Title
Pier Paolo Pasolini’s Canzoniere italiano and the People Without History

Journal
California Italian Studies, 12(2)

Author
Love, Rachel E.

Publication Date
2023

DOI
10.5070/C312255261

Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Canzoniere italiano*, Popular Poetry, and the People Outside of History

Rachel E. Love

Pier Paolo Pasolini's substantial collection of popular poetry, *Canzoniere italiano* (1955, The Italian Songbook), might at first glance seem like an anomaly in the oeuvre of one of Italy's most prominent and prolific postwar intellectuals, as it is a collection of the words of others. Following a theoretical introduction, Pasolini steps aside to showcase 791 songs in dialect from northern, central, and southern Italy, presented with translations in standard Italian but without additional commentary. Pasolini's volume suggests that, taken as a vast and varied whole, these ballads, *stornelli*, *strambotti*, and funeral songs become "poesia popolare," a popular poetic tradition.[1] Upon closer observation, *Canzoniere italiano* reveals itself to be deeply connected to Pasolini's interest in preserving and reenacting the past, not to mention his passion for dialects and regional cultures he first evidenced in his Friulian poetry, *Poesie a Casarsa* (1942, Poems to Casarsa) and the anthology of dialect poetry he published with Mario dell'Arco, *Poesia dialettale del Novecento* (1952, Dialect Poetry of the Twentieth Century). A thorough examination reveals *Canzoniere*'s key place in Pasolini's intellectual and artistic formation. In the introduction, which offers a justification of the project, Pasolini seeks to preserve and to valorize popular poetry as a worthy aesthetic tradition; explores the relationship between art, class, and power; and articulates theories that he would later apply to Italian culture as a whole.

Examinations of the *Canzoniere italiano* have often situated it alongside efforts by other postwar intellectuals, including Italo Calvino and Dario Fo, to use popular culture as the inspiration for new aesthetic and political forms in the wake of fascism.[2] Calvino, who in the 1950s was involved in two important folk projects of his own— his anthology of Italian fables, *Fiabe italiane* (1956, *Italian Folktales*) and later the Cantacronache music group—argued that the postwar fascination with regional traditions represented a search for a renewed, anti-fascist basis for Italian culture:

> Il verismo regionale che ebbe un chiaro senso storico negli anni dopo l'Unità d'Italia, come presa di coscienza delle realtà così diverse e incomunicanti della nuova nazione, ha avuto una nuova spinta, e anche questa ben motivata, quando— dopo che per tanti anni il fascismo aveva tenuto l'Italia come inguardabile e

[1] In this article I use the term popular poetry as a direct translation of the Italian "poesia popolare," which in English might also be translated as folk poetry or folk songs, given that these pieces were performed orally. In the introduction to *Canzoniere italiano*, Pasolini makes a key distinction between "popular poetry" and "folkloric poetry," so I have preserved this distinction in my translation as well. Popular poetry is also different from "poesia dialettale," or poetry written in dialect, which Pasolini addressed in *Poesia dialettale del Novecento*. The slipperiness of these boundaries is a testament to the difficulty of treating any cultural practice or tradition as hermetically distinct.

[2] See especially Eva Marinai, "Il canto popolare come rifondazione del mito. Dai *Canzonieri* a *Medea*," in *Le tradizioni popolari nelle opere di Pier Paolo Pasolini e Dario Fo*, ed. Lisa El Ghaoui and Federica Tummillo (Pisa: Serra, 2014); Vittorio Celotto, "Restare dentro l'inferno. Pasolini, Calvino e la letteratura popolare," *Paragone Letteratura* 67, no. 2 (2016): 151–69; and Alberto Carli, *L'occhio e la voce. Pier Paolo Pasolini e Italo Calvino fra letteratura e antropologia* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2018).

> inconoscibile—si sentì il bisogno di una scoperta minuta e profonda del nostro paese.[3]
>
> (Regional *verismo* had a clear historical meaning in Italy in the years after Unification, when it involved a recognition of the many different and separate realities of the new nation. It gained a renewed impetus, and with good reason—after the fall of fascism, which had kept Italy unwatchable and unknowable for so many years—when we felt the need for a deep and detailed discovery of our country.)

Calvino thus finds a through line in these returns to the regional: both emerge in moments when the need to stake a claim to Italian culture seems particularly urgent. Pasolini's project indeed echoes the work of the nineteenth-century folklorists who were seeking to document and disseminate a national popular culture for a newly unified Italy. Just as these scholars had identified in popular culture the source for a millennial artistic tradition, Pasolini used *Canzoniere italiano* to document the rich diversity of regional cultures and dialects, as a testament both to their enduring resistance to fascist standardization and to what could be lost as the working class gained political power and assimilated into the bourgeoisie. By compiling and analyzing the popular poetry amassed in written anthologies, Pasolini valorized these typically oral practices as worthy of study and inclusion in the Italian literary canon. His lengthy introduction, in which he dissects more than a century of theories on the origins of popular poetry, situates his project within a philological tradition that stretches back to Niccolò Tommaseo and Alessandro D'Ancona's own nineteenth-century studies of songs in dialect. This approach, and in particular Pasolini's insistence on the archaic and ahistorical nature of rural laborers, contrasts sharply with the emerging discourse in the 1950s—promoted, in particular, by Ernesto de Martino—that rural people participated in history and expressed forms of political consciousness through their cultural practices. Pasolini's *Canzoniere italiano* represents a key moment in how he theorized language and power, the role of the popular in national culture before the ravages of neocapitalist growth, and the aesthetic significance of dialect traditions. Nonetheless, I argue that Pasolini's own understanding of popular poetry, as articulated in the introduction to the *Canzoniere*, betrays the radical promise of the work itself and reveals it to be an inherently conservative project, especially when taken in the context of other theories of rural cultures in the postwar. By fixing dynamic oral cultures with the tools of the philologist approaching an ancient text, he aestheticizes popular poetry as a literary tradition and detaches it from its historical conditions and lived practice.

Pasolini's efforts for *Canzoniere italiano* reflect more well-known themes of his life and work, including his love for dialects, beginning with his mother's *friulano*, his erotic fascination with the rural and urban lumpenproletariat, and his much-discussed longing for a mythic, precapitalist past. These themes reach back to his earliest artistic endeavors: his own efforts to write poetry in dialect. The collection *Poesie a Casarsa* offers a longing portrait of a pastoral world rich with the scent of juniper and rain, the sound of water trickling out of fountains, the lowing of oxen, and the sunlight, which in one poem blinds and in another fades into night. Rural labor is conspicuously absent. Unlike in the Friulian poems of the *Canzoniere*, which are full of lovers declaring themselves, few people populate Pasolini's verses beyond the poet and his addressee, often a laughing, rosy-cheeked boy. In one notable exception, from "Tornant al paìs" ("Returning

[3] Italo Calvino, "Il midollo del leone," in *Saggi 1945–1985*, ed. Mario Barenghi (Milan: Mondadori 2007), 1:18. Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own.

to the village"), a voice calls to the narrator almost accusatorially, "Ti vens cà di nualtris,/ma nualtris si vif,/a si vif quiès e muàrs/coma n'aga ch'a passa/scunussuda enfra i bars" ("Here, you visit us, but we live here, we live quiet and dead, like water that passes unknown through the hedges").[4] Even here, Pasolini conveys a perceived inaccessibility of this world he so loves, as well as a sense that it is vanishing before his eyes. In the same poem, the toll of a bell declares itself irrelevant: here, "[i]l timp a no'l si mòuf" ("time doesn't pass").[5] The collection concludes with an almost theatrical dialogue between a mother and son, who longs for his mother's faith but cannot access it. *Canzoniere italiano*, too, in documenting and fixing diverse dialect traditions in one volume, addresses the persistent sense of loss that scholars have identified in Pasolini's efforts to write his own dialect poetry.[6] Compiling other dialects allowed him another means of accessing the spirit of marginalized people, or "quell'Eros collettivo, indigeno, quasi folkloristico, che si spezza e si rifrange come in un prisma nella folla degli ignoti vestiti a festa" ("that collective, indigenous, almost folkloristic Eros, which, as if through a prism, breaks and refracts through the anonymous crowds dressed for a holiday").[7] In many respects, *Poesie a Casarsa* offered Pasolini's first articulation of his understanding of the rural world and his role as its interpreter who seeks to "evoke [this spoken language] in the form of what it is not—namely, writing."[8] In his 1943 review, Gianfranco Contini also recognized that Pasolini, rather than inserting himself into a dialect tradition, was harnessing Friulian to create refined and contemporary lyric poetry.[9] With the help of the legitimizing force of Contini's review, the volume launched his poetic career.

Poesie a Casarsa and *Canzoniere italiano* were early examples of Pasolini's fascination with dialects, rural landscapes, and their people, whom he perceived to be untouched by capitalism. Traditions themselves offer salvific possibilities, as Pasolini declared in 1962: "Bisogna strappare ai tradizionalisti il monopolio della tradizione, non le pare? Solo la rivoluzione può salvare la tradizione" ("We must wrest the monopoly of tradition from the traditionalists, don't you think? Only the revolution can save tradition").[10] By his later works, Pasolini had extended his longing for a precapitalist society beyond Italy's borders to the developing world. In his 1971 call upon UNESCO to protect the city of Sana'a in Yemen from development, he named the "uomini semplici che la povertà ha mantenuto puri" ("simple men that poverty has kept pure") and the "scandalosa forza rivoluzionaria del passato" ("scandalous revolutionary force of the past") as a justification for its preservation.[11] With each of these gestures, Pasolini made clear that the beauty he found in these cultures depended on their perceived distance and detachment from the timeline

[4] Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Tornant al paìs," in *Tutte le poesie*, ed. Walter Siti (Milan: Mondadori, 2003), 1:19.
[5] Ibid.
[6] For more on Pasolini's dialect poetry, see Francesca Cadel, *La lingua dei desideri. Il dialetto secondo Pier Paolo Pasolini* (Lecce: Manni, 2002). For more on the connection between Pasolini's dialect poetry and this persistent sense of loss, see Ara Merjian, *Against the Avant-Garde: Pier Paolo Pasolini, Contemporary Art, and Neocapitalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020); and Andrea Righi, *Biopolitics and Social Change in Italy: From Gramsci to Pasolini to Negri* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
[7] Pier Paolo Pasolini, "I parlanti" (1948), in *Romanzi e racconti*, ed. Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude (Milan: Mondadori, 1998), 2:163.
[8] Chris Bongie, "A Postscript to Transgression: The Exotic Legacy of Pier Paolo Pasolini," in *Exotic Memories: Literature, Colonialism, and the Fin de Siècle* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 193.
[9] Gianfranco Contini, "Al limite della poesia dialettale," *Corriere del Ticino*, 24 April 1943. Reprinted in *Sot la nape*, 44, nos.1–2 (January-May 1992): 99–101.
[10] Pier Paolo Pasolini, dialogue from no. 42 of *Vie Nuove*, 18 October 1962, in *I dialoghi*, ed. Giovanni Falaschi (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1992), 310.
[11] Pier Paolo Pasolini, dir., *Le mura di Sana'a* (1971). Text printed in *Per il cinema*, ed. Walter Siti and Franco Zabagli (Milan: Mondadori, 2001), 2:2110.

of contemporary history. His failure, in his theorization of these societies, to acknowledge how they were pervaded by colonial and racial power relations is well documented.[12] Less attention has been paid to how his early fascination with the margins of Italian language and culture, and in this case *Canzoniere italiano*, anticipates this preservationist impulse.

Canzoniere italiano documents a culture that, after two decades of oppression under fascism, Pasolini finds to be mortally threatened by capitalist development. In doing so, he seeks to justify its place in the wider Italian literary tradition. Alessia Ricciardi suggests that, in his other efforts to preserve and evoke a mythic, archaic, rural society, Pasolini puts forth a metaphor for "radical new beginning."[13] She argues that Pasolini, especially in his later work, assumes the mantle of an "anthropologist of the present" in order "to come to grips with the realities of his day as the symptoms of a cultural emergency."[14] I would argue that *Canzoniere italiano* demonstrates Pasolini's rejection of the present.[15] In this early moment of his career, Pasolini declined to engage, intellectually or practically, with the contemporaneity of oral cultures and the people who participate in them.

Pasolini's philological approach seems especially anachronistic when taken in the context of the evolving approaches to oral and lower-class cultures in the 1950s, in particular those promoted by Ernesto de Martino, who argued as early as 1951 that marginalized southerners participated "nella storia non soltanto nel senso di impadronirsi dello Stato e di diventare i protagonisti della civiltà, ma anche nel senso che […] le loro storie personali cessino di consumarsi privatamente nel grande sfacelo del quartiere" ("in history not only in the sense of taking over the State and of becoming protagonists of civilization, but also in the sense that […] their personal histories would cease to consume themselves privately amidst the great disintegration of their neighborhood").[16] Pasolini's letters suggest that he had a professional relationship with de Martino, and the latter's ethnographic work in Basilicata provided one of the few contemporary sources for the *Canzoniere*.[17] Pasolini respected de Martino's theories, as he referenced them in both *Canzoniere* and throughout his career, including in a 1974 essay accusing other Italian intellectuals of ignoring the power of popular culture: "Non c'è da meravigliarsi che questi nostri intellettuali non

[12] For more on Pasolini's conception of the "Third World," see Chris Bongie, "A Postscript to Transgression," 188–230; Luca Caminati, *Orientalismo eretico: Pier Paolo Pasolini e il cinema del terzo mondo* (Milan: Mondadori, 2007); and Rhiannon Noel Welch, "Here and Then, There and Now: Nation Time and Colonial Space in Pasolini, Oriani and Marinetti," *Italica* 91, no. 4 (2014): 625–53.

[13] Alessia Ricciardi, *The Ends of Mourning: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Film* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 127.

[14] Alessia Ricciardi, "Pasolini for the Future," *California Italian Studies* 2, no. 1 (2011): 4.

[15] In the development of my argument, I am aided by Zygmunt G. Barański's challenge to the standard understanding of Gramsci's role in Pasolini's work; his examination of the gulf between Pasolini's expressed commitment to the peasantry and the aesthetic and paternalistic manner in which he incorporated them into his work; and his exploration of the under-acknowledged influence of Croce in Pasolini's theories of art, mass, and popular cultures. See Barański, "Pasolini: Culture, Croce, Gramsci," in *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy: Essays on Mass and Popular Culture*, ed. Zygmunt G. Barański and Robert Lumley (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

[16] Ernesto de Martino, "Il folklore progressivo (Note lucane)," in *Il dibattito sul folklore*, ed. Pietro Clemente, Maria Luisa Meoni, and Massimo Squillacciotti (Milan: Edizioni di Cultura Popolare, 1976), 123. For more on the radical approach to folklore and oral cultures that developed through the 1950s and became the Italian "folk revival" in later decades, see Cesare Bermani, *Una storia cantata, 1962–1997. Trentacinque anni di attività del Nuovo Canzoniere Italiano-Istituto Ernesto de Martino* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1997); Goffredo Plastino, ed., *La musica folk. Storie, protagonisti e documenti del revival in Italia* (Milan: il Saggiatore, 2016); and Antonio Fanelli, *Contro canto. Le culture della protesta dal canto sociale al rap* (Rome: Donzelli, 2017).

[17] From his 1953 letter to Gianfranco D'Aronco in Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Lettere. Con una cronologia della Vita e delle opere*, ed. Nico Naldini (Turin: Einaudi, 1986), 595; and Pasolini, *Canzoniere italiano*, 625.

conoscano de Martino" ("It's no wonder these intellectuals don't know de Martino").[18] Pasolini's late-career focus on historical calamity in particular shares a kinship with de Martino's examination of cultural apocalypse in essays like "Apocalissi culturali e apocalissi psicopatologiche" (1964, "Cultural Apocalypses and Psychopathological Apocalypses") and in his final, unfinished volume, *La fine del mondo* (1977, The End of the World).[19] Still, the manner in which these two intellectuals approached oral cultures demonstrated significant differences. Armando Maggi argues that Pasolini undervalued de Martino's emphasis, in works like *La fine del mondo*, on the "humanistic conscience" present in every human being, a position that clashes with "Pasolini's belief in a sharp dichotomy between the 'then' of a premodern condition and the 'now' of a post history, which he envisions as a free falling from grace (capitalism; bourgeois culture)."[20] Part of this divergence springs from how Pasolini and de Martino understand who participates in history, and it is starkly present in the early works of both on popular culture.

Pasolini knew from the outset that his anthology of Italian poetry would be "complicatissima e molto impegnativa" ("very complicated and very demanding").[21] Writing to the literary critic Giacinto Spagnoletti in January 1953, he mentions his hesitations about the "immensità della materia" ("immense amount of material") involved in such a project, but a few weeks later he reaffirms his resolve to finish the volume: "[F]ra l'altro se tutte le poesie anonime regionali sono come quelle che già conosco (la friulana, la veneta, la calabrese, la siciliana) ne verrebbe fuori un libro delizioso" ("[B]esides if all the anonymous regional poems are like the ones I know [Friulian, Venetian, Calabrian, Sicilian], a wonderful book would result").[22] In a September letter to Spagnoletti, however, Pasolini's excitement had turned again to desperation: "Credimi, sto passando dei giorni angosciosi per poter spedire a Guanda la nuova antologia in tempo utile: ed è un lavoro tremendo: in due giorni, per esempio, ho dovuto leggermi tremila villotte, e sceglierle!)" ("Believe me, I am passing through days of anguish to be able to send the new anthology to Guanda [his editor in Milan] in time; and it is a terrible amount of work—in two days, for example, I had to read three thousand *villotte* [popular songs] and select them").[23] He wrote to Gianfranco D'Aronco pleading for his anthology of Friulian poetry and to Luigi Ciceri asking for a book on Istrian songs from an Udine library.[24] By the end of 1954, he had assembled "un monte di bozze" ("a mountain of drafts") to be published the following year.[25] These letters underscore the complexity and scope of his anthology. They also demonstrate how dependent Pasolini's research was on existing collections housed in regional libraries and the Biblioteca Nazionale of Rome.

The collected poetry of the *Canzoniere Italiano*, sourced from a vast collection of poetic anthologies, is distanced from the original, oral performance, a significant distinction between Pasolini's work on popular poetry, philological in nature, and that of researchers like de Martino

[18] Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Cultura borghese—cultura marxista—cultura popolare" (1974), in *Saggi sulla letteratura e sull'arte*, ed. Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude, I Meridiani (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), 2:1995.
[19] Ernesto de Martino, "Apocalissi culturali e apocalissi psicopatologiche," *Nuovi argomenti*, nos. 69–71 (1964) in *La fine del mondo*, ed. Giordana Charuty, Daniel Fabre, and Marcello Massenzio (Turin: Einaudi, 2019), 547–79. For more on parallels between Pasolini and Ernesto de Martino, especially in their later works, see Armando Maggi, *The Resurrection of the Body: Pier Paolo Pasolini from Saint Paul to Sade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 6–9; and Alessia Ricciardi, "Pasolini for the Future."
[20] Maggi, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 7.
[21] Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Lettere*, 700.
[22] Ibid., 519, 538. English translation (with some minor amendments) from Pasolini, *The Letters of Pier Paolo Pasolini* (London: Quartet Books, 1992), 397, 408.
[23] Pasolini, *Lettere*, 604; and Pasolini, *The Letters of Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 443
[24] Pasolini, *Lettere*, 595; and Pasolini, *The Letters of Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 601.
[25] Pasolini, *Lettere*, 700.

who were engaging directly with the communities they were describing.[26] Pasolini leaves out the music that would have accompanied the songs, unlike, as he admits, "quanto avrebbe fatto ancora un folclorista che si rispetti" ("what a self-respecting folklorist would have done").[27] He argues that while the music is "inscindibile per il folclorista come scienziato" ("inseparable for the folklorist as scientist"), it is not essential "come criterio estetico per la raccolta o la scelta di testi 'poetici': prodotto autonomo della cultura tradizionale" ("as an aesthetic criterion for the collection or choice of 'poetic' texts, an autonomous product of traditional culture"), a key signal that he is evaluating popular poetry through an aesthetic and philological lens.[28] His bibliographical notes give a sense of the varied material consulted and compiled—the oldest being Filippo Tommaseo's *Canti popolari toscani, corsi, illirici e greci* (1841, Popular Tuscan, Corsican, Illyrian, and Greek Songs) and the newest Eugenio Cirese's *I canti popolari del Molise* (1953, Popular Songs of Molise)—with a preponderance of sources from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Through these sources and his methodological choices, he makes clear that he is investigating and valorizing popular poetry as worthy of philological analysis, not as part of contemporary culture. In doing so, he assumes the role of a scholar bestowing dignity on a rural practice. These choices provoked criticism from Diego Carpitella, an influential ethnomusicologist, who in 1954 had accompanied Alan Lomax on a journey to record Italian oral traditions in every region. Lamenting the omission of music, which left the remaining lyrics "mutili" ["mutilated"], he judged that *Canzoniere italiano* served to "'confezionare' la cultura popolare [...] e farla conoscere 'in città'" ("'gift wrap' popular culture [...] to make it known 'in the city'").[29] Even in 1985, Carpitella may have been thinking of Pasolini when he argued that previous documentation of "un fiume sotterraneo di una cultura musicale orale" ("an underground river of an oral musical culture") had been limited by a "demologico-letterario (ed analfamusico)" ("demological-literary [and musically illiterate]") approach that failed to consider the song as a union of music and text.[30] Reflecting on the work later, Alberto Mario Cirese, another important Italian ethnomusicologist, took a more forgiving stance, recognizing the seriousness of Pasolini's volume and its enrichment of the field.[31]

Pasolini's choice to group the songs by region offers a holistic vision of diverse popular practices and testifies to his belief in the inherent poetic quality of dialects. With this choice he diverges from older folklore anthologies organized by genre, such as that of Alessandro D'Ancona, an important source for the *Canzoniere*. Pasolini argues that his decisions, "privi di ogni apriorismo nazionalistico" ("devoid of any nationalistic apriorism"), would "meglio far notare la

[26] Other researchers who were working with oral testimony and direct contact with rural cultures during the 1950s include Rocco Scotellaro, *Contadini del Sud* (Bari: Laterza, 1954); Danilo Dolci, *Inchiesta a Palermo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1956); and Danilo Montaldi, *Milano, Corea. Inchiesta sugli immigrati* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1960); and Montaldi, *Autobiografie della leggera* (Turin: Einaudi, 1961). For more on the early use of oral sources in Italy, see Cesare Bermani, "Le origini e il presente. Fonti orali e ricerca storica in Italia," in *Introduzione alla storia orale. Storia, conservazione delle fonti e problemi di metodo* (Rome: Odradek 1999).

[27] Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Canzoniere italiano. Antologia della poesia popolare* (Milan: Garzanti 2019), 14.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Diego Carpitella, "La musica e l'etnomusica," in *La Biennale di Venezia. Annuario 1978. Eventi del 1976–1977* (Venice: Archivio storico delle arti contemporanee, 1979), 1217. For more on Alan Lomax's research in Italy, see Alan Lomax, "Saga of a Folksong Hunter: A Twenty-Year Odyssey with Cyllinder, Disc and Tape," *HiFi Stereo Review* (May 1960): 38–46; and Lomax, *L'anno più felice della mia vita. Un viaggio in Italia, 1954–1955*, ed. Goffredo Plastino (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2008).

[30] Diego Carpitella, "Etnomusicologia e stato della documentazione in Italia," in *L'etnomusicologia in Italia. Primo Convegno sugli studi etnomusicologici in Italia*, ed. Diego Carpitella (Palermo: S. F. Flaccovio 1985), 22.

[31] Alberto Mario Cirese, "Il *Canzoniere italiano*. Pasolini studioso di poesia popolare," in *Lezioni Su Pasolini*, ed. Tullio de Mario and Francesco Ferri (Ripatrasone: Edizioni Sestante, 1997).

diversità nell'unità che il contrario" ("serve to point out the differences within unity rather than the other way round").[32] Even as he disavows any nationalist intent in the project, he suggests that the organization of the volume was an ideological choice, a showcase of popular poetic harmony in difference: the reader, "leggendo antologizzate insieme le poesie piemontesi e siciliane avvertirà, se dotato di sensibilità per il documento vivo, difficile e commovente, con maggior chiarezza quelle diacronie […] senza le quali una unità, sia in senso nazionale che stilistico, sarebbe una nozione astratta" ("reading the Piedmontese and Sicilian poems anthologized together, will perceive with greater clarity—if equipped with sensitivity towards the living, difficult, and moving text—those diachronies […] without which unity, in both a national and a stylistic sense, would be an abstract notion").[33] Through this mosaic of songs in dialect emerges a colorful portrait of Italian oral cultures, an alternative understanding of a national tradition. Alberto Carli suggests that Pasolini conceived his project as "un atto di denuncia" ("an act of denunciation") against the flattening standardization of an Italian society spurred by rapid economic growth.[34] The drive to demonstrate the relevance of these dialects to a postwar national culture betrays an anxiety about loss, present in the work of folklorists for a century, about the disappearance of oral traditions in the wake of industrialization, and, later, urbanization and the expansion of mass media.[35] Writing almost two decades after the publication of the *Canzoniere*, Pasolini summed up the vanishing he had tried to prevent: "[L]a cultura del Centro sta distruggendo giorno per giorno, a vista d'occhio, le culture eccentriche" ("The culture of the Center is destroying the cultures on the margins, day by day and before our eyes").[36]

The volume's framing proposes popular poetry as the foundation of a diverse and renewed peoples' culture after fascism, although this explicit purpose is not emphasized in Pasolini's introduction. He dedicates the *Canzoniere* to his brother, Guido, "caduto nel '45 sui monti della Venezia Giulia, per una nuova vita del popolo italiano" ("fallen in '45 in the mountains of Venezia Giulia, for a new life of the Italian people"), and begins with a quotation from Guido's last letter, dated November 1944, asking for his brother's contribution to a new journal he had founded, "Quelli del Tricolore" ("Those of the Italian Flag"): "Dovresti scrivere qualche articolo che fa al caso nostro…con qualche poesia magari, in italiano e friulano…qualche canzone su arie note, pure in italiano e friulano" ("You should write some article that suits us…with some poetry perhaps, in Italian and Friulian…a few songs with familiar tunes, also in Italian and Friulian").[37] This presentation thus makes a connection between a "new life" for the Italian public and the dissemination of dialect poetic traditions. The first edition's cover also marketed the book as a kind of patriotic product: "Questo libro lo ha scritto il popolo italiano" ("This book was written by the Italian people"). Rather than advocating for a kind of neo-Risorgimento or a people's culture based on nationalist or fascist conceptions of Italy, the *Canzoniere* is presented as an anthology of varied Italian identities, based in the diversity of their rural linguistic and cultural traditions.

The recovery of dialect poetry as a foundational element of a postwar Italian culture might conjure up Antonio Gramsci's term national-popular, although Gramsci himself left the concept

[32] Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Canzoniere italiano*, 14.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Alberto Carli, *L'occhio e la voce*, 67.
[35] On the breakdown of rural dialectal traditions in the wake of Italian unification and especially the spread of radio and television, see Tullio De Mauro, *Storia linguistica dell'Italia unita,* 10th ed. (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2011).
[36] Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Cultura borghese—cultura marxista—cultura popolare," 1996.
[37] Pasolini, *Canzoniere italiano*, 9–10.

vague in his writings.[38] Given Pasolini's well-known affection for Gramsci as an interlocutor, a reader might be tempted to view his *Canzoniere* as part of an attempt, as an intellectual, to participate in the creation of this new culture.[39] Still, Pasolini does not refer to this term in his lengthy introduction. Although he does cite Gramsci's "pur così varia, complessa e spregiudicata" ("nonetheless diverse, complex, and unbiased") analysis of popular literature, he finds its focus on Italian melodrama and genre novels—"su quella, insomma, che oggi si definisce 'cultura di massa'" ("on that which, in short, one would today define as 'mass culture'")—to be largely irrelevant to his own discussion of dialect poetry.[40] He imagines that had Gramsci dealt with this poetry, he would have found it irrelevant "[i]n funzione polemica rivoluzionaria" ("in service of revolutionary polemic").[41] Moreover, Pasolini neglects to discuss Gramsci's own observations on folklore, which by the 1950s were helping to shape a new field of study:

> Si può dire che finora il folclore sia stato studiato prevalentemente come elemento "pittoresco" [...] Occorrerebbe studiarlo invece come "concezione del mondo e della vita," implicita in grande misura, di determinati strati (determinati nel tempo e nello spazio) della società, in contrapposizione (anch'essa per lo più implicità, meccanica, oggettiva) con le concezioni del mondo "ufficiali" (o in senso più largo delle parti colte della società storicamente determinate) che si sono successe nello sviluppo storico.[42]
>
> (One can say that until now folklore has been studied primarily as a "picturesque" element. [...] Folklore should instead 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 [or in a broader sense, the conceptions of the cultured parts of historically determinate societies] that have succeeded one another in the historical process.)

[38] For a thorough breakdown of "national-popular," see David Forgacs, "National-Popular: Genealogy of a Concept," in *Cultural Studies Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 2007).
[39] Barański has also argued that Pasolini, despite his claims to a kinship with Gramsci, did not successfully assimilate his theories into his intellectual practices ("Pasolini: Culture, Croce, Gramsci," 147–50).
[40] Pasolini, *Canzoniere italiano*, 32–33.
[41] Ibid, 34.
[42] Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, ed. Valentino Gerratana (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), 27§1, 2311. English translation from *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916–1935*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: New York University Press 2000), 360. When considering the impact of these notes on postwar cultural scholarship, it is important to keep in mind the editorial intervention that led to their grouping. Gramsci wrote these observations over a period of six years, from 1929 to 1935. Scattered across different notebooks, these writings were compiled thematically and published in the volume *Letteratura e vita nazionale*, ed. Felice Platone (Turin: Einaudi, 1950). The grouping of Gramsci's analysis of folk culture, consequently, does not necessarily align with the intentions of its author and might give the impression of a more thorough analysis of folklore and its study than they are. This grouping may also explain some of the ambiguities within the notes. For an analysis of the challenges presented by this arrangement, see Alberto Mario Cirese, "Concezioni del mondo, filosofia spontanea e istinto di classe nelle 'Osservazioni sul folclore' di Antonio Gramsci," in *Intellettuali, folklore, istinto di classe. Note su Verga, Deledda, Scotellaro, Gramsci* (Turin: Einaudi, 1976). Fabio Dei has also written extensively on the Gramscian "rivoluzione" (or the lack of it) in anthropology: see Dei, *Beethoven e le mondine. Ripensare la cultura popolare* (Rome: Meltemi, 2002); and "Un museo di frammenti. Ripensare la rivoluzione gramsciana negli studi folklorici," *Lares* 73, no. 1 (2008): 445–64.

Gramsci orients the folklore within its historical and material conditions and suggests that this culture cannot be isolated from hegemonic culture, given that they inform each other even in opposition. His insistence on the elements of contestation present in folklore—despite his argument later that it cannot be a systematic or elaborated worldview because the people as a collective are by definition not yet organized—delineated a new field of inquiry by suggesting rural laborers possessed an autonomous perspective and were capable of political expression.[43] The absence of these observations from Pasolini's introduction suggests, at the least, another rift between his work and that of de Martino, who by 1951 was reckoning with the implications of Gramsci's observations for political possibilities of folk songs.[44]

Pasolini's project and its methods instead suggest that he is intervening in a lineage of philologists stretching back to D'Ancona and Niccolò Tommaseo, who both documented the rural cultures of a nascent nation and used these traditions to justify political unification.[45] Regina Bendix has noted that the nineteenth-century search for "authentic" folk materials constituted a recovery of an "essence" lost to modernity, a process which in turn helped construct a noble past, give precedence to native languages, and legitimize nationalist projects arguing for political union or independence.[46] The first significant collection of Italian folk songs, Tommaseo's 1841 volume, *Canti popolari toscani corsi illirici greci*, was essential for both the ferment of folklore studies in Italy and its Romantic, nationalistic connotations.[47] Tommaseo suggests that popular poetry presents an ameliorative possibility for Italy, both as an alternative to disjointed urban cultures and as a potential source of instruction for a fledgling Italian citizenry: "Quando la nazione comincia a conoscere il proprio stato, per ben governarla non v'è miglior modo che farglielo conoscere intero, portar la luce nell'oscurità delle moltitudini condensate, segnare a ciascun ordine sociale il suo posto, a ciascuno uomo il suo luogo" ("When the nation begins to understand its own state, there is no better way to govern it well than to make it known in its entirety, to bring light to the darkness of the huddled masses, to signal to each social order their own position, to each man his own place").[48] Pasolini had previously expressed his fascination with Tommaseo in a letter to Contini, praising the latter's 1947 essay, "Progetto per un ritratto di Niccolò Tommaseo" ("A Sketch for a Portrait of Niccolò Tommaseo"), and perhaps identified with Tommaseo's exaltation of marginalized cultures.[49]

---

[43] Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, 27§1, 2312.

[44] Ernesto de Martino, "Gramsci e il folklore," in *Il dibattito sul folklore*, 134.

[45] For more on the development in Italy of the study of folklore and popular culture, often referred to as "studi demologici" ("demologic studies"), see Alberto Mario Cirese, *Cultura egemonica e culture subalterne. Rassegna degli studi sul mondo popolare tradizionale* (Palermo: Palumbo, 1973); Alessandro Carrera, "Italy's Blues. Folk Music and Popular Song from the Nineteenth Century to the 1990s," *The Italianist* 21, no. 1 (2001): 348–71; and Fabio Dei, "Dal popolare al populismo. Ascesa e declino degli studi demologici in Italia," *Meridiana* 77 (2013): 83–100. For more on the development of ethnomusicology in Italy, see Diego Carpitella, "Ethnomusicology in Italy," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 11, nos. 1–2 (June 1974): 81–98; and Giovanni Giuriati, "Italian Ethnomusicology," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 27 (1995): 104–131.

[46] Regina Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 8.

[47] Cirese, *Cultura egemonica e culture subalterne*, 131; and Dei, "Dal popolare al populismo," 85.

[48] Niccolò Tommaseo, *Canti Popolari Toscani, Corsi, Illirici, Greci* (Bologna: Forni, 1841), 28.

[49] Marco A. Bazzocchi and Ezio Raimondi, "Una tesi di laurea e una città," in *Antologia della lirica pascoliana. Introduzione e commenti di Pier Paolo Pasolini*, ed. Marco A. Bazzocchi and Ezio Raimondi (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), xix. For more on Pasolini's early conversations about dialect philology with Gianfranco Contini, see Francesco Ferri. *Linguaggio, passione e ideologia. Pier Paolo Pasolini tra Gramsci, Gadda e Contini* (Rome: Progetti museali editore, 1996).

Following Italy's unification, Alessandro D'Ancona and Costantino Nigra's studies of folklore reflected the cultural exigencies as well as the sociopolitical hierarchies of the new nation. D'Ancona's 1878 volume, *La poesia popolare italiana* (Popular Italian Poetry), elaborates his monogenetic theory of the origin of Italian folklore, which held that the poetic forms of *strambotti* and *rispetti* originated in Sicily in the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries before spreading in various forms throughout the peninsula.[50] By tracing the continuities in form and subject between diverse regional traditions and arguing for a common origin, D'Ancona upheld the notion of a culturally unified Italy. Nigra, in *Canti popolari del Piemonte* (1888, Popular Songs of Piedmont), divided folkloric traditions into two groups along geographical lines—the southern *romanzo* and the northern *celtico-romanzo*—and maintained that both traditions are "immuni d'ogni influenza straniera" ("immune from every foreign influence").[51] The double dimension of this theory constructs a cultural foundation for newly formed Italy, as it makes a claim for the originality of both traditions and at the same time for the subtle superiority—the rationality and historicity—of the northern style. Pasolini's drive to document popular traditions seems more rooted in aesthetic appreciation and a desire to preserve what he understands as a mythic past rather than an explicitly nationalist project. Nonetheless, like these scholars, Pasolini's philological methodology treats popular poetry as a part of a larger national literary tradition and frames it as the recovery of a vital poetic practice threatened by modernity.

Intervening in this tradition, Pasolini finds that previous "critica filologica" ("philological criticism") has failed to grapple with a problem that he finds "meglio che filologico, estetico e morale" ("more than philological, aesthetic and moral"): the origin of popular poetry, "come atto poetico" ("as a poetic act").[52] He finds that previous theories—including Romantic, positivist, and idealist—glamorized popular poetry as a collective invention or that of individual, minor medieval poets.[53] He argues that popular poetry is instead the fruit of a complex exchange between high and low cultural traditions. This theory offers an early glimpse into how Pasolini would later conceive of national culture as a whole, a complexity vulnerable to the flattening effect of neocapitalism. He argues that popular poetry as "*inventio*" is the product of cultural interaction between different classes, between "due vite istituzionali, quella delle classi dominate e quella delle classi dominanti" ("two institutional lives, that of the dominated classes and that of the dominant classes").[54] From the lower class, popular poetry absorbs "una mentalità di tipo arcaico, primordiale, atto a produrre poesia anche nelle comunità umane più arretrate" ("an archaic, primordial mentality, apt to produce poetry even in the most backward human communities"), while from the higher class it reflects "una mentalità che si approssima, per mimesi, per influenza, alla vita moderna, storica" ("a mentality that approximates, by mimesis, by influence, modern, historical life").[55] From this emerges Pasolini's theory of "bilinguismo" ("bilingualism") and "bi-stilismo sociologico" ("sociological bi-stylism"). Together they form one type of culture, "quello storico del mondo in evoluzione dialettica" ("the historical one of the world in dialectical evolution").[56] He argues for an interdependence and mutual influence between these cultures, at least before the arrival of industrialized mass culture.

---

[50] Alessandro D'Ancona, *La poesia popolare italiana* (Livorno: Vigo, 1878).
[51] Costantino Nigra, *Canti popolari del Piemonte* (Turin: Ermanno Loescher, 1888), 38.
[52] Pasolini, *Canzoniere italiano*, 43.
[53] Ibid., 52.
[54] Ibid., 46.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid., 53. Pasolini's analysis of "bilinguismo sociologico" ("sociological bilingualism") foreshadows his later discussion of "free indirect discourse" in *Empirismo eretico* (*Heretical Empiricism*). In the later essay, he refers to the

For Pasolini, this symbiosis offers beauty and power. Without this relationship, popular poetry could not exist, as the "popolo" itself is only capable of producing that which "si potrebbe chiamare meramente folklorica, interessante meglio l'etnologo che il letterato" ("could be called merely folkloric, more interesting to the ethnologist than the literary scholar"), thereby dismissing the lower classes' participation in worthwhile cultural production.[57] Zygmunt Barański has argued that despite Pasolini's efforts to establish a kinship with Antonio Gramsci and his theories of popular culture, his 1955 essay, "La poesia popolare italiana" ("Popular Italian Poetry"), reveals him to be "invariably paternalistic and elitist in his discussion of 'people' and their 'culture,'" a position that distances him from Gramsci.[58] Instead, this essay demonstrates more the influence of Benedetto Croce's analysis of cultural divisions, although Gramsci too sometimes struggled to escape Croce's structures.[59] The *Canzoniere* reveals a similar tendency. Even as he criticizes Croce's conception of the "'popolo' come oggetto di amore immediato, di connivenza cordiale e non politica" ("'people' as an object of immediate love, of cordial and non-political connivance"), Pasolini's own theories recall his predecessor's division between popular poetry and art poetry, an argument that compared popular poetry to "buon senso" ("good sense") or "la candidezza o innocenza" ("candidness or innocence").[60] Pasolini's analysis legitimizes popular traditions through their relationship to established aesthetic forms rather than engaging with them within a historic or materialist context, and he suggests that it is only through their relationship with these forms that they become poetry worthy of analysis.

The innovation of Pasolini's theory is further limited by an insistent tendency to portray the lowest classes as outside of history, a perspective that, while typical of his worldview and reminiscent of previous folklore studies, is inconsistent with the understanding of marginalized people as full political and social citizens. His analysis of what he calls "poesia folclorica" ("folkloric poetry"), included in the volume in an appendix, reveals his larger preoccupation with the "archaic" in the culture of the lower classes. For Pasolini, folkloric poetry is devoid of any artistic elements because it originates in "un mondo così duramente e irrimediabilmente miserabile, che ogni nostra, storica, legge estetica finisce col decadervi, con lo smarrirsi" ("a world so harshly and irredeemably miserable that all our historical aesthetic rules end up decaying and disappearing in it").[61] Pasolini's perspective is that of the intellectual who has positioned himself far above the culture and the people he seeks to represent, and by referring to "*our* historical

---

cultural implications when an author writes from the perspective of someone from a lower class and uses a language that is self-consciously lower than his own literary language. Pasolini writes about this division: "In alto i sistemi simbolistici, ermetici, espressionistici […] In basso i sistemi naturalistici, le imitazioni del parlato sublinguistico o dialettale; la poesia vernacola ecc. ecc.[…] *La contaminazione non avveniva tra la lingua bassa e la lingua media, ma tra lingua bassa e la lingua alta*" ("Up above were symbolist, hermetic, and expressionistic systems. […] Down below were naturalistic systems, imitations of sublinguistic or dialectal speech; vernacular poetry, etc. [...] *Contamination did not happen between the low language and the middle language but between the low language and the high language*"). See Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Intervento sul discorso libero indiretto," in *Empirismo eretico* (Milan: Garzanti 1975), 91–92; translation from *Heretical Empiricism*, ed. Louise K. Barnett and trans. Ben Lawton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 85. Given the elements of this argument reminiscent of Pasolini's theory of popular poetry, we can imagine that the *Canzoniere Italiano* and its introduction as an early attempt to grapple with the dynamics of class, language, and literature, one in which he developed ideas for later cultural criticism.

[57] Ibid., 53–54.

[58] Barański, "Pier Paolo Pasolini: Culture, Croce, Gramsci," 150.

[59] Ibid,147–54.

[60] Pasolini, *Canzoniere italiano*, 44; and Benedetto Croce, *Poesia popolare e poesia d'arte* (Bari: Laterza, 1930), 5.

[61] Pasolini, *Canzoniere Italiano*, 133.

aesthetic rules" he aligns the reader's understanding with his own. His insistence on the illegibility of folklore only increases the temporal and cultural distance from the living people he describes:

> Basta ascoltare al magnetofono, alle volte, le prime note e le prime parole di una ninna-nanna o di una filastrocca che il raccoglitore di canti popolari abbia registrato, magari in qualche zona montana delle aree depresse, per sentire immediatamente come sia gratuito e privo di qualsiasi validità il nostro metodo di accepire e di interpretare questo mondo.[62]
>
> (It's enough at times to listen to a recording of the first notes or the first words of a lullaby or a nursery rhyme recorded by a researcher of popular songs, perhaps in some mountains of the underdeveloped areas, to hear immediately how gratuitous and worthless our methods of understanding and interpreting this world are.)

When finally confronted with a contemporary example of popular culture, Pasolini expresses a longing for what he perceives as an archaic, unknowable popular essence. This is Pasolini's first mention of the tape recorder: when the oral performance is only accessible through aural and technological means, it is alien, the product of another world, while the written documents contained in the volumes of Tommaseo and Nigra can constitute a people's literary tradition. His response to these "first words of a lullaby" is one of love, but it is a love that others its object.

Pasolini's "denial of coevalness" to the people who participate in folklore, in that he positions them in a time separate from his own, diverges sharply from de Martino's argument, which he had begun disseminating several years earlier, that peasant cultures were constantly evolving and responding to their historical and material condition.[63] In 1949, de Martino published an essay in *Società* attacking Western and bourgeois approaches towards ethnology, which he argued reflected the needs, interests, and limits of the landowning classes.[64] Ethnology as a field was reactionary, implicated in the crimes of colonialism, and in crisis with the emergence of a new historical understanding rooted in class struggle. He found in bourgeois ethnologists a connection between "lo sfruttamento politico delle masse popolari subalterne e la considerazione naturalistica della loro cultura" ("the political exploitation of the subaltern popular masses and the naturalistic understanding of their culture").[65] To overcome these attitudes, de Martino proposed a historicization of popular cultural forms and the critical analysis of the discipline itself. He concluded that a scholar of the south must always consider "ciò che di 'popolare' o di 'subalterno' vive in ciascuno di noi" ("the 'popular' or 'subaltern' features that live in each of us").[66] In a 1951 article for *L'Unità,* he coined the term "folklore progressivo" ("progressive folklore") as the "proposta consapevole del popolo contro la propria condizione socialmente subalterna" ("the people's conscious proposal against their own socially subaltern position").[67] Folk culture is not solely archaic tradition, then, but also "una vita culturale di queste masse che rompe più o meno

[62] Ibid.
[63] I use here Johannes Fabian's phrase from *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 35.
[64] Ernesto de Martino, "Intorno a una storia del mondo popolare subalterno," *Società* 5, no. 3 (1949): 411–35, reproduced in Carla Pasquinelli, *Antropologia culturale e questione meridionale* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1977), 46–72.
[65] Ibid., 48.
[66] Ibid., 64.
[67] Ernesto de Martino, "Il folklore progressivo (Note lucane)," in *Il dibattito sul folklore*, 123.

decisamente con la tradizione, e che risuona come 'voce sonora del presente'" ("a cultural life of these masses that more or less decisively breaks with tradition, and that resonates as the 'ringing voice of the present'").[68] Using these developed and conscious cultural forms, the lower classes could actively contribute to the formation of a new national culture. In his later works, de Martino examined behaviors considered irrational—ritual weeping, the use of magic, or the ritual dance called the *taranta*—as part of the contemporary cultural and political systems that had marginalized them.[69] Pasolini as a poet and philologist is not de Martino's target in these essays, but the analysis of the *Canzoniere italiano* aligns with the perspectives de Martino is criticizing.

Both Pasolini and de Martino are attentive to the disappearance of popular conditions with the industrialization of rural Italy, although their conclusions strike different tones. "[S]alve le aree depresse, la tendenza del canto popolare nella nazione è a scomparire" ("except for underdeveloped areas, the tendency of popular song in the nation is to disappear"), Pasolini observes, as the lower class organizes "verso la conquista del potere" ("towards the conquest of power") and works to "abolire l'irrazionale soggezione in cui per tanti secoli era vissuto" ("abolish the irrational subjugation under which they have lived for many centuries").[70] In this difference Pasolini perceives the erosion of a cultural foundation, one which might have provided a means for the lower classes to resist the totalizing effect of neocapitalism:

> [N]on bisogna dimenticare che le armi di diffusione dell'ideologia della classe al potere, come abbiamo ricordato, sono immensamente potenziate: e la loro influenza, nel popolo, è di condurlo a prendere l'abito mentale e ideologico di quella classe: ad assimilarlo. […] La poesia popolare, come istituzione stilistica a sé, è in crisi. La storia in atto.[71]
>
> (We must not forget that the weapons of diffusion of the ideology of the ruling class, as we have mentioned, are immensely powerful, and their influence, in the people, leads them to assume the mental and ideological habitus of that class, to assimilate into it. […] Popular poetry, as a stylistic foundation in itself, is in crisis. History in action.)

[68] Ernesto de Martino, "Gramsci e il folklore," in *Il dibattito sul folklore*, 136.
[69] These include *Morte e pianto rituale nel mondo antico* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1958), *Sud e magia* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1959), translated in English as *Magic: A Theory from the South* (Chicago: Hau Books, 2015), and his masterwork *La terra del rimorso* (Milan: il Saggiatore, 1961) translated in English as *The Land of Remorse* (London: Free Association Books, 2005). George Saunders has compared *La terra del rimorso* to Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* (also published in 1961) in that it seeks to reveal "relations of power, the tensions of cultural change, and the redefinition of the Other through the control of culture by the elite." See George Saunders, "'Critical Ethnocentrism' and the Ethnology of Ernesto de Martino," *American Anthropologist* 95, no. 4 (1993): 885. Emilio Giacomo Berrocal has examined the extent to which de Martino was truly successful at critiquing his own ethnocentrism in "The Post-colonialism of Ernesto de Martino: The Principle of Critical Ethnocentrism as a Failed Attempt to Reconstruct Ethnographic Authority," *History and Anthropology* 20, no. 2 (June 2009): 123–38. On the connections between De Martino's ethnology and the uneven development of modern Italy see also, Simonetta Falasca Zamponi, "Of Tears and Tarantulas: Folk Religiosity, de Martino's Ethnology, and the Italian South," *California Italian Studies* 5, 1 (2014), https://doi.org/10.5070/C351019466.
[70] Pasolini, *Canzoniere Italiano*, 145–46.
[71] Ibid., 146.

In the appendix to their study on the ritual *taranta* dance in Puglia, de Martino and his partner, Vittoria De Palma, make a parallel observation as they take stock of their historical moment, southern Italy during the economic miracle of the 1950s:

> Il tarantismo, senza dubbio, si legava a una serie di rapporti economico-sociali incompatibili con la civiltà moderna: l'istruzione, i mezzi di comunicazione di massa, l'emancipazione sociale della donna, la facilità di comunicazione col centro urbano di Lecce, i contatti dovuti all'emigrazione stagionale, l'introduzione delle macchine nei lavori agricoli, l'industrializzazione e soprattutto la vita sindacale e politica introducevano giorno per giorno modificazioni così decisive nella mentalità e nel costume da costituire un continuo intervento che avrebbe liquidato il tarantismo in breve e per sempre, insieme a tante altre cose del passato.[72]
>
> (Tarantism, without a doubt, was linked to a series of socioeconomic relationships incompatible with modern civilization. Education, the mass media, the social emancipation of women, the ease of communication with the urban center of Lecce, exchange due to seasonal emigration, the introduction of machinery in agricultural work, industrialization, and above all the life of politics and the union have introduced day by day changes so decisive in mentality and customs that they constitute a continuous intervention that will quickly and forever liquidate tarantism, together with many other things of the past.)

De Martino and De Palma recognize that they are describing a practice during a moment of social and economic transition that will likely contribute to its erasure. De Martino, unlike Pasolini, never suggests that these transitions should not occur, but he evokes a similar fascination with rituals, born from extreme poverty, that are destined to disappear. The larger question hovering in the air, and one that officials of the Partito Comunista Italiano frequently asked, is why should such a cultural phenomenon be so thoroughly documented if it is to be overcome with modernization and emancipation?[73] Beyond the inherent value of direct contact with and documentation of peoples' cultures, a response can perhaps be found in the use of tarantism to examine the power relations that have contributed to its practice.

Pasolini's rage at the gradual disappearance of dialects and the homogenization of Italian culture would resurface in his comparisons of coerced consumerism to a new fascism. Shortly before his death, he argued that, rather than solely the culture of the intelligentsia, or the ruling classes, or the laboring classes, "[l]a cultura di una nazione è l'insieme di tutte queste culture di classe: è la media di esse" ("The culture of a nation is the drawing together of all these class

---

[72] De Martino and Vittoria De Palma, "Appendice V," in de Martino, *La terra del rimorso,* 385–86.

[73] Important PCI figures repeatedly attacked de Martino's work and questioned the validity of a historical approach that treated superstitions and magic as valid beliefs. In a 1952 meeting of a commission on national culture, PCI General Secretary Palmiro Togliatti denounced the serious investigations on the cognitive validity of witchcraft and made the veiled suggestion that de Martino was writing a history of "irrazionalismo" ("irrationalism"). See Cesare Bermani, "Le date di una vita," *Il de Martino*, nos. 5–6 (1996): 21. Cesare Luporini responded to de Martino's theory of "progressive folklore" with a scathing essay that accused de Martino of idolizing the archaic: "Intorno a una storia del mondo popolare subalterno," in *Dibattito sulla cultura delle classi subalterne (1949–50)*, ed. Pietro Angelini (Rome: Savelli, 1977). Mario Alicata suggested that the necessity of overcoming superstitious beliefs was equivalent to the struggle against illiteracy and alcoholism ("Il meridionalismo non si può fermare ad Eboli," in *Il dibattito sul folklore,* 183–98).

cultures: it's the average of all of them").[74] The *Canzoniere* represents an early attempt to document and to articulate what might be lost with the eventual "riorganizzazione e […] omologazione brutalmente totalitaria del mondo" ("the brutally totalitarian reorganization and homologation of the world") posed by capitalist modernity, as the people who produced the poetry that Pasolini loved become mere consumers.[75] Despite Pasolini's pessimism, the existence of *Canzoniere italiano* testifies to alternative possible ways of understanding and making culture.

Much like Pasolini himself, *Canzoniere italiano* is full of challenges and complications. The volume was born from Pasolini's profound love of dialect cultures and his desire to reveal their worth by gathering them and analyzing them as an Italian literary tradition. As a poet and aspiring philologist, he saw the diversity and vitality of popular poetry, which had endured two decades of fascist suppression, threatened by the flattening conformity of neocapitalist industrialization, and he hastened to preserve it in a manner that he finds legible, in a book. From this particular perspective arise the *Canzoniere*'s achievements and limitations, and close attention to Pasolini's work itself reveals the contradictions and conservatism sometimes hidden by the leftist mystique of its author. The volume is powerful in its proposal of popular poetry as the dynamic and organic element of Italian culture and a source of renewal after fascism. It is regressive in its valorization of this poetry from a purely philological and aesthetic perspective, one which refuses to engage with contemporary people's cultures on their own terms. His insistence on the lowest classes as producers of unintelligible, archaic practices reads as a classist fetishization of poor people, especially in the context of the wider interest in laboring cultures at the time. *Canzoniere italiano*'s Pasolini is an intellectual who, in celebrating the value and diversity of marginalized poetic traditions, falls back on the very rhetoric and methodological approaches that marginalize them. Even as he testifies to the beauty and power of these dynamic musical and oral songs, he neglects to acknowledge their contemporaneity and fixes them—alongside the people who perform them—within the confines of literature.

[74] Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Il potere senza volto," *Corriere della Sera*, 24 June 1974, included as "Il vero fascismo e quindi il vero antifascismo," in *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società*, ed. Walter Siti e Silvia De Laude (Milan: Mondadori 1999), 313; translation from "The Power without a Face: The True Fascism and Therefore the True Antifascism," in *In Danger: A Pasolini Anthology*, ed. Jack Hirschman (San Francisco: City Light Books, 2010), 45.
[75] Pasolini, "Il potere senza volto," 50; translation from "The Power without a Face," 51.