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ONLY FOR THE PLEASURE OF TELLING:
FILLING THE VOID IN PASOLINI'S *TRILOGIA DELLA VITA*

by

COURTNEY MUNSON

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts,
The City University of New York

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APPROVAL

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in
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for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

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Since Pasolini deliberately cultivated an unrecognizable and illegible public image that embraced incoherence, much of the scholarship surrounding him is plagued by contradictions and mutual exclusivity. For some, Pasolini was a utopian prophet, for others apocalyptic, but most agree that he, through his transmedial and highly self-inscribed life-work, was responding primarily to the crises of neocapitalist consumerism, especially its degenerative effects on sexual conventions and the body. Through an investigation of Pasolini's controversial essays on film theory, the details of his biography, and the films of the *Trilogia della vita*, this thesis argues that it is a mistake to assume that the "return to origins" in the *Trilogia* is expressing an attitude toward the future. This is because the radical subversive power of tales told "only for the pleasure of telling" inheres in its resistance to any form of instrumentalization. Instead, by means of his transgressive conception of freedom, Pasolini's invention is an attempt to remain in touch with evanescent "Reality," which only appears in the present.

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Introduction: Filling Giotto's Pupil's Void

The legacy of Pier Paolo Pasolini's highly personal, self-inscribed, and tragic life-work is dizzyingly complex, which is not surprising, since he took perverse pride in appearing unrecognizable and illegible. These qualities produce an aura of charisma that attracts mystifying adjectives: scandalous, heretical, unorthodox, iconoclastic, prophetic, martyrial, autolesionic, sodomitical, contaminated, fragmentary, introspective, experimental, etc. In the scholarship, such terms proliferate as a function of the poet-filmmaker-theorist's many contradictions; he was "an atheist who directed one of the few genuinely profound biblical films in cinema, a communist who severely criticized many of the radical movements," and a homosexual who "referred to [homosexuality] as his sickness" (*Choice*, on the back cover of Greene 2017). For Pasolini, "consistency is inhumanity, it is a language for fanatical monks, not for men" ... "seriousness is a quality for those who have no other qualities" (Siciliano, quoting Pasolini, 360). While Pasolini condemned the false permissiveness of neocapitalist consumerism for making sexuality obsessive and neurotic, his own life-work also contains "that bit of [flirtatious] neurosis necessary to the seduction of readers," in the Barthesian sense of neurosis drawn from Bataille: "the fearful apprehension of an ultimate impossible" (Barthes 5). Pasolini lures his readers and viewers into a wandering wood of contradictions from which there is no clear and apparent exit.

Even hagiographic accounts of his legacy can differ diametrically; on the one hand, he was an antisocial, apocalyptic, "buggered prophet" who announced "the end of days" (Humphrey 119); on the other, he nostalgically preached "a return to engagement in the production of a critical collectivity, a community of the equally powerless" (Rumble 143). Both of these accounts, the former pessimistic and antisocial (or antirelational) and the latter optimistic and communal, provide an interpretation of the "return to origins" in Pasolini's

adaptations of the Greek tragedians (Humphrey) or the frame narratives in the *Trilogia della vita* (Rumble). Humphrey's *Archaic Modernism*, opposed to the representation of "representation itself as natural and unmediated" (13), represents a Pasolini who revisits civilizational origins to reveal the end already foreshadowed therein; "the films, in short, simultaneously signify the birth of a civilization and its apocalypse or, again, the seemingly paradoxical imbrication of the archaic and the modern" (ibid. 17), while Rumble's *Allegories of Contamination* argues that the archaism of Pasolini's 'cinema of poetry' seeks to "resuscitate the collective dimension of storytelling" (Rumble 130), and "to return the storytelling function to the people" (ibid. 132).

Both accounts, although mutually exclusive, attempt to terminate the interpretation of Pasolini's attitude towards futurity by drawing on philosophical or theoretical discourse, unknown to Pasolini himself, and arguing that he or his work (he strove to make the two seem as indistinguishable as possible) manifested this or that concept in particular. This is not to imply that such an approach is fallacious or has no hermeneutic purchase, but it might be observed that subordinating Pasolini to such concepts, in an effort to terminate the anxiety of indeterminacy engendered by the aforementioned form of neurosis, has the tendency to smooth over, or even erase, the vicissitudes and contradictions encountered in Pasolini's bloated corpus of films, poems, plays, essays, articles, etc. (not to mention that it forestalls the texts's Barthesian bliss).

Humphrey primarily employs the queer theory of the antirelational/negative school, especially Lee Edelman's *No Future* (and by extension Derridean deconstruction), and Rumble, whose philosophical and theoretical influences are more diverse, relies on Deleuze's cinema theory, at least for the concept of the creative, collective function of storytelling, in addition to

other key concepts like “the power of the false.” Not only do both of these accounts, among others, tend to conflate Pasolini and the mode of prophetic discourse that he so often deployed (although with inconsistent content) with such philosophical concepts, but they also conflate their (again, mutually exclusive) interpretations of the film texts with the intentions of Pasolini himself, in order to conclude that he had a stable attitude towards futurity. However, since his attitude towards the future was in constant flux, this critical practice would necessarily involve privileging one of his attitudes over the others.

For example, take the triptych fresco painted by Giotto’s pupil (played by Pasolini) featured in the final episode of *The Decameron* (1971). The third division of the triptych is left empty, and the final words of the film, voiced by Giotto’s pupil, are “why complete a work when it’s so beautiful just to dream it?” Rumble reads the triptych as an “allegory of paradigmatic shifts from the Middle Ages to modernity [that] reveals the movement from closed to open systems, from closed narrative to the very impossibility of narrative closure” (Rumble 127), as an “activation of the reader” towards “participatory reception,” and as evidence of “Pasolini’s abdication of the conventional author function” (ibid. 130). Since “the blank screen (like the blank third panel of the artist’s triptych)” ... “gains its eloquence from what the people project upon it,” Pasolini “transfer[s] to his audience, ideally, the power of the collective utterance that is cinema” (ibid. 134). In this manner, Rumble seeks to demonstrate that Pasolini, in his “return to origins,” and in his desire “to tell, to recount, for the sheer joy of telling and recounting” ... “away from ideology,” ... is not “abdicating his cinema of ‘engagement’” (ibid. 132). For Rumble, again, this is not a simple or escapist ‘return’ to the past, but a return to “engagement in the production of a critical collectivity,” presuming an “incomplete society - *da farsi* - [a *becoming* society] whose completion becomes the desire of the community, the

content of a collective dream” (ibid. 143), like the dreams that the audience is invited to project upon the blank division of the triptych. Therefore, in Rumble’s view, both Pasolini as Giotto’s pupil and Pasolini as director of *The Decameron* are optimistically prophesying from their respective standpoints towards their respective futures; the blank panel is read as the negative space upon which an “activated” audience projects its hopes for communal completion. However, as will be explored below, Rumble’s interpretation entails an instrumentalization of the filmwork that is contradicted by some of Pasolini’s statements on the theory of spectatorship, authorship, and invention as transgression.

Although Humphrey’s *Archaic Modernism* does not contain an interpretation of the ending of *The Decameron* (1971), since its focus is primarily limited to Pasolini’s adaptations of the Greek tragedians in *Edipo Re* (1967), *Medea* (1969), and *Appunti per un’Orestiade Africana* (1970), one might still extrapolate a pessimistic reading consistent with its method and the conclusions reached therein. The seemingly *positive* tone of Giotto’s pupil’s terminal words (“why complete a work when it’s so beautiful just to dream it?”) would likely not inhibit a pessimistic reading of the triptych for Humphrey, since the sodomitical subject’s *queer* pleasure or *jouissance* in *negation* is a recurring motif in his study (which makes much of the term queer’s polysemy); “queerness, in ‘its stubborn denial of teleology, its resistance to the determinations of meaning . . . , and, above all, its rejection of spiritualization through marriage to reproductive futurism,’ embodies a particular manifestation of the death drive, *jouissance*” (Humphrey 16). Thus, the blank panel would be read apocalyptically, anti-representationally representing the embodiment of negation characteristic of the “sodomitical subject,” and as a negation of “the myth of the future” (ibid. 119). The triptych’s incomplete and fragmentary state, a quality found throughout Pasolini’s work, would represent “a challenge to the idea of

completion” and “to notions of singularity or unity” (ibid. 118). *The Decameron* (1971), returning to the time of birth of bourgeois culture in the Late Middle Ages, simultaneously signifies its birth “and its apocalypse or, again, the seemingly paradoxical imbrication of the archaic and the modern” (ibid. 17).

However, it is also possible simply to interpret the blank division of the triptych as representing indeterminacy, neither negative nor affirmative, and neither prophetically utopian nor pessimistic. In this sense, it might be read through the lens of some of Pasolini’s controversial statements on cinema theory, in his essay “The Cinema of Poetry” (1965), as representative of the freedom and infinite possibility characteristic of the language of cinema vis-à-vis the more limited and instrumentalized language of literature. Therein he contrasts the practice of filmmaking with “im-signs” (image signs) to that of writing with “lin-signs” (words or language signs), insofar as the latter is limited by its foundation “on the institutionalized premise of usable instrumentalized languages, the common possession of all speakers,” while, on the other hand, “the cinematographic languages, [which, although they] seem to be founded on nothing at all” (“The Cinema of Poetry” 37), have their basis in the “entire world in man which expresses itself primarily through signifying images” ... “*the world of memory and of dreams*” (Pasolini’s emphasis, ibid. 38). This seems to be because the virtual “dictionary” of units (im-signs) available to the director is equivalent to his/her experienced reality and the totality of infinite possibilities therein, as opposed to the real and limited, instrumental dictionary of the poet or writer. “If by any chance we wanted to imagine a dictionary of images, we would have to imagine an *infinite dictionary*, as infinite as the dictionary of *possible words*” ... “The filmmaker does not have a dictionary; he has infinite possibilities” (his emphases, ibid. 39).

Yet, in “The Cinema of Poetry,” the hermeneutics of im-signs, i.e. how the raw material of reality gains significance, is not particularly well developed. Nor does Pasolini clearly distinguish the purely personal significance of im-signs from their communal significance. He does not explain how the im-signs, “proper to memories and dreams, which prefigure and offer themselves as the ‘instrumental’ premise of cinematographic communication,” move from their personal and idiosyncratic significance for the dreamer-director to the universal comprehensibility of an audience, even though the demonstration of this instrumentality is precisely what the potential significance of a film, as the director’s expressive intention, hinges on, in addition to his assertion that “the language [of cinema] is of necessity interdialectal and international, because our eyes are the same the world over” (ibid. 46). Surely most of us have eyes, but that does not mean that images have universal significance. It seems that most of this obscurity arises from his too strict division between lin-signs, as limited and determined, and im-signs, as unlimited and free. He also includes the language of bodily gestures among im-signs, calling gestures “an indication of an extremely elementary stage of civilization” (ibid. 39), and he equates them with other forms of visual communication and significance like “brute reality,” memory, and dreams, which “are almost prehuman events, or on the border of what is human,” “pregrammatical and even premorphological” (ibid.). As a result, for Pasolini the im-sign, “*the linguistic instrument on which film is predicated, is, therefore, of an irrational type*” (his emphasis, ibid.). Through this mystification of gestures, assuming their archaic, prehistorical purity, Pasolini completely avoids having to consider the history of the rationalistic discipline of the body;

Disciplinary control does not consist simply in teaching or imposing a series of particular gestures; it imposes the best relation between a gesture and the overall position of the

body, which is its condition of efficiency and speed. In the correct use of the body, which makes possible a correct use of time, nothing must remain idle or useless... (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 152)

Pasolini conveniently obfuscates all the ways that supposedly raw or “brute reality” is already *rationaly* coded (often towards the rational maximization of efficiency), in order to maintain that the reality of image signs, like gestures, dreams, and memory, is “crude, almost animal-like” and prehistorical, unlike the elaborate, “historically complex and mature system” of “instrumental communication,” which “lies at the basis of poetic or philosophical communication” (“The Cinema of Poetry” 39). Foucault demonstrates that there is indeed such a complex and mature system, a technology of bodily control, behind many systems of gestures. Additionally, although it is a commonplace, Pasolini’s (perhaps false) analogy between dreams (and memories) and films ought not to be taken for granted so lightly in a theoretical context.

Elsewhere, Pasolini insists that “the Code of Reality and the Code of Cinema (of the cinematographic *langue*)” ... “are the same Code” (*Heretical Empiricism* 277), and that this “Code” is the *Ur-code*, the “code of codes, or code of lived reality” that underlies all other codes (ibid. 293). What’s most striking, since he claims to be working in the tradition of Saussure, is the absoluteness, the lack of skepticism, and the lack of arbitrariness in his radically ontological and naturalizing ideas about the immediacy of his relationship with the code of reality. He does not consider the degree to which the perception of reality might already be mediated by language or lin-signs; instead, he maintains a strict division between the codes of lin-signs and im-signs, in order to treat the language of reality/cinema as completely independent from the languages of literature, and, suspiciously convenient for the filmmaker, freer and more expressive. In this manner, he can maintain an image of reality as pure, archaic,

immediate, and natural, untouched by the stifling conventionality of the vernacular dictionary;

The savage in the presence of an animal is in the presence of a “sign” of that language [of reality]—if it is an edible animal, he kills it; if it is ferocious, he runs away, etc. Eating, running away, are other “signs” of that Language. Living, therefore, is expressing oneself through pragmatism, and said expression is nothing more than a moment of the monologue which Reality holds with itself concerning existence. In fact, both the eaten animal and the savage who eats it are part of the entire body of the Existing or of the Real, physically without a break in continuity. (ibid. 293)

Here, Saussurean differentials are dissolved; nothing is arbitrary, everything immediate. In this state of nature, “the savage” *expresses* himself pragmatically, but his self-expression is also a part of a continuous whole that physically unites his being with the whole of “the Real,” the whole of existence. This is the lost state of unalienated self-expression, comparable to the archaic and primitive world of dreams and memories, still alive for Pasolini in the Third World, or even in Naples (to a degree), at least up to the time when he shot *The Decameron*, which he romantically dreams that the language of cinema allows him to evoke or reanimate. Passages like these make it all the more surprising that some scholars have recruited Pasolini posthumously into the deconstructive camp of literary theory, since his semiotics is manifestly anti-differential and relies on a naturalistic fallacy;

The savage does not need illusions to live, that is, to express himself. But from the moment in which he begins to live reality as contemplation (from the first glimmer of this), and therefore begins to invent its succession and spatiotemporality, he discovers history, that is, illusion. From that moment on he will always need it, and will therefore base on this, and only on this, the absence of authenticity: the alienation, first of the

peasant, and later of the petit bourgeois. (ibid. 297)

Taking up Derrida's discussion of the nature/culture opposition in the work of Lévi-Strauss in his essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," a work roughly contemporaneous with Pasolini's "The Cinema of Poetry," one finds that Derrida's critique of Lévi-Strauss therein applies just as well to Pasolini, in whom one finds "a sort of ethic of presence, an ethic of nostalgia for origins, an ethic of archaic and natural innocence, of a purity of presence..." (Derrida 12). Pasolini's anthropological and historical perspective was rather idiosyncratic, perhaps provocatively absurd; in his view, "ancient history" was ending before his eyes, and consumer civilization was destroying it; "... in my films I show a vanished life, people and places from a historical pocket outside of time, an archaic fossil. At the time I made *Accattone*, *Mamma Roma*, and even *Hawks and Sparrows*, this ancient world existed—but then it was swept away, and from the age of innocence we passed to the age of corruption" (Siciliano 365). For Pasolini, Derridean *freeplay* can only occur in an unalienated past, in a prelapsarian state before the fall from the immediacy of the "Real" into history. Obsessed with guilt and despairing "broken immediateness," Pasolini's sense for the degeneration of the people, and the vanishing of revolutionary hope, prevents him from accepting what Derrida calls the irreconcilable alternative to the negative, nostalgic, and impossible loss of immediateness, i.e. something like the Nietzschean *amor fati*, an "*affirmation [which] determines the non-center otherwise than as loss of the center*" (Derrida 12).

Nevertheless, to put aside the problematization of Pasolini's semiotics of cinema and return to the ending of *The Decameron*, it is well enough to demonstrate that the empty division of Giotto's pupil's triptych, when read in the light of Pasolini's cinema of poetry, might represent the filmmaker's virtual dictionary of infinite possibility, rather than a positive or

negative attitude towards futurity, as maintained by Rumble and (hypothetically) Humphrey. The sentiment of “why complete a work when it’s so beautiful just to dream it?” can be interpreted as eschewing any such determination, and the difficulty faced when attempting to attribute significance to such indeterminacy is congruent to some of the difficulties encountered in the consideration of Pasolini’s own theory of cinema.

Aside from the possibility that Giotto’s pupil’s void might represent pure indeterminacy, in which any notion of temporality dissolves, it might also represent the interstice between the past and the present, both in general and specifically that between the fictional past of the film’s diegesis and the present of its production and projection, rather than the interstice dividing the present and the future, as assumed in both Rumble’s reading and Humphrey’s extrapolated reading. Borrowing Rumble’s analogy between the blank triptych division and the blank screen of the cinema, they might be interpreted as the point of mediation between the past and the present, the space necessary for a dialectic between the past and the present to occur. As such, this terminal image and symbol (im-sign, to appropriate the terminology of Pasolini’s cinema theory) might function as a synoptic and metafilmic statement encapsulating or framing the film as a whole, understood as the intervention of the past in the present. In this reading, the film’s reanimation of the past (or passed, dead images) would be twofold. On the one hand, the film, like any other, is the projection of images from the time at which they were captured into the present, and on the other, by analogy and extension, the film imaginatively dives much deeper, in order to reanimate an image of the Late Middle Ages, filtered through the hypotext and charged with transgressive power in the present.

This interpretation might be strengthened if *The Decameron* (1971) is understood as a product of the phenomenon of nineteen sixty-eight and what Pasolini considered to be the

pitfalls of the generation it engendered, the “unfortunate generation” and its unconscious complicity with degenerative (anti-)historical forces;

What had happened with these young people? That they, with the ideas for which they had become spokesmen, and denying themselves any dialectic with the past, were not refilling the present ‘void’ with something new, but encouraging the restoration of the old content which seemed to have been swallowed up. (Siciliano 349)

This “old content,” vague and somewhat difficult to grasp, is certainly not the content of tradition, especially not the literary tradition, but it seems to be “an old and vanishing set of anarchist ideals,” furnished to the proletariat by the petit bourgeoisie, ideals which involve a nihilistic, “blind and raging rejection [of the past],” and ideals upon which “it was easy to graft the spiral of terrorism” (ibid. 350). It is crucial to recognize that, in Pasolini’s view, this blind and unqualified negation of “tradition” *tout court* is isomorphic (or insidiously complicit) with the homologizing forces of neocapitalist and neofascist consumerism. This is why the unfortunate generation’s struggle backfires;

it was what tried to cast discredit on history—its own;

it was what wanted to sweep away the past—its own;

O unfortunate generation, and you obeyed by disobeying! (Siciliano citing Pasolini 351)

Identifying this unfortunate and paradoxical complicity, that they “obeyed by disobeying,”

Pasolini predicts they’ll come to naught;

O unfortunate generation

you’ll weep, but lifeless tears

because you may not even be able to go back

to what, not having had it, you haven’t even lost ... (ibid.)

Accordingly, *The Decameron* (1971), or even the entire *Trilogia della vita* and the force motivating its “return to origins,” might be viewed as a regenerative and therapeutic intervention that encourages the “unfortunate generation” to engage in a “dialectic with the past” (Siciliano 349), in order to fill the void, since “the break in historical and cultural continuity had generated monsters” ... and “nihilism” ... “a blind and raging rejection within which the Italian middle class seemed to have burned itself out” (ibid. 350). This interpretation of the return to origins would thus be a variation or revision of Rumble’s cinema of engagement towards critical collectivity mentioned above, reorienting the direction of engagement from the future towards the past.

However, some of Pasolini’s comments about spectatorship in an essay he wrote for the journal *Nuovi Argomenti* in 1970, called “The Unpopular Cinema,” render this interpretation of therapeutic engagement problematic. Therein he claims that

one cannot speak of “liberation” of the spectator either in a sociological sense (freedom from mass consumption), or in a political sense (freedom from wrong ideas), or in a pedagogical sense (freedom from ignorance). In fact, in reality one can’t even speak of “liberation,” because the REAL spectator is already Free. (*Heretical Empiricism* 269)

This is because, in this essay at any rate, the spectator is “merely another author,” and not “in a subordinate position with respect to the author” (ibid.). Unlike the sociologist to whom “a mass” is subordinated, the politician to whom “a citizen to be lectured” is subordinated, or a pedagogue to whom “a child to be educated” is subordinated, the author is democratically equal to the spectator, another author. But “the overwhelming majority” are not “real” and free spectators in this sense. It serves to clarify how Pasolini defines freedom and the author-spectator’s relationship to it here; freedom “doesn’t mean any more than freedom to choose

death” (ibid. 267). Freedom is scandalous because “to live is a duty” (ibid.). Accordingly, freedom scandalizes Catholics, for whom “life is sacred,” Communists, who “must live to fulfill [their] duty to society,” and it even scandalizes Nature, which imbues all with the “instinct of self-preservation” (ibid.). It’s worth noting in passing that Pasolini’s spin on the death drive here (which seems obvious, although he does not cite Freud) is neither conceived as having its basis in nature, the possibility of which Freud famously entertained in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” nor is this “freedom to choose death” associated even tangentially to homosexuality by Pasolini; binding the antireproductive death drive to Pasolini as queer auteur is perhaps the basis of Humphrey’s *Archaic Modernism*. However, in “The Unpopular Cinema,” Pasolini cites Jean-Luc Godard, avowed heterosexual, and Jean-Marie Straub as exemplars of the cinematic freedom that characterizes the unpopular cinema.

The author-spectator who embodies this form of freedom is absolutely opposed to conformism; his “stylistic invention” is both an “infraction of the code” and “an infraction of self-preservation, and therefore it is the exhibition of an autolesionistic act: through which something tragic and unknown is chosen in the place of something quotidian and known (life)” (ibid. 268). Pasolini then divides spectators into two categories, the few and the many;

category A enjoyed the sadomasochistic freedom of filmmakers, almost participating in the orgy of transgressions, while category B (the overwhelming majority) was scandalized, withheld itself, laughed, screamed, in short, covered the authors with the shame that they were explicitly demanding (self-punishment for the transgression against linguistic fraternity). (ibid. 270)

Therefore, if the reception of the *Trilogia* is to be read in these terms, there can be no “engagement” or “activation” of spectators who were not already free enough to participate “in

ENJOYING THE FREEDOM OF OTHERS,” i.e. the author-spectator’s freedom to mutilate himself (Pasolini’s capitalization, *ibid.* 269).

The practice of performative autolesion in a decadent culture resonates with Foucault’s observations about the origins of “the ascetic ideal,” in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History;”

there are also times when force contends against itself, and not only in the intoxication of an abundance, which allows it to divide itself, but at the moment when it weakens. Force reacts against its growing lassitude and gains strength; it imposes limits, inflicts torments and mortifications; it masks these actions as a higher morality and, in exchange, regains its strength. In this manner the ascetic ideal was born... (Foucault 84)

Is Pasolini’s belief that, through his martyrial practice of public humiliation and autolesion, he touches the evanescent “Real” not merely a mystification of an expression of a will to power, an ambition to “strive for the sun and the light” of relevance masked by moral posturing? If Pasolini were radically committed to choosing death, in transgression of nature’s will of self-preservation, the obvious conclusion would be mere suicide. Whence such emphasis on spectacle and the public performance of martyrdom? In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche says that “in the concept of the ‘selfless,’ the ‘self-denier,’ the distinctive sign of decadence, feeling attracted by what is harmful, being unable to find any longer what profits one, self-destruction is turned into the sign of value itself, into ‘duty,’ into ‘holiness,’ into what is ‘divine’ in man” (Nietzsche 790). Thoroughly fleshing out an argument that Pasolini is merely a representative of decadent ascetic and self-destructive values is beyond the scope of this project, but is surely worthy of consideration.

It is then clear, if this attitude towards spectatorship is accepted, that Rumble’s participatory interpretation, in *Allegories of Contamination*, of Pasolini’s ‘cinema of poetry’ in

the *Trilogia* as “resucitat[ing] the collective dimension of storytelling” and “return[ing] the storytelling function to the people” (Rumble 132) would be refuted. Pasolini claims that the overwhelming majority, since it withholds itself, only serves the function of fulfilling the author's demand of shame for his transgression against the norm. Accordingly, the “engagement” of Pasolini’s cinema would be free of any instrumentalization, political or otherwise; it is not intended to awake class consciousness, but only has the power to 1) *engage* the already free and “sympathetic” (in the etymological sense of “suffering together”) spectator and 2) *provoke* the mass of conformists, immune to sympathy, who withhold themselves.

It might be noted that, if this attitude is accepted as applicable to the reception of Pasolini’s *Trilogia*, certain statements in Gian Maria Annovi’s more recent and highly praised study, *Performing Authorship*, would also be problematized. Therein he argues that

with the Trilogy, Pasolini uses his own authorial performance to demystify not only the sedimented notion of the author but also his own image as an obscure intellectual and to establish with his new popular audience an apparently egalitarian relationship. In short, he wants to create a new form of popular cinema opposed to the false democracy of mass communication. (Annovi 139)

It might be recalled that “The Unpopular Cinema” was written one year prior to the release of *The Decameron*, so it is not unreasonable to consider the attitudes expressed therein as particularly applicable to its interpretation. It is true that, as mentioned above, Pasolini does consider the relationship between himself and the “*true*,” already liberated spectator to be egalitarian, but this does not mean that Pasolini viewed his relationship with the *populus*, the common mass of spectators, in egalitarian terms.

Then, read through the lens of “The Unpopular Cinema,” Giotto’s pupil’s void would

represent the liminal space between transgression and the norm, the “firing line,” “the instant of combat (that is, of invention, [where one enforces their] freedom to die in the teeth of self-preservation),” ... “the instant when one is face to face with the rule to be broken” (*Heretical Empiricism* 274). It is a paradoxical space, both destructive and creative. And it is in this space alone that one can

touch the revelation of truth, of the totality, or in short, of something concrete. Once the transgression has taken place—which is achieved through a new invention—that is, in a new constituted reality—the truth, or the totality, or that Something concrete, disappears because it cannot be lived or stabilized in any way. (ibid.)

It is therefore necessary to maintain, ideally, “permanent invention,” “continual struggle,” or perpetual transgression, in order to stay in touch with “Reality,” since it seems that Pasolini, in “The Unpopular Cinema,” is assuming the perspective of one already alienated from the Real, a contemporary, unlike his account of the savage above, whose purely “pragmatic” life is free of illusions and perfectly integrated within the “monologue” of reality with itself. The savage can remain in touch with the real without transgression, without violating nature’s mandate of self-preservation, which he pragmatically (if not instinctively) obeys, so it follows that he is neither free (to choose death, transgressing nature) nor alienated.

A three staged metahistorical schema would then appear, if the alienation of the peasant, mentioned above, is taken as the intermediary stage between the savage’s state of nature and the state of alienation experienced by Pasolini under neocapitalist consumerism. This schema is not chronologically absolute, but geographically relative, since, for example, Northern Italy had entered the third stage of alienation before the South. This is, of course, why Pasolini filmed *The Decameron* in Naples, in dialect and with a cast of almost exclusively non-professional

locals; he found that they still embodied the “ancient” peasant mentality with access to a more authentic and direct relationship with reality through their bodies than the northerners degenerated by consumerism. There is, then, an analogical, transtemporal unity between the Neapolitan peasant and the Late Medieval peasant of Boccaccio’s tales. The same applies to the “Third World” peoples represented in *Edipo Re*, *Medea*, and *Arabian Nights*, films beyond the scope of this study and in which sometimes both the archaic (or savage) and the peasant stages are represented. For example, *Medea*, in part, seems to be about Medea’s tragic experience of alienation from the unitary archaic stage, through her fall into the second stage, and an examination of *Edipo Re* would reveal the presence of all three stages.

This study’s second chapter, however, will be most interested in interpreting *The Canterbury Tales* (1972) as an expression of nostalgia for the “reality of the body” (Annovi 126) as the site of transgression, during the peasant stage of alienation, when sexuality’s “joyous nature was a compensation—as in fact it once was—for a repression—a phenomenon that was then about to disappear forever” (Rumble 50), as opposed to the “present which, being too permissive, makes sex sad and obsessive because it is compulsory and graceless” (Blandeau 90). This “false” permissiveness will be treated more thoroughly in this study’s first chapter, as a means of problematizing Humphrey’s *Archaic Modernism*. And, in the second chapter, a survey of Pasolini’s deliberate selection of tales from Chaucer will reveal his interest in emphasizing the joys of sinful transgression against the repression of duties or social obligations, since Pasolini excludes all of Chaucer’s virtuous tales told by virtuous pilgrims, like those praising and demonstrating patience, constancy, holiness, innocence, etc. He also excludes the didactic treatises (“The Tale of Melibee” and “The Parson’s Tale”), emphasizing instead corruption, impatience, greed, lust, etc. This seems to be because he is most interested in

demonstrating the freedom to transgress, encapsulated in the terminal rapture in Hell towards the film's conclusion. Indeed, it seems that a major source of the adaptation's provocative power, aside from, but related to, its obvious and unapologetic sexual explicitness, inheres in its denial of the applicability of the "repressive hypothesis" to the Late Middle Ages, and its inversion of the commonplace assumption that the peasantry (or the proto-bourgeoisie, depending on how the spectator identifies the film's characters's class status) were merely servile instruments of feudal-christian ideologies and institutions. In fact, over and again the film shows us characters instrumentalizing feudal institutions and their ideologies to serve their personal ends. As will be shown, the film seems only to champion instrumentality in the service of pleasure, never as the performance of social obligation. The institutions are all shown as instruments in the hands of the people using them for their own (criminal, petty, innocent, etc.) ends; they serve the bodily desires of the people, bodies which Pasolini thought were the last vestiges of the old world uncorrupted. And the terminal image of *The Canterbury Tales*, the shot of Chaucer, played by Pasolini, inscribing the final words of the poem (*qui finiscono i Racconti di Canterbury raccontati per il solo piacere di raccontare / amen* ("here end *The Canterbury Tales* told only for the pleasure of telling / amen"), would seem to confirm the film's uncompromising rejection of any interpretation or reception that instrumentalizes the text for any end beyond pleasure.

Chapter I: Queer Inscription(s)?

Appealing to the poet-filmmaker-theorist's intention, Daniel Humphrey, in his recent (2020), bleak study *Archaic Modernism*, contradicts the "commonplace understanding" of "many people," who might think that the fragmentary and incomplete state of much of Pier Paolo Pasolini's cinematic oeuvre constitutes an aesthetic failure; he argues, instead, that by "ignoring the futurity inherent in a coherent, marketable body of work resulting from a well-ordered career, one that is meant to *stand the test of time*, Pasolini simply *refused to succeed*" (his italics, Humphrey 119). Apparently, this refusal ought to be traced to two factors: Pasolini's heretical, post World War II Marxism on the one hand, which rejects futurity, after recognizing that the "the origins of the myth of the future can be traced to the development of modernity and modern capitalism," and his "martyr complex" on the other, a "single impulse" described as a fusion between his death drive and his sexuality (ibid.). Put it all together, and we have the instrument *par excellence* for stopping reproduction (of neocapitalism): the "sodomitical subject," the "buggered prophet" who, embodying and speaking death, announces "the end of days" (ibid.).

For Humphrey, this pessimistic characterization of Pasolini and his work also serves to refute criticisms of the Eurocentricity of his gaze, "seen as objectifying the young, the lower classes, and the people of the Third World" (ibid. 120). To give voice to the "commonplace" opinions of some of these critics, the "many people," one might consider some of the more ill-disposed user reviews, on the film oriented social media platform Letterboxd, of *Notes Towards an African Orestes* (1970), which concerns Pasolini's survey of sites in Africa for his planned adaptation of the *Oresteia*: Troy Schulz notes his "wrongheaded European mindset towards the African continent that, unfortunately, is still extremely relevant" in 2022; Amber Atkins's one

star review claims that “Pasolini himself showcases an inability to grapple with issues concerning race, betrayed by his own problematic beliefs, assumptions, and hostility towards being corrected,” and that he “romanticizes a pre-colonized view of Africa almost to the point of mysticism and childish ignorance...;” KnotAndVortex calls it “an awkward, somewhat patronizing historical document that’s not without its moments;” rae claims that the “only redeemable part of this are the students who tell this condescending idiot off;” danshi’s two word, three point five star review: “condescending motherfucker,” which is enriched when Pasolini’s obsession with the Oedipus myth is considered. Yet, not all reviews are morally censuring; audrey snow matzke, for example, notes that “doing gay sex-tourism in North Africa and then waxing philosophical about the revolutionary potential of the third world is such a certified Pasolini moment oh my god.”

However, for Humphrey the “self/other distinctions that are presupposed in such criticisms *and that serve to reinforce murderous forms of relationality* collapse through the filmmaker’s processes of queer *écriture*” (his emphasis, Humphrey 120). And “more importantly,” Humphrey claims that

any ‘positive value’ that might have come out of the encounter between the Italian filmmaker and his subaltern subjects is forestalled. Even the finished film about the unmade film fully accounting for that impasse just falls between the cracks. It has no official English language title (it has variously been marketed in English as *Notes for an African Orestes*, *Notes towards an African Orestes*, *Notes for an African Oresteia*, etc.) and no clear year of release. (ibid.)

Here, a rather strange combination of arguments to refute Pasolini’s reputed Eurocentricity is employed, a vague blend of diegetic interpretation and the historical distribution of the work.

On the one hand, Pasolini “succeeded” enough to have commonplace opinions held about him by many people, opinions which are refuted with reference to his process of queer filmmaking; on the other, and apparently more importantly, his work commercially failed and has not, to this day, found the distribution necessary to generate “positive value” from its encounter with “subaltern subjects.” Is this to assume that the encounter between the filmmaker, his work, and such subjects would have generated positive value, even though, for Humphrey, the filmmaker and his work are opposed to “cultural and personal difference” (ibid.)? It might be argued that such confusion is the inevitable product of congealing, as in reification, the queer inscriber (author), his inscriptions (his work), and his own inscribed body into an ahistorical amalgam of absolute negation (the sodomitical subject). This confusing conflation will be returned to below.

Queer *écriture*, which Humphrey draws from Lee Edelman’s marriage of queer theory to Derrida’s critique of *phonocentrism* (“his term for the West’s privileging of speech over the written word”), is the identification of “the homosexual body as a text” (ibid. 14). This identity can be explicated by comparing the “violent hierarchies” of heteronormativity and phonocentrism; the latter privileges the immediate presence of oral communication over the spatial and temporal distance imposed by writing, and the former privileges the reproductive nature of heterosexuality, against the superfluousness and unproductivity of homosexuality. Writing and gay male sexuality, both excessive and negative elements in the binary sign system, “must be ignored, repressed, or violently disavowed in order to represent representation itself as natural and unmediated” (Humphrey 13, citing Edelman). In turn, homosexual desire, “inherently unconsummable,” is antisocial and antirelational violence, since “same sex encounters are ‘not an exchange of intensities between individuals but rather a condition of

broken negotiations with the world” (Humphrey 16, citing Bersani and Dutoit). By negating the pseudo-naturalistic ideology of hetero-relationality, the negative/antirelational school of queer theory champions “the foundational negativity of human life (the way that life, inherently, ‘doesn’t work’)” (ibid. 15). This “withdrawal from relationality itself” ... “represents a radical eschewal not just of the progressive ideals of cultural inclusivity and liberal tolerance but of the value, writ large, of the multitude of heterogeneous associations that make up cooperative societies—in short, sociality itself” (ibid. 16).

To a degree, this antirelational, queer negativity resembles Pasolini’s conception of freedom and invention, as the freedom to choose death and transgress nature’s law of self-preservation, discussed above, but Pasolini’s central ambition of staying in touch with “the Real” is conspicuously absent; for Humphrey, negation is emphasized at the expense of invention. And, as noted above, queerness and transgression/negation are not essentially bound in Pasolinian cinema theory, as in the case of the antirelational school. This is why Humphrey’s analysis “concerns itself with Pasolini’s queer theory *avant la lettre*—this is to say, not just queer theory before queer theory but queer theory before it was written in words” (ibid. 18). On the other hand, the relationship between Pasolini’s queerness and his work has also been read by many as utopian. If the invention/creativity of queer transgression is emphasized at the expense of negation, one approaches Alberto Moravia’s reading of “the relation between the nostalgia of the genuine peasant and homosexuality” (Siciliano 342) in the *Arabian Nights* (1974), the third and final film of the *Trilogia della vita*. He argues that “the relation consists in a certain idea of youth. Peasant civilization has been the youth of yesterday’s world—homosexuality is the youth of today’s world. Thus, in a surprising way, peasant civilization and homosexuality become identified” (ibid. 343). Although this identity between homosexuality,

youth, and peasant civilization might strike one as naive, simplistic, and too abstract, it is not any more complex or concrete than Humphrey's metaphorical combination of the negativity of Pasolini's gay male sexuality with Derridean inscription. Nevertheless, by assuming Moravia's idea of queerness/youth, Pasolini's "return to origins" is read as a return to gather, from the "innocent and uncontaminated landscape" of the past, the catalyzing "idea of youth, of physical vitality that develops outside the norm" (ibid. 342).

In *Allegories of Contamination*, Patrick Rumble's reading of the relationship between Pasolini's homosexuality and the meaning of his work is similarly utopian, but extends beyond an identification with the peasantry or a nostalgia for pre-modern and pre-bourgeois societies, towards a more all-encompassing, collective alterity, "a community of the equally powerless" (Rumble 143). Rumble also emphasizes the creativity of alterity over its negativity, but instead of viewing transgression as a means for the individual to approach and touch the real, as does Pasolini in "The Unpopular Cinema," he views it as "a return to engagement in the production of a critical collectivity" (ibid.). That is, rather than breaking or transgressing the norm to touch the real, to make contact the ur-code already always there beneath a cloud of ideology, so to speak, Rumble interprets Pasolini's work as transgressing the norm in order to gesture towards a utopian, collective dream of birthing a new, better norm altogether, by returning the storytelling function to the people. This interpretation hinges on Rumble's belief that Pasolini did not believe in any such ur-code, that his cinema practices deconstruction, which implies the mutual arbitrariness of all codes, but, as demonstrated above, a strong case can be made, drawing from Pasolini's own theory of cinema, that he did indeed believe in a fundamental code of reality, to which he gained access through the cinema of transgression.

For Rumble, Pasolini's style of "contaminated" filmmaking foregrounds what

“commercial filmmakers must exclude: images that foreground their artifice, narrative elements that exceed any definite plot-function, and experimentations in point of view that cause the spectator to ponder the historical and ideological determinants of representation and of vision itself” (ibid. 139). It is, of course, difficult to dispute that Pasolini practiced a style of filmmaking (the “cinema of poetry”) radically opposed to the “cinema of prose” characteristic of popular, commercial filmmakers, but Rumble’s position that Pasolini called the “ideological determinants” ... “of vision itself” into question is controversial. In fact, Pasolini’s semiotics of film was considered heretical and problematic among contemporary theorists and critics precisely because it did not do this; “Emilio Garroni, for one, felt that by postulating a universal, natural cinematic language anchored in reality, Pasolini ignored the way language is conditioned by culture and ideology” (Greene 104), and a similar criticism was made above with reference to Pasolini’s insistence that gestures are archaic, pre-grammatical, and pre-morphological. Pasolini insists that “film is fundamentally oneiric” because, among other things, of the fundamental prevalence of the pregrammatical qualities of objects as symbols of the visual language” (“Cinema of Poetry” 41). In other words, the objects of vision, of brute reality, are not instrumentally coded like the words in dictionary languages; they don’t have a history in the same way; in his perhaps condescending and objectifying perspective, the objects of vision are prehistoric holdouts, like Africans and Neapolitans. Therefore, for the Pasolini of the “Cinema of Poetry” at any rate, the objects of vision itself are safe from ideological determination; the “Real” is uncontaminated by ideology. It is always already there; some are able unconsciously to “be it,” as in the case of the “savage,” when subject/object divisions dissolve in the unmediated wholeness of “Reality,” and the alienated fail to see it because of their degeneracy and conformism.

Even the “cinema of prose” is not any less “real” than that of poetry, since “the fundamentally irrational nature of cinema cannot be eliminated;” all of its “irrational, oneiric, elementary, and barbaric elements” can only be “forced below the level of consciousness,” when cinema suffers “a rather foreseeable and unavoidable rape” at the hands of commercial and popular forces (ibid. 42). Rumble’s study’s insistence that Pasolini’s filmmaking style is “contaminated” because it destabilizes the hegemony of any dominant visual code by being a pastiche of several, as in the incorporation of both pre- and post-perspectival recreations of paintings (including Persian miniatures, and paintings by Bosche, Giotto, Bruegel the Elder, and others), completely misses the mark when it extrapolates an assumption of relativism underlying the “contaminated” style. Time and again, as in his 1971 letter to Umberto Eco, titled “The Code of Codes” in *Heretical Empiricism*, Pasolini claims that all codes of representation derive from the ur-code (Reality) that they represent. Therein, speaking of a “blond boy,” who could be “photographed, painted, or sculpted,” Pasolini claims that “he would never be encodable in any of these systems of signs if he were not first of all decodable in the system of the signs of Reality as Self-revelation or as First Language, through its code, which is the Code of Codes” (*Heretical Empiricism* 282-3). In fact, in light of Pasolini’s theory of cinema, “contamination” is a very misleading term. If anything, Pasolini considered cinema to be a pure medium with a privileged and uncontaminated relationship with the Real vis-à-vis literature. It might be argued in Rumble’s defense that his reading of Pasolini’s style as “contaminated” only emerges from a study of the films of the *Trilogia* and not from Pasolini’s theoretical writings, but this would be to ignore that so much of *Allegories of Contamination* relies on a highly distorted interpretation of Pasolini’s “cinema di poesia.”

Returning to the question of the relationship between Pasolini’s style and his sexuality,

Rumble resists the temptation to “draw this style [of contamination] together under the umbrella-term of a gay aesthetic,” instead opting for Barthes’s term “homosexualities,” in a gesture towards a more generalized and unrecognizable alterity “that is found repressed within all subjects and all communities” (ibid 140). This reading of Pasolini’s homosexuality as an alterity rather than an essential identity is shared by Angelo Restivo in *The Cinema of Economic Miracles*. His reading of *Theorem* suggests that (homo)sexual desire, the bourgeois family’s desire for “the Visitor,” drives them “into positions of radical alterity that renders any connection to the social impossible” (Restivo 91). Restivo points out that their fall into alterity dissolves the possibility of social connection, rather than giving rise to Rumble’s utopian community of the mutually powerless. In this way, in the antisocial consequences that is, Restivo’s position resembles Humphrey’s, although the former does not attribute causal force to the filmmaker’s negative sodomitical subjectivity.

For Robert S.C. Gordon in *Pasolini: Forms of Subjectivity*, Pasolini’s homosexuality is a formative quality of his role as “outsider,” one role among his three primary roles of selfhood, the other two being poet and teacher. Like Rumble, and unlike Humphrey, Gordon observes that Pasolini (if only rhetorically), through his performance of alterity, “reclaims a form of transversal universality through difference” (Gordon 80). Gordon cites a letter Pasolini wrote in 1950, a relatively early piece of evidence of his attitude towards his sexuality;

I have suffered all I could, I have never accepted my sin, I have never come to terms with my nature and I have never even got used to it.

I was born to be calm, balanced and natural; my homosexuality was added on, was outside, had nothing to do with me. I have always seen it beside me like an enemy, I have never felt it within me. (ibid.)

Gordon claims that “psychologically, of course, the roots of all his later impulsive, sweeping identifications with the poor, Jews, Arabs, blacks” ... “every exiled humanity” ... and of his searing inner divisions are here laid bare” (ibid.). The guilt and suffering over his “sin” that he fails to come to terms with prefigures his call for perpetual scandal, permanent transgression, and autolesion. This guilty burden of alterity, however, through the suffering and humiliation it engenders, provides Pasolini with both a privileged access to truth and the real, and the ability to transversally identify with the subaltern of the world.

Still, it ought to be noted that Pasolini did identify as a bourgeois intellectual, and for a time as a Gramscian “organic” intellectual, and in the “Cinema of Poetry” he claimed that the director cannot assume the perspective of one outside of his own class or sociocultural horizon and vocabulary;

The pretextual characters cannot be chosen from outside the cultural limits of the filmmaker; that is, they are analogous to him in culture, language, and psychology—they are exquisite “flowers of the bourgeoisie.” If they should belong to another social world, they are mythicized and assimilated by being categorized as abnormal, neurotic, or hypersensitive, etc. In short, the bourgeoisie, also in film, identifies itself with all of humanity, in an irrational interclassicism. (“Cinema of Poetry” 53)

Pretextual characters are those through whom the perspective of the film is filtered; they determine the frame and imbue the images with significance through their idiosyncrasies. In this locus, when he says “flowers of the bourgeoisie,” Pasolini is specifically referring to the bourgeois protagonists of the films of Godard and Antonioni, the neurotic psyche and unstable gaze of Monica Vitti’s characters in Antonioni’s so-called “Trilogy of Decadence,” for example. The same would extend to the perspectives of the bourgeois family in *Theorem*.

However, through the process of mythicization and assimilation that Pasolini mentions here, one finds a key for interpreting the clear autobiographical coding involved in Pasolini's adaptations of *Edipo Re* and *Medea*. Both Oedipus and Medea are obviously members of social worlds alien to Pasolini's own, but they are also, as tragic characters, sufferers of individuation and alienation from their respective worlds; they are both exiles. Oedipus has an abnormality coded into the etymology of his name: "swollen-foot," and Medea, who, not insignificantly perhaps, is played by Maria Callas, rather than a Turkish extra from Göreme, is excluded by the people of Corinth because she is a fratricide and suspect for her witchcraft. She is also shown as uniquely hypersensitive to the sun, for example, over against the Greek people of Corinth, through the ancestral religion of her Colchian people, from which she draws the power that alienates her. Pasolini is able to employ her as the film's pretextual character, according to his own terms given in the "Cinema of Poetry," because of her tragic and individuating fall into history from the archaic and prehistoric Umwelt of her own people. Her experience can thus be compared to Pasolini's experience of his homosexual alterity as other than himself, unnatural and disturbing of his instinctual calm, a calm reflected by Medea's people's mode of life in natural plenitude. Both experience irremediable falls into the illusion of history, as that described above with reference to the alienation of the savage who "does not need illusions to live" (*Heretical Empiricism* 297).

Pasolini's choice of pretextual characters is particularly interesting in the case of *The Decameron* and *The Canterbury Tales*. In both cases, Pasolini abandons the hypotexts's traditional narrative frames: the former's so-called *cornice*, its *brigata*, which flees the plague in Florence for the countryside, focusing instead on his role as Giotto's pupil as a source of unity, and, in the latter, Pasolini removes the tales from the mouths of the tellers, focusing instead on

his performance of Chaucer himself both as the source of the tales's and the film's metafictional unity. In the case of *The Decameron*, only the second half of the film is framed by Pasolini's self-insert, which begins when Giotto's pupil enters the marketplace and begins "framing" its denizens, by making a square with his fingers held up to his eye; the first half is framed and unified by the scoundrel, Ser Ciappelletto, Franco Citti's character; he plays the devil in *The Canterbury Tales*, and we will return to his schadenfreude at the public execution of a man guilty of sodomy below (use of the term homosexual would be ahistorical in this context, as such a category neither legally nor culturally existed in the 14th century). *The Decameron's* bipartite structure, its thematic implications, and Pasolini's abandonment of the *cornice* are thoroughly investigated in Rumble 1996. His conclusion that Pasolini's abandonment of the *cornice* entails, through its implicit negation of the hypotext's function of perspectival subject formation, the activation of the audience as authors, apart of his overall thesis that the *Trilogy* is an effort to return the storytelling function to the people, however, might be contested. Instead, these pretextual framing characters's perspectives, might be read as the vessels through which the director bridges the gap between his horizon and that of the world of the hypotext, emphasizing the role of the author as mediator between the self and "all of humanity," with which Pasolini would, ideally, like to identify in "irrational" and transhistorical "interclassism" ("Cinema of Poetry" 58). Chaucer and Giotto's pupil are assimilable as pretextual characters because, as artists, they are "categorized as abnormal, neurotic, or hypersensitive" (ibid.); they straddle the margin that divides inside from outside. In the case of *The Canterbury Tales*, Pasolini even accentuates the role of author as origin, by excluding Chaucer's prologues, which frame the individual tales, often offer contextual information indicating the progress of the pilgrims, and further characterize the tales's eponymous tellers. Instead, in Pasolini's

adaptation, the only interludes between the tales are scenes featuring Pasolini as Chaucer, usually alone and quiet, working on the text's composition. By doing this, Pasolini charges the individual tales with more personally involved significance than is the case in Chaucer's text, where Chaucer maintains, with further distance from the tales's content, a degree of plausible deniability, the ability to hide behind the semi-mechanical role of the merely mimetic artist/craftsman. Personally charged interpretations of the tales of Pasolini's adaptation will be taken up below. For now, let it suffice to restate that Pasolini, through his sexuality as alterity (not essential identity), "reclaims a form of transversal universality through difference" (Gordon 80), which, in the adaptations of Greek tragedy, Boccaccio, and Chaucer, is always filtered through an abnormal and assimilable pretextual character. For the sake of honesty, it ought to be noted that such a character seems to be absent from his *Arabian Nights*, from which he excludes Sheherazade, but this will remain a lacuna.

We return to the problematization of Humphrey's antirelational interpretation of Pasolini through a statement by Gordon, in which he observes that Pasolini's "appalled reaction to the new neo-capitalist, homogenous universality is so intense precisely because it corrupts that other universality" (ibid. 81), i.e. the universality achieved through difference just considered for several pages. Pasolini's disgust with bourgeois universality, its false tolerance and sexual permissiveness is well-documented, but its debt to antirelationality less so. He claimed that his motivation for making *The Decameron* (1971) was a reaction against recent radical changes in the conventions of sexual relation in Italy; "today, sex is the satisfaction of a social obligation, not a pleasure against social obligations" (Rumble, translating Pasolini, 49) ... "for me the most sincere thing, during that time, was to make a film about a sexuality whose joyous nature was a compensation—as in fact it once was—for a repression—a phenomenon

that was then about to disappear forever. Soon thereafter tolerance would render sex sad and obsessive” (ibid. 50). Speaking on the inception of his *Trilogia (of life!)*, Pasolini claims that the pre-bourgeois sign-system of sexuality (since he reads the sexual relation as a language, determined by convention and subject to change) *worked* better. It is crucial to recognize that, in Pasolini’s view, the neocapitalist valuation of sexuality as a given and sanctioned social obligation does not inhere in its procreative aspect; rather, it is “sad and obsessive” because the burden of obligation for the sexually liberated subject manifests neurotically, as an anxiety that he is not expressing his freedom fully, to which the consumerist obligation to enjoy, and the consumer’s anxiety of not enjoying well enough, is isomorphic. Since procreative utility is clearly not the mandate in a sexually “liberated” neocapitalist society, in its sexual economy sodomy isn’t more superfluous than fertilization.

With this in mind, the purchase of Humphrey’s conception of Pasolini’s life-work as queer *écriture* that challenges the “heteronormative bases that undergird neocapitalist ideology,” especially its “heteroreproducibility,” is called into question (Humphrey 13). Indeed, it appears that queer *écriture* is the negation of *(re)producerism*, *not consumerism*, whose logic manifestly has no regard for nature’s longevity; think not only of pollution and the climate catastrophe(s), but also of the decline of birthrates that seem inevitably to follow the spread of consumerism. Pasolini’s controversial suspicion of contraception and abortion will be returned to below. Pasolini was vocal about consumerism’s degenerating effects. After begging pardon, one might call it *consumption* in a physio-psychopathological sense; the Italian people “have become” ... “a degenerate, ridiculous, monstrous, criminal people. You have only to go out in the street to realize this” ... “I have therefore seen” ... “the forced behavior of consumerist power re-create and deform the consciousness of the Italian people to the point of irreversible

degradation” (Siciliano 379).

Pasolini’s emphasis on “forced behavior” and “obligation” under consumerism evokes a mutual exclusivity between freedom and necessity, and the subject upon whom “freedom” is imposed necessarily enters an aporetic neurosis; “neurosis is the fearful apprehension of an ultimate impossible” (Barthes 5, quoting Bataille). And this neurosis does not lead to the radical freedom characteristic of the state of Barthesian readerly bliss; rather, it more closely resembles Lacan’s definition of neurosis in “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function:” “the inertia characteristic of the *I* formations” (Lacan 80). This abstract, given (by the state), and imposed freedom-neurosis resembles Lacan’s formulation more than Barthes’s precisely in its static abstractness; Barthes’s bliss is necessarily dynamic. It emerges through the reader’s experience and activation of the text of bliss’s deconstructive power, a practice which necessarily dissolves the inert illusions of “*I* formations,” for example that of “autonomy” or the “self-sufficiency of consciousness” (ibid.). It is against this static neurosis of abstract and imposed freedom, which makes “sex sad and obsessive because it is compulsory and graceless” (Blandeau 90), that Pasolini deploys his final message of *The Canterbury Tales*, his “told only for the pleasure of telling.” Both here and in “The Unpopular Cinema,” considered above, Pasolini conceives of freedom as necessarily in motion, as a state achieved through permanent transgression and invention, rather than an abstract concept that can be possessed, since freedom is the expression of a choice (to choose death), through which one can “touch the revelation of truth, of the totality, or in short, of something concrete,” which soon disappears because “it cannot be lived or stabilized in any way” (*Heretical Empiricism* 274). It is for this reason, Pasolini argues, that Power, any Power, is evil, whether it preserves institutions or whether it founds new ones. If a Power which is “less worse” than others is conceivable, this could only be a

Power that, in preserving or reconstituting the norm, took into account the appearances or possible reappearances of Reality. (ibid.)

Power, in this case of imposed abstract “freedom” (a contradiction), tends to preclude the ability of the subject to attend to the appearance of reality. This is why Pasolini’s conception of freedom as transgression and anti-instrumentalized pleasure is radically opposed not only to the power of neocapitalist, progressive freedom, but also to the power of socialist teleological freedom, freedom projected into the future that necessitates the sacrifice of the present. Both project and anticipate a future when present contradictions will be resolved, in order to maintain those same contradictions in the present. Permissive sexuality as a burdensome social obligation is a mandate that the subject must manifest in a struggle towards realizing such a projected future; it is not the demand “be fruitful and multiply,” but the obligation to use one’s body as an instrument for social progress. Pasolini’s “*only* for the pleasure of telling” implies a negation of any form of instrumentalization, which precludes both pleasure and freedom. It is for this reason that, contrary to the interpretations of both Rumble and Humphrey, these terminal words are not loaded with any attitude towards the future. Like Giotto’s pupil’s void triptych division, they do not entail a pessimistic, prophetic, or apocalyptic negation of the future, as Humphrey’s antirelational queer theory would have it. Nor do they entail Rumble’s positive and utopian futurity that prophetically anticipates a critical collectivity of the equally powerless. Both of these interpretations would instrumentalize the text, when, in fact, the only end achieved is in the present, where “Reality” appears.

If neocapitalist consumerism does not have its ideological basis in the naturalization of heteroreproducibility, but is understood as a pathological *consumption*, then the subversive edge of Humphrey/Edelman’s queer *écriture* vanishes. Given hindsight “from a moment in history

that seems even more apocalyptic than Pasolini's own" (Humphrey 121), the role of the "sodomitical subject," who embodies pure negation and announces "the end of days," would appear completely gratuitous, or at least in lockstep with the tendency of the *consumptive* autoimmune disorder. Still, since Pasolini's death, consumable and subjectively appropriable images, co-opted by the mass-media and charged with optimistic futurity, "promoting progressive ideals of cultural inclusivity and liberal tolerance" (ibid. 16) have proliferated, in spite of or, perhaps, in concealment of the rotten core of consumerism. The vantage of the negative/antirelational school of queer theory ideologically rejects these images and ideals at the point of their valuation of sociality and cooperation; but if the proliferation of these ideals, more often than not, were cynical, and not attributable to an authentic valuation of relationality, would this vantage be able to observe the distinction? Making such a distinction is a precondition for tracing the forces at play beneath the masks of ideological posturing in a system of social relations. For example, this is the basis of Pasolini's condemnation of a "false tolerance" ... "one of the major causes of the degeneration of masses of young people" (Siciliano 381), and his nostalgia for pre-consumerist "real tolerance;" "along with its poverty, the Italian people does not even care to remember its 'real' tolerance" (ibid. 375). Additionally, by negating relationality and "the cult of difference" (ibid. 120), the antirelational school (as represented by Humphrey), in its assumption of absolute negativity, not only blinds itself to the hypocrisy of liberal ideology, but also precludes self-reflexivity and thereby prevents the consideration of the possibility that some will to power might be at work through its own articulation of negativity, its "death drive," its embodying and speaking death.

Nevertheless, it is beyond the ambition of this project to continue grappling philosophically with the antirelationist school of queer theory *tout court*, which would

hypothetically lead to identifying it as a recent manifestation of the ascetic ideal, as “life *against* life,” which is, “physiologically considered and not merely psychologically, a simple absurdity” (Nietzsche 556). Perhaps the simple affirmation of life is the only means to refute its absolute negation. The fog emitted by the aforementioned antirelationist assumption that “life, inherently, ‘doesn’t work’” (Humphrey 15) confuses and makes “inaccessible the vicissitudes of history” (Foucault 80), as its negation of relationality and difference precludes an “affirmation of knowledge as perspective” (ibid. 90). The power of negation performed by the antirelational subject is oversimplified to the point of idealization; an act is a complex and unique expression of innumerable forces at work through an “individual.” Reducing this complexity to pure negation impoverishes the observer’s ability to account for anything but this negation itself, incoherently filling the roles of both cause and effect simultaneously.

To end the apophasis, what is proper here has been to measure the interpretive purchase of queer *écriture* when applied to the life-work of Pasolini, registering its apparent erasure of the vicissitudes and complexities of Pasolini’s life-work. To continue problematizing the applicability of the antirelational approach to Pasolini, one might note its complete lack of interpretive power for accounting for Pasolini’s conservative attitude towards abortion, the fact that he was “pro-life;” “I am traumatized by the legalization of abortion, because like many I consider it a legalization of homicide. In dreams and everyday behavior—something common to all men—I live my prenatal life, my happy immersion in the maternal fluids, and I know that there I existed...” (Siciliano 374). There appears to be a fusion here between the belief in the sacredness of life itself, which alone contradicts the antisociality of Humphrey’s position, and Pasolini’s longing for the pre-oedipal lost plenitude of the womb, which is, of course, part and parcel of his broader conception of alienation as the fall into history, or the fall into illusion,

from the “Real,” in which the savage lives harmoniously. He, perhaps predictably, also ties the legalization of abortion to the power of consumerism, the “new fascism;”

I know that the majority is, potentially, all for the legalization of abortion. Legalized abortion is in fact—no doubt about it—an enormous convenience for the majority. Especially because it would make coitus—heterosexual coupling—easier, and there would practically no longer be any obstacles to it. But by whom has this freedom of coitus of the “couple” as conceived by the majority—this wonderful permissiveness on its behalf—been tacitly desired, tacitly promulgated, and tacitly made to become part, in a now irreversible way, of people’s habits? By the powers of consumption, by the new fascism... (ibid.)

Pasolini, identifying as a humanist, implies that humanism and consumerism are opposites, identifying humanism with the “Italian Communist Party,” “a clean country in a dirty country, an honest country in a dishonest one, an intelligent country in an idiotic one, a cultured country in an ignorant one, a humanistic country in a consumerist one” (ibid. 379). He laments not only the degeneration of the body, but also that of sociality brought about by consumerism, and, in the case of abortion, its homicidal selfishness that subordinates the sacredness of life to the pleasure of consumption. As is often the case, Pasolini’s “prophetic” mode of condemning the degeneration and corruption of “the majority” at the hands of the foul fiend in the form of consumerist neo-fascism, is not concerned with projecting or predicting an apocalyptic future, but is, rather, focused on what has happened or what is happening to the people, and how this “happening” is worse than a prior state. We do not find Pasolini “embodying and speaking death, announc[ing] “the end of days” (Humphrey 119).

The scope of Pasolini’s anthropological concern not only extends beyond the limits of

(homo)sexuality, towards the fate of the culturally shared, independent of sexual orientation, sexual sign-system, but also beyond, into conceptions of “the sacredness of the human being attached to the soil” (Siciliano 265). Another complexity which Humphrey’s approach would likely struggle to account for is Pasolini’s populist fetishization of the Third World, from “the Italian southern subproletariat” to “the subproletariats of India and Africa” ... “huge reservoirs of human energy” (ibid. 266). Siciliano cites Pasolini, claiming that “Negritude ... will be the way,” at a moment when

neocapitalism tends either to put the working-class elites to sleep (in a state of resignation that is by no means the evangelical one!) or else to make them become rigid in hard-line positions... it is obvious that the problem of the—immense—southern subproletariat is placed in a new light: a ripe and virgin mass, ready to be called to its historical function (ibid.)

Although Humphrey argues that “the criticism about Pasolini’s Eurocentric gaze, seen as objectifying the young, the lower classes, and the people of the Third World” falls apart, since any “positive value” that might have come out of the encounter between the Italian filmmaker and his subaltern subjects is forestalled” (Humphrey 120), this seems too lightly to wave away the fact that Pasolini objectifies and generalizes all otherness into a homogeneous, “ripe and virgin” mass, whose primary significance (namely, their potential to rock the boat of European politics) to him is determined by his Eurocentric perspective. Humphrey writes this off through his interpretations of the endings of *Edipo Re* and *Medea*, as failed encounters “between the filmmaker and his subaltern subjects,” and, as mentioned above, through his insistence that his *Notes Towards an African Orestes* was a commercial failure, but the productivity of these “encounters,” measured in terms of “positive value,” is a variable completely independent of his

habitual practice of objectifying otherness, which necessarily occurs prior to the outcomes of the films, whether commercial or otherwise.

Chapter II: *The Canterbury Tales* and the Pleasure of Telling

The second tale of *The Canterbury Tales* (1972), which, without its own prologue, follows Pasolini's loose, rapid, and chaotic adaptation of Chaucer's *General Prologue*, and his rather faithful and straightforward adaptation of "The Merchant's Tale," is only immediately recognizable as "The Friar's Tale" to those deeply familiar with the hypotext, since Pasolini dilates Chaucer's (or the friar's, since, in Chaucer, "The Friar's Tale" is told by a biased friar about a reprobate summoner) brief description of the profession of the summoner into a complex visual demonstration of the summoner's profession in action, which entails the clandestine movement of information, from one of the summoner's spies up to the archdeacon himself. Then, adding purely original material, Pasolini shows the consequence of the summoner's work in the form of a public burning of a sodomite, before he finally picks up the recognizable central narrative of the hypotext (or hypotale).

Since "The Friar's Tale" does not traditionally follow "The Merchant's Tale," in order to identify it within the first thirty seconds or so of the adaptation, the viewer would need to recall a detail about the summoner from the beginning of the hypotextual tale, which Pasolini dilates into a roughly seven minute long sequence;

A slyer boye nas noon in Ingelond,
For subtilly he hadde his espialle
That taughte hym wher that hym myghte availle.
He koulde spare of lecchours oon or two
To techen hym to foure and twenty mo. (III, 1322-26)

The spectator would need to recall that the summoner secretly had an "espialle" (a network of spies, themselves lecherous), which is not given a role in the main plot of the hypotale that

follows the mere seventy or so lines of introductory description, in order to register what Pasolini's adaptation might be up to. Although it is not exactly a scholarly source, even the plot summary of the episode on Wikipedia is erroneous. It observes that the episode begins when "a vendor witnesses a summoner who is spying on two different men committing sodomy," when, in fact, the tale begins when a vendor, who the viewer does not yet know to be a vendor, and who later claims that he is the Devil, witnesses an informant working for the summoner, one in his "espialle," spying on two pairs of sodomites.

The hypotale's recognizability in the adaptation is also obscured because the order of the characters' appearances is exactly reversed, substituting a bottom-up order for the hypotale's top-down hierarchical structure. The first character encountered in the adaptation (revealed to be the Devil after the public execution, who the viewer first encounters as a snoop, then in the disguise of a griddle cake vendor) is the last encountered in the hypotale, which begins with the archdeacon, "a man of heigh degree," followed by the summoner, his various informants, etc. In this manner, the entire, highly voyeuristic adapted tale is framed through the perspective of the Devil. Much emphasis is placed on his spying gaze throughout the tale, as opposed to the hypotale, which is told in the voice of the friar, who is motivated by his hostility towards the actual summoner, an auditor present among the pilgrims, to tell a comically distorted tale that categorically slanders all summoners, through the example of one exceptionally diabolical summoner. Accordingly, through the filter of his frame, Chaucer distances himself far more from the discourse of "The Friar's Tale" (and all of the tales, really, but some more than others) than does Pasolini from his adaptation, although Chaucer still makes it metafictionally obvious to the reader that both the friar and the summoner, both the pilgrims and their "told" caricatures, are thoroughly corrupt, petty, and biased.

While Chaucer and his readers are distanced from the tale itself by several degrees of mediation and the obvious recognizability of the teller's distorted perspective, seemingly in order to gather didactic value from the safe and relatively pure subject position of the disinterested reader, in a triumph over and against the comic and sinful pettiness of the tellers, Pasolini instead binds the camera gaze to that of the Devil, which registers nothing but undistorted objectivity. Additionally, for those familiar with Pasolini's *Decameron*, his gaze is even more intimate, since the snoop-vendor-Devil is recognized as Franco Citti, who formerly played Ser Ciappelletto, a homosexually coded, diabolic scoundrel, through whom the first half of the *Decameron* was framed. There are many other intertextual references between the two films, such as "the Neapolitan song sung by the indulgence seller during the opening credits of *The Canterbury Tales*," which "reprises a melody that was used in the *Decameron*" (Annovi 137), and much more obvious is the interlude in which Pasolini as Chaucer is shown reading and laughing at a copy of Boccaccio, which he then carefully hides under a large pile of books on the floor of his study.

Following such observations, Annovi argues that "from these two films it emerges that he indeed conceived of the authorial performance as a guarantor of the coherence not only of the individual films, but of his entire transmedia and transdisciplinary work" (Annovi 137). While the Chaucerian hypotext is unified through its frame of pilgrims and their many voices, Pasolini's adaptation is unified by the presence of the body of Pasolini himself. This observation would, of course, problematize Rumble's oft-mentioned argument about Pasolini's *Trilogia* returning the function of storytelling to the people. It might be added that Pasolini, by wearing intertextuality on his sleeve, is also expressing a will to power that overcomes the hypotexts and their authors through his practice of adaptation. In the scene of Pasolini-Chaucer

reading then concealing the text of Boccaccio, through his complex performance of authorship, Pasolini not only gestures toward a unity between the present episode of the *Trilogia* and the first, but he also becomes *and* overcomes Chaucer, by revealing a fact, his indebtedness to Boccaccio, which is anxiously repressed by Chaucer in the hypotext. In this manner, Pasolini's adaptation employs a deep fidelity against the hypotext, perhaps in order to overcome it.

Speaking on adaptation in the evolutionary and psychophysiological sense, Nietzsche makes a sharp distinction between the original "meanings" and "purposes" of things and the availability of uses to which they can be later put, which is equally fruitful when applied to literary and filmic adaptation; "all subduing and becoming master involves a fresh interpretation, an adaptation through which any previous 'meaning' and 'purpose' are necessarily obscured or even obliterated" (Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* 513). This view of adaptation, of course, problematizes Humphrey's thesis in *Archaic Modernism* (elaborated above) that Pasolini's "return to origins" in his adaptations of canonical texts reveals "the seemingly paradoxical imbrication of the archaic and the modern," to "simultaneously signify the birth of a civilization and its apocalypse" (Humphrey 17). Applied to Pasolini's adaptation of *The Canterbury Tales*, Humphrey's thesis would imply that Pasolini is revealing that the uses to which he is employing the hypotextual material are already dormant or available in the hypotext itself, yet reference to the hypotext itself cannot account for the purely original additions and variations performed on it by Pasolini. And, as demonstrated above, Pasolini is disinterested in expressing an apocalyptic attitude, traced as imbricated already in the hypotext, toward the future in his adaptation; instead he provocatively sets his interpretation of the relative bodily and sexual freedom characteristic of the Chaucerian world in relief against the degeneration suffered under neocapitalist consumerism.

However, although it is apparent that Pasolini attempts to overcome Chaucer and his text, the primary target of Pasolini's *malus animus* in his adaptation is by no means Chaucer. The various ways in which Pasolini "overcomes" the hypotext serve to redirect its significance towards relevance in contemporary ideological battles, not to spitefully exact revenge against Chaucer. Besides this contemporary ideological relevance, although it is definitely important, perhaps more deeply Pasolini's authorial performance even invites personally coded interpretations of the film, which are available to the informed spectator, through the availability of abundant biographical information about Pasolini. Interpretations reached through consideration of Pasolini's own cinema theory are available as well, which theory, as we have seen, is never without its ideological implications.

Having now suggested that Pasolini's adaptation seems to reward very subtle engagement with a variety of extratextual information, from deep familiarity with the hypotext itself, since, for example, his adaptation of "The Friar's Tale" begins with a long dilation of a couple of lines from the hypotext, to familiarity with the first film of the *Trilogia*, and to the details of Pasolini's biography and cinema theory, let us return to "The Friar's Tale" and attempt an interpretation of it in this complex mode. We argue that, by inverting the subject position of the spectator/reader, Pasolini overcomes or subverts the didactic message of the hypotext, which is concerned with the importance of intentionality behind language, in both sin and repentance. Chaucer's tale ends with a prayer "that these somonours hem repente / Of hir mysdedes er that the feend hem hente" (III, 1663-4), while Pasolini's adaptation of the tale ends with the Devil's words, which, in the hypotext, are situated about thirty lines before its ending, "this very night you shall go with me to hell, and there you shall learn more of our secrets than any doctor of divinity" (an accurate, modernized prose translation of Chaucer's lines 1636-38).

Pasolini maintains the hypotale's emphasis on intentionality, while perverting its moral valuation of repentance. The film expresses perverse joy in the public execution of the sodomite, and the summoner's terminal refusal to repent has an air of triumph. Interpreted as well in light of the entire film's post hoc insistence that its tales were told "only for the pleasure of telling," which is itself a major revision of Chaucer's repentant recantation of the entire narrative, among many of his other works, the case can be made that Pasolini, by projecting an extremely perverse autolesionic wish fulfillment in the form of the sodomite's public execution, is celebrating the pleasure of transgression, the freedom of intention, not to repent, but to sin and to choose death and damnation; and this interpretation is, of course, an application of Pasolini's definition of freedom in "The Unpopular Cinema" discussed above.

Moreover, Pasolini's attitude towards the spectatorship of "unpopular cinema" expressed therein is particularly fruitful when applied to his adaptation of "The Friar's Tale." The pleasure produced by transgressing the social prohibition of sodomy, and the ecstasy involved in the representation of the execution are both very thinly disguised provocations of proponents of what we have seen Pasolini call the "false permissiveness." We might safely assume that this overt transgression of the norms of liberal permissiveness and tolerance would, even today, produce the two kinds of spectators Pasolini describes in his essay. On the one hand, there are the scandalized and self-withholding representatives of false permissiveness, who are unable to enjoy "the sadomasochistic freedom" of the filmmaker and unable to participate in "the orgy of transgressions" (*Heretical Empiricism* 270), since (to argue circularly) they are necessary to fulfill the explicit demand of the filmmaker to be shamed and punished. In addition, of course, the scandalized are unable to understand how the public execution of the oppressed could be a source of pleasure for allies of the oppressed like them.

To be somewhat reductive, in order to emphasize just how provocative Pasolini's attitude is in this locus, he seems to be suggesting that homosexual acts in the Late Middle Ages were more pleasurable than those under consumerism, when sex is sad and obsessive, because transgression and pleasure are inextricable. There was more freedom to transgress, and as we've seen, freedom and transgression are synonyms for Pasolini, because (gay) sex was illicit, rather than an instrumentalized social obligation. On the other hand, therefore, the other category of spectators would be those sympathetic to Pasolini's perverse nostalgia for the time when gay sex was risky enough that one could be burned alive for it, those able to share in the Devil's tears of joy while witnessing the sodomite burn. It is clear that Pasolini chooses to represent this particular victim as ridiculous and pathetic. The film offers no cues for commiseration with him, but is rather cynical in its *schadenfreude*. When the victim is apprehended by the summoner, who attempts to solicit a bribe from him for acquittal, the victim's partner, the penetratee, laughs when the summoner condemns the penniless sodomite to "burn on a griddle." Then the Devil as a vendor at the public event of the execution wanders among the crowd hawking griddle cakes, comically and musically repeating "griddle cakes" with sustain.

To refine this interpretation, it ought to be noted that this is not identical to Pasolini's nostalgia for the savage's state of being, since the savage, unalienated from the Real, does not require acts of transgression in order to come into contact with it. Remembering our three-staged metahistorical schema attributed to Pasolini's thought, the middle period of peasant consciousness, rather, is the object of nostalgia in *The Canterbury Tales*. In this period, unlike that of Pasolini's consumerist present, sexuality's "joyous nature was a compensation" ... "for a repression—a phenomenon that was then about to disappear forever" (Rumble 50). In other words, the joy of transgression, especially, but not limited to, sexual transgression, was far more

accessible to the medieval peasant than to the consumerist subject because the body itself was uncorrupted, not instrumentalized in the service of social obligations. Instead, Pasolini's characters are shown manipulating social values, institutions, and ideologies in the service of their own ends and pleasures. Rather than being instrumentalized by ideology, they are shown instrumentalizing it to gratify their own base, bodily desires.

However, as in the case of the scopophilic *Devil*, the film also metacinematically emphasizes vision, in order to reinforce the feeling of loss and alienation from the perspective of the historical context of its production. This is why the film's primary pretextual character is Pasolini playing Chaucer, who is shown at a greater physical remove from the tales themselves than in the hypotext, in which Chaucer is ostensibly a silent auditor among the pilgrims merely copying the words of the tellers. The film comes much closer to suggesting that most of the tales are merely products of Pasolini-Chaucer's fantasy. Pasolini-Chaucer is only shown among the pilgrims, who we never see or hear telling tales, during the brief adaptation of the *General Prologue*, then possibly again in the interlude following "The Friar's Tale," but it is difficult to tell, since none of the pilgrims speak or are distinctly pictured, as the interlude focuses on Pasolini silently sitting on a stool in a dark inn and beginning to write his text. The remainder of Pasolini-Chaucer's appearances feature him writing alone in his study. Arguably, this authorial alienation from the immediate physical pleasures of his characters mirrors the position of the film spectator, and both reflect the fallen state of temporal alienation from the irretrievably lost age of relative plenitude. The transgressive power of Pasolini's adaptation in its own time seems to inhere more in its deliberate resistance to being used instrumentally, i.e. its insistence that it was all "only for the pleasure of telling," than in the behavior of any of the characters within the tales. Since the contemporary body is no longer able to enjoy simple transgressive pleasure as

compensation, Pasolini's adaptation can only resist that it be interpreted as supporting progressive permissiveness by provoking its proponents and violating their assumptions.

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