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QUEERING PIER PAOLO PASOLINI'S EARLY CINEMA: FROM TIME
AND SPACE TO THE BODY IN *ACCATTONE* AND *MAMMA ROMA*

Abstract: In this contribution, I explore various uses of the conceptualization of “queer” as present in Pasolini’s early films. After considering how both *Accattone* and *Mamma Roma* introduce queer characters, I examine how Pasolini queers time and place. In particular I study how the protagonists of both films survive in monumental time rather than linear. Additionally, I argue that Pasolini queers the body of his characters in an effort to challenge social norms. In the end, I contend that by queering time, space, and the body, Pasolini blocks his protagonists from any hope of social uprising, and they remain a part of the “queer art of failure” (Halberstam).

Key Words: queer theory, film studies, body politics, Pier Paolo Pasolini, queer space, queer time.

Introduction

Almost fifty years after his untimely assassination, Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-75), one of the most noted European intellectuals and filmmakers of all time, remains at the forefront of film criticism internationally. Pasolini’s cinema continues to draw attention from scholars across disciplines, Italian Studies being only one. The influence his films have exercised on Film and Media Studies in particular, have critics still studying his film theor(ies).¹ Furthermore, they are also re-exploring his cinema from a Cultural Studies lens along with considering the lasting influences his cinema has on other directors (for example, Bergonzoni 301-15). Scholars have published over 40 academic articles, book chapters, and critical blog posts on Pasolini’s cinema between 2020-21, underscoring his contemporary significance.²

A discourse on queering Pasolini’s opus can perhaps be best situated by returning to Patrick Rumble’s powerful observation regarding *Accattone*, “Indeed what was scandalous about the films and novels Pasolini wrote about petty thieves, prostitutes, pimps and gangs was not merely any homoerotic dimension

¹ See for example “Cinema of Poetry” and later “The Unpopular Cinema” as well as “Technical Confessions” (see the original “Confessioni tecniche”).

² For a comprehensive recent bibliography of Pasolini Studies, see Pacchioni, “Trent’anni di critica pasoliniana in Nord America,” 15-48. See also Casi, “Bibliografia,” in *Cupo d’amore* 88-91. The over 40 articles mentioned above relate only to cinema. Much attention is still being paid to the numerous other genres in which he worked. Scholars generally agree that Pasolini’s poetry is still the most unstudied genre of his opus, partly due to the massive nature of his collections, which he began writing at the age of 14.