

IN DANGER

A Pasolini Anthology

Edited, with an introduction
by Jack Hirschman



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INTRODUCTION

When Lawrence Ferlinghetti asked me if I would like to put together as editor and participating translator an anthology of the works of Pier Paolo Pasolini, I was both delighted and honored. Over the past dozen or more years, no Western poet's work has interested me more than has Pasolini's. In the mid-Nineties I wrote a rather long "Arcane" on the meaning of his life, his poetry, and his assassination; and about a decade later, for the 2004 American presidential election, I composed another "Arcane" using the murder of Pasolini and the resurrection of his voice to mount an attack on the war-dogs in Washington. Both those works, to one degree or other, were also inspired by the wonderful translations of Pasolini's *Roman Poems* by Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Francesca Valente, published by City Lights in 1986 (and again in 2006), one of the very best books that the press has ever published.

Over the past 20 years, many of Pasolini's poems have appeared in translated collections, and a dozen years ago the Castro Theater in San Francisco dedicated two weeks to showing virtually all of the many films he created, because Pasolini is primarily known to the world of cinema aficionados and the general intelligentsia as a "poet" in the art of movie-making. Interestingly enough, however, the dynamism and profound meaning of his written ideas—as they relate to the times we live in—are not as well known to an American readership. This anthology hopes, in a small way (because the body of his prose and theoretical writing is almost as immense as the body of his poetry), to help with a deeper understanding of his ideas, and of their importance.

Pasolini was a creative dynamo in the 53 years of his life and, had he not been assassinated in 1975, I have no doubt that he would have continued writing, with the lucid integrity and passions that are at the heart of his work, to this very day (*magari!*). He embodies an extraordinary fusion of creativity: a poet in his depths, an intellectual of a rare literary and political brilliance and polemical insight, a filmmaker who helped revolutionize that form in Italy and throughout the world, a playwright of great power, and a formidable painter as well.

Pasolini was 21 when the fascist regime fell in Italy. After the war, he entered the Italian Communist Party in the small town of San Giovanni, near the town of Casarsa in the northeastern area of Italy known as Friuli, where he had been raised. In fact he soon became the head of the local chapter and, in the Pasolini Museum, in the very house where he lived, I've seen a large poster written in the Friulian language with child-like printed letters, which Pasolini composed as a call to peasants and workers. Pasolini was however expelled from the Party after a short time. A homosexual, he was discovered in an assignation with a couple of other young men. The times could hardly bear that; the Party also could not. He was forced to flee Casarsa for Rome.

But he remained a communist till his dying breath. And, as an "outsider" within the revolutionary turmoil and struggle in Italy after the war, studying and being intellectually inspired by the writings of Antonio Gramsci, the founder of the Italian Communist Party who died in Mussolini's prison, Pasolini developed not simply as a poet but as the sounder of alarm with respect to the age of consumerism, which he predicted with prophetic accuracy would contaminate the working class with middle-class values, and create an endemic hedonism and pornographic banality that, along with the tragedy of drugs, would

mask a fascism much more difficult to dispense with than the fascism of the Thirties and Forties.

Had Pasolini remained in the orthodoxy of the PCI,¹ I doubt that he would have arrived at such insights. In effect, as a poet, he developed into a provocateur and prophet—the two elements (provocation and prophecy) that are the basis of all his writings, whether poetry or prose. His thrust was toward independent insight while at the same time defending to the core the plight of the poor and marginalized—in Italy as well as the Third World countries he visited. And even when some of the positions he takes seem contradictory, or his views of this or that poet or writer seem myopic or “off the wall” (as in his takes on Pablo Neruda or Charles Olson, for example), there is hardly a paragraph of prose or a stanza of poetry that doesn’t contain Pasolini’s uniquely provocative and prophetic modernity. We who are living in the technologically-driven stage of a neo-capitalism that is both rapacious in the extreme and crumbling from within, and who are witnessing a globally new class of poor, new abolitionists stirring for the battle against worldwide economic slavery, will be inspired by Pasolini’s lucid insights and feelings about both personal and political life, whether or not we agree with them.

This anthology is in five sections. Its title comes from the last two words of an interview he gave Furio Colombo on November 1, 1975, a few hours before he was brutally murdered.

The texts are presented chronologically in each section. The first section is made up of some striking pieces of his prose, including the opening “Civil War,” which concerns Pasolini’s visit to New York in 1966. His insights into American revolutionary

1. Italian Communist Party.

life and struggle—not merely in the sixties but valid even today—urged me to open the book with this text

The second section is a selection of his poems, from 1941 to 1963, two of them in the Friulian language (in which Pasolini also wrote throughout his life), and many which have not appeared before in the American language.

The third section is of literary essays and reviews of books written in the last three years of his life. Published in newspapers and literary magazines, they are presented to show that, in every literary form, Pasolini kept up an intense sociopolitical awareness and engagement with revolutionary struggle. These particular essays were chosen to reflect the wide range of subjects that obsessed him, including: consumerism, fascism, war, sex, violence, and, of course, good (or bad) writing.

The fourth section is another selection of poems, from 1964 to 1971.

The final section consists of two texts: his well-known “I Know” litany (which text some say was one of the reasons he was assassinated) and the interview Pasolini gave on the last day of his life.

This book would not have been possible without a brilliant array of translators. They include Lucia Gazzino, a poet of Udine, Italy, who writes in both Italian and Friulian and who translated Pasolini’s Friulian poems; Pasquale Verdicchio, a poet in San Diego who’s not only translated Pasolini in the past but also written a suite of poems dedicated to him; Giada Diano, who’s from Reggio Calabria and is writing a book on Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s European experiences; Flavio Rizzo, a filmmaker who’s documented Pasolini on the screen and teaches comparative literature at Queens College in New York; and Veruska Cantelli, likewise a teacher of comparative literature at Queens

College, who's also a modern dancer. Also from New York, the poet Norman MacAfee, who is renowned for his translations of Pasolini's poems, has contributed the translation of "Victory" that he made with the Italian documentary filmmaker Luciano Martinengo. From San Francisco, the musician-singer Jonathan Richman, working with Jacopo Benci, has translated a number of pieces; Susanna Bonetti, a librarian at the Erik Erikson Psychoanalytical Library, has contributed the opening work; and I myself round out the team of translators. My thanks to all of them for their contributions to this anthology.

Sometimes, almost exclusively in Pasolini's prose essays, I've changed a colon to a comma, as Pier Paolo often wrote his sentences using colons rather than commas between clauses, as explanatory extensions. My changes are simply to actualize a more lucid experience for a readership not used to Pasolini's unorthodox manner of punctuation.

My especial thanks to Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who's provided many helpful editorial suggestions on the texts; to Graziella Chiarcossi of the Pasolini Estate in Italy for her help regarding the chronology of the works; to Giada Diano for her thorough work in providing key footnote information; to Amelia Carpenito Antonucci, Director of the Italian Cultural Institute of San Francisco, for her invaluable work in securing the cover photo of Pasolini; and to Garrett Caples, poet and editor with *City Lights*, who has also overseen the publication of this book.

Some of these translations have appeared in *City Lights Review*, *Left Curve*, *Brick*, *Partisans* (Deliriodendron Press), and the Parenthesis Writing Series. My thanks to their respective editors.

PROVOCATIONS

CIVIL WAR

The observations on life and political struggle in the United States that I've synthesized and cited are from American authors of the New Left and particularly two ideologues of SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), Tom Hayden and Jimmy Garrett. Hayden's observations are to the point that communist collectivization would not necessarily (historically) lead the worker to a complete participation in power, namely in decisions with respect to his own destiny; that the contrary is perhaps true, that is, the creation of an "anti-community," in which the worker would arrive at the exasperated democratic consciousness of duty toward human rights in complete participation, can lead as a consequence to a collectivization of goods. Jimmy Garrett makes the observation that the communist is a "hollow man." I quote: "Friend, communists are empty, hollow men. They have the same stale ideas, the same bureaucracy. . . . When he mixes with us, a 'commie' dies and a person develops."

These observations are not mine, but in a way I've adopted them.

In Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Romania, I lived among intellectuals, and it was through their worries and stress that I felt the worries and stress of their countries, the cause of which can be sketchily and summarily indicated by the fact that "the revolution did not continue"—that is, the State did not decentralize, did not disappear, and the workers in the factories are not really participating in and responsible for political power. Instead they are dominated—who doesn't by now know it and admit it?—by a bureaucracy that

is revolutionary in name only, and that naturally calls petty-bourgeois revolutionists those who still believe that revolution should continue.

It's very interesting, and it fires one's enthusiasm, to see that in America there are non-Marxist ideologues who understand this in democratic terms—but of an extremist democracy, exasperated and quasi-mystical and yet, in its sphere, revolutionary (the creation of an “anti-community” within the heart of the American community). SNCC, SDS, and many other movements that chaotically comprise the New American Left are reminders to me of Resistance times here in Italy.

In America, even though my visit was brief, I spent many hours in an underground atmosphere of struggle, revolutionary urgency, and hope that belongs to the Europe of 1944 and 1945. In Europe everything is finished; in America I have the impression that everything is going to begin. I don't mean to say that there's civil war in America, nor even something like it, and I don't want to predict such; nevertheless, one lives there as if one were on the eve of great things. Those who belong to the New Left (which doesn't exist, it's just an idea, an ideal) recognize each other at a glance, and there is immediately born between them the kind of love that bonded the partisans. There are the fallen heroes—Andrew, James, and Mickey, and many others—and the big motions, the huge strides of an immense popular movement concentrated on the problem of the emancipation of the Blacks, and now on the Vietnam War.

Who hasn't seen a pacifist and nonviolent demonstration in New York is lacking in a great human experience comparable only to the great days of hope of the Forties.

One night in Harlem I shook hands (though they were suspicious because I was white) with a group of young Blacks who were wearing the symbol of the panther on their sweaters—an extremist movement preparing for armed struggle.

One afternoon in the Village I saw a small group of neo-nazis demonstrating for the Vietnam War; nearby, two old men and a girl who was playing guitar, taken as if by a strange and gentle ecstasy, were singing the pacifist songs of the Village, including those of the beatnik Left, of the drug addicts.

I went with a Black union official to the headquarters of his movement, a small movement that in Harlem has only a few hundred subscribers, and which fights against Black unemployment; went with him to one of his comrades' home, a bricklayer who had gotten sick on the job and who met us stretched out on his humble bed with a friendly complicitous smile so full of that forgotten partisan love of ours.

I went to a middle-class flat in the most squalid part of the Village and heard the hysterical laughter and aberrant bitterness of an intellectual married to a Black man, who blathered resentment against the old American communism and against the drugged Left, as if her rage and burning delusions should immediately be responded to in her world, and suddenly become "action."

I've lived a situation altogether alive with discontent and exultation, with desperation and hope, in total protest against the establishment. I don't know how all this will end, or if it will end at all, but the fact remains that thousands of students (almost the percentile of partisans relative to the Italian population in the Forties) come from the North and go into the "Black Belt" to fight alongside Blacks with a violent and almost mystical democratic consciousness that "doesn't manipulate them" or

in any way coerce them, even to softness, or make them pretend (and they're almost neurotic about this) to even the shadow of any form of "leadership"; and what is more important, with the consciousness that the Blacks' problem, formally solved with the recognition of their civil rights, begins then—that is, as a social, not an ideal problem.

There is still much to add: protest, pure and simple confrontation, the revolt against consumerism. I intend to speak of the phenomenon of the beatniks, which has been set up here in terms of pure curiosity, without need of underlining it with irony. Communists, in Italy at least, so far as I know, prefer to be silent on this subject, or just condemn it, an approach with which old Italian moralism and provincialism find an obscure identification. In reality, in the large American cities, the alcoholic, the drug addict, whoever refuses being integrated into the secure work-market, enacts more than a series of old and codified anarchist acts: he lives a tragedy.

And since he alone knows how to live it and not judge it, he dies of it.

The thousands of drug addicts are actually no more or less martyrs than are those killed by the white racists of the South. They have the same purity and are likewise beyond the miserable human calculations of those who accept the "quality of life" offered by established society.

It's true. Everything I saw or believed I'd see in New York stands out against a dark background—as inconceivable as it is inadmissible for us—that is, against everyday American life, the life of self-preservation that proceeds in a silence that's more intense than even the "screams" that come from the Left. In this silent

background, neutral and terrible, phenomena happen that are of real collective craziness, in a codified hateful way that's difficult to describe. It is racist hatred—that is, nothing less than the exterior aspect of the deep aberration of every conservatism and every fascism. It is a hatred that doesn't have any reason to exist. As a matter of fact it doesn't exist. Whoever's affected by it believes he feels it; in reality he can't feel it. How and why could a poor white hate a Black? Yet it's the poor whites of the whole South who in practice live off this hate. It is born from the false idea of the self and therefore of reality; and it is thus false itself, a sentiment completely alienated and unrecognizable. From this form of life the ultimate and most tragic result is the unvindicated murder of Kennedy, a case of that civil war that doesn't explode but nonetheless is fought out in the souls of Americans.

Speaking always and only of neo-capitalism and the technological revolution with respect to America seems to me partial and sectarian. It seems absurd, but the problem of poverty and underdevelopment acquires a strange and violent meaning with respect to America. Indeed, it's clear to everybody that these are the times in which the rural world of the globe—the Third World—is confronting history (with one foot in pre-history), and the scandal is that, despite the great episodes of the Algerian and Cuban revolts, the core of the struggle for the Third World revolution is really America. The Black problem, linked in a very twisted yet inextricable way with that of the poor whites (in huge numbers, much more than what we think), is a Third World problem. And if this is a scandal for the work-consciousness of the European communist parties, it is even more so for American capitalistic consciousness, which believes itself to be objectively on the clear path of technical progress and economic wealth. So the Black problem will never

be sufficiently considered because, I repeat, it is connected in a crazy and contradictory way with the problem of the poor or once-poor whites. Indeed, two or three generations have not been enough to completely transform the psychology of the enormous masses of immigrants. They (I saw it for sure in the Italian district) first of all keep an adoring disposition toward the country that took them in and, now that they are citizens, toward its institutions. They are still sons, sons too obedient or too desperate. Secondly, they've carried with them—preserved inside themselves—the principal characteristic of peasants of underdeveloped areas—in some way prehistoric—which DeMartino¹ defines as the “fear of losing heritage.” These are the fundamentals of popular fascist racism.

There'll never be enough said about the differences among Americans because of their diverse poor origins.

Perhaps that's why they so desperately want to be equal, one with another, and if they found their anti-communism on the premise that communism would bring about an equalization of individuals, it's because they desperately want above all to be equalized. In order to forget their origins, diverse and inferior, which differentiate them as signs. Every American has an indelible mark printed on his face. The image of an Italian or of a Frenchman or an Englishman or an average German is conceivable and can be represented. The image of the standard American is absolutely inconceivable and unrepresentable. This is the thing that most surprised me in America. One always talks of an “average American,” and then this “average American” doesn't

1. Ernesto DeMartino, 1908–1965, Italian philosopher and anthropologist.

exist! How to sum up in a single “type” all the extraordinary types that are walking around in Manhattan? How to sum up in a single face the nervous Anglo-Saxon face, the crazy one of the Irishman, the sad one of the Italian, the pale one of the Greek, the wild one of the Puerto Rican, the neurotic German one, the funny one of the Chinese, the adorable one of the Black. . . ?

It’s therefore the “fear of losing heritage” and the snobbery of new citizenship that prevents the American—the strange, precise mixture of lumpen proletarian and bourgeois deeply and honestly closed in its own middle-class loyalty—from reflecting on the idea that he has of himself, an idea that remains false in any environment alienating through total industrialization.

Indeed I tried asking those Americans I could if they knew what racism is (a question that particularly implies a reflection on the idea of the self). Nobody knew how to answer. Excepting a few young independent filmmakers who, knowing Europe with love, have some idea of Marxism, all the others resorted to incredibly ingenuous ontologies. (There were only some correct psychoanalytic explanations that touched, however, only one side of the problem, or better, the human condition through which the problem gets started.)

In conclusion, the most violent, dramatic, and defining note of the “quality of American life” is a negative characteristic: the lack of class-consciousness, the immediate effect of the false idea of the individual self, admitted by concession or by grace to the circle of petty-bourgeois privilege of industrial wealth and governmental power.

But there are strong contradictions in this (I’m certainly not the first to point this out): for instance, the overflowing strength of the unionism that comes through incredibly efficient and enormous strikes where it’s hard to understand how a

solid class-consciousness couldn't take place, while it's clear to us that such well-organized, such strongly united strikes don't mean anything else but the vindication of the exploited against the exploiters.

The extraordinary originality (for a European like me) is that the class-consciousness, rather, crops up in Americans in situations that are all new, and scandalous for Marxism.

Class-consciousness, to get into the head of an American, needs a long, twisting road, an immensely complex operation: it needs the mediation of idealism, let's say the bourgeois or petty-bourgeois variety, which for every American gives meaning to his entire life and which he absolutely cannot disregard. There they call it spiritualism. But both idealism in our interpretation and spiritualism in theirs are two ambiguous and incorrect words. Better, perhaps, it's about the moralism (Anglo-Saxon in origin and naively adopted by the other Americans) that rules and shapes the facts of life, and that, in literature for instance—even the popular kind—is exactly the opposite of realism. Americans always need to idealize in the arts (especially at the level of average taste; for instance, the “illustrative” representation of their lives and their cities in their popular movies are forms of an immediate need to idealize).

So instead of strikes or other forms of struggle, the consciousness of their own social reality turns out in pacifist and nonviolent demonstrations dominated precisely by an intelligent spiritualism, which is, at least for me, a splendid fact objectively, for which reason I fell in love with America. It's the vision of the world of people arrived, through ways we consider wrong—but which historically are what they are, that is, correct—at the maturation of the idea of self as a simple citizen (perhaps like Athenians or Romans?), the possessor of an honest and deep

notion of democracy (driven to almost mystic forms, revolutionary ones in some of the representatives of SNCC and SDS). Indeed, to arrive at a consciousness not merely formally democratic of self and society, the truly free American has had need of passing through the calvary of the Blacks (and now through the calvary of Vietnam) and sharing it. Today, after some years, some months, that is, since the formal recognition of the civil rights of Blacks, one has begun to understand that the Black issue is fundamental, and that it is a social issue and not an issue merely of democratic spiritualism and the civil code.

The immense void that opens like an abyss in individual Americans and in the whole of American society—that is, the lack of Marxist culture—as any void, violently claims to be filled. It is filled by that spiritualism that, as I've said, being at first revolutionary democratic radicalism, is now going through a new social consciousness that, not explicitly accepting Marxism, presents itself as total confrontation and anarchist desperation.

It's from this and not anything else that the Other America is born. It's upon this and not anything else that the premises of a possible Third Party are built, about which one talks with great and ingenuous caution, as if it were shockingly blasphemous, with hope or hostility. For instance, in two or three cities where (thanks to the student movement) an embryonic form of this party ran in the elections, it turned out that the party not only was defeated but also caused the defeat of the moderates, to the benefit of the racists.

Now, I live in a society just emerging from poverty and superstition, clinging to the little wealth it achieved as if this were a stable condition, and this society is carrying on this new historical path a common sense that served well on the farms for the herds or for the craftsmen's shops but that today manifests itself

as stupid, nasty, and cowardly in our present world. An irredeemable society, irrecoverably bourgeois, without revolutionary or even liberal traditions. The world of culture—in which I live because of a literary vocation that every day proves itself more estranged from such a society and world—is the place delegated to stupidity, cowardice, and pettiness. I cannot accept anything of the world I live in, not only the apparatus of the central state—bureaucracy, judicial system, the army, the schools, and the rest of it—but also not even its learned minorities. In this particular instance I’m absolutely alien to the momentum of the current culture. I’m deaf to the purely verbal transgressions of the established institutions, which say nothing about who’s behind them, and I’m deaf to the purist and neo-literary revanchism. Let’s just say that I was left alone to turn yellow with myself and my revulsion for talking about engagement or detachment. So I could not not fall in love with American culture, having glimpsed within it a literary reason full of originality: a new Resistance that I must insist, however, lacks all that renaissance spirit, that classicism which—seen from today—impoverishes European Resistance a bit (whose hopes were otherwise contained in the Marxist perspectives of those years, which then revealed themselves as narrow and conventional).

What is required of a “not integrated” American man of letters is everything itself, a total sincerity. Since the old days of Machado² I have not given so fraternal a reading as I did with Ginsberg. And wasn’t it marvelous: Kerouac’s sloshing journey through Italy that provoked the irony, boredom, and disapproval of the stupid men of letters and vile Italian journalists? The American intellectuals of the New Left (because where it’s in

2. Antonio Machado, Spanish poet whose work influenced Pasolini.

struggle there's always a guitar and someone singing) seem to be doing what a line of an innocent song of the Black resistance says: "You gotta throw your body into the fight." Here is the new motto of real, not annoyingly moralistic, commitment. Throw your body into the fight. . . . Who among writers in Italy, in Europe, is pulled by such desperate forces of contention? Who feels this necessity *to oppose* as an original necessity, believing that it is new in history, absolutely meaningful, and replete with both with death and the future?

1966. Translated by Susanna Bonetti