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*Pier Paolo Pasolini*

PPP in the Background

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## After Pasolini's *Teorema*: Notes on the Theatre of Grzegorz Jarzyna and Mikołaj Mikołajczyk

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**Abstract:** The following contribution aims to analyse two adaptations of Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Teorema*, written and directed by, respectively, Grzegorz Jarzyna and Mikołaj Mikołajczyk. In the first, *T.E.O.R.E.M.A.T.*, Jarzyna works both on Pasolini's novel and film, creating a performance composed of the distorted use of the voice, silent dialogues and proximity games, producing a highly conceptual effect. In his *Wszystko jutro, czyli lalki wybanione*, Mikołajczyk, on the other hand, recreates Pasolini's story as a choreographed drama, which examines the dilemmas posed by the Italian author.

**Key words:** Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Teorema*, Grzegorz Jarzyna, Mikołaj Mikołajczyk, adaptation.

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The reception of Pier Paolo Pasolini in Poland is a relatively recent phenomenon that began chiefly after the fall of the Soviet bloc, and one which assumes greater prominence after 2000.

Before the '90s, there were few examples of works by Pasolini, whether in the form of publication or performance, and those mainly confined to the major cities such as Warsaw and Krakow. The only productions of Pasolini in Poland were the screenings of his films in *cine d'essai*: *Affabulazione*, staged in Warsaw and Krakow respectively in 1984 and 1985; in the same year, some excerpts of it were published.

An obstacle to the diffusion of Pasolini's work, as noted by Agnieszka Liszka, was the political engagement evident in the author's works, an engagement that "ha già dall'inizio determinato in qualche modo la loro ricezione in Polonia" (Liszka 2011: 2). She adds: "Anche se

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legato alla sinistra, Pasolini non era un comunista ortodosso, anzi, la sua critica diretta verso partiti comunisti e la società laica lo rendeva un personaggio scomodo anche per le autorità della Repubblica Popolare Polacca” (2011: 2).

Apart from Pasolini’s film production, presented at several festivals such as the Era New Horizons 2002, I will focus attention on Pasolini’s plays that were published and staged on the Polish stage. In particular, two volumes of plays were edited by Ewa Bal, *Orgy. Chlew (Orgia. Porcile, 2003)* and *Pilades. Calderon (Pilade. Calderón, 2007)*, which were presented during a Symposium on Pasolini organized by Teatr Stary in Krakow in the same year. The same translator Ewa Bal also wrote a book devoted primarily to the work of Pasolini and its impact on the development of Italian drama of recent years.<sup>1</sup> The last major translation published in Poland is an excerpt of the script of the film on St. Paul, translated by Zygmunt Borawski and published in a number of the journal *Krytyka Polityczna*.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, two dramas were based on the work and biography of Pasolini: *Pasolini - modlitwa na zlecenie*, written and directed by Konrad Niciński, in Warsaw in 2005, and *Wygynani* by Ewa Wycichowska at Teatr LOGS of Łódź in September 2006, based on themes already presented in *Orgia*.

Among the texts that exercised a strong influence on Polish authors, *Teorema* occupies a position of special importance, in the novel and film version, both released in 1968. In 1965, however, there already was a first draft of *Teorema* as a drama. The story of a young and handsome stranger, a guest of a house in Milan, who seduces all the members of an apparently respectable family, introduces anarchy into the social system, destroying the hypocritical world of the bourgeoisie, seen by Pasolini as a consumer and superficial society.

*T.E.O.R.E.M.A.T.*, first of the two Polish adaptations of *Teorema* and staged in Warsaw in 2009, was created by Grzegorz Jarzyna, probably the most prominent theatre contemporary director and manager of the innovative TR Warszawa theatre since ’98.

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<sup>1</sup> See Bal 2007.

<sup>2</sup> See Pasolini 2007.



Original poster for T.E.O.R.E.M.A.T.

Director Jarzyna explained his process of adaptation in an interview to Magdalena Podbielkowska and Peter Bisley of a New Zealand newspaper, before the staging of *T.E.O.R.E.M.A.T.* at the New Zealand International Arts Festival: “In the novel the subject is more developed; especially the religious, mystical aspect, and the ultimate question of our existence and purpose of life” (Podbielkowska, Bisley 2010).<sup>3</sup>

The strict relation to the novel has been inadequately considered, as is clear from Philip Fisher’s review on the occasion of the 2010 performance at the Barbican in London: “*T.E.O.R.E.M.A.T.* is a classic example of European theatre in which the director is auteur. Grzegorz Jarzyna from TR Warszawa, who brought *4.48 Psychosis* and *Dybbuk* to Edinburgh and, in the case of the former, the Barbican, has taken a 1968 Pier Paolo Pasolini cult movie, *Teorema* and made it his own” (Fisher 2010).

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<sup>3</sup> Grzegorz Jarzyna’s *T.E.O.R.E.M.A.T.* played at the TSB Bank Arena, Wellington, from 13<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> March 2010. The New Zealand International Arts Festival ran from 26<sup>th</sup> February to 21<sup>st</sup> March.

BARBICAN  
14-17 October 2010  
**T.E.O.R.E.M.A.T.**  
A new piece by GRZEGORZ JARZYNA  
Based on the film *Teorema* by PIER PAOLO PASOLINI

*TR Warszawa*

Jan Englert	<i>Paolo</i>
Danuta Stenka	<i>Lucia</i>
Katarzyna Warmke	<i>Odetta</i>
Jan Dravnel	<i>Pietro</i>
Lidia Schneider	<i>Emilia</i>
Rafał Mackowiak	<i>Angiolino</i>
Sebastian Pawlak	<i>Guest</i>
<i>Director</i>	Grzegorz Jarzyna
<i>Decor</i>	Magdalena Maciejewska
<i>Lighting</i>	Jacqueline Sobiszewski
<i>Sound</i>	Agata Jagniatkowska
<i>Music</i>	Jacek Grudzien
<i>Music/Sound</i>	Piotr Dominski
<i>Projection</i>	Adrian Hutryiak
<i>Assistant director</i>	Paweł Kulka

*Cast and crew credits for T.E.O.R.E.M.A.T. at the London Barbican (2010).*

In his adaptation of Pasolini's novel, in which the director also inserts other autonomous fragments, Jarzyna seems to have in mind the film, and he makes precise stylistic choices both from the point of view of the script and of the staging. He opts for wireless microphones that create a sound quality almost similar to that obtained by radio, but at the same time he works on silence and silent dialogues with the actors' bodies to fill the stage with grand movements, body language and proxemics games, creating a *mise-en-espace* with a high conceptual content: "The text at the end of the play portrays the figure disappearing into space, into desert, into nothing, the same recurring landscape, and touches on the philosophy of emptiness". (Podbielkowska, Bisley 2010)

In a subsequent Italian review of the staging, Sergio Lo Gatto notes:

Visivamente impeccabile, lo spettacolo procede per quadri: la messa in scena meticolosa di ogni piccolo dettaglio come la scelta dell'arredamento – sfacciatamente in stile Italia anni Sessanta –, gli oggetti posizionati in scena, la partitura musicale e sonora, i passi calcolati dagli attori per raccogliere le luci, tutto ricostruisce alla perfezione la vuota routine borghese fatta di lunghi minuti di rituale trucco e parrucco di fronte allo specchio, ripetizione insensata di gesti e una glacialità di rapporti che mette i brividi. L'arrivo dell'ospite, chiamato semplicemente "ragazzo", una figura segaligna con il fascino trasandato dello zingaro, spezza la corda di queste insopportabili piattezza e superficialità, ben rese dalla regia tramite la ripetizione di scene identiche se non per qualche minuscolo spostamento dei mobili e cambi

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scena che, nella penombra, lasciano intravedere gli attori impegnati in frenetici movimenti di insofferenza. (Lo Gatto 2012)

The director makes clear his choice to adapt *Teorema*, and no other Pasolini's works, considering it a "prophetic depiction of an all-consuming system of consumption". (Podbielkowska, Bisley 2010). It also specifies how a staging of *Teorema* could have been fully appreciated in Poland only after 1989: "Poland was a totalitarian communist system, and we know what that really means. Pasolini was a utopian and purely ideological communist" (2010). However Jarzyna emphasises that the bourgeois capitalist-communist political dialectic was not his main inspiration for adapting the work: "Its rich metaphor and poetry have much larger force than its political message, and are applicable to the smallest cell of society, which is the family, and the relationships between them. This is a problem which touches each of us" (2010).

According to Jarzyna, the stranger who arrives in the house "is neither a symbol of defeat or victory. He is a catalyst that accelerates the inevitable and appropriate response: he triggers these reactions then disappears" (2010). And more: "He is the activator which evokes the truth deep within us. He helps us to look at ourselves without all the constructions of cultural life, to see the hypocritical self" (2010).



*Stage photograph of T.E.O.R.E.M.A.T.*

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The result is an effective and coldly schematic overview on the reactions of family, orchestrated as a mime show: the maid goes back to the country ending her days in a catatonic state sit on a bench; the son of the couple vents his anger by painting abstract works; the daughter is interned in mental hospital; the mother gives herself sexually to a street gang; Paolo strips in the middle of the central station.

Pasolini's *Teorema* is at the basis of another adaptation, *Wszystko jutro, czyli lalki wybawione* (*Tomorrow everything, meaning dolls forsaken*) by Mikołaj Mikołajczyk, writer, director and choreographer, a performance that was first staged at the Teatr Dramatyczny of Opole in 2010 and then toured in Poland.



Original poster for *Wszystko jutro, czyli lalki wybawione*.

Unlike the previous *T.E.O.R.E.M.A.T.*, Mikołajczyk's work looks like a choreographed drama, halfway between drama and dance, examining the dilemmas posed by Pasolini and

depicting the reality of six people. Five of these represent the family of Pasolini's films, but in the show they are not considered as a natural family, but as an emblem of the general community, opposed to the visitor or the intruder.

The show is mostly dominated by two elements, the table and the "desert", as noted by Małgorzata Dziewulska, consultant and *dramaturg* for Mikołajczyk. The table is the starting point, where the characters sit around and from which they leave; the "desert" is the point of arrival, place of solitude, which is realized through the vacuum of individuals. Dziewulska states:

Jak żyć, kiedy przyjęte kanony ekspresji zmuszają do skrywania prawdy za konwencjami. Konwencje zbiorowej umowy na temat tego, kim jesteśmy i jak powinniśmy wyrażać siebie pozwalają ułożyć życie we wspólnocie, ale jednocześnie sprawiają, że ludzkie relacje stają się sztuczne i iluzyjne. To w tradycji greckiej Pasolini szukał obrazów człowieka, które nasza kultura usunęła w cień. W *Teoremie* zbudował wizerunek pokrewny misteriom dionizyjskim. (Dziewulska, 2010: 9)<sup>4</sup>



Stage photograph of *Wszystko jutro, czyli lalki wybawione* ([www.teatropole.pl](http://www.teatropole.pl)).

<sup>4</sup> How to live when all the commonly acknowledged expressions force one to conceal the truth according to accepted conventions – the convention of group agreement regarding such things as who we are, how we should express ourselves. These help to regulate a life in a community, but at the same time cause human relations become artificial and illusionist. It was in a Greek tradition that Pasolini searched for images of a human being which our culture had left in the shadow. In *Teorema* he created a depiction which is related to Dionysian mysteries [Translation by the Author].

*Teorema* represents in these both cases an interesting perspective on the staging of the Italian author in Poland. Both the directors discussed here opted to work on an artwork that was not originally a play but a novel and then a film. This is quite normal, considering, as stated at the beginning, the limited knowledge of Pasolini's theatre in Poland, compared to awareness of his film production. Grzegorz Jarzyna states that "before I hadn't thought of Pasolini as material that you could bring to the theatre. But I started to contemplate his art and to go deeper into his life" (Podbielkowska, Bisley 2010) and, in keeping with this opinion, the voice of *Teorema* seems almost natural. Working on a novel and inspired by a film, Jarzyna and Mikołajczyk take Pasolini's material and make it their own, recreating not only independent performances, but also new 'plays' that works inspired by Pasolini. These are cases where the directors become *de facto* authors.

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