



Pasolini's Greeks and the Irrational

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INTRODUCTION TO THE IRRATIONAL

This article traces the shifting concept of the “irrational” in Pier Paolo Pasolini’s work through his engagement with Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* from the end of the 1950s.¹ Any treatment of this topic must be selective, given Pasolini’s prolific output and the sheer volume and diversity of the critical responses it has received. I offer a wide-angle view of the problem to draw out some of its even broader theoretical implications, at the cost of ignoring several important debates and skipping over several of Pasolini’s works. Since several explorations of Pasolini’s deployment of the “irrational” by classicists and philosophers already exist, I favor a historical approach focused on assessing a specific literary dialectic between Pasolini and Aeschylus as a lesson in the politics of classical reception.² This line of inquiry was prompted by the question mark at the end of the conference title “A Proletarian Classics?” But it also locates Pasolini’s reception of Aeschylus within a wider set of debates about what I take to be moments of left-wing “failed” reception. Receptions of classical works are necessarily transformative, and I do not mean to suggest that any such labor of adaptation and creative translation “fails,” in the hackneyed sense, because it strays too far from the original or

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1 I would like to thank Mark Payne and Andrew Ollett for providing feedback on earlier drafts of this article, as well as the editors and anonymous reviewers for their insightful suggestions.

2 I am not the first to take this angle, and I have learned a great deal from D’Alessandro Behr, “Pasolini’s *Orestiade*, the Irrational, and Greek Tragedy.” One further excellent example of work on the “irrational,” more broadly, is Vighi, “Lo sperimentalismo di Pasolini.”

because it ignores aspects that may appear, from a critical vantage, to be more salient than those emphasized in the process of reception. Rather, I submit that some receptions “fail” to achieve the kinds of political ends or ambitions of their authors. This is a study of such a “failure,” and one that traces Pasolini’s own reflections on how Aeschylus resisted the generative instrumentalization that Pasolini desired to effect. In brief, I will show that Pasolini believed that a return to Aeschylus’ tragic trilogy might offer the grounds for a proletarian revolution, implicitly posing a broader question about whether the classics might play a broader role in Marxist thought.

I argue that Pasolini’s early work on Aeschylus attempts to answer this question in a positive. He initially read the *Oresteia* as an instrument to posit a proletarian resistance to the emboldened and subtler forms of fascism and capitalism that emerged in postwar Italy.³ For him, the concept of the “irrational” was always inseparable from this broader polemical project. However, as I argue, it is through its interpenetration with discourses surrounding the value of the classics that this concept reveals itself as a frustrated and empty signifier. Ultimately, I follow several recent scholars in reading a disappointment with the “irrational” into Pasolini’s late works – a disappointment that coincides with other forms of disillusionment registered in books and movies left unfinished at the time of his murder in 1975. At the end of the article, I return to the enduring value of compromised or failed classical receptions, and the broader theoretical lessons that might be drawn from Pasolini’s localized disappointments.

For clarity, I want to outline the textual and conceptual itineraries relevant to my argument. This narrative begins in Section 1 with documents (an article, letters, a translator’s note) surrounding Pasolini’s translation of Aeschylus (his *Orestiad*, first performed in May 1960 and published simultaneously). Then, in Section 2, I explore his engagements with the “irrational” in Gramsci, structuralism, and Marxist linguistics (in an essay dated 1965). Section 3 turns to Pasolini’s extension of the *Oresteia* in his *Pilade* (1967), which I read concerning a piece of his later political writings (his well-known article on the “fireflies,” one symbol of the “irrational,” from 1975). Finally, Section 4 explores the “irrational” in two works left unfinished at the time of his murder (his study for a film that was never made, *Appunti per un’Orestiad Africana*, from 1970, and

3 That Pasolini was asking these kinds of questions is made clear in Todini, “Un antico agli antipodi,” and Flores, “Una classicità di rottura,” 245.

his posthumously published notes toward a novel, *Petrolio*, which he had begun in the mid-1970s).⁴

Politically, the overarching tenor of Pasolini's career in this period might be summarized, all too briefly, regarding his growing, quasi-obsessive concern with how social transformations replicate parts of earlier ideological structures. The paradigmatic examples are fascism and capitalism, both of which enter new phases for Pasolini after the war. While the Fascist regime had been defeated, Pasolini believed that a lower-case "fascism" persisted in Italian politics (carrying forward its earlier transmutations of Christian values and ideals). Similarly, capitalism had found a successor in neocapitalism – no longer a mere mode of production but a way of life with a now unabashed globalizing and coercive force (akin to what Anglophone scholars have labeled late-stage capitalism).⁵

Amid these political arcs, one must locate the initial optimism that drove Pasolini to engage with the concept of the "irrational." Nevertheless, there is also an academic background to this concept that discloses its precarious affective position. The "irrational" is ultimately a rubric for Pasolini, which includes and adapts various terms drawn from anthropology and classical scholarship that imply (if they do not explicitly describe) forms of political and cultural nostalgia. It closely resembles the Tylorian concept of "survivals," i.e., those aspects that persist in vestigial form across social transformations, which were of great interest (under a range of similar labels) to the Cambridge Ritualists.⁶ Indeed, Pasolini also speaks consistently of *sopravvivenza* ["survival"] in his works. It is distinguished from the "irrational" in Pasolini by a terminological slipperiness investigated below, transforming the survival of the past's "irrational" aspects into more than a passive remainder. It becomes a force in and of itself, an "irrational" capable of effecting its own active transformations.⁷

The most important, if more indirect, source is E. R. Dodds' *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951), a watershed publication in

4 This itinerary is partly analogous to others taken before, with important exceptions, in clarifying the history of Pasolini's many receptions of Aeschylus. A key text is Picconi, "La furia del passato."

5 For an outline of these polemics, see Righi, "Pasolini and the Politics of Life of Neocapitalism."

6 On the Cambridge School as a context for Pasolini's *Orestiae*, see discussions throughout Usher, "An African *Oresteia*."

7 For the connection between Pasolini and Tylor (and on Pasolini's possible sources) see Bazzocchi, "Costellazione di immagini," 21 (with bibliography).

the history of classical scholarship for its paradigmatic reframing of the seemingly total rationality of the Greek tradition. While Pasolini's engagement with Dodds is less transparent than his borrowings from other scholars, they, in any case, share an attitude toward the ancient past. Both held that the recovery of the "irrational" would serve as a corrective to the ingrained rationality of the present, not being found as much as being retrojected into antiquity. Whereas African and Aztec art had taught a generation of anthropologically-minded scholars to foster an "awareness of mystery in the ability to penetrate to the deeper, less conscious levels of human experience," the reception of the classical past fell squarely into rationalistic exercises that tracked with political expediencies both Dodds and Pasolini sought to resist in their own ways.⁸ But this series of realizations – clear to Dodds when he published his book – was more belatedly attained in Pasolini's oeuvre. Indeed, one can see at the end of this paper that Pasolini's own turn to Africa plays into this processual revaluation of antiquity's purchase on the present. But it remains salient that the initial optimism toward the irrational, which later dissipates, finds its origins in an earlier disappointment toward the inability of the West's classical inheritance to disclose the unconscious depths of human experience seemingly. Thus, one can see that the paradigm shift effected by Dodds when he folded affects surrounding the irrational (disappointment, guilt, shame) into the study of rationalism spoke to a much broader discontent, which then had a powerful catalyzing impact on the broader landscape of Italian and European classical studies.

To foreshadow my conclusions in plain terms, Pasolini posed what was at least initially an eminently reasonable question: if the values of the past can persist in such a way as to strengthen the dominant holds of fascism and capitalism, why might one not attempt to locate the similar survival of aspects of the past that will allow the people to disrupt these ideologies? However, this investigation was hindered by Pasolini's inability to formulate a much-desired Marxist aesthetics to approach the classics. The issue is the possibility of a revolutionary form of reading that comes to be hampered by his slow but growing awareness of his fatal equivocations concerning the posited structure of the "irrational" and its possible political promise.

8 Dodds, *Greeks and the Irrational*, 1.

LEAD UP TO THE *ORESTIADE* (1959–60)

There are substantial traces of Pasolini's creative process surrounding his translation of the *Oresteia*. These paratexts unambiguously attest to the emergence of the "irrational" as a concept that carried a personal sense of urgency for Pasolini, grounded in what he defines as Marxist criticism. Indeed, since Pasolini was generally preoccupied with the question of unexpected continuities across political systems, the invitation he received in 1959 to translate Aeschylus for the *Teatro Popolare Italiano* (TPI) seemed to offer him precisely the kind of personal proving ground he had been seeking for his larger ideas. In this section, I trace the affective attachment to the *Oresteia* that is extant in documents surrounding the *Orestiaide*. My objective is not to summarize the process, as has already been done, but to highlight how the "irrational" is given its first determinate shape in a landscape filled with generative contradictions that speak to the difficulty in balancing creative, academic, and political gestures of self-positioning.⁹

As the winter of 1959 gave way to the 1960s, Pasolini worked on his translation. In the same period, he wrote several articles expressing his discomfort with how contemporary Marxist criticism tended to retreat into bourgeois aesthetic categories, eroding the proletarian or popular historical specificities of poetry. Such is Pasolini's explicit position in a polemical piece, *La reazione stilistica* ["The Stylistic Reaction"], published in 1960, which includes a portion subtitled *La critica Marxista e l'irrazionalità* ["Marxist Criticism and Irrationality"].¹⁰ He proposes that Marxist critics ought to find space for the "irrational" within the confines of rational thought. Edi Liccioli has referred to this argument as countering both the "crisis of engagement" in Marxism and the concomitant abandonment of more flexible, earlier forms of critique. The notion of a "crisis of engagement" is very effective in this context, as it designates specifically a kind of Marxist-internal feeling of alienation that foreclosed the possibility of entertaining the transformative potential of anything deemed "irrational." Pasolini's view is that the stalemate could be broken: an acceptance of the "irrational" within the confines of rational thought would resolve the tension between how, on the one hand, the "irrational" had become a commodified instrument of bourgeois nostalgia (through which it could no longer serve any role in the formation of actual knowledge, having become a symbol of prestige), and how, on the other, the Marxist adherence

9 Pasolini, *Teatro*, 1213–18.

10 *Saggi* 2, 2290–97.

to dogmatic rationalism, which would not touch anything irrational without a ten-foot silver spoon, was itself developing into a disaffected bourgeois pragmatism.¹¹ Marxist materialism needed, however, to leave the door open to the kinds of fantasies in which real-world processes commonly play themselves out. Thus, the importance of the “irrational” in poems is that it allows a reader to extract qualities from the text that can then act as resources for a critique of the same text’s dominant ideologies. By extension, the admission of the “irrational” into the fold of Marxist critique is one of the very things that grant it dialectic efficacy – recovering this, Pasolini proposes, it will be possible to break the very real conceptual stalemate toward which his specific polemic concerning *Decadentismo* and bourgeois aesthetics was aimed.

As Pasolini struggled to concretize his argument, he turned to his work on the *Oresteia*, articulating his *più profonda e totale emozione* [“deepest and most total emotion”] at the passages at the end of the *Eumenides* in which Athena transforms the Erinyes into Eumenides, *lasciandole tale e quali, ossia forse irrazionali* [“leaving them just as they are, as irrational forces”].¹² He reads the work of Athena as an exercise in purposefully preserving aspects of the past that rub against the new order, offering this peculiar conservatism as an example of that which Marxist criticism appears to be unable to appreciate. (We will see later that he reads the trilogy precisely as an instantiation of dialectical synthesis.) However, the ineffability of the “irrational” and its lack of correlates – its *espressività irrelata, non definibile* [“non-referential, indefinable expressivity”] – raises several questions about its standing as a conceptual object. The vestigial, irrational elements of a poetic composition speak obliquely to something perceived as urgent but frustratingly opaque. In the opening of his article, Pasolini admits that he is writing from a reactive position because earlier writings of his had been misunderstood, and he fails to arrive at a satisfying explanation. However, this suffices to conclude that Pasolini is voicing an affective investment in the potentially revolutionary status of the “irrational.”

Indeed, while they shed little further light on Pasolini’s conceptual argument, his letters from the period help us draw a broader picture of this investment. Pasolini’s affective struggle and the desire to define his position pop off the page with unusual intensity, even for a writer who characteristically employs a colloquial and hyperbolic idiom. In a peculiar case of life imitating art, Pasolini was haunted by this

11 Liccioli, *La scena della parola*, 152.

12 Pasolini, *Saggi* 2, 2295.

project. The pressure of getting the work done amid an already packed schedule becomes something of a persecution and, eventually, its own legal battle. Corresponding with Luciano Lucignani, who would go on to direct the performance alongside Vittorio Gassman, Pasolini dispenses with formalities and refuses to be rushed.

Roma, dicembre 1959. Gentile Lucignani, non sono mica un Robot! Sto lavorando, ma lei sa che ho altri impegni [...] ma sto lavorando.¹³

Rome, December 1959. Dear Lucignani, I'm no Robot! I'm working on it, but you know I have other things to do [...] but I'm working on it.

But their impatience was only one kind of pressure. In March of 1960, he tells another correspondent: *ho, nel prossimo mese, un calendario infernale: finire due sceneggiature, fare la traduzione delle Eumenidi* ["this next month, I've got a hell of a schedule: finish two screenplays, translate the *Eumenides*"].¹⁴ In another letter, he makes the toll this all is taking on him explicit: *sono in un periodo di lavoro massacrante* ["I'm getting massacred by my work these days"]; again, in yet another, he punctuates a list of his duties with the same verb, *massacrato* ["massacred"].¹⁵ Once he was done with the project, he felt alienated and dejected. Having returned to Rome, he writes to Lucignani apologizing for not having lingered around after opening night, mingling rhetorical flourishes of emphasis with a stripped-down confession of exhaustion: *non sono fuggito, da Siracusa! Sono scomparso dentro Siracusa stessa... Avevo bisogno di stare solo e riposare* ["I didn't flee from Syracuse! I disappeared within Syracuse itself... I needed to be alone and rest"].¹⁶

He barely returns to the translation in his letters until, as if at the end of his exculpatory exile, he is forced to do so due to a legal dispute. Again, to Lucignani:

non do il benessere perché venga ristampata: assolutamente. L'Istituto del Dramma antico doveva darmi ancora le metà della somma pattuita per contratto, cioè 750 000 lire, come sai: e non me la dà perché dice che la pubblicazione di Einaudi ha danneggiato la sua. Sicché io i soldi non li ho da nessuno dovrò rivolgermi a un avvocato.¹⁷

13 Pasolini, *Lettere*, 463.

14 Ibid., 471.

15 Ibid., 474, see also 472 et passim.

16 Ibid., 476 (my emphases).

17 Pasolini, *Lettere*, 488.

I *absolutely* do not give my go-ahead that [the *Orestia*] be reprinted. The Institute for Ancient Drama still owes me half of the contractually agreed-upon amount, that is 750,000 lira, as you know. They won't give it to me because, they say, the publication with Einaudi has damaged their own. Since I haven't gotten money from anyone, I will have to turn to a lawyer.

Whether this unhappy legal situation was brought to a gracious close by any Athena is unknown to me. (I do not intend to suggest that Pasolini should not have expected his contractually agreed-upon sum for his labors.) Nevertheless, it remains curious that Pasolini's affective investment was amplified in the financial troubles that resulted from publishing houses vying to appropriate some portion of his supposedly radical recasting of the *Oresteia* – coincidentally indexing his overarching concerns about the way literary markets digest ideas into commodities. A further irony is that both publishers (along with the TPI) had, in principle, sought to popularize the classics by cutting across class boundaries. Finally, it is striking that Pasolini should make recourse to a legal system that had been and would otherwise be deeply inimical to his labors and his very person. This emphasized the oscillation between deeply-felt personal contexts (the suffering, laborious author at work on preserving the “irrational” as a source of revolutionary potential) and institutional ones ultimately concerned with their bottom lines.

This tension between personal and institutional selves is repeated in the better-studied *Lettera dal traduttore* [“Letter from the translator”] that prefaces the published text of Pasolini's *Orestia*.¹⁸ In that note, Pasolini casts himself as an anti-philological academic outsider while making unexpected recourse to his qualifications and philological acumen. Pasolini emphasizes, again and again, the rushed nature of his work, offering what has even been recognized as an *excusatio non petita*, sequentially buttressed by several surreptitious recourses to authority.¹⁹ In his words, he was *impreparato* [“unprepared”] when no one less than Gassman himself asked him to translate Aeschylus.²⁰ The results were necessarily amateurish, he says, since time constraints meant that he had to do without all sound philological approaches. He

18 Pasolini, *Teatro*, 1007–9. On the note, see inter alia Fusillo, “Pasolini's *Agamemnon*,” 224–26.

19 Casi, “Pasolini,” 71.

20 Pasolini, *Teatro*, 1007.

explains that he turned this evident embarrassment to his advantage by relying instead on his irrational (poetic) instinct:

non mi è restato che seguire il mio profondo, avido, vorace istinto [...] Mi sono gettato sul testo, a divorarlo come una belva, in pace: un cane sull'osso, uno stupendo osso carico di carne magra, stretto tra le zampe, a proteggerlo [...].²¹

There was nothing left for me to do but to follow my deep, greedy, voracious instinct [...] I threw myself on the text, devouring it like a beast, in peace: a dog going at his bone, a stupendous bone loaded with lean meat, held tight between the paws, to protect it [...].

Pasolini continues to explain that he consulted resources only sparingly and haphazardly. When it came down to differences between translations or the critical editions, he just chose what seemed most pleasing to him: *peggio di così non potevo comportarmi* ["I couldn't have behaved worse"]. He allowed his own irrationality to take command.²²

This bad-boy philologist persona served Pasolini rather well for several reasons (despite its contradictions) related to his desire to inspire direct "engagement" between text and audiences. Primarily, his instinctive approach allowed him to counter the restrictions implicit in the aesthetic tradition of Italian translations of the classics – melodramatic, highfalutin, and exaggerated in performative emphasis to the point of monotonicity.²³ Out with the *toni sublimi* ["sublime tones"] of the old-fashioned aesthetes and musty professors and bring on the *toni civili* ["civil tones"] – the tones of the people.²⁴ There were fundamental conceptual reasons for wanting to do this. First and foremost, poetic intelligibility – Pasolini's fundamental desire to render the classics more directly accessible to wider audiences by translating the lyric choral portions in a straightforward rather than enigmatic manner. Nevertheless, there are also concomitant dramaturgical reasons, as explained by Gassman in the production notes that accompanied the original publication of the translation, who makes a series of striking remarks about the basic aural experi-

21 Pasolini, *Teatro*, 1007.

22 Ibid., 1007.

23 Discussed further below.

24 Pasolini, *Teatro*, 1008.

ence of microphone-equipped stone theaters.²⁵ He clarifies that, since open-air theater requires considerable voice projection, this entails a risk: narrowing the expressive tonal ranges might controvert the desire for a more direct idiom that would close the gap between a chorus and an audience – in addition, there are problems surrounding ambient sounds and the echoes caused by an actor's movements.²⁶ The implication is not merely that the sublime tones carry the usual classist difficulties of literary Italian but that the orthodox modes of performing those translations themselves make the experience partly unintelligible – to attend a classical performance is not to understand and think through the play but to be present at a transcendent event, a status symbol, in which audiences are inured to the effect of the “irrational.”

But Pasolini's perplexing and oblique self-contradictions once again creep into his letter. He justifies his decision to adopt the colloquial registers of spoken Italian by making recourse a generalized, impressionistic philological claim – precisely the kind of (empty) technical claim that a professor might make when introducing the text to students. He asserts that Aeschylus' Greek seems to him a language *né elevata né espressiva: é estremamente strumentale* [“neither elevated nor expressive: it is instrumental to an extreme”], substantiating his point with vague references to a lack of complex syntax and a lack of historical specificity in its allusions to the political events of the time.²⁷ Make of such comments what you will, but note the affectation. Pasolini is caught between a reasoned (if impassioned) defense of his choices as a translator and the desire to come across as a connoisseur. His posturing performs the very kinds of equivocations he had accused contemporary Marxist criticisms of making.

Returning to the head of the letter, another example of this tension can be adduced. Pasolini claimed that Gassman had invited him to translate Aeschylus *because* word had gotten around that Pasolini was at work translating Virgil. It is not clear anyone could have known that he had undertaken that project (he never got very far with it in any case), and, as scholars have noted, that is a strange and self-congratulatory reason to suppose he had been invited to translate the trilogy. Gassman chose Pasolini because he was a public intellectual of great importance and, not coincidentally, one with a literary and

25 This aspect of the creative process has been commented upon already, in Casi, *I teatri di Pasolini*, 91–92.

26 Gassman, “Lo spettacolo del TP1” = Pasolini, *Orestiaide*, 175.

27 Pasolini, *Teatro*, 1008.

political agenda that aligned with the TPI's explicitly popularizing mission.²⁸ Undoubtedly aware of these dynamics, which are flattering, Pasolini could not resist casting himself as a connoisseur of the Classics. On the verge of a turbulent *recusatio* that he transformed into a manifesto of instinctive poetics, a reflex of insecurity has him grasping for established forms of authority.

From this perspective, it is perhaps no surprise that Pasolini would contradict himself again by offering an exegesis of the *Oresteia* based not on instinct but rather on academic reading. His summary of the plot and its political implications is indebted to the contemporary work of the Marxist classicist George Thomson, whose idiosyncratic *Aeschylus and Athens* (1941) had recently been translated into Italian.²⁹ Through him, Pasolini came to see in the *Oresteia* a narrative of dialectic societal transformation centering on the value of a vaguely defined "irrational" force from the past. It is worth quoting this passage of the translator's note at length.

La trama delle tre tragedie di Eschilo è questa: in una società primitiva dominano dei sentimenti che sono primordiali, istintive, oscuri (le Erinni), sempre pronte a travolgere le rozze istituzioni (la monarchia di Agamennone), operanti sotto il segno uterino della madre, intesa appunto come forma informe e indifferente della natura.

Ma contro tali sentimenti arcaici, si erge la ragione (ancora arcaicamente intesa come prerogativa virile: Atena è nata senza madre, direttamente dal padre), e li vince, creando per la società altre istituzioni, moderne: l'assemblea, il suffragio.

Tuttavia certi elementi del mondo antico, appena superato, non andranno del tutto repressi, ignorati: andranno, piuttosto, acquisti, assimilati, e naturalmente modificati. In altre parole: l'irrazionale, rappresentato dalle Erinni, non deve essere rimosso (ché poi sarebbe impossibile), ma semplicemente arginato e dominato dalla ragione, passione produttrice e fertile.³⁰

28 Casi, "Pasolini," 70.

29 In the letter, Pasolini does not mention him by name, although he cites Thomson's critical edition of Aeschylus' plays as one of his reference texts. It is clear from related correspondences that Thomson's work shaped this translation and that the directors of the TPI even wanted to have Thomson come to lecture in Syracuse (he declined due to previously scheduled engagements). The original publication of the translation includes the epistolary exchange and portions of Thomson's work.

30 Pasolini, *Teatro*, 1009.

The plot of Aeschylus' three tragedies is this: in a primitive society, primordial, instinctive, obscure sentiments (the Erinyes) dominate, always ready to steamroll over crude institutions (Agamemnon's monarchy), working under the uterine aegis of the mother, understood, in point of fact, as the unformed and indifferent form of nature.

But against such archaic sentiments, reason arises (still archaically charged as a virile prerogative: Athena was born without a mother, directly from her father), and it overcomes them, creating for society other, modern institutions: the assembly, suffrage.

Nonetheless, some elements of the ancient world, just now overcome, will not be entirely repressed, ignored: they will be, instead, acquired, assimilated, and naturally modified. In other words: the irrational, represented by the Erinyes, does not need to be eliminated (which would, in any case, be impossible) but simply shored away and dominated by reason, a productive and fertile passion.

On the one hand, Pasolini offers a relatively straightforward account of a dialectic process (thesis, antithesis, synthesis – with a heavy emphasis on the latter), showing an immediate indebtedness to Thomson. But on the other, this account is shot through with oracular and complexly gendered language concerning irrational forces that persist indelibly. Massimo Fusillo is correct to note that Pasolini departs from Thomson, showing a crisis in his Marxism and a related turn to Freudism, but also echoes Johann Bachofen's theories on matriarchy.³¹ The importance of Bachofen to Pasolini has been noted in connection to his possible reliance on Friedrich Engels' preface to the fourth edition of *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats* (1884), a text mentioned by Thomson as the inspiration for his own work.³² This preface, which was available in Italian to Pasolini, is crucial also for another reason: it explicitly (and critically) connects Bachofen to Tylor. This intellectual history does little to properly clarify Pasolini's argument above (and I would resist attempts to make it make sense at all costs). It remains a problem that the language of older scholarship floods Pasolini's language with a hypotactic, oratorical exposition precisely where the turns in the dialectic process ought

31 Fusillo, "Pasolini's *Agamemnon*," 224, 226. On Bachofen's theories and their limitations concerning Aeschylus, see Zeitlin, "The Dynamics of Misogyny." On Pasolini's departures from Thomson, see Picconi "La furia del passato" (in dialogue with Fusillo, *La Grecia secondo Pasolini*).

32 Vitali, "Fortuna dell'*Oresteia*," 27; Thomson, *Aeschylus at Athens*, front matter (preface to first edition).

to have received a more explicit elucidation – a concrete example, some of that plain speech for which Pasolini was a life-long partisan. Allowing this contradiction to stand helps to clarify how and why Pasolini understood his political commitment to theories of survival and the “irrational” not to clash with his preoccupations concerning the antiquarian aesthetics of bourgeois culture (discussed further in my next section). At this stage in his career, Pasolini understood the “irrational” as a potential break-away force carried from the past into the present – an irreducible and subterranean power of dissent shored away by Athena in the transition to the new world order. Further, he believed Athena to be acting – to an extent – benevolently and in such a way that the “irrational” could be recovered in its subversive terms. This is his optimism and the source of his eventual disappointments.

To be clear, I am not interested in a critique of the substance of Pasolini's, let alone Thomson's, claims on Aeschylus.³³ Scholars have long noted that very motivated readings at play in the summary above connect to the broader political expedients to which Pasolini bends Aeschylus.³⁴ But the form of Pasolini's encounter with Aeschylus is at stake here. Like Thomson, Pasolini's work was shaped by ideological ratiocinations that are interesting in and of themselves and attest to a curious reaction to anthropological scholarship and the Cambridge School. However, another subtext should be made explicit: Pasolini also followed Thomson in another sense, reacting to earlier and ongoing fascist appropriations of classical tropes and the instrumentalization of the literary past.³⁵ His attempt to define the import of Aeschylus sought to subtract the *Oresteia* from such contexts – or to show how it might be used to subvert those conversations. His broader project to turn the classics into a tool of the proletariat finds one of its earliest expressions in the confused methodological and theoretical pastiche of the translator's letter.

One last word on the translation itself, since I do not engage with it here. Partly, this is because it has been studied at length already elsewhere.³⁶ Except for some of its psychologizing aspects and some

33 For an attentive reading of Pasolini's views on Aeschylus in relation to those of other classical scholars, and specifically on the oddness of his brief claim concerning Aeschylean language, see D'Alessandro Behr, “Pasolini's *Orestiad*, the Irrational, and Greek Tragedy.”

34 Fusillo, *La Grecia secondo Pasolini*, 187; Flores, “Una classicità di rottura.”

35 On Pasolini amid the broader Italian turn against Fascist visions of the classical past, see Caruso, “Classical, Barbarian, Ancient, Archaic.”

36 Fusillo, *La Grecia secondo Pasolini*, 196–214; Morosi, “Vittoria sui contrari”; Piva, “Pasolini Traduttore di Eschilo.”

of the politicized elements already discussed above, Pasolini cribbed (sometimes very haphazardly, sometimes ingeniously) from existing translations, and critical debates about this creative process are ongoing.³⁷ By way of an example, I will merely mention the often-brilliant translation of Greek gnomic and proverbial utterances into rough Italian equivalents, such as the “ox on the tongue” of the watchman’s opening monologue into *muto [...] come una tomba* [akin to English “sepulchral silence”], that attest to his interest of rendering the original in an idiomatic and popular language. Nevertheless, this aspect of his creative endeavor does not address the question of the “irrational” as much as the contexts surrounding the translation continue to do long after 1960.³⁸

GRAMSCI’S *BIRIGNAO* (1965)

This brief section highlights what I consider a watershed moment in Pasolini’s awareness of how the “irrational” is implicated in language politics, leading to a partial reversal in his valuation of the “irrational” more generally. In his *Appunti en poète per una linguistica Marxista* [“Notes in a Poetic Key toward a Marxist Linguistics”] (1965), Pasolini offers lengthy and scattered speculations on a range of problems he perceives at the core of structuralist linguistics.³⁹ At the heart of the essay is a critique of Ferdinand de Saussure’s distinction between *langue* and *parole*. His intervention raises questions about whether structuralist linguistics is supple enough to account for popular idiom and class. Pasolini is clearly reprising elements of the dissatisfaction with Marxist criticism that he had discussed in terms of the *Oresteia* at the beginning of the decade.⁴⁰

But what interests me here is the document’s peculiar opening salvo: a critique of Antonio Gramsci’s use of language. Pasolini effectively and ironically lambasts Gramsci for the kinds of rhetorical tics that Pasolini later admits he recognizes in his writings, some of which I

37 Degani, “Eschilo, *Orestide*, traduzione di Pier Paolo Pasolini” (the early, unfavorable review); Vitali, “Fortuna dell’*Oresteia*.”

38 On the linguistic innovations of the translation, further observations are collected in Liccioli, *La scena della parola*, 156–58.

39 Pasolini insists throughout on his lack of technical knowledge and offers his ideas up for scrutiny, hoping experts will correct him as needs be. Pasolini, *Saggi*, 1307–42.

40 Italo Gallo reports similar concerns regarding Saussure, *langue/parole*, Marx, and the *Oresteia* translation all arose during Pasolini’s visit to Salerno in 1959. See Gallo, “Pasolini traduttore di Eschilo,” 33–34.

sketched out above. He writes Gramsci's early papers *sono scritte in un brutto italiano* ["are written in an ugly Italian"], characterized by professorial-sounding wordplays, recourses to *l'espressività enfatica dell'italiano letterario* ["the emphatic expressivity of literary Italian"], and lapses into an academic translationese that is a consequence of his debts to French and German thinkers.⁴¹ In brief, the young Gramsci is understood to retreat into the safe harbor of bourgeois aesthetics – a striking observation, given that Gramsci was so concerned with his linguistic register, the intermingling of official language and regional dialects, and, as Pasolini acknowledges, even raised the idea of formulating *una possibile lingua dell'egemonia comunista* ["a possible language of the communist hegemony"] that would, by definition, resist highfalutin, obscurantist tendencies.⁴²

Pasolini connects this ironic predicament to the emergence, in the 1960s, of *un particolare « birignao » probabilmente nato contemporaneamente a quello teatrale* ["a particular *birignao* that was likely born at the same time as the theatrical one"], employed by nationalist politicians to promote an aestheticization of authoritarianism. The uncommon word *birignao* refers by onomatopoeia to an over-emphatic recitational technique, an actor's tendency to nasalize speech patterns and affect an unnatural, exaggerated, saccharine register. This is precisely the monotonal register that had been conventional in Italian performances of Greek tragedy (and it remains so today, for the most part), which one saw above that both Pasolini and Gassman had gone to great lengths to avoid for the *Orestiaide*. Pasolini's diagnosis of Gramsci is most incisive because it also recognizes a pattern in the occurrence of such slippages in Gramsci's registers. They are not casual or random stylistic slippages. Instead, according to Pasolini, they tend to occur precisely when Gramsci's ideological analyses betray a faulty understanding of a dialectical process.

These sites of the tonal shift are thus occasioned by the persistence of survival of some fundamental *lacerto dell'antica irrazionalità* ["fragment of the ancient irrationality"] that Gramsci fails to recognize as a constructive interference in the systems he is explaining. Whatever this may precisely signify is left undetermined. On the one hand, the insecurity of the young Gramsci (an autodiagnosis for Pasolini) prevents him from allowing the unpredictable aspects of quotidian experience to shine through, instead suppressing them in the cold rationality of the dominant systems of expression. Compared to Pasolini's note on

41 Pasolini, *Saggi*, 1307–10.

42 Ibid., 1308.

the *Oresteia*, the young Gramsci is here figured as an incompetent Athena – unable to effect an expedient synthesis of the new and the old, flattening the power of the past to disrupt the present. The risk is that the new order is constructed without questioning the basis of the value system at stake: reason conquers the irrational by placing it on the margins, avoiding the implicit threat of inconsistency.

But the irrational is not properly extrinsic to language, Pasolini argues, nearly to the point of over-rationalizing its survival. He offers his own upbringing as an example, citing the bad petit-bourgeois habits of his language, which he identifies as a direct product of having grown up in the 1920s. The reification, nearly fetishization of the irrational in poetic terms, then becomes a site for recovering the putatively primordial forces that structured his linguistic (and, by extension, political) consciousness. It turns out that to affect a *birignao* is both to depart from oneself and also to recover that aspect of oneself pre-emptively alienated by formative habits, an evident contradiction but one without which no real dialectic can take place.

Exploring in these terms, and through an explicit theatrical metaphor, how the conceptual apparatus of a rational/irrational binary might operate in an author, Pasolini offers an implicit key for understanding his subsequent engagement with Aeschylus – and for reading Pasolini through himself.

FROM TRILOGY TO TETRALOGY: PYLADES AND THE FIREFLIES (THE LATE 1960S-1975).

While Pasolini's reading of Aeschylus in 1960 in some ways emphasized the productive potential of reason as a governing force in society, he was – as shown above – still confident that the irrational still had its role to play as a disruptive force. From 1966 to 1970, his attention shifted squarely to unpacking the implications of the latter half of this problem, questioning whether the reasoned transformation produced by Athena preserved the “irrational” in terms that might make it worthwhile to revolutionary projects or merely as precisely the kind of vestige to which bourgeois aesthetics pays exiguous homage while ignoring and curtailing its import. His exploration of this problem is not in essay form but in a theatrical experiment, his *Pilade*, which extends the Aeschylean trilogy by transforming the *Oresteia* into a tetralogy.⁴³ In this play, Pasolini reinvents himself as a kind of Aeschy-

43 Pasolini had explicitly adumbrated this move as a completion of the Erinyes' transformation into their ancient selves in *Bestia da stile* (ca. 1966), which I do

lus – exploring an ambition stated at the end of his translator's note, when he announced that Aeschylus was *un autore come io vorrei essere* ["an author of the kind I would like to be"].⁴⁴ This assumption of an Aeschylean vantage is often read in terms of his desire to explore the *Oresteia* from a new angle as well as by a desire to make its political implications even more transparent for contemporary audiences. My argument in this section is that, as far as the "irrational" is concerned, one arrives here at a moment of clear, pessimistic rupture.

A substantial amount of scholarship has engaged with this play's allegorical recasting of political themes, so I give only a summary here.⁴⁵ The premise is telling: Pylades, essentially mute in the Aeschylean text, is here a vocal critic of Orestes, who had returned as a leader to Argos, espousing ideals of reason and progress that Pasolini sees as part of the transition from fascism to capitalism. Elektra, holding onto the past, serves to underline the continuity in values from fascism to what follows – how the cult of progress instituted by Orestes is hardly revolutionary and is, in its way, just as authoritarian as the old order.⁴⁶ Pylades is left grappling aporetically with how to conceive of a revolution that will not plunge society back into a form of tyranny – how to activate the supposedly irrepressible irrational now that it is found to be on the verge of disappearing.⁴⁷ He vacillates between ideological poles, finding them all saturated with potential or actual authoritarianism. He claims he is consistently unable to speak, to find a voice to articulate an alternative to the status quo. He cannot position his investment in the irrational in any other terms than those of negation, which he fails to transform into active resistance to Orestes' narratives of progress and reason. Indeed, at the end of the play, Pylades finds himself in a despondent exile, seemingly bringing the "irrational" with him off-stage. Pasolini's pessimism here comes to the fore in a way that distinguishes the *Pilade* from his previous engagements with Aeschylus.

However, for a moment, the play engages in imagining what a moment of successful revolution might look like, although it is left void of concrete ideological content. The Eumenides provide Pylades with a prophecy of new-found concord, a utopian fantasy of success-

not explore here due to lack of space. See Mango, "Il cielo può cadere sulla nostra testa," 229.

44 Pasolini, *Teatro*, 1009.

45 Fabrizio di Maio, *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Il teatro in un porcile*, 162–200.

46 Berti, "Mito e Politica," 110–12.

47 Albini, "Pasolini e la storia dell'antico," 27.

ful synthesis between the “strange” irrational-imbued past and the proleptic emergence of a new, “good” world.

È strano. Allora gli uomini saranno buoni...
 I loro visi avranno fisionomie nuove...
 Sia il ragazzo allegro – padrone delle strade di sera
 e delle osterie tra le viti e i glicini –
 sia quello timido – che tace, invece, aspettando
 serio il suo turno di amore,
 negli angoli dove stanno madri e lucciole –
 avranno qualcosa di nuovo che tiene
 in sé luminose e comuni possibilità per l'avvenire [...] ⁴⁸

It's strange. Then men will be good.
 Their faces will have new physiognomies...
 Both the happy boy – master of the streets at night
 And of the taverns between the vines and wisterias –
 And the shy one – who is silent, instead, waiting
 Seriously for his turn in love,
 In the corners where mothers and fireflies are –
 They will have something new that holds
 Within itself luminous and communal possibilities for what is to
 come [...]

In this fantasy, men encounter the feminine matrix of productivity (already identified in the Erinyes by Pasolini, as discussed above). They do so in the meeting with mothers and “fireflies,” the latter, here as elsewhere in Pasolini, slang for prostitutes. But the final verses of the quoted passage literalize the insects, calling to mind the flashes of light that disrupt the night's darkness. This psycho-sexual metaphor will go on to carry enormous weight in Pasolini's political thought.

Indeed, Georges Didi-Huberman's recent archaeology of the fireflies in Pasolini has shown that this image has had a long and complex gestation as a symbol for the survival of the “irrational” and how it operates. It can be traced back as early as to letters from 1941 when fireflies (and prostitutes) abounded in Pasolini's countryside escapades.⁴⁹ There, the young poet envied their lateral movements, their ability to create networks of experience that flitted in and out of sight in unpredictable, irrational ways – resisting the habitus of

⁴⁸ Pasolini, *Teatro*, 407.

⁴⁹ Didi-Huberman, *Survivance des lucioles*.

fascism. In the period in which *Pilade* was written, the fireflies also reoccur in other plays where their prophetic potential remains active, signaling agreement between generations and the possibilities of new and unexpected forms of concord between people. But in a famous article from February of 1975, Pasolini announced that for some time now, the fireflies had disappeared. The possibilities for slipping out from the subtle, totalizing fascism that had saturated Italian politics since the end of the war were gone. The irrational was not preserved as a site of potential transformation. Instead, the vestiges nodded to the past, reminding people that the past is a foreclosed country, from whose ruins the modern nation has been formed irrevocably. In the move from the *Orestiad* to *Pilade*, skepticism grows toward the “irrational” as latent power until those fantasies vanish somewhere between Pylades’ stage exit and the article of 1975.

The splicing of the debate about the irrational into the metaphoric of fireflies raises a host of likely unanswerable poetic questions about how long the two had been connected in Pasolini’s mind. Might one re-read the *Orestiad* for its investigation of flickering lights – the sequence of beacons that drives news of the fall of Troy to Argos, the constellations in the sky above the nightwatchman on the roof? Were fireflies on Pasolini’s mind as he translated these passages? As will be demonstrated in a moment, whether or not he realized it at the time, the passage became yet another way to interpret the disappearance of fireflies in his later works.

UNFINISHED DISAPPOINTMENTS (1970-?)

At the same time as he was at work on his *Pilade*, Pasolini prepared a cinematic sketch titled *Appunti per un’Orestiad Africana* (1970). This work’s title is often translated as “Notes toward an African Orestes,” but this erodes an explicit callback to his translation of the trilogy using the more unusual form “Orestiad.” This is perhaps the more studied text of Pasolini’s Aeschylean receptions, but its position in the debate around the “irrational” is relatively under-discussed.

The movie combines shots taken by Pasolini during his visits to several African countries, archival footage, seminar-style discussions with African students at Rome’s Sapienza University, and musical portions. Pasolini narrates over large portions of the film, making observations and explaining his basic thesis that Africa (construed as a pre-capitalistic space) offers the ideal grounds for staging the *Oresteia*. Scholars have noted the Eurocentric bias in his work, which construes Africa much like the Cambridge anthropologists had done

earlier in the century, as well as clear elements of condescension in Pasolini's questions and answer segments with the students, whose unease concerning Pasolini's easy equivocation between the pre-capitalist and the "primitive" is evident.⁵⁰ There are other issues, including what appear to be fundamental misunderstandings or misapplications of the Aeschylean plot (Argos is not a democratic city) – and other examples of a selective remembering of Greek mythology surrounding the Trojan War (Thersites makes an unusual appearance, perhaps colored by Pasolini's readings of Hegel and Nietzsche, as a captain of the Greek troops). The "irrational" surfaces in several instances but most tellingly in Pasolini's assertion that it is *animale* "animal" (as an adjective, describing the animal part of human activity). As such, it figures neatly into Pasolini's attempt to excavate the pre-capitalist and pre-colonial out of Africa he has problematically constituted as a homogeneous, non-European whole. Thus, the transposition of the irrationality of the Greeks onto Africa that Pasolini wanted to make legible does not work.

While the on-screen Pasolini, talking to and over the students he invited to participate in his project, appears unabashedly oblivious to the criticisms raised by his interlocutors, one does not know his reflections on these materials after the fact. Alessia Ricciardi, and, later, independently, Sarah Nooter, have concluded that perhaps Pasolini may be intentionally putting his mistaken conceptualizations on display by releasing this film *as notes*. (After all, why preserve and screen scenes in which his biases are readily exposed?)⁵¹ Reading the *Appunti* as a documentary of failed reception, Pasolini's work becomes a self-admission of defeat – and may help explain why he never seems to have attempted to complete the project, having realized (by 1975 at the latest, as shown above) that there was a fundamental problem with trying to extract the "irrational" from a synthesis that presupposes badly construed prior elements. Indeed, taken with the *Pilade*, the *Appunti* speak to a double recognition of the misconstrual of both ancient Greek political history and the history of pre-colonial Africa. The "irrational" survivals are merely optical illusions, unruly artifacts of the synthetic process, not routes into an actual (and recoverable) dimension of experience.

50 Raizen, "Voicing the Popular"; Wetmore, *Black Dionysus*; Hawkins, "Orestes on Trial in Africa"; Usher, "An African Oresteia"; for a slightly different set of views, see Fusillo, "Pasolini's *Agamemnon*," and *La Grecia secondo Pasolini*.

51 Ricciardi, "Umanesimo e ideologia"; Nooter, "The Loss of Telos."

This speculative exploration of Pasolini's dejected self-realizations may find support in his novel *Petrolio*, left unfinished at his death in 1975 and published posthumously in numbered notes. In this work, the "irrational" figures, more an adjective than a noun, as a direct component of fascist thought: the irrational philosophies that would fix the form of the past in terms applicable to the present – a past out of which fascism and capitalism find fertile soil, growing irrationally and exponentially.⁵² It may be difficult to argue for a proper reversal in Pasolini's position, given the nature of the evidence. However, it is striking that in the second paragraph of the first page of the extant text (following a laconic description of a decadent house in the first), Pasolini locates the origin of the philosophical conceits of his novel in May of 1960 – the same month in which the *Orestiad*e hit the stage and in which Pasolini retreated into the shadows of Syracuse, exhausted from his translation project.

Ma in quel Maggio del 1960 il Neo-capitalismo era ancora una novità troppo nuova, era il termine di un sapere ancora troppo privilegiato per cambiare il sentimento della realtà.⁵³

But in that May of 1960, Neocapitalism was still too new of a new thing, it was the end of a knowledge still too privileged to change the feeling of reality.

Whether or not this passage can be taken as an autobiographical, metaleptic rupture of the narrator's voice cannot be finally determined, although Pasolini intended to insert the opening verses of the *Orestiad*e into a later portion of *Petrolio* (emphasizing the connection between the stars of the night sky in Aeschylus and the flickering fires set up on the roadside by prostitutes).⁵⁴ But even as a coincidence it encapsulates the despondency of *Pilade* and the defeatism that has been read into the *Appunti*.

IRRATIONAL CONCLUSIONS

Taking an unusual route through texts that surround and extend Pasolini's work on the *Orestiad*e, I have forwarded the argument that Aeschylus' trilogy served as a literary lodestone for exploring

⁵² Pasolini, *Petrolio*, 263.

⁵³ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 292–93.

how the “irrational” might serve as a literary and political category in Pasolini’s oeuvre. There was an initial optimism, a hope that the irrational may offer a route out of the saturating affective reality of fascism’s persistence in Italian politics alongside the entrenchment of capitalism as a way of life. This vision turned sour as the years went by, leading to the pessimistic preservation of the “irrational” as constructed object offered up to critique before it was perhaps recognized as a concept fundamentally antithetical to Pasolini’s project because it is in many ways precisely a fascist construct.⁵⁵

The stakes of this argument for how Pasolini can be read as engaging in advancing “proletarian classics” are twofold. On a merely historiographic plane, one can identify Pasolini’s positive intent to generate a version of the classical accessible to broader, non-bourgeois audiences. This is in line with his broader literary endeavors that I did not discuss but which included, for instance, the production of anthologies of popular poetry, the promotion of folklore, and many critiques of bourgeoisie aesthetics in poetics and essayistic form. The affective investment of Pasolini in conceiving proletarian classics was, therefore, not merely significant in scope. It was also a necessary component of a broader attempt to reframe the boundaries of literary history in constructing imagined communities that resisted the nationalistic trends of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The disappointment of his late career, perhaps aligned with a more general disappointment with the postwar paradigms of artmaking concerning the vacuousness of discourses on progress, might even be compared in future work to the cold conjunction of rationality and horror in Pasolini’s engagements with sadism and fascism, in *Salò* (1975). What kind of “irrational” might stand against the supreme reason of Sadean horror without resorting to ethnographic essentialization and caricatures of the past?

But I want to end by considering how Pasolini’s failed experiment with the “irrational” teaches us something about the importance of classical reception as a kind of artistic and political practice, entrenched to a large extent within the confines of an academic milieu characterized by exclusive intellectualism and elite ideologies of rigor. Pasolini challenged his contemporaries by raising questions of access, democratization, and even revolution – he tried to productively and radically subvert conservative, empty talking points surrounding shared heritages and their ability to form public consciousnesses.

55 On Pasolini’s long and fraught wavering between political poles, see Baldoni and Borgna, *Una lunga incomprensione*.

In this endeavor, he found it remarkably difficult not to fall into a hermeneutic trap, whereby classical works were made to speak to the present with unexpected consequences. The Aeschylus that Pasolini read, translated, and ultimately posited seemed to speak directly to the disenfranchised masses, even inviting a certain kind of resistance to oppressive regimes. But Aeschylus' plays also quickly revealed themselves as inimical to such a project – at least to an extent, since his work required extension in the direction of a sequel, as well as spatial and temporal translation to overcome certain boundaries of historical specificity. Aspects of the ancient poet that did not fit the desired mold were suppressed until they could not be – until Athena's putative success, which Pasolini strove to replicate while he played the role of the Erinyes, became transparently a rejection of the very “irrational” forces that she performatively shored against ruin. As a whole, then, Pasolini's trajectory teaches us to be very careful with the classics. Ancient texts contain mystified and dissimulated ideological coordinates that are not merely historically problematic. As ideological formations, they will continue to forge subjects even out of dissenting reasons – leading to surprising outcomes. In this sense, the classics and the canon can partly foreclose future transformations. In the desire to conceive of proletarian classics, akin to Pasolini's desires, one must not forget that the elite products of past literary history do not themselves share in this ambition.

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ABSTRACT

This article traces Pasolini's engagement with Aeschylus *Oresteia* and the concept of the "irrational," through which he sought to excavate patterns of ideological resistance in the classical past. I argue that Pasolini's translations and adaptations of Aeschylus ultimately failed to achieve his desired ambition to forward an Aeschylus fit for the proletariat, and whose words might spark new kinds of Marxist thought. However, there is value in reading into Pasolini's practices and his reflections on his work. Acknowledging and parsing his affects of disappointment and resignation, the broader conceptual outlines of his ambitions become clearer as gestures of kind of "failed" classical reception – an attempt to turn the classics to new political ends. An analysis of this kind of failure teaches us broader theoretical lessons about what it might mean to perform a generative and politically fruitful appropriation of the classics, necessarily confronting the entrenched ideologies of the past and their tenacious ability to reproduce themselves even in the most unexpected literary and political contexts. The article engages with selections from Pasolini's literary, personal, and political writings from the 1960s until his death – connecting his translations and adaptations of Aeschylus to other contemporaneous essayistic, novelistic, and cinematic projects.

KEYWORDS: Pasolini, Aeschylus, irrational, reception, ideology

Pasolinijevi Grki in iracionalno

IZVLEČEK

Članek obravnava Pasolinijevo ukvarjanje z Ajshilovo *Orestejo* in pojmom »iracionalnega«, s katerim je skušal najti vzorce ideološkega odpora v klasični preteklosti. Trdim, da Pasolinijevi prevodi in priredbe Ajshila na koncu niso dosegli tega, kar je želel, in sicer, da bi predstavil Ajshila, ki bi bil primeren za proletariat in čigar besede bi lahko sprožile nov premislek znotraj marksizma. Kljub temu je vredno raziskati Pasolinijeve prakse in njegova razmišljanja o lastnem delu. Ob priznavanju in razčlenjevanju njegovih afektov razočaranja in resignacije postanejo jasnejši tudi širši konceptualni obrisi njegovih ambicij, kot geste neke vrste »neuspešne« klasične recepcije – poskus, da bi klasike uporabil v nove politične namene. Analiza tega neuspeha prinaša širše teoretsko spoznanje o tem, kaj lahko pomeni generativna in politično plodna prisvojitvev klasikov, ki se nujno sooča z zakoreninjenimi ideologijami preteklosti in z njihovo vztrajno sposobnostjo, da se reproducirajo tudi v najbolj nepričakovanih literarnih in političnih kontekstih. Članek obravnava izbor Pasolinijevih literarnih, osebnih in političnih zapisov od šestdesetih let 20. stoletja do njegove smrti; njegove prevode in priredbe Ajshila poveže s sočasnimi esejističnimi, romanesknimi in filmskimi projekti.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Pasolini, Ajshil, iracionalno, recepcija, ideologija