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Pier Paolo Pasolini , Lawrence Ferlinghetti (Translator) , Francesca Valente (Photographer)

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The Italian film-maker Pier Paolo Pasolini was first and always a poet—the most important civil poet, according to Alberto Moravia, in Italy in the second half of this century. His poems were at once deeply personal and passionately engaged in the political turmoil of his country. In 1949, after his homosexuality led the Italian Communist Party to expel him on charges of "moral and political unworthiness," Pasolini fled to Rome. This selection of poems from his early impoverished days on the outskirts of Rome to his last (with a backward longing glance at his native Friuli) is at the center of his poetic and filmic vision of modern Italian life as an Inferno.

"From all these refusals, we know what Pasolini stood against—political ideologies of all kinds, the complacency inherent in the established social order, the corruption of the institutions of church and state. If Pasolini could be said to have stood for anything it was for the struggles of Italy's working class—both the rural peasants and those barracked in the urban slums at the edges of Italian cities—whose humanity he evoked with great eloquence and nuance. But it is his refusals that animate his legacy with an incandescent rage, a passionate and profound fury that did not, as Ziga suggests, cry out for death—but for just the opposite." —Nathaniel Rich, *The New York Review of Books*

Pier Paolo Pasolini was born in 1922 in Bologna. In addition to the films for which he is world famous, he wrote novels, poetry, and social and cultural criticism, and was an accomplished painter. He was murdered in 1975 at Ostia, near Rome.

Roman Poems Details

Date : Published January 1st 2001 by City Lights (first published January 1st 1986)

ISBN : 9780872861879

Author : Pier Paolo Pasolini , Lawrence Ferlinghetti (Translator) , Francesca Valente (Photographer)

Format : Paperback 96 pages

Genre : Poetry, European Literature, Italian Literature, Cultural, Italy, Culture, Film, Lgbt

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Nancy says

"In poetry, a solution to everything."

Sébastien Bernard says

The introduction reminds us of Pasolini's reputation as a 'civil poet', and Moravia ventures a definition: "a poet who sees his native land in a way that the powerful of the country do not and cannot see it." Asked to describe himself in an interview, he appends a quote attributed to Elsa Morante: "I'm a narcissist with ... an unlucky love for the world." The two definitions combined offer a decent picture, and the feeling here.

In these pieces selected and translated by Ferlinghetti, Pasolini writes about the beauties and evils — large and small — of the Italy of his time, with a mixture of tenderness and alienation, but always a spiritual cool that one might think unlikely of a 'civil poet,' but it turns out is all the more captivating and just.

I'd say the author reserves his real rage and edge in criticism to articles, accusations, and more overtly political poems, such as 'The PCI to young people': each being spotless artifacts of a deep political allegiance to truth. Some of these are selected in the decent 'In Danger: a Pasolini anthology', by City Lights also, a book I would recommend. (There are insights in it which speak beautifully and frightfully to the moment — on poverty and race in the United States, the hippie movement, flattening/co-opting of political symbols, and consumerist fascism.)

In the poems here, Pasolini is both drifting social observer and incurable nostalgist, with the capacity to draw the revelatory, be it personal-universal or social-particular and vice versa, from the mountaintops and minutiae of the mundane; a voice of true, restless talent.

Roisin says

I've seen some of his films but I had no idea that he was a poet and an artist also. This is a special edition to commemorate the 30th anniversary of his death in 1975, when he was murdered. Wonderful poems about Roman life, with passion, politics, love, death, and sex all swimming in this colourful city. If you like Baudelaire, Wilde, Dante, or Shelley, you'll love this. I can smell the streets, the city spaces, picture the people, sense the feelings. Fantastic poems with a few of his drawings too. Fantastico!

William West says

Like most Americans, I came to Pasolini's poetry by way of his cinema. I like some of his films, particularly "Porcile". But I must say I find him a greater poet than film-maker. If his cinema was "post-neo-realist," concerned with Marxist themes of exploitation in his home-land, yet stylistically expressionistic and obscure, his poetry is, in cinematic terms, "Italian Neo-Realist." It is concerned with his country's devastated post-war

state, and also with the plight of his fellow homosexuals under a Catholic, machismo-centric culture. Pasolini lets his poetry do the feeling for him, and leaves the thinking to his film-making.

The man had a great gift for conveying land-scapes, both literal and emotional, through verse. And he did it in the least fancy way imaginable. While reading this, I sometimes forgot I was reading poetry and just took in his descriptions of the dilapidated urban landscapes and their denizens as reportage. But there is also supreme empathy here, and not of the disingenuous, empty type offered by imperialist "reporters" but of one conveying his most personal anguish through the description, the most painfully empathetic conveyance, of the being of his peers.

Tacodisc says

Excellent collection of poems spanning a 25 year period of Pasolini's life in Rome. This edition includes side-by-side Italian originals, which is a great feature for students of the language. The last two pieces published here include examples of Pasolini's native Friulian dialect.

It's a beautifully bound linguistic gem, on top of being a concise anthology demonstrating Pasolini's brilliant expression of homeland nostalgia and his Catholic-Marxist celebration of Italy's meekest, suffering masses. I would recommend reading this alongside "In Danger," also from City Lights. From his films and poems to his political essays, Pasolini was truly an unstoppable, expansive creative force.

M.moore says

Read this poet..he directed one of the foulest movies in history..he was kicked out of the Communist Party for liking buttsecks and assassinated. His poems are modernist lyrics.

Ethan Miller says

This is a beautiful little well bound, pocket size poetry book published by the great City Lights Books. "Roman Poems" is a collection of poems about modern Roman life by the incomparable Pier Paolo Pasolini. Pasolini was one of Italy's great poets, a philosopher, political agitator and of course a legendary filmmaker in the history of cinema just to touch the broad strokes of his resume. This collection of poems seems to span writing from the 1940s up to his murder in 1975. They sing with a heady mix of nostalgia, anger, sorrow, inflammatory vision and humanity; a unique, blended tone that fans would recognize from his cinematic work. Pasolini has an incredibly keen eye for observation and interpretation of humanity and an even more powerful imagination with which he then presents his version of it as a roar of truth at his audience. At times that is a roar of laughter, other times the roar of anger or tears or bile and outrage. And that 'truth' is Pasolini's 'TRUTH', which is to say, always beautiful and full of soul but also a little mad and colored by compulsions. All political elements and legend and intrigue aside, these poems at their most basic level paint an incredibly vivid snapshot of the underbelly of Rome and its surrounding slums and the people who lived there in the mid 20th century. That element alone is fascinating. For PPP fans this little book is a must. Includes a small handful of great photo reprints of a young PPP and a few of his illustrations.

Matthew says

I don't care for the line breaks in the translation, but it's Pasolini; you can't fuck up Pasolini too much. Also, the poems are arched in a way that plays some of Pasolini's themes against each other but only do far as to make the book look like a "book." But it's Piero mofo Pasolini; Ser previous almost-syllogism.

Ryan says

A small book, forty or so poems, with an introduction by Alberto Moravia. My "amazement" is a minor kind, in fitting with the tenor of the poems, with Pasolini's lines spent in a nostalgic reverie recalling the light or smell of Friuli. As he says in the opening poem, Diario, "like existence itself [...] I can only stay true to the stupendous monotony of the mystery." Though you can't get away from the scandal with Pasolini - hey, the poems were written in Rome, between his "exile" from Friuli for a frolic in the bushes with a couple young boys and his suspicious demise at the hands of a Roman hustler - the poems seem to be an attempt to ... some about the rage of being trapped in this persona, having to speak through the thick mask of "avant-garde marxist homosexual", but most are about nostalgia for his youth, the little bit of sweetness and order required for his work, having the world before his eyes and "not just in his heart," about what Italy was attempting to become - or what people were trying to make it - at the time ... with "becoming" not an idea he was fond of.

Anyway, the Italian is on the verso, translation on the recto. Nice. The difference in line breaks and sonority is good to see ... as is his occasional use of terza rima (showing his "radicalism" was backward looking for sure). Another interesting point on his nostalgia is the inclusion of one of his poems, the final poem in the volume (Il di da la me Muart - The Day of My Death) in his native Friulian dialect, hinting at his longstanding opposition to the disappearance of the various Italian dialects. Based on this small sample, it's incomprehensible based on standard Italian, a palimpsest of the ancient and fractious history of Trieste/Udine/Suditrol/Friuli-Venezia.

James says

You are in the streets of Rome with Pasolini and his gift of poetic vision and word are eminent throughout this book.

Steven Godin says

Multi talented novelist, Poet, Playwright, actor, philosopher, Journalist and Politically active homosexual. But for many outside Italy, Pier Paolo Pasolini will always be remembered for being a controversial director. All because of his last and most notorious film, Salo, 120 days of sodom, which does not do the true Pasolini justice, and probably the reason that cost him his life (well that's my own opinion anyway). As long before he turned to film making he was a vastly superior writer, especially in the field of Neo-realism.

This brief collection of poems is clearly very personal and politically engaging. Written while living in poverty on the fringes of Roman society under a fascist reign. For the casual reader of poetry this will probably seem too difficult to get into, and although some of his later writing may have been more accessible, from what I have read this is the best of his early work.

Rachel says

I don't like this translation much - unsurprising, since I've never been very fond of Lawrence Ferlinghetti. The thoughts and sentiments are fascinating. With just my meager familiarity with Spanish and Latin, I can tell that the line breaks in the original are infinitely more intriguing than those in the translation.

J.W. Dionysius Nicolello says

Pasolini has had a colossal impact on my artistic life. I want to clear things up for the curious, normally beginning and ending with vomiting, hive-mind reviews of the film that got him assassinated on the beach, and the average pseudointellectual's insistence on burying the poet there, for all time.

In 2008 I spent most of my autumn with a dear friend, a transvestite. The only reason her transgender is mentioned is because along with the transition, M believed to defy all of life - society, sex, dogmatic Gods, warfare, genocide; everything. Her radical physical shift preceded, or paralleled, a massive psychological shift. In the near nonexistent instance caution was ever employed, there was a hurricane of thrown wind behind it. M had seen it all, done it all. And so when M introduced me to *Le Video*, in San Francisco, two things happened: I nearly died from cinematic bliss, and then I realized it *Salo* had just been rereleased by Criterion. The included paper essays, more so than Disc Two, had received some glowing observations on small film sites. Having found out M had never seen *Salo*, I nearly collapsed once more as we checked out the brand new re-edition, and drank a couple of bottles of wine next door before taking off for M's cavernous room(s).

M. despised the film. She despised me for showing it to her. Not a single essay, or a single historical consideration on my behalf could save her mind from being shattered; she who had put in so much effort so as to 'Never again be annihilated in the future.' I was let down.

"M, for god's sake, do you not realize that Pasolini just fused de Sade with Fascist Italy ala WW II? This film is fucking incredible. THESE THINGS HAPPEN(ED)!"

"It is grotesque, Joseph."

"No, M: It is life. The pitch black ghastly midnight of the history-nightmare soul, 'From which I'm trying to awaken.'"

"I cannot go this far. I want to stick to Kafka and be safe. This kind of film is too sick."

"But you loved *Sweet Movie!*"

"I couldn't stand it. I just wanted to make you happy. Some of my prostitute friends are having a party in

Dolores Park tonight. I would invite you, but you wouldn't belong. There's a train coming in six minutes."

I tried getting M. to watch *The Gospel According to Saint Mathew*, but on archaic grounds she refused. I attempted to explain that at one point in time her beloved Henry Miller published alongside my beloved Thomas Merton for ND, but the call was ignored. M. died shortly thereafter from brain cancer.

As M. was dying, I fell in love again, this time with an actual woman. It did not last long, and this is my fault, but we did at least share a passion for Pasolini, which later led to her studies in Italy and R.'s recommending *The Best of Youth* sort of saved my life, all seven or whatever long hours of it, in one sitting.

With R. and M. gone from my life, I buried many concepts I had once been on the cusp of discovering: The paintings of Sidney Nolan; the films of Gaspar Noe; Orson Welles's *Don Quixote*; Faulkner; Emma Goldman; Pasolini.

I made the rounds, eventually ordering *In Danger*, an anthology put together by San Francisco's worst poet, Jack Hirshmann, who can be found any night of the week at Spec's in North Beach, bumming pitchers of beer off of college students and rambling about communism for five hours straight.

Upon skimming over the dull collection, I decided to take a look at *City Lights* the next time I was in town, and see what they still had in stock by means of Pasolini, *Roman Poems*, Pocket Poets no. 41, translated by Ferlinghetti and a woman no one has ever heard of.

The cashier, intact with lenless glasses and an enormous black plastic nose ring, knew not of the writers nor the spellings of their names, in Lowry, Prevert, Huncke. I gave up on *City Lights* at that moment, as a French tourist purchased a dozen Allen Ginsberg bumper stickers, waltzed upstairs, and stole a copy of *Roman Poems*. It is one of my all-time favorites. From the beginning to the end of the man's careers, includes b/w photos, some drawings, and it is just an all around handsome book. I have quoted Pasolini as the preface to part three of my 1400-page novel; take a look through these pages, and try to figure out what line(s) it be.

Never again in history shall one man write this kind of poetry, create *The Gospel* one year and *Salo* another - in the words of the aforementioned Bill Corncob Faulkner, 'One matchless time.' I have and will defend Pasolini till the end.

R.I.P.

M.

Nicola says

"[T]he stupendous monotony of the mystery." Many surprises in this tiny, deceptively little, city lights' book. It sounds like Pasolini subscribed to this openness in his political beliefs, as well--surprising all the leftists by calling the policemen the true proletariat in a student protest in 1969. I couldn't help but read "Roman Poems" in light of his expulsion from the Communist party and move to the outskirts of Rome. A

harshness here--a wretchedness as a kind of backdrop to these resilient poems.

Matthew says

It is painfully clear that, in this case, the poetry has suffered in translation. I look at the Italian and it simply *sounds* better than the English. In translation,

Sesso, consolazione della miseria!
La puttana è una regina, il suo trono
è un rudere, la sua terra un pezzo

becomes...

Sex, consolation for misery!
The whore is queen, her throne a ruin,
her land a piece of shitty field

Roll the original around your mouth. It has an earthiness and a bounce that the English version doesn't have. Now imagine the original's musicality in tandem with an understanding of the deeply bitter sentiment! If anything, this volume has furthermore encouraged me to learn another language.
