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From Lukács to Lukács: the course of his repackaging¹

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‘He who cannot take sides should keep silent’

Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street*

Lukács provides a typical example of how discussion of a thinker’s work is inextricably linked to its actual reception and its materiality, including the question of its translation.² Indeed, it would not be much of an exaggeration to say that Lukács is almost exclusively known, in France at least, as the author of *Die Theorie des romans* (1916) and *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* (1923) while the rest of his *oeuvre* is widely unknown or even happily ignored, despite the fact that it amounts to a near half-century of intellectual production. So, through no will of his own, Lukács enjoys only a highly restricted notoriety, which even the ripples produced by the (currently-ongoing) French translation of his last work, *Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins* (1964–1971), do not seem very likely to alter...

His works on aesthetics, and in particular those regarding literature, have not escaped this fate, with very few of them having been translated, and even those that have come out in French appearing in a rather haphazard fashion.³ A detailed analysis – impossible within the limits of this article – would have a lot to tell us about the astonishing reception of Lukács’s work in the Francophone world. We will merely note here that his *Die Theorie des Romans*, written in 1915 and initially published in article format in 1916, remains one of his key works,⁴ and indeed is often the only one of his texts on literary theory cited by scholars. The importance accorded to this work – on account of its sweeping scope, ranging from ancient

1. I would like to thank David Broder for his accurate and efficient translation of my paper.

2. Of Hungarian origin, Lukács mainly expressed his ideas in German before retranslating his works into his ‘mother tongue’. On this question see J. M. Coetzee’s remarks in Auster & Coetzee, 2013b, p. 95 and also pp. 86 *sq.*, concerning the interpretation of Derrida’s *Monolingüisme de l’autre*.

3. We need only to think of his great work *Die Eigenart des Ästhetischen* (1963), which has still not come out in French even though it was available in Italian as early as 1970, while Adorno’s 1969 work *Ästhetische Theorie* rapidly appeared in French (in 1974) even though the text was unfinished.

4. His *Correspondance de jeunesse* (Lukács, 1981, pp. 252–287) offers interesting insight into the genesis of this text.

Greece to the nineteenth-century novel, and the way it is written, with all its style and poetry – is of course well deserved. But the problem is that this reputation was *deliberately constructed* to the detriment of his other works – consequently seen as a residue rather than a product – by the numerous sycophants of the ‘young Lukács’. This latter claim was a myth that Oldrini (1986) blew wide open.

A key work, *Die Theorie des Romans* appeared as an island, an outcrop sticking out above the seas of Stalinist distress Lukács supposedly fell into and then, despite appearances, managed to emerge from. So we barely know – or do not know at all – Lukács as a literary theorist in a wider sense, including his early works appearing before the 1915 text, apart from his 1911 collection *Die Seele und die Formen*, whose own portrayal as an apparent ‘outcrop’ overshadows other aspects of his work, such as those regarding drama.

This superlative gap between the supposed young and old Lukács rules out any idea of continuity in his reflection on literature, which was allegedly nothing other than Stalinist involution (if one were to paraphrase Marguerite Duras a little, one might say it was ‘sublime, surely sublime’). But I think that there are not two or three Lukács, or even more – but just one, which is the coalescence of all his facets in reality. His life, as he put it looking back at the end of his career, ‘forms a logical series’; he added that there was ‘nothing inorganic about [his] development’. To put it another way, with all of Pascal’s dialectical refinement, ‘we can only give a proper portrayal by accepting the contradictions’ and ‘you can only understand an author by taking on board the passages that run the other way’ (*Pensées*, 257–684).

So there was just one Lukács, both himself and someone else. Hence the idea that he is perhaps ultimately his own first inheritor, more particularly, of his *Die Theorie des Romans*. Proof of this are his many later reflections on novels and the novelistic, and in particular his many texts on realism written or published in the 1930s–40s, reproduced in collections after the war. For example (among others), one could cite his *Balzac und der französische Realismus* (1951) and *Probleme des Realismus* (1955), as well as his monograph *Der historische Roman* (first published in Russian in 1937, then in German in 1955) and *Wider den mißverstandenen Realismus* (1958), which offers an insightful synthesis.⁵

This paper aims to break *Die Theorie des Romans* out of its isolation by emphasizing the continuity in Lukács’s thought (on which I have always insisted), thus taking this work out of

5. Note that the French edition inexplicably reuses the first title of the German work, *Die Gegenwartsbedeutung des kritischen Realismus*.

the gallery of the Hungarian philosopher's magnificent feats (as if it were a beacon amidst the long darkness of his inveterate Stalinist winter).⁶ All the same, before recalling the arguments of the thirty-year-old (Lukács was born on 13 April 1885) who was then witness to the morbid decay of the 'great' nineteenth century, one has to remind oneself of the theoretical dynamic in which *Die Theorie des Romans* was inserted. This will avoid giving in to the isolation of this work and prevent one from considering it as a monad (like Angelus Silesius's 'rose without why', which 'blooms simply because it blooms'). Moreover, it should be noted that its roots lay not only in *Die Seele und die Forme* (with its series of texts written from 1907 to 1910) but also in his monograph on the history of the development of modern drama (*A modern drama fejlődésének története*), which he wrote in Hungarian in 1908 but was only published three years later, with only part of it initially being translated and published in a 1914 German version (which took the title *Zur Soziologie des modernen Dramas*, and appeared in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*).⁷

An essential theme of this dynamic was Lukács's critique of the reification of bourgeois thought and its artistic forms – which in turn reflected it – like drama and the novel. This was a theme whose future fate we now know, particularly as it reappears in *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, which fully took its lead from this in particular as regards the proletariat's heroic role in and its historic task of *redeeming* the world. One can add one last decisive point regarding his encounter with Ernst Bloch in Berlin who 'pushed' Lukács toward Hegelianism,⁸ a 'push' we can assert in the first pages of *Die Theorie des Roman*. Moreover, we can see this push and its cardinality in the central category that he never abandoned – namely, totality.

The novel as a modern epic

Die Theorie des romans, whose French edition curiously fails to include the supplementary part of the German version's title, *Ein geschichtsphilosophischer Versuch über die Formen der großen Epik* (*A historical-philosophical essay on the forms of great epic*)⁹ – which is somewhat telling, and hardly without importance – has the particularity of being less a narrative portrayal of the novel than a historical metaphysics of literary artistic forms. Indeed,

6. N. Tertulian (1993) provides definitive insight on this score.

7. Full German version in *Entwicklungsgeschichte des modernen Dramas*, in the fifth volume of his collected works, published in 1981.

8. See his letter to L. Popper of 11 February 1911: 'there is someone [in Berlin] who's been very useful to me, Dr. Bloch, the German philosopher who Simmel had already sent me to once before, the first intellectual impulse I've had in a long time, a real philosopher and every inch of Hegel's breed' (Lukács, 1981, p. 152)

9. Lukács, 1965 (henceforth cited as *TR*, followed by the page number).

this historical-metaphysical fresco is peculiar for the mix of its metaphysical notes and the epic dimension of its reflection, starting from ancient Greece and extending as far as the great novels of the nineteenth century (Balzac, Tolstoy) by way of Dante and Cervantes. The ultimate rationale for this work having such a wide scope has however been concealed by the autonomisation of this text and its publication as a book in 1920, even though it was initially intended to be the introduction to a wider study of Dostoyevsky,¹⁰ which Lukács only mentions in passing in the preface to its first re-edition (1962).

Lukács interprets the novel as an objectivation of great epic literature and more exactly as a modern form of epic. The difference between the two does not result from the writer's personal disposition, his/her concrete personality in a given time and space, 'but from the historical-philosophical assumptions established at its base'. So for Lukács the difference lies in the fact that 'our world has become infinitely large, and each of its corners is wealthier in its gifts and its dangers than the Greeks' world ever was – but this wealth goes beyond [*hebt... auf*] the positive and tragic sense of their life: totality' (*TR*, 27). So the novel is in fact 'the epic for an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer clearly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem and yet still thinks in terms of totality' (*TR*, 53).

As the modern form of epic, the novel is fundamentally abstract, in the Hegelian sense of incompleteness. Hence the idea that the fundamental conception defining the novel as a form is objectivated in the psychology of novels' heroes: they are 'on a quest' (*Sie sind Suchende*), Lukács writes (*TR*, 58). And if they are on a quest, then that is because the world is no longer self-evident as it was before, no longer being an organised whole with a fixed destiny as it was for the ancient Greeks, no longer a cosmos, a totality with a given meaning and hierarchy. So unlike other genres the novel is 'something in-becoming, like a process', for which reason it is defined by its plasticity and 'caricature to the point of confusion'.¹¹

10. Eighteen months after his death (4 June 1971), a 'forgotten' trunk was found in a safe of the Heidelberg Deutsche Bank – left there on 7 November 1917. It contained more than 1,600 letters, notebooks, journal notes and fragments of manuscripts. As well as a now-partially published correspondence (Lukács, 1981a), these documents included notes and drafts for the Dostoyevsky book (Lukács, 1985). On this project, see the analyses of Fehér 1977; Löwy, 1976, pp. 138–142; and Rochlitz, 1983, p. 343–365. Finally, see Ernst Bloch's remarks (in Löwy, 1976, p. 299) regarding Lukács's first wife, the Russian J.A. Grabenko, to whom he dedicated *Die Theorie des Romans*: 'it was through her that Lukács married Dostoyevsky; so to speak, he married Russia, the Dostoyevskyan Russia that did not exist in reality'.

11. *TR*, 71. In an insightful essay C. Malabou (2005, p. 25–26, no. 1), reminds us that 'given its etymology – from the Greek *plassein*, to model – the word 'plasticity' has two fundamental meanings. It simultaneously designates both the capacity to *be given form* (for example clay is called 'plastic') and the capacity to *give form* (like in the arts or in plastic surgery). But it is

The novel's processual dimension – its fundamental historicity – makes it a problematic form on the artistic level, because it reflects a world that has effectively become so: 'the contingent world and the problematic individual are realities which mutually determine one another' (*TR*, 76). The novel's problematic character was without doubt deeply syntonically with the war that was then beginning (without it yet being the first in a series) and whose power of reification and impoverishment Lukács had already appreciated. In the autobiographical notes he drew up at the end of his life, he wrote in this regard: 'all the social forces I'd hated since my early youth and which I [had] worked to destroy in thought united to produce the first universal war, which was simultaneously the first war universally lacking in any ideas – the enemy of ideas'.¹²

So the novel does not at all renounce aiming at totality, and it can make use of a cardinal, structuring element to this end, namely active, properly heroic individuality, which is itself the vector of totalisation – in the sense Sartre gave this term in his *Critique de la Raison dialectique*, as a permanent (historical) dialectical movement of totalisation and detotalisation. This individuality has itself become its own end, since 'it discovers' what is essential to itself and gives itself its own life 'within itself, not as a possession and a foundation of its life, but as the object of its quest' (*TR*, 76). Hence the novel's internal form is 'the problematic individual's journeying toward himself', the 'road from dull subordination within a merely present reality – a reality that is heterogeneous in itself and meaningless to the individual – toward clear self-recognition' (*TR*, 79). To put it in one line, which Lukács borrows from R. Browning's poem *Paracelsus*, 'I go to prove my soul'.

The hero's potential for heroism – and he is not, therefore, simply the herald of values or principles outside of him, or even the incarnation of transcendent values as in epics or tragedies – implies a godless world and also supposes that, according to one famous formula, 'the novel is the epic of a world abandoned by God [*Der Roman ist die Epopöe der gottverlassenen Welt*]'. The hero's psychology is, in principle, 'demonic' and 'the novel tells the adventure of interiority' (*TR*, 87). Unlike the epic, then, the novel is characterised by the absence of any transcendent guarantee external to the world: there is no longer any God or ultimate form that gives meaning to the world, and it is from the hero himself that the narrative radiates; and as

also characterised by its power to destroy form. We need only remember that 'plastic' as in 'plastiquage' [a bombing] or 'plastiquer' [to bomb] is an explosive substance'.

12. Lukács, 2005, p. 208 On the war one could also have a look at his (unfinished) text from 1914–1915 (Lukács, 1973), to which he refers in his correspondence (Lukács, 1981, pp. 261–262 et 287), as well as Walter Benjamin's 'Erfahrung und Armut' (1991, p. 213–219).

Lukács will note in his later texts, the hero is at root the literary and problematic expression of the historical expansion of the bourgeoisie.

A world without God is also in a sense a guilty world. That is essentially the meaning of Fichte's line, that 'the [current] epoch is the state of completed sinfulness' – which Lukács quotes when he refers to Tolstoy and brings in Dostoyevsky at the end of *Die Theorie des romans*. This formula is an excellent condensation of the hero's role and more widely of the function of the novel, that is, the expression of a 'free' subjectivity inhabited by *irony* and which is left responsible for formulating an ethic, that is a 'must-be' [*Sollen*], a path of action that draws on itself, on its finitude, because God is dead and 'we have killed him' (Nietzsche, *Gaya Science*, §125).

I have already said that *Die Theorie des Romans*'s look back to 'closed civilizations' is the background and the starting point of explaining the novel as a modern epic form. It is simultaneously the expression of the gods' retreat, heralding the disenchantment to come (Max Weber). Here Lukács paints a picture of a willingly idealized and idyllic ancient Greece, a realm of harmony among men and between man and nature, the 'beautiful totality' so beloved of German Romanticism: 'the world of meaning is clear and concrete'; 'it is a homogenous world' (*TR*, 25–26).

This 'spontaneous totality of being' is, then, no longer anything more than a background to history, a world closed to the now infinite universe. Firstly, ontologically so, because, as Lukács already put it in *Die Seele und die Formen*, 'the Greeks experienced all the forms that were present for them as something real and living, and not as an abstraction'. Then, historically, because the Greeks' 'beautiful totality' in which the metaphysical and the aesthetic coincided – Lukács argues – is now irremediably lost; and not by chance, but due to objective historical need. Hence the emergence of the hero figure, initially embodied in the loneliness of his soul.

Loneliness in drama – deeper than that which tragedy demands – must in turn itself become a problem. 'Such loneliness is not simply the intoxication of a soul gripped by destiny and so made song; it is also the torment of a creature condemned to solitude and devoured by a longing for community' (*TR*, 40). This loneliness speaks to the absence of a closed totality in and through which it could fully deploy its meaning, a former community *ontologically completed* by an enigmatic – or, more surely, absent – transcendence. The meaning of the world now rests 'on' the hero, insofar as it is his lonely soul that organizes its meaning. And in his quest,

he remains irremediably alone; he can have, as Lukács attractively describes it, ‘brothers among the stars but never an earthly companion [*Gefährten*]’ (*ibid.*).

This is also, it seems, the deeper meaning of Pasolini’s *Teorema* parabola; and it was reading this that led us back to Lukács’s ‘Theory’ of the novel and the problematic figure of the hero that the ‘young visitor’ irremediably makes us think about. Because he, too, is alone, and it is indeed his loneliness – clearly, a Christ-like one – that allows him to organise as well as to destroy the world, or rather to make the reification and falseness of this ‘petit-bourgeois’ family’s world shatter into a thousand pieces.¹³

The rhizomes of *Die Theorie des Romans*

If circumstances did not allow Lukács to finish his work on Dostoyevsky, this was not just the result of the war, a plague that lasted much longer than anyone would have imagined. It also and perhaps above all resulted from contradictions particular to Lukács himself, whose desire to get a university post demanded that he reorganize his intellectual work in a more systematic (and less essayist) sense, as one can see from his correspondence with Max Weber.¹⁴

That is what led him to elaborate his reflection on the terrain of a systematic aesthetic. This was an effort which he began in 1912 but which the war, and then *Die Theorie des Romans*, interrupted before he returned to it again in 1916, albeit never to finish it (Lukács, 1974b & 1974c). Lukács was instead seized by concrete history, that is, by the consequences of the 1917 October Revolution – which he repeatedly said had provided a solution to his questions – with his engagement in the communist movement and his participation in the Hungarian Soviet Republic

Nonetheless, even this ‘embarkation’ (Pascal) never fully led him to abandon his reflection on the aesthetic questions of literature. One can see this for example in his early 1920s articles for the Berlin communist daily *Die Rote Fahne* (Lukács, 1978) and further still in the whole debate on realism (Lukács, 1955), of which the discussion of expressionism was just one aspect. So Lukács’s reflection on the novel did not end with the appearance of his eponymous ‘theory’, published in book form by P. Cassirer in Berlin in 1920. On the

13. See below, ‘Redeeming the world?’.

14. In particular his 14 August 1916 letter (Lukács, 1981, p. 273-275).

contrary, he continued to pursue it, if perhaps in a rhizomatic or karstic manner, while also transforming it.

Lukács first returned to *Die Theorie des Romans* in the mid-1930s during the long debate on realism, particularly in two texts (which were really just one text, the second being a development of the first, adopting the same structure), 'Report on the Novel' (1934) and 'The Novel as a Bourgeois Epic', both posthumously published in the collection *Moskauer Schriften*.¹⁵

The first striking thing is that Lukács ultimately held to the general argument of *Die Theorie des Romans*, explicitly reasserting the general theoretical framework of a Hegelian stamp whose legacy he so proudly claimed to uphold.¹⁶ German classical aesthetics was first 'to pose the problem of the theory of the novel at the level of principles ... in a both systematically and historically consequential manner' (*EM*, 82). Its 'imperishable' merit, he added, rested on its 'discovery of the profound connection between the novel as a genre and bourgeois society', in turn raising the need 'for the Marxist theory of the novel to critically approach the determinations and observations of the classical period' (*EM*, 82). The theory of the novel becomes 'a historical phase of the general theory of great epic art', the novel no longer being 'only a "popular" artistic genre, which theory avoids with some distinction' (*EM*, 83).

So the novel is, as Hegel (and Lukács agreeing with him) put it, a 'bourgeois epic', because it seeks to represent the world in its totality but with the essential difference that the hero is no longer connected as substantially as he was previously to the social and moral totality from which he has emerged (unlike in ancient epic, which is a 'model' in the full sense of the word). Through and in his relative autonomy, the hero of the novel depicts, on the contrary, 'the fundamental contradiction of capitalist society, that between social production and private appropriation' (*EM*, 85), which is necessarily represented through his action because 'what men really are, in virtue of their being' can only be portrayed 'in and through an action' (*EM*, 66).

But the representation of action is no simple description, even if in an exhaustive, scrupulous way, as in Zola.¹⁷ The demand on the novel to represent immanent totality does

15. As far as I am aware this has only been translated into French, titled *Écrits de Moscou* (Lukács, 1974a, hitherto cited as *EM*, followed by the page number).

16. See the remarks by C. Prévost, 'Lukács à Moscou' (*EM*, 7-59)

17. See Lukács's essential text on this point 'Erzählen oder Beschreiben?' (1936) in Lukács, 1955, pp. 103-145.

not only mean it has to ‘depict the relations among men, but also the things, institutions etc. that mediate these relations among men and between them and nature’. To put it another way, totality, which is essentially dialectical, is not a simple ‘pedantic juxtaposition of the isolated elements of an “environment”’, but rather is born ‘from a necessity that relates to narration, to the representation of human fates through which the typical determinations of a social problem are expressed on the basis of an action’ (*EM*, 102).

Action is thus the concrete expression of the novel’s inherent need for totality, which consists in depicting the dialectical unity of the individual and the typical. And the centrality of action in turn flows ‘from the need for the most adequate possible reflection of reality’ (*EM*, 94), which cannot be conceived in the narrowly optical sense of the term. The hero of the novel is typical not because he is a ‘statistical average of the individual qualities of a social layer or class’, but because ‘the objectively typical determinations of a class’s general fate are manifested’ within him, ‘at the same time as they objectively correspond to his individual fate’ (*EM*, 101). So now we understand why the novel is ‘the most typical literary genre for bourgeois society’; because it is here that ‘all the specific contradictions of modern bourgeois society are depicted in the most adequate and typical manner’ (*EM*, 79). The hero is a totality of totality, because he is the dialectical unity of the particular and the universal – ‘typical’, in the full sense of the term.

This need for the typical, which Lukács connects to Engels’s remarks in his correspondence with Kautsky and Harkness (cf. *EM*, 282–290) and which he would later develop with the concept of ‘particularity’ (*Besonderheit*),¹⁸ is the sharpest expression of the inflexion of his discussion of the novel, which he henceforth inscribes and reformulates within the wider problematic of ‘great realism’ – an oft-misunderstood term. For realism is not simply an aesthetic question, but more broadly a fundamental *political* necessity.

This is particularly clear in the preface to *Balzac und der französische Realismus*, a collection of texts that he had produced in the same year as his earlier two pieces on the novel. Notably, Lukács here wrote that ‘the artistic representation of man in his integrity is the central aesthetic question for realism. But the consequent application of this aesthetic viewpoint goes

18. Cf. Lukács, 1957, in particular chapter 5 and also Lukács, 1963, vol. 2, pp. 193–266 and Lukács, 1984, pp. 40 *sqq.* Finally, see J.M. Coetzee: ‘And the generalizability of the particular is the essence of realism, is it noy? I have in mind realism a way of seeing the world and recording it in such a way that particulars, though captured in all their uniqueness, seem yet to belong to a coherent system.’ (Coetzee & Auster, 2013b, p. 100).

beyond pure aesthetics, as does any in-depth philosophy of art: precisely in its greatest purity, the artistic principle bears a mass of social, moral and humanist aspects' (Lukács, 1951, p. 9).

Lukács's great realism expresses a radical humanism that makes no attempt to hide its ontological roots. It also provides us with a key to understanding his last works, in particular *Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins*. Much like G. Oldrini (1986), V. Franco emphasizes the fact that this 'turn' (or better, this ontological inflexion of Lukács's thought) dates back to the 1930s – that is, from the height of the debate on realism – and that it develops on the basis of the question of irrationalism.¹⁹ This inflexion – which is, in truth, a development which took shape over many years and was first expressed in *Die Eigenart des Ästhetischen* (1963) – is not 'foreign' to aesthetic reflection in the strict sense, but it owes a greater debt to the discovery of Marx's *1844 Manuscripts*, published in Moscow in 1932, at a time when Lukács was living and working in that city.

Indeed, Lukács's reading of these texts proved crucial to the ontological inflexion of his thinking, leading him to posit that, at root, art is humanity's possibility of reconciling itself with its own essence, which has been torn up by capitalism. That is to say that the novel (and by synecdoche, literature and the arts in general) has an eminently political role, emancipating and constructing the human race, as a passage from the human race 'in-itself' to the human race 'for-itself'. That art is the concrete possibility of passing from a mute, 'natural' human type to a social type, conscious of itself – a humanity that thinks itself and experiences itself as a historical-social type and not as a strictly zoological species (Cf. Lukács, 1984, pp. 7-324).

So humanism continually and intrinsically underpins Lukács's work: from his despair at its negation by the 'Great War' at the moment of *Die Theorie des Romans* to the certainty that socialism – which 'actually existed' – is the promise of its realism. But it is also just a promise, which cannot be fulfilled alone, but has to be accomplished – and in literature realism is precisely the vector of its accomplishment.

Redeeming the world? A short note on Lukács and Pasolini

As I said earlier, my return to *Die Theorie des Romans* was sparked by my reading of *Teorema*,²⁰ which strengthened my conviction that Lukács was the first inheritor of his own 'youthful' work. It is also true that I read *Teorema* after *Die Theorie des Romans* and that, after

19. Franco, 1984, p. 32 *sqq.*; see also Franco, 1986.

20. Pasolini, 1999a (henceforth cited as *T*, followed by page number).

having analysed it; my understanding of Pasolini's text was necessarily informed by the categories and analysis emerging from Lukács's book, and that my *viewing* of Pasolini's eponymous film (contemporary to the text, and which he transposed onto the screen with only small variations) was infused by this 'double' reading.

Despite these reservations, I would like to venture a few reflections on the basis of the stunning artistic, literary (and filmic, as we shall see) object that *Teorema* represents, making clear from the outset that I am simultaneously talking about both the text and the film, these two now being inextricable after the filmic image refashioned the mental representations forged through our first reading of the text.²¹

Notwithstanding the differences in the two men's eras and their means of expression – philosophical (aesthetic) and political for one, poetic (artistic) and political for the other – Lukács and Pasolini did meet on one level: the eminently political and anthropological dimension of human artistic activity and the fundamentally political character of art. More particularly still, *Teorema* and *Die Theorie des Romans* are both works of 'crisis', in its original meaning of 'turning point': for Lukács, the First World War, and for Pasolini, the emergence of an unprecedented capitalism, a neocapitalism that he would later term 'cultural genocide'.²²

Neither entirely a novel, an account or a scenario, *Teorema* is, to use Pasolini's term, a 'story' or an 'argument'. It is less a narrative, as he makes clear, than 'what we might in scientific language call a "census"', a strictly informative one which 'technically speaking' is less 'a "message" than a "code"'.²³ A little later he emphasizes: 'Let's repeat: it's not a realist account, it is a parabola' (*T*, 20) and in the penultimate chapter entitled 'Investigation into sainthood', where he invites the reader to 'take another look', Pasolini explains 'And how unpleasant, banal and useless the meaning of *every parabola* is, without the parabola' (*T*, 175).

21 The film is a sort of filmic re-reading or duplicate of the book, and I have thus simultaneously re-read and re-watched certain themes in Lukács's *Die Theorie des Romans*. Indeed, one might ask oneself whether Pasolini filmed what he wrote, that is, his imaginary representations, or if making the film he rewrote what he had initially 'seen' or imagined. His portrayal of the lurching family (Part I, Chapter 5) is revealing in this regard. On this point see H. Joubert-Laurencin (1995, pp. 185 *sqq.*).

22 The critique outlined in *Teorema* allows an insight into a possible comparison with Marcuse's works – which indeed he mentioned on several other occasions in his essays – and perhaps also Adorno, even if the inspiration for Pasolini's critique of this 'neocapitalism', which began in his film *Porcile* and he pursued in the texts collected in *Scritti corsari* and *Lettere luterane* is perhaps indebted to them, even if in a critical manner.

23 *T*, 18. We ought to emphasize that for Pasolini questions of language, linguistics and semiology were central when it came to literature and in particular cinema. See *Empirismo eretico* in his *Saggi sulla letteratura e sull'arte* (Pasolini, 1999b, vol. 1, pp. 1241-1683). This is also one of the themes of his relationship with Gramsci, as first expressed in the form of a poem (*Ceneri di Gramsci*). On this question, see Joubert-Laurencin, 2005, p. 85-94 and also Tosel, 2009, pp. 115-146 and 221-228.

So what troubled me in *Teorema* is that within it I found many aspects of Lukács's argument, even as he continued it during his exile in Moscow, in simultaneously both precise and confused form, in a strangely familiar fashion (*EM*, p. 63-140). One first strange familiarity resides in the consonance of their respective titles, each of them having a Greek root '*theôria*', (from *theôrein*, 'observe'), which designates 'observation', 'contemplation' – which is also the root of 'theatre' – and, interestingly, reached us via the mediation of ecclesiastical Latin.²⁴ If theory means a 'set of more or less organised abstract ideas and concepts, applied to a particular domain', then a theorem, for its part – especially in logic and mathematics – designates a 'demonstrable proposition that results from other, already-posed propositions (as opposed to a definition, axiom, postulate or principle)'. To put it another way, a theorem is an *intermediate* figure that plays a role of *mediation* rather than one of abstract observation, with a proven intention of demonstration or even of deduction.

Another, certainly more central familiarity is the hero (herald?) figure, which seemed to us, moreover, to be the primary theme of these two texts' interrelation or insights into each other. The young man, or better '*il giovane ospite*', is given no name other than his role or position in the ecumene of this 'petit-bourgeois family' and is not even described as a character in this story. He is thus a character without a *persona*; is an *epiphany*. From this point of view, the power of the images in the film allows us to see what the reader would imagine to be undepicted or undepictable – an epiphany that refers back to the theological dimension underlying the text, as is also apparent in the epigraph borrowed from *Exodus* (XIII, 18) right at the beginning: 'God led the people around by the way of the wilderness'.

Marking the homophony in French between 'héros' [hero] and 'hérault' [herald] the young visitor is indeed at the centre of this story, because he is present throughout the 'scenes' of the first part, and remains present throughout the second part precisely on account of his absence. And if the young *visitor* is the centre of this story, that is also because he is *at* the centre (and *the* centre) of the attention of the other characters who gravitate around him (Him)? So he is also the framework for these figures; it is he who connects them and binds them together, the cement, the religion – the bind and shared adoration – for a family that is 'petit-bourgeois in an ideological sense, not an economic one'. (*T*, 9.) In other terms, *il giovane*

24 One might add (to the point of pedantry) that there is a second meaning to 'théorie' in French, designating a solemn procession, an 'embassy sent from a city to a great temple on a holy day ... to offer sacrifices to a god and ask for an oracle'. Knowing Pasolini's great linguistic interest, I think it not out of the question that he was thinking of this, too.

ospito, whom Pasolini characterised as a ‘visitation’, is like the ‘centre everywhere and the circumference nowhere’, as Pascal famously put it. This theological dimension, which deeply colours the *Teorema* parabola (Farrago, 1976) and is of considerable prominence more generally throughout Pasolini’s work, is also apparent in *Die Theorie des Romans*.

As for the story itself – at the level of how the narrative is constructed – it is composed of a series of tableaux, whose succession (which is more marked in the text than in the film) attests to the *theorematic* character of its argument, whose dramatic progression one can sense in advance, also on account of the initial *Exodus* quote. In fact, *il giovane ospito* is in a certain light a revelation, the agent of a liquidation or, better, of a conversion (St. Paul?). In the film, the character played by Terence Stamp is a youthful and solar epiphany, always dressed in light-coloured clothes...

As for his attitude, it is in fact heavy with *irony* (whose own etymology is interesting in this regard)²⁵ and also points to Lukács’s letter to L. Popper at the start of *Die Seele und die Formen*. He shows everyone the void in which all the characters are immersed, and more broadly the vacuity of petit-bourgeois conformism: he is their revelation. The visitor, a ‘Grace’ of fabulous beauty, an angel – who might be compared to Benjamin’s discussion of the famous Klee painting in his 1940 theses *On the Concept of History* – has been sent by the divinity, who is perhaps theological as well as profane. It is the visitor who brings unity through the concrete disaggregation of the family: the servant-girl who becomes pious, the daughter who falls into catalepsy, the son who cannot paint, the mother who falls into the arms of runaway lovers, the father who strips himself down and ends up crying in the desert – without end? This dispersion is perhaps ultimately the realization of a wider unity, an *ekklésia*, a church, through the redemption of its members, even if it seemed to be negative for the family in question.

The novelistic hero in *Die Theorie des Romans* is also alone, and bears a form of redemption of the world. And this is an idea that appears all the more clearly in *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, where the proletariat’s political role is enounced as an ethical, heroic and redemptive mission (cf. *EM*, 134 sq.)

To give a provisional conclusion to what is inevitably a summary analysis of *Teorema*, I would add that Pasolini seems to be making fun (cf. Farrago, 1976, *in limine*) of this bourgeoisie. He laughs at it, and – perhaps in the manner that De Certeau identifies in

25 From the Greek *eirôneia*, ‘the act of asking with feigned ignorance’, from *eirôneuesthai* ‘mocking by feigning ignorance’, from *eirôn*, *-ónos*, ‘he who asks with feigned ignorance’.

Foucault – it is a cold and clinical laugh, disappointed in what it mocks, simultaneously abhorring it and regretting its decay. Symptomatic in this regard is Pasolini's questioning (of himself) in the chapter of *Teorema*, 'Investigation into the Donation of the Factory': 'And if the bourgeoisie – identifying the whole of humanity with itself – no longer has anyone outside itself onto whom it could offload the charge of its own condemnation (which it has never itself wanted or been able to mention), *has its ambiguity not become tragic?*' (T, 156).

This ambiguity towards the bourgeois echoes that of Lukács in *Die Theorie des Romans*: he hates it at the same time as he regrets its decline. Although Pasolini rejects realism to describe *Teorema*, I rather believe that this text is deeply realistic, as defined by Lukács, as an objectification of the historical-social reality of the world. It implies a political dimension and we can say that *Teorema* is a legacy of *Die Theorie des Romans*.

A comparison with Lukács and his determined defence of 'great realism' now seems all the more necessary indeed since, as I have already indicated, realism is not only an aesthetic category, and (as emphasizes in *Wider den mißverstandenen Realismus* (1958, p. 50)) not 'one style among others but the foundation of all literature', as well as, more essentially still, a political category. As Walter Benjamin said: 'He who cannot take sides should keep silent'.

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