Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Edipo re*

**Plot summary**

The film is divided into three parts: prologue, myth, and epilogue. The prologue takes place in an Italian town during the years of Fascism. A boy is born into a petite-bourgeois family in Northern Italy. The father is a young army officer. The mother breast-feeds her son in a field hedged by poplars while other women play. The analysis of the mother-son, mother-father, and, above all, father-son relationships, make the tension presiding them obvious.

From the atmosphere of Fascist Italy, we go to the desert and mountains of some remote corner of Northern Africa. A tiny Theban infant is abandoned by the man who was supposed to kill him. He is picked up by a shepherd and taken to Polibus, king of Corinth, who cannot have children. Oedipus grows up at the court of Corinth, proud to be the son of Polibus and Merope. When he comes of age, a playfellow puts his royalty in doubt. Oedipus decides to travel to the sanctuary at Delphos to clear up his parentage, but the priestess gives him a terrible oracle: «It is written in your fate: you will murder your father and marry your mother. Thus saith the god, and the prophecy will be fulfilled». Terrified by the oracle, Oedipus decides not to return to Corinth. After many doubts and rejecting several roads, fate leads him to Thebes. During his journey, he murders a powerful man in whom we can recognise the father of the baby in the prologue, and whom we know is Oedipus’ father because among his followers there is a servant who is none other than the man who left Oedipus in the desert. In Thebes, he frees the city from the scourge of the Sphinx. Before being destroyed, the monster says, «There is an enigma in your life. It is useless, son! The chasm towards which you propel me is within yourself.» As a gesture of gratitude, the Thebans offer him the hand of the widowed queen Iocasta and the throne of Laius, the dead king. Oedipus accepts them both.

The second part of the myth is a setting of the play of the same name by Sophocles. In the city of Thebes a plague has broken out, with terrible consequences. The oracle, consulted by Creon under Oedipus’ orders, announces that the cause of the plague is the presence in the city of Laius’ murderer. Oedipus begins an investigation, firmly desiring to arrive at a definite conclusion. The wizard ‘Tiresias proclaims—and the facts confirm—that Laius’ murderer is Oedipus himself and that, moreover, Laius and Iocasta are his real parents. Oedipus resists the growing evidence and accuses his brother-in-law Creon and Tiresias of conspiracy. Iocasta, however, hangs herself; Oedipus puts out his eyes and leaves Thebes, blinded, with only a staff and a flute.

The epilogue once again gives us Oedipus, old and blind, in the modern world: he plays the flute before a church in a busy city full of tourists and middle-class people. Later, we find him in an industrial zone on the outskirts and, finally, in the same villa and the same field hedged by poplars we saw in the prologue. His last words are, «Life ends where it begins».

**The myth of Oedipus in *Edipo re***

One of the most important materials used by Pasolini to build the discourse of this film is that given him by the Oedipus legend. Consequently, any analysis whatsoever of the film necessarily goes by way of studying Pasolini’s relationship with this material of mythic origin. From what we see in the film, and from what Pasolini himself said on some occasion, we will try to clear up in what way a script-writer and film director of the 20th century comes to know a myth created by the Greeks at the end of the second millennium before Christ or the beginning of the first. However, the matter will not be cleared up when we know where he took his data and plot details from; it is just as important to analyse Pasolini’s relationship to his sources.

The myth in its most primitive state, that is to say, in its purely oral stages, is already strongly charged with ideology; we can actually say that the myth is ideology. Pasolini, however, has not known the myth in

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1. The scene vaguely reminds us of the episode in Homer of the games of Nausicaa, the Phaeacian princess, and her servants in the Odyssey.

2. Oedipus kills the soldiers escorting Laius by means of a scheme inspired by Titus Livius (*From the Foundation of the City*). The scheme is to start running and then kill the soldiers one by one, taking advantage of the fact that during the race they have become separated.
this state, but rather has learnt it through cultured re-elaborations, that is, through very personal works created in the heart of a consolidated cultural tradition and with a clear and specific intention. Therefore, we must add to the ideological charge the myth bore when it was created, that which artists and thinkers of several ages have introduced when they have used it in their creations. It is these cultured re-elaborations of the myth which Pasolini has used to build his work, a work which is different from all the others which have dealt with the myth of Oedipus, both in its aesthetic layout and its ideological aims.

There are two cultured re-elaborations of the myth which we can identify in Pasolini’s film: Oedipus rex by Sophocles, and Freud’s theories on sex as expounded in Introduction to Psycho-analysis.

Sophocles’ Oedipus Rex

Oedipus’ legend groups together diverse folkloric ideas around a single personage: besides the theme of unconscious parricide and incest, there are others no less popular and universal, such as the abandoned infant, the riddle-solver, the monster-slayer, the stranger who wins the hand of a princess and the kingdom. However, of the literature that Sophocles knew and took advantage of to create his Oedipus Rex, we have no direct knowledge except for Aeschylus’ Seven against Thebes whose characters are Oedipus’ children and not himself. However, the Homeric poems tell a story whose central character is Oedipus’ mother; in fact, in the Iliad there is only one reference to a wake in Thebes in honour of ‘Stricken Oedipus’. It is in The Odyssey where we find a sketch of Oedipus’ parricide and incest:

There I beheld the mother of Oedipus, the fair Epicaste, who in her ignorance committed the sin of marrying her son. Oedipus slew his father and took his mother to wife, and the gods gave the news to men. The gods ruined him, making him suffer as king of the Cadmeians in his beloved Thebes. Epicaste descended to Hades, knotting a rope to the roof-beam, maddened by sorrow, leaving Oedipus to suffer all the horror that the mother of the Furies could inflict.¹

As we can see, Sophocles’ Iocasta is here called Epicaste; there is no mention of the Sphinx theme nor of Oedipus’ blindness, perhaps because here the episode’s main character is not Oedipus but his mother; there is also no mention of the children born to this incestuous marriage, all of which were to be important elements in Oedipus Rex and the other Theban tragedies by Sophocles (Antigone and Oedipus at Colonus).

The three poems of the Theban cycle, the Oedipoidia, the Thebaid, and the Epigoni, from the little we know of them, presented the theme of Oedipus’ children. We know that the Thebaid, the most well-considered of the three poems, contained the curse called down by Oedipus on the children who had turned their backs on him, and their deaths at one another’s hands at the end of the campaign of the Seven against Thebes.

Pindar’s second Olympiad uses the figures of Oedipus and his heirs as the paradigmatic emblem of the main theme of the poem, Fate’s alternatives: in fact, after the disaster of the story of Oedipus, who kills his father Laius, and his children, who kill each other, Polynices’ son gains glory at the athletic games and in war.

The Seven against Thebes is the third part of a tragedy trilogy by Aeschylus which must have been initiated by a Laius and an Oedipus from which we have received only a few verses. Aeschylus’ work was preceded by ideas deeply rooted in the Greek mentality of the time, such as hereditary guilt and ineluctable divine plans.

With all this material, and doubtless with much more that we do not know, Sophocles created his Oedipus Rex. For a playwright who once again took up the theme of Oedipus in the 5th century B.C., it was essential to decide which facts and which aspects of the myth were to form part of the dramatic action and which were to be excluded from it, which problem, of all those presented by the myth, was the most important to the poet. Sophocles, in his Oedipus Rex, concentrated all his efforts on dramatising the process of the discovery of the truth; matters such as the hero’s guilt or innocence, inherited guilt or divine justice were left aside, and everything is summed up in the efforts of Oedipus, victor against the Sphinx, saviour of Thebes, to solve a new enigma, that of the plague which has smitten the city. Sophocles lets the audience know everything preceding this process of discovery by

¹. Catalan translation: Carles Riba.
means of a complex procedure of giving news during the development of the plot itself, rather than in an informative prologue.

From Sophocles to Pasolini

In Pasolini's film, the plot outline is quite different. The myth is shown in perfect chronological succession from the moment the infant Oedipus is abandoned at Citeron till his leaving Thebes after putting out his eyes. When the part of the film which most closely follows Sophocles' tragedy begins, that is, the moment when the committee headed by Creon presents itself before Oedipus, king of Thebes, having been to consult the oracle about the cause of the plague which has smitten the city, the viewer has already been a witness of the deeds which have led Oedipus to the throne of Thebes. We must look for the reasons for this change in narrative structure in two directions. On the one hand we must take into account that even though we cannot but admire Sophocles' ability at beginning the drama at a very advanced moment in the narrative development of the myth, we must not forget that the conventions of the tragic genre obliged the poet to concentrate the dramatic action on spacio-temporal coordinates which were very limited.

The second line of explanation points towards the central matter in the relations between literary and artistic creations in general: just as Sophocles incorporates the myth and turns it into the basis of the tragic discourse, Pasolini uses Sophocles' tragedy to create a cinematographic discourse with ideological intentions and aesthetic outlines radically different from those of Sophocles. By this I mean to say that Pasolini's film, which is not Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, demanded for a question of internal coherence that the myth be explained in the manner it is explained, that is, in a lineal manner and none other. Because in Pasolini's film, the discovery on Oedipus' part that the guilty person he was seeking was himself is not as important as Oedipus' inexorable march towards the fulfillment of the inevitable, which is the murder of his father and the marriage to his mother in spite of his efforts to avoid it. The whole of that part of the film which I have called the background to the tragedy is presented as an investigation, previous to what makes up the basis of the tragedy, in the course of which the audience discovers who's who, who kills who, and who marries who. And Pasolini achieves this thanks to the parallelisms existing between some of the elements in the first part of the film (the prologue) and some in the second (the myth) such as, for example, the presence of the same actors playing the father and the mother of the two boys in both parts.

All these differences are between the film and the tragedy, not between Pasolini's version of the tragedy and the tragedy itself; actually, Pasolini made no important changes as to Sophocles' text. He reduced, as he himself said at some time, but made no true changes. The most important is the disappearance from the film of Oedipus' daughters, Ismene and Antigone, who only appear at the end of the tragedy. What is produced, thus, is an exclusion in relation to the text, more than a modification.4

There is another change, which does not affect Sophocles' tragedy, but rather the popular Greek myth: it is the episode of the Sphinx. Actually, the Sphinx's words do not appear in Sophocles' text. There is only a mention, with no precision of the circumstances or the details of the meeting between Oedipus and the monster. Pasolini turns the Sphinx into Oedipus' unconscious:5 so as to be able to go to bed with his mother, Oedipus must push the Sphinx, that is, his unconscious, over the edge of the chasm. We are here, therefore, before the first hint of the penetration of Freudian theory into the popular Greek myth.

Freud's Oedipus

Freudian sexual theory and, more specifically, the so-called Oedipus complex, is an inevitable reference in the first part—the prologue—and the second part—the myth—of the film. In his work *Introduction to Psychoanalysis* published in 1916 in Vienna, Freud developed some ideas which he had already sketched out in previous works such as *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900. Freud explained that Sophocles' Oedipus is an immoral work as it suppresses man's responsibility, attributing the initiative in criminal acts

6. *Introduction to Psychoanalysis*.
to the divine powers, and showing that individual moral tendencies are incapable of resisting criminal tendencies.

The reader reacts as if he had found in himself, through self-analysis, the Oedipus complex, as if he recognised in the will of the gods and the oracle symbolic representations of his own unconscious and as if he remembered with horror having at one time harboured the desire to do away with his father and marry his mother. The voice of the poet seems to tell him: «In vain do you resist your responsibility and in vain do you invoke all you have done to repress these criminal intentions. Your crime is not wiped out by this, as such desires continue in your unconscious, without your being able to destroy them».7

In this fragment, we can find the basic ideas of the Freudian theory we know as the Oedipus complex. According to Freud, the child's observation in his first years of life manifests an erotic tendency towards his parent of the opposite sex and a feeling of hostility towards the same-sex parent. The first object on which the individual centres sexual desire is, thus, of an incestuous nature and it is only by means of extremely severe prohibitions that he achieves a repression of this infantile inclination. Later, beginning at puberty, the individual has to face the difficult task of separating from the parents, and only when he has achieved this can he stop being a child and become a member of the social community. The son's task consists in separating his libidinous desires from his mother and making them fall on a non-incestuous sexual object, and reconciliation with his father.

From Freud to Pasolini

Having reached this point, what we must expose is to what point does Pasolini respect the Freudian theories we have expounded and which we can doubtless easily detect in three of the four parts of the film, that is, the prologue, the background to the tragedy, and the tragedy. An attentive viewing of the film leads us to make two confirmations in relation to the matter set out: the first is that in the whole of the film there is a greater interest in the father-son relationship than in the mother-son one. The first part of the film is specially dominated by the father's resentment towards the son, which leads us to the second confirmation we have mentioned: Pasolini is more interested in the parents' attitude towards the son than in the son's towards the parents. The child's erotic tendency towards the mother is only manifested at one moment, when Oedipus calls Locasta mother while he makes love to her. The Freudian influence is clearer if we take into account that in public Oedipus still refused to believe the evidence of his filial relation to his wife. The mother's feelings toward the son are analysed in the breast-feeding sequence in the field. This sequence is made up of a detailed close-up of the mother's breast sucked by the child and by an extremely long close-up of the woman during which her face shows, thanks to a subtle interpretation by Silvana Mangano, moods and contradictory feelings towards her son which go from love to fear and from pleasure to pain.

As to the father-son relationship, the son's ill will towards his father is rather in the background. All we see are the child's weeping when his parents go dancing and when his father is close, and naturally the casual but definitive fact of Laius' murder by Oedipus. What Pasolini makes most clear is the current of hatred running from father to son:

Who are you to take my place in the world, enrich yourself from nothing, and steal from me all I have.

And the first thing you will steal from me will be her, the woman I love [...] Indeed, you are already stealing her love from me.

These are the father's thoughts in the prologue, feelings we see by means of titles along with close-ups of the father's face, where we see all his resentment. These words have a markedly prophetic tone, as they will come true in the second half of the film, within the myth, when Oedipus kills his father Laius and takes his mother to wife. Pasolini himself confirms all we have just said:

The father's resentment towards the son is something I could feel more clearly than the relationship between the son and the mother. The relationship between a son and his mother is not a historical relationship, it is a purely interior, private relationship, placed on the sidelines of the story and thus ideologically unproductive.8

7. Introduction to Psychoanalysis.
8. Conversation with Pier Paolo Pasolini (p. 65), published
Albert Berrio

The character of the mother, following Pasolini's discourse, is like the sun, the moon, or the mountains, that is to say, something which is always there, immobile, solid, fixed. It is man's link to the Earth, to Nature. Thus, the only scene which analyses the mother-son relationship is placed in a natural atmosphere, in a field hedged by poplars. The son is no more than a new-born infant and has not yet begun an ideological activity which, further on, will break his links to his mother and the Earth. This same field hedged by poplars is the place where Oedipus' life search ends, the place where he seeks refuge when he has finished his intense but disappointing ideological activity.

I will close this part of the paper with some words from the Italian director, which sum up everything we have said till now:

What the story produces is the love-hate relationship between father and son; it is for this reason that this relationship interests me more than the mother-son relationship. I loved my mother very deeply and all my work is influenced by this love, but it is an influence whose origin is deep within me and, as I have said, rather out of the story. However, everything ideological, voluntary, active and practical in his profession as writer depends on the battle with his father.7

The Oedipus legend is thus also the basis for the first part of the film, although at first glance it may seem to be missing. On the other hand, the difference with the second and third part is that here between the myth and Pasolini there is not only Sophocles, but also, and above all, Freud. The Freudian sexual theory is, therefore, the element which gives meaning to this part of the film and links it to the others.

The function of myth in the film and its link to the prologue and the epilogue

The Oedipus myth is one of the elements which Pasolini uses to construct his discourse. This is the moment to analyse what this discourse is in its more ideological aspects and in what way the myth of Oedipus is inserted there in both of its versions: Sophocles' and Freud's. A first approach, almost definitive, was given by Pasolini himself in an interview.8 I had two aims: first, to make a completely metaphorical (and therefore mythified) sort of autobiography and, second, to face the problem of the psychoanalysis of the myth.

The autobiographical nature of the prologue and the epilogue is utterly obvious if we have external information about the director's life: the rural Northern atmosphere, the baby born in the fascist years, the bourgeois family, the soldier father, the artistic calling, the political commitment. How is the myth connected to this autobiographical discourse? What relation is there between the myth and the prologue and epilogue? The answer is clear: the Freudian sexual theory. In fact, what exists between prologue and epilogue is not a modern reading of Sophocles' tragedy and the myth of Oedipus, but rather the projection onto the myth of the development and conflicts of a family like Pasolini's.

The Prologue

In the previous chapter I have proved enough that the first part of the film, which we have called the prologue, must be interpreted in a Freudian key, and more specifically in an aspect of the Viennese doctor's thought built on the Oedipus myth. The Freudian slant of the prologue is thus the main key for relating this part of the film to that where the myth is narrated; but there are others. Let us examine them.

The first, and most obvious, is the identification of the town where the prologue develops with Thebes by means of a label which appears in the film's first take. The second is the use of the same actors in the prologue and the myth. In fact, the actor who plays the father of the baby born in the prologue plays Laius in the second part, and the actress who plays the mother in the first part plays Locasta in the myth. These are premises which wish to lead the viewer to an inevitable conclusion: the baby in the prologue and Oedipus are, or could be, one and the same.

by José Luis Guarner in Pasolini XXV International Film Festival, San Sebastián, 1977.

10. Ibid.
A third key for relating the prologue and the myth is established by Oedipus' feet. For the ancient Greeks, the name of Oedipus meant «he of the swollen feet». In Pasolini's film, we find two references to this fact: one is set up in the last take of the prologue and the other in the second take of the central part, that is, the myth. In the first, we see how the father, in a rage, takes up the son by the feet; in the second, immediately after this, we see a shepherd who transports a child tied hand and foot. The child, who was to have been killed, is abandoned and immediately found by another shepherd. This second shepherd unties his feet and bewails the swellings. Thus, it is clear that the content of these takes referring to feet, their consecutive position and their position in the film at the end of one part and the beginning of another, tells us that we are to identify both children and, therefore, we are to integrate both stories, that taking place in Italy in the 20's and the mythical one, into one and the same discourse.

Another key for carrying out this integration of the discourse is the fact we have commented somewhere else —that Freud's sexual theory is not only present in the first part of the film, but also in the part which explains the myth. In this way we see how the myth is made present in the prologue by means of Freud and, again, the situation set out in the prologue is incorporated to the myth, also by way of Freud. The penetration of the Freudian sexual theory known as the Oedipus complex is produced at two moments of the central part of the film: the oracle has spelled out Oedipus' fate and he has decided not to return to Corinth so as not to harm those he believes are his parents, and he wanders around senselessly, not knowing where to turn. A few children (born of non-incestuous love) and some priests (social approval) invite him to enter a sort of maze where there is a naked woman. We see the woman in a long shot and Oedipus' back in a close-up. Oedipus immediately turns his head and a new take shows us the sign-post to Thebes. Without a doubt, Oedipus has just rejected non-incestuous love and is going back to Thebes to meet his mother; where the Greeks spoke of Moira, the inexorable fulfillment of the fate decreed by the gods, Freud spoke of the subconscious. It is all beside the point, because as Heraclitus said «destiny is character».11 The wedding scene at which Oedipus assists as a spectator and precipitately leaves, achieves the same function.

The other moment where Freud penetrates the myth is that in which Oedipus makes love to Iocasta and calls her «mother». Oedipus knows who the woman he has married is. This does not prevent him from maintaining a new sexual relationship with her; on the contrary, this is the most passionate sexual relationship in the film. Moreover, the takes which show the sexual relationship between Oedipus and Iocasta are very similar to those which show the sexual relationship between the parents of the baby in the prologue. Thus, Oedipus takes his father's place not only in the thematic aspect, but also in the visual aspect. This is a stylistic phenomenon which we could call formal symmetry or parallelism.

The last key to relate the prologue and the myth is given by the music: the same melody played by a sort of flute is heard at the last takes of the prologue and the first of the myth. Stylistically, this musical element belongs to the myth and, therefore, it can be said that the myth penetrates the prologue through music.

The Epilogue

It is more complicated to explain the relation which exists between the central part of the film, the myth, and the latter part or epilogue. In other words, between family conflict and poetic or artistic activity, generally speaking.

Perhaps the key to the solution of the matter set out can be found in Oedipus' thoughts (appearing as titles) about Tiresias when the seer —played by actor-theatre director Julian Beck— appears before him for the first time: «The others, your fellow-citizens and brethren, suffer, weep, search together for salvation, and it is only you, blind and alone, who sing.»

There is a clear separation established by these words between the singer, that is, the artist, and the rest of humanity. But there is not a mere statement, as immediately, in other titles, we can read: «How I would like to be you! You sing of what is beyond destiny!»

Oedipus, and thus Pasolini, expresses a desire to be like Tiresias, that is, to cease suffering, weeping, to stop living with the constant worry of having to gain his salvation day by day (a very un-Greek concept, on the whole). He wishes, thus, to cease being a man like all the rest, place a distance from them and have access

11. Fr. 119 DK, Estobeu, Ant. IV 40, 23.
to what is forbidden to mortals: to place himself beyond destiny and know it. This wish is granted at the end of the myth and Oedipus is turned into a new Tiresias. To attain this, however, he has had to pay an extraordinary price. Oedipus reaches the field of poetry and thus succeeds in transforming his sexual impulses into superior spiritual acts. This is the moment Freud calls sublimation. However, as these sexual tendencies of an incestuous nature exist and are very strong, the process leading to sublimation is difficult and painful and requires an act of sacrifice, of self-punishment, which acts as a purification. This is the symbolic meaning of the act of putting out his own eyes which Oedipus himself carries out.

The parallel with Tiresias is not only established in relation to the Oedipus of the myth, but also in relation to the central character of the latter part of the film, which we have named the epilogue. In fact, like Oedipus in the myth and like Tiresias, this character is blind, lives far from other men, and plays the flute. The flute is doubtless a symbol of a different way of relating to the world through art and poetry. The connection to the myth, however, becomes clear as soon as the epilogue begins by means of an even more obvious fact: the actor who plays Oedipus in the myth—Franco Citti—and his companion when he is blind—Ninetto Davoli—are the same actors who play the wandering poet and his faithful companion in the epilogue.

The epilogue means the return to the 20th century and recovery of the autobiographical discourse. In fact, if we are clear on the fact that the baby in the prologue and Oedipus are one and the same person, and that the blind singer in the epilogue is Oedipus, we must inevitably come to the conclusion that the epilogue shows the baby from the beginning, once he has freed himself of the ties of love and hate towards his parents and has begun an adult man’s cycle of development which is marked by motivations of an ideological sort.

In the epilogue there are three clearly different parts which correspond to the three phases of the main character’s adult development: Oedipus in the bourgeois city, Oedipus in the worker’s city, and Oedipus’ return to his childhood places.

Oedipus, fleeing from the barbaric impulses of infancy, flees from reality and takes refuge in the ivory tower of poetry and art. Let us listen to what Pasolini says about this part of the film:

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I filmed [...] the outcome, or rather, the return of Oedipus, poet, in Bologna, where I began to write poetry; it is the city where I found myself naturally integrated into bourgeois society; I believed then that I was a poet from this world, as if the world were absolute, unique, as if class divisions had never existed. I believed in the absolute of the bourgeois world.12

Note that Pasolini unabashedly identifies with Oedipus in the film. He then proceeds to speak of the part of the film in which we see Oedipus in a worker’s environment and places it in relation to his own awakening of social consciousness and his political commitment with the Marxist left:

With disenchantment, Oedipus abandons the world of the bourgeoisie and progressively enters the people’s world of the working class. He no longer sings for the bourgeoisie but rather for the exploited classes. Thus this long road to the factories where, inevitably, he will find another disappointment.13

After this new disappointment, Oedipus begins his return road towards the place where he was born. Oedipus ends in this way his path as a man who thinks and acts from the point of view of the individual who forms a part of a specific time and society. The shot itself of the trees around the field returns Oedipus to the spot where his mother had breast-fed him; but while that first travelling shot had been followed by a close-up of the mother, this ends with a descending movement of the camera which takes us to the naked grass. Meanwhile, a voice off says this phrase: «Life ends where it begins.»

Presentation of the Myth

Once we have analysed the three parts of the film from the point of view of the ideas linking the, now is the moment to comment on them from a different angle. Without moving away from the field of meaning, from here on we do not intend to make the discourse which the film creates explicit, but rather to analyse some of the elements which make up this discourse, that is, the

value of the fact that these elements appear and not others.

As to the fact that the part of the film which tells the legend of Oedipus, what is most outstanding is, doubtless, the absence of Greeks. The prologue, as we said at the beginning of this paper, places us in a country environment in Fascist Italy during the 20's or 30's; the epilogue transports us to an urban environment of Italy in the 60's. And the myth? To what cultural environment does it take us? To what time? The most outstanding characteristic of this part of the film is the mixture of cultural elements: the music, as Pasolini himself has said,14 is Romanian and Japanese; the landscapes, both natural and urban, are Moroccan; the human types are extremely diverse: there are Europeans, North-Africans, Blacks, Eastern Asians, and the hats have an Aztec inspiration. This mixture of elements must be analysed from two different points of view. On the one hand, it is coherent with one of Pasolini's main stylistic traits. These are his own words:

My style is eclectic; [...] it is made up of elements and material taken from diverse sectors of culture: extracts of dialects, popular poetry, popular and classical music. There are references to painting, to architecture, [...] to the humanities. I do not intend to create or impose a style. What is created in me by the stylistic magma is a sort of fervour, of passion, which drives me to take possession of any material, in whatever way which I deem necessary for the film's economy.15

Now then, the film's cultural jumble also has an internal justification: the mixture of elements of different places and times creates a hybrid environment, an environment which cannot be placed at any specific point in time or space; in this way the atemporal and ahistorical nature of the myth is reinforced. Pasolini recreates a social environment equally far from all societies we know in time and space. Wicker, leather, sheep or goat skins, shell and coloured stone ornaments, iron, painted wood, all this contributes, as we have already said, to the creation of an ahistorical and atemporal environment which sends us back to a determined stage of civilization through which all the world's cultures have gone. In this way, Pasolini achieves the description, in an idealised but convincing way, of primitive societies which have created (and still create) the myths around the world, in Greece, in America, Africa, or Asia. Pasolini thus achieves the representation of both the specific —primitive society which creates myths— and the general or abstract —the timeless time of the myth.

This makes the interiorisation and generalisation of the myth which is produced in the epilogue possible. In the prologue, Pasolini sets out a more or less individual case by means of a series of historical and family coordinates. In the epilogue he seems to open out the conflict exposed which projects itself on the rest of men and women: the close-ups of Oedipus alternate with combined shots of unknown and anonymous people. It seems as if Pasolini wished to make us understand that within each of them there is a story like that of Oedipus. And it is at this point where we see clearly that the myth, for Pasolini, is no more than the subconscious which Freud attributes to each of us.

We pointed out at the beginning of this chapter that the most outstanding stylistic trait of the myth is the absence of Greeks. However, the feeling of truth which is produced by the whole part of the film which sets out the legend of Oedipus is much more marked than that which can be produced by the Greeks in Hollywood films or those from Italian studios. This feeling of truth or reality —not realism— is achieved by Pasolini, on the one hand, by means of appropriations of stylistic methods from documentary cinema, and, on the other, by the use of anthropological material from diverse sources. To tell the truth, we are not speaking of two different tendencies but of a single one, as anthropology is one of the scientific disciplines which cinema has most often used as a document and as a way of creating its discourse. Pasolini, in this and others of his films (Medea, The Decameron, The Gospel according to Matthew, etc.), shows a tendency to meticulousness and the everyday in the gestures and activities of the individuals he shows us. It is difficult to explain exactly what that consists of. We could say, for example, that Pasolini always lengthens situations with long shots or even takes which are not essential for the narrative; in them, characters carry out their everyday activities and gesture and take up attitudes which turn them into flesh-and-blood men and women. They are shots and takes which seem to want to make us understand that these men and women have their own existence beyond the film, that the camera is

15. Conversation with Pier Paolo Pasolini, p. 140.
filming all that in a documentary way, as we said before. However, let us remember that the society Pasolini is sketching is an idealised, ahistorical and atemporal society: it is a stage of civilisation more than a specific society.

We have insisted all during this chapter on the feeling of reality produced in the viewer during the central part of the film. This feeling is even more evident if we contrast the myth with the prologue and the epilogue. The prologue is extraordinarily concise and does not stop at all for description. Its function is to introduce a situation whose background is a psychological theory. Thus, the language used is precise and univocal. The epilogue, on the contrary, is metaphorical and didactic, but equally distant from narrative method: the meaning is not derived from the things that happen but from the things there are in the images. The epilogue and the prologue are conceptual, the myth is narrative. Pasolini, thus, achieves that the myth be felt by the viewer as more real and nearer than those other parts of the film where the action takes place in a time and in a society which are, definitely, our own. The reason for this is clear: the epilogue and the prologue are linked to Pasolini's personal biography; the myth belongs to the collective unconscious, that is, to each and everyone who sees the film.