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Allegories of Contamination: Pier Paolo Pasolini's Trilogy of Life (Toronto Italian Studies)

Patrick Rumble

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The Trilogia della vita (Trilogy of Life) is a series of three films that Pier Paolo Pasolini completed before his horrifying assassination in 1975, and it remains among the most controversial of his cinematic works. In *Allegories of Contamination* Patrick Rumble provides an incisive critical and theoretical study of these films and the Marxist filmmaker's complex, original concept of the cinematic medium.

With the three films that make up the *Trilogy of Life* - *The Decameron*, *Canterbury Tales*, and *The Arabian Nights* - Pasolini attempts to recapture the aura surrounding popular, predominantly oral forms of storytelling through a pro-modern vision of innocent, unalienated bodies and pleasures. In these works Pasolini appears to abandon the explicitly political engagement that marked his earlier works - films that led him to be identified with other radical filmmakers such as Bellocchio, Bertolucci, and Godard. However, Pasolini insisted that these were his 'most ideological films,' and his political engagement translates into a mannerist, anti-classical style or what he called a 'cinema of poetry.' Rumble offers a comparative study based on the concept of 'aesthetic contamination,' which is fundamental to the understanding of Pasolini's poetics. Aesthetic contamination concerns the mediation between different cultures and different historical moments. Through stylistic experimentation, the *Trilogy of Life* presents a genealogy of visual codes, an interrogation of the subjectivity of narrative cinema. In these films Pasolini celebrates life, and perhaps therein lies their simple heresy.

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