

## **PIER PAOLO PASOLINI**

Italian director, screen writer, essayist, poet, critic and novelist, was murdered violently in 1975. Pasolini is best known outside Italy for his films, many of which were based on literary sources - *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, *The Decameron*, *The Canterbury Tales*. Pasolini referred himself as a 'Catholic Marxist' and often used shocking juxtapositions of imagery to expose the vapidness of values in modern society. His friend, the writer Alberto Moravia, considered him "*the* major Italian poet" of the second half of the 20th century.

Pier Paolo Pasolini was born in Bologna, traditionally the most left-wing of Italian cities. Throughout his life, Pasolini was especially close to his mother. Pasolini's father was a fascist and non-commissioned officer, moving from one garrison to another. Later Pasolini has said, that in the film EDIPO RE (1967) he told the story of his own Oedipus complex. "The boy in the prologue is myself, and his father, the infantry officer, is my own father, The mother, a governess, is also my own mother."

Pasolini's family originated from Friuli, a region in the North-Eastern part of Italy where a local language, *Friulano*, Rhaeto-Romanic dialect, dominated. Later Pasolini adopted as his way of expression the crude language of the Roman suburbs. Most of his childhood Pasolini spent at Casarsa della Delizia, his mother's birthplace northeast of Venice. During this period he became deeply involved with the dialect of the region.

In 1937 Pasolini returned to his native city and studied art history and literature at the University of Bologna. He published articles in *Architrave*, the politico-literary monthly of the students, and began writing poems in Friulian. Pasolini's first collection of poems, POESIA A CASARSA, which he printed at his own expense, appeared in 1942. It reflected his intense love for 'maternal tongue', Friulian landscape, and its peasants. The poems also showed his knowledge of the poetry of Giovanni Pascoli, on whom he later wrote his thesis, and Eugenio Montale. Pasolini's early Italian poems, L'USIGNOLO DELLA CHIESA CATTOLICA, date from this period but appeared in 1958.

During World War II Pasolini's brother was executed by Communist partisans, who supported Tito. Pasolini joined the Communist Party as a young man - in his works he often explored ideological problems, but his relationship with Communism was questioning - like later the attitude towards him by his party members. The mutual schism led to his expelling from the party for alleged homosexuality in 1949. However, Pasolini regarded himself as a Communist to the end of his life. His father, who had been captured as a prisoner of war in Kenya in 1942, eventually drank himself to death in 1958. From 1943 to 1949 Pasolini worked as a teacher in

almost total obscurity. His first great love was a young country boy, whom he taught to write poems. After a scandal, he was forced to abandon his work.

Pasolini's essay on Pascoli and Montale, showing his skills in close textual analysis, appeared in 1947 in the Bolognese review *Convivum*. An essay on Giuseppe Ungaretti, written in the years 1958-51, was later included in *PASSIONE E IDEOLOGIA* (1960). In 1949 Pasolini moved with his mother to Rome, where he wrote poems and novels of slum life. The first two parts of a projected trilogy, *RAGAZZI DI VITA* (1955, *The Ragazzi*), composed in a mixture of Italian and Roman dialect, and *UNA VITA VIOLENTA* (1959, *A Violent Life*), established Pasolini's reputation as a major writer. In these works he depicted with neorealistic approach subproletarian life and the awakening of social awareness. Both novels were translated in the 1960s into English. *The Ragazzi* was accused of obscenity and confiscated by the police by the order of Prime minister Antonio Segni. Tommaso, the protagonist in *A Violent Life*, is a homosexual, who with his friends lives in a world without hope. After being released from a prison, he gets an opportunity to change his purposeless existence. Eventually he dies of tuberculosis. "But this novel is a great deal more than the sum of its political ideas. It is not devitalized by or dependent on Marxist philosophy. Tommaso's story has its own profound and cumulative power; his world boils with life created by Pasolini's relentless use of dialogue and vivid detail." (Anne Rice in *The New York Times*, November 3, 1985)

During his career Pasolini published nearly ten collections of poems. Many critics, such as Alberto Moravia, considered him one of the most important contemporary poets in Italy, who gave voice to the post-war generation. With Moravia, he travelled in the 1960s in Africa, making preparations for a film about 'black Oedipus', but the idea was never realized. Pasolini also built with Moravia a house in Sabaudia. According to Moravia, Pasolini honestly believed that the lowest proletariat would save the world with all of its freshness, incorruptness, and originality. "Pasolini was, in his own way, a follower of Rousseau," Moravia wrote in *Vita di Moravia* (1990).

In *LE CENERI DI GRAMSCI* (1957) Pasolini returned to ideological debate. He took as his starting point the theories Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), a political leader and the cofounder of the Italian Communist Party, who spent in fascist prisons the last ten years of his life.

In addition to writing scripts, Pasolini worked in the 1950s as an actor. In 1961 Pasolini made his debut as a director. His first film, *ACCATONE*, is a re-working of his own novel *A Violent Life*. The story, set in Rome, centered on the life of a pimp, who was portrayed in the light of religious Mannerist painters. Franco Citti, the then amateur actor, played the eponymous hero. In

the background of squalid scenes, Pasolini used Bach's *St Matthew's Passion*. "My vision of the world is in essence epico-religious," he stated. Pasolini examined further the theme of prostitution in *MAMMA ROMA* (1962), which portrayed Rome's underworld realistically. Anna Magnani played a prostitute who has to go back on her profession.

International fame Pasolini gained in the mid-1960s. *IL VANGELO SECONDO MATTEO* (1964) was a straightforward re-telling of the New Testament story, based on words and scenes from St Matthew's Gospel. Pasolini shot most of the film in Lucan and Calabria, not far from the regions, which were depicted in Carlo Levi's (1902-1975) novel *Christo si è fermato a Eboli* (1945). The Catholic Church helped to finance the film and it received the Special Jury Prize at the Venice Film Festival. Two years before Pasolini had been accused of blasphemy over his satirical sketch in *RoGoPaG* (1962), directed by Rossellini, Godard, Pasolini and Gregoretti. However, Pasolini once said: "For years I thought that an addressee for my 'confessions' and 'testimony' existed. Only now do I realize that he does not exist."

*IL DECAMERONE* (1971), *THE CANTEBURY TALES* (1973) and *IL FIORE DELLE MILLE E UNA NOTTE* (1973, *Arabian Nights*) were based on medieval tales and celebrated the world of simple joys and sexuality. With the "trilogy of life" Pasolini acquired a more broader audience than contemporary avant-garde directors. At that time Pasolini wanted to turn away from ideology, because he had understood, that "to make an ideological film is finally easier than making a film outwardly lacking ideology." As a side-production of *Arabian Nights*, Pasolini made a short film, *LE MURA DI SANA'A* (1973), in which he expressed his disgust for demolition of old buildings in the name of modernism.

*Oidipus Rex* was an adaptation of an ancient text of Sophocles. *TEOREMA* (1968) was a dissection of a wealthy Milanese family through the slogan "make love, not war". Love enters the lives of the family members in the persona of a young man. At the end, the father gives his factory to workers, strips himself naked, and becomes a voice in the wilderness. Using non-professional actors with professionals, Pasolini attempted to combine realism with revolutionary concepts, sex, violence, and sadism. With the gay liberation movement the community of homosexual novelists grew internationally, and along with Pasolini from it emerged such writers as Christopher Bram, James Purdy, Allan Hollinghurst, José Lezama Lima, Reinaldo Arenas, and Yukio Mishima.

In the 1960s Pasolini's interest in language drew him to semiotics, although his concern with dialect marked his work from the first collections of poems.

One of these early influences was the modern novelist Carlo Emilio Gadda, whose experimental novel *That Awful Mess on Via Merulana*, written in a mixture of Italian, Roman, Venetian, and Neopolitan dialects, appeared in a Florentine review 1946.

Pasolini has presented his approach to cinema in a number of essays. His opposition to the liberalization of abortion law and criticism of the radical students made him unpopular on the left. From *PORCILE* (1969), in which a son of a Nazi father is eaten by pigs, Pasolini's films became increasingly controversial, but at the same time his ideological stance become more concealed and individualistic. He once remarked: "I too, like Moravia and Bertolucci, am a bourgeois, in fact a petit-bourgeois, a turd, convinced that my stench is not only scented perfume, but is in fact the only perfume in the world." His last film, *SALÒ O LE 120 GIORNATE DI SODOMA*, set in the last years of WW II in Italy, linked fascism and sadism. The film was banned virtually everywhere.

Pasolini's creative productivity did not stop in films. He wrote several tragedies in verse and published in 1971 a new collection of poetry, *TRASUMANAR E ORGANIZZAR*, which was criticized as bad poetry. In 1972 his critical writings were collected and published under the title *EMPIRISMO ERETICO* (Heretical Empiricism). He also contributed to the Milanese newspaper *Corriere della sera*. On morning of 2 November, 1975, his body was discovered on waste ground near seaside resort of Ostia. A young male prostitute was tried and convicted for the murder in 1976. A week before his death, Pasolini had said in Sweden, that he will be killed probably very soon. He had started to investigate the Mafia's link to the prostitution business. Pasolini's massive unfinished novel, *PETROLIO*, was published in 1992.