

Uccellacci e uccellini:
What Makes an Ideo-comic Fable?

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Abstract: The present article analyses Pasolini's definition of *Uccellacci e uccellini* as 'ideo-comic fable'. The film has always been considered as an eccentric parenthesis in Pasolini's work, and the 'ideo-comic fable' as a bizarre, short lived, experiment. In fact *Uccellacci e uccellini* is the only film of its kind, but a detailed analysis of each element of Pasolini's neologism will show how rooted into Pasolini's artistic practice they all are: if political ideology has always been at the heart of Pasolini's work, the film shows a new direction, in which the director's Marxism crosses Christianity; it will be shown how Pasolini has always been surprisingly familiar with the comic genre, and finally a record will be traced of Pasolini's competence and use of fables. Such a comprehensive examination will unearth many of Pasolini's sources and its dialogue with other artists and intellectuals; finally, it aims at contributing a new approach to the critical analysis of the film, and at opening original insights into some other famous or less known works by the author.

Key Words: Ideology, Comedy, Fable, Communism, Marxism, Catholic religion, Christianity, Capitalism, Crisis.

The mid Sixties in Italy were a period of dramatic changes at all levels: the bubble of the economic boom had burst, the leader of the Italian Communist Party died, and the Catholic Church was radically reforming itself showing signs of enlightenment and openness without precedents. Certainties were shaken, and many artists were thrown into an existential and creative crisis, the main unanswered question being: 'what to do now?', or, as Pasolini put it at the beginning of *Uccellacci e uccellini*: 'Dove va l'umanità? Boh!'. Referring to the films produced in those years, Lino Micciché talks of them as 'film della crisi':

Uccellacci è insieme a *Soversivi* di Paolo e Vittorio Taviani, il più politicamente lucido, dei cosiddetti “film della crisi”, cioè di quelle opere cinematografiche, collocate fra il 1964 e il 1967 – come, oltre ai due film citati, *Prima della rivoluzione* di B. Bertolucci, *I pugni in tasca* di M. Bellocchio, *Le stagioni del nostro amore* di F. Vancini, (e per certi versi anche *La Cina è vicina*, che in realtà è però, prevalentemente un film “sessantottesco” ante litteram) – nelle quali si avverte, filtrato dalla rabbia e/o nostalgia, dalla ironia, dal pessimismo, il duplice motivo della delusa (o infondata) speranza del passato e della necessaria (o impossibile) rifondazione di un futuro. La tematica della “crisi” [...] assume una prima percepibile evidenza all’inizio degli anni ’60 permeando di sé film come *La lunga notte del ’43*, *Il terrorista* o *Una vita difficile*; e acquista una più complessa e più dialettica e più esplicita compiutezza a partire dal 1964 quando, all’indomani della morte di Palmiro Togliatti, sembra che un’epoca, un clima, una strategia siano per sempre tramontati. (Micciché 1995: 193-194)

If an artist of the caliber of Fellini managed to exorcise the crisis (also his personal crisis) by making a film about the creative crisis of a film director in *8½* (1963), Pasolini chose a different route by making a film in which he tried to question the crisis in order to find a way out. Because the crisis at hand was new, and to address it in a film was a new experience, Pasolini invented with *Uccellacci e uccellini* a new film genre that he called ideo-comic fable. The following paragraphs aim to illustrate the genesis of Pasolini’s experiment, its cultural, literal and cinematographic sources; to define what he meant by the terms ideology, comedy and fable, and how these three elements mix together in a coherent narration.

1. Ideo-

The ideology that lays behind the structure of *Uccellacci e uccellini* is the result of a personal synthesis Pasolini operates between the two main ideologies that have always shaped his thought and work: Communism and Christianity. The development of such a dichotomy can be traced back to Pasolini’s first poetic works in post-WWII Friuli: the poet, already fascinated by the myth of an archaic peasant religiosity, approached Marxism and discovered the class struggle of farm workers, taking their side during strikes and in the heated political battle of the time.

In all of Pasolini’s poetic and literary works, Christian and Communist symbology intertwine to form a thick pattern of images that regularly recur. Religion and religiosity are always associated to the lowest sectors of society: humble people live religion and religiosity in a sincere and spontaneous way, exactly the opposite of what happens among the bourgeois class, where religion is a pure formal and instrumental element. The religiosity of the lumpenproletariat is considered by the poet a phenomenon that both embodies and perpetuates tradition; he saw

the raise of Capitalism in Italy in the Sixties as a threat for the survival of tradition, and therefore Communism appeared to him the only political force willing to preserve history and the past, thus becoming the only efficient tool able to guarantee the survival of tradition into the future.¹

In his passage from literature to cinema, Pasolini directly transplanted the myth of spirituality from the Friulian peasants to the lumpenproletariats of Roman slums. With *La ricotta* (1963), Pasolini for the first time gave an organic shape to his personal synthesis between Communism and Christianity, although in a polemic way: the character of a Marxist director is pointlessly trying to find spirituality in the mannerist contrivance of his *tableau vivant*. On one side, we have the director and his producer with their artificial and opulent Catholicism, on the other side we have the lumpenproletariat Stracci who lives on his own skin all the stations of Christ's passion: from the last (scanty) supper with his family, to the mocking of his colleagues from the cast, to the temptations by an extra who plays Magdalene, until the final crucifixion and death.

In regards to *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (1964), it has often been noted how Pasolini's Christ resembles a revolutionary leader, and how the director stressed his human nature rather than the divine. Up to this stage in his career, Pasolini seems to have developed his personal synthesis between Christianity and Marxism on a purely metaphorical level; with *Uccellacci e uccellini*, for the first time he seems eager to make a film-essay to illustrate clearly and analytically this dichotomy of his intellectual vision. The film appears to generate from an urgency to clarify and exemplify, perhaps even to clear any possible doubt. The reasons of such an urgency can be traced in Pasolini's pieces in his weekly column on the magazine of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) *Vie Nuove*, and in particular in those between the years 1964 and 1965. The column, called "Dialoghi con Pasolini",² was conceived as a platform for an interchange of ideas between the intellectual and the electoral base of the PCI. In September 1964, Pasolini resumed his column after an interruption of more than one year; in the meantime, his *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* had been released and presented at the Venice Film Festival, whilst the Communist Party had recently lost (in August) its historical leader Palmiro Togliatti. In his pieces on *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*, Pasolini seemed constantly worried of being misunderstood and tried his best to prevent any possible negative critique that his film was bound to arise amongst the atheist Communist militants.

¹ See Pasolini 1963.

² The column "Dialoghi con Pasolini" appeared for the first time in *Vie Nuove* in the issue number 22 on the 28th May 1960, and for the last time in the issue number 39 on the 30th September 1965 (with a long interruption during 1963 and most part of 1964). The complete column, with the letters from the readers, is now available in Pasolini 1992a: 1-453.

Until December 1964, Pasolini had to answer many letters from angry readers who criticised his religious turn; he tried to explain them that times were ripe for a collaboration between Communists and Catholics, that such a collaboration was inevitable in order to fight Capitalism and that for the first time in centuries the Church was showing signs of openness towards the party thank to the enlightened papacies of John XXIII and Paul VI.

Pasolini wanted his message to get to the mass, so cinema, perhaps more than the column on a party magazine, was in his view the best way to reach a much wider audience; the masses were not only the only people with a true and authentic revolutionary force, but they were also capable (as shown in the archive footage from the funerals of Togliatti that Pasolini inserts in *Uccellacci e uccellini*),³ to candidly alternate a closed fist to the sign of the cross. Togliatti himself, in his *Memoriale di Yalta* compiled in August 1964 just before he died, had explicitly paved the way towards a dialogue with the Catholic world. This might appear just as a plausible political strategy by Togliatti, however times were really ripe for a constructive dialogue between the two ideologies.

If Pasolini seems to be rather accommodating towards the Church at this stage, he also appears to be very critic towards the party. Although he never questioned for a moment the necessity of a Marxist approach, he pointed out its weaknesses and found their cause in the party's dogmatism and in the party's refusal to come to terms with a social and historical reality that was radically changing.

Throughout the whole year 1965, the column "Dialoghi con Pasolini" saw an intensification of pieces with a stronger political focus, and in April and May hosted the stories of the three episodes that in the original idea were to form the film *Uccellacci e uccellini*. The first episode, the one that will be later entirely cut, was called "L'aigle": "Il fondo della favola è la critica della crisi del liberalismo occidentale, e, nella fattispecie del razionalismo parigino" (Pasolini 1992a: 399).

More specifically, 'Parisian rationalism' – which for extension represents Western culture – is thrown into crisis after its acknowledgement of Third World religiosity (represented by the eagle); the Parisian rationalist M. Cournot, the protagonist of the episode, is unable to conceive such religiosity, and fails to understand it because he tries to study it from the point of view and the books of Western tradition (for example Blaise Pascal). But the theme of the impact of a

³ *L'Italia con Togliatti*, produced by Unitefilm, 1964. The film is available on <http://www.cinemadipropaganda.it/search/record/625>.

profound religious experience in a bourgeois environment will be then addressed by Pasolini in *Teorema* (1968) a few years after, and perhaps to have the opportunity of analysing it in more depth, he dropped it in *Uccellacci e uccellini* cutting the whole episode. In his essay “Confessioni tecniche” (Pasolini 1966), Pasolini affirms that he had to cut the episode because of the scarcity of resources the film production put at his disposal, but also because of the impossibility for Totò, in Pasolini’s view, to play the part of a character “in possesso dei privilegi culturali” (1966: 55).

The second episode, “Faucons et moineaux”, will later become in the film the story the crow tells Totò and Ninetto, and it serves the purpose of addressing “i problemi della Chiesa o delle Chiese di fronte alla lotta di classe” (Pasolini 1992a: 402).

The story of the third episode, “Le corbeau”, the longest and most articulated, will later form the backbone of the film, serving as a container for the numerous incidents that will occur to the characters along the road.

With the publication of the three stories for the film, Pasolini wanted to solicit reactions and comments from his readers; he sought to use *Vie Nuove* to test his ideas for the film, but the answers he received were few and usually negative:

Caro Pasolini [...]. Mi sembra che da quando hai ripreso il tuo lavoro per *Vie Nuove* tu stia conducendo un monologo invece che un dialogo. E questo per varie ragioni: innanzitutto perché tratti argomenti che spesso sono estranei agli interessi dei lettori di un settimanale a rotocalco di diffusione popolare; poi perché usi un linguaggio che – per essere molto “proprio” – spesso è inaccessibile ai più [...]; infine perché tu non incoraggi i lettori a sottoporli argomenti e problemi anche minuti o di interesse immediato. (1992a: 417)

Pasolini seems here to totally identify himself with the crow of his fable: in his attempt to educate the mass he patronises simple people with big words and topics too far from them; but the readers are by now fed up with him, and Pasolini, who perfectly realises it, makes Totò and Ninetto kill the talking crow in his film, and in the real world, in September 1965, he leaves the magazine and terminates the column.

Uccellacci e uccellini is, most of all, a film about the crisis of ideology. Far from advancing solutions for the crisis, the purpose of the film is to face it and to attempt a possible way to solve it. Perhaps the greatest cause of such a crisis is the impotence and immobility of Marxism – or rather Marxist parties – against a renewed Capitalism, which is now totally different from that studied by Marx and Engels. Equally powerless is for Pasolini the Catholic Church, hence the

necessity of an alliance between Communism and Catholicism: the common goal being the fight against consumerist Capitalism. Capitalism, which had been historically an allied of the secular power of the Church, now does not need its support any longer; Capitalism has evolved to such an extent that, after having exploited the Church, it does not need to rely on it any more in order to succeed. Consumerist society has created hedonism, and with it contributed to the secularisation of society; this transition has been eased by the gradual disappearance of peasant societies (where religious spirit is traditionally strongly rooted), and so the ancient Christian monotheism has been replaced by the new polytheism of consumerism goods. Pasolini's reasoning concerned Italy, but he saw the country as a precursor of what was going to happen in many countries in the Third World. Pasolini saw Italy, and in particular the South of Italy, as an outpost of the Third World, thus analysing it as a laboratory in which phenomenon of a universal caliber were developed: "La scoperta del Terzo mondo rimarrà un suo stilema costante e rappresenterà per lui, a livello internazionale, ciò che il popolo di Napoli e le borgate romane sono a livello nazionale: un mondo ancora incontaminato" (Sapelli 2005: 35).

The effort to combine Communism and Christianity, however, was not a prerogative of Pasolini's work, but carries on, maybe more drastically, a well advanced debate.⁴ Pasolini quotes two books in particular he used to corroborate his thinking:

Si tratta di un'antologia curata da Franco Fortini che, aggiungendosi all'altro suo recente libro, la *Verifica dei poteri*, sono stati i testi su cui ho cercato di comporre – a correzione della sceneggiatura – la figura ideologica del corvo, traendo dalla complicata e orrida matassa, un poetico filo riassuntivo. (Pasolini 1966: 59)

So far this intellectual exchange with Fortini has not been taken into account by the critics who have written about *Uccellacci e uccellini*, and yet it is fundamental for a better understanding of the director's ideas and to place them in their right place within the cultural climate of the time.

Verifica dei poteri (Fortini 1989) is a miscellaneous text, composed by essays written by Fortini over the years, which addresses many of the themes of *Uccellacci e uccellini*. In his book Fortini theorises, amongst other things, the end of the social mandate of writers, exhorting left-wing intellectuals to re-think and re-formulate Socialism; in the book is also possible to trace some of the cues that the director has followed and developed in his film, for example in the essays about the intellectuals on the pay books of capitalists, or in those about the neo-avant

⁴ See for example what Alberto Moravia had written back in 1944 in his essay "La speranza ossia Cristianesimo e Comunismo", now in Moravia 1980: 11-29.

garde or Brecht; in other instances Fortini's essays have been used by Pasolini as an authoritative source and a theoretical background to corroborate his ideas, like for example the essays on Lukács (one of which, "Lukács in Italia" [1989: 184-209], had already appeared in 1959 in *Officina*, the journal Pasolini edited in Bologna at the time).

In an essay like "Astuti come colombe" (1989: 34-53), is easy to identify some of the ideas Pasolini shared and used in *Uccellacci e uccellini*, such as the relationship between Capitalism and literature; the need for Communists to salvage the values of pre-industrial societies; the promotion of peace and atomic disarmament; the big problems of the Third World and those of the new socialist countries.

In two of the book's essays, "Due avanguardie" (1989: 60-72) and "Avanguardia e mediazione" (1989: 73-83), both clearly based on Lukács ideas, we can find a great affinity with Pasolini's own polemic with the Italian neo-avant garde, which he accused of pursuing a purely formal renewal, without any attempt to address social and political issues. In "Due avanguardie", for example, there is a passage that perfectly describes the essence and the function of the couple Totò/Ninetto in *Uccellacci e uccellini*: "le distinzioni di classe sono in via di scomparsa o in via di essere introiettate, sì che in ognuno di noi conviverebbero ormai il padrone e il servo, il capitalista e lo sfruttato, il produttore e il consumatore di subcultura" (1989: 67).

Another aspect of Totò and Ninetto's psychology can be found in the essay "Le mani di Radek":

gli oppressi e sfruttati in tanto non sfruttino alcun altro né opprimano e sappiano di essere tali, in quel "dover essere" che è la coscienza di classe. [...] *Solo dove non opprimiamo e sfruttiamo noi stessi e gli altri, abitano le forze capaci di non farci perdere la vita.*⁵ (1989: 101)

These words sound very much like the crow's words in the film, moreover, in the same essay Fortini touches on other topics dear to Pasolini such as the Socialist countries in the Third World and China in particular.

As the editors of I Meridiani edition dedicated to Pasolini's cinema point out (Pasolini 2001a: 3102-3103), the second book by Fortini, mentioned but not named by Pasolini, is the collective volume *Profezie e realtà del nostro secolo* (Fortini 1965), in which Fortini anthologises a number of essays by a variety of international thinkers of the calibre of Mandela, Sartre, Fanon, Marcuse, Malcolm X, Lévi-Strauss, Adorno, De Martino, Foucault and others. Among the essays

⁵ Italics by the Author.

that have certainly influenced *Uccellacci e uccellini*, are worth remembering: “L’apogeo del neocapitalismo” by Ernest Mandel (1965: 3-22), and in particular the final section of the essay, “I socialisti e il neocapitalismo”, where the author expands his idea of ‘industrial democracy’, and talks of re-thinking the economic structure in a Socialist way, wishing the workers will take part in such a process; “Pluralismo sociale, programma e libertà” by the Catholic economist Nino Andreatta (1965: 49-63), who addresses problems like the scarcity of houses and internal migration that also find a place in *Uccellacci e uccellini*.

In “Come si depreda il Terzo Mondo” by Pierre Jalée (1965: 84-105), the author often insists in presenting China as the new factor in the international scene that has affected Capitalism by taking from it ‘one third of the planet’s inhabitants’ – and therefore one third of the consumers. Jalée also criticises the Western World mind-set where “il Terzo mondo non vi compare [...]. Vi si ragiona come se il regime capitalistico esistesse solo in Europa occidentale o nell’America del Nord” (1965: 103-104); the essays “Le comuni in Cina” (1965: 144-160), “Voci di contadini cinesi” (1965: 161-168), “La rivoluzione cinese” (1965: 308-332), and “Aspetti del conflitto ideologico Cina-URSS” (1965: 595-603), are all fundamental to understand, in part, how Pasolini formed an opinion about Communist China and what were the positions toward that important Communist country among the international Marxist intellectuals. Pasolini must have used the essay “L’ideologia del declino ideologico” (1965: 197-220) to support his own ideas about the loss of identity of the lumpenproletariat, and their aspirations, fuelled by consumerist propaganda, to become bourgeois instead of desiring to fight and destroy them.

The long essay “La condizione umana in transizione” (1965: 236-262) is especially interesting; one of its statement: “Nessuno sa oggi verso quale destino l’umanità si diriga” (1965: 237), echoes the opening caption in *Uccellacci e uccellini*: “Dove va l’umanità? Boh!” with which Pasolini summarises an interview with Mao by Edward Snow. What follows about the entertainment industry, as in the previously mentioned essay by Jean Fourastié, can be useful to interpret the episode of the travelling actors, in which Totò and Ninetto attend a show ignoring (intentionally or not) that behind them a group of workers is marching – metaphorically – towards a different future:

L’esiguità dei costi, l’intensità, la frequenza, la bellezza e la forza emotiva degli spettacoli che il teatro, la televisione, il cinema offrono alla folla, inducono d’altra parte un gran numero di uomini a ridursi a stati passivi, anche in materia di sport e di sessualità. (1965: 238)

The private crisis of Pasolini's ideology was largely reflected in a more general crisis of Marxist parties in Italy and abroad; the end of an historical era coincided with what in poetry Pasolini used to call 'nuova preistoria': that is, the end of archaic societies which had been formed during the centuries, shaped by Christianity in the Western World, and by any sort of religious spirit elsewhere. The mandate of the intellectuals had expired because they failed to recognise and stop the end of an historic era; part of their failure consisted in addressing totally new problematics with old ineffective tools. This is the reason why the crow has to depart from Totò and Ninetto: he (and the type of Communist he represents) is no longer able to guide the new-born humanity; however, what he preaches is still a valid starting point, and his symbolic departure in the film takes the shape of a ritual sacrifice: he has to be eaten so that his spirit might be absorbed, and through digestion transformed into something new and positive for the future (discarding in the process what is not needed).

2. -comic

The original Italian trailer for the release of *Uccellacci e uccellini*, was created with the intention of attracting people to the cinema with the promise of an hilarious film. The distribution focused – for obvious commercial reasons – on selling the product as one of the many Totò's light comedies, skillfully editing the funniest scenes into the trailer in order to give that impression, and summing up briefly and roughly the real content of the film. In the trailer there are even scenes from the deleted episode "L'uomo bianco".

But Pasolini's intention had always been that of making a comedy, and however central the ideological aspect is in *Uccellacci e uccellini*, in conversation with Oswald Stack the director tried to play it down by putting the accent on the comic element: "perhaps it came too much like that: too 'ideo' and not 'comic' enough". (Pasolini 1969: 99)

The term 'ideocomica' was first used by Pasolini in his last piece in the column on *Vie Nuove* (Pasolini 1992a: 451). In an interview with a very young Dario Argento on the set of *Uccellacci e uccellini*, Pasolini clarifies: "Non c'è dubbio che è un film comico, e anche farsesco. Direi che è un'opera ideo-comica come ci sono opere tragi-comiche e eroi-comiche" (Argento 1965). The editor of the volume *I dialoghi* points out that the term 'ideocomica' could have been inspired by Calvino's book, *Le cosmicomiche*, published that very same year. In "Confessioni tecniche", Pasolini gives some clues as to how to interpret the comic element in the film, and

suggests that this comic vein is a sort of exit strategy from the personal artistic crisis of the author, and at the same time a way to address both the crisis of ideology and the impasse of contemporary literature (Pasolini 1966: 54).

As Franca Angelini notes, “già nella traduzione del *Miles gloriosus* di Plauto col titolo *Il vantone* (1961), Pasolini aveva tentato il comico, con una traduzione in romanesco moderno che molto aveva dell'avanspettacolo, della rivista, del numero da varietà” (Angelini 2000: 97). However, Pasolini's comic inspiration largely derives from the classic silent films of Chaplin, whom he deeply admires:⁶ Buster Keaton, and in particular Larry Semon, known in Italy as Ridolini. In *La ricotta* this homage to the cinema of Larry Semon is already present, and is used to create a contrast with the tragic context of the film, to characterise in a grotesque fashion some exaggerated aspects of Stracci's character; this homage is evident in the accelerated scenes where the protagonist runs in search of food, or in those where he gulps down everything the crew members throw at him (and the theme of hunger itself is a classic theme of comic films, see for example Chaplin who devours a shoe in *The Gold Rush*). It is Pasolini himself who reveals us the source of these accelerated sequences: “Succede quello che succede nei film di Ridolini: con l'acceleratore a tutta callara... patapìn, patapùn, patapàm... [...] alla Ridolini) [...]. Velocità da film di Ridolini: patapìn, patapùn, patapàm, Stracci è schiodato dalla croce” (Pasolini 2005: 471, 476, 484).

In 1965-66 Pasolini wrote the story for a film he never shoot, “La vis comica o il re della repubblica”:⁷ the film was conceived as a film almost silent, formed by five comic sketches randomly put together and with numerous captions on screen; the cast Pasolini had in mind included some of most famous Italian comedians of the time: Totò, Alberto Sordi, Nino Manfredi and Ugo Tognazzi. Pasolini also wrote about the sources for that idea: “È una specie di *Hellzapoppin'*, con altro ritmo e altri significati. Di *Hellzapoppin'* conserva l'arbitrarietà e l'assurdità (tanto per farmi capire subito e magari male)” (Pasolini 2001a: 2669). *Uccellacci e uccellini*, although not completely arbitrary and perhaps a bit absurd, retains more than an echo from “La vis comica o il re della repubblica”, for example the structure with episodes and the idea of having captions on screen.

Pasolini will use the style of silent comic cinema again in *I racconti di Canterbury* (1972), precisely in the episode of the cook where Ninetto Davoli playing Perkin is wearing a Charlie

⁶ See the short article “La ‘gag’ in Chaplin”, now in Pasolini 2007: 256.

⁷ One idea from this story was recycled and inserted in *La terra vista dalla luna* (1967).

Chaplin costume; Chaplin is mentioned six times by Pasolini in the first three pages of the screenplay for this episode, and one might also argue that the presence of Josephine Chaplin playing May in the episode of the merchant, can be viewed as yet another indirect homage to Chaplin (2001a: 1413-1572).

Also in *Uccellacci e uccellini*, Totò's costume reminds of Chaplin, and the scenes where father and son run from the owner of the land are accelerated like in Larry Semon's films or in *La ricotta*; moreover, in the deleted episode "L'uomo bianco", Pasolini had planned some brief chaplinesque documentaries that the tamer of the Grand Cirque de France, M. Courneau, would show to the eagle in order to educate it to the values of the civilised world. M. Courneau resumes these values in: Family, Homeland e Reason (but not religion); playing with words in Italian, these three values are kept together by the 'Spirito', in the sense of humour and irony, not as 'Spirito Santo': hence the comic style of the videos.

In Pasolini's cinema, as pointed out by the editors of the volume *Pier Paolo Pasolini. Corpi e luoghi* (Mancini, Perella 1982), there are numerous funny scenes, but with a fundamental difference: laughter in the lowest classes is expression of vitality, whereas in the upper classes is often expression of cruelty or perversion like in *Porcile* (1969) and in *Salò* (1975). There is also the great difference between a scene of laughter and a scene shot to make the audience laugh. In the second instance, Pasolini, like Pirandello in his famous essay *L'umorismo*, differentiates between comedy and humour: the former produces a laugh due to an objective comic situation, whereas the latter produces a laugh because of an intellectual appreciation of the same situation (Pirandello's example is that of an old lady with an exaggeratedly heavy make up: it is objectively comic, but once you know why she put it on – perhaps to impress a younger lover – then you have humour). In the case of *Uccellacci e uccellini*, the intellectual intervention that converts comedy into humour comes from the acknowledgment that an entire era is bound to become extinct. In Dufлот's interview book, there is an interesting passage that helps us to better understand how Pasolini intended the comedy/humour element in his work:

- D. In *Ragazzi di vita*, l'umorismo non è assente dal parlare della gente del popolo.
P. Il popolo non è umorista, nel senso che possiamo attribuire all'umorismo degli scrittori del seicento, di Cervantes, di Ariosto, di Dickens, ecc. Il popolo è comico, spiritoso.
D. Secondo Lei, che cosa manca allo spirito, al comico popolare per essere umorismo?
P. L'umorismo è distacco dalla realtà. Atteggiamento contemplativo di fronte alla realtà, e quindi dissociazione tra sé e questa realtà.

[...] Ma l'umorismo di cui Le sto parlando segue altre regole; i suoi canoni sono borghesi; ne è un modello compiuto l'umorismo anglosassone. Quest'umorismo della società più borghese del mondo non ha niente a che vedere con lo spirito del popolo romano. Ora l'umorismo che sto acquistando è proprio di quel tipo: l'amarezza, il distacco, la contemplazione anziché la partecipazione attiva, la solidarietà reale; il sorridere di cose che mi avrebbero gettato un tempo nel più puro stato di serietà, di passione, persino di furore. (Pasolini 1983: 50-51)

It is easy to find this kind of Anglo-Saxon humour in *Uccellacci e uccellini*, in fact the whole idea is to laugh about a worrying social and political situation. There are also gags, mostly left to the comic ability of Totò, however, as Pasolini maintains in his short article “La ‘gag’ in Chaplin”:

Solo i films comici muti sono costituiti *soltanto* di “gags”. [...] Nei films parlati dunque le “gags” non possono più costituire la sola struttura stilistica, ma si alternano ad un'altra struttura, che è quella audiovisiva, in cui mimica o pura presenza fisica e parola orale si integrano. (Pasolini 2007: 256)

In *Uccellacci e uccellini* comedy and humour are both present because its characters are caught in a transition from proletariat to bourgeoisie, and eventually, when the transition is near completeness, bitterness and detachment take over the comic element, allowing no more than a bittersweet smile.⁸ Pasolini was strongly convinced that comedy only pertains to the lowest classes and humour to the upper classes: “il mio pensiero è che l'umorismo sia tipico della civiltà borghese, e che dipenda dal razionalismo borghese ‘dissacratore’. Le epoche mitiche, sacrali, non ‘sorridevano di sé stesse’” (Pasolini 1992a: 624).

Mythical eras did not smile at themselves because they were still able to laugh: here, by associating laughter (and comedy) to a mythical past, Pasolini is also giving it a sacred value. The whole section “Visione” in *Petrolino* is a long hallucinated allegory about the change that neo-capitalism was producing in society and in the people; by radically altering existence and imposing the passage from an era regulated by the natural cycle of seasons, to an era regulated by the cycle of production and consumption; the passage from a rural economy to Capitalism also includes the loss of the ability to laugh. At the end of the vision Carlo, the protagonist, finds himself in front of a simulacrum bearing the inscription: “HO ERETTO QUESTA STATUA PER RIDERE”; in Pasolini's intentions this inscription can be used as an epigraph to summarise the whole book: “prevede o prefigura un atto ‘mistico’ che accadrà alla fine di questo romanzo: e si

⁸ Pasolini was perfectly aware of this, he even thought he had wasted his comic duo Totò/Ninetto, in fact he wrote soon after two new short films, *La terra vista dalla luna* and *Che cosa sono le nuvole?*, in order to give another chance to the actors and to extinguish his temporary comic vein.

tratterà di un atto risolutore, vitale, pienamente positivo e orgiastico: esso ristabilirà la serenità della vita e la ripresa del corso della storia” (Pasolini 1992b: 386). The ‘mystical’ action Pasolini is referring to, is nothing but a laugh: “D’altronde è noto come il ‘riso’ abbia una funzione risolutrice di crisi cosmiche, se causato da esibizione di ‘membro’ o ‘vulva’” (Pasolini 1992b: 386-387). Such a cathartic laugh, the “atto risolutore, vitale, pienamente positivo e orgiastico” that Pasolini has in his mind is the *anasyrma*, that is a ritual flashing of the genitals, linked to the ancient worship of Demeter and Dionysus, and to the Eleusinian Mysteries.

In his stimulating essay, Giuseppe Iafrate (Iafrate 1989: 31-35) analyses comedy in Pasolini’s filmography. He notices that comedy in *Accattone* and *Mamma Roma* is purely verbal, based mainly upon the creativity of Romanesque dialect and gestures, whereas from *La ricotta* onwards, this verbal comedy is more and more enriched by comic sketches and comedy situations. According to Iafrate, those new comic sketches and situations are no longer inspired by reality (as was the case with the verbal comedy of the Romanesque dialect), but have their origin in the cinematographic tradition; in this sense, *Uccellacci e uccellini* represents the step towards a more surreal type of comedy, completely detached from real life.

Together with the references to comedy cinema, the large part played by ideology in *Uccellacci e uccellini* contributes to that degree of abstraction that determines the shift from the comedy of reality to the comedy of fiction.

Occasionally Pasolini studied comedy from a theoretical point of view. At a purely technical level Pasolini had in mind for *Uccellacci e uccellini* a comedy filming style, but he later changed his mind opting instead for a ‘cinema of poetry’ style: “I movimenti di macchina dovevano essere tutti funzionali: la macchina, insomma, *non si doveva sentire*, secondo la tradizione del film comico classico (Keaton, Charlot, etc.)” (Pasolini 1966: 51). In addition to the already mentioned short article “La ‘gag’ in Chaplin”, he wrote the article “La comicità di Sordi: gli stranieri non ridono” (Pasolini 1996: 27-31),⁹ in which he accused Alberto Sordi of relying on a typically bourgeois kind of comedy that used the average man’s pettiness and meanness, without offering a moral way out; for Pasolini this type of comedy did not have success abroad because abroad it did not have a complicit and crooked public like in Italy. In the same article, he also gives his own definition of a comic actor:

⁹ First published in Pasolini 1960.

Da Charlot a Tati, per citare solo i grandi, i personaggi comici sono in realtà dei bambini [...]. Nessuno dei grandi comici del nostro tempo è un vero rivoluzionario: ma semplicemente un umanitario, un moralista, che, alla società, indica i mali senza indicarne i rimedi. Il “ragazzino” che è in ogni comico non ne sarebbe capace. Comunque resta un dato di fatto: in ogni comico vero del nostro tempo (e di tutti i tempi, del resto) c'è una profonda rivolta morale, che, se implica l'ingenuità inabile e improduttiva dell'infanzia, ne implica anche la bontà. (Pasolini 1996: 28-29)

Undoubtedly this search for a childish quality in a comic actor is at the heart of the choice of Ninetto Davoli as a stooge for Totò; Davoli brought about him a light-heartedness without having to act it; also Totò, as all actors in Pasolini's film, was chosen for what he was (as Pasolini put it “per quello che è”), rather than for his histrionic ability: “Nel fondo di Totò c'era una dolcezza, un atteggiamento buono, e al limite qualunquistico, ma di quel qualunquismo napoletano che non è qualunquismo, bensì innocenza, distacco dalle cose, estrema saggezza, decrepita saggezza” (Pasolini 2001a: 3010).¹⁰

The problem of the difficulty in exporting Italian comedies interested also Totò. In an interview with Giacomo Gambetti, published with the original screenplay of *Uccellacci e uccellini*, the comedian observes that Italian comedy is not appreciated abroad because it relies too much on puns and word plays, which are inevitably extremely difficult to translate and to convey in another language:

Il nostro cinema comico, siccome è povero, è basato sulle battute, sulle parole, sulle situazioni che non possono avere successo all'estero perché nella traduzione il significato si perde. [...] Viceversa mi ricordo i simpaticissimi Stanlio e Ollio, che andavano a finire con i piedi nella pece, l'areoplano cadeva quando uno era sopra e l'altro sotto, il somaro suonava il pianoforte, insomma tutte cose che in Italia non si fanno, perché da noi è tutto parole, parole, con sceneggiatori da quattro soldi i quali credono sia sufficiente buttare giù delle pagine. (Pasolini 1966: 249)

Pasolini's article “I ‘motti’ di Papa Giovanni” (Pasolini 1999: 120-124)¹¹ does not exactly address comedy, but it is interesting here because it talks of the humour of a pope, interpreting it a sign of great openness and humbleness at the same time. Because it is humour and not comedy, pope John's wisecracks have deep cultural roots but are, at the same time, full of self-irony, giving

¹⁰ First published in Pasolini 1976.

¹¹ First published in Pasolini 1964.

them such a lightness that allowed everybody to enjoy them, even those who did not possess the pope's same cultural level.

The reception of *Uccellacci e uccellini* as a comedy in Italy was very controversial, and the critics divided: Enzo Biagi, for example seems to appreciate Pasolini's intentions, but nonetheless believes the film is a flop, and in particular a failure as a comedy: paraphrasing Pasolini's term, Biagi invents the term "ideo-noioso" (Biagi 1966).

On the other hand, the positive reception of the film abroad is surprising. In addition to the Cannes Film Festival, *Uccellacci e uccellini* was shown at the 10th London Film Festival, at the 4th Annual New York Film Festival, and at the Festival International du Film de Montreal: a quick look at the press cuttings from those festivals shows a vast majority of enthusiastic reviews. The foreign critics have no doubts in calling the film a comedy, and are all pleased with the fun they enjoyed in the theatre, thus openly contradicting Totò's observations about the impossibility of export for Italian comedies. This can be partially explained by the fact that the foreign public did not know Totò, and therefore did not have the same expectations from him that the average Italian audience, used to the light comedies and usual jokes of the actor.

As we have seen before, the Italian distribution of the film tried to use Totò's reputation in order to attract as many people as possible to the cinema, including those who would not go and see a Pasolini's film. A similar marketing strategy, focusing entirely on the comic side of the film, was used by the distributors abroad: this is more understandable, as the ideology, the problems of the Italian Communist Party and those of the Catholic Church in Italy in the early Sixties, were hardly likely to bring audiences to the cinemas abroad. From a commercial point of view, those matters had to come after the fun that the film promised: exemplar and eloquent in this sense is the American poster for the film, where the comedy aspect is stressed to the point of listing the crow amongst the cast members as 'the world's only talking crow'; the film is presented as a 'comedy hit'; and finally three excerpts from reviews are accurately selected in order to emphasise the comedy aspect: 'keen mocking humour', 'wild comic fable' and 'wonderfully fey'.



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...a wildly comic fable."
— Frances Herridge, N. Y. Post

"DELIGHTFUL
...the whole show
is wonderfully fey."
— Time Magazine

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Original poster for the release of Uccellacci e Uccellini in the USA.

3. Fable

Talking about his film with an anonymous interviewer, Pasolini gives a critical insight and a very specific key for interpreting his film:

Uccellacci e uccellini è una fiaba, come le raccontavano Esopo, Fedro e La Fontaine: quindi i suoi personaggi sono allegorici e simbolici. Ci sono un padre e un figlio che rappresentano l'umanità, l'umanità semplice, c'è un corvo che rappresenta, al posto del moralista delle favole antiche, l'ideologo dei tempi moderni, cioè colui che conosce e interpreta la realtà, e poi ci sono degli uccellacci e degli uccellini che rappresentano rispettivamente i cattivi e i buoni, i ricchi e i poveri, in una parola la lotta di classe. (Anonymous 1966)

Uccellacci e uccellini sits between two phases of Pasolini's cinema, and in a way, its scope is, amongst other things, to narrate that passage. It is a film/essay about Italy in the mid Sixties, but it also a sort of diary page where Pasolini reasons about his work as an artist and an intellectual. In order to keep some lightness in his narration and to grasp the viewers' attention, Pasolini chose the narrative genre of the fable, a fundamentally moralistic genre that was well suited for his ideological intent. The fable genre is only apparently far from Pasolini's sensibility. Together with *La terra vista dalla luna*¹² and *Che cosa sono le nuvole?*,¹³ *Uccellacci e uccellini* constitutes a fantastic intermezzo, a sort of pause for the director, in which he abandons himself to a playful whim (the original screenplay of *La terra vista dalla luna* was even drawn by Pasolini as a comic strip).

La terra vista dalla luna is a short-film with the same father and son comic duo Totò/Ninetto; it derives from *Uccellacci e uccellini* the themes of hunger and death, as well as the idea of the two protagonists on the road, walking along the slums of dusty city outskirts. At the beginning of the film the following captions are inserted as an epigraph:

Visto dalla luna, questo film che si intitola appunto: "La terra vista dalla luna" non è niente e non è stato fatto da nessuno...

Ma poiché siamo sulla Terra, sarà bene informare che si tratta di una fiaba scritta e diretta da un certo Pier Paolo Pasolini.

¹² Episode of the film *Le streghe* (1967). The other episodes are: *Senso civico* by Mauro Bolognini; *Una sera come le altre* by Vittorio De Sica; *La siciliana* by Franco Rossi; *La strega bruciata viva* by Luchino Visconti.

¹³ Episode of the film *Capriccio all'italiana* (1968). The other episodes are: *Perché?* and *La gelosia* by Mauro Bolognini; *La bambinaia* by Mario Monicelli; *Il mostro della domenica* by Steno; *Viaggio di lavoro* by Pino Zac and Franco Rossi.

Here Pasolini explicitly calls his film a fable, and in fact, at the end, he takes care of pointing out its odd moral with a new caption:

Morale: essere vivi o essere morti è la stessa cosa.

In *Che cosa sono le nuvole?*, the protagonists are talking puppets; in between the acts of their own staging of Shakespeare's *Othello*, they ask themselves questions about the meaning of life. The short film not only stars once again the couple Totò/Ninetto (the former playing Iago and the latter playing Othello), but it also stars Francesco Leonetti in a similar role to that he had in *Uccellacci e uccellini*, where he lends his voice to the pedantic crow. Leonetti plays in both films characters that are above the others, with a superior critical conscience and knowledge, and that are trying to direct the actions of the other characters (in *Uccellacci e uccellini* by giving unsolicited advice and lessons, in *Che cosa sono le nuvole?* literally pulling their puppet's strings). It must also be noticed the presence of the famous singer Domenico Modugno, who sings the opening titles in *Uccellacci e uccellini*, and plays a singing bin man in *Che cosa sono le nuvole?* (and in both films Modugno sings a song Pasolini wrote expressly for him).

The fable genre, however, had already been employed by Pasolini as an artistic and pedagogical tool in the Forties, when from 1944 to 1949 he was a school teacher in Friuli. The first example is a poem, called "Il flauto magico", that the young poet sends with a letter to his friend Franco Farolfi in 1941. The poem was inspired by both the notorious legend of the Pied Piper of Hamelin and by Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. In his letter Pasolini gives a brief introduction to the poem for his friend:

il significato narrativo, logico, è dato dalla leggenda del suonatore di flauto che si fa seguire, incantandoli, dai fanciulli di un paese, e poi li chiude dentro una grotta; il significato allegorico è: il suonatore di flauto rappresenta il passaggio, segreto, dall'ingenuità alla malizia, dall'impubertà all'adolescenza. (Pasolini 1986: 29)

In the light of this explanation, it is easier to understand why in "Confessioni tecniche" Pasolini explicitly declares that *Uccellacci e uccellini* was conceived "sotto il segno dell'aria del perdono del *Flauto magico*" (Pasolini 1966: 53); the piper suggest the idea of transition: in the case of the poem the passage from childhood to puberty as well as from innocence to the acknowledgement of the poet's own homosexuality (Golino 1985: 219-220), and is therefore well suited for the director to represent the passage from the archaic peasant society to the new

industrial era in *Uccellacci e uccellini*. The crow can also be seen as the piper who leads Totò and Ninetto along the road, carrying them towards a new phase in their lives.

In the imaginative world of Pasolini, every transition can only be accomplished after a struggle with an overpowering obscure force, which tends to repress the vital energy of youth. This is what happens in the second example from the Forties: it is a didactic invention of the teacher Pasolini, who invents a fable, whose protagonist is the imaginary monster Userum, to teach Latin grammar to his pupils:

Si trattava di un mostro che pretendeva da un villaggio vittime umane (fanciulli e fanciulle) da divorare, finché arrivava un cavaliere (un giovane generoso) che affronta il mostro e lo uccide non senza difficoltà in quanto esso è triforme: US, che si getta nel lago, Er che ripara nel bosco, e Um che si arrampica tra le rocce. La leggenda di San Giorgio, l'Ariosto, il duello degli Orazi e i Curazi: una vera macchina. Ma mi servì, allorché rapidamente e senza colorito nella voce (in quanto ero stato "attore" già nel narrare la favola) dichiarai che Us era "amicus", Er "puer", Um "donum", che l'intero mostro era dunque la seconda declinazione, che io ero il giovane che venivo a salvare essi, i fanciulli, dal sacrificio. (1985: 26)¹⁴

In this case the fable is a powerful pedagogical tool, a pretext to grasp the pupils' attention and a trick, that did not require a mnemonic study, to help them remember the lesson, being based instead on the power of imagination. Similarly, the pedagogue crow in *Uccellacci e uccellini*, invents and tells the fable of the Franciscan friars in order to win Totò and Ninetto's attention and better convey his teaching.

Also the third example dates back to the times when Pasolini was a teacher in Friuli, and draws again on the idea of an anthropophagous monster; it is a theatre play called *I fanciulli e gli elfi*,¹⁵ written by Pasolini for his pupils of the school in his home town of Casarsa. The play, which in *Atti impuri* Pasolini calls 'favola drammatica', was written between 1944 and 1945, and was first staged in Casarsa della Delizia on Sunday the 15th of July 1945. Those were the years when Pasolini and his mother Susanna taught in improvised schoolrooms for war evacuees of the villages nearby Casarsa, and perhaps the idea of the play came to Pasolini to exorcise and help the kids overcome the horror of war.

¹⁴ First published in Pasolini 1948.

¹⁵ The original manuscript has been only partially retrieved (29 pp.) and is now kept in the folder IT ACGV PPP at Archivio Contemporaneo "Alessandro Bonsanti". Gabinetto G. P. Vieusseux, Firenze. II. 3. 50, Fondo Pier Paolo Pasolini. Part of the retrieved text has been published (scene I and scene VIII) in Pasolini 2001b: 97-106.

Some years later Pasolini tries his hand once more with the fable genre, writing a short story called “Il castoro e i lupi” (Betti, Sanvitale, Raboni 1985: 105-106);¹⁶ it is the story of a conformist family of beavers, totally self contained and indifferent to everything beyond their own circle, including the community of wolves that threatens them from outside; when all family members die and a little orphaned beaver is totally ignored by the other egoist beavers, he ends up amongst the wolves who, despite what he has always been taught, do not eat him but welcome him amongst them making a wolf of him: sadly the beaver, who has received a conformist education, will also be a mediocre and conformist wolf.

Soon after making *Uccellacci e uccellini*, Pasolini had a first idea for a new film, *Porno-Teo-Kolossal* (Pasolini 2001a: 2695-2753); he will develop the idea over the years but the film will never be realised. In the original idea (2001a: 2757-2760), the protagonist, one of the Wise Kings, was played by Totò. This can be inferred from what we can read in a shot in the opening titles of *Che cosa sono le nuvole?*, where the camera pans on a wall where poster of Pasolini’s future film projects are hanged; amongst them this new film, with the working title of *Le avventure del magio randagio e del suo schiavetto Schiaffo*. Originally then, *Porno-Teo-Kolossal* was conceived as a fourth film starring Totò and Ninetto together; after Totò death in 1967, Pasolini decided the protagonist was going to be another iconic Neapolitan, Eduardo De Filippo (Pasolini 1988: 742).¹⁷ Here, as well as in *Uccellacci e uccellini* and *La terra vista dalla luna*, the narration moves from the picaresque wanderings of the protagonists.

As shown so far, fables recur constantly in Pasolini’s work, and always with an element of novelty added by the creative use the author choose to make of them; for example, in *Appunti per un film sull’India* (1968) Pasolini uses an old Indian legend as the frame for his new film: according to the legend, an extremely charitable maharajah, decided to sacrifice his life and offer his body to support two tiger cubs that were dying of hunger. In Pasolini’s intentions this legend was to be transposed into contemporary India, setting the maharajah’s death before independence (and it is easy here to identify the tiger cubs as the English colonialists), and developing the rest of the film in post-colonial India, with the maharajah’s widow and sons impoverished and wandering through a country full of deep inequalities and contradictions. *Appunti per un film sull’India* shares, and often expands, many of the themes of *Uccellacci e uccellini*, in particular the issues of hunger and religion.

¹⁶ First published in Pasolini 1954.

¹⁷ Letter to Eduardo De Filippo dated 24 September 1975.

Even the ‘edifying’ tales in *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma*, with which the three narrators entertain and instruct the prisoners in the villa, can be considered as perverted fables with their own foul metaphors and wicked morals. These stories have the purpose of educating the victims to the new values they have to abide, fulfilling the very same role fables traditionally have of educating young people to the values of the society they live in.

We might also take into account here Boccaccio’s, Chaucer’s and the Arabian Nights’ tales because of the use Pasolini makes of them in his three films inspired by them. The common thread that runs through the three films of what Pasolini called “Trilogia della vita”, is the proliferation of the stories ‘a brulichio’ (swarming), generating one from the other and often linked: in *Il Decameron* Pasolini abandons the original structure of the book ‘a schidionata’ (skewer), inserting a narrator who, sitting in a Neapolitan street, tells the stories to an audience where we can see some of the characters of those stories. Pasolini also selects from Boccaccio’s one hundred stories, only some of those set in Naples; this detail suggests that he may have been inspired by Giambattista Basile’s *Lo cunto de li cunti ovvero lo trattenimento de peccerille* (1634-1636). With his fifty stories told by ten old ladies over five days, Basile relates to Boccaccio’s structure, but with the difference that his tales are fables, and in fact his book is dedicated to children.

I have used the terms ‘brulichio’ and ‘schidionata’ above because they are used by Pasolini in *Petrolio* in describing the book he was about to write. Also in *Petrolio*, and perhaps more than in other works, Pasolini makes use of fables, especially in key moments of the novel:¹⁸ in the section “Appunto 34bis” titled “Prima fiaba sul Potere (dal ‘Progetto)”, as well as in the whole section “Epochè”, with many narrators following one another from “Appunto 97” to “Appunto 103”. The salient common element between all the fables in *Petrolio* and the big fable in *Uccellacci e uccellini*, is that none of them have a defined and unequivocal moral: that is, they all subvert the traditional concept of fable, reducing their role to that of telling a story with an open ending and leaving the interpretation to the reader/viewer.

Another model for Pasolini’s fables are undoubtedly the parables of Christ. The analysis of parables also gives an insight into the motivations behind Pasolini’s decision to make a fable-like film such as *Uccellacci e uccellini*: at the time, most of his column’s readers in *Vie Nuove*, reproached him for his film from the Gospel, as well as for the difficulty of his reasoning and language in writing; by using the metaphorical language of a fable and the simplicity of a parable, Pasolini

¹⁸ Pasolini planned many other fables to insert in *Petrolio* that he never wrote.

wants to make sure the grass roots of the Communist Party's electorate understand the important message he wants to deliver. As for fable, the use of parable is constant in Pasolini's work, in the form of cues, direct quotations or paraphrases. In *Uccellacci e uccellini* almost half of the film is dedicated to the crow's fable, which is modelled as a parable and indeed quotes many of Christ's parables, mostly from the Gospel of St. Matthew. But the entire film, and not only the crow's fable, is filled with such references: right at the beginning, when the two main characters are introduced, they are having a bizarre discussion about fishing and tides that echoes Matthew 4:18-22, where Jesus is recruiting Simon called Peter, his brother Andrew, James son of Zebedee and his brother John – all fishermen – and promises them to send them out to fish for people. Later on, in the scene where we see two road signs pointing to Istanbul and Cuba – suggesting a movement from East to West –, there can be yet another hidden reference to the Gospel: "For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man" (Matthew 24:27). The finale of the film, with the crow eaten by Totò and Ninetto so that they may assimilate his ideology, is – as Pasolini himself points out – a far too obvious image of Christ's sacrifice, of the last supper and therefore of the Christian Eucharistic ritual:

The eating, it is clear, has a ritual sense. The cannibal never eats because he is hungry, but for reasons of ritual. And the same thing with the Catholic Communion, for example, it is a residue, transposed symbolically, of this old rite of cannibalism. Christ said eat my body, drink my blood. It is a kind of cannibalistic rite that has a religious and moral significance: assimilation. Comprehension coming from assimilation, of sentiments or ideologies or of great examples of the past. Thus they perform a small act of cannibalism, or, if you like, they perform a Communion. That is, they assimilate their teacher. (Bragin 1966: 105)

Finally, Pasolini reviewed the début book of Leonardo Sciascia, *La Sicilia, il suo cuore. Favole della dittatura* (Sciascia 1997: 65-71),¹⁹ showing a deep knowledge and competence of fables: besides Phaedrus, he talks extensively of modern fabulists like Pietro Pancrazi (a critic and author who published in 1930 *L'Esopo moderno*) Trilussa and Mario Dell'Arco (whom, the following year, will edit with Pasolini the book *Poesia dialettale del '900*). In regards to Sciascia's fables, Pasolini believes their best quality is a metaphysical touch that makes them closer to poetry than prose, and that avoids a defined moral; according to Pasolini, thanks to those qualities Sciascia was able to narrate for the sake of narrating, letting his imagination go free. However, if Pasolini admired those traits of Sciascia's fables, he did not follow his example in *Uccellacci e uccellini*, where the

¹⁹ First published in Pasolini 1951.

moralisation has a precise political object and the content is not at all purified in favour of pure imagination.

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