He looks instead to the alternative arrangements of desire and pleasure that might be possible beyond the structures of morality. He starts with the aestheticism of Wilde, for whom our obedience to morality amounts to an 'oversimplification of ourselves in the service of self-protection' (p. 36), and for whom colour-sense was more important than a sense of right and wrong. Phillips positions Wilde as one among a number of writers interested in 'what pleasures, if any, can sustain us' (p. 162) in a secular age, and in reframing notions of the forbidden, of the good and the bad, in a post-religious language. Darwin and, of course, Freud are also part of this turn-of-the-century conversation. And psychoanalysis emerges in Phillips' account as a space in which our obedience can be called into question, and in which the concept of the forbidden can be something to think with, rather than something that stops us thinking. Morality and obedience, Phillips suggests, function as prophecies or promises of the future: if you love and obey God, you will be saved. But in psychoanalysis – at least, in Phillips' version of it – nothing of the sort is guaranteed.

Reference

Phillips, A. (2012). *Missing out: In praise of the unlived life*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Michael Kalisch

http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03060497.2016.1167326

Grace and danger

The selected poetry of Pier Paolo Pasolini, edited and translated by Stephen Sartarelli, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 2015, 512 pp., £17.50 (paperback), ISBN 978-0226325446

Reviewed by Subhaga Gaetano Failla
Translated from the Italian by Manu Bazzano

An initial unsettling scene in the 2007 film *One Hundred Nails* by the great Italian director Ermanno Olmi shows in dim light hundreds of books and manuscripts fastened with large nails to the floor of an old library – suggesting that books are fossils of the spoken word. This also evokes, perhaps, Plato's originary diffidence towards writing itself: precious, risky, even treacherous. The well-known Italian pun *tradurre*/*tradire* (translate/betray) refers precisely to the pitfalls inherent in translation.

I felt a similar sense of uneasiness at first when I came across this translation of Pasolini's poems. This was quickly dispelled by a feeling of freedom: these verses are transported away from the cage of Italian Catholic moralism that pollutes the art of a great author. I salute the publication of this book as a significant event, a bold attempt to evoke in a new language the moods and ambiences that have been absent for some

time in Italian culture. Sartarelli's endeavour is in many ways a tall order, considering that some of the poems are from the Friulan collection *La nuova gioventù*, written in the language of this linguistic minority of Friuli in northern Italy, the native place of the poet's much-loved mother and where he (born in Bologna in 1922) attended elementary school, and where he was to go back for a few years as a teacher. In 1950 he fled Casarsa in Friuli; life had become impossible. He had been accused of corrupting the youth and committing indecent acts in public. A committed anticlerical and communist intellectual, he had become an easy target. In his farewell poem to Friuli he wrote of the desirability of becoming remote, unknown and estranged, and mourned the mutual love for his place of origin as something that had altered into a bright but lifeless sea. Sartarelli's effort is also indispensable, given that some of Pasolini's poetic oeuvre, in particular *Religion of My Time* (1961), may be considered, alongside Dino Campana's *Orphic Songs*, one of the very best of the twentieth century.

Personally, I never tried to *understand* his works – by which I mean the entirety of his existential output beyond his poetry. To understand is to *apprehend*, take hold of, in itself an act of gratuitous violence. What is alive in the work is indefinable and impossible for us to segregate in the prison cell of a definition. Walking along the sunlit country paths of southern Tuscany where I live, I sought to match the rhythm, beat and blank verse of my own steps to Pasolini's steps and verses. I found this attunement especially through his poetry, from *Gramsci's Ashes* onwards. This was a time in his life of arresting poverty after the disastrous Friulan experience when, fired from his teaching post and expelled by the Communist Party with the charge of 'moral indignity' ('In spite of you', he wrote in a letter, 'I am and will remain a communist in the truest sense of the word'), he relocates to Rome with his mother. He takes long walks across the dismal suburbs of the 1950s capital. From these wayward meanderings, verses emerge that convey inexpressible grace, gentleness and pathos akin to the intensity and intimacy of erotic experience.

In his seminal essay *Menippus' Corsair Shadow*, Paolo Lago (2007) writes of a new poetic style emerging from Pasolini's verse, the poetry of the *viator*, the wanderer who perceives and absorbs every aspect of his environment. He walks like an ancient Cynic philosopher of antiquity who from the street itself assembles his reflections on contemporary Italy's social and political reality.

In his long, unfinished posthumous novel *Petrolio* – a virtually unknown masterpiece in twentieth-century literature – the author says of one of his characters: 'He sought – but in the world, among bodies – the most perfect solitude' (Pasolini, 2006, p. 46). This is perhaps that very same solitude, childlike, pure and absolute, that one may recognize in hearing the tender accounts of his friend, the writer Dacia Maraini who, to this day, is striving to find the truth about Pasolini's murder. In a TV interview on 1 November 2015, in the midst of the celebrations of the 40th anniversary of the poet's death (he was assassinated near Rome on the night of 1 November), she said that to be childlike is not necessarily a bad thing, and that her friend Pier Paolo was like a boy at heart, but one with tremendous courage and willing to take risks.

The writing style of contrasting combinations evidenced in the quotation from *Petrolio* can be recognized from Pasolini's early poems of the 1940s and 1950s and collected in *L'usignolo della Chiesa Cattolica* ('Catholic Church's nightingale'). Cruelty and unspeakable tenderness; the image of the Christ as a young woman 'crucified' by two strangers, her muddy blood soiling the bodies whose colour evoked the colour of a pale dawn, is juxtaposed with days of innocent, merry games of young boys.

At first glance, the trajectory would seem to hint at primitive Christianity, but the immediacy takes one's breath away and anaemic sociological interpretations fall away. The circuitous allusion to possible links to personal life and fate stops us in our tracks for we realize this may well be the stuff of secrets reluctantly and modestly whispered to a close friend.

Already in his first poems Pasolini denounces the reification of the human body perpetrated by capitalism, the human being reduced to a thing, commodity among commodities, the whole of humanity turned into a grotesque thing. Pasolini longs for uncorrupted youth, ecstasy reached through extreme polarities, born out of the experience of the threshold. His version of Christ, in his 1964 film *The Gospel According to St Matthew*, is a passionate man with fiery speech and the dark skin of the Mediterranean south. A young man's body pierced by nails, immobilized, mourned by a frail Madonna played by the director's own venerated old mother. As with the thief crucified next to the Christ in his short film *La ricotta* where the extra playing the part dies for real, of indigestion, having gorged, poor and hungry, on a gigantic piece of curd cheese. As in the final scenes of another short film, *Che cosa sono le nuvole?* ('Clouds – what are they?') where the following dialogue takes place between two puppets, Othello and Jago, just discarded by the side of the road by a travelling puppet theatre and about to be collected by the dustman:

Othello: Eeeh, and what are those?
Jago: Those … are … they are the clouds.
Othello: And what are the clouds?
Jago: Who knows?
Othello: They are so beautiful, so beautiful.
Jago: Ah, the heartbreaking beauty of creation!

And then in his 1969 film *Pigsty*, we see a man in the Middle Ages, played by Pierre Clémenti, who attacks the passer-by near a volcano, kills them and devours them. He is arrested alongside an accomplice, tied to a pole and condemned to be torn to pieces by stray dogs. His last words are: 'I killed my father, I ate human flesh, and I quiver with joy'.

In two prose passages of his volume of poetry *La nuova gioventù* (Pasolini, 1975), he writes:

> Why did you let our souls be tempted by the bourgeois? We can't go on like this. We'll have to turn back and start from scratch. So that our children be not educated by the bourgeois, so that our homes may not be built by the bourgeois … Let's go back, with clenched fists, let's start again … No compromise. Let's go back. Long live poverty. Long live the communist struggle for necessary goods. (pp. 245–246)

> No: we mustn't accept this 'development model'. And it's not enough to refuse this 'development model'. We must refuse 'development' altogether … because it is a capitalist development. (p. 241)

Even in his most heated polemics, Pasolini showed a childlike side, a deep personal gentleness, the candidness Maraini recognized in him. Yet this candid truthfulness, voiced in the mind and body of a great intellectual, is very inconvenient. Pasolini has been erased by the collective Italian consciousness because he is seen as too dangerous. An alive, joyous body is considered obscene, especially in a nation,

Italy, which is pierced in its very heart with the double arrows of the Vatican and the Catholic Church, inheritors of public burnings at the stake of thousands and thousands of bodies considered obscene. Italy is unable to accept the vital body of Pasolini, a body that resists automatism, homologation and capitalist reification.

The year 2015 was marked by the commemoration of the 40th anniversary of this great author's death. Despite the empty rhetoric displayed by the media, despite reams of journalistic nonsense, Pasolini's 'obscene' body is still being displaced. Some made a vague stab at posthumous beatification – with very little success. Very few in Italy, besides the odd academic, read Pasolini's poems, and even fewer know of *Petrolio*. In 40 years, films such as *Pigsty* or *Salò, or the 120 days of Sodom* have nearly vanished from TV networks. On the 40th anniversary, three of his films were shown at the unpopular times of 11 pm, 1 am and 3 AM on a week day. The recent death of Franco Citti, protagonist of several of Pasolini's films and friend of the director, has been barely mentioned.

I would like to end with a final note. A few times I have looked with eyes wide open at the face of the poet, bloodied and horribly bruised by his killers. That image, vivid in my mind, brought back to my heart, through a wayward route, another image by James Hillman (Hillman & Ronchey, 2001, p. 156), who in conversation with Silvia Ronchey in 2001 spoke of the death mask:

> The last revelation. For this reason many centuries ago people made death masks, in order to capture that essence. As soon as someone died, they made a death mask to capture the image freed by that person at the moment of death.

References

Hillman, J., & Ronchey, S. (2001). *Il piacere di pensare*. Milan: Rizzoli.
Lago, P. (2007). *L'ombra corsara di Menippo. La linea culturale menippea fra letteratura e cinema da Pasolini a Arbasino a Fellini*. Milan: Mondadori.
Pasolini, P. P. (1975). *La nuova gioventú: Poesie friuliane 1941–1974* (2nd ed.). Turin: Giulio Einaudi.
Pasolini, P. P. (2006). *Petrolio*. Milan: Mondadori.

Subhaga Gaetano Failla

http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03060497.2016.1167327

Beyond self-help

Modern psychology and ancient wisdom: psychological healing practices from the world's religious traditions, edited by Sharon Mijares, New York, The Haworth Press, 2015, 284 pp., £24.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-138-88452-6

The declared aim of this compilation is to provide practitioners in psychological therapy with an idea of the tools and methods available to use from a range of