

Hero Trouble

Blood, Politics, and Kinship in Pasolini's Medea

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Following upon a tradition that began in the 1920s in Italy, American producers became interested in the revival of mythological epics in the 1950s and saw Italy as an appropriate venue for the production of these films. Pietro Francisci's *The Labors of Hercules*, the first in a series of high-grossing mythological films, made an unheard of 900 million *lire* in Italy, a huge profit in the United States, and brought the Italian film studio Cinecittà to the forefront of the international film scene.¹ In the years 1957 to 1964, 170 mythological films were made with stories drawn from the ancient Greek, Roman, Christian, Incan, Egyptian, Hungarian, Arabic, and Amazonian (among others) traditions. Vittorio Spinazzola suggests that the social impact of these mythological "blockbusters" is one of spectator identification with and desire for an altruistic, protective, larger-than-life force:

Hercules invites the spectator to abandon completely the world of reality and human logic. On the other hand, he is not inaccessible, like a divinity, nor is he, like prophets, a mere reflection of divinity. In spite of his superhuman qualities, he remains an earthly hero and as such demands from the spectator not a passive adoration but an active process of identification. This duality is quite important for a sociological identification of the character. Hercules is the incarnation of a noble hero who does not come from the people but who is ready to fight for them, to protect the poor, and to restore order and social peace. He brought back to the screen the eternal tale of the knight errant, challenging his own class in the name of justice [qtd. in Liehm 184].

Although the genre of the mythological epic died out in 1965, desire on the part of spectators for formulaic narratives about omnipotent heroes did not. Mythological films were quickly replaced with a new tradition of Italo-American co-productions about superman-like cultural heroes. As film historian and critic Toby Miller argues, such thematic transference—from mythological

heroes to superheroes—is made seamless with the financial and distribution support of the Hollywood studio system. The blockbuster, thus, lends itself to the cultural colonization and domination of smaller national industries because of the familiarity of the stories and easy transferability of themes onto diverse cultural topoi.

Pier Paolo Pasolini followed the mythological film genre in Italy with his own set of classically-themed films that resisted easy, "for export" escapism and critiqued, in part, the monolithic Italo-American cinematic powers that repeatedly portrayed absolute, mythological heroes. Pasolini's 1969 adaptation of Euripides' *Medea* deflates the heroic epic of Jason (itself part of an ancient Greek epic cycle that included the adventures of Hercules) and his 1967 postmodern version of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* refuses to separate the legacy of Oedipus' hubris from Italy's Fascist past. His anti-heroes (Medea, Jason, Jocasta, and Oedipus) scramble heroic ideals and complicate spectator identification. They unveil a powerful critique of European colonialism and its lasting impact on popular, local, and sometimes subaltern cultural histories.²

The story of Medea and Jason has long been a popular topic in feminist circles. A foreigner, part-witch, guilty of fratricide and infanticide, Medea has been described by feminist scholars as a heroine for standing up to infidelity, misogyny, and abandonment; as a criminal for murdering her children in a horrific act of revenge; and as the ultimate victim of western (Greek) colonialism. In his film adaptation of this tragic tale of blood vengeance, Pasolini articulates Medea's potential as a queer rupturer of values in the context of western, normative kinship structures. His decision to cast Maria Callas as Medea bore particular relevance for queer culture as well as high culture. Following his principle of capturing "reality" on camera by filming people as they are, Pasolini cast Olympic athlete Giuseppe Gentile as Jason, making the character's ultimate failure as a hero more noticeable and disconcerting.³ By casting opera diva Callas in a role already immortalized by her concert performances (Medea was her comeback role in January 1964), Pasolini contaminates his own depiction of Medea's "barbarity" and alludes to her mythological history as a partial divinity. Callas' status as a high-culture icon and her operatic legacy permeate the primitive theme music that underscores Medea's scenes, just as visions of adoring fans (who, in some cases, traveled the world to hear her sing) provide a mythical subtext for the action of the film. Pasolini refers indirectly to Callas' fame as a soprano during an early scene in the film in which Medea's village prepares to sacrifice a young man. A close-up of the victim's face as he is led to the slaughter shows him transfixed, gazing at Medea as if he is starstruck with happiness. In a different scene which occurs later in the film, Callas is depicted in a long, tightly framed shot underscored by the sound of women from her village singing about Jason's invasion. The awkward quality of Medea's silence during this scene draws attention to the actress's alter ego as a soprano—as if she waits, in anticipation, for a cue to sing.

In "Callas and Her Fans," Wayne Koestenbaum draws attention to the importance of Maria Callas to gay opera fans and addresses the historical links between opera and homosexuality. Koestenbaum argues that Callas' vocal range (which includes sparingly applied vibrato) was at times "dangerously schizoid," suggesting a wavering between one value and another: "much as the third sex, a fin-de-siècle image of the homosexual, was thought to hesitate, with an indecisive and uncanny shudder, between the two legitimate genders" (9). This inconsistency in Callas' voice provoked a skepticism and curiosity about her womanliness, according to Koestenbaum, which carried over into speculation about her private life; she was perceived in the public eye as aristocratic and sexually troubled. He describes Callas as a queer icon, arguing that "the forces that shaped 'Callas' as a charged intersection of secret sadness and publicized splendor are the same currents that created the closet and its spectacular opposite, the scene of coming out; Callas and gayness are both symptoms of modern society's pervasive split between silence and speech, secrecy and disclosure" (12). Similarly, Pasolini's *Medea* is permeated with silences, queer moments of wavering inconsistency and troubled subjectivity.

Such temporal, cultural, and gendered moments of non-correspondence in the film, invoked in part by Callas' fame and reputation, add weight to Silvestra Mariniello's argument that Pasolini was trying to create a poetic sense of rupture or a gap in the notion of dialectical synthesis in his work. Mariniello calls attention to a newspaper article Pasolini wrote the year of his death in 1975, in which he stresses the failure of the concept of evolution or progression to hold any further meaning in Italian politics:

In this article, published in the Italian newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera*, Pasolini sketches an analysis of the Italian social-political situation that is brimming with consequences implied by the concept of evolution: the gap between, on the one hand, a rural paleo-industrial society and, on the other, a consumer society, the reality of multinational corporations, and the end of the state. *We are able to act, to intervene, only if we understand the links between old Fascism and the state and between new Fascism and the new economic-political structure. Political parties are finished, and "it is no longer a question of ruling,"* Pasolini remarks, inviting the Italian Left to rethink its political role [113, emphasis in original].

By connecting popular political pronouncements of economic progress to Italy's fascist past in this way (in fact, Pasolini called for several politicians in the Christian Democratic party to stand trial as traitors), Pasolini proposes a gap in the Italian historical narrative of cultural and economic progress since World War II. He sees, rather, a negative dialectic which only produces more fascism under the guise of political and cultural evolution and neo-capitalism. The conundrum of what Pasolini believed to be Italy's fascist past coexisting with its neo-fascist present in 1960s politics took the aesthetic form of dual-temporality in both *Oedipus Rex* and *Medea*. Thus, Maurizio Viano's suggestion that Pasolini failed in his efforts to use the past as a metaphor for the present is

unconvincing, especially since he so succinctly draws attention to the role of the centaur in *Medea* as a bridge between species, the divine and secular realms, and historical periods (242). The centaur, Chiron, serves as Jason's guardian at the beginning of the film when he appears as a baby. The centaur evolves into a man as Jason becomes an adult and reappears mystically as both centaur and man later in the film (standing next to his own image in a split screen shot). Accordingly, mythical thinking (represented by the centaur) is effaced but not completely eclipsed by enlightened rationality (represented by the man). Chiron's dual appearance illustrates Pasolini's conviction that man has failed to evolve from one (historical) moment to the next.⁴

My emphasis on the politics of kinship in Pasolini's *Medea* stems largely from the material he added to the myth, like the expanded role of the centaur. Marianne McDonald points out that Pasolini also alters *Medea's* image in Euripides' play as a woman with particularly "modern" ideas about women's equality by omitting her address to the women of Corinth (19). However, the amount of time he devotes in depicting *Medea* helping Jason steal the golden fleece and murdering her own brother, Apsyrtus, suggests that *Medea's* agency, particularly in the context of marriage and kinship, is a central theme in the film. The scenes in *Medea's* village begin with a fertility ritual underway. A young victim is sacrificed and the community spreads his blood and body parts all over the land and crops. In the process of the ritual the royal family is ridiculed by their subjects but soon thereafter reinscribed in their positions of power. The fertility ritual is followed by *Medea's* visit to the shrine which houses the golden fleece, where she encounters Jason. The theme of heterosexual desire becomes explicit at this point, whereas the theme of homosexuality has already been introduced by Apsyrtus' desirous gaze at the sacrifice victim at the beginning of the film.

The organization of these first scenes suggests that Pasolini was conscious of the differences between the relations of sexuality and the means of production, an awareness that resonates with Gayle Rubin's concept of sex/gender or kinship systems. Rubin identifies this key difference in Frederick Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* in her pathbreaking 1975 essay "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex." She cites the following passage from Engels as crucial to understanding his notion of the twofold nature of social production:

According to the materialist conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life. This, again, is of a twofold character: on the one hand, the production of the means of existence, of food, clothing, and shelter and the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social organization under which the people of a particular historical epoch and a particular country live is determined by both kinds of production: by the stage of development of labor on the one hand, and of the family on the other ... [qtd. in Rubin 165].

For Rubin, this passage provides evidence for a sex/gender system and suggests that both types of production (the production of the means of existence and that of human beings) are subject to control and organization. The control of sexuality in the guise of kinship is nowhere better illustrated in Pasolini's *Medea* than in the scenes depicting Medea breaking tradition and offering herself as an object of marital exchange to Jason, rather than remaining a passive object of exchange between men. Following upon shots of the villagers harvesting crops (ensuring the material means of existence), Medea arrives with her brother to Jason's camp in a horse-drawn cart. The golden fleece is draped over the back of the cart, implying that she is offering the mystical treasure as her dowry.⁵ Medea and Jason exchange desirous glances, as do Medea's brother and Jason, and Jason gazes victoriously at the golden fleece. This triangle of desire between Jason, Medea, and Apsyrtus is thus contaminated by Jason's parallel desire for the golden fleece.

The realm of mobile sexuality (in the movement of desire between the three characters) is juxtaposed with the realm of power and organized heterosexuality. Medea's decision to offer herself to Jason involves a sacrifice and underscores the violent repercussions of acting outside of prescribed roles in the sex/gender system. After enlisting Apsyrtus to help her obtain the golden fleece for Jason, Medea murders him. During the long, drawn-out murder scene, Pasolini registers the shock of her actions on the faces of Jason and his men. Medea is shown repeatedly hacking her brother to bits (mimicking the manner in which the sacrificial victim was dismembered in the fertility ritual) and throwing pieces of his body out of the getaway cart to ward off her father's army. Medea's violent departure from Colchis emphasizes the complete annihilation of her previous kinship structure and the repression of homosexual desire as a component of her pending roles as wife and mother. Apsyrtus' desirous glances at Jason mirror the manner in which he looked at the young sacrificial victim minutes before his death during the fertility ritual, a scene that suggests for Viano an allegory of contemporary, legally sanctioned violence against homosexuals (245–246).

Medea, however, is not the only female character in the film who ruptures the sex/gender system. Pasolini refers to two versions of the story of Medea's rivals Creon and the princess Glauce; Euripides' version, which appears as a dream sequence, and the director's own version. In Euripides' version, Glauce and Creon die as a result of Medea's poisonous gifts. In Pasolini's version, their deaths are depicted as Medea's fantasies about her own abilities as a sorceress, a vision, perhaps, of what is supposed to happen as a result of the gifts but does not come to pass due to a diminishment of her power. Instead, when Glauce receives Medea's gifts (this time supposedly for real), Glauce decides that she will not become Jason's bride, thus removing herself as an object of exchange between her father and her would-be husband. Once again, this decision comes with violent consequences and sacrifice. Murder in Euripides' version

of the myth is reinterpreted by Pasolini as a dual suicide. Glauce jumps to her death from a cliff after trying on Medea's garments, followed by her despairing father. Pasolini makes explicit the connection between Medea and Glauce as rupturers of kinship organization by superimposing their images during Glauce's suicide. When she jumps to her death, Glauce wears the very garments that Medea wore in her native village. The suicide scene depicts the possibility of an alternative form of kinship between the two women, one that exists nowhere in Euripides' tragedy.

Pasolini's *Medea* deviates conspicuously from the original tragedy in other ways as well, most overtly in its use of a non-Western setting in the first half of the film to indicate Medea's foreign place of origin. Filmed on location in Turkey and then in a castle in Pisa, the cultural and geographical juxtaposition in the film embodies Medea's cultural and ethnic difference from Jason and Greek society in general.⁶ In the first half of the film, Pasolini establishes Medea's royal status in her native village and her close relationship with Apsyrtus. The first two thirds of the film reflect his poetic vision of the myth, while the last third is modeled on Euripides' play. Pasolini employed Turkish locals as extras in the scenes that depict a human sacrifice and fertility ritual on the outskirts of Medea's village. The extras wear traditional clothing and are shot against a stark landscape of rustic dwellings built into steep cliffs. Pasolini has been criticized on many fronts for what some call cinematic tourism or orientalism. In a scathing critique that indulges in homophobic language, William Van Watson refers to Pasolini as the "creampuff of the Italian left," and suggests that many of his films are "retreats and excursions into the undeveloped third world," characterized by a "constructed subproletariat innocence" (389; see also Viano 4). Elsewhere, Van Watson calls these "retreats" examples of Pasolini's personal "transgressive consumption" (389). By contrast, Mariniello suggests that Van Watson's type of "rhetoric of nostalgia," frequently associated with critical work on Pasolini, is often brought into academic analyses of the filmmaker's work in order to neutralize, cover up, or misread his critique of the dialectic.⁷ In fact, she highlights Pasolini's continual insistence, both in his writings and in his cinematography, on the inadequacy of materialist dialects through the continual juxtapositions of opposing models of history in his work. She suggests that the way in which a non-correspondence between diverse models of history and temporalities is created is more significant than Pasolini's use of the third world as a discursive element in his films:

In *La Divina Mimesis*, for example, written between 1963 and 1965, he creates the prosopopeia of the old inspiration coming to terms with the new reality: a totalizing, panoramic, ordering vision stands counter to the new that resists narration. As in this interview, the emphasis was on the dynamics between the old and the new, a dynamics that does not correspond to a materialist dialects leading to an ideal synthesis. The emphasis is on the contrast, on the abyss between the two moments rather than on the fullness of a solution. The concept of the dialectic gives way to other concepts—those of contamination and mediation. The gap between past and present,

history and prehistory, exists, but it is unbridgeable.... The awareness of such a historical gap makes it necessary to rethink modes of intervention ... [112].

Based upon this idea of a reality that resists narration, scholars might begin to rethink the substance behind the obvious juxtaposition between the first and the third world, and East and West, in Pasolini's *Medea* by looking at the way he defines the third world and the role of classical mythology in his work.

In a series of interviews in which he claims to "tell the story of my own Oedipus complex," Pasolini points out the link between a type of highly personal autodescription and his first classical film, *Oedipus Rex*: "I narrate my life — mythified, of course — made epic by the legend of Oedipus" (Liehm 244). According to Viano, with *Medea*, Pasolini plunged into the realm of mythology to such an extent that he abandoned his capacity to evoke contemporary reality as he had in *Oedipus Rex* and *Teorema* (237). However, as I have pointed out, Viano's take on the film is conspicuously at odds with Pasolini's own description of his intentions in his historical films. In an article written for *Cinema Nuovo* in 1970, Pasolini wrote, "By its nature film cannot represent the past.... Therefore in my historical films I never had the ambition of representing a time that is no longer: if I tried to do it, I did it by analogy: that is, by representing a modern time somehow analogous to the past" (qtd. in Mariniello 132).⁸ Mariniello adds that Pasolini's *Medea* is informed by an urgency to rewrite history and reject the categories that made it possible.

Pasolini's depiction of the third world, so important in his adaptation of *Medea*, was to a great degree infiltrated with his views of the Italian peasantry (largely from the south of Italy):

You must remember that Italy was and still is in a fairly unusual position in western Europe. While the peasant world has completely disappeared in the major industrialized countries like France and England (you can't talk about peasantry in the classic sense of the word there) in Italy it still survives, although there has been a decline in recent years.... My relationship with the peasantry is very direct, as it is in most Italians — almost all of us have at least one peasant grandfather, in the classical sense. Now the communists in Friuli were peasants, and this is very important. Perhaps if they had been urban working-class communists the class factor would have been too strong for me and I would have resisted; but I couldn't hold out against peasant communists, who are the ones who make revolutions, in Russia, in Cuba, in Algeria — although they make them in a pre-class way ... this is perhaps why there is such a strangely ambiguous symbiosis, which is also a valid one, as well as being poetic, between the peasantry of the third world and the students here [Pasolini qtd. in Stack 21–22].

Clearly, when Pasolini refers to the third world in his writings or film, he both performs an act of autodescription and refers to an almost mythical, geographical site that incorporates Italian peasantry (or those Italians outside of industrialization and thus, outside of history) with perhaps more remote, foreign communities that fit into his vision of locations that do not correspond to ideas of Western progress. Seen in this light, the Turkish peasant setting

used to depict Medea's role as a community leader before meeting Jason takes on the appearance of a particularly colonized space when Jason and his band of men enter the village temple to steal the sacred golden fleece (the object of their travels). Pasolini emphasizes the importance of this encounter by characterizing the arrival of Jason's men with sadistic violence and carelessness. The men steal the first objects they come upon (horses and jewelry) from nearby farmers. When they reach the village, they dislodge the treasury guard with ease, steal the treasury, and mock the villagers by tossing a single coin to the guard who has been thrown to the ground. There is no resistance to Jason and his men from Medea's people. In fact, it seems as if an invasion is the last thing they suspected. Jason succeeds in infiltrating the sacred temple alone where he comes face to face for the first time with Medea. Accordingly, Pasolini's depiction of Jason and his men pillaging Medea's village could refer to colonial violence inflicted by Italians in foreign lands, to violence committed by neo-capitalist Italians on Italian peasants and foreigners within Italy, or both.

Pasolini was concerned with particular forms of colonialism and exploitation inside and outside of Italy up until his death. Days before he died, Pasolini gave a lecture on Antonio Gramsci in which he attempted to distance himself from charges of traditionalism, idealism, and reactionary tendencies whenever he spoke of subaltern cultures:

For Gramsci, it was legitimate to talk about emancipation because he worked, forty years ago, in an archaic world that we cannot even imagine. [...] It was right then ... because Sardinian shepherds lived in a very particular manner. The difference is inconceivable. So you cannot quote Gramsci as an example of emancipation; you can recall Gramsci as a link in a historic chain that leads us to new questions today. To propose a new way of being progressive, a new way of being Gramscians. [...] when Gramsci says genocide ... he takes a position in favor of the victims and against those who victimize them; he takes a position in favor of particularistic cultures that were being destroyed and against the centralist culture that destroyed them [qtd. in Verdicchio 173].

If one follows the logic of the above quote, which refers to recent and ongoing cultural genocides in Italy, it seems more likely that Pasolini is making reference to his contemporary political and cultural milieu in *Medea* than simply creating an aesthetically pleasing portrait of ancient Asia. In the film, he represents Medea and her ancient homeland as existing in a completely different time period than Jason's through the use of ancient Turkish cliff dwellings to represent Medea's village, and Italian medieval dress and architecture to characterize Corinth. Thus, Medea's village stands in for "particularist" cultures destroyed by "centralist" culture.

In keeping with Pasolini's criticism of centralist culture and its victims, his queer intervention into the heteronormative qualities of the mythological film genre should not be overlooked. Although it is no longer taboo in film theory to discuss the homosexual aspects of many of Pasolini's films, explicit links between Pasolini and queer theory are nevertheless uncommon. Viano

suggests that we should not ignore ways in which homosexuality appears in Pasolini's films, as many Italian critics have done over the years in order to avoid tarnishing his status as a producer of high culture. Yet simply embracing Pasolini's homosexuality does not bring us any closer to understanding the degree to which Pasolini's work troubled and threatened the Italian state: while he was alive, he was dragged into court thirty-one times on charges ranging from obscenity to blasphemy to corruption of minors. He was tried once posthumously, and immortalized by the Italian police as a desecrated corpse in a series of photos they published after his murder. While there may be valid reasons to rescue the homosexual over- or under-tones in Pasolini's film adaptations of the ancient past, a deeper exploration of the stigma of deviance that marked his own body and body of work is in order if scholars wish to understand how Pasolini can be seen as a precursor to fields such as queer theory. Michael Warner stresses the fact that sexual deviance has historically been deemed non-normative to the body politic, and suggests that a queer politics around sex does not have to constitute a form of simple libertarian indulgence (Warner). He proposes instead that we look toward the kind of politics that can be articulated by those who refuse to behave properly.

In an article entitled "Picturing Pasolini," John Di Stefano discusses Pasolini's life in the Italian tabloids, including photos taken at the controversial opening of *Accatone*, at which the filmmaker was physically assaulted. Di Stefano suggests that Pasolini's status as a sexual deviant was always emphasized in photos at the expense of his intellectual attributes: "Photographs portrayed him as a subversive, a troublemaker, a pervert, a corrupter, a homosexual, all words that overshadowed other terms like poet, filmmaker, critic, novelist, screenwriter, intellectual" (19).⁹ The absence of discussion of Pasolini's queer forms of political resistance from interpretations of his life's work can only point, as some have suggested, to homophobia on the part of some of his most renowned critics. Viano suggests that the homosexual "discourse" in Pasolini's work complicates the oppressor/oppressed dialectic in such a way as to expose Marxism's inadequacies in confronting sexual oppression. This idea is especially relevant to Rubin's argument about kinship systems. Pasolini depicts Medea as a radical agent who implodes her own kinship system. In the process, discourses of homosexuality and colonialism appear necessarily intertwined. Shots of Medea's escape with Jason are cross-cut with the discovery of Apsyrtus' body parts strewn along their path, calling to mind the aforementioned triangle of desire. Meanwhile, Medea's father and his men recover and grieve for each separate body part ceremoniously, as if it were a whole soldier cut down in battle.

In the introduction to his interviews with Pasolini Oswald, Stack suggests that with Pasolini's turn toward classical mythology he intended to restore a mythological or epic dimension to life. Stack argues that Pasolini saw the Italian peasantry as still sustaining "a sense of awe and reverence to the world" even though it was up against the destructive power of the bourgeoisie (9). He

suggests that Pasolini's view of the peasantry is difficult to reconcile with a Marxist political analysis. Stack is particularly interested in the fact that with his classical films, Pasolini seems to make a sudden shift toward sex as the main threat to the bourgeoisie, thus reconciling "the idea of sexual liberation with his attachment to the peasantry" (10).¹⁰ In a response to one of Stack's questions about his political attitudes toward the various classes in Italy, Pasolini discusses the difference that the Friulan peasantry posed to his own class and culture; a difference that was, among other characteristics, a sexual difference:

As for the other popular class—the working class—I've had a very difficult relationship with them, which was initially romantic, populist and humanitarian. When you are born in a petit bourgeois milieu, you think the whole world is the same as the environment you live in. As soon as I got to see another kind of world, naturally, my own was thrown into crisis. When I realized that the Friulan *braccianti* [day laborers] existed, and that their psychology, their education, their mentality, their soul, their sexuality were all different, my world broke down [qtd. in Stack 26].

Pasolini's notion of a "world" in this non-theoretical context is equivalent to the raw materials that become the relations of sexuality (concerning the production of human beings) and the relations of production (concerning the means of existence), both of which are organized socially in any given historical epoch. Thus, in the above comments, Pasolini refrains from making a liberationist political statement about the sexuality of the Friulan peasants. Rather, he alludes to a different type of sex/gender systemic organization that stands in contrast to the hegemony of bourgeois heterosexuality, and intersects with several other characteristics of the Friulans' marginalization, such as cultural and ethnic difference.

Pasolini's Medea is radically Other, deviant, and unwilling to behave. Nowhere in the landscape of his adaptation of Euripides' play will one find an absolute hero. In fact, Pasolini's heroes fail in a conventional sense, calling to mind his anti-Enlightenment, anti-humanist, queer political stance. His films about the ancient world prompt spectators to rethink political action, masculinity and femininity, culture and history. Time wavers between two parallel yet irreconcilable periods rather than move forward. As such, spectator identification is "dangerously schizoid," at best. Not only does Pasolini's *Medea* offer a critique of enlightened notions of a universal, absolute hero (such as Hercules), but it also interrogates capitalistic notions of progress, not least of which are embraced by the global Hollywood studio system.

NOTES

1. Some of the names of these mythological blockbusters include *The Vengeance of Hercules*, *The Love of Hercules*, *Hercules Challenges Samson*, *The Challenge of the Giants*, *The Triumph of Maciste*, *Maciste in Hell*, *Maciste Against the Vampires*, *Maciste Against the Monsters*, *The Titans Are Coming*, *Samson Against the Pirates*, *The Heroes of Babylon*, and *Goliath and the Rebellious Slave* (see Liehm 348).

2. The bulk of this essay is focused on Pasolini's adaptation of Euripides' *Medea*. For more on his film version of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, see Foley's "Bad Women" (in Hall, Macintosh, and Wrigley).

3. Maurizio Viano suggests that Pasolini's choice of Gentile to play Jason reflects his desire to have the character represent Italy's "new bourgeoisie, the contemporary spirit of the Enlightenment" (241). He refers to Jason as an iconic translation of the "fitness is fun" hedonistic ideology so frequently attacked in Pasolini's criticism.

4. See Viano, *A Certain Realism*, 237, and Mariniello, 114.

5. See McDonald (19) for the earliest references to the story of Jason. McDonald points out that Jason's image as an epic hero is comically shattered in Pasolini's film by his own arrival on a raft as opposed to a "lavish ship" (9). I would add that the men are shown sleeping on the raft, making their arrival even less heroic as they seem to expend little or no effort on rowing.

6. Although, as McDonald points out, the ancient scene of Medea's homeland is infused with Renaissance aesthetics, further confusing the time and space divisions in the film. In a scene which depicts the royal family standing in front of their subjects in Medea's village, the family is shot standing still framed by an archway, a composition that suggests a Renaissance painting (*Euripides in Cinema* 9). In her analysis of the musical themes in the film, McDonald points out that the different cultural and temporal spaces in which the action takes place are represented aurally by a violent percussive music, associated in the film with Medea, and a form of ancient Japanese music that suggests (bourgeois) refinement and is associated with Jason (5). Jason's soundtrack is perhaps an ironic comment on the terror that his men have reaped on Medea's village.

7. Mariniello points out that "even Pasolini refers to himself as nostalgic, often with the rhetorical awareness of one who assumes the opponent's position in order to dismantle their discourse from within" (112). Pasquale Verdicchio also suggests that due to Pasolini's pessimistic vision of the state of Italian diversity, which he compares to a genocide brought about in part by the Italian educational system and consumerism, his critics accuse him of being romantically enamored with the past. Verdicchio argues that such a "reduced version of his work earned Pasolini the unjustified label of reactionary, idealist, and even fascist" (69).

8. Pasolini's earliest film, *Accatone*, was the first film in Italy ever to be restricted to viewers over the age of eighteen due to its "vulgar" depiction of the Roman subproletariat. Its 1961 debut immediately launched the director into what some critics refer to as the "New Italian Cinema" movement, a heterogeneous, rageful response to the "well-being" of consumer society.

9. Two weeks before his death, Pasolini satirized the notion that his stigmatized gay body was separable from his intellect by commissioning nude photos of himself posing with a book by photographer Dino Pedriali. See Di Stefano, 22.

10. Stack cites Pasolini's film and novel *Teorema* as an example of a depiction of the destruction of a bourgeois family via sex. Although I will not argue it here, I will suggest that *Teorema* has many structural similarities in common with Euripides' *Bacchae* and may have been influenced by it, even though Pasolini claims to have invented the mythological character of the Guest himself.

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Edited by MICHAEL G. CORNELIUS



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On the cover: Reg Park in the title role of *Hercules in the Haunted
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and (bottom) *Samson and the Seven Miracles of the World*, 1961

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