describing a sort of hagiographic account, as if the entire Acts reminded him of the falsification of a saint’s life. Hagiographies are indeed “official” and “false” narratives, because their goal is the representation of a human being who abides by the rules of religious law in a perfect and obedient way. Saints’ lives are both “exemplary,” in that they are perfect models of conduct, and “false” in the sense that their authors have manipulated someone else’s existence to make it replicate specific models of representation.<sup>92</sup>

A hagiography is neither a completely “false” nor a completely truthful (whatever we mean by “truthful”) account. More than “false,” a hagiography is a “falsified” narrative. The author of a saint’s life does not invent from scratch; rather, he turns what is known about a holy person’s existence into a recognizable example of devotional biography. In other words, the writer universalizes a given saint’s life by giving it a repetitive and recognizable structure. The hagiographic author emphasizes or deemphasizes aspects of the saint’s biography and adds fictional

events that usually concern mystical experiences (precocious signs of holiness when the saint is a child; a subsequent, mysterious, and almost deadly illness that reveals the child's uniqueness; demonic temptations; miracles; etc.). Acts would thus belong to this genre. Like a hagiography, Acts would be a "falsified" account of real events and written in an "official" style because this narrative details the birth of an "official" Church.<sup>93</sup>

## The Beginning of *Saint Paul*

### *The Birth of a Revolutionary Movement*

The screenplay opens with an introductory vision of Paris during the Nazi occupation: "Description of Paris during that period" (*San Paolo*, 15). This description was to be made of clips from documentaries showing Nazi soldiers walking on the streets of Paris. Pasolini stresses that "it will be necessary to conduct a thorough archival research" to find visual documents that best describe the Parisian "daily life" during those days. These visual quotations would be brief vignettes ("*tranches de vie*") marked by "anguish and death." As we already know from the introduction, Paris stands for ancient Jerusalem. Like Jerusalem, Paris is an occupied city. Instead of Roman soldiers, we see Hitler's army. The Pharisees are the "French reactionary and conservative class and, among them, of course Pétain's collaborationists." If *Saint Paul* is based on the analogy between our present and the past of Paul's times, the puzzling reference to the Paris during the Second World War proposes a second analogical level. The present times are *like* the times of the Nazi occupation, which are *like* the times of the Roman occupation of Jerusalem.

Scene 2, the first fictional reconstruction in a studio, was to be the interior of a lower-middle-class Parisian apartment, whose "dignity" and "poverty" are its most visible features (*San Paolo*, 16). An affective, compassionate gaze would move from the objects of the poor apartment to a room in the dark, where the twelve apostles sit around a table. Pasolini wishes to recall a Neorealist set, with the apostles dressed as members of the French Resistance. Some of them would look like poor intellectuals, whereas others would be workers. Several other men and women, sitting around the apostles, would be the rest of this "assembly of partisans." In Italian Neorealist films, partisans are usually portrayed as lay martyrs ready to die in the name of freedom. In *Saint Paul*, the apostles would be, in a sense, "better" partisans because the religious nature of their

heroism would be apparent. The partisans of *Rome Open City* are now Christian apostles, the founders of the Catholic Church. What unites the partisans to the apostles is their similar (“analogical”) condition as dissidents in a Fascist society. Remember the figure of Ezio in *Salò*, the morally sound, physically attractive, and honest-looking guard who is caught while having illegal, heterosexual sex with a maid and is gunned down by the libertines. Ezio dies proudly declaring his Communist identity to his Fascist executioners (he raises his fist).

Given Pasolini’s free use of broad and vague terms such as *Fascism* throughout his oeuvre, we need to clarify in brief what Fascism means for him. What is the connection between the ancient Roman Empire, Italian and German Fascism, and Western societies toward the end of the twentieth century? Pasolini lays out his view of Fascism in a short article he wrote the year before his death: “Il vero fascismo e quindi il vero antifascismo—24 giugno 1974” (Real Fascism and thus real anti-Fascism, June 24, 1974). For Pasolini, *Fascist* is a synonym for *homologous*, and thus for *conformist*. A “new Power,” Pasolini writes, is slowly killing off all cultural and intellectual differences with the intention of subjugating the masses through the imposition of a new cultural homogeneity. Ironically, Pasolini confesses that he does not know what this new power is and who is behind it. “I only know it exists,” he adds. This undetectable new power is “an ‘absolute’ form of Fascism.”<sup>94</sup> It is embodied neither in the ruling political class nor in the Catholic Church. In reality, this new power has “abandoned” the Church in its attempt to transform peasants and poor people into lower-middle-class consumers. For Pasolini, the alleged “tolerance” of this new power is “false,” because human beings, regardless of their background and social status, had never before been forced to become conformist consumers. In his view, the “repression” exerted by the Roman Empire and the Italian Fascists has acquired a totalizing connotation exactly because this modern form of repression functions on its own, without responding to the will of a recognizable dictator. An “insane” behavior is the only possible reaction to this state of affairs.<sup>95</sup> “Certain mad people,” Pasolini states, “observe people’s faces and their behaviors” as if puzzled by “normal” people’s shallow conformity. Mad people do not adjust to any cultural imposition. Saint Paul is an example of this madness.

Since the apostle Paul embodies a modern madness, Pasolini removes from his retelling every allusion to the numerous mystical events in Acts, apart from Saul’s conversion on the way to Damascus. More in detail, in chapter 1 of Acts we read about the resurrected Christ’s visit with the apostles and his ascension. Before leaving them, Jesus tells his apostles

that they are about to receive the power of the Holy Spirit and that consequently they will become his witnesses (1:8). *Saint Paul* silences other essential moments of the apostles' mystical experiences: the descent of the Holy Spirit upon them at Pentecost and their speaking in tongues (2:1–4); and Peter's speeches and miracles (3). *Saint Paul* opens after two dramatic encounters between the apostles and the Jewish authorities, who order them not to preach in the name of Christ (Acts 4:1–21; 5:21–40).

Still in scene 2, we encounter the first direct speech of the script. Pasolini writes that “in the profound silence, the apostle Peter’s voice arises (*si alza*).” It is important to note that Pasolini mentions Peter’s voice, and makes no allusion to his physical appearance. Although he is the first character mentioned in the screenplay, Peter is present only through his words, which have a religious content. He later almost disappears from the screenplay, and the references to him from Acts are practically cut off. The first sentence of Peter’s speech is in fact about the crucial importance of prayer. In *Saint Paul*, what Peter says is an almost literal translation of parts of Acts 6:2–4. Given the increasing number of converts, the twelve call for a meeting to organize a better distribution of roles within the Christian community. In Acts 6:2, Peter states, “It would not be right for us to neglect the word of God so as to give out food.” Pasolini merges the first and the last sentences of Peter’s discourse. In the screenplay, Peter’s speech opens as follows: “It is not right to neglect prayer and the announcement of the word for the service in the refectories” (*San Paolo*, 16). Pasolini also moves up the reference to “prayer,” which is mentioned at the end of Peter’s speech in Acts (“We ourselves will continue to devote ourselves to prayer” [Acts 6:4]). In *Saint Paul*, the core of Peter’s discourse (the first we would hear in the film) regards the centrality of prayer. However, Pasolini’s Peter also insists that it is important to select seven trustworthy men to overlook “this amorous service to the poor” (*questo servizio amoroso ai poveri*). In Acts, Peter only speaks of the “duty” the seven apostles will carry out. The *Vulgata* speaks of “*hoc opus*” (this work [Acts 6:3]) with no reference to the term *amorous*, let alone *poor*, since the service in question concerned all the converts to Christianity, whereas Pasolini’s translation has a distinctly hagiographic undertone.

### *The Angelic Martyr Stephen, the First Visible Character*

The first character we actually see is Stephen. Pasolini imagines a “long close-up” of the “partisan Stephen, who is very young” and “is still not

due for call-up [*non ancora di leva*]" (*San Paolo*, 17). Whereas Peter is only a disembodied voice that delivers a religious message to the group of partisans, Stephen, one of the seven selected for the "amorous service to the poor," is a young face on which the camera would linger for a long time. Speaking of *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, Bernhart Schwenk stresses that the use of "unmoving single images" often accompanied by a sudden silence is "a characteristic motif of Pasolini's filmic handwriting. In particular the close-up must be described as all but a trademark of his cinematographic gaze."<sup>96</sup> Pasolini's silent and long close-ups recall the sacred portraits immersed in gold of medieval icons. As gold exalts the immutable expression of a saint's face, so do silence and a firm expression grant Pasolini's close-ups a sense of an atemporal revelation. Through lingering close-ups, Pasolini introduces the apostles in *The Gospel*, and the same shot would also show the martyr Stephen in *Saint Paul*.

Adding a short quotation from Acts in parentheses, Pasolini defines Stephen's face (*volto*) as "full of faith and fortitude [*pieno di fede e fortezza*]" (*San Paolo*, 17). The *Vulgata* (Acts 6:8) reads "*plenus gratia et virtute*" and qualifies Stephen's soul, not his face. This may seem a very minor shift in Pasolini's script, but we must also consider that Pasolini's definition is also slightly unfaithful to the original. The biblical expression is much less visual than Pasolini's translation. "Grace" is a divine gift, whereas "faith" is a human attitude. Similarly, "virtue" has a devotional component, whereas "fortitude" indicates the determination we would see on the young partisan's face. Let us remember that Stephen is the first martyr of the Christian tradition. In Pasolini's interpretation, Stephen symbolizes the innocent male youth from a poor background (remember the "dignity" and "poverty" of the apartment where the first meeting takes place) whom modern society forces to participate in its corruption, even though he remains morally pure and untouched.

Pasolini reiterates and clarifies the sacred meaning of Stephen's face in scene 6, where he describes the trial of this young Christian. In the short scene 5, which summarizes the events leading to the arrest of Stephen, Pasolini mentions again the same short passage from Acts 6:8, but this time (just a page after the first quotation) he translates it as "full of grace and truth" (*San Paolo*, 18). The new reference to "truth" instead of the previous "fortitude" points to the "truthfulness" of Stephen's beliefs and to their holy and thus eternal nature. Stephen is "involved in a partisan mission" that is about the supplying of weapons or food. We would see Stephen in "one of those terrible streets of Paris—already seen in the first documentary images—where death broods over daily life." The

same “literal” streets seen in the first scene (the documentary clips from Paris under the Nazi occupation) would become the set of a fictional rendition of Stephen’s deeds. Pasolini underscores that the viewers would realize that they are witnessing Stephen’s deeds on the streets of Paris through the eyes of some unidentified spy. Pasolini used a similar narrative strategy at the end of *Accattone*, where the viewer knows that the police are watching the protagonist. As in *Accattone*, this point of view foreshadows a tragic event (Accattone’s deadly accident; Stephen’s arrest and execution). In both cases, the protagonist is at once a victim and an outlaw. He is unaware that the authorities are after him, which makes his vulnerability and powerlessness even more apparent.

Stephen merges the image of the outlaw-victim (the poor as outcast) with that of an angelic apparition. Following the biblical narration, scene 6 takes place in a courtroom, where Stephen is unjustly accused of having cursed God. Quoting from Acts 6:15 almost verbatim, Pasolini alludes to a second close-up of the young Stephen: “But staring at him, those who sat in the Sanhedrim, saw that his face was like the face of an angel” (*San Paolo*, 19). This biblical passage has an intense visual component. We first imagine a long shot with the judges intently looking at the camera, as we saw in a scene of *Accattone*, and then a close-up of Stephen’s young angelic face. It is fair to say that an angelic presence, the martyr Stephen, is the first identifiable character of Pasolini’s screenplay. We first see his angelic face, and immediately after that we witness his death. The death of the angel Stephen announces the opening of Pasolini’s sacred narrative.

### The Meaning of Angelic Visitations in Pasolini

Angels are frequently present in Pasolini’s films and play a significant role in his poetics. The same young actress (Rossana Di Rocco) plays “the angel of God,” who reassures Joseph about Mary’s honesty and tells him that the Holy Spirit has descended upon her in *The Gospel* (Matthew 1:20–21), and also plays an angelic apparition in *Hawks and Sparrows* (Uccellacci e uccellini). If in these two films this actress identifies with an angelic vision, in *La ricotta* she is the young daughter of the poor family sitting on the grass waiting for the father (Stracci, the man who will die on the cross) to bring some food. In *La ricotta*, instead of being an apparition, she is the recipient of a sudden and joyous angelic revelation. This disclosure takes place at the end of scene 3. While the poor family is eating the meal their father has brought them, the oldest son spots an



effeminate, elderly man wearing a tunic and holding an aureole around his head. The elderly “saint” (one of the characters of the film on Christ’s crucifixion that the “director” Orson Welles is shooting at the moment) cruises the young man with an intense stare and an eloquent smile.<sup>97</sup> The young man stands up and follows the “saint,” who keeps walking toward some bushes on the left side of the scene. After a brief pause in which we see the family eating their humble meal, the “saint” shows up again. This time, a second man in costume accompanies him. Two young men wearing black shirts and black pants follow the “saints.” Like hustlers, these young men mock and cheer their elderly “john.” The second son of the poor family stands up and joins the group. This unusual procession certainly foreshadows *Salò*. The young men following the “saints” in *La ricotta* will become the young fascists who guard the libertines’ castle in *Salò*.<sup>98</sup>

Whereas her brothers accept becoming sexual commodities of a corrupt, consumerist society, the daughter stays with the mother and her baby sister. After her brothers’ disappearance with the “saints” and their followers, the girl looks surprised and smiles. A long shot shows a luminous young man with curly hair who wears a tunic similar to the those of the saints.<sup>99</sup> He looks somehow shy and almost frightened. A breeze moves the bushes in the background. This anonymous and silent character (Ettore Garofalo) is also the protagonist of *Mamma Roma*, a film that Pasolini made before *La ricotta*. In *Mamma Roma*, reproducing Mantegna’s well-known painting of Christ’s deposition *Cristo in scurto*, Pasolini makes the young Ettore die like a second Christ in the cell of a Roman prison.<sup>100</sup> This same spiritual image visits the angelic girl in *La ricotta* at the end of a scene that had staged an instance of social corruption. The viewer cannot help but connect the angelic figure appearing to the girl with the same young actor who dies at the end of *Mamma Roma*, as if the shy and silent figure who stands before the girl without saying anything were the same character after his death in *Mamma Roma*. If contamination and analogy are pillars of Pasolini’s artistic expression, it is of great importance to investigate the narrative echoes and analogies embodied by Pasolini’s amateur actors, whose fleeting presences in his films have a highly allusive and evocative significance. In *La (ri)cotta* (the ricotta cheese but also *ricotta* in the sense of “cooked again”), a film project that Pasolini envisioned as a sequel to *La ricotta*, the same young girl (Stracci’s daughter) leads a wealthy Italian capitalist to a “sort of mystical” conversion. Pasolini imagines that, because of her father’s death, the young girl is homeless and plays the violin on the streets, “according to Chaplin’s technique.” The wealthy capitalist is overwhelmed by her

“purity that punches you in the chest like a fist.” This girl, Pasolini adds, “will be the Angel in a film on the Gospel.”<sup>101</sup>

The fundamental importance of an angelic figure in Pasolini’s cinema becomes even more apparent if we realize that both the film *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* and the script *Saint Paul* find in an angelic visitation their starting point. The first words we hear in *The Gospel* are the angel’s speech to Joseph. The angel prevents Joseph from divorcing his wife and sends him back to her. *The Gospel* narrative begins unfolding from Joseph’s encounter with the angel. In *Saint Paul*, Pasolini dedicates the first two close-ups to Stephen, whose face “looked like the face of an angel.” The angelic Stephen is also the first victim of the Nazi repression. Moreover, Stephen’s final discourse before his judges foreshadows Paul’s subsequent speeches. In particular, Pasolini transcribes only the final section of Stephen’s long monologue (Acts 7:1–53) on the conflicting relationship between the people of Israel and God’s prophets. Staying very close to the biblical text, Pasolini has Stephen conclude his harangue against his hostile audience as follows: “You have always resisted the Holy Spirit, just as your fathers did. Which prophet didn’t their fathers persecute? They killed those who foretold the coming of the Upright one, and now you have become his betrayers, his murderers. You have received the laws from the hands of angels, but you haven’t observed them” (*San Paolo*, 19).<sup>102</sup> The angelic Stephen recalls that angels brought divine Law to human beings. Angels announced and signified the pact between God and his chosen people. It is evident that, by emphasizing that Stephen’s face appeared to his enemies as the face of an angel, the author of the Acts of the Apostles intends to create a parallel between the angels who first disclosed God’s Law and the young “partisan” who announces Christ’s good news. Both angelic disclosures were “resisted” by God’s chosen people.

### Paul First Appears at the Execution of the Angelic Stephen

It is at the execution of the angelic Stephen that we first encounter Paul. Pasolini underscores that the entire scene 7, which will be an analogical rendition of Stephen’s murder (Stephen is shot and not stoned) will be seen through Paul’s eyes, making an evident connection between Paul witnessing the martyr’s death and the police whose gaze had followed Stephen’s illegal activities (*San Paolo*, 20).<sup>103</sup> Scene 7 is a dense and deeply significant moment of *Saint Paul*. Introducing the set of the partisan’s death, Pasolini writes, “It is one of those places, so familiar

to our terrorized memory and to our dreams, in which between 1938 and 1945 shootings occurred. A square, the courtyard of a prison, an open space before a school." By mentioning "our" traumatized memory, Pasolini posits an additional identification between Paul's gaze and his (Pasolini's) remembrance. This second identification, the first being between Paul and the Nazi police, concerns more the screenplay than the hypothetical film. This brief emotional confession reveals the autobiographical connotation of the text.

As in Stephen's case, a close-up introduces Paul. Pasolini insists that the execution takes place "under his [Paul's] eyes" (*San Paolo*, 21). Dedicating two entire paragraphs to the description of Paul's face, Pasolini imagines a man who is only a few years older than his victim. Paul's face "is hardened by fanaticism, that is, that desire, which men have in certain historical moments, of being inferior to themselves." On his face, the viewer would see "his decision of being abject; his hypocrisy, thanks to which everything happens in the name of the law or tradition, or of God." The execution of the young partisan in *Saint Paul* echoes the execution of the partisan Ezio and his lover in *Salò*. I have already mentioned the character of this young man who, abducted by the Fascist libertines, is forced to serve as guard in their villa. At the end of the film, the four libertines and their soldiers find him making love to a black girl (the actress Ines Pellegrini, who was the slave Zumurrud in Pasolini's *Arabian Nights*) and shoot both of them. In *Salò*, the young partisan is shot in the chest repeatedly, whereas his lover is shot in the temple while she keeps her head on a stool. What connects the girl to Stephen is their innocent, childlike look. In Pasolini's words, that "adolescent martyr in his martyrdom almost becomes a kid again." Like the four homosexual libertines who are outraged at the heterosexual couple guilty of having indulged in a "normal" sexual intercourse, Paul looks with a "desperate, disgusting, culpable animosity at that murdered child."

Recalling the chaos that breaks out after Jesus Christ's execution (an earthquake; the dead arising from the graves and walking through the streets of the holy city [Matthew 27:51–53]), Stephen's murder was to be followed by "unbearable" and "unwatchable" scenes of persecution (*San Paolo*, scene 8, p. 22). It is worth noting that the final scenes of torture and murder in *Salò* similarly occur after the violent death of Ezio, the "normal" and angelic young man forced to serve as a guard. Introducing again new documentary footage, *Saint Paul* would now show massive arrests, shootings, deportations, and corpses abandoned on the streets of Paris, as if these new, shocking images showed the unleashing of a universal devastation, similar to the apocalyptic consequences of Christ's

death. The sacred sacrifice of the angelic Stephen sets the narrative in motion. It is after his death that Paul becomes the center of Pasolini's narrative. Shooting additional images in which the character Paul is seen in passing as if he were an "anonymous and forgotten character from the documentary sequences," Pasolini would allude to Paul's direct participation in the Nazi's horrible crimes (cf. Acts 8:1–3) by using a "documentary style" that would have Paul walk through the streets of Paris.

This series of desolate scenes of persecution would conclude the first section of *Saint Paul*, a film that, similar to *Salò*, is structured as an "episodic tragedy [*tragedia episodica*]" (*San Paolo*, 7). The apartment we saw at the beginning of the film would be the visual epilogue of the tragic events occurring after the murder of Stephen. That same poor but dignified apartment, where the partisans gathered to discuss the organization of the church, is now abandoned and in complete disarray. "In the silence and the light invading that emptiness," Pasolini writes, "are the mute signs of a tragedy" (*San Paolo*, 23).

### Paul's Conversion and His Mysterious Sickness (36 CE)

The new chapter, the second of *Saint Paul*, is the first to define its temporal coordinates (36 CE) (*San Paolo*, 25). The opening scene shows Paul reciting a famous passage from the Letter to the Philippians (3:5–7), in which he offers a concise but powerful autobiography. In the biblical text, Paul states that he is "a Hebrew born of Hebrew parents. In the matter of Law, I was a Pharisee; as for religious fervor, I was a persecutor of the Church; as for the uprightness embodied in the Law, I was faultless."<sup>104</sup> Pasolini moves this powerful introductory statement, which Paul in reality makes years after his conversion to Christianity, up to the time preceding his spiritual transformation. By removing all the verbs from the biblical quotation, which is written in the past tense, Pasolini turns Paul's words into a present declaration of allegiance to the Nazi regime. Pasolini's Paul delivers his speech to an "army officer or powerful bureaucrat" in the office of a military base in Paris (*San Paolo*, 27). Pasolini's (slightly modified) preceding citation from the Pauline epistle is his free interpretation of the biblical sentence: "Meanwhile Saul was still breathing threats to slaughter the Lord's disciples" (Acts 9:1). Paul receives "credentials" from the high priest (the Nazi bureaucrat in Pasolini's version) that would authorize him to arrest and deport Christ's followers to Jerusalem.

The following scene 11 shows Paul in the back seat of a black car that crosses the French countryside heading for the Spanish border (*San Paolo*, 28). Pasolini describes a desolate landscape made of “deserted villages” and “long deserted roads.” “On the horizon,” we see “the Pyrenees vaguely menacing, like an ashen wall.” This is the setting of Saul’s conversion on his way to Damascus, that is, Barcelona. God visits Saul in this vast, in-between area of desolation: “Women, elderly people, and children—desperate and mute—everywhere.” Pasolini repeats “everywhere” (*dappertutto*) twice to emphasize the overwhelming feeling of a universal catastrophe. In *Saint Paul*, the Pyrenees appear both as border and barrier. As border, the mountains allude to what awaits Saul on the other side (the new life of conversion). As barrier, they speak of an enduring internal condition, as if to say that Paul will never move away from that deserted land he is driving through. If in Acts (9:3) Saul’s conversion takes place while he was approaching the city of Damascus, in *Saint Paul* God speaks to Saul (“Paul, Paul, why are you persecuting me?”) in the middle of nowhere. Instead of taking the form of a light descending from Heaven (Acts 9:3), God invades the persecutor of the first Christians as a sudden illness. Paul faints. The driver stops the car and opens the window to help him breathe. Paul, Pasolini writes, “is lost in his sickness.” Pasolini chooses the Italian word *malore* and not, for instance, *malattia* or *male* (illness) to indicate the sudden and unexpected nature of Paul’s disease. “Who are you, Lord?” Paul responds, as we also read in Acts 9:5. In the Bible, Jesus reveals himself and orders Paul to go into the city, where he will be told what to do (Acts 9:5–6).

One of the most persistent elements of Paul’s character in *Saint Paul* is his mysterious and devastating sickness. Throughout *Saint Paul*, we read of violent bouts of this undefined disease that ravages Paul’s mind and body. The first outburst of Paul’s sickness is accompanied by blindness, as Pasolini finds in Acts (9:8–9). “Before his blind eyes,” Pasolini writes, expanding Acts 9:8 (“he could see nothing at all, and they had to lead him into Damascus by the hand”), a progressive change of scenery takes place, something he is unable to witness (from rural and deserted France to “the Catalan countryside, the sea, the suburbs of Barcelona, Barcelona . . .”) (*San Paolo*, 29). Pasolini’s insistence on what Paul cannot see is important because blindness seems to signify a persistent condition, as if Paul in fact continued to be blind even after recovering his sight. Paul will not be able to see the shots “from life” (*dal vero*) that will contrast with the “fiction” of all the present characters (“only Paul and his escort are fictional characters”). For Pasolini, the core of Paul’s

character according to the biblical account is indeed “fictional,” and is opposed to the “truthfulness” of what is shot “from life” (*dal vero*).

### Paul’s Sickness from *Teorema* to *Saint Paul*

To shed some light on Paul’s mysterious sickness, we need to look at other instances of this motif. Blindness plays a decisive role in *Edipo re*. In both *Saint Paul* and *Edipo re*, blindness derives from their referential narratives (Acts of the Apostles and *Oedipus the King*) and is not Pasolini’s invention. We must try to determine, however, if Pasolini’s representation of this motif in both works presents some common traits and, if this is the case, what relates the founder of the Church to the main character of Sophocles’s tragedy. The first direct references to an unspecified vehement disease occur in the film *Teorema* and in the homonymous novel that Pasolini wrote while shooting the film. Although it is usually called a novel, the written text of *Teorema* often reads like a screenplay.<sup>105</sup> The novel/script and film *Teorema* share the same central theme: an unspecified illness “breaks out” after the visitation of a mysterious “guest,” as Pasolini calls him, who awakens an intense sexual desire in every member of a wealthy family in Northern Italy and then, unexpectedly, abandons them. Although the ideological message of this work seems outdated (sex as a force that disrupts the falsity of the bourgeoisie), it is important to note that Pasolini posits two opposite outcomes for this sickening passion. In their adieu to the “guest,” the female characters (the girl Odetta and the maid Lucia) confess that the “guest” has triggered a profound “interest” (*interesse*) in their lives, which before were “dominated by false and miserable values.” In particular, Odetta, the daughter of the wealthy family, states that the “guest” has made her “a normal girl” because “before” she “didn’t know men.”<sup>106</sup> The maid returns to the land of her childhood (the peasants’ mythic life) and transforms her sexual passion for the “guest” into a mystical healing for others in need.

In *Teorema*, the female characters experience the disease brought about by the angelic visitation (the “guest”) as a revelation of their true selves. On the contrary, the two male characters, the father Paolo and his son Pietro, perceive their passion for the “guest” as a ravaging force that shatters their identities. In Pasolini’s allusion to the two protagonists of the Acts of the Apostles (Saint Peter and Saint Paul) we find a first reference to the mysterious illness in *Saint Paul*. In “Appendix to the

First Part," an intermission between the first narrative, which is centered on the arrival of the guest, and the second, which is focused on the dramatic changes he triggers in the bourgeois family, the novel/script *Teorema* presents a series of confessions in which each character gives voice to her or his malaise as if they were speaking to the "guest," who, in the last page of the first part, has announced his imminent departure ("I must leave, tomorrow").<sup>107</sup> The film *Teorema* offers a more concise version of the same monologues with slight variations. In the film, the young Pietro declares,

I can't recognize myself anymore, because what made me similar to other people has been destroyed. . . . You have made me different, by taking me away from the normal course of things. . . . To know that I have to lose you has made me aware of my diversity. What will happen to me in the future? My future will be like living with someone, myself, who has nothing to do with me. . . . [T]his diversity . . . is my intimate and tormented nature.<sup>108</sup>

Pietro defines his disease as the disturbing realization that he is divided and double (he is someone living with someone else who "has nothing to do" with him), very similar to Saint Paul's own sickness. Moreover, like Saint Paul, Pietro's illness revolves around his "different" sexual desire. His father Paolo, on the contrary, seems forever stuck in an obsessive mourning for his lost self-image: "You certainly came here to destroy. In me, the destruction you have caused couldn't be more complete. . . . Now I can't see absolutely anything that could lead me back to my identity. What do you offer to me, a scandal similar to a social death, a total loss of myself?"<sup>109</sup>

The film *Teorema* visualizes Paolo's final alienation by showing him in a crowded train station. Paolo cruises a young man sitting on a bench who returns his gaze and walks toward the public restrooms, a well-known place of homosexual encounters in Italy at the time. Paolo looks uncertain. Without moving, he begins to undress, and then we are shown his feet walking through the crowd with the slow and insecure gait of a blind person. As if he had never stopped walking, the last scene of the film shows Paolo traversing a desert (the arid landscape of mount Etna). His scream is the conclusive image of the film *Teorema*. The novel/script *Teorema* offers an entire chapter, (seemingly unrelated to the main story of the "guest" and his bourgeois hosts) on the experience of the Jews in the desert entitled "The Jews Walked Toward the Desert."<sup>110</sup> In the final part of this chapter on the Jewish exile, Pasolini introduces the apostle Paul and describes his journey through the desert.

The identification between the father Paolo and the apostle could not be more obvious. I have already mentioned that in *Saint Paul* the apostle withdraws into the desert instead of going to Jerusalem.

Both sicknesses are determined by the disruption of an order and the perception of one's existence as "scandal." I have mentioned that, in *Teorema*, Pasolini shot the desert scenes on Mount Etna, which is also the setting of one of the two plots of the film *Pigsty*. For Pasolini, the inhospitable landscape of the Sicilian volcano always visually expresses a moment of suspension (for instance, a dreamlike breach within the narrative, as in *Teorema* and *Saint Paul*). In *Pigsty*, Mount Etna is the setting of a medieval story of cannibalism. We see how a hungry young man first eats a butterfly, then a snake, and finally feeds on human beings. This man becomes the head of a horde of "assassins."<sup>111</sup> Eventually, the band of cannibals is arrested and executed. Before being tied to the ground to be devoured by the animals that live in that desolate area, the young man repeats three times, "I ate my father . . . and now I quiver with joy." Whereas in the screenplay Pasolini was still unable to make a final decision about this man's exact last words ("Maybe these are words that don't say anything, like a delirium. Maybe, they allude to the horror of sin," Pasolini writes), in the film the character expresses a clear, scandalous conscience.<sup>112</sup> Like Oedipus, he has committed a revolting crime against nature.<sup>113</sup>

If we keep in mind that Pasolini's negative vision of homosexuality is deeply indebted to a strict form of Freudian psychoanalysis (the original trauma in the relationship of father and son), the connection between the scandal in *Pigsty* and that in *Saint Paul* and *Teorema* is quite evident. Paolo's disease is related to the "diversity" of his young son Pietro, whose homosexuality makes him a pariah, a "scandalous" being, in his own words. In a fundamental moment of both the novel/script and the film, the father Paolo wakes up "in his bed in disorder. He is suffering enormously. At the beginning, his pain is still unconscious. . . . He wakes a bit later and slowly realizes that what makes him suffer is not a nightmare, but an actual physical pain." Still early in the morning, Paolo takes a walk through the garden of his villa and then goes back in. He stops in front of his son Pietro's room and slowly opens the door. Paolo sees his son and the "guest" in bed together. They are still asleep. "The father," Pasolini writes, "keeps looking for a long time, and feels moved. This apparition, to which he can't give a meaning, [is] revealing."<sup>114</sup> We could say that the "apparition" of the son's sexual diversity, which is also his father's diversity since Paolo also desires the "guest," reveals



the meaning of his, the father's, "enormous" physical suffering and triggers a confusing jealousy, since both father and son love the same man. Ironically, in *Teorema* the jealousy at the basis of the Oedipus complex is reversed, since it is the father's jealousy of his son that deeply affects the father's identity and leads to its ultimate revelation, and not the other way around (the male child molding his identity around his jealousy of his father, according to Freud's idea of the Oedipus complex).

An additional, important clarification on the nature of the apostle Paul's sickness comes from the brief *Saint Bastard* (Sant'Infame), a film project that Pasolini sketched in 1967–68, while he was also working on the first draft of *Saint Paul*. *Saint Bastard* in fact revolves around a disease. Its protagonist is a man whose poor family has forced him to attend the seminary.<sup>115</sup> This man soon abandons the religious institution and goes back to the borgate where he grew up. His life becomes more and more criminal and vicious. Because of his meager financial condition, he pretends to be ashamed of his sins and returns to the seminary and is finally ordained as a priest. Developing an "absurd desire to become a saint," he develops a city only for young men. People begin to believe that he is a holy person, even though he secretly continues his life of crime and debauchery typical of a young man from the borgate, according to Pasolini's mythic view of these men. He falls in love with a prostitute who gives him syphilis. Since he has always been a sickly person, he hopes his disease will not be noticed. But his syphilis becomes "another serious disease, a deadly disease, which causes atrocious pains." This illness forces him to focus on his project for boys and to abandon every other sinful activity, so that the man eventually dies "like a real saint."

The apostle's "serious disease, a deadly disease" is a major theme of *Saint Paul*. We shall see that, like the "saint bastard," the apostle suffers from some sort of venereal disease. Remember that for Pasolini the apostle's "thorn in the side" was certainly homosexuality, and also that blindness is central to the Oedipus complex, as punishment for a crime against the father. Pasolini imagines Paul, still blind, sitting alone at a table in a hotel room in Barcelona. Refusing to eat, he seems to be looking "with his blind eyes" (*San Paolo*, scene 13, 30). Faithful to the biblical text, in *Saint Paul* Ananias hears God's voice that orders him to visit Paul (*San Paolo*, scene 14, 31).<sup>116</sup> When Ananias reports God's words to him, Paul recovers from this sudden blindness. Then Ananias baptizes him. We could say that, in Pasolini's interpretation of the biblical story, the apostle regains his sight when he embraces the order of God (Jesus), whose threatening and reproaching voice he first heard right before going blind. After recovering his sight, Paul "looks around with a harsh gaze" (*San*

*Paolo*, scene 16, 32). God's stern and severe language has opened the apostle's eyes. They now share the same intolerant gaze.

My explanation of Pasolini's approach to Paul's lost and regained sight is confirmed by a late addition to the screenplay. After quoting God's words from Acts, in the last draft Pasolini includes the following note: "Voice of the devil who pretends to be God. Scene with devils." This is the first time we find a reference to the devil in *Saint Paul*. By making sure we perceive God's severe words to Paul as something falsified (diabolical), Pasolini indicates that Paul's baptism signifies his acceptance of the Law of the Father. The imposition of a divine, more-than-human Law and thus of a new social conformity is exactly what Paul the "priest," as Pasolini calls him, will strive to achieve through the rest of the screenplay. Unlike Oedipus, who finds in blindness and exile the ultimate and lawful revelation of his tormented identity, Pasolini's Saint Paul regains his sight because he abdicates to the Law of the Father. As we saw previously, in scene 30 we are told that Satan himself, through Luke, is the writer of the Acts. But the first allusion to Satan's falsifying presence within the screenplay occurs right before Paul's baptism. The falsification of Acts begins here, at the pivotal point of the Christian religion, when Paul transforms from persecutor to theologian of the Christian Law.

The duplicitous character of the new Paul becomes immediately evident when he, as a newly converted Christian and thus an opponent of the Fascist regime, meets a group of partisans in Barcelona for the first time (scene 17). Throughout the screenplay, Pasolini plays with the semantic ambiguity of "Christian-partisan" or "anti-Fascist" as almost perfect synonyms for "opponents" to Fascism. The oscillation between "Christian" and "anti-Fascist" responds to the religious ("Christian") or merely lay ("anti-Fascist") nature of their political opposition. In Acts 9:21, the episode Pasolini reinterprets at this point, we read of the Christians' fearful reaction to Paul's conversion. The Christians attending the synagogues in Damascus are surprised to hear Paul preach in favor of Christ. Paul's first words are "Jesus is the son of God" (Acts 9:20). In *Saint Paul*, Pasolini replaces this statement with a quotation from Paul's Epistle to the Galatians 5:1: "Christ set us free, so that we should remain free" (*San Paolo*, scene 17, 33). Pasolini imagines that Paul pronounces these words as a response to the anti-Fascists who doubt the sincerity of his conversion. Whereas in Acts the puzzled Christians remember Paul's violence toward them, in *Saint Paul* the anti-Fascists stress that Paul is "a fanatical, an enthusiastic and fervent servant of power," and that, for Paul, "traditions are . . . authority and hatred, racism and

discrimination.” From the very first moments of his conversion, Pasolini’s Paul is a scandal, both to his fellow Christians and to the anti-Fascists. Rather than presenting Paul’s ideological difference, Acts 9:20 stresses his perfect adherence to the new religion. In Pasolini’s version, by expressing his new faith in Christ’s freedom, Paul places himself against a lay opposition to Fascism. The anti-fascists cannot but read the apostle’s religious faith in the new freedom granted by Christ as a bigoted statement. Strictly speaking, nothing in Paul’s words reveals that he is a “fervent servant of power,” given that, on the contrary, the apostle repeats the word *free* twice.

### The Apostle’s Journey of Proselytism As a Journey to His Past

We have already examined the successive two scenes about Paul’s decision to withdraw into the desert (scene 20) and the appearance of the mysterious author of Acts (scene 21). Instead of narrating the apostle’s experience of the desert, the scene after Luke’s monologue describes the apostle “Barnabas taking Paul by hand” and walking with him through the streets of Paris. Pasolini’s free adaptation of the biblical passage (Acts 9:27 only says, “Barnabas took charge of him”)<sup>117</sup> seems to allude to a newly incapacitated Paul, as if he were blind again. Paul and his escort Barnabas walk by places and buildings of their childhood. Paul and Barnabas “see the school where they studied together” (*San Paolo*, scene 22, 36). Pasolini insists on Paul’s disease with a brief notation (“New apparition of Paul’s ‘sickness’”). This entire scene is an unquestionable echo of the final part of *Edipo re*, where the action moves from Oedipus’s archaic times to modern Italy. The blind Oedipus is sitting on the stairs of the cathedral of Bologna. Out loud, he calls “Angel,” his young guide’s name (Ninetto Davoli). Angel, who has a cross hanging on his chest, is playing soccer down in the square.<sup>118</sup> Placing his right hand on Angel’s shoulder, Oedipus, like the apostle in *Saint Paul*, then revisits the places of his past.

The recognition of familiar places (Paul and Barnabas see the school they attended together; Oedipus and Angel walk through the streets of Bologna and a countryside where the film *Edipo re* had begun) has different connotations in the two works (*Edipo re* and *Saint Paul*). In his “Appendix to *Edipo re*,” Pasolini recalls that Christ spoke against the notions of past and future, which for Pasolini are typical concerns of the bourgeoisie.<sup>119</sup> We saw that Pasolini emphasizes this point also in his video interview with Franco Citti. The Italian director stresses that, for

Christ, human beings should not worry about the past or the future. The obsession with “yesterday,” Pasolini continues, signifies the “foundation of institutions, traditions and *establishments*.” In both *Edipo re* and *Saint Paul*, the journey to the places of an original past is linked to a sense of debilitation and sad defeat. In Paul, however, this does not mean a regression such as we see in Oedipus. Paul’s return occurs at the beginning and not at the end of his life. Paul’s return to his origins is a return to the origin of his sickness, a condition that becomes a central aspect of his identity. His past enlightens his present and determines his future.

After a three-year stay in the desert and a journey to the places of his childhood, Paul joins Peter, the other apostles and their followers in a “clandestine meeting” (scene 23). Unlike the previous group of opponents, the partisans now are apostles—religious rather than lay “opponents.” Transforming an indirect speech into a direct one (cf. Acts 9:27), Pasolini makes Barnabas explain Paul’s conversion to the apostles. When Peter, still suspicious, asks Paul “Why do you do it?” (*Perché lo fai?*), Pasolini inserts a new “long close-up” of Paul (*San Paolo*, scene 23, 37). Paul’s face is “deeply marked by his meditation in the desert, which lasted three years, and maybe already tormented and deformed by the mysterious disease in his body.” Paul responds to Peter’s question with a quotation from 1 Corinthians (9:16) in which he underscores that he preaches the Gospel under compulsion and he would be in trouble if he did not: “I evangelize because it is absolutely necessary to me. Woe to me if I didn’t [evangelize]!” In choosing this forceful reply, Pasolini’s Paul alludes again to his distance and opposition to any other “opponents.” Like the lay partisans in the previous secret gathering (scene 17), Peter and the apostles seem to question not Paul’s conversion per se, but his intransigent character, his obsessive evangelism. The same doubts are shared by the lay partisans.

The following scene (24) describes Paul and Barnabas praying in the church of Notre Dame (*San Paolo*, 37–39). In this scene, Pasolini astutely blends in two distinct sections of Acts (9:28–30 and 22:17–21). While Paul is praying with Barnabas, God orders him to leave Jerusalem because His teachings are not accepted there. Paul reminds God that the people of Jerusalem know him as the persecutor of those who believe in Christ. God insists that Paul preach to the Gentiles in distant lands. The situation becomes even more dramatic when some people enter the church and tell Paul that he must run away because the authorities are looking for him. Barnabas suggests that Paul go back to Tarsus, the city where he was born and raised. The dialogue between God and Paul in this dense scene cites the conclusion of a lengthy narrative speech

that Paul gives to the Jews in Jerusalem much later in the Acts of the Apostles (22:17–21), when he returns to Jerusalem after fleeing the city, traveling extensively (to Athens among other places), and founding the churches of Corinth and Ephesus. Speaking to the Jews of Jerusalem (Acts 22), Paul recounts the most important events leading to his conversion, including God's words to him when he went blind on the way to Damascus. The conclusion of this scene (Barnabas suggesting that Paul go back to Tarsus) comes instead from Paul's first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion ("they became determined to kill him. When the brothers got to know of this, they took him to Caesarea and sent him off from there to Tarsus" [Acts 9:29–30]). Scene 24 reads as a variation of scenes 18–20, where we first saw Ananias baptizing Paul and then Paul fleeing Ananias's house because he was in danger and choosing the desert over Jerusalem. According to Pasolini, the apostle's two essential experiences before becoming actively involved in the new religious movement are his stay in the desert and his return to his origins. These two mythic moments coincide with the birth of the new Saul.

In the Acts of the Apostles, after Paul's departure for Tarsus, the narrative focus shifts to Peter's active proselytism (Acts 9:31–11:24). To this long section we find no allusion in *Saint Paul*, which instead invents a long scene about Paul's return to his home town (scene 25), which recalls *Teorema*. Describing the façade of Paul's family house, Pasolini writes that "it immediately presents itself as the house of very wealthy, very proper, and also very discreet people" (*San Paolo*, 39). The house has a garden in front and is protected by a discreet wall. Paul's house unquestionably echoes the house of the affluent family in *Teorema*. The next shot would show the interior of the house and quickly move to Paul's room. The apostle is "pale, distressed, tired, with a long beard, weak, exhausted" (*San Paolo*, 40). From the window of his room, Paul sees his high school. It is mid-day. Students are coming out of the school "for rich sons" (*San Paolo*, 41). Paul spots one of these rich kids, a pale and handsome young man, and recognizes himself in this "serious and gloomy" student. In *Teorema* the opening scene in black and white shows the young Pietro coming out of a very similar school. Like Paul, Pietro at the end of the film is a disheveled, tormented man, an artist who has become aware of his being a "scandal" thanks to his devastating homosexual passion for the "guest."

Strangely reminiscent of the fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty* in the Brothers Grimm's version, Pasolini imagines that the apostle Paul, still in great pain, withdraws from the window of his room and goes to a dependency, an artisan laboratory for textile artifacts. Paul sits down at a loom and

starts spinning. Acts 18:3 states that Paul was a tentmaker. It is in this room that Pasolini stages Paul's rapture to the third heaven. He passes out and lies on the floor unconscious as if he were dead (*San Paolo*, 42). Pasolini describes Paul's mystical vision as the "apparition of a place of his childhood, with plants, birds, insects, water, a humble 'earthly paradise.'" A very similar "earthly paradise" is also the opening scene of *Edipo re*, the garden and the house of Oedipus's birth. It is in this "earthly paradise" that we witness the origin of Oedipus's exile. In retelling the stories of Oedipus and Paul, Pasolini emphasizes that a retrieval of the past, a return to the origins, is essential for an understanding of the hero's future. Oedipus attains the fundamental insight about his and human-kind's existence by exploring the mystery revolving around his birth, and Paul needs to contemplate from the bedroom of his childhood the school he attended and a young student whose sad and pensive look reflects the apostle's own self-image. "In the beginning was exile," one could say of Pasolini's poetics.

The next scene shows Paul reading but still "devoured by his disease [*male*], humiliated by God." The Italian word *male* (both "evil" and "disease" or "plague") that Pasolini here uses for the first time to indicate Paul's disease (instead of *malattia*) is directly related to the "humiliation" that, in Pasolini's words, God is inflicting upon the apostle. Pasolini seems to be hinting here that Paul's disease is also the expression of God's punishment. Moreover, this "evil/disease" is visualized in a bourgeois setting (Paul reading in the study room of his childhood). This image recalls the first time in *Teorema* that we see the mother reading an Adelphi book and then being interrupted by the maid. Adelphi is a well-known, elegant, and intellectual publishing house run by Roberto Calasso, perfectly suitable, in Pasolini's view, for a well-educated and sophisticated member of the high bourgeoisie.

Barnabas interrupts Paul's solipsistic musings about his past and asks him to follow him to Antioch. Summarizing Acts 11:19–24, Barnabas tells Paul that in Antioch some Christians are preaching to the Greeks, who have been converting in great numbers. It was in Antioch, as Luke explains in Acts 11:26, that the disciples were first called "Christians."

## A Second Conversion: Paul and the Birth of a New Priesthood

Paul rejoices at Barnabas's good news. "Paul's face," Pasolini writes, "lit up [*s'illuminò*]" (*San Paolo*, 43). This new close-up of his main character

shows a new stage in Paul's inner transformation. What follows is Pasolini's description of Paul's metamorphosis:

Along with the light, he [Paul] has also regained the strength of a man of action, the energy of a missionary, of an apostle of a new Law. It is true that the light that enlightens him comes from his memory of God's voice that resounded in the temple. . . . However, the zeal that resurges in him is now the zeal of a priest and not that of a saint.

In this key moment of the Christian movement, Pasolini posits a new "conversion" in Paul. It is crucial to note that Paul's transformation into a man of the Law is accompanied by "strength" and "energy," which is in opposition to the image of Paul as a man devastated by an excruciating sickness. In the last version of *Saint Paul*, Pasolini adds a new allusion to "Satan and his instigator (*mandante*)."<sup>120</sup> The devil's "instigator" imitates God's voice, saying, "I want Barnabas and Paul set apart for the work to which I have called them."<sup>120</sup> Again Pasolini stresses that God's voice in Acts is a fraud. The Father's voice is the voice of the paternal Law imposing a new conformity and thus a new form of violence. This "being set apart" is what Pasolini interprets as the birth of "priesthood," the metamorphosis of Christianity from a message of freedom and salvation to a declaration of repression. As men of the Law, Paul and Barnabas take the train to Geneva (Antioch) "dressed modestly but with dignity, as bourgeois men who have a certain traditional sense of dignity" (*San Paolo*, scene 28, 44). Pasolini imagines that they step down from the train and walk through the crowd with a "vigorous and swift" pace. Paul and Barnabas cut through the crowd because they have been "set apart" as priests.

In an important article that he published in the newspaper *Il Tempo* on April 19, 1969, addressing "the problems of the Church," Pasolini contends that the Catholic Church must "deny itself"; that is, it must reject its nature of "alibi for the new morality of the bourgeoisie" if it wants to avoid a possible schism.<sup>121</sup> The Church, Pasolini continues, must "deny" its character of a state religion and abandon its hierarchical structure, returning to its original form of "ecclesia, i.e., assembly, thus renouncing the apocryphal guidelines of Saint Paul or all the aspects of Saint Paul's thought that come from the old Pharisee." This article on a hypothetical schism within the Catholic Church is in fact a follow-up to a previous piece that Pasolini had written several months before for the same newspaper (September 28, 1968). Let us remember that these articles are contemporary with Pasolini's first draft of *Saint Paul*. In "The Pope's Criticism" ("Le critiche del Papa"), Pasolini comments

on a “mysterious article” that had recently appeared in a conservative Catholic newspaper.<sup>122</sup> The title of this anonymous piece was “Paul VI’s Critical View of the State and of the Political Parties,” and it summarized the content of a letter that the Pope had sent to a Catholic conference. According to the anonymous journalist, Paul VI believed that “in Italy democracy is only formal” and not real, and that a reform of the Italian Constitution was thus necessary.<sup>123</sup> The Italian parties were unable to understand that Italian society was undergoing some dramatic changes. The anonymous writer also stated that, in Italy, the so-called Under-Proletariat (*sottoproletariato*), that is, those among the poor whose living standards are below those of the working class, “is about to disappear, and a massive industrialization is saving from misery large sections of the working class.”

Appropriating the themes examined in this “mysterious article,” Pasolini holds that the Catholic Church itself participates in this major societal transformation. According to Pasolini, in his letter the Pope seems to be taking a stance against the “power” suffocating the Italian democracy and in favor of some form of profound renovation.<sup>124</sup> A schism could take place within the Catholic Church if the Catholic hierarchies do not heed this call for renovation. But what does Pasolini mean by “power” in this specific context? I have already shown that his interpretations of “Fascism” and “power” are far from being clear. More than defining what these words mean in our modern society, Pasolini sees their negative effects. In this article, Pasolini offers a more theological view of these cryptic words. He recalls that in 1 Corinthians Paul makes the following “wonderful” statement: “As it is, these remain: faith, hope and charity, the three of them; and the greatest is charity [*caritas*].”<sup>125</sup>

In a powerful passage from *La fine del mondo* (The end of the world), his seminal study of apocalypticism, Ernesto de Martino makes an explicit reference to the above passage from 1 Corinthians when he points out that our modern attempts to take refuge in the sacred are tainted with a sense of deep despair that betrays our distance from that “healing” and productive “authenticity” expressed by Saint Paul’s “hope, faith, and love.”<sup>126</sup> These three theological concepts reflected a “communal *telos*,” unlike our fragmented society, which is dominated by our individualized submission to technology. In de Martino’s words, the primitive reacted against the possible “catastrophe of the world” (the foreboding perception of the possible loss of presence in the world) by embracing a universal, communal, mythic symbolism. Having lost this support, modernity has withdrawn from the “cosmos” (the world read according to an organizing belief system) toward the “chaos” where no shelter can be found.



The perception of a loss of stability, of a free falling toward “nothingness,” permeates Pasolini’s great emphasis on the centrality of “charity” versus the other two virtues. For Pasolini, the sacred resides in charity because hope and faith can be institutionalized; that is, they can be reduced to a passive and formal acceptance. In the poem “L’enigma di Pio XII” entirely dedicated to the “problem” of St. Paul, Pasolini expands his view of “charity” as the cornerstone of the sacred:

Of charity I only know, as the authorities say, that it exists.  
And not only that it exists, but also that it is what really matters.  
It [charity] is the understanding of a *creature* outside history,  
and, at the same time, of history itself, with its institutions!!<sup>127</sup>

As he has also stated about the concepts of Fascism and power, the poet here says that he only knows that charity “exists.” “Charity,” Pasolini clarifies, “is the *opposite* of every institution!!”<sup>128</sup> Faith and hope corrupt human reason when they are not accompanied by charity. “Faith and hope triumph in the Third Reich.”<sup>129</sup> In his article, Pasolini confirms that charity is essential to faith and hope because, without charity, faith and hope are “monstrous.”<sup>130</sup> For Pasolini, both “Nazism” and the “clerical Church” are based on faith and hope with the exclusion of charity. It is evident that, in this brief article, Pasolini exposes the essential themes of *Saint Paul* with direct lexical echoes (Paul as priest and not saint) and thematic allusions (*Saint Paul* opens in Paris during the Nazi occupation). It is in this context of oppression and a call for transformation that, according to Pasolini, Paul’s existence and message must be interpreted. Pasolini also posits a fascinating connection between Saint Paul and Pope Paul VI. Both embody an “ambiguous” moment of the Church, an institution divided into the above two opposite tensions—on the one hand, the “blind forces of power” and, on the other, the disruptive and revolutionary influence of charity along with faith and hope. Pasolini writes that for a long time Paul VI had believed he could fight this ambiguity with diplomacy but was eventually compelled to recognize that his approach was only “formal” and “not real.” Paul VI is “crucified” on the cross of this radical opposition.

Although he uses the metaphor of the crucifixion to describe Paul VI’s position, Pasolini makes clear that Paul VI does not remind him of Christ at all.<sup>131</sup> Paul VI is only the “metaphorical image” of the modern impasse that suffocates the modern Church. Paul VI, Pasolini concludes, has two options. He can either resign from his role as Celestine V, the “most saintly” among the popes, did, or he can trigger a religious schism

by separating the “clerical Fascism” from the Catholic Church, thus re-instituting “the teaching of the apostle [Paul] whose name he [Paul VI] has chosen.” Paul’s teaching, Pasolini reiterates, focuses on the centrality of charity.

In a conversation with some students, recorded in 1972 but not published until 2005, Pasolini pushes his argument even further. He bluntly states, “The Church is now useless.”<sup>132</sup> Whereas in his article on Paul VI Pasolini posits a possible schism between the two churches (the Vatican as institution and the values of original Catholicism), in this conversation he sees no difference between “the official Catholicism . . . and Catholicism as natural religion.”<sup>133</sup> He holds that “power doesn’t need it [the Church] any longer.” “Power” has replaced the Church with consumerism, which is something “less clerical, less repressive, but much more dangerous.”

### Division As Founding Concept of *Saint Paul*

Division is the explicit theme of the third section of *Saint Paul* (“45 After Christ,” scenes 29–39). As we have already noted, in its first revealing scene Pasolini rewrites the dramatic departure of Barnabas and Paul from the port of Marseille (Seleucia in Acts 13:4), which for the Italian director signifies their first actions as “priests,” that is, as members of the “clerical Church.” Sitting by Lake Geneva, a group of apostles hear God’s demanding words (“I want Barnabas and Saul set apart for the work to which I have called them” [Acts 13:2]). Reading God’s order as a symbol of the division or separation lying at the core of the Church, Pasolini repeats it in two different scenes of *Saint Paul*. Keep in mind that scenes 29–39 deal with the first controversy within the new Church about the role of circumcision for the gentiles converted to Christianity.

God’s request to divide and separate is accompanied by a rising tension within the first Christians themselves. After Barnabas and Paul depart, Pasolini takes us back to Paris, where the apostles are holding a secret meeting to let John called Mark explain why he left Barnabas and Paul (scene 31). Although Acts 13:13 simply states that, once they reached Perga in Pamphylia, “John left them to go back to Jerusalem,” Pasolini interprets this sudden departure as a sign of contrast between Mark and the two other apostles. Mark recounts not only Paul’s brave and miraculous deeds, but also his decision to preach to the gentiles. In *Saint Paul*, Mark had left because he disagreed with Paul’s drastic decision to share the Christian message with the gentiles after the Jews

had refused to listen to him (Acts 13:46). Responding to Peter's direct question, "You then left Paul because he preached Christ's words also to the gentiles, to the non-elect?" (*San Paolo*, scene 31, 51). Mark replies, "Yes, this is the reason! What Paul does is a scandal."

Luke, who is possessed by the devil's "instigator," attends this dramatic meeting. In the next scene Luke is writing in his study room (*San Paolo*, scene 32, 51). Bent over his narrow desk, Luke composes his narration of the events taking place within the Christian movement "with an elegant, clear, precise, and remorseless handwriting." He starts from Paul's arrival in Antioch and concludes with the controversy about the relevance of circumcision for eternal salvation. Paul and Barnabas had suspended their journey to return to Jerusalem and discuss this matter with the other apostles. (*San Paolo*, scene 32, 52). We then see Luke going back to the same "clandestine room" where he had witnessed the argument between Mark and Peter. This second time, Paul is also present at the meeting. This second gathering presents a new division, this time between Peter and Paul. Faithful to Acts 15:7–11, Pasolini makes Peter defend Paul's decision to preach to the gentiles. In order to make the gentiles' conversion less burdensome, Peter suggests that the Church avoid creating too many hurdles for them and limit itself to notifying the gentiles about the things they should shun (cf. Acts 15:23–29). For instance, they should abstain from eating meat sacrificed to idols.

Paul silently listens to Peter's encouraging discourse. Pasolini remarks, however, that Paul's enthusiastic face has a "pharisaic"—that is, official and insincere—expression (*San Paolo*, scene 36, 54). Similarly, Luke, the author of Acts, "smiles and hides the irony that disfigures him by blowing his nose" (*San Paolo*, 55). This puzzling situation takes us back to the issue of falsity and falsification. The presence of the "demonic" author (Luke) as a character of this scene centered on the concept of division seems to blur the boundaries between narrative truthfulness and falsification. If Luke is the falsifying narrator of Acts, what is "true" in this scene that recalls a specific passage from Acts? Where do we find Luke's dishonesty in this passage of *Saint Paul*? Although Pasolini often emphasizes that Satan is behind the writing of Acts, Luke seems to report what is actually happening in a given scene. It would be fair to say that in *Saint Paul* Luke is a faithful, reliable narrator, not a manipulative one. Pasolini seems to equate division with falsity. The character Luke is always associated with an instance of division and is at times accompanied by a vague scene with demons, which underscores that what we just read signified falsity. As I have said, Pasolini adds these demons in order to insist on the deceptiveness of a scene. His initial intention in writing *Saint Paul* must

have been to show that the Acts of the Apostles manipulates the history of Christianity. But then he moves this basic assumption from the actual facts to the meaning of these facts. To synthesize this important point, we could say that, for Pasolini, falsity is distance from truth, as division signifies a distance from Christ's "true" values. The conclusion of this syllogism is that falsity is division, and thus we have the presence of Luke as diabolical historian.

The meaning of Paul's and Luke's secretive reactions is explained in scene 39. After the two apostles depart again for Antioch, we reencounter the mysterious man whom Pasolini had previously called "the author of the Acts" (*San Paolo*, scene 39, 56). In a new close-up with a blue sky in the background, Pasolini shows us the "tormented, sweet and inexplicable" face of the "author of the Acts" who delivers a new message: "Every new institution brings about diplomatic actions and euphemistic words. Every new institution brings about a pact with one's conscience. Every new institution brings about fear of one's companion. The institution of the Church was *only* a necessity."

The "author of the Acts" is and is not Luke, as we saw him writing down his false account under the aegis of the devil. Luke is the author of the biblical text but also a character in his own falsified story. The "author of the Acts" is what Luke knows about his own falsification. The empty blue sky behind him alludes to a revelation that descends from above, from the heavens, as a truthful divine gift. Whereas during the meeting Luke's face was smiling and ironic, the mysterious author's facial expression is "tormented" and "sweet." On the contrary, Paul's face is never "ironic" in Pasolini's screenplay. Its expression recalls the torments and sweetness of the mysterious author, as if Paul and the mysterious author of the Acts of the Apostles were two facets of the same (divided) identity.

Pasolini repeats the same scenery, Lake Geneva, and the same image of the apostles Paul and Barnabas sitting by the shore in deep meditation at the beginning of the following, the longest and most challenging, fourth section of his screenplay (49 CE). This explicit reiteration of the scene describing the initial separation within the Christian movement prepares the viewer for a new, deeper division. After a long shot of the square next to the train station of Geneva, which serves to remind us that we are back to the original starting point of Paul's and Barnabas's journey as "priests" of the "clerical church" (scene 28), we find the two apostles deeply "absorbed in prayer at the shores of the lake, more or less at the same point where, six years before, God's voice had designated them for the first mission" (*San Paolo*, scene 40, 59). God's intervention,

which had taken place at the first scene (29) of the previous section of *Saint Paul*, had signified the birth of priesthood, since Paul and Barnabas had been “set apart” from the rest of the Christian community.

If in scene 29 Paul and Barnabas had been “set apart” from the other apostles, in scene 40 they are “set apart” from each other. We analyzed scene 40 at the beginning of this chapter, when I discussed Pasolini’s questionable claim that he makes Paul speak only through biblical citations. Now we realize that Pasolini’s decision to bend his self-imposed rhetorical rules derives from his desire to dramatize a fundamental aspect of his vision of Saint Paul. The heated discussion between Paul and Barnabas revolves around the apostle John called Mark. Why does Paul sternly refuse to take Mark along on their journey back to the places where they, Barnabas and Paul, had already preached the Good News? The Acts of the Apostles (15:38) only states that Paul did not welcome Mark because he had left them (Paul and Barnabas) when they were in Pamphylia, whereas in scene 31 Pasolini imagines that in reality Mark had abandoned Paul and Barnabas because Paul preached to the gentiles. Therefore, what Pasolini stages at the beginning of this new chapter is Paul’s radical isolation from the rest of the Christian movement. We could say that, at this point of *Saint Paul*, Barnabas comes to represent the side of the apostle Paul that accepts becoming a “priest” of the new “institution,” as the mysterious author of the Acts of the Apostles states in scene 39, whereas Paul embodies the other, revolutionary, side of the apostle that refuses to abide by the “diplomatic” rules of the “clerical church.” Adding a dramatic finale to his made-up debate between the two apostles, Pasolini has Paul exclaim: “Ebbene, allora separamoci! [Very well, let’s break up then!]" (*San Paolo*, scene 40, 60).

### **Division at the Core of Paul’s Apocalypticism and Homosexuality**

After his separation from Barnabas, Paul and his new companion, Silas, travel to a “City in Piedmont” (scene 41) where Paul preaches in an old building used for cultural or political activities. Pasolini here presents the theological consequences, so to speak, of Paul’s solitary mission of evangelization. In Pasolini’s rendition, Paul’s final separation from Barnabas comes to signify his radical and irreversible parting from the rest of the Christian movement altogether. In this context, his apocalyptic creed and his homosexuality come to the forefront. This part of the screenplay is a significant expansion and interpretation of Acts 15:41–16:30.

Luke writes in Acts 16:1–3 that, after traveling through Syria and Cilicia, in Lystra Paul meets Timothy, a disciple with a Jewish mother and a Greek father. According to Luke, Paul decides to take Timothy as a traveling companion and has him circumcised. Pasolini turns this brief and laconic account into the most revealing moment of Paul's identity and message.

In a big, old building located in a quiet street of the unnamed city in Piedmont, Paul the "missionary" delivers a long sermon, which is a long citation from 1 Thessalonians. Pasolini's selection from this Pauline epistle is thus of particular relevance, since this is the very first time we encounter Paul as preacher. Pasolini has Paul recite the beginning of the fourth chapter of 1 Thessalonians (4:3–6), where Paul insists on the essential importance of sexual morality:

God wants you to be holy. He wants you to keep away from sexual immorality, and each one of you to know how to control his body in a way that is holy and honorable, not giving way to selfish lust like the nations who do not acknowledge God. He wants nobody at all ever to sin by taking advantage of a brother in these matters; the Lord always pays back sins of that sort.<sup>134</sup>

Why does Pasolini choose this particular subject for the first speech of his *Saint Paul*? Why this insistence on sexual behavior and not on strictly theological matters? Pasolini underscores that, while Paul is giving his lecture, the camera will linger on his audience much more than on the speaker (*San Paolo*, scene 42, 62). Remember, on the contrary, the long close-ups of Jesus delivering his severe sermons in *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, which seem to have no audience. In *The Gospel*, Pasolini emphasizes the transcendental content of his words, as if he were speaking in atemporal space. In *Saint Paul* the emphasis shifts from the speaker to his audience, because what matters is less his moralizing message than the divisive effect it has on his audience.

While we hear the apostle's words, Pasolini notes that "a young man will be described." He is "in his twenties, but serious-looking, pensive, almost gloomy, marked by a youthful slenderness full of nobility." Next to him, we see a girl, maybe his girlfriend, who is holding his hand. Still speaking, Paul notices the young man and stares at him. The young man realizes that Paul is observing him and responds to Paul's gaze in a "shy and distressed" way. Paul seems to be leering at the young man, lusting after him, and thus contradicting what he is saying about "taking advantage of a brother in these [sexual] matters." This scene of seduction,

entirely based on exchanges of long gazes, is a private event only shared by an older and charismatic man and a naive, much younger man.

Paul continues his sermon by dwelling on the theme of “brotherly love,” but his gaze is still on the young man who, even more confused and tense, looks back at the apostle. We learn from Acts (16:3) that Paul will eventually have Timothy circumcised. This is one of the passages of Luke’s narration that allegedly reveals the fictional, “falsified” nature of his text, given that in the Letter to the Galatians (5:2–6), which is probably contemporary to Paul’s first encounter with Timothy, the apostle “inveighs against those who insist that Gentile converts should undergo this rite of passage.”<sup>135</sup> As he says in Galatians 5:2, “I, Paul, give you my word that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you at all.” Compromise or, as Pasolini would say, desire to conform is indeed behind Luke’s open falsification. The reference to Timothy’s circumcision, which is mentioned in a later scene, hints at the intimacy between Paul and the “young” Timothy. Why does Pasolini feel it is necessary to insert a strong allusion to Paul’s homoerotic bond with Timothy at this crucial point of his script? A first explanation can be drawn from the second part of Paul’s speech to the people gathered in the old building of a quiet city of Northern Italy.

A dissolve would mark the passage from the first to the second part of Paul’s sermon, which derives from 2 Thessalonians (2:1–10). At this point Paul directly broaches the theme of the Apocalypse. The apostle warns his audience that, before Christ’s Second Coming, “the son of sin” must first reveal himself. “The son of perdition,” Pasolini’s Paul continues, must first “enthroned himself in God’s temple, pretending to be God himself” (*San Paolo*, scene 42, 63). This final manifestation of Satan has not occurred yet. “In fact,” Pasolini has Paul say, “The mystery of evil is already active within things” (*Il mistero del male, infatti, già opera dentro le cose*). Pasolini’s slightly unfaithful rendition of Paul’s statement in 2 Thessalonians 2:7 betrays Pasolini’s ideological intentions. A correct translation is “The mystery of evil is already at work” (cf. *Vulgata*: “*Nam mysterium iam operatur iniquitatis*”).<sup>136</sup> By adding “within things,” Pasolini stresses that wickedness has already tainted things, that is, what was pure is now corrupt and decaying. Pasolini’s Saint Paul means to say that reality itself is already infected by evil, which is not what Paul writes in his epistle. This is another interesting aspect of Pasolini’s alleged strategy of “direct quotation” from the Bible. We are reminded of Pasolini’s dream, in which he sees the “sacred” signs of the past (ancient buildings, churches, etc.) slowly dying because, like a neglected child, they are not loved any longer.

The rest of the second part of Paul's long discourse is a somewhat faithful transcription from 2 Thessalonians 2:8–10. Paul's stress is still on the signs announcing the Apocalypse. I need only quote a short passage of Pasolini's rewriting: "The wicked one shall be revealed, . . . [t]he wicked one, whose *Parusia* [revelation] is according to Satan's faculties, with every power and signs and false prodigies, and with every seduction to evil for those who are lost, because they haven't accepted the love of the truth that would have saved them. This is why God sends them a power of deceit, so that they believe in what is a lie."

"In pronouncing these words," Pasolini writes, Paul "is terrible and almost livid, because of who knows what kind of mysterious engorgement in his soul." In *Saint Paul*, this scene stages a pivotal and revealing moment of Pasolini's interpretation of the apostle. Paul's first discourse, like Jesus's numerous speeches in *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, is a patchwork of two different texts, which tackle two seemingly different topics. In *Saint Paul*, the apostle first introduces the theme of human corruption with a direct reference to sexual behavior. According to Pasolini's Paul, the apocalypse is announced primarily by sexual immorality. In this context of sexual sinfulness Pasolini presents Paul's seduction of the "young" Timothy. Pasolini's Paul speaks against a corruption that he himself is manifesting. The *topos* of division that runs throughout the text has now reached its final stage. In his first sermon the apostle reveals his own internal paradox. Paul has a violent reaction to his own speech. He chokes on his own words (he feels an "*ingorgo*," an "engorgement" or "congestion").

A new dissolve introduces the encounter between Paul and Timothy. Paul approaches the young man who is still holding the girl's hand "in a mechanical way [*meccanicamente*]." According to Pasolini's invented conversation, the two men speak as follows:

Paul: Do you want to follow me?

The young man answers hastily, without thinking:

Timothy: Yes.

Paul: What's your name?

Timothy: Timothy.

Paul: Who are your parents?

Timothy: My father is Greek. My mother is Jewish, but converted . . .

Paul: But first I will circumcise you, even though this is against my beliefs, in respect for the Jews of this city, who know that your father is Greek.

The young man looks at him obediently. Paul expresses the arrogance of a superior.

(*San Paolo*, scene 42, 64)



The image of Paul's arrogant demeanor would fade out to show an opposite image of him. In this new scene (43) Paul is asleep in a small bedroom (*San Paolo*, scene 43, 65). We are in a new, unspecified city in Germany that would correspond to the city of Troas where, according to Luke, Paul had a vision of a Macedonian who begged him to go to his land and save his people (Acts 16:8-9). In Pasolini's rewriting, Paul is lying in bed sick. He moans, tosses, and turns, tormented by a great pain. Timothy, who has become his "beloved" (*prediletto*) disciple, takes care of him. At dawn, Paul has a vision of a young man, who is "blond, tall, strong, very handsome, with clear eyes, sensual, and pure." Pasolini adds that this man's beauty is like the external representation of "his inner being and truth" (*San Paolo*, scene 43, 66). Needless to say, Acts makes no reference to the Macedonian's appearance. Like the Macedonian from the biblical passage, this handsome young man asks Paul to go to Macedonia. Paul stares at him astonished. All of a sudden, the young man transforms into a victim of a Nazi concentration camp (*lager*). "Devoured by a mysterious illness," the young man's body now looks like the "living carcass of a *lager*." The young man's two-sided identity (handsome and disfigured by a mysterious illness) mirrors the apostle's own split and sick identity.

The vision of the attractive but also deeply sick young man haunts the apostle in his following journey to Philippi, the main city of Macedonia. In this episode Pasolini again highlights the presence of the narrator "possessed by the devil, Luke" (*San Paolo*, scene 44, 66), but here this allusion does not serve to stress the falsity of the scene, because Luke's presence is justified by the biblical text itself (Acts 16:11: "Sailing from Troas we made a straight run for Samotrace; the next day for Neapolis, and from there to Philippi").<sup>137</sup> Pasolini imagines that Paul and his followers, Timothy, Silas, and Luke, travel on a train full of immigrants and poor people. Pasolini then reports the imprisonment of Paul and Silas (Acts 16:22-24), which would be set in a German city, maybe Munich or Cologne. Chained to the wall and still suffering from the police's violent beating, Paul has a new attack of his mysterious disease. His swollen and plagued body is now "similar to the 'monster' of the concentration camp" into which the young man had transformed during Paul's vision (*San Paolo*, scene 48, 69).

According to Pasolini, Paul's mysterious illness makes the apostle a reflection of the young man he had seen in a dream. But we have also seen that in a previous scene Paul's face mirrored the face of the "mysterious author" of the Acts of the Apostles. This double mirroring (Paul and the author of Acts; Paul and the young man) is based on sickness. The

mysterious author's "tormented" face reflects the apostle's tormented body, which also reflects the young man's disfigured body. When he sees the beautiful young man in a dream, Paul is attracted to the beautiful young man. Would it be reasonable to say that it is Paul's "sick" (homosexual) desire itself that infects the image of the pure young man and makes him sick? And is the young man's beauty a reflection of the "sweet" face of the mysterious author whose "tormented" expression reflects the apostle's physical torment? If desire is the fulcrum of these circular reflections, Pasolini presents Paul himself as an image of desire.

Staying very close to the Acts of the Apostles, Pasolini describes how Paul and Silas, still in their cell, begin to sing, and suddenly an earthquake shakes the prison and cracks the doors of the prison open. Thinking that his prisoners have escaped, the police officer attempts suicide but is reassured by Paul (Acts 16:27–28). The officer asks Paul: "What can I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). After this short question, which corresponds to the original found in the Bible, Pasolini has the policeman deliver a very long monologue on the consequences of the transformation Paul has brought about in him. His first words are: "You have inspired me. Thanks to you, I know now what I didn't know before. . . . I had mistaken myself with myself (*io mi sono confuso con me stesso*) and with the world" (*San Paolo*, scene 48, 70). The policeman's speech is an evident rewriting and interpretation of Paolo and Pietro's monologues at the end of the film *Teorema*. Like the father and son in love with the mysterious guest who leaves them unexpectedly, the policeman has been seduced and transformed. Both texts (*Teorema* and *Saint Paul*) emphasize that this life-changing insight is strictly related to the experience of a radical distance (an abandonment) from the person who has triggered it. The policeman speaks to Paul as the father and son speak to the guest: "Your gaze is neither in me nor in the world." Like the guest in *Teorema*, Saint Paul brings about an awakening that manifests itself as distance and abandonment, as being "different" from "the world," a term that in this context means both the traditional Christian "carnal, sinful existence" and Pasolini's "bourgeois society." The policeman confesses that he had embraced the "life of a servant" so that "power" would consider his life acceptable. Thanks to Paul, the police officer embraces his difference from the world. In similar terms, in *Teorema*, the young Pietro had spoken of his homosexuality, a "gift" of the guest, as the realization of his irremediable difference from the "world."

Unlike the guest, however, Paul is perturbed by the officer's words, as if his emotional reaction suddenly reminded the apostle of his own

troubled desire. Pasolini writes that, at the end of the policeman's conversion, Paul again falls prey to his excruciating illness. Paul faints and dreams "fragments of his childhood," including his birth (*San Paolo*, scene 49, 71). This dream or "nightmare," as Pasolini also defines it, unmistakably reminds us of the opening scenes of *Edipo re*. In his dream, Paul sees his father lift him up toward the sky, a rather explicit echo of the scene in *Edipo re* where the father lifts up the baby Oedipus and ties his ankles to a stick. Paul also sees the garden of his childhood, which had been the setting of his rapture to the third heaven. The same garden in *Edipo re* shows Oedipus's mother for the first time. It is in this Oedipal context that Paul finally sees himself go with other children to a stadium where some "older young men" are playing. Finally, Paul finds himself in the locker room, where the older guys undress in front of him and his younger friends. Back at home, Paul feels sick and is overwhelmed by the convulsions "that will persecute him for the rest of his life." In *Heretical Empiricism* Pasolini confesses that he experienced "the first pangs" of sexual love at the age of three or four.<sup>138</sup> He remembers the "physical nature" of his desire, "so dense and burning that it twisted my viscera." Like those of Saint Paul in his screenplay, these feelings are "identical to those that I have had since then up to now."

### Pasolini and Homosexuality

At the core of Paul's illness lies his "difference," his alienation from the "world." That Pasolini had an ambiguous relationship to homosexuality is not a mystery. In his review of *Gli omosessuali* (The homosexuals), the Italian translation of a French book by M. Daniel and A. Baudry (1974), Pasolini contends that "only psychoanalysis is able to explain homosexuality."<sup>139</sup> According to Pasolini, homosexuality will never become a form of alternative sexuality accepted "in the context of [our] new tolerance." Pasolini believes that the "new tolerance" expanding throughout Western Europe and North America is "not real," but only a form of hypocrisy resulting from the new "consumerist power." Capitalistic societies see men and women as consumers, and not as human beings. In Pasolini's view, homosexuality is intrinsically different: "In general," he writes, a homosexual "wishes to make love to a straight man who is willing to engage in a homosexual experience, but whose heterosexuality is not questioned." Homosexuality itself is an expression of an unbridgeable difference between normalcy and "abnormality," although Pasolini stresses that the term *abnormality* only refers to the fact

that, even in those ancient societies that accepted homosexuality, “normalcy” was the most common form of sexuality.<sup>140</sup> For Pasolini, when Freud speaks of “normalcy,” he envisions heterosexuality as *ordo naturae*.

Given the absolute centrality of homosexual desire in *Saint Paul*, let me clarify the possible contrastive connotations of the terms *homosexuality* and *homosexual*. Pasolini’s homosexuality is still a very divisive subject among those who criticize his unwillingness to come out and join the Italian gay movement and those who insist on Pasolini’s view of homosexuality as a subversive force within bourgeois society. For the former, Pasolini fails to battle for gay social rights; for the latter, Pasolini is primarily an artist, and as such he uses the concept of homosexuality to manifest what is different, irreducible to capitalistic Fascism. In other words, Pasolini’s detractors consider him as a public figure, whereas his supporters emphasize his aesthetics. Before we idealize or defile Pasolini, it is essential to bear in mind a basic and banal idea: Pasolini was a son of his times. Pasolini explicitly states that homosexual desire is something “to explain” through psychoanalysis, and is founded on Freud’s Oedipus complex.

If we consider both the man Pasolini as an Italian homosexual and the homosexual artist Pasolini, we come to the conclusion that *homosexuality* and *homosexual* may in fact signify different things with different negative or positive connotations.<sup>141</sup> As I just said, if we look at *homosexuality* as a generic term for male desire for other men, we see that for Pasolini homosexuality is an unnatural sexuality, which only psychoanalysis can explain. As Stefano Casi writes, Pasolini embraces the Freudian view of homosexuality as a “hypertrophic love for the mother” in order to make sense of his sexual drive.<sup>142</sup> In Freud’s explanation, Pasolini finds not simply the meaning but first of all the mythic origin of his homosexuality. Given his unnatural role within the mythic structure of the family, a “homosexual” man is thus also a sign of decadence from the original, “archaic” family structure, which Pasolini poetically evokes at the end of his documentary *Comizi d’amore* on Italians’ view of sex (shot in 1963 but released in 1965). Giovanni Dall’Orto eloquently defines this reading of homosexual desire as “original sin.”<sup>143</sup> Through this biblical allusion, Dall’Orto also underscores that Pasolini’s mythic discourse about the maternal origins of homosexuality and the modern corruption of Western society in fact helps make sense of his, Pasolini’s, homosexuality. Pasolini “shapes his view of society” in order to justify “an erotic obsession.”<sup>144</sup>

As *Saint Paul* confirms, for Pasolini homosexuality is the mark of sickness and division.<sup>145</sup> It is the sign of mortality, the sign of man’s “original

sin." In Walter Siti's words, Pasolini "had had the intuition that in him a homosexual and a monster coexisted."<sup>146</sup> For Pasolini, the (homosexual) man is a monster also because his monstrosity reveals the monstrous "derealization" of reality, as Rumble says. He is a sort of Sadean creature, victim and spectator of his crime (crime in the sense of an act against the nature of things). Nico Naldini, Pasolini's cousin, puts it very clearly: "For Pasolini, homosexuality was something foreign, something to fight, something to resist."<sup>147</sup> Homosexuality, as far as the man Pasolini is concerned, is the sign of foreignness, of the expulsion from the original family due to an original sin. For Pasolini, the homosexual signifies both the beginning of time (the exile from the mother's land) and the end of time (the apocalypse within contemporary society).

The coexistence of the homosexual as a monstrous body and the homosexual as writer reveals an additional connotation of the terms *homosexual* and *homosexuality*. *Homosexual* is the name of the monster-homosexual whose writing shows the decadence he himself signifies. This paradoxical identity is similar, albeit not identical, to Lee Edelman's concept of "homographesis": "Like writing, . . . homographesis [names] a double operation: one serving the ideological purposes of a conservative social order intent on codifying identities in its labor of disciplinary inscription, and the other resistant to that categorization, intent on *de*-scribing the identities that order has so oppressively *inscribed*."<sup>148</sup>

"Homograph," Edelman further explains, is a "word of the same written form as another but of different origin and meaning; it posits, therefore, the necessity of reading difference within graphemes that appear to be the same."<sup>149</sup> We could say that the word *Pasolini*, taken both as the name of a man and the name of that man's artistic work (his writing), has a double, contrastive nature. By writing his name, the man Pasolini reveals a universal monstrosity that he himself harbors in his body.

The homosexual's paradoxical division is what the apostle Paul lives, according to Pasolini's screenplay. In this sense, as Stefano Casi underscores, the figure of the apostle acquires a special relevance within Pasolini's corpus.<sup>150</sup> Like Paul, the homosexual artist and the homosexual man are two facets of the same monster. In his insightful essay on Pasolini's homosexuality, Casi also transcribes a long passage from *Il sogno del centauro*, the conversation between Pasolini and Jean Duflot (1975) in which Pasolini seems to present an explicitly and undoubtedly positive view of the homosexual man. Pasolini says that, in his search for such a view, the homosexual man "preserves life" (*preserva la vita*) because he stands outside the symbolic order of the father, which is based on the

“cycle of procreation-destruction.”<sup>151</sup> In the later chapter on *Petrolino* and in the conclusion focused on Mario Mieli’s *Elementi di critica omosessuale*, we shall see how to read Pasolini’s seemingly positive remarks within the context of the last phase of his poetics. There the reader will find a more detailed analysis of Pasolini’s statement.

In *Saint Paul*, the apostle Paul lives a “difference” that makes him the spokesman for God’s revelation. However, his persistent and painful illness also clarifies that Paul himself is the battlefield of the war between the “world” and God’s message. Paul’s “convulsions,” which began when he first saw some young men naked in a locker room, testify to the tension between revelation and social conformity, between God’s salvation and the perversion of the world (Paul’s own homosexual tendency). In *Saint Paul*, Paul vehemently speaks against the “world” because he himself embodies the world and its division.

### Paul’s Divisive Theology

The two long final episodes of this section (49 CE) describe two dramatic contrasts between the apostle and the “enlightened” bourgeois society, which reads his message in the light of a set of received beliefs. The plot of *Saint Paul* now stages the events of Paul’s life right after the end of the Second World War. Pasolini greatly expands two events from Acts: (1) Paul’s preaching in the synagogue of Thessalonica and the Jews’ subsequent violent reaction against Jason, who had hosted Paul and Silas (Acts 17:1–9), and (2) Paul’s arrival in Athens and his famous discourse at the council of the Areopagus (Acts 17:19–33). Pasolini sets the first episode in Bonn, Germany, right after the American invasion (*San Paolo*, scene 52, 73). Jason’s house is a “refined house of wealthy bourgeois people,” who host “social and probably also literary gatherings.” Paul is received with the vague and superficial respect that the Western, middle-class intelligentsia offers to trendy spiritual thinkers coming from Asia. Paul looks “harsh, self-assured, ‘pharisaic,’” and his discourse is a selection from the Epistle to the Philippians. Pasolini chooses this particular Pauline letter because of its “harsh,” uncompromising message, which reveals Paul’s incommensurable “difference” from his audience.

Pasolini’s reading of Philippians is a blatant misrepresentation of the Pauline epistle. Both the biographical framework and the addressees of Paul’s speech in *Saint Paul* betray the original circumstances in which the epistle was composed. Philippians is for “a Christian community with whom Paul [had] a long and happy relationship,” and it is marked by

a strong sense of “joy.”<sup>152</sup> In this letter the apostle communicates his complete faith in the future, given that, whether he lives or dies, Christ is always with him. Paul writes from a prison whose location historians are still struggling to determine. The apostle also rejoices because of the Philippians’ dedication to Christ’s message. Taking this optimistic letter out of context, Pasolini turns it into Paul’s revelation of his stern and solitary creed. The Italian director selects a passage in which the apostle presents again the unresolvable tension at the basis of his thought:

Life to me is Christ, and death is a great gain. If to be alive in the flesh gives me an opportunity for fruitful work, what should I choose? I don’t know. And thus I am stuck between these two things: on the one hand, my desire to be freed of my body and to be with Christ, and this would be better; on the other hand, [my desire] to stay in the flesh[, which] is more necessary for your sake. (*San Paolo*, scene 52, 73–74)

In this almost literal transcription from Philippians 1:21–22 Pasolini seems to find an essential paradox: life is death and death is life, and the body is where death manifests itself. In the second part of his speech, the apostle stresses that the “sons of God” must live “pure” in “a corrupt and perverted generation” (Philippians 2:15; *San Paolo*, scene 52, 74). If the body is the manifestation of death, a pure Christian is the one who lives in the body as if his or her body were dead, because in fact the body is death. In a sense, the body is indeed death, according to Pasolini’s view of Paul. It is the body that shows the universal decadence addressed by Paul’s speeches.

After listening to Paul’s severe discourse, the intellectuals present at the gathering judge him with “lay detachment.” Pasolini adds that their criticism “can also be acceptable” (*San Paolo*, scene 52, 75). In other words, as a lay intellectual, Pasolini himself finds Paul’s ideals questionable. However, for Pasolini, the importance of Paul’s message doesn’t lie in its content, but in its complete “difference” from the “lay” beliefs that Pasolini himself, as a lay thinker, finds reasonable. The intellectuals present at Jason’s house in Bonn try to interpret Paul’s philosophy primarily through the lenses of Jung’s psychoanalysis, which was very popular in Italy in the seventies. The intellectuals perceive that Paul’s message expresses an “apocalyptic” view that is “more collective than personal,” although his seeing himself as important to human salvation could derive from his mother, who may have pathologically overemphasized the uniqueness of her son.

Pasolini insists on the intellectuals’ reasonable desire to understand the historical, cultural, and psychological origins of Paul’s unreasonable

discourse in order to make sense of its puzzling message, to frame it within its cultural origins, and finally to discard it. Pasolini imagines that, while outside the building groups of Nazis and Fascists (those who were not arrested at the end of the war) and also some American soldiers are protesting against Paul and throwing stones at the windows of his host's house, a radio journalist interviews Paul. The journalist's subsequent explanations of Paul's answers will "place . . . Paul in the historical and cultural context of his time" (*San Paolo*, scene 55, 78). He will also highlight the diverse theological influences present in his thought (Platonism, Stoicism, etc.) behind a generic Christian "syncretism."

A second, more violent opposition to Paul and his movement occurs in Rome, which in *Saint Paul* stands for ancient Athens. Before describing Paul's preaching in the Areopagus, Pasolini inserts a scene (56) in which the apostle speaks to a group of indigent people in the poor neighborhoods at the fringes of Rome (*San Paolo*, scene 56, 79). Pasolini writes, "This is the only 'abstract' scene of the story of Paul's life." In reality, this scene could easily correspond to Acts 17:17 where, according to Luke, Paul spoke in the Athenian market place with whomever he met. The first revealing point of this scene is its setting, the poor areas outside Rome, which are of an immense relevance in Pasolini's poetics. Second, this scene is dominated by a recurrent reference to the "tragic and daily" sun that shines over Paul and the poor people gathered to hear him preach. Paul, again devastated by his illness, "almost speaks to himself, or to the sunlight," as if he were hallucinating.

In this atmosphere of luminous suspension, the apostle continues and expands the discourse on the body and the apocalypse that he had started in Bonn. This time, Pasolini reports a very long passage from 1 Corinthians (15:35 and 15:39): "Someone may ask: How do dead people resuscitate? And what kind of body will they have when they come back? What a stupid question! What you sow must first die before it comes back to life. . . . Not all flesh is the same flesh: there is human flesh; animals have another kind of flesh; birds have another, and fish yet another." Paul announces to "the miserable gathered to hear him" that the resurrection of the flesh will generate a new flesh and a new body (*San Paolo*, scene 56, 81). "What is sown in corruption," Pasolini's Paul continues, "rises in incorruptibility; . . . what is sown in shame, rises in glory; . . . what is sown is a natural body, but what rises is a spiritual body" (*San Paolo*, 80).<sup>153</sup> This transformation will become visible at Doomsday, "when the last trumpet sounds. . . . In fact, it is necessary that this corruptible nature of ours must put on incorruptibility and this mortal being of ours must put on immortality" (*San Paolo*, scene



56, 81).<sup>154</sup> Paul's discourse speaks of a radical and apocalyptic transformation, in which the human body, which reflects the corruption and shame of the world, will turn into a luminous spiritual body that defies and overcomes death: "Death, where is your blade?" (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:55). This is the sense of Paul's speech to his "miserable" listeners. This same vision of a transcended body returns at the end of the script for *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, as we will see in the next chapter.

The sudden arrival of a truck full of hooligans (*teppisti*) interrupts Paul's speech. In Acts 17:5 these thugs are the "Jews" who attack the house of Paul's host. Before the uninterested eyes of the police that patrol the scene, the thugs chase away the poor, assault and beat up Paul in a "cold and macabre" way, and spit on him. Faithful to the biblical narrative, Pasolini then recreates a brief scene (57) at the elegant restaurant Rosati in Via Veneto, the location of the famous scene of *La Dolce Vita*, where "some Stoics and Epicureans" ironically talk about the apocalyptic ideas of this odd newcomer (cf. Acts 17:18). The next scene (58) is set in a "conference room or library," which stands for the Areopagus, where Paul delivers his famous and long discourse on the "unknown God" whom the Athenians have revered in one of the numerous monuments built for their different deities. Paul's long speech is transcribed in its entirety with only a few minor variations (*San Paolo*, scene 58, 84).<sup>155</sup> Pasolini insists on Paul's "unknown God" and on the centrality of the resurrection, because both concepts indicate an unreasonable belief in the renewal of the world. Pasolini is not interested in the Pauline apocalypse because he espouses the apostle's religious creed, but rather because, by emphasizing Paul's faith in an upcoming apocalypse, he highlights the present corruption and shame of the world. A more correct way of defining Pasolini's "Pauline creed" is to say that, for Pasolini, the corrupted world exists as a constant, perennial, apocalyptic expectation. The world itself calls for an impossible renewal.

### The Apocalypse As the Core of Paul's Theology

Adding a scene after the apostle's discourse in the Areopagus, Pasolini describes Paul wandering through the streets of Rome, "where the daily life, even in its normalcy and gaiety, appears like a nightmare." Echoing the well-known autobiographical poem "Il pianto della scavatrice" (The weeping of the excavator) from *Le ceneri di Gramsci* (Gramsci's ashes), Pasolini writes that Paul, "alone like a dog" (*solo come un cane*), walks into a public garden, which is "too green, too sunny—everything is

anonymous. Soldiers walk far away." Here the apostle has a new violent attack of his illness and, bent over a tree, throws up. Like a homeless man, he washes his face in a fountain and falls asleep on a bench (*San Paolo*, scene 59, 85–86). The thematic echoes between this scene and the poem from *Le ceneri di Gramsci* are of remarkable interest. In both texts, Pasolini depicts an instance of "difference." Both the autobiographical "I" of the poem and the apostle Paul find themselves in a modest public park (*giardinetto*), a recurrent theme of *Le ceneri di Gramsci*. In both cases, the main character's solitude results from his difference from the "world," and the image of a public park recalls the unfortunately frequent image of homeless men and women roaming through the streets of the Italian capital.

In the elegiac "Il pianto della scavatrice," the poet opposes two forms of alienation. Walking back home at night, "[b]ored, tired," he crosses "black / squares of open markets, sad / streets," while "smiling, dirty" groups of young men together drive back to the borgate where they live.<sup>156</sup> Here Pasolini offers a familiar description of his attraction toward the "mythic" condition of the poor but "pure" men of the borgate, who enjoy a "natural," physical camaraderie, whereas the poet is alone with his intellectual, social, and sexual difference. Although the "non-love, mystery, and misery / of the senses" prevent him from participating in the "forms of the world" (*le forme del mondo*), the poet believes that in a recent past he experienced a "new world" because he himself lived in the borgate. Experiencing love by proxy (he speaks of the joy of someone "who loved without being loved"), the poet remembers that, at that time, he "was at the center of the world." The borgate were the center of the world, where the poet was "poor like a cat of the Colosseum." His love for the poor young men of the borgate allowed him to sense "life / in its most present light" (*la vita / nella sua luce più attuale*), even though his love was unrequited.<sup>157</sup>

The "world" as presence and light, even if perceived through others, sustains the poet in his complete isolation, "poor like a cat of the Colosseum" or, as he writes in *Saint Paul*, "alone like a dog." In *Saint Paul*, however, the opposition between the "I" and the "world" has turned into an apocalyptic conflict. The apostle finds no presence in the world, no light, no solace. His attraction toward men, every man and not just the "salvific" young men of the borgate, is the reflection of a disease and not the source of an indirect joy, as he says in *Ceneri di Gramsci*. In *Saint Paul*, the apostle vomits against a tree while looking at a group of soldiers who cross the garden far away from him. The working-class men returning home at the end of the day in *Ceneri di Gramsci* are now

soldiers in *Saint Paul*. The heterosexual men in the poem were harmless and joyous, and neither acknowledged nor rejected the poet's desire. The poet felt close to them because he lived where they lived. In the late screenplay the heterosexual men are soldiers, whose appearance in the text always signifies repression and violence.

As if commenting on the preceding bleak passage describing Paul's solitude, the following scene presents a TV program in which some of the experts who had attended Paul's lecture gather to discuss the apostle's concept of Apocalypse. Most of them agree on a psychoanalytic interpretation, which is in reality Pasolini's own mythic and religious view of the relationship between parents and son. According to these intellectuals, Paul's idea of "redemption" is in essence a return to the subject's first years of life, when he is happy because he is "at the mercy of his Parents" (*in balia dei Genitori*) but at the same time he feels guilty because he exists (*San Paolo*, scene 60, 86). The child's guilt would correspond to the fall from the Garden of Eden. Capitalizing "Parents," Pasolini underscores their "preexistence" in an "absolute and prenatal light," and their radical distance from their son. Paul's Apocalypse would be thus nothing more than a return to a pretemporal condition (a prenatal light) through his Parents' act of "grace." Although the intellectuals' interpretation of Paul's Apocalypse should reflect their inability to understand the apostle's unreasonable thought, it is evident that this reading of Paul's spirituality in effect corresponds to Pasolini's interpretation of his own mythic condition.

While the experts are speaking on TV, Paul arrives in Genoa, which stands for Corinth, where the apostle lives with the Jew Aquila and his wife Priscilla (Acts 18:1–2). Imagining a new encounter between Paul and a group of "enlightened gentiles, intellectuals" similar to what he had described in Bonn, Pasolini begins Paul's speech in Genoa with the insistence on the unbridgeable gap between worldly and divine wisdom. The long and rather faithful quotation from the opening chapter of 1 Corinthians, which Pasolini defines as "one of [the apostle's] most sublime discourses" (*San Paolo*, scene 62, 88), deepens Paul's alienation vis-à-vis the corruption and shame of the world:

While the Jews demand miracles and the Greeks look for wisdom, I am preaching a crucified Christ: a scandal for the Jews, foolishness for the Gentiles.<sup>158</sup> . . . God has chosen what is foolish for the world [*le cose stolte del mondo*] to confound the wise; and God has chosen what is weak for the world to confound the strong; and God has chosen what is humble and contemptible for the world—exactly what does not exist

in order to reduce to nothing what exists, so that no human reason [*nessuna ragione umana*] might brag before God.<sup>159</sup>

Paul's apocalyptic redemption is manifested through what the world sees as "contemptible," that is, what is poor, weak, disposable.<sup>160</sup> Remember the previous "abstract" scene in which Paul preaches to a group of poor people living in the borgate on the outskirts of Rome.<sup>161</sup> As the poet Pasolini had sensed an allusion to the "light" of presence when he lived with the people of the Roman borgate, so does the apostle envision a future existence in God that has already been revealed through what the world considers as poor and contemptible. Following the Pauline discourse in 1 Corinthians very closely, Pasolini's Paul emphasizes the opposition between the "wisdom of the world" and the "wisdom of God," which is not revealed to human reason but rather through the intervention of the "Spirit," who "explores the depths of everything, even the depths of God" (*San Paolo*, scene 62, 90; cf. 1 Corinthians 2:10). In *Saint Paul* the Spirit is the nonrational perception of that "prenatal light" that the experts of the TV program saw as the kernel of Paul's theology. The Spirit of divine wisdom is enlightenment, a "grace," only in the sense that it inspires a longing for a pretemporal condition dominated by the Parents (*Genitori*). It is an irrational grace because it sets apart those who receive it. They are and are not in the world.

The body itself is a manifestation of the Spirit: "The body is not for fornication, but rather for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. . . . Don't you know that your bodies are members of Christ's body? . . . Do you not realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit?" [cf. 1 Corinthians 6:13–15 and 19]. If the Spirit's grace is a nostalgic awareness, the body is the locus of this divine enlightenment. According to Pasolini's reading, the subject finds in his and the other's body two essential facets of his nostalgic insight. The subject realizes that his body acts in accordance with the universal corruption of our times. The Spirit's grace makes the subject become external to himself, as someone who witnesses someone else's indecency. On the other hand, the subject finds in the other a reminder of a harmony, a union that used to be and is not any longer. Think of Pasolini and his obsession for the young men from the borgate.

The intellectuals present at the apostle's speech interpret it as the formulation of a new legal codex. An anonymous character has this insightful comment: "He [Paul] just rejected a Law, but immediately instituted a new one." Paul "is a Pharisee" (*San Paolo*, scene 62, 93). The audience recognizes that, after insisting on the moral duties of the body,

the apostle dwells on legal, formalistic issues, such as the fact that a woman should not be allowed to pray or prophesy with her head uncovered (1 Corinthians 11:5) and that, if she does not want to wear a veil, she should have her hair cut off (1 Corinthians 11:6). Paul's discourse is at once "apocalyptic" and "clerical" (*San Paolo*, scene 62, 93 and scene 63, 95). His words seem to insist on minor, petty aspects of the new Christian creed, which sound like reformulations of the Jewish Law. It is worth mentioning that some scholars now doubt the authenticity of this notorious legalistic passage from Paul's letter.

Since in this chapter we analyze Pasolini's interpretation of Paul and not Paul's texts per se, I only mention in passing that his presentation of the apostle, as a divided figure (priest and mystic), is not necessarily accurate. I waited until now to clarify this point because of the seemingly legalistic tone of the apostle's words in 1 Corinthians. Instead of presenting Paul as a prude, it is possible to claim, in Luke Johnson's words, that in the above passage the apostle "condemns Christians who frequent prostitutes not because sex is ugly but because sex is distorted when it eliminates the dimension of personal engagement in knowledge and love."<sup>162</sup> If love comes from God, sexual intimacy with prostitutes ridicules an act that "is meant to symbolize spiritual unity as well." But again, what Paul *really* meant to say matters less than what Pasolini thought he said.

At the conclusion of his long sermon, Paul, who is "pale, soaked in sweat, and almost on the verge of fainting," mentions and interprets his rapture to the third heaven (*San Paolo*, scene 63, 97).<sup>163</sup> We saw that, according to Pasolini, Paul's rapture leads him to a sudden remembrance of his first homosexual feelings. Read in the light of Pasolini's interpretation, the passage from 2 Corinthians, which concludes Paul's speech to the intellectuals of Genoa, becomes a public confession, as if Paul were openly hinting at the suffering caused by his homosexual desire. Commenting on his vision, Pasolini's Paul says:

So that I should not boast, I was given a pain [*dolore*] in the flesh, a messenger from Evil [*Male*] to debase me [*mi degradasse*], so that I wouldn't boast! And how many times have I prayed to the Lord that he might spare me this pain and debasement! But He told me: "My grace is enough for you. Strength becomes better [*la forza si perfeziona*] in weakness [*debolezza*]." <sup>164</sup>

The expression "*datus est mihi stimulus carni*" is usually translated as "I was given a thorn (or sting) in the flesh" (*una spina nella carne*). Pasolini's choice of *dolore* (pain) makes the apostle's suffering much less physical

than intellectual. "Pain" alludes to an inner torment that comes from the flesh but reverberates through the apostle's identity, body and soul alike. Similarly, "*ut me colaphizet*" (to buffet me; *per schiaffeggiarmi*) becomes "*per degradarmi*" (to debase me) in Pasolini's rendition. Again, "to debase" is much stronger than "to buffet" and involves a shameful humiliation of the victim. "To debase" has a negative, malicious connotation foreign to the Christian God. "Debasement" (*degradazione*) returns two sentences later. In the epistle, the apostle only says "*Dominum rogavi ut discederet a me*" (I begged the Lord that it might depart from me). There is no reference to degradation and shame.

The conclusion of Paul's speech to the intellectuals of Genoa (Corinth) is a citation from Romans 1:14–15: "I am indebted to the Greeks and the barbarians, to the wise and the ignorant, and hence, as far as I am concerned, I am ready to announce the Gospel to you as well, who are in Rome" (*San Paolo*, scene 63, 99). Pasolini moves from the first and second letters to the Corinthians to Romans because in Romans he finds two important references. First, Paul's message of "weakness" (*infirmirate; debolezza*), as he says at the end of the above citation, derives from his exposure to different and even opposite cultures. His "weakness" makes him receptive to disparate communications. His extreme receptivity, his passivity, derives at least in part from his sick condition. Paul's indebtedness, however, does not simply mean that he is grateful for the spiritual fruits he has reaped among the Greeks and the barbarians; it also and primarily means that he is obliged by divine will to preach the Gospel to all classes and to all ethnic groups.<sup>165</sup> Second, this Pauline passage also serves as a narrative link. After stating that his thought is founded on his debt to others, Paul announces his final journey to Rome, which in the screenplay is New York.

Before continuing the narration of the apostle's vicissitudes, Pasolini inserts a short comic interlude deriving from Acts 19, the narration of Paul's journey to Ephesus. Pasolini is particularly fascinated by the episode in which Luke writes that Paul's miracles were so remarkable that "handkerchiefs or aprons which touched him were taken to the sick, and they were cured of their illnesses."<sup>166</sup> Some itinerant exorcists tried to expel demons by stating that they did it "by the Jesus, whose spokesman is Paul."<sup>167</sup> In Pasolini's rendition of this biblical episode, Ephesus is Naples. Ravaged by his disease, Paul is preaching to a big group of poor, "miserable" Neapolitans about the sin of stealing (cf. Ephesians 4:27–28), while three young crooks watch him closely (*San Paolo*, scene 64, 103). A poor man, who looks at Paul the way "a dog looks at its master while he is eating," approaches the apostle and,

after kneeling down before him, takes away one of his shoestrings (*San Paolo*, scene 64, 105). Ironically, Paul is robbed while preaching against those who steal. The thief runs to his “miserable” house in the borgate of Naples, and cures his sick baby with Paul’s shoestring (*San Paolo*, scene 65, 106). At this point, this short intermission in Naples/Ephesus turns into a slapstick of the silent period, as we find in other Pasolini’s films such as *La ricotta*, *Decameron* (set in Naples), and *Hawks and Sparrows* with the couple Totò and Ninetto. The three villains dress up five old men and women as cripples and paralytics. The three crooks, accompanied by their gang, speak before a small crowd. They repeat the same passages from 1 Corinthians on the apocalypse and the resurrection of the body that Paul had pronounced to the poor gathered at the outskirts of Rome in scene 56 (*San Paolo*, scene 68, 109). Pasolini adds that the three criminals’ discourse will be accompanied by sacred music to underscore that Paul’s words “don’t lose their profound, sacred meaning” even in these “blasphemers’ mouths.” Paul catches them while they are performing their “miracles.” The three crooks run away to avoid Paul’s rage as in “slapstick films” (*come nei film comici*) (*San Paolo*, scene 69, 110).

The importance of this seemingly minor interlude lies in the fact that this short episode repeats scene 56, both in its set and in the selection from Paul’s letters. As Paul preached to the poor at the borders of Rome, so do the three petty criminals preach to the poor on the fringes of Naples. Not only do Paul and the crooks’ speeches share the same kind of location, they also share the same Pauline discourse on divine wisdom and the apocalyptic resurrection of the flesh from 1 Corinthians. The message conveyed through the apostle and his irreverent copycat is independent of its speaker. Although they are simply exploiting the apostle’s words, the crooks themselves are poor and thus part of that “holy” and “sacred” social class that is still outside the boundaries of bourgeois corruption.

### The Birth of Christian Conformity

Scene 70 takes us back to Paris (Jerusalem). Following Acts 21, Pasolini describes Paul’s return to the “chaotic and anxious streets of a city in a war” (*San Paolo*, scene 70, 113). We have seen that Pasolini purposefully creates contrastive scenes that look similar but convey an opposite meaning. In scene 71, we return to scene 2 of *Saint Paul*, where we first witnessed a secret meeting of the “partisans” apostles. The new gathering, which Pasolini situates right before the end of World War II (“the

liberation is imminent"; Rome was liberated in June 1944 and Paris in August 1944), is "the usual clandestine meeting." The striking difference between scene 2 and scene 71 is that the apostles, who in scene 2 were described as "partisans," that is, outlaws, are now in scene 71 the founders of a new institution, a new power.

Interpreting an episode from Acts 21:17–26, Pasolini has an anonymous apostle explain to Paul that many Jews have converted to Christ, but have also heard that he, Paul, instructs the Jews to break away from Moses's Law and to discard their customary practices such as circumcision (cf. Acts 21:20–21). Pasolini interrupts his rewriting of the biblical text and makes the same unnamed apostle deliver a long, made-up monologue on the ideology of the newborn Church as an institution based on norms and prohibitions, that is, as a new expression of power and conformity. Pasolini introduces the second part of this apostle's discourse by noting that this man speaks "in a new light—the light of history and of modernity (*attualità*) and of a new language":

Ours is an organized movement . . . Party, Church, call it whatever you want. Institutions have been established among us, who have fought and still fight against institutions. The opposition is in limbo. But in this limbo we already foresee the norms that will allow our opposition to become a strength that takes power, and this will be for everyone's sake. We must defend this future welfare also by agreeing, yes, to be diplomatic, astute, official; by agreeing to keep silent about things that should be said, to avoid doing things that should be done, or doing things that shouldn't be done. [We agree] to keep silent, to allude, to hint. To be hypocritical . . . because we are not a redemption, but rather the promise of a redemption. (*San Paolo*, scene 71, 114)

The term *institution* seems to work here as a synonym for *church*, although *ecclesia* originally did not include the concept of "organized power" but rather that of a "community of the faithful." The crucial difference between "redemption" and "promise of redemption" in this apostle's speech underscores the contrast between an active intervention to redeem history from its decadence and a "hypocritical" silence that de-emphasizes history for the sake of a vague future transformation. The apostle Paul, who in previous scenes has presented himself as the proponent of a new code, is now the one who complicates the delicate political rapport between Gentiles and Jews.

If in scene 2, the first secret meeting of the Christian partisans, Paul was a persecutor of the new religious movement, he is now, after scene 71, the victim of the newly established social order. What follows is



the description of Paul's arrest (Acts 21:27–34). While he is walking with some disciples before the French Parliament (which stands for the temple in Acts 21:27), a "Fascist" mob shouts that he has profaned the Law by bringing gentiles to the Temple and should be lynched. Echoing Jesus's last moments, these outraged people shout "Kill him! This man does not deserve to live among us!" (*San Paolo*, scene 73, 116). Once alone in a cell, Paul has a dream in which the Lord reassures him: "Courage, Paul. You have borne witness for me in Jerusalem and will do the same in Rome" (*San Paolo*, scene 75, 118).<sup>168</sup>

Similar to what he did in his rewriting of Acts 13:2 where God asks that Paul and Barnabas be "set apart," after reporting God's supportive words to Paul, Pasolini inserts a reference to a demonic presence. Pasolini adds "Scene devils" (*scena diavoli*). God's words are again expression of a doubtful, demonic power, for Pasolini the primary source of the entire Acts of the Apostles. In the screenplay, the Father's voice comes from a mysterious authority that dictates and confuses even when he seems to express support. This particular expression takes us back to the first demonic appearance in *Saint Paul* (scene 14), where Ananias, responding to God's order, visits Paul, the persecutor of Christ's followers. These vague references to an unspecified presence of the Evil one appear exclusively in connection with a divine intervention in crucial moments in the development of the Christian religion.

Before narrating Paul's stay in Vichy (Caesarea), where he meets the governor Felix and his wife, Pasolini inserts an episode on the apostle's nephew from Acts 23:16–21 (*San Paolo*, scenes 76–81).<sup>169</sup> In Pasolini's rewriting, the apostle's nephew recalls Pietro in *Teorema*. While walking home after school, the son of Paul's sister overhears some young men plan the death of his uncle. He informs the authorities, who decide to move the prisoner to another location. The real meaning of this young nephew (he is 16 or 17) is that he recalls his uncle's youth. We see him for the first time when he comes out of his high school, as in the film *Teorema* we see the young Pietro for the first time when he leaves his school after the end of classes. This image of a young man leaving school is also linked to the apostle Paul's first homoerotic memories. In Pasolini's interpretation, Paul's ascension to the third heaven occurs in this atmosphere of blossoming homosexuality. A further allusion to homoerotic feelings occurs when Paul's nephew attends the assassins' meeting in a Parisian "bistrot." Totally drunk, one of the killers embraces Paul's nephew while singing a Fascist song. Acts does not say how the young man heard about the conspiracy (cf. Acts 23:16).

After being saved thanks to his nephew, the apostle is transferred to Vichy, where he meets the governor Felix and his wife. Although, according to Acts 24:22, Felix “was fairly well informed about the Way,” he nonetheless asks Paul to explain what he is preaching. Turning an indirect discourse into a direct one, as he has already done in previous scenes, Pasolini makes Paul answer with three words: “Justice, chastity, and the Judgment to come” (cf. Acts 24:25). Felix, whose “conscience was not at peace,” dismisses Paul with a diplomatic smile and tells him that they will talk about these issues another time.

### First Part of the Ending: In a “Poor” and “Apocalyptic” Hotel

Acts 24:27 informs us that, two years later, when Porcius Festus succeeded Felix, Paul was still in prison. Pasolini turns this temporal allusion into a reference to a major power change, from the Nazis to the Americans. Pasolini stresses, however, that “formally” things have not changed (*San Paolo*, scene 84, 127), in that, according to Pasolini, a similar totalitarian power persists from Nazism to American consumerism. “Power,” Pasolini writes, “has always the same face.”

Pasolini summarizes chapters 25 and 26 of Acts in one short scene (85), because he is interested in moving the action to its last setting, New York. Paul meets the new governor and, since he is a Roman citizen, asks that he be tried before Caesar’s tribunal (cf. Acts 25:10–12). Festus thus ships the apostle to Rome, which in the script is replaced by New York (*San Paolo*, scene 85, 128). Paul’s arrival in Rome corresponds to the last chapter of Acts (28:16). Pasolini imagines that a supportive and friendly delegation of the Jewish community welcomes the apostle at the American port (*San Paolo*, scene 86, 128).

The Acts of the Apostles concludes on a hopeful note. After making his case before the leading Jews of Rome, Paul spent two years in a rented lodging, welcoming all who came to visit him and “teaching the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ with complete fearlessness and without any hindrance from anyone” (Acts 28:31). Pasolini develops these final remarks into four new sections of his screenplay (from scene 86 to scene 112) that lead to an ending split into two parts. Paul’s “rented lodging” in Rome becomes a “modest hotel” (*alberghetto*) “at the borders of the Village, on the West Side, an apocalyptic and extremely poor place [*un luogo apocalittico e poverissimo*]” (*San Paolo*, scene 87, 129). In a “curious and moving way,” this hotel reminds the viewer of the “modest hotel

where Luther King was killed." We are also to see an African American policeman keep an eye on the hallway of the floor where Paul has his room.

The apocalyptic connotation of *Saint Paul* finds its apex in this setting, a poor hotel room "at the borders" of the Village. In an "abstract," luminous, and suspended scene at the outskirts of Rome (ancient Athens), Paul delivers an apocalyptic sermon on the resurrection of the body to a crowd of indigent people. Now, at the end of *Saint Paul*, we realize that the "periphery" will be the place of Paul's final apocalyptic disclosure, his violent death. In Pasolini's text, Paul's final revelation occurs in a modest hotel room. Acts as well ends in Paul's rented lodging ("And he remained two whole years in his own hired lodging: and he received all that came in to him" [Acts 28:30]).

In *Saint Paul*, Paul's first discourse to the Roman Jews takes place in his hotel room. He states that he has done nothing against the customs of the Jews, his people, and that "for the hope of Israel, I am bound with this chain" (Acts 28:17–20). The second encounter with the Jewish community, which in Acts also takes place in Paul's rented lodging, is an official lecture held in a luxurious building like the Italian embassy in New York (*San Paolo*, scene 89, 130). Pasolini explains that Paul is to look like "an ex-Pharisee, strict, possessed (*invasato*), in sum not like a saint, but rather like a priest." He gives his speech in an "almost official tone." Without giving an exact quotation, because no direct speech is reported in Acts, Pasolini limits himself to writing that Paul's words are to come from the Epistle to the Hebrews. The second encounter with the Jews of New York ends with Paul's last words in Acts 28:25–28 where, quoting from Isaiah, he prophesies that the gentiles, and not the Jews, will listen to God's words (*San Paolo*, scene 89, 131).

After the two failed encounters with the American Jews, Pasolini adds a third scene, again set in Paul's hotel room, where the apostle is again prey to his violent disease. He has a "miserable face of an aged child, of the scum of humanity. His pain is unbearable and he moans." Paul's modest room is now filled with people, most of them poor blacks—the hotel employees and their friends and relatives—a direct allusion to the conclusion of Acts (Acts 28:30–31; *San Paolo*, scene 90, 132). Although he is "disfigured" by his illness, Paul is able to speak to them in "sudden, inspired, and fragmented" sentences, the way African Americans "are used to improvising their singing." Like his previous discourse to the poor living in the periphery of Rome, Paul's "elliptical and illogical speech" is to sound like the "birth" of the concepts that he will later

develop in the Epistle to the Romans. What Paul says in his feverish rambling is a variation of his apocalyptic vision. Like the apostle's second speech to the Jews, Paul's new monologue opens with a citation from a prophetic text. Pasolini quotes a passage from Romans (9:25–26) where Paul quotes a passage from the prophet Hosea: "As in Hosea he says: I will call that which was not my people, my people; and her that was not beloved, beloved; and her that had not obtained mercy; one that hath obtained mercy" (Romans 9:25; cf. Hosea 1:10, 2:23). The emphasis is again on the apocalyptic election of those who were told they were not God's people. Although the passage from Romans concerns the gentiles (and the prophet Hosea refers to the tribes of Israel), Pasolini turns it into a commentary on contemporary Western society.<sup>170</sup> In *Saint Paul*, the apostle declares that, at the Doomsday, those who live "at the outskirts of society" will be the elect. It is worth stressing that, in *Saint Paul*, Pasolini always sets Paul's "revolutionary" speeches in a "suspended" and dreamlike atmosphere in order to signify their sacred and atemporal meanings. Pasolini's Paul is a sort of reversed Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, a man whose apocalyptic and truthful nature arises only in a state of sickness. Paul's "evil" side, the one written and manipulated by the diabolical Luke, corresponds to his rational and "sane" condition.

The ending of *Saint Paul* is divided into two parts, which derive from two different historical and literary sources. The first part follows the events narrated in the Acts of the Apostles, whereas the second reconstructs the final years of the apostle's life after the ending of Acts. The problem is that the years preceding Paul's martyrdom in Rome are obscure and based only on references present in the apostle's letters and on an uncertain tradition. Pasolini founds his narration on two almost indisputable events: Paul's return to Ephesus, which is Naples in the screenplay, and the apostle's violent death in Rome (New York). The first part of the ending begins with Paul's trial in New York. Before a supportive crowd of the poor, the blacks, and the young people of the Village, Paul is tried and absolved (*San Paolo*, scene 91, 137). When the apostle returns to his poor hotel, he finds that many people have gathered in the hotel courtyard to welcome him. These people are the "scum" of the American society: "the dirty and provocative young 'beats' and 'hippies'"; "a group of very effeminate homosexuals wearing lots of makeup along with some young hustlers who are almost in a costume, given the excess of their violence and virility"; old drunks and old whores who are now beggars; but also some intellectuals "with ashen faces but attentive

eyes" (*San Paolo*, scene 92, 137–38). Paul's words to these dejected people are marked by a hopeful apocalypticism. Using parts of Romans 14, Pasolini has Paul remind his visitors that "none of us lives for himself and none of us dies for himself, because if we are alive, we are living for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord (14:7–8). . . . But you, why do you judge your brother? And you also, why do you despise your brother? (14:10)." Pasolini's selection from Romans highlights the concept of a universal acceptance, a universal kinship gathered under the aegis of an apocalyptic expectation. The resurrection of Christ and his Second Coming (which the historical Paul saw as imminent), "transform the relation of the believer[s] to death" and renders them members of an apocalyptic and "democratic" community.<sup>171</sup>

If in this scene (92) Pasolini presents a Paul who speaks to the poor and rejected about their apocalyptic salvation, in the following scene (93), still quoting from Romans, Pasolini offers a radically different apostle. In the same Pauline epistle, Pasolini detects two opposite ideologies. This new scene takes place in a big conference room—a cinema, or a theater, or a ballroom (*San Paolo*, scene 93, 139). Addressing the same sort of people who had gathered in the courtyard of Paul's modest hotel, Paul now presents himself "in all his power and authority of great organizer, of apostle, of founder of churches" (*San Paolo*, scene 93, 140). In his long discourse, Paul underscores the importance of "obeying the authorities, because every authority comes from God, and those authorities that exist now have been selected by God. Do you want not to fear authorities? Behave well, and you will receive their [the authorities'] approval" (cf. Romans 13:1 and 3). The audience responds to Paul's words very negatively. Paul "should be sent back to Franco in Spain." Someone says that Paul speaks in favor of political power because he is afraid of "being killed, as happened to Martin Luther King" (*San Paolo*, scene 93, 141). This is in reality the sort of death awaiting the apostle in the second ending of the script. "His preaching," someone else says, "is totally authoritarian. His expressions of weakness are either narcissistic or rhetorical devices." Someone else concludes, "For him, power is everything" (*San Paolo*, scene 93, 142). Disappointed, the same people who had supported Paul during his trial now leave the room while he is still preaching about the holiness of the Law (cf. Romans 7:7–13).

The first part of the ending concludes with a demonic revelation. The scene moves back to Rome (that is, Jerusalem). Satan, whom the viewer sees only from the back, visits Luke, the author of the Acts of the Apostles (*San Paolo*, scene 93, 143). Luke and Satan toast to the birth of

“their Church” (*San Paolo*, scene 93, 144). While they are getting drunk, they “evoke” all the crimes of the Church, “a very long list of criminal popes, all the compromises between Church and power, acts of injustice, violence, repression, ignorance, dogmas.” Totally drunk, Satan and Luke laugh at the idea that Paul is still preaching and organizing the new institution around the world.

In the first part of the ending, the apostle lives a sort of living death. Luke’s falsified narrative has become incarnate in the apostle Paul. The false biblical account has given birth to the apostle who founds a new institution. We could add that Luke’s false story has also healed the apostle, whose physical torments will be meaningless from now on. Luke’s false text has granted the apostle a new biography and a new, “healthy” body.

## The Second Part of the Ending

During the last revision of the text, Pasolini adds a paragraph (printed in italics) on a possible introductory, nonfictional scene with an “interview” (he does not say who would interview whom) on “the meaning of making a film on Saint Paul.” This additional part would precede the conclusion of the screenplay. Pasolini uses a similar technique in *Teorema*, which opens with an interview concerning the relationship between Eros and the bourgeoisie. “The past crimes and responsibilities of the Church,” Pasolini contends in this short additional paragraph, “are nothing in comparison to its contemporary responsibilities. For now the Church passively accepts an irreligious power that is dismantling the Church and reducing it to folklore” (*San Paolo*, 147). In these few lines Pasolini seems once again to underscore the apocalyptic connotation of his film project, which is confirmed by a subsequent vague reference to “articles on the *Corriere della Sera*.” Pasolini refers to two pieces he had written in September and October 1974 on the contemporary situation of the Catholic Church, which, for the Catholic Pasolini, identifies with the Church *tout court*. In these articles, Pasolini had addressed the papacy of Paul VI, as he had already done at the end of the sixties in his articles for *Il Tempo*. In the first piece, published on September 22, 1974, Pasolini comments on a statement the pope had made at his residence of Castelgandolfo. Pasolini implicitly compares Paul VI to the apostle Paul, when he is overwhelmed by a state of sudden bewilderment, one of the symptoms of his mysterious disease. Pasolini writes that the Pope had delivered his speech as if in a “*raptus*,” as the apostle Paul does in more

than one scene of *Saint Paul*.<sup>172</sup> According to Pasolini, these “almost inappropriate” expressions were not uncommon for Paul VI, who at times had “impulses of sincerity.” Pasolini has sympathy for this pope because, as he will clarify in 1975, “Paul VI feels sorry for the same things I feel sorry for.”<sup>173</sup> The Pope behaves in a contradictory way, “which is typical of every intellectual.”

In an article for *Il Tempo*, Pasolini holds that “Paul VI has openly admitted that the world has overcome the Church [and] that power doesn’t need the Church any longer.” Paul VI’s “sincere words” have a “historic” meaning because they “foresee the end of the Church.”<sup>174</sup> The Church has been “betrayed,” Pasolini continues, by “millions and millions of believers (first of all, countrymen who have converted to laicism and hedonistic consumerism).”<sup>175</sup> The identification between the “intellectual” Paul VI and the intellectual Pasolini is clear. In Pasolini’s words, he and the pope “feel pain” for the same thing. The cause of their common suffering is their awareness of the apocalyptic nature of the current historical moment. The “mythic” people of a sacred “motherland” (for the poet Friuli and the town of Casarsa, where his mother was born) used to find in the Church the expression of their culture. The Church “used to have” a mythic nature. Pasolini concludes that the current condition of the Church has a “millenarian” nature and manifests its forthcoming end.

Let us also remember that already in *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* Pasolini had emphasized the divisive nature of Jesus’s revelation. In Pasolini’s film, Christ is a stern and secure speaker who attacks the conformity of the religious institution that eventually will execute him. In *Saint Paul*, the apostle Paul embodies the division that *The Gospel* had described as the opposition between Christ and the institutionalized religion. Paul is both the messenger of Christ’s good news and the “power” that stifles that divine message of redemption. Paul’s intrinsic duality or duplicity is itself an apocalyptic sign. According to *Saint Paul*, the power of the Evil One drives a wedge into the message of the Church founder. The first part of the ending, we could say, concerns only one side of the apostle’s nature (his being the founder of a new, repressive institution). The last words coming from this first Paul concern the sanctity of the Law. The second Paul, the one who is faithful to Christ’s message of liberation, meets a very different end.

Pasolini divides the first scene (94) of this new section into four sub-scenes, all dominated by the word *transitions* (*passaggi*), which take place in different cities, although only Naples and Genoa, the first two cities of Paul’s “passages,” are given a name (*San Paolo*, scene 94a, 147–48).

Remember that Naples stands for Ephesus. Pasolini calls this series of “transitions” “a mysterious sequence-intermission.” They are indistinct cities because information about the last years of Paul’s life relies on uncertain sources. These quick “passages” through unnamed locations also serve as a final visual summary of the entire film. Long shots were to show Paul walking through “most of the places he had already visited; he speaks, but from afar, so that his voice is confused, weak, and imperceptible; meets and hugs old friends; converses with some new ones, etc.” In these first, fleeting scenes Paul withdraws from the places and people he had encountered in his journeys. In Naples (Ephesus), Paul sees Timothy and other followers (cf. 1 Timothy 1:3). Like Jesus the night of his arrest, Pasolini’s Paul says adieu to the places and people that had been his life. It is interesting to note that the ending is announced by the apostle’s weakened voice, a voice that speaks “from afar.” This new view of the apostle is accompanied by his new arrival in New York (Rome; *San Paolo*, scene 96, 149). In tears, Paul realizes that this time no one is waiting for him. He gets off the ship followed by the police, who drive him into “the traffic of the huge port.” He shares a cell with a group of criminals who look at him suspiciously (*San Paolo*, scene 98, 150). This moving rewriting of Paul’s second arrival in New York (Paul’s tears, his complete solitude) is the beginning of his Passion.

Like the first, the second part of the ending begins with Paul being released from prison. This time, however, the reason is different. The director of the prison receives a mysterious letter. After reading it, he says, as if he were “disassociated, that is, justified by his obedience: We must do him in” (*San Paolo*, scene 99, 153). Outside the prison, no one is waiting for him. Paul ends up in a poor hotel very similar to the previous one at the outskirts of the Village. This second hotel is “identical to the one where Luther King was murdered” (*San Paolo*, scene 102, 154). Pasolini highlights Paul’s isolation and solitude from the Church he himself has founded. If we focus on this element of Pasolini’s narrative (Paul withdrawing from the Church), we understand better the apparent contradiction between the first part of the ending versus the conclusive section of the screenplay. The first part sees Satan and Luke celebrate the birth of “their” Church, while Paul comes to identify with his official, sacerdotal role.<sup>176</sup> After an intermission (the part entitled “64–66 CE”), Pasolini deals with the “other” Paul, the apostle who is still faithful to the spirit of Christ’s revelation. This apparent narrative inconsistency between the first and second parts of the conclusion in fact reflects an ideological paradox: Pasolini cannot help but describe two possible finales because Paul is a divided, double figure.



In the second part of the conclusion it is Timothy who embodies the corruption of the new religious institution. From his small room in that "new modest hotel" (*stanzetta del nuovo alberghetto*) Paul composes his two letters directed at "Timothy, true child of mine in the faith" (*San Paolo*, scene 103, 155).<sup>177</sup> Timothy is now the new "pastor" (*pastore*) of Naples (which stands for Ephesus). For Pasolini, Naples is the city that best exemplifies the contrast between the two Pauls and now between Paul the apostle and Timothy, the high priest. While a voice-over was to read Paul's letter to his disciple in which he encourages him to persevere in his dedication to Christ's message of renewal, we were to see the streets of Naples where Paul had previously preached to the poor and the outcasts. Pasolini lingers on the "smelly and decrepit outskirts full of empty areas, old fetid kitchen gardens, formless and dilapidated buildings, vast squares blinded by the sun" (*San Paolo*, scene 104, 156). His emphasis on the blinding sun lighting a poor square at the periphery of a major city reminds us of the scene where Paul had spoken to the poor living outside Rome (Jerusalem). In contrast to these images of the miserable areas of Naples, Timothy's church has "a sensual and apocalyptic baroque heaviness" [*una sensuale e apocalittica pesantezza barocca*] (*San Paolo*, scene 105, 157). Seated at his "powerful, luxurious, neoclassic desk," the bishop Timothy reads Paul's letter but seems uninterested or unable to take in its message. Although his face still retains its original kindness and purity, which had triggered Paul's love for him, "a sort of dust has deposited on him, a certain lack of expression. . . . Like the statues of Christ, the Angels, the baroque and neoclassic saints hanging from the walls or vaults of his rich house."

A "documentary" (*documentario*) of an ecclesiastical ritual was then to show us Timothy performing his pastoral service. For Pasolini, *documentary* always signifies the irruption of the real in its raw, brutal essence. What is real for Pasolini can only convey violence and alienation. Remember the clips about Paris under Nazi occupation at the beginning of the screenplay, for instance, or the superimposed images in *Sequence of the Paper Flower*. Timothy would be "literally dressed in gold, crushed under his miter, almost unrecognizable" (*San Paolo*, scene 108, 160). The high priest Timothy would stage a sort of falsified, pseudo-resurrection. His religious performance would be a theatrical "promise" (as the mysterious author of Acts had said) of that resurrection that, according to the institutionalized Church, will take place sometime in an indistinct future. Around the high priest, we would see the "colorful," "sumptuous," and "carnival" choir of priests, along with the poor old ladies

praying in the pews and the political authorities in grand uniforms accompanied by their elegant wives. This “hypocritically mystical . . . work of utter unbelief” would contrast with Paul’s voice-over: “And consider this: in the last days there will be some difficult times. People will be selfish, greedy, vainglorious, arrogant, blasphemers, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, impious, without love . . . blinded by the smokes of pride, lovers of pleasures more than of God, people who seem to be religious, but in fact have rejected truth” (*San Paolo*, scene 108, 161; cf. 2 Timothy 3:1–5).

The irony of this sumptuous scene is evident. The official and conformist Timothy is the product of Paul’s evangelization. Paul is now a stern voice-over, a disembodied presence, a quotation. The apostle’s final transformation had been announced by his weakened, barely audible voice at his second arrival in New York. As an openly unrealistic technique, a voice-over indicates the distance between speaker and addressee. Paul’s message is now a relic, a dramatic warning about the end of time coming, however, from an irretrievable past.

The final scenes of *Saint Paul* take us back to New York, where Paul’s body is still ravaged by his unknown disease. Pasolini repeats the scene in the modest courtyard of Paul’s hotel where the “usual, humble and anonymous people” gather around the apostle (*San Paolo*, scene 110, 163). Among these people is a man who has been following Paul. The figure of this spy or hit man who appears at the end of *Saint Paul* reminds us of the policeman in *Accattone* who follows the last moments of Accattone’s life. Paul’s “sublime” words are now fragmentary and illogical. Back in his room, Pasolini describes a close-up of the apostle. He has the “face of a sick man, of a pariah” (*San Paolo*, scene 111, 164). Remember that the first close-up of the screenplay was of the angelic Stephen, the first martyr. *Saint Paul* opens and closes by contemplating the faces of those who are about to die (the angelic Stephen; the apostle Paul). Both Stephen and Paul, however, are about to transcend death. Stephen’s face is the face of an angel. He enters the narrative moments before being executed. The screenplay ends with a second execution. Paul’s shed blood will have the luminosity of a resurrected body.

We see Paul writing his final letter to the “bishop” Timothy. The citation is from 2 Timothy 4:6–8, where the apostle explicitly mentions that he is approaching his death: “As for me, my life is already being poured away as a libation, and the time has come for me to depart.”<sup>178</sup> It is in the same letter that Paul expresses his isolation and fatigue: “I have finished my course” (2 Timothy 4:7).

After writing this letter, the apostle goes to the balcony on his floor (*ballatoio*) to rest a little (*San Paolo*, scene 112, 165). “He looks around with a sense of profound tranquility,” Pasolini writes, “like someone secretly happy because of some accomplishment.” Paul is gunned down with “violent, lacerating shots.” The door of the bathroom, from which the hit man shot him, is still swinging back and forth. Paul falls on the floor. His blood flows into a crack and drips down on the courtyard. “It is a small rosy puddle” (*piccola pozza rosea*) on which Paul’s blood keeps dripping. His blood that “keeps falling” on the courtyard, where he had met with the poor and the outcasts, is creating a “rosy” surface. The “rosy” luminosity of the apostle’s blood recalls the well-known description of Saint Francis’s stigmata by his biographers and by the first Franciscan poet, Iacopone da Todi. Needless to say, Pasolini knew Iacopone well and quotes, for instance, one of his most famous Lauds (“Donna de Paradiso”) in a key scene of *La ricotta*. In Laud 61 (“O Francesco povero—patriarca novello”), Iacopone dwells on the open wounds found on the saint’s corpse. The one on the side “was like a sanguine rose” (*como rosa vermiglia*).<sup>179</sup> For the Franciscan poet, this bleeding rose is the sign of Francis’s sanctification, his mutation into an apocalyptic body announcing Christ’s victory over death.

Stephen’s execution at the beginning of the screenplay and Paul’s murder at the end powerfully frame an apocalyptic narrative centered on the concept of division: division within time (the “now” as a perennial fall from the “then” of an archaic reign of the mother) and division within the subject. Stephen’s face had the beauty of an angel. Paul’s blood has the luminosity of a beyond-time condition. Transcending both body and time, Pasolini’s *Apocalypse* is a utopia that first and foremost takes place in the flesh, as Paul says in the First Letter to the Corinthians. These are also the essential themes of Pasolini’s *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, the scenario that we examine in the next chapter.



# The Journey to Sodom and Gomorrah and Beyond: The Scenario *Porn-Theo-Colossal*

*This shorter chapter is a close reading of a scenario that Pasolini intended to film after Salò. Pasolini may have borrowed the expression “porn-theology” from an article by Deleuze on Klossowski’s view of the body as the ultimate and all-encompassing idiom of reality. This possible source confirms Pasolini’s obsession with the body as the locus of any apocalyptic disclosure. The kernel of this film project is a journey toward a new Bethlehem. Using a new form of analogical transposition, similar to what he also did in Saint Paul, Porn-Theo-Colossal is the story of a decent, elderly, Neapolitan man who, accompanied by a young Roman servant, leaves his city at Christmas time to follow a comet that incites him to travel toward the Savior’s birth place. The Magus’s journey passes through Sodom (Rome), Gomorrah (Milan), Numanzia (Paris), and finally Ur, the Middle Eastern city of a universal origin. After discussing the multiple versions of the text, this chapter brings to the fore the important differences between Totò, the original protagonist of the hypothetical film, and Eduardo de Filippo, whom Pasolini chose to play the role of the Magus after Totò’s death. I show how Eduardo, a major Italian actor and also (and primarily) a superb playwright, lends Pasolini some key concepts of his poetics. In particular, in the last part of his scenario Pasolini alludes to Christmas at the Cupiello’s, a famous play by Eduardo on the decadence of the pristine family values so important in Neapolitan culture. Porn-Theo-Colossal works as a summation of Pasolini’s apocalypticism: the sexual conformity supported by capitalism and the resurrection of the body as alienation, a form of surviving as one of the living dead somewhere outside of this world. In this regard, the analysis of the different conclusions is essential to an understanding of Pasolini’s complex and contradictory view of the apocalypse.*

Our analysis of *Saint Paul* has brought to the surface a fundamental aspect of Pasolini's apocalyptic thought. Rather than limiting itself to the social connotations of a lay Apocalypse—the imposition of a dehumanizing culture and the end of the sacred, *Saint Paul* reveals that Pasolini's apocalypticism finds in the body its first manifestation. In the screenplay the resurrection first occurs in the apostle himself, who is a perverse man suffering from a mysterious and horrendous disease, which bursts out when the apostle first recognizes his homoerotic desire and accompanies him throughout his life. Paul is a man “against nature” in that he at once announces a new message of physical and spiritual transformation and actively denies that very message. We could go as far as to say that, in Pasolini's view, Paul's perversion truly lies in the sterile opposition between the announcement of the “good news” and the annihilation of that possible, forthcoming, pleasurable actualization.

We could also see Pasolini's Paul as a Sadean subject who lives with the present expectation of a pleasure to come. In Pasolini's text, Paul and his disciple Timothy form a sort of Sadean secret society of friends whose pleasure consists in announcing, and thus also deferring, the imminent imposition of an ultimate pleasure. In *Saint Paul*, Paul seems to transcend his perverse nature at the moment of his death, when his blood acquires a rosy, luminous hue. Apocalyptic bodies, so to speak, know that the ultimate “pleasure” of the good news will coincide with their own erasure. Like the Sadean libertines, the apostle and his disciple have a foretaste of their annihilation. In *Saint Paul* the Apocalypse is presented as a necessary future conclusion to a state of universal corruption. Pasolini continues his exploration of this central theme of his late poetics in the scenario *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, which dramatizes the last moments preceding the unleashing of God's wrath. Pasolini makes the Apocalypse coincide with the destruction of the two sinful cities of Sodom of Gomorrah, without considering that according to the Bible the Apocalypse is much less the manifestation of God's destructive anger than the revelation of the New Jerusalem on earth. It is worth remembering that the Book of Revelation is in fact a description of the final defeat of evil and the joyous celebration of God's salvation. In *Saint Paul* this positive aspect seems to appear in the apostle's luminous blood at the moment of his death, as an allusion to the universal enlightenment still to come. We could say that *Porn-Theo-Colossal* opens where *Saint Paul* ends. Moreover, at the end of this scenario we encounter a new radiant body arising after the annihilation of a corrupted world, but this time Pasolini also clarifies his interpretation of Paul's “spiritual body,” as the apostle writes in 1 Corinthians.

In *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, Pasolini creates an essential identification between a process of spiritual enlightenment and the erasure of the sodomitical body. In a nutshell, this scenario recounts the story of an old Magus who follows the comet toward the birthplace of Jesus. In his journey, this wise man visits three “sodomitical” cities that divine wrath happens to destroy during his brief stay. Each time, the Magus resumes his path to the divine baby when he sees the citizens of these cities die. The death of the sodomites in effect punctuates the evolution of the Magus’s spiritual progress. At the end of the scenario, we see that the Magus himself is doomed to die and to divest himself of his body. We also understand that the violent death of the sodomitical “other” had foreshadowed the Magus’s death. *Porn-Theo-Colossal* does not posit an opposition between the pious man in search of the divine baby and the sinful, sodomitical other. The Magus and those who live an existence against nature show a fundamental affinity in that they are two sides of the same annihilation. The pious Magus and the sodomite die the same death.

## Introduction

In her detailed book on *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, Laura Salvini stresses that *Saint Paul*, Pasolini’s last novel *Petrolio*, and the scenario *Porn-Theo-Colossal* should be considered “distinct segments of a cohesive project.”<sup>1</sup> The biblical stories of Sodom and Gomorrah lie at the core of the scenario *Porn-Theo-Colossal* (*Porno-Teo-Kolossal*) one of Pasolini’s last “failed” projects, which, like *Saint Paul*, never became a film, although Pasolini had mentioned it to many of his friends and collaborators. According to Uberto Paolo Quintavalle, the Italian writer who was one the four libertines in *Salò*, Pasolini wished to make one more film after *Salò*. This film was to be “the story of a King Magus who travels around the world in search of the comet. The world will be composed of some exemplary cities such as Naples, Rome, Frankfurt, and Paris.”<sup>2</sup> That Pasolini intended to shoot *Porn-Theo-Colossal* right after *Salò* is confirmed in a letter the Italian artist sent to the critic Gian Carlo Ferretti.<sup>3</sup>

Pasolini began working on this text in the sixties and continued to tinker with it until the year of his death. According to the director Sergio Citti, one of Pasolini’s closest friends, who participated in many of his film projects, the producer De Laurentiis had asked Pasolini to shoot a short documentary about Christmas for an American television channel.<sup>4</sup> The title of this project was “I Re Magi randagi” (The stray kings Magi), and

Citti himself had first sketched it out. It told the story of three simpletons who cross the world and meet people as simple and naive as they.<sup>5</sup> Citti holds that Pasolini's *Porn-Theo-Colossal* derives from his, Citti's, "I Re Magi Randagi," although the final version of Pasolini's scenario is very distant from Citti's original idea. Citti did make a film entitled *I Magi Randagi* in 1996, which has almost nothing to do with Pasolini's *Porn-Theo-Colossal*. The basic resemblance between the two projects lies in the idea of a frustrating journey toward the baby Jesus, and a final realization that contradicts the travelers' original goal. Apart from this basic abstract connection, Citti and Pasolini's stories are independent endeavors.<sup>6</sup>

As far as I know, Pasolini revisited and reinterpreted *Porn-Theo-Colossal* at least three times. Before the final draft, he wrote out a first outline in 1968 and then a second, shorter, summary in 1973. These three stages of the same plot reveal important differences. We find a first synopsis in a letter to Mrs. Giulia Maria Crespi, who had written to Pasolini because Christmas was approaching and she could not find any text appropriate for her children (December 1968). The Crespis, who belonged to the Milanese bourgeoisie, were friends with Pasolini and allowed him to use some of their property for his film *Teorema*.<sup>7</sup> In her letter to Pasolini, Mrs. Crespi explains that it was customary in her family to ask the children to recite some verses next to the nativity scene. "This year," she adds, "I would like them (four voices) to say something about peace."<sup>8</sup> Mrs. Crespi refers to the Vietnam War. In his reply, Pasolini mentions that he has received innumerable letters, many of them from miserable people in jails and mental hospitals who at this time of the year feel desperate and would benefit from a friendly letter.<sup>9</sup> On top of that, Pasolini is about to take off for Tanzania. Instead of detailing a hypothetical children's text in his response to Mrs. Crespi, Pasolini outlines a first possible plot of *Porn-Theo-Colossal*.

Pasolini's letter to Mrs. Crespi introduces some important remarks on the relationship between "message" and "hagiography."<sup>10</sup> Referring to the theme of "peace," the main topic of Mrs. Crespi's letter, Pasolini holds that there are numerous "demagogical" interpretations of this term offered by the Italian leftist parties. "Infinite is the field of semiology!" he exclaims. Pasolini interestingly moves from an abstract discussion of "peace" to the names of historical figures who, for some, may have embodied this idea. His "heroes" are neither Che Guevara nor Mao. For Pasolini, Camilo Torres, the Columbian cleric (1929–66) who joined the guerrillas and died during a battle, is a truthful example of "peace" because "he spoke about peace by making war, that is, through the language of action."<sup>11</sup>

### Porn-Theology: Deleuze's Article on Klossowski

According to Pasolini, if examined from a linguistic standpoint, each life expresses a form of "action" (*azione*) that translates into an "example." In other words, each existence is a gesture. This gesture, or "action," evokes a transcendental plot. Each life, Pasolini continues, is an exemplary "work" (*opera*) that has a specific style and a specific meaning, that is, a specific "message" (*messaggio*). Like an *exemplum* in classical rhetoric, a name summarizes an entire life and carries a symbolic meaning. Pasolini may have found the expression "porn-theology" in Gilles Deleuze's essay "Pierre Klossowski et les corps-langage," published in March 1965 in *Critique*.<sup>12</sup> As far as I know, no critic has noted this possible source. Pasolini's familiarity with Klossowski and Deleuze is unquestionable. Klossowski's *Sade My Neighbor* is one of the explicit sources of *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*. In the attempt to define Klossowski's thought, Deleuze writes, "Est-ce la théologie qui devient un art total, une prodigieuse théo-pornologie?"<sup>13</sup> In Deleuze's article, Pasolini could find more than a clever expression. Referring to Klossowski's analysis of Sade's concept of communication, Deleuze emphasizes the linguistic nature of the body. Languages (language of the body; verbal expression) are gestures that can mean the opposite of what they seem to say. This rhetorical figure, Deleuze points out, is called solecism.<sup>14</sup> In *La monnaie vivante* (The living currency), Klossowski states, "There is only one authentic universal communication: *An exchange between bodies through the secret language of corporeal signs.*"<sup>15</sup> Deleuze adds, "The body is language because in essence it is a form of 'flexion.' In reflection, corporeal flexion appears as if multiplied, divided, opposed to itself, reflected upon itself. It finally appears for what it is, having been freed of everything that normally hides it."<sup>16</sup> Deleuze speaks of the "internal pantomime" constantly going on within language, whereas "a discourse, an internal narration" takes place within the body.

If we rephrase Pasolini's statement in the light of Deleuze's analysis of Klossowski, we could say that Pasolini's concept of life as a form of "action" summons the image of a body miming the "gesture" lying at the core of its life. This gesture is "reflected" upon the surface of verbal language, which has brought to the fore the meaning of the body's "action." This statuary, firm gesture that summarizes an existence recalls a painting depicting the martyrdom of a saint, the unforgettable gesture that signifies this saint's existence (for instance, Saint Lucy offering her eyes on a plate; Saint Sebastian tied to a tree and pierced by numerous arrows). Deleuze reminds the reader that our ultimate salvation lies in



the gesture or action formulated by the body: "The spirit acquires its salvation only insofar as it returns to its body, since the resurrection of the body determines the survival of the spirit."<sup>17</sup>

"I rehabilitate hagiography," Pasolini declares in his letter to Mrs. Crespi. Pasolini contends that in the lives of saints, "existence" is a narrative that blends a transcendental and a biographical layer. And like a saint's life, existence is "invented" (reflected upon) in order to become a recognizable narrative form, an "example." Remember that in several of his famous essays on cinema, Pasolini underscores the essential importance of editing in the film process. Editing is the means by which the infinite signs of an existence turn into a coherent "hagiography." Editing is indeed a form of reflection, in which the gestures (of the body) of reality metamorphose into a coherent language based on the viewer's (the director's) reflection. As we have seen, *Saint Paul* itself is a form of hagiography based on a series of "edited" and "invented" verbal and visual components (citations from the Pauline texts; the "analogical" transformation of Paul's life into an episodic narration transferred to our modern times).

In his letter to Mrs. Crespi, Pasolini mentions that for this new film idea, he had originally considered two comic actors, Totò and Ninetto Davoli, who had been the protagonists of *Uccellacci e uccellini* (Hawks and sparrows). He thought of them because *Porn-Theo-Colossal* and *Uccellacci e uccellini* share similar narrative elements. Each work concerns a journey that concludes with an unmistakably apocalyptic message. Both are picaresque and comical stories about the end of time. It will be useful to mention only a few elements of this famous film. *Uccellacci e uccellini* narrates the story of two poor men, an elderly but dignified father and his naive and masculine son, who set off to evict a poor family living near Rome. All of a sudden, a crow with Francesco Leonetti's voice joins them in their trip. Speaking as a Marxist intellectual, the crow soon alienates the two men, whose basic interests are food and sex. Terribly hungry after their long walk, Totò and Ninetto end up eating the crow/Leonetti. Before being killed, in the screenplay the crow delivers a long apocalyptic speech:

A ghost is moving through Europe, and it is the crisis of Marxism. We must do, however, everything we possibly can to find our path back to the revolution, because today more than ever before Marxism offers itself as our only way of salvation. It [Marxism] saves our past, and thus also our future. Capitalism contends that it wishes to save our past, but in fact it destroys it.<sup>18</sup>

Reminiscent of the cricket in *Pinocchio*, the crow speaks in the name of wisdom. Like the cricket, the crow encounters a violent end. In the

crow's tragic speech, the death of Marxism is identified with the death of humanism. In the crow's words, Marxism guards both the past and the future of the human condition, for the crow is convinced that Marxism envisions a pristine, mythic class of human beings untainted by the decadence of history and modern capitalism. In the beginning, we could say, was the natural world of an Edenic, Marxist condition. Working against humankind's nature, capitalism is at once sodomitical and apocalyptic.

As a bourgeois intellectual and a sodomite, Pasolini partakes of the capitalistic practices against nature. Let us remember briefly the obviously autobiographical subtext of Pasolini's views. Pasolini's idealization of the working classes outside the boundaries of the "sodomitical" city had an openly erotic connotation. As an expression of the capitalistic practices "against nature," the middle-class sodomite at once "infects" those who live outside the boundaries of a capitalistic society and is able to foresee the apocalyptic erasure of what is natural and mythic.

In the letter to Mrs. Crespi, Pasolini contends that *Porn-Theo-Colossal* will continue and develop the themes of *Uccellacci e uccellini*. Although Pasolini made very significant changes in the final version of the scenario, this early description helps us understand the overarching meaning of Pasolini's project. He writes that *Colossal* would recount the picaresque story of one of the Magi who follows the star announcing the birth of the Savior. Like Don Quixote, this king would be accompanied by a faithful servant (Ninetto Davoli), a younger man with curly hair, a mustache, and an "impenetrable face." Their journey toward the nativity is delayed by a series of dramatic encounters.<sup>19</sup> First, they walk at night through a battlefield covered with innumerable corpses, which they bury and honor with a monument. Then a throng of poor and naked people greets them. Again, the two travelers stop and comfort this indigent community. Afterward, they help a group of hungry people, then one of thirsty people, and then one of sick people. When they finally arrive at the site of the nativity, they realize that the King of Kings left a long time ago. The older Magus, sick and hopeless, dies. His younger companion reveals his true nature. He is an angel. This radiant and smiling spiritual being wakes up his dead friend and together they fly up to the sky.

The second outline of *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, written in 1973, presents a few important variations that, even though eliminated from the final draft, shed light on the overall meaning of Pasolini's project. In the opening paragraph Pasolini explains that the film would deal with "two characters on a journey (discovery of the world; cf. Don Quixote)."<sup>20</sup>

Instead of reaching “a goal,” the two travelers “come to understand reality for what it is, that is, with no goal.” The ending of the first version had a romantic but rather vague character, which is certainly clarified in this second rewriting. Furthermore, while ascending to heaven, which in the final version is some of sort of nowhere space, the two travelers turn to look down at the earth and “become two pillars of salt like Lot’s daughters.” In this draft Eduardo and Ninetto’s tragic end would recall that of the citizens of Sodom, which in this version is destroyed after Gomorrah, the first step in the two men’s travel. Pasolini replaces Lot’s wife with his daughters on more than one occasion, not only in this scenario. In some cases, this replacement looks like a mistake because it is only a fleeting reference. In *Colossal*, however, this mix-up does have a meaning, as we will see in a moment.

### ***Porn-Theo-Colossal: From Picaresque Story to Apocalyptic Initiation (from Totò to Eduardo de Filippo)***

The final version of *Porn-Theo-Colossal* maintains the open, vague conclusion and the apocalyptic communication present in the first draft (1968). Like *Saint Paul*, *Porn-Theo-Colossal* is based on what Pasolini calls “an allegorical transposition.” In the scenario, after a prologue set in Naples, Pasolini describes three cities: the city of Sodom, which will be modern Rome; Gomorrah, which will be Milan; and the mythic city Numanzia, which will correspond to Paris.<sup>21</sup> The concluding section of the screenplay takes place in Ur (in Iraq), the empty and desolate place whence everything originated.<sup>22</sup>

We must bear in mind that, although in his letter to Mrs. Crespi, Pasolini said that originally his *Colossal* would star the same two protagonists of *Uccellacci e uccellini*, he later replaced the comic actor Totò with Eduardo de Filippo, and kept Ninetto Davoli. This substitution, due to Totò’s death in 1967, implied a radical rethinking of the entire project. For those who are familiar with the great Neapolitan playwright and actor Eduardo de Filippo, Pasolini’s choice may seem puzzling. After Totò’s death, *Porn-Theo-Colossal* loses its picaresque connotation. The sole and most significant connection remaining between *Uccellacci e uccellini* and *Colossal* is their apocalyptic nature, which has, however, two very different emphases. Pasolini turns the picaresque *Colossal*, as he defines it in the letter to Mrs. Crespi, into the story of an apocalyptic initiation. The cities the two characters visit are stages of a process of purification and enlightenment. As in the original version, in the last scene of the scenario Ninetto reveals

that he is an angel. In Pasolini's films, one of the main traits of the actor Ninetto Davoli is indeed his angelic character, if we take "angelic" in a broad sense (as positive, young, simple, sincere, harmless herald). In the film *Teorema*, Ninetto is a postman, a messenger (his name is Angelo). After delivering the telegram announcing the arrival of a mysterious guest, the postman Ninetto leaves, flapping his arms around like a bird.

In *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, Pasolini defines the character of Eduardo de Filippo as an "old Neapolitan gentleman."<sup>23</sup> Eduardo de Filippo acted in both theater and cinema (he was in Vittorio De Sica's famous film *L'oro di Napoli* [The gold of Naples] along with his friend Totò), and was also a theater director, although he was first of all a playwright. Eduardo's *Natale in casa Cupiello* (Christmas at the Cupiellos'), *Filumena Marturano*, and *Napoli milionaria* (Millionaire Naples) are three masterpieces of twentieth-century Italian theater. Unlike Totò, Eduardo's modest, skinny, and dignified figure evokes the image of a poor but honorable "everyman" from Naples, the "capital" of Southern Italy. Writing to Eduardo on September 24, 1975, Pasolini explains that for the first time he has recorded his scenario on a tape recorder before writing it down and states, "I bequeath Epifanio [the name of the Magus] entirely to you [Eduardo]. You are Epifanio."<sup>24</sup>

Pasolini had a special rapport with Naples. He set his *Decameron* in Naples, and in *Saint Paul* he inserts a significant comic interlude in Naples (which stands for Ephesus), where some poor crooks appropriate Paul's message to swindle money from their listeners. In Pasolini's poetics, Naples is the city of an enduring myth. If the mythic people of the Roman borgate occupied only the periphery of the Italian capital before being absorbed within the perverse, capitalistic society, in Naples these outcasts find their natural habitat. Naples is the city of pariahs. Pasolini states,

In the past Naples was a great capital, center of a unique culture. . . . Neapolitans are today a big tribe who, instead of living in the desert or in the savannah, . . . live in the belly of a great port city. This tribe has decided . . . to die out, by rejecting the new power, that is, what we call history or modernity. [This rejection] gives a profound melancholy, like all tragedies that take place slowly. . . . Neapolitans have decided to die out, by remaining until the very end who they are, that is, unreachable, irreducible, and incorruptible.<sup>25</sup>

In *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, Eduardo embodies the spirit of this "incorruptible" city—its honor and decency as well as its decadence and poverty. But Eduardo fascinates Pasolini also as a playwright, not only as an eloquent Neapolitan actor. Pasolini's scenario is deeply indebted to Eduardo's

masterful play *Natale in casa Cupiello*, which revolves around the decadence of ancient values such as the celebration of sacred family values at Christmas.

### The Beginning: Leaving Naples

In Pasolini's scenario, the Magus Eduardo lives in Naples with his wife, who is "ancient like the world" (*antica come il mondo*). It is interesting to note that the scenario opens with a blank exchange between two elderly spouses. Pasolini leaves empty an introductory dialogue between Eduardo and his "ancient" and obese wife, who has a mournful voice and is "eternally in bed." The action begins when the man leaves behind his ancient, speechless, inert wife and walks outside with his servant Ninetto, whom he had hired the night before. Ninetto, who at the end of the scenario will reveal his angelic identity, is a distant and aloof young man. To emphasize this servant's mystery, in the second draft in 1973 Pasolini calls him Romanino, has him wear moustache, and gives him an "absent, polemical, impolite" character.<sup>26</sup> Ninetto obeys this master, but without any real conviction or interest. While heading to an open market, the two men realize that the entire city of Naples is celebrating the birth of the Messiah. At this initial point of the scenario, Pasolini emphasizes the term *Messiah* with no direct allusion to Jesus. At night Eduardo, who had been awaiting this event for a long time, sees the comet from his window and gladly decides to follow it (*Porn-Teo-Kolossal*, 2700). Eduardo and his servant rush to the train station, where he encounters other Magi, who disagree on the direction to take. Knowing that the "journey of [his] life" is about to begin, with joyful tears the Magus Eduardo says farewell "to his home, his wife, and his city" and, accompanied by his servant, takes the first train heading north (2701). The first city they encounter is Rome, which in the film would represent the city of Sodom (2702). Pasolini adds in parenthesis that the whole film will be based on an "enormous metaphor" that will "reverse and reinvent reality." We have seen that *Saint Paul* is based on a similar analogical process. Both *Porn-Theo-Colossal* and *Saint Paul* would limit the use of studios to the scenes of interiors. In both cases, the metaphorization of reality would take place on the streets of modern cities (Rome, Milan, Paris, etc.).

I would like to point out an interesting aspect of this opening scene of the scenario. It would be reasonable to believe that this festive reaction takes place at Christmas time (the comet; the Magus). The Magus's fellow

Neapolitans seem to be getting ready for Christmas. Eduardo leaves Naples at Christmas time to reach the origin of that anniversary, as if his journey unfolded backward in time. The Messiah celebrated by the Neapolitans differs from the Messiah Eduardo is seeking. The Messiah is about to be born again, as if the event celebrated at Christmas had to be renewed.

### Sodom, the First City: Norman O. Brown's Thought

Getting off at the main station of Sodom, which in fact would be the Stazione Termini in contemporary Rome (ironically, the viewer would see the sign Sodoma Termini), the two travelers walk through Piazza dei Cinquecento (the square of the Stazione Termini), where they are welcomed by some cute and cordial policemen who ask Eduardo whether he likes men or women (*Porn-Teo-Kolossal*, 2704). At the Neapolitan gentleman's surprised and offended reaction, the policemen reply with a suggestion: although in the city of Sodom people like him are free to reside wherever they want, he would be better off in the neighborhood called "Borghese" (Bourgeois). Pasolini repeats twice that these initial scenes would try to recreate Rome as it was in the fifties, the time of the so-called "economic boom." Eduardo and Ninetto soon realize that something "abnormal" (*anormale*) is going on in Sodom (2705). Homosexual desire seems to rule over the entire city. Eduardo sees groups of older and younger men together. Pasolini writes, "In the cafés there are no couples. You don't see men and women with children, etc." It is interesting that, in this initial scene about Sodom, Pasolini never uses the term *couple* to indicate two men together, even when he describes the scene of a "man" and a "young man" kissing tenderly, "as couples usually do" (*come usano fare le coppie*). The two men are *like* a couple. In Pasolini's description, male homosexuals tend to live in confused groups merely dominated by sexual drive. He uses the word *couple* only once for two lesbians, but breaks the sentence in two parts to stress how weird these women look: "He [Eduardo] sees—but he doesn't believe his eyes (maybe it's a hallucination)—a couple of two women." However, as in the case of the male couple, there is a significant age gap between the two women.

That in Pasolini's view "real" couples can only be married and heterosexual is evident from the last part of *Comizi d'amore* (Love meetings [1964]), his groundbreaking documentary on Italians' opinions on love and sex.<sup>27</sup> Interrupting the documentary style he uses throughout *Comizi d'amore*, Pasolini narrates the wedding of Tonino and Graziella, a poor young couple. This final part of the film is not an interview. We

only hear Pasolini's voice-over. Every pretense of objectivity is removed. Pasolini silences his interlocutors (Tonino and Graziella; the relatives and friends attending their wedding) because their physical (but silent) presence serves only one purpose: the reinforcement of Pasolini's "poetic," "mythic" (and we could add "falsified," fictional) view of the lower classes of society. Pasolini's voice follows the moments preceding the encounter between the bride and the groom. We see Graziella smile while putting on the veil, and in his room her future husband looks pleased in his wedding suit. The tone of Pasolini's comment agrees with the particular genre of his film. Rather than a documentary, the conclusion of *Comizi d'amore* is a poetic reconstruction, a fictional narrative. Pasolini's words abandon the sociological character they had during the film and become poetic musings on the "mythic" nature of this modest wedding. We hear Pasolini say that what Tonino and Graziella "know about their love is only that it is love." In the event of their wedding, "by exercising their right to be what their ancestors were, they [reaffirm] the gaiety and innocence of life." Graziella and Tonino express a "grace that doesn't want to know." In sum, this couple belongs to an atemporal condition outside the vicissitudes of history. They reenact what their ancestors had already experienced in an immemorial past. They know love as the joyous ignorance that preceded the Fall. Tonino and Graziella are, in Pasolini's eyes, a new Adam and a new Eve, who live outside the corrupt city of the present time. In the documentary, we understand that this mythic wedding takes place somewhere away from an urban area (in a northern farm village). A guest running to the wedding with a bouquet crosses some open fields. Our modern versions of Sodom and Gomorrah could not host such a pure wedding.

Let us go back to the Magus Eduardo and his servant Ninetto. While the comet continues to shine over the city of Sodom, the two travelers look for a place to stay, and the servant Ninetto suggests that his master send a postcard to his wife in Naples. Let us remember that Ninetto is in fact an angelic messenger. Surprised by the unexpected advice, Eduardo agrees that it is a good idea to write to his wife, whom he has left behind in the "distant, unrecoverable Naples." The Magus Eduardo has left the place of a natural and mythic condition (Naples) for a city "against nature" (Rome/Sodom). In the store where he is looking for a postcard, Eduardo meets a fellow Neapolitan, who explains to him that Sodom is a city of "*finocchi*" (fairies), and that in order to survive he has sex with other men (2706–7). Even before hearing this confession, however, Eduardo notices that there is something "anomalous" (*un po' oltre il normale*) about this Neapolitan's exceeding friendliness. Even though this

Neapolitan man claims that he engages in homosexual practices only to get by, in reality he has turned into a sodomite. The city has corrupted him. The servant Ninetto himself seems to lean toward this abnormal desire. Before walking into the simple *pensione* suitable for heterosexuals, Eduardo notices that his servant is staring at a small group of handsome young military officers standing on the other side of the street. Ninetto winks at the soldiers, and the soldiers wink back at him. Eduardo concludes that his servant is quickly adjusting to the culture of this city.

Asleep in his hotel room, the Magus Eduardo does not hear the melody of a fifties song coming from a party announcing the annual holiday that the city of Sodom will celebrate the following day. Pasolini stresses that, whereas all the previous scenes would be seen “through Eduardo’s eyes,” thus somehow recording the Magus’s surprised and repulsed reaction to Sodom, this specific scene would be “objective” (2708). Although Pasolini writes “objective” in quotation marks, thus stressing the obvious relativity of such a statement, it would be useful to understand why he emphasizes the distinction between these two points of view (Eduardo’s and the “objective” gaze). The meaning of Pasolini’s “objective” sight becomes clear if we consider the events that are seen as “objective.” At this party where, of course, men dance with men and women dance with women, “something strange” happens. One of the cutest young men in the crowd looks at a girl and unexpectedly feels attracted to her. She responds to his gaze with similar desire. The two “feel the old attraction between the sexes; the old attraction that here in Sodom [was] forgotten, illegal, scandalous” (2709). Without saying a word, the young man and the girl leave the party and meet outside, “exactly as two abnormal people would do in a normal society.” Alone in a solitary place (a garden or his apartment), the girl unbuttons the young man’s pants and finds out what a penis looks like and, similarly, the man lifts up the girl’s skirt, pulls down her panties, and looks at the female sex. The two discover “sex in its original purity [and] slowly do the ancient, amorous act of the human species” (*l’antico atto amoroso della specie umana*). The “original purity” of a young heterosexual couple recalls the “ancient” ritual of marriage portrayed at the end of *Comizi d’amore*.

Unfortunately, the police of Sodom catch them and take them to prison. The punishment, however, will certainly be very mild, because Sodom is founded “on rules of goodness, mildness, understanding, of *real* tolerance” (2709–10; emphasis in original). What is “objective” then is to see a “normal” heterosexual encounter, which shows “sex in its original purity,” as a young man and a young woman must experience it. Pasolini had described a similar experience in his rendering of the story of



Ricciardo and Caterina in his *Decameron* (fourth story of the fifth day), where the two lovers' first night together is depicted as a joyous and spontaneous event. Whereas Eduardo's gaze (as an *intradiegetic narrator*) serves to emphasize the abnormality of what the viewer would see, that is, it interprets and comments upon the events in the city of Sodom (Rome), an "objective" gaze would simply let the heterosexual sex scene speak its normality.

In the following scene, Pasolini returns to Eduardo in his hotel room. While chatting with his fellow Neapolitan, Eduardo understands that Sodom is a utopian city, "what medieval thinkers called the city of God" (2710). Sodom is "the city of Utopia," because it is built on "coherent and absolute rules—a totally abstract, ideal, perfect world." With iconoclastic irony, Pasolini draws an incorrect, but fruitful, comparison between Saint Augustine's theology and the city of Sodom, which in the Bible symbolizes the place of all sins. Augustine's *City of God* does not portray a utopia (as does More's *Utopia* or Campanella's *City of the Sun*), because it does not speak of an actual space, but rather of a mental disposition. According to Pasolini's remark, Christianity itself expresses a state of decadence with regard to an "original" normality, similar to the decadence symbolized by the city of Sodom. However, it is crucial to stress that, when Pasolini compares Sodom to the "city of God," he refers to the "coherent and absolute rules," the new Law created by the institution of the Church, as he details in *Saint Paul*. Throughout his oeuvre, Pasolini distinguishes between two forms of Christian experience: on the one hand, the Christian religiosity of those who live in what he defines as "archaic" society (peasants; people from the Italian countryside); and on the other, the sclerotic and formulaic "rules" of the Church as Law.

In a telegraphic but fundamental footnote related to the concept of Sodom as a utopian city, Pasolini explains that "to a great extent the ideology behind Sodom comes from Norman [O.] Brown's *Love's Body*" (2713). We will see, however, that Brown's influence extends far beyond the boundaries of Sodom, the first section of Pasolini's *Porn-Theo-Colossal*.<sup>28</sup> In his review of the Italian translation of Eliade's *Myth and Reality*, Pasolini has a dismissive attitude toward Brown, even though Brown's two main books exert a great influence not only on *Porn-Theo-Colossal* but also on *Petrolino*. Pasolini opposes Eliade's research, which does not privilege Christianity, to Brown's thought, which "manipulates" Eliade's work in order to privilege "Protestant Christianity" as the "product of a millenarian religious evolution." Pasolini's staunch Catholic stance does not do justice to Brown's best seller *Love's Body*, which in reality clarifies the apocalyptic structure of the entire scenario.

Brown, one of the most influential gurus of the sixties, wrote *Love's Body* as a sequel to *Life Against Death*, in which he hypothesized a new "resurrection of the body as the seat of primary pleasure."<sup>29</sup> According to Brown, "mankind can only transcend the terrible toll that the fear of death takes if it lives the body fully and does not allow any unlived life to poison existence."<sup>30</sup> Developing the utopian idea of a new revolution of the body laid out in *Life Against Death* (1959), *Love's Body* is a long sequence of fragments, often commentaries on citations from a plethora of diverse thinkers. This relatively short but deeply influential book reads as a manual of religious initiation, made of aphorisms, cryptic musings, and openly religious reflections on the Apocalypse.<sup>31</sup> Its fragmentary structure and obscure thoughts invite the reader to appropriate and personalize its message.

If we read Pasolini's *Colossal* in the light of Brown's philosophy, we understand that Sodom and Gomorrah are not just two cities based on opposite sexual ideologies (Sodom ruled by homosexuals; Gomorrah ruled by heterosexuals), but two progressive facets of the same societal corruption. The Magus must pass through Sodom before reaching Gomorrah, because the spirit defining Gomorrah is connected to and derives from Sodom's. First of all, how is Pasolini's concept of Sodom related to Brown's best seller, which was first published in 1966? In the first chapter of *Love's Body* ("Liberty"), Brown contends that "Freud's myth of the rebellion of the sons against the father in the primal, pre-historic horde is not a historical explanation of the origins, but a supra-historical archetype."<sup>32</sup> In Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Brown finds an essential "distinction between two archetypes of social psychology: the individual psychology which in the primal horde belonged to the father alone, and the group psychology of the sons, or brothers" (9). "Liberty," Brown writes, "means equality among the brothers (sons)." Elaborating Locke's *Two Treatises of Civil Governments*, Brown concludes, "Liberty, equality: it is all a dispute over the inheritance of the paternal estate" (4). Let us remember that Pasolini envisions Sodom as a city founded on "real tolerance."<sup>33</sup>

According to Brown, "the energy which builds fraternal organization is in rebellion against the family and the father" (13). This kind of society is similar to fraternities, clubs, or secret societies, which "striv[e] to put asunder what is joined in the family—male and female, parent and child." In secret societies, one finds "the persistent tendency . . . to separate the sexes and the generations; to form homosexual . . . groups" (11). Separation is the founding criterion of both Sodom and Gomorrah. For in fact "the prototype of all opposition or contrariety is sex"

(23). In "Nature," the following chapter, Brown clarifies that the concept of "separation" is linked to a societal process of initiation. First, "[f]raternity comes into being after the sons are expelled from the family . . . away from women . . . the boys are detached from their mothers, and given a new mother by initiation" (32). Brown speaks of "[m]ale mothers; or vaginal fathers" (35).<sup>34</sup> The subsequent union with a woman is still a reflection of the primary division (Gomorrah). Hence, heterosexual intercourse enacts a primary division. "Every coitus repeats the fall," Brown writes (48). In a subsequent chapter, "Boundary," Brown reveals the political connotations of this original split: "Separateness, then, is the fall—the fall into division, the original lie. Separation is secrecy, hiding from one another, the private parts or property. Ownership is hiding; separation is repression" (148–49). We will see that Numanzia, the third city visited by the two pilgrims in Pasolini's *Colossal*, is a socialist society. But socialism is still a reaction to the original "brotherly," "homosexual," division, and is thus doomed to fail, like the ideologies of Sodom and Gomorrah, although Pasolini's partiality toward this third kind of society is explicit. *Saint Paul*, of course, is founded on the concepts of separation and division.

In Brown's view, before every possible social revolution, it is mandatory to mend the original rift within the individual. The revolution is first and foremost a renewal of the body, a new "incarnation."<sup>35</sup> "To return the word to the flesh," Brown writes, "[t]o make knowledge carnal again. . . . Incarnation is to be understood carnally" (*Love's Body*, 224). In a paper that he delivered in 1966 and later published in *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis*, speaking of Daphne's mythic transformation into a laurel tree, Brown explains further that the subject's transformation signifies "the humanization of nature," and describes this concept in apocalyptic terms: "The tree is the teleological end, the *eschaton*. We shall all be changed, in the twinkling of an eye. Resurrection is metamorphosis, from the natural to the supernatural or spiritual body. It is raised a spiritual body. Casting the body's vest aside. . . . It is the resurrection of nature in us."<sup>36</sup>

We shall see that the end of Pasolini's *Colossal* in fact dramatizes Brown's apocalyptic view. Both the Magus and his servant will "cast their bodies' vests aside" to acquire a renewed body, what we could call "an apocalyptic body."

Pasolini's relationship with Brown's thought is contradictory. Pasolini at once absorbs Brown's apocalyptic view concerning the resurrection of the body and derides its possible, albeit wrong, reading as a "utopian" call for a sexual revolution. In *Love's Body*, Brown stresses that "the body is not to be understood literally. Everything is symbolic, everything,

including the human body" (224–25). In his *Colossal*, which he openly connects to Brown's bestseller, Pasolini intentionally overlooks Brown's insistence on the symbolic nature of his concept of the "resurrection of the body." In imagining the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Pasolini must have had in mind the following passage from *Love's Body*: "The real apocalypse comes, not with the vision of a city or kingdom, which would still be external, but with the identification of the city and kingdom with one's own body. . . . Political freedom is only a prefiguration of true freedom. . . . Political and fleshly emancipation are finally one and the same; the god is Dionysius" (225).

The connection between Sodom, a city based on "real tolerance," as Pasolini says, and Brown's allusion to political freedom as a reflection of a fleshly, Dionysian liberation is evident. Pasolini dramatizes his intentionally faulty interpretation of Brown's views in the next scene, where he describes the punishment of the heterosexual couple, which coincides with the celebration of the annual holiday of Sodom. As the reader remembers, the young man and the girl had met at a party on the eve of this big event. Pasolini emphasizes that once again the viewer will see this scene through Eduardo's "startled" (*esterrefatto*) gaze (*Porn-Teo-Kolossal*, 2711). The public punishment will take place at the peak of the annual celebration, which in the film would begin in the "old slaughterhouse" located in the Roman neighborhood known as Testaccio, which is "Rome's first official working-class district."<sup>37</sup> The viewer would recognize the traditional celebrations associated with "the feast of Saint John or Saint Paul." In Pasolini's Sodom, Brown's Dionysian political and bodily emancipation turns into a public orgy, and the "relatively mild" punishment for the heterosexual couple is rape (*Porn-Teo-Kolossal*, 2714).

This annual celebration is called the Feast of Fecundation. During a "big public coitus," the men and women of Sodom have sexual intercourse "to give birth to the new children of Sodom" (2712). The slaughterhouse is divided into "sections" where young men wait in line with forms in their hands that indicate their female partners, as if these were ballot papers and they were in line to vote in a political election. The whole experience is festive and cheerful. Eduardo even has a chance to meet the ruler of Sodom, a virago who gives him a brief summary of the fundamental ideology of the utopia of Sodom: "In Sodom, tolerance is real; mildness is real; mutual understanding is real; and everything is based on a real democracy. In the world of Sodom, minorities of all kinds are welcome. Not only sexual minorities, but also minorities of black people, Jews, gypsies, who live there in the most complete freedom, including *internal freedom*" (2713).

This is the point that Pasolini explicitly connects to Brown's philosophy. When the queen has finished explaining the ideological structure of Sodom, the festivities move to a stadium where the official punishment of the straight couple will take place. The citizens of Sodom cannot contain their excitement. Pasolini compares the sodomites' enthusiastic invasion of the streets of Rome/Sodom to the rowdy celebrations following the success of the local soccer team (2714).

In the middle of the stadium the sodomites place two beds. The girl is dragged to one of the beds and forced to strip naked (2715). In tears, she faces the immense crowd gathered in the stadium. A speaker announces the arrival of three beautiful and voluptuous women who force the girl to make love to them as they wish and penetrate her with dildos, while the vast audience cheers them. A similar fate awaits the young man, who is penetrated by three well-endowed men, the "best" of Sodom. Pasolini stages a similar rape in the film *Salò*, when the four Fascist libertines first celebrate a heterosexual wedding between a young man and a girl and then, helped by the harlots who keep their four customers excited by recounting their sexual exploits, violate them on the floor. The connection between *Salò* and this scene in *Colossal* brings to the fore the true nature of Sodom. Like Sade's "secret society of friends," the city of Sodom is founded on "outrage," as Klossowski defines it in *Sade My Neighbor*: "Perverse reason retains the [societal] censorship and introduces into the 'rational' sensuous nature punitive sanction as an *outrage*—which Sade understands as the transgression of norms."<sup>38</sup>

Outrage is essential to the foundation of a community that translates libidinal impulses into societal logic. Outrage is essential to the survival of Sodom. But outrage is also a reflection of the sterility of this society, whose Feast of Fecundity coincides with the punishment of the heterosexual couple. In Pasolini's scenario, the city of Sodom survives thanks to the punishment of the straight couple who have breached the ruling ideology. By celebrating the mating feast during the rape of the heterosexual couple, the ruler of Sodom reaffirms the law that founds the city itself. Like the libertines in *Salò* and in Sade's *120 Days of Sodom*, the city of Sodom exposes the rift in the "norm" in order to trigger a libidinal response that shows the erotic norm on which the city itself is founded. The rape of the heterosexual couple is "mild" because it does not erase the victim; rather, it maintains them as the persistent "offense" that in actuality guards the cohesiveness of the sodomitic society.

Pasolini finds the punishment of an "irregular" form of sexual encounter in Sade's *120 Days of Sodom*, where it has, however, a radically different meaning. What is publicly exposed in *Porn-Theo-Colossal* is the

opposite of what the “illegal” couples have done in private. Their illegal sexuality leads to the visual reinstatement of the supremacy of the ruling sexuality. In Sodom, the heterosexual couple is raped in a homosexual manner. In “The Twenty-fifth Day” of *120 Days of Sodom*, the girls Aline and Zelmire are caught in bed together. Every form of sexual intercourse unauthorized by the four libertines constitutes “grave” disrespect.<sup>39</sup> The gravity of the case, however, is more a pretext for punishment than an aspect of actually dangerous activity. Curval, one of the four libertines, “sniffed about just below each one’s clitoris, and clearly recognized that both of them were still full of fuck.” In itself, an impudent act is not bad, as long as it is performed “upon Messieurs’ express instructions and before their eyes.”<sup>40</sup> Nothing is prohibited in the libertines’ secluded society, as long as it is expression of their sexual drive. The girls are dragged “before the council, and the two delinquents . . . were ordered to demonstrate what they had been up to, and before a crowd of spectators to display just what their individual talents were.” By forcing the two girls to repeat their sexual encounter before a crowd of spectators, the libertines appropriate the sex act that the girls had performed in secrecy. Moreover, the libertines turn this sexual act, which the girls have demonstrated then and there, into a crime that calls for a severe punishment. In other words, the secret sex becomes a double source of pleasure, *now* as a public and humiliating performance, *later* as a sadistic punishment. The two girls’ bodies wait to be abused. In *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, the public display of the “criminal” heterosexual couple reinstates the ruling sexuality. The pleasure the straight couple offers to the spectators is the reassurance of the dominant sexual conformity. *Salò* presents the same case of “illegal” sexuality, with Eva and Antiniska as the homosexual couple and the soldier Ezio and the dark-skinned servant as the straight couple. But we will see that *Salò* echoes *Porn-Theo-Colossal* rather than Sade.

Eduardo and Ninetto leave the stadium and return to their hotel room. At this point of his narrative, Pasolini opposes the ritualized rape of the heterosexual couple, which is performed as part of the annual festivities of Sodom, to another rape, which in fact disrupts the culture of “mildness” and “tolerance” present in Sodom. This second rape involves the group of handsome soldiers we had previously seen standing in front of Eduardo’s hotel. The scene is Pasolini’s rewriting of the biblical story of Sodom and its inhospitality. Pasolini somehow blends the two main interpretations of this episode. He imagines that a group of vicious sodomites gather outside the house where these attractive soldiers are staying (2716). The crime of Sodom, in Pasolini’s film project, is both rape and inhospitality. Lot, an old heterosexual who is hosting these

soldiers, does not want to give his guests over to those rude young men (*giovinastri*). For Lot, his guests are “sacred.” He is willing to offer his three daughters and even his wife to the lesbians of Sodom. The police arrive but, “as happens in every normal city,” they do not intervene, because sodomy is the ruling ideology of the city. The alleged tolerance and mildness hinge upon tacit respect for the dominating practice of sodomy.

### Departure from Sodom: Eduardo’s “Outrage”

Pasolini again makes clear that the viewer will see this event “through Eduardo’s eyes.” Looking at the large windows of Lot’s house, Eduardo will see the hooligans (*teppisti*) invade the heterosexual’s house and attack the soldiers, some of them still wearing their beautiful uniforms (2717). “Scandalized,” Eduardo turns to Ninetto for comfort. His servant is looking up to the sky. The comet is moving away from Sodom, which means that it has to resume its journey. As in *Genesis*, an “apocalyptic scene” is to follow. Divine thunder and lightning burn down the city of Sodom and kill all its inhabitants (2718). The two visitors, accompanied by Lot and his three daughters, run away and witness the final destruction of the “houses, palaces, churches” in a gigantic fire.

In a footnote at this point Pasolini says that the two travelers’ real names are Epiphanius (carrier of epiphany) and Nuntius (messenger), thus revealing the more-than-human nature of the two protagonists. We now know that Ninetto/Nuntius is in truth an angelic being. Pasolini strips the biblical story of its divine connotation but maintains an “angelic” point of view, if we remember that in *Genesis* the travelers were angels. The end of Sodom is the end of a utopia, a society founded on a primordial rift of the kind Pasolini has found described in Brown’s *Love’s Body*. God’s punishment is a revelation of the sterile nature of the city of Sodom. Sodom is sterile because its ruling ideology is homosexuality, even though, as we have seen, the sodomites know how to take care of the problem of reproduction. God intervenes when the sodomites reveal the true nature of their society. A seemingly peaceful sodomitical society in actuality presupposes the staging of its “outrage” against those who break the rules.

The two pilgrims and their heterosexual companions (Lot and his daughters) arrive at one of Rome’s peripheral train stations and jump on a train that is about to leave the burning city (2719). Interpreting the biblical story, Lot orders his daughters (but not his wife) not to turn to look back at the destroyed city of Sodom. The new train scene serves

as a thematic connector between the two utopian cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The train is practically empty because all the sodomites have died under God's wrath, and the two Neapolitan pilgrims and the four survivors from Sodom sit in two different cars. When the train stops briefly at a minor station, the travelers buy sandwiches and wine. Alone in their car, Lot's daughters get their father drunk and have sexual intercourse with him, while, almost unconscious, he continues to repeat "Don't turn; don't turn!" (2720; cf. *Genesis* 19:30–38). In the meantime, in the other car, Eduardo and his servant remember Naples with nostalgic Neapolitan songs.

Still on the train but approaching the main station of Gomorrah, Eduardo and Ninetto have a glimpse of the outskirts of this new utopian city. What they see is strikingly different from what they had witnessed in Sodom. Gomorrah (Milan) is a modern industrial city. They see long lines of white and anonymous factories with perfectly trimmed lawns (2721). Although at first these scenes suggest a "civilized" bourgeois environment, the two travelers soon identify some troubling details. Pasolini's description of the Milanese suburbs underscores a cultural contrast. The modern factories have been built around "old villages" at the margins of Milan. In the courtyards of the barracks and schools of these "old" towns, the Neapolitans see crowds, "regiments" of naked young people. They seem to be waiting for something—something "mysterious." It is a "civil, i.e., either institutional or religious," mystery.

### The Second City: Gomorrah

The first description of Gomorrah brings to the fore importance differences from Sodom. Sodom and Gomorrah are not two specular, sinful cities. Sodomy and heterosexuality do not translate into two mirroring utopias. In fact, we shall see that Gomorrah, unlike Sodom, has few characteristics of a typical utopia. But we must bear in mind some basic stylistic and narrative points. First, Pasolini does not mention Eduardo's gaze as frequently as he did in Sodom. There is something objective in Gomorrah. The viewer does not need to be constantly reminded of the perverse nature of this city. Gomorrah's perversion is merely the extreme exaggeration of a natural instinct and not a behavior against nature, as we saw in Sodom. Second, Pasolini opposes modernity (white factories and well-defined lawns) to "old villages." It is in these remnants of an older culture that Pasolini places the first reference to the sexual ideology of Gomorrah. Sex would seem to be something foreign to capitalism,



even though in truth its consumerist version fully participates in its ideology.

If Sodom at first looked like a traditional utopia, given the great kindness and joviality of the policemen welcoming the two pilgrims at the station, Gomorrah is characterized by extreme violence, which is not typical of a utopian society. A bomb explodes on the train, which goes off the rails and flips over (2722). The two pilgrims come out of the wreck on fire and reach the station on foot. The station of Gomorrah looks like a "huge specter" (*immense spettro*). A group of men loitering in the station assault the women who were on the train with Eduardo and had survived the terrorist attack. Lot attempts to defend his daughters, but the aggressors kick him away and order the three girls to turn because they want to penetrate them from behind. Lot's daughters scream and refuse to do it "because it is God's order" not to turn. When the men force them to turn around, the three girls become three statues of salt.

The seam that joins Sodom and Gomorrah is the explicit allusion to sodomy. Following a Sadean view of anal intercourse, Pasolini makes sodomy the quintessential symbol of perversion altogether. In both Sade and Pasolini, sodomy is not a merely sexual act; it has a distinctly biblical connotation. Sodomy is the sign of a human being (but also of a culture or a "utopia") who turns his back on Nature. Pasolini makes sodomy into the symbolic connector between two opposite, perverted utopias. The act of taking someone from behind (either in homosexual or heterosexual intercourse) is portrayed as a gesture of a sterile perversion. The two girls turn into pillars of salt.

Additional meanings arise from Pasolini's depiction of this failed rape at the entrance of Gomorrah. We could easily overlook the fact that Pasolini has moved the famous conclusion of the Sodom narrative from Rome (Sodom) to Milan (Gomorrah): Lot's three daughters turn into pillars of salt when they arrive in Gomorrah and not while they are leaving Sodom. Pasolini's narrative shift is not casual. Seen from this specific perspective, the three girls' transformation does not fit within the meaning of Sodom because, in Pasolini's rewriting, their metamorphosis in fact concerns the ideology of Gomorrah. Pasolini's source is, again, Brown's *Love's Body*. In the chapter "Trinity," Brown writes, "We are in a world oscillating between the one and the many, a world of fission and fusion, the world of schizophrenia" (66). Our world of fusion and fission is dominated by the paradoxical, schizophrenic connection between "coitus and castration" (65). The original rift at the basis of Western culture is the source of this confusing identification. This "paradoxical connection" is the essential theme of Pasolini's monstrous novel *Petrolio*, in which he

stages this “paradox” as an actual sexual metamorphosis. In *Petrolino*, the oscillation between “fission and fusion,” in Brown’s words, becomes an actual sexual fluctuation (a man who turns into a woman/homosexual man and back into a “real” man, as Pasolini would say).

“The solution to the castration-complex,” Brown writes, “is genital organization. But genital organization is the basic equation of body (self) and penis.” Elaborating a well-known Freudian concept, Brown states that the male penetrates the vagina but is also devoured by the vagina that he has penetrated. The fission-fusion is thus the “utopian” wish “to be the mother with a penis: both erection and castration.” In *Petrolino*, Pasolini stages this unsettling image in the episodes regarding the sexual transformation of the two main male characters, the two Carlos. To explain this schizophrenic fantasy, Brown mentions the myth of Medusa. Her head, “a trophy,” is still potent even after Medusa is decapitated. Medusa’s head is “the female genitals with no penis, but with snakes for hair” (66). A reference to Pasolini’s rewriting of the Sodom episode appears in the following passage: “The sight of Medusa’s head makes the spectator (of the primal scene) stiff with terror, turns him to a stone. The stiff is a corpse, and an erection. The stone phallus, an abbreviation for all kingship.”

Pasolini’s shift of the biblical detail (the act of turning into a pillar of salt) from Sodom to Gomorrah is of great significance. Lot’s three daughters become “petrified” (*impietrite*) when the excited men of Gomorrah try to penetrate them from behind. The women are the image of the men’s castration. One of the aggressors curses God after touching one of the girls and saying “They are made of salt” (*sono di sale*). Pasolini explains that Gomorrah is dominated by a “furious and insane love for female flesh” (2723). Gomorrah differs from Sodom in its attempt to mend the “primal scene,” that is, the primal rift or separation. Both cities are ruled by “brotherhood,” as Brown had defined the original “rebellion of the sons against the father” (3). Homosexuality and heterosexuality are in fact two facets of the same original separation from the father. The phallus dominates both societies. The “stone phallus” is, in Brown’s words, an “abbreviation for all kingship.” By identifying with the phallus, men attempt to recreate the original fusion with the “king” or father by means of sexual penetration. It is significant that in *Porn-Theo-Colossal* the old father, Lot, is kicked away by the aggressors who try to rape his daughters. But it is equally important that, in Pasolini’s story, Lot is primarily a father, not a husband. His daughters turn to salt, not his wife. Lot is the original father, who is rejected by the brotherhood of his sons (the rapists of Gomorrah).

*Porn-Theo-Colossal* is a Sadean work dominated by Norman O. Brown's thought. The opposition between the original father and the sons is an essential tenet of Sade's philosophy, and we shall examine it in detail in the chapter on *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*. At this point we simply summarize Sade's view of this crucial issue by referring to Lucienne Frappier-Mazur's lucid synthesis: "Under the monarchy, Sade had been imprisoned as an unruly son. Conversely, under the Terror as an aristocrat, he must have partly identified with the fathers and meditated upon their fate. In other words, Sadean aggression hesitates between the fathers' power—compromised by the Revolution—and that of the sons—crushed under the monarchy—a sort of dialectic that is resolved by the suppression of any filiation."<sup>41</sup>

This dialectic between two forms of violence is staged in this scenario as the journey from Sodom to Gomorrah. Both cities are based on repression, which is embodied in the sterile gesture of sodomy. The sex that the two travelers witness is perverse in that heterosexuality here is exclusively a male experience of solitary pleasure. Not only do the men of Gomorrah objectify their women, they also use them in order to prove their (male) power to break the rules of a seemingly bourgeois society. In Gomorrah, men and only men set and break the societal rules and values. The men of Gomorrah possess their women whenever they feel like it and in the most violent ways. In so doing, the men gain the pleasure that the Sadean libertines obtain by breaking the rules they themselves have posed. Again, from this specific point of view, the heterosexual men of Gomorrah and the inhabitants of Sodom are indeed specular creatures.

"Here is chaos," Pasolini writes, summarizing what the two Neapolitans are about to witness in Gomorrah. "Gomorrah," Pasolini continues, "is the typical Italian city (or maybe European, or even worldwide) of the years '75–76." Let us remember that Sodom was supposed to look like an Italian city in the fifties. It is as if in leaving Sodom the two pilgrims had also traveled in time. The temporal gap between the two immoral cities is remarkable. We could say that Sodom in some way prepares for Gomorrah, which is the ultimate manifestation of a utopian process. To see the two cities as complementary also elucidates the meaning of the two public punishments staged in these two different societies.

At their arrival, the two travelers see that in Gomorrah women often expose themselves in public to please the men, who possess them right on the spot in cruel and almost bestial ways (2725). At this point, in italics, Pasolini indicates that we are to see these "constant apparitions" (*continue apparizioni*) of almost naked women who "show everything they can show" in order to turn the men on. The indecent women of

Gomorrah are “allies” of the men. If we read Pasolini’s description in the light of *Love’s Body*, we can say that the men of Gomorrah use sex both as incest and as masturbation, as the phantasmatic retrieval of the father/king’s phallus. In Brown’s words, the men’s task is “endless: to achieve the impossible, to find a male female (vagina father) or a female male (phallic mother). It is to square the circle; the desire and pursuit of the whole in the form of dual unity or the combined object; the diabolical hermaphroditic nature of the Antichrist” (71). Brown reminds us that “in the Apocalypse, pomp, power and politics are discovered to be sex. Perverted sex; sado-masochistic sex” (75). Pasolini has defined as “cruel” the sex performed in Gomorrah. There, women have willingly accepted their role as “whores,” as manifestations of the “great whore, Babylon, that great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth.” That the women of this modern city are meant to act as prostitutes is for Pasolini not an amusing stroke of the imagination. According to Pasolini, this is the normal condition of a modern and “liberated” woman.

Pasolini identifies Babylon (Gomorrah) with the contemporary “typical” city in Italy, Europe, or in general the Western world. The “utopia” of Babylon is already here. The “whore” is already ruling over the earth. Pasolini fails to depict a utopian Gomorrah because he sees the “city of Babylon” as our “typical” city. What is “utopian” in Gomorrah is only that the heterosexual couplings occur in the open with no restriction. Pasolini had already labeled Sodom as a false utopia, because it was a society based on a practically prescriptive homosexuality. It is, however, decisive to realize that Pasolini’s attack against a false utopia occurs here, when he describes Gomorrah. I have said that Pasolini is not interested in depicting Gomorrah as a traditional utopia. He repeats the same expression he had used in his definition of Sodom: “Gomorrah expresses a false tolerance, according to which in reality only the freedom of the majority is tolerated.” We can understand what Pasolini means when he states that Gomorrah is a utopian society based on tolerance if we consider that, in this initial description of this city, he adds a brief footnote that leads the reader to his articles against capitalistic culture (“Compare my book *Scritti corsari*”).

To gain a complete understanding of Pasolini’s scenario, we must keep in mind that the fictional references to “chaos” in Gomorrah harbor a specific historical connotation. In *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, Pasolini refers explicitly to his collection of articles titled *Scritti corsari*. In his piece “Studio sulla rivoluzione antropologica in Italia” (Study on the anthropological revolution in Italy), he mentions the “Fascist Massacre in Brescia.”<sup>42</sup> On May 28, 1974, during a political gathering, a bomb exploded in Piazza

della Loggia, killing 8 people and injuring 103. A series of other terrorist attacks had preceded the massacre in Brescia. The bomb in the train station of Gomorrah alludes to the carnage in Brescia and, more generally, to the dangerous conditions of Italian society. In his article for the newspaper *Corriere della sera* (June 10 1974), Pasolini tries to define the nature of the new form of Fascism. His explanation is imaginative, by which I mean that it only makes sense if read within Pasolini's poetics. His explanation has very little historical foundation. What is Fascism today? Pasolini asks himself. Neo-Fascism is modern "conformity" (*conformismo*). From a cultural standpoint, the young neo-Fascists in Italy do not differ from the vast majority of Italian young men. In Pasolini's view, the neo-Fascists and the rest of Italian youth are "identical."<sup>43</sup> In other words, Italian society itself has given birth to this recent crop of neo-Fascists.

In this context Pasolini introduces the key concept of *epoché*, which plays a fundamental role in *Petrolio*, as we shall see in the next chapter. According to Pasolini, *epoché* is a synonym for "fracture." The erasure of Italian "archaic" values has broken "every form of historical continuity."<sup>44</sup> What is fundamental to understand is that, for Pasolini, this post-archaic condition in fact corresponds to a new mythic condition. It is true that Pasolini obsessively insists on the death of myth, but is he not here formulating a new myth, the myth of a new apocalypse? The "fracture" from the "then" of an indistinct mythic era signifies a "now" that identifies with "later." In other words, Pasolini's idea of the death of the myth recreates a new myth in which present and future coincide. Pasolini envisions a "postmythic" myth, one that recounts a perennial fall, an eternal and static damnation. I believe that to view Pasolini's political discourse as a mythmaking practice gives us a better understanding of his poetics in general and of *Porn-Theo-Colossal* in particular.

It is obvious that for Pasolini every form of cultural evolution comes to identify with this eternal "fracture" from the archaic. In a notorious and aberrant article titled "Troppa libertà sessuale e si arriva al terrorismo" (Excessive sexual freedom and the result is terrorism, 1972), Pasolini links the new permissive attitude toward sex to decadence and violence. The same themes of this piece return in the later and more famous essay "Abjuration of the *Trilogy of Life*," which we discussed in the introduction. Pasolini writes, "Italy is no more the picturesque country where groups of young men walk together or hang out in squares, alone, with their scooters and masculine complicities: now in those groups one 'always' finds some girls."<sup>45</sup> Pasolini depicts these girls as prostitutes who are "available" (*a disposizione*) for the men's sexual needs. In this way, Pasolini adds, every man can "get off" (*hanno il loro "sfogo"*). "Prostitution

is disappearing in Italy," Pasolini claims erroneously, because young men do not need streetwalkers anymore; easy women are available everywhere. They are the girls who used to stay at home and now are allowed to join the men in their outings. Pasolini goes so far as to contend that this "sudden sexual liberation" leads to "sexual conformity" (*conformismo sessuale*).<sup>46</sup> Whereas "until recently" marriage was a "justified wish" for young men, now girls are "a duty" (*un obbligo*). Young men are now compelled by societal norms to get a girl and marry, and thus are prevented from exploring other forms of sexuality.

One could obviously claim exactly the opposite. Marriage was "then" a strict social norm and now is more an expression of personal choice. As the ethnographer de Martino emphasizes, "the life of the primitive is not so free as many philosophers and romantic writers claim. An incredible number of norms and restrictions regulate the primitive's life."<sup>47</sup> Pasolini offers no rational explanation for his peculiar claim concerning modern sexual conformity versus the former natural inclination toward marriage, and the hagiographic writings on Pasolini published mostly in Italy gloss over its vulgar rationale. Pasolini's claim is not founded on a rational conclusion but rather on his usual opposition between what is natural (the primitive; the peasant; etc.) and what is unnatural (the bourgeoisie). He cannot posit any form of conformity in a rural society. Everything there is natural. Heterosexual marriage is the most natural expression of human nature. Conformity is a perversion that can only be a product of modernity. Moreover, Pasolini grants no special value or meaning to female homosexuality because lesbians reject any physical contact with heterosexual men, who are for him the real center of any society. One could go so far as to say that the heterosexual men of Gomorrah have become so depraved because of their women's aggressive and unbecoming behavior. The folly ruling over Sodom and Gomorrah seems to concern much less the real, heterosexual men, than the other, inferior citizens (homosexuals, women) whose irresponsible, modern demands lead society to its final demise.

Paradoxically, it is this permissive stance toward sexuality that, for Pasolini, brings to the fore sexual "diversities" (*diversità*). It is sexual liberation that creates "ghettos." It is impossible, as Giovanni Dall'Orto points out, not to read Pasolini's opposition to sexual liberation as a statement coming from an old-fashioned, closeted, homosexual man who finds himself deprived of partners who used to engage in sex with him primarily because girls were not available. Since girls have become very "easy," real men do not need homosexual men any longer.<sup>48</sup> Remember that Pasolini in "Abjuration of the *Trilogy of Life*" mentions the disruptive

consequences of sexual liberation on his “private” sexuality. The fact that women and men have sex much more easily now denies the homosexual the security deriving from his secret and meaningless encounters with straight men. The homosexual is compelled to come out of his invisibility and expose his sexual identity.

I mentioned before Pasolini’s idealization of a “mythic,” “archaic” wedding at the end of his documentary *Comizi d’amore*, which deals with modern sexuality in Italy. For Pasolini, homosexuality was an invisible component of that archaic society. In the Mediterranean area, Pasolini states in *Il sogno del centauro*, “homosexual freedom” is about to disappear because of our current sexual liberation.<sup>49</sup> What Pasolini calls “homosexual freedom” is the freedom to accept a role within the patriarchal society in which the “real” man may engage in sexual activities with homosexuals before embracing marriage as his deepest longing. In an “archaic” society, the homosexual is the sign of normalcy exactly because he does not exist as an active social presence. As theorized in many cultures, this kind of homosexual is neither man nor woman; he is a sort of human hybrid whose undefined identity supports and often heals the natural (heterosexual) course of society.

In the previous chapter on *Saint Paul*, I discussed some of Pasolini’s pieces from *Scritti corsari*, in particular those on the current condition of the Catholic Church and the nature of homosexuality. Recall that Pasolini envisions homosexuality as an intrinsically “different” desire and sexual act. Homosexuality is different because it is the sexuality of a minority but also because, according to Pasolini, in Mediterranean societies homosexuals usually wish to have sex only with “real” men and not with other homosexuals. We have seen that, in Sodom, male homosexuals either hang out in groups, or in couples based on difference (age, social status, etc.). In Pasolini’s *Scritti corsari* the theme of homosexuality is linked to tolerance. Pasolini addresses the topic of tolerance in his famous article on the possible legalization of abortion that he published the year of his death. Pasolini is vehemently against abortion. He believes that “today the sexual freedom of the majority is in fact a form of conformity, an obligation, a social duty, a social anxiety, a fundamental characteristic of a consumer’s life.”<sup>50</sup> The legalization of abortion would be extremely useful for the (sexual) majority, because “it would make coitus even easier. Heterosexual coupling would have no obstacles.” Let us remember that Pasolini had defined the annual celebration in Sodom as a “big public coitus.” As a real utopia (a hypothetically perfect society that in fact unveils the shortcomings of our current society), Pasolini’s Sodom offers a reversed version of the utopia produced by capitalism, in which

heterosexuality is the norm. "Coitus is political," Pasolini concludes in his article on abortion.<sup>51</sup> We understand now the connection between Gomorrah and Babylon. For Pasolini, the legalization of abortion equals "the legalization of murder."<sup>52</sup> This is why, as we shall see in a moment, the utopian nature of Gomorrah is a legalized and boundless male violence, which serves to safeguard the coitus of the heterosexual majority according to capitalistic culture. Milan would represent Gomorrah.

Before we resume our close reading of the scenario, we must say something about the relevance of Pasolini's identity as a homosexual man in the creation of his apocalypticism. In his articles and essays, Pasolini posits the homosexual as the pivotal figure in his depiction of what I called the "mythic post-condition." The homosexual becomes visible when decadence imposes an everlasting fracture between the "then" of the archaic origins and the "forever now" of what Pasolini calls capitalism. This new mythic order, a clearly apocalyptic condition, sees in the homosexual its revelation. The homosexuals' sexual difference reveals itself only when capitalism imposes itself as an eternal post-condition. The homosexual in fact used to safeguard the sacredness of heterosexual marriage, because men, according to Pasolini, did not need to marry right away and could "explore" their sexual drive with those gay men who were eager to please them in complete secrecy. Similar to female prostitutes, homosexual men were the protectors of the archaic myth of the origins, exactly because they did not exist from a social standpoint. They were sterile creatures and thus could not be equated to real, productive men. When the homosexuals began to exist socially, society had to face the tragedy of abortion, which is another facet of the same mythic decadence. To abort your child is, for Pasolini, the visible manifestation of that mythic post-condition in which mothers can slaughter their offspring in the name of progress. Like Sade's libertines, modern mothers reject their own humanity as life-giving beings. Homosexual visibility and abortion are symptoms of the same decadence.

The image of a mother killing her children inevitably reminds us of *Medea*. In a key scene of that film, the centaur who raised Jason, Medea's husband, visits him after many years of absence, but this time the centaur is literally split into two beings: a man and a centaur. This "vision," as the centaur says, takes place within Jason himself. The "old" centaur, the one Jason recognizes, was the centaur that embodied the sacred during Jason's childhood, whereas the "new" one is the secular version of the old mythic creature. According to the centaur, Medea's "spiritual catastrophe" is that she has betrayed the ancient time in which she was born and raised: "You [Jason] understand her . . . spiritual catastrophe,



the disorientation of an ancient woman living in a world that ignores what she has always believed in; . . . that poor thing has had a reversed conversion and has never recovered from it."<sup>53</sup> Medea's perverted "conversion" occurred when she stole the sacred Golden Fleece for Jason. Her blasphemous deed will find its tragic conclusion when she murders her own children. In Pasolini's film Medea symbolizes the modern woman who renounces the sacred role of mother and enters a consumerist society in which children have become disposable commodities.

According to Pasolini, modern mothers enact a (post-myth) mythic condition. In *Petrolio* and *Salò*, Pasolini likens the act of giving birth (according to the new capitalistic order) to defecation. Borrowing heavily from Sade, Pasolini compares the fetus to feces that the mother expels from her entrails. The fetus comes to symbolize the capitalistic discard, an artifact that is produced, used, and trashed.

As in Sodom, the two travelers run into a fellow Neapolitan, who suggests that they get some weapons, because it is hard to survive in Gomorrah without a gun. "What happens [here] is indescribable," the Neapolitan concludes (2724). Seeing that they are two men traveling together, the good Neapolitan also warns them that in Gomorrah the worst crime is "to be a faggot" (*essere un recchione*). The citizens of this city do not tolerate any form of difference or minority. Again, it is impossible to detect any utopian element in Gomorrah. Pasolini describes a city constantly disrupted by acts of violence (a bank assault with a victim lying in his blood on the street; a protest march of some students, whom the police attack, kill, or wound ruthlessly; a line of cars burning), which we would see "through Eduardo's eyes" (2725). As we saw in the chapter on Sodom, Eduardo's eyes would underscore that what we are seeing is something out of the ordinary, something scandalous. Eduardo's eyes signify a scandalized gaze. From Pasolini's homosexual standpoint, contemporary Western societies are in a sense utopian because their laws (the legalization of abortion, for instance) posit heterosexual desire as their primary criterion. The unique utopian element in Gomorrah is that it removes the flimsy layer of hypocritical decency still present in our society.

We should remember, however, that Eduardo himself is heterosexual. Whereas Sodom was an "abnormal" utopia *tout court* because founded on homosexual desire, Gomorrah's abnormality only lies in the extreme manifestation of a "normal" desire. The violence constantly erupting in Gomorrah results from the fact that Gomorrah is a city ruled by an unbounded male heterosexual desire, which Pasolini specifically relates to the insurgence of a capitalistic culture. In Sodom, Eduardo had not witnessed any form of excessive or overtly homosexual coupling, but

only the open manifestation of homoerotic feelings. Eduardo was scandalized by the fact that in Sodom men and women did not hide their sexual identity—not because they engaged in sexual and “cruel” acts in the open. In Sodom violence erupted only during the annual celebration, and was part of the celebration itself. Sodom was overall a decent and organized society, whereas Gomorrah is dominated by “chaos.”

### Discrepancies between Sodom and Gomorrah

Pasolini tries hard to make the episode of Gomorrah a narrative reflection of that of Sodom. He writes a footnote to make sure we do not miss it (“Please note the overt analogy with what happened to our ‘picaros’ in Sodom” [2726]). As in Sodom, the two travelers find a hotel and go to bed. They do not know that it is the eve of a great celebration, a parallel to what we saw in Sodom. As in Sodom, while the two pilgrims are asleep, the viewer would hear some music. This time the music does not come from a party, but from an arena where “bestially excited” people are watching a porn film. What was in Sodom a nice and private gathering, becomes in Gomorrah an open space where people are watching an “extremely vulgar” porn flick in which two straight partners try to be as “vulgar, obscene, and offensive” as possible (2727). “Offensive” to whom, one might ask—probably to the Magus Eduardo whose gaze is often “scandalized,” as Pasolini reiterates primarily in the episode of Sodom. It is as if both cities were founded on the premise of being “offensive” to the father, to his gaze “from of old.” The two perverse cities stage the sons’ attack against the father’s order, as Norman O. Brown theorizes. *Porn-Theo-Colossal* could be read as the father’s journey through the empire that has rebelled against him and now pays the price of its rebellion (chaos, perversion, capitalism).

Faithful to his view of homosexual desire, in his new representation of an unlawful love Pasolini imagines that a “middle-aged,” working-class man cruises a very handsome “adolescent” who went to see this porn movie out the curiosity typical of his age. Pasolini describes a mute, anonymous, homosexual encounter, as it was common in Italy at the time, when men would have sex in (heterosexual) porn movie theaters. The older man goes to sit next to the boy and reaches out to touch his thigh. Then he takes the boy’s hand and moves it to his crotch. Unlike the encounter between a young man and a girl in Sodom, the two gay men discover only sex, not love. They are “taken by a sudden urge” and, as men would do at the time, go to the restrooms to have sex (2728).

Please consider how Pasolini defines homosexual desire. In *Sodom*, heterosexuality was the sudden discovery of an “ancient” and natural desire, which reconnected the young straight couple to their ancestors. Heterosexuality occurs when the subject wakes up from the amnesia of homosexuality. Homosexuality, on the contrary, is an “urge” that the two men satisfy in a public bathroom without exchanging a word. In Pasolini’s depiction, the two forms of sexuality are far from being on an equal footing. Homosexuality is valuable only if seen as behavioral difference. In the context of heterosexual conformity, Pasolini considers homosexuality as a challenge (a scandal for the good and old Eduardo), not as a viable expression of love. Homosexuality is a sexual urge that one takes care of in silence in the restroom of a movie theater or a train station, as we see at the end of *Teorema*. Like defecating, a homosexual encounter takes place where human society hides its bestiality.

As in *Sodom*, the two “abnormal” men are found out and arrested. As actually happened in Italy at the time, the police drag the two men out of the cinema “with a bestial brutality,” while people spit on the two criminals. The “utopian” nature of *Gomorrah* exclusively resides in its having revealed the (male) violence that founds capitalistic society. *Gomorrah* is “the Utopia of the City of Violence” (2730). I would like to stress that the violence of *Gomorrah* is the manifestation of a Sadean “morality,” in that *Gomorrah* as the symbol of capitalism stages the objectification of Eros. The women of *Gomorrah* exist in order to reassure the men, who founded capitalism and now enact its values, of their right to vent their basest sexual impulses, because male heterosexual depravity does not contradict the philosophy of capitalism. In *La monnaie vivante*, Klossowski calls our attention to “the mercantile norms” of the subject’s libidinal life.<sup>54</sup> In this sense, *Gomorrah* is the expression of a natural perversion, if by “natural,” we mean the innate, “mercantile” laws determining human behavior.

If violence lies at the core of capitalism, *Gomorrah* brings into the open its most truthful nature. However, this successful capitalistic society is also a place where bombs explode in the train station, and chaos is everywhere. The successful coexistence of well-planned and organized capitalism and sexual anarchy is utopian. In his creation of the city of *Gomorrah*, though, Pasolini is unable to transform this basic concept into a convincing narrative, because *Gomorrah* is in fact the Italian city in the sixties and seventies where homosexuality still “doesn’t exist,” and men meet in porn movie theaters or in parks at night. For a homosexual, every Italian city expressed the violence of *Gomorrah*. As a result, the final part of this chapter on *Gomorrah*, the second stop in

the two travelers' journey toward the Messiah, reads more like a caricature of reality. In Gomorrah, the annual celebration is called The Feast of Initiation (2729). Young men run naked through the city and rape every woman they run into. Then they assault and destroy stores. If in Sodom the celebration had a clearly symbolic meaning and served a precise goal—the preservation of the species—in Gomorrah the Feast of Initiation is very similar to what happens in Gomorrah every day. Men do not hold back their sexual drive and possess women in the open, as Eduardo and Ninetto had noticed as soon as they arrived in the city.

What kind of "initiation" takes place in Gomorrah? The concept of initiation, Eliade explains, "comprises a threefold revelation: revelation of the sacred, of death, and of sexuality."<sup>55</sup> Initiation is a "mystery" that "signifies passing beyond the profane, unsanctified condition, the condition of the 'natural man,' who is without religious experience."<sup>56</sup> What sort of insight does the slaughtering of the homosexual grant the young men and women of Gomorrah? This rite of "initiation" seems to correspond to the first of the three categories of initiation according to Eliade. The first type of initiation is a "collective" ritual "whose function is to effect the transition from childhood or adolescence to adulthood."<sup>57</sup> The second and third forms of initiation concern secret societies and "mystical vocations," such as shamanism. The first type of initiation revolves around the "revelation of the sacred" in its strict connection with death.<sup>58</sup> If we follow Eliade's indication, it becomes evident that the disclosure of sexuality and death is certainly present in the ritual of Gomorrah. What is hard to detect is the sacred. The unveiling of the sex-death connection is in actuality a divided event, in that the men and women of Gomorrah mate and witness the death of the other, the homosexual, but do not ritualize their own mortality. Instead of leading to an instance of self-awareness, the rite of Gomorrah displaces death and transforms it into an event "against nature."

Piazza Duomo, the main square of Milan, is the stage where the two homosexuals will be executed (2731). The death of the two men is highly symbolic. The boy is buried alive in the ground, while the older man is undressed and tied to the undercarriage of a helicopter. When the helicopter takes off, the executioner shoots the man in the throat so that his blood may wet the crowd gathered below (2732). In this ritualized death, the man's bleeding throat is a symbol of the ejaculating phallus that has reestablished its supremacy over the political body of the city, which had been violated by the homosexual couple. What follows is a scene of cannibalism with the people of Gomorrah drinking and licking the blood falling from the man's body. In Gomorrah the homosexual

has a tainted, contaminated body. The city's annual ritual recalls the establishment of a Sadean society in that, by swallowing the fluids oozing from the homosexual's unclean body, the citizens annihilate it and appropriate the homosexual's condition of victim. The citizens' victory lies in their playing the role of victims of their victim, since they swallow his bodily fluid.

How can we possibly interpret the different forms of punishment described in these two "utopian" cities? The apparent discrepancy between the "mild" punishment in Sodom (ritualized and public rape) and the murder in Gomorrah is explained if we understand that Sodom and Gomorrah are two facets of the same Sadean utopia, according to Pasolini's reading of Norman O. Brown. The passage from violence to death corresponds to the evolution within the libertines' "secret society" of *The 120 Days of Sodom* and *Salò*. In a society ruled by sexual perversion, the fundamental "outrage" must escalate from violence to death. The victims are commodities that are used up and discarded when they have exhausted their societal role. In both cities punishment is a public, not a private occurrence. The "criminals" are not castigated within the walls of a jail. Execution is the logical step toward the annihilation of the subject whose body has been used for the pleasure triggered by "outrage." We could synthesize this point with the following scheme:

Law-Outrage →	Punishment →	Death
[Sodom-Gomorrah]	[Public rape in Sodom]	[Public murder in Gomorrah]

Again, the comet leaves the city marked by a new, horrendous crime, and the two travelers follow it. In the meantime, Gomorrah is devastated by a plague that kills all its inhabitants (2733). Pasolini morbidly details the symptoms of the plague. People vomit, defecate, and die in their feces. Their bodies "are invaded by horrendous lesions. Their eyes fall out of their sockets. They lose their hair. All the citizens of Gomorrah become purulent specters, who slowly decompose and die one on the top of the other." It is worth noting that this detailed description of the undoing of the body is absent from Pasolini's notes about the end of Sodom. In theory, the punishment of the first city would allow a similarly gruesome description (roasting and decomposing of bodies in a divine fire). From a description of a sodomitical society, the scenario moves on to a closer look at the corrupt bodies of that very society (Gomorrah). The endings of the first two utopias of *Porn-Theo-Colossal* identify with the decomposition of the sexual body. The citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah become "specters," in Pasolini's words.

### The Third City: Numanzia

Before getting infected with the same mortal disease, the two Neapolitan travelers, the Magus and his angel, reach the train station and take the first train, as they had also done when they fled Sodom. The first two utopias revolved around sexuality. The third seems to contradict this pattern because Numanzia, the third stop in the travelers' journey, is the embodiment of a political and not sexual utopia (2735). Pasolini first explains that Paris would represent Numanzia. In *Saint Paul*, Paris corresponded to Jerusalem under the Roman occupation. Similarly, Numanzia is the name of the Spanish city that, like Carthage, was attacked and razed to the ground by the Roman army. Given that they could not overcome its solid walls and its brave citizens, the Romans besieged Numanzia and let its inhabitants die of hunger. In Pasolini's project, the Romans are "a Fascist army that is about to occupy Numanzia, a Socialist city." We could thus say that Numanzia/Paris in *Colossal* is a new version of Jerusalem/Paris in *Saint Paul*. In both cases, Paris as the city of "truth and freedom" (the Gospel in *Saint Paul*; socialism in *Colossal*) is oppressed by the Nazis/Romans/capitalists.<sup>59</sup> The two narratives, however, represent two different forms of apocalypticism. In *Saint Paul*, Paris is first liberated from the Nazis, only to be later "occupied" by modern capitalism. In *Saint Paul*, the resurrection of the body, the core of Pauline thought according to Pasolini, occurs in opposition to the "perennial" death of capitalistic culture.

It is evident that the two film projects should be read together, because *Colossal* in fact works as a thematic continuation of *Saint Paul*. If *Saint Paul* has a historical foundation (the biography of Saint Paul as the announcer of Christ's resurrection from the dead), *Colossal* uses a historical setting (both the biblical references and Pasolini's modern rereading, in which Sodom is Rome and Gomorrah is Milan) as a launching pad for reaching a conclusive disclosure that moves from history to myth. Paris, the modern city that in *Saint Paul* embodies ancient Jerusalem, in *Colossal* becomes an in-between space, since Numanzia/Paris is at once an ancient city and the myth of a free society crushed by an imperialistic power.

*Porn-Theo-Colossal* is Pasolini's *Book of Revelation*. Like the biblical text, Pasolini's film project narrates a metamorphosis that is both personal and communal. In this scenario, modern Rome *manifests* Sodom; Milan *manifests* Gomorrah. The viewer of this hypothetical film would be asked to sense that the seed of an apocalyptic transformation is already present in contemporary Rome. In *Saint Paul*, contemporary Rome signifies

ancient Athens in that, in Pasolini's view, Rome plays a similar, "analogical" role within contemporary culture. In *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, Rome symbolizes something different. Rome now acquires a mythic connotation. Rome recalls a city that God razed to the ground. Rome is analogically linked to Sodom because contemporary Rome alludes to its end.

The opening pages on Numanzia recall the opening section of *Saint Paul*. Both parts are direct allusions to the Nazi occupation of Paris. As in *Saint Paul*, we are reminded of unfortunately well-known descriptions of the Nazis' brutal treatment of their prisoners. The train heading for Numanzia is stopped by the Nazis, who arrest all its passengers, divide them into groups, and lead them toward the local police station. "Their final destination," Pasolini adds, "is certainly a concentration camp." As in Sodom and in Gomorrah, a fellow Neapolitan saves Eduardo and Ninetto. This Neapolitan is the cook of the head of the Roman/Nazi army and in order to help them, he claims that he needs the two pilgrims as servants (2736). Pasolini makes an indirect reference to *Saint Paul* when he explains that the two travelers would see "a world that is typically clerical and fascist . . . a terrifying return of neo-Nazism . . . even though, of course, in a form that is more modern than twenty or thirty years ago" (2737).

At night, Eduardo and Ninetto realize that the comet is moving toward the city of Numanzia. They thus decide to flee the Nazi/Roman encampment and pass the city borders. They succeed in their attempt, but the soldiers of Numanzia soon stop them, question them, and finally make them sleep in a cell. If *Saint Paul* was based on analogy, how should we define this episode in which two familiar faces of Italian comedy appear within the analogical interpretation of a historical event (the Romans' siege of Numanzia)? According to what we understand from Pasolini's notes in *Saint Paul*, the actor playing the role of the apostle would be seen as an analogical representation of the apostle himself. In *Saint Paul*, the relationship between the real (contemporary Paris), historical (the biblical narratives from Acts), and analogical (the overlapping of real and historical) levels was clearly defined.

In *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, to the third level we must add a fourth, less definable layer, which is represented by the two "comic" actors, whose presence has no obvious justification. In *Hawks and Sparrows*, the two protagonists, Totò and Ninetto, played the roles of a father and his son who walk together on an empty road. The two characters were a comic couple. Totò was the caricature of a poor elderly man, with a moralizing and decorous attitude that covers his petty crimes and hypocrisy. In *Colossal*, Pasolini does not replicate the same couple. As I have already

explained, Eduardo de Filippo is very different from Totò, even though both worked in the same kind of post-war Italian comedy. Moreover, in this film project, Ninetto is not the Ninetto we encounter in *Hawks and Sparrows*. We know that, in *Colossal*, Ninetto is a mysterious and aloof angelic messenger who accompanies the Magus Eduardo through his journey toward the baby Jesus. The two characters are not on an equal footing. *Porn-Theo-Colossal* is about Eduardo, and not about the couple Eduardo-Ninetto.

It is revealing that, in the few parts of the film project in which Pasolini attempts to sketch a comical situation, the emphasis is usually either on Ninetto or on the anonymous Neapolitans that Eduardo and Ninetto encounter in the first three cities (Sodom, Gomorrah, Numanzia). The three nameless men are amusing stereotypes of middle-aged Neapolitans who adjust to the most unnatural conditions (the first Neapolitan becomes a sodomite just to get by in Sodom). Eduardo is primarily his gaze, as Pasolini overtly states. Eduardo's character comes across as funny only in reaction to an unusual situation (for instance, his scandalized reply when he is asked if he likes men or women). In replacing Totò with Eduardo de Filippo, Pasolini defines a new sort of man, a respectable and modest elderly gentleman whose moral and traditional values become funny because they are in opposition to those of modern society. It is important to realize that Eduardo is a witness more than an active participant in the events taking place in each city. He is shocked to see that his servant Ninetto seems to develop some kind of interest in the handsome soldiers standing across from their hotel in Sodom. Furthermore, Eduardo is always asleep when something decisive occurs in the three cities (the two sexual crimes in Sodom and Gomorrah and, as we will see, the general suicide in Numanzia). Eduardo is both a humorous presence, and a "scandalized" gaze. Eduardo ends up fleeing the three failed utopias.

*Porn-Theo-Colossal* has a four-level narrative structure:

1. Biblical foundation
2. "Analogical" transposition to modern times (for instance, Sodom = Rome)
3. Comic intermezzos
4. Eduardo's scandalized gaze

The event defining Numanzia (the general suicide) occurs when Eduardo is asleep in his cell. Pasolini comments, "Here the usual parenthesis begins, *the usual episode of Eduardo's sleep*" (2738; emphasis in original). "The usual parenthesis" in reality becomes in this case a long narrative



episode that spans a considerable amount of time. Again Pasolini tries to minimize the evident discrepancies between one episode and the next. Unlike the victims in the previous two cities, the citizens of Numanzia do not die because of a sudden divine intervention. Furthermore, the sacrificial victim is the instigator of the final devastation and shares the same fate as his fellow citizens. Finally, the ritual of this city is not an annual event and is not performed in a public space. Pasolini moves the action to a typical Parisian café, where some intellectuals are debating how to respond to the Nazis' siege. A poet, who had kept silent so far, stands up and proposes a "collective suicide," because "death is better than slavery" (2739). Given that Numanzia is a democratic society even though its dominant ideology is socialist, the poet's proposal is discussed in newspapers and later in the Parliament. A general referendum determines that the majority of the population is in favor of a collective suicide. All citizens of Numanzia "will have to kill themselves collectively the following day, at the same time" (2741).

When Eduardo wakes up, he sees that Ninetto looks very happy (more than usual), and that the door of their cell is open. Once outside, he "looks up and sees his Star, which is moving toward the center of the city." A new, "absolutely unique" revelation awaits the two travelers. Numanzia has become a huge city of dead people. Again, Pasolini's emphasis on the "extraordinary" nature of this event indirectly alludes to Eduardo's scandalized gaze. We have seen that Pasolini visualizes the ideology defining the first two utopian cities through long shots showing festivities of their annual celebrations. It is reasonable to believe that the defining "celebration" of the socialist society of Numanzia is its collective suicide. When they enter a movie theater, Eduardo and Ninetto see that the audience has committed suicide while watching Chaplin's *Great Dictator* (2742). In particular, when the two pilgrims walk into the theater, Hitler is striking a globe with his behind. The reason for Pasolini's choice of that particular scene is obvious. The utopian ideas of socialism are dead. Fascism declares its vulgar supremacy.

Numanzia is not struck by divine wrath. The citizens of Numanzia commit suicide. But has Numanzia committed any kind of sin? It is reasonable to say that, when he enters the city (Paris), the Magus Eduardo walks into a new stage of his initiation. In Numanzia, failure does not equal sin. What fails is not the body, whose failure the reader or viewer witnesses at the end of the second chapter (deadly sickness in Gomorrah). Unlike Sodom and Gomorrah, Numanzia is a utopia in the real sense of the word, whereas the first two imaginary cities were utopias only in the sense of being impossible societies. For these two cities,

Pasolini uses the word *utopia* as a synonym for “imaginary city ruled by a univocal sexual desire.” But it is essential to recognize that Pasolini’s scenario depicts a body whose destruction comes both from within (sin in Sodom and Gomorrah) and from without (Roman army in Numanzia). The body is “wrong” and doomed to annihilation because of an inherent failure and an external attack. The body is the pivotal mark of failure. The body fails. What the three cities share is the death of their citizens. Fire, deadly virus, and suicide manifest the complete collapse of the subject.

When the two travelers arrive at the café where the poet first launched his proposal for a collective suicide in response to the siege, they find that all the regulars are dead but still sitting at their usual tables. Only one man lacked the courage to kill himself—the poet who had come up with the idea of the general suicide (2743). The poet later participates in the banquet celebrating the Fascists’ invasion of Numanzia. The head of the Fascist army, who wishes to be seen as an intellectual, asks the poet to recite some verses suitable for that occasion. The poet chooses a poem by the Russian author Mandelstam that ends with a reference to two different wines: Asti Spumante and Châteauneuf du Pape (2744). Pasolini mentions neither the title nor the date of this poem, but only the last verse concerning the two wines. The poem in question is part of Mandelstam’s uncollected verses (N. 233) and was written on April 11, 1931. Pasolini’s choice of Mandelstam’s work is not random. The poem reads as follows:

I drink to the soldiers’ star-flowers, to everything I was blamed for:  
to lush fur coats, to asthma, to Petersburg days and their bile,  
to pine-trees’ music, to petrol in Elysian Fields,  
to roses in Rolls-Royces, to Paris-paintings.  
I drink to Biscay waves, to pitchers of Alpine cream,  
to arrogant red-haired English girls, to quinine from colonies.  
I drink: to which? I still don’t know, wine  
from the Pope’s cellars, or a lovely Asti Spumante . . . <sup>60</sup>

At the end of the poet’s recital, the Fascist chief orders that a waiter bring a bottle of Asti Spumante for a toast with the poet. This request leads to a ludicrous, absurd argument between the poet and the Fascist, because the poet is convinced that the wine they are drinking is Châteauneuf du Pape and not Asti Spumante, whereas the Fascist believes that it is without a doubt Asti Spumante. Since the poet refuses to budge on this issue, the Fascist orders that he be shot. Before dying, the poet will

scream: "Hurrah for the Revolution!" (2745). Eduardo and Ninetto, who had been hired as waiters at the Fascist party, see that the comet is leaving Numanzia, and off they go.

Mandelstam's poem does read like the impromptu speech of some drunk and extroverted poet at the end of a successful banquet. It sounds like a toast to a victorious army: "I drink to the soldiers' star-flowers." This poem seems written by a hypocritical and subservient poet, who simply celebrates the ruling power of the moment. But this absurd episode reveals its crucial meaning if read in the light of Pasolini's view of Mandelstam. Keep in mind that the poet is the last character to die in the scenario, and that after his death the two pilgrims leave the Western world behind and enter a progressively more vague and ominous Arab land that will lead them to the discovery of the Savior's fate. The poet's execution is the boundary between the known and the unknown, between history and a post-historical condition. In *Descrizioni di descrizioni* (Description of descriptions, 1972–75), Pasolini explains his interpretation of Mandelstam's poetry and of his life. "Did Mandelstam have a life?" (*E' stata una vita quella di Mandelstam?*), Pasolini asks himself. For Pasolini, the Russian poet's life "doesn't belong in the 'human tradition' according to which we perceive others' lives as very similar to each other."<sup>61</sup>

Born in Warsaw in 1891, Mandelstam grew up in Saint Petersburg and studied in Paris and Heidelberg.<sup>62</sup> Numerous wanderings and adventures punctuated his biography. He was arrested in 1934 probably because of an ironic poem on Stalin. He attempted suicide in prison. After having been allowed to travel to Moscow briefly, he was arrested again in 1937 and died the following year. Mandelstam's life, Pasolini writes, was "absurd," like the death of the poet in *Porn-Theo-Colossal*.<sup>63</sup> Instead of moving to Western Europe permanently, Pasolini continues, he remained in Saint Petersburg to witness the revolution. But soon the authorities asked him to stop writing poetry and, "incapable of any reaction," Mandelstam decided to do nothing. Pasolini describes the Russian poet as an alienated man who withdrew from a society that kept him as "an eternal child and an impotent man in a Communist world."<sup>64</sup> For the Italian filmmaker, Mandelstam represents a failed artist and intellectual in that he lived an "unreal life, for which there was no solution." At the end of his career, Pasolini shares Mandelstam's tragic condition. Mandelstam "experienced politics as life" (*la politica vissuta come vita*).<sup>65</sup> And like Pasolini, Mandelstam perceived "the entire world as a secret and luminous novelty." Pasolini's poetics centered on the numinous revelation of the sacred mirrors Mandelstam's childlike contemplation of the world's radiance.

Now we understand the apparently absurd ending of the Numanzia episode. The poet who dies at the end of the Fascist banquet is an intellectual who is unable to justify his “absurd” role in a new, repressive society. The ludicrous dispute over the wine inadvertently leads the failed intellectual to retrieve his original revolutionary impetus. Speaking of Mandelstam, Pasolini writes that the Russian poet “inaugurated” a new “isolated and internal opposition.” This is also the opposition that Pasolini envisions as his sole answer to what he calls new Fascism. The “absurd” poet of Numanzia recalls both Mandelstam (according to Pasolini’s view) and Pasolini himself. This is a pivotal moment of the scenario. After the poet’s death and the end of the society of Numanzia, the two pilgrims abandon the (Western) land of history and enter a mythic and oneiric space.

If we consider all three utopias (Sodom, Gomorrah, and Numanzia), however, we realize that Sodom and Numanzia are somehow connected to each other. Both are “real” democracies, based on a “real” tolerance. In Numanzia, conservatives “naturally” abandon their views. Moreover, in their walk through the silent city of dead people, Eduardo and Ninetto visit a house in which they find a “homosexual [who died] holding his boy in his arms, next to a bunch of roses” (2742). This stylized scene, which reinforces Pasolini’s stereotypical image of an older man with a much younger lover, speaks of a society, the socialist Numanzia, in which minorities are not persecuted. The decency (democracy, tolerance, kindness) characterizing Sodom is the same decency that Eduardo finds in Numanzia. We saw that Gomorrah is certainly not a utopia, since it is based on violence and repression. According to Pasolini’s description, a homosexual utopia and socialism have something in common. Sodom and Numanzia are what Gomorrah, the city of heterosexuality, is not. It is impossible to determine whether Pasolini was aware of the similarities his narrative creates between homosexuality and socialism. Both are “impossible” conditions, whereas Gomorrah identifies with reality, with what is going on at the present moment in the typical Italian or, more generically, European cities in the seventies.

### The End of the Journey

The fourth and final chapter concerns not a city but a journey toward a city. After their first three stops in three different cities, the prophet/Magus Eduardo and the angel/servant Ninetto reach their final destination, the city of Ur (geographically located in Iraq), through a

“three-phase” transit, as Pasolini himself defines it. These three sections, Pasolini writes, were to be increasingly more “delirious” and “surreal” (2746). In particular, Pasolini stresses that, whereas in the previous chapters of the film “the music was always real,” the conclusion was to have “a continuous musical commentary,” which would signify the fictitious, unreal nature of this final part of the film. We know how important this distinction is for Pasolini. As in the *Gospel According to St. Matthew* or in *Salò*, an external, “false” music highlights the solemn meaning of a scene expressing a sudden and fundamental revelation. The examples could be numerous. Take, for instance, the *Gospel*, in which the well-known African American gospel song “Sometimes I feel like a motherless child” sung by Damietta is in striking contrast with the images of the Magi arriving at the scene of the nativity. The last scene of *Porn-Theo-Colossal* was to be a rereading of the same religious event.

The first segment of the finale is about Eduardo and Ninetto on a plane (“a Jumbo”) directed toward the “crimson Orient.” While asleep, Eduardo holds a mysterious package tight to his chest. This package contains his gift for the baby Jesus. A first characteristic of this initiatory journey is the progressive stripping away of the two Neapolitans’ belongings. The plane lands in an unspecified, vast, and chaotic city. Here the two travelers must connect with another flight. Given the confusion, Eduardo’s luggage does not make it to the plane. On the plane, Eduardo sees from the window an old Arab man carrying away his suitcases on an ass. The text stop is a “white city on the banks of a salty, totally dry and white lake” (2747). From this moment on, the cities visited by the two pilgrims are nameless. While they are asleep waiting for their next connection, two young Arab men remove Eduardo and Ninetto’s clothes and leave them in their underwear. Eduardo is still holding his gift for the baby Savior. They rush to their plane half naked, but no one notices it because all the other male passengers only wear towels around their waists, and their women wear long veils.

### **The Magus’s Gift to the Baby Jesus: A Nativity Scene**

The third stop is a place that “is shockingly similar to the end of the world” (2748). It is a desert with a few skeletal palm trees. The driver of the Land Rover, which is supposed to take Eduardo and Ninetto to the “Hotel Continental,” turns out to be another Neapolitan. After the traditional greetings we have seen already in the previous three parts of the film project, the three Italians drive “toward the flaming nothingness

[*il nulla infuocato*]" (2749). Given that it takes a day and a night to get to Ur, their final destination, the three travelers decide to take a nap under a palm tree. The Neapolitan driver steals Eduardo's secret gift and drives away. He soon arrives in "a place outside the world." Here he opens the mysterious package and realizes that it is a precious, baroque nativity scene that has been modified into a modern toy. Turning a handle on its side makes the music of a traditional tarantella come out of the nativity scene, the shepherds dance around, and the baby Jesus opens and closes his little arms. After the tarantella, sacred music is heard, announcing the arrival of the "humble and solemn" Magi, who walk up to the baby and offer him their gifts (2750).

Pasolini explicitly indicates the particular shot that he wanted to use for this scene. It was to be a close-up, in order to let the nativity scene take up the whole screen. In this shot, "the scene seems real." It is impossible not to relate this hypothetical shot to the same famous scene in the *Gospel According to St. Matthew*. In *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, the sacredness expressed through this close-up would be signified only by the music coming out of the mechanical nativity scene, a sort of homage to something passé and folkloristic. The nativity scene would look like a precious knick-knack typical of a southern Italian house. This hypothetical close-up of the nativity scene speaks volumes about the last phase of Pasolini's poetics and ideology. First, the mechanical nativity scene is a toy, an ornament typical of a lower-middle-class family. Pasolini stresses the ancient and southern origin of this artifact ("You would say it is a seventeenth-century Bamboccianti" [2749]).<sup>66</sup> Second, this artistic object has been "mechanized" to reflect a new cultural environment. The nativity scene was originally an expression of Neapolitan religious art and was famous throughout Europe. The Metropolitan Museum in New York celebrates Christmas with a gigantic Neapolitan nativity scene. The sacred and artistic value of Eduardo's gift has been violated. The sacred crèche has been turned into a pathetic machine. Third, in the *Gospel*, the nativity scene is relived along the slopes of a poor and arid hill in southern Italy. The humble and nonprofessional participants in the scene blended into this natural set. The nativity scene, we could say, was in the nature of things, in the sense that Pasolini had succeeded in presenting the birth of Christ as the "natural" expression of the spontaneous religiosity of an ancient, precapitalist culture. The truthfulness of the nativity arose in the film as "natural" revelation because its sacredness was part of the sacredness of a premodern society.

In *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, Pasolini concludes his description of the mechanical nativity scene by focusing on the "humble and solemn" Magi

who approach the Savior. We must remember that Eduardo is himself one of the Magi following the comet. The secret gift of Eduardo the Magus is a mechanical reproduction of the nativity scene, in which he himself originally participated. In other words, Eduardo wishes to offer the baby Jesus an object that reminds us of Jesus' past birth. Eduardo's journey is a memorial, an act of remembrance. But the nativity scene is also the Magus Eduardo's biography. In the nativity scene, the Magus would contemplate the representation of his own past biography (Eduardo already saw the Savior in an immemorial past, as the nativity scene shows). The disappearance of the gift brings an insight, a sudden self-revelation, as if Eduardo's true self were the absence of the nativity scene itself as the remembrance of a past, pretemporal event (the Magus Eduardo met the baby Jesus in a time preceding the fall of time). Eduardo's self-recognition is the recognition of the "blazing nothingness" of the present time and place. By losing the image (memory) of his biography depicted in a mechanical nativity scene, the Magus understands that his journey cannot be a repetition of that past, mythic path to salvation. In the "blazing nothingness" of this "end of the world," the Magus must divest himself of his identity. He finally loses himself (his body, depicted in the mechanical nativity scene stolen by the driver), and by losing himself, he faces the persistent void of the present.

We could infer that the presence of the comet, however, alludes to a second birth of Christ. Christ's second coming, according to this reading of Pasolini's scenario, would begin with his second birth, a reenactment of his original human biography. The Word would become incarnate a second time. The Apocalypse would start from the Word's renewed birth. It is evident that, by placing the narratives of Sodom, Gomorrah, and Numanzia next to the Gospel story of the Savior's birth, Pasolini creates a powerful contrast between the three failed utopias (sexual and political impossible societies) and a new utopia based on the recreation of a fertile family, of a new fertile discourse of renewal. The holy family is nowhere to be found now. Eduardo and Ninetto's journey to the city of Ur underscores the impossible retrieval of that familiar unity from which the Word came.

### Eduardo de Filippo's Play *Christmas at the Cupiello's*

When he wakes up and finds out that his fellow Neapolitan has stolen his gift, the Magus Eduardo "is about to die of sorrow." To fully understand the Magus Eduardo's attachment to the nativity scene, we must

remember that Christmas and the nativity scene are the main themes of Eduardo's *Christmas at the Cupiellos'* (*Natale in Casa Cupiello*, [1931]). This play is one of the most popular and famous pieces of twentieth-century Italian theater. *Christmas at the Cupiellos'* revolves around the character of Luca Cupiello, an elderly and poor Neapolitan gentleman. Eduardo de Filippo himself played this role throughout his life. Each year, Luca Cupiello spends time and money to build a beautiful nativity scene for his family and friends, even though his son, his wife, and his brother consider the whole thing a waste of time. For Luca, the construction of the nativity scene is both a ritual and a way to deny the difficulties of his daily life. Luca is in fact estranged from the rest of his family. He is a dreamy, idealistic man, who wants to believe in the traditional values of the typical Neapolitan family, although his daughter Ninuccia is having an affair that will destroy her marriage, and his son Tommasino is a petty thief with no real future. There is no doubt that the Magus Eduardo in Pasolini's *Porn-Theo-Colossal* closely resembles the protagonist of Eduardo's *Christmas at the Cupiellos'*. Like the Magus Eduardo, Luca Cupiello is an old-fashioned, good-natured, elderly man. When Luca's son flatly confesses that he does not like his father's nativity scene, Luca replies as follows: "You say this because you want to pass yourself off as a modern young man who doesn't like the Nativity scene . . . a superman. The Nativity scene is something moving. Everyone likes it."<sup>67</sup>

In one of the most poetic scenes of the play, Luca Cupiello proudly shows his nativity scene to Vittorio, a young man who is his daughter Ninuccia's secret lover. Luca asks Vittorio to step back to have a complete view of his masterpiece. He then turns on "many small Christmas lights in the sacred composition." Luca explains to the young man, whose flattering comments are actually meant to ridicule the old man, that "I have a real passion. When Christmas comes, if I don't make the nativity scene it feels like a bad omen. My beloved father used to build it for my brother and me when we were little. . . . Then I began to make it for my children."<sup>68</sup>

In *Christmas at the Cupiellos'* we also find a direct allusion to the Magi. Luca tells Vittorio that he had just returned from the store where he bought the Magi because, when he opened the box where he keeps the figures, he found one with the head broken. "I have chosen the most beautiful ones," Luca continues, "the Magi who brought their gifts to the baby Jesus."<sup>69</sup>

Luca's dreams are shattered when, during their Christmas dinner, his son-in-law abandons his unfaithful wife. At the end of the play, Luca is in bed in a state of mental alienation. He had a stroke that left him confused and unable to use an arm. His son finally tells him that, yes,



he does like his father's nativity scene. De Filippo describes what Luca imagines without saying a word:

After obtaining that precious "yes," Luca looks far away, as if he were following an enchanting scene: a nativity scene big like the world, in which he recognizes the festive swarming of real human beings, who are, however, very small. These people are rushing to the poor dwelling, where a real ass and a real cow, which are small like those people, with their breath are keeping warm the baby Jesus, who is very big and alive and screaming like every other small baby.<sup>70</sup>

Pasolini's *Colossal* opens with a prologue that presents a similar image:

We find ourselves in the darkness and silence of the cosmic altitudes. Below, we see the globe. . . . We notice the furrows in the earth, the murky spots of the seas, the boundaries of the continents, etc. In the end—given that the globe rotates—we suddenly recognize the cloudy and ruby shape of Italy.

At this point, we begin hearing distant voices, screams, and even a voice that sings an old Neapolitan song, which is, however, very feeble because of the distance.

We get closer . . . and all of a sudden we see the panorama of Naples. Naples is seen from above, with its narrow streets, its small squares, its *bassi*. (2697)<sup>71</sup>

We could summarize the evident similarities between Luca Cupiello (whom Italians directly associate with Eduardo de Filippo) and Eduardo in *Porn-Theo-Colossal* by saying that both texts focus on the transformation of his main character, who is a man at odds with his environment. Both Eduardo and Luca Cupiello are alienated men. The connection between the endings of the two texts is especially interesting. In *Christmas at the Cupiellos*, it is Luca Cupiello himself who brings about the disaster he wishes to avoid. Although he strives to save his daughter's marriage, Luca inadvertently gives Nicola, his son-in-law, the letter in which his daughter tells her husband that she intends to leave him for another man. Luca's wife, Concetta, had previously convinced her daughter not to give this letter to her husband. Luca finds the letter and, seeing that it is addressed to his son-in-law, gives it to Nicola, thus making his son-in-law aware of his wife's dishonesty. At the end of the play, Luca lies in bed in complete mental alienation. He keeps asking "Has Nicola arrived?" because he wants his daughter and her husband to get back together.<sup>72</sup> When Vittorio, his daughter's lover, enters the scene, the

delirious Luca believes that he is Nicola, his son-in-law, and takes the man and his daughter's hands in his in a symbolic act of reunification. It is at this point that Nicola, Ninuccia's husband, comes back, probably with the intention of forgiving his wife. But he walks into the room when Luca is blessing Ninuccia and Vittorio, whom Luca thinks is Nicola, and asks them to promise that they will never leave each other. Seeing this, Nicola comes to believe that Luca and the rest of his wife's family have been fooling him all along, and abandons the scene.

Luca is a pathetic, alienated man who cannot bear a reality that denies his ideals. Similarly, in *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, Pasolini presents a Magus, Eduardo, who follows the comet in a world at odds with his "outdated" values. Let us remember that, in Eduardo de Filippo's play, Luca's attachment to the nativity scene is also a way of honoring his father, who used to build the nativity scene for his children. If we read de Filippo's play in the light of Pasolini's ideology, we could say that Luca embodies Pasolini's view of a mythic past based on premodern values, if by "premodern" we intend a hypothetical culture still untouched by the "corruption" of capitalism. Luca Cupiello's alienation stems from his being from "another world," a world that does not exist in reality.

### Ur: The City of the Origins

The ending of *Porn-Theo-Colossal* presents a different form of alienation. Epiphanius (Pasolini now chooses this name rather than Eduardo) wakes up and realizes that his gift for the Messiah, his precious nativity scene, has been stolen. After a moment of utter despair, Epiphanius sees that Ur, their ultimate destination, is visible on the horizon. Once in Ur, the two travelers ask the locals about the cave where "a Messiah such and such was supposed to be born" (2750). Some natives, Pasolini writes, give Epiphanius and Nuntius only vague answers. They do not really know very much about this Messiah. The two pilgrims eventually walk to the "other part of the city" where trash is collected. The comet, which shines now as it never shone before, stops over a poor, dusty hut. The "extremely violent light of the comet" illuminates an empty space of rocks and dust. A child suddenly arrives to sell the two foreigners cheap souvenirs of the messiah. When Epiphanius asks him about the Savior, the child tells him that "the Messiah was born, but a long time ago, and now is dead and forgotten" (2751).

At the end of this devastating revelation, Epiphanius dies of despair. At this point, "from Nuntius's body the figure of a second Nuntius comes

out: an Angel, a real Angel of the Lord. Beaming, he approaches Epiphanius's corpse and takes his hand." Epiphanius's soul arises from his dead body. He "is very elegant, all dressed in white," like a typical Neapolitan gentleman at the beginning of the twentieth century. Addressing him in the Roman dialect, the angel tells him: "Let's go, man of good will! [*Namo, omo de bona volontà!*]" (2752). The "man of good will" has been resurrected with a new, cleansed figure. He wears a white, elegant suit and follows the angel in a renewed journey.

The two travelers exchange some final words. The angel Ninetto expresses himself in "romanesco," whereas the Magus Epiphanius speaks in "napoletano." The two dialects evoke two different clichés. Both dialects can signify a working-class individual who is unrefined, gregarious, with theatrical manners, dishonest, and with a gross and contagious sense of humor. However, *romanesco* also includes an element of meanness and cleverness used to deceive others. A character who speaks *romanesco* is somehow in the know. He is aware of something that others may ignore and may use this knowledge against them. This connotation may be absent from a man or woman speaking *napoletano*, which in fact involves a touch of goodhearted joviality. In his scenario, Pasolini is consistent with this clichéd view of Romans and Neapolitans. Ninetto, the Roman servant, is an angel who knows more than his master. He is direct and unapologetic, whereas Eduardo seems lost and more sensitive.

Shedding his human skin, the Roman angel dismisses his deference toward his Neapolitan master. Like a divine messenger from a biblical story, Nuntius addresses his human interlocutor with firm and unsympathetic words. The two spiritual beings (the angel and the human soul) fly up in the cosmic space, which Pasolini had described at the very beginning of his scenario. The film project ends where it had begun. We understand that Nuntius was meant to lead Epiphanius to Paradise, which, however, has disappeared. "But it was here," the angel says in *romanesco* (*Eppure stava qua*). The soul of Eduardo replies in *napoletano*: "What? Paradise?" (*Che? U' Paradiso?*).

Epiphanius's soul is rather a purified, cleansed body. In his journey up through the deep skies, Epiphanius must stop a moment because his feet hurt. Later, he will stop a second time to urinate. Looking down, the two see the same image of the Earth that Pasolini described in the prologue of this film project, which was also an echo of the closing scene of de Filippo's *Christmas at the Cupiello's*. The two travelers find themselves in an infinite, silent emptiness. Paradise is nowhere to be found. Similar to what we read at the beginning of the film project, Epiphanius hears distant noises and voices coming from far away. He realizes that, "like every

comet, the comet I followed was a bunch of crap [*una stronzata*]," but that thanks to that illusion he had been able to understand reality (2753).

The vague noises and voices from the Earth become distinct revolutionary songs. A revolution must be taking place down there. Epiphanius asks himself and the angel, "And now what?" The angel responds, "Well, signor Epiphanius, the end doesn't exist. Let's wait. Something is going to happen." The end of *Porn-Theo-Colossal* alludes to a renewal, which is apocalyptic in that it manifests an eternal waiting. This new beginning finds in the bodies of the two main characters its primary manifestation. Dressed in white, the color of the elect's robes at the end of time according to Revelation, the Neapolitan Magus/prophet Eduardo sits in an unspecified, distant space outside the Earth and hears the songs announcing an upcoming revolution. The two enlightened men are "out of this world," and the revolution seems something perennially announced but never realized. The two men are angelic and "saved," but their salvation lies in their lingering in a sort of dark limbo somewhere far from reality. In *La fine del mondo*, de Martino characterizes modern apocalypticism as a paralyzed and suspended condition between two opposite views of the world:

Two contrastive terrors govern our epoch: that of "losing the world" and that of "being lost in the world." On the one hand, we fear to lose... the splendor and the joy of our daily life, the energy that leads us to communal projects in our social life... On the other hand, we consider the world as the danger that undermines the most authentic human destiny... On the one hand, the world appears as a lost paradise, ... and we curse modern science; on the other, the catastrophe appears exactly in enclosing oneself in a worldly horizon with no presentiment or hope or faith in "another" world.<sup>73</sup>

The two pilgrims end up suspended in outer space; they listen sadly to the songs of some future revolution and doubt the realization of that revolution. Their distanced gaze suggests that they are torn between the memory of "the splendor and joy" of a possible world (the revolution) and the perception of the void, the dark outer space, lying between that possible world of renewal and the reality of its misery. Eduardo's metamorphosed body results from his failed journey through the deceptive and unsuccessful ideologies that rule over Sodom, Gomorrah, and Numanzia, all of which, at least in theory, were based on real tolerance and democracy. All three stories of these cities emphasize the central relevance of physicality (Sodom and homosexuality; Gomorrah and heterosexuality; Numanzia and a "socialist" suicide).

We find a less evocative and melancholic, but more powerful ending in the second outline of this scenario, as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. According to this version, the Magus and his angel turn around to look at the Earth and become two pillars of salt like Lot's daughters at the beginning of the episode about Gomorrah. The futility of the two men's journey is here more explicit. But what is more evident is that the two travelers are not superior to the citizens of the burned-down biblical city. The old man's decency and wisdom and his companion's angelic nature do not lead to any form of salvation. They die as the citizens of the modern Sodom die.

In the final version of the scenario Eduardo and his angel place themselves outside all of these social orders. Eduardo is resurrected and ascends to a nonplace whence he awaits the revolution. Eduardo, the Magus in search of the original family, has transcended his own quest. He has lost himself (the mechanical nativity scene as representation of his biography) and has not found the family that gave birth to a new Word. He has even transcended origin itself (Ur). Eduardo exists or, better yet, survives as if in a living death (he is in a nowhere place; he casts off his body as a snake sheds its skin), as in *Saint Paul* the apostle Paul had found in his death a first allusion to the resurrection of the body, the essence of his discourse of transformation.

The influence of Norman O. Brown's apocalypticism is now evident. As Brown hypothesizes a "new" body, a resurrected body, so does Pasolini depict a process of initiation that is a progressive abandonment of one's body, where *body* (as Brown points out) means both the subject's vision of his own physicality and the repository of the subject's identity. The body is the subject's memory and the subject's presence in the here and now of a perennial decadence. We understand now that Pasolini posits a fundamental mirroring between the erasure of the "failed" bodies of the "failed" utopias and the erasure of the Magus himself. At the end of the scenario, the Magus dies and then comes back to life as a nonbody, the presence of a constantly deferred apocalypse.



THREE

## “A Diluted Reel of Film in My Brain”: To Preach a New “Word of Abjuration” in *Petrolino*

Watch out. Hell is arising toward you.

PASOLINI, IN HIS LAST INTERVIEW, HOURS BEFORE HIS DEATH

*This long, fragmentary, and unfinished novel seems to frustrate every attempt for a unifying definition. The book is usually approached through paratactic classifications: Petrolino is about this and also about that. This analysis centers on the theme of form, which Pasolini identifies as the foundation of his novel. The author's initial claim that Petrolino is less about a plot than about the birth of a form is usually not taken as the actual foundation of the novel; it is examined as a philosophical statement that is often independent of the events narrated in the text. Consistent with the apocalyptic themes studied in the previous chapters, I believe that in this context “to give birth to a form,” as Pasolini says, signifies a sequence of interrelated concepts: a new way of seeing reality, but also the form of a new reality and the form of a new organism—the fetus of a new humanity. In other words, Petrolino is about the formation of a new world and a new way of inhabiting it. This new humanity and new world exist under the aegis of schizophrenia. As we also find in Ernesto de Martino's *La fine del mondo*, schizophrenia is a form of private apocalypse that shares important aspects of social and cultural apocalypses. Echoing a fundamental passage from Norman O. Brown's *Love's Body*, Pasolini envisions this new apocalyptic reality as the private theater present within a schizophrenic's mind, a movie theater that projects the*

The title of this chapter includes two quotations. The first is from Brown, *Love's Body*, 120. The second comes from Pasolini, *Petrolino*, trans. Ann Goldstein, “Note 71 I,” 298. “Word of abjuration” is a literal translation from the original Italian; see Pasolini, *Petrolino*, ed. Graziella Chiarcossi and Maria Careri, 342.

images from the patient's external world as if they were fictional films. The new world of *Petrolio* is similar to a schizophrenic mind's dark and empty cave, where the world is shown as if on a screen. Schizophrenia is also a journey of initiation into a new, forthcoming world, as the numerous journeys in *Petrolio* confirm. Like the judge Schreber, whose famous journal recounts his dramatic gender mutation, the two main male characters of *Petrolio* (Carlo 1 and Carlo 2) are turned into women by a power that has possessed and emptied their bodies. Finally, the new form also summons the image of an anal fetus, the feces "brought to life" and discarded. The schizophrenic body is a body possessed, manipulated, and discarded as something of no value. The concept of an anal birth is also essential in Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom.

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*Petrolio*, Pasolini's famous unfinished work that came out seventeen years after his death, is a literary monster comprising 133 fragments, for a total of more than 500 pages in the original Italian version.<sup>1</sup> Pasolini was still working on *Petrolio* when he was murdered. He defines the literary segments composing *Petrolio* as "notes" (*appunti*), a term that seems to indicate that they are nothing more than rough drafts hastily jotted down and still unpolished. Some of these notes are in fact refined and complete tales, but most of them span a vast range of narrative or linguistic incompleteness. To make this chaotic manuscript more readable, its Italian editors adopted a series of typographical symbols to explain a number of recurrent textual problems, such as interlineal variants, syntactical or lexical gaps, and underlined or circled words that awaited revision. This chapter is not a descriptive analysis of the entire work; rather, it focuses on two long sections of *Petrolio* that are relevant to the themes of my present research and also crucial for a full understanding of the entire novel. However, when necessary, I allude to other sections of the book.

What is the meaning of *Petrolio*? What does Pasolini wish to accomplish with this fragmentary text? This is a tough question. Pasolini seems to reveal his true intentions in more than one note. He holds that in this work he intends to create a "form," but in this context the word *form* has more than one connotation. In "Project Note," he states that *Petrolio*

should be presented in the form of a critical edition of an unpublished text (considered a monumental work, a modern *Satyricon*). Four of five versions of that text survive: they correspond in some respects and not in others, some contain certain events while others do not, etc. Hence this edition makes use not only of a comparison between the various surviving manuscripts, . . . but also of the contribution of other materials: letters from the author, . . . letters from friends of the author, . . . oral testimony, . . . etc.<sup>2</sup>

*Form* is here a synonym for the way Pasolini wanted the book to appear. It should look like a "critical edition," with all of the unavoidable philological apparatus and footnotes. Such an edition would recall the *Satyricon* both in its content and its fragmentary form. It would consist of single units (the "notes") with major narrative gaps and unclear references. At least from this point of view, the printed version of *Petrolio* is certainly close to Pasolini's original intentions. Unlike most critical editions and the *Satyricon* itself, *Petrolio* exposes its variants in the body of the text. However, like a building covered with thick scaffolding, *Petrolio* is also sustained by the variants exposed on the page. This textual exposure is an integral part of the form of the book. We could say that these variants are a form of representation staged on the page.

In *Il sogno del centauro*, Pasolini explains why he insists on presenting the variants of an original, and lost, Ur-text of *Petrolio*. His interviewer Jean Dufлот remarks that, according to Herbert Marcuse, our modern values require a new language. Nowadays, it is impossible to conceive of a morality based on the concept of beauty. Pasolini responds by saying that this is because "we are entering the moment of variants"<sup>3</sup> by which he means a time of variations and confusion, a sort of modern tower of Babel whose builders await divine punishment. Our "present time" is an "inferno," Pasolini states. The "form" invoked by Pasolini is a silent statement, a "something" that exposes itself as neither good nor bad, neither progressive nor regressive, but only existent. It is a suspension of the progress of decadence exactly because it resists interpretation. The statement is the scaffolding itself.

Pasolini confirms this interpretation in "Note 37," which bears the eloquent title "Something Written":

[My intention is] not to write a story but to construct a form, . . . a form consisting simply of "something written." I do not deny that certainly the best thing would be to invent an alphabet, perhaps of ideographs or hieroglyphics, and to print the entire book that way. . . . Michaux (?) has done this recently, creating an entire book, line by line, through the infinite, patient invention of nonalphabetic signs. . . . I have chosen, for my self-sufficient and pointless construction, materials that are apparently meaningful. (129).<sup>4</sup>

Before we can understand the important reference to Michaux, we must identify the source of Pasolini's concept of "form" in order to clarify its meaning. He molds his idea of form after Philippe Sollers's *L'écriture et l'expérience des limites*, a volume that was very dear to Pasolini; he



mentions it in *Petrolio* and in the film *Salò*. Sollers hypothesizes a new “program” based on “the practice of writing” (*la pratique de l’écriture*). Sollers endeavors to define the “space” (*espace*) of writing in contrast to the traditional coordinates of “myth and representation.” “The theory of textual writing,” Sollers continues, occurs in the practice of writing.<sup>5</sup> Sollers proposes a new way of looking at literary histories by focusing on those texts that question the concept of history by proposing a new “space,” and thus also a new way of placing oneself (writer and reader) within that space. Sollers analyzes six authors—Dante, Sade, Lautréamont, Mallarmé, Artaud, and Bataille—and sees a particular connection between Dante and Sade.

Sollers’ “space” is a synonym for “form.” In his first chapter, on Dante, Sollers emphasizes the frequent “appeal” (*appel*) that Dante directs at the reader. According to Sollers, “the entire poem . . . turns toward that empty space that reads it [*lieu vide qui le lit*]” and that the text addresses “in order to become readable to itself [*pour se rendre à lui-même lisible*].” This space is both interior and exterior to the text, since language oscillates between two extremes: an “insurmountable opacity” (*opacité infranchissable*) and an “absolute transparency” (*transparence absolue*).<sup>6</sup> These two poles in fact respond to the mutual reflection of the Self and the Other, “the empty and initial form of thought” (*forme vide et initiale de la pensée*). This “Adamic form” (*forme adamique*) is the original, primitive, linguistic form given to human beings, before the Tower of Babel and the confusion of languages.<sup>7</sup> Pasolini’s insistence on *Petrolio* as a “form” rather than a “novel” finds its meaning in Sollers. The idea of creating a form does not mean that Pasolini is trying to recreate some sort of primitive, divinely inspired expression, some kind of pure poetry that defies time and decadence. *Petrolio* is a form in the sense that it aims to bring to life “the initial form of thought,” which is at once “transparent” and “opaque.” The concept of giving birth to a form is crucial for a correct understanding of *Petrolio*. The “initial form of thought” is a thought that is in a perennial state of birth. “Form” is a “thing” (*Petrolio*) that speaks that “initial thought,” echoing both the pristine Adamic form and the hypothetical (apocalyptic) evocation of a new “form” that is always about to come to life. The reader should remain mindful of this weird but central concept of the form of a “textual” fetus, a prebirth form that reveals itself in its perfect “opacity.”

Pasolini’s comparison between *Petrolio* and Michaux’s writings helps us to make these dense concepts more approachable. Here again Pasolini underscores the importance of the actual appearance of the text (what

the page should look like). Since Pasolini stresses that Michaux's book came out "recently," he may be referring to Michaux's *Par la voie des rythmes* (Through the path of rhythms, 1974), a short book written entirely with nonalphabetic signs. Michaux divides his text into five chapters or "movements" (given their visual musicality). To summarize the basic theme of each section, on the last page of his booklet Michaux aligns five groups of signs, each corresponding to the first image of each section.<sup>8</sup> Some of these signs vaguely recall human forms in motion, unspecified quadrupeds, insects, birds, stains, an infantile scribbling, and Chinese ideograms. Michaux's book speaks without expressing any detectable and rational discourse. Deprived of narrative content, what the book "says" is a nonlinguistic communication, like the message of a dream we struggle to share with a friend. In famous essay written in 1965 ("From the Laboratory") Pasolini had already broached the issue of an expressive language that defies rational meaning:

It would be necessary . . . to bring back the *memoriel* beyond *langues*, still understood instinctively as spoken-written institutional languages; beyond *langues* up until the time in which *langues* were and are purely vocal. . . . I was three, three-and-a-half years old; . . . I had a cycle of "serial" dreams in which I lost my mother and looked for her through reddish streets full of porticoes of the ghost of Bologna. . . . In that period . . . I experienced the first pangs of sexual love. . . . I found myself with the physical necessity of "naming" that sentiment. . . . I invented a word. This term was, I remember perfectly, "TETA VELETA."<sup>9</sup>

"Teta veleta" is the name of an overwhelming feeling of distress and loss. Pasolini's first experience of the love pain is openly connected to the sequence of dreams about the loss of the mother. As he does in his dreams, the little Pier Paolo "went to find that object of my tender-terrible heartache in her house."<sup>10</sup> The lady the child was attracted to was a substitute for his mother, who was pregnant at the time and thus could not grant the child's request for her absolute attention. Talking with the eminent linguist Gianfranco Contini, Pasolini many years later decided that behind "teta" was the "ancient Greek word *tetis*, meaning "sex." But what really matters in the expression "teta veleta" (a veiled, hidden, and unattainable desire) is its intrinsic dynamism, its indication of a status of loss and panic that compels its speaker to seek its corresponding but elusive signified. "Teta veleta" is the evocation of a missing form—we could infer that it is the form of the mother pregnant with someone else.

In a similar manner, what matters in Michaux's written language is the form the reader internalizes during the act of reading. Its "meaning" is its visual rendition, a febrile and subtle sequence of dynamic signs inching across the page. Adapting Michaux's insight, Pasolini claims that *Petrolio* is made of "apparently meaningful" materials (*apparentemente significativi*). Like the almost-meaningful figures in Michaux's book, *Petrolio* uses "materials" that "look like" significant communication, although in fact their meaning is not the story they tell. The form and the story are two distinct but interconnected aspects of the book. The story (the "critical edition" of a lost original) is no more significant than Michaux's pages full of obscure but evocative signs.

It is also essential to consider that *Petrolio* has no beginning, as the first note, "Note 1: Facts Preceding the Story," makes clear. The first note is in fact a series of dots (a new form of alphabet?) alluding to that "something" that took place "sometime" before the beginning of the present narration (3).<sup>11</sup> This narrative void has a footnote: "This novel does not begin." The idea of a text that neither begins nor ends reaffirms the vision of a text as a visual event, an image-less image that exists as an event, that is, a "form."<sup>12</sup> In this regard, it is revealing that Pasolini refers to "ideograms" or "hieroglyphics" that could substitute for the alphabetic signs printed on the page. Ideograms have a special significance for Michaux as well. Both Pasolini and Michaux see the creation of new forms of expression as the evocation of an archaic, mythic condition. In *Idéogrammes en Chine* (1975), in which he hypothesizes new forms of ideograms, Michaux writes, "Gone [are] the archaic characters that moved the heart. Gone [is] the original poetry, the tenderness in the surprise of the original 'encounter.' Gone [is] the still 'pious' trace. . . . Burned [are] the bridges with the origin."<sup>13</sup> Pasolini and Michaux share a similar poetics. Both authors endeavor to evoke that "pious trace," the "original poetry" that has "disappeared." Remember that *Petrolio* is the critical edition of a lost original, and that its aim is not the construction of a story, but rather the depiction of a form. This form is an inner evocation of a lost origin. *Petrolio* is meant to summon a form that arises from the signs (the narrative lines) of the book.

Pasolini does try to compose a text (a poem? a memoir? a self-portrait?) reminiscent of Michaux's nonalphabetic books. In his fascinating study *Pasolini e la morte* (Pasolini and death), the artist Giuseppe Zigaina reproduces an "abstract drawing" in which Pasolini merges iconic signs and verbal language.<sup>14</sup> Pasolini's "mandala," as Zigaina defines it, is made of four squares aligned on four rows. In these sixteen spaces, Pasolini draws abstract motifs that gently and almost imperceptibly mutate

from square to square. Without connecting this drawing to Pasolini's statement about Michaux in *Petrolio*, Zigaina compares Pasolini's "mysterious signs" to "lips" or "birds" in the air. At the bottom of the page, Pasolini inserts the following sentence: "The world doesn't want me anymore but doesn't know it" (*Il mondo non mi vuole più e non lo sa*). The forms within the squares (delicate birds, pages, or hair ruffled by a gust of wind) seem to be about to arise and to fly away at the same time. There is something "funereal," as Zigaina says, about these linear forms.<sup>15</sup> Their "being about to" recalls a work in progress, the process of summoning a visible and recognizable form. Pasolini's statement comments on the rhythmic forms whose cadence evokes the anticipation of a beginning. This "beginning" concerns the end of Pasolini, his having become unnecessary for the world. This abstract image blends in end and beginning. The beginning evoked by the "birds" about to fly away is the end of Pasolini. This is the form of Pasolini's "self-portrait."

### The "Form" of Strindberg's *Inferno* According to Pasolini

In *Petrolio*, Pasolini makes an explicit reference to August Strindberg's autobiographical novel *Inferno* (1897), which the great Swedish author wrote in French.<sup>16</sup> I will point out later some direct and crucial echoes of this text in *Petrolio*. Since our focus now is on Pasolini's concept of "form," it is extremely enlightening to read what Pasolini himself writes about Strindberg's book, which he admired greatly. In a short essay on this novel, Pasolini praises the "extraordinary 'form' of this [Strindberg's] journal," which blends long and enjoyable pages of "descriptions" with "sudden, astonishing moral musings."<sup>17</sup> Pasolini encloses the term *form* in brackets to highlight its importance and originality. What is original and "extraordinary," in Pasolini's words, about the form of Strindberg's *Inferno*? And how is its form relevant for *Petrolio*?

*Inferno* is a journal that records its author's mental illness—what Strindberg himself defines as an "inferno." Its recurrent and essential themes are the presence of haunting spirits and persistent hallucinations; the protagonist's complete alienation from the world and his mystical obsessions; and his profound and unclassifiable anguish that translates into constant wanderings in search of an impossible solace (between Paris and Sweden). For Pasolini, the "extraordinary 'form'" of this text first of all stems from its being "unfinished" and "in progress."<sup>18</sup> It is wrong, Pasolini emphasizes, "to read this work as a literary text." *Inferno* is neither literature nor document, in the sense of transcription of a mental

crisis. What is it then? Pasolini states that it is “like the experience I imagine one has by living with a man suffering from a mental disease.” The form of *Inferno* prevents the book from being classified as a specific genre.

But what is the difference between a “document” and “the experience” of seeing someone with a mental illness? Pasolini shifts the emphasis from the written page to the reader’s view of it. By rejecting any possible definition of the book, Pasolini makes Strindberg’s text vulnerable to the reader’s appropriation. What matters is what the reader sees thanks to the book. Pasolini first of all is convinced that Strindberg knew Freud’s theories very well. “It is almost absurd to believe that a well-read man like Strindberg doesn’t know Freud!” Pasolini exclaims. “The cultural and historical premises,” he continues, “*required*” that Strindberg know Freud. Why is this important? It is crucial for Pasolini to recognize his own mythology in Strindberg’s psychological struggle. In the same paragraph where he asserts the necessity of the Swedish author’s knowledge of Freudian psychoanalysis, Pasolini mentions the case of one of Strindberg’s friends, who “after the first sexual contact with a prostitute” believes that he exudes a “horrible stench” because in reality he is dead. This man also “curses his mother, who until then had adored him.”<sup>19</sup>

Strindberg *must* be acquainted with Freud because, thanks to Freud, Pasolini can turn Strindberg into his alter ego, someone who faces the same crippling psychological issues. Strindberg’s friend “dies” when he has sex with a woman who is not his mother. He curses his mother because he knows that his death and stench come from his having betrayed his mother. This man witnesses his own decomposition. Pasolini’s choice of this particular case could not be more explicit. An element that may be overlooked, though, is that this man’s disease is a form of self-reflection. He sees himself decomposing. In one of the most dramatic passages of *Inferno*, in a moment of great distress the main character makes the following confession to his deeply religious mother:

What do you want, my child?

I want to die, and then to be burned, or better yet, to be burned alive!<sup>20</sup>

“A tragic relationship with his mother,” Pasolini hypothesizes, is the first datum of Strindberg’s illness. Misogyny follows this “tragic” problem. “Homosexualism” is the last piece of the puzzle, which produces in Strindberg “symptoms of schizophrenia.”<sup>21</sup> In the beginning, there is the mythic tragedy of the male subject’s separation from the mother, according to Pasolini’s Freudian interpretation. Pasolini finally mentions Strindberg’s “conversion . . . to Catholicism as the religion of the

ancestors." All the elements of Pasolini's poetics are present in his reading of Strindberg's book.

Pasolini sees himself reflected in the mirror "formed" between Strindberg and his "journal," which is neither literature nor document. Let us remember that Pasolini links Strindberg's illness to schizophrenia. *Inferno* is a surface on which Pasolini sees his own mythic tragedy unfold as if Strindberg were telling his, Pasolini's, story to Pasolini himself. In other words, Strindberg reveals Pasolini's myth to Pasolini by offering this "form" that does not fit in any specific genre, because it is an "experience." Pasolini does not distinguish between what is real and what is fictional in *Inferno*, and Strindberg himself plays with this fundamental identification. Pasolini makes explicit his intention of blurring the boundaries between reality and dream in the initial "Project Note": "The fragmentary character of the whole book ensures that, for example, certain 'narrative pieces' are in the themselves complete, but we can't be certain, for example, whether they are real events, dreams, or conjectures made by one of the characters" (4).

The oneiric base of *Petrolio* is absolutely essential for a correct understanding of the novel, especially of those controversial chapters in which the two Carlos seem to turn into women. Strindberg describes a powerful, dreamlike real event when he reads about his recent death. One morning, the man (Strindberg as the first-person narrator), who is suffering from hallucinations and spiritual visitations, reads in a magazine the following summary of Strindberg's disease: "The unfortunate Strindberg [has brought] to Paris his misogyny."<sup>22</sup> We have noted that Pasolini connects *Inferno* to the act of witnessing someone else's mental disease.

The concept of form as reflection of a schizophrenic patient (Strindberg) who tells the story of someone else (Pasolini) is crucial to the following part of my analysis of *Petrolio*.

### Norman O. Brown's Analysis of Schizophrenia

The essential importance of a "schizophrenic" representation is confirmed in a one-sentence note ("Note 34ter") of *Petrolio*, which is a cryptic reference to Norman O. Brown's *Love's Body*, a fundamental text for Pasolini's last works, as I noted in my analysis of the scenario *Porn-Theo-Colossal*. Norman O. Brown's seminal book plays a central role in *Petrolio* as well. As far as I know, this crucial connection between Brown and Pasolini has never been thoroughly investigated. We will see how Pasolini not only borrows Brown's ideas, but also quotes from Brown's

book without mentioning him as his source. In this note (34ter), Pasolini writes, "At the end of the reception, quote sentence of a schizophrenic patient (Róheim cited by Brown)" (116).

Although Róheim's books (among them *Animism, Magic and the Divine King*, and *The Eternal Ones of the Dream*) are often cited in *Love's Body*, Pasolini's laconic note unmistakably refers to a section from chapter 6 of *Love's Body* ("Representative"). Remember that, like *Petrolino*, *Love's Body* has a fragmentary structure. Each chapter consists of a series of single sections. In the chapter entitled "Representative," we read:

The detached observer: subject and object distinguished; the subject-object dualism. The dualism that separates subject and object, allows the subject only pictures; the first effect of the "influencing machine" to which schizophrenics imagine themselves plugged in . . . is to make the patient see pictures, "something like a diluted reel of film in my brain." Pictures: spectral images on the inside, which represent external reality to the subject.<sup>23</sup>

In a later part of this chapter, I show that Pasolini uses the second part of this segment from *Love's Body* in a later "note" for *Petrolino* without specifying that it comes from Brown. For the director Pasolini, Brown's statement is an invaluable insight. A schizophrenic sees reality as a film projected inside his mind and thus becomes a spectator of his own existence. The "form" of reality is like "a diluted reel of film."<sup>24</sup>

Brown quotes from Géza Róheim's fundamental book *Magic and Schizophrenia*, whose entire second part is dedicated to the study of the case of a "male hebephrenic . . . white, native-born American, unmarried, and about thirty-two years old," whom he observed for more than a year (1938–39).<sup>25</sup> Commenting on his patient's statement about the "diluted reel of film," Róheim writes, "He could hardly have expressed himself more clearly." What is schizophrenia? Róheim answers this question as follows: "Schizophrenia means split-mindedness, duality of purpose, lack of integration." A schizophrenic "represents two persons (mother and child)," who have been divided, separated once and for all. A schizophrenic internalizes the mother who has withdrawn from him, although he continues to perceive her presence as a vital absence. In other words, the schizophrenic's mother is forever present as the absent mother whom the patient carries within himself. The schizophrenic is fragmented by the absence of the mother. "The lack of integration in the schizophrenic personality," Róheim explains, is "a failure to tolerate . . . the amount of tension involved in the separation from the

mother. The schizophrenic cannot regard himself as complete, as a whole, without the mother."<sup>26</sup>

*Petrolio* is a "schizophrenic" novel from more than one point of view.<sup>27</sup> First of all, schizophrenia is a central concept running through the entire novel. For Pasolini, schizophrenia is not only a private illness; he identifies it with the illness of modernity altogether. Schizophrenia is an apocalyptic disease. In *La fine del mondo*, Ernesto de Martino analyzes schizophrenia from a cultural point of view:

In the primitive, magic is a communal action rooted in the world of being together [*nel mondo dello stare insieme*]. Every disaster is the work of demonic forces that threaten the primitive's life [but] through a set of behavioral rules, he protects himself and avoids risks. . . . The schizophrenic experiences something very different: [a] new world opens up that is premised on the collapse of the previous one. For the schizophrenic, this new world does not evolve as a historical continuation of the past. This new world emerges from a mutated existential condition, which is founded on the patient's mutated corporality.<sup>28</sup>

For Pasolini, schizophrenia comes to symbolize the condition of a modern human being cut off from the past, whereas the primitive perceives the past as the foundation of the present. For the primitive, the past protects the subject from the dangers of reality. The schizophrenic world, on the contrary, is a chasm; it opens up as if to swallow the subject into its nothingness. Having lost his historical connection with a past that grants meaning, the schizophrenic (and the modern man in Pasolini's poetic appropriation) also loses his own physicality and acquires a mutable, unstable presence that is molded by the inscrutable demands of this "new world." A basic, well-known aspect of this scandalous novel is that it tells the story of a man who dies and then becomes two men who then turn into something like women.

A schizophrenic division, metamorphosis, and loss of the original identity are the essential traits of *Petrolio*. The concept of division goes far beyond the merely narrative level (the story of a man who becomes two men). Róheim states that one of his schizophrenic patients held that "his primary function in life" was "to restore people who had been *multilated*."<sup>29</sup> This passage from Róheim is also mentioned in Brown. The neologism *to multilate*, which means at once "to multiply" and "to mutilate," points to the schizophrenic's tendency to merge word and object. The neologism itself testifies to the physical mutilation and multiplication going on in reality. We have seen that, for the schizophrenic,



reality is in fact an internalized projection (“the diluted reel of film” projected on the internal screen of the patient’s mind). The schizophrenic “translates” object into words: “He [the patient] declared that the *right way* to pronounce the word *shoe* was to take the shoe off his foot and put it into his brain so that the object could help the word come out of his mouth.”<sup>30</sup>

The patient powerfully explains a paradox. Although the word *shoe* lies in his brain, he needs an actual shoe inside his brain to pronounce the word. The drama constantly staged inside the schizophrenic (the story projected on the vault of his mind) is founded on the loss of the mother. Death is the meaning of the story, and the concept of division signifies an unrecoverable distance between the present absence (the son as the division from the mother; the word “fractured” from the object) and the absent presence (the mother as everlasting absence; the word as everlasting call for the object). Let us remember that *Petrolino* is Pasolini’s attempt to create a form. A form of what? we may ask. We also know that *Petrolino* is the critical edition of a lost original. The tension between a lost text and its imperfect copy is a topos of *Petrolino*, as we shall see in later sections of this chapter. At the origin of *Petrolino* lies a loss, a vanished text. The form Pasolini wishes to create with *Petrolino* is the form of loss, the form that would manifest an object whose basic term is *loss*. The real topic of *Petrolino*, its “form,” is the presence of the absent mother. The mother is a haunting presence throughout the novel. By “mother” I do not mean the character of the protagonist’s mother, whom the son violates sexually. The mother lies behind the novel. The haunting presence of the withdrawn mother is what generates the form of the novel.

Pasolini’s reference to Róheim, through Brown, also helps us to perceive two other essential aspects of *Petrolino*. It first clarifies the meaning of the relationship Pasolini establishes between the narrator and his narrative. Second, the particular location of this telegraphic note within the novel illuminates the preceding and the following clusters of notes, which, unlike other sections of the novel, have a distinct narrative unity. In other words, “Note 34ter” is a fulcrum placed between two unitary and particularly meaningful sections of *Petrolino*. In this regard, it is useful to report how Pasolini describes the narrative style he has adopted for *Petrolino*. In a letter to Alberto Moravia, Pasolini writes,

In a novel the narrator usually disappears, giving way to a conventional figure who alone can have a real relationship with the reader—real precisely because it’s conventional. . . . [In *Petrolino*] I have spoken to the reader as myself, in flesh and bone, as I

write you this letter. . . . I have made the novel an object between the reader and me, and I have discussed it (as one can do by oneself when writing).<sup>31</sup>

Although of course it is erroneous to believe that Pasolini/author coincides with the first-person narrator's voice, it is important to emphasize that Pasolini wants the reader to perceive him, Pasolini, as a real presence (a real voice) within *Petrolio*. Some critics have hailed the novelty of Pasolini's direct voice in his last novel, ignoring or forgetting the distinction between the author (the person who has written the book and whose name is printed on the cover) and the extradiegetic/intradiegetic narrator, that is, the character of the writer who narrates in the "I" form and, even when he is external to the events, speaks from within the narrative space. This distinction is a basic tenet of narratology. Pasolini and the narrator Pasolini in *Petrolio* cannot be considered as one presence, even if the character of the author claims that he is present "in flesh and bone." The "I" voice speaking as Pasolini in *Petrolio* is in reality the voice of a character created by the author whose name is on the cover. This is why my analysis distinguishes between Pasolini and the narrator Pasolini. It is also important to add that the narrator Pasolini is a "detached observer," as Brown says at the beginning of his fragment on Róheim's schizophrenic patient. And, like a schizophrenic patient, the first-person narrator of *Petrolio* refrains from a sentimental, affective participation in the narrated facts, as Pasolini himself makes clear in more than one passage of the novel.<sup>32</sup>

As far as the relationship between the narrator and the narrative is concerned, Pasolini's citation from Brown presents a narrator to whom his own narrative is narrated. According to Brown's passage, the schizophrenic sees his life as a "diluted reel of film." In other words, what the schizophrenic sees is paradoxically objective and subjective at the same time. If we apply this paradox to Pasolini's novel, we could say that in *Petrolio* the story tells itself to the storyteller, even though this story is something arising from the storyteller's mind itself. The schizophrenic's sight, as Brown says in commenting on Róheim, is made of "spectral images" (dreams the patient sees while awake) that tell the schizophrenic about what is going in the external reality. *Petrolio* is replete with dreams, visions, and angelic and demonic visitations. But Pasolini also insists on the oneiric nature of cinema. His essays on cinema underscore the fundamental connection between dream, reality, and cinema. For Pasolini, cinema evokes a reality that is at once objective and subjective, oneiric and brutally physical.<sup>33</sup>

As Pasolini explains in his letter to Moravia, *Petrolio* is an “object” placed between him and the reader. Pasolini’s voice is objectified in the novel. According to Stefano Agosti’s important essay on *Petrolio*, this form of objectified narrative is close to a “testamentary writing” (*scrittura testamentaria*).<sup>34</sup> We should add that a will becomes readable at its writer’s death and is usually associated with the promise of a gift. Pasolini writes *Petrolio* as the “form” of his death, in that, like a will, it announces what is about to come and represents a narrative voice that perceives itself as dead (a statement/will that can only be heard after the speaker’s death). The narrator of *Petrolio* can only envision his text as a testament in the sense that he, the narrator, lives in order to mourn the death of the mother, to mourn his being divided, his being the “widow” of his mother. His mother’s death is the narrator’s own death, because the mother/giver of life is not there. The narrator’s testament is at once the manifestation of his, the narrator’s, death and the evocation of the mother’s everlasting withdrawal. In other words, the narrator writes *Petrolio* so that the reader may see the “form” of death (both the son’s and the mother’s death).

In my earlier remarks on the short passage from *Love’s Body* in “Note 34ter,” I explained that the specific location of Pasolini’s brief allusion to Brown helped us understand the section preceding and the one that follows “Note 34ter.” To indicate the importance of these two narrative segments, it is enough to say that the sequence preceding “Note 34ter” (“Note 22f” through “Note 34bis”) recalls a specific section of the screenplay *Saint Paul*. In particular, Pasolini offers a new and original version of the episode in the Acts of the Apostles in which Paul goes to Corinth (modern Genoa in Pasolini’s script) and gives “one of his most sublime discourses” in the house of the Jew Aquila and his wife Priscilla (Acts 18:1–2). This important episode of *Saint Paul* takes up two lengthy scenes (62 and 63) and lies at the core of Pasolini’s view of the apostle Paul. The sequence following “Note 34ter” (from “Note 36a” to “Note 37”) is also a rewriting of a canonical text—in this case Apollonius Rhodius’s *The Argonautika*.<sup>35</sup> This section narrates a mythic return to the land of the origins. In Pasolini’s rewriting, Orpheus, not Jason, is the most relevant presence in the text. Putting aside the traditional account of Orpheus’s death (the women who have converted to the cult of Dionysos slaughter Orpheus in an orgiastic fury because he has rejected heterosexual love), Pasolini’s free interpretation of *The Argonautika* claims that Orpheus dies of malaria and leaves a testament whose “voice,” style, and ideas recall the first-person narrator of *Petrolio*. Pasolini posits a strong parallel between Orpheus’s testament and *Petrolio*, Pasolini’s own testament. It

is worth remembering that in a letter to Moravia, Pasolini openly calls *Petrolio* a "preamble to a testament" (xiii).

### Plot Summary of Events Preceding "Note 34ter"

To get a basic idea of what is going on in notes 22f–34bis, I must attempt a basic plot summary. *Petrolio* is the story of a death. Faithful to what we have read in the preceding citation from Brown's *Love's Body*, the first "note" of *Petrolio* (note 2, "The First Rose of Summer") opens with the engineer Carlo who, in a bout of overwhelming depression due to a persistent feeling of "failure," sees "his own body fall. On the balcony, on the dreary cement floor . . . there was his body . . . alone with only the sky spreading over him" (5). The "schizophrenic" structure of the novel is explicit from the outset. The main character sees himself die, as if the death of his body were an external event. The act of witnessing one's own death is the core of the novel.

Two angelic beings, one good and the other evil ("Polis" and "Tetis"), "arrive beside that supine body" and argue over it.<sup>36</sup> Did this body belong to a good person or to a bad one? Carlo sees that, after a long debate, the two spirits come to an agreement. The good angel will take away the visible dead body, whereas the demon will capture the body hidden inside the corpse. The demon makes a long cut in the corpse's stomach and extracts a fetus that soon grows into a new Carlo. The corpse lying on the ground is suddenly resurrected. Carlo, the man who has fallen and died, sees two new Carlos, the resurrected Carlo and the new Carlo extracted from the first Carlo's stomach. We thus have three Carlos: the one who saw his own death, plus the two new Carlos, one for the angel and one for the demon. I believe it is essential to bear in mind that, at the end of the second note, the original Carlo disappears from the novel. The gaze of the Carlo who has seen his own death merges with the gaze of the first-person narrator, the "detached observer," in Brown's words. Throughout *Petrolio*, the detached observer is someone who has distanced himself from himself and, "as if on a reel of film," follows the story of the two Carlos, who are split reflections of his own dead body. This detached observer speaks as someone who knows death—or better yet, he speaks only because he has experienced death. His account is also his testament.

Pasolini summarizes the distinction between the two Carlos as follows:

[Carlo 1, the one who goes with the angel] is a wealthy, cultivated, bourgeois, an engineer who works in the oil industry; he is among those in power . . .

[Carlo 2, the one who comes out of Carlo's stomach and belongs to the demon] is, in the social hierarchy, inferior to Carlo [1] in spite of being identical. . . . The second Carlo, like all poor people . . . —rather like dogs—is good. (xiv and "Note 6," 26)<sup>37</sup>

This apparently clear definition of the two characters is immediately obscured by the following sentence: "Yet it is in Karl that the bad aspects of Carlo are concentrated, while it is in Carlo that the good aspects of Karl are concentrated." This short passage should give an idea of the complicated relationship between the two Carlos and, more importantly, of the objective difficulty of sorting out two distinct biographies. In this same note ("Note 6") Pasolini states that "from now on" he will call Carlo 2 Karl, or Carolus, as he says in "Note 20," but then he forgets about this promise, and Carlo 2 is almost always Carlo and in rare cases Karl (74). More than two independent characters, the two Carlos tend to embody two distinct psychological, cultural, and political attitudes—or better yet, they are two poles of one identity, two oneiric manifestations of one (divided) subject.

The narrative first seems to follow the events of Carlo 2's life. Carlo 2 is "pure" like a dog, a beast that knows only how to serve.<sup>38</sup> In this spirit of servitude, Carlo 2 leaves Rome, the city where the original Carlo died, and travels back to Turin, where he studied and where he now "serves" his sexual instincts with no restriction whatsoever. In "Note 19," the narrator synthesizes the events following Carlo 2's return to Turin: "Carlo had complete sexual relations—and, for the most part repeatedly—with his mother, with his four sisters, with his grandmother, with a friend of [his grandmother], with the family servant, and with her fourteen-year-old daughter. . . . In addition, he had exhibitionist relations . . . with at least a hundred underage girls and as many older; he made use of half a dozen pimps and masturbated . . . practically every time he found himself alone, even if in public" (70). Carlo's obsessive masturbation brings to the fore the "antisocial, self-involved, and self enclosed" nature of his sexuality. In Christopher Looby's words, "the onanist . . . is represented as . . . self-divided by virtue of the alterity of the hand and genitals."<sup>39</sup>

Before we move to Carlo 1's story, I need to mention a secondary event pertaining to Carlo 2's life. A group of unspecified "characters" meet in a comfortable bourgeois house close to Carlo's. These men decide it is necessary to spy on Carlo 2 and charge a "young fellow" by the name of Pasquale to follow Carlo 2 ("Note 6bis," 30). The narrator explains that "[e]verything Carlo . . . does will be 'as if seen' by this hit man [Pasquale], who does not judge" (31). Like the narrator/Pasolini, the hit man Pasquale is "detached" from what he sees (Carlo 2's numerous

sexual activities). To see through the eyes of a spy or policeman is a topos of Pasolini's oeuvre. See, for instance, the last scenes of the film *Accattone*, where the protagonist's last thefts leading to his accidental death are interspersed with close-ups of a mysterious and inexpressive ("detached") man who keeps track of Accattone's actions.

Before beginning the narration of Carlo 2's sexual adventures in Turin, the narrator/Pasolini inserts a note describing what happens *after* Pasquale's return to Rome at the end of his mission in Turin. In "Note 6sexies," the narrator tells us that, while he is on the train from Turin back to Rome, the spy Pasquale sits in a second-class compartment with a leftist intellectual who has a suitcase full of books (34–35). Both passengers fall asleep. Pasquale's detailed report on Carlo 2's unbridled sexual life in Turin and the intellectual's suitcase are stolen. The suitcase resurfaces at the Roman flea market of Porta Portese ("Note 19a: A discovery at Porta Portese," 71–74). The connection between Pasquale's lost report and the leftist intellectual's suitcase is evident. Both the lost report and the lost books are fundamental to the narrator/Pasolini's novel. Pasquale's report would reflect the cultural background of its writer, a young working-class man. On the contrary, the narrator/Pasolini is a leftist writer who is culturally similar to the intellectual on the train with Pasquale. The narrator/Pasolini's rewriting of a missing report cannot help but translate the original into an "artificial" text, a report of a report ("Note 6sexies," 36). Pasolini explains that this artificial "legibility" is a pale reflection of the original and external legibility of Pasquale's actual report, which is now lost forever. The similarity to the schizophrenic patient's remark in *Love's Body* is unquestionable. What is real (Pasquale's report) is cut off from the "observer" who sees reality through an internal reflection ("the reel of film" inside the mind). The "death" of the report also mirrors the "artificial" narrator, who speaks as someone dead (the deceased Carlo observing the bodies of two new Carlos).

The books in the intellectual's suitcase are not-so-subtle allusions to the narrator/Pasolini's literary sources. Along with Dostoyevsky, Propp, Sterne, Cervantes, Swift, and Joyce (*Finnegan's Wake* and *Ulysses*), among others, all prestigious and experimental authors to whom the narrator obviously wishes to compare himself, we also find less self-aggrandizing and more revealing references, such as those to Daniel Paul Schreber's *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, Philippe Sollers's *L'écriture et l'expérience des limites*, Strindberg's novel *Inferno*, and canto 29 of Dante's *Purgatorio* ("Note 19a," 73). Pasolini also mentions Swift, Plato's *Republic*, and Ferenczi's *Thalassa*, which is cited several times in *Love's Body*.<sup>40</sup> Later in this chapter I show how these texts are concretely present in *Petrolio*.<sup>41</sup>

Right after the description of the leftist intellectual's suitcase, the narrator/Pasolini abandons Carlo 2's lascivious life and his spy Pasquale to focus on Carlo 1. We encounter Carlo 1 while he is heading to the salon of Signora F., a bourgeois Neapolitan lady who "organize[s] almost weekly Receptions (like the present one), at which literary types, journalists, scientists and politicians m[ee]t." The literary salon of Signora F. is the set of Pasolini's rewriting of scene 62 of *Saint Paul*, where the apostle makes one of his most "sublime" speeches (from 1 Corinthians) in Genoa/Corinth (Acts 18:1–2, at the house of Priscilla and her husband Aquila).

### **"First Fable on Power" ("Note 34bis," 106): A New St. Paul**

The preceding summary of the fragments before the mysterious "Note 36ter" on Norman O. Brown takes us back to the leftist salon of Signora F.<sup>42</sup> Let us remember that in "Note 20," the narrative switch (from Carlo 2 to Carlo 1) has Carlo 1 heading to Signora F.'s house to attend one of her literary parties. We learn that the engineer Carlo 1 is attending this event for professional reasons. He is trying to get a position in an influential state agency. The politicians and businessmen at the party have decided to "test" Carlo 1 by giving him a "job of a bureaucratic nature, which would require a trip to the Orient" ("Note 32," 104). This trip, the topic of the section following "Note 34ter," is Pasolini's explicit and problematic rewriting of *The Argonautika* by Apollonius Rhodius. Again, the one-sentence note on Brown's *Love's Body* serves to link the party at Signora F.'s and the rewriting of the Argonauts' mythic journey.<sup>43</sup> We will see that the two tales are in fact complementary.

At the beginning of "Note 34bis," (106) the narrator/Pasolini introduces a new intradiegetic storyteller, who amuses the salon of Signora F. with a political "fable" (*fiaba*). The connection between this note and scene 62 of *Saint Paul* is of great importance. In both passages Pasolini recreates a bourgeois gathering of leftist intellectuals. Both episodes revolve around the figure of Saint Paul, according to Pasolini's interpretation. However, whereas in scene 62 of *Saint Paul* the apostle is one of the guests and delivers a "sublime" and contradictory discourse, in "Note 34bis" of *Petrolio* one of the intellectuals at the salon tells the "exemplary story," as Cervantes would call it, of a prototypical "Saint Paul" who closely resembles the apostle in scene 62 of *Saint Paul*.

The unspecified character at the party of Signora F. first says that his story will be "universal and thus generic" (106). Like the apostle in *Saint Paul*, this unnamed intellectual is a sick person: "In his corpulence

(he was not obese but round and puffy, with crazy, yellowish flesh) there were grim signs of psychic degeneration." It is in his flesh that the intellectual reveals his "degeneration." It is interesting that Pasolini uses the adjective *insana* (insane, crazy) to describe the man's flesh. The man is "degenerating" because of a slow "undoing" that is at once mental and physical. The Italian *insano* recalls *malsano* (unhealthy), which would be more appropriate if related to words such as *carne* (flesh) or *corpo* (body). Every trait of this degenerating body has a round, circular shape, as if his body were an organism unable to reach a distinct form. The intellectual is "unformed": "On his face, which was completely round, as if made of concentric circles, he had round eyebrows and, beneath, round eyes, round cheeks . . . a round chin, a round mouth (106)."

The mouth is the center of the man's round, unformed being. His mouth "lost its rotundity when he spoke, and assumed irregular but always indefinite and imprecise shapes and thus a certain repulsiveness—the kind that viscous things have." His mouth is a repulsive hole that opens and closes in irregular shapes. This intellectual's mouth resembles an anus. It is worth noting that Sade and Pasolini make similar allusions to a mouth/anus when describing the libertine Curval in *120 Days of Sodom* and *Saló*. The anus/mouth is the center of this intellectual's degenerating body (his yellowish, insane, and unhealthy flesh). The narrator in *Petrolio* is adamant about this repulsive intellectual: he was "a repellent monster of passionate servility" (107). His "servility" recalls both Carlo 2's status as a "servant" and Carlo 1 who, like this "repellent" intellectual, uses his "servility" to achieve a successful career. In other words, this man is at once pure (like Carlo 2) and impure (like Carlo 1).

The parable of the repellent intellectual acquires a religious tone when one night a "Dark Force" (*Forza Oscura*) visits him and challenges him to reveal "the purpose of [his] life" (107).<sup>44</sup> This obscure presence is in fact the devil, who informs the man that "the purpose of your life is Power" (108). In the chapter on *Saint Paul*, we saw that Satan was behind the composition of the Acts of the Apostles and, through Luke, manipulated the events of the first Christian movement in order to present the church as a new (repressive) institution in flagrant contradiction of Christ's message. In *Saint Paul*, Paul is at once the founder of the new Law and the true apostle of Christ. In this "fable" of *Petrolio*, the devil accompanies this intellectual toward a truthful inner disclosure about the meaning of holiness. By talking with the Dark Force, the intellectual first of all realizes that he wishes to attain power through sanctity (110).

The intellectual "beg[ins] his new life as a saint," the narrator at the party of Signora F. explains, "and in the most natural way live[s]



a true contradiction in terms." The narrator portrays the intellectual's "contradiction" as an "impossible" division between "faith" and "hope," virtues that the intellectual speaks about publicly, and "charity," which he practices "in private" because, if revealed, charity "loses its nature" and becomes "the work of the Devil." This division, the narrator holds, corresponds to the "traditional separation" practiced by the Church, as we have already seen in *Saint Paul*. This rift between the external and the internal observance of Christianity, between formalism (the intellectual's speeches on faith and hope; his following the Church's traditions) and truthful, open application of the Christian message of "charity" (the most important of the three cardinal virtues, according to Saint Paul) slowly creates around the man an "atmosphere . . . of profound and silent veneration, and finally of exalted, rapturous expectation" (111). The devil's trick is working. People begin to regard the intellectual as a holy man with miraculous qualities.

But the intellectual's persistent pursuit of sanctity leads to a sudden and dramatic realization that questions his "holy" lifestyle: "[W]hat had dawned on him was how radical was the theoretical division in which he lived, preparing for sanctity. Suddenly, in a whirl, Faith and Hope deprived of the Charity from which they had been separated became inconceivable to him. . . . Every kind of innovation in religious thought turned out to be unthinkable, except heresy (112).<sup>45</sup>

The paradox of the man working on his holiness is that the path toward heresy is the sole truthful response to the divine, although this insight comes to him from the devil. For it was thanks to the devil that the intellectual had walked on the path toward sanctity. Overwhelmed by this stunning contradiction, the intellectual falls to the ground.

*Petrolia* presents other more shocking and better-known moments of sudden revelation, namely, the sexual transformation of the two Carlos from man to woman, which I discuss in the second part of this chapter. These sexual metamorphoses in fact share a basic trait with the story of the intellectual turned into a saint. In both cases, the metamorphosis coincides with a fundamental insight (the nature of sexuality; the relationship between sainthood and alienation) that literally creates a hybrid, a human being who enters a dreamlike existence in which opposites coexist (the two Carlos know they are men with female sexual attributes). This hybridization manifests itself as sickness.

In the fable of the holy intellectual, we see that, at the moment of the man's defeat (his falling to the ground after an unbearable realization), the devil "took advantage of this [the man had passed out] to open . . . to make sure that . . . on the palms of his hands were two long, bloody

stigmata" (113). The narrator's description of these diabolical stigmata requires a close analysis. First, unlike what Saint Francis experienced on Mount Verna in Umbria, this holy intellectual is "taken advantage of" by the devil, who "inflicts" the wounds when the man is unconscious. The wounds are signs of violence, as if the devil had raped the man, whose face reminds us of an anus. However, the two "long" and "bloody" wounds suggest the rape of a woman rather than that of a man. The intellectual is submitted to a male-female rape. The wounds of the devil do not allude to the marks of the Savior on the cross. In this fictional story, the wounds are "long" openings exuding blood. They don't signify a loving encounter between the holy man and the divinity, as in the case of Saint Francis and the numerous women mystics in the Middle Ages. Saint Francis received the stigmata as a gift of his divine beloved (the risen Christ), who descends within the seraph to encounter his human lover and leaves in his body the marks of his love (Christ died on the cross because of his infinite love).

The wounded man is raised up to the third heaven (like Saint Paul). The demonic rapture again recalls a sexual assault signified by the bloody wounds opened in the victim's hands. During this rapture, the man speaks of the apocalypse and of the "lost true texts of Saint Francis." It is interesting that, in this ecstatic moment, the intellectual man is concerned with the "lost true texts of Saint Francis." Again, we see that the idea of written texts as falsifications of original lost documents is a dominating concept in *Petrolio*. The original, long report detailing Carlo 2's lascivious activities gets lost. The man wounded by the devil raises the issue of Saint Francis's "original" statements, preserved only through a number of scattered, hagiographic collections. The man wounded and enlightened by the devil seems to allude to the contrast between the truthful (original) Francis of Assisi, the one who received the stigmata, and the derivative (false) Francis as presented by others (hagiographers), primarily St. Bonaventure's *Legenda maior*. In ecstasy, the wounded intellectual perceives that he himself is a falsified version of the original saint. All these examples go back to the schizophrenic patient in *Love's Body*. All these "falsified" texts and "falsified" human beings (the holy/demonic intellectual; the two female men) point to the separation between the original reality that is lost (the reality out there) and the falsified reality the schizophrenic sees projected like a film on the screen of his mind.

When he is led up to the third heaven, the holy intellectual sees a "Luminous Force," which he recognizes as God. The man reveals to God his feelings of unworthiness, his being a fraud. God reassures the confused

intellectual of the truthfulness of his mystical experiences, including the stigmata. God explains to the man that the devil cannot possibly grant any form of holiness. God asks the man to “return to earth . . . and bear witness to all this.” The divinity has only one request: “[I]n going away from here [the third heaven], you must go straight, without turning back to look at me” (114).

Although he promises to respect this condition, the intellectual does turn to look at the divinity. The man realizes that what he had seen was not God, but rather the “Dark Force” sneering at him. “Like Lot,” the holy intellectual becomes a stone that falls from the third heaven. Remember that in Genesis 19:26 it is Lot’s wife who becomes a pillar of salt. Moreover, the stone is not salt, as in *Genesis* and in *Porn-Theo-Colossal*. The stone falls into a “melancholy little valley in a desert.” Geologists were unable to determine the nature of this “divinely beautiful” stone, which remained an “enigma.” Each mineral composing this multicolored stone presents “contradictory characteristics, both in relation to itself and to other minerals with which it is amalgamated” (115).

In the fable of the holy intellectual, Pasolini’s rewriting of the biblical destruction of Sodom is both similar and dissimilar from the version present in *Porn-Theo-Colossal*. In both cases, turning into a stone signifies a denial. In the scenario, Lot’s two daughters become pillars of salt when the men of Gomorrah try to possess them from behind. We saw that, borrowing from *Love’s Body*, Pasolini uses this biblical reference as a metaphor of castration. The two girls who are turned into pillars of salt allude to the myth of Medusa, whose gaze fills the viewer with terror and turn him into a stone. Lot’s daughters are the materialization of the male failure to possess them. In *Petrolino*, the intellectual undergoes a similar but not identical process. We have already noted the feminization of the holy intellectual, his being a man subjected to the violation of the “Dark Force.” The holy intellectual is both male and female. It is his female, passive side that allows him to be invaded by the overwhelming insight of his duplicitous nature. Julia Kristeva, echoing Lacan, calls this sort of homosexual “l’âmoosexuel,” the homosexual masochist who submits himself to the phallus, because it is thanks to this complete submission that the *âmoosexuel* can become the “real woman—passive, castrated, non phallic.”<sup>46</sup> As an example, Kristeva explicitly mentions Pasolini and his violent death.

In Pasolini’s fable, the man’s becoming a stone manifests his being “petrified” in an unsolvable contradiction. As the narrator explains, the stone is an “enigma.” Its components present “contradictory characteristics, both in relation to itself” and to its surroundings. This stone is the

holy intellectual, the heretic, the scandal, the man/woman devastated by an inner disease that also translates into "insane" flesh, in Pasolini's own words.

### **The Testament of Orpheus and the Story of the Argonauts (Notes 36–37)**

The "insane" flesh of the male/female holy intellectual who, like Saint Paul, lives a dual, divided existence is of essential importance in understanding the segment following the connector, "Note 34ter," the one-line allusion to Norman O. Brown. As I mentioned earlier, at the salon of Signora F., where we hear the story of the holy intellectual, some influential businessmen and politicians related to a big state company decide to "test" the engineer Carlo 1 by sending him on a trip to the Orient.

The best definition of this strange journey is in the introductory "Notes 36–40: The Argonauts": "Series of 'visions' reconstructed on the Myth of the Journey as initiation, etc., mixed with realistic visions of true journeys (without names or precise information, as in dreams, etc.)" (116). The thirteen notes narrating this journey are not easy to read. Based on a syntactical structure that tends to be nominal (fragments of sentences, often without verbs), these notes are short sequences of words connected by dashes. For instance, the first note opens as follows: "Departure by jet—An interminable dawn—A young porter with a military-style beret on his head—Greek newspapers—Low mountains of white stone, sheer, with no beach, above the sea made blue by chemical waste—Appearance of the Giants—Their gentleness and the enormous size of their penises" ("Note 36," 117).

*Vision* is the key word in the introductory explanation. Pasolini mentions two kinds of visions: "realistic visions of true journeys" and visions of the mythic journey of the Argonauts. However, both visions share an oneiric dimension that merges the two levels. In his vast study of modern apocalypticism, Ernesto de Martino reminds us that the journey is a crucial concept of schizophrenia. A schizophrenic perceives his confusing experiences also as an initiatory journey toward a new status, a fundamental new revelation about his or her human condition. Like the initiatory rituals of primitive populations, the unfolding of schizophrenia is a "passage through death," a "*post-mortem* condition" which is also the condition of the narrator of *Petrolio*.<sup>47</sup>

The first lines of the first note on the voyage are stills of a film loosely related to each other, as in a dream, which also corresponds to Pasolini's

view of cinematic expression (his *cinema di poesia*). As far as the overlapping of two narrative levels (analogical and literal) is concerned, we saw its centrality in *Saint Paul* and will encounter it again in the later segment entitled “Époché” of *Petrolio*. In these fragments on the Argonauts, what does this double vision mean? In the same introductory note, the narrator/Pasolini explicitly mentions Carlo’s “‘dreamed’ trip to the Orient.” Pasolini puts the word *dreamed* in quotation marks, as if to emphasize its metaphorical connotation.

We must also consider that the adjective *true* accompanies *journeys* and not *journey*. That is, the “true” level of the dreamlike narrative is a collage of memories from disparate trips. Carlo 1’s journey is thus an act of memory more than the account of a temporally linear trip to foreign countries. I said “Carlo 1’s journey,” but in fact this expression is incorrect because the character Carlo 1 disappears within the oneiric account. Carlo 1 is absent from the story of his journey to the Orient, although he briefly resurfaces in one important segment toward the end of the story. The syntactical choice of a nominal construction gives the narrative a static connotation, as if we were asked to perceive the contemplative nature of the stills passing before our eyes.

At the beginning of the journey, Pasolini writes: “Departure by jet” and not, for instance, “Carlo 1 departs by jet.” The story is about the act of departing more than about Carlo 1’s departure. The story of the Argonauts is like a dream. In a dream, “departure” is a perception more than a well-defined picture. The dreamer senses that the dream is about “departure.” Subsequent images/frames could be, as in the first note of Pasolini’s *Argonauts*, a sky at dawn and the close-up of an unknown porter with a military beret, which could be followed by the undecipherable front page of a Greek newspaper. We are dreaming of departing for a foreign country, which is also the land of myth. By association, we then see the Giants flaunting their sexual organs. The Giants stand for a fantasized hyper-masculinity, a “gentle” but also “enormous,” excessive phallus/man. For our male dreamer, the Giants are the victory of the phallus. Merging fantasy and memory, Pasolini’s *Argonauts* indeed works as the “reel of film” passing before the schizophrenic’s inner sight.

Pasolini’s nominal syntax brings to mind Gabriele D’Annunzio’s *Notturno*, a text in prose detailing the writer’s temporary blindness. In *Petrolio*, the *Argonauts* is a “diluted reel of film” that the viewer sees with his eyes shut. Blindness is the condition we enter the moment we try to make sense of Pasolini’s “diluted” and opaque narrative allusions that make up these telegraphic notes. In theory, Pasolini seems interested in maintaining the four-part structure of Apollonius Rhodius’s *The Argonautika*,

although no consistent connection is detectable between the classical text and Pasolini's rewriting. The echoes of the original story function as debris of memory that appear and disappear within the flow of the narrative of Carlo 1's "true journey[]."

The "realistic visions of true journeys" recall Pasolini's own frequent trips to Middle Eastern and African countries for various film projects. Carlo's arrival in Teheran is described in "Note 36" as follows:

Waking up—American breakfast . . . —Landing in Teheran, with snow—Traces of heroes who passed in the preceding centuries . . . —Appearance of Heracles—His gentleness, enormous size of his penis—His lingering at a great distance—Heracles takes the road again—The Tehran Hilton—The son of Umberto II, Victor Emmanuel, at the bar—Orpheus sings the first part of the journey—Operation of the teletype machine. (117)

The arrival in Tehran is announced by the narrator's "waking up," although we know that the whole journey will have an oneiric nature and form. This "waking up" in fact introduces the narration of a "wakeful" dream composed of personal (Pasolini's actual journeys) and literary memories (what the narrator/Pasolini retains of Apollonius Rhodius's *Argonautika*). At the airport of Tehran, which is covered with snow, Heracles welcomes the dreamer from a distance. Heracles is a sort of fleeting visitation. Like the Giants, Heracles has "an enormous penis." This sexual-mythic hero visits the dreamer at the beginning of the dreamer's journey. Why is Heracles the welcoming character and not Jason, the protagonist of the *Argonauts*? In the *Argonauts*, Heracles disappears from the story very soon, at the end of book 1. The *Argonauts* is not about Heracles. Nonetheless it is useful to understand the reasons for and consequences of his disappearance.

Heracles had a beloved companion, Hylas, who followed him on his journey toward the Golden Fleece. Hylas was the son of Theodamas, king of the Dryopes. Heracles had taken the beautiful Hylas away after slaying his father.<sup>48</sup> In book 1 of *The Argonautika*, we read that, when the travelers land in Mysia, Hylas goes "in search of some spring's hallowed flow." A nymph, amazed by his beauty, lures him into the spring and plunges him into the water. Polyphemos, one of the Argonauts, first hears Hylas's cry for help. He rushes to help him, fearing that the youth is being attacked by a wild beast. Polyphemos runs into Heracles and informs him of his beloved's disappearance. Suspecting that the natives of Mysia have kidnapped Hylas, Heracles reacts violently: "So he [Polyphemos] spoke; and at the words sweat rained down Herakles's temples, and in his gut the black blood boiled."<sup>49</sup>

In the meantime, the Argonauts have already raised the anchor without waiting for Heracles and Polyphemos, who will be left behind. This is the last episode of *The Argonautika* in which we encounter Heracles. At the end of book 1, we learn that Heracles threatened to destroy Mysia and ordered the Mysians to look for Hylas. Heracles's command brought about an annual ritual, during which the priests entered the forests of Mysia invoking the name of Hylas. In the rest of *The Argonautika*, Heracles does not participate directly in the story.

In Pasolini's version, Heracles appears briefly and then "takes the road again." Heracles is the hero of a different sort of quest. His fruitless search for the absent beloved makes him the quintessential representation of a mythic longing (the creation of a fascinating and moving ritual). His "enormous penis" is indicative of his erotic significance, of his embodiment of desire as a mythic journey. In *Petrolia*, Heracles "linger[s] at great distance" and then leaves. Heracles is the hero who leaves. In a later note on the *Argonauts*, we learn from Orpheus that "[w]e go in the footsteps of Heracles, who dreamed our journey" ("Note 36e," 121). Both Heracles and Orpheus are mythic figures from the past. Apollonius Rhodius's *Argonautika* can be also seen as the story of "the exploring Hellenes who penetrate [the] Barbarous Brown Age world of wonders and magic" represented by Heracles and Orpheus.<sup>50</sup> Heracles, who symbolizes the more-than-human virtues of a past golden age, disappears from the narrative because he does not belong in this "new age." It is thus significant that Pasolini has Orpheus, another mythic figure from the past, reveal the dreamlike essence of Pasolini's new *Argonautika*.

Heracles, the hero "who leaves," is the source of the entire dream. This is why the dreamer first encounters him at the airport of Tehran. It is a paradoxical situation. The dreamlike narrative of the *Argonautika* comes from the hero, who withdraws from the story to look for his vanished beloved. The dreamer follows (walks in the footsteps of) a hero who pursues an unquenchable longing. The appearance of Heracles at the airport leads to a "true" image, the image of the Hilton hotel in Tehran, and Victor Emmanuel, son of the Italian king Umberto II (1904–83), sitting at the hotel bar. This "realistic" sequence is interrupted by the image of Orpheus, a new reference to the mythic-literary source of the dreamer's journey.

### The Death of Orpheus

If Heracles is the hero who dreamed the journey, Orpheus is the one who recounts Heracles's dream. Orpheus "sings" the journey. In *The*

*Argonautika*, Orpheus is the first one named in the list of the Argonauts. His singing appeases the Argonauts' quarrels by narrating the origins of the world (bk. 1, vv. 493–518);<sup>51</sup> is part of religious rites (for instance, bk. 2, vv. 922–29); and defeats the Sirens' dangerous melodies (bk. 3, vv. 903–09). However, in *Petrolio*, Orpheus has a very small role in the story. We only learn about his death, an episode absent from the original story. In Pasolini's rewriting, Orpheus becomes "incarnate," so to speak, only when we read that he dies of malaria and the Argonauts celebrate his funeral. Like the narrator/Pasolini, Orpheus "sings" the events concerning a journey that is also his journey (he is one of the Argonauts in Apollonius Rhodius's version), although he appears as an external, "detached observer" of a story that is also his story.

Pasolini's *Argonautika* is composed of three kinds of writings: first, fragments of landscapes, long shots of open spaces (for instance, the desert in Kuwait, Iraq, or views of cities, mosques, palaces) and of interiors (receptions in luxurious hotels or the Shah's palace); second, the bare bones of Jason's and Medea's story, scattered throughout the sequence of "notes" as a rather blurred mythic background, which could be rendered visually as chapters of a silent melodrama; third, Orpheus's written text, his testament. I have already mentioned the parallel between the narrator/Pasolini and Orpheus. If with *Petrolio* the narrator only wishes to create a "form," the subsection on the Argonauts is Orpheus's form. For one thing, Orpheus is the only character in the entire story who speaks. All the other characters are silent figures whom we see in passing. It is also through Orpheus that we understand the mythic role of Heracles in this rewriting of Jason's vicissitudes.

In "Note 36e," we first hear Orpheus's words:

Meditation of Orpheus—The true birth is the second birth—Initiation: cultural birth, Orpheus—The true journey is the second journey—The first is sleep (in a cave, under a tree: it's all inside the mother's womb)—The second journey is the true one because it is realistic—It couldn't be if it didn't have the "dream foundation" of the first—We go in the footsteps of Heracles, who dreamed our journey. . . . We are perhaps the last, and in fact our dream is very close to reality. . . . We are "late," we are corrupt Alexandrians, we are cultivated men / who still have, no one knows why, the possibility of initiation—Death of Orpheus (malaria)—Burial of Orpheus. (121)

Pasolini's Orpheus opens his meditation with a reference to the topic of initiation. In classical culture, Orpheus was indeed seen as the founder of the rite of initiation. As Plato confirms in the *Republic* (364e), "[a]s founder of mystery-religions, Orpheus was the first to reveal to men



the meaning of rites of initiation (*teletai*).” In W. K. C. Guthrie’s words, “Orpheus was regarded by the Greeks as the founder of a certain kind of religion . . . [he] appears in history as a human prophet and teacher.”<sup>52</sup> Rather than advocating the existence of other deities, Orphism was a unique way of worshipping the classical divinities. In the *Republic*, we read, “[By showing books by Orpheus, itinerant priests] persuade not only individuals but also cities that there are means of redemption and purification from sin through sacrifices. . . . They call them *teletai*, these ceremonies which free us from the troubles of the other world.”<sup>53</sup>

In *Petrolino*, Orpheus’s meditation on the meaning of initiation is based on almost literal quotations from chapter 2 (“Nature”) of *Love’s Body*. In the chapter on *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, we saw that in this chapter of *Love’s Body* the concept of brotherhood is seen as a departure from the natural mother in order to acquire a new sociocultural mother, a masculine, phallocratic mother (a mother whose vagina is also a penis). In *Petrolino*, this theme (a mother/man) becomes a pillar of the entire book (the two Carlos as male women, as we will soon see).

The theme of the mythic conflict between the first and the second birth is a well-known topos of Pasolini’s poetics (the contrast between the mythic symbiosis with a spontaneous, motherly culture and the “fall” of modern consumerism; the corruption of contemporary Italian language versus the mythic dialects and idioms of the peninsula, especially the mother’s Friulano), and it is particularly noticeable in his film *Edipo re*. In “Nature,” Norman O. Brown tackles the issue of the Oedipus complex at the end of a dense examination of the subject’s “two births”:

Initiation is rebirth. But rebirth from one’s “real” mother is nullified. . . . Who is my real mother? It is a political question. . . . “The journey of initiation is ended. It goes from the mothers to the mothers. Although in reality the young man is henceforth to be separated from the mother, symbolically he is brought back to her. . . . The young man is put into a hole and reborn—this time under the auspices of his *male mothers*.” Male mothers; or vaginal fathers: when the initiating elders tell the boys “we two are friends,” they show them their subincised penis, artificial vagina, or “penis womb.”<sup>54</sup>

I quoted the end of this passage in the previous chapter on *Porn-Theo-Colossal*. Pasolini’s Orpheus finds in Brown’s meditation on the role of the “male mother” a fundamental inspiration. For Orpheus, the “second birth” is at once degeneration and regeneration, in the sense that the (male) subject who has concluded his journey of initiation (initiation is for Pasolini the main theme of his *Argonautika*) is shown the “penis womb,” a new “hole” into which he can crawl and relive his pristine

fusion with the mother, a sort of dream-reality hybrid, in which, as Orpheus says, the dream level is essential to the existence of the reality level. Orpheus does stress, though, that this second "cultural birth" is *now* experienced as a decline, as a progressive distancing of oneself from the dream of initiation, because "our" dream is getting very "close to reality." Orpheus speaks of this decline as a rhetorical, literary degeneration ("we are Alexandrians," he confesses). The classical times are past and gone. What remains is the perception of cultural decline (our dream has become more and more reality).

Orpheus clarifies that "[t]he first [birth] is sleep (in a cave, under a tree: it's all inside the mother's womb)." What does he mean by "in a cave, under a tree"? Still in the chapter "Nature" of *Love's Body* we read, "To explore is to penetrate; the world is the insides of mother. 'The entry into the world of knowledge and schoolwork seemed to be identified with the entry into the mother's body' . . . The child is hollowing out a cave for himself inside his mother's body. We are still unborn; we are still in a cave; Plato's cave."<sup>55</sup>

The "cave" we excavate in our two journeys (inside the mother's womb and by penetrating the "insides" of the woman/mother with our penis/womb) is also a "tree." After comparing the "cave" to the "labyrinth" ("the Paleolithic caves . . . are labyrinths of twisting, narrow slippery corridors and galleries along which intruders have to grope"),<sup>56</sup> Brown cites three verses from Blake's *Jerusalem*:

The labyrinth is also a spreading tree . . .

"The Tree spread over him its cold shadows, (Albion groan'd)  
They bent down, they felt the earth, and again enrooting  
Shot into many a Tree, an endless labyrinth of woe."<sup>57</sup>

"In the cave of separateness," Brown explains, "the self curls up in sleep. In the Mundane Shell the unborn sleeps. The human condition is that of Albion at the beginning of *Jerusalem*: the Sleep of Ulro. And sleep is uterine regression." Sleep and dream, Brown continues, share a state of regression. "In dreaming," Brown states, "we return to dream time—the age of heroes and ancestors."<sup>58</sup>

Isn't Pasolini's rewriting of the *Argonautika* a series of visions of a double nature, visions of a mythic "age of the heroes" (Heracles first of all), and "realistic" visions "as in dreams"? We go back to the theme of schizophrenia: "Withdrawn from the environment, or split from the environment; as in schizophrenia. . . . The womb into which the sleeper

withdraws is at the same time his own body. The dreamer sinks into himself." But we have also seen that, as a schizophrenic "detached observer," the narrator/Pasolini emphasizes the fundamental importance of a divided and duplicated text (*Petrolino* is a critical edition of a lost Ur-text; the holy intellectual meditates upon the "true" but lost writings of Saint Francis of Assisi; the report written by the spy Pasquale on Carlo 2's lascivious behavior is missing but recomposed and "falsified" by the narrator/Pasolini). The "essence of dreaming" is in fact "duplication, division; as in schizophrenia."<sup>59</sup>

Is it possible to break this chain of journeys from and to the womb, the cave in which we persist in a degenerative process of reflection? The second birth, the cultural birth that is taking place now, as Orpheus says, still retains a potential, new initiation, even though we are late, corrupt, cultivated men at the end of a classical, mythic era. Orpheus seems to posit this possible initiation as a new mythic restoration, as an apocalyptic project. To break away "from the cycle of rebirth" (the first and the second birth as a vicious circle) corresponds to "the experience of the unborn." This is the "resurrection":

The son without a father in the resurrection; in the resurrected body; a body that is not genitally organized . . . without father, without mother, without descent; having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God. A Son of God who is without a father; the Oedipus Complex transcended. Without descent, without genealogy; no more generations; the world of generation and death transcended.<sup>60</sup>

This is something in which Pasolini does not believe. Brown posits a utopian severance from nature. "[T]he real birth is the second birth," Brown concludes, as Orpheus repeats in the above "meditation."<sup>61</sup> However, Pasolini's Orpheus does not offer a solution to the cycle of journeys and the metamorphoses that this "late" man undergoes (his vaginal penis; his becoming a male mother). Brown and Pasolini do not use the expression "second birth" in the same way. For Brown, the second birth equals the "awakening to eternal life; free from the cycle of rebirth." For Pasolini's Orpheus, the second birth is the subject's entrance in the "late" culture of our times. It is the acquisition of a cultural consciousness. With *Petrolino*, Pasolini does not intend to offer a solution to the cyclical exit and return to the womb, he only wishes to expose its perversity. The schizophrenic body (the body of someone who leaves and yet remains within the womb, and in the womb sees himself as a man who penetrates and a woman who is penetrated; both vagina and phallus;

both narrator and narration; both writer and written text) becomes the body of a contradiction that can only occur at this late hour, when the heroes are gone once and for all. At the end of the above "meditation," Orpheus dies of malaria. His death, however, does not prevent him from speaking. Like the narrator/Pasolini, Orpheus speaks from the place of death. His "will" (*testamento*) is to be read in later passages of Pasolini's *Argonautika*. Like the narrator of *Petrolio*, Orpheus is a "monster," someone who speaks only because he is dead.

Orpheus's voice continues to be heard as a commentary on the meaning of the journeys itself (the "form" of Orpheus' will is the form of the journey):

The will of Orpheus—There is a point in the journey where one begins the return—Alexander is not only Alexander, he is also Sikandar—It is Sikandar who knew how to pluck that miraculous moment, which precedes the return by an instant—The end of every journey is Zulmat (the Land of Obscurity)—One turns back by chance—One leaves the interior, returns to the light—But is it worth the trouble? ("Note 36g," 123)

Pasolini here blends two mythic sources: The Greek Orpheus and Alexander the Great depicted as a prophetic figure in *The Book of Alexander the Great* (Sikandar Nama) by the twelfth-century Persian poet Nizami of Ganja. Like Jason, Orpheus, and Carlo 1, in this Persian rewriting of the *Novel of Alexander* (an ancient anonymous story with innumerable versions written in different centuries and in different languages), Alexander the Great turns his attempt to conquer India, "the Orient," into a religious quest.<sup>62</sup> In particular, Orpheus refers to the episode in which Alexander (called by the name Sikandar) goes into Zulmat (the land of darkness) in search of the water of life.

When we read the passage describing Alexander's voyage into the land of darkness, we cannot help but think of Orpheus himself walking down the path to the Netherworld to save Eurydice. Both stories (Orpheus's attempt to save Eurydice and Sikandar's search for the water of life) are unsuccessful. Alexander leaves with a selected army:

They arrived at a place where the [light of the] sun,  
As a phantom in a dream, they saw not.

...

The earth snatched luminosity from the air;  
the veil of terror displayed the Dark Land.  
In one direction, the Dark Land revealed the margin [of the earth].  
In the other direction, the deep sea . . .<sup>63</sup>

The road toward the water of life “became finer than a hair; / darker than the darkness of evening.”<sup>64</sup> It is darkness itself, more than the water of life, that is the real goal of Sikandar’s journey:

When fortune became concordant for the king [Sikandar],  
he found out the path forth to the illuminated world.

...

Though he found not the road to the water of life, he grieved not.<sup>65</sup>

But Sikandar’s expedition to the Dark Land in search of the water of life also recalls a shamanic journey toward the sacred. The shaman dies in the act of entering the realm of the Dark Land and returns as the messenger of a sacred revelation. Orpheus, whose words recall Pasolini’s as the first-person narrator of his testament *Petrolio*, speaks as if he is dead, since his words are his testament read *a posteriori*, after his companions have buried the poet (Orpheus; Pasolini). Antonio Tricomi rightly contends that “Pasolini . . . describes himself as a *shaman* and imagines *Petrolio* as the founding myth and the sacred narrative of a truth he is charged to disclose to his faithful, that is, the readers.”<sup>66</sup> The “founding myth” granted by Pasolini *post mortem* reveals itself progressively. This myth of the origins is not a statement that the shaman Pasolini relates to his disciples but rather a “form,” as Pasolini insists at the beginning of his novel, a sort of insight similar to the nonverbal understanding required by Michaux’s “unreadable” books.

The journey presented in Pasolini’s rewriting of the *Argonautika* becomes a dense hybrid, a literary monster made of fleeting allusions to a variety of different and mutually intertwined narrative threads:

1. The voice of Orpheus as both extradiegetic presence (he is like the narrator/Pasolini in *Petrolio*) who speaks to create a “form” and as a character of a modern version of the *Argonautika*. If we listen to Orpheus’s voice, we perceive the voice of two presences at once. Both presences speak from the standpoint of death (they speak their will).
2. The extradiegetic narrator (the narrator/Pasolini), who is also Orpheus, writes fragmentary descriptions of a fictional modern journey to Near Eastern countries, which derive from (Pasolini’s) “true” memories of his multiple trips. This narrative has no protagonist, no specific hero.
3. Fragments of allusions to Apollonius Rhodius’s *The Argonautika*, which either interrupt or contaminate the narration of the modern journey.
4. In his testament, Orpheus makes some allusions to a third journey to the “Orient” based on *The Book of Alexander the Great*. This third mythic journey is stripped of all

its details and reduced to an essential "motif," as Propp would say: the hero enters a space of radical danger (the land of darkness). The hero Sikandar/Alexander becomes an indirect allusion to Carlo 1, the absent "hero" of the modern journey to the Orient.

This medley of narrative voices and mythic allusions becomes particularly visible in "Note 36l: The Argonauts, Book IV (continued)," where we find all the above threads interwoven:

Scenes of Medea—Apocalyptic crises of complaints, recriminations, threats, explosions xxx of hatred—Jason's plans—"Excursion" to a fishing village, with rows of sharks lined up where the waves break and flocks of birds flying around—Two hours in a jeep along the beach—The "savage woman" is abandoned there, after becoming intoxicated by "whiskey"—Precipitate departure from Aden—Appendix to the Will of Orpheus (found among his papers at the embarkation)—Identification of the death with the real goal of the journey—For "our" Sikandar, the Land of Obscurity, or Zulmat, would be, curiously, Kuwait. (125–26)

The opening reference to Medea's "recriminations" is an allusion to the episode in book 4 of *The Argonautika* where Apsyrtos, Medea's brother, is ready to attack the Argonauts, whom Medea, madly in love with Jason, has helped steal the Golden Fleece from her father. Apsyrtos, who has pursued Argos with his army, demands that his sister be returned to her family. Fearing that Jason may accept her brother's request to avoid a bloody confrontation, Medea addresses Jason "with hurting words": "Jason, what is this plot you've all / worked out on my account? Has success left you quite forgetful? / Have you no regard for all the speeches you made to me / when necessity pressed you so hard?"<sup>67</sup> The two lovers end up murdering Medea's brother through deceit and thus trigger Zeus' violent anger.

The allusion to a pending danger (Apsyrtos' imminent attack on the Argonauts) is suspended by another fleeting reference to a touristy "excursion to a fishing village," which is part of the modern journey. The fact that the words *excursion*, *savage woman*, *whiskey*, and *our* are enclosed in quotation marks seems to signify a citation from a spoken interaction, as if "excursion" were used ironically and "savage woman" were a nickname used for a pestering lady. But "savage woman" also echoes the "savage" Medea, who is prone to violent outbursts of despair and recrimination. The "savage woman" is abandoned on the beach in a state of intoxication, as if after a long party. In the previous note, the narrator mentions a "formal reception in the grim hotel lobby" ("Note 36i," 125).

What follows is a new reference to Orpheus's will, now inserted as an indirect quotation: "Identification of death with the real goal of the journey." This isolated citation from Orpheus's will seems to relate to a subsequent new allusion to the mythic story of Alexander the Great/Sikandar in the Land of Obscurity. In this new reference to Alexander's story, we perceive an additional layer of referentiality. Orpheus's laconic allusion to death as goal of the journey is placed next to Sikandar's journey to Zulmat. But now Alexander is "our" Sikandar, so that Alexander is identified with the original protagonist of Pasolini's version of the *Argonauts*, Carlo 1 himself.

The allusion to death as both end and goal of the journey is the fulcrum whence all the other threads of this note originate. It is Orpheus who reveals the centrality of death for all journeys (those of the Argonauts, Orpheus, Alexander the Great/Sikandar, and also Carlo 1). It is important to realize that the sole direct allusion to Carlo 1 occurs after Orpheus's revelation. In the following note, "Note 36m," we read for the first time in this new modern *Argonautika* the name "Carlo":

Carlo's prophetic dream—Interior of a Coptic church, where some young priests are singing—They stand in an oval at the back of the roughly square church—The Sanctum Sanctorum is at the center: another rough square covered with garish naïve pictures telling stories of the Archangels—There is nothing clerical about the priests who are singing—They are boys whose hair is between curly and kinky . . . The old men are like them, and just as youthful . . . One of these old men has a radiant smile—The dreamer approaches him, until the eyes of the white-haired old man rest on him—It is a penetrating and revelatory look—That old man "knows everything" about Orpheus and his relation with the Third World. (126–27)

In Pasolini's *Argonautika*, Carlo 1 becomes a visible character only in this episode, which is detached from all the other narratives mixed up together in this sequence of notes. Carlo appears to introduce a "prophetic dream" in which he visits a Coptic church that has "nothing" clerical, and is thus radically different from the Church of the West, the church of Saint Paul's new Law. This Coptic church embodies the mythic church of the "Orient," a utopian space where priests are youthful, free, and smiling. In this dream-vision, the Sancta Sanctorum is at the center of this church free of clericalism. The square walls surrounding the Sancta Sanctorum with paintings of Archangels seem to reflect the young and joyful priests singing. As I mentioned before, in Greek religion, Orpheus was the founder of the rites of initiation and the singer of the mysteries. Orpheus was the first and most powerful religious poet-singer.

Carlo 1 approaches an old, happy priest who "knows everything" about Orpheus. This dream-vision is a prophecy that touches upon the core of the mystery surrounding Orpheus, the priest of initiation, the singer-poet who posthumously revealed that the goal of the journey is death. The expression "knows everything" has a distinct oneiric connotation, as if the dreamer Carlo heard the priest who "knows everything" as a mysterious voice that in fact reveals nothing. That is, "knows everything" does not mean "everything" about Orpheus. It only means that the deceased Orpheus does have something to reveal.

Orpheus himself must explain the "knows everything" of the old sage in the Coptic church. The following note, "Note 36n," opens with a new citation from Orpheus's testament. The first sentence makes a mysterious allusion to the presence of a "secret" in an act of writing "sincerely," that is without aiming at any secret communication. Orpheus's paradoxical statement becomes clear if we read it in the light of Maurice Blanchot's *Le livre à venir* (The book to come). Blanchot is explicitly mentioned in one of the previous notes of Pasolini's *Argonautika* ("Note 36g," 124). Let us read Orpheus's words first: "'When one writes without thinking that one is revealing a secret, that is, sincerely, one realizes one has revealed a secret one did not know one had'—'To die before these people abjure'—'But also to communicate cheerfully to others what one knows of these people'—Last notebook of Orpheus—Departure for Tel Aviv" ("Note 36n," 127).<sup>68</sup>

In "Mort du dernier écrivain" (Death of the last writer), one of the last chapters of *Le livre à venir*, Blanchot hypothesizes a paradoxical "parole secrète sans secret" (a secret word without a secret) that would follow the death of the last writer. This "secret word without a secret" would be a noise (*bruit*) that would seem to be saying something, but which in fact would say nothing. It would be the word of a society deafened by a relentless and meaningless noise. In his last notebook, the poet (Orpheus) evokes the presence of a secret by revealing not the secret itself but only the existence of a secret. Blanchot explains that a writer gives a "form" to his silenced word, as if the writer were creating a "statue" out of the silence evoked by his word.<sup>69</sup> We have seen that with *Petrolio* Pasolini in fact intends to create a "form" and not a story. We understand better now what Pasolini means by "form" as something opposed to "story": "story" is noise; "form" is the "statue" of silence.

In his last notebook, Orpheus posits a clear connection between the secret evoked by his silent word and death. Orpheus contends that death is in fact the ultimate goal of the journey. It is advisable to die *now*, because "these people" are about to "abjure." This is the "prophetic"



meaning of the old priest who “knows everything” about Orpheus. Orpheus’s “malaria,” the disease that killed him, in fact was Orpheus’s choice to die before this final, apocalyptic abjuration. His “malaria” reminds us of Saint Paul’s mysterious illness that ravages his body. Both diseases spring from a virus, so to speak, necessary to distance the subject (Orpheus; the apostle Paul) away from those who are about “to abjure.” However, the problem with this kind of belief is that the act of dying itself is a reaction to “abjuration.” Orpheus and the apostle Paul die of a disease brought about by “abjuration.”

### Carlo 2’s Metamorphosis

*Petrolino*, Pasolini writes in “Note 42,” is not about “disassociation . . . [but about] obsession with identity and, at the same time, its destruction” (150). *Petrolino* has become famous for its obscene notes recounting the two Carlos’ sexual obsessions. I have already mentioned in passing Carlo 2’s numerous sexual encounters with every woman in his family, including his mother.<sup>70</sup> We also know that the two Carlos are one and only one subject who visualizes his split identity in a dreamlike narrative. While the second Carlo serves his basest heterosexual instincts, the first Carlo goes on a journey to the Orient. I have pointed out, however, that in his journey Carlo 1 is paradoxically absent. Apart from being a character in a final, “prophetic” dream, Carlo 1 is never mentioned in the account of his own experience in the Orient. Let us remember that Carlo 1 is on a business trip. He is a noncharacter, and the memories and fantasies about the Orient described in this sequence exist as independent entities. Orpheus as the alter ego of the narrator/Pasolini is the real main character of Carlo 1’s journey.

Back in Rome, Carlo 1 regularly meets with Carlo 2 at night. “The experiences that the two exchanged,” the narrator explains, “had nothing special or dramatic about them.” Confirming what I just said about Carlo 1’s absence from his own journey, the narrator states, “It was Carlo the Second who was speaking, since it was Carlo the First who was to be made a participant in the joys he had renounced” (“Note XXX,” 155). Carlo 2, who “serves” Carlo 1 because of his superior social condition, has the “anguish” of someone dominated by the “feverish, spasmodic hunger” of sex.

However, Carlo 2’s repetitive sexual experiences with “the bodies of bourgeois women and girls” were not satisfying (“Note 43a,” 156). At this point of *Petrolino*, Carlo 1 and Carlo 2 share the same drabness of the

bourgeois condition. Although he is socially inferior to Carlo 1, Carlo 2 is nevertheless part of the lower middle class, and still embraces its economic and social laws. Carlo 2 is a heterosexual man whose servility has extended to the sexual realm. He "serves" his phallus. As the narrator clarifies, Carlo 2 "had not understood what an intimate and supreme bond there was between poverty and the body and how the body had benefited from it, thus preserving in itself . . . the 'raw material' of the people, which was health, innocence, crudeness, crime: everything except banality, vulgarity, and a sense of guilt." Pasolini is usually known for his hymns to the "mythic" male bodies of the Roman borgate. In his last works (*Saint Paul*, *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, *Petrolio*), the emphasis shifts from the saved to the unmythic bodies of those who are not saved, those who do not know "the supreme bond . . . between poverty and the body." This unmythic condition belongs to those who die of "abjuration."

Following his "anguish," as usual Carlo 2 goes out at night in search of sex after a "banal" conversation with Carlo 1. At the Stazione Termini, a well-known meat market for both heterosexual and homosexual prostitution, Carlo experiences "an apparition [*apparizione*]" ("Note 50," 160).<sup>71</sup> Several trucks full of young communists singing and holding red flags invade the square: "They were poor boys; laborers, housepainters, plumbers, elevator men, delivery boys, carpenters. . . . They were anticipating something that was about to happen. . . . Their youth, even physically, was an apparition. . . ." It is in this atmosphere of revolutionary expectation ("the apparition") that Carlo 2 feels sexually aroused by looking at the "pants that covered those legs and those crotches" (161).

This "apparition of a new youth" leads to a transformation of Carlo 2's body. We need to pause a moment before proceeding. To a post-communism reader, Pasolini's overt exaltation of the poor young men's "healthy" masculinity as embodiment of a "new youth" in opposition to the inherent decadence of the bourgeoisie may seem like a new form of Fascist discrimination.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, when we look at the metamorphosis of Carlo 2's body, we cannot help but perceive a negative view of women and femininity as well. I think this view is unquestionably correct. I do believe that the homosexual Pasolini tends to associate female identity with whatever bourgeois society means to him. In Pasolini, *homosexuality*, *womanhood*, and *bourgeoisie* at times become synonyms for the same identity. These three terms indicate passivity and distance from "nature," that is, from the symbiotic and pretemporal harmony of mother and heterosexual son. "Abjuration" is the illness that may result from this "fallen" condition. We will come back to this issue later.

When we saw the content of the leftist intellectual's suitcase, we also encountered the famous *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* by the German jurist Daniel Paul Schreber (1903). Carlo 2's metamorphosis undoubtedly echoes Schreber's disturbing journal. But first let us see how Pasolini/narrator details this identity change. After having been exposed to the "apparition" of the young communists, Carlo 2 becomes something like a woman:

Carlo's chest grew heavy. It was an unnatural weight, a mass that crushed him as it rose. At the same time, his lower abdomen became light and empty. Awareness of his penis, which in Carlo was a "basso continuo," a note without end, vanished. . . . An unexpected chastity overwhelmed him. The vision that reduced him to an entity in which only sex counted (that day, sex almost without the flesh of a girl) suddenly vanished from the world. . . . He went straight to his room and undressed, looking at himself in the big, plain mirror. . . . Two large breasts—no longer young—hung from his chest; and below his belly there was nothing; the hair between his legs had disappeared, and—only by touching it and pulling apart the lips—did Carlo, with the clear gaze of one who from his experience as an outlaw has learned the philosophy of the poor, see the little fold that was his sex. ("Note 51," 162–63)<sup>73</sup>

First, Carlo's chest has something "unnatural." It weighs too much and creates an unnatural imbalance with the lightness of the abdomen. Carlo has an imbalanced, unnatural body. Moreover, his abdomen becomes "empty." Carlo's new sex is experienced as an unnatural weight and emptiness. Carlo also experiences the disappearance of his sex organs. He is a woman/castrated man, what Kristeva defines as "âmosexuel" (the passive, masochistic, castrated homosexual who strives to become the "real" woman through a complete abandonment to the phallus). What is natural to this new identity is "chastity," because this creature has no sex whatsoever, apart from an unnatural weight on his chest, like some "heavy" anguish or guilt. When he undresses in front of the mirror, Carlo 2 sees his heavy, "no longer young" breasts. It is interesting that this physical metamorphosis was triggered by the "apparition" of some attractive youth. Carlo 2 sees that his breasts are "no longer young," and "down there," Carlo has "nothing." That "nothing" between his legs is a wound covered by two little lips. Carlo 2's feminization is in fact a form of castration. He has the breasts of a middle-aged woman unable to procreate. The disparaging tone of Pasolini's view of woman is utterly offensive (she is sterile because she cannot have children, that is, she cannot be mother). Carlo has nothing but a new "chastity" marked by a "little fold" protecting an opening. This nothing defines his male-female condition.

In his *Memoirs*, the jurist Schreber details an apparently similar experience of feminization. Just a few words about Schreber may be necessary. Born in 1842, he studied to become a judge and married but had no children. At the age of forty-two, he had his first nervous breakdown. He recovered from it, but at the age of fifty-one he had a severe relapse that led him to an asylum where he spent nine years. He wrote his *Memoirs* as an account of his extraordinary mystical experiences but also a plea for release.<sup>74</sup> Schreber's immensely popular book has a strongly apocalyptic aura. As he stresses in "Open letter to Professor Flechsing," which precedes his shocking memoirs, his "aim is solely to further knowledge of truth in a vital field, that of religion."<sup>75</sup> Schreber claims he has been granted a special insight about a profound "crisis in God's realm." He has received this unique information because he has been asked to lead an apocalyptic renovation, which entails his transformation from man to woman. A brief analysis of Schreber's religious and sexual experience is crucial to a correct understanding of Carlo 2's feminization in *Petrolio*.

Schreber defines this sexual metamorphosis as "unmanning," which occurs every time someone "has entered into indissoluble contact with divine nerves (rays)."<sup>76</sup> A basic concept of Schreber's theology is that the nerves of the body rule over the entire spectrum of a human being's possible activities. A human being's soul is contained in the nerves of his or her body, and God himself is "only nerve, not body, and akin therefore to the human soul." God is able to produce infinite nerves, which can transform themselves "into all things of the created world; in this capacity they are called rays" (20, 21). "Rays" evokes the image of the sun that, according to Freud's interpretation of Schreber's illness, "is nothing other than a sublimated symbol of the father."<sup>77</sup> Keep in mind that the name of Pasolini's father is Carlo.

Schreber experiences this divine manipulation of his body as a form of rape. Róheim, speaking of Schreber's schizophrenia in *Magic and Schizophrenia*, reminds us that "the schizophrenic is a martyr" subject to multiple forms of persecution.<sup>78</sup> In Schreber's case, God's "rays" creep into the subject's body (including the mind, since it is something physical) and are able to make his or her nerves "vibrate in the way which corresponds to the use [of language]" (54). Even before initiating the process of sex change, God's rays trigger "compulsive thinking," through which these divine rays, now inside Schreber's mind and body, "continually wan[t] to know what I [am] thinking about" (55). Schreber's detailed description of divine invasion closely resembles descriptions of demonic possession, as numerous Renaissance treatises on demonology confirm. As I explain in *Satan's Rhetoric*, a demon enters a subject primarily through the mind by

"infecting" the subject's thoughts.<sup>79</sup> Remember that, according to Aristotelian physiology, the mind is deeply physical. Thoughts are remnants of physical impressions (fragments of memories, called *phantasmata*) imprinted on the matter composing the subject's mind.

According to Schreber, God's rays ask such an "absurd question" (it is absurd because one can think of nothing or of many things at once) only to achieve a complete control and domination over the human being's mind, whose "nerves" are forced "to perform the movements corresponding to the use of [the words God's rays want to hear]." One of the first thoughts of this sort concerns the jurist's imminent metamorphosis: "[O]ne morning while still in bed (whether still half asleep or already awake I cannot remember), I had a feeling which, thinking about it later when fully awake, struck me as highly peculiar. It was the idea that it really must be rather pleasant to be a woman succumbing to intercourse" (46).

Pasolini finds in Schreber's detailed analysis of his "unmanning" an invaluable coincidence between a physical and sexual invasion, and a mental and spiritual one. For Schreber, the subject's body is the locus of complete submission to (divine) power. Schreber contends that a woman "succumbs" to intercourse and in this complete abandonment to the phallus's domination she finds pleasure. The adjective *indissoluble* defines the "contact" with the divine as a perfect (mental and physical) domination that inevitably leads to a sexual transformation. To become a woman means that the divine rays have accomplished their mission. "This process of unmanning," Schreber writes, "consisted in the [external] male genitals [scrotum and penis] being retracted into the body and the internal sexual organs being at the same time transformed into the corresponding female sexual organs" (60). To dominate and to be dominated are the basic terms of Schreber's theology. For Schreber, "woman" signifies a man's pleasure in "succumbing" to the phallus, which coincides with a total domination over the (passive/homosexual) man's mind and physicality. The victim's penis withdraws into the body as if hiding from violence. The (female) organs signifying the victim's abjection are "internal," unlike what we read in *Petrolino*, where with his fingers Carlo 2 opens the "lips" of his new open wound. The jurist contends that "[t]wice at different times . . . I had a female genital organ, although a poorly developed one, and in my body felt quickening like the first signs of life of a human embryo" (18).

But the process of becoming a woman also signifies the schizophrenic's loss of presence in the world. Whereas the primitive finds in the past the behavioral rules (magic, rites, etc.) that have proved to protect the subject against the perils of reality and the risk of losing one's

presence, the schizophrenic is exposed to and lost in a new world, whose major rule is the divine demand to subject oneself to its ominous manipulation. The world of the schizophrenic is a world of rape and immolation, a world of inscrutable signs. To become a woman symbolizes, as Ernesto de Martino confirms, this defenseless, passive nakedness vis-à-vis the abusive requests of a world that does not need to justify itself.<sup>80</sup> No stable identity is promised in this new world. The subject may be turned into a hybrid, a half-man and half-woman, if it pleases the power that lies beyond the victim's understanding.

Unlike Carlo 2, Schreber "succumbs" to (divine) power because he is supposed to become a second Virgin Mary, ready and willing to respond to divine "rays." As I mentioned before, Schreber's forced but pleasurable submission is part of a divine plan of apocalyptic renewal. God intends to cleanse the contemporary, corrupt generation by procreating a new humanity through Schreber's womb. No trace of renewal is detectable in Carlo 2's metamorphosis, even though some essential similarities between Schreber's *Memoirs* and Pasolini's *Petrolio* are certainly recognizable and enlightening. I focus on chapter 7 of the *Memoirs*. Like the narrator/Pasolini in *Petrolio*, the jurist writes *post mortem*. His becoming the physical vessel of a divine renovation entails a condition of death. At the beginning of chapter 7, Schreber writes that, "in the middle of March 1894, when communication with supernatural powers was well under way, a newspaper was put in front of me in which something like my own obituary notice could be read" (86). During this time, Schreber adds, he "was kept in bed continuously day and night." Schreber has entered a new temporal status. He is dead so that a new generation of men may be created through him. Kept in bed so as to be ready to be impregnated, Schreber writes his *Memoirs* as the testament of his apocalyptic condition. Schreber is at once mother (the Virgin) and Son (the Savior). His *Memoirs* are both a new Book of Revelation and a new Gospel. For that matter, in the gospels the Savior only speaks *post mortem*, since the first of the gospels (Mark) was written some fifty years after His death.

Chapter 7 of Schreber's *Memoirs* is a compelling synthesis of the major themes of Schreber's apocalypticism. While forced to remain in bed "day and night," Schreber is penetrated by Prof. Flechsig's "soul." Prof. Flechsig, a main presence in Schreber's *Memoirs*, is the jurist's nemesis. Flechsig is the physician controlling the asylum where Schreber is confined. Schreber believes that "probably [Flechsig's] whole soul" had been "thrown into my belly by way of a miracle" (86; emphasis in original). It is worth noting the identification between the two rapists Dr. Flechsig and the sun/God. Both embody two facets of the father, as the ultimate

ruler over the “nerves”—and thus the mind and body—of the son. In his study of the jurist’s illness, Freud underscores that Schreber’s father was himself “a highly regarded physician.”<sup>81</sup> Dr. Daniel Gottlob Moritz Schreber was considered the founder of therapeutic gymnastics in Germany. The correspondence between the two powerful and threatening figures of father and physician is evident.

Schreber spits out the physician’s soul, as if the jurist were a possessed person who, through a successful exorcism, has been able to throw up the demon lying in his or her belly. But the expulsion of the physician’s soul has also a strong sexual tone. The doctor’s “whole soul” comes out of the victim’s mouth and leaves a “foul” aftertaste (87). The occurrence of this “nervous” penetration (the soul is made of nerves like the rest of the body) coincides with “the time of the First Divine Judgment,” which would be followed by a series of additional judgments. Already in chapter 6 of the *Memoirs*, Schreber had remarked that night visions had revealed to him “the notion of an approaching *end of the world*” (75: emphasis in original). It is extremely fascinating and important to see the parallel between Schreber’s sex changes and his apocalyptic times on the one hand, and the two Carlos’ feminization and apocalypticism on the other. The jurist penetrated by his doctor’s soul knows that “a crisis dangerous for the existence of the realms of God” is under way.

The jurist’s sexual transformation is both the effect of and the solution to a “crisis” that spans the entire creation. One aspect of this universal state of emergency is the crisis of the German people (in particular the Protestant Germans), who are not “God’s chosen people” any longer. In Schreber’s *Memoirs*, Catholicism and Prof. Flechsig embody a vast array of vaguely negative concepts (danger, decadence, violence, corruption). During the “First Judgment,” the man/woman jurist knows that Catholicism is growing at a dangerous rate. However, Schreber identifies a much more ominous crisis, which encompasses all of humanity, which I will soon discuss.

Another important similarity between *Petrolino* (and also *Saint Paul*) and Schreber’s *Memoirs* is the perception of the “lateness” of time. Schreber knows that “a large gap in time [has] occurred in the history of mankind, [even though] viewed merely from outside everything has remained as of old” (88: emphasis in original). The perception of an essential, ontological, dichotomy between what was and what is now is at the core of Pasolini’s poetics. We have seen that Pasolini stages this temporal apocalyptic hiatus as an actual overlapping of two historical moments (see, for instance, *Saint Paul*). “A large gap of time” has elapsed between what was real (and divinely ordered) and the “now” that reveals a vast emptiness, the visible absence of what used to exist. The contem-

plative nature of Pasolini's cinema, his insistence on the role of montage in creating an aesthetic suspension, strives to summon the emptiness, "the *large gap in time*" that the German jurist had already perceived. For Schreber and Pasolini, the terms *gap* and *emptiness* evoke the concept of feminization. Like the Saint Paul of Pasolini's screenplay, Schreber sees his failed heterosexuality as a reminder of the "unmanned" nature of our times.

The unquestionable "changes" in the sky are apocalyptic signs announcing that, given the present crisis, God "[has] been forced to draw nearer to the earth" (90). The changes that Schreber notices are typical of Western apocalypticism. First of all, "walking down the garden," Schreber "[sees] two suns in the sky simultaneously" (90, 91).<sup>82</sup> In this atmosphere of impending doom, Schreber experiences his sexual metamorphosis. The "changes in my sex organs," Schreber contends, must be connected to "the idea of the end of the world," which he knows is "imminent." The great earthquake of Lisbon in 1755 had been a warning sign. "Leprosy and plague" would follow soon.

In this regard, Schreber, who is being changed into a virgin in order to generate a new breed of purer humans, also seems to have contracted this apocalyptic "leprosy, signs of which were visible on my own body" (94). This leprosy is certainly a "holy disease" (95). As the primary sign of the Apocalypse, the German jurist embodies both the Virgin, who will give life to a regenerated humanity, and the "harlot" mentioned in the Book of Revelation 17:4 (94, 95, 96). Again, Schreber is being "filled" with new nerves, in this case nerves of "voluptuousness," which are making him into a woman. However, since his womanhood has a double nature (Virgin and harlot of Babylon), the result is at once his assumption of the roles of Savior-Virgin (mother and Son) and the abused and damned prostitute: "Always the main idea . . . was to 'forsake' me, that is to say, to abandon me . . . by unmanning me and allowing my body to be prostituted like that of a female harlot" (96).

The jurist experiences his contradictory metamorphosis (Virgin and harlot) as a torturous manipulation by the divine: "God's rays frequently mocked me about a supposedly imminent unmanning as 'Miss Schreber.' . . . [A]n expression used frequently and repeated *ad nauseam* was, 'You are to be *represented* as given to voluptuous excesses,' etc. I myself felt the danger of unmanning for a long time as a threatening ignominy, especially while there was the possibility of my body being sexually abused by other people" (124; emphasis in original).

"Miss Schreber" must be exposed to sexual abuse as if on a stage. He must become the representation of sexual abuse. This is part of divine



providence, although Schreber's God himself participates in the sexual abuse to which the jurist must be subjected. His unmanning is an "essential . . . preparation for the renewal of mankind, particularly while I thought the rest of mankind had perished" (254–55). For Schreber, the human race is extinct. For the time being, what Schreber sees around him in the asylum are "fleeting-improvised" men, that is to say, souls "temporarily given human shape by divine miracle" (28). Schreber's unmanning will give life to a new beginning in the history of humankind.

In Schreber's journals, the death of humankind is linked to a corruption of the pristine values of the German people. According to him, Catholicism is prevailing over the Germans' healthy Protestant religiosity. Death thus results from a physical and intellectual decadence. The "holy leprosy" that is now ravaging Europe is a sign of cleansing, and the jurist himself shows symptoms of this apocalyptic disease. His unmanning, which he lives as humiliation and prostitution, is the turning point of a universal renewal. The echoes in Pasolini are unmistakable. Both Schreber's and Carlo's sexual fluctuations mirror the collapse of an entire culture. One final connection is worth mentioning. Consider the mysterious illness ravaging the apostle Paul's body in *Saint Paul*. The Virgin/harlot Schreber, who shows signs of a "holy leprosy," also perceives inside of himself the presence of a "God" or "Apostle" of the new humankind to come: "I recognized in [the Apostle] flesh of my flesh and blood of my blood" (114). Schreber is also the "Apostle" of a renewed human generation. Not only does he give life to a post-apocalyptic humanity, but he is also the apostle of the creed of renovation following the Apocalypse.

We have seen how, according to the narrator/Pasolini, Carlo 2 contemplates his transformed body while undressing in front of a mirror. Schreber alludes briefly to a similar experience: "I see myself . . . standing in front of a mirror in the adjoining room in female attire . . . Picturing female buttocks on my body . . . has become such a habit that I do it almost automatically whenever I bend down" (211). However, this long series of parallels between *Petrolino* and Schreber's *Memoirs* should not overshadow the fundamental distinctions between the two. In *Petrolino*, Carlo 2 sees his metamorphosis as a deprivation of sexuality. He feels a sudden sense of "chastity" since his removed penis has been replaced with a small "fold" hiding a hole. Not so Schreber, who senses that his feminization (he is given nerves of "voluptuousness") is intended to turn him into a (holy) prostitute. Carlo 2's breasts are a burden, like a heavy anguish or guilt pressing on his chest. On the contrary, Schreber writes that "the mammae particularly play a very large part in the perception

of sensuous pleasure" (245). As Kaja Silverman underscores, unlike Pasolini's Carlo, Schreber experiences his sexual metamorphosis both as "the negative form of a radical unmanning" and as "the positive form of a sexual reterritorialization." Schreber's new apocalyptic body is not the "shattering of his conventionally masculine ego" as we find in Carlo, but "the formation of the classically female *moi*."<sup>83</sup> For Carlo, to become a woman means to lose one's own (male) identity (a body that lacks sexual organs; the vagina as a sterile wound), whereas for Schreber, it means to acquire a new sacred fertility. In Pasolini's depiction of Carlo's feminization, becoming a woman is like becoming a male homosexual in that both transformations signify nonmasculinity.

If the meaning of Carlo 2's feminization is different from Schreber's, why does Carlo acquire female sexual organs?<sup>84</sup> Unlike the German jurist, Carlo 2 is sterile. His vagina is not a new sexual organ; it is the lack of a sexual organ (the phallus). In this regard, Carlo is much closer to having a schizophrenic perception of his body than is Schreber, in that, as Deleuze and Guattari point out, the schizophrenic experiences his body as deprived of organs: "The body without organs is nonreproductive; nonetheless it is produced."<sup>85</sup> As we shall see in a moment, Carlo's "female" body exists when heterosexual men see it as a machine producing pleasure (Carlo's mouth and anus). Heterosexual men do not desire Carlo's body; they transform it into a self-pleasing machine, a sort of masturbatory device. In reality, it does not matter whether Carlo has become a real woman or not, because his body does not exist as an independent entity. The men who use it for their pleasure create it the moment they need it. As a schizophrenic body, Carlo's body is empty, depleted of subjectivity. It is indeed a screen on which a reel of film is projected. The film shown on the internal screen of Carlo's feminine body is about the genital satisfaction obtained by several heterosexual men.

To understand this intricate issue fully, we must turn to the notorious "Note 55" of *Petrolio*, the lengthy and detailed description of Carlo 2's multiple experiences of sexual intercourse on the "field beside Via Casilina" (165). First of all, it is imperative to understand that what Pasolini describes in this sexually explicit note is not a heterosexual gang rape. In "Note 55," the "woman" Carlo 2 recalls the figure of an Italian homosexual man at the time of Pasolini. In the chapters on *Saint Paul* and *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, we have already seen how Pasolini envisions male homosexuality. For Pasolini, the male homosexual pursues sexual encounters only with "real" men, heterosexual men who use the homosexual as a woman. This is a sort of silent agreement. The two men (the gay and the straight) agree that the heterosexual man uses the gay man

as a sexual outlet “to get off,” no more no less. The heterosexual man may also enjoy the humiliation he inflicts onto the “unmanned” man. Moreover, both the “unmanned” man and the “real” man assume that no actual emotional exchange can possibly take place between them. When he is having sex with an unmanned man, the real man is emotionally somewhere else, with his “real” woman. The unmanned man has indeed a paradoxical nature. His presence summons the absence of the woman. The humiliation to which the homosexual man is subjected is also a result of his acting in the real woman’s stead.

“Note 55” opens as follows:

When they had come to an agreement, Carlo took a few steps forward into the field, without turning back to see who had decided to be first. He looked around to choose a suitable place. But here were too many holes and small mounds, there too many stones (mixed with shards and garbage), farther on no grass, just dirty earth. . . . The others, who had remained behind in a mass, began to get impatient and let out a few whistles. . . . They felt too exposed in the middle of the field, perhaps, . . . or they wanted to be able to see the “fuck” of the friend whose turn it was. These, at least, were the “bourgeois” suppositions of Carlo, who felt some anxiety about it. (165–66)

For all Pasolini’s aficionados, this description should evoke more than one scene from some of his best-known films. What Pasolini means by “field” is an open space at the outskirts of Rome, placed against dense and ugly clusters of anonymous, tall, and white residential buildings, the results of the so-called economic boom. These vast and empty fields, which will be eventually swallowed up by the surrounding working-class neighborhoods, are spectral spaces, where “garbage and shards” accumulate, and people go for anonymous sex encounters. These no-man’s-land areas, doomed to disappear, which Pasolini shows in *Mamma Roma* with a unique visual power, are the land of the outcasts. Legality is here suspended. The images of these spectral and surreal neighborhoods open the Italian-American horror film *The Last Man on Earth* (1964) and are a perfect visual representation of the apocalyptic message of the film.

In chapter 1, we saw that Pasolini imagines a scene for *Saint Paul* in which the apostle addresses the people living in the borgate at the outskirts of Rome. The stage of Saint Paul’s sermon is similar to the “field” of the sex scene in *Petrolio*. This field evokes humiliation, suspension of social norms, poverty, and violence. We see this in a disturbing scene of the film *Accattone*, where at night a gang drives a prostitute out to a solitary field, beats her up, and abandons her there like a bag of trash. What

we read in "Note 55" certainly recalls this scene of *Accattone*, although the differences between the film and the novel are significant.

First of all, the woman abused in the dramatic scene of *Accattone* triggers compassion in the viewer. We are given a close-up of one of her shoes abandoned on the ground. Not so in the case of Carlo 2 in *Petrolio*. As I mentioned earlier, Pasolini makes clear that he does not intend to write a bourgeois novel that calls for some form of identification with its main character. In *Petrolio*, ideology replaces psychological identification. Furthermore, the sex scene in *Petrolio* is part of the "diluted reel of film" mentioned by Róheim's schizophrenic patient. It is a scene projected on the screen of the narrator/Pasolini's mind. Remember that this internal "diluted reel of film" (*Petrolio* is Pasolini's testament) tells the viewer (the narrator himself) what is "out there." As in a dream, the characters disappear and metamorphose unexpectedly.

The narrator mentions that Carlo, after choosing the right location to have sex with some twenty young men, feels "anxiety." Pasolini also clarifies that this anxiety is linked to Carlo's bourgeois condition. Carlo's anxiety comes from "bourgeois suppositions" because he projects onto these men his "sick," self-conscious point of view. Carlo's reputation is exposed and not the men's, and at the same time Carlo wishes to witness his own being exposed to the men, that is, his complete humiliation. Carlo's exposure recalls the exposure involved in the act of taking a picture. Carlo exposes himself to the men and, in so doing, he creates the image of himself as the one who exposes his shameful pleasure.

This is the core of "Note 55," the longest fragment of *Petrolio*. I have pointed out that, unlike Schreber, Carlo 2 presents himself as a sterile woman. Although both feminizations respond to an apocalyptic emergency, Carlo 2's metamorphosis is not part of a universal regeneration (Schreber is a new Virgin who will give birth to a new humankind). Carlo 2 is a hybrid, a monster, and his monstrosity exclusively serves to bring to the fore a radical opposition. What is real and what is imaginary in "Note 55"?<sup>86</sup> This could sound like a silly question, since we are dealing with literature, but the question is worth asking. On the one hand, we have the freak Carlo, a man/woman hybrid, the result of the sudden death of a depressed middle-class man (remember the very first note of *Petrolio*). On the other, we read of a bunch of horny, working-class men who use the monstrous Carlo to "get off." The reality issue seems to lean toward the young men, whose distinct physical traits the narrator describes in great detail. We have realized, however, that the whole sexual event revolves around Carlo, and not the men. The figures of these young men are

a function of Carlo 2's humiliation. Carlo 2 is the real presence in this sexual episode.

Both Carlo 2's transformation and his multiple sex acts are exposures from the "diluted reel of film" that is unfolding as a dreamlike event. Not only is Carlo 2 a sterile woman, the sex between the young men and the sterile man/woman alludes to a homosexual (sterile) kind of sex. Although the men who have sex with the "woman" Carlo 2 are twenty, they do not seem to be very imaginative when it comes to sex with a woman: they either force "her" to perform oral sex on them and swallow their semen or take "her" from behind and, when they pull out, comment on "her" nice behind. Even before examining the sex between Carlo 2 and these young men more in detail, we can certainly state that sterility is one major aspect of Carlo 2's transformation. "Note 55," like all the other pieces of *Petrolio*, is part of Pasolini's will—one that also addresses the issue of sterility.

The twenty young guys who one after the other have sex with Carlo 2 are not real human presences. This is confirmed by the narrator's comments at the end of the fragment:

Pietro [Carlo 2's last sex partner] had evoked for Carlo . . . his Penates, his Lares of dust, dry wood, a few household goods, a bed or cot made up in the kitchen, perhaps, or the entranceway. . . . But he also felt the presence of subterranean Gods, Demons, as if in sacred /league/ with these Gods for the night; it was clear: that night . . . was demoniacal: but these were not Demons belonging to an Inferno where the damned atone; rather, they belonged simply to the Lower World, where everyone ends up. In short, poor Gods, who go around leaving behind the smell of dogs . . . who, coming out of their effigies of tufa . . . or of wood eaten by sun and rain, make the entire nocturnal world, and the cosmos, melancholy. Naturally the Gods of the Lower World, going around in that night . . . were above all attracted by the group of their fellows standing on top of a low rise in the enormous field; they had evidently gone to mingle with them, it was clear, divine protectors, Spirits or Genies, but at the same time humble, dependent, and faithful as dogs. (195)

Let me first point out an ironic contradiction. The narrator speaks of the "melancholy" provoked by these "divine" men. But these are the same men whom Carlo 2 pays to have sex with him. If at the beginning of the note, the narrator explains that Carlo 2 feels like a prostitute, and *prostitute* (referring only to Carlo 2) is repeated more than once in the note, we find out that it is the prostitute who pays her clients, whom the narrator defines as "poor Gods." An additional seemingly odd point

is that these men, who get money to have sex with a man/woman, are this man/woman's Penates and Lares.

To get a better idea of who these deities are, let us see how in *De natura deorum* (On the gods' nature), Cicero defines them: "[T]he Penates or household gods, a name derived either from *penus*, which means a store of human food of any kind, or from the fact that they reside *penitus*, in the recesses of the house."<sup>87</sup> As far as the Lares are concerned, *lar* means "hearth" and thus, taken as a synecdoche, "home." The historian Ammianus Marcellinus confirms this interpretation: "So then he entered Rome, home [*larem*] of the Empire and of every virtue."<sup>88</sup> However, the narrator of *Petrolio* seems to emphasize a possible connection between these divinities and demons, which recalls the Renaissance interpretation of Greek and Roman gods. As I explain in *In the Company of Demons*, a book mainly dedicated to these deities,

In the highly influential *The Images of the Ancients' Gods* (Le immagini de gli dei degli antichi [1556]), Vincenzo Cartari defines these pagan divinities as follows: "The *Lar* or *Lares* (since they were numerous) were certain gods or, better yet, demons that the ancients worshipped in the homes as their custodians." But the ancients, Cartari explains, offer more than one depiction of these false, demonic deities. First, since they were "the demons who guarded private homes, the *Lares* were depicted as young men clothed with dog skin, who also kept a dog at their feet." The dog's presence signified that they [the demons] were "faithful and diligent guardians of the household."<sup>89</sup>

It is evident that in "Note 55" of *Petrolio* Pasolini has in mind the Renaissance view of the Lares and Penates, as "gods or, better yet, demons" that people used to worship in their homes, as Cartari says. Pasolini also merges the early modern interpretation of these classical gods with their traditional portrait: "young men clothed with dog skin, who also kept a dog at their feet." Pasolini mentions dogs twice in the above passage. These young men who have sex with Carlo 2 are "divine protectors" and are as "faithful as dogs." These deities/men also leave behind "the smell of dogs."

Let us clarify the nature of these complex gods according to Pasolini. First of all, these young men are Carlo 2's "household gods," as if they were long deceased members of his family. Cartari states in *The Images of the Ancients' Gods*, "[s]ome believed that the *Lares* were our souls when they escape from their human bodies."<sup>90</sup> In his sexual contact with them, Carlo 2 perceives a lost past that concerns him. These young men, whom Carlo 2 pays for sex, defend and represent the concept

of “home.” They are like dogs. The narrator also makes clear, though, that these deities/men come up from a “Hell” or “Lower World, where everyone ends up.” The clause “where everyone ends up” is a faithful translation of the Italian “dove si finisce tutti.”<sup>91</sup> However, in the Italian an additional connotation is clearly perceivable. “Dove si finisce” also hints at the act of “finishing up,” that is, “to be done with,” “to die.” It is worth recalling that, during the interview he gave hours before being murdered, Pasolini states that “Hell is arising toward you.” The connection between the demons from the Netherworld in *Petrolio* and the hell “arising” from within our society is unquestionable.<sup>92</sup>

The men sexually involved with Carlo 2 are deities who used to protect and symbolize “home” but are now in the Hell where everyone “finishes up.” These young men come from a classical time that is gone forever. They have nothing to do with modernity. These working-class and very sexual young men are revenants, whom Carlo 2 summons in a sort of witches’ Sabbath (that night “was demoniacal,” the narrator remarks). In Strindberg’s *Inferno*, Pasolini could also find an explicit identification between “demons,” according to Swedenborg’s mysticism, and the souls of the dead. In chapter 18 (“The Redeemer”), the Swedish writer states: “What are the demons? Since we have admitted the soul’s immortality, the dead are survivors who continue their relationship with the living.”<sup>93</sup> Therefore, Strindberg infers, “the evil spirits” are not “evil” because their goal is positive and protective. These gods are demonic only because they come from a “lower” nonplace where everything ends. They have become unnatural presences, since their role as symbols of the household has been exhausted. In other words, they should not be here. Carlo 2’s sexual encounter is sterile also because these men have lost their original meaning as defenders of homes.

In the poem “Versi da Testamento” (Verses from [or as] testament) from *Trasumanar e organizzar*, Pasolini explicitly recounts his night encounters with young men in desolate open areas.<sup>94</sup> As in this episode of *Petrolio*, Pasolini sees these young men as “inhuman” creatures in that the sexual warmth they offer to the poet “leaves no trace behind” (*non lascia tracce*).<sup>95</sup> Every young man who has sex with him “smears with his semen and goes away” (*unge di seme e se ne va*). “The world . . . arrives with him; appears and disappears” (*Il mondo . . . arriva con lui; appare e scompare*). *Petrolio* and this poem have a similar nature. They are both testaments. In “Versi da Testamento,” however, the distance between the homosexual and the young men reflects an impossible emotional encounter. The tone of the poem is sad and melancholic. The poetic “I” asks for compassion. The young men, moreover, are of this world. They

are the "fecundity of the world." In *Petrolio*, the same young men are demonic presences whose "world" is a Lower World where everything finishes up. The world of the men's fecundity is gone with these deities, who only come back to be serviced sexually by a freak, a woman/man. In the poem we still have the "traditional" Pasolini who contemplates the world from a distance because of his sexual, cultural, ideological difference. The "different" Pasolini looks at the world as it is embodied in these young men, whose semen fecundates the earth. In *Petrolio*, these fecund men are gone once and for all. The same kind of sexual encounter (a lonely homosexual pays some young men for sex at night in a desolate field) acquires a radically different meaning in *Petrolio*. These young men have no fecundity to give to the world because they are not of this world any longer. Everything takes place as an inner vision, a private memorial.<sup>96</sup> The poem and *Petrolio* are two different forms of testament. In "Versi da Testamento," the "testament" is the poet's exhibition of his solitude, which results from his inability to participate in the world. But the world is there. The world does exist. In *Petrolio*, the world has become "a diluted reel of film." Solitude implies a failed relationship (the homosexual versus the heterosexual young men). *Petrolio* stages no relationship. What happens is a reflection of the hallucinatory "I."

The narrator adds an interesting final comment on these deities. They are "humble, dependent, and faithful as dogs." Pasolini here pushes the concept of "dog" beyond its original association with these deities. "Humble" refers to a fundamental quality of these men/deities/dogs. In Pasolini's mythology, "humble" applies to the men from the borgate. Their humility does not mean weakness and meekness: we will see in a moment their explicit and rather violent sexual behavior. These male deities are "humble" because they are poor, socially inferior, untainted by bourgeois values. Only one of them, a hairdresser, is socially a notch higher than the others. This "women's hairdresser," according to the man/woman Carlo 2, is the least likeable of the bunch (176). The hairdresser Gianfranco is "a bit bourgeois, as his name implie[s]." He is less authentic than the others. This young man is probably less attractive also because of his feminine profession. These young men's "humility" lies in their being like dogs. Like dogs, these men are faithful to a pristine home that is lost forever. Humility as an element of prebourgeois poverty was the spirit reigning in and defining the original home. These deities/dogs meet at night on the outskirts of the city for a sterile encounter with a modern monster, before returning to their hell.

Ironically, in "Note 55" of *Petrolio*, it is Carlo 2 who acts like a "humble" and "faithful" dog, ready and willing to serve his masters. The sex



he has with these men sees him either on his knees lapping, licking, and sucking the men's sexual organs, or on all fours while he is penetrated "doggy style" (like a sheep; *alla pecorina*, in Italian; 177).<sup>97</sup> In Carlo 2's perverted body, humility becomes humiliation, and faithfulness becomes sexual passivity. We could thus say that Carlo 2, his male/female body, and his sexual behavior are a perverse mockery of the original and now lost "home." Carlo 2 is at once man and woman (father and mother), the hypothetical founders of "home," but also the humble and faithful Lares and Penates of this nonexistent "home" (the deities who, like dogs, protect the household). Instead of being part of home, Carlo 2 embodies the rejection of the pristine home. He serves these men who come from the Lower World (in the sense of "Netherworld" but also of a world of a lower status), but their sexuality shows how incredibly distant their Lower World is from Carlo 2's world. Carlo 2's numerous and repetitive sex acts with these men obsessively reenact, expose again and again, this everlasting rift between the now of a perverted reality (Carlo 2) and the then of "home" (the deities from the Lower World).

In a subsequent section of *Petrolio* that I analyze later, we find a second allusion to the Netherworld, when Carlo 1 actually enters and walks through some sort of "Underworld" accompanied by a young man called the Shit and his girlfriend Cinzia. The Shit is a companion of the demons who ascend from the Netherworld to be serviced by Carlo 2. The demons of Carlo 2 and the Shit, Carlo 1's Virgil to hell, share the same background. They are both poor young men from the poor neighborhood of Rome. In his description of Carlo 1's journey through hell, Pasolini stresses that the mother rules over the Netherworld. The centrality of the mother is already evident, albeit indirectly, in Carlo 2's sexual encounter with these young Lares and Penates. These divine presences from antiquity watch over the household, the realm of the mother. They come from the mother's subterranean land and recall the myth of Mother Earth. In the mythic stories recounting the experience of a hero descending into the depths of the earth, Eliade writes, "to enter her [Mother Earth's] body is equivalent to descending *alive* into the depths of the earth, that is, into Hell."<sup>98</sup>

It should be clear that the distance between the male deities of the night and the perverted Carlo is not merely due to their different sexual orientation. This would be a gross simplification of Pasolini's text. Carlo 2's perversion is the perversion of these "late" times, as Orpheus writes in his notebook in Pasolini's *Argonautika*. Carlo 2 is what we all are *now*. To clarify this point, it is useful to recall that, among the books found in the suitcase that had been stolen from the leftist intellectual while on a

train with the spy Pasquale, the narrator also mentions Sandor Ferenczi's *Thalassa: A Theory of Genitality*.<sup>99</sup> In this important book, Ferenczi investigates the mythic, psychological, and physiological meanings of *phallus* and *vagina*, which signify cosmic symbols. In particular, Ferenczi insists on the "catastrophe of birth" and "its repetition in the act of coitus." Ferenczi holds that we should "regard the phallus as a miniature of the total ego, as the embodiment of a pleasure-ego, and . . . this duplication of the ego is for the narcissistic ego the fundamental prerequisite of love." The identification between the phallus and the "pleasure-ego" leads Ferenczi to the conclusion that the act of coitus is "an attempt on the part of the ego . . . to return to the mother's womb, where there is no such painful disharmony between ego and environment. . . . The sex act achieves this transitory regression."<sup>100</sup>

As Enrico Capodaglio correctly states, psychoanalysis plays a fundamental narrative role in *Petrolio*.<sup>101</sup> Schizophrenia is the founding concept of the novel. In his fixation with the young male deities' phallus, Carlo 2 repeatedly lives the always-failed attempt to enter the realm of the phallus, the "pleasure-ego" through which he could bring back the original "home." For Carlo, the male deities' penis exists only as an erected phallus ready to return "home." It is however essential to understand that this rift between the male deities and Carlo 2 has also a mythic connotation. Again, Carlo 2 is what humankind is *now*. As Ferenczi says, "[I]n symbolic or indirect forms of expression on the part of the psyche or the body, there are preserved whole portions of buried or otherwise inaccessible history—much in the manner of hieroglyphic inscriptions from out of the prehistoric past."<sup>102</sup>

The phallus of a young man returning one night from the Lower World is for Carlo 2 a "hieroglyphic inscriptio[n]" that holds the secret of his, Carlo 2's, present existence. The division founding *Petrolio* (the intellectual Carlo dying and splitting into two Carlos) is the "original," mythic division between the time of the Lares and Penates—a classical time when male deities lived on earth (the time of Orpheus and the Argonauts)—and the present, "late" time.

Let us examine the first sexual encounter between Carlo 2 and his male deities:

[T]he first to come up behind Carlo was Sandro. Carlo, squatting on the hard, dry chamomile plants, turned to look at him. . . . In vain did his [Carlo's] heart within his breast perceive the miracle /before him/ ("feeling," all around, that field shading into the crystalline solitude of the sky, that moon brightly distant from its faithful evening star); his heart was cruelly filled . . . with this consciousness. . . . [Carlo] went down on

his knees before Sandro and waited, expressionless and as if detached. . . . Sandro was, for his part, a little shy. . . . [Sandro] was perhaps barely sixteen; and in fact in his eyes sparkled with the smile not only of a boy but of a boy who practices the good manners his mother has taught him: a mother from the people, for whom a good upbringing is naturally an instinctive, deep-rooted politeness. This maternal politeness. . . had remained attached to him [Sandro] like a smell. ("Note 55," 167–68)

The narrator presents Carlo as faithful in his adoration. When Sandro approaches him, Carlo is crouching down, expecting the imminent event of a "miracle." The sky is a "crystalline solitude" and the moon is "distant" from the evening star. Sandro walks toward the base human creature as a divinity who deigns to listen to his call. But, as we have already seen, this deity is "humble" and "shy," like a new Adam who has been asked to leave a divine enclosure to walk through an uncharted territory. Sandro wears the divine smile of "the mother of the people" (*una madre del popolo*), whose teaching is an "instinctive . . . politeness."<sup>103</sup> Like a new Hermes, he is a divine messenger, and his message concerns the mother. And like one of the Lares or Penates, he also announces the "politeness" of the woman, who signifies the divine calmness of "home." Sandro has the "smell" of the woman who is also a mother.

In the poem "Memorie" in *L'usignolo della Chiesa Cattolica* (The nightingale of the Catholic Church), Pasolini makes explicit the identification between sex with young men and the evocation of the absent mother: "The world is in the shadow / of your pale smile / of a young mother" (*il mondo è nell'ombra / del tuo tiepido riso / di madre giovinetta*).<sup>104</sup> The encounter with the mother can only take place in the "shadow" of the world (an open field at night) and through the bodies of men who are sons, that is, men whose presence recalls the absent mother (they carry the smell of the mother): "I fall in love with bodies / who have my flesh / of a son" (*M'innamoro dei corpi/ che hanno la mia carne/ di figlio*).<sup>105</sup>

Sandro's phallus is "naturally" excited. Having a hard time taking it out of his pants, he comments, "It's already erect" (168). Sandro's penis is the phallus "erected" to symbolize the son's yearning for the mother's womb. Sandro's phallus is indeed a vision, a miracle occurring before the "pious" Carlo, who is already "on his knees":

Carlo's heart was in tumult at the sight [*visione*] of that cock—big, /pale/ [*chiaro*], almost luminous in its pigment [*quasi luminoso nel suo pigmento*]. . . with the skin drawn over the tip, which was just barely red, and slightly chapped because of an odorless down, a sign that it was some time since Sandro "had come." . . . [Sandro's cock] was pushing out and up, uncovering even more desperately the clear, dry, pinkish

tip. . . [Carlo] merely raised his head and looked for an instant into Sandro's face, murmuring happily and somewhat affectedly "My love," to ingratiate himself. In that instant he had time to see Sandro and to contemplate what he was in that moment of his life. (168–69)

Sandro's phallus is a "vision" for Carlo waiting on his knees. The young man's phallus has a luminosity that recalls the "crystalline solitude" of the night sky and the "moon" distant from the evening star. A moonlike luminosity emanates from the youth's phallus, which has "appeared" to Carlo 2. Raising his head, Carlo 2 "contemplat[es]" Sandro's face as if the face and the phallus were two manifestations of the same deity. Carlo 2 contemplates how the deity Sandro "appears" before him in that precise instant.

By making Sandro come, Carlo 2 performs a double role. On the one hand, he gives the young deity's phallus the pleasure it would feel in the act of going back "home." Carlo 2 serves the deity's phallus, whose essential goal is the return to the "mother of the people." On the other hand, Carlo 2's mouth perversely functions as the womb to which the phallus returns. "My love," Carlo murmurs to the young man, as if Carlo were the young man's spouse ready to be impregnated. In reality, Carlo can only contemplate the phallus of the young deity and make it come, in a sterile act of ejaculation that mimics a false return to the mother.

Sandro forces his member into Carlo 2's mouth and, with one hand on Carlo's shoulder and the other on his nape, Sandro takes full control of the man/woman's head and makes him swallow his semen. When Sandro takes his member out of Carlo's mouth, this is what Carlo sees:

Carlo . . . looked at Sandro's cock, a few inches from his nose: in that condition, already a little soft, it seemed even bigger; and then there was the translucence of the semen and the saliva, which gave a kind of bestial and obscene lividness to the color of the skin; and yet there was something sacred in that oily liquid. Carlo raised his eyes to Sandro's face again for an instant. It was another instant equal to a century of contemplation. (170)

The narrator again creates a parallel between Sandro's member and his face as two parts of the same divinity that Carlo 2 feels compelled to contemplate. It is interesting that at this point the narrator remarks that Sandro's member is "obscene." The phallus is obscene because, in that pretense of intercourse with Carlo (his mouth used as a vagina), the phallus has exposed its hidden goal (a mythic return to the "mother

of people"). Furthermore, after ejaculating in Carlo 2's mouth, Sandro's phallus recalls a fetus. After the "intercourse" with Carlo 2, the phallus has become bigger, livid, and covered with a layer of oily liquid (semen and saliva) that gives it a "sacred" translucence. After mimicking a sexual intercourse by "choking" the man/woman, Sandro's phallus gives life to itself, as its own offspring. Carlo seems as if rapt in spirit while he looks at Sandro's member for the last time: "It was another instant equal to a century of contemplation" (*Fu un altro attimo pari a un secolo di contemplazione*).<sup>106</sup>

Carlo 2's mouth, the sexual organ of his sterility, more explicitly recalls the pains of labor in the third sex encounter, with Claudio:

This time, too, his heart was in a tumult, because the cock always appeared in the form of a miracle. . . . Claudio's [cock] was nice and big. . . . He stuck it in Carlo's mouth violently, making it penetrate to the back of the palate . . . causing him [Carlo] to retch. . . . Two or three times Carlo was on the point of vomiting, his eyes full of burning tears; and several more times, against his will, from his mouth . . . [came] groans and belches or retching sounds. (173, 174)

Claudio is the first of the twenty men to penetrate Carlo 2 from behind. This particular encounter is of great interest because it fully reveals Carlo's androgynous nature, although it is not strictly androgynous because in "Note 55" Carlo 2 does not have male and the female organs at the same time. Yet the modality of Carlo's sexual interaction with Claudio is androgynous. As if in a dream, Carlo mutates almost from sentence to sentence, from shot to shot (if we had to use cinematic terms). In this "diluted reel of film," Carlo is at once a submissive homosexual man and a female prostitute:

Then suddenly he [Claudio] moved a step away from Carlo, holding his cock in his hand as if to hide it from Carlo's sight, and in his rough peasant's voice he said, "Turn around." Carlo understood /in a lightning flash/ (*fulmineamente*), and docile, almost distressed [*quasi afflitto*], he turned. . . . Claudio was on him, and, with some difficulty, and not wanting Carlo to help, he began to enter him. He gave three or four heaves with blind force. . . . Then he ordered Carlo to "[l]ie down on the ground." . . . The smell of grass was stupefying [*stordiva*], but at the same time the hard stalks stuck Carlo in the stomach [*ventre*], in the neck [*collo*]. The cosmos viewed with eyes glued to the ground was even more absolute. . . . The moon was behind him. Carlo was able to think about this while on him Claudio, as if he did not exist, tried whatever he felt like doing. . . . [H]e plunged his sex so deep into the /woman's/ belly [*ventre*] that he could go no further. (174–75)<sup>107</sup>

In chapter 2, we saw that Pasolini reinvents the biblical episode of Lot and the destruction of Sodom. In *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, Lot's daughters become pillars of salt when the men of Gomorrah, the city dominated by heterosexuality, force them to turn around. In this passage from *Petrolio*, the act of being penetrated from behind seems to hold some secret connotation: "Carlo understood /in a lightning flash/." *Fulmineamente*, the adverb used by Pasolini, recalls the immediacy of a divine punishment (a lightning flash), when the woman or women of the biblical event (Lot's wife or daughters) "turn around." We saw that in *Porn-Theo-Colossal* the women's transformation into stones signifies the impossibility of the sexual relationship. The women are forced to "turn away," so to speak, from the fertility of sexual intercourse.

Carlo 2 experiences this form of penetration as a fall into an "absolute" in which the light of the moon (Sandro's phallus has a similar luminosity) has withdrawn ("behind him"). The luminescence of the moon is removed from Carlo, who is now the passive receptacle of a violence that erases him/her. Carlo is "intoxicated" (the smell of grass "*stordiva*"), while the "hard stalks" pierced him in the belly (*ventre*) and in the neck/mouth (remember the brutal thrusts of Claudio's phallus deep into his throat). When he is penetrated from behind, Carlo is thrown into an abyss of extinction. The light of the moon is "behind" him while the man is raping him; his body is violated (the "hard stalks" pierce his abdomen and neck) as if he is a new Saint Sebastian. At the apex of this violation (Claudio's phallus could go no deeper), we encounter a reference to Carlo 2's belly as "the woman's belly." It is crucial to note, however, that Pasolini uses the same word, *ventre* (belly) to indicate both the male Carlo's low abdomen pierced by the "hard stalks" and the female Carlo's vagina penetrated by Claudio from behind.

The long sequence of sexual violence to which Carlo 2 subjects himself reveals its meaning in a seemingly secondary passage in which two young men appear to Carlo 2 as close friends who need to get home early. The two men announce to the man/woman Carlo 2 that they need to leave soon:

[A] dark-haired boy who . . . lived nearby [approached:] "Me and my friend gotta go, or we're gonna be late," he told Carlo when he got close to him (/there is no need to say/ that he, too, arrived at a run). "Who is your friend?" asked Carlo. . . . "He's that blond, with the part on the side," said the dark one. . . . Over in the group of twenty—some of whom had sat down—a blond head was distinguishable immediately, at first glance, under the now almost solemn light of the moon, which had reached <its zenith>. "If we get home after midnight, our mother will kill us," added the dark-haired one. (178)

There is an apparent contradiction between the beginning of this passage, where the two young men are friends, and the later part, when Fausto ("the dark-haired boy") speaks of "our mother." The core of this encounter between the two men and the man/woman Carlo is in fact "our mother." I mentioned the importance of the two young men's imminent departure. The English version ("If we get home after midnight, our mother will kill us") is a valid translation of the original Italian, which however betrays a second, decisive meaning. What Fausto says is "*Se arrivamo dopo mezzanotte nostra madre ce s'incula*," which literally means "If we get home after midnight our mother is going to fuck us in the ass."<sup>108</sup> This vulgar expression is very common in Rome (the dialect spoken by Fausto), but it is impossible not to notice that "to fuck in the ass" (*inculare*) is exactly what is going there, in the open, at night.

The entire new encounter between the two boys and the woman/man Carlo 2 is premised upon the idea of "our mother," who will penetrate us from behind. Right before meeting Fausto and his friend-brother, Carlo had been overwhelmed by a great sense of melancholy while looking at the phallus of the hairdresser Gianfranco, who had possessed Carlo 2 "like a dog" (177). When the hairdresser pulls out, Carlo 2 "gazed at it [his penis], [and] a sudden feeling of <love> seized him, as if pouring down on him from the cosmos. . . . In that so ordinary penis, he [Carlo] . . . saw those he had lost forever" (177, 178). The encounter with the two boys is introduced by an unmistakable dirge to the "lost phallus." Carlo 2's melancholy has a universal tone. It "pour[s] . . . from the cosmos." Let us remember that the moon accompanies every sex act performed in that open field.<sup>109</sup> When Carlo 2 meets the first of the two boys, the moon has an "almost solemn light" and has reached "its zenith." The moon, the female "planet" of melancholy for the Romantics, the planet of a dark light, is at the very center of the sky. The "solemn," maternal moon dominates Carlo 2's melancholy and his repeated attempts to retrieve all the phalluses "he had lost forever."

It is also important to note that Fausto, and his friend as well, is a "boy" (*ragazzino*). He is dominated by "our mother" and shows an "inevitable boy's chastity" (*la sua forzata castità di ragazzo*).<sup>110</sup> This youth comes to the man/woman Carlo 2 as a messenger of a maternal "chastity," that is, the chastity of a male youth who is in perfect symbiosis with the mother. For Pasolini, "chastity" is also the deepest unconscious drive of the homosexual man who respects "the sanctity of the mother."<sup>111</sup> It is significant that it is during his sexual intercourse with Fausto that we read of Carlo being "fecundated":

Fausto knelt on him, then mounted him; with his own hands he looked for the /eternal/ orifice. . . . He [Fausto] came as if transported in ecstasy, letting go inside Carlo's body and spilling his seed perhaps for one of the first times in his life. "You got a nice ass," he said at the end, getting up. . . . Fausto didn't move. "Pay us first," he said, "'cause we gotta go." Carlo understood: he took out of his pocket four thousand lire; he gave two thousand to Fausto and two thousand to Gustarello [Fausto's friend], who had meanwhile arrived, fresh as a rose. (180)

Rather than "spilling his seed," Fausto "fecundates" (*fecond[a]*) Carlo 2.<sup>112</sup> We also learn that this fecundation is perhaps one of the first in Fausto's young life. This early fecundation is, however, linked to the youth's need to go back home early. We know that Fausto and his friend, like all the other young men at this sex meeting, are Lares and Penates, the deities of the household. They cannot help but go back home, because home is where they belong. But what kind of fecundation can possibly occur between this young deity of the household and the man Carlo, whose female sexual organ is nothing but a slit folded as if to cover its shameful nature? We are reminded of the ambiguous and unnatural character of Fausto's fecundation when we hear his comment about Carlo's "nice ass." Moreover, Fausto reminds the "prostitute" Carlo that he, Carlo, has to pay them (Fausto and his friend) right away because their mother is waiting for them at home. In no other passage of the lengthy "Note 55" are two men mentioned together. Fausto and Gustarello are "brotherly" friends. They are friends who share the same mother. They evoke a home that needs to be restored immediately. In a sense, we could say that Carlo 2 pays their fare back home, to that Lower World where everything finishes up.

We have already discussed the sterility of Carlo 2's feminization. I have contrasted Carlo 2's metamorphosis with that of Schreber, who becomes a woman to breed a new species of human beings. However, I must make a point about Carlo 2's sterile womanhood. The night encounter with the young men is also, as the narrator makes clear, a sort of Sabbath where the witch Carlo 2 meets with his night deities. It is thanks to his unnatural condition that Carlo 2 is able to conjure up these spirits of the night. It is his/her sterile life, his/her being "against nature" (a man with something like breasts and a vagina) to which the spirits from the Lower World are drawn. The sex these male deities have with the freak Carlo does not infringe upon the "home" these gods symbolize and defend. In fact, their abuse of Carlo 2 underscores the unbridgeable gap (the "slit") between the Lower World and Carlo 2's world.



The moon, the symbol of melancholy and womanhood, the symbol of the mother, watches over the repeated rapes that night. Carlo 2 perceives his sexual submission to these male deities as a form of worship of some divine presences that come but need to return home early. Carlo 2 senses the absence of the phallus, the mark of both the young deities and “our mother” who possess them, exactly while he is contemplating it. It is thus evident that, unlike Schreber, Carlo 2 is meant to give life to something that is not a new breed. Both Schreber and Carlo 2 are unique, special human beings. Carlo 2 brings to the fore (gives life to) a revenant, the image of a maternal home that is gone forever. This home ruled by the mother is what is natural and divine. All the divine young men who rape Carlo 2 are expressions of this mythic and natural existence that comes back during a night Sabbath as demons coupling with the witch Carlo 2. Paradoxically, the monster man/woman Carlo 2 is in the privileged position of summoning the pristine “home” that, in our “late” times, is nowhere to be found.

### Carlo 1's Metamorphosis

The narrative shift following Carlo 2's night of sexual encounters expands Pasolini's concept of “home.” Returning from his trip to the Orient, Carlo 1 realizes that Carlo 2 has disappeared. Carlo 2 is not waiting for him in the apartment the two of them share (“Note 61: Karl Is Gone,” 199). The sexual transformation of the two Carlos is probably the best-known aspect of this complex novel. Like Carlo 2, Carlo 1 undergo some sort of sexual metamorphosis, whose nature and consequences are extremely different from Carlo 2's. Carlo 1's sex change is announced by melancholy. At his arrival in Rome, Carlo 1 mourns the loss of Carlo 2, his “poor dog Karl” (200).<sup>113</sup> But along with the loss of Carlo 2, Carlo 1 also begins to “empty himself.” The narrator uses this expression when he comments on Carlo 1's progressive loss of power within ENI, the important state company for which he works. In other words, whereas Carlo 2's transformation resulted from his servile response to his sexual drive, Carlo 1 acquires a female nature after a double loss of power: power over Carlo 2 and power within the state company. The narrator speaks of this second loss as follows: “The position Carlo had reached in the ENI hierarchy [and] his power: . . . in a few months they were being emptied [*andarono svuotandosi*]” (200).<sup>114</sup>

Carlo 1's feminization is a progressive loss, a progressive “emptying of oneself.” We have already noticed that Carlo 2's sex change involved the

loss of his male organs. Carlo 1 experiences something very similar, but his loss is identified with the Pauline concept of *kenosis*. In Philippians 2:7, Paul writes, [Jesus] emptied himself (*kenosen*), taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men." *Kenosis* is the core of sainthood according to the apostle Paul. To become a saint means to empty oneself, that is to erase one's own identity so that the divine may fill it with His own will. A saint is an empty vessel. Pasolini explicitly cites the short passage from Paul's epistle to the *Philippians* in one of the very last notes of the novel, where he comments on Carlo's numerous dreams. In "Note 130," the narrator explains that a "mute character" often visits Carlo's dreams (457). In a footnote, Pasolini reminds the reader that, according to Freud, in dreams muteness often symbolizes death. One morning, after Carlo woke up, this mute presence began to speak through Carlo's mouth. One of the statements that comes out of Carlo's mouth is, "Having found himself in the mold of a human being, he emptied himself" (this was reminiscent of Saint Paul, I think the letter to the Philippians)."

The loss of the male genitals in Carlo 2 acquires a different connotation in Carlo 1. We have already noticed Carlo 1's mourning the unexpected disappearance of Carlo 2: "Carlo felt . . . that there was no hope of Karl's return, that he was finished with Karl forever" ("Note 62," 201). Carlo 1 decides to take a walk to the places Carlo 2 used to visit at night in his search for sex partners. Carlo 1 thinks of picking up a prostitute, but a violent physical reaction overwhelms him, which unquestionably recalls the apostle Paul's mysterious illness in *Saint Paul*:

The sharp pain that all day had pierced his guts became, if possible, still more painful and was transformed into a feeling of nausea. . . . [H]e vomited; or rather he tried to vomit, but nothing came out. Surely he was not made to take the place of a man of another nature or at least compelled to another experience. His "private" life must undoubtedly be considered over. There remained for him only to choose . . . to be solely "public" and therefore "holy" [*santo*]. (203)<sup>115</sup>

Carlo 1 "vomits nothing" (*senza vomitare nulla*) as a sign of the nothing that is his inner emptiness. Carlo 1, the high-ranking representative of ENI, cannot be the "servant" of Carlo 2. Carlo 1 cannot fill his emptiness by pretending to be someone else, someone who can give free rein to his sexual drive. The "sharp pain" Carlo 1 has been feeling the whole day is a sign of the emptiness that is taking hold of his being. Similar to an anorexic, Carlo 1 refuses to "absorb" a role that is foreign to him. The sex Carlo 1 will have once his sexual transformation is complete will be dom-

inated by emptiness and loss. Instead of a series of unbridled sex gatherings, the excruciating solitude of an abandoned lover will be Carlo 1's experience of femininity. His "holiness," as the narrator writes, will translate into a powerful, oneiric activity that culminates in two sequences of long apocalyptic visions, which I examine in the last part of this chapter.

The first "symptom" of Carlo 1's feminization is similar to Carlo 2's metamorphosis—a sudden disappearance of the phallus. During a business dinner with conservative Catholic and neo-Fascist politicians, "Carlo suddenly stopped feeling his penis as flesh. The physical <path> between him and his penis, that is, the underpants and pants, seemed to have suddenly lost their capacity as inanimate intermediaries, . . . and the drop of pleasure always vaguely burning at the tip, under the skin . . . seemed to have evaporated" ("Note 64bis," 209). Whereas Carlo 2 experiences his metamorphosis as a sexual intoxication fixated on the phallus, Carlo 1's feminization makes him a passive receptacle of internal visions, disclosures of a universal and apocalyptic nature. The division between the two Carlos mirrors their different but complementary reactions to their feminization. The first symptom of Carlo 2's transformation was the feeling of some heavy weight pressing his chest. The appearance of the breasts preceded Carlo 2's realization of the absence of the penis. Carlo 2 first perceives a new sense of "chastity" that paradoxically coincides with a complete abandonment to sexual intercourse. However, the sex Carlo 2 gives himself to is the pleasure of (other) men. Similar to a mother, Carlo 2 senses the presence of the breasts as a "chaste" physical request to suckle men, although what happens is totally the opposite. On the contrary, Carlo 1 first senses the loss of his penis. Carlo 1 is a man of power, as the narrator reminds us ("Note 64bis," 209). His process of (female) enlightenment is not about nourishing or suckling, it is about sensing a radical *kenosis*, the act of being emptied or emptying oneself to the divine. As we shall see in a moment, Carlo 1 experiences sex as abandonment and isolation, as the lack of the beloved. It is that form of melancholy that Pasolini attributes to the bourgeoisie. For Carlo 1, feminization consists of the inner visions that this unique form of *kenosis* grants to the (female) mind.

### Carlo's Vision of a Medieval Garden

In "Note 65: Prologue to the Medieval Garden (from the "Mystery")," Pasolini introduces Carlo 1's first "vision . . . whose protagonist was his father" (209, 212). Pasolini constructs this vision as a modern form of

*theater of memory*, which he certainly found discussed in Giordano Bruno's well-known treatises *De umbris idearum* (On the shadows of ideas), *De imaginum compositione* (On the composition of images), but also in *De gli eroici furori* (On the heroic frenzies).<sup>116</sup> "An angel," the narrator explains, leads Carlo 1 "in front of the garden of his house" (211). Carlo stands outside the image of a closed space (a "medieval garden") in which a series of statuelike figures offer themselves to his sight. As Bruno states at the beginning of *De umbris idearum*, the art of memory is similar to an "architecture" (*architectura*) through which the mind is invited to walk and to recognize (that is, to recall) symbolic images that together echo a hidden and universal message.<sup>117</sup> The figures standing in Carlo 1's garden are like statues in a Renaissance Italian garden. They have a static and moral composure. The father rules over the entire garden, including those figures that, as we will soon see, seem to contradict the father's all-encompassing power. Every aspect of the garden serves the father's intentions.

Carlo 1's vision is indeed a form of archetypal recollection, which comes to him thanks to his feminization. In the same note, Pasolini remarks that the "sacred figures" in the garden are inspired by Roberto Longhi's analyses of fourteenth-century Italian paintings. After "Cimabue, Stefano Fiorentino," Pasolini makes a vague reference to "spacious Giotto" (*Giotto spazioso*), which is the title of Longhi's famous study of Giotto's *Scrovegni Chapel*. In *Allegories of Contamination*, Patrick Rumble emphasizes the importance of Longhi's essays on Giotto for Pasolini. Rumble underscores that, through Longhi, Pasolini appreciated Giotto's experimentation "with various codes of representation," for instance, the creation of "multiple perspectives."<sup>118</sup> What is special about this particular essay? Longhi discusses two subtle "optical illusions" (*inganni ottici*) that Giotto creates within the chapel.<sup>119</sup> On the two sides of the apse, Giotto painted two gothic spaces closed off by two parapets that lead the gaze up toward the two painted open windows. If we stand at the center of the chapel, Longhi remarks, we cannot help but see that these double false spaces "pierce" the walls and open the chapel to the outside. But this split and doubled space also "converges toward a center that runs along the 'real' depth of the apse."<sup>120</sup>

In Longhi's essay, Pasolini finds the description of a division painted on an interior space (remember the "diluted reel of film" projected on the screen of the schizophrenic's mind), which, however, points to an ideal, sacred center that reunites the two halves. The allusion to the essential theme of the entire novel is evident. What is also relevant is the central position that the viewer Carlo 1 takes vis-à-vis the entrance to the mysterious garden, in whose center Carlo 1 sees his father sitting "in

a realistic wicker garden chair" ("Note 65bis," 212). Carlo 1 is face to face with the father. The "medieval garden," as the narrator calls it, recalls a new and original Garden of Eden, in the center of which the "father" sits comfortably and, in contrast to the biblical story, imposes an everlasting stasis. What Carlo 1 contemplates resembles an old-fashioned family photo with the *pater familias* and his lady on the forefront. Carlo 1's feminization is under the aegis of the father. The disclosure of another sexuality does not lead Carlo 1 to an orgiastic evocation of the mother. Unlike Carlo 2's new sexuality, the feminization of Carlo 1 is dominated by the father.

Like Schreber, the two Carlos are indeed the two halves of a schizophrenic body. The two bodies born out of the dead middle-class Carlo at the beginning of the novel evoke a reunified, archetypical family. The two Carlos are also their own parents, but their concept of father and mother perversely mirrors the original rift that gave birth to the subsequent almost-twins. The two Carlos know and summon a reunified, familiar nucleus in which the father eternally bans the mother to whom he is eternally married. In other words, the two man/woman Carlos cannot help but embody the order of the world as a perennial union and a perennial opposition.

In the schizophrenic Carlos, the word *father* exists only insofar as it is linked and opposed to *mother*. Recall what R  heim says about the schizophrenic tendency to identify word and object. Remember too that *Petrolino* itself is the "form" of a missing original manuscript, of a missing original coherent unity. This novel-form makes visible an original absence. The two words *father* and *mother* are connected with each other. "Father" also means "absent mother."

Let us resume the analysis of the "medieval garden." Standing outside the garden, Carlo first sees the father married to Providence who "si[ts] beside the father." The figures appearing in the garden are lined up in four rows. In the forefront, the father sits next to his spouse, Providence. All the characters present in the garden are abstractions, "medieval," archetypical concepts, all of them evoking the order of the father. Providence, an out-of-time apparition, wears a "Romanesque tunic" (213). As in a family portrait, the mother Providence keeps her four small children before her. They are "four little Gods" whom the narrator hails as the "Gods of humble Italy." These were the gods that "peasants saw and used to reproduce in wood carvings, making them stiff, awkward, and childlike yet deliciously precious." These minor gods remind us of the Lares and Penates with whom Carlo 2 has sex at night in an open field. These new minor gods participate in the father's order. They used to

support "peasants" in their endeavors; they were part of the work force sustaining the father's social system.

In the second row, right behind the father, we see "Grace with her three daughters." Next to Grace, we find "her sister Parsimony, who resembled her" and has two children who play marbles. These kids are "normal, innocent" (214). The entire family in this picture is "normal," in the sense that it literally represents the exterior normalcy of the paternal order. We are truly visiting the Lacanian "garden" of the symbolic. This is the garden of the Eden created by the father.

The third area is "a circle a little farther back," behind the couple father-Providence in the forefront and the couple Grace and Parsimony behind the father. The first two perfectly balanced layers, focused on the father as main pivot of the whole familiar structure, seem to cover the third area in the background, where numerous opposite qualities gather in a circle: Obedience, Patience, Resignation, as well as Disobedience, Arrogance, and Villainy are "all sisters" with the same "plebeian and kind" (*plebei e gentili*) gestures (214).<sup>121</sup> These symbolic presences are aware of their being "unbecoming" and have an "almost gay feeling of shame for their own presence." Like the "normal" children of Parsimony, these contrastive qualities are subservient to the father. They stand in the back. With the adjective "plebeian" (*plebei*), the narrator also indicates that they do not participate in the corruption of the bourgeois system. These qualities know that they can be "very bad," but, like good children, they express an "almost gay" (*quasi gaio*) kind of "shame." They do not infringe upon the original order of the father.

Pasolini's "medieval garden" recalls a *theater of memory* in the tradition of Giulio Camillo's *Idea del teatro* and Giordano Bruno's *De umbris idearum*. We are invited to visualize an inner space populated by archetypal figures that serve as signposts to guide us through the landscape of myth. The figures next to the circle of good and bad qualities are much more detailed and resemble real presences much more closely. We encounter a "Horse, also a God" that is "ready to watch over the father." This horse might be a "stallion or a cart horse or a saddle horse." Although the horse's role is not clear, it is evident that the animal is there to play some kind of servile role for the father. He could be the "stallion," the quintessential symbol of paternal dominion over the family, or simply the "cart horse" the father uses in his garden. Next to the horse we see two opposite figures. We first see "April, who h[o]lds in his hand an acacia flower, with its sharp . . . scent of human seed," and then "the white-haired God of Primroses," an old man with the "shoulder blades sticking out on his childlike back." This elderly man holds a glass

in his hand while reciting a poem “of which only the accents [are] heard, not the words.”

Let us remember what Pasolini writes about Michaux and his book made of “nonalphabetic signs,” in which the reader is asked to follow a graphic melody with no content. The old God of Primroses recites a poem made of pure “form” (accents with no words). The narrator explains that this old man has “an ironic look (surely not the look of an old bourgeois but that of a slightly mad peasant).” The glass he is holding might mean that the old man is giving a public reading of this abstract poetry (a glass of water for the poet reading his verses), which expresses a pure, natural form that can only come from a rural culture, untainted by modernity.

The image of the elderly poet reciting an unintelligible text could be also a reference to the final human figure mentioned in canto 29 of Dante’s *Purgatorio*, one of the texts present in the intellectual’s suitcase that was lost on the train. In this heavily doctrinal canto, the pilgrim Dante witnesses a long procession whose participants symbolize the ideal history of the Church (the books of the Old and New Testaments; the cardinal virtues; etc.). Like the medieval garden in *Petrolino*, the religious procession in *Purgatorio* 29 serves the father (the Father). This vision takes place in a forest that runs along the banks of the river Lethe. At the very end of the procession, the pilgrim sees an elderly man who walks alone and asleep (“*un vecchio solo / venir, dormendo*”).<sup>122</sup> With his intense expression, this elderly sleepwalker symbolizes the apocalypse. Similar to the elderly man in *Petrolino*, this man participates in the symbolic procession honoring the father’s order, but he is now asleep, because what he has to say concerns the future.

All the figures in Pasolini’s nocturnal garden serve the father, even when they seem to contradict the paternal ideology. We encounter this seeming paradox when we finally reach the back of the garden, where in the “opposite corners . . . were two other groups of Divinities” (215). Pasolini offers here a powerful, visually stunning portrait of the opposition between the son (Carlo 1 and Carlo 2) and the father. In the left corner at the back of the garden, we see “the Devil” accompanied by “the Son, the Hermaphrodite, the Anarchist, and Eros.” The irony of this set of deities is that they are all “without sex.” Moreover, they keep “their heads bowed,” and some of them even have “their wrists bound.” These castrated, erotic divinities echo Carlo 1’s castration. These are all synonyms for “Son,” also in the sense present in Brown’s *Love’s Body*. If the society of brothers, as Brown defines it, results from the son’s murder of the father, in this oneiric garden the father castrates the son, whose Eros

has moved back to the father. The hermaphrodite represented in this back corner of the garden is Carlo 1 himself. The father has demanded Carlo 1's feminization.

In the right corner, "were Divinities of a completely different type and nature." We see "the First Father, the State, Order, Folly." The group of deities gathered around the First Father, the narrator adds, "demand silence and prayer." Carlo 1's father does not "dare" look at the First Father, who is his archetype, or "if by chance he did turn toward [the First Father], it was with a look of complete and total subordination." The First Father stands behind Carlo 1's father, who senses his awesome presence.

Carlo 1, the son who becomes a woman, is able to see the First Father, whereas his father, who sits at the center of the garden, cannot because the First Father is in the back along with his synonyms State and Order. The soundtrack, so to speak, of this nocturnal vision is something like a "national anthem," which Carlo 1 hears as if during a national parade. This is the *mise-en-scène* of Carlo 1's feminization, of his turning into a castrated "real" man, that is, a woman, according to Pasolini's ideology. Carlo 1's metamorphosis springs from this mythic set that stages the family and its deities and, "in the back," the original, mythic separation between Eros, the Hermaphrodite, and the Son, on the one hand, and the First Father on the other.

"Among all these divinities," the narrator continues, there is "one I would call an outlaw or anomaly" (216). A very young man, "raised to a divine nature," wanders around the garden without having a specific location. This is the only deity with a very eloquent name: Salvatore Dulcimascolo. He is the "firstborn son of a Palermitan mother, who is proud of him." It is the first time we hear a reference to "mother" in the garden of Carlo 1's vision. Salvatore brings to the garden the original pride of the mother, who is however absent from this "medieval" space. The mother can only be absent, even though her presence is perceivable through her firstborn son. Salvatore Dulcimascolo is the name of a "Savior" (*Salvatore*) coming from the mythic South, who is in the garden on behalf of the mother, to whom he gives joy and pride. He is a "sweet masculine man" (*Dulcimascolo*) who walks through the garden as an outsider because of his social inferiority. However, Salvatore has an "ancient experience of corruption," not because he is intrinsically corrupt but because "the wealthy corrupt him" (218). These people's "sin" is in fact "the act itself [of initiating] their relationship with him."

Similar to the deities Carlo 2 encountered during a night of sex galore, the "Savior" Salvatore knows "corruption" (the young men were paid by



the man/woman Carlo 2 in exchange for sex) as something coming from the outside. But it would be wrong to believe that Salvatore does not belong in the father's Garden of Eden. Salvatore is in fact a "hired gunman of the Master Gods" ("Note 66," 223).<sup>123</sup> Rather than questioning the order of the father, this deity sent by the mother reaffirms the father's Garden of Eden. This is an important point for Carlo 1's vision but also for his feminization. Salvatore follows the father's orders. This minor god coming from the mother's mythic South is there in the night garden to make Carlo 1 into a woman, into something less than a real man.

Salvatore falls asleep, as if to invite Carlo 1's close contemplation of his body. Carlo 1's womanhood is revealed in this nonrelationship (Salvatore is unaware of Carlo 1's stare). Melancholy as lack of relationship is the core of Carlo 1's metamorphosis into a woman. The first symptoms of his transformation are similar to Carlo 2's: "He [Carlo 1] felt a profound grief, which was manifested in a pressure on his chest and a sense of emptiness in his belly [*ventre*], as when one feels dizzy [*come quando si provano le vertigini*]" (222).<sup>124</sup> It is revealing, though, that whereas Carlo 2 had experienced these symptoms in their merely physical connotation (he looked at himself in the mirror and with two fingers opened the lips of his wound/vagina), Carlo 1 senses the same symptoms as signs of a psychological condition. Grief and vertigo (*vertigine*) mirror the weight pressing his chest (his breasts) and the hole between his legs (the vagina).

The same feelings of sorrow and emptiness accompany Carlo 1's contemplation of Salvatore's crotch while the youth is asleep: "He only felt more acutely, and almost unbearably, the weight that pressed on his chest and the sense of emptiness . . . in the pit of his stomach [*in fondo al ventre*]." Carlo 1 experiences his womanhood as grief and vertigo exactly when he realizes that, perhaps because of some sexual dream, Salvatore has got an erection. Although the deity wears some modest pants that reveal his poor origins, "the form [of his erected penis] was almost perfectly legible in its disarming innocence" (223).<sup>125</sup> Salvatore is asleep, and his phallus is hidden in his pants. In Carlo 1's case, to be a woman means not to have and not to see the phallus. Like Carlo 2, Carlo 1 finally contemplates his female organs in front of a mirror, but for him the vagina is not a "fold" but rather a "nothingness" (*un nulla*) covered by a bush of hair ("Note 58," 227).<sup>126</sup> In his description of Carlo 2's vagina, the narrator did not mention the "vulva" that hides the "nothingness" of the vagina. Carlo 2 had in fact no hair at all around his sex. His vagina was exposed as a fold ready to open up like lips. Carlo 1, on the contrary, has a bushy vulva and huge breasts. Both Carlos have big breasts, but again in Carlo 2's case we are given a more physical, less abstract,

definition. Carlo 2's breasts are "no longer young" and "hung from his chest."

### Carlo 1's Love for Carmelo, the "Savior"

Carlo 1's initiation to his new (female/male homosexual) sexuality is at once similar and radically different from Carlo 2's. The place is basically the same, an open field at night. The social difference between the woman/man and his/her partner is also there. During another political dinner in a fancy restaurant, Carlo 1 meets a young waiter, Carmelo, who could be the incarnation of the god Salvatore. Carlo 1 returns to the restaurant several times until the two hook up and drive to a desolate open area. A first basic difference lies in the bourgeois nature of this sex date. Not an anonymous encounter, Carlo 1 and Carmelo know each other and drive together to the field. Carlo 1 has also Carmelo's phone number. After the sex, Carmelo does ask for money, but he turns down Carlo 1's exceedingly generous offer. He explains that he only needs some extra cash to pay the rent. The premises for some sort of real relationship are also present. Carmelo even suggests that they meet again, possibly with a woman, whom Carmelo "would satisfy first and then him [Carlo 1]" ("Note 62," 254). It is the bourgeois Carlo 1 who turns down Carmelo's unbecoming offer. Carlo is still a man, even after his apparent sexual transformation. What makes him like a woman is his homosexuality.

The fundamental difference between the two Carlos' sexual experiences, however, lies in the fact that Carmelo, unlike the men in the field with Carlo 2, penetrates Carlo 1 as a woman, face to face and not from behind: "With a gesture that he believed to be gentle but was in reality violent, [Carmelo] pushed Carlo to the ground, on his back, climbed onto him, and with blind fury found the vulva with his penis. While he was doing this, he uncovered Carlo's breasts and began to bite them desperately. The possession was rapid" (252). This "rapid possession" had been preceded by a gentle act of tender intimacy: "[Carmelo] looked him in the eyes for a moment, with a dim [*offuscato*] smile. A moment: then hugged him against his chest, squeezing with his hands spread. [It was] like a mother's embrace" (251).<sup>127</sup>

Unlike Carlo 2, Carlo 1 seems to be a woman who establishes a real, "bourgeois" connection with a "real" man, who looks him in the eyes and hugs him before possessing him and biting his breasts. The narrator describes Carlo 1's sex with Carmelo as heterosexual, as an intimate

coming together of a man and a woman. Rather than signifying actual, heterosexual intercourse, the sex between Carlo 1 and Carmelo appears as heterosexual because it indicates a profound, albeit temporary, symbiosis that, for Pasolini, only a heterosexual couple can attain. As I have already pointed out, the bourgeois Carlo 1's femininity can only coincide with melancholy and loss, with the grief and emptiness of his female sexual organs. At the end of their encounter, two mysterious "spirits" take Carmelo away as if for a quick and secret execution (256). The spirits seem to come from the father's garden, as if Carmelo knew them and could only obey them: "They were silent, as happens when an appointment has been agreed on among accomplices or when there is a relationship, irrevocably fixed, between victim and persecutors who belong to the same world" (257). The real mission of these spirits is in fact the withdrawal of Carmelo from Carlo 1. Remember that the deity Salvatore, who becomes Carmelo for Carlo 1, is a "gunman for the Master Gods." His mission is to reveal the true meaning of Carlo 1's feminization: the removal of the phallus and the subsequent melancholy (the grief and dizziness linked to Carlo 1's breasts and vagina).

As a vision had announced Carlo 1's metamorphosis (the medieval garden of the father), which leads to his sexual encounter with Carmelo, so does a second vision follow Carlo 1's first sexual experience as a woman. Unlike Carlo 2, Carlo 1 knows sexuality as the exclusive realm of melancholy, which leads him to a series of long visions. Let us recall the traditional connection between melancholy and prophetic insight, a central topic of Renaissance Neoplatonic philosophy.<sup>128</sup> Melancholy is a state of suspension, of in-between-ness, that Carlo 1 enters after the disappearance of Carmelo. His sexual aberration itself symbolizes this interval or pause between a past (his being a man) and an indistinct future (his feminization as a state of abandonment). "Perhaps," the narrator holds, Carlo 1 had "entered [the] *taedium vitae*," the nonspace of melancholy and depression. The narrator also sees a correspondence between melancholy (*taedium vitae*) and the concept of "epoché," the core of Husserl's philosophy: "The epoché, perhaps, the epoché was coming to pass" ("Note 63," 268, 269).

Pasolini offers a clear-cut definition of *epoché* in the article "Studio sulla rivoluzione antropologica in Italia" (Study on the anthropological revolution in Italy [1974]), part of the collection *Scritti corsari*. We discussed the main themes of this important essay in the chapter on *Porn-Theo-Colossal*. Speaking of the cultural "void" (*vuoto*) that has followed the erasure of the archaic culture of rural Italy, Pasolini contends

that "every form of historical continuity has been broken. The 'development,' which Power has pragmatically chosen, has constituted a sort of *epoché*, which in a few years has radically 'transformed' Italy."<sup>129</sup>

*Epoché* is thus a fracture rather than a suspension. This historical fracture, however, does not envision a new subsequent beginning. In Pasolini, this rupture becomes an atemporal, mythic condition. Although he intends to signify the modern distance from the mythic, "archaic" status of a premodern Italy, he in fact creates a new myth. If *myth* evokes *origin*, Pasolini's new myth revolves around a post-temporal origin. The creation of a new, post-archaic Italy summons a perennial "post" condition. *Epoché* becomes a synonym for "death."

Pasolini's concept of *epoché* is less a suspension than a "block," as we read in a later fragment:

A character created by dividing a person in two.

A character created as the synthesis of an infinite number of people or an infinite number of people created from the pulverization of a single one. In the first case there is order . . . and death; in the second case there is disorder and life.

In an intermediate case there is a block: that is the *Epoché*. ("Note 103a," 397)

The concepts of "order" and "disorder" apply both to Pasolini's new mythic history (a history with no future; a post-temporal condition) and to the single subject. The dichotomy between order and disorder, between a character as "synthesis" and a character as "pulverization" finds in the idea of *epoché* its medium point, where the subject is neither unity nor disunity, neither one nor many. In Carlo 1, *epoché*, or "block," is a liminal sexuality, in that he desires both to possess but also to be possessed. Carlo 1 at once remembers his past masculinity and feels the new urge to be penetrated. However, as the narrator explains, "being possessed is an experience cosmically opposite to that of possession" ("Note 65," 278). Carlo 1 is stuck between these two irreconcilable positions. It is also essential to understand that the narrator's definition of the two roles (the one who possesses and the one who is possessed) reflects a biased point of view. In a clearly Sadean vision, the narrator reads this impossible relationship from the point of view of the one who is possessed in male homosexual intercourse. According to the narrator, the one who possesses sees the passive man as "fatally limited," whereas the possessed man allegedly perceives the man who penetrates him as infinite: "The one who is possessed loses consciousness of the shape of his penis, of its limited wholeness, and feels it as an infinite and formless

means by which Something or Someone takes possession of him, reduces him to a possession, to a nothing that has no will except to be lost in that different Will which /annihilates him/."

The narrator's explicit reference to a homosexual anal penetration emphasizes the identification between the loss of the penis (the passive man) and the experience of annihilation and the loss of will. We could thus say that the impossible dialogue between the man who possesses (the one with the phallus) and the man who is possessed (the one who experiences the loss of the phallus; the feminized man, who identifies with every homosexual in Pasolini's view) is the truly impossible reconciliation between being annihilated by the (absent) phallus and becoming the infinite presence of the phallus. Carlo 1's "block" or *epoché* results from the remembrance of a whole (Carlo 1 as man) and a longing for annihilation (Carlo 1 as woman without Carmelo). Carlo 1 is neither a whole nor a nothingness, given that he is neither a phallic man nor a feminized man, because to be feminized means to experience the wholeness of the other's phallus, which is now absent (Carmelo's disappearance). Carlo 1's condition is essentially apocalyptic because it awaits its annihilation as the necessary completion of his identity.<sup>130</sup>

## Two Visions of Hell

Carlo 1 has two series of visions of the Netherworld, each having a distinctively apocalyptic nature. The first set of visions occurs at night at the Colosseum, a traditional place for homosexual encounters in Pasolini's times. Carlo 1 approaches some people he knows there: "His acquaintances were telling stories, as if the plague had burst upon the city and only in that circle, around the Colosseum, in the deserted night whipped by the north wind, did there remain any hope of survival, reduced, perhaps, to mere knowing and remembering. Listening to the words of those poor creatures, Carlo had a *Vision*" ("Note 70," 282; emphasis in original). "The plague" (*la peste*) has broken out, and the only possible way of survival lies in "knowing and remembering" there at the Colosseum. "The plague" speaks both of a divine punishment and a closure. A group of people gathers for a memorial at the place (Colosseum) that embodies and recalls an ancient past.

Carlo 1's nocturnal vision of a modern Inferno expands the narrator's discourse about the homosexual act of possessing and being possessed. The entire vision is under the aegis of the anus as the homosexual vagina, but also as the hole that gives birth to the feces/fetus. To understand this

visionary sequence of *Petrolio* is also necessary to read *La divina mimesis* (Divine mimesis), Pasolini's other incomplete attempt to write a modern version of Dante's *Inferno*. A fundamental difference must be borne in mind. Whereas in *La divina mimesis* Pasolini is a new pilgrim Dante who follows his guide through the circles of hell (his own conscience as a new Virgil), in *Petrolio* Carlo 1 is exclusively the gaze that observes the narration. As Robert Gordon points out, in *La divina mimesis* "Dante and Virgil are . . . played by two versions of Pasolini himself."<sup>131</sup> The pilgrim Pasolini is led through the infernal areas by his conscience, which appears as a "minor civic poet of the Fifties . . . unable to help himself, let alone another person" (*un piccolo poeta civile degli Anni Cinquanta . . . incapace di aiutare se stesso, figurarsi un altro*).<sup>132</sup>

In *La divina mimesis*, the journey through hell involves a narcissistic reflection between the poet Pasolini and his own image, which he describes in a self-pitying tone (a poor and isolated "minor poet").<sup>133</sup> Pasolini looks to his conscience as the visible guide (he is his own Virgil) who will help him fathom his role within a society that is itself doubled (the contemporary Italian society, whose meaning becomes visible if seen as a modern hell). Pasolini as guide and as pilgrim also mirrors Dante and Virgil. The doubled reference of Pasolini/Dante and Pasolini/Virgil enlightens the rapport Pasolini sees between his civic presence (Dante the pilgrim; Pasolini as engaged intellectual) and his writing (the guide Virgil), which accompanies the pilgrim Pasolini through hell.

In *Petrolio*, the journey to hell is an internalized event, which does not emphasize the guiding role of literature. We find no Virgil and no Dante. No reference is made to the redeeming role of reporting, transcribing, and sharing the pilgrim's insight. Like *La divina mimesis*, *Petrolio* presents a couple (in this case a young proletarian heterosexual couple, the Shit and Cinzia) that is both guide and pilgrim. The narrator also mentions three mysterious deities who are always behind Carlo 1 and serve as some sort of tour guides. In one instance, the narrator compares these gods to "the good Virgil" ("Note 72g," 329).<sup>134</sup> Carlo 1, who receives the vision, is a strange kind of pilgrim, because he merely witnesses the couple's trip through hell without interacting with them. They do not even seem to know that Carlo 1 is spying on them. The journey of the Shit and Cinzia through this dark area does not foreshadow any kind of redemption. The guides/pilgrims the Shit and Cinzia have nothing to teach or to reveal. They show hell to someone who stands in front of them, as if he were meditating on their image, as Pasolini did in *La divina mimesis* (the pilgrim Pasolini looking at his own image of "minor poet"). Pasolini compares Carlo 1's gaze to the gaze of a film director

who looks at the scene from behind the camera. Carlo 1 at once has a vision of hell and experiences hell as an external reality of which he is a mere spectator. Once again, the reference to the schizophrenic's "diluted reel of film" is an eloquent explanation of Pasolini's project.

The initial description in *Petrolio* unquestionably echoes *La divina mimesis*. In "Note 71" of *Petrolio*, we read,

In this first section of the Vision we see the scene as a whole. . . . In fact, in the Vision Scene there is no light. The light comes from behind and shines through the material the scene is made of. . . . As a result the scene is luminous, of an even, diffuse luminosity that has no shadow or half-light but, rather, tones. . . . For accuracy, the Scene of the Vision is evenly divided into an ordered series of subscenes, or Gironi, each of which has a different color. ("Note 71," 282–83)

Pasolini gives the same attention to the light of the scene in "Canto 1" of *La divina mimesis*:

At the age of forty, I realized I found myself in a very dark moment of my life. Everything I did in the "Selva" of the reality of the year 1963. . . . [T]here was a sense of darkness. . . . In that darkness, to be totally honest, there was something terribly luminous: the light of the old truth, if you will, the truth beyond which there is nothing else to say. Darkness like light. The light of that April morning. . . . when I arrived . . . at the cinema Splendid (or Splendor? or Emerald?).<sup>135</sup>

In both passages Pasolini speaks of the same sort of darkness/light. Both citations also focus on cinema. The autobiographical account in *La divina mimesis* is an explicit literary rewriting of the opening canto of *Inferno*. In a dark moment of his life Pasolini goes to the cinema Splendid. The light of that spring morning is not dark per se, but only as experienced by Pasolini, the first-person narrator. In cinematic terms, the first sentences from *La divina mimesis* would be a voice-over that would disclose the private feeling of the protagonist (Pasolini/Dante). We would also catch the ironic reference to the name of the cinema (Splendid or Splendor). Pasolini stands outside, in front of the name Splendid. The reference to the luminous nature of cinema also indirectly contrasts the narrator's speech with his inner darkness.

In *Petrolio*, the protagonist's dark light becomes the scene of a film. This paradoxical light becomes an objective condition. The dark light is both the author's construction and a reality, something that both the author and the viewer see. The Dantean dark "selva" has become the quality of the light itself. But it is also important that the light "comes

from behind." The scene is enlightened by the author's gaze, which tints the light before his eyes. As we noticed in Pasolini's *Argonautika*, the protagonist Carlo disappears within the scene. The narrator/Pasolini presents Carlo 1 as the director of this vision-film, and as director he plays no active narrative role. The vision in *Petrolio* continues as follows:

In this second section of the Vision we see characters whose movements act as a guide to the Vision itself. There is a young man, the Shit [*il Merda*], and his fiancée, whose name, it seems, is Cinzia. At the start of this Vision these two young people are passing the traffic light at the intersection of via Casilina and Via di Torpignattara. Carlo, the one who is watching, observes them coming /toward/ him: in fact, he is in the middle of Via di Torpignattara, on a cart with cork wheels, exactly like a director on a dolly. And since the two Protagonists of the Vision are, as I have said, coming toward him, the cart is being pulled backward along Via di Torpignattara at the same slow rate at which they move forward, so that the distance of the point of view is always the same. To turn again to film jargon, there is a long, slow, backward tracking shot. ("Note 71a," 283)<sup>136</sup>

In *La divina mimesis*, Pasolini's own "conscience" (*Coscienza*) is the pilgrim's new Virgil, who guides him through the circles of hell.<sup>137</sup> His conscience has a pale and somber mien, which derives from his "sorrow for all those people who live down there in confusion" (*pietà per tutta quella gente laggiù, che vive nella confusione*). In *Petrolio*, the two protagonists (the Shit and his fiancée Cinzia) are both guides and pilgrims. I have also mentioned that Carlo 1 has a second sort of Virgil, the three gods (one of the three is silent) who sit behind Carlo 1 on the cart with cork wheels. The couple Dante/Virgin or Pasolini/his conscience in *La divina mimesis* becomes now a poor, proletarian, heterosexual couple whose role as guides is very questionable. The couple serve as guides simply because they live in the post-war working-class areas on the south side of Rome where this new hell is located.

The dynamic relationship between Pasolini and his conscience or between Dante and Virgil is absent in the couple Shit/Cinzia in *Petrolio*. The three deities behind Carlo 1 might recall the Virgil of *La divina mimesis*, but they limit themselves to naming each *girone* or *bolgia*. In his description of the third *bolgia*, the narrator mentions that the two gods (excluding the one who is always silent) are having an "interior monologue," which "reverberates in Carlo, who is absent because of the trauma" ("Note 72c," 324). In *Petrolio*, we thus find two Virgils and two pilgrims. Virgil is at once the couple the Shit/Cinzia, who give a tour of hell, and the three gods who sit behind Carlo and speak within his



mind. In this context, Carlo is indeed the schizophrenic witnessing what is said (the two gods) and shown (Shit and Cinzia walking through hell) inside his mind. But we also have two pilgrims: Carlo 1, who looks at the scene as a film director, and the couple who is within the scene. To see (Carlo 1) and to be (the couple Shit/Cinzia) are two distinct functions. Similarly, to show (the couple) and to understand (the three gods) are two independent tasks of this double Virgil. A double Virgil and a double pilgrim walk through the inferno of *Petrolio*. Doubleness, duplicity, division constitute the “form” of this new hell, and of the entire novel.

It is essential to consider also the viewer's perspective. Carlo 1 “observes” the scene from a “cart with cork wheels, exactly like a director on a dolly.” Carlo 1 faces the Shit and Cinzia, who are the “guides” of a pilgrim who does not participate in the story. The “sorrow” (*pietà*) of Pasolini's conscience in *La divina mimesis*, reminiscent of the sorrow of the pilgrim in Dante's *Inferno*, is nowhere to be found in *Petrolio*. As the narrator makes clear, the “distance” between Carlo 1 on the cart and the couple Shit/Cinzia “is always the same.” The description of this “long, slow, backward tracking shot” in which the two protagonists expose themselves to the gaze of Carlo 1 in a crude, frontal vision recalls the long and slow backward tracking shot in *Accattone*, where it is also used to follow a sub-proletarian couple, Accattone and Ascensa, his wife and the mother of his child. In *Accattone*, the man walks a bit behind the woman holding the baby in a “miserable” open space (*spiazzo miserabile*), as Pasolini writes in the screenplay.<sup>138</sup> The long, backward tracking shot shows the man first verbally abusing the woman and then apologizing and begging her to accept him back. Given the sacred nature of family in Pasolini's oeuvre, this scene in *Accattone* is of rare pathos. Through a backward tracking shot, Pasolini details the fracture of the “holy” concept of family (mother, father, and son). The little baby in his mother's arms is the real, albeit silent, focal point of this tragic scene. Ascensa, the mother, rejects Accattone, the father, because he is a “loser” (*accattone*), someone who survives by exploiting others. The woman's family will later chase away Accattone after a bloody face-off between him and Ascensa's brother.

In Pasolini, a long, backward tracking shot stages a mythic drama, a radical and irrecoverable state of decadence. The narrator points out that “in this Apparition [*Apparizione*] the most important and significant fact is that the two are embracing as they walk” (“Note 71a,” 284).<sup>139</sup> Cinzia is “an ordinary girl in blue jeans, with a fat ass.” Her fiancée the Shit is no less ordinary. In his twenties, “he is not fat but has, as they say in the borgate, a gut” (283). He has a “fixed” smile on his face

that betrays "envy, bitterness, grief" (284). Their embrace as they walk looks odd and uncomfortable because the Shit is shorter than Cinzia and has "to hold her bent over him . . . as if she were ill or handicapped." Stefano Agosti sees a fascinating similarity between this couple and the mythic couple Orpheus and Eurydice.<sup>140</sup> Cinzia's ill appearance could echo the condition of Eurydice as Orpheus accompanies her away from the Netherworld. An essential difference between the two couples, however, is that the Shit and Cinzia are not walking away from their hell. They know of no exit from their hell—they do not even know that they are living in hell.

Unlike the couple in *Accattone*, the Shit and Cinzia walk in silence because they are mute figures of an Apparition, similar to the holy images of a religious icon. In the narrator's words, between them everything has been said "in their previous life." I have already mentioned that Pasolini, following Freud, contends that in dreams silent, mute presences allude to death. The name "the Shit" (*il Merda*) certainly echoes the derogatory connotations of "Accattone" (Miserable Man; Loser), but Shit expresses connotations that are absent from Accattone. The Shit is the name of that "human trash" Pasolini mentions in his "Abjuration of the *Trilogy of Life*."<sup>141</sup> The Shit is the name of a young man who, according to Pasolini, used to embody that "archaic" and "innocent" young man whose sexuality was at once free and "violent" because attuned to the laws of nature. Both Accattone and the Shit signify miserable, poor, failed men. However, the name Shit also brings to the fore the meaning of the entire Apparition narrated in this section of *Petrolio*. I have explained that this vision is under the aegis of the anus, as a perverted vagina. The anus both expels and gives birth to feces. Here we have another important shift from *La divina mimesis* to *Petrolio*. In *La divina mimesis*, Pasolini's rewriting of canto 3 of the *Inferno* envisions a multitude running behind a banner that shows the image of a big "Turd" (*Stronzo*).<sup>142</sup> The turd (the Shit) materializes in *Petrolio* and becomes the pilgrim/guide of Pasolini's new version of hell.

In his invention of the character of the Shit, Pasolini may refer to Strindberg's *Inferno*, one of the books in the leftist intellectual's suitcase. We have seen that Pasolini not only expresses great admiration for this text, but also sees a number of essential similarities between his poetics (and *Petrolio* in particular) and Strindberg's. *Inferno* is a modern rewriting of Dante's first *cantica*, in a sense similar to *La divina mimesis* and to this section of *Petrolio*. Strindberg details the mental illness of the "pilgrim" Strindberg, in a narrative doubling that recalls Dante both as author and as main character. In *Inferno*, we encounter the theme of the

double, persistent and troubling visions and dreams, and, most important, the topos of the journey. Strindberg's meditation on Swedenborg's definition of hell is especially relevant at this point. When he returns to Sweden, Strindberg receives an "old German volume" that contains extracts from Swedenborg's *Vera Christiana Religio*.<sup>143</sup> Experiencing life as a concrete manifestation of hell, Strindberg tries to find some solace and understanding in his fellow Swedish visionary: "This is how Swedenborg depicts hell. The damned soul resides in a dazzling palace; finds its life pleasant, and believes to be among the elect. Slowly, the pleasures begin to evaporate; then they disappear; and the despondent soul realizes that it is imprisoned in a miserable shanty surrounded by excrement." This is the "excremental hell" that Strindberg comments on in a later passage of the novel.<sup>144</sup> In his vision of hell, the Swedish mystic Swedenborg underscores the identification between false values (wealth) and shit, something that Pasolini could easily see as a reference to the "shitty" status of contemporary bourgeois Italy. "Earth is hell," Strindberg states in his reading of Swedenborg. "Maybe without knowing it, Swedenborg describes our life on earth when in fact he wishes to describe hell." Like the inferno in *Petrolino*, Strindberg's hell is at once outside and inside the subject. The character Strindberg does walk through a dark wood one night, and his experience is reminiscent of the "image of Dante's hell."<sup>145</sup> What differs in Pasolini's hell is that the character Carlo, who should be the sole pilgrim of the story, is in fact a mere gaze.

Carlo 1 himself has given birth to the Shit. In "The Excremental Vision" (chapter 13 of *Life Against Death*), Norman O. Brown analyzes the symbolism of excrement in Swift's works. We know that in *Petrolino* Swift's books are in the suitcase the leftist intellectual loses on the train. Brown introduces the topic by recalling the strict connection between sex and defecation. He stresses that, according to Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, "the human infant passes through a stage—the anal stage—as a result of which the libido . . . gets concentrated in the anal zone. . . . The anal product acquires for the child the significance of being his own child."<sup>146</sup> This anal infant (the feces) is an instrument that his "father" (the child) can use both "to obtain love from another (feces as gift), or to assert independence (feces as property), or to commit aggression against another (feces as weapon)." Ferenczi's *Thalassa* rephrases this issue as follows: "It is as though the child produced a kind of introversion of his libido . . . by being womb and child (feces) in his own person, he makes himself independent of the nurse (mother) in a libidinal sense."<sup>147</sup> Commenting on *Thalassa*, Lea Melandri correctly emphasizes the power struggle beneath this contentious relationship of

the mother to the male child: "[S]he is the 'beginning of life,' but inasmuch as she is witness to the corporeal roots of every being, she is also the beginning of the limits of life; she is 'nourishment' for the development of the individual, but also risk of 'perennial dependency.'" <sup>148</sup> In Pasolini's view of sexuality, which is based on domination and submission, the image of the caring mother, the locus of origins, hides the specter of the annihilating chasm where we all "finish up."

In what sense can we say that the Shit is Carlo 1's own son? Before beginning a detailed analysis of Carlo 1's vision, which will answer this riddle, let us recall what Ferenczi says about the connection between urethral and anal pleasure in *Thalassa*. Pasolini discusses Ferenczi's theory in a later story of the "*Epoché*" series, where we read of some "wailing shit" (*la merda che vagiva*), the offspring of two men ("Note 102," 380). <sup>149</sup> Ferenczi contends that the physiological coordination "of urethral and anal innervation may be expressed in the vocabulary of the sexual theory as a synthesis or an integration of anal and urethral erotisms into genital erotism." <sup>150</sup> In *Petrolio*, Pasolini rephrases Ferenczi's hypothesis as follows:

There is no urethral eroticism that is not tinged with the anal and no anal eroticism that is not touched with the urethral. Something fundamental for the formation of the character. Yet at the same time it should be observed that "rectum" (ass) and "bladder" (or testicles) are entities of late development and definition. . . . We then find ourselves . . . faced with the double temptation of discharging both the penis and the contents of the intestines: which, in a hallucinatory way, have been identified with each other through their common identification with the child. Our cock is the child I, but so is shit. ("Note 102," 374)

The filial nature of the Shit could not be more obvious. The Shit is the firstborn of the woman/man Carlo 1. Let us consider the Shit's appearance. Shit is not just a nickname. Shit resembles and evokes shit: "[The Shit] is ugly and repulsive. [He has] yellow, ratlike teeth [*dentini gialli da sorca*], [a] greasy face covered with freckles that look like fly shit [*cacate di mosca*], [and an] expression whose arrogance displays hatred toward everything and everyone" ("Note 71d," 289). <sup>151</sup> According to the narrator, the Shit is "ugly and repulsive." <sup>152</sup> He is a proletarian, arrogant, vulgar young man whose features make you think of filth and shit (his yellow ratlike teeth and the freckles on his face similar to fly shit).

A repugnant and "shitty" creature plays a major role in the final section of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, which Brown discusses at length in the chapter entitled "The Excremental Vision" in *Life Against Death*. We

have seen that Pasolini establishes an explicit connection between the Shit and shit. Swift uses exactly the same kind of words to describe the Yahoos, brutal animals Gulliver encounters in his fourth adventurous journey ("A Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms"), whose distinctly "excremental theme" revolves around the mysterious and disgusting Yahoos.<sup>153</sup> Gulliver narrates that, after he becomes captain of a ship and sets sail from Portsmouth, his crew rebels against him and abandons him on an unknown island. Here he has a first encounter with these repugnant beasts: "Their Shape was very singular, and deformed, which a little decomposed me."<sup>154</sup> Given that these beasts' "heads and breasts were covered with a thick Hair," Gulliver at first does not realize that these unknown creatures resemble human beings. Rather than their human features, the anus of these creatures first captures the captain's attention. For Gulliver, the anus seems to be the unique and somehow unforgettable trait of these bestial bodies: "They had no Tails, nor any Hair at all on their Buttocks, except about the *Anus*." The centrality of their anus paradoxically becomes apparent after the traveler "observe[s], in this abominable Animal, a perfect human Figure." Gulliver is adamant about the disgust he feels for these filthy, humanlike beasts that have a "strange Disposition to Nastiness and Dirt."<sup>155</sup>

These are indeed shitty human creatures whose anus signifies their ontological identification with shit. In his analysis of *Gulliver's Travels*, Brown quotes the following well-known passage from Swift's novel: "I [Gulliver] observed the young Animal's Flesh to smell very rank. . . . While I held the odious Vermin [a young offspring of these animals] in my Hands, it voided its filthy Excrements of a yellow liquid Substance, all over my Cloaths."<sup>156</sup> The Yahoos (their name comes from "two exclamations of disgust: 'yah!' and 'ugh!'") smell like shit and look like shit. Their own shit is their alter ego. Let us remember the Shit's little "yellow ratlike teeth" and shitlike skin that recall the yellow excrement of the young Yahoo. The satirical subtext of *Gulliver's Travels* and *Petrolino* is not difficult to detect (when he goes back to England, Gulliver recognizes Yahoo-like features in his fellow citizens). There is one essential difference between the Shit and the Yahoos. Swift presents these beasts as animals that exist somewhere, whereas the Shit is the product of Carlo 1's mind. The Shit is the main character of the vision that Carlo 1 is granted after his hypothetical transformation into a woman. In *Petrolino*, we are not offered a patent opposition between humanity and inhumanity, a confusion that is in fact at the core of humanity itself. Both the Shit and Carlo 1 are monsters, so to speak. Carlo 1 is a man who believes he has acquired female genitals. Moreover, Carlo 1's erogenous hole is

at once the vagina and the anus. The erotic nature of the anus is also apparent in Gulliver's description of the Yahoos.

The Yahoos, Carlo 1, and the Shit are all creatures of the anus. As Carlo 1's vagina is also his anus, so do the Yahoos seem to give birth from the anus, the most erotic part of their body. We could say that the Shit is a sibling of the young Yahoo defecating on Gulliver. It is Carlo 1 who gives birth to the Shit through his vagina/anus. If we follow this syllogism to its unavoidable conclusion, we must infer that Carlo 1 himself is a Yahoo. We could go so far as to say that the vision of the Shit and his fiancée is a gift of an anus metamorphosed into a vagina. Metamorphosis is the foundation of Carlo 1's vision of hell. Carlo 1's hell is made of fifteen *gironi* (reminiscent of the three areas of the seventh circle of Dante's *Inferno* where the violent are punished) and five *bolge* (the ten ditches of the eighth circle of Dante's *Inferno* where the fraudulent live), although at the end of his vision the guides explain that Hell continues "after the fifth bolgia" ("Note 72g," 329). Each of the twenty parts of this new hell represents a division and a metamorphosis. Carlo 1's feminization (his being both a man and a woman) is mirrored in the hell he visits with his guides, the Shit and Cinzia. We know that Carlo's visit to hell takes place on the south side of Rome. Pasolini clarifies that the "scene" of Carlo's hell is in reality two scenes, the first placed within the second, so that both are perceivable at the same time.

The concept of a double (analogical) image, an image that contains and exposes a second image, like a female Carlo who also embodies a previous male Carlo, has been a recurrent theme of our analysis of Pasolini's late works. Pasolini theorizes this essential doubleness in a variety of different modalities. In *Saint Paul* the present of post-war Europe echoes the places mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles. Similarly, in the scenario *Porn-Theo-Colossal* modern Rome would recall Sodom and Milan would represent Gomorrah. But we have also seen that in the short film *The Sequence of the Paper Flower* doubleness is the literal overlapping of two unrelated images: brief visual quotations from the war and post-war documentaries superimposed upon long, backward tracking shots of Ninetto walking in contemporary downtown Rome.

In his description of a new hell in *Petrolio*, Pasolini presents "a 'double,' or Real Scene, [which] is not contemporaneous, chronologically, with the present view, or Vision Scene" ("Note 71b," 285). The opening scene of this short film on hell, so to speak, shows "the intersection of Via Casilina and Via di Torpignattara," which is both "that of once upon a time" (*quello di una volta*), "which is to say, six or seven years ago," and that of the present moment. The rift between what used to be and what

is now has taken place recently. It is crucial to keep this in mind. The obvious corruption of what the scene shows now still echoes a precorruption past. The viewer Carlo 1 thus witnesses a very recent trauma, a cracking up of reality (a birth) that is still a fresh memory.

The opposition between the "Real Scene" and the "Vision Scene" is clear-cut. The past and "real" scene is made of poor, modest objects and people "dressed in gray, almost in rags" (286). However, "a light warm wind raises spirals of . . . dust (yet/ charged/ with those ancient and forgotten laws which have animated history and the cosmos since the world began)." This shabby, "colorless" scene is paradoxically the real scene, even though it does not exist any longer. The reality of this real scene is thus a sort of sad memorial of something past and gone. Its "colorless" images recall the faded colors of old photographs, which, however, do not make these images less identifiable. The "Vision Scene" has, on the contrary, stark and vivid hues (the excessively intense colors of people's clothes or the green and red lights of traffic signals) that result from a "monochrome light" used to light scene.

The opposition between the "now" and "then" scenes is reflected in the two opposite kinds of people that inhabit them. "In this wretched prospect," the narrator explains, "some handsome people are walking" ("Note 71c," 287). These "handsome" people have the spontaneity and truthfulness characteristic of the "then" scene. They are poor and live on the fringes of society ("drunken thieves" and "disheveled women in dirty black dresses" along with the usual sexy "gangs of young men"). The beauty of these people is in stark contrast with the people of the "now" scene, the vision scene. They are a "museum of horrors" (288). These people could be the Shit's brothers and sisters, since their physical traits are similarly repulsive.

Each *girona* and *bolgia* focuses on one aspect of these people's shitty nature. The paradox of this new hell is that all sinners have in fact committed the same "sin." What the different areas contain are separate facets of this sin. Moreover, what the Shit and Cinzia show in their journey through hell is that the sinners' condition and their punishment coincide. Residence in this hell does not take place in a time following sin. In this hell, sin and punishment are the same thing. Sin manifests itself in the physicality of the sinner, like a contagious disease. In most of these *gironi*, a "Model" placed at the center of each infernal area embodies and signifies the specific facet of this universal sin. The first "Model" signifies "ugliness and repulsiveness" and "is buried in the heart of the Girona" ("Note 71e," 290). Ugliness and repulsiveness constitute the main traits of all the subsequent manifestations of the original sin. Ugliness

and repulsiveness manifest themselves as "quotation" and "silence" (292–93). The bestiality of these modern Yahoos, to borrow Swift's definition, lies in their being silent quotations, that is, they cite without even knowing the source of their citation. Like animals, their behavior is a form of passive imitation. These Yahoos' citation is an ugly, repulsive attempt to conform to an invisible model. Conformity is in fact the basic theme of the second *girone*.

The following two infernal areas (*gironi* 3 and 4) are of particular importance, because of their stark difference from all the other parts of hell. The third *girone* has no Model, which makes it a unique space. The difference between the real scene (the mythic past) and the vision scene involves opposite ways of facing "the end and death" ("Note 71g," 296). The people of the real scene "go toward the end and death" with a silent dignity, which derives from their internal, nonverbal, awareness that they exist in order to fulfill the eternal natural laws. This physical certainty "is eternal in their illusion and eternal in the reality that contains them." In this sentence the narrator synthesizes Pasolini's concept of myth. The people of the real scene have the nonrational but firm perception that their existence is eternal (mythic) not in its individuality but as the expression of an eternal condition in which they are asked to participate.

On the contrary, the repulsive, shitlike people of the vision scene "stand as evidence of the absence of a Model and therefore of disorientation and disease" (297). They have a "corpse-like" pallor and their eyes have "no light" or an "exalted light." The disease they suffer from "has the generic name of Neurosis." Neurosis is the sickness of a humanity that has repudiated its mortality. This abjuration of death is indeed a sick, repulsive act against the nature of things.

We have seen that sickness defines Pasolini's view of St. Paul. The inner division Paul experiences is not different from the unnatural condition experienced by these repulsive people. The reference to St. Paul becomes even more apparent in the following *girone* 4, which is also based on "an anomaly." The Model at the center of this infernal area is not buried but is "outside his tomb, and the tombstone lies overturned on the street . . . and is supposed to give spoken advice, like an oracle" ("Note 71h," 298). This Model presents himself as a new resurrected Christ (he is "beside his open tomb") and is about to announce a new creed. He is "a kind of Saint who 'preaches' the New Word like an apostle." The reference to Paul could not be clearer. But the Paul we see in *Petrolio* is not only the founder of the Church as an institution against nature, but also and more importantly a Christlike figure, or better yet, an Antichrist. He stands next to his open tomb as if he had just



resurrected from the dead, although his “acolytes” are the “corpse-like” people living in that *girone*. This is a perverse kind of Savior, someone who evokes the victory of life over death, but in fact embodies death itself. This is quite different from the condition of the people of the real scene, who live to fulfill their death.

This Model speaks, and what he is saying is “What, there are still people who go with fags?” (*Che, ce sta qualcuno che va ancora co’ i froci?*).<sup>157</sup> His tone is “triumphal, full of hatred.” This apostle is sure “of having the whole future on [his] side.” The Word this apostle is announcing is “the Word of Abjuration” (*il Verbo dell’Abiura*). The Antichrist Model of this *girone*, a monster who blends the resurrected Christ and the apostle Paul as the creator of the Church based on a corrupted appropriation of Christ’s message, seems to found his new Word of Abjuration on a hateful and insulting attack against the “fags.” What is the connection between this Word of Abjuration and homosexuality?

It would be reasonable to believe that this apostle’s hatred of homosexuals betrays some sort of fear. The apostle of this new creed of Abjuration looks forward to a future moment when the “fags” will be annihilated once and for all. This seems to be the fundamental premise for the success of his Word. We shall see in a moment that in *girone* 6 the narrator explicitly mentions the Nazis. Like the Jews in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, the annihilation of the fags will signify the success of the apostle’s new Word. But recall that in *Saint Paul* the apostle’s disease was a manifestation of his own homosexuality: he first got sick when he sensed his homosexual tendency.

The answer to this problem seems to lie in a double interpretation of the concept of homosexuality. First of all, we could say that fags are both expressions of our “late” times, that is, their existence shows the corruption also reflected in this inferno; it is a lens through which the corruption of these “late” times can be detected. The homosexual is at once inside and outside the creed of abjuration announced by the perverse apostle. In order to impose his creed, the homosexual apostle must eradicate the sign of homosexuality, which speaks his, the apostle’s, abjuration. This is an important concept and needs more explanation. The new creed of the homosexual apostle is abjuration itself. Denial is what this creed signifies. In this context, abjuration does not mean to convert from one belief to another; rather, it means to impose a universal denial, an enduring NO as a new religion, as a new way of living and looking at reality.

Read in this manner, homosexuality is more than the sign of decadence. The NO of the homosexual apostle’s new religion must deny

(abjure) the homosexual because, if the homosexual signifies decadence, he inevitably also echoes the memory of a past preceding that decadence. This Model's words express hatred for the fags, who are the negative reminder of something that is not abjuration, whereas in the apostle's new theology, NO is an affirmation that lives in a perpetual present. The new religion of the homosexual apostle imposes a perennial present deprived of memory. To go with the fags, as the apostle says, means to distance oneself from the present and to look at it with a homosexual gaze, that is, a gaze that necessarily expresses not only decadence, but also the memory of the past. Let me emphasize that the opposition between the present as the manifestation of a loss and the unrecoverable past is a key concept of *Petrolio*. This text is the "critical edition" of a lost, unrecoverable, original manuscript.

The following *gironi* detail the apostle's new creed. In the fifth *girone* we encounter the word *abjuration* again. In this area of hell, Respectability (Perbenismo) is the Model, which lies buried in the earth. The narrator defines the young inhabitants of this part of hell as follows: "Champions of ugliness and repulsiveness, [they are] disfigured by a neurotic pallor [and are] devoted with odious ignorance to the abjuration of all that they have been" (*dediti con odiosa incoscienza all'abiura di tutto ciò che sono stati*). The "odious ignorance" of these Yahoos, to borrow again from Swift, lies in their living in a perpetual present that abjures "all that they have been." "Their gaze," the narrator continues, "does not touch even for an instant anyone who looks at them" ("Note 71i," 299).<sup>158</sup>

After the *gironi* of "bourgeois dignity," which inevitably leads to Fascist propaganda, and that of Cowardice (Vigliaccheria), the Shit and Cinzia enter the eighth *girone*, whose Model is Tolerance (300, 301, 303).<sup>159</sup> We have seen that tolerance is the official ideology of the city of Sodom in the scenario *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, although its unspoken creed is the superiority of homosexuality. And in fact the inhabitants of this area are effeminate men, whose "weak, feminine bodies are seized by a sort of nervous tremor [and] make irritated, prissy faces" [*fanno facce annoiate da signorine*] (303).<sup>160</sup> But here we also encounter a new version of the apostle speaking in the *girone* of abjuration. The Model of the *girone* of Tolerance "is outside his tomb" and preaches "his Word." The difference between the two apostles is that this new apostle has no face. His face looks like an egg. This faceless apostle's creed is based on tolerance, but a tolerance that mirrors abjuration. The narrator explains that the people of this area "wish not to know but to be."

If the *girone* of Abjuration recalls Gomorrah for its hatred of the fags, that of Tolerance is closer to Sodom. Both areas have apostles who, like

new resurrected Saviors, have come out of their tombs and preach a new religion. In this new version of *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, Pasolini still portrays Sodom and Gomorrah as cities that exist now (Rome and Milan in the scenario; the poor and developing areas on the south side of Rome in *Petrolio*). In *Petrolio* and *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, the apocalypse is here and now. Rome is both Sodom on the brink of destruction and the hell arising after the destruction of the city. The present of the homosexual apostle's new creed is the eternal present of an imminent and already present hell.

The Models of the following *gironi* repeat the theme of abjuration with less originality. For instance, "Girone XIV," as Pasolini calls it, goes back to the concept of conformity, which was also the Model of the second *girone*. As the narrator himself states, it is the third time we find a Model "sitting outside his tomb... in order to complete his act... through preaching" ("Note 71t," 309).<sup>161</sup> And again this *girone* echoes the city of Gomorrah, where women satisfy men's sexual drives whenever and wherever they arise. The narrator specifies that the women who are listening to this third apostle of abjuration "[know] perfectly well what they want even when they are... bitches [*stronze*] and giving head [*bocchinare*]." <sup>162</sup> The crude definition of these women is consistent with the ideology of Gomorrah, where the women know and willingly accept their status as "bitches" whose main role is to satisfy men's sexual urges. The vulgar and direct reference to the practice of oral sex also echoes the obscene night encounter between Carlo and the twenty young men. In both cases, oral sex is the sign of submission to male heterosexuality, which for Pasolini is identified with the whole of sexual experience.

This fifteenth and last *girone* is where the Shit and Cinzia belong. This area of hell "is frequented only by [heterosexual] couples" ("Note 71v," 311). The last *girone*, like the first one, is dominated by "Ugliness and Repulsiveness." Like the Shit and Cinzia, the couples of this infernal space walk "tightly embraced." It is interesting that the sole sexual reference in this *girone* is to the "cunt" the girls show through their tight jeans: "The girl, in extremely tight blue jeans, so that as usual one can see the crack of her cunt [*fica*], is silent" (312).<sup>163</sup> The girl keeps silent, but speaks through her "cunt" because this is the language spoken in this last area of "ugliness and repulsiveness."

Faithful to the essential theme of *Petrolio*, the five *bolge* stage the theme of duplicity in a new fashion. Remember that the Dantean *bolge* are the ditches where the fraudulent are punished in eternity. Each of these five areas revolves around a "two-faced" Model in the form of a "Janus herm" ("Note 71z," 314). We understand better now that this

inferno is divided into two areas that highlight two aspects of the same sin. The fifteen *gironi* emphasize the violence resulting from this sin, whereas the five *bolge* unveil its origin, its fraudulence. The "souls" themselves living in each of these areas of hell are fraudulent and are split into two facing zones. The first *bolgia* contains on the right side some "ugly and repulsive" lower-middle-class young men who "are great exhibitionists [of their] 'baskets' (that is, the tuberous bulges of their sex)" (317). These men give off an unpleasant smell, "the specter of a smell" (*lo spettro di un odore*), which is also the smell of their "baskets," which send out an almost unbearable "stench" because these men do not wash properly.<sup>164</sup> They are like "fascist worke[rs] or church lawye[rs]." On the left side of the *bolgia*, we see these men's alter egos, who are "symmetrical to those on the other side" (318). They are copies of each other. If the souls on the right resemble middle-class men, the ones on the left are "horrible victims of a degradation that makes them almost bestial." These Yahoo-like men are dying. Their faces "are disfigured by a corpse-like pallor." They give out "an odor of the most disgusting and ancient filth." These Roman Yahoos make you retch.

But the filth, the repulsive and disgusting stench of these Yahoos seem to reflect the stench emanating from the "stale," corrupted nature of language. The last three *bolge* in effect focus on three distinct aspects of language as something "gone bad." The third of these concerns the impossibility of a real discussion. The people of this area either express a rage "due to certainty" or keep silent ("Note 72c," 324). The fourth *bolgia* reveals their inability to create any new linguistic expression, in particular a literary one. Here we sense Pasolini's obsessive belief in the death of expressive language and the subsequent formation of a "national language" that stifles every authentic expression ("Note 72f," 328). "The Elements of Life, and therefore of living," the narrator explains, "are destroyed . . . one by one" (327).

With the infernal perversion of language, Carlo 1's journey through hell comes to an end. Let me repeat that in this new *Inferno* both the figure of the pilgrim and that of the guide are doubled. The gods sitting behind Carlo 1 on the cart/dolly whisper the meaning of each scene. They serve as a voice-over in a film that strives for complete objectivity, in that this hypothetical filming of hell has no protagonist with whom the viewer can identify. The Shit and Cinzia are the other guides, only in the sense that hell is their milieu and they walk through it with no didactic intentions. They never interact with Carlo, who should be their pupil/pilgrim. The Shit/Cinzia couple is Carlo's alter ego, in that both this couple and Carlo know nothing about hell. But a basic difference

between the two pilgrims is that the Shit/Cinzia couple is unable to formulate any possible reasoning about what they see and experience. The lack of self-reflection in the Shit/Cinzia couple is compensated for in Carlo by the presence of the gods who sit with him on the dolly. In this sense, we could say that the couple Dante/Pasolini and Virgil/Pasolini's conscience is present in *Petrolino* as well.

At the end of the journey, the Shit suddenly dies of what seems to be a heart attack. He has an unbearable "pain in the arm with which he embraces his woman" and falls dead to the ground ("Note 72g," 329). The resemblance between Carlo 1 and the Shit, his alter ego, is interrupted when their journey through hell touches on the ultimate manifestation of death, the erasure of language. The connection between Carlo and the Shit had been based on their common role as pilgrims. But we also saw that we could regard the Shit as Carlo's offspring. I also stated that this riddle would be solved at the end of the journey. In giving birth to the Shit, the woman/man Carlo first of all wishes to create the heterosexual couple he, Carlo, embodies by being both man and woman. The Shit is the son who dates and will eventually marry his fiancée Cinzia, thus reproducing the normal heterosexual family. But the Shit is also the son who closely resembles his father. Carlo 1 defecates his first-born, the Shit, and through him also gives life to hell. That is, through the Shit Carlo brings out of himself the hell he himself embodies. In accordance with Freud and Ferenczi's remarks on the child's anal sexual phase, we might say that the Shit is both Carlo 1's gift and his weapon. The Shit brings forth Carlo's longing for normalcy (a woman is supposed to bear a child and form a family). Remember that Carmelo, the man Carlo loves, disappears after their first sexual encounter. The Shit is the offspring of the nonexistent couple Carlo-Carmelo.

The Shit is the son and alter ego of a woman/man who harbors a female/male homosexual desire. In his voyeuristic journey in hell (he sits on a dolly and looks at the couple face to face), Carlo 1 has recognized the sterility, the monstrosity, and death that he himself is. The degradation to which he gives life (the Shit) is the degradation that he is (a castrated man/woman whom no one can love) and the degradation of the world out there. The Shit has served as a connector between the inside and the outside; he comes out of his father/mother and shows his father/mother the degradation of the world, which is the same as the degradation of his own parent.

After the Shit's death and the end of his visit in hell, Carlo realizes that in that Netherworld no one had expressed "a look . . . of love or sympathy." It is at the end of his journey that Carlo has his most

powerful and important insight on the meaning of this modern hell. He understands that if the Shit (his anal firstborn) and "those young men and boys had become that way, it meant that they had the potential for it; so their degradation also debased their past, which had therefore been completely deceptive. [Moreover] Carlo felt intuitively that those young men and boys would pay for their degradation with blood: in a massacre that would render their presumptuous illusion of well-being /fiercely ridiculous" ("Note 73," 330).

The resonance between this statement and the depiction of Gomorrah in *Porn-Theo-Colossal* is evident. Like Gomorrah, this modern inferno will be destroyed by divine wrath. The narrator alludes to the biblical city when he recounts that, upon reaching the "center" of this infernal space, Carlo has a view of the entire city, whose buildings, streets, and squares have been turned into obscene allusions to the female and male organs (for instance, squares like vaginas; towers like penises). The city shares the ideology of Gomorrah in *Porn-Theo-Colossal*.

A fundamental question arises at this final point of our reading of Carlo 1's visit to the Netherworld. What is the connection, if any, between the spirits (the Lares and Penates) who had sex with Carlo 2 at night in an open field and the Shit and the other young men living in this hell? Commenting on the young men who had sex with Carlo 2, the narrator had stated that they were "Gods of the Lower World," a Netherworld where "everyone ends up." We have read that Carlo 1's final insight about the meaning and destiny of this modern hell is that the young men's degradation was something that they had inside of themselves. "They had the potential for it," the narrator says. But the narrator also adds that this contemporary degradation "also debased their past, which had therefore been completely deceptive." Whom did these young men deceive? Who found their behavior "deceptive"?

In his journey through hell, the pilgrim Carlo accompanied by the guide/pilgrim the Shit visits the places where the young "gods of the Lower World" reside. These young gods, who had sex with Carlo 2 at night, are the same young men Carlo 1 sees in their utmost degradation. The Lower World where these young deities live hides their degradation. Carlo 2 had seen them as the gods of the household, the Lares and Penates, who came up at night as if for a demonic Sabbath. The couple Shit/Cinzia reveals the degradation ruling over the Lower World. Carlo 1 completes the revelation these deities had granted Carlo 2 during that sex encounter. After "giving birth" to his son the Shit, Carlo 1 is able to go down through the places of the Netherworld where these alleged Lares and Penates live. But by following Carlo through the paths of hell, we

understand that the deities who had sex with Carlo 2 have “debased” their divine nature and their mythic past. If *Petrolio* is the story of a divided self, the young men meeting the two Carlos reflect the main characters’ duplicity. The men coming from the Netherworld seem to mirror Carlo 2’s goodness, his being free of the bourgeois social norms and hypocrisy, whereas the Shit and the other young man of the new hell have the stench and meanness of a perverse, lower-middle-class mentality.

We have seen that in *Thalassa* Ferenczi states that the child’s anal stage corresponds to an “introversion of libido” in that the child becomes his own mother. Carlo 1’s journey is unquestionably regressive. It is important to keep in mind the initial reference to Carlo 1 sitting on a dolly in a long backward tracking shot. Carlo 1 goes “backward” while he contemplates his “child” the Shit with his girlfriend going through the streets of hell. Carlo 1’s backward journey could only end with an encounter with the mother, the last stop, so to speak, of his journey. While returning home at the end of his vision, Carlo 1 sees an enormous tabernacle in a narrow square:

This Tabernacle . . . held an imposing simulacrum. . . . The dimensions of this image could not be called gigantic; yet it was grand: three times as tall as a man of normal height. To say that it represented a woman would be inexact, though it was the first impression. /It was/, rather, a monstrous woman, consisting of two stocky legs, and between them, in place of the groin, a huge woman’s head was embedded—so that the crack of the vulva coincided with the break in the chin. The hair was arranged like a peasant’s, but for a holiday. . . . This monstrous woman, moreover, held in her right hand a long stick, as tall as she was; and this stick was, without any possibility of doubt, a long, knotty, virile member [*membro virile*]. (“Note 74,” 333)<sup>165</sup>

The vision of hell concludes with a reunification between the child (Carlo 1) and the mother. “Mother and child as one body is mother with a penis,” Brown contends in *Love’s Body*.<sup>166</sup> “Aphrodite, the personification of femininity,” Brown continues, “is just a penis, a penis cut off and tossed into the sea.” But the simulacrum that presents itself to Carlo 1 is a woman primarily because it has a female head stuck in her groin. The simulacrum holds a penis in his or her hand. If the groin, the male crotch, is the locus of desire for Carlo 1 and Carlo 2, a woman’s face looking at you from the place of desire signifies a form of contemplative reflection between mother and son. The face of the mother, not her vagina, is what the son sees. Her face recalls the original mother, according to Pasolini, because she has the face of a peasant. The penis in the woman’s hand is the castrated phallus that the mother has successfully

overcome. We could say that the mother presides over the hell Carlo 1 has just visited. This view is confirmed by a key passage in *La divina mimesis*. In his rewriting of canto 4 of *Inferno*, the pilgrim Pasolini enters a "garden full of poets" (remember the medieval garden in *Petrolio*), where the pilgrim has a sudden insight about the mother: "The mother! She [is] the queen of Hell. She [is] modest, sweet, protective, and a child; [she is] still in the light of the Garden of Eden."<sup>167</sup>

The seeming contradiction between the mother as queen of hell and the mother still living the purity preceding the Fall in reality expresses the perfection of the mother's power. She rules over heaven and hell, although she still retains her original sweetness and protectiveness. The mother of the simulacrum posits the contemplation of her face as the highest form of desire. Her head is the castrated penis. As I have noted in previous passages of this chapter, the narrator/Pasolini speaks in *Petrolio* from the place of the mother. She is the mother of regression; the mother of a mythic "going back" after having traveled through a world of decadence. Think of *Argonautika*; Orpheus's notebook found after his death; and *The Book of Alexander the Great*, with its emphasis on the journey to the water of life. And of course consider also the journey to hell, which ends with a contemplation of the mother who lives before and after the Fall.

We should not be surprised, then, to learn that, "having crossed the garden of the Vision," Carlo opens the door of his modest apartment and realizes that he is no longer a woman ("Note 82," 340). Looking at himself in the mirror again, he sees his male organ and decides to undergo surgery to become castrated. Castration as the final identification with the mother, as the acquisition of the absent mother's voice, is the main and essential theme of the last section of *Petrolio* and the final subject of this long chapter.

### Castration and *Epoché*

When we analyzed Pasolini's telegraphic reference to Róheim's schizophrenic patient mentioned in Brown's *Love's Body*, I said that in fact Pasolini appropriates and quotes almost literally much longer passages from the chapter entitled "Representative" from Brown's book. In "Note 34ter," Pasolini alludes to the first part of the fragment that deals with the "diluted reel of film in my brain" of Róheim's patient. Brown comments: "Pictures: spectral images on the inside, which represent external reality to the subject."<sup>168</sup> At the beginning of the final part of *Petrolio*, Pasolini



goes back to the same fragment from *Love's Body* and borrows the rest of that fragment on the "diluted reel of film" without acknowledging his source.<sup>169</sup> The presence of this important fragment in two crucial sections of *Petrolino* is of great relevance, as I show in a moment.

What is the connection between the schizophrenic mind's "diluted reel of film" and the final part of *Petrolino*, which opens with a new bourgeois party in which politicians and pseudo-intellectuals mingle ("Note 97")? Describing the people present at his party, the narrator states,

There . . . one is among the actors: with whom the spectators identify bodily, poor things; it is "methexis" for them, not "mimesis." As for the actors, they display their whole person as if it were a penis; but exhibitionism, as everyone knows, indicates castration. Thus the heads of the Medusa were "cut off." And it was for that reason that they turned everything to stone. Carlo went among the petrifiers to assume his role: to be an exhibitionist, to show off his genitals (346).

To the word *spectators* Pasolini adds the following footnote: "At least according to Lévy-Bruhl, Durkheim, and others." Let us now read the second part of the fragment in Brown's book about the "diluted reel of film":

Correspondence is then a relation of likeness, or copying, or imitation, between internal image and external reality; instead of correspondence as sympathy, or action at a distance, or active participation; *methexis* and not *mimesis*. "The principal reason for which Lévy-Bruhl, Durkheim, and others assign for the fact that the primitives 'do not perceive with the same minds' as ours, is that in the act of perception, they are not detached, as we are." Primitive participation, *participation mystique*, is self and not-self identified in the moment of experience.<sup>170</sup>

Pasolini finds the direct reference to "actors" and "castration" only a few pages later in the same chapter of *Love's Body*: "The outcome of the castration-complex is genital organization, the primacy of the penis, the identification of the whole person with the penis. The actor exhibits his whole person as a penis; but the exhibition exposes the castration. The whole person as a penis . . . cut off, a trophy, a severed head, Medusa's head cut off."<sup>171</sup>

Pasolini's significant borrowing from this part of Brown's influential book can only mean that he finds in these excerpts a cogent support for his poetics.<sup>172</sup> The core of Brown's passage is that the "the primitives" are unable to distance themselves "in the act of perception." This is exactly what Pasolini stages in the scenario *Il padre selvaggio*, which also alludes to Eliade's theorization of the primitive's perception of reality,

in contrast to Ernesto de Martino's. Pasolini's view of the relationship actor-spectator, which he takes from Brown, presents theater as a form of art in which the actor (the "exhibitionist") "needs the audience to reassure him that he is not castrated," even though in fact he is.<sup>173</sup> But the people at the bourgeois party have no audience. Carlo 1 is among "the actors," the "exhibitionists." Both Carlo and the other men at the party are castrated exhibitionists. We have seen that Carlo decides to undergo surgery to get castrated right before going to the party.

The party is not different from the *gironi* and *bolge* of the inferno Carlo visits with the Shit and Cinzia. Both are places where the actors (the souls in hell, but also the politicians and intellectuals at the party) stage their castration without being able to reflect upon it. In other words, like the schizophrenic patient, these infernal souls are given their self-image as a blinded, castrated, non-relational experience. We have noted that the Shit is not a guide and does not teach anything.

It would be a mistake, though, to believe that Pasolini is merely reiterating here his negative view of the bourgeoisie and its castrating values. In *Petrolio*, the metamorphoses of the two Carlos into women/men portray a castration that has become an internal event, something that primarily concerns the narrator, whose writing is a testament, a *post-mortem* communication. Like the schizophrenic patient in R  heim, both Carlo 1 and these men at the party are told their own stories as if they saw their own images projected outside/inside of themselves.

We have also seen that the feminization signifies that the two Carlos are their own mothers. They are the sons of a mother whose presence is the son himself. The two Carlos are sons who give birth to themselves from the mother they inseminate in their own bodies. This perverse process of insemination and reproduction is the sign of a general perversion of the real.<sup>174</sup> The internalization of the mother as a result of her withdrawal mirrors the reign of the father, whom the schizophrenic patient perceives as an all-encompassing and threatening power "out there." The loss of the mother, let me reiterate, is an event that takes place within and without the patient. The schizophrenic is divided between the power of the father and the power of the dead mother, who after her death "reincarnates" in the son's body. The patient distinguishes between what is alive but dead (the father, the god of the Lacanian symbolic) and what is dead but alive (the mother, whose reign is the son himself because the memory of her unrecoverable loss exists in the son's flesh and in the world he inhabits).

Of the seven stories told at the party I choose to analyze the third and the fifth because they most directly relate to my study of *Petrolio*.

In the third story, Pasolini rewrites *Petrolino* in a few pages. He first offers this premise, which eloquently confirms the importance of Brown's influence: "Everything I'm going to tell you appeared not in the theater of the world but in the theater of my mind" ("Note 99," 358). The first character appearing on the screen of the mind is not the mother, but the father. The mother plays no apparent role in this story. The narrator calls the father "God of Saulo," the God who rules in the Garden of Eden from which the narrator is expelled. "I was coming from death," the narrator explains. The place of death is the land of the withdrawn mother. The father of the Garden of Eden sends the narrator away. This story begins with an expulsion.

The story revolves around a double division. The first concerns the father (the God of Saul); the second springs from Saul himself (the son). Needless to say, Pasolini is here rephrasing not only *Petrolino*, but also *Saint Paul*. After his expulsion from the garden of the father (remember the "medieval garden" ruled by the father), the son becomes a narrator who takes up the character of the father and divides him into two new characters. One is a man; the other is a woman. Seeing that these figures were in fact the same person, the narrator "repeated the two characters back into one" (360). The same division befalls the narrator himself, the God of Saul's son: "I also brought about a split in myself, a dualism. The same that I had made in the God of Saulo. Saulo was also two. And each of his two parts ended up becoming symbolic" (362). The narrator's hypothetical story thus revolves around the opposition between two divisions, that of the God of Saul and that of Saul himself, the narrator.

The act of writing is a face-off between the father and the son, but it is crucial to understand that this basic opposition takes place within the realm of the father. The father exists as long as he exerts his power over the son, and, vice versa, the son is a function of the father. The mother is nowhere to be found. The son Saul reveals the presence and role of the mother in a final disclosure:

At the same time as I was planning and writing my novel—that is, looking for the meaning of reality and taking possession of it, immersed in the creative act that all of that involves—I also wished to free myself from myself, that is, to die. To die in my creation: to die as, in effect, one dies in birth [*morire come in effetti si muore, di parto*]: to die as in effect one dies, ejaculating into the mother's womb [*ejaculando nel ventre materno*]. (364)<sup>175</sup>

The narrator defines the act of writing his novel as an organization of "the meaning and function of reality." Attempting to "take possession"

of the real, the narrator absorbs and rewrites reality not just as something written, but also as his own being in the real. In other words, the "form" of the novel is the form of the narrator. But in the act of creating this narrative form, the narrator also perceives a complementary drive: the evocation of the mother. The reality the narrator is forming does not exist, because it has not been born yet. And birth is, of course, the mother's business. The narrator evokes then a clearly schizophrenic scenario, in which he dies in the act of giving birth (form) to himself as the mother would do. Again, writing as the act of giving birth (form) is the role of the mother, who is absent. The characters of the novel, and the narrator himself, are figures of a ghost story. "To die" here means at once "to die in birth" and "to ejaculate." If the mother dies in giving birth to the son, it means that someone (the son) has previously ejaculated into her womb. The mother dies in the act of giving form to a son who has died in the act of giving form to himself. Now we understand what the narrator means when he writes "I was coming from death." He was coming from the land of the dead mother, the "archaic characters that moved the heart," in Michaux's words, and that existed before the biblical Garden of Eden. The "origin" of the mother's land exists as form in the narrator, who cannot help but compose a text that evokes the "disappearance" (again in Michaux's words) of the original "pious trace."

The story ends on a clearly regressive note. His desire "to die in birth" compels him to take the train down to Calabria, which he had visited when he was a child. He finds a "stony white beach"; strips, and walks into the water (365). He wishes "to reach the point where one could no longer touch bottom, and so die." Once he is totally immersed in the water, he feels as if he is flying without wings: "I could not say that I was swimming, my slow darting resembled, rather, a flight without wings. . . . There, my story is all here. It—I must say—*desinit in piscem*" (366). The "hallucinatory" conclusion of this story is a clear reference to Ferenczi's *Thalassa*. In the title itself Ferenczi emphasizes the centrality of the concept of "sea," not only from a psychoanalytical but also from a mythic and biological point of view. Pasolini's allusion to "fish" (*piscem*) is particularly revealing. Ferenczi writes,

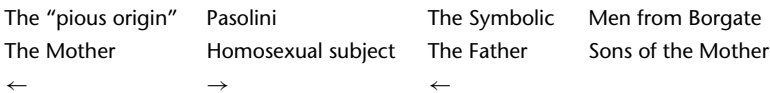
If the fish swimming in the water signifies . . . the child in the mother's womb, and if in a multiplicity of dreams we are forced to interpret the child as a symbol of the penis, the penis signification of the fish on the one hand, and on the other the fish signification of the penis, become more self-evident—in other words, the penis in coitus enacts not only *the natal and antenatal mode of existence of the human species*,

but likewise the struggles of that primal creature among its ancestors which suffered the great catastrophe of the drying up of the sea.<sup>176</sup>

If the short story from the “*Epoché*” series symbolizes *Petrolio tout court*, it is reasonable to infer that the “form” Pasolini wishes to evoke with his novel is the form of the “natal and antenatal mode of existence” of the male subject, and more specifically his perfect fusion with the mother. We could go so far as to say that the metamorphoses of the two Carlos allude to a development in the human species, to use Ferenczi’s words. It is as if Carlo 1 and Carlo 2 were new prototypes of a regression to the mother/sea. They are male/female. The metamorphosed bodies are also memorials of the mother. Their monstrosity lies in that they signify a passage, an in-between stage between the decadence of now and the “pious origin,” as Michaux phrases it. In *Il sogno del centauro*, Pasolini justifies his opposition to abortion by saying, “I don’t feel totally detached from the primordial waters of the maternal bosom.”<sup>177</sup>

We have seen, however, that in *Petrolio* Pasolini presents a radically new vision of the “pious origin” of the mother. The young men who used to echo the original mother are now shadows of the “Lower World” and meet with Carlo as if for a night Sabbath where witches mate with demons. Furthermore, we know that the mother is “queen” of that very Lower World where these ghosts or demons reside. *Petrolio* signifies a Copernican revolution in Pasolini’s poetics, which is consistent with what we have learned by examining *Saint Paul* and *Porn-Theo-Colossal*.

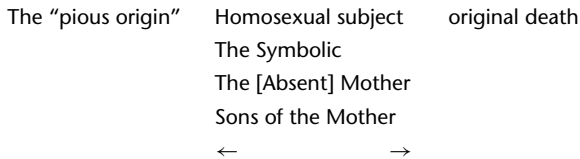
Faithful readers of Pasolini tend to read his oeuvre in the light of a set of almost proverbial beliefs that emphasize Pasolini’s activity as an engaged, “political” intellectual. We can visualize the structure of Pasolini’s familiar ideology as follows:



The gaze of the homosexual subject is directed at the father and, beyond him, at the Borgate as the world of the sons of the mother. Whereas the homosexual subject is an orphan of the mother, the young men have the “smell” of the mother. Sex with these men is a maternal ritual, in that the homosexual subject worships the bodies that are loved by the mother. The mother turns her back on the homosexual subject. Remember the backward tracking shot in Carlo’s vision of hell. The attack against the order of the father (capitalism, consumerism, death of

dialects and expressive language) is a prayer to the mother, who lives in the sons who have not betrayed her (the men of the borgate). The homosexual subject embodies a double bind. On the one hand, his perverted nature is a betrayal of the natural order of the mother. On the other, his outcast condition compels him to look to the sons of the mother in an act of veneration. To practice this maternal ritual, the homosexual subject must overcome the order of the father, whose power is predicated upon an erasure of the mother.

The Copernican revolution detailed in *Petrolio* offers a tragic simplification of the structure represented above:



This scheme invites us to reevaluate Pasolini's "political" thought. What does *political* mean in Pasolini's later works? Whereas the Pasolini we are familiar with is a (homosexual) subject who is split between a longing for the place and time of the mother (who is *behind* him) and a fierce accusation of the corruption of the place and time of the father (who *faces* him), *Petrolio* challenges us with new questions.<sup>178</sup> What is exactly the place and time of the mother? And what is the place and time of the father? Where are the sons who have not betrayed the mother? *Political* now describes the gaze the homosexual subject directs at himself. He, the son who has been rejected by the mother, carries the memory of the mother as an unrecoverable loss. The (homosexual) subject is both the memorial of the mother (the "origins"; her pre-Fall idiom) and the denial of the father (the symbolic order). The sons who have not betrayed the mother become part of the maternal memorial that exists *within* the subject as a perennial mourning. The denial of the mother (the symbolic order of the father) and the living loss of the mother are the foundation of the new political subject. The new political battlefield is the subject himself. This does not mean to say that Pasolini in his later works embraces a sort of nineteenth-century introspection. The subject is "political." The subject is the site where the symbolic erases the mother, where the sons of the mother disappear once and for all. Remember what Róheim writes about the schizophrenic's confusing of word and object. And remember the "diluted reel of film in my brain" of Róheim's schizophrenic patient. The encroaching erasure of the borgate and of its

mythic inhabitants, the faithful sons of the mother, takes place in the subject who witnesses this erasure. The absent mother, the queen of hell, reigns in the subject who longs for her.

### The Mother/I/The Shit

I conclude this analysis of *Petrolino* by looking at the triad of the mother, the castrated man/woman, and the Shit as the staging of a linguistic performance. I synthesize this three-part structure as follows:

Speaker	Signifier	Signified
[Mouth/womb]	[Death of fetus]	[Dead fetus]
Mother	I	The Shit
Queen of the Dead	Post-mortem expression	Discard
The Underworld	Testament	Corpse

The Shit is the product of the act of dying, which is what the “I” signifies. The castrated man/woman Carlo mirrors the Shit and desires the Shit (the Shit is a young man with a girlfriend; the Shit is a “real” heterosexual man). The Shit is the abject object that, in Julia Kristeva’s words, “draws me toward the place where meaning collapses.”<sup>179</sup> The Shit is a brother of those twenty young men with whom Carlo 2 had sex one night in an open field. The Shit is certainly disgusting, revolting, and abject. He looks like a rat. But the Shit is also the guide to the underworld where the demons of the night, the Lares and Penates (the young men whom Carlo 2 serviced sexually), reside in eternity. And what is the abject object but “a weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me”? The Shit is a “weight” of nothingness (what is the meaning of feces?), but he is also the representative of the “real” world (the modern hell). He lives “on the edge of nonexistence.” He is a “form” that disgusts and attracts us.

The scheme presented above also responds to Pasolini’s view of the “birth” of the Italian language. The passage from a hypothetical, literary form to a living expression is indeed, for Pasolini, a form of miscarriage. It is superfluous to remind the reader of Pasolini’s tirades against the “newly born” national language brought to life by television and bureaucracy. Can a post-mortem expression (a testament) give birth to a different language?

In her essay on Mishima’s homosexuality, Catherine Millot defines Mishima’s homosexual desire as “a seesaw movement . . . between the

two poles of the maternal Other and the phallus."<sup>180</sup> In this "extreme dispossession of the self," the homosexual subject is divided between the "chastity" of the woman/mother (remember Carlo 2's feeling of chastity when he becomes a woman) and the fetish of the phallus.<sup>181</sup> In *Petrolio*, this complete dispossession equals the expression of an idiom that only signifies what has been dispossessed, what has been removed from the womb prematurely (a miscarriage). What the "I" says is a perennial post-mortem recognition of an abortion. The "I" is an oxymoron, if you will. He says that the journey, the leitmotif of the entire novel, is a perennial post-mortem announcement. The "form" of the novel is thus something that is at once expressed and discarded, something like feces.





FOUR

## To Give Birth in *Salò* and Sade's *The 120 Days* of *Sodom*

Why is the trendy intellectual of today so interested in the Marquis de Sade?

MAURICE BELLET

Is this what you wish to express with *Salò*?

I don't know. PASOLINI

*Petrolio and Salò are premised on the same concept of giving birth to a form, where form means not only a new narrative form, but also the form of a schizophrenic space closed off from the world, and the mute form of a stillborn fetus. Salò is the representation of the "diluted reel of film" projected in the schizophrenic's mind (see the discussion of Norman O. Brown's allusion to Róheim's idea in the preceding chapter). Through a close reading of the film in the light of Sade's vast, unfinished novel, The 120 Days of Sodom, we understand how Pasolini interprets and appropriates the Sadian obsession with nature and motherhood, which are seen as the libertine's two fiercest enemies. In particular, Pasolini focuses on two major characters of Sade's novel: Constance, the pregnant daughter of one of the four libertines, and Sophie, the victim whose mother died in the attempt to save her from the libertines. At the end of Sade's The 120 Days of Sodom, Constance is slaughtered, and her stillborn baby is extracted from her belly. Merging these two female figures, Pasolini creates the character of Renata, one of the female victims who stands out throughout the film as the symbolic representation of the mother (Constance) and the daughter*

The second epigraph is from Pasolini, "Il sesso come metafora del potere"; see *Per il cinema*, 2:2064. On the vicissitudes of the screenplay of *Salò*, see Walter Siti and Franco Zabaghi's detailed essay in Pasolini, *Per il cinema*, 2:315559. The editors of the two volumes of *Per il cinema* have kept the original Sadean names of the four libertines in their textual transcript from the film *Salò*. I follow their editorial choice.

mourning the mother's death (Sophie). As we can already detect in the opening scenes describing the formation of the four Fascists' secret society, Salò functions as a dirge in honor of the deceased mother as the locus (the womb) of a pre-Fall condition. Salò differs from Pasolini's previous visual and verbal works centered on a nostalgia for the mother in that along with the dead mother the film evokes the image of her stillborn fetus, that inferior matter that the Sadian libertines equate with feces and sperm. The closed space of Salò is where the absence of the mother is felt and mourned as the loss of humanity per se. This mythic and emotional vacuum is invaded and raped by the Fascists, the brute and obscure forces of an external world that has no meaning.

On January 27 Madame Martaine, the third narrator in Sade's *The 120 Days of Sodom*, offers these two final stories, the second of which is only one sentence:

This personage performs an abortion when the woman's pregnancy has entered its eighth month. He forces her to drink a certain brew which brings the child out dead in a trice. Upon other occasions, this libertine by his art causes the child to be born from the mother's asshole. But the child emerges dead, and the woman's life is gravely imperiled.

He severs an arm.<sup>1</sup>

In the previous chapter we saw that excremental birth is a pivotal theme in *Petrolino* and also corresponds to one of the most notorious and disturbing scenes of *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*. A sign of perversion, the anus is a vagina that gives birth to something that is at once a fetus, waste, and also food. The anus acts as a vagina that absorbs the phallus and stages an original fusion between mother and fetus, which is, however, expelled from the vagina as feces are expelled from the anus. The anus is the locus of an aberration, for it at once generates and discards, unifies and alienates. Madame Martaine's following telegraphic allusion ("He severs an arm") seems to indicate a metaphorical transference from the phallus to the "arm" severed. The pregnancy the phallus has brought about is "severed."

We have already encountered these themes in *Petrolino*. They are also predominant in Sade's masterpiece and in Pasolini's *Salò*. However, the two unforgettable "shit scenes" in *Salò* (a girl is forced to eat shit; a shit banquet) are usually ascribed to Pasolini's disgust with capitalistic society. Read in this manner, shit is both the goods and the customers caught up in a vicious circle of production, consumption, and expulsion. We have seen, however, that in *Petrolino* feces are much more than a metaphor for consumerism. Critics all too often reduce *Salò* to a metaphor for the

universal objectification produced by capitalism (the young bodies used for pleasure and then discarded). “There is nothing more to say about *Salò*,” an intelligent and gifted graduate student recently stated at his dissertation defense. “At this point we can only investigate the individual metaphors of the film,” he added. This film would represent Pasolini’s dark pessimism vis-à-vis Italy’s aggressive modernization.

According to this received idea, *Salò* would be a work of art that, like a porn flick, has nothing to hide. What you see is what you are supposed to get. The meaning of this film, so to speak, exposes itself to you. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Pasolini, a vehement enemy of all sorts of conformity, has created an academic conformity that is very hard to eradicate. To be an accurate and respectful interpreter of *Salò* often means to harp on Pasolini’s “prophetic” view of modernity (the end of the human à la Marcuse; the Italian language as a stillborn product produced by TV; the imposition of a pervasive cultural Nazism, etc.) without checking to see if his alleged prophecies have really come to pass. Another frequent strategy for leaving Pasolini’s prophecies unchallenged is to adjust them to reality (the corruption and decadence of Italian society, etc.), leaving aside the in-your-face, apocalyptic nature of his ideas. Pasolini’s thought is not limited to Italy’s social, academic, and cultural corruption; it asserts the once-and-for-all end of what it means to be human. Recall Marcuse’s best seller, *One-Dimensional Man*, which I discuss in the final chapter of this book. The tone of Pasolini’s poetics is apocalyptic, not merely critical of Western society’s immorality. Viewed from the perspective of a respectful approach that tends to repeat what Pasolini says about his film, *Salò* is indeed a pornographic film.

To glean a better and less conventional understanding of this film, we must read *Salò* not only in view of its contemporaries, *Petrolino*, *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, and *Saint Paul* (Pasolini began working on it in 1968 but continued to revisit it until his death), but also in light of Sade’s *The 120 Days of Sodom*. A problem with most readings of *Salò* lies in the fact that Sade’s novel is often interpreted in the light of *Salò* and not vice versa, as if Sade had written his novel in preparation for Pasolini’s film. In other words, critics approach *Salò* with the false assumption that they already know what *The 120 Days of Sodom* is about. They assume they do not need to know this text too well, since Pasolini’s film is very clear in its basic significance. When they do refer to Sade, they do it only to confirm the meaning of specific episodes of *Salò*, ignoring the fact that Sade’s incomplete novel is more than seven hundred pages long.

A careful analysis of Sade's novel is of paramount importance for an understanding of what Pasolini did with it, what he chose to use and what he left out, how he reinterpreted and blended two or more characters or two or more episodes, or how he shifted the order of the female narrators' stories. Pasolini saw himself primarily as a poet, as an artist of the written word. In a recent interview, the director Pupi Avati emphasizes Pasolini's central presence in the writing of *Salò*.<sup>2</sup> Avati explains that, although Sergio Citti was supposed to shoot the film, while Avati and Pasolini were only the screenwriters, Avati and Citti kept silent ("*facevamo scena muta*") during their meetings with Pasolini. Pasolini was the mind behind the entire project. He was the one who chose which passage from Sade they would work on that day and how they would interpret it. *Salò* was Pasolini's from the very beginning.

As in the preceding chapter on *Petrolio*, I do not intend to offer here a descriptive analysis of this film. Several accurate works have been dedicated to this essential endeavor. This chapter offers a traditional close reading of selected scenes that I make converse with their Sadean source and Pasolini's other contemporary works.<sup>3</sup> The overall meaning of the film will arise from these parallel dialogues. So far, we have talked about an excremental birth and an "excremental hell" (of the kind Strindberg creates in *Inferno*) as psychological, metaphorical, or even mythical events. In the above passage from *The 120 Days of Sodom*, Sade literalizes these concepts and uncovers their unnatural, aberrant nature. An "excremental birth" is an oxymoron because in reality the "child" is always dead when it comes out of its mother's anus. This sort of aberrant birth is an abortion. By making the mother defecate her fetus, the libertine shows that a fetus has the same nature as feces. The fetus is waste to be discarded, a silent and even repulsive product of nature. But in his unveiling of nature's hypocrisy, the libertine also reveals the true nature of a mother. A mother is a woman who carries "something like" shit in her belly.<sup>4</sup> The equation shit = sperm = fetus is recurrent in Sade and represents a rhetorical continuum based on the verb "discharge" (*décharger*), which Sade uses to indicate "to defecate," "to ejaculate," and "to give birth." I return to this issue later. One might argue that *Salò* offers a much narrower view of feces than do *Petrolio* and Sade's *The 120 Days of Sodom*. Is that because it is a film rather than a novel? Is it because cinema is always "realistic," and in a film shit is nothing but shit? This would be, of course, a trivial answer, but it is true that the complexity of the concept shit/birth in *Petrolio* seems to be absent from *Salò*. Let us see if this is the case.

## The “Heroine” Constance: From Sade to Pasolini

Let us first consider “the most notoriously unforgettable moment in *Salò*, a point of no return,” in Gary Indiana’s words.<sup>5</sup> Indiana refers to the scene of a girl forced to swallow feces on the floor. During Signora Maggi’s first turn as the narrator of stories about coprophilia, the Duc defecates on the floor and forces a young girl to eat his shit with a spoon. Pasolini here merges two different parts of Sade’s novel. Before looking at this notorious scene more closely, let us read one of the two direct sources. For the time being, let us focus only on the passage regarding the conclusion of the scene in *Salò*. At the beginning of the seventeenth day of Sade’s novel, we are reminded of President Curval’s hatred of the young woman named Constance. Falsely accused of having exposed her front to her master “when he had called for her behind,” Constance is summoned, and

the President shitted in the center of the room, and she was enjoined to approach his creation on hands and knees and to devour what the cruel man had just wrought. She cast herself upon her knees, yes, but in this posture begged pardon, and her solicitations went unheeded; Nature had put bronze in those breasts where hearts are commonly to be found. . . . At last, however, decisive actions had to be taken. Constance’s very soul seemed to burst before she was half done, but it had all to be done nevertheless, and every ounce disappeared from the tiles of the floor. (443–44)

Who is Constance? Both the girl (Renata) in *Salò* and Constance in *The 120 Days of Sodom* are unique and fundamental characters whose roles are essential within the economy of the two works. It is crucial to see how Constance in Sade metamorphoses in Renata in Pasolini’s film. We must become acquainted with these two girls through a detailed analysis if we are to understand what they symbolize and what their symbolic presences signify for Sade and Pasolini. In Sade’s novel, Constance is the daughter of Durcet, one of the four libertines. Durcet is the most effeminate of the four men. Sade describes Durcet as follows: “[He is] small, short, broad, thickset . . . his entire body, and principally his hips and buttocks, absolutely like a woman’s; his ass . . . excessively agape, owing to the habit of sodomy; his prick is extraordinarily small; . . . it has entirely ceased to stiffen. . . . he has a chest like a woman’s” (210). Durcet seems to recall the two Carlos’ feminizations in *Petrolino*. In the introduction of Sade’s novel, we learn that Durcet likes to be penetrated by the “proud and masculine” Duc, who has a huge member “in constant erection” (201).

If Durcet presents himself as the quintessential image of the passive, womanlike sodomite (he is small and has feminine breasts, hips, and buttocks), his daughter is his exact opposite. Constance is "a tall woman, slender, lovely as a picture. . . . Her eyes [are] large, black, and full of fire. . . . Her bosom [is] most buxom, fair as alabaster and as firm" (211). Constance is lovely "as a picture." Sade is often accused of being unable or unwilling to give a visible portrait of his characters. In this case, Constance embodies the symbol of a beautiful, perfectly healthy, and imposing woman. She has the virility lacking in her father (her eyes full of fire). Furthermore, although her father did not care for her education, Constance has embraced "the principles of rectitude and of virtue it seemed Nature had been pleased to engrave in her heart." This attachment to virtue and rectitude is something natural in Constance, because she has "no formal religion," given her father's stern opposition toward any kind of spiritual upbringing. "Modesty" and "natural humility" are the most visible traits of her strong character.

Durcet marries his daughter Constance to the Duc. It is the Duc who in *Salò* forces the girl to eat his feces. In *The 120 Days of Sodom*, we learn that "the day after the Duc had despoiled her of her maidenhead, . . . she had fallen dangerously ill. They believed her rectum had been irreparably damaged." But Constance recovered and became used "to this daily torture" (212–13). According to Sade's description, Constance symbolizes a healthy, uneducated, but naturally religious woman. Pasolini could not miss these unique traits, which fit perfectly well in his mythology. Constance is in contact with nature and the sacred without having received any bourgeois or clerical indoctrination, like Pasolini's beloved men of the Roman borgate. But in Sade's novel Constance is more than a strong and determined woman. She is the only character who stands up against the libertines, refutes their immoral statements, and does her best to defend the other victims. The novel presents numerous examples of her bravery. For instance, at the beginning of the twentieth day, Sade narrates that during the previous night the Duc, totally drunk, went to the room of Sophie, thinking that she was Aline, the girl who was supposed to be his wife for that night according to the rules the libertines themselves had defined. The Duc wants to sodomize the wrong girl, who flees the room and enters the apartment of Durcet, who "is lying with his daughter, Constance." Sophie begs Constance to help her. Constance "did rise from the bed, despite the efforts the drunken Durcet made to restrain her by saying he wanted to discharge; she [Constance] took a candle and accompanied Sophie to the girls' chamber." Constance sees the Duc chasing the terrified girls. "Constance finally

showed him his error, and, entreating him to allow her to guide him back to his room, . . . Constance [then] withdrew from the room, and calm was restored generally" (467).

### Constance's Pregnancy

If we keep in mind the Duc's violent and arrogant stance, the image of Constance showing this libertine "his error" and taking him back to his room stands in stark and amusing contrast with what we read throughout the novel. Only Constance has the unspoken right to speak up and contradict the libertines. Not even the four prostitutes dare to challenge the four men's most perverse whims. But the most disturbing and enduring contrast between the four depraved men and Constance concerns her pregnancy. Constance is about to become a mother. We learn that she is pregnant early on in the novel, at the beginning of day four. She makes this unexpected announcement after having spent the night with President Curval, the libertine who later will make her eat his shit from the floor. Curval is not happy with Constance's sexual performance and is about to write her name down on the blacklist of those victims who deserve to be punished. "That lovely creature," Sade writes, "declared that she was pregnant" (313).

Renata, the girl who eats the Duc's feces in Pasolini's *Salò*, is the pregnant Constance in *The 120 Days of Sodom*. After revealing that she is pregnant, Constance is "dispensed from service at table, from chastisements, and from a few other little odds and ends the accomplishments of which her state no longer rendered voluptuous to observe." The libertines "legalize" Constance's special condition not out of respect, but only because later this pregnant woman will offer them "even more lewd" forms of sexual entertainment. From this moment on, the opposition between Constance and the four men hinges upon her pregnancy.

I have already mentioned that in Sade it is President Curval who defecates on the floor and forces Constance to eat his feces. And it is also Curval who expresses the most violent hatred for this girl who is soon to become a mother. Why is Curval the libertines' spokesman against this pregnant woman? In Sade's prefatory notes, we learn that Curval is, so to speak, the most "shit-like" man of the bunch. Curval is indeed nothing more than a gaping anus. Sade writes that Curval has "slack, drooping buttocks that rather resembled a pair of dirty rags flipping upon his upper thighs. . . . In the center of it all there was displayed—no need to spread those cheeks—an immense orifice whose enormous diameter, odor, and

color bore a closer resemblance to the depths of a well-freighted privy than to an asshole" (205). Curval's huge and wide-open anus is a latrine ready to be used. Curval keeps his anus "in such a state of uncleanness that one was at all times able to observe there a rim or pad a good two inches thick."

Curval and Constance stage a radical opposition between two forms of birth. Whereas Constance is a mother according to the rules of nature, Curval's anus is an open vagina that defecates its fetus. We could say that Constance in effect embodies a perversion of the libertines' system of thought. The first open and deeply disturbing confrontation between Constance and Curval occurs at the end of one of stories of Madame Duclos, the first narrator in the novel. The story that leads to the heated argument between Curval and Constance is the following: "[A gentleman's] joy consisted in eating expelled ovulations and in lapping up miscarriages; he would be notified whenever a girl found herself in that case, he would rush to the house and swallow the embryo, half swooning with satisfaction" ("Seventh Day," 347). If the first citation from Sade speaks of the identification vagina/anus and fetus/waste (the baby was dead), in this brief story we read of the fetus as food, that is, as pre-fecal matter (the embryo; miscarriages). In both cases, the thing eaten and produced, or defecated, is dead stuff. The libertine, whom Curval knew, swoons with satisfaction in his act of eating what could have been life and is instead food that is about to become shit. The President states that to "lap up" a fetus would "produce a lively discharge, and were Constance to grant me her kind permission, for I hear she is gravid now, . . . [I would take] her son along before he's fully done, and . . . toss him off like a sardine" (348).

"Oh, all the world knows your horror of pregnant women," Constance replies with indignation. The pregnant woman also takes the liberty of accusing Curval of having murdered his wife "because she conceived a second time." The showdown between the girl who is about to be a mother and the libertine whose rectum is a latrine open to every kind of "discharge" could not be more dramatic. "I am not fond of progeny," Curval confirms. In a subsequent confrontation with the girl, the President calls the fetus she carries in her womb "a spoonful of modified fuck" ("Twenty-First Day," 485). Once again, Constance has the guts to stand up against the libertine: "[It is] surely not with you I count upon being respected because of my state. Your loathing for pregnant women is only too notorious." In this case, Curval is so outraged by Constance's words that he is "on the verge of committing some sacrilege against that superb belly" but he is stopped by Madame Duclos, the first storyteller.



Constance's pregnancy is the fulcrum of the entire novel. More than the vague temporal indications used as titles of each chapter, Constance's pregnancy signifies the passage of time within the closed space of the libertines' dictatorship. "The beautiful Constance," Sade writes in the chapter on the twenty-sixth day, "made her appearance naked; the sight of her belly, which was beginning somewhat to swell, made Curval's head very hot. . . . Curval's horror for her was doubling every day" (520). In this passage, Constance seems to flaunt the beauty of her belly, which is slowly swelling up. Naked, she parades her pregnancy as a sign of female authority. "Horror" is certainly an appropriate word in *The 120 Days of Sodom*, but Sade's use of this term in this context sounds funny and paradoxical. In Sade, a vagina and a woman's swollen belly are sources of "horror." But isn't horror a fundamental source of sexual arousal for a libertine? Speaking of a man who "would swoon away from pleasure" if he saw a person "burned alive or quartered," Madame Duclos reports this criminal's words: "Only a pregnant woman would have a stronger effect upon me" ("The Twenty-Seventh Day," 532). What people call "horror," this libertine explains, may "produce an erection." As Sade explains, something is pleasurable only insofar as it is horrible "in the eyes of others." For the libertine himself looks at himself through the eyes of the hypothetical other who would be horrified at seeing someone in such a horrible situation.

Curval's horror at the sight of Constance's growing belly has a particular connotation. His revulsion is a sign of defeat rather than a source of pleasure. Constance's pregnancy is an affront. The progressive growth of her belly is a sign of time as the expression of nature's undefeatable supremacy. After listening to Madame Duclos's stories about men discharging on women in the act of giving birth, Curval, seething with horror, ironically declares, "I never see a pregnant woman without being melted; think for a moment what a marvelous thing is a woman who, just like an oven, can make a little snot hatch deep in her vagina. . . . Constance, dear girl, come hither, I beseech you, come let me kiss the sanctuary wherein, at this very moment, such a profound mystery is in progress" ("The Twenty-Eighth Day," 543). A fetus is a little "snot" sitting in the "oven" of a woman. It is something cooking. But if the fetus grows like a cake in the oven, Curval "melts" when he sees the woman's "oven." After these words, Curval drags Constance into his alcove, where she is heard "to vent a scream."

In *The 120 Days of Sodom*, Constance's pregnancy as a marker of time (her belly looks more and more swollen) opposes a second, and radically different, form of temporal indicator: the perversions of the four

libertines, which worsen from one account to the next, from one narrator to another, and eventually end in a sequence of ritualized, sadistic murders. Let us read one eloquent example. The last story of the thirteenth day is about an "old brigadier in the King's army; he had to be stripped to the skin, then swaddled like an infant; when he was thus prepared, I [Madame Duclos, the first storyteller] had to shit while he looked on, bring him the plate and, with the tips of my fingers, feed him my turd as if it were pap. . . . [The libertine] discharges in his clothes, the while simulating a baby's cry" (410). This man is a "baby" during the first part of the novel. He cries like a baby while feeding on Madame Duclos's excrements. And his ejaculation itself recalls a baby defecating in its clothes. The pleasure of this man lies in the perverted reenactment of his infancy. Madame Duclos is the mother who feeds him with her "pap." Much later, in part four of the novel, Madame Desgranges informs us that this libertine has grown out of his original mania: "He whom Duclos cited earlier, the gentleman who liked to be wrapped in swaddling clothes and fed whoreshit in a spoon rather than pap, swathes a girl so tightly in baby's blankets that he kills her" (631). The libertine who used to discharge if he saw himself as a baby nourished by his mother, he is *now* a man who murders the mother by wrapping her in his baby clothes.

Again, this story of the libertine who discharges only if "swaddled like an infant" is the final tale of the thirteenth day. In her lengthy narrations, Madame Duclos recounts innumerable stories of libertines obsessed with feces. Coprophagy is in fact the leading "mania" in the first and most developed section of Sade's novel, which takes up a significant part of the entire book. It is telling that Pasolini makes Signora Maggi open her performance exactly with the story of the libertine defecating in baby clothes and eating the prostitute's feces. It is also worth noting that the use of the spoon in the equivalent scene in *Salò* echoes the second reference to the same libertine in Sade's text (the gentleman who was "fed whoreshit in a spoon"). In the second reference, the same libertine has switched roles with his female partner. He is now the one (the mother) who swathes her baby (the woman) so tightly that she suffocates.

In *The 120 Days of Sodom*, the frequent references to Constance's evolving pregnancy contrast the progressive darkening of the libertines' manias. To give birth (Constance) and to kill (the libertine in Madame Desgranges's stories and the four libertines in the final section of the novel) are the two parallel apexes of the novel. And it is Constance who, in the final pages of the text, comes to embody the two contrastive trajectories. Her horrendous death is in effect a form of giving birth. *The 120 Days of Sodom* concludes with the ritualized murder of the pregnant

Constance. The mother Constance gives birth and dies at the same time. We will return to her horrific death later.

In his interpretation of Constance, Pasolini maintains the essential association with motherhood, but erases the connection between Constance and the libertines. Pasolini's Constance has nothing to do with these men. She is not a member of their families. At the beginning of the film, when the four libertines stipulate their reciprocal marriages in order to tighten their perverse bond, the viewer cannot identify their daughters when the Duc mentions their names. Several young soldiers drag four well-dressed girls into the room where the four libertines have decided their future. The scene is a static long shot with the girls lined up in two rows on the left side of the frame, and the Duc and the Bishop sitting on the right side. The shot recalls a perfect Renaissance perspective, thanks to the wooden pillars defining the space, as in a Piero della Francesca painting. The vanishing point corresponds to Durcet, the most effeminate of the four libertines, who sits at a simple but authoritative desk. The Duc stands up and walks toward the center of the room without crossing the invisible boundary between the left side (the four girls) and the right one (the authority; the libertines). Looking toward the other three libertines and holding their rulebook, *Regolamenti* (Rules), the Duc announces the four marriages. In this key scene, Pasolini is not interested, for instance, in determining which girl is Susy, the President's girl, who is destined to be the Duc's wife. This is quite different from Sade's detailed descriptions of the libertines' daughters, and in particular of Constance. And very different is the evocative connotation of the name "Constance" (a girl firm in her virtuous principles), which is lost in the banal "Susy."

### Renata Merges Two Sadean Characters: Constance and Sophie

In *Salò*, Constance's qualities and symbolic value transfer to the character of the beautiful and sensitive Renata, one of the female victims. Renata reflects both Constance (the woman who is about to become a mother) and Sophie (a girl who mourns the death of the mother). In Renata, Pasolini has thus merged two essential aspects of his mythic concept of "mother," as he formulates it at the end of his life. Renata is at once the mother who gives life (the woman who carries the fetus) and the mother who dies. She recalls a mythic origin and an apocalyptic end. We have already encountered this view of motherhood in *Petrolio*. The death of the mother is the point where the subject originates (remember the identification between fetus and feces) and where the subject will

end (remember the "Underworld" ruled by the mother). In *Salò*, Renata echoes both the origin (Constance) and the end (Sophie).

Constance's identification with motherhood is present in Renata, who is not the daughter of one of the libertines but one of the young victims abducted to satisfy these men's manias. Among all the female victims, Renata is without a doubt the most prominent and visible. The viewer is made aware of her uniqueness from her first appearance. Renata is one of the two girls in the first close-up of the female victims waiting to be scrutinized in a room on the same first floor where the libertines are conducting the examination. Renata is the third girl shown to the libertines. However, whereas the first two girls are taken from the "storeroom" that seems to be located on the first floor, Renata is dragged down from the second floor, even though when we first saw her she was waiting with other girls on the first floor. Renata's descent "from above" is a powerful allusion to the unforgettable, theatrical scenes of the three elegantly dressed narrators descending from the upper floor at the beginning of each of three "circles" (*gironi*) of the film. Like the three female storytellers, Renata has something to tell. Moreover, unlike the previous two girls exposed to the libertines' examination, Renata is already naked when she is led to the men's scrutiny.

Like Sade, Pasolini selects a female character to create a forceful contrast between the libertines' ideology and the mythic concept of motherhood. Renata enters the room naked. A pan shot follows the girl and the matron who holds her by the arm, while they walk in from the left toward the center of the room. The diagonal shot from the left side focuses on the libertines who are comfortably sitting on a long sofa placed in the right corner of the frame. Similar to the previous scene of the stipulation of marriages, this long shot presents a scene divided into two areas, but in this case the slanted perspective highlights the superiority of the girl over the men. The diagonal and slightly high-angle long shot posits the standing girl as the fulcrum of the scene. She literally looks down on the men sitting on the sofa (fig. 6). All the characters present in the room (a male servant at the door; the matron; the libertines) look toward the girl. The four libertines, who symbolize four facets of power (nobility, Church, judiciary system, and economic power), look up to her.<sup>6</sup>

Renata is also the only girl whose story is so powerful that it makes the libertines stand up in adoration. In *Salò*, the events preceding Renata's arrest are a straightforward repetition of Sophie's terrible plight in Sade's text: "The fourth [girl] was named *Sophie*: she was fourteen. . . . She had been seized while on a walk with her mother, who, seeking to defend her, was flung into a river, where she expired before her daughter's



Figure 6

eyes" (227).<sup>7</sup> In *Salò*, after hearing the matron's account, Renata falls on her knees sobbing. In a sort of visual seesaw, a long shot shows the libertines standing up and now looking down on the girl. Renata exposes or even flaunts her suffering. She does not cover her face with her hands. She does not lower her head. With her eyes closed, she turns her face upwards in a posture recalling Dreyer's *Jeanne d'Arc*, in particular the famous scene of the first encounter between the saint and the inquisitors. The contractions of Renata's neck make her intense sobs visible as if in a silent film that has bypassed sound. Her ultimate nakedness is her exposed neck, which leads her sobs from her chest to her mouth.

Renata does not say a word in this introductory scene. She neither begs for mercy nor covers her face in despair. Her composure, silence, and gestures are a sentence with no secondary clauses. From the outset, Pasolini manipulates the Sadean text into a statement about the loss of the mother. Renata carries this sacred message throughout the film. Renata mourns the loss of the mother also because her mother died in the attempt to save her. We shall see in a moment that, in the scene where she is forced to swallow the Duc's feces, Renata behaves in a very different way. In the shit scene, Renata becomes very loquacious. She honors the memory of her dead mother, cries, and brings her hands to her face, as one would expect from a girl in great pain. In this second scene, moreover, Renata is fully dressed and defends herself against the men who undress her. I would like to emphasize only one detail at this point. I explained that Renata is the third girl shown to the libertines. Each of the three girls wears at least one hairpin. For instance, the hairpin of the second girl, who is rejected because she lacks a tooth, has a red heart on

top of it. Renata's hairpin displays a series of small daisies (*margherite*). This detail is worth remembering. We shall see that "Margherita" is the last word uttered in the film.

Let me repeat that Renata is the loss of the mother. Renata lives as a reminder of the mother who died before the beginning of the film. The film, we could say, is the funeral of the mother. Critics have often underscored the lugubrious atmosphere of *Salò*, which has been attributed to Pasolini's negative, Catholic interpretation of Sade. I would say that the darkness and emptiness of *Salò* lies in its being a religious service in honor of the mother, with all the mythic and even political implications of this event. The introductory scene in the "ANTINFERNO," as Pasolini calls it, where Renata shows the nakedness of a creature deprived of the mother, is preceded and followed by two revelatory events. Immediately after the image of Renata sobbing on the floor and the libertines staring at her in awe, we witness the death of a young man who jumps off the jeep carrying some of the male victims and is gunned down while running along a river. This scene is absent from Sade's *120 Days of Sodom*. In Sade, the eight male victims are selected by ballot, because the pimps had originally brought one hundred and fifty boys, far too many for Durcet's chateau. To cut down their number to eight, the libertines even decide to "dress the boys as girls," which would "depreciate" the value of some of them (229). No murder is mentioned at this point of the novel.

The scene of the murder of the young man directly follows Renata's sobbing for her mother. Renata's mourning is foreshadowed in a preceding scene, the only scene of the entire film in which we see a mother saying goodbye to her son, who has been apprehended by the Fascist soldiers.<sup>8</sup> This scene opens with a long, 90-degree pan shot from an open door whence two Fascists drag out a young man. At the same time we hear the men's steps on the ground and the sobbing of a woman, the young man's mother. We actually hear her sobs before we see her. The woman's initially subdued sobs soon become clear and distinct, creating a visual imbalance between the sound of the men marching away and the lament of the mother we do not see but hear so clearly, as if she was hiding very close to the camera. A second long pan shot shows the mother running after the three men and sobbing, "Claudio, Claudio, your scarf! Claudio, my son!" We finally see the mother from the back reaching her son from behind and putting the scarf around his neck. Her son turns to her and tells her, "Go away." The mother brings her hands to her face and emits one final distressing sob (fig. 7). Claudio, her son, is about to become one of the libertines' private guards. Claudio is also the first man to express violence and abuse toward the women in



Figure 7

the film. He is the guard who spits on the face of one of the libertines' daughters before they are taken to the room where their fathers have decided their marriages. The young man playing Claudio closely resembles Ninetto, Pasolini's beloved friend and actor. In particular, Claudio's rejection of his mother recalls Ninetto's refusal to consider God's request in *The Sequence of the Paper Flower*.

Renata's sobs for the lost mother echo those of the mother who sobs for Claudio, her lost son. But it is also revealing that the son she is about to lose has already spurned her. The three scenes I just mentioned (Renata in front of the libertines; the young man killed while running away; the mother running after her son) echo and complement each other. This is the "Pre-Hell," where we are instructed on the mythic setting lying behind the events narrated in the film. Claudio, the young man who rejects his mother, a woman we only see from the back, lives in a modest, mythic, and rural world. In this setting he at once joins the Fascist militia and denies the mother. Pasolini opposes this cruel son to the young man who tries to run away and is murdered by the same Fascist militia. In the middle of this introductory narrative, we find Renata mourning her deceased mother. Renata's sobs echo the rejected mother's sobs, which are the soundtrack, so to speak, of her son's departure.

The claustrophobic and obsessive insistence on the absence of the mother brings us back to *Petrolia* and in particular to Norman O. Brown's citation from R  heim's *Magic and Schizophrenia*. The closed space of the mind as an airless movie theater in which "pictures" are projected on the wall finds in *Sal  * its ultimate mise-en-sc  ne. For the schizophrenic, in Brown's summary, "pictures" are "spectral images" of an external reality

that is at once oneiric, remembered, and real, but experienced and thus reported by someone else. Speaking of Pasolini's "cerebral approach" to his film, Naomi Greene states, "In Pasolini's elegant lager, everything speaks of formal precision and abstract lifelessness: dark and somber colors (grays, blacks, browns); icy tile floors with geometrical patterns; and mathematical combinations. . . . More strongly than any words, the precise geometry and formal rituals of the film make it clear that no spontaneity or life, no *jouissance*, is possible."<sup>9</sup>

We could synthesize Pasolini's introductory staging of the mother's withdrawal as follows:

Death of Mother	Death of Son
(Renata)	(young man gunned down)
Son denying Mother	
(Claudio)	

In a space of no *jouissance*, birth and life are problematic concepts. Renata's contracted neck in the act of sobbing is indeed a form of giving birth. The main difference between this scene in *Salò* and the corresponding page in Sade's *The 120 Days of Sodom* is that, as Kristeva defines the subject's reaction to abjection, in the film Renata "giv[es] birth to [herself] amid the violence of sobs."<sup>10</sup> After being reminded of her mother's death, Renata "expel[s] [herself] . . . within the same motion through which she clai[ms] to establish [herself]." "That detail," Kristeva continues in her theoretical analysis, "turns me [the mourning subject] inside out, guts sprawling; it is thus that *they* see that 'I' am in the process of becoming another at the expense of my own death." Kristeva's powerful words are a cogent description of Renata's reaction to the matron's account. Renata's sobs signify the "birth," as Kristeva says, of a new self, a subject who dies and gives birth at once. Renata summons the loss of the mother in her performance of the act of giving birth (her neck as a womb in labor). What the viewer remembers of this first scene centered on Renata are the spasms of her moaning. Renata is the gesture of her neck in labor. "A gesture," Alphonso Lingis summarizes, "captures the sense of something. The hand that rises to respond to a gesture hailing us in the crowd is not preceded and made possible by a representation first formed of the identity of the one recognized. It is the hand that recognizes the friend who is there."<sup>11</sup> In *Salò*, sobbing is the gesture evoking the mother.

We need to bear in mind a crucial difference between Sade's novel and Pasolini's rewriting. Whereas in Sade the matron's discourse about



Sophie's dead mother announces the libertine's future pleasure, in Pasolini the same account "gives birth to" Renata as the bearer of the maternal loss. In the novel, Sophie is little more than a name, and the report of her mother's death is primarily a biographical identification. Sade uses the same device for every male and female victim. A few narrative notes serve to associate a name to some biographical event (how the victim was kidnapped; the social role of her or his father, etc). In *Salò*, not only does the mother's death qualify Renata's biography (Renata is the girl whose mother has died), but this event also "gives birth" to the girl as an autonomous identity. Renata is born when she is reminded of her mother's death. The libertines stand up to admire the girl when she falls on her knees sobbing. Similarly, in the shit scene the Duc stands up to acknowledge Renata's unique presence. Renata's moans, which echo the initial sobs of Claudio's mother, summon the phantasmatic presence of her mother. Having seen her die, Renata has turned her death into her own idiom.<sup>12</sup>

### Nature and Motherhood in Sade

Pasolini disrupts Sade's view of murder as the ultimate expression of the libertine's sexual drive. Whereas Sade keeps the description of this mania, as he calls it, as the shocking end of his book, Pasolini deemphasizes the importance of murder by presenting it at the beginning of his film. We are shown the death of the young man running away from the Fascists. Moreover, what in Sade is a fleeting reference that serves as a quick biographical mark (Sophie is the one whose mother died to save her), in Pasolini becomes a powerful and unforgettable scene. Renata, as the expression of the mother's death, inaugurates and concludes Pasolini's interpretation of Sade. By seeing her mother drown, Renata has already been exposed to her own unavoidable end.

Pasolini's emphasis on the concept of the mother's death is an expansion of one of Sade's most recurrent topoi. Sade's characters constantly express their hatred toward their own mothers and toward the concept of mother in general. In Sade's work, however, the hatred of the mother is strictly connected to the hatred of the fetus. The metaphorical identifications fetus = feces and sperm = feces augmented by the verbal connector "to discharge" is of great importance. Sade's characters often call feces "the egg" and the woman "the chicken" in the act of "laying" the egg/turd for the libertine, who is ready to swallow it.<sup>13</sup> Curval makes the connection between sperm and feces very clear: "There's nothing that

makes me discharge like a discharge [*Je ne connais rien qui fasse décharger comme une décharge*]” (379).<sup>14</sup> “To discharge” means “to defecate,” “to emit sperm,” but also “to expel the fetus as if it were a turd.” I opened this chapter with a very eloquent and disturbing quotation from Sade that lays out the equivalence of “to give birth” and “to shit.”

As far as the identification egg/fetus/turd is concerned, I will mention only a couple of examples. In the third part of the novel, Madame Martaine recounts the disturbing story of a libertine who “flogs a pregnant woman upon the belly until she miscarries; she must lay the egg in his presence” (619). The most explicit example of the perverse correspondence mother/shit/fetus is, however, the final section of Sade’s novel: “A man . . . binds a pregnant girl to a wheel and beneath it, fixed in a chair and unable to move, sits the girl’s mother, her head flung back, her mouth open and ready to receive all the ordures and rubbish which flow out of the corpse, and the infant, too, if the girl gives birth to it” (663). Here we have the case of a mother forced to swallow the “rubbish” coming out of the corpse of her daughter, including, possibly, her fetus. The mother swallows her own discharge (her daughter) plus her daughter’s discharge (her feces and her fetus). In this scenario, the libertine has staged a closed circuit of conception/birth/death/discharge, in which the “culprit” (the first, original mother) must take back every discharge produced by her own discharge.

The libertine has a “natural” hatred for his mother and, according to the Sadean libertine, conversely, the mother who lives according to nature has a “natural” hatred for her fetus.<sup>15</sup> In Sade’s *La philosophie dans le boudoir*, Madame De Saint-Ange contends that a mother has the “natural right” to kill her fetus, before or after birth. She even likens the fetus to an excrescence that we remove from the body. Madame De Saint-Ange also states that the propagation of the human species is not the ultimate goal of nature. Nature “tolerates” it (*“la propagation . . . n’est qu’une tolérance”*).<sup>16</sup> Abortion is a form of “purgation,” a physical cleansing.<sup>17</sup> By forcing a mother to swallow the fetus and feces of her daughter, the libertine reestablishes the “natural” order disrupted by the mother. Is giving birth an act against nature? Sade’s inconsistent concept of nature and especially of woman’s presence within the natural order may be explained if we understand that, for the libertine, neither nature nor the woman exist.<sup>18</sup> In Sade’s thought, women and nature share the same incongruous character. Like nature, women either confirm or oppose the libertine’s behavior. A woman either conspires with the libertine or falls prey to his violence. But there is a difference between woman and womanhood for the Sadean libertines. Whereas a woman can be either an ally

or a victim, womanhood as the manifestation of nature always escapes the libertines' power. And what is even more paradoxical is that, in the libertines' view, nature always prevails because nature is beyond existence. Nature's offspring reveals an intrinsic drive toward nonexistence. Everything nature produces is a discharge. The libertines' superiority over the rest of humanity lies in their awareness of nature's true essence: giving birth in order to annihilate.

Nature is at once the mirror of the libertine's debauchery and that something that frustrates the libertine's quest for annihilation. The paradoxical essence of the Sadean libertine's thought is that nature (and thus women as mothers) is the nonexistence that the libertine wishes to attain. We shall see later that, like nature, the libertine silences his "heart" or, better yet, ignores what the heart is. The libertine sees the "heart" as a mistake, an error that nature implants in human beings in order to confound their understanding. Again, nature embodies what the libertine constantly fails to become: "Insofar as he is himself part of nature, he senses that nature evades his negation, and the more he outrages nature and the more he serves it, the more he annihilates it and the more he submits to its law."<sup>19</sup> For the libertine, nature's existence speaks from the locus of her nothingness. Nature has defeated nature. The libertine is unable to move from the locus of the "heart" (where error has been implanted by nature) to the locus of nothingness whence nature speaks. Women, as the spokespersons of nature, can be vilified and erased, but nature's disorienting order (reproduce yourself so that I can erase you) persists.<sup>20</sup> In the fourth part of *The 120 Days of Sodom*, the act of vilifying the heart, the organ of nature's deceit, acquires an utterly violent sexual manifestation. Madame Desgrandes, the final storyteller, mentions an anonymous libertine who "formerly loved to fuck every youthful mouth and ass; his later improvement consists in snatching out the heart of a living girl, widening the space that organ occupied, fucking the warm hole" (646). "To fuck the heart" becomes at the end of the novel the literal act of removing the heart and violating the hole, the void, resulting from its removal. Once again, the libertine has moved from a metaphorical to a literal application of his intellectual belief. Pleasure and murder connive in the "hole" of the heart.

We have seen that in *Salò* Renata echoes both the mother (Constance) and the daughter (Sophie) in Sade's *The 120 Days of Sodom*. I have also pointed out that Pasolini combines two distinct scenes from Sade's novel. We have already considered the Sadean source of the final part of the scene, when the girl is forced to eat the Duc's feces. I have explained that this is an allusion to the seventeenth day of Sade's novel, when Curval

accuses Constance of having exposed the “wrong” part of her body (her genitals and not her buttocks). To punish her, Curval defecates in the middle of the room, and Constance on her knees swallows his feces directly from the floor. Let us now consider the source of the first part of the same scene of *Salò*.

We must read the passage in the second day of *The 120 Days of Sodom* where Madame Duclos opens her narration by remembering her mother's departure. Her husband finds a note in which her mother informs him of her decision to leave because of his abusive behavior (285). “As for Mother,” Madame Duclos states, “I don't care what's happened to her, as a matter of fact, even if it's the worst I'm perfectly delighted, and all I hope is that the whore is far enough away so I'll never see her again for the rest of my life” (287). Unlike Signora Maggi in *Salò*, Madame Duclos does not murder her mother, who simply disappears. Madame Duclos's remarks about her mother's destiny introduce a series of stories that revolve around the “discharge” not of feces but rather of sperm on young girls' bodies. For instance, when she was a child Madame Duclos saw a man cover her sister's face with his semen. Her last story before the Duc's interruption is about Madame Duclos's own experience of this mania. A man ejaculated on her open genitals (292). No reference is made to feces. This section of Madame Duclos's storytelling concerns men's discharge with a restrained use of physical contact. Remember, we are still at the beginning of Sade's novel. The emphasis is on the lack of contact, on sex as masturbation.

At the end of Madame Duclos's autobiographical story, the Duc interrupts her to ask about her mother: “Have you ever had any news of your mother, have you ever discovered what became of her?” Madame Duclos confesses: “Neither my sister nor I have ever heard the slightest word from that woman.” The Duc then asks Madame Duclos to explain the reasons for her antipathy toward her mother. Madame Duclos then confesses that she “would in all probability and very easily have poisoned her,” given the intensity of her and her sister's hatred for their mother (293). She justifies her antipathy by claiming that nature had inspired that feeling. Remember that in *Salò* Signora Maggi had opened her narration by quoting the Sadean story of the man who discharged while Madame Duclos, like a mother, fed him her excrements as if they were pap. In Pasolini's manipulation of Sade's narrative, Signora Maggi functions as a perverse mother who feeds her son (the libertine is swaddled like a baby) her own feces. In so doing, the mother Signora Maggi offers her child the “egg” of her anus. If we bear in mind the semantic conflation turd/egg/fetus, we infer that the mother Signora Maggi introduces

her narrations on shit (*girone della merda*) by perverting the act of filial nourishment. She symbolically feeds her son (the libertine) the “egg” that signifies the son himself.

Signora Maggi’s initial story foregrounds her subsequent allusion to her mother’s murder. It is also relevant to note that Signora Maggi’s mother behaves in a way that recalls Claudio’s mother at the beginning of the film. Signora Maggi says, “My mother . . . cried and begged me not to go, to change my life.”<sup>21</sup> Like Claudio, Signora Maggi inaugurates her life of debauchery by rejecting the mother. Remember also the entrance of Signora Maggi. When Durcet asks Signora Maggi to show her “best part” before beginning her narration, Signora Maggi turns around and we are given a close-up of her naked buttocks. Borrowing from the opening pages of the third section of *The 120 Days of Sodom* (Madame Martaine, the storyteller “proudly describes her ass; Messieurs request her to display it, she displays it”), Pasolini transforms Madame Martaine’s proud display into an ironic gesture of disrespect, as the actor Totò (the protagonist of Pasolini’s *Hawks and Sparrows*) would do in one of his comic films (600). Signora Maggi’s entrance is at once very solemn and perversely humorous. She turns and literally sticks out her behind. She behaves like a cabaret actor who, to mock his audience, turns his back and makes the gestures of giving the audience his butt.

### The Narrative Stage in Sade and Pasolini

The exposure of Signora Maggi’s “best part” opens her narrations revolving around the theme of coprophilia. The exposure of her behind is the “thesis,” so to speak, of her upcoming sermon about the pleasures of eating excrement. But her exposed behind also signifies an act of audacity, which becomes apparent when she recounts the murder of her mother. The Duc’s subsequent comments confirming the negativity of motherhood move from Sade to *Salò* with no relevant editing, apart from being abridged. Before we examine the Duc’s words, it is important to consider how the ladies’ narratives are staged. Here we cannot help but notice a fundamental difference between Sade and Pasolini. In *The 120 Days of Sodom*, the storytelling takes place in the assembly chamber, whose shape is semicircular. The libertines sit in four niches along the curving wall. “These four recesses,” Sade writes, “were so constructed that each faced the center of the circle; the diameter was formed by a throne, raised four feet above the floor and with its back to the flat wall” (237). More than the women themselves, the central feature of the

chamber is the way sound from the podium will descend to the four niches in the opposite wall. In Sade, the narrators primarily tell their stories while sitting on the throne. Sade makes clear that for "authentic libertines . . . the sensations communicated by the organs of hearing are the most flattering" (218). Barthes correctly states that the space of the chamber is the space created by language.<sup>22</sup> Sade himself states that the narrator is "placed like an actor in a theater, and the libertines with their companions in their niches find themselves situated as if observing a spectacle in an amphitheater" (237–38).

Pasolini stages the scene in a radically different way. In the center of the room is a long, rectangular, dark table that is perpendicular to the stairs whence the female narrators descend each morning. In the frequent long shots presenting the entire scene, the table unmistakably points to the stairs as the vanishing point of the scene. A wedge or blade stuck into the scene, the dark table is an oxymoronic presence. As an empty obtrusion, the table signifies both a central void ruling in the chamber and an imperative and all-encompassing impediment. In *Salò*, the storytellers descend from above and sit at the right corner of the room, which has a rectangular form. Sade's emphasis on the spoken word is betrayed in Pasolini's rendition. The Sadean throne of the spoken word in *Salò* is replaced by an imperative void wedged into the scene.

In *Salò*, the narrators, the libertines, and their "fuckers," according to Sade's definition, behave around the table as if driven by an unspoken deference toward the empty and dark "altar" in the center. In reality, in *Salò* the spoken word is not the main element of the performance. In the chapter on *Saint Paul*, I analyzed Pasolini's view of literal quotation from the scriptures. We saw that Pasolini emphasizes the clash between the sacred expressed by the apostle Paul's words and the profanity of the present. The opposition between what is sacred (Saint Paul's words) and what is decaying (the present times) evokes an irrevocable opposition between the word that signifies and a visibility (the now) that is withdrawing from signification. This irreducible contrast, this wedge stuck within reality (a reality whose visibility says nothing; things have ceased to speak) is staged as a historical contrast between the events and characters of the Acts of the Apostles and their echoes in the present time.

The screenplay *Saint Paul* and the film *Salò* put on the same tragedy. For one thing, like *Saint Paul*, *Salò* deals with the issue of verbal quotation. Sade's *The 120 Days of Sodom* is the referential text of the film, as the biblical texts were the foundation of *Saint Paul*. The two works (*Saint Paul* and *Salò*) are, however, in two different media. Analogy in *Saint Paul* is a synonym for similarity within a radical opposition (the clash of two

narratives that are at once similar and deeply dissimilar). In *Salò*, analogy acquires a much more literal sense, in that Pasolini believes that what happened in the Fascist republic of Salò echoes what is happening now, which echoes what happened at Sade's times. Klossowski, whom Pasolini knows well, phrases this three-part reflection as follows: "The vision of a society in the state of permanent immorality presents itself as a *utopia of evil*. And this paradoxical utopia corresponds to the virtual state of our modern society. But while the utopian sense of human possibilities elaborates the anticipation of a virtual progress, the sadist mind elaborates the anticipations of a virtual regression."<sup>23</sup> In these few lines from *Sade My Neighbor*, we hear distinct echoes of Pasolini's poetics. The libertine's paradoxical utopia recalls the utopian cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in *Porn-Theo-Colossal*. Klossowski writes, "For Sade, the putting to death of the king [Louis XVI] plunges the nation into the inexpiable; the regicides are parricides. . . . He was not far from experiencing the legalized carnage of the Terror as a caricature of his own system."<sup>24</sup>

Again, *Salò* is based on a new and different interpretation of analogy. In the film, the Sadean text is quoted in a way that seems to be a faithful transposition from the book to the image. But this is not the case. A first problem lies in the Sadean word itself. In *L'écriture et l'expérience des limites*, Philippe Sollers rightly stresses that Sade's real crime is not the "explicit apology for the crime of pleasure," but his having dared to make explicit what, within language, "was supposed not to be told," namely, that language "has nothing to say" and that all verbal expression is under the aegis of the "neurotic structure" ruling over the subject.<sup>25</sup> The "Sadean hero" does not speak to communicate. He does not speak *to* anyone.<sup>26</sup> His heart is "unfathomable." I have already mentioned the story of the libertine who penetrates the hole where his victim's heart was.

### "Heart" in Sade

Sade himself has the best definition of the libertine's heart. In *La philosophie dans le boudoir*, the sodomite libertine Dolmancé states, "I don't know what the heart is. I call 'heart' the weaknesses of the spirit" (*Je ne sais ce que c'est que le coeur, moi; je n'appelle ainsi que les faiblesses de l'esprit*). When one reasons, Dolmancé holds, one always makes some mistakes. These "false definitions" are "the heart." "Don't listen to your heart," the same Dolmancé tells the young Eugénie; "it is the falsest guide we have received from Nature." The heart is what is "false" in nature. We could easily point out a basic contradiction in Sade's discourse. If the libertine

is the truthful follower of nature's orders, how can one make sense of a nature that lies to itself by placing a deceitful guide within the human being? And how does the libertine determine what is truthful and what is not in nature's messages? "Heart" is what makes the libertine doubt the nothingness of the other. Dolmancé is adamant about this. The object that gives him pleasure (anus; hand; mouth; vagina) is "nothing" (*nul*), and as such deserves no consideration.<sup>27</sup> The "heart" blurs the clear vision of the libertine, who looks at reality through the lenses of voluptuousness. There is nothing to be said about the other. To attempt to make the object of my pleasure speak means "to listen to the heart." The libertine does not explain the meaning of his pleasure, nor does he offer consistent reasons for his lubricious and murderous behavior. His language, Georges Bataille holds, "repudiates any relationship between speaker and audience. . . . It seeks to cut itself off from human kind, and its purpose is the denial of humanity."<sup>28</sup> In *La monnaie vivante*, a text I have already quoted in my analysis of *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, Klossowski likens the libertine's linguistic "nothingness" to money, as a "sign of what does not exist" (*signe de l'inexistant*), but also of what is "possible" (*possible*).<sup>29</sup>

In Sade, *nature* is the word signifying the libertine's nonsaying. Nature is that something that either sustains the libertine's behavior (what I do is a response to nature's request) or upon which the libertine must impose his pleasure.<sup>30</sup> Either way, "our mother" nature only "speaks to us about us" (*ne nous parle jamais que de nous*). "Nothing is so selfish as her voice" (*rien n'est égoïste comme sa voix*).<sup>31</sup> These two brief quotations from *La philosophie dans le boudoir* are the clearest statements about the libertine's idiom. The libertine only speaks to himself about himself. Nothing is more selfish than his voice, in that he is both speaker and addressee. His selfishness actually mirrors his mother's selfishness, since nature only speaks to herself about herself. It is thus evident that, if our mother embodies the most "natural" egotism, we, her sons, are entitled to give voice to our own egotism even if it entails an attack (a murder) on our mother because solipsistic expression is the ultimate manifestation of what is natural.

### The Duc's "Sacred" Speech and the Service in Honor of the Mother

In *Salò*, Signora Maggi begins the story leading to her mother's death by moving from the chair where she had been sitting toward the central table. She stands behind the table without touching it. The table casts a



perpendicular shadow that almost fills up the rest of the diameter that cuts through the center of the room. A familiar long shot shows the table as the fulcrum of the scene and Signora Maggi as a small figure behind it. A subsequent close-up of Signora Maggi coincides with her reference to her mother "crying and begging me." At the word "crying" (*piangendo*), we see Renata next to Curval, who asks, "And then?" A new close-up of Signora Maggi follows after she confesses to killing her mother.

At the end of Signora Maggi's confession, the Duc stands up and begins his speech against the mother, which will conclude with Renata's punishment. His first three introductory sentences ("It was the only thing you could do. What was awaiting you in that inn was stronger than any other thing in the world. It thus deserved a sacrifice") are not in the corresponding Sadean passage. While the Duc pronounces the third sentence on the necessary "sacrifice," we see the pianist turn toward her audience. The pianist seems to be directing her gaze first at the Duc and then at Renata, whom we see right after, at the exact moment when the Duc begins to quote from Sade. A close-up of Renata's downcast face lasts for the entire first sentence of the Duc's Sadean citation: "It is madness to suppose that one owes something to one's mother" (293). A subsequent medium shot of the Duc lingers throughout the rest of his speech, which he delivers in a slow and firm manner.

This is one of the most complex scenes of the entire film and deserves a close analysis. First, the pianist turns when the Duc mentions the word *sacrifice*, and it is at this sacrificial moment that the pianist looks first at the Duc and then at the girl who is about to be punished. The sudden relevance given to the pianist serves to emphasize that a sacrificial rite is about to take place and at the same time foreshadows the pianist's own sacrifice, her suicide.<sup>32</sup> What is about to happen is the staging of a sacrifice, whose meaning is to memorialize the deceased mother. It is also the pianist's gaze that connects the Duc and Renata, who stand on the opposite sides of the room. Second, the Duc delivers his speech as if in a trance, as if his voice were pronouncing someone else's words, which is in effect the case since what he says is a citation from Sade. The Duc makes an almost imperceptible pause in his discourse (a long and static close-up) by slowly closing and reopening his eyes.

It would be a mistake to think that the Duc limits himself to citing the Sadean Duc's hateful speech against the mother. I have already mentioned that the Duc speaks slowly and in a trancelike state. The first part of his speech (the one preceding the pause) is not a literal citation. What is different is not the content but the tone of the translation from Sade. In *The 120 Days of Sodom*, the Duc says, "Et sur quoi donc serait fondée la

reconnaissance? Sur ce qu'elle a déchargé quand on la foutait? Assurément, il y a de quoi!" (And upon what, then, would gratitude be based? Is one to be thankful that she discharged when someone once fucked her? That would suffice, to be sure.)<sup>33</sup> In *Salò*, the Duc says, "Dovremmo esserle grati perché ha goduto mentre qualcuno la possedeva una volta? Questo dovrebbe bastare a dire il vero" (Are we supposed to be thankful because she felt pleasure while someone once possessed her? Certainly, that should be enough). In *Salò*, the tone of the Duc's words is impassive and inexpressive, but also indirectly respectful of the mother. Pasolini's Duc refrains from vulgarity (the mother is "possessed" and not "fucked"; she "felt pleasure" and did not "discharge," the typical Sadean word for "to ejaculate," "to defecate," but also "to have an abortion"). Pasolini's Duc fails to convey the Sadean hatred toward the mother. In *Salò*, the mother is killed, denied, as if her disappearance were in the order of things, even though her execution does not result from hatred. Pasolini cuts out the following eloquent passage in the Duc's speech: "As for myself, I see therein naught but grounds for hatred and scorn. Does that mother of ours give us happiness in giving us life? . . . Hardly. She casts us into a world beset with dangers, and once in it, 'tis for us to manage as best as we can" (293).

In a previous citation from *La philosophie dans the boudoir*, I pointed out that, for Sade, Mother Nature speaks to us only about us, and that no one is as selfish as she. In *The 120 Days of Sodom*, the Duc posits his own birth as a betrayal of the mother, who has followed nature in her pursuit of a selfish act of pleasure. Following Mother Nature, the mother has insulted her son because, by giving birth to him, she has exposed him to the selfishness of nature. Blanchot is right in summarizing the libertine's sadistic practices as a verification of his victims' nothingness. The Sadean libertine looks at his victims from the mother's perspective: "While tormenting them [his victims] and destroying them, he does not seize upon their life, but verifies their nothingness. He becomes master of their nonexistence."<sup>34</sup>

In *Salò*, Sade's discourse, even when it is a citation, harbors a different meaning. Pasolini's libertines are of a different ilk. In this specific scene, the Duc looks numb and absent while reciting the Duc's discourse from Sade's novel. In *Salò* the second part of the Duc's speech (after the imperceptible pause marked by the blinking of his eyes) follows the same editing process I noticed in the first part. The first sentence is a correct quotation from Sade ("I distinctly recall that, long ago, I had a mother who aroused in me much the same sentiments that you [Signora Maggi] felt for yours").<sup>35</sup> But Pasolini leaves out the following sentence spoken

by the Duc: "I abhorred her" (*je l'abhorrais*). Any trace of acrimony toward the mother is blotted out in Pasolini's libertine. The death of the mother, her murder at the hands of her son, has already been foreshadowed in the opening section of the film when Claudio rebuffs his mother ("Go away!"), who runs after him sobbing. The denial of the mother is an event that in *Salò* (as well as in *Petrolio*) is something of such tragic consequences that the speaker cannot help but announce it through an expression that is inexpressive. The announcement of the mother's murder has taken place "in the beginning." To communicate hatred and resentment would mean that the mother is still active in the now of the libertines' lubricious activities. Hatred would signify both a sacrilegious disrespect for the deceased and an anger that only the living can incite.

The concept of mother is the cornerstone of Pasolini's poetics. His artistic expression began as a hymn to the land of the mother (his poetry in Friulan) and concludes as a dirge for the mother. Regarding this division between a before and an after in relation to the death of the mother, however, we must also consider an additional connotation. We could say that in Pasolini's linguistics the Lacanian symbolic does not correspond to the mimicry of the father's voice, but to the submission to the mother's order. In Pasolini, the mother is the locus of prohibition. What connects the Lacanian symbolic to Pasolini's is the emphasis on what is lacking in expression—its perennial risk of becoming a soulless, lifeless idiom (Pasolini's belief in the decadence of the Italian language; its progressive detachment from its mythic expressivity). The mother orders the son to speak as if he were invoking her through a deficient language (an idiom that belongs and does not belong to him). Before and after the mother's death lies the mother's phantasmatic presence. Being an order, the mother cannot be *there*, because she can only exist as a firm request to go and perform something where she is not. She dispatches the son as a messenger, as an angelic being whose ontology is the expression of the mother's (divine) order. This is the essential facet of Pasolini's concept of expression. The son is the speaker announcing that the mother has sent him to communicate her request for (love) expression.

It is thus important to understand the crucial shift between the before and the after of the pivotal concept "death of the mother." Before her death, the mother was a command to love her through the expression of a complete submission (you shall say that you love no one but me). The son was a speaker who spoke to us on behalf of the mother who was not there, because the mother lived as a command and resided in a mythic somewhere, the place of an original fusion between mother and son. After her death, the mother's order has changed. The mother

now demands that the son mourn her loss. The mother has turned into a perverse request. The son knows that the mother and the “mythic somewhere” exist no more, although she persists as a command. We saw that in *Petrolio* the mother now rules over the “Underworld.”

### The Motherless Mother in *Pilade*

In both phases (before and after her death) the mother is an imposition, which has now acquired a perverse character in that she is no more. Her being a twisted order (you shall obey an absence) makes her *also* a synonym for the father. The mother of *Petrolio* and *Salò* is both dirge (the memory of *my* deceased mother) and a new command arising from the father. Similar to the man/woman of *Petrolio*, the new mother is a father/mother. Pasolini had already alluded to this perverse form of motherhood in the tragedy *Pilade* (Pylades), which is Pasolini's free and revealing interpretation of the last two parts of Aeschylus's trilogy *Oresteia* (*Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Eumenides*). Pasolini had translated the *Oresteia* in 1960.<sup>36</sup> As David Ward rightly contends, *Pilade* “is the most topical of all Pasolini's verse tragedies.”<sup>37</sup> *Pilade* opens with Orestes's return to Argos after murdering his mother Clytemnestra to avenge his father's death. In his first dialogue with the chorus, the matricidal Orestes states that he has come back to Argos with a new mother, the goddess Athena. He explains that

[Athena] has no parents.

She was not born in the obscure and terrifying way  
we were born . . .

from the love between two strangers.

. . .

She has not waited within the [mother's] entrails  
like a dog or a lamb: she did not come out gasping  
from the darkness of the beast mother [*madre bestia*] toward the light.

. . .

[Athena] had only a father.

She was born from the head of her father.<sup>38</sup>

Orestes is here referring to the famous myth of Athena's birth from Jupiter's head. In Pasolini's rewriting, Athena becomes the goddess of a new societal order exclusively based on reason. Athena, Orestes adds, wants the citizens of Argos “to forget the past.”<sup>39</sup> In a later episode

of the tragedy, a boy relates what he has heard directly from Athena. The goddess states, "Human respect, dignity, devotion, modesty and religion, the old religion, are not reality any longer."<sup>40</sup> The mother of this new societal order erases the values Pasolini associated with the mythic maternal land. This (divine) woman born from her father has no mother. Moreover, her messenger (Orestes) is the man who has murdered his own mother to avenge his father. Athena is motherless and gives birth to a new society that does not differ between mother and father's idiom, because this female deity has no mother, and therefore the society she founds in *Pilade* is based on a perennial oblivion, which Pasolini identifies with modernity. Oblivion is also and primarily self-oblivion, as Sade and Pasolini's libertines stress. Oblivion is experienced by those who have erased their "heart" (human respect, dignity, modesty, and the religion of the past).

It is important to note that, in Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, the scene of Orestes's return to Argos occurs at the beginning of *The Libation Bearers*, the second part of the trilogy, where he comes back to Argos in order to kill his mother, not after having killed her.<sup>41</sup> In other words, Pasolini's rewriting summons a matricide that takes place twice, when Orestes murders Clytemnestra (before the beginning of *Pilade*) and when he returns with a new mother, Athena, a goddess conceived without a mother (at the beginning of *Pilade*). "A God has enlightened me" (*Un Dio mi ha illuminato*), Pasolini's Orestes states in the opening scene.<sup>42</sup> In Aeschylus, the "new order" founded by Athena revolves around the Areopagus, her famous court of law. Athena's new order is the order of law and justice. Aeschylus's trilogy, unlike Pasolini's *Pilade*, celebrates law and reason as salvific powers against the irrational forces of human instincts. At the end of Orestes's trial for manslaughter, Athena even persuades the Furies to become benevolent patrons, changing their names to Eumenides.

Pasolini's selection of Pylades as the main character of his tragedy is also meaningful. "The classical figure of Pylades," Ward explains, "is something of a nonentity."<sup>43</sup> In Aeschylus, Pylades is a silent presence mentioned only in *The Libation Bearers*, where he speaks only once, when, in front of the terrified Clytemnestra, he urges Orestes to put aside his doubts and kill his mother:

Orestes: What will I do, Pylades? I dread to kill my mother!

Pylades: What of the future? What of the prophet God Apollo,

The Delphic voice, the faith and oath we swear?

Make all mankind your enemy, not the gods.<sup>44</sup>

Apollo had ordered Orestes to kill his mother. As the god's delegate, Pylades serves the divine order of things. His life is a function of the sacred. In Pasolini's text, Pylades retains this divine imperative, although it translates into an attack against the new order imposed by the goddess Athena. Reiterating a central concept of Pasolini's poetics, Pylades rejects Athena's ahistorical ideology and emphasizes the centrality of the past (the maternal womb) in a human being's quest for self-awareness:

The great attraction in all of us  
Is toward the Past, *because it is the only thing*  
*We really know and love.*

...

Our mother's womb is our goal.  
Athena's reason . . . does not know the maternal womb<sup>45</sup>

Pylades becomes the head of a revolutionary movement that fails to subvert Athena's new society.<sup>46</sup> Echoing the Gospel of Luke (19:41–44), Pasolini's Pylades contemplates the city of Argos from afar and laments its imminent destruction, as Jesus mourns the future devastation of Jerusalem while approaching the city. Looking at Argos from the mountains where his troops are stationed, Pylades says,

Yes, let us contemplate it again,  
in the valley, before our eyes,  
before appropriating her and losing ourselves in her!

...

I see your ancient walls and behind  
the royal palaces built by ingenuous ancestors, the innocent  
churches, the roofs of the institutions,  
the towers of the wealthiest families' houses,  
consecrated to melancholy.<sup>47</sup>

And in Luke we read,

As he [Jesus] drew near and came in sight of the city, he shed tears over it and said, "If you too had only recognized on this day the way of peace! But in fact it is hidden from your eyes! Yes, a time is coming when your enemies will raise fortifications all round you, when they will encircle you and hem you in every side; they will dash you and the children inside your walls to the ground."<sup>48</sup>

In Pasolini's tragedy, Pylades is a Christlike figure who attempts to subvert Athena's new order, which is based on oblivion. Enacting the above gospel passage, Pylades is at once Christ observing the city of Argos/Jerusalem from afar and the "enemies" that will raze the city. But in Pasolini's text, Pylades' attack fails and Athena's order prevails. What makes *Pilade* unique in Pasolini's oeuvre is that Pasolini's concept of a motherless mother, a mother born from a father, becomes incarnate in a divine presence, Athena, who appears to Orestes, the son who has murdered his mother, and prophesies a "new revolution":

And I, in this red light of this evening in Argos,  
DO NOT PROPHESIZE [A] RIGHT-WING REVOLUTION AND [A] WAR  
FOR THOSE WHO WILL LIVE IT  
BUT FOR THOSE WHO WILL FORGET IT.<sup>49</sup>

Pasolini's Athena incarnates and speaks oblivion. In Aeschylus too, Athena is the goddess without a mother ("No mother gave me birth," the goddess states in *The Eumenides*), but her being motherless signifies her "honor[ing] the male, in all things but marriage."<sup>50</sup> Athena sides with the father in that the father equals justice and reason. But the father is also the origin of things, the primary cause. The father is the founder of all things. Read in this manner, Athena is not the deity of forgetfulness, as Pasolini holds, but the mother who enacts the father's natural order. To enact what is natural also entails a respect for peace and persuasion, for civil debate regarding societal tensions. In *The Eumenides* Athena states,

Behold, my land, what blessings Fury kindly,  
gladly brings to pass—  
I am in my glory! Yes, I love Persuasion . . .  
Thanks to Zeus of the Councils who can turn  
dispute to peace.<sup>51</sup>

What in Aeschylus is the birth of paternal law becomes in Pasolini a "revolution" whose successful outcome is the erasure of memory. Athena is the motherless mother whose perverse birth gives birth to a perverse societal order, the Sadean "secret society of friends." The Sadean hero lives in a perennial present, where the memory of a crime can only be a flaw of the heart.

Pasolini's libertines differ from Sade's because they are expressions of a societal system, whereas in Sade the libertines defy the contemporary

ruling system. This is not a minor difference. For Pasolini, what the libertines represent is the rule, not the exception. The town of Salò, the last stronghold of the Fascist regime, becomes in Pasolini's film a microcosm reflecting a universal condition. In *Salò*, the libertines stand for a new order and a new set of cultural values. Sade's libertines, on the contrary, are alone in their pursuit of the ultimate apathy, the ultimate void. In Bataille's words, *The 120 Days of Sodom* enumerates "to the point of exhaustion the possibilities of destroying human beings. . . . Interminable and monotonous enumeration alone manage[s] to present him [Sade] with the void, the desert, for which he yearned."<sup>52</sup> In the French novel, the libertines also function as the author's fictional alter egos. They accomplish what the author strives to accomplish through writing. In Sade, the libertine works to achieve the void that both the libertine and the author of the novel see as their ultimate goal. In *Salò*, the libertines already have what they need and long for. In Pasolini's film, they are members of a society that is only apparently separated from the rest of the world. For Pasolini, the town Salò is a synecdoche for all of capitalistic society. In the film, the libertines already live in a void, in a funereal emptiness that results from the violation of previous values. Pasolini's libertines enact a play that describes the present, whereas Sade's society of friends identifies with something to come. Again, unlike Sade's libertines, Pasolini's four Fascists exist to manifest an existing void that includes them. They are not outsiders.

### Differences between Renata and the Two Sadean Victims Constance and Sophie

Let us resume the analysis of the "shit scene," and its Sadean source. "At this point dreadful sobs were heard," Sade writes at the end of the Duc's monologue (294). We have seen that Pasolini makes "sobs" (*sanglots; singhiozzi*) the visible mark of Renata's identity. Renata's sobs are heard while the camera still lingers on the Duc's face at the end of his discourse. The Duc turns to look at the girl on the opposite side of the room. Renata is sobbing again, this time holding her hands against her cheeks. Again, Pasolini seems to offer a literal citation from Sade's work when he actually deeply modifies its message. The dramatic interaction between Renata and the Duc is similar to what we read in Sade's text. As Signora Vaccari reminds the Duc, Renata mourns the death of her mother, who drowned in the failed attempt to save her daughter. Falling on her knees, Renata begs the Duc to respect her mourning and adds, "*Ella è morta per*



*me e io non la rivedrò mai più!*" (She [my mother] died for me and I will never see her again!).

What follows is again a seemingly faithful echo of Sade's work. The fuckers undress Renata, as Sophie is undressed in the novel. What differs is Pasolini's insertion of Renata's religious invocation while the men take off her clothes: "*Uccidetemi! Almeno Dio che invoco avrà pietà di me*" (Kill me! At least God, whom I now invoke, will have pity on me). In Sade, Sophie does not ask to be killed, but only to be granted "this one evening of respite" (*cette seule soirée de repos*).<sup>53</sup> Pasolini underscores the sacrilegious act of undressing a girl who is mourning her mother's death by making her call for God's help, as if Renata were a martyr in the Christian tradition.<sup>54</sup> The Bishop remarks Renata's "criminal" words (God's name is never to be invoked), and Durcet writes down her name in the black book. Renata's martyrdom will certainly take place, the Duc confirms, but later. We shall see that Renata is at the center of the final scene on the torture and murder of the victims.

I have explained that in this scene Pasolini merges two distinct passages from Sade's text. Up to this point, Pasolini has followed the events of the second day in *The 120 Days of Sodom*. As we also see in Pasolini's film, Sophie is undressed and exposed to the Duc's violence. However, what makes total sense in the novel is not so consequential in the film. Sophie is undressed because the Duc wishes to "smear some fuck on her cunt." This initial section of the novel describes libertines who discharge without having a real contact with their victims. These libertines ejaculate on some specific parts of the women's body (their genitals, their faces, etc.). This is what the Duc wishes to enact. In *Salò*, the act of stripping Renata of her white dress and also Renata's desperate defense against the fuckers appear less justifiable. Let us remember that Renata had already appeared totally naked at the beginning of the film. Moreover, we might wonder why the girl has to be naked while swallowing the Duc's feces. To be naked is necessary for Sophie's punishment, not for Renata's.

We have seen that Constance, and not Sophie, is forced to eat Curval's excrement from the floor in a much later passage of the novel (seventeenth day). In his description of this new act of violence, Sade makes no direct reference to Constance being naked. "They were at the time breakfasting in the girls' quarters," Sade writes, "word was dispatched, Constance was summoned, the President shitted in the center of the room" (444). The President's feces replace the breakfast Constance was supposed to share with the other women. I would like to clarify how Sade and Pasolini grant the same theatrical event (a woman forced to swallow

a libertine's feces in the center of the room) two distinct effects and meanings, which result from the two different media (novel versus film).

First of all, in *The 120 Days of Sodom*, being forced to eat the libertine's feces is only the first part of Constance's humiliation. Again, here are Sade's words: "The President shitted in the center of the room, and she was enjoined to approach his creation on hands and knees and to devour what the cruel man had just wrought [*ce que ce cruel homme venait de faire*]." <sup>55</sup> Note that Sade does not offer a graphic description of the act. For instance, he says nothing about Constance's mouth, which is the part of her body most violated. What interests Sade at this point is the allusion to a repulsive act of submission: "Constance's very soul seemed to burst before she was half done, but it had all to be done nevertheless, and every ounce disappeared from the tiles of the floor." It is interesting that what Sade visualizes are in fact the "tiles of the floor" cleaned of the feces. What we are shown is the place where the excrement no longer appears.

Sade turns his narrative into a more visual *mise-en-scène* in the second part of the humiliation of Constance. While watching Constance eat his feces from the floor, Curval and each of the other three libertines are "frigged" (*se faisait branler*) by a different girl. <sup>56</sup> Curval, "singularly aroused by the operation and benefiting from the wondrous skill of Augustine's enchanted fingers" calls for Constance, "who had scarcely finished eating her mournful breakfast" (*son triste déjeuner*). Sade's description posits a dichotomy between the intellectual arousal deriving from an act of violence and the sexual arousal deriving from the girls' physical stimulation of the libertines. It is Augustine's hand that translates a violent event into a sexual one. In other words, the "arousal" that comes from seeing a girl eating feces is an insight that the libertines transform into sexual pleasure. I am not trying to say that, for the libertines, humiliation is not erotic in itself, but that its erotic nature is an intellectual insight that is brought to the fore through physical stimulation by the girls' "enchanted fingers."

In Sade, humiliation turns from a one-to-one event into a three-way experience. The girl with "enchanted hands" changes position: "Curval, . . . who, while operating, was having Augustine shit, opened the sluices and let fly into the mouth of the Duc's miserable wife [Constance], and at the same time swallowed the fresh and delicate little turd the interesting Augustine had hatched for him." Curval himself underscores the sequential nature of the two acts of this show of humiliation. Addressing Constance, Curval tells her: "Hither, come to me, whore, . . . after having bolted some fish one needs a little sauce, good white sauce. Come, get a mouthful." Curval's words to Constance could

be seen as a mere insulting joke to make some sense of a renewed humiliation, but the conclusion of Constance's "mournful" meal shows otherwise.

We must consider two essential aspects of this scene. First, Sade mentions Constance's mouth at the end of this *mise-en-scène*. Her mouth becomes visible when it turns totally passive to the libertine's offense. Constance's mouth is now visible because it is open to receive Curval's "white sauce." Whereas in the first part of her punishment her mouth played an active role in her humiliation (she must "devour" [*dévor*er] the excrement), in the finale her mouth metamorphoses into an open hole, the oral vagina submitted to the libertine's discharge. From the beginning, her punishment was meant to lead to the man's discharge. Her mouth was first linked to the larger picture of Constance's humiliation (her body resembled that of a dog eating on the floor) and later becomes the hole (an infertile vagina) where the phallus discharges. In this passage from active to passive hole, from invisibility to visibility, we also detect the libertine's phantasmatic presence. It is the libertine who renders Constance's mouth the visible mark of his supremacy.

The second point to consider is the presence of the other girl, Augustine. Unlike what we witness in *Salò*, this scene in Sade's novel reveals its conclusive sense only when we realize that its erotic nature lies in the mirroring performance of its two main actors' (libertine versus Constance), which is enacted by the "interesting" Augustine. It is Augustine who makes Constance's humiliation into a sexual event by exciting the libertine and participating in his performative transformation. After she strokes his member for a while, Curval makes Augustine defecate, while he continues to masturbate. Both Augustine and the libertine are about to discharge (the libertine's semen; Augustine's feces). Augustine acts now as the libertine acted at the beginning of the scene. When he discharges into Constance's mouth, the libertine has completed his transformation into the victim, Constance herself. By acting as Constance for Augustine, the libertine reenacts the humiliation he himself had initiated. His discharge occurs when he takes Constance's place and turns her humiliation into an intellectual manifestation of supremacy. At the end of this complex scene, "to eat shit" has acquired a reversed significance. Curval is now both the female victim (he swallows Augustine's feces) and the male master (he ejaculates into Constance's mouth). Not only is he both man and woman, he also embraces the woman's state of humiliation and doubles it. He is humiliated by a woman (Augustine) and acts as a woman (Constance). Klossowski synthesizes this essential point of Sade's philosophy as follows:

The representation of having a body whose state is not that of one's own body is clearly specific to perversion. Although the pervert feels the alterity of the alien body, he feels much more the body of the other as being his own, and the body that normatively and institutionally is his he experiences as being really foreign to himself. . . . For him to be able to conceive the effect of his violence on the other, he must first inhabit the other. . . . He is both within and without.<sup>57</sup>

I have underscored the primary role played by imagination in the libertine's perverse mise-en-scène. For the libertine, reason and imagination are gendering drives, in that it is within the dialogue of reason and imagination that the pervert stages his "androgynous being—not a woman-man but a man-woman," in Klossowski's words.<sup>58</sup> In the chapter on *Petrolino*, I repeatedly stressed the importance of the two Carlos' ambiguous sexual metamorphosis. In this regard, the two main characters of *Petrolino* share significant similarities with the Sadean libertines. The two Carlos are homosexual men/women, not men who transform into women. To misunderstand this central point means to overlook the inherently Sadean tone of these two characters. The humiliation of the homosexual man/woman, which is what Pasolini has in mind in *Petrolino*, is different from the humiliation suffered by the women in Sade, in that the body Carlo takes up exists only insofar as it is humiliated by the (real) man.

Barthes speaks of the "clarity" of the "Sadean body," which is always a synecdoche, that is, it is reduced to one of its parts.<sup>59</sup> Barthes is right in stating that the Sadean body, the body of the victim, is a body "seen from afar" exposed to the absolute light of the scene. It is this perfect clarity that actually effaces the body's individuality and limits it to the desirability of one of its parts. I would add, though, that the application of the term *clarity* to the Sadean body is another way of defining its openness. The Sadean body is erotic exactly because it is exposed to the light of its openness.<sup>60</sup> It is important to bear in mind the evolution of the mouth, which is the metonymic sign of the entire body, in both Constance and Curval. From the out-of-focus exposure at the beginning of the scene (Constance eating the feces on the floor), the sign "mouth" becomes visible as a luminous hole (Constance opening her mouth to the libertine's phallus) and eventually withdraws again from visibility (Curval as a new Constance swallowing Augustine's feces). In its moving toward and away from the light of visibility, the Sadean body also stages its essentially androgynous nature.

This detailed analysis of the passage from *The 120 Days of Sodom* illuminates Pasolini's radically different approach to the same event of

humiliation. First of all, we have no Augustine in the scene. The fuckers and the other victims remain impassive vis-à-vis the interaction between the two main characters, the Duc and Renata. The fuckers limit themselves to undressing the girl with visible but moderate gusto and then delivering her to the libertine. What is going on in this scene? What is its main point? Let us go back to the first interaction between the Duc and Renata. Replying to her desperate request to receive a deadly punishment so she can join her dead mother, the Duc tells Renata that her despair will not thwart his “urge” (*voglia*). On the contrary, the girl’s hopeless requests for mercy enhance the libertine’s “urge.” But what kind of urge is the Duc talking about? Remember that we hear Renata’s sobs while the Duc is still describing his pleasure at his mother’s death. Again, her sobs announce Renata’s entrance into the scene. As the libertines at the beginning of the film stand up to admire the girl’s distressed sobbing, so now the Duc interrupts his narration and turns his face to the left to look at Renata, who is a powerful source of marvel for the libertines.

The Duc’s “urge” is related to Signora Maggi’s storytelling, which began with the tale of the man who discharged only if acting as a baby boy nourished with the feces of the “mother,” Signora Maggi. Signora Maggi had then continued her speech by recounting her murder of her own mother. According to what we have learned from Sade, a libertine’s “urge” is logically linked to his discharge. The Sadean libertines’ urges spring from the narrative they have just heard and lead to an enactment of that specific narrative. In *Salò*, the Duc explicitly says that “Signora Maggi’s tale must be put into practice immediately, don’t you [Renata] think?” (*Il racconto della Signora Maggi va subito messo in pratica, non trovi?*).

But how does the Duc put into practice Signora Maggi’s tale? What exactly does he wish to put into practice? Signora Maggi actually recounts two stories, not one: (1) The baby eats the mother’s feces; (2) Signora Maggi kills her mother. The Duc’s urge has thus something to do with the mother and with feces, but also with the nourishment of the mother’s offspring. Remember also that the spoon the Duc gives Renata to eat his excrement is an explicit reference to the second version of the same tale of the man swaddled as a baby. In *Salò*, the spoon is not, or not only, a perversely ironic touch. It is a reference to a slightly different version of the very same tale Signora Maggi had first narrated.

Mirroring the opening part of Signora Maggi’s performance, we are given a long shot from the opposite side of the room. The long table still at the center, a 45-degree pan shot follows the Duc from the left side of the room to the center. He unzips his pants and crouches down to defecate. A long shot shows the upper part of the Duc’s body squatted



Figure 8

behind the table (fig. 8). I have already commented on the significance of the omnipresent table in this scene. The table at once hides what is obscene and literally exposes its superficiality. What we see and are about to see is a surface, something that has erased any form of depth or reflexivity. As the Duc denies the girl's despair, so is the table a flat and dark surface that has nothing to hide. The table is a visible presence that alludes to a nothing that cannot be hidden because it is not there. As Sollers puts it, the heart of the libertine cannot be fathomed.

The revelation of the Duc's nakedness and his feces lying on the floor in a puddle of urine is given as a subjective shot. A shot of Renata's anguished face is followed by a long shot, taken from Renata's side, showing the Duc still in the same squatted position. He has discharged. "*Vieni avanti, piccola. E' pronto*" (Come over, little one. It is ready) says the Duc to Renata. He has prepared the food for his little one. The Duc's paternal tone evokes a family setting. The meal for his little one is ready. It is impossible not to hear an echo of Signora Maggi's first story about the man acting as a baby and her feeding him her feces.

This upsetting scene offers itself as an inexpressible horror.<sup>61</sup> It is a shocking and truly unforgettable exposure that remains unmatched throughout the film. Not even its graphic ending compares with this relatively brief, unexpected break-through of horror. One could simply say that the Lacanian "real" is offered to the viewer as a violation that forces itself into us, as an abuse shoveled down the viewer's throat. The libertine stands over the girl who is kneeling down as in prayer. The libertine yells at her, "*Mangia!*" The girl begins scooping up his shit. I would like to highlight two main points. The libertine's imperative



Figure 9

mirrors the girl's retching. Renata's spasms recall her sobbing. She retches and sobs while swallowing. This act against nature (to swallow what was expelled) finds its apex in a medium long shot in which the table and the body of the girl bent over the shit become the two opposite diagonal lines of a frontal perspective whose vanishing point is a void (fig. 9). In this shot, the table seems to have moved back from the scene to make the horror visible.<sup>62</sup> If the table before was a wedge into the scene, it now serves to point to the nothing at the center of the horror we see. The body of the girl with the spoon in her hand at once mirrors the exposure created by the diagonal position of the table and opposes it. The girl is what the table had so far harbored but not revealed. The "real," however, is neither the table nor the girl, but rather her retching and her sobs, which work as the soundtrack of the nothing at the center of the perspective created by the two diagonals (Renata's body and the table). As she does not vomit up what she is swallowing, so does the center of the scene show nothing.

The girl does not vomit; the frontal perspective points to a nothing; and, I would add, the Duc neither frigs nor discharges. He is satisfied to see that the girl has eaten his excrement. When Renata has finished her "meal," Signora Maggi resumes her storytelling, but first she scolds the girl, who was unable to appreciate such a succulent food. Let me also remind the reader that no one masturbates during Renata's punishment, which is a truly un-Sadean detail. The spectacle of the girl eating shit does not seem to turn on the libertines, not even the Duc who first mentioned his "urge." The Duc's urge does not seem to be of a sexual nature, because no masturbation accompanies the girl's punishment and no discharge

marks its conclusion. Without picking up where she had left off (the story that had begun with her mother's death), Signora Maggi mentions a new, rather bland story about a friend of hers who wished to swallow the feces of elderly and poor women.

It is at this point that we witness the first discharge of this new *girone* (circle) dedicated to stories of coprophilia. Durcet, the most effeminate of the four libertines, leaves the room in a rush, finds a lateral empty room, and masturbates alone while looking at himself in a mirror. Behind him, two statues of women kneeling in prayer face each other. In the background, we see an open restroom, a urinal and a toilet with the lid down. The interesting aspect of this "footnote" to the scene of Renata eating the Duc's feces is that it is a symbolic representation of what we just witnessed. Durcet discharges alone, in a private act of complete solipsism. He masturbates before his own image. Moreover, behind him—that is, reflected in the mirror—are two symbols of defiled womanhood (the statues of two women facing each other and in the space between them are the urinal and toilet in the back room). It is also important that these ladies are on their knees, as Renata was during the scene of her humiliation. Finally, the two women face each other as Durcet faces himself in the mirror. This short follow-up to this notorious scene is the apotheosis of sterility.

The emphasis on the defilement of womanhood is the real meaning behind the brief story following the punishment of Renata. After telling off Renata for being so unthankful, Signora Maggi recalls an old and destitute woman. Her body was covered with tumors and festering wounds. Signora Maggi introduces this sick and elderly woman to a friend who loved to eat the feces of old and poor women because they were "tastier and smellier." Moreover, this man used to make these women's shit even more delicious by giving them diarrhea. Stories involving elderly and unattractive women abound in Sade's novel. Signora Maggi's account is an edited version of the Sadean tale preceding the story of the man swaddled as a baby and eating Madame Duclos's shit. In other words, Pasolini has reversed the order of the stories in the corresponding section of Sade. By switching the Sadean sequence (In *The 120 Days of Sodom*, Madame Duclos's last two stories for the thirteenth day are first the story of the old and poor woman's feces and finally the story of the man/baby), Pasolini alludes to a process of defilement of the woman. In *Salò*, we have first the baby boy eating the mother's shit; then we witness the humiliation of Renata (we see her mouth smeared with shit) along with the reference to the death of the mother; and finally, we see what a woman is "at the end," that is, we are shown the ultimate image



of a defiled, humiliated woman. The old, poor, and repulsive woman whose feces are the object of a libertine's obsession embodies this conclusive depiction of womanhood. Let me give you an abridged version of Madame Duclos's words:

She had seen sixty-eight summers, an erysipelas was eating every inch of hide, and the eight rotten teeth decorating her mouth communicated so fetid an odor it was all but impossible to speak with her at a distance of under five yards. . . . He [the libertine] takes her in his arms, kisses her mouth, . . . then, having her present an ancient wrinkled ass such as you see on a very old cow, he kisses and sucks it avidly. A syringe is brought in, three half-bottles of liqueur too. [He] loads his syringe and pumps the healing drink into the entrails of [the old woman]. [Later she] settles her great, ugly ass upon his mouth, pushes, [and] . . . a turd or two doubtless emerge with the liquid; he gasps, but it all goes down. (409)

Pasolini replaces the "syringe" with "indigestion," which is a practice discussed the following day of the novel (fourteenth day), where Madame Duclos relates her first sexual experience enhanced by laxatives (416). She is given a "laxative drug" that makes her have diarrhea, which is also mentioned by Signora Maggi in her conclusive remarks.

### **The "Rules" of Pasolini's Four Fascists versus the "Statutes" of Sade's Libertines**

In *Salò*, Signora Maggi's narration is suspended when it attains the final degradation of the woman (the elderly, indigent, and repulsive woman who receives an enema made of a liquid that makes her defecate a huge amount of liquid). This narrative pause corresponds to a new alteration of the Sadean source. The new scene takes place in one of the living rooms where the libertines sip tea and nibble pastries. While commenting on Signora Maggi's "inspirational" stories, Curval proposes an amendment to the regulations. Instead of wasting all the feces produced during the day, it would be more appropriate to save them by placing containers in their guests' bathrooms. We then see Durcet walking up the stairs to the girls' rooms. Renata is the girl whose bed is the closest to the door, and we see her adjusting her daisy hairpin as Durcet walks into the room. In *The 120 Days of Sodom*, the rule against wasting the victims' fecal discharge is established in the Statutes (*Règlements*) laid out in the introduction to the novel:

As it is strictly forbidden to relieve oneself anywhere save in the chapel [*chapelle*], which has been outfitted and intended for this purpose, and forbidden to go there without individual and special permission, the which shall be often refused, and for good reason [*pour cause*], the month's presiding officer shall scrupulously examine, immediately after breakfast, all the girls' water closets. . . . The friends shall move from there into the little boys' apartments in order to perform the same inspections and similarly to pronounce capital punishment against offenders. (242–43)<sup>63</sup>

Pasolini presents the libertines' system in its making, as if the libertines were slowly discovering the laws most suitable to their secret society. At the end of the introductory "ANTINFERNO," the Duc and Curval, from a balcony (reminiscent of Mussolini's balcony in Piazza Venezia in Rome), unveil the basic directives of the new social organism. One of the paradoxical rules imparted by Pasolini's Curval is that the ladies' narrations must inflame the imagination. As a consequence, "every lascivious act will be permitted." This anything-goes "law" recalls what is going on in Gomorrah according to *Porn-Theo-Colossal*. Men and women copulate wherever and whenever the men want, regardless of any social norm. But this is not what the libertines stipulate at the beginning of Sade's *The 120 Days of Sodom*. The opening paragraph of the libertines' Statutes details when the girls will be deflowered and after how many weeks the boys' "seal" will be opened (241). The libertines know that "voluptuousness" must "become irritated by the augmentation of a desire incessantly inflamed and never satisfied." In Pasolini, this essential allusion is missing. I have already remarked that "discharge" is not the ultimate goal of Pasolini's libertines. What Pasolini stages in *Salò* is a different form of libertinage, a social practice in which sexual pleasure is not the ultimate objective.

The very first sexual act in *Salò* is a failure. During Signora Vaccari's narration in the "*gironi delle manie*," the first of the three chapters of *Salò*, the bishop drags one of the male victims away to a lateral room. Soon after, the bishop returns, angered and upset because that young man has been unable to give him pleasure, and nothing can be done now to fix the situation. "The efforts to satisfy me," the bishop confesses, "would be immense now." And the second attempt is also a failure. When Signora Vaccari resumes her narration, Curval forces another young man to give him a hand job. Again, the act does not lead to discharge because this boy does not know how to perform the act. These are the two first sex scenes of the film. If we had to judge by these first attempts, we would conclude that this naughty gathering of horny fellows is not that promising.

One might argue that the first failed sexual act in *Salò* is an almost literal transposition from Sade's novel. This is true. The initial scene of the *girone delle manie* is a faithful translation from *The 120 Days of Sodom*, the only relevant difference being the transference of Signora Vaccari's first experiences from a convent to a college. Unlike the speeches of the next two ladies, Signora Vaccari's initial tales follow Sade's model both from a linguistic and a structural standpoint. The initial sequence of her stories is exactly the same in Sade. Exactly as we see in *Salò*, in Sade's novel the bishop interrupts the narrator and drags "Narcisse to his alcove" (272). The bishop's subsequent furious words against the ineptitude of his victim and his brief dialogue with Signora Castelli, who offers to please him, come directly from *The 120 Days of Sodom* (272–73). What may be easily overlooked, though, is that the bishop's initial failure is immediately followed by the second failure (Signora Vaccari notices that a boy does not know how to stimulate Curval), which is not in Sade's novel.<sup>64</sup> Onanism becomes a problem at the beginning of the second day of Sade's novel and concerns the girls and not the boys: "Highly dissatisfied with all these girls' ineptness in the art of masturbation, . . . Durcet proposed that one hour in the morning be set aside for giving them lessons" (283). Boys are "more skilled in this technique than the girls, because in the case of boys it is merely a question of doing for others what they do unto themselves" (284). Moreover, recall that in *The 120 Days of Sodom* some sex had already been practiced before the beginning of Madame Duclos's opening stories. Before gathering in the salon to listen to those stories, the libertines had a superb lunch during which Durcet and the Duc engaged in anal sex with the fuckers (264–65). We shall return to this preparatory meal because Pasolini turns it into the first banquet of the film.

Pasolini sets the tone of his film by emphasizing the failure of sex, and in particular the failure of an encounter between two men. This brief detour in the first circle of *Salò* is relevant also because it helps us understand why in *Salò* the libertines decide to preserve the victims' feces only after hearing Signora Maggi's stories on coprophilia. The first hint is again in Pasolini's modified version of Sade's text. In Sade, the Duc's first harangue to the victims in the auditorium is primarily directed at the women. If we read his hateful speech carefully, we see that the Duc insists on the women's "wrong" nature—something the libertines must place under strict control. "The lives of all women who dwell on the face of the earth," the Duc says to his victims, "are as insignificant as the crushing of a fly" ("Introduction," 251). Women are the most serious danger to the libertines' system. The Duc's stress is on the emotional ties women tend

to create with one another. Addressing the four libertines' daughters and wives, the Duc warns them that they will be treated "with an even greater severity," because "no blood attachment is sacred in the view of people like ourselves." The Duc also mentions the friendship between two women as another dangerous liaison that must be punished harshly. Sade's libertines attack women because they embody the fruitfulness of nature, which the libertines aim to destroy. The Duc explicitly mentions the ugliness of the vagina, not because to be a libertine means to be a homosexual, but because the vagina stands in opposition to the female or male anus, the sterile hole that defies nature.

In *Salò*, after the Duc's introductory speech, Curval reads the rules to the victims. Curval makes no hateful reference to women. The primary risk that Pasolini's libertine foresees is heterosexual coupling. It is also interesting that Curval connects this "crime" (*delitto*) to religion. Like heterosexual sex, religious practices are serious infringements of the libertines' law. In *Salò*, sodomy equals homosexuality, an identification that is not explicit in Sade. For Sade, "every licentious image is sodomitic. Sodomy is in every surge of lust."<sup>65</sup> Pasolini deletes Sade's reference to the "wrongness" of women and indirectly emphasizes the "wrongness" of male homosexuality, which is by default the ultimate expression of libertinage since its opposite (heterosexuality) is posited as its fiercest enemy. What Pasolini's libertines despoil is the sacredness of heterosexuality, seen as the repository of the mythic and now forever lost, motherly existence according to nature.<sup>66</sup>

### The Wedding Scenes in *Salò*

In *Salò*, feces are less a source of pleasure than the means through which the libertines besmirch the sacredness of heterosexuality. The modification of the rules (the victims must preserve their feces) precedes the second wedding in the film, the one between the young man Sergio (as bride) and Curval (as groom). It is at this wedding banquet that the libertines and their guests taste the flavorsome delicacy of shit. This wedding is a desecrating event not only because of its meal. Pasolini presents this second wedding and its subsequent banquet as a parody of the first wedding celebrated by the libertines, the one between Sergio and Renata. We have already discussed Renata's symbolic nature. She recalls the death of the mother, and her sobs and gasps are the language of the mother. But Renata also symbolizes the girl who is about to become a bride and thus a mother. The beauty of Renata and Sergio embodies the

purest expression of what is natural and chaste. Their beauty is different from the cuteness of the other male or female victims. Renata and Sergio share a luminous and reserved beauty.

The wedding of Sergio and Renata is another unforgettable scene. After the libertines kick all the guests out of the room where the two spouses are to spend their first night, we are given a close-up of the spouses' clothes while they are being tossed on the floor by the guards who are undressing the spouses. Let me remind you of the conclusion of *Comizi d'amore* (Love Meetings), which I discussed in chapter 2. In the final scene of Pasolini's documentary on the Italians' sexual behaviors, we find a similar emphasis on the spouses' clothes. We are shown a chair with the bouquet and the bride's shoes, and then her white dress. Finally, we see the girl as she puts on the veil. Pasolini's voice-over states that these two spouses, as they are "dear to life" (*cari alla vita*), confirm the joyfulness and innocence of life (*la lietezza e l'innocenza della vita*).

The first wedding scene in *Salò* certainly recalls the conclusion of *Comizi d'amore*. After they are stripped naked by the guards, a long shot shows the newlyweds lying on the floor naked. Again, a perfect frontal perspective emphasizes at once the emptiness and the funereal rigor of the event. The apex of this new scene of abuse is not Durcet and the Duc rushing to prevent the couple from having sexual intercourse, but the subsequent moment when Curval creeps behind the Duc, pulls down the Duc's pants, inspects his buttocks, and sodomizes him while the Duc is groping Renata, the girl who later will have to swallow his excrement. The wedding between a man and a woman, the natural expression of love, is polluted by sodomy.

*Salò* stages the defilement of what in *Comizi d'amore* Pasolini had poetically praised: "An Italian young man marries an Italian girl. And in this day every evil and every good that preceded it seem to be erased, like the memory of the storm in a peaceful moment."<sup>67</sup> If a sunny day welcomes the celebration in *Comizi d'amore*, a heavy rain is heard in *Salò* while Renata e Sergio lie naked on the floor, caress each other, and finally are abused by the libertines. The first wedding in *Salò* signifies violence against a natural institution, heterosexual marriage. A different meaning is detectable in Sade. In *The 120 Days of Sodom*, the first wedding is a parody of the societal rules of the outside world. To celebrate the end of the first week, the libertines organize the first wedding of their newly founded society: "No chapel permissions were granted that day; Monseigneur clad himself pontifically, and they betook themselves to the altar. The Duc, representing the bride's father, and Curval, who represented the young groom's, led forth Michette and Giton. Both were

extraordinarily arrayed in the most formal dress, but also reversedly, that is to say, the little boy was costumed as a girl, the little girl wore boy's clothes" (344–45).

Sade envisions the first wedding of the novel as a mockery of the ritual performed in the real world. The boy is the girl, and the girl is the boy. Moreover, these kids are allowed "to finger and caress one another; young Michette polluted her little husband and Giton, aided by his masters, frigated his little wife as nicely as [he] pleased" (345). If we keep in mind the identification between Renata and Sophie (the girl whose mother drowned in the river), we can also identify the wedding between Renata and Sergio as the wedding between Sophie and Céladon at the end of the sixth week of *The 120 Days of Sodom*: "On that day they celebrate the sixth week's festival with the marriage of Céladon and Sophie, which union is consummated, and in the evening Sophie's cunt is put generally to use" (581). The wedding between Sophie and Céladon (Renata and Sergio in *Salò*) is particularly significant within the economy of *The 120 Days of Sodom*. In the fourth part of the novel, we learn that "Céladon and Sophie are in love" (659). Of all the weddings performed in *The 120 Days of Sodom*, the one between Sophie and Céladon is the only one that corresponds to an actual emotional commitment. The libertines make sure to humiliate this union by forcing Céladon to perform acts of utter violence against his beloved: "Céladon, her [Sophie's] lover, had been obliged to burn the interior of her cunt, all her fingers had been severed, her four limbs bled, her right ear had been torn away, her left eye gouged out. Céladon had been constrained to lend his assistance in all these operations" (669). *The 120 Days of Sodom* ends with the list of the victims "dispatched" daily, starting from March 1. The death of the two lovers takes up two days: "On the 6th and the 7th: Sophie and Céladon together, for they are lovers, and they perish nailed one to the other" (671).

The signifier "Sophie" thus not only evokes the signified "daughter mourning the death of the mother" but also "the fiancée." This identification could not escape Pasolini. In *Salò*, we have no explicit statement that Renata and Sergio are lovers, but it is noteworthy that in the film the wedding of Renata and Sergio is the only celebration that resembles a plausible, realistic union between a man and a woman. Furthermore, their brief moment of intimacy on the floor shows a spontaneous affection. Renata caresses Sergio's head. Sergio kisses her. They hug and are about to consummate their union but are stopped by the two libertines. The following two weddings are all perverted forms of marriage. In the second, Sergio, dressed as a girl, marries Curval, whereas in the third

Curval, the Duc, and Durcet are dressed as the brides. Renata and Sergio's wedding is also a more complete celebration: first comes the ceremony, and then the spouses' physical intimacy.

Sergio, Renata's spouse, becomes the bride of Curval in the second wedding of *Salò*. I have pointed out that this second wedding, a defiling parody of the first, occurs immediately after the libertines' corrections of the rules governing their private society. I also explained that this is a significant rewriting of Sade's text, in that Sade posits the prohibition against wasting the victims' feces in the libertines' original rules, whereas in *Salò*, the libertines first apply their modified law at the wedding banquet of Curval (groom) and Sergio (bride). As Signora Maggi explicitly states at the banquet, the libertines' ideology aims at founding a new set of rituals as negative reproductions of the traditional societal rites.

Critics have noticed the visual similarity between the structure of the wedding banquet in *Salò* and the wedding banquet at the beginning of *Mamma Roma*. In *Mamma Roma*, Anna Magnani enters the room of the banquet accompanied by pigs, which then walk around even under the tables. The bride's elderly father then holds a brief and simple discourse that underscores the decency and social relevance of poor country people, his people, in opposition to the inauthentic bourgeois life. The wedding of Sergio and Curval could certainly be read in opposition to the modest, sub-proletarian wedding depicted in *Mamma Roma*. It would also be appropriate to underscore the rather explicit reference to the bourgeois practice of production-consumption-disposal. Recall what Strindberg writes in *Inferno*, a novel that exerts a significant influence on *Petrolino*. Strindberg contends that, according to what Swedenborg saw during his mystical visions, hell is a bourgeois-looking environment that slowly reveals to the damned soul its hellish, shitty nature. The most enlightening comparison, however, is again with Sade's novel itself. The wedding banquet in *Salò* that is based on feces is nowhere to be found in *The 120 Days of Sodom*. In Sade's novel, however, we do encounter a description of a pre-dinner based on shit. At the end of the fifteenth day, the Duc interrupts Madame Curval's speech:

At this point the Duc, very hot indeed, said that as the supper hour was hard upon them, . . . he had Sophie come to him, received her turd in his mouth, then obliged Zélamir to run up and eat Sophie's creation. . . . The stunt struck the others as so engaging that each of them imitated it. . . . [Durcet] had Zéphyr shit in his mouth and ordered up Augustine to eat the marmalade, which that lovely and interesting girl promptly did, her repast being as promptly succeeded by racking vomiting. Curval imitated this variation and received his dear Adonis's turd, which Michette

consumed. . . . As for the Bishop, he . . . had the delicate Zelmire excrete a confiture that Céladon was induced to gobble up. . . . The Bishop and the Duc discharged; the two others either could not, or would not. (429–30)

What is the difference between Sade's view of coprophilia and Pasolini's? Pasolini and Sade place the term *feces* or, better yet, *turd* in two distinct ideological contexts. Although both authors link "turd" to "anus," the meaning of this semantic connection is different. For Sade, "turd" evokes the act of sodomy, because "turd" is what the anus hides and produces:

The sodomite depicted by Sade, willed by Sade, does not annihilate his victim; he gores him, he penetrates into his shit, he leaves the germ of the genus in that shit. . . . It is in plunging his erection into the anus, into the shit, feeling the internal organs of the sexual partner being torn, bile and blood released as shit and into shit, that the sodomite discharge is voluptuous. The supreme sodomite image is that of coprophilia.<sup>68</sup>

In *La philosophie dans le boudoir*, the libertine Dolmancé contends that the anus, and not the vagina, is the natural repository of the phallus. "Isn't this orifice round like them [male members]?"<sup>69</sup> How could we possibly think that nature wished an "oval" hole to be meant for "round members"?

In the Sadean system, shit is the ultimate manifestation of libertinage. Shit signifies the sexual act par excellence. A turd is not so much the "offspring" of libertinage as its mark and reminder. In eating shit, the libertines feed on sodomy, in a metonymical transfer that also summons a metaphorical reversal (my mouth is my anus). Again, the Sadean libertine eats sodomy; he devours his own practice.<sup>70</sup> The Sadean libertine is a monster in the sense that his physicality is perverted (his anus "vomits," and his mouth is penetrated), and thus he metamorphoses into a beast that speaks shit (his mouth smells like shit; his mouth speaks sodomy) and defecates nourishment, that is, he expels what is alive and vital (language; food) and feeds on what is expelled as waste, what is not part of societal exchange.

Pasolini's view of coprophilia and libertinage means something else. For Pasolini, the turd signifies what was not born; that is, it embodies the discarded fetus in all its social and cultural connotations. If for Sade shit recalls a practice (sodomy), for Pasolini it evokes the (missing, failed, perverted) results of this practice. It is a fine but essential distinction. Remember that in *Petrolino* Pasolini tells the story of the "wailing shit" (*la merda che vagiva*). The turd is a baby. It is some sort of offspring. Like Sade, Pasolini sees *turd* as a metonymical sign, but whereas for Sade *turd* stands

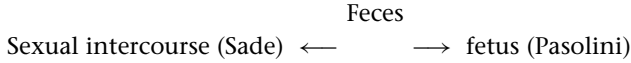


for a sexual practice, for Pasolini it speaks of a societal practice. This is why in *Salò* no libertine discharges during the wedding banquet based on shit. No one discharges because, in this context, shit is not about sex. In the above passage from *The 120 Days of Sodom*, we see that the act of eating shit is a dynamic sexual process in which all members are reduced either to “mouth” or to “anus.” They either swallow or defecate. They are open holes that discharge and absorb the discharge in order to discharge again. In this dynamic mise-en-scène, Sade also stages a sort of egalitarian society in which its citizens are their orifices, with no class distinction. In *La philosophie dans le boudoir*, the defense of all possible forms of crime (including murder and incest) is based on the assumption that a republic is a form of dynamic government. Morality would fit in a perfectly peaceful (and thus static) society, which is, however, not what exists in reality.<sup>71</sup> The above passage from *The 120 Days of Sodom* depicts the dissolution of every social bind and the imposition of anarchy.

In Pasolini, the shit banquet is a ritual, as one of the storytellers says. We could call it an “active fiction,” as Sollers defines the Sadean libertines’ practices.<sup>72</sup> Both Pasolini’s and Sade’s libertines live an incessant play that they write and enact. But the two sorts of libertines do not write the same play. The contrast between the shit banquet in *Salò* and the scene in *The 120 Days of Sodom* could not be stronger. Pasolini’s film shows no discharge, no movement, no masturbation during this wedding dinner based on shit. Nobody is interested in discharging. Both the libertines and their victims sit still. Some of the guards and two of the female victims (Graziella and Eva) barely hide their disgust with great composure (the guards make faces at the horrible smell; Graziella tells Eva that she cannot bring herself to eat feces). The excrement they eat is the offspring of a new societal and cultural order. Pasolini’s libertines find in their victims’ disgust their primary form of pleasure, because their pleasure lies in their having transcended the other’s weakness.<sup>73</sup> The other who sits at the libertine’s table restates the libertine’s superiority, his having defeated the alleged repulsion of feces. In this regard, Pasolini’s libertines follow the Sadean tradition, although they have desexualized the power of their apathy. Pasolini’s libertine is indeed apathetic, but also in the sense that he has transcended every form of “weakness,” including sex. Sex is one form of power expression but not the supreme one.

In *Salò*, shit is the sign of the new perennial decadence, the sign of a perverted, albeit static and enduring, system. *Saint Paul* and *Petrolino* come to similar conclusions. The turd is here the other aspect of the fetus. Bear in mind that in the preceding scene the Duc gave birth to feces for Renata to swallow, and that Renata signifies the murdered mother.

Renata is also the bride of Sergio, who is now forced to marry Curval. Shit is the appropriate meal for this wedding, which is the negative of the previous one (Renata-Sergio). We could summarize the radical opposition between Sade and Pasolini as follows:



In Sade, the turd is both the visible feces and the Peircean index of sodomy, taken in its broadest meaning. In Peirce's system, an index is the sign of memory. A hole in the wall may recall a bullet previously shot into that wall.<sup>74</sup> As a visible form of recollection, a turd is a sign that points to a sexual practice. In Pasolini, not only through the explicit interpretation in *Petrolino*, but also in Signora Maggi's first story, a turd signifies the outcome of that practice. As such, it acquires an additional metaphorical connotation in that, seen as "result," it is the offspring of a (sexual) practice.

### The Second Wedding in *Salò*: Curval's Mouth /Anus

I have pointed out that this wedding banquet in *Salò* is both the negative of the previous natural wedding (Sergio and Renata) and the rewriting of the wedding banquet in *Mamma Roma*. The first wedding in *Salò* presents itself as the recollection of what a wedding could be. The luminous beauty of the spouses, their immaculate clothing, and their short intimacy on the floor bring back the memory of a pristine wedding based on love and nature. In watching this scene, we perceive that this wedding is both unreal and reminiscent of a real wedding, something that used to be possible (fig. 10). The two other wedding scenes (in *Mamma Roma* and the second wedding in *Salò*) are more real because they are paradoxically a defilement of that original, defunct ritual staged by Renata and Sergio. Of the second wedding we are given no intimate moment. We see the couple (Curval and Sergio) walk up the stairs toward the same room where Sergio had previously married Renata. Curval stops Sergio, who is still wearing the white dress and veil; holds his male bride's face in his hands, and breathes on his face. A close-up of Curval's face shows him while he opens his mouth still smeared with shit and brings it close to the young man's face. This is the scene that most evokes Sade's sexual synecdoche. Standing on the stairs face to face with Sergio, Curval is indeed reduced to his gaping mouth in the act of discharging the smell



Figure 10

of shit into his male bride's mouth. In my view, this is the most obscene scene of the film, also because the libertine kisses his young male bride on the forehead as if to mimic a paternal expression of affection, thus adding an incestuous connotation to this ludicrous celebration. Pasolini succeeds in evoking the obscenity of the Sadean fecal banquet without showing any sexual act. In this scene of *Salò*, however, it is only Curval who discharges onto his bride's mouth. Pasolini's magisterial interpretation of Sade turns Curval's gaping mouth into an open anus. The reciprocity described in *Sade* is alluded to by the fact that both spouses' mouths are smeared with shit.

Curval's final kiss would seem like a deflection from the original obscenity of the scene. The libertine kisses the young man on the forehead. Rather than bestowing a marital kiss, Curval kisses as a father blessing his young son, who looks back at him humiliated but also puzzled, as if in the kiss the libertine were expressing some kind of affection. The libertine's lips, which first stayed open in a long, obscene posture, now close to place a reticent kiss on Sergio's forehead. Sergio metamorphoses from bride to son. A filial condition is suitable to Sergio, as Renata as well is less a bride than a daughter. Sergio's original role is in reality that of a son. Let us keep in mind that the libertines had made Sergio marry Renata after the young man and the girl had been masturbated in the same room where later the libertines celebrated their wedding. The masturbation of Renata and Sergio had been the outcome of a preposterous "discussion" (*discussione*) initiated by Durcet and the Duc. How can one establish the "real sex" (*vero sesso*) of a boy or a girl? By masturbating them, of course. This is an odd adaptation of a page of Sade's novel, in

which the act of masturbating the young victims is used to determine if they are old enough to ejaculate.

Does one really need to masturbate a boy to determine whether he is a boy or not? Whereas in Sade this test serves to lead the male or female victims to orgasm so as to make them more useful sexual objects (the libertines can use both the young victims' semen and feces), in Pasolini it is primarily an act of abuse. In *Salò*, the libertines' reasoning is not easy to follow. Whereas at the beginning of the scene the act of masturbating the victims would allegedly serve to determine their sex, at its end the emphasis shifts from the youth's sexuality to their sexual maturity, which is Sade's original stance. Guido, one of the guards, masturbates Sergio while Signora Vaccari works on Renata. "He's come! He is a man!," Guido shouts, rubbing Sergio's semen off on his pants. The Duc replies: "Good, very good. Our little Sergio has acted honorably." "And here we have a woman," Signora Vaccari replies, indicating that Renata has come as well. The Duc concludes, "And the first couple is constituted."

The Duc emphasizes the creation of the "first couple" as if the libertines played a paternal role reminiscent of God's creation of the first couple in the Garden of Eden. The goal of masturbation was thus the creation of two adults who could become the first husband and wife. Renata and Sergio embody the prototypical son and daughter, whose marriage is arranged by their fathers. Their becoming a man and a woman, however, hinges upon their having orgasms. Masturbation, the sterile ejaculation, becomes the paradoxical sign of a marital union. This point is particularly important because it also helps us shed some light on Pasolini's conception of the three infernal *gironi*. The constitution of a fertile couple (Renata and Sergio) occurs in the first circle, which in truth deals with sexual acts that shirk complete physical contact. Faithful to a Sadean conception of nature and fertility, Pasolini posits the foundation of the family within the frame of infertile and solitary sex. In her first story, Signora Vaccari recounts how Professor Gentile, her customer, wished to come on her face when she was still a little child. To ejaculate on and into little girls' bodies is his only "passion" (*passione*). The wedding of Renata and Sergio takes place in this sexual setting, which makes the natural encounter of a young man and a young woman into an unnatural event. Following their Sadean model, Pasolini's libertines enact the reversal of nature. In their highly theatrical society, union occurs when union is denied.

If the first circle stages the creation of a prototypical domestic nucleus, the second circle evokes the offspring (the wailing shit; the first story of the libertine as a baby fed with excrement) of that perverted household



Figure 11

(*"girone della merda"*). Remember that the third and final *"girone del sangue"* (circle of blood) moves from a theatrical enactment to a literal dissolution of the troupe that had staged the first two acts of the libertines' play. Murder is, however, already an ominous occurrence in the first part (*girone delle manie*). In the Pre-Hell, we see a young man gunned down when he tries to run away from the libertines. In the first circle, we witness the obscure death of a girl who, like the young man shot down, tries to escape by running to the window but is apprehended by the guards.

An examination of this second death will reinforce and greatly illuminate the leading themes of the film. When does the girl decide to run away? I have commented on the relevance of the two initial failed sexual acts. Signora Vaccari notices that the young man who is masturbating Curval does not know what he is doing. "One might think that this one has never seen a male member before," Signora Vaccari remarks, "This is scandalous (*scandaloso*)."

At the word *scandalous* a 45-degree pan shot shows the girl standing up and running to the window. The representation of the girl's rush to the window is a three-layer scene. The background is the wall, on which we see an imposing Renaissance painting of the Virgin Mary holding the baby Jesus. In the foreground we see Renata and the young man who failed to please the bishop. Both face the camera and turn to see the girl running behind them. The second, middle level of Pasolini's *mise-en-scène* is the girl running along the horizontal trajectory created by the table that stands between the background (the huge painting of the Virgin Mary) and the foreground composed of Renata and the sexually inept boy (fig. 11).



Figure 12

This scene is an explicit reference to the mother. The mother is both in the back (the painting) and in the front of the scene (Renata, the girl who mourns her mother's death). The mother fills the screen. The death of this impertinent girl, which is shown after the first banquet, is under the aegis of the mother and is a reaction to the "scandal" that is enacted in the salon (see fig. 12). The banquet scene is not just a suspenseful pause within this dramatic moment. The banquet expands the symbolic meaning of the girl's death. We must also consider that Pasolini doesn't cut from the scene in the salon (the girl's failed to escape) to the next scene in the dining room (the first banquet). The image of the girl fighting the guards fades into the frontal image of the banquet, a much less frequent technique in Pasolini's cinema.

### **The First Meal in *The 120 Days of Sodom* and the First Banquet in *Salò***

I have explained that the first banquet in *Salò* derives from Sade's description of the introductory meal before the beginning of Madame Duclos's storytelling. We could simply say that Pasolini reverses the order of Sade's narration. The meal before the beginning of the first lady's stories becomes in *Salò* the official meal celebrating the first pause in the first lady's storytelling. These are the two main events of the libertines' first meal in *Salò*: (1) A guard sodomizes one of the girls. (2) Durcet drops his pants, shows his buttocks around, and asks the same guard to sodomize him. Sade describes this scene as follows:

The fuckers, whom the friends had granted every liberty with their wives, treated them somewhat untenderly. Constance was even a bit knocked about, rather beaten for having dawdled over bringing a dish to Hercule who, seeing himself well advanced in the Duc's good graces, fancied he might carry insolence to the point of drubbing and molesting his wife. . . . Spying one of his neighbors stiffen, Durcet, though they were still at table, promptly unbuttoned his breeches and presented his ass. The neighbor drove his weapon home. ("The First Day," 264–65).

The anonymous girl violated at the banquet in *Salò* is Constance in *The 120 Days of Sodom*. In the novel, Constance is beaten, drubbed, and molested by the fucker Hercule. In the film version, she is sodomized. The act of sodomy is a clear and unequivocal allusion to the "scandalous" nature of this secret society. Sodomy being the ultimate manifestation of Sadean perversion, Pasolini turns the first banquet of the libertines into a celebration of perversion. The sex that had failed during Signora Vaccari's first storytelling succeeds when the Sadean society gathers to celebrate itself.

In Pasolini's film, both the first and the second banquet are rituals celebrating sodomy. We could argue that in *Salò* the sex, if by sex we mean the act of exposing and giving one's body to others, occurs at the dinner table. Whereas Sade insists on the repetitiveness of all sexual acts culminating in sodomy, Pasolini exposes its ritualistic nature by turning it into an actual banquet with actual courses, silverware, elegant plates, napkins, wine and water glasses. Sade places the meaning of sex in the sex act itself, while Pasolini splits sex into performance and meaning. Pasolini's Fascist libertines celebrate the significance of sodomy through allusions to the sex act as if memorializing a perennial victory. Even when the guard sodomizes first the girl and then Durcet, the participants maintain the composure necessary for an official, quasi-religious event.

Again, the details of the scene are revelatory. The first character to initiate the ritual of sodomy is Claudio, the young man who rejected his mother in the Pre-Hell part. Claudio spits on the naked buttocks of one of the girls, and, in doing this, he brings to light the insignificance of the woman within the ritual of sodomy. This is not to say that the woman does not participate in the ritual; rather, she participates as the one who has no meaning.<sup>75</sup> Claudio spits on the woman's behind even though he may sodomize her later. Consider also that, whereas the girl (Constance in *The 120 Days of Sodom*) experiences sodomy as something violent and foreign to her, Durcet asks for it. The woman is subjected to sodomy, whereas Durcet enacts sodomy. Both the girl and Durcet are the passive partners of the same "fucker," but their passivity is radically different.

A 45-degree, medium-long shot of the central table has the Duc at its center while, behind him we can see the back of the guard still sodomizing Durcet on the floor. Whereas the others turn to watch the guard penetrating the libertine, the Duc looks pensive and detached. At this point the members of the banquet begin to sing *Sul ponte di Perati* (On the Bridge of Perati), a war song dear to Pasolini.<sup>76</sup> This is the most melancholic and most moving moment of the entire film, and we do not really know why. A sudden sadness seems to descend from nowhere and involve the whole banquet, even if in the background one of the libertines enjoys being sodomized. In Pasolini's words, *Sul ponte di Perati* is "a Second World War song" but derives from a "First World War song." In particular, Pasolini explains that World War I saw "a vast production of war songs" because of the static character of this world conflict.<sup>77</sup> The long stays in the trenches led to the creation of beautiful and melancholic war melodies.

Why does Pasolini use this song all of a sudden with no narrative consequence? The song is a memorial to the young men who died during the war. "The best of youth is being buried" (*la meglio gioventù la va sotto terra*) is the key sentence of the lyrics and is repeated twice. In *Salò*, the song is visually divided into two parts, both introduced by the opening words "*Sul ponte di Perati*." After lingering on the same diagonal shot focused on the Duc, we see two guards bringing in the chair with the "frigging dummy" on which the victims will later practice their masturbatory skills. A pause in the singing corresponds to a long frontal shot of the whole banquet. This arresting image introduces the second stanza of the song, which again opens with the words "*Sul ponte di Perati*." At the words, "*bandiera nera*" (black flag) we are given a close-up of one of the most handsome male victims and the Duc's favorite. We follow the entire second verse through this young man's thoughtful and beautiful face: "The best of youth is being buried." The same verse, "The best of youth is being buried," accompanies a second close-up of Umberto, another attractive young man, who will stand next to the Duc in the final scene of the film, while through binoculars the Duc watches his friends torturing the victims. Umberto has dark hair, whereas the previous boy's curly hair is blond. These two opposite male beauties sing the death of youth.

In the last poem of *La meglio gioventù* with the homonymous title ("La miei zoventù"), "the best of youth" itself seems to complain to God about their destiny:

Lord, we are alone. You do not call us anymore!  
You do not look at us anymore, year after year, day after day!



On this side there is our darkness, on that side Your Splendor.  
 You feel neither anger nor compassion toward our evil condition.

Signòur, i sin bessòj, no ti clamis pì!  
 No ti ni òlmis pì an par an, dì par dì!  
 Par di cà il nustri scur par di là il To luzòur,  
 no ti às pal nustri mal nè ira e nè dòul.<sup>78</sup>

I would like to stress that in the war song the expression “*la meglio gioventù la va sotto terra*,” which literally means “the best of youth goes underground,” has an additional and eloquent meaning that is closer to the above verses. Recall those young men in *Petrolino* who have sex with Carlo 2 at night in an open field. Remember that they were spirits coming from an Underworld dominated by the mother. These men were spirits or demons who used to inhabit the world and now live in a Netherworld that they leave at night for brief sexual encounters with a homosexual/woman (Carlo). The narrator had called these spirits of the Underworld Lares and Penates. In classical Latin religion these were the spirits of the dead who looked after the household. In Strindberg’s *Inferno*, Pasolini could find a similar connection between spiritual creatures and souls of the dead. The sudden melancholy flooding the scene of the banquet in *Salò* derives from the fact that these young men seem to be singing a dirge for their own death.

In his memoir dedicated to his experience as actor in *Salò*, the writer Uberto Paolo Quintavalle (Curval in the film) contends that, before the shooting, Pasolini complained to him that he had a hard time finding young men with “naïve, healthy, beautiful” faces. “Before,” Pasolini told him, “things were different. Even during the Republic of Salò the world was better, so much so that I rather delve into that era spiritually than into ours.” He also thought that the “good people” he had worked with in the *Decameron* did not exist anymore. The choice of the fuckers, in Quintavalle’s account, had been very difficult. Pasolini had interviewed thousands of young men, but he either found men with long penises but with stupid faces, or men with small penises and interesting faces.<sup>79</sup> According to Quintavalle, whose derogatory comments on *Salò* show his limited understanding of the film, this is why Pasolini had decided to glue dildos on the men with the right looks. Even the men’s sexual attributes were not what they used to be.

Pasolini frequently stated that he became interested in Sade’s novel when he realized that he could transfer this story to the last days of the Fascist Republic of Salò in 1944. This insight was in fact based on a new

form of temporal analogy, the same rhetorical device that was fundamental in *Saint Paul* and *Porn-Theo-Colossal*. This scene in which young men sing in memory of their own deaths compels us to consider additional analogical elements. Along with the violent death of his partisan brother in 1945, which affected Pier Paolo deeply, we could mention one additional traumatic event. In 1944, two German soldiers were killed in Casarsa, the village in Friuli where the young Pasolini lived with his family at the time. In *La meglio gioventù di Pasolini*, a collection of interviews with men and women who lived in Casarsa at that time and knew the Pasolini family, we learn that when the Nazis began arresting people to avenge the dead soldiers, Pier Paolo and his cousin Nico Naldini were saved by Maria and Giovanni Guerin, who lived in the house next to the church. In Maria Guerin's words, Pier Paolo and Nico were "frightened and were looking for a hiding place."<sup>80</sup> When the Nazis pounded on their door, the two young men had already reached the bell-tower. This brief encounter with death reveals a biographical side to Pasolini's compassion for the best of youth who go underground. *Salò* is also a deeply biographical analogical narrative. The sudden communal song at the banquet of *Salò* is also the memorial of a personal death.

Let us resume our analysis of the banquet scene. In a sudden contrast (from melancholic memorial to humorous cabaret), the song is interrupted to introduce the masturbation class organized by Signora Vaccari. Although she had decided to institute a masturbation lesson because a boy had been unable to masturbate Curval, all the students who are pushed toward the "frigging dummy," as Sade calls it, are girls. I have pointed out that in Sade's novel the girls and not the boys need to learn how to masturbate a man. In *Salò*, the substitution of a girl for a boy had enhanced the sense of failure and sterility of the initial sexual acts. If a man had been unable to masturbate another man (the boy and Curval), now a man shows how to rub a penis. One of the fuckers kicks away the inept girl who is kneeling next to the dummy and proudly shows how to handle the dummy's erect penis. The uselessness of the woman is reinstated (remember Claudio spitting on the girl's buttocks). The woman does not know how to do it. The fucker proudly masturbating the dummy shows that sex is a male thing. What is erotic in this scene is paradoxically the woman's nothingness, which makes visible the man's dominion over the sexual act. The fucker is no less of a man because he is holding a man's penis. He brags about his sexuality in all its forms as an essential male quality.

The previous scene concluded with a girl running to the window in the failed attempt to escape the libertines. I pointed out that she stood

up and ran at the word *scandalous*. Pasolini makes sure we perceive the explicitly religious connotation of the scandal going on in that room. The girl ran along in front of the imposing painting of the Virgin Mary with the baby Jesus. The close-up of the girl fighting off the guards faded into the scene of the first banquet, which opened with Claudio spitting on the girl's buttocks and concluded with the girl unable to masturbate the dummy. The banquet enacts the scandal that had prompted the girl's failed escape.

The scandal alluded to at the end of Signora Vaccari's storytelling session takes place during the banquet that had associated the act of sodomy with the memorial to the death and burial of the best of youth. In the chapter on *Petrolino*, we saw the essential connection between the best of youth's night return to earth to be sexually serviced by a homosexual man/woman and the centrality of the mother, who rules over the Underworld where the best of youth lives in eternity. As in that fragment from *Petrolino*, the best of youth, now a revenant from hell, sodomizes a man/woman (the girl who represents Constance and then Durcet, who takes up the woman's passive role). In the banquet, the "real" woman is the libertine Durcet and not the girl (Constance in Sade's text) who does not appreciate the guard's phallus. Durcet literally crouches next to the girl to replace her in the role she is not enjoying (she does not understand it because she is only a woman). The "real" woman is now the "scandal" of a man/woman who absorbs and reinterprets womanhood in enjoying a form of pleasure that is truly female because the agent is a man.

### The Execution of the Girl in the Shrine of the Virgin Mother

The "scandalous" event announced at the end of Signora Vaccari's narration and enacted during the banquet concludes at the beginning of the new session of Signora Vaccari's storytelling, when the guards open the shrine containing the large painting of the Virgin Mother. The visual perspective shifts from the grand entrance of the room and the piano on its left side to the lateral wall containing the image of the Virgin Mary. A long frontal shot of the opening of the shrine shows the girl's corpse falling back in a posture that is perfectly perpendicular to the holy image and closely resembles Andrea Mantegna's famous painting *Cristo in scurto*, to which Pasolini alludes to in other films—for instance, in the final scene of *Mamma Roma* (fig. 12). The death of this girl is far from being clear. In the Sadean system, the victims do not have the right to kill themselves, nor are they killed at the beginning of a gathering. The

victims who deserve to die, die at the end of the novel. Moreover, it is hard to believe that a victim who has just been apprehended in the attempt to commit a crime would be left free enough to be able to close herself in the shrine and commit suicide in front of the Mother of God.

"Someone" has slit her throat. The girl has been silenced. In the early scene in which Renata is introduced to the libertines and sobs on her knees because of her mother's death, the neck of the anguished girl was the visual center of her desperate expressions of sorrow (her sobbing). The murder of the girl hidden in the shrine is an impersonal execution. The girl had dared to react against the scandal being staged in that room. We could say that "the system" has executed her. Her death does not deserve to be staged because it does not reflect the libertines' "urge" as the Duc says when he forces Renata to eat his feces. This is the execution of someone whose behavior does not satisfy the libertines' system. I have already stressed that Pasolini's libertines do not strive to enact an alternative societal structure. They are expressions of an all-encompassing, absolute system based on scandal. They act within, and not without, mainstream society so that, in a sense, society has tossed away the useless girl.

With the corpse of the girl still lying on the floor, Signora Vaccari transforms the image of the Virgin Mary into the backdrop of her stage. This is the only time in the entire film when one of the storytellers seems to be speaking from an actual stage. Instead of the open perspective alluding to an empty space behind the female narrator (the stairs leading to the second floor), in this scene Signora Vaccari has a backdrop (the painting of the Virgin) that evokes the setting of the storyteller's performance (the new stories take place in the land of the Virgin Mother). The theme of her first new story is female buttocks, which had been defiled at the beginning of the first banquet. Exactly this "base" part of the female body is the focus of Signora Vaccari's tale. Of all the possible stories recounted by Madame Duclos Pasolini selects the one from the third day in which a libertine has a woman "enveloped in a sheet so that her face and breasts would be entirely hidden from him. The only part of her body he wanted to see was her ass; all the rest meant nothing to him" (306).

What is remarkable is the new frame this story acquires in *Salò*. In Pasolini's film Signora Vaccari herself is the woman who is asked to cover everything but her buttocks, whereas in Sade's novel Madame Duclos relates someone else's experience. This someone else was an "old *duenna*" who was "ugly to the point of bitterness." Signora Vaccari is not an ugly *duenna* who happens to have a nice behind. In Pasolini, it is woman in general that must be covered up to show only her buttocks.

Signora Vaccari had shown her vagina to the libertine, who had reacted with horror. This is not what the Sadean libertine emphasizes in his mania. In Sade, the libertine wants to focus on a behind “of the highest degree of excellence,” which means that by covering the other parts of the woman’s body, the libertine wishes to exalt the beauty of her buttocks. In *Salò*, the libertine goes for the girl’s behind because it is the only thing he can bear to look at. Although Signora Vaccari is not an old and ugly *duenna*, she is a woman. Her buttocks are what make her similar to a man. The libertine says of Signora Vaccari, “These poor little whores [*queste povere sgualdrinelle*] have only their vaginas to show you.”

The movement from Signora Vaccari’s story to Durcet’s subsequent question about the best way of assessing a young person’s sexuality is not a rational one. It should be clear by now that many of the inconsequential events in *Salò* begin to make sense when we understand that their obscurity results from the conflation of two distinct passages from the Sadean novel. In creating scenes that almost make sense, Pasolini achieves two different goals: on the one hand, he destabilizes his narrative, turning it into an oneiric flow that resembles reality without becoming a realistic representation of something occurring “out there”; on the other hand, he summons a different form of completion through his beloved analogical process of bringing together two unrelated entities (two images, two stories, two characters, two historical moments, etc.), which leads to a new, baffling, result, as he does in *Saint Paul* and *Porn-Theo-Colossal*.

In this specific case, we have already seen that Durcet proposes to investigate the best way to determine the “real sex” of a boy or a girl, that is, their “most delicious part.” According to the libertine, the best way is through masturbation, of course. In Sade, at the end of the third day (the same day of Madame Duclos’s story about the libertine whose women must be wrapped up like mummies and expose only their buttocks), the libertines play a game in which they “hid the face and chest of each little girl and gambled upon recognizing her on the basis of a study of her ass” (311). The conclusion of the third day of *The 120 Days of Sodom* makes sense. Inspired by Madame Duclos’s story, the libertines play the game of the woman’s ass, so to speak. In *Salò*, on the contrary, the same story about the lady’s behind leads to the masturbation of Sergio and Renata and to their subsequent wedding. A contest to determine the best ass takes place at the end of the second circle (the *girona della merda*).

Instead of following Sade’s narrative development, Pasolini offers a seemingly awkward rewriting of his text. Since Signora Vaccari’s story dealt with the possible attraction of a female behind, it would have

made sense to have the contest (who has the cutest butt, a man or a woman?) at the end of this circle. But again, Pasolini's emphasis is less on the sex described in a given situation than on the ideological meaning expressed through a sex act. In other words, Pasolini's film does not address the beauty of a particular behind, but the meaning and function of its beauty. To push the ass contest from one circle to another also entails a reinterpretation of the signifier *ass* altogether. At this point, at the end of the first circle, Pasolini stages the defilement of the mother and of her manifestations. Signora Vaccari speaks of her buttocks being exposed to the libertine with the image of the Virgin Mary as the backdrop of her performance. The setting of her story is not the "ass" but rather the "Virgin" and "Mother."

If we keep in mind that Signora Vaccari's story is told before the image of the Virgin, who is also a mother, we understand why the Duc and Durcet move from a discussion about the beauty of a female behind to the young man's spilling of semen and the orgasm of a young woman. "He's come!," the guard Guido says, wiping off Sergio's semen on his pants. "And here we have a woman," adds Signora Vaccari referring to Renata. Being the sign of sodomy, the "ass" signifies the debasement of a (maternal) virginity. The "ass" is less a physical part of the body than the sexual and cultural meaning it acquires in the context of the Italian libertines' society. Read in this manner, the transition from Signora Vaccari's story to the libertines' act of masturbating a young couple becomes understandable.

While Guido and Signora Vaccari are masturbating Renata and Sergio, the Duc delivers a now well-known, albeit still unclear, speech on the relation between anarchy and Fascism. "We are the real anarchists," the Duc boldly states. By watching Guido and Signora Vaccari masturbating the two victims, the Duc says, he has realized that "the only real anarchy is the anarchy of power" (*la sola vera anarchia è quella del potere*). The libertine's discourse is, however, contradictory. After declaring the identification between anarchy and the Fascists/libertines' total power, the Duc adds, "However, look there, obscene gestures are like the language of deaf-mute people. They follow their own code that none of us, notwithstanding our limitless control, is able to transgress." Whereas the Fascist power imposes itself by means of a verbal code deriving from a rational decision (The Rules laid out at the beginning of the film and at the beginning of Sade's novel), sex speaks a silent idiom that imposes itself on the subject regardless of his or her social status. What the libertine emphasizes is that an obscene gesture is not verbal, that is, it is not an audible order ("Mangia!" the Duc yells at Renata to force her to eat his feces),

although it is indeed an order that nature expresses for no reasonable cause. A deaf-mute language is, in theory, closer to verbal expression than to a sex gesture in that it is still a rational expression. What connects a deaf-mute statement to a sexual gesture is its silence. Like two deaf-mute people, Guido and Signora Vaccari speak a language that excludes the libertines. What the Duc underscores in his speech is that they, the libertines, witness the sexual gesture (Guido and Signora Vaccari masturbating the two victims) as an event that is only apparently a response to their order. Nature expresses itself through the victims and the libertines alike.

The Duc's conclusive remark ("Our choice is categorical. We must subject our pleasure to only one gesture") is recognized by the bishop as a quotation from Klossowski. What is this "one gesture" (*gesto unico*)? To perform one and only one gesture would signify the libertines' attainment of a truly all-encompassing power. But would it not be also a contradiction of that "anarchy" the Duc saw as the true expression of Fascism? How can anarchy utter one and only one gesture? The conclusion of the libertine's discourse goes against its stated thesis ("We [Fascists] are the only real anarchists"). In *Sade My Neighbor*, Klossowski does speak of the libertine's primary and sole "gesture." The libertines' gesture is linked to the basic and interrelated concepts of apathy and death in their rapport with nature. Quoting from Sade's *Justine*, Klossowski explains that for Sade there is only one "principle": "In all living beings the principle of life is no other than that of death."<sup>81</sup> For Sade, nature's sole gesture is self-destruction. Nature gives birth (the young couple lying on the floor know the gestures of sex without having learned them) in order to give death. In *Salò*, the Duc is aware of the fact that the libertine is unable to perform a gesture different from nature's gesture of death. The libertine is a master who is subject to a higher master, nature herself. But what the libertine can do is to appropriate nature's discourse of death by responding to nature with nature's same apathy toward her incessant self-destruction. Klossowski defines the libertine's reaction to nature as follows: "The practice of apathy, such as the characters Sade created recommend, presupposes that what are called *soul*, *conscience*, *sensitivity*, *heart*, are but diverse structures that the concentration of the same impulsive forces take on. . . . [These] impulses are ever the same."<sup>82</sup> In Klossowski's words, the "renunciation of the reality of self" is the libertine's anarchical gesture. As the Duc states in *Salò*, the libertine transforms all facets of human subjectivity (the infinite depth of the "heart") into a unified gesture of death. The libertine's gesture of death is indeed an anarchical expression in that it denies the denial

performed by nature. The libertine's apathy (his self-denial) stands against nature's existence as perennial self-destruction.

It is, however, essential to bear in mind a basic contrast between Sade's and Pasolini's views of libertinage. Consider the conclusions of the two works. Sade's *The 120 Days of Sodom* ends with the death of all its victims. Its last page is in fact an obituary. Sade draws up a detailed list of those who died and those who returned to Paris. Of the forty-six inhabitants of the château, Sade writes, "thirty were immolated and sixteen returned to Paris" (672). Those who survived are only the four libertines, the four narrators, and the eight fuckers. Everybody else, the kitchen staff included, is murdered before the libertines take off. It is interesting that Sade uses the past participle "immolated" (*immolés*) in the prefatory sentence before his section entitled "Final Assessment" (*Compte du total*) and "massacred" (*massacrés*) in the "Final Assessment" itself.<sup>83</sup> The more visual term *massacre* evokes a sweeping and ruthless mass murder. "Ominous sign!" the extradiegetic narrator states at the end of the twenty-fourth day, according to the English translation. After spending some time with the Duc, "one of [the girl Augustine's] fingers had been twisted" (508). The expression "Ominous sign!" is not in the original French version of the novel, but it incisively highlights the uniqueness of the event.<sup>84</sup> Augustine's twisted finger is indeed the initial "sign" of the last phase of the libertines' "gesture," which progressively loses its metaphorical expression and unveils its literal meaning (from sex as death to death itself).

The "disintegration of [the] body" (*cacochysme*), as Sade calls it, is the ultimate goal, the libertine's ultimate gesture ("The Twenty-third Day," 495).<sup>85</sup> According to the fifth edition of the *Dictionnaire de L'Académie française* (1798), the adjective *cacochyme* means "*malsain*" and is usually used for a human body that is "*plein de mauvaises humeurs*." In Sade's novel, Curval mentions the true story of "the brave Marquis de S\*\*\*, who, when informed of the magistrates' decision to burn him in effigy, pulled his prick from his breeches and exclaimed: . . . 'Covered with opprobrium and infamy, am I? Oh, leave me, leave me, for I've got absolutely to discharge'; and he did so in less time than it takes to tell." The Marquis de S\*\*\* sees his "infamy" as an erotic self-portrait, as if the Marquis discharged by looking at his own infamous body, or better yet, as if he discharged in the act of defaming his own body as the body of a victim subjected to his murderous violence. It is important to remember that what excites the Marquis is a moral quality, not a physical one. His "infamy" turns him on.



The libertine's gesture of death first of all implies a reduction of the subject to his physicality. Everything in the subject (including his heart, soul, intellectual character, morality, etc.) finds in the body its center. The libertine's body is the locus where his self-denial (or "cacochysme") is enacted. The initial step of this metamorphosis, Curval adds, "resides in our hearts." According to Curval, the libertine "imparts a vicious cast to his soul" (*il . . . fait prendre à son âme une espèce de tournure vicieuse dont rien ne peut plus la sortir*).<sup>86</sup> At the end of this intellectual transformation, "all that before affected one disagreeably, now encountering an otherwise prepared soul, is metamorphosed into pleasure" (496). What the libertine perceives as erotic is the death he gives himself through the violation of "someone," meaning a person who has seen his or her "heart" erased. This "someone" is both the libertine's victim and the libertine himself. "Someone" is the name of the person in the process of being erased, and thus it is incorrect to differentiate between the one who erases and the one who is erased. Both the libertine and the other's body are external sources of "infamy." The death given to the victim is the same death the libertine has already inflicted upon himself. The other's death is the victorious sign of the libertine's "anarchy."

One clear difference between Sade's novel and *Salò* is that Pasolini's film seems to lack an ending. This is Roland Barthes's opinion, for instance. Sade gives the reader a precise account of how and when the victims were "massacred." How many people die in *Salò*? Who dies and who survives? In the last *girone* fifteen victims are given bright blue ribbons that symbolize their imminent punishment. These are the victims who misbehaved and whose names were written in the libertines' black book. But do all the victims die? Pasolini neither shows nor alludes to a complete mass murder. We do see a girl hanged after being penetrated. But what about the others? As we shall see more in detail later, in the final scene of the film Pasolini insists on images of torture rather than of murder. The libertines cut a boy's tongue, poke out an eye, and burn another boy's nipples. But these are not executions. In Sade, torture and death are not synonyms. At the end of his novel, Sade mentions the exact date of every victim's death.

What is also questionable is Pasolini's belief that Sade focused on the "accumulation of crimes" (*accumulazione dei crimini*). This definition is more suitable for Pasolini's work than for Sade's. Pasolini's words stress the Fascists' power over their victims, whereas Sade actually attacks the sexual body as the offspring of nature. *The 120 Days of Sodom* stages the progressive undoing of the body. In *Salò*, the body is the main, but not the sole, venue of the libertines' manifestation of an all-encompassing

power. Their expression of power has no end. It imposes itself as the law of a microcosm that indeed reflects the macrocosm of modernity. But why does *Salò* end with two young men dancing around? It is not clear whether the two men dance while one of the libertines is still in the room watching the tortures in the courtyard or after the end of the torturing.<sup>87</sup> In the latter case, the two men would be left alone in the room and the libertines would have suddenly disappeared from the scene. What kind of ending is that? The answer must wait until the conclusion of this chapter.

## Two Pauline Epistles on Blood and Forgiveness

Pasolini's insistence on the body as the object of the other's power (and not as the physical "clarity" of the Sadean body that, in Barthes's words, is smeared and undone by the other's sexual arousal) becomes evident in the scene following Sergio and Renata's wedding. While the two victims were being violated, the Bishop mentioned Klossowski in response to the Duc's official statement about the unique "gesture" the libertines must strive for. The libertines' gesture is a gesture of death, the sole gesture that silences the silent idiom of sex. In the intermission between the wedding of Renata and Sergio and Signora Vaccari's new narration, we see three of the libertines (Curval, the Duc, and Durcet) sitting in the dark in one of their private living rooms upstairs and enjoying a glass of liqueur. They look disheveled and satisfied as if after an opulent banquet. Curval sits on the floor. This is an important scene in which the three libertines debate the source of the following statement: "The origin of every grandeur on earth has been completely and for a long time soaked in blood. . . . Without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. . . . without shedding of blood." The libertines think of Baudelaire first, then Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, and finally Saint Paul's Epistle to the Romans, which is however mentioned as an unlikely source.

It is interesting that Pasolini makes the libertines mention Saint Paul as an impossible source when in actuality the second part of the above quotation comes directly from Saint Paul, not from the Epistle to the Romans, however, but from the Epistle to the Hebrews. In Hebrews 9:22, Paul writes about the new covenant sealed by Christ with his blood. Christ's blood is the blood of a new covenant between God and humankind. "According to the Law," Paul writes, "practically every purification takes place by means of blood; and if there is no shedding of blood, there is no remission." The first part of the libertine's statement comes from Nietzsche, but the second is from Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews,

with the additional allusion to the themes present in Paul's Epistle to the Romans (cf. Romans 5:9). We have seen that in the screenplay *Saint Paul* Pasolini makes significant references to Romans, especially to the apostle's emphasis on the role of the Law.

The Law is the common denominator of Pasolini's selection of Hebrews and Romans. In the first part of the ending of *Saint Paul*, the apostle finds himself in New York and delivers a controversial discourse on the holiness of the Law. In this scene (93) of Pasolini's screenplay, Paul presents himself "in all his power and authority of great organizer, of apostle, of founder of churches."<sup>88</sup> In particular, the apostle refers to the following passage from Romans 13:1–2: "Everyone is to obey the governing authorities, because there is no authority except from God, and so whatever authorities exist have been appointed by God. So anyone who disobeys an authority is rebelling against God's ordinance." In *Salò*, the libertine Curval blends the words from Hebrews and from Romans, in that he alludes to the essential meaning of the libertines' social system. Like Paul, Curval summons the absolute nature of the Law, of the libertines' Rules for their microcosm. In this regard, the shedding of blood is an expression of the Law, not the foundation of a new Law. In the libertines' view of the Law, there is no Christ, not because their law is evil, whereas biblical law leads to man's salvation, but because the libertines' law expresses the real, eternal, immutable nature of the Law. In his perverse connection of the libertines' Rules with the apostle's statement in Romans, Pasolini underscores the eternity of the values expressed by the libertines and their rules.

The shedding of blood is not a relevant practice in Sade's novel, but it appears in the first circle of *Salò*. In *The 120 Days of Sodom*, the act of shedding the victims' blood occurs in the third part (the description of "150 criminal passions"). Recall Pasolini's statement about Sade's alleged Dantean vision. Sade refers to a "criminal passion" only in the third section of the book. *Criminal* is *not* the key word of Sade's novel, but only one of the possible manifestations of the libertines' passions. Sade uses terms such as *crime* and *criminal*, along with all other possible negative nouns and adjectives defining a libertine and his actions (*depraved*, *villain*, *ungodly*, etc.), less to accuse than to titillate the "criminal" characters, as if he were reading his novel out loud before the libertines themselves. Sade does not speak from the point of view of a reader scandalized by the events described in the text, but as an ambiguous storyteller who mocks the hypothetical, scandalized reader by using this reader's possible words. In other words, Sade speaks to his characters by mimicking the voice of a scandalized reader. Furthermore, blood in Sade's novel is

not particularly erotic per se. The first victim in the castle to be bled is again Constance: "Curval suggests they bleed Constance because of her pregnancy; and bled she is, until she collapses" (614). Constance is bled "because of her pregnancy," in that blood is liquid containing and nourishing the woman's "egg," in the libertines' words. To shed the blood of a pregnant woman is to express a new insult against nature.

In *Salò* the appearance of blood is linked to the complete degradation of the victims. Blood becomes visible in the film when the libertines make their young victims eat a ball of polenta with needles inside. Let us summarize the transition. In the intermission that takes place in the dark and elegant living room (Leger's paintings on the walls), three of the four libertines discuss the possible sources of a two-part statement, whose origin is Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* and Saint Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews. The overall meaning is clear: The shedding of blood signifies the universal and unquestionable supremacy of the Law. If every authority, as Saint Paul says in Pasolini's perverse appropriation of his epistles, expresses God's will, and since the libertines hold a complete authority over their private society, the libertines' violence is not only in the nature of things. It is its highest expression, given that it is nothing less than God's will. In *Salò*, blood is in fact part of the religious disclosure of the victims' submission to the Law.

Pasolini links the shedding of blood to humiliation, a concept that perfectly reflects the compound quotation from Nietzsche and Saint Paul. After the conversation among the three libertines, Signora Vaccari resumes her storytelling in the salon. Her new tale is about a libertine who forced her to act like a dog and to eat with his dogs. Pasolini is very faithful to his source, the twenty-ninth day of *The 120 Days of Sodom* (551–53). On all fours, Madame Duclos had to run after a chestnut, but the libertines' two dogs overrun her. Then, still on all fours, she ate from a trough. The libertine's pleasure came from humiliating a woman: "That's how one should deal with all women . . . whore, slime, scum!" (552–53). It is important to note that in *Salò* as well humiliation and degradation are female prerogatives, so to speak. Renata is the first victim to cry in front of the libertines, and it is she who has to eat the Duc's feces from the floor. The degradation of a victim is a form of feminization, something we have already encountered in *Petrolio*.

The scene of the Duc yelling "*Mangia!*" at Renata while she is kneeling on the floor is reflected in the scene following Signora Vaccari's new story on her sharing some food with a libertine's dogs. Pasolini interrupts his citation from Madame Duclos's storytelling and stages the reenactment of her story, which is something not foreign to Sade, although in his

novel it does not happen at the end of this particular story. Acting as dogs, the victims walk up the stairs on all fours while the guards hold them on a leash. When they finally gather in the same room where Renata and Sergio were sexually violated, the libertines throw food at them as if they were playfully feeding dogs. The camera again lingers on Renata. The Duc, who in the next circle will feed her his feces, now treats her like a dog. He drops food on the floor. Renata eats it up. When she is done, the Duc pats her head and strokes her back like a master expressing affection to his pet. Nothing makes us foresee the libertine's following outburst of rage against the girl. Real food thrown on the floor is not unlike feces defecated on the floor, since both signify the eater's submission to a higher power. The libertine feeds Renata her humiliation.

It is also interesting to note a detail that could be easily missed. The long shot of the victims getting into the large room shows a last victim joining the group when the others are all ranked in front of the libertines. This late victim is Sergio, Renata's "husband." Sergio is the last victim to enter the room, and Renata is the first "dog" eating the food on the floor. Another aspect of the victims' degradation is the disintegration of their individual presence. Their social presence, their actions (their becoming husband and wife, for instance) are done and undone according to the masters' intellectual "urge," as the Duc says in *Salò*. Only a few scenes later the Duc violates Renata by forcing her to eat his shit. He now smiles at her with affection and pats her on the head. In the next circle, the same Duc will not understand that Renata bursts into tears while he is speaking about the murder of his mother because his words remind her of her mother's death. Signora Vaccari must explain to him why Renata cries when she hears stories of matricide. The Duc does not remember that the girl crying now had already cried when he and the other libertines first interviewed her in the Pre-Hell. What compelled him to stand in awe before this girl a few scenes before is now totally forgotten, as if it never happened.

In this state of perennial oblivion, when he forces Renata to eat his feces, the Duc does not seem to realize that he is behaving and speaking as Curval had previously behaved and spoken to an anonymous victim who refused to eat the food on the floor. Curval screams "*Mangia! Mangia!*" to a boy who cannot bring himself to eat from the dog bowl. Before chasing him around the room with a whip, Curval addresses him with the same expression the Duc will use for Renata. Both victims (Renata and this boy) are crouching on the floor. The situation and the words used are basically the same. What differs is the meaning of this food. This food kills. The act of eating on the floor is not the symbolic defilement

of the mother. This meal performs a different ritual: the shedding of the victim's blood to honor the Law embodied by the libertines. The Duc appropriates Curval's performance (his words and behavior toward the naked victim he chases around the room) and enhances its significance. The meal at the end of the first circle officially imposes the power of the Law. Curval sticks some needles in what seems to be polenta and gives it to a girl, who first screams and then, without spitting the food out, lets a streak of blood flow out of her mouth. The same act of eating reveals an additional fundamental connotation in the second circle, when a new victim, Renata, must eat the Duc's feces from the floor. The anonymous girl at the end of the first circle spits out blood while chewing on the libertine's food (polenta with needles). In the second circle, Renata swallows the libertine's food (the Duc's feces). Blood and shit are two sides of the same act of feeding and being fed. The parallels between the two scenes are quite visible (food on the floor; both libertines yell "*Mangia!*" in similar expressions of rage against a victim who does not want to eat). We could say that the two scenes enact two rituals. In the first scene, the ritual concerns the immolation of a victim (the symbolic shedding of blood). In the second, Renata embodies a perennial act of abuse. In other words, the libertines' prototypical victim is both immolated and humiliated.

In his astute weaving of stories from *The 120 Days of Sodom*, Pasolini gives Sade's tales a new meaning. In *Salò*, the stories told by the female storytellers harbor a structural significance; that is, they are not mere variations and are not juxtaposed, as they are in Sade's novel. The tales in *Salò* allude to an overarching meaning deriving from the entire narrative sequence. This is particularly visible at the end of the first circle. When, after the shedding of the victims' blood, Signora Vaccari resumes her narrative performance, we are offered a tale that seems to be disconnected from what we just saw. To render Signora Vaccari's new story closer to her previous one (a libertine made her act like a dog) and the preceding scene (the victims treated as dogs), Pasolini opts for a slightly free translation of a story from the thirtieth day of *The 120 Days of Sodom*, which seems to express some important connotation for the conclusion of the first circle. Madame Duclos tells her audience that once she encountered a libertine who, pretending that she had disturbed him, threatened to kill her. In *Salò*, Signora Vaccari reports the libertine's words as follows: "What are you doing here, little bitch? [*Che cosa stai facendo qui, piccola cagna?*]" (567). The French version, however, has "*Que viens-tu faire ici, scélérate?*"<sup>89</sup> In Sade, we find no direct reference to dogs as the thematic link between the previous story and the new one. "*Scélérate*" becomes "bitch" (*cagna*) in Pasolini.

This translation creates a thematic connection or at least a linguistic echo between what viewers have seen before and what they are witnessing at the moment. This structural connection is absent in *Sade*. The entire final section of the first circle reveals other and more significant internal connections. The scene opens with Signora Vaccari napping on the narrator's chair while all the other characters, who are already in their usual places, stare at her. What the libertines, the fuckers, and their victims see is a rather laughable Signora Vaccari. Not only is she asleep while all the members of this secret society are waiting for her new exciting story, she is also wearing two huge white flowers in her hair that make her look pretty ridiculous.

Why does Pasolini introduce this openly ironic touch? He does so to create a series of echoes between Signora Vaccari's story and the victims in the room. The narrator concludes the first circle of *Salò* by recounting a story about death, or better yet, about a *mise-en-scène* staging a symbolic death. Let me reiterate that Signora Vaccari introduces her tale, so to speak, by napping on the chair. When she wakes up, she tells her audience of her strange encounter with a libertine who first threatens to kill her but then limits himself to burning all her clothes. This man finally masturbates on the ashes of the lady's clothes. Signora Vaccari adds that the libertine fell in a "state of semiconsciousness" (*stato di seminconscienza*) before ejaculating on her burned clothes (568). She herself was in a state of semiconsciousness before beginning her story. The scene, we could thus say, opens and closes with the allusion to a condition of less than consciousness, a weakened awareness that precedes and follows the ashes, which symbolize death.

What takes place within this narrative space seems to be irrelevant both for the libertines (Signora Vaccari's story triggers no reaction in them) and for the victims. The real focus is in fact on the victims themselves and not on their masters, who are silent presences in this last portion of the first circle. In two consecutive shots, the image moves from a long to a medium shot of the victims, once of the girls and then of the boys, seen first from the back and then frontally, as if to stress the secrecy or privacy that the camera infringes upon. We first hear Graziella whisper to her intimate friend Eva that she cannot go on any longer ("*Eva, non ne posso più*"). Then, we see a male victim writing "*addio*" (farewell) on the dusty carpet he sits on. This boy completes the word *addio* exactly as the narrator pronounces the following sentence: "He [the libertine] cursed" (*pronunciò qualche bestemmia*). Pasolini reinforces the centrality of the victims in the finale of the first circle by turning down the narrator's voice and by focusing on the desperate

words whispered by Graziella and on the "*addio*" silently written on the carpet by the forlorn male victim.

Signora Vaccari's tale about her symbolic death seems to be a well-known story, something the audience does not need to hear again because its message has already sunk in. The boy writes "*addio*" like someone who knows that he is already among the dead. The semiconsciousness of Signora Vaccari, which mirrors the semiconsciousness of the libertine who ejaculates on her burned clothes, speaks of a state of numbness and death that repeats itself in a bored and boring manner. But an additional structural echo is present in this scene. Unlike the two victims who desperately and lucidly foresee their death, another male victim, the Duc's favorite, sits next to his master and responds to his kiss with complacency and even desire.

The finale of the first circle stages a symbolic event by recalling the story of a symbolic death. Semiconsciousness, a sort of wakeful slumber, rules over this narrative, while the victims are divided into two categories: those who sense their death, their being among the dead, and those who embrace their condition as the living dead by willingly subjecting themselves to their masters. The Duc and his protégé share an intimacy that is founded on the victim's active acceptance of his condition as one of the living dead. The first circle ends with a medium close-up of Signora Vaccari wearing those funny flowers in her hair and recounting how the libertine ejaculated on her burned clothes. She smiles as if in a stupor.

It is interesting to note that Pasolini chooses to end the second circle with another story revolving around a woman's death. This story comes from the twenty-seventh day of Sade's novel. It should be evident by now that Pasolini picks and chooses tales from *The 120 Days of Sodom* with no respect for its actual narrative sequence. He gives Sade's short narratives a new and different connotation by making them into pieces of a new narrative puzzle that conveys a totally new meaning. Going backward in his selection from Sade (for instance, the first circle had ended with a story from the thirtieth day, whereas the second circle ends with a tale from the twenty-seventh day), Pasolini edits the story of a libertine who cherished the feces of women who were about to be executed (533). Signora Maggi apologizes for mentioning this story because it seems to be more related to the theme of the following "*girone del sangue*."

As we saw in the previous narrations of Signora Maggi, the rectangular and dark table dominates the opening long shot. The room now lies in the darkness. The table now resembles a coffin placed in the center of the narrative space, and the characters (libertines, fuckers, and victims) seem to participate in a memorial. What is also important and very evocative



is that, as at the end of the first circle, the visual emphasis is not on the narrator but on those who will be subjected to the libertines' violence. The frontal long shot with the table/coffin in its center takes up Signora Maggi's entire introductory statement (her apologies for the selection of this particular story). The first close-up is not of the narrator but rather of Eva, the girl who tried to give comfort to her friend Graziella at the end of the first circle. The visual and narrative echo could not be more evident. The close-up of Eva occurs when Signora Maggi mentions the words "women condemned to capital punishment" (*donne condannate alla pena capitale*). Whereas at the end of the first part Eva tries to express support for her friend, now she is in tears, and nobody lies next to her. It is as if Eva were listening to her own death sentence. After a long shot of Signora Maggi, we see close-up of Ezio, the guard who in the third circle is found having sex with the maid and is gunned down by the libertines.

The first close-up of Signora Maggi shows her wearing a dark veil, which she did not have just a few seconds before at the beginning of her tale. We have already noticed that inconsistencies are a trait of Pasolini's filmmaking. We first see the storyteller's veil when she explains that the libertine in question wanted his female victims "to show their loins and to defecate in front of him" (*mostrassero i lombi e defecassero davanti a lui*). The camera lingers on the veiled face of the narrator of stories on coprophilia for the rest of her speech. It is evident that the theme of feces is the pivotal section of the film, not only because it is in the second of the three parts, but primarily because Pasolini makes it the locus of memory and oblivion. The second circle is literally the darkest of the three circles of this new hell. In the first and the third circles, the room is immersed in a light absent from the final part of the second circle. In the circle of shit, death is both remembered and announced. As shit is the embodiment of what is created and what is discarded (shit as fetus and as waste), the second circle of *Salò* stages the memorial of an already occurred death and the proclamation of an imminent carnage. Signora Maggi wears the veil of a lady who mourns the death of her listeners and informs them of their looming execution.

Pasolini cuts off the conclusion of Sade's story on the libertine obsessed with the feces of women about to be killed. In Sade, Madame Duclos explains that the man "reserve[d] his fuck for the climax, and release[d] it at last when before his delighted gaze the condemned person expire[d]." In Pasolini's edited version, the woman's feces are the mark of her death. The woman shits her life, so to speak. She symbolically dies the moment she defecates. In the film, we do not hear about her actual execution, because her feces already contain it. In Sade, on the

contrary, the libertine ejaculates only when he sees her die. In Pasolini, no ejaculation is mentioned. What Sade divides into two parts (the libertine makes the woman defecate and then masturbates when she dies) is one and only one event in Pasolini. This narrative distinction reflects a distinction between feces and body, something Pasolini erases. In *Salò*, shit is both feces and the body that will be discarded.

### **The Structure of *Salò* According to the Identification of Body and Feces**

The centrality of the dual concept feces/body allows us to give *Salò* a different subdivision. Instead of a Pre-Hell plus three *gironi*, we could say that the film is centered on the first two circles, plus an introduction (Pre-Hell) and a conclusion (third circle), which in fact depicts the undoing of the societal structure founded in the Pre-Hell. As we will see in a moment, the third circle contains only one tale. The emphasis of this final chapter of the film is much less on storytelling than on the last metamorphosis of the libertines' secret society. Consider, first of all, that the "*girone del sangue*" (circle of blood) does not open with the new narrator, Signora Castelli, getting ready in her room for her performance. Three of the four libertines seem to have replaced the narrators. Dressed in female clothing, they look at themselves in the mirrors, as the first two storytellers did, before getting married to three of the fuckers. The next scenes concern the denouement of a series of betrayals, which signifies the presence of an alternative and opposed secret society within the society created by the libertines.

The first two main events of the third circle in fact indicate a reversal, a narrative and structural opposition. The libertines impersonate the female narrators, and the victims, acting as some alternative libertines, construct a relational network against the societal laws built by the libertines. The final, gory scene, which has received so much critical attention, seems to result from the discovery of this series of crimes against the libertines' secret society. More than crimes, we should talk of a single crime, in that Pasolini creates a visible opposition between two kinds of sex: sodomy between two men on the one hand, and heterosexual and lesbian sex on the other. It is only in the third circle that we actually see some sexual intercourse. The longest and most graphic scene is the "lawful" one (that is, between two men). After the marriage of the three libertines and the three fuckers, we see a fucker penetrating the bishop in bed. This passionate scene of homosexual sex (the two men fall off

the bed and kiss tenderly at the end) contrasts with the lesbian sex scene (Eva and Antiniska) and the heterosexual one (Ezio and the dark-skinned maid), both of which end with the immediate or announced capital punishment of the criminals. In *Salò*, the conclusion of the libertines' society in fact coincides with the imposition of male homosexuality as the only lawful form of sex. Pasolini makes this connection between sodomy and the future after the end (of the secret society) very apparent. What will take place "after" is sodomy.

According to our restructuring of the film, *Salò* is thus constructed as follows:

Pre-Hell	Circles of manias/shit	Circle of blood
[Foundation of society]		[Birth of society]

The two circles prepare for the birth of this new societal order. The first circle revolves around a "discharge" triggered by the negation or failure of sexual contact. The negation of intercourse is followed by the negation of motherhood (the murder of Signora Maggi's mother; the murder of Renata's mother), or better yet, the creation of a perverted motherhood. The figure of the mother in this second circle gives birth through her anus. The first and second circles are two sides of the same negation. A negation of sexual intercourse (the rejection of the vagina) leads to the creation of feces as the new fetus. The birth of the new societal order following the end of the film occurs at the end of the second circle, which is in fact the celebration of a new form of motherhood. We could go so far as to say that the final circle of blood serves to let this new society blossom, as if all the previous sections of the film had served as an incubator for the birth of a new society. When this birth takes place, the temporary secret society formed by the libertines can be dissolved.

### The Luminous Baptism of a New Order

When Signora Castelli does begin her narration, the room has acquired a luminosity absent from the previous circle. Moreover, the ominous rectangular table that occupied the center of the room has disappeared. The removal of the table, which was a blade stuck within the scene, is part of the restored luminosity. The victims are gone as well, and with them the benches along the walls. The libertines now sit comfortably with their protégés in front of the speaker. A sequence of frontal shots of the speaker and her audience underscores the perfect reflection between

the two opposite sides of the scene. The lady who speaks and the men who listen to her mirror each other. More than absorbing her words in order to get aroused (in the sense we saw before), the libertines and their new storyteller reflect each other, as if they already knew her story, as if the pleasure they receive is not in what she says but rather in her mere presence and her telling them something pleasantly familiar.

Signora Castelli's story is the last tale of *The 120 Days of Sodom* at the end of the fourth part of the novel. Whereas the first two speakers in *Salò* borrowed their tales exclusively from Madame Duclos's narratives, Signora Castelli quotes from Madame Desgranges, the fourth speaker of the novel. In other words, Signora Vaccari and Signora Maggi are in fact two versions of the same Sadean character. The last tale of Sade's novel describes the literal undoing of womanhood and makes an explicit reference to the "infernal" nature of this final account (667). She calls this final passion "*enfer*" (hell).<sup>90</sup> In *Salò*, Signora Castelli describes a libertine whose physical and intellectual attributes recall the Duc's (he is around forty, tall and extremely well-endowed, with an insatiable sex drive and a ruthless cruelty).<sup>91</sup> This man selects fifteen young girls, whom he tortures and kills in fifteen different ways. More than simply killing them, this libertine literally undoes them.

Both Sade and Pasolini envision this last story as an echo and synthesis of their entire works. As we saw at the beginning of *Salò*, this last Sadean libertine requires that all his female victims have flawless and beautiful bodies (666). This libertine resembles the Duc, the first, strongest, and most powerful of the four libertines. Moreover, this last libertine makes his victims defecate in his mouth, even though he does not swallow their feces. Why does he turn down such a succulent meal? We saw that Signora Maggi scolded Renata for failing to appreciate the Duc's excrement. The libertine wishes to mark an interruption in his physical intercourse with his victims, that is, he does not wish to act as the victim of his victim. They defecate in his mouth, but his mouth vomits out their feces. Finally, this man brands these girls upon the shoulder and then kicks them out of the window and down into the cellar of his building.

A difference of some relevance between Pasolini and Sade is that in the novel the libertine, before dumping them into the cellar, sodomizes and deflowers his victims, whereas Pasolini's libertine limits himself to fondling them, as the Sadean libertine also does at the beginning of his encounter with his victims. I have noted Pasolini's tendency to desexualize Sade several times in this chapter. I would argue, however, that in this final case Pasolini's omission renders the whole scene more compact and significant. The emphasis of this final tale is on the girls' flying

out the window down to the cellar and their being undone by the libertine's "infernal" machinery. The victims of this final libertine literally fall into their damnation, into their undoing. Speaking in German, Signora Castelli makes an ironic allusion to the concept of a "hermeneutical circle" (*Zirkel im verstehen*), thus stressing both the circularity and the spiral nature of the process of hermeneutical interpretation, as Gadamer explains it in *Truth and Method* (1960). The first torture engine is a wheel that "bears against an outer circle studded with razors which everywhere scratch and tear and slice the unfortunate victim" (667–68). The last story of *Salò* summons the image of a fall down to the pit of understanding where the body of the woman is undone.

It is interesting that the second kind of torture mentioned by Signora Castelli is not one of the fifteen forms of murders used by the last libertine in *The 120 Days of Sodom*. The storyteller tells her audience that the libertine inserts a rat inside of a girl's vagina. In *Sade*, most of the fifteen forms of torture performed by the last libertine include the use of some machines and fire. Although it is certainly a Sadean form of murder, the idea of placing a rat in a woman's vagina does not fit into this final libertine's scheme. It is reasonable to infer that Pasolini modifies *Sade's* list because he wishes to conclude Signora Castelli's narrative with a reference to the violation of the vagina. Pasolini chooses two final tortures that focus on the destruction of the woman. Razors on a wheel slowly "peel off" her body. A rat gnaws on her entrails once it is stuck into her vagina. The woman's body and her sex organs are immolated at the end of Signora Castelli's narrative. The vagina becomes the sewer in which a rat hides. The "hole" that turns a woman into a mother is now the underground, invisible repository of waste. If a fetus is nothing but the "egg" a woman expels as if she were defecating, the final torture in *Salò* evokes a different sort of phallus, a living organ (a rat) that does not serve motherhood, but possesses the mother in order to annihilate her.

In *The 120 Days of Sodom*, the ultimate expression of the libertines' destruction of the woman is at the end of the novel, when *Sade* offers a detailed description of Constance's death. After the narration of this murder, the novel becomes an outline of how the novel would proceed if the author had a chance to finish it. Constance's death is indeed the end of *The 120 Days of Sodom*. After her gruesome murder, the novel unravels as if it had already reached its goal. The novel ends when Constance ends. Her pregnancy, which had marked the passage of time, had at once threatened and aroused the libertines. Curval had frequently expressed his hatred for this soon-to-be mother and had explicitly mentioned the pleasure he would take in gobbling down Constance's "egg."

The undoing of Constance had seethed in Curval's mind as the expectation of an extreme, ultimate form of pleasure, as the undoing of the mother and thus of nature, the object of the libertines' fierce resentment. Sade describes Constance's death as follows: "Constance lay upon a kind of mausoleum, the four children decorated its corners. As their asses were still in excellent condition, Messieurs were able to take considerable pleasure in molesting them; then at last the heavier work was begun; while embuggering Giton, Curval himself opened Constance's belly and tore out the fruit, already well-ripened and clearly of the masculine sex" (670). Constance is immolated on a "mausoleum" where the four children sodomized by the libertines echo the masculine fetus she is holding in her belly. *The 120 Days of Sodom* ends with the birth of a dead fetus, which the most hateful libertine, like a midwife, extracts from the mother's body. This truly disturbing ending unquestionably exalts the presence of this woman, whose pregnancy had been an affront to the libertines' philosophy. The four boys reminiscent of angelic figures accompanying a holy image of nativity manifest what the baby inside Constance will not be. The act of sodomizing the four boys echoes the murder of the mother.

Pasolini does not fail to make a subtle allusion to the concept of motherhood at the end of the film. What happened to Renata, the mourner of the mother's death? Let us remember that she at once echoes the victim Sophie (whose mother died to save her) and Constance herself (the mother who dies before giving birth to her child) in Sade's *The 120 Days of Sodom*. *Salò* is seen *also* through the eyes of the victims, which is foreign to Sade's narrative, with the sole exception of Constance, who in some passages reveals a different perspective both on a given event and on the libertines' ideas. The victims in *Salò* appear as distant and apathetic only if we do not consider the victims in Sade's text. In Sade, the victims are simply not visible. They are mere names, abstract qualities, and body parts (mouth; penis; buttocks). In *Salò*, we see the victims' distraught faces, their exchanges of silent communications, their failed attempts to construct private relationships. In Pasolini's film, the victims are recognizable as distinct human beings who try to be as invisible as possible in order not to fall prey to the libertines' violence.

Pasolini's free indirect discourse (or more precisely, "free-indirect-point-of-view-shot," which, according to Pasolini, is not identical with the "interior monologue" nor with "free indirect discourse" in literature) mirrors the unstable presence of the victims themselves.<sup>92</sup> Like their gaze, the victims and their biographies arise to the narrative surface and withdraw from it leaving no apparent memory. This is especially visible in

Renata, who is first presented as a daughter distressed because of her mother's death; then marries Sergio and is unmarried immediately after; is forced to eat the feces of the Duc, who vents his anger against the mother by humiliating her, whereas he had smiled at her earlier and fed her as if she were his favorite pet. The same can be said of her temporary husband. We first see him when the libertines scrutinize their male victims. We hear his name and, through the libertines' gaze, we notice his charming face and smile. Sergio marries and unmarries Renata. Then he is the last "dog" to join the meal the libertines give to their pets. Later, as a woman, he marries Curval.

The victims are errant biographies and gazes. They are indeed unstable narrative signifiers that metamorphose from scene to scene, from one circle of Pasolini's hell to the next. Their relentless mutability relates, of course, to their lack of power within the libertines' system. The victims, and their gazes, exist intermittently. Their discontinuous presence, however, does not coincide with an erasure of their symbolic power. Renata and Sergio's biographies may be blotted out from the narrative flow, but what persists is their emblematic significance, which resurfaces within the representation by means of indirect visual and verbal allusions. In other words, Renata and Sergio are signifiers that maintain their significance through the presence of other representational signifiers.<sup>93</sup> It is true, as more than one critic has pointed out, that *Salò* stages the libertines' secret society as an atemporal space, but the victims succeed in evoking an alternative atemporality that defies the erasure of time performed in the film.

We see Renata again sitting in the shit container with other female victims. She seems to be praying. As has been noted, the allusion to Christ's passion and death is overt in this preparatory scene (the soldiers playing cards; the girl quoting Christ's last words on the cross), where only the female victims are soaked in shit while the men are bundled up like sacrificial lambs on the floor. Renata is also the first female victim to be tortured in the notorious final scene of the film. If we take a close look at this scene, we notice that Pasolini opposes two couples. Sitting on his podium within the house, through his binoculars the Duc first sees the bishop and Curval standing on the right side of the courtyard, which has become a torture chamber.<sup>94</sup> The bishop is dressed in white, and Curval wears a similar long robe in black. A second couple appears in the right lens of the binoculars after we are shown the guards saying goodbye to each other behind the Duc. This second couple who, like the first, stand on the right side of the courtyard, are two victims, a girl and a young man. The separation between the left and the right side



Figure 13

of the binoculars is clearly marked by the vertical black line separating the two lenses. On the left, Durcet is lighting a candle; on the right, the heterosexual couple is waiting. These two victims recall Pasolini's *The Canterbury Tales* (fig. 13). The young man is wearing a crown made of ivy as if to celebrate some victory. At first, it looks like Durcet is lighting the candle in honor of this couple waiting to receive the libertine's homage. The two victims resemble a young couple about to be married. The young man's victory could be the girl's hand.

In *Salò*, the libertines' tortures are symbolic acts of defilement that complete each other. The entire scene is made of complementary oppositions and reflections. The first couple (the libertine in white and the libertine in black) mirrors the second couple, the young man who seems to have won over the girl. If the second couple recalls a heterosexual nucleus, the first two victims reflect this concept. Durcet takes the candle to the first male victim and burns his penis. He uses the same candle to burn the nipples of Renata, the first female victim of this final Grand Guignol. Renata's expression of pain recalls the scene in the Pre-Hell where she desperately lamented her mother's death. *Salò*, we could claim, opens and ends with Renata's agony. It is also essential to note that the same torture (the burning of nipples) is later applied to Sergio, Renata's "husband." Only Renata and Sergio are subjected to identical torment. Sergio is also the last victim to be exposed to the libertines' violence. The original couple Sergio/Renata (theirs was the only "natural" marriage) is thus unmistakably evoked at the end of the film. Renata is the first female victim to be tortured in the courtyard, and Sergio is the last of the entire scene. The symbolic significance of Sergio and Renata



resurfaces at the end of the film, even though their biographies have been manipulated and erased (the Duc did not remember why Renata cried when Signora Maggi told how she killed her mother; the Duc got angry at Renata; the Duc looked kindly at Renata; he patted her on the head as if she were his pet; Sergio married and unmarried Renata; Sergio married Curval as a woman; Sergio became a dog).

The ghost of a fertile “normalcy” defying the libertines’ system is a persistent allusion, the persistent memory of a pristine societal condition that still lingers in a world that has denied it. More than an erasure of the past, we should speak of a metamorphosis of the past. Human beings, *Salò* tells us, have metamorphosed into monsters of an eternal present. Their monstrosity lies in a denial of time; they have changed into beings who do not change. The inhabitants of the libertines’ new order are brothers of the Shit (*il Merda*) in *Petrolino*, who wanders with his fiancée through the circles of a new hell. We have seen that *Petrolino* evokes a number of metamorphoses. Apart from the two Carlos’ transformation into two homosexual men/women, we have encountered the spirits of the Netherworld who come up from their hell to be sexually pleased by the freaks Carlo 1 and Carlo 2. These spirits used to be the spokesmen of an immemorial past, which is now a Netherworld ruled by the mother.

*Salò* locates itself at the intersection between the death of one race and the birth of another. Pasolini himself is at the threshold of this major revolution. Similar to the “double-faced” Models of the hell in *Petrolino*, Pasolini is a “Model” who looks both at the past and at the future. Like the two Carlos, the spirits of the Netherworld, and the victims of the libertines, Pasolini himself senses that he used to be someone different. His metamorphosis is also a response to the larger changes he sees taking place at the moment. Commenting on *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, I discussed Pasolini’s questionable opinion about the changes in sexual behavior in Italy. Pasolini resents the fact that women are now free to hang out with young men, which he sees as a new form of prostitution. The new female prostitution, according to Pasolini’s dubious idea, prevents heterosexual men from “exploring” with other men, namely, homosexuals who used to get some sex thanks to the seclusion of women. The homosexual now sees his identity challenged and jeopardized by the alleged sexual revolution. The homosexual used to be someone else.

Transformation is a relational event. In Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*, men and women become something else because of a traumatic event involving the gods or other humans. I have pointed out that *Salò*, unlike *The 120 Days of Sodom*, is more about the victims than about the libertines. The victims are signifiers that are vilified, manipulated, erased,

even though their significance persists as a present memory. The victims are signs of metamorphosis, whereas the libertines and the storytellers present themselves as those who never change. Their perversion is primarily that they are “those who do not change.” In the fleeting autobiographical references present in these ladies’ narratives, we recognize an initial moment in which they stopped transforming. In Signora Maggi’s case, this moment coincides with the murder of her mother. The death of the mother is the marker of this eternal immutability. This is a topos of Sade’s writings. See, for instance, *Crimes de l’amour*. Killing one’s mother grants the libertine the central insight about his or her (Signora Maggi’s or the Duc’s) nature. The mother in fact signifies the act of metamorphosis. Her body changes (see Constance’s progressive pregnancy in the novel) and gives birth to change itself.

The verses from Pound’s *Cantos* that are read on the radio while Durcet looks down at the courtyard reiterate the opposition between the “paternal word” (*la parola paterna*) and the fraternal one, which is “mutuality” (*mutualità*). The father’s words, we hear, are “filial compassion, devotion.” We have seen that this is the essential theme of *Porn-Theo-Colossal*. “A race arises from one and only one” (*Una stirpe sorge da uno solo*), the voice from the radio recites, while the two guards, Maurizio and Claudio, sit bored in the living room. The ambiguity of this quotation in this particular setting stems from a series of contradictions we have already identified in *Petrolino*, *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, and *Saint Paul*. The fraternal word is spoken, so to speak, in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, a scenario heavily influenced by Brown’s reading of Freud in *Love’s Body*. The fraternal word is “disorder and quarrels” (*disordini e baruffe*), we hear at the beginning of the quotation from Pound.

### **Claudio, Who Has Denied the Mother, Embodies the Closure of the Film**

The ending of *Salò* puzzles many viewers, including Barthes, who holds that *Salò* is a failure because it lacks a real ending. According to him, Pasolini does not know how to finish his interpretation of Sade. But *Salò* cannot have an ending because an ending would allude to a closure, to some sort of cathartic denouement that *Salò* cannot grant. As I mentioned before, we do not even know who among the fifteen victims dies and who is merely maimed and physically violated. Sade is much more precise in specifying the date of a given execution. The ending of *The*

*120 Days of Sodom* is the completion of a mass murder. The murder of the victims in *Salò* does not end. In the last scene of the film the emphasis shifts again to the guards, especially to Claudio, the young man who, after being recruited by the libertines, spurns his mother (“*Va via!*” he yells at her when she runs after him to give him a scarf).

It is with this guard that the film finds its end. Claudio invites his colleague to dance with him. An implicit homoerotic undertone is detectable in the gazes the two young men exchange when they hit the floor. While dancing, Claudio asks Maurizio his girlfriend’s name. “Margherita” (Daisy), Maurizio answers. This is the last word of the film. It is obvious that the two guards know that their lives will suffer no substantial change after the end of the libertines’ society in *Salò*. Claudio also assumes that Maurizio has a girlfriend waiting for him when this gig is over. The two young men are among those (heterosexual) men whose power remains untouched. Before and after the fall (the sexual revolution; the decadent descent from the father’s mythic order), this kind of man is on the right side. The two guards flirt a little before dancing, because in any case their brief flirtation does not make them into perverts. These are the men who, before the sexual revolution, let homosexuals please them sexually. These are the men who can engage in homosexual acts without being tainted by them. And of course these men have fiancées, like the Shit in *Petrolino*.

The name Margherita certainly evokes a sense of purity, of simplicity and honesty. This Margherita is waiting for a young man who has participated in the persecution, torture, and murder of other people. But I have also repeatedly remarked that throughout the film Renata wears a hairpin that has a string of daisies on it. “Margherita” is the echo of the original and essential concept of motherhood that dominates the entire film. The word *Margherita* hangs on as the signifier of a memory, the mother, the family lair. Its signified (the girl) shows the present reality summoned by the word. Claudio will marry the girlfriend he certainly has back home. He will return to his family, even though at the beginning of the film he denied his mother. *Salò* does have a coherent and powerful ending. Should we expect to see what happens when the hell in *Salò* is over and the allies liberate Italy? Should we actually see who survives and who does not? Durcet does hand out blue ribbons to the fifteen victims before torturing them, but these markers are soon lost. The two young guards dancing together celebrate a new beginning. *Salò* ends with a beginning. We could call it the “birth of a nation.”

## “A Schizophrenic Child Is a Tiny Dot, I Dreamed Once”: Metamorphosis in Mario Mieli and Pasolini

My feeling transsexual was both a cause and a result of the progressive mutation of the way I perceived my body and my mind, the “external” world and the others. At times I felt I was a real woman; at times I was pregnant spiritually. Some other times I was like the reincarnation of a woman. Moreover, to put it “in a certain way,” my inner *ghosts*, and along with them “the archetypes” of the collective unconscious, were “projected” or, better yet, *met* “externally.” My schizophrenic experience allowed me to unveil many of the secrets hidden by the recurrent representations of a “normal” past. . . . I felt like the interpreter of a great *destiny*.<sup>1</sup>

The preceding passage is not from *Petrolio* or another of Pasolini’s last works. It is one of the most personal confessions in Mario Mieli’s *Elementi di critica omosessuale* (Elements of homosexual criticism) a treatise on homosexual identity that shares some of the crucial themes of the conclusive phase of Pasolini’s opus. My analysis of Pasolini’s last works has focused on concepts such as transformation, metamorphosis, division, doubling, and annihilation. The common thread has been the idea of being born and giving birth in the sense not only of a radical renovation or resurrection, but also of a perverted labor and nativity. Pasolini’s

last works emphasize a new beginning, an initial stage that is at once personal and universal. Pasolini's obsession with mythic origins is a central theme that has rightly received great critical attention. What differs at the end of his artistic production is that the imagined land of mythic origins becomes the focal point of his art. At the end of his life, Pasolini writes on something he knows does not exist. This nonexistent land, its nonexistent idiom, and its nonexistent inhabitants become the exclusive center of Pasolini's final works.

It is of great interest to realize that Mieli's *Elementi di critica omosessuale* not only addresses some of Pasolini's central concerns, but also makes use of similar philosophical sources, primarily Norman O. Brown. Mieli, whose book appeared in 1977, only two years after Pasolini's death, comments on the significance of his murder and offers a new look at the poet's persona, that is, the public image he molded according to the ideological parameters expressed by his works.<sup>2</sup> In one of his well-known essays on the connection between montage and death, Pasolini remarks that the subject attains some kind of completion only after death. In his view, death is our official biographer. Pasolini himself, however, contradicts his original idea.

Before tackling this issue, I should note that in Italy the theme of homosexuality is still so unpleasant that it is very common to find academic books that either ignore it completely or only make fleeting references to the artist's sexual difference, which is seen as something unworthy of special attention. Homosexuality was part of Pasolini's private life, and we should respect his reticence. If a study published in Italy does mention Pasolini's homosexual identity, it is almost exclusively in connection to his love for the men of the borgate. His homosexuality is an objective, biographical datum, not something worth critical investigation. The academic works (essays or books) that broach this difficult issue are rare. Even where homosexuality is the central, in-your-face topic of a Pasolini text (as in *Porn-Theo-Colossal*), some young Italian scholars succeed in avoiding the word *homosexual* and the theme of homosexuality altogether—a truly remarkable rhetorical tour de force.

Let us analyze the preceding passage from Mieli's *Elementi*, in which he comments on the experience that led him to clinics for mental illness for a short period of time (191). It has been said that Mieli uses the word *transsexual* in an unfamiliar way, which is generally true. For Mieli, *transsexual* usually does not refer to a person who has actually undergone surgery to change sex. The word means something else, as we will see in a moment. In the above passage, however, Mieli seems to be alluding to an imaginary and temporary sexual reassignment. Like Schreber,



the apostle's message is predicated on his sexual difference, on his being someone who is different from himself. This paradoxical condition is in fact the insight that allows the apostle to envision the "new destiny," as Mieli puts it, of humanity.

Mieli's discourse on his schizophrenic phase is heavily indebted to Brown. "As Norman O. Brown says," Mieli states, referring to the chapter entitled "Boundary" in *Love's Body*, "it is not schizophrenia but normality that is split-minded; in schizophrenia the false boundaries are disintegrating. . . . Schizophrenics are suffering from the truth" (184).<sup>5</sup> The emphasis on the disclosure of truth as the kernel of what Mieli calls his schizophrenic moment is based on Brown's apocalyptic reflections about Christ's incarnation and resurrection in the chapter entitled "Fulfillment" in *Love's Body*. "The real apocalypse comes," Brown writes, "with the identification of the city and kingdom with one's own body."<sup>6</sup> Brown synthesizes this pivotal element in the following passage, which Mieli borrows in his description of his schizophrenic experience:

To find the kingdom in one's own body, and to find one's own body in the outside world. The body to be realized is the body of the cosmic man, the body of the universe as one perfect man. The word that is incarnate in Christ is the word that is incarnate in the universe now recapitulated in the divine-human body. . . . As in schizophrenia: "what happens to the person's own body . . . is identical with what happens in the universe."<sup>7</sup>

We have seen that the essential idea of an internal reality absorbing the external appearances of the world is also the foundation of *Petrolino*. In this passage, Brown brings to the fore the apocalyptic potential lying dormant in the schizophrenic body. Brown literalizes the concept of the divine "word" and of its identification with the humanity of the second person of the Trinity. The word, in Brown's reading, becomes the reflection of the schizophrenic body, which exists in the world as an incarnation of itself, so to speak, in that it is an internal statement that is reflected in the real. The schizophrenic is a word made flesh, and in his conflation of language and body he appears as a visible paradox. It is useful to recall Róheim's patient, who believed that to pronounce the word *shoe* one had to stick an actual shoe in his mind.

Mieli and Pasolini appropriate Brown's apocalyptic view of the schizophrenic who "recapitulates" what happens in the universe. Mieli, however, pushes Brown's reasoning further. For Mieli, the schizophrenic and the homosexual share similar traits and play similar ideological roles: "What appears as an asocial presence according to the judgment/

prejudice of the dominant ideology usually hides something deeply human, which often evokes a (re)conquest of the real community" (186). Mieli contends that in his delirium the schizophrenic pursues "the solitary recognition of the huge importance of the human subject and of life" and that his fear of being persecuted betrays his awareness of an actual persecution "against the human person in our capitalistic society." "Christ," Mieli concludes echoing Brown, "today suffers in jails and mental hospitals" (186–87).

It would be easy to dismiss Mieli's discourse as an outdated expression of a late apocalypticism that the Italian theorist had already found in Marcuse. The same tone and the same vision are present in Pasolini. "Time is running out," Mieli states (187). What I find deeply evocative is Mieli's insistence on the "solitary recognition" of our human condition pursued as an insane project that only insane individuals can share. The deeply humane association of a mental and a sexual "asociality," as Mieli puts it, should resonate with our times, in which many gay men and women see heterosexual marriage as the ultimate expression of social freedom, which could be seen as an ironic paradox. Claude Rabant is right in seeing a connection between Mieli's view of schizophrenia and that of Deleuze and Guattari, as they define it in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972).<sup>8</sup> Consider, for instance, this passage from the introductory part of their seminal book:

The schizo is at the very limit of the decoded flows of desire . . . where a despotic Signifier destroys all the chains, linearizes them, biunivocalizes them, and uses the bricks as so many immobile units for the construction of an imperial Great Wall of China. But the schizo continually detaches them, continually works them loose and carries them off in every direction in order to create a new polyvocality that is the code of desire.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to stress that, unlike Guy Hocquenghem, Mieli does not make extensive use of Guattari and Deleuze's philosophy. Tim Dean and Christopher Lane rightly stress that Mieli's *Elementi* is much less psychoanalytical than Hocquenghem's *Homosexual Desire*.<sup>10</sup> For instance, Hocquenghem never mentions Norman O. Brown. It is also true, as Teresa De Lauretis points out, that Mieli's discourse would have been different had he read Foucault.<sup>11</sup> It is important to stress, however, that Mieli does not limit himself to theorizing the connection between schizophrenia and homosexuality; he lives it as the core of his identity. We find in Mieli an eerie identification of theory and practice that recalls Pasolini's own existence, which is based on a profound osmosis between literature and



personal biography. Both Mieli's and Pasolini's writings revolve around the "human," which they see as irredeemably threatened in our contemporary capitalistic society.<sup>12</sup> Both evoke a pre-Fall, mythic stage of nature, which for Mieli is reflected in homosexuality. For Pasolini, on the contrary, homosexuality is the primary manifestation of the Fall. In Pasolini's view, the homosexual reveals that the Fall has taken place

"Time is running out," Mieli writes, and this could work as the slogan of Pasolini's poetics. Mieli makes himself the incarnation of this apocalyptic word, as Schreber had seen himself as a second Virgin impregnated by the divine. This fundamental aspect of Mieli's writing should be kept in mind. For Mieli, schizophrenia is at once an actual disease that he experiences in his life and a *Weltanschauung* that this disease and his homosexuality grant him. Tim Dean's definition of Mieli's thought as an "ecstatic utopia" captures the core of his writing.<sup>13</sup> I believe that the phrase "ecstatic utopia" could be also applied to Pasolini's final poetics. His "schizophrenic" novel *Petrolio* is ecstatic, as are the pivotal moments of the film *Salò*. Remember Signora Maggi's storytelling and in particular Renata's highly symbolic significance. For Dean, nothing reveals the distance between Mieli and us more than the AIDS plague.<sup>14</sup> In my view, more than his obvious ignorance of the epidemic, what makes Mieli so distant from us is his belief that sexual difference matters. Today, we grant meaning neither to mental disease nor to homosexuality. Rather than a moral or ideological judgment, mine is an objective assessment. It is simply a fact that today "difference" as mental illness or homosexuality has no mysterious or profound meaning and thus must be erased. Ours is a time of no negations.

Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* and *One-Dimensional Man* exert an essential influence on Mieli's and Pasolini's apocalypticism. Like Brown, Marcuse is frequently discussed in *Elementi di critica omosessuale*. Mieli mentions an important passage from *Eros and Civilization* when he addresses the possible meanings of perversion. He reminds us that, according to Marcuse, "Perversions express rebellion against the subjugation of sexuality under the order of procreation, and against the institutions which guarantee this order. . . . Against a society which employs sexuality as a means for a useful end, the perversions uphold sexuality as an end in itself; they thus place themselves outside the dominion of the performance principle and challenge its very foundation" (215).<sup>15</sup>

Contradicting Marcuse's statement, Mieli stresses that modern society tends to absorb and normalize perversions in order to make them into profitable forms of consumerism (216). Rather than letting perversion speak, capitalistic society deprives it of its idiom, that is, it practices a

"repressive desublimation" of perversion. But this expression too comes from Marcuse, whose *One-Dimensional Man* includes a chapter entitled "The Conquest of the Unhappy Consciousness: Repressive Desublimation."<sup>16</sup> Mieli quotes from this chapter in other sections of *Elementi* (98, 216). What Mieli means is that society (and most likely he refers to Italian society in particular) offers a silenced form of perversion, which can be marketable and thus intrinsically repressive and heterosexual. In the seventies in Italy, when Mieli wrote his book, homosexuality simply did not exist as a visible and lucrative behavior. Pasolini directly addresses this topic in *Porn-Theo-Colossal*. We have seen that he comments on the tragic destiny of the male homosexual in Gomorrah in a footnote that echoes what Mieli writes in another passage of his book, where he describes the dangerous and precarious condition of the homosexual whose life is always at risk (166). The murder of a famous artist such as Pasolini, Mieli argues, comes as a shocking revelation to a society that seems to have understood and absorbed all contradictions.<sup>17</sup>

In the recent *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self*, Didier Eribon contends that nowadays a gay person's identity is still shaped by the verbal violence to which he or she can be subject "at any moment of his or her life."<sup>18</sup> Didier also holds the questionable opinion that Proust's depiction of a gay man as someone who speaks "in the feminine" with other homosexuals and polishes his gestures and language around strangers "transcend[s] its time."<sup>19</sup> It is impossible to agree with Didier's absolutism, given that, for example, today a vast section of the gay population, at least in the United States, pursues the myth of a hypermasculinity that shuns even minimal references to effeminacy. Even without looking at this contemporary obsession, it is fair to say that today among many gay men the identification gay = effeminate or gay = woman seems a bit passé or, better yet, an amusing relic of a past culture. What is interesting in Didier's belief is not its distance from reality but its allusion to the sense of insecurity that still pervades homosexual life. Proust's depiction of a typical, early-twentieth-century homosexual does not coincide with our vision of multiple forms of homosexual identity and behavior, as David Halperin confirms in his most recent book, but the risk of verbal or physical violence (Didier's "insult") is still a sad reality.<sup>20</sup> Marcuse's concept of desublimation is still in progress.

What Mieli says about the desublimation of perversions finds an additional echo in Marcuse's concept of the "functionalization" of language, a theme dear to Pasolini. Marcuse also calls this phenomenon "the authoritarian ritualization of discourse."<sup>21</sup> In the section entitled "The Language of Total Administration," Marcuse writes,

This sort of well-being, the productive superstructure over the unhappy base of society, permeates the “media,” which mediate between the masters and their dependents. . . . Its language testifies to identification and unification, to the systematic promotion of positive thinking and doing, to the concerted attack on transcendent, critical notions. . . . The concepts which comprehend the facts and thereby transcend the facts are losing their authentic linguistic representation. Without these mediations, language tends to express and promote the immediate identification of reason and fact, truth and established truth, essence and existence. . . . [F]unctionalization of language helps to repel non-conformist elements from the structure and movement of speech. Vocabulary and syntax are equally affected.<sup>22</sup>

The language that “repels” a nonconformist expression (the idiom of a maternal land for Pasolini; Mieli’s homosexual or, better yet, transsexual identity) uses a “syntax in which the structure of the sentence is abridged and condensed in a way that no tension, no ‘space’ is left between the parts of the sentence.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, the homosexual in Mieli’s connotation is the “space” threatening the sentence of the administrative idiom. Marcuse’s statement is certainly behind Pasolini’s pessimistic view of linguistic evolution. We know how Pasolini relates the birth of the Italian language to mass media, which spread the administrative language of the “masters.” In the chapter on *Petrolio*, we saw the similarities between a stillborn language (modern Italian for Pasolini) and the image of the fetus/feces.

We cannot help but recognize a fundamental identification between the survival or retrieval of a pristine maternal language and the expression of a homosexual idiom. Both Pasolini and Mieli emphasize the existence of a “space,” a silence or pause within the visible or audible sentence that testifies to a time before the present, a time evoked and embodied by the homosexual. If the fundamental and most recurrent themes of Pasolini’s last works are division, separation, mirroring as doubling, we understand that division occurs when a space is located between the before and after of what is seen and said. Marcuse’s “space” is also the rupture of the boundary between the I and the world evoked by Mieli in his description of his schizophrenic experience. In opposition to a discourse made of synonyms and tautologies, Marcuse advocates a language of “spaces,” so to speak, of tension “between essence and appearance,” which sustains a “dimension of thought” that he defines as “historical.” The suppression of history, Marcuse contends, is the essential trait of the modern “functional language,” which strives toward the imposition of an eternal present, a linguistic continuum of tautologies

with no past and no future.<sup>24</sup> We have seen that the erasure of time is an essential aspect of *Salò*.

Pasolini and Mieli are active within this cultural tension between an eternal present and the language of difference and time. In both authors, the homosexual is the marker of the "space" disrupting the eternal present of modernity. It is crucial to understand, however, that for Pasolini and Mieli the homosexual embodies this essential role as a mythic calling. Pasolini sees himself in a strict rapport of opposition with the young men of borgate. He exists as their alter ego, as their fallen brother. Pasolini and his beloved young men from the borgate share the same mother. The same mother determines who will be saved and who will be damned. Paradoxically, the homosexual Pasolini both decries the decadence of our contemporary times and embodies this very decadence. His having sex with those (mythic) young men does not taint their pure masculinity, but reinforces it. As he states in one of his most controversial articles, contemporary sexual freedom prevents these young men from exploring other sexual activities, namely, their being serviced sexually by a homosexual like him. Pasolini seems to justify this humorous statement by referring to an original bisexuality thwarted by modern sexual habits. But he never pursues this hypothesis fully. A "real" man, according to Pasolini, is even more so if he engages in some sexual encounters with homosexuals because in acting sexually with a homosexual, a real man in fact rejects the homosexual (no love can exist between a real man and a homosexual) and thus reiterates his masculinity, a gift from the mother.

By speaking of the metamorphosis of the young men into demons of the night coming from the hell of the mother, Pasolini indirectly addresses also their alter ego's mirroring transformation. In *Petrolino*, the homosexual reveals himself as a hybrid, a freak, a half homosexual-half woman, a man with big breasts and a vagina, organs that are visible but not necessarily existent. In the 1996 film *Nerolio*, shot in black and white (an invented word that blends *petrolino*, "gasoline," and the adjective *nero*, "black"), Aurelio Grimaldi transforms the notorious fragment from *Petrolino* where Carlo has sex with a number of young demons at night into an encounter between Pasolini and some Sicilian young men.<sup>25</sup> The entire film is depressing, and this scene is particularly so because the character of Pasolini (played by the excellent actor Marco Cavicchioli, who shows an eerie resemblance to the Italian poet) is stripped of his mythic aura and manifests a deeply sad and annoying nature. Grimaldi's Pasolini is a middle-aged, well-educated homosexual. Pasolini's ideological, political beliefs are not

emphasized in the film. In *Nerolio*, Pasolini is a resentful, repressed, depressed, and depressing gay man, such as one could encounter in Italy in the seventies. Pasolini is a bourgeois and well-read man who angrily mulls over his alienation. Deprived of his mythic vocation, Grimaldi's Pasolini is a homosexual at odds with a society that denies his desire.

This view of Pasolini as an aging homosexual who rants about the decadence of our times because he cannot make sense of it is reflected in Uberto Paolo Quintavalle's memoir on the shooting of *Salò*, a book I mentioned a few times in previous chapters. Not only does Quintavalle, who plays the libertine Curval in Pasolini's film, seem not to understand the sense of Pasolini's last film, he is also not very sympathetic with Pasolini's poetics. His view of Pasolini reinforces the sense of radical isolation that Pasolini communicates through his last works. Quintavalle holds that Sade's novel was not a suitable text for Pasolini, and that *Salò*, the film in which he stars, is not a successful work of art because of its "historical" and "ideological incoherence." According to Quintavalle, Pasolini makes the four Fascists express his own sexual preferences, whereas real Fascists would never have openly embraced homosexuality.<sup>26</sup> Yet this alleged "incoherence" obviously plays a central role in Pasolini's interpretation. In Quintavalle's account, Pasolini's negative ideas were also due to the fact that men did not respond to his sexual advances.<sup>27</sup> Basically Pasolini had a hard time accepting that he was aging.

In *Nerolio*, the character Pasolini travels to Sicily during the fall, goes up to a group of young men who are playing soccer in a desolate open field, and picks them up for sex. All the ingredients of a Pasolini film are there. We see him walking around a poor neighborhood. We see him approach his typical "*ragazzi di vita*" (his beloved hustlers). What is missing in the film is Pasolini's mythic rendition of this setting. The places and the men usually associated with Pasolini have become flat and prosaic, as if myth had withdrawn from them. The nymphs are still living in the woods, so to speak, but neither the nymphs nor the forest have anything of the divine. Furthermore, what marks the withdrawal of the myth (the young men as the nymphs at a spring waiting for the shepherds) is the very presence of the homosexual who used to conjure up that myth, the homosexual who revealed the myth lying dormant within those places and men. In *Nerolio*, Pasolini services these hustlers one after the other on the beach. He even makes the first man listen to Satie while sitting in his rented car and asks him if he likes that music before he steps out and gets ready for action.

The gray and funereal *Nerolio* stages a demythicized reality by attempting a possibly more realistic portrait of Pasolini.<sup>28</sup> While he is having sex

with one of the young men on the beach, the others sit around a fire and crack jokes about faggots. One of them stands up and mimics a very effeminate man who has stuck a rose up his anus. His friends find the joke very amusing. We might easily dismiss this film by simply saying that Pasolini was more than that. And of course this is true. But Pasolini was *also* that. Imbued with the apocalypticism of Marcuse and Brown, the same basic sources of Mario Mieli's *Elementi*, Pasolini's last production revolves around the "space" of the homosexual as the embodiment of deprivation and subtraction. Pasolini's homosexual is "less" rather than "different." He speaks deprivation. He speaks of a reality that is becoming "less and less." Please remember his elegiac renditions of a heterosexual marriage at the end of *Comizi d'amore* and also in the first circle of *Salò*.

We have seen how both Pasolini and Mieli find in the concept of schizophrenia a cogent expression of their thought. But the meanings they assign to *schizophrenia* could not be more different. For Pasolini, schizophrenia is a claustrophobic condition. The schizophrenic mistakes imagination for external reality. The walls of his mind become the landscape of his world. Pasolini's schizophrenic has less contact with reality. In Pasolini's view, the schizophrenic's mind is the "spacious" stage of his imagination, because schizophrenia signifies the collapse of communication. Hence his insistence on the fetus/feces image as the sterile and solipsistic production of an alienated mind. For Mieli, on the contrary, schizophrenia indicates an opening of the subject to the "truth" of reality, as he says, citing Marcuse.<sup>29</sup> Mieli believes in a schizophrenia that, by destroying the division between inner and outer reality, leads to a universal revelation, to a shared truth.

It should be evident by now why Mieli rejects the idea of bisexuality as a viable solution to the opposition of hetero- and homosexuality. First of all, for Mieli, bisexuality is more than a universal and abstract concept; it is a behavior that he, as a "part-time transvestite" (in his own words), associates with repression and secrecy (130). Bisexuals are *also* those straight men who allow themselves to express their homosexuality in shady encounters with other men who agree to play the female role. According to Mieli, even when a man defines himself as bisexual, his social presence lies on the side of normalcy. A correct understanding of Mieli's view must consider when he writes and against whom he writes. Living in Italy, he knows a bisexuality that does not dare to defy heterosexuality. For him, bisexuality is a sexual limbo that de facto supports the oppression of homosexual men and women. In Mieli's words, bisexuality is an "often hypocritical compromise between repressive Norm and transsexuality" (63). In *Homosexual Desire*, Guy Hocquenghem pays scant

attention to the issue of bisexuality and primarily mentions it in the context of the Freudian concept of “polymorphous perversity,” which he identifies with “the constitutional bisexuality of men and women.”<sup>30</sup> In *A History of Bisexuality*, Steven Angelides underscores that in the Western gay liberation movements that flourished in the 1970s, “a gendered politics of bisexual experience had replaced the dream of a future society free from the hetero/homosexual structure.”<sup>31</sup>

Mieli’s insistence on a pan-sexual or, better yet, transsexual identity appears to be a defense of bisexuality. In the gay liberation movements, Angelides stresses, “the theory of bisexuality or bisexual potential was *avowed* as the basis of a new liberating ontology of sexuality. Yet this potential was located in a utopic space that was a nowhere place.” Bisexuality, Angelides concludes, “would be a viable practice only *after* sex roles and sexual categories had been abolished.”<sup>32</sup> This is particularly evident in Joanna Russ’s novel *The Female Man*, where gender metamorphosis hinges upon the transference of (phallogentric) power:

I’ll tell you how I turned into a man.

First I had to turn into a woman.

For a long time I had been neuter, not a woman at all but One Of The Boys, because if you walk into a gathering of men, professionally or otherwise, you might as well be wearing a sandwich board that says: LOOK! I HAVE TITS! . . . I’m not a woman; I’m a man. I’m a man with a woman’s face. I’m a woman with a man’s mind. . . . I’m a sick woman . . . a man-eater; I crack their joints with these filthy ghoul’s claws.<sup>33</sup>

The character Jael in Russ’s novel is a warrior with steel teeth and cat-like claws. For her, identity coincides with the presence or absence of the phallus. A “neuter” is a human being removed from the opposition of hetero/homosexuality and masculinity versus femininity. In this context, a “neuter” is a bisexual (“One Of The Boys”). What Mieli advocates, instead, is a universal openness that transcends the boundaries set by the phallus. In his view, homosexuality is the symbolic practice par excellence that sexualizes a radical openness to the other. He understands that the “subversive potentiality” of a gay man lies in his now famous expression “my ass is open to everyone [*il mio culo è aperto a tutti*]” (155). Mieli’s defiant expression radicalizes Guy Hocquenghem’s emphasis on homosexuality as “group desire”: “Homosexuality is a group desire; it groups the anus by restoring its functions as a desiring bond, and by collectively reinvesting it against a society which has reduced it to the state of a shameful little secret. . . . The anus’s group mode is . . . a circle which is open to an infinity of directions and possibilities for plugging in, with

set places."<sup>34</sup> Hocquenghem's concept of "group desire" as a "threat to the Oedipal 'social'" still conceives of anal sexuality as a sexual behavior in opposition to the Oedipal society, whereas Mieli looks to the openness inherent in a sex organ that signifies openness and non-discrimination.<sup>35</sup> As Tim Dean points out, Mieli's definition foreshadows the contemporary debate in the field of queer theory on what Bersani calls "the homo-ness" inherent in homosexual desire.<sup>36</sup> Mieli's transsexuality is a radical openness to the other in which the subject "takes in loving the other as the same, in homo-ness. In that love . . . he risks his own boundaries, risks knowing where he ends and the other begins."<sup>37</sup> Instead of "homo-ness," Mieli speaks of an "intersubjective act [*atto intersoggettivo*]" (148). As Christopher Lane emphasizes, however, Mieli's discourse does not explain what role women play in this hypothetical intersubjective interaction.<sup>38</sup> Hocquenghem's treatise presents a similar limitation.

Neither Hocquenghem nor Mieli know how to address the problem of woman because they do not know how to theorize heterosexuality. They envision male heterosexuality as a merely social expression of repression and conformity. The woman, Hocquenghem writes, is "the social sexual object" and "has no place in society."<sup>39</sup> But even this general statement in fact echoes the "absence" of the male homosexual from the social scene. Mieli has more powerful words on this subject: "*The other sex* (woman) is a *hole*. It does not matter if this hole belongs to a woman's or a man's body, because this hole is empty, is a nothingness" (157–58; emphasis in original). But the paradoxical result of this reasoning is that homosexual intercourse is productive, whereas the heterosexual version is only a man's ejaculation in an empty hole, a sort of masturbation that engages the woman as a nonexistent, albeit necessary, emptiness. When in the same paragraph Mieli infers that "man is a woman," he refers to the intrinsic transsexual nature of every human being, by which he intends "man" more than "man and woman." In the same passage, Mieli reiterates that "transsexual" does not mean "bisexual."

Hocquenghem's and Mieli's inability to theorize women's hetero- and homosexuality is due to their inability to theorize male heterosexuality, given that, for them, the heterosexual man identifies with the phallus, and for them all forms of sexual behavior revolve around the exertion of a phallocratic power. Paradoxically, it is the heterosexual man's possession of the phallus that, in the view of Hocquenghem and Mieli (and Pasolini), prevents him from expressing a truthful sexual identity. Men fight over the phallus, we could ironically infer, and women have no chance to get into the game. In Mieli and Hocquenghem, the male homosexual inhabits the locus of womanhood. Mieli's "revolution" lies in



the appropriation of the feminine against male heterosexuality. He believes in one and only one truthful form of homosexuality: the passive homosexual man who flaunts effeminate behavior.

The idea of the productivity of homosexual intercourse arises from Mieli's interpretation of Freud's anal stage. Expressing a view of this stage that is radically different from Pasolini's, Mieli envisions the infant's anal product not as a stillborn offspring, as in *Petrolino* and *Salò*, but as the symbolic performance of a rebirth of sexuality according to its original, pristine rules before their perversion by (capitalistic) society. Like Pasolini, Mieli borrows from Norman O. Brown's analysis of Luther's famous scatological revelation (see "The Protestant Era," in *Life Against Death*). Rejecting the equation fetus/feces/discard expressed by Pasolini, Mieli exclusively emphasizes the generative symbolism inherent in the act of defecation. What is discarded (feces; homosexuality) becomes the truthful locus of pleasure, because it corresponds to the infant's "first gift," as Freud says in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*.<sup>40</sup> The "gift" of homosexuality thus identifies with the revelation that the source of what is discarded (the anus) harbors a secret pleasure that can be only unveiled if one gives up his or her phallocratic subjectivity. "The gay counterattack of shit" (*la gaia riscossa della merda*) is Mieli's definition (149).

In one of his most personal passages, Mieli mentions that once he dreamed the sentence "A schizophrenic child is a tiny dot" (*un bambino schizofrenico è un piccolissimo punto*), which I have used in the title of this final chapter. Mieli does not explain this brief, oneiric communication (he puts this dream in parentheses), but we can hazard an interpretation. Dots are used to suspend a discourse or to show what is missing in a statement. Dots open up a space. Dots are also what we discard (disregard) in the act of reading. What do you do with dots? How do you read them? Asked to read out loud during a class, a student usually stops and maybe giggles, unsure how to pronounce dots. Dots are present to say that something is missing. Mieli's entire discourse, with its incoherence and naïveté, identifies in the "dot" the essence of his "ecstatic utopia." What is his utopic transsexual but a homosexual man who has succeeded in creating a pause in the subject's search for sexual identity? Mieli's transsexual is in fact a homosexual who has flooded our sexual discourse with dots. The open anus ready to welcome anyone, as Mieli says, is not a grave, to paraphrase Bersani's well-known expression. The open anus is not the gaping hole of a modern Netherworld where a fetus is nothing but feces. Its sterility is the dot representing a schizophrenic baby in Mieli's dream. This new offspring takes the "risk of self-dismissal, of losing sight of the self."<sup>41</sup> This is Mieli's "ecstatic" message of liberation.

Pasolini and Mieli look at the reformation of the body as the essence of an apocalyptic resurrection. Both Pasolini and Mieli visit Sodom, as Rocky O'Donovan suggests in the essay quoted in the introduction to this book, and walk out of this burned-down city with the promise of a forthcoming new beginning. For Pasolini, however, this new genesis coincides with an everlasting end in which the body will never die because it never lived. The young men of the Roman borgate have begun to live as living dead, as monsters arising from the Netherworld of the mother. Pasolini finds himself at the final intersection of mourning the past and looking forward to an apocalyptic era. All the works I have examined in this book dwell on the concept of division, of an individual presence that exists against itself. Read in this manner, Sodom is indeed a place against nature, in that it calls forth its own annihilation. Sodom is the city of those who should not live, those whose bodies are utopias. The Sodomites are those who remind you of their nonexistence, of their being at once self and its denial. Their existence is not a contradiction, but the openness of a living myth. Pasolini has described the destruction of Sodom as an eternally repeated event.

What role does language play in Pasolini's apocalypticism? The poet sings of that nothingness that appears through the cracks of a reality that is about to end. This nothingness is the language of the mother, who gives birth to the poet as a messenger from a land that lies before and after time. The land of the mother (the Netherworld whence male demons come at night and have sex with homosexuals) is the land of an annihilation that lies before every possible birth and every possible death. Poetry is thus the language that lasts, we could say, because it rests on and springs from the nothingness of the mother. And so does the body. The resurrected body is the body of a son who embodies the nothingness of the mother. To exist and to speak poetry is a gift for and from the mother.

Mieli dreamed of this eternal recurrence as a sequence of dots, of suspensions of discourse. This is the body of the schizophrenic child, according to his dream. But a dream, we could add, is also the desire for and the announcement of something to come. "My body is a dot," this child could ironically say. Unlike the baby/shit in Pasolini's *Petrolino*, Mieli's child is a body that awaits to be told, we could conclude, a body that is waiting to surprise and suspend you, like the angelic beings at the end of *Porn-Theo-Colossal*. Their annunciation is first and foremost their luminous bodies that summon a suspension, a sequence of dots, before the revelation.



## Appendix: A Basic Biography

The following is a selective biographical sketch. It emphasizes events that are reflected in the works discussed in this book or that contribute to a better understanding of Pasolini's ideas.

1922. Pier Paolo Pasolini was born in Bologna on March 5. His father, Carlo Alberto Pasolini (1892–1958) was a career officer, and his mother, Susanna Colussi (1891–1979), was a high school teacher of peasant origins from Casarsa in Friuli, where Carlo Alberto and Susanna first met. One year older than her husband, Susanna was thirty-two when she had Pier Paolo. They had different social and cultural backgrounds, and incompatible characters. Carlo Alberto identified with his virile and military persona, whereas Susanna had intellectual interests and tended toward a more lighthearted lifestyle. Their first child, Carlo, born before their marriage, lived only three months.

1925. In Belluno, where the family had moved, Susanna and Carlo Alberto had a second son, Guido Alberto. The three-year-old Pier Paolo became aware of his parents' antagonistic relationship and sided with his mother, who had shifted her emotional needs from her spouse to her child, and experienced a first love longing. He named his indistinct feeling toward a lady, to whom he transferred his feelings of love for his mother, *teta veleta*, as he later explained in a famous essay (see chapter 3).

Although the number of biographies of Pasolini equals the staggering number of monographs devoted to this author, for this brief biographical sketch, I have consulted in particular the following books: first of all Marco Antonio Bazzocchi, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*; René de Ceccatty, *Pasolini*; Luigi Martellini, *Ritratto di Pasolini*; Maurizio Viano, *A Certain Realism*.

Because of Carlo Alberto's military duties, the Pasolini family frequently moved from city to city in northern Italy. For Pier Paolo, their repeated stays in Friuli were particularly meaningful. He soon identified this Italian region as the place of an original, mythic freedom from the corruption of history.

1929. Pier Paolo wrote his first Petrarchan verses, inspired by a love sonnet his mother had composed for him. Of his mother's poem, Pier Paolo retained only the final verse: "*di bene te ne voglio un sacco*" (I have a lot of love for you). At the time he had no direct knowledge of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*.

His cousin Nico Naldini, who was an important presence in the artist's life, was born in this year.

1936. He attended the Liceo Classico Galvani in Bologna and distinguished himself for his vast readings and intellectual curiosity. During this period he became familiar with Rimbaud's poetry. He showed his great passion for soccer and biking.

1939. He enrolled in the University of Bologna in the faculty of Letters and attended courses in Italian literature, which he found uninspiring.

1941. He attended art history courses taught by Roberto Longhi, whose analyses of medieval Italian painting affected Pier Paolo deeply.

His father left for Africa, where he was captured by the English army.

1942. In July he financed the publication of three hundred copies of *Poesie a Casarsa*, a poetry booklet of less than fifty pages. Although they are dedicated to his father, the verses are written in the maternal dialect of the Friuli region. Pier Paolo intended his publication to be a scandalous presentation of a new poetic world, and this is how the eminent historian of Italian language Gianfranco Contini defined it in a very supportive review.

In August, Pier Paolo and his mother moved back to Casarsa to avoid the frequent bombardments in the big Italian cities. He collaborated with the journal *Il setaccio* of the Fascist University Youth (*Gioventù italiana del Littorio*). This journal published translations from modern and ancient classics (from Sappho to Baudelaire).

1943. He became aware of his homosexual desire and had an intimate friendship with a younger friend, Bruno.

On September 1 he was called to serve in the military and went to Pisa. The Nazis captured his division, but he was able to flee and return to Casarsa.

With a group of friends, he founded a sort of private high school to help students who could not reach the official school in Udine because of the frequent bombardments. Although Pasolini's school was soon declared illegal, he and his friends continued to tutor their students at Pasolini's house.

1944. To avenge the murder of two German soldiers in Casarsa, the Nazis went from house to house to arrest the young men of the town. Pier Paolo and his cousin Nico Naldini were saved by neighbors who lived next to the local church.

In April and August the poet published the first two issues of *Stroligut di cà da l'aga*, a journal of Friulian poetry.

His brother Guido joined the partisans.

1945. On February 12 a group of Italian Communist partisans, who favored the annexation of the Friulian territories to Slovenia, killed Guido, who belonged to a division that opposed it.

On February 18 he and some friends and students founded the Academy of Friulian Language (Academiuta di lenga furlana).

His father returned from Africa.

1946. He published a new collection of poetry entitled *I diarii*. Eugenio Montale selected one of these poems for publication in *Il mondo*. He visited his uncle Gino in Rome.

1947. Until 1949 he taught in a middle school close to Casarsa. He became a member of the Communist Party and directed the branch in San Giovanni.

1949. On October 22 the poet was denounced to the police for "corruption of minors and obscene acts in public." At the end of September he had had sex with three adolescents. He lost his teaching position and was expelled from the Communist Party. Newspapers made Pier Paolo's humiliating experience public.

1950. On January 28 he fled with his mother to Rome. Because of their meager finances, his mother worked as maid. They rented a modest apartment close to the ghetto of Portico d'Ottavia. In a letter Pier Paolo called Rome "this new Casarsa." He worked as an extra at Cinecittà and collaborated with several newspapers. He befriended prominent literary figures such as Giorgio Bassani, Sandro Penna, Attilio Bertolucci, Giorgio Caproni, Giuseppe Ungaretti, and Carlo Emilio Gadda.

His trial took place in December. He was sentenced to three months with probation. He decided to appeal the sentence.

He met the young Sergio Citti, who had just been released from the reformatory, and his brother Franco, who starred in six of his films.

1951. With his mother he moved to an apartment close to the prison Rebibbia. Until 1953 he taught in a private middle school, which allowed his mother to quit working as maid. His father, now sick and alcoholic, joined his wife and son in the spring. Pier Paolo welcomed him with veiled hostility.

1952. He worked on two poetic anthologies: *Twentieth-Century Poetry in Dialect* (Poesia dialettale del Novecento) and *Canzoniere italiano: Antologia della poesia*

*popolare* (Italian canzoniere: Anthology of folk poetry). The second volume came out in 1955.

1954. With Giorgio Bassani, the author of *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, he wrote the screenplay for a Mario Soldati film, *La donna del fiume* (The woman of the river), with Sophia Loren.

1955. The Pasolini family moved to the neighborhood of Monteverde Nuovo, in the same block where Carlo Emilio Gadda had his apartment. Pier Paolo published *La meglio gioventù* (The best of youth), which collected all his Friulian poems (see chapter 4).

He published the novel *Ragazzi di vita* (The ragazzi). With a few notable exceptions (Gianfranco Contini, Giuseppe Ungaretti), critics, in particular Marxist ones, rejected the novel's explicit sexuality, vulgar language, and its depiction of a disturbing reality—the slums on the fringes of Rome. Pier Paolo and his publisher Garzanti were denounced for “obscene publication.”

With his friends Francesco Leonetti and Roberto Roversi, he conceived of a new literary journal, *L'Officina*, whose aim would be a critical analysis of post-war Italian culture.

He became close friends with Alberto Moravia and Elsa Morante.

1956. Pasolini and his publisher were acquitted of the accusation of obscenity.

1957. Until 1961 he collaborated with several Italian directors, among others Federico Fellini (*Le notti di Cabiria*, 1958), Mauro Bolognini, and Luciano Emmer.

He won the prestigious Viareggio Prize for his poetry collection *Le ceneri di Gramsci* (Gramsci's Ashes).

1958. He published *L'usignolo della Chiesa Cattolica* (The nightingale of the Catholic Church), a collection of early poetry, composed during his Friulian period.

On December 19 his father died. In a letter Pier Paolo expressed his sense of guilt for his resentment of his father, whose despair and isolation had dramatically intensified during the last period of his life.

1959. He published the novel *Una vita violenta* (A violent life). Italo Calvino praised the novel and found it superior to *Ragazzi di vita*.

He was denounced again for a short poem critical of pope Pius XII published in his journal *L'Officina*.

He translated Aeschylus's *Oresteia*.

1960. Catholic and Marxist groups denounced *Una vita violenta* for obscenity. Vittorio Gassman staged Pasolini's translation of *Oresteia*.

He published *Passione e ideologia*, a collection of literary essays written between 1952 and 1957.

He wrote the screenplay of *Accattone*. After watching a few preliminary sequences, Fellini refused to produce the film because of Pasolini's alleged mediocre skills.

He visited Sudan and Kenya.

Between December 1960 and January 1961 he traveled to India with Elsa Morante and Alberto Moravia.

1961.. He shot his first film, *Accattone*. Presented at the Venice film festival, the film was heavily criticized by some critics because of its supposed moral and aesthetic flaws.

With Sergio Citti, he wrote the screenplay for *Mamma Roma*.

1962. He shot *Mamma Roma*.

He made another trip to Africa.

He attended a conference in Assisi on the relationship between cinema and spirituality. He read the gospel of Matthew and conceived of the subsequent film.

1963. He traveled to Palestine and again to Africa.

He shot *Sopralluoghi in Palestina* (Inspections of Palestine).

He bought an apartment in the new residential neighborhood EUR.

While shooting *La ricotta*, he met the adolescent Ninetto Davoli, whose family had moved from Calabria to Rome. The film was immediately censored and removed from theaters because it was considered insulting to religion.

He composed the script *Il padre selvaggio* (The savage father), inspired by his trips to Africa. He never turned it into a movie. He also began writing *La divina mimesis*, on which he worked until 1967. The text came out posthumously in 1975.

Between March and November, he shot *Comizi d'amore* (Love meetings), which came out in 1965.

1964. The Venice Film Festival received *The Gospel According to Matthew* very positively. The film was shown in the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, where he met Sartre.

He published *Poesie in forma di rosa* (Poems in the form of a rose).

1965. He made the film *Uccellacci e uccellini* (Hawks and sparrows), with the actors Totò and Ninetto Davoli. It came out in 1966 and met with a negative critical response in Italy.

In September he was in New York and met Allen Ginsberg.

He attended the Pesaro First International Film Meeting, where he met Barthes and read part of his famous essay on the cinema of poetry.



He published *Alì dagli occhi azzurri* (Alì with blue eyes), a collection of poetry and prose.

1966. He was hospitalized for an internal hemorrhage. During his convalescence, he composed six tragedies. He shot *La terra vista dalla luna* (The earth as seen from the moon), again with Totò and Ninetto.

1967. He shot *Edipo re* in Morocco and *Che cosa sono le nuvole?* (What are the clouds?), starring Totò and Ninetto Davoli.

1968. He wrote the first draft of the screenplay *San Paolo*, on which he continued to work for several years.

This was the year of *Teorema*, both as film and as novel written during the shooting. The film stirred the usual controversies because of its alleged immorality.

During the summer, he made *La sequenza del fiore di carta* (The sequence of the paper flower).

He began filming *Porcile* (Pigsty).

His documentary *Appunti per un film sull'India* was shown on Italian television.

He began working on the film project *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, which underwent at least three rewritings.

1969. He finished *Porcile* (Pigsty) and shot *Medea* in Capadocia (Turkey), Italy, and Syria, and *Appunti per un'Oresteide Africana* (Notes for an African Oresteia).

1970. He traveled to South America with Maria Callas, the star of *Medea*.

He filmed *Decameron*, which received a very positive reception in Italy and abroad.

1971. He completed *The Canterbury Tales* and published the poetry collection *Trasumanar e organizzar*.

1972. He published *Heretical Empiricism*, his most influential collection of essays on literature and cinematic theory. *The Canterbury Tales* was released with great success. He made his first allusions to *Petrolino*.

1973. Ninetto Davoli got married. While in Yemen to film *Le mille e una notte* (The Arabian nights), he made the short *Le mura di Sana'a* for UNESCO.

1974. *The Arabian Nights* was released.

1975. He published the screenplay *Il padre selvaggio* and the *Lettere Luterane*. He shot *Salò, o le 120 giornate di Sodoma*.

He was murdered on the night of November 2 on the beach of Ostia. The police arrested the young Pino Pelosi, who in 2005 denied having killed Pasolini and claimed that three mysterious people were responsible for the crime.

1992. *Petrolia* was published unfinished.



# Notes

## INTRODUCTION

1. O'Donovan, "Reclaiming Sodom," 247.
2. Ibid., 248.
3. I discuss Robertson's prophecies in *Satan's Rhetoric*, 234.
4. *New Jerusalem Bible*, 1387.
5. Ibid., 1275.
6. Ibid., 1400.
7. For a succinct and insightful biography of Pasolini, see de Ceccatty, *Pasolini*. The first and the last chapters deal with Pasolini's last days.
8. Fortini, *Attraverso Pasolini*, 243. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.
9. Merola, "Pasolini riconciliato?" 74–78.
10. Santato, "Per una rilettura di Pasolini," 7. But we can go even further back in time with the essay by Pio Baldelli, "Il 'caso' Pasolini e l'uso della morte." Baldelli convincingly criticizes Pasolini's "evangelization," his harping on the imminent end of times, and the imposition of a new Fascism (161–62). After some thirty years, Baldelli's healthy debunking of Pasolini's ideology is still very refreshing.
11. Merola, "Pasolini riconciliato?" 74. Unfortunately, some fifteen years after the publication of his lucid essay, far too many unnecessary volumes on Pasolini are still published every year in Italy. Merola is right in emphasizing that Pasolini's "demonization of Power" was certainly wrong (76) and that it contributed to the confusion concerning his poetic message.
12. Rich, "The Passion of Pasolini," 80.
13. Rhodes, *Stupendous, Miserable City*, 2.
14. Pasolini, "Cultura borghese–cultura marxista–cultura popolare"; see *Saggi sulla letteratura*, 2:1995.

15. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 70.
16. Ibid., 99.
17. De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 247.
18. De Martino, *Furore simbolo valore*, 64.
19. De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 646.
20. On the contrast between pre-history and post-history in the late works of Pasolini, see Santato, “L’abisso tra corpo e storia,” 15–36. Santato emphasizes the “utopian” tone of Pasolini’s view of a post-historical condition, which implies a return to a pre-historical condition (26).
21. Pasolini, *Il padre selvaggio*; see *Per il cinema*, 1:292; emphasis in original.
22. De Martino, *Sud e magia*, 98–99.
23. Ibid., 97.
24. De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 241.
25. Ibid., 643.
26. Pasolini, “Droga e cultura,” in the section “Da *Il caos sul Tempo*”; see *Saggi sulla politica*, 1168.
27. For an analysis of the relationship between Pasolini and his mother, see Ryan-Scheutz, *Sex, the Self, and the Sacred*, 14–44.
28. Pasolini, “Abiura della *Trilogia della vita*”; see *Saggi sulla politica*, 599, 600, 601.

#### CHAPTER ONE

1. Pasolini, “La mia provocatoria indipendenza,” in the section “Da *Il Caos sul Tempo*”; see *Saggi sulla politica*, 1172–73; emphasis in original. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.
2. For a succinct and enlightening analysis of the editorial vicissitudes of *Saint Paul*, see Pasolini, “Note e notizie sui testi” in *Per il cinema*, 2:3151–53. On Pasolini’s *Saint Paul*, see Parmeggiani, “Pasolini e la parola sacra”; Escobar, “Pier Paolo Pasolini”; Rinaldi, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 243–49; de Meo, “Les interrogations de Pasolini”; Martellini, *Ritratto di Pasolini*, 125–28.
3. Pasolini, “Note e notizie sui testi,” in the section “Appunti per un film su San Paolo”; see *Per il cinema*, 2:3151. Pasolini uses the expression “theological film” in a letter to Don Emilio Cordero, to whom he had sent a first sketch of the possible film project in 1966. The first complete draft of *Saint Paul* was finished in 1968.
4. Wills, *What Paul Meant*, 7, 23. Wills cites Wayne Meeks at the beginning of this quotation.
5. This quotation appears in Matteo Cerami and Mario Sesti, eds., *La voce di Pasolini*, 35. The editors report part of an interview Pasolini gave to Tommaso Anzoino (see Anzoino, *Pasolini*.)
6. Conti Calabrese, *Pasolini e il sacro*, 27. For a discussion of Pasolini’s view of the Catholic Church, see pp. 27–36. Conti Calabrese’s pioneering book is a compelling analysis of Pasolini’s spirituality. His examination of Pasolini’s essays on Eliade is very insightful. See also Spineto et al., eds., *Su Pasolini e il sacro*.

7. For an accurate survey of Pasolini's approach to the concepts of pre-history and post-history, see Francese, *Il realismo impopolare di Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 41–67.
8. Sapelli, *Modernizzazione senza sviluppo*, 23–24.
9. Cf. Conti Calabrese, *Pasolini e il sacro*, 100.
10. Parmeggiani, "Pasolini e la parola sacra," 197.
11. Pasolini, "Note e notizie sui testi"; see *Per il cinema*, 2:3151. For a convincing analysis of this screenplay from a theological point of view, see Conti Calabrese, *Pasolini e il sacro*, 37–51.
12. Pasolini, *Il sogno del centauro*; see *Saggi sulla politica*, 1444.
13. Pier Paolo Pasolini, "L'enigma di Pio XII," in *Tutte le poesie*, 2:17. Pasolini makes a direct connection between *Saint Paul* and this collection of poetry in *Il sogno del centauro*; see Pasolini, *Saggi sulla politica*, 1462.
14. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 99, 100, 92.
15. Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, xv.
16. Ibid., xvi. Andreea Deciu Ritivoi, in *Yesterday's Self*, further explains that "[d]espite similarities in behavior, the mechanisms that trigger nostalgia and melancholy are complete opposites: The melancholics want to sever themselves from their surroundings. . . . The nostalgics, on the other hand, have already been severed from their initial surroundings, and they keep fishing for reattachment" (28). Ritivoi's book is a lively and inspired examination of nostalgia with a specific emphasis on its literary manifestations. On the centrality of memory in nostalgia, see Wilson, *Nostalgia*, 21–29. Cf. Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, 4–13. Whereas Boym's analysis focuses on Eastern European nostalgia, Lowenthal studies the Anglo-American historical development of nostalgia. Both works are monumental in the literal and metaphorical sense of the word. For a possible psychoanalytic interpretation of Pasolini's personal nostalgia, see Carotenuto, *L'autunno della coscienza*, 101–4.
17. Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, xviii.
18. Lowenthal, *Past Is a Foreign Country*, xvii.
19. Rumble, *Allegories of Contamination*, 140. Rumble refers in particular to *The Trilogy of Life*.
20. Pasolini, *Il caos*, 123–24. Some of the articles mentioned in this chapter are not included in *Saggi sulla politica*, which only offers a selection from *Il caos*.
21. Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, 104.
22. Pasolini, *Scritti corsari*; see *Saggi sulla politica*, 390.
23. I quote from the following edition: Pier Paolo Pasolini, *San Paolo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), 5. Subsequent citations of this work are given parenthetically in the text by page number. It is interesting to note that, in the most recent edition of Pasolini's opus, this introductory part becomes an appendix to the screenplay, even though at its beginning Pasolini makes a direct reference to the "film project that precedes these notes." Cf. Pasolini, "Appunti per un film su San Paolo"; see *Per il cinema*, 2:1883.

24. Pasolini, *Il sogno del centauro*; see *Saggi sulla politica*, 1508–09. In the introduction I mentioned that Pasolini has become a mythic figure in Italy and elsewhere. His unexplained death greatly contributes to his transformation into a lay saint, and consequently also to a hagiographic approach to his life and to his poetic message. In *Pasolini sulla strada di Tarso*, Ilario Quirino sees a parallel between the lives of Pasolini and Saint Paul. In particular, Quirino convincingly claims that the martyr Stephen reminded Pasolini of Guido, his brother, who, like Stephen, had suffered a violent death (61–67). For an analysis of *Saint Paul*, see pp. 160–82. Quirino mentions the similarities between Guido and Saint Stephen on p. 167.
25. Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 251. The expression “reflexive” nostalgia is already present in Fred Davis’s *Yearning for Yesterday*. Davis contends that nostalgia can be seen as divided into three “successive orders of cognition and emotion . . . : First Order or Simple Nostalgia, Second Order or Reflexive Nostalgia, and Third Order or Interpreted Nostalgia” (17; emphasis in original). The second level (*Reflexive Nostalgia*) occurs if the subject “does more than sentimentalize some past” and instead questions the veracity of his or her nostalgic feelings (21). Nostalgia, Davis adds, “is one of the means . . . we employ in the never ending work of constructing, maintaining, and reconstructing our identities” (31).
26. On the multiple interpretations of this myth in connection with Pasolini’s film, see Albini, “Pasolini e la storia dell’antico,” 19–21, and 24. On how Pasolini modified Sophocles’s text, see Gigante, “Edipo uomo qualunque?”
27. Elie Maakaroun, in “Pasolini face au sacré ou l’exorciste possédé,” speaks of the “enterprises baroques de l’analogie et des correspondances” in Pasolini’s cinema (34).
28. Tesauo, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, 279.
29. Virgilio Fantuzzi, in “La ricotta (part of RoGoPag),” speaks of Pasolini’s aestheticism in *La ricotta*: “Agnostic intellectual as he was, Pasolini tends to mask his own cynicism in aestheticism, that is, in *La ricotta*, in citations of Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino. But aestheticism is a false approach, the negation of a poetry of sincerity” (106). Aestheticism is only one facet of Pasolini’s approach to religion. In *La ricotta*, we encounter two opposite stances vis-à-vis the staging of Christ’s death and resurrection. The aesthetic view expressed by Orson Welles, who plays the role of the director, does not coincide with the overall message of the film. Pasolini expresses at once a deeply reverential attitude toward the Christian mysteries and an “agnostic” or modern cynicism, which is also a result of his own fall from grace.
30. Tesauo offers this important definition in *La filosofia morale*, bk. 18, chap. 4, 554–55. Cf. *Cannocchiale aristotelico*, 217. I examine Tesauo’s philosophy in “The Word’s Self-Portrait in Blood.”
30. Tesauo, *La filosofia morale*, 554.
31. In *Il limite oscuro* Raffaele Cavalluzzi speaks of the “subtle but impenetrable glass screen of an aquarium” that separates the viewer from the images of

- a Pasolini film (44). I find the metaphor of an “aquarium” interesting and suggestive.
32. Viano, *A Certain Realism*, 59. The word *subjective* is present in Viano’s book.
  33. *Ibid.*, 61; see also Manzoli, *Voce e silenzio nel cinema di Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 99–115, esp. 101.
  34. Viano, *A Certain Realism*, 63. See also La Porta, *Pasolini: Uno gnostico innamorato della realtà*, 66–67. La Porta sees the novel *Petrolio* as Pasolini’s final attempt to capture a reality that evades him (73–93).
  35. Pasolini, *Saggi sulla politica*, 1545. Cf. Jori, *Pasolini*, 100; Conti Calabrese, *Pasolini e il sacro*, 30. Conti Calabrese emphasizes the link between the religious man’s perception of the end of the sacred in modern times and Pasolini’s worship of the motherland. Andrea Miconi offers very interesting remarks on Pasolini’s concept of realism in *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 107–18.
  36. Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, 12.
  37. Cf. Viano, *A Certain Realism*, 187–91; Rinaldi, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 274; Rhodes, *Stupendous, Miserable City*, 149–50.
  38. Naomi Greene, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 141. Pino Bertelli, in *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, defines the *Sequence* as a “favola” (fairy tale; 212) and a “piccolo apologo sulla stupidità” (short parable on stupidity; 213). I do not think that Riccetto’s behavior is determined by his stupidity. Naïvete and stupidity are not synonymous. Bertelli offers a good historical background and technical information about this short film (211–14). Such information is generally the best part of Bertelli’s book.
  39. Pasolini, *Per il cinema*, 2:3126.
  40. Viano, *A Certain Realism*, 188.
  41. On this short film, see Rohdie, *The Passion of Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 41. Rohdie writes, “The idea of knowledge in the film is in the form of a parable about innocence and knowledge which Pasolini expressed in his other fictional parables equally about innocence and knowledge. . . . Parabolic forms are analogy, rhyme, mirrored repetition, dream, imitation, example.” On Ninetto’s presence in Pasolini’s cinema, see Lawton, “The Evolving Rejection of Homosexuality, the Sub-Protelariat, and the Third World in the Films of Pier Paolo Pasolini.”
  42. See Pasolini, *Per il cinema*, 1:1093 (“La sequenza del fiore di carta”).
  43. Nicholas McMaster’s essay, “Superimposition in Pier Paolo Pasolini,” is in progress.
  44. As Michael Syrimis underscores, Pasolini makes use of this still also to emphasize that Medea’s point of view dominates the visual narrative. Syrimis offers a detailed analysis of Pasolini’s free-indirect point of view in this film. I refer to his presentation at the symposium on Pier Paolo Pasolini held at the University of Chicago on February 25, 2005. The title of his paper was “Pasolini’s Erotic Gaze: From Medea to *Salò*.” Syrimis is currently finishing an essay based on this presentation.
  45. Sémolué, “Après *Le Decameron* et *Les Contes de Canterbury*,” 137.



46. Pasolini, "Comunicato all'Ansa (Ninetto)"; see *Tutte le poesie*, 2:77–78. Ansa is a famous Italian press agency.
47. Cf. Pasolini, "La sequenza del fiore di carta"; see *Per il cinema*, 2:1094.
48. On the connections between these two works, see Angelini, *Pasolini e lo spettacolo* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2000), 91–96.
49. Baranski, "The Texts of *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*," 294.
50. Marcus, *Filming by the Book*, 113.
51. Gervais, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 47; emphasis in original. Gervais also stresses that Pasolini's Jesus "is different" (49).
52. Testa, "To Film a Gospel," 191.
53. Baranski, "The Texts of *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*," 289.
54. *Ibid.*, 299.
55. Pasolini, "Cerco il Cristo fra i poeti"; see *Per il cinema*, 2:2840.
56. Greene, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 76.
57. Sam Rohdie, "Neo-Realism and Pasolini: The Desire for Reality," 167.
58. For an analysis of the temporal categories founding Christian apocalypticism, see de Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 287–92.
59. Pasolini, "The Screenplay As 'a Structure That Wants to Be Another Structure'"; see *Heretical Empiricism*, 187–96. For an insightful analysis of this issue, see Bertini, *Teoria e tecnica del film in Pasolini*, 71–83. See also Bazzocchi, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 172–73. On *Heretical Empiricism*, see Ward, *A Poetics of Resistance*, 115–48.
60. See Rinaldi, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 227–67. Rinaldi contends that "the screenplay of *Saint Paul* is perhaps the text that most adheres to the objective inspiration at the basis of Pasolini's practice of cinema and the least lenient toward mythologizing and fantastic tendencies" (244–45). Rinaldi sees in Pasolini's insistence on documentary clips the real vocation of Pasolini's writing. "*Illuminismo*" (the Italian word for the French "Enlightenment") is a recurrent term in Rinaldi's detailed work. Rinaldi speaks of the "*sguardo puro*" (pure gaze) totally foreign to any sort of "oneiric fascination" (237). It is hard to support Rinaldi's reading, given the numerous allusions to the dreamlike atmosphere present in many scenes of *Saint Paul*. Overemphasizing the Enlightenment as the primary tenet of Pasolini's cinema, Rinaldi concludes that "Pasolini's cinema is the contrary of myth. [It is] a dry and transparent description of events and actions and bodies" (269). In this context, Pasolini's interest in the screenplay becomes a pivotal stage in his poetics.
61. Cf. Pasolini, "The Screenplay"; see *Heretical Empiricism*, 191.
62. Sollers, "Pasolini, Sade, Saint Matthew," 117.
63. In the aforementioned letter to Don Emilio Cordero (see n. 3, above), Pasolini writes that he will have to "rewrite the [biblical] passages, because the translations I have used are horrible" (in Pasolini, "Note e notizie sui testi"; see *Per il cinema*, 2:3151). What does Pasolini mean by "rewriting"? Would he choose other translations or would he translate them himself? I approach the issue of Pasolini's intervention in Paul's statements when it is strictly

- necessary to our understanding of *Saint Paul*. We do not know which Italian versions he had used. In some cases, I compare Pasolini's version to the *Vulgata* in order to determine whether the specific translation he uses in *Saint Paul* may come from an Italian printed translation or not. When the translation is obviously an unfaithful expansion of the *Vulgata*, we might assume that Pasolini has emphasized a particular element of the biblical text.
64. I find the definition "historical monograph" in Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, xl. For an analysis of Luke as author of Acts, see pp. xl–xlv. See also Johannes Munck, ed., "The Acts of the Apostles," xxix–xxxv; Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 1:76–82; Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 1:30–48.
  65. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, xlii.
  66. See Acts of the Apostles, "Prologue," 1:1, in *The New Jerusalem Bible*, 1238. On the connection between Acts and Luke, see Munck, *Acts of the Apostles*, xv–xvii.
  67. See Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 1:187.
  68. Paolo: "Rimettiamoci in cammino, e torniamo a vedere come stanno I fratelli delle città a cui abbiamo annunciato l'evangelo nel nostro primo viaggio." Barnaba: "Sì, e portiamo con noi anche Giovanni, detto Marco . . ." Paolo: "Giovanni detto Marco? Non ti ricordi come in Panfilia ci ha abbandonati e lasciati senza aiuto?" "Che importa questo? Egli è un bravo fratello." . . . "Ebbene, allora separiamoci!" . . . Barnaba: "Ah, è così?" "Sì, separiamoci! Tu vattene con Giovanni detto Marco dove vuoi. Io prenderò con me Sila, e andrò in Siria e in Cilicia." On the importance of dialogues in *Saint Paul*, see Parmeggiani, "Pasolini e la parola sacra," 201–2.
  69. I quote from Acts of the Apostles, in *The New Jerusalem Bible*, 15:36–41, 1257.
  70. Pasolini, "Una visione del mondo epico-religiosa"; see *Per il cinema*, 2:2846.
  71. *Ibid.*, 2:2868.
  72. *Ibid.*, 2:2868–69.
  73. See Chiesi, "The Dreaming Subject," 83–105. Analyzing Pasolini's concept of "visionary narrative," Chiesi writes that it originates from an "innate anomaly": "The anomaly transgresses and disobeys the laws of the norm; it overruns and undermines them, plunging events into a dreamlike atmosphere and subjecting the logic of the real to madness" (84).
  74. Pasolini, *Saggi sulla politica*, 601.
  75. Jean-André Fieschi, *Pasolini l'enragé*, (Collection Cinéma de notre temps, 1966, 65 minutes).
  76. Sapelli, *Modernizzazione senza sviluppo* 5, 8.
  77. Christoph Klimke, "Der Erotische Blick: Zur Sexualität in den Filmen Pasolinis," 26.
  78. Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 203.
  79. *Ibid.*, 205.
  80. Francis of Assisi, *Testamentum*, pt. 1, 307.
  81. *Ibid.*, pt. 2, 307.

82. "Nota al testo," in *San Paolo*, 35.
83. Ibid. 36.
84. *Porcile*, episode 1 ("Orgy"), scene 1; see Pasolini, *Per il cinema*, 1:1099. On the similarities between *Teorema* and *Saint Paul*, see Conti Calabrese, *Pasolini e il sacro*, 46–47. For an interesting analysis of the topos of the desert in *Teorema*, see Cesarino, "Pasolini in the Desert." In particular, on Mount Aetna as desert, Cesarino writes, "The world of [the] Milanese high-bourgeois family is shot through with images of a desert that is the lavic refuse and waste excreted by a subterranean force that shakes Sicily and the whole Mediterranean from time to time and from time immemorial. . . . Is Mount Aetna Milan's unconscious?" (99).
85. It is interesting to note that Norman Mailer's recent novel *The Castle in the Forest*, a fictional biography of Hitler, involves a similar impasse vis-à-vis the problem of a demonic presence within a realistic narrative. Mailer imagines that the devil himself in a first-person narration recounts the biography of Hitler, starting with his grandparents and his incestuous conception (his mother's father was also her husband). Reminiscent of what happens in *Rosemary's Baby*, the devil is present the night when the father makes love to his daughter-wife and then becomes a Nazi officer. The devil reveals his identity at the moment of Hitler's birth: "Yes, I am an instrument. I am an officer of the Evil One. And this trusted instrument has just committed an act of treachery: It is not acceptable to reveal who we are. The author of an unsigned and unpublished manuscript can attempt to remain anonymous, but the margin of safety is not large" (71). Instead of intensifying the evilness of the account, the explicit insertion of demonic creatures weakens the text.
86. Acts 13:4.
87. On the importance of music in Pasolini, see Calabretto, *Pasolini e la musica*. On Bach's *Passion According to St. Matthew* in *The Gospel*, see pp. 394–98.
88. "Nota al testo," in *San Paolo*, 170.
89. Rumble, *Allegories of Contamination*, 62. Rumble offers a detailed analysis of the visual citations and the *effetto dipinto* in *The Canterbury Tales* (50–63).
90. Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, 270, vv. 1675–80.
91. I find a reference to Pasolini's camp in Viano's *A Certain Realism*, 282.
92. For an extensive discussion of hagiography as a literary genre, see Miccoli, *Francesco d'Assisi*, especially 190–98.
93. Cf. Parmeggiani, "Pasolini e la parola sacra," 200–201. Parmeggiani stresses that Pasolini ignores the initial section of the Acts and, in general, all references to the apostles' miraculous deeds.
94. Pasolini, *Scritti corsari*; see *Saggi sulla politica*, 313, 314.
95. Ibid., 315.
96. Schwenk, "The Chosen Image," 42.

97. See Rohdie, *Passion of Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 79: “The smile, as Pasolini used it, is that which is socially uncoded, hence a disruption of the social.”
98. See Pasolini, *Per il cinema*, 1:332–33.
99. I cannot agree with Sergio Perussa’s claim according to which “Pasolini’s angels . . . are not celestial messengers, presences carrying a heavenly message” (in *L’eros onnipotente*, 27). This episode from *La ricotta* openly contradicts Perussa’s view. For one example, consider the mysterious and sudden apparition of the young man dressed up as an angel in the film *La ricotta*. His unexpected and unmotivated presence breaks the narrative flow and is welcomed with awe by the poor girl who, unlike her brothers, seems to preserve her moral purity.
100. On the visual quotations from Mantegna and other painters in *Mamma Roma*, see Pasolini, *Per il cinema*, 2:2826–28.
101. Pasolini, *La (ri)cotta*; see *Per il cinema*, 2:2661, 2659, 2661.
102. Cf. Acts 7:51–53, 1246.
103. Cf. Acts 55–60.
104. Letter to the Philippians, in *The New Jerusalem Bible*, 1329.
105. Cf. Pullini, “*Teorema*: Punto di convergenza emblematico dei ‘volti’ di Pasolini.” Pullini remarks on the cinematic nature of some descriptions in Pasolini’s novel, as if he already saw them as shots in his film (179–81). See also Bazzocchi, *I burattini filosofi*, 107–27. Bazzocchi analyzes in particular the five books shown in the films (119–25).
106. Pasolini, *Teorema*; see *Per il cinema*, 1:1086–87.
107. Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Teorema* (Milan: Garzanti, 1999), 94.
108. Pasolini, *Teorema*; see *Per il cinema*, 1:1086.
109. *Ibid.*, 1:1087.
110. Pasolini, *Teorema*, 87.
111. Pasolini, *Porcile*; see *Per il cinema*, 1:1111 (episode 1, scene 15).
112. *Ibid.*, 1:1117 (episode 1, scene 22).
113. For an excellent analysis of Pasolini’s Freudian misinterpretation of Sophocles’s tragedy, see Paduano, “*Edipo re* di Pasolini.” Paduano underscores that Pasolini follows the modern trend to read the tragedy in the light of Freud’s interpretation. Paduano offers a fascinating examination of the discrepancies between the Greek tragedy, Pasolini’s screenplay, and the film, which distances itself both from the original Greek text and the Italian screenplay. Paduano stresses that the essential exegetical error regards Oedipus’s “innocence,” which in Sophocles is connected to the character’s “exercise of virtues that are incompatible with the oedipal transgression, which results in the subject’s fixation in some infantile universals. . . . His virtues are instead the quintessential paternal virtues,” that is, the “organization of public life” (81–82).
114. Pasolini, *Teorema*, 54, 57.
115. Pasolini, *Sant’Inflame*; see *Per il cinema*, 2:2675–76.
116. Cf. Acts 9.10–12.

117. Acts 9:27, 1249. Cf. *Vulgata*: “*apprehensum illum.*”
118. Pasolini, *Edipo Re*; see *Per il cinema*, 1:1048–50 (scene 46). Pasolini makes no reference to the name “Angel” in the screenplay.
119. Pasolini, “Appendice a *Edipo re*”; see *Per il cinema*, 1:1055.
120. Pasolini does not include God’s statement from Acts 13:2. He only refers to a following page of his script, where he writes out the sentence in question.
121. Pasolini, “I problemi della Chiesa”; see *Il caos*, 131.
122. Pasolini, “Le critiche del Papa”; see *Il caos*, 51.
123. *Ibid.*, 52.
124. *Ibid.*, 53.
125. 1 Corinthians 13:13, 1300. *The New Jerusalem Bible* translates *caritas* as “love.” On the concept of “charity” in Pasolini and primarily in the collection of poetry titled *Trasumanar e organizzar*, see Gordon, *Pasolini: Forms of Subjectivity*, 133–34; Conti Calabrese, *Pasolini e il sacro*, 33–35.
126. De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 643–44. It is important, however, to keep in mind that, for de Martino, “the sacred is not a permanent necessity of human nature.” The sacred plays a societal role that modernity has rejected without replacing it with any other symbolic support. See de Martino, *Furore simbolo valore*, 73.
127. See Pasolini, “L’enigma di Pio XII,” from *Trasumanar e organizzar*; see *Tutte le poesie*, 2:17–25. “Della carità so solo, come dice l’autorità, che c’è. / E non solo che c’è: ma che è ciò che importa. / Essa è comprensione della *creatura* fuori della storia, / e, insieme, della storia: con le sue istituzioni!!” (18; emphasis in original).
128. *Ibid.*, 2:20: “Benché la carità sia il *contrario* di ogni istituzione!!” (emphasis in original).
129. *Ibid.*, 2:24: “Fede e speranza di nuovo trionfano nel Terzo Reich.”
130. Pasolini, “Le critiche del Papa”; see *Il caos*, 54.
131. *Ibid.*, 55.
132. Gamba, ed., *Un pomeriggio con Pasolini*, 26.
133. *Ibid.*, 27.
134. *New Jerusalem Bible*, 1337.
135. Wilson, *Paul*, 129.
136. *New Jerusalem Bible*, 1340. The Italian CEI edition (1977) has something very similar to the English version: “*Il mistero dell’iniquità è già in atto.*”
137. *New Jerusalem Bible*, 1258; emphasis added.
138. Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, 66. See also Viano, *A Certain Realism*, 10–12. Viano correctly connects Pasolini’s description to his enthusiastic acceptance of a Freudian view of homosexuality. Pasolini’s first sexual desire was for a woman, which Viano relates to Pasolini’s intense love for his mother. Pasolini reads his first memory of sexual desire as a confirmation of Freud’s psychoanalysis.
139. Pasolini, *Saggi sulla politica*, 490.
140. *Ibid.*, 491, 493, 490.

141. See Rumble, *Allegories of Contamination*, 135–44. Rumble stresses the social role that Pasolini grants (his) homosexuality within the “nostalgia” he feels not for an indistinct past but for a different form of social intervention.
142. Casi, “Pasolini: La coerenza di una cultura,” 26. Casi’s essay is a fine and detailed excursus of the evolution of Pasolini’s rapport with homosexuality. See also Levergeois, *Pasolini: L’alphabet du refus*, 97–112.
143. Dall’Orto, “Contro Pasolini,” 167.
144. *Ibid.*, 151.
145. In *Allegories of Contamination*, Patrick Rumble emphasizes the “ever-ambivalent” nature of Pasolini’s homosexuality. It is “a form of aberration in a structure or system whose economy returned profits to those in competition to control it” (136).
146. Siti, “Postfazione in forma di lettera,” 186.
147. Naldini, ““Un fatto privato,”” 15.
148. Edelman, *Homographesis*, 10.
149. *Ibid.*, 12–13.
150. Casi, “Pasolini,” 40.
151. *Ibid.*, 43; Pasolini, *Saggi sulla politica*, 1544.
152. Morna Hooker, “Philippians,” 105.
153. Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:43–44. On the issue of the resurrection of the body in 1 Corinthians, see the essay “1 and 2 Corinthians,” in Dunn, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Saint Paul*, 74–90. Jerome Murphy-O’Connor explains that in this epistle Paul responds to “some at Corinth [who] denied the resurrection. These were those who denigrated the body” (82). Paul holds that the resurrected body “will resemble the glorified body of the risen Christ” (83).  
Giacomo Jori reminds us that the powerful poem “Crocifissione” (Crucifixion) from Pasolini’s *L’usignolo della Chiesa Cattolica* (The nightingale of the Catholic Church) echoes Paul’s famous statement in 1 Corinthians 1:23 (“We are preaching a crucified Christ: to the Jews an obstacle they cannot get over, to the gentiles foolishness”), which is quoted at the beginning of the poem. “Crocifissione” stresses the importance of “exposing oneself” as Christ exposed himself on the cross (see Jori, *Pasolini*, 40–41). At the beginning of the second stanza, Pasolini asks himself, “Perché Cristo fu esposto in Croce?” [Why was Christ exposed on the cross?]. It is necessary to expose oneself (“Bisogna esporsi . . .”), Pasolini explains in the third stanza, because “la chiarezza del cuore è degna / di ogni sdegno, di ogni peccato / di ogni più nuda passione” (the clarity of the heart sustains / every rejection, every sin / the most naked passion). I quote Pasolini’s “Crocifissione,” from *Tutte le poesie*, 1:467–68.
154. Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:52 and 53.
155. Cf. Acts 17:23. Luke speaks only of “monuments,” whereas Pasolini writes of “sacred monuments, sanctuaries, and altars.”
156. Pasolini, “Il pianto della scavatrice,” from *Le ceneri di Gramsci*; see *Tutte le poesie*, 1:833–50 (pt. 1, vv. 15–19 and v. 27).

157. Pasolini, "Il pianto della scavatrice," *Le ceneri di Gramsci*, pt. 1, v. 13, and pt. 2, v. 19; pt. 2, vv. 28 and 33; pt. 2, v. 1; and pt. 1, vv. 69–70.
158. Cf. 1 Corinthians 1:22–23. Paul writes "we are preaching" and not "I am preaching."
159. *Ibid.*, 1:27–28.
160. On the concept of rejection seen from a philosophical standpoint, see Zingari, *Ontologia del rifiuto*, especially pp. 6 and 44. In Zingari's rambling booklet, Pasolini serves as a symbol of those who place themselves outside capitalist society.
161. For a historical introduction to the Roman borgate, see Rhodes, *Stupendous, Miserable City*, 1–16.
162. Johnson, *Faith's Freedom*, 144.
163. Cf. 2 Corinthians 12:1–6.
164. Cf. 2 Corinthians 12:7–9.
165. Cf. Murray, ed. and trans., *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1:24–25.
166. Acts 19:12
167. Acts 19:13.
168. Cf. Acts 23:11.
169. Cf. Acts 24.
170. See Murray, *Epistle to the Romans*, 2:38.
171. Murray, *Epistle to the Romans*, 2:182.
172. Pasolini, *Saggi sulla politica*, 350–55: 351.
173. *Ibid.*, 869.
174. *Ibid.*, 352.
175. *Ibid.*, 353. Pasolini reiterates the same concept in the second article; see *Saggi sulla politica*, 356–61: 360.
176. In an essay entitled "Marzo 1974. Altra previsione della vittoria al referendum," Pasolini speaks of the "diabolical pragmatism of the Church"; see Pasolini, *Saggi sulla politica*, 300.
177. Cf. 1 Timothy 1:2.
178. 2 Timothy 4:6.
179. Iacopone da Todi, "Laud 61," in *Laudi*, v. 51, 113.

## CHAPTER TWO

1. Salvini, *I frammenti del tutto*, 8–9. See also Bertelli, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 307.
2. Quintavalle, *Giornate di Sodoma*, 99.
3. Ferretti, "Sedici anni di ricordi, 1959–1975," 34.
4. Sergio Toffetti, ed., *La terra vista dalla luna*, 20.
5. *Ibid.*, 21. This volume also reproduces Pasolini's scenario *Porno-Teo-Kolossal* (47–84).
6. For an analysis of Citti's film and a detailed plot summary, see Macis and Naitza, eds., *Mi chiamo Sergio Citti, racconto storie*, 11–24.
7. Salvini, *I frammenti del tutto*, 31–32.

8. I find the text of Crespi's letter in Pasolini, *Per il cinema*, 2:3233.
9. Pasolini, *Per il cinema*, 2:2757.
10. Ibid., 2:2758.
11. On Torres, see Pasolini, *Per il cinema*, 2:3234.
12. This important essay is cited in Alyce Mahon, "Pierre Klossowski, Theopornologer," 37.
13. Deleuze, "Pierre Klossowski et les corps-langage," 200.
14. Ibid., 203.
15. Klossowski, *La monnaie vivante*, 61; emphasis in original.
16. Deleuze, "Pierre Klossowski," 204.
17. Ibid., 211.
18. Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Per il cinema*, 1:803.
19. Pasolini, *Per il cinema*, 2:2758–59.
20. Pasolini, "Il cinema," 93.
21. Salvini sees a temporal development in Pasolini's description of these three cities. Sodom would represent the past, Gomorrah corresponds to the present, and Numanzia would embody a future condition (*I frammenti del tutto*, 73).
22. For a detailed plot summary of the events occurring in the first three cities, see Salvini, *I frammenti del tutto*, 72–106.
23. Pasolini, *Porno-Teo-Kolossal*, in *Per il cinema*, 2:2698. Subsequent citations of this work appear in parentheses in the text by page number. Eduardo de Filippo expressed a great admiration for Eduardo Scarpetta (1853–1925), his artistic and natural father, who was also a director, actor, and playwright. Scarpetta was responsible for the *imborghesimento* (the transformation into a middle-class individual) of the mask-character Punchinello (Pulcinella). De Filippo embraces Scarpetta's interpretation. As a comic cinema actor, Eduardo was never a caricature, unlike Totò. See Barsotti, *Eduardo*, 12–20. On Eduardo as the main character of *Porn-Theo-Colossal*, see Jori, *Pasolini*, 84.
24. Pasolini, "Il cinema," 147.
25. Pasolini, *Saggi sulla politica*, 230–31. For an analysis of Pasolini's view of Naples and of his short essay entitled "La Napoletanità," see Sapelli, *Modemizzazione senza sviluppo*, 37–57.
26. Pasolini, "Il cinema," 148.
27. On this documentary, see Restivo, *Cinema of Economic Miracles*, 77–91. Restivo offers an interesting analysis of the structural echoes within the film, especially the relationship between the norm and subversive sexualities. For analysis of the role played by women in this documentary, see Ryan-Scheutz, *Sex, the Self, and the Sacred*, 41–42.
28. See Pasolini, *Saggi sulla letteratura*, 2:2114–15.
29. I take this brief summary of Brown's book from Becker, *Denial of Death*, 260.
30. Ibid., 260–61.
31. Ibid., 285.



32. Brown, *Love's Body*, 3. Subsequent citations of this work in the following discussion appear parenthetically in the text.
33. In *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* Paul Badiou speaks in terms that seem to echo Brown's Freudian ideas. In particular, Badiou connects Freud's interpretation of the son's betrayal of the father to Pasolini's view of St. Paul. Badiou praises Pasolini's film project as follows: "No one has better illuminated the uninterrupted contemporaneousness of Paul's prose than one of the greatest poets of our time, Pier Paolo Pasolini" (36). In Badiou's words, "Greek and Jewish discourse are both discourses of the Father. That is why they bind communities in a form of obedience (to the Cosmos, the Empire, God, or the Law). Only that which will present itself as a discourse of the Son has the potential to be universal, detached from every particularism. . . . Pasolini's Paul is as though torn between the saintliness of the son—linked, given the law of the world, to abjection and death—and the ideal of power proper to the father" (42–43; emphasis in original).
34. Brown repeats this concept in *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis*, 13.
35. Brown, *Apocalypse*, 175.
36. Brown, *Apocalypse*, 18–19; emphasis in original.
37. Rhodes, *Stupendous, Miserable City*, xi. For a good and original analysis of the final scene of the film *Accattone*, which was shot in this area, see pp. 66–67.
38. Klossowski, *Sade My Neighbor*, 17.
39. Sade, *120 Days of Sodom*, 509.
40. *Ibid.*, 510.
41. Frappier-Mazur, "A Turning Point in the Sadean Novel: The Terror," 121.
42. Pasolini, *Saggi sulla politica*, 307.
43. *Ibid.*, 312, 311.
44. *Ibid.*, 309.
45. Pasolini, *Saggi sulla politica*, 237.
46. *Ibid.*, 238.
47. De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 153.
48. Dall'Orto, "Contro Pasolini," 160.
49. Pasolini, *Saggi sulla politica*, 1543.
50. Pasolini, *Saggi sulla politica*, 373.
51. *Ibid.*, 375.
52. *Ibid.*, 372.
53. Pasolini, *Per il cinema*, 1:1280. For a summary of the vicissitudes of this film, including a fleeting reference to Dreyer's failed project, in which Maria Callas played Medea, and its influence on Pasolini, see Rubino, "Medea di Pier Paolo Pasolini." See also Torraca, "Il vento di Medea"; Tuscano, "Il mito di Medea." Tuscano surveys the evolution of the Medea myth in modern literature. For the origin of the name Medea and the meaning of her corruption, see pp. 151 and 153–54. Conti Calabrese offers a deeply insightful analysis of *Medea* within the context of Pasolini's cosmology in *Pasolini e il sacro*, 111–29.
54. Klossowski, *La monnaie vivante*, 16.

55. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 188.
56. *Ibid.*, 191.
57. Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, 2.
58. *Ibid.*, 3.
59. Cf. Salvini, *I frammenti del tutto*, 176. For Salvini, Numanzia signifies Reason, in that “it succeeds in controlling and organizing the irrational.”
60. Mandelstam, *Complete Poetry*, 194.
61. Pasolini, *Saggi sulla letteratura e sull’arte*, 2:1693.
62. These biographical notes come from Sidney Monas’s preface to Mandelstam, *Complete Poetry*, ix.
63. Pasolini, *Saggi sulla letteratura*, 2:1694.
64. *Ibid.*, 2:1695.
65. *Ibid.*, 2:1696.
66. “Bamboccianti” refers to a seventeenth-century artistic trend in Naples that, in contrast to the convoluted baroque style of the time, privileged a simple, modest depiction of everyday life.
67. De Filippo, *Natale in Casa Cupiello*, act 1, pp. 9–10; my translation.
68. *Ibid.*, act 2, p. 37.
69. *Ibid.*, act 2, p. 38.
70. *Ibid.*, act 3, p. 68.
71. The opening scene of Pasolini’s *La terra vista dalla luna* (The Earth seen from the Moon), describes “the crust of the earth seen from the moon,” on which an arrow points at some blurry spot of the globe. On this image, Pasolini writes, he will superimpose the title of the film. What follows is another farce with Totò and Ninetto, as we can see from the cartoons Pasolini himself draws to visualize the picaresque story of a father and son in search of a new wife-mother. See Pasolini, *Per il cinema*, 1:837.
72. De Filippo, *Natale in Casa Cupiello*, act 3, p. 60.
73. De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 475.

### CHAPTER THREE

1. On the difficult genesis of this text, see Fontanella, “Pasolini ovvero lo scandalo permanente.” For a brief discussion of the book, see Martellini, *Ritratto di Pasolini*, 208–13.
2. Pasolini, *Petrolio*, trans. Ann Goldstein, ix. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from this English translation, which is hereafter cited parenthetically by page number in the text.
3. Pasolini, *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società*, 1450. For an analysis of Pasolini’s self-perception as “epigono” (that is, as an Alexandrian writer active at the end of a classical era) with a special emphasis on Barthes’s influence, see Tricomi, *Pasolini: Gesto e maniera*, 115–27.
4. On the topic of form in *Petrolio*, see Agosti, “Opera interrotta e opera interminabile.” According to Agosti’s insightful interpretation, Pasolini’s form

serves to distinguish between “life” and “survival of life” (*sopravvivenza della vita*; 115–16). Being nonmimetic (i.e., detached from historical content), “form” represents the “interminable” act of living (116). Carla Benedetti identifies “four doors” or keys to *Petrolio*: power, visions, times, and world in “Quattro porte su *Petrolio*,” 34. Benedetti sees a relation between these four categories and recent changes and events in Italian culture and politics that is useful in interpreting Pasolini’s novel, thus indirectly reasserting the alleged prophetic nature of Pasolini’s work. For a discussion of the sexual component of the novel with regard to Schreber’s journal, see Bazzocchi, *I burattini filosofi*, 129–43.

5. Sollers, *L’écriture et l’expérience des limites*, 8, 9.
6. Ibid., 17, 18.
7. Ibid., 20.
8. Henry Michaux, *Oeuvres complètes*, 3:813.
9. Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, 65–66.
10. Ibid., 66.
11. See Fusillo, “L’incipit negato di *Petrolio*.”
12. Cf. ibid., 40.
13. Michaux, *Oeuvres complètes*, 3:823.
14. Zigaina, *Hostia*, 45. See also Zigaina’s *Pasolini e l’abiura*, also in *Hostia*, 280.
15. Zigaina, *Pasolini e la morte*; see *Hostia*, 46, 50. Zigaina dedicates three important works to Pasolini’s death. He contends that it is possible to detect an actual and detailed self-murder in Pasolini’s oeuvre. Zigaina’s fascinating readings are more convincing in the first part of his trilogy. I agree with Gian Carlo Ferretti’s more sober interpretation of Pasolini’s relationship with his own death. According to Ferretti, Pasolini envisions his death as the “extreme . . . revelation” of his poetics; see Colombo and Ferretti, *L’ultima intervista di Pasolini*, 41.
16. For a comprehensive introduction to Strindberg and his autobiographical novel, see Mary Sandbach’s introduction to Strindberg, “*Inferno*” and “*From an Occult Diary*,” 7–89.
17. Pasolini, “August Strindberg, *Inferno*,” in *Descrizioni di descrizioni*; see *Saggi sulla letteratura*, 2:1804.
18. Ibid., 2:1805.
19. Ibid., 2:1803.
20. August Strindberg, *Inferno* (French edition), 199.
21. Pasolini, *Saggi sulla letteratura*, 2:1806.
22. Strindberg, *Inferno*, 210.
23. Brown, *Love’s Body*, 120. Franco Fortini holds that *Petrolio* is a new form of Naturalism, a sort of “second-degree Naturalism,” in that this work imitates not external reality but “the inner workings of the mind subjected to frustration and chaos.” See Fortini, *Attraverso Pasolini*, 242.

24. The quotation is from Róheim, *Magic and Schizophrenia*, 165.
25. *Ibid.*, 119. In the most recent Italian edition (1992) of *Petrolino*, edited by Silvia de Laude, we find a footnote that identifies *Magic and Schizophrenia* as the source of Brown's statement (601–2). However, the Italian editor does not mention the correct passage from Róheim's book. Her brief comments concerning the essential concept of "anal birth," which Pasolini derives from Brown, are interesting and accurate. This edition of Pasolini's text is particularly useful for its numerous footnotes on Pasolini's quotations from political magazines and newspapers.
26. Róheim, *Magic and Schizophrenia*, 165, 98, 109, 195.
27. Walter Siti holds that Carlo, the protagonist of *Petrolino*, "is a hollowed-out St. Paul." See Siti, "Pasolini's Second Victory," 68.
28. De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 44.
29. Róheim, *Magic and Schizophrenia*, 96; emphasis in original.
30. *Ibid.*, 170; emphasis in original.
31. Pasolini, "Letter to Alberto Moravia," in *Petrolino* (trans. Goldstein), xi–xii.
32. For instance, in "Note 65" ("Confidences with the Reader"), Pasolini writes that "the analysis" of a character's "inner life" in a particularly dramatic and painful moment ("the profound grief" of being deprived of one's lover) "lies outside the task I have undertaken" (274).
33. Cf. Pezzella, "Allegoria e mito in *Petrolino*."
34. Agosti, "Opera interrotta e opera interminabile," 119.
35. On Pasolini's interpretation of ancient Greece, see Fusillo, *La Grecia secondo Pasolini*, 3–28. Fusillo points out that Pasolini's first approach to Greek drama corresponds to a crucial moment in his career, his "conversion" to cinema (8). As Fusillo explains, "in Pasolini's view, Greece is a barbaric [land] because it rejects every neo-classical idealization" (14). Pasolini's interpretation recalls Nietzsche's. On the film *Medea*, see pp. 18–19. For a survey of the most visible classical sources in *Petrolino*, see Lago, "*Petrolino* e l'antico." Lago focuses primarily on *Satyricon*, but he also devotes a few pages to *The Argonauts*, the Greek tragedies, and the epic genre.
36. As Rino Genovese explains in his insightful essay on *Petrolino*, Polis recalls the concept of "order," the "state," or civic society, whereas Tetis is the Greek word for "sex." This is what Pasolini himself states in *Empirismo eretico*, where he recounts that, when he was a child, he called his first object of desire "teta veleta." See Genovese, "Manifesto per *Petrolino*," 84.
37. For a clear synthesis of the plot, see Ryan-Scheutz, *Sex, the Self, and the Sacred*, 211–21. She contends that Carlo 1 represents the world of reason, whereas Carlo 2 represents the world of "bodily instincts" (212).
38. The English version translates the Italian *puro* (*Petrolino* [1992 edition], "Appunto 6ter," 42) as "innocent" (*Petrolino*, "Note 6ter," 31).
39. Christopher Looby, "The Roots of Orchis," 179–80.
40. See Brown, *Love's Body*, chapter 6 ("Head"), 126–40.

41. The best taxonomic analysis of the books in the suitcase is by Capodaglio, "Congetture sugli Appunti di *Petrolio*."
42. Pasolini, *Petrolio*, "Note 22g,": "Signora F.'s salon . . . was a salon of the intellectual left. But in Signora F., as well as in the culture of those years, there was a certain ecumenical and conciliatory tendency" (93–94).
43. On the centrality of the concept of the journey in contemporary Italian literature, with a special emphasis on Pasolini, see West, *Gianni Celati*, 249–52.
44. See also *Petrolio* (1992 edition), 129.
45. Guido Zingari offers an interesting analysis of the topos of "heresy" in *Il pensiero in fumo*. As is confirmed in this "fable" from *Petrolio*, heretics such as Bruno and Pasolini "aimed to reestablish new forms of equilibrium, new harmonies between the subject, . . . nature, and society," thus triggering a new thought based on the concepts of "beauty and joy inspired by a new grace" (22; emphasis in original). According to Zingari, Bruno and Pasolini share a similar longing for "the *being of purity*" (29; emphasis in original). The image of the *rogo* (stake) traditionally associated with Bruno applies to Pasolini as well. "The *truth of the stake*," Zingari contends, "transforms into a mysterious epiphany, in an ecstatic revelation. . . . The stake stages what . . . *cannot be interpreted*" (35; emphasis in original).
46. Julia Kristeva, *Histoires d'amour*, 101.
47. De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 48. De Martino's remarks are a comment on Alfred Storch's article "Tod und Erneuerung in der schiophrenen Daseins-Umwandlung."
48. Apollonios Rhodius, *Argonautika*, bk. 1, vv. 1211–20, p. 74.
49. Ibid., bk. 1, vv. 1208, p. 74; vv. 1257–60, p. 75; vv. 1261–62, p. 75.
50. See the translator's introduction to Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautika*, 36.
51. Apollonios Rhodius, *Argonautika*, bk. 1, vv. 496–98: "He sang how, in the beginning, earth, sky, and sea, confounded / in a common mass together, were, as the result / of deadly disruption, separated one from the other" (56).
52. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, 17, 8–9.
53. Quoted in *ibid.*, 158–59.
54. Brown, *Love's Body*, 33, 34, and 35; emphasis in original.
55. Ibid., 37.
56. Ibid., 38.
57. Ibid., 43. Cf. Blake, *Jerusalem*, 173.
58. Brown, *Love's Body*, "Nature," 45, 46.
59. Ibid., 49, 51.
60. Ibid., 54, 55, and 54.
61. Ibid., 54.
62. See Carlo Franco, "Premessa," 15–18. Franco's Italian edition is based primarily on Wilhelm Kroll's edition, *Historia Alexandri Magni* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1926).

63. I quote from this translation: *The Sikandar Nama, E Bara, or Book of Alexander the Great*, trans. Captain H. Wilberforce Clarke, 791.
64. *Ibid.*, 793.
65. *Ibid.*, chap. 70, 810.
66. Tricomi, *Sull'opera mancata di Pasolini*, 415. Cf. Zigaina, *Hostia*, 49.
67. Apollonios Rhodius, *Argonautika*, bk. 4, 355–58, 160.
68. I have corrected the usually very accurate English version, which here misinterprets the original “Morire prima che questa gente abiuri” (*Petrolio* [1992 edition], 153). The translation has “To die before abjuring these people.”
69. Blanchot, *Le livre à venir*, pt. 4, chap. 4, 297, 298.
70. On the figure of the mother in Pasolini, see Bazzocchi, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 118–21. Bazzocchi offers a succinct but very thorough analysis of the main maternal references in Pasolini’s oeuvre.
71. Cf. *Petrolio* (1992 edition), 192.
72. For an interesting analysis of the topos of the young heterosexual man in Pasolini, see Trento, “Metamorfosi dei ragazzi pasoliniani.”
73. Ryan-Scheutz offers an interesting analysis of the verb *vanish* (*cadde*) in this quotation; see *Sex, the Self, and the Sacred*, 213.
74. See the introduction by Rosemary Dinnage in Schreber, *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, xiii.
75. *Ibid.*, 7.
76. *Ibid.*, 53. In chapter 1, Schreber explains that the “human soul is contained in the nerves; about their physical nature, I, as a layman, cannot say more than that they are extraordinarily delicate structures—comparable to the finest filaments—and that the total mental life of a human being rests on their excitability by external impressions” (19). This work is subsequently cited parenthetically in the text by page number.
77. Freud, *The Schreber Case*, 42.
78. Róheim, *Magic and Schizophrenia*, 101.
79. See Maggi, *Satan’s Rhetoric*, chap. 3.
80. De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 46.
81. Freud, *Schreber Case*, 40.
82. I discuss the theme of multiple suns in the sky in chapter 2 of my book *In the Company of Demons*.
83. Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, 351, 352.
84. For an important discussion of the feminist implications of Carlo 2’s transformation, see West, “Da *Petrolio* a Celati,” 45–46. Pasolini’s identification of the female with baseness is unquestionable. Bruno Pischetta speaks of Pasolini’s “radical devaluation of woman” in *Petrolio*. See his essay “*Petrolio*: Una significativa illeggibilità?” 164.
85. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 8.
86. See Fusillo, “Il protagonista androgino.” Fusillo emphasizes the allegorical connotation of Pasolini’s novel, especially of his view of sexual transformation (90). He contends that allegory is in effect the key to Carlo’s

feminization in that “the opposition between possessing and being possessed” has a strong political meaning in Pasolini (95). In the same volume, Stefano Casi underscores the theatricality of Pasolini’s novel and sees important connections with his search for a new form of theatre. See Casi, “Nel teatro della mia testa.”

87. Cicero, *De natura deorum*, 2.68, p. 189. This analysis of the Lares and Penates comes from the introduction to my book *In the Company of Demons*, 9–12.
88. See *Ammianus Marcellinus*, bk. 16 (“Constantius et Gallus,”), 1:10, 13, 249.
89. Cartari mentions Ovid as one of the sources of this interpretation. The reference is in *Fasti*, Ovid’s poetic interpretation of the Roman year: “The Kalends of May witnessed the foundation of an altar to the Guardian Lares, together with small images of the gods. . . . The reason for the epithet [guardians] applied to them is that they guard all things with their eyes. They also stand for us. . . and bring us aid. But a dog, carved out of the same stone, used to stand before their feet. What was the reason for its standing with the Lar? Both guard the house: both are faithful to their master.” See Ovid, *Fasti*, bk. 5, vv. 129–30, 133–39, 269, and 271.  
 Another famous Renaissance text on pagan mythology is Natale Conti’s *Mythologie*, which includes a detailed chapter on the *Penates* and *Lares*. See Conti, *Mythologie: Paris 1627*, 1:277–79 and 281–82.
90. Cartari, *Le immagini de i dei de gli antichi*, 395.
91. Pasolini, *Petrolio* (1992 edition), 229.
92. Colombo and Ferretti, *L’ultima intervista di Pasolini*, 61. According to Colombo, Pasolini granted him this interview on November 1, hours before he was killed (51).
93. Strindberg, *Inferno* (French edition), 229.
94. On the nihilistic character of this collection of poetry, see Martellini, *Introduzione a Pasolini*, 129–33. Martellini also gives a good analysis of the title, which recalls both Dante (*trasumanar*) as the impossibility of expressing what cannot be expressed, and the “administrative” modern Italian language (130).
95. Pasolini, “Versi da Testamento,” from *Trasumanar e organizzar*; see *Tutte le poesie*, 2:118–19.
96. See Genovese, “Manifesto per *Petrolio*,” 80. Genovese holds that *Petrolio* is very distant from Pasolini’s original “expressionistic naturalism.” Pasolini tried to reach out and depict the social reality of the young men who live in the borgate. *Petrolio* “moves in the opposite direction.” See also Lawton, “The Evolving Rejection of Homosexuality,” 167–73.
97. Pasolini, *Petrolio* (1992 edition), 212.
98. Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, 61–62; emphasis in original.
99. See Capodaglio, “Congettura,” 361–62. Capodaglio highlights the importance of Ferenczi’s book for *Petrolio* and also identifies Pasolini’s most important borrowings.

100. Ferenczi, *Thalassa*, 44, 16, 18.
101. Capodaglio, "Congesture," 332.
102. Ferenczi, *Thalassa*, 44.
103. Pasolini, *Petrolio* (1992 edition), 203.
104. Pasolini, *Tutte le poesie*, 1:457–61.
105. *Ibid.*, 368. See also Bazzocchi, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 119, 138–41.
106. Pasolini, *Petrolio* (1992 edition), 205.
107. *Ibid.*, 209, 210.
108. *Ibid.*, 213.
109. On the topos of the open field in Pasolini, see Gordon, *Pasolini: Forms of Subjectivity*, 167–68.
110. Pasolini, *Petrolio*, 179; *Petrolio* (1992 edition), 214.
111. Pasolini, *Il sogno del centauro*; see *Saggi sulla politica*, 1544.
112. Pasolini, *Petrolio* (1992 edition), 215.
113. Pasolini resumes using the name Karl for Carlo 2.
114. Cf. Pasolini, *Petrolio* (1992 edition), 234. The English version has "they were being divested," which is a correct translation.
115. *Ibid.*, 238.
116. For a concise analysis of this issue in Bruno, see my "Emblema/Emblematica." I examine the meaning of emblematic images in Bruno in "The Memory That Devours the Mind."
117. Bruno, *De umbris idearum*, 65.
118. Rumble, *Allegories of Contamination*, 46. Cf. Galluzzi, *Pasolini e la pittura*, 71–80. Galluzzi offers a rigorous and insightful analysis of Pasolini's identification with Giotto in his film *Decameron* and also discusses Longhi's essay "Giotto spazioso."
119. Longhi, "Giotto spazioso (1952)," 59. This essay first came out in the journal *Paragone* 31 (1952): 18–24.
120. *Ibid.*, figures 64 and 65, and p. 61.
121. The translation has "crude" for "*plebei*."
122. Dante, *Purgatorio*, canto 29, vv. 143, 144, 327.
123. Pasolini, *Petrolio* (1992 edition), 261: "il Dio Salvatore Dulcimasco, sicario degli Dei Padroni."
124. *Ibid.*, 259.
125. *Ibid.*, 261.
126. *Ibid.*, 265. The English version translates "*un nulla*" as "empty space," but I prefer "nothingness." On this concept in *Petrolio*, see Biancofiore, *Pasolini*, 58–60.
127. Pasolini, *Petrolio* (1992 edition), 291.
128. I discuss the issue of melancholia and visionary experiences in chapters 3 and 4 of *Satan's Rhetoric*. I analyze two seemingly different sorts of melancholic visions: Saint Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi's mystical visit to Purgatory and Girolamo Cardano's theory and personal experience of melancholic insight.



129. Pasolini, *Saggi sulla politica*, 309; emphasis in original.
130. Cf. Fortini, *Attraverso Pasolini*, 243. For Fortini, whereas Pasolini's Marxism and Christian values are "fragile" and problematic, his "nihilism" is the most truthful aspect of his poetics.
131. Gordon, *Pasolini: Forms of Subjectivity*, 273. See also Novello, "Per una parola trasparente," 191–98.
132. Pasolini, *La divina mimesis*, 16. On the importance of Dante for Pasolini, with particular reference also to *La divina mimesis*, see Levergeois, *Pasolini*, 51–64; Bazzocchi, *I burattini filosofi*, 37–56.
133. On the topos of Narcissus in Pasolini, see Gordon, *Pasolini: Forms of Subjectivity*, 138–46.
134. On Pasolini's rewriting of the couple Virgil/Dante, see Sollers, *L'écriture et l'expérience des limites*, 33.
135. Pasolini, *La divina mimesis*, "Canto 1," 5.
136. Pasolini, *Petrolio* (1992 edition), 324.
137. Pasolini, *La divina mimesis*, "Appunti e frammenti per il IV canto," 35.
138. Pasolini, *Per il cinema*, 1:51–56 (scene 24). See also the interesting remarks of de Benedictis on the meaning of the tracking shot in Pasolini in *Pasolini: La croce alla rovescia*, 157–59.
139. Pasolini, *Petrolio* (1992 edition), 325.
140. Agosti, "L'inconscio e la forma," 80.
141. Pasolini, *Saggi sulla politica*, 601.
142. Pasolini, *La divina mimesis*, "Appunti e frammenti per il III canto," 33; cf. Dante, *Inferno*, canto 3, vv. 52–56.
143. In *Inferno*, Strindberg does not specify the title of this mysterious German text. As Mary Sandbach explains in her introduction, Strindberg read a German translation of a French anthology of Swedenborg's visions (see Strindberg, "*Inferno*" and "*From an Occult Diary*," trans. Sandbach, 63).
144. Strindberg, *Inferno* (French edition), 183, 226.
145. *Ibid.*, 175, 177.
146. Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 51–53; Brown, *Life Against Death*, 191. On Freud's concept of "primitive," see Pischedda, "*Petrolio*: Una significativa illeggibilità?" 165–66.
147. Ferenczi, *Thalassa*, 22.
148. Melandri, "From Gender Difference to the Individuality of Male and Female," 114. On the possibility of transcending this social culture that sees "all relationships of difference and disparity" exclusively through the lenses of "domination and exploitation," see Muraro, "The Passion of the Feminine Difference beyond Equality," 78.
149. Pasolini, *Petrolio* (1992 edition), 435.
150. Ferenczi, *Thalassa*, 9.
151. Pasolini, *Petrolio* (1992 edition), 331.
152. On the ugliness of the young men corrupted by capitalism versus the beauty of the original poor youth, see Mantegazza, *Con pura passione*, 39–41.

- Mantegazza stresses that for Pasolini the ongoing cultural corruption of youth's purity is an attack against beauty.
153. Brown, *Life Against Death*, 180.
  154. Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, 215.
  155. Ibid., part 4, chap. 2, 222, and chap. 7, 255.
  156. Ibid., chap. 8, 258. Cf. Brown, *Life Against Death*, 190.
  157. Pasolini, *Petrolio* (1992 edition), 342.
  158. Ibid., 343.
  159. Ibid., 346.
  160. Ibid., 348.
  161. The Model is outside his tomb in *gironi* 4, 8, and 14.
  162. The English translator uses "sluts" for *bocchinare*. This is a correct interpretation, but I prefer to maintain the explicit sexual reference.
  163. I modify the translation, which uses "vulva" instead of "cunt." "Fica," unlike "vulva," is a vulgar term. "Cunt" is more correct, in my view.
  164. Pasolini, *Petrolio* (1992 edition), 367. Pischedda holds that the Model's vulgar reference to the faggots may signify the passage from classical times to secular Christianity. See Pischedda, "*Petrolio*: Una significativa illeggibilità?" 169.
  165. Pasolini, *Petrolio* (1992 edition), 385. I modify the English translation slightly. *Grande simulacro* is rendered as "large image," which is correct but does not convey the mysterious and religious element of the image inside the tabernacle. Also *membro virile* is translated as "penis" in the English version. "Penis" does not communicate the more than physical connotation expressed by *membro virile*.
  166. Brown, *Love's Body*, 62.
  167. Pasolini, *La divina mimesis*, 39 and 47.
  168. Brown, *Love's Body*, 120.
  169. Cf. Tricomi, *Sull'opera mancata di Pasolini*, 403. Tricomi stresses that *Petrolio* should be read as a "patchwork" of citations (*centoni*).
  170. Brown, *Love's Body*, 120–21. Brown quotes from Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry*, 31.
  171. Ibid., 124.
  172. Cf. Tricomi, *Sull'opera mancata di Pasolini*, 399. According to Tricomi, Brown's book is "decisive" for Pasolini.
  173. Brown, *Love's Body*, 125.
  174. On Pasolini's "perversion," see Wahl, "Le discours de la perversion." Wahl identifies three levels: (1) The pervert is someone "who knows himself in his desire" because desire is for him something in which he loses himself (71); perversion is thus a form of "destruction." (2) The pervert's desire is a function of the Other's desire; in Pasolini, the mother identifies with the Other (75). (3) The pervert attempts "to systematize" his world of desire (79). This is usually accompanied by the belief in the evil of the divine.
  175. Pasolini, *Petrolio* (1992 edition), 419.

176. Ferenczi, *Thalassa*, 49–50.
177. Pasolini, *Saggi sulla politica*, 1545.
178. Cf. Agosti, “‘Ebbro d’erba e di tenebre,’” 47. Agosti underscores the “posthumous dimension” of Pasolini’s concept of “origin.”
179. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 2.
180. Millot, “The Eroticism of Desolation,” 218.
181. *Ibid.*, 212.

#### CHAPTER FOUR

1. Sade, *120 Days of Sodom*, 620. This English edition is hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by page number. On this film and, more generally, on the relationship between Sade and Pasolini, see Mario Verdone, “Salò-Sade”; Greene, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 196–217; Viano, *A Certain Realism*, 294–311; de Ceccatty, *Sur Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 75–88; Leproni, “Sade e Pasolini.”
2. This interview is on the DVD that accompanies Cerami and Sesti, *La Voce di Pasolini*.
3. On the theoretical issues concerning the translation of a literary text into a film, see Marcus, *Filming By the Book*, 13–24.
4. On the topos of the mother in *Salò*, see Repetto, *Invito al cinema di Pasolini*, 137. In the brief chapter on Pasolini’s last film, Repetto also compares *Salò* to Kafka’s *The Trial* (132–33).
5. Indiana, *Salò*, or *The 120 Days of Sodom*, 73. On this sequence, see also Serafino Murri, *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma*, 41–42 and 150–51.
6. Cf. Martellini, *Ritratto di Pasolini*, 193.
7. Cf. Pasolini, *Salò, o le 120 giornate di Sodoma*; see *Per il cinema*, 2:2035.
8. For an analysis of these opening scenes, see Murri, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 81–84.
9. Greene, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 202 and 199; emphasis in original.
10. Cf. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3.
11. Lingis, *Foreign Bodies*, 8.
12. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3–4. Cf. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 175.
13. For instance, see Sade, *120 Days of Sodom*: “The chicken is about to lay, and I feel the egg” (377).
14. Sade, *Les 120 Journées de Sodome*, 192.
15. On this topic, see Klossowski, *Sade My Neighbor*, 127–35.
16. Sade, *La philosophie dans le boudoir*, 123, 124, 122.
17. On Sade’s view of nature as the “spirit of destruction,” see Blanchot, *Lautréamont and Sade*, 31.
18. Acker, “Reading the Lack of the Body,” 233.
19. Blanchot, *Lautréamont and Sade*, 32.
20. Cf. Copjec, *Imagine There’s No Woman*, 221–22: “One needs to emphasize . . . that the antinomic structure of the *split subject* in neurosis is quite different from the *splitting of consciousness* in perversion. . . . [P]erversion

is the attempt to avoid the very status of subject, precisely by avoiding the split . . . that characterize[s] and unsettle[s] the (neurotic) subject. Perversion seeks to ensure that gaze and vision, desire and law, conscious and unconscious no longer contradict each other [emphasis in original]."

21. For Pasolini's *Salò, e le 120 giornate di Sodoma*, see Pasolini, *Per il cinema*, 2:2047.
22. Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, 151.
23. Klossowski, *Sade My Neighbor*, 62. For a detailed list of Pasolini's borrowings from this book see Pasolini, *Per il cinema*, 2:3159.
24. Klossowski, *Sade My Neighbor*, 57 and 50.
25. Sollers, *L'écriture et l'expérience des limites*, 55. On Sollers's view of Dante in Pasolini's oeuvre, see Titone, *Cantiche del Novecento*, 8, 120–21. Titone also offers a good analysis of Dante's presence in Pasolini (7–40).
26. Sollers, *L'écriture et l'expérience des limites*, 57.
27. Sade, *La philosophie dans le boudoir*, 256, 253, 258.
28. Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, 189.
29. Klossowski, *La monnaie vivante*, 60.
30. Cf. Blanchot, *Lautréamont and Sade*, 32–33.
31. Sade, *La philosophie dans le boudoir*, 129.
32. Vighi rightly holds that in *Salò* only the pianist and Ezio withdraw from the libertines' law. See Vighi, *Traumatic Encounters in Italian Film*, 89.
33. Sade, *Les 120 Journées de Sodom*, 114; Sade, *120 Days of Sodom*, 293.
34. Blanchot, *Lautréamont and Sade*, 25.
35. Cf. Sade, *120 Days of Sodom*, 293.
36. On this subject, see Gallo, "Pasolini traduttore di Eschilo." The essay emphasizes the Marxist connotation of Pasolini's translation and its "analogical" approach, that is, the poet's tendency to modernize words and images (i.e., "church" instead of "temple").
37. Ward, *Poetics of Resistance*, 158.
38. See the version of *Pilade* published in Pasolini, *Teatro*, 284.
39. *Ibid.*, 286.
40. *Ibid.*, "Episode 8," 383.
41. Cf. Aeschylus, *The Libation Bearers*, in *The Oresteia*, 177.
42. Pasolini, *Teatro*, 283.
43. Ward, *Poetics of Resistance*, 160.
44. Aeschylus, *Oresteia*, 217.
45. Pasolini, *Teatro*, 314; emphasis in original.
46. See Siciliano, "Pilade, Politica e Storia." Siciliano contends that Pylades represents "a socialist influenced by a rural idealism," because he "embraces the cause of the outcast[s]," who in the play are the peasants living in the mountains outside Argos (72). In "Nota sul caso *Pilade*" Massimo Oldoni asserts that one of the merits of Pasolini's play is the attempt to investigate the friendship between Orestes and Pylades (238). Angelo Trimarco's essay "Il dono della ragione" speaks of the duplicitous nature of Athena's reason.

Rino Mele's intelligent essay "Il teatro di carta" comments on the fascinating opposition between Oedipus and Orestes. Oedipus is unaware of his paternal crime, whereas Orestes chooses to kill his mother (194). Pasolini's play takes place after the end of the Greek trilogy (199).

47. Pasolini, *Teatro*, 362.
48. Luke, 19:41–44.
49. Pasolini, *Teatro*, 360; emphasis in original.
50. Aeschylus, *Oresteia*, 264.
51. *Ibid.*, 274.
52. Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, 116.
53. Sade, *Les 120 Journées de Sodom*, 115.
54. Joël Magny rightly calls Pasolini's film a "messe noir"; see "Une liturgie du néant et de l'horreur," 197.
55. Sade, *Les 120 Journées de Sodom*, 249.
56. *Ibid.*, 250.
57. Klossowski, *Sade My Neighbor*, 36.
58. *Ibid.*, 37.
59. Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, 132 and 131. Barthes speaks of metonymy, although he mentions synecdoche.
60. Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, in "Truth and the Obscene Word in Eighteenth-Century French Pornography," speaks of the "hallucinatory" nature of the obscene word that works as a "substitute" for the partial object; "it itself acquires the status of part[ial] object and, like the part[ial] object, may stand for the whole erotic body" (217).
61. On *Salò* as an "unwatchable" spectacle, see Greene, "*Salò*: The Refusal to Consume"; Miconi, *Pier Paolo Pasolini: La poesia, il corpo, il linguaggio*, 145–49.
62. Cf. Murri, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 127–30. Murri writes elegantly on that "something that comes forth from the scene and reveals the truth" behind what appears on the surface (127 emphasis in original). Although Murri refers to the "truth" hiding behind the ruthlessness of the libertines' power, his insightful remarks apply to my analysis as well.
63. Cf. Sade, *Les 120 Journées de Sodom*, 64–65.
64. On the unerotic nature of *Salò*, see for instance Greene, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 203; Ferretti, *Pasolini*, 107–8. In particular, Ferretti cites some insightful comments of Giovanni Testori, a writer close to the religious and sexual themes present in Pasolini. In an article on *Salò*, Testori points out that in his last film Pasolini expresses a "curse" against "the organs of reproduction." See Giovanni Testori, "Film antipornografico," *Corriere della sera*, 10 December, 1975.
65. Lingis, "Deadly Pleasures," 33.
66. Regarding the notion of homosexuality as a disruption of the natural order, see Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. I find particularly fascinating Edelman's analysis of Hitchcock's *The Birds*, in which the birds would signify the irruption of the libidinal drive that "the Child," as symbol

of “reproductive futurism, serves to mask” (131). Both *The Birds* and *Psycho*, Edelman explains, emphasize the “passive” nature of birds, which however “demand” to be seen and recognized as symbols of repressed, “passive,” drives.

67. Pasolini, *Per il cinema*, 1:473.
68. Lingis, “Deadly Pleasures,” 41.
69. Sade, *La philosophie dans le boudoir*, 144.
70. See the introduction in Hunt, *Invention of Pornography*, 41.
71. Sade, *La philosophie dans le boudoir*, 216.
72. Sollers, *L'écriture et l'expérience des limites*, 66.
73. Cf. Blanchot, *Lautréamont and Sade*: “The man of complete egoism is a man who knows how to transform all distaste into tastes, all repugnance into attractions. . . . He must experience everything in order to be at the mercy of nothing” (20).
74. See Buchler, ed., *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*: “An index is a sign which would, at once, lose the character which makes it a sign if its object were removed, but would not lose that character if there were no interpreting. Such, for instance, is a piece of mould with a bullet-hole in it as a sign of a shot. . . . An index is a sign which refers to its object not so much because of any similarity or analogy with it . . . as because it is in dynamical (including spatial) connection both with the individual object, on the one hand, and with the senses or memory of the person for whom it serves as a sign” (104 and 107).
75. On this subject, see Zupancic, “Kant with Don Juan and Sade.” Starting from an analysis of Kant’s definition of the eternity of the soul, Zupancic sees “uncanny” coincidences between the perfection pursued by the libertine and the immortality attained by the soul: “If you persist in following the categorical imperative, you may finally be granted the possibility of ridding yourself even of the pleasure and pride you took in the sacrifice itself” (121). In the mirroring relationship between libertine and victim, Zupancic also has something interesting to say about the similarities between Don Juan and Sade’s libertines. Commenting on the fact that men and not Don Juan’s female victims take offense at the libertine’s seductions, Zupancic states: “[Woman] is not simply [man’s] property, what he *has*, but his being, what he *is*. . . . Once we accept the fact that ‘woman does not exist,’ there is only one way to define a man: a man is . . . a woman who believes she exists” (114).  
     In *Imagine There’s No Woman*, Joan Copjec holds that *Salò* “could be described as an attempt to expose [the] perversion of the moral imperative. . . . *Salò* is Pasolini’s own ‘Kant with Sade.’ The film rummages the ruins to which the sadist reduces not only Kant’s practical reason but also his aesthetic judgment” (225–26).
76. Cf. Pasolini, *Per il cinema*, 2:3159. Pasolini included this in *Canzoniere italiano* (poem n. 784), his famous anthology of Italian popular poetry. Its initial words also became the title of his collection of poetry *La meglio gioventù*.

77. Pasolini, ed., *Canzoniere italiano*, 1:135, 139.
78. Pasolini, *Tutte le poesie*, 1:157–58.
79. Quintavalle, *Giornate di Sodoma*, 32, 33.
80. Mariuz, “La meglio gioventù” di Pasolini, 92. More than one witness remembers this horrible event; see pp. 68, 96.
81. Klossowski, *Sade My Neighbor*, 89.
82. Ibid., 94; emphasis in original.
83. Sade, *Les 120 Journées de Sodom*, 445.
84. Sade, *Les 120 Journées de Sodom*, 305–6.
85. Sade, *Les 120 Journées de Sodom*, 294.
86. Sade, *Les 120 Journées de Sodom*, 295.
87. On the meaning of popular dance in Pasolini’s films, see Calabretto, *Pasolini e la musica*, 109–19. Regarding the last scene of *Salò*, see 513–15 and 540.
88. Pasolini, *San Paolo*, scene 93, 140.
89. Sade, *Les 120 Journées de Sodom*, 357.
90. Sade, *Les 120 Journées de Sodom*, 439.
91. Cf. the introductory description of the Duc in Sade, *120 Days of Sodom*, 201.
92. Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, 177. For a detailed analysis of Pasolini’s film theory, see Wagstaff, “Reality Into Poetry; Fabbri, “Free/ Indirect/ Discourse.” On Pasolini’s free indirect discourse, see Joan Copjec’s fine and insightful analysis in *Imagine There’s No Woman*, 214–16. See also Deleuze, *Cinema 2*. Deleuze gives a clear synthesis of this controversial concept (148–49).
93. In *The Freudian Body*, Leo Bersani seems to allude to this stylistic procedure: “The relationship between Sade and Pasolini [is] a relation between . . . two types of discourse: on the one hand, a philosophical argument which, in a sense, novelistic representation merely re-presents as traumatically persuasive scenes, and, on the other, a self-reflexive discourse, in filmic terms, which repeats and deflects narrative violence in formal recognitions” (54–55).
94. On the meaning of the binoculars in this key scene, see Greene’s insightful remarks in *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 216.

#### CONCLUSION

1. Mieli, *Elementi di critica omosessuale*, 192; emphasis in original. The quotation in the chapter title is from p. 159 of this work. The translations from Mieli’s book are mine. Citations are hereafter given parenthetically in the text by page number.
2. David Fernbach edited and translated Mieli’s book in 1980; see Mieli, *Homosexuality and Liberation*. On Fernbach’s English edition, see Paola Mieli, “Premessa,” in Mieli, *Elementi di critica omosessuale*, 247.
3. Mieli refers to Schreber’s “transsexual” experience at the beginning of *Elementi* (19).
4. On Róheim and Schreber, see Mieli, *Elementi*, 146.

5. Brown, *Love's Body*, 159.
6. Ibid., 225.
7. Ibid., 226.
8. Rabant, "Un clamore sospeso tra la vita e la morte," in Mieli, *Elementi*, 298.
9. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 40.
10. See the introduction by Dean and Lane in their *Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis*, 20. See also Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*.
11. De Lauretis, "La gaia scienza, ovvero la traviata Norma," 265.
12. For a historical description of Mieli's political role within the "autonomous gay collectives in the seventies," see Rossi Barilli, *Il movimento gay in Italia*, 95–98.
13. Dean, "'Il mio tesoro': Note a posteriori," 260.
14. Ibid., 254.
15. See Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 49–50.
16. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 56–83.
17. Cf. Mieli, *Elementi*, 67; Rossi Barilli, *Il movimento gay in Italia*, 80.
18. Eribon, *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self*, 15.
19. Ibid., 1–2.
20. Cf. Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*, 108. Halperin holds that it is important "to deidealize homosexuality, so as to return it to its cultural specificity and contingency." Halperin aims "to bring out the particularity of 'homosexuality' as a singular, distinctive formation that pretends to represent all same-sex sexual expression, a partial perspective that claims to encompass the whole" (107–8). He sees "four pre-homosexual categories of male sex and gender deviance: 1. effeminacy, 2. paederasty or 'active' sodomy 3. friendship or male love 4. passivity or inversion" (109).
21. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 101.
22. Ibid., 85–86.
23. Ibid., 86.
24. Ibid., 97, 98.
25. In *The Cinema of Economic Miracles*, Angelo Restivo offers an interesting analysis of this film. Restivo mentions Pasolini's "pedagogical" role, present throughout his oeuvre, in contrast with Grimaldi's reading of the Italian poet (150–52).
26. Quintavalle, *Giornate di Sodoma*, 118.
27. Ibid., 66.
28. On this film in the context of the contemporary vision of Pasolini as protean cultural presence, see Miconi, *Pier Paolo Pasolini: La poesia, il corpo, il linguaggio*, 29.
29. Cf. Rossi Barilli, "La rivoluzione in corpo," 308.
30. Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 75.
31. Angelides, *History of Bisexuality*, 133.
32. Ibid., 130–31, 127; emphasis in original.
33. Russ, *The Female Man*, 133–35.



34. Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 111.
35. Ibid., 112.
36. Dean, “‘Il mio tesoro’: Note a posteriori,” 255–56; Bersani, *Homos*, 128.
37. Bersani, *Homos*, 128–29.
38. Christopher Lane, “L’estetica transessuale di Mieli,” in Mieli, *Elementi*, 279–90: 283.
39. Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 78.
40. Freud, *Three Essays*, 52.
41. Bersani, “Is the Rectum a Grave?” 262.

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