
As the editors note in their acknowledgment, “this project originated as a conference called ‘Pier Paolo Pasolini: Heretical Imperatives,’ held in Toronto in the spring of 1990 in conjunction with the traveling retrospective of Pasolini’s films” (3); and is a volume in the series Major Italian Authors, general editors Massimo Ciavolella and Amilcare Iannucci. In addition to a brief (two pages) chronology of the life of Pasolini, and an eight page illustrations section containing expressive scenes from the films, a ten page introduction, a bibliography and filmography, the volume contains twelve exceptionally well written essays by noted Pasolini scholars from North America and Italy – essays which truly support the subtitle’s claim to present contemporary perspectives on an author who was as controversial in death as in life, and who continues to grow in international stature as a result of his theoretical views on language, politics, culture and morality. Finally, the volume gives us David Ward’s English version of “Manifesto per un nuovo teatro” (Manifesto for a New Theatre) and Patrick Rumble’s rendition of “Testis” – both excellent translations which make the opinions of Pasolini accessible to a wider audience. Another interesting feature of the text is the fact that it conducts something of a review of itself in the sense that each essay is preceded by an incisive synopsis and contextualization, provided by the editors.

Even though, as stated, the text’s production was inspired by the film retrospective, the critical scope of the papers embraces virtually all of Pasolini’s views on language and thought as expressed in his essays from Poesia dialettale del Novecento (1952) and Passione e ideologia (1960) to Lettere luterane (1976). A major international event, as far as Pasolini criticism is concerned, was the 1988 translation of Empirisno eretico (Heretical Empiricism, Indiana University Press). A whole new set of English speaking film critics became interested in the theories of the Italian poet and filmmaker and it shows to the extent that virtually all of the essayists in the volume cite the text. As well, North American interest in the critical stance of Pier Paolo Pasolini with respect to language and image, and their relation to reality, politics and ethics, ensures that the collection of articles is coherent and focused.

Although Nico Naldini, author of Pasolini, una vita (1989), in his essay “Pier Paolo, My Cousin” (13-21), “fills in the gaps in our knowledge of the period preceding Pasolini’s transfer to Rome” (13), the pages cited from the biography are not always insightful. For example, one of Naldini’s first recollections is: “I was two or three years old. A large patch of diarrhea is the result of my malaise and, arriving suddenly, Pier Paolo steps in it. I am myself irritated by his exaggerated complaining” (15). Despite the fact that there are important details about Pasolini’s parents and his early predisposition to homosexuality, the piece in general falls well below the intellectual standard set by the essays which come after.

Joseph Francese’s “Pasolini’s ‘Roman Novels,’ the Italian Communist Party and the Events of 1956” (22-39), “charts Pasolini’s development as both thinker and literary artist by examining his fortune in the Communist press” (23) – thereby combining intratextual and extratextual commentary. The critic argues that the technical differences between Ragazzi di vita (1955) and Una vita violenta (1959), can be accounted
for by Pasolini’s response to Communist critics who took issue with certain aspects of the first novel which, according to them, did not fit the neorealist narrative model established by Pratolini’s *Metello*. Francese correctly points out the discrepancy between Pasolini’s repudiation of the critics’ contention, in articles published in the periodical *Contemporaneo*, and the adjustments the writer made in the structure of his second novel. Of equal importance is Francese’s focus on the role ascribed to dialect in the exchange of views: a role which was destined to become quite prominent in subsequent Pasolini writings; specifically, his “evaluation of the regional dialects as a source of renewal for literary language provided theoretical justification for what he was attempting in his prose” (30).

Jennifer Jones, in “Pasolini, Zanzotto and the Question of Pedagogy” (40-55), takes the discussion of the previous essay on the language issue in the direction of pedagogy where she effectively demonstrates the “significance of Pasolini’s linguistic pluralism and his interest in stylistic ‘contamination’ ” (40). Jones notes a relationship between this aspect of Pasolini’s thought and Zanzotto’s fascination with the modes of language acquisition in children.

In “Pasolini’s ‘Second Victory’” (56-77), Walter Siti studies the works which were produced in the ‘70s – not treated in any great detail by North American critics. His approach is a psychoanalytical one whereby he sees in Pasolini’s late return to his Friulan poetry and to the novel format of *Petrolio* – an unfinished work – the realization of the following phenomenon: “By confronting men with the brutal and cynical fulfillment of their desires, consumer society suddenly toppled a thousand-year-old culture based on repression” (57). Siti’s allusion to “second victory” is a reference to the poem “Aneddoto dei vecchi re” where we find this quote: “è stata una vittoria infelice: / anche se i mostri sono stati due, e due le vittorie” (72). On the basis of these lines, the critic interprets Pasolini’s coming to terms with the subliminal effects of consumerism on the modern psyche.

In writing “Free/Indirect/Discourse” (78-87), Paolo Fabbri examines Pasolini’s views on the semiotics of film. Specifically, he follows the debate concerning the possibility of analyzing film with linguistic criteria. A great deal of Pasolini’s thought on the subject derives from his collection of essays *Heretical Empiricism* and his arguments on the equivalence of film and language go to the heart of his basic assumptions about the relationship between reality and representation.

Giuliana Bruno “The Body of Pasolini’s Semiotics: A Sequel Twenty Years Later” (88-105) continues along similar lines as the preceding essay. Her fundamental thesis is that Pasolini’s intricate interdisciplinary views are only now beginning to be understood and properly contextualized within contemporary theoretical discourse. She states: “Pasolini’s position seems prophetic today not only in relation to the development of semiotics but also in terms of poststructural theory and ideological implications of the postmodern condition” (92).

Silvestra Mariniello’s “Toward a Materialist Linguistics: Pasolini’s Theory of Language” (106-126) “proposes to set out a theoretical bridge between a Marxist understanding of ideology and the methods of structuralist linguistics” (106). Placing Pasolini in a context that includes Bakhtin, Gramsci and McLuhan, Mariniello establishes a plausible parallel between the ideological instrumentality of film and of the printing press. According to this critic, Pasolini “tries to combine the scientific author-
ity of structuralism with a materialist understanding of reality” (119), thereby bringing the thought of Pasolini right into the modern debate on the cultural and political effects of the mass media.

In “A Genial Analytic Mind: ‘Film’ and ‘Cinema’ in Pier Paolo Pasolini’s Film Theory” (137-151), David Ward explains the distinction, made in the essays of Pasolini, between the notion of “cinema” – essentially structured around the concept of the “long take” – and the notion of “film” – defined by the process of editing. Ward relates Pasolini’s preference for the latter, despite the arguments of critics to the contrary, to his preference for the mirror over the tape-recorder as a cognitive mode. Virtually all of these observations deal with the central issues in Pasolini’s inquiry into the nature of reality and man’s capacity to depict and interpret it by means of language: written, spoken and cinematic. In so doing, Ward “develops a far fuller portrait of the artist’s film theory than we have known” (127).

Also treating the films of our author, P. Adams Sitney’s “Accattone and Mamma Roma” (171-179) makes “some claims about the genre of Accattone and about its uniqueness in that genre, and finally its relationship to Mamma Roma” (171). The critic frames his thesis by comparing the style of the first film with that of Fellini’s Le notti di Cabiria and Dreyer’s La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc. What enables Adams Sitney to argue his case effectively is the contention that Pasolini’s films rely on Biblical intertexts which move them away from the standard neo-realist fare – a technique that “distances Accattone from the norms of the ambitious films of the late 1950s in ways that suggest a refashioning of neorealism without actually repeating the strategies of the films from the 1940s” (175).

In interesting fashion, Bart Testa’s “To Film a Gospel ... and Advent of the Theoretical Stranger” (180-209) pursues the theme of religious subject matter with the intention of reasserting the importance and relevance of Pasolini’s film version of Matthew’s Gospel. “Il vangelo is even more strikingly anomalous both for what we might call its ‘genre’ and for Pasolini” (181). He notes the difference and originality of this film in relation to other “Jesus films” – from that of Griffith to that of Scorsese. In creating his work “he [Pasolini] read Matthew through a Gramscian theory of literature developed in the rationalist period of Officina” (184).

Patrick Rumble’s contribution is: “Stylistic Contamination in the Trilogia della vita: The Case of Il fiore delle mille e una notte” (210-231). The trilogy refers to The Decameron, Canterbury Tales and The Arabian Nights, according to the filmmaker his “most ideological films” (210). Rumble analyzes these with an eye to illustrating Pasolini’s own contention that their structures are “homologous” with those of society and economy. The theory of “homology” is developed in Empirismo eretico. As well, Rumble “enriches Pasolini’s long, enduring political theory of culture” (210).

Naomi Greene examines Pasolini’s last film, Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma in, “Salò: The Refusal to Costume” (232-242). Greene reconsiders critical responses to the film and “moves beyond them” (232). She concedes that “the double axis of the film – centered on sexuality and politics – embodies the two areas that Pasolini had embraced so controversially throughout his life” (234) and argues that the film is a statement against the postindustrial society which has corrupted values by turning everything into commodities. She, therefore, aligns herself with the few critics who see the real message of the film in “its desire to be unbearable” (240).
In conclusion, this outstanding volume demonstrates the unquestioned relevance of Pier Paolo Pasolini's writings with respect to the modern cultural and linguistic debate, as well as its own relevance to the rapidly growing body of Pasolini criticism. The only minor flaw which we note is the emphasis on the theoretical writings and their impact on the cinema of Pasolini. To some extent, the poetical writings are not treated with the same depth in a text that brings to bear the most recent critical methodologies to the full complement of Pasolini's works.

CORRADO FEDERICI

Brock University


By the time of his premature death due to heart attack in 1989, Antonio Porta (who had been writing poetry for nearly 30 years) had already left a legacy of more than fifteen books of poetry, half a dozen prose pieces including two novels, several works for the stage, and countless essays. In addition to his prolific poetry, Porta becomes, from the 1960s through the mid-80s, an undeniable force for shaping literary tastes through his contributions to numerous journals and periodicals, and his work as an editor for such houses as Bompiani, Feltrinelli, Sonzogno, among others. Given such prolific production and such omnipresence in the field of contemporary Italian poetry, one wonders about the relative dearth of critical consideration for Porta's *oeuvre*. (To be sure, Porta's works have always received notice but, to date, there exist only two book-length studies of his work). Enter John Picchione's deftly written study of Porta, *Introduzione a A. Porta* to help fill the gaps.

Because Porta is known almost exclusively for poetry, an *introduction* to his work would be wrong-headed (if not completely remiss) if it did not fix steadily on it. Covering a rather long period of great poetic innovation from his debut with the other four poets comprising the *Novissimi* of 1961 (and later of the larger *Gruppo '63*) through the deconstructionist early 80s one could imagine instrumentalizing Porta, making him the *speculum* through which to examine Italy's evolving socio-cultural milieu and those critical paradigms (philosophy, science, the plastic arts and, to a much lesser degree, music) in which Porta himself engaged. To the greater success of this study, Picchione avoids such posturing and focuses (refreshingly, unabashedly) on the evolution of Porta's poetry.

This is not to suggest the author neglects the theoretical considerations or implications of Porta's poetry; on the contrary, Picchione's use of theory is elegant and deployed with discretion. The phenomenological school of philosophy (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, for example, is particularly influential) made up part of the foundation of Porta's poetics and, thus, Picchione studies it in some detail in the opening section of *Introduzione*. Porta's poetic orientation, Picchione asserts, "si muove tra lavorazione linguistica e interrogazione del mondo, tra storia e immaginario, tra la percezione del