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# Playing God: Alberto Caeiro's "Num meio-dia de fim de primavera" and Pier Paolo Pasolini's *La ricotta*

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Ciò di cui viene dissacrata la innocenza non è l'arte ma l'autore.  
Pier Paolo Pasolini, "L'ambiguità"

This paper examines the relationship between "creators" (gods and poets) and their creations in the poem "Once at mid-day in late spring" ("Num meio-dia de fim de primavera") by the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa (1888–1935)—but ostensibly authored by Alberto Caeiro, one of the numerous fictional heteronyms through which Pessoa published entire works in verse and prose—and Pier Paolo Pasolini's short film, *La ricotta* (1963). I focus in particular on Pessoa and Pasolini's displacement of a divine subject onto a human object and of creative authority onto secondary authors. Secondly, I consider the playfulness inherent in the irreverent rejection of the institutionalization of artistic and religious creation in the poem and the film, as well as the use of bucolic settings that revive a kind of pre-historical, pre-Christian religiosity in a landscape that is nonetheless distinct from traditional "pastoral" modes due to the constant interruption of modern systems of production and representation. Finally, I explore the reversal of the hierarchical relationship between ignorance and intellect, *pathos* and *logos*, which is employed in both works in order to access a more authentic representation of natural existence.

"Once at mid-day in late spring" ("Num meio-dia de fim de primavera") is the eighth of the forty-nine poems that comprise the collection entitled *The Keeper of Sheep* ("O Guardador de Rebanhos"). In the seventeen stanzas of the poem, the poet adopts a playful tone to describe a dream in which God descends from the cross, taking residence in the poet's house in the form of an "Eternal Child" who finally finds the freedom to criticize God and create mischief in the poet's village. The emphasis on the child's ignorance of worldly affairs, the pleasure he finds in observing nature and his inability to comprehend the poet's "stories about the doings of mankind" ("histórias das cousas só dos homens")<sup>1</sup> provide an example of why Edwin Honig and Susan Brown, authors of the English translation, define *The Keeper of Sheep* as a "poetic manifesto, proclaiming the unknowable and manifold nature of reality as something

perceptible only to the unthinking and intensely receptive bodily senses.”<sup>2</sup> Pessoa succeeds in establishing this poetics of “unthinking” rooted in the senses in two fundamental ways. First, he displaces the divine from religious institutions onto the figure of the unknowing Child, and secondly he removes his own poetic persona from the collection entirely by introducing the fictional author of Caeiro, whose biography, education, and poetic style are clearly distinct from those of Pessoa himself.

These poetic devices are not unique to Pessoa. In fact, he has been likened to two of his literary contemporaries in Italy, Giovanni Pascoli (1855–1912), whose “poetica del fanciullino” similarly evokes childhood as a more authentic state of being, and Italo Svevo (1861–1928), whose pseudonyms and authorial displacements are reminiscent of Pessoa’s heteronyms.<sup>3</sup> I am not aware, however, of critical studies that have attempted to examine the significance of Pessoa’s work in relation to Italian poets of the subsequent generation, or specifically to Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922–1975), but believe that such a comparison would prove fruitful given that Pasolini’s sardonic re-envisioning of the Passion of Christ in his short film *La ricotta* shares many elements with Caeiro’s “Once at mid-day in late spring.” *La ricotta* is Pasolini’s contribution to a film project directed by Roberto Rossellini with the collaboration of three other directors (Pasolini, Ugo Gregoretti and Jean-Luc Godard) whose short films on the topic of consumer culture form the four episodes of *RoGoPaG* (1963). *La ricotta* is a film within a film in more ways than one. First, its placement within the larger collaborative project cannot be ignored; secondly, just as Pessoa’s poem was “authored” by Alberto Caeiro, Pasolini’s film is “directed” by Orson Welles, who plays himself in a storyline about shooting a movie based on the Passion in the Italian countryside.

‘*E ESTAR SEMPRE A MORRER*’: CAEIRO’S ETERNAL CHILD AND PASOLINI’S PENITENT THIEF

A discussion of the similarities of these works can begin at the basic level of theme, tone and characterization. As immediately evident in the first two stanzas of Caeiro’s poem, the poet’s reimagining of the birth and Passion is both irreverent and playful:

Num meio-dia de fim de primavera  
 Tive um sonho como uma fotografia.  
 Vi Jesus Cristo descer à terra.  
 Veio pela encosta de um monte  
 Tornado outra vez menino,  
 A correr e a rolar-se pela erva  
 E a arrancar flores para as deitar fora  
 E a rir de modo a ouvir-se de longe.  
 Tinha fugido do céu.  
 Era nosso demais para fingir  
 De segunda pessoa da Trindade.  
 No céu era tudo falso, tudo em desacordo  
 Com flores e árvores e pedras.  
 No céu tinha que estar sempre sério  
 E de vez em quando de se tornar outra vez homem  
 E subir para a cruz, e estar sempre a morrer  
 E os pés espetados por um prego com cabeça,  
 E até com um trapo à roda da cintura  
 Como os pretos nas ilustrações.  
 Nem sequer o deixavam ter pai e mãe  
 Como as outras crianças.  
 O seu pai era duas pessoas. . .  
 Um velho chamado José, que era carpinteiro,  
 E que não era pai dele;  
 E o outro pai era uma pomba estúpida,  
 A única pomba feia do mundo  
 Porque não era do mundo nem era pomba.  
 E a sua mãe não tinha amado antes de o ter.

Once at mid-day in late spring  
 A dream came to me like a photograph.  
 I saw Jesus Christ come down to earth.  
 He came down the slope of a mountain,  
 Turned once more into a child  
 Running and romping through the grass  
 And pulling up flowers to throw them away  
 And laughing so loud he was heard far away.  
 He had escaped from the sky.  
 He was too much like us to pretend  
 He was the second person of the Trinity.  
 It was all false in the sky, all out of keeping  
 With the flowers and trees and rocks.  
 In the sky he always had to be serious  
 And now and then he had to become a man again  
 And mount the cross and always be dying  
 And the head of a spike hammered into his feet,  
 And even a rag around his waist  
 Like the black men in the picture books.  
 They didn't even let him have a father and a mother  
 Like the other children.  
 His father was two people—  
 An old man named Joseph, who was a carpenter,  
 And wasn't his father;  
 And the other father was a stupid dove,  
 The only ugly dove in the world,  
 Because it wasn't from the world and it wasn't a dove.  
 And his mother hadn't loved anyone before having him.<sup>4</sup>

In the subsequent stanzas, the reader learns that Caeiro's God, to whom the poet refers alternately as the New Child ("Criança Nova", literally "new creation") and the Eternal Child ("Eterna Criança"), tired of having to "always be dying" has managed to escape to earth by creating a "Christ eternally stuck to the cross" ("um Cristo eternamente na cruz") to serve as an example, while he instead makes himself "eternally human and a child" ("eternamente humano e menino"). The child eventually moves into the poet's village and takes up residence in his house. He relays to the poet how his mother was a mere vessel for his birth, nothing more than a "suitcase" ("uma mala"), while God is a "stupid sick old man / Always spitting on the floor / And saying indecent things" ("um velho estúpido e doente / Sempre a escarrar no chão / E a dizer indecências"), and the Holy Ghost is a filthy bird who "scratches itself with its beak / And perches in

chairs and dirties them up” (“coça-se com o bico / E empoleira-se nas cadeiras e suja-as”). The child further laments that God doesn’t understand anything

Das coisas que criou–

“Se é que ele as criou, do que duvido”–

“Ele diz, por exemplo, que os seres cantam a sua glória

Mas os seres não cantam nada.

Se cantassem seriam cantores.

Os seres existem e mais nada,

E por isso se chamam seres.”

About the things he’s created–

“If it’s he who created them, which I doubt.

He says, for instance, that the creatures sing his glory,

But the creatures don’t sing anything.

If they sang they’d be singers.

The creatures exist, and nothing more,

And that’s why they’re called creatures.”<sup>5</sup>

The idea of “creatures” who simply “exist, and nothing more” becomes the central theme of the poem, in which the poet learns from the child, who is both a “human being that’s natural” (“o humano que é natural”) and a “divine being that smiles and plays” (“o divino que sorri e que brinca”), how to observe nature with a light heart, to dance, laugh and sing and to recognize beauty in simple existence. Thanks to his communion with this “new creation” (“Criança Nova”), the poet gains an intimate awareness of a deeper, material truth.<sup>6</sup> He is also forced to reconsider his understanding of poetic authority; his use of the verb *criar* and the proper noun “Creation” (“Criança”), and the alternation between describing the child as “new” and “eternal” allow authority to constantly shift between these two figures, between the material and the theoretical, new and old, ignorance and knowledge.

Just as Pessoa’s God is a “natural child” (“uma criança natural”), the true protagonist of *La ricotta* is a local man, Stracci (whose name literally means “rags”), who has been cast in the film as the Penitent Thief. Like the child in “Once at mid-day in late spring,” Stracci seeks to escape from his cyclical and seemingly interminable role of being nailed to the cross and is fully detached from the religious significance of the film, focused entirely on his urgent, human needs. While preparing to shoot the scene of the Crucifixion, Stracci is preoccupied solely by his hunger. After delivering lunch to his wife and children, he hurriedly returns to the set and hides his own block of ricotta in a small cavern near his trailer, but his various attempts to sneak lunch are thwarted. The cheese is eaten by a dog, which Stracci sells to the journalist on the set in order to replace his lunch.

As Stracci momentarily flees the set to purchase another wheel of ricotta from a nearby shepherd, viewers are immersed in the natural, agricultural landscape of Stracci’s daily existence, before the arrival of the film crew reminds us that the film itself is tied to a modern system of production and representation that disrupts and exploits the very bucolic, pre-industrial landscape it seeks to evoke.<sup>7</sup> All of the apparatus carried in by the film crew (megaphones, cameras, the director’s chair), in addition to the highway that is visible behind the fields where the crew is filming, interrupt the otherwise timeless landscape of the set, in much the same way that Caeiro’s references to photography, picture books, a

suitcase, and the Virgin Mary knitting all provide a series of modern interruptions to the otherwise bucolic setting of his poem.

One could argue that Stracci's demise begins at the moment when he must negotiate between these two landscapes, that of the fields where his sons work outdoors (his family does not take part in the filming but watches the actors from a distance, visibly perplexed and amused), and that of the film set. The entire sequence in which Stracci runs from the set to the shepherd's cheese stand is shot in fast-motion, adding an element of cartoonish humor to the film, but also serving to create a more pronounced contrast between the movement that characterizes Stracci's daily existence and the fixity and rigidity of the highly composed scenes of the film-within-the-film. This consists of a series of *tableaux vivants* of Mannerist paintings (by Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino) of the Deposition of Christ, which are shot in color, while the rest of *La ricotta* is in black and white. The alternations between black-and-white and color and between standard speed and fast-motion provide a contrast between the stylized authoritative text (the Bible, the sixteenth-century paintings, the director's orchestration of the scene) and the moving images of natural, "unthinking" life in the actors' unscripted world, as captured in the black-and-white scenes.

Just as Caeiro's New Child is tired of having to "always be dying" on the cross, the endless repetition and rigidity of the Crucifixion has begun to wear on the entire cast and crew of Welles's film. This is particularly evident when the director announces that the cast must reshoot the scene of the Deposition, which they have already filmed 2,049 times. The actor playing Jesus is visibly tired; an older extra is told to stop picking his nose; a contemporary musical track is played instead of the Scarlatti record which was supposed to accompany the scene and the crewmembers are accused of irreverence; the actors forget their cues and lines, fidget, and break into laughter when Christ falls down as he is being deposed. This "series of blunders," as Michael Syrimis has observed, clearly contrasts with "the director's fixation on a highly controlled style" and with the somber composition of Rosso Fiorentino's *Deposition* (1521), after which the scene is modeled.<sup>8</sup>

The irreverence of the actors in this scene is similar to Caeiro's child God who, once liberated from the cross, is shown to similarly misbehave:

Limpa o nariz ao braço direito,	He wipes his nose on his right arm,
Chapinha nas poças de água,	He splashes around in puddles,
Colhe as flores e gosta delas e esquece-as.	He picks flowers and loves them and forgets them.
Atira pedras aos burros,	He throws stones at the donkeys,
Rouba a fruta dos pomares	He steals fruit from the orchards
E foge a chorar e a gritar dos cães.	And runs away from the dogs, screaming and yelling.
E, porque sabe que elas não gostam	And, because he knows they don't like it
E que toda a gente acha graça,	And that everybody finds it funny,
Corre atrás das raparigas	He runs after the girls
Que vão em ranchos pelas estradas	Who stroll in groups along the roads
Com as bilhas às cabeças	Carrying water jars on their heads,
E levanta-lhes as saias.	And he lifts up their skirts. <sup>9</sup>

Despite these humorous undertones, neither work should be interpreted as a purely parodic or comic reinterpretation of the Passion. As Syrimis has argued, the use of parody in *La ricotta* is a “complex process” involving a “systematic contrast between two ideological positions, two clashing Pasolini voices, operating within one and the same work.”<sup>10</sup> This is especially visible in the representations of Stracci as he navigates between his central preoccupation (simply being able to finally eat his lunch) and his occupation as an actor. After he succeeds in procuring the ricotta, his efforts to satisfy his hunger are again thwarted when a voice on a loudspeaker calls him back to the set to film his scene as the Good Thief. The crew is ordered by Welles to nail Stracci, along with the two actors playing Jesus and the bad thief, to their crosses; one crewmember complains of having eaten too much at lunch, prompting a group of actors to taunt Stracci with food and drink as he lies nailed to the cross, and he proceeds to convince one of the actresses to perform a striptease. This parody of Lenten self-denial replaces repentance with carousal and provides a visual representation of the fixity of Stracci’s economic and social status and his lack of agency.

In what first appears to be a reversal of fortune, the director decides to shoot another scene and Stracci is momentarily released from the cross. He runs back to his hideaway and begins to devour the ricotta with a loaf of bread. A crowd gathers around him, laughing and taunting him as he becomes the center of a tragicomic reversal of the Last Supper. Rather than sharing his meal with others, Stracci alone consumes the food that is thrown at him by the growing audience. A man offers him two eggs, which Stracci cracks and swallows raw; another offers him a watermelon; a table is carried in and food is tossed at Stracci, who ignores the laughter as he tears into the banquet. In the final scene of the film, Stracci is again nailed to the cross, which is raised in preparation for filming the Crucifixion scene. Stracci is too full and plagued by indigestion to practice his line, the verse from Luke 23:42—“remember me when you come into your kingdom” (“quando sarai nel regno dei cieli, ricordami al padre tuo”). As filming

begins, Orson Welles is shown standing in front of a large banquet table laden with fruit, bread and wine that has been prepared for the spectators who have gathered to observe the scene. As the director calls “Action” multiple times and even supplies Stracci with his lines, it appears that Stracci has missed his cue until the crowd apprehends that he in fact has died on the cross. Through his crucifixion, Stracci’s physical action supersedes and defies the director’s repeated calls for filmic “action.” In response to Stracci’s death, Welles comments that dying was the only action available to “Povero Stracci” to show that he had lived.<sup>11</sup> Stracci’s real and immediate suffering and sacrifice—rather than the artistic interpretation of that of God—becomes the central and definitive focus of the film, and while the *tableaux vivants* of the film merely represent the Passion, Stracci’s death becomes the Passion.<sup>12</sup>

As made clear in the conclusions of both the poem and the film, the role of Christ is subsumed in Caeiro’s New Child who steals fruit and chases local girls and in Pasolini’s hungry thief. While the poet in Caeiro’s poem initially takes on a paternal role, telling the child stories and putting him to sleep at night, it is the boy who shows a fundamentally superior understanding of the universe. Though playful and ignorant of modern affairs, he is also a kind of pastor, guiding the poet with his “pointing finger” (“o seu dedo apontando”). Like Stracci, the child possesses a truth that remains inaccessible to the intellectual:

Depois eu conto-lhe histórias das cousas só dos homens	Later I tell him stories about the doings of mankind
E ele sorri, porque tudo é incrível.	And he smiles because it’s all so incredible.
Ri dos reis e dos que não são reis,	He laughs at kings and those who aren’t kings,
E tem pena de ouvir falar das guerras,	And it hurts him to hear me speak of wars,
E dos comércios, e dos navios	And of commerce, and the navies
Que ficam fumo no ar dos altos-mares.	That are left as smoke in air on the high seas.
Porque ele sabe que tudo isso falta àquela verdade	Because he knows it all lacks that truth
Que uma flor tem ao florescer [. . .]	A flower has in bloom [. . .] <sup>13</sup>

Like the final scene of *La ricotta*, the final verses of Caeiro’s poem explicitly compare the human subject to the image of Christ’s Passion:



Quando eu morrer, filhinho,  
 Seja eu a criança, o mais pequeno.  
 Pega-me tu ao colo  
 E leva-me para dentro da tua casa.  
 Despe o meu ser cansado e humano  
 E deita-me na tua cama.  
 E conta-me histórias, caso eu acorde,  
 Para eu tornar a adormecer.  
 E dá-me sonhos teus para eu brincar  
 Até que nasça qualquer dia  
 Que tu sabes qual é.

Esta é a história do meu Menino Jesus.  
 Por que razão que se perceba  
 Não há-de ser ela mais verdadeira  
 Que tudo quanto os filósofos pensam  
 E tudo quanto as religiões ensinam?

When I die, my little son,  
 Let me be the child, the smallest one.  
 Take me in your arms  
 And carry me inside your house.  
 Undress my tired human frame  
 And lay me in your bed.  
 Tell me stories if I waken  
 So I can fall asleep again.  
 And give me your dreams to play with  
 Until whatever day is born,  
 A day—and you know which.

This is the story of my Child Jesus.  
 For what conceivable reason  
 Should it be any less true  
 Than all the philosophers think of  
 And all that religions teach?<sup>14</sup>

While Pessoa and Pasolini both suggest that their renderings are no “less true” than Christ’s Passion, they were also both aware of the polemical nature of their representations and both anticipated that their works would face accusations of sacrilege. Pessoa expressed fears of having committed “blasphemy” in “Once at mid-day in late spring” but ultimately concluded that to prohibit Caeiro from expressing his views would be tantamount to preventing Shakespeare from creating Lady Macbeth.<sup>15</sup> Pasolini likewise addressed future accusations of blasphemy in the voiceover at the beginning of *La ricotta*, in which he declares that “la storia della Passione è la più grande che io conosca, e [. . .] i testi che la raccontano sono i più sublimi che siano mai stati scritti.” Given their public acknowledgement of the potentially scandalous aspects of their works, it would be easy to conclude that the primary function of the secondary authors of Caeiro and Welles is to shift blame. Yet we must consider that although Pasolini never explicitly compares Welles’s character to his own role as director (Pasolini actually argues that Welles was simply “playing himself” and “playing the director” and, at most, was perhaps “caricaturing himself”), just as Pessoa never acknowledges an equivalence between himself and Caeiro, the identities of the two directors and the two poets often seem to coincide.<sup>16</sup> In the scene in which a journalist interviews Orson Welles’s character, the director describes his film as an expression of his “profondo, arcaico cattolicesimo” and refers to himself as a Marxist, two characteristics that clearly tie the fictional director to Pasolini himself. Moreover, Welles holds a copy of Pasolini’s *Mamma Roma* (1962) in his hands and recites Pasolini’s poem, “10 giugno 1962”:

Io sono una forza del Passato.  
 Solo nella tradizione è il mio amore [. . .]  
 E io, feto adulto, mi aggiro  
 più moderno d'ogni moderno  
 a cercare i fratelli che non sono più.<sup>17</sup>

This scene serves not only to complicate the relationship between Orson Welles and Pasolini, but also to establish Stracci, and not the director, as the true “force of the past”: an “adult fetus” condemned to wander in search of “brothers that are no more.”<sup>18</sup> The director’s intellectualism ultimately precludes him from the instinctive existence that brings Stracci closer to the true spirit of suffering evoked by the film. Welles’s indictment of Italy as “il popolo più analfabeta, la borghesia più ignorante d’Europa,” and his dismissal of the journalist as unable to understand the significance of his words because he is a “uomo medio,” also become an indictment of the director’s elitism and his inability to experience firsthand the kind of authentic existence that his work seeks to represent onscreen.

Thus, Welles is not merely a caricature of Pasolini’s role as director but also, as Syrimis has argued, a device through which the spectators are “encouraged to distrust Pasolini’s discourse” and reconsider their own “ideological investment in the work and engage in a process of self-reflection.”<sup>19</sup> Through Welles’s dismissal of Stracci’s physical rather than intellectual existence, Pasolini invites spectators to reflect critically on artistic representation and the intrusion of creative representation on authentic being. This becomes clear in the final shot of *La ricotta*, in which the camera—now in color—zooms in on a table overflowing with cheese and grapes, behind which a megaphone is visible. As Pasolini himself explained, “the richly loaded table offsets—as a comical figurative effect—the hunger of Stracci crucified” and thus is intended as a representation of “the opulence and wealth of the ruling class to which both the producer and the director belonged in the capacity of intellectuals.”<sup>20</sup>

#### PESOA’S “BETTER METAPHYSICS” AND PASOLINI’S “CINEMA OF POETRY”

Pasolini’s use of the fictional director as a means of removing his own authorial persona from the position of the “creator” is therefore similar to Pessoa’s creation of Caeiro as a secondary author that allows him to approach experience from the perspective of an unlearned subject, and to shift the poetic I/eye out of the thinking self and into the unthinking external world. Caeiro (who “lived,” according to Pessoa’s invention, from 1889–1915) was the first and most central of Pessoa’s coterie of heteronymic poets, and Pessoa referred to him as his “master” (“o meu mestre”). Pessoa’s heteronyms, far from mere pen names, were accompanied by detailed and diverse biographies and poetic styles. As a pastoralist, Caeiro’s poems espouse a worldview that has been described as “purposefully naïve,” and the poet became a highly influential figure for two of Pessoa’s other heteronyms,

Ricardo Reis (to whom Pessoa assigned a birthdate in the year 1887), a classicist whose odes were based on Latin and Greek models, and the most modern of the heteronyms, Álvaro de Campos (“born” in 1890), a retired naval engineer fascinated by machinery and progress.<sup>21</sup> These poets interacted with and were disciples of Caeiro; Ricardo Reis compared his master’s poetics to Whitman’s, noting that despite their similar love of nature, Caeiro never attributed any transcendental value to his sensationist materialism, instead championing “a quite perfectly defined absolute objectivism”:

To a world plunged in various kinds of subjectivisms, he brings Absolute Objectivism, more absolute than the pagan objectivists ever had it. To a world merged in humanitarianisms, in workers’ problems, in ethical societies, in social movements, he brings an absolute contempt for the fate and the life of man.<sup>22</sup>

Álvaro de Campos instead described Caeiro as “the voice of the earth that is everything and nothing” and recalled conversations in which his mentor, believing that “poetry is what everything is,” had demanded to know, “Why is it so hard to conceive that a thing is a thing and is not always something else out there beyond it?”<sup>23</sup> It is thus Caeiro the shepherd, and not Pessoa the poet, who can reject thought as a mode of understanding the world, as in another poem in *The Keeper of Sheep*, “My glance is clear like a sunflower” (“O meu olhar é nítido como um girasol”), in which the poet argues that “thinking is not understanding” (“pensar é não compreender”) and that to think is to be “eye-sick” (“doente dos olhos”).<sup>24</sup> The aim of Caeiro’s poetry “to unteach and unlearn the intellectual, spiritual, and even linguistic practices common to Western cultures”<sup>25</sup> is found throughout *The Keeper of Sheep*, but is especially evident in the fifth poem, “There’s metaphysics enough in not thinking about anything” (“Há metafísica bastante em não pensar em nada”). Here, the poet describes his attempt to arrive at the “better metaphysics” (“melhor metafísica”) of those who do not know why they live, nor even that they lack this knowledge (“não saber para que vivem / Nem saber que o não sabem”).<sup>26</sup> In this poem, as scholar Kenneth David Jackson has observed, “thinking and knowing are transferred from mental to sensorial processes,” showing how “Caeiro accepts no abstract or hidden meanings, no universal categories, and all that is perceivable is in immediate sensory perceptions.”<sup>27</sup>

A similar privileging of unlearning or unknowing is found in *La ricotta* and in Pasolini’s belief that “the elements at work in the psychology of a derelict, of a poor man [. . .] are always rather pure because they are devoid of consciousness, and therefore essential.”<sup>28</sup> Whereas Pessoa accesses the psychology of the “poor man” through the figure of Caeiro, Pasolini credits his initiation as a filmmaker with providing him a fresh approach, devoid of technical knowledge and conceived as pure vision. He recalled having arrived at his directorial debut, the

film *Accattone* (1960), with “a total lack of technical training” but also “no need of technical knowledge” in order to realize his vision for the film.<sup>29</sup> Pasolini’s use of non-professional actors, who often belong to the agricultural realm and speak in the local dialect rather than in Standard Italian, is further evidence of his disregard for technical knowledge and artistic sensibility. Commenting on the cast of *La ricotta*, Pasolini explained this “idiosyncrasy concerning professional actors,” noting that while “a professional actor carries a consciousness with him, an idea of his own about the character he interprets,” non-professional actors are instead “shreds of reality as is a landscape, a sky, the sun, a donkey passing along the road.”<sup>30</sup> Insofar as Pasolini views the actor’s role as that of *being* rather than *representing*, we can identify a further parallel between Pasolini’s filmic style and Pessoa’s poetics. Pasolini attempts not only to circumvent the authority of the director, but also to deprive his actors of a more theoretical than experiential understanding of the relationship between nature and art.

Pasolini saw film itself as having a subtext that is fundamentally “mitico e infantile” and thus as being distinct from prose narrative (the “lingua della prosa” or “lingua della prosa narrativa”).<sup>31</sup> The director elaborates on this difference in his theoretical essay, “Il ‘cinema di poesia’”, arguing that “mentre la comunicazione strumentale che è alla base della comunicazione poetica o filosofica è già estremamente elaborata, è insomma un sistema reale e storicamente complesso e maturo—la comunicazione visiva che è alla base del linguaggio cinematografico è, al contrario, estremamente rozza, quasi animale.”<sup>32</sup> The “crude” nature of cinematic language is well suited for capturing the essence of characters like Stracci, who live outside of historical consciousness while “the bourgeois world is quite evidently the world of history.”<sup>33</sup> Pasolini in fact affirmed that his primary intention in *La ricotta* was to represent, “accanto alla religiosità dello Stracci, la volgarità ridanciana, ironica, cinica, incredula del mondo contemporaneo.”<sup>34</sup>

Through their proposals of a “better metaphysics” and a “cinema of poetry,” Pessoa and Pasolini both attempt in their works to eschew the philosophization and institutionalization of art and religion, and instead to capture the lived, material experiences of their protagonists. Stracci’s silence, death, and absence on the cross, as well as Caeiro’s “God that was missing” (“deus que faltava”), defy the will of their creators by *being* what the director and the poet can only *represent*. By removing themselves from the role of “Creator,” Pessoa and Pasolini aim to achieve a poetics of “unthinking” and to become, like Caeiro, masters of “unknowing.” Yet it is impossible to read Caeiro without reading Pessoa, just as the “director” in Pasolini’s film, who cites Pasolini’s poem and shoots Pasolini’s film, can never operate outside of Pasolini’s direction. Ultimately, then, the specter of the Other, the learning and thinking poet, looms throughout these works, with the effect that Caeiro’s poem and Pasolini’s film are less an homage to “unthinking” experience than an invitation to reflect on the constant interplay between *pathos* and *logos*, profane and sacred, nature and industry, life and art.

## Notes

1. Fernando Pessoa, "Once at mid-day in late spring," in *The Keeper of Sheep*, trans. Edwin Honig and Susan M. Brown (Riverdale-on-Hudson, N.Y.: Sheep Meadow Press, 1986). This translation is based on the Portuguese edition of the collection found in Fernando Pessoa, *Obra Poética* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Nova Aguilar, 1983). All English translations of Caeiro's poems in this paper come from Honig and Brown's edition.

2. *Ibid.*, Introduction.

3. See Antonio Tabucchi, *Un baule pieno di gente: Scritti su Fernando Pessoa* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1990); and "Alvaro de Campos e Zeno Cosini: due coscienze parallele," in *Studi filologici dell'Istituto di filologia romanza e ispanistica dell'Università di Genova* (Genoa: Bozzi Editore, 1978), 149–162.

4. Fernando Pessoa, "Once at mid-day in late spring," in *The Keeper of Sheep*, 15. Throughout the paper the original Portuguese version is cited from: [http://www3.universia.com.br/conteudo/literatura/O\\_guardador\\_de\\_rebanhos\\_de\\_fernando\\_pessoa.pdf](http://www3.universia.com.br/conteudo/literatura/O_guardador_de_rebanhos_de_fernando_pessoa.pdf)

5. *Ibid.*, 17.

6. Because *criança* is translated with its most literal meaning as "child," its etymological root ("creation") is lost in the English translation.

7. On Pessoa and Pasolini's respective attitudes towards modernity, see Mauro Ponzi, "Pasolini and Fassbinder: Between Cultural Tradition and Self-Destruction," in *Pasolini, Fassbinder and Europe: Between Utopia and Nihilism*, ed. Fabio Vighi and Alexis Nouss (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010). Ponzi compares Pasolini's attempt "to reevaluate the cultural tradition and identity at a time when all intellectuals, on both the left and the right, manifested an unshakable faith in progress" to that of Pessoa, who likewise "did not refuse the technological novelties of modernity, but who rather knew how to use them to the utmost [. . .] and nevertheless blamed the nihilist and destructive character of modernity" (7–8).

8. Michael Syrimis, "Self-parody in Pasolini's *La ricotta* and *Appunti per un'orestiade africana*," *Forum Italicum* 47.3 (2013): 560.

9. Pessoa, 16.

10. Syrimis, 558.

11. "Povero Stracci. Crepare. Non aveva altra azione per ricordare che era vivo." *La ricotta*. Dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini, in *RoGoPaG*. Dir. Rossellini, Roberto, Jean-Luc Godard, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Ugo Gregoretti, and Alfredo Bini. Italia, Francia: Arco film; Cineriz; Lyre, 1963.

12. On the difference between Christ's Passion as represented in the paintings versus Stracci's Passion, Aurelio Ferrero has pointed out that "La 'passione' vera è quella di Stracci, irriso e umiliato, tremendamente solo. La maniera, pur filtrata attraverso le linee e i colori degli adorati Pontormo e Rosso Fiorentino, diventa irrigidimento e formalizzazione della vitalità e del dolore [. . .] una maniera odiosamente falsa." Aurelio Ferrero, *Il cinema di Pier Paolo Pasolini* (Milan: Mondadori, 1978), 44.

13. Pessoa, 19.

14. Ibid., 19–20.

15. See Maria Irene Ramalho de Sousa Santos, “‘O Deus que Faltava’: Pessoa’s Theory of Lyric Poetry,” in *Fernando Pessoa’s Modernity Without Frontiers: Influences, Dialogues and Responses*, ed. Mariana Gray de Castro (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Tamesis, 2013), 28.

16. This statement comes from the transcription (and subsequent translation by Letizia Ciotti Miller and Michael Graham) of an interview between Pasolini and the students and faculty of the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome and first published in *Bianco e Nero*. See Pier Paolo Pasolini, Leonardo Fioravanti, Omar Zulficar, Nazareno Natale, Giuseppe Francone, Antonietta Fiorito, Dan Perry, Giulio Cesare Castello, Elena Lumbreras, Simon Raoul Hartog, Stefano Silvestrini and Carlo Morandi, “Pier Paolo Pasolini: An Epical-Religious View of the World,” *Film Quarterly* 18.4 (Summer, 1965): 38.

17. The poem appeared in the screenplay of *Mamma Roma* and was later published in the collection entitled *Poesia in forma di rosa*.

18. See Silvia Carolorosi, “Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *La ricotta*: The Power of Cinepoiesis,” *Italica* 86.2 (Summer, 2009): 261.

19. Syrimis, 557.

20. “Pier Paolo Pasolini: An Epical-Religious View of the World,” 32.

21. K. David Jackson, “Alberto Caeiro’s Other Version of Pastoral,” in *Adverse Genres in Fernando Pessoa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 117. On the birth of the heteronyms, see Pessoa’s 1935 letter to Adolfo Casais Monteiro, “Carta sobre a gênese dos heterónimos” in Fernando Pessoa, *Obras em prosa* (Rio de Janeiro: Aguilar, 1974), 97. On the history of the heteronyms and the fictitious and historical dates of composition of the poems in *The Keeper of Sheep*, see Judith Balso, *Pessoa, Le Passeur Métaphysique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2006), 7–10 and 35–37, and Maria Irene Ramalho de Sousa Santos, *Atlantic Poets: Fernando Pessoa’s Turn in Anglo-American Modernism* (Hanover: Dartmouth College, 2003), 8–9.

22. “Alberto Caeiro: Translator’s preface by Ricardo Reis,” in Fernando Pessoa, *Always Astonished: Selected Prose* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), 22–23.

23. “Notes on the Memory of My Master Caeiro by Álvaro de Campos,” in Pessoa, *Always Astonished*, 26–27.

24. Fernando Pessoa, “My glance is clear like a sunflower,” in *The Keeper of Sheep*, 6.

25. Jackson, 119.

26. Fernando Pessoa, “There’s metaphysics enough in not thinking about anything,” in *The Keeper of Sheep*, 11.

27. Jackson, 121.

28. “Pier Paolo Pasolini: An Epical-Religious View of the World,” 32.

29. Ibid., 34.

30. Ibid., 37–38.

31. Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Il «cinema di poesia»*, in *Empirismo eretico* (Milan: Garzanti, 1991), 173–75.

32. Ibid., 168–69.

33. "Pier Paolo Pasolini: An Epical-Religious View of the World," 36–37.

34. This statement comes from the transcripts of Pasolini's trial (accessible at: [http://www.pasolini.net/processi\\_ricotta\\_processoverbale\\_7marzo63.htm](http://www.pasolini.net/processi_ricotta_processoverbale_7marzo63.htm)) following his formal accusation of blasphemy in March of 1963. While the plot of *La ricotta* was deemed acceptable, the representation of the cast's uncouth behavior during the fictional filming of the Deposition was severely criticized. See Latifah Troncelliti, "All'ombra della Controriforma. Dal discorso di Paleotti alla *Ricotta* di Pasolini," *Italica* 84.2/3 (Summer-Autumn, 2007): 548–55.