

BOOK REVIEWS

CARERI, Maria and Walter SITI, eds. 2022. *Pier Paolo Pasolini, Petrolio*, Garzanti: Milano. Pp. 828. ISBN 978-88-11-67331-6, Paper. € 28.

The idea of a new edition of *Petrolio* — the “monumental ‘scartafaccio’”¹ written by Pasolini between 1972 and 1975, and unfinished because of his untimely murder — has been under discussion for a long time. During the roundtable which took place on 10 December 2017 at the Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa at the end of the conference entitled *Petrolio 25 years later*, Silvia De Laude and Walter Siti reflected on the possible criteria that could inspire and guide a new edition of the work.² Beyond the potential different approaches imagined, a new edition could accommodate all those texts that had in some way rotated around and towards *Petrolio* — starting with the materials that would have probably been part of it, had Pasolini not been killed, i.e., the three speeches given by Eugenio Cefis and the pictures of the author made by Dino Pedriali in Chia — and from the need, felt above all by Siti, to emphasize the incompleteness of *Petrolio* and thus prevent the reader from the illusion of an accomplished form.³

Compared to the *princeps* of the novel, published by Einaudi in 1992 and edited by Maria Careri and Graziella Chiarocci under the supervision of and with a philological note by Aurelio Roncaglia, and compared to the two following editions published by Mondadori — the first in *I Meridiani* in 1998 edited by Siti and De Laude, the second in *Oscar* in 2005 edited by De Laude and including the philological note by Roncaglia already published in the first edition of the novel⁴ — the new edition of *Petrolio* (the fourth) shows some notable differences at both the textual level (Careri’s competence) and in the overall structure of the book (Siti’s competence).⁵

At the textual level, the aim of respecting and reproducing Pasolini’s final intentions (which is the guiding criterion of the critical edition) is accompanied by the aim of accounting as much as possible for the author’s indecisions and for the precariousness of some of his choices (“indicanti

1. MANGHETTI 1995, 11.

2. BENEDETTI, GRAGNOLATI, LUGLIO 2020, 283–311. See also DE LAUDE 2020.

3. On those aspects see also BENEDETTI 2020.

4. PASOLINI 1992; PASOLINI 1998; PASOLINI 2005.

5. PASOLINI 2022, 5.

incertezza e provvisorietà”) as they are testified to by some “segni” placed by the author in the typewritten copy of his novel.⁶ Indeed, as Roncaglia has observed in his precious philological note, the incompleteness of *Petrolio* is revealed not only by the quantity of what is missing, but also by the quality of what remains to the extent that the “segni di provvisorietà”⁷ traceable in Pasolini’s novel spread across both the microstructural and macrostructural levels (1992, 572). On this basis, following the criterion introduced by De Laude in the Mondadori edition, Careri and Siti have chosen to include in the footnotes the previous readings not deleted by the author and therefore alternative to the most recent ones; to insert within half square brackets those portions of the text bearing signs of uncertainty and therefore very likely destined for additional revisions (a decision that restores the criteria of Einaudi’s edition rejected by Mondadori); and, above all, as noted by Careri, to include in the text, in a smaller font, “tutte le parti cancellate non sostituite o non riutilizzate altrove che è parso possano avere un qualche interesse sia per una migliore comprensione del singolo passo, sia anche, più in generale, per la lettura e l’interpretazione di *Petrolio*”.⁸ This last choice, which considerably enlarges the number of deleted and reinstated textual passages, and which represents the main difference with respect to previous editions, has made it possible to publish a preview of the many textual strings which contribute to both witnessing the openness of the novel and to promoting its exegesis. The main and most interesting reintegrations concern, in particular, the following notes: the so-called ‘Ur-Appunto 31’, which is absent in the typewritten copy of the novel, but not in the photocopy of the novel that Pasolini made in September 1974 (it is an interesting page because it prefigures the Appunto 20. *Carlo — come in un romanzo di Sterne — lasciato nell’atto di andare a un Ricevimento*, without using Giorgio Steimetz’s pamphlet against Cefis, the president of ENI and then of Montedison, as will happen abundantly in the Appunto 20 and in the following Appunti); the Appunto 33, left empty in previous editions and now containing an ironic *Invocation to the Muse* (*Invocazione alla Musa*) that “annuncia la paradossale intercambiabilità realizzata nella ‘favola’ dell’Appunto 34bis”⁹; the unnumbered and deleted Appunto in which Pasolini translates about sixty lines of *City Without Walls* by W. H. Auden (now inserted between the Appunto 120. *I Godoari* (IX) and the

6. CARERI 2022, 775.

7. RONCAGLIA 1992, 572.

8. CARERI 2022, 775.

9. SITI, in PASOLINI 2022, 754.

Appunto 121. *La nuova periferia*), the poem to which Pasolini refers in the Appunti 90–99; the two paragraphs about the *Nuova periferia* added to the four previous Appunti on the same topic, which testify, on the one hand, that Pasolini would have wanted to insert here the fourth *momento basilare* of the poem — i.e., the last sexual metamorphosis of Carlo di Polis (this mutation will instead be postponed and it will be prompted, in epiphanic forms, by the subsequent fascist demonstration that Carlo will attend standing on the sidelines) — and, on the other hand, that the Turin setting of the new and terrifying suburbs actually contains some elements that refer unequivocally to the Roman district named EUR.

The choice to reveal the textual variations and uncertainties and to restore in a smaller font many textual passages deleted by the author does not contradict the editors' respect for Pasolini's final authorial intentions, and it meets a legitimate and declared need: it highlights the open, experimental, and *in fieri* feature of *Petrolino* on the assumption that it is not only an interrupted and unfinished novel (therefore necessarily incomplete compared to the vast novel of 2000 pages about which the author spoke publicly), but also a deliberately unfinished novel, a work “to be done”, a project systematically sketched in the name of infinite openness and integration. In short, the choice to highlight the programmatic incompleteness of *Petrolino* reveals the attempt to faithfully reflect the “poetica del frammento e dell'incompiuto” (Santato), dell'ultimo Pasolini e in molti casi permette di toccare con mano una delle maggiori implicazioni di una simile poetica, cioè la continua e ostinata presenza dell'autore ‘sulla scena’ come ‘istanza superiore che media la fruizione dell'intero testo.’¹⁰

More problematic from a methodological point of view is the editors' (in particular Siti's) decision to publish in the first appendix of the volume (entitled *Dal Dattiloscritto*) the page about Carlo's career (*Per la carriera di “Carlo”*) that had been excluded from previous editions in light of how Pasolini condemns his draft to destruction in the last line: “Appunto da distruggere.” It is true that the authorial indication at the bottom of this page can be considered as a part of the “gioco metafilologico”¹¹ Pasolini was talking about in relation to his novel (his recommendation, in other words, can be taken not seriously or literally, especially in light of the material condition of *Petrolino*), and it is true that this page has not been inserted in the text, but in the appendix, i.e., outside the text (those elements, at least partially, legitimize the decision to publish this note),

10. BENEDETTI 1998, 164.

11. SITI 2022, 785.

but it is equally true that — on the basis of the content of this page — Siti does not limit himself to speculate on which speeches of Cefis Pasolini would have included in his novel (which in itself is a legitimate and indeed appropriate hypothesis), but he decides to give a precise structure to the edition of *Petrolio*. What Pasolini writes in this note — that “i due pilastri”¹² of *Petrolio* are the two lectures given by Cefis, the first to the students of the Military Academy of Modena on 23 February 1972 (*La mia patria si chiama multinazionale*), the second at the Centro Alti Studi Militari in Rome on 14 June 1974 (*L'industria chimica e i problemi dello sviluppo*) — becomes not only the foundation of the (right) hypothesis that Pasolini would probably have inserted in his novel two and not three speeches of Cefis, but it prompts Siti to exclude one lecture of Cefis from the third appendix of the book. Although the lectures by Cefis that Pasolini kept among the papers of *Petrolio* and which he intended to include at the center of his work are three (all are in the Archivio Alessandro Bonsanti of the Gabinetto Vieusseux of Florence among the novel's papers), Siti chooses to exclude from the appendix Cefis's third speech (*Un caso interessante: La Montedison*) based on this unpublished Appunto. The remark that Siti makes in his afterword — Cefis's third speech “non sembra molto pertinente rispetto agli interessi pasoliniani, a differenza degli altri due” e “in ogni caso l'appunto ‘da distruggere’ toglie ogni dubbio sul fatto che il plurale pasoliniano alludesse a *due* discorsi; fedele anche in questo a quella ‘fissazione sul due’ che caratterizza l'intera struttura del romanzo.”¹³ — is certainly a legitimate and interesting observation from an exegetical point of view, but it does not justify the choice to exclude the third conference of Cefis from the appendices and thus confirm what are in fact Pasolini's absolutely provisional and undecidable intentions.

For the same reasons, the choice to place the letter to Moravia at the beginning of the novel on the basis of an indication of Pasolini traceable in one of the notes of his *Block-Notes* (which is now located in the second appendix of the book) is equally problematic. Once again, in fact, hinging on an authorial indication that is anything but definitive (the notes in this little notebook, moreover, are not dated and they add very little to the interpretation of the novel), the critical hypothesis made by Siti (which is very reasonable) ends up having consequences on the edition of the text because it modifies the sequence of *Petrolio* as it is preserved in the archive of Florence. In placing the letter to Moravia at the beginning of

12. PASOLINI 2022, 653.

13. SITI 2022, 808.

the novel and in placing at the end of the novel the other annotations that in previous editions precede the exergue of Mandel'stam, Siti runs the risk (a risk of which he is aware) of transforming his own conjectures into the guiding criterion for the edition of the text. The choice of modifying the succession of the sheets of papers because of some programmatic indications by Pasolini, or because of what Pasolini would probably have decided to do or not to do, in short, contrasts with the task required of those who play "il ruolo ingrato di curatore".¹⁴ From this point of view, the choice of including in the third appendix the three journalistic articles (by Riva, Vigorelli, and Bruner) which are in the Gabinetto Vieusseux also appears risky (though it would have been equally risky and bizarre to publish in a further appendix some and not all the pictures shot of the author by Pedriali by deciding which of these pictures Pasolini would probably have chosen and inserted in his novel).¹⁵ It is true that these journalistic articles deal with Francesco Forte (probably the model to whom Carlo is inspired), and it is true that Pasolini would probably have included these or other journalistic articles in his novel, but it must be recognized that the choice to place these texts in an appendix next to the lectures of Cefis (for which there is, on the contrary, explicit authorial direction to integrate them into the text) inevitably ends up giving to this exegetical hypothesis, which is completely legitimate on a critical level, an aura of evidence and necessity that is incongruent with respect to the objectives of a critical edition. On the contrary, the decision to publish at the opening of the novel its alternative titles (*Vas* and or *Petrolio*) makes a lot of sense as they appear in some initial sheets of paper in the folder of the novel. Additionally, this editorial choice underscoring the author's uncertainty concerning the title to give to his work (an uncertainty analyzed by Siti and already highlighted by Roncaglia in his philological note), is in fact consistent with the last arrangement of the novel.

After the three appendices (*Dal dattiloscritto; Il Block Notes; Documenti*), the new critical edition of *Petrolio* contains three further elements: the apparatus of *Notes* edited by Siti, a much more reduced apparatus in comparison to the dense and excellent commentary edited by De Laude for the *Oscar*, which is nevertheless full of further information, some of which is made necessary by the reintegration of the textual passages deleted by the author and by the inclusion of other texts; the *Note to the text* in which Careri summarizes the main differences between this new

14. *IBID*, 807.

15. On those pictures see *IBID*, 809–10.

edition and the previous ones and in which she appropriately explains a series of choices and expedients; and the *Afterword* by Siti (*Non doveva finire così*) in which he puts forward some genetic and interpretative hypotheses on *Petrolio* and gives an account of the choices made as curator. This is not the place to properly discuss the interpretation of the novel offered by Siti in his afterword, and yet it is worthwhile to indicate — schematically — some cardinal elements: the obsession with terroristic massacres and plots of power (and for Cefis) comes late in the structuring of the novel and Pasolini's critique is mainly aimed at the consumerist homologation and at the anthropological revolution; *Petrolio* is probably the cause of the author's murder; to understand such a fragmentary and magmatic text it is necessary to face its different levels, starting from the split of the main character; to get out of a novel that was getting tangled up, Pasolini, on the basis of a series of authors who describe rituals and forms of civilization extraneous to Western society, chooses to absolutize the historical crisis he is experiencing (the anthropological mutation, the plots of power, the self-destructive impetus of neocapitalism), transfiguring it into a cosmic crisis which preludes, as an esoteric initiation experience, a new form of life; instead of escaping from literature, Pasolini aims for "un'ultraletteratura" (inspired primarily by Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*) and aims "rifondare (per via di impotenza) il romanzo".¹⁶ In short, as we can see, it is a very rich afterword in which, however, the conjectures on how *Petrolio* would have ended up tend in some cases to justify risky and flawed decisions at a philological level.

In this context, and also in light of the remarkable work of re-reading, correction, and standardization carried out by the editors, it seems appropriate to point out that it is definitely plausible that in the manuscript sheet corresponding to the jpeg file 0509 of the digitized version of *Petrolio* should be read 'two' and not 'his' contrary to what is reported by all editions of the novel (in this latest edition see page 657 and the scan at page 660). Despite the difficult decoding of the author's writing, here as elsewhere, it seems possible to me that in this planning note Pasolini wants to reiterate the idea (one of his main obsessions) that the phases of terrorism are two.¹⁷

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16. *IBID*, 805.

17. TORACCA 2020, 73.

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DELLE DONNE, Fulvio — CAPPELLI, Guido. 2021. *Nel Regno delle lettere. Umanesimo e politica nel Mezzogiorno aragonese*. Roma: Carocci. ISBN 978-88-290-1099-8. Pp. 239. Paper. € 22.

F. Delle Donne and G. Cappelli's *Nel Regno delle lettere* describes the ideological tools of Aragonese literary production used to legitimize and reinforce the political system, namely the monarchy of the Kings of Aragon. The volume consists of a prologue (*La letteratura politica, la politica della letteratura*), two parts, and an epilogue (which reverses the initial title: *La politica della letteratura, la letteratura politica*), enriched by an extensive bibliography and a useful *Indice dei nomi e delle cose notevoli*. The two parts