



Le Mostre

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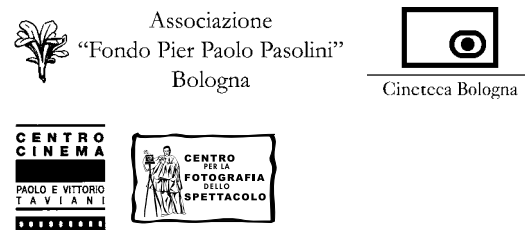
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Fondazione Aida: Roberto Terribile e Meri Malaguti
Casella Postale 1062 – 37122 Verona 10 (ITALY)
Tel. 0039-045-8001471/ 595284 – Fax. 0039-045-8009850
www.fondazioneaida.it – fondazione@f-aida.it

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via Zara, 58 – 56024 Corazzano, Pisa, ITALY
Tel. 0039-0571-462825/35 – Fax 0039-0571-462700
www.titivillus.it – info@titivillus.it

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Pier Paolo Pasolini Poet of Ashes

edited by
Roberto Chiesi and Andrea Mancini

writings of
Attilio Bertolucci, Gianni Borgna, Giorgio Caproni, Roberto Chiesi, Tullio De Mauro, Oriana Fallaci, Adelio Ferrero, Andrea Mancini, Alberto Moravia, Sandro Onofri, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Aurelio Roncaglia, Roberto Roversi, Paolo e Vittorio Taviani, Paolo Volponi

pictures by
Angelo Novi

translations by
Michael F. Moore, Ann Goldstein, Stephen Sartarelli, Angela Carabelli



Translations

“New Year’s Eve, 1974, with Pasolini”, “A Marxist in New York”, “Reality is a Sacred Language”, “In New York There is Greater Desperation”, “Pasolini, Teacher and Friend”, “Pasolini and Music”, “The Body’s Truth”, translated by Michael F. Moore.

“Cinema: Under the Sign of Transgression”, “Pasolini’s Theater”, “Poetic Word and Vital Discourse”, “The Vital Tenderness of Pasolini”, translated by Ann Goldstein.

“Poet of Ashes”, “Marilyn”, “An Hour and Fifty Minutes from New York”, “On the Subject of My Frivolous Subjects”, “With Ford’s Voice as Background”, “Gram-

sci’s Ashes”, “Pasolini as Civic Poet”, “Pasolini: From the Stratification of Tongues to the Unity of Language”, “Angelo Novi, a “Terrible Photographer””, translated by Stephen Sartarelli.

“An Evening with the Living Theatre” translated by Lee Marshall.

“A Poet of the Eternal Forms of People”, translated by Angela Carabelli.

“From *Accattone* to *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*”, translated by Michael F. Moore, Ann Goldstein, Stephen Sartarelli and Angela Carabelli.

New Year’s Eve, 1974, with Pasolini*

by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani

We were driving down the road from Rome to Viterbo, near the promontory, when our attention was drawn to a ruin of sorts, half ancient, half modern. With difficulty and growing discomfort, we recognized it: it was the little medieval castle that Pasolini had bought and which he had commissioned the production designer Dante Ferretti to transform into his refuge.

The two of us remembered it lit up artfully and discretely on the last night of 1974: Pasolini had invited us and a group of friends to celebrate the outgoing and incoming years. We said “a group of friends”, but the two of us were not exactly friends of Pasolini. Our relationship had grown through a handful of get-togethers outside the paths we normally crossed during fifteen years’ working in the film world.

The life of the party was, of course, the actress Laura Betti, who was at her best on this domestic occasion. Welcoming the guests at the door was the cinematographer Tonino Delli Colli. Serving as host, Pasolini could not hide a self-satisfied glee in making his way through the new house, perhaps because it somehow reflected his own spirit, with its contrast between the ancient walls and the large glass panes that Ferretti had positioned between the buttresses. This game of contrasts is what had made the two of us love Pasolini’s films.

Something wasn’t quite right about the heating system and we were all moving around in a bluish haze. The host and the guests, maybe without realizing it, took advantage of the little mechanical breakdown and the ensuing search for a remedy to thaw the awkwardness that almost always accompanies such evenings, where everyone arrives bearing a separate history and

meets other people for the common task of partying, because some occasions, like New Year’s Eve, always have to be celebrated, regardless. Pasolini had decided to surrender to the ritual of tradition with an almost melancholic sweetness that made us feel like his tacit accomplices. We were reminded of a previous get-together at Pasolini’s home in Eur. That time, too, his apartment had impressed us with the contrast between the luminosity of its bourgeois interior, where Pasolini spent his days with his mother, and the embattled darkness of his nights. We had come there to propose that he act for us in the film that we were preparing, *I sovversivi* [The Subversives]. All of his works spoke of his need for an unmediated presence, to exhibit himself and his resources, at the risk of catastrophe, and, accordingly, he was attracted to being an actor, who is always poised between glory and derision.

For the character of Ludovico we wanted the face of Pasolini, his fierce and Franciscan gaze, as it was evident in our favorite films by him: *Accattone*, *The Gospel According to Saint. Matthew*, and *La ricotta*. We weren’t wrong. He was immediately interested in the project. We spoke of dates. He smiled at the idea of getting back in front of the camera, but on one condition: that the character not be a director as we had imagined him. He would have to be a man who had given his life to art, and who suddenly found himself facing the nullifying specter of death. However, his profession had to be in something other than cinema, otherwise the identification between the character and Pasolini himself would become distracting and embarrassing. “You should make him, we should make him, a musician”, he urged us, “an architect”. We responded to his impatience with our own impatience, which was, finally, to

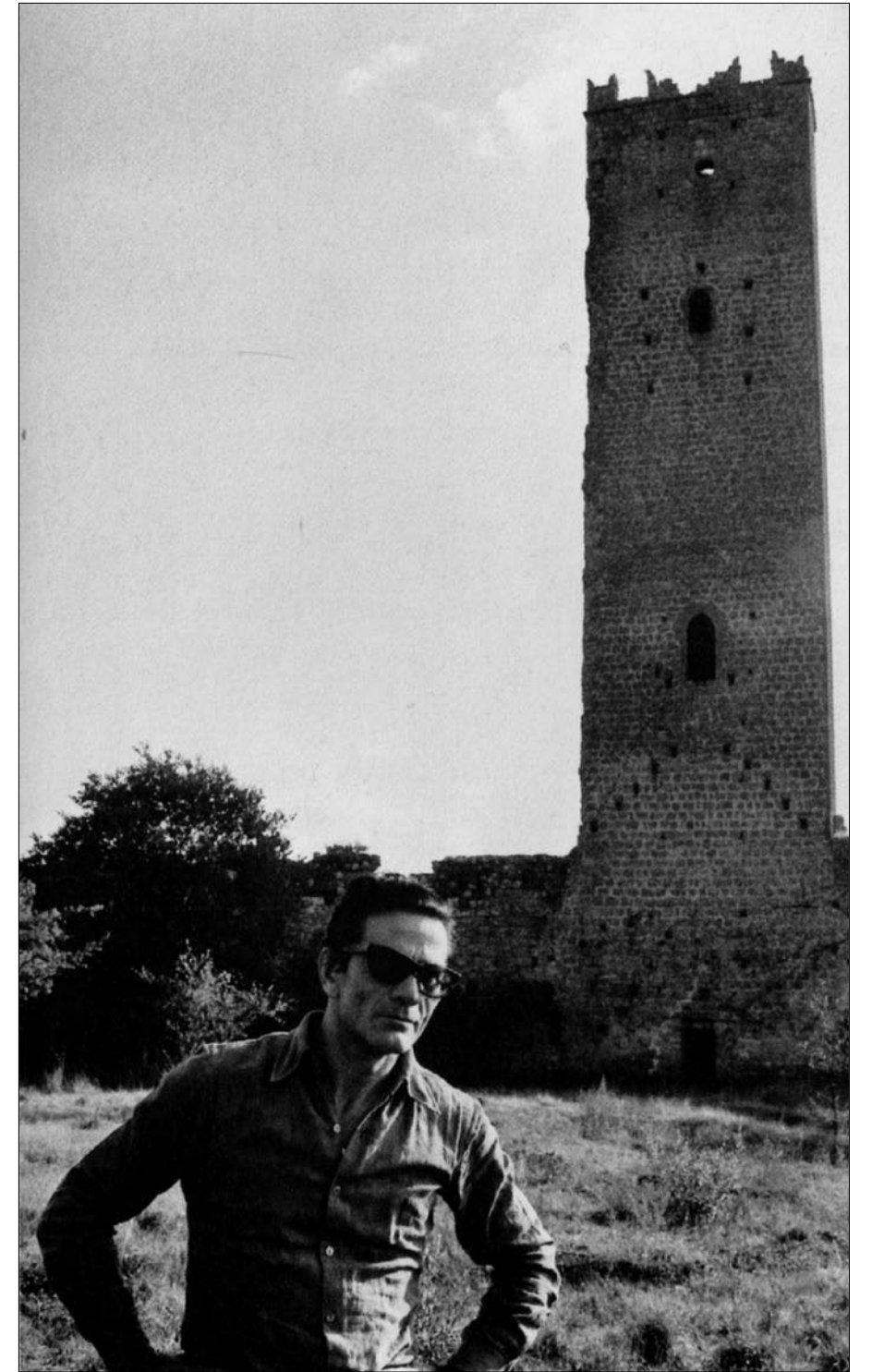
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6 breathe life into a fictional character with whom we had been living for some time. When we shot *I sovversivi* we did not reconnoiter with Pasolini on the set, but we did meet later on, with our respective films, on the road where a million people – a million Italian Communists – followed the coffin of Palmiro Togliatti. Pasolini loved *I sovversivi*, just as we had loved *Hawks and Sparrows*.

Back in Pasolini's castle, midnight was fast approaching. While we waited for it, we went through the various steps of the ritual, which had been prepared with voluntaristic determination. A game of bingo was set up. The guests took their places around the table. But the host was not there to answer the roll-call. The two of us found him in the oldest wing of the house. After some hesitation, he spoke softly to us about the film he was working on: a project that had been passed along to him by Sergio Citti – *The 120 Days of Sodom*, by Sade, but set in Salò, during the last days of Fascism. In his voice we noticed a tone that reminded us of another get-together we had had some time earlier, which had deeply affected our relationship. In a private screening room Pasolini had seen our film *San Michele aveva un gallo* [Saint Michael Had a Rooster]. While exiting, he, unlike the other guests (Glauber Rocha and Marco Bellocchio among them), said nothing to us and disappeared into the night, restless and surly. We thought that he hadn't liked our film, but we were wrong. He met with us to speak about it at Laura Betti's house. He arrived late to dinner and apologized. He had come on foot, he told us, but had to walk with his head down because he found it unbearable, impossible, to look at the faces of the people he ran into, a

parade of monsters – another reason why we felt the need to meet and even to disagree: he from the concern that the future was doomed, the two of us out of the feeling that we were part of a landscape dominated by chaos, over which we moved stubbornly in search of a thin blade of common sense. Sitting off to the side, while the others began to eat, we spoke with a brutality that is owed to people you must respect. And brutal was the conclusion that we reached. "Your optimism", murmured Pasolini, "is more tragic than my pessimism". Our reply: "You speak of the end of the world, we of the end of a world".

Midnight finally arrived, and the champagne was uncorked. The sound of it popping seemed to reawaken Pasolini. It was time to go out, to get the cars. He drove us through the darkness of the countryside as far as an open-air dance hall in a farm village a few kilometers away. The party lights were about to go out and in the silence the last couples were dedicated only to each other and their love. Pasolini asked for, wanted music. And he danced, with Gisella, with Ninetto, with the others. He danced with happiness, energy, and grace. We looked at him focusing on the steps of the tango, unleashed with the lightness of a waltz. We looked at that poet who not long thereafter would, with *Salò*, stared evil in the eyes, and we were reminded of his words when once, in his desperate candor, he protested, "But I'm a cheerful man".



Pier Paolo Pasolini in front of the tower of Chia (Viterbo), 1975 (picture by Gideon Bachman, © Cinemazero).

