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“IL POTERE È SEMPRE... REALISTICO”:
PASOLINI AGAINST POWER AND REALISTIC LITERATURE

Abstract: This paper investigates the link between experimental narrative and political engagement in Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Petrolio* (1992). In particular, it argues that Pasolini employs the narrative strategy of allegorical vision, typical of medieval literature, to challenge the new Power of neocapitalism. He does this by opposing an allegorical and visionary representation of reality to a realistic one, as in the novel realistic literature appears to be dangerously related to Power. This article starts with an analysis of *Appunto* 103B, where the concept of realistic representation acquires a negative connotation. Used as a synonym for “Machiavellian,” realistic representation is defined as the way in which the new Power acts. In the same *appunto*, visions are presented as an alternative non-realistic form of representation that mocks the logic of Power. Thus, considering the novel’s main allegorical visions, this paper discusses how this type of representation sheds light on the new Power and its crimes.

Key Words: Pasolini, *Petrolio*, allegory, vision, realism, power, neocapitalism, medieval literature.

Defining the Context

At the end of the 1960s, Umberto Eco suggested looking at artistic engagement from a different perspective: “L’artista svolge la propria contestazione nelle strutture stesse della propria opera e non descrivendo minatori sofferenti” (“Il gioco” 301). This angle seems particularly appropriate for reading Pasolini’s late fictional production. In these works, Pasolini has indeed abandoned the subject matter of the Roman subproletarians—the “minatori sofferenti” of Eco’s discourse—which was prominent in his early literary and filmic works—*Ragazzi di vita* (1955) and *Accattone* (1961). The protagonists of his late production, for example, the family of *Teorema* (1968) and the engineer Carlo Valletti of *Petrolio* (1992), belong rather to the bourgeois class. Moreover, scholars like Carla Benedetti have underlined the structural novelty of Pasolini’s late works, remarking on the way they challenge artistic conventions and produce still meaningful artistic pieces, even at a time when art had been turned into a product for cultural consumption by the market of cultural industry (*Pasolini contro* 159-70). Let us not forget that in Italy this was also the time of the disintegration and hybridisation of traditional literary genres and of the new experimentalism brought about by Gruppo 63.¹ The intention of this paper is to

¹ For more reference, see Di Gesù 47-68.