



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Theorem (Teorema)

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Director: Paolo Pasolini
Production Company: Aetos Film
Producers: Franco Rossellini,
Manolo Bolognini
Production Secretary: Sergio Galiano
Production Manager: Paolo Frascà
Assistant Director: Sergio Citti
Script Supervisor: Wanda Tuzi
Screenplay: Pier Paolo Pasolini
Based on the novel by:
Pier Paolo Pasolini
Director of Photography:
Giuseppe Ruzzolini
Camera Operator: Otello Spila
Assistant Camera Operators:
Luigi Conversi, Giuseppe Bonauroi
Editor: Nino Baragli
Art Director: Luciano Puccini
Costumes: Marcella De Marchis
Silvana Mangano's Costumes:
Roberto Capucci
Make-up: Goffredo Rocchetti,
Manlio Rocchetti
Hair: Maria Teresa Corridoni
Music: Ennio Morricone
Music Director: Bruno Nicolai
Sound: Dino Fronzetti
Sound Mix: Fausto Ancillai
Paintings Consultant: Giuseppe Zigaina
Cast:
Terence Stamp (*the visitor*)
Silvana Mangano (*Lucia*)
Massimo Girotti (*Paolo*)
Anne Wiazemsky (*Odetta*)
Laura Betti (*Emilia*)
Andrés José Cruz (*Pietro*)
Ninetto Davoli (*Angelino*)
Alfonso Gatto (*doctor*)
Carlo De Mejo (*Lucia's lover*)
Adele Cambria (*second maid*)
Luigi Barbini (*boy at the station*)
Susanna Pasolini (*elderly peasant woman*)
Ivan Scratuglia
Guido Cerretani
Cesare Garboli
Italy 1968
98 mins
Digital

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Pier Paolo Pasolini was a man of many qualities and contradictions – oft-noted when folks point to the strangeness of an atheist making *The Gospel According to Matthew* (1964) – and that is reflected both in the diversity of his films and in how people respond to them. Some, for example, prefer the seemingly more realist early works like *Accattone* (1961) and *Mamma Roma* (1962); others prefer his exotic adaptations of Greek myths (*Oedipus Rex*, 1967; *Medea*, 1970) or the late, determinedly populist ‘Trilogy of Life’ (*The Decameron*, 1970; *The Canterbury Tales*, 1972; *Arabian Nights*, 1974); and some even favour the extreme horrors of *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (1975). My own favourites? Well, I’ve long had a great affection for *Pigsty* (1969), but my number-one favourite has always been *Theorem*.

It should be said that, along with *Medea*, these two titles are probably the most defiantly original films of Pasolini’s admirably defiant career. In the latter half of the 60s, he took to experimenting with form, frequently using a kind of dual narrative. *Pigsty*, for instance, intercuts and ‘rhymes’, to wonderful satirical effect, two stories, one about a cannibal in a vaguely defined pre-industrial past, the other about the strange, pig-fetishist son of a wealthy modern industrialist.

But *Theorem* is a little different. While it too brings together different narrative styles – from fake newsreel interviews and subdued ‘realist’ drama dealing with familial tensions to something more blatantly fantastic or mythic – it does so, remarkably, in a more organic and integrated way.

Hence, the story of a well-to-do Milan household – paterfamilias, mother, daughter, son and maid – transformed beyond recognition by the arrival of a mysterious and attractive visitor (Terence Stamp) may be read – indeed, it virtually demands to be read – in various ways, each equally intriguing and rewarding.

Politics, sex, religious fable, existential allegory and wickedly mischievous satire are all held in precarious but perfect balance by Pasolini’s distinctively strange but seductive poetics. Small wonder critic Tony Rayns has written that nobody had ever seen such a film when it was first released in 1968.

My own first viewing of the film was about five or six years later, when I was a student, but even then it still struck me like a bolt of lightning. It wasn’t just that cast, including as it did Stamp, Anne Wiazemsky (fresh from Bresson’s *Au hasard Balthazar*, 1966, and Godard’s *La Chinoise* and *Weekend*, both 1967) and the extraordinary Silvana Mangano; nor was it the often surprising but consistently evocative use of locations; nor Pasolini’s characteristically stimulating use of music (Mozart and Morricone).

All these had their effect, but what felt most miraculous to me were the striking images Pasolini found to make his strange story so persuasive. Stamp seemed like some Apollo or Dionysus, and those falling under his spell appeared, very plausibly, to be utterly possessed. Even more than *The Gospel According to Matthew*, *Theorem* felt like a film which dealt – both seriously and semi-comically at the same time – with the spiritual and sensual, the physical and metaphysical.

I believed in its peculiar magic, and it reminded me very forcefully of the ancient saying, ‘Those whom the gods wish to destroy, they first make mad.’ Of how many movies is it possible to say that? Clearly, Pasolini knew a thing or two... if not about gods, then about humanity.

Geoff Andrew, bfi.org.uk, 10 April 2013

In the pre-credits sequence of *Theorem* a reporter hectors the dazed recipients of Paolo’s factory, with the style of Godardian questioning that simultaneously supplies the required answers, into agreeing that no matter what the middle-class does it’s in

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS**Wild Strawberries** Smultronstället

Mon 1 Jul 11:50; Tue 9 Jul 20:50; Sun 21 Jul 14:20; Tue 30 Jul 18:20

Point Blank

Tue 2 Jul 12:20; Wed 17 Jul 18:10 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large); Sat 27 Jul 18:30

Pierrot le fou

Tue 2 Jul 18:10; Fri 12 Jul 20:40; Mon 15 Jul 12:10; Mon 29 Jul 20:45

Taxi Driver

Wed 3 Jul 17:50 (+ intro by Chantelle Lavel Boyea, BFI Assistant Curator of Television); Sat 13 Jul 18:00; Tue 16 Jul 12:15; Tue 23 Jul 12:20

The Passenger Professione: reporter

Thu 4 Jul 20:40; Sat 6 Jul 12:00; Mon 15 Jul 18:10; Fri 19 Jul 12:20

Au hasard Balthazar

Fri 5 Jul 12:20; Wed 10 Jul 12:20; Fri 19 Jul 20:45; Wed 31 Jul 18:10 (+ intro)

The English Patient

Sat 6 Jul 17:15; Sun 21 Jul 19:20

The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie

Le Charme discret de la bourgeoisie
Sun 7 Jul 17:10; Thu 11 Jul 12:20; Sat 20 Jul 16:10

Theorem Teorema

Mon 8 Jul 12:20; Wed 10 Jul 18:15 (+ intro); Wed 17 Jul 12:30; Sun 28 Jul 20:30

Gloria

Sat 13 Jul 13:10; Tue 16 Jul 20:35; Sat 20 Jul 13:30; Tue 30 Jul 20:30

Unforgiven

Sun 14 Jul 19:50; Tue 23 Jul 20:30; Thu 25 Jul 14:40

Bitter Victory

Thu 18 Jul 20:45; Sun 28 Jul 12:00

Daughters of the Dust

Mon 22 Jul 12:20; Wed 24 Jul 18:10 (+ intro by Arike Oke, Executive Director of Knowledge, Learning and Collections); Sat 27 Jul 20:45

F for Fake

Mon 22 Jul 18:20; Wed 24 Jul 12:40; Fri 26 Jul 20:50

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the wrong. The joke is not simply one for Bertolucci and Bellocchio to enjoy, for Pasolini aims it at himself; his lifelong anti-bourgeois crusade having won for him a full measure of profit, he now perches with precarious irony on the fence between the vituperative ranks he once spoke for and the establishment comforts that irresistibly claim him.

Not unnaturally, the result is neo-Moravian, a parable of dissipated integrity in which Marx and Christ ('that other communist, Jesus', as Skolimowski once remarked) become interchangeable symbols of self-destruction. The trouble with gods is that they aren't human; too easy, then, for them to demand the inhumanly possible. So Pasolini portrays the bourgeois family unit as if nothing could ever have been more foreign to him than, for instance, to suggest to the whores of Rome that they form a trade-union (*Il gobbo* [d. Carlo Lizzani, 1960]), or to their pimps that money is a garbage commodity (*La notte brava* [d. Mauro Bolognini, 1959]).

True, the home is splendid to the point of being a palatial caricature, but within the breast of each member of the family beats a loneliness that Accattone would have been proud of. A capitalistic yearning for true values? A portrayal of the characteristic bourgeois inability to avoid excesses of every kind, spiritual and physical alike? The film works both for and against its characters in an ambiguity that even extends as far as the music on its soundtrack – a Mozart Mass sung by a Russian choir. The reincarnation of Billy Budd invades them with a docile sexuality, they declare that this mirror of their desires has cured the blindness that kept them sane, and they all go careering off the rails with varying degrees of despairing inventiveness. One could leave it at that, were it not that Pasolini gives too many strong signs of going with them.

First, he is quite clearly fond of the characters he has written: the maid who distractedly attempts to mow the lawn while her Saviour coolly reads in his deckchair, the son through whose eyes we contemplate the piercing malaise of Francis Bacon, the daughter and her enormous snapshot albums (although Pasolini's very choice of actress here is simple enough guide to his feeling about the part), the mother whose white, masklike face contorts with a terrible pain as she unwillingly picks up yet another man, and the father who is used for the last and most striking sequences of the film so that Pasolini's identification appears complete.

Secondly, *Theorem* is punctuated by shots of bleak volcanic dust, blowing almost subliminally across the narrative until everything is buried beneath an arid desert; flashing in, as it does, even while the guest is feeding the lusts of his disciples, the image spells despair consistently throughout the film.

And thirdly, *Theorem* flicks its jaundiced observations (glibly at times, perhaps, but allegory does depend, after all, upon broadness of definition) across a full spectrum of social activity – political, sexual, artistic and religious – and finds nothing that can be trusted, nothing that endures. Even the godhead is carted away in a taxi, just as it once ascended into the clouds or became mutated through the words of Mao.

Yet for all the depression, if this is indeed the Pasolini mood, *Theorem* is a film of extraordinarily crystal beauty, in which Pasolini establishes himself as a master in the use of lighting and of colour (the husband's early morning wander is a hymn to both), as well as of landscape and architecture. Ambiguity aside, his scenes are crisp and unfussy; he has caught a number of Antonionian habits, possibly the most typical of which is the creation of compulsive cinema out of tiny details of narrative, such as Odetta's choreographies on the grass or Paolo's long walk through the station. While his spokesman totters naked across a wilderness of demolished ideals, Pasolini has undoubtedly found in filmmaking a religion that affords at least a few compensations.

Philip Strick, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, May 1969