

GABRIELLA POZZETTO

LAST TANGO: UNVEILING THE MYSTERY

With a Conversation with Bernardo Bertolucci

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Preface

How to read "Last Tango" Characters: A Pattern

Summary of the plot of "Last Tango"

Unveiling the Mystery: Father and Son, God and Christ, Rosa and Paul

Three Days and Three Nights: The Movie Time Span

FIRST DAY

Rue Jules Verne

The Temple/Apartment

Jeanne and Paul

Jeanne and Tom

Rosa and the Hotel in Rue De Depart

Paul

"No names here!"

Maman and Paul

The Numberless Names of the "Master"

Jeanne in Reverse Gear

The Kingdom of the Father

Paul's Mission

The Light Shines in the Darkness

SECOND DAY

"I want you free"

Subway

Marcel and Paul

THIRD DAY

Family Secret

About Desire and Freedom

The Marriage

"Jeunesse pop, Marriage pop"!

Love and Illusion

Rosa, Paul and the True Love

"Il faut tout repenser, papa!"

DEATH AND RESURRECTION

The Movie is Over

The Last Tango

"As I have loved you, so you also should love one another."

AT BERTOLUCCI'S

A Conversation on "Last Tango"

APPENDIX

Notes

Biographical Notes

Filmography

Bibliography

INTRODUCTION

PREFACE

"Last Tango in Paris" is a son's answer to his father. It is an initiation journey and an extraordinary coming together of the sacred and the profane.

Before starting the journey, it is necessary to bear in mind three keys to its interpretation, which, used together, will unveil the mystery of the goal of the journey itself. We will then use religion, mythology and psychoanalysis against a biographical background.

Our research has taken into account Bertolucci's sources and works, in particular, the enlightening "text" of "Last Tango in Paris".

The results of our research lead to a surprising discovery, which reveals the desire motives of the journey Bertolucci takes through his movies, sharing them with the appreciative viewer.

Actually, Bertolucci's movies represent the various stages of his journey in a "frantic search for identity".

Significantly, in "In Search of Mystery" - a 1962 collection of poems Bertolucci wrote at the age of about 20, before starting his activity as a film director - we can find, if not the answers, the first questions, his restless soul's unconscious demands, just the ones that will later provide him with the imagery to be found in his movies. Bertolucci's movies are indeed visual poems that succeed in making archetypes manifest, as only poetry can do.

About his filmmaking, Bertolucci said, "It's difficult to imagine that any one thing in my movies only means that thing, as it always means other things, often its opposite".

It was just his semantically rich and creative production that inspired our research on "Last Tango", a research which brought us to see Bertolucci's movie as a re-writing of the Gospels, that is, of Christ's journey in the midst of mankind.

Behind Marlon Brando's persona in the role of Paul, the "stranger" in Paris, Christ's figure is hidden, with His revolutionary sacrifice.

Indeed, an analysis of "Last Tango" reveals the director's high religiousness: he unveils and presents the fatal archetype through the unconscious and its images.

Significant religious signs are present in all his movies, but in "Last Tango", as well as in the other ones, his is undoubtedly a religion of freedom, not of institutional observance, connected with Christ's action and message, rather than with the Church of Paul of Tarsus. Bertolucci's is the religion of love for man, the focus of all his artistic research.

Having thus defined the essence of Bertolucci's religion, we want to show that the oedipal triangle in "Last Tango" is a reflection of the theological Trinity.

Freud pointed out, in Totem and Taboo, that "The sources of religion and morals, of society and art, lie in the Oedipus complex, which, according to the data of psychoanalysis, is the core of every neurosis". An all-important connection can be found in Bertolucci's statement that: "All my movies have been cast in the mold of psychoanalysis, mostly based on oneiric material. And, after all, aren't movies, too, made out of oneiric material? Aren't movies such stuff /As dreams are made on?".

Indeed, we know that dreams are made up of archetypal images, of sacred and profane symbols, of emotions; in a word, they are made of the same stuff as man is, and speak to man about man. That is the truth the Bible revealed in its mystical language and Freud explained through the concept of the unconscious.

From the dream - the channel the unconscious favors to communicate the fatal archetypes - to the movie, to the viewer: that is the different but coherent route Bertolucci chooses to make his message known.

To sum up, this is the point we want to make: "Last Tango", the work of a great master and sensitive poet, conveys in the language of art the same message of love and freedom that Christ left to us and Freud challengingly taught us to decipher.

HOW TO READ "LAST TANGO" CHARACTERS: A PATTERN

ACTORS

CHARACTERS

HIDDEN FIGURES

Marlon Brando

Paul

Jesus Christ

Veronica Lazar

Rosa

God the Father

Maria Schneider

Jeanne

the human being

The other characters - Tom, Marcel, Maman, Olympia, the President of the Tango Jury - interpret and represent the human being in his imperfect aspects: they are the counterparts of the people in the crowd accompanying Christ on his journey unto death.

The action is set in Paris and unfolds over the same period of time, three days, as Christ's Passion and Resurrection.

A SUMMARY OF "LAST TANGO"

To make the reader's "journey" through the text more appealing, we have arranged the summary of the plot following the time divisions of the events in the movie.

FIRST DAY

(Scenes 1-16)

Paul, an American in Paris, about forty years old, is walking, desperate and confused, in Passy, a quarter of Paris. He is noticed by a young woman in her early twenties, who overtakes him out of curiosity.

Shortly afterward, they meet in an empty apartment for rent in the nearby rue Jules Verne.

A magnetic attraction springs up between the two. They make love, without revealing anything about themselves, not even their names, at Paul's explicit request.

After leaving the apartment, she makes for the station where her fiancé, Tom, a movie director, is waiting for her. She's caught by surprise by his using her as an actress in the role of herself, a modern-day young woman.

Next, we see Paul in a hotel room and learn from a maid's account that his wife, Rosa, (the owner of the hotel where they've been living together for five years) has killed herself with a razor.

Paul has an argument about Rosa's funeral with her mother, a reserved, sanctimonious woman. He then introduces to her the miserable hotel clients Rosa used to take in, lovingly calling them "guests".

Paul and Jeanne meet again in the apartment in rue Jules Verne.

SECOND DAY

(Scenes 17-20)

The relationship between Jeanne ("an old-fashioned girl trying to get along" and Paul (the stranger" with a shady past, but also a free and self-aware man) goes on, though exclusively inside the apartment.

Jeanne betrays an unresolved dependence on the figure of her father (a colonel who died in Algeria), and projects her fantasies onto her relationship with both her shallow, traditionally "à la page" fiancé and Paul, to whom she feels emotionally attracted.

At night, at the hotel in rue De Depart, Paul meets Marcel, his alterego and Rosa's lover. Paul and Rosa had no secrets from each other, but it's only during his surprising conversation with Marcel that he finally understands the reason for his wife's devastating desertion.

THIRD DAY

(Scenes 21-29)

Paul and Jeanne are not merely passionate lovers: it becomes more and more evident that they are also taking on the roles of master and disciple. Paul tries to enlighten her about the meaning of life and to show her how to face reality as a free, independent individual by exposing all conditioning and false illusions. Consequently, their relationship becomes, at times, crude and violent.

Jeanne, however, carries on with her fiancé, and continues acting in his movie.

Tom proposes to her, and she accepts nonchalantly ("For youth that's pop, a pop marriage"). She then breaks the news to her mother, the counterpart of Rosa's mother.

After playing in the last scene of Tom's movie, Jeanne goes again to the apartment, still wearing the bridal costume. She tells Paul she is in love with someone else, which is obviously an act of childish challenge, not a free choice.

At night, Paul goes back to the hotel. In a room transformed into a "garden" of hydrangeas, near Rosa's coffin, he breaks into an impassioned, dramatic monologue. Her mother has dressed Rosa in her bridal dress and made her up, but a sobbing Paul cleans her face, so that she may look as authentic and free as she really was.

Toward the end of the night, an "agée" prostitute rings the bell at the hotel door, asking for help, and Paul furiously goes for her mean, cowardly client, who, after accosting her, had disrespectfully dismissed her.

DEATH AND RESURRECTION

(Scenes 30-36)

Jeanne stands alone and desperate in the empty apartment. Paul is no longer there, and his few pieces of furniture have also disappeared. She phones Tom to tell him she wants to show him the apartment, but, when he sees it, he says it is absolutely unsuitable and decides to look for another one.

While walking in the street, Jeanne is caught up with by Paul, who looks quite different in elegant clothes. He reveals his identity to her now, because he wants their relationship to continue in the open. Jeanne shouts at him that it's over, that she's getting married. We then see them enter a ballroom, where mannequin-like couples are dancing stiffly.

Paul asks Jeanne to dance the last tango with him. Their way of dancing, free and provocative, upsets the Jury so much that the "Madame" the President expels Paul from the hall.

After repeating over and over again that everything's finished between them, Jeanne rushes out into the street and makes for home.

Resigned but determined, Paul follows her to the colonel's apartment. Once inside, he playfully puts on her father's army cap. Then, for the first time ever, he asks her name. On saying it, she shoots him in the side with her father's pistol.

Paul staggers out on to the balcony, collapses, and, curling up in the typical fetal position, dies.

UNVEILING THE MYSTERY: FATHER AND SON, GOD AND CHRIST, ROSA AND PAUL

Paul, the protagonist of "Last Tango", the "stranger" in Paris, hides another figure: Jesus Christ.

Paul's life is the re-enactment of Christ's life.

The punishment inflicted on Paul by the Jury in the dance hall corresponds to the death sentence imposed on Christ by the Sanhedrin.

The last tango is equivalent to the Last Supper.

Jeanne kills Paul by shooting him in the side, and Christ's "side" is mentioned in the Gospel of St. John: "But one soldier thrusts his lance into his side" (John 20, 34).

Shortly before his death, we see Paul wearing a purple necktie, and purple was the color of the cloak the soldiers put on Christ.

The army cap of Jeanne's father on Paul's head is his "crown of thorns".

Moreover, Paul is united to Rosa by the bonds of marriage: they are one, like Christ and the Father bound into unity by the Holy Ghost.

Still in connection with the archetypes underlying the movie, the name of Rosa evidently refers to the metaphysical component of the triad or trinity, since, in the West, "Rosa" means the revelation of the Unity, of the Absolute.

Like God, Rosa sacrifices the absolute Oneness and, through separation and incarnation, originates a dyad with Christ-Paul. Conversely, Paul must repeat her sacrifice and form a triad with Jeanne in order to restore the unity.

By committing suicide, Rosa "gives" Paul to the world, and he will sacrifice his life obediently to deliver his message of a new kind of love.

Rosa is indeed a symbol of God the Father.

At the beginning of the movie, Paul rails against the Heavenly Father, venting his anger and torment for being alone in the world.

He is clearly blaming Rosa for breaking their bond and forsaking him, just as God had done with His Son. Before dying, Christ, too, "cried out in a loud voice, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?, which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27, 46).

Dying, Rosa obliges Paul to take her place at the hotel in rue De Depart, a hotel which is also a home, a church and a shelter for everybody.

The guests of the home/hotel immediately evoke the multitudes Christ cherished, the multitudes of the "least", the socially neglected and downtrodden.

From the hotel in rue De Depart Paul will set off on his predestined initiation journey with Jeanne. Actually, from the very beginning the relationship between Paul and Jeanne appears to be predestined: despite the absence of names and their different lives and experiences, they are able to communicate with each other because they are predestined to do so, like Christ and the people of Israel.

Paul re-enacts the passion and death of Christ, and, at the end, he, too, rises from the dead to new life, as his dying in the fetal position symbolizes.

In fact, our new interpretative approach to the text will bring to light further definite analogies with the Holy Scriptures.

The "poetics" of Bertolucci-Paul-Christ is centered around one theme: man, or, better, the individual who becomes able to mold himself and rid himself of fatal archetypes, false constraints and stereotyped valueless traditions in order to achieve self-awareness and self-realization, courageously choosing to live free, in equilibrium with himself and with his natural environment.

Bertolucci, a magic creator of images and words, expresses this vision in "Last Tango" While "traveling" with him, we go through the stages leading to deliverance from bondage and to self-knowledge, in the soft orange light suffusing Paris throughout the movie.

THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS: THE MOVIE TIME SPAN

The duration of the action in the movie offers another important analogy with the sacred time of Christ's Passion, Death and Resurrection.

Let us quote Bernardo Bertolucci: "Last Tango" is the first movie I've ever set in the present, using a contemporary outlook... The story unfolds over two or three days, though the viewer gets the impression it's much longer. At the sight of Brando's dead wife, the emotion arises from the sudden realization that only two or three days have passed since her death".

The duration specified by Bertolucci exactly corresponds to the evangelical time span. Paul dies three days after Rosa's suicide, but the fetal position he assumes suggests a rebirth, as acknowledged by Bertolucci himself. The reference is clear: on the third day Christ rose again from the dead, ascended to the heavens, sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

Another significant time connotation can be pointed out: Jeanne tells Paul that their relationship is over, and then kills him, three days before marrying Tom.

"When it was already evening, since it was the day of preparation, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a distinguished member of the council, who was himself awaiting the Kingdom of God, came and courageously went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus" (Mark 15,42-43).

"When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. Very early when the sun had risen, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb..." (Mark 16,1/2).

At another point in the New Testament Christ declares that he will need only three days to rebuild the Temple. "Jesus answered and said to them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up... But he was speaking about the temple of his body. Therefore, when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they came to believe the scripture, and the word Jesus had spoken." (John 2, 19-21/22).

To fulfill his promise to Rosa, Paul has found a way of joining her, of restoring the unity with her - wife, mother, father - through his own sacrifice, which is accomplished by the third vertex of the triangle, Jeanne. Though not a component of the trinity, Jeanne is absolutely necessary to make the reunion of father and son possible, just because she is predestined to make the initiation journey with Paul.

As Michel Serres pointed out, "Any initiation journey is submitted to the law of the three nights, a metaphor for a triple deprivation: this idea is explained by St. John of the Cross in connection with the ascent of Mount Carmel... Tobias spends three dark nights before marrying Sarah, as St. John also says... The religious undertones of the journey are clearly brought out"

Three days after Paul's resurrection Jeanne will get married, that is, she will be united to a reverse fake father/husband, Tom, to start a new old journey through life - "below", not "above" like Paul.

FIRST DAY

Rue Jules Verne

Morning. Under a bridge in Passy, a man raises desperate eyes to the sky of Paris and, into the roar of a subway train passing overhead, shouts at the top of his voice "Fucking God".

The man, a stranger living in Paris, is Paul (Marlon Brando).

The sky is grey. Some policemen with wind-proof flashlights can be seen on guard at the subway entrance.

A young woman follows Paul, until curiosity makes her overtake him.

She's Jeanne (Maria Schneider).

In an apartment building in rue Jules Verne, Passy, the young woman tells a black concierge she'd like to see the apartment for rent on the top floor.

The movie begins with these characters: the stranger, the Parisian girl and the black concierge (a fat, mysterious woman, who laughs disturbingly at the end). They are brought together by an apartment in rue Jules Verne, Passy.

It is not by chance that Bertolucci locates the street in Passy (the 11th arrondissement of Paris). "Passy" semantically evokes "passage", and the director's shots of the bridge and of the river water and embankments underline the symbolic image of a passage.

This passage, or, better, this rite of passage is disturbingly confirmed by the choice of the street name: Jules Verne.

Indeed, great critics, like Barthes and Butor, have detected in Verne an extraordinary, very subtle fear of the future, despite its astonishing engineering contraptions.

The fear of the future Verne felt is also underlined by Herbert Lottman in his biography of the French novelist. Verne's desire for escape from reality was obsessive and restless, a reaction to the worries of a hellish everyday life, including an unbearable unresolved conflict with his son Michel.

In agreement with Michel Serres, we can also say that all Verne's works are about the human path, the initiation journey, the eternal Adam, and the trinity, sought after in order to restore the unity of the father in the son, and viceversa.

We can now clearly see the connection between the choice of rue Jules Verne in Passy and the initiation journey Jeanne is about to begin there, after meeting the Master. On the other hand, this is for Paul the start of his three-day-long final Passion.

As further evidence that man's search, his pilgrimage and eternal initiation journey occupy the same place in both Bertolucci's and Verne's different poetic mosaics, we can quote Francesco Casetti's relevant remark." Bertolucci's characters travel a lot...An in-depth examination reveals that the journey always occurs under particular conditions; the arrival, for example, often arouses an almost insuperable feeling of strangeness. Let us consider the classical situation of two foreigners like Giacobbe (arriving from Paris in 'Partner') and Paul (arriving in Paris in 'Last Tango'): their uneasiness is not only moral - they feel outside of life -, but also geographical, as they are far from their native countries".

The recurrent theme of the journey already appears in some of Bertolucci's youthful poems, collected under the referential title "In Search of Mystery" (1962) . There is also an important time reference in the first line of "After an Illness":

“The third day was already turning, when the darkness
Awoke me with the light
Of the signs in the street...

I wandered with senile bad grace
Looking for a window, as if
The soul were a pensive
Pilgrim, skimming the pleasant surface
Smoothed by faith, in the sirocco-swept
October, heavy on the eyelids..."

In "On a Photograph", another poem in the same collection, we read:

"How I long to escape
From Rome, without saying a word
At home and to the people
Who greet me in the street..."

Also note the last lines from the same poem:

"Forgive me, father, if you can love the cowardly acts
Of your son, intent on suffering
In a loud voice, to make himself heard."

Besides the explicit theme of the journey as a restless flight in search of an identity, we can note the use of religious wording in the last triplet, where the poet begs for his father's forgiveness for his desire to escape. Just as the poet begs "in a loud voice", Paul, raising his eyes to the sky, shouts "Fucking God" in the first scene of "Last Tango". Similarly, an entreaty for his Father's forgiveness is implicit in the words Christ says in the garden of Gethsemane, revealing his desire to escape sacrifice.

Jules Verne is also mentioned by Attilio Bertolucci, the director's father. In "Arrhythmia", his memoirs, he declares he has been a fan of the French writer from childhood, and denies that Verne's works are science fiction.

"Nothing bores and annoys me more than science fiction, to begin with the term used to define it. I thought it impossible that that great father of my dreams should also be the father of the synthetic, horrible dreams of the so-called science fiction writers of today.

I had to check. I took the first of his 'Voyages imaginaires', published in Paris a century ago, and read it again with the same old rapture... Nothing but the earth, the moon and the clouds, as seen by a geographer, without the slightest mistake, and yet full of dream and mystery in their truth: a dream, a mystery which Verne is able to draw from nature because he is as innocent as the 'enfant amoureux de cartes et d'estampes' about whom Baudelaire speaks in the same years. Butor has written that in Verne's works man is in perfect harmony with things. Quite true. In science fiction, on the contrary, everything is in deep disharmony with man".

As we will see later, Paul lives with Rosa (Veronica Lazar) in a hotel in rue De Depart. The street name chosen by Bertolucci suggests a point of departure. Indeed, after Rosa's death, Paul will depart from here to "pass" to Passy, rue Jules Verne.

Evidently, rue Jules Verne could only be located in Passy to evoke an initiation journey which Bertolucci had long cherished, as noted by Maurizio Schiaretti .

Jules Verne thus symbolizes both the journey and the travelers: Paul and Jeanne are initiate travelers bound together to the bitter end by a multiple relationship, master-disciple, father-child, brother-sister, in a transitional dynamics of passage and self-discovery, in order to fulfill the plan dominating and guiding them.

About the initiation journey, I think it particularly important to stress the connections between Verne's writings, the Bible, Freud's psychoanalytic method and Bertolucci's "Last Tango": in Verne, we always have a myth of descent in which a very strong enemy must be fought against to reach the goal of the descent; in the Bible, Christ descends into the underworld to save mankind from hell; in Freud, the descent into the unconscious through our dreams is a means to get rid of the infernal oedipal cage; similarly, Paul starts from rue De Depart and walks down the Paris streets to break the conditioning shackles of men's infernal social structure.

The Temple/Apartment

Jeanne enters an apartment building in rue Jules Verne, and asks the ironic, fat, black concierge for the keys of the apartment for rent on the top floor, but the keys have disappeared. After strategically dallying about, the concierge finds a spare bunch of keys and hands it to Jeanne with a loud disturbing laugh.

The concierge's laughing confirms and stresses Jeanne's initiation, as it is accompanied by the words "You are very young, right?"

The laugh anticipates the rite, announcing a loss, the denial of self, of meaning and stability. It is a destructive laugh, a disturbing and powerful epiphany of the encounter with the sacred, the revelation.

After this rite of admission, Jeanne goes up to the apartment. She enters, opens the windows, and, on turning around, sees Paul, "the stranger", perching on a radiator. Strangeness becomes knowledge.

Jeanne: What a fright! How'd you get in?

Paul: Through the door.

Jeanne: Stupid of me. I left it open, but I didn't hear you come in.

Paul: I was already here.

Jeanne: I beg your pardon?

Paul: Before you came... I was here.

She is backlit, while he is bathed in the orange light coming through the window.

The below-above/darkness-light contrast is immediately evident.

Below, in the underworld, in the streets, in the concierge's cubby, hole it was grey, dark and noisy, there were barrooms and lavatories.

The doorkeeper's laugh represents the link between the two worlds, hell and paradise.

The home of the Father is always above. Her father's apartment, in the last sequence, will also be "above". The roofs of Paris can be seen through the windows of both apartments, at the beginning and at the end of the movie. In Paul and Rosa's hotel, too, their room is above the room of Marcel, Paul's "human double", which is below.

This dichotomy appears again and again in the text.

Throughout the movie, in perfect equilibrium, that which is above is always balanced by that which is below, it is reversed or turned up-side down, but always in such a way as to form the same whole with sacred and profane connotations.

So Paul was already in the apartment, and had naturally got in through the door, without having any problem with the concierge.

"Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate but climbs over elsewhere is a thief and a robber. But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens it for him and the sheep hear his voice...I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved... I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep...This is why my Father loves me, because I lay it down on my own. I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again. This command I have received from my Father" (John 10, 1-3; 10, 9; 10, 11; 10, 17-18).

Indeed, we have good grounds for drawing a comparison between Paul and Christ from the very beginning. In the scene under examination, Jeanne enters the apartment and, on turning around after opening the windows, sees Paul the "Stranger": she is backlit, but he is enveloped in the orange light of the sun.

"The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him" (John 1, 9-10).

Here is another situation exemplifying the divine-human/outside-inside above-below contrast. Jeanne looks around carefully, considering the space in practical terms.

Jeanne: An armchair would be nice near the fireplace.

Paul: No, the armchair goes in front of the window.

The window, that is, the outside, the infinite, the air, freedom and knowledge represent the natural dimension of the god, while the inside, the close, the fear of the unknown and the reassuring confines of a home with a fireplace represent the privileged situation of the "all-too-human" human being, restrained by his own neuroses from flying toward the infinite.

Bertolucci's lines, "Looking for a window, as if / My soul were a pensive/Pilgrim..." , easily come to mind here.

Jeanne and Paul

Paul's use of language is quite different from Jeanne's, not only because he is a foreigner, but also because he behaves as if he was always absolutely aware of his actions. A further analogy with Christ is evident in what he says after expressing his only doubt in the first dialogue with Jeanne.

Jeanne: Well, have you decided? Going to rent it?

Paul: Yes... I had already decided...Now I don't know. Would you like it?

Jeanne: I'd have to think about it.

Paul: Think fast.

John 13, 27: "...After he took the morsel, Satan entered him. So Jesus said to him, What you are going to do, do quickly".

In the top-floor apartment, empty and bathed in light, Paul immediately makes himself and the new code known to Jeanne through the body.

The relationship between the two is instantaneous, disruptive and passionate. There is no trace of violence, only mutual acceptance and gratification of the senses. There are no guilt feelings, as their lovemaking is spontaneous and free. Moreover, when it is over and they separate, Jeanne crouches down in a fetal position, a symbol of the initiation she is about to undergo thanks to the meeting with the stranger.

This explosion of the senses can be seen as pure energy, positive and transforming because novel and free. The connotations of a master-disciple relationship become more and more evident in the next dialogues between Paul and Jeanne.

Erotic language is used to show a new direction. It expresses the feast and the real evolution toward freedom and self-transformation.

Pleasure is happiness, a novel communication of the senses, innocent of any morbidity: it is "feast".

The feast is regenerating, and, as Kerenyi put it, “in the feast we are raised to a plane where everything is bright and primeval, where we are united to the gods, or better, become gods, where a breath of creation blows gently”.

The use of the pleasure code, of the feast of the senses, is innovational and free, as, like Christ’s, it corrects and improves the old norms.

“Do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill... I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5, 17; 5, 20).

Bertolucci uses sex and the language of the body freely and independently from any institutional repressive code. His is a language of hope, strongly opposed to commercial sex as an end in itself, the kind of sex that was then being offered to Italy’s movie-goers under the form of Italian-style pseudo-comedies or of bluntly porn foreign films, innocuous because meaningless.

Later on in the movie, in the long sequence of “the feast” in the ballroom, during the tango contest, the contrast between the director’s new language and the norms of an institutionally controlled feast is blatant. The official feast is wholly past-oriented, as its function is to preserve and consecrate the current social order.

Stability and unchangeability of the laws regulating the world, respect for hierarchy, order and seriousness are the categories according to which the official feast is organized. As a consequence, the tangoing dancers look like rigidly manipulated mannequins.

On the contrary, Paul’s free dancing expresses an innovational, transforming, future-oriented ideology.

In order to innovate, as Bataille said, “it was necessary to do away at all costs with the feeling originating the transgression of the prohibition”. In years of great social changes, Bertolucci’s aim was to suggest a new opportunity for the individual, which always subsumes a revolutionary charge similar to the energy emanating from Christ’s language, and Christ spoke not to the powerful, but to the common people, the multitudes that, in the medieval folk feast, realized, though temporarily, the utopian realm of universality, freedom and equality.

Jeanne and Tom

We have a sudden intuition of the truth, or, rather, of the significance of the truth the movie intends to convey, soon after the music has marked the end of the scene in the apartment and the camera has moved to the station where Jeanne meets Tom, her fiancé.

Jeanne: And so you kiss me... knowing it's a film. Coward...traitor.

She calls Tom "traitor" when he tells her he is making a film about her, so his kiss is just part of the screenplay, the representation of an emotion.

Jeanne is surprised by the fiction and by the fact that he is using her in the role of "a girl of today" in a TV movie. This is the scenario of the establishment, or, better, of trendy modern society, completely regulated and directed by remote control, which uses fiction to represent itself, and Tom is the perfect, new creator of such fiction.

Tom is Jeanne's fictional - and betrayed - official fiancé, her future husband and the director of the movie as well as of their relationship, as the theme of the film is the life of a girl of today.

Paul's criticism sounds really terrible when, in a later scene, to Jeanne's question, "So you think I'm a whore", he replies, "No. You're just a dear old-fashioned girl trying to get along".

Rose and the Hotel in Rue De Depart

After the "fiction" scene at the station, the camera moves on to show the hotel room where a maid is telling Paul about the police interrogation on Rosa's death.

"They didn't believe in suicide, ... too much blood all over"

The maid is cleaning the bathroom where Rosa killed herself and repeating the police questions to Paul, while he stands motionless in front of the window.

We see the blood, and we see and hear the water flowing out of the tub faucet - blood and water -. We'll soon learn that Rosa killed her-self with a razor.

"But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs, but one soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out" (John 19, 33-34).

We are in the presence of the unknown here. Faced with his wife's inexplicable, desperate gesture, Paul, "the Stranger", looks stunned and upset, perhaps resigned, while listening to the maid's account.

"The clients awake all night... The hotel, full of police... They playing around with the blood".

The connection with the evangelical source appears evident: here is a re-enactment of the sacrifice of the Father and the Son. As we will realize later on, Rosa is not only Paul's wife, but also his mother and father, she is the first person of the trinity, imposing on the son who was in him/her the sacrifice of their separation and his final awareness, so that the word can be spread and the sin of unfulfilled self-consciousness atoned.

Rosa's blood recalls the sacred symbolism of the blood covenant between God and Israel in the Old Testament: "This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you..." (Exodus 24, 8).

Moreover, just as the image of God is known only to Christ, Rose is seen only by Paul throughout the film. The following analogies can then be established: God/Rosa makes a blood covenant to save Israel and sends into the world His Son/Paul, who will make a new covenant by sacrificing himself and transforming his blood into the water of new life.

Paul

The scene is still set inside the hotel, which, we understand, is also Rosa and Paul's home. From the maid's account of her interrogation by the police we learn a lot about Paul's life: "And how long had you been married... and why didn't you have children... Pigs... Nervous type, your boss. You know he was a boxer? That didn't work... so he became an actor, then a racketeer on the waterfront in New York... It didn't last long... played the bongo drums... revolutionary in South America... journalist in Japan... One day he lands in Tahiti, hangs around, learns French... comes to Paris and then meets a young woman with money... he marries her... and since then... what does he do, your boss? Nothing."

Besides being confirmed as a Verne-style "traveler", Paul also seems to be a perfect "figura Christi". The analogies between Christ and Paul are obvious.

Christ, like Paul, was a homeless wanderer going to many different places, finding shelter anywhere, without caring about appearances, and choosing his disciples -"My children" (John 13,33) - among the sinners and the humblest. "Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head" (Luke 9, 58).

And more: from a traceless, narrated past, like Christ's, Paul arrives in Paris as a grown man; similarly, an adult Christ arrives in Galilee from Judea to be baptized in the water of the Jordan.

We still see Paul and the maid in the bathroom.

Paul: Why don't you turn the water off?

The young maid is wiping a long, old-fashioned straight razor. She brings it to Paul: "They told me to return it to you".

Paul: It's not mine.

Then Paul's hands turn off the faucet of the tub. In the sudden silence we see the back of Paul's head leave the room.

After a moment the young maid makes a movement and the water's running again in the bathtub.

Paul leaves the room and the hotel, a home-like hotel, -and what a hotel! - in rue De Depart.

As we have said before, the hotel clients immediately evoke the multitudes of the poor and neglected cherished by Christ, and Rosa's preferential treatment of them will be clearly revealed

when, toward the end of the movie, an “ag e” prostitute asks Paul for help and reminds him of her close ties of friendship with Rosa.

“No names here!”

After the disruptive intrusion of reality through the thin veneer of the day-to-day routine, there’s a musical interval. Then we are again in the apartment in rue Jules Verne, though the situation is different. Ignorant of everything, as she is at the beginning of her initiation rite, Jeanne goes up to the apartment, meowing like a cat to scare off the real cat she finds there. She is then caught by surprise by the arrival of two movers carrying some pieces of furniture into the apartment Paul has just rented.

It is significant in this context to remember that Paul and Jeanne never say their names. As Paul puts it, “You don’t have a name, and I don’t have a name either. No names here!”

“No names into the temple.” One does not need to identify oneself except by the name of one’s own conscious and free choice.

After the “absolute reality” of Rosa’s death, Paul seems to show a repetition-compulsion, or, better, a desire to relive his experiences in his relationship with Jeanne, in a sort of psychoanalytic transference.

Unfortunately, to achieve self-realization Paul, like Christ, must sacrifice himself by getting involved in an interpersonal relationship with the others. This is a sacrifice Paul first refuses (“Fucking God”) and then denies in the initial scene of the meeting with Jeanne (“I had already decided... Now I don’t know”).

Later, during Paul’s dramatic soliloquy near Rosa’s corpse, we will hear an echo of Christ’s words (“Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done”) in Paul’s appeal to his wife: “Rosa, my love...forgive me... I need to find a way”.

There seem to be two levels of reality. In fact, there is only one, represented by Paul and Rosa and the meeting with Jeanne, the third vertex of the triangle.

Jeanne and Tom embody fiction, metareality, appearances, that which must be done, in short, social behaviour as dictated and controlled by the institutions even in sex, in the feast, in marriage.

However, as we have said before, the relationship between Paul and Jeanne is predestined, like that between Christ and Israel.

Paul is Christ, but he is also Rosa, as being part of the same divine triangle, a holy triad that recalls the oedipal triad.

Before carrying on the analysis of the text, we think it necessary to make a digression illustrating the archetype and the particular use of it we intend to unveil here.

If, as Borges suggested, Western culture has always related either to Christ or to Odysseus, we understand why the appeal of Christ, the King and the Crucified, has survived over the centuries.

He embodies the sacrificer sacrificing himself, the precious victim.

An archetype manifests itself only through a symbol. Each experience arouses emotions, and emotions produce symbols.

To be such, an archetype must have an unconscious, hidden part. The language of poetry is the most appropriate to make an archetype apparent. Rather than of words, a poem consists of the emotions they awake, and that is the only way an archetype can be revealed.

At the end of our digression, the connection with Bertolucci becomes evident. The key figures in his early life were poets (his father and Pasolini) and he himself wrote poetry. He has then transformed verse into the images and symbols of cinema, an art form that helps the imagination unveil the archetype through intimations and allusions.

That is why Bertolucci also underlines the importance of undubbed films: the particular tone of voice an actor uses at exactly the same time he interprets an emotion, is, together with the image, a means to denote the archetype.

As mentioned before, the name "Rosa" archetypally recalls the metaphysical component of the trinity.

In the scene in the apartment under examination, two more significant details help us discover the archetype, that is, Paul's refusal to use names and Jeanne's down-to-earth insistence on positioning the armchair near the fireplace.

Paul ironically underlines his role of "master" when he says, "That chair goes in front of the window", and pulls the armchair over to the window with her in it.

Jeanne: Listen... Mister... I don't know what to call you.

Paul: You don't have a name. Neither do I. No names.

Jeanne: Yes, yes...no names. Why?

Paul: Maybe I am. But I don't want to know anything about you... nothing. You and I are going to meet here without knowing anything that goes on outside here.

Jeanne: But Why?

Paul: Because... because we don't need names here. Don't you see.

We're going to forget everything we knew - every - all the people, all that we do, all that we - wherever we live. We are going to forget that, everything - everything.

Paul's proposal to Jeanne sounds exactly like Christ's.

"Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 16,24-25)

The word "Mister", addressed to Paul by Jeanne, is semantically connected with "Master". Paul's message is as free and unprejudiced as Christ's, and Christ, too, was called "Master" by his disciples.

No names, no signifier, only signified, only true knowledge of oneself and the other.

Maman and Paul

Each character in the movie has his/her double. As we have seen before, everything is symmetrically held together: all that is above, is mirrored below.

In the next scene, Paul meets Rosa's mother at the hotel. He calls her "maman", so she seems to be Rosa's counterpart.

The double-image effect is strengthened when, in the bathroom next to the room of Rosa's mother, water can be heard to run out of the same faucet the maid intentionally left turned on while wiping Rosa's blood away.

The two rooms can be seen simultaneously from the corridor. Paul comes out of Maman's room and goes into the bathroom. He turns off the faucet, as he had done before in the presence of the maid, and goes back to Maman.

There is a significant repetition of images here. The parental figure of Rosa/Maman is set next to the filial figure of Paul, united with the divine image by the bonds of marriage. Besides, Paul's anxiously repeated gesture of turning off the faucet suggests that he wants to stop the water flowing as well as postpone the hour of action.

"The mother of Jesus said to him, They have no wine. And Jesus said to her, Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come" (John 2,4). John the Evangelist's words about Christ's first miracle, the transformation of water into wine, also recall the holy symbolism of wine turning into Christ's blood during the Last Supper.

We should remember that "blood and water flowed out" of Christ's side (= "costato" in Italian, a recurrent word in Bertolucci's poems "In Search of Mystery"), and that John's Gospel refers to water and blood as symbols of the light and life Christ brought into the world to make a new creation.

This new creation for the sake of man's redemption from sin is underlined in the following dialogue between Paul and Maman.

Maman: I had them (the black-rimmed cards) in the house. I've been through death before. By now I think of everything. I'm going to make her a beautiful room with flowers everywhere.

Paul: Cards... mourning clothes... parents... flowers... all in that suitcase. You've remembered everything. One thing only - I don't want any priests.

Maman: But, but Paul...

Paul: Understand?

Maman: You need them. It must be a religious funeral.

Paul: No! Rosa wasn't a believer.

Maman: Don't shout, Paul.

Paul: Priest doesn't want any suicides. Church doesn't want suicides, do they?

Maman: They'll give her absolution. Absolution and a nice Mass. That's all I ask, Paul. Understand? Rosa... She's my baby girl, Rosa. Why did she kill herself?

Paul: Why does one kill oneself? You don't know why, do you? You don't know.

The reversed position of Rosa's mother, the earthly mother "borrowed" by the divine plan appears evident. The plan, however, is not read, nor is the sacrifice understood. On the other hand, we can clearly see the oneness of Rosa and Paul, one and two in the same person, "Unitas Multiplex", God and Christ, equal and interdependent, working on the same plan for the salvation of mankind.

Paul's words against priests are an outspoken "j'accuse" recalling Christ's accusations against the Pharisees in the synagogues.

And note: "So Judas got a band of soldiers and guards from the chief priests and the Pharisees and went there with lanterns, torches and weapons... So the band of soldiers, the tribune and the Jewish guards seized Jesus, bound him and brought him to Annas first. He was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had counseled the Jews that it was better that one man should die rather than the people" (John 18,3; 18,12-14).

Paul gets angry with Maman because he is aware, he knows that destiny must be fulfilled, that the laws of worldly power will condemn him, as they condemned Christ, and that he will sacrifice himself, "a suicide", in order to induce reflection and create a new life.

Significantly, Maman is alone, as Rosa's father has stayed at home.

“It’s better like this. I’m stronger.” No father is present in the movie. Fathers are absent. God, Father and Son in himself, does not need any evident substitutes, except a woman who can give birth to the divine incarnation - a passive woman, ignorant of the inscrutable plans of the divine unity.

So we can understand Paul’s later reply to Maman: “It’s not true at all. Rosa was not like you. Rosa was very different from you”.

The movie more and more clearly shows the connections between the unconscious divine/oedipal trinity and the trinity of fact: father, mother and child, or any of the characters playing their roles.

The Numberless Names of the “Master”

The score underlines the end of the scene at the hotel, and we are back in the “temple” in rue Jules Verne. It’s still daytime. We see Paul and Jeanne facing each other and embracing tenderly.

Jeanne: It’s beautiful without knowing anything.... Maybe we can come without touching.

Paul: Come without touching? You concentrating? Did you come yet?

Jeanne: It’s difficult.

Paul: I didn’t either yet. You’re not trying hard enough.

Jeanne: I shall have to invent a name for you.

Paul: A name? Jesus Christ! Oh God - I’ve been called by a million names all my life. I’m better off with a grunt or a groan for a name. Do you want to know my name? Woof Woof Wuaa Wuaffr.

Jeanne: It’s so masculine. Listen to mine, trrr, trrr, trurrr, trurrr, trruurrr.

First of all, we should note the analogy between Paul’s answer to Jeanne’s resolve to invent a name for him (“Jesus Christ! Oh God -I’ve been called by a million names all my life”) and the fact that Christ, too, was called by many different names: King of Israel, Elijah Jesus, Christ, Prophet, Messiah, Savior, Master, Lord, Son of God, Nazarene, Lamb of God, Son of Man, Son of Joseph...

Moreover, Paul utters a prophetic sentence:

Paul (laughs): I think it's a last name.

During Jeanne's initiation journey Paul, the "master", explains to her that names, signifiers, are useless. Indeed, the connotation of one's personal identity is supplied not by a proper name but by knowledge of oneself and the other and by continued dialogue.

The importance Jeanne gives to a name reveals her superficiality and desire for reference points which, though stereotyped, are essential for her, like, for example, the name of the father.

As Freud pointed out: "Among the tenets of Mosaic religion one is more important than it first seems. It is the prohibition of creating images of God, an obligation to worship a God nobody can see. Moses' God had neither a name nor a face. But, once this prohibition was accepted, it was bound to have deep effects. Indeed, it means subordinating sense perception to a so-called abstract representation. It means the triumph of spirituality over sensibility, or, strictly speaking, a denial of instincts, with unavoidable psychic consequences.

The religion that started with the prohibition of making images of God has developed over the centuries into a religion of suppression of instinctual impulses. I do not say that it demands sexual abstinence; it is satisfied with a considerable restraint on sexual freedom."

These Freud's significant remarks on the image of God the Father suggest that Jeanne's need to know the name of Paul, her father's alter ego, is, in fact, a craving for authority. Instead, Paul would like to rid her of that dependence by teaching her the language of the body and the spontaneous expression of sensitivity, the only means to attain self-knowledge and individual freedom.

We can quote another Freud's relevant remark: "We know that the mass of men need an authority to admire, to submit to, to be dominated and, maybe, even maltreated by. From the psychology of the individual we have learned where this need of the mass comes from: it comes from a longing for the father of our childhood... Who but our father could have been "the great man" of our childhood!"

Jeanne in Reverse Gear

In this scene, Jeanne, wearing a curly new hairstyle, meets Tom, her fiancé. The dialogue reveals Jeanne's timid initiation, soon to be dampened and finally annihilated by Tom.

Jeanne: Today we improvise... follow me.

Tom is now taking the present-and-in-progress place of Jeanne's father and of Paul, her father/lover. This is the beginning of the reversal from "above" into "below".

Jeanne's sudden desire for independence ("Today we improvise... follow me") turns into a trap and she falls into it, as Tom's unaware accomplice. Far from being an actress directing and surprising her director, she is made to regress to her childhood, the prisoner of a cobweb, for ever unable to conceive any other form of individual freedom. She becomes a prisoner of the inevitable, unconscious repetition-compulsion that will drive her to acknowledge Tom as her father's legal successor and to kill Paul, her father/lover, in order to realize her own time as a daughter.

The whole movie is a clear demonstration of the interplay between the oedipal and the holy trinity.

Freud had already observed that Moses, killed by the Jewish people, was the forerunner of Christ and of the father himself, and that parricide was necessary to solve the problem of the son's growth, as illustrated by Oedipus' tragedy.

"Since then (i.e. 1912, when he wrote "Totem and Taboo") I have never doubted that it is possible to conceive religious phenomena only by utilizing the individual neurotic symptoms familiar to us, since they are recurrences of significant, long-forgotten events in the primordial history of the human family. I have had no doubt that they owe their compulsive character to this origin, and that, therefore, they affect men through the force of their contents of historical truth. As far as this point is concerned, I believe the correspondence between the individual and the mass to be all but complete.

In the masses the impression of the past persists under the form of unconscious mnemonic traces."

The scene is set in a country house on the edge of Paris, where Jeanne spent her childhood after her father's death. Tom has decided to film her there, right in the middle of her past. Olympia, the old nanny, "faithful, admiring and racist", follows the group.

Jeanne: We're sheltered here. It's such fun to look at the past.

Tom: Stop! Why is it fun? It's marvelous, it's your childhood, it's everything I've been looking to find...

While Paul is trying to emancipate Jeanne from her past and make her aware of the present and her new self, Tom is guiding her back into her childhood, so that she can't but move from there toward him.

After starting a new journey forward with Paul - to discover and re-create herself -, she is now being taken backward - to be tied up in the fatal bondage of her indelible archetype: the great father in full dress uniform of her childhood. Tom's aim is to stop her growth. So, realizing that "growing old is a crime", she acknowledges him as her savior and is ready to kill anyone who, like Paul, may try to sever her ties with her childhood in order for her to attain independence and self-knowledge.

Tom: The door! The door! I'm opening the door! I'm opening all the doors!

Jeanne: What are you doing?

Tom: There! ... I found it ... Reverse gear! Understand? Like a car. Put it in reverse. Close your eyes. Back up. Close your eyes.

Come forward, backing up. Keep going... and find your childhood again.

Jeanne: It's Papa... There...

Tom: You take off... and find your childhood again.

Jeanne: Papa in full dress uniform...

Tom: Don't be afraid. Overcome the obstacles.

Jeanne: Papa in Algiers...

Tom: You are fifteen, fourteen, thirteen, twelve, eleven, ten, nine...

So Tom offers Jeanne the key, as Zolla suggests, "To get lost in the primeval forest of archetypes. Man wants periodically to lose his way in the primeval forest of archetypes. He does so when he

dreams, but dreams are not enough. He must get lost awake, enraptured by a daylight archetype. He will hear the call of Symmetry, of Union, of Oneness in the Dyad, he will be driven anyhow into the embrace. Every individual has his own particular myth, his personal acting out, enabling him to ecstatically communicate with the archetype tormenting him. The event from which he cannot recover, by unveiling the fatal archetype, branded him for life.”.

Better to illustrate the plot we are unraveling, we quote from Elémire Zolla again: “A novel by Piotr Demianovic Uspenskji (“The Strange Life of Ivan Osokin”, editor’s note) is about a man who got expelled from school, gambled his inheritance away, lost his job and was left by his fiancée. At the end of his resources, he went to see a magician and desperately asked him for help. The magician sent him back to his school years, and everything happened to him for the second time. He repeated the same errors one by one, though he now knew they would ruin him. In this way he became aware of his slavery, and, strengthened by this awareness, after living his life all over again, he found himself back in the magician’s study. On coming out, he looked dreamily at the Moscow alley and at the dreamy cats lazing around, and then he finally understood the significance of his being here and now impersonally, emancipated from himself.

Instead, man usually clings to the shreds of his past, to his biographical identity, and persistently repeats the scenes that express his personal equation.”

It is this process of deliverance from outer and inner conditioning toward self-awareness and independence that Bertolucci presents to us through the magical images and meaningful words of "Last Tango".

In the scene at Jeanne’s country house we can note another important symmetrical analogy: Jeanne shows Tom the trees of her “jungle” in the garden, that is, in the “temple” of her garden, in the shrine of the temple. Here, she sees some Algerian urchins defecating with their bottoms in the air. Astonished, she asks them what they are doing, and they answer quite naturally, "We’re shitting. Why? Can’t you see?"

Olympia, the old nanny, then rails against the urchins, saying, "If I catch you, I’ll hang you. Go shit in your own country, you little bastards. Africa! You can’t even live at home any more". Well,

Olympia's racist resentment is the same the President of the tango jury will feel and express in the dance hall where Paul and Jeanne dance the last tango.

Not by chance, Paul will show the outraged "Madame" his buttocks after lowering his pants, just like the Algerian boys, while she rails against the couple saying, "What are you doing? This is a familiar place. Go to the movies to make love".

In the scene in the garden, however, Jeanne shows a "politically correct" attitude: she asks Tom if he has shot the whole scene, because "Olympia was magnificent. Now you'll have a precise idea of race relations in the suburbs of Paris". Tom replies, "This really is a jungle".

In other words, social concerns are barely touched on by Jeanne and Tom, as if they should only be exhibited, not really felt. Confined to the surface of Tom's TV movie, they are not part of its content. This is the real trouble with the society Jeanne and Tom represent: it is blind and self-complacent, dulled by a sort of intellectual haze into uncritically accepting the conditioning control of institutions.

As an example of control, note how cleverly Tom persuades Jeanne, who would like to go away, to stay longer by asking her about her father

Tom: Tell me about your father.

Jeanne: I thought we were finished for the day.

Tom: Five minutes.

Jeanne: But I'm in a terrible hurry for a business appointment.

Tom: Yes, yes... well, the colonel?

The Kingdom of the Father

Tom's attempt to stop Jeanne fails only partly. Actually, she goes away, but then starts her conversation with Paul just by speaking about her father, the colonel. Yet, her feelings, superficial and stagnant when she was with Tom, are now quite different.

Jeanne: The colonel had green eyes and shiny, shiny boots. I wore-shipped him. He was so handsome in his uniform.

Jeanne still evokes a divine figure - her father whom she loved like a God -, but, when she meets the true God in the temple/apartment in rue Jules Verne, she does not recognize him! Just like the people of Israel, who prayed and loved God but did not recognize him as such when they saw him and killed him. Oedipus, too, did not recognize his father and killed him. Blindness is typical of those who do not want to see.

"But because I speak the truth, you do not believe me" (John 8,45). "I come into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who see might become blind" (John 9,39).

Jeanne: ... I worshipped him. He was so handsome in his uniform.

Paul: What a steamy pile of horseshit!

Jeanne: What? Don't you dare...

Paul: All uniforms are bullshit, everything outside this place is bullshit. Besides, I don't want to hear about your stories, about your past and all that!

Jeanne angrily tells Paul off for making fun of her dead father, and then asks him what she is supposed to say or do.

Paul: Come on the good ship lollypop.

This is a new departure: they are going to travel without ever moving off.

We are in rue Jules Verne, and the captain is setting sail toward another island. We are in a sacred place, the apartment, where the knowledge of far-away spaces and the epiphany of a new dimension are attainable.

Everything connotes the great voyage. "The past doesn't matter" Paul says to Jeanne. "Deny yourself" says Christ to anyone who wishes to follow him - forget your past and start the new journey.

Significantly, after listening to the notes of the harmonica, Jeanne asks Paul, "Why don't you go back to America?". Her question certainly betrays her impatience at his behavior, but it also underlines the fact that Paul, an American, has traveled from the new world to the old one to bring

novel knowledge. Paul is an American in Paris, in Europe, the land from which explorers set sail to discover a new world they at first did not recognize as such. As a matter of fact, Colombo thought he had reached India.

Conceptual planes are once more reversed: just as America was before the Europeans discovered it, Christ/Paul was before Jeanne.

When Paul describes his childhood on a farm, in a small rural community, he is in fact drawing the picture of a natural, old-time way of life. There, among cattle and somewhat rough, wild oddballs, he had nevertheless loved nature.

We are reminded of the infancy of Christ, born between an ox and a donkey in a small community of shepherds, and of the countryside Bertolucci spent his childhood in and has always missed since he moved to Rome. Not to mention Brando, who seems to be lying on a Freudian couch, talking about himself and his own real childhood in a small provincial town among cattle and odd characters.

This is a picture of ourselves and of the collective childhood of mankind, the world we communicate with in our dreams and through our memories, the childhood of fairy tales, of myths and rites, the jungle of archetypes.

"Childhood, the most beautiful thing" says Jeanne after reciting "Growing old is a crime" in Tom's movie. She says so again in the apartment in rue Jules Verne, after Paul has given her a likely description of his own childhood and she has jokingly impersonated Little Red Riding Hood. "'It' s funny. It's like playing grown-up when you are little. I feel like a child again here".

In the temple/apartment Jeanne feels as fine as she did in the temple/jungle of her childhood country house. So Paul can now begin to reveal something to her that he will later make her fully acknowledge, that is, the uselessness of all stereotyped, conventional illusions. Childhood is not "the most beautiful thing" in life.

Paul: It's the most beautiful thing to be made into a tattle-tale, or forced to admire authority, or sell yourself for a piece of candy.

He insists he has no pleasant memories of his childhood except for an elderly man with a pipe who hated work. Indeed, there seems to be a connection between Paul's vague description of that period of his life and the slight amount of imprecise information we have about Christ's childhood. "Everything begins when one is grown-up" is Paul's message to Jeanne as well as the rule Tom will eventually impose on her, the "only" difference lying in the degree of independence and self-awareness.

Paul, like Christ, says that no bond, nothing is more important than self-definition if one wishes to be saved.

"Another of his disciples said to him, Lord, let me go first and bury my father. But Jesus answered him, Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead" (Matthew 8,21-22).

"And another said, I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family at home. (To him) Jesus said, No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the Kingdom of God"(Luke 9,61-62)

There is another significant detail connecting Paul with Christ.

When Paul speaks about his childhood, he mentions a mustard field. "We had in front of the house... we had this big field, meadow... it was a mustard field in the summer...". It is rather unusual to see a mustard field, but in the Gospels the Kingdom of God is compared to a mustard seed.

"He said, To what shall I compare the Kingdom of God, or what parable can I use for it? It is like a mustard seed that, when it is sown in the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade"(Mark 4,30-32)

The Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God the Father is the only true kingdom, and He only is the true father of Christ. Similarly, Rosa, the symbol of Unity, is Paul's true father. All the rest is useless, including names and false bonds, which can generate pleasant or unpleasant memories but are meaningless until one becomes aware of one-self and of the other as part of oneself.

Family relationships and lesser forms of attachment bind the individual with thin and false ties and use blackmail to stop him growing into an independent, free adult, generously open to his fellow men and to nature.

"His mother and his brothers arrived. Standing outside they sent word to him and called him. A crowd seated around him told him, Your mother and your brothers (and your sisters) are outside asking for you. But he said to them in reply, Who are my mother and my brothers? And looking around at those seated in the circle he said, Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3,31-35).

Just as the mustard seed grows into a large plant in whose shade the birds of the sky can dwell, Rosa and Paul's hotel houses anyone who knocks at its door.

Paul's Mission

Like Christ, Paul is free and offers a message of freedom and harmony.

He wants to rid Jeanne of the superstructural chains imposed by institutions that claim the right to interpret and dictate an exclusive code of pseudo-freedom.

Paul's are words of freedom, like Christ's. At different points in the movie Paul shouts "Fucking God", "Fucking family", "Fucking police". True, Christ said, "The Father and I are one" (John 10,30), "I am in the Father and the Father is in me"(John 14,11), but during the agony,"... about three o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27,46)

Besides, Christ orders those who wish to follow him to leave everything behind and break all family "ties". He himself does not acknowledge his family bonds and does not belong either to his mother or to his brothers because his family comprise all those who do the will of God.

Christ affirms the freedom of the individual even against the law of the high priests. "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath. That is why the Son of Man is lord even of the

sabbath.” (Mark 2,27). “Again he entered the Synagogue. There was a man there who had a withered hand. They watched him closely to see if he would cure him on the sabbath so they might accuse him. He said to the man with the withered hand, Come up here before us. Then he said to them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath rather than to do evil, to save life rather than to destroy it? But they remained silent. Looking around at them with anger and grieved at their hardness of heart, he said to the man, Stretch out your hand. He stretched it out and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately took counsel with the Herodians against him to put him to death” (Mark 3,1-6).

Jeanne’s error becomes evident again at the end of this scene. She is exactly like those who see and do not want to see.

“I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see and those who do see might become blind. Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, Surely we are not blind, are we? Jesus said to them, If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, We see, so your sin remains.” (John 9, 39-41).

At the center of Christ’s message is man’s redemption. The aim of his sacrifice is to emancipate man from the infernal bondage imposed by the princes of the world and to give him full freedom. Once emancipated, man will restore the unity with the father in the son, free himself from death forever and gain eternal life.

Placing man at the center of everything was also Buddha’s aim 500 years before Christ, as Bertolucci once underlined adding, in confirmation of his own free, conscious and unconscious belief, “My concern is centered around man”.

The strong, revolutionary message of the Son of Man was not understood by institutions in the past nor is it today either. In fact, it was used to “perfect” the reading and re-writing of the holy texts according to the different sociopolitical purposes of the diverse sources of power.

Anyone can enter the church of God, the only place where social differences do not exist. Similarly, anyone is welcomed into Rosa and Paul’s hotel. As a matter of fact, history and news reports offer ample evidence of the fact that Christ’s revolutionary message has often been distorted by political readings. In the name of Christ, there have been wars, abuses, killings, dangerous alliances, political

parties that had nothing to do with Christ's message of individual self-realization and respect for man in equilibrium with nature.

By his Reformation Luther expressed a violent, disruptive rebellion against the manipulation of the holy texts by the Roman ecclesiastical elite. The Protestant Reformation certainly contributed to the individual believer's autonomous development and attainment of self-knowledge, thanks, above all, to the personal study of the Bible, which everyone could read and interpret independently from any ecclesiastical authorized version or intermediary. And yet, if, on the one hand, individual reading of the Bible shaped many thoughtful, independent minds on the other hand, it gave rise to a great number of sects, each bent on imposing its own interpretation of the holy texts. Some religious denominations even reintroduced the institutional dependence and hierarchies that had been so violently rejected by the Reformation.

It is not by chance that in the original screenplay of "Last Tango", in the thirteen scene under examination, somebody knocks at the door, to Paul's and Jeanne's surprise: it is a seller of bibles, who intones, "The Bible complete... unique edition without notes... without cuts...". And then, "The true Bible... don't close your door to eternity". And finally, "Someone is there! Open the door to the Jehovah's Witness". At this point, Paul opens the door abruptly and shouts the seller of bibles away, a reaction that recalls Christ's furious attack on the desecrators of the temple (Mark 11,15-18).

This scene was deleted by the director after the movie was shown at the New York Film Festival.

In other words, man must grow up so as to emancipate himself from all the forms of dependence that make him neurotically repeat the same errors.

Bearing the connection between religion and Oedipus in mind, we can say that, the more man grows, the easier it is for him to break away from Oedipus and religion. This is evident in the more highly developed countries, where secularism prevails. That is also why the "Church" looks for developing "children" countries, which can still depend on the father figure of the unique God, terrible, powerful and good.

The Buddhism of Buddha, who preached his teachings 500 years before Christ, is a non-religion: it is the independent morality of grown-up children.

It appears evident that man's individual growth toward freedom is not the aim of the Church or of the institutions that followed and still follow its obsolete traditions. "So the Pharisees and scribes questioned him, Why do your disciples not follow the tradition of the elders but instead eat a meal with unclean hands? He responded, Well did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines human precepts. You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition."(Mark7,5-8).

The Light Shines in the Darkness

The tango could be defined as the religion of man and of the passion of man, son of man and of the heavenly father. But this will be shown later on in the movie, in the scene in the dance hall.

We are now in rue De Depart, at Rosa and Paul's church/hotel. He is talking with Rosa's mother.

It is evening. Maman is wearing a bathrobe, and a saxophone is playing, which prevents her from sleeping.

Maman: I can't sleep. That music ...

Paul talks without looking at her:

Paul: I came to this hotel to spend the night. I stayed five years.

Maman: When we had this hotel, Papa and me, people came here to sleep.

Paul: Now there is everything. You can hide here, take drugs here, play music. Don't touch me.

The Mother-in-law puts her hand gently on Paul's shoulder.

Maman: You are not alone. I'm here.

Paul bites her hand.

We are clearly in the presence of Rosa's double, here.

Maman: You're crazy. I'm beginning to understand.

Paul: Rosa was like you. People must have told you often... Isn't that right, mother?

Maman; Up until ten years ago they were still saying - two sisters. Paul: It's not true at all. Rosa was very different from you.

Maman: That music. that music... I can't stand it.

Paul: Do you want me to make them stop?

This scene shows Maman as Rosa's fake, though necessary, double, but Paul refuses to acknowledge her role by pointing out the obvious difference between them under the apparent resemblance.

Faced with Paul's revelation that she is only "a woman about to die who buries her dead", Maman reacts by saying "That music... I can't stand it".

It is a clear-cut refusal. Rosa's mother rejects the place -the hotel- where people once came only to sleep, while they now come to commit all sorts of sins, from playing music to hiding or taking drugs, in a word, to escape and transgress. She even rejects her daughter, whom she thought she resembled like a sister ten years before.

This double rejection, of the place and of her daughter, reveals her inability to see and recognize the reality of life. She refuses the music that, in the darkness of night, might ask her disturbing questions. She does not accept that her daughter may have become different from her just by becoming herself, an independent person capable of killing herself without leaving a word to explain her action to her mother. As Paul said to her before, she does not understand Rosa's suicide.

She refuses to see reality and chooses to blame Paul in order to find an alibi for herself: "You are crazy. I'm beginning to understand"

Paul will not allow her to escape from reality, and, after switching off, the lights he will show her the hotel clients, among whom Marcel Paul's double (another double!) and Rosa's lover.

The life Paul shows to Maman is hell, the everyday hell into which he has descended by marrying Rosa, as Christ had done by espousing his Father's cause.

It is a dark reality. The hotel clients are afraid of the dark, and Paul introduces them to Maman on the staircase, in a pandemonium of frightened foreign voices.

Paul: You know, it takes so little to make them afraid. Do you want me to tell you what they're afraid of? They're afraid of the dark, imagine that.

Maman: Paul...put the light.

Paul: Come on, Mother. I want you to meet my friends. I think you ought to meet the clients of the hotel. Hey, folks, I'd like you to say hello to Mom. Mom, this is Mr. Juice head junkie here. He's our connection, Mom. And Mr. Saxophone here... And right here is the beautiful Best Blow Job of 1933. She's still making a few points when she takes her teeth out. Maman: The lights. Light the lights.

Paul: Oh, are you afraid of the dark, Mom? She's afraid of the dark. Aw, well, poor thing. All right, sweetheart. I'll take care of you, don't worry about it. I'll give you a little light. I'll give you a little light. Don't worry about a thing. Then, before Paul brings back light to the hotel - There is an unknown man in the entrance. He looks at her without speaking... They look like two statues.

Maman: Who is that?

Paul: Do you like him? He was Rosa's lover.

In the last part of this scene, the sixteenth, Paul fully reveals his "figura Christi."

He comes in the darkness to give the light back. He lives just in the midst of sinners, of those who have lost the light and can have it back through him.

The hotel is really like the church of Christ, a harbour for all those who wish to find shelter and the light illuminating the darkness - the darkness they are afraid of because they know its deadly meaning.

Rosa and Paul's hotel is the Temple of God. "For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, I will live with them and move among them and I will be their God and they shall be my people." (2 Corinthians 6,16)

From beginning to end, this scene connotes the site of the House of God the Father as a harbor for His people. Once, when false gods - Rosa's parents - ruled, people only came to sleep: it was a place for the dead who buried their dead. Nobody was alive, nobody sought the light. Everybody only looked for the oblivion of sleep.

With the coming of Rosa and Paul there has been an awakening, self-awareness and consciousness of the human condition outside of Eden, in the hell of everyday life, in search of the light.

SECOND DAY

“I want you free”

Scene 17 is set again in the apartment in rue Jules Verne, in broad daylight. Jeanne is in the bathroom, and wonders what she is doing here in the apartment with Paul.

Jeanne: What I'm doing in this apartment with you?

Paul: Well, let's say, we're just taking a flying fuck at a rolling doughnut.

Jeanne: So you think I'm a whore.

Paul: No. You're just a dear old-fashioned girl trying to get along.

Jeanne: I prefer to be a whore.

Jeanne is looking for an identity of her own, and is shown a pitiless picture of herself by Paul.

Jeanne's lack of self-knowledge is also characterized by this need of seeing herself reflected in Paul's judgment. He tells her she is just a dear old-fashioned girl trying to get along, that is, trying to find herself.

But she sees and thinks of herself as a whore. So she has no idea she could have a choice and be herself. She does not realize that she is in this apartment because she is looking for a key to self-definition. At best, she sees herself as a whore, that is, a desire object, a passive, non-desiring instrument.

Her desire depends on someone else, on her father's image, on her fiancé and on her new godlike father - Paul, analyst and lover. Jeanne, however, does not see the true Paul, a free man, master of himself and of his choices, and she cannot understand his message of freedom and self-awareness. She is only intrigued and disturbed by him, so she tries to find out something about him by searching through his jacket pockets, with no success.

Paul: Why were you going through my pockets?

Jeanne: To find out what you are.

Paul: Well, if you look real close, you'll see me hiding behind my zipper.

Paul suggests the key to true knowledge (“Well, if you look real close, you’ll find me behind my zipper.”), the key that only desire can offer, because desire is revolutionary in itself and brings about innovation and change.

But Jeanne continues with her superficial search for pointless clues.

Jeanne: We know he buys clothes in some big store. It’s not much, but it’s a beginning.

Paul: That’s not a beginning, that’s a finish.

Paul insists on telling her the truth, but she will neither see nor accept it. She is convinced that only what appears is true, and is unable to break the usual patterns. That is why Paul tells her that, far from being a beginning, her search is already finished. She wants to carry on the game anyway, following the old, useless rules. So Paul plays along and tells her a lot of nonsense about his past.

It is important to point out that, when he eventually lets her know his true identity, she will mock him and refuse to go on playing. The foreseen sacrifice will then be accomplished, exactly as described in the holy scriptures:

“If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you and you do not believe. The works I do in my Father’s name testify to me. But you don’t believe, because you are not among my sheep” (John 10,24-26)

“Why do you not understand what I am saying? Because you cannot bear to hear my word. You belong to your father the devil and you willingly carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks in character, because he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth you do not believe me” (John 8,43-45).

Quite revealing is Jeanne’s remark as she watches Paul shaving.

Jeanne: A barber’s razor, yes.

Paul: Or a madman’s.

We see her making herself up while Paul is lathering up his face before shaving. Only one half of her face is made up, the other half is perfectly clean.

In Paris hard-boiled society Jeanne always makes herself up. Make up in her disguise

the stereotyped mask Paul would like her to take off.

Rosa, instead, never wore make-up, because she did not need a mask. That is why Paul will clean her face during his poignant soliloquy near her corpse among the hydrangeas.

Jeanne stops dead, with the mascara in her hand, stares at the razor

Paul is handling, and says;

Jeanne: So you want to cut me up?

Paul: That would be like writing my name on your face.

Jeanne: Like they do the slaves?

Paul: Slaves are branded on the ass, and I want you free. There is a double connotation here: oppression and freedom. Jeanne sees herself as a slave, and she is one, but Paul teaches her that she is mistaken, because the brand of slavery is hidden - it is not on the face, but on the ass.

The mark of the slave is concealed under clothes, make-up, appearances. The reference here is to the evil sado-masochistic complicity between the torturer and the victim: no apparent violence, only covert submission to the rules of the stronger one.

Paul, who is neither sadistic nor impotent, replies to Jeanne that nobody is branded on the face, and that, anyway, he is not interested in her as a slave branded on the ass, because he wants her free.

Freedom is that which Paul wants her to see during her initiation journey with him. But as Christ did not succeed in erasing false prejudices and conventions, Paul cannot make Jeanne get rid of her hard shell/carapace, except, perhaps, through bloodshed.

"They answered him, We are descendants of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How can you say, You will become free? Jesus answered them, Amen, amen, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. A slave does not remain in a household forever always remains. So if a son frees you, then you will truly be free. I know that you are descendants of Abraham. But you are trying to kill me because my word has no room among you" (John 8,33-37).

Jeanne retorts, pointing out his mistake: "Free, I'm not free"

Paul: You are free to come fucking with me.

Jeanne: Free, shit! I come running here... to fuck, yes... you want to know why you don't want to know anything about me? Because you hate women! What have they ever done to you?

Paul: Either they always pretend to know who I am, or they pretend that I don't know who they are, and that's very boring.

Jeanne: I'm not afraid to say who I am. I'm twenty years old and...

Paul: Jesus Christ! Don't wear out your brain! Shut up. I know it's tough, but you're going to have to bear it.

Jeanne: The only truth is...

Paul: ...These twin sinks are a beautiful invention. They're rare you don't find them anymore. They've been devised so we can stay together even after we make love ... so our happiness gets longer... I think happiness gets longer...I think I'm happy with you.

After this biting exchange, Paul leaves the bathroom and then the apartment silently, without Jeanne realizing, as if to shock her into further soul-searching,

Throughout the dialogue Jeanne shows her total inability to recognize the meaning of either freedom or truth. It is just her obstinate mistaking reality for truth that makes Paul angry, so he shouts to her not to wear out her brain. He then tries to tell her something more in a gentler way, but, realizing it is impossible, he diverts her attention by pointing out that they can still be together in the bathroom, after making love, thanks to the beautiful invention of twin sinks.

This is another reference to a time when love between man and woman forever united, was happy and eternal, before the original sin, before Adam and Eve generated, in pain and deception, the progeny that would be reconciled with the Father and truth only by the coming of the "Second Adam" - "The Last Adam" (Paul 1 Corinthians 15,45-48) - Jesus Christ, who like Paul declared, "The truth will set you free"

Jeanne does not understand and, on realizing Paul is no longer in the apartment, reacts angrily.

Jeanne: I'm finished. Shall we go together?

Jeanne: Hey, do you hear me?

She rails against him because she would have liked to leave the apartment with him. She then phones Tom, her fiancé and Paul's alter ego, and asks him to meet her at Passy subway station immediately because she has something very urgent and important to tell him.

Subway

The scene shows rue Jules Verne and Tom watching it with complete indifference: the building and the temple/apartment have no meaning for him.

From the platform opposite Jeanne calls out his name, but, as he is going toward the subway staircase to join her, she shouts to him to stay where he is. Tom is rather annoyed by her behavior but plays along

Jeanne: You must find somebody else.

Tom: For what?

Jeanne: For your film.

Tom: Why?

Jeanne's answer to Tom is sincere: she is really tired of playing the role of "girl of today" in his movie, she feels defiled and wishes to put an end to her collaboration with him.

At this moment Jeanne is trying to break away from the past so as to find a present of her own, but Tom does not accept. As her director-fiancé, he wants the problem to clear up at all costs and treats her as if he was a father cross with a wayward, rebellious daughter: he slaps her face violently.

She pays him back in kind, but the incidents ends in an embrace and a long kiss, just like a fairy tale or, better, an illusion.

Tom's behavior seems to reflect the typical institutional oppression. He quenches Jeanne's desire and does not allow the tie to be broken so as to keep everything in order within the boundaries of the institution of marriage.

Jeanne's attempt is immediately held back because her desire is controlled by Tom the icon of the oedipal family tie. That is why the two young people embrace and kiss at the end of the scene: desire now flows "correctly" again in the figures that reflect and represent socio-familial authority, Having found her father's figure again in Tom, Jeanne feels reassured, and he gratifies her by directing and controlling her desire. In order to prevent Jeanne's further attempts at self-assertion he will later asks her to marry him, and she will accept, thus bringing off Paul's "passion".

Tom connotes his middle-class characteristics more and more clearly and appears to be the paradigm of the "boy of today", perfectly "à la page", but only apparently modern.

In other words, he epitomizes everything old dressed up in new clothing. He does not have a language of his own, never stops to think, makes use of stereotyped patterns and wants to preserve them. In short, he does not want to change anything and does not evolve,

Paul tries to open Jeanne's eyes and to teach her to feel her own desires as the only reality - not the false bourgeois reality as the object of her desire. But Tom blocks her progress toward self-awareness by offering her a punctured life belt.

By the way, it might be interesting to note that Jeanne, the old-fashioned girl of today trying to get along, is unable to make a personal effort to emancipate herself either because she is oedipally constrained in her role as daughter or because she is a female brought up to be passive.

"You belong to what is below, I belong to what is above. You belong to this world but I do not belong to this world. That is why I told you that you will die in your sins. For if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins... If you remain in my world, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free" (John 8,23-24; 8,31).

Marcel and Paul

Paul's mission becomes essential in the following dialogue with Marcel, his all too human alter ego.

Paul goes to Marcel's room. The two men are wearing identical bathrobes both being presents from Rosa.

While talking to Marcel, Paul understands why Rosa did not leave a word to explain her choice: the explanation is Marcel himself. At the end of the dialogue everything is clear.

Paul: I was looking for a letter from Rosa. But the letter is you...

Paul: Really, Marcel. I wonder what she ever saw in you.

Later on, in front of Rosa's corpse, Paul will confirm this revelation by saying, "And then to help me to understand you, you let me inherit Marcel. The husband's double whose room was the double of ours".

Marcel represents the poor human being, alone and mortal, completely self-centered. The worries of earthly life condition him and drive him to defend himself by looking for sham comfort in body care so as to exorcise the passing of time and physical decay, the epiphany of death.

Marcel, who keeps fit by doing gymnastics and feels upset by a small sore of his lip, perfectly expresses the worries and fears of a man bereft of the dimension of eternity.

Paul discovers in Marcel the fear of death and man's inability to accept limited, finite horizons. So he finally understands Rosa's sacrifice. Rosa, like God, makes a new covenant with man to save him from death.

God had offered a covenant to His people, but, to survive the sufferings and solitude in the desert, they had created new idols thus breaking the covenant with God the Father.

"For thus speaks the Lord God: I will deal with you according to what you have done, you who despised your oath, breaking a covenant.

Yet I will remember the covenant I made with you when you were a girl, and I will set up an everlasting covenant with you... For I will re-establish my covenant with you, that you may know that I am the Lord, that you may remember and be covered with confusion,

and that you may be utterly silenced for shame when I pardon you for all you have done, says the Lord God." (Ezekiel 16,59-60; 16, 62-63)

Rosa's tearing the paper off the walls of Marcel's room, to uncover the white plaster underneath, expresses the longing to open up a new horizon.

The walls of Rosa and Paul's room are whitewashed and shiny: she herself had wanted them different from all the others in the hotel. So Rosa tore the wallpaper off to bring back light, do away with all covers and lay bare the pure substance. Just as God created man in His own image, Rosa wanted Marcel to be in her image through Paul's figure.

But man finds his human condition really unbearable.

Marcel suffers so much because of his mortal limitations that he begins to fade away and pathetically looks for relief in easy diversions, like body care, under the illusion that in this way he can defeat diseases and old age.

Therefore, Marcel embodies the first Adam and Paul is the second Adam, since, according to St. Paul's definition, it is Christ who must show the way to salvation.

"The first man, Adam, became a living being, the last Adam a life-giving spirit. But the spiritual was not the first; rather the natural and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, earthly; the second man, from Heaven" (I Corinthians 15,45-47)

Rosa's blood symbolizes the bloodshed that redeems man from sin, purifies him and seals his new covenant with God. In the Old Testament God announces the coming of the Messiah, who will reconcile man with the Eternal Father.

Paul brings a new message, like Christ who must teach what his Father taught him in order to deliver men from the slavery of death.

"And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8,32).

God/Rosa renews His relationship with His "earthly creature", but the new covenant will only be sealed by the sacrifice of His beloved Son/Paul, born in blood (the blood of Rosa's suicide) and purified by the cleansing power of water.

For the sake of his Father, brothers and little children (all his disciples and apostles) and of the new covenant, Paul/Christ will suicidal shed his blood by willingly offering himself as a victim to Jeanne.

In the sequence of the maid's account after Rosa's suicide we see blood everywhere, but, while the water is running in the bathtub, the blood slowly turns into clear water. We witness the transubstantiation of the water: the water of death becomes water of life, that is, a source of life for Paul. The Father begets the Son. In the name of the Father/Rosa the mission of the Son/Paul must go on.

We have already noted the interweaving of the Divine and the Oedipal Trinity, in which sexes and roles are interchangeable.

Everything is written in the Gospels: a Father, a Son - Christ -, who is also father and brother, a bridegroom - Joseph -, who is also son, father and brother, a bride - Mary -, who is daughter, mother and sister. "For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother and sister, and mother."
(Matthew 13,50)

THIRD DAY

Family Secret

Next day, On entering the apartment in rue Jules Verne, Jeanne finds Paul sitting on the floor, eating bread and cheese. The girl is in a hurry.

She has brought a portable record-player. He asks her for butter, and she, like an automaton, gets and throws it on to plate.

Then she sits down, facing him.

Jeanne does not find interesting to watch an American eating cheese in an empty apartment, so she nervously drums the floor with her fingers until she realizes there must be something under the parquet.

Paul joins her on all fours, but, when he is about to uncover the hidden secret, she stops him, frightened, and tells him it might be a family secret not to be investigated.

Jeanne's sudden anxiety reveals her awareness and fear of family secrets.

“Beware of the leaven - that is the hypocrisy - of the Pharisees. There is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, nor secrets that will not be known” (Luke 12, 1-2)

Paul: Family secret? I'll tell you about family secret.

While sodomizing Jeanne, Paul breaks into a violent attack against all the vices the family hides and controls and against the hypocritical moral institution of the family itself, a whitewashed tomb.

Paul: I'm going to tell you about the family. That holy institution, meant to breed into savages. I want you to repeat after me.

Paul: Holy family. Come on say it. Go on! Holy family, the church of good citizens. Say it. The children are tortured until they tell their first lie.

Paul: Where the will is broken by repression. Where freedom is assassinated by egotism...family. You fucking-fucking family. You fucking family. Oh God, Jesus.

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You cleanse the outside of cup and dish, but inside they are full of plunder and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisees, cleanse first the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may be clean.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and every kind of filth. Even so, on the outside you appear righteous, but inside you are filled with hypocrisy and evildoing.”(Matthew 23,25-28)

“Woe to you! You build the memorials of the prophets whom your ancestors, killed. Consequently, you bear witness and give consent to the deeds of your ancestors, for they killed them and you do the building. Therefore, the wisdom of God said, I will send to them prophets and apostles ; some of them they will kill and persecute” (Luke 11, 47-49)

“All their works are performed to be seen. They love places of honor at banquets, seats of honor in synagogues, greetings in marketplaces, and the salutation ‘ Rabbi’..Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You traverse sea and land to make one convert, and when that happens you make him child of Gehenna twice as much as yourselves...Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You pay tithes of mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier thing of the law: judgment and mercy and fidelity. But these you should have done, without neglecting the others. Blind guides, who strain out the gnat and swallow the camel !” (Matthew 23,5-7; 15; 23-24)

"No disciple is above his teacher, no slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, for the slave, that he become like his master" (Matthew 10,24-25).

"Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven... Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father"(Matthew 18,3; 6; 10).

Christ’ s words are reflected in Paul’s. The ones recall and develop into the others. The holy text and the film script echo, overlap and enlighten each other.

About Desire and Freedom

After 1968 truth, power and desire forcefully emerge in discourse formulae.

"Word of truth, technology of power, desiring machine: this is the triple function of discourse formulae"

Freud had recognized the abstract universal essence of desire and had located it inside the private family. In the oedipal triangle desire was not produced autonomously, but only represented. Besides, in Totem and Taboo, Freud had observed that the roots of religion, morals, society and art are in the Oedipus complex, which psychoanalysis had identified as the core of every neurosis.

From the beginning, religion has controlled and institutionalized the sacred. Any religious organization sets up collective norms and determines a social conscience. In this sense, the function of religion is to legitimate individual ethical behavior and social order.

The Catholic Church has always tried to safeguard the social structure by imposing a general code of collective behavior. This imposition, however, was challenged and broken by the Protestant Reformation. As Weber pointed out, a new ethics originated from the Reformation, substituting secular power for the power of the clergy. If it is true that Protestantism and Calvinism - through its most rigorous expression, the sects - laid the foundations of capitalism and modern entrepreneurship by asserting the active role of the individual in society, their tenets have nevertheless brought about serious phenomena of alienation. According to Weber the social structure of modern and contemporary societies has been greatly influenced by the model of Protestant religious communities.

We can conclude that until 1968 desire was strictly controlled by all the institutions in order to manipulate and channel man's free and autonomous production of it.

Christ, Freud and Bertolucci testify that man is the main object of their commitment and concern and that their aim is to show him the way to self-knowledge and individual freedom.

Christ's words were as disruptive as Freud's discovery of the unconscious, which provoked a scandal similar to the official condemnation of Galilee's or Darwin's theories.

When Bertolucci presented "Last Tango", sheer pandemonium broke out in Italy: the film and the director went through a lengthy calvary that ended in the seizure and burning of the reels and in a five-year suspension of the director's political rights.

The reading of the film was submitted to the most perverse and reactionary interpretations by the political and religious Establishment.

This furious attack can only be explained by the fear that the movie could make people think and unleash autonomous desires, just as Christ's and Freud's words intended to do.

As evidence of the absolutely incorrect and misleading interpretation the film was given at the time, it is enough to remember that the sequence we have just examined was labeled as the "butter scene", not as the scene of the invective against the abuses of institutions and the various forms of family egotism that constrain the freedom of the individual from early childhood.

As Freud pointed out "Being sane is a hard task for civilized man. We can find the desire of a strong, uninhibited ego comprehensible; the present age is the enemy of civilization in its deepest meaning. And, since the demands of civilization are represented by family education, on studying the etiology of neurosis, we must also remember the biological peculiarity of the human species, that is, the protracted period of child dependence" After the quotation from Freud, note Christ's words. "I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing! There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth?' No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three; a father will be divided against his son and a son against his father, a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law" (Luke 12,49-53)

"If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own Life, he cannot be my disciple... In the same way, everyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple"(Luke 14,26;33).

Christ's words, Freud's investigation into the unconscious and Bertolucci's text seem to urge man to rid himself of superstructural conditioning and false, selfish family ties, so he may release his new individual self and become able to desire freely and produce autonomous desires.

We will see that Bertolucci has carried his artistic search for emancipation from all oedipal residue right to Buddhist self-denial, that is, to free desire, autonomous and not reactive to "fatherly" figures.

As the father of psychoanalysis and in confirmation of his theory, Freud unleashed numberless filial conflicts, showing that Oedipus is in religion, in politics and in art, for it is an unavoidable, though resolvable, archetype of our unconscious.

Bertolucci's great merit is having shown us the fatal archetype, as only a poet could do, enabling us to look at ourselves in the mirror, in the darkness of a movie theater, as if we were in our innermost den.

Unfortunately, since producing and providing opium has always been more profitable, the film - an energetic, healthy shock to slumbering minds - was passed off as an inventory of pan-sexuality, and, consequently, any other interpretation was neglected.

On the contrary, erotic language was the keystone of the new message. In Bataille's essay entitled Eroticism we read: "Eroticism always entails the dissolution of set forms, I repeat, the dissolution of the forms of disciplined social life on which the discontinuous order of our individualities is based."

To confirm the correspondence between the holy and the oedipal triangle, let us quote Bataille again: "And though we anxiously desire the survival of our own mortal being, we equally crave after an original wholeness uniting us with the All. It is this craving that rules the three forms of eroticism in every man, that is, the eroticism of the body, the eroticism of the heart and the eroticism of the sacred... Though the search for the wholeness of being - systematically pursued beyond the immediate world - denotes an essentially religious attitude, sacred eroticism in its form familiar to the West commingles with the search for God, while the East pursues a similar search for wholeness without necessarily healing the representation of a God into play. In particular, Buddhism is alien to such an idea."

"Last Tango in Paris" is an endogenous as well as exogenous initiation discourse. It is endogenous: because it arises from Bertolucci's own Weltanschauung, and it is exogenous because of its social effects: unity is accomplished through the dialogue between the author's individual self and the others as a whole.

Paul's use of erotic language is transgressive and bold: it breaks the moral unity that society demands of every human product, as Barthes put it.

Perversion here means transgressing the language of the ruling class. Paul is the bearer of the new language.

Jeanne, the old-fashioned girl trying to get along, embodies the alienation of anyone who simply adopts the language of the establishment in order to conform. Together with Tam, her fiancé and director who represents her as the perfect girl of today in his TV movie, she reflects the ideology of the ruling class and expresses the old language. She does not subvert any ideology. There is nothing, no ideology behind Jeanne and Tom.

Paul, instead, breaks and subverts ideology. He symbolizes the "asocial character of pleasure", the "flight forward", as opposed to Tom, who finds the key to self-preservation in the "reverse gear" that blocks Jeanne.

According to Barthes "We only have this avenue left to escape the alienation of present day society: the flight forward."

The Marriage

In the following scene Jeanne bears witness to the repetition of the old language. After leaving the apartment in rue Jules Verne, she is now with Tom on a barge at mooring: L'Atalante.

Tom: I'll ask you questions. Know why I sent everyone away?

Jeanne: Because you are angry or want to talk alone with me.

Tom: And why?

Jeanne: Because you have something important to tell me. Tom: It's something very important.

Jeanne: Happy or sad?

Tom: It's a secret.

Jeanne: Then it's happy. What kind of secret?

Tom: A secret between a man and a woman.

Jeanne: Dirt or love?

Tom: Love. And it's not everything.

Jeanne: A love secret that isn't everything? What is it?

Tom: That in a week I'm marrying you.

When proposing to Jeanne, Tom defines marriage as a secret between a man and a woman, thus upholding the conception of the family as a den of secrets. He does not deviate from the old bourgeois values, secretly guarded inside the family - the family which Paul had so violently attacked earlier with Jeanne.

The image of Paul and Rosa's marriage is in sharp contrast to that of Tom and Jeanne's: when speaking to Marcel, Paul had said, "I know everything. Rosa told me everything . If you only knew how many times we talked about you. I don't think there are many marriages like that".

Christ's words - "There is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known" - are reflected not in Tom and Jeanne's but in Paul and Rosa's relationship. This is further proof of the revolutionary force of the free new language as opposed to the old one which is really like a whitewashed tomb, beautiful on the outside but full of filth and rot.

Significantly, at the end of Tom and Jeanne's conversation, a life preserver they have thrown into the water sinks. This bad omen on the outcome of a marriage based on such old and hazardous foundations does not alter the course of events.

So Jeanne goes to tell her mother about her forthcoming wedding, thus confirming that hers is, according to Barthes, "an encratic language (produced and spread under the protection of the establishment), which is statutorily a language of repetition... always the same structure, the same meaning, even the same words: the stereotype is a political fact, the main figure of ideology. The stereotype is the word repeated with no magic or enthusiasm, as if it was natural, as if this recurring

word was always miraculously appropriate each time for different reasons, as if imitating could no longer be felt as imitation. Well, by this standard, the stereotype is the present-day channel of 'truth'."

As the film goes on, it becomes more and more evident that Bertolucci's use of erotic discourse formulae expresses the search for a novel kind of language which, by breaking away from the stereotype, stimulates reflection, presents the new as pleasure and stands for a disruptive flight forward. This flight forward enables the individual to choose to be free; in other words, it represents a break from the past and the emancipation from the alienation due to the control of pleasure by the culture of the ruling class; it also means that the individual will grow inwardly and outwardly into an adult for whom, in Freud's words, "Novelty is always the condition for pleasure."

If the mass media are the machine that repeats the institutional language, we can understand why a different from the allowed stereotype interpretation of Bertolucci's movie could not be conceived, let alone propounded. And we can also understand why this film received such a superficial treatment, only its erotic aspects being emphasized as ends in themselves. While the production and release of erotic movies was largely permitted, a film that broke the stereotypical code and presented pleasure and desire could not be tolerated.

As Barthes maintains, "The opposition (the knife of value) is not necessarily between sanctioned, denominated contraries (materialism and idealism, reformism and revolution), but always and everywhere between the exception and the rule. The rule is abuse, the exception pleasure. For example, the exception of the Mystics can at times be upheld. Anything but the rule (the generalization, the stereotype). The bastard form of mass culture is indecent repetition: contents, ideological patterns and deletion of contradictions repeat themselves over and over again, though their superficial forms change: always new books, new broadcasts and new movies, but the meaning is always the same."

"Last Tango" presented and still presents new horizons of meaning. That is why it was then burnt 'at the stake' and is now shown with no in-depth reading.

Jeanne's family is still the typical bourgeois family of today: values are steadily rotting away but the stereotype repeats itself 'ad infinitum', bringing about an increasing number of 'founderings', symbolically foreseen by the sinking life preserver.

In the scene of the dialogue between Jeanne and her mother - the widow of the colonel who died in a foreign land, as a colonizer, though - we are just in front of a 'whitewashed tomb'.

Jeanne's mother is the mirror image of Rosa's mother, both pretending that nothing is amiss. Rosa's mother pretends to ignore the reality of the 'Least' living in the hotel and demands a mass and absolution for her daughter, though Rosa committed suicide and was not a believer, as her mother well knows. Similarly, provoked by her daughter showing her a photograph of a bare-breasted native girl, Jeanne's mother pretends to know nothing about her husband's affairs with Berber girls in Algeria.

Many relics of a sound bourgeois family concerning the colonel will be moved to the museum/country house to be watched over by Olympia, the faithful nanny, except his boots and pistol which the widow wants to keep in her Paris apartment: "Papa's boots, no. I'll keep them. They give me strange shivers when I touch them" and "In any respectable household, a firearm is always useful".

The family and its painstakingly kept secrets seem to continue and be reiterated in Jeanne's announcement of her forthcoming wedding. There is no transformation of social customs: the tailoring is different but the cloth is always the same.

Jeunesse Pop, Marriage Pop

In the following sequence Jeanne and Tom specify the 'new formula': "à jeunesse pop, marriage pop".

The novelty of the formula is tied up with the publicity the ruling class makes use of in order to promote the production and consumption of ideas and goods.

It is just from advertisements that Jeanne derives the new smiling way of facing marriage without acknowledging, or, perhaps, hiding from herself, a reading of reality she cannot change.

Tom: How do you see marriage?

Jeanne: I see it all the time.

Tom: What's that, all the time?

Jeanne: Yes, on walls, all over buildings... Does that surprise you?

Jeanne: The subject of advertising is the young couple. Before marriage, without children, and the same couple after marriage and with children. In short, marriage.

Tom: Deep down, I suppose that's true.

Jeanne: No, it's not true. But it might as well be. The perfect marriage - happy, successful, ideal - can no longer be found between the walls of a church. That kind of marriage is based on endless obstacles which the couple has to overcome. That way you have a husband loaded with responsibilities and a nagging wife. In publicity, it's just the opposite. There, marriage smiles.

Tom: Smiles... in advertisements?

Jeanne: Sure. But in the end, I say, why not? Why not take advertising's marriage seriously? Marriage that's... pop.

Tom: There is the formula. For youth that's pop, a pop marriage...

Jeanne: Marriage is a product, a machine. If it isn't working, you have to repair it like you repair a car.

This is a sign of the times: if times change, marriage, too, changes. Too bad the innovation is suggested by make-believe, by the advertising code that is only a reflection of the capitalist system, or, rather, an instrument of that system. Consequently, the new marriage and the new couple are broadcast on behalf of the firm that wants to show an updated image of itself in order to promote and sell the same product.

Capitalism is perfectly reflected in Jeanne's 'wise and new' vision: production and desire are kept separate and under control. Even children are no longer created but produced. Since the union of desire and production is revolutionary, they must be kept apart.

Tom: What about children?

Jeanne: Oh, them. Before you created them. Now you produce them.

Tom: What's the difference?

Jeanne: When marriage and love were synonymous you created them. Now the opposite. Marriage is a product which produces children. You make a machine which produces a series of little machines. Little pop machines.

Production is independent of desire, there was desire once, when love and marriage were synonymous and the couple was free:

"Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator made them male and female and said, For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate. Then they said to him, Then why did Moses command that the man give the woman a bill of divorce and dismiss her? He said to them, Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so" (Matthew 19,4-8)

Tom: Is love pop too?

Jeanne: No, not that.

Tom: Then, what is it?

Jeanne: The workers go to a secret apartment... They take off their overalls, turn back into men and women and make love.

Tom: But that's just adultery, from five to seven. The same old stuff.

Jeanne: Love and adultery are the same thing. If you don't cheat.

That is part of the whole thing.

Tom: And this?

Jeanne: This is unforeseen... This is the unforeseen.

Tom: You disappoint me: I thought that the unforeseen... would have been foreseen.

Jeanne: Love catches us by surprise. It jumps on us like a murderer in the night.

Tom: Then love is like death, you know it will come but you don't know when. Don't you think it is an old-fashioned idea? Of the kind you think about in church?

Jeanne: Of the kind you think about in empty apartments. The last few lines, as well as the ones about children, are present in both the Italian (pp 88-89) and the English (pp 146-147) scripts but not in the movie. This part of the dialogue points out that, far from being pop, love is like death, because you know it will come but you don't know when. Besides, in order to underline the sacredness of the image, reference is made to the place where this idea of love becomes manifest: in church or, better, in empty apartments, as Jeanne says.

Jeanne epitomizes the total confusion of the new pop girl: marriage becomes pop, comes out of churches and appears with the smiling faces of actors on billboards.

The heavy weight of responsibilities imposed by a church marriage is replaced by the lightness of a consumer-oriented smile.

As Weber observed, ecclesiastical power was replaced by capitalism, but nothing has changed. Jeanne herself admits that love has nothing to do with old- or new-style marriage.

Love, desire, the relationship between unconditioned man and woman have the holy characters of the knowledge of freedom.

Love can catch us by surprise like the coming of Christ, bearer of the new message of love, and like Paul's meeting with Jeanne in the temple/apartment, outside of the social context.

Love does not belong to social categories, either old or new. Indeed, marriage created children only when it was synonymous with love, and then children have only been produced.

Love is associated with death because it catches one by surprise in an unforeseen way.

Jeanne expresses all her alienating fantasies, her illusion of having found the object of her longing again in Paul's love, as she will later say. Unfortunately, these fantasies deceive her into believing in another perfect father figure to depend on and will eventually provoke her rebellion, which, in fact, is a rebellion against a primal father fantasy.

Only from the truth of the need can one reach the truth of reality, which, however unpleasant, is to be preferred to the best of fantasies. Paul will later try again to show Jeanne that the only chance of living freely depends on starting from reality without any false, illusory alibi: that is the only way of achieving self-awareness.

Only the death of illusions can give rise to a religious hope that is not merely a childish form of escape. Only the truth of loneliness makes possible freedom and an authentic meeting with the other as a separate being and not as a fantasy created by our need. Jeanne's self-deception goes on. Wearing the bridal dress sewn on her in front of a rapt Tom, she says, "Yes... The costume creates the bride", and then runs in the rain to the apartment in rue Jules Verne.

Christ's message is dangerous because it is aimed at an oppressive system that makes use of God to safeguard such disvalues as prestige, power and money.

Praying the God of the New Testament necessarily leads to the Gospel and must originate a freedom that subsumes the values of the spirit and the canons of morality, beyond all so-called virtues and sins, and finally fosters faithfulness to the land where nobody dies but is resurrected.

Love and Illusion

The cycle of the Passion begins. There is a wedding party, comparable to the entry into Jerusalem. Jeanne goes to rue Jules Verne and is carried by Paul into the apartment, after her purification in the rain and before her discovery of a dead rat, soaked in its own blood, on the holy bridal bed, the altar.

Jeanne enters the apartment wearing a bridal dress after telling Tom that love can be found only there. Her journey, however, still starts from a need that arouses illusions of false freedom and a false concept of love. This need causes her dependence and makes her unable to be aware of herself, that is, to desire and produce her desires autonomously, so as then to establish free and evolving relationships.

Since desire is always revolutionary, the oppressive action of the establishment consists in generating and controlling the 'need' by creating representations that rivet and renew the need.

Paul, like Christ, like Freud, like Bertolucci, like 'the artist', expresses his own free genius. And, as soon as genius appears, there is a breakthrough, something that no longer belongs to any code or time. It produces, as Deleuze and Guattari assert, "chains of decoding and deterritorialization that set up and operate desiring machines"

Paul refuses to act as a 'crutch' to Jeanne. He wants her to become a free, self-desiring person, and freedom can only be achieved by denying all the conditioning, binding past. As Christ said, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself" (Mark 8,34). Jeanne enters the apartment in rue Jules Verne carried by Paul. She really enters it carried by her self-deception, by her false fantasy. It is the dependence on the stereotype that guides her so far. She only wants to be wanted. She does not know that she herself can desire, and when her illusion is faced with the crude, naked truth of a dead rat on the bed she screams and loses control.

Her hysterics at the sight of the dead rat sacrificed on the altar of their bed - while she is dressed like a bride but is no bride - is the mirror of reality.

The rat is a feminine symbol and, to quote Bertolucci himself, "Freud says that mice and rats are more symbolic of the feminine sex. I remember reading that." And Deleuze and Guattari affirm "that the place of the universal castration by which the family is conditioned is", quoting Artaud, "the asshole of a dead rat hanging from the ceiling of the sky."

Jeanne's frightening scream on seeing the dead rat reflects the irreparable breakthrough of reality. Jeanne, who had entered the apartment prey to her oedipal dependence ("Forgive me. I wanted to leave you and I couldn't. I can't. Do you still want me?"), in the arms of the ghost of her father, bridegroom and lover, can no longer play her role and, shuddering, screams, "I want to go. I want to go away! ... This is the end... I can't make love in this bed any more. I an't. It's disgusting, nauseating".

Paul's answer is calm and ironical. He unlocks the door and goes to strip the bloody sheet off the bed. Jeanne, who was determined to go away, returns to the living room and, to bring reality into her shattered dream, she announces, "I forgot to tell you something. I fell in love with somebody".

Jeanne embodies the ambiguous traits of the disciple-lover-traitor, of the rebellious child, of the brother murderer.

Paul's and Jeanne's following words and actions denote the holy rite preceding the sacrifice.

Jeanne challenges Paul like Judas, who, during the Last Supper, asks, well knowing the answer, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" (Matthew 26,25).

Paul's reply is ironical: Paul: But, you know, I'll be smirking and giggling all the way to eternity.

Jeanne: How poetic... But please, before you go, wash my feet.

The answer is a terribly disturbing paraphrase:

Paul: Noblesse oblige.

This is the re-enactment of the rite of the washing of the disciples' feet by Christ before he leaves them. Jeanne asks Paul to wash her feet before he goes all the way to eternity. Paul's answer, "Noblesse oblige", refers to the act the Son of God must perform, that is, the act of humbling himself in order to fulfill the right of mankind to be served by him and redeemed from sin.

The dialogue between Paul and Jeanne shows a weaving of ambiguities and revelations, just like a holy text for initiates: wrapped up in a bath towel by Paul, she tells him that her lover "is full of mysteries", and he retorts that "All the mysteries that you're ever going to know in life are right here".

No man will ever give her the understanding of the great mystery of the meeting with God. He does know. And yet, just to fulfill his mission, he teaches her that her dream is false because the man she thinks she is in love with is someone else: she must first love herself to be then able to love her fellowmen.

No love is such unless it is free and generous, unfettered by any dependence or need. Paul shows Jeanne the artifice of her fantasy, the sorcery on which she depends.

Paul: You want this gold and shining powerful warrior to build you a fortress where you can hide in. So you don't have to ever have- have-a-a-a- you don't have to feel lonely. You never have to feel empty, that's what you want, isn't it?

Jeanne: Yes. Paul: Well, you'll never find him.

Jeanne: But I found this man!

Paul's retort to Jeanne, who obstinately refuses to understand, is a manifesto of feminist freedom, a denunciation of the slavery an unloving man imposes on the woman who offers herself to him passively, without loving either herself or him, only urged by her fantasies of dependence and need.

Paul: Well, then it won't be long until he'll want you to build a fortress for him out of your tits, and out of your cunt and out of your hair and your smile - and it's someplace where he can feel comfortable enough and secure enough so that he can worship in front of the altar of his own prick.

Jeanne persists in her blindness and deafness.

Jeanne: But I found this man.

Paul then shows her the real picture of the aloneness of an enslaved, passive being that has no love of self or others and does not know what loving and being free mean.

Paul: No, you are alone. You are all alone. And you won't be able to be free of that feeling of being alone until you look death right in the face. I mean, that sounds like bullshit and some romantic crap. Until you go right up into the ass of death -right up his ass- till you find a womb of fear. And then, maybe, maybe then you can-you'll be able to find him.

As Jeanne stubbornly keeps playing her passive role, Paul carries the situation of reality to an extreme and makes her sodomize him, thus reversing the act he himself had performed on her.

His gesture is suicidal, but he wants her to face reality consciously and actively, whereas she still refuses to open her eyes.

Jeanne: But I've found this man. He's you. You are this man.

Paul: I want you to put your fingers up my ass. Jeanne's attitude is an example of the behavior often condemned in the Gospel, that is, the reluctance to be free, the desire to remain a slave, and the refusal to accept the redeeming truth.

Paul: Put your fingers up my ass, are you deaf? Go on. I'm going to get a pig. And I'm going to - and I'm going to have the pig fuck you. And I want the pig to vomit in your face. And I want you to swallow the vomit. You going to do that for me?

Jeanne: Yeah.

Paul: Huh?

Jeanne: Yeah!

Paul: And I want the pig to die while - while you're fucking him. And then you have to go behind and I want you to smell the dying farts of the pig. Are you going to do all that for me?

Jeanne: Yes, and more than that. And worse. And worse than before.

Faced with her tragic inability to listen and understand, Paul can but speak in the same code as Jeanne. This will be the way of definitively accomplishing his mission, for Rosa's sake and following her example: giving himself as a free love gift to a mortal, blind and deaf human kind so that the way to light can be shown.

Rosa, Paul and the True Love

Rosa appears just at this point.

In the middle of the night, Paul enters the hotel room that has been transformed into a mortuary chapel and sits alone, speaking to his wife's corpse.

The two halves are reunited in this room, like the Father and the Son. Paul is alone and speaks to Rosa, just as Christ, alone in the garden of Gethsemane, speaks to his Father. Paul's monologue recalls not only that of Christ to his Father but also that of a husband to his wife in Dostoyevski's short story "A Meek One".

Troubled and distressed, Paul expresses irony and disgust at the sight of Rosa's face made up by her mother, who has also dressed the corpse in her bridal dress. We should remember that in the Gospel Christ calls himself 'the bridegroom', while his disciples are 'the bridegroom's friends'. As to the bride, the Catholic Church has identified itself as such by unlawful appropriation or, perhaps, committing the sin of pride.

The make-up on Rosa's face reveals her mother's inability to understand reality, which does not need a mask if it is true. And Rosa, a repository of knowledge and truth, never wore make-up, differently from Jeanne and many other human beings.

Rosa and Paul's relationship is a clear manifestation of the truth and its achievement as the only possible key to salvation. Paul is angry with Rosa and gives vent to the feelings of love-hate of a son-husband who was not enough for his mother-wife as an exclusive love-object. He scolds her for lying to him and keeping secrets from him. Actually, he has found a cardboard box on top of the closet, full of small objects, including a clergyman's collar, forgotten by the men clients of the hotel.

This fond curiosity about her guests reveals Rosa's love for human creatures, which is like God's love for the man He created, like a father's love for his child, but also like a husband's love for his wife whom he, full of violent jealousy, accuses of unfaithfulness. The oedipal triangle, subsumed in the three figures of the trinity, is repeated here in an unequivocal, conflictual manner: the relationship is between the son, the father and the wife, but it is necessary to bear in mind that the father is also son and wife and mother, in the last analysis, the relationship is not between three but always between two interchangeable figures; on the other hand, it could not be otherwise, as human beings are only two in any kind of relationship: a male and a female as a mere manifestation of the divided self.

According to Deleuze and Guattari "The trouble with Oedipus is just not knowing any more where it starts, or which is which. And 'being a parent or a child' correlates with two other differentiations on the vertices of the triangle, 'being a man or a woman' and 'being dead or alive'".

Paul, Rosa's son/husband, rages at her because she did not love him exclusively, and he had to share her love even with her 'guests'. Besides, he expresses the bitterness of a betrayed son/husband because she did not let him know her plans in advance.

Paul: Even if the husband lives two hundred fucking years, he's never going to be able to discover his wife's real nature. I mean, I might be able to comprehend the universe but I'll never discover the truth about you, never. I mean, who the hell were you?

Similarly, Christ does not appear to share in the first covenant his Father makes with man. In the Old Testament the Father acts directly. The Son is in Him and with Him but never appears. The relationship is only between the Father and the man He created. The Father manifests Himself, becomes angry and punishes man, first by condemning him to the sufferings of a mortal life and then by deserting him, exactly like Rosa with her guests. That is why Paul says that it is easier to comprehend the universe than for a husband to discover his wife's real nature even if they live together for two hundred years.

If we analyze the position of Christ, the Son of God who was in Him and with Him, we cannot understand why the Father separates from His 'beloved Son' for the sake of His traitorous and ungrateful creature, His 'beloved Son' will even have to undergo incarnation and suffer the pains and iniquities of the poor human being in order to regain his seat on the right hand of the Father.

Paul says it is easier to comprehend the universe than one's wife because, like Christ, he does not understand the behavior of his Father/wife who not only deserts him but also compels him to sacrifice himself in order to be reunited with Him/her after placating His/her anger against His/her creatures/guests.

Christ must leave his divine position and go on his limited human journey so as to deliver his human double from the mortal punishment inflicted on him by the Father. He is the Son who must sacrifice himself for his human step-brother in order to regain his Father's love and be identified again as the Son of God.

By marrying Rosa Paul has become like one of her 'guests', even though with privileges, just like Christ, the Father's beloved Son, and men, the Father's creatures.

Paul: They were all your - your guests, as you used to call them. I guess that includes me, doesn't it? It does include me, doesn't it? For five years I was more of a guest in this fucking flophouse than a husband, with privileges of course. And then to help me understand you, you let me inherit Marcel. The husband's double whose room was the double of ours.

God had loved man so much as to create him in His image and likeness. But He had then be disobeyed by Adam and his progeny. So God the Father unleashed His wrath and jealousy at man's betrayal and condemned him to the hard job of living. But God the Merciful does not forget His

flock and forgives: "I myself will pasture my sheep; I myself will give them rest, says the Lord God. The lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, the sick I will heal (but the sleek and the strong I will destroy) shepherding them rightly... I will appoint one shepherd over them to pasture them, my servant David; he shall pasture them and be their shepherd. I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I, the Lord, have spoken... The trees of the fields shall bear their fruits, and the land its crops, and they shall dwell securely on their own soil. Thus they shall know that I am the Lord when I break the bonds of their yoke and free them from the power of those who enslaved them... No longer shall they defile themselves with their idols, their abominations, and all their transgressions. I will deliver them from all their sins of apostasy, and cleanse them so that they may be my people and I may be their God. My servant David shall be prince over them, and there shall be one shepherd for them all; they shall live by my statutes and carefully observe my decrees... I will make with them a covenant of peace; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them, and I will multiply them, and put my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling shall be with them; I will be their God and they shall be my people" (Ezekiel 34,15-16;34,23-24;34,27;37,23-24;37,26-27).

This is the message of the Father. Besides, Rosa lets Paul inherit Marcel so that he may understand how much her creatures need to be loved - her creatures, that is, her guests, who are also her brothers and 'little children', as Christ used to call his disciples and apostles. Paul had already guessed Rosa's message when he had talked to Marcel and realized how great his fear is of physical pain and of the evil of death that grips and conditions 'poor mortal man'.

It is just the condition of the human being striving to avoid death or live a little longer that moves God to pity. And, at the same time, that is the reason why the poor mortal creature betrays and kills God, and then expects His forgiveness - just because man is mortal and God is not.

In tearing off the wallpaper in Marcel's 'double' room Rosa had strongly felt the anguish of those who have a limited time and space. Far from lying to Paul and deserting him, Rosa acted that way only to make him look after her flock of lost sheep and bring, the new message of freedom and love outside, to all human beings. Rosa's gesture, her leaving Paul alone in the world among lost sheep, is not a betrayal but an act of love, which Paul finally understands while, sobbing over her corpse,

he makes a promise to her: "Rosa, my love... forgive me... I don't know why you did it. I'd do it too if I knew how. I just don't know. I need to find a way!".

Just as Paul speaks to Rosa in the room turned into an unbearable fake 'garden', Christ, alone in the garden of Gethsemane, speaks to his Father before going to death: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done...He was in such agony and he prayed so fervently that his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground" (Luke 22,42;22,44).

Il faut tout repenser, papa!

From now on the veil is up, and the foreseen will come true.

Paul is called to the hotel door by an 'ag e' prostitute who wants a room despite the late hour - four o'clock in the morning. Paul understands the bonds that linked Rosa with her clients also thanks to this heavily made-up, worn-out old whore. She asks Paul to run after her cowardly customer and convince him to come back.

Paul pursues the man who, after crossing many little streets, runs down an alley, stops near a Boite and turns his overcoat inside out to change his appearance. Paul, disgusted by the cowardice of the man, grabs him while, not by chance, the bill of the play performed at the Boite is framed between the two men: "FAUT TOUT REPENSER, PAPA!".

The title is blatantly referential and explicit on the doubts crossing Paul/Christ's mind about his great sacrifice for the sake and salvation of such mean humankind.

The prostitute's frightened customer reveals his nature of poor first Adam.

Customer: Please don't say you found me. Did you see how ugly she is? Once my wife was enough for me. But she caught this skin disease a year ago. Just like that. All of a sudden her skin became disgusting. Like snakeskin. What am I supposed to do?

Paul: Now get the fuck out of here! Faggot! While Paul retraces his steps, we see a frame of the Boite sign: "LA BOHEME", that is, 'la tragedie humaine'.

In contrast with the first, the second Adam (1 Corinthians 15,46), Christ/Paul, is ready to obey his Father/Rosa and die to deliver his disobedient brother/son from eternal death.

Paul's angry reaction is quite understandable: he must die to redeem the guilt and sin of all mankind. The title of the play performed at "La Boheme", "Faut tout repenser, papa!", seems to emphasize that it might be necessary to revise the plan of sacrificing the beloved Son for the salvation of a humankind represented by cowards and traitors.

DEATH AND RESURRECTION

The Film Is Finished

Paul's love for Rosa is so great that everything must be fulfilled. In the next scene, Jeanne goes to rue Jules Verne and finds the apartment empty: all the furniture is gone except for the record player. Crouching down on the floor, she weeps over Paul's departure. Then she goes to ask the concierge about him, but in vain. "A little while and you will no longer see me, and again a little while later and you will see me" (John 16,16).

Unable to find Paul, Jeanne phones Tom to show him the apartment, thus revealing her need for oneness with Paul through his double.

Tom and Jeanne meet in the empty apartment, and now Jeanne's dependence on Tom is reiterated and definitively confirmed.

She at once makes him notice how bright the apartment is and points out that there is a small room quite suitable for a baby.

Jeanne: Fidel. Nice name for a kid. Fidel. Like Castro.

Tom: But I want a daughter too. Rosa. Like Rosa Luxembourg. She's not as well known, but she's not bad...

The naming of the future children, too, expresses the repetition of the double assonance with Rosa's and Paul's figures: Rosa - after Rosa Luxembourg, just as little known as Rosa/God - and Fidel - like Castro, who appeared on the stage of the world as a guerrilla and is faithful to the revolutionary ideal of his God/Father.

Tom tells Jeanne that the film is finished.

Tom: I don't like things that finish. One must begin something else right away... Everything seems to be at an end, and the new beginning is approaching. Jeanne tells Tom she has found this apartment by chance and suddenly he says:

Tom: We'll change everything.

Jeanne: We'll change chance to fate.

Significantly, Tom does not want to leave anything to chance, at least, to the 'chance' of this apartment, to Jeanne's 'chance'.

So he mimics a mock camera with his hands, that is, he uses his instrument to show he feels himself to be the director of his and Jeanne's fate, and urges her to take off. Jeanne playfully simulates a flying airplane until Tom abruptly stops playing.

Tom: What's happening to me? An air pocket...

Jeanne: What's happening to you?

Tom: Enough of these turbulent zones. We can't joke like this... like children. We're adults.

Jeanne: Adults? That's terrible.

Tom: Yes, it's terrible.

Jeanne: Then how must we act?

Tom: I don't know. Invent gestures, words... For example, one thing" do know. Adults are serious, logical, circumspect, hairy... They all face problems. Here, this apartment is not for us. Absolutely not.

Tom takes the role of the adult, the father. The film is over, the affair between Paul and Jeanne is finished, and the pop marriage begins, organized and directed by Tom. He will let Jeanne fly a little longer while he solves problems for her too, starting from the search for another apartment: they cannot live in this one, it is sad and smells... enough, enough of these turbulent zones, enough.

At the end of the scene, Jeanne will tamely tell Tom she cannot go with him now because she must "Leave it all in order". They part with a handshake, a symbol of their future 'covenant' that will be made possible and sanctioned by Paul's sacrifice.

The Last Tango

Outside the apartment, down in the street, Paul appears behind Jeanne, with a reversal of the initial scene. Everything is drawing to a close.

Paul is wearing new clothes -a blue jacket and a light-colored shirt- and will shortly put on a purple necktie, too.

He follows her down the street and accosts her using her old code because this is the way he had to find in order to meet his fate as a sacrificial victim.

“I have told you this in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures but I will tell you clearly about the Father” (John 16,25).

Paul reveals his name to Jeanne, and tells her about Rosa. But now that he uses her own code he becomes a threat to be avoided, as she has already made her covenant with Tom. Paul: It’s me again.

Jeanne: It’s over.

Paul: Yes, it’s over. Then it begins again.

Jeanne: What begins again? I don’t understand anything any more.

Jeanne has already projected herself into a settled, reassuring future with Tom and can no longer listen to Paul. It is over, and she does not understand how something that is finished can begin again, as Paul says, because Paul’s reality is unacceptable for her who needs someone perfectly ‘pop’ like Tom.

In order to make the accomplishment of his mission possible, Paul tells Jeanne things about himself he would never have told otherwise, but she will not understand.

He reveals his age to her, and tells about his life and his wife’s suicide in the hotel in rue De Depart. Then he tells her he wants her, or, better, he wants to be naked with her, without any misunderstandings. He even reveals to her he cannot have children because of an accident he had in Cuba that turned his prostate into something like ‘an Idaho potato’.

Paul enters the tango ballroom with Jeanne. He enters the other temple, the temple where the rite of the tango is performed, the church where the ceremonial act is danced by stiff soulless dancers.

Just as the last supper is eaten in church, the last tango is celebrated here. The rite is conducted by a mistress of ceremonies, 'Madame', who, like Olympia, the old nanny, manages and watches over the temple of 'the family'.

The tango really seems to be a religious rite for man because it speaks of his loneliness and day-to-day existence, but here, in the ballroom, it is performed according to set patterns and rigid movements, as the postures of the mannequin-like dancers show. It really looks like a Mass in the temple.

The ceremonial exacts a sacrifice. Jeanne raises her glass twice to drink to Paul's death after he has openly and fearlessly revealed himself, ready to defy the judgment of the Tango Jury and of Jeanne—who will betray him.

Paul appears free and revolutionary because, in the temple where the rite of the tango is celebrated, he dances following his feelings, and his movements break all the rules of the institutional ceremonial.

During a saddening dialogue, Jeanne humiliates him because she no longer wants to recognize him as the man he really is but only sees him as he says he is: a widower and the owner of a rather seamy hotel.

Then Paul invites her to dance to show her how to dance freely. The last tango is poignant, it is the eve of death, like the last supper. Moreover, Paul's and Jeanne's way of dancing, so outside all stereotyped patterns, unleashes the reaction of the Jury that condemns Paul to be banished from the social context, like the Sanhedrin did with Christ. 'Madame', as President of the Tango Jury, underlines the outrageousness of their way of dancing by saying, "This is a familiar place. Go to the movies to see love".

The tango is a rite, Paul has said to Jeanne, and presents itself as man's religion, but, here, it is a religion managed by the jury that dictates set postures and rules to the dancers, so they lose the possibility of expressing themselves and feeling free.

In tango lyrics man speaks of his day-to-day existence, of his job of living, of his loneliness as well as of his little natural joys. In short, the tango is an intense existential communication.

It is not by chance that, while tangoing, a man and a woman blend into each other to form, as it were, one figure, while senses and sentiments intermix.

Dance expresses the contact with the divine, and the tango is a perfect medium. The last tango is the last dance, the last supper, the last communication between man and God. Paul gives his dance a divine motion and free movements, in contrast with the other couples dancing rigidly, like plaster mannequins, without feeling the music, without metaphysically communicating with God.

Paul's free language upsets and defies the institutionalized sense of public decency. His dance is divinely carnivalistic because it goes beyond (the sense of) public decency, and expresses the value of dance, that is, the pleasure of communicating with the divine through the senses.

"Between saints and prostitutes, between God and the world, dance," says Nietzsche in The Gay Science. In the Bible, too, those who sing the Psalms praise God with cymbals and dances, and David used to dance before God with all his might. It was Christianity that separated the sacred from dance and constrained the body within a controlled, close space.

In Umberto Galimberti's words, "As the sacred ceases to be the meeting place of the pure and the impure to become a place of mortification and asceticism, as the word and the mind become the vehicle of the sacred, the body and its gestures animated by dance move from the realm of Dionysus to that of the Devil. Unless bodies are capable of avoiding contacts or keeping stiff".

The bleak large ballroom really looks like one of those modern churches forgotten by God and men because, instead of encouraging the coming together of the sacred and the profane, they restrain any form of emotional communication of the senses in the aseptic atmosphere of a hospital. Here, in the ballroom managed and controlled by the jury, among so many automaton-dancers moving around stiffly without feeling any pleasure, Paul's tango symbolizes as Bertolucci says "the cathartic moment of the protagonist confronted with social life".

The last tango is the climax of the rite. We should remember that Paul is wearing a purple necktie, and purple was the color of the cloak Pilate's soldiers put on Christ before he was sentenced to death.

Paul and Jeanne's dance breaks the rules of the jury; it is free and intentionally provocative, but no dancing couple seems to care, which is significant.

The dancers are quite respectful of the rules imposed by the jury, and it is the President of the jury who furiously attacks Paul. He mockingly retorts, "Madame, c'est l'amour, toujours l'amour", and then scornfully bares his bottom to her.

But the love Paul speaks about is finished, or, better, his relationship with Jeanne is finished. Shortly before the tango, she had mocked and offended him, like the crowd had done with Christ before the Sanhedrin.

Jeanne: But this is so pitiful.

Paul: Yes, but I'm here, aren't I ?

Jeanne: Monsieur Maître d'Hotel.

Paul: That's rather nasty. Anyway, you dummy, I love you and I want to live with you. Jeanne: In your flophouse?

Paul: In my flophouse. What the hell does that mean? What the hell difference does it make if I have a flophouse or a hotel or a castle? I love you! What the fuck difference does it make? I'll sell it.

An echo of Christ's revolutionary message can be heard in Paul's last words: love, communication between God and man and between man and man, has nothing to do with forms or social stereotypes; only being aware matters.

Love does not exist in a castle, in a brothel, or in a hotel. Love only exists between humans aware of being alive. All the rest is fraud and deception, slumber of the senses, annihilation of being. Jeanne is unable to understand the message, or, better, she gives up. It costs her too much to acknowledge the illusion under which she lives, so she must get rid of the man who disturbs her 'à la page' bourgeois tranquillity.

It is over. Paul is condemned to death, like Christ.

"As I have loved you, so you also should love one another"

Jeanne rushes out of the ballroom trying to lose Paul, but, fully conscious of his impending fate, he follows and reaches her in front of her house.

Jeanne: I'll call the police.

Paul: I smell the hen house. Well, shit, I'm not in your way. I mean, après vous, Mademoiselle. So, so long, sister. Besides you're a crummy-looking broad. I don't give a damn if I never see you again. Shit!

Jeanne: Enough! Enough!

Paul: Oh, fuck the police!

The meaning is clear: I'm not interested in you as a woman; after all, you're not so attractive; in fact, I don't give a damn if I don't see you again, but everything must be fulfilled. So Paul, like Christ, proceeds on his way toward death.

Jeanne manages to reach her apartment, but Paul follows her inside. After playfully putting on her father's army cap, a symbol of Christ's crown of thorns, he says his last words to her.

Paul: This is the title shot, baby. We're going all the way. It's a little old. But full of memory now. How do you like your hero? Over easy or sunny-side up? You ran through Africa and Asia and Indonesia. Now I've found you. And I love you. I want to know your name.

At the very moment man's truth, the certainty of truth and the end of the illusion appear manifest Jeanne says her name and shoots Paul in the side.

Those who killed Christ thought they were on the right side of the law and truth, exactly like Jeanne who will maintain this principle in her last words in defense of her murder. Paul staggers out on to the balcony, and, here, outside the apartment, while looking at Paris roofs, he mutters, "Our children. Our children. Our children. Will remember". Then he collapses and dies curling up in the fetal position, a symbol of rebirth, of non-death and resurrection.

Christ, who, like Paul, had no children, addresses his apostles like this: "My children, I will be with you only a little while longer. You will look for me, and as I told the Jews, Where I go you cannot come, so now I say it to you. I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another... And you also testify, because you have been with me from the beginning" (John 13,33-35; 15,27). After shooting Paul, Jeanne justifies her gesture perfectly, and repeats to herself the words she intends to use before the law.

Jeanne: I don't know who he is. He followed me on the street. He tried to rape me. He's a madman. I don't know who he is... He wanted to rape me. I don't know who he is... He wanted to rape me. I don't know. I don't know him. I don't know who he is. He's a madman. I don't know his name.

Jeanne's justification recalls that expressed by the crowd before Pilate to have Christ condemned to death.

"So Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple cloak. And he (Pilate) said to them, Behold, the man! When the chief priests and the guards saw him they cried out, Crucify him, crucify him! Pilate said to them, Take him yourselves and crucify him. I find no guilt in him. The Jews answered, We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God. (John 19,5-7)

Paul, like Christ, is called 'a madman.

"When his relatives heard of this they set out to seize him, for they said, He is out of his mind." (Mark 3,21)

The last sequence brings back to mind Paul and Jeanne's first meeting in the apartment in rue Jules Verne where the journey began, and Paul stood in the light near the window. Similarly, now in Jeanne's apartment where the journey ends, Paul dies out in the open, bathed in daylight, while Jeanne remains inside, in the darkness, a 'free' prisoner of her illusions.

A CONVERSATION WITH BERNARDO BERTOLUCCI

December 18, 1998, Rome. In Bernardo Bertolucci's library

G.P.: Dear Maestro, I'd like to start our conversation by speaking about Marlon Brando. I think he appears to be a perfect 'figura Christi' from the very beginning, from the first frame, the first line.

B.B.: We were all thrilled. There were dollies and cranes moving down toward Marlon's face. The first take...and the camera operator comes up to me and says, "Sorry, we must do it again". "Well, of course, if the first one isn't good... but how come?" "Because when I saw Brando in front of me I forgot to move the camera and stood there gazing at him as if I was at the movies." Yes, his first curse or entreaty, may indeed suggest what you say.

G.P.: Brando's first words, "Fucking God", sound like the appeal of Christ on the cross ("Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?") and also reflect the accusation of be-betrayal Paul directs at his wife during his soliloquy near her corpse. I say so because I think Rosa, the wife, hides the figure of God the Father, while Paul, the husband, hides that of the Son, Jesus Christ. In 1972, disturbing films, such as "A Clockwork Orange", were released in Italy without too many problems, but yours wasn't. Last Tango was banned because, as my research underlines, it stimulated reflection by showing a new approach to desire, to the language of desire, of being and of freedom.

B.B.: I've always seen Paul's figure from an oedipal viewpoint. I mean, the situation was very strange because, after three years' analysis, the mine full of secrets of my Oedipus had been explored more than enough. And I've always thought that Tom and Jeanne are myself, my own two natures, masculine and feminine. Paul is Laius, the king and father who is eventually slain. I've always read it like this, from an oedipal point of view.

G.P.: When Jeanne kills Paul she acts exactly like the people of Israel when they demand that Christ be crucified. It is the killing of the father, as Freud explained in his work "Moses and Monotheism". By the way, where does the religious language that belongs to you come from?

B.B.: Actually, I don't know if I 'own' a religious language. I'm surprised. I think, however, a certain language is, as it were, genetically ingrained in anyone who was born in Italy and baptized as I was, even though I later chose atheism. I was also in some way influenced by Pier Paolo {Pasolini}, who was a very religious man. Only someone deeply religious could give vent to such with-ering invectives as Pasolini did. Yes, perhaps it is partly due to Pier Paolo's influence.

G.P.: At the beginning of my essay I wrote that "Last Tango" is a son's answer to his father. And your own words confirm my statement. You said, "When the film came out, Pasolini got very angry, and the angrier he got, the better I understood I had hit the nail on the head".

B.B.: There's something else you probably don't know. Pier Paolo said to me, "Ha, but that Marlon Brando! How can you...?" Pier Paolo, who was all for the carnality of non-professional boys, actors taken from life - from the street, as they used to say at the time -, spoke to me about Brando in these terms: "No, no, he's no good". One year later, having probably forgotten about it, he called and said to me, "Listen, that Brando of yours. Could I meet him? I'd like to meet him". "Why! You didn't like him at all!" "Well, you see, I've changed my mind. I'm thinking of a St.Paul and believe Brando would make a perfect St.Paul". I was impressed, and still am, especially after what you have just said, because I've always thought that, up to and including *The Conformist*, I'd moved within , let's say, a 'geography' in some way linked to my father: Before the Revolution, that is, the re-appropriation of his Parma {the protagonist of the film speaks of the need for a society of sons to act as fathers to their fathers}, and then *The Spider's Stratagem*. When I made *Last Tango*, I think I completely escaped from my father's universe. While shooting *The Conformist*, I said to myself, "When I film *Trintignant*, *Sandrelli*, *Sanda*, it is as if I was filming my parents in their youth, in the years 1936-37". On the contrary, *Last Tango* was something quite different. I remember that, after my father and mother saw the preview showing of the film - when one could already feel the vibes of what was to become a kind of persecution -, my mother was quite happy, whereas my father was gloomy and said to me, "What have you done? You're getting into serious trouble, you know. Why did you want...?" So, perhaps, both he and Pasolini realized I'd partly got rid of their fatherhood.

G.P.: The choice of the characters' names is also very interesting. While analyzing them by using free association, I thought Rosa is the divine archetype (in the West 'Rosa' is a symbol for unity

and the divine), Jeanne may be a tribute to Renoir, and Paul may be Pier Paolo Pasolini, since you yourself call him like that in your poem Dream.

B.B.: Movies are always the result of stratifications.

G.P.: Well anyway, you did choose the names, didn't you?

B.B.: Yes, of course, but it's always a matter of stratifications on top of stratifications.

G.P.: Making a film must be a great fortune, a liberating activity. I suppose you don't need analysis now.

B.B.: Actually, I'm cutting down on it at present. I've been under psychoanalytic treatment for thirty years now. There's an essay by Freud entitled Endable and Endless Analyses, and I certainly be long in the latter.

G.P.: Maybe one doesn't want it to end.

B.B.: One refuses to bring it to an end because one doesn't want to be separated. Personally I've always lived parting, separation, traumatically, as a DEATH. Do you know what the first title of Last Tango was? "The Little Death", which meant orgasm in the eighteenth-century libertine language.

G.P.: Yes, in "Last Tango" there's a poignant anger at separation, at betrayal, at the split of the duality.

B.B.: Duality?

G.P.: Let's think of God and the Son of God. Paul doesn't want any names. "I've been called by a million names all my life," he says, and Jesus Christ was called by eighty-two names. In the Old Testament God the Father takes pleasure in and speaks to His chosen people directly. Christ, the Son of God who was in Him and with Him, never appears. But then he must suffer incarnation to conciliate God the Father and His toy, His creature, man, so he, the Son, may regain his Father's love, sit again at His right hand, and restore the unity with Him.

B.B.: I was just thinking that a model of non-separation might be the union of my parents, who are symbiotic even now they are slowly fading. I realize now that, by doing away with Paul's wife before the total Oedipus was accomplished through Paul's killing of the father, perhaps I represented something that hasn't occurred yet, that is, the split of this couple. They were so tightly

united that not even their children could intrude, though they've always been loving parents, very close to us. And this town, too, Parma, quite incapable of aggressiveness. Anyway, I've always kept this image of them as impenetrable to us, and now it occurs to me I did represent the separation of Attilio and Ninetta in *Last Tango*.

G.P.: I think you didn't represent only the impossibility for you children to appropriate the primary language of the code your parents alone possessed. Throughout the movie there's a continuous repetition of symmetries and refractions of the union. Jeanne and Tom repeat Rosa and Paul's union 'below'/on a lower level, Jeanne's parents are the counterparts of Rosa's, and Rosa's mother is balanced by Jeanne's mother. Everything is held together symmetrically.

B.B.: Yes, it's true. All these mothers are there.

G.P.: Marcel is Paul's double, his doppelgänger.

B.B.: The double belongs to a highly schizophrenic period of my life, which is reflected in the films I felt impelled to make... one after the other. Well, in "Before the Revolution" Fabrizio has a double called Agostino, the fair-haired boy who kills himself. Then followed *Partner* - based on The Double by Dostoyevski -, *The Spider's Stratagem* - in which I doubled the same actor as the father and the son running away through a poplar grove -, "1900" - in which the protagonists, Olmo and Alfredo, represent another doubling -, and "Last Tango" - in which it's Rosa, the wife, who wants a double of her husband.

G.P.: I think we should refer to the contact of God with His creature, made in His image and likeness, the double of His Son and of Himself.

B.B.: Ha, ha, yes.

G.P.: When Paul goes to see Marcel in his room, he's surprised by the likeness because they're both wearing...

B.B.: Yes, they're wearing identical 'robes de chambre'.

G.P.: Well, at first Paul tells Marcel he knows everything about him because there were no secrets between him and Rosa, they were a special couple ("I don't think there are many marriages like that."). But he understands Rosa's plan only at the end of the dialogue, after seeing Marcel's fear of

physical pain because of the cold sore he has on his lip. By the way, in the screenplay Marcel cuts his finger, instead.

B.B.: Oh, yes, but Massimo Girotti, the actor, had this small sore on his lip, so I decided to use it instead of hiding it. You know, I always say I make cinema vérité.

G.P.: Paul also sees Marcel's eagerness to keep fit, to hold old age at bay and exorcize the passing of time, and then he understands the suffering of the poor, time-bound, human being. Right then he understands Rosa's gesture, as he'll later say in front of her corpse, "And to help me understand you, you let me inherit Marcel", Marcel, the poor mortal being. Out of her great love and pity for the poor mortal being, Rosa, like God, makes a new covenant with him by doubling herself. Paul, like Christ, will sacrifice himself to free man, the creature in God's image and likeness, from eternal death, and will find a way by adopting Jeanne's lower language, so as to bring about his own death and give her a hope of reaching self-awareness.

B.B.: In your opinion, what's the primary, immediate reason for Jeanne shooting Paul? Why does Jeanne kill him?

G.P.: Well, Jeanne realizes Paul is true love and the bearer of a new language, but she can't accept him. She chooses Tom because she's unable to transform herself. So she rejects Paul, the mirror of truth, and prefers to carry on with the easy fiction of the 'pop' marriage with Tom. She really can't bear the idea of changing because she's only "an old-fashioned girl trying to get along".

B.B.: Oh, yes, she comes of a military family. But, you see, the usual way of reading her action is that she can't bear Paul betraying her great romantic dream of love unspoilt by the triviality of a social identity. When he says to her, "I'm forty-five, my name's Paul, my wife owns a hotel in rue De Depart, ...", he debases the dream, the utopia, their little utopia. She can't accept all that so she does him in.

G.P.: She can't accept the fact that God, made man, can exist in the real world. She lives reality only with Tom.

B.B.: That's it. Reality was something else. The man she wanted and accepted was the one who had made a covenant with her in the apartment on the first day. "No names here, no names here, I have no names, I have no names", which is just the ideology of their relationship. The very man who had

made her experience sadomasochism and all kinds of sodomy is now a forty-five-year-old with a run-down hotel.

G.P.: She's confronted with reality.

B.B.: Well yes, but then she says, "I already have a fiancé".

G.P.: I quote: "I will come in the light, and you will not recognize me". "How can this man say he is the son of God if he is the son of man?" Jeanne had been in contact with the divine in the temple/apartment and only there, without knowing anything about Paul, just like about God, but she's now unable to believe, and, in fact, rejects the incarnation because it would make everything more difficult for her. Believing utopia may come true would imply difficult choices and changes, the rejection of the easy deception she has so far accepted and the assumption of new responsibilities. In short, it would mean revolutionizing her life. It's easier for her to exorcise the problem by refusing to face it. When, after killing Paul, she envisages the police interrogation, she even paraphrases the words the crowd said to Pilate: "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die, because he made himself the son of God". Paul followed her, he wanted to rape her, and, in any case, he broke the law by forcing his way into her apartment.

B.B.: "Je ne sais pas qui c'est. Je ne connais pas son nom." It's true she doesn't know his name. "I don't know his name. I don't know what his name is..."

G.P.: He forced his way into her apartment...

B.B.: "Il m'a suivi... Je ne sais pas qui c'est. I don't know who he is. I don't want to know who he is".

G.P.: He's adopted her code, as he'd never done before, in order to accomplish his mission. He adopts it only after speaking to Rosa and after meeting the 'agée' prostitute and her cowardly customer. By the way, when the man is confronted by Paul in front of "La Boheme" Boite, he says, "Once my wife was enough for me...". At this very moment Paul becomes aware of his plight, and scornfully attacks the man, thinking "And I must sacrifice myself for this contemptible humankind!". The playbill outside the boite reads, "Il Faut Tout Repenser, Papa!", which is astonishing. I wonder whether you created it or found it there. Oh! It was there! Then it was really an incredible coincidence!

B.B.: I always say I make cinema verité.

G.P.: "Il Faut Tout Repenser, Papa!"

B.B.: But the truth... Well, you need to have the right truth in front of you when you make a film.

"Il Faut Tout Repenser, Papa!"

G.P.: In front of that boite, while Christ is about to sacrifice himself for man's sake...

B.B.: Wonderful! Ha! I remember now... the very first title I gave to Last Tango was still another one. You know, in 1970 or 1971 presented two movies at the New York Film Festival, The Spider's Stratagem and The Conformist. It seemed miraculous, as if the Messiah had come, because they were quite different and I presented them together. I'd indeed worked on them simultaneously. I'd shot The Stratagem in the summer of 1969, and had started editing it when the occasion arose to make The Conformist. I wrote it in one month, imagine that! It sounds crazy now, but in those days cinema was like that. I finished editing The Stratagem while shooting and then editing "The Conformist" with Kim. They were practically born together. And these two movies aroused such enthusiasm I decided to make another one at once. So, in my hotel room in New York, I wrote down the outlines of a story -half a page in all- whose title was One Day, One Night and One Day and One Night, just like that. I've just remembered it now on reading the table of contents in your essay.

G.P.: Well, I'll tell you something. While I was doing my research on your film, every time I reached a certain stage I stumbled on some new difficulty in finding books, texts that could help or confirm my interpretation of symbols and meanings. For example, 'the rat', the famous rat on Paul and Jeanne's bed... It was the only symbol I couldn't explain until I found the solution in Artaud.

B.B.: Really?

G.P.: Yes, in Artaud's essay on the Theater...

B.B.: The Theater of Cruelty.

G.P.: That's right.

B.B.: The Theater and 'son double'.

G.P.: Yes, and there I read, "Family is a dead rat's asshole". Jeanne enters the apartment, and what does she see? The dead rat sacrificed on the altar, the bed, the symbol of the reality she's going to accept with Tom and for Tom in her bridal dress.

B.B.: Artaud!

G.P.: You certainly knew Artaud very well.

B.B.: Oh, yes. I had a passion for him in the years of The Living Theater, when I made “Agony” with them. And “Partner”, too, had been influenced by Artaud and his theater. You know, I’ve always

been struck by the way I tend to absorb, to ‘metabolize’ something I’ve overheard in the street, so at times someone might even feel I’ve stolen his ideas, but I never remember where a certain thing comes from. The origin is lost. As Freud says, I am “omnivorous, perverted and polymorphic”.

G.P.: Mnemic traces?

B.B.: It’s a real appropriation of many different things that then mix up inside me, completely losing their origin.

G.P.: Metamorphosing.

B.B.: Metamorphosing and being then used improperly with regard to their origin but properly in relation to what I have in mind.

G.P.: By the way, after the New York showing you deleted the scene of the seller of bibles, who was a Jehovah’s Witness. Why?

B.B.: Because, after I’d successfully broken away from the rules of the Nouvelle Vague, this scene seemed to me a little too complacent, too self-indulgent, in the manner of the Nouvelle Vague movies. The appearance of this seller of bibles had something ... well, far-fetched, phony about it. Moreover, in those days people loved Brando so much that, when he wasn’t on the screen, all the rest was, as it were, centrifugally expelled from the movie.

G.P.: You weren’t asked to...

B.B.: No, no. Once they’d accepted, that was that. When the film was released in the United States, I remember, there were two cover stories in one week: “Times Magazine” put Marlon on the cover, and “Newsweek” my face. I was thirty-one.

G.P.: It was a sensational success.

B.B.: Yes, sensational!

G.P.: I’ve read the review by Pauline Kael.

B.B.: Oh! Pauline Kael is a great film critic. She's written beautiful books.

G.P.: Her review of "Last Tango" is certainly enlightened. Just think of the comparison she draws between "Last Tango" and "Le Sacre du Printemps" ("The Rite of Spring") by Stravinsky because of their revolutionary significance in movie and music history respectively. She was the only critic who looked deep into your film, beneath its surface aspects. I've read through the reviews that appeared in Italy on the various occasions "Last Tango" was shown: they never went farther than a generic recognition of the presence of Eros and Thanatos, or, quite often, simply expressed a banal and misleading judgment of pansexuality.

At the beginning of my research it seemed unbelievable to me no one had understood the hidden message, that is, that Paul's figure hides the figure of Christ. Just imagine! If this archetype had been revealed and this film explained and discussed at University -and it could have-, if this message of freedom and desire, this new language had been conveyed then, in 1972, ...

B.B.: I did explain my film at DAMS, but certainly not in these terms because I'd never thought of it like this... Christ, God, and so on. You see, 'your' God, Rosa, was played by a Jewish actress whose name is Veronica Lazar, like Lazarus. She's Romanian. She was also in the cast of "The Moon", as Jill Clayburgh's friend, and acts a bit part in The Siege.

G.P.: I've read you've found some connections between Last Tango and The Siege.

B.B.: Well yes, partly because "The Siege" is set 'à huis clos', as the French say, in an enclosed space, a small mansion in the Piazza di Spagna - with these two solitudes gently brushing against each other, parting, taking each other...

G.P.: Is there a sacrifice here, too?

B.B.: There's a great sacrifice, but it isn't a human sacrifice in the end. He make a great sacrifice giving up all his goods for her and with joy: the better he can build up her happiness, the more ecstatic he is. I suppose there's something Christian in all this ... theoretically, at least.

G.P.: I've read that during the lawsuit "Last Tango" was first released from sequestration in Bologna...

B.B.: You see, the judge of the court of first instance acquitted the movie, but the judge of the court of appeal condemned it.

G.P.: In Bologna as well?

B.B.: Yes, in Bologna. At that point we appealed to the court of final jurisdiction, which, years later, in 1975, confirmed the sentence of the court of appeal, that is, the destruction of the negatives of the film and two months for me, Grimaldi and Brando. I also lost my political rights for five years. This suspension was part of the sentence but it had escaped my attention at the time. Later, when a general election was called, I didn't receive my voter's certificate. I went to the electoral office to look for it, and the man in charge began to turn the hand-written pages of a huge register - it really seemed a scene from *The Trial* by Kafka - until he said to me, "Mr Bertolucci, you can't have your certificate, you can't vote". "But why?", I asked. "No, you can't" he said, "because you were sentenced to a five-year suspension of your political rights". This was a real wound. The two-month sentence had excited me, it had made me feel a martyr. I liked it because, when one is young, one is elated by such things. But the loss of political rights, being unable to vote at a time politics was so important to me, that was a deep wound indeed.

G.P.: They wanted to hit you hard. But what did you say in your defense?

B.B.: I didn't speak in my defense. The lawyers did everything and pleaded the case in court.

G.P.: Oh! You didn't take part in it personally?

B.B.: Well, I was present but never spoke.

G.P.: Never?

B.B.: No, no. The lawyers did everything.

G.P.: You mean you never had the opportunity of explaining yourself?

B.B.: No, I didn't. On the other hand, I think that, if I'd mentioned the themes you're speaking about, I'd have been sentenced two years, not two months.

G.P.: Then, you mean, in those days.

B.B.: Then, of course.

G.P.: One last remark. When Paul dies on the balcony at the end of the film, he says, "Our children will remember all this". Paul had no children, just like Christ who used to call all his disciples 'little children'. So 'children' are all the disciples who will remember.

B.B.: Moreover, "children will remember" is, in a way, an autobiographical sentence because at the time I'd have wanted children but I wasn't going to... I couldn't.

G.P.: Did you really want children?

B.B.: Yes, at the time I did. Well, I did and didn't. I mean, I'd have wanted children but I was afraid, I couldn't because my father was too important.