

REWORKING ANCIENT TEXTS IN CONTEMPORARY  
MEDITERRANEAN CONTEXT: ALLEGORIC PROJECTION AND  
UTOPIC NOSTALGIA IN THE WORKS OF NAGUIB MAHFOUZ AND  
PIER PAOLO PASOLINI

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## ABSTRACT

REWORKING ANCIENT TEXTS IN CONTEMPORARY MEDITERRANEAN CONTEXT:  
ALLEGORIC PROJECTION AND UTOPIC NOSTALGIA IN THE WORKS OF NAGUIB  
MAHFOUZ AND PIER PAOLO PASOLINI

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This study explores how the use of ancient texts in modern works of art can shed light on the lives of subaltern people in the present time. Works chosen for analysis are Italian director Pier Paolo Pasolini's "Arabian Nights" and "Gospel According to St. Matthew", and Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz's "Arabian Days and Nights" and "Children of the Alley". In these, two artists have a common point of referring to, and borrowing from, the same ancient texts: The Biblical-Qur'anic narratives of Abrahamic religions, and the story collection of *One Thousand and One Nights*.

In their works, both artists depart from a sense of discontent over the current state of things, which is shaped by modernity and capitalism. Mahfouz, in his novels, explores the reasons behind the problems of present age. Fictional worlds in his works are allegoric projections of the real world. What makes real and fiction relatable to each other are the ancient texts these novels refer to. Through their employment, Mahfouz intends to help his readers understand the past more clearly. Pasolini, on the other hand, tries to find certain essences in ancient texts that are remnants of those aspects of life expelled by modernity outside the field of vision. These essences, belonging to a time when modernity and capitalism did not exist, can contain kernels of hope to help overcome status quo, and establish a new world. Thus, by using ancient texts in his films, he finds hope in the past, and establishes utopia through nostalgia.

**Keywords:** Pasolini, Mahfouz, Allegory, Utopia, Mediterranean

## ÖZ

### ÇAĞDAŞ AKDENİZ BAĞLAMINDA KADİM METİNLERİN YENİDEN İŞLENMESİ: NECİP MAHFUZ VE PIER PAOLO PASOLİNİ'NİN ESERLERİNDE ALEGORİK İZDÜŞÜM VE ÜTOPİK NOSTALJİ

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Bu çalışma, çağdaş sanat eserlerinde kadim metinlerin kullanılmasının, günümüz madun topluluklarının hayatlarına nasıl ışık tutabileceğini araştırmaktadır. İncelemeye kaynaklık etmesi için İtalyan yönetmen Pier Paolo Pasolini'nin "Binbir Gece Masalları" ve "Aziz Matyas'a Göre İncil" filmleri ile, Mısırlı yazar Necip Mahfuz'un "Binbirinci Geceden Sonra" ve "Cebelavi Sokağı'nın Çocukları" romanları seçilmiştir. Her iki sanatçı da, bu yapıtlarında, aynı kadim metinlere başvurup, bunlardan ilham alarak ortak bir noktada buluşmuştur. Söz konusu metinler, İbrahimî dinlerin kutsal kitaplarındaki menkıbeler ve *Binbir Gece Masalları*'dır.

Her iki sanatçı da eserlerinde, modernite ve kapitalizmle şekillenmiş günümüzdeki durumla ilgili hoşnutsuzluklarından yola çıkmaktadırlar. Mahfuz, romanlarında, yaşadığı çağın sorunlarının altında yatan sebepleri araştırır. Eserlerindeki kurmaca dünyalar, gerçek dünyanın alegorik birer izdüşümüdür. Kurmaca ve gerçek arasındaki ilişki ise kadim metinler üzerinden kurulur. Bu metinler sayesinde Mahfuz, okuyucuların, geçmişi daha berrak anlamalarını sağlamayı amaçlar. Pasolini ise kadim metinlerde, eski zamanlarda hayatın önemli bir yanı olup, günümüzde, modernite ve kapitalizm tarafından dışlanmış bazı unsurlar peşinde koşar. Bunlar, modernite ve kapitalizmden önceki bir zamana ait olduklarından, bünyelerinde, mevcut durumu aşmanın ve yeni bir dünya kurmanın olabirliğine dair umut nüveleri barındırırlar. Dolayısıyla, Pasolini, filmlerinde kadim metinleri kullanarak, geçip gideceği umut arayıp, nostalji üzerinden bir ütopya kurmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Pasolini, Mahfuz, Alegori, Ütopya, Akdeniz

*to the rose:  
like hyacinth, hanging  
adorned in color pink  
in a collared-dove's beak*

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*God knows and sees best what lies hidden in the  
old accounts of bygone peoples and times.  
—One Thousand and One Nights*

Naguib Mahfouz (نجيب محفوظ, 1911-2006) and Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975) are two controversial figures who created quite a sensation with their works in recent times. Egyptian author Mahfouz, one of the most important novelists writing in the Arabic language, is a Nobel Prize Laureate in literature. Italian artist and intellectual Pasolini, although having produced notable works in many areas as a novelist, literary critic, columnist, poet, translator and playwright, is best known as an influential film director and theorist. Due, most probably, to the difference in the medium they work, their works are rarely interpreted in relation to each other. However, With Pasolini's "Arabian Nights" (1974, original title: *Il Fiore Delle Mille e Una Note*) and "Gospel According to St. Matthew" (1964, original title: *Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo*), and Mahfouz's "Arabian Days and Nights" (1982, original title: ليالي ألف ليلة, "Layali Alf Layla") and "Children of the Alley" (1959, original title: أولاد حارتنا, "Awlad Haretina"), two artists have a common point of referring to, and borrowing from, the same ancient texts: The Biblical-Qur'anic narratives of Abrahamic religions, and the story collection of *One Thousand and One Nights* (referred hereafter as the *Nights*). On the other hand, as shall be discussed

presently, the way they interpret these ancient texts, and the methods they use to permeate them into their works differ significantly. This is partly due to the differences they have in approaching and interpreting the modern world and its problems.

The main motivation behind this study is to explore how the ancient texts prevalent in the lore of Mediterranean people can be operational in modern works of art for shedding light on the lives of subaltern people of that region in the present time. This will be done through a comparative analysis of four works mentioned above. These works belong to Mahfouz and Pasolini; ancient texts they refer to are the Biblical-Qur'anic narratives and the *Nights*. Here, neither the choice of auteurs, nor the choice of ancient texts is obvious. After all, there are many other ancient texts from the same region, like the epics of Homer, which are as prevalent. Similarly there are other artists who use these texts in their modern works, like José Saramago (1922-2010) and Nikos Kazantzakis (Νίκος Καζαντζάκης in Greek, 1883-1957), both of whom have works inspired by the life of Jesus, with former's "*The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*" (1991, *O Evangelho Segundo Jesus Cristo*), and latter's "*The Last Temptation of Christ*" (1955, *Ο Τελευταίος Πειρασμός*, "*O Teleftéos Pirasmós*"). Kazantzakis is also the author of a sequel to Homer's epic with "*The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*" which was first published in 1938. Thus, I will not claim that the choice of Mahfouz and Pasolini as the artists, and the choice of Biblical-Qur'anic narratives and the *Nights* as the ancient texts are the only possible ones to achieve the intention mentioned above. However, due to certain reasons, these choices make a lot of sense.

One factor is the impact. It will be beneficial for this study if both the ancient texts and the artists who create modern works inspired by them command considerable impact and wide circulation. The religions of Abrahamic tradition have shaped the worldviews and sentimentalities of people all around the Mediterranean for more than two millennia, not to mention their overall worldwide diffusion. Religion may not be as powerful in the present time, but it is still a force to reckon with, at least at a philosophical level. It will be a bold and fictitious claim, but it will not be too far-fetched to say that there has not been a single person living in the region in the last two thousand years whose life is not affected this way or the other by

these religions. Even a person who has absolutely nothing to do with faith has to come to terms with those aspects of these religions that seeped into the fabric of daily life. Thus, with sources predating the Abrahamic religions, the prevalence of the Biblical-Qur'anic narratives is undisputed.

Similarly, the lore of the *Nights* is common knowledge to all the inhabitants of the Mediterranean basin, and especially with the academic and lay interest in it growing in the West, for the last century, to millions of people worldwide. Indeed, "the Nights' influence outside the Arabic-speaking world has been so pervasive in the arts throughout history that, according to Robert Irwin, it is easier to name those who have not been influenced than those who have" (quoted in Ouyang, 2004:125). Individual tales in it have been part of the folklore for a long time, and as an entire collection, it has been a subject of academic study as well. Other similar story collections, like *Decameron*, on which Pasolini also has a movie (*Il Decameron*, 1971), are not as widespread as the *Nights*. They do not have as wide a currency and circulation, and are rather more local. In addition, compared to the other story collections, the *Nights* has a very specific narrative structure. While others like *Decameron* are almost like anthologies of separate, individual tales, the *Nights*, as shall be elaborated shortly, with its framing story and connections between its tales, has a more layered and complex structure. This creates a fertile area for artists when adopting from it, since they can emulate not only its content, in other words the narratives of its tales, but also its formal capacity coming from this structure.

On the same vein with the prevalence of the *Nights* and the Biblical-Qur'anic narratives, both Pasolini and Mahfouz have quite an impact with their works. Pasolini is not only a director but also an influential film theorist. Mahfouz is read widely not only in his homeland, or where Arabic is the dominant language, but worldwide. Both have been influential on their contemporaries and the later generations. Part of this influence is due to the love-hate relationship they have with the public. Both are well respected for their works and achievements, but both are hated as well by a considerable number of people for challenging social norms. Mahfouz, for instance, is branded as blasphemous for his works by the religious authorities and their following. In addition, his views about the Arab-

Israeli relationships, for instance, and his support for a peaceful solution to the problem gained him quite an inimical opposition within other circles in the Arab world. So much so that, at some point, films based on his novels were distributed under different names, and without him being ever mentioned, lest people recognized that the story belonged to him (Booth, 1989:14). Thus, notwithstanding those who see the Nobel Prize as a politically motivated instrument of Western imperialism, Arab nationalists loved him for putting the Arabic language in the world literary map, but at the same time they hated him for some of his political views on some of the most controversial issues.

Similarly, Pasolini, who was "criticized, misunderstood and often marginalized", "holds a particular place in cultural history, not only for how interesting he was but also because his ideas, insofar as heretical, were not readily accepted or acceptable" (Bruno, 1991:30). He was often in the newspapers, and a frequent visitor of courthouses, defending himself against many allegations. Thus, with

his name and picture frequently appearing in the Italian press, often associated with trials and legal disputes; his regular presence as a columnist in major newspapers; his sometimes controversial participation in famous literary prizes and film festivals; his availability for interviews, published or broadcast (Bondavalli, 2007:25),

he was quite a public figure, both admired in his fame, and hated in his notoriety. On the other hand, he was also hailed as a foremost artist of Italian intellectual life in all areas he produced. His first film *Accattone* (1961), for instance, which was heavily criticized at the time it was released, and was used as an excuse by some neo-fascists for an assault on him, was later elevated into the canon of Italian cinema. It was "hailed as a masterpiece of the Italian cinema" and "was telecast on Italian state television" (Di Stefano, 1997:19).

It is, then, unfortunately, not a coincidence that both artists became target of brutal assaults on their lives. While Mahfouz survived the attack only to have serious health problems for the rest of his life, Pasolini, surviving several such attacks in his lifetime, was mysteriously murdered in the end, his body, being overrun by his own vehicle several times, left beyond recognition.



Thus, in terms of impact, selected artists and ancient texts appear to be good candidates. Another factor in this choice is the subject matter and political inclination. It is expected that both the ancient texts and the modern works inspired by them have something to do with the lives of subaltern peoples. To the extent that the Abrahamic religions appeared, among other things, as a response to the poverty, oppression and injustice in people's lives, the narratives in their texts are also the narratives of people. Similarly, the *Nights* can be read as a commentary on the lives of simple men and women, and their rulers. On the same vein, not only do both Mahfouz and Pasolini have works focused on the lives of subaltern peoples, but they also approach this subject matter from an oppositional stand point. Mahfouz has many times proclaimed that he is a socialist and he believes in the "values of democracy, socialism and science" (Najjar, 1998:143). At the same time, though, in opposition to the mainstream leftist movements, his socialism does not exclude religious dimension and sensibility. He says, for instance, that "for some, socialism could be the elimination of obstacles that stand in the way of God's justice" (quoted from Mahfouz in Sfeir, 1966:950). Pasolini, a proclaimed socialist and atheist, an outcast of society in general terms, was expelled also from the Italian Communist Party for his unconventional ideas. Their being politically marginalized both in general and also within the opposition is reflected in their personal lives too. They are both exceptional figures in the respective societies they belong to. As a result, they are not content with the current state of things, and this is reflected in their works. Therefore, in terms of subject matter and political inclination, too, the selected artists and ancient texts appear to be good candidates.

Taking into account these two factors, the choices made here about the artists and the ancient texts seem to be justified by the four works mentioned in the beginning. There may be other artists who employ other ancient texts to produce works about subaltern peoples, but in terms of subject matter and impact, and thanks to their works, Mahfouz and Pasolini present a sufficiently good and consistent case to develop the arguments here. Naturally, there may be some advantages and disadvantages to be aware of. Geographic and cultural affiliation of the artists is both an advantage and a disadvantage. One is from Italy, where, it can be argued that, at least artistically, modern era has long commenced. Pasolini,

with his works, points to the shortcomings of modernism and tries to go beyond it. Mahfouz, on the other hand, is from the other side of the Mediterranean where the modernist project is obfuscated by colonial past and intrinsic features of Egyptian history. Mahfouz talks about a society where modernism has not grown as strong roots as it did in Europe. His is a project of founding one in its own terms, in which he tries to diagnose the shortcomings of the attempts made this far.

Thus, their approaches to modernity are substantially different, presenting a good opportunity to compare their attitudes towards the shortcomings of modernist project especially in terms of the lives of subaltern people, and to compare the ways they employ ancient texts in their works to problematize this. On the other hand, comparing works from different regions and cultures is always tricky due to the culture-specific codes which inevitably enter into the texts. This is not entirely so in our case since it can be argued that Mediterranean provides a common context that brings closer Italy and Egypt, and in this light, these two may not appear to be as disparate as one might think at first. According to this view, their seeming separateness is an obfuscation of Modernism, which, by dividing and compartmentalizing Mediterranean and its basin with borders, became an obstacle to the age old movements that created a certain unity characterized, instead of strict demarcation, rather by fluctuation and ambiguity (Chambers, 2008:38). The result of this complex unity coming from unending interaction, migration, contamination and permutation in and around the entire Mediterranean can be seen quite strikingly, and specifically for the case of Egypt and Italy, for example, in music. "Listening to Oum Kalthoum, the great twentieth-century Egyptian singer [...], we can tune in to an overarching trajectory that weaves together the Mediterranean inheritance of Arab music and, for example, Neapolitan song" (Chambers, 2008:42). In addition to all the common elements they have due to this Mediterranean unity, Egypt and Italy have some unique commonalities as well. One telling example is that both were a vantage point in the intrusions from the other side of the sea. Sicily, where in the twelfth century only the Muslims were referred to as *sicilienses* (Chambers, 2008:69), was the very first point of entry for the Arabs into the northern shores. Egypt became stage to one of the most memorable incursions of Western Europe into the Southern-Eastern shores of Mediterranean: Napoleon's expedition of 1798-99, which, being "both a military

and cultural exercise, intent on not merely colonizing, but also appropriating the Orient" (Chambers, 2008:12), became a high point in the Orientalist project in all its aspects.

More importantly, having the same ancient texts at the core of this study also helps alleviate the difficulty of dealing with culture-specific codes. No matter how much they differ due to their cultural backgrounds, placing the same ancient texts as the backbone of their works brings Mahfouz and Pasolini closer together. The same goes for the difficulties which arise from the fact that they work in different mediums and speak different languages. Written and cinematographic texts may not readily and easily lend themselves for comparison. This is probably why, to the best of my knowledge, the works of Mahfouz and Pasolini were not evaluated together. However, the employment of ancient texts here, again, provides a sufficient context to overcome this problem. In addition, focusing on the visual aspects of the texts, where possible, will help with the language problem. Pasolini's films are already abundant with visual cues which are quite meaningful in establishing their statements. Mahfouz has a similar language full of metaphors, many visually loaded, which is not lost in translation and can be used for analysis.

### **1.1 Methodology**

This analysis will be done, mostly, via a close reading of the four works mentioned above that belong to Mahfouz and Pasolini. The basic premise is that employing ancient texts in these works helps each of the artists produce his own respective discourse, and develop his own ideological arguments. Thus, it will be necessary to lay bare these discourses before displaying how the ancient texts become helpful in producing them. This will require a contextual analysis of each of the works along with intertextual analysis with other texts whenever required. In this, other works of both artists as well as episodes from their biographies, and their direct statements they make outside their works of art in the form of essays or interviews will enter into discussion whenever relevant.

As mentioned, the way the ancient texts are incorporated by these artists in their works is the backbone of this study. In this regard, the ancient texts they refer to,

Abrahamic narratives, as told in the Old and the New Testaments of *Bible* and in the *Qur'an*, and the story collection of *One Thousand and One Nights* will also be included in analysis. However, a thorough examination of these is beyond the scope of this study, and they will enter into discussion only to the extent that they are quoted by Mahfouz and Pasolini. In this, not only content, but also form and methods of borrowing from ancient texts developed by these artists will be discussed, especially when form and method becomes instrumental for them in developing their respective discourses. Visual intertextual analysis between painting traditions and Pasolini's films will also be necessary to reveal visual tools Pasolini uses in his works.

## **1.2 Organization**

Following two chapters of this thesis will be reserved to discussions on Mahfouz and Pasolini. The focus will be on the four works that constitute the backbone of this study, with an emphasis on how these works relate to the ancient texts they are based on or inspired by. Fourth chapter will be a comparative analysis trying to understand the reasons why each artist adhered to the ancient texts in their works. Final chapter will lay out the concluding remarks.

## CHAPTER 2

### NAGUIB MAHFOUZ: ALLEGORIC PROJECTION

*...of justice that we do not enjoy, of mercy we do not experience, of dignity we do not see,  
of piety that seems not to exist and honesty we have never heard of.*  
—Naguib Mahfouz, *Children of the Alley*

*Let us leave the rulers till ruling corrupts them...*  
—Naguib Mahfouz, *Arabian Days & Nights*

#### 2.1 *Awlad*

Mahfouz's novel "*Children of the Alley*" is widely interpreted as an allegory of religious history with tales based upon those told in the traditions of Abrahamic religions. There is good reason to support this view, for "Mahfouz provides several clues, including phonetic and thematic resemblances, to indicate that the main outlines of the story are drawn from certain events in the religious history of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam" (El-Gabalawy, 1989:92). Not only do the main characters in the novel have striking resemblance in their life stories and actions to the characters like Adam, Eve, Abel, Cain, Moses, Jesus and Mohammad, but also the very structure of the text has allegorical significance "since it has exactly as many chapters as there are Suras in the Koran" (Moussa-Mahmoud, 1989:161).

The name of the novel in Arabic is أولاد حارتنا, transliterated in English phonetics as "*Awlad Haretina*" (referred hereafter as *Awlad*). "*Hara*" means a neighborhood

or a quarter of a city, which, similar to many other works of Mahfouz, is identified here as Cairo. "*Awlad*", literally means children, but metaphorically it may refer to any group of people with a specific common bond. The change from "*hara*" to "*haretine*" in second plural possessive, making it "*our hara*", is significant, because it implies a particular collective identity of the people living in the neighborhood. This identity in the novel comes from a common ancestor, Gabalawi, who is the founder of the estate upon which the *hara* is built. The first English translation of the novel by Philip Stewart in 1981 was named "*Children of Gabalawi*". The later translation in 1999 by Peter Theroux was named, rather more faithfully to the original name in Arabic, as "*Children of the Alley*".

### **2.1.1 Controversy**

Since the time it was first serialized in *al-Ahram* newspaper in 1959, the novel has been subject of heated and intense controversy (Najjar, 1998:140). It was the first ever novel of Mahfouz to be serialized in a newspaper as opposed to being published in book form. Thanks to this, it reached a much wider audience immediately, and became very controversial at the same time (Booth, 1989:15). Characterizations based on revered religious figures, first and foremost the character of Gabalawi, who is allegedly fashioned after the God of Abrahamic religions, is at the center of this controversy. Islamic scholars from Egypt and other parts of the Muslim world condemned the novel as blasphemous especially due to its alleged personification of God and the prophets—and that, not always with the best of character traits. Due to the opposition from the Al Azhar University, novel remained unpublished for the next thirty years. It was the only work of Mahfouz that did not appear in book form in Egypt all those years (Aboul-Ela, 2004:345).

Later, when the author was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988, these accusations were added an extra layer with overtones of being an agent of Western cultural imperialism. In a way, Mahfouz became the symbol of the fight between the modernist tendencies materialized in the government of his time and the Islamist opposition, each trying to legitimize its claim through him, the former praising him as an internationally acclaimed cultural achievement of modern Egypt, the latter condemning him as the result of the blasphemy the government caused

(Aboul-Ela, 2004:343). This un-called-for attention was, in the end, followed by death threats, and in 1994 he was attacked and stabbed in the neck. Although he survived this suicide attempt, his physical health was permanently affected afterwards, limiting his control over his right arm. *Awlad* "was widely viewed both inside and outside Egypt as the reason for the attack" (Aboul-Ela, 2004:346). In an interview made long before the attack, retelling how the novel came to be published in *al-Ahram*, Mahfouz, in intuitive foresight, was saying that its serialization in *al-Ahram* nearly caused him a catastrophe (Booth, 1989:15). He did not know at that time that catastrophe was yet to come!

### **2.1.2 Hi-story of the *Hara***

The novel opens when Gabalawi, contrary to the expectations, chooses his youngest son Adham instead of his first born Idris for managing his estate. Idris defiantly leaves the house and accuses his father of being unjust. Adham, having married Umaima, lives in the estate happily until later, when Idris lures him into doing something strictly forbidden by their father. Having caught in the act by his father, Adham faces his irrevocable wrath too, and is thrown out of the estate. He spends the rest of his life in utter poverty, always mocked by Idris, and always in expectation of a sign of mercy from his father.

After this instance, Gabalawi retreats into the seclusion of his mansion, and cuts himself off from the outside world. He is virtually non-existent in the rest of the narrative, but he becomes a very important character through his absence, which is quite a central and weighty matter in the novel. Once he withdraws from the scene, management of his estates is taken over by the strong men of the *hara*, the overseers, or the *nazis*. They rule it with complete disregard to the plight, poverty and misery of simple folk, who are the descendants of Gabalawi. They often use local petty gangsters, the *futuwwat*, to consolidate their power through violence and coercion. People of the *hara*, trying to survive under oppression, often ask why their forefather has left them in the hands of these cruel people. Gabalawi's forsaking them becomes a constant instigator to search for ways of establishing a just and peaceful social order in the absence of the only rightful arbiter, and triggers all subsequent events in the novel.

Thus, at certain periods, someone from among the descendants of Adham leads the fellow people of his generation in rebellion against the *nazis* to overthrow the latter's unjust rule over the estate. These are Gabal, identified with Moses, Rifaa, identified with Jesus, and Qassem, identified with Mohammad. Each rebellion, after an initial success, fades away and remains utterly inconclusive. This gives a cyclical and historically claustrophobic character to the novel since the "story of the novel is the rise and subsequent defeat-by-assimilation of five popular uprisings" and none opens a door for the people of the *hara* to a better world (Greenberg, 2013:201). As soon as these inspiring leaders are dead, so are their ideals. Those who acquire power after them are immediately corrupted by it, "they soon acquire all the deplorable characteristics of *futuwwa*". Since power remains as the basic idea governing daily life, or in other words, *futuwwa* is not outside society, but part of it, it becomes permanent as "a condition which derives from the authoritarianism (*tasallut*) of society" (Vatikiotis, 1971:176).

The last of the rebellion leaders, Arafa, identified not with any of the prophets of the Biblical-Qur'anic tradition but with science, has the secret knowledge of magic, and brings about the death of Gabalawi. Later he is forced into putting his knowledge, and the weapon he developed, "a sort of Molotov-cocktail" (Nijland, 1984:149), reminiscent of the atomic bomb, into the service of overseers, and is killed. Novel ends with Arafa's brother teaching the young men of the *hara* the secrets he learned from Arafa "in anticipation of the day of their promised deliverance" (Mahfouz, 1959: 448).

### **2.1.3 Similarities with the Biblical-Qur'anic Accounts**

Similarities between the Biblical-Qur'anic mythology and the story of the novel are innumerable, and a detailed analysis of all of them is beyond the scope of this study. However, a comparison between the Genesis stories and the novel's first section can be instrumental in understanding how Mahfouz incorporates the traditional religious stories into his text.

The parallelism between the first section of the novel named after Adham, and The Old Testament starts with allusions in both to a state of nothingness before the



creation. "The site of our alley was a wasteland" is the first sentence of the Adham section (Mahfouz, 1996: 9) and "earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep" reads Genesis 1:2. In the following pages of the novel, the estate of Gabalawi is introduced just like the Garden of Eden is introduced in Genesis 2:8 through 2:14. The creation of man is alluded to in Genesis 1:27, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" and 2:7, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul". In The Old Testament, though, there are no references to the conflict between Adam and Satan, known previously, according to the Qur'an, as the Angel Iblis. This is an important instance in the novel since all later developments stem from it.

The story of how Iblis was expelled out of God's grace is first mentioned in Baqarah:34, and then primarily in Araf:11-19. According to this, after he creates Adam, God orders the angels to bow down to him. All obey except for Iblis, who says "I am better than he; You created me from fire, and You created him from mud". This is reflected in the novel when Gabalawi elevates his youngest son Adham over his eldest Idris by choosing Adham for the job of looking after the property. God's decree to the angels in Qur'an to bow down to Adam, and Gabalawi's decision which requires on the side of other sons obedience to Adham, have the same basic logic.

Iblis' justification for his protest to God's decree is also reflected in Idris' justification for his protest to Gabalawi's decision. Idris says, first, that he has the right to the management of the estate since he is the eldest son, and second, that he is superior to Adham by the very nature of his birth since Adham was conceived of a black slave —just like Adam is created out of mud— whereas he is the son of a respectable lady —just like Iblis is created out of fire. Upon insistent questions from his sons asking the reason of this decision, Gabalawi goes onto say that "Adham knows what kind of people the tenants are, and he knows most of them by name". Similarly, in Baqarah 31-33, it is said that Adam knows the names taught to him by God which the angels do not. Therefore, the favorable position of

Adam in Qur'an and Adham in the novel is established due to their having superior knowledge of "the names of things".

The similarities go on up until the section of the book which tells the story of Arafa. The Biblical-Qur'anic accounts of the creation of Eve from the ribs of Adam, expulsion from the Garden of Eden, Murder of Abel by Cain, the Exodus led by Moses, Jesus, his life, death and resurrection, and finally Mohammad and his revelations are all reflected in a similar manner in the novel. Some finds a parallel even between the topography of the *hara* in the novel and the historical experience. The origin of the narrative is Gabalawi's mansion in the east, and the *hara* is enlarged through stages towards the west (El-Desouky, 2011:435). The last of the revolutionary leaders is Arafa, who, as mentioned above, represents rather the western science and not any of the Abrahamic prophets. The fact that Arafa brings about the death of Gabalawi, the God, although not a part of Abrahamic mythology, is yet another similarity with the history of Abrahamic religions. Interpreting this entire history as a succession of attempts to break the yoke of suppression and poverty, Mahfouz, after death of God, bestows this revolutionary role to science. On the other hand, he is well aware that in the wrong hands, science might as well serve and fortify oppression. In the novel, Arafa is forced by the *nazir* of his time to help him consolidate his power, making the latter effectively the strongest *futuwwat* ever existed. This clearly resonates with the ambitions and fears of a post-nuclear world (El-Enany, 1988:26).

#### **2.1.4 Allegory in *Awlad***

An allegory functions through a "doubleness of levels: the literal meaning and the deeper allegorical significance" (El-Gabalawy, 1989:92). If *Awlad* is an allegory, then the literal meaning stems from the story of Gabalawi and his sons, and the deeper one is the Biblical-Qur'anic narratives. However, the parallelism between the events in the novel and the legend are almost literal. Each similarity appears not as a metaphor with a deeper meaning, but rather as a *projection* of the Biblical-Qur'anic account onto the lives and tales of the members of a wealthy Cairene family that turns into a clan. As such, this *projection* does not say anything new about the Biblical-Qur'anic accounts, nor does it provide the reader with any

deeper insight into the characters in the novel (Somekh, 1971:53). One level is not placed any deeper than the other in terms of meaning. At the best, one is fashioned after, or inspired by the other, as implied by the word *projection* above.

Thus, basically, Mahfouz “uses religion, not as the subject of allegory per se, but as a model of storytelling” (quoted from Jacquemond, 2003:129 in Greenberg, 2013:202). A comparison between the characters in the Biblical-Qur’anic accounts and their correlates in the novel shows that this modelling works most conspicuously through what can be called *demythologization* (El-Enany, 1988:25). Mahfouz himself describes this through a metaphor of re-interpretation by saying that “I criticize the legend by way of reality. I have clothed the legend with the garb of reality, so that we may understand reality better, and have greater hope in it” (Najjar, 1998:160). In *Awlad*, much venerated characters of Abrahamic narratives are stripped off of their sacred cloaks, and brought down to earth, to a *hara* in Cairo. This is also apparent in the fact that there are not that many supernatural incidents in the novel. Indeed, almost only supernatural occurrences are those about Gabalawi, starting from his unusually long span of life covering several generations of his descendants (Somekh, 1971:51). Therefore, the place to look for a deeper meaning in the story of Gabalawi and his descendants is not the Biblical-Qur’anic accounts on which it is based, but elsewhere.

### **2.1.5 Oppressive Rule & the *Hara* as the Main Characters**

It is true that certain tenets of the characters in the novel lead the reader into asking questions about the Biblical-Qur’anic originals of those characters, and the concept of religion at large. For example, through the character of Gabalawi, “the novel inspires haunting doubt about God’s nature, raising different possibilities in the reader’s mind” (El-Gabalawy, 1989:96). However, the same cannot be said of all the other characters based upon the prophets, who, in their quick succession and short duration of existence in the novel, appear rather flimsy (Somekh, 1971:53). For them, Mahfouz incorporates just enough cues from their lives, so that readers can easily identify the characters in the book with their counterparts in the Abrahamic narratives. However, he does not go a step further to suggest a deeper commentary on these narratives, or the religions they belong to.

On the other hand, along with Gabalawi, who is indeed only a passive agent in his total isolation behind the doors, and in his reluctance to act except for sending messages to the chosen ones among his descendants, one entity which lasts throughout the novel, and has a very active and important part in it, is the oppressive government materialized in the *nazirs* and the *futuwwat*. In short, it is possible to read the novel as "a parable of authority and power, not only in Egypt (its author's country), but everywhere in the Arab world, or rather in the Middle East" (Abu-Haidar, 1985:119). Abu-Haidar goes so far as to claim that contrary to widespread interpretation, *awlad* in the name of the novel refers not to the people of the *hara* or the rebellion leaders, but specifically to the *futuwwat* (Abu-Haidar, 1985:120).

Gabal, Rifaa, Qassem and Arafa, all come and go in their due time, but the oppressive state as an institution, personified in the characters of *nazirs* and the *futuwwat*, is always there, always appears as the active agent with respect to which each generation of rebels define themselves. Neither do the rebels ever go extinct, nor does the oppression ever come to an end. *Hara*, in this regard, becomes the *stage* on which its people put out their fight. During and after each rebellion, the rebels establish a new neighborhood on this *stage*, and so the *hara* is irreversibly marked with the traces of that phase of struggle. In a way, the *hara* itself becomes the unwritten and unsung story of that age-old fight. Abdelmonem & Selim, for instance, with references to some other works of Mahfouz, discuss the "relationship between architecture, memory and everyday social practices through determining the way architecture moderates community experiences and communicates narratives among generations" (Abdelmonem & Selim, 2012:165) in the case of Old Cairo. Neighborhood appears to have a very central place in Mahfouz's works. In the introduction to the English translation of *Midaq Alley* (1947), translator Le Gassick says "In this, as in many of Mahfuz' works, we perceive time, here personified in the ageless Alley, to be the novel's central focus" (quoted in Deeb, 1983:123). In *Awlad*, too, this approach gives an active agency to the *hara* making it a permanent character in the novel. With its change over time, *hara* gains a certain character-depth as well. In its power to transmit the tangible traces of past struggles of former generations to the posterity, it attests to the strength, survival and endurance of its people, and becomes an inspiration for

continuing the fight. No matter how much the oppressors try to degrade the rebellious past, and make people forget its grandeur, its evidence is always present in durable, material form in the *hara*. As long as the houses, alleys and coffee shops exist and are part of the daily life, so is the fight.

It is also worth pointing out that in the ancient times when writing was not as widespread, and the only viable place for recording data for many people was personal memory, methods they used to imprint information on their minds depended mostly on locations. People memorized whatever they wanted to remember "through a technique of impressing 'places' and 'images' on memory" (Yates, 1966:11). Places "such as a house, an intercolumnar space, a corner, an arch" (Yates, 1966:22) were coded in the mind as reminders of information, and turned into the ingredients of recollections later. This way, the structures filling the living spaces of people made up not only their physical environment, but also became the constituents of *mental maps* they draw for themselves to get through daily life. As such, there was a more direct connection between architectural environment and memory. *Hara*, as a whole, was both a place of living and a placeholder for remembering.

Therefore, it would not be far-fetched to say that the main characters of *Awlad* are, first, this personified conceptualization of oppressive state and its inevitably unjust rule (Abu-Haidar, 1985:119), and second, the *hara*. These two things, the concept of *futuwwa*, and the idea of a neighborhood in all its appearances as a tangible form of communal bond from a small community of close friends to an entire nation, seems to have quite a prominent place for Mahfouz.

Mahfouz establishes his personal identity as a citizen of Egypt and a carrier of Egyptian culture. He is a member of several *haras* in different scale, be that Egypt, Cairo, or his neighborhood, Gamaliya. According to Said, for instance, "What mostly enables him to hold his astonishingly sustained view of the way eternity and time are so closely intertwined is his country, Egypt itself" (Said, 2001). All his writing is about Egypt, in all its times and facets, from ancient times to present. On a smaller scale, his writing is very much focused on the idea of *hara*, and all the *haras* he creates in his works are modeled after Gamaliya, the district of Cairo

where he was born and lived for many years. Although a writer of world renown, he left Egypt only twice in his entire life, "Once was to what was then Yugoslavia, at the request of Gamal Abdel Nasser, in order to inaugurate the birth of the non-aligned nations. The second time was to Yemen when it was liberated from its autocratic regime" (Athsan, 2007:114). There may be other, personal, or economic reasons why he did not travel much, but at the same time, such reluctance to the extent of not going away even to receive the Nobel Prize, is a sign also of a certain disinterestedness in what goes on outside of his "home", which probably comes from a high level of embeddedness in what he calls home, be it the Gamaliya district, Cairo, or Egypt.

Thus one main character of *Awlad*, and many of his books, "the *hara*", is important for him on a personal level. The other, the *futuwwa*, is no less important and no less personal, since it is something he had to live with all his life. In his memoir, for instance, he mentions a boy bullying him and others when he was a kid:

We were all boys living in the same street, our ages ranging from eight to ten. He stood out because of a bodily strength that was beyond his years, and he would apply himself ardently to developing his muscles with weight lifting. He was a boorish, coarse, and quarrelsome boy, ready to pick a fight for the most trivial of reasons. No day passed peacefully without a battle and without him beating one of us up. Thus he became in our lives a specter of torment and trouble (Mahfouz, 1998:5).

One could say that he spent an entire lifetime under the torment of specters casting large or small shadows, from dictators to neighborhood bullies and hoodlums. It is not surprising that the idea of coercion, authority and oppression has become one of the most important themes of his writing.

### **2.1.6 Cyclical History**

Thus, like Mahfouz's many other works, in *Awlad* too, the *hara* and the *futuwwa* emerge as two main characters. All the others, including *Arafa*, represent different versions of the coping mechanisms humans developed throughout history to deal with the tyrannical and oppressive state and its miserable outcomes. Indeed, it looks like at the time he was writing the novel, Mahfouz was quite preoccupied with the failure of 1952 revolution in Egypt. By 1952, he

had already come to believe firmly that Egypt's only hope [...] lay in its adoption of a scientific outlook free from the fetters of religious mythology and Islamic revivalist idealism on the one hand, and a just social order founded on the principles of socialism on the other (El-Enany, 1990:74).

The 1952 revolution, ending the British occupation and the monarchy, might at first have appeared promising to those who thought like Mahfouz, but soon enough all the hope people nourished for it turned into disillusionment. Because of this, he must have felt a "deep sense of frustration at the collapse of national aspirations yet again at the hands of the very regime which initially seemed capable of achieving what earlier generations had failed in" (El-Enany, 1990:78). In *Awlad*, and other novels written around the same time, it is possible to see the traces of this recurring disappointment (El-Enany, 1990:75). Particularly in *Awlad*, the search for the reasons of the ever repeating failures of revolutionary attempts might be directed to putting into context the concurrent failure of 1952 revolution, from the frustration of which the author was probably suffering.

Therefore, the novel can be an allegory, not of the Biblical-Qur'anic account, but of the endless and cyclical story of human kind since the dawn of sedentary life in class-based societies. This allegorical understanding can be *projected* back onto the religions developed around the Mediterranean in a way that the story of Abrahamic religions can be interpreted as attempts of successive generations of humans to fix the unjust social system. This is also in line with the author's own view, who, when asked whether the character Gabalawi personifies God, said that the character represents "not God, but a certain idea of God that men have made" (El-Gabalwy, 1989:92). Therefore, the book refers to something more general than what can be found in the Biblical-Qur'anic traditions. By the same token, the novel can be connected to the mythologies developed around Mediterranean, since the Biblical-Qur'anic account is but a branch of that tradition (Hooke, 1963). This would also give it a more universal character since, after all, the basic story of humankind living under class based agricultural societies is similar in its essentials everywhere, not only around rivers flowing into the Mediterranean, but also around the Indus River in India or the Yangtze River in China, other major and authentic centers of sedentary, civilized life in the ancient times.

Lastly, it is hard to miss the influence of ibn Khaldun's (Abd Ar Rahman bin Muhammed ibn Khaldun, 1332-1406) ideas about history and social bond on Mahfouz's writing. Two central themes of ibn Khaldun's theories, cyclical understanding of history and *asabiyyah*, shape also the events and characters, not only in *Awlad*, but also in Mahfouz' other novels, including *Arabian Days and Nights* which will be further analyzed in the following sections. Ibn Khaldun interprets history in terms of successive, cyclical rise and fall of empires and dynasties, and explains in depth the different stages of these cycles along with the mechanisms operating in the background that cause the ascent or the descent in power and living conditions. He gives emphasis to the concept of *asabiyyah* in this explanation. The term can be defined loosely as the bond that creates the communal feeling in a group of people, and that becomes the source of social cohesion. A group with a valid and strong *asabiyyah* will be on the rise, whereas a group which has lost its cohesive strength will dissolve and start descending in power. In *Awlad*, it is possible to see the interplay of several *asabiyyahs*. Indeed, the possessive pronoun "our" in the title is a direct reference to this, since it refers to a communal feeling. The noun this word refers to, "*hara*", is the fundamental source of the social bond of this community. Thus, the very first, primeval, *asabiyyah* in the novel is the one that comes from being a resident of the *hara*. This, in turn, is driven from the common ancestry of Gabalawi. Later, as the followers of each of the revolutionary leaders become a group in itself, and get settled in different regions, each develops a separate *assabiyyah* that is based on affiliation to their respective neighborhoods and leaders.

### **2.1.7 Stories of the *Hara*, Histories of the World: Ancient Text as Interface**

Indeed, one could say that in the way Mahfouz utilizes them in *Awlad*, ancient sacred texts become operational like an *interface*. On the one side of this *interface* is the world created within the novel, a neighborhood and people living in it for generations, portrayed so realistically with so many "quotidian details of a neighborhood in Egypt: the clamor of street life, the routine courtship of young lovers, hunger, anxiety, ambition and all of the deeply humane depictions of social life" (Greenberg, 2013:213), that it can be read for its face value, as a totally



independent narrative in itself. On the other side of the *interface* is the real world we live in, and the history of humankind on it since the beginning. What makes these two relatable to each other are the ancient texts they both refer to.

Someone who knows nothing about the lives of the prophets in Abrahamic traditions, and does not understand any of the references made to the lives of those prophets in the novel, would not make any connections between the two, and would read the novel only from the first side, as the story of a neighborhood in Cairo. With the help of the interface made of the ancient texts, though, it becomes possible to draw parallels between the reality of the *hara* in the novel and the reality of the world, creating an understanding of human history from a materialist-Marxist perspective. Interpreted from this angle, society becomes the arena of an endless struggle for power, just like the *hara* in the novel; state becomes the mechanism by which strong and dominant groups force the rest of the people to accept their terms in division of labor and wealth, like the *nazirs* in the novel; armed forces becomes the coercive tool they use to permeate their domination, like the *futuwwat* in the novel; and myth-religion become the persuasive tool they use to legitimate their unjust, inhumane rule, like the tales told in coffee houses in the novel. When seen through the *interface* of ancient texts, the story of the *hara* in the novel makes the history of humankind relatively clearer and more easily accessible.

### **2.1.8 Mahfouz the Storyteller**

In the final analysis, in *Awlad*, Mahfouz re-tells the history of humankind, which has always been written from the perspective of powerful oppressors, from another perspective, that of common people. This matches also the character Mahfouz creates for himself in *Awlad*. The narrator in this novel appears as a storyteller who, unlike others telling the same stories in coffee houses in the presence of rich and strong, and in a form customized according to the hegemonic ideology of rich and strong, tells them, first, in writing, and second, from a different perspective. These stories, the narrator says in the novel, have "never been told in the right order, and even then always at the mercy of the storytellers'

whims and prejudices”, and the narrator takes it upon himself “to write the petitions and complaints of the oppressed and the needy” (Mahfouz, 1959:5).

Thus, just like the narrator of the novel reinterprets the stories of oral tradition current in his *hara* as the history of the weak and oppressed, Mahfouz is also reinterpreting the stories of his own *hara*, and rewriting them as “a people’s own history”, and not the history of the dominant powers, as is done more commonly. As argued by El-Desouky, the sacred narratives can be interpreted from a strictly religious perspective as stages of divine revelation, or they can be interpreted from a materialist-Marxist perspective as revolutionary attempts. Thus, just like the narrator, Mahfouz too, sets out to put forward “a counter-vision to official religious and state histories [...] that may eventually reveal the masses’ role in the struggle for power”. El-Desouky, inspired by De Certeau’s ideas on the counter-traditions focusing “on the question of the other in discursive formations of knowledge”, attributes the materialist-Marxist moment of the novel to the fact that it concentrates more on the revolutionary cycles than on divine revelations and interventions (El-Desouky, 2011:432-433). Apart from concentrating on the revolutionary cycles, another strategy Mahfouz employs is demythologization of events and characters, since, after all, it can be said that the “religions extant today are only the mythologized accounts of phases of” the “protracted and unrelenting struggle for the achievement of a just social order on earth” (El-Enany, 1988:27).

## **2.2 *Layali***

More than twenty years later, in 1982, Mahfouz published another novel drawing inspiration from another ancient text, this time the story collection of the *Nights*. Translated into English as “*Arabian Days and Nights*”, its Arabic title is ليالي ألف ليلة, which can be transliterated into English as “*Layali Alf Layla*” (referred hereafter as *Layali* ). This novel, in which, according to Al-Musawi, “Mahfouz makes use of modern poetics in writing the best emulation, so far, of Sheherazade’s tales” (Al-Musawi, 2003:109), is a curious case of an ancient text being worked into a modern work, because it is neither an adaptation, nor a commentary, but a *sequel*. Such an attempt creates a whole different tension

between the ancient and the "novel" texts since it requires a certain level of fidelity on the side of the contemporary one, which, being written in a modern literary form, has to be structurally different at the same time. Mahfouz uses two strategies, one structural, and other contextual, to solve this dilemma.

### **2.2.1 Dynamics of a Sequel**

The *Nights* is a loosely bind collection of tales. Of course the social context of its tales are somewhat similar, and there are certain themes, narrative patterns and characters repeated in different stories, but still there are many isolated tales in it without any internal ties to the others. Only connection between such tales and the rest is the one which is external to them all: the framing story of Shahrazad and Shahryar. In the absence of any common elements between two such isolated tales, the only narrative path from one to the other is through the framing story. Only when one such tale is concluded and the narrative returns to the framing story, which is external to both tales, can the next one be commenced. There is no direct, internal connection from one to the other.

Although conceived and read as a novel, *Layali*, in the end, is also a collection of stories, "adopting the storytelling fashion of The Arabian Nights" (Hellengren 2004:79). It starts the day after Shahrazad tells her last tale to Shahryar, and is spared by him from death. Then, chapter after chapter, Mahfouz tells some stories revolving around a set of characters. However, neither the characters nor the stories are isolated. Each tale is connected to several others by several direct links, which may be a common character, a cause-effect relationship between the events, or even some direct references. Thus, each story becomes a node in the network of relations which constitute the substance of the novel. In this network, all "tales partake from, as well as influence, the main story" (Al-Musawi, 2003:375) and also each other.

This, to some extent, is valid for the *Nights* too, but the *Nights* has a relatively more linear structure. The tales in it, its nodes so to speak, are narrated one after the other, and each time narrative goes back to the framing story to pass on to the next one. This is the case even when a group of tales which are related to each

other through following the same storyline or containing the same characters *branch out*; they all return to the framing story. Hence, the nodes in the *Nights* are placed in a more linear fashion, whereas in *Layali* they rather constitute a web. Therefore, in terms of style, Mahfouz ensures the fidelity of his sequel to the ancient text by keeping two structural elements intact: nodal building blocks, and the framing story. On the other hand, he transforms his work into a novel by changing the logic of two things: first, the arrangement of these blocks, which is changed from a linear sequence to a network, and second, the level of their dependency on the framing story. This is the structural strategy Mahfouz employs when he writes a sequel to the *Nights*.

In the absence of solid, widespread internal connections between its tales, in the *Nights*, the framing story, although very ingenious and attractive in its imaginative appeal, merely becomes more of a glue to hold disparate tales together than a main story upon which all the side ones are attached. On the other hand, a novel does not function this way. It is identified by the integrity of its plot. For this, all the sub and side stories in a novel should be a part of, contribute to, merge into, or at least refer to, the main story. In going from *Nights* to *Layali*, Mahfouz, in order to convert an anthology into a novel while at the same time maintaining the structural feeling of a compilation, simply utilizes the story of Shahrazad and Shahryar, and develops it from being the framing story of a collection into the main plot of a novel. This is the contextual strategy Mahfouz employs. The story of Shahrazad and Shahryar becomes a context upon which all the other stories are placed. This requires an improvement on this story, thus Shahrazad and Shahryar gets out of the bridal chamber to which they were confined for the last one thousand and one nights, and start gaining flesh and bone. While they were previously nothing more than instruments of narrating all the tales in the collection, now, compared to the *Nights*, they gain a little bit more volume, and turn into characters with their own personalities, ideas, strengths and shortcomings.

### 2.2.2 An Allegory of State Mechanism

This context provided by a disturbed kingdom, a cruel king and corrupt officials is instrumental in establishing also the allegorical subtext of the novel. After all, "What could be more pertinent to present-day Arab regimes than such a story?" (Ghazoul, 1996:135). In retrospect, one cannot help but observe how this remark has preserved its validity throughout the first two decades of the new millennia. Therefore, although the events narrated in the novel take place in an imaginary world of fairy tales, what they indeed refer to is modern day Egypt. Drawing direct and obvious parallelisms between the novel and specific events in the recent history of Egypt would be too bold an effort but, it is clear that wars, corruption, injustice, suicides, political intrigue etc. populating the stories in the novel are in no way alien to the history of Egypt during Mahfouz's lifetime. Similar to *Awlad*, in *Layali* too, the author puts the ancient text into use to talk about modern themes.

As a result of this rich and deep allegorical level, just like *Awlad*, among lots of flimsy characters with short durations of existence, and in the absence of a main character leading the plot, coercive government in its different aspects appears as a protagonist. Indeed, this relative flatness of the human characters seems to be supporting the analogic dimension of the novel by concentrating the attention on the oppression of the state rather than around psychological complexity of the personalities. This way of treating characters is not encountered only in *Awlad* and *Layali*, but appears quite often in Mahfouz's writing. These characters,

leave lasting impressions but also hold back something essential that does not come within our grasp. They turn up and disappear, leaving traces and clues, but remain enigmatic, ambiguous. They are figures in a greater story or pieces in a puzzle, that is the oeuvre of Mahfouz (Hallengren, 2004:80).

And that oeuvre, as well as the two works mentioned here, overall, are themselves about the great story and the time immemorial puzzle that is the human life.

This allegorical level in *Layali* also consolidates its status as a sequel to the *Nights*, because the *Nights* itself can be considered an example of "a long-standing tradition in Arab culture of writing allegorically and allusively about political issues" (Ghazoul, 1996:135). Indeed, this very aspect of the *Nights*, and the significance of the allegorical meaning of the novel is also alluded to in a self-reflexive

reference: Shahryar's metamorphosis in the novel from a despot to a repentant, humble man is triggered by his realizing that Shahrazad's tales may have some deeper meaning pertaining to the real world. Thus, the tales in the *Nights*, and especially the framing story with its undertones of resistance to a despotic government, can be taken as part of a collective strategy developed by the subaltern peoples of the past, not so much as to fight, but at least to deal with the oppression they received from the state. It has, in this respect, "long been a favorite of Arab audiences and a subaltern classic" (Ghazoul, 1996:134). Thus, if the contemporary political situation Mahfouz writes about is, in its historicity, a sequel to the essentially similar political situation of the past, it is only plausible that he builds his attempt to reveal and satirize the actors of this situation in the form of a sequel to the works of past generations attempting the same in their own time. This way, through his text, Mahfouz also pays homage to the innumerable storytellers of the past in furthering the invisibly minuscule but timeless effort of each and every one of them to survive in the face of a relentless socio-political system.

### **2.2.3 Vicious Cycle**

Another similarity between *Awlad* and *Layali* is that in both novels, events happen in the backdrop of a socio-political setting characterized by a vicious cycle. In *Layali*, story after story, crimes are committed, culprits are found and punished, inept officials are beheaded, but none of these brings in a conclusive solution. In the very next story similar things keep happening, and the cycle repeats itself. Only in the very end does the author seem to be offering a glimpse of an escape from this cycle, by transporting Shahryar first to a counterfeit court mocking his own kingship, and then to a dream-like kingdom of fairy tales, but still, in the end, there is no indication that these prove conclusive in the real world of the narrative. In all this repetition, characters come and go, many die, some disappear, but coercive government manned by corrupt officials relying on the arbitrary use of power to protect their own interests always stays intact. Indeed, Mahfouz portrays the state as a mechanism of robbery and mischief as a whole, starting from the very top and permeating through the very bottom. While doing this, he "by no means reserves corruption for the ruling elite" (Ghazoul, 1996:142), but by

displaying the malignancy inherent in individuals, points also to the reciprocity between degeneracy at the micro level among people, and degradation at the macro level in governance.

If one current in the novel follows the two-sided flow of corruption within society, another one demonstrates the changes in the distribution of political power. Indeed, the latter is significant in terms of the relation between the ancient text and its contemporarily rendered sequel. The novel "begins by humanizing power and ends by popularizing it" (Ouyang, 2003:411). Allegorical level of the novel requires Mahfouz to talk about a modern-day society, allegedly a nation-state, through the political and social structures of a past time. In order to do that, the author slowly projects and transforms old social structures into new ones in the course of events. Thus, in the end, Shahryar is not the potentate that he was in the beginning, he is more humane; and the government posts are occupied by ordinary people, which means that a democratization of power is taking place. Although this does not guarantee in any way that things will change for the population at large, or it will provide a way out of the vicious cycle of corrupt, coercive state, it nevertheless makes it easier for the author to put forward more direct statements about present day reality. On the other hand, while establishing relationships specific to nation-state, at the same time, the novel places the community emerging out of these relations in a fantastic world. By situating nation-state in "the realm of the fantastic, not the real", one could say, that there is an interpretive allusion to the impossibility of nation-state as an imagined community (Ouyang, 2003:413).

#### **2.2.4 Fantasy**

In contrast to *Awlad*, in *Layali*, Mahfouz amply and explicitly includes supernatural elements. In *Awlad*, too, there is mention of supernatural, but it is implicit only in what the characters believe, which, to the extent that people also believe in supernatural in real life, is just like the real life. After all, there is nothing supernatural about people believing in the supernatural. Thus, for instance, in *Awlad* the author, or the narrator, does not join in the characters to confirm or deny the truth in any of the supernatural occurrences. For anything that may

appear as supernatural, Mahfouz leaves the door open for a logical, naturalistic explanation, and it is safe to assume that this is a deliberate choice since, as explained before, in *Awlad*, he mainly tries to demystify what appears to be beyond perception in the ancient text he comments on.

On the other hand, being a sequel, in *Layali* he keeps supernatural, one of the main elements in the *Nights*, intact. As such, he delves easily and masterfully into the world of magical realism, which is a powerful tool to comment on contemporary reality. After all, the *Nights* itself "relies on effects of the fantastic to comment on reality" (Suyoufie, 2009:190), and Mahfouz is doing the same in his sequel. He also utilizes fantastic elements for his own ends as *deus ex machina* and keeps it "at hand to provide to any lack of causality" (Al-Musawi, 2003:110), so that "running against stability the supernatural instigates action or disorder that mobilizes the narrative" (Al-Musawi, 2003:114). Among numerous such elements, especially the genies help developing the narrative. As mentioned before, to give more emphasis to the oppressive state as a main actor, Mahfouz leaves the characters relatively flat and underdeveloped. In the absence of psychological depth, it sometimes becomes difficult to explain, and put into context, some of the actions of human characters. In such cases, similar to the *Nights*, along with magic, genies and their interplay of good and evil intentions become triggers and instigators for the actions of human characters, and provide an escape for the author from the labyrinth of underdeveloped personalities.

In addition, supernatural elements become instrumental in developing the main statements of the novel too. As is the case for what is called "magical realism" in general, Mahfouz's use of supernatural in *Layali*, in the same vein with Suyoufie's comment on another Arabic author's works, "enhances the readers'/characters' perception of reality" and magical realism appears "as a medium of questioning conventional assumptions about the way we experience reality in general and of criticizing the troubling aspects of" society the author writes about (Suyoufie, 2009:182). After all, *Layali*, broadly speaking, is about society and the human nature, and as such, it is based mainly on observation. Supernatural elements, first, help the author to create all kinds of awkward, unexpected and extreme situations which operate as a good medium for observing the human behavior



sharply; in other words, they are used to "entice, torment and test humans" (Ghazoul, 1993:141). The peculiarities of human nature become more vividly visible when the normality and the conventional assumptions which camouflage them are removed, and supernatural here is employed just like a laboratory tool is used to create experimental conditions. Secondly, genies, being outsiders to the human society, make keen observations about them on behalf of the author, similar to how a telescope helps astronomers to peep into what is not visible to the naked eye. In a way, through the use of supernatural, by creating a magical-realist world, like in other similar works, Mahfouz's "characters are transported to new territories of consciousness and, as readers, we are urged to have a more nuanced perception of reality" (Suyoufie, 2009:205). Thus, fantasy, in Mahfouz's novel, becomes a narrative-syntactic technique enhancing his capabilities of observation, and a semantic element to produce sentences about the realities of society. In this regard, the *Nights*, putting fantastic at the very core of its narrative, provides a very fertile ground for the author, who utilizes it very efficiently to comment upon the modern Arab world and the human condition in general (Al-Mousa, 1992:42).

On the other hand, the tales in the *Nights* collection belong to a time when supernatural was a relatively natural component of people's imagination. Regardless of whether they really existed or not, many people believed in the existence of genies, monsters, flying carpets and various kinds of such phenomena. For them, for people listening to these tales back in time, these elements may still have appeared excitingly other-worldly, after all these were not things they came across on a daily basis. However, these elements were probably not regarded as fantastic as they are for the modern audience. Supernatural may not have materialized as a direct experience in their daily lives, but they had a certain feeling as to its reality somewhere nearby in the world. In this respect, the function ascribed, and status given, to fantastic elements in the ancient text and its modern sequel are substantially different. One could argue that belief in certain supernatural phenomena like genies is still widespread in contemporary Egyptian society, but its depth and intensity in the disenchanting modern times, and the perplexity it creates in the mind, can hardly be compared to the old times when the two worlds, the real and the fantasy, were interfused, and supernatural was ingrained in the fabric of human mindscape (Al-Mousa, 1992:43).

### 2.2.5 Religion & Sufism

Not only in his incorporation of supernatural in the narrative, but also in his approach to religion, Mahfouz's attitude in *Layali* is substantially different from that in *Awlad*. This may indeed be attributed to the changing conditions of Egypt and Mahfouz's own personal inclination towards faith. Late 1970s in Egypt was a time of "religious revival" accompanied by "a burgeoning Sufi activity", and it appears that Mahfouz has, differently from the time when he wrote *Awlad*, now settled on a more religious worldview, for, in an interview in 1976 he says "I am a believer in religion. For a while, I wavered between the materialist and religious trends [...] but afterwards I finally settled upon faith as my own course" (Allen, 1977:108).

The difference in his approach to religion between *Awlad* and *Layali* is mainly due to the elaboration of Sufism in the latter through the character of Sheikh Abdullah al Balkhi, a Sufi scholar and a prominent character, especially due to his influence over the others. He "tutors others into both the love of God and the rejection of injustice in this world" (Al-Musawi, 2003:317) and among his many students, one is Shahrazad, whose "knowledge and the wisdom implicit in her fountain of stories" is also attributed to him (Ouyang, 2003:408). The element of Sufism here is placed opposite to the oppressive government, just as "Shahryar is the opposite of the Sheikh, for the first stands for worldly power and violence, while the Sheikh stands for spiritual power and love" (Ghazoul, 1996:140). Similarly, in some of his short stories written at around the same time, "Mahfuz speaks of religious mysticism as an antithesis" (Myers, 1986:85) of that understanding of life which is based on economic gain and power to will. His reconciliatory attitude bridging sufism and revolutionary political activity goes so far as re-defining his understanding of socialism. In 1963 in an interview, he mentions what he calls "sufi-socialism" (quoted in Somekh, 1970:31), defining, in effect, sufi path as a coping mechanism used by oppressed peoples to deal with the authority.

In *Awlad*, religious movements were interpreted more through their sociological context: every religion, which starts as a sort of rebellion in reaction to unjust social conditions is, later, after the death of its charismatic inspirational leader, absorbed, tamed, and assimilated into the social status quo without having a

substantial influence over, or causing any fundamental change in, the present conditions. However, in addition to this revolutionary aspect, in each faith there also is a mystic vein preceding any particular religion in its sources going back to shamanist, animist periods, and exceeding them in its scope by inquiring into the very depths of both human existence and also the cosmos. Moreover, this aspect of religion continues existing even after the initial revolutionary zeal dies out. Sufism, which can arguably be defined as the Islamic mysticism, is presented in *Layali* as a counterbalance to the organized religious institution, which is part of the oppressive state, and is complicit in latter's coercion by providing it with an ideology and legitimacy. In an interview, Mahfouz also points this out by saying "[in *Layali*] I produced a blend of what can be called 'political realism' and 'metaphysical speculation' which may be labelled as 'Sufi speculation'" (quoted in Ghazoul, 1996:137). In addition, emphasis on Sufism contributes to the allegorical agenda of the novel too, since "Mahfouz makes extensive use of Sufism, not only as [sic] non-fundamentalist position, but also as a strategy to decenter the secular discourse of the nation state" (Al-Musawi, 2003:376).

## CHAPTER 3

### PIER PAOLO PASOLINI: UTOPIC NOSTALGIA

...but I with the conscious heart  
of one who can live only in history,  
will I ever again be able to act with pure passion  
when I know that our history is over?  
—Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Ashes of Gramsci*

One of the most controversial figures in the arts scene in the last century, Pier Paolo Pasolini, starting with *Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo (Gospel According to St. Matthew)*, referred hereafter as *Il Vangelo*) in 1964, made several films inspired by ancient literary, mythological and religious texts. Being a proclaimed Marxist, an open partisan of the Italian Communist Party for a while, and a candid critic of capitalism, it was all but natural to expect him to make highly politicized films with themes more directly deriving from, and referring to, Marxist-Communist ideology, depicting, perhaps, certain aspects of class struggle, like the plight of the poor, the fight for the rights of the proletariat, and the inhumane arrogance of capital. Instead, though, film after film, he preferred stories depicting ancient narratives. In *Edipe Re* (1967), and *Medea* (1969), he chose re-narrating ancient Greek myths, and in his so called *Trilogia (La Trilogia Della Vita, The Trilogy of Life)*, referred hereafter as the *Trilogia*) he drew inspiration from the folk tales of the Mediterranean basin and the British isles, namely from Boccaccio's *Decameron* in *Il Decameron* (1971), Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* in *Racconti (I Racconti di Canterbury, The Canterbury Tales, 1972)*, and the story collection of the *Nights* in

*Il Fiore Delle Mille e Una Note* (literally translated, "The Flower of One Thousand and One Nights"; released with the English title *The Arabian Nights*, 1974; referred hereafter as *Il Fiore*). Despite the favorable critical recognition these films received, and prizes awarded in Berlin for *Il Decameron* in 1971, and in Cannes for *Il Fiore* in 1974, Pasolini was criticized as being unpolitical in the *Trilogia*, to which he answered that these were the most ideological films he ever made (Rumble, 1994:211). It can be said that the subtle politics in these films draws its power from what can be called *utopic nostalgia*, which is diffused into the films using certain visual and cinematic tools aimed at creating what can be called *cinepoiesis*, a poetic cinema language, or, as Pasolini himself calls it, a *Poetry of Cinema*.

### **3.1 *Il Vangelo***

The first time Pasolini made a film inspired by an ancient text was in 1964, when he daringly attempted to make a film about the life and deeds of Jesus as narrated by evangelist St. Matthew. Named simply "*Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo*", literally, "*Gospel According to Matthew*" (released with the English title "*Gospel According to St. Matthew*"), this film was a daring pursuit not only because it chose for itself as sensitive a subject matter as the man who is considered to be God by millions of people in the last two millennia, but also because the director who envisioned it was a known homosexual, socialist and atheist, in short, almost everything the Catholic Church disapproved.

Surprisingly enough, the way Jesus is portrayed in the film is not at all detrimental to religious sensibility as could have been expected from an as self-assured atheist as Pasolini, so much so that, the film is highly acclaimed even by an institution like the Catholic Church as one of the best films depicting the life of Christ, and as the one that is the most faithful to the scripture. In 2014, for instance, Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano*, in its celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the film, praised it "as the best film on Jesus ever made in the history of cinema" (La Stampa, 2014). However, this may not be as surprising as it appears at first, because the film is not as much a politically engaged socialist commentary on the ancient text as it is more like an audio-visual complementary to it. It is rather like a sermon given by a creative, impressive priest, decorated with vivid images from

the life of Christ, and striking quotes from the Gospel; a sermon, which does "not preach, glorify, underline, sentimentalize or romanticize his famous story" but tries "to simply record it" (Ebert, 2004). In this sermon, instead of words, intonation and rhymes, which a priest would adhere to for increasing the heat and passion of his/her congregation, Pasolini makes use of the medium of film and visual imagery to weave the pattern. However, the film is not entirely unpolitical or impersonal; politics and personal commentary in it is subtle, and it may appear transparent at first only because it is founded upon the inherent qualities of Matthew's text itself.

Why would an artist, who is openly known to be a socialist and an atheist, make a film following the scripture to the book as much as possible? First of all, Pasolini's views on Marxism are not totally in line with the mainstream Marxism of his day, which was categorically antagonistic to religious sentiment. This was indeed one of the major disagreement points in his conflicts with the Italian Communist Party. His socialism is derived from subjective and personal readings of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) (Sillanpoa, 1981:121), and, according to Pasolini, "an alliance between Marxism and Christianity would strengthen both", and "a fresh encounter with ancient tradition and 'the sacred' might break capitalist culture's hold on the social formation of the world" (Dunghe, 2012:583).

Bourgeoisie by trade, and intellectuals by education, adhere to the rules of rationality, which, thus, becomes the logic of capitalism. Subaltern classes, on the other hand, still have a more immediate relationship with the supernatural in their lives. Thus, such "'irrational' features of reality, still known to those classes not yet absorbed into the ethos of the 'neo-capitalist' bourgeois, are valuable means of dealing with the existential questions of human life" (Dunghe, 2012:583) in a capitalist world. If sacred is expelled from capitalist worldview, this is because it cannot coexist with a strict rationalism unless its contradictions are smoothed. This indeed is one of the things that the Protestant mentality has achieved in the formative periods of capitalist development. Thus, it is possible to say, an untamed sacredness could be a front of resistance against the very mindset that is the progenitor of capitalism in that it could "inspire criticism and become heretical", paving the way to a "revolutionary use of tradition" (Cassano, 2012:99). Therefore,

despite his own atheism, religious sentiment as such is not outside Pasolini's worldview.

Secondly, the answer lies also in the nature of Jesus' story in the Gospels. There, his words and deeds appear quite revolutionary in the deepest sense of the word, not only for the first century Judea, but also for the present time and age too. After all, Christianity emerged among common people as a response to the all-encompassing Roman Imperial state, and as an attempt to replace the latter's oppressive bureaucratic unity with the unity of the community that was reflected onto, and embodied in, the supreme unity of God, personified as Jesus. Thus, in its beginning, it was a genuine attempt to overturn a world of oppression, confusion and absurdity. Jesus of Nazareth, with all his parables, deeds and miracles, was the inspiration for this revolution. But then, in a process which started with St. Paul's intense correspondence with remote Christian communities, Christianity directed its efforts not to revolutionize the world and life, but to the establishment of a separate organization to rival that of Rome. Centuries later, when it finally conquered Rome and canonized its scripture, it was nothing less than another Rome, only more powerful and audacious; a power so great that it necessitated one of the greatest forgeries of all times, the so called Donation of Constantine, to legitimize itself (Russell, 2004:365). In the end, it turned into "nothing more and nothing less than the unlimited ability to absorb and accumulate the inhuman" (Lefebvre, 1947:217).

### **3.1.1 A Revolutionary Boy from Nazareth**

During this process, Jesus, the boy from Nazareth, as a character, was modified into Jesus, The Lord Christ, and became the primary patron saint of the Church, and the excuse of all its pomposity. However, despite this transformation, the acts and words of Jesus of Nazareth narrated in the Gospels are even more resonating today for the people who are crushed under, not a visible, tangible and solid a foe as the mighty Rome, but one which is very imperceptible, elusive and insidious, one which is exceptionally successful in making people believe in its inevitability and benevolence: capitalism.

It is said that the very first thing Jesus did after entering Jerusalem was going to the Temple to expel all the moneychangers and merchants out of it after wrathfully overturning their tables, and scattering their money all around:

Matthew 21-12 - And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money changers, and the seats of them that sold doves,

Matthew 21-13 - and said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.

What, apart from "O ye of little faith", would this Jesus say to people living in a system which turned, not only a little temple, but the entire planet, and nowadays even the space, the real and the eternal seat of "his father", into a "den of thieves"? How wrathful would he be when he learnt "theft", usurpation and exploitation of one's life, time and labor, has been normalized with a thousand economic terms? How would he react to those who "sold and bought", not only all kinds of "doves", but even the tiniest pebbles of that greater Temple called The Earth?

Therefore, a relentless critic of capitalism in his works, Pasolini is not in contradiction with himself when he portrays Jesus as the revolutionary that he appears to be in the Gospel. This may have been what attracted him to this story in the first place, since, according to what he says, it seems like the idea of making a film from Matthew's Gospel came very naturally to him: "I read the Gospel, and as I was reading it, that increase of vitality one feels when one reads as great a work as the Gospel, suggested the idea of making a film out of it" (Pasolini, 1965:43). In the same interview he also says that his "view of the world is always at bottom of an epic-religious nature", and what better subject matter than Jesus' story to epitomize epic-religious quality.

Thus, the epic insurgency of Jesus which inspired a profound world religion seems to have enticed him to make this movie and, very much in accord with this motive, the portrait of Jesus he draws in the film appears very revolutionary. So much so that, according to Nguyen, for instance, Jesus exhibited by Pasolini appears like a Marxist "who liberates the peasant people from socio-political oppression" (Nguyen, 2010:194). Casarino uses what he calls the "Leninist Christ" of *Il Vangelo* as an example of how "transcendent diction and religious iconography are turned



into vehicles for profoundly materialist historical insights" in Pasolini's films (Casarino, 2010:693). Similarly, Irish Film Institute, while presenting their special programme on Pasolini, introduced the film as having a "portrayal of Jesus as a political revolutionary" (IFI, 2015). Ebert, in his review of the film, says Jesus portrayed in it "speaks with a righteous anger, like a union organizer or a war protester" (Ebert, 2004). According to Aichele, "Pasolini's Jesus does not preach pie-in-the-sky escapism, but rather down-to-earth revolution"; he is concerned about the poverty and oppression, and he is all about changing the world (Aichele, 2002:531).

### **3.1.2 Political Commentary through Faithfulness: The Nazarene vs The Christ**

In order to create such a portrait, Pasolini did not have to make many alterations to the original text of Matthew; after all, Jesus of Nazareth already appears there as a humble revolutionary. In this regard, choice of Matthew's Gospel over others is significant since "Matthew's Jesus is revolutionary in his underscoring of social diversity and empowering moral thought" (Mugnai, 2014:442). All Pasolini needed to do was to put the halo aside, and to avoid all the grandeur and loftiness added to the persona of Jesus of Nazareth by the church to convert him into Jesus Christ. Indeed, that is what he exactly does. Jesus in his film is not the broad shouldered imposing figure with flowing hair locks, he is "no transcendent evangelist in shining white robes, performing his ministrations and miracles in awesome spectacles" (Crowter, 1966). He is a simple lad looking like a neighborhood kid who can be spotted in any Mediterranean town (Figure 1), "a young man of spare appearance, garbed in dingy, homespun cloaks" (Crowter, 1966). Baby Jesus is not the wise, chubby baby with the gaze of a grown up and body of an infant as depicted over and over in so many paintings, but he is as clumsy and puzzled as any baby is (Figure 2). His miracles are not performed in a background of lightening and rainbow, or in company of a chorus of angels, but are simple daily acts performed as inconspicuously as breaking a loaf of bread. Even Satan who comes to tempt Jesus is not the magnificent crook with horns and tail and a trident, but a man like any other, wearing ordinary garments and acting like an ordinary person. Clearly, Pasolini, creating "a non-scriptural gospel of Matthew" (Aichele, 2002:526), did not

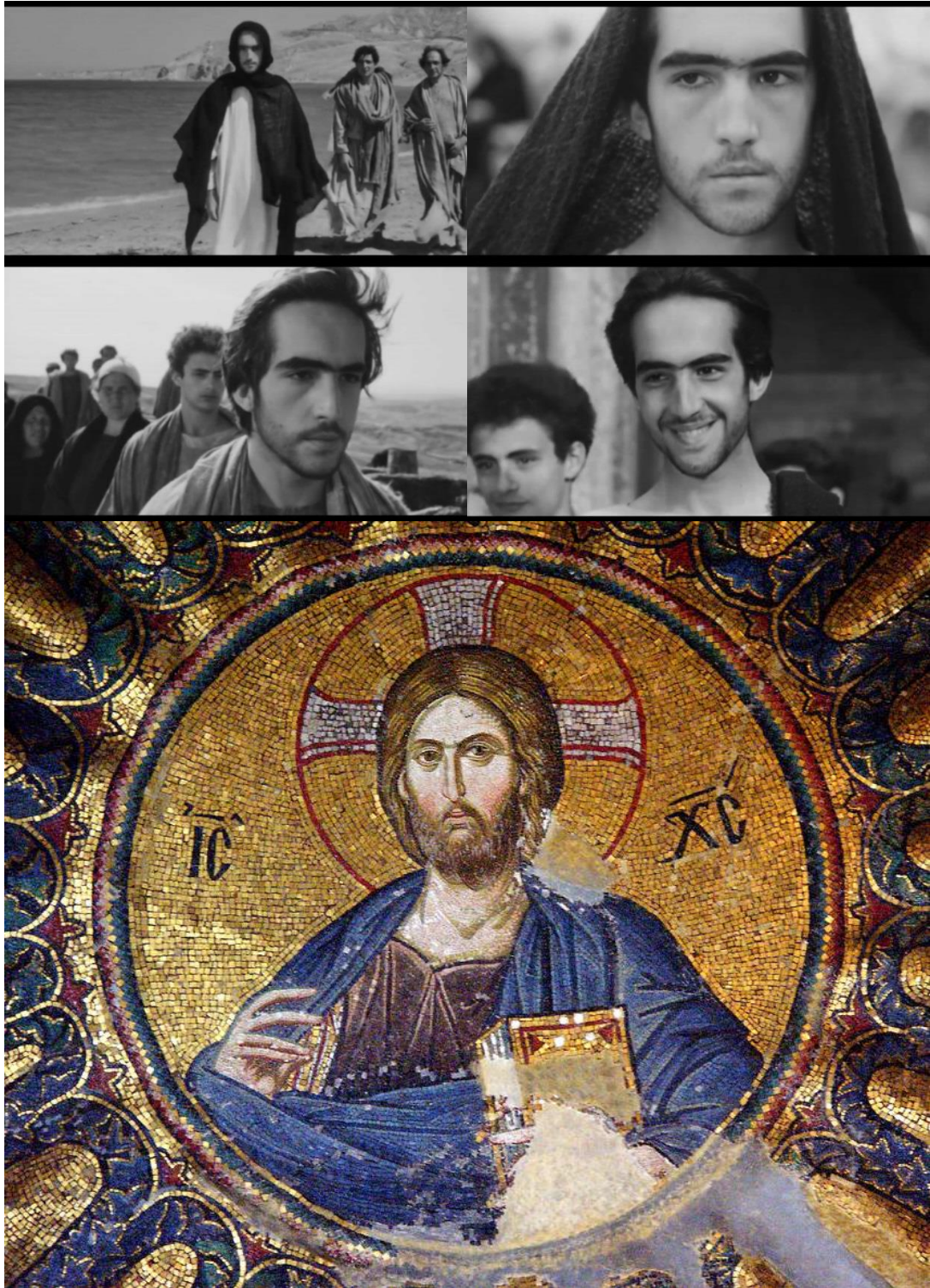


Figure 1. Above: Jesus in *Il Vangelo*. Below: mosaic of Christ Pantocrator, south dome of the inner narthex, Chora (Kariye) Museum, Istanbul.



Figure 2. Above: baby and child Jesus from *Il Vangelo*. Below: detail of Child Christ from Leonardo Da Vinci's (1452-1519) *Virgin of the Rocks* (c. 1483-1486), Louvre Museum.

want his characters to appear elevated above daily life. In this regard the film has a documentary like feeling, it almost "tells the life of Christ as if a documentarian on a low budget had been following him from birth" (Ebert, 2004).

Thus, the story of the life and deeds of Jesus as narrated in *Il Vangelo* follows quite faithfully the narrative of the Gospel of Matthew, and Jesus we see in the film is not The Lord in all his magnificence and sumptuous attire ostentatiously working miracles right and left, but a young, fragile looking lad clad in simple robes, speaking to people still in imposing but also an empathetic manner. In his personality and actions, he presents a striking anti-thesis to the two stereotypical extremes of human existence dictated, and forced onto people, by capitalism: anonymous, powerless, passive proletariat in its castration, and dominantly active, highly individual bourgeois in its effusing ego. Jesus Christ in *Il Vangelo* is neither of them; he is in a sense both: he is both the Nazarene, the simple boy, and the Christ, the supreme ego.

He, Jesus of Nazareth in the film, is a simple young man in the way he acts, looks and speaks, but being the faithfully embodied character of Matthew's Gospel, he is also The Lord Christ. Thus, Christ, the God of Abraham who, in the Book of Genesis created the universe and the humans in all his omnipotence, later to expel them from his Kingdom in all his wrath; who, in the Book of Exodus, saved Moses and his children out of the bondage in Egypt in all his mercy; this God whose power and love is narrated in these earlier parts of the Christian Bible, and whose short but compassionate material life on earth is narrated in the book of Matthew along with other Gospels, can be this simple boy Jesus wandering around with worn out sandals. Thus, read the other way around, at the same time, the ordinary boy seen in the film, Jesus, can be The God, The Christ, The Anointed One, the most transcendental individual ego in the universe while and still retaining all his simplicity. This sensitive looking adolescent, who does not seem any different from all the others around him, can also be all omnipotent, all merciful, and all wrathful. Therefore: simply, any one of human beings, and not only members of a certain group of wealthy or powerful people, in their innate humility, can also be all these things. What better way to undermine the capitalistic sentiment than bringing forth the God-like strength in every human, and human-like fragility in every God, the

“old ones and the new”, be it the age old gods of Abraham, Mithras or Upanishads, or the new age Gods of the Market, Money and the Work-Shift.

### **3.1.3 Epic Worldview**

In this regard, adopting the Matthew’s Gospel as faithfully as possible to the letter is quite a sagacious choice of Pasolini’s, since it attests to both truths embodied in the Jesus figure in the film: the Nazarene boy and the Lord Christ. Through this faithful adaptation, the persuasiveness and credibility attached to Matthew’s Gospel through two thousand years of religious sentiment, which attributes its text to divine inspiration, is transferred onto the image of Jesus in the film to support the simplicity and ordinariness of him, which, basically, and as elaborated above, is the main argument put forward in *Il Vangelo*.

For this reason, it seems, that, Pasolini chose to base his film about Jesus’ life on a particular text, Mathhew’s Gospel, instead of re-writing the story himself with references to many accounts of it that are in existence. He is not after making a biographical film about a man who is supposed to have lived in the environs of Galilee two thousand years ago; he does not intend to put on film a historical Jesus, so to speak. He is quite aware that such a figure may very well have never existed, or even if he did, he was probably one of so many claimants to the divine prophecy preaching in that region at that time. About this point, Pasolini says:

I did not want to reconstruct the life of Christ as it really was. I wanted to do the story of Christ plus two thousand years of Christian translation, because it is the two thousand years of Christian history which have mythicized this biography, which would otherwise be an almost insignificant biography as such (quoted in Myrsiades, 1978:215).

Thus, according to Pasolini, what separates Jesus of Nazareth from all the other insignificant preachers of his time is the mark his image as Jesus Christ left on the two thousand years after his alleged life. What Pasolini intends doing is not to tell the story of historical Jesus, if there ever was such a man, but the epic that is created around him. Matthew’s gospel is a part of that epic, and the one suited best to Pasolini’s interpretation of it, as the story of a revolutionary who put forward his claim in the only language that was available to him in his time, the language of religious sentiment. Thus, Pasolini’s Jesus is an epical character who is

not in epic proportions. In the sense that he appears very down to earth, his grandeur comes from his simplicity and humility.

### **3.1.4 Pasolini: Director of *Il Vangelo***

Therefore, not only was Pasolini not in contradiction with his political inclinations when he made this film, but he also did not need to deviate from his filmmaking style. Indeed, story of Jesus of Nazareth and those around him gave Pasolini a fertile narrative to apply his principles as a director. His main focus in his films is the life of the subaltern peoples. Jesus of Nazareth, being himself a member of the underprivileged population of the first century Judea, and inspiring a movement of the subaltern people, is already within Pasolini's artistic coverage area. Moreover, as will be discussed shortly, the narrative of the Gospel, aligned with Pasolini's approach, is well suited to be filmed with a cast of non-professional actors, and this is a practice he much preferred. As he puts it, he wants "to be, at every moment, the author of [his] own work", but "a professional actor carries a consciousness with him, an idea of his own about the character he interprets" and this is quite undesirable for Pasolini, since it may interfere with his own vision of his work, hence his "resistance to professional actors" (Pasolini, 1965:38).

Thus, just like he would do in many later films, like the films in the *Trilogia*, in *Il Vangelo* too, Pasolini casted non-professional actors, including his own mother as Virgin Mary in her old age (this, matched with the fact that a good portion of Pasolini's artistic output had references to his own life (Bondavalli, 2007:26) gave way to an autobiographical interpretation of the film, which also attributes homosexuality to Jesus (Aichele, 2002:532)). This may be a reason why there are so many facial close ups in the film. All the figures elevated to the level of God and Saints in the last two thousand years, appear in the film as ordinary looking, "rough, unadorned and real" (Crowter, 1966) human beings of Italian South, and this becomes most clearly visible in the uncontrolled, natural responses of the facial muscles, and in the traces the life left on those faces. Thus, all the faces seen in the film are conspicuously Mediterranean, Italian and subaltern, and close-up is the major type of shot prevalent throughout the film (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Close-ups from *Il Vangelo*. Left-to-right, top-to-bottom: Virgin Mary (young), Joseph, Angel, Satan, Peter, Judas Iscariot, Virgin Mary (old), John the Baptist, head Pharisee, King Herod

### 3.1.5 Non-linear Time

Another vehicle establishing the anti-capitalist ideological statement of the film is a non-linear understanding of time. The concept of time is neither natural, nor neutral. There may be, and there have been, different ways to understand and interpret time in different epochs and places, and each understanding comes with a discourse. Natural phenomena, for instance, follows a cyclical order. Despite that, the dominant way to experience time in "the present time" is a chronologic one based on a linear understanding. Such linearization could not have happened by itself, or "not have been based on the study of natural phenomena, since linear processes were not discovered in nature until the second half of the nineteenth century" (Pomian, 1979:570). Where, then, does it come from? According to Pomian, "it is the authorities who introduce the linearization of time" (Pomian, 1979:570). If that is the case, the concept of linear time is inevitably branded by the worldview of the so called "authorities"; it is not free of ideology, it is loaded with a certain discourse. As natural as it might appear "now", the "very idea of basing the linearity and irreversibility of time on human activities" was quite unthinkable, for instance, in the Middle Ages (Pomian, 1979:580). Thus, according to Anderson, for instance, before the dawn of capitalism, time was apprehended in a more cyclical manner. In the ancient times, throughout the middle ages, what is called the Messianic time was the dominant mode of interpreting the concept of time. According to this, the idea of simultaneity was established to exist between what is now called the "past", the "present" and the "future". This made possible, for instance, the paintings in which Jesus, Mary and the other figures from The New and The Old Testaments were portrayed just like the people who lived wherever and whenever the painting was made (Anderson, 1991:145) (Figure 4).

The idea of linear time was arrived at through stages over time, and it had the unmistakable mark of a capitalist ideology characterized first and foremost by economic thought. An important ingredient of the linear understanding of time, the idea of progress, was the key in this, and unsurprisingly, the inspiration behind it was the "progressive nature of the development of Western societies" in which "during the first half of the nineteenth century, most economists have not the least doubt" (Pomian, 1979:599). Thus, non-linear, cyclical, or Messianic time was





Figure 4. Above: Scene from the massacre of infants from *Il Vangelo*. Below: *Massacre of Innocents* (1565) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (c. 1525-1569), British Royal Collection. Biblical scene depicted in a winter setting in Netherlands.

external to modern science and capitalism. For Galileo to observe the effects of gravity by dropping two objects from the Pisa Tower, the idea of simultaneity had to be perceived to exist between the falling trajectories of those two objects. Similarly, a capitalist had to be on time with everything to manage the production in the factory. Two different shipments of raw products, coming from different locations, through different, perhaps very distant, routes, had to be scheduled so that they would arrive at the factory “just in time” to maximize profit. For such a person, the idea of “simultaneity” should be established, not between the sacrifices in the Biblical accounts of Abraham and Jesus, but between the transportation of those materials travelling towards the factory from different locations. Thus, the ideas and the concepts of simultaneity and contemporaneity, and their logical result, the linear understanding of time and history, are modern concepts which emerged along with capitalism; and these are what Pasolini tries to disrupt using certain vehicles in his films.

In *Il Vangelo*, for instance, filming this Biblical tale not in the Biblical lands but in Southern Italy with distinctly Italian faces helps establishing a non-linear time. Apparently, Pasolini traveled through the Holy Land in search of locations for his film, but finding them unsuitable, he decided in the end to film in Italy. Indeed, aside from the unsuitability of locations he visited, filming not in “ancient” Judea, but in “present day” Italy might have appeared more consistent with his approach to temporality in his films. Arguably, *Il Vangelo*, along with *Il Fiore* later, appears to be one of the most conspicuous works in Pasolini’s oeuvre in terms of the emphasis on the non-linear time notion. Only through this understanding of “time do we appear able to give meaning to” these two films (Terentin, 2013). In *Il Vangelo*, the music also contributes to this feeling. Instead of using hymns or oriental sounds, which would have been the usual, or the obvious, choice for this kind of film, Pasolini, who was praised on account of this film with his “remarkable avoidance of clichés” (Crowter, 1966), employs quite “anachronistic” sounds from different parts of the world “including sacred music from different world faiths” (IFI, 2015).



Figure 5. Above: Three Kings from the East visiting baby Jesus in *Il Vangelo*. Below: *Adoration of Magi* (1304-1306) by Giotto di Bondone (1295-1337), Scrovegni (Arena) Chapel, Padua, Italy.

### 3.1.6 Deviations & Contamination

Being quite a faithful adaptation of Matthew's Gospel, *Il Vangelo* may at first appear as a transparent text in terms of Pasolini's stamp on it, but it is indeed a very personal statement, especially in its attitude to portray the characters as ordinary people, and events as ordinary, daily happenings. In fact, the film does not follow the Gospel word for word, for there are some deviations from it in the form of omissions and reordering. In addition, even if the narrative were followed point by point, Pasolini would have still had to imagine, create, and choose by himself, the entire mise-en-scène and the music which, naturally, is not described in the Gospel to the minute detail, if at all. In addition to these, Pasolini also "contaminates" his work with intertextual references from all kinds of other works about Jesus, and rather "complicates the literary text by positioning the spectator at the intersection of a plentitude of visual, aural, textual, and historical discourses" (Fuller, 2006).

Included in these contaminations in *Il Vangelo* are the various paintings taking scenes from the Gospel as subject matter. By making references to the canonic scenes depicted frequently in paintings in the Christian West, like the Massacre of the Innocents (Figure 4), Adoration of the Magi (Figure 5), and Baptism of the Lord (Figure 6), and using their compositional principles, Pasolini contaminates his film with what people are already used to seeing in the churches when they feel themselves in the presence of The Lord. Thus, film places itself in the line of all the visual works from *Shroud of Turin* and Andrei Rublev icons to Da Vinci's *Last Supper*, and summons their authority to establish its own truth.

Alterations to Matthew's narrative in the film are few, and they are mostly in the ordering of events, not in their essential traits. Thus, in terms of narrative, Pasolini avoids deviating from the Gospel as much as possible, and this means he is, to a certain extent, devoid of narrative-cinematic tools to make the plot of his film self-consistent. Because of this reason, *Il Vangelo* is not a closed narrative complete in itself. The film depends on, and assumes the existence of, audience's prior knowledge of the characters and the story. A viewer who does not have any familiarity with Jesus and his story may find some loose ends and unexplained



Figure 6. Above: John the Baptist baptizing Jesus in Jordan River in *Il Vangelo*. Below: Detail from *Baptism of Christ* (1405) by Andrei Rublev (1360-1430), Moscow Kremlin, Russia.

points in it. On the other hand, this assumed familiarity of the audience enables Pasolini eschewing the classical imagery created about Jesus and those around him. He is free to choose a short haired, stocky man as his Jesus, because he knows his audience can identify Jesus through what Jesus does, which they already know the latter will be doing. Similarly, he does not have to abide with the classical imagery of Satan, because he trusts that his audience already knows that the figure who will come to tempt Jesus on the mountain in his solitude is Satan. In the same vein, actors need not act, indeed it is better if they do not act at all, but just stand there, and create a visual complementary to, and a depiction of, the scenes from the Gospel, much like a painting, which the audience is already familiar with. Working with non-professional actors who do not really know how to "act", proves to be advantageous in this regard.

### **3.1.7 Immanuel**

*Il Vangelo*, then, is a personal interpretation of Matthew's Gospel by Pasolini, and the director establishes his commentary by bringing out a certain essence implicit in Matthew's text, by "extrac[ting] the ancient essence from Jesus story" (Pulver, 2010), or in other words, by staying true to the ancient text wherever, and as much as possible. Therefore, in the final analysis, Pasolini's text is an interpretive visual complementary to Mathew's text, which lays bare latter's essence by depicting Jesus as the revolutionary he appears to be there. That Jesus in *Il Vangelo* is stripped of his grandeur does not mean that he is rationalized. One way of putting the ancient texts with supernatural elements on film is to rationalize them by finding natural or psychological causes to the supernatural occurrences. Pasolini avoids this. In his film, although Jesus is arguably less supernatural, and more political, than the written gospel's character (Aichele, 2002:531), he still does walk on the lake, he does feed a whole lot of people with scanty provisions, and he does heal the incurable. However, he does all these very modestly, in full austerity, like any other daily act. One feels like, if all those miracles did really happen, they must have happened just like they are depicted in *Il Vangelo*. Indeed, this latter remark is pointed out for the entirety of the film. In 1966, "Catholic Film Newsletter praised the film, saying that it 'constantly makes the viewer feel that what he sees is the way it must have been'" (quoted in Fuller, 2006), and in his

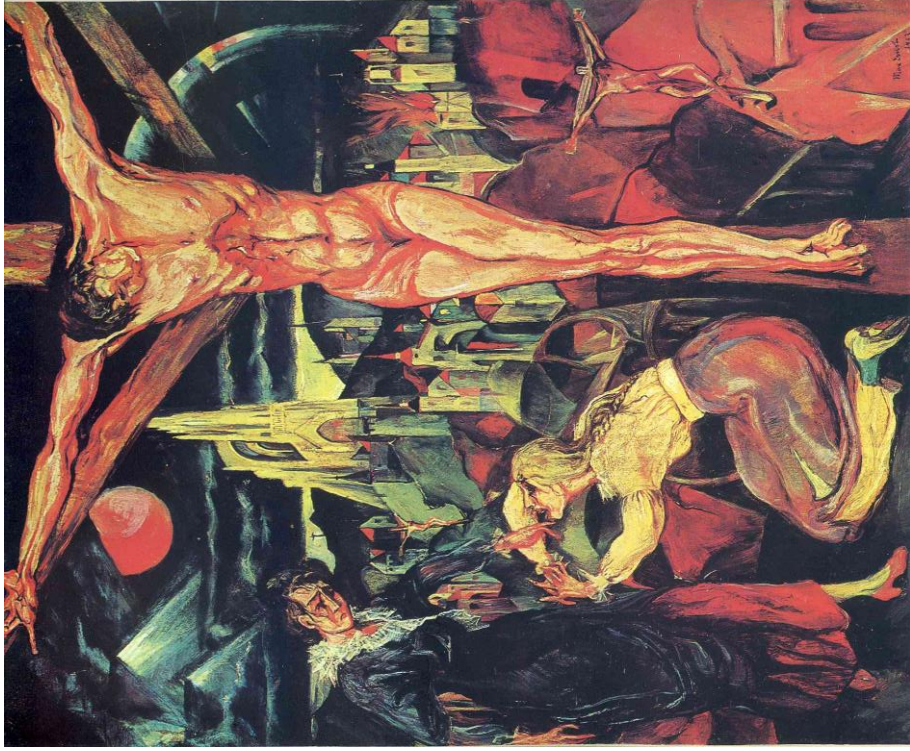
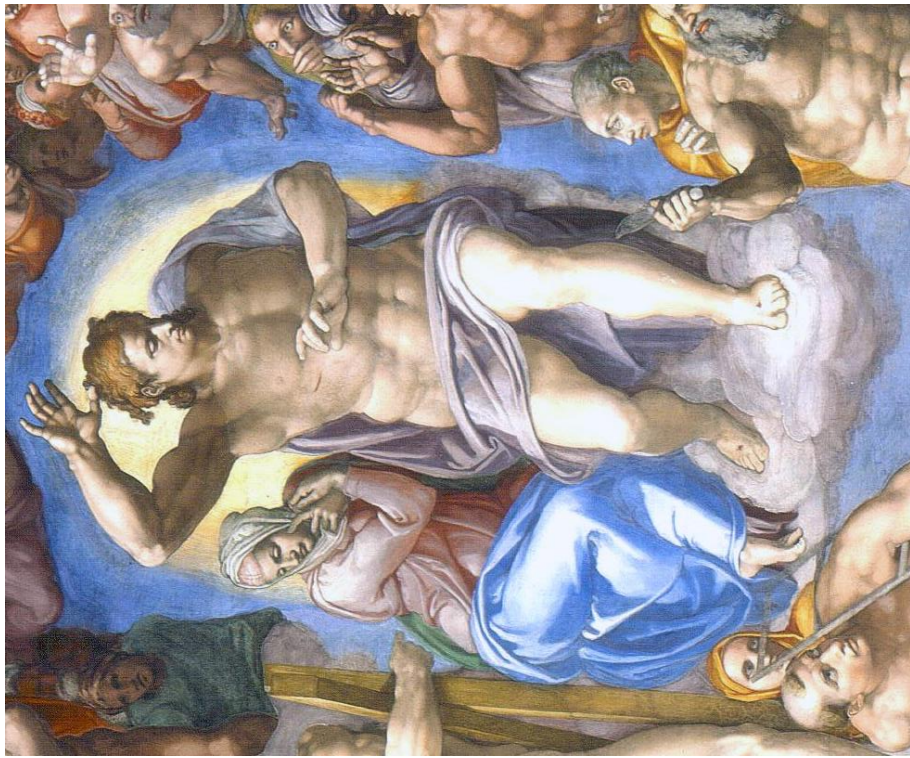


Figure 7. Left: Detail from *The Last Judgment* (1536-1541) by Michelangelo (1475-1564), Sistine Chapel, Vatican. Right: *Crucifixion* (1913) by Max Ernst (1891-1976). Cologne, Museum Ludwig.

*New York Times* film review in the same year, Crowter says that the film gives the viewer “the mystical sense of being there” (Crowter, 1966).

On the opposite side, the customary images showing Jesus either as the enthroned king (the Christ) or as the most inhumanely tortured body (the sacrificial lamb) are above and/or beyond the daily life (Figure 7). The former in his grandeur, the latter in his physical agony are out of the perceptible world of ordinary humans. Pasolini’s Jesus, on the other hand, is only one of many people around him, he is one of them, he is *with* them, especially with the poor underprivileged folk. Thus he fulfills perfectly, and better than many other images of Jesus, the prophecy mentioned in Matthew 1:23:

Behold, a virgin shall be with child,  
and shall bring forth a son,  
and they shall call his name Immanuel,  
which being interpreted is, God with us.

Pasolini’s Jesus truly deserves the name Immanuel, because he is God with the people. Not one above them, not one beyond them, not one up in skies or at the end of the world, but in their midst. This may be a reason why the Catholic Church, under a Pope who chose for himself the name of St. Francis, and envisioned the Church under his ministry as the “poor Church for the poor” (La Stampa, 2014), appreciated the film so much. After all, Jesus portrayed in the film is the poor God of the poor people.

### **3.2 *Il Fiore***

“*Arabian Nights*”, or with the more faithful translation of its original Italian name “*Il Fiore Delle Mille e Una Notte*”, “*The Flower of the One Thousand and One Nights*”, is the last of Pasolini’s *Trilogia*. In the movie, the director gives his take on some of the tales he chooses from the story collection of *the Nights*. The tales in the film, in their outline, generally follow the tales from which they are adapted. However, the execution gives them a personal touch, and makes them an individual interpretation of Pasolini’s. It is possible to say that the director, by his adaptation, tries to achieve “recreating an ancient text in a particular cinematic style [to] allow viewers to enter into discourse with the experience of another, more archaic era —



perhaps even to re-experience what once might have been seen as an encounter with the sacred" (Dunghe, 2012:582), and while doing this, he tries to make a very political statement. This film and the other two in the *Trilogia*, *Decameron* and *Canterbury Tales*, are usually placed within the third phase of Pasolini's cinematic career, which is described as commercial/popular (Syrimis, 2012:512). What characterizes this phase, as opposed to his earlier periods, is that he approaches cinema as mass entertainment, rather than a medium primarily to convey ideas. As such, the film was at first criticized as being non-political. To this, as mentioned, Pasolini answered by saying that these were the most ideological films he ever made, adding that "Its ideology is hidden deep below the surface. It is brought out not by what is explicitly said, but by representation" (quoted in Rumble, 1994:211).

### **3.2.1 Ideology in *Trilogia***

To establish the ideological standpoint of the films in the *Trilogia*, Pasolini follows a strategy of undermining a widespread perception created by capitalism: the perception that freedom and happiness are possible only through an incessant effort to increase personal wealth and property; that life of the underprivileged is one of constant agony, and their world is the barren, desolate "desert of the truth"; that a life with no material wealth and property is a life of bondage; and, finally, that such a life is no life at all. In these three films, Pasolini exhibits the life of the subaltern peoples of an earlier time in all its vivacity, color and brightness. He tells the stories of a time and place when and where it was possible to live happy fulfilling lives with little property; when and where, in the absence of such things as the modern eight-to-five imprisonment and nation-state borders, people were relatively more free to roam the earth; when and where, as opposed to compartmentalized egos of the modern day, people were more wholesome, and this showed through their free, unconstricted laughter; when and where, as unthinkable as it is for the "cellularly" and "auto" "mobile" people of modern times who are utterly alienated from one another, people from all walks of life had a chance to come together, intermingled and feasted together fearlessly; when and where, not yet have been suppressed through a feeling of guilt by an interdicator ethic fearful of anything that can undermine the flow of labor, wealth and

property, not yet have been severed from their roots connecting them from their soles to the earth, and not yet have been snatched off of their ancient bond with the animal living inside their bodies, people ate, drank and copulated to their heart's content; when and where more of the world was beautiful not because of its value in the market, but for all the unmediated sublime beauty in it.

Thus in these films, which "are populated by corporeal signifiers" (Bruno, 1991:37), Pasolini shows his audience "the subordinated classes [which] are credited with a more natural and spontaneous relation to their bodies and desires" (Hardt, 2009:115): the poor people who, for instance, throw away or instantly spend all the gold they lay their hands on; he makes his characters travel to the ends of the world to most remote places; in order to give solid form to their unconstricted laughter, he comes very close to their faces, to their yellowish white teeth, to the twitching muscles of the cheeks when they laugh; he makes them eat and drink in merrymaking in sumptuous feasts with a thousand others; he consecrates life force in animal lust by poking the erect, tingling members of men in the eyes of the audience or pulling the audience inside the seductive gaping members of women; he generously displays the *virtuous laziness* of lush landscapes with trees, flowers and animals that are all there for no other purpose than just being there. In the end, "what the existence of these underclasses demonstrates is indeed the survival of a humanity which lives outside the temporal dynamics of capitalist society" (Trentin, 2013:1031). Thus, there was once a time when people were happy with less, less was indeed more in the full sense of the word; once they had real tactile feeling of the road they traveled; once they had joyful, wholesome lives in peace with nature around and inside them, and all these, despite all their material poverty and comparative technological powerlessness. Thus, it was, and is, actually possible to be happy in such conditions, and so, another world is possible. Thus, Pasolini reminds once again that the codes of Western capitalist culture are neither the only possible nor the ideal ones for humanity. Other ways and worlds are possible and, as seen in the joyful and vivacious life portrayed in *Il Fiore*, may even be more favorable.

### 3.2.2 Sexuality in *Trilogia*

The candid, sincere portrayal of lovemaking becomes remarkable especially in *Il Fiore*, which arguably, is the film marked most by “the insistence on the joyful nature of the characters and their sexuality” (Lundell, 2013:125). Thus, one of the most significant elements in the *Trilogia*, and especially in *Il Fiore*, is the sincere eroticism infused in each of the tales, and also the film in general. This aspect may also be one of the keys to understanding how the adaptation from an ancient and anonymous text to a highly individual and modern film is made. It may also help understanding why Pasolini described this film and the others in the *Trilogia* as his most ideological ones.

Pasolini’s well known bold approach to, and explicit portrayal of, sexuality in his films is especially focused on the conflict between sexuality inherent in people’s lives and the external forces such as society, state and religion, which restrict it (Lundell, 2013:120). It is possible to say that the sincere eroticism in *Il Fiore* is also the very first personal touch of Pasolini to the ancient text of the *Nights* while he adapts it for his film. He selects from the collection those stories which are most adequate for the portrayal of inherent sexuality in the lives of simple men and women. This choice is also faithful to the spirit of the oldest manuscript of the *Nights*, which “contains similarly sexually focused, morally ambiguous stories, many of which critique notions of marital happiness” (Lundell, 2013:121).

Sexuality, therefore, is very instrumental in establishing the subtle ideological statement of the film. Due to his personality and sexual orientation, being an outcast of the generally accepted morals and mode of life in a capitalist society, Pasolini seeks to make visible all that is suppressed and hidden by this system. That is why the marginalized people of the lower strata find a central place in his works. A sincere and natural sexuality as it appears in the *Nights* is another aspect of life marginalized by capitalism under the shroud of protestant ethics. Moreover, sexual norms in any time and place are so deeply ingrained into people’s mind that they appear not only very natural and indispensable, but also eternal and everlasting. Although being the result of an evolution which started in time immemorial, people seldom feel this historicity inherent in sexual mores.

Experiencing in a film another kind of sexuality that is very different from their own, can potentially lead people to question all such values that seem very natural and ahistorical to them, like the socio-economic system or the religious beliefs. Hence, the vast array of people belonging to the underclasses, and the sexuality in their lives, remind the spectator of a world which was much different from the one s/he lives in now. This, from another perspective, means that the concurrent life and its corresponding social-political system are not the only ones, they are not eternal, and hence, they do not have to be everlasting either.

Utopian belief in the possibility of the existence of another kind of life is the first step in transforming the current one. In this regard, the statement made in the film through the portrayal of marginalized humanity and suppressed sexuality becomes a very ideological one. According to Pasolini, modern bourgeois society has arrived at what he calls "de-realization of the body", but reality still survives in the bodies of subaltern peoples, and thus putting those, in his own words, "'innocent' bodies with the archaic, dark, vital violence of their sexual organs" on the screen is a way to resurrect what modernity has buried (Pasolini, 1994; quoted by Syrimis, 2012:520).

In addition, Pasolini, by giving active agency to the female characters in the film (Lundell, 2013:124) and constructing the male body as a subject of female erotic gaze (Syrimis, 2012:513), tries also to undermine the male dominant codes of modern society. Male characters in the film are almost dragged around by the decisions taken by female characters. This is most conspicuous in the framing story of *Zumurrud and Nureddin* (Ali Shar in the original *Nights* text (Lundell, 2013:121)). While Zumurrud is the active agent in their relationship, making all the decisions and leading the actions, Nureddin only obeys or follows her (Lundell, 2013:124). By giving a conspicuously feminine character to his adaptation, Pasolini converts the *Nights* text into a vehicle of undermining hegemonic masculine codes of modern society.

### 3.2.3 Fragmented Time

Like he did in *Il Vangelo*, another way Pasolini denies the norms of modern day capitalism in *Il Fiore* is through rejecting the linear understanding of time and history. In this film, Pasolini

does not try to reproduce the setting of the medieval Middle East on the basis of philological reconstruction [...] but through the recording of what he considers the remnants of that past era in contemporary times. In other words, Pasolini appears to look for the survivals and the existing constellations of medieval Arabia and 1970s Yemen, Nepal, India, and Ethiopia, the countries in which he shot the scenes of the film (Trentin, 2013:1033).

This leads to a different understanding of time where past and present coexist. Similar to the case displayed in discussing *Il Vangelo*, within this framework, history itself ceases to be a succession of facts leading to present, and becomes an accumulation of different temporalities where past continues to exist as a constituent of present.

Another way Pasolini adheres to in *Il Fiore* to break the codes of hegemonic understanding of time is employing the narrative method of "tale within tale", which gives a sense of time with multi-trajectories that is alien to the modern understanding of forward progressing, single trajectory, linear time. From a narrative point of view, this very structure is already an instrument of disrupting the time-plan of authority in the *Nights*, for in there the "embedded tales are an eternal deferral of the exercise of power" (Rumble, 1994:218). Embeddedness, insertion of "a thousand and one" tales into one happens through the framing story, that of Shahrazad and Shahryar. What Shahrazad does by telling all these stories is, at first, delaying authority follow its planned course of action, and, for all we know, preventing it in the end; so in a way, she first breaks the time of authority, slows down its pace, and in the end, stops it. Similarly, by keeping the embedded-story structure intact, by placing all the tales he chooses from the *Nights* into one of them, the tale of Zumurrud and Ali Shar (not the framing story of the *Nights*, that of Shahrazad and Shahryar), Pasolini breaks the linear time, fragments it, and presents it in a different way.

Linear-progressive understanding of time is Eurocentric and exclusionary. It renders peoples and communities which are not active agents of the presumed forward progression invisible; leaves them irremediably outside the history it defines.

Cumulative and irreversible linear time was so identified with the time of history itself that peoples who had not succeeded in discovering it were simply peoples without a history, the *Naturvölker*. On the ideological level, the identification of historical time with cumulative and irreversible linear time thus justified Eurocentrism (Pomian, 1979:612).

Pasolini not only breaks this, but also he replaces it with the one that was shaped by those peoples who are left out of history by it. Time in the *Nights* is cyclical, non-progressive, fragmented. If the *Nights* was shaped by collective efforts of countless generations of anonymous subaltern peoples, one can say that this is how they experienced, perceived and interpreted time. Bringing forth their version of time gives them the active agency which was so jealously denied to them by linear progressive history of capitalism.

Fragmented time in the movie also appears to be a resistance against the hegemonic codes of cinema as a literary form, which is developed in, and according to the ideological codes of, capitalism. Cinema, conventionally, is based on a narrative with coherent plot and integrated sense of time, as opposed to embedded stories and fragmented time. A literary opposition to a coherent plot in this sense is the rejection of a clear ending and resolution, thereby leaving ambiguity in the narrative. Tale-in-tale narrative structure, in which the individual tales do not have clear cut boundaries separating them, enables storylines continuing in many tales and crossing each other at times, eluding "repressive elements of textual closure. Pasolini's *Il Fiore* highlights this elusive nature of the lack of a resolution" (Lundell, 2013:122).

### **3.2.4 Spatiality & Visual Contaminations**

Pasolini attacks not only the dominant mode of temporality of capitalism, but spatiality too. Through the execution of the film, he questions the way the space and the spatial dimension are organized and perceived in Western understanding. This is done, primarily, by contaminating scenes with images representing another

way of seeing that is alien to the one developed in the West since the Renaissance. Photorealism and perspective-based way of seeing and visualizing in the West, due to its utility function within the capitalist production process, have become hegemonic worldwide at the expense of other ways of seeing and visualizing. Striving to create a perfect illusion of three dimensional reality on two dimensional surface, this method naturally rejects any aspiration to flatness. Read from the other way around, any trace of flatness can be instrumental in breaking its codes.

Utilizing this principle, Pasolini develops a visual language that eschews the norms of Eurocentric way of seeing things. For this, film-image is infused with a flatness which defies the strict rules of perspective. More specifically, in *Il Fiore* various elements of miniature paintings find their place within the *mise-en-scène*, and also certain distortions of perspective characteristic of these paintings appear in the composition of the scenes:

Not only does Pasolini use Persian and Rajput miniatures as source for costumes, architecture, décor, and so on, all elements found within the *mise en scene*, but he will also reproduce, as much as his medium will allow, certain distortions in spatial composition as found in these miniatures (Rumble, 1994:216).

There are several techniques through which Pasolini achieves this. One is emphasizing the flatness in the images by displaying a strictly frontal (Figure 8) or side view (Figure 9). Another is placing persons or objects in front of large monochrome or mono-pattern backgrounds (Figure 10). Still another is by putting in the focus the naturally flat facades of architectural structures, or destroying the single receding point by placing in the image several structures with different orientations (Figure 11). One other is placing objects in oblique angles to the picture frame, or to one another, in order to increase distortion in shapes (Figure 12). Lastly, of course, he achieves a *miniaturesque* effect by using the same subject matter, objects and places that are commonly found in miniatures. Processions (Figure 13, top; Figure 14), lovemaking scenes (Figure 13, middle; Figure 15), hunting scenes (Figure 13, bottom; Figure 16), pool parties (Figure 17) Pasolini includes in his film are also found in miniature paintings. Not only the subject matter and content, but also techniques mentioned above like oblique angles, large mono-pattern areas, side and frontal views or architectural settings with confused perspective are hallmarks of miniature paintings (Figures 14, 15, 16, 17, 18).



Figure 8. Flatness achieved by strictly frontal view in *Il Fiore*.



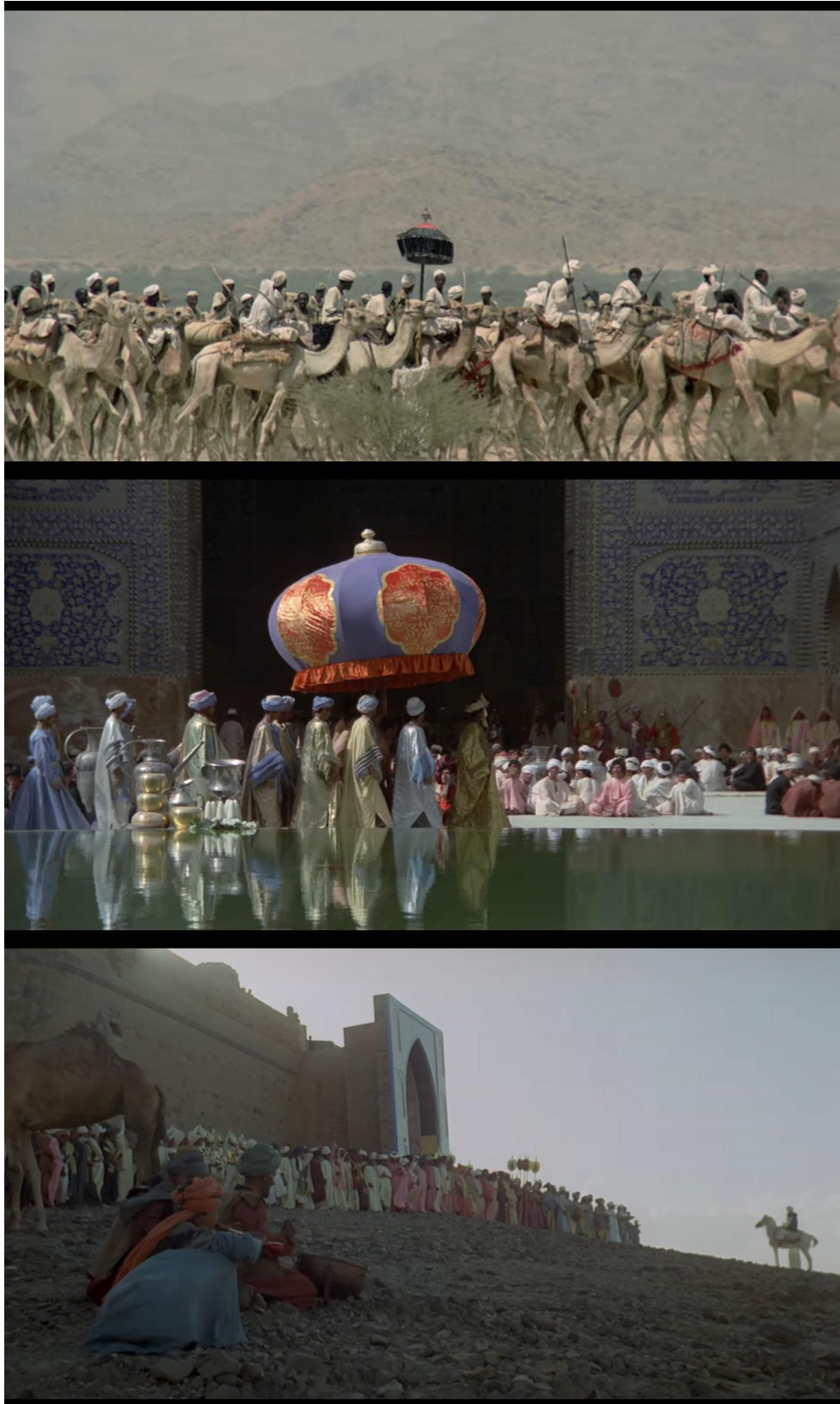


Figure 9. Flatness achieved by strictly side view in *Il Fiore*.



Figure 10. Flatness achieved through mono-pattern backgrounds in *Il Fiore*.

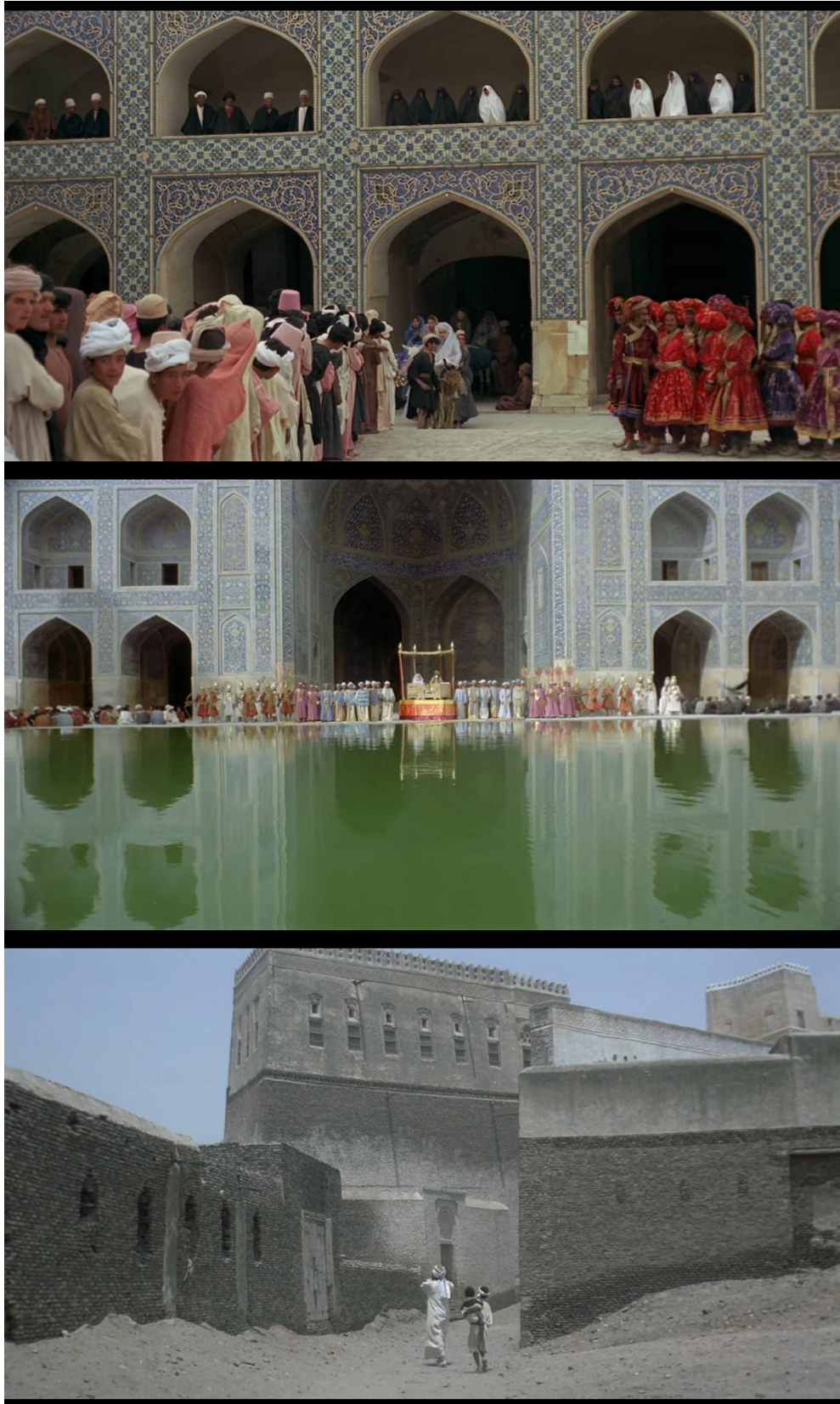


Figure 11. Flatness achieved with facades or multiple orientations in *Il Fiore*.



Figure 12. Flatness achieved by placing objects in oblique angles in *Il Fiore*.



Figure 13. *Miniaturesque* effect through similar subject matter in *Il Fiore*.

Top: procession; middle: lovemaking; bottom: hunting.



Figure 14. *The Marriage Procession of Dara Shikoh*. Mughal painting, 1740s. National Museum, New Delhi, India.



Figure 15. Ottoman Miniature Signed by 'Abdullah Bukhari, Turkey, circa 1740. Private Collection.



Figure 16. Persian style miniature. *Shirin Praying And Khusrau Hunting* from *Khamasa of Nizami*, circa 1720-40. Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, Canada.





Figure 17. Above: Pool scene from *Il Fiore*. Below: Detail from a miniature found in 16<sup>th</sup> century manuscript of Nizami's Khamsa, British Library.



Figure 18. Ottoman Miniature from *Suleymanname*, 16<sup>th</sup> century. Depicting the ascension ceremony of Suleyman I. Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul.

By infusing his frames with a two dimensional quality inherent in miniatures, Pasolini attacks the cultural hegemony of the West from the *visual battlefield* by challenging the dominant forms of seeing and visualizing based on scientific perspective which, arguably, represent the world from Western eyes. These codes also dominate visual logic of cinema due to the use of the camera, which, naturally, is based on a single receding point, one of the foundation blocks of scientific perspective. Pasolini's frames contaminated with another visual logic, on the other hand, create "the presence of a visual subculture that exists as a moment of rupture within the rationalizing hegemony of Western forms of spatial and cultural organization" (Rumble, 1994:223).

This, not only breaks the ideological codes of capitalism that are embedded visually in the logic of perspective, but also summons the spirit of that which has been sidelined by the hegemony of perspective and photorealism in visual arts. Such a depiction that is in peace with the flatness of the surface has been part of the visual traditions of pre-capitalist times. Miniature painting in India, Persia and the Ottoman Empire, manuscript illumination in Ireland, painted scrolls and calligraphic painting in East Asia, decorative painting all around the world, follow aesthetic principles that do not deny the flatness of painting surface. With the advent of Western culture, though, many of these traditions were sidelined by photorealism. Thus, contaminating his scenes visually in such a way, Pasolini makes visible what was pushed to obscurity by the photorealist tendency in arts. Just like the plot of *Il Fiore* is full of references that would remind one of the possibility of another world, this visual approach gives a sense that another way of seeing and visualizing, different from what is dictated by the hegemonic one, is also possible.

### **3.2.5 Reclaiming Epic in Cinema**

In *Trilogia* and his other films based on epics, Pasolini disrupts also the Hollywood-centric way of depicting ancient themes and epic texts. Epitomized most conspicuously in such movies like *Ben-Hur* (1959), Hollywood's approach can be characterized with "pompous trumpet fanfares and shiny marble columns" (Solomon, 1995:116). This is even more so for the case of *Il Fiore* and *Il Vangelo*, since both the *Nights* and the life of Jesus frequently fall in Hollywood's radar.

Pasolini, through the innovative way he re-thinks the ancient epic narratives, “created a world so different from the thoroughly established Hollywood/Cinecitta stereotype of antiquity that filmgoers were forced to rethink the concepts of antiquity and breathe a different air” (Solomon, 1995:116).

In this regard, *Il Fiore* is exceptional among all the other film adaptations of the *Nights*. Indeed, it is among a handful of films that can rightfully be called an adaptation, because most Hollywood films referring somehow to the *Nights* are at best inspired by it (Irwin, 2004:225). Not only the film makers did not have any intention of quoting faithfully the tales in the *Nights*, but also the extra content they had to add in the films were chosen to make them more alluring than more *Nightsesque*. Dialogues, mise-en-scène, plot elements, those things that are not in the *Nights*, but needed in film, were often times not in congruity with the literary and narrative atmosphere of the *Nights*. This being so, many people living especially in the West, who have no interest in reading the original *Nights* text, have their visual idea of the Orient, populated with “harem girls, scimitars, genies, minarets, the cyclops, the prince disguised as a beggar, the basket full of serpents, the rope which turns into a ladder”, (Irwin, 2004:225) shaped by such films as *The Thief of Bagdad* (1924, remakes in 1940, 1952, 1961 and 1978), various versions of Aladdin & The Magic Lamp story (*Aladdin*: 1958, 1992; *Aladdin and His Magic Lamp*: 1967, 1970; *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp*: 1917), *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* (1944, 1954) and *Sindbad the Sailor* (1935, 1947), not counting all the TV series and cartoons. Pasolini is at variance with this way of cinematizing the world of the *Nights*. First of all, not only does he directly quote certain tales from the collection for his plot, but also, as already mentioned, he is faithful to the narrative structure and literary style of the *Nights*.

Secondly, Pasolini is also more faithful to the spirit of the *Nights*, especially in his bold and candid portrayal of sexuality, which, in *Il Fiore*, is as much sincere and life-size, so to speak, as it is in the *Nights*. Unlike other adaptations, he “inadvertently or not, seems to have presented in *Il Fiore* a representation of the *Nights* that mirrors the fundamental characteristics of its oldest Arabic manuscript” (Lundell, 2013:120), which appears to be infused with a similar attitude to sexuality. After circulating orally throughout the East for centuries, the tales in the

*Nights* were first written down in a collection in the thirteenth century. This was copied and re-copied all around the Arabic speaking world countless times, and in the nineteenth century when the printed editions started appearing, there were several manuscripts around (Haddawy, 1990:xv). Those translating it to Western languages not only used different manuscripts as the Arabic original, but also they were quite liberal in their understanding and interpreting the text, leaving aside all the errors they made in translation (Haddawy, 1990:xv). Thus, lacking a standard, the *Nights* always had several versions and translations in circulation. Among all these,

no other manifestation of the *Nights* has solely highlighted the unique sexual nature of the *Nights* apart from its oldest manuscript [...]. Pasolini seems to have been able to trace, even while not using this manuscript, a 'fundamental' identity of the *Nights* that is consistent with that of its earliest incarnation (Lundell, 2013:121).

Pasolini differs from Hollywood in his attitude towards gender relations as well. In Hollywood film, female characters often become an excuse for putting scantily clad female stars in the image to attract and serve voyeuristic tendencies of male audience. All the princesses of Hollywood, Yasmins, Yasminidas, Amaras and Aminas are mostly passive women with no active agency whatsoever, included in the film only as an object of desire and a bone of contention for the good and bad male protagonists. Such a character usually waits in a corner to be wooed and courted, is kidnapped in sacks by villain's evil men whenever the good hearted hero is out minding his business, to be rescued by him later, more often than not being dragged along from her arms in this rescue mission by the fast moving strong hero to whom she becomes a hindrance in her slow, lady like gait, which becomes the reason for their re-capture together, only to be rescued once more by the hero, increasing his potency and power in our eyes. Pasolini's Zumurrud, on the other hand, not only leads the action in sex, business, travel and decision making, but also, at some point, turning the worldly order of power and authority upside down, she becomes the king of a region. Such powerful, bold female characters, leading the action, and moving the plot forward, first and foremost Shahrazad herself, are not at all lacking in medieval Arabic storytelling (Irwin, 2004:228), and thus, with his female characters in the film, Pasolini comes closer to the spirit of the *Nights*.

Thirdly, Pasolini did not use a pompous set designed after the Western, Orientalist visual representations and iconography, but filmed on spot in different parts of the East. In the same vein, as in his other films, he preferred working with local people and amateurs as his actors. Therefore, his characters are not played by the members of Hollywood star system, who, in most cases, portrayed not fully rounded characters, but such types as the adventurous sailor, wise king, cruel pirate, shrewd young boy or pretty princess, who are moved in their actions by the all-powerful Oriental Destiny when the plot comes to a dead-end, and who talk in "Oriental speak", "a stately, solemn language, laden with proverbs and invocations of Destiny", pronounced in a way the gutturalness of which is in direct proportion to the perversity, wickedness and malignancy of the character speaking it (Irwin, 2004:225). Instead, Pasolini's actors are the real people living in those very places in the present time. The characters they play are not simple types, but multi-dimensional personalities demonstrating change, conflict and maturation.

The last, but not the least, Pasolini, by establishing a critical attitude, comes closer to the *Nights*, which, as mentioned in the discussion on *Layali*, was a collection of stories that is not only entertaining but also critical at the same time. The *Nights* mocks power relations, displays human condition, and comments on the shortcomings of human psyche. Hollywood portrayal of the *Nights*, on the other hand, is mostly for entertainment, it usually targets juvenile audiences, and rather than critiquing, or at least revealing, the human condition, uses it to create catharsis and false-satisfaction. With all this, it creates, re-creates and re-cycles Orientalist stereotypes. Pasolini though, more true to the social and historical literary function of the *Nights*, challenges the audience, for instance, when he "reminds them of their own voyeurism" (Irwin, 2004:227), turns the sexual relationships upside down, and mocks the power hierarchy. Thus, he, in a way, comes to terms with the Orientalist depiction of the ancient text he refers to.

### **3.3 Virtuous Unfaithfulness**

From a narrative point of view, in *Il Fiore*, Pasolini is not as fully faithful to the narratives of the individual tales he chooses from the *Nights* as he is faithful to Matthew's Gospel in *Il Vangelo*. After all, what he needs now is not as much the

truth value in them as their spirit, which is best portrayed in an exaggerated, fairy-tale-like manner. While people react to the Gospel by letting themselves believe in the absolute truth of its miracles, they react to fairy tales by letting themselves being seduced by the miraculousness of the everyday in their stories. Thus, Pasolini greets his audience to the worlds he creates through the doors that they are most used to. Audience enters the world of Jesus in the tone and manner of the Gospel, in a self-assured way, to believe in its reality, in a way to think that if all that actually happened, if Jesus of Nazareth really healed the lepers, walked on a lake and turned water into wine about two thousand years ago in the environs of Galilee, it must have happened just like it happens in the film, in such a barren countryside, in such a solemn, quotidian way as is common among the poor folk of the Mediterranean basin. Audience is welcomed into the world of fairy tales of the ancient folklore from another door to which they are as much accustomed to: the door of exaggeration, color, and sumptuousness.

On the other hand, there are certain disconcerting aspects of the films which are too conspicuous to dismiss or to overlook simply as byproducts of filmmaking process. Ambiguity, loose ends and inconclusive threads defying catharsis seem to be the hallmarks of Pasolini's art. This, on his side, is a deliberate effort, since, one of the his main problems with contemporary society is consumerism, and "a poetic cinema" with "polysemic films that are meant to resist easy consumption" can be "an instrument of resistance against the commodification of culture" (Bondavalli, 2010:409). In this regard, for instance, despite the claim to being as true a portrayal of the life and deeds of Jesus Christ, *Il Vangelo* is full of faces which are conspicuously Italian, even Sicilian (Figures 1, 3). Of course there is no way to find the same exact faces who would have followed Jesus of Nazareth around two thousand years ago, but it is as much nonobligatory to make them look so conspicuously Sicilian. Similarly, Pasolini sees no reason to hide that the landscape in the film is that of Southern Italy, where it was shot. Not all the elements in the mise-en-scène strive for a truth-effect either. Some of the costumes, for instance, like the costumes of the Roman soldiers, and some objects, do not make much sense, may even appear anachronistic. Similarly, in the films of *Trilogia*, not all the plot elements are logically closed; lots of loose ends are left. In all these films, acting by non-professionals look somewhat clumsy and rough. A certain level of

ambiguity is sustained throughout the films, as Bondavalli points out for another film of Pasolini, "by a variety of strategies including elliptical narration, antinaturalistic performance, and an alternate montage that opens up several interpretive possibilities" (Bondavalli, 2010:415).

All these contradictions, ambiguities and loose ends create a dialogue between different and sometimes contradictory aspects of the films. In *Il Vangelo*, the real conspicuously Sicilian landscape must establish a dialogue with the imagined-filmic landscape of Judea; the real conspicuously Sicilian faces of the actors must come to terms with imaginary-filmic Hebrewness of the characters. In *Il Fiore*, disparate locations used in the film from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Yemen and Iran to India and Nepal (Bachmann, 1973:25), should all talk to one another to create a unified meaning. Indeed, this is a major vehicle of the aforementioned anti-capitalist stance of the films discussed here. As mentioned before, what is emphasized in these films after all is nothing but a trait of human beings which transcends all time and space. That each human carries a God inside, that wholesome and happy lives are possible outside the strictures of any political system, are statements whose validity is free of any time or space. What better way, then, to put together all time and all space possible for the duration of a film, in order to underline this.

### **3.4 Free Indirect Discourse**

Indeed, such incongruities can be thought of as the instruments of establishing what Pasolini, as a practicing film theorist and a theorizing film-maker, calls *free indirect discourse*. Articulated further by Deleuze later as the "method of between" (Baker, 2003:62), this can be understood as an expressive dialogue *between* different points of filmic experience within the film. The most straight forward method of applying free indirect discourse is to narrate the story from the point of view of one of the characters in it, or, technically speaking, to utilize *point of view shot*. In this case the contamination and dialogue occur *between* the languages of the character *and* the author. This requires author to give up his/her own class position, and assume the position of another whose life experiences and class identity are different. Thus, each is contaminated, in a way enriched, by the other, thereby making the free indirect discourse an expressive mode. In this sense, for



instance, "free indirect discourse must bear the inscription of the socio-economic difference between speakers in their language and consciousness" (Schwartz, 2005:117).

This is further strengthened by the dialogue between the director and spectator that occurs upon the act of watching the film. In Pasolini's case, this is even more emphasized, since, for him, making a film is basically a way to convey to the spectator whatever he sees from his mind's eye. His filming practice attests to this too. Film, for him, is first and foremost a mental creation. "Because the shots seem to be there, ready, in his head, and putting them on celluloid is just a necessary, technical obstacle between his imagination and the viewer" (Bachmann, 1973:26). That is perhaps why he seems to be trying to do everything about the film himself, to the extent that "if he could make the film entirely alone, Pasolini would do it" (Bachmann, 1973:26). To achieve a maximum resemblance between his mental image and the image on the screen, he tries to arrange, set and do everything by himself. He does not want any intermediaries between himself and the viewer. He wants the image that comes to being in viewer's mind to be as close to the image in his own mind as possible. He wants no obstructions in the communication and the dialogue he establishes with the viewer.

Presuming, by default, the existence of a multiplicity of gazes and voices, free indirect discourse is already quite instrumental in undermining capitalist sentimentality, which, either, as manifested in its obsession of industrial standardization, repudiates multiplicity for the sake of homogeneity in its classical-modernist form, or deceitfully celebrates it to the point of saturation where multiplicity loses its entire meaning in its neo- or post-modern form. "Free" in its name refers to this multiplicity, which implicitly assumes the existence of endless possibilities paving the way to a discourse of freedom, which would not have been possible in the case of an absolute unity based on exclusionary singularism. "Indirect", on the other hand, tells that all the separate parts, rather than expressing themselves "directly" as they are, on their own, they do so "indirectly" through each other, by a mutual exchange. Thus, the filmic reality of Jesus speaks to modern spectator through the actual reality of Mediterranean faces; thus the

world of the *Nights* becomes universally operative by being articulated through the environs of very distant locations seen within the same film.

Free indirect discourse is not created only through such plot elements though. Indeed, it is more effectively achieved by visual tools. Being a cinema film, *Il Fiore* is inevitably part of the pictorial, photorealist tradition of the West, but as mentioned already, it is contaminated with elements of different visual traditions. Thus the aforementioned two dimensional and non-perspective contaminations in the scenes in *Il Fiore* operate to this very end as a vehicle of free indirect discourse. In this way, Pasolini, by mediating *between* naturally imperative photorealism of cinema *and* flatness of other traditions, creates a new meaning from old ways of seeing and visualizing. Through this dialogue he revitalizes a new expressive potential in both of them.

He revitalizes not only the ancient painting styles, but by narrating old tales, he also "reaches the ancient shore of storytelling, folklore, and myth" (Cassarino, 1992). This must be a reason why he uses the Italian verb *revivere*, to animate, in conjunction with the discussions on free indirect speech (Baker, 2003:68). In addition, ontologically a cinema film is always an act of re-animating frozen images, stored as traces on photochemical film or as digital data, to recreate something that was once naturally animated. Thus, Pasolini's idea of free indirect speech based on the act of *revivere* is consistent with how the medium works as well.

### **3.5 Poetry of Images**

Such bringing together different images to create a new connotative meaning which is not inherent in any of them reminds one of what poets do with the words. Indeed poetry, compared to the other forms of written text, is quite a visual form, especially due to the use of metaphors, which function through creating what is technically called an "image" or "imagery". Although "image" in poetry does not have to be visual, it is in no way coincidence that the technique and its constitutive element are called just that. After all, arguably, poetry functions through activating memories and senses, and not only is sight the primary sense through which

humans interact with the world, but also memory, in its final form, is a collection of images embedded in the mind which can be recalled at will.

Thus, if poetry of words already functions primarily through visual means, the poetry of images, if there ever is such a thing, will be at advantage in igniting senses and touching memory in a more intimate, immediate, and direct way. Through such visual poetry, it is possible to have images "speak beyond their visual signs and evoke abstract connotations on a subjective level. Before it expresses itself in words, in fact, memory evokes images, facts, colors, lights, faces, especially when interconnected with feelings" (Carlorosi, 2009:254). Thus, *visual poetry* will communicate more directly to the memory and human subjectivity. Similarly, Pasolini also states that "the processes of dream and memory, both involuntary and, above all, voluntary, are the primordial outlines of a film language" (quoted in Bruno, 1991:33).

It is no coincidence, then, that Pasolini claims his cinema to be a *Cinema of Poetry*, and defines the singular expressive image, the "*im-sign*" (*imsegno* in Italian) as the basic building block of this, and attributes the creative power in it to a collision between the images (Bruno, 1991:33). This indeed makes his films an integral part of his vast intellectual production, since not only is he "perhaps the most important theorist of the idea that cinema can stretch beyond the apparent limits of the objectivity of things", but also, regardless of the medium he works in, he is first and foremost a poet. In fact, as a poet working with words he has a similar attitude too, especially in terms of running after what is long lost. Most conspicuous manifestation of this are the poems he wrote in the local dialect of his native region Friuli. Despite he knew there would not be many people to read and understand these poems, he still wanted to bring out the music and rhythm in the language. His poems are also characterized by a similar attention on the "primordial virtues of a simpler world", and strive for the "rejuvenation of certain traditional stylistic modes" (Sillanpoa, 1981:124).

### 3.6 Essential Realism and Utopic Nostalgia

Compared with a realistic approach trying to achieve a mimesis of the visible, sensible aspect of the world, such a poetic and expressive approach as Pasolini proclaims emphasizes the chaotic, multifaceted, ambiguous nature of reality, coming close to "the infinite, chaotic world of memory and dreams, and [...] reveal[s] an intimate form of communication with the self and between the author and the viewers" (Carlorosi, 2009:256). This, again becomes instrumental in breaking the hegemonic codes of capitalism which functions by putting a highly rationalized, standardized and clear-cut straight jacket on an irrational, multifaceted and vague reality. After all, some of the most essential things in life as "the miracle of birth, the madness of sexual passion, the mystery of death" (Dunghe, 2012:583) are all out of the realm of comprehension, thus no matter how much capitalism tries, irrational is always a part of life, and a cinema of poetry, by giving free rein to this suppressed reality of life, and by bringing "to light what official history suppresses" (Trentin, 2013:1031) is by its very nature a politically revolutionary art form.

Part of this is due to its opening the way to subjectivity, since, through free indirect discourse, it is possible to add a dialogical subjectivity to the technically "objective" lens of the camera, and expand the expressive means of cinematic language, by, as confirmed by both Deleuze and Pasolini, "presenting infinite meanings and possibilities" and "reveal[ing] 'the real' beyond the surface" (Carlorosi, 2009:260). This idea of infinite possibilities, by expanding the area on which artistic creativity can operate turns such films into works of poetry, since, after all, as affirmed by the Greek root of the word, *poeios*, which means "to create", "to make", the driving force behind poetry is creativity. Here, insofar as the act of recreating (*revivere*) gives a new cinematic life to what has been destroyed long ago in an effort to make people believe its reality in a past time, it becomes a moment of, what can be called, *utopic nostalgia*.

The feeling of nostalgia is characterized by a striving towards the past, by an aspiration to what has already passed, and is now long gone. From the point of view of a linear understanding of time in which the history moves forward by

leaving what is outdated utterly behind, nostalgia can be seen as a reactionary moment of looking backwards. However, as put forward and elaborated by philosophers like Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), if time is understood in a non-linear fashion, in a way in which it unfolds unto itself, "in which the present, rather than being visualized as a point in a line, should be looked at as a topological hub in which various temporalities coexist" (Trentin, 2013:1030), then inevitably, nothing is forever left behind, everything that has happened in the past remains in the current as residual sediments in its crusts, thus, "past appears always to shed its light on the present" (Trentin, 2013:1035), everything past is also current, and lives on in one way or the other within the current reality. Seen from this angle, and to the extent that they contain elements which are at odds with the concurrent hegemonic way of life, elements which can be called the *revolutionary kernels of the bygone*, ways and styles of life from earlier times, can also serve as an inspiration, even as a guideline, in developing an oppositional political agenda of dissent.

This, by combining a *forward look to past* with a *backward look to future*, is what Pasolini achieves in his films discussed here. By "recreating an ancient text in" cinema, first, he gives an opportunity to "viewers to enter into discourse with the experience of another, more archaic era —perhaps even to re-experience what once might have been seen as an encounter with the sacred" (Dunghe, 2012:582). Second, through the subversive potential of the act of remembering, Pasolini creates a case to question the very reason why certain things were forgotten or excluded from human story. After all,

a return of the excluded clearly offers far more than a series of additions to fill in the gaps in the already established historical mosaic. The forgotten do not complete the picture; rather they query the frame, the pattern, the construction (Chambers, 2008:59).

Thus, displaying past ways and styles of life, by translating the naturally non-capitalistic elements in them into deliberately anti-capitalist themes, is the departing point of the *utopic nostalgia* in Pasolini's films.

For Pasolini, such nostalgia is implicitly political, since

Attacking the leveling of conflicts and the superficial unified picture resulting from the 'industrial puritanism' of consumer society, he called

attention to regional cultures and historical peculiarities. Rather than a conservative call for traditional values, this interest in geographical and historical specificity can today be understood, in the context of postmodernism, as the denunciation of the end of history in the postmodern era (Bruno, 1991:39).

And this seemed to him a better and viable way to voice dissent than the language adopted by opposition movements of his day, which, he thought, was obsolete and inconsequential (Bondavalli, 2010:409). Indeed, for Pasolini, the political vision embodied in the poetry of such a *utopic nostalgia* seems arguably the only meaningful form of cultural and intellectual resistance against capitalism, because not only such a resistance “can reinstate some of the complexity and ambiguity that prevent cultural products from becoming instant commodities” (Bondavalli, 2010:409), but also

In Pasolini’s view, the materialistic transformation of Italian society could not be criticized with the same rational means that consumer power employed to control it: exact, transparent, ‘technological’ language disseminating a sense of freedom, security and happiness that only masks subtler forms of dominance. [...] Pasolini sees poetry as the only weapon of resistance to the advance of neocapitalism (Bondavalli, 2010:409).

In an essay, Pasolini poetically described (Casarino 1992:30) the loss of archaic, pre-industrial bliss through the image of the “disappearance of the fireflies”. His cinema of poetry intends to show people on the screen the charming play of lights fireflies used to create in the fields before fields were turned into polluted industrial towns. How can a person who once experiences this charming, blissful moment ever be the same again?

## CHAPTER 4

### IDEOLOGY OF RESISTANCE IN THE ANCIENT

*How is it possible to consider the present, and quite specific present, with a mode of thought elaborated for a past which is often remote and superseded?*

—Antonio Gramsci

*All previous great culture is pre-appearance of something achieved, in so far as it could still be built up in images and thoughts on the panoramic heights of time, and thus not only in and for its time.*

—Ernst Bloch

The ways Mahfouz and Pasolini employ ancient texts in their works are quite similar, and significantly different at the same time. To begin with, both *auteurs* add their own personal touch to the anonymous ancient texts to make their own works more individual and modern. It is possible to say that both depart from a sense of discontent with the modern life and the current state of things. However, while Mahfouz uses the ancient texts as a blueprint, or a foundation, for his own narrative in order to expose historicity of the shortcomings of present age, Pasolini re-creates ancient texts in a new medium not only to expose but also to intervene in the normative codes of current world. Mahfouz tries to show the historical pattern which has led to the present, while Pasolini tries to find a way out of the present without making any references to the possible past reasons of current misery. They both agree, on the other hand, that the current state of things is not tolerable, and a profound change is necessary. They also have a common point of adhering to same ancient texts in their modern works. What value, then, is there in

those ancient texts, and in their employment in modern works, for creating new meanings relevant to present day, that Mahfouz and Pasolini, two different personalities with different backgrounds from the opposite sides of Mediterranean, were attracted to them?

#### **4.1 Mahfouz: Exposing the Invisible**

It is possible to say that Mahfouz tries to take the first step to changing the world by understanding how things turned out the way they are. He narrates the stories of failed past attempts directed against the oppressive social systems, and makes visible what cannot be seen in any of these individual epochs: the vicious cycle around which they all revolve. Naturally, the first step to get out of this cycle is to be aware of it. In this respect, it would be possible to say that *Awlad* and *Layali* are complementary to each other. In *Awlad*, emphasis is on the periods of revolution. Stories, works and deeds of each of the revolutionary prophets are narrated in great length. Then, at the beginning of each new section, the narrative resumes from a time when everything that was build up in the previous revolution has degenerated, and life regressed back to what it was before; it became even worse than its previous state.

Thus, for instance, the first sentence of Qassem's (corresponding to Mohammad) section is: "almost nothing changed in the alley" (Mahfouz, 1959:253). However, the transition period between Rifaa's (corresponding to Jesus) and Qassem's, and events leading to this total degeneration, which results in a complete negation of the previous revolution, are not detailed except for some references made in passing. On the other hand, in *Layali*, there are no such breaking points or upheavals as the revolutions of *Awlad*, and reader has a chance to see the mechanism of coercive government at work, especially its infinite potential to turn everything it touches into one of its parts, including all the changes made on it, either small ones like new appointments to key administrative positions, or large ones like revolutions. Broadly speaking, *Awlad* tells how not to cope with oppressive state by displaying mistakes made in the past attempts, whereas *Layali* lays out how these mistakes led to total absorption of these attempts into the state mechanism.



It is safe to assume that the people mentioned at the end of *Awlad*, Arafa's brother and the youth following him, have seen enough, have heard enough, have enough data now to be finally aware of what is not readily available to them, but is apparent only when they contemplate the entire history of their *hara*. After so many wasted generations and rebellions, they should know that instead of attacking a certain *nazir* of their own time, or fighting with certain members of *futuwwat* of their own time, they need to establish their struggle against the very existence of the system that necessitates, produces, and is carried out by, *nazirs* and the *futuwwat*. And this time they should do this by applying to the principles of science instead of waiting for the intervention of a long forgotten ancestor. In this novel, Mahfouz seems to be displaying the faults in the previous attempts to overthrow oppressive society, so that these faults are not repeated again. "The importance of force, the glorification of violence establish the principle that the strong rule over the weak" (Vatikiotis, 1971:175). Thus, fighting with the concurrent representative of the *nazirs* or members of *futuwwat* means nothing by itself, since in the end, as long as the system portrayed in *Layali*, which creates the *nazirs* and the *futuwwat*, and the basic principle of which is the glorification of any kind of power, regardless whether its source is brute force, or economic means, or anything that leads to inequality, stays intact, new people will appear as new *nazirs*, and to fill the ranks of the *futuwwat*. Such a fight is meaningful only to the extent that it is part of a larger struggle to break the vicious cycle.

The fact that in *Awlad* Mahfouz concentrates more on the failed attempts and not on how these attempts in the end turn into a total negation of themselves, might as well be the reason why he adhered to the narratives of Abrahamic religions. As mentioned before, the novel, in its entirety, tells the story of oppressive society. The representatives of this oppression in the novel, unlike the legendary rebellion leaders, have no specific counterparts in Abrahamic religious history. Indeed, rather than appearing like legendary figures, they are very realistically portrayed: typical bullies who strive for power, grasp it, and fight further to keep and enlarge it in an endless Machiavellian Battle. Their side of the story is not "about abstractions, but about everyday realities" (Abu-Haidar, 1985:120).

Employing ancient narratives for telling the stories of rebellions against oppression and its representatives, gives the latter a historical depth, and emphasizes its perhaps most important traits: its persistence and its power to incorporate its opponents. Ancient narratives become instrumental especially in detailing these traits. Jabal, just like Moses, issues a set of laws for people to follow, but soon these very laws degenerate into a tool of the oppression. Rifaa, like Jesus in the New Testament, preaches solidarity and compassion, but soon enough people's greed for power turns his teachings into the ideology of oppression, just like Christianity turned into the official religion of Rome, in a way that it did not transform Rome but rather was conquered by it. Qassem, like Mohammad, puts forward his claim by establishing self-governance to rival the government of oppression, but his faction in the end melts into the oppressive administration it rivaled.

Basically, *in Awlad*, Mahfouz lays out both the principles and the weaknesses of each of the revolutionary attempts, and the most important weakness they have in common is that they direct their efforts to conquering the establishment instead of establishing solid bonds between people, and reinstating a community based on solidarity. After all, if solid bonds between humans could be established, and the community emerged; if inflictions such as private-exclusive property obfuscating community's own vision of itself dispersed, then such institutions as coercive bureaucratic state and oppressive organized religion would gradually become obsolete and irrelevant, be externalized, marginalized and finally, if there is ever a total communal unity and coherence, would disappear. Indeed, this must have always been an intuitive knowledge of humans, because almost all past attempts to revolutionize life were directed against the organized religion and state, albeit, more often than not, interpreted in a confusion of causality: they targeted the symptoms, and missed the root cause. With an expectation that egalitarian and just human society would be restored once state or church was conquered or destroyed, efforts were directed at such conquest or destruction instead of restoration of community and solidarity; hence almost all these attempts fully or partially resulted in failure. Mahfouz, in *Awlad*, recounts all such attempts which are part of Biblical-Qur'anic tradition, whereas in *Layali*, he explores more in depth

the mechanism of the vicious cycle, its connection to the organized state and religion.

For this reason, what Mahfouz does in his novels is to expose the vicious cycle, the state mechanism, and the weaknesses of revolts. He never presents any clear cut resolutions or answers. What he does is simply making readers ask questions about the nature of life, belief, happiness, misery and evil (Somekh, 1971:50). Indeed, exposing seems to be one his main concerns in his other works too. Writing about some of his short stories, and comparing them to Kafka's work, Myers says that "In general, Kafka censures totalitarianism, and Mahfuz exposes tyranny. The tyranny in Mahfuz's work refers to the abuses of office which, upon becoming institutionalized, can result in a reign of terror" (Myers, 1986:92). Because of this, in *Awlad*, he keeps the narratives of each of the tales he borrows from the ancient lore, and is content only by *allegorically projecting* them onto his fictional *hara* in Cairo, without changing the essentials in the storyline except for removing the mystification in the original. What he tells in succession are the tales of the prophets, but what he wants to emphasize is not as much what happens in each of the tales as something that exceeds and circumvents all of them. Similarly, in *Layali*, he is loyal to the form and content of the original text of the *Nights*, and the modifications he does serve as a method of establishing this sequel as an allegory, or in other words, a *projection* onto the present time.

Mahfouz's choice of utilizing ancient texts in *Awlad* and *Layali* can be seen, among other things, also, as a synthesis in his own literary career. His early novels which were historical fictions with narratives taking place in pharaonic Egypt can be considered as the works of his first phase (*Khufu's Wisdom*, 1939; *Rhadopis of Nubia*, 1943; *Thebes at War*, 1944). This is followed by what is referred to as his realist period, narrating the tales of the people he knew best, the people of Cairo, especially civil servants like him, and their families, in their typically Cairene neighborhoods, from which most of these novels derive their names (*Khan al-Khalili*, 1945; *Midaq Alley*, 1947; *Cairo Trilogy: Palace Walk*, 1956; *Palace of Desire*, 1957; *Sugar Street*, 1957). In both these periods, though, despite the remoteness in time of the settings, his main concern was contemporary Egypt. His historical fictions narrating the tales of people some thousands years ago had

references to make them resonate with modern day Egypt (Athsan, 2007:115; Booth, 1989:15), and his exploration of ancient Egyptian "history allowed him to find there aspects of his own time, refracted and distilled to suit rather complex purposes of his own" (Said, 2001), although some claim that Mahfouz's aim in writing these was not "to understand the contemporary, still less was it to criticize it in a covert fashion" but "to seek the identity of his own country in the space-time of his existence and the sphere of his Self" (Hallengren, 2004:80). Still, though, it can be said that understanding and retelling "the workings of society with its problems, struggles and uncertainties" (Athsan, 2007:113) was his primary goal in his literary endeavor, and after trying historical and realist fiction, he certainly must have found something in the ancient texts that made them convenient for him to achieve this goal.

#### **4.2 Pasolini: Remembering the Future**

Differently from Mahfouz, Pasolini's is an attempt to put forward an alternative, and he finds that alternative in the past. He is not happy with the modern world and capitalism, a system which is strikingly successful in making people believe in its inevitability and uniqueness. Thus what Pasolini wants to do is to show people that the current system is neither inevitable nor without alternative, so that they can envision the possibility of another kind of world. The method Pasolini chooses to do this is based on reminding people of another time when this system did not exist. He wants to show that different ways of doing, feeling and seeing things, other ways of interpreting the concept of time, and another kind of life were once a reality.

In both of the ancient texts used in his works analyzed here, Matthew's *Gospel* and the *Nights*, there is already a certain essence which he can employ for this end, and his approach in both is to bring out that essence as clearly and strikingly as possible by adhering to the potential of visual imagery and cinematic language. Thus, he seems to be saying, that life was once full of color, vivacity and joy, just like he portrays in *Il Fiore* the lives of people populating the tales from the *Nights*. Thus, as in *Il Vangelo*, even a lofty figure as Jesus, even when he was in his most exceptional, like when he performed miracles, can be a humble man just like any

other. Consequently, life can be colorful, vivid and joyful again as it is depicted in *Il Fiore*, and every single human being in their full humility, has infinite potential to change the world, like Jesus in *Il Vangelo*.

However, in this, Pasolini faces the danger of making what he puts on the screen exotic and irrelevant. In order to lead people to believing that what they see is not only relics of a long lost age but also a current alternative to the existing system, he has to re-create the ancient text with a new, very individual, and modern outlook. Cinematic language, the medium he uses, is helpful in this regard, but, as discussed above, his choices, and the way he structures the scenes and frames of his films, also serve this purpose.

### **4.3 Adaptation vs Inspiration**

In this regard, compared to Mahfouz's, Pasolini's is more of an *adaptation*, not only because he recreates the ancient text in another medium, but also, and primarily, because he does this with a very specific point of view and in a form particularly designed to this end. Both of his adaptations analyzed here work through bringing out a certain essence implicit in the original texts. Mahfouz's work is very individual too, but his personal point of view comes to the fore not in how he re-narrates all the things he borrows from the ancient texts, but in how he puts them together to show something that goes beyond the scope and universe of any of them. Thus, for instance, in *Il Fiore*, there is no mention of the story of Shahrazad and Shahryar; the tales chosen from the *Nights* are suited to displaying the wealth and colorfulness of life among common, underprivileged people, including the tale of Zumurrud and Ali Shar, which is chosen as the framing story in the film. On the other hand, *Layali* establishes itself on top of that framing story, because this story presents a fertile narrative to establish a political allegory. Pasolini does not make substantial alterations in the narrative of the tales he chooses, and embeds his commentary instead in how he depicts them, while Mahfouz is inspired by and borrows from the ancient texts, and transforms what he borrows by adding his personal touch in how he projects them onto his fictional world, in *Awlad* to a *hara* in Cairo, and in *Layali*, first to the fictional world of the *Nights* itself at the literal level, and from there to the modern day Egypt at the allegorical level.

Thus, while *Il Vangelo* is content following the steps of Matthew's Jesus as plainly as possible, in Rifaa, counterpart of Jesus in *Awlad*, for instance, Mahfouz creates a whole different person with a strong resemblance to Jesus. In Rifaa's story, it is possible to find parallel events to all the important turning points of Jesus' life, from Mary and Joseph's escape to Egypt, to last supper and crucifixion, but each is modified in its own way to fit into the fictional world of the *hara*. Rifaa, for instance, learns healing the sick from a healer in the neighborhood, while Jesus does it as a vehicle of divine mercy. Both Rifaa in *Awlad* and Jesus in *Il Vangelo* are in a way demystified, but the former through *rationalization*, the latter more through what can be called *naturalization*. Still, it is possible to say that there are also similarities between the way Jesus is portrayed in *Il Vangelo* and the way Rifaa is characterized in *Awlad*. They are both prophets of love and compassion; they are both the poor leaders of the poor; they are both revolutionaries. This trait of Jesus is emphasized in *Il Vangelo* as a way of bringing out the revolutionary essence in the Gospel. On the other hand, Rifaa's compassion is placed in juxtaposition to Gabal's (Moses' counterpart) wrath in order to delineate a different method of revolution, which is based on love as opposed to force.

#### **4.4 Allegory as a Safety Net**

In Mahfouz's case, it can be said that using ancient texts stems from a need that is a direct result of the very social and political situation he writes about. There never was a total freedom of speech and thought in Egypt in his lifetime. As an author trying to reflect upon, and write about, society and its ailments without attracting undue and unwanted attention, conveying his ideas through allegory and parables, veiled in symbolism, might have appeared as a plausible way. He has other works which, while not directly commenting on the current political situation, are more immediately about it, especially in terms of the time and setting of the plot. Still, though, even in these, political commentary is conveyed in an indirect way through narrative and characters. Thus, his "use of allegory undoubtedly results in part from limitations on the freedom of expression which the author feels" (Milson, 1972:325).

As it appears, Mahfouz did not like any head-to-head confrontation with the authorities, religious or political. Nor did he want to stir any controversy. *Awlad* could not be published in book form in Egypt in his life time, and there are no indications that he ever intended to fight for it. In an interview made before 1989 he says that *Awlad*

was the first novel I published in a newspaper. This was bad luck; none of my previous novels contained anything controversial, or even if they did, they were published in book form, and readers of books were far less numerous than those who read newspapers (quoted in Booth, 1989:15).

Any other author in a similar case would have been happy to reach out to a larger reader base than what s/he previously enjoyed. Moreover, controversy about a work of literature might as well mean that it stirred something, and can be taken as a sign of success. Still, for Mahfouz, who spent long years as a civil servant, such direct head-on confrontation and heated controversy are things to be avoided. After all, he is well aware that an author with openly admitted political allegiances “might wake up in the morning and find himself in prison” (Booth,1990:25). On the other hand, in the two of his works discussed here, as well as in others, he directs unyielding criticism to both authorities and the moral codes of society. Thus, it can be said that he puts up his fight through his works, but at the same time he tries to avoid being explicit. In a way, his literary output is his own way of dealing with authority, his tactic in the sense De Certeau uses the term, to go around the oppression to make it obsolete, without openly confronting it. Invoking the expression De Certeau coins, his art, literature, for him, is also an “art of making do with” the authority and oppression (De Certeau, 1984:xix). Clearly, ancient narratives are quite suitable for the purpose, and Mahfouz using them is like Jesus giving messages through parables to avoid direct confrontation with Roman officials and Judean clergy.

Pasolini was no less under pressure despite being from Italy, that other side of Mediterranean which allegedly was more in peace with European values and liberties. After being censored by the state, and receiving hostile reactions for his film *La Ricotta* (1962), a film centered around a film set where a movie about the passion of Christ was being shot, he might have had a “need to develop artistic strategies to circumvent government censorship and cultural sidelining” (Mugnai, 2014:441). *Il Vangelo*, his very next film, hits the target home by presenting a

harsh critique of both the state and the religious institutions through a narrative which no authority embracing the Catholic faith, neither the conservative state, nor the church, can oppose. This might be a reason why he follows the scripture word by word especially in the dialogues.

In this regard, just like Mahfouz's novels, *Il Vangelo* can also be read as a more direct allegory of the actual political events, with Jesus in the film representing the revolutionaries of modern day Italy, and his derelict followers representing the poor Italian people muted by poverty, ignored or oppressed by the state, and forced to abandon their traditional ways of life by capitalism. Completing the picture would be the Romans in the film standing for the Italian state, and Jewish clergy standing for the Catholic Church (Mugnai, 2014:443). When taken as being directed at the state and the church, words of an unrelenting, stern, and pugnacious Jesus in the film, could become a very formidable critique.

#### **4.5 Affinity & Distance**

The scope the ancient texts present and provide through the affinity factor seems to be important in making them valuable sources of inspiration for modern works. Pharaonic Egypt of Mahfouz's early novels, for instance, is too far away from, and too strange to anything of, modern day Egypt. It is nowhere in people's life except for in monuments which are long since out of their original context. On the other hand, modern day Egypt of his realist phase is too close, too here and now, to be able to put a critical distance. Strong and direct affinity readers might have with all the characters and events in these realist novels might at times be a barrier in relating the wider perspective they aim to portray of the society. In a way, the former is too far away to see clearly, the latter is too close to see in perspective. Ancient texts, though, are neither too far, nor too close. They are close enough in their *timelessness*; they are far enough in their *peculiarity*.

Both the Biblical-Qur'anic accounts and the *Nights* are living entities; not only do the people have an affinity with them, making them more familiar than Pharaonic Egypt can ever be, but also they are still part of and within daily life; they are still alive, still changing and evolving. Indeed, their being used in modern works, just



as Mahfouz and Pasolini do, is part of this very evolution, since, as Al Musawi says for Mahfouz, this "broadens the view of tradition and heritage as process rather than as immutable texts"(Al Musawi, 2003:110). Myrsiades, for instance, in an analysis of how Pasolini uses ancient myths in his work, goes so far as to say that "the common man of Sophocles' time is essentially no different from the worker in present-day Italy, if sameness is measured not in material goods or external appearance, but in feelings, emotions, desires, the struggle of daily living" (Myrsiades, 1978:214). A little bit far-fetched and essentialist perhaps, but if the truth value in this argument is accepted with certain reservations, then, such mythical texts, which were a solid reality for the people of Sophocles' time, still have some validity for, and power to speak to, the common person in the present era as well.

The affinity his readers in Arabic had with these texts might have been important for Mahfouz from yet another perspective, for he seems to have a concern of having a foot in Islamic-Arabic culture. He appears to be upholding such values of the West as the freedom of expression, social justice and scientific thought, but he adds that these are in no way strange to the Islamic culture, and so, they do not distance him from his own heritage (Booth, 1990:22). Thus, he feels a need to justify adopting Western values with their being potentially inherent in Islamic-Egyptian culture too.

No matter how much people are familiar with them, at the same time, what is in the ancient texts, especially in detail, is quite different from all the actualities of contemporary life. It is very easy for present day reader to establish a distance with them, and be able to act as an outsider, which, supposedly, gives a better vantage point to see from a wider angle. As a result, characters and events in the ancient texts, although not lending themselves to a direct translation into modernity, can be easily projected onto it, giving the interpretation of modernity perspective and depth.

The timing of *Awlad* and *Layali*, for instance, is somewhat telling in this regard as well. *Awlad* came right after Mahfouz's so called realist period. Similarly, from 1973 till 1983 he published some novels (*Love Under the Rain*, 1973; *Karnak Cafe*,

1974; *One Hour Remains*, 1982; *The Day the Leader was Killed*, 1985) that are more “of a documentary nature, dealing with issues topical at the time of their authorship”, which, it is claimed “are artistically negligible in themselves” but can be considered “as a priceless source for the social and political history of the Egypt of their day” (El-Enany, 1990:78). *Layali*, interestingly, was written in the middle of these documentary-like novels. It is as if whenever such realism full of contemporary details becomes insufficient for his goal, whenever, as mentioned above, his vision of the larger perspective is too blurred by too close a glance at the contemporary, Mahfouz turns to ancient texts as an expressive device. This is valid even in the case of the documentary-like novels. These are very focused texts presenting quite a narrow world that is concentrated mostly on the psychology of the protagonist, but, even in them, the narrative is supported by, “the use of legends, history, and traditional or popular allusions, which endeavor to enrich the action and compensate for the narrowness of the novel’s world” (Hafez, 1976:75). This power of traditional legends to enrich and expand the horizons of the world created in a novel is given full reign in *Layali*. There, the author creates a whole new world out of the world of the *Nights*, and he uses full freedom to expand it in whatever direction he pleases.

#### **4.6 Timelessness**

It can be said that the ancient texts being discussed here are beyond time, or in other words, timeless. This, in turn, is much likely to be driven from the timelessness of the themes and issues they touch upon. Without catching the very essence, or the core, of human condition, they could not have survived this long. After all, all through their existence, in all the times and places they passed through, Abrahamic narratives, from Sumer where they originate to modern world, and the *Nights*, from ancient India whence they supposedly come, to today’s world, wherever and whenever they were narrated, told, written and re-written, they picked up, and were added, whatever was the current understanding of human condition at that time and place. Whatever was out of date, or surpassed, was either thrown out of, or fossilized in, them. Therefore, they evolved (and are still evolving) along with the humankind, and as such, whatever is still in them, the residue, whatever still survives, is to a good extent stripped off of all the

peculiarities of any particular time and place, and being so, is as close as it gets to the essence of human condition. As such, whenever intense realism with contemporary details makes it too difficult to see beyond what is here and now, a narrative and language established upon these texts may help to clear the vision and open a literary path to the very essentials of human condition.

In an interview, speaking about the use of fantastic elements in his novels, Mahfouz says "I may invest my work with abstract dimensions, but this is only to get to the heart of reality" (quoted from Faraj in Al-Mousa, 1992:36). The narratives of the ancient texts can be counted among those abstract dimensions, and Mahfouz's formula of "getting to the heart of reality" is just another way of saying what is being claimed here, that the employment of these texts provides means to elaborate on the very essence of human condition.

Just like Mahfouz achieves making explicit what is not readily available in what is perceived as real, Pasolini also achieves, through the use of ancient texts, to "reveal 'the real' beyond the surface" (quoted from Pasolini in Carlorosi, 2009:260). Reality, after all, is not limited by what can be perceived by the five senses; there is a part of it that eschews what is perceptible, and that part is sometimes more about the essence of things. What makes the ancient texts timeless, makes them also more *essentially realistic*, in the sense that they can "counteract the negative domain of the artificiality of a prosaic world which is not able to go beyond the immediately perceptible reality" (Carlorosi, 2009:264).

Lastly, timelessness gives these texts an authority as well, one that can be invoked whenever they are mentioned. Ancient narratives and their ability to speak to the sensibilities of the people of at least a certain region has passed the test of time; thus their attestation naturally strengthens any message or interpretation about modern day reality.

#### **4.7 Creative Incoherence**

Just like the ancient texts help Mahfouz create a multi-faceted, multi-layered text that can point towards what is beyond mere short-term brute reality, they help

Pasolini in the same way to create a cinema of poetry. A conventional film, best exemplified perhaps by Hollywood, is based mostly on the narrative, on the "sequential logic of events and of straightforward meanings". Closer to being what can be called a "cinema of prose", in such films, the visuality of the image becomes subservient to the narrative, and seldom does it have any meaning entirely of its own. Whenever it does, it is to help the narrative move in its course (Carlorosi, 2009:267).

A cinema of poetry, on the other hand, depends on the visual signification power of the image itself, on what Pasolini calls the "im-signs", and the metaphors that come to being through this power. This comes, however, at the expense of a clear-cut narrative. In an effort to create meaning primarily through bringing together images, and through the intrinsic visual cues inside those images like color, composition etc., narrative inevitably might fall short of a coherent web and nexus of events following a consistent and continuous progression. Employing the ancient texts comes handy just at this point. First, as mentioned already, the audience is already familiar with them, thus it is not necessary to tell everything. Second, these texts themselves are not coherent anyway. Both Abrahamic narratives of the old and the new testaments, and the *Nights* are texts that came to being over time through an evolution during the course of which they were added many discordant parts. Thus, they lend themselves comparatively more readily to be a foundation for new texts that defy clear cut coherent narrative structure, like the cinema of poetry Pasolini is after.

Moreover, the supernatural elements and the inherent irrationality in these texts are clearly not the rational reality or rationalized fantasy of modernity, nor are the characters in them the calculating people obeying the Protestant ethic. Thus, through the subjectivities of these characters, ancient texts become very conducive to create a poetic cinema. When

the eye behind the camera is able to merge in mimesis with the protagonist's mind and be guided by its irrational thoughts, subjective visions, interior feelings, it will gain the power to disrupt the linear logic of a prose cinema, and thus begin to unveil an alternate vision of the real (Carlorosi, 2009:257).

It was already mentioned how point of view shot is suitable for creating free indirect discourse. Thus, often times both in *Il Vangelo* and in *Il Fiore*, we feel like seeing the world through the eyes and minds of Zumurrud, Nureddin, Jesus and other characters (Figure 19). Narrative follows closely their irrational thoughts, epiphanies, desires and anxieties.

In short, "cinema of poetry should aim to create 'im-signs' able to evoke sensations and emotions, presenting infinite meanings and possibilities" (Carlorosi, 2009:258), and employing ancient texts makes it relatively easier to achieve this. Through their eclectic structure, they are already open to multiple meanings and possibilities, as attested by the endless interpretations and commentaries written about them. Finally, being written texts, they give the director more freedom in designing the image, and provide a better opportunity to create im-signs. Thus, overall, ancient texts become a fertile ground for Pasolini to apply the logic and principles of his cinema of poetry.

#### **4.8 Different Approaches to Sexuality**

Both Mahfouz and Pasolini are known for candid and comparatively open portrayal of sexuality. Not only in the two works discussed here, but in Mahfouz's other works too "the subject of sex plays a central role" (Najjar, 1998:144), and same goes for Pasolini as well. However, two artists deviate in the way they treat sexuality. As elaborated, for Pasolini, sexuality is a moment of liberation. It is one of those aspects of human life that has always been suppressed both at an individual and on a social level, regardless of time, place, and socio-economic system. On the other hand it carries within itself so much potential to disrupt the established codes of oppression, that it can be a powerful asset in liberating human existence.

Mahfouz, however, is usually content with a portrayal of sexuality as it appears in life without adding to this depiction any values of his own. In the absence of such an explicit subjective standpoint, the attitude towards sexuality in his works is no different from the many attitudes towards it in society. Thus he focuses mostly on what can be called the *sexual politics*, the way sexuality, and social regulations



Figure 19. Jesus' Trial by Pontus Pilate, as seen from the eyes of John the Apostle in *Il Vangelo*

over it, are instrumentalized within the various power relations in society. In this regard, prostitutes, for instance, have quite a central role in a lot of his writing, about which he says "the prostitute enters my novels as a censure of a 'respected Person', telling him: 'you are the prostitute not I'" (Najjar, 1998:144).

#### **4.9 Differences of Literary Feeling**

The difference between the way the ancient texts are used by Mahfouz and Pasolini is manifested also in the general feeling their works create. As discussed, Pasolini's *Il Fiore* is characterized by joy of living, his *Il Vangelo* by serenity, whereas Mahfouz's novels give a feeling of desperation. *Awlad*, for instance, is quite prone to creating a claustrophobic feeling, since the world created in it is a tightly packed one with no literal or metaphorical exists. As already mentioned, "the world has been condensed in this novel into a typical Cairene habitational area, the *hara*, a sort of dead alley comprising some houses, closed off from the main street with a gate" (Nijland, 1984:148). The image of a dead alley that is closed off from outside already establishes the foundation for such feeling. In addition, there is no remarkable mention of the world outside the *hara*; everything and everyone, once they are inside it, are contracted in it to the extent that they can never get out unless they die. The *hara*, throughout the course of the book, expands geographically, but in terms of the human life that it supports, it keeps contracting within itself. This is mostly due to the cyclical events that repeat, and the level and ferociousness of the oppression that increase at each repetition. Overall, "the outlook, as it emerges from *Awlad* is highly gloomy" (Somekh, 1971:59), and the same vicious cycle gives a similar character to *Layali* too.

On the other hand, Pasolini's is an attempt to put to the question the current reality against the long lost, but latently present, reality of the past. "He wishes to put the present in a dimension of doubt, and the past is the only force that can usurp the present" (Bachmann, 1973:27). If, for instance, present is the so called "desert of the real" that we live in with its gloom and colorlessness, his work borrowing from the *Nights* creates a stark contrast by creating a feeling of colorful, festive and hopeful world. If, again, an inspiring story about a boy from Nazareth is usurped by the Church through artificial magnificence, Pasolini gives that story

its true character by depicting in it the modest serenity of the whole affair. This way, he gives back the text of Matthew its true feeling too, since, “many of the elements for which the movie has been criticized—for example, the isolation and ‘distance’ of Jesus from his followers, or the silence and the anonymity of the crowds— also characterize the biblical gospel” (Aichele, 2002:529). In short, it can be said, Pasolini uses the ancient text of the *Nights* to infuse a feeling of hope, whereas Mahfouz uses it to analyze the lack of it; Pasolini’s interpretation of Gospel creates a feeling of serenity, while Mahfouz’s interpretation of Biblical-Qur’anic narratives is meant to create alertness in the face of an age old danger.

#### **4.10 Mahfouz’s Literary Anti-colonialism**

Incorporating ancient narratives into his works helps Mahfouz also create a more indigenous literary form. This is more apparent in *Layali* than it is in *Awlad*, since, after all, *Layali* is a case where “an imported literary genre from the ‘West’, the novel, is integrated into the indigenous tradition of storytelling” (Ouyang, 2004:125). This, indeed, points to a transformation in author’s own vision of the novel as a literary form. For long years, he was seen as a pioneer in creating the novel form in Arabic language, to the extent that during most of his lifetime, his own career as a writer paralleled the history of Arabic novel. In 1986, for instance, Siddiq, to demonstrate the shortness of novel’s history in Arabic, was saying that “practically all the phases in the development of the mature Arabic novel fall within the creative career of a single Arab novelist: Najib Mahfuz of Egypt”, who, Siddiq claimed, was “the paragon of the Arabic novel” (Siddiq, 1986:207).

In line with this, especially in his historical and realist fictions, Mahfouz followed the conventions of western novel quite religiously. His recognition in the West, and receiving the Nobel Prize, can be seen, among other things, as a result of this. It is noteworthy at this point to mention that novel, at least in its beginning, was indeed not very far from Arabic storytelling. One need only remember that even Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (1605), presumably the very first modern novel, is narrated as if it is a collection of stories written by a fictional Moorish author named Cide Hamete Benengeli. In this regard, one can say that there is little coincidence, if any, that the rise of the modern novel matches in time with Antoine



Galland's (1646-1715) translation of the *Nights* to French in 1704, which was its very first appearance in any European language. However, the "novel, the history of whose travels in the Arab world coincides with the Western colonial intrusion, is symbolic of Western hegemony and a reminder of the absence of 'authenticity' in contemporary Arabic literature" (Ouyang, 2003-2:85). It appears that the historical and ideological baggage of the novel that is reminiscent of colonialism led Mahfouz towards a search for a more authentic narrative form. In an interview he made, it is possible to see that by 1980 he was looking for a new form that was more personal, but at the same time, more Arabic and Egyptian, when he was saying:

My devotion to the *hara* is part of my yearning for authenticity. When we began writing the novel we thought that there was the correct form and the wrong form. In other words, the form of the European novel was sacred. As you get older [...] you find yourself searching for the music which you can bring out from your depths. [...] As if you were asking: what are the forms they wrote in? Are these not artistic methods they created for themselves? Why do I not create a form specifically for myself with which I am comfortable? [...] I began to look increasingly into my own depths for the music in which I write. [...] Imitation of any kind, whether of the old or the new, is bondage. It is important that you find what agrees with yourself, your identity. [...] As for us, the writers belonging to the developing or under-developed world, we used to think at the time that realizing our real literary self, identity coincided with the annihilation of our own self, identity. What I mean to say is that the European novel was sacred, and departure from this form was sacrilege. For a while I thought that the role of our generation was to write the novel in the correct form because I believed there was such a thing as the correct form and the wrong form. Now, my theory has changed. The correct form is that which comes from an inner music. I do not imitate either the *maqama* or Joyce. Frankly, what irritates me these days is imitation, even of tradition! What I hope is that the new generation, who may achieve global reach for us, will be more faithful to their selves, identities, because it [the novel] must not only be indigenous in subject matter but also in form (quoted in Ouyang, 2003-2:86).

His irritation with the imitation of other literary forms is a sign of his intention of creating a personal narrative form. On the other hand, this form, avoiding the imitation of both traditional (*maqama*) and modern (Joyce), stems from what he calls "inner music", thus, from his own person. For Mahfouz, who, as mentioned, was very much connected to his land and language, this music inevitably finds its resonance, melodies, rhythm and chords in the native literary forms of Egypt and/or those flourished in Arabic. Thus, especially in *Layali*, written in 1982, utilizing not only the plot elements of the *Nights*, but also the structural form,

Mahfouz sings the songs of that inner music much more efficiently, especially in terms of expressing their emotional tone and historical payload.

This can also be seen as a silent protest against the widespread view which perceives the novel "as the culmination of national aesthetic achievement" and the "sense of faith in the novel as the perfect form for all nations and cultures, a marker of modernity and a sign of integration in world culture" (Omri, 2008:245); a view which Mahfouz also shared in his earlier periods. Just like Pasolini infused his scenes with visual language of non-western and pre-capitalist times and places, Mahfouz, in *Layali*, also established his narrative on a foundation of non-western, pre-capitalist literary form; in other words he *contaminated* the novel with non-western literary elements, and started a *free indirect dialogue* between them. His borrowing from the *Nights* corpus for structural and narrative inspiration in a way "decenters the novel as a 'bourgeois epic'" (Al-Musawi, 2003:376). Thus, at least in terms of form, it can be said that his disillusionment with the modernization efforts in Egypt has started expanding over to modernity itself. The difference between the ways he interacts with the ancient texts in *Awlad* in 1952 and in *Layali* in 1982, can be interpreted as an indication to this end as well. In *Awlad*, there is a certain critical distance with the Abrahamic narratives, which shows itself in the form: it follows more religiously the conventions of novel form. In *Layali*, though, such critical distance is less, it might even be possible to say that there is no distance at all; Mahfouz is fully immersed in the *Nights*, both in terms of form and content.

#### **4.11 Pasolini's Literary Reclamation**

For both artists, even without looking at the content, the very act of incorporating these ancient texts into their works already had political motives and implications. For Mahfouz, as elaborated, this had an anti-colonial tinge to it. In the case of Pasolini, despite the affirmative attitude to film from papal authorities, making of *Il Vangelo*, for instance, can be seen as an attempt to reclaim St. Matthew's Gospel from the Church, and liberate it in the name of subaltern masses, because, the film "brings the common man back to his own control over biblical events and to a view of Christ as revolutionary" (Myrsiades, 1978:217). Its being chosen as part of the canon of four Gospels by the Church was intended, after all, to consolidate the

power of Church over people, property, and, of course, Jesus' life story. Thus, Matthew's Gospel, along with the other three, Mark's, Luke's and John's, was turned into a "profoundly ideological device", giving the church the power to manage not only estates, but also the meanings in the text, and how it was supposed to be understood (Aichele, 2002:524).

It was mentioned that the characters in *Il Vangelo* were stripped off of their artificial sanctity, and brought down to earth. The same goes for Matthew's narrative, and in a sense, Matthew himself too. "Pasolini's *Matthew* de-sanctifies the biblical Matthew by quoting it whole, as though it were isolated from the rest of the Bible" (Aichele, 2002:525). In this regard, Pasolini, by treating Matthew's text by itself, pulls it out of the canon, gives it new life outside the "sanctified" corpus. It is poignant, in this regard, that, in the original Italian name of the film, Pasolini dropped the title "saint", and called his film "*Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo*", the gospel according to, simply, Matthew (Aichele, 2002:525). Thus, in a way, Pasolini reclaims Matthew as well.

Similar argument can be carried out for *Il Fiore* and the *Nights* too. The *Nights*, one of the most important collective literary achievements of the peoples of the world, after being represented in the West countless times in so many different media from paintings to songs and movies, after being analyzed, psychoanalyzed, dissected, arranged, rearranged, sutured and re-sutured in arts and letters so many times, more often than not, each time more subdued, more divested of its originality and spirit, cleansed more of the real Orient and the real people living in the Orient, with *Il Fiore*, was given a voice of its own, true to its purpose, function and spirit. Pasolini in this regard reclaimed the *Nights* in the name of people, for "his was a people's Nights, featuring the ragazzi di vita" (Irwin, 2004:227).

#### **4.12 Looking Back Beyond the Present: Overcoming with the Ancient**

Adhering to ancient texts seems almost a natural result of Pasolini's political agenda. His "displeasure with the effects of consumerism on sub-proletarian populations is obvious" (Verdicchio, 1992:147). According to him, capitalism and consumerism, through the uniformity they impose on life styles and peoples all

across the world, are even more dangerous than the fascist centralism, since the latter, after all, left the local, indigenous cultures in Europe almost untouched, while the former has wiped all indigenous particularities, and replaced them with a "mass hedonism" (Bondavalli, 2007:27). The borders of this hedonism reached out even to the shores of sexual liberation Pasolini defended so pugnaciously and elegantly earlier, especially in the *Trilogia*, the films of which were devoted, as already mentioned, to "a celebration of free expression of sexuality" (Cassano, 2012:99). Later, though, in 1975, a couple of months before his death, Pasolini repudiated his earlier benediction of sexuality. By then, sexual liberation was in full force, and it was already tamed by, and integrated into, the consumer lifestyle. About this, he said that "expressive democratization and sexual liberation have been brutally surpassed and neutralized by the decision of consumerist power to allow for a tolerance that is as far-reaching as it is false" (quoted from Pasolini in Cassano, 2012:99). In short, "the Barbarians of the 'free market' lay waste to all they encounter" (Chambers, 2008:150), "even the factual reality of bodies that seemed to hold the last line of resistance" (Cassano, 2012:99), and reduced everything to an excruciating uniformity.

This uniformity imposed by capitalism, to Pasolini, is a most disturbing aspect of bourgeois ideology and morals. He says, for instance, that

the most detestable and intolerable thing, even in the most innocent of bourgeois, is the inability to acknowledge experiences of life that are different from their own, which means conceiving all other experiences as substantially analogous to their own (quoted in Vighi, 2003:102).

He is so disturbed by the "sacredness of commodities and their consumption" (quoted from Pasolini in Cassano, 2012:100) as the primary tool, or weapon, so to speak, of capitalism that is used to permeate uniformity, and make it hegemonic, that he goes so far as saying that

everything ends up being consumed. At the same time, I know that there is something inconsumable in art, and we need to stress the inconsumable quality of art. Therefore, with all my forces, I will try to produce difficult and indigestible works (quoted in Bondavalli, 2010:408).

Thus, loss of diversity due to capitalism and consumerism, "gradual incorporation, exploitation, homogenization, and effacement of archaic socio-economic and cultural structures at the hand of industrial modernization" (Casarino, 1992:31), are a major concern for him, and this, naturally, is the vantage point he takes

when he plans his artistic attack on them. Among those that are wiped out by capitalism are the ancient myths, medieval folklore and storytelling, and he uses these amply not only in his cinema works, but also in poetry too, "to denounce and resist the complete obliteration of residual pastoral, agricultural, and artisanal social formations" (Casarino 1992:31). Consumerism establishes itself, among others, by invading the visual field in a way that "its materials, products to be acquired and accumulated, form the visual focus of contemporary society" (Verdicchio, 1992:134). It is impossible for a person of the present day not to be occupied by some visual signifier of consumerism in any moment of his/her daily life. Wherever our gaze falls upon, there is either a luring product with colorful shiny packaging, or an advertisement banner designed with all the ingenious means to be attractive. Pasolini's cinema films can be taken as the battlements in the "visual front" he opens in his intellectual fight with consumption based life style. By putting on the visual field of spectator another way of life that does not depend on the existence of consumable goods for its color and shine, Pasolini, in a way, challenges the visual aspect of consumerism and its incorporation of all the visual cues accumulated within human culture through the ages, like colors, shapes, images, composition etc.

This, as a political project of resistance, still seems fresh, and applies even more to the current situation, because nowadays a considerable part of capitalist hegemony is established through visual means, by making discontents of the system invisible, by getting them out of the visual field. With elements of mass media and culture industry, poverty, hunger, oppression, exploitation and all the other horsemen of capitalist doom are hidden from public eye craftily. This is further supported by urban regulation and gentrification projects banishing the underclasses away from cities. In a way, whatever the system crushes or destroys is swept away to be forgotten and suppressed. Casarino, for instance, establishes a parallelism between this and how the unconscious operates in psychoanalysis, and asks:

Is the Mediterranean Europe's unconscious? Is the mythic, pre-modern, rural, agricultural, and poor South the unconscious of the historical, modern, urban, industrial, and affluent North, in Italy? And, in global terms, are the dispossessed of the earth the oppressed and disavowed

unconscious of our North, that is, of the contemporary West? (Casarino, 2004:99).

All that was suppressed during the long hegemonic consolidation of capitalism, contrary to what the system wants people to believe, have neither been absorbed to become harmonious parts of the system, nor been totally destroyed. They are out there, somewhere; they reside in the collective unconscious of peoples living under, and inside, capitalism. In this regard, it becomes crucial to call them to a level of consciousness, and what Pasolini is trying to do can be interpreted as an effort to this end. After all, as Casarino points out in an analysis of Pasolini's another film, *Teorama* (1968), repudiation of unconscious is a strategy to make exploitation acceptable, and on the same vein, "acknowledgement of the unconscious is the key to liberation" (Casarino, 2004:99).

This is quite central to Pasolini's ideological statement developed in his works of art, since his main objective in this regard is "to understand and bring to the heart of public awareness the existence of those unacknowledged netherworlds inhabited by the abject subjects of our Western geopolitical universe, whose inconspicuous lives unfold away from our gaze" (Vighi, 2003:99). Here, in this effort to reveal what is not readily available, Pasolini comes close to Mahfouz, but, the difference is that the invisibility of what Mahfouz reveals comes not from its being suppressed but from its being imperceptible. The vicious cycle, the nuts and bolts of the social, economic mechanism of oppression are not perceptible, especially for those who are inside it, unless one takes a step back and views it in its entirety. Pasolini, on the other hand, conjures up the ghosts that were hidden away and makes them apparent.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

*Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee.*  
—Deuteronomy, 32:7

*He brings forth the living from the dead, and He brings forth the dead from the living; and He gives life to the earth after its death.  
And in like manner shall you be brought forth.*  
—Surah al-Rum, 20

This study was conducted as an exploration of how the use of ancient texts in modern works of art can shed light on the lives of subaltern people in the present time. Among many such works which are inspired by, or based on, some ancient text, four of them have been chosen here for close inspection. These are Pasolini's films *Il Vangelo* and *Il Fiore*, and Mahfouz's novels *Awlad* and *Layali*. *Il Vangelo* is about the life of Jesus, and is based directly on Matthew's Gospel. Similarly, *Awlad* takes its inspiration from the narratives of Abrahamic religions, including the story of Jesus. The other two works, *Layali* and *Il Fiore*, are both very closely affiliated to the *Nights*.

Although it is possible to find many other combinations of artists, modern works, and ancient texts, the choice of Mahfouz and Pasolini as the artists, and the choice of Abrahamic narratives and the *Nights* as the ancient texts, along with the four works mentioned above, provides a sufficiently consistent, self-contained context as a starting point for analysis. This also has the advantage of narrowing down the

discussion on the culture that flourished around the Mediterranean, which also emerges as another contextual framework.

Mahfouz's *Awlad* is based on the narratives of Abrahamic religions. On the surface, it is the story of people living in a fictional *hara*, a neighborhood, of Cairo. All of them descendants of a mythical ancestor on whose estate the *hara* was built, people living there try to survive in the face of the unjust rule of administrators, the *nazirs*, and the brutality they receive from *nazirs'* hired thugs, the *futuwwat*. Generation after generation, following an inspiring leader from among their midst, people start rebellions against the oppression. However all these rebellions remain inconclusive; the yoke of injustice and oppression cannot be broken definitely.

The significance of all the events and the characters in the novel comes from their unmistakable similarity with the events and figures in the history of Abrahamic religions. From Adam and Eve, and their children, up till the self-proclaimed triumph of Western science over religion, many of the important characters and turning points in this history have a counterpart in the novel. The aforementioned rebellion leaders, for instance, correspond to Moses, Jesus, and Mohammad, and the common ancestor of people corresponds to God, which explains why the novel became very controversial when it was first serialized in a newspaper, and why it remained unpublished in book form in Egypt for a long time. The similarities between the novel and the Abrahamic narratives are almost literal, and, when projected onto a small *hara*, the history of the region shaped by Abrahamic religions becomes more easily accessible.

When squeezed in time to a couple of generations, and in space, to a small *hara*, thousands of years of history on a region that covers a significant portion of the settled area on Earth, is stripped off of all the detail that hides its bare essence. This way, it becomes possible to focus on entities that might be difficult to observe when only a part or miniscule details of that history is considered. One such entity that has survived through time is the oppressive state mechanism, existence of which Mahfouz lays bare in *Awlad*. Persistence of people in the face of this never ending oppression, on the other hand, is embodied in the *hara* itself. Thus, the novel, more importantly than all the characters that are counterparts of important



figures of Abrahamic mythology, has two main characters: oppressive state and the *hara*. As such, it becomes an allegory of the dialectic relationship between the oppression of ruling classes, and the resistance of people. Indeed, the concepts of neighborhood and coercive state have quite a central place in Mahfouz' works in general.

From this relationship between oppression and resistance, emerges a cyclical history in which people repeatedly try to overturn the unjust rule, and fail in the attempt. Thus, it becomes possible to read the history of Abrahamic religions as a history of people's struggle to create a more just world; and the prophets of Abrahamic tradition become the revolutionary leaders in this struggle. In such an interpretation, prophets are stripped off of their sacred cloaks, and brought down to earth. Such *demythologization* is the main strategy Mahfouz uses in *Awlad* for building the allegory, which, as mentioned, operates by projecting the history of the world onto the story of people in a small neighborhood. In this projection, Abrahamic narratives operate like an interface, through which readers can relate the stories of, and the characters in, the *hara* they read about in the novel to, respectively, events and the operative forces in the history of the world. This way, Mahfouz arrives at a Marxist interpretation of history that is shaped more by material conditions than by divine revelation. As told by Mahfouz, this history is narrated more from the perspective of people than that of the strong and the rich who exercise power and authority. Cyclical narrative of the novel, and the *hara* as a source of social bond, remind also of ibn Khaldun's interpretation of history, and his idea of *asabiyyah*.

The relationship between *Layali* and the ancient text it is based on, the *Nights*, is different, because it is written as a sequel to the latter. Mahfouz picks up the framing story of the *Nights*, that of Shahrazad and Shahryar, from the day after the one-thousand-and-first night. He introduces many other characters representing people from all walks of life in the Kingdom of Shahryar. Allegorically, the novel is about the recent history of Egypt and the Arab world, which is, just like the Kingdom of Shahryar in the novel, not immune to the vicious cycle of war, corruption, coercion, and injustice. Thus, focus is again on the workings and the mechanism of state, but this time Mahfouz takes a closer look at how that

machinery works, rather than focusing on its breaking points. In this regard *Awlad* and *Layali* are complementary to each other: former approaches the same subject matter from a macro level concentrating on long range causes and effects, while the latter from a micro level concentrating on miniscule, quotidian relationships. In *Layali*, too, rather than all the short-lived humans populating the tales, coercive state appears as a main character. Thus, again, Mahfouz builds allegory through projection, this time, from the actual recent history, to the events in an imaginary Kingdom.

*Layali* 's significance as a sequel to the *Nights* does not stem only from its narrative. In it, while creating a work in a modern literary form, the novel, Mahfouz stays faithful at the same to some important structural and contextual aspects of the *Nights*. For instance, he keeps intact the structure of the *Nights* that is based on embedded tales, and its context provided by the framing story of Shahrazad and Shahryar. In the *Nights*, though, the sequencing of the tales is relatively more linear, and the framing story is rather skeletal. To convert this into a novel while keeping its essential traits untouched, Mahfouz, firstly, develops the relationships between the individual tales to convert their overall outlook from a linear sequence to a mesh based network; and secondly, he gives more depth to the framing story, and more volume to the characters in it.

From a narrative point of view, the prominence of fantasy and supernatural helps creating a literary atmosphere that is faithful to the *Nights*. By creating all kinds of extreme and awkward situations in which the veil of normality is lifted, fantasy also helps the author make keen observations on human condition. Differently from *Awlad*, in *Layali*, there is a more affirmative attitude towards Islam. Elaborated through Sufism, faith becomes a "socialist" antithesis both to the complicity of organized religion in oppressive state, and to capitalist ideology and lifestyle based on material gain. Lastly, to the extent that the tales in the *Nights* were created to mock and display oppressive nature of social relationships and political institutions, Mahfouz stays true also to this purpose, for he is likewise making visible the hegemony of power that is ingrained deeply in society.

Pasolini's *Il Vangelo* is quite a faithful adaptation of Matthew's Gospel. It even received approval from the Catholic Church as one of the best films depicting the life of Christ. This, despite his proclaimed atheism, is in keeping with Pasolini's socialist views, for, first, his ideas on socialism do not exclude a sentimentality towards sacred, and second, Jesus in Matthew's Gospel already appears as a revolutionary character whose words and deeds resonate with the problems of present time and age as much as they did in the first century Judea. In addition, according to Pasolini, religious sentimentality, adopted most sincerely by subaltern masses, and being in opposition to the rationality of capitalist logic imposed by hegemonic classes, can be an inspiration for resistance.

Thus, Pasolini did not alter much the narrative of Matthew's text; he rather created a cinematic complementary to it. While doing this, on the other hand, he portrayed Jesus as the poor, insurgent boy he appears to be in the Gospel. This meant stripping Jesus' image off of all the grandeur and pomposity added to it by the Christian church. This way, Pasolini's Jesus, turning the divine order of hierarchy around, embodies both a God brought down to earth, and a man risen high up in skies. The message of this portrayal is that every human being carries in himself/herself both a god-like potency, and a very human fragility. This goes against the worldview of capitalism, which establishes its ideology upon the dichotomy that is based on the allegedly insurmountable hierarchy between the bourgeoisie and proletariat.

Although a faithful adaptation of Jesus' story as narrated in St. Matthew's Gospel, *Il Vangelo* does not intend to be a biographical film. It is rather an epic story centered on a Jesus brought down to earth among poor people as one of them, and enriched by all that is added to his presumed life story and persona in the last two thousand years. For instance, by making visual references to the canonic images of Jesus in painting, Pasolini summons the emotions attached to these scenes to adorn Jesus character in his film. This way, he also brings together all the character traits added to Jesus in different times and places, and thus, develops a non-linear notion of time that folds onto itself. Such non-linearity, which is antagonistic to the linear, forward progressing time preached by modernity, is also emphasized with certain production tools like the actors and the locations,

which, quite conspicuously belong to the modern day Italian south. In addition, although making him appear down to earth and mundane, Pasolini avoids rationalizing Jesus. All the supernatural occurrences in the Gospel do still take place in the film, but rendered in a way to make them feel quotidian and modest. Overall feeling emanating from this rendering is *serenity of sacred*, which, one can argue, is the essence of faith that was expelled out of life by modernity to elevate strict rationalism of capitalism to exclusive prominence.

*Il Fiore* is based on some tales Pasolini chose from the *Nights*. This film, along with the other two in the *Trilogia*, is characterized mostly with a sincere and candid portrayal of sexuality. Indeed, these films are a celebration of all that is related to *corporeal joy of living*, and the tales Pasolini chose from the *Nights* corpus to include in *Il Fiore* are well suited for this purpose. Through this selection, Pasolini tries to develop a counter argument to one of the premises of capitalism: that happiness and joy is possible only through means provided by material wealth. In addition, strict regulation of sexuality, due to its being very ancient and universal, might appear very natural. By showing the audience another kind of sexuality that is a lot more natural and freer than what they experience, Pasolini intends to undermine a phenomenon that is ingrained deeply both into minds of people, and into the fabric of society. This might pave the way for spectators to question other such seemingly unhistorical and natural social phenomena like state, religion, etc. One possible result of such questioning is an increased trust in the possibility of another, better world, which opens the door for utopian hope. Thus, Pasolini, by displaying long lost lives and peoples, through such nostalgia, achieves creating a utopian desire; hence what he does can be called *utopic nostalgia*. His liberating attitude towards sexuality includes also giving active agency to women, and thus, disrupting hegemonic patriarchal codes prevalent in society.

In addition, like Mahfouz does in *Layali*, Pasolini stays true to the structure of the *Nights*: one of the tales he chooses becomes a framing story to the others, just like the tale of Shahrazad and Shahryar is the framing story in the *Nights*. This way, through the embedded story structure, Pasolini fragments time and, contrary to the forward-moving linear understanding of modernism, emphasizes non-linearity in it. Remembering that the linear understanding of time is exclusionary

towards those lives and peoples that diverge from dominant way of life, which hegemonic forces celebrate as the only meaningful target of every human endeavor, Pasolini's attitude appears to be a literary resistance to this oppressive discourse about time. This resistance extends also over to the mainstream cinema film form, which depends on a coherent plot and a clear ending. Pasolini, by preserving structural ambiguity of the *Nights*, avoids this in *Il Fiore*. In addition, by infusing scenes with flatness and distortion of perspective that is reminiscent of pre-renaissance painting traditions like the miniature painting, he contaminates his film with principles of pre-modern ways of seeing and visualizing, which are at odds with the scientific perspective. Since photorealism achieved by perspective has been the dominant way of seeing and visualizing imposed by capitalism in arts and design, through such contaminations, Pasolini summons the ghosts of those things which have been wiped away by capitalism. This might appear, again, as a nostalgic, reactionary attitude at first, but Pasolini approaches the past in order to find that which existed without capitalism once, and thus can be a kernel of hope to re-establish a life without it again. In this regard, his attitude towards the visual aspect of his film can also be identified as a moment of *utopic nostalgia*. In *Il Fiore* and *In Vangelo*, Pasolini also objects to the mainstream way of cinematizing the ancient texts that is prevalent in Hollywood film, and based mostly on Orientalist prejudices and clichés. He does this mainly by staying faithful to the literary spirit, ideology, and the structure of the texts he refers to.

For both films, emphasizing the essence of the ancient text being referred is how Pasolini establishes an oppositional standpoint. *Serenity of sacred and corporeal joy of living* are two aspects of life sidelined by capitalism, and these are exactly what Pasolini depicts in *Il Vangelo* and *Il Fiero* respectively. Both ancient texts, Matthew's Gospel and the *Nights*, are already infused with these, so Pasolini, using cinematic tools, and through staying faithful to the feeling of the ancient texts, simply brings forth the essence of these aspects that is inherent in them. Wherever he is not faithful, whenever he needs to add material of his own either as a choice or as a requirement of adapting a written text into visual one, contaminations he introduces operate in a way to establish a dialogue between seemingly separate elements. Theorized as *free indirect discourse*, this dialogue enriches both of its constituents. Through all these, Pasolini intends to create a poetic cinema

language, *cinépoiesis*, where images, rather than being subservient to the narrative, gain agency by themselves, and their coming together creates new meaning that is not inherent in any of them.

Thus, Pasolini's employment of, and nostalgia for, the ancient texts and the world narrated in them, become vehicles of elaborating a utopian standpoint, which aims at going beyond the social and political status quo. After all, if utopia is that asymptotic state of being which, despite its unattainability, is politically the most desired, then what can be called the *revolutionary kernels of the bygone* in ancient texts become characteristically utopic, since, by definition, they are both desired compared to the current situation, and they are, in their form and context, forever lost, never to be attained ever again exactly as they were once. Put in more concrete terms, if capitalism is this all-encompassing force with an immense power to digest or destroy everything it assimilates in realizing itself, those things it has disrupted and obliterated, inasmuch as they can still relate to life somehow, and to the extent that they can remain at least partially undigested within capitalism, contain at least an inspiration, sometimes more, in the way of opposing and overcoming capitalism. Especially, when one thinks that the most beguiling weapon of capitalism is its power to make people believe in its inevitability, past forms and ways of life from when capitalism did not exist as such become the most solid proof that a life outside the capitalist society was once a concrete reality, and thus, a life outside capitalism was, and can still be, possible. After all, if the belief in another world is the basic premise and, in a way, the necessary condition of any revolutionary politics, providing solid support for such a belief, past ways and styles of life can be instrumental in developing such a revolutionary political agenda. This, though, is not naturally and necessarily so: one could easily slip into absurdity and anachronism of the inevitable tautology: life before capitalism is simply the life before capitalism. It was, by definition, a time when capitalism did not exist. Once capitalism came into being, though, things have irreversibly changed. Whatever there was before it, has lost all validity in its aftermath, and cannot be a measure of anything anymore. In order to avoid this, the past needs to be read from a certain angle with an effort directed at finding the kernels of oppositional moments lying dormant in it, and these need to be put into action to lay bare their revolutionary potential.

In Pasolini's search to find, lay bare, and activate the revolutionary potential of these kernels, in other words, in his *utopic nostalgia* elaborated here, it is possible, also, to find traces of Gramsci's thoughts. It is often said that Pasolini's socialism is inspired from, and influenced to a great extent by, Gramsci. This, however, does not mean that Pasolini adopts Gramsci's thoughts verbatim. Instead, one could say that he builds his ideology on top of Gramsci's ideas. Part of this is trying to respond to the questions Gramsci poses in his writings. *Utopic nostalgia*, which emerges out of his films inspired by ancient texts, can be thought of as such an answer to a somewhat rhetorical question Gramsci asks in a passage where he discusses the historicity of one's philosophical conception of the world:

Philosophy cannot be separated from the history of philosophy, nor can culture from the history of culture. In the most immediate and relevant sense, one cannot be a philosopher, by which I mean have a critical and coherent conception of the world, without having a consciousness of its historicity, of the phase of development which it represents and of the fact that it contradicts other conceptions or elements of other conceptions. One's conception of the world is a response to certain specific problems posed by reality, which are quite specific and 'original' in their immediate relevance. *How is it possible to consider the present, and quite specific present, with a mode of thought elaborated for a past which is often remote and superseded?* [emphasis added] When someone does this, it means that he is a walking anachronism, a fossil, and not living in the modern world, or at the least that he is strangely composite (Gramsci, 1971:326).

In making films with themes and subject matter from remote and, in Gramsci's words, "superseded", past, Pasolini seems to be seeking for a way to make this remote understanding of the world operational in order to "consider the specific present". The sense of history Gramsci has in this passage appears to be closer to a linear notion of time than to the more varied and stratified understanding of it Pasolini adheres to. This is apparent, most remarkably, from Gramsci's use of the word "superseded". The idea of supersession, which implicitly implies that what is superseded is left in the past, and loses its validity to be relevant in the present, bears the marks of a linear understanding of time. As discussed previously, this idea, along with the time notion it promotes, is one of the things Pasolini opposes in these films.

While doing this, Pasolini indeed expounds on the realization of a level of philosophical consciousness which Gramsci thinks is critical. According to Gramsci:

For a mass of people to be led to think coherently and in the same coherent fashion about the real present world, is a 'philosophical' event far more important and 'original' than the discovery by some philosophical 'genius' of a truth which remains the property of small groups of intellectuals (Gramsci, 1971:327).

Such a coherent understanding of the world that is not only "thought", in other words, that does not exist only at the level of immaterial ideas, but also is lived and experienced concretely in their daily lives by the masses of people did indeed exist before modernity. Conceptualized by Lefebvre as the *style of life*, such coherence gave unity to the totality of human existence. In the pre-modern, agrarian societies,

[man] lived and achieved all his potential. Feeling no deep conflict with himself, he could give himself up—in that magnificent state of balance which was the peasant community—to his own spontaneous vitality. No aspect of himself, of his energy, his instinct, was left unused. Perhaps he was basic and elementary, but at least he lived without being fundamentally 'repressed'; and maybe he sometimes died appeased (Lefebvre, 1947:207).

On the contrary, what characterizes the modern bourgeois existence is fragmentation and the lack of such unity; in other words the "absence of style" that is "imposed by the dominant class" all over the society (Lefebvre, 1947:6). Thus, such harmonious unity, such coherence of philosophical and material world, a very important phenomenon according to Gramsci, is not something that masses of people should be, or can be, "led into" as he suggests, but something that exists as a natural part of the "style" that their lives innately had once. After all, "praxis and poiesis does not take place in the higher spheres of a society (state, scholarship, 'culture') but in everyday life" (Lefebvre, 1968:31). Pasolini in these films, by displaying the different facets of that ancient style of life, tries indeed to find clues as to how that philosophical coherence can materialize in the real world.

This, again, is not very far from Gramsci's ideas on folklore, since he says elsewhere that folklore should "be studied as a 'conception of the world and life' implicit to a large extent in determinate (in time and space) strata of society and in opposition (also for the most part implicit, mechanical, and objective) to 'official' conceptions of the world" (Gramsci, 1971:360). Pasolini and Gramsci both agree that folklore, the ancient wisdom in "lore of the folk", has a potential to be a foci of opposition to the official conception of the world imposed by the hegemonic,



dominant classes. The role Gramsci attributes to it, though, is rather passive, and based more on an archeological investigation to dig up its "archaic" remains. Pasolini, on the other hand, refuses that whatever is found in folklore is "archaic"; he gives it a more political and ideological role, in which it becomes an active part of oppositional ideas and politics. Gramsci accepts the importance of folklore and its being a part of present world when he says "folklore must not be considered an eccentricity, an oddity or a picturesque element, but as something very serious and is to be taken seriously"; and he aims for a state where "the separation between modern culture and popular culture of folklore will disappear" (Gramsci, 1971:362); but he does not seem to be attributing as much active agency to the ancient wisdom implicit in the lore of the folk as Pasolini does. Gramsci suggests studying and teaching folklore for a political end, while, for Pasolini, its being not only preserved, but also experienced, is a political end in itself; and immersion in it is a way to achieve that end.

Thus, in short, through the employment of ancient texts in his works, Pasolini tries to bring forth kernels of hope in the bygone to intervene in the codes of hegemonic way of life, to, finally, overcome the status quo. As discussed already, Mahfouz, on the other hand, tries to expose, and make visible, what is not readily available in history and society. Pasolini wants to find a way out of the current situation; Mahfouz wants to understand what went wrong, and where. For this, Pasolini aims at achieving fidelity to the feeling of the ancient texts to bring forth a certain essence in them, while Mahfouz projects history and social life onto fictional worlds he creates that are inspired by the ancient texts.

Difference between their respective attitudes as to what they want to achieve through their works can be attributed, among other things, to the cultural, political, and social differences between Egypt and Italy. Mahfouz spent his entire life in Egypt, which was trying to come to terms with its traumatic introduction to modernity through colonialism, and to achieve modernity in its own terms. Pasolini, on the other hand, being from Italy, south of which, in its otherness from the rest of Italy, and from Western Europe in general, has been the subject of what is called the "southern question" (Cassano, 2012:125), experienced modernity both through its supposed accomplishments, and its apparent shortcomings. Thus, one

can argue, Mahfouz joins the search for an indigenous modernity for Egypt, and tries, first, to understand the past as an initial step to realize it, while Pasolini, having observed both successes and failures of modernity, is intent on finding a way to exceed it.

Broadly speaking, Mahfouz, in his contemplation of history through the *allegoric projections* he makes in the two novels discussed here, arrives at the conclusion that the problem of the attempts made so far to revolutionize the world was that they aimed at conquest of power, rather than obliterating power's hold on social relationships at all levels of society, from simple daily dealings between individuals at the micro level, to more complicated events involving institutions and large numbers of people at the macro level. He, on the other hand, does not reflect much on how to overcome this problem; does not deign to find answers, and is usually content with describing and displaying. Where he leaves off, though, Pasolini takes over: he suggests, through the *utopic nostalgia* he develops in his films, looking back with a forward glance to find the revolutionary kernels in the life styles of bygone peoples, who lived at a time when capitalism did not exist, and who, thus, naturally, were not corrupted by it, and whose way of life can provide clues that can help us overcome shortcomings of the present conditions, and give us hope to establish a new, humane, just, egalitarian world.

For both artists, without going deep into their works, even the mere fact that they use ancient texts in their works has political implications. In Mahfouz's case, for instance, integrating the structural elements of the *Nights* in *Layali*, he also engages with the prominence of novel as a literary form, which, in Egypt, went hand in hand with colonial intrusion. Pasolini, on the other hand, reclaims these texts in the name of people. Gospel and the *Nights* are both the result of thousands of years of collective storytelling by ordinary humans, but in the end they were also acquired by organized, oppressive institutions, like how the Church appropriated Jesus' biography, and capitalist culture industry appropriated the *Nights*. Pasolini, by bringing forth the ancient essence in them, establishes over them again the sovereignty of people.

Both Mahfouz and Pasolini, by producing works which somehow emulate the ancient texts, also become heirs to the time immemorial storytelling tradition, "for storytelling is the art of repeating stories" (Benjamin, 1968:91), and they, in their own way, repeat the stories that has come down to us in Abrahamic narratives and the *Nights*. In Mahfouz's case this is more explicit, since, in *Awlad*, he speaks through a fictional storyteller, who takes it upon himself to tell the stories of his neighborhood from the perspective of poor, humble people, unlike all the other storytellers who so far has told them in a fashion distorted for the taste and the interests of authorities; and in *Layali* he directly adopts the storytelling fashion of the *Nights*.

Benjamin makes a distinction between two kinds of storytellers: sedentary one and itinerant one. First one tells the local tales and traditions, second one tells whatever he or she has heard or experienced while travelling. First "is embodied in the resident tiller of the soil, and the other in the trading seaman" (Benjamin, 1968:84-85). Curiously enough, Mahfouz fits in the first category as much as Pasolini does in the second. Mahfouz, not only tells the tales of his own locality, but he is as sedentary as a man can ever get: as mentioned, he left Egypt only twice, and most of his life he resided in the same neighborhood of Cairo. He is quite sedentary from a literary point of view as well, for his works share a similar quality in that all of them are related to, and have narratives which take place in, Egypt. Pasolini, on the other hand, not only goes out on a metaphorical, literary exploration of what is not immanently Italian/European, but he also does a lot of actual travelling when making his films. The original literary worlds of Gospel and the *Nights* are not in the center of European culture. Pasolini travels through them and brings back for his spectators the essence he extracts from his literary journeys.

In addition, according to Benjamin, "every real story [...] openly or covertly contains something useful", and the storyteller has counsel for those who listen to him (Benjamin, 1968:86). The ideology and politics implicit in the four works analyzed here, and elaborated throughout this study, can be considered as the counsel that Pasolini and Mahfouz give to their audience. Moreover, Benjamin says "it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation" (Benjamin,

1968:89). As already mentioned, both Pasolini and Mahfouz avoid providing clear cut explanations or resolutions, and the employment of ancient texts is quite instrumental in that, since these texts, being the result of a long evolution, already have an ambiguous nature, and are open to different interpretations.

For both artists, adhering to ancient texts provides certain advantages as well. They put forward highly political and critical statements in their works. Veiling their messages with the indisputably popular, well enjoyed, and/or highly respected ancient texts, they evade censorship, and, risk of reception, if not outright, pressure. Secondly, ancient texts are very well suited to comment on the present, for they provide an optimal distance to reality that is neither too far to miss the details, nor too close to blur the vision. Thirdly, these texts have passed the test of time; they are, so to speak, timeless. Their ability to speak to the sensibilities of people is attested by their endurance. By invoking the feelings their audience already have for these texts, Mahfouz and Pasolini strengthen their messages.

This timelessness of ancient texts mentioned above, and the presumed existence in them of *revolutionary kernels of the bygone*, can be thought of as another manifestation of what Bloch calls "utopian function", which establishes a philosophical affinity between Pasolini's *utopic nostalgia* and Bloch's *revolutionary romanticism*. From Bloch's ideas, it can be surmised that everything manmade, anywhere, anytime, contains in itself utopian impulses that exceed the particularities of its own time and place, and that lay dormant till the time when their utopian potential becomes relevant. The "genuine classicism which does not consist in rounding off, but in eternal youth, with constantly new perspectives in it" (Bloch, 1986:155), which Bloch finds in the great works of philosophy, can be attributed, with no difficulty, to the ancient texts which are the results of collective, cumulative philosophizing of people across time and space. Poignantly, that which is characterized with eternal youth is timeless and vice versa. Being so, anachronism is forever cancelled for any creation of human mind and labor that is the result of the "dream of a better life" and is "pushed to the limits of its perfection" (Bloch, 1986:156). Within its eternal youth, or timelessness, such a work defies the idea of linear progression, since it contains in itself vectors pointing to future, no matter when and where it was produced. Thus,

The classical element in every classicism equally stands before each age as revolutionary Romanticism, i.e. as a task that points the way forward and as a solution that approaches from the future, not from the past, and, itself still full of future, speaks, addresses, calls us on (Bloch, 1986:155).

However, utopian and revolutionary seeds of the cultural products of bygone times and peoples, as already said, is dormant, and needs, first, proper environment and conditions, second, careful tending, just like a seed needs proper soil, humidity, and temperature, and careful tending of either nature or humans, to germinate and flourish. Proper environment and conditions for the seeds of cultural products, on the other hand, are found, not in abundance of resources, but, to the contrary, in scarcity and aridity. Capitalism has disposed of so much in the way of establishing its hegemony, reduced so much to the bare minimum of market value, and flattened so much to monotony and uniformity, that it is just the right time now for the "principle of hope" to become operative. For this, though, careful tending is needed, which, first and foremost, can happen through a solution that approaches, not toward, but from the future, which, in other words, looks back beyond the present.

If we accept that cultural formations contain in them elements that are the results of what Bloch calls the *principle of hope*, then every culture, every way of living, every method of dealing with nature, every action adding depth and value to the simple organic, biological human existence, becomes a value in and of itself. None of them "simply constitute an imperfect and incomplete stage of development, but rather" each is "a different way of seeing that aims at protecting its own autonomy vis-à-vis the developed world" (Cassano, 2012:xxxviii). In other words, they do not constitute "a space of backwardness and underdevelopment, as an unfinished version of" (Cassano, 2012:xxxix) something else, but they are complete, consistent, and evolving in their own way. This is so, simply because not everything goes in the same direction, or with the same pace. When viewed from this angle, adjectives implying a hierarchy between different ways of life become meaningless. There is no such thing as developed, developing or undeveloped, unless one "by positioning the West as necessary destination of all progress, labels regressive every alternative to the dominant way of life" (Cassano, 2012:xli).

Therefore, every way of life, that of nomadic herdsman in deserts, steppes and tundra, that of rainforest people in the Amazon, Congo and Papua New Guinea, that of mountain people in the Andes, Himalayas and the Alps, that of ocean people populating the endless coasts of the Atlantic, the Pacific and the Indian Ocean, that of ice people living in the remote Arctic region, to name but a few, are valuable with no other apparent reason than that they all are highly developed within their specific context. Each life form is optimized according to the resources in its environment, and to accommodate the needs of its specific conditions. Every way of life, if it has survived and passed the test of time, is as "developed" as it can, and should, get within the conditions of geographical region it inhabits. Western/European way of life, which claims to be the ultimate destination of every human endeavor, which monopolizes the use of the adjective "developed" for itself, like any other way of life, and despite its proven and immense adaptability, would actually become quite underdeveloped outside of its own context. The ways developed to use natural resources, to give meaning to life, and to form communities in the Western/European creed, would mean nothing under the thick canopy of the rainforest, in the middle of desert, or beyond the 66<sup>th</sup> parallel. Pick a random group of "developed" individuals from any city in the US, Europe or Japan, and leave them on a tree, on a dune, or on ice. It would be impossible for them to survive with the tools and methods of living-technique they inherited from modern Western/European legacy, unless there are cameras around to film and market their awkwardness, misery, and pathetic situation.

Dominance of a certain culture, to be more specific, that of the Western/European lineage at the present time, in this light, is not the result of a divine commandment, or not even so much of its intrinsic values, but rather conjectural. It just happens that Western/European culture evolved in a way that is suitable to inhabit, and dominate by force, much of the habitable earth at a certain time in history. Indeed, defining itself as the ultimate form of human life, and imposing itself on the rest of the planet, it makes the very human existence fragile. On this point, there is a self-contradiction as well. The major premise of Western/European thought on the human existence is that homo sapiens is a special creature that is given the dominion over the Earth above all the other species; and through this premise, survival of humanity is consecrated. One needs only remember, in this

regard, countless Hollywood films in which a few people who have survived some sort of doomsday fight all kinds of obstacles to secure the continuation human existence. If that is the case, though, if human existence on earth is an absolute necessity, if we are not a mere coincidence of evolution that turned into a cancer gnawing away the tissues of the planet —which we probably are— then the existence of all ways of life at any time is crucial for securing the eternal continuation of human existence. If all the eggs are placed in one basket, basket of the Western/European origin, and if the physical living conditions on earth change drastically in a way that Western/European way of life cannot handle, then human race would face absolute extinction. If, for instance, all the earth turns into a desert, and all the desert people of old times are now living as factory workers producing TV sets or cell phones, if the ancient wisdom containing the information about the ways and methods of dealing with life, and surviving in the desert is lost, then who will teach us how to find food and water in such conditions, and who will tell us which part of desert animals and plants taste better?

Thus, imposing a certain way of life on the entire human race makes the existence of humans very fragile. This, though, is neither a remote dystopia, nor impossibility. One needs only think the dependence of modern Western/European way of life on rapidly decreasing fossil energy resources, and the fast depreciation of all kinds of landscapes. It is known, today, for a fact, that the entire planet acts like a single organism in which each part, no matter how remote, is tied to all the others. If the sands of Saharan desert, blown away by winds and carried by ocean currents, provide necessary nutrients for plants in the Amazon basin; if the minerals of Pacific, stored and carried in the tissues of salmon fish through the rivers, thanks to bears which eat only certain parts of the fish and throw away the rest deep in forests, end up nourishing trees in high reaches of mountains, there is no way that planet-wide human existence in its entirety is not also like a single organism. Thus, human life is highly interdependent, and all forms of it are needed for it to continue its existence. If interdependency is inevitable, dialogue is indispensable. Ancient texts containing information on other, older, ways of life, insofar as they can be tools for this dialogue, necessarily take their place in modern works of art, as seen in the works discussed here.

These texts entering into modern works of art in this way can also be seen as part of an effort to put things in their right order. One of the words that define Western/European dominance is expedition. Western/European outburst in other parts of the world was pioneered and legitimized by expeditions put together to explore, research, and finally appropriate lands previously unknown to Europeans. In the case of East-West dichotomy, for instance, Napoleon's expedition to Egypt was of vital importance in setting the stage for the entire Orientalist enterprise (Said, 1979:76). Ancient texts discussed here, these "cultural fruits of the Orient", traveling to the heart of Western/European culture, taking their place in texts produced within Western/European milieu as novels or cinema films, can be thought of as a counter expedition.

For a worldview that defines itself pure and original, that rejects its sources and discordant parts (Chambers, 2008:146-147), that swallows and digests everything to turn everything into itself, contamination is a fearful prospect. In this regard, contaminating the novel form with storytelling method of the *Nights*, or infusing principles of miniature painting into necessarily perspective-based scenes of a film, provides opportunity to take steps in this counter expedition. This, though, "is not to abandon that formation, that inheritance —Occidental humanism and its presumed possession of modernity— but, rather, to excavate it, to dig deeper into the folds, to expose its languages, to explore the profound ambiguities" (Chambers, 2008:19) in order to salvage modernity from the relentless unidimensionality, uniformity and "intolerant straightjacket of instrumental reason" (Chambers, 2008:22) that it imprisoned itself along with the rest of the world.

At a time when West/Europe finally wakes up from the impossible dream of uncontaminated colonialism; when people of former colonies, having somewhat acquired the cultural codes of their former colonialists, demand a place in the heart of their forcibly adopted culture; and when the Mediterranean has turned into a graveyard for those who face up to the challenge of a risky passage to put forward this demand, such openness to contamination is needed, first and foremost, by the West itself. If, arguably, Protestantism is a Christianity that is uncontaminated by Jesus Christ, then Pasolini's Nazarene is its missing piece, its necessary dialectical other, its complementary contamination. In the same vein, if novel is the end of



storytelling (Benjamin, 1968:87), in other words, if it is the method of telling a story that is uncontaminated by storytelling, then Mahfouz' inclusion of old stories in a novel is the necessary contamination for the novel form for it to be whole.

Such an effort is indeed needed to make modernity whole, in general. In this regard, this effort does not deny modernity itself, since, after all, modernity is also one of the many ways of living which is no more or no less valuable than others. However, it opposes the way modernity establishes and imposes itself. Thus, this is not to destroy modernity, but rather "to slow down and deviate the tempo of modernity, its neurotic anxiety for linearity, causality, and 'progress', by folding it into other times, other textures, other ways of being in a multiple modernity" (Chambers, 2008:33).

Finally, it is possible to say that both Mahfouz and Pasolini agree in their discontent over the current state of things, and in their interest in the lives of the subaltern people. What they disagree is what to look for in the past for overcoming current problems. According to Mahfouz, past is the realm of the reasons of current misery. Knowing it is the key to understanding the structures and mechanisms which lead humanity to its current problems; and understanding the nature of the problems is the first step in solving them. On the other hand, for Pasolini, past is where the hope itself resides. The key is to find or provide opportunities for the archaic codes of the past to exist within the present time, so that, they can develop as vehicles, or at least seeds, of cultural resistance to the hegemonic codes of modernity. Irrespectively of this difference, though, both resist their fate by committing themselves to storytelling as a Sisyphian enterprise. They do it well, each in his own way.

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## APPENDICES

### A - TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Bu çalışma, çağdaş sanat eserlerinde kadim metinlerin (*ancient texts*) kullanılmasının, günümüz madun (*subaltern*) topluluklarının hayatlarına nasıl ışık tutabileceğini araştırmaktadır. İncelemeye kaynaklık etmesi için İtalyan yönetmen Pier Paolo Pasolini'nin *Binbir Gece Masalları* (1974, orijinal İtalyanca adı: *Il Fiore Delle Mille e Una Note*; İngilizce *Arabian Nights* olarak biliniyor) ve *Aziz Matyas'a Göre İncil* (1964, orijinal İtalyanca adı: *Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo*; İngilizce *Gospel According to St. Matthew* olarak biliniyor) filmleri ile, Mısırlı yazar Necip Mahfuz'un *Binbirinci Gecedeki Sonra* (1982, orijinal Arapça adı: ليالي ألف ليلة; İngilizce'ye *Arabian Days and Nights* adıyla çevrilmiştir) ve *Cebelavi Sokağı'nın Çocukları* (1959, orijinal Arapça adı: أولاد حارتنا; İngilizce'ye önce 1981'de *Children of Gabalawi* adıyla, sonra 1999'da *Children of the Alley* adıyla çevrilmiştir) romanları seçilmiştir. Her iki sanatçı da, bu yapıtlarında, aynı kadim metinlere başvurup, bunlardan ilham alarak ortak bir noktada buluşmuştur. Söz konusu metinler, İbrahimî dinlerin kutsal kitaplarındaki menkıbeler ve *Binbir Gece Masalları*'dır.

*Cebelavi Sokağı'nın Çocukları*, İbrahimî dinlerin kutsal kitaplarındaki menkıbelere dayanmaktadır. Yüzeysel bir okuma yapılırsa, roman, Kahire'de küçük bir mahallede yaşayan insanların hikâyesini anlatmaktadır. Hepsi ortak bir atadan gelen bu insanlar, adaletsiz yöneticiler ve onlara hizmet eden mahalle kabadayılarının baskısı altında hayatta kalmaya çalışırlar. Farklı zamanlarda içlerinden biri çıkıp bu baskıya karşı bir isyan başlatsa da, bu isyanlar sürdürülebilir sonuçlar üretmezler. Romanda art arda bu isyanların ve nasıl başarısız olduklarının hikâyesi anlatılır.

Romadaki olayların ve karakterlerin önemi, İbrahimî dinler tarihindeki olay ve kişilere olan benzerliklerinden gelmektedir. Âdem, Havva, ve çocuklarından, Batı biliminin dine baskın geldiği yakın zamana kadar bu tarihin hemen bütün önemli köşe taşları ve kişileri romanda kendine yer bulur. Mesela, sözü geçen isyan önderleri Musa, İsa, ve Muhammed'e, mahallede yaşayanların ortak atası olan Cebelavi de İbrahimî dinlerin tanrısına denk düşmektedir. Tanrı'nın Âdem'i yaratması, Şeytan'ın Âdem'e secde etmediği için cennetten kovulması, Havva'nın Âdem'in kaburga kemiğinden yaratılması, yasak meyve, Musa'nın kavmini baskıdan kurtarmak için görevlendirmesi, İsa'nın sevgi ve yoksulluk vaz etmesi, Muhammed'in vahiyleri ve peygamberliği gibi olayların romanda hep bir karşılığı vardır. Bu da, romanın, ilk kez bir gazetede yayınlandığında birçok tartışmalara yol açmasını ve Mısır'da uzun süre kitap olarak basılamayışını açıklar.

Romadaki olay ve kişilerle İbrahimî dinler tarihinin olay ve kişileri arasındaki benzerlik çok açık olup, çok geniş bir alanda yüzyılları kapsayan bu tarih küçük bir mahallenin birkaç kuşaklık hikâyesine yansıtılınca daha anlaşılır hale gelir. Böylece, bu tarihin, bir bölümü, ya da ince ayrıntılarına bakıldığında gözden kaçabilen kimi unsurlar görünürlük kazanır. Bu unsurlardan romadaki en önemlisi yöneticiler ve kabadayılarda somutlaşan baskıcı devlet idaresidir. Bunun karşısında insanların direnişi ise mahallenin kendisinde somutlaşır. Yani, İbrahimî dinler tarihindeki kişilere denk düşen bütün karakterlerin ötesinde, romanın iki ana karakteri, aslında, baskıcı devlet ve bir olgu olarak "mahalle"dir. Bu iki unsur, Mahfuz'un diğer yapıtlarında ve hayatında da önemli bir yere sahiptir. Neredeyse bütün hayatı boyunca Kahire'nin aynı mahallesinde yaşamış, yurtdışına sadece iki kere, kısa süreli olarak çıkmış bir yazar olarak mahalle olgusuna önem vermemesi düşünülemez. İçinde yaşadığı koşullar dolayısıyla, kaba kuvvetle arkadaşlarına şiddet uygulayan mahalledeki çocuktan, baskıcı devlete kadar, gücün çeşitli somut halleriyle de hayatı boyunca uğraşmak zorunda kalmıştır.

Baskıcı devlet ve insanların direnişi arasındaki bu diyalektik ilişkiden, olayların sürekli kendini tekrar ettiği döngüsel bir tarih anlatısı ortaya çıkar. Böylece roman, tarihin materyalist bir okuması olarak değerlendirilebilir. Bu okumada İbrahimî dinlerin peygamberleri isyan önderleri, bu dinlerin kendileri ise insanların baskı karşısında geliştirdiği birer mücadele yöntemi olarak anlaşılabilir. Dolayısıyla

romanda, dinlerin kutsal kişileri, bu kutsallıklarından arındırılmış olur. Zaten Mahfuz'un alegori yaparken kullandığı ana yöntem de budur. Burada İbrahimî dinlerin kadim metinleri birer ara yüz işlevi görür. Bunların sayesinde romandaki hikâye ile gerçek tarih arasında bağ kurmak mümkün olmaktadır. Bu tarih, olayların temelinde ilahi esinlenme değil maddi koşullar olduğundan, Marxist bir yorum olarak görülebilir. Ayrıca, genelde olduğu gibi güç sahiplerinin değil, sıradan insanların bakış açısından bir tarih anlatısıdır.

*Binbirinci Geceden Sonra* romanı ile kaynak aldığı kadim metin olan *Binbir Gece Masalları* arasındaki ilişki ise daha değişiktir, çünkü roman, *Binbir Gece Masalları*'nın devamı olarak yazılmıştır. Şehrazad'ın bin birinci gece son masalını anlatıp Şehriyar tarafından hayatının bağışlandığı noktadan başlar. Sonrasında Şehriyar'ın sultanı olduğu ülkede yaşayan kişilerin başlarına gelen olaylar anlatılır. Aslında roman alegorik olarak yakın dönem Mısır tarihini anlatır. Aynı Mısır gibi Şehriyar'ın ülkesinde de yolsuzluk, siyasi kirlenme, adaletsizlik ve baskı almış başını gitmektedir. Ama romanda bunlar sadece devlet idare edenlere özgü değil, insanlar arası her türden ilişkiye sinmiş, tüm topluma hâkim unsurlardır.

Diğerinde olduğu gibi bu romanda da asıl belirgin karakter baskıcı devlet mekanizmasıdır. Ama burada, diğerinden farklı olarak, bu mekanizmanın kırılma noktaları değil çalışma esasları incelenir. Dolayısıyla *Cebelavi Sokağı'nın Çocukları* aynı konuyu daha geniş bir açıdan uzun erimli neden sonuç ilişkileri bağlamında ele alırken, *Binbirinci Geceden Sonra* romanı ise daha kısa erimli, gündelik ilişkilere odaklanır. Bu anlamda bu iki romanın bir birinin tamamlayıcısı olduğu söylenebilir. İkisinde de ortak olan, yazarın *alegori* üzerinden bir *izdüşümü* yapmasıdır. İlkinde İbrahimî dinler tarihi küçük bir mahalleye yansıtılır, ikincide yakın dönem Mısır'ı hayali bir masal krallığına.

*Binbirinci Geceden Sonra* romanı, *Binbir Gece Masalları*'nın sadece içerik olarak değil biçim olarak da bir devamıdır. Çünkü roman, *Binbir Gece Masalları*'nın "hikâye içinde hikâyeler" yapısını korur. Fark ise bu hikâyelerin dizilmesinde ve çerçeve hikâyenin niteliğindedir. *Binbir Gece Masalları* gibi daha çok antoloji denilebilecek bir yapıtı romana çevirmek için Mahfuz, teker teker hikâyeler arasındaki bağları artırıp bir olay örgüsü oluşturmuş, çerçeve hikâyeye ve bu hikâyenin kişilerine de derinlik katmıştır. Böylece, *Binbir Gece Masalları*'nda daha çizgisel şekilde art arda

gelen hikâyeler, Mahfuz'un romanında daha karmaşık bağlarla birbirine bağlanırlar. Bu yapılırken, Şehriyar ve Şehrazad kendi iç çelişkileri, kişilikleri olan, zamanla evrim geçirip gelişen, değişen karakterlere dönüşürler.

Ayrıca *Binbir Gece Masalları*'na benzer olarak, bu romanda da doğüstü olay ve olgular önemli bir yere sahiptir. Uç noktalarda, sıra dışı durumlar yaratan bu olay ve olgular insanlık durumu hakkında yakın gözlemler yapmaya fırsat yaratır. Bu doğüstü unsurlar içinde, örneğin, cinlerin ayrı bir yeri vardır. Asıl olarak baskıcı devlet ve işleyişine odaklanırken, Mahfuz, karakterlerini kısa ömürlü yapar ve çok geliştirmez. Psikolojik derinlik olmayınca, kimi zaman karakterlerin yaptıklarını anlamlandırmak mümkün olamamaktadır. Böyle durumları cinlerin işe karışmasıyla açıklayarak, Mahfuz hikâyenin akışını sağlar.

Ayrıca bu romanda yazarın İslam'a yaklaşımı da *Cebelavi Sokağı'nın Çocukları* romanına göre daha olumludur. Tasavvuf üzerinden değerlendirilen İslam, hem kurulu dinin baskıcı devlet aygıtının bir parçası olmasına hem de maddiyat ve tüketim odaklı kapitalist hayat tarzına sosyalist denebilecek bir alternatif olarak görülür. Ayrıca, *Binbir Gece Masalları*'nın kendisinin de bir işlevinin baskıcı devleti biraz da alaya alarak eleştirmek olduğu düşünülürse, roman bu anlamda esinlendiği kadim metnin işlevine de sadık kalmıştır.

Pasolini'nin *Aziz Matyas'a Göre İncil* filmi, Aziz Matyas İncil'inde anlatıldığı şekliyle İsa'nın hayatını konu alır. Olay örgüsü ve diyaloglara bakıldığında İncil metnine sadık bir film olduğu görülür. Bu yüzdendir ki, örneğin, Katolik kilisesi, yönetmenin aykırı kişiliğine rağmen, filmi, İsa'nın hayatını en iyi anlatan yapıtlar arasında göstermiştir. Bu, ilk bakışta öyle görünse de, kendini sosyalist ve ateist olarak tanımlayan Pasolini için aslında bir çelişki değildir. Bunun iki nedeni vardır. Birincisi, Pasolini için maneviyat, kapitalizm ve onun temelindeki dışlayıcı akılcılığa karşı bir odak olması açısından kabul edilebilir bir olgudur. İkincisi de, Aziz Matyas İncil'inde anlatılan İsa, söyledikleri ve yaptıkları bugün de geçerliliği olan devrimci bir karakter olarak görülebilir. Zira yoksul insanların içinden çıkmış, zenginliğe ve gösterişe olumsuz yaklaşmış, insanlara zenginleşmeyi değil teslimiyeti vaz etmiştir. Kapitalizmin temelinde yoksulluğun erdemi değil zenginliğin sürekli artırılması, akılcılığın temelinde de teslimiyet değil sürekli sorgulama olduğu düşünülürse, İsa'nın yaptıkları ve söylediklerindeki çağdaş muhalif potansiyel meydana çıkar.

Dolayısıyla bu filmde Pasolini, İncil metnine mümkün olduğunca sadık kalmayı tercih etmiştir. Bunu yaparken, İsa'yı yoksulların içinden gelen ve onlara öncülük eden bir isyancı olarak canlandırmıştır. Bu da, İsa karakterine kilisenin kendine mal etmek için eklediği bütün kutsallık ve şatafatın arındırılmasıyla olur. Bu şekilde bakıldığında, filmdeki İsa hem yeryüzüne inmiş bir tanrı, hem de göksel güçleri olan bir insandır; hem tanrısal bir gücü hem de gayet insansı bir kırılabilirliği bedeninde barındırır. Bu şekilde, tanrı ile insan arasında bir eşdeğerlik kurarak, Pasolini, kapitalizmin burjuvazi ve proletarya arasındaki aşılması dayalı dünya görüşüne karşı çıkar.

Her ne kadar Aziz Matyas İncili'ne çok sadık kalsa da, film bir İsa biyografisi değildir. Bundan çok, odağında İsa'nın olduğu bir epik olarak görülebilir. Dolayısıyla, İsa karakterine son iki bin yılda eklenen unsurlar da filmde kendilerine yer bulurlar. Bunun bir yansıması, İsa ve hayatı ile ilgili diğer sanat eserlerine, özellikle de bazı resimlere yapılan göndermelerdir. Gerek Rönesans öncesi dönemde gerekse Rönesans ve sonrasında resimlerde sıkça kullanılan İsa'nın doğumu, Doğu'dan gelen kralların hediyeler getirmesi, İsa'nın vaftiz edilmesi, son akşam yemeği gibi sahneler filmde yer vererek, Pasolini bir yerde bunlardan alıntı yapar. Farklı zamanlarda yapılmış birçok ikon ve resmi filmde bir araya getirerek, farklı zamanları da üst üste getirir. Böylece, belli bir çizgide ilerleyen doğrusal bir zaman yerine, kendi üstüne bükülen, döngüsel bir zaman anlayışı oluşturur. Çizgisel, ilerlemeci zaman kavrayışının kapitalist anlayışın başat zaman algısı olduğu düşünüldüğünde, bu durum muhalif bir potansiyel taşır.

Filmde Pasolini İsa'yı akılcılaştırmamıştır. Yani İsa ile ilgili anlatılan menkıbelerdeki bütün doğaüstü olaylar ve mucizeler filmde de gerçekleşir. Ama, yönetmenin bunları sıradanlaştırarak doğallaştırdığı söylenebilir. Filmde bu olaylar istisnai durumlar gibi değil de günlük hayatın doğal bir parçasıymışçasına olur. İsa, gölün üstünde de yürür, amansız hastalıkları da iyileştirir, bir somun ekmek ve bir testi şarapla ardındaki kalabalıkları da besler, ama bütün bunlar kendiliğinden, bir dinginlik ve doğallık içinde olurlar. Bu haliyle film, *maneviyatın dingin huzurunu* resmeder. Bu hissin, kapitalizmin hız tutkusu ve akılcılığı tarafından hayatın dışına atıldığı düşünülürse, yönetmenin muhalif bir bakış açısı geliştirdiği söylenebilir. Bu

his zaten Aziz Matyas İncili'nde vardır. Yönetmen bu kadim metindeki bu özü açığa çıkarıp filmde resmeder.

Pasoli'nin *Binbir Gece Masalları* filmi ise aynı adlı kadim metinden seçilmiş bazı hikâyelere dayanır. Yönetmenin *Hayat Üçlemesi* olarak bilinen filmlerinin sonuncusudur. Bu üçlemedeki filmler, başta cinsellik olmak üzere, hayatın bedensel hazlarına odaklanır. Bu filmde Pasolini'nin *Binbir Gece Masalları*'ndan seçtiği hikâyeler tam da buna uygun olanlardır. Hayatın renkliliği ve hazlar resmedilerek, hayata renk ve neşe katan her şeyi maddi zenginliğe bağlayan kapitalizme alternatif bir anlayış geliştirilir. Filmde, insanlar, maddi zenginliğe ihtiyaç duymadan, birbirleri ile ve bedenleri ile olan, kendiliğinden, doğal ve dolaysız ilişkileri üzerinden mutlu olabilirler.

Ayrıca cinsellik üzerinden hayatın doğal bir parçası olarak görülen baskı unsurlarının sorgulanması amaçlanır. Bu unsurların farkına varmanın, bunlardan bağımsız başka bir dünya kurmaya giden yolda ilk adım olduğu düşünülürse, Pasolini'nin bu filmdeki muhalif bakış açısı daha iyi anlaşılır. Böylece Pasolini filminde eski yaşam tarzlarına bir özlem duyup nostalji yaparken, asıl olarak bugünkü durumu aşıp daha iyi bir dünya kurmanın yollarını aramakta, yani bir ütopya oluşturmaya çalışmaktadır. Bu sebeple, bu yaklaşıma *ütöfik nostalji* adı verilebilir.

Pasolini, ayrıca, Mahfuz'un *Binbirinci Gecedeki Sonra* romanında yaptığı gibi, *Binbir Gece Masalları*'nın "hikâye içinde hikâyeler" üzerine kurulu yapısına sadık kalır. Bu anlatı şekli, zamanı kırıp, çerçeveleyip, parçaladığı ölçüde çizgisel zaman anlayışına karşı bir yaklaşım olarak belirir. Ayrıca, sinema filmi, en bilindik, ticari, ve yaygın haliyle, olayların bir birini takip ettiği, sağlam neden sonuç ilişkilerine dayalı bir anlatı yapısına dayanır. Hikâye içinde hikâyelere dayalı Pasolini'nin filmi ise anlatı açısından da farklı bir çıkış noktasına sahiptir.

Ek olarak, Pasolini filmdeki kareleri Doğu kaynaklı resim sanatlarının kimi unsurlarıyla buluşturup, bunları birbirine bulaştırır. Minyatür gibi sanatlarda görülebilecek bu unsurların başında, fotoğraflık, üç boyutlu bir gerçeklik algısı oluşturmak peşinde koşmayan, resim yüzeyinin iki boyutluluğu ile barışık bir resmetme anlayışı gelmektedir. Pasolini de filmde çeşitli yollardan bu iki boyutluluğa vurgu yapar. Modernite ile birlikte görsel sanatlar ve tasarım

dünyasında üç boyutlu gerçekliğin olduğu gibi resmedilmesine dayalı anlayış egemen olduğundan, ve bu egemenlik diğer görme ve resmetme biçimlerinin kıyıya itilmesiyle gerçekleştiğinden, Pasolini'nin bu yaptığı, kapitalizm ve modernitenin bir başka baskın unsuruna karşı alternatif geliştirmek olarak okunabilir.

Bu iki filmde Pasolini ayrıca özellikle Hollywood yapımlarında görülebilecek Doğu'nun Oryantalist şekillerde anlatılmasına da alternatif bir bakış açısı geliştirir. Hem İsa'nın hayatı hem de *Binbir Gece Masalları*, Hollywood tarafından sıkça konu edilir. Fakat ideoloji, amaç ve genel his olarak bu filmlerin kaynak aldıkları kadim metinlere sadık kaldığı pek söylenemez. Pasolini, kadim metinlere her üç açıdan da sadık kalmaya çalışır.

Zaten her iki yapıtta da nostalji üzerinden ütopya üretirken benzer bir yöntemi kullanır. Bu yöntem, kaynak aldığı kadim metinlerin özünü bulup bunu ve içlerindeki muhalif potansiyeli harekete geçirmektir. *Aziz Matyas'a Göre İncil* filmindeki *maneviyatın dingin huzuru* ve *Binbir Gece Masalları* filmindeki *hayatın bedensel hazlarının coşkusu*, modernite ve kapitalizm tarafından baskılanmış ve dışlanmış iki unsurdur. Pasolini, kadim metinlerde içrek bu unsurları meydana çıkarıp görülür ve bir adım ötesinde arzu edilir hale getirerek muhalif bir dil geliştirir.

Kadim metinlere sadık olmadığı noktalarda, ya kendi seçeneği ile, ya da yazılı metinlerden film yapmanın bir gereği olarak, filmine eklemeler yaptığında, bu, filme bulaştırdığı görünüşte bir birinden çok farklı gibi olan unsurların, karşılıklı konuşması ile olur. Bağımsız dolaylı söylem (*free indirect discourse*) olarak adlandırılan bu yöntemde, karşılıklı diyaloga giren unsurların her biri bu konuşma üzerinden bir birini zenginleştirir. Bütün bunlar sayesinde Pasolini, şiirsel bir sinema dili oluşturmaya çalışır. Bu, filmin görselliğinin, anlatısına hizmet edip onun anlamını geliştirmekten öte kendi başına bir anlam ifade ettiği bir dildir.

Birlikte değerlendirildiğinde, her iki sanatçı da eserlerinde, modernite ve kapitalizmle şekillenmiş günümüzdeki durumla ilgili hoşnutsuzluklarından yola çıkmaktadırlar. Mahfuz, romanlarında, yaşadığı çağın sorunlarının altında yatan sebepleri araştırır. Eserlerindeki kurmaca dünyalar, gerçek dünyanın birer *alegorik izdüşümü*dür. Kurmaca ve gerçek arasındaki ilişki ise kadim metinler üzerinden

kurulur. Bu metinler sayesinde Mahfuz, okuyucuların, geçmişi daha berrak anlamalarını sağlamayı amaçlar. Pasolini ise kadim metinlerde, eski zamanlarda hayatın önemli bir yanı olup, günümüzde, modernite ve kapitalizm tarafından dışlanmış bazı unsurlar peşinde koşar. Bunlar, modernite ve kapitalizmden önceki bir zamana ait olduklarından, bünyelerinde, mevcut durumu aşmanın ve yeni bir dünya kurmanın olabirliğine dair umut nüveleri barındırırlar. Dolayısıyla, Pasolini, filmlerinde kadim metinleri kullanarak, geçip gidende umut arayıp, *nostalji* üzerinden bir *ütopya* kurmaktadır.

Yaklaşımlarındaki farklılık, başka şeylerin yanında, yaşadıkları ve içinden geldikleri kültürle de ilişkilendirilebilir. Mısır'ın modernite ile olan ilişkisi kolonyal tarihten ötürü sorunludur. Son dönem Mısır tarihi aynı zamanda moderniteyi ihraç edip Mısır'a özgü bir yaklaşım oluşturma çabasının da tarihidir. Mahfuz'un yaşadığı dönem de bundan bağımsız değildir. Dolayısıyla Mahfuz ve yapıtlarının da bu çabanın bir parçası olduğu düşünülebilir. Bu açıdan bakılırsa, burada sözü geçen romanlardaki baskıcı devlet anlatısı, bu devletin işleyişine ve kırılma noktalarına dair yorum ve gözlemler Mahfuz'un bu çabaya katkısı olarak görülebilir. Yazarın, kendi şartlarına uygun, baskı ve gücün egemenliğinden bağımsız bir modernite kurmak için, geçmişte bunu yapmaya çalışan kuşakların hikâyelerini öğrenip ders almayı ilk adım olarak gördüğü söylenebilir.

Pasolini ise, modernitenin daha derin ve özgün kök saldığı bir batı Avrupa ülkesinden, İtalya'dandır. Bununla birlikte, İtalya'nın, özellikle güneyinin, Avrupa içinde ayrıksı bir durumu olduğu söylenebilir. Hem maddi ve teknik gelişmişlik hem de kapitalizm ve modernitenin yaşam biçiminin benimsenmesi açısından bu bölge "sorunlu" olarak adlandırılır. Dolayısıyla Pasolini modernitenin hem kendi içinde başarıya ulaştığı, ama hem de tam nüfuz edemeyip kısmen başarısız olduğu durumlarla iç içedir. Bu yüzden, onun yapmaya çalıştığı şey bir modernite inşası değil, moderniteyi aşip onun yerine başka bir şey koyma çabasıdır. Geçmiş ise ders alınması gereken bir hatalar yumağı değil, tam da yeni bir dünya kurmanın umuduna dair nüvelerin olduğu yerdir. Mahfuz, kadim metinlerde anlatılan eski zamanlara dair unsurları, süregelen hayal kırıklıkları ve başarısızlıklar üzerinden kurduğu geçmiş anlatısına anlam vermek için kullanır. Pasolini ise, geçmiş zamanlardaki hayatta umut ışığı arar. Mahfuz için geçmiş tekrarlanmaması



gerekenlerin bulunduğu yer iken, Pasolini için tam da yeniden canlandırılması gerekenlerin aranacağı yerdir.

Mahfuz'un *alegorik izdüşümlerle* oluşturduğu tarih anlatısından çıkardığı en genel sonuç, geçmişteki mücadelelerin temel hatasının, onların odak noktaları olduğu sonucudur. Buna göre, bu mücadeleler gücü ve güç merkezlerini ele geçirmeye odaklandıkları için başarısız olmuşlardır. Bunun yerine yapılması gereken, gücün bir olgu olarak hayatın merkezinde yer almasına karşı çıkmaktır. Hiyerarşik olmayan, gücü değil eşdeğerliliği merkeze alan, insanlar arasında dayanışma bağlarının kuvvetli olduğu bir toplum kurulması halinde zaten güç odakları ortadan kalkacak ve bunların ele geçirilmesi de gereksiz hale gelecektir. Öte yandan, gücü ele geçirmek, genel olarak güç tarafından ele geçirilmekle sonuçlanır.

Bununla birlikte Mahfuz ne yapılması gerektiğine dair bir öneri sunmaz. Onunki daha çok bir betimleyip anlatma ve ortaya koyma çabasıdır. Tam da Mahfuz'un bıraktığı yerden Pasolini devralır. Yönetmene göre, merkezinde güce tapınmanın olmadığı, eşdeğerlik üzerine kurulu bir toplum yapısının nasıl olabileceğine dair ipuçları eski zamanların yaşam biçimlerinde vardır. Bu yaşam biçimleri, doğaları gereği, kapitalizm ve modernite ortaya çıkmadan önceki bir zamana ait olduklarından, bunların bazı kirlenici unsurlarından bağımsızdırlar. Dolayısıyla, kapitalizm ve modernite olmadan da yaşanabileceğinin elle tutulur birer kanıtı ve aynı zamanda bunun nasıl olabileceğine dair de zengin bir başvuru kaynağıdırlar.

İki sanatçı için de yapıtlarında kadim metinleri kullanmanın kendisi bile muhalif bazı potansiyeller barındırır. Mesela, *Binbir Gece Masalları* gibi bir Arap klasik metnini romanlarına yerleştirerek Mahfuz, roman formuna daha Mısır'a özgü bir yorum getirmeye çalışır. Roman'ın bir form olarak Mısır'a girmesinin batılılaşma ve sömürgecilikle olan ilişkisi düşünülürse, Mahfuz'un burada yapmak istediği, aynı zamanda sömürgecilik karşıtı bir tavır olarak da görülebilir. Pasolini ise, geniş bir coğrafyada uzun çağlar boyunca yaşamış sıradan insanların ortak eseri olan kadim metinleri ruhuna, yapısına ve ideolojisine sadık kalarak filmlerine ekleyip, bu metinlere asıl sahibi olan sıradan insanlar adına tekrar el koyar. Bakıldığında, örneğin, İsa'nın hayatı üzerinde kilisenin kesin bir hâkimiyeti vardır. Onlarca İncil içinden dört tanesinin seçilip kabul edilmesi bu hâkimiyeti kurmak içindir. Bunun üzerinden İsa, şatafat ve güçle özdeş bir karakter olarak resmedilir. Pasolini ise,

İsa'yı metinde anlatıldığı gibi tevazu içinde ve yoksul olarak resmederek buna karşı çıkar. Benzer şekilde *Binbir Gece Masalları* da hem kültür endüstrisi hem de akademi tarafından onlarca inceleme, yorum, film ve çizgi filmde aslından ve içinden çıktığı Doğu'dan uzaklaştırılarak nesneleştirilir. Pasolini *Binbir Gece Masalları* filminde de buna karşı çıkar. İlkinde *maneviyatın dingin huzurunu*, ikincide *yaşamın bedensel hazlarının coşkusu*, yani kaynak aldıkları kadim metinlerdeki temel özleri öne çıkararak, bu metinlerin aslına yaklaşma, onları kilise ya da kültür endüstri gibi kurumların elinden alıp, yeniden sıradan insanlara mal etmeye çalışır.

Her iki sanatçı için de yapıtlarında kadim metinlere yer vermenin sağladığı bazı kolaylıklar vardır. Geçmiş çok eskilere dayanan, insanların sevdiği ya da saygı duyduğu bu metinlere vurgu ya da gönderme yapmak sansür ve yasakların etrafından dolaşmanın bir yolu olarak görülebilir. Sonuçta iki sanatçı da eleştirel, muhalif yapıtlar vermektedirler ve tam bir ifade özgürlüğünün olmadığı bir ortamda baskı ihtimalinden kaçmak için kadim metinler işler hale gelir. Bir ikinci nokta, kadim metinler günümüze dair söz söylemek için çok yerinde bir mesafe sağlarlar. Günümüz gerçekliğinin geniş açıdan görmeyi zorlaştıracak kadar içinde değildirler. Öte yandan, değişik zamanlara hitap edebilmeleri, yani zamansız olmaları sayesinde günümüz gerçekliğinin dışında, uzağında da değildirler.

Bu zamansızlık ayrıca bu metinlerin insan durumunun ve gerçekliğinin özüne temas etmesi olarak da yorumlanabilir. Tek tanrılı dinlerin kutsal metinleri de, *Binbir Gece Masalları* da yüzlerce yıllık bir evrimin sonucunda ortaya çıkmış metinlerdir. Bu evrimin hala sürdüğü de söylenebilir, ki Mahfuz ve Pasolini'nin burada konu edilen yapıtları da bu evrimin bir parçasıdır. Bu metinler, ilk ortaya çıktıkları zamandan bugüne, anlatıldıkları ya da yazıldıkları her yerde ve zamanda, o zaman ve yere ait olan insanlık durumuna dair ne varsa içlerine almış, süreç içinde geçerliliğini yitiren şeylerden de arınmıştır. Dolayısıyla bugün içlerinde kalanların, insan hayatına ilişkin saflaşmış, özleşmiş olanlar olduğu söylenebilir.

Son olarak, her iki sanatçı da, çağdaş yapıtlarında kadim metinlere yer vererek, aynı zamanda kendilerini birer hikâye anlatıcısı olarak da konumlandırırlar. Mahfuz'un durumunda bu daha belirgindir. *Cebelavi Sokağı'nın Çocukları* romanındaki kurmaca anlatıcı, mahallede yaşayan hikâyecilerden biridir. Yani Mahfuz'un romanda kendisine karşılık yarattığı karakter bir hikâyeye anlatıcısıdır.

Pasolini ise, kadim metinlerdeki hikâyelere bir şair duyarlığı ile yaklaşp şiirsel bir sinema dili yakalayarak bunu seyircisine ulaştırır. Yani eski hikâyeleri kendi dili ve yorumuyla aktararak, çağdaş bir hikâye anlatıcısı olur. Bir bakıma ikisi de katı olan her şeyin buharlaştığı bir zamanda ve üstelik tüm bunların nafîle olması ihtimalini de göze alarak, hiç buharlaşmayan hikâyelerin peşine düşerler. Her ikisi de kendi dilince, ve dili döndüğünce, eski hikâyeleri anlatırlar. İkisi de bin yıllar önce, bilinmez bir zaman ve yerde anlatılan o ilk hikâyenin heyecanı peşinde koşarlar. İkisi de o zamandan bu zamana yaşamış sayısız hikâye anlatıcısı içinde yerlerini alırlar.

## B - TEZ FOTOKOPİSİ İZİN FORMU

### ENSTİTÜ

Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Uygulamalı Matematik Enstitüsü	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enformatik Enstitüsü	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deniz Bilimleri Enstitüsü	<input type="checkbox"/>

### YAZARIN

Soyadı : Gündes  
Adı : Feridun  
Bölümü : Medya ve Kültürel Çalışmalar

**TEZİN ADI** (İngilizce) : REWORKING ANCIENT TEXTS IN CONTEMPORARY MEDITERRANEAN CONTEXT: ALLEGORIC PROJECTION AND UTOPIC NOSTALGIA IN THE WORKS OF NAGUIB MAHFOUZ AND PIER PAOLO PASOLINI

**TEZİN TÜRÜ** : Yüksek Lisans  Doktora

1. Tezimin tamamından kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla fotokopi alınabilir.
2. Tezimin içindekiler sayfası, özet, indeks sayfalarından ve/veya bir bölümünden kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla fotokopi alınabilir.
3. Tezimden bir bir (1) yıl süreyle fotokopi alınamaz.

**TEZİN KÜTÜPHANEYE TESLİM TARİHİ:**