

Document Citation

Title	Pasolini's Decameron
Author(s)	
Source	<i>Evergreen</i>
Date	1971 Sep
Type	article
Language	English
Pagination	35-41
No. of Pages	7
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Il Decameron (The Decameron), Pasolini, Pier Paolo, 1970

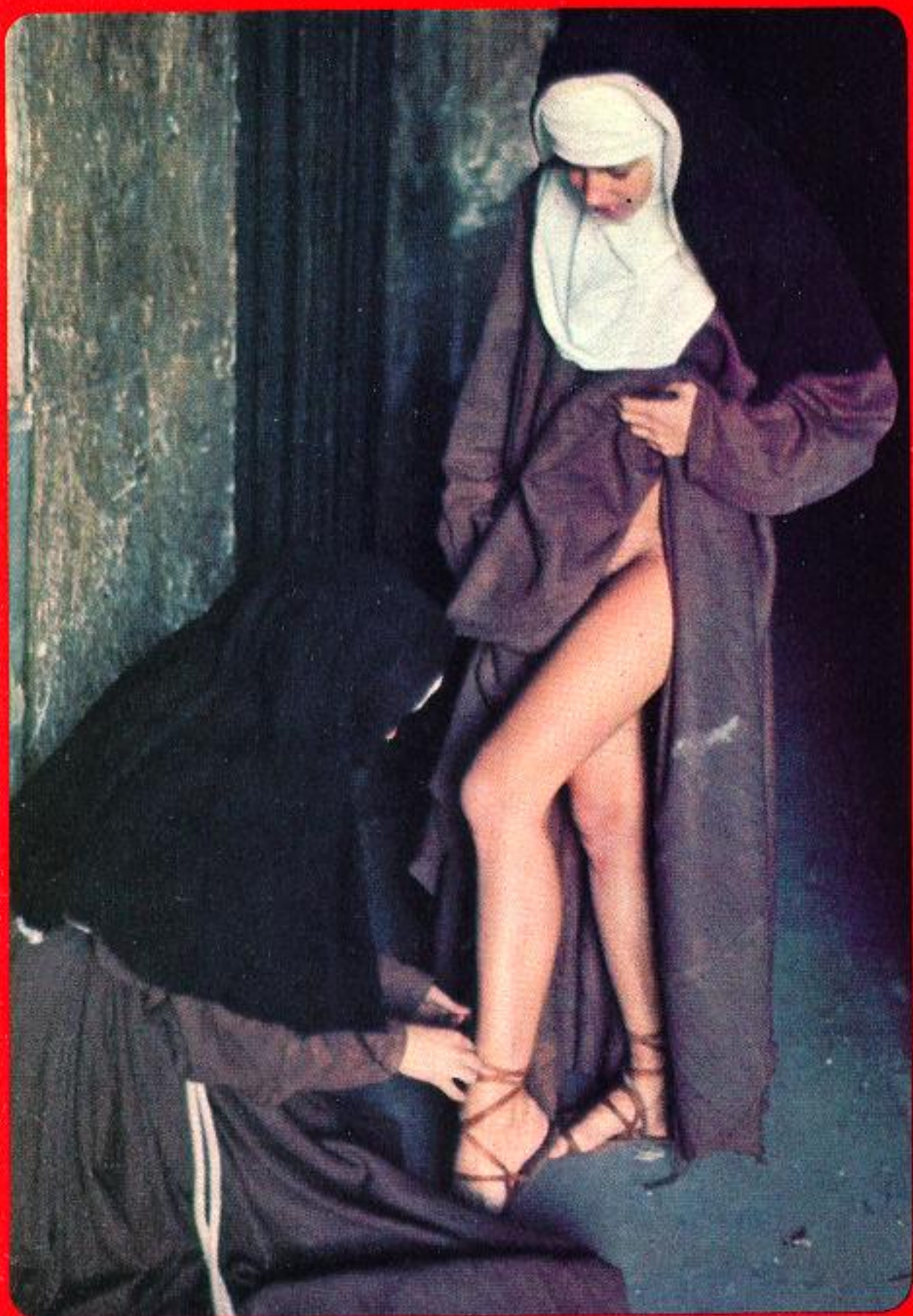
PASOLINI'S DECAMERON PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID HAMILTON

The photographs on this and the following pages were taken by photographer David Hamilton during the shooting of Pier Paolo Pasolini's new film, *The Decameron*, based on Boccaccio's famous Renaissance classic. Pasolini, the Italian director of *Teorema* (1968) and *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964), is especially noted for his strong visual sense; he has said that in many ways modern Italian cinema has picked up where Italian painting left off. For *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, Pasolini himself has acknowledged Piero della Francesca as the visual inspiration. For his new film, the inspiration was the painter Giotto, a contemporary of Boccaccio's (therefore a reliable source for authentic costumes and props) who actually appears in one of his stories.

Written by Boccaccio between 1348 and 1358, *The Decameron* consists of one hundred prose tales adapted from traditional sources, but stunningly original in their ribald humor and earthy realism. For his film, Pasolini chose more than half a dozen of *The Decameron's* Neapolitan tales, plus two others and a segment about the painter Giotto (acted by Pasolini himself), who becomes the director's chief means of imposing a unifying view on the teeming fourteenth-century world he portrays. Pasolini wrote his own screenplay in such a way that the individual stories flow into one another, and some of the characters reappear constantly in a stream of action. In the final scene, Giotto is hard at work on his great fresco cycle in the church of Santa Chiara; the faces on his paintings are those of the characters who appeared in earlier scenes. Pasolini has said that the figure of Giotto bears the same relationship to the characters (whom Giotto arranges into a balanced fresco) as he, Pasolini, himself does to the whole composition of the film, thus creating, in effect, a stage-within-a-stage technique.

In casting *The Decameron*, Pasolini avoided the use of professional actors as much as possible. Aside from three actors and himself, none of the people he chose for *The Decameron* had ever before appeared on the screen. The vast majority of the fifty-four actors seen in the film are ordinary people cast from the streets of Naples. Most of the scenes were shot on location in Naples, the only Italian city which Pasolini feels has remained relatively unaffected by modern civilization.





For another of his scenes, Pasolini chose the tale of Musetto, a young man pretending to be deaf and dumb in order to gain admittance into a convent as a gardener. Soon two of the nuns decide to test the young man's sexual prowess and, being duly impressed, invite all the other nuns to share Musetto with them. Taxed to the limits of his strength by the insatiable Mother Superior, Musetto suddenly breaks his silence to blurt out his desire to leave. The Mother Superior declares him to be miraculously cured by divine intervention and persuades him to remain in the convent to the satisfaction of all the nuns.

Pasolini has said that his intent in making *The Decameron* was to apply the choral principle of Greek tragedy to a whole film, "only this time it would be a film that is earthy, frolicsome, crowded with people, and full of light." He was attracted to the period of the early Renaissance by what he felt was a similarity between the fourteenth century and our own age—the breakup of old, traditional forms and classes, and the emergence of something totally new. "I sense all around me the possibility of a new explosion of liberty," he says. "I am also pessimistic enough to think that perhaps it won't occur, but I want to portray it nevertheless in my *Decameron*."



